

# **26<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference**

## **Celebrating 50 years of the ASF**

### **Caves Critters and Craters, Mt Gambier 2007**

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Well after two years of planning and 12 months of frenzied organising the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary conference has come and gone. If you didn't attend, you don't know what you missed.

So what were the highlights of the conference? Well it had the highest number of attendees for an ASF Conference -151 to be exact. I hear it raised the most money ever at a caver's dinner auction. It had some of the oldest and youngest attendees ever. Of the four 1956 veterans, three were CEGSA members - these were Elery Hamilton-Smith, Bob Sexton and Noel Mollet.

The conference also brought out a number of other old-timers, some of whom hadn't been to a conference since 1965; that's a long time between drinks. Overall, the conference received mainly positive feedback – that it was very family friendly, and that the range of activities and presentations suited all tastes and interests from the scientific to the creative.

No conference can work well without its support team and the people behind the scenes. Besides all the work that went on prior to the event, there was much to do before people arrived. Athol Jackson, Chris Gibbons, Kevin Mott, Adam Branford, Monica Burt and myself worked hard for two days before the event setting up the venue, organising food and electronic equipment. We also had a number of interstate cavers who turned up early and were "recruited" into helping to set up. Most notable of these were Chris Gillard (NSW), Greg Leader and Ian Farhall (Vic). Then there were June and George MacLucas who arrived to set up the Art Show with help from Sam and Geoff Aslin. The Art Show seems to get bigger each time and many local artists were represented.

Our first hiccup came with the Cold Room at the function centre. It had broken down before we arrived and they were still waiting for the repair guy when we got there. Thanks to Vilma at the Racecourse - she kept chasing them up so it was running by the time the first lot of food arrived.

Then hiccup number 2 - Damian Grindley found Stan Flavel broken down on the side of the road on the morning that the conference opened - with our T-Shirts, mugs and half the programs. Damian and Amanda unloaded their car and put the conference gear in to get it to us ASAP while Stan got his car repaired.

Although some were recruited to help us, having quite a few conference attendees turn up days early also created some problems at Willow Vale Caravan Park where most people were staying, as the place was virtually booked out and some major shuffling had to happen. But in the end it was all sorted out, even with all the extra people who turned up at the last minute. Willow Vale was a little overcrowded but the atmosphere was pretty good and relaxed and many people were impressed with the owners' hospitality.

Another group who require a special mention were the volunteers that took care of feeding the hordes at lunchtime and during tea breaks. We had decided to include lunch in the cost of the conference to keep everyone together and ensure things ran on time but it was a big job - mostly the washing up after each break. These volunteers included Monica Burt, Sam Aslin, Christy and Dannielle Thomas, Julie Mott and Sharon Dykes. They were

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our conference angels; so much so that I went out and found halos for them all - all except Christy because if you ever stay at the farm at Avenue she can be a little devil - so she got the bright red devil's hat complete with horns and tail. Anyway they did an extraordinary job and it was probably the most physically demanding of all.

Then there was Adam Branford who ran numerous errands, organised some equipment and kept some of our attendees entertained on a number of caving trips. He was also an entertaining bus driver for our Naracoorte field day trip.

Athol and Stan took control of the presentations, ensuring it all ran smoothly. I have to wonder just what equipment Athol doesn't have - he brought so much down from Adelaide. It included PA systems, projectors, TVs, video and DVD players, printers, computers, cabinets, display boards, screens - you name it he had it.

Damian of course took care of his special project of wines along with numerous other jobs including dobbing me in to the local media for an interview when I had just woken up from a quick nap. But the wine was really his baby. It proved so popular he had to have another 12 cases shipped to the Mount. Tim Payne put together an SRT race along with an SRT obstacle course that proved a bit challenging.

Day one was registration day. There were a number of self-guided adventure caves available for those who turned up early along with some snorkelling at Ewens Ponds. We also had a number of very late registrations, and people went about setting up all sorts of displays. We then had a welcome BBQ after which Andy Eavis, President of the International Union of Speleology, presented a viewing of the BBC's "Planet Earth Caves".

