# CAVE DIVING

**Histo** 

# in SOUTH AUSTRALITA

(Photo courtesy R&D Keller/ANT Photo Library)

# The First Cave Divers

- 1878: First known cave dive (30m penetration), Fountain of Vaucluse (France) by Ottonelli
- **1936: First UK** cave dive, **Swildons Cave** by **Graham Balcombe**
- **1946: Jacques-Yves Cousteau & Frederic Dumas** nearly killed in the Fountain of Vaucluse at a depth of 60 metres
- **1952: First Australian** cave dive, **Jenolan Caves** by **Ben Nurse** & **Denis Burke;** and first US cave dive, **Jugg Hole,** by a Florida Speleo Society diver

Late 1950s: First Mount Gambier explorations by a number of pioneering divers including David Burchell, Bob Cunningham, Peter Girdler, Barry Fowler, Errol Harding, Scoresby Shepherd, the Haig brothers, Ron Addison, Lorraine Newman, Bill Kunert, John Noonan, Bob Pulford, Lawrence "Snow" Raggatt and Philip "Mick" Potter

Sources: NSS Cave Diving Manual (Exley 1992), The Cave Divers (Burgess 1976), and

misc. personal communications by P. Horne



















### Lawrence "Snow" RAGGATT



(courtesy Snow, Jean & Steve Raggatt, 2004)



## Philip "Mick" POTTER



(courtesy Snow, Jean & Steve Raggatt and Mick Potter, 2004)





(courtesy Bob Cunningham, 2006)



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(courtesy Dave & Ona Burchell, 2004)

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(Peter Horne Dec 2006)





(Peter Horne Dec 2006)





(courtesy Ron Addison, 2006)







## **Ewens** Ponds



(courtesy Valerie Taylor)





(Peter Horne, 1976)





(courtesy Ron Addison, Nov 2006)





(courtesy "Snow", Jean & Steve Raggatt)







(courtesy Steve Raggatt)

(courtesy Mick Potter)









(courtesy Ron Addison, 2006)













(Peter Horne 1999)





(courtesy Alex Wyschnja)



### Little Blue Lake, 1961/62



(Graham Went, 1982)



#### The first known map of a Mount Gambier sinkhole

The Little Blue Lake, drawn by Philip ("Mick") Potter after his second-ever scuba dive on 13 Dec 1961 with Dave Burchell, compared to the CDAA Research Group's Grade 4 survey in 1992











(courtesy Ron Addison, 2006)





(photos with special thanks to Mark Nielsen, Alex Wyschnja & Neil Vincent)



#### 1962 (April): CEGSA group – first known divers to formally explore & document Wurwurkooloo (One Tree) and Ela Elap



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(courtesy Alex Wyschnja 2005)





(Phil Argy 1990s)


















(Peter Horne 1980)



(Peter Horne 1977)













(courtesy Mick Potter)

#### 1962 (Nov): first dives in The Sisters (right) and Simpsons Hole ("Ten-Eighty", below)



(Andrew Cox)



(Peter Horne)

## 1963: First known dives in The Black Hole



#### ... and the first recorded Bullock Hole dive



(Peter Horne, 1983)





# 1963 (July): first known Hells Hole dive



(Mark Nielsen 1980)



(Peter Horne 1980)





#### (courtesy Ron Addison 2006)





(Peter Horne 1980)





(Terry Wilson 1983)



# 1964 (April 4) Engelbrechts Cave

First cave dive using Mick Potter's guideline concept (white cord on open spool with a stick thru the centre)





#### TOURIST POTENTIAL NOT IN THIS CAVE

The four divers, who explored Engelbrecht Cave on Saturday, have a "breather" in the main chamber of the cave. They are Ross Curnow (left), David Burchell, John Lees, annd Mick Potter. On the ledge above the water with his back to the camera is Craig Roeger, son of the Town Clerk (Mr. D. H. M. Roeger) who assisted in the exploration. (Picture by Ray Fowler).

The Border Watch, Tuesday, April 7, 1964-

ENGELBRECHT CAVE does not appear to have any potential for development as a tourist attraction, although its underwates features impressed four divers who explored it on Saturday.

