



Metropolitan Speleological Society

Quarterly
NEWSLETTER

Winter 2015

Issued September 2015

Society Information.....	page 2
MSS 50 th Celebration Update.....	page 3
MSS Website Update>>>>>>.....	page 4
Editors 2 Cents.....	page 5
Trip Reports	
Ningaloo Underground June 2015 (Jim).....	page 6
ASF Conference June 2015 (Rod).....	page 11
Abercrombie 20 th July (Angus).....	page 26
Abercrombie 20 th July (Rod).....	page 29
 Trip Calendar.....	 page 31
<i>Appendix 1 – Meeting Minutes.....</i>	<i>page 32</i>

Cover Shot: Abercrombie Camp Ground by Rod Smith

Society Information

Club EPIRB

Just a reminder to all trip leaders that we have the new EPIRB and this should be taken on every remote trip. Our Equipment Officer, Jim (0407 284 256), jcrockett3@bigpond.com), has this, so please coordinate with him to collect it before you lead your next trip.

MSS Officers list

Position

President president@mssadventure.org.au
Secretary secretary@mssadventure.org.au
Treasurer treasurer@mssadventure.org.au
Equipment Officer equipment@mssadventure.org.au
Librarian library@mssadventure.org.au
Training Officer training@mssadventure.org.au
ASF Liaison Reps

Newsletter Editor newsletter@mssadventure.org.au
Website Manager webmaster@mssadventure.org.au
Public Officer

Name

Jim Crockett
Rod Smith
Cathi Humphrey Hood
Jim Crockett
Rod Smith
Beth Little
Jim Crockett,
Rod Smith
Natalie Etherton
Rod Smith
John Gray

Membership Fee Details

Full member \$80
Family membership \$160
Prospective member \$30 (3 months)\
Honorary membership \$45
Already a member of an ASF Club? \$30

Preference is for payment by Direct Debit to:
Account Name: MSS
BSB: 062-021 (Commonwealth Bank)
Account: 00901421
Cheques or Cash also accepted.

MSS is Celebrating 50 years of Adventure!

By the time this Winter issue goes to print, the 50th evening will have happened. Thankyou to all those that were able to make it and contributed to the evening. Watch out for an article regarding the evening in the 50th anniversary special edition publication.

We will also have voted on our new tshirt by then and will have information regarding ordering on our website as soon as possible. Make sure you don't miss out!

Beth Little

50th@mssadventure.org.au

0450 226 811

International Congress of Speleology 2017 update

Planning for the conference is well under way and we are still looking for volunteers to help with organising field trips to Yarrangobilly during this time. We also need someone to become a camp manager for a proposed private camp ground at Penrith Museum of Fire.

If any club members are interested in helping out with this or in any other way, could you please advise Rod Smith or Jim Crockett.

We will definitely be running our own MSS trip(s) before the congress to hone our caving skills and using this time for gathering information for a future field guide.

For more information on the 2017 congress visit <http://speleo2017.caves.org.au/>

MSS Adventure Website

<http://www.mssadventure.org.au/>

When you login to the member's area of the Website you will notice a new access method requiring a member's login and a password. This feature has been added to improve the security of the member's area.

To access the members' area the login will be your current email address and the password remains as "forester"

There is an added feature to allow you to make a password change and also if you wish to change your login to something else other than your email you can send a message to Rod at webmaster@mssadventure.org.au

For those that indulge in social media and want to see some MSS adventure in action visit: <https://www.facebook.com/MSSAdventure>



Editors 3am Raves:

-Natalie Etherton

With Jim & Rod at the ASF conference in WA, and another member Beth busy gallivanting around the good old USofA and then an Abercrombie surprise snow storm adventure, trips were not numerous this winter, but as one of the trips that went ahead involved months of planning, 1000's of kms travel and weeks out in the great outdoors, this was totally understandable. In this Winter issue, you will find 2 trip reports detailing the WA conference antics. These are long reports so grab a hot beverage, put your feet up and enjoy a good read. Prepare to be envious. Then be inspired to make sure you attend the next conference.

Make sure that you read the MSS minutes as there is an exciting development for those like myself who live remotely and cannot travel to meetings but are still wishing to be involved. The age of technology is upon us and the opportunity to conference the meeting is being explored. Other exciting news in the minutes is some upcoming trips next year pencilled in. For these more involved trips it takes months of planning and plotting, so contact the team leader as early as possible with your expression of interest as it could make a huge difference in technicalities such as transport & accommodation- not to mention permits!.

Happy & Safe Adventuring!



Trip Reports

Ningaloo Underground Pre and Post Conference Caving Trips

June 2015 - Jim Crockett

It's such an exciting prospect to have the opportunity to go and see caves in a state which I have never been wild caving before. Probably the only other time I visited some caves there was a visit to a tourist cave at Margaret river in the 1970's. There was also the opportunity of catching up with many caving friends from all over Australia and to learn so much more about Australian speleology.

So the planning for this was made more than a year in advance and after a minor hiccup, as my family could not to make it due to the illness of my father in-law. The change of travel plans all worked in my favour as I was able to find friends to share the cottage at Exmouth as well as 2 others to share the Long drive to and from Perth.

And so it began;

Taxi to airport, picking up Rod on the way and then the flight to Perth where we met with Kevin Moore (a member of SUSS) before collecting the hire vehicle which we were lucky to get an upgrade from a Mitsubishi Outlander to a Pajero, which helped a lot to carry all the additional camping gear etc that we had brought, and made it much more comfortable.

So on the road with 3 drivers changing every 2 hours made it easy for the 1200km trip to Exmouth.

First night stop was at Green Head about 3 hour's drive from Perth via the Indian Ocean coastal highway.

First problem we had was that Kevin went to get the tent out of his luggage and it was not there, oh no probably somewhere on the floor at home, so he was resigned to sleeping in the car.

At the campground reception we had noticed a poster promoting Stockyard Creek caves and the campground manager was able to give us more information including directions to the caves. He mentioned that the cave went for 8-9Km and ends 3km out in the ocean. Good, that would be our first destination in the morning. It came as bit of a shock as neither of us were expecting to go caving on only the 2nd day of the trip.

So we arrived at Stockyard creek caves which are actually in an area called Eneabba and a short walk down the creek to the entrance to Tunnel cave which is approximately 300m long, followed by a creek walk of about 400m to the Arch which is protected by numerous beehives. Through the arch we are soon at the entrance to the Stockyard creek cave which we followed for a few 100m's. This cave apparently goes for about 800m before sumping out, not quite the 8km were told !, but maybe the creek does flow all the way out into the Indian Ocean ? We had to finish this trip and get back to the car as we still had a long way to travel today.



Left: Kevin and Rod at the entrance to the Tunnel, at Stockyard Creek Caves, Eneabba.
Right: Looking out towards the entrance of Stockyard Creek cave.

After many changes of drivers and roadhouse stops, including meeting a large group of cavers from WASG at the Billabong Roadhouse we made it to Hamelin pool at Shark Bay, just in time for the sunset and to view the Stromatolites that this place is well known for.

Now you might ask what are stromatolites ?

These are colonies of microbial mats which fossil evidence suggests are among the first evidence of ancient life. They also form Stromatolitic limestone which has good examples at Bullita in the Northern territory, the stromatolites colonies there are that large they can be seen from space.

The next day we continued north experiencing unseasonal weather for this region as we came upon outbreaks of rain. The next stop was at Carnarvon to see the Museum of Space and Technology which I had a personal interest in as this was a former OTC site, a company which I had first started working for as a Trainee after finishing school. The museum is well worth a look to find out Australia's involvement in the space programs of NASA and looking after the first satellites that were launched by Intelsat in the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions in the 1960's.

We were soon back on the road again as we needed to make it to Exmouth hopefully before nightfall.

This section of the west coast is quite arid, consisting of low flat plains with low scrubs up to 2m high, lots of spinifex grass and about 100km out from Exmouth we started to come across termite mounds which are one of the great indicators that you have crossed over the tropic of Capricorn. There were not the swarms of wildlife that I was expecting to see, I did not see a kangaroo or any other marsupial, the most I saw was perhaps a flock of birds or the odd eagle overhead. I guess this was understandable given that there was very little standing water and very few rivers were crossed and even those had no signs of flowing water at this time of year.

We arrived at Exmouth late afternoon and settled in to our 3 bedroom cottage. We soon found the shopping centre which was located nearby so we were able to stock up on supplies for our 10 night stay. I was quite shocked at the food prices here being almost double that of the city, but I guess that is because of the remoteness of the town.

We had a meeting that night to organise and select our choices for the pre-conference trips.

Firstly I will give you a bit of a lesson on the karst formation of the Cape Range which may help explain the structure of the caves.

