

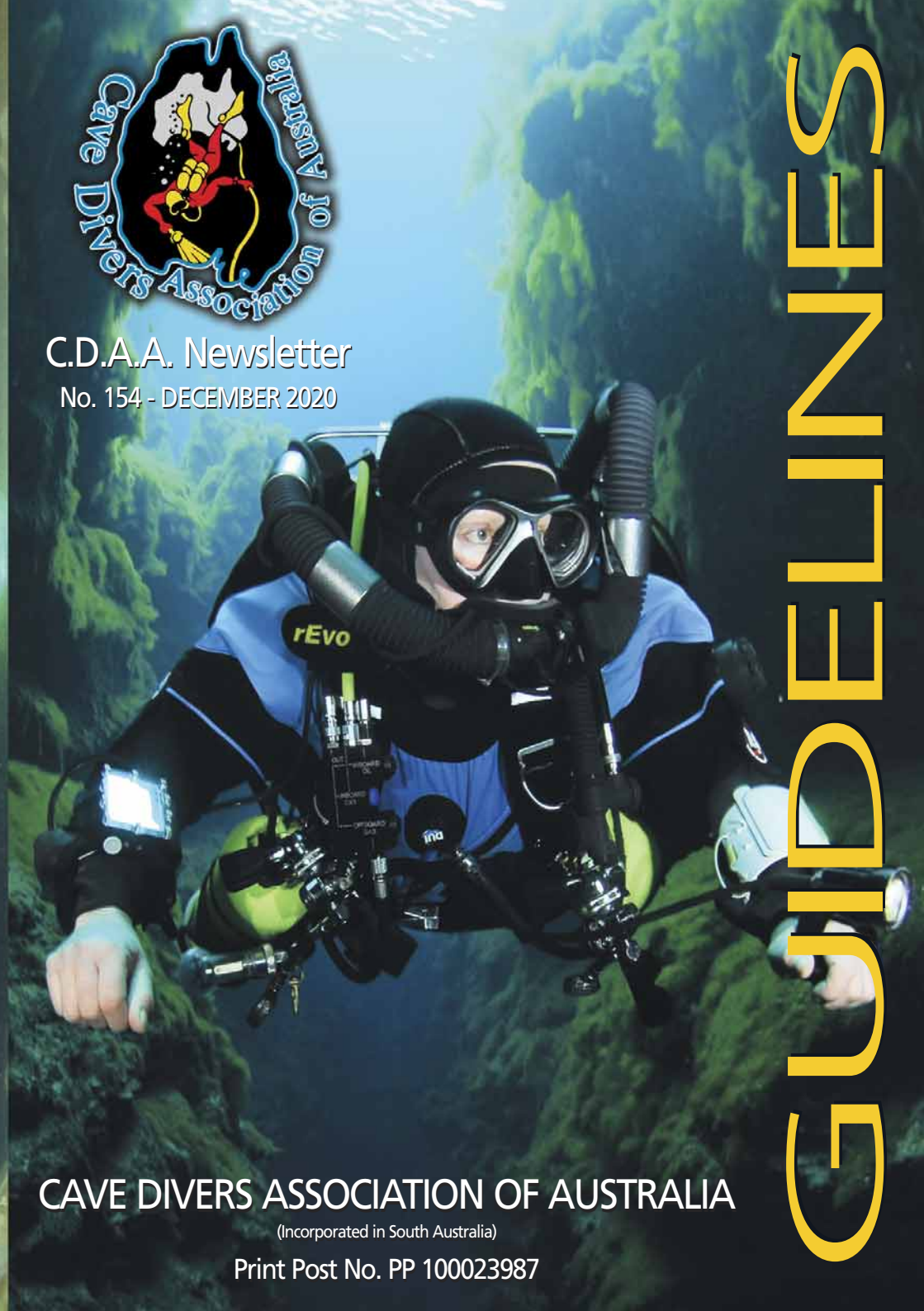


Gary Barday



C.D.A.A. Newsletter

No. 154 - DECEMBER 2020



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CAVE DIVERS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

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Photo by Liz Rogers

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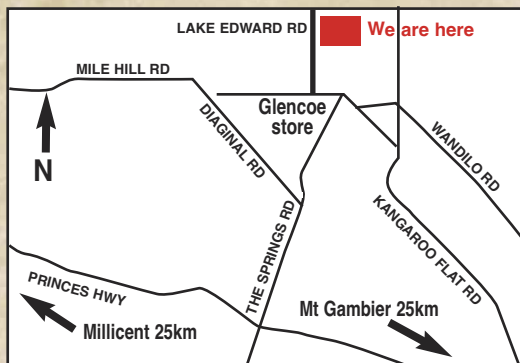
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PUBLICATIONS REPORT

MEGGAN ANDERSON



Hello there members

Well here we are at the end of 2020. This time last year we had no idea what was coming. I didn't even know what Zoom was.

I recently wrote an annual report which is on the AGM section of the website, which outlines what goals my portfolio achieved this year and what the plans are for 2021. Currently I am trying to ensure all site information is up to date on the website, including COVID19 arrangements. Another recent development is that there will be a reduction in international visitor permit fees, which will be reflected soon in the regulations.

As I come to the end of another year, it means it's time to thank people. Firstly to Brendan, Rowan and Dave for all your help throughout the year. I'd also like to thank the members with IT skills helping me with the web upgrade project (affectionately known as "The Nerd Herd"). I cannot do this job on my own so I appreciate everyone's expertise and support. To all our other volunteers, thank you for your help this year, a lot of you were helping others to dive when you couldn't dive yourselves. To the rest of the National Committee, well we survived. The job can be bloody hard sometimes but considering the challenges I think we came out alright. Congratulations and also welcome to our new Standards Director Tim Featonby. I'd also like to congratulate Linda Claridge and Gary Barclay on their life memberships, a well deserved achievement that recognises all you have done for the association.

I'd also like to thank my dive buddies who kept me in the water this year. I've battled with a shoulder injury for months and they happily helped lift my tanks and helped me gear up if I couldn't reach certain spots. I had to stop doing a few activities this year and without their support I would not have been able to dive. Being in the water was the one time where I didn't experience much pain and had better movement than on land. I am pleased to say after months of stretch band exercises, there has been significant improvement - I was lifting a full dive tub overhead in my garage the other day and realised that was not something I could do 3 months ago.

And finally Guidelines. What I've learnt with Guidelines is that it's not that people don't want to contribute, they just need ideas. Yes there are some members who regularly come up with articles on their own. But some need to be prodded (or nagged). So thank you to those who responded to my "Hey how you going, just wondering, how would you feel writing about this.....". I hope you've enjoyed the issues this year because it was really important to me that while members were restricted from cave diving they could still feel some form of connection to the sport.

I hope you all have a great festive season and good tidings into 2021. It looks like borders would have reopened by the time you read this, please be safe, take it slow and enjoy the comeback..

Take care, Meg

Meggan Anderson #4942 | Publications and Records Director
M: 0415 291 904 | E: publications@cavedivers.com.au

Articles for Guidelines March 2021 - Deadline is Feb. 15th

- Send articles and jpeg images by email to guidelines@cavedivers.com.au

Did you know?

You can opt for an electronic copy of Guidelines rather than a paper copy. Simply login to your CDAA online account, select the dropdown menu under the My Records tab and click on Update My Details. Handy for those who have multiple CDAA members in their household or for those wanting to do their bit for the environment!

NATIONAL COMMITTEE UPDATE

DECEMBER 2020

The last three months seem to have flown by! It's been a busy time for members of the National Committee - with the AGM, Annual Directors reports, financial audits, budgets, insurance renewals and various other administrative tasks all falling within this quarter.

As such, I will keep this update brief, as many of these matters are discussed in more detail in this addition of Guidelines as well as the Annual Directors Reports. I encourage all members to log in to the CDAA website and read each Director's reports if you have not already done so, as these provide a lot of insight into what has happened behind the scenes over the last 12-months.

On a positive front, it appears that the restrictions that have limited interstate travel for much of this year are finally easing and no doubt this has many members chomping at the bit to get over to cave-country in the coming weeks and months.

