# OPENING ADDRESS

by

Dr. Sue Barker

Doctor Sue Barker is currently the manager of the programs branch of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, South Australia.

Her work involves the preparation of management plans for the State's national parks.

A botanist by training, she graduated from the London University and did her post-graduate study at the University of Adelaide.

She has an interest in the arid zones and was involved in the debate about whether national parks should be burned regularly.

Her study of the fire history of snow gums in the Kosiosko National Park in 1973-74 concluded that many of the older trees would not have reached their current size if they had been burned regularly, say every 10 years.

For five years she lectured in the Geography Department of the University of Adelaide on bio-geography or the geography of plants and animals.

For a period she was the National Parks and Wildlife Service's acting State Director after joining the Service about eight years ago.

# OPENING ADDRESS - DR. SUE BARKER

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I am standing here today, having accepted the invitation of the Cave Exploration Group of South Australia on behalf of the Speleological Federation to open your 14th bi-ennial conference. In my opening remarks I want to explain in fairly general terms the role of National Parks and Wildlife Service, with particular reference to caves - which are your special interest.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service has a great deal of contact with speleologists and the Speleological Federation. This happens for a number of reasons. Many of the caves in Australia are not accessible to the general public because they are on private land and have been either filled in or fenced off. Many of the caves which are accessible come under the management auspices of National Parks and Wildlife Services, not just in this State, but throughout the country.

The National Parks and Wildlife Services, do not always have the expertise and the knowledge to enable them to carry out the proper management of caves which are vested under their control, and consequently we have to rely on the services of people like yourselves and the Speleological Federation to help us carry out scientific investigations and management endeavours.

Conservation agencies have caves which are open for public inspection and again we have a responsibility to explain them to the general public, who may have a very poor general knowledge of caves. We have to explain to them what the important features of these caves are, and again we rely on speleologists to provide us with the sort of information we should be giving to the general public about their particular scientific value.

In South Australia, the areas of contact that we have with speleologists are quite evident. We have caves which are accessible to caving enthusiasts, particularly those which are not open to the general public. We also have caves which are of scientific importance and are currently the subject of scientific investigations, and of course we have the tourist caves which are open for general public inspection at all times of the year. Generally speaking, in South Australia caves come under the classification of conservation parks, in other words they are areas which are set aside for the conservation of some particular feature. About 90% of our conservation parks were specifically set aside to protect the biological features within them. But there are a number of National and Conservation Parks which have other specialist features of geology or archeology and which also have caves.

For example, those of you who are South Australians would know the Kelly Hill Caves, Tantanoola Caves, Naracoorte Caves and Nullarbor National Park which also has caves in it. In addition, there are underwater caves at Piccaninnie Ponds Conservation Park and also at Ewens Ponds where the caves are not under N.P.W.S. control. In any park, the National Parks and Wildlife Service has an obligation to manage it in accordance with a series of objectives which are specified in the National Parks and Wildlife Act. In relation to caves these objectives are: the preservation of historic sites, objects and structures of historic and/or scientific interest within reserves; the preservation of features of geographical, natural or scenic interest; and the encouragement of public use and enjoyment of reserves and the education in, and proper understanding and recognition of, their purpose and significance.

In order to achieve these objectives the National Parks and Wildlife Service should take some fairly positive action to protect the outstanding natural features of any park and to retain representative samples of Australian flora and fauna. Such action generally includes protecting naturally sensitive environment from overuse and controlling the impact of recreational developments, of which we have several in any parks system whether in this State or any other. We also need to control or eliminate non-native species, and that refers particularly to some of our big conservation parks, where we have feral goats, wild dogs, wild cats, weeds and pigs and that sort

of thing. We also have to protect native flora and fauna and natural features from illegal activities, such as people who collect, whether it be rocks, sea-shells or birds' eggs or birds, for their own purposes without a permit. We also have to rehabilitate degraded areas, where such areas occur, to prevent erosion, and we also have to effectively manage fire, and as you know at this time of the year we are particularly sensitive about fire.

In caves, the preservation of geological formations and the unique biology of the caves is most important. For example, some caves have most important populations of bats, birds and insects which we are obliged under our Act to maintain. In some caves, particularly those on the Nullarbor, we are responsible for protecting the archeological evidence which they contain in forms of paintings or relics of other activity or occupation by the Aborigines. Some caves have ancient animal remains in them.

In general terms these parks, particularly those which are of natural vegetation, are tending to become relatively undisturbed island within the cultural landscape. In other words they are surrounded by developed agricultural land in lots of cases, and some of them not far from here, are surrounded by suburbs. Consequently the pressure of use by human populations is increasing and our responsibility in trying to maintain these areas in their integrity is also becoming more difficult simply because more areas, which we may wish to add to the parks' system are coming under clearance from agricultural development. Management of any natural resource is both expensive and time consuming and consequently government always has a tremendous responsibility in this regard. Management activities thus need to be ordered and systematic and based on a clear set of priorities and this is as particularly important to cave parks as in any other parks.

These sort of priorities, and priority for the sort of development which might take place in a park, are elucidated in a document known as a management plan.

