

# INTERNATIONAL SHOW CAVES ASSOCIATION SYMPOSIUM, YAOLIN, CHINA 20 -24 October 2000

- Arthur Clarke

Australia (and ACKMA) was quite well represented at the recent 4th International Show Caves Association (ISCA) symposium in China in late October this year – with Brian and Sue Clark (representing ACKMA & Naracoorte Caves), Arthur Clarke (University of Tasmania, Hastings Caves & ASF/ ACKMA) and Nick White (ASF, ACKMA & Buchan Caves/ Jenolan Caves). Incidentally, it took two days before the symposium organisers realised there were three of us with the surname “Clark/e”. (The official attendance list excluded Brian Clark and only two of us were registered as “Dr. Arthur Clarke and Mrs. Sue Clarke”.) We four Aussies were also the only attendees from the southern hemisphere and along with the two Americans: the ISCA Vice-President: Stephen Fairchild and his wife from California, there were the only six English-speaking delegates! Including the six of us, approximately a third of the 82 symposium attendees (and six interpreters) were western “foreigners”. Apart from us six, the foreigners were all Europeans (accompanied by a Slovenian tour guide); most were show cave people from Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

Accommodation and ISCA symposia events took place in the “small” town of Tonglu, in Tonglu County, northwest Zhejiang Province where we were hosted by the nearby Yaolin Cave Administration and local government officials. Tonglu County is one of many counties (or municipalities) in Zhejiang Province; we were told that the 1820km<sup>2</sup> Tonglu County had a population of 400,000, but were also told that the township of Tonglu had a population of 400,000. (This confusion may have something to do with the relatively frequent information loss that often occurs during translation from Chinese to “Chinglish”.) The town of Tonglu lies about 90km SW of Hangzhou (pronounced “Hung Joe”), the capital of Zhejiang Province. Situated about 250km SW of Shanghai, Hangzhou is one of the six ancient capital cities in China, a little over two hours away from Shanghai by the very reliable fast Express Train). Lying further southwest beside the Fuchunjiang River, Tonglu is itself an old town – established in 225AD - a picturesque spot with many modern buildings set amongst misty hills within the Fuchunjiang River-Xinjiang River-Qiandaohu Lake National Park. Tonglu has a sub-tropical monsoon climate with annual rainfall of 1450mm and average annual temperature of 16-18°C.

In most towns or cities in China, very few individual “houses” are seen; most people live in tall rise buildings with small balconies (to hang out their washing) – similar to our multi-storey apartment blocks. Live-in delegates at the symposium were accommodated in twin-bed rooms on the 15th, 16th and 17th floors of the modern Tonglu Jinxin Hotel. One of three hotels known as the Tonglu Hotel, the Jinxin was the

tallest building with a view overlooking a surprising number of rooftop solar panels and satellite dish receptors. Rated as a 2-3 star hotel with Business Centre and Bar on the First Floor (our Ground Floor), swimming pool and gymnasium, it had an 18-lane ten-pin bowling alley, Cabaret and Karaoke Room plus the Theatre Hall where ISCA delegates were treated to as fashion parade, Chinese Folk songs, traditional instrument band and an impromptu performance of the Beijing Opera.

Although the local currency in China was in Yuan (or RMB), the US dollar was generally the preferred monetary exchange for payment in most of China; the “going” exchange rate being around 4 Yuan per AUS dollar and 8 Yuan per US dollar. The ISCA conference registration cost USD200, bed and breakfast accommodation was USD35 per night (half each if you were sharing a room) and two meals (lunch and dinner) another USD15 per day. All ISCA delegates scored a very impressive large heavy duty “Weibao” canvas satchel with the “Show Caves Protection and Restoration Symposium” label - complete with handle, carry strap and lockable twist fastener. It was almost worth going to the symposium for the satchel alone! The considerable weight of satchel contents included a copy of the ISCA Agenda and 12page glossy covered “*Guide of Conference*”; the 168page ISCA symposium proceedings (with papers variously in Chinese, English, French and Italian); a large A4 size hardback book about the history of calligraphy in China (written in Chinese); a 238page booklet on “*Research on Origination and Environment of Yaolin Cave in China*” - with name title, contents list and abstract (at end of the book) being the only parts in English; local tourist information for Tonglu County and brochures about “*Yaolin Wonderland*” Cave; two packets of pre-stamped postcards featuring scenery in Tonglu County and Yaolin Cave; and two cave tourism promotional CD’s (which don’t seem to work here on my home computer in Oz). Probably quite good value if you could read Chinese and had a Chinese computer.

