

GABFEST 1998

- Peter Bell & Robyn McBeath

The 1998 Cave Guides *Gabfest* held in the Margaret River region of Western Australia. It was hosted by AMRTA (*CaveWorks*), CNTA (Ngilgi Cave) & the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). 16 delegates from the East crossed the Nullarbor to join with an additional 18 local participants for a exciting week of caves, frivolity, networking and surf.

Delegates visited a wide range of sites gaining a thorough introduction to the Caves and Karst of the Leeuwin Naturaliste Ridge. From the complex phreatic caves of Augusta to the well developed stream passages of the northern regions, participants caved till they dropped. Visits to the Jewel and Moondyne caves in Augusta included some of the non-tourist sections with displays of certainly some of the finest decorations to be found in the region. Giants and Calgardup caves were on show to parade the enormous passageways that are so typical of the south west river caves, while in-depth viewing of the extensive redevelopment of Ngilgi and Mammoth caves revealed some of the innovative technological developments that will provide unique viewing opportunities for visitors. These included the introduction of plastic modular boardwalks in Ngilgi cave and the *C-BUS Minder* automated lighting system in Mammoth Cave. Adventure caving opportunities were provided on the final day for all participants to get down and get

dirty. Caves visited included Strongs, Easter and the Cape Naturaliste Sea Caves.

The *Gabfest* conference dinner held on the shores of the Indian Ocean at Gnarabup Café provided a great opportunity for all to get together, exchange addresses and recount the events of the week. After formalities it was voted that the next *Gabfest* (2000) should be held at Wombeyan under the watchful eye of Terry Matts. Delegates retired exhausted after the evening to the quiet confines of the Margaret River Retreat to prepare for their departure, or perhaps as we have heard to keep on partying!!!

For the record, the *Gabfest* program was as follows:

Monday 16 March

Host: Department of Conservation and Land Management. Visit Central Ridge, Giants and Calgardup Caves. Redgate Beach. Scenic areas of the Park.

Tuesday 17 March

Host: Augusta-Margaret River Tourism Association. Visit Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse, Jewel Cave, Moondyne Cave.

Wednesday 18 March

Host: Cape Naturaliste Tourism association. Visit Ngilgi Cave, Adventure Tour, Bush Tucker Tour.

Thursday 19 March

Hosts: CALM, AMRTA, CNTA. Adventure Caving – choice of sites. Evening: Conference Dinner.