

# SWEET AS: PART 2

## ACKMA AGM, TE ANAU NEW ZEALAND

Steve Bourne



*One of the many glorious views we enjoyed during the week, from near Key Summit.  
Photo: Steve Bourne*

When I wrote up the ACKMA Waitomo conference of 2013, I headlined the report “Sweet As”, in reference to a colloquial New Zealand saying for something “great” or “excellent”. The AGM at Te Anau was different for sure, as it was predominantly field trips without the papers of the conference, but was nonetheless an excellent learning experience for all attendees. Te Anau is in the deep south of New Zealand on the edge of Lake Te Anau and the Fiordland National Park, which in itself is part of a larger World Heritage Area. “WOW” was uttered more times than you could count. This is an incredible part of the world! The following is a short summary of the week long adventure.

Getting to Te Anau requires a reasonable amount of effort and patience but as noted above, one is well and truly rewarded. My travel started at 12.30 pm Tuesday 2 May, arriving in Te Anau at 6.30pm Wednesday 3 May. My travel group included Nick Heath and Matt Cooper from Kangaroo Island whom I met up with in Adelaide, and Andy Spate whom we met in Melbourne. This group expanded in Auckland for the leg to Queenstown with the final arrivals here the Capricorn Caves crew and Lana Little from Chillagoe. Once loaded onto the coach, we had just another 2½ hour coach ride to Te Anau. Despite some travel weariness, we enjoyed a reception barbecue and met the Real Journeys team. Their leader and convener of this AGM, Neil Collinson, had suffered a fall when a ledge gave way beneath him in Te Anau Cave on Anzac Day, severely breaking his ankle. This could have presented significant difficulties for hosting the ACKMA contingent, however Neil’s team stepped up admirably and the week’s

activities passed without a hitch (for us at least). Sometimes you don’t know just what your people can achieve until the space is made and Neil reflected on this on the last evening – more on that later.

On Wednesday, Day One, we convened at the Department of Conservation (DOC) park headquarters adjacent to the holiday park where most of us were staying. Park ranger Lindsay, in charge of biodiversity, provided an outline of DOC’s work managing the largest National Park and World Heritage Area in New Zealand. I did enjoy his description of biodiversity



*Lunch at Key Summit  
Photo: Steve Bourne*

management which ‘mostly involves killing things’. After this introduction, three groups were formed to experience three different walks; Key Summit, Hollyford Track and Kepler Track. I was in the Key Summit walk, headed by guide Anja who had an incredible career of guiding across many different countries. We enjoyed lunch at the top of the Key Summit walk, which in reality is surrounded by many much higher peaks and some incredible scenery. On the walk down a rabbit crossed our path and I asked the guide if it be OK to stone the rabbit, in other words, assist in the biodiversity work outlined by Ranger Lindsay in the morning. No one would ever believe this story except it was witnessed by a number of people – the stone I hurled at the rabbit brought about its immediate demise! How unlucky was that rabbit!!

Other groups took the Kepler Track or Hollyford Track and Ann Augusteyn and Regina Roach have provided a description of these.

### Kepler Track

“Just a wee stroll” and 12 kilometres later! I would not have missed it for the world. The track through the magical beech forest loaded with lichens, mosses and ferns was perfect ; the gradient was such that conversations could flow freely!! Our hosts Thomas and Heath were amazing; they regaled us with fascinating stories of the Fiordland bush; demonstrated the predator controls and even eventually discovered Moturau Hut on beautiful Lake Manapouri where lunch awaited us! The *Kids Restore Kepler Birdsong Project* supported by the local community and funded by Air New Zealand CTOS and Distinction Hotels in partnership with DOC is most impressive. It is so refreshing to discover a “good news” story. I loved every moment.

Ann Augusteyn Capricorn Caves



Julia James with Ann Augusteyn on the shore of Lake Te Anau  
Photo: Ann Augusteyn

### Hollyford Track

A ‘Walk in the Park’ was the theme of the Guides’ Workshop on Thursday. There were three options. Kepler Track, Key Summit on the Routeburn Track and the Hollyford Valley Track.

Question. Why choose the Hollyford Valley option?

