

Events

Conference Field Trip

Thanks to the generous sponsorship of the various cave managers, all conference attendees were able to visit a range of the major tourist caves on the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Ridge during the field trip.

In the morning, buses took the entire party first to Ngilgi Cave at Yallingup, where managers Liam and Jenny Kinsella showed us round and described the cave's history and some of their management initiatives. The group was particularly interested to see the moves to replace old, intrusive walkways and steps with more "cave-friendly", non-polluting recycled inert plastics. Another imaginative solution is the series of contoured plastic crawlways installed a short way inside the entrance, designed to offer families a "virtual caving experience" while protecting this section of the cave from the damaging exploration permitted in earlier generations. The Ngilgi visit was delightfully rounded off with a complimentary morning tea and scones taken in the pretty, peppermint-shaded picnic area.



For the middle part of the day we travelled south to Wharnccliffe Mill at Margaret River, a former timber mill now run as a community recreation camp by the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). Several presentations were given here, including two by CALM staff. Caves Manager Anne Wood explained the development of the permit system for in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park, convincing some former unbelievers of the wisdom of restricted access in such fragile karst. Neil Taylor, Visitor Services Manager for the Blackwood District, presented CALM's own brand of new stainless steel walkway technology, firing everyone with his enthusiasm and roping in some "trades assistants" for a practical demonstration of the construction technique.

Following a picnic lunch, the tour continued southward to Forest Grove, where CaveWorks, the caves management and karst research branch of the Augusta-Margaret River Tourism Association, has its major interpretive centre at Lake Cave. Some chose to enjoy the excellent interpretive displays (or were they just picking out ASF members in the photographs?), while others were mainly interested in a speed challenge for the "virtual cave" crawlway (record now held by Rob Susac). Some found out the hard way about the virtual stalagmite....

We then split in half for the final cave visits, with each half able to visit one of the illuminated tourist caves run by CaveWorks, plus one of the unlit, normally self-guiding caves managed by CALM.

CaveWorks offered either Lake Cave - where the vast doline is an event in itself before you even reach the cave with its beautiful formations reflected in the lake - or the equally beautiful Mammoth Cave, complete with video tour. (I should mention that each conference delegate also received a pass enabling them to visit any CaveWorks cave in the post-conference period.) The CALM caves were either Giants, a "through" trip combining vast chambers with some tight squeezes and climbs, or Calgardup, where the groups installed a little bit of that stainless steel walkway and heard about various other measures taken to rectify earlier tourist impacts.



While the Lake/Giants groups worked off some energy climbing stairs, the Mammoth/Calgardup groups enjoyed a short bushwalk between their two caves, with informative commentary on the local geography and flora from Jane Scott of Cavers Leeuwin and Anne Wood, kindly standing in for husband Peter who sadly missed the entire conference owing to injury. The day ended quite late, and we were grateful to all the cave managers and guides who stayed on to assist with the visits. The return bus trip to Bunbury was fairly subdued and it seemed everyone was worn out, but it's amazing what a little dinner and wine can achieve. The day concluded with a memorable night in the Grotto Bar, with hilarious games of physical contortion continuing until the small hours.