

VALE ELERY HAMILTON-SMITH AM: A LESSON in not LIMITING OURSELVES

Dennis Williamson

**This is an amended version of the eulogy delivered by Dennis Williamson
at Elery's memorial service on 1 July 2015.**

A Renaissance Man Passes By

Professor Elery Hamilton-Smith AM was a remarkable Australian and a good friend who passed away on 27 June at Westgarth Aged Care Centre, following 18 months of illness. I am very honoured by his family in being asked to give this eulogy for Elery at his memorial service, held at St. Francis Church in Melbourne on 1 July. Again, my heartfelt condolences go to his wife Angela, Elery's five living children and his extended family and close friends. We are all going to miss him greatly.

Nearly 200 friends, colleagues and family gathered at the memorial service, even though it was held at relatively short notice. His long-time friend and Nullarbor explorer, Father Ken Boland, officiated. His other long term friend and speleologist, Andy Spate, also delivered a tribute. And, I understand that hundreds of emails and social media messages of sympathy have flowed to the family from around the world. This typifies the mark of the man.

Elery was well known throughout Australia, and the world, for his significant contribution to the fairly diverse fields of youth work, social work, cave and karst exploration, parks and leisure research, and World Heritage Area assessment and management.

In some ways, I think Elery may be one of a dying breed of "Renaissance Men" born during the last century. More than that, however, Elery set a great example of why none of us should limit ourselves in terms of our interests, our fields of work, whom we collaborate with and what we can achieve for the world around us.

Elery's Early Days

Having been born during 1929 into a family of Unitarians in Shady Grove, South Australia (near Handorf), Elery moved with his parents southeast to a larger farm at Tooperang in 1938. Elery grew up as the only child of Thorald and Elizabeth Smith. He was later to add his middle name, "Hamilton", to his surname with a hyphen during the 1950s for personal reasons.

Elery told me that he was a rather sickly child who was not well enough to go to school until he was 9 years old. As such, he was home-schooled by his parents and learned to read fairly early in life. He devoured whatever



newspaper stories and books came his way. And he was encouraged in his reading and learning by an Aboriginal family friend, David Unaipon – the man whose face graces the Australian \$50 note.

At Tooperang, Elery used to walk two miles (3 km) to attend the small one-teacher Nangkita School - Nangkita being an Aboriginal name for "Lots of Little Frogs". As it was to turn out, Elery was a big frog in a small pond at that stage. His walks through the forests and woodlands on his way to and from school had a great influence on Elery's later interest in bushwalking and nature.

After his graduation from Victor Harbou

r High School near the end of 1946, Elery spent a short time at the University of Adelaide during 1947. However, at the age of 19, he wasn't ready to settle into further studies and he moved about Australia working at

different jobs, including rabbit-shooter, tree-faller, and truck driver.

Elery's Further Education, Career and Explorations of Caves

From 1949 through 1956, Elery held several positions as an outdoor education teacher and youth worker in the Adelaide area with Scotch College, the Industrial School for the Social Welfare Department and with Prince Alfred College.

In 1950, Elery enrolled part-time in the University of Adelaide's Social Work, completing his Diploma in 1956.

During this time, Elery served as a Senior Scout leader and also began early exploration of cave systems in South Australia with friends. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Cave Exploration Group of South Australia (CEGSA), the Nullarbor Expeditions, and the



