

## *Cave Guide Training Survey Results*

### **Scott Melton – Jenolan Caves**

Following on from the very successful “Guides’ Schools” run in conjunction with the last two ACKMA AGM meetings, ACKMA was very interested in ascertaining the scope and depth of the differing methods of training provided to cave guides around Australia and New Zealand. Following the establishment of a sub-committee to investigate this subject, an online survey was designed and distributed to seek the thoughts of cave managers, cave guides as well as others who have a general interest in cave guides’ training. One of the main reasons for this project is that, over the longer term, ACKMA could be looking at developing a nationally accredited Certificate in Cave Guiding, possibly in conjunction with a Registered Training Organisation, which would be broadly tourism based but with a specific focus on cave and karst fundamentals.

Preliminary survey results were presented to the ACKMA Conference held at Margaret River in May 2018 by Scott Melton and Jodie Anderson. The survey closed on the 30th June 2018 and a total of 71 responses were received. Following is a summary of the results of the survey: -

- 33% of respondents were in a management/supervisory capacity;
- 66% of respondents were guides; and
- 1% of respondents were other interested individuals.
- 77% of respondents were 35 years or older.
- Over 75% of respondents have post-high school qualifications (TAFE/University).
- Nearly 52% of respondents have worked in the tourism industry for 10 or more years.
- ~ 60% of respondents are employed on a part-time or casual basis; and
- ~ 38% of respondents are employed on a full-time basis.
- The majority of respondents were from NSW, QLD and VIC, followed closely by TAS, WA and New Zealand.
- Most of initial guide training is by observation of experienced guides followed by the provision of a training manual. Unsupervised inspection of a cave ranked as the third main method of guide training.
- A variety of methods is used for the delivery of risk management training including SOPs, one-on-one discussion with experienced guides, scenario training and workshops.
- The focus of cave guide training manuals is closely split between cave geology and the social/cultural history of a cave site.
- Videos & DVDs, reference books and documentaries also provide information.

Nearly 50% of respondents advised that no formal checklist or sign-off process was implemented for initial guide assessment.

- 78% of respondents advised that professional development/training opportunities are provided at their site (such as TAFE, Savannah Guides & In-House Training); and
- 63% of respondents advise that they have been offered the opportunity for external accreditation; and
- Other training opportunities are also provided such as external courses and opportunities to attend conferences;
- 60% of respondents advised that they are afforded the opportunity to attend such events;
- Nearly 77% of respondents advised that they are either funded or partly funded to attend such events; and
- Benefits of such training include: -
  1. Increased level of knowledge & skills;
  2. A more professional standard of guiding;
  3. A formal recognition of skills; and
  4. Networking opportunities
- Nearly 69% of respondents are interested in the development of a National Certificate Level III in Cave Guiding;
- 25% of respondents may be interested;
- Just over 73% of respondents would participate in the accreditation if it was online;
- Just under 21% may participate if accreditation was online; and
- Just over 79% would either self- fund or employer fund such accreditation.
- Topics that respondents would like to see included in such accreditation include: -
  1. Risk Management / Group Management/Interpretation/Delivery Principles/Engagement;
  2. Flora & Fauna;
  3. Geology/Cave Creation/Cave Decoration;
  4. Social/Human Impacts on and interaction with caves; and
  5. Cave Staff
- Interpretation – Guiding, Delivery & Engagement is of prime importance to cave managers such as presentation techniques/Communication, Customer Service and Risk Management; and
- Funding & time issues were also identified by management as well as factually correct training manuals/reference materials as requirements to enable the delivery of high quality guided tours.

## *Cave Guide Training Survey Results* continued

- Conversely, issues identified by guides as being barriers to the delivery of high quality guided tours include: -
  1. Availability of appropriate training;
  2. Access to appropriate training;
  3. Funding for training; and
  4. Burn-out of staff.
- Guides see content and interpretation as the two main types of training they would like to receive - with this including: -
  1. Presentation/Interpretation Skills;
  2. Group Management Skills/Group Engagement Skills; and
  3. Guide Exchanges.
- 88% of respondents had heard of ACKMA;
- 80% of respondents had heard of ACKMA through the workplace; and
- Regrettably, under 50% of respondents were aware that ACKMA facilitates a Guides' Training school every two years.

As can be seen, the results of the survey are encouraging and show that there is indeed an underlying body of support for the development of either a Certificate III or IV in Tourism/Cave Guiding with a focus on cave and karst processes as well as customer service and delivery skills. However, funding for guide training appears to be a major impediment to the delivery of such training.

While ACKMA is not able to fund training for guides, it is felt that ACKMA has the skill base within its membership to assist with the development and delivery of a cave guides' training programme.

### Bonus *"Around the show caves"* from the Naracoorte Caves' Spring newsletter

#### *Science Week at Naracoorte*

Naracoorte Caves also ran its own special science week 'in cave event' with adults receiving entry at children's prices to encourage a joint family interactive learning experience. Cave guides took participants on a journey back in time to learn about the mega fauna that once roamed the area 45,000 years ago. Local palaeontologist Dr Liz Reed intrigued participants during a special presentation in a cave and in the site laboratory. In the afternoon guests were treated to a performance by the world's favourite singing palaeontologist, Professor Flint, in Blanche Cave.

