

Ernst (Ernie) Albert Holland

25 September 1938 - 20 June 2021

A Celebration of a Life Well-Lived



It was an honour to have known, worked, and played with Ernie Holland over some forty years although, alas, I have had little contact in the past few years – narrowly missing seeing him in Tasmania over Easter this year as he judged at the Hobart Gemboree.

Ernst Albert Holland left us on 20 June to investigate many mineral sites and caves around and under the surface of the globe.

Some of ACKMA's current members will not have encountered or heard of Ernie. He was our first, very charismatic, President of ACKMA. He contributed dramatically to our Association and to Australasian cave and karst management generally. And overseas.

I sought comment from ACKMA members and others who had contact with Ernie over the years. These are reproduced below – some have been edited. Thanks to all those who contributed – many of you have supplied further background beyond caves to help ACKMA celebrate Ernie's life.

In the words of one inaugural ACKMA member he was: 'without doubt, one of the greatest characters in the history of Australian cave management in general, and Jenolan in particular'.

His cheery approach and enthusiasm of looking after caves and karst cannot be underestimated although sometimes his enthusiasm led him into difficult political fields. For example, on a consultancy in Malaysia he was told the communists utilised many caves during the Malayan emergency in the 1950s. At a formal dinner with the State Governor, Ernie expressed a desire to meet with these communist cave users – shock, horror around the table!

But any difficulties are far outweighed by his amazing contributions to the understanding of cave management and interpretation.

Let's review the life of this remarkable man:

He was born in Grenfell, attended school there and then at Wolaroi College in Orange as a boarder before gaining his Intermediate Certificate in 1953. From 1954 until 1971 he records his life as a 'farmer, driver of earth moving equipment, shearer, share farmer and structural welder'. He joined Jenolan in 1971 – one wonders what drew him there? This started a remarkable career in the cave world. From Grenfell to caves around the world.

He rose through the ranks at Jenolan from Guide to Senior Guide, to General Manager of the Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust and finally to Karst Resources Manager for the Trust until retiring in 2001. His retirement was not spent sitting down as you will see from the various tributes below.

Ernie's education did not stop at Wolaroi College – his document 'Ernst Holland My History' lists 13 short courses including work toward a Masters degree at UNSW – the latter unfortunately not completed. Things ranging from Laboratory Skills to Environmental Economics – again a measure of this man's intellect.

Turning back to caves: Ernie visited and consulted at many sites across the world including Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Hungary, Austria, Switzerland and France. This led to him becoming a co-chairman of the International Union of Speleology's Commission on the Protection of Show Caves.

Over the years he was on numerous advisory and community committees providing guidance not only on caves and karst but on a number of other subjects.

Ernie received a number of awards over the years. These include:

- Honorary Life Member of ACKMA
- Life Member of the Bathurst Stamp Coin Collectors and Lapidary Club Inc
- Award for 50 years' service to the NSW Rural Fire service.
- NSW Rural Fire Service recognised 63 years of service.
- Fellow of the Australian Institute of History and Arts.
- Declared one of 200 Living Legends as part of the 200 years celebrations for Bathurst, 2015.

So where did such awards as the Australian Institute of History and Arts come from? As well as caves and bushfires Ernie was hooked on rocks, minerals and fossils. So much so that he became a national, and subsequently international, judge at gem and mineral shows (Gemborees) in Australia and elsewhere.

And what happened in retirement? As can be seen from the contributions below he increased his role in the Rural Fire Service!



Ernie's memorial service was as well attended as one could expect in this time of COVID difficulties. Had there been no COVID the attendance would have been numbered in the hundreds, if not thousands. The RFS had an honour guard and presented Elaine with the RFS NSW flag as a mark of respect. But he still had to do things differently, instead of a flower wreath on top of his coffin it had to be vegetables from his garden.

As his daughter Lea says:

It was a beautiful day, and he was farewelled with love, laughter and tears. He will be greatly missed.

No truer words!

ACKMA has lost one of its legends – but his legacy will not be lost.

Andy Spate AM

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On the Nullarbor.

Ernie Holland: from caver to speleologist.

Ernst started as a guide at Jenolan Caves in 1971. Whilst working in the tourist caves he explored numerous small tight leads. During that time, he would have would have known of the contributions that speleological societies and caving clubs had made at Jenolan. He acknowledged these when in 1985 as senior guide; he assigned them a cottage on Burma Road (The Cavers Cottage). The cottage was burnt to the ground in a bushfire in December 2019. For 34 years, Ernst's foresight had provided an excellent base at Jenolan for cave exploration, rescue, surveying and science.