Cape Range consists of a Limestone peninsula 16km wide and 80km long. The limestone is of Tertiary age formed in the late Oligocene to mid Miocene (25-30 to 15 million years ago). It consists of 3 distinct layers of deposition with the oldest being the Mandu limestone which is a chalky white rock of low porosity and permeability. The overlying pinkish-yellow Tulki limestone makes up the bulk of the Cape Range and is more porous. The youngest formation is the mid-grey Trealla limestone which is much softer and hence most of it has been eroded away. The Tulki and Trealla formations contain many good fossil examples and are very similar to the marine animals in the current day Ningaloo reef. Darren the local cave expert has even found the fossilised tooth of a Megalodon, which is a giant shark, known to have grown up to 15m long.

Most of the caves occur in the Tulki limestone and generally the caves are mostly vertical in nature, the main exception being the 7km long Wanderers cave. The area frequently experiences tropical cyclones during the wet season and the heavy rainfall associated with this creates the major cave formation activity.

Because the Tulki limestone is so porous it is easily eroded downwards until reaching the Mandu limestone at which point it usually spreads horizontally in most cases soon sumping out. There are a few small caves occurring in the upper Trealla limestone.

There are also a number of flank margin caves that occur on the western side of the Cape Range.

Pre-conference caving Day 1

First day of the pre-conference field trips and my choice was Dry Swallet C18 a vertical cave on top of the Cape Range accessed via the Charles Knife road. My party consisted of Garry K Smith, David Wools-Cobb, Denis Marsh, and myself, ably led by Greg Thomas.

All of our group loaded into Greg's truck as the road was getting too rough for a SUV, we made it the cave entrance, which was only 20m from where we parked the car. The entrance is quite large and as the name suggests is the Dry Swallet of a creek which would take in lots of water during the wet season. The main pitch is a continuous drop of about 45m into a large chamber but it is not the preferred route. Instead we traverse around to a smaller hole where we start the abseil, this leads to a rebelay in a circular hole and from there on it is a nice free hanging pitch of about 35m landing in the main chamber. The cave has an upper and lower section. We start exploring the upper section which leads to another large high chamber which is known to contain many examples of cave biota (cave critters) We observed many millipedes, spiders and snails. From there we continued down to the lower section which is much narrower ending in the lowest section at a pool of water where we observed some crustaceans (Isopods) swimming in the pool. That was the end of the cave so it was back to the main chamber for the prussick out. We all made it out safe.



On the way back we continued to the end of the Charles Knife to see the site of the first successful drilling for oil on the Australian mainland. Unfortunately commercial quantities were never discovered until later drilling at the nearby Rough Range.

Pre-conference caving Day 2

I wanted to continue with the vertical cave theme, there were options for horizontal caves but I had enjoyed yesterday's SRT so I wanted more.

So today I signed up for a Cork-screw C56, Bell C29 and Tophole C88 caves swap over trip.

Our group consisted of Danny Wilkinson, Weidi Koh, myself and the trip leader was Ian Collette. These were all West Australians except for me. This cave was in a similar location to yesterday's cave off the Charles Knife road. We had a bit of rain overnight and there was some concern as to the road condition which was only apparent in the last 300m of the drive, but we made it and only had 100m walk to Bell cave. This cave has a single pitch of about 30m which is rigged from large piece of steel girder laid across a high point above the entrance making for a nice clean abseil route. The first problem was that the recent cat 5 cyclone had caused subsidence at the entrance and there were 2 very large boulders wedged up against the metal belay. Fortunately with a bit of kicking and pushing the 2 boulders were edged over the drop and crashed at the bottom of the pitch. This pitch turned out to be a nice easy start as you are able to drop down underneath the rope with plenty of standing room, reach out grab the rope and start straight away on the abseil. Once at the bottom you soon realise why it's called Bell Cave, a narrow circular opening at the top and a much wider circular chamber at the bottom. Good example of a bell shape. At the bottom of the chamber there is not a lot more to see. There are some small passages of about 30m leading off but not much more. So it was back up again, and good thing was we could leave the pitch rigged ready for the next group.



Weidi Koh prussicking Bell Cave C-29

We had some time on our side and Ian wanted to have a look at other nearby caves. The first was Tophole cave C88 which we located only a short distance away. This consisted of a small vertical entrance but Ian had a lot of concerns as it did not fit the description that he had been given as consisting of a narrow horizontal entry point which had to be crawled before reaching the pitch head. He had concerns that the entrance had been somewhat modified by the recent Cat5 cyclone and may be unstable or blocked. So we decided to enter this cave. We were later to find out that the description that Darren had given him was incorrect and that the entrance we had seen was the normal condition of the cave. We continued looking in the same area as there were some other caves Ian wanted to look for. We found one called Green Snot which was named because the entrance pitch is coated with green slippery moss. We did not enter this cave, but headed back to the car for lunch and then to the swap over cave. While finishing lunch the other group showed up and advised that Cork-Screw cave C56 was rigged and ready for us.

So it was back along the main road for about 2km to the turnoff for the BOM Weather station. The cave is located very close to the main road, but cannot be seen from passing cars as at one point we could clearly hear an argument going on between a couple in a RV.



The low narrow entrance leads to the first pitch of about 10m. It was here that I had a minor scare as halfway down you had a pass a redirection and I stopped to pass it, removing the carabiner off the rope I pulled the handle on my new abseil device (similar to a Petzl stop) this put me into a fast abseil which was stopped when my bum hit the floor. No big damage done except for a sore bum, but the lesson I learnt was to always use the new abseil device with an additional braking carabiner and use caution when inching down short distances.

I was Ok to continue and the pitches in this cave were pretty much continuous as the cave cork-screwed down. There were 3 more pitches of 9, 11 and a final one of 5m that was only completed by Ian as he had to turn back due to high level of CO2.

The next job was to derig the cave and this was completed quite easily before heading back to town for the night.

Right: Weidi Koh and Danny Wlikinson waiting to enter Cork Screw C-56

Pre-conference caving Day 3

The cave I selected was C-215 which is quite a bit different to the previous 2 days as it was basically horizontal and wet and located on the west coast side of the Cape Range. Again this was led by Ian Collette, with the rest consisting on Garry K Smith, David Wools-Cobb and Janice March.

The first stop was at the Milyering Visitor Centre which has a lot of information about the Ningaloo reef and an opportunity to purchase a fridge magnet. Our destination was only a few minutes away at the back of the guide's accommodation complex. It was also only a short 10 minute walk to the cave entrance located on a rocky lump surrounded by fig trees.

The cave starts with a short 5m ladder climb down a pothole entrance into a small chamber. The cave continues down wards through a squeeze to a climb down where a handline is handy. It is here where I turned on my new Sony Action cam for the first time in a cave, I will see the results later. This is where the horizontal passages are met and we follow this until we reach pools of water which have massive tree roots of the fig trees on the surface reaching down into sapping up the moisture. The pools get deeper and longer before we observe our first Blind Gudgeon fish. These are only about 50mm long, completely white and of course completely blind, so much so that they have evolved to the extent where there is nothing left of where their eye socket used to be. This is one of the only 2 Australian blind invertebrates the other one being a blind eel which is also found in the Cape Range. This cave is a known hotspot for troglodytic fauna as we also observed a scutigera or hairy mary centipede making its way along the cave wall. The blind fish proved very elusive and we were all attempting to photograph them but they must have sensed our presence and dived deeper into the pool. So as the saying goes if you can't beat them join them, so it was into the waist deep pool to chase the blind fish, this eventually became chest deep but the good thing was I was up in front and could chase the blind fish and see them before they dived and was lucky enough to

see them close up close to the surface. We all spent some time chasing the fish for that elusive photo but I don't think any of us were able to get a winning photo. We eventually gave up and headed out of the cave. From there we were taken to turquoise bay and I was able to borrow a snorkel and mask from Ian so we could go snorkeling for a few hours. This is one of the best places for snorkeling on the Ningaloo coast as there is a drift running south/north. So you go to the south end of the beach swim out about 20 to 30m and then float above the reef which is about 4m deep. There is an abundance of tropical fish and other sea life including manta rays, turtles to be seen. The coral is a bit disappointing as all I saw was large isolated lumps of brown coral, not the colourful display I was expecting. But it's worth it just to see the variety of the fish. The drift takes you 200m north and then you get out of the water walk south again and into the water for another go.

