

# Finding your Voice and Keeping It!

## A Voice Training Manual for Cave Guides!

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### Abstract

Guided cave tours are the principal way that the community experiences show caves and how most cave interpretation is delivered. Yet, cave managers and cave guides give little attention to how a guide's voice can be misused when continually 'at work' delivering cave tours.

Voice development and training are essential; not just to avoid voice issues such as laryngitis, but to better equip the guide to more effectively deliver quality and engaging presentations.

*Finding your Voice and Keeping It!!* This is a voice training manual for cave guides that was developed in 2007 and is readily available on the ACKMA website. It's simple to use, free of charge and an easy first place to start voice development for cave guides, and anyone else who wants to use their voice more effectively.

### Value your Voice...Love your Larynx



This was the theme for World Voice Day in Australia this year. World Voice Day is celebrated internationally on 16 April each year. In 2018, rather than have a single day, Australian organisers dedicated the entire month of April to 'Voice Awareness Month'.



### What has Voice Awareness got to do with cave and karst management?

Most show cave sites in Australia and New Zealand have guided tours as the primary way of the community experiencing the caves. Most cave interpretation delivered at these sites, comes from what the guide says. Therefore, the health and development of the guide's voice should be an active part of cave management. We take our voices for granted; until something goes wrong.

#### *What can go wrong?*

Without a thought for their voices, we expect cave guides to go out and deliver a tour, and sometimes tour after tour, to large groups of people, in large caverns where it's hard to be heard. This is a recipe for misuse of a guide's voice.

Some of the voice issues associated with cave guiding are:

- Laryngitis
- Husky voice
- Raising the voice to be heard
- Shouting

Misuse of the voice can result in long-term voice damage and even for a cave guide to have to leave their job. In the modern workplace with a high focus on staff health and safety, care of the voice must be considered.

## Voice care and other professions

A choir does not start performing without a 'warm-up', an actor doesn't go onto the stage without voice exercises, nor does a news reader commence their duties without preparing their voice.

We would not expect a ballerina to commence a performance or a football team to run onto the ground without warm-up routines. We would probably think it was careless if they did. Likewise, it's time for us to consider what we are asking cave guides to do with their voices.

## Voice awareness is more than avoiding laryngitis

We use our voices to communicate; to greet people, to talk socially and to deliver messages. Voice development and ongoing training is an important part of oral communication and message delivery.

'Words carry approximately 7 per cent of the message, while the voice carries 38 per cent', voice coach Lorraine Merritt (Merritt, 2003) quotes in her book, *Talking the Talk*. This means that for a message to be effectively communicated we need to put effort into not just what we say, but into the voice that delivers the message.

If guide health and effective visitor interpretation are important, then cave guides, and their managers, need to ensure that guides are equipped with good voice skills.

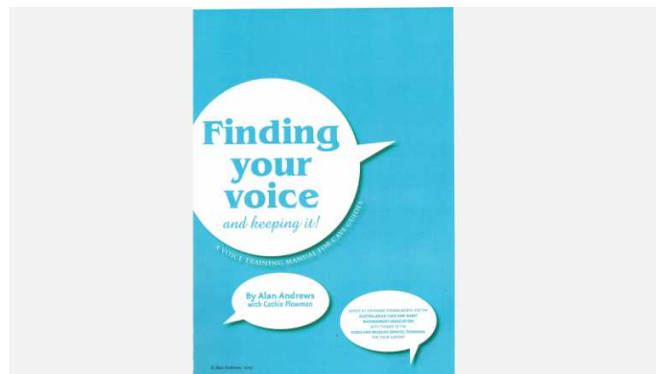
Voice training is about developing a rich, vibrant and engaging voice that can hold a listener's attention. It is also about power and maintenance of the voice.

## Finding your Voice and keeping it!!

This is the title of a voice training manual which was written for cave guides in 2007. Alan Andrews (Andrews and Plowman, 2007) who wrote the exercises is a professional actor and voice coach. He also worked as a tour guide at the Port Arthur Historic Site in Tasmania, where his work included training his colleagues in voice work.

You can find the manual at the ACKMA website under 'cave guiding':

<http://www.ackma.org/Guiding/VoiceWorkFINAL.pdf>



Print off a copy and try the exercises. Like most things, we don't know the benefits of new skills until we've acquired them.

