



Editorial Ramblings

Mulu! Well!!! Our AGM 'week' next April is utterly and totally booked out – overbooked according to Brian Clark. Close to an incredible **100** members have registered – this is more than for most full ACKMA Conferences! Indeed, it will be bigger than Ben Hur! Needless to say, if you are only now thinking about attending – bad luck. You have very much missed the boat. I did warn you...

Some very sad news, I'm afraid. ACKMA Life Member Clyde Stiff died on 25 August, in his 88th year. A full tribute to him is elsewhere in these pages.

As will be noted from the resultant extensive article elsewhere herein, I recently immersed myself in the karsts of Northern Australia – and visited some fabulous areas, to say the least. One thing that did strike me, ACKMA-wise, is that the Kimberley would be a great place for an AGM weekend. If one was based at Fitzroy Crossing, for example, we'd have plenty to see and do – Geikie, Mimbi, Windjana, Tunnel Creek... However, we are forward-committed for not a few years! – 2014 would be the earliest opportunity... But it is certainly something we could look at, perhaps, in due course.

Speaking of my north OZ trip – in my view the greatest 'remedial reader' in Australia is *The Northern Territory News* – the trashiest newspaper I have ever had the misfortune to encounter. The following pearls of sentence construction appeared in the 8/9/09 edition:

Bats Trash Cash

The Federal Government has spent up to \$150,000 in a vain attempt to catch bats. The money went towards a program to trap some of the last remaining members of the endangered Christmas Island pipistrelle bat, to establish a captive breeding population. But the four-week program has ended without the capture of a single bat. Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett said the bats were too smart for the bat-catchers. 'We knew it was a battle against the odds,' he said.

Pathetic, is all I can say – from every perspective.

Is there no end to his talents? As well as being famous yodeler (as attested in the last Journal), it transpires that Andy Spate is also a small

businessman of note – he is pictured below enjoying the fruits of his capitalism!



On a more serious vein, Andy is recently back from yet another advisory visit to South Korea, and in February he will be at Cango Caves to do a Training Course for guides and others. ...and amongst all of that I understand he is likely moving to live at Exmouth in Western Australia. Something about the Cape Range karst and its environs has obviously taken his fancy...

The above photo of Andy was taken, truth be told, during the ACKMA Post Conference Study Tour back in May. Another fascinating photo, from the same anonymous source, has also come into my possession. It features ACKMA Fellow and eminent karst geologist, Ken Grimes, and in my view, it provides an excellent redefinition of karst indolence....



Speaking of Andy, I did receive the 'odd' email from him during his latest Korean visit. The following image took his fancy...it is of large (free) condom vending machines for umbrellas! Andy sez: 'On wet days these get wheeled out into the front of shops, etc. You thrust your brollie into them and when you withdraw it, it is sheathed in a plastic condom so you don't drip on the floor as you go into shop! What will they think of next!'



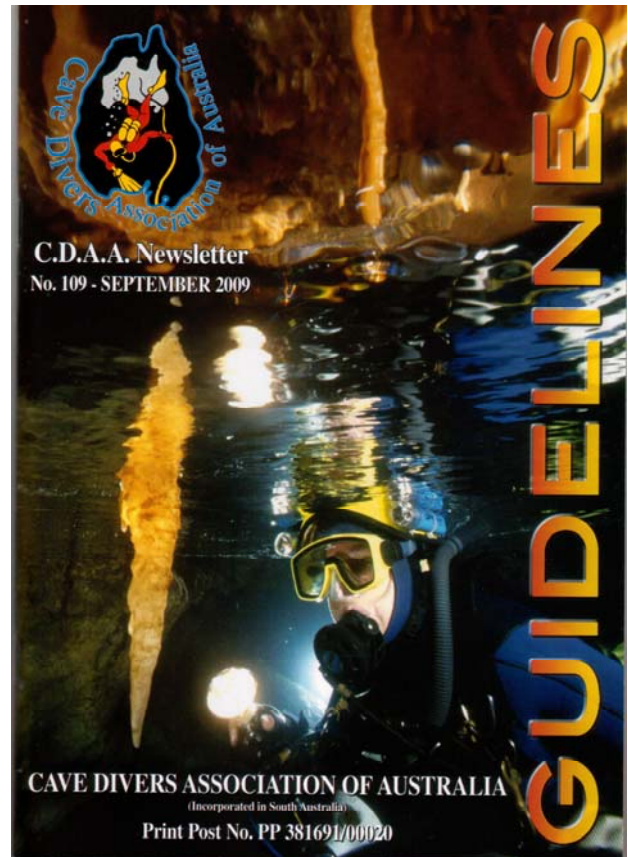
In the last Journal I mentioned that Wombeyan Caves was without an appointed manager, and two of its show caves were off-line. The former is still the case (sigh...), but the latter is fixed, happily. Both Junction and Kooringa Caves are now re-opened after a major overhaul of electronic equipment destroyed by a severe electrical storm late last year.

