



Editorial Ramblings

In case you have been on the moon and didn't know, the 17th Australasian Conference on Cave and Karst Management at Buchan Caves, Victoria, is now only five months away! It is very likely we will have a substantial international presence too, which is great! The Registration Form and full details are again inserted herein. **NOT TO BE MISSED!!**

Some unhappy news from Margaret River in Western Australia. ACKMA Fellow and our Immediate Past President, Robyn McBeath, has resigned as CEO of the Augusta-Margaret River Tourism Association (which manages the Augusta-Margaret River Caves). The following article appeared in the *Augusta-Margaret River Mail* on 6 September, under the heading 'McBeath Resigns':

August-Margaret River Tourism Association general manager Robyn McBeath and marketing manager Valeria Rocco resigned last week, with Ms McBeath saying her position was "untenable". Public relations and communications administrator Carol Eckersley resigned three weeks earlier, on July 19.

After tendering her resignation on Thursday Ms McBeath notified Association members by email on Friday. "I am extremely disappointed that I have had to make this decision to resign, however I found my continuance in the position of CEO to be untenable," she said. "I have clearly articulated my concerns to the Committee of Management and am hopeful that these issues will be addressed. "For the Association to move forward, it is vital that the Committee of Management establishes a clear, long term strategy to provide a framework for effective and efficient executive operational management."

Ms McBeath will leave the Association in six weeks' time, after 11 years of service in the AMRTA and 14 months as general manager. Board chairperson Lindsay Quann said he had found Ms McBeath extremely professional and diligent, and was very disappointed at her resignation. However, he said she had resigned with good grace.

Subsequently, ACKMA Fellow Peter Bell resigned as Manager of the Augusta-Margaret River Caves. After the required six weeks notice, he finished up on 24 November. From a Cave Management point of view, it is most unfortunate, to say the least, to see the two of Australia's most experienced, capable and dedicated cave and karst managers leave their

positions. Both have been outstanding, and their absence will be sorely missed across the profession – although hopefully they will pop up in other karst-related roles in future. I am certain all ACKMA members will join with me in wishing both Robyn and Pete all the very best for the future.



"I took the early retirement package."

Andy Spate recently represented ACKMA at the 6th International Show Caves Association (ISCA) Congress in Bermuda (in late October). ACKMA was a bidder to hold the 7th Congress in 2010 at Waitomo but we were unsuccessful in the vote. The 7th Congress was awarded to Slovakia. Nonetheless, Andy renewed many old contacts and made many new ones. He was also elected to the ISCA Scientific Committee. The ISCA-ACKMA relationship has been significantly strengthened as a result. Great stuff!

The Nettle Cave at Jenolan was "officially opened" on 23 October, although its development was still far from finished on that date, let alone opened to the public... A souvenir booklet was produced for the event, of which few were produced, apparently. ACKMA member and Jenolan guide, Rob Whyte, very kindly sent me a scanned copy – the cover of which is reproduced below.

When the cave is actually open to the public – one assumes at least by the time you receive this Journal – it will operate on a 'self-timed' basis. Visitors will be issued with a personal communicator to wander about the cave at leisure. I am advised the 'voice' on the communicator will be that of noted Australia actor Michael Caton (the movie 'The Castle', and the TV show 'Hot Property', etc). I assume the commentary will be also be available in languages other than English...?

In other Jenolan News, Russell Commins has been seconded from the guiding staff to the NSW Parks & Wildlife Service Karst Conservation Unit. His father, Grant Commins, remains the Jenolan Visitor Services Manager (aka Head Guide). The *Jenolan Karst Conservation Reserve – draft plan of management* was released for public comment in early September. See: http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Content/jenolan_mgmtplan_draft

As will be noticed (possibly...) from my article elsewhere herein, I spent some time exalting in the karsts of Mexico recently. Our Mexican karst cousins undoubtedly try their best to master the Queen's English, but I am not sure they get it quite right... The first image below was taken at the end of the tourist section of Rancho Nuevo Cave, the second was taken at Cascades de Agua Azul, the third in the grounds of Aktun Chen Cave...



