

# CAPRICORN CAVES 2016: CAVES GUIDES' SCHOOL and ACKMA AGM

## Various Contributors

### FROM THE EDITOR

*The Cave Guides' School was a particularly energetic two days. It was the most interactive workshop that I have had the opportunity to participate and observe in the nine guides' workshops I have attended to since 1997. A report appears elsewhere in this journal, with the following provided by those who attended. I suggest their contributions clearly show the value of their participation. Well done to Ann Augusteyn and her team for hosting this, and to John Pastorelli, Cathie Plowman and David Morgans whose professional leadership made it the success it was.*

### Jodie Anderson Wellington Caves Complex Manager

If I take any message away from the 2016 ACKMA Cave Guides' School and AGM it is that people are the most important element in the interpretation, preservation and protection of caves and karst environments and at the core of this is the need for training and development of people.



The training delivered by John Pastorelli and Cathie Plowman was an energetic experience that awakened the senses and provided invaluable tools to interpret not just caves but absolutely anything (transferable skills). It had us up and interacting with each and the environment in new and exciting ways. Like children exploring the world we used touch, smell, sight, sounds, imagination and more to interpret the world around us, opening up an exciting array of tools of which we could use to craft engaging talks and experiences for guests.

Armed with an amazing array of tools we also learnt processes for developing the all-important message. For example: the 60 second plunge, which is essentially 60 seconds of idea diarrhoea captured on paper. The content is then funnelled down through a process of "so what?" until you are left with a message. The 60 second plunge simplifies the overwhelming process of communicating content & facts and turns it into an engaging story with meaning.

There were so many valuable lessons learnt and tools added to the tool box, but the three that really stuck for me are:

- Developing a message is a simple process which gives meaning to interpretation.
- As guides we should "stretch" ourselves to delivering 1% different each time. Doing this will drive continual improvement and innovation.
- Teaching the art of interpretation and filling up the tool box of guides is paramount. "Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day, teach a man to fish and he will eat for a life time". Just providing content & facts; is to "give a man a fish", providing guides with the tools of interpretation is "teaching a man to fish..." which allows



*L-R. Roslyn Hognno, Teagan Symons, Nicola Beckett, Raygan Davis, and Jodie Anderson prepare for abseiling  
Photo: Nicola Beckett*

them to use their knowledge and content to create engaging, meaningful and memorable interpretation.

The energetic workshops of Cathie and John, were balanced with the passionate and engaging presentations from David Morgans from Tourism and Events Queensland. David provided insight into the importance for organisations, business and individuals in developing, delivering and embedding their brand, vision, mission and promise to their guests in all aspects of their operations.

At the core, changing the attitudes and perspective of how we view our guests (instead of visitors) and our role as their hosts (not just guides). For me learning from David could not come at



*Capricorn Caves' guide Katherine Herring leading a group  
Photo: Steve Bourne*

a more pivotal time as I start the process of rebranding and developing the Wellington Caves Complex.

We now all have a great opportunity to use the momentum generated from attending Guides' School and the ACKMA AGM and set out some simple actions of how you we will implement and use our new found tools, knowledge and connections.

*"Knowledge is not power, knowledge is only potential power. True power comes from action."* Anthony Robbins.

When I return to work, here are just a few ways I intend to take action:

- Schedule a team gathering and deliver aspects of the guides' school and share what I learnt from the experience with my team
- Ensure sufficient budget is allocated to training and development in next year's and subsequent years' budgets
- Use the process of discovering "the message" when creating an interpretation plan for Wellington Caves
- Follow up on the connections made at the conference

To continue the conversation and momentum going there will be a Facebook group created for all those who attended. As well as being a place where we can connect post Guides' School and AGM it will be a space where we can share our thoughts, ideas and ways in which we have used our new tools/knowledge to enhance our guests' experience. I would encourage others to share the actions they are going to take after attending the Guides' School and ACKMA AGM.



*Jodie Anderson and Luke Parnell atop the Capricorn karst  
Photo: Steve Bourne*

I could write about all the amazing tours, field trips and experiences we shared from abseiling, caving, croc farms, dinners and dancing but at the end of the day what made it one of the best experiences I've had, is the people. I come away with new friends, a feeling of connectedness in being a part of the ACKMA family and a thirst and hunger to do more and get more involved.

