

MISCELLANEOUS

RESCUE AT CHILLAGOE.

Chris Parr.

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the support services available to a rescue being carried out in North Queensland. I am not discussing the physical aspects of hauling stretchers about a cave as this has been done in many other publications. Rescues usually have to be carried out with the equipment and personnel of the trip.

INTRODUCTION

Chillagoe is a remote caving area by most standards, but by Queensland standards Chillagoe is close, with many Northern Australian caving areas being many times the distance. The best way to prevent a rescue is not to have an accident. If and when an accident occurs self rescue is the only practical solution. If an accident victim can be moved to a comfortable location his or her survival is enhanced. Medical help can be provided by the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia (R.F.D.S.).

CAVE CLIMATE

Choosing an underground camp site for an injured person could be the difference between survival and not surviving. The temperature in Chillagoe caves varies between 22 and 28 degrees. Exposure to cold (hyperthermia) is a remote possibility. Water is not generally present in Chillagoe caves and re-supply from an external source would have to be considered if a prolonged underground stay is necessary. Dry dirt floors provide the best insulation and it would be desirable to find one as night temperatures underground are lower than body temperature. Tropical thunder storms can drench a tower in ten minutes making floor areas subject to rainwater inflow very wet.

Varying surface temperatures on the limestone causes air flows in the caves to alter. This may also have an effect on the relative comfort of a camp site. The need to prevent loss of body heat is not critical as it is in temperate climates and insulation provided by overalls is usually adequate. Wet areas are subject to evaporative cooling.

SELF RESCUE

When a fall occurs and the injuries sustained are not immobilizing the following procedure is suggested:

- 1) If possible move the victim to an area and climate most suitable for survival.
- 2) This move should be made in the shortest possible time after the accident before shock and pain become apparent, this may only be 10 to 20 minutes.
- 3) Elementary first aid should be applied to deal with simple broken bones, sprains etc.

In remote areas leaving a person down the bottom of a pitch, in a crawl or any other inhospitable area should be avoided. A full rescue party with stretchers may take more than a day to organize. The success of moving the victim in the first twenty minutes may be critical to their survival.

MEDICAL HELP

Rendering of immediate first aid to injuries like severe bleeding, depressed rib cage and severe fractures is critical to the survival of the victim. After this initial treatment the seeking of medical help becomes a priority. At Chillagoe the first step is to go the local hospital matron (Linda Pearce) who will then contact a doctor. The hospital matron will then liaise and administer treatment and drugs.

A similar service is provided by Elders Resources from the Red Dome gold mine but the amount and variety of drugs held is limited.

A number of years ago the Chillagoe Caving Club Inc. purchased a medical kit and a portable high frequency radio. The medical kit has a number of prescribed drugs which the poisons regulations to the Health Act allows the Club's authorized officer (Alan Cummins) to control these drugs. The Health Act Regulations state:

MISCELLANEOUS

D2.15. The Director-General may authorize in writing the obtaining, possession, sale, supply or use of a dangerous or a restricted drug by a person under the conditions set out in such authority.

'Person'- Includes a company, partnership, and any body or associated persons.

G1.01. (a) A person authorized by or under Regulation D2 of these Regulations to buy or obtain a dangerous drug or a restricted drug shall do so upon a written order in accordance with the provisions of this part.

G1.02. A written order under this part shall-

- (a) be legibly written in ink;
- (b) bear on the face thereof
 - (i) the date when written
 - (ii) the name and address of the person, hospital, university, institution, college, establishment, department, base, or service requiring the supply; and
 - (iii) the quantity and description of the dangerous drug or the restricted drug to be supplied; and
- (c) be signed as prescribed by sub-regulation G1.03.

G1.03.

(f) For sale or supply of a dangerous drug or a restricted drug to the person in charge of a base or outpost established in the State by the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia, such written order shall be signed by a medical practitioner employed by the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia with his usual signature.

To actually use these drugs radio contact with a doctor of the R.F.D.S. has to be established. The portable radio has an output power of 25 watts and has to be set up according to instructions to gain maximum benefit. This radio is equipped with the standard emergency calling system which is activated by depressing the red button on the front of the radio for 30 seconds or longer. This emits a 500 hertz tone which activates a paging system at the Cairns base. An R.F.D.S. radio operator is wakened as well as a doctor. Communication is then made with the outpost station (you) and the doctor determines if a medical evacuation is required. If an evacuation is required a pilot and nursing sister are called and air transport organized. When the situation warrants the R.F.D.S. will charter any specialized aircraft.

TOURIST CAVES

When tours are being conducted for a fee it becomes the responsibility of the guides to rescue an injured person. In the case of serious illness advice should be obtained from the Chillagoe hospital or the safety officer at Red Dome mine. Both these have oxygen breathing equipment.

CONCLUSION

Medical aid is available if an injured person can be placed in a position to receive it. It was not intended to cover the physical hauling of people around inside a cave but to cover the support services. The constructing of emergency airstrips is adequately covered in the booklet in the medical kit.

Chris Parr,
Post Office Box 1215,
Cairns, Q., 4870.