



CAVE & KARST WORKING GROUP (CKWG)



## NEWSLETTER #4, JANUARY 2021



Explore  
Understand  
Protect



Photo by John Gunn

**The IYCK logo and theme are here superimposed on the entrance to Skocjanske Jame in Slovenia which is a World Heritage Property, a Ramsar Site, and a Biosphere Reserve that is part of the CaveMAB network of biosphere reserves.**

*Welcome to the fourth of our irregular Newsletters providing information on activities within and relevant to the CKWG.*

*As most of you will be aware 2021 is the International Year of Caves and Karst and below we reproduce a message written by Dr. George Veni, President of the International Union of Speleology and a member of the CKWG.*

*As reported in our third newsletter, the CKWG now has a database listing sites in each of the UNESCO Protected Area categories that are thought to have caves or karst developed in carbonate or evaporite rocks. Whilst caves and karst may have been significant features when some of the PA were designated, in others managers may not be aware of the importance and vulnerability of caves and karst or even of the extent of karst within their PA. Hence, a future objective of the CKWG should be to promote links with those involved in managing sites on the four databases. A first step in this direction is to welcome the formation of the CaveMAB Network which focuses on Caves in UNESCO Biosphere Reserves. Details follow George's message.*

*The final section of the Newsletter provides news of the newly published IUCN Guidelines for Geoconservation in Protected and Conserved Areas and provides an update on progress with our other primary objective, producing revised Guidelines for Cave and Karst Protection.*

*Welcome to the International Year of Caves and Karst by George Veni*

For the first time in history, the global speleological community is united in 2021 in one grand project, the International Year of Caves and Karst (IYCK). The main goal of the IYCK is to teach the world about the many benefits of caves and karst. As I write these words, the International Union of Speleology (UIS) and its 55 member countries are joined by 84 international and national organizations as partners, and more organizations have told me they are planning to join. Several of these partners are not cave organizations, which is a success in itself. Their alliance with the UIS proves that the IYCK is seen as broadly important, and not limited to speleologists.

The greatest alliance came in September, when the UIS was invited by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to hold the Opening Ceremony of the IYCK at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. Speleology has never had such a high international stage to reach large numbers of influential national ambassadors and their governments and show them how very important caves and karst are to their countries.

Yet despite this success in partners, we are challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic. Soon after we received the UNESCO invitation, Paris was declared a COVID “red zone” and now, as 2021 begins, the situation in Paris and everywhere is worse. The Opening Ceremony will be held virtually on 26 January 2021. Watch the IYCK website ([www.uis-speleo.org](http://www.uis-speleo.org)) and UIS Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/uisspeleo>) for announcements about all IYCK events. The UIS is now working with UNESCO to schedule an IYCK celebration sometime later in 2021 as allowed by the virus.

Over the past few months, I have received many messages from people who want to organize activities of the IYCK, but don't know how because of the pandemic. One year ago, the UIS published a Planning Guide to help our members and partners develop IYCK events. Two months later, the world's activities closed because of COVID-19. As 2021 begins, following are new directions on how you and your clubs can create virtual IYCK events and conduct other valuable activities safely during the pandemic. If you have your health, a computer or phone, and some free time, you can make important contributions to the advancement of speleology while staying safe at home.

**Visit the IYCK website.** The website has a lot of general information about caves and karst. Share it with the people so they can learn more. Go to the Download page for the logo, leaflet, posters, and other materials to help you. You do not need special permission. The information is free and open to everyone. Also, remember to share the UIS Facebook page.

**Understand the IYCK goals.** The purpose of the IYCK is teach the world about caves and karst. Think about the best ways to reach people who need to know what speleologists understand. If you organize meetings for cave explorers and scientists, that is good, but it is important that they include the public too, or at least some influential people who need to learn about caves and karst. I'll give some examples below but remember to stay focused on the public.

**“International” does not always mean “big.”** Some people think that because this is the International Year, they need to plan big and complicated activities. If you can do that, excellent! But many times, several small activities can be better at reaching the public than one big event. The UIS has said from the start that you should “do what you can.” No activity is too small!

**Use virtual tools.** There are now many ways to connect with people. Use teleconference tools like Zoom to give lectures about caves and karst. Do you know teachers? Offer free lectures for their students about caves. You can do the same for meetings of non-speleological organizations. You can also record your voice in PowerPoint as you give your lecture, then load it on YouTube or social media for download. Go out into the karst with your camera or camera phone and record a field trip that you can share. For a small amount of time and effort, you can reach hundreds or thousands of people this way over the year. You can also use your virtual presentations in the ideas below.

