



# Editorial Ramblings

So! Mulu is upon us!! It is only about six weeks until our 2009 Annual General Meeting event. Brian Clark tells me there will be about 110 people thereat (with the odd local, like himself, thrown in). An amazing response – and more than a few new ACKMA members have ‘popped up out the porridge’ too. Needless to say there will be a word or two about the event in the next (June) Journal. You will notice a ‘few words from Brian Clark’ herein, plus various photos as a bit of a primer, as well...

I was talking to Dale Calnin at Buchan recently, where things continue to buzz. The December-January 2010 Holiday Season visitation was on a par with the previous year, despite much hot weather (traditionally, Buchan visitation thrives in cooler summer weather when tourists look for other activities when they can't sit on the Lakes Entrance beach...).

All the old 32v lighting is now out of Royal Cave, and it is now totally LED lit. Fairy Cave is almost ditto, with just a few small areas of old light fittings to come out. There is still a bit of tweeking to do in both caves, of course, but that's happening.

There is a whisper of new office infrastructure at Buchan – hopefully the funding will emerge and Dale et al will get out their current ‘portables’. Buchan has a new (extra) ranger, in the person of Ros Brown – who had the temerity to turn up pregnant with twins, Dale tells me! Clearly, her initial tenure, at least, will not be lengthy...!

*Parks Victoria* has, recently, given permission to selected caving groups to undertake serious exploration through excavation (with many conditions) at the Potholes Reserve, north of Buchan. This has also included cave diving, and I am advised a number of significant discoveries have already been made.

The big upcoming event at Buchan this year will be the Centenary Celebrations for the Royal Cave, which falls on 8 November (more details in due course). Conveniently this date falls in what will be a State Government election campaign – which will hopefully focus many political minds on Buchan...

Finally, like many others, Dale (with his family in tow) is going to Mulu. He was put up for the *Parks Victoria Overseas Study Award* – and won! – thus he is being totally funded. How convenient! Levity aside, well done Dale – much merited!

ACKMA Fellow Neil Kell was back in South Korea in January to finalise the last stage of installing LED lighting in Gossi Cave in Yeongwol District.

Hopefully, we will be favoured by a few words from Neil in a future Journal edition.

Speaking of overseas ‘junkets’, Andy Spate has very recently returned from a visit to Cango Caves in South Africa, at the behest of our good friend Hien Gerstner, to do some guide training. Again, hopefully, we will be favoured by his impressions of Cango in the next Journal. Of course, ACKMA will be at Cango in May 2012 for our AGM.

By the way, Andy has recently moved to Exmouth in Western Australia – obviously attracted by the delights of the Cape Range Karst, amongst other things. His new contacts details are listed in the ACKMA Officer Bearer's section of this Journal. In order to relocate his ‘stuff’, Andy drove from Canberra to Western Australia in early February, and en route stopped at Naracoorte (as you would). A mini ACKMA gathering resulted, as attested by the following image, courtesy of Catherine Sellars.



At dinner in Naracoorte. – L to R: Hans Loder, Andy Spate, Kirsty Dixon, Deb Carden, Terry Reardon, Cath Sellars and Steve Bourne.

As will be recalled, ACKMA visited the fabulous Fire Clay Caverns in Mount Morgan in association with the May 2008 ACKMA Annual General Meeting Weekend at Capricorn Caves in Central Queensland. Of course, the feature of the Fire Clay Caverns is its stunning fossilized dinosaur footprints on the ceiling. I am advised that a grant of \$50,000 has been received to further expand the infrastructure, but on what it will be spent remains unclear. What is needed is the opening of the small high(er) chamber towards the rear of the caverns, which will allow visitors a much closer view of the footprints than is currently the case, together with appropriate lighting. I suspect \$50,000 will not that far, but we'll see...

I am delighted to announce that ACKMA has now cross-affiliated with the Association of British and Irish Show Caves (ABIS). The Committees of both organisations are delighted with this result, and we look forward to a long and happy relationship.

