

THE 6TH ISCA CONGRESS – 2010

or how to find happiness in the changing world of caves

– Kent Henderson

AN INTRODUCTION TO ISCA

For those who have not already heard about it, the wonderful news is that ‘we’ have been awarded the next International Show Caves Association (ISCA) Congress, which will be held at Jenolan Caves in late October 2014. It will showcase Jenolan in particular, but also very much Australasian cave and karst management in general, to the world. Let us start at the beginning...

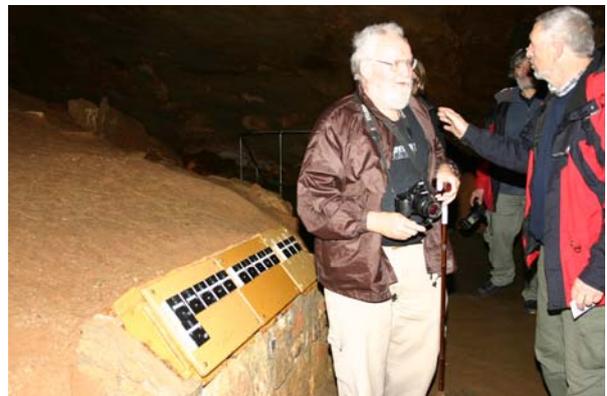
ISCA is a most interesting organisation. It was founded on 4 November 1990 at Genga, Italy, during the 1st ISCA Congress. Since then, at least until recently, it has been largely a European institution – indeed, European Show Caves still hold the majority of ‘full’ members – 56 out of 84, as at the 2010 Congress. Eighty-four members doesn’t seem many given the many hundreds of show caves in the world, but up until now, because of ISCA’s fee structure in particular, these all have tended to be mostly big players. However, this is changing and the organization is progressively becoming globally inclusive – more on that shortly.



Andy Spate views stainless steel in Koněprusy Cave, Czech Republic.

Largely, in order to belong to ISCA as a full member, one must be a show cave operation, whether privately or publicly owned. The great majority of the world’s show caves are the former, although it obviously varies from country to country; often far more so than within a country. Of course, all but one show cave in Australia is ‘government owned’ and most are (one way or the other) government-run. Public ownership of show caves is a relatively-rare phenomenon in Western (but not Eastern) Europe or North America. Show cave-running organizations can also be members, in addition to the more usual single (or occasionally multiple) show cave operation – such as the Slovak Cave Administration or the Czech Cave Administration, both of which run all the show caves in their respective countries, and thus have one ISCA membership each. If they wanted to pay (which they don’t!) the Slovaks, for example, could conceivably have one ISCA membership for each of their fourteen show caves (and thus fourteen votes in the organization

instead of their current one). Finally, national or multi-national organizations of show caves can be full members, such as the Association of British and Irish Show Caves (ABIS), and of course, ACKMA. Initially ‘they’ disliked the fact that ACKMA also admitted individuals, not just show caves, as members. However, when advised that all show cave operations in Australia and New Zealand were members, they ‘relented’. One can, however, be an ‘Associate Member’ as an individual or group – i.e. no vote (only full members get that) – at 50 euros per year (circa \$A70). ACKMA was an Associate Member (as from early this year), and as of 1 January 2011 it will be upgraded to a full (voting) member – only the second in Australasia (after Jenolan).



Dusan Milka (right) chats with Andy Spate in Koněprusy Cave. Note the battery of magnetic switches to the left.

The rub is the money (isn’t it always?), and even more importantly, I suggest, bang for your buck! Let’s deal with the money first. ISCA membership is graded by visitation – the higher a cave’s visitation, the steeper becomes the annual fee. Without giving you a boring lesson in ISCA fee scales (email me if you’re desperate to know...), prior the 2010 ISCA Congress, in our Region, most probably, only Jenolan and Waitomo (the Glowworm Cave), and maybe Margaret River, could really afford to be members (not that any were). Forget about all the many smaller low visitation show cave operations across Australasia. Prior to the recent Congress in Slovakia, ‘our’ single full member was Jenolan. It only joined earlier this year (largely to facilitate its bid for the next Congress...). However, at the just-concluded Congress, ISCA re-structured its fees, so membership is now, perhaps, financially-possible for some smaller cave locations. I will talk to some locations in due course.

While the money was, and to some extent remains, an issue, the other was what you got for your ‘hard-earned’. The answer in the past was, frankly, not much. There was an old ISCA web site that had not changed in living memory, and you got to pay (much money!) to fly overseas every four years to attend an ISCA Congress. To be fair, ISCA also holds a Conference every two years between Congresses, but only at a Congress itself

can any constitutional matters be addressed. Okay, so in the past you got to spend lots of money every two years. Hmm... It should have come as no surprise why the likes of us, in far away lands, had almost zero interest in membership.



The Pre-Conference Excursion Group.

But then things started to change. The 5th ISCA Congress in 2006 was held in Bermuda – the first outside of Europe. At that Congress also, the first non-European President was elected – David Summers. Many will recall David from his visit to the 18th ACKMA Conference at Margaret River eighteen months ago. David had a vision – he still does. He spent four years mostly flying around the world (at his own expense...) espousing the virtues of ISCA, and recruiting show caves – at which he had some success. But to a fair extent he was tied by constitutional strictures – more than a few of which were successfully addressed and changed at ISCA 2010 (with, in my view, quite a bit more to be done, but that's another story...). With these changes (such as broadened fees, already mentioned), David – who has happily been re-elected to a second four year term – is now much better placed to carry ISCA to yet greater heights, and particularly broaden its membership base.



Touring the nuclear bomb shelter which forms the entrance passage to Vypustek Cave.

ISCA now has a new, just-completed, professional website, which is marvelous, very interactive, and is promised to be updated very regularly. See: <http://www.i-s-c-a.com/>. Another big issue between ISCA meetings in my view (and many others...), in the past, has been a sorry lack of communication – this is very likely to be addressed by an e-newsletter several times a year. It hasn't happened yet, but I am very hopeful it is not too far away. Thus, things ISCA are looking very much up.

The Australasian connection with ISCA first occurred four years ago, when Andy Spate attended the 5th ISCA Congress in Bermuda – just highlighted – and the first personal level contacts, as such, were made. Andy's remit thereat, aside from generally enjoying the event (which he did!), was to *press the suit* of Waitomo for the 2010 Congress (won by Slovakia, where we have just been). Waitomo was thumped in a veritable 'cake walk' – despite having a wonderful AV presentation. The fact that ISCA was then still Euro-centric didn't help (two congresses in a row outside Europe was a very big ask), but the fact that Waitomo (nor any other show cave location in Australasia) was not even an ISCA member helped even less. The same mistake was not to be repeated four year's later...



A view up the Macocha Abyss inside Punkva Cave.

Following Andy's visit, many contacts were maintained, notably with David Summers as I've already indicated. Another strong contact was with Professor Arrigo Cigna, the chairman of ISCA's Scientific and Technical Committee. It was a delight for us to meet him (again, in Andy's case) in Slovakia. He is quite literally the 'Elery of Europe'. We are hopeful he will attend our Ulverstone Conference in Tasmania next May, perhaps as keynote speaker – we'll see...

So, after the foregoing lengthy introduction, we come to ISCA 2010. Those of us attending were Dan Cove, Andy Spate, Barry Richard and myself. Andy, Barry and I also attended the three-day Pre-congress Excursion to the Czech Republic, starting on Friday 15 October – Dan attended only the Congress itself.

THE PRE-CONGRESS EXCURSION & some general observations...

