

Foreword

Fifty years ago this month speleologists from all over Australia travelled to Adelaide to meet like-minded friends, begin the modern era of exploration and study of the Nullarbor caves and karst and establish a precedent for many later expeditions, have a great time, and establish the Australian Speleological Federation.

In 2003 the ASF Executive began discussing ideas for a celebration of 50 years of ASF. The Cave Exploration Group of South Australia had done a superb job of organising the inaugural Conference and field trips in 1956, and readily agreed to host the 26th ASF Biennial Conference in Mount Gambier, simultaneously with our 50th anniversary.

Attention then turned to what special arrangements ASF itself could make to mark 50 years. We decided to locate and invite as many veterans of that first Conference as possible, and to produce some kind of publication to celebrate the occasion.

Well, practicalities prevailed and we decided to let the history and growth of ASF be revealed primarily through the pages of the quarterly newsletter. The objectives for this publication are threefold:

- to recapture the enthusiasm and remarkable foresight which envisaged a national speleological organisation and then accompanied ASF's formative years;
- to compile a selection of speleological writings conveying something of the flavour of the following half-century; and
- to provide a permanent record by documenting key achievements.

No doubt the time will come when an enterprising PhD student will find a trove of material in the archives of ASF and member societies, but for the moment, this will suffice. The most difficult decision was what to omit. The newsletter articles have been reformatted and in general have not been edited, but in a few cases, references and contemporary contact details have been omitted. We have retained the original typewritten format for a few archival letters and minutes.

Too much text, you say? Well, very few photographs and maps were published in the older newsletters, but we have included a few that were available digitally and which reproduced reasonably well.

So here it is: snapshots of speleology in Australia over the last 50 years.

The Editorial Team

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