

## **The Benders Quarry saga, an update.**

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Pre-September 1992 chronology of the Exit Cave saga, and discussion of mining of Mole Creek karst is described in the reference.

Mid September saw the removal of loose and crushed material from the quarry floor despite Ros Kelly's closure on Aug 20. A Huon pro-mining lobby is set up at a public meeting including three State Cabinet ministers and the Tas president of the Liberal party. Later in the month Ros Kelly quietly gives Bender the nod to blast another 25000 tonnes. Through the night of the 28th a band of Wilderness Society volunteers filled the drill holes with rubble, thus foiling the blast. On the 30th Ros Kelly decides to stop blasting again, but allowed further active mining by "mechanical means". Thus continuing disturbances at the site resulted in further clay mobilisation into the cave system directly below. Both Governments still in the mindset of eventual relocation to a highly cavernous site near Maydena; the state Mines department spent huge sums proving up this deposit gratis and exclusively for Bender.

October 2, the mining resumed, creating more siltation problems. The next day a 70 year old sawmiller is assaulted by pro-mining blockaders, "protecting" the quarrying operations. Raising the profile of the main customer of the World Heritage limestone, a peaceful protest was held the following week at the EZ gates. The two infiltrator protesters were arrested at EZ for stopping the delivery of limestone by chaining themselves to the lime hopper. Thus the alternative sources of industrial limestone were publicised. The owner of the Glenorchy quarry was persuaded to speak to the 7:30 Report advertising that he could supply all of the agricultural lime requirements of the Huon. It was publicly shown that no market was dependent on Benders supply. 3000 tonnes of the Exit karst system was removed in this month. Federal/State talks broke down over funding and Ros Kelly again announced closure of the quarry on the 30th.

The start of December saw disgruntled quarry workers, still waiting for Bender to pay them out, reveal that Bender had for the last 20 years been using the lower parts of the quarry as a refuse site for industrial waste from his Hobart-based engineering workshops. In doing so he avoided paying municipal refuse charges by backloading lime trucks on the way back from EZ. The waste includes drums of sump oil, filters, rags, machinery etc, and has been hastily buried at the lower parts of the quarry. No strategy has yet been devised to effectively deal with the problem. The State minister washed his hands of it and says it is better not to disturb the waste. He is also reluctant to prosecute against the environmental breach.

The rehabilitation plan is still only in draft form, and Ros Kelly is not implementing it, on the grounds of funding wrangling with the state; rather, waiting for the next election.... Hewson? (shudder!)

In the meantime Mole Creek is under extra pressure, now supplying the EZ requirements as an additional market, and the prospect of cavers having to defend the internationally significant Dogs Head Hill karst against mining looms ever larger.

### Reference:

M.Lichon 1992, Recent history & issues surrounding the saving of Exit Cave, and future options, *Illuminations* 1, 17-22.