

JUNGLE FAIRIES

Steve Bourne



Henry and Syria with some Australian friends

When ACKMA visits a cave location, it likes to make a mark. One way has been raising funds for an appropriate local cause. Last year when ACKMA visited Mulu, Cathie Plowman again led the charge to raise funds, this time for training for Mulu staff. A significant sum was raised, probably influenced by Mulu Manager and ACKMA Life Member Brian Clark's promise to match the sum raised. Sorry Brian, I cost you a bit!!

Brian considered bringing some staff to the ACKMA conference in Tasmania but the cost was high and a week of conference would give staff little opportunity to learn from local staff. Typically, Brian went all the way to the top and sent an email to Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Chief Executive Allan Holmes seeking DENR to support a visit from two Mulu staff, and if Allan was supportive, he would speak to "Bournie" to make it happen. As always, Brian's timing and planning were impeccable. Allan visited Mulu at the end on 2010 and he had clearly fallen in love with the place and Allan directed

"Bournie" to make it work. Being a good public servant I followed instructions.

Brian brought Syria and Henry to Australia in early March. Both have impressed me in my two visits to Mulu with their knowledge and passion, and also with their desire to learn. The first evening I arranged a barbeque for Brian and Sue to meet with friends, some they had not seen since departing for Mulu 10 years ago. It was a great evening and an opportunity for Naracoorte staff to meet or reacquaint themselves with Henry and Syria. Henry stole the show explaining he was raised in the jungle and did not see a "long nose" (white person) until he was six years old, and that his education was all outside what we see as the regular means to gain an education. Although his formal schooling may be lacking, I have never met a more observant person, nor one more able to interpret the environment he was looking at. Somewhere during this evening the term "jungle fairies" came to mind to describe our guests, which somehow stuck and was a name they loved.



Henry and Syria in Starburst Chamber, Victoria Fossil Cave, Naracoorte

Syria and Henry had variety of experiences at Naracoorte. Naracoorte staff took them on a number of adventure tours, they learnt and led show cave tours and visited a number of sites away from Naracoorte. They spent a day visiting Tantanoola Cave, Piccaninnie Ponds, Mount Schank and the Blue Lake with Andrew Hansford and Deb Carden took them to the coast; the first time Henry had seen the ocean. I wish I had been there to see his reaction, Deb was worried he might not stop when he ran into the water! I also took Brian and Sue to Bool Lagoon. This ephemeral wetland had been mostly dry since Brian left, after Brian drained it to allow vegetation to regenerate. It has been a standing joke that Clarkie was to blame for Bool Lagoon being dry for 10 years so it was fabulous to be able to show him with record March levels in it. At least I had filled it up again!!

They had 9 days at Naracoorte which passed all too quickly. On their penultimate day, I drove them to Adelaide to meet up with Brian and Sue at Cleland Wildlife Park, where our department showcases local and other wildlife, most famously the koala. The park provides excellent opportunities to get up close and personal with Australian wildlife. The obligatory photos were taken with koalas, kangaroos and emus plus a few other Australian friends.



Syria and Henry took full advantage of the opportunity, observed their surroundings, made their own assessments of the Naracoorte business and planned what they would take back to other Mulu staff. I feel the funds ACKMA left at Mulu to support training have been really well utilised and ACKMA has made a significant improvement in the interpretation at Mulu.

The following email was forwarded by Brian on behalf of the “jungle fairies” and it is worth including to show how much they gained from the experience.

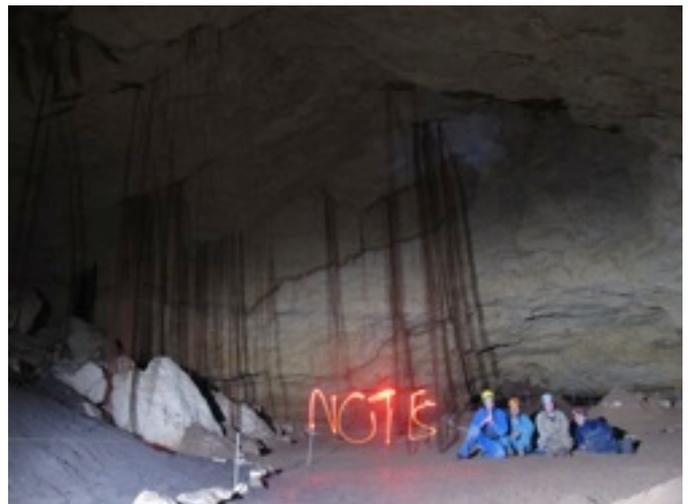
Dear ACKMA Members and Naracoorte Caves Management (and also Brian).

We would like to express our deep and sincere thanks to everybody at Naracoorte Caves. We found the programme very interesting, comfortable accommodation providing good service and food. We would like especially to thank everyone who sponsored our trip because without the assistance from you guys our dream could not come true. We feel very grateful to be able to further our knowledge. Our trip was wonderful and we thank you for making it so. We feel we were really able to enjoy the main sights and get a feel of the land and we were such a short time in Naracoorte but those trips showed us some fascinating highlights. The friendliness and hospitality of Naracoorte will stay in our hearts.

This memorable experience will definitely enhance ourselves to bring a better guiding system in the future to Mulu.

Yours sincerely,

Syria and Henry.



Fox Cave, Naracoorte. Henry “wrote” NCTE, an abbreviation for Naracoorte with his headlight.