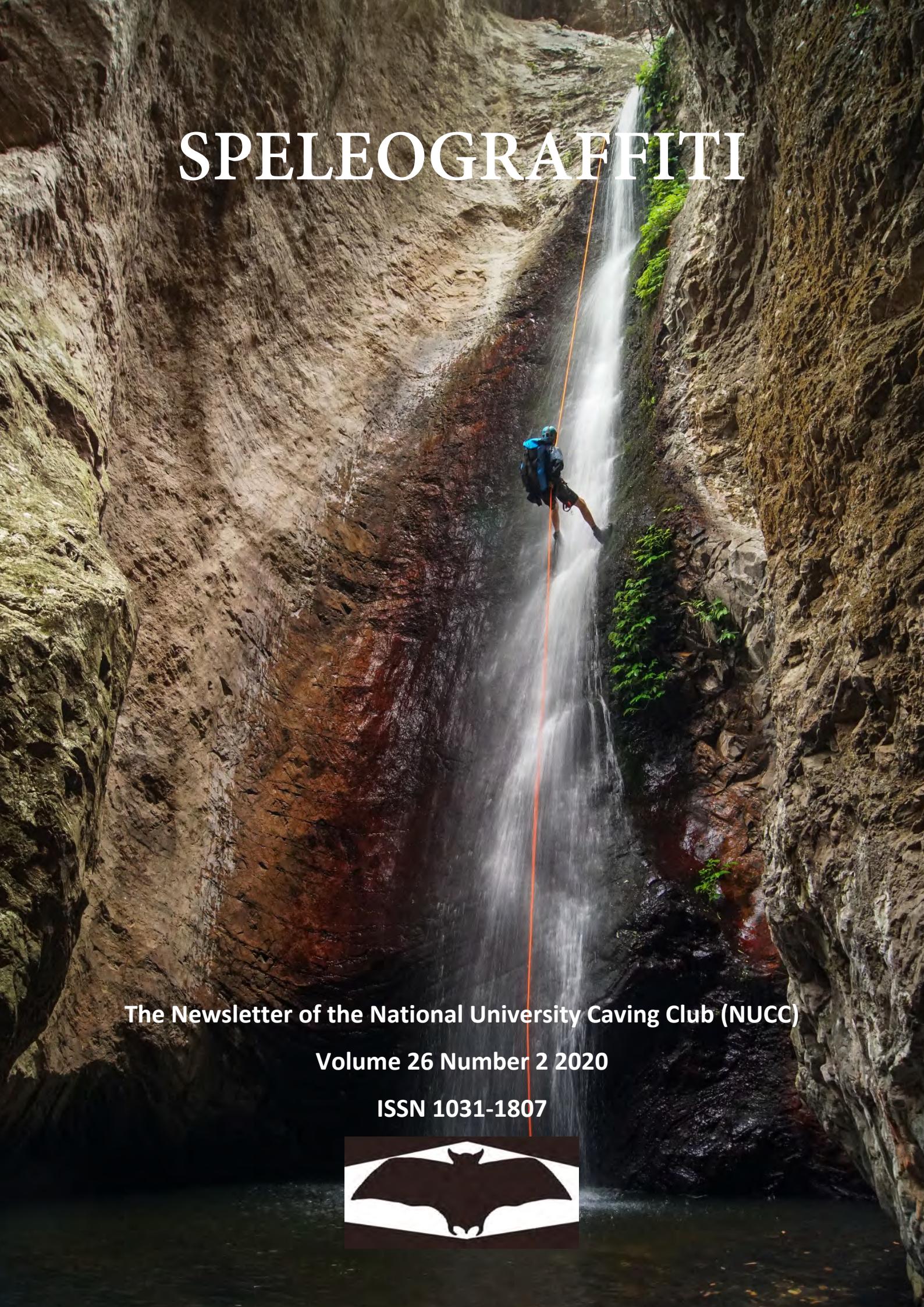


SPELEOGRAFFITI

A photograph of a person rappelling down a waterfall in a narrow, rocky canyon. The person is wearing a blue helmet and a black harness, and is attached to an orange rope. The waterfall is cascading down the center of the canyon, creating a misty spray. The rock walls on either side are dark and textured, with some green moss and plants growing in the crevices.

The Newsletter of the National University Caving Club (NUCC)

Volume 26 Number 2 2020

ISSN 1031-1807



Contents

Editorial.....	4
President's Prattle Pedestal.....	4
Caving News.....	5
Trip Reports.....	6
Kempsey.....	6
Blueys Canyoning.....	17
The Long Road North to Open Caves (Moparrabah again).....	20
Mac Pass After Rain	22
Mac Pass Upper Section Recce	24
Cotter Caves.....	26
Watta 'bout Me?.....	27
Diving Mount Fairy.....	29
Back to Mac Pass.....	33
Abseiling Love Creek Falls	34
Ngungun SRT Practice, a.k.a An Exercise in Maintaining Some Semblance of Safety Hanging on Rope While Using One or Both Hands to Desperately Fend Off An Unbelievable Plague of Mosquitos	35
Border Ranges Canyoning.....	36
Watta Canyon (v4a4III**)	41
Bungonia Main Canyon (v4a4III**).....	43
NUCC SRT Kit Details.....	45
Australian Caving Community Online Directory	48
2020 Trip Listing.....	50
2021 Trips.....	51
Photo Gallery!	52

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Do you want your own copy of *Speleograffiti*, spiral bound, printed, and stamped with the official NUCC stamp?

Copies can be had of *SpeleoG* 25.1, 26.1 and 26.2 for \$4.50 each, so that your Librarian can pay for paper and replace his print-credit when it runs out. Email caving@anusra.com.au the editions you want, and transfer your payment to the NUCC account (details here: <https://nucc.caves.org.au/join/>).

Speleograffiti

The Newsletter of the National University Caving Club (NUCC)

Volume 26 Number 2, December 2020

ISSN 1031-1807

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Front Cover: Abseiling the main drop of Burnett Canyon, Queensland. Photo by Oxana Repina

Back Cover: Looking down into the main constriction of Galah Canyon. Photo by Lachie Bailey

Following Page: Rod Obrien (SUSS) about to head off for the first known dive of the sumps of Mount Fairy Main Cave (MF1-4). Photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood



Editorial

The National University Canyoning Club continues to trundle along at full speed! Despite a promising start with a caving trip report, this edition of *SpeleoG* soon devolves into moreandmoreandmore and more canyoning. Thankfully, all this canyoning is being put to good use, with topos for three canyons, and track notes for a fourth.

Unfortunately, as we move into 2021, there is still no access to caves in National Parks and Wildlife Service or Department of Lands managed areas. This is apparently due to a ministerial directive from the NSW government, so is very difficult to bypass or overturn. The NSW Speleological Council is active in this, but progress is slow. Please be patient: I know it sucks to be unfairly locked out of the caves we all love while far more COVID-unsafe activities are allowed. But there is sunlight on the horizon, and hopefully before too long we will be caving at Yagby, Wyambene, Cooleman, Jenolan and all our other favourite haunts again!

Here's hoping 2021 is an active year (the signs are promising...), and The Editor gets lots of lovely trip reports for *SpeleoG* 27.1. If you've been cowering in fear of my reign of trip-report-extracting terror, you don't need to worry however- Cecily Reid is taking over from me as Editor in 2021.

I can only hope she's got a set of thumbscrews ready (knowing that I'll probably be the main culprit with providing late trip reports)... I have enjoyed some of the excuses for not submitting trip reports, with my favorite being 'the wombat ate my homework!' This is an insufficient excuse, although I might accept it where Mount Fairy is involved.

Jokes aside, thank you so much to the people who gave me a trip report for this round- they're great!

- Lachlan Bailey, the (outgoing) Editor

President's Prattle Pedestal

Firstly, I'd like to thank the outgoing Club Committee of 2020, and welcome all the members of the 2021 NUCC Committee: Lachlan Deakin, Andriana Stoddart, Andy Waddell, Brittany Brockett, Cecily Reid, Claud Tomkins, Corey Hanrahan, Lachlan Bailey, Lauren Schenk, and Riley Baird. I'm staying on as Vice-President in the new Committee.

In 2020, NUCC had a total of 50 Members, and ran 34 trips. The membership is slightly lower than last year due to Semester 2 Market Day being online- not a great format for Market Day. We've also had some major difficulties with accessing caves, thanks to first the fires, then flooding and then COVID. Participation was consistently high at SRT though, except when we couldn't run the sessions for 3 months because of COVID restrictions!

We ran caving trips to a variety of locations in 2020, including Bungonia, Wee Jasper, Mount Fairy, Abercrombie, Kempsey, and Buchan. In addition to this, we had a bunch of canyoning trips to Bungonia, Macquarie Pass, and the Blue Mountains. There were certainly a few new destinations for trips over the course of the year!

Thanks to the Trip Leaders who organised activities for the club: Lachlan Bailey (ran caving trips), Michael Larkin (ran canyoning trips), Corey Hanrahan (ran a cave conservation workshop), and Andy Waddell (organised joint trips with other caving clubs).

- Chris Bradley, 2020 President

Caving News

This is where important development in NUCC or the caving community go. There is more news for 2020 in *SpeleoG* 26.1 too... Ideally, this should also be a salacious gossip column, but short of publishing caving memes, I've got nothing for you!

2021 is the International Year of Caves and Karst (IYCK, <http://iyck2021.org/>). It's been torpedoed by COVID a little, but keep an eye out as there's still some great events on!

It is now official: the Cave Animal of the Year 2021 is the Cave Beetle! Have a look at the CATOY website for more information about these fascinating creatures, and buy some great cave beetle merch! <https://www.caveanimaloftheyear.org.au/>

The next ASF Conference to be held in Ceduna SA has been postponed to April 2022, with the conference being from the 16-21st April. There will be travel and field trips either side of that too. As the Nullarbor caves will be just as speccy then, there'll probably still be NUCCers going in 2022. The website for it has gone live: <http://asfconference2022.com/>

NUCC is going to Tassie in February 2021, despite the best efforts of COVID to derail the trip. A group of 12 of us will leave Canberra on the 30th January, and be at Ida Bay until the 5th February. We'll move to Junee-Florentine on the 5th, and the last stragglers will get home on the 16th February.

ANU Sport is planning to implement an online membership and activity portal sometime early 2021 called UniOne. It should be active by Market Day, all trip fees and membership details will be handled through it.

Speaking of Market Day, it is happening on the 17th February, with all clubs setting up on Willows) Oval. The more NUCCers that can make it the better!

SRT will return for 2021 on Tuesday the 2nd February. As usual, it will be held 6-8pm by the Old Climbing Wall at ANU Sport. The last SRT session of 2021 will be 14th December, so you'll have lots of chances for ropework practice!

Rod Obrien, the ASF Cave Diving Commissioner, has put together a website for the Commission. You can have a look here: <https://cdg.caves.org.au/>. Make sure you check out the Gallery section, it has some great photos!

NUCC has a bunch of ongoing projects that we're intermittently pursuing. Trips to the relevant areas are likely to feature project work, if you're interested:

- Mapping Y10 Old Inn Cave at Yagby
- Mapping Y7 North Deep Ck at Yagby
- Mapping CP12 Black Range Cave at Cooleman Plains
- Mapping, GPSing, surface-trogging, documentation, and dive support at Mount Fairy
- Improving availability of information about non-Blue Mountains canyons
- Supporting MSS in fieldwork for their book on Abercrombie Caves
- Visiting as many new and unfamiliar karst areas as we can and acquainting members with them
- Surface documentation Bungonia

Trip Reports

Kempsey
October sometime

By Rod Smith

Participants: See credits list

A long time ago in a karst area far,
far away....

KEMPSEY

*A pandemic has ravaged the lands.
The NPWS empire has decreed that
caving is forbidden.

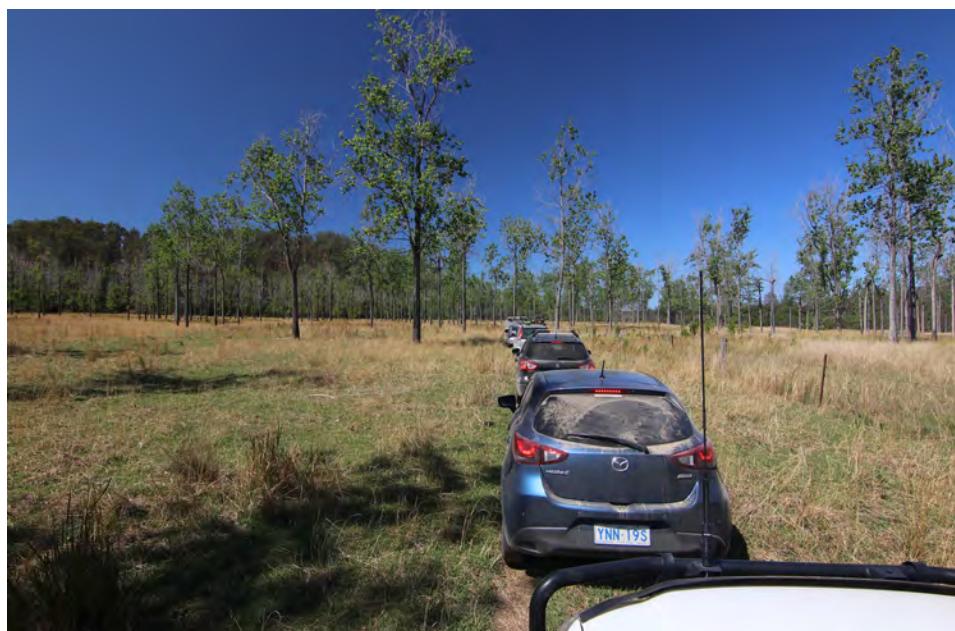
A small group of freedom cavers
have sought other avenues in their
quest for subterranean adventure.
Venturing into areas not under the
direct control of the NPWS empire,
Rod Smith prepares to lead the
group to the little-visited
Moparabah system ...*

Scene 1-

It's 4pm on Friday afternoon. Rod S., with minimal fuss, enters his transport and starts the engine. Shortly into the commute a digital sign is witnessed with the words:

Incident on M1 north of Wahroonga, expect delays

Rod S. – I've got a bad feeling about this.



A caver's idea of bad traffic! (photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood)

The M2 is gridlocked, it would be nearly as quick to get out and walk. Rather than draw attention to himself, Rod S. becomes just another of the mindless masses attempting to escape the Greater Sydney Metropolis.

Five changes of the lights are required just to get onto Pennant Hills Rd. The crawl continues with only occasional, brief, reprieves, never long enough to give any real hope.

An hour later than scheduled Rod arrives and Jim's domicile. Equipment is transferred to Jim's transport and a plan is hatched in an attempt to avoid the crush of the masses heading north. Ducking and weaving through the back streets of Wahroonga, Hornsby, Asquith and Mt Colah, the intrepid travellers join the old Pacific Highway for a smooth run to Berowra. Now north of the incident Jim and Rod S. join the M1 with the hopes of a near-empty freeway, and plunge straight back into gridlock.

Their speed inevitably increases, but traffic remains heavy. Three hours after departure, Rod meets Jai for the first time at Kariong.

Jai – New to MSS and caving, the Kempsey trip is my first non tourist cave trip and I am super pumped

The three travellers all settle in to Jim's transport for the rest of the trip, which remains uneventful. Even the evening meal at Bulahdelah is uneventful, filling the stomach but leaving the taste buds neglected.

They arrive at the designated meeting point to find most of the others already asleep, so they settle in for the night in preparation for the challenges that await in the morning.



A keen subset of the group, raring and ready to go. Or something like that... (photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood)

Scene 2-

After ignoring dawn's light filtering through the curtained windows for what never feels like long enough (*Ed: that's because you arrived around midnight!*), obligation to coordinate the attendees forces Rod S. to rise and face the morning. Rod S. emerges to find the camp already full of activity, so he starts with greetings and introductions.

At this stage only Oxana and Corey are still en route, but they still have plenty of time as the scheduled meeting time with the locals is not until midday.

