



SHEDDING LIGHT: Checking out the lighting situation in the Gunns Plains Cave are (from left) cave tour operator Geoff Deer, cave lighting designer Neil Kell, of Tumut, NSW, and Devonport electrical contractor Shane Hill. Picture: Tony Cross.

Gunns Plains Cave safety in spotlight

By NIGEL TAPP

THE GUNNS Plains Cave, near Ulverstone, will become safer and its treasures will be better displayed and protected with the installation of a new electrical system designed by internationally recognised cave lighting expert Neil Kell.

The \$220,000 project, funded by the State Government, will involve a simplified configuration of lighting circuits with most of the cabling 24 volt instead of the existing 240-volt system.

It means that in the future the cave will not have to be closed during times of flooding because of the risk of electrocution caused by the 240-volt system.

The new lighting will also ensure people can move safely inside the cave during normal tour operations and in the case of an emergency.

A battery-powered, two-hour uninterrupted power supply will support the lighting, meaning in an emergency people will be able to safely return to the surface along a lighted walkway.

The atmosphere lighting system is designed to highlight the features of the cave and assist in the protection of the cave's resources by providing a visual attraction for areas considered at risk of handling.

The new work will also have a positive impact on the energy efficiency of the cave reducing its power output from a maximum of 15kW to 800W.

Mr Kell said the aim of the work was not to seek to replicate the environment of the state's other two tourist

caves, Mole Creek and Hastings, in the South, but to maintain the existing differences.

"Gunns Plains is a little bit more adventurous so we want to keep the feeling more mysterious," he said.

Devonport firm Shane Hill Electrical is undertaking the work, which is expected to be completed by the end of next month.

The cave was first discovered by Bill Woodhouse in the 1890s and opened to tourists in 1909. Since then 236m of walkway has been provided.