

PAPAROA NATIONAL PARK, NEW ZEALAND, UPDATE

Mary Traves

On Friday 10 March 2017, the new Paparoa National Park (PNP) Management Plan was launched by the Department of Conservation (DOC) at Barrytown Settlers Hall, just south of Punakaiki. Changes to the previous plan were needed for the Government to push forward a new Great Walk (and ride...) over the Paparoas to commemorate the twenty nine men who lost their lives in the 2010 Pike River Mine explosion.

In the scramble to meet the time frame set by the Minister, DOC planners had to work hard to have a new plan in place by early 2017. Their first move was to do a round of community consultations. To do this they had a caravan at set points with advertised timetable through February – March 2016 so people could go and chat with them about any aspects of park management important to them personally. I went along on my own behalf when they were at Runanga and then Geoff Schurr, Phil Wood and I met them on behalf of ACKMA in Westport the following week.

After this, the planners spent April and May drawing up a draft plan which incorporated key aspects of the old plan (1990), various things people had asked for during the community consultation round, and statements regarding the dual role which local Maori (Poutinin Ngai Tahu) would have along with DOC in the future management of the park.

From the cave and karst management perspective, it was obvious that the draft plan needed much work, there being both factual errors and a number of oversights in the draft. To that end, the whole caving fraternity got busy writing submissions in July and there was much email networking behind the scenes between members of ACKMA, the New Zealand Speleological Society (NZSS), Nelson Speleological Group (NSG), Canterbury Caving Group (CCG) and the West Coast Alpine Club (WCAC), to which many cavers in the Greymouth area belong. I wrote a personal submission, including points about non cave and karst issues, and asked ACKMA if they would endorse the sections I had written pertaining to karst and caves, as the basis of an ACKMA submission.



*Loggers Road polje
Photo: Mary Traves*

Dale Calnin, ACKMA President endorsed the idea and my initial draft was circulated to the ACKMA committee and some NZ members. Overall the feedback was positive, i.e. yes, that ACKMA should make a submission and this was duly accomplished with the help of John Brush (who edited my draft), some useful comments by Pete Chandler and Neil Collinson, and positive encouragement from Grant Gartrell and Steve Bourne. In late July I got my own submission away to DOC, asking for an oral hearing, and then worked at getting the ACKMA one completed on time – it needed Dale's signature and his OK for me to speak on ACKMA's behalf. In the end, when he wasn't answering emails because he was out of town, DOC gave me an extension over a weekend in mid-August, and I rang Dale him and luckily caught him in the office on a Saturday - sorted.

The hearings sessions were held in Greymouth over two days in August and went off fairly well, although like everyone else, I seemed to be pressed for time to make my points. I stayed around to support other submitters like Ian Millar, who was speaking for NZSS and Alice Shanks for CCG. The atmosphere was quite collegial. On the first day Ian Millar, Ian McGregor (NSG) and I had lunch together after making our presentations and on the second day a bigger group including Alice Shanks (now an ACKMA member) and a few other cavers and submitters wound down after the two days with coffees at Greymouth's DP1 Café.

In early October, all those who submitted were sent an online link by DOC which they could open and see whether or not what they had asked for had been 'allowed' or 'disallowed'. From the cave and karst perspective many points we had all wanted were 'allowed', e.g. the poorly worded phrases about public use of the Metro Cave had been rectified and all mention of Xanadu Cave (for safety reasons) had been removed, being replaced by the more general term 'Bullock Creek Caves.' I was annoyed, however to still find that the original boundary between 'Nikau Place' and 'Manuka Place' (DOC have the park divided up into various blocks for biodiversity management) still cut across underground drainages in the Fox River area, i.e. the cave entrances/resurgences are in 'Nikau' and the submergence in Armageddon and Cave Creek North are in 'Manuka.' I had asked for this to be changed in both my own and ACKMA's submissions, specifically referring to it with a map and photographs in the ACKMA hearing.

By late October the next step was for DOC to get sign-off (approval) for their plan from the West Coast Tai Poutini Conservation Board (a regional body which advises the West Coast Conservator) followed by the NZ Conservation Authority (a body which advises the Minister). This is about the time when things started going pear-shaped about one aspect of the whole plan leading to some strong letters to the newspapers, boycotting of the plan launch on 10 March by some groups and a small protest organised by yours truly outside the hall on the day. No, and ACKMA didn't get an invite.....when all the other caving groups did.

