Mount Etna: Mining or recreation?
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The campaign to save the limestone caves at Mount Etna, about 22 kilometres north of Rockhampton, their bats and the semi-evergreen vine thicket around them from destruction through mining is the longest environmental campaign ever waged in Australia. This paper outlines some aspects of the campaign, which sought to preserve an arresting landscape, home to some very special animals, in the face of competition from miners in an era when the economic ethos placed mining ahead of environmental concerns. The campaign began in the mid-1960s with letter-writing and other forms of lobbying, but when this proved ineffectual, and encouraged by the rise of the green movement and its successes, it turned to direct action, which included blockades and legal challenges. It ended with a formal reconciliation between the conflicted parties in 1990 and the declaration of Mount Etna as part of a national park in 2009.

Mount Etna is a prominent pyramid-shaped, cavernous peak which rises about 283.5 metres above sea level and is visible from many points in the district. Nearby are two areas that became tourist attractions: Olsen’s and Cammoo caves, and Limestone Ridge, where the main cave is known as Johannsen’s. The cavernous area was discovered by John Olsen in 1882. From 1886 he and his family conducted tours through the caves and built a hotel to house visitors overnight before they went on to the caves the next day. This was Rockhampton’s first tourist venture. Recreation reserves were proclaimed over part of Mount Etna (R 444) and on adjacent Limestone Ridge (R 272) in 1920. The area, known as The Caves, attracted visitors because of Mount Etna’s shape and prominence in the landscape, the vegetation, the beautiful formations within the caves, and the escape from the summer heat. The potential for adventure was not exploited until the 1960s, when the caves were first explored by speleologists.

Recreation reserves did not preclude the granting of mineral leases, and within five years mining was in progress on these reserves. Mineral Lease (ML) 200 was granted in November 1925: the mining was for guano, which was removed from Johannsen’s and Bee Caves on R 272. The grant of the mining lease provoked the Evening News to express the fear that Mount Etna’s beauty could be affected. When geologist FW Whitehouse reported on ‘Limestone and Guano Deposits of Mount Etna’, he pointed out that guano mining

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improved conditions for recreational visitors, while limestone mining made the caves unsafe. Between 1928 and 1933 guano was mined in Cammoo Cave by M Forster. In 1935 Berserker Pilkington applied for ML 236 on R 272 and in 1939 for ML 243 on Limestone Ridge. The District Geologist, JH Reid, considered in a memo to the Chief Geologist on 23 March 1939 that limestone on R 444 might be exploited and that the mountain did not warrant reservation for scenic purposes. These decisions, which gave primacy to mining over other considerations, created a situation where conflict became inevitable.

During World War II Johannsen’s Cave was used as a munitions store and Mount Etna became a secret training base for commando troops of Z Special Unit. When this usage ceased, Pilkington extended his interest and mined limestone from 1948 in an area known as Pilkington’s Quarry.

The Caves attracted local visitors for more than 50 years before the first trip to Mount Etna by a caving group from Brisbane was made in 1958. This group later disbanded and was replaced by the University of Queensland Speleological Society (UQSS) which discovered _Miniopterus_ (Little Bent-Winged) bats in Bat Cleft in 1962. In 1964 UQSS sent a report, ‘The need for conservation of caves in the Mt Etna district, Queensland’, prepared by Elery Hamilton-Smith for the Australian Speleological Federation, to the ministers of government departments involved and to the National Parks Association. Other efforts were made to protect Mount Etna and exploit its potential for tourism. The Rockhampton Branch of the Young Liberals Movement believed it to be a ‘magnificent natural scenic attraction ... [with] enormous tourist potential’, a view that was not supported by the Director-General of Tourist Services, who, after an inspection of one cave in the system, determined it would require considerable finance to make the cave available to tourists and that Olsen’s Caves and Forster’s Caves, then being opened, served the purpose. Tourism, as perceived by the government, apparently demanded facilities such as were being developed in the south-east and the more spectacular areas of Queensland; notions of nature-based or adventure tourism were then rare and unacknowledged by the tourism bureaucracy.