Upon our arrival in Prague (via Singapore and London), we were duly meet by three women (whom we subsequently didn't see again!), whisked off to the small(ish) town of Průhonice and installed in the pleasant-enough Floriet Hotel. We arrived around lunchtime, and thus our jet lag had the balance of the day to itself (fortuitously). Průhonice is about 10 km from central Prague, and is the seat of the Slovak Cave Administration – whose offices are located, conveniently, adjacent to the hotel. After dinner with several cave luminaries at an excellent pizza restaurant and a (reasonable) sleep, our first full day saw us taken into central Prague for a (very!)

full day walking tour. I had been to Prague before but Andy and Barry had not. Seeing the considerable sights of Prague in one day is definitely a challenge but the pleasant Czech girl who acted as our English-speaking guide was up for it! I am not quite sure the rest of us were... We were joined on our meander by a number of American ISCA attendees, a French couple and an Italian – with all of whom we subsequently got on famously – particularly the Americans (speaking a ‘broadly similar’ language helped!). Our walking tour started at 10am, and the *Prague marathon* finished about 6pm! – after eight hours (!!) of cultural gawking, with a little time off for (late) lunch along the way, for good behaviour. That said, it was wonderful – Prague is astonishing (close to the most picturesque and interesting city in Europe in my view, and I’ve been to most). I will not dilate on what we saw – hit the internet or plan to visit yourself, I suggest. At any rate, by the time we finally got back to Průhonice we were definitely ready for a beer! ...and both Czech and Slovak beer is wonderful, I have to say – even an ultimate connoisseur like Andy Spate was impressed (and I’m told, Joe Jennings before him too)!



Boats at the exit of Punkva Cave.

Day two of our Pre Excursion saw us bus off into the wilds of the Czech Republic, loosely in the direction of Slovakia, towards the fabulous Moldovan Karst. There are fifteen show caves run by the *Cave Administration of the Czech Republic* – spread across the country, although up to half are in the eastern province of Moldova. We were destined to be shown six. En route, we stopped to tour Koněprusy Cave – which, unlike most, is relatively close to Prague, in central Bohemia near the small town of Beroun. It was discovered in 1950 and opened in 1959. The tour is 620 metres.

The cave is quite well decorated in parts and contains the ‘usual speleothems’ in relative abundance, plus (according to the ‘blurb’) *unique opal-bearing decorations, as well as numerous paleontological excavations*. Of course, to an Australian opals are a little ‘ho-hum’, but I can see how they could excite the Europeans a bit more. One thing that I did find a bit unusual about this cave was its (many!) magnetic light switches (the fact that there was plenty of switching is also good, obviously). Also, like many caves in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia, it was the ‘owner’ of a significant number of monitoring devices – for everything from CO₂ to ground movement.



Andy Spate and Barry Richard at interpretive signage near the top of Macocha Abyss.

The interesting thing about this cave – indeed I think in almost every cave we were to see in the Czech Republic and later in Slovakia – was that it was the repository of several blast furnaces worth of stainless steel handrails, platforms and steps. Many Eastern European Caves, in more recent years, have been blessed with European Union *Structural Adjustment* funding (which makes me think Australia, or at least many of our Show Caves, could usefully join the Common Market). This has meant that ‘squillions’ have been available for cave infrastructure work. In almost every case, this has been used to replace every (and I do not mean some...) handrail and non-concrete step (and probably even concrete ones in some cases), or anything that remotely resembled the same, with stainless steel. They have also re-done virtually every track way in concrete as well (that is not stainless steel). Assuming you like stainless steel in caves (which, fortunately, I do), it is wonderful. With one exception in Slovakia (which was of *Australian Standard*), all the handrails in the caves we saw were of a narrower gauge than ours – which, frankly, I much prefer as they are easier to grip.



Barry Richard at the Punkva Cave train.

It is very rare that one can say that he has been to a whole series of caves and come away with virtually no criticism of the physical infrastructure (lighting excepted, of which more shortly). The copious new concrete tracking we saw was particularly good, in that ‘concrete lips’ have invariably been built up on the sides to allow water cleaning of paths without run-off onto areas of decoration. Excellent! That said, I am not sure any dirty water thus created is actually transported out of the cave, or whether it merely finds a deeper hole somewhere else, but no doubt our local colleagues will soon advise us. Barry Richard rather thought nearly every cave we

visited had had its paths 'freshly washed shortly before we turned up' – a bit like vacuuming just before the mother-in-law arrives (perhaps a not inappropriate comparison!).

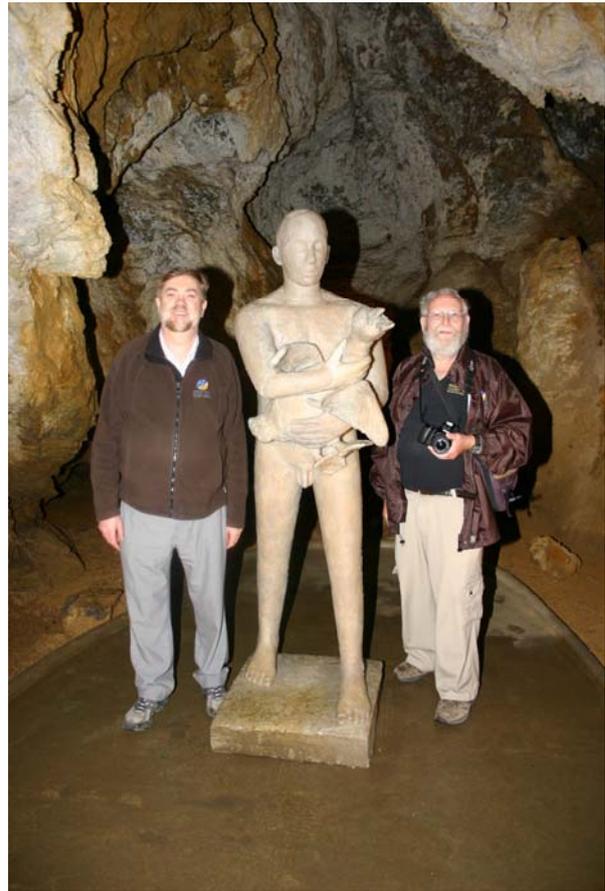
So, in my view, very largely, tracking in the caves we saw was marvelous – certainly world's best practice. When it comes to lighting, sadly, things are decidedly less rosy. The locals have spent all their money as I have just described, and virtually nothing on re-lighting. Now I am not complaining *per se*. Given a choice – the physical tracking infrastructure or the lighting – just on the basis of cave conservation alone, you'd almost certainly have to go with the former (which they have done – fine!). Actually, like Barry and his water-cleaning, I suspect we were largely only shown the caves that have already been 'stainless-steeled'. There is a plan in both countries to 'stainless' every show cave over time (as finance comes through – of course, many show caves in Australasia know all about drip-feed funding...). But that's okay, we always put out the best china when guests arrive (let alone the mother-in-law – plural, in our case!). That said, along with Steve Bourne and Andy Spate, I did see almost every show cave in Slovakia when we visited six years ago (largely pre-stainless steel days), so Andy and I at least had a good take on 'the past'.



Stainless, stainless everywhere...

Coming back to the lighting – yes, it is tired. Go back circa twenty years or so in Australasia and there you have it – parafloods, one-directional lighting, powerful lights in your eyes rather than on cave features, etc – I hardly need to rave on; we remember our past. We noted some, but certainly not much, *lampenflora* across the caves we visited – local management is chemically on top of it. Of course, preventing it in the first place – and other sins upon the eyes of tourists – is, of course, far more preferable in the first place. But

if you haven't got the money... Even with current lighting, a number of things could be done. For example, shielded parafloods seemed to be very conspicuous by their absence in most caves that we saw...



In the Zbrašov Aragonite Cave. Only the guy in the middle made any sense...