I say a big thank you to Ann, Amanda and all of the team at Capricorn Caves for providing us with such an exceptional experience. The level of care, organisation, efficiency and team work did not go unnoticed. From having our names on our doors, providing basket of things we may have forgotten to delivering fantastic tours and experiences. We will not forget how you made us feel!

The exceptional experience we had is testament to Ann's investment in the training, development and wellbeing of her team. Her return on investment can be seen in the loyalty and

longevity of staff, their passion and love for their jobs and the success of the business.

*"If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients"* Richard Branson

*"Train people well enough so they can leave, treat them well enough so they don't want to."* Richard Branson.

I truly do believe we are in such a privileged position to be able to provide people with the opportunity to discover and connect with caves and the natural environment. The skills and knowledge that were given to us at the Guides' School and ACKMA AGM will ensure we are able to deliver experiences that create lasting emotional connections with caves, which will lead to the preservation and protection of caves and karst areas. I would encourage, other managers and guides to attend future ACKMA events and invest in the training and development of their staff. It all starts with people!

*"Through interpretation understanding, through understanding appreciation; through appreciation, protection."* Freeman Tilden

### **Lawrie Dunn Wombeyan Caves**

The first impression I had on arriving at the Capricorn Caves' reception area was that it was neat and tidy all things having a place, this in turn making me keen to meet the staff and I was not disappointed, being greeted by enthusiastic members of the Capricorn team all doing their part to make our stay as pleasant as possible. It is obvious that management has a good grip on making this place work right. Everything from accommodation to meals and activities was well planned and to my knowledge, had no hick ups. The time spent in the lodge recreation room must have been engaging as I don't recall catching anyone sleeping. John, David and Cathie seriously delivered a lot of thought provoking stuff. In fact, I am still processing some of it. Having been a guide since 1990 maybe you can fall into a rut and not notice it. In any case it is well worth having a good look at yourself, you never know what new ideas or different ways you may discover. The public is changing in what it wants from a tour and we need to keep up with the times or be left behind, I



*Barry Richard taking a photo of L-R: Regina Roach, Scott Melton, Judy Christiansen, Christian... and Brittney Butler during role play exercise  
Photo: Steve Bourne*

came to Capricorn for an injection of enthusiasm to deliver on tour, to try and understand just what it is that the modern visitor wants from a tour. Still sorting through it all but now I go armed with a fully loaded toolbox and hopefully I will be a better guide for having spent time with quality trainers. This trip to Capricorn Caves was a great chance to catch up with some old friends, make some new ones and spend some time at a cave system I have not been to before. I thank Ann and all her staff for a wonderful stay at Capricorn Caves.

PS Being one of the Lord's more relaxed creations, the only thing I have taken from my Capricorn show bag so far is the stubbie holder. Guess I have some reading to do!

**Heidi Vandermere  
Capricorn Caves**

I didn't really know what to expect from ACKMA or how much involvement I would have in it. My main aim was to get the opportunity to learn something new about guiding techniques and expand my knowledge.



The first day we had 'hands on' activities with a partner we were unfamiliar with. We were put into situations that are out of the ordinary and were having to come up with a solution on the spot. I found this to be quite challenging but also very rewarding in the sense of the different practices that makes a tour memorable.

The main challenge for me was having to demonstrate what I knew in front of people who potentially knew a lot more than me! The activities got people talking and a sense of trust was formed with the partner and I think this had a big impact on me and how we need to make a relationship with our guests – not just talk at them.

Throughout the week we met people from all over Australia and New Zealand, and we shared different experiences and spoke of the similarities in the work we do. One of the highlights was learning about the different places people work and seeing the

different fields they work in. One that truly stands out was Scott Hocknull's presentation about fossils, megafauna and the transformation of the environment through climate change. I also thoroughly enjoyed John Augusteyn's presentation on the local bats of Capricorn Caves.

The main thing I am taking away from the experience over the week is having my enthusiasm and passion back! We work in an amazing environment and we can never stop learning about the different features in our caves, and to be able to educate guests and tell them the stories that we know is a very special thing.

**Manuwai Wells  
Kawiti Family Glow worm Caves, NZ**

Open up ur mind...let ur fantasies unwind...in this darkness which u know u cannot fight ...the darkness of the music of the night....as Andrew Lloyd Webber's music filled the air and warm candlelight glowed gently against majestic formations of the Capricorn Caves I was immediately transported to treasured memories of seeing the *Phantom of the Opera* many years ago with my family.