As a result, the upcoming Christmas and New Year holiday period will be very busy around Mount Gambier. With recent changes to a number of site access arrangements, I ask that you re-familiarise yourself with current booking processes and site-access protocols prior to turning up on site. I also request that our members exercise courtesy, respect and patience when dealing with booking officers, land managers and other members during this busy time.

On a related note, many of our non-South Australian members may not have dived as frequently (or at all) in recent months due to various state-specific restrictions. If this applies to you,

please make sure that that you have checked all your equipment thoroughly and completed a few "shake out" dives in a non-overhead environment before you enter the caves. We all get a bit rusty after time away from cave diving, so please be conservative and don't rush into it – the caves aren't going anywhere.

Have a fantastic Christmas, stay safe, and have fun!

Peter Wolf
CDAA National Director



*On behalf of the
National Committee*



Mary-Anne Mcleod,
Business Director



Kelvyn Ball,
Site Director



Tim Featonby,
Standards Director



Meggan Anderson,
Publications and
Records Director

SITE REPORT

KELVYN BALL



23 Years ago, I met this couple (when I was the world's best cray basher) and I thought a deep dive was 10m. Gary and Linda introduced me into cave diving and since then we have had a great connection with family/friendship including Gary and Linda teaching all 5 of our children to dive. The latest, this year. We have enjoyed seeing them instruct many courses over the years in Mount Gambier and the Nullabor. Gary and Linda have got me through from basic cave right into technical diving. It is always a great adventure and I look forward to many more adventures. Big congratulations to you both on your life memberships.

Thank you goes out to Tim and Ryan for applying for standard's role. It is one thing to sit on the fence and comment and another to actually step up and have a go. Only one position was avail-

able and congrats to Tim on his appointment. Looking forward to working with you. One of the first things we will be working on together is how we are going to manage where we are going to do courses. Would be appreciated if instructors could let Tim or I know of any ideas on how we can run courses without them having to pay CTO Licences?

NSW Rep position is now filled by Matthew Pridham. Thank you Matt.

Once COVID19 restrictions are lifted we are planning for the State Reps to host a night and a couple of the Directors will come along to join in. Short and sweet, until we all get diving together again. Cheers!

Kelvyn Ball
Cheers Kelvyn Ball – Site Director

STANDARDS REPORT

TIM FEATONBY



Gday fellow stygobionts, I would like to thank those members that voted for me and look forward to giving back to the CDAA and all members over the next few years as Standards Director. It appears that things are opening up as the year comes towards the close and hopefully it keeps getting better for the new year.

Things are not back to normal yet, and as such I would ask everyone to double check that you are up to date with the latest rules, regulations and booking requirements. They are in place not, to hinder or stifle cave diving in any way. Rather, they are in place to protect you, the land owners, and the caves them-

selves, so that we and those that come after us can continue to enjoy the beauty of diving these wonderful sites.

Simply put, please do the right thing and don't jeopardise our sport by irresponsible or selfish behaviour.

Over the next few months we are looking at getting back into offering vertical access training for our members and for those who are around I am always up for chatting about karst geology and how the caves form. Most importantly enjoy your diving.

Tim Featonby #3372
Standards Director



As 2020 comes to a close, it is great news that the SA borders will be opening up, allowing our Victorian members to finally dive the Mount Gambier caves again and providing easier access for QLD, NSW & ACT.

Due to travel restrictions this year we held a virtual AGM, thanks to all those that attended. Whilst not ideal, this format did allow the opportunity for members around Australia to easily attend, we even had a member joining us from a hotel in Sth East Asia. Unfortunately, a few members, including myself, had connections issues, thanks for your patience and understanding.

During the AGM I presented a summary of the 2020 results and the 2021 budgets. For those unable to attend, please refer to the AGM 2020 section of the member library for my annual report and the financials. If you have any questions or feedback, please get in contact.

The voting for the AGM was again conducted

electronically. I'm pleased to see voter participation increased from 36% last year, to approx. 40% in 2020. For next year, I will be reviewing the provider as prices have increased, and there are now more options to consider as organisations continue to move towards digital voting alternatives.

Congratulations to Tim Featonby who was elected as Standards Director. Thanks to Ryan Duchatel who also nominated for the position, keen to commit his time and efforts for the CDAA. We also welcome two new life members: Linda Claridge and Gary Barclay – Congratulations to you both, and all you've committed over the years.

I wish everyone a Merry Xmas and look forward to seeing more divers in the water in 2021.

Mary-Anne McLeod #5011
Business Director

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Australian Cave Diving in the Year of Our Lord 2020

aka The Year of COVID-19 - SA & NSW

By Meg Anderson (with contribution from Tim Featonby)

**Disclaimer – this article may be distressing for members on the Eastern seaboard.*

There is a line from a poem about COVID-19 (whose author is unknown) which was quoted a lot this year: "We are in the same storm, but not in the same boat." COVID-19 has impacted everyone in some way this year but in terms of cave divers, those living in some states were far better off than others. I thought it was important to document what has been a very strange year (you probably have an array of other feeling words you'd use to describe it). From time to time, members donate old Guidelines and I like to read them, as it takes me back to that time as there are some interesting

stories in old issues that give a snapshot of the history. I thought it was important to have some account of the happenings of this year as it may be interesting for someone to read and look back on in 20 years' time.

The majority of our members live in Victoria (roughly 286 but pre-COVID was over 300) with the second highest numbers being in SA (151 – yes the Vics dwarf us). The majority of our members therefore dive in Mount Gambier as it is smack bang at the halfway point between Adelaide and Melbourne. When the state borders first closed in

March, the CDAA decided to close sites because the National Committee pretty much had to figure out how things were going to work in such a WTF time – no one gave us a manual about how to run an association during a global pandemic.

South Australians were being discouraged from regional travel – I remember at Easter the messaging was "stay home." I'm an essential worker and never worked from home and driving to work in Adelaide was at times like driving

through a ghost town. In May CDAA sites started to re-open but as the borders remained closed it was mainly only members in SA and WA who benefited as they have caves in their states.

As an active cave diver living in South Australia, this has been my experience since May. Firstly, Tank Cave only allows 6 divers a day instead of 12 because of social distancing. I noticed that regular buddy groups seemed to be booking on every 4 – 6 weeks and we seemed to have some kind of a rotation going between buddy groups. You'd look at the bookings and go "oh it's that lot's turn this weekend." I can easily list who the "regulars" were in this rotation, sometimes there was an anomaly, such as a Queenslander once SA opened their borders to them. Very rarely were there people on the waitlist, on the odd weekend here and there the South Australians couldn't fill the 6 slots. A couple of times my group decided to mix it up and give Tank a miss, we did a sinkhole weekend once which was fun and I finally got round to doing some AC sections of Pines again. More often than not, you'd go down and only see the people you went down with. I noticed the drive there and back had fewer trucks and Grey Nomads. Mount Gambier definitely seemed quieter at times. We ate

out more because we wanted to help out the restaurants and we'd try round up as many people in town as we could for dinner. However the caves definitely benefitted from less traffic. The water was clearer and we experienced some brilliant conditions in a number of different sites. But at times I have "cave diving survivor's guilt." And yet every time I talk to a Victorian on the phone they say "don't feel bad, please go dive for me." If it makes anyone feel better, they closed the border to WA the day I was supposed to arrive in Olwogin. In the long run the association needs all its members and businesses would also benefit from borders reopening. I would urge members to support these businesses as much as they can right now and when borders reopen.