One of the primary objectives for the weekend is to resurvey Moparabah Cave.¹ Rod S. approaches Phil M. in regards to this

Rod S. – Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to lead the survey of Moparabah.

Phil M. agrees to this much too easily, thus no arm-twisting is required.

After a discussion with Phil L., Rod S. addresses the team.

Rod S. – At the Spotted Frog, the local cavers, we will meet

Thankfully Google Maps hadn't been updated with the new name for the café formerly known as the Spotted Frog. So Rod S., Jim and Jai found Rod O. and Cathi outside Blueys. Although the name is decidedly less interesting, the burgers are a definite improvement on the previous night's evening meal.

By midday most of the cavers have filtered in, including locals Phil L. and Thomas, but Phil M. and Simon were still at a coffee shop somewhere in town, and the burgers were yet to be consumed. The burgers arrive, are eaten, and still no sign of Phil M. and Simon.

Phil L. and Thomas need to take a small detour to retrieve some maps, so they head off with the plan to meet us again further down the road.

As soon as Phil M. and Simon arrive, the merry band all board their transportation and depart.

Scene 3-

John Taylor is found just short of the final destination, patiently waiting for everyone else to arrive. He joins the convoy as they approach the first gate and enter private property. Two more gates are passed as the group wind their way through an old match-stick plantation.

They stop next to a small escarpment covered in lantana, stinging nettles, stinging trees, and other native and introduced vegetation all designed specifically to inflict pain and misery on any foolhardy travellers attempting to enter their domain. With the right mixture of fools and hardy, the cavers skirt the bottom edge of the escarpment before finding a suitable entry point.

¹ Ed: minor footnote of karst terminology- Rod is correct here, the Karst Index spells it 'Moparabah', as opposed to Moparrabah. Unfortunately, the

area appears to be actually gazetted as Moparrabah, so there's no easy solution.



The pack gets ready to go caving (photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood)

And there it is, Moparabah Cave. This is the main, lower entry. Various holes amongst the tumble of boulders all appear to lead further into the depths of the hillside, but most are too small to be enterable by humans. Of course, at least one is big enough.

The initial plan is for Phil L. to take a small group on a quick trip through the cave to familiarize themselves with the basics and then start surveying. It sounds like a good idea, until the small group becomes most of the cavers.

As the not-so-small group begin their not-so-quick trip through Moparabah, John leads Lachlan, Thomas, Andy and Rod S. onto the escarpment to locate the upper entrances plus another hole that Thomas had looked at previously. Quickly locating Thomas' hole (*think of better wording here*), Thomas, Andy and Lachlan headed in to see if it would link into the main system. After pointing out that helmets required removal in order to fit through one squeeze, Rod S. opts to remain on the surface with John.

After a while, and with Lachlan, Andy and Thomas well into the cave, John and Rod S. decide to go looking for some of the upper entrances to Moparabah. Heading up the hill they quickly locate MP20 and MP2 plus some associated holes. Rod S. finds another hole, but John insists it's not MP1, the very top

hole. Continuing the search yields no results, so Rod S. has another look at the hole he had located. Sure enough, there is the MP1 tag. Apparently the small tree John remembered in the entrance is now two large trees (*Ed: at this point I will respectfully comment while casting no aspersions whatsoever that the two trees are different species*).

Heading back down the slope John and Rod S. encounter the other three coming up, having not found a connection between Thomas' hole (*Seriously, think of better wording*) and the main cave. They then started showing Thomas, Lachlan and Andy the other locations when they found Phil L. had emerged from MP1 and is looking for some relief.



Phil L and Rod GPSing stuff (photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood)



Phil M searching around for the way on in Moparabah Cave (*photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood*)

Slowly but surely the others began to emerge from MP1, the entrance not being conducive to a rapid departure. There is some talk amongst the emerging cavers regarding their experience.

Andriana - This may be the first time that I have been to a cave in Australia that truly deserves to be described as 'beneath the fig tree'.

Jim - The cave is quite maze like and mainly consists of dry small passageways and a few larger chambers.

Jai - The main entrance required a crawling start so we were straight into it. Once inside it opened up a bit and the caving experience began. Crawling through a few tight squeezes negotiating some narrow passages, crawling through the dirt and viewing some beautiful features while trying to dodge the few hundred (if not thousand) bats we had inadvertently tried to avoid! The cave had a bit of everything and

seemed to go on forever. Can't wait for the next one.

Rod O. - The character of the cave changes as you progress through it, ranging from squeezes, rifts, chambers and mazes. Side passages run off seemingly everywhere, sometimes joining back onto the main passage deeper into the cave. There are some nice areas of formation, tons of marine fossils along with some interesting bone breccia deposits. The oldest signature found so far is J.P 1/6/1910. The cave is also home to large colonies of Bent Wing and Horseshoe bats.

Jim - There is a quite a bit of vertical extent and some tight areas. We were expertly led by local KSS member Phil who obviously has a lot of experience in this cave. This is actually the largest cave in the Macleay River karst.

Trish - 2 hours underground, being bashed by bats, finding fossilized remains (hopefully not a previous caver) and finally a series of squeezes and turns to be birthed at the top of the cave. Great times. Can't wait to do it again.



Kirra exiting MP1 (*photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood*)

Jim - This cave has a significant population of Eastern Bent Wing Bats. Our attempts to avoid them had failed or maybe Phil was wrong about them being in a particular chamber. The passages were soon engulfed by these flying mammals, certainly like nothing I had experienced before. It just so happened that the girl in front of me was freaked out by these bats movements. She resorted to getting down on hands and knees, head down eyes partly closed to avoid their presence. This was quite an event as some of the bats were deflecting off my clothes and one was momentarily caught on my shirt. Others even had the bats go inside their helmet and clothes. With my open eyes this was all quite a unique experience from these Bat storms.



Aerial photo of karst (*photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood*)

Meanwhile Andy, Lachlan and Thomas regale the emerging cavers with the exploits of the above ground group.

Thomas – We peeled off up the hill to relocate MP34. Without much difficulty we were successfully gathered around the entrance and preparing for entry, with the hopes that the extra eyes may locate further

passage that could potentially connect with the main cave system, given its proximity amongst the other known entrances. A second question to this quest was to also assess the viability of mapping this system by the more experienced than myself. Whenever I'd sat down to try and translate memory to mud map it would just become a drawing in the shape of one big confusing twistie stood on its end.

Andy - John, Rod Smith, Tom, Lachlan and I climbed into MP34 and had to bypass a rather large spider. The cave turned out to be a bit of a squeeze, with some nice formation here and there. Unfortunately we couldn't connect it up with main cave, which was our objective, so we hopped out and continued with the day.

Lachlan - It was one of those sort caves where everything wants to rip you, and there's not enough space to avoid getting shredded. We barreled down to the bottom of the cave, leaving Rod and John on the surface to swap stories (and eventually get bored and wander off). Here there were a few enjoyably nasty leads that were all too tight or impenetrably filled with mud. There was also a rather fat brushtail possum. I tried rescuing it, but it declined to be rescued, and wandered off through a slot that was far too tight for me to fit through. Considering that not only was it fat, but it was also uninjured, I suspect that there's another entrance to MP34 somewhere. Tom hopes that MP34 connects to Main Cave, and the possum makes me suspect he's right. It's also right over the top of the course of Main Cave according to the GPS. If the cave ever needs a name, Andy and

I would like to suggest Possum's Palace. There's more of MP34 down a climb covered by a nice flowstone cascade. But by the time Andy and I got there, we were pretty filthy and didn't want to grot up the formation. So need to go back with a clean tape and detrog...

Thomas - Andy and Lachlan began the bumpy descent before me. Once we had reached what we shall call the bottom of the cave for now, the pushing and poking of other branches began, though to little avail. What I found very interesting at one stage was the reflection of a red eye catching my own, scampering away up a slope to the left of Lachlan. Disappearing through a squeeze more suited to



A group of cavers very much worn-out by their extended trip through Moparabah Cave with Phil L (photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood)

possums than people was a Brushtail.

By my rough guess we'd have had to been around 30 vertical metres below the entry, not to mention the twists, turns, slopes and squeezes between. A lot deeper in than I'd have ever expected to find a possum. Either its presence suggests a connection to an easier access through the tunnel where I last saw it enter or it's just exceptional at navigating in the pitch dark. Or a third possibility I suppose

could be that it was in fact too deep and was extremely lost and that we fumbled that cave rescue.

Andy - I poked my head into a couple of holes just near MP2. One barely went further than a couple of meters. But another was a bit more interesting. A climb through a rock pile, and down a slit took me about 10-15m into the cave. Once jammed in at the bottom of the slit I was too large to orient myself to see what was underneath, and if it went further, so I turned around. Perhaps someone else smaller than me can give it another look.

Having been underground for a few hours, most people feel like doing the return journey above ground, but Phil L. says he would prefer the subterranean route as it is quicker. Grasping their opportunity for a trip through the main cave, Lachlan, Andy and Thomas quickly follow Phil L.

Andy and Lachlan were excited by the opportunity.

Andy - Phil took us back through the cave and out the entrance. Man there were a lot of bats! It was quite an interesting cave.

Lachlan - Phil Lardner offered to take anyone who wanted back down though Main Cave, so Andy, Tom and I set off with him. It is a cracking bit of cave, and it's going to be a big survey project. The volume of bats in it was kinda worrying though, I think a reasonable chunk of the cave is going to have to be nocturnal surveying.

The group return to their transportation where a discussion follows ensuring everyone knows where and when to meet the following day, and the scene fades out ...

Scene 4-

Today a slightly smaller group arrives at the café formally known as The Spotted Frog in a much timelier manner, Dave and Marilyn both opting out due to not feeling well. However, John is again kept waiting as Phil L. decides to play tour guide during the drive out, stopping numerous times to point out various locations of interest to Rod S. and Rod O., and anyone else in earshot.



The Great Gear-Up Mk2 (photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood)

Arriving back at Moparabah the cavers are better organized into groups. Phil M. leads the first group to start surveying Moparabah from the main entrance. Lachlan takes the second group to the top entrance to begin surveying from there. The third group heads beyond Moparabah to look at some of the other caves in the area.

The third group, consisting of John, Phil L., Thomas, Rod S., Rod O., Cathi, Jim, Trish and Jai, make their way up the escarpment. Soon the group fragments with Phil L., Thomas and Jai checking out some squeezy holes and the rest passing Lachlan's survey team setting up at MP1 before arriving at MP11??? This is a small cave with a couple of entrances through rockpile and into some lower chambers. The farthest extent

of the cave is barely out of earshot from the surface.

The group of cavers then moved on to MP23??? which is more extensive than MP11??? A vertical climb leads to a sloping passage running into the main, decorated chamber. The chamber extends to the left and right with what looks like possible leads, although they probably require rock removal to actually get anywhere. Straight on there is a squeeze that leads further into the cave. Jim is the only member of the group to explore further into the cave, but, according to the map, he didn't find his way to the furthest reaches.

The group return to the transportation where lunch is stowed in order to consume their midday repast, well after midday. Rod S., Rod O. and Cathi then decide to acquaint themselves with the Sebastopol area, ably guided by John.

Scene 5-

Sebastopol is a National Parks managed area and, as such, the cavers don't have permission to go underground. They do, however, have



The source of the general malaise- into the valley of stinging plants we go... (photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood)

permission to walk the surface, so that is the plan. One of the first they visit is the efflux,

where soon a rotten animal smell permeates the air. It seems to be coming from the cave itself, maybe something has fallen in.

As they turn to leave John sees a snake and immediately moves away before realizing the red-bellied black snake is obviously the source of the foul aroma. The cavers move quickly past, not because of any danger to their lives, just their olfactory organs.

Moving further up the hill they continue to look for other tagged features, while trying to avoid the worst of the lantana and other annoying vegetation. Rod S., the only one in shorts, sits out one particularly nasty section in an area that reminds Cathi and Rod O. of Bullita, only on a smaller scale.



Impressive Bullita-esque karst at Sebastopol (photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood)

The last feature visited is Daylight Cave. This is named because of the hole in the roof that provides daylight into the first chamber in the cave. The entrance is a scramble down a slope but it would be possible to also enter via the daylight hole as it is quite large, but would require SRT as it is also quite vertical. Being quite a large feature it leaves the visiting cavers wondering why no other similarly sized features have been found.

Scene 6-

With a different destination planned, a different meeting place is organized, so the café formally known as the Spotted Frog didn't witness the arrival of a group of cavers

transportation. Again a large, but not full, compliment of cavers meet for a visit to Yessabah. John had opted out for the day as it was the wrong direction for him travelling home. Oxana, Corey, Andy, Kirra and Andriana all decide to get an earlier start for the homeward trip, as they are all aiming to be in Canberra by evening. Before leaving they reflected on their weekend.

Andy - Kirra, Oxana, Andriana, Lachlan and I started to map the cave from MP1. It was a very slow process as we were still relatively new to mapping, and some of us were learning for the first time. The cave was a lot more complex than we had expected. It was interesting to be able to see so much more of the cave while mapping it, than if we had just passed through at speed.

Andriana - I had a lot of fun learning how to survey over the weekend, and only wish that we hadn't gotten the bats so upset!

Yessabah is the site of an old quarry, which had removed some of the limestone. There's still plenty left with a good number of predominantly small caves over the hillside. Some of the cavers head directly for the old quarry, whereas some decide to follow Phil L. round to the left and then up the side of the hill.

The group following Phil L. don't move very fast, primarily so they can stop at any feature and have a good look, including entering the position on various GPS'. This allows a few more cavers to catch up, but still not the entire group.

And then, it happens. Simon didn't see the sapling stinging tree with the single leaf. That single leaf smears across his left thigh as he walks past, and the pain is immediate. Numerous profanities issue forth from between gritted teeth. Not wanting to get



A panorama of the view from the upper benches of the abandoned Yessabah quarry (*photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood*)

stung himself, and in a strange sense of revenge, Rod S. uses his footwear to remove the stinging tree from any conceivable human path.

After investigating the immediate area, and not wanting to separate the group any further, the decision is made to return to the bottom of the hill. Thankfully, Simon, despite the pain, is able to walk down the hill unaided and soon the majority of cavers area sitting in a shady spot in front of the old quarry.

Looking up it is just possible to see the tiny dots of Rod O. and Cathi on the highest reaches of the quarry. Simon, with Phil M. and Lachlan who all travelled to Yessabah in Phil M.'s transport, depart in order to find some herbal remedies for Simon's thigh. The rest, not wanting to all leave while two cavers would be unaware of what's happening, discuss options. Dave and Marilyn, since they are staying in the Kempsey area for another day, offer to wait for Cathi and Rod O. to return. The others accept the offer and return to their transportation.

Rod O. - Cathi spent most of the morning, in her element, wandering around the old quarry.

When Cathi and Rod O. return they are given the story by Dave and Marilyn. In response to Simon's experience with the stinging tree, Cathi replies.

Cathi - Rod got whacked by one too on our way down the hill (and there was much swearing), but as usual he brushes these things off.

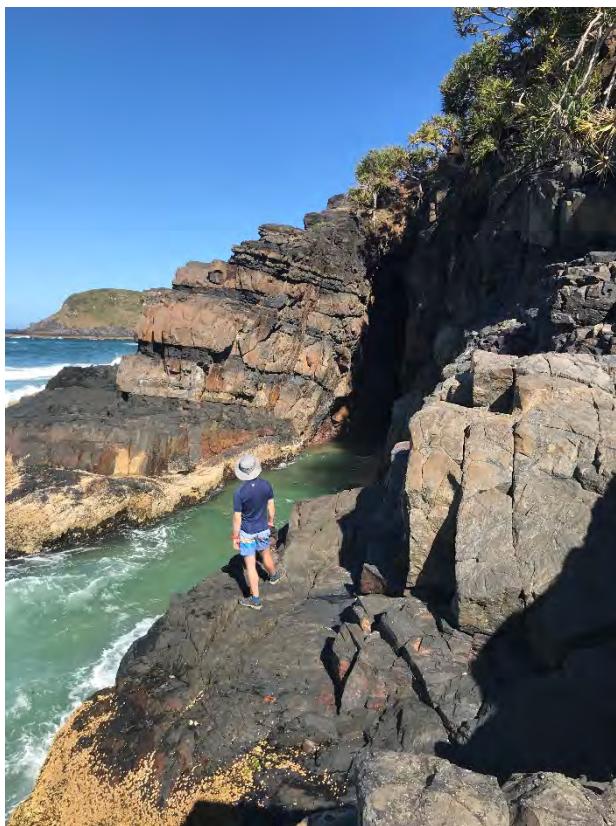
Scene 7-

For Jim, Jai and Rod S. the return trip to Sydney involved a recommended stop at Riccardo's Tomatoes near Port Macquarie. A very popular spot with travelers due to the quality of tomato and strawberry they produce.

