



Metropolitan Speleological Society

Quarterly NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2015
Issued June 2015

Society Information.....	page 2
MSS 50 th Celebration Update.....	page 3
MSS Website Update>>>>>>.....	page 4
Editors 3am Rave.....	page 4
NSWSC Meeting.....	page 5
<u>Trip Reports</u>	
Wolligambe 1 –Boxing Day- 26 th December 2014.....	page 5
Freshwater Canyon 24 th January 2015.....	page 6
Claustral Canyon 14 th March 2015.....	page 10
Maliata Wall Abseil 2th April 2015.....	page 13
Ice Cave (extraordinary experience)	page 16
Trip Calendar.....	page 20
<i>Appendix 1 – Meeting Minutes.....</i>	<i>page 21</i>

Cover Shot: Freshwater Canyon photo 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

 Newsletter Editor(s) 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!

The planning for the Dinner event on 5th September is all coming together with caterers booked. Thank you to those members who have indicated they are happy to do small slideshow/presentations for us all.

We have sold all our tickets for the events, however if any of our members have forgotten to rsvp and would like to come please contact 50th@mssadventure.org.au as we may be able to squeeze you in. Going to be a great night so don't miss out!

Please send through your submissions for t-shirt designs, as we will be voting on these soon and organising printing in the upcoming weeks.

More information about the MSS 50th can be found in the members section of the mss website.

Beth Little
50th@mssadventure.org.au
0450 226 811

International Congress of Speleology 2017 update

As some of you might already be aware, Australia will be playing host to the ICS (International Congress of Speleology) in July 2017 in Sydney.

The ICS Organising Committee is currently looking for groups to organise various field trips before and after the running on the Congress. At a previous MSS meeting it was decided that MSS was in a position to organise field trips to Yarrangobilly caves and it was agreed we should proceed with this task. It was also felt that it might be better to organise this in collaboration with another group so currently we are having discussions with CSS (Canberra Speleological Society).

MSS is still looking for helpers to run the field trips at Yarrangobilly during this time, if you could help in any way it would be most appreciated. If any club members are interested in helping out with this could you please advise Rod Smith or Jim Crockett. Jim is also currently negotiating an agreement with the Yarrangobilly management on accommodation.

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

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

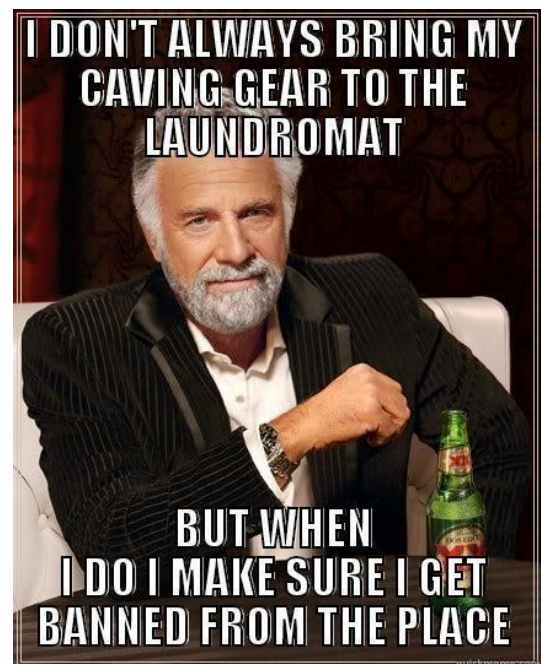


Editors 3am Raves:

Autumn was mild. Mild weatherwise and mildly busy with some good MSS trips enjoyed by the young and not so young. As this newsletter gets uploaded Rod and Jim are off to the 30th ASF Conference in Exmouth, Western Australia. I am sure that everyone will join me in wishing them a great trip and safe travels. I look forward to an indepth report when they get back from BOTH Rod and Jim,(now you are warned guys)! Keep notes and lots of photos. Especially take in all the gossip at the after parties- I heard that the dance floor is dangerous when the bass drops. I saw this meme and thought of all the different ways we have washed caving gear when on extended trips.

New Website News: My first ever attempt at editing the MSS newsletter went from smug "It was fun" to last minute frustration as I tried desperately to reduce the files size from over 20MB to a more acceptable email quality 1MB which was not achieved without harsh reduction of quality photographs. Now thanks to our web guy, Rod has allowed me to have 2 options for you- the higher file size with great photos or the lower file size with sufferable photo quality.

The MSS celebrations are fast approaching and I know that Beth and Rod have been a pair of busy secret squirrels arranging what promises to be a great social night. If you haven't got your ticket yet, you may have to get creative with an excuse and get ready to flatter, cajol, beg or bribe Beth to squeeze you in, because the allocated tickets are sold out.



Cheers Big Ears, Natalie

NSWSC Meeting

Held at Cleifden to observe the 200 year anniversary since the first discovery of limestone in Australia, which was at Cleifden on the 24th May 1815.

There are two vacant positions if anyone is interested. These are the ASF NSW Conservation Convener and an Executive position with the NSWSC. Neither position is overly onerous. If you are interested in either position please contact Rod Smith.

There was some positive news regarding the proposed dam on the Belubula River. The site at The Needles, which would be the one to cause the most flooding to the caves, is now the third option. The first option is at Cranky Rock, further downstream. If this option is built to it's maximum height it may still flood some of the lowest caves. The second option would have no direct impact on the caves. There is still the hope that no dam will be built.

There was some concern raised that non caving clubs had been granted permits to some caving areas, and may not need to meet all the criteria that ASF clubs are required to meet. At this stage we are looking to confirm all the facts to then determine the next course of action.

The next meeting is currently scheduled for the 18th of October and will be held in Sydney, the exact location is yet to be confirmed.

