



OPENING ADDRESS

By Lana Little

Caving means different things to different cavers - or more often, a number of different things to any one caver.

Let's look first at caving as an adventurous activity. A great many of us were probably first attracted to caving as a sport - a challenge, a lot of fun, great fellowship, and all in a novel and often very beautiful setting. We learnt and honed skills together, and developed a sense of unity amongst teams, caving groups and the greater fraternity of cavers.

We should acknowledge, though, that element of risk that we also found attractive. To us, it is an element of the challenge and attraction of the sport. But today's landowners and managers have come to realise their exposure to litigation and so has been born the ASF caving insurance policy. Running parallel with the search for appropriate insurance cover came the push for a cave trip leadership accreditation scheme, which has already become a reality in some ASF affiliated clubs.

From my professional perspective, given that a private land manager can demand and expect compliance with insurance and trip leadership conditions, in order to minimise his or her liability towards cavers on their property, I can accept that managers operating on behalf of Government Agencies are concerned about expecting any less. As many of you are aware, caving is set to become a Special Activity on Protected Areas, requiring a permit to be issued to an accredited leader. The ASF has been, and I'm sure will continue to be, heavily involved in the refinement of all such initiatives, to the ultimate benefit of the caver.

The other aspect of caving, apart from its recreational values, lies in its intrinsic scientific value. Caves are functioning laboratories where we may observe processes of biology, geomorphology and hydrology taking place - or at least evidence that it has done so!

Members of the CQSS - in particular Peter Berrill, Noel Sands, Clive Kavanagh, and in the past Andrew March, Craig Hardy and others have been deeply involved in research in my District, particularly the Mitchell-Palmer karst. Here their interests have centred upon the Ghost Bat and its habits, but they have been unfailing in their observations of all creatures, great and small.

John has already highlighted a local conservation issue, in his address concerning the Mt Etna campaign. The challenge of protecting our caving areas into the future is a real one. An aid towards this objective is the Queensland system of conservation agreements, binding private owner/managers and Government Conservation agencies in a land-title-based contract to ensure the long-term viability of both the resource and the caving activity. In all these contexts, we value conferences such as this to provide a forum for constructive discussion. It's these sort of progressive steps that will lead the way into the next century.

I join John in thanking the CQSS, both for their extensive efforts in caving and cave conservation in the past, and for the months of preparation that have gone before this conference today.

On behalf of John and myself, I hereby declare the 22nd conference of the Australian Speleological Federation officially open.