

## From the Conference “first timers”

### No 1



**Nick Powe (Ian Eddison)**

Kents Cavern, UK has been a member of the ACKMA for many years and we have enjoyed receiving the quarterly magazine. In May 2018 I attended the ACKMA conference in Margaret River, WA for the first time and I am very pleased I did. This association embodies all the disciplines that are relevant to the work we do managing and protecting natural underground environments. The papers presented were diverse and covered aspects of cave guiding, karst conservation, education and geotourism. Above all, the people attending were passionate about caves, caving and cave research, and I gained much from the many conversations during the week.

What a privilege it was to discover the Margaret River, with its many fantastic show caves, each offering visitors a slightly different underground experience, from Ngilgi Cave in the north with its rich cultural connections and self-guided exploration tours, to Jewel Cave in the south offering visitors an exceptional insight into the majesty of what can lie beneath our feet. This area not only has great caves, but it has an amazing coastline, deep rooted culture heritage and a tradition of food and drink recognised internationally through its famous wine production. All these are connected to the fascinating geological heritage in this, the most south-western corner of Western Australia. Geotourism at its best and all exceptionally well presented during the conference.

I would recommend anyone involved in cave operations, cave exploration and cave and karst science to become a member of this organisation and attend its conferences.

**Nick Powe**  
**Director**  
**Kents Cavern Prehistoric Caves**

### No 2



**Nick McIntyre (a“selfie”?)**

Feedback points on the conference:

- Good mix of presentation, discussion, questions and practical exercises/field work. Having the site visits in the afternoons was a great idea as by lunchtime people can become a little disengaged if having a full day of presentations. The site visits in the afternoon just broke this up nicely.
- It was great to see a mix of generations in the crowd and gave me great hope that there are future up-and-coming caving managers, guides and researchers around who can learn from the wisdom and experience of older members.
- Catering and logistics was really well done and set a high standard.

I had a lot of fun..... most important..... and there was a great balance between social and learning interactions.

As a cave site manager with tourism interests, I was particularly engaged with the audience around me as I could link into a range of caving expertise from researchers, explorers, site managers, guides which was very useful.

Overall a good experience & well done to all.

**Nick McIntyre**  
**Acting Site Manager Naracoorte & Tantanoola Caves**

### No 3

Margaret River 2018 was my first ACKMA Conference experience. I went with little expectation of what I may learn or see, and I was blown away. The conference was fascinating; the papers that were presented inspired me to learn a lot more about the natural world. Every day was perfectly broken up by the field trip in the afternoon. I have not yet been to many caves in Australia, especially caves as decorated as in Margaret River, and seeing such a place has further instilled my passion for cave and karst environments.

**Christian Bom**  
**Capricorn Caves**

## No 4



*Anne and Philip Woodward about to ladder out of Aiennyu Cave (Peter Chandler)*

### *It is not the destination but the journey*

When we started to run commercial tours in Nikau Cave twenty-four years ago, the destination was foremost in our minds. Survival and retaining the farm!

We had early guidance from the Auckland Adventure Operators Group, learnt about RAM documents and shared marketing dollars. They were fun times and we learnt lots, using our children as guides with no training other than their carefree, rural upbringing. Our training was no more – farming, shearing, nursing, raising five children.

After twelve years, although visitor numbers were increasing, we needed a boost, so made a leap of faith and started planning to build the Café. About then, I think, we appeared on the ACKMA radar and have been members since. It made us official! We met Peter and Libby Chandler who became mentors of sorts, although they may not realise that. They encouraged us for years to attend a conference and finally we attended a full day at Waitomo. We felt like frauds amidst such high-powered and experienced company but were warmly welcomed; loved it; and were inspired by our day.

Five years ago, the Adventure Safety Standards for caving were introduced and we had our first audit. While we were successful in achieving our accreditation, the auditor commented that we had developed in isolation and needed more contact with the caving community.

Finally, with sufficient dollars now available, we are able to have that contact.

