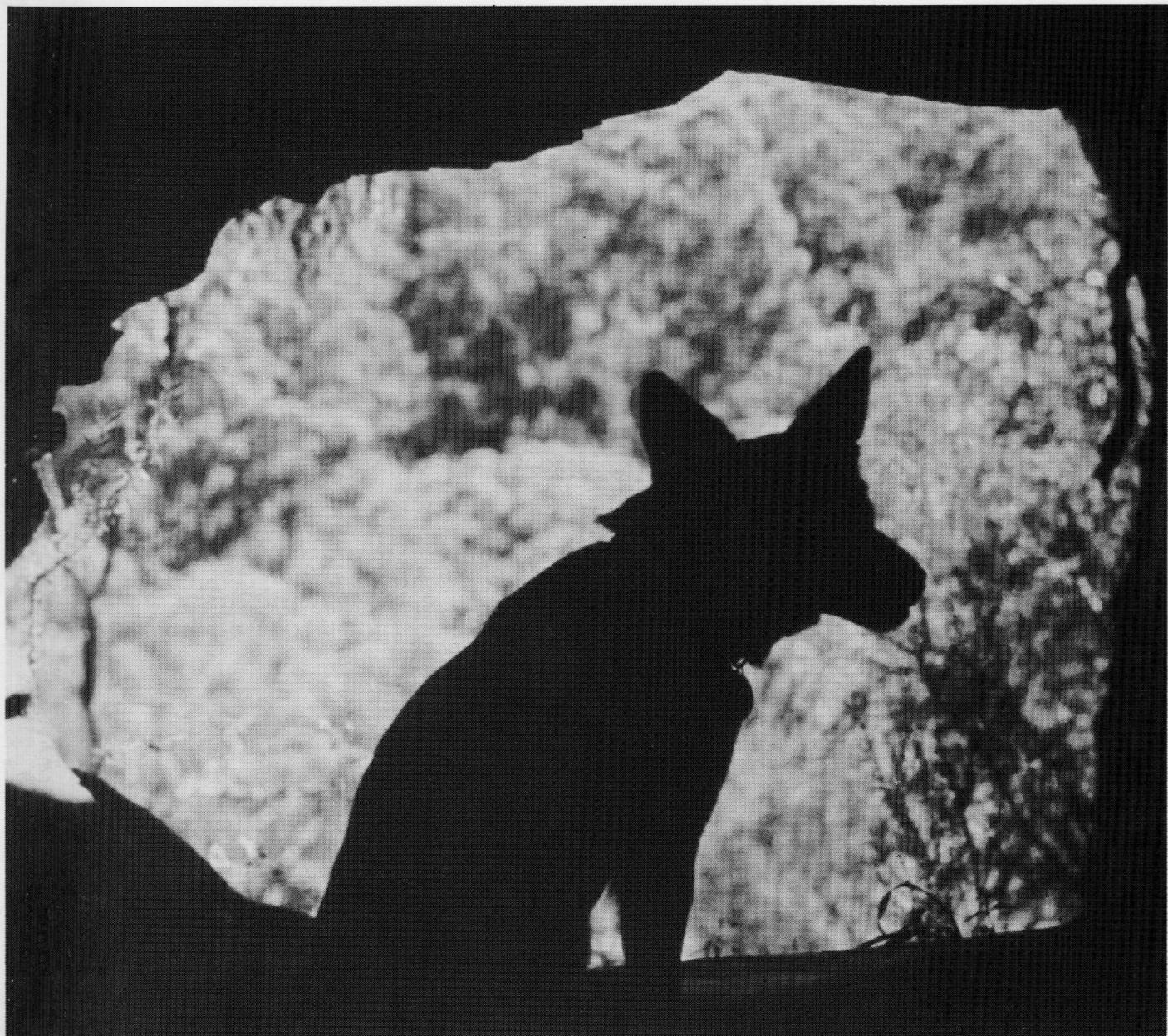


NUCC

SPELEOGRAFFITI

The Newsletter of the
National University Caving Club
G.P.O. Box 4, Canberra, A.C.T. 2601



Volume 21

Number 1

1990

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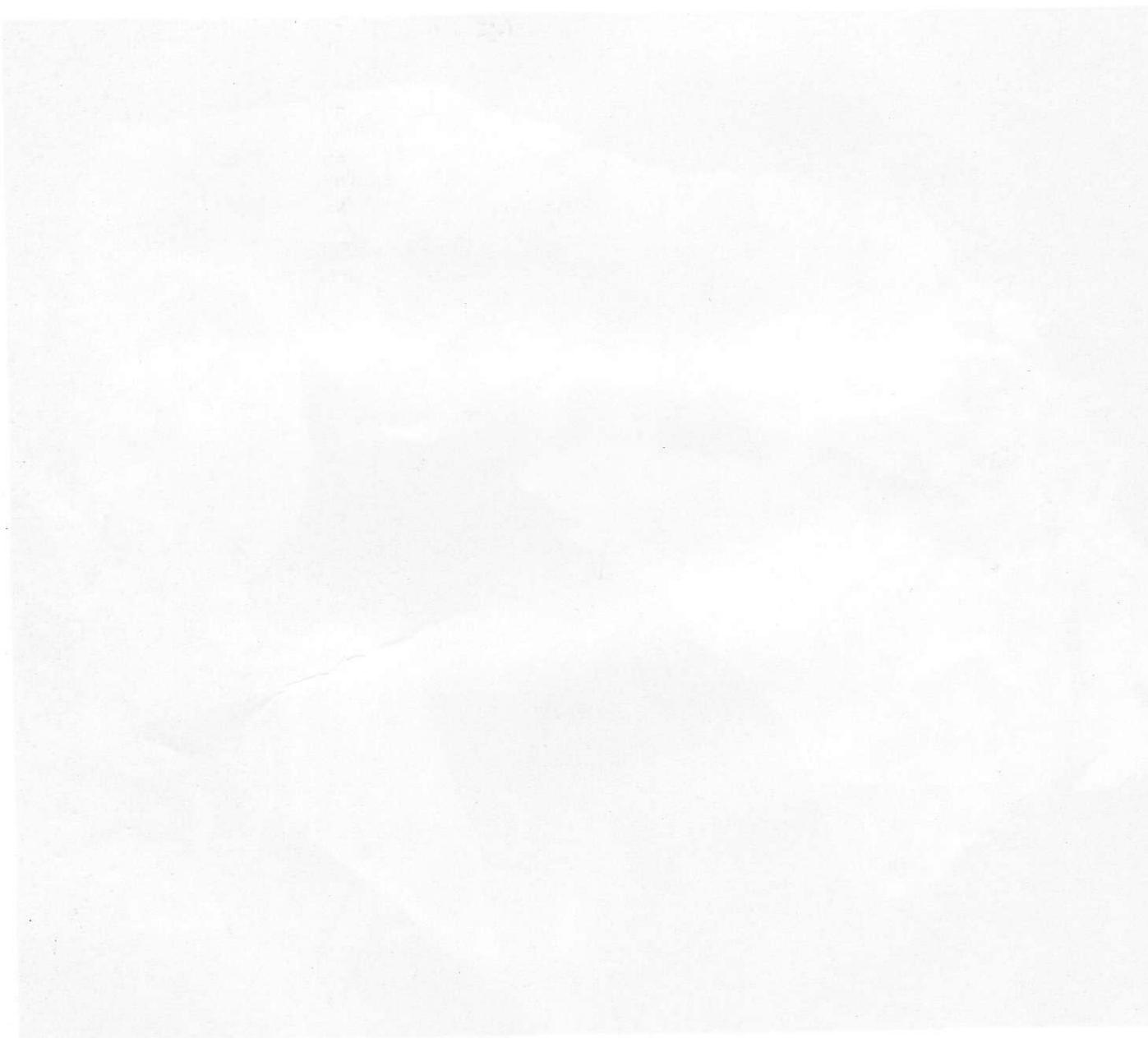
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SPELEOGRAFFITI

Volume 22

September 1990

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY CAVING CLUB (NUCC)

GPO Box 4, Canberra, ACT, 2601

A member Society of the Australian Speleological Federation Inc.

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Editorial

Well, here we have it - another well awaited and long overdue issue of Speleograffiti. Following present trends it looks as if the magazine is becoming an annual affair. One of the main problems in getting a magazine like this up and running (apart from trying to find a night when we actually get some work done instead of accidentally getting pissed) is the general lack of articles or other interesting features to include in the magazine (much thanks to those who have contributed to this issue). In terms of the next edition of Speleograffiti (next year) contribution of any articles, whether caving related or not, are most welcome - so come on, why not get your own article in print. Just as a final note, I may not be the best editor the magazine has ever had (I failed English so I am not overqualified), but I hope you enjoy the mag.

