

## **Waitomo, NZ— local news from Peter Chandler**

### **News from Spellbound Glow-worm and Cave Tours**

#### Winter cave flushing

Our trading name, Spellbound Glow-worm and Cave Tours, is because, as much as our visitors are expecting to go underground, they are principally doing so to see the spectacle of tens of thousands of these creatures at the same time.

It being June, we are in our winter recess. During this time, we remove the small weir/dam for which we have resource consent. The dam is needed to enable the inflatable raft to operate on flat water, from where the majority of the New Zealand Glow-worms are viewed.

This removal enables the Mangawhitikau Stream to flush out of the cave the silt and leaves that accumulate at the downstream end and the gravel that builds up at the top end of the cave. June may also bring a flood event to help this process.

The dam is also removed, for a night, at any time of the year before or just after a major flood event to let the stream gravel wash through.

It is to be noted that the free draining volcanic soil overlying clay in the region, along with wetlands and indigenous forest cover, buffers the stream flow to an extent from runoff from its 2000 hectare catchment.

#### Staffing changes

Over the past summer, our guiding team has increased to include part-timers Kieran Chandler, Anna Drabble and Mieke Heyns - all past Black Water Rafting guides but also now generally qualified outdoor instructors. Kieran will also be lending a hand on maintenance and operations.

#### Visitor facilities and tour changes

Here at Spellbound, finishing touches are also being made to an outside shelter for improved visitor facilities. And we have serious plans to establish a visitor meeting point closer to our caves. With Google maps now being ubiquitous, we believe many would be happy to travel closer to our caves. This would reduce our shuttle to our caves and back from 31 km to 5 km, and give more opportunities to have a one cave/one hour (or so) tour option. Watch this space!

#### **General Waitomo news**

Visitor dynamics at the Waitomo Caves' destination has changed somewhat from the previous summer as the Waitomo Glow-worm Cave concessionaire, THL, through the science advisory group and the owners' group (Hapu Trust having a 75% interest with the Department of Conservation holding the remainder) was able to increase the operational

CO<sub>2</sub> limit from 2400ppm to 3000ppm (but only for 5 % of the time).

This meant that they did take most glow-worm experience seeking visitors, and fewer visitors were diverted to other glow-worm tours. Most would now agree that this iconic cave has become over commercialised for much of the time.

#### **News of long time ACKMA member, Derek Mason**

This June, Libby and I visited Derek Mason and his wife, Jill, now happily ensconced at their residence in Havelock North. They are strategically located near two daughters and their families. Derek and family remain the owners of the glow-worm cave where we operate, having retained 10 hectares of their farmland before they sold the remainder of their farm in 2001. Derek ran tours based from their farmhouse between 1994 and 1999 – a tour which featured during the ACKMA Waitomo conference in 1997.



**Visiting the Masons**

#### **Finally, occasionally cave managers do get to undertake cave exploration**

Dave Smith and I recently revisited Stonemason Cave, which is a tributary to Luckie Strike Cave, a cave located on the Chandler/Ash wilderness land.

After not finding it a year ago when we went looking for it, this time we made our way down the 50 metres or so of narrow passage to the spot where, in about 1993, Kip Mandeno hammered open, and squeezed through, an aperture to the concern of an onlooking John Ash!

The squeeze is still there and, this time, in winter, there was a good breeze issuing from it, so it definitely remains a lead worth pursuing!

**Peter Chandler looking at the squeeze hole (and hoping to get back to test it at a future date!)**

