

# A MATTER OF TERMINOLOGY

- Andysez and Celeryreckons,  
Joint Professors,  
ACKMA Department of Pedantry.

A number of years ago we, the cave management community, had a quiet revolution in cave management practice when we gradually came to replace the term “tourist” cave with the less-loaded term “show” cave. Even this term has its drawbacks but at least it puts the emphasis on the cave – the product, if you like – rather than on the image of casual, Hawaiian shirt-clad Americans, on camera-bedecked Japanese, on Australian families with stressed dads, harassed mothers and bored kids, or young lovers only interested in each other, swarming into Ourbest Cave.

With management wanting to get them through in the quickest time at the best possible price, with bored guides wanting to get out for a smoke and a cuppa and with the visitors rapidly becoming glazed by the proximity of others, the “taped” sound track and “The Elephants Ears”. Ourbest Cave, naturally, is the one that takes the most people at once. However, we have made that step and recognised the cave. And tried to build the tour.

It is now more than time to critically examine two other terms that have come into general use – “adventure” caves and “wild” caves.

The first of these suffers from the fact that it means too many things. At Yarrangobilly, for instance, it means issuing torches, a bit of a nature walk and a visit to an old tourist cave or two with steps, handrails and so on. At Naracoorte, torches, overalls and helmets are issued and one is able to wander round an old tourist cave and squeeze through small muddy holes - under supervision. At Jenolan it can mean all the gear, a packed lunch and a fairly full-scale assault on a large cave system - with a couple of guides.

All too often, at one end of the spectrum, it is about as adventurous as a game of croquet on the village green. At the other it may violate, in terms of training and experience, the conditions demanded of the speleological fraternity to visit the same cave.

The term “wild” caves has come to mean those used by cavers of all types from “the boys” and their beer on a

Saturday arvo to the speleologist members of the Australian Speleological Federation Inc’s member societies who visit caves without paid guides. But sometimes the users may be paying commercial tour operators. [Discussion of the word “speleologist” is also warranted - but we won’t open that can of worms just yet!]

We have just demonstrated that there is a spectrum of uses and users from the fully lit and developed show cave through several degrees of sophistication to the casual use (abuse?) by the ill-equipped and uneducated.

However, we do need terms to differentiate the various management styles needed. For show caves one understands that we use regulations, steps, switches, guides and so on as management tools. At the far end of the spectrum we commonly see (benign) neglect mainly as result of historical practice or lack of resources.

Between these extremes the cave management fraternity has developed some crude administrative tools such as permits and cave-management classification systems to manage the use of non-show caves. We hasten to emphasise that any classification system or similar device is not management – it may be a means to that end. However, we need more and better discussion amongst ourselves, with users and with other organisations on the management of “wild” caves. To this end one of the themes of the next conference in 2001 will be on just this subject.

In the meantime let’s get the ball rolling. We believe that we need a term to replace “wild” - and that the use of the term “adventure caving” needs to be discussed. In order to enhance the former we are offering a modest prize for the best word or phrase to replace “wild”. Supplementary prizes may be offered for other deserving entries. Nothing derogatory or rude will be considered. The judges’ (us) decision will be final (although bribery may help with the supplementaries). The prize will be announced at the Conference Dinner, 2001. We reserve the right not to award a prize. Entries, with justification if desired, to either of us.