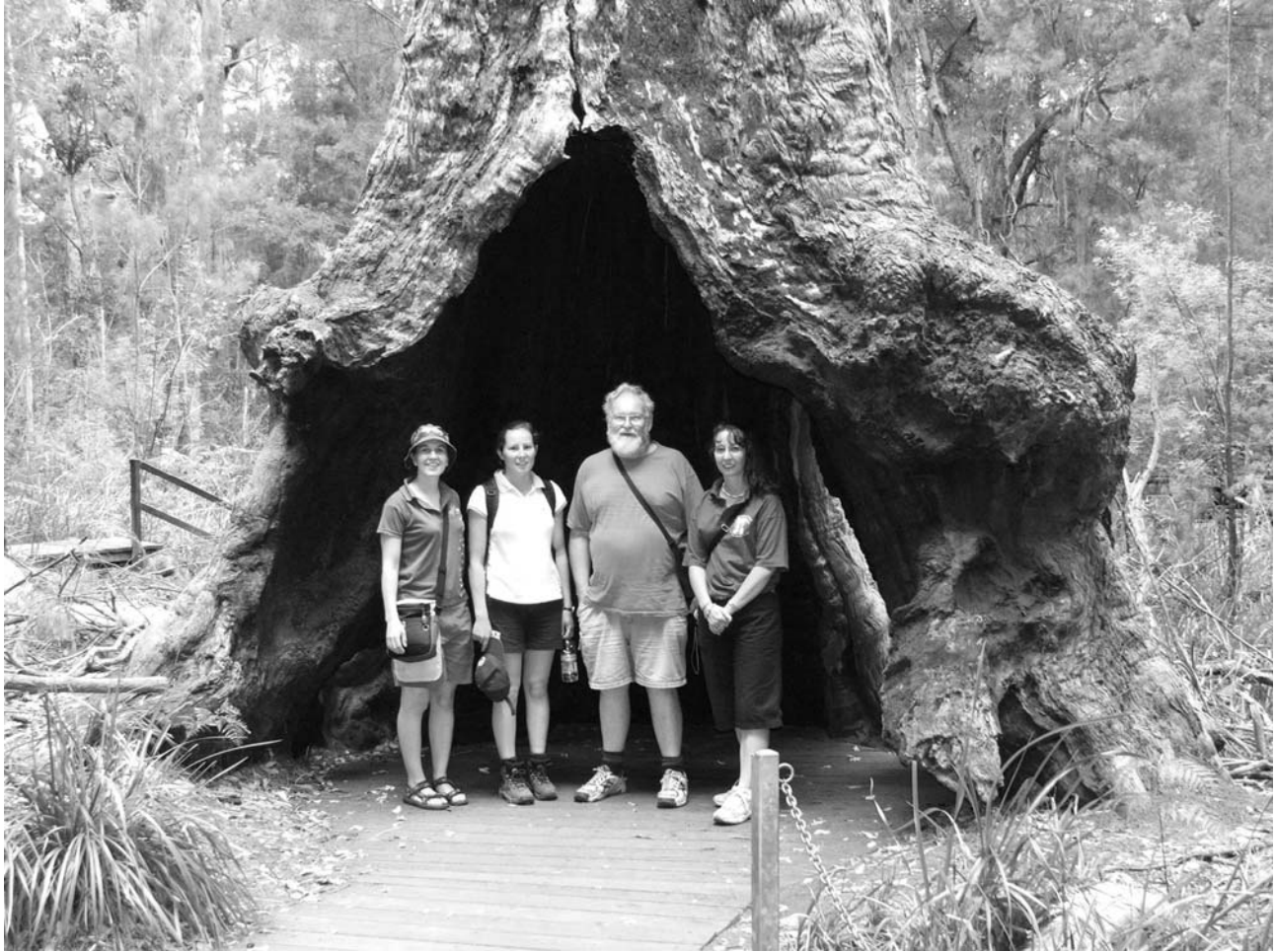


Catherine Sellars (Naracoorte), Jennifer Kreusser (Landells, formerly Yarrangobilly), Andy Spate and Katrina Wills (Naracoorte) at the Valley of The Giants, Western Australia, after the 11th Cave & Karst Presenters Workshop, 2006. Photo: Andy Spate



WESTERN AUSTRALIA WANDERINGS

A Gathering of Cave Guides

26 February - 3 March 2006

- Scott Melton

Jenolan or Western Australia? That was the choice attendees were asked to vote for at the 10th Cave & Karst Presenters Workshop in Mole Creek (2004) as to the venue for the 11th Workshop. While it was a close result - well....Western Australia - here we come!

In order to save costs, Ted Matthews and I shared a rental car. After arriving in Perth on Wednesday 22nd February we decided to head for the coast. As it was my third visit to WA (1979/80 for a Scout Jamboree and 1991 for a holiday). I was able to act as a guide to some degree. First stop was Perry Lakes, home for ten nights during the Scout World Jamboree.

