

# ***Publishing: a Means to give a Wider Understanding of Caves and Karst to the Community***

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## **Abstract**

Publishing material about caves and karst is a major way of disseminating information and publicizing messages of good karst management. There are several forms of publication that can be used to get our messages across to cavers, the general public and to participate in scientific discussion. This workshop will explore the different modes of publication and what their advantages and disadvantages are and how the relevant ASF commissions can be used. The various publications of ASF will be used as the framework.

## **Introduction**

Why should we publish our findings? Where do we fit in the scheme of things as amateurs in what is increasingly a workplace situation? It is important to discuss these issues as they occur all the time. Do we need information from the various scientists and what do they need from us?

## **Reasons for publication**

The reasons for cavers to publish information is basically that we need to show that we are experts on caves and karst. If we do not do this in a professional (rather than Professional i.e. paid for) manner we are doing ourselves a disservice. We cannot then claim to be 'experts' because we do not subject our ideas and findings to others to be reviewed and subject to positive criticism. We are also abdicating from a responsibility to present material in a way that can lead to the protection/conservation of caves and karst.

Publication can be in the forms of reporting trips for exploration details, social reporting, publishing cave descriptions, cave documentation, scientific descriptions and conservation issues. It can be in any or all of these: Club Newsletters, Club Journals, Caving Journals, Speleological Scientific Journals (some refereed and some not), Speleological Monographs, Unpublished Reports, Conference Preceedings/Proceedings, refereed Scientific Journals, Books, Monographs or just about any other media. All of these are important in getting information out there to the caving and general public.

When publishing material it is important that material is accurate. Misinterpretation and inaccuracy are usually due to the following problems:

**a) Failure to absorb and use new ideas and interpretations of new ideas and data.** In this case the major issues in ASF and clubs is the regurgitation of out-dated ideas. Just because an eminent scientist said something 20, 30, 40 or even 5 years ago, is it necessarily true today? Or was it ever true? New information, updated interpretation occurs all the time and we need to keep up with it. We should not automatically accept an eminent persons' statement when we can see it does not fit the data before our eyes!

We also need however to make sure we do not make improbable statements, e.g. the cause of the feature at place A is due to processes A, B, and C. They will not necessarily be the same causes in place B or C unless the same or similar conditions apply. This is particularly the case with new ideas in areas we are unfamiliar with.

**b) Failure of communication.** We are all guilty of this and we need to make sure we try to describe things carefully and clearly. Equally we need to listen to what is actually said rather than what we think was said.

**c) Tendency to blame lack of resources** This is an old issue and although we can make it clear we cannot do everything immediately, we can keep working on it. Equally we need to give people time to get things done.

**d) The retention of out of date material long after it is past its 'use by' date.** This is related to the issues discussed in point a)

**e) Myth and misinformation creep.** This is where information becomes confused. The best example I heard was in a tourist cave where the cave was a small stream cave that was a tributary to a larger river; stream became a river, a river became the river, and the cave was described as having the main river having flowed through it in the past and formed the passage. Most unlikely!

**f) Scientific education problems.** These are not going to go away and the level of understanding of geological processes and geological time alone is an issue.

## **Some Questions?**

There are many issues that arise out of the questions of what and how to publish. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each type of publication listed above? What sort of articles are the best to publish in each? How should we regard and use the articles? What is refereeing? What role do editors play?

When material is edited **please** do not take this as gratuitous interference. It is **impossible** to edit your own work; you just cannot see the problems. You see what you think you wrote. *Caves Australia* is edited i.e. the editor goes through submitted work and corrects grammatical and spelling mistakes, points out repetition, inconsistencies, citation of other people's work and poorly expressed sections and will usually make suggestions as to how to fix any problems. The people we really like are those whose material is well written, interesting and who can take the suggestions in the spirit they are given i.e. to make the article better! There will often be a few things to discuss. Sometimes material is forwarded to someone who knows the topic to check it. We try really hard to make sure that previous work is appropriately acknowledged. None of us likes seeing things we have done go unacknowledged in publications. That it is a small club journal does not mean you cannot be rigorous and fair about this.

