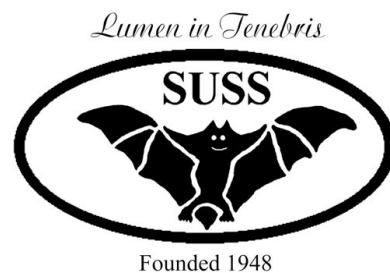


SUSS BULL 48(1)

APRIL — JUNE 2008



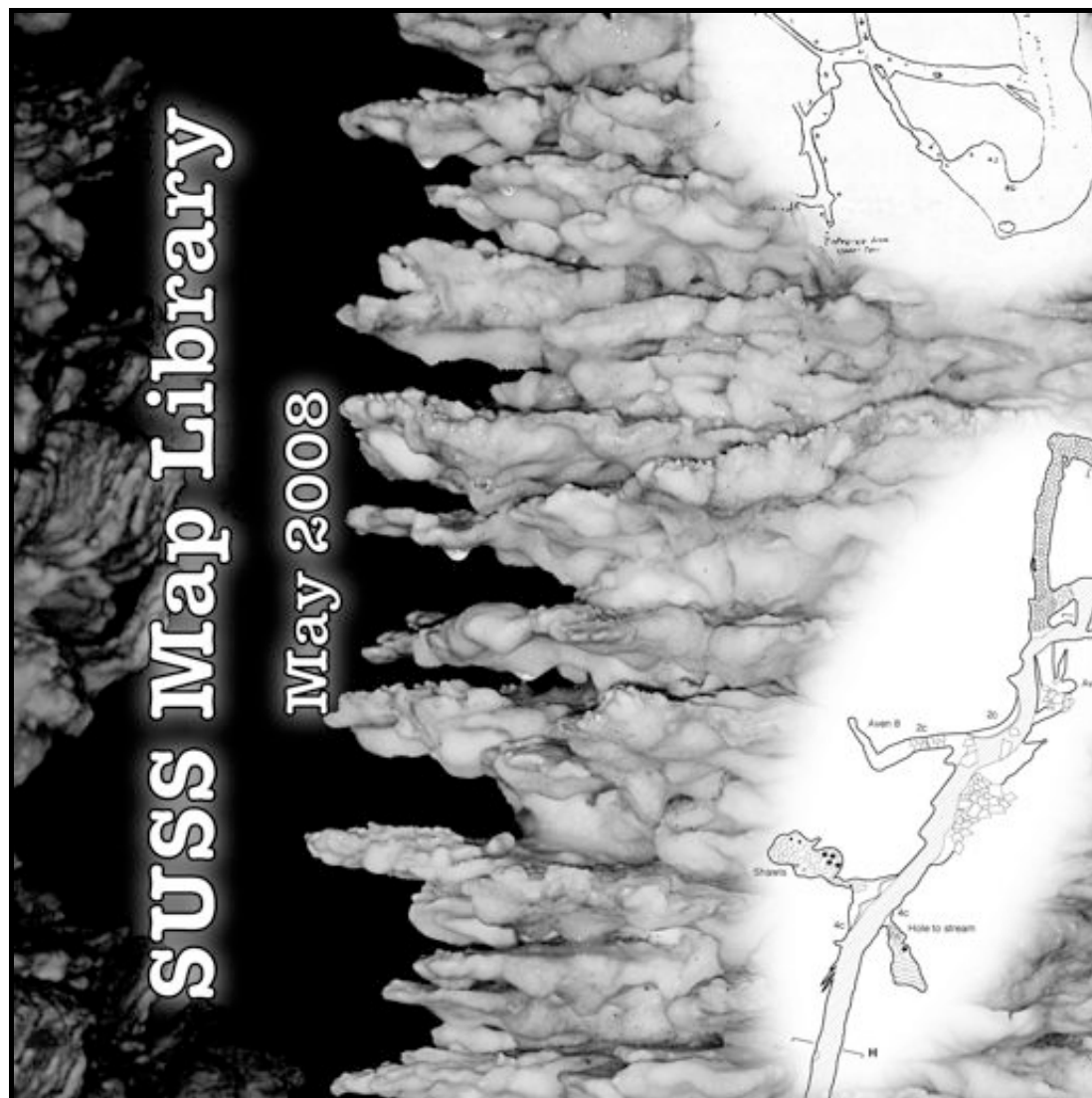
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Maps on DVD!

SUSS is happy to announce that our entire cave map library is now scanned and available for purchase as a DVD. There are field sketches, ink maps produced on drafting film, ink maps produced on linen (!), as well as some of the latest digitally-produced cave projects. Get 'em while they're hot.

Phil Maynard



Timor Book

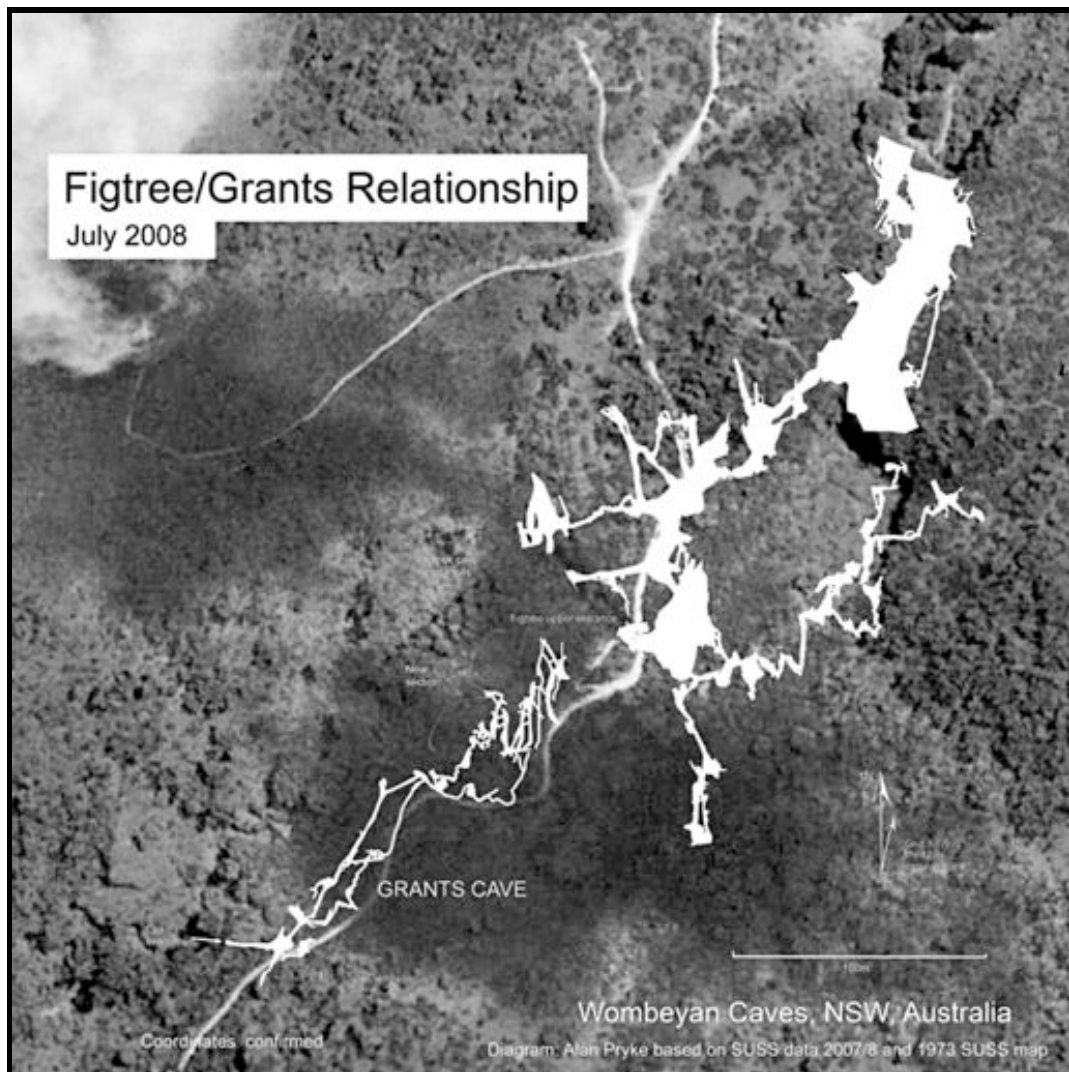
The eagerly awaited publication, "Timor Caves – Hunter Valley, New South Wales" is at the printers and will be available for sale from the 2nd August 2008, for \$35 plus postage and handling. To celebrate, a book launch will be held on Saturday the 2nd August at 2pm at the Murrurundi Bowling Club in Murrurundi in the Upper Hunter Valley of NSW.

Light refreshments will be provided, some small speeches made and you could get your copy of the book signed by the 4 editors, Jodie Rutledge, Garry Smith, Meredith Brainwood and Andrew Baker. Whether you are a caver, nature lover, or an interested local – contact Jodie Rutledge of NHVSS for details.

Grants Cave Wombeyan

Recent exploration and survey work has proved that Grants cave is very close to connecting to Fig Tree. The map shows the new sections of Grants in silhouette, along with Fig Tree, the creek and the Junction track over the top of Grants. The north eastern corner of Grants is a series of parallel rifts, with a stream passage underneath. The stream passage connects downstream to the known stream in Grants cave, while upstream is blocked by rockfall. There are still prospects of pushing the stream further. Up in the higher levels of the cave, there are a number of drafting leads still to be pushed.

On the Fig tree side, the tourist track enters the cave at the upper entrance. Underneath this there is an extensive rock pile, only partly surveyed and shown on the silhouette map. There is also a rockpile lead heading south from the creek entrance of the cave. Neither of these areas has an active streamway, so it's a bit of a mystery where the stream in Grants is coming from.



SUSS TURNS 60!

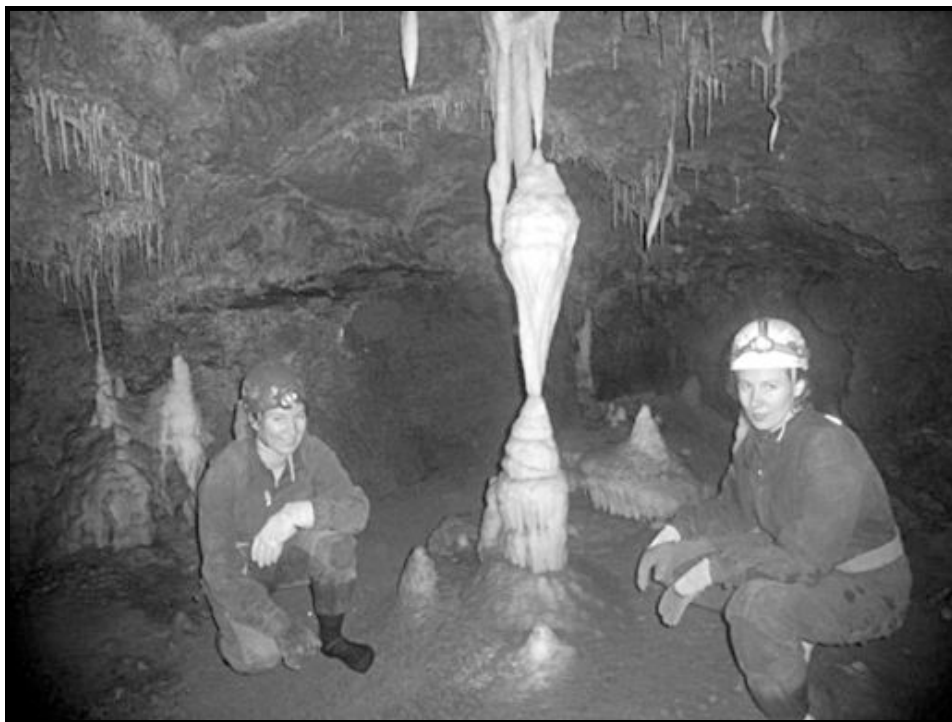
BY TINA WILLMORE

The weekend of 2, 3, 4 May 2008 saw the celebration of our society's 60th anniversary.