Cave guiding for me is about making connections. We connect to our caves in New Zealand through our love for grandparents (Founders of the Kawiti Family Glow worm Cave Tours), our environment, and our memories. That love in turn allows us to share and connect with our visitors - encouraging them to love as well. Capricorn Caves did an excellent job of connecting with us - through education, fun, history, music, atmosphere and memories #ourgoal TePaihere Martin and I were lucky enough to be attending 2016 Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association (ACKMA) two day Cave Guides' School in Rockhampton, Brisbane. Being able to discuss interpretative techniques with other guides and experience such different personalities, surroundings, wildlife and landscape was truly incredible. We were amazed to see a bat flying around in the caves and to learn about microbats and how the caves in the area can house up to 1800 microbats per cubic metre! Wow! One of the Capricorn guides even spoke about a carpet python



*The Capricorn Caves team. L-R. Ann Augusteyn, Scott Hopkins, Lynda McCorquodale, Lucas Zielke, Judy Christenson, Christian Bom, Robert Augusteyn, Jayden Bond, Heidi Vandermere, Amanda Hinton, Jordan Wheeler, Katherine Herring, Darren Papendorf, Courteney Blamires, Chennoa Wells, Loryus Chappel, Charlotte Riley.*

that ate a rock wallaby a few weeks ago and couldn't move for days until it was digested. The Karst Limestone Geo Discovery walk at sunset was another stunning feature, absolutely breathtaking (literally and figuratively hee hee). I would call it a cliff climb but our Aussie counterparts would probably call it a walk to the supermarket.

We thoroughly enjoyed the guide tool box exercises with Cathie Plowman and John Pastorelli and loved listening to David Morgans speak about hosting, reputation economics and branding. As a manager, I found the presentations, group work, discussions and feedback, invaluable, rich, revealing and insightful. I would encourage more managers to take the opportunity to attend, listen and participate.

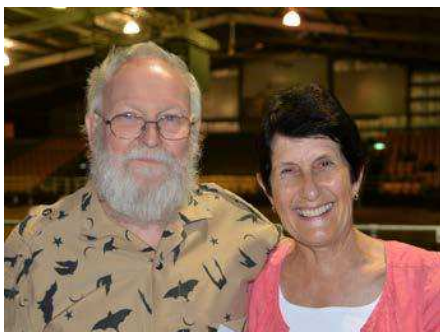
Overall, reconnecting with our ACKMA family and adding new faces and names to our list of caving friends from across the ditch was the highlight of the week. Andy, Scott, all of our ACKMA buddies, we loved seeing you all again. Thank you to Ann and Capricorn Caves, everybody really, for welcoming us and making it such a memorable experience, Arohanui.



*L-R. Manuwai Wells, Raygan Davis, Tim Davidson, Roslyn Hogno and Andy Spate during role play exercise. "The Google family"- see Regina Roach's story below  
Photo: Steve Bourne*

**Ann Augusteyn  
Capricorn Caves Owner and Manager**

What a wonderful gathering of over 60 members of the ACKMA family from Te Anau to Kawiti Caves across the ditch to Chillagoe, Tasmania, Kangaroo Island and Margaret River Caves and many more between. Add to this the large number of local supporters who attended various functions and workshops.



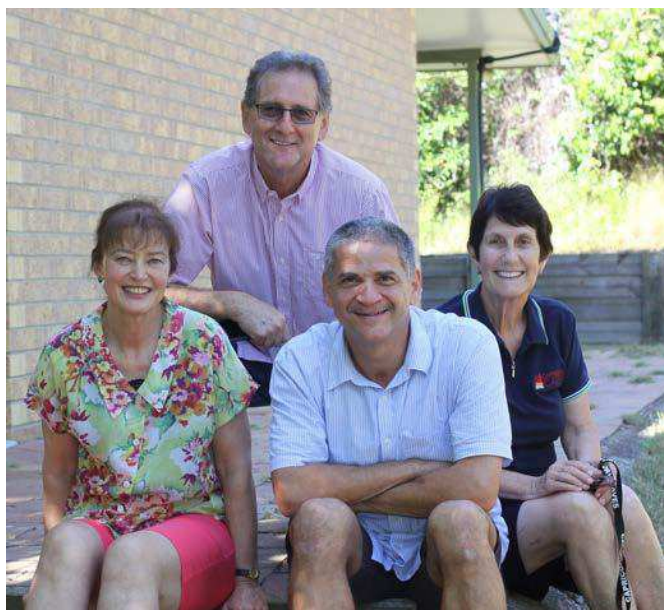
*Andy Spate with Ann Augusteyn  
Photo: Steve Bourne*