Rod Smith

Trip Reports

Wollongambie 2 (from Kids Canyoning Weekend Summer 2015) by Owen Johnstone

We arrived at the fire station near Wollongambie 2 at 9:30am to meet the others and drive down to the camp ground at Wollongambie 2 where we got ready to go to the canyon. As we walked down we saw a large snake and did a bit of climbing to get down into the canyon where we pumped up our lilos and got ready to go downstream where we went down a natural water slide and jumped off small cliffs into the water below. Me and Kaitlyn raced on our lilos and we even saw a brown snake in the canyon. On the way at a rapids I got knocked over and went underwater for ten seconds and my foot snagged but the water was coming so hard and at an angle that it went over my head in a way that it made an air bubble type of area so I could kind of breath and then my foot came free and I came back up out of the water.

When we finished canyoning we had to climb up a reasonably sized rock face to get out but to get back to the camp site we had to go through charred bushland and eventually we got back to our car and we drove off.

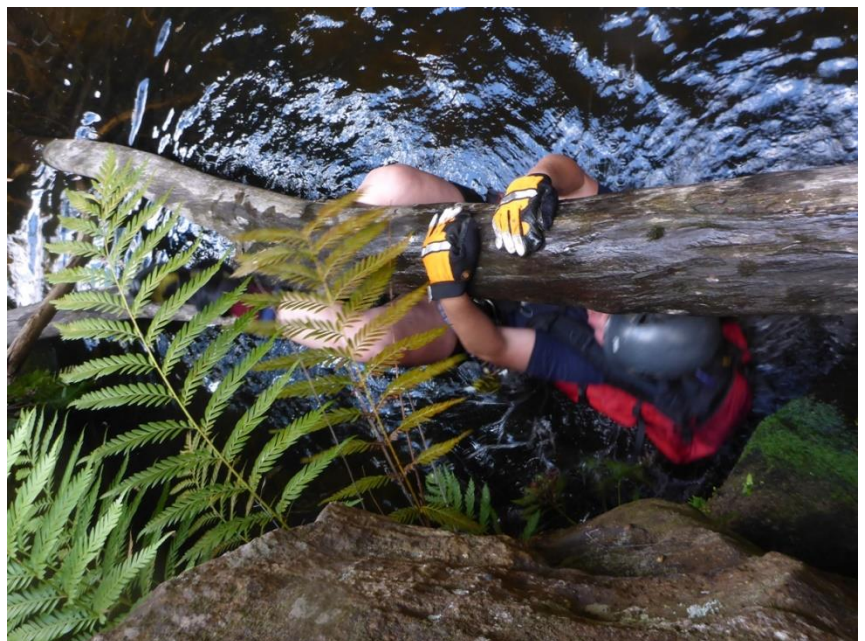
FRESHWATER CANYON

24th January 2015

Participants; Beth (TL), Andre, Natalie, Rod, Annette, Lachlan.

Sounds of laboured breath and pounding hearts echoed in our ears as we climbed freshwater creek in the summer morning's heat. A distant cry of a yowies' coo eee could be heard somewhere up ahead from time to time urging us on. We had started our day early to try to avoid the worst heat of the day, but it was still a slow going slog.

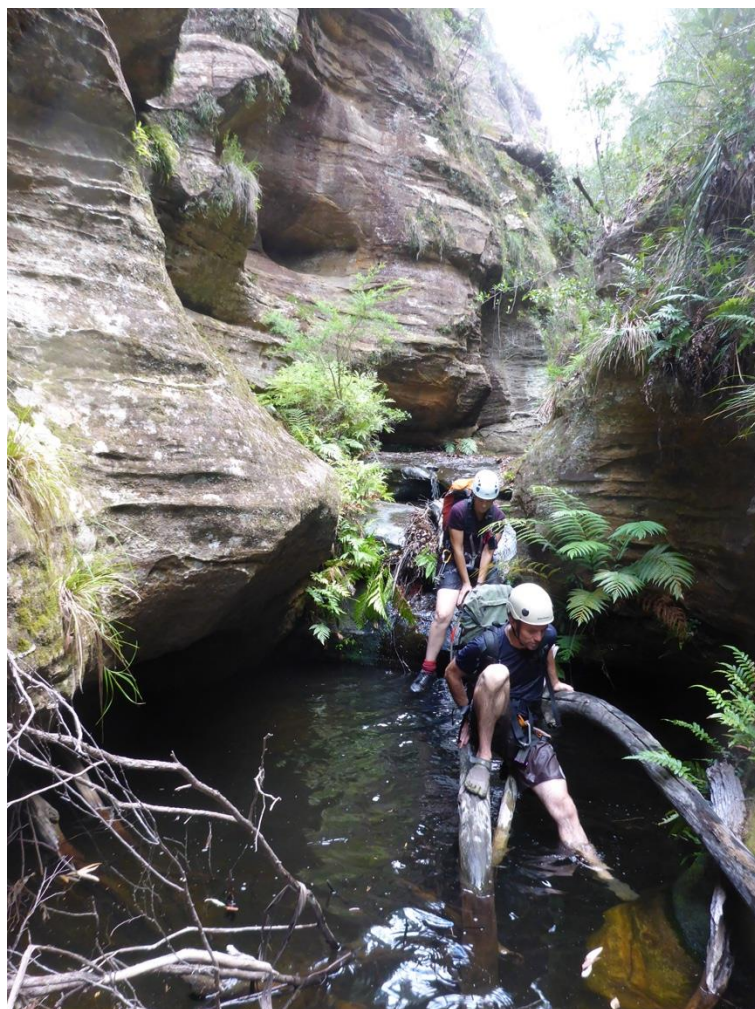
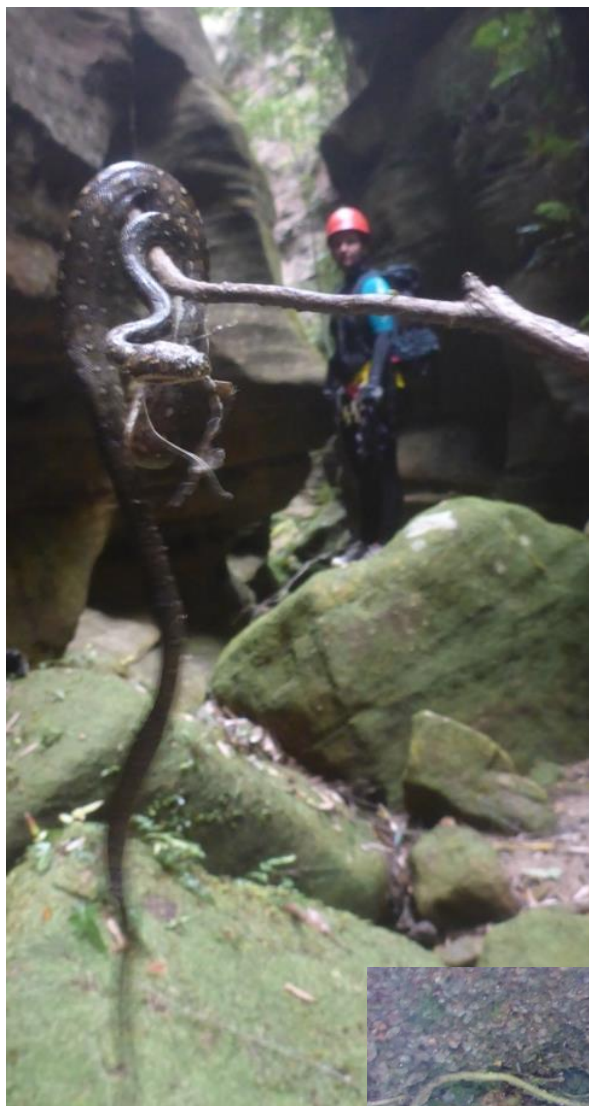
We cut across the creek after C branch and a quick little traverse and steep scramble had us soon at the ridge, unfortunately in time to greet a full summer midday sun. We dropped into the canyon a little earlier than anticipated to escape the blaze, dropping in near the unnamed B3 tributary.