While the Eastern Europeans are right up there with much in the way of modern infrastructure as I've just noted, we in Australasia are considerably more advanced (or at least developed...) in cave lighting. I am not being critical; I am merely stating a fact. Andy Spate mentally estimated, I think, fifteen show caves in Australasia already re-lit in LEDs, with many more in the pipeline. From what I can make out, the LED figure in Europe (where there are 'many hundred' show caves) is currently less than a dozen. There was a German LED company (*Germtec*) present and demonstrating its wares at the Congress – it is very likely Europe will move increasingly to LEDs as time goes on. That said, *Germtec* was also at Bermuda four years ago displaying cave lighting systems with garish colours.

Upon leaving Koněprusy Cave, our bus drove across the Czech Republic to the Moldovan Karst, arriving at our hotel mid-afternoon (!) for lunch. Just to diverge again briefly, while the organization of everything both pre and during the Congress was first-rate, the Europeans have a much more laid back idea of meal timings than in English-speaking cultures (which particularly annoyed some of the Americans, I have to say). Lunch in mid afternoon or dinner around 9pm, or even later, is hardly unusual to their lifestyle. Many of us were quite amused that in the

Congress Program each day 10pm to 12 Midnight was listed as 'free time'!

After our (late!) lunch, we sequentially toured two caves – Balcarka and Výpustek. To the Balcarka Cave blurb – it is *famous for its very rich and colourful calcite decoration. The Gallery and the Natural Corridor are among the most beautiful in the Czech Republic.* Well, yes one would hope so! Balcarka is a lengthy through-tour, the exit (as not uncommon in Eastern Europe) being an excavated tunnel – lots of Jenolan's *Binoomea Cut* around the place. It is quite rich in decoration and stainless steel, and it does have a small but interesting 'anthropological museum' in its final chamber, with a number of life-sized models of 'cavemen' and attendant fauna, and many information panels. It all seemed very well done indeed.



ISCA President David Summers addresses the 6th Congress.

However the big, and quite pleasant, surprise in Balcarka Cave is that it possesses one (only) quite large and fairly heavily-decorated chamber lit entirely in LEDs, by the aforementioned German company. It has been extremely well done, frankly. That said when the tour party gets to about the middle of the room (as Europeans call a chamber), suddenly classical music starts up and the LEDs flash in some sort of sequence across the chamber. Hmm. Okay I suppose – but for mine the musical interlude went on far too long (and thus became quite boring), and I would have much preferred to see the LEDs ramp up and down at varying speeds, rather than doing the 'flash dance' that they did. But hey, it's the first even partially-lit LED cave in central Europe, let's give them a break!

Another aside... Before entering Balcarka Cave (and indeed, in this case, on leaving also) our party was presented with a shot glass each of 'fire water'. This is a very (Eastern?) European thing, and as I recall it occurred at most caves we visited in both countries – indeed in an ice cave in Slovakia we had 'fire water' laid on halfway through the tour! Seconds or thirds were never a problem! It's all most hospitable, and given the local low temperatures (both inside and outside the caves) a 'warming dram' goes down well for many. That said, I think occupational health and safety officers in Australia at least (or as the Americans suggested, insurance agents in their country) would take a 'dim view' if such largesse

was considered for our cave tours (nice though it would be, perhaps)!

We were then taken to Výpustek Cave – now this was different. The blurb again – *Výpustek Cave is an extensive and unique underground system created many centuries ago. However, parts of it were significantly effected by phosphate clay exploitation by both the Czechoslovak and German armies in the 20th Century. In the 1960s an underground fallout shelter and secret command post were created in one of its corridors...* It is not often that a non-geologist (such as I) finds a cave completely devoid of speleothems that is quite interesting, but Výpustek is certainly an exception.

The entrance into the cave is a truly fascinating walk down the very long corridor which formed the said cold war nuclear bomb shelter – which even local residents knew nothing about until very recent years. It is still bedecked with all its 60s-style beds, phones, contamination units, etc. The cave itself is obviously very heavily modified (let's say trashed) – it was actually 'blown up' by the retreating Germans (who used it for arms storage, etc) during WWII. Thus, 'four walls' is pretty much it. The cave has a number of quite large interconnecting chambers. The main interest of the tour in the cave itself, aside from a few items of mild historical interest, and a number of good interpretive panels, is a 'star show' light experience – formed by hundreds of LEDs imbedded in the ceiling of a large chamber, which twinkle to music. Not really my cup of tea, but there you go.

After our (untimely) evening meal back at the hotel and assumedly a good night sleep by all, we awakened to our third (and last) pre-conference day, which was to prove most memorable. After breakfast, and stowing out gear in the bus, we boarded a little 'electric' train that was to take us to the truly wondrous Punkva Caves and Macocha Abyss! The blurb: *Punkva Caves are one of the most popular tourist attractions in the Czech Republic. Visitors will see the bottom of the world-famous abyss Macocha and travel by boat along 350 metres of the underground stream Punkva as part of a fascinating underground circuit which finishes amidst the beautiful stalactite decoration of Masaryk's Dome.* It is all stunning stuff! Certainly from a spectacle point-of-view it must number right up amongst the world's top show caves.

The quality and range of decoration in the cave is superb (God knows how many kilometres of stainless steel it now contains...). The Abyss is certainly one of the larger sinkholes you'll see at 187.5 m deep – just stunning. The boat trip – great! The management – good quality! And just when you thought 'that was it' – having sailed out the underground river and exiting the boat in daylight, one then tramps off a short distance to a cable car to ascend to the top of the Abyss so you can also look down into it (having looked up from inside the cave). Just stunning stuff! As Andy Spate commented: *Where else can you get a train ride, great decoration, a massive sinkhole, an underground boat ride, and a cable car trip – all in one cave experience? Say no more!*



The opera singers – Demänovská Cave of Liberty.

Andy and I were a bit lucky to leave with the rest of our party. After gawking down the abyss from the top, Andy charged off back to cable car (I just followed him...it was not my fault!), whence we descended to the valley floor, went to a coffee shop...as you do. The fact that none of our party followed escaped our notice – until a slightly frantic cave official raced up to ask if we were from Australia. We promptly realised that we had been extremely naughty, and that our bus was parked back near the top of the abyss, ready to whisk us away to other karst delights. Thus, as rapidly as possible, we re-ascended the cable car. Our hosts said nothing, the Americans much (in the nicest possible way, of course!). Sigh...

Our (almost) final pre-conference cave, prior to being driven over to border to the conference venue in North-central Slovakia, was the Zbrašov Aragonite Cave. Having seen the delights of the stunning Aragonite Cave in Slovakia six years previously (and which we were to see again, of which more later), I must say I had high expectations of the Czech version. The blurb again: *The Zbrašov Aragonite Cave is the only show cave of hydrothermal origin in the Czech Republic. It was created in deep springs of hot acidulous water which created unique decorations – raft stalagmites, little shrublets of aragonite and ‘doughnuts’ over the walls. The lower parts of the cave are filled with carbon dioxide.* So, a hypogene cave (which you know all about having read the *Andysez* on that very subject in the last Journal)! It is, geologically, an intensely interesting cave – having said that it is far from ‘packed with speleothems’ and thus may disappoint some. Certainly, from what I saw, the aragonite was decidedly smaller and sparser than I had hoped, but then again, as you will see below, I had already been badly spoiled in Slovakia...

Having seen our *almost final* pre-conference cave, we now came to the ‘final’ one – an odd way to describe it, perhaps, but our last Czech experience consisted of only viewing the final chamber of Kulna Cave (still in the Moldovan karst). This cave is a through tour but, given time pressures assumedly, we entered through its large back entrance. The cave is devoid of secondary deposition, having been known to mankind ‘forever’ – but that’s its glory – it is one of Europe’s great paleontological sites, having been massively excavated by scientists in the (more recent) past. The displays, quite deep excavations, and interpretation, are as good as

you’d see anywhere – they are extremely impressive. The karst monoliths around the cave area are pretty good too.

