The World Heritage listed South China Karst encompasses about 550,000 km² of subtropical to tropical karst in Guizhou, Guangxi, Yunnan and Chongqing provinces. The karst terrain includes tower, cone and pinnacle karst, together with massive caves, natural bridges, deep gorges, enormous sinkholes, karst waterfalls and disappearing streams. Mountain slopes and peaks are clothed in dark green rainforest in contrast to the bright green rice paddy fields on pocket handkerchief parcels of land in valleys or on hilly terraces, flanked by traditional rural villages.

At the conclusion of the International Botanical Congress in Shenzhen, Alison Downing and colleague Josephine (Pina) Milne from the National Herbarium of Victoria, were privileged to be invited by Professor Zhang Zhao Hui from Guizhou Normal University in Guiyang, as special guests, to participate in the China-Australia International Workshop for Karst Bryology in Guizhou held by the Key Laboratory for Information Systems of Mountainous Areas and Protection of Ecological Environments of Guizhou Province. This proved to be an ideal opportunity to learn more about this famous area of karst and to engage in field trips to areas of spectacular natural landscapes. Participants to the workshop, about 45 in all, included staff and students from Guizhou Normal University and other local universities and colleges.

On the first day of the workshop, there were 11 oral presentations, and 17 abstracts were published in the official handbook prepared for the workshop. The presentations were of particular interest to Alison Downing, who had previously worked on bryophytes on karst in Australia, and to Pina Milne, who has published on the taxonomy of bryophytes on calcareous and saline substrates in arid and semi-arid environments of Australia. Many of the presentations focussed on the biodiversity and ecology of bryophytes in natural karst systems, such as karst waterfalls, active travertine deposits, peak clusters and caves; some related to urban issues, such as moss walls in cities; others confronted pollution problems, including heavy metal contamination and using roadside epiphytic bryophytes as heavy metal biomonitor; and lastly, moss-dwelling protozoan communities in aquatic karst environments. One study in particular, by Dr Wu Qimei, is a reminder of the very long history of China. Her research involved the use of aquatic mosses to monitor pollution in a river near a mercury mine. So why would that be so special? Just that the mine had been in operation since about 221 years BC, the time of Emperor Qin Shi Huang 秦始皇, famous for the Terracotta Warriors 兵马俑, of Xian. Planned for his underground tomb were rivers of mercury, doubtless the mercury may have originated from this mine where, fortunately, operation ceased in 2001.

The following days were spent visiting some most amazing regions of karst, including the famous Huang Guo Shu waterfall, the highest waterfall in China and the Zhijindong Cave, China’s largest cave, providing opportunities to understand much of the research outlined in the papers presented on the first day of the workshop.

Huang Guo Shu Waterfall National Park (黄果树瀑布国家公园) near Anshun City (安顺城) in south-western Guizhou, is famous for its waterfalls; of these, the Huangguoshu Waterfall on the Bai Shui River (白水河) is the most celebrated, almost 80 metres high and just over 100 metres wide. However, in late Autumn, when water levels drop considerably, rheophytic bryophytes (growing in fast moving water) and bryophytes growing on substrates...
adjacent to this waterfall and others, such as Do Po Tang Waterfall, 陡坡塘瀑布, have been surveyed by Professor Zhang Zhao Hui, his staff and students.

The second field trip site, Zhijindong Cave, 织金洞, in the Guizhou Zhijin Cave Scenic Area, 贵州织金洞风景区 near Bijie in western Guizhou, was equally amazing. The cave which was discovered in 1980, has an area of over 30,000 square metres. In the highest section, it is 185 metres tall. Visitors can take a 2.5 km long walk through the cave which is rich with stalactites, stalagmites, waterfalls and underground lakes. However, it is necessary to be very fit, as most of the walking is actually stair climbing, with 400 steep, punishing steps to the exit! The Zhijindong Cave limestones are also famous for their fossils, including not only the appropriately named *Kweichosaurus* (Guizhousaurus, 贵州龙), but also for crinoids and ichthyosaurs (鱼龙). There is a poem written by a famous contemporary writer Feng Mu, who said “When you come back from a visit to the Huangshan Mountains, you have no interest in other mountains. The same is true of Zhijindong Caves!” It is impossible to speak of the karst terrain of Guizhou without superlatives as it is truly unique and magnificent.

The workshop and associated field trips were especially productive and there appears to be considerable scope for collaboration between Guizhou Normal University and Macquarie University in the future. Congratulations and thanks are due to Professor Zhang Zhao Hui, Professor Wang Zhizhi, Dr Wu Qimei, Dr Wang Dengfu and all the students from Guizhou Normal University for organisation of a most successful workshop and careful planning of field trips to some extraordinary areas of karst. The presentations were all the more remarkable when it was realised by the visitors that most students had never previously had the opportunity to speak in English to an English-speaking person!