The thing that I noticed most was the fact that the lakes contained significantly less water than they did in 1979. A short drive had us arriving at City Beach before continuing through the northern

coastal suburbs of Perth. We were both impressed with the amount of coastal limestone to be viewed. Thanks to the generosity of Jay Anderson (ASF President) and her husband Ross, we were able to stay with them in the lovely suburb of Floreat. Thanks heaps for your warm hospitality!

Thursday saw us boarding a ferry to Rottnest Island. What a place! Historic buildings, a great lunch and incredible limestone beachscapes. One of my favorites was The Basin although other notable sights included Bathurst Point and Wajemup Lighthouses, West End and of course the Quokkas.

It is thanks to the Quokka that Rottnest Island received it's name. As Dutch explorers were sailing past they thought they saw large rats, hence the name "Rotts Nest" which became the Rottnest Island of today.

Friday saw our first visit to a cave area. Yanchep National Park, north of Perth, is a lovely recreational area with a variety of activities to engage in. No visit to Yanchep is complete without inspecting Crystal Cave. Although we had to pay an entry fee, we did not mind as all money raised goes to the upkeep of the park. Thanks in particular should go to our guide Brenton who was very informative and took the time to show us the damage done during the break-in the previous week. Apparently some youths gained entry via a solution pipe and smashed some fish tanks and broke several large speleothems.

After returning to Perth, a visit was made to Kings Park, several hundred acres of landscaped grounds overlooking Perth and the Swan River. Highlights include the War Memorial and Eternal Flame, the Floral Clock and the Glass Bridge. Kings Park is certainly a credit to the people of Western Australia.

Dinner that night was a BBQ on the limestone cliffs above the Blackwall Reach of the Swan River with Ross and Jay and some of their friends. Although we had been in Perth for two days only, we were certainly aware of the ever present limestone.

Saturday saw us heading south towards the Augusta-Margaret River area. A stop was made at Dawesville in order to view the artificial channel cut in 1994 to help water flow in the Peel Inlet. Lake Clifton followed in order to see the Thrombolites which are similar to Stomatolites. Thrombolites are formed by a variety of micro-organisms. As the micro-organisms photosynthesise, calcium carbonate is drawn out of the lime enriched lake water to form rock like material.

Next stop was Busselton where a walk was made to the end of the 1.8km long Busselton Jetty. Afternoon tea was next on the agenda in the company of Aubrey Draheim and his girlfriend Danielle. Aubrey is the son of former Jenolan Caves guide Cathie Draheim so it was good to catch up with him. Accommodation that night was Prevelly Park Caravan Park, near where Margaret River flows into the Indian Ocean. It also afforded us Easterners the rare opportunity to watch an ocean sunset.

Sunday saw visits to Gracetown (scene of the tragic 1996 cliff collapse) as well as the very interesting non-limestone Canal Rocks. They are an interesting feature where the ocean's erosive power has enlarged joints in the rock. Next stop was Yallingup Caves House which has undergone extensive renovations since I stayed there in 1991. Yallingup Beach and Reef are yet another example of the stunning scenery to be found in the South West of Western Australia.

On to Ngilgi Cave where we just happened to bump into Andy Spate as well as Catherine, Katrina and Greg from Naracoorte Caves in Ngilgi's Visitor Centre. This just happened to be when staff were opening a package from NSW which contained crystal and rocks which were "souvenired" from the cave; obviously someone had a guilty conscience!

An interesting amble through Ngilgi Cave allowed us the opportunity to view some of the infrastructure work within the cave as well as the stunning speleothems. Afterwards, we all inspected the prominent limestone beds at Bunker Bay.

A quick drive south found us at Augusta for check in for our accommodation at the well appointed Baywatch Manor YHA which was to be our base of activities for the next few days. A sumptuous welcome dinner allowed us to sample the fresh produce and wine for which this region is justly famous and to renew old and establish new caving friendships from around the country.

Monday morning dawned clear as we piled into Lindsay and Peter's vehicles; first stop was "Kodak Corner" to view a magnificent stand of trees for which this area is also famous. On to Mammoth Cave where we undertook the self-guided tour of this magnificent cave; complimented by an informative audio commentary. *CaveWorks* was next on the agenda; for those of you who have not been there it is a must on any visit to this area. An excellent interpretive display prepares the visitor for an inspection of Lake Cave; the highlight of which is the *Suspended Table* as well as an impressive collection of straws.

Tuesday was also clear as we prepared for a visit to some undeveloped caves as well as a walk through typical south western bush. Splitting into two groups we visited AU10 Cave, Old Kadardup Cave and Deepdene Cave as well as experiencing the joys of bushwalking in 37 degree heat. After regrouping we visited the Augusta Water Wheel and the Tufa Springs. I was particularly impressed with the springs, having seen similar at Wombeyan Caves. Dinner was fish and chips by the Blackwood River; purchased from the Colourpatch Cafe which advertises itself as the "Last Eating House before the Antarctic"! Back to the vehicles and off for an evening inspection of the semi-developed Moondyne Cave. It is an incredible cave, again featuring impressive speleothems.

