

## INTERNATIONAL SHOW CAVES CONFERENCE 2012

Dan Cove

The 2012 Conference of the International Show Cave Association (ISCA) was held in early November co-hosted by Perama Cave, Greece and Dim Cave, Turkey. The major gathering for ISCA is actually the Congress held every four years, with the next such event to be at Jenolan in 2014. A conference is held at the two-year mark between successive congresses, and provides an opportunity for the ISCA Board to meet, the various Commissions to provide updates and reports and for the general meeting of minds that, on its own, makes attendance at any such gathering worthwhile.

This Conference was well attended, with over 50 delegates travelling from North America, China, Europe, Malaysia and the Middle East. Greg Middleton and I cheerfully represented Australasia. Being a conference split between two countries presented a logistical challenge, however the conference organisers had clearly worked hard and the arrangements for the extended travel involved worked smoothly.

As always, it was fascinating to visit new show caves – 6 systems in 6 days, and to observe the differing approaches to lighting, infrastructure and interpretation. Some of the caves were quite stunning, particularly Alistrati and Aggitis Caves. Every cave visited was presented to the Conference attendees with great pride and enthusiasm by the local guides. It is always terribly hard to become a genuine tourist at such times, and to enjoy the cave without eyes drifting to consider lighting placements, obtrusive distribution boards or style of handrails. There were certainly many such areas, with lighting in particular one area where there was always clear room for improvement. But again this made for stimulating discussion amongst attendees, and it was interesting to hear of the differing approaches to cave lighting currently being employed.

Equally fascinating was the discussions regarding show cave tourism generally. The global tourism situation is exceptionally volatile, and almost every attendee reported abnormal trends and unexpected peaks and troughs. Some areas have been worse affected than others – Europe in particular is suffering badly from the current economic situation. This, sadly, was all too evident in Greece. Our Conference coincided with the end of one general strike and the beginning of another, and the signs of the nation's economic woes were clearly evident as we moved through the country.

One strong message to come from the Conference was that international interest remains exceptionally high in attending the next Congress at Jenolan Caves in 2014. The official dates for this Congress were established as November 2-8. There will be both official pre and post Congress trips organised also but a great many international visitors, from North America and Europe in particular, are very much viewing this as the opportunity to undertake a 'once in a lifetime' trip down

under, and I know that many will be taking extended trips in Australia and across the Tasman to New Zealand. As the time draws closer, I anticipate that there will be an ever increasing volume of correspondence between Jenolan and all other Australasian show cave sites as itineraries are finalised. With an anticipated international attendance in excess of 120, this should be an exciting time.

The great sadness immediately following the Conference was the tragic loss of the Manager of Perama Cave, Ioannina Greece Giannis Zalavras. Giannis was our host for the Greek part of the Conference and accompanied us to Turkey. He was a marvellous host, and a wonderful young man. He was passionate about his job and his cave, and devoted to his young family. Giannis was killed by a deranged intruder in the main office of Perama Cave a week after the conclusion of the Conference. His death was shocking, and has cast a long shadow over the memories of all attendees. His loss was deeply felt by those of us who had been fortunate enough to have got to know him, and is a loss to the world of show caves.

So now ISCA looks to Australia and to 2014. I shall be attempting to provide regular updates on the progress of Congress organisation and have already had preliminary discussion with certain ACKMA luminaries whom I am hoping to coerce into participation in this event. As I am well aware that the next two years will pass in the twinkling of an eye, I am hopeful that the first update and some firm information on Congress structure will be forthcoming early in 2013.



*Dan Cove in action at the ISCA Conference*