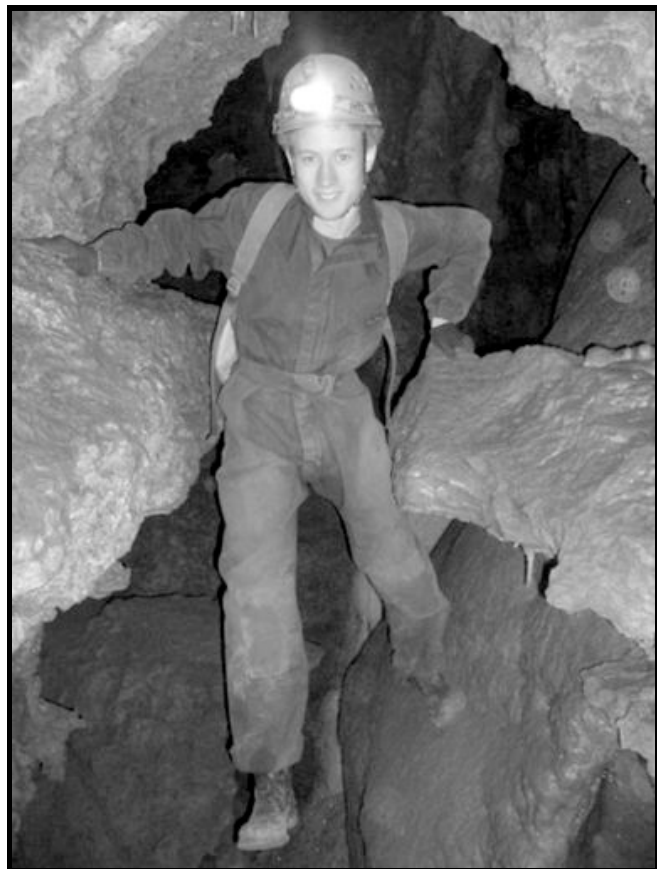
Our dinner gathering on the Saturday night was graced by good food, drink, fellow cavers and cavers' speeches. Our president, Keir Vaughan-Taylor presented an unexpected thank you to myself, as club secretary. My role came into play a few weeks before the big weekend by organising the permit and putting together the final caving program.

This weekend came together due to the work of many people so I would like to take the opportunity to spread the recognition. Planning began about 12 months ago.

Brett Davis (treasurer) sought out Susslings far and wide, mailing invitations and investigating accommodation along with dinner for the Saturday night. Keir and a few others also assisted with these important tasks.



*Louise and Deborah Johnston in Barralong during the 60th
photo Deborah Johnston*



*Richard Kennedy in Barralong during the 60th
photo Deborah Johnston*

Ideas were bounced around by all the SUSS committee to offer adventures for the young and not so young. Deborah Johnston (minute secretary) has the unofficial role as social secretary – a vital role.

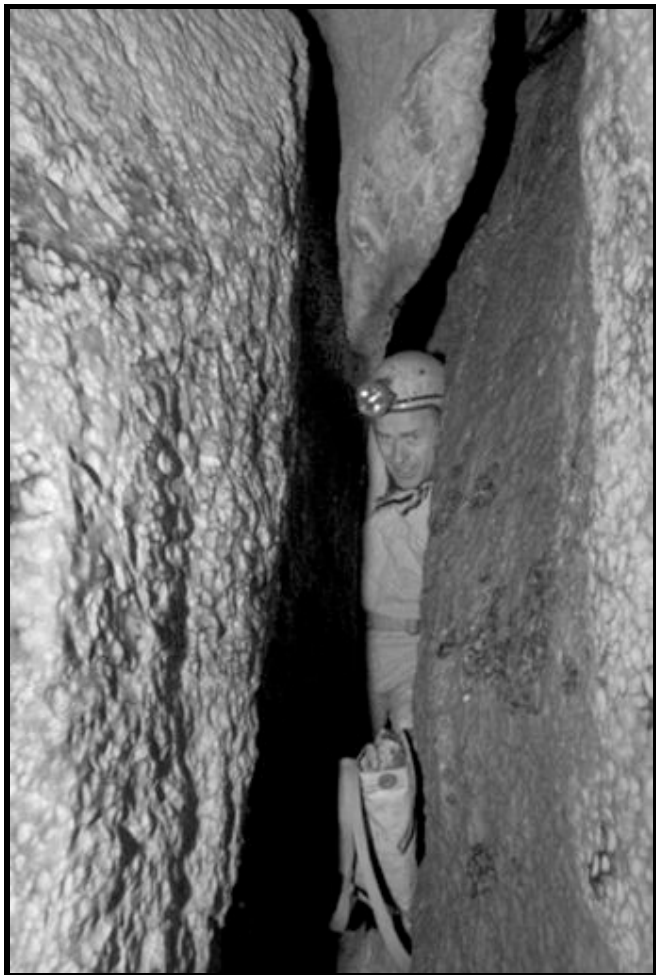
Phil Maynard (editor) put together art work for the invitations – our beloved Jenolan Guide and Sussling Alison Fenton being the model.

The caving program was initiated by Michael Collins (safety officer). He contacted Joe Sydney for the first aid kit, UHF radios and NICOLA radio communications – so of course thank you to Joe for supplying us. Michael also requested Rob Whyte to provide us with a Ghost Tour – thank you to Rob for your specialised tour.

A big thank you to Grant Commins, manager cave operations at Jenolan, for his assistance in communications, show cave discounts, after hours access and special access to the Lucas Cave. He also rounded up his professional team of guides that are also SUSS members, to volunteer their services for cave activities.

All of SUSS extend gratitude to Stephen Meehan, Manager Karst Conservation Unit, for granting our permit and allowing us to be slightly over numbers for this special occasion.

Sasa Kennedy led an off the track tour of the Chifley, Sharon Lewis supervised the Lucas Cathedral presentation and Richard Kennedy provided escort into Barralong. There were more offers of assistance from Alison Fenton,



*Ivan Desailley in Snakes Gut, Mammoth Cave
photo Grant Elliot*

Rebecca Lewis and Steve Roy. Thank you for making these trips memorable.

Alan Pryke put enormous effort into a slide show (as always) that did not make it to air due to equipment failure – our apologies for this stuff up (pest rating 10). I can hear the round of applause that would have been – thank you Alan.

Thank you to Ron Allum for his fantastic presentation on the Titanic in the Cathedral. A first rate presentation on a topic the world continues to be fascinated by.

Mike Lake and Phil Maynard put much effort into cataloguing SUSS's surveying efforts over the years for a DVD – a major project achieved in record time! And of course thank you to Susslings that have contributed to these works. I will have fond memories of being tail over head in an S bend while trying to read the clino, at the same time dreaming of being out for a peddle on my push bike with the sun warming my back!

Thank you to Jill Rowling in designing our Cave Trip Sign In sheets and setting up in Wallaby Hall with assistance from Mike, Keir, Brett and others. Many chaperoned Wallaby Hall to check cavers out and in, answer questions and sell SUSS memorabilia.

Thank you to our Master of Ceremony Don Matthews, along with speeches by Jak Kelly (SUSS first president), Pat Larkin and Keir Vaughan-Taylor (current SUSS president). Memories relived with laughs for everyone.

Our fearless trip leaders took cavers far and wide through the Jenolan limestone. Thank you to: Steve Contos, Ian Cooper, Michael Fraser, Mike Lake, Mark Lowson, Phil Maynard, Max Midlen, Chris Norton, Megan Pryke, Alan Pryke, Jill Rowling and Mark Staraj.

A final thank you to all that participated in caving and our dinner. We are all still here today as a result of our great members. Have I left anyone out? Sorry if I have – I will catch you at the 70th!



*Phil Maynard in Naked Lady Chamber, Mammoth Cave
photo Grant Elliot*

BELOW THE TIERS

MOLE CREEK, TASMANIA, JANUARY 2008

BY MEGAN PRYKE, PHOTOS ALAN PRYKE

Deborah Johnston ran a trip to Mole Creek earlier this year, visiting the usual assortment of caves, such as Kubla Khan, Genghis Khan, Croesus, all of which have been reported on sometime in recent SUSS bulls. There is more to Mole Creek than the permitted caves. This trip we visited some of the other speleological delights. Apart from caves, there were sights to see around Mole Creek, such as Devils Lookdown, Cradle Mountain and many other attractions that allured small groups away for the odd day trip.

Along for the trip from SUSS were Shannon Crack, Deborah Johnston, Louise Johnston, Alan Pryke, Megan Pryke and James Selles all based at Springfield Deer Farm. Paul Lewis and Ted Matthews stayed in the more welcoming accommodation provided by a friend closer to the Mole Creek township. Henry Shannon from Northern Cavenneers (NC) came out from Launceston which is not so far away now due to an improved highway. David Woolscobb from NC also made an appearance as Kubla Khan guide and a day out at Sassafras Cave. Virtually every day beamed with sunshine, with views of the Great Western Tiers often to be seen. I secretly hoped that this would hold for a planned five day walk on the DuCane Range the following week. Thanks to all on the trip, especially to Deborah.



The usual assortment..... Louise in Ghengis Khan

My Cave

Alan Pryke, Megan Pryke, Henry Shannon

My Cave was annoyingly close to where we had looked a few years ago. This time we had Henry's help, so we had far less problems locating "My Cave".

Henry described My Cave as a shrunk down Lynd's cave. A pretty good description though the stream has a few more unexpectedly deep sections though nothing much above the crotch. Sections have been subject to cave cleaning and there is some track marking to that helps to in keep these areas clean.

When searching for My Cave we came across a recently tagged entrance. Inside we found passages with dry calcite decoration. We de-trogged to cross a section of flowstone, due to the return of sticky mud we halted further exploration. As for its name, well apparently there are a few names allotted such as "Your Cave", "Their Cave", however I believe that "My Cave" is still the pick of the lot.

In regards to technical gear, a 10 m hand-line tape was set up to assist in the climb out, which would be of great assistance in the case of wetter conditions and/or tired cavers. We did locate a second squeezey entrance (untagged) that avoids the tape.

Westmoreland Creek Cave

Louise Johnson, Alan Pryke, Megan Pryke, James Selles

Westmoreland Creek Cave has an active stream, a large chamber and passages with lots of black slippery boulders that water topples through. At the downstream end we went as far as dry passages would take us – to a sump. The upper end of the cave has a huge chamber with daylight holes, one which you can almost exit from. For some SRT practice we set up a pitch through one of the daylight holes. Descent was stalled by photography; I wonder how many cavers have suffered harness hang due to photography sessions!

Sink Holes

Megan Pryke, James Selles and others at a different time without trog gear

On the slopes of Springfield Deer farm's pastures is a large sinkhole. In times past, attempts to either fill in the hole or dispose of large rubbish items were made.



Henry in My Cave



Daylight holes in Westmoreland Creek Cave

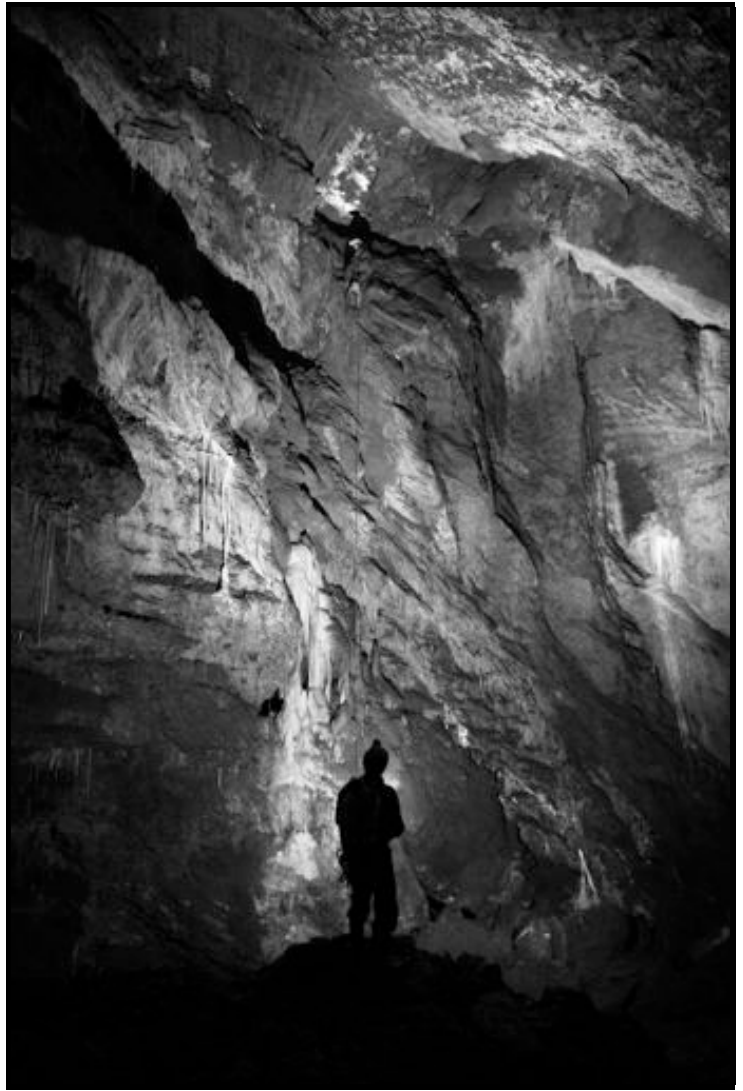
Consequently, there are several dumped cars and other rubbish to contend with. We wondered if access would be through a car door! Fortunately it was not the way in. However, the stench of a recent deer stopped James from going in too far. We were told that a European researcher interested in cave biota had made it to the bottom of the pitch and taken water samples, I assume he did not have to contend with as many undesirable insect larvae as James did on the way.

