

NEWSLETTER MONTHLY



Trip Reports:
Malaita Wall + Bonus Abseils
Abercrombie

Caving News
World's Largest Cave

May 2009

In this issue

Last Meeting	3
Next Meeting	3
Quote of the Month	3
Announcements	3
Trip Reports	3
Malaita Wall + Bonus Abseils - 9th May, 2009	3
Abercrombie - 30th - 31st May, 2009	4
Caving News	9
Discovery of 'World's largest cave in Vietnam' by British explorers	9
Future Trips	10

Cover Shot:

A couple of speleotherms locked in their natural environment, Grove Cave at Abercrombie.

Photo by Julie Burton

Trip Reports

Last Meeting

Watch this space, we're working on something extra special!

Next Meeting

Monthly meetings are temporarily suspended due to the loss of our venue.

The committee are currently seeking alternative accommodation and will advise in due course.

If anyone is able to assist, please let us know.

Quote of the Month

"I can have three conversations at once!" - John Marshall seemed incredulous that Bob Horn couldn't carry on two conversation at the same time.

Announcements

There has been an update on the bet between Brett and Dave. Due to the unfortunate cancellation of the November Jenolan trip, the bet has been postponed. It is also worth noting that Brett has lost the bet. As such, the next Jenolan trip that goes ahead, Brett will be supplying lamb shanks (cooked in the slow cooker) and a bottle of Mead.

Malaita Wall + Bonus Abseils - 9th May, 2009

With: Cathi, Rod, David and Johan.

Do you remember those autumn days in the Blue Mountains when the sun's warmth is just right and there is absolutely no wind? When the sky is bright blue and not a cloud to be seen? When you can clearly hear the voices of other abseilers on adjacent routes and the tinkle of karabiners is mixed with the calls of the Bellbirds?

....And that was just the first 5mins.....



Johan modeling the latest in abseil apparel
Photo: Cathi Humphrey-Hood

What a top day! That first 50m pitch descending Malaita wall was as spectacular as always - just a massive wall of Blue Mountains sandstone - followed by that classic corner abseil off the gendarme. Then, a bit of a wander down the track to the next pitch and an exciting rap over a roof, shortly followed by a delightfully long and smooth wall – nothing like the gentle control of 9mm ropes gliding through the bars of a rack!

One more pitch and we were on the walking track and chatting to a group of 5, who had also descended Malaita wall, several minutes ahead of us.

Funny how over the space of a few minutes, it's possible to find common ground with other people, make friends and suggest that we all go and do more abseiling together – to Sahara and Kilimanjaro! So, our group of four had turned into a group of nine!



Abseiler on Sahara
Photo: Rod Smith

So, over to the Devil's Hole track and a little walk out to the edge of the escarpment, for two more exciting abseils. Not far away, the cliffs of Narrownneck were glowing in the afternoon sun as we watched climbers doing an ascent of 100ft Slab and another group abseiling on the upper cliff line. A real adventure playground on a sunny Saturday afternoon.

So, that's 7 abseils for \$3.00, which equals about .42c per pitch...real value or what!

Johan

Abercrombie - 30th - 31st May, 2009

Cavers: Danielle Lewin, David Stuckey, Rob Clyne, Bob Horn, Julie Burton, John Marshall and Rod Smith (TL)

Abercrombie. How many times had I heard that name? A name deeply intertwined with the history of MSS. The site of many digs, a time capsule, multiple annual dinners, a wedding, countless stories and so much more. Yet there hadn't been a trip there since before my time.

Was that it? Would we ever return? Had we moved on, destined to have Abercrombie fade from our memories over the course of time?

No, damn it! I wanted to see what the fuss was all about. I'm as much a part of this club as Abercrombie is, shouldn't we meet?

It was time. Time to rekindle the relationship. Time to reminisce or time to discover, as the case may be. Time to revisit Abercrombie.

The first step was to obtain a permit. I located the phone number for the guides office at Abercrombie and gave it a ring. As soon as I had mentioned that I was from MSS I was informed that I was talking to a former member in Barry Cubitt. I gave him my email address so he could send me a permit application.

When the email arrived it included a note that recreation and familiarisation were no longer considered valid reasons for obtaining a permit. However, due to the amount of work MSS had done in the past, an exception would be made in this case.