Post-conference caving Day 1

So the conference was over and we had spent the Saturday moving from Exmouth to the top of the range to just outside the National park and then setting up camp. We had a record 43 people and 1 dog, 3 portable toilets, shared shelters with cooking facilities and a variety of camping setups. There were a variety of horizontal and vertical trips to choose from but to follow on with my vertical theme I went for Pterodactyl C-201. The members of this party were Ian Collette (TL), Aimee Leong, Asha Lane, Janice March and myself. So we gathered up a number of ropes and rigging gear as this cave had 8 pitches in total. A fifteen minute drive down the range we parked and headed southeast along a tricky limestone plateau, an hour later we arrived at the cave entrance on a small creek. So we all set charge into the small entrance armed with 2 ropes of 60m, the intention being to rig continuous rope as the pitches were one after the other. We had to use all natural anchors and the initial pitch presented a bit of a challenge, but after a few attempts and a few changes we finally had a nice free pitch to start off. Ian went deeper and continued the rigging and we followed. The first pitch of 8m was immediately followed by a 12m down a circular hole then smaller pitches of 4m and 8m before the first horizontal crawl. The second rope was rigged here as the cave became more complex with 2 possible routes down. We chose the most obvious route which consisted of 3 more pitches of 10m, 6m and final one of 7m. This ended in a small terminal chamber with a low crawl way that I was able to follow for 15m before reaching the sump and the end of the cave. So it was up the same way we came and I found it not too punishing on the body because the pitches were only short allowing rest between them. We all made our way out safely. The good thing was could leave the cave rigged as there was another group visiting tomorrow. In the end I was highly satisfied with this cave trip.



Left: Asha Lane on first pitch in Pterodactyl
Right: Aimee Leong preparing to abseil on first pitch in Pterodactyl

Post-conference caving Day 2

So day 2 beckoned and I joined up with Greg Thomas (TL), Danny Wilkinson, Luana Dwyer, David Butler and myself. I found it always good to meet up and cave with different groups and today was no different. The main objective for today was C-471 which is yet to be bottomed due to high CO2 level. We also had some other cave options if we had time, so I was looking forward to this. I was surprised that the cave entrance was only a short walk from where we parked the cars. Greg entered and started to rig as this was another vertical cave. The small entrance chamber contained a window which had to be entered for the start of the pitch. This was quite small and awkward but there was a safe spot inside to get onto the rope. The first pitch of 20m was quite tight landing at the top of a steeply sloping chamber filled with rubble. Any dislodged rocks were heading for the second pitch 10m away, so it was careful treading. We waited while Greg descended the second pitch which was supposed to be 60m, but not long after he returned saying that he reached high levels of CO2 about 20m down and so we could not continue. So we had no choice but to proceed to exit and leave the end of this cave still unknown.

So we had some time on our hands and the plan B was instigated. First we went to Twin holes C-36 which is an easy climb down cave next to the road. This consists of 2 adjoining holes connected by a bridge, not a lot to see but this is a known spot for snakes, but we were unlucky enough not to see one. Further down the road and again close to road is Owls Roost C-4 which is well known locally. This cave is entered via a large pothole of 10m diameter and 10m deep using a permanent chain ladder. Some care had to be taken on the ladder because a fall here could result in serious injuries. Once down in the cave the single chamber is quite spacious, forming a V shape and containing some large decorations of reasonable quality. But we did however find to our dismay some graffiti. We were able to remove the graffiti by scrubbing with some water and brushes and we were all very pleased with the result we got as none of us were expecting to do any cave restoration.

Post-conference caving Day 3

This was the last opportunity to go caving as the convoy of groups leaving was to commence just after lunch. So our first job was to pull down everything and pack the vehicles ready to leave. With that in mind all the trips scheduled for today were easy short trips. My choice was Papillon C-15 and Anomaly C-96. So off we went to Papillon which was reputed to be very hot and full of cave fauna. We had to climb down past the dead wallaby, but once down the heat was pretty obvious, and then we started to discover the bugs ! Schizomids (an arachnid), spiders, scutigera (aka hairy mary), white centipedes, and many more. The cameras were out and flashing with everyone trying capture good photos of these bugs. This activity ate up our cave time and so we did not have enough time to go and see Anomaly cave and we needed to get back to camp for the final packing of vehicles and commencement of the convoy as we had to make a rendezvous with the military staff so we could take the easy route through the military base.

This was the end of a fabulous series of pre/post conference trips and just like to pay tribute to the organisers, they did a fantastic job of leading us through these caves. Safety was always a paramount feature as was the great enjoyment of meeting and caving with new people, most of which I had never been caving with before. Such as sad time to say goodbye to everyone there.

ASF Conference 2015 – Exmouth, Western Australia

-Rod Smith

The various participants mentioned:

Rod Smith, Jim Crockett (MSS), Kevin Moore (SUSS), Ian Collette (WASG), Fran Head (WASG), Greg Thomas (WASG), Denis Marsh (OSS), Luana Dwyer (WASG), Gregori (WASG – I think), Weidi Koh (WASG), Roz Hart (ex-WASG), David Butler (NC), Cathie Plowman (NC), Danny Wilkinson (WASG), Lana Little (ASF individual), Garry K Smith (NHVSS), David Wools-Cobb (NC), Miles Pierce (VSA), Ian Curtis (OSS), Darren Brooks (WASG), Al Caton (RSS), Deb Hunter (MCCC), Steve West (WASG), Graham Pilkington (CEGSA), Janice March (NC), Lisa (WASG – I think), Rob Susac (WASG), Bob Kershaw (ISS), Sarah Gilbert (STC), Ian Lutherburrow (HCG), Grace Matts (ASF individual), Ann-Marie Meredith (WASG), John Taylor (KSS), Dominique (An adventure cave guide from the Margaret River area), Asha Lane (WASG), Brett Wiltshire (WASG)

Club acronyms:

MSS – Metropolitan Speleological Society
SUSS – Sydney University Speleological Society
WASG – Western Australian Speleological Group
OSS – Orange Speleological Society
NC – Northern Caverneers
NHVSS – Newcastle and Hunter Valley Speleological Society
VSA – Victorian Speleological Association
RSS – Rovers Speleological Society
MCCC – Mole Creek Caving Club
CEGSA – Cave Exploration Group of South Australia
ISS – Illawarra Speleological Society
STC – Southern Tasmania Caverneers
HCG – Highland Caving Group
KSS – Kempsey Speleological Society

As most of you would be aware, every two years there is an ASF conference. It is rotated amongst the states, so in 2013 NSW held the conference at Galong near Yass. This year the conference was held in Exmouth in WA. Having been to the 2013 conference, in fact I was part of the organising committee, I had had my taste for the experience and the 2015 conference was a great excuse to travel to a part of Australia I had never been too before.

As the saying goes “if it wasn’t for the last minute nothing would get done around here”, the night before my flight I started packing. With the alarm going off at 5:30am Monday morning, I had to be reasonably well prepared before going to bed. I awoke on time, showered, and put the last couple of things into the appropriate bags. Jim, with the taxi he had ordered, was already there and waiting when I walked out the front door. It feels good to get to the airport and check-in with no issues and be ready to board in plenty of time.

The flight departed on time and actually landed us in Perth about 20 minutes early. After getting our luggage we found the Avis desk to get our hire car. The bad news was that they didn’t have the Outlander Jim had booked. The good news was that it meant we were upgraded to a Pajero at no extra cost. Now all we had to do was find Kevin. A quick phone call determined he was in the cafe next to the Avis desk. So we looked through the cafe and couldn’t find him. Another phone call and we realised the cafe he was in had a different name. It turns out there are two Avis desks at Perth airport, for reasons that may remain a mystery to me.

After a lap around the airport we finally got out and onto a main road. A short time later we were on a main road heading in the correct direction. A little bit later again we were on a freeway heading north.

The first stop was a mall, not for sightseeing, but to stock up on some food for the drive to Exmouth. The one thing to note was that we had lunch in the “dining precinct”, not the “food court”. Maybe this was meant to be the more upmarket area of Perth.

Our second stop for the day was The Pinnacles. It’s an amazing area, which photos could describe much better than I could. We arrived late in the day, but had enough time for a walk around and marvel at the geological wonder. While there we also saw a reference to a cave in Stockyard Gully, apparently not far north of there. Something we would have to try and find.

The Pinnacles



We left The Pinnacles as dusk was approaching. We opted not to drive into the night and instead stopped at the caravan park at Green Head. Jim asked the gentleman at the counter if he knew about Stockyard Gully. Not only did he know about it, he even gave us a mud map including distances of how to get there. On top of that he told us that there were three caves to look at, the one with the tourist track and the two downstream from there. This sounded like the plan for the morning, but we still needed a plan for dinner. We were very helpfully informed that the only option was the hotel down the road, but we’d want to get there early to ensure we got a table. We took the advice, got there early, and no other customers appeared that evening.

We stuck to the plan and drove to Stockyard Gully to start the next day’s travel. The road out to it is OK for a 4WD, but you’d have trouble getting a 2wd car out there.