It was a privilege to host the ACKMA AGM and Cave Guides' School, which was so inspirational and stimulating thanks to the keynote speakers, John Pastorelli and David Morgans. They were such contrasting presenters in their delivery but totally engaging with the support of Cathie Plowman weaving her magical facilitation. We continued to be spellbound with Scott's front line technology producing images of the caves never seen before thanks also to Rochelle and Jon. Then just to add to the wonder of the moment a thylacine tooth and a ghost bat jaw discovered on the cave floor and excavated rocks respectively. Finally John Augusteyn's report on bats of Central Queensland left us with sober thoughts.

I think every cave should host an ACKMA event; the impact on the staff goes beyond anything that can be achieved on site. It was so good to see the mixing of everyone from different sites and different professional levels. It has reignited the passion of the Capricorn Cave guides and presents a huge problem that they all want to join ACKMA and come to Te Anau!

For me the take home message is that cave guides are the future of ACKMA with collaboration and guidance from senior managers, who embody the knowledge and experience of cave conservation. As David Morgans wrote "Guides are the heart and soul of the tourism industry because this is where the industry can make a real connection to people." and it is people's appreciation and love of caves that will ensure their preservation. Exciting technical innovations will reinforce the connection that caves embody the story of the earth. I believe that it is ACKMA's responsibility and mission to harness this energy and go forward, guides and managers, together.

We would like to acknowledge the support of ACKMA over the many years. A sincere thanks is extended to our inspirational presenters John Pastorelli, David Morgans, Cathie Plowman, Scott Hocknull and John Augusteyn. Our caving trips would not have been possible without the leadership of Noel Sands, Clive Kavanagh, Cameron James and Dianne Vavryn. Lastly a huge thank you to the Capricorn Caves staff for all the preliminary preparations for showcasing our property, organising the conference, the catering (thanks Darren - the meals were fantastic) and to Amanda for such a huge effort in seamlessly coordinating the school and AGM. Finally a thank you to everyone for coming and making it such a memorable experience for all of us.



*L-R. Cathie Plowman, David Morgans, John Pastorelli, Ann Augusteyn.  
Photo: Steve Bourne*

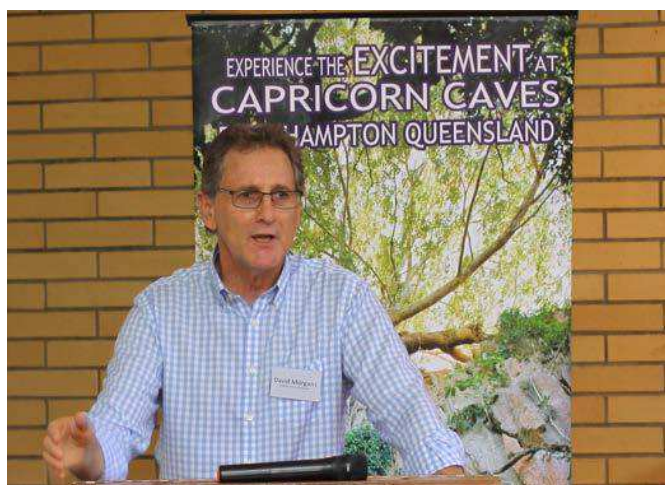
**Regina Roach  
Yarrangobilly Caves**

The Caves Guides' School 2016 was held at Capricorn Caves, Queensland, and attendees were immersed in a mixture of caves, coral, culture, crocodiles, cattle, country and caving amongst other experiences. Before the Cave Guides' School commenced, attendees selected from a range of free activities, which included a Cathedral Cave tour, adventure caving and abseiling courtesy of Ann Augusteyn and her enthusiastic crew. Or one could do nothing and just enjoy the warmth of the Capricorn Coast and Rockhampton. "Rocky" to the locals. Rocky is different. Where else do you see giant statues of bulls lining the road leading into the city centre?