Which caves would we visit? Not knowing what the options were, I emailed Dave for his advice. In return I got a list of options: Bushrangers, The Grand Arch, King Solomon's Temple, Cathedral, Mother-in-Laws Breath, Stable, Grove and Long Tunnel. There was just enough room on the permit application for the full list, so they all went on.

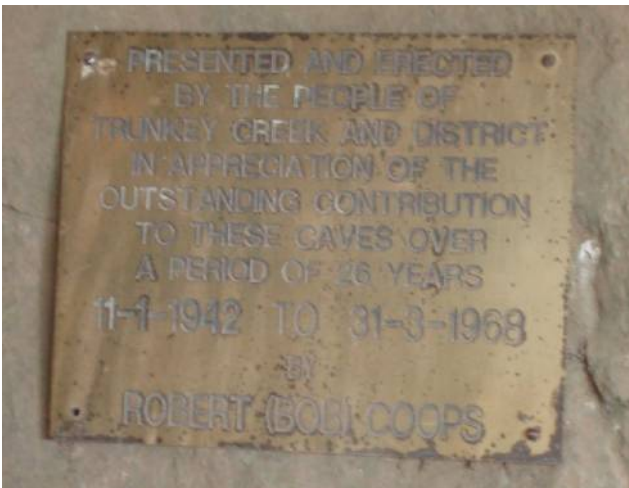
The first attempt to fax the application didn't work, the fax number rang out. I rang the guides office the next morning to find out what was happening. "The fax has been unplugged, there must have been a thunder storm. I'll fix that now." The second attempt was much more successful.

It was a couple of days later before I received the email stating that the application had been approved, with the exception of Long Tunnel, due to the bats. Still, we were going to Abercrombie!

A week out Dave emailed me to ask how many takers we had. Since Julie wanted her presence to be a surprise, I could only state that, other than the two of us, Danielle was the only other starter. We wouldn't go with less than four, so the call went out, "who else was going to join us?".



Some of the historic engravings in The Grand Arch
Photo: Rod Smith



Plaque located above the engravings in The Grand Arch
Photo: Rod Smith

The first reply was from Pam Horn, she and Bob were coming out. The trip was on! Rob also emailed to say he had to work Saturday, but would be out there Saturday evening for a day of caving on Sunday.

I met Julie in Bathurst on Friday, bought my food for the weekend, and headed south for Abercrombie. After a near miss with a kangaroo a bit south of Trunkey Creek, we arrived at Abercrombie 5 minutes behind Bob. Pam, as it turned out, had too much on and wouldn't be joining us.

We introduced ourselves to Stuart, who would be looking after Abercrombie for the weekend, Barry had taken the weekend off. Then it was time to set up camp. Always nice to do that in daylight.

Julie had taken the soft option and booked a cabin, which, considering it had a heater, may not have been such a bad idea. After settling in she drove over to join us around the campfire. In the meantime John had arrived. He intended to sleep in the back of his car, but got talked into taking a bed in the cabin, complete with layers of innuendo.

Dave arrived at 12:15am Saturday morning and slept in his car. It was not surprising that he was the last to rise.

Danielle was meant to arrive around 9am, so I told her we'd wait for her. By 11:30 we couldn't wait anymore and so made a bee-line for the caves.

Features were pointed out on the way. Here was efflux cave, where John had been doing a dig. Here was a great swimming hole when the river was higher, it was the lowest Dave had ever seen it. Above the swimming hole were a couple of holes where, with a good throw, a rock could be lobbed into the top hole and would bounce out the bottom hole into the pool. I managed it on my first go, then couldn't repeat the feat.

We started with the Grand Arch, which is now a self-guided tour. We didn't realise at first, but we went through in the reverse direction to most people. Not that it was a problem, we had the master key, which opened everything (although there may have been a couple of locks we didn't try).



Dave pointing out another engraving in The Grand Arch
Photo: Rod Smith

Our own private tour guide, Mr Stuckey, pointed out more features than most guides would know, and we hadn't even paid him! There were engravings, The Diamond Cascades, former positions of the tracks and bridges, The Destroyer, Aircraft Carrier and Submarine, the dance floor where, among other things, Peter Shaw was married, a demonstration of the Arch's acoustics, the time capsule, The Hidden Cities, craybacks and many others. It was also noted that the water level in the river was lower than Dave had ever seen it.