So, finally, about 9pm (another late dinner...) we arrived at the Hotel Družba in the wonderful Demänovská (karst) Valley about 15 minutes drive south of the city of Liptovský Mikuláš (the seat of the Slovak Cave Administration) in north central Slovakia. Thus, ISCA 2010 was about to commence...

Before finishing this section, I must warmly thank (I know also on behalf of Andy and Barry) the Czech Caves Administration for so ably hosting us. Staff seemed to appear and disappear effortlessly over the three days. But we know a huge amount of work was put into it – which was most appreciated by all attending the pre-conference. We would like to warmly thank, in particular, our now very good friend Dusan Milka, whose efforts were marvelous. We look forward very much to repaying his kindness, or indeed that of any of his Czech colleagues, when they can get to Australia.



ISCA attendees in the conference room.

ISCA 2010

While a *List of Participants* was not circulated (although a list of ISCA members was), I roughly counted about 120 attendees at the 6th ISCA Congress. The venue, the Hotel Družba, was excellent. It is nestled next to a ski run (we had a dusting of snow on one day too – nice!), and in summer its clientele would certainly include people visiting the stunning Demänovská Valley and its show caves. October is pretty much between seasons, so having an international conference at this time was obviously propitious. The hotel has excellent rooms, conference and dining facilities – the staff appeared faultless – certainly the food was excellent and voluminous and the service top quality.

In commenting generally to begin, I thought the Congress was a very great success; certainly by the end of the week we had that ‘ACKMA feeling’ of a wonderful family gathering – despite the fact that English was not the first language of many attendees, and a few could not speak it at all. English is the official language of ISCA, and (almost) all proceedings and papers were in English. Indeed, after the Congress, David Summers commented to me in an email: ‘...the past four years has seen an incredible

improvement in the amount of English spoken. This was our very first Congress without formal translation.' Indeed, it would appear the quantity (and perhaps the quality) of papers has greatly expanded. Looking at the recently-printed *Proceedings of the 5th ISCA Congress*, it would appear that, at best, ten papers were presented in Bermuda four years ago. In Slovakia we had about thirty papers (there were also about ten posters).



The Korean delegation – at least 3 familiar faces?

Day One of the Congress (Monday 18 October) devoted the entire morning to the General Assembly, i.e.: ISCA business. It wasn't quite as boring as watching paint dry, but it was certainly in that direction on occasions. These things tend to be a 'necessary evil', but I have to say the Europeans (and not just them...) are Past Masters at stringing out verbosity. We started with a (relatively) brief speech of welcome by the Slovak Minister for the Environment, and the *Official Opening* of the Congress. Fine, so far. We then had the 'Call to Order' by the President, David Summers (he simply 'called the meeting to order'). This seems to be a very European thing (remember it is 'they' who wrote the ISCA Constitution...); I suppose they think people will be rowdy until they are 'bought into line'!

We then had the election of the Chairman of the General Assembly. This turned out to be two joint Chairmen – André David (of France) and Heinz Vonderthann (of Germany) – who subsequently shared the duties. Members then voted to 'Approve the Agenda' (another European thing), and pass the minutes of the General Assembly held four years previously (there was a move to read them, but we were spared, mercifully).

So, we were swimming along, until we got the next item, the Report of the ISCA President. Now, David did go on for a very long time – admittedly he had four years of his 'doings' to dwell upon – but I would have thought the circulation of a written report, and then spoken (brief!) reference to highlights would have been better. But despite the fact that David is a former Falkland Islander, now owning a show cave in Bermuda, the 'European Way' does not expect brevity, it would seem. Other extensive written reports were circulated and then every word was read. Sigh...

We then came to 'Amendments to the Constitution' – and this went on 'forever' as well; although I found it quite interesting (I concede that many would not...). As the ISCA Constitution can only be changed by vote at quadrennial congresses, there was much to put forward. All of this came from the 'Constitutional Study Group'

appointed in Bermuda. I will not bore you with the sordid details, but the changes were, in my view, good stuff – although more needs to be changed no doubt – that will have to await *ISCA 2014* at Jenolan.

We then came to the 'Election of the Nominating Committee'. This is another quaint European custom apparently – a Committee is elected to nominate the ISCA Office Bearers (President, two Vice Presidents, the Secretary/Treasurer, and ten 'Directors'). So, a Committee to nominate the Committee! What?! The Officer Bearers were slated to be elected later in the Congress – in the event there are more nominations than vacancies (which was clearly not the 'plan'). Yes, well... Why one wouldn't just have a straight election and be done with it... But as we'll see below it came unstuck anyway, to some extent.



Entering Dobsinka Ice Cave. Note the bank of monitoring equipment of the right.

The next item was the proposed 'Guidelines for Show Cave Management', developed over the last four years by the *ISCA Scientific and Technical Commission* chaired by Prof Arrigo Cigna. I do not need to dilate here as the *Draft Guidelines* were published in the last *ACKMA Journal*. Long and animated discussion ensued, with a number of attendees (albeit not many, it seemed...) opposing some provisions, particularly on the issue of the use of wood in caves. So, in a typically European way, if you can't agree, defer – so the matter was 're-listed' for later in the Congress – which was infinitely better than debating the matter for the rest of the day. Finally, Annual Dues for the next four years were set (after some debate...), a matter to which I have already referred. All this took around three hours. I wonder how we'd go trying to run an *ACKMA* Annual General Meeting over three hours – not easily, I suspect! After a 'coffee break', we had about an hour of 'Around the World', wherein various members stood, and in five minutes, related what is happening at their cave/s – most were descriptive rather than full of management insights, but it was an interesting session nonetheless.

After lunch, it was onto the first paper session; with David Summers as the moderator (what we'd call a session chairperson). Before proceeding to the three papers that were presented, I will diverge to a 'book review'. I must say the 'Congress Handbook' was exceptional. It is A5 size, 60 pages, and in full colour – with a laminated cover! It was prepared and published

by the Slovak Cave Administration and edited by Pavel Bella, Peter Gažík and Lukáš Vlček – all of who deserve the highest praise. Its chapters include an 'Introduction to Slovakia', 'Karst and Caves in Slovakia', 'Congress Venue and Surrounding', 'General program', 'Abstracts' of all papers (plus a few not presented), the *Draft Management Guidelines for Show Caves*, the 'New ISCA Website', and finally an 'Excursion Guide' to all the places to be visited. My only (very minor) criticism was that the Abstracts were not printed in 'Order of Presentation' – rather I suspect in 'Order of Receipt'. But let's not quibble. The front cover features an absolutely stunning photo taken in the Demänovská Cave of Liberty (which I've 'acquired' and will publish in this Journal in due course...), whilst the back cover (top shot, too!) was taken in the Dobšinská Ice Cave. Stunning stuff – 'we' will have much to do to emulate it in four years time, and not only the 'Conference Handbook'! If any ACKMA member would like the 'Abstracts', at least – let me know and I'll endeavour to arrange a PDF copy.



Enjoying 'fire water' in Dobsinka Ice Cave.

The first paper of the session, by L'ubica Nudziková, was entitled *Foundations of the Slovak Caves Administration Marketing Strategy*. It was okay, but pretty technical and statistical – in other words heavy, but the abstract is quite interesting reading. The second paper was by Peter Štefín and Ksenija Dvorščak of Slovenia – *Key Success Factors of the Postojna Show Cave in its 192-year long Tourist History*. This was an interesting paper on what had been tried, pretty much with success it would seem, in managing Postojna – one of the world's great show caves, attracting at least 500,000 visitors per year. Peter, who presented, dealt with many issues – such as guide training, carrying capacity, adaptation, development – his list was a long one. I was impressed that Postojna guides must speak quite a number of languages to get the gig – we'd be close to 'guideless' in Australasia if we required that one. Sigh...