The rest of the journey is much like the trip to Kempsey, but in reverse. The fast flowing trip becomes a snail's pace around Gosford and the mindless masses return from their long weekend travels.



Models demonstrating the classic Kempsey caving clothes of knee-high gaiters or boots, and knee-length shorts. Simon (on right) is soon to regret his choice of short-shorts (*photo by Lachie Bailey*)



Simon trying to decide if he wants to risk even more life and limb on this trip by attempting to swim into the sea cave (photo by Lachie Bailey)

Meanwhile Phil L. is taking Phil M., Simon, Lachlan, Marilyn and Dave to the coast to show them a sea cave. Phil M. summarised the experience.

Phil M. - We got to the beach on Monday afternoon and looked at a big sea cave but there was a bit too much wave action to swim into it.

Marilyn, on the other hand, goes into more detail.

Marilyn - After we'd finished our caving exploration on Monday (and most people had left to travel home), Phillip offered to take us (those of us who'd decided to stay an extra day) on another adventure. A SEA CAVE!

We drove down to Gap Beach, and started walking across the beach over to the rocks. "Just up here"

says Phillip, it was a jungle of *Lantana*, *Pandanus*, and *Lomandra* - all of which were scratchy and spiky, and the Crocs I was wearing weren't coping. Not to mention that it was very snaky and I didn't wear my gaiters,- what was I thinking? Fortunately we stopped and Phillip said, "I'm sure there is a track on the hill", and sure enough we stumbled onto it. And then another cove appeared - it was like Treasure Island! We dropped down into the cove and there was another lovely campsite, with plenty of fire wood. Then we headed over to the slot that we could see from above.

Sadly, although it was low tide, it wasn't low enough to jump in and check out the slot. But Phillip took us up the rocks, and over to a natural bridge over the top of the slot which we used down to get back onto the rock platform, and there voila was this stunning cave – which had a back entry that we couldn't see, but it apparently joined up with out slot. We all agreed that this was a place that we HAD to revisit, preferably with lower tide, plus snorkeling or diving gear! Great adventure, thanks Phillip.

And finish with the cliché, although apt, "Top Trip"



Looking along the coast to Green Island (photo by Lachie Bailey)

Credits-

Kempsey

An MSS Production

In association with KSS, SUSS and NUCC

Directed By

Roderick Smith

Starring

Rod Smith

Jim Crockett

David Stuckey

Marilyn Scott

Trish Morrow

Cathi Humphrey-Hood

Rod Obrien

Phil Maynard

Lachlan Bailey

Andy Waddell

Corey Hanrahan

Oxana Repina

Simon Murphy

Andriana Stoddart

Kirra Solterbeck

and introducing

Jai White

Guest Starring

Phillip Lardner

John Taylor

Thomas Lewthwaite

Cinematography

David Stuckey

Cathi Humphrey-Hood

Rod Obrien

Casting By

Roderick Smith

Lachlan Bailey

Stunts

Simon Murphy

Roderick Smith

Electrical Department

Phil Maynard

Location Scout

Roderick Smith

Rod Obrien

Lachlan Bailey

John Taylor

Art Department

Phil Maynard

Lachlan Bailey

Andy Waddell

Corey Hanrahan

Oxana Repina

Simon Murphy

Andriana Stoddart

Kirra Solterbeck

Accommodation Scout

Marilyn Scott

Drivers

Jim Crockett

Rod Obrien

David Stuckey

Phil Maynard

Lachlan Bailey

Andy Waddell

Trish Morrow

Corey Hanrahan

Phillip Lardner

John Taylor

Catering

The Café formally known as The Spotted Frog

Ricardoes Tomatoes

Lighting

Everyone

All characters in this trip report are factual. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, is purely intentional. No animals were harmed in the production of this trip report, but during the trip itself we killed plenty of mosquitoes, flies, ants, and assorted other bugs (*Ed: you may want to check your definition of the Kingdom Animalia Rod!*).

Blueys Canyoning

16-18th October 2020

By Andriana Stoddart

Participants: Andriana Stoddart, Michael Larkin (ISS), Oxana Repina (SUSS), Corey Hanrahan, Lachie Bailey, Riley Baird

As someone who hadn't been to the Blue Mountains in many years, and never for canyoning, I was really excited for this trip. Eagerly piling into cars and setting out on Friday afternoon, we prepared ourselves for a four hour drive, which unfortunately turned into seven as we were engulfed by a thick fog and forced to contend with impassable ruts in the road, wombats, and deep puddles. Completely exhausted, the goal to start early the next morning was scrapped. Unexpected excitement was quickly becoming the running theme of the weekend.

Recovered from the night's events, we woke up to a quickly dissipating fog that revealed a campsite full of canyoneers, and around us a flourishing forest full of orchids and cicada shells. It was very exciting to see how the last few months of rain had helped the mountains recover from the summer fires. Over breakfast we made plans to check out Closet Canyon, a pretty but rarely visited canyon in Newnes Plateau.



Tracking our way to Closet Canyon through the badly burnt out bush up on the Newnes Plateau (*photo by Lachie Bailey*)

Finding the entrance quickly became a full on mission in the burnt out forest. Any semblance of a path had essentially disappeared, so we were reliant on our GPS and map to direct us to the entrance. After a couple of hours of bush bashing we finally found ourselves alongside the upper section of a canyon. However, after checking and rechecking the map, we realised that we had overshot Closet's entrance and had instead stumbled into Galah Canyon. By this time it was getting later in the day and we were keen to get canyoning, so we quickly changed plans to instead head down Galah Canyon.



Some spectacular canyon formation in Galah Canyon (*photo by Lachie Bailey*)

Galah was a stunning canyon, despite its lack of galahs. We had missed the upper section of the canyon, but decided to continue down the stream way through some beautiful grottos to our first pitch. The water was surprisingly warm and the weather brilliant, which we enjoyed whilst shouting to each other over the deafening cicadas.

The next couple of sections were short abseils next to the occasional fixed rope, slippery mossy rocks beside short waterfalls, and walks

through beautiful fern lined gullies overlooking the sandy river bed, sometimes with miniature forests growing inside. The flowing water eventually plummeted past us into a large grotto. We found the original anchor point, with fragments of melted rope beside it, and abseiled down into the lower canyon section.



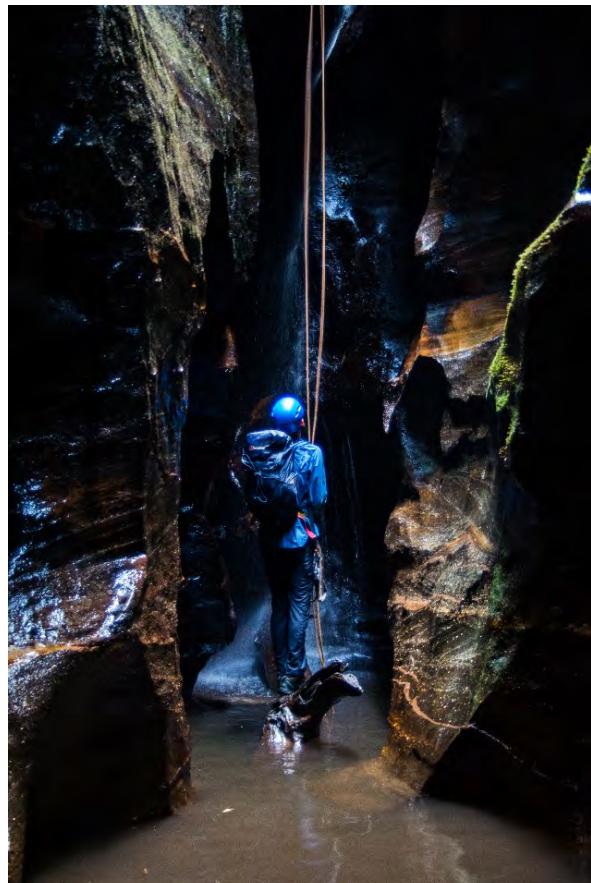
A tasty stew of melted rope and tape (*photo by Lachie Bailey*)

Here the water gained speed and depth as the canyon narrowed. The next couple of abseils were down next to waterfalls and into sizeable pools. Staying mostly dry was becoming increasingly difficult and entertaining to watch. Riley was commendably stoic despite a few big splashes! We abseiled deeper and deeper into the canyon, as the warm sunny air became decidedly more chilly. Finally, the canyon widened into the final abseil down a waterfall, after which the deepest swim was quickly gasped through and we were able to finally be in the sun again. While the weather was beautifully warm, the chill had started to set in by this point, so the sun was welcome.

However, the fun was not over yet. Exiting the canyon involved skirting the side of the cliff face until a fixed rope scramble up a sketchy slab of rock was found. We then followed the cliffs back into the upper section of Galah canyon, where we discovered that we had made an unfortunate mistake. Exiting Galah required us to leave a rope on an abseil nearby where we had entered. In our planning, we had not brought the notes for Galah and had

overlooked this. While we knew roughly where we needed to exit, we were unable to do so in the way that was intended, which meant that we had to scramble up yet another sketchy muddy slope on the canyons edge. While we did so without incident, let this be a lesson to any future trip planners! Perhaps a way we could have mitigated this would have been by bringing a pdf copy of the guidebook with us, on any of the many phones we had brought on the trip. Being prepared for any eventuality is essential when we head outside, and it's important that we can anticipate these mistakes and learn from them.

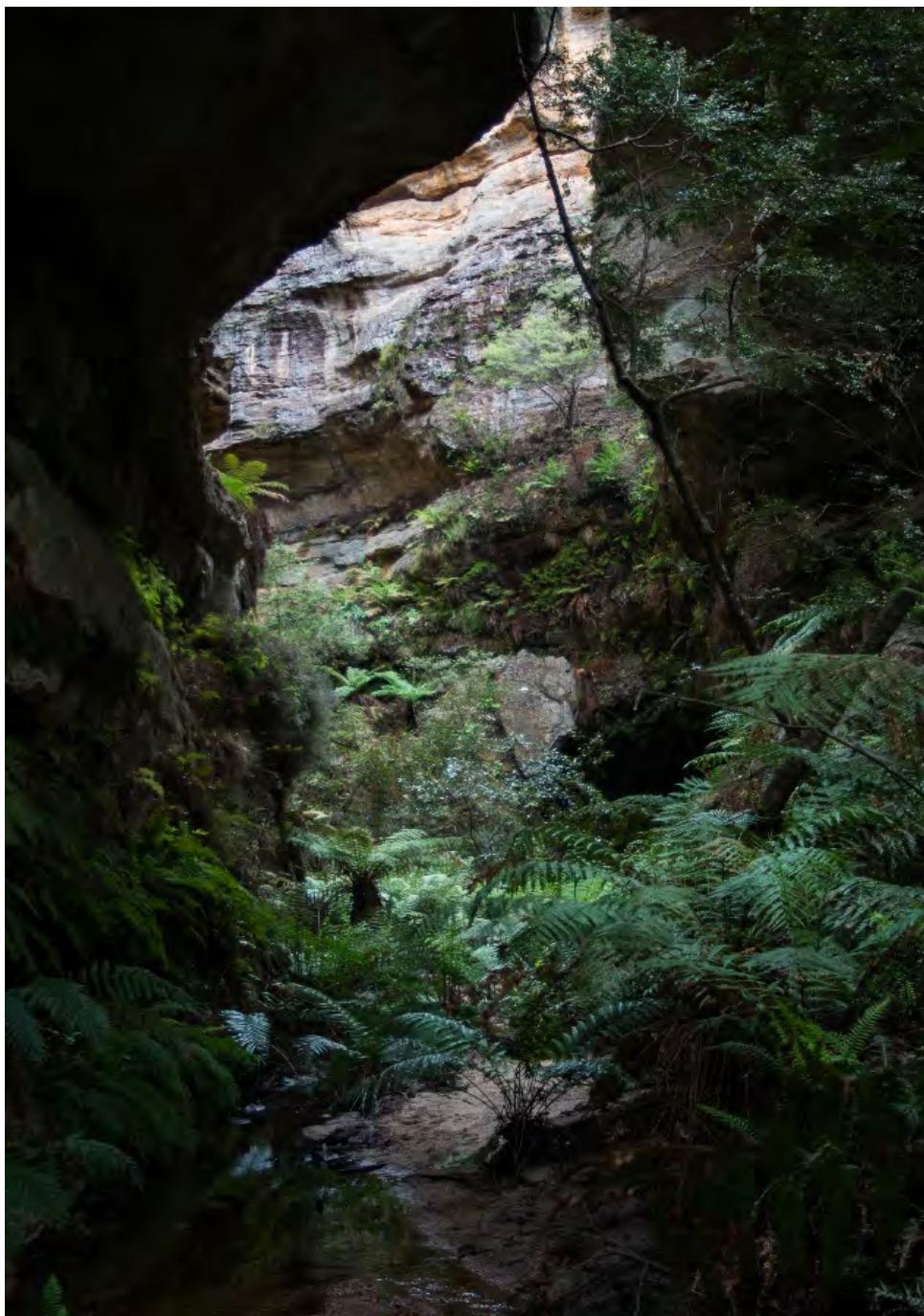
Luckily, navigating back to the cars was much easier, so we finally arrived back into camp at around 8pm. The day had been a ten hour adventure that had left all of us completely knackered. The beers



Corey managing the pitch off the cover of the Jamieson guide (*photo by Lachie Bailey*)

around the fire that night were some of the best we'd had, and not just because we got to try some delicious milk stouts that Michael had brought along.

The next day we unanimously agreed to do something a bit more relaxed. We decided to explore River Caves Canyon, a walk through canyon that would only take a few hours. It was another beautiful day and an easy down a gully



Lovely lush slot in River Caves Canyon (*photo by Lachie Bailey*)

lined with amazing rock formations. The canyon itself was gorgeous, with plenty of water and crayfish scuttling over the river bed. Lachie managed to catch a crayfish, which I think he was pretty proud of.

Heading back to Canberra passed with only a little incident, as Corey's car got a bit smoky while doing a U-turn on a steep, muddy dirt road. At the end of the day though, we all

learnt a bit about saving a bogged car, so it wasn't all bad.

Anyway, thank you Lachie, Corey, Oxana, Michael, and Riley for a brilliant weekend, and excellent job Riley for being an absolute trooper on your first canyoning trip! It's always hard your first time, and this weekend definitely didn't make things easier for him.

The Long Road North to Open Caves (Moparrabah again)

23rd October to 25th October 2020

By Lachie Bailey

Participants: Lachie Bailey, Phil Maynard (SUSS), Rowena Larkins (SUSS), Alan Pryke (SUSS), Megan Pryke SUSS, Antonella Wilby (SUSS), Keir Vaughan-Taylor (SUSS), Carol Layton (formerly SUSS), Rod Obrien (SUSS), and Phil Lardner (KSS)

Rule No.1 of Fun Caving Trips: Never sign up for the next trip before you drive home

This is always a good idea right? It gives you a chance to check your diary, sort out when the uni work is, and defuse any fury from other people in your life about end-to-end caving trips. But most importantly, it gives you a chance to consider the drive home. This is particularly important when you're caving at Kempsey, which is a good 8h drive from Canberra. Each way. Through Sydney. In Peak Hour.²

Obviously, I forgot this cardinal rule, and had signed up for Phil Maynard's next Moparrabah surveying trip even before I headed home from the previous trip. I soon began to regret my life choices as I flogged up the Hume Highway. Still, at least I had a SUSSLing to pick up as a passenger in Campbelltown. Antonella was great company on the drive north, and very forgiving of the decrepit state of my car's aircon. We were late enough that we missed the group Thai meal in Kempsey, although apparently that was no great loss.

