

President's Report

Ian Eddison

As I write this President's report, it is a beautiful Autumn Sunday in Bathurst, NSW. News in our world is a little more positive and I am encouraged that, although COVID-19 challenges continue, here in Australia and New Zealand the number of cases is considerably lower compared to the recent past. With the roll out of vaccines, our society may return to some sense of normalcy. We must remain vigilant, however. While cave tourism sites are hoping to increase carrying capacity (which could be good economically), it does put us at risk of the threat of new outbreaks. It remains a challenging time.

Your committee along with several ACKMA members have been busy on a number of fronts:

Yarrangobilly – A proposed Mountain Bike Trail Network in Kosciuszko National Park potentially would have impacted on the Yarrangobilly Caves catchment. This proposal hid behind the idea that it would bring tourism to Caves House, cave tours and the region – creating many jobs in both construction and maintenance. The reality, though, was that proper environmental research of the risks had not been done nor proper consultation undertaken. This meant we responded strongly against this proposal. In particular, I want to thank John Brush for his tireless work on this. David Gillieson, Andy Spate and I (along with John) worked on our considered response to this proposal (and the following related issue).

Bushfire and Local Economic Relief Fund in NSW - There is a NSW Upper House inquiry into the distribution of grant money to councils from this fund. Our committee has, in particular, been concerned about the Snowy Valleys Council push for the Mountain Bike Trail Network in Kosciuszko National Park (see above). Local newspaper editorials occurred supporting the proposal before the closing of submissions for the fund! We have submitted our concerns.

Timor Caves, NSW – A 'Hills of Gold Wind Farm' proposed within 5km of Timor Caves was opposed by our committee for its intention to clear habitat and potentially creating erosion; and for its close proximity to cavernous rocky landscapes including the limestone caves at Timor. The desire for renewable energy seems to be gathering such momentum that other aspects of the environment are being ignored in the process.

Renewable Energy Zone Central West NSW - I attended the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment presentation in Gulgong for the proposed Renewable Energy Zone (REZ). This was largely an information session but also enable departmental representatives to gather comments from the community about where a new high voltage network could be installed to which projects would connect - these being being solar and wind energy farms. There was little argument about environmental gains because renewable energy is positive for the environment compared to coal extraction and coal-fired power



generation. However, nothing was mentioned about selecting a network route for minimal environmental impact. No overlay of the geology or karst areas was provided, nor one of the floristic habitats involved. I made the observation that many of these rural lands have remnant woodlands that are endangered ecological communities—meaning that great care is required not to reduce these habitats further. There is more to this than the money for the landholders who will carry the network or host the projects that feed into the new grid or the grant opportunities that may be offered to community or other not for profit groups. This is likely to be repeated in other states around Australia so be involved and informed.

Liaison and relationship building with ASF and NZSS – At a joint committee meeting between ACKMA and ASF, where we not only exchanged pleasantries, we agreed that we often have similar interests and should communicate more often if possible. Discussion on the International Year of Caves and Karst led to the exploration of a creative celebration of caves and karst in Australasia. Our relationship is a positive one and these discussions led to NZSS becoming part of the combined effort in the creative Celebration of Caves and Karst in Australasia happening. I am encouraged by this relationships building between our organisations. ACKMA, ASF and NZSS will contribute to a \$1,000 grand prize and Ledlenser are providing four \$500 vouchers for each of the divisions of the creative competition. More details are later in this issue. Check out the conditions and get creative!

The Ann Augusteyn Award - Submissions closed on 15 March. Cathie Plowman has done a sterling job organising this and sending out reminders. The announcement of a winner will occur at our online AGM in May.

President's Report continued ...

What a wonderful way to pay respect to Ann through the recognition of those of you who share and teach interpretation skills.

Atmospheric Data Logger project - This project continues to gather momentum with data coming in and analysis being conducted by Professor Andy Baker enabling a better appreciation for all our members. This project, funded by ACKMA, assists tourist cave sites to harvest data of temperature and humidity levels during the closure (and, thus, without visitors) of caves in 2020 and for it to be able to be compared with the data recorded as tours begin to run again. Andy Spate, David Gillieson and Andy Baker have all worked on making this a successful program.

Sixteen Legs - This exciting travelling exhibition through Bookend Trust is up and running again. It is currently in Queensland at Capricorn Caves. Do consider how you might be able to work your town in with this team (especially for those of you who work in cave tourism).

Wellington Caves Creative Immersions (WCCI) - The Dubbo Regional Council Cultural Development Unit invited me, as ACKMA President, to write a letter of support for a program at Wellington Caves which links to the International Year of Caves and Karst but which may give an ongoing annual opportunity for creative and scientific

communities to be showcased. Watch this space.

Cave tourism site restoration - It is heartening to know that various cave tourism sites are undergoing new infrastructure planning and restoration following devastating bushfires. Some, also, suffered huge flooding as well. The renewal programs include Jenolan Caves, Wombeyan Caves, Buchan Caves and Kelly Hill Cave on Kangaroo Island.

Kangaroo Island Karst - Good planning continues for both the Flinders Chase Reimagining project and a Management Plan for the western end of the island's National Parks. David Gillieson is actively involved in both of these. One of the most interesting things to come out of the fires on Kangaroo Island has been the ability to locate and log new, previously unknown cave entrances. No doubt we will hear more on this as information becomes available.

Best practice guidelines for show caves - This project continues to be co-ordinated by Andy Spate and David Gillieson. Input is invited from those managers who can contribute from recent experience. This project really is an extension of, and update on, past guidelines.

The ACKMA Strategic Management Plan - This ongoing project is being worked on by Jodie Strickland. Get in touch and contribute where you can.

Detailed Map for 404 Caves of Phong Nha Cave System Created

After some 30 years of research, experts from the British Royal Caves Association (BCRA) has created a detailed map for 404 caves that have staggering length of 231km in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park in Quang Binh Province.



Tien (Fairy) Cave

Scientists estimate that Phong Nha-Ke Bang and adjacent areas are home to over 1,000 caves. There are more than 600 caves that still remain unrevealed. Artificial intelligence (AI) will be applied to discover caves and digitize the entire cave system for scientific study and tourism development, said the director of Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park.

Of which, there are many caves containing information of the process of Earth formation over 400 million years ago.

The Phong Nha cave system has 157 caves with a length of 103km. The specialists made surveys of 58 grottos measuring 48km and 20km of the 60-cave Nuoc Mooc system. Outstanding caves are Phong Nha, Tien Son, Son Doong, Thien Duong, Va, and En.



Experts from the British Royal Caves Association (BCRA) has created a detailed map for 404 caves in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park.

From "Cave Talk", the newsletter of the National Caves Association of the USA