Finding your Voice—and keeping it!

A voice training manual for cave guides

Cathie Plowman

The above is the title of a voice training kit that I prepared with Alan Andrews in 2007. Alan is an actor and drama coach, who worked as a tour guide at the Port Arthur Historic Site in Tasmania, where his work included voice coaching work for the tour guides

Why voice training for cave guides?

Show cave experiences in Australia are largely focussed on the guide to show and interpret the cave. If you're a cave guide, how often have you raised your voice to reach the 'back of the group'? This is neither good for your voice, nor does it contribute to an engaging and effective presentation.

Good use of the voice requires learning and on-going practice. Voice work is an established and integral part of the theatre and performing world where voice warm-ups, relaxation, posture, breathing exercises and facial exercises are as much a part of performing as learning a script and being on stage.

Singers, actors and news readers all work with their voices to communicate well and reduce the risk of strain and laryngitis. Why not cave guides?

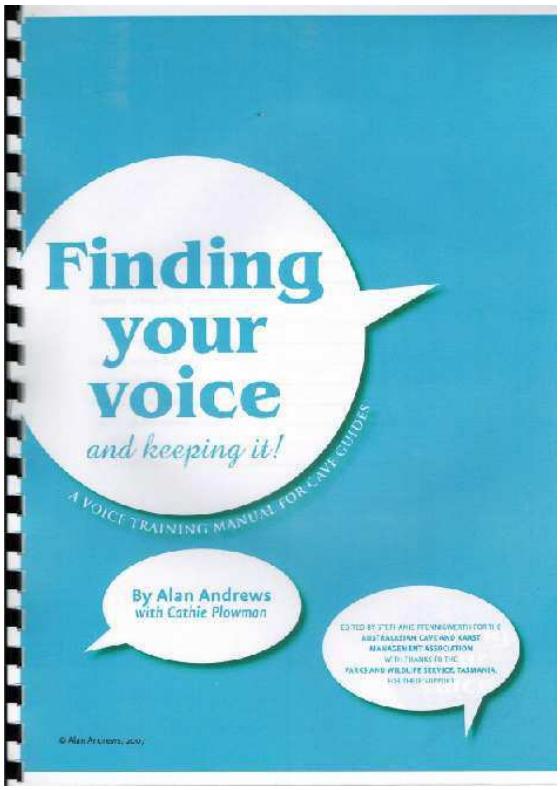
Cave guides who use their voice for work every day without being taught how to use it are like ballet dancers going onto the stage without first warming up: their performance will suffer, and the audience will leave feeling unsatisfied.

'Words carry approximately 7 per cent of the message, while the voice carries 38 per cent,' voice coach Lorraine Merritt quotes in her book, *Talking the Talk.* If guide health and effective visitor interpretation are important, then cave guides, and their managers, need to ensure that guides are equipped with good voice skills.

Finding your Voice contains four groups of exercises to help get started on voice health and enhanced communication. These are breathing awareness, articulation, projection and resonators. The manual can readily be accessed at the ACKMA website. Print off a copy and give it a go. Voice work is easy, fun, will enhance your tours and reduce your risk of voice strain and laryngitis.

Voice work is not just for cave guides. It's a useful skill for anyone who does public speaking.

In my presentation at the ACKMA conference in May 2018, I discussed some options for taking voice work further, but using the *Finding your Voice* manual is an easy place to start. I would love to receive feedback from cave guides who are using the manual.



Recovery of fossil bones from Elephant Hole Cave, Mount Etna

Dianne Vavryn

After reading Scott Hocknull's excellent paper in the September 2017 Journal - "The Ghosts of Mount Etna" - I thought I would write a bit more about the fossil bones from Elephant Hole Cave that Kerry Williamson and I recovered in 1986 and finally, after many years, led to the studies of fossil bones in the area - studies which continue today.

Elephant Hole Cave was situated on the west flank of Mount Etna in Central Queensland. It had three middle level entrances, all with vertical pitches. It was well known to me, my husband Josef and other cavers to contain large quantities of fossil bones.

Some of these bones were cemented in calcified mud and large quantities of the calcified mud had weathered into a powdery soil freeing its bone contents.

In 1970, Central Queensland Cement, who were mining the eastern end of the southern flank of Mount Etna, began preparing a haul road around the base of the mountain and began mining a small limestone hill adjoined to the main cavernous face approximately a third of the height of the main mountain. It contained many huge fig trees with massive roots disappearing down solution holes. We felt confident that there must be caves in this hill but there were no holes large enough to enter.

