

ASF CONFERENCE AND ASF COUNCIL - BATHURST 2000-2001

- Arthur Clarke

From 29 December 2000 to 3 January 2001, cavers from most parts of Australia – plus one from California – converged on the All Saints College at Bathurst in NSW to attend the 23rd ASF biennial conference: rated as the second largest ASF Conference ever held. In a recent contribution to *Ozcavers*, the conference organiser (Jodie Rutledge) reported that 113 people registered for the ASF Conference and she was very proud to announce that it was a success. Furthermore following the conclusion of what seems to be a regular fund raising event at ASF Conferences – the “Dutch Auction” selling leftover Conference paraphernalia – the convenor (Angus Macoun) announced that ASF had made a reasonable profit from the conference!

On the day before the conference - Thursday, 28 December – there was an all day “talkfest” to discuss the future of cave documentation in Australia, desired fields for the national cave database and operation of the new ASF Web-based Karst Index Database (KID). Thirteen ASF members attended this discussion group including many of the ASF State KID Co-ordinators and others –such as Andy Spate representing the interests of NPWS in NSW. Convened by John Dunkley, the meeting covered levels of access to the web-based KID, fields to be suppressed by level of access, new fields to be developed covering the interests of cave biology and mineralogy, compatibility with IUS (International Union of Speleology) fields, means of maintaining security e.g. establishment of an audit trail, development of updating software, protocols for updating e.g., maintaining a paper copy of cave summary forms, the magnitude of the deficit in updating of cave data state-by-state, and operational structures etc. This ASF discussion group heard a report by Mike Lake on the implementation and implications of the new ASF Web-based Karst Index Database (KID). Attendees were able to have a “hands-on” experience with this web-based KID using computers in the All Saints College library accessing their various State Karst Index databases online via the new ASF website (<http://www.caves.org.au>). Preparations are now being made to enable ASF State Co-ordinators to commence data updates using the web-based software.

The following six days of conferencing involved a crammed programme alternating between visits to caves and karst areas, days at All Saints College in Bathurst for the many concurrent presentation sessions plus the choice of varied post-conference field trips. Over forty papers were presented, along with the poster presentation sessions, workshops, slide shows, cave art exhibition, plus photographic competitions, Speleo Sports, prussiking challenge and the biennial kidnap of “VicTim” (though we have been since told by Rauleigh Webb that this particular gnome is an

impostor)! Although there was a short supply of ASF Executive members present, the Executive held several meetings and the 45th ASF Council was convened on the second last day: 2 January 2001. All credit should go to Jodie Rutledge who acted as site manager, secretary and treasurer for the ASF conference, plus the convenor: Angus Macoun who gave presentations, ran workshops and organised the biennial photo competition while acting as convenor.

Numerous ACKMA members were present including the convenor of the 14th ACKMA (Wombeyan Caves) Conference: Mick Chalker, who attended the 23rd ASF Conference opening proceedings at Abercrombie. Pat Larkin – a practising environmental lawyer and the most recent “Fellow” of ASF - opened the ASF conference on the old wooden dance floor in *Abercrombie Arch* on the morning of Friday 29 December. After listening to the melodic sounds of our chorister – Domino – as her renditions echoed through the arch, Barry Cubbitt (chief guide at Abercrombie) took conference attendees on an historical tour of *Abercrombie Arch* and the nearby *Bushrangers Cave*. Following afternoon tea in the picnic shelters, we headed back to the All Saints College where Andy Lawrence from the Jenolan Caves Trust opened the ASF Cave Art Exhibition on a hot afternoon in Bathurst.

Titled “*Speleo Art – Down Under*”, the exhibition contained 76 different works of sixteen cave artists from Australia, Austria, Slovakia, UK, USA and Wales. Although the exhibition was dominated by the artwork or cartoons by nine UK artists including the two Welsh artists, four Australian cave artists presented works: Andrew Lawrence, June MacLucas, Glenn Woodley and Valda Gillies. On the topic of art, free art and digital photographic techniques were one of the six division themes in the ASF photographic competition that included a presentation of mounted prints and slides. Other divisions included Science and Biology, Research and Surveying; Cave Formations (speleothems etc.), Clastic Sediments and Karst or Non-karst cave passages; Cavers in action; Humour; and anyone of the five main Conference themes. Stefan Eberhard won the coveted title as ASF Cave Photographer of the Year as a result of his superb collection of photographic prints of cave fauna and cave passages. Arthur Clarke won three other photography awards including First Prize for the best slide in Cave Humour and a First and Third for slides in the “How-To” conference theme including images of Henry Shannon surveying in *Pendant Cave* in the threatened (“Caves-in-Crisis”) magnesite karst of NW Tasmania.

