

# ACKMA Conference (2023) and Field Trips – Tākaka and surrounding regions of NZ South Island.

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Well, what an amazing adventure, but where to start. I suppose at the beginning – leaving home.

## Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2023

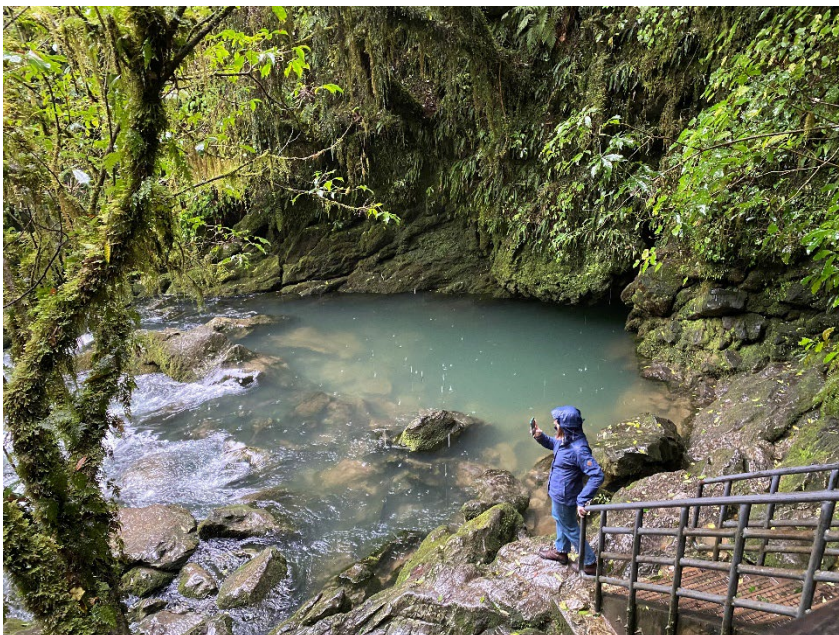
I awoke at 4 am, had a quick breakfast and loaded the car with all my luggage. Katerina then drove me to the nearby Springwood train station where I had to do a fast run along the platform to catch the train about to depart for the 1.5 hour journey to Central Station. A fast run was also necessary to catch the next train to the Sydney International Airport. I thought that would be the end of sprinting with a large 23 kg bag and 7 kg backpack, loaded with caving and camera gear - that was a pipe dream.

I was informed via an airlines text message during my train journey, that my second connecting New Zealand flight - Wellington to Nelson had been moved forward by 30 minutes and that made it a very tight change over between flights in NZ.

When going through Australian security to board the plane at Sydney, I was pulled aside as security wanted to check out my photographic and caving gear, however it was found to be within the regulation battery power capacity allowed on a plane. The actual Sydney to Wellington flight was thankfully uneventful. However, the plane had landed at Wellington Airport 15 minutes late and close behind another much larger aircraft, which meant I had just 20 minutes to collect bags, get through customs and run from the international terminal to the domestic. Stress levels were very high while waiting for baggage from two large planes to be unloaded and arrive on the carousel, then the sprint was on to get through customs and recheck-in my luggage for the next domestic plane to Nelson. I jumped many queues and sprinted with my luggage through terminals. Airport staff said no time to check in luggage, so I had to run with my heavy bags to just get through the boarding gate (I was the last person) and continue running down the passenger boarding bridge to the tarmac for the porter to put my luggage straight into the plane's cargo bay. The plane started taxiing onto the airstrip as I sat down. What a day of stress.

I arrived at Nelson airport at 4.40pm and met up with David Wools-Cobb who landed on a different flight just half an hour later. We then caught a taxi to the Rutherford Hotel in Nelson and checked in.

To unwind we had a casual stroll around town and a counter meal to finish off the day.



## Friday 19<sup>th</sup> May (Pre-conference)

The two of us were picked up in a minibus (along with other participants) at 8 am and taken to see the amazing Riuwaka resurgence (Fig. 1), then over the mountains to Tākaka for a morning tea stop. Here we met more participants going to the pre-conference field trips. Then, it was off along the very windy gravel coastal road to the accommodation lodge owned by the conservation group – The Friends of Mangarakau Swamp Society.

