

HAPPENINGS AT OLSEN'S CAVES

- Ann Augusteyn

Much activity has been occurring on the surface at Olsen's Caves in Central Queensland – after all, we are known as “the above ground caves”! As a result of funding from the Natural Heritage Trust, attention has been focused on weed eradication and re-vegetation programs. To honour our commitment to the preservation of the dry rain forest and the involvement of the local community, a native nursery has been established to supply indigenous seedlings to the local community as well as to our own bush regeneration activities. Environment Officer Lyle O'Sullivan has coordinated his ground works with an environmental school program that has been well received. National eco-tourism accreditation has also encouraged us to implement a total property management plan that focuses on issues ranging from recycling to guide training.

The conversion of Olsen's *tea room* into a Visitor's Centre by Ken Augusteyn has become a major event with interpretative displays on geology, local heritage and landcare. A formal opening is

scheduled for later in the year. The final stage, the Bat Cave, was well received by the delegates to the *8th Australasian Bat Conference* in April. The Bat Conference Annual General Meeting was held underground in the Cathedral Cavern followed by a conference dinner that was reminiscent of the legendary ACKMA Conference dinners. Ken has also been busy with the ground works for the first stage of our accommodation project. Caravan and camping sites should be ready for the high winter season. The next stage includes cabins and a dormitory-style lodge for school groups.

The Asian tourist downturn has effected us indirectly as the Gold Coast and offshore islands are now targeting our traditional self-drive market. This has been counteracted with cooperative marketing and the development of an *Eco-heritage Discovery Tour* linking Olsen's Capricorn Caverns with the Dreamtime Cultural Centre and the recently re-opened Rockhampton Heritage Village.