PS. A special thanks to Harvey for his generous assistance.

Tim Barrett

I must agree with all the comments Tim makes above, however there is one point he leaves out which cannot be overlooked. The production of a magazine is a much larger task than the writing of the articles that go into it. Admittedly you can't have a magazine without articles, and to Tim's credit he did contribute a large proportion of the trip reports in this issue, but the real work is in typing up those reports, in organizing the layout, in getting the diagrams together, in filling in the niggly little gaps - in short, the production of a magazine from a collection of bits of paper. I would just like to make the point that before the next publications officer takes on the job they should be aware of what is involved, and be prepared to do the necessary work.

HP

Water, water everywhere...

A detailed study by a team of hydrologists from Canada involved the collecting of a number of water samples taken from three different environments in the limestone terrains of northern Yukon. The three environments covered pine forest areas with dense understory at elevations of 500-750m, high altitude (950m) snow-melt streams from above the tree line, and resurgence streams in limestone terrain. The idea was to measure various parameters such as the partial pressure of CO₂, the CaCO₃ content, pH, alkalinity, cation and anion content etc and after relating that to the vegetation cover, to determine the chemical aggressiveness of the water and try to correlate that to the degree of karstification encountered. Well they found that vegetation increases the partial pressure of CO₂, which increases the potential for dissolving calcium carbonate, and that water from the high non vegetated altitudes was saturated with a total hardness of 80mg/l whereas water from the forested regions was undersaturated even with greater total hardness. So waters from vegetated areas are significantly more aggressive than waters from non vegetated areas. But the only real conclusion they could come up with was that the most important factor in the karstification process is the presence of abundant water - amazing!!!

Thibaudeau,Pierre.; Jean Roberge and Bernard Lauriol (1988)
 "Agressivité chimique des eaux dans les massifs calcaires du nord du Yukon - Canada (1)"
Revue de Géomorphologie dynamique 37: 61-71

HP

Nullarbor Caves

The May Nullarbor holiday was a combined CSS/NUCC trip to the Nullarbor. Seven people ventured into the unknown to fight against nature and the earth.

They were Neil Anderson, Chris Bradley, Catriona Johnson, Robert Apps, Jane Cudmore, Dru Dietz and Jeanette Dunkley.

NB: Don't be put off if I am negative about a cave, this is only my opinion of the cave and not necessarily representative of the group's opinion.

Weebubbie

Don't forget your bathers and lilo. There's a scramble down two shaky ladders into a huge cave system, and down to a lake. The lake used to be the water supply for the Nullarbor Motel/Hotel. The water pump and part of the pipeline are still in the cave. Our group had a couple of floatie things: Neil's inner tube, Chris' lilo, Jeanette's shark, and, wait for it, a rubber waiter belonging to Dru. "It's fucking freezing" most people said on entering the water. Neil had his mask and snorkel and went diving to examine the floor bottom and especially the underwater passage entrances that stem from the lake and extend for some kilometers.

Chris, Catriona, and Jane were being energetic, kicking on the one lilo. I forgot to mention that one of the group swam starkers, however, the water was too cold to make this fact interesting to anyone.

Heading towards the dome on a lilo I felt so overcome with feelings of amazement. I had been in large chambers before, but never in one that was partly filled with water. Here I was floating towards something called a dome, gazing at the rock walls and roof: an under-ground paradise. It seemed as though an Indiana Jones movie should be filmed there, with the hero equipped with diving gear, swimming from an underwater passage to save his woman (no sexism intended). This cave is a must on any caving trip.

Kelly's Cave

a walk-in cave with many large stalactites. It is very dusty and most of the formations are brown. This description also fits Webb's Cave, though Dru felt the latter smelt more musty and of rotting animals. Six small dead bats were found, along with the extreme dust and lack of variety in the two caves.

Abrakurrie

Huge describes it! Massive, extensive, unforgettable. Unfortunately the river forgot to enlarge the entrance, so you actually have to stoop to go into the cave. You enter the cave scrambling over large boulders with birds flying over your head. Inside, one great chamber confronts you. It extends for miles only divided slightly by small arches. One steps into this underground chasm and just stares at its magnitude. We wandered around and proceeded towards the dome at the end.

The dome is formed by extensive pressure from the upper layers of rock pressing down-wards and breaking

up the bottom layer so that it falls, creating a circular hole in the roof. The cave walls are composed of billions of broken shells, all mashed together in layers, a reminder that the whole Nullarbor was once a sea bed. We sat examining the walls for shells and bits of sea anemones. Chris found a tiny bat huddling in one of the crevices in the rock. It was shivering violently for fear. We were large creatures, chattering with blinding bright lights. We had seen some other bats near the cave entrance and I hope this one found its way back to that group of bats.



Kestrel 1

For those who like abseiling, laddering or jumaring. The pitch down to the bottom of the doline is 80m. A horror for me as I hate laddering. Dru whizzed up, a beginner to jumaring yet mastering it quickly. She was a pure white figure (white helmet and overalls) pictured against the brown, heavily jointed or honey-combed rock. Jeanette, who we nicknamed "The Monk", sat at the top of the pitch looking down. A solitary figure dressed in a large grey jacket with the hood drawn down against the cold and rain. For me, with all my bias, the cave was definitely not worth the laddering. The cave is quite large but peters out after about forty meters.

Snake Pit

Snake Pit is very dusty, very dark, and very dead. Including the rotting ram, carked-it cat, smelly snake skin - but don't worry, no snakes. It's one of those once only caves: once is enough.

Joe's "Muddy" Cave

A large doline one kilometer from the faint road. This has a cave of 200m, involving a lot of crawling, much of which is over mud. Beware: feet are liable to sink in the mud which can reach the top of one's boots.

Kestrel 2

The person surveying this cave forgot to mention the need for a ladder and perhaps also a rope to make the descent to the cave entrance safe. Even Neil had to turn back and wait for the ladder. Once inside the track slopes downwards. There was a recently deceased kangaroo with a broken leg in the cave, probably not "gnawed" as someone said, not mentioning any names Neil Anderson! The cave looked as though it had a fair amount of rain at times. Not a bad cave overall.

Thampana

Brilliant; Neil's and my favourite cave. Thampana's entrance is a pitch of 45x5x5m. The cave breathes as do many of the Nullarbor caves. When the cave was expelling air, we had fun throwing a frisbee over the pitch and watching the frisbee suddenly being pushed higher into the air. For six hours the cave sucks air into itself and then proceeds to expell it again for another six hours. The fact that the caves can suck so much air in gives one an idea of how big they must really be. Of course as the rock is fairly porous the air can go in cracks too small for humans. Thampana has two special areas in it: the 'extension' and the 'drain'. The former is a must. After entering the cave one follows the right-hand passage (towards the hill on surface) along to its last alcove, where the extension is found. The extension has been open since 1981. It is a tiny hole on the right of this arch and requires sliding on your stomach to get through. It is well worth doing this as the cave soon widens into numerous chambers where one can spend hours exploring. The extension has numerous chambers with overlapping, twisting, and branching passages: Thank God this cave has little red fluorescent markers; otherwise it would be easy to get lost due to disorientation. Note the 'coffee and cream' formation in this area.

The drain seems to go forever. It is a very long crawling height passage that occasionally opens up into small chambers. If you're very persistent, and are prepared to crawl for an hour or so, you will get to a quite beautiful area of formation. (It would be easier to look in Thylacine or Witches however.) Don't ask me how much further the drain goes, as our exploratory party of Neil, Catriona, Robert and myself didn't have time to reach the end. According to Chris and Dru whom we had left behind in an extension chamber, we were supposed to just look up ahead around the next corner. Instead we were gone for about one and a half hours.

We went to Thampana twice we loved it so much.

