

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SYDNEY UNIVERSITY SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Box 35,
The Union,
Sydney University.

Price Five Cents

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Edited by the Hon. Secretary

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Special Issue

25th August, 1966

SPECIAL ISSUE : STATE OF THE SOCIETY FORUM

S.U.S.S., the oldest speleological society on the Australian mainland, is just eighteen years old. From the small group of keen inaugural members, the Society has evolved along a number of lines connected through a friendly interest in caving and associated activities.

At the present time S.U.S.S. is undergoing one of its periodical internal conflicts, when these lines seem apparently at loggerheads. But there is nothing new in this, in S.U.S.S., or in any other active University club or society.

What IS new on this occasion is that the Hon. Secretary invited a large cross section of the Society to express its views in a special edition of the Newsletter, which you now have before you.

In the invitation, the Editor offered to print (subject to any necessary legal restrictions, eg. libel) complete and unabridged contributions. This has been done. What you read herein are the "undoctored" words of the various contributors.

Contributions are published in the order received. In this way the Editor has attempted to be as impartial as possible in the presentation of argument.

The second feature of this Newsletter is that it is the first composed entirely of members' contributions. This is unique in S.U.S.S. history. Let this continue in the future.

PLEASE NOTE : The Editor takes full responsibility for the decision to produce this Newsletter, but the views expressed herein are those of the individual contributors, and are not necessarily those of the Editor, the Committee, or the Society as a whole.

Geoff Butlin.
Editor.

TO BE, OR NOT TO BE -- THAT IS THE QUESTION

Sir,

I am very glad that you have given members the opportunity to air their views without fearing the prolonged bilateral bickering that has dominated recent meetings of the Society. I think that this very timely move could help "clear the air" on many of the contentious issues which the Society is facing and must resolve.

As a member of SUSS I could not help being dismayed at recent criticisms of the Society, and, most important, at the apathy with which many of our members seemed to regard the situation which now exists. These criticisms were levelled at people who were associated with a recent SUSS trip to Coolemon but could well be applied to other trips on which members, as well as "hangers-on", have participated. While such trips (most commonly the so-called "Freshers' Trip") can only be described as being "gay" and in themselves harmless, they are being subject to increasing criticism from outside, as well as from within, the Society. If SUSS continues to come under fire it can only become the "odd-man-out" Society, and accordingly, people may see fit to exclude SUSS from the areas they control. This would be disastrous and it is no exaggeration to say that the rash of Societies not yet enjoying the privileges we enjoy as members of A.S.F. would be very happy to replace us (if we can give them the ammunition). Perhaps they would deserve to. This is no longer a conflict between the So-called "responsibles" and "irresponsibles" within the Society -- it is a conflict between those who wish to continue caving and those who don't -- it is becoming Australia wide.

Caving areas are not abundant in Australia and it does not take long to alienate those who control them. We should examine what has gone on in Britain and especially the United States. Cave after cave is being closed to cavers as well as the general public. The National Speleological Society of America issues pamphlets on how to conduct oneself in a caving area so that no-one could possibly be critical or inconvenienced. SUSS itself was excluded from Cliefden for four years as a result of gaiety and thoughtlessness on a typical Freshers' Trip; Wee Jasper is in danger of being closed, as are the Tourist Areas; and one entrance to the Mammoth Cave at Jenolan has already been blocked. What is happening in America is starting to happen here. We must not follow suit, but what we must follow, whether we like it or not, are the standards which other Societies expect of us. These Societies will force us out of A.S.F. and the best caving areas (eg. Jenolan) to protect their own interests. What one speleological society, or one speleo does, reflects on societies in general, and their activities in any area. One only has to ask the Head Guide at Jenolan or Wombeyan what he thinks of speleological activities -- one only has to read the editorial in Calcite to see how activities alleged to have happened at Coolemon are naturally thought to happen at places like Jenolan. This is not a highly exaggerated or coloured belief held by me alone -- one only had to attend the last A.S.F. Committee Meeting in Canberra to grasp the trend of public opinion in Australia and to realise what has to be done. If we do not realise, as a group, then we will be the losers.

I implore those members who go on caving trips or trips to caving areas to bear in mind what I have said. I admire those who have the sense to "get away from it all and have a good time" but why have "too good a time" when we go to caving areas? Why can't we organise our "good times" to places where we can't jeopardize the caver's right to go caving? (eg. Bonfire nights).

As Treasurer of the Society I feel duty bound to say a few words about the current financial situation. Many appear displeased with it. I feel, however, that we have done much in the past months to elevate the position of the Society by spending money and by the activity of many members, not least the Secretary who produces our monthly Newsletter. I think this reflects the attitude of the present Committee. Much money has been spent, but on valued materials which add to the Society's equipment or to assets which will be used or give returns over the next umpteen years. At the moment we have relatively little ready cash. This does not really matter. I am sure we will have enough money to continue publishing the Newsletter at its present standard and this appears to be our only real worry for some time to come.