Josef and I, along with our caving companions, checked the mining operations regularly to see if any caves had been opened by the mining operations.

Along with other members of Central Queensland Speleological Society, in 1982 we had the great privilege of seeing one such cave which was named Crystal Palace before its total destruction. Our belief that this hill contained caves was vindicated.

It was quite a dangerous exercise climbing down through the blasted rock to access the cave below. The beauty of this cave for its speleothems was outstanding and was equal to some of the best I have seen elsewhere. We later found another deep hole in the quarry that was too dangerous to contemplate entering. It was later found to reach the very lower level of Elephant Hole cave - not all that far from the fossil deposits.

On one of these trips, we came across some very large blocks of calcified mud, with huge bones cemented in them, on the steep road leading out of the quarry. It appeared they may have fallen off a truck. The colour of this material was not like any other I had seen in any cave in this area. It was very dark maroon - almost bordering on dark purple. I wanted to shift these blocks off the road so they would not get destroyed, but sadly they were just far too heavy to shift. It weighed heavily on my heart and I still fell a sadness that these bones are gone and we will never know what they were and how old.

At that period the mine operators were not in the least bit interested in the preservation of any part of Mount Etna - that came much later when Chris White took over the management. I had long thought the bone deposits in the caves were important to science but could not get anyone I approached at conferences interested in having a look - as Riversleigh had everyone's attention.

As mining operations continued, the road into what now was becoming an open cut was lowered on many occasions and, from 1984 onwards, Jeff Simmons, Josef and I had to re-route the Bat Cleft track numerous times to be able to continue doing the tours. All the environmental values of the mountain were presented on these tours and we were gaining public support for the saving of the mountain.

In 1986, the mining company started building a road leading from the existing haul road up to the main cavernous face of the mountain in the vicinity of many important caves. It was clear that their intentions were to mine this area. These caves included Illium Cave, with its huge guano deposits usually with Horseshoe bats (*Rhinolophus megaphyllus*) present. It had once been used by Little bentwing and Eastern bentwing bats (*Mineopterus australis* and *Mineopterus orianae* oceanensis) as an acclimatising cave prior to moving into Bat Cleft.

Helms Deep was used by Ghost bats (*Macroderma gigas*) and both *Mineopterus* species.

Speaking Tube Cave contained the warmest known wintering roost of any cave in this area - it was used by the pregnant female Ghost bats and was considered to be essential to their survival.

> "*E7 Speaking Tube is the principal overwintering site for pregnant females in The Caves area. The Ghost bat colony is extremely persistent in its use of the site, despite the fact heavy mortality has been recorded after blasting in the western quarry.*" (John Toop).

John was the foremost authority on Ghost bats in this area and this would have been written prior to the caves destruction. Eastern horsehoe bats also roosted in this cave.

Last, but not least, Elephant Hole Cave, with large deposits of bone fossils, was also used by Ghost bats, Eastern horseshoe bats and Common sheathtail bats *(Taphozous georgianus*).

I felt it was imperative that as much of the fossil material as possible should be rescued before the cave was destroyed and the bones gone forever. Josef was in hospital at the time and I could not reach other local cavers. I contacted Kerry Williamson from the University of Queensland Speleological Society about the bones and what I thought was the imminent destruction of the cave. Kerry was based in Brisbane. Kerry came up from Brisbane and stayed with me, my daughter Tania (then aged 17) and son David (then aged 16) at The Caves.

I first showed Kerry the bone deposits which involved abseiling a number of vertical drops; some climbing; and making our way through narrow (and in places very low) passages. The following day we returned to the cave. Kerry had a number of bags with him. I thought he would sift through the material the bones were in and just take the bones. However this was not the case and we also filled the bags with the material they were in. We had wonderful company at the site as we filled the bags with a number of Horseshoe bats checking us out as they fluttered around us numerous times and followed us part of the way as we made our way back through the narrow passageways to the first pitch. These very special little bats are very inquisitive and often flutter around cave visitors inspecting them.

One by one, we each lugged the full bags to the first pitch - which was a feat in itself. Kerry prussiked up to the first ledge and I tied one bag on at a time onto the rope, then Kerry hauled each one up to his ledge. I then prussiked up past Kerry to the next ledge and Kerry repositioned the bags on the rope and I hauled them up to my ledge. We did this up two more drops until we reached the entrance. One ledge was particularly difficult to haul the bags over as the bags kept getting caught under the overhang and it was also difficult to prussik over. There were many more bone deposits than we could save - a whole shaft of calcified mud full of fossilised bones.