The discovery of bats occupying caves on Mount Etna was the trigger for the conservation campaign. Of particular concern was Bat Cleft, a maternity cave for _Miniopterus_, which was

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3 Caffyn, ‘Historical outline’, p. 85.
4 Caffyn, ‘Historical outline’, p. 86.
5 Caffyn, ‘Historical outline’, p. 88.
6 Rockhampton Branch Young Liberals Movement, 6 May 1965, to the Minister for Labour and Industry, forwarded to Minister for Mines, Queensland State Archives (QSA), series 9187 Item ID 294241.
7 Caffyn, ‘Historical outline’, pp. 88–93; Department of Primary Industries to General Manager, CQC, 11 March 1965, Central Queensland Cement (CQC) Records, File B. The records of CQC are at the office of Cement Australia, Rockhampton.
in a vulnerable position on a mining lease, and this prompted UQSS to seek local interest in its protection. The group also found the Ghost Bat, *Macroderma gigas*, in some of the caves where it over-wintered. The Rockhampton & District Field Naturalists Club visited Johannsen's Cave and some caves on Mount Etna in 1965 and expressed its concern, but its members were not adventure cavers. UQSS then encouraged the formation in 1967 of the Central Queensland Speleological Society (CQSS). Under the chairmanship of RM Kersey, who farmed in The Caves district, and with Kelvin Olsen as secretary, one of its first decisions was to explore the possibilities of a national park. It also decided to write to Central Queensland Cement Ltd (CQC) and Mount Morgan Mining Company Limited, which had ML 306 on Limestone Ridge, seeking formal permission to enter caves.

The forerunner of CQC, Hartley Investments Pty Ltd, was formed by Rockhampton businessmen in July 1959, and changed its name on 21 October. Economic development was the priority of the state government and Rockhampton City Council, and a cement plant was welcomed. The limestone that Berserker Pilkington had quarried on Limestone Ridge was crushed and turned into lime used in sugar milling, and after Pilkington's leases were taken over by Mount Morgan Limited it was used as a flux in the smelting process. CQC would market the Mount Etna limestone for building; it was near white, attracting a premium price.

Mining leases were granted to CQC between 1960 and 1967. Limestone mining lease 340, transferred to CQC on 9 April 1962, had conditions set out in the First Schedule: that a barrier of not less than one chain in width had to be left between the mine workings and known major entrances of caves inhabited by the rare bat *Macroderma gigas* and that the mine workings had to be directed so that intersection with branches of those caves was unlikely. Bats were protected under the *Fauna Conservation Act 1952*.

In 1965 the Department of Primary Industries, prompted by enquiries from the Australian Speleological Federation (ASF), wrote to CQC to suggest that the company avoid mining caves and leave buffer areas around mine entrances. The company agreed to these conditions but refused to comply with the request to notify a speleological expert of the discovery of a cave. Moreover, it insisted that only employees of the company be allowed on freehold or leasehold land, which was a breach of the regulations of the Recreation Reserve.

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8 C Vallis, President Rockhampton & District Field Naturalists' Club, to *Morning Bulletin (MB)*, May 1965, undated press clipping, in Club scrapbooks, CQ University, Capricornia Collection.
9 Central Queensland Cement (CQC), Correspondence, Mines Department, file E. The records of CQC are at the office of Cement Australia, Rockhampton.
10 Department of Primary Industries to General Manager, CQC, 11 March 1965, CQC records A1, folio 5411.
11 Jones to Inspector of Mines Rockhampton, 23 June 1965, CQC records A1 folio 5404.
Efforts to save Mount Etna from mining continued through 1967–1969. The speleologists made the most of their connections with reputable scientists. Dr PD Dwyer of the Department of Zoology at the University of Queensland made three trips to Mount Etna to survey the bat population. His report in April 1967 was the first scientific study of bats at Mount Etna.¹² He noted that Bat Cleft served as a major breeding cave for both *Miniopterus schreibersii* and *Miniopterus australis*, and estimated that about 100,000 adult females moved to Bat Cleft each year to give birth and rear their single young. Mining was then about a quarter of a mile from Bat Cleft and he considered its destruction inevitable if mining continued. He also noted the presence of *Macroderma gigas*.¹³ In 1975 the Department of Environment and Conservation agreed to fund the Capricornia Institute of Advanced Education (CIAE) to employ a research fellow for two and a half years to study *M. gigas*, the project to be supervised by Dr Dwyer with assistance from officers of the Department of Primary Industries.¹⁴ A request from the Director of the CIAE that John Toop be allowed access was refused by CQC; nevertheless, he made an exhaustive study over many years, which established the presence of these bats and the importance of the caves to them.¹⁵ His report was ‘lost’ by government agencies and discounted by the CQC, but it survives. In March 1967 blasting revealed Resurrection Cave with its exceptional formations, and Don Woodcroft, the then manager, recommended to the company board that all persons be banned from entry and that no statements should be made to societies or to the media.¹⁶ The company adopted this policy and adhered to it for more than 20 years in the face of increasing pressure from speleologists and conservationists. The policy marked a deterioration of relations with conservationists and many in the local community, but it could not suppress knowledge of the caves and their fauna.