Elery - 1954



1954 Nullarbor Expedition

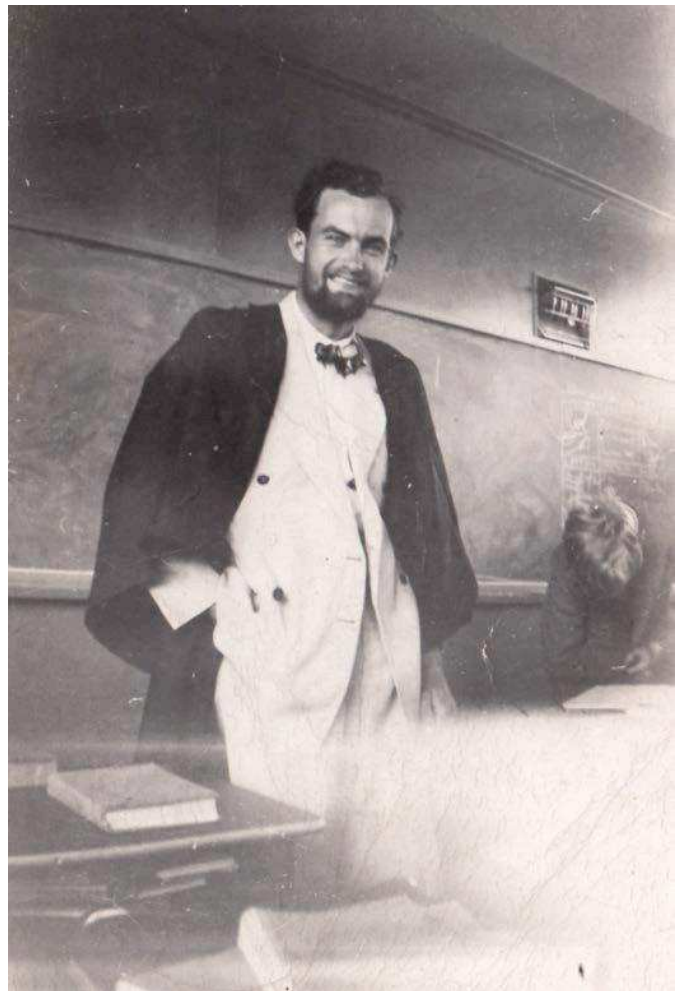
First National Conference of the Australian Speleological Federation (ASF).

It was also during this time that Elery began his penchant for documenting his various adventures with the Scouts and his discoveries in the South Australian Caves by writing articles for scouting and caving organisation journals and newsletters. He also wrote reviews of various social work and natural history books. This was just the beginning of what would accumulate through his lifetime in well over 800 such contributions, including books that he co-edited and consultant reports for a range of clients.

Major Streams of Elery's Professional Life

At this point, I will diverge from a strictly chronological account of Elery's life to the four streams of his professional life and career. The principal areas in which Elery made highly significant impacts include:

- Social Sciences, including Social Work, Community Development, Youth Work,



Early days

Gerontology and Dementia

- Caves and Karst Geology and, broadly, Cave Zoology throughout Australia and the World
- Recreation and Leisure Planning and Research
- Protected Area and Park Management of the World's Natural and Cultural Landscapes

At first glance, a person might think some of these are somewhat divergent topics, but to Elery they were very much inter-related at various times.

The Social Sciences

As we have seen, Elery was involved with youth work and social work through the Scouts and in teaching outdoor education at secondary colleges from about 1949 to 1956-57.

Elery undertook a major shift in his life when he moved to Melbourne during 1957 to participate in the Family Centre Project with Brotherhood of St. Laurence – a non-profit Anglican organisation dedicated to assisting people in poverty.

Elery established himself as one of the ground-breakers in Australian social work, youth work and community development during the next decade. His various roles included:

- part-time lecturer in Social Work at the University of Melbourne
- Development Officer with the Victorian Association of Youth Clubs (VAYC)
- assistance with the development of a new Ministry of Social Welfare by the Victorian State Government

During the late 1960s, Elery established CPS Services (Community Planning & Survey Services) where he worked with local governments such as Stawell, Springvale, and Nunawading on a wide range of social and community development issues. Elery was instrumental to the founding of the Victorian Association of Professional Youth Workers and the Sociological Association. He served as State and Federal President of the Australian Association of Social Workers. Elery also advised several foreign governments on social development through CPS, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the UNESCO Youth Research and Policy program. This phase was gradually displaced by Elery's move into professional consulting. From 1967 through 1977, Elery's reputation in the field of social work grew. His work took him around the globe to Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Papua New Guinea (PNG), and New Zealand.