**Figure 1: Riuwaka Resurgence near Tākaka (left)**

Manarakau was an old gold mining settlement, mostly now demolished and returned to pastoral use or overgrown with thick vegetation. The Lodge has two levels with downstairs set up with a communal bunk room, shower, toilet and upstairs contains kitchen, lounge room and an open-air veranda (Fig. 2). What a magic place with spectacular views in all directions. It cost each participant just \$20 per night to stay there.

**Figure 2: Inside the Friends of Mangarakau Swamp Society lodge (right)**



### Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> May

Next morning at 8am, David and I jumped into a minibus going to Prouses Cave (eight people) while another eight went in a second minibus to Wet Neck Cave.

Both these caves were on private property, within 1 km of the coast, about a 5 km drive west of Mangarakau Swamp Lodge near the mouth of the Patarau River. This road is called Dry Road on the map, however over night it had rained heavily, and this caused the river to flood right across the road for several hundred metres (Fig. 3).



**Figure 3: Flooded 'Dry Road' on the way to Prouses cave (left)**

That meant that someone had to walk along the centre of the road in water up to knee depth to act as a flood gauge for the convoy of vehicles following. It was a bit concerning at one stage where the depth became border line for the vehicles to continue. Thankfully all the cars and minibuses made it through. At the property, contact was made with the property owner before our convoy continued toward the caves.

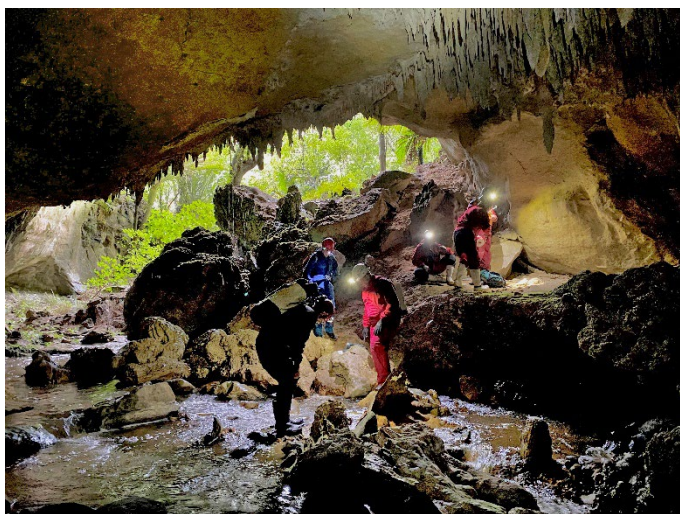
The view of the ocean and unusual karst outcrops was absolutely amazing (Fig. 4).



**Figure 4: Beautiful countryside and waterfall near Prouses Cave (above)**

However, the weather was challenging with squalls of rain and freezing strong wind as we marched up the hill past a large waterfall (a little downstream from the cave outflow) then along a valley to the cave entrance.

Local caver Oz Patterson was leading our group. I was immediately impressed with the large entrance chamber (Fig. 5). Inside a stream entered from beneath a large pile of rocks. A lot of the cave was negotiated by walking in the flowing stream and there were some large dry side passages (Fig. 6) and well decorated sections (Fig. 7). Needless to say, I took a few photos while on this trip.



**Figure 5: Entrance chamber of Prouses Cave (above)**



**Figure 6: Dry passage in Prouses cave (above)**



**Figure 7: Dirk Stoffels in a decorated section of Prouses Cave (left)**

Further inside, more streams entered from side passages, greatly adding to the water flow. We were told that no vertical gear was required, and that this was a relatively dry walk-through cave, but we may encounter some knee-deep water - I can say that was greatly optimistic as there were several pools where I was immersed up to my shoulders.

Lots of fun holding my pack above head height while wading through 13-14°C water. I was wearing thermals and cotton overalls. Yippee that was refreshing (Fig. 8).

