

FROM THE CONFERENCE CONVENOR

Stephen Bunton

It is vital that the cavers of Australia belong to a viable national body and for almost fifty years the ASF has been that body. To maintain such an organisation requires an enormous amount of work by quite a number of very dedicated individuals. In the past I have felt unable to commit myself to such tasks. Besides the everyday endeavours necessary to maintain ASF, the two major entities which provide the lifeblood for our organisation are the newsletter, *Caves Australia* and the biennial conferences. When it became Tasmania's turn to host the 25th Biennial Conference of ASF, I realised that here was something that could be done to serve the cavers of Australia.

There is no doubt that organising such an event as this requires a great amount of work and I am indebted to the following people for their assistance. Primarily Arthur Clarke was the other driving force. Having been to previous conferences more often and more recently than myself, he was able to advise me on the culture of these events, the necessary protocols, expectations and meeting schedules. He also organised the Photo Competition rules and entries as well as liaising with Rodney Dillon and the overseas visitors including chasing up their abstracts and papers. During the conference he played host to numerous people who stayed at his place in Francistown. Robyn Claire, his partner, offered sage advice on many occasions and ensured that the Artshow and Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery Exhibitions became a reality. June MacLucas was the organiser of the Artshow and was assisted tirelessly by her husband George. Steve Phipps was and still is, a most meticulous and diligent treasurer. Dean Morgan ably maintained the website. Albert Goede helped organise the abstracts, programme of papers and assisted in editing these proceedings. Greg Middleton helped with the proofreading.

It was decided to hold the conference in Dover because, besides offering the special old-world charm of regional Australia it was closer to the Hastings and Ida Bay caves and this made the running of fieldtrips easier. Tasmania's tourism industry is endowed with a number of high-profile conference venues but holding our event in Dover was much cheaper and in many ways more suitable. CaveMania would not have been such a success without the use of Dover District High School and I would like to thank the Principal, Peter d'Plesse, for allowing us to use the school and for the generosity and support of his staff; cleaner Alanna Hudson and IT teacher Trevor Henwood. Mike Foley and Denise Young of Far South Wilderness Backpackers Inc. accommodated and fed the majority of CaveMania participants. Mick Williams ably transported most of us around the various venues. Esperance Multi-Purpose Centre lent us their data projector and screen.

CaveMania provided an ideal opportunity to showcase various Australian and Tasmanian products and services and so I



PHOTO: JOE SYDNEY

The Convenor, Stephen Bunton, welcomes His Excellency The Governor of Tasmania, William Cox, at Dover District High School.

would like to thank sincerely our sponsors for their support and generosity. In particular I mention Aardvark Adventures for the abseil of the Gordon Dam which was a highlight for many cavers, Anvers Confectionary who provided their superb truffles, Cadbury-Schweppes for the chocolate so well known to cavers, Cascade Brewery for that other essential conference ingredient: beer, Events Tasmania for financial support, The Hastings Experience for the Newdegate Cave tours, adventure cave tours and the BBQ facilities at Hastings Thermal Pool, Lark Distillery for thank yous for the presenters, Mountain Designs for prizes for the Photo Competition, Nick McKim, Greens MHA for Franklin for his donation, Qantas for discounted airfares, Snowgum for prizes for the Speleosports and stationary and Walch Optics for the prize for the Photographer of the Year.

Since moving to Tasmania in 1986, I have become very proud of my adopted home and the lifestyle I enjoy. Therefore I was very happy to show off these aspects of my life to all Australian cavers. It is no surprise that the thing I missed most, when I moved to Hobart, was the long-standing friendships I had made in Sydney. CaveMania was a great opportunity

for me to catch up with old friends and rekindle relationships. CaveMania also introduced me to many new friends and put names to the faces that I read about in Australian cave literature.

I would also like to say thanks to the many people who stepped up on the spur or the moment to help in the day to day running of the conference, the self-starters, those with initiative that see the work to be done and then pitch in to do it. Most notable in my mind are the Western Australians, Greg Thomas, Ian Colette, John Cugley and Darren Brooks for setting up and running the Speleosports and prusiking competition, Jay and Ross Anderson, particularly Ross for his IT support, Cathie Plowman and Dave Butler for the raffles (one for the victims of the tsunami disaster appeal) and numerous other odd jobs, Steve Blanden who was always there to help and in particular his assistance with the Photo Competition entries, Joe Sydney for amongst many other things, capturing most of the conference in photographs. Julia James from whom I learned so many of my organisational skills quite some time ago, was always there to offer good advice to pitch in with the less glamorous tasks like washing up, Matt Cracknell was a great go-between for CaveMania and the Hastings Experience where he works. These are just the people I noticed in a big way. No doubt I have forgotten many helpers and for that I apologise and thank you despite your having to remain anonymous. Thanks also to my darling wife, Kathy and delightful daughter, Grace who helped immensely. I was not sure what sort of Christmas holiday I could promise them but in the end they thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Likewise I was not certain what I could promise my friends the Evans family Brian, Ruth, Dane and Rhys. They trusted

me when I said it would be a good time. As is turned out, it was great and so were they!

I would like to thank those members of Southern Tasmanian Caverneers who could not be persuaded to attend the conference but were willing to run fieldtrips, most notably Ric Tunney, Janine McKinnon and Phil Rowsell. They believe that caving is to be done and not just talked about. I think that deep down we all think that and without the fieldtrips, visiting Tasmania would have been much less enjoyable for all CaveMania participants. The other Tasmanian clubs: Northern Caverneering Club, Mole Creek Caving Club and Savage River Caving Club also ran a plethora of fieldtrips which enhanced everyone's experience of The Caving State. Thanks to the enlightened members of the Tasmanian Department of Tourism, Parks, Heritage and the Arts who relaxed permit restrictions so that a few more people could enjoy Tasmania's iconic caves. Specifically thanks must go to all those cavers who helped with the cleaning of Kubla Khan and thus making the world a slightly better place. Dave Wools-Cobb is to be particularly thanked in this regard.

When I next attend an ASF conference I promise that I will attend all the sessions, listen to all the presenters, enter the photographic competition, participate in the Speleosports, attend the fieldtrips, drink less responsibly at the BBQs, relax, let what is left of my hair down and generally do all those things that I was too busy to enjoy doing at CaveMania.

I would also like to thank all the people who presented papers, posters, workshops or seminars without whom there would be almost no point in coming. Here is your published work, I hope we have done it justice.

Thank you all.

RODNEY DILLON'S WELCOME TO COUNTRY

Stephen Bunton

Over recent years the Southern Tasmanian Caverneers has worked closely and harmoniously with the Tasmanian Aboriginal community.

Much evidence of Aboriginal occupation has come to light in some very significant cave sites. Cavers and Forestry Tasmania have worked co-operatively to ensure that these places are well managed into the future.

As a sign of co-operation and respect the organisers of CaveMania felt it entirely appropriate to ask a member of the local Aboriginal community to welcome us to this place.

Rodney Dillon expressed his concerns about the treatment of Aboriginals in the past and Stephen Bunton reaffirmed the willingness of Australian cavers to work with indigenous Australians to preserve their culture.

Stephen replied that cavers were likely to be much more aware of the Aboriginal occupation of this continent than the community at large, since they are constantly reminded of the Aboriginal presence, through the physical evidence they encounter in caves.

POSTSCRIPT

Rodney Dillon was declared Aboriginal Person of the Year during NAIDOC Week 2005.



PHOTO: JODIE RUTLEDGE

Rodney Dillon during his welcome.