Day two saw the official opening with Elery as the keynote speaker and then the presentations began. Later that afternoon we had the official opening of the Speleo Art Show and there was a great range of artistic styles presented ranging from sketches, sculptures and paintings. Unfortunately the only work Brigid was able to submit this time were the logos that she had designed for the conference which impressed a lot of people. After the Art Show opening, Andy Eavis gave an excellent 3D slide show of impressive caves from around the world.

On day three were more presentations with the day having a strong cave diving contingent. Peter Horne even managed to make it between work and ill health so he could present a history of CDDA and cave diving. One of the activities that proved successful was a limestone sculpting workshop run by local artist Ivo Tadic. Some of the participants came back wanting that to be run at all conferences. These proud new sculptors put their handiwork on display during the conference and a number of them even managed to sell their creations - possibly some future artists in our midst.

We also had another group of budding artists who paid \$5 for a plywood bat (flying type, not cricket type) that they could paint or decorate. These artists ranged from 2yrs to 50yrs plus, with the majority being 12 and under. They even decided to put on their own little art show and covered the place with signs announcing their Bat Art exhibition. The Bat Art proved so popular that we were cutting them out of cardboard for the kids to do.

The evening ended with a Speleo Quiz with about 10 teams entered. The Quiz included a range of serious scientific, general knowledge, historical and funny story questions. Did you know that Dick Smith (Dick Smith Electronics) was once a member of a NSW caving club, or that Steve Bourne, Manager of Naracoorte Caves, had a previous job as a Sheep Shearer? What I'm trying to work out though is even though the judges (Damian Grindley and John Dunkley) were open to some bribery, how did my table (the one with all the kids

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on it) manage not to win when we had most of the answers? The winners ended up being a mixed team of Tasmanians, NSW and Western Australians I believe.

Day four again was full of presentations and the ASF Council meeting. Other than that, the most significant event that was developing before our eyes was a young romance budding between 4 year olds Merrin Grindley and Mitchell Payne. These two little love birds were often seen running hand in hand towards the large sprinklers, on the very hot days we were having, ignoring Amanda's and Pams calls not to get wet. Could this be the start of a new caving dynasty, the joining of two prominent CEGSA families? Stay tuned - you never know what may happen over the next 20 years - maybe the big event at the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference will be a caver's wedding!!!!!!

Day five saw the field trip at Naracoorte. Poor Steve and the staff at the caves. It was a stinking hot day of about 38°C and even though there were a few hiccups, the day was a big hit. Cavers were made most welcome. Steve and his team had to manage his normal busy Xmas holiday visitors and then to have 140+ cavers turn up for the day was a big ask with tours and talks through all of the Show Caves and a number of wild cave tours available. Although only a few of the group who went to Brown Snake Cave managed to get through that tight entrance, of course Damian had to stay on the surface and entertain those that couldn't get in.

Everyone met back at Wirreanda for a relaxed BBQ dinner and even the staff at Naracoorte got to relax for half an hour. Then as it began to darken, most people headed to the Bat Cave with their wine and beer to view the bats flying out. Mind you there is a bit of a concern that the drought is impacting on the bats. If you saw the Advertiser article from early January when Steve went in to do some maintenance on the Bat Cave cameras, he came across a large number of dead bat pups. Anyway we headed back to Mt Gambier at around 10pm with Adam's bus picking up a number of stragglers. The ride back was very entertaining and if Adam ever wants a career change he should consider being a Bus Tour driver.

By Thursday Chris and I were exhausted but there was little time to rest as we had to organise a number items for Friday. One of those was green jelly for the Speleo Sports. We ended up buying every packet of green jelly in Mt Gambier along with plain gelatine. We spent the afternoon making gallons of the stuff. We also had a heap of BBQ items left, so Thursday night saw a free BBQ dinner for those who wanted it. A number of Videos and DVDs were also presented.

Well Friday was the last day - there were a few presentations but the big events for the day were Speleo Sports and SRT races. Stan and I set up the Speleo Sports utilising the winner's area of the race course. We wound about 300 metres of cheap rope around, over, and through various gates, fences, and steps as well as through a detergent-covered tarp tunnel and then the tarp-covered paddle pool full of green jelly and ice. Yes, I said ice because we left the lids down on the eskies - when we put them in the fridge a lot of the jelly didn't set. We also placed a key in the pool which the teams had to retrieve. Teams of four had to move through the course while connected to ropes and carrying an egg. Damian and Stan assisted many of the teams at the paddle pool by diving on top of participants once they started looking for the keys in the pool, to make sure they got low enough to find the key...