The first cave is a tunnel the gully follows, approximately 10 metres wide and 5 metres high. It goes far enough and with enough turns that a light as a must. Considering it was three cavers no-one would be surprised to learn we checked out every hole we could find heading off the main tunnel. One looked reasonably significant, but just inside had a sign saying “No entry: this area has not been surveyed and may be unstable”. We had survey gear in the car, but decided against getting it. Not surprisingly we found out later that it had been surveyed, and is quite stable.

There are a lot of wild bees and beehives in the area, so they posted a sign to be aware of the bees. They didn’t seem to be particularly active, but we didn’t try stirring them up.

The second cave would be better described as an arch, and a torch is not required. The third cave is very close to the second and is a proper cave. According to the gentleman at the Green Head Caravan Park, this third cave exited about 3km out to sea. This would mean that, in a straight line, it would be at least 17km long. We had our doubts. It was definitely longer than the second cave/arch. It also became a boulder pile a short distance in which slowed our progress significantly. We decided that we still had a long way to drive and didn’t want to spend too much time here, so we made our way back to the car.

We drove back to the main road and turned northwards again. We didn’t get far before stopping at Leeman for morning tea. We stopped at a cafe called Fran’s Kitchen, where Kevin and I both had a home-made sausage roll. This was one of the two best sausage rolls I had ever had (the other being at a cafe on Bells Line of Road). Definitely a good place to stop if you’re ever in the neighbourhood.

Lunch was at Northampton, where the cafe had a sign saying “many have eaten here and survived”. Having passed Geraldton, towns and other forms of civilisation become smaller and sparser. The first Roadhouse we came to was Billabong Roadhouse. There we stopped for fuel and change of driver. While there some of the Western Australians, including Ian Collette, Fran and Greg, also stopped for fuel. After chatting for a while we all went on our way.

We had decided that we’d drive out to Hamelin to look at the stromatalites. We arrived shortly before sunset but with enough time to have a look at the stromatalites. We camped at Hamelin for the night.

Wednesday morning drove back to the highway and once again turned northwards. Our next stop was Carnarvon, which has the OTC museum. This was one of the sites used for communication with the moon landings. It also has extra significance for Jim as OTC, as they were known then, is the company Jim works for, and he knew some of the guys that had worked over there. It was interesting seeing the type of equipment they used at the time.

We left Carnarvon and drove on the Minilya Roadhouse where we stopped for lunch. There were two young ladies, presumably backpackers, working there, one was from France and the other from Argentina. Just passed Minilya is the turnoff for Exmouth.

We arrived at Exmouth at approximately 4:00pm and had no trouble finding our accommodation for the week. Shortly afterwards Denis found us. That evening we registered for the Thursday pre-conference caving trip and met some of the other cavers.

Thursday was a bit of an early start for a holiday, but not really too bad. It was a short drive to the designated meeting point. There we found that there had been some small adjustments made to the trips, but nothing to concern us. I joined a group including Kevin, Luana, Gregori, Weidi, Roz, David Butler, Cathie, Danny and Lana, and lead by Ian Collette. We drove around to the Cape Range National Park and the Milyering Discovery Centre. Half the group stopped here to go snorkelling for the morning while the rest of us drove on a short distance to visit C215. We were told it’d only a 200m walk to the cave, it turned out to be closer to 500m.

The entrance to C215 is under a fig tree and has a small entrance pitch. It’d be possible to climb the pitch, but the decision was made to rig a ladder. From the bottom of the pitch the cave slopes down in all directions, with the way onwards being to the south west. There’s a bit of a rock-pile with a hole in the floor being the way on. All packs were sent through except for Danny’s massive pelican case that we couldn’t make fit. All the cavers fit except for Kevin and me, and not for want of trying.

While we waited for the others to return we explored the rest of the entry chamber, and found a hole in the roof with a breeze blowing out. I managed to climb up to have a look. There were about three possible, but small, leads, but I couldn’t tell where the breeze coming from.

With no more exploring to do we sat down to wait. It didn’t seem too long before we could hear the others returning. Some of them had got wet to their hips, while others were wet to the armpits. It didn’t matter too much as there was a light rain when we exited, although we seemed to avoid the worst of it.

Back to the Discovery Centre so we could go snorkelling while the rest of the group went to the cave. Once they’d departed we sat down for lunch and watched as more rain came over. Although we’d get wet anyway, the weather didn’t inspire anyone to go snorkelling, so we drove back to Exmouth.

Friday I chose a different type of trip, joining the Greg lead group of Garry, David Wools-Cobb, Denis and Miles to visit C64, Shothole Tunnel. We drove out the Shothole Canyon Road, which had

seen some damage during the last wet season. Although it's called a canyon, it's not like what we're used to in the Blue Mountains.

Greg had never been to Shothole Tunnel, but he did have the GPS coordinates as well as a description of what to look for. We stopped at a spot he believed was the place to park, but he hadn't seen a navigational marker he was looking for. So the decision was made to drive to the end of the road where there's a lookout. It is only a short walk to the lookout which, although certainly not the highest point around, offered some great views.

We headed back down the road and Greg stopped us at a different spot, which, according to the GPS, was the closest point on the road to the cave. The only problem was that it didn't allow for the ridge we would have to climb and descend to get to the cave, so we had gone barely 50m before returning to the cars and looking for a flatter approach.

The next spot we stopped at we soon found was the spot the previous day's group had stopped at, so we were more confident as we left the cars. After a few hundred metres we hit a creek bed just up from a junction with another creek. Considering the creeks are all dry at this time of year and free from spinifex, the creek seemed to be the logic route to follow. We walked a reasonable distance up the creek, at least a couple of kms, before realising we'd still have to cross a ridge to get to the cave, we should have gone up the other creek from the junction.

I wasn't keen to retrace our steps back to the junction, I felt up and over would have been quicker, but Greg felt it would be better for the whole group to stay on the flatter terrain. So we turned around and went back. Taking the other creek we went a short distance and arrived at another junction. Looking up the left option we didn't go far before realising it wouldn't go. So taking the right option we kept going.

When we reached the headwaters the GPS confirmed we were finally in the correct location, the cave was too close to be on the other side of a ridge. The only problem was that we still couldn't actually see the cave. So we kept following the GPS and found C116, which we'd been told was just below C64. Greg and I found an awkward climb to get us up to C64, Garry found another way and joined us less than a minute later. Greg then guided the other three up an easier way.

We had lunch at the entrance then entered the cave. It starts large enough to be walkable before dropping down a slope and turning sharply to the right. From there on it's crawling, some sections higher than others. We were aiming to get to the sump, it's very hot in the cave and the thought of jumping in the water was very appealing. Miles turned around shortly into the crawl which, in hindsight, is what I should have done. Instead I continued with the rest of the group, eventually getting to the squeeze which is just before the sump. I did make a concerted effort to get through the squeeze, but it wasn't going to happen.

With the heat and exertion I decided to just lie down and recover for a while. So I was laying on my back looking at the roof a couple of centimetres above my face and listening to the rest of the group splashing around in the sump.

After a while I decided to get a head start and head for the exit. But before I'd gone anywhere David arrived at the other end of the squeeze, and asked if I could spot him coming through. I couldn't say no, so I kept an eye on him and made sure he picked the right line. The other followed after, so much for the head start.

Not surprisingly it wasn't long before I was at the back of the group again. This didn't bother me, but Greg did the responsible trip leader thing and waited for me. By the time we got back to the walkable section the others were taking some chamber photos. At least they allowed me a couple of minutes rest before exiting and heading for the cars.

Once we were walking and not crawling I didn't have any trouble keeping up, in fact I was the first back to the cars. The others weren't far behind, and then we packed up and returned to Exmouth. The fifth caver to be sharing our accommodation, Ian Curtis, arrived later that afternoon.

After two trips that had resulted in not reaching the end of the cave, I was debating whether to have a third attempt or not. In the end I decided to join an easy trip lead by Darren. The rest of the group was Ian Curtis, Denis, Cathie and Miles. This time we drove up Charles Knife Rd which goes onto the top of Cape Range. The views on the drive up were very impressive, with Ian getting excited by all the holes he could see. One in particular looked to be worth closer inspection, and we found out later it is C8. We stopped at one lookout on the drive out.



