



INTERNATIONAL RANGER FEDERATION  
4<sup>th</sup> WORLD CONGRESS – VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA March 2003

## CONGRESS REPORT

May 2003

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## Introduction

The International Ranger Federation is the peak representative body for operational staff working in protected area management. It has working links to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, World Protected Area Leadership Forum, and the United Nations. It is the umbrella organisation that links national Ranger Associations across the globe. Every three years it holds a congress to allow continued networking and information sharing, and further the professional development of its members. This year the congress was held in Victoria Australia from March 21 to March 28. The congress commenced in Melbourne and moved to Wilsons Promontory National Park for the bulk of the program.

## Congress Aims

1. To provide an opportunity for Rangers from around the world:
  - to come together to learn from each other by discussing common problems and working on the solutions
  - to establish a network of contacts for support and assistance; and
  - to engage in fellowship, social activity and enhancement or renewal of motivation and spirit for the mission of protecting the worlds special places
2. To facilitate participation from all parts of the world, particularly the Asia / Pacific region
3. To provide the IRF an opportunity to determine how best to use its role and collective advocacy, and to establish priorities in its efforts to benefit the people who protect the world's special places.
4. To afford delegates the opportunity to experience the natural and cultural heritage of Victoria and Australia.
5. To provide delegates, whilst in Australia, with the opportunity to participate in
  - Shadow assignments
  - Expanded visits to protected areas; and
  - Other educational opportunities

## Program

The program covered the period of a full 7-day week. The theme "Rangers at Work – Improving the Practice" was a 'back to basics' concept, focusing on the practical skills of the Ranger and on-ground delivery of protected area

management. It contained the sub-themes of *Building Community Support*, *Managing the Masses*, and *Healthy Habitats* (each of a days duration). These days contained a number of streams from which the delegate could choose topics / workshops of interest. A field trip day and IRF business day was also part of the program

Relevant keynote addresses and other identified proceedings from the Congress will be available on the IRF web site. The proceedings will also be produced as a hard copy attachment for identified recipients. This will include the bulk of the keynote addresses and some of the workshop abstracts. Two key resolutions were worked upon and further refined. (See below)

In undertaking the organisation of the Congress program and associated support requirements, the Organising Committee worked to a set of principles including using local business, being 'Green' and being observant of cultural needs.

### Delegates

There were 204 delegates from 37 countries. A number of other delegates dropped out in the week preceding the congress, it would appear principally because of the international crisis concerning Iraq. Australian delegates made up the largest national group with every state and the federal park agency represented. Indigenous Rangers also were well represented within this delegate group. Protected area staff from the Asia / South Pacific were a small but enthusiastic group. The focus for 'new delegates' was on this geographical area. The executive committee of the IRF is pleased that a number of delegates from these countries are keen to develop a nexus with the IRF by becoming members or working to set up their own national associations.

The congress organisers provided a mentoring opportunity for sponsored delegates (if needed) and/or those delegates who had limited English language. This proved very successful and all such delegates felt included and well catered for.

Including accompanying partners, volunteers (principally Rangers), speakers, IRF and the Victorian Rangers Association organising committee, there were 310 participants involved in the congress.

### Sponsorship

28 delegates were sponsored. Sponsorship for delegates varied from full cover (airfare & registration), to either or parts thereof. Over \$AU 81,000 was raised in sponsorship. Sponsorship came in the form of direct financial contributions (\$81,000) or in-kind support. Parks Victoria, the major employer of Rangers in Victoria and responsible for the management of the states parks and waterways, made a significant contribution of in-kind sponsorship. 4

sponsored delegates (from Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of Congo, & Malaysia x 2) were unable to attend due to visa, late travel issues, and the Iraq war. A number of World Heritage area delegates were sponsored and will be required to separately report to the World Heritage Commission, an arm of the United Nations Economic and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO)

**Major sponsors included:** *Parks Victoria, The Myer Foundation, Australia – India Council, The Victorian Rangers Association, Australia – Korea Foundation, Melbourne City Council, AusAid, World Heritage Commission, Nissan Australia.*

### Financials

Original Congress plans allowed for a maximum delegate number of 350. This would have meant an operating budget of close to \$500,000 (Aust). However with a reduced attendance number of approximately 200 the budget income was expected to be around \$345,000. Fixed and variable expenditures were planned to match the income with a small margin for profit. Seeding loans from the IRF and Parks Victoria (\$5000/\$2500 respectively) were to be reimbursed, and this action has now been completed. Some savings were made on catering and accommodation, and most particularly labour with the assiduous input of many volunteers. The Congress Organising Committee is pleased that the congress financials have finished in the black.

