

# DEBATES

*Many of the electronic debates that clog up internet sites were once conducted exclusively through the medium of ASF and club newsletters. A pity in a way as only a minority of members are likely to read or engage in such discussions. Some debates were drawn out and some recur in cycles. As usual, some produced much heat and little light and it is a mark of ASF's success that occasional healthy introspection is encouraged, while lasting acrimony has been almost non-existent. In recent years the most fiery were in response to external imposts such as the Great Insurance Crisis, caver accreditation, Leadership Standards and most recently, Risk Management. The advent of electronic communication has strengthened ASF by facilitating swifter and more frequent two-way communication with member clubs, and acrimonious debate is now rare in annual Council Meetings.*

*A small sample is followed by a list of others that will no doubt jog memories.*

## 1. The early days - what are we here for?

### OPENING ADDRESS - 3rd. Biennial Conference of ASF

Mgr Favier

ASF Newsletter 9 (1961)

(This address was given at Canberra on Dec.29th. 1960 by Mgr Favier. Some sections of the address have had to be omitted.)

I have been genuinely honoured by the request of your Canberra Convenor, Dave Purchase to officially open the third Biennial Conference of the ASF, and the first gathering of the Federal body in the ACT.

I congratulate you upon your initiative (1) in establishing the Federation and (2) in holding these Conferences in the face of a good deal of pessimistic apathy or even opposition from those yet to be converted to the benefits of federalism. The Federation and the Conventions both derive from the quality and quantity of the membership of constituent bodies, and their continued success will be based on the spirit of true comradeship and joint enterprise which prevails amongst most cavers.

Though Speleology is an 'ology' and is sometimes defined as the scientific study of caves., I venture to say that Speleology – for the average speleo – cannot be called a Science. It certainly does extend the frontiers of knowledge, it touches on many branches of science, and some few speleos are in the game for scientific reasons, but the majority take to it mainly because it is an adventure, because it is their sport. their recreation, their hobby. Therefore. let us not get too pompous or pontifical about it – let us have Conventions and papers, but let us not expect that all our Bods are going to turn into Boffins. Certainly, too, Speleology though not a Religion can lead a thinking person to Religion by the speleo's reverence for these beautiful and unusual works of God's Creation so unexpected within the very bowels of the earth – the shawls, the stalactites, the helictites, the massive and microscopic beauty of limestone caves, formed over geological aeons in the evolutionary cycle, by the operation and interaction of the Creator's laws of nature.

Therefore since – as I claim – caving is neither a Religion nor a Science, but rather a sport, let us beware of exaggerated claims for caving – claims that cannot be substantiated.

Certainly caving is not an appealing Sport to the vast multitude of men. To them there seem to be many more appealing ways of spending their leisure than in caving. To them it would seem much more sensible and pleasant to feel the gentle glow of King Sol on your back in the brilliant sunshine at Bondi than to feel in the pitch darkness the bite on your back of the stalactites as you wriggle – or shall we say reptate – through a squeeze, wondering as you get more and more stuck whether you'll lose only your ears or also your head if you're pulled out backwards; or whether, if you go forward into the unknown the foul air that's making your head boom is going to give you the K.O. before the sweat around your eyes blinds you or the water rising around your mouth drowns you. If you are a confirmed speleo, it's into all this that you'll go. not in present enjoyment; *that* will come in retrospect.

And so what is the honest answer to the question? Why do you do all this? The simplest and most honest is – “Because we like it.” Few sports offer their devotees a wider range of disagreeable moments than does caving. Certainly, there is the aesthetic value of the views in the new cave, but there is also the very definite ascetic value of the descent, involving as it does risk, uncertainty, sacrifice, discomfort, hard rations, and dogged perseverance.

However, we speleos feel that to clamber for a day or so over virgin subterranean gullies, and down their waterfalls, to dive through syphons or to traverse chasms is an addition to our personality and an exercise of individuality – a personal achievement which involves preferring the happiness of effort to the pleasure of remaining comfortably in the rut.

Again, attend to science if that be your bent, collect your specimens, classify your rock formations, plan your trips, study your maps, announce your route, follow the safety code but go also and always to enjoy yourself. Go like a child into a region of wonderful things. Be attuned to the harmonies of Creation. Then will your precious sense of wonder never be blunted – then will you hear the music of the depths, and the thrilling voice of new and lonely places.

## THE ROLE OF A.S.F.

Elery Hamilton-Smith

ASF Newsletter 22 (1963)

The Federation has acted to disseminate information among societies, to foster joint efforts and regular contact between them, to set standards in such aspects as ethics and conservation, to act as a liaison body with international contacts, and to develop a library.