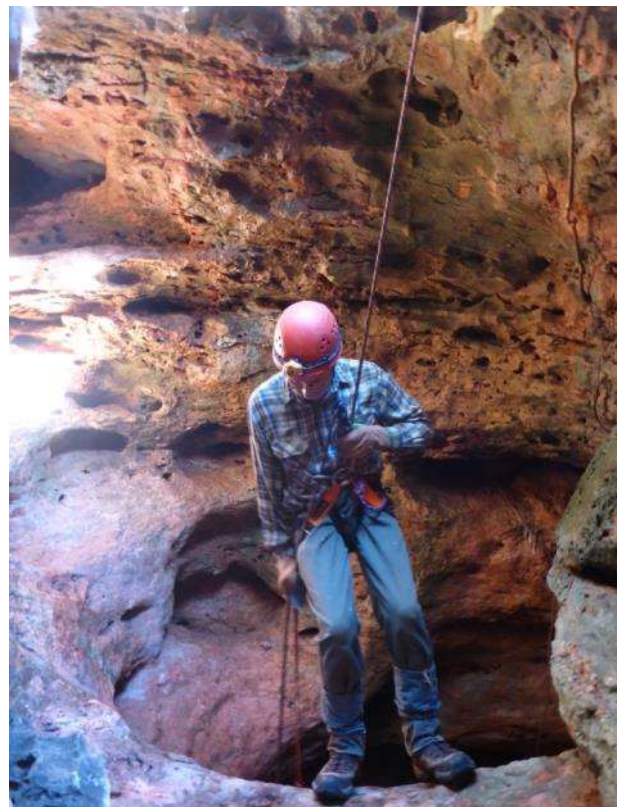
Admiring the view from Charles Knife Road

We arrived at the carpark for the days cave and unloaded our SRT gear. It was at that point that I realised I must have left my rack back in Sydney. I checked with Darren if he'd object to me using a munter hitch, which he didn't. I didn't feel too bad when I found out that Darren had forgotten his harness.

It's only a short walk from the carpark to Bell Cave – C29. Darren rigged the entrance pitch while the rest of us put on our harnesses. The cave is well named, with the rope dropping almost into the centre of a beautiful bell-shaped chamber. Ian descended first, and from the noises he was making we could all tell he was enjoying himself. Cathie followed and then Miles, who had decided to use a Petzl Stop which he had never used before. After Darren showed him how it worked he descended followed by myself and Denis.

There's one passage leading off the chamber which then splits after a short distance. We went left first and found the passage choked out after a while. The right passage is a bit longer and has some decoration in the end. After three attempts I finally entered a cave and saw the entirety of it.

Back to the entrance chamber and time to exit. With the entrance pitch being over 30 metres this was going to be the slowest part of the day. But no-one minded and we were not in a hurry. We all ascended and found Darren at the top. He had gone for a walk while we were underground to see a nearby cave. There had been reports that the nearby cave had changed significantly due to the most recent wet season which had included cyclones. Darren found the cave exact as he had seen it previously.



Miles about to descend into Bell Cave

At the carpark was a picnic table so, considering it was also a good time for it, we had lunch. The lunchtime conversation focused on the local flora and fauna, and I was impressed at the knowledge within the group, of which I could contribute very little.

The rest of the day was spent driving to, and checking out, a number of features in the area. The first was Corkscrew Cave – C56, which is apparently named for the entrance section. The next stop was the end of the road where a well had been sunk looking for minerals and any other natural resources. The well was approximately 2.7km deep, and they didn't find anything useful.

We then had a look at an example of National Parks old risk management strategy. C10 is a cave quite close to the road and not at all difficult to find. So, to stop anyone falling in and hurting themselves, National Parks had fenced it off and filled the entrance with concrete. We left there and went back to Exmouth, stopping at a couple of lookouts on the way back.

That evening we found out that Fran had broken her ankle the night before. We also found out that a trip to check out C849, which hadn't been previously explored, had found the cave didn't go far, but they had surveyed it while there.

Kevin had booked him and me into a whaleshark snorkelling tour for Sunday. This meant the earliest start for the holiday as we had to be out the front at 7:25am to be picked up. After picking up more people we were taken round to the west coast, not far from the National Park entrance. There we were ferried out to the boat we would be spending the day on.

We were introduced to our crew. Todd was our captain for the day. Mick was deckhand, spotter, and probably a lot of other things I didn't notice. Janine Marx is a professional underwater photographer. And the two Mels, who snorkelled with us and were basically our in-water guides for the day.

The first spot we went to is called Amazeballs, and this was for everyone to get into the water and do some snorkelling, and make sure all the equipment fit and didn't leak. But it is also a great spot and we saw plenty of fish and coral, plus a couple of stingray and other aquatic wildlife.

Next we went out of the reef and into the open ocean. Because the water was so calm inside the reef I hadn't thought about seasickness. I was alright for a while, but started to feel a bit off by the time we reached the first whaleshark. I still felt that I was doing better than a couple of others who looked very green. I jumped in for the first swim, which felt a bit disorganised with people going everywhere, but I still got a reasonable view of the whaleshark. Getting back on the boat was actually the worst feeling, so I decided to sit out the next couple of whaleshark swims.

We saw a total of three whalesharks plus a couple of humpback whales from a distance before going back inside the reef. As we were motoring to our next location we saw a dugong from a distance. We then had lunch before jumping in for another snorkel. Feeling better now that we were in calmer waters I got back in the water. This was quite a long snorkel on the reef, and very enjoyable admiring the various animals.

We returned feeling that the trip had been money well spent. But the day wasn't over as the conference welcome BBQ was scheduled for that evening.

We'd been told that the bar opened at 5pm, so we were there close to 5 and were some of the first to arrive. People drifted in over the next hour so that by the time the BBQ started almost everyone registered was there. The food was awesome, and no-one went hungry. During the meal I was chatting to Cathie and found out that she is an aunt of someone in my SES unit. Another example of what a small world it is.

Included in the evening was a raffle. There seemed to be a disproportionate number of winners from WA, which caused some comments, but was probably because WA was very well represented at the conference.

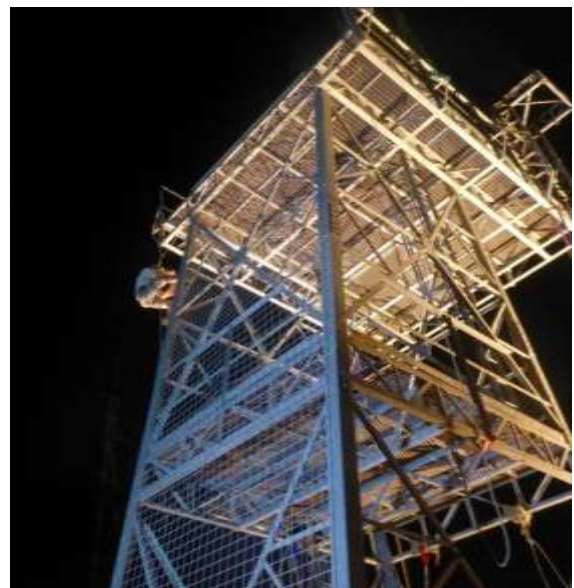
Monday the conference was officially opened by the Shire President. This was followed by Darren giving us an introduction to the Cape Range karst and then the keynote speaker Dr Bill Humphries. The rest of the morning talks covered different aspects of the area, including the history, World Heritage listing, and aspects of the karst area.

The talks continued after lunch, starting with a fascinating talk about how a mathematical degree lead to better modelling of climate data retrieved from various sources, including speleothems. This was followed with details regarding a massive project of remapping the Jenolan show cave system that has been ongoing for well over a decade, and then details of archaeological work that was conducted in caves in Southern WA. The last item for the day was a workshop run by Kevin on building a Disto X2, a very useful tool for cave surveying.

Monday evening a lot of the preparations were made for the post-conference trips, with final details to be ironed out over the week.

Tuesday was a full day of presentations covering a large variety of topics including safety and risk management, cave diving expeditions, cave photography, caving and cave fauna study in South East Asia, cave animal of the year, and reminiscing of conferences and caving of the past. All extremely well presented and very interesting. The day's sessions finished with a workshop about the UIS conference to be held in Sydney in 2017.

That evening was the SRT challenge. There were two separate challenges set up. The first was a straight 30m prussic, rigged on a pulley and descender as there was nowhere nearby where a 30m rope could be hung freely. The second challenge was an obstacle course including prussiking, knot crossing, rebelay, a small tyrollean and other rope skills. I didn't participate in either activity, but did take a lot of photos.



Top: Al Warild on the Obstacle Course



Right: Al Warild about to start the Prusik Challenge

Wednesday was a mid-week field trip. This was planned as an opportunity to see various aspects of the Cape Range area. Two buses were hired to transport everyone.

The first stop was the lighthouse, which had quite an impressive view. Then we moved on to some rockholes, in which we could see some blind fish. The next stop was the Milyering Discovery Centre, then further down the road we looked at some flank margin caves. After that we arrived at Yardie Creek for a boat tour.



Yardie Creek

Because of the size of the boat we had to go in two groups. I was in the second group, so we had lunch while the first group headed out. After they returned we got our chance. The main focus on the tour was the endemic rock wallaby. There were quite a few visible, once you knew where to look. Besides the rock wallabies there was osprey, other birds, various fish and plants, plus some more history of the area.



