

Broken River Gorge. Note the prominent limestone cliffs and the resurgence of Stream Cave at the lower right.



A RETURN VISIT TO NEW ZEALAND

– Miles Pierce

In October, ACKMA members Miles and Rhonwen Pierce enjoyed another visit to New Zealand's south island and in the course of car touring in mainly the southern half, took the opportunity to check out some caves and karst.

At Te Anau, we had the pleasure of again visiting the Te Anau Glowworm show cave, facilitated by *Real Journeys* manager at Te Anau, ACKMA member Neil Collinson. It was pleasing to find Neil is continuing to improve from the injuries he sustained in a motor vehicle accident earlier in the year, and was as cheerful and positive as ever. Thanks Neil.

Real Journeys has a new catamaran vessel, aptly named 'Luminosa' to take visitors from Te Anau across the waters of Lake Te Anau to the cave landing and on-shore visitor centre. A visit into this very active stream cave, which is but the lower end of the much longer Aurora Cave, is always rewarding and surely a memorable experience for the many tourists who include it in their itinerary.

The roar of the stream in the early part of the cave tour taxes the voice power of the team of friendly

cave guides. Marie, who led our party, did well in getting across her interpretive information and shepherding the party whilst also leaving appropriate 'quiet time' for tour participants to absorb the cave environment.

The generally understated artificial lighting also works very well in helping to convey the 'feel' of the cave. For many visitors, the punt trip in darkness and silence across the terminal sump passage section away from the roar of the stream to see the many resident glowworms is a contrasting culmination of their subterranean experience.

Earlier on, we paid a visit to 'the Clifden Caves' at Clifden on 'the Scenic Road' from Invercargill to Manapouri. This area has some good exposures of Miocene limestone, both along the Waiiau River and in prominent bluffs and other outcrops in Clifden Gorge.

A wild cave, immediately beside the gorge road, is signposted and often visited by casual cavers and others. In this tradition, my daughter Wendy, her friend and I traversed about a half of this quite impressive, intermittently active stream cave with

minimal preparation and equipment. The passageway exhibits classic development profiles with the vadose action of the streamway constantly evident. This cave and its location is on freely available tourist information, however, a pleasingly positively worded *Department of Conservation* (DOC) sign at the entrance points out its fairly serious nature, precautions that should be taken if entering it and warning of its dangerous flooding propensity after heavy rain. In the latter respect, Neil Collinson mentioned a dramatic rescue from the cave earlier in year after a flash flood event went very close to claiming the lives of some imprudent explorers.

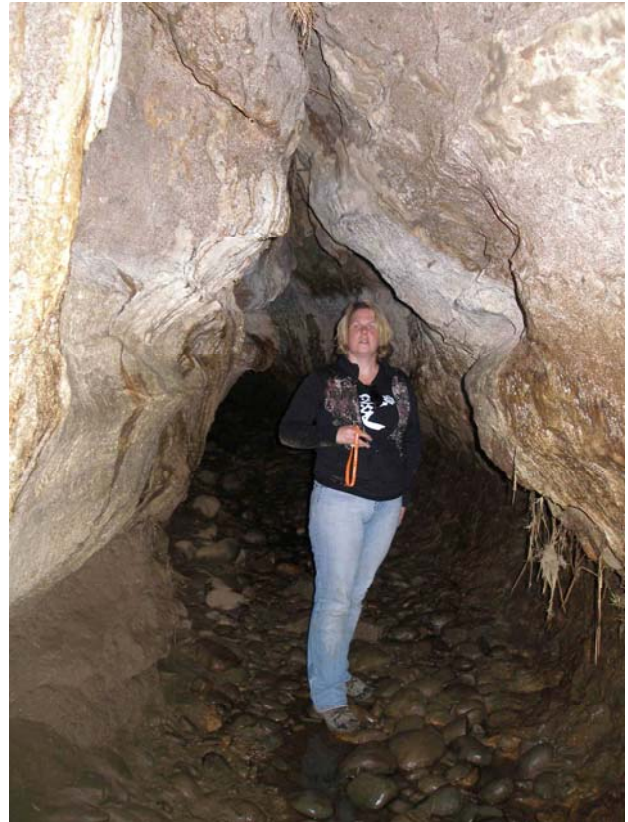


ACKMA member Mary Traves

A similar impressive karst area with a publicly accessible wild cave is located at Broken River on the eastern side of Arthur's Pass. The approximately 0.5km long, permanently active 'Stream Cave' traverses below a public car parking and picnic/interpretation area.

Again, positively worded DOC signs briefly explains the nature of the cave; the need for warm clothing, strong footwear and adequate light sources and a suitable team size if a traverse is to be attempted, as well as warning of its dangerous flooding propensity after rain.

Although the stream was at a comfortable level at the time of my visit, regrettably, I was not equipped to tackle the waist deep water sections and underground waterfalls, etc, and more importantly, I did not have any fellow team members. I contented myself with a look at the upstream and downstream entrances and the surrounding limestone exposures, something well worthwhile in itself. I look forward to exploring Stream Cave on a future occasion.



Wendy Pierce in Clifden Cave, showing its upstream passage cross-section with recent flood debris visible in the roof.

It is understood that both Clifden Cave and Stream Cave have previously claimed the lives of people who ventured in following or during wet weather and were caught by flood flows. Notwithstanding these tragic events, possibly due to foolhardy behavior, it is gratifying to see that it has not resulted in banning or otherwise restricting access. Like the risks involved in the New Zealand bush and mountains, information is provided on the nature of the terrain and its hazards and the need to be prepared. Beyond that, it is up to individuals to take responsibility for their own safety.

Finally, whilst briefly on the West Coast, we had the pleasure of staying in 'the lodge' – alias 'the rabbit hutch' – at the Runanga residence of the Victorian Ambassador, aka ACKMA member, Mary Traves (see photo). We also caught up with ACKMA's Deborah Carden and her partner Les, together with Mary Traves, over a meal at Greymouth's historic Franks Café. In all, as in past excursions across the Tasman from Oz, we thoroughly enjoyed our sojourn.