



AN OVERVIEW OF THE MT ETNA CAMPAIGN

– Peter Berrill and Dianne Vavrym

A large portion of the cavernous area of Limestone Ridge and all the cavernous area of Mount Etna would have been destroyed if it weren't for the efforts of the many people and organizations who contributed to the campaign and those who refused to give up even when the odds seemed stacked against them.

The campaign had 4 main, roughly chronological phases.

1960s: University of Queensland Speleological Society (UQSS) and ASF provide first publicity. UQSS explore and document caves and karst and begin scientific work, continuing until the early '80s. Bat Cleft recognized as a maternity cave for bet-winged bats. CQSS is formed at the instigation of local cavers and a public meeting. General community awareness is otherwise nascent.

1970s: CQSS join with UQSS in the exploration and documenting of caves and karst and scientific work, the lobbying of politicians and bureaucrats, & UQSS publishes two books on Mt Etna.

1980s: CQSS takes up the challenge again, with increasing vigour and determination as the company's activities expand. Bureaucrats and politicians visit Bat Cleft, including Queensland Premier who announces the mountain is 'saved for all time'. Bat Cleft and several other caves protected after the company surrenders part of a lease. Direct Action activities are commenced involving many organizations and hundreds of individuals to save caves important to the Ghost Bat *Macroderma gigas* not included in the protected area. Bob Brown and Dick Smith visit.

Some arrested and charged with trespass. CQSS pursues legal action as far as the High Court of Australia.

1990s to present: for years, mining continues and a costs order restrains conservationists. In 1998 under new management CQC commits itself to righting some of the wrongs of the past by rehabilitating the quarries, and entering a dialogue with the many stakeholders that still continues

Hundreds of people and many organizations can look back and say the battle was well worth the enormous physical, financial and emotional commitment involved. In particular those who knew the caves intimately - CQSS members and others - and witnessed their destruction and later being able to move toward a full reconciliation between the company and all those opposed to the mining is indeed a remarkable feat.

From when the first leases were granted between 1962 and 1965 there had been media campaigns, lobbying and meetings with politicians, ministers and mining company managers and directors. Even a legal challenge made by UQSS on the legality of leases was prevented from going to court. CQC's actual mining plan wasn't known but it became obvious their intentions were to mine the western cavernous face.

Plans for direct action non-violent activities began in 1987 with the filling in of drill holes to get media attention. In 1988 after the protection of Bat Cleft plans were made for a full blockade involving CQSS and many other organizations to save Ghost Bat habitat.

L to R. Don Henry WPS, Molley Olsen WWF, Dr Bob Brown WS and Dianne Vavryn CQSS at the entrance of Bat Cleft viewing an unforgettable wildlife spectacle. Photo: J. Vavryn (1988).



The conservation movement was on a 'high' at the time from successes on the Franklin River. Bob Brown (later Senator) warned us of the treatment dished out to blockaders on the Franklin – all quite frightening to a group of conservative cave conservationists, particularly for those living near mine employees, but we were determined. The blockade galvanized conservationists and others around the country.

CQSS reached the High Court of Australia. It's an expensive place to litigate, and eventually we were forced to abandon legal action at immense cost. The bill of legal costs for CQC alone exceeded \$213,000, the real cost over a million. Members of CQSS knew that if they stayed to the end, then in today's changing environmental world, some good must come. For them the end came when the statute of limitations took effect in relation to the monies held in security as a result of the legal action. But another nine years passed before the world changed.

Reconciliation

In March 1998 CQC's solicitors wrote saying that CQC was willing to consider consenting to an Order that the money paid into the Court with interest be paid out of Court to CQSS in order to dedicate the moneys towards an environmental research project. On 22/9/1999 the parties entered into a Settlement Deed, and among other provisions, CQC and CQSS applied funds to the purchase of land to extend the national park over Cammoo Cave and part of Limestone Ridge.

Peter Berrill, CQSS President, wrote:

'When we were first approached about reconciliation we were very suspicious but we had an obligation to listen. After 37 years of destroying caves, they say that they have had a change of attitude and now want to make up for the past.'

In 1998 the company changed its management, its name, its corporate ethos and ethic, rewarding consultation and committing to environmental protection. It has since sponsored a Bat Conference, reconciled differences with cavers and conservationists, donated towards purchase of Cammoo Caves for inclusion in the National

Park, undertaken rehabilitation of the mine site, supported palaeontological work by Queensland Museum, and consulted closely with CQSS and ASF. As Dianne Vavryn wrote in 1998 and quoted in company publications:

'The peace makers of this world will help to heal the wounds, soften the scars, and help to make this a better world to live in.'