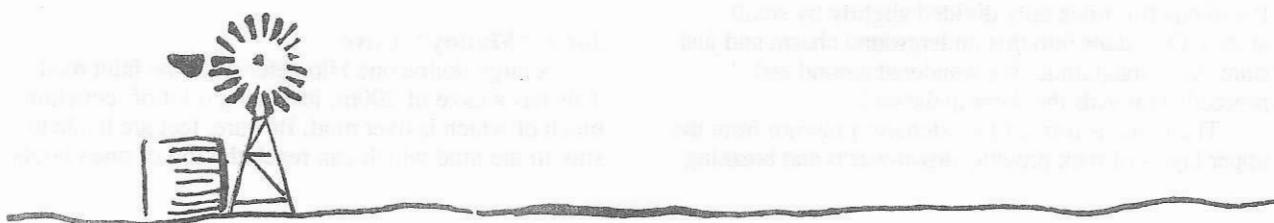
Witches

One of the better smaller caves. Numerous connecting chambers of varying height from crouching to just standing. A little way in there are markers. An early chamber has a marker off to the left and one to the right. We took the passage to the right which continued, with some crawling, to a terrific area of evil looking formations. Hence, I suppose, the name "Witches", for we didn't see any witches, nor their black cats or broomsticks. Two formations were an umbrella with tassels seen by Catriona, and a crocodile seen by Chris (you needed a good imagination). We then retraced and progressed/regressed left. A fairly tight squeeze took us into a crawling height chamber. Jane called back that the squeeze led to a chamber and sucked in Robert and Chris into following. The hole is not really worth entering unless you wish to photograph sea anemones sticking out of the ceiling; these are found in the right-hand corner. Beware! The squeeze out is a wonderful excuse for those who like to swear. To find Witches you go the required distance along the fence line, then jump the fence and head 600 ft at 90° from it.

Thylacine (First trip)

They all trodged up and up and prepared to descend into the lengthy pitch. Unfortunately, Jane got her hair caught in the whatail as she descended. Robert advised her to just keep on going down slowly as the hair should release itself. This worked successfully so that there was no need to throw a ladder down so that she could detach her hair. The group had started abseiling down even though they knew the ladder didn't reach the bottom. After three people were down Jane decided to climb up to the ladder to check that it was as easy as it looked. At nine feet off the ground she reached for a thick stalagmite the size of two fists. This unfortunately came loose, throwing her from the wall. Luckily Chris intercepted her descent after six feet and she fell onto Catriona's lap. Injuries sustained were to Catriona's face and nose, Chris' finger cut slightly, and Jane's nose grazed in two parallel lines, like claw marks. It was a virtually impossible climb back up so Robert and Neil dragged two of the members, who really didn't feel like doing chin-ups, up to the start of the ladder.

The cave possessed some of the best formations I have ever seen. The soil is dark red, and there is black rock. Pure white calcite surrounds this. There are numerous distorted stalagmites and stalactites. Sections of the roof are completely filled with 20cm stalactites, all parallel and pointing downwards like the roof of a chamber for torture; a chamber in which the walls, roof and floor protrude spikes and slowly contract piercing their victim. The cave is relatively undisturbed with much of the crystal on the ground still intact. In the prettiest part there is a thin 30cm path for people to walk along, thus stopping further damage.



Thylacine (Second trip)

Two kestrels and another bird were inside the forty foot pitch, and flew out as we rigged. It is a hard pitch to abseil due to a slight overhang at the beginning. As you move from the entrance passage into the first chamber, note the hole from which you emerged: it can be hard to find on the way back.

The aim of the group's second trip was photography. Chris photographed the formations "The Devil", "The Bubbling Cauldron" as well as an X-rated picture of a stalagmite. Why X-rated? I'll leave that to your imagination, but remember that Chris is NUCC's ~~former~~ Morals Officer.

One of the interesting things about this cave is the presence of thin centimeter-length pellets of brown faeces. Our group couldn't think what they belonged to. We decided against the mummified owl we found, yet what type of animal can live in the dark without food? Our best theory was that the kestrels or owls had brought in their prey - rats - of which some had been still alive and these had multiplied.

Mullamullang

If you're into 10.45 hr slogs over forty large boulder piles for 12 km, then this cave is for you. As you enter the cave a 'reduce speed' sign confronts you; just follow the cairns (small rock pile markers) and particularly the red and white markers that are visible from a large distance. A sand dune with a path to its left is then seen. The sand dune is one of the cave's major features; it is extremely high. Progressing further you can take a scenic route through 'coffee and cream' decoration to the 'salt cellars'. Coffee and cream is two tone soil blended in stripes: white calcite powder mixed with equally powdery red rock soil. The salt cellars are small passages where gypsum salt is squeezed out of the rock under pressure. The formation comes out like toothpaste: long thin curly

white tubes ooze from the one point. A photographer's dream.

It is probably time to stop and criticize the thoughtless vandalism of some people in such delicate areas. The smooth surface of the dune, as well as the coffee and cream formations, have been marred by footsteps. Such people have irreparably spoilt this formation for everyone. We now stare bitterly at the destructive nature of people rather than the beauty of nature. Once vandalism starts it continues more rapidly as each new person values the formation's beauty less.

Other major formations include 'the sail', a flat piece of fallen rock lodged vertically in the path, 'the drop off', where there is a long valley between rock piles and the lakes. There are three major lakes. The members of the expedition, minus Jeanette and Dru who declined the full 10.45 hr challenge, swam in White Lake on the way there and back: an icy-cool refreshing swim before climbing yet another boulder pile. Beware! some of the piles are 60m high In some parts dead cockroaches and bats can be found on the path. Look out for 'the kitchen' and 'camp 1', the campsite of the 1965 mapping survey expedition.

Reaching the end dome is an achievement, though not very spectacular. Just ignore your legs when they tell you that you can't possibly scramble up more boulders for another five or six hours on your return. On our trip we had Neil discovering and leading us down the easiest path, Jane screaming when she fell down between rocks, Robert at the rear stopping stragglers and keeping the group together, Chris with information about the 1965 expedition and knowledge of the cave, and finally Catriona with her supreme audacity in not looking too exhausted at the end of the 10.45 hr stretch.

Jane Cudmore

The Real Caver's Guide to Caving Calls

Up Ropes:	When ladder climber is stuffed and wants to be hauled up on the rope.
That's Me:	Call used when those with dead lights start groping around in the dark.
On Ladder:	Call used when a person up above appears to be derigging the ladder.
Help:	Call used to alert other cavers to your temporary disabilities.
Climbing:	Used to inform others that you are about to do something extremely stupid
Slack:	Expression used for cavers who will not grovel in the mud or crawl through squeezes.
Falling:	Momentarily accelerating at 9.8m/sec^2 in a downwards direction.
Below:	Used to warn the people below that you or some other cave debris is about to land on top of them.

Buchan

Leaving a little after 4pm on the Friday afternoon (4.30 pm to be precise - NUCC trips always run late) we headed off with our destination being Buchan. After seven hours driving and much stressful navigation on my part (I was not driving) we arrived at Homeleigh to meet Ian and Jenny who had arrived quite a while earlier, and three sprightly VSA members, the only one I can remember being Peter Ackroyd. Within half an hour Chris, Jane, and a guy whose name has temporarily slipped my memory, arrived from Melbourne.

Because of the late hour of our arrival at Buchan and the even later hour by which we got to bed, no one was in any particular hurry to get up on Saturday morning, but finally the hot showers and brewing coffee lured us out - Chris and Jane, of course, being last. Within 2-3 hours we were organized and the advanced party headed off to Baby Berger while the beginners and those who did not feel like the strenuous activity of SRT-ing went and did Wilson's cave (a cave which starts on one side of the road and ends up on the other - no it is not a drainpipe) and another cave whose name I have pleasantly forgotten.

For those of us who did Baby Berger, the abseil of about 50m was terrific, especially as the rope hung down the middle of a cavern for most of the drop. The only problem with this cave was that once we had reached the bottom of the drop we had to prussik all the way back up again - to the regret of our leg and arm muscles.

On Sunday we all headed down to the Pyramids area (by car of course) to have a little bit of a walk and look through Dalley's Sinkhole Cave. This is an interesting but moist cave with a small river running through it, which I am sure must get bigger at certain times, with scalloping covering most of the rock surfaces lower down in the cave. Kelly the speleomut waited at the cave entrance for us.

Next we walked around and had a look at a small untagged cave, and then one of the Pyramids which are just limestone outcrops. Ian and I decided to climb one but I retreated about half way up. Ian on the other hand, continued to the top to find that getting down is harder than getting up; so we had to throw some tapes up to him.

That evening, on the way to the Pub, Chris and I looked through Wilson's Cave, to the annoyance of Dru who was dying to get to the pub (Bob and Dru arrived on Saturday). We accidentally got our jeans dirty by trying too hard - Oh well!

On the final day we decided to leave early and look at the sights on the return trip. We headed from Buchan to Snowy River National Park where intermittent snow was falling. While taking in the view of the waterfall from Little River lookout, we just happened to drop a rope over the edge from the viewing platform and abseiled down. Jane and I even clambered in behind the waterfall. She then decided to go for a swim - I was a little more sane as it was still snowing occasionally.