Freshwater is a beautiful and sustained canyon. One of the mountains best in my opinion. It was a gorgeous day as we waded, climbed, weaved, stemmed, swam and walked our way down. Nat's upside down log crawl a definite highlight from the joys of the day.

Lachlan, who should more aptly be named 'the destroyer', had it in mind to improve on mother natures' design this day with some canyon modifications at any opportunity. Most memorable was a little push of some pebbles that broke a dam and started a cascade of mud and water resulting in us waiting 10 minutes while the water levels equalised in the canyon section. Equally as entertaining was the three man effort to pull a log into a better position for a log climb down after everyone but Andre had already climbed down. This little piece of modification was accompanied by my late cry of "not with my canyon rope!" when I realised what was going on....but no damage done.

A few little landmark changes since last I was there (although that was more than a decade ago so my memory not too crisp!). A few of the abseils are now climbable due to log jams, and on the flip side a few of the rock climb downs have been wedged up with logs and so are now abseils or hand over hand with handline.



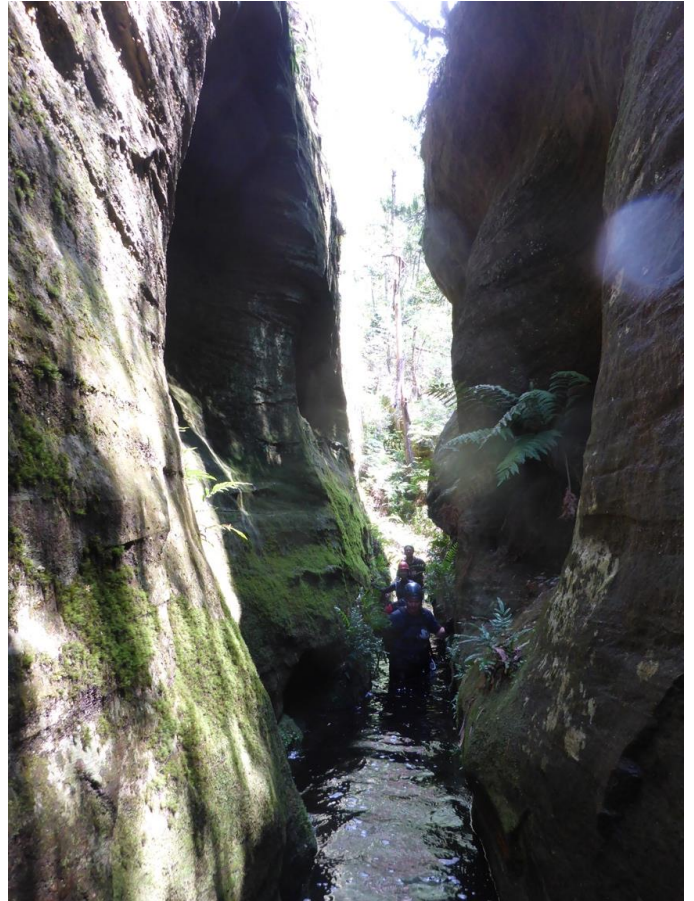
Wildlife a plenty made their appearance on this day; leaf tailed gecko, skinks and a goanna. Huge blue grandpa yabbies with their knobbly large claws seemed to populate every large pool, baby gabbies anywhere you looked. We even rescued a little python from a particularly dark and cold part of the canyon with a sandwich box.



Future canyoneers definitely need to remember to pack the 10 metre handline. So useful for all those quick little climb downs, or hand-over-hand scenarios. Ours was back on the hood of the car awaiting our return to camp. Getting the 60 metre out was over kill - 2 x 30's would have been perfect or even a 50m more than enough.