But what diving is happening in other states and is anyone running courses? In South Australia, Tim Payne has continued to run courses. In other states Joseph Bicanic has run courses and crossovers in WA and Tim Featonby in NSW. Some changes and modifications have had to be made for COVID-19 reasons, such as having exemptions for the number of different sites you have to dive in a course. Joseph Bicanic has written us a great account of what the situation has been in WA and it follows



Peter Williamson



Damian Bishop and Peter Williamson

this article. Tim Featonby is based in NSW has had a bit of interest in courses but not many eventuating. He has been running his courses in Burrinjuck Dam, as he says it is about the only thing worth doing in NSW and its pretty easy to get to. The dam can get to about 50m depth and is cold and dirty. There are some impressive thermoclines with 11 degrees C in some layers and an almost tropical 14 degrees C in others. The vis is highly variable and tends to be clear in thin



Damian Bishop

thermocline layers with some layers being up to 5m vis and others being 5cm. It takes a few trips to see the cave as you can only process part of the picture each trip depending on the clear layer depth if there is one. The cave can be accessed by boat, it is situated on the cliff face of a small island in the dam with the depth of the opening changing from being completely dry in bad droughts to generally 5-25m below water level depending on water levels in the dam. It is tri rated, and offers some opportunities for training but due to the temp and clarity this can be a bit of hit and miss. The cave is fairly large with a confusing series of fixed lines running around it. Tim says you wouldn't want to be doing a lost line drill in the cave as it is big, dark, dirty, and confusing. You really want to make sure you hold on to the line so he recommends that you are experienced at cave level. The penetration side is a small slot at the back of the cave which requires about a 50m jump to get to the next fixed line. This part of the cave is quite pretty and goes for quite a bit further than you would expect. The line jumps around a bit and there are a few poorly placed random lines in there that require careful negotiation and marking to ensure your exit is safe. Again vis is highly variable usually better than the cave part and often only clear in about 1m layer. And COLD. All in all Tim says, it is a rare and beautiful, well decorated cave with lots of calcite speleothems and many very large columns in

Silurian highly fossiliferous steeply dipping fractured limestones. He advised it is well worth the visit but really does require someone to hold your hand to show you the ropes the first time and is definitely not the place for things to go wrong.

To sum up, I have been extremely grateful that I still had cave diving this year. All my immediate family live overseas and I don't know when I'll see them again. While I wasn't in lockdown, COVID-19 did impact me in many other ways. The main people I socialised with were my cave diving friends and it's the community that got me through the year. I know a lot of you have missed cave diving and seeing your friends. I know a lot of you have had the worst year of your lives. My hope for 2021 is that the storm subsides and we all manage to get our boats into the same harbour. Just keep yours 1.5m away from me please. I've come to like my space.

**Photographed in Kilsby's
by Meggan Anderson.**

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Diving and Surviving through Covid in Western Australia

By Joseph Bicanic

Without a doubt 2020 will be a year many of us would like to see in the rear view mirror. However some States have been less impacted than others. Like the rest of the country Western Australia had strict travel restrictions in the earlier stages of Covid with both interstate and intrastate restrictions in place but it has been almost business as usual (albeit within the state) since June. By the end of October there will have been at least six separate trips ex-Perth to the Nullarbor. With Dive Travel being rather limited the Nullarbor has become a bit more popular than usual with several of us having been out for a third trip within four months.

Compared to most of Aus, we in the west had a very short restrictions period and even during the restrictions I had been granted a G2G (Good to Go) pass so as to cross into the Southern Region (the region next to the greater Perth area).

This allowed me access to the local Dams and Lakes we use for Basic Cave Courses and Technical Diving Courses. I was able to teach some one on one Tech Courses (within the C-19 one on one guidelines) during this period and then not long after that the restrictions were removed and it was (almost) business as usual here in the West.

In June most intrastate restrictions were lifted which meant it was Cave Training and Nullarbor time. It did not take long to get a crew together for a Weebubbie / Olwolgin trip in July. Weebubbie, in my opinion is the most picturesque of our systems on the Nullarbor and I could not wait to get out there. Like on all Nullarbor trips we packed everything (and then some) due to the remoteness of the location.



What we did not anticipate was the difficulty in buying fuel and the opening hours (or lack thereof) at the roadhouses. With almost no tourists passing through the Roadhouses had very few customers to serve. By June the greater

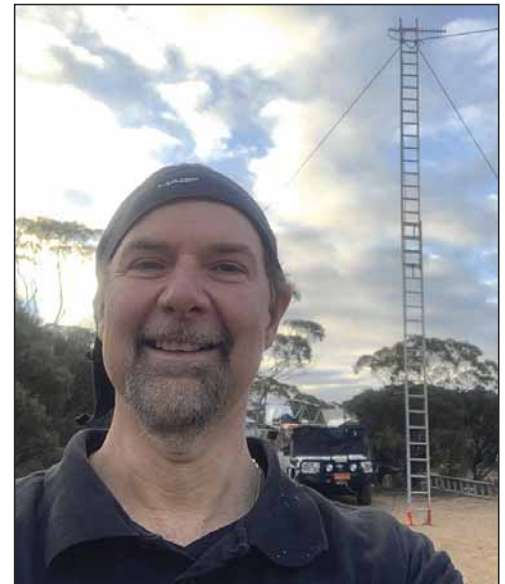
Perth area, as well as most of the western coastal area, were almost back to pre-Covid living. However, seeing the lack of tourist traffic on the Eyre highway was a bit of a shock.

Balladonia Roadhouse was the first eye opener. We coincidentally arrived during an "OPEN" period. The staff were more comfortable serving patrons travelling from west to east (towards the border) rather than from the east (from interstate) as they were concerned about the potential of Covid from interstate. The usually busy hotel was empty. It was like a ghost town. Next stop was Cocklebiddy Roadhouse. Another ghost town. We chatted to the staff about the lack of tourist trade. They do not know how long their doors can remain open. Cocklebiddy was still operating all day but Madura

was on a schedule. Eucla was also on a schedule (two hours in the morning and afternoon) however Eucla had no unleaded fuel. Most of us were on Diesel so there was not too much of a fuel issue. Gerard and Helaina ventured off to Border Village (SA side of the border) to buy unleaded. It was real easy crossing into SA and then they saw the line to get back to WA. With the permission of the Border Authorities they were able to buy fuel and cross back into WA. How things have changed in 2020! While at Weebubbie several Divers completed CDAA and TDI courses and once the training was over it was time for some fun. Weebubbie is a bit of a favourite for me as it has something for everyone with its impressive lake and sinkhole, crystal clear water, reasonable depth as well as the logistics of getting to the waters edge. Like on most trips we had an A Frame to lower gear to the mouth of the cave and from there run a Flying Fox to the last pitch. Essentially there is only 50'ish meters of carrying gear from the end of the Flying Fox to the waters edge. I do love my Flying Fox.

During the Weebubbie portion of the trip we went for a day trip out to Abrakurrie Cave. The following is an extract about Abrakurrie Cave from <https://www.showcaves.com/english/au/caves/Abrakurrie.html>

"Abrakurrie Cave is mentioned to contain the longest (?) cave chamber on the southern hemisphere. A rather strange superlative, as there is no chamber at all. The cave is a single huge passage with an S shape, and what they talk of is the far



Me and my very own Telstra Tower.



Pre-Dive Planning at the mobile classroom Before Diving Tommys (Valdi, Joseph, Chris, Elijah and Paul).



Dave's car anchoring the Flying Fox at Pannikin Plains. I've Never camped so close to an entry before.

end of the S. Some talk of a 335 by 45m big chamber, others tell the cave is 365m long. On the other hand, it is not listed by the Geology and Geography Section of the National Speleological Society. However you may interpret this, what remains is a beautiful huge cavern, a single passage with no technical difficulty".

Abrakurrie is impressive and well worth the effort. I've done the day trip several times from Weebubbie however this was the first time we had seen Wombats bolting across the tracks and there are a lot more burrows then I've ever seen before. According to Management at Cocklebiddy Roadhouse, Wombats are sighted far more often along the highway.

Back at camp it was time for a fire and dinner as well as uploading the obligatory pic's to social media. Mobile reception (Telstra only) is minimal to average at best at Weebubbie however I had recently installed a Cell-Fi Cellular Phone Signal booster and added a Yagi Directional antenna. Reception went from 2-3 bars of 3G to 3 bars of 4G with a 45mbps download speed.

