

Editorial Ramblings

(with the one-off sub-title: "Mostly about Jenolan")

Well! It's all happening!! The 17th Australasian Conference on Cave and Karst Management at Buchan Caves, Victoria, is only eight months away. The Organising Committee have been working feverishly to ensure it is our biggest and best conference yet – and it will be! The Registration Form and full details are inserted herein. **DO NOT MISS IT!!**

Speaking of Conferences, the ACKMA Committee has decided to bid for the 6th International Show Caves Association (ISCA) Congress in 2010, for Waitomo. Andy Spate and our key Waitomo members have prepared our bid, involving an extensive presentation to the 5th ISCA Congress in Bermuda this October. Andy recently spent a week at Waitomo with Pete Chandler and Greg Martin et al, putting the bid together. Andy will be attending in Bermuda, and possibly Pete. Whether our bid is successful is in the *Lap of the Gods*, but in any case a much closer ACKMA-ISCA relationship will undoubtedly be formed as a result – in itself a great thing.

Elery Hamilton-Smith has been globe-trotting again. He undertook a whirlwind trip to Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in late July. In Slovenia he was the keynote speaker and main lecturer at the annual Summer School at Postojna Cave, after which he which he traveled to Bosnia-Herzegovina where he visited Vjetrenica Cave and the surrounding karst. Thence to Sarajevo where he attended and spoke at a seminar at the Academy of Sciences, and had discussions with the Environment Minister and other officials concerning World Heritage Nomination for the Bosnian Karst. In October he will be traveling to Vietnam and South Korea – to the latter for *The Management of World Heritage Areas in Asia* seminar on Jeju Island (which our President, Steve Bourne, will also be attending). Other outings for Elery

this year almost certainly include UNESCO/World Heritage trips to Papua-New Guinea and China. Phew! I understand there are moves to make him an honorary Australian citizen (if he's ever in the country...!)

I am delighted to advise that, through the good offices of Brian Clark, ACKMA and the Malaysian Karst Society have cross affiliated and we look forward to long and happy relationship. Their web address is: <http://www.mykarst.org/> and their quarterly Newsletters can be downloaded from that site.

Merit rewarded! John Ash and Peter Chandler have been made Members of the New Zealand order of Merit (MNZM) for services to tourism. It is the Kiwi equivalent of the Order of Australia. Of the 201 NZ citizens named in the various categories, 49 were MNZM's. John and Pete's awards were the only ones for tourism. Warmest congratulations to both – most deserved. Both John and Pete are, of course, thrilled. By long standing convention, the source of nominations received by the NZ Prime Minister is not disclosed, but Pete reckons it helped that the Prime Minister did a Black Water Rafting trip a few years ago!



"It says, 'No animals were actually killed in the production of this cave painting.'"

As foreshadowed in the last Journal, Wombeyan and Abercrombie Caves, and the Jenolan karst, are now under the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service (NSWNPWS). The handover occurred on 1st July. and on that date a function to mark the occasion was held at a pub in Taralga. ACKMA member John Callaghan (of Jenolan Caves) who attended the event, reports: "The evening was enjoyed by about thirty-five people, not the least were the 'guests of honour', those who would no longer

be employed by Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust (JCRT). Affectionately they have been known as 'The Dirty Dozen', although there are thirteen: Steven Meehan, Steve Reilly, Lisa Behan, Mick and Annette Chalker, Geoff Lang, David and Corrin Smith, Barry and Lynn Cubitt, Stuart Bremner, Laurie Dunn and Mark Simpson. Andrew Fletcher, CEO of the JCRT, presented each of these people with a Certificate of Appreciation and those in leadership roles received appropriate framed photographs from their cave system. It was wonderful to see Jenolan Caves well represented as their colleagues were farewelled. Jenolan people in attendance were: Scott Melton, Ted Matthews, Ian Dive, Charles Degotardi, Margaret and Grant Commins, Dan and Dom Cove, Russell Commins, Phyllis Calvert and myself."

Speaking of Jenolan, I'd like to give a plug to *Binoomea*, the regular Newsletter of the Jenolan Caves Historical and Preservation Society (JCH&PS). It is excellent – the current edition is eight pages of joy, which is very well put together by its Editor, Jenny Whitby. I thoroughly recommend membership of the JCH&PS which, of course, gets you *Binoomea*.

