

Conference Convenor's wrap up!

By Mark Delane



***Katherine Herring (see page 21)
and Mark Delane (Ann Augusteyn)***

Now that the conference has come and gone, we have a chance to reminisce and reflect on what was a fantastic and uplifting experience. Our ability to come together from so many different parts of the world, so many different roles, occupations and levels of experience, and to become one for the conference is truly amazing. To think that guides, managers, academics, land managers, cavers, students, employed and retired, all respect and embrace each other in the interest of learning and sharing is so cool!

I hope that when you read this that you take a moment to reflect on the conference and that it brings a smile to your face.

Personally, I had a blast; and while yes there was lots to do and organise before and during the conference, I still had a wonderful time, I learnt a lot and got to meet so many amazing people. I know you all did also, which makes the experience so much more and the conference such a success.

As I said in my closing address, my part as convenor was straightforward, like herding cats! But, I cannot stress enough nor thank you all – for the success of the conference was as a result of all that attended. To take the time and make the effort to travel and attend, often at your own expense, and then to participate in so many ways, really did make the conference. The presenters were amazing, you engaged us all and stimulated conversation, ideas and questions.

I would love to take credit for how well each presentation flowed to the next, almost like a script, but it was mostly on the strength of each presentation, as Andy and I only shuffled a few around to suit times and days. I certainly loved them all, some with great practical application like Jordan and Christian's presentation on interpretation and storytelling for guides, Peter's on Cave cleaning and Shayne's on education packs for schools. Others were of great value for demonstrating applications of ideas and management, like Chaka and Nic on Naracoorte along with Julia's presentation on Cave Surveying.

The theme of the conference was Hydrology and the management of water within Cave and Karst regions, with Stefan certainly painting the picture so well for our region, it was a good shot in the arm for us all, I think, and then to be supported with presentations by Pauline, Jay, Tim and Julia was fantastic.

Equally, there were some thought inspiring presentations by Katie on the impact of Fire on Karst and by Erie's presentation on Human Indicating Bacteria in caves. Then to have Pauline's presentation on tree rings, hydrology and rainfall ... wow! It was exciting to see that there is so much research taking place. While we all agree there are so many other areas of research yet to be undertaken, I think these presentations gave us all some renewed hope. I know I am looking more at how we can be apart of some research projects into the future.

Then we had the entertaining; we all laughed along with Scott and his retelling of Enid's stories and we all partook in group vocal training with Cathie's presentation on your voice, which was fun but a really important topic. We also had some great sharing of examples from Hein, Greg, Tim and Nick with their presentations on overseas sites and experiences, and we all look forward, hopefully, to seeing them first hand ourselves now!



Pre-conference adventurers near the entrance to Coorow Cave (Mark Delane)

I know I have only mentioned a few of the presenters and their topics, and I could go on listing them all, but simply, they were all amazing, and all deserving of our praise. Thank you!

The afternoon field trips I hope were complementary to the presentations, and judging on everyone's smiles, questions and the feedback from Mike and Max, our trusty bus drivers, everyone was well pleased. I know a true highlight for so many was Josh's welcome to country at his meeting place at Cape Naturaliste – we all agreed it was so fitting and perfect and, for many, the best.



**Welcome to country
at Cape Naturaliste
(Mark Delane)**

We covered a lot of ground, all with an underlying purpose, to get you all incredibly disorientated and equally jealous of our region and I know it worked... We did get to see so many beautiful parts of the region, starting with Cape Naturaliste to Shelly Beach to Ngilgi on Monday; then to Mammoth, Calgardup and Tunnel Caves on Tuesday; to Moondyne or Calgardup or winery/brewery tour on Wednesday; then Giants and Lake Cave on Thursday with a stop in Borranup Forest; and finished off with Jewel and Cape Leeuwin on Friday. Wow... that was a lot now I think of it! But given how great the weather was all week, I think it was worth it and it would have been wrong not to take advantage of that stunning weather.

The evenings were also a great way to connect, to strengthen new relationships, to forge others, to discuss the day's presentations, to share jokes and to show some support to the local establishments, to ease their pain and disappointment of Steve Bourne not attending for the first time in forever.

For those that made the extra effort to attend the pre-conference fieldtrip, thank you. I hope you got as much from it as I did! It was an amazing few days, and a true treasure.

For those that stayed longer in the region, I trust you all had a great time, certainly your photos and smiles suggest that you did!

Overall, I hope you all enjoyed the conference, that you learnt something, you shared something, that you made new friends and contacts and that you reconnected with old ones. Know that you are not alone and that someone in ACKMA can help you – simply ask.

To all of you who attended, it was my privilege to have shared the time and experiences with you. It was great fun and with the support of you all, it was pain free! I look forward to our paths crossing again. For those new friends on Facebook, hello! ...and for those yet to accept my request.....I have your details.....

Cheers

Mark