

EDITORIAL RAMBLINGS

It is only a few weeks until many of us will be together at the next "family gathering" at Waitomo. The 12th Conference on Cave & Karst Management is coming together very well, with Peter Dimond, Greg Martin and the organising committee doing a great job! There has been a steady flow of registrations, and all the "important people" will be there! If you haven't registered yet, hop to it!!

Of course, the 13th Conference will be held in 1999 at Naracoorte. Brian Clark has been his usual frantic self in recent months. The new Naracoorte Visitor's Centre will commence construction on 1 July, and be completed by April 1998. The caves is about to take possession of a further 56 ha of land over Blackberry and Wombat Caves, bring the surface karst under Brian's control. The land is presently under pine plantation, which is imminently to be removed, and thus great improve the hydrological situation. A team of ten people are being employed at Naracoorte over the next six months under the Government's Greencorp program. Their job will be largely in culling the Reserve's feral trees, and replanting 10,000 native seedlings.

Hot news from Naracoorte is a large restaurant is to be added to the Park. It will be located below the existing carpark, about 100m south of the existing Visitor's Centre. It will have internal seating for 100 people, and external seating for the same number. It will be leased to private enterprise. Brian has control over the design, to ensure the construction is in tune with the park environment. No five star hotel as yet, but nothing would surprise me where our Mr. Clark is concerned!!

A new entrance is also about to be constructed into Victoria Fossil Cave. The existing entrance with its interminable steps will be filled in, and a new entrance tunnel dug into the first chamber, with only 24 steps. This project, costed at \$50,000 will commence in April/May. The Bat Cave Television Centre is not being ignored either. \$40,000 is being spent soon to upgrade the Centre still further, with displays on echo locating, extra cameras, and a slide/interactive presentation on the Bats of Australia. The joint project is being undertaken with Flinders University.

Buchan Caves continues to bubble along, but largely devoid funding for anything, the antithesis of Naracoorte, if you like. The Victorian State Government has recently amalgamated Metro Parks (Melbourne Water) and National Parks into *Parks Victoria*. This new body is big into privatization, and Buchan Caves are being seriously considered. The first few *adventure cave* trips through Lilly Pilly Cave at Murrindal were undertaken in January,

finally bringing this wonderful cave "back on line" after several years of title wrangling (now solved).

Hastings Caves is still heavily under the Tasmanian State Government's gaze for privatization. The "Expressions of Interest" deadline (formerly late January) was extended until 28 February. Evidently, no "big dollars" had expressed interest by the original deadline, although a few potential concessionaires had inquired. Phil Bradley has prepared a submission for Hastings to be run as a corporatized enterprise, but public funding would still be needed for any new infrastructure. The Government is looking for a Visitor's Centre and substantial on-site accommodation to be put in place, which will probably tell against Phil's submission, if such is offered. Time will tell.

Our illustrious President, Mick Chalker, Jenolan Caves Manager Andrew Fletcher, Elery Hamilton-Smith, and I, joined a goodly (as opposed to Godly?) number of other ACKMA members at the *Caveworks* Official Opening at Margaret River on Saturday 22 February. It is an outstanding facility, of which Robyn McBeath and Peter Bell are justifiably proud. An article on the event is elsewhere in this Journal. During the WA trip, I had the opportunity to conduct an extensive interview with Andrew Fletcher on the future plans for Jenolan Caves. This interview should appear in the next (June) edition.

After a lengthy absence, the ASF's *Australian Caver* magazine was finally published recently, thanks to the work of new editor Dean Morgan, of Tasmania. The first edition was excellent, particularly given the time restraints he was under, and we can look forward to its quarterly production from now on. Great stuff!

There has been much positive feedback from visitors to the newly re-opened Cathedral Cave at Abercrombie. Other new improvements at Abercrombie Caves include a new gate at the top of Stable Cave, enabling visitors on its Adventure Tour to enter the cave from the top, climb down through the hill, and exit at creek level through Stable Arch. Other pleasant news is that a picture of Abercrombie's Grand Arch features on the front of the 1997 Telstra White Pages phone book for the 063 area (Bathurst, Orange, Lithgow, etc). This will not do promotion any harm!!

The June Edition of the Journal the ACKMA Journal will, not surprisingly, feature a full wrap up of the Waitomo Conference and Post Conference Study Tour.