Rather than staying in at Kempsey, this time we were camping out on the property of the farmer that owned Moparrabah Main Cave. This had the distinct advantage that we only had to walk about 50m to the lower entrance of the cave. The disadvantage was dodging the cowpats left behind by his extremely holistic cattle. Not every cowpat was dodged over the weekend, which resulted in some uniquely

smelly cavers (guano and cowpat are a fragrant combination).

Saturday was wet, which did rather slow everyone down in the morning, but still, two survey teams were at work by 9:30am. I went back to the upper section of the cave to show Alan where we had gotten to last time. Alan was extremely unhappy about the quality of the cave in Waterfall Chamber- apparently Phil Maynard had promised him clean washed walkthrough passage. We barreled down into Signature Chamber, and then spent a while capturing leads up to the MP20 entrance. We gave up about 5:30pm, by which time we'd almost gotten to The Maze. Phil Lardner took the Moparrabah initiates for a rambling tour of the cave while all this was going on.

There's still a lot to do in this section: the flowstone downclimb in the parallel passage and two possible surface leads up in the Waterfall Chamber still need to be surveyed. There's also a higher level with at least two easy climbs up into it between Waterfall and Signature Chambers, and a lead in a false-floored aven in Signature Chamber that probably goes to the same place. We didn't thoroughly push the breakdown on the floor of Signature Chamber either, as it reeked of histo. Lastly, there's another loop up near MP20 that we didn't quite get to. So someone is going to have fun tidying up the loose ends.

Despite the threatening weather, we managed to have a campfire Saturday night, thanks to Keir's efforts in getting it going. Brumbies (*Ed: sorry I mean feral horses*) came up for discussion at one point, and Carol ably held her own in the ensuing argument despite being outnumbered about 6 to 1. My gas cooker continues to excite everyone- I reject the suggestion that it should be classified as a prohibited item under the 1980 Geneva Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons

² Every hour seems to be Peak Hour in Sydney these days. Why can't they try climbing an actual peak for an hour instead?

*Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects.*³

Sunday saw the surveying continued, but only in the top section. Here, the survey leapt into The Maze (Alan was rather happier here) with Phil Lardner showing up around lunchtime to say hi. There was also a pretty heavy rainstorm at one point, but not so bad as the forecast had suggested.

I'm sure more happened after this, but I left for Canberra about 1-ish (10:30pm arrival back home). Alan was probably griping about something.

The trip home was eventful- as well as bucketing rain and the usual morons on the freeway, I very nearly didn't escape from the campsite at Moparrabah after the rain storm.

This occasioned nasty comments from Rowena about my X-Trail- thank you very much, but if the 4WD system had have been functioning an X-Trail is far superior to a Forester. IF it had have been working, there is no way whatsoever I would have needed Phil Lardner to snatch me up that mud slope.⁴

Antonella and I stopped at Andy's Cherry Pie Café on the way back- the pie and fried chicken was pretty good, and I thought rather hilarious considering the known culinary skills of NUCC's President.⁵ I also almost ran out of fuel at Eaglehawk, with about 3% of a tank left when I rolled into the servo. Lucky it's a 24h servo! Oh, wouldn't it be nice to have a normal trip for once where nothing dumb happened on the drive there or back again?



Any's Cherry Pie Café. Let's hope Andy never gets an idea like this into his head! (photo by Lachie Bailey)

³ No I did not make that up, that is the actual title of the agreement

⁴ I also absolutely did not nearly wrap my driver-side door around the gate at the top of the slope. It never happened. There was also no mocking

post-trip email from Rowena about her Forester's prowess

⁵ No-one who saw Andy's tin of SPAM at Cooleman will ever forget it. That was nearly 20 traumatised cavers

Mac Pass After Rain

1st November 2020

By Oxana Repina

Participants: Lachie Bailey, Corey Hanrahan, Michael Larkin (ISS), Oxana Repina (SUSS), Andy Waddell

We stared nervously at the little gullies on either side of the road, each one chundering with water, as the car rounded the turns down Macquarie Pass. Someone casually noted that they hadn't even seen those flowing last time we were here. A light rain began to fall as we pulled on wetsuits and helmets and flaked rope into packs. We'd prepared to do the canyon in high water, but had we really prepared? Did anyone really know what they were doing?

At the entry-point to the lower section of the canyon, we bumped into a group from ANUMC. We canned our option of doing the upper section as they told us the water level there was higher than it was here, and still rising. But the lower section was all escapable, so we decided we could start here... but best try to get through it *quickly*.

We didn't even try the waterfall bolts on the first pitch, and abseiled down the wall to avoid the torrent. Macquarie Rivulet had risen substantially above what we'd seen before,

and water barrelled through each drop. The little swim after P2 looked dodgy at best, with a possibility of getting sucked into a current and spat down a chute at worst (*Ed: everyone loves a good pour-over*). The optional slide with the small pool at the bottom had overflowed to form an expansive section of river. At P3, the rope snaked down into the thinnest of gaps between two frothing waterfalls.

Interestingly, the water was not as bad as it seemed. What appeared as deadly whitewater was actually fairly tame; the current, though faster than normal, was still easy to swim through. We walked around some sections of the creek and abseiled out and away from the waterfalls, but where we did end up in the water, it manageable, even fun.

We had a brief lunch at the top of P4. On previous trips we had rigged P4a and P4b separately, but this was not possible at this water level – the normal landing spot of P4a was now underneath a waterfall. We rigged the rope to drop straight down to the bottom of P4b down the very left hand side of the main waterfall and nearly committed, but backed out before anyone got on rope. The water had risen yet again over lunch and while we fussed



The little jump after P2 (photo by Oxana Repina)



The top of P3- a slightly precarious spot to get to at this water level (photo by Oxana Repina)

with rigging, so the whitewater swirling between the narrow walls at the base of the waterfall had worsened. The line of rope we had rigged also seemed likely to pendulum into the waterfall when weighted.

We climbed up out of the canyon on the true left and rejoined the track back to the cars. The completion of the trip without anyone having

drowned was celebrated by a stop at Robertson Pub on the way home.

(Ed: Oxana made an excellent video of the trip that you can view here-
https://m.youtube.com/watch?fbclid=IwAR1BRZ-uuhTIPdYWtbhE5_zgfzHBC80wZwRHTWjAKY9K7kcWIWtCR6Gv_s&feature=youtu.be&v=EOrjBsrt3IE)



The pulldown from P3 (photo by Oxana Repina)

Mac Pass Upper Section Recce

13th November 2020

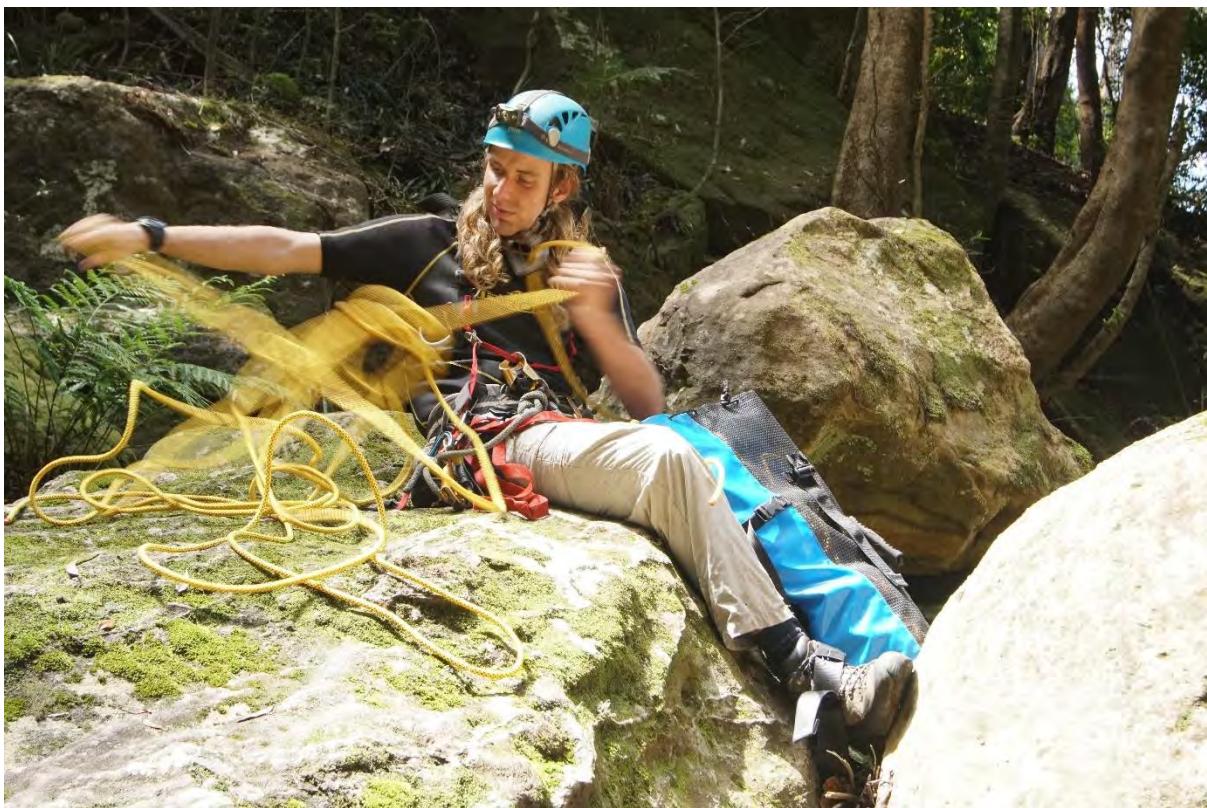
By Oxana Repina

Participants: Lachie Bailey, Corey Hanrahan, Oxana Repina (SUSS)

The motivation behind this trip was two-fold. First, the club had done three trips here this year and none had managed to start from the upper section, despite the upper section being reputedly much more spectacular than the lower. And second, Corey and I had purchased 65 m of new canyon rope a couple weeks back in an Adventure Base sale under the pretence of it being Corey's birthday present, and his birthday was today, so obviously we needed a trip to use the rope and validate the birthday present claim.

Forest, which is how previous trips to the area have started.

We parked at the regular trailhead but split away from the track to the lower section at the patch of open grass. We'd been told there was a shortcut track to the upper section from here. There was not. What started off as a vague footpad devolved into crawling through vines with canyoning packs, navigating by compass, and hauling ourselves up crumbling vertical slopes using tree roots. We arrived at the base of a waterfall, very confused as to where we were on the canyon topo. After 400 m of creek walking, we realised we had arrived at the start of the 400 m of creek walking marked on the topo... all of which could have been avoided and a whole lot of bush-bashing and root-hauling could have been saved, if



"Untangling rope is the best part of canyoning!" - Lachie Bailey, 2020 (photo by Oxana Repina)

The trip started off with coffee and Bavarian cream donuts from Moonacres Kitchen café in Robertson. I can highly recommend this as a way of starting off trips to canyons in the area. I can recommend it especially highly compared to starting off trips at McDonalds Sutton

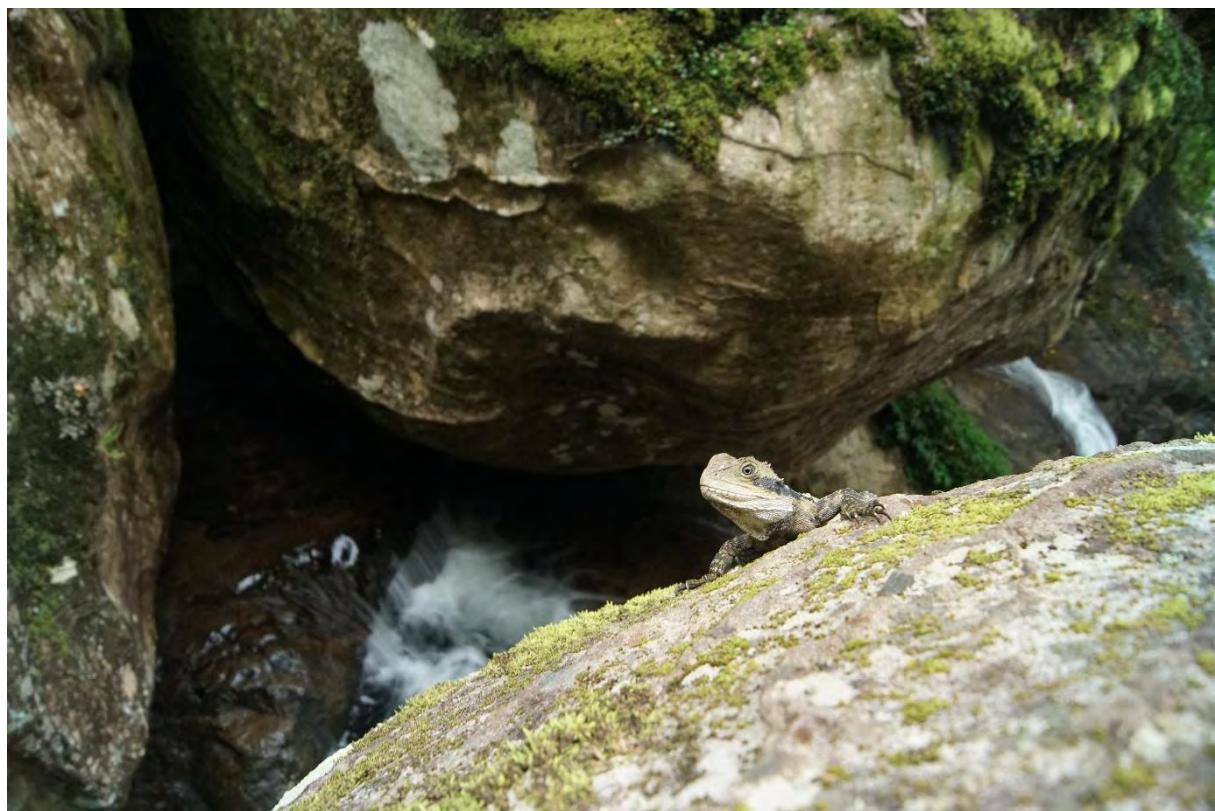
we'd taken the track along the river directly to the top of Clover Falls. At least we got in a token abseil somewhere in the middle of it all from a set of bolts, something that must have been optional and is not marked on the topo.

Clover Falls made up for it. It was a beautiful abseil down the true left of the waterfall, and

the 65 m rope was christened. We were also able to properly make use of SRT-style canyon rigging, using a munter hitch. The landing spot was not visible from the pitch head, so the first person down the rope was lowered to set the rope length. We noted that lowering did seem to wear the rope sheath a fair bit more than we expected. Where the pitch does not finish in swiftwater, it seems best to overestimate the required length of rope for the first person down and then raise the rope as required once their weight is not longer on it.

As we continued down the creek and the smaller pitches that followed, a thunderstorm menaced closer and boomed loudly, starting to shed rain. We arrived at the end of the upper section and the start of the lower section and decided to call it and head back to the cars as it was already early evening – the route-finding faff in the morning had taken up a lot time.

We had just started up the track when we heard a shout or whistle from somewhere down in the canyon. This was a concern, as it was very unlikely that a group had just started the lower section so late in the day. We shouted back into the bushes a few times but couldn't hear anything in return. As a last resort, we tried a few whistle blasts. This revealed the source of the original sound – a lyrebird! It seemed to be attracted by the noise of the whistle, and ran in circles around us as Lachie gently whistled to it. It seems a bit worrying that they can replicate the sound of whistle blasts – it might lead to some confusion at canyon pitches!



Water dragon near the end of the upper section (photo by Oxana Repina)

Cotter Caves

15th November 2020

By Lachie Bailey

Ever wanted to go caving in the ACT? Now's your chance! Corey Hanrahan had arranged for a group of us to visit Paddys River Caves, out near Cotter Dam (and commonly known as Cotter Caves). This was our second attempt to go out there- a visit in mid-October has been postponed due to rain.