As was only to be expected, many problems were encountered, and some friction existed between societies. However in overcoming these, steady progress has been made and the Federation grows stronger year by year.

Certain principles of Federation policy which have clearly emerged from debate in recent years are worth highlighting as these are often re-opened in later discussion by societies not aware of earlier decisions. The first is that the Federation can only be a co-ordinating body – it cannot and should not control its member societies; the second is that the keeping of trip reports and maps is a society responsibility, not the Federation's; and third, business should not be discussed at a meeting unless due notice has been given.

This latter point is one of considerable importance. Many of the disagreements in recent years have resulted from the introduction of new business during the meeting. It would appear -wise that a bylaw might be enacted prohibiting a meeting from dealing with any such business. Another suggestion which has been made is that greater progress might be achieved if meetings were to concentrate on points of common agreement rather than upon those Matters to which considerable opposition was raised. This might ultimately be embodied in a constitutional clause which demanded more than a simple majority to pass any motion. At this stage it is desired only to raise the issue for discussion and to highlight the need for unity and harmony if we are to achieve an effective national body.

### The Executive of ASF

A frequent point of difficulty has been the appointment of the executive. Many enthusiastic individuals have undertaken the task of an office on the executive and then, often through circumstances beyond their control, have been unable to carry out their responsibilities. However it is pleasing to see that in each year a higher proportion of our executive have carried out their task conscientiously. Perhaps those offering in earlier years did not realise until in office, the formidable load of work they were undertaking.

Some thought also needs be given to the very careful selection of executive members both able and willing to carry out the work of their office. It is also desirable that provision be made for an element of continuity in the executive so that the experience and contacts gained are kept within our organization – yet this must be balanced by continual introduction of new personnel. The Secretary has further comments on this subject - see page 8.

### The Future of ASF

We have made considerable progress, but we need further planning, stronger administrative machinery, greater unity between all and a better level of decision-making on the part of annual meetings. This means each society thinking about Federation more seriously, each appointing the best possible delegate to the Committee and supporting the Committee in the decisions which they make.

## 2. Whose caves are they anyway?

*In various guises this is a recurrent argument. Traditional custodianship of caves has not been addressed, although at the 23<sup>rd</sup> ASF Conference at Bathurst in 2001 and a later meeting of the NSW Speleological Council an Aboriginal guest speaker enlightened the audience with his people's perspective on caves. Unfortunately this was not published.*

## WHAT IS A CAVE LIKE KUBLA KHAN FOR?

Roy Skinner

ASF Newsletter 67 (1975)

The recent film making effort in Kubla Khan Cave at Mole Creek by a party from the Mainland has evoked some critical comment from persons concerned about resultant damage caused in the process. It has also been stated that publicity surrounding the venture will more than compensate for the damage. A further point has been made that it is hoped the film will justify the use of the top entrance. Inherent in all these comments is a common concern for the cave's protection. Let us then try to determine by whom and for whom the cave should be protected.

First of all, the filming did take place and nobody legally could have prevented it. Some apprehension was expressed beforehand that some damage was bound to occur and this apparently was shown to be an accurate prophecy. The publicity was intended, by those who initiated it, to draw greater attention to an awareness of the cave's visual attractiveness. I think it would be correct to assume that this was the principal motivation for the decision to make a film there in the first place – with the challenge to the skill of the speleocinematographers as an added incentive. As for the quality of the film justifying the damage, according to reports filtering through, I think we can forget about this. It is unlikely to be acclaimed with any great enthusiasm as a milestone in the evolution of the cinematographic art, albeit my personal good wishes of success for the perpetrators.

So, a film was made, some damage occurred, considerable publicity accrued and the film can at best be expected to be moderately successful. Was the damage justified?

Kubla Khan is known - by everybody who knows anything – as Australia's most beautiful cave. As such, it is agreed that it must be preserved in its natural state as far as is humanly possible. Does this mean that it must be preserved by cavers for cavers for ever? I don't think so! The recent publicity has probably had its desired effect. Many more non-cavers will be intrigued by the glowing descriptions of the cave's features and would like to see them but lacking the caver's ability and inclination, they may not do so until access and means of progression are made much easier.

Obviously, the ultimate means of protection in perpetuity is to impose a total ban on entry.

Any alternative must involve compromise. Compromise can mean a form of restricted entry but this involves problems of selectivity and is no guarantee against un-authorised entry or errors in selection, both conducive to occurrence of further damage. Even if these things did not happen, the means of progression through the cave must bring about fairly severe deterioration.

