

EDITORIAL RAMBLINGS

The BIG (MASSIVE!) news this quarter is the award of **Membership of the Order of Australia** (AM) awarded to our own Professor Elery Hamilton-Smith in the Australia Day Honours List (26 January). The citation reads: "For service to conservation and the environment, particularly in the areas of national park, wilderness, cave and karst management, to the development of leisure and recreation activities, and to the community as a contributor to social policy development and through programs dealing with youth issues".

As the facilitator of Elery's nomination, I would like to sincerely thank those many who contributed letters and statements in Elery's support when the nomination was put forward over two years ago. It is a tremendous result, and a thoroughly merited public recognition of a great bloke, who has given so much in so many ways, and continues to do so.

So, the **14th Australasian Conference on Cave & Karst Management** at Wombeyan Caves, NSW, is all but upon us! Being held in the first week of May, it now only weeks away!! Registrations officially closed on 1st February, and bookings for the Conference have been heavy. Evidentially, registrations include at least two Americans, and a Professor of Geology from Korea! It will be another superb family gathering! After some confusion on the *surcharge* for late registration, especially overseas, it has been decided to drop it on this occasion. **Thus, you can still register NOW, without financial penalty. MEMBERS WHO HAVE NOT YET BOOKED CAN STILL PUT IN A LATE REGISTRATION.** I am told the Post Conference Study Tours were quickly booked out, as I foreshadowed would be the case. See you at Wombeyan!! The final Program for the Conference is elsewhere herein.

While on the Conference the **ACKMA Annual General Meeting** will be held during it. I can only emphasize yet again what Brian Clark has said in his President's Report at the start of this Journal. If you feel you have something to offer, put your name forward and fill in a Nomination Form for election to the Committee. Occasionally, I hear a grumble that the ACKMA Committee is a closed shop. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is true that nominations haven't exceeded vacancies since the AGM in Tasmania in 1995 (the last time an election was necessary). However, you can only have an election if there is more than one nomination for a position!! If you don't wish to stand yourself, then nominate someone else who does.

Oh no! Not another wedding – we seem to have had a Spate of them (no not Andy!). Simon Chalker, son of Mick and Annette, was recently married to the lovely Rachel. Simon, now in the RAAF, was until recent years an electrician at Jenolan Caves. Warmest congratulations to the happy couple! I am

told the reception proved a very late night for the Chalker clan!! The obligatory photo is adjacent!

In late January, following the Wombeyan Conference Organising Committee Meeting, I went over to Jenolan Caves for the day. I hadn't been to Jenolan for awhile (how times flies...sigh). On a previous visit, I viewed the newly updated/re-lit Chifley Cave, and was reasonably impressed. This visit, happily, coincided with a Two Day Workshop being run by the Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust (JCRT) for its staff, entitled "Introduction to Cave Science and Interpretation". It was run by ACKMA member, Dr. Armstrong Osborne, and I was delighted to catch up with him and Penny – not having seen either since the Wellington Karst Studies Seminar last February. As one would expect, the two-day course was superb. I was invited to sit through it, but I only had time for one afternoon session, unfortunately. The 40 page booklet/course notes prepared by Armstrong and Penny was outstanding. Armstrong is a riveting speaker and one of Australia's top karst experts. The JCRT is to be highly commended for arranging this extremely valuable in-service training for its staff. I may have more to say on my Jenolan visit in the June Journal.

Moving to Western Australia, Peter Bell spent the latter part of October and all of November in the United States, including a week with Tom and Cathy Aley. He attended the American Cave Association Convention, and visited a number of Show Caves operations. The Lake Cave at Margaret River is now completely re-lit, the job being finished at the beginning of November, at a cost of \$42,000. The cave was gutted, but only closed for one week. All the lighting is low voltage, and computer controlled, with four underwater lights. There are now only four key-pads in the cave, and the lighting is designed to give blackness before and behind any tour group, making the cave seem much bigger. The next project will be Jewel Cave at Augusta. Starting in February, and continuing from about six months, all the boardwalks in the rear half of the cave (which were never done when the cave was last updated) will be replaced. It is planned to completely re-light Jewel Cave in the future, including completely re-designing its internal infrastructure. This is probably a few years away waiting, at least, the final result of Stefan Eberhard's ongoing hydrology study of the catchment.

I will be at Waitomo for two days in mid March, and I'm looking forward to getting back there, and especially looking over the updated *Museum of Caves*. I am told that Waitomo will be all but empty in the 1st week of May – almost everyone will be a Wombeyan!!

Arthur Clarke, who is fast becoming an international cave traveller in the Elery mould, is imminently to be underground in France. He is attending the International Workshop on Mapping Subterranean Biodiversity in Moulis (Ariege) France from 18 – 20 March. We can look forward to his report in the June Journal. This conference, of

course, is right on the money, given Arthur's MSc studies at the University of Tasmania in cave creepy crawlies. The University is partly sponsoring his trip.

And finally, the following comes the Autumn edition of the "*Abercrombie Beacon*" – the Newsletter of Abercrombie Caves, edited by Barry Cubitt: "It was a hot day when a 1.5 metre brown snake managed to slither through a hole in the screen door to the Caves office. Just imagine the panic that followed when Senior Guide Barry Cubitt returned to the

office to find the snake crawling across the kiosk floor. He quickly grabbed a trenching tool which was just outside the office for such emergencies and after several unsuccessful attempts at trying to get it outside, the snake was getting a bit upset and struck out. By now Barry was also getting upset and used the trenching tool to solve the problem. The diary entry for the day read, '*Cleaned toilets, found snake in office, relocated snake (in three pieces), repaired holes in floor made by trenching tool, changed undies*'".