

INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF SPELEOLOGY 2009

– Moira Lipyeat*



At New Year 2009, I was visiting Les Wright who had ably edited my book 'Delving Deeper' with me. He suggested that I should consider going to USA for the International Congress of Speleology. He had downloaded all of the information for me and felt that I would enjoy it so much. He added that I should also attend the ACKMA conference in Western Australia. His third 'resolution' for me was a trip through Xanadu with him for my Big '0' birthday which was eminent. What a year!

The trip to Western Australia was fantastic and I loved our two hour trip through Xanadu – lots of photos and memories back to my last trip, before surgery. The trip to Texas seemed a different matter but the more I probed and learnt, the more it seemed possible and an opportunity not to be missed. By the end of January 2009 I was booked, pre-paid and eagerly awaiting July 16th.

The Union Internationale de Speleologie (UIS) was founded in 1965 in order to promote and advance the exploration and scientific study of caves. UIS fosters the exchange of information on caves and karst between its members, whatever their motivation for descending into caves or visiting karst landscapes. UIS encompasses the entire spectrum of exploration science and tourism to ensure conservation and protection. It engages the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the World Commission for Protected Areas(WCPA) and the International Show Caves Association (ISCA). There are over sixty member countries.

If requested, UIS supports member countries to protect their caves and karst with applications to UNESCO for World Heritage Listing. A number of caves and limestone areas worldwide are listed. A congress is held every four years in a different

country. A few NEW ZEALAND cavers have attended previous congresses at Stuttgart, Barcelona, Switzerland, Brasilla and Athens. Professor Paul Williams, from the University of Auckland, has been our delegate since 1965. At present he is one of eight adjunct secretaries. Other officers include President Andy Eavis (Great Britain), Julia James (Australia) and Syung Sik Woo (Rep of Korea) who have caved in NEW ZEALAND. The next congress in 2013 will be held in Eastern Europe in the Czech Republic.

After a long flight with a few stopovers, I arrived at San Antonio's attractive airport, a few days early, to visit friends there. Texas cavers were meeting every plane to offer support and friendship. This was an example of the dedication of the 200+ volunteers over the next week. Under the Congress Chairman Dr George Vini they were a great team. As planned, I met up at 1.20pm July 16th at a UIS kiosk at the airport. Shuttle buses loaded with International cavers were provided with volunteer drivers – ours was from Mexico. We were made to feel very welcome.

Kerrville was an hours drive northeast. It was an attractive city with about 20,000 population set in rolling hill country on the Edwards Plateau. This karst area is situated on an aquifer, which is the largest in the USA. It supplies water to about 2,000,000 including San Antonio city. Quarries and limestone road cuts were evident everywhere.



Moira putting recent NZ cave discoveries on the world scene.

Schreiner University was a most appropriate site for the 1,500 plus attendees from over 50 countries. I was a student in residence – twin room (huge) with an en suite and walk in wardrobe each. My room mate Barbara am Ende was stimulating company. She had dived The Huautla Cave, Mexico System (1475ft), with Bill Stone in 1994. She gave me a copy of their book 'Beyond the Deep' and I couldn't put it down! Temperatures were around 100°F each day with odd thunder storms and all buildings and

transport were air conditioned. Definitely a change from a cold Christchurch winter. An attractive swimming pool was appreciated – Club Med?!

At registration we were greeted (again) and loaded up with a complimentary satchel full of giveaways, information, a new book (400+ pages) on USA caves, program information and the three volumes (12kg) of proceedings from 500 papers to be presented. I was transported by golf cart to Speleobooks to deliver Delving Deeper books to Emily Davis who had ordered them. (She said they sold quickly). It was good to see Emily and Mike Warner who I had met at ACKMA in Australia recently.

There was no way that I could attend everything that I wanted to go to; just not enough hours in each day. I could list events I missed, e.g. many papers such as S.A.R., Paleontology, Mineralogy, The IUS Auction, Open Microphone, Terminal Syphons, musical events, swimming in Guadalupe River Hot Tubs, Speleo Photographic and Art Salons held at Kerville Cultural Centre, Ann Bosted's 3-D films as well as many exploration talks.

I would have also enjoyed exploring the large scale maps of Mammoth (600km) and Lechuguilla (now over 200km) which were laid out on the gym floor. However, I still managed a very full schedule. As I said, the temperature was hot, the pace was hot also. My room mate said my schedule exhausted her. I did attend and enjoy so many fantastic events. I'll record most to make you envious!



Dr. Caroline Boyd, an archaeologist who conducted a tour of rock art.

SUNDAY

Opening event, Nachos & free local beer. Meeting old and many a new friend. I met up with Paul Williams during this function.

MONDAY

9.00am Bexar Cavers were running a trip to Robber Barron; a wild cave, and had invited me. We headed back to San Antonio and the cave was under a supermarket! San Antonio, like Perth, is built on limestone. To come out and enjoy free samples at a supermarket was a first for me. The cave (like Xanadu) was mainly a horizontal maze.

In early 2009, NE states of the US were hit by a mystery disease in bats called White Nose Syndrome. Many bats died, so to prevent further spread of disease a rigid decontamination procedure was enforced. Some local caves were closed for visits.

6.00pm

That evening, preceded by wine, a premiere of the film 'Texas Caver' was presented in the large university theatre. To fit many of the 1,500 present, most venues had to be huge. Texas cavers also launched an excellent book to mark their 50 years.

8.00pm The Howdy Party followed and was some party! Like all of the functions it was organised with meticulous precision. We had a Texan BBQ, steaks, chicken, beans etc. and more free local beer and better still ice cream tubs. The party was held in a large pavilion at Schneider Campus.

