

Remembering Kenneth George Grimes (19 Oct. 1944–17 Aug. 2016)

Contributions for this eulogy to Ken Grimes have come from several sources, to provide a wider perspective of Ken's life and work. This composite has been edited by Rod Bird, secretary of HFNC.

Dave Munro: Ken Grime's contribution to the Hamilton Field Naturalists Club

Ken Grimes one of HFNC's long-serving and dedicated members, died in a tragic accident. He was a member of the HFNC for 25 years during which time he served for 15 as Treasurer.

Ken was a geologist who specialized in karst systems and volcanics. He had a national profile and was known and respected by his colleagues across Australia (see notes by Ian Lewis & Ian Withnall).

Ken was always willing to share his knowledge in many different ways. Not only did he deliver talks at club meetings but he wrote several articles for the Nature Notes column which featured in the Hamilton Spectator in the mid-2000s. Most of these articles concerned local volcanic features. His summary of the ages of local volcanoes created much interest. Another rather quirky article was sparked by seeing a group of windmills in a paddock in South Australia. Ken's whimsical sense of humour imagined them as a breeding colony of a rare and threatened species.

Obviously the excursions which he organised and led focussed on geology but on any other field trip whenever a rocky outcrop was encountered Ken would be asked to reveal the story hidden in the rocks. His explanations were unfailingly clear and concise. He had the ability to avoid technical terms and where he could not he would translate them into plain English.

As a photographer Ken was forever looking for features which illustrated some geological principle; something he could use in future publications or presentations. His photographic interests were not confined to rocks. He had a love of patterns, be they in sand, tree bark or lichens. He often used lichens as his subjects – again perhaps due to their close association with rocks.

Another of his skills which will be badly missed was his familiarity with digital technology. He was the club's 'go to' man for setting up the digital projector and coping with the inevitable problems associated with that technology.

Ken was computer savvy and contributed much to our web site construction and content. He was also artistic and you will see his wonderful sketches there and read his articles on landscape and geology. Ken's lasting legacy to the club may well be his cartoons. The club members are drawn as Barred Bandicoots each with its own personality. They are perceptive masterpieces of whimsy and humour. The draughtsmanship echoes the skill he used to illustrate his many papers and journal articles.

Ken was an active member of other groups, including the Yulecart CFA brigade for over 20 years. He was a frequent volunteer for regional strike teams called to fight fires in other parts of the state.

We were devastated by Ken's untimely passing and will sadly miss his quiet, learned presence, and the expertise he gave so willingly to our group and other organisations.

Janeen Samuel: notes written on Ken Grimes for the Hamilton Spectator in 2000

The boarders' house at Brisbane Grammar School in the 1960s overlooked the city's railway goods yard. It was a dreary prospect for a boy from the bush. Ken said it was the main factor behind his decision to become a geologist. "After four years of looking at that view I wanted a job that would take me back into the bush".

When he said "the bush" he was thinking of something a bit wilder than SW Victoria. His first job was in Queensland's Carpentaria Gulf Country. He was funded through Uni by a cadetship from the Queensland Mines Department, so when he graduated he worked for them. They had a joint project with the Commonwealth, mapping the geology of the Gulf region. They worked in the field in winter and spent the summers in the office compiling all the data. The summer was the wet season and it was impossible to move around. A lot of the river crossings washed out and had to be rebuilt every year.

Geological mapping means making maps that show the different types of rock. The maps are then used by exploration companies, land use planners, etc. Ken said, "We weren't looking for minerals ourselves, even when we were drilling. Of course the land-owners always wanted to know whether we'd find water. In fact some of our drill holes were converted to water bores after we'd finished".

The Gulf Country is inhospitable, hot and dry in winter, basically flat but with rugged rocky outcrops that the geologists had to get to in order to sample the rock types. Sometimes this was done by helicopter – and Ken recalled one anxious day when the helicopter had dropped him and flown off, and the pilot then couldn't relocate the spot where he'd left him. Ken was wondering whether to start walking to the nearest water when the helicopter finally turned up. Most of the travelling was done by four-wheel-drives – or on foot for the last slog up the outcrops.

Ken's early life stood him in good stead for this work. He grew up on a beef cattle property "on the flattest part of the Great Divide" about 300 km north of Brisbane. Being much younger than his brothers and sister he was virtually an only child and spent a lot of time in the bush on his own. This love of exploration was encouraged at his first school, Toowoomba Prep, where on weekends a remarkably understanding staff allowed the boarders to disappear into the scrub "down the range". "So long as we there were at least three in a party and we were back for dinner at night. Oh, and there was a rule about not stealing chooks."

At University a love of the bush and interest in geology made it natural for him to join the Bushwalking and Caving Clubs, which is how he met Janeen. "The trouble is, that made me less keen on long field trips." Communication between the Gulf and Brisbane was not easy, but there were some long phone calls when he came into town for supplies. "The Burketown post office was run by a fellow called Bert who always seemed to be in pyjamas. After he'd put me through to Brisbane" - a process that could take up to twenty minutes - "he'd go and make a cup of tea. When he'd drunk it he'd come and say "Three minutes; are you extending?" I'd say 'Yes' and he'd go and have another cuppa. I guess he knew I was phoning my girlfriend."