Jim in Mandu Mandu Gorge

Rock Wallabies in Yardie Creek



Mandu Mandu Gorge

After the boat tour people had an option of either a spot of snorkelling or a walk up Mandu Mandu Gorge. I opted for the walk as I didn't have any snorkelling gear with me. There was a loop track which, according to the signs, we wouldn't have time to complete. Nevertheless we started walking up the gorge. Half the track was in the bottom of the gorge and then it climbed onto the rim and the rest was at the top. We made good time getting to the point where the track climbed onto the rim, so we decided we had enough time to do the complete loop. Then round the corner we found two caves.

How could we not stop for a look, we are cavers after all. Both appeared to be flank margin caves. No real depth to them, but reasonably wide and containing some decoration. We had a good look and GPSed them. By the time we finished we found that we no longer had plenty of time to get back. Although I don't like having people behind me, there was three together so I decided it would be better to get back and let them know how many more were still coming. The bus was waiting when I got back, but no-one seemed overly concerned.

After picking up the snorkelers we all made our way back to Exmouth. That evening there was a photo display for the locals to learn more about speleology. Also the photos entered into the photo comp for the conference were on display for everyone to vote on. There were so many good shots it was very difficult to make a choice.

Thursday started with the first half of the ASF council meeting. We managed to get through the majority of the agenda, including a couple of contentious issues. This meant that the second half on Friday afternoon should go reasonably quick.

After morning tea there were three presentations, the first an update on the threat to Cliefden Caves. Following this was details about strain gauges installed by the late Lloyd Robinson in various caves around Australia. The last a presentation by Garry on calcite straws growing in concrete.

David Wools-Cobb

Following lunch was the speleosports. For those unfamiliar with the concept, this is a team event where, usually, teams of four have to negotiate an obstacle course, which are a representation of the types of obstacles that can be found in caves. This one was set in and around a playground. It started with a survey leg followed by a crawl through a tunnel with a locked gate at the far end. Shortly after the gate competitors were required to connect a carabineer, which was attached to a band on their wrist, to a fixed line.



They then had to follow this fixed line over, through and under the playground equipment. At the other end of the fixed line was a short flying fox then a crawl through suspended tyres with water in them, although only one of the team had to do this.



Left & Right; Garry Smith

Lastly another team member was required to do a short ladder climb to exchange a carabineer at the top. The team was also required to take one pack with them through the course. And at various points were different types of pasta, to represent speleothems, and time would be added to the teams result for any damage.

I decided, just for the fun of it, to join a team and have a go. Before lunch I had got myself on a team with Jim, Al and Deb. Unfortunately Deb received some very bad news over lunch and had to pull out. So at the last minute we recruited Steve to join our team.



Above: Dominique on the Flying Fox

Looking at the course I was concerned there were a couple of sections I wouldn't be able to fit through. Rather than wait for our turn to find out I tried one of the squeezes, through the rungs of a ladder used to climb onto some of the equipment. It looked like I'd fit, but as I tried to back out my t-shirt curled around the lower rung and got me stuck. This meant that the team about to start had to wait for me to extricate myself. I'd already embarrassed myself and we hadn't even started.

While watching the first team we came up with some tactics. The main tactic that I needed to know was that I would be last to ensure I wouldn't slow the others. Then we decided to get our go out of the way.

After the survey leg we entered the tunnel and through the gate. Not surprisingly I fell behind rather quickly, but that didn't bother me. I kept going as quickly as I could, all the while thinking I needed to lose weight and get fitter. I somehow managed to catch up at one point, which was useful for Jim as I was able to give him a leg up on one obstacle. In the end I wasn't far behind the rest of the team.

After getting my breath back I then started brushing the sand off me, although only a shower and washing my clothes would fully get rid of it all. I could then watch the other teams and take plenty of photos. It was a really great afternoon.

After dinner was the quiz night, with teams of six competing. I lined up a team with Ian Curtis, Graham, Steve, Janice and Lisa. After a slow start we were quite competitive in the middle, at one stage only one point behind the two teams on equal first. Unfortunately a couple of bad rounds meant we ended up out of the places.



Quiz Night

During the course of the evening there were some extra diversions. Apparently they'd over-catered on the alcohol and decided some impromptu little competitions with some of the alcohol as prizes would be a way to solve the problem. The first bottle to be given away would go to the first person to show Fran that they were wearing red underwear. I was wearing the wrong colour, and probably wouldn't have been able to get up there as quick as Rob anyway. Next prize went to the first person who could bring up \$1.75 in change, Bob only just beat me to that one. Next was for the first person to bring up a bra without a woman in it, Sarah managed to remove hers from under her top while on the run up to Fran. This was followed by the first person to bring up a pair of jocks without the man in them. Bob started running for the bathroom when a pair was thrown up from Ian Lutherburrow. There was also one for the first person to bring up a list of all US states beginning with N.

At the end of the evening there were two teams equal first. Only one tie-break question was required to resolve the winning team. Jim was in the team that finished third.

Friday started with a single presentation, on unusual caves of Australia. This was followed by a workshop on OzKarst. I'd seen OzKarst before and didn't feel the need to go through it again. This went right up to lunch which was followed by the second half of the council meeting. The meeting went quickly with no issues, so we had plenty of time before the Cavers Dinner.

Dinner was great. They put on a buffet of roast meats, vegetables and salads, and there was plenty of food. During dinner they also held an auction to raise money for the Karst Conservation Fund. I ended up with a snorkel and mask, a couple of carabineers and a DVD. They also presented the winners of the photo comp, the prussik challenge and the speleosports (we didn't come last!!). Grace was also awarded a fellowship of the ASF, which was amusing because she wasn't paying attention and so didn't realise what she was being presented with.

The evening finished with a lot of socialising with fellow cavers. Another enjoyable night.

Although the conference was now officially over, the trip certainly wasn't, and next was the post-conference trip. The plan was for camping up on the range for three nights and numerous caves in the area. Saturday was spent in preparation, starting with buying food for the trip. We were all going up in a convoy because we had permission to cross the airport and avoid the roughest section of track, but we all had to be there together. Denis wasn't staying and needed to get to the airport for his flight home, so we made arrangements that I would drop him at the airport and get picked up from there. We were leaving the hire car at the airport as we were told the car would get badly scratched if we took it up onto the range.

All went according to plan; I saw Denis off and was then picked up by Greg for the drive up. We were specifically told that we were not allowed to take photos as we crossed the airport, not that I saw a whole lot worth photographing.

Greg was in the lead driving onto the range, and soon left most of the others behind. There were quite a few vehicles and we ended up spread out a long way. We found the designated camping spot and started setting up. Everyone else drifted in over the next hour or so. Since provisions were made for toilets and communal areas, we helped set them up after pitching our own tents. The day finished with preparations for Sunday's caving trips.

My first choice for Sunday was to visit C127, considered the best decorated cave in the Cape Range. The problem was the entry, which I was told I probably wouldn't fit through. So I then chose my second option, which was to do a surface trog with the aim of getting more accurate coordinates for a number of caves and investigate some possible new features.

So Sunday morning I joined Graham and Ann-Marie for some surface work. We planned our route for the day, but due to Ann-Marie dropping off another group for their caving adventure we were the last to get started. A short drive to the Spiral carpark and then on foot. The first part of our walk was to pass a number of known caves and get an accurate GPS reading for their location. Although the plots we had were not overly accurate, and with no other information, we still managed to find every cave we were looking for. We also found three other features, one solutional feature, one doline and Ann-Marie found a cave that required some rock removal.



A Bunch Of Cavers

Even though this was supposed to only be the first part of our walk, by the time we'd finished we were running out of daylight and so made our way back to the car. We weren't the last to arrive back at camp, but most people had beaten us back.

Jim, Kevin and I had arranged to share cooking facilities with Cathie and David Butler. Since they'd driven from Tasmania they had a gas stove and car fridge, as well as pots, pans, cutlery and crockery. Being able to use their equipment made things a lot easier for us and was greatly appreciated.

Monday I decided to join Graham and Ann-Marie again, the only difference being that Kevin also joined us. With the aim of covering some of the territory we hadn't got to on Sunday, we headed to the same area, but picked a slightly different parking site.

About 10 metres from the car I found a piece of PVC pipe buried vertically into the ground to a depth of about 20cm. The inside was empty, except for the remains of a long dead animal in the bottom. I had no idea what it was there for. Leaving that mystery behind us, we began our walk for the day.

The first objective was to find a feature marked as "new pit" on the copy of the map we had. We spent a reasonable amount of time looking for it and found nothing that could even remotely be classed as a new pit. We decided that the feature didn't actually exist and so moved on to more features that were much more likely to exist.

The next three features we were looking for were hard to find, but we found them in the end. Considering a couple of caves we had no idea where they were until we were within 5 metres of them, it shows why accurate coordinates needed to be taken for them.