### Issues

No major issues confronted the organising committee during the congress week. Problems of delegate visas and travel were minor, though as mentioned due to the start of the conflict in Iraq a number of delegates had to forgo their attendance. There were some problems with the supply of the congress marquee - dining, lecture, and kitchen/serverly tents. However issues were resolved by the assistance of Wilsons Promontory NP staff and congress volunteers.

### Resolutions and Outcomes

Two resolutions will be taken to the IUCN World Parks Congress in Durban South Africa in September this year (2003). Once every 10 years this Congress brings together the major deliverers of world protected area management and wildlife conservation. It includes staff and elected representatives from all levels of government and their agencies, and also staff from the Non-Government Offices (NGO's) and conservation lobby groups. Members of the IRF will have the opportunity of speaking at the Congress.

The two resolutions are:

- **'Protecting the Protector'**. This deals with the action required for nations and their conservation agencies to further enhance the protection for staff

working on the frontline in the protection of wildlife and wildplaces. Across the world many such staff die each year in the line of duty. (This resolution can be made available on request or found on the IRF web-site)

- **Capacity Building – ‘Training the Ranger’.** This resolution focus’s on the enhancement of Ranger skills particularly at the professional level. It is targeted for the workshops of the congress sub-theme ‘New Skills for a New Century – Capacity Building’. The issue is seen important as, “an enhancement of a Rangers competence to safeguard protected area resources is crucial to providing benefits, both within and beyond protected area boundaries”.

Outcomes of the congress can be assessed as being of a personal and professional development opportunity for each congress delegate. All had the opportunity to listen, learn, share and contribute. The many workshops and sessions allowed for a wide array of interests. Most importantly contacts and friendships were formed that will allow for further sharing of information and exchange in years hence. An example to highlight this was: At an unplanned moment, simple but eloquent and emotional words from World Heritage delegate and indigenous representative Beryl Smith from Kakadu National Park, represented many delegates views when she spoke of her pride in being a Ranger and working with all those people here at the congress in protecting ‘the land’.

From an agency or government perspective, outcomes of the congress will not have any significant, short-term effect. The congress, because it focuses on staff (Rangers) at the ‘grass-roots’ / operational level, is designed for an enhancement of the individuals skills, building further awareness and enthusiasm, and a nexus to the global community of protected area staff (as per stated aims). Therefore the long-term benefits for agencies will be the collective enhancement of delegates’ ongoing interest in furthering Rangers commitment, skill and initiative to their work in protected area management. An avenue for such collective enhancement will be the reporting back to their respective agencies and such forums as the World Parks Congress.

A participants survey was distributed for completion by the delegates during their return to Melbourne and many positive comments were received:

“....the opportunity to be at this conference was a life changing experience”

“....the overall experience was sensational. A great interaction of people, cultures, and areas”

“....a conference far above and beyond any I have ever attended”

The general areas of Program, Venues and Logistics received an overwhelming response of excellent. Of the 16 subcategories that delegates could comment on less than 0.5% considered the action unsatisfactory

The Congress Organising Committee and the IRF executive committee believe that all set Aims of the congress were met

## Conclusion

The IRF 4<sup>th</sup> World Congress was a resounding success. All delegates left with something: renewed vigour, new contacts, ideas and initiatives to try, new friends, and most importantly the knowledge that they were not alone in their endeavours in the sometime difficult and poorly resourced environments in which they worked. The Organising Committee is immensely appreciative of the hundreds of hours that the volunteers contributed and the support of the many sponsor groups.

A lasting memory of the congress will be the memorial plaque, located at Tidal Overlook, a quiet place now set aside to remember those Rangers who died whilst protecting the places and wildlife they were dedicated to.

## Andrew Nixon

Chairperson – IRF 4<sup>th</sup> World Congress Organising Committee

### **NB. Attachments and appendices to this report included:**

1. Ranger Shadowing report
2. Full financial and budget report
3. Program / proceedings
4. Media report
5. Sponsorship report
6. Resolutions for World Parks Congress, Sept 2003, Durban, South Africa

These can be made available through contacting the Secretary, Victorian Rangers Association

Further info can also be sourced from the Australian Ranger Federation website [www.ranger.org.au](http://www.ranger.org.au)