The first evening was an informal dinner at The Caves pub. Yes, there is a small town called "The Caves" near Capricorn Caves. The visiting guides came from near and far; Capricorn Caves, Chillagoe, Yarrangobilly, Bairnsdale, Jenolan, Wombeyan, Buchan, Wellington, Kangaroo Island, Te Anau, Kawiti and Naracoorte. The first morning after an early breakfast we met our presenters, Cathie Plowman, John Pastorelli and David Morgans. Then it was the usual "Who's who at the Zoo?" (introductions). The first session was with Andy Spate who led our contemplation of Elery Hamilton-Smith as "Elery the founder of professional cave guiding in Australia."

I was bracing myself for the endless discussions regarding speleothems but it didn't happen, and it never happened during the sessions. A Cave Guides' School where one doesn't talk about speleothems - now that has to be an absolute first! Cathie and John introduced us to "The Guides' Toolbox". "What's the issue?" I pondered. I always take a torch and key on a cave tour. "Who needs tools?" Instead, John commenced his presentation with the word "kesen". It's a Japanese word meaning "little steps". His advice to improve your interpretation was to change one thing at a time on your tour. Change by small steps will enhance your guiding and the visitor experience. Try something different every tour, that is, in small steps. Most people communicate through talk but the guide needs to heighten their visitors' experiences by communicating with them in different



David Morgans presenting his talk with an appropriate backdrop  
Photo: Steve Bourne

ways. Like through their senses, e.g. "feel the breeze", "smell the cave", "feel the sharpness of this rock" etc.

We learnt that the guide's goal is to create a positive cave experience for the people. "People want experiences rather than just looking" that's what the research tells us, "and this experience originates from emotional connections". This is where the guide must have 'tools' in the toolbox hence "The Guides' Toolbox". Another light bulb moment for me.

We then shared our tool box experiences with role plays. The dysfunctional "Google family" was hilarious with Ros Hogno as the out of control child, Raygan Davis (Mrs Google) who just knew everything and was trying to constantly organize everyone while holding the crying baby, and Tim Davidson, her partner, attempting to engage with the guide, Tepaihere Martin who just prattled on and on and on while domestic mayhem escalated. As guides I think we identified strongly with this scenario having witnessed this scenario on tours.

These activities transitioned into David Morgan's theme, "What defines a memorable, engaging and inspirational visitor experience?" David explored the concept that visitors should be treated as guests and the number one goal of any organization is to have the happiest guest. The treatment a guest receives relates to a business's core values and the expectation of the tour is set at booking time. David's philosophy to ensure the guest experience exceeded their expectations was by using the acronym GUEST.

- G Greeting – give a kindly greeting to everyone
- U Understanding – listen first, then react
- E Efficiency – Be efficient
- S Special treatment – Give extra, special treatment to all guests
- T Thankfulness - Always thank the guest

David reminded us of the old saying, "A person will not remember what you said, or what you did, but they will always remember how you made them feel."



Scott Hocknull speaking at his palaeontological site in Colosseum Cave, Capricorn  
Photo: Steve Bourne

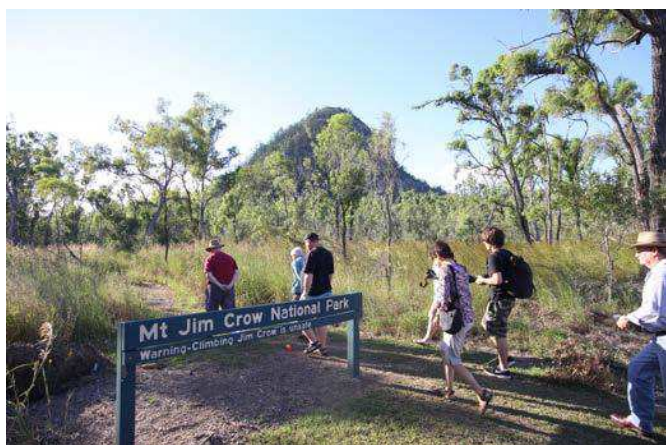
Then it was doing time. We chose from the options available; A Geotour of Discovery, adventure caving or abseiling. I chose adventure caving as I wanted to see how this was conducted at this location. Keagan led our group of five people through squeezes...well, the people who could fit through... under rocks, into a cavern - where one had to find ones way out, and through

passage ways until we found Scott Hocknull's palaeontological site. Capricorn Caves is a great adventure caving site as any tour can be adjusted to fit the guests' abilities.

After dinner at Capricorn Caves the keynote address was given by John in the Cathedral Cave. Ann Augusteyn guided us through the cave showcasing the newly installed lights. Then some people celebrated well into the night beside and in the pool.

