

NEW TOURISM ARRANGEMENTS AT WOMBEYAN?

- by a team of Special Correspondents

The downturn in tourism to New South Wales resorts, particularly from overseas, has prompted recent moves to look at innovations to revitalize cave visitation in that State. One proposal, reputedly under active consideration, is the possibility of turning the Wombeyan Caves into a luxury resort for naturists.

The introduction of naturism and its activities at Wombeyan will involve a modest expansion of the current above-ground infrastructure, to include extra tennis courts, a croquet lawn, an Olympic-size heated swimming pool, a nine hole golf course, and family spa pool facilities. These developments, it is considered, will fit well within the Wombeyan environment, particularly in view of the large under-utilization of recreation space in the Caves Reserve. A nearby Naturist Resort attracts up to 1000 visitors each weekend during the summer season alone. Each visitor pays \$40 per visit for entry and full use of the facilities. It is reckoned that the introduction of this innovative development would make Wombeyan the premier cave system in NSW.

Nudism has many practical advantages for karst managers. Firstly, the lint problem in tourist caves is almost entirely eliminated, although navels may need periodic inspection. Secondly, it is anticipated that nude cave tourism will have significant traffic calming advantages on cave tours, greatly slowing the visitor flow through the delicate cave environment. Thirdly, there is little doubt this innovation would be a further evolution of World's Best Practice in cave and karst management.

As an interim measure to gauge support for this development, it is understood that nude adventure cave tours will soon be offered at Wombeyan. Reliable sources suggest that the management personnel of Wombeyan Caves is especially keen to participate actively in this evaluation process.

There are several other unique features of this enhanced tourism regime. Of course, cave guides will need special identification to indicate their status. Non-permanent ink stamps are evidently

one option under consideration, as are colour-coded scarves. It is understood there is a likelihood, given the fame of the Fig Tree Cave at Wombeyan, that the leaf of this plant will, in time, become the new emblem of the Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust. Specialised guide training will be a further feature of the new naturist visitation arrangements, and it is expected that selected staff will receive ample instruction at similar resorts in the Pacific Rim countries.

The General Manager of the Trust, Mr. Ted Reedy, has been reported as commenting that "this is an innovative and interesting proposal which I will be evaluating personally". Certain current staff members at Wombeyan have expressed quiet satisfaction, in particular, about the proposed new 9 hole golf course, which will alleviate the need for frequent South Coast trips. However, one possible management issue is the necessity of holes in the golf course, and the resultant problem of ball retrieval, given the cavernous nature of the karst terrain.

A feasibility study will soon be initiated using the services of the world famous karst expert, Mr. Andy Spate, to address the perceived problem of disappearing balls, and to generally assess the likely environmental impact of naturist activities on or in the Wombeyan karst hydrological system. It is likely that occupational health and safety issues concerning radon will become insignificant in terms of enhanced UV radiation receipt by both staff and visitors.

The Trust apparently also considers that there would be significant value-added opportunities for Wombeyan associated with events such as the annual Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras, and the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. However, it is understood that the Rev. Fred Nile is anxious about the possible adverse moral impact of the proposed development on the Southern Tablelands of NSW. Nonetheless, the Trust appears confident that the financial benefits of the expanded activities associated with the resort will allay any community concerns.