Glenn Hunt.

DRINKING, BUNGONIA, & FRESHERS

Sir,

As far as the drinking and singing is concerned, I think this is purely a matter of personal opinion and as long as it is restricted to the evenings so as not to interfere with caving, I see no reason to ban alcohol on trips. However, our Society is a speleological society and I think trips purely for the sake of drinking should be discouraged. Many present on this occasion were not members and in my opinion came along just for the grog-on. None of these many odd-bods paid trip fees, and certainly did not help the freshers.

As a freshers' trip, it should have been designed to instruct the few freshers on the trip in caving techniques, such as ladder climbing (which was done) and more important, knots and belaying methods. I think therefore that those present on this trip should only be freshers and experienced members directly involved with instructing the freshers. The boisterous behaviour of most of those present would certainly not induce many freshers, especially female ones (in which the Society is sadly lacking) to join the Society or come on any more trips.

So I think a new better organised Freshers' Trip should be instituted, preferably commencing next year in which only freshers and experienced cavers are allowed to go.

As far as all the other odd people are concerned they can also have a new trip, and could call it the Bungonia Boozers' Trip, -- but should not come on the Freshers' Trip which should, as such, be solely reserved for the freshers. I don't think this is an unreasonable request for just one trip a year to be devoted to freshers, which are needed to replenish the Society's blood. At

present very few new members are joining and taking an active interest in the Society; and every effort should be made to interest others in speleology.

Extra Suggestions.

1. That a larger Orientation Week Drive be made at the beginning of next year to get more new members.
2. That at least a few vacancies on trips be reserved for interested new members especially freshers who are a little overwhelmed by the present necessary procedure of many phone calls to obtain a seat in a car for the trip.

Graham Bradley.

BATTY S.U.S.S.

Sir,

General Meetings over recent years have been going from bad to worse and getting more and more boring and an utter waste of time for the vast majority of active cavers. It is usually obvious that much of the trouble arises from the budding politicians or lawyers who like to hear themselves speak, yet rarely go on trips. When they do so it is usual for them to continue their talking and doing all they can to disrupt those who want to go caving.

They frequently arrive late at night, make as much noise as possible so that every one in the area is wakened, regardless of the fact that there may be "tourists" or bushwalkers in the area, so giving us all a bad name.

In the evening and sometimes during the day they consume large quantities of alcohol and once again keep all awake. If they must drink alcohol, why go to a caving area? On Sunday they usually leave early, frequently leaving others to clean up after them.

They are usually the most vocal at meetings, arguing minor points of Constitutional amendments which do not really matter. We are a very small and unimportant Society, and to spend hundreds of hours arguing minor points is stupid. There can be few societies that have such a large and complex constitution.

The right to vote is given to all full and associate members and the idea is that this right should be used wisely. I feel that it would often be better to let an active prospective, who wants to go caving, have a vote, rather than some irresponsible who does not go caving and only wants to talk. I feel most strongly that for a person to remain a voting member they should do a certain amount of caving, in various areas, every year, excluding such orgies and disorganised set-ups as Fresher Trips.

I feel that it is high time we forgot about the Constitution and made our General Meetings interesting and informative to all, members and non-members alike. We say we want to increase membership, well the rubbish that goes on at most General Meetings is enough to drive all but the "talkers" away.

Barbara Dew.

UNITED WE CONQUER, DIVIDED WE FALL

Sir,

The sound of muffled war drums stirs the air.

S.U.S.S. is holding a General Meeting. The two parties, the "irresponsibles" and the "devotees" exchange looks of daggers. The President declares the Meeting open. The foray begins.

Despite the warlike appearance of meetings it has been shown over the years that peaceful co-existence IS possible with startling advances of the Society's objectives.

It seems that during periods of maximum activity differences become more evident.

Only let the "irresponsibles" acknowledge their identity and admit to actions which place the Society in a light unfavourable from other societies' viewpoint; only let the "devotees" refrain from frowning upon actions which at times are over exuberance only of a few of our members, and S.U.S.S. will continue to progress united in its aims if not in its members opinions.

Richard Roberts.

TIME, GENTLEMEN !

Sir,

I do not think it wise to dredge up recent controversies and I'm not at all sure this Newsletter will serve any useful purpose.

It is quite understandable that being a University society, S.U.S.S. will consist essentially of individuals. Also it is not surprising that many of us will be outspoken in our opinions.

My greatest concern is that our General Meetings are degenerating into political arguments and not serving as a social get-together. Maybe the idea of cutting out general business between 9p.m. and 10p.m. would be the solution. Ardent politicians could then resume battle after the most useful part of the meeting was over.