Next stop was lunch in the bush and then we moved on to McKillops Bridge. Again the urge took hold of us so we dropped a few ropes from the top of the bridge and abseiled our way down. The abseil was so good I decided to prussik back up. Everyone else wimped out and walked back around.

After swapping drivers a few times, and a few more hours, we reached Cooma. To our annoyance none of the four pubs in Cooma were still serving counter meals, so the final resort was the take-away adjacent to the park. The service was really up the creek! As we left Cooma we all went our separate ways (Our own separate speeds would better sum that up). I got home at about 10pm (I think?) after having had a thoroughly good weekend - what I would class as a "Buchan good weekend"

Tim Barrett

Yarrangobilly

Australia Day Weekend, 1990

Chris Bradley (Trip Leader), Tim Barrett, Jane Cudmore,
Jason Sinnott, Hugh Sainty, Lindsay Irvine.

After leaving three quarters of an hour late from Canberra, we arrived at the meeting place in Cooma to find the other vehicle had only arrived five minutes before us anyway.

We reached Yarrangobilly Caves by midnight to find the Ranger Station and Caves House deserted, and a note to the effect that the Rangers were all down at the thermal pool.

Having made the walk down to the pool we joined what turned out to be a party in full swing. Rod Edmundson (the Ranger in charge for the weekend and also a member of NUCC) had lost the keys for Yarrangobilly in the thermal pool and searching for them proved pointless in the dark, so he had to break into the Ranger Station to get us the Cotrills and cave keys.

On Saturday we did Mill Creek Swallet, to the disgust of everyone's knees and elbows. This (I think) is a terrific cave. We managed to connect a passage previously mapped by NUCC (1988) to a passage I knew of from a previous trip into the cave. There was very little water passing through the cave and the sump water level was low so we could enter a small chamber not normally accessible, and could see further passage underwater which we did not feel up to entering.

That afternoon we entered Y10 or Old Inn Cave. None of the party had ever been in this cave before so we had to go solely by the map (Nargun 20(7) : 65). After the epic entry through (now compacted) blackberry bushes where you have to make your own path, we began our exploration of the cave. This is a nice cave, containing decoration in patches and an interesting (but very wet) squeeze through the first sump (and yes, some of us were stupid enough to grovel our way through). Once wet, the two small waterfalls inside the cave also make interesting climbing. One hint for future trips - if you want to get wet, do it on the way out.

After a good barbecue and much alcohol, we all had a good, if somewhat sore nights sleep.

On Sunday we headed off to do North Deep Creek Cave. On the walk to the cave we passed the entrance to Janus Cave - and eyed it with much envy (those of you who know the cave will know why, for the rest of you, bad luck). We all reached the first sump of the cave, but to my disappointment, no one else was willing to pass through. We all signed into the visitors book and took a whole lot of pretty pickies to show that we had been there and done that. Getting back to the cars from the cave took a little longer than the trip in because we became temporarily disoriented. That evening Jason headed back to Canberra as he had to go to Tech of Monday.

Mondayitis set in for the final day of the trip, and when we did rise everyone was sore and Chris' arm was not in the most active condition for caving, so we decided

to do the two tourist adventure caves rather than more wild caves. We ended up doing Castle, Harrywood and Glory Hole Caves (taking lots of pickies) and, of course, we did the "Kids Cave" (if you could call it a cave). To end the day we went for a swim in the thermal pool and met Neil Kell (Chief Ranger at Yarrangobilly) on the way out, so we talked for half an hour before heading back to Canberra.

On our way in and out we did our service to the park by hitting three rabbits, but we also wiped out an owl (outside the park) and Chris nearly hit a wombat... and thus the Madza 626 expedition to Yarrangobilly was over!

Tim Barrett.

Wee Jasper

13 January 1990

Present: Tim Barrett (trip leader), David Bofinger, and a hole lot of University Summer Scholars.

This turned out to be a beginners trip where they learned the real meaning of caving, including ladder climbing, crawling and much more.

If you really want to know more then you can come and ask me, but I will say two more things: it was the first time I have been caving with an Iranian, and the first time I have been breath tested on the Wee Jasper road!

Tim Barrett

Bungonia

29 January 1990

Present: Tim Barrett, Jason Sinnott, Lyle Williams, Chris Bradley, and Jane Cudmore

This was a day trip which turned into an afternoon trip because everyone slept in.

Lyle, Jason and I went to do Blowfly (and specifically the adytum) while Chris and Jane went to do B4-5 and Grill (and who knows what else).

After abseiling into Blowfly and rigging the ladder, we discovered we were one ladder short; we had enough for the main pitch but needed one for the entrance to the adytum. This was saved because I had my SRT gear there so we used the bottom ladder from the main pitch.

After doing the squeeze of squeezes, which just happened to end with a ladder pitch, we rigged the adytum. Jason and I abseiled down, just to have a prussik back up. At least we could say that we had done one of the longest underground pitches on the mainland of Australia - 155 ft. Because the squeeze was on an angle we did not have gravity to help us on the way out, which made life very difficult.

After exiting the cave we went and had a look at Bungonia Gorge, and the superb mess that mining has made of it. The dramatic increase in the size of the mine surprised us all.

After a dinner and grog stop in Goulburn, we headed home - a good day had by all.

Tim Barrett

Wyanbene

a short recount

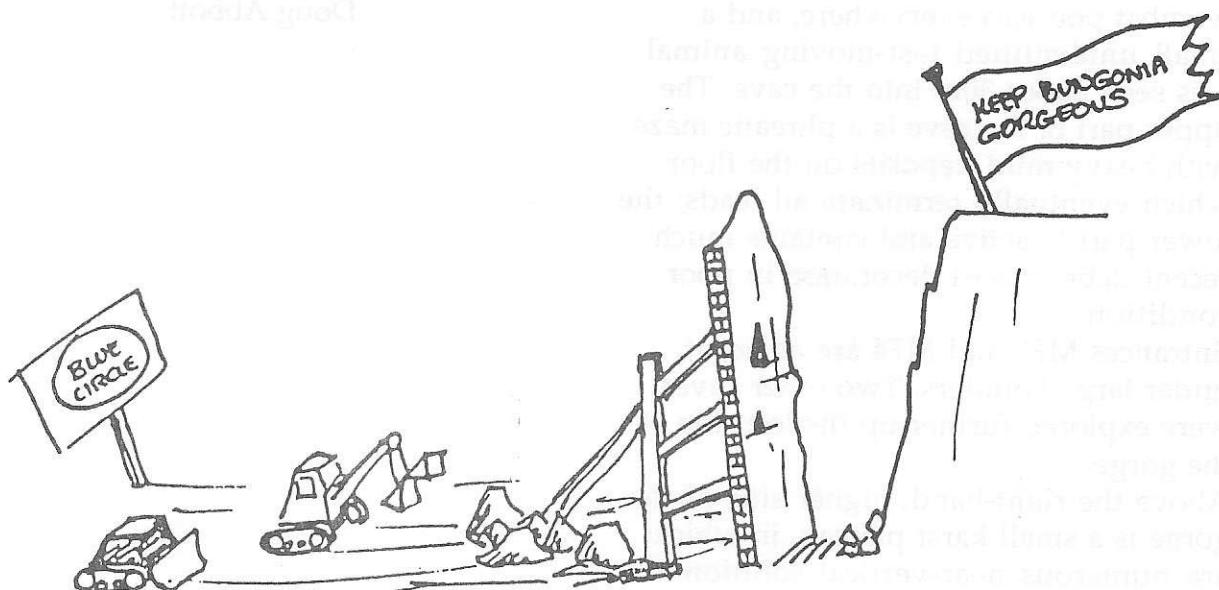
April 6, 1990

Doug Abbott, Harvey Perkins, Jenny Dyring, Lyle Williams, Tim Barrett, Jason Sinnott, David Bofinger.

After a delayed start, when Lyle was extracted from his bed, we regrouped at the Shoalhaven River and headed to the Wyanbene carpark. Sometime later, when gear was sorted out, we sloshed up the (flowing) track to the entrance and proceeded to get wetter still inside the cave. Much time was spent in locating 1. Aitchisons Bypass, 2. the Gunbarrel Aven, and 3. Caesers Hall. After lunch we went as far as Diarrhoea Pit, where the water was about 1.5 m deep. This dampened enthusiasm somewhat, so the decision to retreat was not a hard one.