The finale of the canyon was accompanied by an applause of the gods, as a thunderstorm rolled over the valley supplying thunder bouncing off the canyon walls. We made the fire trail/4WD track just at dusk. Bit of evening rain kept us cool on the walk back in the dark.

Twelve and half hours car to car, with the only casualty being my volleys.... a sad farewell to these faithful companions the next morning over breakfast. Great day out, great canyon.



Claustral Canyon – 14th March 2015

(Rod Smith, Natalie Etherton, Trip Report: Chris Johnstone)

After leaving home at the usual ungodly hour (well for me, it was), I arrived at Rod's place to pick him up.

A few apologies for being late and a short confused discussion on the best route resulted in us heading up the M4 towards Richmond then on to Bells line of road. All of this had only confirmed that I am not a morning person.

Being too early for me meant that I needed to stop for a sustaining coffee. Which led me to the second lesson of the trip. MacDonald's coffee is bad and M4 MacDonald's is even worse than most at getting the orders right (well that was no revelation but it was confirmed).

Sometime later, a few expletives about poor coffee and some SMS message exchanges meant that we met with Nat at the entrance to the Mt Tomah botanical gardens. Nat appeared to very happy to be woken up, my conjecture is that she had been dreaming of the wonders that awaited her, but I may just be poor at judging moods. In convoy we drove up to the walk in point just beyond Mount Bell.

So after parking far away from the entrance track, Rod, Nat and myself signed the book around 9am and took some guesses about how long it would take to do the trip. I was convinced that it wasn't a long day from my previous experience but Rod and Nat were adamant that I was wrong (ah, the snows of yesteryear – maybe I was just younger and fitter and able to power through in those days)

It looked like there was a group or 2 ahead of us but not a really busy day (not like the day before where it appeared that at least 6 groups had gone through). That was good, no delays.

We perambulated, in a buoyant mood, through bushland for a ½ portion of an hour, down to a point where we met the Claustral Brook. We followed the brook in our regular attire until we needed to don our wet suits. I was sure I had negotiated Claustral before but I didn't really recognise the walk in or this part of the canyon. Having said all that, it was 30 years ago and the track I came in then was the old one before it was closed by those nasty property owners who had decided to build their accommodation right in the way of all righteous adventurers.

On the way down the subject of the 'shortcut' was discussed but no decisions were made. The committee for the 'shortcut' had been formed.

After daintily slipping into our wetsuits on we commenced the real canyoning adventure.

There were a couple of water jumps in the first section, nothing too deep or big, just enough to get you cooled down after the walk, refreshing hmmm.....

The way soon brought us to The Black Hole of Calcutta. An ominous name for the highlight of the canyon.

At that point, we had caught up with the party before us and had to wait a short while to get our abseil set up. That was fine because we were not precipitously delayed and it gave us a chance to discuss the meaning of life and Natalie's recent ailments.

To negotiate the Black Hole, there is a short scramble down to the belay point, where there is an abseil of 2 pitches in series, which can be done one rope, followed by a 3rd through the keyhole. So Rod went down the first 2 pitches on one rope with the second rope to rig the 3rd pitch. I went next. Nat was to go last.

While we went down the first abseil another party caught up with us and rudely started rigging before Nat had finished the pitches. We took a motion of disapproval on this matter.

The Black Hole is truly one of the better waterfall abseils in the Blue Mountains. Pretty, sculptured, narrow and into darkness without being too technical, it makes a great experience. The first pitch goes through a vertical slot, the second over a lower waterfall. A short swim or wade brings you to the 3rd pitch, a short abseil into darkness and a deep pool followed by a swim to a dark rocky beach.



After descending the Black Hole, the closed in main section of the canyon was before us.

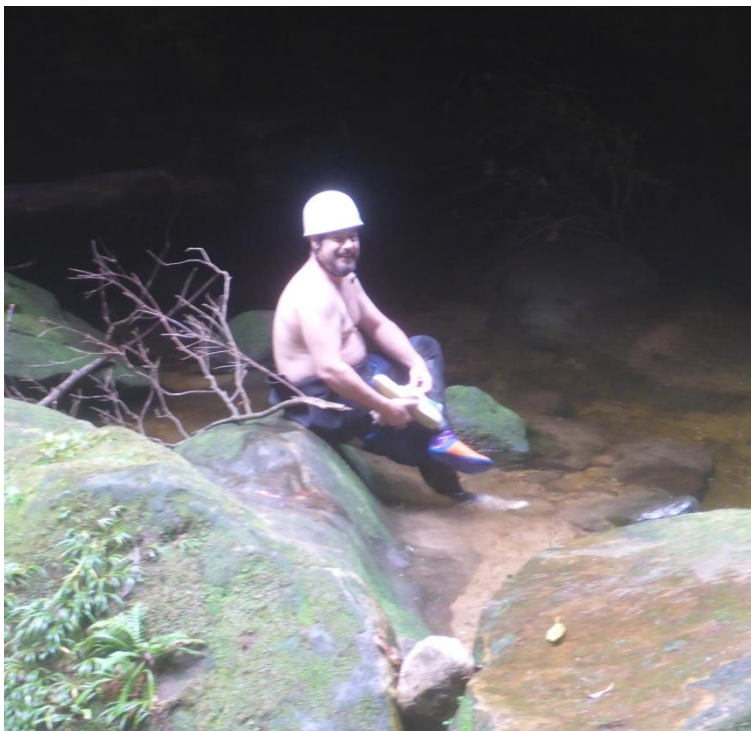
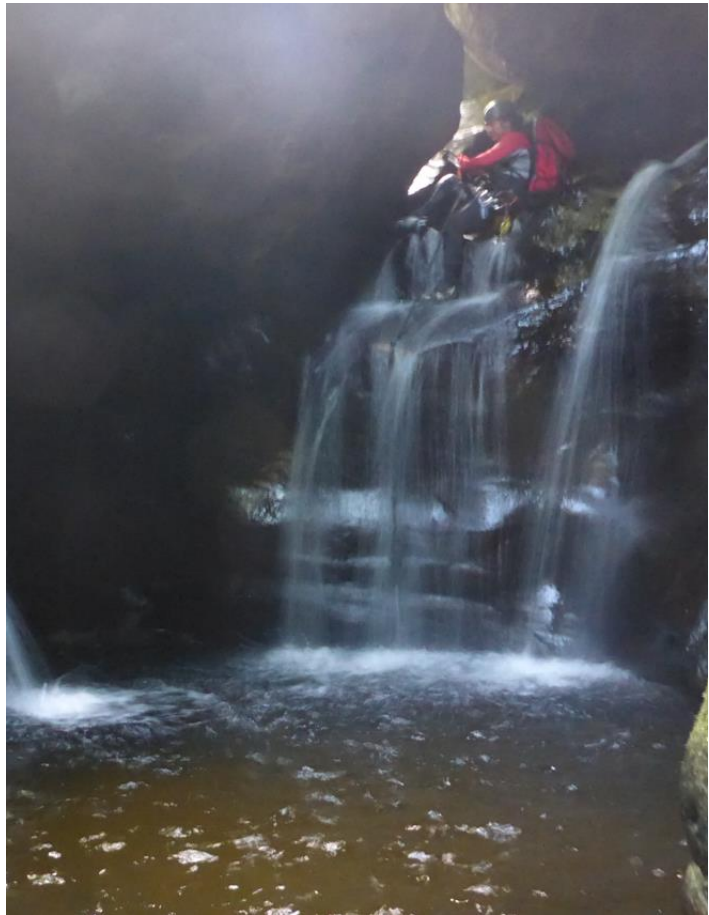
The main section is a long deep narrow slot with a few wades and some swims. Not much light gets to the bottom but if you get the right light, it is spectacular. The walking was easy with little boulder hopping, the wades were cool but not unpleasant, the swims were bracing but nice, the scenery was beautiful and well worth the effort.



