

# Cave Tourism Brochures

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## Abstract

Ephemera is characterized by being of a public nature, often mass produced and freely distributed, but equally mass discarded, of little or no intrinsic value at the time. Postcards and books are post-trip souvenirs, often kept for many years, and many have become collectables. Brochures are usually pre-trip advertising and publicity, more frequently discarded and overlooked. The National Library of Australia has a section devoted to ephemera and has mounted several exhibitions including, for example, superb early posters promoting our caves.

Brochures can be useful measures of social history and of the way our caves were promoted and displayed. They record a move from package tours to more individual programs; they reflect on changing values such as standing on decoration, smoking in caves, provision of disabled facilities; there are changes in the promotional language utilised; there is a rising emphasis on special interest tours, attractions or themes such as music, adventure tours and regional attractions. They throw light on the history of caves no longer shown to the public, such as Scotts, Baldocks, Cammoo, Nettle and Arch. Privately owned caves often differ from publicly owned ones by promoting an incorporated gift shop, restaurant, motel or other profit centre.

Interesting Australian and foreign brochures will be displayed including some quirky examples: a Jenolan one advising that "cabin trunks and hat boxes cannot be conveyed as luggage"; a woman in swimsuit next to a column; the bathrooms of Samcheok; the American obsession with safety and comfort; and appeals to Ripley or the Guinness Book of Records in the quest for biggest, tallest or whatever.

## Introduction

Cave brochures must seem a rather mundane subject to be talking about. They are handed out free, and they're usually discarded afterwards. They are, after all, nothing more than advertising matter. They cost nothing, so perhaps they're worth little. They are ephemeral. In a breakdown of the spectrum of tourism experiences, brochures fit into the anticipatory stage, and are followed by the stages of travel to the site, on-site experiences, return travel and recollection. People who actually visit the caves advertised may well buy postcards, books, pens, patches, T-shirts, jewelry, snowdomes and all manner of souvenirs afterwards as gifts, mementoes or recollections of a pleasant trip. Quite a few of us collect such memorabilia. But not much attention has been given to pre-trip advertising and publicity media like brochures.

Caves are major regional attractions in some parts of the world, particularly in China (which hosts over 40 million cave visits a year!), Slovenia (with up to 1 million visitors a year just to the Postojna area), Missouri (with 20 competing show caves) and Thailand (where I estimate several million cave visits a year, mostly to Buddhist sites but with a growing promotion of adventure

tours). Brochures are one of several media demonstrating contrasting cultural approaches to cave interpretation; in China particularly the very names of many caves highlight cultural differentiation.

Australian cave tourism in the modern sense, began in the late nineteenth century largely by word-of-mouth, through Cook's Australian Wonderland, centenary celebratory books such as Cassell's Picturesque Australasia and Andrew Garrahan's Picturesque Atlas of Australasia, and occasional lengthy newspaper articles analogous to the confected travel sections in today's newspapers, including the excellent articles in the Illustrated Sydney News. In May 1905 the quaintly titled NSW Department of Intelligence established a State Tourism Bureau to promote tourism, and shortly afterwards the first cave tourism brochures appeared. Other states rapidly followed suit. Because trains were the usual mode of travel, many early brochures promoted caves as part of a package offered by the various Railways Departments, which were developing extensive travel departments. The first newspaper advertisements also date back just over 100 years. Promotional advertising expanded rapidly with cheaper printing, especially of photographs, the growth of the middle class, paid annual vacations, and the advent of rail excursion fares. As motor transport spread, there was a gradual move to increasing promotion of the caves themselves, and a corresponding growth in brochures.