The time capsule
Photo: Julie Burton

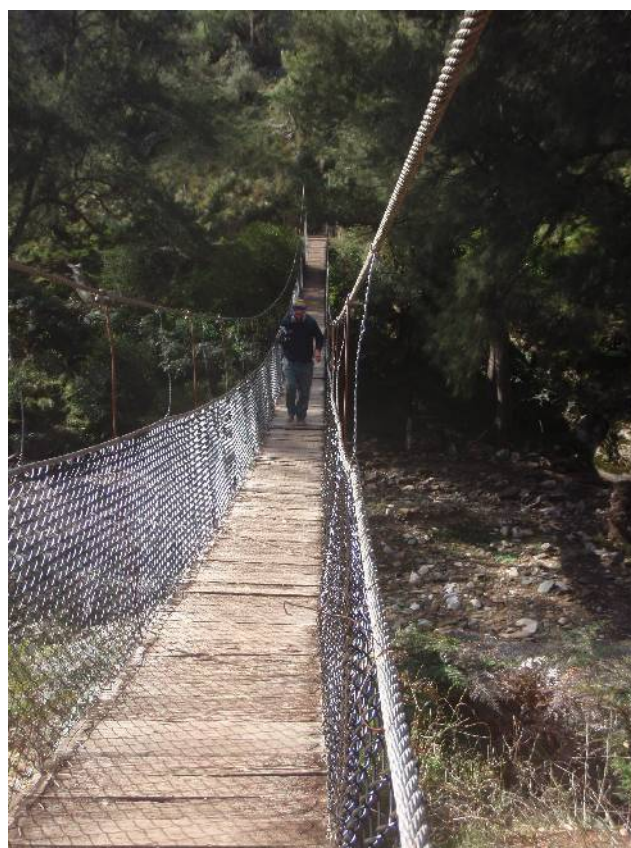
Next in line was Bushrangers, a cave in which bush rangers had actually camped in days of yore. We had to be through before the 2pm tour, but we had plenty of time. Our guide continued to point out the many features, including the Spare Bedroom and the 'bushies dig', still containing shovels, picks, etc. and even a wheelbarrow.



The entrance to Bushrangers Cave
Photo: Julie Burton

It wasn't long before we were back in daylight and making our way up the hill towards the top entrance of Stable cave. We were planning on doing Stable til Sunday, but we wanted to make sure it hadn't run away. The entrance was exactly where it should have been, but the padlock was looking a little run-down from lack of use. Still, it opened easily, which was nice to know.

We made our way back to camp, taking the high road, over the swing bridge. "I'm looking down Shrek, I'm looking down!!". The boards on the bridge didn't look to be in much better condition than those portrayed in the movie.



John Marshall braving the swing bridge
Photo: Rod Smith

After lunch Danielle still hadn't arrived and John opted for a lazy afternoon, so four of us headed back to the caves. We started by looking at Stable Arch and checking that the bottom gate on Stable Cave would open. No problems with the padlock, but the gate needed a bit of brute force to get through the dirt and debris.

Then a quick look at the Eastern Galleries before making our way into Cathedral. There were a number of bats roosting in Cathedral, and a few decided to fly around a bit once we disturbed them. Near the top we noticed what appeared to be a recent but small rock fall and daylight above it (we found the hole on the surface later, tagged as A68). Right at the top of Cathedral the guano was very thick, so we didn't stick around long to breathe it in.



Down the ladder and through the hole, part of the Eastern Galleries tourist track
Photo: Rod Smith

From here we went straight into King Solomon's Temple. At the top landing Julie found a rare cave feature known as a chocolate wrapper. It's extremely unlikely that future visitors will locate this rare specimen as it has now been placed in a more appropriate location. Down a short flight of steps and into a marvelously winding passage. Where would it lead? Into daylight.

The next cave to be visited, and the last for the day, was Grove cave. The ladder had been replaced. The thermometer told us that it was 10°C. We found the piece of glass glued across one of the fissure to monitor movements in the rock. Bob pointed out that the original was in a jar below it and that the replacement was intact. Mmmm

We made our way back along the river to camp, with Dave pointing out that he'd never seen the water level so low. At camp we found Danielle pitching her tent. She'd had a very early start and had gotten drowsy during the drive. Being the sensible person she is she stopped for a sleep rather than trying to push through.



Playing hide and seek with the wildlife
Photo: Rod Smith

Rob arrived after dark, and brought the rain with him. He hadn't brought much rain, so it was alright.

Sunday morning I set the aim of being underground before 11am. It was a hard task, but one we managed to achieve. Leaving camp around 9:30am we headed for A13-A14, via the Grand Arch.

