

Resources

BOOK REVIEWS

Andy Spate

In the last edition of the Journal, I reviewed the wonderful *Lechuguilla* book. I now have to-hand two very similar looking books to review – Max and Stefanie Wisshak's *New Zealand Karst* and the Metropolitan Speleological Society's *Abercrombie Caves*.

Before turning to the reviews. I would like to indulge in a little elderly gent's whimsy especially relevant to *Abercrombie Caves*. I have watched the evolution of caving club publications over a period of about 60 years. I consulted some of my colleagues about what they had seen. Their comments included:

Grant: If you do not wish to regress quite as far back as William Caxton, or even Monks scribing on to vellum, then how about Gestetner machines mimeographing Roneos? The smell of methylated spirits. Ahhh! While they were undoubtedly the good old days, forgive me please for thinking that things today may be even better? I might even still have some blank stencils in a draw somewhere, although the rats have probably long ago chewed them, and I couldn't find a typewriter to cut them, although I am not so sure about that.

Dave: I have fond memories of UQSS newsletter parties, well lubricated with cheap cask wine, where we all took turns at the Roneo machine (purple ink that went everywhere), later on the more sophisticated rotary Gestetner machine with stencils that were corrected with pink fluid.

John: A lot of it was proprietary technologies. I remember Gestetner duplicators, Roneo machines, offset printers (if you had access to the printing room in your workplace) and later, Xerox photocopy machines. Not to mention home-office inkjet and laser printers in more recent times.

And now we have evolved to beautiful, wonderfully illustrated hardback books via such fine books on Wombeyan and Yarrangobilly published by the Sydney Speleological Society and the textbooks produced by Jennings, Gillieson, Hamilton-Smith and Finlayson, and the forthcoming book on Australian caves and karst produced by John Webb and colleagues.

Enough trivia and onto the books.

Again, like *Lechuguilla*, at first glance they are 'coffee table' books. They are so, so much more than that! Both are landscape format, hardback and profusely illustrated with wonderful photography and in the case of *Abercrombie*, contemporary artworks by such people as Charles Condor. *New Zealand* features images of Māori cave art.

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Let's take each book in turn:

New Zealand Karst: a voyage across limestone landscapes into the subterranean realm of caves

Max and Stefanie Wisshak

The first is *New Zealand Karst: A voyage across limestone landscapes into the subterranean realm of caves*. Max Wisshak and Stefanie Wisshak. 2020. Publisher: speleo-photo editions. 256 pp, 232 colour images, three diagrams.

Stunning photography and 13 descriptive chapters as detailed below. Plus, forewords and afterwords and further discussion. The forward is by the internationally recognised Professor Paul Williams – the true 'father' of New Zealand's karst studies.

The book is a truly fine exploration of New Zealand's karst and its connections with its long Māori involvement. The chapters texts are only two pages in length – followed by an array of Max's wonderful images. The book includes by far the best map of the distribution on New Zealand's limestone distribution that I have seen. The book does not include reference to the country's lava tubes – but it is about karst after all!



Contents

The chapters are followed by short pieces on conservation; an epilogue which provides a short historical discussion (which includes the first colour image of a New Zealand cave published by Arthur Thomson in 1854); a page on the photography, and acknowledgements. This is followed by several pages on sources, further reading and web resources. The chapter enigmatically titled 'Ruins' is a nice discussion of the cycles ages of landscape evolution.



Page 11 - Occurrences of limestone (shown in red) and marble (in blue) across the New Zealand archipelago, together with the suite of karst areas portrayed in this book.

To my shame I had no knowledge of Māori rock art and thus found that section of considerable interest. To quote from the book (page 235):

The rock art is either composed of petroglyphs (carved or chipped into the stone) or pictographs (drawn of painted onto the rock). To produce the latter, animal fat was mixed with vegetable gum and red ochre or charcoal pigments to make red or black paint; blue, yellow or white components are rare. Most commonly charcoal was used dry rather than as paint. Subjects of drawings are people, always without facial features, and animals, such as birds, dogs, lizards, seals, or fish. Other forms are abstract symbols, difficult to interpret or they are merely doodles. The most captivating designs portray enigmatic spiritual entities.

There are both similarities and differences with the styles of Australian rock art.

Right: Ōpihi Taniwha (mythical water monsters believed by the Māori to dwell in riverside caves).



Page 247: Māori rock art (left).

Page 217: Fossil whale spinal column bridging walls (below).



All-in-all it is a comprehensive and spectacular visual overview on New Zealand's karst resources.

The book can be obtained direct from Max website www.speleo-photo.de at a cost of 49.90 EUR (ca. 78 AUD) for the standard edition and 69.90 EUR (ca. 110 AUD) for a slip-cased special edition and 21 EUR (ca. 33 AUD) shipping.

It is also available in New Zealand, for example from Nationwide Book Distributors at www.nationwidebooks.co.nz/product/new-zealand-karst-9783982171401.

