

ANDY AND THE UIS CONGRESS

Andy Spate



The "Taste of Australia" group.

Photo: A Bystander

I had intended to have nothing to do with the UIS/IUS Congress in Australia but I found myself enmeshed in the Congress – firstly reviewing some presentations and then involvement in an excursion and then chairing sessions.

I was volunteered into being the boffin on an excursion titled "A taste of Australia" led by Grace Matts with the professional bus driver Larry Zanker piloting a coaster bus with Rob Stenson as support with a 4WD and trailer hosting the morning and afternoon teas and our lunches. Our American friend were most impressed by the concept of morning and afternoon teas – they seem not to be part of the American psyche.

Our brief was to look at some landscapes in southeastern NSW over a week – with an emphasis on karst. A "Taste of Oz" in a week is ridiculous – but we tried.

Twenty-three of us embarked on Larry's bus – meticulously counted by Larry on the many times the bus was boarded. Grace and I had planned an "armchair trip" – just as well as we had several guests who were not marathon runners. Most were Americans with two from Germany.

First off we visited Royal National Park and had an introduction to Australia's remarkable flora by an NPWS expert. On to Symbio Wildlife park to allow our visitors to see kangaroos, koalas, echidnas etc. Then to look over the Illawarra Escarpment to discuss the southern Sydney Basin landscapes and the remarkable Sea Cliff Bridge and the Austinmer Coal Measures. The next day up to the Mount Kiera Lookout and then off the Sydney Basin Rocks to The Lachlan Fold Belt – limestone at last!

A few hours at Bungonia visiting the various lookouts and explaining to our guests the significance of cubic turds – the wombats! Then to Yass for the overnight stop.

Up early the next day to Wee Jasper. First a trip up the valley to talk about the remarkable Punchbowl Hill with its stacked vadose and phreatic levels. Then down to the Cooradigbee Homestead where Ian and Helen Cathles gave us morning tea

and an exposition about the remarkable Devonian fossils followed by a brief visit to the fossil outcrops.

Onto Careys Cave for lunch followed by Geoff Kell's unique cave visit experience - very much appreciated by our guests. Then to Goulburn for the night.

Now to Wombeyan – inspection of all the caves by most with a reverse Fig Tree Cave inspection by the less energetic. Much photographing of kangaroos! In the evening, we had a great talk by the local wildlife carers on their laudable efforts to rehabilitate injured native fauna.

The next morning off to Abercrombie Caves via an interesting, and ultimately not very successful stop at a tiny village post office to send international postcards. We did the Abercrombie Arch backwards including various off-shoots. Still on the Lachlan Fold Belt rocks we set off to Bathurst to visit the remarkable Somerville Mineral and Fossil Museum. Our guide there was the redoubtable Ernie Holland – former ACKMA President – the first time we had met for very many years.

The next day we set off for the Sydney Basin again via Hassans Walls. Govetts Leap and so on. Filled the day well and the next we got all adventurous and went on the Scenic Railway and Skyway . Later we visited some Aboriginal engraving sites lower down the Blue Mountains on our way to Penrith – the UIS Congress site.

So, for the next few days I frequented the Congress. Much was interesting but the necessary concurrent sessions were frustrating. One criticism that I would make that it was a pity that presentations on the Nullarbor were spread across concurrent sessions so that one could not hear all the Nullarbor stuff. The organisers did a wonderful job in getting the Congress up and running. ACKMA should have had a stall running to promote our organisation. We did pick up a new member – a very enthusiastic young lady from Japan who may well be at Margaret River next year – and a few renewals from our American friends.



Geoff Kell does his "candle-magic" in Careys Cave.

Photo: Gordon Smith