Most members will be aware of the Karst & Geodiversity Unit within the New South Wales Department of Environment, Climate Change & Water. One of the recent projects undertaken by the Unit has been the development and launching of a Geodiversity, Karst & Caves web page. It has come up very well – congratulations to all involved! See: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/geodiversity/>

As those who have already read our illustrious President's Words of Wisdom near the front of this Journal will have noted, I was at Naracoorte early in October to attend a Masonic Lodge meeting in Blanche Cave. I thought it amazing that, given the 100+ years of community events in Blanche, it had never before been used for a Lodge meeting – until now! Of course, Masonic Lodge meetings have been held in the past, not infrequently, in the Lucas Cave at Jenolan, but this was a first for Naracoorte. A photo of the event follows; you may recognize the sad visage on the far right....



ACKMA has recently cross-affiliated with the Cave Diving Association of Australia Inc. (CDA). The committees of both organizations are certain that a mutually beneficial relationship will be fostered in the years ahead. As part of our relationship we share publications. CDA puts out an excellent regular Newsletter – 'Guidelines'. While of necessity it contains its share of technical stuff, it also has plenty of good cave/cave diving related articles. Interestingly, it is published in A5 size, and the latest edition (below) has twelve pages in colour. An article on the CDA is in this Journal.



Lots of Waitomo News! In early July Pete Chandler had famous guests on his *Spellbound* glowworm tour, in the person of Peter Jackson and his wife Fran Walsh, the director/producer of the Lord of the Rings trilogy and many other films. Pete says: 'They were having a rare family holiday, based in Taupo, and with their teenage son and daughter they arrived by chartered helicopter. Peter was particularly impressed with the limestone escarpment visible on the right as you travel down the *Spellbound* access track – the Mangawhitikau fault line. He took lots of pics while the chopper hovered nearby, maybe we will appear in a movie one day?'

Pete also advises that he and Libby have been 'inundated' with ACKMA people staying recently including Neil Taylor and Tracey Robbins, and Moira Lipyeat. The former, of course, were kind enough to host my wife, Marise, and I during our recent stay in Kununurra. Moira has also been busy – attending the IUS Congress in the USA – upon which she writes elsewhere herein.

...and then there is Van Watson et al, who have been busy working on upgrading Aranui Cave at Waitomo, spending about \$NZ110,000 in the first stage – upgrading the steps and pathways in the cave. This five year project will eventually include a complete re-light. Sounds like the ‘New Aranui Cave’ will be complete in good time for the 20th ACKMA Conference, scheduled for Waitomo Caves in May 2013! A few words from Van about the current progress in Aranui are herein.

News in from ACKMA Fellow Arthur Clarke (who has recently been in China yet again): The 20th International Conference of Subterranean Biology will be held in Postojna, Slovenia, from 29 August to 3 September 2010. It is being run by the ISSB (International Society of Subterranean Biology).

A few notes from our Conference Convenor, Tony Culberg: The ACKMA Conference team recently undertook a detailed reconnaissance (on November 7 & 8) for field trips for the 2011 ACKMA Conference at Ulverstone, Tasmania (tentatively called NIBICON – Nineteenth Biennial CONFERENCE).

‘Unlike ASF’s NIBICON in 1972, this one is likely to produce Conference Proceedings.... The venue is booked, the Ulverstone Surf Life Saving Club, with accommodation in a nearby caravan park (75 metres away) or a motel (150 metres away). Field trips to karst areas such as the Vale of Belvoir, Dismal Swamp, Trowutta Arch etc are planned. Junkets to Mole Creek and Gunns Plains show caves will also be available. Wild caving will be available to members of ASF (who have the relevant insurance). Non-members can buy a three month membership of Northern Caverneers or Southern Tasmanian Caverneers’.