After five days of Diving we packed up, some went home and some of us headed off to Olwogin. While out there I wanted to see if my Cell-Fi / Yagi Antenna would get a signal. We first put up my six meter ladder. We braced it to a tree for stability but the antenna was not high enough. Next Craig came up with the idea of attaching the antenna to

my twelve meter ladder. It was a real team effort raising our own little communications tower. We had three guide ropes tensioning the ladder and anxiously awaited a signal. The antenna was aimed at the Madura Telstra Tower but still nothing. We left it up over night and by the morning some of us had emails, texts and the like on our connected devices. There was hope with a little tweaking we may get better signal. After a few more attempts at changing the direction of the antenna a few degrees, Andrew checked the topography using HEMA Maps. As it turns out the escarpment comes much closer to the coast and stopped the line of sight required for the antenna to make a good connection. It was still fun. Damien sent up a Wi-Fi dongle on a drone and those connected were able to access some Wi-Fi (albeit a tad slow). And for those wondering, our group were all happy to be without social media whilst at Olwogin but it was interesting to see what was possible.

We enjoyed another 5 days exploring the site and then it was off home. Again the road was lonely with the lack of tourists.

It was less than 2 months on and I had another group heading out to Tommy Grahams and Pannikin Plains in September. Whilst at Tommys several students completed CDAA and TDI Courses

then it was time for some fun dives. Tommys has a lot to offer and 5 days allows a good amount of time for exploration of the first and second sump. After Tommys I said goodbye to the first group of Divers and hello to the next group at Pannikin Plains. Having never dived Pannikins I had no idea what to expect. What an absolute ripper of a site and the 22 degree water temperature was very pleasant. On our first day we did a scooter run to Concorde Landing and had a quick look at sump two. Day two we dived sump two and followed the line to the marker stating "2016 End of the line" (which is no longer the end of the line). Craig pushed ahead for a bit as he was on Side Mount CCR (the better option this far back in the system). I'm looking forward to going back to Pannikins but it won't be after a week of teaching and diving at Tommys.

A few of us are again about to head out to Olwogin. Our group will be arriving at Olwogin a matter of days after another group is leaving (albeit they are staying on the Roe Plains for some dry caving). A third group will be on a Cocklebiddy / Murra / Tommys trip. Three groups on three permits at different sites on the same weekend.

C-19 has certainly put the brakes on International Dive Travel. However Divers are looking at alterna-

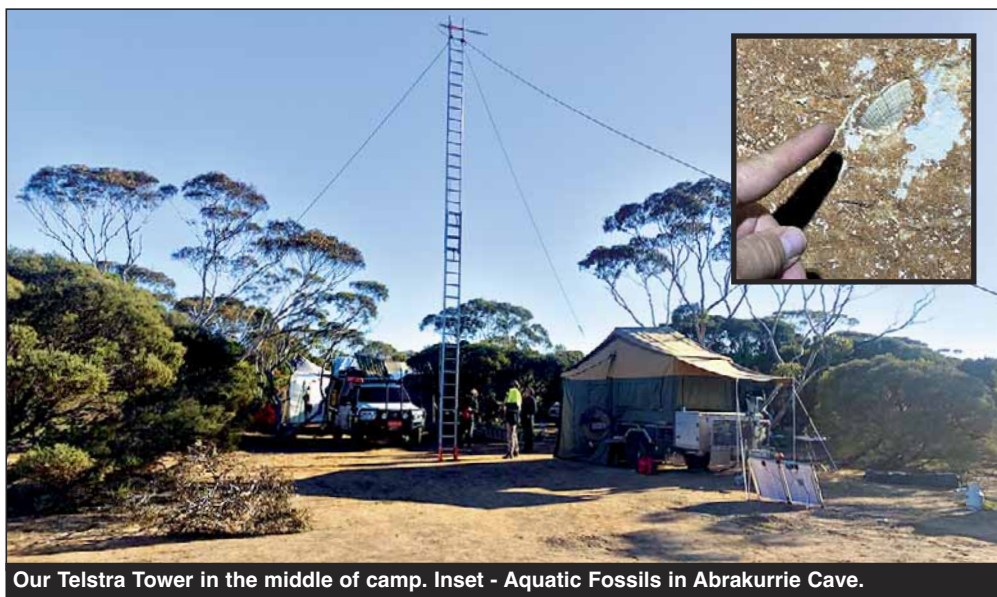


Chris and Jack ready to play "Pass the Parcel" in Tommy's with made to spec duffel bags.



Cave Course done and dusted. Time for Chris, Paul, Elijah and Joseph to do some exploration.

tive Dive Destinations and opportunities. From my perspective there seems to have been a reasonable increase in the number of Cave Diving trips to the Nullarbor since June as well as an increase in Cave Diving Courses. In saying that there have been no Interstate trips to the Nullarbor so the overall visitation is probably the same. I'm looking



forward to the state borders opening up and having more Aussies west of Eucla come back out to the Nullarbor and spend some money at the Roadhouses we so desperately need to stay open.

What will be interesting to see is if this surge in our sport continues after WA opens up the borders and even more so when International travel commences.



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My CDAA Crossover Experience

By Hiro Yoshida #5353

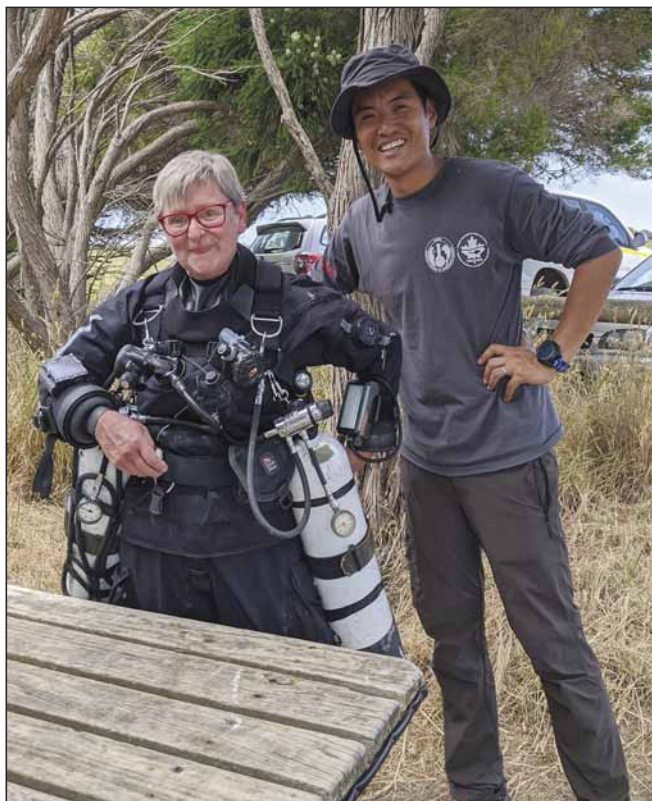
Part of what I've enjoyed most throughout my diving career is that there is always something new to learn and other techniques to observe. I do admit that when I enquired about cave diving in Australia, part of me said "NO" to the required crossover and felt "Why can't I just go diving." However my cave diving experience comes from overseas and I had not thought too much about how caves are managed here in Australia.

A complex part of the cave diving in Australia is that access could be on private property or government land. When I was living in Thailand and cave diving there, it was easy. You made a payment to

the guy standing at the park entrance and then you're all ready to go. Mexico is pretty much the same and you need the local dive guide to take you out to the non-tourist caves once they're familiar with your skill level.

The crossover was done over two days. Before the trip, I had to organise the necessary paperwork and the CDAA instructor inducted me around the website portal that manages the cave sites. Through the course, I got to know more about why the CDAA was formed and how it is managed. It's important to understand the procedures at the end of the day so that we all can dive safely and protect the cave diving community from losing access to the sites. After all, this is the sport we love to do.

I was lucky to buddy up with another keen diver from NSW. It was a 2 to 1 ratio, so a small group setting and we spent time discussing the gear configurations and techniques. I learnt to cave dive in Thailand while my buddy learnt in the USA. We did our crossover with a very experienced Australian cave instructor so there was a mixture of techniques and configurations between us but it was nice to see another style that



Hiro with CDAA instructor Linda Claridge during his crossover



Hiro and Sandra Yoshida diving in Song Hong Cave, Thailand.

is not only influenced by the 'popular style' but had its own practical reasons.