Henry and the pacemakers head to Mersey Hill

Louise Johnson, Alan Pryke, Megan Pryke, James Selles, Henry Shannon

Limestone is found all around Mole Creek. From the foothills of the Great Western Tiers at the southern edge, down to the plains of Mole Creek township then extending north through Mersey Hill and beyond. The Mersey River does not pass through the town of Mole Creek; it is to the west and north of town, arcing to the east as it skirts Mersey Hill. Beyond the river, land rises to the Gog Range; it is conjectured limestone extends past the river up the sides of this range.

Whether dining and wining on the deck of the our accommodation, or traipsing over the pastures of the Deer Farm, Mersey Hill stands as a central part of majestic views around Mole Creek. And we knew that somewhere underneath its basalt cap was limestone – thus a cave, or two, maybe more..... Each time I gazed at the hill, I wondered about this. At times my mind would start to play “Ferry ’cross the Mersey”, lyrics such as “cause this land’s the place I love and here I’ll stay” seemed oddly prophetic to a speleologist knowing something of its geological composition.



Megan on-rope in Mersey Hill



James in the flattener, Mersey Hill

Having obtained various permissions we were off. I was glad for the lack of moisture as any dampness would have made the descent down the sides of Mersey Hill somewhat less controllable as it's very steep. Brushing through the tussocks and bracken, Henry located the cave. I knew the cave to be an outflow cave so I was expecting to see a stream, but I should have known that being limestone the stream could have still been underground.

Once in the cave we soon enough came to flowing water, gladly finding that there was no need to wet our noses.... yet. The passage was not just rock and mud, over the years calcite formation has accumulated. At



James on ascent, Mersey Hill

less stream passage, he counted two hundred and seventeen paces back to the rope, with the call of the unexplored cave whispering behind....

The top of the abseil has a lot of sticky mud; an onion skin bag was at the top of the pitch when we were there. The descent deposits abseilers, and dirt, on a section of white decoration. It would be good to investigate whether the rope could be redirected lower down keeping in mind the upper section rub point. The rock is very porous and muddy, thus bolting the top section of the abseil to limit rope rub may not be an easy option.

Sassafras Cave

Shannon Crack, Louise Johnson, Deborah Johnston, Alan Pryke, Megan Pryke, James Selles, Henry Shannon, David Woolscobb

stream level we found large redissolved calcite formation showing bands like tree growth rings. Eventually we got to the low section – Henry bid us goodbye at this point.

Henry had mused about having to suffer a wet nose through a long crawl, this did little to whittle our interest, so we pushed through the flattener knowing we would be a little damper. However, Henry's warning had tuned our expectations towards the anxious end of the trepidation scale in regards to this low, wet section. When we found ourselves in walking height passage sooner than expected, we felt a mixture of relief and disappointment! We explored many, if not all, offshoot passages. Aragonite was found in nooks and crannies of the higher level passages. Many of the areas had gypsum dust. Alan found some tiny selenite spears, with centimetre long blades.

Meanwhile we had dragged our packs laden with rope and SRT gear through the cave, including the crawls and worming sections. James declared that after dragging his SRT gear and 50 metres of rope, descent down the end pitch was compulsory. By 6pm, we had located the pitch. After pfaffing with anchors, which are a long way back from the 15-20 m pitch, Louise, James and Alan descended into a huge room. I stayed on top, I knew that there would be limited time and wanted to monitor the rope for rub. I set up a bag part way down the pitch to protect the rope.

The room was huge – Henry had not exaggerated! It was long enough not to see the end with your torch. This section of the cave was apparently only discovered in the 1990s and not many have descended the pitch. James travelled the furthest as Alan took photos. We were already going to be quite late. James turned back from travelling down end-



Henry and Megan in Sassafras



Sassafras Cave

Alas, it had arrived, our final day of caving at Mole Creek. Already Paul and Ted had departed for the mainland. The team staying at the deer farm joined in with Henry Shannon and David Woolscobb for a saunter through Sassafras cave. Much of the cleared land around Mole Creek has recently had plantations sown of a fast growing eucalypt. For our trip, it was a short walk through long grass and sapplings to get to Sassafras Cave, however in future it is likely that the walk will be through stands of this eucalypt plantation.

Stage one was locating a stream bed, it was then a matter of walking upstream until the stream bed was undercover. The going was easy enough, with some low ceiling sections, particularly around places that would be a sump in higher water. We did feel that full trog gear was warranted for these sections though we were careful not to muddy ourselves too much for the trip back. By doubling up flash power with two slaves (human and electronic ones), Alan took backlit photos of Henry in the middle of an impressively large, water carved passage. Henry was pleased with the result, not for his silhouette but for the display of the geomorphology of the passage.



At home on the deer farm

BARRALONG CAVE EXPLORATION

6TH AND 8TH JUNE 2008

BY MICHAEL COLLINS

Friday

SUSS members Michael Collins, Tina Willmore, Paul Lewis and Stephen Kennedy

At 10.30am, we entered the Binoomea Cut with eight packs containing Keir's and my diving gear. The objective for the day was to get rigging and dive gear to the lake to be ready for the next day also so Keir and I would arrive fresh the next day. We crossed a River Cave tour on the way out and had a chat with the guests and guide (Barry Richards). Barry rallied his guests to a round of Happy Birthday for me as it was my birthday. I was slightly embarrassed.

We had an early exit of 3.00pm.

That night there was a gathering of friends for a BBQ with a great birthday cake courtesy of Rob and Melanie. Thank you to all for making the night special.



*Keir gets kitted up for the dive
photo Michael Collins*



*The bats leave their mark on the calcite in Barralong
photo Paul Lewis*

Saturday

The divers were Keir Vaughan-Taylor and myself. The support team was made up of Stephen Kennedy, Paul Lewis (SUSS) and six members of MSS: Rob Clyne, David Stuckey, Tim Grimes, Rod Smith, Brett Pilcher, Stephanie Pilcher.

While Keir had used most of his brownie points on prior trips, he was not going to miss this day to see what was at the top of the sump. We entered the cave with minimum packs. Michael and Keir geared up carrying SRT, ladders, ascending gear, racks, climbing harnesses and spanners into the dive. We had to dive through the four sumps down stream of Barralong arriving at Captain Cooks Cavern which was discovered in 2006 and has a number of leads heading upward. The one lead that I had been working on over the past 12 months had taken three trips to put scaling poles and finding suitable anchor points to get up a 15 metre phreatic tube which had a thick layer of clay on it.

On this particular trip we SRT'd half way, at which point we hauled up scaling poles and ladder and rigging gear to get a further 5 metres up. At which point I proceeded up the scaling poles with a self belayed lead ascender attached. At the top of this I had excitement along with disappointment. I saw spectacular aragonite, flowstone, helictites and straws. The disappointment was that the cave did not go. I proceeded to descend back to Keir and we packed up gear.

The return portion of the trip took four hours. It took great physical effort to haul packs with rigging, ladder and scaling poles back through four sumps with zero visibility. The effort for this would be something like mountaineering. At the end of the sumps the support team was ready to assist us changing and further packing gear. Due to the time taken, the tank packs were left behind for Monday. Other gear was removed with high efficiency chaining to minimize the impact on the cave. Barralong is highly decorated so we must ensure this cave remains in the good condition that it is.

7th June 2008 saw the 44th anniversary of the discovery of Barralong by Ron Newbould and John Culley. Next to the Womens Weekly signature is Ron and Johns signatures. I called Ron on that Saturday night to let him know how our trip went. He also commented that he was pleased to see that cave exploration was still being done at Jenolan, especially Barralong. He will look forward to seeing photos of our past trips.

No caving in Barralong on Sunday as I was working as a guide doing tours.

Monday

The team consisted of Stephen Kennedy, Paul and Rebecca Lewis and myself. We entered the cave at 10.00am. The objective for this day was to carry out the tank packs, ladder and rigging gear and to take photos for Ted Matthews of some particular rocks. There are some rocks in the vertical position along the wall of the stream way before the first sump. Ted noticed these rocks in a photo taken prior by Paul. More photos were taken by Paul for further inspection by Ted.

I noticed quite a large quantity of fresh guano throughout the cave. While on the top of the ledge at the 4 m drop (better known for its metal anchor pin in the days of Ron Newbould and John Cully) two bats flew past me at point blank range. It is the first time I have seen bats in this cave since I began exploring it in 2002.



*Muddy climbing on the poles
photo Michael Collins*



*Hanging around on the climb
photo Michael Collins*

getting my SRT gear in order and to Al Warild for supplying me with a MTDE chest harness. All my equipment worked a treat, despite being caked in mud. A particular thank you goes to Ted Matthews for his support and knowledge to aid in our direction of exploration. Thanks also to all those that have supplied photos for the BULL.

We exited the cave at 1.30 pm again passing show cave visitors intrigued as to where we had been with our packs and being covered in mud. There was a fair amount of interest at Jenolan about the diving in Barralong –the show cave guides were sharing with their guests that cave diving was happening in the Barralong that weekend. The future for exploration in Barralong – we need to check out other leads especially downstream Blue Tongue.

Special thanks go to all that have participated in the Barralong trips over the past six years. Which is too many to named. Thank you to Grant Commins and Dan Cove from JRCT and Stephen Meehan and Stephen Riley from Karst Geomorphology Unit of DECC. They have been giving much support for SUSS with diving exploration at Jenolan Caves. Thanks to Michael Fraser for



*Aragonite at the top of the lead
photo Michael Collins*

EASTER EAST DEEP CREEK

YARRANGOBILLY, MARCH 21ST – 24TH

BY ROWENA LARKINS, PHOTOS DEBORAH JOHNSTON

Participants: SUSS: Phil Maynard, Deborah Johnston, Shannon Crack, Glenn Smith, Max Midlen, David Martin (Jack), Thomas Rogerson, Rowena Larkins, Brenda (Bea) Carr, Tracy(without an e) Jarvis. Vic ring-ins (MUMC); Alistair, Sam, Simon

Deb somehow managed to get a little rip in her shoulder tendon. Caving? No. Canyoning? No. Climbing? No. Carrying groceries? YES! She made the trip to Yagby with full intentions to cave sans pack but alas no.... so she settled for a relaxing four days of hiking, touring and thermal pool shenanigans instead!

Friday morning some of us, the early risers, headed over to the caves opposite the camp site and began poking around in them. Being in jeans and T shirt with thongs, we decided against doing too much.

Old Inn – Phil, Rowena, Max, Tom, Jack, Tracy, Sam, Simon.

The entrance to the cave was down a doline which also swallowed a creek. Inside the cave we followed the creek down a streamway until it ran down a small crack, too small to follow down. We followed a passage off to the left. This led around a rockpile and eventually back to the water. We admired the walls covered in cave coral. The passage eventually opened into a largish room, where we stopped. Heading on was a de-trog section so we had lunch and a photo session. While people were taking pictures Rowena headed off up a muddy climb to the right. There was a small squeeze which went down a hole through which she could see virgin passage. She decided against detrogging and crawling through it, and instead climbed up to a higher room which led to a T intersection with a rift. Climbing the left side passage she found some tree roots indicating she was near the surface. Being well out of sight and earshot of the rest of the crowd she decided against more exploring and headed back, which was just as well as the rest of the party had left and there was just Phil waiting.



Stream in East Deep Creek Cave

When we were almost back at the entrance chamber Phil told us of a secret passage which led to some more rooms to the right. Max hunted around and found the way through and we got into some well decorated rooms. More photo sessions. Returning down the rockpile, those with experience assisted those who were new. We were in the cave for about 4 hours. It was good to see the daylight at the entrance.

After the caving we sat around the fire thanking Deb and Shannon for getting the wood. The temp was hovering just above zero so we were glad of the fire. It was a cold night and the next morning there was a light frost to be seen along the river bank.

