

Palaeontological surveys- more than just numbers

E. Reed and S. Bourne

Department for Environment and Heritage, c/- Naracoorte Caves National Park, PO Box 134, Naracoorte, South Australia 5271, Australia. Email: liz.reed@flinders.edu.au

Abstract

Heritage assessments of palaeontological resources have traditionally centred on constructing faunal inventories and using criteria such as taxonomic diversity, time span of representation, excellence of preservation and potential for scientific research to determine significance. Other qualities such as historical, social and intrinsic values are usually given very limited consideration. In most cases they provide little useful information that assists managers and planners with site management. They may also be of limited value to researchers unless the list is accompanied by an accurate site map, data from previous excavations and information as to where previously excavated material is housed.

Naracoorte Caves World Heritage Fossil Site is best known for the large Victoria Fossil Cave deposits, which have been the focus of palaeontological research since their discovery in 1969. Collections have been made from many other sites within the park, but information relating to these collections is fragmentary and scattered. We had previously identified 20 fossil sites within the park's 26 caves (Reed & Bourne 2000), however, this figure was based on museum and published records, with very little accurate field work.

The objectives of this project were to identify World Heritage values to meet State Party obligations under the World Heritage Convention to protect and manage properties on the World Heritage list; and to increase knowledge of the World Heritage values of the Naracoorte Caves National Park to provide an important tool for the protection and management of the site.

The methodology involved conducting thorough field and literature surveys to identify all palaeontological resources within the park. During the field surveys, assessments were made on the condition of sites, threats, impacts and the potential for research and interpretation. The scientific, social, historical and intrinsic value of each site was determined via significance assessment using criteria developed for this project. An extensive computer database was completed and an archive of field survey, bibliographical, research data, maps, photographs and other relevant information was compiled for each site. The results from the project form the basis for a detailed report on the World Heritage values of the Naracoorte Caves. This report will establish parameters to assist with monitoring and completion of periodic reports to UNESCO. It will also provide critical information for developing future management plans and research strategies.