

Children participating in activities on the day.



WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CAVERS CO-ORDINATE A COMMUNITY DAY FOR NATIONAL SCIENCE WEEK – August 2009

– Jay Anderson

The displays being examined by visiting children.



National Science Week occurs annually in late August and it's a great way to be involved in community education – raising the profile of caves in your area. Last year (2008), in Western Australia, the local Margaret River region speleological group – Cavers Leeuwin, had undertaken a local event focussing on 'Science of Speleology'. This involved a special 'community day' where local cavers held a community display and volunteered and guided visitors thru several caves. We also had held an evening presentation night – with several presentations on the Science of Speleology. The key partner was the Department of Environment and Conservation

(DEC) and the main sites utilised were Calgardup Cave and Giants Cave. We had received \$1000 in State funding for resources for this community day and you may recall a previous article with some photo's and an image of the 'sticker' that was printed and provided to all visitors.

During late 2008, Cavers Leeuwin decided to apply for a Federal Grant to assist with the future event planning. We aimed to have several presenters and to have two community presentation nights on different aspects of speleological research. We also planned a larger 'community cave day'. The project was called 'Discovering Caves and Speleology – the Science of the Subterranean'. The main aim of the funding sought was for promotion and advertising in the local community. During February 2009, Cavers Leeuwin was notified that we were successful in obtaining a grant for almost \$6000 from the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science & Research for National Science Week 2009!

It was a busy year with the planning and organisation for the week of events. The National Science week itself went well – with the combination of displays, presentations and the community day. During the 'community cave day' there were guided tours of key cave sites and interpretive walks of the associated forest ecosystem. There was a hands-on display which included examining rocks, cave life and fossils, hence promoting the discovery of the 'sciences of

speleology' and promoting the opportunity for members of the public to meet speleologists and scientists. This enhanced the visitor experience and increased awareness of speleology and the sciences involved in speleology. There were several activities set up for participants to interact with and learn from, especially activities for children. The activities were varied, interesting and fantastic and involved all family members. In particular, we utilised the 'crystal kits' that Geoff Kell from Carey's Cave had showcased at Buchan in 2007. We can highly recommend these excellent activities as they are of interest to anyone!

The implementation of the two evening seminars was positive, although the night events were not as well attended as we'd anticipated (which surprised us). The promotion had involved several radio interviews and extensive newspaper advertising. Thanks to our sponsors for the evening presentations, we had excellent facilities for the presentations – Shire of Augusta Margaret River (Wednesday Night at the Cultural Centre – where the ACKMA conference was held in May) and Australis (Saturday night at the Function Centre). Here is a summary of the presenters and their topics:

- Mrs Anne Wood - DEC Cave Manager – 'Caves of the Leeuwin Naturaliste Ridge'
- Dr Stephen Swabey - Speleologist & Geomorphologist – 'Caves: Nature's Recording Studio'
- Dr Tim Bleby - University of WA – 'plumbing the depths of tall trees using caves'
- Mr Ross Anderson - Local Speleologist – 'Come caving' (photojourney)
- Mr Peter Lane - Local Geologist – 'Caves of the Capes; their regional geological setting'
- Dr Tim Moulds - Speleologist & Biospeleologist- 'What's down there anyway? An introduction to life underground'
- Dr Mark Harvey - WA Museum – 'Confessions of a troglodite: tales of weird creatures from Australian caves'
- Dr Joe Dortch – 'University of WA – 'The long view - people and environment in south-western Australia from 45,000 years ago to AD 1800'

The community caves day was very successful despite the cold and windy weather. It was excellent that the Cape to Cape Catchment Group had loaned us their totally amazing large interpretive display tent – it kept the wind out and gave a great backdrop for our displays. Of significant note was the number of local families who came out to the caves after seeing our advertisement in the local papers. During the day, Cavers Leeuwin volunteers were kept busy talking to the visitors, guiding visitors through the caves, participating in activities with children or demonstrating aspects of the science of speleology to the members of the public.

We consider that our events were successful and our visitors provided positive feedback. In terms of 'outcomes', the usual daily visitation at DEC

caves for a winter/August day during 2009 was tripled. In comparison to our event last year we received double the visitation this year. We consider the success of the day in 2009, was the result of the additional promotion that our event received.

In particular we were very impressed at the large amount of families in attendance and the number of children visiting was by far the most recorded. We are confident that all the visitors to our events went away greatly informed about both National Science Week and also the Science of Speleology.



Two boys hard at work with the crystal cave kits – replicating speleothems.

Some of the Feedback provided

During the 'Caves Day' the visitors provided positive verbal feedback. Many families were interested in the interactive activities and it was clear that the children enjoyed the activities. Both Adults and children all enjoyed the experience.

Here is a sample of feedback provided on written evaluation sheets:

- 'Makes me want to see more of cave systems and how they record and work'
- 'great displays and information'
- 'it was great, especially the calcified tree root extension'
- 'it was fantastic, the kids loved it and the adults found it interesting, it was a real experience. Thanks'
- 'awesome activities, knowledgeable and friendly guides, would love to come back again and do the adventure section, with older clothes, and the other 'special' cave that is not usually open. Big thanks'
- 'loved it' and 'great speakers, amazing topics'

In summary, it is considered that the Cavers Leeuwin National Science Week Project involved great teamwork for a successful event. Special thanks to the Australian Government - Department of Innovation, Industry, Science & Research for the funding which gave Cavers Leeuwin the capacity to undertake another successful community event. Thanks also to our other supporting partners: Department of Environment and Conservation, Cape to Cape Catchment Group, Australis Margaret River and the Shire of Augusta Margaret River.