9.00pm Cowboys arrived to give horse riding, lasso, and horsewhip displays – indoors. This was followed by dancing and moon hopping to celebrate the first moon walk exactly 40 years prior.

TUESDAY

In the morning Lois Manno from the neighbouring room, an artist and author, invited me to join the Speleo Art Group. I've always enjoyed amateur photography, but had not considered art.

I found a day in the beautiful 'Cave With No Name' (¾ hr SE) a most inspiring experience. Some artists produced interesting art and demonstrated the line between abstract and real was a fine one. We arrived back at 5.40pm.

6.00pm I was then onto a bus, as I was booked for 'Caverns of Sonora' that evening (1½ hrs SW). What a privilege to visit two of the most beautiful caves ever seen in one day. Sonora was packed with crystals and every imaginable speleothem, some formed by sulphuric acid speleogenesis as found in Lechuguilla.

That evening concluded with another huge Texas meal at the cave. I saw my best electric storm that night. We were very late home, and I found a note on my door regarding the following day's trip.

WEDNESDAY

The day was devoted to all off campus activities. I had pre-booked for the Seminole Canyon Rock Art trip. The trip was now leaving at 5am. After hot coffee and tacos served on the bus, we travelled for about three hours. I was surprised when we were stopped at a border station – Mexico/USA. An official was not impressed with the New Zealand woman without her passport (..who takes a passport on a cave trip!). However, after many embarrassing moments he spotted my Superannuation Gold Card.

Thinking I must be some important diplomat, he apologised and let me continue. The limestone

canyon, visitor centre and Rock Art were all outstanding. Archaeologist Dr Caroline Boyd guided us. Afterwards a picnic was served beside Rio Grande. A great day – but late again.

THURSDAY

At last I attended some papers including one by Ross Anderson (WA) on syngenetic karst. I visited conservation and environmental displays and sat in at a Vertical Workshop. A caver older than Derek was competing! I kept meeting interesting and friendly cavers. So many commented that life had never been the same after their first cave visit. I could relate to that.

I met Michel Siffre (France), who in 1955 spent six months studying time patterns research in a cave. I found Paulo Forti (Italy) a very jovial personality. He was co-author of the excellent book *Cave Minerals of the World*. Peter and Ann Bosted (US), photo artists, remembered their great time with CCG; the well attended 3-D show and breakfast with members the next day.

Brett and Nancy Aulenbach called me over for a picnic lunch with their six year old daughter. Many will remember Nancy who, with Hazel Barton (also present) were cavers in the film 'Amazing Caves'. Brett, her husband, had just won a survey contest. Four bookshops were a great drawcard and acted as a hub for cavers to meet. I was given a number of books by authors -- all captivating reading.

5.00pm I was back on a bus headed north this time to James River Cave to witness 4 million bats make their nightly exit. I'd never witnessed anything like it. I saw a gypsum mine on the way. It was typical karst country and the side road to the cave had flooded. We hitched the last distance in a truck going by. Life had it's adventures. Late home again.



Dr. Paul Williams with Miora Lipyeat at the IUS Congress.

FRIDAY

I was booked from 9am - 4pm for a course on Speleology for Cavers. We were given a folio of notes and about 30 of us listened to all aspects of cave science. That evening, after another swim, a bus took us 30 minutes to a ranch where 1500 of us

enjoyed the NSS Banquet. Good food, speeches, awards and plenty of free local wine. (That's the third cave conference I've been to with vineyards close by!). I met Jansen Grady there, an ex ASG member who is now working in Alaska with his wife. His was the third pin on New Zealand on the world map back at Admin. This congress was combined with NSS (Natural Speleology Society of USA).

SATURDAY

Tom Summers, (not to be confused with David Summers (Bermuda), President of ISCA), the owner of 'Cave Without a Name', had offered to take me to Natural Bridge Cave and also show me some Texas countryside. The small towns had many historical limestone buildings.

The Natural Bridge Cavern was amazing. Only found in 1970, and I had met its discoverer. Many archaeological digs have found 5000 old fossils and artifacts. The 2½ mile trail passed so many huge stalagmites.

We returned in time for me to meet Nancy Weaver, volunteer from a local cave group. She had offered to drive me to Kerrville (4km) and show me more lovely buildings along Guadeloupe River. We attended a lovely church service – beautiful music, very Mexican. Nancy was on crutches from a caving injury. I was rather unsteady when we arrived back out in the country for the UIS Banquet. They had a table reserved for handicapped persons. We were amused, but grateful. The food was even more delicious and we got great service at our table.

SUNDAY

In the morning was Hot News in Exploration. Some months earlier I had stuck my neck out and offered to present a paper to put New Zealand caves on the world scene. Al Wood (CCG) had prepared a slideshow of Beautiful Bulmer and Lindsay Main, Alice Shanks and Joe Arts (all CGG) had filled me in on some facts. I titled it 'Still Delving Deeper'.

I must admit it was a bit scary knowing that my audience would be very knowledgeable, but I think it was all well received. The chairman for this program was no other than the intrepid Bill Stone. He proved very helpful. I watched the next Hot News on exploring a Mexican cave – exciting, but I had to rush off, finish packing and be ferried to Admin for more farewells and depart via the shuttle to Antonio Airport.

I spent the next week in Colorado but that is another story. I went up to over 12,000 ft (Mt Cook height) twice. Once in the train, and once by car; a contrast to my adventures below ground in Texas. I felt it an honour to be a New Zealander there; I enjoyed every minute.

* This article was first published in 'Tomo Times' No. 179 – October 2009 (The newsletter of the NZ Speleological Society).