

## Criteria on selecting a cave for commercial wild adventure tours

Report on Workshop held at ASF Conference "A Cave Odyssey 2001"

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This was a well-attended workshop with quite a deal of lively discussion. There was no formal structure and no prepared papers presented. The discussions can be grouped under the following headings.

### Choice of Cave

Characteristics considered were variety, vulnerability, ease of access, ease of use as operator and rescue perspective. The concept of "Sacrificial Cave" was brought up without dwelling on the term.

### Commercial Operators

It was obvious that there were a variety of opinions regarding the competence of operators. Some consideration was given to the range of operators and whether their objectives were to service education groups, children or clients seeking adventure. There was a questioning of the conservation ethics of some operators. Considerable concerns were expressed about the used of caves for corporate bonding and team building uses. Concerns were expressed about the leadership qualities of operators and their employees.

### Cave Managers

Cave managers have responsibility for ensuring Commercial Operators (including their own operations) are conducted responsibly with respect to clients and with respect to the karst resource under their management.

There were a lot of unknowns and perceptions that some managers were ruled by commercial motive. It was unclear which managers had satisfactory policies within Management Plans or Department Procedures governing the licensing of operators. It was not known which managers required operators to adhere to the ASF Codes of Conservation and Minimal Impact Caving (or similar). Insurance and liability questions were also raised in this discussion.

There was a lot of concern expressed about the criteria used to judge the leadership skills of operators.

Some of the concerns expressed problems (real or perceived) of competition with recreational cavers.

### Conclusions

This workshop obviously touched many nerves. There was an inadequate information base on the extent of commercial operations and its affect on caves. ASF does not have formulated policy about commercial adventure cave operations. Anecdotal information was that there were concerns about such operations across the country.

The group was unanimous in expressing the need to be active in discussions with managers and commercial operators towards reaching a fuller understanding of adventure cave touring in Australia. It was suggested organising a Workshop on the subject to initiate the process.