

EARLY SPRING CLEAN for NARACOORTE CAVES, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Nick McIntyre

Spring cleaning got off to an early start at the World Heritage listed Naracoorte Caves during August with staff being involved in a series of workshops and practical demonstrations on cave cleaning and restoration. The workshops were conducted by John Brush and Marjorie Coggan from the Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association (ACKMA).

John and Marjorie were invited to the Naracoorte Caves to share their cave knowledge with local guide staff who as a result will now initiate regular cave maintenance programs. The caves at Naracoorte are unique and have an international reputation being a major visitor drawcard locally and in the region however, over time the impacts from providing visitation services and public access also needed to be managed.

John and Marjorie have worked for many years on cave cleaning and restoration projects in both show caves and wild caves in southeastern New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

Comparing his experiences John noted that *“The New Zealand limestones are very porous and easily damaged and are more akin to the soft and friable nature of the Naracoorte limestones. Working in caves in these soft and geologically-young rocks is a relatively new experience for us’. It is very different from the 300-400 million year old limestones and marbles of southern New South Wales.*

Every cave, every cleaning project is different and each project proposal has to be carefully assessed prior to starting. It was good to share experiences and techniques with the Naracoorte

guides. They know the caves intimately and are quick to notice any changes in ‘their’ caves”.

These changes include damage to the internal surface of the cave by more recent graffiti along with unwanted growth of green algae and mosses near some of the installed cave lights. Whilst the growth of lampenflora such as mosses, green algae and other plants occurs naturally around cave entrances where light and moisture combine to create the right conditions, it is unwanted growth internally around cave lights and requires treatment.

Naracoorte staff were enthused by the results of cleaning trials using methods suited to the caves such as low dosages of hydrogen peroxide for lampenflora applied for up to twenty minutes at a time. As the new Naracoorte Caves Site Manager I was impressed with the benefits of using hydrogen peroxide to control lampenflora as it became quite obvious with a background and treatment site established showing a notable change. More recent graffiti was also removed with ‘scrubbing and dubbing’ techniques using steel wool or sponging to provide a more natural finish to cave walls.

While the in cave LED lighting highlights the internal features of the caves and provides a unique visitation experience, alterations to the positioning and intensity of the lights will also be considered as a way of controlling unwanted lampenflora establishment.



*John Brush demonstrating a graffiti removal technique to Danielle Smith, Naracoorte Caves Guide.
Photo: Nick McIntyre*