**Call the news media.** Television, newspapers, magazines, radio, and Internet news media are always looking for something different and exciting to report. They like stories of scientific curiosity. Call and tell them about interesting discoveries and caves in your area. Show them your virtual presentation. What may not seem interesting to you could be very interesting to the media. Always connect your story to the International Year to show that caves and karst are internationally important, and that your words stand with a worldwide community that knows caves are important. Through the media, you will reach thousands of people!

**Ask for proclamations.** Many elected officials make proclamations that say they recognize an important event. Ask the mayor of your town, governor of your region, or other officials to proclaim that your town or region recognizes 2021 as the International Year of Caves and Karst! Be prepared to give a virtual presentation, as above, to explain the importance of the Year. These proclamations will get even more attention from the news media and will help with other outreach ideas below.

**Contact policymakers.** Who makes the laws in your area that protect your environment, water, ecosystems, and cultural heritage? Are their laws good at protecting caves and karst? If not, call them. Show them what they need to understand and help them develop better and more effective laws.

**Contact land managers.** Sometimes you have good protection laws, but the managers don't understand caves and karst well enough to use them properly. Some managers don't understand caves and karst are important. Teach the managers. Make them excited about caves and karst. They will become better at protecting caves and, when the pandemic is over, they may become good partners in helping you find new caves to explore!

**Call your show caves and karst parks.** The International Show Caves Association (ISCA, <https://www.i-s-c-a.org/>) supports the IYCK but not all show caves are ISCA members. Tell show caves in your area about the IYCK and ISCA. Also, contact parks in karst areas. Show caves and parks are always looking for new ways to attract tourists. By connecting them to the IYCK, they can prove their importance to the regional economy and bring in more tourists when the pandemic is over by showing they are not just local curiosities but parts of a globally recognized valuable natural resource. Also, encourage them to connect with caves and parks in other countries to develop sister-cave or sister-park relationships. If they work on that during the pandemic, it will result in more tourism, media attention, and public education later. In 2019, more than 144 million people visited show caves. Show caves are our best partners at reaching and teaching millions of people about caves and karst. Work with them!

**Work with partners.** Several of the steps above involve developing partnerships for the IYCK. Think about other partners who can join you. Of course, you will first think about speleological organizations, but then contact groups that are not involved with caves. Remember that we need to teach others about caves, so tell your local hiking, climbing, water protection, nature, archaeological, or other groups that their area has caves or is karst. Join their virtual meetings and give presentations. Help change them from groups that only use the karst to groups that understand and protect it.

**Create virtual conferences.** Conferences are usually for specialists, not the general public. If you organize a virtual conference, invite some of the people mentioned above, such as lawmakers, land managers, and others whose work affects caves and karst, but who do not understand it. Give them free registrations to the conference so they can learn and create partnerships. They probably would not join the conference if they had to pay, but their attendance at a virtual conference will cost you nothing but may gain you a lot.

**Be creative.** You are not limited to the ideas in this guide. Think of other ideas that can engage the public during the pandemic, such as art, video, and music contests for caves and karst. Create fun programs for young people on Tik Tok, Instagram, and other social media. If you are at a university, company, or organization with its own magazine and social media, send articles for posting about your cave and karst work. It will benefit the IYCK and will be good for your career. There are many other creative possibilities.

**Post your activities to the IYCK website.** It is important that you announce your events, no matter how small, on the Events page of the website. Use the Contact Us page to send your information in the format shown on the Events page. After your event, send a website or social media link, PowerPoint, PDF, or other report that describes your event's attendance, activities, and results. If you create a video, online story, or are part of a news report, send those links for posting on the Events page too. At the end of the year, we will compile all IYCK activities into one report that can be used by anyone in the years ahead to demonstrate the importance of caves and karst. This report will help future speleologists find funding and support for exploration, research, and better management of caves and karst.

Why should you help? I have been exploring and studying caves for 45 years. Every caver and cave scientist I have met has complained about damage to caves, pollution to karst aquifers, and/or loss of rare cave ecosystems and irreplaceable cultural heritage. They all want better protection, cooperation to support exploration, and funding for much needed research. Everyone wishes the public and governments understood the importance of caves and would stop damaging and destroying them. But wishes will not change anything. Action will. The International Year of Caves and Karst will.

Change will not happen quickly or in one year. But the IYCK will accelerate the rate of change so in 10-20 years we will see huge changes compared to today. The UIS Bureau has laid the foundation, but the Bureau is only 12 people. We need you to build on our foundation. Together and with the help of our partners and good use of virtual tools and the news media, we can reach tens of millions of people.

The benefits of the International Year of Caves and Karst can be enormous, but only if you get involved and invite others to help too. The theme of the Year is "Explore, Understand, Protect." Explore your communities. Help them understand the incredible value of caves and karst. With that understanding, they will join us to protect these natural treasures on and below the Earth's surface. Please join us and contact me if you have any questions ([gveni@nckri.org](mailto:gveni@nckri.org)).