After that we went to Ann-Marie's find from the day before, which had now been named Swimming with Mermaids. We began rock removal and soon were able to get in the entrance. Ann-Marie went in and was able to descend about 6 metres before getting to the next section requiring some rock relocation. I joined her and we set to work. We seemed to move a lot of rocks and although it continued to look promising we were unable to make any significant progress. Eventually we decided that we were not going to make the breakthrough that day and retreated to the surface. While we were underground Graham and I found another hole a short distance away that is most likely connected with Swimming with Mermaids.

We'd spent a few hours at the dig and now it was getting late in the afternoon. So the decision was made to return to the car, but we had time to look for prospects on the way back. Picking a section of terrain we hadn't already covered we slowly made our way back, but unfortunately found nothing of interest on the way.

When we returned to camp we told Darren and others about the PVC pipe I'd found. Someone identified it as a trap to capture small marsupials, presumably as part of some scientific study. However, when it had been finished with it should have been removed so that other animals didn't fall in and starve to death in the bottom. We felt that it had been irresponsible of the researcher to leave it as I'd found it and that we should do something about it. Digging it out would be difficult, but we realised the next best option would be to fill it with rocks so that it could be emptied again if required, and no animals would fall into in the mean-time.

The decision had been made to leave Tuesday, so the first thing we did was pack up. Next was to sort out a lift back to the airport, which proved to be more difficult than it should have been. Once that was done I secured a lift to Twin Holes, which was an easy cave to do on the way out. Before getting to Twin Holes we stopped at the PVC pipe trap to fill it with rocks, and I'm glad we did. When we got there I found that the trap was no longer empty, as a small bird had fallen in and couldn't get out. Ian Curtis, who was with us, produced a leather glove so we could lift the bird out without it biting or scratching us. I had a go first but was more nervous than I should have been and clearly wasn't getting anywhere. So I handed the glove back to Ian and managed to lift the bird out. As soon as it was above the edge of the pipe it flew away, without so much as a thank you. I then filled in the pipe and we made our way to Twin Holes.

At Twin Holes Ian and I joined Garry, David Wools-Cobb, David Butler, Cathie, John, Dominique and Kevin. The climb in to the cave is not too difficult. The cave is well named as it consists of two holes connected at the bottom by a small scramble. Not much else to the cave besides the holes, but still worth a look.

We then went down the road to Owls Roost, which was close enough that a couple of us walked. We had lunch before entering the cave. The entrance pitch has a fixed ladder, which looked like it was made of a number of axles for the rungs and held together by chain.



Decoration in Twin Holes Cave



Right ; Decoration in Owl Roost

Below; Dry Rim Pools in Owl Roost .

Owls Roost is a little bit more extensive than Twin Holes and includes some decoration in a couple of places. We spent some time in the bottom, taking photos and exploring, before deciding it was time to exit. I went up first and was asked to pose for some photos while on the ladder.

Shortly after reaching the surface a car pulled up, and Asha and Brett jumped out. They had decided on doing some speed caving in an attempt to see as many caves as they could be the trip was over. They managed to find a gap in the stream of people exiting and quickly descended the ladder.



Soon other cars started to arrive, this being the convoy heading for the airport, which we had to join. I got a lift with Ian Collette who seemed displeased with the pace, or lack thereof, of the vehicles in front of us. Despite the slow pace we arrived at the airport on time to be escorted across. Jim, Kevin and I were then dropped at our hire car to begin our drive back to Perth.

It was already mid-afternoon so we didn't plan to go far before stopping for the night. We decided on Coral Bay, which is about 10km off the highway. We arrived to find the caravan parks reasonably full, but not completely, so we had somewhere to stop for the night.

Sunset at Coral Bay

With a bit of daylight left we walked over to the beach and Jim and Kevin went for a swim. I waded in a little bit, and still managed to see a small sting ray swimming around. We stayed on the beach to watch the sunset and then went in search of food. There weren't a lot of options, but what we had was quite good.



Kevin and I had a “Big Kev’s Breakfast Pie” for breakfast at the local bakery the next morning. I recommended it next time you’re in Coral Bay.

The plan for the day was to drive to Monkey Mia to see the dolphins the following morning. Although not a huge distance we still spent most of the day in the car. We did stop at Shell Beach on the way. As the name would suggest, it’s a beach made predominantly from shells. Worth a look, but don’t expect to be blown away.

We arrived at Monkey Mia late afternoon and secured our camp site for the evening. We then ventured to the pub for a meal. The pizza was delicious, but the colour of the Solo had me a little concerned.

We joined the dolphin experience after breakfast. Not surprisingly there were a lot of people there. We did get to see the dolphins, and some lucky people (not us) got to feed them as well. Like a lot of these things it’s more overly commercialised than I’d prefer, but still worth doing. We then had a swim before packing up and heading off.



Appropriately named Shell Beach

Another day of primarily driving with the aim of getting to Kalbarri National Park and seeing some of the sites. There are four tourist stops in the national park and we got to three before running out of time. The scenery is very impressive and was well worth a look. We then drove into Kalbarri township to find somewhere to stay the night.

Friday we decided to try to get to Yanchep to do a cave tour, so the third straight day of driving a reasonable distance. Garry had told me about a beach on the north side of Geraldton that was worth a look as it was primarily made of Garnet and so was a purple colour. Unfortunately I missed the turnoff I was looking for, and there were no signs. Once we realised we’d missed it we thought it better to just keep going, it’ll give me another thing to go back for.

We made it to Yanchep just in time for the last tour of the day. Our guide, Inga, was very enthusiastic, which made for a great tour. We told her we were cavers which, if possible, seemed to get her even more excited.

We stayed that night in Perth’s northern suburbs. It meant we were in no rush to get to the airport Saturday morning, which we were happy about. No issues on the trip back to Sydney, except Jim had forgotten to take a penknife out of his carry-on luggage and ended up surrendering it to security.

It was an awesome trip and I would thoroughly recommend any caver to attend at least one conference. Since the conferences are rotated around the states, most will include pre and post conference trips to areas you would rarely visit, and with local and knowledgeable guides as well. The presentations are generally interesting and informative, and the other activities are a lot of fun. And most importantly you get to mingle with like-minded people and make connections from all over the country.

Abercrombie Caves 18th July

-Angus Wildie

On Saturday 18 July, Sapphire and I attempted to participate in an MSS Adventure caving trip to Abercrombie Caves. There had been unusually heavy snowfalls in the previous 2 days, and this turned into a very unusual trip, which I thought would be good to document.



First thing that was unusual was that the Great Western Highway was closed between Katoomba and Hartley due to black ice. That meant a change of direction to the longer Southern route.

A. Crookwell Wind Farm



There was snow on the ground from just north of Goulburn. By Crookwell it was 20cm deep, and not aware it was going to continue for over 100kms of driving, stopped for a snowball fight.

The road just north of Crookwell had a barricade across it bearing a sign marking it as closed. Naturally we understood that this sign was only directed at other people and drove around it.

The road through to Tuena had not been fully cleared. Half the road was covered in snow, and there were branches and whole trees pulled down by the weight of the snow over the road. Slow going, but we got through.

The photo on the left shows the Tuena camping ground we have stayed at many times. It was under 10 – 20cm of snow.





We finally reached our objective – Abercrombie Caves about midday (2 hours slower than we would normally have done). Another road block was placed on the road, also intended for other people, so we drove down to the campground past even more fallen trees.

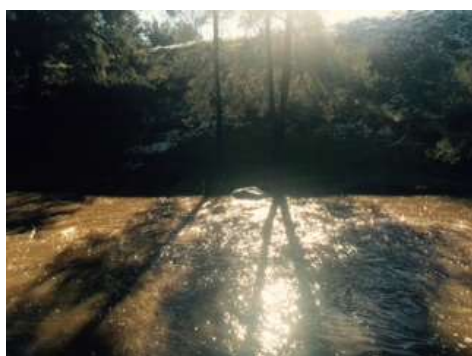
At the bottom of the hill the fallen trees were impassable by car, so the rest of the journey was on foot.

The causeway was under some water, but could still be crossed with dry feet. The normally placid Grove Creek though was now displaying characteristics of a Class IV rapid. The gold in the creek will have certainly been churned up and reconcentrated.



The campground was under a good 20cm of snow, and most definitely inaccessible with fallen trees. Our trip leader was nowhere to be seen. There is no mobile phone coverage in the best of times in this area, so we drew the conclusion that the trip was abandoned.

With blue skies and 5 more hours of sunlight, there was still time to look for some gold – so back to Tuena.



The Mt. Costigan Road causeway was well under water and blocked with fallen trees, so we had to park on the Western side of the creek. All the usual digging places were under water, and the creek running too quickly to cross, no matter how far down the creek we walked. The site I refer to as the Tuena super pit was under 1.5m of fast flowing water.