Refereeing (or reviewing) is a more detailed and rigorous version of this, where the article or book is referred to someone for an opinion on its quality and for suggestions on how to improve it. This is normal for scientific/academic papers, e.g. for *Helictite* and for monographs and books. This all takes time to do, especially as referees are not paid to do it (even for very prestigious journals). The article in question is returned and then altered to meet the requirements requested. If there is something the referee and the author disagree about, this can be discussed and usually a compromise of some kind is worked out or the work is withdrawn. All of this takes time and it often takes over 12 months for the process to work its way to final editing stage. Certainly monographs, books and *Helictite* will not be published under the ASF logo without this happening.

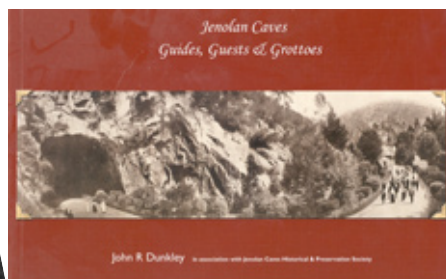
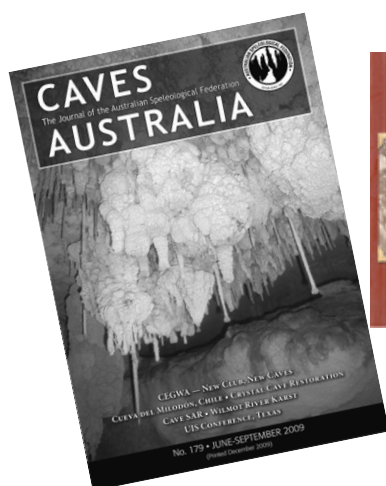
### What does ASF publishing do?

The ASF Publications Commission is responsible for the editing, production, publication and distribution of hard copy items and publication of electronic material produced by ASF. This includes quarterly magazines such as *Caves Australia* or member newsletters such as *ESpeleo*, but does not include the publication of *Helictite* which is the responsibility of the ASF Helictite Commission. The Commission members oversee issues to do with copyright and potential issues of offensive material.

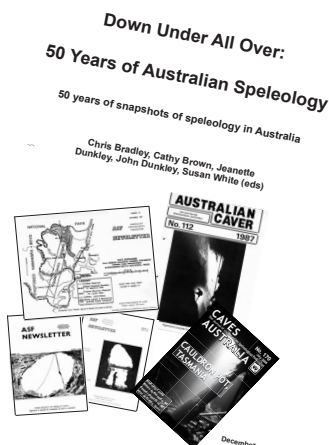
Fortunately we have had very little problem with this last issue. The main tasks revolve around collecting material and editing it to a suitable standard and getting appropriate graphics, again of suitable standard for printing, and then getting material ready for publication. This involves layout and proofreading. Finally then sending it out to members or organising distribution and/or sales. The main time consuming matters are to do with editing and proofreading, both of which take time, and rushing tends to result in mistakes.

Why is *Helictite* not part of the Publications Commission and has its own separate commission? Isn't this just duplication? This does look like duplication but when ASF received *Helictite* from the Speleological Research Council Inc, it was agreed that it would have a separate commission. People were concerned that it might just disappear and the money be 'frittered away'. In reality we struggle to keep the journal going, however we are managing to do so 'just'! Having the two commissions run in tandem rather than merged has minimised duplication.

This workshop finished with some discussion on how people can get involved and what tasks are needed to be done.



Examples of ASF publication



## Cave and Karst Conservation Forum

### Abstract

This forum is to provide an avenue to air problems and look towards solutions. The following questions are just some to prompt a contribution to the forum.

- What is the state of play in your patch?
- Are you in control?
- Are the caves being trashed and is it us or them?
- Does the Minimum Impact Caving Code need reviewing?
- Could the caves be better managed by your local management agencies?
- How should ASF support local karst conservation initiatives?

No findings or discussion were written up and submitted but the discussions were important for the Conservation Commission's work.