



ONE YEAR AT NARACOORTE CAVES

– Deborah Carden

A while ago I promised Kent I'd write something about Naracoorte for the ACKMA Journal. Time really does fly – I have just passed my first anniversary in Australia. So I have compiled some items from twelve months as Caves Manager for Naracoorte National Park and World Heritage Area and Tantanoola Caves Conservation Park in South Australia.

A WARM WELCOME

On 27 January 2009 I stepped off the plane from NZ to be greeted at Adelaide airport by Steve Bourne and a 45° day, both providing a warm welcome. Temperatures were in the 40s for the next four days during which time I was kindly introduced to staff and the sites via air conditioned cars and offices or self conditioning caves. I can't say I have gotten used to 40° days but I did notice that a recent 33 degrees did not drive me inside.

In the first week I met the Naracoorte and Tantanoola caves staff and the staff from the co-located Upper South East District Office at a SBBBQ (Steve Bourne Organised Barbeque) arranged to introduce us to each other. This was a really nice way to meet everyone and a reminder of what great hosts the Naracoorte people are.

I had been to Naracoorte twice before and had met several of the longer standing staff on my week-long second visit, travelling together to an ACKMA AGM on Kangaroo Island. My first visit had been as part of the ACKMA Mt Gambier-based conference when Brian Clarke was Caves Manager.

ALEXANDRA CAVE CENTENARY, 5 APRIL 2009

Naracoorte has been host to large and small events for over 100 years – family gatherings, picnics, conferences, meetings, weddings, OZACT (Shakespeare in the Cave) and recently the Heidelberg Choral Society. The Blanche Cave is perfect for events. However, in April 2009 it was Alexandra's turn.

Staff love an occasion. Alexandra's 100th birthday provided a perfect reason for celebration. In conjunction with Friends of Naracoorte Caves (FoNC) preparations started well ahead of 5th April.

Gardens were trimmed, weeded and replanted. Catering arranged, history researched and written, casts of actors selected, invitations sent and a fine day ordered.

On the day guests were greeted by a guard-of-honour of beautifully dressed staff, FoNC members and local school children. Barb Lobban, President of FoNC, and her husband Scott and a sign writer friend had created a copy of the original welcome sign that greeted guests when Alexandra was opened 100 years ago.

The guest of honour was the Minister for Environment and Heritage (DEH), the Honourable Jay Wetherill. Peter Alexander, Regional Conservator for DEH and the Naracoorte Mayor Ken Grundy welcomed everyone to the Park and the fine day request which seemed to have got lost in the mail was found just in time for the ceremony.

At the Alexandra Cave Centenary...



The Guard of Honour – guides, Friends of Naracoorte Caves and local school children dressed for the occasion.



Beautifully dressed – Pat Bourne (left) and Alison Rowe.



Yarrow Lee lights the way.

During the official part of the ceremony a remembrance plaque was unveiled, the 'Trapped in Time' DVD was launched and trees were

planted. The official party was then lead into Alexandra Cave by Steve Bourne and they were met and escorted through the cave by William Reddan (Andrew Hansford) and his daughter Agnes (Barb Lobban). William had been a caretaker at the Park and he had discovered Alexandra Cave. Agnes had been a teacher.



Guide Julie Stone explaining a lot of old bones in the Kid's Education Shed.



Children doing novice adventure caving.

THE EDUCATION REVIEW AND THE MASTER PLAN

Along with the bat research project (which Steve Bourne has written about in this Journal edition) The Education Review and the Master Plan are two interesting projects at Naracoorte.

The purpose of the **Education Review** is to assess what is offered to schools and ensure the future direction aligns with curriculum, keeps up-to-date with science and research and meets the demands, in presentation, as a web-based tool capable of keeping up with advancing technology and techno-smart users. Review participants include Head Office staff, the Naracoorte guides, Steve Bourne, Liz Reed and me, external educators, consultants and facilitators. It's quite a big piece of work. Since July '09 three two-day workshops have been held, each of which determines the framework for the next stage. The first workshop determined the range of topics interpreted by guides for schools and visitors on tours that the guides lead. The next involved education sector representatives and the third focused on product development. The final phase is for DEH's Information Technology team to turn the hardcopy data into a smart, user friendly web site. Their ideas on this are innovative and I am

looking forward to when it goes live – all going well that will be by mid 2010. I feel that the information that will be on the web and about which staff are fully knowledgeable can also be used for new nature-based tourism products.