There were a number of teams ranging from adults to kids and a couple of mixed teams. One of the funniest sights was when Pam Payne and her 2 young ones were in the event with a friend and young Mitchell kept deciding he wanted to run off (I think he was looking for Merrin) and she had to chase him down. He's fast for a little tacker. The competition

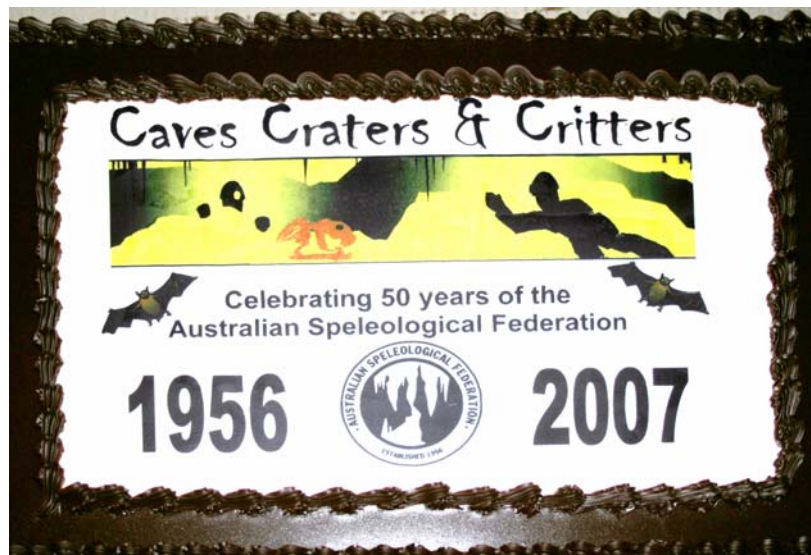
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was at an end when Stan was duly dumped in the jelly pool and bombarded with the leftover eggs. Of course I missed that because I was setting up for the Dinner and I'm not sure what Damian's excuse was.

The dinner was great, and three people rang up and booked-in the night before for that. The caterers were great and the meal was excellent so if you ever want to cater something in the Mount, I highly recommend Posh Nosh and their prices are reasonable. We decorated the tables with candles and black and gold Helium balloons. I have to say Adam looked really funny when he rolled up with his car full of 150 balloons.

There were the usual speeches as well as the auction in which Andy Spate was the Auctioneer. He did a great job but you had to be careful as scratching your nose was considered a bid for some. As mentioned, it was the most money raised at a conference dinner and probably the biggest one ever. There were a number of characters at the dinner. Motty of course was in fine form with his white overalls, Hagrid Wig and drinking helmet with flashing bats.

We even had a great birthday cake. I got the same people who made the CEGSA 50<sup>th</sup> birthday cake make this one. It had the conference logos along with the ASF logo and bats on it. I have to mention a grateful Thankyou to Harry's wife who caught him as he backed out of the driveway to remind him that he was to bring the cake to the Dinner from Adelaide on Friday, because like many males he's a bit forgetful when it comes to things like that. Anyway the dinner wound up well after midnight and so the 50<sup>th</sup>



anniversary came to an end (well for some - I still had a post conference trip to do.)

All in all it was a very successful event and a great celebration of the ASF's first 50 years. We were told by many that we had raised the bar for conferences. I believe we succeeded in our goals of making it an interesting, diverse and fun event. We wanted to try and have activities and events that appealed to a broad range of our young and old members and make it as cost-affordable as possible and I think we did that. However, I think I can safely say the next time it's CEGSA's turn to host the conference there's quite a few people who will be hiding, because its "bloody hard work!"

Congratulations and thank you to all involved in helping out. Hopefully I haven't forgotten anyone. Also Special Mention and thanks to our sponsors: SA Department Of Tourism; SA Department of Environment and Heritage and their respective Ministers; Scout Outdoor Centre; City of Mount Gambier; Limestone Coast Tourism; District of Grant; and Willow Vale Caravan Park.

For those from CEGSA who didn't make it, you missed a great time and if you didn't get a T-shirt, I have a few left in L, XL, and XXL at \$30 each.