

INTERPRETATION TRAINING IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

– Jay Anderson

Cave and Lighthouse guides at the Interpretation Workshop pictured in the Lake Cave doline, with Jay Anderson (front right) and Cathie Plowman (next to Jay). Photo: Ross Anderson.



The Augusta Margaret River Tourism Association (AMRTA) brought interpretation specialist Cathie Plowman to WA, from Tasmania to consult on interpretation planned for the **Jewel Cave Preservation and Redevelopment Project**. This was an excellent opportunity to provide staff with training. The workshop was expanded to include staff from other cave and lighthouse sites. The training involved staff from three organisations, representing a number of key tourism sites in WA—actually two Lighthouses and seven cave sites.

Cave Guides from the Augusta Margaret River Tourism Association (AMRTA) met with staff from Department of Conservation (DEC Leeuwin Naturaliste National Park and Yanchep National Park) and Geographe Bay Tourism Association (GBTA). The cave sites involved were Jewel Cave, Mammoth Cave, Lake Cave, Calgardup Cave, Giants Cave, Crystal Cave and Ngilgi Cave. In addition, guiding staff from the two Capes Lighthouses were also in attendance—Cape Naturaliste (GBTA) and Cape Leeuwin (AMRTA).

The guides met in the theaterette at *Caveworks*, over two days, participating in a number of group exercises. The group discussed interpretation, visitor experiences and focused on ‘thematic’ interpretation. The guides then worked in small groups to develop an interpretive theme and then present a thematic tour to the rest of the group. This involved working together on a theme in a cave environment. The Lighthouse staff were imaginative and developed an interpretive theme to present off site.

Cave works manager, Jay Anderson, said ‘this was an excellent opportunity to work in partnership with our colleagues at other sites, allowing our guides the opportunity to learn new techniques, exchange ideas, share together and to develop

relationships with other guides’. The resultant feedback from all attending guides indicates that the training was well received by all who attended. One guide stated ‘It was definitely a rewarding experience and we are all looking forward to putting what we learnt into practice. It was also great to meet all the other guides and to share ideas, experiences and knowledge.’ While another guide said ‘I personally found it very challenging and rewarding. It was great to be able to mingle with other fellow guides and hear their ‘tricks of the trade’ and words of wisdom. The whole course really made me think ‘outside the cave’ so to speak’. Comments from guides included, ‘Cathie did such a great job making us all realise that every tour matters. She was so focused, and empowered us all to make some great changes in the way we guide’ and ‘Cathie was inspiring and made the two day workshop fun, challenging and rewarding’.

It is well known in the career of guiding in general, that it is often easy for guides to lose interest or find tours monotonous. Many guides may feel they are ‘stuck in a rut’ or may be reluctant to try new techniques as they are out of their comfort zone. This training was presented by a specialist who has also worked as a cave guide, ranger in a cave reserve and as a cave manager. Cathie shared her passion in interpretation and worked with staff to develop their presentation skills. In particular, techniques in ‘thematic interpretation’ were discovered by everyone.

The aim was to further develop guides skills in interpretation so that visitors can enjoy the places we show them, but also to allow guides to develop a greater range of ways to share their sites with visitors. All guides who attended the workshop will also be qualified in a unit of national competency (*Prepare and Present Tour Commentaries or Activities*). This national competency is part of the Certificate 3 in Tourism. The benefits of this specialist training will extend to visitors of the caves and lighthouses in Western Australia.



A ‘Gaggle of Guides’ in Caveworks.
Photo: Jay Anderson.