A short while into the main section we were overtaken but two of the following party. They were cold and had not worn wetsuits, so they were going to power through to keep warm. We never saw them again so I surmise they got out before us and we never saw the rest of their party, or maybe they are still there - in spirit at least, their bones taken by rogue bunyips (ok it wasn't Halloween, so I won't persist with that one but it would be rightful justice after their earlier transgressions).

After a few hundred meters the canyon opens up again and the sun makes a showing. In this open section there are a couple of jumps and wades. There was one tricky climb down on a rope and a log but nothing more. We took advantage of the warmer climate about midway through this section and around 1 pm, stopped for lunch in one of the pleasantly appointed picnic areas. Warming up was nice but we had forgotten the fois gras, caviar, toast and champagne so we made do with the slim pickings we had thrown together in our backpacks the night before.

A bit more boulder hopping after our luncheon brought us to the exit on the left of the canyon heading north again. At that point some of our party removed our wetsuits, I did not because I am obstinate in that way and I will not bow to peer pressure.



Then followed the reformation of the committee to discuss if we should take the 'shortcut'. The parks recommended way takes you back to the old start of the canyon going through the 'camel hump' (up one hill, down into a valley then up another hill) then you follow the creek down to the place where we started and involves a bit of swimming and wades. The 'shortcut' cuts off a chunk of the upper canyon and an uphill walk, so the committee recommended we should use it.

So up the first mountain we went. A steep walk to the top – about 40 minutes. Then we dropped into the saddle and 20 mins or so. Around the middle of the saddle, looking at the other side of the camel back, we found the 'shortcut' – none of us had done it before and the track was not very well defined. The shortcut committee reconvened and decided to press on with 'shortcut' anyway, more unnecessary uphill was decided to be undesirable.

Following the 'shortcut', the track appeared to peter out. Had the committee inadvertently put us in pickle or not? A bit of a scramble around and we found a rope already set up and running down a waterfall. This looked like the way, but it was strange that someone would leave a nice new looking rope out here. We decide to trust it because it looked new enough and down we went. The committee had redeemed itself.

At the bottom, the track was even less obvious, but eventually we found a walking route down into the canyon again. I thought we had come back to the walk in track, but Rod was sure we hadn't. Since I always know better, I made my point and finally took off my wetsuit. But as Rod is usually right about such things, so we reluctantly decided to trust his judgement. We continued down the canyon, more water, more wading, a bit of scrambling over rocks while I braved the cold without my wetsuit, adamant that we were going the wrong way.

There was nothing technical in this section although we may have avoided a short abseil talked about in the guides a bit further up the canyon. The scenery in top part of the canyon is pretty but nowhere near as spectacular as the bottom part of the canyon below the Black hole. We continued on for a few hundred meters to the entry track which was to be our exit point.

When we finally reached the exit, I concluded that the last time I did the canyon I had only done the upper bit and had probably walked out on the same track we came in on. Oh well, so I wasn't even that fit in my younger days.

In the end the committee decided we hadn't found the real short cut, or least we had taken a longer version of the short cut. It may have been quicker than the recommended route but not by much. There was not supposed to be an abseil on the way down and we had not avoided the swims.

But we still had the final exit track to negotiate and that meant more uphill. We commenced, this time we had all removed our wetsuits, not all canyoning is bushwalking in wetsuits. The challenge of the final uphill jaunt was to reveal a resilience in us all.

The walk out had been long and we finally reached the cars entrance around 6pm. We were all pretty exhausted, Nat had done well despite her injuries, but it was the final extra 100 meters to the cars that did us in (Rod was wrong for once, we had parked too far away).

To close the adventure, a new committee was formed and we agreed that Claustral is an excellent canyon. It is a long day, although not as long as some, and probably not suitable for the younger members of the club but worthwhile for anyone of appropriate fortitude.

Suitably satisfied with our efforts, the party disbanded, I agreed to document our findings and we said our goodbyes. Nat headed off to the big shed in Rylstone and Rod and I went off in search of sustenance.