The organisational support for the symposium was quite impressive. The list reads like a “Who’s Who” of County, Provincial and national authorities in China, plus the international bodies. Support organisations included the International Show Caves Association; UIS Commission on Cave Mineralogy; UIS Commission on Protection of Karst and Caves; China National Park Association; Planning Division of National Tourist Bureau of China; China Tourist-Geoscience Association; National Natural Science Foundation of China; China Geographic Society; Institute of Geography, Chinese Academy of Sciences; Cave Study Commission of China Geology Society; Scenery Department of Construction Ministry; Commission of Science and Technology in Zhejiang Province; Construction Bureau of

Zhejiang Province; Tourism Bureau of Zhejiang Province; Commission of Science and Technology in Hangzhou City; Tourism office of Hangzhou City; Construction Committee of Hangzhou City; Tonglu County people's Government, Zhejiang Province; and the Administration of Yaolin Cave, Zhejiang, China.

Needless to say, we foreigners were treated like dignitaries. There were metre high welcome banners (in Chinese) strung across the streets on the outskirts of the town, through main streets and any of the arterial roads we used. In the case of field trips, the foreigners were all placed in a bus of their own, seated with the various six young lady interpreters: all 3rd and 4th year Tertiary language students from Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, who had all been given "English" names. We Aussies had two interpreters to ourselves: Yu Xuyan (Jane) and Chen Xueling (Linda). Linda had originally been seconded to the ISCA symposium as the Japanese interpreter, but when no Japanese delegates arrived, she joined the friendly Aussies, along with Jane.

Our ISCA bus (and the following bus, vans and cars with the Chinese attendees) was constantly escorted by at least one or two police cars or motorbikes with their lights ablaze and sirens blaring. Normally, anywhere you go in China, the streets of Chinese cities (and countryside) are constantly crowded with hundreds or thousands of pedestrians, cyclists, motor scooters, three-wheeler taxis, sedan cars, vans, buses and trucks – often travelling with little regard to traffic lights, let alone pedestrian crossings, and often driving on the wrong side of the road. We could not figure out why our convoy of ISCA buses and vehicles were having such a dream run through the busy streets of Tonglu and suburbs. However, we soon discovered that in addition to our police vehicle escort, authorities were in radio communication with street police on motor bikes who stood at all side streets and major intersections to stop any pedestrian or vehicle traffic and give our ISCA convoy a relatively fast and unimpeded journey.

There are an estimated 1500 show caves in the world and 260 of these (around 17%) are in China. On Friday afternoon, October 20th the ISCA symposium delegates had their first look at one of these Chinese show caves: Yaolin Cave at Camel Hill. Supposedly rated as "*No. 1 Cave in China*", Yaolin Cave is also listed - in one of the few English language Chinese tourism brochures - as one of the "*40 Topping Tourist Attractions of China*" and one of "*10 Paradises of Zhejiang Province*". I had only just arrived in Tonglu – about 15 minutes before the bus was due to depart - after being collected from the Hangzhou railway station, then escaping from the "dodgem-car" (or "dodgem-pedestrian") and horn-tooting traffic of suburban Hangzhou streets and driven along one of the Chinese motorways at speeds around 130kph. Nick White and the Clarks had not yet arrived at Tonglu – due to another organisational misunderstanding and problem with communications – a seemingly frequent occurrence for westerners in China! Our police guided ISCA bus headed off to Yaolin Cave, some 23km away from Tonglu, with lots of arm waving well wishers and villagers en route as we left the

outskirts of town and travelled through rural parts, passing recently harvested rice paddies with bundles of drying rice stalks and numerous large ponds with freshwater pearl-oyster beds. We arrived at Yaolin Cave to be greeted by an entourage of cave administration, town, County and Provincial officials waiting to unveil the ceremonial opening of a marble plaque dedicated to the ISCA Symposium and visiting international guests, including Nick White and the Clarks who had just arrived by taxi from the Holiday Inn at Hangzhou.

