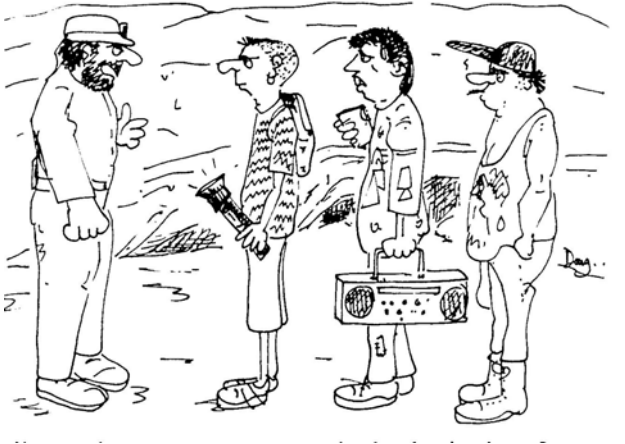


# Editorial Ramblings

CONFERENCES DELEGATES HEAD FOR THE CHILLAGOE TOWER KARST...



*You guys have got some great gear...do a lot of caving do you...?*

What a STUNNING Conference! I am certain the eighty or so delegates will agree with me! Lana Little, Dave Gillieson and Val Speedie, and their army of assistants, made the 15th Australian Conference on Cave and Karst Management unforgettable – very possibly the best yet! It will come as no surprise that I have waxed lyrical on the matter elsewhere in these pages, so I will not iterate here...



The Korean delegates, gaining a deep insight into Australian culture! – Conference 2003

It was our new President, Robyn McBeath who once said (tongue in cheek...?) that “life is but ACKMA Conference to the next!”. Indeed! And the next one will be a stunner too! The 16th ACKMA Conference will be on the West Coast of New Zealand’s South Island – a wild, romantic area with sensational caves and karst!! The DRAFT program is herein – put the dates in your forward diary NOW!!

And of course, before that, we have the 2004 ACKMA Annual General Meeting at Mole Creek in Tasmania (29th & 30th May). Cathie Plowman is promising a feast of caves and karst (which Mole Creek certainly has!). Again, not to be missed!

At the risk of being accused of being politically incorrect, isn’t it great to have our first female President (and not before time)! Robyn McBeath will do a fantastic job as our new *Supreme Ruler*, and comes to the role with a tremendous track record in cave and karst management, and experience in ACKMA.

Let me add my thanks (to many others) on the service of Peter Chandler as President over the last five months, when he was thrown into the deep end. You did well, Pete, especially with all those speeches at the Conference! Well done!

Staying on things Kiwi, the TREMENDOUS news, which broke at the Conference, is that ACKMA Life Member (which pretty much says it all!) Kevan Wilde has been appointed as the Director of the Waitomo Museum of Caves, in succession to the late Peter Dimond.

I could not conceive of a better appointment. Kevan’s breath of karst knowledge is staggering – as are the legion of skills he will bring to the role. Congratulations Kevan! – I look forward to seeing you at the 16th Conference, though I hope they’ve finally cured your snoring by then! (there’s a clue is you are looking for a room mate...!).

Speaking of the Waitomo Museum, the new audiovisual show (a final testament to Peter Dimond) has already attracted many positive comments from museum visitors. The Waitomo Education Centre has been successful once more obtaining a LEOTC grant and is fully funded for a further three years.

Jo Short, the Waitomo Education Officer, has extended the service considerably by contracting to teach children visiting the Otorohanga Kiwi House in addition to her Waitomo visitors. She is now travelling between Waitomo and Otorohanga on a regular basis. Well done, Jo!

Still at Waitomo, avid readers (should be singular, no doubt) of my ramblings will recall I previously reported that ACKMA Life Member Dave Williams had returned to Glowworm Cave as part-time guide, then to be subsequently appointed as Training Officer. He has now left to take a job with Otorohanga District Council, but reportedly he may still work at the caves occasionally at the weekend.



Dave Gillison karsting around at Chillagoe.  
Say no more! – Conference 2003

Aside from Kevan Wilde, the other hot appointment is that of (newly elected) Fellow of ACKMA, Peter Bell, as Manager of Yarrangobilly Caves in New South Wales. Great stuff, again, and congratulations Pete!! Of course, he has been at the Augusta /Margaret River Caves for several years, and it is wonderful to see him step up!