The next day Cathie, John and David expanded upon their key messages. We concluded the indoor sessions with a Q & A panel session which resolved with the intent to develop a Guides' private Facebook page where guides could communicate with each other. Ros Hogno and Jodie Anderson are to create and manage the page.

After lunch it was into the vehicles for a short trip to Mt Jim Crow, a volcanic plug, where we received interpretation of the local environment. This Capricorn Caves country was beginning to make better sense to me. Into the vehicles again and onto Kemp Beach for another walk, this one with choices. Either along the beach to check out the shells and sand (ex coral) or up to the lookout to "spot the turtles". I think the locals were kidding us about those turtles. "They look like brown rocks" they said. When one ascended to the lookout and surveyed the scene below there were hundreds of brown rocks! However three audacious people took up the challenge, "You won't have time to walk around the 2.5 km loop track in twenty minutes before the



The volcanic plug of Mt Jim Crow  
Photo: Steve Bourne

bus leaves." Result. Three people returned via the loop track with time to spare for a short walk along the beach.

Emu Park was our next destination where we viewed the new ANZAC memorial and interpretation panels. It was great. Sculptured memorials in relief with their vivid images of a past time, and panels linking closely the local enlistees and nursing staff to world events. Then onto the Koorana Crocodile Farm where we had - you guessed it - "crocodile". It was a dinner with a difference. We ordered our meal and received crocodile entrees. Then outside to check out the big breeding crocs from behind the safety of wire fences. Then back to the table for the main meal. Then it was outside again to another part of the farm where we enjoyed ourselves spot-lighting the crocs by identifying their presence by their red eyes, or watching the females fight over territory. The breeding season was soon to start. Then back inside for dessert (non crocodile). For those who wished....a pat and photo with a baby croc - it was 2 feet long and had its jaws taped shut. Then you could send the



Brittney Butler overlooking the bay at Kemps Beach  
Photo: Steve Bourne

photo to your friends and say, "This is what we did at the Cave Guides' School."

The next day was our "free day" with options for organised activities:

- Option 1 Caving in the Mt Etna National Park with Noel Sands and Clive Kavanagh. Caves visited were Resurrection and Inner Johanssens - "Inner Joeys" to the locals.
- Option 2 Capricorn Cave tour options - Geotour of Discovery, abseiling or Cathedral cave.
- Option 3 A day at Great Keppel Island - coral, coast, catamaran, coffee

I chose caving at Mt Etna and had the best time. I learnt all about guano mining, saw the old relics, bats, revegetation sites, some modern pink cave markings!! I was reminded of the battle to save these caves, bats and archaeological deposits of extinct animals. We saw the results of the blasting which broke a huge stalactite which half buried itself when it fell.

The final night's dinner was advertised in the program as "Dinner and bull ride at the Great Western Hotel." If Rockhampton is located on the east coast of Queensland then how can one have a Great WESTERN Hotel? I never did sort that out.

"Yeah, yeah", I thought, "they would have a mechanical bull up here in cattle country". But no, I was wrong. The hotel had an indoor arena where the local lads practised their rodeoing skills and where rodeos are held. We watched as they unloaded the cattle, penned the bulls in the chutes and tried to ride out the



Matt Cooper successfully negotiated 8 seconds on this beast  
Photo: Steve Bourne

mandatory eight seconds. Sometimes the clowns practised their skills to protect the riders. I think the bulls can count to eight because they stopped bucking after this time interval. We viewed these happenings as we ate out dinner. It was another dinner with a difference.

My impressions of the 2016 Caves Guides School at Rockhampton could mostly be summed up with words beginning with the letter 'C'. Cheery Capricorn Caves crew, challenging caving, carboniferous country, crusty coral, cringe worthy crocodiles, cattle country culture, cavernous Cathedral Cave, and chatty creative camaraderie.

**Roslyn Hogno  
Yarrangobilly Caves**

Thank you Capricorn Caves for hosting the 2016 ACKMA Guides' School! If I have come away with a single key message, it would be that it all starts with the people. Capricorn Caves is an excellent example of just that. An incredible team of people who are genuinely passionate about their jobs, their local environment and the interpretation of educating their guests on a daily basis. Each staff member who I met at Capricorn showed an incredible amount of enthusiasm and love the entire week. Thank you Ann and your team for your warm hospitality and kindness, your efforts did not go unnoticed.