Yaolin Cave is quite famous in eastern China. Promoted as the "*Yaolin Wonderland*", the cave is located in a picturesque forest setting with ornate buildings and their red lantern lights, goldfish ponds, decorative wall murals, various sculptures and positioned karst solution features. Old and worn, hand-carved paving stones, slabs and steps with grooved "grip" treads lead into/ or out of the cave. Yaolin Cave is basically one large chamber with four (out of six linking) halls developed for tourism, covering a total area of 28,000 square metres.

Typical of most show caves in China, Yaolin Cave features some quite magnificently large stalagmites, stalactites, columns, flowstone and rimstone pool sections all lit with a myriad of coloured lights. Numerous tour parties of 15-20 visitors with a guide travel through the cave simultaneously in different directions. (Chinese cave guides typically describe cave formations in terms of their shape and likeness to animal forms, the figure shapes of Chinese minority peoples and various fictitious or cultural identities including Buddha head statues.) Tourist visitor numbers and income figures are quite impressive, along with their promotional advertising. Development as a tourist cave commenced in 1979 and Yaolin Cave was opened to the public in July 1980. Since that time, "*...more than 22.19million Yuan RMB has been invested in the exploitation and development of Yaolin Wonderland...*" and it now has an asset value "*...reaching 120million Yuan*" (\$30millionAUS). In 1982, about 1.3million visitors went through the cave and although visitor numbers have declined since, the cave still averages around 390,000 to 400,000 visitors per year and on May Day (May 2nd) 1997, there were 14,000 visitors during normal opening hours of 9am and 4.30pm. Tourists pay 50 Yuan (\$12.50AUS) to visit the cave. Tourist income from Yaolin Cave contributed a substantial part of the 0.49billion Yuan RMB tourist income for the Tonglu County in 1999.

Since being opened for tourism, there is substantial evidence of deterioration or "weathering" – as the Chinese describe it - (dulling and loss of natural appearance) of the speleothems in Yaolin Cave. Some tourist income is being channelled into scientific research to examine the causes of this deterioration and experiment with restoration of speleothems to return the cave to its natural state. Scientists from the Beijing-based Academy of Sciences (including ISCA symposium organiser Song Linghua) attribute the deterioration to a number of factors including increasing cave air temperature from high wattage of globes or

temperature of different coloured lighting, the changed airflow and elevated CO<sub>2</sub> levels and are engaged in dynamic experimentation within the cave to artificially enhance regrowth of speleothems. Researchers are actively planting more surface cover plants on Camel Hill (above Yaolin Cave) to promote humus development and enhance organic levels in surface soils in an effort to increase soil CO<sub>2</sub> levels and promote increased limestone solution and “natural” carbonate deposition within the cave.

From our Australian perspective, the deterioration in speleothems appeared to be also linked to the fact that the Yaolin Cave has too many visitors and is poorly maintained. Like many other show caves in China, apart from the litter and rubbish in the cave, there are vast accumulations of lint, dust and lampenflora on the cave formations that are now becoming ingrown into the surface of the speleothems.

There were a number of conference papers delivered at the ISCA symposium – all day Saturday and Sunday morning. Although some papers were presented in French and Italian, the majority of presentations were in English including the “Chinglish” translations by interpreters or English-speaking scientists. A number of presenters deployed quite sophisticated lecture aids, including Powerpoint presentations via Lap Top and the use of an overhead projector with an electronic/ digital interface allowing storage and manipulation of transparency images and delayed projection of transparencies. Slides and video recordings accompanied some presentations.

The initial presentations to the ISCA symposium focussed on the technical and scientific aspects of karst and/or show cave development. The Saturday morning program of papers included the following topics: Preliminary research of organism mechanics in a karst dynamic system (by Cao Jianhua); New microclimatic measurements in the Is Zuddas Cave at Santadi, in Cagliari, Italy (Jo De Waele et al.); Exploration and utilisation of Yaolin Wonderland (Tong Shuiping et al.); The influences of cave tourism on CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations and temperature in Baiyun Cave, Hebei, China (Wei Xiaoning); Speleological study and exploration of Benxi Water Cave (Shen Linmei et al.); and Preliminary research on tourism exploitation around Longkong Cave (Zhou Nianxing). We discovered a problem with the English translation of some Chinese papers: the translated version did not always relate to the Chinese version (sometimes it was totally different) and sometimes the Chinese “English” translation resulted in the wrong or inappropriate word and phrases. This was particularly noticeable in regard to word spellings in translation of Figure or Graph captions and the inadvertent downsizing of numbers used in the graphics and illustrated Figures, for example where “4million” was translated as 400,000 or 40,000 was translated as 14,000.