We met the ranger out at the walking track up to Cotter Cave (PR1). He unlocked the gate and showed us around. It was rather more impressive than I was expecting- quite a large chamber. Less impressive was all the remaining graffiti and rubbish left behind by generations of thoughtless cave users. We had a very thorough discussion with the Ranger about cave conservation. He's thinking of putting together a park care group for Cotter Cave, and we were very keen to be involved.

After a good noodle around, we headed outside and said goodbye to the Ranger. We wandered around the hill and had a look at Powder Store Cave (PR2) and Blasted Cave (PR3), which are both rather smaller and tighter than Cotter Cave! But they were good fun to examine, even if I didn't quite manage to work out which was Powder Store, and which was Blasted. Either way, we all enjoyed doing a through-trip in the upper cave, although larger cavers like Andy enjoyed it relatively less than smaller cavers like Riley.

After looking at the two smaller caves, we briefly considered some surface trogging, but it was getting too hot out in the sun. So we called it quits and retreated back to the cool and shade and airconditioning of Canberra. A neat day out, and very interesting to finally get to see Cotter Cave!



A photo I think sums Cotter Cave up very nicely. It would once have been a lovely speleothem, but it has been thrashed by decades of unsympathetic cave use. Hopefully the current gate and some TLC from ACT Parks will give formations like this a chance to recover over time (*photo by Lachie Bailey*)

Watta 'bout Me?

24th November 2020

By Michael Larkin

Participants: Michael Larkin (ISS), Oxana Repina (SUSS), Corey Hanrahan, Lachie Bailey, Riley Baird, Chris Bradley, Andy Waddell, Claud Tomkins, Jess Spargo

After a 7:30am false start that turned into 8:15am, we eventually made our way to Watta Canyon, south of Robertson on the edge of Budgeroo NP. After a change and walk to the canyon, we made our way through rock hopping, wading to the 1st serious jump. Only a couple of metres high. After a quick depth check, the hardier souls had some fun jumping off.

A few more wades including one that seemed like caving again through twigs and a rock hole we arrived at the 1st abseil (15-20 metres high) to find a narrow waterfall with lots of water volume. Personally, I think this is far too much fun, but there was some hesitation on the part of others. This was negotiated with varying degrees of success and grace but all were able to make it through safely and move onto the big sequence of abseils over the main waterfall. And what a stunning waterfall it was directly opposite the canyon was another



Riley vanishing into the waterfall of P1 (*photo by Oxana Repina*)



Michael starting down the 20m drop of P2 (*photo by Oxana Repina*)

beautiful 80 plus metre waterfall which made the apprehension over the 55 metre main abseil easier to take.

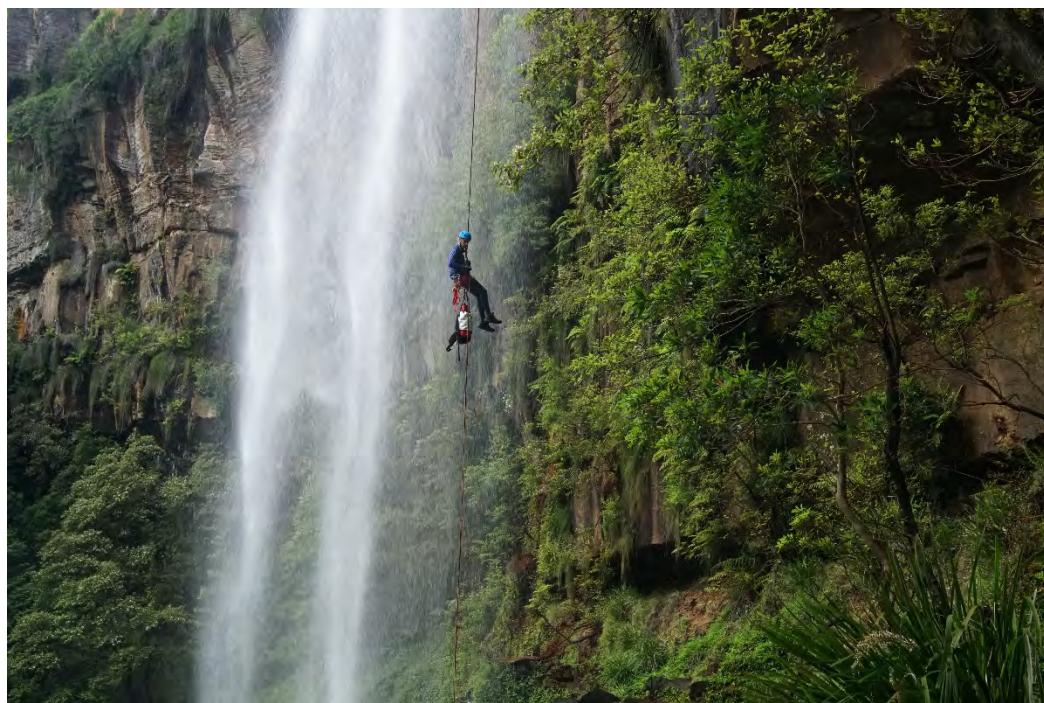
A traverse line to the first 15 metre pitch was set up and Lachie went first before setting up the 55 metre abseil. This abseil is a stunner, just to the right hand side of the waterfall, which thanks to all the rain we'd had these last couple of months had plenty of water cascading down. I was first down the main abseil and then proceeded to spend 90 minutes in natures shower belaying everyone else. This became a torrent when having to retrieve the ends of one of the ropes which had basically fallen into the main plunge. Eventually all our party were able to negotiate the main abseil before moving onto the last 15 metre abseil into the final pool. In hindsight though this could have been achieved as a climbdown on the far left hand side but whatever we all got down safely.

I'll need the reader to allow me to go off on a tangent. In December 2011, there was an incident in this canyon, where a canyoner experienced vertical abrasion of the rope and fell approximately 15 metres. He survived but unfortunately one of the Special Casualty

Access Team (SCAT) paramedics in the course of the rescue died. There was a plaque placed on one of the boulders commemorating him. We located the place where the plaque was but then noticed it had been removed. Post canyoning googling has revealed that the plaque has been removed twice now. One of my concerns is how relatively remote the plaque is. It's not near bushwalking tracks, or areas that are generally accessible to bushwalkers or the general public. Therefore, it seems possible that it was canyoneers who removed the plaque. If true, that level of disrespect saddens me.

The walk out was one of the easier ones. About 80 minutes of bush bashing following the creek up to the road and then a jaunt back to the cars. This trip took about 8.5 hours, but with a smaller, more experienced group could easily be done in 5-6 hours.

Overall though, I love this canyon in the same way I love going into Punchbowl at Wee J. Punchbowl has a bit of everything and that's Watta as well. Few jumps, few swims, scrambling, slides, a beautiful view, big abseil, abseil in a water fall, and then a relatively short walk out makes it my new favourite.



Corey enjoying P3 right next to the waterfall (photo by Oxana Repina)

Diving Mount Fairy

28th to 29th November 2020

By Lachie Bailey

Participants: Lachie Bailey, Andy Waddell, Claud Tomkins, Brad Hearn, Andriana Stoddart, Hugh Mason (MUMC), Rod Obrien (SUSS), Cathi Humphrey-Hood (MSS), Keir Vaughan-Taylor (SUSS), Sue Willis (SUSS), Alan Green (SUSS), Diana Paiva (MSS), Iain McCulloch (FUSSI)

So, the bait was loaded at Kempsey, the trap ready and waiting- Rod, there's 3 un-dived sumps at Mount Fairy, do you want to come and have a look?

Thus were a bunch of Sydney cavers were baited into coming down and visiting this most essentially Canberra caving location. I wasn't expecting that many takers to be honest, as it was after Semester ended for NUCC (people go home), and Mount Fairy is very definitely not on most people's speleoradar. It doesn't help that Mount Fairy has a reputation for insignificant caves and abundant wombats.

This meant it was a great surprise that I ended up with 13 takers! We met up Saturday morning at Mount Fairy, with Rod, Cathi, Alan,

Keir, Sue and Diana having driven down from Sydney on Friday evening. It was nice to catch up with everyone- interclub trips are one of the joys of caving in NSW, and there have been less of them than usual this year (thanks COVID). Rod was raring to go with his dive, so we got ready and headed over the hill to Main Cave.

I hadn't been out to Mount Fairy since early August, so was astounded to see the growth of thistles that had sprung up around the karst. The normally short-cropped grass was a waist high thicket in places. La Nina is definitely making itself felt, and is turbocharging the blackberries around all the cave entrances too!

Eventually Brad and I hacked our way into the MF1 entrance, and we all set off for Sump 1. The Hills Speleo Club map of Main Cave indicates this is the downstream sump of the cave, with water flowing from Sump 2 to Sump 1. I'm not entirely sold on this, and would very much like to see the cave in a flood event sometime, as I suspect reality could be a little different. It would make a good dye-tracing experiment!



Walking up the dry creekbed to Main Cave amongst all the new thistles (*photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood*)

Rod soon kitted up, and plunged into the water. Apparently it was bitterly cold, despite how wet it's been recently—possibly indicating there is little flow through the cave, or that Sump 1 is isolated hydrologically. The sump was also extremely turbid, leaving Rod with quite poor visibility. Soon Rod vanished into the murky depths, but not before Cathi got a great pose!

Cathi, Alan, Diana, Keir and I hung around while Rod was diving, but Andy, Claud, Brad, Andriana, and Hugh headed off into the Kokoda Extension. They had a nice time exploring all the nasty side-leads they could, and came back acceptably wet and muddy. Brad unfortunately couldn't fit through the U-bend at the entrance of the Kokoda Trail.

Rod reported a promising but frustrating dive. He reported that:

On reaching Sump 1 I found the water very muddy—probably due to the recent rain. So much for seeing where I was going. It was going to be one of those dives where I crawl along the bottom feeling my way around the walls with my hands and feet. I found the old map of the sump extension did a reasonable job of representing the passage. We made a light and voice connection to a passage beyond Sump 1 onto a sump marked on the Hills Speleos map.⁶

I then discovered what appears to be the main passage heading downstream in the end chamber at a depth of 2.4m. The passage was wide but low, making for a very tight fit. I was stopped by a loose, unstable gravel slope that threatened to collapse and block my way back. I believe that the gravel could be carried away by the next rain event so is definitely worth another dive. I then took some survey measurements to redraw the Sump 1 map.



Rod taking the plunge into Sump 1. You can see all the paparazzi were lined up to record this first known cave dive at Mount Fairy (photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood)

Next we moved onto Sump 2, Poms Puddle. This is not a diver-friendly sump, with limited space to kit up, and being half-choked with boulders. Still, Rod managed to slither into the sump, leaving us all to get comfortable while we waited. Cathi was heard remarking with concern that the enclosed space of the tube running down to the sump was making her a little claustrophobic with all of us packed into it! I don't think the general willingness of us NUCCers to crawl over people to swap places in the tube helped either. Soon Rod was back, with the following account of his dive:

⁶ Ed: the sump immediately to the north of f' on the f-f' cross-section. It's more like a pool and is tight

but definitely crawlable if you have more tolerance of cold water than me!

I was very cold by the time I exited Sump 1, but we made our way upstream to Sump 2 to find the water clarity there was just as bad as Sump 1. The entry passage into Sump 2 is low, and this low passage continued underwater with the floor made up of loose cobblestones. I discovered what felt like numerous passageways that were too small for me to enter.

Feeling my way around the walls by using my feet I found and entered a small solution tube that surfaced in a small dry passage about 4m long. This dry passage contained several flying insects that seemed to be fixated with my dive light. At the end of this passage is a small vertical shaft that could join onto a passage in the Kokoda Extension. I took some brief survey notes and returned to the sump.

With everyone getting cold we decided to skip the forward sump and retire to the sun on the surface. Just shy of the entrance, we ran into Iain, who had come in to say hi. It was threatening to storm, so we retreated back to the campsite and relaxed into the evening. A

very pleasant one was had around the campfire, graced by Alan's excellent cooking.

Come Sunday morning, lassitude set in a little, but we still got to work after a few cups of tea. Sue and Keir wandered over to the old quarry to look for birdlife while the rest of us trooped back over to the Main Cave area. Andriana and I amused ourselves using a hand drill to install a tag on Wiilban, which is now tagged MF67. Those of you with some Mount Fairy familiarity might recognise MF67 as Kokoda 'Cave'. This is actually the Kokoda Extension of Main Cave, and the MF67 tag was never actually allocated by Hills Speleos. Hence why we used the number for Wiilban.

Once the tag was installed, we set to work surveying Wiilban. This took a good while thanks to the cave's delightful squeeze. I got stuck, and despite several attempts still struggled to get through even though I'd been through before. Have I put on weight in the last couple of months? Cathi and Diana both gave us a hand with the surveying before they headed off to do other stuff.



The next sump to dive... Poms Puddle (photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood)



A new take on tunneling into a cave (*photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood*)

We've surveyed the entire current extent of the cave, and are confident that it won't go any further without digging. However, digging prospects in the cave are very good. We're still unsure about the history of MF67; it is perched above the valley floor, but becomes sediment-filled at about the current creek level. It is clearly phreatic in origin, but has had significant vadose modification, despite the absence of any known active streamways on the west wall of the creek. Despite the proximity to MF35 (Zed Cave), and the leads heading off Zed Cave, I've not been able to achieve a voice contact.

The others had a good time mooching around, visiting a number

of the other caves scattered around Main Cave.

Particularly interesting was the visit up to MF8, 9 and 10, where Andy found a flooded passageway at creek level that needs diving. There's definitely more to do at Mount Fairy, and we certainly only achieved a fraction of the project work we wanted to do for the weekend.

All in all, it was absolutely an interesting one! While we didn't find vast new passages, we've got some very interesting leads to follow on future trips down to Mount Fairy. The gravel-filled chute in Sump 1 is particularly interesting, and hold great promise. It'd be great to come back in summer with a pump and wetsuits...



Lachie doing a spot of surveying in Wiilban (*photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood*)

Back to Mac Pass

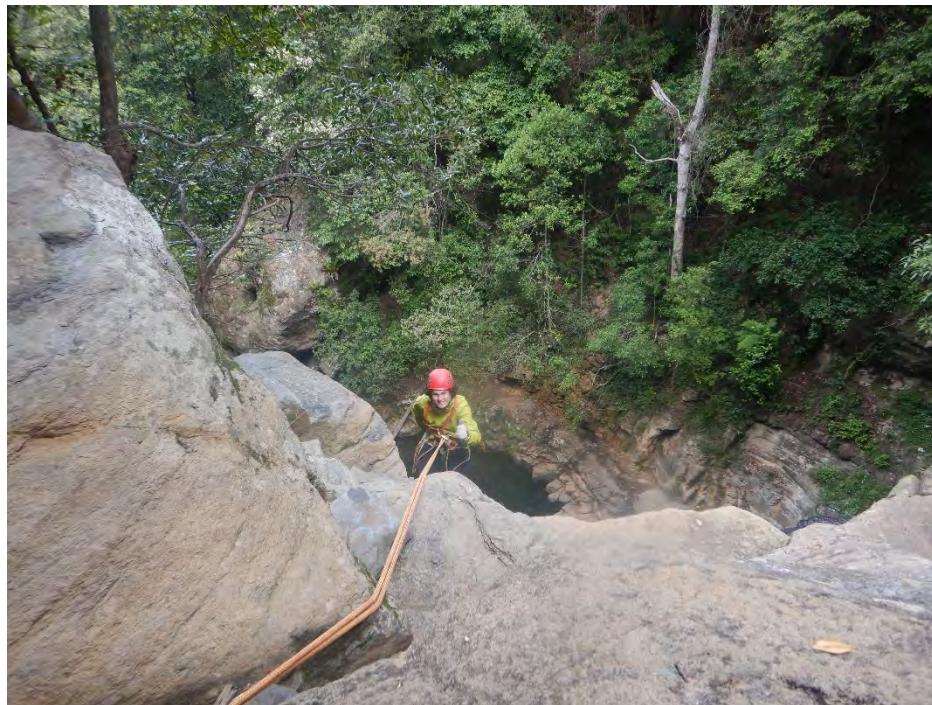
12th December 2020

By Jess Spargo

Participants: Jess Spargo, Claud Tomkins, Lachie Bailey, Tali de Mestre

I was really keen to squeeze one last canyoning experience in before making the move to Melbourne at Christmas. Lachie, a canyoning enthusiast himself, was only too happy to organise one to Macquarie Pass, a national park south west of Wollongong. It is one of several canyons in the area and features a wide river, open canyon and a nice rainforest walk. The club had held a trip there the month before however, they were only able to do three of the abseils due to the high water levels from the recent rain. This time around the water levels were lower and we had a small group of four which meant we would be able to move through the canyon quickly as well as have ample time for Claude and me to practise rigging under the expert supervision of Lachie.