A plan of management is a set of guidelines which identifies how a park is to be managed. It is the basic working document of the park manager and also advises the public on how the park service intends to manage a particular park in the long-term. Management planning, therefore, does several things. It identifies the purpose of the park; the philosophy for which the park was set aside, and it identifies the natural value of the park and its natural outstanding features, vegetation, communities, geological formations, etc. It identifies the boundary of the park, which in a lot of cases is uncertain, particularly in remote areas. It determines the management strategy to be followed to meet the basic management objectives and it determines what works need to be carried out to attain these basic management objectives. Out of all this the ranger who is in charge of a particular park has a scheme of operation within which he works in trying to manage the park.

It is our intention to have a plan of management produced for every park in the State. We have in the order of 196 parks at the present time. Preparing a management plan for each of these is a fairly time consuming business. We have had a lot of support in the last three or four years in pushing our planning programme ahead and indeed some of you would already be aware that we have used the skills of the Speleological Federation membership in helping us to prepare draft management plans for both Tantanoola and Naracoorte Caves Conservation Parks in the South-East. We have been able to use your expertise to determine the precise underground locality of some of the caves, their size and their scientific, geological and aesthetic importance. This has been of tremendous value to us. In 1983 we hope we are going to be able to start management plans for Piccaninnie Ponds Conservation Park which is an underwater cave system and also for the Ewens Ponds Conservation Park system which is not far from Piccaninnie Ponds. The Ewens Ponds cave diving area is the responsibility of the Department of Lands, but we have an area of land alongside the lakes which we manage and which a lot of cave divers use for camping. Consequently, a management plan for that park will include both the Department of Lands and ourselves and again we may be seeking some expertise from your membership to help us with that. In preparing a management plan there are a number of steps in the process. The first one is the collection of resource data about what the area is like, what special features it possesses, how many people go there, what people like to see when they get there, how long they spend and what sort of further facilities they would like to see. We get this from people like yourselves and also by direct approaches to particular bodies of people who we know are interested. We put an advertisement in the paper to say that we are preparing a management plan, please write in with your ideas. Sometimes we do not get much response. That is no criticism of people who put in ideas, I think it

is very difficult to generate ideas in a vacuum. People find it a lot easier to think of things when they have a document in front of them to comment on. Once we have that background information we then put up a series of proposals in a draft plan which is then exposed to public comment for a month or two months. Those draft plans are free of charge to anyone who wants to comment on a particular plan. Once the public comments have been received, those comments and the draft plan are forwarded to the Reserves Advisory Committee which is a small body that the Minister has to advise him. It consists of five people.

The Committee goes through the plan and the public comments, and indicates whether as a result of the public comments the plan should be amended. The plan and the Reserves Advisory Committee report then go to the Minister who decides whether to adopt the document as the plan of management. It can then be published in its final form and is available for sale. These final plans we do charge for.

The South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service manages parks for the preservation of those values which are special, while allowing for public access. This is especially true for the management of caves which have unique features and unique usage by visitors. In South Australia some new techniques are being employed, especially in the light of access to minimise the potential damage which could be brought upon caves which are now open to the public, and I think a number of you would be quite conscious of the sort of damage which has been brought about in the past in cave usage by the public.

The very bad and the very good in preservation can be seen next to each other at Blanche Cave and Victoria Fossil Cave in the Naracoorte Caves Conservation Park. For example, the decorative formations in Blanche Cave were extensively damaged by ignorance and vandalism during the first 50 years after its discovery, as there was no form of restriction or control over public access to it. In 1885 the South Australian Government Forest Board appointed a ranger who was instructed to beautify the cave and its surrounds before the turn of the century. The cave is still used today for the demonstration of the historic uses of caves with graffiti from candle carbon, tables and chairs from the times when the area was used for balls and parties, with the remains of ornamental trees, ferns and creeper beautifications and the older style coloured lights. More modern ideas on cave display are demonstrated in the Victoria Fossil Cave, where, with the assistance of speleologists, the public has been allowed to see the scientific value of the work which is carried out by scientists in that cave. Fossil beds which are now considered to be amongst the best in the world were discovered there in 1969.

Bones found include some from giant extinct marsupials to tiny marsupial rats. With an Australian National Estate Grant and the help of the South Australian Museum, the proper interpretation and the significance of the scientific discoveries can be made. The construction of the glass-sided laboratory is such that work on the fossil remains can carry on at the same time as public viewing.

In spite of this, obviously problems in managment still occur. 60,000 people visited the tourist caves at Naracoorte during the last financial year, while 1,500 people like yourselves who are interested in exploring wild caves actually went through the wild caves at Naracoorte last year. The main proportion of people arrived during the summer holidays. 15,000 out of the 60,000 for example, last year visited in January. This places a tremendous strain on the physical resources for viewing, and in addition, on the financial and people resources that the State has to actually take people around the caves and explain to them what they are all about.

The theme of your conference is the future of speleology. As far as I am concerned I believe there will always continue to be a close liaison between the National Parks and Wildlife Services and speleologists, because no service is going to be able to have sufficient speleological expertise on its staff to help it to produce the right sort of management decisions.
Consequently, I hope that the Australian Speleological Federation will continue to make available to the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service the best advice and advances in the scientific study of caves and also in management ideas. It is our hope that the proper and improving management can ensure an instructive and enjoyable experience for all future cave explorers be they hardy adventurers or the general public. It is with great pleasure therefore that I declare the 14th bi-ennial conference of the Australian Speleological Federation open.
Thank you.