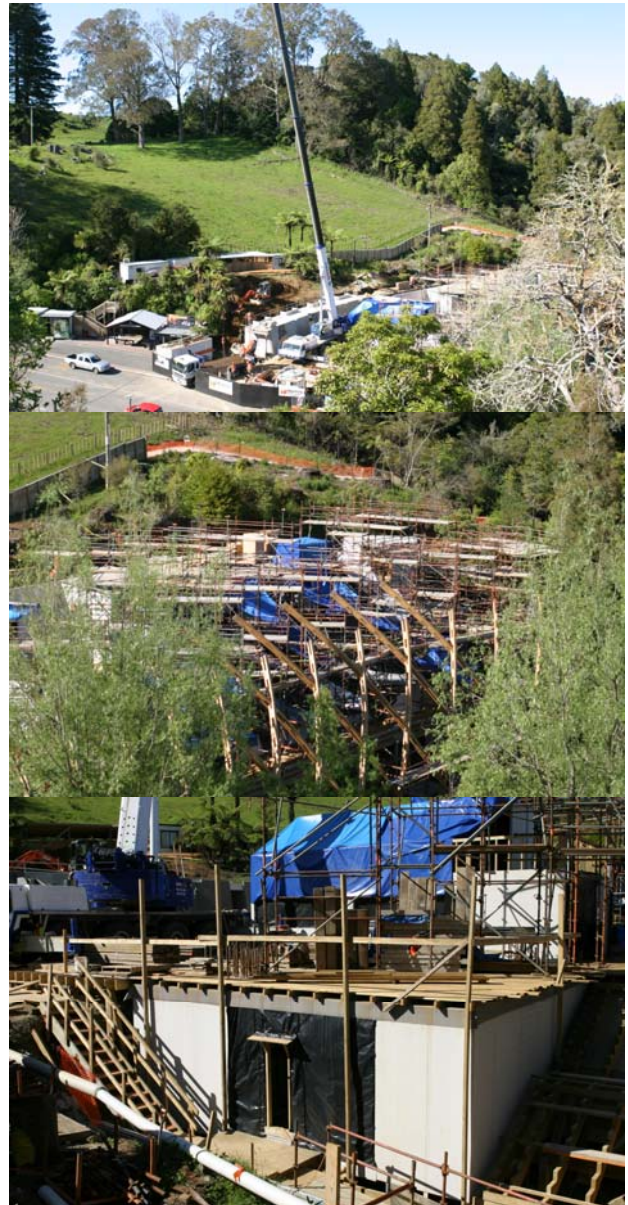
‘Conference Dates: **Sunday 8 May 2011 to Friday 13 May**. The organisation for a Post conference study tour is also well in hand. Further details in due course.’

News from Jenolan... On 20 August 2009, the Honorable Carmel Tebbutt MP, Deputy Premier and Minister for the Environment and Climate Change, formally re-opened the Orient Cave after its recent re-light and upgrade. According to the Press Release: ‘A dedicated team spent many months working on the redevelopment, which involved hundreds of lights and kilometers of cables in one of the most delicate and fragile crystal caves in Australia. The new lighting was carefully designed to highlight the myriad cave decorations as they have never been seen before. The new system is environmentally friendly, using entirely low energy LEDs. The effect is amazing and uses a fraction of the previous power, minimizing heat output, which would otherwise be damaging to the sensitive cave environment. So not only is the Orient Cave even more spectacular, it is also better protected for future generations to enjoy’.

Of course, the propagandists would say all that, but in this case it is true, I am reliably informed. All reports I have received suggest the revamped Orient Cave is wonderful – as you’d expect given the quality of Dave Rowling and his team. Well done – I,

and I am sure many others, look forward to seeing the ‘new’ Orient!

