

## Vale Chester (aka “Cheddy”) Alan Shaw

(3 May 1947 – 19 March 2019)

### Andy Spate

The quote below is from ANDYSEZ #1 which described a trip around Tasmania with Kevin Kiernan in 1989. It was on this trip that I first met Chester and Kay.

“I can totally recommend the Western Tiers Tea Rooms as a caving base at Mole Creek ... Kay even turned the electric blankets on for you when you come home after dark!”

Way to go!

During that epic trip where we visited 2.8 caves on average (albeit briefly in most cases) a day for 10 days. The highlight was a through-trip of Kubla Khan with Chester as our guide. Fantastic cave. Fantastic trip!

Other than at ACKMA meetings, my interactions with Chester took place on three other significant occasions:

- In 1990, on secondment from NSW NPWS to the Tasmanian Park Service, together with Stefan Eberhard (and others), I researched Kubla Khan in depth and developed a management plan still in use today;
- In 1995, Lana Little and I rigged the fabulous Kubla Khan at Chester’s request for the ACKMA Conference; and
- Serendipitously, whilst on our sandstone research in Northern Australia in 2008 (with Ken Grimes, Rob Wray and partner Jayne Thomas, Ian Houshold and partner Jenny Dyring), we pulled into one of the roadside overnight camping areas somewhere in Queensland and proceeded to camp next to the grey nomads, Chester and Kay!

Kirsty and I were privileged to have them both attend our wedding in Blanche Cave, Naracoorte, in 2015. Chester was a quiet, unassuming man who set a fine example in his approach to his beloved caves and other wonderful landscapes in the Western Tiers of Tasmania.

I cherish his memory.

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The following is a newspaper article about Chester following his ACKMA Fellowship conferring in 1999. I have added a few comments in square brackets. Thanks to Dave Butler for handing this on.

The [Launceston] Examiner, May 21, 1999 – page 3

**“Underground landscape restoration leads to worldwide recognition. Chester praised for work in caves”**

By Kirsty Eade

After spending the past 32 years in the inner sanctum of the Mole Creek cave systems, a Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife ranger has received worldwide recognition for his restoration work.

ACKMA Journal No. 115 June 2019

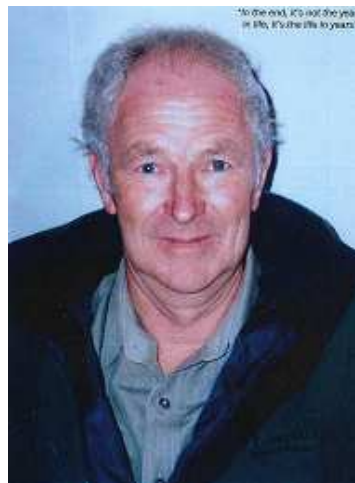


Photo: Kay Shaw

This month, Chester Shaw was elected a Fellow of the Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association, which has a reputation as being among the world’s leaders in the planning and management of caves and karst (limestone formation) landscapes.

[Pat on the back there for ACKMA – thanks Chester.]

Mr Shaw, 52, was honoured for his dedication to the restoration work at the Marakoopa and King Solomon caves.

“You don’t do it for the recognition,” Mr Shaw said

“My main aim was simply to make people aware of the management and care that needs to be taken with caves. There’re not just holes in the ground; they are part of the landscape.”

Mr Shaw originally became involved in caves when a debilitating illness caused him to seek work not physically demanding.

[Through-trips in Kubla Khan and other tough caves and walks in the Walls of Jerusalem were not “physically demanding”?]

[Chester was a fine AFL football player until health issues forced him out. Later in life he was a basketball player and coach for many years.]

Originally a sawmiller, ulcers perforated his bowel and he was fitted with a colostomy bag.

After becoming involved as a tour guide, he accumulated a great deal of experience, from establishing the caves’ complex but unobtrusive lighting system to educating the public.

When asked how much time he has spent underground in his 30 years, he gently laughs: “Too much.”

“My friends have even started calling me troglodyte,” he said.

“There is an air of mystery about caves.

“When I bring people down here and show them evidence that this was once a coral reef hundreds of thousands of years ago, I can almost hear their minds ticking over.