The testimony of scientists gave credibility to UQSS and its members were able to negotiate with government with some sophistication. Moreover, a policy committee, formed in June 1969, recommended that the former aim of removing CQC from Mount Etna was outdated, and that the policy needed to accommodate mining while protecting the caves. Two members met with officials from the Mines Department and National Parks in August 1969 and reported: ‘[a] better image was presented ... as we were both remarkably well dressed

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¹³ Dwyer, ‘Rockhampton caves’.

¹⁴ UQSS records, box 1646.22.

¹⁵ A Appleton to DE Woodcroft, 6 February 1976, CQC records, A1, folio 5344.

¹⁶ Woodcroft to Board, 18 October 1967, CQC records file A, folio F5419.
and got on well with all concerned'. However, UQSS had to leave much of the campaign to CQSS: Elery Hamilton-Smith found that:

part of the problem of this campaign was that after a long and agonizing drive from Brisbane [probably eight hours or more], there is little time to do other than focus on the caves which were the object of the visit ... very few speleologists ... have visited ... the summit of Mount Etna with its splendid panoramic view ... the forest ... or a number of other features which make this a very attractive and valuable area. An issue UQSS had sought to clarify was whether 'a mining lease over a recreation reserve gives the [lease] holder the right to stop the general public from entering the reserve immediately adjacent to a quarry site'. The Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Protection Association, through its 'Save Mount Etna Caves' sub-committee, pursued the issue, submitting to the Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate that Mount Etna should be preserved and mining stopped and that Mount Etna should be set aside as a recreation reserve and be included in a national park. It wanted the legal status clarified, and argued that the position whereby mining was accorded preference over all other land uses should be challenged through a national education campaign and that the Australian government should exert its influence to amend the state mining laws. Mining law was the topic of a seminar held by the Capricorn Conservation Council in March 1974, its objective being to change the law and preserve Mount Etna and similar places. The recreation reserve survived until June 1977, when it was rescinded.

This period coincided with the Country Party (National Party from 1974) premiership of Johannes Bjelke-Petersen, premier from August 1968 until December 1987. Bjelke-Petersen quickly confirmed his position and his power was unchallenged, the opposition Labor Party making no electoral gains until 1978. Pro-development, Bjelke-Petersen saw Queensland as a quarry to be exploited for profit, and allied himself and state-run enterprises, such as the State Government Insurance Office, with big business. He was supported until 1980 by Ron Camm, his Minister for Mines.

The conservation viewpoint in these early stages of the Mount Etna dispute was put by CQSS, UQSS, the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (WPSQ) and the Rockhampton & District Field Naturalists' Club. The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), the Queensland Conservation Council and the Capricorn Conservation Council, formed in 1973, also took up the cause. In contrast to UQSS, with a membership largely of

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17 Mount Etna policy committee, UQSS records, box 1646.20.
18 E Hamilton-Smith, 'Conservationists and their blind spots', paper delivered at the 11th Biennial Convention, Australian Speleological Federation, December 1976, UQSS records, box 1646.22.
19 P Caffyn to Department of Mines, 11 April 1969, UQSS records, box 1646.20.
20 Capricorn Conservation Council Seminar, 23 March 1974, UQSS records, box 1648.3.
21 Queensland government gazette (QGG), 18 June 1977, p. 1017.
22 CQC records A1, folio 5398, 18 January 1968.
university students and staff, Rockhampton cavers were not scientists or necessarily 'greenies'. They were young men and a few young women seeking recreation and adventure, who took up the role of bat protection to preserve the caves. The campaign in the early 1970s was one of letter-writing and lobbying politicians, rarely reaching beyond the local media and the speleological fraternity. A novel suggestion was made in 1975 when the artist Christo was 'wrapping' landscape features. Randall Champion wrote to Christo: 'We wondered if you would be interested in putting a big Bandage over the sore, quarried, sector of the mountain. This would greatly assist in bringing the issue before the public.' The artist replied that he liked the idea and was eager to help the environment, but nothing came of it.\(^{23}\) CQSS became an incorporated society to better manage legal action and, together with its allies, formed the Mount Etna Committee. It therefore had connections with the principal conservation bodies active in Queensland, although the campaign was still driven from Rockhampton, and when direct action began it called on help from green groups from northern New South Wales who had gained experience defending the rainforests. As the bats' vulnerable conservation status became known, the bats, protected under the *Fauna Act*, became the speleologists' most valuable allies.