In short, the background to this is that DOC did not allow for public consultation during the planning process about where mountain bikers might enter or exit the proposed new Paparoa Great Walk (and ride...). Locals had made it clear back at the outset back in March that they didn't want bikers on the very popular Pororari River Track which meant DOC needed to come up with an alternative. However in the draft plan no alternatives were mooted, nothing in the text or on the various

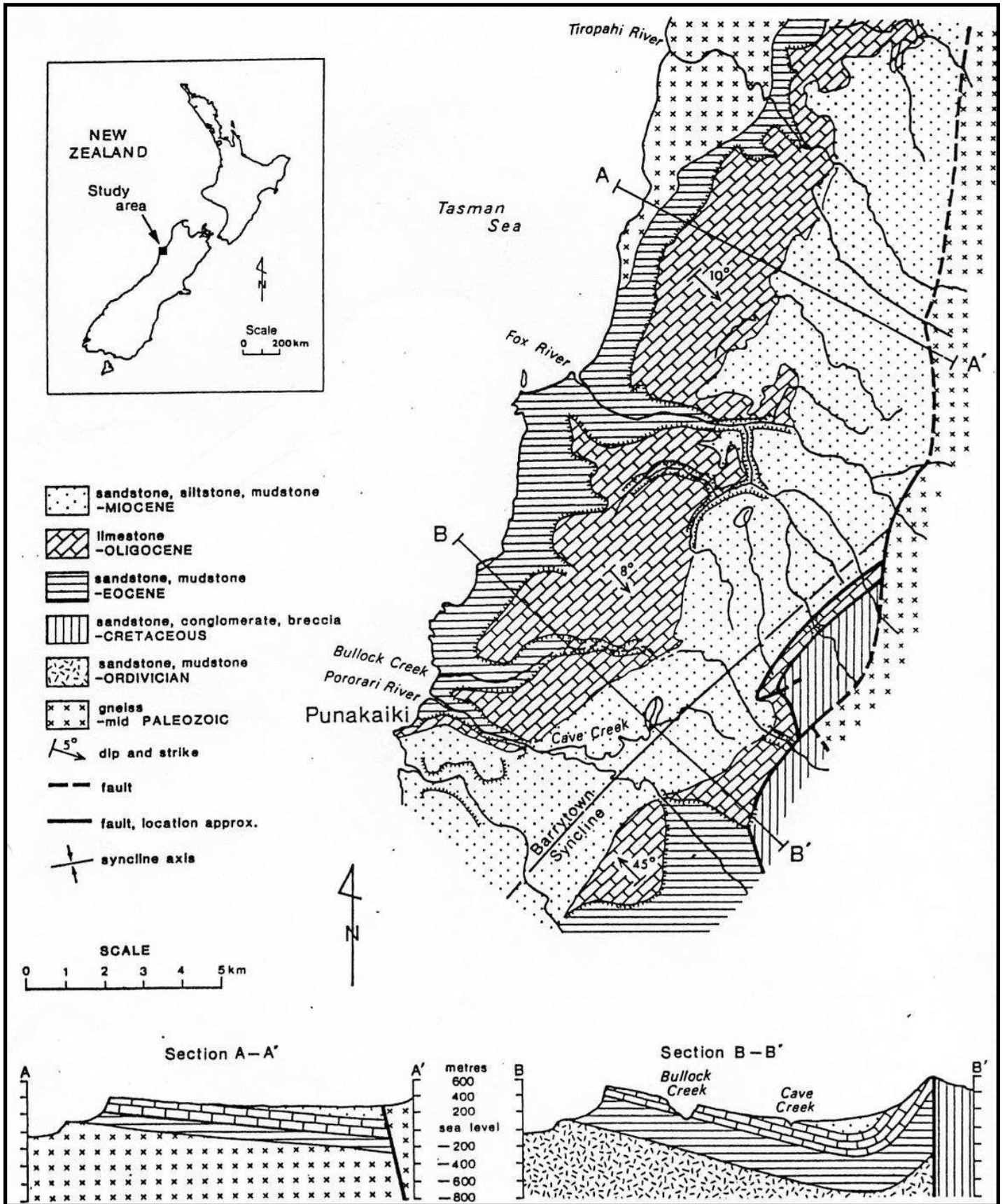
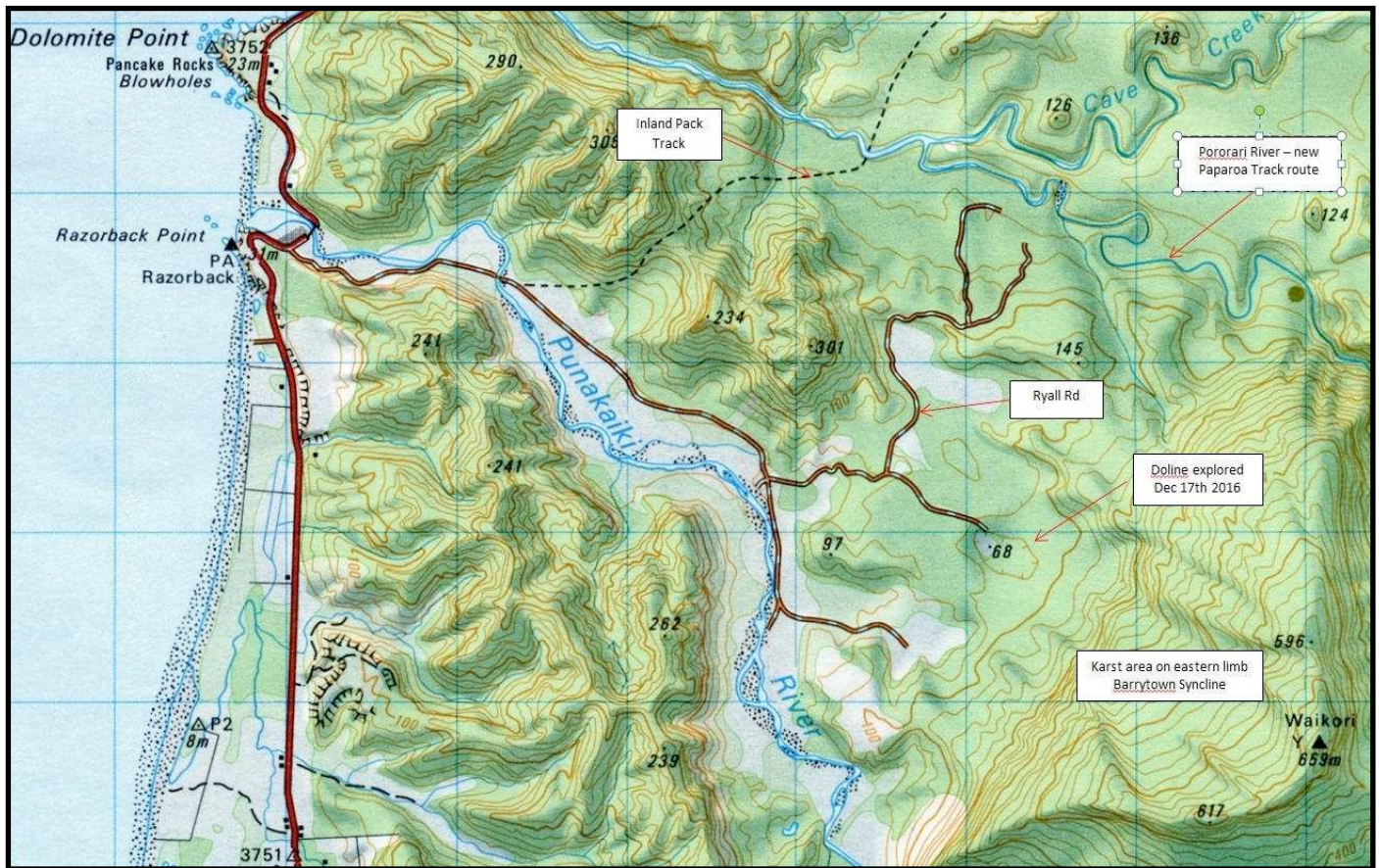


Fig. 1. Geology of the Paparoa Karst (after Laird 1998) from *The Hydrological Behaviour of a High Flooding Frequency Karst System in New Zealand*, S. Crawford, 1989.