Following the opening of the art exhibition on Friday afternoon, I attended two sessions: a presentation by Jeff Butt on *Exploration in the Junee-Florentine karst of*

Tasmania illustrated with cave surveys, plus the seminar run by Angus Macoun titled: *Understanding Lighting for Photography*. Later that evening – as part of the Creative Caving theme – Angus conducted cave photographers on a visit to *Jenolan Caves* to practice lighting techniques in photography of speleothems and decorated chambers in *Orient Cave*, *Temple of Baal* and on to the *Pool of Cerebus* via other caves in the “Southside Show Caves” system.

On Saturday morning, Bill Allen from NPWS in Bathurst and ATSIC (?) delivered the keynote speaker address titled *Aboriginal Perspectives* describing the significance of some cave sites and karst areas in terms of aboriginal of islander beliefs, their heritage and “dreamtime” experience. The first full day of ASF conference presentations followed this keynote address. The conference programme was divided into five distinct themes or streams: Caving History, Cave How-To (caving equipment and techniques), Cave Why-For (the science of speleology), Creative Caving (art, photography etc.) and Caves in Crisis (cave management).

Due to the timetabling clash of concurrent presentations, it was impossible to attend all the many interesting talks during the conference. Amongst the sessions I attended all, or part of, there were: Angus Macoun (*Hunting Signatures*); Andy Spate (*Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust: State of the Environment report*); Evalt Crabb (*Macquarie NHT project implications*); Ernie Holland (*Would we develop Imperial Cave today?*); Chris Bradley (*Bullita Cave – Gregory National Park*); Jeff Butt (*New Glue-In Bolting Techniques for Caves*); Jill Rowling (Poster: *Aragonite in NSW caves & Cataloguing Ribbon Helictites and other Capillary Controlled Speleothems*); Nick White (Workshop: *Selection of a cave for Wild Adventure Tours*); Sue White (*Scientific Publishing: Where do cavers fit?*); Peter Dykes (Workshop: *NSW GIS Karst Database*); Norm Poulter (*The Nullarbor – Fuel Stove Only?*); John Dunkley (*Explorers, Surveyors & Missionaries*); Ian Curtis (*Survey of Graffiti in Cliefden Caves*); and another Angus Macoun seminar: (*Digital Imaging with Photoshop & Creating a page for “Australian Caver”*).

New Years Eve was *Jenolan Caves* day where conference delegates were given a number of options including an historical tour of *Jenolan* and surrounds lead by John Dunkley, and visits to the South and Northside show caves such as *Lucas Cave* and *Imperial Cave*. Jill Rowling lead two tours: looking at “ribbon helictites” and other speleothems in *Jubilee Cave*, plus cave minerals in *Chifley Cave* where I was surprised to see coloured lighting – similar to the show caves of China. The after dinner entertainment started when Arthur Clarke gave an hour-long talk to accompany a Powerpoint slide presentation describing the recent caving expedition in the cone karst of western Guangxi Province in southwestern China – with images of coloured lighting in their show caves. This was followed by another splash of colour - in the sky: the “New Millennium”(?) fireworks display at a local sports club

in Bathurst, if you didn’t get lost on the way trying to find it. Then back at All Saints College, there was the official launch of the ASF website (<http://www.caves.org.au>) followed by the ASF “come dressed as a bat” *Bacardi Bash* New Years Eve party – where yours truly won the best-dressed bat costume prize – a bottle of Bacardi (Bat) Rum - with the aid of a bats-wings umbrella (seconded from the STC Xmas Dinner)! The drinks bar stayed open and the bat party continued into the night with dancing and music – with the usual fun and games of conferences including body massage, the wet T-Shirt competition, skinny-dipping and losing your clothes!

On the final full day of conference, there was an unfortunate choice of events: a pleasant field trip to *Borenore Caves* with Mia Thurgate or attendance at the 45th ASF Council Meeting. There seemed to be a few delegates missing from this meeting! Councillors were given a presentation of the results arising from the ASF KID discussion group and ASF Council endorsed a number of motions relating to access to the web-based database, advanced search functionality access levels, controlling mechanisms and administrative management of users. Some significant changes were made to the ASF Constitution, enabling ASF to apply to become registered as an environmental organisation and if successful in turn will permit Tax Deductible donations to be made to ASF. The ASF budget discussions centred on rises in capitation fees, now going up to \$37.00 (from \$35) for individual members, so the ASF corporate (club) member rate (0.7% of single rate) will be \$26.00 and the student rate will be \$18.50.

Ernie Holland represented ACKMA at the ASF Council Meeting, since Andy Spate was unable to attend. There was some heated discussion at the Council meeting about the ACKMA CD ROM. Unfortunately, the outgoing General Secretary of ASF (Keven Cocks) was not present, so the recent letter from ACKMA Executive Secretary (Dave Gillieson) - relating the outcomes of the Buchan AGM discussions on the CD ROM - was not tabled at Bathurst. Along with other ACKMA material, the CD ROM includes a compilation of the first 12 cave management conference proceedings in Australasia (scanned or copied electronically from the various publications). The first seven cave management conferences were conducted under the auspices of ASF and the organisational structure of the former ASF Commission of Cave Tourism and Management (that was formed after the second cave management conference). The proceedings of the first four conferences were published by ASF, two of these jointly with other organisations; non-ASF bodies including ACKMA published the next three conference proceedings. (ACKMA was formed as a separate entity to ASF, following the seventh conference.) ASF believes that ACKMA owes it an apology, because the CD was produced without the specific written consent of ASF (who did not receive any formal letter from ACKMA). There were two major concerns expressed by ASF Council: firstly, the fact that the CD ROM and its cover

state that its contents are Copyright to ACKMA and secondly, there is no acknowledgement to ASF or any mention of ASF Copyright. Ernie was asked by the ASF President (Peter Berrill) to report the concern of ASF Council to the ACKMA Committee as a matter of urgency, so this issue can be resolved.