A highlight of the Gulf work came in 1983, when Ken was asked to help a team of zoologists from the University of New South Wales, headed by Dr Michael Archer, who were digging for fossils near Riversleigh. Using aerial photographs, he spotted a new area that looked promising for fossil deposits. He visited the site and then led the team to it, where they found fossils unlike any they had seen before. The site proved to be one of the most important in Australia, providing a record of the evolution of marsupials over 20 million years. The area is now a World Heritage site in a joint listing with the Naracoorte Caves, which contain more recent fossils. It is fitting perhaps, that Ken's first job after he came to Hamilton in 1991 involved assessing caves in South Australia's South-East.

So why did he come to Hamilton? Simple: "Janeen got a job at the Regional Veterinary Lab here." Perhaps there was more to it than that. Cuts in government spending had meant that he was rarely getting out of the office for field work. And Brisbane was getting bigger and more stressful. But what about the weather? "I was prepared for the cold. It used to get very cold in Toowoomba. But the constant wind was a bit of a shock."

Joining the Hamilton Field Naturalists was an obvious move. "Well, there wasn't a bushwalking club." Many people have enjoyed the cartoons with which he illustrated the Club's activities. He said he had always drawn; all his school books had drawings in the margins. "Once when I was sick and in the school sanatorium I got into trouble for drawing on the wall by my bed. Matron confiscated my pencil. But I found another." On field trips he would relax at weekends with a pen and sketch book, drawing old bush pubs, sheds and homesteads.

The interest that began when he joined the University caving club expanded to the point where most of Ken's work was to do with caves and karst – "karst" being the landscape where caves form and water flows underground.

Karst is a landscape that calls for sensitive management. "Cave managers have to balance the need to preserve the cave and its ecosystem with increasing pressure for tourism and recreation. We have a wonderful resource in this area," he said. "I hope we can get the balance right."

Ian Lewis, Cave Exploration Group of South Australia: remembering Ken Grimes

Amongst his many geological specialities, Ken was a 'Speleologist' and had an extensive knowledge of the formation, processes and wide variety of caves across the Australian continent. He published many papers and reports on this subject and was a highly-respected member of the Australian Speleological Federation, the Victorian Speleological Association and the Cave Exploration Group of South Australia. He produced a number of important guidebooks and scientific papers about the local lava caves in Western Victoria, the World Heritage caves at Naracoorte and the caves, sinkholes and limestone region of the South East of South Australia. His research led to the change of the sign at the Cape Bridgewater Blowholes which explains that the natural tubes along the walkway were not a 'Petrified Forest'!

More widely, Ken wrote of the geology of cave systems from Western Australia right through to Queensland. He recently produced a major authoritative book on the newly-discovered Bullita Cave systems – vast sub-tropical cave passages totalling over 150 km of passages in the remote north-western Northern Territory. His geological consultant work was important in the efforts to preserve Western District volcanoes, grasslands, caves and other landforms from damaging development, but his advice was always measured and practical.

Speleologists valued him as a great friend, an expert, and very generous with his knowledge, information and well-drafted cave maps which he made freely available to all. We all use his maps to explore and explain caves here in the South-west and in the South-east just over the border. Ken was eminent, witty and a very active cave explorer and thinker. We can't believe we have lost so suddenly such a good friend and huge contributor to our sport and science. We all know Ken and Janeen as good friends and all of us support Janeen at this time. Ken's presence will be missed enormously by the entire speleological community across Australia and this was shown by the attendance at his funeral of representatives from speleological organisations right across Australia.

Ian D Lewis
President

Ian Withnall, a former colleague of Ken, writing in the "Queensland Geologist".

While I was preparing this newsletter, the sad news came through from Janeen Samuel that Ken Grimes was killed on 17 August by a falling tree on their property near Hamilton, Victoria.

Ken joined the Geological Survey of Queensland in 1969 after graduating with Honours from the University of Queensland.



Ken on a HFNC excursion to Canunda, SA, in 1997

He was assigned to the joint BMR-GSQ team mapping the Carpentaria and Karumba Basins, where he made a major contribution to the interpretation of the Cenozoic geology and landscape development of that region. He went on to apply the expertise that he developed to areas of central and southern Queensland, such as Fraser Island. He was always ready to share his knowledge and his geological legacy lives on in the many maps he contributed to, and his influence on, those of us who adopted his approach to mapping the Cenozoic. His scheme for regolith unit compilation was used for the Geoscience Australia's 1:1M digital surface geology map of Australia (2009).

Ken left GSQ in 1990, when he and Janeen moved to western Victoria. He continued to make contributions to geology as a consultant geomorphologist specialising in karst, speleology and regolith. Ken is remembered with real affection by those he worked with at GSQ as a kind, generous and gentle person.