

NARACOORTE TOWN ENTRANCE SCULPTURES

Steve Bourne

Naracoorte has brand new entry statements to the town, featuring megafauna skeletons constructed from steel, similar in design to those at the entrance to Naracoorte Caves National Park. I recall discussing a similar project with then Naracoorte Manager Brian Clark in 1998 when I started full time at Naracoorte, and it never got off the ground. In 2003 I tried again with the local council presenting a fully costed report which was voted out. In 2008, a small group from the local business and tourism association started a project to develop entry statements to the town, seeking arts funding, undertaking public consultation, getting design after design submitted by anyone who thought they had a good idea.

Naracoorte Lucindale Council formed a committee (always dangerous!) to establish the town entrances and allocated \$20,000 towards the project in one budget and \$20,000 the following year. The local business and tourism association pledged \$10,000. The committee sought submissions from artists, narrowing it to four artists asked to produce concepts around megafauna and the Naracoorte Caves. The words "Naracoorte: home of World Heritage fossil caves" had to be included. The committee presented four designs to Council in September, by which time I was working there. It was

narrowed down to two and once again to public consultation. There were still many in the community who could not see why Council would spend \$40,000 on sculptures for the town entrances, and even within Council, some staff and councillors who wanted to abandon the project. In February, I presented a report and recommendation to Council which was accepted, and Steve Hayter, the artist behind the Wonambi Fossil Centre diorama and Naracoorte caves entrance



Top. Steve Hayter (artist), Scott Lobban (stonemason) on sculpture; L-R Julie Earl (committee), Deborah Carden (Caves Manager), Decima McTernan (Naracoorte Caves and committee, Mayor Erika Vickery, Judy Johnson (Naracoorte Business and Tourism Association).

Bottom. The large crowd at the opening.

sculptures was awarded the contract. These were officially opened by Mayor Ericka Vickery and the community on 9 September 2012, with over 130 people attending.

The opening day was a chance “to be a visitor in your own town”, with the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources providing a free Alexandra Cave tour and afternoon tea at Naracoorte Caves. Mayor Vickery led a procession of cars to the caves, traveling in a 1910 vintage car. The day was a lot of fun and reconnected many of the local community with their park.

The response to the sculptures has been interesting. The fierce opposition has vaporised and many who could not see the point are starting to see the value of the features. One person who opposed the installations commented to the mayor that they have given “Naracoorte a soul” and

that they are a good value for money. How things can change!

They have already appeared in the local paper a number of times, most recently with visitors from Western Australia taking a holiday snap there. Local television has featured them and ABC national radio has featured them. We plan to run a photographic competition over the Christmas holiday season and create an online presence. I have also been approached to use images on a range of children’s clothing and the postcards are being designed.

It has been a long haul to get these sculptures in place and many people have contributed. The aim was to establish stronger links between Naracoorte and Naracoorte Caves to benefit both, and early indications are that it is working. It just took 15 years to happen!



Above left. The sculptures are designed to be “interactive.”

Above right. Some local humour during installation

Below. The northern town entrance at night.