In 1972 he was a founding member of Jenolan Caves Historical & Preservation Society (JCH&PS). He used history in cave interpretation, publications and track signage. He delved into the history of speleothem protection at Jenolan. In a paper "Away with the Wires" he acknowledged that Jeremiah Wilson the first keeper of the caves (1866-1900) hand wove the unsightly wire netting that protected irreplaceable decoration. Writing this paper prompted Ernst to consider and research alternative methods for the protection of speleothems.

When in 1984, Ernst was appointed Senior Guide there was an acceleration of scientific studies at Jenolan. To prevent overlap, as many disciplines were involved, Ernst founded a scientific committee consisting of cave and karst investigators. Ernest chaired the meetings of the speleologists who were working at Jenolan. The meetings gave him an overview of cave and karst projects and allowed the participants to discuss their projects. During this period many university students (Honours to PhD) worked on various projects at Jenolan. Many scientists and their students have acknowledged Ernst's assistance and contribution to their publications.

The cavers had always recorded and surveyed caves in the Reserve. Ernst required a complete survey of the tourist caves. It had to be of a suitable standard that the maps could be used for interpretation, science and management. The cavers of NSW took on Ernst's challenge and started the Jenolan Caves Survey Project in 1987. Ernst accompanied the surveyors through caves he knew like the back of his hand. Remember those holes he explored as a slim guide: he pointed them out and for completeness they needed to be surveyed. A small caver was sent in with surveying gear; fortunately none of them went for kilometres. When it was found difficult to keep the tourist caves underground from existing surface data; he organized an aerial survey of the karst that allowed the caves to be placed accurately below the surface.

Ernst's time as Senior Guide, saw Karst Conservation Reserves (KCR) established. Jenolan Caves KCR, Wombeyan Caves KCR, Abercrombie Caves KCR and Borenore Caves all fell under the care of the Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust. When Ernst was made the inaugural Karst Resources Manager for the Trust in 1990 he had a budget for karst research. He used his resources to establish a laboratory at the Trust office

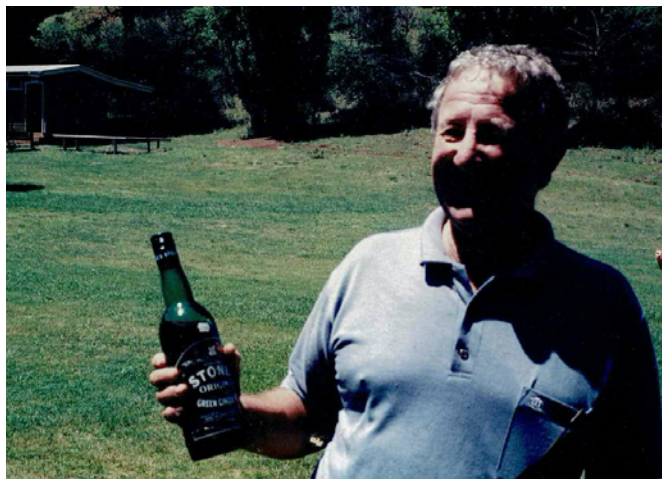
in Bathurst, employed and trained karst research assistants and oversaw research in the four Karst Conservation Reserves. In this role he was able to visit other caving areas through Australia and New Zealand. In 1996 he visited the Nullarbor with a group of speleologists. During this time he was investigating the effect of bushfires on karst.

When he retired from Jenolan in 2000, the wealth of information this inspiring person had supplied to cavers and speleologists was greatly missed.

Julia James

I first met Ernie Holland when I started going to Jenolan with CSS, and then we started to work together when I joined the Social & Environmental Monitoring Committee at Jenolan. Over the next decade we spent quite a lot of time together and I gained a great appreciation of his intellect, immense experience and abundant good humour.

He grew up on a farm at Grenfell in humble circumstances. We went out there one weekend and re-found a sandstone cave in a deep valley near his old farm. As kids he and a mate had climbed up to it and found a tin matchbox and a Colt revolver, both now in the Grenfell Museum and attributed to Ben Hall's gang. I led the climb up to the cave and found it most interesting. We sat up there reminiscing and drank Stone's Green Ginger Wine out of tin mugs.