Another alternative is to completely or partially disallow entry for an unspecified interim period, terminating at a point in time usually defined vaguely as "when the demand warrants and funds are available to develop the cave for the general public". I maintain that the point in time is now! The demand for recreational facilities for the general public is great enough at the present time to justify initial planning for the very best methods of exhibiting our superior caves, ensuring that past mistakes are not repeated and drawing upon the sum total of accumulated knowledge and experience to reserve, present and interpret the natural features to the best of our ability.

To identify with this objective, means that cavers can play a more positive role in forward planning and cave conservation and also in the achievement of a worthwhile goal to which their past efforts have greatly contributed. I know that many cavers are contemptuous of, and are reluctant to, identify with "tourist caves", but don't forget that you have all been, or will be, a tourist in some form or another at some stage of your life. However, the day will come when you inevitably must hang up your trog suit and bash hat for good!

(Reprinted with kind permission of Roy Skinner, from an article appearing in the May 1975 issue of "Speleo Spiel", No. 101, Page 4.)

## CONSERVATION – ANOTHER ANGLE

Al Watt

ASF Newsletter 53 (1971)

I am beginning to think of myself as something of a hypocrite as a caver. Whenever a conservation case comes up for caves, the hue and cry goes up that these caves should be preserved for the public and their recreation. However it seems that caving clubs themselves are becoming more orientated in the other direction and are fast setting themselves up as 'controllers' of areas with gates on caves, and access agreements. In fact I read in one club magazine that it was policy to discourage anyone other than members of recognised caving groups from entering caves. If this were Australia-wide policy, we would be likely to go down under the mining companies' claims that they were of more benefit to the community at large than caves available to the privileged few in the caving cliques.

(reprinted from Nargun 3 (11): p. 1)

## NOT THOSE DAMN SCOUTS AGAIN!

Bob Kershaw

Australian Caver 107 (1985)

On the weekend of February 9-10th we were caving at Wyambonia and found that many beautiful speleotherms were broken!

When we exited the cave, we found a pile of remnant decorations near the entrance to the cave.

From the group was heard

"Those damn scouts again!" Unanimous agreement!!! How many times have you heard that expression whilst you have been caving?

There are other groups that go caving you know!! – like bushwalking clubs, S.E.S. groups, C.E.B.B.'s and groups of friends.

Have your speleo society ask this question to themselves at their next meeting. “What have we done to improve the image of speleology and the knowledge of caving for the other caving groups mentioned above that exist in our area?”

The Illawarra Speleo Society improved that image twice last year. Firstly, we held a weekend at Bungonia for members of the general public which was organised by Dep’t of Leisure, Sport and Tourism. This proved to be a very successful weekend. Secondly, the South Coast Area of the Scout Association asked us to organise and run a Training program for its Venturer leaders (Adults in charge of males and females between the ages of 15 to 10) interested in caving activities. With enthusiastic leaders we held 3 training weekends at Bungonia spread over a period of 6 months. Going through the theory, practical and examination sessions, these leaders, with various degrees of experience, gained a wealth of caving knowledge. Members of ISS also learnt a great deal from training others interested in caving. The point of this brief article is threefold: –

- 1). What has your speleo society done in its region to improve the image of Speleology?
- 2). Don’t knock “them” because we as a Federation (Australia’s foremost caving authority) are just as much to blame as we haven’t bothered to educate “the masses” in the past;
- 3). Try contacting “caving groups” in your area, who might only go caving 2-3 times a year and offer them your assistance.

## CAVE RIGHTS FOR TROGLOBITES

Norm Poulter

Australian Caver 128 (1991)

### Abstract

Prior to, and during, our Bicentennial year it became increasingly popular, even trendy, for the media, politicians and individuals, to recount the continuing struggles of the Australian Aborigine – the original owners of Australia for land rights. Now, a couple of years after that monumental non-event, it is becoming fashionable to talk land rights again. This time, amongst others, there are those who are calling for land rights for Koalas!

Even though membership of speleological societies has declined in recent years, the pressure on caves and their faunal inhabitants has increased to the point where, in some caves, there is urgent need to raise more than a word or two about land – or more precisely – cave rights for troglobites. the original ‘owners’ of caves.

Have we mere terrestrials, who are infrequent cave visitors but who often perceive ourselves as the best or logical custodians of caves and all they contain, lost sight of the fact (either through arrogance or ignorance) that troglobites and their troglophile cousins have rights too?

Through eons of time people have entered caves for a variety of reasons ranging from habitation, art, religious rites, curiosity, impulse, recreation, mining, study or vandalistic intent. All these activities can and do have a detrimental effect on a cave and its environment or fauna, either through ignorance or sometimes callous indifference.