Wednesday saw us visiting Giants Cave and Calgardup Cave, two caves managed by the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). They were very impressive, with informative guides. A stop was also made at Brides Cave, the most visual feature being the abseiling launch platform which was recently constructed to assist commercial tour operators.

At Tunnel Cave, located under the main Caves Road, an informative lecture was presented on archaeology studies done in the cave. Of course no visit to this region is complete without sampling wine from one of the many wineries. Voyager Estate provided the venue although as I was driving I could not sample – despite pleading, no one else wanted to drive. A very impressive establishment; I would love their landscape team to give my backyard the once over! An enjoyable dinner at the local Chinese restaurant concluded another interesting day.

Andy Spate merged amongst the Cosy Corner coastal karst pinnacles – 11th Cave & Karst Presenters Workshop, 2006. Photo: Andy Spate.



Thursday, our last day of activities, commenced with a cruise along the Blackwood River with Captain Annie who pointed out some of the local history and stories for us. A stop was made at Bill's Swaggy Camp. Bill gave a very fascinating talk about his family's history as well as the local area. An enjoyable morning tea of damper and billy tea followed before cruising back to Augusta.

After lunch it was off to Jewel Cave; I have been to Jewel Cave before but was totally unprepared when we deviated off the track into the *Flat Roof Room* where there was literally 1000's and 1000's of straws. I used to think that shawls were my favourite however I soon changed my mind after viewing this incredible collection!

Two oceans, the Southern and the Indian, meet at Cape Leeuwin and this was our next stop to see the tallest lighthouse in Australia. Jenolan's resident lighthouse affectionado Anita was suitably impressed as were we all. A farewell dinner at the *Colourpatch* concluded a most enjoyable few days in this stunning area.

Of an evening, opportunities were afforded for each of us to make a presentation on our own cave areas or other cave related topics. As always, Andy Spate was on hand to provide advice on all topics of speleology. Some of the issues facing the South West (but on a wider scale as well) is the depletion of ground water reserves.

Much of the water supply for Perth and surrounds is drawn from aquifers and this supply has reduced over the years. As such, Perth is looking further a field for ground water and of course this includes the south west of the state. Having been to Crystal Cave at Yanchep three times in the last 27 years

I have certainly noticed the drop in the level of water within this cave. We were informed that when the *Flat Roof Room* in Jewel Cave was first discovered it was by achieved by boat, but it is now dry. Like the rest of the country, more and more

demands are being placed on ever dwindling water supplies. This can only have a long term negative impact, particularly in karst regions such as the south west which rely so much on water.

As the official activities were now finished, Friday allowed time for some more sightseeing in the region. A quick drive north to Margaret River and we were soon enjoying morning tea with Robyn McBeath before heading over to Ellensbrook Homestead and Meekadarrabee Falls.

I was very impressed with Meekadarrabee Falls and would suggest they be on the itinerary of anyone visiting this region. Boranup Lookout provided great views after traveling the Boranup Forest Drive. Stops were also made at Hamlin Bay and Cosy Corner. Saturday saw us head back to Perth to visit Phil McGuire and his wife Lissa. Phil used to be a guide at Jenolan and it was good to catch up on old times with him.

Sunday was shaping up to be a very hot day so we spent the morning at the West Australian Museum viewing its geological displays. A ferry to South Perth and return, a visit to Reabold Hill and a swim at City Beach at sunset rounded out another full day of sightseeing.

Monday saw us traveling to Fremantle, where we witnessed the 1.00pm canon firing at the Round House, as well as visiting Rockingham and Point Peron. Monday saw an early morning swim at City Beach before flying home after an enjoyable two weeks in Western Australia.

Particular thanks should be afforded to Peter Bell and Lindsay Hatcher for organizing our events; Robyn McBeath for allowing them the privilege of putting up with us and all of the *CaveWorks* and CALM staff who made our visit so enjoyable.

Thanks also are due to Neville from Baywatch Manor who made our stay at his establishment all the more enjoyable. The question on everyone's lips, of course, was where to in 2008?

Nominations to host the 12th Cave & Karst Presenters Workshop in 2008 were received from Yarangobilly Caves, the John Forest National Park Railway Tunnel and Jenolan Caves. It a close vote but Jenolan Caves won out. Thus we look forward to hosting at Jenolan in two years time.

For the record, those attending in Western Australia were: Scott Melton (Jenolan), Ted Matthews (Jenolan), Ian Eddison (Jenolan), Anita Eddison (Jenolan), Jenny Kreuser (Yarangobilly), Hannah Matthews (Yarangobilly), Katrina Wills, (Naracoorte), Greg Wills (Naracoorte), Catherine Sellars (Naracoorte), and Andy Spate (ACKMA) and our hosts from *CaveWorks* – Peter Bell and Lindsay Hatcher. Not forgetting of course the numerous *CaveWorks* and CALM staff who joined us on various activities.