Unfortunately, Pete was in the throws of moving from Western Australia to Yarrangobilly at the time of our Chillagoe/Undara Conference, which accounts for his non-attendance thereat (very poor excuse, I know – so he'd better be at the next Conference, or else!)

So, news of our “infirm” members. I am firstly delighted to advise that Stephanie Finn, the Ranger-in-Charge of Buchan Caves, who as many will be aware suffered horrendous injuries when she fell off a horse shortly before our Chillagoe/Undara Conference (which she was to attend), is making a great progress. The prognosis is that her recovery will be complete, and she will soon be back on “light duties” at the *Parks Victoria* Bairnsdale Office, prior to returning to her Buchan role in a few months time. Wonderful news!



Stephanie Finn (left), with Kent Henderson and Dale Calnin at Buchan Caves, a few weeks prior to her accident

And secondly, I am equally delighted that Elyer Hamilton-Smith has pretty much made a fully recovery from typhoid, which very sadly prevented him from attending the recent Conference. He will be off karsting around the world later in the year, to Europe, Vietnam (this time with his typhoid shots up to date, no doubt!) and Myanmar.



The new Buchan Caves Visitor's Centre

Speaking of Buchan, I was down there a few weeks before our recent Conference, primarily to view the new Buchan Visitor's Centre. It's “okay”, but I was not thrilled, shall we say. Over \$300,000 was spent on a relatively small architect-designed (as it would be..) addition to the old kiosk building, which itself has been done up. I am advised about half the dollars were spent on consultant fees... Sigh... Frankly, one could readily think of several who could (arguably...) have consulted much better and at a fraction of the cost. Sigh (again)... The extension is not, in my view, particularly functional, but there you go. I must say though that the new interpretation is quite well done, relatively extensive, and complete. There are numerous minor mis-descriptions and spelling errors, but it is infinitely better than the nil interpretative displays that didn't exist at Buchan previously. Incidentally, Buchan Caves has been granted the **17th ACKMA Conference**, which will be held in Autumn 2007.



Displays inside the new Buchan Caves Visitor's Centre

Some may be aware of the fight in Melbourne in recent years about the removal of large colony of bats from its botanical gardens, where they have allegedly been damaging trees. The following cartoon appeared recently in Melbourne's *Herald-Sun* newspaper, during the recent war on Iraq. It is most appropriate....



Onto publications matters. I have limited copies of both **the 15th Conference Handbook**, and **15th Conference Field Guide** (the latter edited by Professor Dave Gillieson) still available. Of course, delegates all received their copies at the Conference. If any other member would like a copy, use the order form located on page two of this Journal.



The President-elect (as she was then) defacing the ceiling of the Post Office Hotel, Chillagoe (with permission I might add!) – Conference 2003

And looking well ahead into the crystal ball.... While it is early days, it would appear not unlikely that at the 16th Conference we will have two bids to host the 2009 (18th) Conference – from Kelly Hill Caves, on Kangaroo Island, South Australia; and from the Augusta/Margaret River Caves in Western Australia.

And finally, it could only happen in America, couldn't it? ...A cave turned into a motel??? Sigh... Not so, as the following pictorial article from a recent edition Qantas Airlines magazine testifies.... Doubtlessly, you'll all rush out to stay there...

## cave to rent in the blue mountains

If the call of the wild is calling you then head to the Blue Mountains, roll out your swag and camp in a fully equipped cave for a few nights.

The Cave – part of Hatters Hideout, a luxury bushland retreat at Bell – is an authentic Aboriginal occupation site, complete with art and artefacts. The ceiling, which rises 25 metres and gently curves 20 metres back into the cliff face, forms a huge natural amphitheatre with great acoustics. Private corroborees can be arranged.

Access to the Cave is a short walk down a meandering track, passing through woodlands and heath, before unexpectedly emerging onto a high cliff face with stunning views of a rocky gorge. Deep below, cool temperate rainforests, which once covered vast tracts of Australia, have found shelter as climates changed and provide a refuge for plants previously believed to be long extinct, such as the Wollemi Pine.

Hatters Hideout also includes a luxury lodge and eight acres of private nature reserve. For more information visit [www.hattershideout.com.au](http://www.hattershideout.com.au) or phone (02) 6355 2777.