In recent times some people – especially cavers – have become aware of the physical damage that can and does happen to caves and have moved to protect them, often citing fauna or habitat protection to add plausibility to their argument.

All too often we talk about caves as if they are ‘ours’ and that we can do just about anything we like in them.

We lock them up to keep everyone but ourselves out.

We talk about being the custodians of caves for future generations to enjoy.

Future generations of ‘us’ – but cave fauna? I think not.

However, talk about preventing or restricting some or all of ‘us’ from going somewhere in a cave, or perhaps a whole cave, and all hell breaks loose. “You can’t prevent us from going caving – we’re cavers! We have a ‘right’ to go caving!” Do we?

We try to regulate our activities in certain areas and sections of caves. We certainly try to regulate the activities of others in caves, but do we really regulate ourselves very well in relation to a particular cave and fauna it may contain? Do we really care?

How many amongst the general cave and cave diving community have taken the time to question the immediate and cumulative effects of their activities on a cave’s fauna or food supply? How many have given more than a passing thought to bat guano, so often contemptuously trodden underfoot in the haste to explore a cave’s confines, excrement that may provide sustenance to a multitude of cave fauna, especially when so few cavers take the time and effort to look for such creatures, much less understand their life cycle or needs.

Indeed, who would have thought that even degraded bat guano serves as a food source for cave fauna, as has been found recently in some caves of the Nullarbor Plain, and no doubt elsewhere. Have cavers, where there is no option but to proceed through guano, established a single file trail, even to the extent of walking in others’ footsteps?

The point to be emphasized is that even the simple activity of tramping indiscriminately through vulnerable habitats like guano, litter and soil/mud deposits degrades them by breaking down their open structure to form hard compact substrates in which nothing can live. Hence the need for creation of trails which cause minimal disturbance within the cave.

A somewhat different but graphic example of the effects of indiscriminate tramping is to be seen in Roaches Rest Cave, a cave few cavers put much value upon. It once harboured a large community of troglobites (including cockroaches and spiders) which died out, probably with the close of a past moister climatic regime. The evidence for this lay in the accumulation of preserved troglobite carcasses that once littered the cave floor and formed a quite unique historical record of a community now extinct. A couple of decades of visitation and trampling has turned the cave floor into a dust bowl lacking any evidence of the former inhabitants (Gray, pers. comm). Part of the reason for this sort of destructive happening is that invertebrates are relatively invisible – better awareness becomes very important here.

Equally important, any other source of organic material in a cave should be left undisturbed. Such materials form vital energy ‘hot spots’ on which the cave biota depends. Even plant root systems whether alive or decaying and so often found in caves provide food and shelter for cave fauna.

Casual perusal of literature reveals that there is a higher percentage of recreational rather than ‘scientific’ caving (SRG is no exception). However, recreational caving is not being criticized as such by this paper. What is being criticized is the indifference towards caves and of the need to take special care of these subterranean environments.

A case in point is the area known as the Dome in Mullaullang Cave, Nullarbor Plain. It has become the ‘macho rite’ amongst visitors (ASF members or not), to ‘do the Dome’ (complete the arduous 10km return trip in a day). Indeed, many seem to go the Mullaullang Cave for no other purpose than to prove that they can ‘do’ the Dome. As Ken Boland of the Victorian Speleological Association so aptly puts it, they came under the influence of the ‘Dome Syndrome’. At the moment little has been done to cure people of this detrimental condition. It is now thought that the Dome’s fauna, *Tartarus mullaullangensis* (spider) and *Trogloblattella nullarborensis* (cockroach), are either extinct or have suffered a massive population decline due to habitat disturbance as a result of this increased human activity. A high price to pay just to satisfy people’s egos. Thirty years ago the Nullarbor Plain was a very remote area and may have been visited by speleologists only once or twice a year. Such trips often took months to prepare. Today numerous expeditions to the Nullarbor are staged each year often with repeated intense activity at certain caves – in keeping with popular practice to areas closer to home. When, at the suggestion of Dr Mike Grey of the Australian Museum, SRG proposed a 10 year ban on entry to the Dome in an effort to allow any remnant population to re-establish itself, the howls of ‘What about us’ were very loud indeed.

Between 1982 and 1987 the troglobitic species of Nurina Cave had been lifted from one to seven making it one of the most important biospeleological caves on the Nullarbor Plain. It also has one of the region’s highest visitation rates due to its proximity to human habitation and ease of access. Shortly after the discovery of aquatic amphipods in the cave (a Nullarbor first) and news had disseminated around the caving fraternity, a member of one caving party went to the cave with the express purpose of ‘Photographing the amphipods’ (information extracted from visitors book September 1985). This sort of activity should be discouraged due to the risk of habitat disturbance and possible death of the subject/s. An alternative would be availability of studio photographs of (scientifically) collected specimens.