The final paper of the trio was Dr. Svetozár Dluholucký's offering – *Recent Knowledge and Utilization of Karst Caves for Speleotherapy*. According to his abstract – 'The beneficial effect of the karst cave environment to human health has been known for centuries and has been used as a natural medicine in various parts of the world...' Maybe so, but it was certainly news to me (but not to Andy Spate, who thought it pretty 'old hat' – it shows my general ignorance, I suppose).

Evidently this doctor (and many others) place people of all ages in various caves and this 'exposure' reputedly cures allergies, skin disorders, and much else. Well, there you go! Obviously we need to do extensive studies on cave guides in Australasia – clearly they must be our healthiest citizens! My wry humour aside, this is taken seriously by more than some, and obviously does have beneficial effects. The author of this paper is a leading Slovakian pediatrician...

At about 4.30pm, we bussed off (always in two busses) on our first Slovakian field trip. You had 'Bus 1' or 'Bus 2' prominently displayed inside the window of your large plastic name badge, so you didn't get it wrong! 'Pure' English-speakers, like Americans, English and Australians seemed to be on 'Bus 1', whilst the French, Italians and Germans, etc, were mostly on 'Bus 2'. Somewhat logical, I suppose.

Our port of call was nearby – at the truly fabulous Demänovská Cave of Liberty. One (maybe) unfortunate thing about most Slovakian caves – certainly in the Demänovská Valley – is that their entrances are usually 'half way up a mountain' and no, the bus does not pull up at the cave door! Sigh... So the walk up from the road in the valley below is long, steep and a test for not-a-few! I'd forgotten after six years, but I was soon rudely reminded! Puff, pant... Some of the more corpulent Europeans did not make the top in anywhere near record time. Did us all good though!

Upon passing through the entrance of the wondrous (and I do not say this lightly) Demänovská Cave of Liberty (at 870m asl – most of which we'd just climbed on foot, I think!), one descends into a very large first chamber, with a high waterfall spouting out of the ceiling to the rocks on one side. Stunning in itself! Once we were all assembled in the chamber (with its very spacious flat concrete floor) drinks and nibbles were circulated by ever-attentive staff (including shot glasses of 'fire water', of course!). We were to have an *Opening Ceremony* (presumably a speech) by the Mayor of Demänovská Valley who was, we were advised, inconveniently ill – so it didn't happen. And then a treat indeed – three wonderful opera singers from the Slovakian State Opera (two brothers and a sister – two tenors and a mezzo-soprano) performed for well over half an hour. Their voices were superb, the acoustics grand! It was really fantastic – something else for Jenolan to emulate or exceed in four years time!

After the concert, it was off on the cave tour. The cave is over eight km long, with two tours offered. The *Traditional Tour* is 1150 m long with 913 steps (60 minutes), with the *Exclusive Tour* being 2150 m long with 1118 steps (100 minutes). We are talking a lot of cave here! We wandered through the lot, as you would. And it has everything – huge chambers, a river walkway (most of the tour), and fantastic decoration. I put this cave in the 'top three or four' in Slovakia, and as one of the top show caves in the world – all this is impossible to define, in reality, of course. Needless to say, the cave has been severely stainless-steel-ed and re-tracked. The lighting – well, there is massive potential! We got back for

dinner about 8.30pm-ish, I think it was. Certainly, ISCA Day One was memorable.

Day Two (Tuesday 19 October) comprised two paper sessions, and a field trip, amongst other delights. Paper Session Two, with four papers, commenced at 8.30am, with Prof. Arrigo Cigna as moderator. The first was delivered by Prof. Alain Mangin of France, and entitled *Cave Management, Visitation Limits and Environmental Preserving*. Alain talked much about establishing criteria, CO₂ and radon monitoring, and other technicalities. Unfortunately (well, for me at least) he delivered the paper in French, with Arrigo cross-translating – which made following it a tad difficult. But at least the abstract was in English.

Paper Two was *Tourist Carrying Capacity in Caves: Main trends and applications in Brazil*, by Heros A. S. Logo et al. Let's look at the start and finish of his abstract: 'The establishment of touristic carrying capacity is one of the greatest challenges facing environment planners and managers....carrying capacity should be studied as a function of variation, intensity and frequency of demand, as well as seasonal dynamics in the resilience of the cave environment'. Well, there are problems with this thesis one feels, but we can agree with looking to *the resilience of the cave environment*, at least. There are more than some who will argue that a cave's 'carrying capacity' is nil. But the paper provided an interesting perspective, nonetheless.



Dan Cove gives ISCA the 'Jenolan Treatment'!

The third paper of the session was by Peter Bosák (Czech Republic): *Dating of Processes in Karst and Caves – Implications for Show Cave Presentation*. Peter provided the longest printed abstract – close enough to a full paper. It was scientific, and right at the end he came to the conclusion that 'the results of scientific research represent an important and powerful tool for the management of show caves'. This was hardly revelatory being a self-evident truth, I would have thought. While this paper was fine *per se* – in itself no doubt an excellent paper – I felt it (and a couple of others at the Congress, frankly) would have been far better placed in a scientific karst conference setting, rather than directly to show cave owners/managers.

The last paper for the session was *Scientific Investigation of Natural Caves and Management of Tourist Caves in South Korea*, by our good friend and ACKMA Member, Prof. Kyung-Sik Woo. As

one might expect, this paper was up there with the best of them. Basically, Kyung-Sik gave us a guided tour of the karst, caves and cave management in South Korea – the latter particularly in the last ten years. It was an excellent summation.



Interactive displays and interpretation at Domica Cave.

After coffee, Paper Session Three commenced, with Pavel Bosák as moderator. We were in for five papers, starting with Prof. Arrigo Cigna on *The Problem of Lampenflora in Caves*. It is not often one hears the definitive paper on a subject, but this would have to be close. It was excellent, needless to say (but I will anyway). I will say no more at this stage as I have received Arrigo's permission to re-print his paper in the ACKMA Journal, which I will so do in the next edition. Paper Two was something of a 'follow up', and was entitled *Preliminary Results of Lampenflora Removal using a 15% Buffered Hydrogen Peroxide Solution in Show Caves (Postojna, Slovenia)*, by Stanislav Glazar and Janez Mulec. Despite the mouthful of the title, and the somewhat technical nature of the paper, most people knew what they were talking about. It worked, of course, but again, this was no great revelation. Still, it was a good paper – I enjoyed it, at least.

The next paper was, of course, stunning (!) – *The Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association Inc: A trans-national organization of show caves, managers, scientists and cavers*, written by Andy Spate and also attributed to Dan Cove and myself (though I suppose we had a minimal input). Of course, Andy 'laid them in the aisles'! It certainly set up Dan nicely for his Jenolan presentation later in the Congress. At the end of Andy's presentation, Barry and I rushed around giving out ACKMA Journals, ACKMA CD Roms, Membership Fliers and Ulverstone Conference Fliers and Registration Forms. We would have also kissed any babies present, but there weren't any. Actually, our 'electioneering' wasn't really necessary – at least in terms of getting up Jenolan's bid for the next ISCA Congress – it was already a 'done deal'! More on that later.

The penultimate paper of the session was *WISKI 7 – a world wide used environmental Monitoring System*, by Robert Gal (Germany). This was the first of the 'commercial' papers at the Congress, with the author a senior operative of his company, pushing their monitoring systems for caves. It

was informative and useful – and already used in more than a few caves around the world. Certainly, there is not much his monitors can't do, other than kiss you goodnight – all at a price, of course.

The final offering of this rota was by Peter Gažík et al – *Integrated Cave Environmental Monitoring System (ICEMS)*. This paper dealt extensively with all the specialized cave monitoring undertaken in Slovakia, data collection, and its use. Again, it was to some extent a 'party political' for a certain company and its equipment – but that's okay; it is certainly good for cave operators to be aware of options. So, an interesting paper, and definitely potentially useful for more than some.



Ice column in Dobsinka Ice Cave – stunning!