K30 1:50,000 topo map showing key features around the southern end of the Barrytown Syncline

maps. One of the few groups to comment about this was the West Coast Alpine Club, which asked DOC in its submission to consider use of the old logging roads in the Punakaiki River area.

While everyone was waiting for the plan to go before the Conservation Board in October two different groups of WCAC members found blue survey tape by the Inland Pack Track (IPT) between the Pororari and Punakaiki Rivers and after consulting one another, correctly surmised it was to do with changes (to the grade) for biker egress from the Paparoa Track coming down the Pororari River valley. As this section of the IPT connects with the lower Pororari River Valley Track to form a great half day walk there was immediate consternation which rapidly hit the air waves. Opposition to DOC's plan, which had basically gone under the radar, has been escalating ever since with much letter writing and a couple of meetings with the Greymouth Area DOC manager. DOC management at a higher level have countered this saying they have consulted (yes, but only with the Conservation Board), that it's an 'operational' decision (so they don't need public approval anyway) and whatever we do they have the final say. So far these 'fighting words' have managed to unite a good array of tramping and outdoor clubs, a couple of environmental groups and a good assortment of non-affiliated residents living in the Punakaiki area.

You may be asking what's all this got to do with cave and karst management, but I have included this here because;

- a) there is a need to document the fact that there are real misgivings about the way the back country is being managed in New Zealand (see the great article in this month's NZ Wilderness Magazine about this), and
- b) because some members of the 'Save the Inland Pack Track' movement are the very same people who put the caves of Paparoa National Park on the map in the late 1960's and early 1970s, i.e. Paul Caffyn, Jean Rodgers, Bruce Annabell, Kerry-Jayne Wilson and Carolyn Hewlett.

There is a feasible, if maybe more expensive, route using one of the old logging roads (Ryall Road) which DOC could use for their mountain bike egress, our movement will keep working on ways to achieve that. The Government gave DOC \$10M to set up the Paparoa Great Walk, so there is money there if some re-prioritisation is done.

The big spin-off for caving from all of this that Ryall Road, (which many people have been exploring) and the new Paparoa Track up the Pororari, both give access to the steeply dipping Potikohua Limestone on the eastern limb of the Barrytown Syncline around Mt Waikori (see the topographical map). To date most karst exploration in Paparoa National Park has taken place in the limestone of the western limb of the Barrytown Syncline, where there are significant karst features (Bullock Creek - Cave Creek South stream capture and cave systems, the Abyssinia Cave system, which needs further exploration, and further north the Fox River - Cave Creek North cave systems). I have not been able to find any record of systematic prospecting in the Waikori area.

On 17 December 2016 Bruce Annabell and I (both pushing 70 years) made a start on this exploration when we decided to visit a large doline - or small polje - marked on the K30 1:50,000 topo map. A branch road off Ryall Road seemed to head right towards it so we set off along this in an easterly direction armed with loppers (for the bush lawyer and scrub), bits of tape to mark key points and my very basic GPS. Our first problem was crossing a small but deep creek on what was left of a couple of old bridge bearers but after that following the old road formation was fairly easy, although it meant pushing through bits of scrub in places and climbing over a few large logs. The road was both fairly straight and fairly level, dropping away in places on both sides.

After half an hour's travelling, and a bit of lopping through some windthrow, the just road fizzled out, and the ground just dropped away steeply both straight ahead (east) and on our

right (south). We put up a marker or two, noted a couple of limestone boulders and headed in a south-easterly direction down the hill into the doline. After clambering down and under a huge old log, and putting up a couple more tapes so we could find our way back, we suddenly stepped over a tiny stream – barely any water – and out onto a flattish area covered in grass dotted with some species of divaricating *coprosma* up to about 2- 2.5m tall. We estimated the drop down to be about 30m.

From here we continued on in our south easterly direction toward the other side of the doline where there was a gap on the skyline. Stopping for munchies and a drink, we noticed how everything looked the same so took care to mark our way across so we could find our way back up to the old logging road. After about 15 minutes we reached the far side and lo and behold we found some more large limestone boulders and a couple of very muddy sinks. They were all of 2m deep and sumped with mud. Aha.