## ***CaveMAB #TogetherForCaves***

CaveMAB is an informal network of biosphere reserves around the globe that treasure natural and cultural phenomena related to caves. This network is multidisciplinary and addresses the similar challenges we all face, whether social, educational, cultural, or scientific, in protecting the biodiversity of the unique cave and karst environments within the MAB program. In 2021, CaveMAB is hosting an outreach campaign to promote the understanding, exploration, and protection of the biodiversity of cave and karst environments through sustainable actions. We believe that we are stronger together and invite your biosphere reserve to join the network as well as participate in on-going collaborative projects. Specifically, we are putting together a short video highlighting cave and karst biosphere reserves and would like to see places and faces from across the globe. You can find more information about the network at [cavemab.com](http://cavemab.com) or feel free to contact one of the network coordinators listed below.

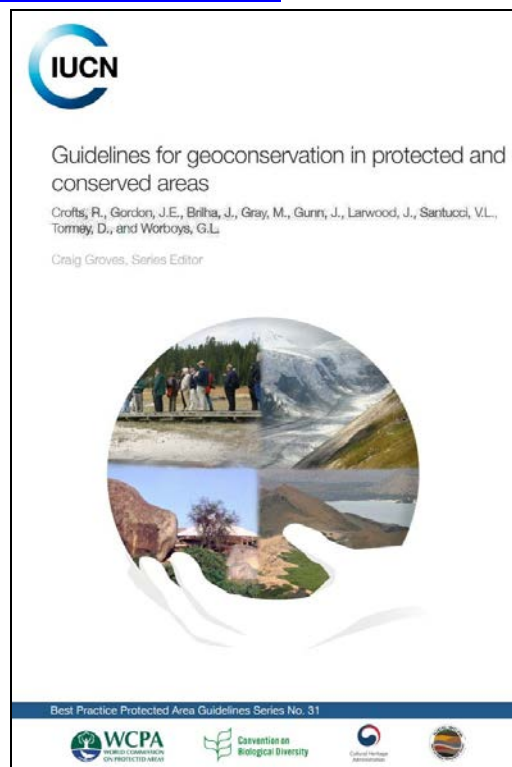
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## ***Guidelines for Geoconservation in Protected and Conserved Areas***

As many of you will already know the IUCN Guidelines for Geoconservation in Protected and Conserved Areas were published in November 2020. This is number 31 in a series of Best Practice Guidelines and the first to address the protection and conservation of geodiversity and geoheritage. The document includes chapters on general principles of geoconservation, establishing geoconservation in protected and conserved areas, geoheritage management, dealing with threats to geoheritage and on education and communication for geoconservation. Section 7.1 of the guidelines is devoted to "Karst and cave protected and conserved areas". The document is intended principally for protected area managers, staff and advisors but anyone with an interest in the conservation of cave and karst should also find it useful. The document is available as a free download from <https://doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.CH.2020.PAG.31.en>.



## *Progress with Revision of IUCN Guidelines for Cave and Karst Protection*

The Geoconservation BPG is a very important document and the section on caves and karst will provide useful information for PA managers. However, there is still a need for more detailed and targeted guidance that addresses conservation of both earth science and biological features in cave and karst areas. The CKWG is aiming to provide this advice by updating the *IUCN Guidelines for Cave and Karst Protection* which were published in 1997. This project is being undertaken with support from the International Union of Speleology as a contribution to IYCK. The aim is to have a digital publication ready for the UIS Congress in July 2021 and to subsequently approach IUCN-WCPA to seek their endorsement.

David Gillieson & John Gunn are editing the document and so far material for the sections on What is karst?; Some values of karst and caves; The special nature of karst environments and cave systems; Scales of management in karst areas and Forestry and agriculture have been received and edited. Lead authors have been identified for the sections on Scientific research; Extractive industries; Water supply; Sustainable use and occupation of karst; Traditional or indigenous use of caves and Developing effective monitoring and mitigation. However, there are three sections for which no lead author has so far been identified: Recreational and adventure caving; Tourism: surface and underground (show caves); and Urban development and infrastructure. Anyone willing to act as lead authors for those sections, or to assist in the reviewing process is invited to contact the editors: david.gillieson at unimelb.edu.au or j.gunn.1 at bham.ac.uk.

## *Future Meetings*

### **UIS 2021**

Providing Covid restrictions are lifted in time the 18th International Congress of Speleology will be held at the Savoie Mont Blanc University, Chambéry, France from 25 July to 1 August 2021. The theme of Symposium 1 is "Karst Heritage and Resources" and this is the flagship theme for the whole meeting. CKWG are involved in the organisation of this Symposium and the main meeting of CKWG in 2021 will be during the Congress.

If you want to know more then please email us.

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