

Voice training?

What's this got to do with cave management?

Laryngitis
Husky voices

Guides raising their voices so as to be heard by large groups
Visitors unable to hear what the guide is saying

EXAMPLE: Chronic laryngitis leads to cave guide's resignation

A few years ago a colleague at the Mole Creek Caves in Tasmania had such severe laryngitis that she recorded her tour on tape and carried a portable cassette player through the cave playing her commentary. Not really the kind of quality visitor experience that most of us aspire to. And not a nice way for a long-serving dedicated guide to finish her career: unable to talk and giving up her job on medical advice to prevent permanent voice damage.

If you've been a cave guide, managed cave guides or taken an interest in cave tours, you have probably experienced these problems.

Guides taking tours are an integral part of cave presentation and management. But how much interest do we give to the health issues associated with continual use of the voice? How much do we consider voice quality in relation to the visitor's experience as well as the delivery of the guide's message?



TRISH DEER (concessionaire operator and guide) and IAN GADSBY (guide) from Gunns Plains Cave at the voice training workshop in Mole Creek, Tasmania, in 2005.

Is voice training an issue that cave managers should have to concern themselves with?

'A guide using their voice for work every day without being taught how to use it is like a ballet dancer going onto the stage without first warming up.'

— Alan Andrews, voice coach, Port Arthur Historic Site, Tasmania

'Words carry approximately seven per cent of the message, while the voice carries 38 per cent and physical use* 55 per cent of the message' (Drummond, 1993).

— From Talking the Talk by Lorraine Merritt, Choice Books, 2003

*Physical use here means physical presentation such as hand gestures, facial movements, eye contact and standing position.

If we rate issues such as guide health and effective message delivery to visitors as important, then we need to ensure that guides are equipped with good voice skills.

How do we do this?

There are no voice training standards included in the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF), and there are no established training programs in this area. Perhaps things are different in New Zealand but I'm still to discover what's happening in this country.

Voice work is an established and integral part of the theatre and performing world where practises such as voice warm ups, relaxation, posture, breathing exercises and facial exercises are as much a part of performing as learning a script and being on stage.



Voice training for Tasmanian cave guides

The Environmental Tourism Program has funded a voice training program for cave guides. This consists of two six-hour sessions at both Hastings Caves and Mole Creek Caves. Guides from Gunns Plains Cave have been included in the program.

The training sessions have included:

- Relaxation skills
- Neck stretches
- Humming to warm up the larynx prior to talking to groups
- Sound exercises
- Playing with words
- Adding colour with words
- Adding colour to words
- Pausing
- Tones
- Applying intentions to speech

All the guides attending reported that the first session was fun and that they were keen to attend the second session. The second session is to be held approximately eight weeks after the first, so guides can practise and play with what they were taught at the first session.

Who organised and delivered the training

The trainer is MICHAEL EDGAR from the School of Visual and Performing Art at the University of Tasmania, who has wide experience in the theatre industry.

CATHIE PLOWMAN from the Parks and Wildlife Service, Tasmania, made a successful application for money to fund the voice training program and is coordinating the program.

EXAMPLE: Port Arthur Historic Site

As part of the guide training program, Port Arthur Historic Site has recently employed a professional voice and drama coach. Weekly workshops are available to all guides and one-on-one sessions are available. All new guides are required to attend these sessions as part of their work and there are currently eight guides doing regular voice work with the coach. Existing guides have the choice to attend these sessions, with some doing so and others declining.

Voice coach ALAN ANDREWS says 'It's like taking your voice to the gym.'

One aspect of voice work that he coaches guides with is breathing. Alan says 'that without good breath control, guides will restrict themselves to sentences that are always the same length. This makes for a monotonous presentation. With breath work, variety can be added to both voice tone and sentence length.'

Finding a lower register is another area Alan assists guides with. Have you sometimes heard the high pitch of a guide's voice making loud sounds in a cave and the visitors not being able to understand what's being said? Working to lower the register of the voice can assist here.

Conclusion

Voice skills are essential for both voice health and good presentations in cave guiding.

This poster is not conclusive and has been prepared midway through the current program with Tasmanian cave guides. We hope this program will be a pilot for ongoing work in this area.

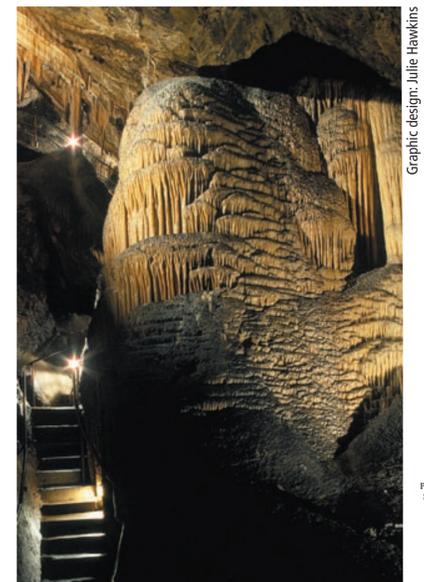
CATHIE PLOWMAN and ALAN ANDREWS are both keen to develop a voice training program that can be delivered as part of guide training packages through the Technical and Further Education system.

This **skill development program** has been funded by the Environmental Tourism Program with the assistance of the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training and the Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training, Department of Education.

Resources

Talking the Talk: Communicate with Persuasion, Panache and Passion, Lorraine Merritt, Choice Books, 2003

Voice Care for Teachers, training video by Alison Russell, Jenni Oates and Cecilia Pemberton, CDV, 2001



Graphic design: Julie Hawkins