The mining company CQC was well connected with Queensland industry and with the government. It was majority-owned by Queensland Cement and Lime (QCL), a third branch being North Queensland Cement. Eleven men held all 18 positions on the company boards, which could shift profits from one firm to another and fix prices. A large customer for lime was the sugar industry, adding to QCL's key position in the Queensland economy. Shares were tightly held, with Suncorp, a government instrumentality, holding 22.5 percent of shares in QCL.\(^{24}\) The government granted QCL a monopoly in 1981, when it would be the only producer of cement in Queensland and its cement alone would be use in all state government construction contracts and all semi-government and local authority works financed from loan funds. No crown land or owned or leased wharves below the high-water mark could be used to establish a cement works without Cabinet approval, a position tested but not broken when Adelaide Brighton Cement Co attempted to establish itself in Queensland.\(^{25}\)

Between 1971 and 1974, in response to the conservationists' continuing pressure, various proposals went between the Department of Mines and the company, which resulted in an agreement in November 1973 whereby CQC would surrender ML 236 and 243 on Limestone

\(^{23}\) Randall Champion to Christo, 13 June 1975, and Christo to R Champion, 24 July 1975, UQSS records, box 1651.3.
\(^{24}\) ALP Green Network Newsletter, November 1988, CQSS records, box R2/1632.2.
\(^{25}\) Department of Harbours & Marine to the Secretary, Harbour Board Townsville, 2 April 1981, CQSS records, box 1634, file 1.4 and 'Not a year for locals', *Courier-Mail (CM)*, 20 November 1978.
Ridge (which were never in the company’s mining plan). Conditions were attached: that it had a clear right to mine its Mount Etna leases, that the one-chain limit be removed, mining leases were to be renewed on expiry on these terms, and CQC was to have prior access to further areas. In 1976 Limestone Ridge was then proclaimed a national park (excluding portion 132, a CQC freehold) and Mount Morgan Limited voluntarily relinquished its lease, having no further interest in limestone. But this gain was accompanied by a loss, for, prompted by questions from conservationists about the status of the recreation reserve, the government rescinded R 444 in June 1977.26 According to Don Woodcroft, ‘Jack Woods [a company director and former Director of the Mines Department] had a hand in instigating this as a measure to circumvent claims of recreational value, etc.’

Nine members of the ASF visited The Caves in June 1979, when Glen Pure, conservation secretary of UQSS, declared that the Rockhampton area should be declared a ‘a national environmental disaster area’, because of the threats to the wetlands from the Iwasaki development, the proposed oil mining on the Great Barrier Reef and the limestone mining at Mount Etna.28 CQSS continued to hold monthly meetings, weekend trips and safety and training days, naming and mapping caves its members discovered, but its secretary reported that ‘caving is at an all time low, and could at best be described as spasmodic’.29 By 1987 the pace of activity had accelerated and the focus sharpened with a new secretary, Craig Hardy, and 37 active members. Three times a week, from November to December, the group led tours to Bat Cleft to view the spectacular emergence flight of the Little Bent-Winged Bats as they flew off to feed in the evenings. The tours were free, but donations were welcomed. Printed T-shirts were for sale, and the group also had pre-prepared letters in support of the preservation of Bat Cleft, which visitors could sign, to be posted by CQSS members. By 1985 Bat Cleft Tours had earned $688.00, and a video was in production.

