

THE CAVE AND KARST PRESENTERS WORKSHOP - NARACOORTE CAVES

- Steve Bourne

"The experience as a visitor has on a cave tour may influence whether they ever visit a cave again."

Can there be a greater motivation for gathering of the site presenters of caves of Australia for a workshop on interpretation and presentation? The renamed *Gabfest* took place at Naracoorte Caves recently and was an outstanding success, both with the number of participants and the outcomes achieved. Proceedings got underway on Sunday 3 February, although Ken Fleming from Wombeyan was so keen he turned up on Thursday. A late withdrawal was David Smith who had a stint in hospital on the eve on the workshop. Apparently it was an internal problem, possibly brought on by the thought of a week at Naracoorte! David's illness was brought to the attention of all, who drank to his health. He should be better now. The WA contingent along with Mal of New Zealand crammed into the Ford Meteor of Naracoorte guide, Sally. I believe Trans-Tasman relationships were forged much closer on the trip from Adelaide to Naracoorte. The proceedings were opened by the NPWSA regional manager, John Schulz, around a quiet evening barbecue.

"The Brown" displaying some of his finds to the group



Monday's program was based around fossils and how these are presented to visitors. Prof. Rod Wells gave an enthralling talk on the discovery of Victoria Fossil Cave fossil deposits and the process of developing the cave to present science to paying customers. Everybody left the morning talk in Blanche Cave with a far greater understanding of World Heritage and the scientific value of the fossils of Naracoorte Caves. Rod continued with the group into Victoria Fossil Cave and added several interesting anecdotes while the group discussed the presentation of the cave.

After lunch the group were treated to a look at the Wonambi Fossil Centre, no doubt the envy of many a cave manager and guide. The centre continues to grow in popularity with several new improvements adding to the spectacle. At last, at 3:30pm, some exercise with a look at the novice adventure caves. An evening slide show tantalised the group, many thought Naracoorte was a calcite free zone after Blackberry Cave.

Tuesday was Bat Day, with talks by Terry Reardon of the SA Museum and Judy Bellati of Adelaide University. Again the talks were excellent and relevant, with most cave systems in Australia having some bats. Naracoorte Caves, as most are aware, has a unique infra-red camera system in Bat Cave that provides visitors with a peek into the lives of bats with no disturbance.

In a time when the term Eco-tourism is over used, this presentation fits the most stringent of criteria. After lunch, groups again descended to the underworld with trips to Fox Cave, Starburst Chamber and Cathedral Cave. Cathedral Cave is not offered as an adventure tour, but Flinders University student, "The Brown", kindly took groups to look at the fossil deposit he worked on.

After the underground exercise, it was time to unwind with a tour of the nearby Russet Ridge Winery. Some frustration was experienced by a few who found the tour prolonged by others asking questions. The guided tour was excellent with Elaine showing all the skills of a good interpreter. A few wines were sampled before returning to the dormitory to dine. After eating the group ventured to the Bat Cave, to witness the spectacle of bentwing bats exiting. Terry has been developing a laser counting system and provided a demonstration of this technology.

Under the threat of being left behind if not on the coach at 8:15 am, all managed to surface "bright eyed and bushy tailed" and it duly departed at 8:13 am - unbelievable! The objective of the day was to compare the experiences offered by Tantanoola Cave, Engelbrecht Cave and Princess Margaret Rose Cave.

Unfortunately, just after John Callaghan had enlightened us on the development of Tantanoola for wheel chair access, the cave suffered a blackout. Being all good guides carrying safety lights, the group of 35 toured the cave with about 5 torches. Volunteers run Engelbrecht Cave, a concept that most found interesting but not one they were keen to take on. Definitely the highlight of the day was the cruise up the Glenelg River to PMR, one of the best packages available with a cave system. Those who had been suffering calcite deprivation were returned to normal on this day.

Thursday's workshop built on the previous day's experience, developing ideas for the presentation and marketing of the four cave systems as a package. The delightful Alexandra Cave was used as a setting for this exercise. While half of the group worked on this, the others developed a tour of Cathedral Cave.

Collating the results was interesting; especially those who thought a "church theme" would work in Cathedral Cave. Evolution and creation at the one place? Two hours free time enabled everybody one last look at their favourite cave or a look at other Naracoorte attractions before the final dinner.

By popular request T-shirts were designed and ordered. In what must be some sort of a record, the T-shirts were freighted from Adelaide, design sent by e-mail, printed and delivered all within 48 hours of the initial request. As one would expect of a hard working group, the final dinner was a quiet affair and everyone had an early night??!!

The workshop was made all the much better by a fantastic group of people, professional in their outlook and with a genuine desire to develop their craft. Naracoorte staff thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to display the unique values of Naracoorte Caves. The next workshop is tentatively planned for Tasmania in 2004. And by the way, guess who was last to leave? Ken, on his way to Tasmania I presume!



**John Callaghan with group
in Tantanoola Cave**