It is important to ensure that an example of our unique Nullarbor cave ecosystems survives as intact as possible. Nurina Cave provides an excellent opportunity for this. It contains a uniquely rich and representative sample of the ‘typical’ Nullarbor troglobitic fauna and should be a prime candidate for special conservation status and restricted entry.

As a more immediate measure, it has become a practise for societies and individual members of societies to keep some cave locations or sections of caves ‘secret’ from the general caving community (and their own members) in an effort to protect the contents. SRG has joined this trend somewhat in relation to Nurina Cave except that we are letting people know about it and why. While recommending to the possible future cave manager, Dep’t of Conservation and Land Management (CALM), that the cave be gated, SRG is restricting access to the map that shows the location of the Fauna Chamber and Arachnid Alley to scientific perusal only and asks readers to respect this action. The Fauna Chamber and Arachnid Alley are not conducive to exploration caving, aesthetic photography or even the ASF recommended minimum sized party due to the arduous nature of the passage ways and the diverse troglobitic fauna that resides there. A sign (see figure) has been placed at the entrance to these passages asking accidental discoverers of the extensions to respect the rights of the fauna beyond and not to proceed further. The sign also mentions that the spiders’ webs that would be encountered are virtually invisible to direct lighting. The webs quite often occupy several cubic metres and can be destroyed before a person realizes one is there or by small air currents generated by nearby body movement.

## Conclusion

We are cavers and no doubt wish to continue enjoying being underground for whatever reason. Due to the increasing pressures of population we find ourselves competing with other interest groups for a scarce non-renewable resource. Quite often we have to negotiate with land managers, be they government, semi-government or private owners, in order to gain access to caves and adhere to ever restricting rules and regulation. Gone are the days of frontiersville - well almost.

People join a caving club for a variety of reasons in addition to achieving a common goal which is access to caves. The duty of the more experienced members of these clubs is to train the less experienced members how to enter and traverse the confines of any given cave without injury to themselves, their companions or the cave. Perhaps it is time that all club members were made aware that apart from being trained not to injure the cave, they should be trained to take greater care not to injure the cave’s natural inhabitants.

The NSS once adopted a quote reading in part “leave nothing but footprints”. That could leave a trail of death and destruction depending on where the foot was placed. It is understood that this quote has now been changed to “leave nothing but memories” Does that mean Americans ‘float’ through caves?

The ASF carries a message on its letter head saying that “What we have now is all there ever will be”. The present author is suggesting that “What we have now is less than we had yesterday” would be a more appropriate remark and one that all cavers should bear in mind on entering a cave.

Wherever there is a food source in a cave - it is possible there is also a faunal ecosystem. In times past we have argued the right of a cave to exist. It is about time we acknowledged that the fauna within a cave (no matter how much fear or contempt we may harbour for that fauna), also has a right to exist - and that existence must be protected and respected.

(The assistance of Dr Brenton Knott, Dept of Zoology, University of Western Australia and Dr Mike Gray, Australian Museum in the preparation of this paper is gratefully acknowledged)

HI

YOU HAVE ENTERED THE AREA KNOWN AS THE "CALCITE CRAWL AND ARE ASKED NOT TO PROCEED ANY FURTHER.

A RICH AND DIVERSE TROGLOBITIC FAUNA COLONY EXISTS NEARBY AND YOUR PRESENCE CAN EASILY DISTURB OR DESTROY THEM OR THEIR HABITAT.

THE FOOD BASE IS THE DEGRADED BAT GUANO FOUND ON THE FLOOR AND SHOULD NOT BE TRODDEN ON UN-NECESSARILY.

VERY RARE AND DELICATE SPIDERS OCCUR. THEY AND THEIR WEBS ARE INVISIBLE TO DIRECT LIGHTING.

THE PASSAGE BEYOND THIS POINT BECOMES QUITE NARROW AND DOES NOT OPEN OUT TO ANYTHING THAT MAY BE PLEASING PHOTOGRAPHICALLY.

