

THE 50th ANNIVERSARY of THE SYDNEY SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY and LAUNCH of the BOOK, CAVES and KARST of WOMBEYAN Wombeyan Caves, 6-7 November 2004

- Ross Ellis

The crowd at the Book Launch in *Victoria Arch*.

Photo: Andrew Bosman



Almost two years of effort went into the preparations for the 50th Anniversary Weekend and Dinner of the Sydney Speleological Society (SSS) and into the production of Sydney Speleological Society Occasional Paper No. 13, *Caves and Karst of Wombeyan*.

Most of the impetus for the planning and production of the dinner and the book came from John and Glenda Wylie whose efforts can only be described as phenomenal, and without their drive and perseverance neither could have eventuated. Other members of SSS deserve credit for their efforts over the weekend as do the guides and other staff of the Wombeyan Caves Reserve. A special thanks also to Mike Chalker, Manager of the area, whose assistance and advice was greatly appreciated.

Preparations for the weekends events began on Thursday, but late Thursday night, the most welcome, pouring rain, gave us a bit of a fright. This cleared away by about 10am Friday morning, allowing the two main marquees to be erected, and the tables and chairs set up. Electricity, lighting and sparkle lights had also been supplied to the marquees during the afternoon by Andrew Bosman, and a PA system was installed by Alex Boyd.

Others then gave their attention to the book sales and display tents near the approaches to the Victoria Arch. Once these were erected the displays by SSS, the Mittagong Historical Society, the Taralga Historical Society and the Goulburn Field Naturalists Society were set up.

During this time the set up for the Power Point Presentation inside the Victoria Arch was worked out. Late Friday night Ben Nurse turned up with the long awaited book and copies of these spread like wildfire around the scattered tents and cabins of the worried groups who were preparing to

evacuate the area if the book did not turn up for the book launch.

Very early Saturday morning the books went on sale in the book sales/display tent, and during the weekend over 100 copies were sold along with various other SSS publications, etc. The book launch by Alan Griffin in the Victoria Arch was preceded by the History of Wombeyan Caves 1864-2004, and Postcards of Wombeyan. Over 250 people were in attendance. Alan congratulated the Society on the production of both the new and the old Wombeyan Caves books and advised of some very important new developments occurring in the caves and the area, both now and in the future. A marvellous afternoon tea, provided by Marie Webb then followed and the SSS 50th Anniversary cake was cut.

Mike Chalker had arranged for special cave tours to be available to SSS members and others there for the dinner. These were run through Junction Cave and the Fig Tree Cave. Maries Bush Catering got their set up working in the Barmah facility, and had everything prepared for the celebration dinner to be held in the big marquee in the evening. The children's tent beside the main marquee, complete with videos, video games, etc., was a great idea and proved most entertaining to the children and convenient for the parents. A special thanks to Vanessa and Rebecca Dolan for supervising this tent. Tickets were collected at the door by Tom Santa and Simon Bland and the evening got underway when Ben Nurse announced which tables should move out along the red (pinkish, actually) carpet leading across to the Barmah facility to be served their meals.

In the meantime, those seated waiting for their turn to be served were entertained by another Power Point Presentation, this time depicting members and friends of SSS, past and present, and which caused many bouts of hilarity from various tables around the tent.



A group of attendees listen to the book launch proceedings in Victoria Arch.

Photo: Andrew Bosman

Once the meals and desserts were over, which by the way were described as excellent (no greater praise can be given) by Geoff McDonnell (an expert on eating), several awards were presented to SSS members for their outstanding and continual service to SSS. The awards were presented by Martin Foster (one of only three Presidents of SSS), to Julia James, Ernie Byrnes, Andrew Bosman, Ross Ellis and Glenda Wylie, with life membership awards being given to Erik Halbert and Greg Middleton. John Bonwick (SSS's second President) then presented an award to Ben Nurse (SSS's first President, and in office for 48 years) for his outstanding contributions to the Society and Australian Speleology.

Andy Spate, our guest speaker, was then introduced by Julia James and his talk was entitled "Fifty Years of Caving and Karst Science in Australia and Environs." This well illustrated talk was enjoyed by all as was adequately shown when John Bonwick gave the vote of thanks. It was then left to a gallant few led by Simon Bland to clear the tables and get the tent ready to take down next morning. This virtually finished off the evenings entertainment, most people dispersing to various campfires and lounges in cabins to talk with friends new and old, while some set off for home.