The two entrances were cleverly hidden behind a couple of logs, but that didn't fool our guide (who was probably the one who put them there). The two entrances connect, but it includes one squeeze not made for people of larger dimensions. As such, Rob and I had to go into each entrance separately rather than doing the through trip.



Form left to right: John, Danielle and Bob at the entrance to A13
Photo: Rod Smith

After that bit of fun we made our way to Stable Cave. Entering the top of the cave ensured we had gravity working for us as we worked our way through. In the bottom of way of the larger chamber John helpfully pointed out the way to those of us lagging behind, then pointed out that we were in a cave. At the same time there was some laughter coming from Dave and Julie.

"Your not laughing at me, are you?" inquired John.

Dave replied, "No, we were laughing at Bob because he forgot to .. bob". Apparently Bob was thankful he was wearing his helmet.

Although close to the exit at this point, there was still some sporting caving to be done, for those people who could fit. Dave led the way through the flattener, followed by Julie, Danielle and Bob. Julie managed to find an even smaller hole to crawl through, followed only by Danielle. That bit of fun managed to get all four quite dirty as the dust was very thick down there.

After checking the installation date on the gate, written by Dave himself, we made our way to the Grand Arch and Mother-in-Laws Breath, minus John who made his way back to camp. The entrance to Mother-in-Laws Breath is rather tight, but not enough to stop any of us getting through. The bats in there were quite happy doing some very close fly-bys, one even decided to hang out on Bob's overalls for a while.



The installation date on the gate of Stable Cave
Photo: Rod Smith

Another squeeze and some climbing got us to the bottom of a short ladder. The top of the ladder revealed a chamber overlooking the tourist track. A traverse along a small ledge led to the final squeeze, which even had Dave struggling. Only he, Julie and Danielle managed this one, with the other three of us needing to go back.

Getting out of Mother-in-Laws Breath we decided to go through King Solomon's Temple to meet up with the others. We found them waiting for us in the daylight. Dave quickly took Danielle back through King Solomon's Temple since she had been yet to see it.

One more task before lunch. We had spotted an opening that would usually have been covered by the river, but the water level was the lowest Dave had ever seen it. Bob had stuck his head in it Saturday and reported that it kept going, so, now that we were trogged up, we were ready to explore it properly.

Dave went in as far as Bob had, then came back out claiming he would never believe Bob again. Apparently the opening did keep going, through a hole none of us could have even fit our heads!\

Back to camp and lunch.

Danielle was keen to get underground again, but it looked like she may be only one. Then Dave convinced Rob that he should have a trip through Bushrangers, and we were off again.

Julie, Bob and John decided to go home, the rest of us went to Bushrangers to beat the 2pm tour. Danielle, with the knowledge imparted from Dave, could confidently lead a Bushrangers tour herself.

We then made our way back through The Grand Arch. Along the way we passed Stuart and the two people on the Bushrangers tour.



Koh-I-Noor Cave
Photo: Julie Burton

Last stop was Grove Cave. The glass was still where we'd left it, and it was still 10°C. It was a quick trip, but it meant that Rob and Danielle hadn't missed much for not being there on Saturday.

Finally it was time to pack up and head for home. I handed back the key and had a chat to Stuart about the situation at Abercrombie and the chances of getting another permit in the future (may not be too bad). Crossing the causeway and seeing the dry riverbed on either side I was reminded that Dave had said the water level was the lowest he'd even seen it.

Thanks to everyone who made it to Abercrombie and made it a great trip, just so I could see what all the fuss was about!

Rod.

Caving News

This bit of caving news was brought to the attention of the editors by both Johan Verhagen and Sarah Payne. Who wants to lead the club trip to visit it?

Discovery of 'World's largest cave in Vietnam' by British explorers

A British caving team believe they have discovered the world's largest cave passage in the heart of the Vietnamese jungle.

The rocky passage is 150metres long and measures a towering 200metres in height - seven times as high as the vaulted ceiling of York Cathedral.

Called Hang Son Doong (Mountain River Cave) it is believed to be almost twice the size of the current record holder.

'It is a truly amazing sized cave and one of the most significant discoveries by a British caving team,' said Adam Spillane, a member of the 13-man expedition team.

Using a laser measuring device known as the LaserRace 300, which measures height and width, the team are now back in the UK analysing their readings.