Sat morning: North Deep Creek, East Deep Creek (sporty) – Phil, Max, Tom, Jack, Rowena

Sat afternoon: East Deep Creek (pretty and sporty) – Glenn, Bea, Shannon, Alistair, Deb, Simon, Sam, Tracey.

We split into two parties, the early risers heading to North Deep Creek and leaving the cabin early, ie about 9 am, and the rest, who were more interested in sleep, eventually found their way to East Deep Creek sometime in the afternoon. It was 40 minutes to North Deep Creek from the car park. The way in was through a large rockpile. At the end of the rockpile Phil hung a 10 m ladder down. He was the first down and suggested that we move the ladder to avoid damaging the cave coral on the way down.

We followed down a river passage for a while and decided to explore a small passage off to the left. This went down a crawl along a rift which came to a muddy aven. At the base of the aven was a small squeeze where we did a u-turn, almost back the way we had come. This opened into a rift than along a muddy crawl to a small room where Max felt a breeze. He and Phil probed around and decided it was a bit hard to push, and would wait till another trip. We went back to the main streamway and followed the stream rift down to a duckunder. There were tools which could be used to dig out the sand and rubble in the base of the river in order to get through the duckunder. We decided against going through.

We followed the rockpile up, which was not as straight forward an exit as we expected, but we eventually came to the exit. On the way out we found our friends from NUCC preparing to enter the cave and SRT the pitch we ladder climbed. We headed up the doline and down to East Deep creek.



East Deep Creek Cave

We did the sporty section of East deep creek. 1st a scramble down a rockpile, and then under a squeeze and into the crawl. That long crawl was longer than we remembered, but it was a good feeling to find the half way point where we could stand up. None of us had cameras so there was no stopping to admire the decorations. The cave was its usual cold self, and the thermals were appreciated. After the crawl it was down the rift, where we admired the old river channel on the roof, which followed a similar path to the floor creek way, but with lots of meanders.

Once we got to the end, Phil went for a wander up the mud slope to the right to see how far he could follow the stream which was coming down. It was a nasty sticky mud slope and most of the party followed him. It led to a small chamber. Rowena, back on the floor was asked to check for light as the group above shone their torches through possible leads. Sadly they all seem to lead back down where they started from.

Back up the cave a bit, past where the first stream came in from the right there was another nasty climb. We all headed up this and it came to a muddy chamber with a few pretties. A rift passage headed away from the main passage, where there was a really nasty climb. The group was struggling to get up, but Phil, Max and Tom made it. Phil called down to Jack that as he was not that experienced he would probably not make it. This was enough to spur Jack on and holding on the wall with his teeth he managed to get up. Rowena stayed behind. The room was full of mud. Passages and rooms went further into the mountain all covered in mud from top to floor. Max spotted some footprints, indicating someone

had been here before, but interestingly the footprints were calcified over, so they had been there for a while. Heading back down was a challenge, and it was noted that it would be good to bring some tape next time we explore this area.

The other group entered the cave in the afternoon and explored the detrog section first and then headed down the sporty section led by Shannon. They were in two groups of 3. They mentioned that a previous group had left filthy marks across the previously pristine formation. They had obviously not removed their dirty overalls. We met Deb back at the cars, and all piled into Max's car to head to the thermal pool to get rid of the mud.

Sun: Eagles Nest – Max, Rowena, Bea, Jack, Tom, Glenn, Shannon

Tourist caves – the rest.

The Easter bunny did find us at Yagby, and people found Easter eggs waiting outside their tents when they got up. Some were exhausted from the caving and elected to have a rest day, maybe see some tourist caves. Others were keen to get in as much caving as they could. We did Eagles nest.

From where we parked the car it was a 45 minute walk to the giant doline that was the entrance to Eagles nest. While Max set up the ladder, the climbers amongst the group had a go at some of the walls of the doline. Someone

pointed out the big nest after which we assumed the cave was named. We all climbed down the 10 meter ladder pitch and assembled at the base of the entrance chamber. After following a few obvious false paths we realised we needed to go up a rock pile and through a vertical squeeze. This proved tricky for some and those of us with bigger bums needed a good shove.

Following the main path we came to a spot where a handline was set up as a non pitch. Glenn dropped his cave pack down and heard a Pssssssss noise. Hunting through his pack he found a can of coke had ruptured when it hit a rock on the way down. It was a bit surreal when the rest of us climbed down to see someone standing there polishing off a can of coke. Along a few crawls and rifty passages including one crawl through a gate, and we came to a big U turn chamber. We stopped for lunch. Most of us had simple fare, but Glenn and Bea got out a full blown picnic, making a salad, wraps, etc. While waiting, Max headed down some promising leads and made a note to check them out in more detail on his next visit.

After lunch we headed along to the pretty chamber. There was a bit of a walk and some rifty stuff and then we saw the start of a trail marker. For the next hour we walked along a trail marked between two strings. There were side passages marked which lead to some pretties; the floor was mostly clean flowstone and rim pools, while formation hung from all the walls and the roof. The marked trail led up over rock piles, down hills, and even across a small bridge. The trail petered out and we realised we were near the exit. Up through a rockpile and out where we saw the sky again. Once out, the climbers had a go at some choice boulders. Max and Shannon decided to head to the river and see the Arch. The rest of us headed to the thermal pool to wash off.

Mon: Coppermine – Phil, Max, Tom, Rowena, Sam, Simon, Alistair, Tracey.

An early start was made as we headed down the firetrail to park at the barricade. A 20 minute walk down to the river and we were at entrance to Coppermine. The weather was cool and sunny. Phil lead the way in and we paused at the sharks fin for some pictures. As the cave was coldish, around 5 degrees, we were glad of wearing thermals. Max and Tom went for a trog up the river for a few minutes and decided against going through the duck under and getting soaked.

It was then a scramble up the rift to follow it along about 5 meters above the river. Lots of pauses for picture opportunities for the 4 visitors. It was interesting guiding them as we progressed along the rift. It was about 5 meters above the river and while the experienced amongst us were used to straddling the rift and using 4 limbs to walk along the near vertical flowstone, the beginners were on their bums and using hands and feet to edge very slowly along the rift. I am sure we all have fond memories of doing that in our first trips.

The climb was reasonably tricky and the more experienced of us positioned ourselves at appropriate spots on the climb to lend assistance to those less experienced. More picture opportunities awaited those with cameras.

Phil pointed out the gate, which was a single bar through a tight squeeze. Phil called it a “Bastard squeeze”. One by one, the experienced of us scrambled down to see the gate and agreed that it did not look pleasant. There were more photos taken on the way out, with the same level of guidance given to the visitors as on the way in. At the entrance, Alistair, who had done some climbing, decided to climb up and take the high route out of the cave.

Outside it was raining. A brisk 20 minute walk back to the cars and back to the Cabin. From there it took us about 30 minutes to pack up and we were on the road back to Sydney.



East Deep Creek Cave

HANGING OUT ON PUKETITI STATION

NORTH ISLAND NEW ZEALAND, 15TH – 30TH MARCH 2008

BY TINA WILLMORE, PHOTOS (MOSTLY) ALAN PRYKE



Megan and Carol admire the Guardsman, Ten Acre Tomo

The excitement of this trip began a couple of weeks earlier for me – travel was being discussed with a friend when the subject of visas came up. This triggered the memory that my return visitor visa for Australia had expired. As I am a permanent resident of Australia, I require this \$120 sticky label in my US passport to gain entry back to good old Oz. I experienced a degree of panic as the time had come to renew – and quick! I do wonder when I would have remembered if it was not for that discussion.

The A team (Alan Pryke, Geoff McDonnell and myself) had been chatting by email sorting logistics. Alan insisted we take the 7.00am flight as the first day would be busy getting ourselves down to Puketiti. Not being a morning person, I was somewhat unimpressed.

Geoff and I stayed at the Pryke's the evening prior to take off. I arrived with my suitcase weighing 25 kg and a 20 kg limit. My suitcase was tossed to see what could be culled. I was left with essential cave gear, the clothes on my back and one set of bush clothes, now 23.8 kg. The carry on luggage was the next challenge. One of my pieces was about 12 kg and the other about 9 kg. This was cleverly disguised by holding my laptop by two fingers – surely they would not notice the grimace of pain on my face by fingers breaking!

15 March 2008 – Day 1

The bedroom light was thrown on at 4.00am. We were out the door by 4.35am. Megan (MP1) kindly dropped us off at the airport. We were successful getting on board with no excess baggage charges. The next three hours was planning food for the duration. Arrival in NZ was a breeze – boots were declared and passed. I was somewhat fortunate discovering the dried fruit remaining in my bum bag the night before – I could see me starring on Border Security!

A mad dash was made to the rental car, followed by a shopping expedition at Pak N Save. For some reason the locals were laughing at us – maybe due to us reading labels about MSG and palm oil or trying to find tinned fruit in juice rather than syrup. Maybe our accent mix (Aussie, Pom and Yank) drew some attention. We supported Pam's fine range of foods (NZ generic label). A non-event during our trip was branded as Pam's.

About 3 ? hours, \$900 and 7 boxes of Cheerios later, we met our next challenge of fitting it into our Rav4 all wheel drive. It fitted with some creativity, though a left turn had to be negotiated with care so as to not dump a load of food on me.

I was assaulted by cereal boxes throughout the day.

Arriving at Puketiti around 9.45pm, we saw lights on in the Shearers' Quarters and found a woman at the stove. She was looking at us with surprise. After introducing ourselves, I overheard the woman say to her male companion Karsten, There goes our romantic evening. The story came out the next day – Karsten is the New Zealand version of Farmer Needs a Wife. The lady friend was one of 60 that had applied to meet Karsten.

Day 2

The day started with a bang – wonderful blue skies. After Geoff's first breakfast of Cheerios, he had had enough. Only 6 ? boxes to go!



Tina discovers the electric fence



Glowworm strands in Pompeii

Keeping in fine SUSS form, we were out the door by 11.30am. We stopped in on the property managers – Ben and Julie. They offered use of phone to ring nearby property managers for permission to cave on their properties – all successful.

We headed off across Puketiti with Pompeii in mind. The views were great – we could see Ruapehu in the distance. Do you recall the AAMI ad where a dog jumps off a hill and lands in the car, causing an accident? This was nearly replicated with sheep. And later with cattle beast (kiwi for cattle) and goats.

Car parked we set off for the east entrance of Pompeii. It is a large walk through pas-

sage about 2 km long. We spent several hours exploring side passages and being christened with Puketiti mud. This was my first trip to Puketiti and I was treated to fine sights such as the skeleton of the extinct spotted Kiwi, magnificent flow stone and glow worms. I was wet only to my knees until I tripped on a rock and went belly down into the stream. My camera went in also – for some reason I started getting error messages on the screen after this.

Our return to the car was amusing with needing to get over an electric fence. The choice of going through it worked well with a bit of team work to splay the wires apart.

Day 3

Another fantastic weather day. Plans were to explore forest around Agamemnon and Weihnachshohle for more caves. The RAV did the job of getting us there – the passengers were getting a little excited when driving along ridges and over tall thistles not being able to see the other side. The 17 point turn was mastered to get us turned around. This tactic was utilised many times during the trip.

On foot we explored a forest with no worthwhile fortune. A couple of holes were found where Geoff thought that at home they would be tagged. We moved into the open paddocks and again found little. Following the valleys, exploring potential potholes we stumbled upon Silvesterohle unknowingly. It is a great stream cave complete with low ceilings, a variety of wonderful formations and an eel or two. We made it to the sump, 100 m or so, when Alan yelled and was tugging on something – more like something tugging on Alan. An eel took hold of his finger and was determined to remain. Geoff and I grabbed onto Alan's heels to give aide. After considerable struggle, Alan retrieved his finger intact.

Back into the sun, we briefly thawed before heading into Weihnachtshohle. We thought this would be more pleasant as we were able to walk at the start. It did not take long for it to close in on us. Again well decorated with an active streamway. We made many 90 degree turns taking us well into the cave. Geoff and I were getting burned out on this crawl when Alan called out he could see day light. I was spurred on, with Geoff in tow. We surfaced in the forest a few hundred metres through the hillside. We had to make our way over the hill to retrieve our packs at the entrance.