Over the following 17 years, from 1977 to 1994, Elery shifted into academia, becoming a lecturer at Preston, which became Phillip Institute of Technology (PIT), where Elery was later promoted to head of the Leisure Studies

Department. Phillip Institute was absorbed into RMIT University during 1992, where Elery worked in the Leisure, Ageing and Wellness Unit.

During his academic years, Elery was a visiting or guest Professor at 15 international Universities, from Europe to Canada, the USA and New Zealand. Over the course of his professional life from the 1950s, Elery wrote and edited a great volume of professional journal articles, professional association newsletter articles, professional reports, books, and book reviews, numbering in their hundreds.

Fortuitously or ironically – as Elery suffered this affliction himself in his final few years - it was during this time that Elery commenced research on Dementia Care and on the Social Construction of Ageing. During 1992, he co-authored, with David Hooker and Margaret James, the Occasional Paper through RMIT University titled: *Granny is a Bit Strange: The Medicalisation of Dementia*.

Following his retirement in 1994, Elery continued his work on a range of social, community and gerontology issues as a Professor or Professorial Fellow at:

- WLRA International Centre of Excellence (Wageningen, The Netherlands)
- Lincoln Gerontology Centre, LaTrobe University.

He focussed on issues associated with dementia and prepared, with Sally Garratt and other colleagues,:

- *Rethinking Dementia: An Australian Approach*, 2001
- *Teaching about Dementia Teaching*, 1997 (Multi-media Kit with Sally Garratt)
- *A Collection of Readings on Dementia* (three editions)

During his career in social work and community development, Elery helped to establish or served in several significant organisations, in particular:

- the Victorian Association of Professional Youth Workers
- the Sociological Association, and
- served as State and Federal President of the Australian Association of Social Workers.

Caves and Karst

Caves and karst were one Elery's greatest areas of interest and his lifelong passion.

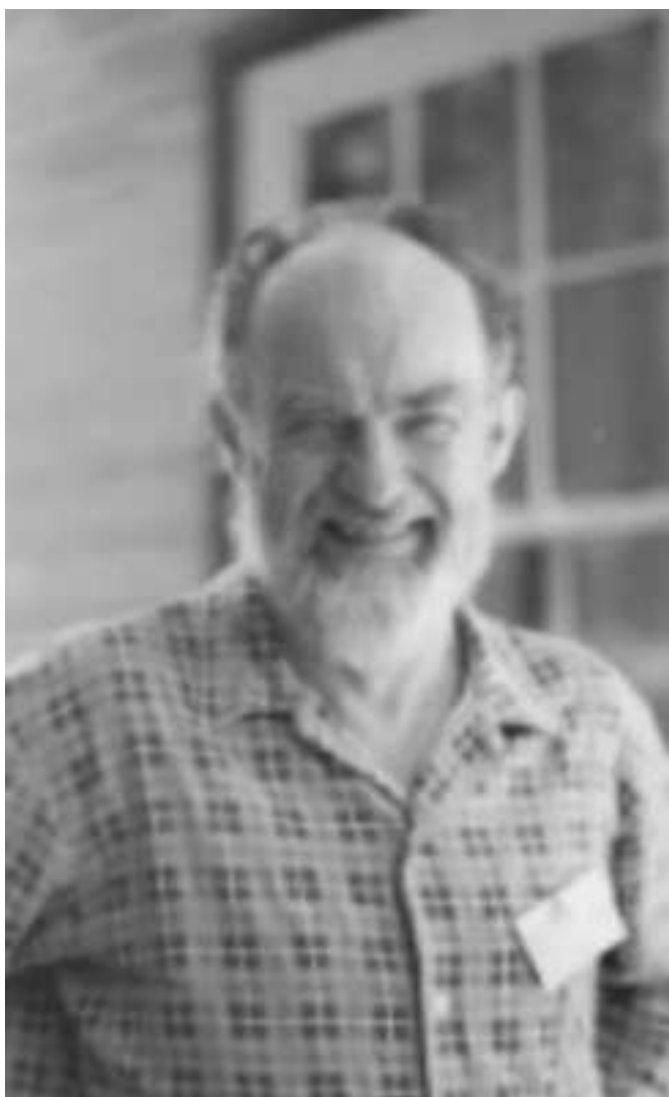
First, for those of you who may not know what karst is – a simple definition is that it refers to landscapes or terrain that are largely a product of rock material that has been or is being dissolved by water or otherwise shaped by the processes of solution. More broadly, Elery regarded karst as an integrated and dynamic system of

