

# THE WONAMBI FOSSIL CENTRE OPENING NARACOORTE CAVES

by a pseudo-dignitary

Friday, 4 December, 1998. I arrived at Naracoorte about half an hour prior to the scheduled *Official Opening* of the Wonambi Fossil Centre, as Naracoorte's new \$3+ million Interpretation Centre had been named. I disembarked from my car at the same time as Nick & Sue White, and upon exchanging greetings, we walked up to the new centre, arriving just in time to witness the South Australia Premier, Hon John Olsen, unveil the obligatory plaque, prior to him touring the centre with the Official Party. Well, I was only a pseudo-dignitary on this occasion, and upon briefly admiring the outside of the structure, I headed for the nearby marquee, to catch up with the other ACKMA members present – Elery and Angela Hamilton Smith, Andy Spate, Mick Chalker, Grant Gartrell, Dave Hearn, and Brian Clark – of course!

After a brief "Old Home Week", it was off to the Blanche Cave for the Official Opening, aka copious speeches. Surprisingly for such an occasion, we had no party political broadcast, and the speeches were quite good – they even thanked and acknowledged Brian Clark, Associate Professor Rod Wells and Dr. Grant Gartrell – the three people most responsible for the discovery and development of Victoria Fossil Cave.

It was then back to the marquee for luncheon – very expansive and gourmet too – plus lots of chatting and imbibing. After the repast, I joined Andy and Mick et al, for a tour of Victoria Fossil Cave, being particularly keen to see its new entrance (now used as the exit, with tours now starting at Fossil Beds). I was impressed, and it has significantly cut down the number of steps. Our young guide, an indigenous Australian named Annita (only 6 months on the job) was superb. We all agreed her interpretation was amongst the best we'd heard, and she had a very discerning audience, let me tell you!

Then it was back to tour the Wonambi Centre itself. Unspeakably wonderful, as you'll expect!! The displays, with 17 extinct life-sized animals on display in a primordial setting, was outstanding. Many of them moved... At the end of the route, a number of interactive interpretative screens are sited, again, tremendous stuff. I don't want to describe the experience in too much detail here, as ACKMA members will experience it themselves at our Conference next April – NOT to be missed!! After a visit to the Bat Teleview Centre, and more chatting and imbibing, the day eventually drew to a happy end.