Some very momentous news has emanated from The Australian Speleological Federation (ASF). I reproduce a recently-circulated letter to ASF Clubs, entitled **ASF TO OWN LAND AND CAVES AT MOUNT ETNA**, in full:

Dear Members,

We wrote to all ASF member clubs a week or two ago with an important announcement. As that was a conventional letter the details may not reach you until your next club meeting, hence this message. You will no doubt be aware of the long dispute over limestone mining and cave destruction at Mt Etna in Central Queensland, a dispute which ran for more than 40 years with the predecessor of the current lessee, Cement Australia. It reached the High Court of Australia, was lost to conservationists at huge financial and personal cost, but has now been resolved in a manner far beyond expectation. Mining ceased a few years ago. Following several years of negotiation with Central Queensland Speleological Society and more recently ASF, Cement Australia has offered, and ASF has agreed to accept as a gift through our tax-deductible Gift Fund, freehold title to land on the eastern slopes of Mt Etna, adjacent to Mt Etna National Park. We believe this offer is without precedent in Australia's environmental history.

The total land area of about 14 hectares includes some original vine thicket forest, the former Eastern Quarry site, the former Manager's house, some sheds, yards and other improvements, sub-tropical karst and most importantly, two caves. These are Resurrection Cave - widely regarded as the best decorated on Mt Etna - and Winding Staircase. A condition is that the former quarry will be rehabilitated to a standard enabling it to be offered to Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service at some future time, and some of you will have seen the early rehabilitation during the ASF Conference in Yeppoon in 1999.

The Company will pay ASF to manage the rehabilitation program for five years, a task which we expect to contract to a professional landscaper. The deal is fully self-funding and there will be no call on ASF recurrent funds. The ASF Executive has set up the Mt Etna Land Management Committee (MELMAC) to handle the details and to liaise between ASF, our Gift Fund Directors and Cement Australia on the details. We have retained a Brisbane solicitor to handle the legal aspects and a Memorandum of Understanding has been substantially agreed upon by the parties which we expect to be formalised in October. These will, of course, be the first caves we have ever actually owned.

This remarkable achievement coincides with ASF's 50th Anniversary Year, and it comes as 20 or 30 of our members prepare a book celebrating the many conservation issues involving Australian speleologists, publication of which is expected in 2007. A full report will be presented to the ASF Council Meeting in January 2007. There is a great deal more to do, but this outcome is fine testament to the dedication of numerous members of ASF and particularly CQSS since the campaign commenced over 40 years ago. It will greatly enhance the image of speleology in Australia.

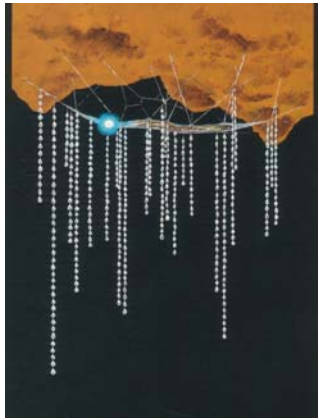
Nicholas White (ASF Acting President),
Peter Berrill (for CQSS),
John Dunkley (for ASF Gift Fund).

This is a tremendous result, and means a most significant area of karst will be protected in perpetuity. I am sure ACKMA members will join with me in congratulating ASF on this outstanding achievement.

BRIGHT WISHES GLOW-WORM CARDS

Cathie Plowman has recently produced two wonderful all purpose greeting cards. Images of her two beautiful designs are below. They come in packs of ten, with envelopes – five each of the two designs.

The cost is \$16.00 per pack, PLUS post and packing (within Australia), as follows: 1 pack \$2.40; 2-3 packs \$6.05; 4-10 packs \$9.75. For New Zealand or overseas postage, please contact Cathie directly. Also email her for wholesale and bulk order prices – Cathie Plowman, *Lueena*, 637 Deviot Rd, Deviot, Tasmania. 7275. Email: lueena@bigpond.com



Speaking of acquiring caves – a most significant cave has effectively come onto the real estate market. Starlight Cave, a large sea cave near Warrnambool, Victoria, is one of only two known maternity sites of the Southern Bat-wing Bat (the other being Bat Cave at Naracoorte). The property in question containing the cave is privately owned, and is now for sale. ACKMA Fellow (and Acting ASF president) Nick White, is looking at a campaign to try purchase the cave. More news in due course.

Many members will know, or know of, ACKMA member Graham Parkes. Graham is a former Manager of Buchan Caves, but for some years now he has been Ranger-in-Charge of The Grampians

National Park in Western Victoria. Recently, Graham received the *Parks Victoria* Individual Outstanding Achievement Award at an Awards Ceremony in Melbourne. The citation is a long one, so I will not copy it here. However, the title of the award pretty much says it all! Warmest congratulations Graham! I understand Graham is planning a “Back to Buchan” experience for our Conference thereat next May, and I am certain many, myself included, are looking forward to catching up with him then.

