

SHADES OF DEATH CAVE - MURRINDAL, VICTORIA – SOLD

- Dennis Rebbechi

Entrance area – Shades of Death Cave



Shortly after Carol and I were transferred by my Employer to Queensland in 1993, Shades of Death Cave (at Murrindal, just north of Buchan, Victoria) ceased tourist operations. This was due to a number of reasons that made it difficult to continue a show cave operation:

1. Lack of responsible man power as only three of the original partners were available for guiding and administration.
2. Public Liability Insurance premiums increased by many hundred percent. The cave was never a profit generator but the partners could not accept substantial losses.
3. The death of Warren Kennedy in 1991 was a mortal blow to the Cave as he had designed and installed the computer chip based lighting system that could not be maintained by the partners. An outside consultant could not understand the principles and eventual replacement seemed the only answer.

Under these circumstances, the group reluctantly closed the door to show cave operations, after a show history that dates back to the early 1960s:

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| 1900 | Cave discovered - Mr. E. Henham |
| 1905 | Explored by Frank Moon |
| 1950 – 1960 | Visited often by members of VCES |
| 1960s | Lease granted to a group headed by Jack McMahon, Geoff Rebbechi and Graham Shaw. Entrance blasted and concrete paths constructed. Cave shown until 1969 |
| 1969 | Lease not renewed |

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| 1982 | 2ha of land around the cave purchased by Carol Rebbechi. |
| 1982 – 1984 | Maintenance, new concrete paths and lighting installed |
| 1984 | Officially re-opened by Mr Tom Henham on 2/1/84 |
| 1994 | Cave closed to scheduled tours |

In the meantime, it became obvious that Carol and I would not return to Victoria and therefore we wished to use the money more profitably than being tied up in a house (which we built on the 2ha next to the cave) earning little income. The property was actively marketed with an auction campaign that drew no serious bidders, and then an on-going strategy through Real Estate Agents. None of this was attracting the replacement value of the above ground property, let alone the value that included a non-profit cave. In fact, the cave seemed to detract from the value of the rest of the property judging from the attitude of the few buyers who showed any interest. The Victorian Government was not interested despite a number of approaches.

Finally about two years ago, Dennis approached the Council to ascertain their attitude to a subdivision of the property. This subdivision would result in two parcels each smaller in area than the permitted minimum lot size under Council regulations. The response from Council officers indicated that, in extenuating circumstances, such a situation might be permitted by the Council.

An application was made on the grounds that the absentee owners wished to sell the house property but keep the cave in the family. This application was eventually approved by the Council and the land subdivided to obtain a cave lot of 4000M². The balance of the land including the house was marketed by a local agent and sold late last year to the surrounding landowner.

In March this year, the Cave was offered to the Victorian partners and Geoff Rebbechi agreed to purchase the cave on his own behalf. The price was agreed at the costs that had been incurred in arranging the subdivision (not a cheap procedure) and was a perfect solution for all parties. We all wanted the cave to remain in the hands of the family and this has been achieved. Practically speaking nothing has changed in respect of the situation as Geoff, Mary and Graham will still regularly be at the Murrindal Schoolhouse and administer the cave.

What is the future of the cave? Obviously I cannot answer for my brother but initially I believe he intends to allow ACKMA members John and Kym Van Dyk to complete their survey of the whole cave. The tourist area is just a fraction of the passageways within the cave and there is a magic pristine wonderland just beyond the lights. Unfortunately it seems most of these passageways could not be accessed by tourists without significant damage to the cave – or could they? – only time will tell.