What we have here is a reminder of the Earth's evolution and the fragility of nature."

His work has also led him to the conclusion that the community must take responsibility for its actions, such as waste management.

"We have to be careful where we put our roads, for instance, and where we site different things so that we don't degrade these valuable underground landscapes," he warned.

**The following tributes to Chester were sent to Andy by ACKMA people:**

**Kevin Kiernan**

The very definition of a gentleman was Chester. Some of my fondest memories of him accrued during a year-long project I had recording, mapping and water tracing the karst and related things at Mole Creek back in the early-mid 1980s. Chester was spectacularly supportive, keen to be involved in all sorts of things both sensible and crazy, suggesting a number of the latter to sucker me into things wet and uncomfortable while also quietly sharing various of his personal gems.

Wonderful company and a great bloke. I spent much of that year living at the Marakooa Parks Service base, firstly in a caravan and then later in the Parks Service's Single Men's Quarters, caving with Chester and Vic Fahey, and enjoying the hospitality of Minis and Lesley How. That was one of the best years of my life, with Chester always up for any trip or assistance he could offer.

His enthusiasm for caves and karst knew no bounds. Now, looking back over the years I knew him, it is his sincerity and generosity of spirit as a human being that most stands out in my memory. My employment in later years allowed far less caving than that halcyon year as essentially a professional caver, and life mostly took me in directions other than Mole Creek. There were still some great times had with Chester nonetheless, including some particularly fond memories while scoping out possibilities with him for an ACKMA conference he convened in the 1990s. It was only his health that faded in later years, not his interest in matters karstic or environmental, and nor his pre-eminent qualities as a gentleman.

Anne and I intended dropping in on Chester and Kay on our way to Cradle recently but, finding no cars around and their home seemingly deserted, we put the visit off until our return journey – and the following day we learned the sad news of Chester's passing. On our return journey, it was not only Chester's house that was now empty but, seemingly, all of Mole Creek; it felt a bit like the soul of the place had vanished, knowing that the linchpin of so many good memories there was no longer around. RIP mate, you are very sadly missed by so many, many people.

Chester certainly was a fine, very lovely gentleman. I am sure he will be sadly and greatly missed.

**Cathie Plowman**

Chester can only be described as a gentleman. I was privileged to work with him as a ranger at Mole Creek.

Whether at the caves or out in the bush, Chester was always polite, quietly spoken, unassuming, ever-helpful, never flustered and never fazed by any less than considerate behaviour from his workmates or members of the public.

While most ACKMA members would associate Chester, quite rightly, with the Mole Creek Caves, his duties also took him into the Walls of Jerusalem National Park and Central Plateau areas of Tasmania. He worked in these areas when management changes meant that some traditional uses such as horseriding, cattle-grazing and hunting were curtailed in favour of nature conservation. Chester's gentle nature was sensitive and considered toward his local community where these changes were not automatically accepted at the time.

But Chester's foremost love was the caves where he worked for several decades providing service, hospitality and countless tours to whomever visited. He loved being involved in ACKMA; meeting with ACKMA members; visiting other show caves; and bringing home ideas to help improve the management of the Mole Creek Caves.

In retirement, Chester continued to live at Mole Creek with his dear wife Kay, where he had to extend the house to cope with his ever-increasing collection of cave memorabilia. He delighted in bumping into cavers and hearing their stories about current projects and recent trips. Cavers and caves have lost a great friend with Chester's passing.

**Dale Calnin**

Chester Shaw was one of life's true gentlemen. He made us so much richer through his life and his legacy. A sad loss to all - but especially to the ACKMA family.

**Kevan Wilde**

This is the first I have heard of this awful news. Chester was such a great guy and a doyen of caves, in general, and of ACKMA.

Kent Henderson and Brian Clark each said

He was indeed a fine and gentle gentleman.

**Grant Gartrell, Dennis Rebbechi**

He was indeed a gentleman. Sad, but wonderful memories.

**Indonesian Speleological Society**

We're very sorry to hear that loss. Our deep condolences for Chester Shaw. May he rest in peace.