The cave was originally discovered in 1991 by a Vietnamese Jungle man called Ho Khanh. However Mr Spillane said no-one had entered it before because 'it emitted a frightful wind and noise which was due to a large underground river'.

But assisted by representatives of Hanoi University of Science, the joint British-Vietnamese Caving Expedition 2009 spent five days exploring the cave in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park in mid-April.

The team spent six hours trekking through the jungle to reach the cave. Climbing down into a large chamber, they had to negotiate two underground rivers before reaching the main passage of the Hang Son Doong.

The team will return to Vietnam later in the year to complete the expedition of the cave and conduct a full survey.

'The cave is 6.5km long at present but the end of the main passage still continues with a calcite wall of over 45m high halting our progress,' Mr Spillane said.

'More work on the next expedition is required to make a complete exploration of Hang Son Doong and obtain a complete photographic record of the cave.

'It is a great achievement in this day and age to discover and explore such a fantastic cave.'

Future Trips

Welcome to the new look future trips section. Anyone with artistic abilities are welcome to submit their own icons for any of the categories here, and/or any other categories. If we use your icon then you'll have to be prepared to accept the praise and admiration from your fellow club members. Send your icons, or any other feedback, to roderick_smith@hotmail.com.

Legend:

Activity



Caving



Canyoning



Diving



Hiking



Abseiling



Cycling



Horse Riding



Kayaking



Climbing



Skiing

Grade



Easy



Easy/Medium



Medium



Medium/Hard



Hard



Extreme

Accommodation



Camping



Cottage



Extras
















Kites



Camp Ovens

Where	When	Activity	Grade	Trip Leader	Accommodation (if applicable)	Additional Costs	Let Trip Leader Know By:	No. of Spots Left
Narrowneck	14 th Jun			Rod Smith 0438 444 262 roderick_smith@hotmail.com (that's 2 underscores)			10 th Jun	
Other Info:								
Springwood	20 th - 21 st Jun			Warwick Blake 9988 4401 Warwick.Blake1@det.nsw.edu.au			17 th Jun	
Other Info:								
Wee Jasper	27 th - 28 th Jun			Julie Burton 0447 604 786 julbur@tpg.com.au			24 th Jun	
Other Info:								
Penrose Gully and Tiger Snake	12 th Jul			Rod Smith 0438 444 262 roderick_smith@hotmail.com (that's 2 underscores)			8 th Jul	
Other Info:								
Kanangra	25 th - 26 th Jul			Dave Stuckey 0414 590 305 stuckedl@cba.com.au			22 nd Jul	
Other Info:								
Jenolan	1 st - 2 nd Aug			Rob Clyne 0409 033 224 caver@people.net.au		\$5 hut fees	27 th Jul	

Where	When	Activity	Grade	Trip Leader	Accommodation (if applicable)	Additional Costs	Let Trip Leader Know By:	No. of Spots Left
Other Info:								
Castle Head	15 th Aug			Johan Verhagen 4758 9811 johan.verhagen@sydneywater.com.au			12 th Aug	
Other Info:								
Snowy Mountains	22 nd 23 rd Aug			Dave Stuckey 0414 590 305 stuckedl@cba.com.au			19 th Aug	
Other Info:								
Yarrangobilly	7 th - 13 th Sep			Jim Crockett 0407 284 256 jim.crockett@reach.com		We'll be staying in Caves House, which will be an additional cost	14 th Aug	
Other Info:								
Mt Solitary	10 th - 11 th Oct			Johan Verhagen 4758 9811 johan.verhagen@sydneywater.com.au			7 th Oct	
Other Info:								
Tongariro Track – New Zealand	Jan 2010			Johan Verhagen 4758 9811 johan.verhagen@sydneywater.com.au		Flights, huts fees etc.	1 st Jul	
Other Info: One of New Zealand's “great walks”.								

Where	When	Activity	Grade	Trip Leader	Accommodation (if applicable)	Additional Costs	Let Trip Leader Know By:	No. of Spots Left
Lake Waikaremoana Track – New Zealand	Jan 2010			Johan Verhagen 4758 9811 johan.verhagen@sydneywater.com.au		Flights, huts fees etc.	1 st Jul	
Other Info: One of New Zealand's “great walks”.								
Waitomo – New Zealand	Jan 2010			Johan Verhagen 4758 9811 johan.verhagen@sydneywater.com.au		Flights, trip costs etc.	1 st Jul	
Other Info: These are commercial trips, but well worth the costs for the amazing experience.								