Angel or Ogre? – Kerry Hamilton (at the Reconciliation) on the personal cost

The Central Queensland Speleological Society has had something less than an angelic public image these past thirty years. That isn't to say that we didn't have our support base – obviously we did or this wonderful turn of events we celebrate today would not have occurred and the Mt Etna National Park would be a hole in the ground.

But this delightful outcome, this refreshing turnaround, was not brought about by some Dick Smithian magnanimous gesture or by a sweeping move by a people's government anxious to score a few votes. No, this was done by you and me. Yes, the 'little people' that we hear less and less of in these days of big and bigger government.

Can you imagine how it felt to be able to visualise today's occasion thirty-two years ago and needing to stand patiently by, watching priceless natural assets squandered while we waited for public opinion to change, as we knew it would? It had been changing rapidly all around the world, people were realising that the 'dig it up – chop it down' mentality was a short-sighted approach with dire consequences for their children.

And so we waited, and waited some more. And while all this waiting was going on we pulled out our hair, we squabbled among ourselves, we fought vicious battles in 'Letters to Editors' around the country, we hauled various 'issues' before the courts, even to the Holiest of Holies we went, the High Court of Australia. And it hurt, a lot. But what hurt most of all was the alienation, the being set apart from friends, from employers, from promotion and from family in many cases.

Being cursed with foresight had costs that our merry band of young bucks (and fawns) could not foresee. Yes, we had sage old elders too and it seems, in hindsight, that they were well aware of what those costs might be, but simply knew there were no free lunches. For their patience with us, and advice to us, we are forever grateful.

Speaking of such things, let's go right back now, to a time when rank commercialism was under control, a time when folk gave more than lip service to their beliefs, to when the Olsen family were proudly showing off their caves to townspeople, who'd travel by buggy the bumpy two hours from Rockhampton.

Yes, it seems that in the 1800s there was a greater appreciation of the wonders of nature. Else, why would our great grandparents have sought the highest protection then available to place Mt Etna and its caves under the Recreation Reserve that secured the mountain until the granting of leases to mine in 1962?

'There is a tide in the affairs of men' seems to have been a truth evident even in Shakespeare's time, now we too have seen a most providential turning to the point where we see the two protagonists in the 'Mt Etna issue' coming together in a spirit of reconciliation and understanding.

No society remains static in its perceptions; we all come to see that some of our treasured beliefs don't stand up to continued scrutiny. We have, in

this hand-over today, proof that slow social change, though painful in the getting, is inevitable and unstoppable. Truth has won the day and healed the soul.

(**CQC** – Central Queensland Cement PL (later Pacific Lime, then Cement Australia (CA)), **ASF** – Australian Speleological Federation **CQSS** – Central Queensland Speleological Society, **UQSS** – University of Queensland Speleological Society)

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CHRONOLOGY OF THE MOUNT ETNA STORY

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1880s	John Olsen finds Olsens (Capricorn) Caves, tours begin of this & Johannsens Cave
1920s	Mt Etna & Limestone Ridge declared Recreation Reserves, Theodore Olsen appointed caretaker of Johannsens Cave
1928?	Forster family begins guano mining from their caves on Limestone Ridge, a short-lived operation
1940s	Capt. Sam Carey (later Professor of Geology, University of Tasmania) uses caves as training for possible guerrilla activity
1959-65	Hartley Investments PL changes name to Central Queensland Cement PL, secures 6 leases on Mt Etna / Limestone Ridge
1962	UQSS discovers the large bent-winged bat colony in Bat Cleft
1962-65	CQC secures 6 leases on Mt Etna and Limestone Ridge
1966	Mining begins on eastern face of Mt Etna. Conservationists begin protests about bat site. Cammoo Cave opens
1967	UQSS visits and is 'dismayed to find the majestic cone of Mt Etna irreversibly scarred by the new quarry'. Blasting destroys a cave wall & opens Resurrection Cave. Assistance is sought from Australian Conservation Foundation and others. Rockhampton Mayor calls a public meeting, resulting in formation of Central Queensland Speleological Society (CQSS). First paper (by Robert K Headland) on Mt Etna conservation is published by UQSS
1968	First paper on Mt Etna in ASF Conference Proceedings followed by 4 more in 1970, 1972, 1974, 1976 & 1986. An interdepartmental inquiry including representatives from Mines Dep't

