

CHANGES IN EDUCATION:
SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR CAVE USAGE AND MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

This paper will highlight some significant changes in the direction and philosophy of education in Australia in recent years, notably the growth of recreation, environmental and outdoor education and of field studies in the school curriculum. The growth in caving activity and the demands this is likely to place on cave and karst resources will be examined. Possible matters of policy for A.S.F. and club administrations will be raised for discussion.

In other papers and discussion this week we have learnt of the growth of caving as a recreational activity in Australia. Some quantitative data has been presented and analysed, and predictions made which have great impact on our own activities and policies as individuals, clubs and the Federation.

What I would like to do now is to point out where some of this growth is occurring, try to explain why, and then raise some policy issues for the Federation, for individual clubs and for management authorities. I have chosen to concentrate on just one source of growth but the implications and policy issues raised are much the same. Let me start with some background.

Most of us here have probably been educated in a system, derived philosophically from English grammar and comprehensive schools with an overlay of American egalitarianism. You queued for a measured and pre-determined allotment of English, Mathematics, Science, Geography or whatever, studied the subjects for a prescribed period, passed the prescribed examinations, and perhaps proceeded to college or university to follow the same procedure for another three, four or five years. Competitive sport was important, at least for the talented few, but quite divorced from the academic curriculum.

In this system, physical education was something you did on Wednesday afternoon, bushwalking or camping was something you did with the Scouts and the environment was a trendy area which you and some like-minded friends dabbled with in your spare time, if you had ever heard of it, of course. Rock climbing, caving and trekking in Nepal were weekend or vacation pursuits for the unsociable or eccentric.

The one thing which all these pursuits had in common was that they were separate from "real" education. They were extra-curricular, extra-mural. So there was a limited range of academically oriented subjects, each studied with a single textbook, each separate from one another from the world outside.

Well, things have changed. What I want to do now is to draw your attention to what the economists and financiers would call the growth stocks in the

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education industry. The two most significant changes, and they are closely related, are the trend towards an integration of education, leisure and work, and a boom in what could loosely be termed education for personal development.

The practical effects of these trends have been a large increase in the variety of subjects offered in schools, a greatly increased range of materials used in learning, more and more work being done outside school walls and school time of a kind not traditionally regarded as school work, and a greater involvement of people other than teachers in the education of students

At this stage, instead of continuing to ramble incoherently as educational practitioners are liable to, I want to pause to paint a few vignettes.

I am sure you will forgive me if many of them are from Canberra. Not only are these the ones with which I am most familiar, but for several reasons Canberra's school system is now probably the most progressive, flexible and innovative in Australia. Just how progressive, flexible and innovative you might be able to gather from the fact that one school - a government school in fact - offers, for credit, such delights as Body Massage and Sexual Awareness 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6!

1. Many schools, in Canberra at least, offer courses or activities related to caving which carry credit for school certificates or even tertiary matriculation. For example, St Edmunds College offers Caving I, implying there is more to come. This course is registered with the A.C.T. Schools Authority and appears on students' school certificates.

Phillip and Dickson Colleges have karst geomorphology as a half term unit in their geography courses. Hawker College offers majors in Recreation and in Wilderness Activities, including canoeing, cross-country skiing and outdoor survival. All these courses are justified in terms of their potential for personal development, their effect on self-confidence, team cooperation and so on. It is instructive to note that in a recent schools cartography competition, the prize-winning entry was a map of Dog Leg Cave at Wee Jasper.

2. All state education systems operate field centres which combine studies of the environment, geography and science as well as recreational activities. For example, near Yallingup in this state, Fracture Cave, Solution Cave and Maxwell House Cave are used by school groups as part of a fieldwork programme. The Queensland Department of Education's Outdoor Education Centre at Boonah operates a highly successful wilderness experience programme which combines environmental education, camping and adventure in a wilderness setting.

3. Case studies of environmental issues and management conflicts involving cave and karst resources are creeping into the educational literature, especially in geography, social studies and politics as well as environmental studies. The Colong and Bungonia issues have been used not only as studies of environmental conflict but as examples of the workings of pressure groups, grass roots democracy and political decision-making, even of personal and organisational ethics. One of the best documented examples, of course, is that of Mt Etna and I know of at least two publications applying this issue as a case study in the context of geography and environmental studies.