landforms, life, energy, water, gases, soils and bedrock. Caves are typical karst features, but not always so.

Another strange word you will hear a lot in discussions of Elery is “speleology”, which is simply the scientific study or exploration of caves.

Elery’s initial interest in caves began during the 1950s in South Australia with a group of friends with whom he used go bushwalking and climbing. They needed to try something new and began exploring caves and their contents around South Australia.

From this time on, Elery organised and participated in



Elery at Jenolan Caves, New South Wales - 1985

various cave expeditions throughout Australia and in a host of countries internationally.

Cave bats and invertebrate fauna, particularly spiders, became an area of great interest to Elery.

Elery was instrumental in the establishment of a range of cave and karst exploration and scientific organisations and events. Some of these included:

- the Cave Exploration Group of SA
- Nullarbor Expeditions
- the First National Conference of the Australian Speleological Federation (ASF)
- Victorian Cave Exploration Society in the 1960s - now the Victorian Speleological Association (VSA)
- Australian Cave and Karst Management Association in 1987 (ACKMA)
- the Australasian Commission on Cave Tourism and Management
- IUCN Advisory Group on Chiroptera Caving.

Some key roles that Elery played in the cave and karst field included:

- Chair, IUCN Task Force Cave & Karst
- Executive Officer, Australian Cave and Karst Management Association (ACKMA)
- Editorial Board, International Journal of Speleology

Some important contributions that Elery made to the cave and karst literature included:

- the “Biospeleological Collection” in 1962 at the South Australian Museum
- *The Arthropoda of Australian Caves*, 1967 in the Journal of Australian Entomology Society
- *Guidelines for Cave and Karst Protection* in 1997 with John Watson, David Gillieson and Kevin Kiernan for the World Commission on Protected Areas and the World Conservation Union (IUCN)

Elery was one of the early explorers of caves in Australia, leading the way in their analysis, protection and management. He has even had at least three species of cave fauna named after him (e.g., Cave Bats: *Mormopterus eleryi*, *Murina eleryi*; and the Pseudoscorpion: *Pseudotyrannochthonius hamiltonsmithi*).

Elery carried his work widely around the globe and became highly regarded as a world expert on caves and karst.

Recreation and Leisure Planning and Research

Elery’s work on both social issues and caves led him into activity on a range of recreation and leisure research studies, becoming a leading academic in the field, with the bulk of his work in this area occurring from about 1977 onwards.

From that time, much of his cave-related work was focused on the preparation of various cave management plans. Elery assisted with the organisation of the first cave management conference and the publication of the Australian Speleo Handbook.

During his time at PIT, Elery established the Leisure Information Centre (LIC) and later a published directory in relation to this. He also led or collaborated with others on recreation and leisure research studies regarding a wide range of topics including:

- Leisure Activity Adoption
- Motorist-cyclist Conflict
- Community Arts
- Leisure services in local government
- Benefit measures for recreation and urban parks
- Relationships between park visitors and neighbours
- Graffiti

Elery received the Canadian Study Fellowship for which he worked at various locations and universities across Canada and helped to establish the annual workshop series – “One Question, Thirty People, Three Days”.