Thank you John, Cathie and David for your energetic and informative talks and training. You had us all thinking outside the box and taught us valuable ways on how to use our own existing skills and knowledge, to deliver exciting and memorable experiences for our guests. What a jam-packed week of activities, tours and trips! From abseiling, to crocodile farms, to snorkelling on the Great Barrier Reef, we experienced the best of Capricorn Caves and Rockhampton as a whole!

I left with a bunch of new friends, new experiences and a "toolbox" full of knowledge to take with me back to Yarrangobilly Caves, where I soon hope to have the privilege to deliver my own educational and memorable experiences for guests! Thank you to everyone whom I met during the short week away, I have left the ACKMA Guides' School feeling inspired and confident that I someday will have the honour and privilege of working as a guide in this incredible community and industry.

**From the Editor**

*Prior to the Capricorn Caves Guides' Workshop, Cathie and John asked guides to respond providing what they use in their toolbox. Scott kindly provided me with his response. In many years working at Australia's busiest show cave system, Scott has developed a great set of skills for working with visitors.*

**Scott Melton  
Jenolan Caves**

**Knowledge**

Knowledge of your subject matter is one of the key tools that I use on my tour. Given the amount of university/TAFE study I have done, the study trips overseas, a guide exchange overseas as well as attendance at events such as the Guides' School, coupled with a lifelong love of caves, I have developed what I consider to be an excellent knowledge of caves. I believe this knowledge shows on my tours – one of my favourite visitor



*"Use your imagination", just what is Scott Melton showing Judy Christenson?  
Photo: Steve Bourne*

comments remains *"This is the third trip I have done through the Lucas Cave but you are the first guide who was interesting enough to listen to"*.

Anyone can parrot learn a tour but a visitor will soon pick up if you are doing this or do not have a good understanding of your subject matter. If you are truly passionate about caves, expand your knowledge by research or other means and do as many cave tours in as many places as you can. This will not only expand your own knowledge base but will allow you to learn different techniques from fellow guides. Perhaps this can be best summed up – "Never stop learning".

Only the other day I had a group of gents on my Chifley Cave tour who were from Pakistan. They were most impressed that I knew that the highest cave entrance (in elevation above sea level) in the world is in Pakistan! How many people also know that Mt Everest is partly limestone...!!!

**Empathy**

Empathise with your visitors. Take time if possible to learn a little bit about them; where they are from, are they enjoying their holiday in Australia and so on. Even if you only talk to a visitor once on an individual basis, they will appreciate it. Having said that, I am sure there is still the odd tour where someone will come out of the cave and you think to yourself "Were they on my tour".

Having said that, do not focus too much attention on one or two people on the tour, to the detriment of the rest of your visitors. The people subject to the extra attention may start to feel uncomfortable and the rest of the group will start to feel ignored. Years ago I was conducting a tour and a visitor asked to join my tour as she felt she was receiving too much attention from the guide on her tour.

**Use the Kids**

One of the first things I was told when starting my training was "Include the kids on the tour as well". This will make them feel important; hopefully foster an understanding about the magical world that they are in and the parents will be appreciative that you are not ignoring their kids. One of my favourite experiences on an Imperial Cave tour was having a four year old leading 40 visitors through the cave carrying my torch, which had started the tour screaming and kicking, not wanting to go in the cave at all! Of course, don't ignore the adults to focus solely on the kids either.

When I used to run the interview process for new guides, one of my favourite questions that I would ask a potential candidate was “How would you deal with an enthusiastic but precocious eight year old on your tour who wants to be the centre of attention”. My favourite answer – “Well I would implement the process of facilitation to ensure that the child was fully included in all aspects of the tour...”

**All questions are valid**

This section would tie in with knowledge as mentioned above. If you are a trained guide, whether you have 1 year or 40 years of experience, you will more than likely have more knowledge than the majority of your visitors. They will be entering an environment that will quite possibly be foreign to them with little understanding of the processes that have created that environment. Treat all questions as valid, no matter how strange they may seem to you as the guide.

If a visitor asks a question that might seem a little strange, if you can, try and think about what the visitor was really trying to ask and rephrase the question and then provide an answer along those lines. For example, one question I am sure we have all been asked is “How many undiscovered caves are there”. I reply along the lines of “It is the cave divers who are making the biggest discoveries here at Jenolan as they are going down into the water filled sections of the cave system”. This allows me to deflect the potentially embarrassing question that the visitor asked and also opens up a whole new subject that visitors are fascinated with. This then becomes a win/win/win for the visitor who asked the question; your group as a whole and of course yourself.