## So, what value do cave tourism brochures have?

Mainly, they provide another window of insight into the way our caves were promoted and displayed, into changing social habits and values, and to comparative interpretation and presentation practices. They have been utilised by writers about tourism history generally. Some illustrated examples from this presentation include:

- Information on caves no longer shown to the public, including names given to decorations etc. e.g. Scotts, Baldocks, Jersey, Cammoo (Fig. 1), Exit Cave (adventure tours) or until its recent reopening, the old Nettle and Arch at Jenolan.
- Changing transport methods to the caves. The move from package tours e.g. with train included or stops on the Blue Mountains, to more individualised programs as cars became more common (Fig. 2). Gradual changes due to technological changes e.g. horse and coach versus organised motor tours. The Caves Express, and train tours to Mole Creek, Buchan (Fig. 2) and Naracoorte.
- Changing prices e.g. how Jenolan widened the gap between prices of Lucas Cave and of more restricted caves like Ribbon, to market the latter as a premium experience. There were even changes in name - Ribbon Cave became the Blue Ribbon Tour, part of Imperial Cave became Diamond Cave Tour. In both cases prices increased markedly as new marketing niches were exploited. Similarly, new owners decided that Capricorn Caverns marketed better than Olsens, and Careys better than Goodradigbee (Fig. 3). At Waitomo, staid advertis-







ing of the “world famed glowworm grotto” expanded to more aggressive promotion of “underground playgrounds” and “eight amazing adventure options” (Fig. 3).

- New directions in marketing – at Naracoorte, Victoria Cave became Victoria Fossil Cave to cater for a boom in public interest in the fossils. Other examples include Jenolan promotions such as the many anniversaries of various discoveries; “The other Wilson”, etc. Jenolan has in general marketed its history better than any others in Australia. It is also instructive to compare earlier and later marketing focus with that from the 1980s era when it was called Jenolan Caves Resort, administered by the Department of Leisure, Sport and Tourism, and emphasised tennis courts, fitness trails and a camping ground. An increase in special-interest tours can be tracked through some brochures

- Changes in the language of advertising – “inspections” became “tours”, “tours” became “adventures”. Nevertheless, in many cases florid language such as “a place apart and enchanted ... surcharged with mystery” (Jenolan, 1930) (Fig. 4). and “a symphony in stone” (Yarrangobilly) (Fig. 4) has not changed with terms like the current (2008) “magic happens here”.

- Reflections on changing practices – things that aren’t done any more (or shouldn’t be). Some brochures show visitors touching the formation, standing or climbing on decoration, or offer overnight adventure camping in caves (in the USA, we might add!). Luray Caverns in Virginia used to advertise widely its Stalacpipe Organ, where the organ’s hammers struck selected stalactites! (Fig. 5) Han-sur-Lesse in Belgium apparently still features someone lighting a flaming torch and dashing down an underground rockfall trailing ash. Regulations were often cited: facilities for the disabled, smoking and eating in caves, preference given to guests of Caves House (Jenolan) for certain cave tours, and restricted opportunities for photography (which eased as faster film and digital cameras became available).

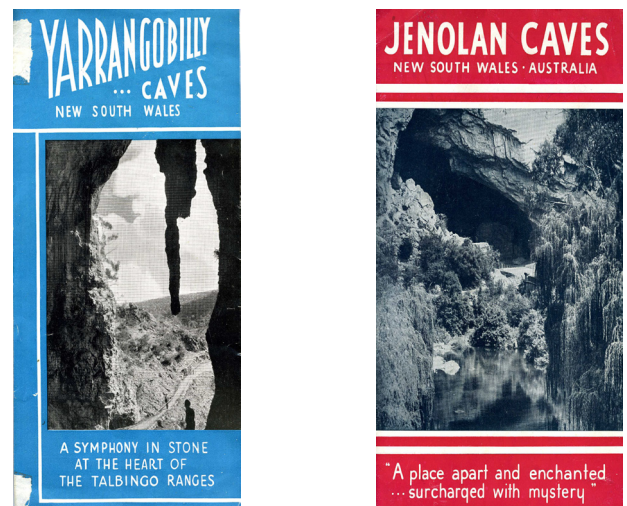
- Inside, many caves look much the same to visitors. Product differentiation therefore became important. New Zealand’s Te Anau Cave claimed to be “the only known example of a living cave that may be visited by the public anywhere in the world”, while caves like Postojna (Slovenia), Cumberland (USA) and Dragon Palace (China) make much of their featured underground electric transport by train, open car and boat respectively. There is a widespread American penchant to claim the “biggest”, “tallest”, “most spectacular” or whatever (Fig. 6), and appeals to Ripleys or the Guinness Book of Records (caves such as Bridal Cave and Lost Sea)