So, after something of a marathon of nine papers, it was time for (late) lunch, and thence on our next excursion to the Demanovska Ice Cave, departing about 3pm. Happily this cave is also in the Demänovská Valley so the bus trip was not very long. Yet again, we all had another very long, steep walk up to the cave from the valley floor. I have pretty much forgotten much of the cave over the past six years, but it soon all came back! Of course, ice caves are almost unknown in our part of the world, but they are not uncommon in Europe – indeed there have been a number of international workshops on ice cave management. Slovakia has two 'show' ice caves – we were to see both. A usual feature of ice caves – certainly all the ones I have seen – is a complete lack of calcite speleothems. They are mostly walls and, well, ice. – usually ice 'flowstone' and ice speleothems. Demanovska Ice Cave has 'suffered' over the last few years from 'warmer than average' winters; thus the ice in the cave (our Slovakian hosts apologetically explained) was not as good as normal. Indeed, compared to what I remembered of my last visit to the cave six years ago, it was certainly 'ice-diminished'. Not surprisingly, the cave had been 'stainless steeled'. It is very hard to fault the management of the cave. It seemed every conceivable monitoring device was *in situ* – even with instruments recording internal rock temperatures.

Upon our return to the Hotel Družba, you'd expect we'd be having dinner – but no, not immediately. First we had to re-convene in the Conference Room for the 'Closure of Nominations' by the Nominating Committee. The chairman on the said Committee, Prof. Arrigo Cigna, advised that there was only one nomination for President

(David Summers), two for Vice President (Brad Wuest – USA & Heinz Vonderthann – Germany), and one for Secretary/Treasurer (Renate Marinelli – Italy). So far, so good – no elections needed. Arrigo then announced that there were ten nominees for the ten positions of 'Director'. It is worth quoting the ISCA Constitution at this point: *To be eligible to serve as a member of the Board (of Directors), with the exception of the Secretary, the Treasurer and the Chairman of the Scientific and Technical Committee, the member must hold a position of responsibility and/or involvement in the organisation of a full member. Associate Members, who are elected as Directors, are exempt from this provision. A maximum of two of the positions of director may be held by Associate Members. And further: With the exception of the Secretary, the Treasurer, Associate Members elected as Directors and the Chairman of the Scientific and Technical Committee each member of the Board shall belong to a different country.*

So, we had, conveniently, ten nominees for ten positions – all of whom came from different countries. I must say that I quite like this constitutional provision, in that it does ensure for a broad representation across the world – even though one could argue it is 'undemocratic' and that you do not necessarily get the best candidates – some of which may come from the same country. In any case, the 'best laid plans' went a bit awry. It is possible, at a 'Closure of Nominations' meeting, for the Chairman to accept candidates from the floor – additional to those put forth by the Nominating Committee. This was brought to the meeting's attention and – what a surprise! – four further candidates were put up! One of the original ten was our own Dan Cove – destined to be the 'Australian Director'. One of the additional four nominated was Andy Spate. However, it was promptly pointed out that such would mean two Australian nominations, and that was illegal as you can only have one Director per country. Andy then graciously declined nomination. Actually, he need not have done so, as he is an Associate Member of ISCA – if you refer back to the provisions I have just quoted, there was effectively no problem. However... So, we then had thirteen nominations for the ten Director positions – we thus awaited the actual elections later in the week with bated breath!

Day Three (Wednesday 20 October) saw the first of our full day excursions, to Dobsinka Ice Cave and Spišský Hrad Castle. The former I had previous seen, the latter I had not. We were now heading much further afield – into Eastern Slovakia to its World Heritage areas. The Dobsinka Ice Cave is World Heritage-listed, and justifiably so! Upon arrival, we had yet another 'get fit' session getting up to its Visitor's Centre...

Yet another aside. Dobsinka, as with every other cave we visited, had an excellent Visitor's Centre at or very near its entrance. Invariably, excellent and expansive interpretation signage was provided (usually also in English), along with the presence of a ubiquitous gift shop. This was a magnet for American 'cave memorabilia' collector Gordon Smith (Marengo Cave *et al*). Gordon is a great guy (as indeed were all the Americans at ISCA). He is well known in Australia for 'out-

bidding' everyone on e-bay went a 'cave item' comes up for sale. Without doubt, his collection of Jenolan memorabilia, in particular, exceeds any held in Australia! So, when we arrived at any cave gift shop, Gordon was always first in the queue. I'm told a cargo jet was later needed to get him and his loot back to the USA!

Dobsinka is wondrous! Now fully stainless steel, of course – it is packed with ice and ice formations, particularly ice flowstone, as well as spectacular ice columns and other speleothems, and even ice tunnels. There is a large flat area of ice in the cave that, historically, was used for figure skating (long since discontinued, of course) – indeed, Olympic skaters used to train there! Using LEDs in the cave in the future would be most interesting, but the current parafloods are okay – it is pretty hard to grow *lampenflora* on ice... The cave is heavily monitored, and (accepting the lighting needs updating...) its management is pretty much as good as it gets.



The Americans...

Spissky Hrad (or Spiš) Castle was a little bit of the trip there and back, but it was well worth it – a 'karst castle' no less! It is massive, and sits on top of a high (200m high) dolomite tor – I would have hated to have been in an attacking army; your chances would not have been good... A significant part of its walls are of cut dolomite blocks too. The castle is early medieval. It burned down in 1780, and has been in ruins since. It was partly reconstructed in the second half of the 20th century, when extensive archaeology was carried out on the site – indeed, a small cave was found under the castle containing bones and artifacts. The reconstructed sections house the Spiš Museum, which is rather good too. Spissky Hrad is considered 'the best' castle in Eastern Europe and it is, not surprisingly, World-Heritage listed also. Our walking tour through it was great – you can climb up to the very top for magnificent views – which most of us did.

Day Four (Thursday 21 October) was destined to be a day of election 'drama' and papers, with a cultural visit thrown in for added interest. After breakfast, we assembled in the Conference room for the 'Announcement of Nominations' and the election of Office Bearers (two hours were allowed in the program for this!). The 'Announcement' was a bit pointless as very one already new who they were. Three scrutineers were elected headed by Prof. Arrigo Cigna. The elections of President, the two Vice-Presidents, and Secretary/Treasurer were declared. The only 'minor' drama was over who would be First Vice-President and who

Second Vice-President – clearly a momentous decision! The ISCA Constitution provides this be decided by the toss of a coin! (Why one wouldn't just simply elect a First and a Second Vice-President, and be done with it, quite escapes me). Anyway, Brad Weust magnanimously announced that he would happily serve as Second Vice President, deferring to Heinz Vonderthann at First Vice-President – so no 'toss of the coin' was necessary (spontaneous applause!).



Spissky Hrad 'karst' Castle.

We now came to the much-anticipated election of the Board of Directors – as you will recall we had thirteen nominees for ten positions. The election revolved around a large 'ISCA-inscribed' ballot box on the head table. One by one the names of each voter (full member) was called and the said person strode to the front and with maximum flourish deposited his or her ballot paper in the said box. Many of the same faces were seen several times, or even voted sequentially, as a member could hold up to three proxies from other members and indeed, an individual can be eligible to vote on behalf of more than one member. After the (lengthy) voting process we adjourned for coffee while the scrutineers did their bit. Eventually, the result was declared – and nine of the ten 'Nomination Committee nominations' was elected. Dan Cove received close to the maximum individual vote, which was great. For the record, those elected were (in no particular order) Zhang Shouyue (China), Hein Gerstner (South Africa), Guilhem De Grully (France), Peter Gažik (Slovakia), Hanne Öedin (Sweden), Dan Cove (Australia), Filiberto Cecchi (Italy), Rafael Pages (Spain), Nick Powe (England) and Zsuzsa Tolnay (Hungary). Of course, ACKMA member Hein Gerstner, who was at the Congress, is well known to us all. Nick Powe (Kent's Cavern, England) is also an ACKMA member, but unfortunately he was a late withdrawal from the Congress so we did not get to meet him. Hanne Öedin joined ACKMA at the Congress, along with two others (thus far)! Interestingly, Zhang Shouyue (China) and Rafael Pages (Spain) were elected as Directors despite the fact that neither they, nor any of their countrymen, were at the Congress.