We wanted to return to the forest where we started our day. Discussions were had as to direction back. I pointed one way but Alan's GPS said otherwise. Geoff stated that he always sticks with the GPS. In hind sight my finger-



Tina in Long John

pointing would have shaved a couple hours off our return. GPS interpreter error caused a rather long, out of the way, up and down, return. Geoff and I had doubts of ever getting out of that forest. We finally surfaced to the open world – Alan in fine fettle, but cavers in tow were stuffed. Geoff gave the analogy of not getting this experience at Westfield Parramatta. When Geoff and I hopped the fence, we collapsed. Alan took a photo which I will entitle – “A Day Out with Alan Pryke”.

The setting sun treated us to fine sights across the property once again.

Day 4

Geoff had a nightmare – that he was captive of yesterday’s forest and being forced to eat Cheerios.

Glorious weather once again, and again a very late start – 12 noon. Long John’s was the destination. With rigging in place we abseiled the 10 m pitch. Nauseating smells were over whelming. Alan spotted the cattle beast responsible, and gave a too detailed description as to the remains. Geoff and I hugged the right hand wall to keep as much distance as possible.

This cave was a wonderful walk through – wet, very muddy and plenty of decoration. Straws galore which Geoff said were straw like. I lost all composure and fell into hysterics. Geoff did not know why I was laughing saying he had said nothing funny that day. On exit another eel was spotted. Alan figured it was over 1 metre in length and possibly 4 inches in diameter – it grew as the trip progressed and story was retold.

Those knowing Alan Pryke also know he is famous for calling others pest. I added a new dimension during this trip – a pest rating. Geoff earning a pest 4 rating while I did a minor irritant obtaining a pest 2!

The A Team extension arrived – Megan Philip (MP2) and Tomas Helnes arrived from Tauranga, their new home after leaving Sydney in December.

Day 5

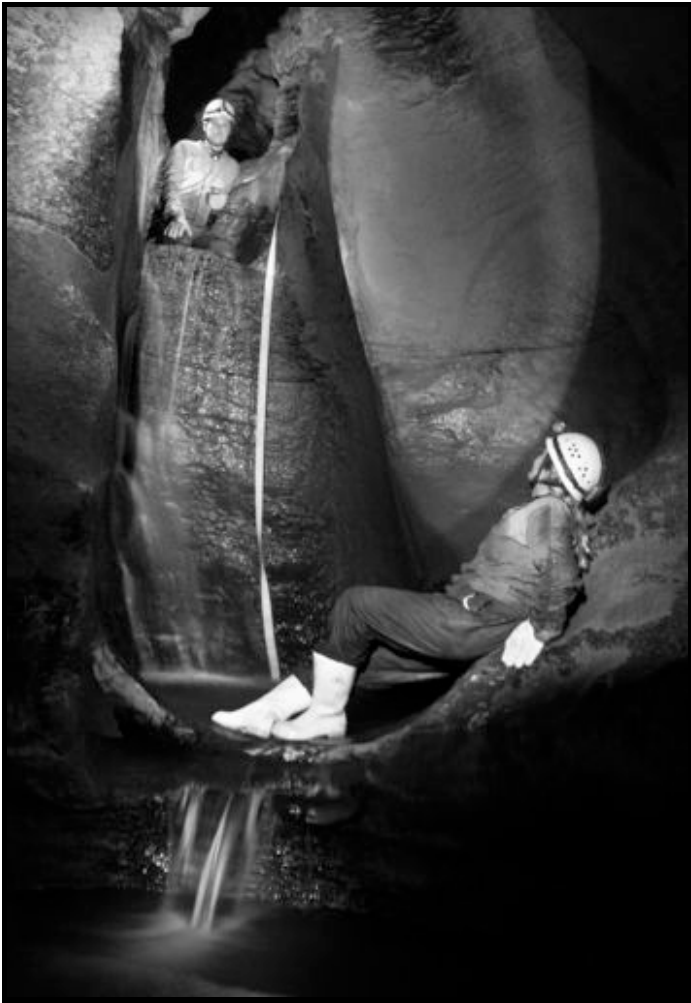
Daily we have been packing the chully bun (kiwi for esky) with the most incredible enzed (NZ) apples. Welcomed after a day of crawling through mud. On our way out to Matawhero, we passed Mark Verry and his dogs. With the biggest smile on his face he greeted us with “You back again?”. Again the map came out with discussion about what might be new.

It took us about 40 minutes to drive to the day’s location, which was only 5 km from Puketiti as the crow flies. No one was familiar with this area so searching was needed to find Matawhero. A cave entrance was found which Geoff thought was very cave like. We headed in and again came across foul smells and bones of the deceased. It was a truly horrible cave – narrow passage covered with cave coral and sharp rocks. Some pretties were found but not to compensate for the truly pathetic cave it was. We decided to abandon as things were getting worse. On the way out I spotted a tag – MF 35. This tells us it was Masochismia. We knew we wanted to steer clear of this cave but not having seen tags before, it was missed. This cave also claimed my Timex watch. Maybe another caver will turn it up, and should it keep on ticking, I see a commercial in the making. After searching the area for more caves, Alan thinks he was within metres of the exit of Masochismia before we bailed out.

At lunch break, farmer Ron came past herding sheep with his dogs. The dogs were brilliant to watch as they worked the sheep. Ron’s face beamed with a smile and a hand breaking grip for a hand shake.



Long John streamway



Megan and Tomas in Matawhero

(along with mud). This was the entrance to Phloughte. We did not get too far til Alan had another run in with the wild life – giant wetas. I took a nice photo of a weta on Alan's helmet entitled Brain Sucker. I will leave the reader to decide if it was getting a good feed or not. We were geared up for water and found one short bit of the streamway up to our chests. Alan and Geoff stopped here, choosing to retrace their foot steps and finish the survey of Agamemnon.

Megan (MP2), Tomas and I continued on through the cave, getting stuck in the mud often. The skill is to not stay still more than a few seconds, otherwise you are likely to leave a boot behind.

Alan went in search of cave entrances that were hopefully tagged so we could get some orientation. Alan sorted out where Matawhero was so suited up in wet suit and cave suit, we headed off. It was an easy walk in entrance with a few boulders to climb over. Very early there was decoration, mostly canopies with a dry and fluffy look. I had an eel jump out of the water and strike me above the knee – I let out a scream but came out of unscathed. On the way out Megan felt one trapped and wriggling under foot. The decorations in this cave were the best we had seen since our trip began, and certainly better than most places I have caved. The 10 foot water fall to scale was also excellent. MP2 and I exited early due to cold leaving the guys to further explore. They did not find the way through, so the challenge was thrown to me to return next week with the B team to find the way on.

Quote of the day – at dinner Geoff thought the corn on the cob he had was the best since he last had corn on the cob – which was just 24 hours prior.

Day 6

Off to Phloughte with adventure over the pastures in our 4 wheel drive. My passengers were having fun but I was a bit white knuckled being the driver. I am not accustomed to having large drop offs nor not being able to see over the bonnet.

Geoff was exploring the decoy ducks left under the tinny at the pond. There was something said about his treatment of ducks – after the sheep. I do not know what this means and it is probably best that way.

Find a dead animal, find a cave. A Puketiti requirement



Meinhohle. Photo by Tina Willmore



Tomas in Matowhero



Alan in Meinhohle. Photo by Tina Willmore

There was good formation in a few pockets of the cave and a few tomos letting day light through. Once out the far end, we had to start our walk back. Challenging given the amount of mud we were packing. Megan and I had a guess as to the direction of our walk – we were both wrong. Saved by the compass. It was a lovely walk across the paddocks.

MP2 and Tomas headed back home this morning and Photo Phill arrived this evening. More good food and good company. Standard dinner time was around 9 or 10pm each night.

What I learned today – Find a dead animal, find a cave entrance

Day 7

Yesterday Geoff stepped into a mud pot and lost his balance, jamming a finger into limestone. This morning he had a crack develop in his foot so he diagnosed foot and finger disease rather than hoof and mouth disease.

Geoff, Alan and I headed off for Egg Drop. Way, way, way over the paddocks. Rav 4 parked, the walk begins. After being pricked by blackberries and thistles and two hours later, we found Egg Drop. Alan had two GPSs, which I commented meant that we would get twice as lost (in fairness to Alan, the coordinates given were not quite right). Of course we got there in the end. It was a hot day for tramping around in trog suits. Geoff and I rigged the pitch off three little birch trees – nothing else in sight. Nice drop down to the stream way.

We had little information about this cave but were told it was only ankle deep – we were soaked. There was some low and wet crawling through streamway, walking along streamway up to waist deep and being stopped at a rock fall chamber that was full on dripping with water.

There were several areas with formation that was fantastic including scalloping in calcite. Geoff said they were the best straws he had seen – since the last straws. Geoff earned a pest rating of 8 getting mud on Alan's flash. He felt honoured. My camera toppled over from its tripod and I managed to catch it on its way down – saved from certain death but now covered in more mud. A thought: we have to declare our boots upon entering a country, but will they check our cameras for dirt?



Tina exits from Egg Drop

We covered part of Meinhohle as we made our way to the junction with Egg Drop, exploring both branches. We were covered in so much mud that there was no grip possible in some areas. We also became quite cold feeling like “chilly buns”.

We SRTd out of Egg Drop by which time it was dark. The moon was just shy of full, giving us brilliant light to walk by. A full change of clothes was needed back at the car. Geoff said there were two full moons that night and that it was so bright, a cave light was not needed (referring to someone's back side during change). I was again stuffed after the day's caving. We were back to the car at 9.00 PM. There were expectations that we would have dinner early this night – wrong again. It took nearly two hours to find our way back across the paddocks. I think I did nearly as many kilometers on foot as the Rav 4 did. We were constantly on foot running up and down hills using our cave lights to find our road back to the hut. It was a big challenge and I had thought we might not make it back that night. I was now ready to collapse.

Once we made it back to the gate at the twin water tanks, I shed a few tears of relief. When we finally made it back, part of the B team, Megan Pryke (MP1) was waiting along with James, a POM now living in NZ. Carol Layton had hit the sack. I had made dinner that morning and thankfully Megan had reheated and put together some pasta. Dinner was at 10.45pm. Melanie Stamell was supposed to be with Megan and Carol. She left her passport at home in the ACT so had to wait for a later flight.

What I learned today – I will never complain about getting wet caving again.

Day 8 – Finding Mel

I did not move until 9.00am. My knees had been complaining the last two days so I was forced to take a day off. I joined Megan and Carol to head to Waitomo in search of Mel. With no sighting, I had asked the information centre when buses come in. I was told just one a day at 11.30am. So we believed we would not see her until the next day. Just shy of being out of mobile range, my mobile rang. It was Mel and she had just arrived in Waitomo. Back we went. She told us of her trials of the day. She had a back up plan if we did not pick her up as there was no accommodation available in Waitomo due to Easter. MP1 had suggested Mel bring a large garbage bag. Mel figured she would employ that plastic bag, using a stick, to make a tent. Megan then explained the reason for the bag was to put muddy gear in after caving.

The guys had been out for the day exploring the paddocks and found a couple of new entrances to Pompeii. James' caving technique does not require a trog suit - T-shirt and shorts worked just fine.

Day 9

Chully bun packed we were off to Hang Over Hole. No one had hang overs but the cave did give me a headache with a waterfall pounding the floor of the large chamber. Two pitches to abseil (5 m and 10 m). With temperatures unseasonably hot, we looked forward to getting underground. MP2 had come back for a couple more days of caving.

Between the two pitches, it was rift with plunge pools. I was able to step around them without getting my feet wet – protected by gum boots. Once to



Megan Pryke in Hang Over Hole



Sunset at Hang Over Hole

the bottom of the main chamber, Alan pulled out his camera for a photo shoot. The sections we visited were formation free. There is an upper section with pretties reached by a 10 m chimney, which we did not do. It was MP2's first go at SRT. She did well on the lower pitch, finding the final ledge hard to get to due to rigging being low at this point. The upper pitch was also bit difficult with getting up the last few metres as it was narrow with loose dirt and rocks.

Out once again late seeing the beautiful colours as the sun was setting. Autumn leaves have just begun to fall in the last few days – very beautiful. Dinner was at a slightly more civilized hour – 9.00pm.

Day 10

The A team, B team and MP2 made our way to Kuratahi. A top cave with lots of decoration. High ceiling, stream passage with gypsum oozing from the walls. In many areas it looked like snow drifts. Our macros were in full swing photographing the gypsum trees. I also spotted a skeleton of a rodent. The skull width was smaller than a Panadol, with a long snout. Crystals were forming on the skull. I will endeavor to find out what the rodent was.