It was refreshing to do some of the cave diving skill sets. Just like anything else practise makes you more confident. I get giggles when I hear "zero vis, sharing air source and exit by following the guideline in a single profile." It is the nightmare situation for the diver to encounter in real life but for training, it's a very fun exercise for me. After demonstrating your general competency in cave diving skills and knowledge then your crossover is complete. The instructor is not out there to fail you or retrain you to be cave diver. It's more of an induction into the Australian style of cave diving and eases you into the community of cave enthusiasts so you can share your common interest joyfully and respectfully.

I will never see clothes pegs in the same way again. This was also an interesting difference from overseas. Some Australian cave divers use clothes pegs on the guidelines to mark their way. Now that I'm a CDAA cave diver, I will have to find my own unique clothes pegs to make my mark!

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CONGRATULATIONS GARY BARCLAY & LINDA CLARIDGE



LIFE MEMBERS - 2020

2020 POST-(APOCAPLYPTIC) AGM UPDATE

By Peter Wolf

"Challenging" and "unprecedented" are terms that are often used to describe the year that has been 2020. To maintain some level of normalcy, we've all had to reassess our circumstances and find ways to adapt, both in everyday life, as well as an organisation.

Traditionally, the CDAA's Annual AGM and symposium, held in Mount Gambier, is the highlight of the year. Every year the CDAA invites and hosts high-profile international guest speakers, and well as a variety of Australian-based guest speakers, to present to our members. We run the CDAA cave rescue SROP training program and other workshop events. For CDAA members, the AGM and symposium weekend provides an opportunity to come together to go diving, socialise, tell stories, go-out for meals, and celebrate everything cave-diving related.

Alas, 2020 threw a spanner in the works. So, this year, we had to reassess and adapt.

For the first time ever, the CDAA successfully ran a "virtual" AGM. This took much planning and coordination, with the lion's share being tackled by CDAA Business Director, Mary-Anne McLeod. We would like to pass on our appreciation for everyone that made the effort to attend. As expected, there were some technical difficulties, with some members having issues logging in, or staying connected for the duration of the meeting. For the majority, however, the feedback we received has been positive, and that is welcome considering this was unfamiliar territory for us all. For members who were unable to attend the virtual AGM, I will provide a summary of the meeting, voting results, and any other business below.

ELECTIONS:

For the third year, CDAA voting was decided by electronic ballot. 250 votes were cast this year, with the voter turnout representing approximately 40% of eligible members.

This year two Director positions were up for re-election. These were the roles of Business Director and Standards Director.

Many-Anne McLeod ran unopposed for the role of Business and was successfully elected to her second term in the position.

Two members, Ryan Duchatel and Tim Featonby stood for the role of Standards, with Tim Featonby successfully elected to the position for the next two years.

Thank you to Ryan for throwing your hat in the ring, and congratulations to Mary-Anne and Tim.

We'd also like to express our gratitude for the hard work and dedication put in by outgoing Standards Director, Joseph Monks.

LIFE MEMBERSHIP NOMINATIONS:

This year we had two nominations for Life Membership - Gary Barclay and Linda Claridge. As long-time CDAA Instructors, and both former committee members, Gary and Linda are well known amongst the cave diving community. Accordingly, their considerable contributions to the CDAA over several decades were aptly

recognised with both Gary and Linda successfully awarded CDAA life membership by the members. Congratulations Gary and Linda!

PUBLIC OFFICER:

The committee has once again appointed Andrew Seifried to be the CDAA's Public Officer. Andrew has done an exceptional job chairing previous Annual General Meetings and representing the Association in his capacity as Public Officer. The committee thank him for his efforts, and we look forward to working with Andrew again over the next 12 months.

MEMBER MOTION:

CDAA Member Stephen Fordyce, seconded by Richard "Harry" Harris, submitted a motion thanking the National Committee for their efforts over the last year.

It is cliché, but being a CDAA Director is often a "thankless" role! So, to receive a motion of recognition for the hard work the Committee Members have put in from two such highly esteemed members is a real honour. Thanks Steve and Harry!

OTHER BUSINESS:

No formal submissions were received under "other business", however the chairman opened the floor for members to ask questions of committee members at the end of the AGM. This also led to us receiving a couple of follow up questions via email. I will summarise the topics discussed below, for the information of all members.

- Ground Penetrating Radar;

As announced previously, the CDAA has purchased a MALA Ground Penetrating Radar unit thanks to a generous bequest by past-member Peter Naujoks.

The GPR is available for use by CDAA members via application for a CDAA Science, Mapping and Research (SMR) Permit. The permit process

ensures that relevant controls are in place, such as site access approvals, and that the CDAA has access to the data derived from any research projects, so that all CDAA members and landowners may benefit from this information.

The National Committee have appointed CDAA member and Mount Gambier resident Mark Simpson as the GPR equipment officer. Mark has been familiarising himself with the unit over the last couple of months and will be in a position to assist members looking to use the unit for research purposes.

If members have a project in mind, wish to find out more about how to apply for an SMR permit, or have expertise in the use of GPR and would like to get involved, please email me at national@cavedivers.com.au

- CDAA Finances;

As most members are aware, the CDAA has amassed considerable savings over the preceding years. What the CDAA "should do" with these savings is a topic that often comes up in discussion amongst members.

Two years ago the National Committee began adjusting our Annual operating budget so that any forecast surplus derived from member fees and the like is re-allocated to areas that directly benefit the CDAA and its members, such as site improvements, site maintenance, safety and emergency response equipment, to offset site fees, promotional material, education, research, exploration and conservation initiatives. This ensures the benefit to the members is maximised, without compromising the CDAA's strong financial position.

With regard to the existing savings, the intention is to maintain the current position to ensure these savings are available for capital projects such as the upgrade of our online booking system and website (which is now due), and, when such an opportunity presents itself, the purchase of additional cave sites.

- CDAA Cross-over Program;

The CDAA cross-over program ensures that cave divers certified by other agencies, who wish to become members of the CDAA, are adequately experienced, equipped, trained and familiar with local site conditions and access protocols.

The program is conducted by independently certified CDAA-endorsed instructors and is designed to be delivered as an orientation to CDAA membership and local diving conditions.

The cross-over program is an easy target for criticism. After all, the majority of applicants pass without major issues. I will concede that the program could be refined, and that on occasion, it may be perceived as "overkill".

The requirement for in-water assessment, in particular, is sometimes viewed with indignation by divers carrying "equivalent" certification under other agencies. However, the program has a very important purpose and is designed to protect the CDAA, landowners, and of course, the individual divers. The cross-over program ensures that, irrespective of where training was undertaken, or under which instructor, all divers granted access to CDAA-rated sites have been assessed to a uniform set of standards.

The need for an organisation that is positioned to assess cave divers under a uniform set of standards was highlighted in the investigation reports into the early cave diving fatalities, and is one of the core tenets upon which the CDAA was formed.

These days, cave diver training provided across the many different agencies and instructors is at a very high level. So, the question is sometimes asked – "is the cross-over program still required?". Without question, the answer is "Yes".

Cave environments are unique to different regions, and the training provided both nationally and internationally is not uniform. This means there is no way to measure "equivalency" between training and certification unless divers are assessed to the same set of standards,

under the same conditions. This is the role of the CDAA cross-over program.

In the 12-month period leading up to the COVID restrictions, after being assessed by an endorsed instructor, no less than 7 cross-over applicants were found not to be at the required standard commensurate to their "equivalent" level of certification.

This should highlight exactly how important the cross-over program is – as these results provide tangible evidence that cave diver training delivered by other instructors under different conditions, no matter how good, is not uniform, nor does it always prepare a certified cave diver to safely dive in conditions we experience locally. Belying this figure is also a percentage of divers who may not have been at the required level but were brought up to the appropriate standard as part of the cross-over program.

Where a diver does not meet the required standard, the applicant is typically offered CDAA membership at a lower-tier CDAA rating and directed to "polish up" certain skills, or gain additional experience prior to being re-assessed. Often the instructor will provide assistance to get the diver's skills up to the expected standard.

I note with disappointment that another cave diving association now facilitates site access to non-CDAA certified divers in the Mount Gambier region without having them undergo in-water assessment. The intention, I imagine, is to attract a greater number of cave divers who may have been certified elsewhere, to the region. I have grave fears that, for all the reasons mentioned above, that this arrangement will appeal to divers who are not at the required level, lack the relevant experience, or have not maintained currency, thereby allowing them to effectively by-pass the longstanding safety controls the CDAA has developed and maintained to protect landowners and members of the cave diving community.