The Society holds its meetings at Jenolan, generally every 2-3 months. The cost is very modest, as follows: Single Membership: \$20 per year. Family Membership: \$20 per year for the first adult and \$5 for each additional of the same immediate family living at the same address. Student Membership: \$5 per year until the age of 18 years, upon which evidence of full time study must be produced to remain for this rate. Pensioner: \$5 per year. 5 year membership is available at four times the annual rate. (i.e.: single \$20pa x 4 = \$80, saving \$20). To join simply send your details and cheque (payable to JCH&PS) to: The Membership Secretary, JCH&PS, Locked Bag, Jenolan Caves. NSW. 2790.

Having plugged *Binoomea*, here are two snippets from the current (August 2006) Edition:

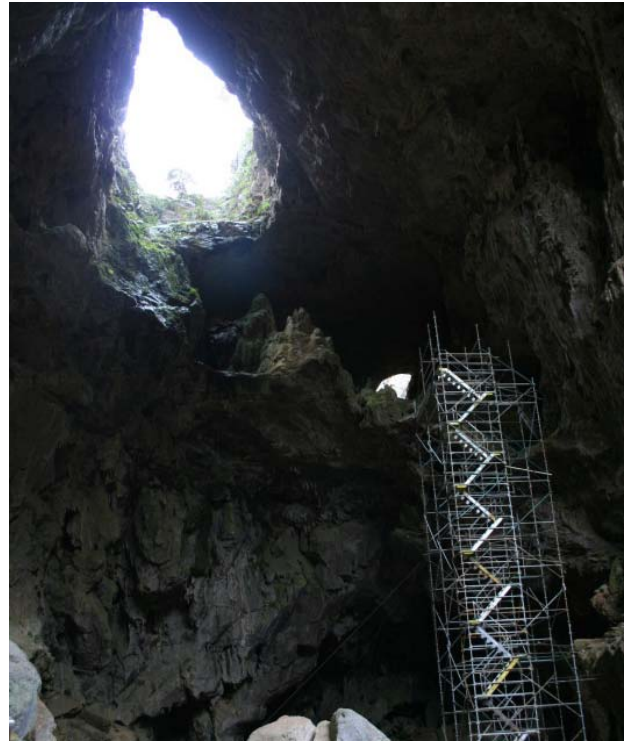
"On Wednesday 7th July 2006 the NSW State Government took back control of Caves House, and plans to outsource the tour guiding services at the site to attract new management. The Government won the lease back from St George Bank, who last year called in a receiver and evicted the previous lessee, Archer Field.

"The Environment Minister, Bob Debus, plans to offer a seven year lease on tour guide services, together with a 21 year lease on the hotel. He refused to disclose how much was paid to win back the lease. The Government plans to spend \$3 million on the upkeep of the caves, and \$1.8 million on Caves House before calling for tenders". – Extract from *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 July 2006

"Nettle Cave – on show again. Work has commenced on the development of the Nettle Cave, which will eventually be a self guided cave. Scott Melton reports "The work is progressing well in the Nettle Cave and the exit stairs were recently lifted into place by a crane that when fully extended reached

as high as the Pinnacle on top of the Grand Arch. Visitors will enter via the Coach House and exit down the steps from the Nettle cave entrance that you can see from the Lucas Cave Balcony.

"The Nettle Cave was discovered in 1845 and was closed as a show cave in 1932, the day after James Wiburd retired. Apparently he was the one who wanted it kept open. As to when it "re-opens" we are told in August 2006 but no date has been set as of yet. Stay tuned."



Above: Construction Infrastructure in The Devil's Coachhouse at the entrance to Nettle Cave, Jenolan. Photo: Rob Whyte.

Below: New exit Infrastructure from Nettle Cave into the Grand Arch, Jenolan. Photo: Andy Spate.



By way of comment, I must say having a self-guided (oops – 'self-timed', sorry Elery) cave at Jenolan is long overdue and most welcome. That said, I (and not a few others) think the adjacent Arch Cave should have been part of the package, with the (de-constructed) bridge between the two caves reinstated. Still, it all comes back to funding, and hopefully this outcome will occur in the future.

The Karst Conservation Unit Staff – L to R: Steve Meehan, Nigel Scanlan, Lisa Behan & Steve Reilly.



