

## THE MEMORY KEEPERS

Sasa Kennedy



*John Callaghan holds the floor, January 2008  
Photo: Sasa Kennedy*

As interpretative guides, an important aspect of our job is keeping our presentations fresh. Delivering similar information in the same place day after day, this can become one of the more challenging aspects of our profession. Using a range of themes is one way to avoid getting bored; another way is to include new information, such as scientific developments, new discoveries and so forth on tours. Trawling 'Trove' and other such internet sites can dredge up new primary sources for old stories, or even bring to light new tales. Guides and managers can also incorporate new technology into cave tours. All these things can refresh a guide's interpretation of a site.

Another way to find 'new' stories is to talk to your local 'memory keeper' – the guide or other staff member who has been around for a long time, who comes up with funny or interesting tales and who has a passion for the site. These 'memory keepers' may not always be outgoing with their information but as interpretative guides these are the people we should be paying attention to. They are not just a wealth of information on the history of a site, but often embrace its distinct ethos and can share information on how quite subtle differences have developed over time.

John Callaghan, whose obituary appears in this issue of the journal, was one of these people. Prior to his retirement from Jenolan he led three extended tours for the guiding staff: one of the Imperial/Diamond and Chifley caves, one of the Lucas and River caves and one through the Orient and Temple of Baal. These were amongst the most keenly attended training or caving activities I have ever witnessed at Jenolan.

Some of the interpretative possibilities he brought to light were fossils that were unknown to many guides, historic signatures and feature names that had been forgotten over time and stories from the period in the 70s and 80s when the caves infrastructure was getting a major upgrade. John was not the only person to know of these fossils, signatures and stories, but as they are not usually covered in tours, they were not routinely being passed on to new guides. Over time our stories were being lost.

Some of the stories are great anecdotes for repeat visitors on the lookout for something new. Not all of them are suitable for inclusion in tours, but sharing them certainly builds on the camaraderie and team spirit that are a major aspect of working at any cave site.

Others are useful information for those super observant visitors – the ones who notice the writing near the floor that states: 'FOR SHORT GUIDES ONLY'. This inscription (on a small block of concrete) dates to the relighting of the Imperial Cave in the 80s. The switch board for the lights was constructed by some of the taller guides at a comfortable height for themselves. When one of the less lofty guides complained that it was hard to reach, they built him a special step - and inscribed it. I still smile every time I notice it and visitors also get a laugh from the tale.

Studies show that tourists come to cave sites and other natural areas for an authentic and site-specific experience. If we don't deliver, chances are they won't return. So think about arranging some story-sharing tours for staff at your cave site. Pass on those special stories held in trust by your own 'memory keepers' before they get lost and forgotten. Help to ensure that nobody leaves your cave system thinking that all cave tours are the same.



*John Callaghan shares Orient Cave stories, January 2008  
Photo: Jenny Whitby*