Two issues came to mind following this trip: A lesson should be learned, regarding the observing, registering and remembering of one's environment. Especially in such unfamiliar surroundings as a cave, where the usual cues for orientation are not applicable. Physical fitness for caving is also of high importance. Because distance is covered relatively slowly, I am often lulled into thinking that I am not overly exerting myself. However, as well as this being a fallacy, the cold (and in this case, wet) conditions combine to make caving a potentially hypothermic situation in south eastern Australia. Anyway, if you are fit, you get all sorts of other benefits above ground too!

Jenny Dyring



reprinted from SUSS BULL 26 (1)

Mt Fairy

8 April 1990

Six cavers visited Mt Fairy on 8 April 1990. Lindsay was to have led but he was crook and wisely stayed at home (I was crook too, but not so wise).

The obvious entrance facing you as you arrive at the limestone outcrop (MFX 16) is a short man-made adit. Continuing to the left of the outcrop and descending into the "gorge", one passes an obvious sink on the right, whose entrance is tagged but thoroughly blocked by cobbles - this is where the stream from the direction of the farm buildings sinks. Several other tagged entrances, some man-made, were found on both sides as we walked along the gorge; most were short and/or tight; some contained swallows' nests, some wombat holes; one man-made adit led to a natural cave. There is also a small abandoned limestone quarry.

The main cave (MF1) was easily located about 200m along the gorge on the left, where a sizeable stream, flowing towards you, sinks at a large entrance. A large number of bats were seen and heard (and smelled !) in the entrance chamber, wombat poo was everywhere, and a small unidentified fast-moving animal was seen about 30m into the cave. The upper part of the cave is a phreatic maze with heavy mud deposits on the floor which eventually terminate all leads; the lower part is active and contains much recent debris; most decoration in poor condition.

Entrances MF2 and MF4 are adjacent, under large boulders. Two other caves were explored further up the left side of the gorge.

Above the right-hand, higher side of the gorge is a small karst plateau, in which are numerous near-vertical solution tubes up to about 6m deep and 2m across, some of which are partly or wholly mud-

filled. Here the dip of the limestone strata is about 80° , with the strike more or less parallel to the gorge. In addition, there are numerous entrances adjacent to prominent outcrops. Some but not all of these tubes and entrances are tagged, some clearly recently so; the highest tag number seen was MF59. We did not fully explore the plateau but one surmises many small caves with mainly vertical development. In particular an untagged (?) hole in the bottom of a steep-sided shakehole was noted, but a thick mass of thorn bushes prevented close inspection. This whole area clearly invites more and methodical exploration - it may offer new discoveries and may be suitable as a beginners and/or training area. Some interesting-looking cliffs, both man-made and natural, lie beyond the farm buildings, but we did not inspect them for limestone.

Much time was spent exploring on the surface; the weather turned foul, and as we were by then wet and cold, we called it a day in mid-afternoon.

Doug Abbott

Mt Fairy or In the Lair of the Killer Wombat

29 April 1990

Andrew Wall, Tim Barrett, Doug Abbott, John, Paul
(Names changed to protect the guilty)

- Here we are in the Bat-Cave (MF1) again, Batman!
- Don't call me "Batman" !
- Well what are those floppy black things all over you?
- That's not the point, Robin. We're here to find the Killer Wombat and bring it back alive!
- The Killer Wombat?
- Yes, Robin, the Killer Wombat; we're in its burrow now!
- Holy Toledo, Batman, it must be enormous!
- It is Robin, and dangerous too; look at those deep scratch-marks on the wall - its claws are tipped with tungsten carbide, and its breath can drop a caver at ten metres. We must be very careful!
- Look at these huge cave-pearls, Batman! They are 5cm in diameter and soft and brown!
- They're not cave-pearls, Robin, they're Killer Wombat shit! Crawl for your life!

(back on the surface)...

- What's for lunch, Batman?
- Don't call me "Batman" !
- Well, what's for lunch?
- Crunchy bat.
- What's that?
- Fresh bat, lightly killed (crunch!) ...
- I'll pass.
- Did you observe, Robin, that those bats had no noses?
- Then how do they smell, Batman?
- Awful, Robin, absolutely awful.
- Holy histoplasmosis, Batman, let's go home!
- OK Robin, but first we'll visit MF4, MF20, MF21, MFX39, MFX17, MF7 (worth another look), MF37, MF41, MF40, MF12.

Doug Abbott



The dreaded
Killer Wombat
asleep in
its lair

Mount Fairy: Main Cave

After several recent trips to Mount Fairy I thought it appropriate to write a general report on the main cave (MF1-4)

The main cave is located several hundred metres along the northern side of the obvious dry valley to the south of Mount Fairy. One of the two main entrances to the cave is a stream sink (intermittent), the other being a dry entrance above and to the left of this. If the stream is dry the stream passage can be followed for about 20-30 metres, past the obvious 'rift' near the entrance (that goes to the rockpile entrance of MF3) along a crawl passage, and over a small rockpile to a sump. On my last visit the water level was low enough to see along 5m of passage with enough air space to be negotiated, but I didn't feel like getting wet! The passage is heading in the general direction of the sump near the extension squeeze.

There is some tight passage above the first sump, one of which leads to another entrance via a low crawl (MF50 ?). A lot of sediment is evident here, and much evidence of wombats. There were a couple of tight leads in this area but they were not explored very far and appeared to be very tight and not likely to "go".

The fourth entrance to the cave is via the mine adit and some passages that are intersected some way into the mine. These passages connect into the maze section of the cave, a series of complex phreatic passages that have been fairly badly vandalized. This section of the cave is dry and is often used by bats. Many of the small phreatic tubes are partially filled with sediment, evidence that this part of the cave has been "dead" for a long time. Many possible leads exist in this section, most of which would have to be dug to some extent. Some digs appear to have been done in the past, but no evidence could be found as to who by. There is little decoration in the upper sections of the cave - decoration that does exist is either badly vandalized or very dirty and dead.

By following a series of small passages down through the maze the lower section of the cave is entered. A side passage in the upper level leads to a window that overlooks the main chamber in the lower level. A careful traverse and descent via a handline leads into the main chamber. As this way is a little tricky it is not often used. The chamber at his lower level appears to be generally of phreatic origin, with some good examples of roof pendants etc. There has been some modification by vadose action, and this is continuing during times of high water levels. Lots of bats use this chamber, so take care to disturb them as little as possible.

There is a major rift crossing the floor of this chamber with a cobble floor. This rift can be followed, past the extension squeeze and another small lead off to the left, to a sump. Off to the left, if access was via the normal way, several rift-like passages can be followed to another sump. Again, last time I was here the water level was low enough for some brave soul to continue along the stream passage, but none came forth, so the problem remains.

The extension is gained via a very tight squeeze located about half way along the rift passage to the right of the main chamber. The squeeze is found opposite a flowstone wall (on the right), just past a flowstone duck-under section of the rift. If Hills Speleos have recently been in the cave then the squeeze will be filled with rocks. A few minutes of clearing is all that is required to open it again. A number of people feel that this blockage is responsible for the muddying of decoration in the externsion during flood times, and the evidence certainly points to this conclusion.

I feel it would be better to leave this squeeze open (maybe a better means of protection could be devised - ie a gate). The tight crawl further along the rift passage also leads to the extension.

The extension squeeze leads into a very muddy rift with a nicely decorated upper level. A low crawl through a couple of pools and lots of mud leads to the main chamber of the extension, with its great straws and 'tites. A visitors book has been placed here by Hills Speleos - please sign it for their records. Note the very flat (bedding plane?) roof. Passages continue to the right and left. To the right are a couple of small rooms, one with a rockpile wall, and some nice decoration. Several small passages lead off to the right and down to water, which appears to be standing water, ie the water table. These passages are very tight and great care should be taken. They still havn't been fully explored yet.

To the left of the visitors book passages continue up past a stalagmite boss and decoration. While there are passages to the right of this passage, they are blocked (initially at least) by sediment. Past the boss the passage becomes low and continues past some great (dry) helictites on the right hand wall to a flowstone shelf. Over the shelf and down to the left leads to a small chamber with lots of nice decoration. On the way in look out for the tiny, pure white helictites on the roof! Several passages and rooms lead off this chamber, two on the right hand side leading to a small room with a shallow pool. There are some great botryoidal formations (pure white) in a small recess behind the pool.

The pool is nearly blocked by a flowstone mass which comes to within 10cm of the water level at its lowest. This squeeze can be passed but it is tight and does require getting very wet. As my companion would not follow me through on the last trip I only had a quick glance around this section. Other people had certainly been here as evidenced by the boot prints in the mud. The pool is only about 4m long and is in a 3x4 m room with some beautiful white shawls and straws. I followed one lead through to another room and further passages but did not continue as I was by myself. The lower passages were very muddy but the decoration above the mud was great! This section of cave certainly warrants another look.