IF YOU WANT FURTHER INFORMATION REGARDING THE FAUNA OF THIS CAVE INCLUDING COPIES OF SCIENTIFIC PHOTOGRAPHS YOU ARE URGED TO CONTACT:

DR. MIKE GRAY  
AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM  
COLLEGE ST. SYDNEY 2000  
(02)3398111

OR

NORMAN POULTER  
SRGWA  
P.O. BOX 120 NEDLANDS 6009  
(09)2762495

PLEASE DO NOT PROCEED BEYOND THIS POINT

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN CAVING CONTACT:

THE SECRETARY  
AUSTRALIAN SPELEOLOGICAL FEDERATION  
P.O. BOX 388 BROADWAY 2007

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SPELEOLOGICAL  
GROUP.  
P.O. BOX 67 NEDLANDS 6009  
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SPELEOLOGICAL RESEARCH GROUP WESTERN  
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P.O. BOX 120 NEDLANDS 6009  
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WITCHCLFFE AREA SPELEOLOGICAL SUB-GROUP  
(097)555324

## THE MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE

Ernst Holland

Australian Caver 131 (1991)

### Introduction

The intention of a manager is to control. Because managers of cave areas often felt that they had no control over those persons who entered the caves without paying or being employed by the management authority, it compromised this objective of control.

It could be argued that the first 'cavers' were the managers such as Moon of Buchan, Wilson of Jenolan. People such as Etheridge and Trickett could possibly come under either category i.e. managers and cavers. Today we see cavers who become managers and it has been interesting to note the change of perspective from these persons.

Historically it has been recognised that human entry to caves creates impacts. Jeremiah Wilson's referral to the use of fences and burning of Magnesium ribbon verifies this. Today it is recognised that everyone has impacts on caves, but because it is for the so called 'right' reasons (economic, safety, etc.), it is acceptable to some authorities, whereas to impact on a cave for fun is not seen as acceptable to those same authorities. However, it is seen by some cavers as being acceptable if it is to further their interests.

What managers were trying to protect were those features (basically the formations) that were seen to enhance the visitor experience from a tourism and education perspective (the visual experience). The caver wanted to experience the thrill of exploration (finding new caves), recreation (to enjoy themselves), and to gain scientific knowledge (even though this was seen as an excuse by many managers).

### Sport versus Science

In British caving, conservation and access have involved the 'science-sport' conflict since Baker and Balch parted company earlier this century. Baker confessed that his priority was sport, and science the pretext. When the cause of science failed to get him access to Swildon's Hole he resorted, as he put it, to 'cave-burglary', and justified his act of piracy on the grounds of 'sportsmanship'.

There is no more mention of Balch for the comparison to be made; he apparently maintained the ethic of science over sport. But even the genuine caver was very rarely successful in conveying that message because their knowledge was not shared and often resulted in repetition of the same work or projects: how many times is that cave going to be mapped? This resulted in the inability to recognise the overall contribution that each party was trying to achieve.

### Managers and Cavers

Over the years there have been conflicts between managers and cavers as to who creates the major impacts. The fences that are put in a cave by managers to protect the features are thought of by the cavers as having an impact. The helmets worn by cavers were viewed by the managers as a threat to the features of the caves. This was seen at Hollow Hill, New Zealand during a management conference.

Managers are there to manage the caves (their ability to do so is a separate question). As such, unrestricted access was seen by the manager as an unacceptable, unknown quantity and had to be avoided at any cost. Also, managers felt that the resource and their credibility was threatened by the activities and attitude of cavers who would often question their right to manage.

In reaction to this, cave entry by permit was introduced as a means of control. However this ended up in the hands of administrators (head office) who had never been in caves, thought impact was something to do with teeth, and were just doing a job anyway. This compromised the local managers control and was seen as giving the caver a free go. This was especially obvious when the club newsletter would arrive and the report relating to a particular visit had no relationship to the permitted reason for the trip.

Many persons often try caving for the experience, then lose interest, get a fright, or take on other commitments. This results in a lot of short term cavers, only seen once by managers. For this reason some cavers were seen simply as non paying tourists.

A manager's view of cavers can often be influenced by: his or her background, specific management objectives, changing requirements beyond the control of the manager, and their own experiences.

This has resulted in the introduction of adventure tours with impacts that have become acceptable and with no limits being set. By the same token, cavers frequently see themselves as having no impact, or claim: 'it was the other group that did it'. What defines an illegal caver when the regulations for an area, which are the manager's responsibility to enforce, state that an illegal caver is any person that enters a cave unaccompanied by a guide? Is familiarisation a guided tour?

The manager sees cavers emerging with mud all over their clothes as objectionable and not proper amongst the well dressed visitors. The visitors see it from the spectator's point of view and a sense of adventure. The real impact: what was done to the caves or how that mud was transported, is often overlooked.

Through the permit system cavers were directed to those areas that did not contain an abundance of formations or were seen as unimportant. This often resulted in the cavers taking a lot less care, because these caves were then regarded by them as being of no consequence.