Page 3 dates noted yet?

The following day, I took Kerry and the bags to the railway station where they were emptied into a very large bag, weighed and sent to Brisbane. Kerry said it would be some time before he could work on the bones as he also had other material (from Chillagoe). He thought the many small curved teeth in the deposit were possibly from a rodent - possibly an extinct one but could not say for sure until he could examine them properly. He said the deposits may be from owls or from animals that had fallen down the now sealed shaft. He didn't know how old the bones would be but maybe around 20,000 years.

He said he would know more when he had studied them.

Ten or more years after we had collected that material, after years of waiting and wondering just what that material contained and how old, it was music to my ears to hear from Scott Hocknull that he was working on those bones.

I am so pleased that there has been further study of the bone deposits in the caves area. I am highly delighted about other important discoveries made up to date. It is such exciting work Scott Hocknull is doing and the discoveries he is making. Some of the fossil bones are 500,000 years old and the only Quarternary-aged rainforest fauna in Australia.

If Kerry and I had not rescued that material, and Scott Hocknull as a very keen young volunteer at the museum had not asked and been given permission to sort through the material, I wonder very much if any of these very important discoveries would have been made and whether that large bag of fossils bones would still be sitting on a dusty shelf at the Queensland Museum. Simply because no one was interested in fossil bones from Mount Etna, they weren't thought to be of much importance when compared with research and findings in fossil bones going on elsewhere in Australia. I don't think palaeontologists at the time had any inkling just how old and how important to science these fossil bones would turn out to be.

It is great that some of the remaining material was found and has been stockpiled for future generations to study. The resultant findings will add to our understanding of the past climates and the life forms that prevailed at those periods.

Karst and pseudo-karst features along the Tour du Mont Blanc - the rambles of a frustrated speleo in the European Alps

John Brush

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The Tour du Mont Blanc (TMB) is a long-distance walking route around the Mont Blanc Massif, passing through France, Italy and Switzerland. The full circuit is 170-190 km long (there are several route variations), involves a total ascent (and descent) of 10,000 to 11,000 metres, and takes most people 12 or 13 days, including one or two rest days. It can be walked in either direction and commenced at any point, but is traditionally walked in an counter-clockwise direction starting at Les Houches, a small ski village on the outskirts of Chamonix in France.

Each day, the scenery along the walk is stunning with views to Mont Blanc and other snow-covered peaks and glaciers. The route traverses tricky scree slopes, precipitous rock faces equipped with steel ladders, alpine meadows full of wildflowers, shady larch and fir forests and, in early summer, remnant snow drifts. The route also goes right past isolated mountain chalets and village cafes that sell freshly brewed coffee, temping patisseries, cake and more substantial fare. And cold beer. It is possible to camp along the route, but accommodation for us was in rustic mountain refuges and comfortable hotels in villages. As delightful as all this was, from a speleological perspective the walk was a little disappointing. There was barely a hint of the spectacular karst scenery that is so typical of many parts of the European Alps. Perhaps in frustration, my eye was drawn instead to a range of pseudo-karst features. The following notes document some of the features that grabbed our attention along the way.

Stage 0. A training/ loosening-up day that commenced with a cog railway trip from Chamonix up to Montenvers, an old hotel overlooking the Mer de Glace (Sea of Ice). This one of the longest glaciers in Europe and near the lower end of the glacier there is an ice cave. However, it is not a natural meltwater outflow cave but a man-made tunnel freshly dug into the glacier for the summer tourist trade. Apparently, a fresh tunnel is dug into the ice each year. Visiting an ice cave can be very spectacular, as everything is bathed in soft blue light transmitted through the ice. However at Montenvers, we became aware that green, red and purple LED lights had been installed to 'enhance' the ice cave experience. Perhaps the LEDs are now required because the surface of the glacier above the cave is covered with opaque tarpaulins in an attempt to reduce the rate of melting over the summer. Needless to say, we skipped the cave visit and walked 17 km back to Chamonix.

Stage 1 (Les Houches to Les Contamines). Nice scenery and spectacular views but disappointingly devoid of karst, pseudo or otherwise.

Stage 2 (Les Contamines to Col de la Croix du Bonhomme). We spent the morning ascending beside the Torrent Bon Nant. A section of the track was along a cobbled road and across a stone bridge that were both built by The Romans. Nearby, the full force of the Bon Nant stream passes through a natural bridge. It is possible to descend a steep track towards the base of the arch, but with all the water, it was not possible to get very close. **(See photo at top of next page)**