

UPDATE FROM CAPRICORN CAVES

- Ann Augusteyn

Ann Augusteyn, Robyn McBeath, and John Giulieri
at the National Tourism Awards, February 2006



"The challenge to managers is to find ways in which new products might be shaped and developed within the setting of karst and cave resources." Elery Hamilton-Smith "Let's Stop Running Cave Tours!" ACKMA Journal No 35, p 13 – 15

With visitor numbers to Capricorn Caves off and on over the last few years, Elery's challenge is indeed pertinent. In 2005 the core product, the main guided tour has taken on a new experience with the construction of a 30 metre swinging bridge as an optional exit from the caves. It has been very well received. But much more was needed.

Since 2000 the main focus at Capricorn Caves has been the expansion of adventure recreation product and the provision of training and education programs, spiked by the enthusiasm of Activities Manager- John Giulieri and facilitated by the construction skills of Ken Augusteyn.

Wild caving adventures have long been on offer with minimal patronage. Today the visitor has a choice of abseiling down a rock face into a cave; the challenge of an 8m Climbing Wall and for groups a High Ropes Course. An Adventure & Leisure Expo in June 2005 launched the combined product onto the market.

The greatest patronage has come from the school education market. Hosted school camps are accommodated in the 48 bed lodge or tent camping. This has led to a re-assessment of the delivery of our interpretation of the caves, flora and fauna, resulting in improved guide training and development of more resources for staff and the visitor. The objective is to provide a "real experience" for all age groups and understanding of the cave as a natural museum.

Complimentary to this process was the arrival of Scott Hucknell, assistant curator Geosciences, Queensland Museum. After some exploratory work in

the area, Dino Dig was launched in 2005 with some amazing finds in Capricorn Caves and Mt Etna Caves National Park. What more could a science educator/ tour guide want than "an ancient wombat the size of bull" to spike the interest of visitors in the climatic, geomorphic, vegetation and animal changes of the past. Scott Hucknell was generous with his time in sharing his passion with caves staff and school groups and as a result we now have a wonderful product for school camps and an insight for cave visitors.



Melitta & Emma on the new Swinging Bridge

To deliver these programs it was essential to train and retain quality staff. All tour guides had achieved Certificate III in Tour Guiding but more was needed, particularly in the outdoor recreation area. No such training is available in Central Queensland, so the proposal that is now on the table is to fill the gap by providing our own accredited training with the local TAFE acting as the Registered Training Organisation. This will open many doors from training schools for tour guides to outdoor recreation accreditation and international student study tours.

We must be on the road to success, having won the Queensland Tourism Award for Adventure Tourism in 2005. We were delighted to meet up with fellow ACKMA member Robyn McBeath at the National Tourism Awards in February 2006. Although neither of us received the final gong on the night, it was a matter of pride to see cave products in the limelight on a national stage.

