

# KEYNOTE ADDRESS

## Looking Back: Gains and Losses

*Elery Hamilton-Smith*

Antique Speleologist



1966 Nullarbor Expedition

## *South Australia has a long speleological heritage*

- Grey, Angas, Burr and others 1840
- Edward Snell 1850
- Father Tenison Woods 1856-67
- Reddan, Mason, Leitch and others 1890s-1930s
- Samuel Bedford 1930s
- Woolf & Watson 1930s
- Hale and Tindale 1930s
- J Maitland Thomson, MacRitchie 1930s-1960s

## *“Modern” Speleology*

- 1946 Tasmania
  - Warren Carey and the Caverneers
- New South Wales
  - The bushwalker tradition
  - SUSS, then SSS and others.
- South Australia, which now leads to CEGSA and my personal narrative

## *The New Elizabethans and Rover Scouts*

- It all started on 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> June 1954



The first caving trip to Corrells Cave, Curramulka, 4-6<sup>th</sup> June 1954.

Back Row: Graham Chinner, Elery Hamilton-Smith; Centre Row: Cecil Giles, David Pegum, John David Taylor Front: Noel Mollet (Photograph: N. Mollet)

*Over the next 12 months, this group grew rapidly, recruiting other Rover Scouts, friends, bushwalkers and others.*

*The things we gained . . .*

- Fun, fellowship and a wonderful new interest
- A sense of new confidence and of safety in this new pursuit
- Freedom and spontaneity in caving
- New Friends – including landowners
- Respect and support from the museum and from academics

*And also . . .*

- Getting to know Captain Thomson
- Learning technical expertise from each other and other inquiries
- Developing greater environmental understanding
- The opportunity for inquiry and research
- Visiting remarkable places across the State

*Some vital strategies*

- A focus on proper recording and documentation
- Many things due to the remarkable Alan Hill, e.g.
  - Cave Numbering
  - Understanding cave processes in soft rock
  - A greatly enriched vocabulary
  - Receiving gifts from the Queen and others

*So, on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1955*

The Cave Exploration Group of South Australia was inaugurated.

*Many other things followed but in particular . . .*

- Hosting the Inaugural Conference of the Australian Speleological Federation
- Two Nullarbor Expeditions

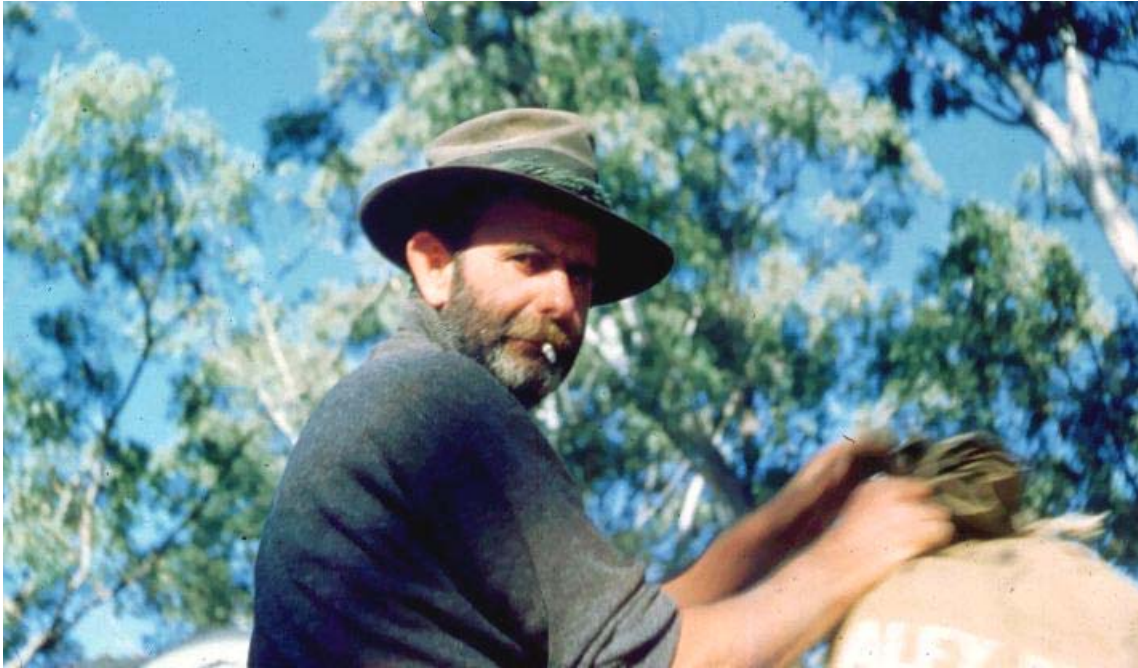


The 1954 Nullarbor Expedition, led by Arnold (Burly) Wright, standing in front of driver's door  
(Photograph by courtesy Peter Wright)



Now for the compulsory pikkies

*The great Captain      J. Maitland Thomson*



Captain J. Maitland Thomson (Photograph Ken Peake-Jones)

*And the 1956 Expedition . . .*



The 1956 Expedition camped at Weebubbie Cave (Photograph Hamilton-Smith)



Coordination Team for the 1956 Expedition: Stan (driver), John McQuie (surveyor), Gordon Bowen (radio operator), Jonathon Coles ('Advertiser' Newspaper) and Elery Hamilton-Smith.  
(Photographer anon.)