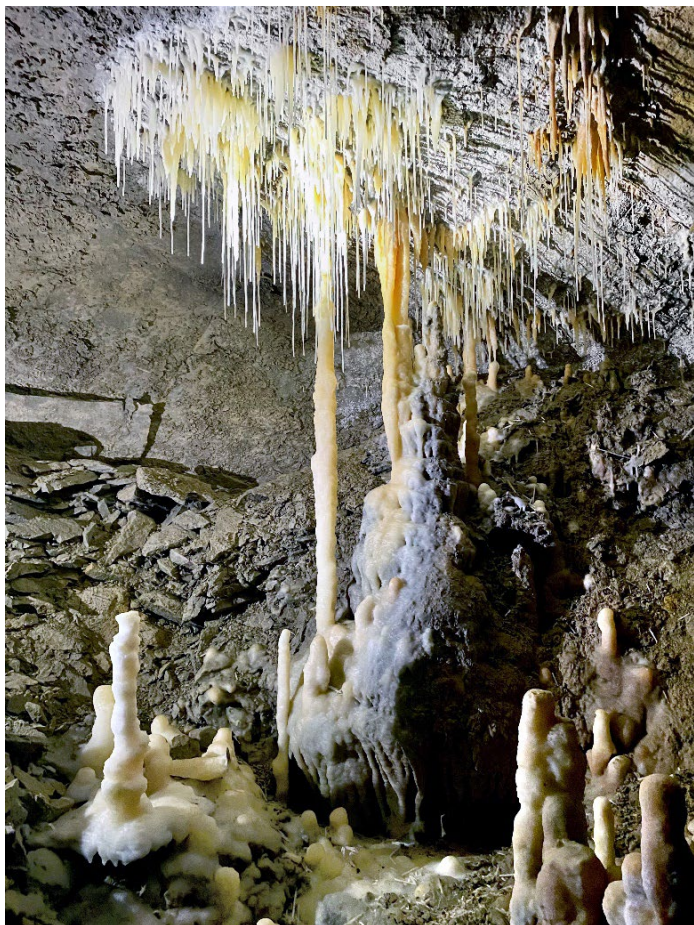
**Figure 8: Just before entering the chest-deep water in Prouses Cave (right)**

We eventually emerged at an outflow entrance a little upstream from the waterfall we had seen on our walk to the cave. Thankfully the rain had now eased, but there was still a strong cold wind. Time underground was 3 hours and 35 minutes. Overall, a great cave.



## Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> May

At 8.30 am those participating on today's caving trips jumped into two separate buses. David and I went with the group going to Cascade Cave, while another group went elsewhere. It was blowing a howling gale and raining horizontally when the bus stopped at our drop off point. However, the minibus was now stuck in the mud and had to be pushed by all of us back onto the road. What a start to the day of caving!



**Figure 9: Formations in Cascade Cave (left)**

Cascade Cave has some well decorated chambers with pure white and yellow speleothems (Fig. 9) and a spacious chamber containing a very large stalagmite and several columns (Fig. 10).

Oz Patterson and a few others spent some time laying out track marking to guide cavers on future trips and minimize impact on the cave.

**Figure 10: Installing track marking in Cascade Cave (below)**



There was also a long flattener crawl, which led to a lower passage containing lots of gypsum and halite (salt) formations. We spent 2.5 hours in this amazing cave. I took a number of multi flash photos while underground and someone kindly snapped a group photo on my camera before we changed out of caving gear (Fig. 11).



**Figure 11: Left to right; Garry Smith, Oz Patterson, Kieran Chandler, David Wools-Cobb, Ray Walker & Lydia Georgeson after returning from Cascade Cave (left)**

That afternoon we packed up and were driven back to the Tākaka accommodation (Golden Bay Motel) which David had booked.

After checking in and a quick change of clothes we were off to the conference welcome dinner at Tākaka Recreation Hall.

## Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May

At 8.30 am David and I were collected from the hotel and taken to the Tākaka School Hall where the conference was to be held.

The proceedings got underway at 9 am with a traditional Māori welcome ceremony (mihi whakatau) led by Ngāti Tama. After that there were talks by Prof. Paul Williams and Andrew Yuill about the Tākaka Aquifer and history and conservation campaign to preserve them.

After lunch everyone was driven in the minibuses a few kilometres to the incredible Te Waikoropupū Springs which has a huge volume of crystal-clear water (fluoro-aqua coloured) bubbling up from between large rocks at the resurgence (Fig. 12). What a sight!!!