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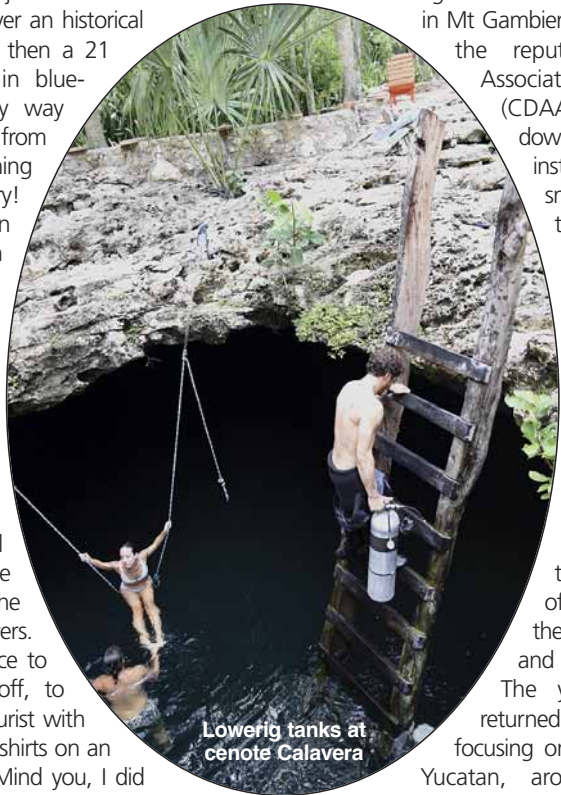
Quintana Roo, in the days of Coronavirus

Photos and story by Pierre Constant - www.calaolifestyle.com

As a cave diver, you do not come back from Yucatan and say: "I have done Mexico", boasting with pride and glory... It takes more than one time to fully appreciate the enormous potential the peninsula has to offer underground, and that means having not only the guts for it, but also the necessary training and experience to be able to do so. Rome was not made overnight, as they say.

My first time in Yucatan was back in 1976, shortly after a devastating 7.5 magnitude earthquake that had rocked Guatemala, just before it intended to invade Belize, over an historical border dispute. I was then a 21 year-old backpacker in blue-jeans hitch-hiking my way across Latin America from north to south. Learning Spanish was compulsory! Cave diving in Yucatan was virtually unknown in those days. I came back in 2017. Frankly speaking, that was a bit of a shock. Tourism and incredible development had taken hold of the so-called 'Riviera Maya'. I felt I had landed on the wrong planet. Playa del Carmen was just made for the Americans, the crazy rich and party lovers. It was obviously a place to be 'seen', to show off, to behave as a typical tourist with straw hats and flower shirts on an exotic beach holiday. Mind you, I did not come for that, and I would have run like a frightened rabbit, if not for a very noble goal: to become a TDI Full cave sidemount diver. I did it with

the very good, French run 'Phoceia Mexico'. However, least I forget that my initial cave diver training had been done in 2003 and 2007 in Mt Gambier, South Australia, with the reputable 'Cave Diving Association of Australia' (CDAA), the tough ones down under. I can see my instructor Linda Claridge's smile from here, after all these years. "You can die for that sort of mistake!", she said to me once... after an exercise poorly executed. Well, I guess it did some good, because I never forgot. With the 'Full cave Sidemount' certification in the pocket, I was ready for the real thing, dove a number of caves and cenotes on the east coast of Yucatan and produced some article. The year after (2018) I returned for more, this time focusing on the western side of Yucatan, around Merida, where cenotes and caves are noticeably deeper, in the 40 metres zone. That involves a conspicuous problem, in consideration of decompression and



Lowering tanks at cenote Calavera

compulsory gas mixes. I was not prepared for that. Year 2019 saw me again for a brief tour, driving around the peninsula, from Quintana Roo to Campeche and Merida, to have a look at different sites, archeological, paleontological, hidden and out of the way cenotes. Some old forgotten ruins were just awesome or impressive in their own right. Eventually, my belief was that I had seen enough of Yucatan. I did not imagine I would ever come back. With more than 6000 cenotes and still counting, that could not possibly and realistically be the end. Once infected with cave diving, I had additionally caught the virus of Yucatan caves. Out of the blue, I decided to return early September 2020, with some new training in mind, as if I needed a good excuse to fly back. No direct flight from Paris to Cancun this time, and I had to go through Mexico with a 'pain in the neck' transit at 3am, taking me to Cancun with Aeromexico at 10am. Despite coronavirus pandemic, Mexico had decided to keep its doors open for tourism, Yucatan state was closed nonetheless, but Quintana Roo was welcoming visitors.

Jonathan, my Full Cave instructor, was waiting for me. "You are my first student since the occurrence

of Covid-19....", he confessed. The face mask was mandatory in shops, supermarkets and restaurants, but on the street nobody really cared. Few were those who were actually wearing the 'cubre boca' - as it is called here- although it is well advertised. The use of the hydro-alcoholic gel was spread out anywhere anytime. My 'TDI Stage course' was to start the next morning for a period of 3 days. Jonathan took me driving to El Eden cenote, - 25 km south of Playa del Carmen - where the practical in-water training would be conducted. The place was deserted, except for the odd iguanas that had been missing the tourists for a few months, and a furry brown mammal that zoomed past in a hurry. As the name implies, the Stage course involves the use of a third tank, which is clipped on the left side of the body. The pre-requisite for this level is 'Full Cave Sidemount' certification. Jonathan first demonstrated the rigging of the third tank: a ring with a clip on the lower part of the tank, a clip with a bungy around the neck of the valve. Once in the water, on the edge of a wooden platform, sidemount tanks will be donned first. With a movement of the left hand between body and the side tank, one would then pull the bottom clip of the stage



Inside cenote Dreamgate

tank towards the back where it will be hooked to the 'D' ring of the harness at the rear left. The top clip of the neck valve is to be attached to the front D-ring of the harness's shoulder strap. Ideally, the stage tank lays below the sidemount tank, aligned with the body. The regulator hose of the stage is brought around the back of the head, and the reg itself is taken into the mouth from the right. One is supposed to breathe from the stage tank first. I am a bit apprehensive of turning into a Christmas tree, with so much to carry. Over time, I realize that the load of the stage tank creates a growing tension on the lower right side of the back, as one needs to compensate to keep the balance in the water. Off we submerge, for swim underwater around the cenote: "To get the feeling...". Jonathan demonstrates how to unclip the stage, to leave it on the bottom and put it back on again. A gesture of his hand invites me to do the same, without losing my buoyancy control! I must repeat the exercise twice. Finally, I am required to unclip the lower part of the stage, and to push the tank forward as we pass through a 'restriction' between the rocks. One hour has passed, in 25°C of water, I feel fine in my 5mm shorts, but the picnic lunch is appreciated! Back in the water for the afternoon training. This time, Jonathan places a line between two stumps of wood on the bottom, as the fish gaze in expectation: "Are we going to play a game?". In the cave

environment, we will get rid of the stage first at some point of the penetration, and must therefore clip the tank onto the line, "Preferably in the direction of the exit", so we know which way to go after retrieving the stage. Easy to understand, arguably not so obvious to perform. Either because it is hard to unclip the lower part, or the upper part if the bungy is too tight. Adjustments are a very personal task! The other variable is the neutral buoyancy factor, which is affected with or without the stage, right? So, after I drop the stage on the line, and close the tank valve, Jonathan mimics a gesture for me to continue along the line, as if going further into the cave. Then turn around, come back, retrieve the stage. The sudden change of weight makes me crash into the sediment and grasses of the bottom. "Remember about the buoyancy control!", he slams upon debriefing. Next morning, I have to do the exercise all over again. Visibility is good, few people around, the sun is shining, I perform the buoyancy well. Jonathan gives me the OK sign. More complicated it gets, when he wants to simulate the zero visibility conditions. For that matter, he hands me a 'black mask' underwater, which I have to put on my face (Not like Linda, who had surreptitiously placed a black mask on my face from behind, without advanced warning! Gosh... ;-)

Anyway, eyes closed with a hand on the line, I

progress towards the stage clipped to the line, feel it with one hand, grab the lower clip and attach it to your D-ring -still holding the line, right- then grab the other clip and attach it to the D-ring on the shoulder strap, - don't forget your buoyancy, good man- then open the stage valve, swing the reg hose over your helmet, and switch regs to breathe from your stage. I perform without stress or hurry and Jonathan gives me the thumbs up, when I take off the black mask ... some miracles are hard to explain!