- Because most tourist caves there are privately owned, American brochures frequently place great emphasis on the ubiquitous gift shop, restaurants, and frequently a motel and other facilities which serve as profit centres (Fig. 7). Indeed, in many such, the peripheral attractions are a greater revenue source than the cave itself. In the UK, Wookey Hole devotes less than 10% of its brochure to the cave itself, promoting instead an Edwardian Fairground and photo studio, a Penny Arcade, a magical mirror maze. The nearby Cheddar Showcaves brochure similarly has more to say about cream teas and cheddar

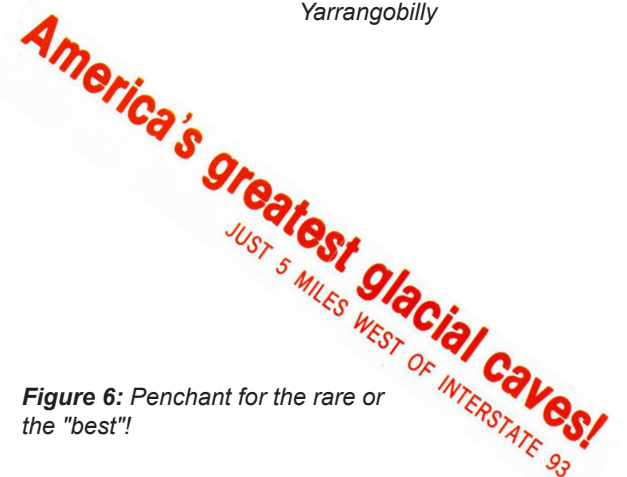
cheese, rock climbing, orienteering and open top double-deck bus tours than about the caves. Australian cave sites are usually more traditionally oriented, probably because most are in public ownership, and they have only recently realised the need for some form of product differentiation.

- There are sometimes quirky comments on values and concerns of the times – examples are given of a woman in swimsuit beside a cave pool at Luray Caverns (Fig. 8); the bathrooms of Samcheok in Korea (Fig. 8); soothing the American fastidiousness about safety and comfort, even warnings that “cabin trunks and hat boxes cannot be conveyed as passengers’ luggage” (Jenolan).

Despite the millions produced, old tourist brochures generally are not easy to find, precisely because of their fleeting nature and minimal market demand. On the other hand, for those contemplating starting a collection, cave brochures have one other advantage over most other speleological ephemera in these days of eBay: current ones can be obtained free!