Rod and I agreed upon North Richmond as a suitable haven for gourmands like ourselves. After getting lost trying to find the car park and annoying some council workers with erratic driving, we did manage to get a good viewing of the local teenage wildlife and secure a sumptuous hamburger meal before completing the drive home to civilisation and sleep in comfortable beds.

All in all, a splendid day.

Malaita Wall

12th April 2015

Participants: *Natalie Etherton, Chris Johnstone, Helena Johnstone, Ben Johnstone, Owen Johnstone, Rob Clyne, Laura Clyne, Rod Smith (TL)*

Malaita Wall. The very name can make the bravest man crawl into the foetal position and cry "I want my Mummy to come and hug me and bring me hot cocoa and tell me everything's going to be alright".

But I wasn't going to put up with any of that nonsense, so no brave men were invited. Instead we had a group of MSSers, who are not afraid of massive exposure, but are afraid of Tupperware parties, kittens and reality TV shows.

I arrived to find a lot of eager faces, obviously blissfully ignorant of what they were about to undertake. I, on the other hand, was not at all ignorant. I was rather blissful though, thanks to the meds.

Malaita Wall tests a person's fear immediately, the walk up the road can be terrifying.

We approached the first pitch and saw another group descending in front of us. Their leader thought he smelt smoke, a fire on a trip like that would add to the adrenalin. Especially if the rope itself was on fire.

No-one else detected smoke, so we figured he must be as crazy as the rest of us and had just imagined it. Soon he was gone and it was our turn.

I sent Rob over first. After assuring him there were no kittens at the bottom of the rappel, he descended, making it look easy (show-off!). Helena followed. Since they'd each taken a rope they were then able to rig the second pitch.

Laura was next, and was suddenly not so blissful. I tried to help, but every time I pushed her (gently) over the edge she would bounce right back. Once the human yo-yo was finally sitting in her harness she was suddenly all smiles again and off she went.



Nat followed, then Ben, who rigged the rack himself. He probably won't rig it exactly that way again. He was safe, but ended up with a twist while halfway down. Unfortunately for Ben the twist wouldn't come out, so the second half of the descent was more painful than scary.

It was then only Chris, Owen and myself and we were all down ... the first pitch.

From the bottom of the first pitch it's a long way to the top of the second pitch, about 20cm. Most were already down the second pitch and it wasn't long before we regrouped at the bottom.

The hike to the top of the third pitch is long and arduous, through virtually impenetrable scrub, up and down near vertical slopes, over boulder fields with holes disappearing beneath our feet and fending off ravenous beasts. But everyone was up to the challenge. We rigged the third pitch and I descended. There is a massive, intimidating overhang to pass before touching down on a narrow ledge with a yawning abyss behind you. Some brave soul had, in bygone days, rigged a safety line to aid abseilers make it safely to the top of the fourth pitch.

Once I assured everyone that I had made it safely down the third pitch they began to follow. Sufficient ropes soon arrived and the fourth pitch was rigged. We started the day descending like professionals, now we actually looked like we knew what we were doing!



With four pitches behind us we rigged the fifth. The fifth and sixth pitches can be done in one go, but we opted for splitting them.

The fifth pitch is like a kitten. Sure, it might look all cute and harmless, but when you least expect it it'll turn evil, ripping off your head and one leg then getting one of its friends to throw your head to it while it uses your leg as a bat to hit your head into the tallest tree where your undead eyes will look down on it putting the rest of your body on a spit then carving off chunks of cooked meat to devour while sitting around discussing politics and poetry.

The sixth, and final, pitch starts on a gentle slope, to lure you in. Then suddenly it cuts the other way and there's nothing, for a couple of metres. Once you return to terra firma the rest of the pitch is a mixture of vertical and horizontal surfaces. Kind of like a staircase, but the kind of staircase MC Esher would have nightmares about.

We had survived! But now we were in the depths of the Jamieson Valley. Calling on the vast array of navigational skills present within the group we determined that the best course of action was to turn left, east, and follow the track.

Even though we were following a track we still had to deal with washouts, logs the size of trees, and pools of water the size of puddles. It wasn't long before we were approaching the boardwalks and maintained paths of ScenicWorld, with what is most probably the most dangerous element yet, tourists!

It was apparently almost immediately that there was no way of passing through undetected, we had to try the riskier approach of trying to "blend in". The group split, with most heading for the scenic railway, while Nat and I headed for the Skyw... Gondol... Scenic... Other thing.

We joined the queue, but considering the length I'm sure it went past Q, through R, S, T and U and settled on V. Although we joined at the end, tourists then joined after us, and we were surrounded. The best approach was to remain calm.

After what seemed like an eternity the ... thing ... arrived, let out a group of tourists and then we moved forward with the throng, ready to be swallowed by its giant maw. Nat made the comment that we could end up just missing out getting in. I responded that it would be because of the two tourists that had started behind us but were making their way around the outside and jumping the queue. Little did we know how accurate that prediction would be. As the attendant closed the gate in front of us we laughed, in only the way people trying to fight off maniacal fear can.

The attendant asked us what was so funny, so we explained it to him. Although we were prepared to wait til the next time, the attendant decided we could also fit in and let us through. Sometimes it pays to laugh in the face of danger.

We ascended on a cable that was hopefully bigger and stronger than the ropes we had descended on. The ascent was mercifully short, but we were then deposited in the largest concentration of tourists I have ever seen. In the process of paying for our "privileged ride" Nat and I became separated. I headed for the exit, except, it wasn't the exit. There had to be an exit, but where was it? How would I escape? Was I trapped?

I took a deep breath in an attempt to calm myself and noticed someone pointing to a door and saying it was a way out. I dove through the opening, and into open air. Heading for the car park I was able to calm my nerves. I found the others waiting for me, we had made it!

I can't wait for the next adventure.

