

## A TRIP to CAREYS CAVE with GEOFF KELL

Cathie Plowman

Saturday 5 May 2012 and I woke huddled in our tent at Wee Jasper to freezing temperatures. Outside the day was bright, sunny and warming very slowly. The morning's agenda was a trip to Careys Cave with operator Geoff Kell, followed by the AGM. Before leaving for the cave, several ACKMA members implored me to 'keep Geoff moving' to ensure that the AGM was able to start on time.

Well, Geoff is not a man to be rushed and in the hidden pocket of the Wee Jasper valley time hardly seems to matter. It gets light in the morning and dark in the evening. Beyond that, time does not seem important.

Outside the entrance gate, Geoff talked about what he tries to do on his cave 'tours', or perhaps it was rather what he tries not to do. His cave presentation is definitely 'out of the box'. As we descended the steps, rich colours and formations greeted us. Geoff left us to 'ooh and aah' for a few minutes before ushering us into a second chamber with rows of plastic seats. While explanations of stalactites, stalagmites and the like is not a regular part of Geoff's tour, getting people seated and getting them to look up and around while he gradually lights the cave, one candle at a time, is a key part of Geoff's efforts to have the visitors immerse themselves in the cave.

Geoff explained that on his 'tours' there's no obligation to leave the seats and look further into the cave, or even leave the cave at the end of the 'tour'. People were welcome to sit there all day. Parents can venture into the rest of the cave with their children or sit in quiet reflection while children either explore the cave or focus

on the very interesting collection of items on the touch table, including a piece of limestone that had depressions and cavities in it with models of cavers, lights and ropes. In short, here is a cave where you can, to a large extent, suit yourself. You probably do have to leave at the end of the day though.

Taking photographs of visitors is also part of Geoff's standard, he won't allow a family member to step out of the frame to take the photo and, if people don't have a camera, he borrows someone else's and gets people to swap email addresses. While park managers rarely reflect upon it, research shows that family relationships are enhanced in natural environments. The family photos that Geoff encourages add to this dimension.

While many show caves have far too many visitors to be as flexible and unstructured as things are at Careys Cave, cave presenters and guides could generally take a leaf out of Geoff's book and consider what options they have 'out of the box' in allowing and assisting people to immerse themselves and fall in love with the cave environment.

Speaking of love, the cave is a popular wedding venue. I'll finish with one of my favourite quotes from Elery Hamilton-Smith: 'Our job is not to teach people about caves, but to allow them to love caves; and the rest will follow.'

Well done on your efforts Geoff and thanks for your part in hosting a great weekend. And, we did all arrive promptly for the AGM!



*Left. Geoff introducing Careys Cave with some ACKMA members listening.  
Right. John Ash and Travis Cross in Careys Cave.*

*Photos: Greg Martin*



*Geoff Kell in in full flight. Photos: Greg Martin*