There was also some further concern expressed at ASF Council about Arthur Clarke being an ASF Executive member as well as being on the ACKMA Committee. Although some Council delegates suggested a conflict of interest, there were also positive comments about the mutual benefit of having a person involved at the Executive level in both organisations.

As a result of the ASF Council elections to fill office bearer vacancies, three new faces were elected to the ASF Executive. The ASF office bearers for 2001 are:

Peter Berrill (QLD) – President
Chris Bradley (ACT) – Senior Vice-President
Grace Matts (NSW) – Treasurer
Kath Rowsell (NT & VIC) – General Secretary
Jodie Rutledge (NSW) – Membership Secretary
Arthur Clarke (TAS) – Executive Secretary
John Dunkley (ACT) – Vice President
Joe Sydney (NSW) – Vice President
Wayne Tyson (WA) – Vice President

Subsequent to the Council meeting, the ASF Executive appointed Peter Dykes (NSW) as a Non-Executive Vice President.

The Conference Dinner on Tuesday evening, 2 January – after the ASF Council meeting - was the final item on the conference programme, prior to the post-conference field trips starting on Wednesday. Julia James gave a brief pre-dinner presentation and talk about the forthcoming IUS international Speleo Congress in Brazil in July this year. The dinner was an occasion for many speeches! Tony Culberg (a former ASF Secretary) gave one of opening dinner speeches relating the exploits of Henry Shannon and discovery of *Conference Concourse* in *Exit Cave* after the 1970 ASF Conference, then describing some of the deepest cave in Australia at the time!! Al Warild delivered the guest speaker address on the delights of cave exploration around the world with accompanying slides from caving expeditions in New Guinea and Mexico. Brett Wakeman and Kath Rowsell used some of Arthur's digital camera images taken during the conference to give a Powerpoint Presentation: these images featured conference cavers in their bat party costumes and some of the imagery or tricks that can be achieved by using Photoshop or Powerpoint. Various cavers were presented with their long overdue Certificate of Merit and Edie Smith awards; (Lloyd Robinson should be congratulated for following this through). The dinner night ended with a game of Speleo Bingo followed by the usual Dutch Auction of leftover prizes and donated items including numerous bottles of Bacardi Bat rum. And so endeth the proceedings and fanfare of another successful ASF Conference!

Accompanying the package of items that went with the ASF Conference, there was an optional 66-page guidebook produced, edited and published by Evalt Crabb. Titled: "*Caves, Karst and Canyons – A guide to Central-Western New South Wales*", this excellent booklet is largely based on extracts from an unpublished manuscript: "*Caves and Karst Areas of New South Wales*" being prepared by Garry Smith. The booklet produced by Evalt Crabb was prepared specifically for attendees at this 23rd ASF Conference and is an invaluable asset to compliment the Conference proceedings. After glancing through the guidebook at Bathurst, I was keen to test it after the conference!

Post-Conference field trips started immediately after the conclusion of the ASF Executive meeting on Wednesday morning. Ernie Holland lead a visit into *Slavens Cave*, near Lithgow, though some conference delegates missed the turnoff and ended up at the wrong end of *Newnes Glowworm Tunnel* in the Wollemi National Park! Most of the interstate Conference visitors headed back to Jenolan – packed like sardines in the Cavers Hut or the outside dormitory in the garage. The three caving Tasmanians headed off to see *Tricketts Arch* and associated caves on Peter Dykes property in the Jaunter karst area, then went up and down the perilously steep Yo-Yo fire trail tracks to *Tuglow Cave*, southeast of Oberon. Angus Macoun organised the post-Conference caving trips at Jenolan and there were trips to *Mammoth Cave*, *Frenchmans Cave*, *Spider Cave*, *Serpentine* and other caves. As a prelude to the next ACKMA Conference, my north island caving adventures finished up in Mick Chalker territory at *Wombeyan Caves* with trips into *Fig Tree Cave*, *Victoria Arch* streamway and lower section (where adventure tour cavers go), *Chalkers Cave*, *Wollondilly Cave* and *Junction Cave*. After this, it was back to Tasmania and within an hour of exiting the ferry terminal, I was sitting in the Burnie offices of Western Metals Resources to mediate with stakeholders on the future of the limestone quarrying exploration license in the Mt. Cripps karst of NW Tasmania...