Now, consequential Jenolan news. The guiding (and other) staff at Jenolan (after the handover the Jenolan karst, but not the show caves, to the NSWNPWS on 1st July), remain under the Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust (JCRT) for the time being. Employment has been guaranteed for twelve months while the process of outsourcing the show

caves and caves house occurs.

It will be a requirement that current Trust Staff be employed by the new operator. The new operator will be bound by the Jenolan Plan of Management, which was due for public exhibition on 6th July. Andrew Fletcher, General Manager of the JCRT, and his secretary, Faye Christopher, retire in October and we wish them well. One assumes that once the new commercial operator is in place, the JCRT will be formally wound up.

As a corollary, a Karst Management Unit (long since foreshadowed) under the NSW PWS has now been set up, staffed by former JCRT employees. Its watch will be the environmental management of all karst in New South Wales controlled by the NSW PWS, and we certainly wish them well. Full details of the Karst Management Unit were recently posted on the ACKMA Email List.

Kent Henderson talks to Andy Spate...



Steve Meehan writes: "The formation of a Karst Conservation Unit (KCU) within the NSW Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) will ensure the on-going protection and sustainable management of the State's significant karst estate. In particular, the KCU will be responsible for:

- developing and maintaining a holistic management capability for caves and karst within the DEC and other agencies;
- ensuring the sustainable management and use of karst environments;
- encouraging and fostering research in caves and karst, and matching research outcomes with management practices;
- ensuring a consistent and contemporary approach to cave and karst development and maintenance, and
- the provision of secretariat support to the Karst Management Advisory Committee.

"The KCU will develop policy, management prescriptions and guidelines in relation to its responsibilities, and work closely with DEC operational staff and stakeholder groups.

"Stephen Meehan, who, until recently, filled the position of Senior Environment Manager with the

Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust, will head the KCU. Other staff members include Stephen Reilly, Senior Policy Officer, Nigel Scanlan, Policy Officer and Lisa Behan, Administration Officer. The KCU is based in the Macquarie Area Office of the Parks and Wildlife Division of the DEC.

"Support to the KCU will be provided by the Karst Management Advisory Committee, which is to be comprised of experts from a variety of different areas and disciplines.

"Similar to the role of the KCU, this Committee will have statewide responsibilities, reporting findings and providing advice, to the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council (NSW). Nominations for the Committee are currently being considered."

And to persist with our Jenolan theme – a bit of karst excitement (especially if you are a karst boffin...). ACKMA member Dr. Armstrong Osborne has been in the news of late, with a momentous discovery, reported in a recent paper, viz: R. A. L. OSBORNE, H. ZWINGMANN, R. E. POGSON and D. M. COLCHESTER. Carboniferous clay deposits from Jenolan Caves, New South Wales: implications for timing of speleogenesis and regional geology. *Aust. Journal of Earth Sciences* (2006) 53, (377–405). As a result, this item appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Melbourne Age* on 26th July:

Jenolan Caves the oldest of them all

THE Jenolan Caves in NSW have been named the world's oldest discovered open caves, with new research fixing their age at 340 million years.

Scientists from the CSIRO, Sydney University and the Australian Museum used clay-dating methods to test the limestone caves near the Blue

Mountains, which attract thousands of tourists a year.

Armstrong Osborne, a senior lecturer at Sydney University, said he had long suspected the caves were older than the previous estimate of 90 million to 100 million years.

But the fact they dated back 340 million years still surprised

him. "Even in geological terms, 340 million years is a very long time", he said.

"To put it into context, the Blue Mountains began to form 100 million years ago, dinosaurs became extinct 65 million years ago, and Tasmania was joined to the mainland as recently as 10,000 years ago."

And yet still on Jenolan, Kier Vaughan-Taylor and his team of intrepid cave divers from the Sydney University Speleological Society have recently made significant new discoveries at Jenolan in Barralong Cave, as reported (not necessarily accurately) in the Sydney *Sun-Herald* (25/6/06), below. JCH&PS's Jenny Whitby, who kindly sent me the cutting, commented:

"Unfortunately the map in *Sun Herald* is misleading. The map gives the impression that the new discoveries are heading south into the unknown. That is not the case. The divers were

pushing downstream towards the River Cave (opposite direction) with the aim of producing one continuous river passage dive from Barralong all the way to the Blue Lake. The River Cave to Blue Lake section was completed some years ago.