Graeme Jessup.

DISAPPROVAL OF NO APPROVAL

Sir,

S.U.S.S. has grown considerably since its foundation and is still continuing to grow. This growth, not only in members, but moreso in capital assets, publications, etc. is governed by both the keenness of members and available funds.

One would think that in a Society which aims to unite people for their mutual benefit, that empire building members of the Society would be forced to limit their grandiose schemes to suit the Society's purse. Not so ! In the last six months, many

members of the Society (including myself) have spent large amounts of money without prior official approval of the Committee of Society but with the casual assent of several Committee members. Each such member no doubt believes the purchases he makes are justified. But look where such haphazard methods have put us. Near bankrupt!

There is no doubt that several of the recent purchases were grossly extravagant in view of the financial climate: \$10 on a heavy duty stapler which could have been borrowed as in the past; \$70 on lapel badges allegedly approved three years ago. If a member of the Committee can't occasionally make do with second best, or shop around using his own time to save the Society's funds, then he should not be on the Committee. If as a Committee member he is not prepared to make do with what the Society can afford then he should not have accepted nomination in the first place.

The Constitution of the Society has grown at the same rate if not faster than other facets of the Society. An idealist might consider that the Constitution should consist only of the aims of the Society, trusting members' integrity and co-operation to manage the Society. However, due to difference of opinion which is continually present, or the stupid actions of a few, the Constitution has, by necessity, evolved to its present state. Despite the disadvantages of further lengthening the Constitution it seems necessary in the light of the present financial ~~fravas~~ to legislate against indiscriminate spending and to make it the Committee's responsibility to plan and approve expenditure.

Harley Wright.

A WAY OF LIFE

Sir,

S.U.S.S. provides for caving as a science and a sport. But it also provides for caving as a way of life. Those who have the courage to accept caving as a way of life are inevitably the richer for the experience.

S.U.S.S. is an environment in which people grow up -- the University caters for one's vocation, but S.U.S.S. provides an exercise ground for one's developing characteristics -- social, intellectual, (and perhaps spiritous). S.U.S.S. witness the transformation of naive, wide-eyed freshers into a semblance of worthwhile, capable human beings.

The Society hops from crisis to crisis, because each new generation of members has to undergo the same cycle pf growing up. This can readily be seen when perusing the old minutes and newsletters.

The current crisis is a little more serious. S.U.S.S. has had access to more money than ever before; more, in fact, than it actually had. Much money has been spent on things which are contributing to speleological endeavour. But considerable sums have gone on some quite remarkable items -- badges and staplers are surely not conducive to caving activity. S.U.S.S. could possibly be deregistered. Well,

at least we will have plenty of baubles and trinkets to remind us of past greatness.

There is also a marked tendency to condemn the older, less active members. The persons who have been struck off the list of trip leaders were, in fact, leading trips long before most of the present Committee had ever been in a cave. Sic transit gloria.

Should S.U.S.S., however, maintain a continuity of existence, one thing is clear -- the whole of the present troubles, together with its comic actors, will contribute another memorable chapter to the annals of Australian speleology.

Glen Chandler.

EXCERPT FROM AN OLD NEWSLETTER

"The former speleologist in his or her growing maturity begins to see either speleology as a manifestation of psychologically immature minds, (that is speleology as practised by S.U.S.S.), or, as a group of unsociable eccentrics."

Vol.1 No.9 Nov. 1961.

WHAT HAVE WE GOT

Sir,

There is little to be said for the performance of various members during the last two General Meetings. It is in the best S.U.S.S. tradition to have periodic conflicts between the opposing elements in the Society; however when people resort to the pathetic character attacks of recent times it is no wonder that long standing members are induced to leave the group and join more stable and satisfying clubs.

The internal conflict present at this period coincides beautifully with a time when everybody seems to regard us as fair bait. A prime example was the editorial which appeared in a society's recent journal, questioning the function and use of S.U.S.S. in no uncertain terms. Oh yes! we obtained our full retractions on that one but did this change the official view? I doubt it.

Our relations with tourist areas is another aspect which seems to be downgrading as time goes on.

It is of course easy to ignore all these signs and carry on blithely without giving a hang for what these other people might say. After all, they are only ignorant hicks who aren't important to us and who are only jealous of what we've got.

A question which it might be of interest for all of us to ask is:- "What have we got?" It is so good.

It may be overly pessimistic to say this but my own answer at

would be "not much"; furthermore unless we can unite and act constructively instead of destructively the indications are that S.U.S.S. as a worthwhile society could pretty soon collapse.

Erik Halbert.

THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN [A Tale For Tiny Troggs]

Sir,

Once upon a time there was a happy little caving club. At the head of the club was the wise old President, who, together with six wise and virtuous councillors, formed the Council of Seven, which saw to the affairs of the club.