**Figure 12: Te Waikoropupū Springs just out of Tākaka (below)**



At 3.30pm there was a talk by Phil Castle about the decades of exploration in the Golden Bay marble. Then after dinner at 8.30 pm Bruce Mutton talked about the exploration and mapping of Greenlink Cave.

### **Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> May**

I was the first presenter for the day and talked about the differences between ‘Calthemite and Speleothem Straws’ and the studies undertaken. Next was Ian Eddison talking about the ‘Ground Cover Vegetation at Jenolan Caves’. After morning tea, Mary Traves talked about the ‘Riddle of the Inangahua Drainage’, then Prof. David Gillieson talked about the ‘Geomorphology of the Caves and Karst of Kangaroo Island’. David Wools-Cobb talked about the ‘KarstCare Project in Genghis Khan Cave, Tasmania’.



**Figure 13: Owner Aaron McLellan, guiding ACKMA members through Te Anaroa Cave, Aorere Valley (left)**

After lunch everyone jumped in the three minibuses, which headed out to the Aorere Valley to visit the Te Anaroa Cave owned by the McLennan family which operated the show cave until recent times. Aaron McLellan farmed the property and was kind enough to show us through the cave (Fig. 13). This cave has some amazing decorations (Fig. 14), large shell fossils (Fig. 15) and penguin bones encased in the calcite ceiling. We spent 1 hour 45 minutes in this fantastic cave. Afternoon tea which consisted of scones, or cake with tea or coffee, was catered for at the Historic Bainham Store. A very interesting store with lots of antique items for sale.

A group of us then went to see the waterfall on Salisbury Creek and bridge over the Aorere River on the Quartz Range Road. A beautiful little waterfall and the bridge spans an interesting section of the river.

Upon returning to Tākaka we had dinner at a local restaurant. At 8.30 pm Van Watson did an interesting presentation on the early days of deep caving at Nelson.



Figure 14: Decoration in Te Anaroa Cave (left)



Figure 15: Shell fossils in Te Anaroa Cave (above)

### Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> May

The day started with a presentation by Mary Traves about the ‘Caves of the Greymouth Quarries’. Dr Julia James talked about ‘Caves and Climate Change’. Dave Merritt talked about ‘New Zealand Glowworm - more than one Species’. John Brush covered ‘Microbes in Jillabenan Cave’ and Helen Smith talked about ‘Spiders in Jenolan Caves’.

After lunch a group of us headed off to Commentary Cave (Fig. 16), which is a short wild adventure cave used by some school groups.



Figure 16: Left to right; Lydia Georgeson, Logan Doull, David Wools-Cobb, Kieran Chandler (TL) and Garry Smith ready to enter Commentary Cave (above)



Figure 17: Keiran Chandler abseiling into Commentary Cave (right)

Kieran had a little trouble finding the entrance in the thick scrubby doline, but once located, he set up the rope down the 17 m entrance pitch (Fig. 17). This done, it didn't take long before we were all down at the bottom, near the start of the cascading waterfalls. There were several other small drops (5 m and 3 m pitches) with plunge pools at bottom of each. There is some good decoration in a large chamber just before the end, but overall there is not an abundance of speleothems. Near the exit there were a couple of unusual shower head and sucker pad formations. Great short day with about 2.5 hours spent in the cave, then it was back to the ACKMA AGM to arrive just before the meeting finished.

That night everyone converged on the Tākaka's Dada Manifesto Restaurant for a delicious meal which was included in the conference fee.

### Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May

At 7.30 am we jumped aboard one of the minibuses and were driven up the winding mountain road to Tākaka Hill to visit the Ngarua Show Cave, hosted by David Hobson and Janet Morgan. Morning tea was served at several picnic tables with a view down the mountain and over the bay toward Nelson. What a magic sight. Then it was off to see Ngarua Cave. A short flight of steps takes us down to the main level of the cave (Fig. 18). On the way we pass a number of actively growing tree roots growing out from between stalactites.

**Figure 18: ACKMA members visiting Ngarua Cave (right)**

Once at the base of the steps most of the cave from here on is horizontal. Large areas of wall and speleothems are covered in rounded popcorn shaped coral. A skeleton of an extinct Moa is laid out in a fenced off alcove (Fig. 19). Lampenflora is an issue in several locations near the track lighting. Toward the back of the cave there is a column with historic signatures. The cave is exited by a short ladder to the surface via a different entrance to the one where the tour had started. We spent about 1.5 hours in this cave.