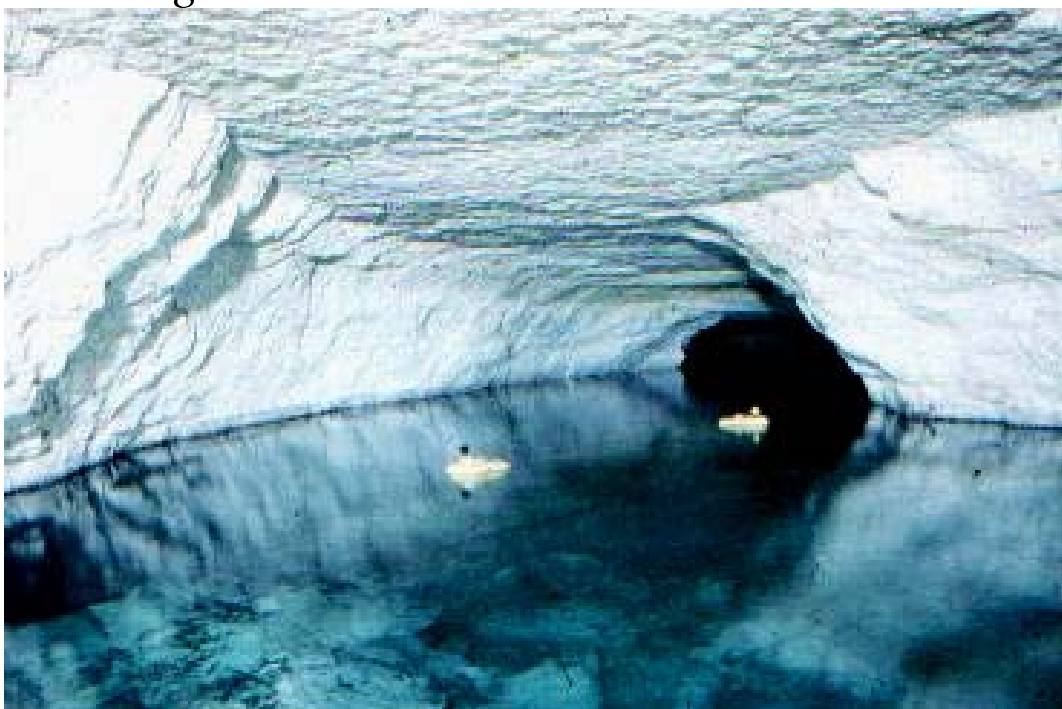
Bob Sexton surveying in Warbla Cave (Photograph Hamilton-Smith)



The great Joe Jennings in White Wells cave, saying a few appropriate words about the fact that his camera tripod has just collapsed for the umpteenth time! (Photograph Hamilton-Smith)



*The Photographic Challenge . . .*



- The last photograph, taken with the help of the Megaflash, brings us to the photographic challenge of the Nullarbor caves
- So, the Nullarbor became the focal point of experiments with the so-called Diprotodon – a lamp which blew magnesium powder through a flame

### *Various diprotodons . . .*

- Invented and used in Europe & North America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Introduced to Australia by Charles Kerry
- Commercially manufactured by Baker and Rouse under the brand Austral
- Used on the Nullarbor by HG Watson who in turn passed it on to Maitland Thomson

### *The 1950s and other elaborations*

- Henry Fairlie Cunninghame built several for the 1956 Expedition, each powered with a meteorological balloon
- Alan Hill used high density magnesium powder
- Norm Poulter used canned gas

### *Most importantly, there have been wonderful discoveries*

- The Koonalda (and later many other) archaeological sites
- The Victoria Cave and many other fossil sites
- The cave invertebrates, especially at Cape Range
- The use of intra-red imagery at the Bat Cave

### *Close co-operation between cavers and scientists*

- Particularly fostered by Tindale and by Jennings

### *Then, organisationally . . .*

- The ASF Handbook and Karst Data Base
- The development of cave diving and in particular the training program

*As a brief digression, two of my most significant and highly valued personal decisions have been to take that first journey to Curramulka and to proceed with the notion of the Federation and everything that has arisen from that . . .*

*Including*

- Growing national and then international co-operation
- The Australian Bat Banding Scheme and eventually, the inauguration of the Australasian Bat Society
- A progressively holistic approach to Cave and then Karst Conservation
- A systematic strategy for improving quality of cave and karst management, and again, the eventual establishment of the Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association
- And now, a broad commitment to international programs in heightening environmental awareness, protection and conservation

*But, what have we lost?*

- The spontaneity and freedom of just simply going caving
- Including the freedom to just explore new discoveries without impediment
- The uselessness and cost of most “risk management”
- The growing complexity of ensuring protection

*Most importantly . .*

- We have certainly lost many valued friends, including the late Alan Hill, Norman Tindale and others
- So, let me pay tribute to the many people who walked along the road with us and whose memory now helps to sustain us.