



Above: The Chinese delegation with Jenolan staff. Below: On a cave tour. Photos: Martha Demas

CHINESE DELEGATION VISITS JENOLAN CAVES

– Dan Cove

From 15–17 April Jenolan hosted a visiting delegation of international cave managers and scientists. The majority were management and research staff from the Dunhuang Academy, located in Gansu Province, north-west China, with associates from the Getty Conservation Institute in Los Angeles and Australian heritage management experts. The visit was a further step in a long running joint project to mitigate visitor impact and ensure effective long-term management of the World Heritage listed Mogao Grottoes located near Dunhuang between the edges of the Gobi and Taklimakan deserts.

The area was once a significant hub on the ancient Silk Road, and Dunhuang a site of substantial cultural interchange. Mogao Grottoes are a series of entirely man-made caves, carved over 1000 years by Buddhist monks and followers and decorated with artwork, sculpture and iconography of extraordinary intricacy and great beauty. Over 700 caves were excavated at Mogao, including Cave 17, also known as the 'library cave', which was sealed until rediscovered in 1900 and found to contain over 50,000 Buddhist scriptures, including the world's oldest printed book.

Today the site attracts over 500,000 visitors annually, with peak visitation exceeding 6000 on a single day. Visitors are spread over roughly 30 of the caves. The environmental effects of this high visitation are all too evident in discolouration and breakdown of the artworks, and a diminished experience for the visitors themselves. The primary focus of the

delegation's visit was to discuss monitoring and evaluation, particularly in regard to CO₂ build-up, future lighting design and visitor management/interpretation.

While at Jenolan the group visited the Orient, Temple of Baal and Nettle Caves, and undertook a series of workshops and discussions with Jenolan management. It was a wonderful opportunity for both the international delegates and the Jenolan team, as it was immediately clear just how many resource and visitor management issues were common between us. All benefited from the exchange of ideas and knowledge, and there was a quite wonderful sense of shared purpose and camaraderie. The delegation departed with many promises of future visits, offers for us to visit Dunhuang and discussion of hosting guide exchanges. It was a pleasure to work with them over the three days, and we look forward to the possibility of continued collaboration in the future.

