

73rd Savannah Guides Field School – Atherton Tablelands, Queensland. 14-17 November 2019 Andy Spate

What a fabulous experience! Amazing diverse program! Wonderful, friendly people! Truly professional! So many fields of interest and expertise!

Their slogan – “Protectors and Interpreters of the Outback” Does ACKMA need something like that?

I was a guest at this school with my registration fee being paid for by Savannah Guides Ltd (SG Ltd) – ACKMA will be responding to this courtesy by paying the registration for Russell Boswell, Manager of Savannah Guides Ltd, at our conference at Jenolan next year. The ACKMA Committee agreed, not at my suggestion I hasten to add, to pay my airfare from Sydney – all other expenses were mine – travel from Hobart to Sydney, rental car, meals etc. The redoubtable ACKMA member Regina Roach was also in attendance.

Savannah Guides Ltd was established in 1988 (ACKMA was in 1987) and consists of groups – SG Ltd itself, many enterprises such as Capricorn Caves and Undara, and trained guides at various levels (<https://savannah-guides.com.au/>). They have been working on a strategic plan for more than a year. I have passed on their plan to Jodie Anderson as she heads our strategic plan group. They have a well-developed website with about 100 documents. A new cultural awareness web page was launched at the Field School – see <https://savannah-guides.com.au/understanding-and-visiting-indigenous-australians/>



Above—Fourty Mile Scrub National Park on the Savannah Way

Right—Savannah Guides banner with slogan

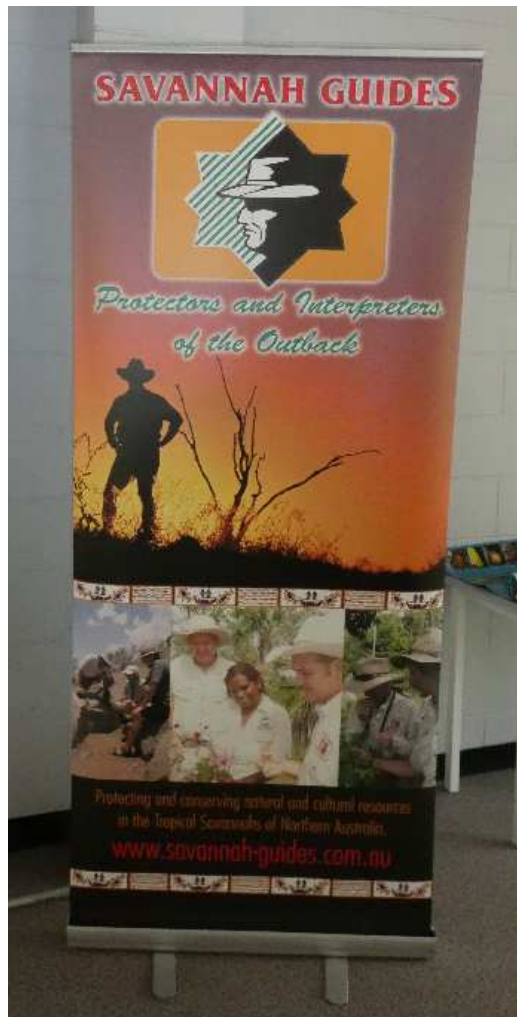
I believe ACKMA could learn much from SG Ltd – and maybe they from us?

The program was amazing and included four welcomes, eight half-hour talks, nine or more field excursions, seven ‘Enterprise Updates’ and a half-hour workshop cultural awareness session. Talk topics ranged from “Top Tax and Financial Tips for Tour Guides” to elephant ecology! Others included a fantastic geological/ecological evolution of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, a QNPWS Update, an account of South African tour guide training and my talk on ACKMA. I unfortunately missed the Friday events due to Korean work commitments.

If anyone wants to see a digital copy of the full program let me know. I can also make available the tax handout on request.

The Field School opened with four welcomes: to Country with a very heartfelt description of the Traditional Owners from Aunty Syb and Uncle Laurie – from the Tablelands Regional Council – from the President, Mick Clark, and from the Genazzano Resort which is a well-setup establishment for meetings such as this one. It is on the shores of Lake Tinaroo about 35 minutes’ drive from Atherton.

After the welcomes, all participants stood and introduced themselves, their backgrounds and work sites on the first morning. It took a long time - some were quite verbose. We are going to try this at Jenolan next year but may have to have a heavy-handed chair!



The eight Enterprise Updates were accounts of happenings at each operation. These were:

- Outback Aussie Tours,
- Red Dirt Tours,
- Australian Age of Dinosaurs,
- Adels Grove,
- El Questro,
- Moreton Telegraph Station,
- Oz Tour Safaris and
- Undara Experience.

Field events included visits to the giant Cathedral Fig Tree, Nerada (Australia's biggest tea producer), the Tolga Bat Hospital (almost the highlight for me), tree kangaroo and platypus spotting, a ride on a historic train and a geological crater walk amongst others.

Other happenings included optional early morning bird watching and Tai Chi, afternoon 'camaraderie' sessions (BYOG), evening activities and a jam session around a campfire on the last night. I must mention the Twitchathon. Bird identification seems a major passion amongst SG people! On the first morning the group was divided up in teams to create bird lists – participation was made compulsory if you wanted to have the Field School dinner. Not being able to tell the difference between an Emu and a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo myself I was not much use. On Sunday morning the results were discussed by the lugubrious Ivor Davies (Undara) amid much merriment. Some groups got more than 120 species.

A brief AGM was conducted on the last morning. The Savannah Guides Ltd Board (=Committee) met on several occasions. One further interesting feature was that some

meals, morning and afternoon teas were sponsored by the Life Members, Enterprises or individuals. I hope I am correct in assuming 'sponsored' = 'funded'.

All-in-all it was an illuminating, education experience, well-worth my time and, I hope, ACKMA's money.

Thank you to Russell and Sam – it was great meeting you and all my other new friends. Very much looking forward to seeing Russell, and potentially others, at Jenolan in May 2020.



Tolga Bat Hospital

Lightning visits to Chillagoe and Undara (and Yarrangobilly!)

Andy Spate

I took the opportunity while in Far North Queensland to visit places other than the Ganazzaro Resort. Lana Little provided logistic and much other support. Chillagoe was no more than a beer with Chillagoe guide Dave Hill and with Lana and her husband Tony – and to get my laundry done! Nice evening – except for the very loud peacocks next door through the night.

Then on to Undara Lava Tubes (pyroducts) to see what I had assumed from email discussions with Bram Collins to be a new disabled-access facility in Collins Road – it turned out to be the old system reported upon in the Journal many years ago. But some useful discussions and suggestions with the manager Kane Bassett. Kane is the single employee for four months over The Wet (summer) as visitor numbers are so low that accommodation and food services are not viable. We also

saw some nice small calcite speleothems which I completely failed to photograph adequately.

We also went through The Arch and thence into Ewamian Tube. Nice geology and vistas. Five lucky visitors paid for an hour-long single-cave tour and got over two hours and two caves as Lana and I were there.

We then spent a day wandering about the Atherton Tablelands looking at various geological and giant tree sites. Next day Cairns – the Aquarium is wonderful as are the Botanic Gardens. Both well worth a visit.

Many thanks to Lana and Kane.

After a few family days in Sydney and Canberra I went onto my beloved Yarrangobilly at the invitation of Bernadette Zanet (the not-so-new manager) to do Q & A sessions with some of her guides. I spent a very pleasant few hours after my arrival sitting on the verandah of the 1917 (two-storey) section of Caves House answering emails (which could not be sent from the delightfully free of modern communication Yarrangobilly) and preparing this report.