The mining company appeared to have control of the situation but was then shocked when Mount Etna and Limestone Ridge were proposed for listing in the Register of the National Estate.30 Although listing would not prevent the company continuing to mine, the company was aware of the damage to its public relations. To counter the conservationists’ claims, CQC commissioned engineers and environmental consultants Oceanics Australia to investigate the bats at Mount Etna, instructing them ‘that any expert opinion retained must

26 CQC records, company reports and accounts, book 1, ‘Mt Etna Limestone deposit: brief history’, folio 392 and QGG, 18 June 1977, p. 1017.
29 J Simmons to W Paul, UQSS records, box 1646.23.
be *independent* (author’s italics) and in no way sympathetic to the cause espoused by opponents of our limestone mining operations at Mt Etna’.\(^{31}\)

That study started in May 1980 and the final report, based on a study of less than two months, was ready to give to an Australian Heritage Commission (AHC) Consultative Group which visited on 17 and 18 July 1980.\(^{32}\) The group inspected 15 caves, but the real issue was Bat Cleft. The company vigorously lobbied against listing, with the support of the Queensland premier, who said that Queensland needed ‘no help on heritage’ and pointed to his government’s actions in trebling the size of gazetted national parks.\(^{33}\) However, the listing on the National Estate Register went ahead, thus giving the Commonwealth government an interest in Mount Etna.

Without bat occupation of Bat Cleft, the company might have averted listing on the heritage register. It investigated a number of possible steps to move the bats and installed a thermal barrier three metres high.\(^{34}\) Its purpose, to raise the temperature within the chamber and thereby encourage the bats to leave, was judged by Dr RL Hughes, president of the Australian Mammal Society, as ‘not scientifically responsible or in the best interests of conservation’.\(^{35}\) CQSS members carefully dismantled the barrier in early November and placed it against the cave wall. Dr Peter Dwyer from the University of Queensland also objected to the wall, which would interfere with the early flight trials of juveniles, and called it ‘irresponsible’.\(^{36}\)

Pressure from conservation groups, constant media releases published in the *Courier-Mail* and the Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin* and questions in both state parliament and federal parliament kept the Mount Etna issue simmering. In May 1987 the Mines Department recommended to the minister that CQC be pressed for its mining plan, be requested not to mine near Bat Cleft while it served as a maternity cave, and be urged to cooperate with the National Parks Department in a study of Bat Cleft. The mine manager, Robin Town, recommended to the board that it approve, as a working plan, the 30-year plan which involved expansion of the current working area with an 80-metre buffer zone around Bat

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\(^{31}\) DE Woodcroft, Manager, 31 March 1980, to Oceanics Australia, CQC records, file H, folio H21.


\(^{33}\) *Courier-Mail*, 4 December 1980, and CQC records, file H2, folio 100.


\(^{35}\) RL Hughes to CQC and the Co-ordinator-General’s Department, 11 March 1983, CQC records, file A, folio 5497.

\(^{36}\) Oceanics Australia to CQC, 14 February 1983, CQC records, file A, folio 5499.
Cleft, without any guarantees being given for Bat Cleft or any of the other caves on Mount Etna, and that any study proposal by National Parks should be discouraged.37

Politicians, parks administrators and prominent conservationists visited Mount Etna in 1987, when Queensland politics were in turmoil. CQC’s manager, Robin Town, in his regular report to the company board on conservation matters for January 1987, reported these visits and discussions and listed his new concerns: the local Member of Parliament was sympathetic to conservationists, the National Parks and Wildlife Department was involved for the first time, and its senior officers were clearly interested. He considered that the government politicians ‘are novices in this matter and have the simplistic view that guaranteeing Bat Cleft would defuse the issue entirely’.38 This proposal and other confidential discussions led to an offer from CQC to surrender ML 326, to ensure the future of Bat Cleft and over 86 percent of the known caves on Mount Etna. The area would be covered by a Reserve for Departmental and Official Purposes under the joint trusteeship of the Minister for Mines and the Minister for National Development, and would allow access to the caves over vacant crown land, removing any need for the public to cross company leases or its private land.39 A new mining plan recommended the extension of current workings, but with the preservation of a buffer around Bat Cleft; however, there was no buffer around Elephant Hole or Speaking Tube caves, which the cavers claimed were the habitats of *Macroderma gigas*, a claim denied by CQC.40 Negotiations with the government proceeded for some months, unknown to the cavers.