4. Schools are becoming more involved in issues of social controversy and conflict, ethics and values. These know no subject discipline boundaries and are learnt, not from text-books but from diverse sources including field work and observation, guest speakers and case study materials. In this context, I suggest there is great scope for an enterprising Queensland speleo to develop a role play exercise based on Mt Etna, similar to one done

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commercially on Western Port Bay in Victoria. I would be glad to assist in any such venture.

5. School expeditions are replacing traditional organised tours as major contributions to learning, and there is already an Australian Schools Expeditionary Society. Significant research and exploratory work has been carried out by British senior school students on the caves of Ireland, Iceland and north Norway. There is no reason to doubt that remote areas of Australia, Niugini and South-east Asia could receive the attention of similar expeditions.

PROGNOSIS

1. Clearly we can expect a continuation of the trends I have outlined. There is going to be a continued increase in usage of caves and karst regions, and much of this increase will come from a younger age group.

2. I question whether this need necessarily result in degradation either of the caves themselves or of the cave experience as a learning experience. For one thing, demand can be channelled by wise management classification into a relatively limited number of wild caves. For another, for most youngsters caving will be as ephemeral an interest as yo-yos, but the experience is much more likely to enrich their lives and create positive attitudes to conservation and sound management.

3. Remoteness or physical difficulty of access will not be a protection for caves, indeed it may act as an attraction. There is obviously a huge latent demand for adventure activities, wilderness experience and holidays in outlandish places, and caving has joined these. I doubt that I shall be the last speleo featured in the *A.S.F. Newsletter* 'contemplating the sink of the Harpan River Cave in Nepal.' To illustrate, there are now glossy brochures pushing commercial trekking expeditions to remote parts of Nepal, Kashmir, the Yemen Arab Republic, even diving expeditions to the Red Sea off Port Sudan. There are semi-commercially operated caving instruction courses in several places here and overseas, for example, the Whernside Centre in Yorkshire. Roy Skinner has written of his wilderness tours of Exit Cave. Who is to doubt the appeal of commercial tours to the Nullarbor Caves, or to the karst country of Niugini and South-east Asia?

4. I have a feeling that some of this increased demand stems from a lack of opportunity in younger days, and that to some extent the present boom in caving therefore represents a telescoping effect of current demand with deferred demand. If this is true, we may expect a slackening of the rate of growth in five to ten years.

A number of institutional factors operates to make the trends described likely to continue.

Education in Australia is becoming increasingly decentralised, meaning that the locus of decision-making about what students study and what is undertaken is decided by the school and not by a centralised bureaucracy. The curriculum is much broader, encompassing disciplines and experiences never previously considered part of the schools' responsibilities. It follows that if the demand and opportunity for caving activities arises in a school, there are few bureaucratic barriers to prevent it.

If as a group of speleologists we take our responsibilities seriously, we should be seeking to influence decision-makers in the educational sphere,

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as well as in management authorities, in areas of concern to us. These decision-makers would include directors of outdoor education and field studies centres, principals' associations and individual school principals and/or school boards. Practical assistance could take the form of simplified codes of safety, ethics and conservation (I believe our present codes are too detailed for juniors), suggesting the need for minimum standards of leadership training, experience and maturity, and providing occasional guest speakers to schools. The public relations role should incorporate more case study materials suitable for school use in geography, environmental studies, politics and so on. Just a small example to illustrate. Earlier on I mentioned a field study course at Yallingup. One of the instructions reads 'Do not remove material from caves.' This is fine. But it goes on to say 'We can arrange for specimens to go back to your schools from "dead" caves'!!!

DISCUSSION

[Following presentation of the paper, spirited discussion took place on the following propositions which do not necessarily reflect Federation policy.]

1. Without neglecting scientific and conservational aims, we must examine our policies and devote more of our energies and resources to the recreational, managerial and educational facets.
2. In turn, without neglecting to influence policy-makers in management authorities, we must pay more attention to serving the educational function, both in the public relations arena and in schools. This could be looked on as a policy of sound investment in the future.
3. We must encourage and support management initiatives towards classification of caves.
4. We must press the case for a "representative" rather than an "outstanding" approach to the determination of significance of cave and karst resources. This case is strengthened by recognition of the value of caves for educational experiences. In this connection, several recent papers on conservation and management of caves have completely omitted reference to their significance for educational experiences.
5. We must remove any perceptions of exclusivism which others may have about our membership and our policies, by involving a more representative range of cave users.
6. We must ask ourselves whether our policies on access to controlled areas should be based on purpose of the speleological visit rather than on organisational affiliation.