

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

– Steve Bourne



Our Official Guest at dinner at the Marriott Resort in Miri – Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Dr George Chan Hong Nam, Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Tourism– is thanked by Steve Bourne.

Well, we survived Mulu!! Brian and his team certainly did an amazing job of hosting us and showcasing the wonders of the Mulu World Heritage Area.

In a site that quickly determines the gap between your aspirations and capabilities, Brian's carefully thought out program lasted about five minutes as nearly everyone revised their activities.

Not all of us escaped unscathed either with a few minor injuries incurred by some. I wish everyone a speedy recovery from their ailments and hope none evolve into anything more serious. I spent a rather uncomfortable first night back in Australia with a fever but I guess that's what you deserve if you drink water from inside Sarawak Chamber....

As a second time visitor to Borneo, I was pleased to be able to visit Niah Caves and visit a couple of sites missed previously at Mulu. Niah is extraordinary; the bird nesters must have nerves of steel and an incredibly high skill level to climb wooden poles and scaffolding 50+ metres to the cave ceiling.

The level of degradation in the cave with cigarette butts, discarded batteries and general litter was disturbing and I am sure not all can be attributed to the bird nesters. From what we observed, visitors to the cave are largely unsupervised and provided little guidance.

On a previous visit to Mulu, I visited most of the caves available on the program. I did revisit Lagang Cave with Brian to view a section of the cave developed as a show cave.

The raised boardwalk enables a much better view of the cave although there are a few issues with the cave lighting at present with some wiring finding a new use at the hands of bird nesters.

When the Mulu meeting was confirmed, I asked David Head of Weidmuller to build a light that would enable me to see Sarawak Chamber. It is well known as the largest chamber in the world, although supposed dimensions vary according to the source you use – <www.showcaves.org> –

states it as 600m x 415m x 80m. It was pleasing to find water levels low enough in Good Luck Cave to enable myself, Travis Cross and Keiran Chandler along with guides Bagli and Michael to access Sarawak Chamber.

It was more pleasing to switch the David Head 'megalight' on and actually see the chamber! Fair to say it was hard to determine details on the far walls, but at least we could see where they were. Many thanks David!!!

Brian showed a strong liking for the light so it seemed fair to leave it in Mulu, such a powerful light is overkill in the small caves of Naracoorte.

The Pinnacles Climb was great experience, strenuous but well worth the effort to view the famous pinnacle karst. I would recommend this to anyone who visits Mulu to experience exhilaration and exhaustion in approximately equal amounts.

It was great to catch up with over 90 ACKMA members and here what is happening in their patch. Caves in Australasia are busy places, for example: Jewel Cave visitor centre progressing in Western Australia, the new Waitomo visitor centre to open in early September, new lighting continuing at Yarrongobilly and Buchan, and Tasmania preparing to host the 2011 ACKMA Conference.

And we did hold the AGM! The Royal Mulu Resort was the most exotic location ever for an ACKMA AGM and most managed to drag themselves away from the caves to attend.

The demographic of ACKMA members is expanding with more younger people and a reasonably equal balance of sexes. As usual, there was little need for elections and all positions remain the same.

I will reiterate Andy Spate's comments about having some new members putting themselves up for committee positions.

As I enter my last year as president (after six years in the role, I will not be re-nominating next year) , I will start seeking interest to get some new faces on the committee.



Steve Bourne chats to Brian Clark 'in his office'.