

CAVES (Karst, survey and management)

"IS ASF RELEVANT?" TWO PERSPECTIVES.

Andy Spate and John Dunkley.

ABSTRACT

Lack of understanding of the respective roles and aspirations of managers and cavers by each party often leads to adversarial positions and potential conflict. These two papers address questions relating to communication between cavers, cave managers and cave scientists.

1. MANAGERIAL INTERACTION WITH CAVERS

Andy Spate

A This paper addresses the needs, expectations and
B obligations of cave and karst managers and of
S users. It is primarily concerned with the interaction
T between managers and users of wild caves.
R
A Examples of conflict are briefly discussed and
C some suggestions for non-adversarial interaction
T are given. It is emphasized that interactions between managers and users must be two way and that both sides must understand the responsibilities, aspirations and obligations of the user.

2. ASF: HOW RESPONSIVE AND HOW RESPONSIBLE

John Dunkley

A This paper develops some of Andy Spate's themes
B and asks whether ASF (or cavers generally) are
S capable of an intelligent response. Central to the
T success of ASF policies and image of organized
R speleology generally has been the close relation-
A ship between members interested in scientific re-
C search, conservation/management and recreational
T caving. However several developments in recent years call into question the continued effectiveness of ASF in addressing all of its stated aims.

Some suggestions are offered for discussion and debate.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with the needs, inter-relationships and roles of managers and users of non-tourist ("wild") caves. Some managers will be private landholders, tourist cave operators, other park rangers or similar. Obviously there will be different responsibilities but reactions are often similar. Users will extend in a broad spectrum from highly motivated and skilled cavers and scientists to out and out "ratbags". Hamilton-Smith (1981) has a useful discussion of the user spectrum; perhaps the manager spectrum should also be examined in a similar way.

First of all I feel that I must make a personal statement about my job and my involvement with cave users. This paper is in many ways a personal credo and perhaps plea

for both cavers and managers to become more aware of each others needs and hopes. I have written elsewhere (Spate 1973, 1984) of my views that use of caves (by cavers and tourists) is more damaging to the cave resource than is sporadic quarrying, rubbish dumps and perhaps forestry operations. Davey (1976) presents a useful discussion of these problems. That is not to say that there are not very considerable dangers from such activities especially at places like Mount Etna, Yessabah and in Tasmania.

My position is unusual in that I manage directly no karst resources. I tender advice to Service staff (at district, regional and head office levels) and to some organizations outside the Service which request assistance from

CAVES (Karst, survey and management)

the Service. Examples of these latter include shire councils, NSW Government agencies and in a few cases Government agencies outside NSW. I have also had a long amateur caving career and have conducted research into various aspects of karst in various parts of Australia. Because of this personal involvement with caves I am often called upon to act as a "prisoners friend" to cavers and research workers. The resultant wearing of two hats I find quite difficult and debilitating - I thought I was becoming paranoid but recently found out that this paranoia takes only 4-6 weeks to develop in cavers becoming managers/guides.

To some extent the cave management in NSW has entered a new era with a more open and professional approach to the management of caves and karst. The reasons for this are many; the increasing professionalism of bureaucracies and cavers, increasing public pressure and avenues for public involvement, reduction in management by regulations displayed on quaint antique boards (all saying penalty "Five Pounds"). The recognition, by managers, of the legitimacy of recreational caving as an "appropriate use" has certainly helped here as the whole approach has become more honest. In the past caving clubs have invented scientific looking excuses for obtaining access to controlled areas; these appear to have fooled managers. Perhaps they were just looking the other way? Hopefully these times are past and both cave users and managers recognize that there must be a spectrum of recreational, scientific and management opportunities.

When communications between manager and user break down, or have never been established, there often tends to be a runaway or snowballing effect and the parties become more and more distant. A recent example of this are the events surrounding the imbroglio around Kubla Khan Cave at Mole Creek in Tasmania. I believe that the "Mexican standoff" which has eventuated was utterly predictable and should never have happened.

Positive management, possibly involving physical works, is apparently required. A caving club started a hardening project which was ultimately halted by the management authority. It is unlikely that the managerial authority has the means or perhaps the expertise to carry out within-cave works and there seems to have been some double standards in relation to the control of visitors to the cave. Here, it appears to me, managers have lost access to labour and expertise and "face" in front of part of the caving community. Cavers, on their part, have lost contact with the managers and perhaps were behaving not very sensibly, or even perhaps irresponsibly, toward the cave. I believe there is "egg" on both faces.