The A team was in full photography mode, out-staying the B team and only leaving when the camera batteries died. The gypsum trees were quite a sight. On the way out, Alan disappeared around a corner and came up with a strange

sound. I thought he had a child's toy that was clicking. When he reappeared, he had a frog in his hands. It was such a loud, artificial sound I did not expect it to come from a frog.

We made it out by 7pm. When we arrived back at the hut, Megan (MP1) already had dinner complete. Chili – everyone was really looking forward to it. Megan said to me it may be a bit spicy. Bowls served up for 6 people. After one bite, I was looking for water. I could not eat any more resorting to left-over pumpkin soup.

Day 11

The best of the A team and B team plus extension formed for a trip back to Matawhero – Megan (MP1), Carol, Melanie, Catherine and myself. Alan gave us a site location to find MF10, with the idea of entering that end to find the way through to MF26. It was our mission to get through. We spent two hours looking on the surface to find MF10 to no avail. I thought I would suffer heat stroke being dressed in wet suit and trog suit.

We gave up the surface search and entered MF26. Again being treated to the wonderful calcite formations we pressed on to make our way through the cave. At a junction, our novice caver, Catherine, quickly spotted two carbide arrows on the rock which led the way on. How the boys did not see this we do not know. It was a climb and chimney along to get into the slot. From there it was squeezey for about 15 metres. Mel thought it was a neeto tunnel – Catherine and I did not share the enthusiasm. After two 90 degree turns it changed to narrow, vertical rift with sharp horizontal rock protrusions. All fit through well except me. After being semi wedged, I was hesitant to continue on. Megan popped back and demonstrated the ballerina position. This was one foot on the ground, back foot trailing horizontal, leaning quite forward with front arm and body horizontal, and trailing hand up high to balance. An awkward position but it worked.

I shed my trog suit to give me a bit more space. With implementing the new technique, I was able to get through. After about 15 m, we popped out to the stream way again – with plenty of silt to sink in.

We just needed to keep left and that should see us through. After some time pushing on, the question was asked how much further we wanted to go before we would turn around – being concerned we could not find the way through. It was unanimous. No one wanted to turn around to be faced with the squeezey bit so we pushed on. Much slipping, sliding and sinking in mud provided good laughs. We were wet from head to toe but had no problem keeping warm with the effort being put out. Carol and Megan pushed on with the rest in tow. When we spotted wetas Mel and I were quite excited. Catherine did not share our excitement, until she realised this meant we were near an exit.

The exit was a near-vertical climb up a 4 or 5 m pitch. Carol did some gardening as the rocks looked like they would come down and the exit was covered with blackberries. If it was not day light, there would be question if we would have found it. Clearly it is not an exit used regularly. The exit hole was just larger than our bodies after Carol enlarged it. We gathered for a group photo – Megan tossing my dry bag – which landed in blackberry thorns. She



Calcified skull in Kuratahi. Photo by Tina Willmore



Mel at the Guardsman

definitely has it in for me (chili being too hot, not mailing my parents' anniversary card and now putting holes in my dry bag).

It was such a pleasure to be out on the surface. Our next dilemma was figuring out where we were. We climbed the first hill to see another hill. That was also climbed and still no sighting of the car. Mel and I pulled out the map and between the sun set and the orientation of the cave exit, had the direction of the car. Carol and Megan were all set with the direction anyway. As we were walking, Mel did not think it would be much of an issue locating the car as "It's only a farm, how big could it be?"

The men did surface work looking for Friday 13th. With wrong information given as to its location, there was no luck although they believe they found Verry's Disappointment Efflux. What I learned today – keep your mouth closed at entrances / exits of caves to keep the wetas out.

Day 12

Our first collective disaster – the washing machine broke down. We were reliant on it to spin out our creek washed cave gear and do the thermals wash daily so we ducked over to the Single Men's Quarters to use their washing machine.

The entire group headed out to Ten Acre Tomo. It was quite a sight. A huge tomo with heavy jungle growth. We hiked to the north end of the tomo and opted for a side trip to Port Hole. James found it at the bottom of the hill, over the north side from Ten Acre Tomo. It was a bit of a climb in then entering a hole at the back of the entry chamber to the left. After crawling through a couple of chambers, it opened up to standing room. It is a small cave that is well decorated with the full gamut of decoration. Alan found a car headlight attached to a lead acid battery. It looked quite old and still had charge in it. After using it to light up the cave, Alan removed it with concern about leakage. There was graffiti by the National Museum. We would like to have stayed longer but time was running out for the day.

After a short break, we headed down Ten Acre Tomo. It was a thick, dense forest filled with tree ferns and vines that grabbed every thing in sight. We easily found the cave and followed the stream way in. We got to a point

where we were not sure which way to go. The instructions said to go under a big boulder – hmmm, the cave was full of big boulders. When we saw the big boulder, the instructions made perfect sense. A little squeeze, climbing up and to the right, we were in the big chamber. This chamber was massive – over 20 m wide and 150 m long.

The decoration was wonderful. The Guardsman is the most unusual stalagmite any of us had seen. I would describe it as a 2 metre high Christmas tree with too much snow poured on top. I also saw a stalactite that had 3 more stalactites attached and extending to the side and down. A few of us stayed in for a couple of hours shooting everything in sight. We had to head out to make it up the tomo in daylight. The forest was so dense, without daylight it would be very hard to work out where to climb out so as to not end up going up a cliff.

James had exited the cave with others and had a look for Taranui Cave. It was only 5 minutes away but we did not have the time to check it out. We made it out of the tomo just minutes before dark. Another good and welcome dinner on our return at 9.30 pm.

Day 13

The rental car had a flat – a sharp stone puncturing the tread. The flat was changed and Carol went in to Pio Pio for a repair. We thought it would be a plug repair but the stone did great damage on the interior of the tire so a new one was purchased.

Alan, Geoff, Megan, Melanie and I headed out for a trio of caves. Dave's was the first. We drove across the paddocks and jumped fences to get there. Entry was a bit of effort with a key hole tunnel and stream running below. We had to stay high for some time, getting to a slot on the right which needed climbing in to. An eel was spotted in the stream way, maybe 16 inches long. Alan knows first hand about slippery as an eel.

There was good passage to walk along, finding some pretties and long tree roots making their way into the cave. It was a sporty cave with climbing and scrambling through the passages. One section pushed us onto our knees in the water and sliding along on our bellies. The exit was great – it looked like a scene from Indiana Jones with the limestone pillars and jungle-like vegetation. Lunch was had on the exit of Dave's, with Nirvana 50 m away.

The regular entrance to Nirvana has collapsed so we slinked our way in through a small tunnel. Mel was the scout, going in first and letting us know it opened out within a few meters and the rest of us could get in – well, maybe. The method was dropping down a 2 m hole, inserting feet first into the tunnel and getting through on your side.



Tina in Nirvana

Water was flowing freely as we squirmed through. I managed to keep my upper body out of the water until I had to pose for a photo – I became quite wet after this. There was great formation in this cave. We traveled up stream for our first photo shoot and then down stream. It took some time to get through this due to the photos taken. I also think there were the most brachiopods in this cave. There were a couple of sections of rift to squirm through – a bit of hard work with a pack but good fun. The exit felt like being in an Indiana Jones set again with pillars of limestone lining the stream. The stream also allowed us to wash our gear – refreshing to arrive back at the hut de-mucked.

Another late dinner – our standard. We had our first rain tonight – just a shower. There were more clouds around today that looked like they would shed water droplets.

Day 14

The group went different directions today. I tagged along with Alan and Brendan to go in search of Cathys Cave. Alan and Brendan went underground while I followed on the surface making voice connections (I also needed some vitamin D production). The cave was only supposed to be 200 m long, so they anticipated they would not be long. After a couple of hours and still no sign, I pulled out the map to locate the exit. The map put the exit over a hill 90 degrees out from where the voice connections were heading. Believing it was wrong and not sure where to go, I stayed put on a hillock to await their resurface. Lunch and some light reading passed the time. They finally resurfaced after another hour. They described the cave as hard going, rift, crawling on one side in water but well decorated and virgin cave was discovered.



Entrance to Cathys. Photo by Tina Willmore

In discussion of the survey done in 1984, the GPS points and knowledge collected of the cave, the map just did not fit. I suggested rotating the map 90 degrees along with flipping it for a mirror-image – then it made sense. Alan down loaded the GPS data and the survey fits with the rotation and flipping.

Brendan needed to get off to Waitomo so Alan headed off to look for GG Murder Cave on his own – again the coordinates failed to reveal its location. I went back to the hut to cook a fine Cottage Pie and vegetables for the group.

Megan, Geoff, Carol, James and Catherine left around 4.00 am to conquer Egmont – a 2000 m vertical climb. They arrived at 7.00am, in the dark and rain. Not deterred, they began the ascent. Geoff had to turn back at the scree slope as his shoes failed him. The rest pushed on through cloud and rain. They were well rewarded breaking through the cloud with excellent views. Ice and snow were encountered.

Mel also had a good day – she parked herself in front of Alan's computer and watched nine episodes of Dexter. She tells me she did break for lunch.

Day 15

Shocking news – cavers left the hut at 8.30 am. Those left behind decided they were spurred on as a last ditch effort to get in as much caving as possible with the end of the trip looming. Alan, Geoff, Melanie and James went to Puketiti Mudbath. I am told it lived up to its name.

The cave was located with the usual dead sheep near the entrance after which they crawled then walked along easy passage only to find that they soon encountered very low passage mostly filled with mud and water. They groveled through this for several metres before emerging into high rift passage which continued past tomos and avens to dangerous rock fall. A strong breeze issued out. After a few photos of James groveling in the mud, they left the

cave and went to explore various dolines and bush looking for the tomo entrances to the cave. James, pacing like a lion stalking his prey, was amazed to find that most of the dolines in the near vicinity led to some sort of cave passage, mostly vertical. They abandoned descending most of the tomos as they were too deep – requiring more tackle. On reaching their deadline, Geoff found a ladderable pitch and James was dispatched down an 18m pit located up a doline wall, with no way on.

Looking around the various dolines, Alan pulled out a block of plants with his head down a hole. He then pulled out a jaw bone, more bones, another jaw bone giving a matching set, then a spine – reassembling a dead animal. A mixed bag of stuff was coming out. After deciding it was too small, Geoff threw in some thistles to fill the hole back in, remarking it looked like a landscaped garden.

After lunch we all headed to Te Kuiti to see the running of the sheep down the main street. It was fun watching around 2000 sheep on the run. The sheep were not happy about the crowd so kept to the middle of the street. After all that excitement we headed for Pio Pio where we had ice cream with fresh fruit. A wonderful stop.

Next stop – Waitoru to explore Mangawhero Cavern. Once on the property, we crossed paths with a farmer who gave us directions on roads that were drivable.

We packed 7 into the Rav to head up the last of the rough road. It was a short walk over the arch and down into the gorge. The cavern is an impressive and massive cave opening. We had a short walk around, seeing the oolites and taking a few last photos.

On return to the hut, airplane noises were being made while driving up the runway on Puketiti Station airstrip. Alan announced “This is your captain speaking. We have now reached our cruising height of 2m. Out the left you will notice a doline. The captain has turned off the seatbelt sign, but you would be advised to keep your belt fastened. Altitude is 2m.” With our final dinner together, the evening was spent cleaning and packing our gear. Alan got out the gurney to blast clean gear along with the mud caked on the Rav. He also needed to blast off bits of dead farm animal collected over the last two weeks.



Puketiti sunset. Photo by Tina Willmore

A REAL ARM WRESTLE

TRAINING WEEKEND, BUNGONIA, 31ST MAY – 1ST JUNE 2008

BY LOUISE JOHNSTON, PHOTOS DEBORAH JOHNSTON

At around 10:30pm our car pulls into Bungonia State Recreation Reserve and we (Louise Johnston (Commander Lulu), James Selles, his Dad Alf Selles (Big Daddy A), & Sergeant Tom Short) began the lap around the campground. Being a cold June weekend we had foolishly expected to have the place to ourselves, so I approached the large cluster of tents we saw and walked over to meet the weekends' trip members.

Walking past the silent tents a lone person emerges in the distance and stands with a torch shining directly into my eyes, "Deborah?" I call, no reply.... "What group are you with" I demand, a little crossly because I'm half blind by now. A terrified little voice squeaks out "1st Kembla Scouts" before I apologise and scurry away into the darkness, forever a nightmare in this child's mind.