#### Mick Potter's sketch of Engelbrechts Cave (eastern side)



#### Potter's sketch compared with the Engelbrechts cave system as we know it today



(CDAA Mapping & Research Group)



# 1964 (21 May)

First recorded dive in **McKays Shaft** by David Perry & others







**1964ish: The Shaft** first dived by Jock Huxtable & shortly afterwards by Ron & Valerie Taylor







(Peter Horne)

(courtesy Valerie Taylor)







(Andrew Cox)



## Other interesting events, mid-1960s:

1964: (July 10): first known scientific dive in Fossil Cave (Gordon McKenzie); later dives in 1968/69 by Brian Brawley & possibly others

**1965:** General diving to the area increases in popularity

1966: Piccaninnie Ponds becoming widely known; Ron & Valerie Taylor make first movie, "The Cave Divers", including early Shaft and Pines dives and fossil kangaroo bones

# **1969 – 1973 The first cave diving accidents**







#### DUAL FATALITY

"When he reached the surface, Kerry said, 'What is the matter George? What has happened?' George didn't speak but swam straight past Kerry to the ledge. Kerry swam over to George and George was very white and shaking uncontrollably. He said, 'Kerry, they're dead.' Kerry said, 'You're kidding George.' George said, 'Brett and Pat are on their backs dead.' Kerry asked George how much air was left in his lung and George checked his gauge and saw there was only 100 pounds."

Four teenage divers, George Nikoloff, Kerry

# AUSTRALIA'S FIRST CAVE DIVING ACCIDENT KILSBYS HOLE April 1969 (2 VICTIMS)

- inexperience
- 60+m dive with only single cylinder
- too deep for safe air dive



# PICCANINNIE PONDS January 1972 (1 victim)

- inexperience
- inadequate air supply
- Iost in silt-out
  - (no guideline)

#### Ponds out of bounds

Picconinny Ponds, east of Port Mac-Donnell, in the South-East, have been declared out of bounds to swimmers, campers and divers the SA National Parks Commission (Mr. R. G. Lyons).

night the area would re-scuba gear, and that he main out of bounds until had only recently bought polution : could

Lyle Kelly, 20, of Hampton, Melbourne, had been scuba diving in one of the ponds with a friend when he got into difficulties and was unable to return to the surface.

His body was recovered on Saturday evening by local scuba divers.

Mr. Lyons said he had instructed the park ranger in the area to erect a notice at the entrance to the ponds declaring the area out of bounds.

He wanted to talk to scuba divers and other bodies connected with by the director of water safety, to try to find some way to allow people to enjoy the ponds safely.

He said he understood Mr. Lyons said last perience in the use of



#### DEATH CAVE October 1972



(courtesy The News)



# THE SHAFT May 1973

# (4 VICTIMS)

- 60+m dive with single tanks
- too deep for safe air dive
- Iost (no guideline)



(courtesy SA Police & The News)









REPORE of the committee appointed to investigate safety precautions for Souba Divers in Fresh Water Sink Holes and Under – water Caves

september 1973





All known diving sites assessed to one of 3 "Categories" and all divers tested to relevant levels





(Andrew Cox)



#### DIVER DIES DIVER DIES DIVER DIES TRAPPED 200 FT. 200 FT. SINKHOLE

A young man drowned today in a sinkhole near Mount Gambier.

He got into difficulties while diving with a companion in the Piccaninny Ponds sinkhole early today.

Police in Mount Gam- that could be done to assist bler said: "There is no the man. hope for him now. We are! A seven-man diving

 60+m dive with only single cylinder

guideline entanglement

# PICCANINNIE PONDS December 1974 (1 victim)



(courtesy Channel 7 Adelaide)

# PICCANINNIE PONDS April 1984 (2 VICTIMS)



- insufficient training
- 60+m dive with only single cylinder
- too deep for safe air dive
- unsafe open clips
- guideline entanglement



(courtesy SA Police)

# Mount Gambier cave diving accidents: the key contributory factors

- Inexperience in general scuba diving in many cases
- In most instances little or absolutely NO cave/sinkhole training whatsoever
- Many dived far deeper than recommended safe limits
  and with only a single scuba cylinder with no redundancy
- Many did not use a guideline reel to navigate through disturbed sediment
- Several cases involved guideline entanglement at great depth
# 1970s/early '80s – an explosion of interstate cave diving discoveries