Our lunch break involved a five-minute police escort bus journey back to the Jinxin Hotel from the front door of the lecture theatre in the Tonglu County Government’s Conference Centre – where

four kimono clad ladies constantly greeted and farewelled us. Although it didn’t always happen as planned, hotel staff attempted to direct us to different sections of their dining room, with the foreigners being seated in the “soft seat” chairs and Chinese delegates given the “hard seat” wooden chairs. The foreign delegates were given the option of using chopsticks or knife and fork. The prepared food was somewhat westernised in smorgasbord presentation style including Chinese preparations of western style food and as per the custom with Chinese meals, soup is served at the end of the meal. At least you could see what you were choosing to eat first, even though you didn’t quite know what you were getting and the green chillies were cunningly disguised as green beans and what looked like tomato was invariably a piece of red chilli!

The Saturday afternoon programme of ISCA symposium lectures included: Cave environmental changes and protective management in Yaolin Cave, China (Lin Junshu et al.); Controlling mechanism of Carbon in soil on the Epikarstification (Pan Genxing); Exploration evaluation: program for humanistic resources in Wanhua Cave (Ying Tao et al.); World Heritage Listing and Naracoorte Caves (Nick White); Scientific Management of Yaolin Cave on the base of market study (Wang Jun); and TMS\_230 Th Dating of young stalagmite and Layer-counting Chronology (Sheng Lingmei et al.).

The Saturday evening program for the symposium was scheduled as “Recreation and Sports”. My evening recreation started with a posed photograph taken in a rickshaw taxi in the pouring rain outside the Jinxin Hotel following our return from the Conference Centre. With camera case in hand (or so I thought), I sat in the rickshaw while one of the Chinese delegates used my digital camera. A few minutes later, I discovered that my protective soft felt camera case was missing... gone with the empty rickshaw! About two hours later, I was introduced to the manager of the Tonglu taxi company who asked me to describe the Chinese taxi driver. The beauty of a digital camera is that you can instantly download images to your Lap Top, so ten minutes later I was able to show the manager an enlarged image depicting the taxi driver and his rickshaw registration number. Not really expecting to see a result – after all this was a large city (by Hobart standards) with around 400,000 people – I joined other ISCA delegates in the evening recreation: ten-pin bowling at the Jinxin Hotel. Two hours later around 10pm, my very wet and flattened camera case appeared: some four hours before, shortly after 6pm, the rickshaw taxi driver had found it on his passenger seat, thrown it away in the street, where it had been run over by countless cars and push bikes and it was still there waterlogged and flattened - four hours later – when he went looking for it.

Apart from the few unscrupulous Chinese that take material advantage of you in the westernised cities like Shanghai, most of Chinese people are incredibly honest and sincere. Although I have “rubbished” the Chinese over their environmental policy – the throwaway mentality of discarding unwanted plastic wrappers, containers, cigarette

butts and empty packets, plus general refuse and food scraps, the return of my camera case actually made me re-consider my derogatory attitudes. It could only happen in China! However, I still think the Chinese need to develop some change in regard to their environmental policies, their exploitation of natural resources and the ever-present constant pollution of waterways and city air – where the smog from coal burning is always present.

Back to the conference program: the principal ISCA symposium organiser (and Secretariat): Professor Song Linhua presented the first Sunday morning paper on the development and environment of show caves in China. Carbonate rocks cover a 1,200,000km<sup>2</sup> area of China. Caves have been used as ceremonial and habitation sites from times before the birth of Christ; charcoal from a hearth site under flowstone inside the entrance of Yaolin Cave has been dated to 2,900years BP. There is an ever-growing demand to develop caves as tourist sites as income earning sources for County and Provincial governments. In 1998, Reed Flute Cave at Guilin in Guangxi Province had 920,000 visitors. In 1999, the total domestic value of tourism in China reached a staggering 4.89billion Yuan RMB with a considerable portion coming from tourist cave income. In the first week of May this year (2000) during the May Day holiday period, some 57,000 tourists visited Yaolin Cave. Relatively few tourists travel to caves in private cars; most visitors are transported in buses direct from hotels, rail stations or airports. Present scientific research in show caves of China is geared towards restoration work, rather than protection of existing caves.