"However what is shown heading south is more or less correct and was found by SUSS divers in 1988. It's just not the *Captain Cook's Cavern* discovery of a couple of weeks ago. Next dive trip is planned for 2/3 September to continue the *Cook's Cavern* exploration".

New cave may yield secret passage

JENOLAN Caves last week grudgingly yielded up a 350 million-year-old secret when Sydney adventurers discovered a new cave that could be the missing link in a complex underground river system.

A joint team from the Illawarra and Sydney University speleological societies broke through a previously blocked underwater tunnel to emerge into a cave no human had ever seen before. It was the first cave found in the underground network in 42 years.

The first through was diver Michael Collins. "It was awesome to emerge into a space no living being had ever seen before," he said.

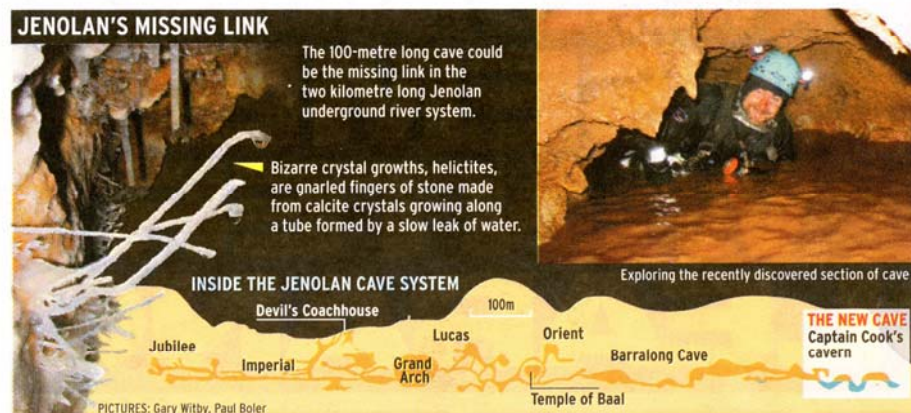
The explorers had pushed further than anyone before along the southern extent of the caves.

They headed downriver from Barralong Cave, diving through sumps - parts of the cave that were underwater.

The team came to a narrow passage that had been blocked by boulders. An earlier team had cleared the rocks but had to stop because the water had turned into a virtual mud custard.

This time the water was clearer and Collins and Jason Cockayne spent two hours underwater trying to probe through the passage.

"It was like being the first man on



the moon - no footprints, no sign of anyone ever being there before," Cockayne said.

As the first man into the cave Collins had the right to name it and decided to call it Captain Cook's Cavern.

The divers risked being buried in sand as they dug shifting sand, mud and boulders to clear a passage wide enough to drag themselves through.

They finally emerged into the cave,

10 metres high and three to four metres wide, which could be up to 100 metres long. Walking along the cave, they hit a rockfall.

"There are a lot of rocks that have fallen from the roof and it is hard going but we think the passage goes on further. We have to go back to try again," Collins said. "It gives such a feeling of pride and achievement to make a breakthrough like this."

Team leader Keir Vaughan-Taylor said it was a major discovery.

"Cavers have been searching for generations trying to find this missing link in the underground river system," he said. "The new cave contains sparkling chocolate-coloured flowstone due to unusual mineralisation."

There are 22 caves in the Jenolan system. The first to be discovered was Lucas Cave in 1860.

Caves have been on television of late... I am sure many Australian members have been watching the wonderful BBC series *Planet Earth*, narrated by Sir David Attenborough (yes, Claire Baker's close and dear friend), running on ABC TV on Sunday nights.

I assume it has been aired in New Zealand. The fourth episode in the series - "Caves" - was aired on Sunday 30th July. On Thursday 17th August, the ABC Science Show, *Catalyst*, featured megafauna fossils found during a Victorian Speleological Association caving trip to the Nullarbor. If you

missed either show - contact me, I can assist if you possess a DVD player...

But, bear in mind that I will be overseas from 1st September until 10th October visiting, amongst much else, the fabulous cenotes of the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico.

There is a fair chance they'll get a mention in the December Journal! Until then, take care! If any member needs to contact me while I am away, my usual email address will find me.