

STOP BABY-SITTING AND START EDUCATING!

- Andy Spate and Steve Bourne

How often do we hear that the answer to society's problems lies in building knowledge and respect in tomorrow's people? Most ACKMA people recognise that decent cave and karst information can unlock a great understanding of matters environmental. However, show cave operations across Australia and probably New Zealand may be missing important opportunities to expand and enthuse their client base.

Many members will be aware of the *Discovering Caves* kit put together by the Australian Geological Survey Organisation (AGSO) on the initiative of Yarrangobilly's Jo Ingarfield last year. This kit, of fact and worksheets and a superb poster, had input from many ACKMA members, researchers and from the ASF. It is very reasonably priced and in our view AGSO's initial distribution was more than generous.

The initial pack of kits was met with great enthusiasm at Naracoorte Caves as it filled an immediate requirement. The education market is one Naracoorte is working to attract and, on-site, to deliver a quality product. Presentations to classes include fossils and their World Heritage values; caves and cave decoration; bats through the purpose-built Bat Cave Televue Centre and past environments using the Wonambi Fossil Centre. What was being delivered though was a one-day lesson, with no pre-visit material or post-visit follow up unless the teacher was particularly enthusiastic. The *Discovering Caves* kit is perfect for both of these needs and is now an integral part of a Naracoorte Caves school visit. The map and kit are prominently displayed, with a kit kept in a folder for interested visitors and teachers to examine.

A kit is **GIVEN** to a class when a booking is made with the minor cost far out-weighed by the benefits. The gift creates a lot of goodwill, but more importantly, a class of students can be well-versed in caves and karst before they arrive. Teachers can develop their own worksheets and ideas aside from what is available on-site and best of all, the cave visit is then a catalyst for many more lessons in the classroom. Several teachers have indicated that the visit to the caves is now the basis for a whole term's work. The other positive impact is that a visit to the Naracoorte Caves is not seen as an "easy day out" for a school excursion, but a fun-filled and educational experience.

Naracoorte's school visits have increased not only in number but also duration over the past 12 months from a 2-3 hour visit to many classes staying overnight or longer. The educational value of the program is spreading wider and we look forward to our first visit from a NSW school in November. Part of this can be attributed to the *Discovering Caves* kit and the greater educational value schoolteachers feel they are gaining from a visit to a cave system.

Given the undoubted value of the kit and the enthusiasm with which it has been received in many areas in this country and overseas it is very distressing to see that in many show cave operations there is no trace of the kit. In one area recently one of us was questioned by a guide of long-standing as to the availability of such material. This person had been selling tickets with a laminated, rolled-up poster next to their knee and the package of complete kits only a metre or two away – and completely unaware of their existence. Another operation had them stashed away under the counter – no advertising of the kit's existence. Another operation has decided flatly against using it.

Why isn't this kit in greater use? It is designed for a show cave operation to tailor it to local circumstances so that you can push your own messages or special features. It is inexpensive and very spectacular. Having worked very hard with others to make *Discovering Caves* a success – and as an upfront image-maker for ACKMA – it is very, very disappointing that it isn't even seen in many places – let alone used.

However, on a much brighter note, we have recently seen a splendid introduction to caves and karst, and to karst management, prepared by Keith Collin of *green grub software*. The CD-ROM is one of several he has prepared (as a hobby) to be used in conjunction with the NSW Higher School Certificate Geography Syllabus. The CD is entitled *Ecosystems at Risk: Limestone Caves*.

Keith, who is based at the Riverina Field Studies Centre at Wagga Wagga, has been bringing students to Yarrangobilly for a number of years and the material is based on his trips there. It includes very high quality photographs, topographic maps, animations of karst and microclimatic processes, basic text explanations. Topics addressed include climate, landforms, ecology, human impacts and change, management approaches as well as facts and figures. There is a student workbook that not only covers the material given, but includes a management planning scenario based on a very real-life situation. A teacher's pack gives suggested answers and approaches.

It is worth looking at for the photographs and animations alone! Obviously one could quibble about this and that but Keith has indicated that he will update and expand the CD given appropriate material. We regard it as an outstanding effort and it could well form the basis of a touchscreen or similar introduction in a visitor or educational centre.

Make sure that you look at his website (www.greengrub.com.au) which has a preview of the caves CD plus two similar *Ecosystems at Risk* packages dealing with alpine and river red gum environments respectively. There is a further package that uses a similar approach to look at

dryland salinity issues through investigations of biophysical interactions in the Lake Albert Catchment at Wagga. All the material is aimed at students in the final years of high school.

Keith can be contacted at kcollin@greengrub.com.au – or more conventionally, at P. O. Box 958, Wagga Wagga. N. S. W. 2650, or by telephone on (02) 6931 5039.

One of the treats at the last ACKMA conference was the all-too-short time we had with Geoff Kell

demonstrating his underground approach to enthusing school groups about caves. Careys Cave now has a series of subterranean “classrooms” and real opportunities to explore various aspects of caves. Geoff’s approach is proving very popular and he is building a clientele from across Australia taking advantage, amongst other things, of the National Science Week Festival held each year in Canberra. There is a lot to be learnt from his experiences.