Answer. “Because it has everything.” A bus ride viewing textbook glaciation features - U shaped valleys, terraces, hanging valleys, roches moutonnees, kettles, neve fields etc. Great photography - except for the Mirror Lakes. It was misty rain so their mirror image reflections were not on display but the boardwalk and bird life made for a short pleasant stroll.

Knobs Camp, an old public works camp now utilized as tourist accommodation, was a quick stop before we climbed up out of the valley, and off loaded the Key Summit walkers at the beginning of the Routeburn Track. This group thought one has to ascend and descend steep hills to take outstanding photos. If they had been smarter they would have stayed on the bus with the Hollyford group and their guide Brad Crawford.

We drove slowly through Gunn’s Camp at the head of the Hollyford Valley, named after Davey Gunn, a cattleman who lived there ninety years ago. The settlement later became a road camp and now has a shop, museum and accommodation.

Our walk commenced with a swing bridge crossing. Only a maximum of two people at a time are allowed on the bridge except if you do not read the sign. Luckily there were no issues for the group of people who waltzed across the bridge in one group without first reading the sign.

Located beside the swing bridge was a boat ramp for the launch of jet power boats. It is used by fisherman and many people completing the eight day circular DOC Hollyford Track walk. The “walkers” walk the easy sections and find alternate methods (jet power boats and helicopters) to avoid the hard sections!

We sauntered about 4 km along the mostly level track, sometimes alongside the river where one could spot the trout cruising among the rounded river stones. The trails and traps of the stoat contractors were obvious. Being heavy boxes many were located close to the track where they could easily be transported in, set up and monitored.

Brad showed us how to identify landslips by the vegetation. We learnt about the different types of beech trees and ferns, foods the Maoris ate and bird calls. Included was a lesson in Kiwi bush craft if ever one needed emergency food or shelter. It was an excellent interpretative example in the use of alliteration to communicate a message.

If you are hungry then search for the big ferns whose fronds feel “hard and hairy” they will feed you – remember the saying “hard, hairy and hungry”. The ferns which feel “soft and silky” will provide you with shelter, and the saying is “soft, silky and sleepy”.

On the return stroll to the bus whilst walking alone I reflected about my setting . High above, the U shaped valley was walled in by Darren Mountains. The sun glistened on the snow patches against a bright blue sky background, thirty metres above me the beech formed a broken canopy of dark coloured leaves, and the dappled light danced upon the different coloured tree trunks and moss covered trees. Surrounding me was vegetation in endless shades of green.

The Hollyford Track option was an outstanding example of a ‘Walk in the Park.’

Regina Roach, Yarrangobilly Caves

On day two, we travelled a bit over an hour to Clifden Caves, via the historic Clifden suspension bridge. Clifden Cave is immediately adjacent to the road and clearly signposted, available for anyone to visit. As we all know, the issue with open access to caves is the inevitable damage and vandalism. Maybe not though! Read on for the Luxmore Cave description! Clifden Cave is a stream cave, easily accessible with mostly walking passage. There are a couple of pools that can be skirted around the wall (ably assisted by Thomas) or the direct option through up to knee-deep water could be taken. All who wished to stay dry did.

Neil had asked John Brush to lead a graffiti cleaning workshop in the cave, given John’s experience in this work. David Wools-Cobb was in my group and like John, has cleaned many a cave surface. We experimented with a few techniques; spraying water, wire brushes (with stainless steel bristles to avoid rust if they drop out), nylon brushes and a drill with a nylon bristled



*Two methods of negotiating the pool in Clifden Cave. Above. Thomas Lundman watches Daniel Carrauthers skirt the pond.*

*Photo: John Brush*

*Below. Thomas assists Charlotte Riley through the water with Keagan Morris in the foreground.*

*Photo: Steve Bourne*



*The Capricorn Caves crew at Clifden Cave. Standing. Jordan Wheeler, Christian Bom, Ann Augusteyn, Charlotte Riley, Kimberley Wheeler. Seated. Judy Christensen, Keagan Morris. Photo: Ann Augusteyn*