After a bite of lunch and a long walk along the west bank of the Tuena creek, with periodic attempts to cross the creek we reached the bank opposite the “Super Pit” site. We could go no further due to blackberry jungles, barbed wire entanglements and unclimbable cliffs.

One positive of the high water was that the fastest flowing section of the creek was quite clear, and along with it, the probable gold-line. This led me to dig in a place I wouldn’t have thought to do so. With only an hour to dig and icy water to pan in, the gold was quite good – getting chunkier the deeper the hole went.

In the meantime Sapphire constructed a family of snowmen.



We left by 4pm to ensure we got through the snow before dark, and were back in Sydney by 8:30pm. Although it didn’t turn out anything like planned, it was a great trip, with a chance to see a once in a decade event first-hand. The new dig site shows some promise, and is worth further investigation.

Abercrombie 18-19 July

-Rod Smith

Participants: Rod Smith (TL), Angus Wildie, Sapphire Wildie

Considering this year is MSS's 50th anniversary it seemed appropriate that we have at least one trip to Abercrombie. But when we're picking dates for trips we can never tell how many people will be available on the particular weekend, nor what the weather's going to be like

Angus had told me that he and Sapphire would be coming out. A small group, but I hadn't planned anything too extreme, so I wasn't worried. Angus also told me that he and Sapphire would come up early Saturday so they only had to camp one night in the cold. I debated about doing the same, but in the end decided to head out Friday night.

There'd been reports about the snow in the Blue Mountains which started Thursday afternoon. I checked the web and it looked like the Great Western Highway was not a good option, so I chose Bells Line of Road. It was a surprisingly good drive, with snow visible on the ground from before Bell and all the way to Lithgow. There was still some snow in Lithgow as I drove through.

From there to Bathurst was fine, then I turned towards Abercrombie Caves. As I approached Trunkey Creek the snow on the ground increased with each kilometre.

As I drove through Trunkey Creek two guys waved there arms at me, so I pulled up to see what the issue was. The issue was simple, they were drunk. They also couldn't believe that I intended to camp out at Abercrombie.



The road beyond started getting more interesting. There was only one lane of wheel tracks through the snow. Most of the drive it was just snow covering the rest of the road, but in places it was also branches and trees. This was fine unless someone came the other way, but that didn't happen.

The road down to the reserve was worse. Every 5 to 10 metres there was something on the road. I was driving over a lot of trees and branches and taking it very easy

I arrived at the reserve at 10pm to find a sign saying the camp ground was closed. Since I was planning to sleep in the back of the car I just found a flat spot to pull up and go to sleep.

In the morning I found out that slept the night where a tree had brought down the power lines to the reserve, probably not the best spot. I also found out they were closing the whole reserve, we wouldn't be doing any caving this weekend.

I took some photos of the snow covered ground and slowly made my way out. I expected Angus and Sapphire to arrive around 10am, so I waited at the turn off til 10:30am, but they hadn't arrived. I drove to Bathurst where I could get some reception and called Angus, getting his voicemail, and left a message telling him the trip was happening.



Back on the highway a sign said both the Great Western Highway and Bells Line of Road were closed due to ice. My original plan included meeting Peter Dykes at Abercrombie that afternoon. Because of the change of plans I arranged to drop by Peter's place at Jaunter instead. Part way out I stopped to help a guy that was stuck. In a two-wheel drive car he'd ended up with both wheels on ice and couldn't go anywhere. I just had to tow him a short distance til he could get some traction. I was certainly glad I was driving and all-wheel drive car. Even so, I was definitely going a lot slower than usual.

I left Peter's around sunset. Thankfully they'd opened the Great Western Highway around midday and I was able to get home without any problems. As much as the snow ruined the intended trip, it was still quite impressive to see.

Rod.



Trip Calendar

September 5th
MSS 50th Celebrations

By prebooked tickets only

September 6th
Dry Canyon
Bell Area

Trip Leader: Marilyn
Contact 0417 453 170
Grade: Easy



September 19th & 20th
CAVING
Jenolan

Trip Leader: Rod Smith
Contact 0438 444 262, roderick_smith@hotmail.com
Grade: TBA

September 27th
ABSEILING
Pierce's Pass

Trip Leader: Helena Johnstone
Contact: hxb@tpg.com.au
Grade: Medium/Hard 200m Abseil

October 3rd & 4th
CAVING
Glenrock

Trip Leader: Rod Smith
Contact: 0438 444 262, roderick_smith@hotmail.com
Grade: Easy/Medium

October 24th & 25th
DECADENCE WALK
TBA

Trip Leader: Rod Smith
Contact: 0438 444 262, roderick_smith@hotmail.com
Grade: Easy/Medium

November 7th & 8th
CAVING
Colong

Trip Leader: Rod Smith
Contact: 0438 444 262, roderick_smith@hotmail.com
Grade: Easy/Medium

November 26th & 27th
SRT Training & Abseiling
Rylstone

Trip Leader: Beth Little
Contact: littlebeth78@hotmail.com
Grade: Easy/Medium/Tricky

December 5th & 6th
Caving
Abercrombie

Trip Leader: Rod Smith
Contact: 0438 444 262, roderick_smith@hotmail.com
Grade: Easy



December 26th
Canyoning
Wollongambe

Trip Leader: TBA (Maybe Ray?)
Grade: Easy



December 27th
Canyoning
Mt Wilson Area

Trip Leader: TBA
Grade: Easy/Medium



MSS 418th General Meeting, 20 August 2015

Held at Canada Bay SES

Meeting Opened: 7:30pm

Present:

Roderick Smith, Jim Crockett, Beth Little, Chris Johnstone, Matt Thompson, Rob Clyne, Cathi Humphrey-Hood

Apologies:

Ben Johnstone

Any Corrections to Previous Meetings Minutes: None

Correspondence:

None

Committee Members Reports:

President: None

Treasurer: None

Equipment Officer: We had two ladders donated to the club

Training Officer: None

Librarian: None

Web Manager: There have been some problems with the contact us page on the site. I'm still working on it as it doesn't appear to be fixed yet

50th Anniversary Coordinator: Following the meeting will be a discussion on the final preparations that need to happen.

Status of Action Items:

Bolting Course – Rod Smith: None

Resurveying Stable Cave – Jim Crockett: None

Abercrombie surface survey – Rod Smith: None

Abercrombie documentation – Rod Smith: None

Documentation – Chris Johnstone: None

Electronic Meetings – Rod Smith:

Rod has done some research and found the following teleconferencing companies with the minimum cost:

Eureka conferencing - <http://www.teleconference.com.au/>

8c per caller per minute

Ozlink - <http://www.conferencecall.com.au/>

6c per caller per minute

Express virtual meetings - <http://www.teleconferencing.com.au/>

24c per caller per minute

Budget conferencing - <http://www.budgetconferencing.com.au/telephone-conference-calling/>

5c per caller per minute

Based on the cheapest option, Budget, the cost would be \$30.00 per meeting based on 5 callers for two hours, but only in Sydney. The cost would be \$27.60 for us and two callers from outside a capital city.

After some discussion the following course of action was agreed on:

- Chris to look into NetMeeting
- Chris (or Helena) to look into Facebook forum facilities.
- Continue holding meetings at SES.
- Rod to check if we can use the SES internet connection.
- Include a forum to discuss topics for 2 weeks prior to the meeting
- Aim for a trial run next meeting.

New Business:

ASF has increased the time period for temporary membership from 3 months to 12 months. Although there has been some discussion within the ASF as to how this will be implemented, MSS has agreed to offer the 12 month temporary membership to any new members.

UIS trip to Yarrangobilly – We are still intending to run a pre or post UIS conference trip to Yarrangobilly, but we need someone to drive this initiative. Cathi put her hand up to do this.

ASF has a draft working with children policy which will be discussed at the next ASF council meeting in January. We will aim to get a copy to review and discuss, if necessary, at our next meeting.

Trip planning:

Date	Leader	Activity	Location	Grade	Notes
5-6 Dec	Rod	Caving	Abercrombie	Easy	
26 Dec	TBA	Canyoning	Wollongambie	Easy	
27 Dec	TBA	Canyoning	TBA	TBA	
Feb	Rod	Caving	Timor	Easy	
Feb-May	Jim	Caving	Palawan – Philippines	Medium	
April	Rod	Caving	Nullarbor	Medium	
July	Rod	Caving	Bullita	Medium	
Mid-year	Rod	Canyoning	Karijini	Medium/Hard	
Not too cold	Beth?	Caving	Yagby	Medium	

Next Meeting:

Abercrombie – 5th December

Meeting Closed: 8:50pm

Meeting was followed by Tim Tams and photos from previous trips.