For those who have not been to Naracoorte we have a campground and bunkhouse accommodation. Both are used by schools during term times and are available to others during holidays.



New handrail in Alexandra Cave.

The **Master Plan** is a strategic plan designed to ensure that Naracoorte Caves as a National Park and World Heritage Area has sound, well-thought direction for development during and beyond the next decade. The Park has interdependent functions that include conservation, tourism, education and research. It needs to achieve a balance, ensuring the functions can occur without comprising the site's values. To achieve these goals DEH, as manager, will consult with a wide cross-section of the community in its analysis.

It has identified major interest groups who will be invited to comment on Naracoorte Caves' future direction. Audiences identified include education and scientific institutions, recreation groups, business and tourism sectors, conservation groups, and local residents and community groups. Key stakeholders include local, state and federal government, aboriginal partners and Friends of Parks, various regional Boards.



Friends of Naracoorte Caves preparing the Alexandra Cave garden for the Alexandra Cave centenary celebrations.

To date informal discussion has been held with key parties. Formal consultation workshops will be held on 11 and 12 March 2010 at Naracoorte. Steve Bourne, as ACKMA President and me as Karst Science Officer, are able to represent ACKMA at the table. We can facilitate discussion with the wider ACKMA membership.

FRIENDS OF NARACOORTE CAVES

The Friends are an interested and supportive group who are involved throughout the year with activities at the caves. Last year's programme included 'Clean-up Australia Day' where they cleaned up in and around the Naracoorte Park. As noted above they were key participants with the Alexandra centenary; they attended Palaeontology Week activities, helped tidy up the Heritage Walk and removed coastal wattle and other weeds between the campground and the visitor precinct and co-hosted the Threatened Species Day. They are a key part of the bat research project. The Park is lucky indeed to have such a supportive group.



Palaeontologist Liz Reed's biodiversity and climate change dig in Blanche Cave, Naracoorte.



Young palaeontologists in the Kid's Shed.

WORLD HERITAGE – ONGOING SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

Liz Reed of Flinders University remains involved with the palaeontologic research at the Caves and we are interested in the climatic and biodiversity directions that she is taking her work. It will add much value to the climate change and biodiversity focus that Naracoorte's education packages offer to schools and to the day-to-day guided tour interpretation.

Blanche Cave's heritage listed steps.



When I arrived Amy Macken, Flinders Masters student was working under Liz's supervision on a dig in Grant Hall in the Victoria Fossil Cave. Amy completed her study with First Class honours and we were delighted to hear she is to continue on the theme with a PhD.

Amy joined us recently at a staff event and showed her thesis presentation to guides, as she had promised. Staff were very pleased to see the results of Amy's long hours with dentist's tools and soft, thin paint brushes.

TANTANOOLA CAVES

This year it rained. And Tantanoola Cave was a picture. It's such an exquisite little cave. Its location means it doesn't get a huge number of visitors but those who do go are always pleased they stopped in. As well as the cave there is an attractive walk up and around from where 360° views can be obtained of the inland, the coast and the Canunda wind farm. The latter looks surreal

on a misty day, as some ACKMA members may remember from the Mt Gambier conference.

GENERAL

For those who know Naracoorte Decima McTernan (Snr Guide), Frank Bromley, Barb Lobban, Jen Maclean, Suzi Sims, Matt Crewe and Andrew Hansford (Park Assistant) and Jenny Paech (Admin Officer) are with us still; Julie Stone and Yarrow Lee have made it to nearly two years here. Andrew and Suzi worked in ranger roles for a while and then returned to the caves umbrella (helmet). Andrew is looking forward to becoming a father mid-February. Erica Boyington left us to have baby No 2; Amy Cheminant has shifted to Darwin; Alison Rowe, Tammy Graetz and Gavin Kluske joined the guiding team.

Visitor numbers have been up and down but tracking reasonably year-to-date. The bats had babies and we have enjoyed seeing them grow from jellybeans to fur covered flyers. The Tantanoola team comprises Fiona Bastian, Sarah Bastian and Mandy Telfer. DEH took over the running of Caves Cafe on 1 September 2009.

We are about to advertise for a café team leader and a café assistant as staff leave for other jobs. Steve Bourne is enjoying his role as Deputy Regional Conservator. It takes him out around the South East region, involved in a wide range of jobs.

He is still living in Naracoorte and is a very helpful source of information about Naracoorte and Tantanoola Parks. I am enjoying the manager role here - it is varied and there is never a dull moment.



At the memorial plaque, Alexandra Cave Centenary, April 2009.