Afternoon, we head for the cave environment. Into one of the tunnels with halocline, to provide you with an 'exquisite' blur vision, before emerging into clear water. Jonathan signals to drop the stage on the line at 100 bars. We proceed further in sidemount, until we reach 130 bars. As we turn around, I take the lead, retrieve the stage, crashing a bit on the bottom. The whole dive lasts for 76 minutes for a maximum depth of 15,4 metres. I do not get the thumbs up for this one, nobody's perfect... It rains heavily as we drive back to Playa del Carmen, Jonathan criticizes my swimming below the line at times. "People would judge you negatively for this", he claims. Back to the hotel, the room has not been made and the internet does not work...,

bummer, shall I call it Murphy's law? "Murphy was a cave diver", argues one famous instructor in Tulum.

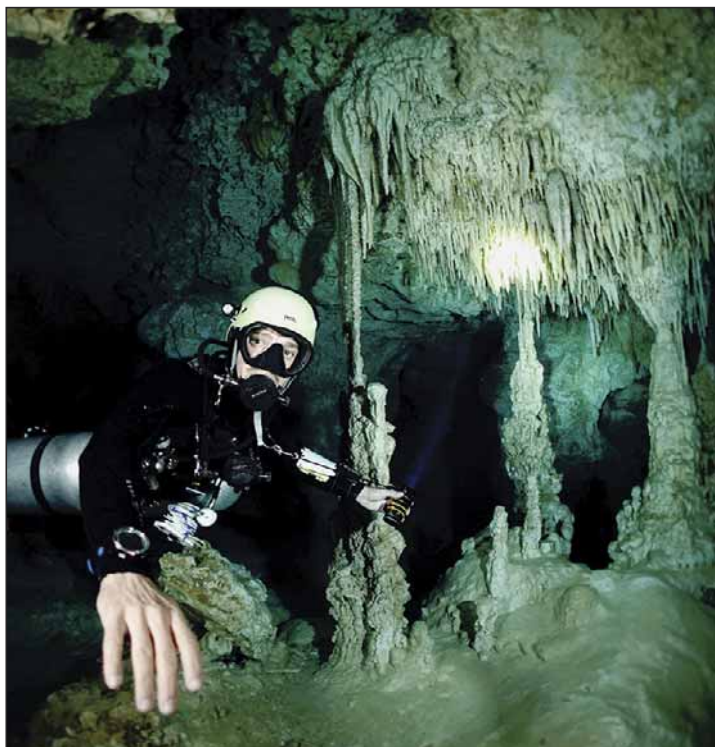
On the third day, we drive to the end of a pot-holed dirt road in the Yucatan jungle, with pools of water. Otoch Ha cenote is part of the Sac Aktun system, which has recently been discovered to be over 369Km in length, connecting 227 cenotes! The key to the main gate is obtained at a dive shop on the way, and I need to pay for the M\$200 (US\$10) entry fee. Surrounded by trees and vines, the cenote looks dry and rocky at first sight, but a ring of water circles the inner periphery under the overhang. The place is full of mosquitoes. A large reddish-brown tarantula with black legs slithers by as we don the equipment in silence. Covered with leaves, the old cement stairway snakes down to a wooden platform overlooking the water. "Careful, it is not very reliable", jokes Jonathan. The water surface is pasted with a white film of calcareous sediments. A crescent moon swim counterclockwise, before we duck underwater following the line. At the first T-junction we veer right after leaving cookies. 36 minutes into the dive, with 100 bars left in the stage, I wave the light and my instructor signals me to drop and clip the stage onto the line. Pushing further



Thibault through a tunnel, cenote Cristal



Attilio under a roof of pillars, Zacil-Ha



Diver next to exquisite pillars, Chan Hol



Attilio coming out of a restriction with the spool, Zacil-Ha

unto the cave on the side-mount tanks, we reach a second T-junction, water very clear. The tunnel is wide, with stalactites, stalagmites, sometimes straws on the ceiling, pillars everywhere. A beautiful cave that is. When I have 150 bars left in the sides, we are 55' into the dive. Jonathan reckons we have covered 800m to 1000 metres... Maximum depth is 13,9m. I lead the way back, retrieve the stage, adding air in the wing in anticipation and immediately rise like a balloon. A bit of a mess there, but I manage eventually. Back to the entrance for a safety stop, I almost empty the stage and have to switch to the side-mount tanks. Total dive time is 107 minutes, my longest cave dive ever. Jonathan is satisfied with my performance, a good thing indeed. Certification is granted, I have pushed my limits a bit. However, there is no way I can dive holding a camera with arms and strobes, carrying a stage! I will remain an extra week in Playa del Carmen to do cave diving in sidemount, for the sole purpose of underwater photography! Starting off with guide Attilio at Phocaea Mexico, we dive Zacil Ha and Carwash. Upon the occasion, Attilio's fun is to take me into the 'Rabbit Hole', a narrow snaky tunnel, which is rather challenging with the camera. Not the coolest thing for claustrophobic people. "How long is this

going to last?", you ponder, until we emerge into a nice tunnel fully decorated and the very picturesque 'Hall of tears'. That is for starters. The main connection from Zacil Ha to Carwash is black and dark, not very alluring. However, rising towards the lentil shaped window of Carwash cenote, in psychedelic apple-green colour, with dead logs and branches emerging from the bottom, is for sure a visual treat! On day two, guide Thibault leads me to Cristal /Naharon cenote, a lush green oasis of exotic palms and trees west of Tulum. We are almost first on site, if not for two stunning slim Mexican girls in suggestive bikinis, coming for a romantic morning swim. Nature has its unexpected surprises. A very dark black tunnel leads down to the halocline at 18m. We do two jumps to the left, to reach a well decorated chamber with stalactites, stalagmites and pillars. Interestingly, this cave was inhabited by prehistoric people. The skeleton of a 25-30 year old woman, 'The eve of Naharon' was discovered there in 2000, at a depth of 23m, and carbon dated at 13600 years. It has similarity with skeletal type of people from Southern Asia, rather than North Asia, and can be seen at the exciting 'Paleontological Museum of Dos Ojos, on the way back to Playa del Carmen.

Dreamgate is a semi-cenote in the jungle. The tanks are brought down on a rope to a wooden platform below the cliff. Seldom visited, with an entry fee of M\$380, it is a bit of a hidden gem, which no one will want to show you, unless you are a decent and responsible cave diver with serious consideration for the overhead environment. Rather shallow at an average depth of 4-5m, it is highly decorated all the way. It includes what seems to be a canyon in some parts. Halocline is found here and there. Towards the end of the tunnel, after two jumps to the left, it gets really narrow with restrictions. The maximum depth is 10 metres, for a total dive time of 70 minutes.