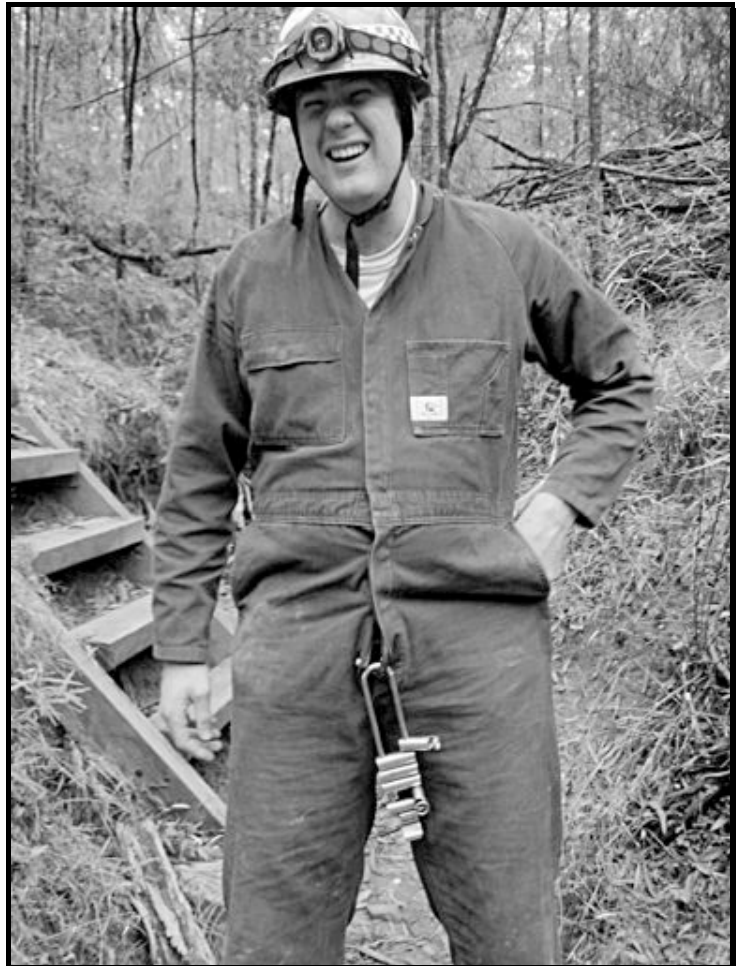
We continue our lap of the campground, noticing two distinctly adult shapes sitting near the entry sign. By the time we have finished arguing over whether it was a man or a woman we are forced to do a second lap to go and check it out. Big Tim, renowned Venturer leader (and definitely not a woman) and Michael Collins, renowned cave diving masochist have found each other in the darkness, almost been poisoned by mysteriously frothing tea and help us set up our tents. Deborah "Supreme Overlord" Johnston, Ninja Nichol Hill, Andrew Pratley (Max Fightmaster) & Tracey Jarvis (T-rex) arrive shortly after in Nichol's luxurious 4wd campmeister.

It's a cold night at -4C but the sounds of Deborah and Nichol snorting with laughter as they watch DVD's in their heated rooftop tent lying on electric blankets ring out late into the night.

Saturday morning the ritualistic laying out of the gear begins as everyone feels a need to make their pile look as large, impressive and shiny as possible. Alf, James & Tom with little gear of their own to display, demonstrate their manliness by going for a 6km run around the green track. Just before testosterone reached peak levels we are joined by Kapitana Kandy Wang, her mum, Jessie, Chris Rodwell, Danielle Johnson (Danger Dan), Mark Lowson & Jen. We now try to compress our gear back from whence it came and find the two lost joggers so we can drive to Hogan's wall for abseiling instruction.

With helmets plastered with identifiable nick-name tags the fresh blood is lined up for a demonstration by Tim and Mark Lowson on the joys of safe abseiling. With more gear than you can poke a stick at we rig two lowerable ropes, two more single ropes and an SRT rebelay. One by one they teeter on the edge of the cliff, grit their teeth, gaze trustingly at Tim, Louise or Michael and descend over the edge with a call of abseiling! At the bottom they learn to belay and soon we have an efficient cycle of people trying out different ways to descend and ascend. Ancient bolts on Hogans wall are skeptically examined before Mark rigs a large rock spike and teaches Jen the ins and outs of crossing rebelayes.

After lunch 16 cavers file into the entry chamber of Grill to be dazzled by the spectacular formation, (or rather the cautionary tales of historically insensitive caving), along with the standard safety spiel before descending the series of ladders. With a scout troop also in attendance somewhere in Grill we take the opportunity to take the

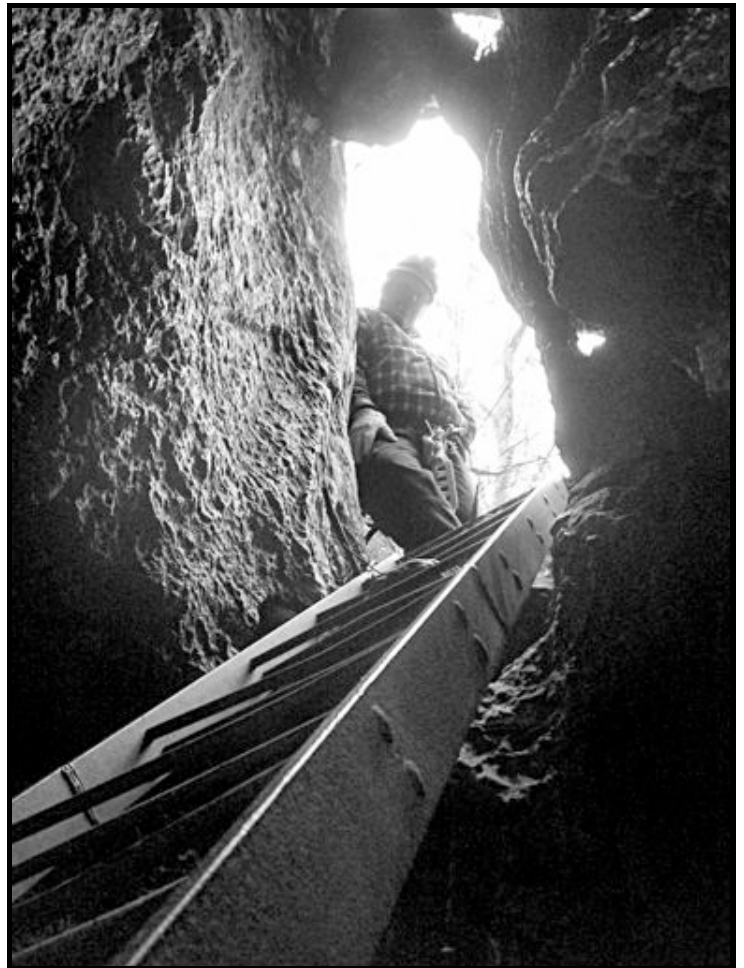


Nichol demonstrates his rack while keeping the harness clean

adventurous root through squeezes and under, over & around boulders. The size of Grill is noticeable with more than 20 people in the cave at once yet it never feels crowded and we only once see the other group. Fortunately 14 cavers manage to exit the cave, some (Commander Lulu) less elegantly than others after twisting a foot in the daylight hole climb and remaining awkwardly perched on a ledge until a handline is dropped. After psyching out other contenders for the daylight hole with this display of ineptitude they quickly scurry out the other entrance. Communication up top turns to "Louise is stuck" and Tim's heart leaps with the opportunity to rig some elaborate hauling rescue system. Disappointedly they throw a tape down, James manages to sit in a pile of stinging nettles and we all trudge to the car for some classy group shots.

The evening is spent in the Bungonia kitchen with a late arrival (Adam Dunn aka Swarmy G), a bang up group BBQ, plenty of celebratory beers, poker, arm wrestling competitions (note to self- NEVER get in a fight with Michael Collins, Tom Short or Swarmy G!) and exaggerated tales of adventures gone by (some just hours before). Late at night we head to our tents. Even later we hear someone trying to head to their tent, crashing into canvas and calling out "is anyone in there?" before seemingly finding somewhere to wait out the not so cold night (-2C).

Early the next morning the gear freaks emerge for another gear piling exercise. Perhaps this is some unresearched mating phenomena where the wares are displayed as a demonstration of partner potential. Some go for the neatly arranged segmented piles in regimented rows, others for a messy tower impressive by its height and variety of colours, some others crouch wearily over stoves heating up the morning brew while the smartest of the lot scull leftover custard. It's a late start in the end as today's caving is a more complicated exercise. We are making a through trip of B4-5 however with two cavers technically too large for either of the squeezes in the middle we have to come up with a more creative solution. Deborah, Tim, Swarmy & Nichol enter Fossil Hole to rig up abseil and ascending practice ropes as well as ladders for the eventual exit of party two who enter from B4 via the hairy traverse (ie no vertical work required). With a large group (although two remain at camp for well earned rest) we expected a slow trip through and spread leaders out amongst the group. The group exceeds our expectations with incredible displays of competence and shortly we reach Kings Cross. Setting up packs at the entry and exit points to Kings X we send everyone off exploring telling them they can go wherever they want as long as they don't pass either pack. This is an interesting section of cave that loops around under and back over itself and many fail to recognise they are reaching the same section over and over again. Both the upper and lower squeeze prove reasonably tight and shortly after we are at the bottom of the first ladder pitch.



Adam contemplates Fossil Cave

Surprised to see no ladder hanging we call out and discover that Tim's party have only just finished rigging the abseil ropes. The experienced climbers in the group free climb to rig the pitches while the other half sensibly sit around eating delicious chocolate and lollies. The second ladder pitch is significantly easier although higher so a belay is used to assist our climbers (who choose either the ladder or the wall). Up top we see why party 1 had taken so long as the entrance looks like Spidermans lair with a dizzying array of backup rigging and safety lines. This has been Deb & Swarmy's classroom for the morning and one by one we escape the cave and up the steel ladder into the daylight (with an interesting game of ladder twister to top things off). Some elect to stay and try out some underground abseiling and ascending but most hungrily head to the campground to eat the piles of leftover sausages, wash some of the dust off and drive home. By the time the derigging party return the campsite is empty but hot sausages remain piled up on the bbq plate and are quickly demolished along with any other leftover food.

It was an excellent weekend with 17 non-stop smiling faces. For many it is their first time underground, for others it is their first late night flannellete-adorned arm wrestle and for others it is the first time they have emerged from a cave to find a hot cooked lunch. All in all it doesn't get much better than that!

SYCAMORE WEEDBUSTING AT JENOLAN

BY BRUCE WELCH



Party heading off up the Surveyors Creek Valley

The first Jenolan Caves Sycamore Weedbusting weekend was held on 10th & 11th of May. It was hosted by the Lithgow Oberon Landcare Association with the NPWS & Jenolan Caves Trust. Accommodation, tools and training were provided. The weekend was attended by a small group including a cave guide, NPWS staff, a specialist trainer, and volunteers. Among the volunteers were 'old' SUSS members Paul Greenfield and Bruce Welch.

The first day was spent on the hillsides just upstream of the dam on Surveyors Creek. This was followed by a fabulous BBQ at the playing fields. Sunday was spent working down from the top of the 2 Mile Hill towards the same area. The infestation is severe but hopefully with at least two weedbusting weekends per year it can be reduced.



Sycamore-infested gulley near the top of 2 Mile Hill

YOU'RE NEVER TOO YOUNG TO LEARN TO PRUSSIK

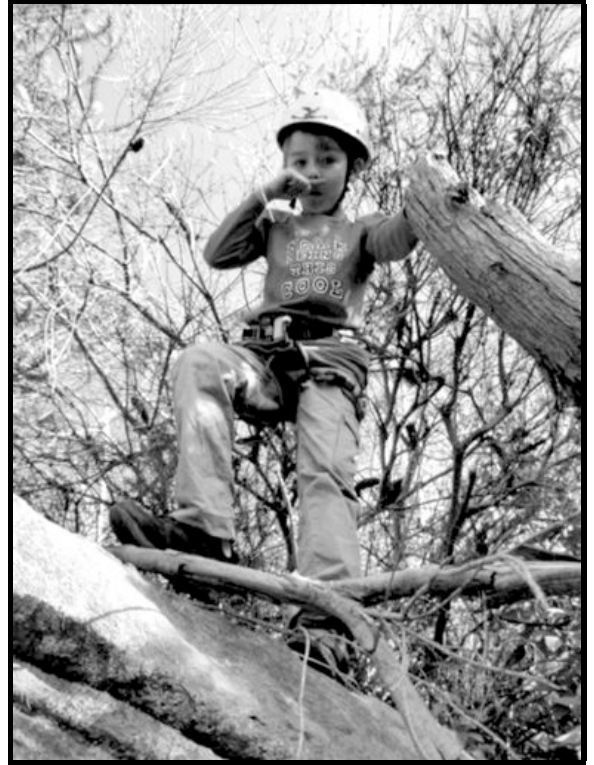
ROPE TRAINING DAY, ST IVES, 23RD MAY 2008

BY ROWENA LARKINS

10 am was the scheduled time for the training at Steve's place. Deb and Louise, with her 7 year old Marcus, were there right on time, closely followed by Rowena. The three women stood out the back gossiping while Steve got himself out of bed, dressed and breakfasted. Marcus decided that as it was a climbing day he was going climbing and up the embankment he went. Phil arrived uncharacteristically late, with Rachel in tow. Rachel had done some abseiling once but nothing serious. Phil pointed out to Steve that Uggies were probably not the best gear to abseil in so Steve went off to get something more suitable. Inside we could hear the sound of Annalisa grinding coffee. Soon after the aroma wafted out, then miraculously home made cappuccinos appeared.