The second Sunday morning paper by Pavel Bella detailed the problems associated with changing surface environment conditions and tourist visitation in the Ochtina Aragonite caves of Slovakia, where some 30,000 visitors per year pay slightly more than one US dollar per cave visit. Only one group of visitors is allowed in the cave at any one time and the maximum party size is 45 persons. The next paper presented by Zhang Jie and Song Linhua described the micro-morphological approach to deterioration of speleothems in Yaolin Cave.

Following there were four unscheduled papers. The first presentation described the methodology and rationale for colour lighting in Chinese show caves, where coloured lights are perceived as a means to enhance the natural appearance of dull or uninteresting speleothems as well as producing a certain evocative and emotional, but comfortable state for visitors. Green lights are used to encourage feelings of peace and relaxation; red light gives a feeling of delight and healthiness; blue light promotes wisdom and spirituality and mauve or purple lighting supposedly takes you into higher levels of consciousness.

Now for something completely different – a far cry from China – an ice cave in the Austrian Alps developed as a show cave. Using an accompanying video, Oedl Friedrich described the 42km long Eisriesenwelthöhle Cave (in limestone)

with entrance elevation at 1600m, where some 150,000 tourists annually visit this site, rated as the largest ice cave in the world – if only just to see the different array of speleothems each year. First opened as a show cave in 1920, it has been operated as a family concern since and requires particular management skills to keep it natural and maintain safety for visitors. There is no electric lighting in the cave and most visitors are guided without a personal light. Every 5th person in the party of visitors carries a carbide light and the cave guide also uses magnesium ribbon to illuminate particular ice formations. During the year when open for tourism, the ice is cleaned daily with vacuum cleaners to remove litter, surface lint and dirt from visitors' footwear. Most of the new ice is formed in spring when melt water enters the caves and cave temperatures remain low enough to keep the thin stalactites firm and hard. Although the cave air temperatures are fairly static with a year round range of 0°C - 1°C, the cave is further insulated by keeping the entrance door closed in summer, but open in winter. However, even in winter the door has to be shut sometimes because the very strong (20metre per second) wind flows actually erode the ice formations. In summer time the ice becomes "soft" due to the influence of surface meltwater and some of the ice formations – including stalactite forms weighing up to ten tonnes – become dangerous. During the late spring and summer months, some weaker ice formations are shot down with guns to prevent possible accidents from falling ice stalactites. The cave is closed during a small part of summer and every year around this time it is washed out using high-pressure water hoses to remove the excess dirt and grit from visitors' footwear before it becomes ingrained into the ice.

The final two presentations at the symposium in Tonglu related to the next two ISCA gatherings: the 2001 ISCA committee meeting and AGM being held in Italy – with presentations of some of the Italian show caves that visitors will see, such as Grotte Di Frasassi, Grotte Di Pastena and Grotte Di Collepardo. The last presentation was given jointly by Peter Štefin and Alojz Črnigoj describing the venue for the next October 2002 symposium of ISCA to be based at Postojnska Jama (cave) in Postojna, Slovenia, about 70km from the nearest main airport in the capital: Ljubljani. There are some 7,500 caves in Slovenia (one of the former States of Yugoslavia), in a country where 42% of its land surface is karstic. Slovenia is also renowned for having the world's first ever Karst Institute at Postojna, established in 1938, situated within a kilometre of Postojnska Jama. One of 35 show caves in Slovenia, Postojnska Jama was first opened as a show cave in 1890 and has since attracted some 28million visitors who see a little less than a third of the 20km long cave. Visitors enter (and exit) the cave via a 4km long train ride then walk another 1.5km along the elevated walkways to inspect some of the high chambers above the underground river.

The Sunday afternoon programme for ISCA delegates involved a boat trip along a hydro-electric lake impoundment formed by flooding of karst terrain in the Three Gorges section of the Fuchun River, plus a visit to a cultural site on the

lakeside: the Yanziling Angling Terrace. This site dates back to the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220AD) when Mr. Yanziling was there, living a hermit's life of plain and simple living after shunning the royal court summons of the ruling emperor, amusing himself by fishing (angling) from the sides of his terraced gardens. Cultural remains include Yanziling's ancestral temple with ancient engraved stone plaques, various pavilions, ornate buildings with their arched roof eaves (to prevent evil spirits falling off), terraced gardens with statues and plaques engraved with old Chinese writings.