The sudden advent of the Jenolan Environment Protection Committee and resulting multi-media controversy in my view is a similar case but perhaps with a reversal of the "silliness" role. However, more good is likely to emerge from the Jenolan happening than the Tasmanian affray.

On a smaller scale, we recently have had a cave dig encounter a very interesting looking sub-fossil deposit at Bungonia. The management body called a halt to this dig for around six weeks whilst some relatively cursory investigations took place. Interesting rumours began to circulate around the Sydney caving scene about the heavy hand of bureaucracy and about deliberate attempts to destroy the site completely.

Such digs should be closely monitored by both the diggers and managers to ensure that stratified sediments and/or bones are not destroyed, cave micro-climates changed and that opening of new entrances does not lead to aggravation of management problems. The Punchbowl-Signature tunnel at Wee Jasper, dug and blocked in the 1960s, is a good example of this latter. History is now in danger of repeating itself at Bungonia with a similar dig. I believe that the ASF Code of Ethics adequately covers the situation for digging, but enthusiasm is often a distorter of ethics.

ROLE OF THE MANAGER.

The manager of publicly owned karst resources will have a variety of roles; some of these roles will be statutory, others will be traditional and thus perhaps of dubious value to either manager or user. An example of this latter might be the artificial minimum party sizes that seem to appear spontaneously in tourist cave areas. Often the one or two person party is the one most interested in the resource, they may well have a great deal to offer the guide also.

Obviously the management direction will vary with the responsibilities and directions of the management body. But, as with other non-renewable resources, a conservative direction is indicated even if primary functions include revenue raising or tourist demand servicing. Clearly such conservative directions are hard to justify to accountants and similar professions - and hard-line government adoption of user-pays principles do not necessarily help either.

A further complicating factor often raised is that of public safety. The NSW NPWS is often under pressure to open or reopen vehicular tracks to caves so that people can be rescued more easily. This is usually by people not aligned with formal caving groups who in NSW at least seem relatively happy to walk. Davey has pointed out that life is basically dangerous but this sort of statement is unlikely to impress the legal fraternity and the rising tide of "American" style litigation can only make the public safety red-herring more complex.

A third complicating factor is that of lack of resources and of priorities directed toward active on- and in-the-ground management. Whilst the human and money resource situation is unlikely to improve dramatically across the board there seems to be an increasing recognition of karst values amongst our management authorities.

ties and thus overall karst management is improving. Whether this increase has anywhere near the same slope as the gradient of increasing use pressures is another question.

The manager is thus the "meat in the sandwich" between the many conflicting expectations of the public and the statutes. For example the public would, I think, expect a cave tour to be completely safe (like cars, roads, cigarettes, etc.). However, the attraction of adventure tours must, in part at least, be the presence of real or perceived dangers such as darkness, vertical drops and so on.

All of this forces us into the spectrum approach where we provide opportunities for different sorts of use (e.g. the so-called OROS - the outdoor recreational opportunity spectrum of Stankey and others). In many ways wild cave areas managed by cave tourism authorities have traditionally been utilized this way but as a bi-modal, rather than as a continuous, distribution. Adventure tours start to introduce the continuity but are probably not enough to satisfy the full range of demands. In addition we certainly don't cope well with the apportioning the spectrum of cave and karst resources to match the user demands. This, of course, is the realm of cave classification which requires both a detailed knowledge of the local resource and the state and national perspective. We need more scientists looking at basic documentation of caves and their contents, at how their ecosystems work and what, if any, buffering capacity they have to cope with surface and underground disturbance. Unfortunately this sort of information is difficult to obtain and indeed difficult to relate to effective management strategies and tactics.

Very soon we must face up, nationally, to the fact that we have not enough of the resources to continue the way we (cavers and managers) have been going over the last few decades. One of the biggest tasks facing the manager will be to convince users of these limitations. Users like myself must realize that the "golden age" of caving is now past in Australia. This is demonstrated by the Australian leadership and involvement internationally in cave exploration in Papua New Guinea, Thailand and Mexico.

