

# EDITORIAL

My final act, for each of this and the earlier editions of this Journal that I have put together, is penning my editorial. For this, my penultimate edition, I had intended to reflect on how our world in Australia and New Zealand had been fortunate in our governmental and community responses to the pandemic, resulting in a new “Covid normal” settling on our societies and our activities. I dictate this, during my 75 km, 3:15 AM commute on Christmas Eve when, in six hours or so, I will deliver my two final judgements for the year. When I get to my chambers, I will plug my digital recorder into my “pet Dragon” (a computer with Dragon NaturallySpeaking voice recognition software installed) and it will produce a near-perfect draft of this editorial. A marvel of human ingenuity! The emerging vaccines for Covid-19 are further miracles of human innovation and technology, developed in record time and able to be rolled out over the coming months or years to provide protection for humanity and, I hope, for people of all races and in all places (including the farthest flung corners of our planet).

Australia was open across the whole continent and a trans-Tasman travel bubble was in the offing – although too late for my family’s planned visit to New Zealand and the expanded range of adventure caving activities my teenage children had planned for Waitomo. Now that the younger of them had passed his 16th birthday and thus expanded the range of activities in which he was permitted to participate, he had been looking forward to writing another “mystery shopper” piece to go with those which he had already contributed during my editorship.

Then came the so-called “Avalon cluster” here in Sydney, disrupting plans for family Christmas festivities and with three differing lockdown regimes operating across Sydney depending on whether you were in the epicentre suburbs for the cluster; in the nearby but a little distant adjacent grouping of suburbs; or, living, like me, in what is described as Greater Sydney. The new, “new Covid normal” is that there is no new Covid normal and that each twist of the barrel of the kaleidoscope of life has the potential for new and different fast response restrictions on our lives.

The lengthiest piece in this edition, Greg Middleton’s description of his visits to various Neolithic cave sites in the Dordogne region of France complements my own earlier descriptions of visits to such sites in the Dordogne and the Ardèche regions of France. His piece reminds us of the available delights of earlier times when skies (and caves) were open!

A report from Peter Chandler, our New Zealand Vice-President, also shows that hope of return to a more normal life may be possible.

The Association’s cave atmosphere monitoring project continues to provide interesting data as Andy Baker, Andy Spate and Dave Gillieson report in an update in this edition.

In this edition, an opinion piece from Nicholas White appears (also published earlier in Caves Australia, the ASF journal, but reproduced with permission here) about the cavalier and thoughtless destruction by Rio Tinto of the caves of the Juukan Gorge. At least the outpouring of public anger at the senseless destruction of this priceless and sacred Aboriginal heritage provides some hope (but not certainty) that change for the better in protecting such sites may result.

Also out of the physical and metaphysical ashes of these dark times, in our next (March 2021) edition, Dave Gillieson reports on recovery efforts on Kangaroo Island following the impacts of the disastrous bushfires nearly a year ago – bushfires that impacted not only on the caves and associated infrastructure on that island but also on many other cave and karst locations in eastern Australia. Indeed, yesterday, my wife drove the two of us from west to east along the Wombeyan Caves Road and nearby fire trails where the blackened trunks of many eucalypts were producing epicormic growth (promising recovery over time) but when many of the more distant hillsides were visible showing merely black, burnt match stick like trunks with no sign of epicormic greening and very little sign of any other regrowth – such was the intensity of the firestorm that ravaged those valleys.

As my wife drove, I reflected on the fact that, in 1989 as the then NSW Minister for the Environment, I was appointed as the chair of a cabinet committee to address what should be, to the extent a state government could influence it, our response to greenhouse gas emissions. Over 30 years later, we live in a world where we have not yet reached universal common commitment to address the warming of our planet.

Enough of the maudlin ramblings of a soon to depart editor! I apologise that I was not able to publish this edition in time for it to make your electronic Christmas stocking, but the necessity to finalise, before Christmas, a lengthy decision dealing with fire safety risks in a tyre storage facility in Sydney’s southern suburbs had me in my office for the whole of last pre-Christmas weekend working on the judgement rather than on this edition as I had expected.

I hope you all had a happy festive season in whatever circumstances Covid 19 permitted to you.

I conclude with my thanks to Tony Culberg and his wife, Pat, who act as my proofreaders for this Journal. The coherence, spelling and grammar owe much to the assistance I receive from them!

**Tim Moore**

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