**Figure 19: Moa bones in Ngarua Cave (below)**



From here about half of those attending the conference walked across country to view several dolines and cave entrances over parts of the property. After about half an hour of walking and looking at surface features we entered Kairuru Cave, which is an easy walk-in cave. After descending the entrance chamber slope we came to a T-intersection with a spacious horizontal passage leading off. There were some interesting cave coral speleothems with erosion flutes cutting deep into them. They were quite unusual.

There was also a large, very distinct volcanic intrusion in the limestone that the cave passage had bisected. This cave was very interesting and our group of about 15 spent about an hour underground.

After that we were taken a short distance in the minibuses to have lunch at the Woolshed Cafe. Then on to Canaan Road to visit Harwoods Hole Lookout and Homestead Creek Submergence. These involved a walk through the forest of about an hour following a creek which led to the submergence - a huge limestone doline with a cave containing multiple large pitches. We did not enter this cave. From here we climbed up to the lookout for a magnificent view overlooking the Tākaka Valley.

On the way back along the Canaan Road we stopped to see the entrance to the Greenlink Cave system, on a property which the NZSS Cave Conservation Trust had purchased with the assistance of an ACKMA donation. It was quite an amazing plot of land containing the cave.

After the trip back into Tākaka there was a talk at 8.30 pm by Kieran McKay about the cave exploration that continues in the local area. Van Watson then talked about his exploits and book covering 1974 Expeditions to Papua New Guinea.

### Friday 26<sup>th</sup> May

The morning presentations started with Rob Davies' talk about 'Diverse landforms revealed by LIDAR digital - examples from Golden Bay and Nullarbor Plain'. Then Prof. David Gillieson presented on behalf of Dr. Claire Buswell, 'The windmills of our time - the industrialisation of the Nullarbor'. After morning tea, Prof. David Gillieson talked about the 'ACKMA Strategic Plan - where to from here?'

At 12 noon we all grabbed pre-made packed lunches and jumped onto the minibuses for a trip out to see Rob Davies' property which contains some of the caves and resurgences covered in his morning talk. Rob's house lies right on the fault line which is on the east side of the Tākaka Valley.

We spent about 30 minutes in Woolshed Cave. It is mainly horizontal in the section we visited and contains some reasonable decoration.

**Figure 20: The unusual bubble drip in Elliot's Cave, Tākaka (right).**

This is the photo that Gary won the photo competition with!



Then we were driven a short distance to another property and walked up a hill to Elliot's Cave. This cave was once used as an adventure tourist cave. Kieran Chandler led our group underground. He had told us there was a drip that had a bubble at the end of a short straw (Fig. 20).

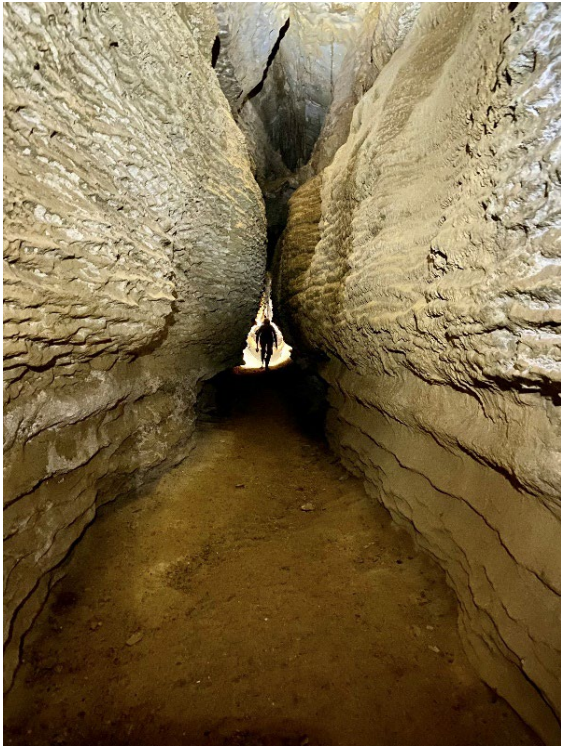
Following Kieran's instructions, David soon found it and I set about photographing this very unusual sight. First, I took a video of this amazing sight with the water gradually flowing over the outside of the bubble and a number of drips falling from the still intact bubble. I then took a couple of photos. John Brush arrived and also took a few photos. We were well back from the bubble drip, however it burst and over the next 5 minutes it did not reform. Thankfully I had taken a video and a couple of photos as I had never seen this type of drip before.