He was one of the most intelligent people I've ever met. His encyclopaedic knowledge of rocks and minerals, delivered with his habitual, and often delightful, malapropisms, impressed all that met him and was an abiding interest. His collection at Raglan was justly famed and one could spend hours in there learning from him. He developed an interest in the effects of fire on limestone, which led to some innovative experimental work at Jenolan and several papers.

Before I moved north to Cairns, Ernie, and I went out to the Nullarbor for about three weeks. We had a ball. We managed to find the campsites where several hundred First Nations people gathered in 1907 to conduct ceremonies. There were many stone hut circles, flaked bottle glass and telephone insulators, and a ground stone axehead, which turned out to come from Mount William in western Victoria. We had an interesting time exiting Mullamullang when our caving lights gave out, using a cigarette lighter to illuminate the next few metres. Ernie was a great companion, absolutely unflappable and interested in everything.

Ernie came on a trip to the Mitchell-Palmer and Chillagoe with my late wife Jill Landsberg and Lana Little. We had a great trip which took us to some quite remote karst and caves, also to the Palmer River goldfields and thence to Chillagoe. Ernie loved the bush and was blown away by the rock art – one cave in particular with a gallery of paintings and only one set of naked footprints on the soft red dirt floor...

I feel very privileged to have known Ernie and will miss him very much.

Dave Gillieson

I would like to extend my sincere condolences to Ernie's family on this very sad day.

Ernie was a stalwart and life member of the Raglan Rural Fire Brigade and a committed member of the NSW Rural Fire Service, since joining the Brundah Bush Fire Brigade in 1956.

It was my very great pleasure to present Ernie with his 60th year Long Service Medal in August 2019 and to reflect on the many achievements he had contributed during a long and distinguish career with the Rural Fire Service as a proud member of the Chifley-Lithgow District.

Ernie's willingness to support his local community, not only the Rural Fire Service, was renown, although he was not one for personal accolades, just to get on with what needed to be done to help others.

His sudden passing was unexpected, and he will be greatly missed by us all.

Assistant Commissioner Steve Yorke AFSM

I first met Ernst in the early nineteen eighties at Jenolan Caves. I found Ernie to be a lover of caves and karst, not only the Jenolan karst as his interest was worldwide. If he hadn't seen it he had certainly read about it, such was his passion.

In 1989 the Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust was formed, and Ernie was appointed karst resources officer; from this position he played a major role in the conservation, preservation, and presentation of the karst reserves under the control of the then Trust.

Ernie and I became good mates, he was always forthcoming with good advice. We enjoyed working, travel, caving and the occasional Green Ginger together!!!!

RIP. Ernie he was ONE OF A KIND.

Mick Chalker

Ernie joined the Brundah BFB in 1956. He moved with his family to the Jenolan Caves area in 1970 for his work in the caving field. Over the next several years he attended many fire related incidents alongside other local residents, but there was no organised or formally constituted Fire Brigade. Ernie, along with other residents, got together and formed the Jenolan Caves BFB in 1979.

Ernie was part of the working group that then built a dedicated brigade station and lobbied the then Department of Tourism to acquire fire appliances over the ensuing years.

In addition to attending fire related incidents, brigade members also assisted with search and rescue in the rugged surrounding national park. Ernie would tell the story of how, on one such S & R in winter, the crew ran out of daylight and sought refuge in a cave for the night. It was cold, but one person said he was ok because he found an old blanket in the cave. When dawn broke, it became apparent the old blanket was the skin of a very smelly dead wombat. We reckoned the story must be true because he told it often enough.

Upon retiring from the Caves in 1998 Ernie moved to Raglan and joined the local brigade. It was around this time that I first met Ernie. Through my role as DFCO and also an instructor, and Ernie's increasing involvement in the Raglan brigade, including Captain from 2002 to 2005, we developed a good working relationship and a friendship. I attended many local and out of area fires with Ernie.

I knew that any area that Ernie was responsible for, was one less problem I had to worry about.

In more recent years Ernie trained up and became an air base manager in the Aviation arm of the RFS. His people skills, initiative and "can do" attitude came to the fore in this role, particularly in the recent disastrous fires. I often had the pleasure of working with Ernie in his Air Base Manager role and my Air Observer role.

Ernie was highly regarded by all that worked with him in the RFS Aviation fraternity. His gentle friendly nature, along with his patience, encouraged many volunteers to learn the skills to run an AB.