After the elections were over, we moved on to the 'Presentations of Applications' to host the 2012 ISCA Conference and the 2014 ISCA Congress. There were two nominations for the former – from Greece and Turkey. Given this situation, and that clearly while there would be a winner there would also be a loser, David Summers spent considerable time in diplomatic discussions with the two parties. Now, like getting Serbs and Croats to love each other – getting Greeks and Turks to 'sing from the same hymn sheet' is also

problematic, at best. But David achieved it! The two 'sides' agreed to share the 2012 ISCA Conference (starting 3 November 2012) with three days in Greece, a 'traveling day' in-between and then three days in Turkey. A fascinating result – and a very good one in the circumstances.



At the Ochtinska Aragonite Cave.
Above: The Visitor's Centre. Below: A view of some of the interpretation therein.



We then had the AV presentation for Jenolan from Dan Cove – which, of course, was stunning. At its conclusion Barry Richard and I ran around giving out Jenolan Caves caps to all and sundry (still no babies to kiss...). As I mentioned earlier, there was no opposing bid (our whole PR thing was now more about encouraging people to actually attend in 2014...). Thus, with no voting necessary (we can be thankful for small mercies...) Greece and Turkey were formally announced as the joint hosts of the 2012 ISCA Conference, and Australia (Jenolan Caves) as the host of the 2014 ISCA Congress.

After lunch, it was time for Paper Session IV, with Andy Spate as moderator. Four papers were presented. The first was by Peter Gažík and Brad Wuest on the *New ISCA Web Site*. There were four pages on it in the *Congress Handbook* as well. I waxed lyrical on it earlier in this monologue and gave the web address, so I will no iterate here. Check it out – it is fantastic! Brad Wuest presented the second paper, entitled: *White-nose Syndrome in the United States*. This is a VERY serious problem in America that is decimating bat populations in the Eastern United States (and it is spreading west), which has significant cave management implications, obviously. As Brad discussed in his excellent paper, there is presently no 'cure' and containment cannot work either (it is hard to stop bats flying to different

locations...). Let us pray this malady never gets to Australasia...

The third paper on offer followed on nicely from Brad's. Natália Martínková gave us: *Is White-nose Syndrome a Threat for Bats in European Caves?* Her answer to this question was, very unfortunately, yes. The fungal growth which causes White-nose Syndrome in bats (*Geomyces destructans*) was first found in Europe in 2009, and was shown to occur across, at least, Central Europe.

However, for some reason as yet not understood, the fungus has not (at least, not yet) caused mass bat mortality in Europe. Obviously, studies continue apace... The final paper of this session was by Pavel Adámek and Alžbeta Durecová (Slovakia): *Radiation Protection against Radon in Natural Caves in the Slovak Republic*. This paper was basically a summary of radon monitoring efforts with local guides. While radon is no longer much of an issue in Australasia, it is still very much so in Europe where cave radon levels are generally, and sometimes significantly, higher.

Later in the afternoon, around 5.30pm, we all bussed off to the *Pribylina Skanzen* – Slovak Open Air Museum. This was a collection of old (largely medieval) buildings from around the country gathered together into a historical park. Various artisans worked in various houses; we wandered around... (having first had fire water on arrival, and snacks and more fire water later). The highlight was a local (costumed) man playing a variety of strange indigenous instruments, including Slovak bagpipes (yes, there is such a thing!). He was obviously an expert, and his performances were most interesting.



A huge aragonite cluster
– Ochtinska Aragonite Cave.

Day Five (Friday 22 October) was our final conference day, as such (prior to one last all-day field trip) and a very full program of papers was in the offing. However, prior to the papers commencing, David Summers convened the first meeting of the new ISCA Board of Directors – as an 'Open Meeting', enabling all others who wished to observe the opportunity to do so. It was relatively brief and dealt with routine matters – mostly the appointment of the chairperson and members of the various ISCA commissions and committees. Actually, all former office bearers appear to have been re-appointed, including Andy Spate to the Scientific and Technical Commission.

The only new appointment was Kent Henderson (!) as an additional member of the 'Constitutional Study Group'.

Paper Session V was moderated by myself. I still have no idea how or why I got the gig! There were six papers listed, but I was advised that two were not proceeding, happily for me. I did try (but not hard, I admit) to learn or at least learn to pronounce, the names of the papers' authors (I definitely got the hardest lot!). In the end, I simply read the name of paper to be presented and shut up. Thankfully, someone always seemed to rush forward and start talking! You'll see what I mean in a minute... The first paper was *The Preservation of the Cave Floor and its Importance for Interpretation*, by Matej Kržič (pronounced Martay Korgitz – I got that one right, anyway).

The paper was delivered by Tina Troha (who spoke excellent English), the twenty-something year old daughter of Alojz Troha – who was attending ISCA representing Križna jama. Indeed, I knew Alojz, as did Andy – Steve, Andy, Neil Kell and I visited Križna jama – in Slovenia (the cave is not far from Postojna) six years ago! It is a stunning experience – quite unforgettable. It's a wild cave used for an adventure tour. You traverse the cave's river by a series of boats – only three people (plus the guide – Alojz) per tour. Translated into 'Australian', the paper was largely about track marking. Very good, too – as was the fact it lasted only about ten minutes – undoubtedly an ISCA (and probably European) record! Having said that, to be fair, across the whole Congress very few papers went over time.



A view inside the Domica Cave Visitor's Centre.

The second paper was by presented by our Turkish friends – Lütfi Nazak, Fuat Şaroğlu, Sanal Durukal, Yılmaz Güner, and Volkan Güner (I've given you the whole list, rather than an 'et al', so you can see my problem!), whose paper was *Problems of Artificial Caves, which were operated as Show Caves*. This paper was largely about salt mines and their ilk, and really, to be frank, not the fodder of ISCA – which strictly defines a show cave (constitutionally) as a 'naturally occurring void beneath the surface of the earth'.

The third paper of my session was *Cave Tourism in the Polish-Slovak Trans-frontier Area*, by Lukasz Lewkowicz, a Polish speleo – who seemed to turn up at the Congress just to do his paper, and disappear soon after. Basically, things are pretty sick, cave-wise, on his side of the border. Most of

the known caves on the Polish side have been trashed (which goes to show that freely advertising cave locations was not a great policy...). He spent much of his paper whining about Slovak caves charging too much for entry fees, souvenirs, etc, etc. You can draw your own conclusions, as did I.

The final paper of 'my' session was by the Greek contingent – Vassilis Giannopoulos, et al. As for the paper's title – your guess is as good as mine! The abstract in the *Congress Handbook* was in Italian, and the paper was presented in Italian (by Greeks, as I said...beats me). Talk about this little Moderator getting the 'rough end of the pineapple'! There was some translation into English as the paper progressed. Looking at the AV, I gather it was something about 'Caves in Crete', but other than that, I really couldn't say.



The newly-elected ISCA Board of Directors in session – watched by everyone else!

After the papers were concluded, and just when I thought it was 'safe to go out at night again' – no, I was still at the table for the resumption in debate on the proposed 'Guidelines for Show Cave Management'! Oh no! Thankfully, however, Heinz Vonderthann rushed up to take over, and promptly tossed the meeting to Arrigo Cigna. It soon became clear that the issues of earlier in the week were not resolved, with a number standing to again vent their spleen. Arrigo resolved to put the matter to the vote, whereupon the *Guidelines* went down is something of a screaming heap. There were certainly a lot of abstentions too, it would seem – nowhere near the number who voted in the elections did so this time.