Managers did not like the cavers forming, by use, an obvious pathway to a cave entrance because it showed other cavers where a cave was situated. The real problem is erosion, but the caver solves the problem by using the management concept of gating, which in itself attracts by the suggestion that a gate is guarding something important. The caver-explorer wishes to know where the water ends up, and so adds a chemical substance to assist. The manager is worried about the water's appearance being unnatural. What do the aquatic fauna think of it?

The caver-scientist removes bones for further study and the manager bemoans the fact that they can not now be put on public display as an added attraction. The scientist in the future wonders what the big hole is for?

The cave with the biggest shawl is developed for commercial gain by the management authority. The deepest cave is rigged for the ego of the caver. Development may be seen as long-term and rigging as short-term, but the rigging can be more frequent and consequently have the greater impact.

Pathways are developed through show caves to keep visitors to a defined area. Pathways develop in non-show caves because it is the easiest position in the cave to walk along. The pathway in the show cave is so aligned that the user will not fall and break a leg or formation. The accidentally formed pathway has no such considerations: you see the muddy hand marks on walls that have been used for support.

Call them tunnels and they are for the convenience of the visitor and unnatural. When they are digs, it is so you can find new caves. Management authorities have frequently created artificial water levels to assist their operation of show caves, while cavers attempt to lower water tables to further exploration.

#### Minimising Impacts

Many conferences, seminars, etc. have caused an awareness of impacts and so managers are now looking for guidelines and tools to control and minimise those impacts. The failure to recognise who is the cause of some impacts creates some resistance to the implementation of such guidelines and tools. But there have been many positive moves, with the managers recognising what cavers are about, and the assistance by cavers in various projects has been very welcome.

Finally, mention must be made of the tiny minority who will prove to be the salt of the earth in caving. The only people of this century's cavers who will not be hated and condemned, but revered by future generations will be those few, the Show Cave owners. Caves are continuously being eroded away by cavers, albeit usually unintentionally; floors are damaged and formations smashed. It is only with the protection of a Show Cave and the element of access control that goes with it, that some of our caves are likely to be conserved for future generations. Thus, those who will achieve ultimate fame will be the Show Cave owners and/or operators.

### 3. Is there really a “NSW problem”?

#### COMMITTEE MEETING – REFLECTIONS

E. Hamilton-Smith

ASF Newsletter 80 (1978)

The so-called “NSW problem” of the Federation made another of its frequent appearances. A membership application was rejected, partly because the real issues were lost in vociferous debate about proliferation of societies in NSW, and a less vociferous (but nevertheless strong) underlying concern by delegates from other states about the increasing voting strength of NSW societies.

I want to argue that the increasing number of NSW societies and the voting structure of the Federation are NOT the real issues. This is just a symptom of a much more important problem – namely that the number of cavers is growing rapidly but the number of caves is not. The Federation urgently needs to focus upon the real problem. Not only does the present situation in NSW have nation-wide implications, but it is a situation which is likely to develop in due course in most other parts of the country.

#### NSW – a non-coping strategy

Although the current NSW situation is not my major focus, it is important to examine what is happening in that state, and see what we can learn from it. I would go so far to say that Australian speleology has adopted strategies which are exacerbating the situation rather than solving it. This is not just because of NSW cavers, although they must accept a great deal of responsibility, but the failure of others to fully understand the problem is an Australia-wide responsibility.

NSW is the state which has experienced the most rapid increase in demand for outdoor recreation in general and speleology in particular. It has a relatively limited supply of caves, and restricted access to these. The result is that cavers are behaving like 27 monkeys in one cage with only 9 bananas between them – so caving in NSW is fragmented and lacks any sense of unity or direction.

A multitude of organized groups have developed, and probably less than half of these are involved in the Federation. Communication between groups ranges from reasonable to zero; attitudes and relationships are characterized by uncertainty, suspicion, distrust, parochialism. or even downright jealousy and hostility.

Naturally, I am aware of the efforts being made by the NSW Speleological Council. However, I am equally aware that various delegates to the Council tell me what stupid bastards some other delegates are and that many cavers have never even heard of the Council.

Rational access policies are generally lacking, and although it is easy to criticise the various land management agencies, we must accept a share of the blame. The views put forward to these agencies by speleologists have generally been diverse, often contradictory, and usually both poorly developed and poorly enunciated.

#### Towards better strategies

If we are to help solve the problems in NSW and to reduce their future impact in other states, then we need to look very seriously at the way in which the total Federation tackles things. Here are some suggestions:



1. We must stop seeing the NSW situation as being separate from the rest of Australia, and accept much greater responsibility for trying to find a solution.
2. We must stop being exclusivist about membership and aim at involving every genuine and reasonably responsible group of cavers as fully as possible.
3. We must aim towards achieving organizational arrangements which will absorb the growing number of organized groups, will foster communication and co-operation between them, and will minimise the vote-counting power games which distract us from real problem-solving.
4. From this, we must develop sufficient unity and sense of direction to enable the formulation of a clear and strong policy base.
5. This in turn, must lead to not only better caving practice, but to better negotiating capacity in our relationships with land management authorities.