### 1979 Flinders Uni FOSSIL CAVE project





### 1979/80

Engelbrechts East air chamber discovered by Peter Stace, Phil Prust and Ron & Robyn Allum Engelbrechts West 100m passage first explored by Peter Stace and Phil Prust (air chamber found soon afterwards by Terry Reardon & Ian Lewis) First record of Three Sisters Cave explanations First exploration of Baker's Cave, by Robin Garrad, Jenny Hiscock and friends First rumours emerge about "Elgine's" Alleyn's Cave, or Mud Hole)

(Mark Nielsen)

(Peter Horne)





### 1981-82

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(Lee Dixon)



Mark Nielsen)

### First known exploration of "Airport Cave" 5L144









Mark Nielsen





### 1981/82 - the early days of research



#### New species of syncarid *Koonunga crenarum*



#### sponges



(Mark Nielsen)

(Jenny Ploenges)





(Peter Horne)

### **1983 (March-August)** First **petroglyphs** recognised







(Rino Dell'Antonio, Andrew Cox & Peter Horne



(Rino Dell'Antonio, Andrew Cox & Peter Horne)



(Richard Harris)





### 1983 (Aug)



1983 French "Nullarbor Expedition": (I-r) Eric Le Guen, Veronique Borel, Sylvie Goutiere, Jerome Krowicki (sitting) and Francis Le Guen (People magazine 5 Dec 1983)



(Francis Le Guen)





### 1984 - The Shaft Mapping Project





(unknown photographer)



(Richard Wirski)



(Peter Horne)



(Andrew Cox)





#### Jean, Robert, Trevor & Bertram 'Viv' Ashby

(courtesy Jean & Viv Ashby, 1985)

### 1984 - 5L250 (Iddlebiddy Cave) first explored by local divers



### **1985 - PICCANINNIE PONDS** Mapping Project



(photos & sketch by various team members – refer to research report for details)





(David & Petra Funda/Fundova)

### **1985** First BLUE LAKE research dives





(Mark Nielsen)



(Peter Horne)



### Plumbing the depths of the Blue Lake

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(Peter Horne)









(Peter Horne/Mark Nielsen)







#### e-1 wande Weak Names-Jameryk (16) World first discovery in Blue Lake?







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## **1985** CDAA Engelbrechts Cave & Little Blue Lake mapping projects



(Ken Smith & others)

(Mark Nielsen)



















#### **1987/88** Numerous SAUSS, CDAA & private projects in both Mount Gambier area and around the State (Kangaroo Island, Naracoorte, Flinders Ranges etc)









(Peter Horne, Stan Bugg, Emi Okada & Carlo Virgili)

#### TIME-LINE OF MAJOR MOUNT GAMBIER CAVE DIVING RESEARCH PROJECTS

1960-1979: Early Private Mapping and Research Work		
1980	<b>1973 - CD/</b> Flinders Uni Fossil Cave work	
	Kilsbys Hole -1983 - CDAA Research Group forms	
1985	The Shaft ———	
	Piccaninnie Ponds ——	
	Engelbrechts Cave —	1986 - SAUSS forms
1990	Barnoolut	Fossil Cave ———— Gouldens Hole ————
	Tank Cave	Iddlebiddy Cave ———
	Nettle-Bed Cave —— Black Hole ———— Hanns Cave —————	Blue Lake Little Blue Lake Ten-Eighty Sinkhole



### 1989/90

**TANK CAVE: Chris Brown** and **Phil Prust** first to break into new major extensions: the mapping will continue for the next 15 years!

Another **Barnoolut Estate** site assessment project – new caves & sinkholes

**NETTLE-BED CAVE** explored and mapped by Grant Pearce & friends






## THE SHAFT explored to 87m for the first time – the deep team included Sheck Exley, Ron Allum and Andrew Wight

## Two new sites, **BAKERS CAVE & HANNS CAVE**, become available

**CDAA BLACK HOLE** mapping project commenced



(Andrew Cox)





(Peter Horne)





(Alex Wyschnja)



(Alex Wyschnja)





(Alex Wyschnja)













# The Shaft late 1990s-2006







(with thanks to Chris Brown & Tim Payne, ASF Cave Diving Group, 2004)



The future? Mount Gambier still hides many fascinating secrets....



Many thanks to Ken Smith for his help and for providing access to his slide-scanning equipment, and to all those whose photos were used ... and a very special thank-you to Steve, Jean and Spow Raggatt, Dave & Ona Burchell and Ron & Lorraine Addison for their help with historical information and photos



#### This has been another



### Hornefilm production!





(Peter Horne)