

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO SPELEOLOGY

Lana Little

The show caves at Chillagoe are managed by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), and the tours are conducted by QPWS Ranger-guides. In the interests of best-practice resource management, visitor engagement and safety, and staff development, QPWS supports local management in the bid to maintain a very high standard of guiding.

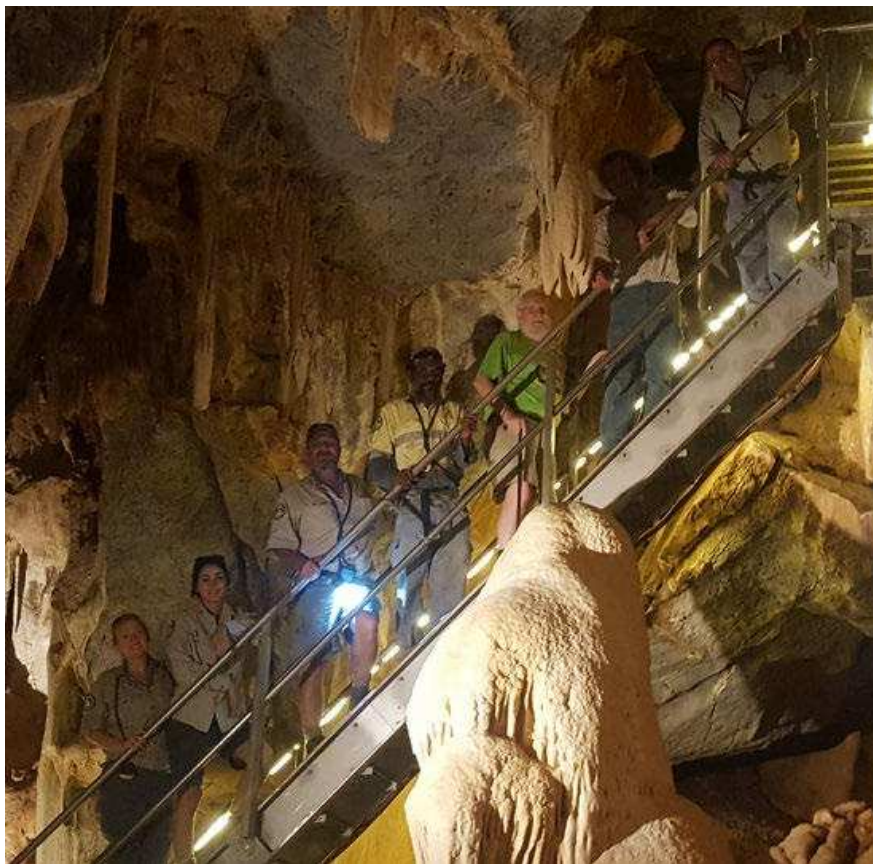
To this end, QPWS engaged ACKMA's Andy Spate to develop and present a guide's workshop at Chillagoe, held 4-6 December 2017. During these three days, eight Chillagoe Ranger-guides had the opportunity to acquire new information and clarify or refine existing knowledge during class room and field-based activities. Andy encouraged questions throughout, allowing participants to focus either broadly or on very specific details. The on-site rambles through the three caves used for guided tours were especially well received, with each guide having the chance to develop a deeper appreciation of features which may have seemed commonplace beforehand.

Three days may seem more than 'brief', but Andy insists that it is no more than a peep around the door into the complex, dynamic and enthralling world of karst and caves. Nonetheless, the range of topics was vast, including geomorphology, climate, biology, palaeontology, fire, human impacts and the management implications of them all. The handbook Andy prepared provides many excellent illustrations, a bibliography and a list for further reading. The accompanying slideshow of karst and pseudokarst from around Australia and around the world had the audience engrossed.

Andy's workshop built upon a grounding in local karst and cave geology which was delivered to the guides by Chillagoe geologist John Nethery earlier in the year. It's also not the first time that Andy has travelled to Queensland to undertake similar Guide Schools – one was held at Chillagoe in 1994, and Rockhampton in 2001. QPWS had supported the attendance of 2 Chillagoe Rangers at the Rockhampton workshop, but due to staff turnover, there remains only one current guide who previously had the privilege of a face-to-face 'Andy Sez' session.

Ranger-in-Charge Mick Cockburn commented that the Rangers had guiding experience ranging from 1 to 15 years, and Andy was able to share knowledge very effectively with them all. He made the further point that the Rangers all perform general duties as well as sharing a guiding roster and it was important for them to recognise and appreciate the special values and relationships that exist in karstic terrain, as they go about their routine tasks.

The handbooks provided to each participant were retained as resource material and Andy, as always, has indicated his willingness to respond to emailed queries into the future. ACKMA's journals, conference papers and other material are also invaluable to the Ranger whose curiosity and appetite for answers to all things cave and karst has been whetted by Andy's "Brief Introduction to Speleology".



*Andy Spate, third from right, with workshop participants in Trezkin Cave
Photo: Doug Davidson*