Monday was devoted to more ISCA field trips. Firstly a visit to the National Forest Park of Daqi Mountain walking through conifers, then a bamboo forest grove, passing an old style Chinese Tea House, an adult's adventure playground with various swings and climbs to test your balance – a bit like a “speleosports” venue – then onto a series of impressive waterfalls. The afternoon trip involved yet another police escorted bus ride along the Tianmu Stream (we would call it a river) to partake in a “gob-smacking” cave visit experience at the “*Chuiyan River to the Heaven*” site. The Chuiyan River is a 4.5km resurgence stream that exits an 8km long cave – known from recorded history in China since the period of the “Warring States” (475-221BC).

Chuiyan Cave was only opened for commercial tourism in March 1999 and since then has seen 130,000 visitors. Cave tourists normally pay 40yuan (\$10.00AUS) for the basic cave tour that involves a guided tour by longboat with 6-7 passengers per boat, plus cave guide and/or someone else controlling the oar. You are rowed across a lake then into the low roofed cave with roof pendants, relic karst gravel and boulder fills and relatively low key coloured lighting to highlight speleothem formations along the route. The first lower level section of the cave is a 700m long stream passage with a short little interlude halfway along where tourists climb out of their rowboats to inspect a rimstone pool section with a waterfall that pours over flowstone banks. Apart from the quite magnificent growth of lampenflora (small ferns and bryophytes) near fluorescent tubes, this section features a clothing stall where visitors can dress up in the Emperor's gowns and other old style fashion garments to be photographed with the backdrop of sparkling flowstone and mirrored images in the rimstone pools. Tourists are collected again on the far side of this feature and rowed further upstream passing two side streams continuing along the main passage through a fissure of mauve lit stalagmites and flowstone walls towards the sound of rushing water. Then possibly the experience of a lifetime – the rowboats are guided into a dual framed gated stainless steel cradle: two boats at a time and raised up a 15-20m long inclined haulage over a flowstone bank to an upper level streamway which the guidebook says is 8m (??) above the lower entrance (resurgence) stream level. Your rowboat takes off again through larger cave passages with magnificent speleothems until you finally terminate in another chamber with small waterfalls and depart your boat to climb steps into a decorated room with more opportunities to dress up and be

photographed. Most tourists normally leave the cave here, passing a waterfall, walking over an ornate bridge, along a phreatic tube with fairy lights in the ceiling and up a flight of 153 short riser steps to the surface entrance (a climb that make your thighs ache unless you take two steps at a time). For those who want to explore further, there are two guided adventure cave options with light, gumboots, helmet and overalls supplied. The first option is a 40minute return trip for 140yuan; the second an hour and 40 minutes for 280yuan going another 1.5km upstream.

After another welcoming gathering with local officials and a TV interview regarding my recovered camera case, the final destination for the day was a brief trip to the Red Lantern Village/ Countryside Garden. Another commercialised tourist site with a huge waterwheel in their gardens and numerous gift shops, venomous snakes in crates (to advertise the sale of snake wine), shag tobacco rolling demonstrations, souvenir shops selling ancient swords, scrolls, bamboo made crafts and stone jewellery including jade. Out the back there was a courtyard where you could watch a performing monkey while you were stilt-walking; see Chinese ladies doing a jump stick stepping dance to rhythmic drumbeats (more like playing dodgem-stick before your ankle gets crushed); and an amazing puppeteer with models attached to his back performing a Kung Fu fighting ritual. Following this, we walked through a cave tunnel passing red lantern lights, en route to a pavilion type restaurant for a traditional Chinese banquet meal complete with options of rice wine, cheap red grape wine or the usual low alcohol Chinese beers to join in all the many toasts. After dinner there was the final wind-up session for the ISCA symposium in an open-air venue where we really learnt what was meant by “hard seats” – ISCA delegates all sat on permanently fixed hard rock boulders that were scattered around a courtyard in front of the stage. Following this session of backslapping and congratulatory speeches we were treated to a theatrical concert, some acrobatics and audience participation events including a mock marriage game and more dodgem-stick jumping.