At this stage direct action might have been avoided, but the conservationists, aware of movement on the mine site towards Bat Cleft, stepped up their activity, and direct action began. On 12 December members of CQSS, including Craig Hardy, now the conservation secretary, filled CQC drill holes with concrete, while being filmed by the media which had been invited along. The company began legal action in the Mining Warden’s Court to recover damages of $2,000 and to prevent the trespassers, who had been identified, from again entering CQC mining leases.41 It welcomed the Queensland premier, Mike Ahern, with his Minister for the Environment, Geoff Muntz, in January 1988, the occasion for the surrender of ML 326. The manager believed:

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37 General Manager CQC to the General Manager QCL, 20 May 1987, CQC records, file F, folio F115a.
38 RJ Town, ‘Conservation matters, Jan. 1987’, CQC records, company reports and accounts book 1, folio 615.
39 Town to Department of Mines, 12 January 1988, CQC records, file E, folio 289 E108.
40 Mount Etna Mining Plan, February 1987, CQC records, company reports and accounts book 1, folio 616.
41 Manager’s report, conservation issues, December 1987, CQC records, company reports and accounts book 1, folio 620.
Whilst a residue of ill-feeling against the company exists among the hard-line ‘greenies’, it seems that they will no longer have the influence they once did over public opinion and certainly not over the Government view.\(^42\)

The management was mistaken. The political climate was changing. Bjelke-Petersen had resigned in December 1987 and Premier Mike Ahern was leading a government tarnished by scandal. A new Mines Minister, Martin Tenni, was appointed. The Mount Etna dispute had become more than a local issue and was attracting supporters experienced in Green activism.

CQSS was stepping up its campaign. On 3 April 1987 a meeting between CQSS, the Capricorn Conservation Council and WPSQ was held to discuss tactics. The meeting suggested increased publicity, involving well-known environmentalists, and getting more articles into newspapers, with a less hostile approach to QCC and CQC.\(^43\) The groups formed the Mount Etna Committee to avoid any legal action against its members. Hardy met some experienced Green activists, including a member of the Colong Cave Committee who gave him a campaigning kit that influenced his planning. Matthew Jameson from the Wilderness Society visited Rockhampton and Mount Etna, and took the issue back to Bob Brown. Hardy discussed with these people the adoption of eco-terrorist tactics, but concluded that they were not appropriate; they might achieve a tactical victory but not a strategic one; and deliberate destruction was off-limits.\(^44\) On 25 August 1987 Bob Brown visited Rockhampton and inspired CQSS to believe in their ability to achieve success. He encouraged Chris Harries from the Wilderness Society in Hobart, a leading activist from the Lake Pedder and Franklin campaigns, to come to Rockhampton. From discussions with Brown, Harries and others, Craig Hardy learned about activist tactics, including sit-ins. CQSS also invited Patrick Larkin to Rockhampton, then a young solicitor, for advice on ‘does and don’ts’.\(^45\)

Hardy’s careful consideration of tactics led him to decide that blockades were the means to change public opinion. He saw their value on the Franklin — not that they protected anything, but that they caught the public’s attention. Hardy said CQSS was initially ‘petrified’ of blockades, as he was, and conscious of the personal risk that he could go to jail.\(^46\) Peter Berrill, the president of CQSS, found it ‘pretty scary stuff ... we all came from Rockhampton, very conservative, lot of rednecks, and we’d never done this before, it was all new to us ... but we were committed’.\(^47\)

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\(^42\) Manager’s report, January 1988, CQC records, company reports and accounts book 1, folio 621.
\(^43\) CQSS records, Mount Etna Committee, file 1647/2.
\(^44\) Hardy interview with Gistitin, 22 February 2007.
\(^45\) Berrill interview with Gistitin, 4 August 2007.
\(^46\) Hardy interview with Gistitin, 22 February 2007.
\(^47\) Berrill interview with Gistitin, 4 August 2007.
Two blockades, a cave sit-in, a moratorium on mining near the caves by CQC and on protest action by the Mount Etna Committee, the well-publicised destruction of caves and the killing of bats made this a long and bitter finale to a complex campaign. Legal action and a change of management of QCL coincided with a change in public attitude, followed by a change of government. QCL became a wholly owned subsidiary of a Swiss company, the Holderbank Group, which by 1993 had completed a draft rehabilitation strategy for Mount Etna and in 1998 issued its first Environmental Report and won the Premier’s Award for Environmental Excellence. In 2009 Mount Etna was added to the Capricorn Caves National Park.

The cavers who fought for Mount Etna from the 1960s are now middle-aged men and women who bear the scars of the battle. Kerry Hamilton, member and unofficial historian of CQSS, has written that the campaign hurt a lot: ‘what hurt most of all was the alienation, the being set apart from friends, from employers, from promotion and from family in many cases’. Moreover, the campaign removed opportunities to enjoy their chosen recreation. They now rarely go caving, but are committed to a vigilant watch over Mount Etna.

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