The canyon can be divided into the upper and lower section. The group hiked up to the second waterfall of the top section, Clover



Tali starting down Clover Falls with an audience (photo by Lachie Bailey)

Falls, which would be the first abseil for the day. Lachie put his university tutor hat on and ran us through some rigging tips and tricks. By the time Claud and I had rigged it and were ready to go we had built up quite an audience at the bottom. We abseiled down, one at a time, with Claude bottom belaying before commencing a swim/walk across to the other side. The trip notes said the water was warmer in this canyon than in the Blue Mountains, but I wasn't sold on that.

We hiked to the next abseil where we once again practised our rigging. By the time we had arrived at the third abseil, which marked the beginning of the lower section, it became apparent that members of the group were getting cold as they turned to interpretive dance to keep warm. As such we strategically avoided abseils that ended in a swim where possible. However, some of the optional jumps further down proved to be too tempting for the 'younguns' who chose to launch themselves into the cold water while us old farts found more comfortable ways to navigate those sections.

The pitches in the lower section were in quick succession of each other. As Claud and I had become confident with our rigging, we were able to go ahead and set the next abseil while others pulled down the previous one. It wasn't long before we reached the final abseil which marked the end of our fun and the start of a bushbash/hike back out. All in all, a fantastic way to finish a year of canyoning and caving with NUCC.

Abseiling Love Creek Falls

21st December 2020

By Corey Hanrahan

Participants: Corey Hanrahan, Oxana Repina, Nicole Carter

Love Creek Falls was a fun, yet pretty easy-going abseiling trip down a three-tiered waterfall in Queensland.

We started at the carpark at the end of Cedar Creek Road at about 9:30 am. The walk-in consisted of relatively straight-forward rock hopping over mostly flat terrain. Following the popular Cedar Creek upstream past Cedar Creek Falls, we kept right at the confluence with Love Creek. We then continued upstream until we arrived at the base of Love Creek Falls.

From the base of the falls we scrambled up an obvious track on the right. This was very steep, with tree roots forming almost makeshift stairs. We arrived at the top of Love Creek Falls at 11:30am, and enjoyed a quick snack on the large flat rocky section before the first pitch. At this point we found a tree that Nicole used to practice using Oxana's rappel rack, rather than her usual ATC.

The three abseils were very pleasant:

1. 15-20m, from a sling joining two bolts, behind a large boulder at on the cliff edge (roughly the centre of the creek). Reasonable views and uncomplicated descent into a pool.
2. 8-10m, from two bolts on the true left near the edge. Not as scenic, down a dry slope which could be down-climbable in a pinch. Easy pull-down.
3. ~30m, two bolts behind some vegetation on the right. Very scenic rappel into a pool at the bottom of a slot. Pull down was difficult but achieved on the first go.



Corey abseiling down Love Creek Falls (*photo by Oxana Repina*)

The rappels were rigged using a single rope contingency anchor using either a figure 8 or a munter mule. Oxana and I rigged, but Nicole watched closely and made some useful suggestions - her background in climbing proving useful for the trip. For example, we used Nicole's 'quad' to join the bolts for the second and third abseils. This allowed for the creation of a releasable anchor using a munter.

The weather for the trip was hot and humid, sunny on the way in and overcast on the way out. Furthermore, the water was pleasantly cool without being cold. Wetsuits were definitely not required. Despite recent rain, water levels were low, but still flowing. Overall, this was an enjoyable abseil trip with a reasonable 2 hour walk each way. I would definitely repeat this trip in the future.

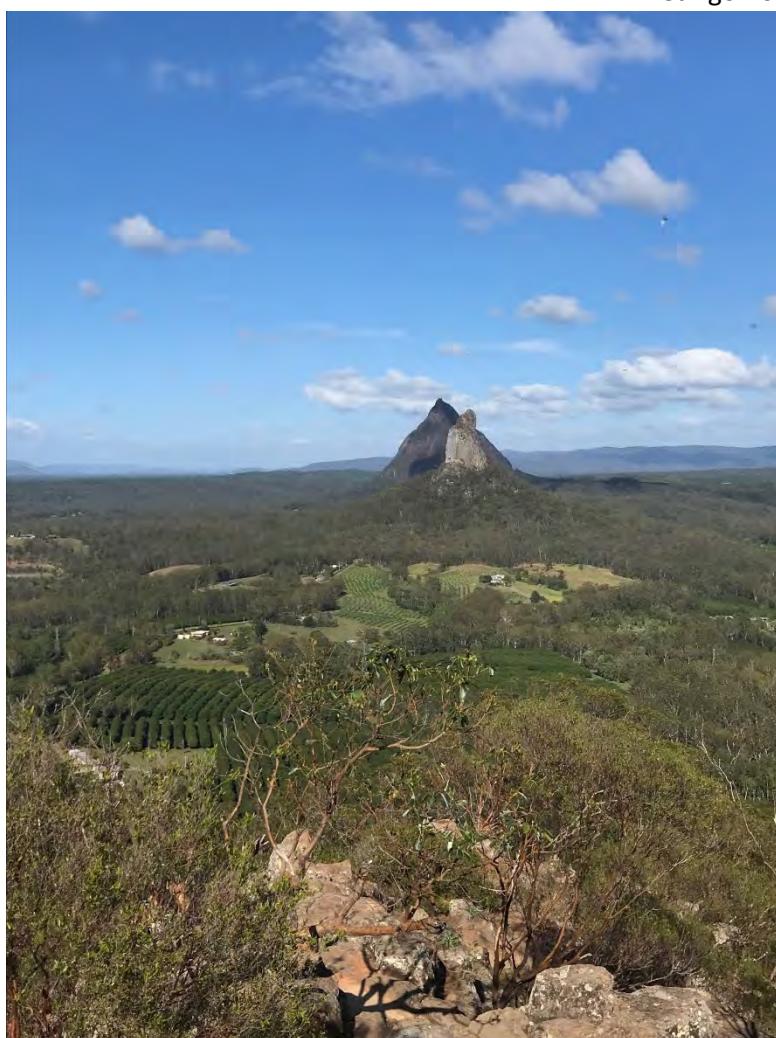
Ngungun SRT Practice, a.k.a An Exercise in Maintaining Some Semblance of Safety Hanging on Rope While Using One or Both Hands to Desperately Fend Off An Unbelievable Plague of Mosquitos

27th December 2020

By Oxana Repina

Participants: Corey Hanrahan, Oxana Repina (SUSS), Lachie Bailey

This trip is largely summarised by the title. The three of us were staying with our families that day in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, so called a last-minute trip to practice SRT before two expedition trips to Tasmania in January and February. It was a beautiful Queensland



The classic view from the top of Ngungun, complete with 0 mosquitoes (*photo by Lachie Bailey*)

afternoon, on the shady side of the mountain, a 10 minute walk from the carpark – perfect! Except nobody had bought insect repellent and the recent downpours had allowed mosquitoes to proliferate in such numbers that a single swat could hit five of them on one's arm. They descended and drilled into skin even as we walked, so by the time we made it to the lower cliffs we felt obligated to at least set up the ropes and practice a couple of descent/ascents to make all the existing bites worth it.

Rigging took a very long time as each step of knot tying, carabiner clipping and rope flaking was punctuated every few seconds by swatting mosquitoes. The SRT practice consisted of diverting only just enough concentration to not let go of the rope when abseiling and maintaining two points of contact when ascending, and devoting all remaining mental capacity to tracking and swatting mosquitoes. A small amount of mental energy was briefly put into a discussion about whether or not the hundreds we had killed would influence either the population dynamics or evolution of mosquitoes in the area (e.g. does the process of killing the ones that bite make the remaining population more likely to evolve to avoid biting humans, or does it just create an ever-increasingly agile and intelligent species with a particular knack for avoiding swatting hands?).

The trip ended with a record minimum duration of faffing at the cars, as everybody desperately sought to jump in, slam the doors and escape the ceaseless biting.

Border Ranges Canyoning

27th December 2020

By Corey Hanrahan

Participants: Corey Hanrahan, Oxana Repina (SUSS), Lachie Bailey, Claud Tomkins

Gathering together a group of Canberrans staying with family in SE QLD, our aim was to recce two canyons along the QLD-NSW border. We had pieced together track notes from two sources: 'The Vertical Adventurer' and the 'Northern Rivers Bushwalkers Club', which Lachie was keen to update based on this trip.

We rendezvoused at Beaudesert, where Lachie introduced us to his Dad's Pajero. The 4WD was required to navigate the road to Burnett Creek Canyon. However, this Pajero had a habit of the boot door becoming stuck (leading to some issues for Lachie when making dinner), and had a resident St Andrew's Cross spider, which had apparently become a family pet. So, under strict instructions to take care of the spider, we drove to Woodenbong Campground.

Having organised our camp for the night, we bundled into the Pajero, heading to Burnett

Creek Canyon. Turning down a rough track labelled 'Victor's Shortcut Road', so were soon stopped by a fallen tree – apparently the shortcut was not in action today. Thankfully, Dead Horse Mountain Road to the west was clear enough to pass. The road was rough, and Lachie showed great bravery navigating deep puddles, shallow streams, eroded roads and steep hills. He also valiantly requested we break various twigs along the way, to avoid scratching the car.

When we arrived at the border fence to an empty car park, I sadly realised I had forgotten my clothes for the hike in. But it was too late to go back, so I resigned myself to wearing the wetsuit from the start on that hot summer's day. The walk-in itself would have been really pleasant if it weren't for my wetsuit: we ducked under the two border fences, followed a steep downhill along a fire trail, had a leisurely stroll along another flat fire trail, and one short but dense bush-bash to the creek. I had to plunge myself into the shallow creek water immediately to cool myself down in the wetsuit!

Once here, Burnett Creek Canyon was really high quality. The pitches were regular, and



Claud descends P1 of Burnett Canyon, surrounded by lovely rainforest (*photo by Oxana Repina*)

mostly around 10-15 meters down smooth rock. There were also some fun slides and nice constrictions between the abseils. Throughout the canyon, Lachie busied himself with writing track notes on his waterproof notebook, Oxana took lots of photos, and Claud and I just enjoyed and soaked in the whole experience. The canyon ended with a steep but short walk back to the car. Overall, this unassuming border canyon was easily comparable in quality to many Blue Mountains slots.

The next day, our aim was another QLD-NSW border canyon, Watsons Creek. One of the things we had noticed in Burnett Canyon was that both The Vertical Adventurer and the Northern Rivers Bushwalkers Club seemed to overestimate the pitch heights. This was an important note, because according to their notes/trip reports, we would only *just* have enough rope to complete the trip. This, combined with some rain overnight, set our group on edge as we set out to Watsons Creek Canyon.

The walk in for this canyon involved a reasonably short walk along the border fence, a strategic jump over this fence at a gate, and a walk down a well-formed fire trail to the start of the canyon. The view at the start of the canyon looked intimidating. It seemed that the pitches were all directly after each other, making us feel very exposed at the top. On a positive note, the water level seemed to be high, but not in flood. We decided to go ahead with the descent.



Corey enjoying one of the many waterfall abseils (*photo by Oxana Repina*)



The look of relief after surviving the first two abseils in Watsons Creek Canyon (*photo by Oxana Repina*)

Unfortunately, we had a miscommunication in between pitches 1 and 2. Originally, the plan had been to leave the rope rigged at the first pitch, to allow escape from the canyon if the second pitch didn't look good. However, when I arrived at the bottom of this first, the rest of the group had moved on, so I (mistakenly) pulled the rope down the pitch. Unfortunately, when Oxana returned from her recce of the second pitch, she said it looked like a "swirling vortex of death". But having pulled the rope down, we were committed, so we nervously continued the canyon.



A look back at the second and third pitches in Watsons Creek Canyon
(photo by Oxana Repina)

To our relief, we received Oxana's whistle signals indicating a safe descent of this second pitch. As it turned out, the abseil line ran beside (not through) the waterfall, and it looked much tamer from the bottom. We also found that each pitch was consistently overestimated in height according to the track notes we followed. For several, we tied either two (or three) ropes together, finding that one of the ropes was not needed at all.

After the first two large pitches, the last pitch was small and pleasant. The walk out was more difficult as it was overgrown with stinging trees and lantana. It also quickly became apparent that larger pitches meant a much harder uphill slog than Burnett Creek Canyon. Overall, the trip through Watson's was a success (no-one died) and was actually quite fun in hindsight.

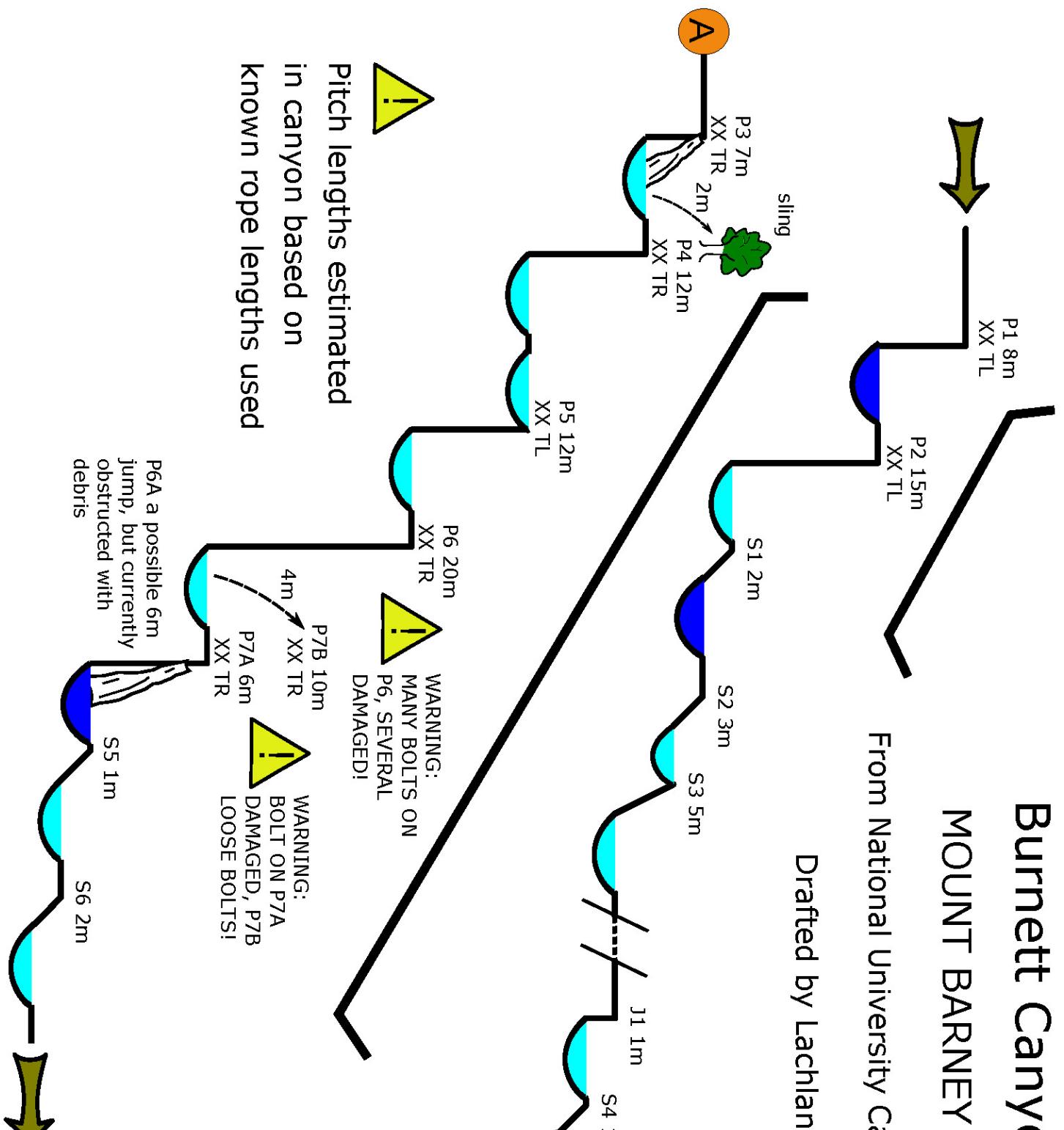
For our first foray into the Border Ranges Canyons, we were really quite impressed. This area is definitely worth another trip in the future!