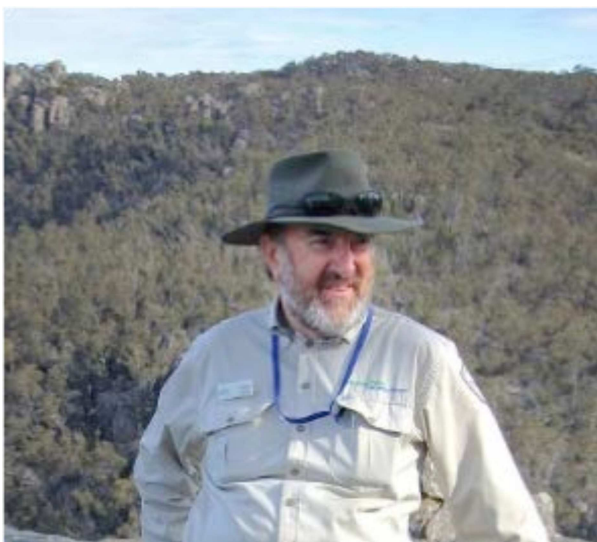
Backtracking all around we found that streams which fed these sinks came from both the north and south after wending their way in circuitous fashion across the bottom of the doline. Most interesting from a drainage point of view, but not so good for those hoping to find a nice cave entrance. Before we headed I took some GPS readings and Bruce made a sketch map of the area including taking bearings on some clearly visible high points like Mt Waikori.

Back up on the road, having collected our bits of tape, we made our way back to Ryall Road, checking out some dolines on the right/north side of the road as we went. After a while they appeared on the left/south side so we surmised the road had crossed some sort of underground waterway. Eating lunch back in a patch of sun at the intersection with Ryall Road we suddenly both realised that we could hear running water and went to investigate. A full sized creek was cruising along parallel with Ryall Road – a lovely bush stream – but where had it come from? We hadn't crossed it going out to the doline or seen it coming back.

We headed on out and later asked Neil Mouat about this, whose family used to own the land before it became National Park. He told us that that stream, which is not marked on maps, goes underground further north, resurges near where we had lunch, then goes underground again before finally resurging near the Punakaiki River. Amazing that of all the maps we had recourse to, including the Punakaiki Geological map, not one showed any parts of this drainage, although some had the doline clearly marked on them. We also learned that Paul Caffyn and Leon Dalziel visited the second last submergence of this stream on one of their forays up Ryall Road and say it's worth taking a torch. A trip back to this area is now overdue.

PUBLIC SERVICE MEDAL AWARDED to GRAHAM PARKES

Dale Calnin



ACKMA recognises and congratulates former Ranger in Charge of Buchan Caves Graham Parkes for his Public Service Medal awarded in the 2017 Australia Day Honours, for his outstanding contribution to the Victorian community.

Graham, a renowned Parks Victoria leader, received the medal for his significant and dedicated contribution to fire and emergency management, tourism and regional development, natural environment conservation and visionary park planning.

Graham began working for the Victorian National Parks Service as a park assistant in 1973, became the Ranger in Charge of Buchan Caves Reserve in the mid-eighties, later went on to become the Ranger in Charge of the Grampians National Park in 1994 and was District Manager for South Western Victoria prior to his retirement in 2016.

Graham's time at Buchan was marked by many achievements with significant progress in the management of Cave and Karst resources. He became a member of ACKMA and fostered partnerships with local caving clubs and organisations.

He introduced sensitive and controlled management principles, improved cave guiding standards, initiated the Friends of Buchan Caves group and accepted the other eight reserves with cave and karst values as part of his management responsibilities.

Many people who know Graham would agree that over his 43 year career, he built many strong friendships within Parks Victoria and enduring relationships with our partners and stakeholders.

Graham led the emergency response to some of the most severe fire and flood events in living memory. He drove recovery programs which protected sensitive environments and rebuilt essential park infrastructure, as well as supported the local tourism industry to recover and continue to contribute to regional and State economies.

Graham is well known for his capacity to build strong partnerships with people and organisations, including Traditional Owners, community groups, volunteers, all levels of government and the tourism industry. These partnerships have delivered innovative conservation, cultural and recreation works across many parks.

Those who had the pleasure in working with Graham cannot speak highly enough of this genuinely kind, hardworking and committed person. He embodies all that is good in land conservation and protection.

Congratulations to Graham on receiving this prestigious award.