The final day – Tuesday morning – was devoted to a report back/ feedback session for delegates to let our Chinese hosts know what was required to further promote (or exploit) their cave assets and how to encourage more western tourist visitors. I managed to avoid this ordeal by scoring another personal trip into Chuiyan Cave in the company of Linda: my English-speaking interpreter in order to re-photograph the experience. (A problem with digital photography – you push the wrong command button on camera or computer and lose all your images!) Three of the main items that came out of the feedback session were the western needs for better communication channels with the Chinese including more reliable and pre-planned travel arrangements; more update and accessible location maps; and the recommendation that tourist destinations be promoted or advertised further away from the local venue in major city centres and overseas tourist offices. ISCA attendees departed Tonglu after lunch; the Europeans (and Aussies) boarded

a bus back to Hangzhou with the Slovenian tour guide describing the local delights of China en route.

China is a country of contrasts, many different standards of living and many different cultures inter-mixed and often operating independently or side by side. A visit to China is a real education about life, especially in the countryside and small towns, but also in the bigger cities; there are 500 recognised cities in China. Apart from the obvious difference in the written and spoken language compared to western cultures, the culinary differences in China and varieties of foodstuffs are quite staggering and much of the time you don't really know what you are eating. However, there are many eating-houses, banquet halls or restaurants where you can actually see what is on offer out front or by "inspecting" their kitchen pantry. Most restaurants have their own aquariums of fish, prawns and lobsters; some have bowls of turtles, snails, water snakes, "yabbies" and crabs on the pavement out front or have caged land snakes including cobras, caged bamboo rats, squirrels, pheasants, chickens or ducks. In rural areas, the roadside banquet houses have annexed chicken cages or duck ponds and sometimes you will see a dog or cat tied up – you never knew whether the latter were pets or just waiting for a customer order. In one rural countryside restaurant at Daxu, south of Guilin (Guangxi Province) where we were visiting after the ISCA symposium, I thought we had found some unusual fluffy chickens – when you looked front on, you realised they were owl chicks being "fattened" up for the dinner table!

Most meat is cooked whole, bone and all, and sometimes with gut intact. Chickens are usually freshly prepared for each meal – throats cut, feathers plucked, gutted and washed, then cut up whole with head and legs going into the stir-fry wok or hot-pot soup bowl in centre of the table. On my second day in China – 3 weeks before the ISCA symposium – I broke a tooth munching into what I thought was a piece of battered meat: it was actually a piece of battered bone! Before I visited China, I was told that the Chinese eat anything that moves; I soon found out that this was true. During the first part of my visit to China, I was part of a team of visiting cavers from England and France: exploring a new area of cone karst caves in the Lingyun and Leye counties of western Guangxi Province. While collecting fauna from cave streams well over a kilometre underground – blind cave-adapted decapod shrimps and blind cave fish (with tentacles) for scientific determination - I was competing with a chain-smoking local villager who trundled into the cave wearing his plastic flip-flop sandals, carrying a flimsy fishing net and a small hand-held torch. On our third or fourth day in this exploration area in western Guangxi Province, we were eating this wonderfully tender veal-like meat; after enquiring what it was - we were told it was the meat of a village "field animal" – a dog!

One announcement of interest from the ISCA Symposium: coming up next year, there is also another international conference being held in China – in Beijing, from August 30th to September 2nd, 2001. This Beijing gathering will

be the First International Conference of Sustainable Development in Karst Regions. It will be immediately followed by the international working group meeting/ workshop of IGCP-448: "The World Correlation of Karst Ecosystems". This "workshop" being organised by Prof. Yuan Daoxian (in Guilin) and Dr. Chris Groves (Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA) will comprise a ten-day 4000km long field seminar in south China – visiting some of the most renowned karst areas in the country: Chongqing, Guiyang, Kunming Stone Forest and Guilin. The Beijing conference will cost USD350 if paid before May 30th 2001 (and USD200 for accompanying persons or students); it also includes another seven post-conference field trip options ranging in price from USD500 to USD700. The IGCP-448 workshop excursion will cost USD800 (USD500 for accompanying persons or students) and includes all airfares en route from Beijing to Chongqing, Guiyang, Kunming and Guilin plus accommodation, meals, guidebook and other excursion costs. Participants will have to fund their own travel on from Guilin. So that's a little bit of China for you...