I fully appreciate that all this will not be easy, nor will it necessarily please everyone - but a little thought about the alternative should convince most people that it would be worth trying.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

ASF Newsletter 81 (1978)

Mr. L. Moody,  
ASF Newsletter Editor,

Dear Laurie,

For some time now I have pondered over where to publish an article, at club, ASF or WACCON even, calling for a change of attitude by ASF members, in response to a changing speleological scene. The comments made by Elery Hamilton-Smith in Committee Meeting Reflections have caused me to publicise my points briefly below.

It seems everyone is aware of the "NSW problem" except people in NSW. This paranoia seems to be the product of the imaginations of people outside NSW. Elery has probably been able to perceive this by virtue of the fact he is not from NSW either. If a NSW problem does exist in the minds of others then NSW can hardly be held most part responsible as he would suggest. My belief is that the NSW delegates who are the more senior members of the caving fraternity and not as active in caving as many others, do however, represent more mature views and more unified views on Australian Speleology. I guarantee they consider the interests of Australia more important than inter-society squabbles within their state. It is a pity other states don't consider Australia more important than their state, an attitude the afore-mentioned paranoia is symptomatic of.

I would like to agree with Elery in saying that "the increasing number of NSW societies and the voting structure of the Federation are NOT the real issues"\* but I challenge his perception of what the problems are. It may be true in other states that there are too many cavers and too few caves and I admire the conservationist motive which underlies such a statement but in NSW this is not really the case (yet).

If the number of cavers in NSW is increasing then it is not through the expansion of ASF societies but through the expansion of non-affiliated activity and youth groups or the proliferation of new clubs, some wishing to join the federation. I believe it would be better to allow such new groups to join.

I can understand how the increase in the number of NSW societies could upset cavers from other states especially those like Victoria with a well-oiled unifying machinery which (unfortunately) only yields them 1 vote. I am not implying the Victorians are whingeing in fact I compliment them on their organisation and ability to overcome what I see as a problem NSW societies can't overcome!

If there is a NSW problem it is this:

There is absolutely no reason why any young, active, aspiring caver would want to join an ASF society despite the obvious benefits we can see for him. He would rather cave with friends, learn from his own experience and not commit himself totally to long, tedious scientific studies of caves when a large part of his interest is solely derived from uninhibited enjoyment of the cave environment and its surrounding bushland. It takes any fresher too long to break into a caving club and requires too much effort to become included in cliques arising from experiences he has not shared. It is not worth the bother and this energy threshold is our fault and thus we should not condemn any new group of cavers for wanting to do their own thing.

The fact that the number of societies is increasing is due also to the fact that older societies don't fade away. They retain several more senior members who often accentuate these cliques. The clubs experiencing less of this problem are the Uni. clubs who regularly experience almost complete membership turnover due mostly to the fact that their recruitment is assured. This is not to say such clubs don't have to work on recruiting, it is just that other clubs, like my own, have to work quite hard utilizing all possible channels. Such channels as the phone book, radio and shop bill-boards should be used to the fullest to encourage younger cavers to join our society rather than start their own for the obvious benefits to all concerned and especially for the good of the caves.

I congratulate Elery on his constructive suggestions towards overcoming the problems which face all ASF societies as a whole. Although he expected criticism I hope he sees me as not too displeased with his article.

Yours faithfully,

Stephen Bunton,

#### **4. A short list of other long debates**

Where is ASF going? Issue numbers 120, 139 among others

Should endangered caves be named after politicians who have the power to save them?

How secretive should we be? Should cave locations and details be publicised or should we restrict information? How can we press the case for conservation of caves if the public cannot see them?

Cave Rescue – should there be a separate organisation or should everyone be a rescuer 97, 98

Should ASF benefit financially when its members use its resources in paid consultant work – 118

Is blasting and digging in caves justifiable? 117, 118, 123, 130

Is cave classification a useful management tool? - 130

Exclusive or inclusive? – should we embrace all who are interested in caves, or should we affect elitism? 107, 109

Why should we have to have insurance? - this debate was conducted mostly “behind the scenes” but emerged in e.g. 157 during the Great Insurance Crisis

What is a Code of Ethics for? 131, 132, 133, 147

Is bolting justified? 144, 145

The Great Accreditation Debate – 132, 136, 139, 141 among others