We really enjoyed our visit to Te Anau, and benefited from being able to discuss shared issues and problems.

Now, a year later, after our first full conference, we feel truly part of the ACKMA *whanau*; have learnt and experienced so much; and appreciate the opportunity to grow.

Neil and Mark, you have been outstanding hosts, showcasing your home patches with pride and passion. Thank you! (And a sincere “thank you” to Ian Collette for enabling a ‘first’ for us in Aiennyu Cave.)

Yes, the journey. We can’t rest at our destination yet, but the approach is so enriching.

**Anne Woodward**  
**Nikau Cave and Café**

**Editor’s note:** Nikau Cave and Café is less than 90 minutes drive south-west of Auckland, New Zealand.

## No 5

Working as a Cave guide has been one of the most rewarding jobs I have been fortunate to have. Coupled with a fun work “family”, the days are more enjoyable, rather than mediocre.

We are so grateful that our Management team continually encourage staff to better our skills and knowledge. Staff enrichment can often take you to ‘AMAZING FAR AWAY LANDS you may have never been before’... for example, the west coast of Australia.

So off we set, 8 staff members, to the other side of the Australian continent. There we were met by Mark Delane, the conference convenor, Asset and Environment Manager, Margaret River Busselton Tourism Association. Thus began the 22<sup>nd</sup> ACKMA Conference Margaret River - 10 days of great weather and absolute BLISS!

The Conference theme, “Hydrology management”, well and truly ran its course through the papers over the week. Papers highlighted the relationships with land usage of karst neighbours and the reduction of water inflow, due to follow-on effects from these usages. Water, as we know, is such a precious ingredient for Cave process both biotic and abiotic.

Cave Hygiene is a new aspect of Cave Management that has only recently shown to cause great management issues. Cave Hygiene could include but is not limited to dirt, mud, lint, dust introduced into the cave system. A little grosser is the addition to these contaminants with skin flakes, hair and even bacteria. These introduced build-ups seem to be constantly increasing due to the ever-increasing visitation to caves all over the world. It was exciting to witness the implementation of ideas and witnessing some of the actions being trialled to combat this issue. A field trip to Mammoth Cave gave us the opportunity to view both the “Stair Nappy” and the “kick rails”. The “Stair Nappy” is a plastic sheet that is hung under the stairs. This collects soils and contaminants that are caught below.

Another day had the Leeuwin - Naturaliste Ridge - Cave Rescue Response Plan presentation. This motivating discussion on the journey undertaken by all parties involved in producing a working Response Plan for cave emergencies in the park. It didn't take long for them to realise how under-prepared all stakeholders would have been in the event of a real emergency. This would have been a take home message for all, I'm sure.

Never to be called dull, ACKMA will always enjoy a light hearted romp. This was highlighted by the collective enjoyment of attendees to the hilarious presentation of adventures through the Caves with kids, Enid Blyton and a Chicken.....

Each afternoon, we were spoilt with Caves we were able to visit. It was like visiting other worlds. Much fun was also had on the journey to our destination. It was wonderful to experience other cave environments and management issues that we may not usually encounter.

Thank you for an experience that was priceless.

**Katherine Herring**  
**Interpretive Guide**  
**Capricorn Caves**



*Christian Bom and Katherine Herring (Ann Augusteyn)*

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## **Honorary Life Members' Fund**

At the recent Margaret River Conference, a policy on management and operation of the Honorary Life Members' Fund was agreed to at the Association's AGM.

An important element of the new policy was establishment of a sub-committee of three Honorary Life Members each year to make recommendations to the ACKMA Committee on expenditure proposals from the Honorary Life Members' Fund. Nominations were sought from current Honorary Life Members wishing to be considered for sub-committee membership.

The ACKMA Committee received three nominations - Brian Clark, Greg Martin (NZ) and Dave Smith (NZ).

The ACKMA Committee has confirmed these three as constituting the sub-committee until the next AGM.