Of course, we all have our perennial favourite questions, other than the one mentioned above, such as:-

- Do wombats fly like ordinary bats?
- Were the handrails and steps here when the cave was discovered?
- Is the water tidal? and
- How heavy does the cave weigh?

**Words**

When answering a question or delivering your commentary, don't answer with words that will further confuse your visitors or use slang/abbreviations that are familiar to you but may as well be another language to them. While words such as epikarst, phreatic and vadose may be familiar to you, they will not be to your visitors. If you use such words, ensure that you explain them in terms that your visitors will understand. Try and learn a few basic words in other languages if you can.

**An Emphasis on Syntax and Pronunciation**

In the 2003 movie “View from the Top”, starring Mike Meyers and Gwyneth Paltrow, Mike Meyers delivers a classic one liner “*you placed the wrong empharsis on the wrong syllarble*”.

- **Emphasis** - A prominence given in reading or speaking to one or more words or syllables
- **Syntax** - The arrangement of words and phrases to create well formed sentences
- **Pronunciation** - The way in which a word or name is pronounced

While we normally would not give it a second thought, the way we use emphasis, arrange our words and also pronounce these words can deliver a much more professional tour for our visitors. Speak clearly with well rounded speech. Even just a simple two second pause will emphasise a point that you are trying to make.

**Perception**

Your perception of the group, at an early point in the tour, will allow you to make suitable adjustments to your commentary to suit the needs of the group. It would be pointless delivering a geologically focussed tour suitable for a group of university students to a group of year three kids!

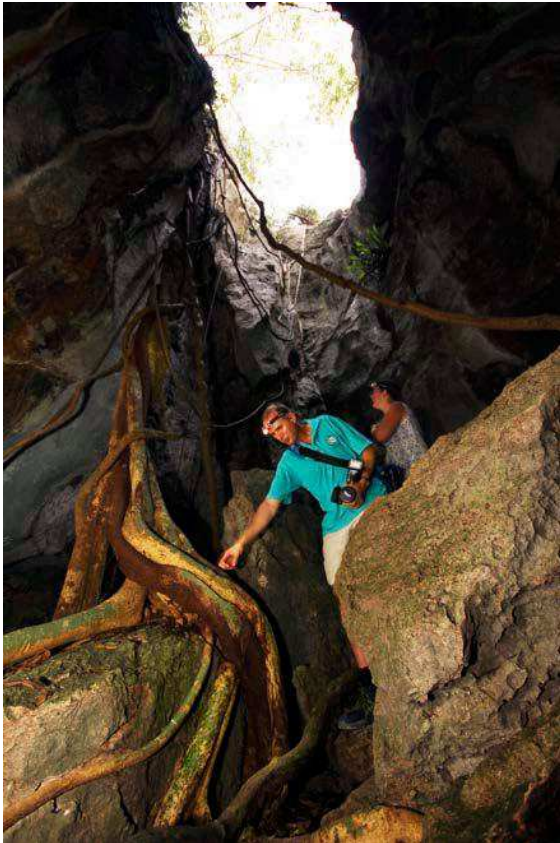
Be prepared to constantly change your delivery, even as your tour is progressing. You may detect a hint of restlessness amongst your group so give consideration to even shortening your commentary. Just because you know all the facts does not mean you have to give all of the facts to the group.

A salient piece of advice I was given when I first started training as a guide in the early 1990s was to deliver more commentary in the early parts of the tour as the majority of visitors will be more attentive than at the end. All visitors will reach the saturation point at some stage of the tour if you deliver too much.

**Other Tools**

Of course, the above tools all have one thing in common and that is that they are not “physical” tools; that are not tools that you can hold in your hand. Some examples of physical tools that you may use on a tour include:-

- Torch - Not only for safety if the lights go out but they are of course great for pointing out features as well as illuminating crystal.
- Cigarette Lighter - Great for lighting the candles in an emergency or demonstrating candlelight.
- Remote Control - Vital on certain tours at Jenolan Caves; and finally...
- Cave Key - As Effie used to say on the TV show Fast Forward “*How Embarrassment*” if you get to the entrance of the cave and you have forgotten your cave key...!!!



Ross and Jay Anderson  
Photo: Steve Bourne