

CONFERENCE COMMENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE. Several attendees at the 17th ACKMA Conference last May have sent me their impressions, which are recorded below.

From **Candace Williams**, of Ngiligi Cave, Western Australia:

'Being a novice ACKMA attendee, I don't really have anything to base the conference on. To me the Conference seemed very well organised and flowed along without any hiccups (that is how I felt from my side of the fence – I'm sure I will feel different in 2009!!). There was not a lot of time between papers, workshops, caving and eating. I think this lack of free time probably proved to be a good thing for me, at least The Buchan Hotel saw a lot less of my money!

I found the papers very interesting, there was such a broad range of topics. I look forward to the CD being issued so I can go back over them all, at my own pace and hopefully take a lot more in. For me personally the conference was a great way of getting to know everyone in the industry. I met more people and made more contacts than I ever expected. It's comforting to know that there is a network of people out there, in the same boat that are always happy to lend a hand or give advice when needed.

I was told ACKMA is like one big family. Now I know for myself, even if it is a slightly odd family at times! (Ahh – She's met a Mexican! – Ed!) Buchan is a beautiful little town and together with Dale and Co, they pulled off a great conference and a great experience. I am grateful I had the opportunity to attend and I look forward to the ACKMA conference in 2009'.

From **Renee Mouritz**, of Ngiligi Cave, Western Australia:

The come-down post conference ... Candace and I whiled away our many hours at the Melbourne airport seeking out ACKMA delegate lookalikes in the crowds. Maybe a few too many late nights coupled with a long day of travelling didn't help our hysterical nature! You were all there in some form or another! Since returning to Western Australia I have had many flashbacks of past conversations that, in all the chaos that is an ACKMA conference, I never had time to process. Now all the very useful information is coming flooding back to me!

Today I returned to my real job of being a cave guide at Ngiligi Cave, or should I now say 'Cave Host'. My first tour was a little daunting after all it was my first in a month (pre-conference I was on holidays in North Queensland, maybe a more appropriate title would be Study Tour after all I did visit Chillagoe!). What was my theme going to be, my take home message? Was I going to interact with each and every person?

'On entering the cave for the first time I was struck by its beauty and all that space ... and the very small amount of visitors (I left mid-Easter craziness

and have returned to full winter quiet). This made being enthusiastic and interesting all the more easy, the small group size enabled me to be a lot more personal and I must say the visitors responded well!

'As for the conference ... I had a great time, it totally exceeded my expectations! I met so many wonderful people and must say I came away feeling a little empty knowing that it will be another two whole years until I see most of you again.

It was great to be around so many like minded people, to share in everyone's achievements, to absorb all the knowledge and to be able to go away with a feeling of belonging, knowing that there is an incredible support network out there should one need it! I look forward to future correspondence and all the challenges that will come with helping to organise the 2009 conference. See you all then if not before!



Candace Williams (left) and Renee Mouritz
– ACKMA Conference 2007

From **Travis Cross**, of New Zealand:

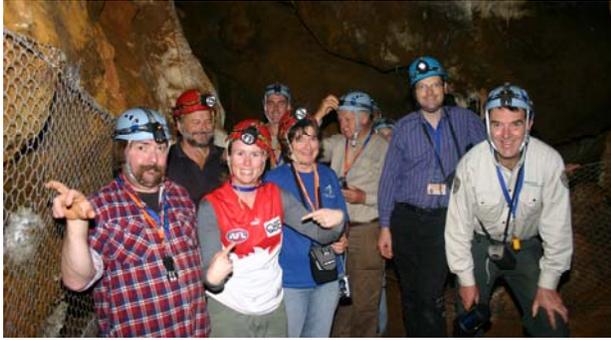
'With Buchan to be my second ACKMA conference I was really excited about catching up with the ACKMA-ites I'd met previously at Westport, meeting new cave men and woman, and the prospect of visiting some Aussi caves and karst areas.

'My trip began with catching up with some of the Kiwi contingent in Melbourne to check out the sites, nightlife, and on the following day, to embark on the traditional 'Pete Diamond Memorial Road Trip'.

This included visiting Wilson's Promontory on two successive days and spending the night in Foster where I got to sample kangaroo, a local delicacy. Being my first trip to Aussi I had a bit of the wide-eyed Kiwi syndrome that continued throughout my visit with all manner of interesting new things to see. Arriving at Buchan was as expected, with everyone extremely friendly and welcoming. People's

common interest and love of caves and karst creates a feeling of coming home to an extended family gathering.

The conference proper was very interesting. Papers were diverse and I certainly learnt a lot including many topics outside my interest areas, which is always good to broaden ones knowledge. If I had to choose I would have to say I most enjoyed the papers given by the international delegates.



A bevy of delegates in Murrindal Cave
- ACKMA Conference 2007

I especially enjoy hearing, and learning about caves and karst in other parts of the world. And it can't be easy standing up and talking to a group in a second language. But of course, all of the papers were really interesting especially when one is harbouring a cave obsession like myself.

'Afternoon fieldtrips were wonderful and again I learnt heaps. Caves in the Buchan area are stunning and most are quite different to those I've seen in New Zealand. They are certainly very well decorated and the pronounced bedding in the area was something I hadn't really seen before. Seeing the paleokarst and learning about the inverse landscape were also highlights.

'Of course, one cannot fail to mention the fun and merriment of the evenings. Traditionally, we are always extremely well fed at ACKMA conferences (not just in the evenings) and this time was no exception.



I heard people mention going on diets when they returned home on more than one occasion. And as usual, liquid refreshments were abundant and I'd have to admit to having a sore head during at least one morning session. The evening entertainment was also great fun and I'm sure there are many incrimination photos floating about. There seem to be photos of Geoff Deer's tongue on my camera that I don't remember taking??

'All and all I had a fantastic time and I'm sure everyone else did too. I think the most valuable thing about these conferences is the people we meet and the sharing of knowledge and expertise. Many thanks must go to Dale Calnin and his crew, the Buchan Parks staff, Uncle Albert and his mob, the Buchan community, and all of the other organisers and helpers. It was a truly memorable conference.

'The Spate mega-road trip' occurred immediately after the Conference. This trip is best summed up by using Kim Ryeon's most frequent comment throughout the trip 'Wow.....Wow!' and by the fact that if he took less than 1000 photos a day he was having an off day.

The mega road trip was a post-conference trip hosted by Andy Spate for international delegates including people from South Korea, China, Mulu, Slovenia, USA, and New Zealand. For the part I attended, we visited caves and karst sites in three states over ten days. Some of which included the Port Campbell/Twelve Apostles area; Mt Eccles lava caves; a few days in Naracoorte where we received the royal treatment from President Bourne; Mt Gambier where we visited some of the cenotes that we heard about during the conference; Tantanoola; the Snowy Mountains and a few days in Yarrangobilly where we were joined by a group of Canberra cavers.

'We did far too many things to mention in this short note but suffice to say that many great sites were seen, fine wines sampled and people met. Many thanks to Andy Spate and co-leader Brett Farquharson for the fantastic time.'



Images from Elery Hamilton-Smith's Historical Display at Buchan during the 2007 ACKMA Conference.
Photos: Rauleigh Webb