I think there is still a lot of cave waiting to be found at Mt Fairy. Certainly the section beyond the pool requires a good look at. I feel that further steps should be taken to protect this great cave . We should also survey the extension and the stream passage near the entrance, and tie this into NUCC's previous survey (J. Furlonger, 1972).

Lindsay Irvine



Victorian Lava Caves

Expeditioners: Tim Barrett, Andrew Wall and Byron Deveson.

The three of us and 4-Runner with trailer hitched set off at six thirty on Thursday 12 July. After dinner in Yass and several more hours driving (and sleeping on my part) we stopped for the night in Holbrook.

Friday was our first chance to get underground - although not down a cave. We were in a tourist mine in Bendigo and were even provided with Lead Acids and Helmets for our tour. The tour was interesting, but our guide failed to allow us to climb the emergency ladder - rather making us take the lift up the height of sixteen stories.

We arrived in Hamilton on Saturday morning and found luxury accommodation before heading to Mt Eccles National Park. First stop was a natural bridge Cave - part of a lava tube which had collapsed at both ends of the cave. The tube was about ten metres in diameter and 30-40 metres in length. The walls of the cave were composed of very rough volcanic rock due to the amount of gas in the lava when it was molten. The tube for many hundreds of metres each end of the cave was completely collapsed in and looked more like a ditch.

Next we looked at a spatter cone. This is a small offshoot of the main volcano and looks like a volcano on a much smaller scale. I am told that it is normal for volcanic features like this to close up as their activity is reduced, so this open spatter cone is very unusual if not unique in the world. The cone was about 60 foot deep and began five metres in diameter - opening up as we descended. The rock at the mouth of the cone looked like it had been spattered with mud, but this was in fact rock which had been spattered from the cone when active. A map of the cone is included.

The main crater at Mt Eccles is about a kilometre long and half a kilometre wide. There are several lava tubes leading from the side of the cone, one of which has been developed as a wild tourist cave. In the base of the crater is a lake called Lake Surprise.

Sunday saw us heading to Byaduk and the small cave reserve a few kilometres from the town. These lava tubes extend from Mt Napier which is several kilometres away. The enterable tubes extend in a rough line (as can be seen in the map

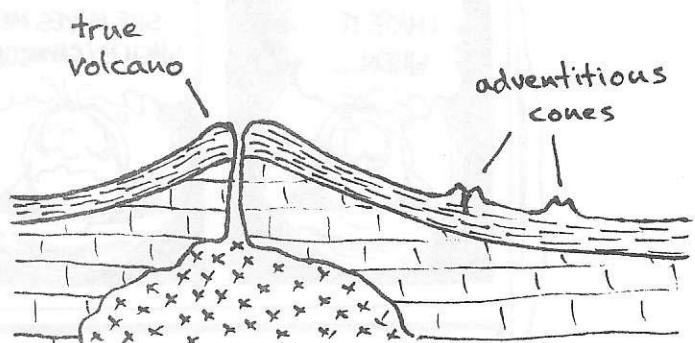
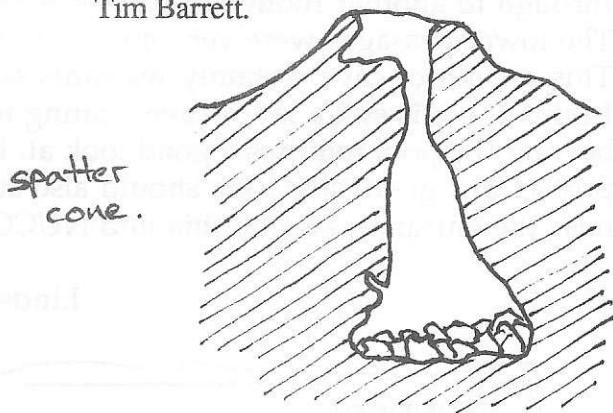
of the Byaduk area), and only extend in bits and pieces for about a kilometre, even though we were 5 - 10 kilometres from Mt Napier.

The longest of the lava tubes in the Byaduk area is about 150 m long, and all the tubes extend from spectacular collapses in the lava tube. Fortunately the Byaduk Lava features are relatively unknown and only with maps, and in certain cases ladders and other equipment, is it possible to enter the caves.

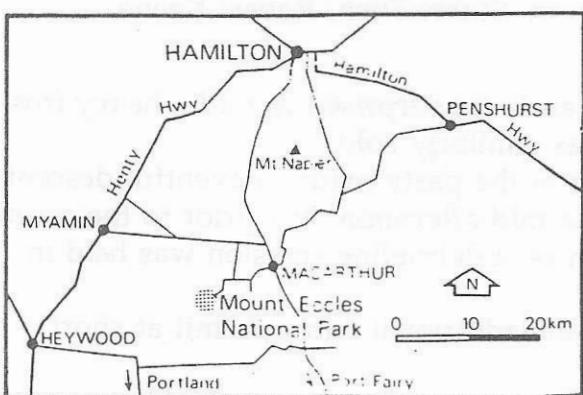
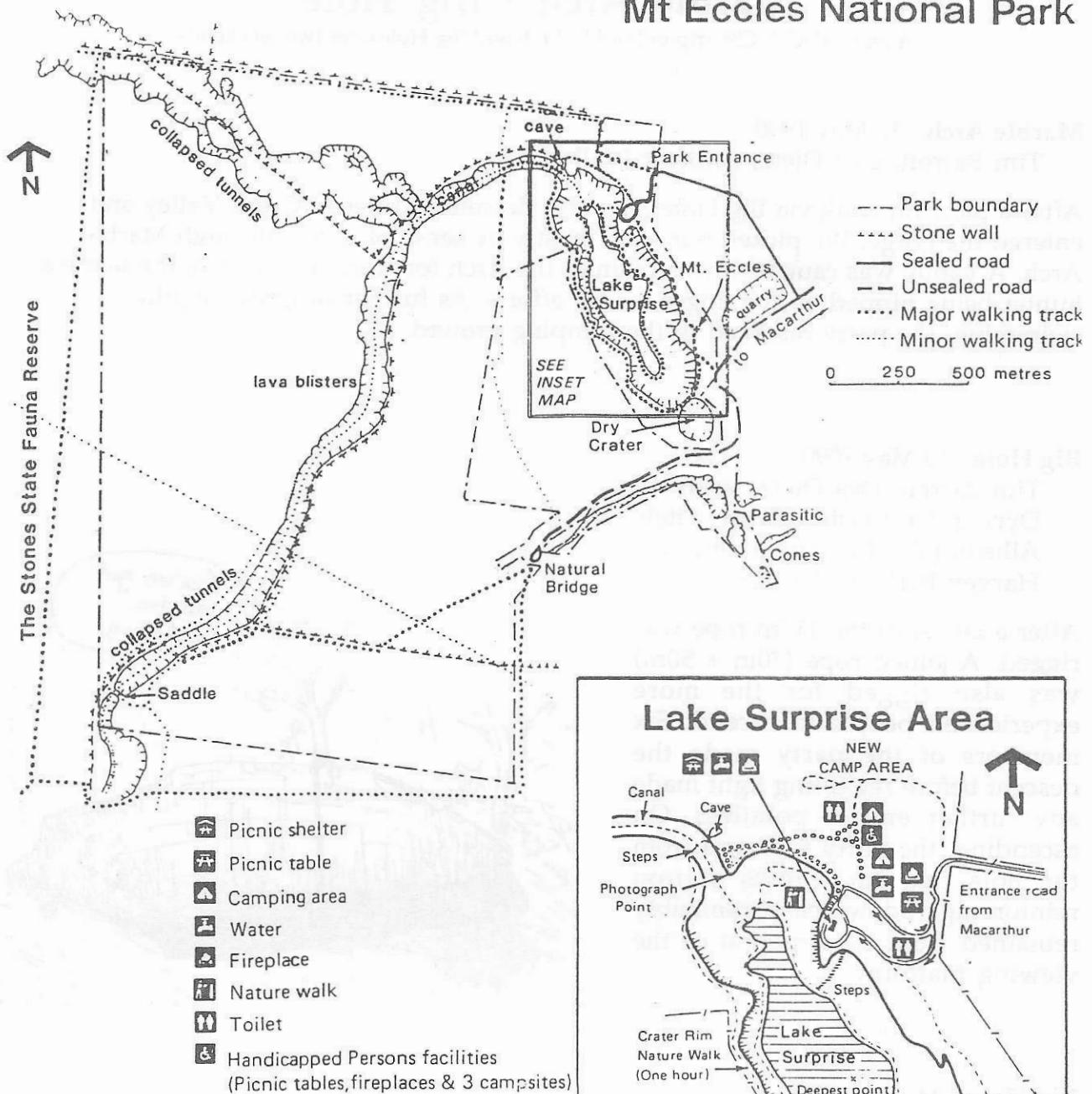
Monday saw us heading towards the Grampians - very spectacular granite mountain ranges with large cliffs on one side of the range and a steep slope on the opposite side. The next stop was Mt Arapiles, from where we watched the sunset. This is one of the largest and most prominent rock climbing areas in the country.