*Graffiti in Clifden Cave. Different inks and paints used require different methods of removal. This would be an excellent topic for a future journal for members to share their success or otherwise with graffiti removal*

*Photo: John Brush*

brush. As John and David highlighted, each situation needs a different technique, and I hope to have an article for a future journal on this topic. There was some particularly offensive coloured blue paint in Clifden Cave, reading 'Vlad from Russia' (Putin??) part of which was successfully removed through the use of the above four techniques. Graffiti in caves stimulates interesting discussions. What is the cut-off date for something to be considered historic? What if it is a person of note? Two examples jump to mind; a date of 1213 in Postojna cave, Slovenia and Brett Whiteley's (an Australian artist), signature as child visitor to Jenolan Caves, New South Wales.

On this day, we also visited the Totara Forest Walk. This was a nice short walk to visit the majestic trees and capped off a great day, prior to our hour long drive home.



*Peter Chandler using the drill with nylon bristled brush to remove the blue paint of "Vlad".*

*Photo: John Brush*



*How many ACKMA members to circle a giant Totara tree?  
Eleven!!  
Photo: Ann Augusteyn*

### **Te Anau Glow Worm Cave**

Te Anau Cave is accessed via a 25 minute boat trip across Lake Te Anau to the Murchison Mountains, where the Takahe, a flightless bird, once thought to be extinct, was rediscovered in 1948. This bird looks like an over sized Australian swamphen and is of the same genus. We were able to see these close up in a park on Sunday but no one was lucky enough to see a wild bird.

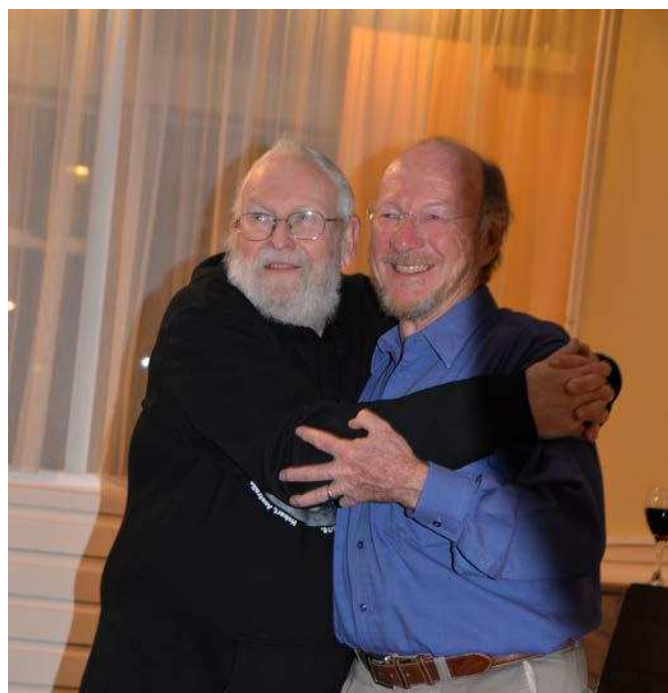


*Lucy Collinson introducing Te Anau Glow Worm Caves to ACKMA members.  
Photo: Ann Augusteyn*

Lucy Collinson introduced ACKMA members to Te Anau Cave in the visitor centre. I was immediately struck by the enthusiasm of the Real Journeys guides which was a highlight of our entire visit to the site. Te Anau Cave is accessed through a low entrance, some bending required. The first section of the cave has a fast flowing stream and waterfall, and it was above this that Neil had his fall just prior to the ACKMA AGM event. He was lucky not to head over the waterfall. Above the waterfall, a dam has been constructed and boats take visitors further upstream to view the glow worms. As an ACKMA member and well travelled caver, I have been lucky to view quite a few glow worm caves. Te Anau Cave has a moderate showing of glow worms, and I have certainly seen caves with larger more spectacular shows than this. This does not detract from the cave experience though, which starts from the moment you

board the boat at Te Anau. The package of boat trip across the lake, tour through a very active stream cave, viewing of glow works by boat inside the cave and walk through the forest accompanied by knowledgeable and friendly guides make this an excellent and very worthwhile experience. On a cave tour it is normal to be subjected to a few facts, most of which we fail to retain. Fortunately, I have had several trips to Waitomo and my knowledge of glow worms and their life cycle is reasonably good. One other fact I managed to retain was the age of Te Anau Cave, just 12,000 years! I found this incredible and it was confirmed the following day by Prof Paul Williams in our trip to Aurora Cave.