Being a training rigging day, the trip leaders supervised, while the ladies did most of the rigging. Phil spent much of his time working with Rachel to get her comfortable with abseiling, while the rest of us headed up to the higher cliffs to rig some pitches under Steve's watchful eye. Steve had thoughtfully bolted his cliff (aka backyard) some time ago so the anchor points were fairly obvious (once we found them under the urban jungle). The women hung down the cliff getting a refresher in setting up re-belays, redirections and negotiating them.

Michael Fraser dropped in for a few minutes, to make sure everyone had set things up properly. Down at the lower cliff Marcus had geared up and was having a go at prusiking up, which impressed us all greatly. Phil then decided to show Rachel how to prusik, using real prusik knots!! None of this wimpy ascender rubbish.



Marcus



Steve throws Rowena a challenge

Steve then threw us a challenge. He set up a really nasty tight horrible rebelay which was too short to lock off a descender while crossing, and had a figure of 8 loop big enough for a circus clown to jump an elephant through. While there was no circus, the leaders did take it easy at the base of the cliff and watched with some amusement while the ladies worked out how to abseil across the evil rebelay, and then how to prusik up past it.

Deb impressed us all, given her fear of heights. She went up and down the cliff and around the rebelays, including the tricky one. 1pm saw time for Deb, Louise and Marcus to leave, closely followed by Phil and Rachel.

Steve gave Rowena some tips on setting up a rescue for a stuck abseiler and then we de-rigged and stowed the gear. A special thanks to Steve and Annalisa for allowing us to practice in their backyard.

COME FOR THE CAVING, STAY FOR THE RESCUE

WOMBEGAN CAVES, 17 MAY 2008

BY JILL ROWLING

Participants: Phil Maynard, Mike Lake, Jill Rowling, Alan Pryke, Megan Pryke, Brett Davis

Friday Night – Saturday Morning.

Mike and I had taken the Friday off work on leave, so that we could have a leisure day before the SUSS trip. This was mainly shopping and dining. We then drove to Wombeyan, arriving a little after 9pm. There were a lot of campers this weekend but the “caver’s corner” had no one except for a small white car parked there with tent behind. Thinking it might be “one of the SUSS contingent” we did not disturb whomever it was and set up our tent near the fallen tree. As it was cold, we sat in our car, reading. Mike eventually turned in. Shortly afterwards, Alan and Megan arrived. They thought the tent behind the white car might be Geoff McDonnell’s. We all went to bed. I didn’t hear Phil arrive.

The next morning we all discussed around breakfast about the tent. Phil said he’d not been contacted by Geoff to attend but had heard third hand that Geoff had been interested in the trip. The tent had no-one in it. The car was a hire car. A tattered trog suit in the tent suggested that Geoff had gone off somewhere but we could not access the car boot to see if there was any helmet or light. If these items were in the boot, then Geoff was most likely not in a cave.

People speculated all sorts of things: had Geoff got lost, or sick? Had he had one of his spells? Had he wandered out in the bush somewhere? Had a tourist found him ill and sent him off to Goulburn? Phil and I went to the guides office anyway to let them know what were our trip plans, get tokens for the Fig Tree cave gate and let them know about our concerns about this car and tent. As there was nothing we could do at this stage, we continued our trips to Fig Tree Cave (Phil, Mike and Jill) and, later, Grants Cave (Alan and Megan).

Saturday – Fig Tree Cave

Mike, Jill and Phil entered Fig Tree Cave using a token at the top entrance. We proceeded along the path to the north end of the Opera House where we put on the rest of our caving gear and climbed up the dry stone wall to the old path. Mike complained about his photochromic glasses still being dark, and being impossible to see by. Phil set up the tripod and we started surveying, linking in the steel spike near the drystone wall and numerous other points in the chamber. The odd bat flew past. There are some small leads off the rockpile near here which we will use Suuntos to survey later on. We continued through to Bat End, where we could hear a few bats grumbling but could not see them.

I showed the guys the climb up to the Ball Room, got out the tape handline and we all went up the old steel structure to set it up for the drop beyond. Mike illuminated the survey point in the ceiling of the little connecting hole between the two chambers. Bats were starting to grumble and a few flew around, so I suggested we come back in the evening to finish that part of the survey. We went out for lunch via creek cave, returning the same way. This time we again set up near the north end of the Opera House and surveyed up into the Drawing Room. We looked at the Ceiling Room (awesome view of the Opera House) and Phil climbed round the exposed area to look at the other end of the Ballroom.

Phil mentioned a pit there; I thought it was accessible from near the Drawing Room (I may be wrong, haven’t been there for about 20 years!). Phil declared that was really another trip’s worth of surveying so we continued northwards to the Collonnades. This is a very well decorated area with lots of cabling on the floor, so we had to be careful not to disturb anything. A couple of tripod setups linked into features near the showcave path, above the Bath Room. Phil and Mike went down into Bush Rangers Hall and linked that in too. Mike was getting cold in this part of the cave so we called it a day and headed out.

We stopped at the Kiosk/Office and let them know that we’d left a red tape handline near the Bat End for a return trip tonight, when the bats would have departed. We enquired about the abandoned tent and if no-one had shown up, should we not call the Police? Corin Smith and Laurie Dunn did just that, as the tent was still abandoned. That was really the end of the SUSS trip activities as such, as other matters then took over.

[Alan and Megan checked Grants cave for recent entry and found nothing. More on the search and rescue operation in the next Bull. ed]

PHOTO GALLERY



*Above and below the pitch in Hang Over Hole, Puketiti, North Island New Zealand
photos Alan Pryke*

PHOTO GALLERY

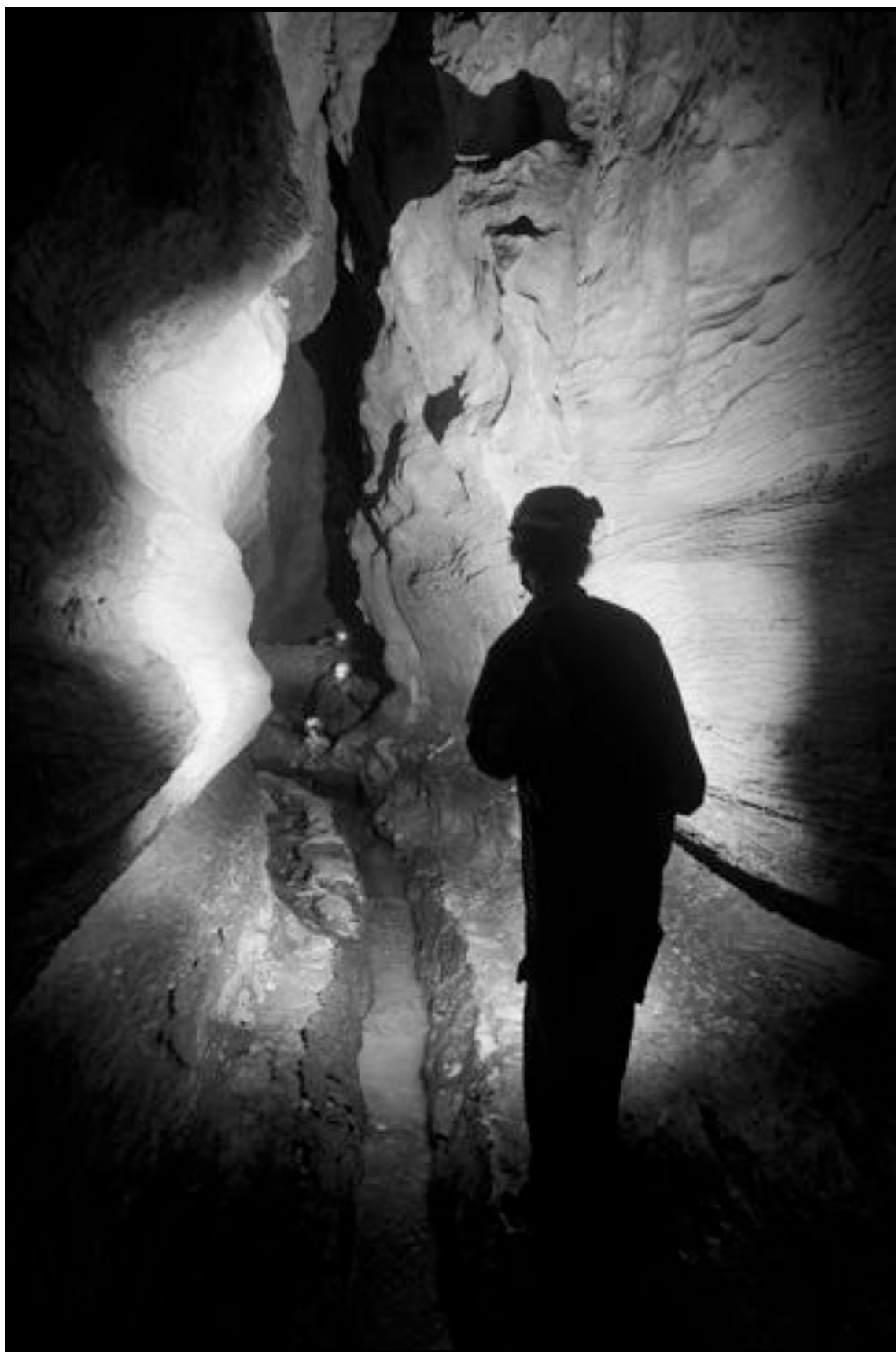


*Alan Pryke meets a friendly weta in Ploughte, Puketiti, North Island New Zealand
photo Tina Willmore*



*Tina Willmore in Nirvana, Puketiti, North Island New Zealand
photo Alan Pryke*

PHOTO GALLERY



Nirvana streamway, Puketiti, North Island New Zealand
photo Alan Pryke

TRIP LIST: JULY 2008

SUSS General Meetings are held on the first Thursday of the month at 7:00pm (for a 7.30pm start) in the Common Room in the Holme Building at the University of Sydney.

For updates to this list, check out the SUSS Website: <http://ee.usyd.edu.au/suss>. Detailed information on each caving area (plus other useful information such as what you will need to bring) can be found in the *Beginner's Handbook* section of the Website.

Please Note: it is YOUR responsibility to inform the trip supervisor of any relevant medical conditions which may in any way affect your fitness, such as asthma, diabetes and the like.

July

26–27 Bungonia. SRT trip. Contact Michael Collins by email michaelcollins@trimixdivers.com or mobile 0425 210 361 or Michael Fraser michaelfraser172@hotmail.com or 9988 3252 (home) or 0419 236 576.

August

2–3 Tuglow. Get into winter caving in Kanangra. Contact Keir Vaughan-Taylor keir@usyd.edu.au

9–10 Jenolan. Come and enjoy a weekend of crawling through the bowels of the earth, followed by a hot shower and entertaining evening banter. Contact Max Midlen mmidlen@aol.com or 0415 922 201.

16–17 Wyanbene. Contact Jill Rowling Rowling@ali.com.au or 9697 4484 (work).

23–24 Wombeyan. A place of beautiful scenery, fun caving and great camping. Trip leader to be arranged.

31 Narrow Neck Tunnel. Contact Phil Maynard Philip.Maynard@uts.edu.au or 9908 2272 (home).

September

13–14 Jenolan. Trip leader to be arranged.

20–21 Wombeyan. Trip leader to be arranged.

October

3–5 Cliefden. Cliefden Main and others, warm caves out west of the divide with shearers accommodation. Contact Megan Pryke meganandalan@optusnet.com.au or 9524 0317..

11–12 Jenolan. Trip leader to be arranged.