Members will recall the tragic event – quite a long time ago now – of the fire that destroyed the above ground infrastructure at the Glowworm Cave at Waitomo. It has indeed taken several years, but at last new infrastructure is ‘rising from the ashes’. It was hoped it would be finished by next February, but as is often the way with these things, March-April is looking the more likely time frame for the ‘Official Opening’. Pete Chandler recently sent me the following images of the work-in-progress:



So, now a bit of world news. Some of you may remember my article on Cango Caves in South Africa – a few Journals back – and my visit to the Cradle of Humankind near Johannesburg. *The Star* (South Africa) recently reported that: ‘*The Cradle of Humankind, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, could be in danger due to water pollution. The Star cited an unnamed ‘karst expert’ who asserted that acid drainage from now-closed gold mines flows into the dolomite quartz of the area, destroying rare cave*

minerals and fossils. The expert added that the karst system also faces contamination from radionuclides, sewage, and heavy metals. The environment manager of the Cradle of Humankind says the acid draining problem would cost billions to fix, and that the primary difficulty is that the karst is like a big sponge.'

Yes, indeed... Elery drew my attention to this problem sometime ago. It is arguably the worst case of karst pollution the world and it effectively cannot be remediated (no one is likely to spend 'several billion' to do so...). Sigh... ACKMA will, most likely, be visiting the fabulous Cradle of Humankind en route to Cango for our AGM in May 2012.

A bit closer to home... Plans to build a cement factory in Central Java led to demonstrations for and against the proposal, according to the *The Jakarta Post* recently. It stated: 'Opponents claimed that the factory could result in severe pollution in the

area's karst, and that the environmental analysis of the plan had ignored this risk. An analysis team from the Environmental Studies Center of a Javan university said the factory would not damage the environment as long as the developers took proper precautions, including mapping the underground streams. At a hearing with the provincial legislative council, the head of the Central Java Environmental Board said that mining is considered friendly to the environment as long as it is conducted 20 meters above the spring areas.'

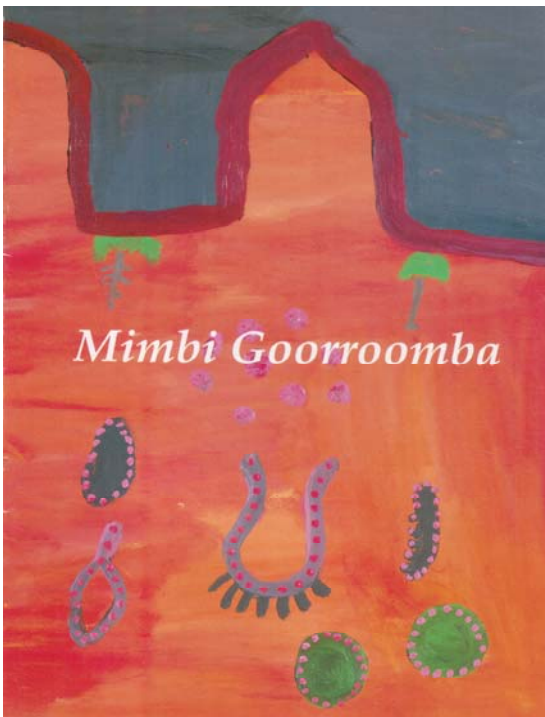
Oh dear... You have GOT to be kidding – 'mining is considered friendly to the environment as long as it is conducted 20 meters above the spring areas'. Clearly the head of the Central Java Environmental Board knows nothing about karst. Sigh...

And finally, a cartoon dedicated to all erstwhile cave managers....



BOOK REVIEW

MIMBI GOORROOMBA. Gooniyandi elders. Australian Heritage Commission. \$15.00 plus postage. Available from or through the Fitzroy Crossing Visitors Centre, Western Australia. A5. Full colour throughout. **Reviewed by Kent Henderson.**



This small booklet, written by the elders/traditional owners of Mimbi Caves, the Gooniyandi people, is a celebration of indigenous culture associated with the area. The booklet deals with the history, both actual and legendary, of Mimbi, and the relationships of the local traditional owners with it. The book relates a number of traditional stories concerning the caves, including how they were formed in the dreamtime.

The book also deals with the modern cultural tourist project (which allows us to visit Mimbi today), and the geological and anthropological work with the Mimbi Community – which has involved mapping the cultural landscape, recording sites and stories about the place, drawing up genealogies, and extensive photography of the cultural record.

It also tells the story of, and archaeological dig at, the caves. Radiocarbon dates on charcoal from ancient fireplaces reveal indigenous habitation of at least 40,000 years – making Mimbi one of the oldest recorded habitation sites in Australia. This is a special book, a wonderful read, and well worth adding to your library.