**Figure 4:** Florid language used to describe cave tour experiences at Jenolan and Yarrangobilly



**Figure 6:** Penchant for the rare or the “best”!



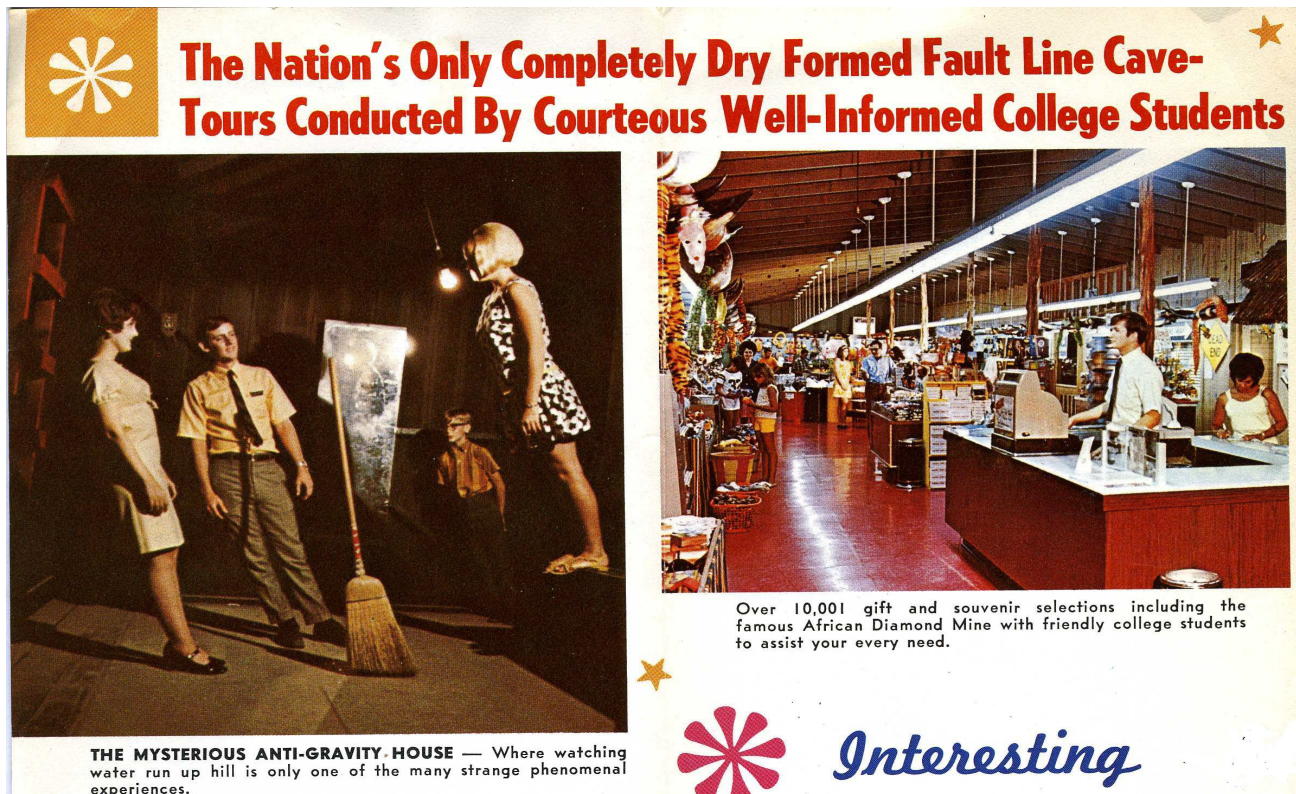


Figure 7: Brochure showing gift shop in an American cave brochure

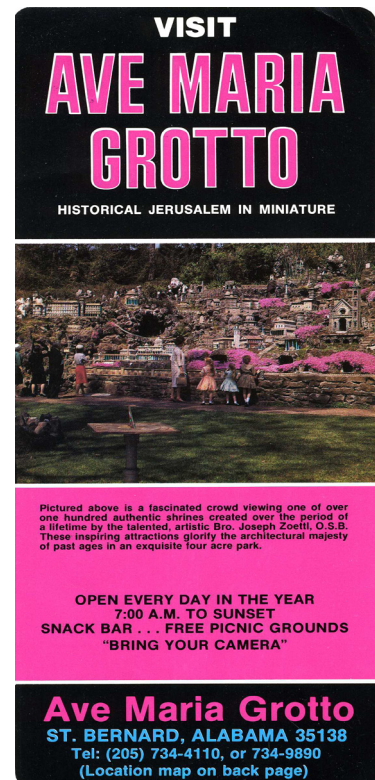
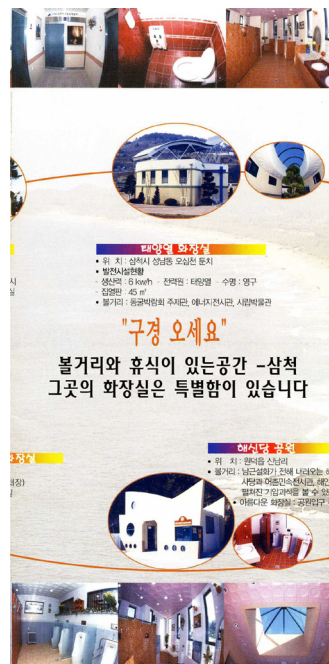


Figure 8: Quirky information a) woman in swimsuit beside a cave pool at Luray Caverns, b) toilets in Korea and c) shrines at Ave Maria Grotto in Alabama