

At Wellington Caves: L to R – Chris George, Kent Henderson and Dr. Mike Augee



A QUICK STOP AT WELLINGTON

– Kent Henderson

Recently, I was in northern New South Wales on business, and on my way home I managed a brief stop at Wellington Caves. I was some years since my last visit. Upon arriving, I met Chris George – now the Caves Manager – whom I hadn't met before, but of whom I'd heard much (positively!), from Andy Spate and others. We had a good chat (as you do).

like many, the caves' management authority, the Wellington Shire Council, is not flush with funds. When this needed upgrade will occur is anybody's guess – certainly it is far from imminent, unfortunately. Chris suggested to me that \$1.2 million was the needed amount – no mean sum – but of course, the project could readily be done in stages as and when funds become available.



Bruce Day at the entrance to Water Cave

For those unaware, Wellington has two show caves – Cathedral Cave and Gaden Coral Cave, plus the wonderful Phosphate Mine. The latter, part old mine and part cave, was put up as a fully lit item a few years back (and wonderfully so). Cathedral, however, is in dire need of upgrading, both in lighting and infrastructure. Things are afoot – Neil Kell has been there to advise on relighting, and plans for revised pathways, etc, are done. However,

Two other projects of considerable note have been happening at Wellington. The first is the Water Cave. This cave, located in the middle of the caravan park next to the show caves precinct, was "re-discovered", and the entrance dug out, back in 1988 by Ernie Holland and Armstrong Osbourne et al, and reported upon in Issue 2 of this Journal.



Stabilization work around the Water Cave doline
A view across the "Field of Fossils", with

Bruce Day at one of the seven "stop sites"



The cave is lengthy and mostly submerged (depending on water table levels), and has a wonderful anticline just within its entrance. As reported in more recent editions of this Journal, the *Friends of Wellington Caves*, staff and innumerable cavers – over many workings bees – have been cleaning out and stabilizing the entrance, with many tonnes of soil and debris being removed.

The plan, when funds become available (sigh...) is to open the entrance as a "self-guided experience", with ramps and steps down its collapsed doline entrance to a platform, and the lighting of the entrance and anticline – with suitable interpretive panelling.

A new fence around the doline is also needed, and one idea is to have a turnstile entrance with a gold coin as admission. I was kindly guided down to the entrance by Wellington senior guide, Bruce Day,

and we discussed options. Bruce intimated that for the fencing and infrastructure, we were looking at about \$40,000. The lighting and signage would add to that. Happily, power is available at the edge of the doline.

My other delight at Wellington was to be taken on a personal tour of the *Field of Fossils* by Dr. Mike Augée. Mike, an ACKMA member, is one of Australia's most noted palaeontologists. He 'retired' to Wellington a few years ago, and resides in a house about a hundred metres from the caves' Visitor Centre – about as close as one can get! Mike has been elected to the Wellington Shire Council and is now Deputy Mayor. Having one of "us" in power is good stuff!

Anyway, just south of the show caves precinct is a wonderful karst hill area of quite gentle elevation, which is packed with surface fossils. The *Friends of Wellington Caves* and staff have built a circuitous pathway across the hill. Seven interpretive points have been positioned, each displaying *in situ* examples of different fossil types. Shortly, numbered signs (1 to 7) will be erected. Mike expects to have the *Field of Fossils* open by Christmas, with visitors supplied with an interpretive brochure. The next stage of the project will be actual interpretive signs at each of the seven stops. Most of the fossils to be indicated are at the stop positions, but a few rock-embedded fossils will be moved from elsewhere on the hill and glued into position (for obvious reasons...). This project is a wonderful addition to Wellington, and has been undertaken at minimal cost – thankfully. Well done Mike, Chris George, Bruce Day and all involved!



Dr. Mike Augée pointing out fossils at a stop site – Wellington "Field of Fossils"