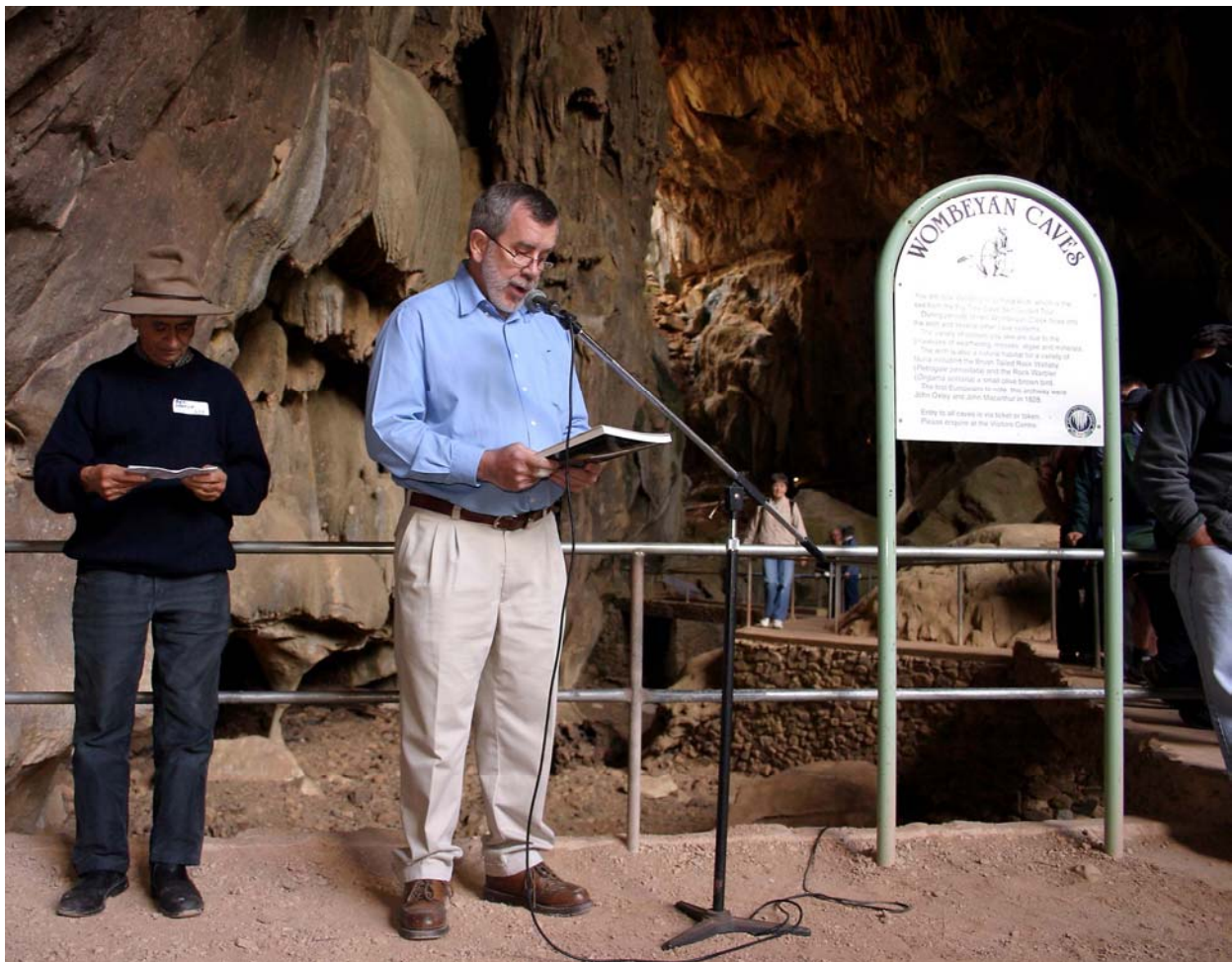
Sunday saw groups assembling for the various guided walks arranged for the day. One walk was a Historical Quarry Tour, led by Peter Rafferty (former quarry worker) and guide Laurie Dunn, and this was attended by approximately 45 people.

The Flora Tour of the Karst, led by Goulburn Field Naturalist Rodney Falconer, proved very popular and those on the tour were most impressed with Rodney's expertise. They walked up the caves track up Wattle Hill, crossed over the top of the Arch and came back down behind the Kui Kiosk.

There were only about a dozen people at the Memorial Service for Henry Gratten, but it was a very moving occasion that local Anglican Minister Carol Wagner conducted up there in the bush around the marble slab that marks Henry's grave. John Wylie had also provided and attached a memorial tablet to the marble slab.

That virtually ended all the organised activities for the weekend, only leaving the final pulling apart of the displays, taking down of the tents, and packing of the cars, all of which took most of the rest of the day.

Those of us lucky enough to be able to stay on till the Monday, had a quite and relaxed Sunday night, and just put the finishing touches on everything before we left. However, getting off early in the morning, we set off to fully explore a cave found on a previous trip, which we decided to name Anniversary Cave in honour of the 50th Anniversary Weekend of the Sydney Speleological Society. The cave was quite impressive, containing some very nice speleothems, reasonable sized chambers and a final deep pitch. Photographs and a cave description will appear in special December 2004 edition of *The Journal of the Sydney Speleological Society*.



Alan Griffin officially launches *Caves and Karst of Wombeyan*. Photo: Andrew Bosman