Elery undertook a major study with the with the US Forest Service on the benefits of leisure, including work with collaborators at the Universities of Minnesota, Fort Collins, Montana, and Seattle.

During this time, Elery served in the following roles:

- Board of Directors, ISA research committee on leisure
- Advisor on USFS national survey of dispersed recreation
- Chairman, World Play Summit
- Melbourne Parks and Waterways Advisory Council

Elery helped to organise or prepare the following conferences, plans and other actions during this time:

- World Congress of Sociology, Uppsala, Sweden
- Conference on Popular Culture, Trois-Rivieres
- International Conferences in NZ and Queensland
- The Macedon Ranges Plan
- TAFE planning for Frankston Region
- Management Training Program, National Parks of Thailand
- Leisure Planning for Frankston, Rodney, Deakin & Doncaster
- Port Phillip Bay

- Editor with David Mercer, *Recreation Planning and Social Change in Australia*, (1991)
- WLRA Paper on Education for Recreation Management.

Elery's most important writings and works in the recreation and leisure field, as compiled by Dr Ken Marriott, include:

- *The Demand for Recreation Workers* (1973); *Education of Recreation Workers*: a report to the Minister for Tourism and Recreation (1973), which was also delivered as a paper at the seminal 1974 National Department of Tourism and Recreation conference, *Leisure: a new perspective* (1974)
- *Leisure, People and Social Systems* (with Ross Baxter, 1975)
- *Space for Play*: a discussion paper (with Carey Handfield, Western region Commission, (1975))
- *Recreation Planning and Social Change in Australia*, co-edited with David Mercer, (1980)
- “A conceptual model of how people adopt recreation activities”, *Leisure Studies*, vol. 1 no. 3, 1982, with J. Brandenburg, J. Greiner, H. Schotton, R. Senior and J. Webb
- *Managing Public Lands in a Time of Financial Stringency* (Phillip Institute of Technology workshop papers, 1988)
- *Recreation Benefit Measurement* (1990), a Phillip Institute of Technology workshop convened by Elery which featured papers from, amongst others, Bev Driver and John Kelly from the US, Lea Scherl, Gary Howat, Rhonda Galbally, Norm McIntyre, Duncan Ironmonger and Betsy and Steven Wearing, as well as one by Elery; *Measuring the Benefits of Recreation*, co-authored with Kate Driscoll, a background report to an Australian benefits workshop, (1990)
- “*The Construction of Leisure*”, in the volume *Benefits of Leisure*, edited by B. L. Driver, Perry Brown and George L. Peterson and published by Venture Publishing (1991)
- *Urban Parks and their Visitors*, co-authored with David Mercer for the Board of Works in 1991 as part of the first-ever comprehensive research into the use of Melbourne’s metro parks (in association with Ken Marriott and Jan Bruce)
- *Recreation and Wellness*, papers from a workshop convened with Marg James (1992); “*Serious and other leisure: Thirty Australians*”, *World Leisure and Recreation* vol. 35, no. 1, (with Stan Parker and Penny Davidson).



Elery and Angela greeted by the Sani Yi people at the South China Karst World Heritage Listing Celebrations Near Kunming, Yunnan Province, China (Shilin Stone Forest Geopark) in 2007



*Elery in Perth - 2002
Photo: Rauleigh Webb*

Protected Area and Park Management

Following retirement, Elery was also an Adjunct Professor at the School for Environmental Studies at Charles Sturt University in Albury, New South Wales.

He maintained involvement in a wide range of karst, recreation and World Heritage management planning projects internationally and throughout Australia.

Of special note during Elery's "retirement years" was his work with various Chinese and other world karst and World Heritage experts on the management of karst sites in Australia, China, Malaysia, PNG, Slovenia, Vietnam and on their review and nominations for World Heritage listing. During the decade following 2000, Elery and Angela made five trips, as honoured guests of Chinese universities and government agencies, to work on World Heritage issues.