	recommends 31 acre lease on cavernous face of Mt Etna be surrendered & gazetted as a scenic reserve. Action is delayed for many years and when taken is inadequate.
1970	UQSS publishes its 116-page book <i>'Mount Etna Caves'</i> to raise public awareness of the significance of the site.
1973	Mining begins on western face of Mt Etna, lasting until 2004. CQC relinquishes part of lease to enable Fitzroy Caves National Park to be gazetted, & protection of Ghost Bat breeding site on Limestone Ridge, but not all cavernous area
1974	CQC moves operations to western side of Mt Etna. Conservationists express concern but is relatively low-key until CQC reveals plans to mine through an area containing two significant caves, Speaking Tube & Elephant Hole
1975	Mt Etna Committee formed, eventually leading to challenge of legitimacy of mining on Mt Etna on the basis that the 1934 gazettal referred to the Recreation Reserves as being <i>'permanently reserved and set aside for recreational purposes'</i> , so that granting of mining leases is illegal. But the law at the time required a person or organisation with legal standing to bring the case to court, and after 2 years of dithering the Attorney General refuses to grant a fiat enabling action to proceed. CQSS initiates public tours to Bat Cleft to heighten community awareness of the importance of the site, publicising and leading trips on a voluntary basis for 15 years.
1976	UQSS publishes <i>'Mount Etna and the caves: a plan for action'</i>
1977	6 days after the Attorney-General's fiat is refused, the Qld Government revokes the Recreation Reserves, neutering conservationist challenges without a court being able to decide whether the original leases were lawful or not
1979	UQSS prints a new <i>'Save Mt Etna Caves'</i> brochure to reinvigorate the campaign
1986	Fossil bone material removed from Elephant Hole to save it from destruction. Studied many years later.
1987	After years without success elsewhere, CQSS plan a campaign of Direct Action on the mining lease itself, with support from Bob (later Senator) Brown, then Director of Tasmanian Wilderness Society, and others. The first public protest occurs on 3/10/87 as 3 CQSS members hold placards in a Rockhampton street. On 12/12/87 protesters take action, inviting the media to witness them plugging drill-holes to prevent blasting. CQC takes legal action for trespass..
1988	Campaign reaches a peak, politicians & bureaucrats visit, & media coverage heightens. Qld Premier visits, announces Mt Etna 'saved' (but it isn't!). 42-day blockade begins to save Ghost Bat habitat not included in protected area. Bob Brown, Dick Smith & numerous conservationists visit. IUCN General Assembly votes for protection of Mt Etna, its caves and wildlife - of the 1,100 delegates, only the Queensland Government opposes resolution. A 'moratorium' begins between protesters & CQC. CQC recommences mining after blockade, which is reimposed. On 2/11/88 CQC lowers high-pitched sirens into Speaking Tube to force protesters out, one arrested. The cave is blasted, & on 4/11/88, so is Elephant Hole.
1989	CQSS commences legal action against CQC in Qld Supreme Court citing breaches of Fauna Conservation Act (destruction of protected species). Application refused with costs on grounds of lack of standing. CQSS appeals to Full Court of Supreme Court of Queensland, obtains injunction preventing CQC from mining on cavernous face of Mt Etna. Interlocutory injunction later extended after \$30,000 is raised by CQSS as costs security. CQSS obtains special leave to appeal to High Court of Australia. Leave granted subject to imposition of a further costs security of \$45,000. CQSS is unable to comply so legal action lapses but security costs are retained in the Supreme Court for many years. On 4/4/89 CQC commences legal action against some people involved in the blockade, alleging economic damage to the company's operations, and using provisions of the law designed to stop unions taking strike action in essential services.
1990	Queensland NPWS takes over Bat Cleft tours, led by Dianne Vavryn. Renamed Mt Etna Caves National Park gazetted.
1997	Following a change in management, CQC approaches the main protagonists to join a partnership of government, industry and community interests. In the light of the company's history, some conservationists are initially suspicious, especially as the costs order is still in place. The company helps sponsor a Conference of the Australian Bat Society
1998	CQC reconciles its differences with CQSS and other environmentalists and the costs order against conservationists is removed. CQC calls in specialists from Queensland Museum to recover and study fossils located in caves.
1999	In a unique partnership between CQC (now Pacific Lime), & the Queensland & Commonwealth Governments, Cammoo Caves and part of Limestone Ridge is purchased and added to the National Park. On 17/11/99 a celebratory Reconciliation Ceremony is held at Cammoo Cave. (see numerous articles in Australian Caver No. 151 and ACXKJMA Journal No. 37).
2004	The last limestone is taken from the Mt Etna site after almost 40 years. A land restoration program is commenced by the Company. Consultations, site visits and discussions continue with traditional owners, the Darumbal people.
2005	The last equipment & infrastructure is removed from the sites. ASF begins discussions with renamed Cement Australia on future of the eastern and western quarry sites.
2006	CA, ASF & CQSS continue discussions about the future management of the eastern quarry site, and a draft Memorandum of Understanding is drawn up. CA & QM host a Fossil Discovery day for general public
2007	CA becomes part of the multinational conglomerate CEMEX
2008	Mining lease close to surrender as rehabilitation of site nears an end, as does the whole Mt Etna saga.