Tuesday presented us with a 13 hour drive back to Canberra, travelling from about 150 km from the South Australian Border. Tired but happy, we arrived in Canberra at about 9.30pm - a terrific trip had by all!

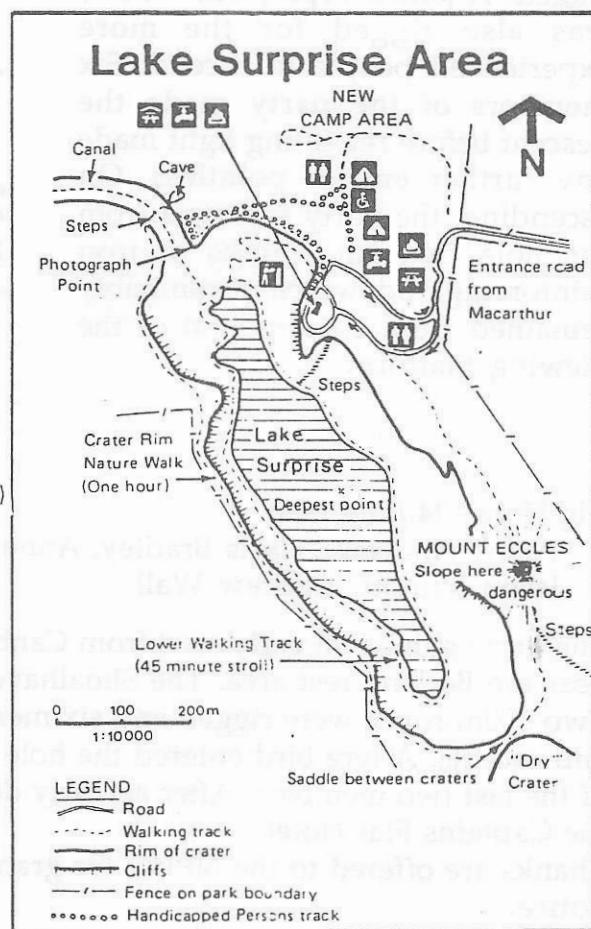
Tim Barrett.



Mt Eccles National Park



Ref:N-350-0167



Conservation
Forests & Lands

October 1984

Marble Arch / Big Hole

A joint NUCC/CSS trip to Marble Arch and Big Hole over two weekends

Marble Arch - 12 May 1990

Tim Barrett, Dru Dietz, Andrew Wall

After a pleasant walk via Big Hole the party descended Reedy Creek Valley and entered the gorge. We picked our way, mostly by sense of touch, through Marble Arch. A yabby was caught downstream of the Arch for closer inspection, the fearless hunter being nipped on the finger for his efforts. As further progress required swimming, the party returned to the camping ground.

Big Hole - 13 May 1990

Tim Barrett, Dru Dietz, Jenny Dyring, Paul Fisher, Stuart Fitch, Allison Jabs, Melanie McIntyre, Harvey Perkins, Andrew Wall

After a late start the 117m rope was rigged. A joined rope (70m + 50m) was also rigged for the more experienced people to ascend. Six members of the party made the descent before retreating light made any further entries pointless. On ascending, the party removed from the hole two 2m lengths of iron reinforcing rod which presumably remained from construction of the viewing platform.



Big Hole - 24 June 1990

Penny Andrews, Chris Bradley, Annette Dean, Stuart Fitch, Robert Keene, Jason Sinnott, Andrew Wall

The party gained an early start from Canberra and was surprised to find a heavy frost near the Berlang rest area. The Shoalhaven was similarly cold.

Two 100m ropes were rigged and six members of the party made uneventful descents and ascents. A lyre bird entered the hole in the mid-afternoon, just prior to the ascent of the last two members. After an early departure, a debriefing session was held in the Captains Flat Hotel.

Thanks are offered to the NPWS for granting the additional entry permit at short notice.

Andrew Wall

Rosebrook

19 August 1990

Tim Barrett, Neil Anderson, Dru Dietz, Harvey Perkins,
Andrew Wall, Lindsay Irvine, Doug Abbott, Byron Deveson and his nephew Angus McMullen

Rosebrook is a small cave occurring in a limited outcrop of limestone on private property a few kilometres east of Bunyan, just north of Cooma. Before the trip, rumours were rife that the farmer had thrown a decrepit old windmill down the entrance so that he could use its ladder to get down more easily. As it turns out, the "windmill" is in fact a remarkably well constructed series of ladders made of scaffolding which twist their way down the fairly tight 30-odd metre vertical entrance shaft. This was supposedly done, after a particularly profitable wool season, so he could show off the cave and its contents to his friends. And for a small dry cave it certainly does have some showy features.

The bottom of the entrance shaft opens into a decent sized chamber which has a fair bit of cave coral and some superb "cave cauliflower" - brilliant white florets burgeoning from a uniformly brown background. Another attribute of this chamber was the great diversity (if not quantity) of garbage: broken glass, old batteries, bits of plastic, wire, a used band-aid, shoe liners, aluminium foil, bottle tops, cigarette butts, and even an old comb; all of which were removed.

Of peculiar interest to me was the presence of hundreds, literally, of dead blowflies (*Calliphora spp.*) and their pupal cases. They had obviously spent their whole life cycle in this chamber which means the eggs must have been laid and hatched there. The fact that they were able to complete their larval growth means there must have been an adequate food supply: perhaps a dead animal, or maybe just the garbage left by previous human visitors. Even more remarkable though, is that there were too many to have all been from the one brood. This means that either there was more than one gravid female who decided the bottom of a cave was a good place to drop her load, or, more probably, that the first generation of flies actually went on to mate and carry on this speleophilic line. No mean feat given that blowflies normally rely on sight as well as smell to locate potential procreative partners. The only other fauna in evidence was a single very dead and disjointed carabid beetle.

At one end of this chamber the cave continued up through a maze of rock fall cavities and a network of anastomosing phreatic side-passages. None of these passages continued for very far, but were well worth exploring, from both a sporting point of view, and for the surprising beauty of some of the small but pristine formation developing in their most secluded recesses.

Through the rock fall and down a very narrow and very sharp cleft, the cave opens out again into what appears to be a terminal chamber. It is here that the incredible formation, characteristic of this cave, reaches its climax. The floor of this chamber is covered with stalagmites which, rather than being smooth and lumpy, are pillars of the most exquisitely intricate cave coral I have ever seen. Unfortunately they are fairly mud-stained, presumably due to the filling of this chamber during times of high rainfall. There is no obvious exit from this chamber and it looks like the water must simply drain slowly away at the lowest point which is marked by about 2 m² of flat fine mud.

With nowhere further to go, Andrew, Byron, and Lindsay got down to the serious business of photography (I must remember to take my camera down next time) while the rest of us headed for the clear blue skies of the Southern Tablelands.

Back on the surface, the hillside is liberally scattered with weathered limestone but little else in the way of karst features. The only other promising hole in the ground, a little way up the hill, becomes very tight after the first 12 feet and I found it impossible to get past what felt like an upward-bending left-turning corkscrew. Maybe someone smaller could manage it but probably only head first which would make getting back out particularly nasty - and unadvisable. I have it on good authority from Neil Anderson that there are no other caves in the area - an exhaustive search was carried out something like 20 years ago - but in my opinion the one cave that is there has enough going for it to warrant returning more than once in the future.