I had an email from our good friend Geoff Schurr recently. Of course, Geoff and his crew run *Norwest Adventures* on the West Coast of New Zealand’s South Island. Geoff was one of the key organisers of the 16th ACKMA Conference, in his patch, last year. As most will know, Norwest runs underworld rafting trips, glowworm tours, and adventure caving through Metro Cave. Recently, the NZ Department of Conservation renewed Norwest’s caving concession to use Metro Cave, which is great news. Their administration base has now been moved permanently into The Charleston Cavern Hotel, and they have also undergone some significant equipment upgrades. All lighting systems are now of the ‘super-bright’ LED type. Their guides now no longer use carbide (applause!). Further significant upgrades of their operation are well advanced, too. Stay tuned! As a result of their new location, new contact details are as follows: Postal address: Norwest Adventures, P. O. Box 7, Charleston, West Coast, South Island, New Zealand. Phone: (+64 3) 788 8168. Email address: norwest@orcon.net.nz

Now, some housekeeping... It comes around every year – it is Committee Nomination time again. The Nomination Form, together with formal notice of our upcoming Annual General Meeting at Buchan next May, is inserted in this Journal. I exhort members to put their name forward for election. All committee positions become vacant at the AGM – let’s have your nomination! If you want to know what is involved in any position, contact any member of the current committee.

Additionally, it’s “President’s Award” time again. Every two years, an Ad Hoc Committee of two (the President and Elery Hamilton-Smith), bestow the “President’s Award” for the best paper or article published in the ACKMA Journal during the preceding two years. They will undoubtedly be conferring early in the New Year, and the announcement will be made at the 17th ACKMA Conference Dinner next May. The winner receives a framed certificate, and a prize. It is not too late to ‘enter’ – simply submit your offering for publication in the March 2007 Journal! Copy closes on Friday 9th February.

While on this Journal, can I please request that contributors, when sending me images for inclusion, provide them at high resolution. My broadband server can take well over two meg easily. Low resolution images transpose badly into print, while high resolution images are much, much better. Your cooperation would be greatly appreciated.

As members are SURE to recall, in the June Journal this year the following appeared:

FREE ACKMA CD ROM

(conditions apply!)

I am delighted to advise that Dave Smith is well advanced in producing a new ACKMA CD Rom containing papers from all past Conferences (including the last year's Conference on the West Coast, New Zealand), many substantive papers and articles from the ACKMA Journal, and much more.

The price will be \$25 per copy. However, the ACKMA Committee has agreed that it will be circulated **FREE** with the December ACKMA Journal to ALL members who are **FINANCIAL** as of 1st October 2006.

Unfortunately, we have suffered some production delays – mostly occasioned by a number of presenters at our last Conference NOT getting their papers in for publication. I should name and shame these people, but I will resist the temptation (for now...). Suffice it to say, Dave Smith and I know who you are....

As a result, the CD ROM is not inserted with this Journal. However, come hell or high water, it will be distributed with the next (March 2007) Journal to

all members who were financial as of 1st October 2006. We know who you are too!

We have a new regular contributor! My nephew, Ben De Quadros-Wander, is a very skilled graphic artist – he has a degree in the discipline. He has volunteered (well, press ganged really...) to provide an original “cave cartoon” in this Journal on an ongoing basis. He has already provided three, the first of which appears elsewhere here in. The strip is entitled *Andysez and Celery Reckons* and will feature the “adventures” of two ACKMA notables. The mind boggles! Of course, I have no idea where he gets his inspiration – it will remain a perpetual mystery, no doubt...

And finally, speaking of Andy Spate, he recently sent me this snippet he picked up somewhere, which I publish without comment (Sigh.....):

“Scientists are attempting to extract DNA for the first time from the fossilised bones thought to be of a Neanderthal man who roamed Britain 35,000 years ago. Experts plan to use a tooth from the upper jaw to establish whether the closest relative of modern humans lived in Britain later than it was once thought. The fragment was found in 1926 at Kent’s Cavern in Devon.” Does this tell us about the ancestry of a certain well-known personage?

Quo Vadis....