*Finding your Voice and Keeping It* contains four groups of exercises to get cave guides started on voice health and enhanced communication. These are breathing awareness, articulation, projection and resonators.

Regular practise of all four groups of exercises will enhance the voice, helping with message delivery and reducing voice issues such as laryngitis. These exercises are not just for cave guides. Public speaker or not, anyone who wants to communicate in an engaging manner will benefit from voice exercises.

Here is an introduction to the exercises:

### Breathing awareness

Voice does not simply come from the mouth. The voice is part of a complex respiratory system and all parts of the system will affect the quality of the voice. The start of voice training is breathing awareness. Breathing work will help a cave guide develop variety in the tone of their voice and the length of sentences, making for more interesting presentations.

### Articulation

These are exercises that help with pronunciation and sound. They will build the strength of your words and assist visitors to better hear what you are saying. Articulation exercises are fun. There are a number of these exercises in *Finding your Voice and Keeping It*. You can even create your own. Here are some to you get started.

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### Projection

These exercises are to help strengthen the voice to help you 'carry' it to the back of a group without having to 'raise your voice' or shout. There are exercises for both indoors and outdoors. The latter helping you to deliver your voice to rooftops and tree tops without shouting.

### Resonators

Consider how the quality of the sound of a guitar or violin is in part due to the resonance which is created by the size and shape of the resonating cavity. The same rings true for developing the quality of our voices. The quality of our voice can be altered by learning how to use the mouth to change its shape and sounds.

### Good voice health needs ongoing care

Just as the rest of our bodies need ongoing care and attention so do our voices. There are websites with tips to help with better vocal health. (See below for some suggestions.)

The Voice Foundation is a United States of America based association to promote good voice care. The Foundation's website includes the components of vocal hygiene which are:

- Healthy diet and lifestyle
- Voice warm-ups before use

- Voice training on proper technique to meet voice demands
- Voice exercise to improve endurance and power
- Proper voice use and avoidance of voice misuse and overuse

It cannot be said strongly enough that a healthy voice means not smoking and avoiding all cigarette smoke.

The Foundation has an easy acronym for remembering voice hygiene

#### Remembering Steps for Vocal Hygiene

- V Value your voice through healthy diet and lifestyle.
- O Optimise your voice with vocal warm-ups before use.
- I Invest in your voice with training in proper voice technique.
- C Cherish your voice by avoiding voice misuse, overuse, and abuse.
- E Exercise your voice to increase endurance and power.

Finding  
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voice

### Taking things further

Any work with the voice will add to your voice repertoire and voice health. You might not have a professional theatre coach in your local community, but it's surprising the local talent that you can unearth when you start looking. Regardless, most small communities are not too far from a choir, a singing teacher, a local drama society or a school drama teacher. These people might be able to assist in having the occasional voice training day at your cave site.

Voice work is not just for cave guides. It's a useful skill for anyone who does public speaking or anyone who wants to expand their voice skills and better communicate their message.

### Technology needs to be considered

Voice training and voice awareness will go a long way to better voice health and better message delivery, but the very nature of caves might mean that it is not possible for a guide's voice to be heard. We don't expect someone to speak to a local town hall meeting or in front of a school assembly hall without a microphone.

There are a range of small portable microphones and amplifiers on the market and cave guides and cave managers are encouraged to investigate technology that assists both the guide to deliver their message and for visitors to enjoy the experience.



attention to the voice that delivers the message and assist guides to develop their voice skills. Cave managers and cave guides need to consider voice skills and voice training as an integral part of show cave management.

*Finding your Voice and Keeping It* is a voice training manual for cave guides that can be located on the ACKMA website and cave guides and cave managers are encouraged to start using it at their sites.

## Conclusion

We rely on cave guides to show people through our precious caves and deliver engaging presentations. This often has the guide raising their voice to be heard and overuse of their voice. This can result in both voice damage and a poor visitor experience.

More than care for a guide's voice, if we expect cave guides to deliver a message, then we must give



## References

Andrews, A. and Plowman, C. (2007) *Finding your Voice and keeping it! A voice training manual for cave guides.* (<http://www.ackma.org/Guiding/VoiceWorkFINAL.pdf>)

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