

MORE ABOUT BRIAN

- Elery Hamilton-Smith

Elery Hamilton-Smith (left) with Steve Bourne at the entrance to Cathedral Cave, Naracoorte.



I first encountered Brian almost immediately after his appointment. The telephone rang, Brian introduced himself, and then said, "I've just read the management plan which your team put together, and I want to talk about it." So I drove to Naracoorte into the beginning of one my most highly valued and exciting friendships. We walked about talking through the plan, and towards the end of the day, Brian asked, "This bit about recommending World Heritage nomination – is that bullshit or is it for real?"

I assured him we were very serious about it indeed, and then he said in a quietly meditative tone, "Hmm. Well, that means I'm stuck here for at least 10 years if we are going to pull that off!"

Others have already written about many aspects of what ultimately became 17 years. I echo all that they have said, but would like to add a few personal anecdotes and comments. Michael Aldersey has referred to the matter of removing pine trees from the reserve.

When we prepared the management plan, a lot of local residents had expressed a very strong commitment to retaining the pine trees, and so, after considerable discussion, we moved to the point where we recommended that when any pine tree died, it should be replaced by an appropriate native species.

Within a few years, Brian had convinced the same people of the importance and wisdom of removal. The result was not only a much quicker change than we had foreseen, but by felling all the trees at one time, it made money rather than costing money!

Many people have heard of the conflict between Brian and the recreational caving community. What they have probably not heard is that the first caving trip to arrive at Naracoorte after Brian took over, not only infringed the conditions of their permit, but then lied to try and conceal that fact.

They were totally unaware that Brian (prior to commencing his new job and while watching the cricket) had overheard two young men planning this particular deceit on the basis that the new ranger wouldn't know anything about caving!

A little later, the next caving trip not only infringed permit conditions, but during a subterranean party (not what they had claimed they would be doing in the cave!) committed a significant act of vandalism.

A colleague from Canada – one of the world leaders in park management, who has worked with or studied park services in all continents of the world – came to visit, so I took him to Naracoorte. His assessment was the same as mine – Brian is one of the greatest park managers of our professional experience.

So, we see him move on with a mixture of regret and joy: Regret that we will see him less often, but joy that he is undertaking a challenge which dwarfs that which he faced at Naracoorte. Knowing Brian as I do, the man thrives most on challenge.

Finally, all too little has been said about Brian's wife, Sue. Sue is herself a remarkably gifted and competent lady. But she has also been the most wonderful companion to, and support for, Brian. She also deserves our most sincere thanks and best wishes for their next great adventure.



Elery Hamilton-Smith (left) addresses the audience on Brian's virtues at Brian's "Farewell" Function.