Rod.

Ice Cave above Longyearbyen

22nd March 2015
Report and photos by: Cathi Humphrey-Hood



On the 20th March, 2015, a total solar eclipse tracked eastward across the Arctic, with the sun's shadow falling first upon the Faroe Islands off Scotland and then over the town of Longyearbyen in the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard. Svalbard had the better weather prospects (a whole 10% chance of clear skies and 60% for various types of broken cloud and overcast - the other 30% being made up of blizzards and snow and so on) but Svalbard would take more planning to visit, due to limited accommodation and the entire world's solar eclipse watching community being determined to go there. Because so much of what you can do is determined by the weather, planning an actual itinerary in advance is not really possible. I knew I wanted to visit an ice cave while we were there, but even though we booked accommodation over three years ago, I still had to wait until we'd actually arrived to see which trips were running and how long they would be.



Left: One of our guides carrying essential equipment for ice-cave trips in Svalbard - a decent-calibre rifle to ward off polar bears. You can trek/ski off on your own, but don't do it without the gun - you'll need to hire one before you go. The two guys on the right are eclipse chasers from Estonia - they didn't seem to feel the cold much.

Ice caves are common in the glacier above Longyearbyen. There are a number of different tours

available, but most of them were 8 hours and involve being tracked up to the glacier in a snow cat. Because of time constraints, I opted to do one of the shorter tours, which involved trekking on foot up about 600 vertical feet of snow-covered hillside to one of the caves closest to the edge of the glacier.

This tour was run by Poli Arctici (coincidentally the people we booked our accommodation through) and cost 750NOK (about AUD\$130) per person. No one else in my group thought they'd be up to the trip, and I didn't think my children would be, so I signed up by myself and joined a group of about twelve people from various countries who had all converged on Longyearbyen for the solar eclipse (except for the guides, most people in the group had all seen at least 4 or 5 total solar eclipses in different parts of the world).

Right: the poles mark the cover to the snow cave. The access shaft is covered by a sheet of plywood, and the shaft itself needs to be repositioned a couple of times a year.



The trip left at 4.30pm in the afternoon. As this was the beginning of spring, with the sun having only come up for the first time at the end of February, the days were still short but the twilight was already long (the northern part of the sky is still in twilight at 11.30pm). It was a balmy -17°C in the valley (and a lot colder up on the top of the hill, as a fierce wind was blowing). The cave, when we finally reached it, would be a pleasant -3°C inside. We hiked up the hill to the glacier at a fairly decent pace through crunching snow, which got deeper and slower as we neared the lip of the glacier itself. Once at the cave, marked by two poles sticking up out of the snow, the guides cleared the snow off the access cover and handed out crampons, helmets and headlamps to everyone. The crampons were a neat affair of stretchy rubber with chains and spikes on the bottom that fitted over most sizes of boot and they gripped the ice really, really well.



Left: the access shaft is about 5m long and goes down to the glacier through packed snow.

Once we had geared up we slid down through a tight tunnel of snow which turned away to the right and ended up in a cleft of ice that was wide enough for one person and quite high enough to stand up in. Head lamps revealed sparkling crystals and rocks frozen beneath clear smooth ice.

Photographing it was more challenging. My Canon 400D looked fogged - before a quick examination revealed a layer of solid ice frozen over the front of the lens. Not wanting to mess about with that, I found the Lumix DMC inside my jacket and fortunately the same problem did not happen with its lens. Normally I avoid using the flash in limestone caves because of the red cast it brings - but the flash was absolutely essential here and there was only a slight red colour-shift to be seen.

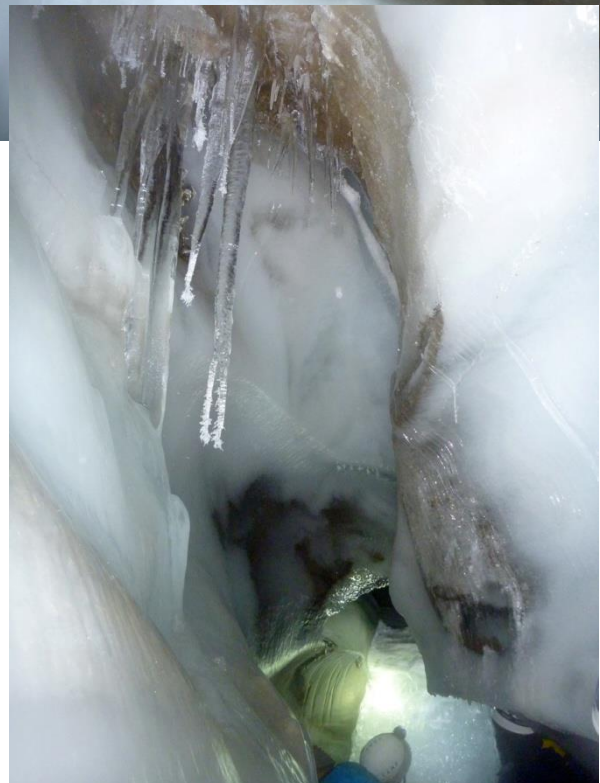


Above: one of the few 'no flash' photos



There were a lot of rocks below the ice - other caves further up the glacier where there is clearer ice apparently look much bluer. Since this cave is at the front of the glacier where it shovels up boulders and so on, these get incorporated into the ice and as a consequence the cave looked like it was made from layers of toffee. Rock could be seen quite clearly in places below a smooth coating of ice.

These caves are formed by melt water running through them in the few warm months of summer, which creates new channels, stalactites of ice (often with little feathery ice crystals attached) and many different types of flow features. In spite of the remoulding, the overall layout of these types of caves remains fairly much the same year after year.



