

ABERCROMBIE RE-VISITED

- Kent Henderson

Earlier this year, after several years absence, I called in at Abercrombie Caves in NSW. Cave Manager Andy Lawrence promptly *dragged* me into Abercrombie's *new* (to me) self guided tour. Actually, the self guided operation has been active for a few years now, again reminding me of the gap since my last visit.

Those who remember the Grand Archway guided tours will recall they entered through the front (southern) entrance and into the *Hall of Terpsichore*. The self guided tour has reversed this (see the adjacent map). The Arch itself, at 221metres, is often quoted as being "the longest in the Southern Hemisphere". It's probably not, according to Andy Spate, but I suppose it sounds good!! Even so, absolutely magnificent it most assuredly is!!

As a starter, visitors receive an *explanatory brochure*, whereupon they proceed "over the top" as it were, past Grove Bluff and Coops Bluff and enter the rear (northern) end of the Arch. Along the way a number of excellent interpretative signs have been placed (see adjacent photos) explaining features of the karst landscape. The Archway is then entered, wherein further interpretative signs have been placed to explain its geology and features.

Since my last visit, when a major flood washed away most mains conduit, the Archway has been re-wired and re-lit, and very well at that. Tracking and track lights are excellent, although I thought

some of the lighting on the signs inside the Arch itself could have been better.

The *Eastern Galleries* section of the Archway Cave was recently added to the self-guided tour (as from 7th September). As noted in my editorial, the Cathedral Cave (located about halfway along the Archway on the Western side) was officially re-opened as a guided tour on 7th September.

Around the Reserve itself, several improvements have been effected. During my visit, Andy took me back up the entrance road a bit to check out a brick veneer house formerly used as a guide's residence. It has been totally refurbished for tourist accommodation - very plushly I might add. However, I thought the overnight tariff for it was rather plush too... The *Visitor's Centre* has, since my visit, been recently upgraded to make it more open-plan and visitor-friendly, and a new staff amenities room added. An adjacent rotunda has also been completed.

So, my brief visit to Abercrombie came to an end. Clearly, the management of this wonderful cave system is in very capable hands. Don't miss it if you're in the area!