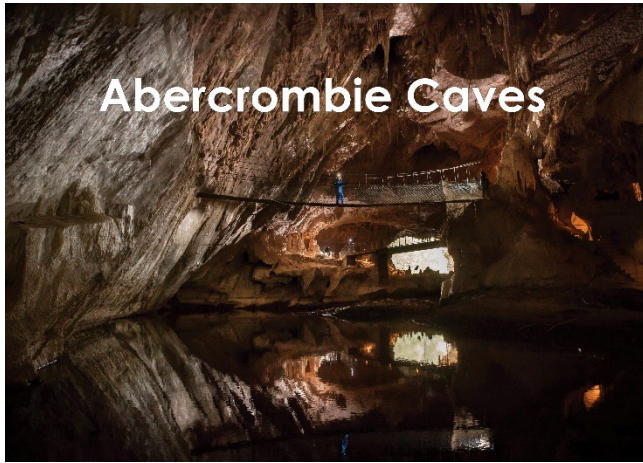
I hope to have a copy of the book at the upcoming conference at Takaka for the perusal of attendees.

Page 18 - 19 karst platform.



Abercrombie Caves

Metropolitan Speleological Society (NSW)



Abercrombie Caves

Turning now to *Abercrombie Caves*. This lavishly illustrated 160-page book is published by the Metropolitan Speleological Society (NSW).

It contains around 190 photographs, painting reproductions, maps, and graphs. It is accompanied by a separate folded map of the Abercrombie Arch Cave (about 1:1200 scale). It is the fifth publication on Abercrombie over a span of 115 years.

Eleven authors contribute to 12 chapters and two appendices plus comprehensive acknowledgement of the First Peoples and of the many contributors and supporters, and a fine index and a short, illustrated description of the 2022 flood damage. Production was supported by an Australian Speleological Federation Inc grant.

This review expands on a short 'publisher's blurb' written by Garry K Smith in the last ACKMA Journal.

Cover photo: *Abercrombie Arch Cave*, photo Alan Pryke.

The chapters and authors are as follows:

- *Introduction* – Stuart Bremner
- *Wiraduri Connection to Abercrombie* – Marilyn Scott and Aunty Gloria Rogers
- *Early European Exploration* – Barry Cubitt and Marilyn Scott
- *Bushrangers at Abercrombie Caves* – Barry Cubitt and Marilyn Scott
- *Development of Abercrombie Caves* – Barry Cubitt and Marilyn Scott
- *Karst Management at Abercrombie Karst Conservation Reserve* – Andrew C Baker
- *Flora and Fauna at Abercrombie Caves* – Beth Little
- *How Caves are Formed* – Garry K Smith
- *A Geological History of the Abercrombie Caves Area* – Cathi Humphrey-Hood and Peter M Downes
- *Introducing Speleothems, Speleogens and Mineralogy of Abercrombie Caves* – Jill Rowling
- *Caves and Karst Features* – David Stuckey, Beth Little and Roderick Smith
- *Glossary of Cave Terms* – Garry K Smith

Below: *Wombat skeleton in Hill Cave*, photo Gary Smith.

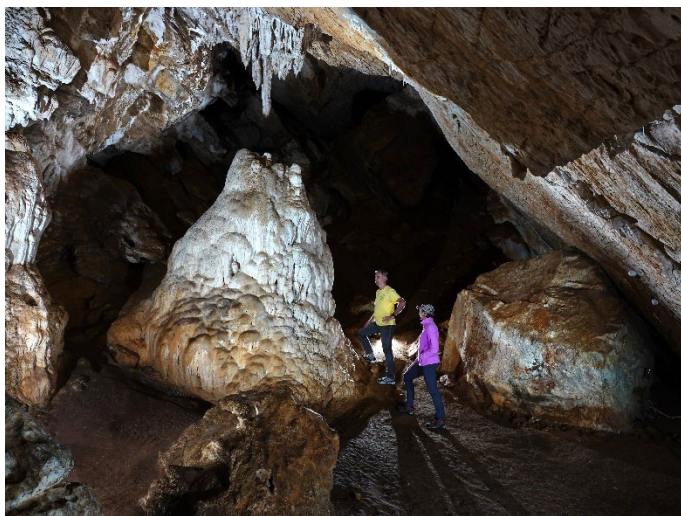


Each of the chapters is followed by a bibliography – I am gratified to see my name appearing in a few chapters!

The two appendices are:

- *Historical Inscriptions found in Abercrombie Caves* – A map and a very comprehensive tabular database – Barry Cubitt, Alan Pryke (and others?)
- *Staff at Abercrombie Caves* – Barry Cubitt and Stuart Bremner

All-in-all it is a wonderfully presented, thoroughly professional publication. Even if you are not interested in Abercrombie there is much of interest to cave people such as ACKMA members. The maps are very well done and the use of reproductions of historical artworks by painters such as Conrad Martens adds to the value of the book. A similar comment applies to reproductions of newspaper articles and extensive quotations to be found in the text. The photographs are excellent and display many of the wonders to be seen at Abercrombie. I found the historical inscriptions appendix a wonderful example of dedication to protecting the European heritage of the site – even if we don't inscribe our names in caves today!



Above: *David Stuckey and Marcia Kaye at the Pulpit in Bushranger Cave*, photo Gary Smith.

I do have a few quibbles – but they are not strong enough to enumerate. The book costs \$AUD45 plus shipping costs and can be ordered from <https://www.mssadventure.org.au/Home/AbercrombieBook>