Personally, I think the matter could have been better handled from several directions. The *Guidelines* had been previously circulated for a long time – all ISCA members had heaps of time to comment, or whatever. For some to turn up to derail the matter, without notice, on the day as it were – I thought was a bit rich. However, who knows what politics was happening behind the scenes?

On the other hand, if I were Arrigo, I would have merely pulled the supposedly-contentious clause on wood in caves, and thus ease the passage (hopefully) of the amended document. Most of a cake is better than none, I'd have thought. Unfortunately, Arrigo appeared to want all or nothing, and so got the latter. The whole thing was not a good look – hopefully ISCA can do much better at Jenolan in four years time...



Two of our American friends at the Slovak Speleological Museum – Gordon Smith (left) and Roger McClure.

After a coffee break, André David (France) took over as moderator for Paper Session VI. Six papers were listed. The first was, well, incredibly good! (What, biased? Me?). Dan Cove spoke on *The Essential Role of Interpretive Guiding in ensuring Understanding and Conservation of Cave and Karst Systems*. It was great! Say no more! Next up was a complementary paper by Zsuzsa Tolnay (Hungary) entitled *Interpretation – a Little Utilised Management Tool*. Actually, she was right on the money at least as far as Europe was concerned (in my experience, at least). Indeed, her paper, and that of Dan, would win my prizes as the two ‘best’ of the Congress.

The third paper of the session was also excellent – *Model for Developing of Competences for Show Cave Guides and a System of Permanent Mentorship/Tutoring/Training*, by Ksenija Dvorščak. This paper was largely an expansion on his joint paper with Peter Štefin from earlier in the week. Ksenija explained in detail how guides are selected and trained at Postojna Cave in Slovenia, and the various levels and competences necessary. Very interesting indeed – I can tell you Australasian guides get it easy in comparison!

Next up was a ten minute talk from Joëlle Darricau (France), the Chairperson of ISCA’s *Commission on Pre-history in Show Caves*, who talked on that very subject. She pre-circulated her address (in English) and then read it in English. Fine, it wasn’t long, and it was clearly the best way for her to present it. Marian Sojak and Peter Fecko (both Slovakian archeologists) presented the fifth paper of the session: *The Presentation of Open Archeological Sites in Slovakia (Status, Perspectives and Comparison with Foreign Countries)*.

They talked mostly about work and displays at, and in, Domicca Cave (which we were to see on the following day). It was an interesting paper indeed. The final offering of the session was from several Czech speleologists who presented on the *16th International Congress of Speleology*, to be held in 2013 at Brno in the Czech Republic. Much will be said on this in the future. Go to: <www.speleo2013.com/>.

After lunch, we came to the final set of papers for the Congress (Session VII), chaired by Brad Wuest. Only two were on offer, to be followed by

five-minute Poster Presentations. The first was by Ján Novomeský (Slovakia) entitled: *Did we find a Miracle Light Source?* He was, of course, talking about LEDs. He basically spent about twenty minutes or so saying ‘yes’, and listing all the well-known (to us) reasons why. Finally, the last presentation of the Congress was the second of our ‘commercial’ papers, from Alexander Chrapho of *Germtec*, on his LED lights – much of which was an LED ‘light show’.

During the morning, Barry Richard advised me that Peter Gažík had arranged for a carload, including him and me, to go into Liptovský Mikuláš to visit the Slovak Speleological Museum.

This was the first I’d heard such a beast existed! So, we missed the poster presentations (I’d looked at the all during the week anyway) and headed into town. It was very good indeed – a top class museum and most displays were also captioned, usefully, in English. I did later (gently!) upbraid Pavel Bella for not including this museum in the Congress program. It would be been preferable to me (and probably many others) than visiting the ‘cultural village’ – although I can understand the locals wanting to showcase their culture to us.

After the poster session, while we were still away, Andy did his *Caves of Australasia* AV show. In combination with Andy’s ACKMA talk, Dan’s Jenolan talk and this latest propaganda session – we had just about everybody, we feel, itching to get to Australia. Obviously, we’ll get plenty at ISCA in four years time, but I’d be confident we’ll see a fair number of internationals at our ACKMA Conference in Tasmania next May as well.



Signage at Domicca Cave.

The final dinner and ‘Farewell Party’ that evening was one out of the box. We enjoyed a sumptuous repast, and a brief ‘Closing Ceremony’ where the *Moderator’s Bell* was passed on to Dan Cove for use at Jenolan in four year’s time. The ‘floor show’ was wonderful. Firstly, a group of very amusing ‘cultural dancers’ entertained us (they re-appeared, at intervals, throughout the evening).

They had a happy knack of ‘stealing’ peoples’ watches, wallets, etc. without them knowing, and then requiring the ‘victims’ to do or say terribly amusing things to get them back. It was extremely funny, to say the least. Later, we had a truly outstanding magician come on, with a definite flair for balloons, and involving heaps of people in mysterious circumstances!

Day Six (Saturday 23 October) – the Final Day!

Our last hurrah was a full day field trip to the wondrous Ochtinska Aragonite Cave, and Domica Cave – both World Heritage sites. When we got to the Aragonite Cave, at least there wasn't a mountain to climb (for a change!) to get to the entrance. The Visitor's Centre is a round structure – a 'bit unique' – and the profuse interpretative panels inside are wonderful. But nothing can be as wonderful as the cave itself – it is unspeakably good. Think of the biggest aragonite clusters you have ever seen in a cave, multiple by a factor of ten, and then realize such would be loose change in the Ochtinska Aragonite Cave. Massive clusters – and they are in huge abundance almost everywhere you look. Interestingly, aragonite is pretty much the only decoration-form in the cave! For mine, this cave is in the top three show caves of the world.

And then we got to Domica Cave... The entrance is only about two kilometres on the Slovak side of the Slovak-Hungarian Border. On the other side of the border is the huge Baralda show cave. Both Domica and Baralda are part of the same cave system – indeed it is quite possible to cross the border underground! Domica is a long show cave tour, which includes an underground boat trip on its river. Highlights include some staggering decoration, particularly gours. It is also justly famous for its archeology.

When we surfaced, we had a (late afternoon...) lunch in the Visitor's Centre, and explored the profuse displays. It then came time for a parting of the ways. Bus One took all those attending the 3-day Post-Conference Excursion to Hungary (about half of all attendees, including all the Americans) and deposited them over the border before returning to Domica. Naturally there were

many fond farewells prior to their departure! No Australians were attending the Post-Conference trip. Andy and I had already 'done' Hungary six years previously, Barry was heading for the delights of the Slovenian caves, and Dan had to get home anyway. The two busses, with the remaining attendees, returned to the Hotel Druzba, dinner, and our own farewells. Andy and I, in a group of about a dozen, left in a bus at 5am(!) next morning for Vienna airport; then onto London, and home.

Well, what further can one say? The ISCA experience was fantastic. It is wonderful that our region of the world is now fully engaged. We have much to offer the world of caves to be sure, but if we learnt anything it is that it also has much to offer us in return.

Despite language differences, cultural differences and even some differences of perspective, we are all essentially 'in the same boat, trying to sing the same tune'. We all want what is best for caves and karst. We have a wonderful Australasian-wide ACKMA family, but we also have a great world-wide 'cave family' too! Let's nurture it as well!

I cannot conclude this very long monologue (sorry) without tendering our most sincere thanks the Slovak Cave Administration, and the ISCA administration, for putting together such a near-flawless Congress. Particularly, we must single out our great friends Peter Gažík and Pavel Bella (they are such lovely people!), and their staff. Nothing I can say even comes close to extolling their efforts.

See you all in Greece and Turkey in 2012, and at Jenolan in 2014!!



The 'Congress Photo'! Photo: Pavel Bella.