Ed: I would have rated Watsons Creek Canyon rather higher than Corey's 'actually quite fun' assessment! As a helping hand for anyone else who wishes to enjoy Burnett or Watsons Creek Canyons, here are the topos I drew up after the trip. Any comments or corrections are welcomed (send them to caving@anusra.com.au), and following my next visit I'll do an updated version and a description to go with the topo.

Burnett Canyon (v3a2II**)

MOUNT BARNEY NATIONAL PARK

From National University Caving Club trip 29-12-2020
Drafted by Lachlan Bailey, version 1.4



NOT TO
SCALE!

Watsons Creek Canyon (v4a1IV**)

MOUNT BARNEY NATIONAL PARK

From National University Caving Club trip 30-12-2020

Drafted by Lachlan Bailey, version 1.3

Down-climbable
ledge approx. 8m
from bottom on P1

WARNING:
OVERHUNG AND
SUSCEPTIBLE
TO ROPE-RUB

handline

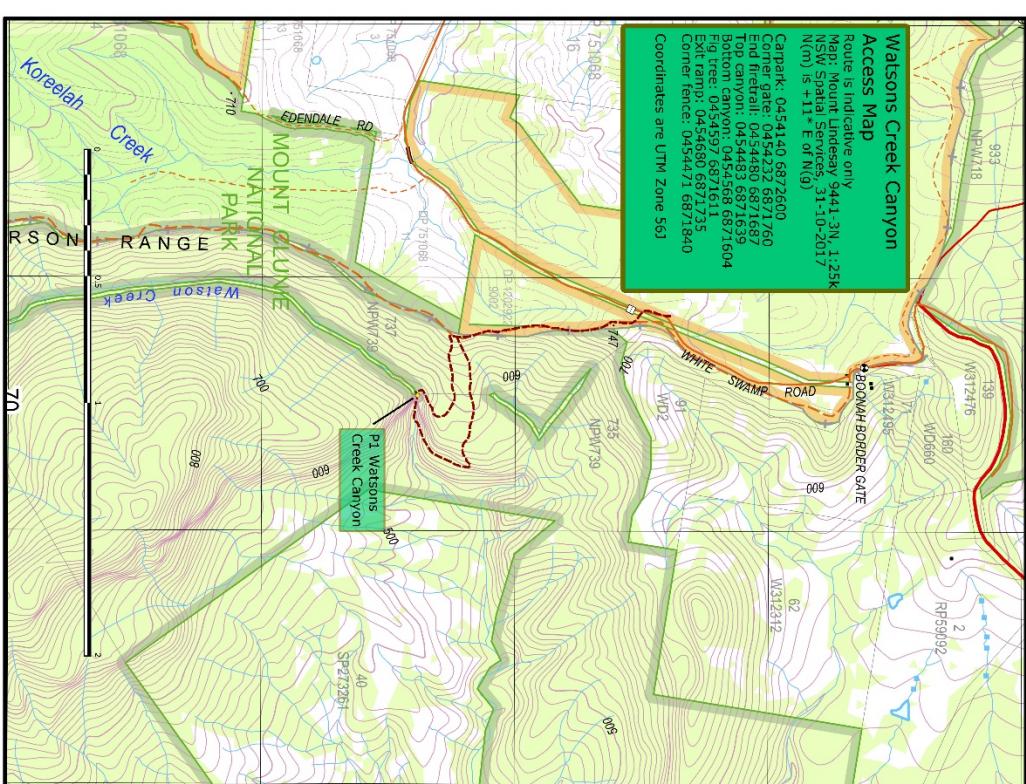
P2 40m
XX TR

X TR

P3 7m
XX TR



Pitch lengths estimated
in canyon based on
known rope lengths used



Watta Canyon (v4a4III**)

November 2020

By Lachie Bailey

Note: Pitch lengths are estimates, and have *not* been exactly measured. TL= true left, TR= true right

Watta Canyon is an excellent trip down a relatively aquatic canyon on Dharowal Creek in Budgeroo National Park. It should be approached with caution after heavy rainfall, and all party members must be confident swimmers and abseilers.

Access- Park at GR819670, just before the bridge on Fountaindale Road. There is limited space to pull over on the left, but you can squeeze three cars in there. Follow a bush track along the fence line, until you pick up the old firetrail. After approximately 15 minutes, the fire trail ends, and if you continue straight ahead you will get bluffed. Instead, there is a faint track to the left that will drop you down into Dharowal Creek at a large pool. Put on wetsuits or other swimming clothes here; you can also put your vertical kit on if you don't mind walking in it.

Creekwalking- Continue downstream. This section is a mess of boulders, logjams (most are fairly stable with the odd loose log), and the occasional swim, up to about 50m. There is a 4m jump into a deep pool, but it can be bypassed on the TL. Two large logjams obstruct the creek shortly before P1; they can be tunnelled through at water level. The second one can also be avoided by a climb up on the TL that offers a short slide.

Immediately after the second logjam is a long, deep pool approximately 60m long. It abruptly terminates at P1. This lip is very slippery and would be incredibly risky in high water.

Pitch 1 (20m)- Anchor on the TR, recessed back from the lip of the pitch. Actual length of pitch is probably closer to 12m, but more is needed to reach anchors. In moderate to high flow, you are unavoidably abseiling in the waterfall for

the last 5m. There can be a floating disconnect at the base of the waterfall.

Rockhop downstream for 100m to reach the top of the main waterfall and Pitch 2. I have broken the main waterfall into three pitches, and do not recommend abseiling the full drop!

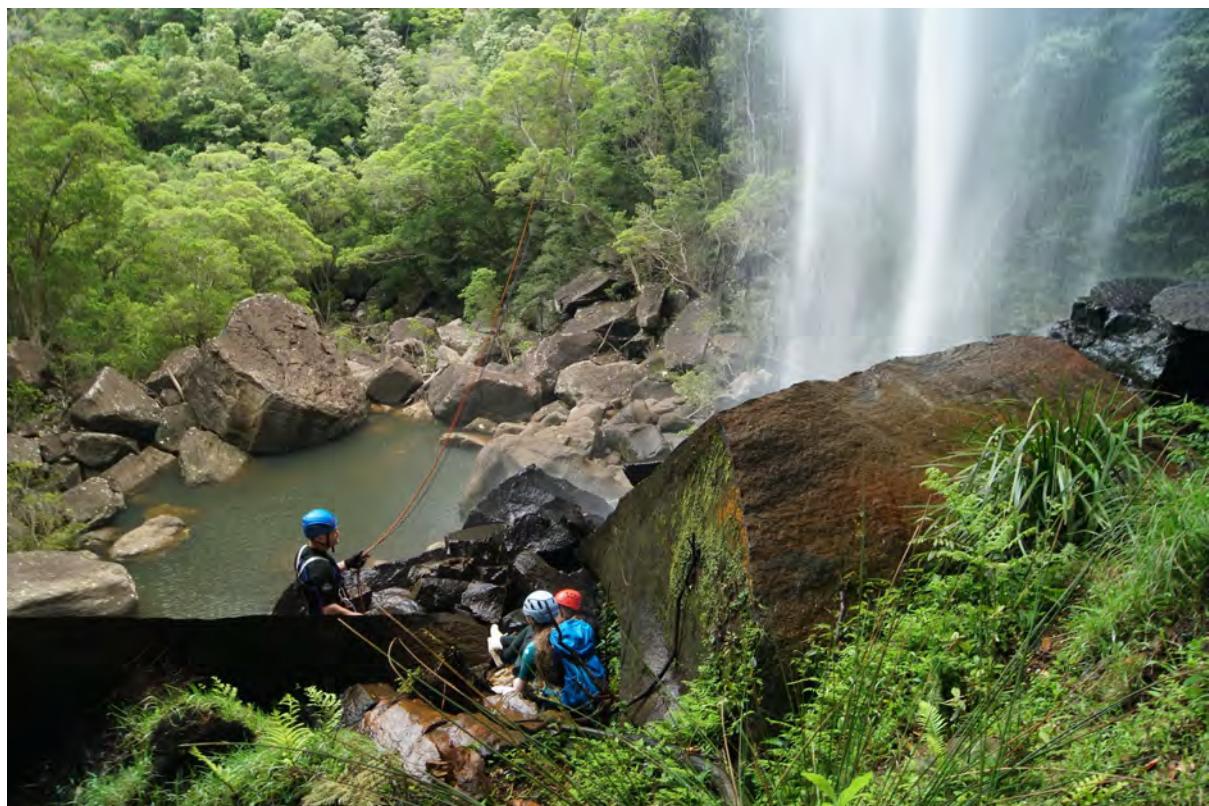
Pitch 2 (20m)- There are slings placed around a tree on the TL in an exposed spot overlooking over the waterfall. A short handline may be desired to provide a safety for access, and a rope protector is desirable just below the anchor point due to awkward placement. Puts you down a scrubby gully to the top of P3.

Pitch 3 (60m)- Main pitch, next to but not in the flow of the waterfall. You will be exposed to spray, but shouldn't get particularly wet in low-moderate flow. There are bolts with slings at on a small ledge at the bottom of P2. Apply a rope protector on the lip of the abseil, as there is a moderate severity rub-point. Last 30m is free hanging, lands on a large ledge with plenty of space. Can be a difficult pull-down, so bring hand ascenders to assist.

Pitch 4 (15m)- OPTIONAL, from sling around tree on the TL. Lands on rock shelf by pool at base of waterfall. Can be bypassed by scrambling ridge on the TL.

Exit- Up the obvious gully you can see entering on the TR of the canyon at the bend 150m downstream at GR827664. There may be other optional abseils if you follow Dharowal Ck downstream to its junction with the Kangaroo River and exit up Missingham Steps.

Follow the creek upstream for around 1hr, bushbashing on the TL is probably the easiest route to follow. Occasionally, you will have to enter the creekbed to avoid bluffs. Once you pass a waterfall on your right (TL), exit up a gully on the TL. This will put you up on the plateau, keep walking gently uphill until you hit Fountaindale Rd. Turn right, and follow Fountaindale Rd to the next bridge- your cars should be there.



Two gratuitous photos of Watta Canyon to go with the description. It was such an absolutely gorgeous canyon, from start to end. It's hard to say what the most photogenic part of the canyon was (*photos both by Oxana Repina*)

Bungonia Main Canyon (v4a4III**)

By Lachie Bailey, December 2020

Note: Pitch lengths are estimates, and have *not* been exactly measured. TL= true left, TR= true right

Bungonia Canyon is a quartzite canyon on Bungonia Creek. It is a relatively open canyon with sheer walls, several exposed pitches and deep pools of water that offer fun swims. Due to these features, it is best avoided during cold months, and on hot summer days.

Access- Park at the Yellow Track carpark in the campground. You can arrange a car shuffle by parking the other car at the Red Tk carpark. Don't forget to sign in at the Ranger's Station, and pay the park access fee. Follow the combined Yellow and Green Tks downhill, and take the Yellow Tk where they split.

Creekwalking- Once you reach the bed of Bungonia Ck, turn right (downstream). You will pass the 10m bedrock pillar of Devils Pulpit in the creekbed. With care you can stay dry until the first 30m swim (55H 774360 6144936). Avoid the first set of following cascades on the TR, and the next on the TL. P1 is shortly after.

Pitch 1 (40m)- From 2x rusty pitons and cam on TR 5m up; access approx. 10m back. There is also poorly placed sling around a Casuarina on the TL. Small landing gully then a 40m swim (hence the a4 rating). 4m handline from piton on TL to get down boulders (can be scrambled). Short stretch of creek and cascades to P2.

Pitch 2 (6m)- Single bolt on TR, 4m down cascade where it becomes vertical. Can be jumped (5m) from bolt, but be very cautious of submerged rocks. Pool is about 3m deep at base of pitch in normal conditions. 20m swim. Several more short swims and wades accompanying avoidable cascades to P3. The ridge immediately above P3 is on the TL is a potential but dangerous exit.

Pitch 3, Bungonia Falls (65m)- Has routes on TR and TL; TR has 2x bolts and is preferred.

Climb around the back of large boulder on TR to access. This is a tiered waterfall that can be scrambled with care when dry (start on the TL). There are trees on the TL that offer alternative shorter pitches, you'll need to replace anchors.

Due to the tiers, watch for damaged, tangled or stuck ropes). Ascenders and pulling from the far side of the 25m swim at bottom can help. There is 200m of creek with several short swims before P4. Jerrara Canyon enters on the TL immediately before P4, and the ridge between the two canyons can be used as an exit. This is steep with much loose rock, and strongly not recommended.

Pitch 4 (45m)- 2x bolts on ledge TR overlooking falls (. This pitch is into a 30m wide pool that can drop 15m+ when drier. If the pool is low, there is a large slinged Casuarina on the TR underneath the main overhang of the falls that offers a belay. It is about 15m above the normal water level. There are trees on the TL that offer alternative shorter pitches, but bring material to replace anchors.

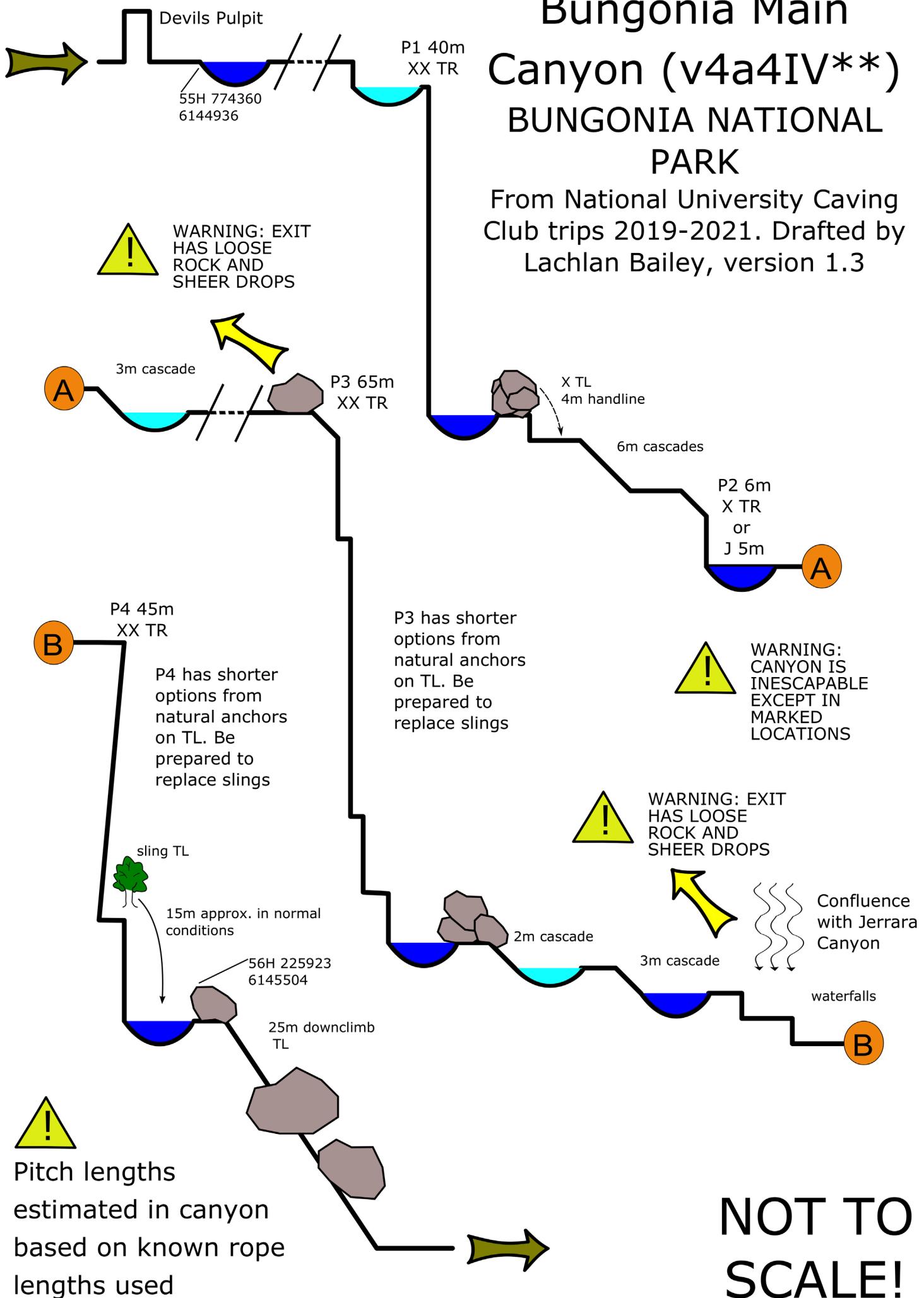
Exit- Canyon ends at 56H 225923 6145504. Do not exit TR; this leads to a cascade and a large drop. Instead there is a 25m alternative on TL: climb down slot, which turns into slippery 12m climb. Go around the back of massive boulder, and then right of the next big one. Downclimb the chockstoned chute in front of you, and there's a scramble down to creek level.

