

John Ash (left) and Pet Chandler (right) with Honorable Anand Satyanand, Governor-General of New Zealand, after receiving their New Zealand Order of Merit awards.



PETER CHANDLER AND JOHN ASH

– Van Watson

On Wednesday 13 September this year I had the pleasure of attending a ceremony in Auckland where the Governor General of New Zealand awarded Pete and John the NZ Order of Merit. It was a formal occasion and the Governor General pointed out that it was a healthy thing for communities to acknowledge people who had 'added something special' to their country.

The citation was necessarily short, so, these notes pad it out a bit:

First of all, we must realise that there was no Adventure Tourism at all at Waitomo Caves before these guys started the Cave Tubing Activity. Cavers used to 'float through' Ruakuri but Pete was the one who tailored that to be a Commercial Tour. John joined Pete in the enterprise as he was already guiding educational activities to a cave in the area.

The early days were the exciting times of building not only a new business but also a totally new product and everyone was having fun. There was young Pete roaring round like crazy building everything NOW, while John was busy consolidating the present and peering into the future. They worked out of an office and workshop at the Museum of Caves. They had a strong and flexible asset base of thirty-two inner tubes.

They realised that people eat. Hospitality to travellers was paramount and the obligatory soup and toast or bagel re-warmed half a million wetsuit victims. They press ganged young children straight out of the playground and

trained them to be soup girls and business managers. They offered cradle to grave employment, or the realisation that you could start your own business in adventure tourism. They also inspired young people to indulge in the good things in life.

All the while they worked with the Education Service at the Museum to give Kiwi School Kids a great time. They supplied one of their fleet vehicles for a morning and afternoon school bus run to keep the Waitomo School open.

The guides; meanwhile, had reached a pinnacle and needed more challenge. Another tour was started with a 35m abseil into Ruakuri Cave. They were on a roll, 20,000 clients, great guides and a fleet of busses. Sure, there were some days when the business wasn't sure whether it was coming or going. Pete was still coming to grips with paperwork. There are 2 photos showing Pete at a desk.. This does not mean he was there very often. This was just the time when he was moving slowly enough to be photographed. John was still trying to get the colour 'right'.

The next Step – art form. Expansion to the Model Village site and 10 years had gone by; now art.... An original inner tube, if presented correctly as an art form, can sell for millions of dollars. Copies; though flattering, are nowhere near as valuable. White lace-up gumboots were especially made for BWR. These are not Rugby Boots. These are not from an English game played in New Zealand. These are from a New Zealand Icon Product. Born in New Zealand.

John and Pete in the early days of Blackwater Rafting



With Pete and John's approach to professional growth BWR Guides have qualified as National Instructors and have serious input into National Cave Guiding Standards, Cave Rescue techniques and Cave Instructor programs. They attracted a wide range of great young people to their workforce & helped them grow. Then suddenly. Kaboom! Through the wall into Hyperspace. Another Dimension. From Recreation to Commerce to Art; all that was left was Transcendental Meditation and then there was nowhere else to go on the planet.....

They had about 40,000 clients of their own coming to the district..... They had 'proved' the industry viable and indirectly assisted other Adventure companies to launch into the Waitomo Market and they draw in their own clients. Two very good Back Packer Hostels were built on the strength of these 'Adventure' clients coming to Waitomo. Kiwi Experience, Stray & Magic Backpacker Bus networks call at Waitomo for adventure activities.

The Adventure Industry in Waitomo employs approximately 60 staff fulltime all year round and about 120 altogether over the summer months. It's a multi million dollar industry. It can be good fun. These guys started it. They are the pioneers of the industry and we acknowledge that.

Stand. Clap.

COMING EVENTS

In particular, this list covers events of special interest to researchers and managers. If you are interested in any listed events, contact Elery Hamilton-Smith on: <elery@alphalink.com.au>. If you plan to visit North America or Europe, we can probably also provide details for some of the local meetings that take place there.

2006: December 3-6	Sustaining Social and Natural Capital, Australia New Zealand Systems Society Conference, Katoomba, New South Wales
2007: January	26th ASF Conference, South Australia, celebrating 50 years of the Australian Speleological Federation, Mt. Gambier, Sth. Australia.
2007: March 10	UK Cave Science Symposium
2007: April 9-12	CAVEPS – Conference on Vertebrate Evolution, Palaeontology and Systematics, Museum of Victoria, Melbourne
2007: April 29 – May 4	17TH ACKMA CONFERENCE , Buchan, Victoria. This will be part of the celebrations to mark the centenary of the discovery of Fairy Cave.
2007: May 15-18	International Cave Rescue Conference, Aggtelek-Jósvalfö, Hungary
2007: July 8-Aug 3-	17th INQUA (International Quaternary Association) Congress, Cairns, Queensland
2007: July 23-27	NSS Convention, Marengo, Indiana, USA
2007: August 13-19	International Conference on Karst Hydrogeology and ecosystems, Western Kentucky University, USA.
2007: September 17-21	UNESCO International Conference on Geoparks, Belfast, Northern Ireland
2007: October 8-12	Cave and Karst Management Symposium, St Louis, Missouri
AND LOOKING AHEAD:	
2008	European Speleo Congress, Vercors, France
2008:	19th International Symposium on Subterranean Biology, Perth, Western Australia
2008: May	ACKMA Annual General Meeting Weekend. Venue and dates to be advised.
2008: August 17-20	Inaugural Global Geotourism Conference, Perth, WA.
2009: January	27th ASF Conference
2009: May	18TH ACKMA CONFERENCE , Margaret River, Western Australia
2009: July 19-26	International Congress of Speleology, Texas, USA