The Australian Government's TQUAL Grants (formerly known as the Australian Tourism Development Program) were announced on 15 December. The Government doled out over \$8 million for various projects across Australia. Two are of particular interest to us. Jenolan got

\$100,000 towards the redesign and redevelopment of the southern show caves, viz:

*A comprehensive redevelopment will be undertaken of all major aspects of in-cave infrastructure, particularly the lighting systems within the River Cave at the Jenolan Caves in the Blue Mountains. The redevelopment will comply with best practice standards, encompassing visitor safety, aesthetic sensitivities and environmental conservation. TQUAL Grants funding will contribute towards the installation of the new lighting systems.*

Secondly, Capricorn Caves also got \$100,000 for a Geo Centre that will provide facilities for tour guide training, the introduction of a specialised geo tour at Capricorn Caves and for its school education program, viz:

*This project will see the construction of a GeoPark precinct at the Capricorn Caves, 25 kms north of Rockhampton. The new precinct will incorporate an innovative cave experience, a training facility and visitor services. A geotourism themed tour will add a new dimension to the visitor experiences at Capricorn Caves and complement international marketing projects. TQUAL Grants funding will contribute to construction costs.*

Indeed, the TQUAL grants could be a useful source of capital funds for other cave locations. Check out the criteria, etc. at:

<<http://www.ausindustry.gov.au/Tourism/TQUALGrants/Pages/TQUALGrants.aspx>>

The full details of the 13th Cave Guides Gathering at Wellington Caves in July is in an insert herewith. This will be a great professional development (not to mention networking and social) event for guides, and all managers are strongly encouraged to send as many of their staff along as they can spare – which should be most; Australia caves are not usually frantically busy in mid winter!

## INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON VULCANOSPELEOLOGY

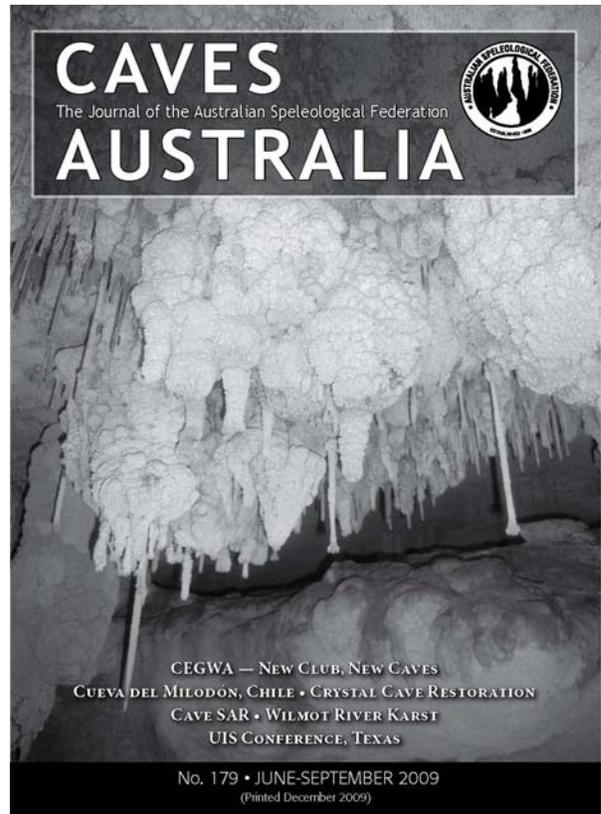
UNDARA AUSTRALIA • AUGUST 2010



The other big event in Australia this year is the 14th International Vulcanospeleology Symposium, at Undara Lava Tubes, Queensland – from 12 to 17 August. It should be marvelous! ACKMA is a major supporter of the Symposium. There will also be a Pre-Symposium Western Victoria Excursion from 7 to 10 August to the fabulous lava caves in the Hamilton area – including those at Mt Eccles, Mt Napier and Byaduk. Several ACKMA members are

key organizers of these events including Greg Middleton and ACKMA Fellow Ken Grimes. Full details, and the booking form etc, can be found at the following web site: <<http://ackma.org/14VSC/>>

The latest edition of the Australian Speleological Federation's *Caves Australia* is now out (No. 179 June-September 2009 – printed December 2009), and it is a bumper edition. Contents include: *Are we ready to move into the 21st century?* by Alan Jackson; *Crystal Cave Restoration 2009* by Ian Collette; *Wilmot River Karst* by Stephen Blanden; a *UIS Congress 2009 Report* by Susan White; *Conversation on Conservation: Cave Conservancies* by Nicholas White, and *Scientific Investigation in Caves* also by Nicholas White – plus much more.



And finally, researchers in Arkansas, USA, have found that the way caves 'breathe' can offer insight into climate history. *Science Daily* reported on 16 March 2009 that researchers from the University of Arkansas (including its 'Stable Isotope Laboratory') have been examining carbon cycling in an Ozark cave. Their work has shown that carbon dioxide pressures in caves vary with external temperatures and ground cover. This indicates a possible link between the carbon found in rock formations in caves and seasonal changes. The layers in a speleothem resemble the rings found in trees, except that the cave decoration can hold information dating back millions of years. One issue with this approach is how to correlate cave formation layers with the conditions that would have produced them. By looking at certain isotope ratios, the researchers hope to improve the worth of cave formations as proxies for historical climate.