

A Tribute to the late Dr Mike Augee

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Mike and Wellington Caves

Mikes involvement with Wellington caves

In 1982 under the leadership of Dr Mike Archer from the University of NSW. A dig was started near the base of the Altar going down approximately seven meter's Mike was invited by Dr Mike Archer to be part of the team along with Dr Lyn Dawson. The dig lasted approximately 4 years. (They weren't slow they could only do it on a part time basis).

1986 Mike visited Munich Germany to talk to Prof Dehm the Director of the Palaeontological Museum-Jan -Mar 1986. Mike would meet with Dehn to find out the fascinating story of the two German palaeontologists that were collecting from Wellington Caves in 1939. Mike had Lunch with Prof Dehm once a week it wasn't until the final days before Mike was to depart Germany that Dehn gave him additional information pertaining to the fossil collection. Mike told me that Prof Dehn had a minder and couldn't be open as much as he wanted to.

Mike also interviewed the Gardoll boys that were here when the two scientists were collecting.

Without Mikes curiosity and thirst for knowledge these facts would be lost (Mike, was gathering material for a book that will never be published).

Mike organised a Conference that took place in Cathedral Cave.

Mike purchased the property on Caves Road close to the Caves so that he and a friend could run adult educational classes on Megafauna and identification of fossils however his friend passed away before this came to fruition.

1999 After retiring Mike moved to Wellington in 2000 continuing his research into the extinction of Megafauna.

Mike was extremely generous with his time and his love of educating students. His house was always available for those who needed accommodation.

For the next 20 years Mike continued his connection with Wellington Caves. Mike developed relations with Schools that would come back year after year. Schools would stay a few days at Caravan Park.

Day 1 consisted of a BBQ which Mike put on at no cost to school then a night tour of Cathedral Cave.

Day 2 students participated in washing, material that contained fossils in the morning while the school went and visited other locations. Mike did the Phosphate Mine tour with groups of students throughout the day.

Mike would gather dried soil take it back to the lab that he had purposely organised to help students. The lab consisted of benches with lights that were magnified, tools used in sorting through sediment and work sheets. Before the sorting commenced, he would give a talk on dentition and how to identify certain fossils. (This was all done on a volunteer basis). He also conducted night tours for the schools.

There were also Uni groups who visited Wellington Caves mainly from the University of NSW Mike always welcomed them with a BBQ sometimes up to 40 students. I remember a staff member saying to me that when students fill out their evaluation sheet at the end of their stay, they always gave a good one if they were well fed which Mike always supplied plenty (nibblies, Wine main & dessert cold drinks).

The University would stay for 2-4 days and Mike would provide breakfast (bacon & eggs Cereal's juice fruit and the odd vegetarian) Lunch Mike would lay out all the materials so they could make their own sandwiches fruit cake was provided & a popper. The University would charge a minimal amount for their meals. Mike shopped prepared and organised food for forty people for four days which is a huge undertaking. Mike just loved being generous he was in his element when talking to a captive group. Though his talks were so informative and never boring.

I remember a tour that Mike was taking with the general public and of the tourist recognised Mike's unique voice and the tourist asked if he lectured at the UNSW because they were still using recorded lectures that Mike gave at the University of NSW during his time there.

February 1987 Wellington Caves Advisory committee was discussed and which organisations would make up the Board of experts to advise council on maintaining the Caves and reserve.

1990 Mike did an animal survey which meant setting up 100 traps to see what was on the reserve he caught 5 house mice. There was a follow up of a scat survey and spotlighting. This identified rabbits, foxes, cats, rats, possums, Kangaroos and echidnas. The reserve had very little native wildlife.

27.10.2004 Wellington Council as the trustees of the Wellington Caves wished to Appoint the Wellington Caves Advisory committee under the provision of section 355 of the local Government Act. This Committee was to be made up of experts in their fields to advise council on how to maintain the Wellington caves as a natural asset. Mike was invited to become a member of the WC advisory Committee as the palaeontologist.

2008 Mike was appointed as Honorary Curator of fossils.

2008 Plan of Management wanted to start a group called friends of the Caves. Which were made up of interested persons that volunteered their time to help with projects on the Reserve. Some of those projects include aiding the cave divers to clean out the newly rediscovered water cave named Anticline Cave. Mike was responsible for organising the commencement of the Fossil Trail with the help of the Friends of Wellington Caves. A rough track was made through the reserve finding locations where invertebrate fossils could be found and identified this was later made into a proper walking track that commenced with a Cairn that Gay Bennison did. Mike produced the map and interpretive material that is used today. Also, Friends cleaned sediment from the cave that had covered some of the speleothems in the cave as a result of doing the stairs down into Cathedral Cave always expert advice was sought on how to do this with least damage to the cave.

After Volunteering for these projects Mike would always shout lunch, we could order off the board anything we felt like (in those days they provided meals) I asked him once who pays for all these meals and he said there was a slush fund, The Slush fund was Mike's enumeration for being a Councillor he said he didn't want to be paid for being a councillor the money would go back to the community.

He did this numerous times I know when he hired a bus to take interest groups or committee member of a board that he was on, Mike paid for the hire of the bus.

Whilst on Wellington Council Councillors were given sub committees of council Mike was allocated these committees the Heritage Committee, Ponto falls committee, Mount Arthur Trust Reserve (one of the few committees that were doing well) and Historical Society. One of his first projects for the Heritage committee was to do an audit of churches, cemeteries, community halls and other important heritage items in the local government area which extends from Geurie to Euchareena Yeoval to Gollan. Those bus trips and hire of the bus was funded by Mike and Mike also was the bus driver.

2008 Jenolan hosted the cave and Karst Presenters Conference to which Wellington Cave Conference were invited if you wished to attend you needed to finance yourself. Mike thought it was important for those guides wishing to attend to go, one guide who was a casual and if she went to the conference she

would not be paid. Mike paid for her to attend the conference along with lost wages. During the conference it left Wellington Caves short staffed so Mike volunteered to do all tours.

It is because of Mikes connection to the University of NSW and his close friendship with Dr Mike Archer who was at that time Director of The Australian Museum, that Wellington Caves have the casts that was displayed in the Lost Kingdom Display. Wellington Caves are now in possession of the large casts of *Egalinia*, *Wonambi Diprotodon* & *Thylacoleo* (the last 3 are housed in the phosphate mine).

In recent years Dr Armstrong Osborne wished to donate a lot of items plus specimens to Wellington Caves however there were no dollars involved to get the donation from Dr Osborne. Mike made two trips to Sydney to bring back Dr Osbornes donations to the caves.

The Public kept asking for information pertaining to the cave. Mike researched and paid a photographer to take photos of important features of the caves and reserve collated the material Bruce Welch did the layout of the book *Cave Divers* produced the maps that are found in the book. Mike paid for all the printing of the books so the public could have a memento of their visit. If wishing to purchase a copy Mike was not interest in making money for these books so they were available to purchase for very little.

2019 During covid lock down Mike wanted to see the Fossil trail have a larger role as part of the attractions offered by Wellington Caves as the main focus is on Megafauna and the lesser known invertebrate fossils are sometimes left behind. Mike was working on educational materials that schools could use to assist teachers with their site visits and some recommendations that would not be a burden on Dubbo Regional Council in maintaining the fossil trail. If guides could be trained in the interpretation of the site a charge could be set for interest groups or schools Mike was also working on updating his previous fossil map.

Mikes vision for the Wellington Caves was that it would lead the way for excellence in education considering it an important role in history and it may encourage more international interest.

Thank you for speaking at the conference I know you will do Mike justice.