Harvey Perkins

Rosebrook:

Date: 19.8.90

Present: Tim Barrett, Neil Anderson, Dru Dietz, Harvey Perkins, Lindsay Irvine, Andrew Wall, Doug Abbott, and Byron Deveson with nephew Angus in tow

The Facts:

- 07.45 I managed to wake up
- 08.00 Those stupid enough to be on time began arriving at my place
- 08.30 Those (like myself) who were also running late arrived
- 08.45 Harvey made a stand (he stood up and said "let's go") so we all gave up on Mum's tea and biscuits and the fireplace and went.
- 10.15 We all signed indemnity forms at Mr Pfeifer's place
- 10.30 Stopped on edge of road, stripped, trogged, and walked
- 11.00 Descended into bowels of Bunyan. This cave is spectacular formation-wise and a little (stress the little) photography is worthwhile. No equipment is required to enter the cave as the farmer has rigged a mass of ladders starting about 10 ft down the entrance, but a ladder for the first 10 ft and a belay rope are optional. For those into masochism, after climbing over and through a few squeezes over sharp rock, there is an exceptionally pretty chamber. In the main chamber the formation is not as good, but still impressive.
- 13.00 Dru, Neil, Doug, Angus, Harvey and myself exited the cave to soak up the sun
- 13.30 No further people having emerged, we yelled abuse down the cave entrance. Upon getting no reply we upped and left for the cars
- 14.30 Having become bored of waiting and having consumed all available liquid and food, Harvey, Dru, Neil, and myself headed for Michelago Pub
- 16.00 No one else had arrived at the Pub so we figured either they had passed or Andrew's vehicle had got wind up, so we headed for Canberra.

Tim Barrett

Benefits of bat shit

Bernie Steele, a microbiologist from Auburn University, has recently discovered a variety of bacteria living in bat guano which could change the future of waste disposal. Steele's tenet that organisms living in extreme environments will have unique types of metabolisms and unique enzymes with potential commercial value looks like paying off. By patiently sifting through mounds of guano in Bracken Cave in central Texas, beneath a roosting colony of 30 million Mexican free-tailed bats, he has discovered an array of unusual microbes which may be of great use to biotechnology. Amongst these are a number of bacteria which can break down ammonia which he believes can be genetically engineered to be used directly in the treatment of waste water.

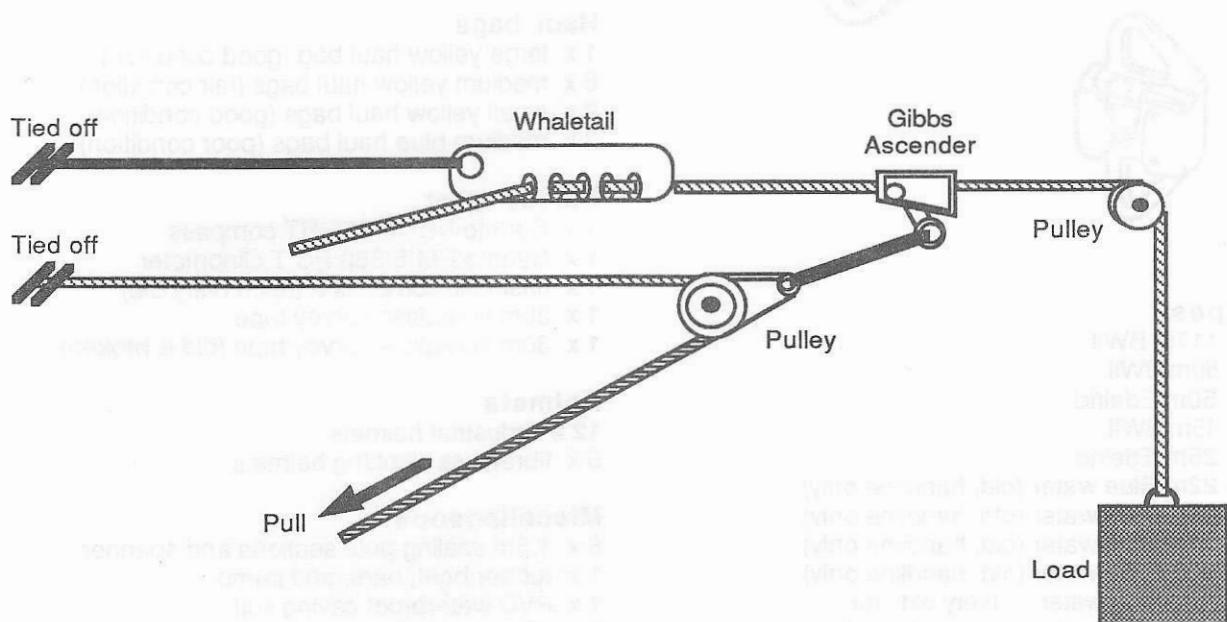
Others produce an enzyme that breaks down chitin, a complex polysaccharide which makes up the hard exoskeleton of insects and crustacea. He proposes that these chitinase-producing microbes could be used to break down waste from prawn, lobster and crab processing plants, and the resulting simple sugars used for the production of fuel alcohol. Chitinase might also be useful in the control of insect and nematode pests in agriculture. HP.

Haul System

A hauling system which is to be used to extricate someone from a cave should have the following characteristics:

- It should be possible either to lower the person a short distance (if snagged on a projection for example) or to lower the person rapidly to the floor of the cave.
- Any mechanical parts capable of malfunctioning or fouling should remain accessible to the haul party at all times.
- The system should be as simple as possible.

Such a system, which gives a 2 to 1 mechanical advantage, is shown below in diagrammatic form.



Notes:

- For rescue purposes, where unusually large forces may be present, whaletails and Gibbs ascenders are strongly recommended as opposed to other descending and ascending devices.
- The use of pulleys to redirect rope around corners will greatly reduce friction on the rope.
- Where failure of a pulley will cause an accident the rope should also pass through a karabiner which is located next to the pulley.
- The presence of a large number of bystanders may enable a 1 to 1 haul, simplifying the system.

Andrew Wall

National University Caving Club Stocktake

as at 5 March 1990

Ropes

- 1 x 117m BWII
- 1 x 50m BWII
- 1 x 50m Edelrid
- 1 x 45m BWII
- 2 x 25m Edelrid
- 1 x 22m Blue water (old, handline only)
- 1 x 27m Blue water (old, handline only)
- 1 x 24m Blue water (old, handline only)
- 1 x 10m Blue water (old, handline only)
- 3 x 15m Blue water (very old - for knot practice only)
- 5 x 1.5m Blue water (knot practice only)

Ladders

- 6 x 30' ladders
- 1 x 50' ladder (condemned)
- 3 x 30' ladders (condemned)
- 12 x ladder traces

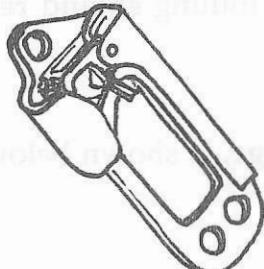
Tape

- 15 x 5m tapes
- 1 x 10m tape
- 1 x bulk roll tape
- Miscellaneous short lengths of tape for use as battery belts etc.

Technical hardware

- 5 x rappel racks
- 5 x whaletails
- 14 x large Stubai carabiners
- 1 x Riley rescue pulley
- 1 x Clog chest ascender
- 3 x Gibbs ascenders
- 6 x Grey Jumars & miscellaneous rigging

Lights



Lights

- 11 x lead-acid miners lamps
(MSA minespots & Oldham T2s)
- 1 x MSA minespot (being repaired)
- 1 x MSA minespot battery (being repaired)
- 8 x Petzl Zoom headlamps
- 5 x AA battery holders for Petzl lamps
- 1 x Triang battery charger
- 2 x KarMate battery chargers
- 1 x charging board
- 1 x charging board (needs repair)

Haul bags

- 1 x large yellow haul bag (good condition)
- 6 x medium yellow haul bags (fair condition)
- 2 x small yellow haul bags (good condition)
- 3 x medium blue haul bags (poor condition)

Survey gear

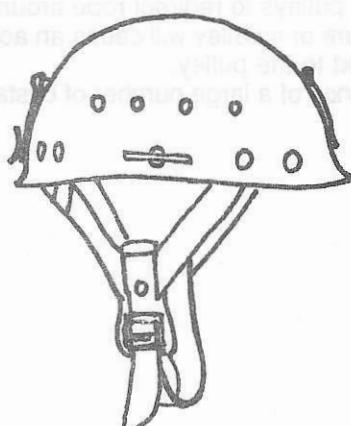
- 1 x Suunto KB-14/360 RT compass
- 1 x Suunto PM-5/360 PC T clinometer
- 1 x prismatic compass & tripod (very old)
- 1 x 30m fibreglass survey tape
- 1 x 30m fibreglass survey tape (old & broken)

Helmets

- 12 x industrial helmets
- 5 x fibreglass climbing helmets

Miscellaneous

- 6 x 1.5m scaling pole sections and spanner
- 1 x rubber boat, oars, and pump
- 1 x PVC waterproof caving suit
- 5 x rope protectors
- 2 x suitcases containing first aid kit
- 1 x small first aid kit
- 1 x electric jug
- Miscellaneous NUCC banners
- Miscellaneous old leather gloves





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