Cross to TR to downclimb, and boulder hop downstream following the easiest course. The boulders begin to thin around where Bungonia Ck swings from NNE to SSE. Take care not to miss the extremely steep Red Tk up Bretons Ck on the TR. If you hit the Slot Canyon (100m+ sheer vertical walls both sides), backtrack.

Follow the Red Tk markers uphill until you reach the junction with the Green Tk. Continue straight ahead and down to the Red Tk carpark. Take car shuffle, or walk back along Lookdown Rd to the Green Tk on the right just past Adams Lookout Rd. This is shorter than following the Green Track counterclockwise along the gorge

Bungonia Main Canyon (v4a4IV**) BUNGONIA NATIONAL PARK

From National University Caving
Club trips 2019-2021. Drafted by
Lachlan Bailey, version 1.3



NUCC SRT Kit Details

By Lachie Bailey

As Equipment Officer, one of my major frustrations was at first that I didn't know the details and provenance of our current SRT gear. Seeing as I've replaced the suspect bits and IDed the rest, here's a description for any future Equipment Officer trying to identify the random old tat in the storeroom...

SUMMARY: Our kits are standard frog-style setups. Hence, they naturally are more Euro-influenced than American-influenced. Following ASF recommendations, NUCC uses *Vertical*, by Al Warild as a standard SRT manual. Importantly however, our harnesses do deviate somewhat from his recommendations to make them easier for beginners to use.

The standard orientation of kit L-R on the central attachment point as you're wearing it is: cowtails, descender, braking krab (if used),



One of the NUCC SRT Kits, artfully posed on a jaunty angle (photo by Lachie Bailey)

chest ascender, hand ascender tether. Normally, cave packs are hung from the bottom (spine) of the central attachment.

HARNESSES: These are all Petzl Fractios. Their manufacture dates are from about 2004,⁷ so replacement is happening in 2021. We will buy the same again, as these have been excellent and hard-wearing. Most of them are of the smaller size, except the ones in Kits 11 and 12, which are the larger size. To tell any old ones and new ones apart: the old ones have a yellow comfort strap, the newer ones a black one. We also have a Petzl Superavanti and MTDE Amazonia I harness (both 2013 vintage) given to us by the ANUMC in 2019.

CENTRAL ATTACHMENT: Screw-gate Petzl Omnis, purchased in 2015. With the amount of (ab)use they get, these are definitely superior to the triact lock alternatives, which gum up with cave too quickly. The demi-ronds that were used before these are still in the storeroom.

⁷ Yes, I know 'about' isn't good enough. But the serial numbers are badly faded enough that 04 is about all I can make out

LANYARD ROPE: Made from 9.8mm Edelrid Parrot dynamic rope, purchased in 2019 and installed in 2021. The previous rope was in service for at least 6 years, which is almost certainly too long. Recommend replacement again in early 2025.

LANYARD CONNECTORS: 2 screw-gate krabs on the cowstails, and a maillon on the hand ascender. The maillons are not all rated, and not all stainless steel. These should standardised to rated stainless steel when we have the time and finances. Strongly recommend screw-gate krabs on the cowstails and a maillon on the hand ascender for club use.

HAND ASCENDERS: These are all Petzl Ascension ascenders, and are of varying age. I don't believe any of them are more than 15-20 years old. Just replace them with new Petzl Ascension hand ascenders as they wear out.



Descender options in the storeroom (L-R, T-B):
SRTE 5-bar aluminium rack, Aspiring 5-bar stainless steel rack, Petzl Stop, Petzl Simple (*photo by Lachie Bailey*)

CHEST ASCENDERS: Like the hand ascenders, these are all made by Petzl, and are of varying age. I don't believe any of them are more than 15-20 years old. Just replace them with new Petzl Crolls when they wear out. IMPORTANTLY, there is currently a CROLL S(mall) and a CROLL L(arge). The CROLL L is the continuation of the current Crolls we have on the club harnesses, so you want to get them, not the CROLL S. The smaller Croll is lighter and probably more efficient, but it has a nasty potential failure method and doesn't wear as well. Some people also find it difficult to operate if they have big hands or large fingers.

CHEST STRAPS: The current straps are the Petzl Torse. They replaced the previous straps in 2017, and even though the relevant Petzl Technical Notice specifies no lifespan, I would still be replacing them somewhere around 2030 I expect, as they are a fabric component and are occasionally critical to ensure an abseiler's safety. There is also an AV Speleoshoulder and MTDE Garma that are ex-ANUMC from 2019.

FOOTLOOPS: These are a custom job, put together by Iain McCulloch. When the fabric degrades, replace with new 25mm webbing. The tape on Kit 7 was redone in 2019. Obviously, the footloops must be adjustable (and I always strongly recommend that personal footloops should be adjustable too). If I was going to replace them with a commercial alternative, I would probably go for the similarly designed Aspiring ones. Arguably a dyneema alternative like the Petzl Footcord might be better, as it stretches less.

DESCENDERS: Currently we have a mix of different types of racks in use, but all are 5 bar U-frame racks. The gold racks were produced by an Australian company called SRTE (SRT Equipment). SRTE no longer exists- it got eaten by a company called Capital Safety in 2011, which seems to have since vanished. These racks have aluminum bars, and the ones with the white writing on them are a lot newer (c.2013), and should have more life left

(they're also longer, so better for light-weight people).

The sliver racks are produced by the New Zealand company Aspiring, and have stainless steel bars. We're gradually replacing the gold aluminium racks with sliver stainless steel ones as they expire. Over time, we should standardise all the club racks to these Aspiring racks.

There is also a selection of Petzl bobbin-style descenders, Petzl Simples and Stops. These are all pre-2019 models, so beware that the Stops still have a fully functional clutch-and-plummet feature. NUCC considers bobbin-style descenders (and especially the Stop) advanced equipment, and does not teach their use to beginners. Remember to always use with a braking krab. Bobbins also have a potential failure method where a small connector can lever the attachment plate open. For this reason, they should only be used with:

- A locking (and preferably oval) krab
- A mailon that has an isolated section to hold the bobbin attachment plates captive
- A specifically designed device like the Petzl Freino

RACK MAILLONS: These are mostly not rated, and should be replaced with rated maillons when finances permit. Racks should always be used with a mailon to prevent catastrophic failure by levering the gate on a krab. Large opening 8mm stainless steel maillons with a stamped (permanent) rating are ideal here

Note: Up until 2020, NUCC only had Kits 1-12. In 2020, we realised we had nearly enough gear to make up another 2 kits, 13 and 14, thanks to the ANUMC giving us some caving kit they weren't using. These have different gear to the other 12 kits, and should NOT be used by beginners. They are safe, but experienced NUCCers should consult their friendly Equipment Officer before using them.



Don't forget- while the SRT kits look clean and tidy, they do have a hard life! (photo by Lachie Bailey)

Australian Caving Community Online Directory

By Sil Iannello (FUSSI)

Reproduced, with additions, from FUSSI
Newsletter Vol.32, No.1 2020

Australian Speleological Federation

<https://caves.org.au/>

Facebook @asfcavers

New South Wales Speleological Council

<https://nswsc.caves.org.au/>

Flinders University Speleological Society Inc.

<https://fussi.caves.org.au/>

Facebook

@FlindersUniversitySpeleologicalSocietyInc

Cave Exploration Group South Australia Inc.

<https://cegsa.org.au/>

Victorian Speleological Association Inc.

<http://caving.org.au/>

Facebook @ Victorian Speleological
Association

Sydney University Speleological Society

<https://suss.caves.org.au>

Facebook @suss.caves

Rover Speleological Society

<https://rss.caves.org.au>

Facebook @RoverSpeleos

Orange Speleological Society

<https://oss.caves.org.au>

Newcastle and Hunter Valley Speleological Society

<http://nhvss.org.au/>

Facebook @nhvss

Metropolitan Speleological Society Inc.

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

Facebook @MSSAdventure-group

Kempsey Speleological Society

Facebook @www.kss.org.au

Illawarra Speleological Society Inc.

<https://iss.caves.org.au/>

Hills Speleology Club Ltd.

<https://hillsspeleos.org/>

Highland Caving Group

<https://hcg.org.au/>

Cavers & Adventurers of the Snowy Mountains

Facebook @CASM - Cavers & Adventurers of
the Snowy Mountains

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

<https://southerntasmaniancaverneers.com/>

Facebook @SouthernTasmanianCaverneers

Under Victoria

<http://under-victoria.com/>

Rimstone Cooperative

<https://www.rimstone.org.au/>

Facebook @Rimstone Co-operative

Northern Caverneers Inc.

<http://northerncaverneers.com/>

Mole Creek Caving Club

<http://molecreekcavingclub.org/>

Blue Mountains Speleological Club

<https://bmsc.caves.org.au/>

Chillagoe Caving Club Inc.

<https://chillagoecavingclub.org.au/>

Facebook @chillagoecavingclub

Canberra Speleological Society Inc.	https://www.uis-speleo.org/
https://canberraspeleos.org.au/	FFS - Fédération Française de Spéléologie
Facebook @Canberra Speleological Society	http://www.ffspeleo.fr/
National University Caving Club	National Speleological Society
https://nucc.caves.org.au	https://caves.org/
Facebook @National University Caving Club	Facebook @NationalSpeleologicalSociety
Western Australian Speleological Group	New Zealand Speleological Society
http://www.wasg.org.au/	http://caves.org.nz/
Facebook @ The Western Australian Speleological Group	British Caving Association
Cavers Leeuwin Incorporated	https://british-caving.org.uk/
https://caversleeuwin.com/	Facebook @BritishCavingAssociation
Facebook @caversleeuwin	Derek Bristol: Gear reviews
Cave Animal of the Year Australia	https://youtube.com/channel/UC66bwyl1N0BVQ_gu3Zg-fnw
https://caveanimaloftheyear.org.au/	Kieran Mckay
Facebook @caveanimaloftheyearaus	https://www.youtube.com/user/mckaycaver
Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association Inc.	Meridianpost (Alan Green, SUSS/MSS)
http://ackma.org/	https://www.youtube.com/user/meridianpost
Facebook @ACKMA	Vertical Cavers Facebook @Vertical Cavers
NSW Cave Rescue Squad Inc.	Cavers of Facebook @caversoffacebook
http://caverescue.org.au/	Australian Cavers Facebook @Australian Cavers
Facebook @nswcaverescue	Women Cavers: Extraordinary Women Leaders in Speleology
Cave Rescue Gippsland	Facebook @WomenCavers
Facebook @caverescuegippsland	
ROC Cavers	
https://roc.org.au/	
Facebook @ROCCavers	
Sydney Speleological Society	
https://www.sss.org.au/index.htm	
Facebook @SydneySpeleologicalSociety	
International Union of Speleology	

2020 Trip Listing

This is all the 2020 NUCC trips, covering all known NUCC trips that at least 1 NUCCer went on. If the trip was organised by another club (ie, we were gatecrashing), the club that did all the hard work is noted. Well done everyone for a great year despite fires and COVID-19, with 34 trips- that's 4 more than last year, despite a 3 month intermission! At this rate, we're going to have to move to a weekly trip schedule...

1. Abercrombie (MSS)
2. Abercrombie (SUSS)
3. Wee J Surface Trogging
4. Macquarie Pass Canyon
5. Mount Fairy
6. Mount Fairy
7. Macquarie Pass Canyon
8. Wee J
9. Wee J
10. Bungonia Caving and Canyoning (Cancelled)

COIVD-19 Intermission...

11. Buchan (ROC)
12. Blue Mountains Canyoning
13. Bungonia
14. Bungonia and Marble Arch
15. Long Gully Canyon
16. Kayaking Lake Tuggers (ANUMC)
17. Mount Fairy Caving and Bungonia Main Canyon
18. Wee J Surface Trogging
19. Mount Coree Abseiling
20. Mount Fairy
21. Moparrabah and Yessabah (MSS)
22. White Rocks
23. Blue Mountains Canyoning
24. Moparrabah (SUSS)

25. Lake Burley Griffin Kayaking (ANUMC)
26. Macquarie Pass
27. Upper Mac Pass
28. Cotter Caves
29. Watta Canyon
30. Mount Fairy
31. Buchan
32. Mac Pass

Love Creek Falls (private trip)

33. Ngungun SRT
34. Border Ranges Canyoning

It's worth pointing out the Mount Fairy was our most popular caving destination this year!



We all love random stuff in the bush. And random stuff the Editor throws in to fill up blank space...
(photo by Lachie Bailey)

2021 Trips

Our upcoming trip plans are currently very fluffy (thanks COVID). For updates, keep an eye on the mailing list, website and Facebook page. There will definitely be more trips than this, but these are things we can be relatively confident of happening at the moment.

January

- 10-15th: Newnes Canyoning
- 23-26th: Australia Day. Maybe. If COVID and border restrictions allow us to go anywhere...
- 30th: Start of Tassie trip

February

- 2nd: SRT returns, 6-8pm at the Old Climbing Wall at ANU Sport
- 16th: End of Tassie trip
- 17th: Market Day
- 20th: Wee J Field Day
- 22nd: Semester 1 begins

- 27th: Canyoning at Macquarie Pass
- 28th: Canyoning at Mac Pass Round 2

March

- 6-8th: Buchan caving beginner's trip (Canberra Day)
- 11th: Caving movie night at ANU

April

- 1-5th: Blueies canyoning or permit caving
- 24-26th: Canyoning or caving somewhere depending what's open

May

- 28-31st: Caving somewhere, hopefully Jenolan or Yagby

June

- 12-15th: Buchan caving over the Queen's Birthday longweekend



Yes, this is exactly what it looks like. A paddle-race across what is possibly the coldest part of the Shoalhaven River, where it has just been spat out of the Blockup Gorge. In July... Come on some 2021 NUCC trips! (photo by Lachie Bailey)

Photo Gallery!

Details and authors of photos in order presented, starting p52

Photo 1: What's a club magazine without an embarrassing photo of the President? (photo by Cathi Huphrey-Hood)

Photo 2: Looking down the guts of Cotter Cave (photo by Lachie Bailey)

Photo 3: The spectacular Clover Falls, and the christening of the brand new rope the colour of which may or may not have been strategically selected based on how it would look in photos **(photo by Oxana Repina)**