Further inside the cave there are the remains of an old wooden ladder and a rotting plank precariously balanced across a deep pit. These were the only things which indicated that the cave had once been used as a tourist cave.



After descending a short pitch with a hand line, we entered a small room full of beautiful white decoration. I set three flash units out to get a good photo, however one decided it would move locations and fell several metres down the next pitch. After the crash, smash, thump, I climbed down to find my electronic flash unit and slave trigger in many bits scattered across the cave floor. After gathering up as many bits as possible, I was able to get the unit working despite some small missing parts. I then took a few photos in the well decorated chamber.

Our group then began heading back out the cave and we reached the surface at 3.35pm. We had been underground for 1 hour and 15 minutes.



That evening the conference attendees gathered at the Tākaka Recreation Hall for the final dinner and entertainment. Upon arrival, delegates were asked to submit two images for the photo competition. I only had my phone so was able to email two phone images to Peter Chandler. The short notice did not help, so I was limited to those I had on my phone.

Van Watson spoke about some of his exploits in Papua New Guinea. Then David Wools-Cobb spoke about cave rescue from a volunteer patient's point of view.

The conference organisers then showed the photo entries on a large screen TV and held an attendee's choice vote by a show of hands. I was shocked to take out first and second places in the competition with phone photos (Figs 20 & 21). It certainly shows that phone photos are fast encroaching on the quality of digital cameras.

After that we were all shuttle bussed back to our various accommodations.

**Figure 21: Gary's other winning photo competition entry.**

*This photo was included under editorial prerogative, not by the author.*



### Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> May

We were picked up from our accommodation at 7.45 am and taken to the local bus depot. The local bus company had been contracted to take a group of attendees back to Nelson airport or into town as required. This was a pleasant trip over the mountain and on to the lowland around Nelson.

After checking back into the Rutherford Hotel, David and I walked up to the top of Botanical Reserve Hill, which is claimed to be the centre of New Zealand. From the top it was a beautiful view over the Nelson city centre and ocean. We then had a walk through the Christ Church Cathedral Nelson which is constructed from local marble. The day wound up with a restaurant dinner in town just a few minutes walk from our hotel.

### Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> May

Both David and I flew out on different flights. David flew back to Tasmania, while I flew to Auckland to meet up with my partner, Katerina, to continue on a trip around the North Island until the 6<sup>th</sup> of June.

A few notes on the road trip which Katerina and I did after the 29<sup>th</sup> of May.

During the ACKMA conference I had the pleasure to meet the owners and a guide at Nikau Cave. This cave is located at 1770 Waikaretu Valley Road, about a 1.5 hour drive south of Auckland.

Katerina and I called in to see Nikau Cave and Cafe. This adventure tourist cave is owned by Philip and Anne Woodward who extended a very warm welcome to us. Guide, Ray Walker led us through this active stream passage cave which involved walking and a short crawl in ankle to knee deep water for about 1 km. The cave contains lots of fossils, glowworms, and speleothems. There are also several eels in the stream way. The cave temperature is around 13°C. The standard tour takes about 1.5 hours; however Ray was very amenable in allowing me time to take photos through this great cave. Photos are not normally allowed.

This cave has lots to offer the adventure tourists and speleologist alike. Our tour took just over two hours – greatly appreciated Ray.

I will write an article about the Nikau Cave for a future edition of the ACKMA Journal.

**Acknowledgement.** A special thankyou to the conference organizers, Peter Chandler, Libby Chandler, Neil Collinson, and Kieran Chandler who did an amazing job in organising the events and chaperoned us around in minibuses among many other tasks to pull this event together. Also, a special thankyou to the numerous local cavers who also gave up their time to show us around and through the local wild caves and the cave owners for their hospitality with guided tours etc. Thank you to Katerina Fulton for proofreading this report.