On Saturday evening, Paul Williams provided an after dinner talk on the Aurora Cave system and geology of the broader Fiordland landscape. See Paul's article elsewhere in this journal (page 13).



*Paul Williams receives a man-hug following his excellent dinner address.  
Photo: Ann Augusteyn*

### **Aurora Cave**

Aurora Cave is the master system of which Te Anau Cave is a small section where the stream exits the mountain into Lake Te Anau. We enjoyed another boat trip to reach this and a nice walk up the mountain to reach the cave entrance. We had quite a leisurely look through some sections of the cave, with the highlight being Paul William's on site interpretation. One of Capricorn Cave's young guides provides his thoughts on the Aurora Cave experience.

One of many of the incredible experiences from ACKMA 2017 at Te Anau was the Aurora Caves, not only the caves themselves but also the walk to and from. What significantly added to this experience was the overview of the geology and formation of the caves and of the Te Anau area. Understanding why everything looked like it did gave me an insight to the recent past of this beautiful place. The walk to the caves was full of Beech trees, and a micro world full of mosses, every time I looked closer at the mosses, I would discover that the many species are all living symbiotically with each other. Then was the caves themselves, from the entrance that could fit a 747 plane, to the gushing

waterfalls. I struggled to say a single word while inside that cave because I was so blown away by what I was seeing in front of me. I am very thankful to all those who put this experience together and thankful to those who attended, I am looking forward to seeing you all in the future.

Christian Bom, Capricorn Caves



Marjorie Coggan and Dave Smith in Luxmore Cave  
Photo: John Brush



Nicola Beckett under the “Rock of Death”, a slab of rock identified as unstable and could possibly fall. I did like the risk strategy, only one person to move under the rock at any one time. Seems perfectly reasonable to me.

Photo: John Brush

On Monday, the majority of the group took a helicopter flight to the Mount Luxmore Hut, from where we would visit Luxmore and Luxless Caves. The Capricorn Caves crew visited Aurora Cave on this day, after walking to Mount Luxmore the previous day, a fair day’s exercise of 28 km *plus* caving. Understandably, they were a little weary after that effort, particularly the very petite Charlotte Riley who must have run most of the day to keep up.

I commented about graffiti in open access caves when describing Clifden Cave. The Mount Luxmore Caves are open access and I only saw one piece of graffiti. There may have been more but it wasn’t obvious. One can draw two conclusions as to why there is a lack of graffiti in these caves; the people who walk the track are conservation minded and respect the

environment they are accessing, or people do not carry spray paint cans and other writing implements with them while hiking. I hope it’s the former but suspect there is an element of not having writing tools available to leave their mark.

On Monday night, the final night of the extended ACKMA AGM weekend, a dinner was held at the Distinction Motel. The usual final dinner thank yous were perhaps a little more personal than usual. Neil Collinson reflected on the achievements of his team, including Laura Dawson, daughter Lucy, guide Thomas Lundman and wife Paula, providing gifts of alcohol and flowers. While Neil was able to attend the meeting and greet ACKMA members on occasions, his team largely filled the organisational breach. Laura, Lucy, Tom and Paula worked long hours to deliver a great week of activities and I am sure the experience will raise them to a new level. Neil reflected that his accident and his absence from much of the event was a good thing. I don’t think there is anything good about what Neil was and is going through, but the growth of his team is an outcome he is proud of. The AGM attracted 60 members, who were treated to a great week of activities - *sweet as!!*

All good things come to an end and Tuesday it was time to say goodbye and make our way home, while some members stayed on and enjoyed a holiday in New Zealand. I am sure that Te Anau is now on the list for most if not all of us to visit again.



Anne Musser examining moa bones in Luxmore Cave  
Photo: John Brush



The wounded warrior Neil Collinson.  
Photo: Ann Augusteyn