

**ADDRESS GIVEN BY DAVID SUMMERS,
PRESIDENT of the INTERNATIONAL SHOW CAVES ASSOCIATION to
the INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE DEVOTED to the 100TH
ANNIVERSARY of KUNGUR ICE CAVE, PERM REGION, RUSSIA
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When the average person thinks of a show cave they would rarely see it as a series of obligations and responsibilities, but rather as an attraction, or better still as a place of education. The successful show cave operator on the other hand, whether they want to admit it or not, is faced with a huge fundamental obligation, and an even greater fundamental responsibility.

The fundamental obligation is relatively simple. It is the obligation to preserve and conserve the cave or caves. An obligation is often thought of as being something that must be done because of a law. But laws are generally limited to the national boundaries of the country that they are enacted within. Many, in fact the majority, of the countries in the world do not have laws that adequately protect caves.

It is a very nice thought that all caves, all over the world, would be protected by well thought out laws. This, in reality, is not going to happen. The reality is that show cave operators will simply have to rely on best practice in order to fulfil their obligation to preserve and conserve their cave or caves.

Fortunately, thanks to organizations such as the Union Internationalé Spéléologie and the International Show Caves Association, assistance is available to help show cave owners and operators to know how best to preserve and conserve their cave or caves. This process, however, should never be thought of as being a process cast in concrete, but rather one of continuous education. This is particularly the case with new space age products, now available, that can be used in a show cave. Some of these products, such as light-emitting diode lighting, better known today as LED, has proven to have great success in show caves, whereas some composite lumber has proven to be nothing short of disastrous.

It is quite probable that we have gained more knowledge about the conservation and preservation of caves in the past fifty years than we did since the beginning of the era since caves began to be used as show caves. We know more about lampenflora and its causes. We know a great deal more about what materials can be used in a cave and what should be used. Stainless steel within itself is not the panacea to all material needs in a cave, as there are grades of stainless steel. Only the higher grades of stainless steel should be used in a cave.

The conservation and preservation of a cave is generally considered to involve a lot of science and technology, and in deed it does. But the services of scientists and

technologists rarely come free. They usually need to be paid with money.

It does not matter what currency you trade or deal in. It is all encapsulated in one word - money, which in turn can be described as capital, meaning an excess of assets over liabilities.

While being in this great country I am reminded of an appropriate quotation by Heinrietta Marx, the mother of the famed philosopher and economist Karl Marx said:

"If Karl, instead of writing a lot about Capital, made a lot of Capital, it would have been much better."

The need for capital to undertake the fundamental obligation to preserve and conserve the cave or caves is very clear, and it is for this reason that I referred to an even greater fundamental responsibility at the need for a show cave to be operated as a sustainable successful business.

Not only must a show cave run as a business, but it must be operated successfully, year after year. That is the reason that the word sustainable was just used. This fundamental responsibility must be complied with year after year. A show cave can barely afford to be unsuccessful for one year. It cannot afford to be unsuccessful for two years in a row otherwise, total economic failure may occur.

When a major construction project runs into financial difficulties, invariably the budgets for landscaping and planting are among the first items to be reduced. When a show cave runs into financial difficulties, invariably the budgets for conservation and preservation are among the first to be reduced or even eliminated.

It is often said that the worst thing that can happen to a cave is for it to be discovered by mankind. I offer you the thought that the worst thing that can happen to a show cave is for it to fail as a business venture and be closed down.

When a show cave fails as a business venture, the best that can usually happen is for the entrance or entrances to be locked with gates. Over a relatively short period of time the metal forming these locked gates will fail and will no longer be capable of securing the entrance. This provides those intent on vandalism ready access to the closed down cave in the form of built pathways and trails.

A show cave has all of the requirements that any other business has, including payroll costs, payment of taxes,

development costs, cost of supplies, payment of utilities, maintenance and repairs, vehicle costs, accounting services, advertising as well as scientific and environmental costs, to mention only some of the items that need to be considered.

Compared to many businesses, show caves have a great disadvantage in that they cannot relocate to a more favourable location. The vast majority of businesses have the luxury of selecting the place that they do their business in. Caves are rarely located in highly desirable locations.

A show cave operator needs to have all of the business knowledge and acumen that any successful business must have in order for it to be operated successfully, year after year. This is the great fundamental responsibility that every show cave in the world has. Without this financial security the show cave will not be able to fulfil its obligation to conserve and preserve the cave.

Achieving, and maintaining, a successful business model is of such fundamental importance to a show cave that it ranks as its most important element. The conservation and preservation of the physical cave may be considered the most important aspect in a show cave operation to the purist, but if there is no capital generated by a successful business operation, there will be no ability to fund these critical components of the operation.

While this address has focused on the most important obligation, and the even greater responsibility faced by a

show cave operator, there are many other obligations and responsibilities to be taken into account by a successful show cave operator. These other obligations and responsibilities are, however, subservient to the two primary considerations. It is imperative that operators of Government owned caves also be conscious that these fundamental obligations and responsibilities are applicable to them, as well as operators of private caves. Government owned caves are susceptible to the wishes and whims of politicians, who are apt to reset, without notices, when they realize that public funds are being lost.

It is important that I stress the need for show cave owners and operators, and those interested in show caves to, collaborate to a greater degree. The previous language barriers need no longer act as reasons not to collaborate.

Andy Spate, the noted Australian scientist, recently speculated in a paper on world-wide show cave visitation, that there may be about 1,500 show caves around the world. Each one of these show caves would benefit greatly if they were members of national or international organizations, where they could learn by the experience of other show caves.

If the vast majority of these approximately 1,500 show caves would come together, the information that could be shared would be tremendous. We all need to reach out to each other more. There is no place for complacency in the world of show caves.