

Wonambi turns ten – Peter Alexander, Julie Earl, Steve Hayter and Rod Wells cut the commemorative cake.



WONAMBI TURNS TEN!

– Steve Bourne

Staff and invited guests celebrated the tenth anniversary of the opening of the Wonambi Fossil Centre on 4 December 2008. Several of those responsible for the development of the Centre were present, but unfortunately the distance from Mulu was just too great for Brian Clark. Peter Alexander, South East Regional Conservator for the Department for Environment and Heritage, introduced the evening's proceedings with Professor Rod Wells the guest speaker. Rod spoke at length on the finding of the Fossil Chamber through to the desire of presenting the fossil history to the public and the concepts behind the Wonambi Fossil Centre. He presented several amusing anecdotes of himself and Brian Clark dealing with beaurocrats in pushing the project through the system. Steve Hayter was also in attendance, but typically could not be drawn into a few words. Steve has remained close to the Wonambi Fossil Centre project through the entire ten years and continues to present and implement new ideas and undertake routine maintenance on the robotic animals. It was a shame that Brian Clark could not be there given his integral role in the development, however he did visit in January to cast his eye over the park.

Naracoorte Business and Tourism Association President Julie Earl spoke of the impact the park development has had on Naracoorte businesses. I responded to Rod and Julie's words highlighting how the Centre changed the face of Naracoorte Caves in the way the caves and their fossil history are presented to the visiting public. In the first ten years of Wonambi, nearly 250,000 visitors have enjoyed the display. Park visitation has increased by an average of 80% with a corresponding increase in revenue and jobs, and

the development of a World Heritage site truly displaying its World Heritage values.

It was great to have Rod Wells and Dr Grant Gartrell together to reminisce on their halcyon caving days of 1969 and their great discoveries. An inspection tour of the new Victoria Fossil Cave viewing platform was provided for all guests and provided a platform for some extended story telling. We then adjourned for some nibbles and fine local wine. All very sensible really; a cave, fossils, conversation, great wines and food and the bringing together of a local community. Wonambi really has achieved what those responsible set out to achieve.



Two old fossils – Creatures of the Night or Underground Wonders: Which best captures the two gentlemen in question? Rod Wells and Grant Gartrell in the Wonmabi Fossil Centre.