We were in the cave for about an hour, including a pause for a hot drink and the return trip. The walls and floor were smooth ice but traction with the crampons was very good, and there had been steps cut into some of the steeper slopes as well. Eventually we reached a point where there was a drop - the guides themselves had been down there, and assured us that the cave went on for quite a way but required rope work and equipment we didn't have. The only actual 'hard work' of this trip was at the end - worming up out of the snow tunnel. There wasn't much room to move, but there was a rope buried in the snow to help, and it didn't take very long to get everyone out of the cave and back into the freezing cold wind. It was the first cave I've emerged from in a long while where I haven't been covered in mud!

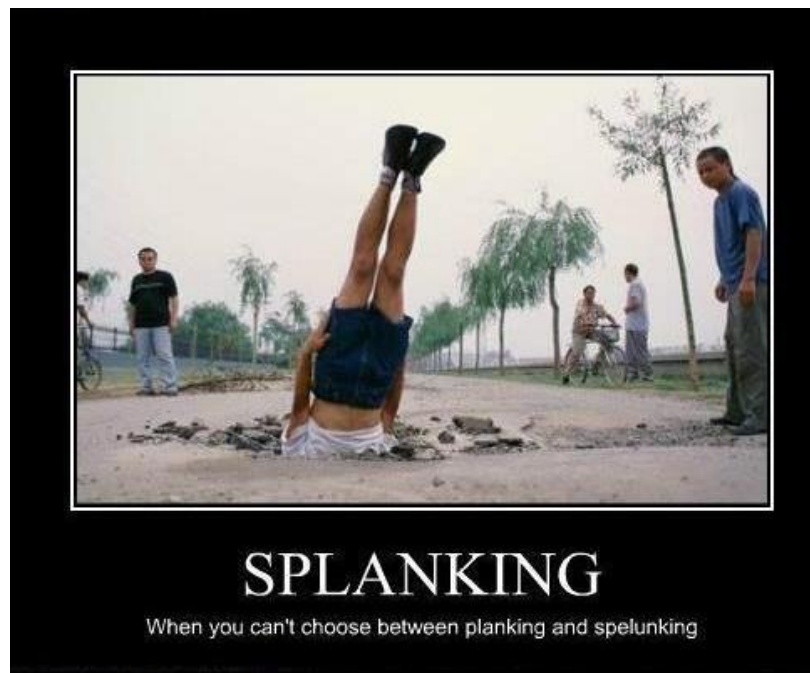
Our guides were excellent - competent, knowledgeable and very friendly. It was a fairly low-key operation and that was a good thing - it never felt like a commercial trip at all, just a group of friends exploring a sculptured cavern under the ice. Highly recommended!



Left: other highlights of the trip - observing a total solar eclipse over the peaks and glaciers of Svalbard from the Isfjorden hill of Fjordnibbe (about 50km east of Longyearbyen and accessed by snowmobile), and photographing aurora in Tromso.

Vocabulary Enhancement Time.

New word for the season "Splanking"



SPLANKING

When you can't choose between planking and spelunking

MSS Trip Calendar

July 18th 19th
CAVING
Abercrombie

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

August 15th & 16th
CAVING
Jenolan

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

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



MSS 417th General Meeting, 14 May 2015

Held at Canada Bay SES

Meeting Opened: 7:35pm

Present:

Roderick Smith, Jim Crockett, Beth Little, Chris Johnstone, Matt Thompson (prospective member)

Apologies:

Cathi Humphrey-Hood, Tim Grimes

Any Corrections to Previous Meetings Minutes: None

Correspondence:

SUSS Bull 53(3)

Joe's Lithgow-Mudgee project account

Caves Australia 199

Numerous RSVPs for the MSS 50th

Committee Members Reports:

President: None

Treasurer: None

Equipment Officer: We have received three new helmets for the club.

Training Officer: We've rescheduled the May training day to the June Jenolan trip. So part of the Jenolan trip will be training in SRT and rigging in a real environment.

Librarian: Due to the librarian moving home, the MSS library is currently in boxes. There is the intention to use the unpacking process to thoroughly catalogue the contents of the library to assist in locating information and resources easily. Any volunteers willing to assist in this process would be greatly appreciated.

Web Manager: There are some minor changes to the website to co-inside with the Autumn Newsletter. More is planned, watch this space.

50th Anniversary Coordinator: Preparations for the 50th anniversary event are in full swing. So far we have approximately 40 RSVPs. Accommodation is under control. The main thing left to do is to lock in the catering, but there are a number of other things as well.

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: Started, with the intention of having it done by the 50th

Electronic Meetings – Rod Smith:

The intention was to have something ready for this meeting. Unfortunately this didn't happen. However, a couple of other considerations have come up to add to this project.

Firstly, most RSL and equivalent clubs have a requirement to provide the use of meeting facilities to other clubs such as MSS. All that is required is a letter of appreciation each year (we could set up a standard template for it). This has a couple of potential advantages, such as (hopefully) good facilities, can be a central location, and we could add a social aspect of a meal beforehand.

The other suggestion was to make the meeting online in a forum, such as a private forum on Facebook, and have it open for a week or two so people can comment whenever they can log in.

Discussion at during the meeting concluded that the appropriate option might be to have the forum during the lead-up to the meeting but still hold the meeting itself for final discussions, voting, etc.

New Business:

Beth needs a commitment from the club regarding an amount per head for catering so she can co-ordinate with a caterer: We agreed on \$30.00 per head as a figure to go to the caterer with.

Trip planning:

Date	Leader	Activity	Location	Grade	Notes
18-19 Jul	Rod	Caving	Abercrombie	Easy	
27 Sep	Helena	Abseiling	Pierces Pass	Medium/Hard	200m single pitch
3-4 Oct	Rod	Caving	Glenrock	Easy/Medium	
7-8 Nov	Rod	Caving	Colong	Medium/Hard	
28-29 Nov	Beth	Training	Rylestone	Training	

Next Meeting:

20 August – Canada Bay SES Headquarters

Meeting Closed: 8:50pm

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