The members of the club worked harmoniously together, happy and contented, some to explore the fairylands beneath the surface of the earth, some to sample magic potions whilst sitting in the sun. Each person was happy, each doing that which he liked best.

One day, a wicked little elf came to the Council of Seven.

"O wise elders of this happy little caving club: know you not that in the Halls of the Crooked Gnomes it is said that your happy band are Irresponsible, that they lack keenness and devotion to caving?"

Unfortunately, the Council did not realise that the W.L.E. spoke only from motives of jealousy, for jealous he was of the prestige and happiness of the happy little caving club. He was, in fact, one of the Crooked Gnomes.

Now it chanced that at that time in the club there were two members good and true, who devoted were to a wondrous potion prepared by the old wizard Resch. These two had offended two of the wise and virtuous members of the Council, who, being less wise and more virtuous than the others, felt that if they did not like magic potions, no one else should either. Between themselves they said:

"Let us take these two potion loving goats, and make of them scapes. Thus shall we appease the wrath of the Crooked Gnomes, well as removing those with whom we see not eye to eye."

Thereupon, the two less wise and more virtuous members of the Council thought of Charges, that might be brought against the two scapes. That none might deny the truth of the Charges, one was accused of breathing the air, the other of being Charged with Something. In truth, none could deny their guilt in these things.

There were those of the happy little caving club who suggested that such accusations would destroy the club, but by logic strange and devious, learned perhaps from the Crooked Gnomes, it was given forth that only those who attempted to dismiss the charges were harming the club.

Therefore, the club decreed that any who were not just like the

two less wise and more virtuous members, who did not spend all possible time underground, or who drank magic potions, or who were the most senior members on trips, or who breathed the air, or who were charged with something, should be sealed forever from the bowels of the earth.

The reason why such a wise and happy club could make such an unwise decision was that the Council of Seven had become so wise that their decisions could no longer be changed by the rest of the club put together, which removed any flexibility in the attitudes of the club, since its attitudes became those of the less wise and more virtuous members of the Council. Soon, owing to the rigid enforcement of the Seven Decrees, the Council was all that remained of the club, and shortly nothing remained of the Council but the purest Virtue.

Michael Morris.

IS S.U.S.S. STAGGERING ?

Sir,

It would appear that the recent rift in the ranks of S.U.S.S. has been brought about by two factors. Firstly the decision to censure two members on the basis of evidence which was either biased or pure hearsay and secondly the somewhat nebulous state of our financial backing -- I say nebulous as I am still unable to whether or not we have any funds, and if we do, exactly how much.

Of the former, I feel that action such as this only helps to widen the gap between the two sides of S.U.S.S. After recent events there can be no doubt in any member's mind that S.U.S.S. is akin to a federal parliament -- it consists of two parties with two different and often conflicting aims. It is a speleological society and as such indulges in serious caving activities but it is also a University society and as such is an outlet for students; a way of freeing oneself from the grind of study in the company of others who like to get outdoors and away from the restrictions of city life occasionally. S.U.S.S. always has had these opposing factions and probably always will. This situation will continue until such time as both sides fully understand and agree in principle, that the society exists for the fulfilment of both aims.

Of the latter, we are in a mess. Funds have been spent on items which doubtless are of benefit to the Society but which we just cannot afford. Debts have been incurred on credit for which no allowance is made until bills are presented and the elected powers in these matters have gone ahead spending as if there are no outstanding debts. I would even go so far as to suggest that in the accounts as presented to the Society no allowance is made for outstanding cheques. The basic principle of accounting is that financial statements show a fair and accurate picture of the financial position. Both the planning of expenditure and the method of accounting in S.U.S.S. leave much to be desired and while the present position is allowed to continue the Society will hover on the brink of deregistration as a University Society.

Malcolm Watson.

This Newsletter has been held up as three further contributions were expected but did not eventuate.

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* * GENERAL MEETING * *
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* * The 65th General Meeting of the Sydney University * *
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* * Speleological Society will be held at 7.30p.m. in * *
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* * the top floor lecture room of the Geography Bldg., * *
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* * University of Sydney, on Thurs. 6th October, 1966. * *
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* * This will be the last meeting until December so * *
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* * make a date to be there. * *
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AN ADDENDUM

Sir,

After a detailed examination of the current finances and formulation of a budget for the remainder of the Financial Year I want to change my plea of guarded optimism to one of guarded pessimism. The Newsletter is now most worthwhile, and to continue its present high standard up to the next April issue will involve \$50. We will try to find it or else economise in various ways. The current financial situation has largely been brought about by an underestimation of the costs which were to be incurred in our current boom.

Glenn Hunt.

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