As a consequence of his combined interests in nature and sociology, Elery has been instrumental in the designation of several karst World Heritage Areas and Geoparks around the world, including South China Karst and Ningaloo Coast, both of which I had the great pleasure of working on with him.

Elery – The Friend I Knew

Despite Elery's various professional accomplishments, he remained a very ordinary and humble man with a great sense of humour. He had an abiding respect and concern for his colleagues and other people from all walks of life.

Elery was one of the most accomplished networkers I have ever met. And he took great delight in sharing his network with others. He would always say, *"Have you met this person or that person? They are one of the best people in this field and have achieved marvelous results. Here is their email and phone number - or we'll have them over for dinner and invite you to join us!"* And there were many gatherings at Elery and Angela's house in Clifton Hill (Melbourne).

Since first meeting Elery during the late 1970s through our mutual friend, Dr. George Stankey (US Forest Service and Oregon State University), I have rarely heard Elery mention a bad word about any individual. He almost always had high praise for and was amazed by the skills and achievements of other people. And this went for almost any person, regardless of their education, wealth or age. It was only bad governments, politicians and bureaucrats who received Elery's ire from time to time.

Elery never played the role of an intellectual elitist. He was always a reliable and loyal friend.

Elery lived through a period of incredible social and technological change, but was unfazed and undaunted by them. He was very adaptable, always mindful and respectful of the past, but also constantly looking forward to the future and what new opportunities it may bring.

With his wide range of knowledge, skills and talent, Elery may have been one of the last real Renaissance men in the world.

Some Lasting Thoughts from Elery

Elery has left us with some lasting thoughts and basic principles to consider and apply.

Two basic principles that he has related to me include:

1. Everything is related to everything else; and
2. You can never change just one thing!

Some of Elery's key reflections on life and the world also include the following:

- He totally rejected Cartesian thinking and was greatly disappointed that it has survived so strongly;
- He was pleased with the growing strength of holistic thinking – not just multi-disciplinary thinking, but certainly imaginative and trans-disciplinary thinking;
- He recognised and believed that we should all acknowledge the wisdom of many tribal peoples;
- He believed that we must deal with ambiguity in life;
- He has been appalled at the rise of neo-liberalism, as well as the fashion for obfuscation in politics;
- He believed there has been a tragic rise of pseudo-accountability through so-called risk management;
- And last, Elery had a great respect for our natural environment and for indigenous and local cultural ways and knowledge. He would want us to take better care of the precious natural ecosystems and landscapes of our world, as well as look after people and their cultures.

A Lesson in Not Limiting Ourselves

The life of Elery Hamilton-Smith AM is a great lesson to us all not to limit ourselves and what we can achieve with others for positive outcomes in this world.

Elery successfully blended his personal interests in nature and the environment with his concerns and enthusiasm for youth and social welfare and justice.

The intricate mix of his passion for the outdoors through camping, climbing and cave exploration along with his penchant for sociological problem solving produced both single discipline research results - such as his writings on dementia and his contributions to cave and karst science and management - as well as trans-disciplinary results by him and his colleagues - as demonstrated by his research on the social benefits of recreation and leisure.

This ability to synthesise and combine different disciplines, as well as Elery's sheer joy in networking with a wide array of people from all different professional fields, walks of life, cultures and languages, was also demonstrated through his work and successes in gaining international recognition through the IUCN for caves and karst sites and in the listing of several World Heritage Areas reflecting these types of geologic phenomena.

Although Elery's formal tertiary education was limited to his Diploma of Social Work, he never allowed that to be a barrier to the breadth or the depth of his work. His great contributions to Australia were recognised by his admission as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 2001. In addition, he was awarded a Doctorate of Applied Sciences *honoris causa* from RMIT University during (c.) 2002.