ROLE AND EXPECTATIONS OF CAVERS

I believe that the roles and expectations of cavers are not well understood by managers. This lack of understanding has in my opinion been partially engendered by the caving fraternity and some of the frustrations that both parties are now experiencing indicate that past practices and attitudes need change. Amongst these changes are the need for managers to recognize the validity of recreational caving as a pastime and users must also realize the limited nature of the resource and accept that some restriction will increasingly become the norm.

The question "Why does one go caving?" is frequently asked and is as frequently poorly answered as are most of these sorts of questions. One can respond with Sir John Hunt's immortal reply but the reasons are obviously far more complex. Much of the reason is clearly to do with the social networks that are established - managers reading trip reports that deal mainly with the Saturday night around the campfire may understand some of this. These sorts of reports may well arise from the difficulty most people have verbalizing or writing about emotive experiences. They rarely reflect the professional standards that many caving groups profess and certainly don't often provide the sorts of information managers must have in order to understand the resources they are entrusted with on behalf of the community.

The experience that cavers are attempting to satisfy include elements of the following inter-related needs:

- * The need for "wilderness" experience over a broad range of expectations.
- * The need to discover unknown places and new caves. This latter rarely happens but a degree of "unknownness" is probably there in most caves.
- * The need for building social awareness and contacts - getting away from it all with some friends.
- * The need to do something different without the obvious controls of modern society.
- * The need to contribute to society in order to justify the relatively privileged access that has been made available in the past. As the "newness" of the experience dies away to be replaced by genuine inquisitiveness this need becomes more dominant.

Those interested in the motivation of cavers are urged to read Leakey (1978) who argued that the primary motive is one of fear coupled with being born to lead or to follow. He also points out that writing about caving is the supreme way of achieving fame and status in speleology - and avoids the inconvenience of actually going underground.

ROLE AND EXPECTATIONS OF RESEARCH WORKERS

There is clearly a continuum of researchers from the cave mapper through to dedicated and full-time institutionally supported workers. However there are a number of needs in common of which the most basic is access. This often needs to be relatively unfettered and sometimes extremely short notice - for example hydrological research needs access at times of extreme events which are unpredictable.

Sampling may be required and this may be destructive and sometimes on a wide scale. Sampling needs often sit uneasily on the shoulders of the managers of natural resources.

CAVES (Karst, survey and management)

- resource documentation
- management actions based on sound advice
- sampling needs including destructive sampling
- sites of significance
- unfettered access
- lack of other visitor interference
- access needs conflicting with resource needs (bats in winter)

RESEARCH NEEDS OF MANAGERS OF NON-TOURIST CAVES

- resource documentation
- effect of use
- carrying capacity
- reactive capacity of the resource
- how to handle wild cave users
- what knowledge means to the manager

WORKING WITH USERS

- flexibility
- firmness
- cave access committees
- permits / contact / keys
- Jenolan Sci. C'ttee
- Wyanbene example
- rationing

USER RESPONSIBILITIES

- privileged positions
- rationality
- continuation of the integrity of the resource
- flexibility
- freedom
- mutual respect and understanding

CONCLUSIONS

It may be enough in this forum to finish with a quotation from Leakey (1978)

"Finally mention must be made of the tiny minority who are the salt of the earth in caving. The only people of this century's cavers who future generations will revere in hatred and condemnation of the rest will be those few - the Show Cave Owners. Caves are continually being eroded away by cavers - albeit usually unintentionally floors are damaged and formations smashed. It is only with the protection of a Show Cave and the elements of access control that go with it, that some of our caves are likely to be conserved for future generations. Thus those who will achieve ultimate fame will be the Show Cave owners and/or proprietors."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ian Household for explaining I am not alone in my paranoia.

REFERENCES

- DAVEY, A.G., 1976. Caving & Karst Conservation, ASF Newsletter, 72, pp.8-10.
- HAMILTON-SMITH, E., 1980. The Concept of Recreational Specialization, in Mercer, D.C.(Ed.) **Outdoor, Recreation: Australian Perspectives**, Sorrett Publishing, Malvern, pp.68-76.
- LEAKEY, R.D., 1978. Caving Motivation, BCRA Bull. 20, pp. 20-23.
- SPATE, A.P., 1973. This? or this? Conservation of Australia's Caves, Report of the ASF ad hoc committee on conservation for 1972, Aust. Speleol. Fedn. Newsletter, 60 pp.3-8
- SPATE, A.P., 1984 Review of Nature Conservation Programmes, Paper No.33 - Karst Sites of Significance, unpub. report, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.