

# OH DEAR....

- Kent Henderson

Oh dear... Members who attended the 13th ACKMA Conference at Mt. Gambier in 1999 will recall the outstanding paper delivered by Chris Sharples – *The Dismal Swamp Polje of northwest Tasmania: A Case Study in Geo-conservation*. The Dismal Swamp karst area in North West Tasmania is a polje - a rare karst landform in Tasmania and one of the best examples of its type in Australia. In recent years the area has been a focus for mining industry opposition to the concept of geo-conservation. In the light of this, a recent press announcement is grave cause for concern, and may provoke yet another karst conservation battle in Tasmania – though it looks pretty much like the matter is already a “done deal”.

In an article entitled “Swamp Maze a Boon for North West” (Page 1, *The Advocate* – 11/5/02), it is announced that “A new \$2m ecotourism development near Smithton will create the world’s biggest maze and in the first year of operation will lure 35,000 visitors eager for a taste of wilderness adventure.

Announced yesterday, the Dismal Swamp Maze and Visitor’s Centre will be operating by January. It will place the North-West in an ecotourism triangle with the Tahune Forest Airwalk in the State’s South and the Scottsdale Forest Ecocentre in the North-East. Forestry Tasmania and the State Government will contribute \$1m each to stage one of the project which is before the Circular Head Council for planning approval.

And while the early settlers may have found the area a bit bleak, the Dismal Swamp development, near Togari, should be anything but dull. This will not be a traditional clipped English maze. A slide will carry the adventurous from the canopy 30 metres down to the swamp floor where a 2 km

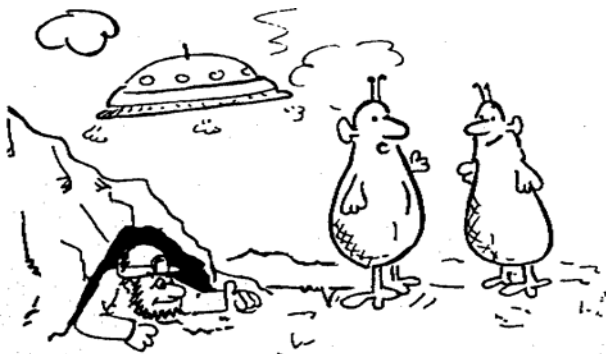
maze will be waiting. A viewing platform and springboard will give an eagle-eye view of the 600 ha blackwood sinkhole. Replicated timber railway carriages will weave through the maze that will feature bridges, barrels and a walking, talking forest experience.

‘We are working with the 6 km of topography to create the experience – people already get disorientated in the swamp and we will build on that’ project architect Neil Wade said. Mr. Wade was also behind the Tahune Forest Air Walk. “There will be nothing like it anywhere else”, he said.

Circular Head Mayor Ross Hine sees the tourism development as another string to the bow of the region he thinks is set to boom. Construction of the wilderness playground should create 30 jobs with five full-time staff needed when the attraction is up and running. Visitor numbers are expected to swell to 60,000 a year as the development cements its place on Tasmania’s tourist map.

Circular Head is set to boom and the impetus has been the timber industry. It is another welcome injection of funds, confidence and jobs,’ Mr. Hine said.” The article goes on to quote further effusive comments from the Tasmanian Deputy Premier.

What can one say? One awaits the Environmental Impact Statement with interest. All we need now is Disneyland at Jenolan and Madame Tussauds in the Glowworm Cave at Waitomo. As ACKMA Fellow Dr. Kevin Kiernan commented when he sent the above article to me: “makes you wonder why we bother...”



At the ACKMA AGM weekend. Left: Lana Little & Mick Chalker. Right: Elery, Lana, and Peter Chandler at the entrance to Murray Cave, Cooleman.