In my mind it was Ernie's personal qualities that distinguished him.

Some of the many comments about Ernie's death on the Chifley RFS face book page are worth repeating:

Champion little bloke. Lovely man. True gentleman. Great mentor. You have graced us with your knowledge and experience.

Jeff Larsen RFS Senior Group Captain (Retired)

Ages ago, shortly after Ernie retired, Mike and I visited him at Kelso.

We were not surprised to find he had a wombat or two under his suburban house.

Another anecdote: Ernie had a habit of saying "been there" when a new cave was described to him. One person who should remain nameless spun a great yarn, about amazing non-existent extensions to a cave and of course Ernie said he'd been there too.

What a wonderful fellow and well-loved.

Jill Rowling

I first Ernie Holland back in 1987 while taking part in a Staff Exchange Program that he had helped orchestrate at the time between Jenolan and Buchan Caves.

The program involved a complete swap between Senior Guide Keith Oliver of Jenolan Caves and myself, Senior Guide at Buchan.

I quickly learnt that behind Ernie's wicked sense of humour was a very clever mind and a pioneer in many cave and karst management initiatives.

Ernie remained a wonderful mentor and a constant source of inspiration during my early days in cave and karst management.

I will be forever grateful for his friendship and guidance.

May his legacy live on forever.

Dale Calnin

I was the school teacher at Jenolan Caves Public School 1973 - 1974. In those two years I taught four of Ernie and Elaine's children - Deirdre, Derek, Leah and Michael.

They were both welcoming and kindly to me, in 1973, a first-year teacher. Ernie was helpful and diligent in his role as President and held regular meetings of the P & C. I knew that if I needed any support Ernie would back me - this was rarely needed as my years at Jenolan are amongst my happiest memories. Elaine provided a friendly welcome opening up the school and doing her cleaning before school and making sure the heaters were turned on - a necessity in Jenolan winters.

The school community was a happy one of children, parents, Jenolan workers and me as teacher. We all benefitted from Ernie's easy-going approachability and counsel and help.

Vale Ernie - you will always be gratefully remembered by me for helping to make my time at Jenolan enjoyable and rewarding.

With deep sympathy to Elaine and the children whom I remember so well.

Julie Brackenreg [Hayes]

I seem to remember all these pillowcases on the back of chairs around the guides table full of baby wombats and when we scared a wombat further into a cave, Ernie taught us the wombat mating call to try and entice it back out. I think we may have been calling the wrong sex.

Peter Brown



Ernie was the judge for mineral entries in the competition at the 2021 Easter Gemboree (National Gem & Mineral Show) in Hobart.

He will be greatly missed in the gem & lapidary community.

Jimmy Lim

Ernst Holland had been interested in rocks and mineral since he was a child, thanks to his father, an interest that Ernst turned into a lifelong hobby. Unable to attend any formal education on the topic Ernst began reading any book on the subject that he could get his hands on – he yearned to learn how to identify rocks and minerals as well as amass an impressive collection of rock and mineral specimens. His knowledge as a geologist and lapidarist will be sadly missed by the club and the hobby generally.

Another aspect was his hobby of lapidary - the age-old art of transforming natural rocks and minerals into polished gemstones suitable for use in jewellery and for other ornamental purposes. Ernst had taught himself the artistic skills of gem cutting, faceting and jewellery making; he volunteered in teaching his gemstone artistry at the Bathurst Stamp, Coin, Collectables and Lapidary Club and more recently the newly named Bathurst Lapidary and Collectors Club Inc.

Several years ago, Ernie became a 'National Level Judge' with the Gem and Lapidary Council of New South Wales. Along with his wife Elaine he has regularly attended, since the year 2000, the annual GEMBOREE National Gem and Mineral Shows held all over Australia. Many of his specimens from his personal collection have won many prizes in competitions.

Another passion that Ernst pursued was cycling and kayaking along with collecting early brass microscopes and other equipment, having amassed a very impressive and historic collection. He enjoyed charity rides such as the 1000km pushbike ride through the Flinders Ranges to raise money for the Royal Flying Doctors Service and the 3000km ride from Adelaide to Perth across the Nullarbor - just two of some 20 fundraising rides he has taken part in, some with Elaine.

Alan McRae



Firemen never die, they just burn forever in the hearts of the people whose lives they saved

Susan Diane Murphree