Day three takes me to the south-west of Tulum, on the road to Chetumal. Chan Hol cenote (Little hole in Maya) is right next to the road on a farm with manicured garden, separated from the highway traffic by an old stone wall. A flight of stairs leads to a small entrance, with poor if nil visibility underwater. Suddenly, you find yourself in an antechamber with a ledge on the right-hand side, displaying two Maya potteries and a few bones. The long winding corridor has pillars, arches, helictites (a distorted form of stalactite), on the ceiling and the usual stalactites. The cave floor is bedecked with deposits of



Otoch Ha cenote in the jungle



The oasis of
Minotauro cenote
from below



Stop sign at the
entrance of the
cave section,
Cristal

Background image:
Carwash cenote



Draperies and
stalactites,
Dos Pisos

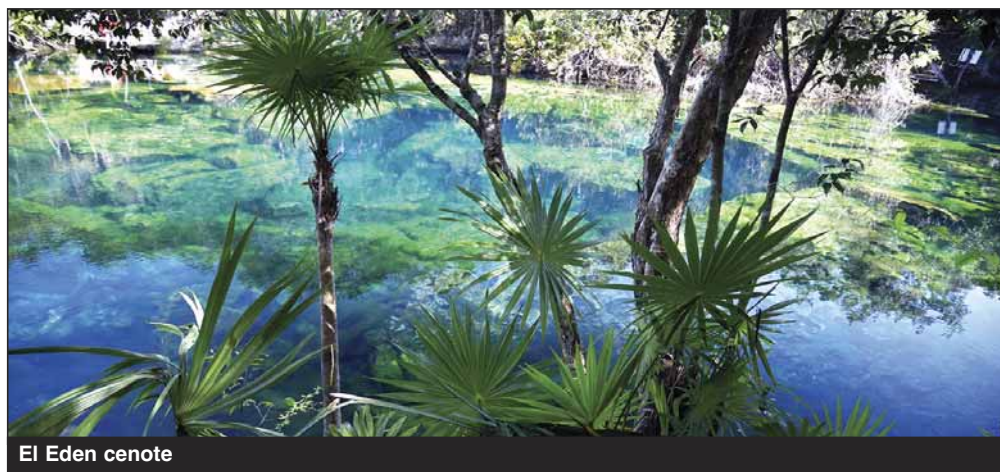


Maya potteries
and bones,
Chan Hol

white calcite flakes. As I swim through the tight, then wider passage, I imagine how Chan Hol was a refuge for prehistoric men over 10000 years ago, during the last ice age. Three Paleoamerican skeletons were discovered there in 2006-2009 and 2016. A cave diver had found remains of Chan Hol II in 2009 - 1240m south-west of the cave entrance at a depth of 8,5m -, then posted the photos on the social media in February 2012. Before the Mexican archeologists came in late March, the site was van-



A jump into a side tunnel of Dreamgate



El Eden cenote

dalized. The skull and bones were unscrupulously stolen, never to be found again. Fragments of a hip bone embedded in a stalagmite, revealed after analysis, those of a young male, dated 11311 years, one of the oldest ever from Meso-America. An archeologist from Dallas, Texas, claims that there is convincing proof and evidence that humans colonized the Americas before 14000 years ago.

Dos Pisos is a small cenote in the jungle on the 'El Campesino' ranch, involving a little 80m walk from the car park. A keyhole entrance is followed by a twisting passage to get to the main tunnel, highly scenic with a succession of chambers, and calcite flakes on the cave floor. The maximum depth is 6m, the dive lasts for 70 minutes. Rain catches up with us as we exit the place.

Day four sees us heading north in the direction of Coba. On the right side of the road is renowned cenote Calavera (the skull). A hefty fee of M\$400 is charged per cave diver, plus M\$200 for the right to take photos!! The guide needs to pay half price.



This semi-closed cenote is round, with a thick wooden ladder coming down straight into the water. One has to tie a piece of rope at the bottom of the stairs, in order to clip the tanks. Another string is fixed on the other side, to clip the camera. This popular place attracts lots of people: "Including porn stars on a special shooting tour!..." bursts Thibault with a cheerful laugh. That morning, a gorgeous Asian American girl in a yellow bikini, was posing for her boyfriend on the edge of the hole. My eyesight was a bit distorted after that, but I regained my composure when I hit the 26°C water. The plan for today will be T-right, T-left, T-right and jump left. The halocline is met at 14 metres in most of the winding tunnel, ending up in a canyon with crystal clear water below the halocline. 'Madona's passage' is particularly impressive with a giant tooth-like stalagmite right in the middle. Maximum depth 18,6m for a dive of 61 minutes.

Further away in the direction of Chetumal to the south-west, Hatzun Aktun is a wide-open cenote at the end of a dirt road. Virtually no one around. A few convenient steps, lead to the central pool of water, green and dirty, with a high temperature of 29°C. As soon as we dive underground it turns to 25°C, feeling suddenly cool! Dark, spongy and silty on the bottom, it clears up as we enter the large tunnel, rising up and down to a maximum depth of 21 metres. The cave is full of thin pillars in clusters, with lots of helictites on the ceiling. We hit the halocline at 20m. Thibault wants to proceed further into the narrowing passage, but I have reached my turning point already. On the way back, he lures me with a jump to the right, indicating 'for a little while' between his thumb and major finger. Soon after he dives into a rabbit hole in zigzag downhill and I wave my lamp frantically before he disappears around the corner! The rain comes down on us, as we make it back to the pick-up, just in time.

On my last day, the guide recommends Minotauro, at the end of a dirt road into the jungle. A turquoise blue pool of clear water with white sand and rocks, lays among palms, like in a Japanese botanical garden. Idyllic. We squeeze through a narrow passage underwater for sometime before it opens up into a larger tunnel with a bonanza of decorations. The speleothems, stalactites, stalagmites and pillars are yellowish brown to even dark red, evidence of strong organic tannin coloration. Some stalactites display an elephant foot, with nothing underneath

for support. Strikingly, a lot of big stalagmites and stalactites are tilted or lay broken on the cave floor. Proof of a definite earthquake in the past. A whole block of stalactites has even collapsed from the roof, a couple of tons worth! Unusual maybe, but considering that the Caribbean Plate is in subduction under the Yucatan peninsula, that is not a surprise. Referring to the Greek legend, the name of Minotauro stands for the fact that the cave is a real maze, with ramifications everywhere. Max depth 13,2m, for a dive of 67 minutes.

Our last dive took place north-east of Playa in the direction of Pto. Morelos. A cenote in the forest, String of Pearls has an archway type of cave opening, with very shallow water for the first 30 metres or so. A curtain of fibrous roots hangs down from the ceiling like 'rasta' plaits. Bats come in and out of the cave as we enter, knee deep, lugging tanks further in. There are swarms of mosquitoes to eat in the surrounding jungle. Penetrating a narrow passage, the cave floor suddenly drops to 11 metres before rising up again. Unexpectedly, the camera battery dies on me shortly after. I'll have to enjoy the scenery with my eyes only. The cave is very pretty. Lots of calcite crystals cover stalagmites and stalactites, as if budding like desert flowers in pinkish white colour. A jump to the left swallows us into a tight tunnel, where the halocline is present towards the end. A site I'll remember, with a pinch in the guts, since I could not take any digital memories. As we drive back to Playa, after a full day, Thibault asks me: "So, you are off to Paris tomorrow?" "Not quite, I'll take a day off, then I'll go to Tulum". "A beach holiday or something?", he smiles, inquisitive.

"Hell no, I'll start a DPV Cave course in two days!"



The author behind the sidemount and the stage tanks

GPR LOTTO

By Mark Simpson

There's a courier truck coming up the driveway, I'm so excited! I can't believe it's here. This has been many, many months in the making. The CDAA GPR is here!

GPR (Ground Penetrating Radar) is a tool used to 'image' a subsurface. As cave divers we are interested in looking below the ground but GPRs are also used to survey concrete slabs, roadways or even Russian embassies.

The CDAA GPR is a Mala Ground Explorer HDR with a GX80 antenna. The system has three main parts, the control unit, antenna and post processing software.

The control unit is your user interface. It allows adjustment of all settings and has a real time display showing you its inter-



pretation of what is below which is called a radargram. This sadly isn't a perfect pictorial reproduction of what is below us and must be interpreted. Some things are easily interpreted,

(think, massive open expanses like The Shaft). Others require some experience.

The antenna sits on the ground and is dragged behind you, it sends and receives radar pulses that are triggered by a distance measuring wheel attached to the back. The control unit and antenna communicate to each other either by a cable or wi fi connection. To cover an area completely it's best to scan in straight parallel lines. If needed you could follow this up by scanning the area again but this time perpendicular to your first set of lines. Now, the antenna weighs 25kg so consider how far your motivation will allow you to drag it. The solution to this could be more willing participants or to tow it behind something like a 4 wheeler. I ended up towing it behind a ride on mower but I have also pulled it by hand for several kilometres.



The software has to be installed on your computer and after a trial period you will need the USB security dongle for it to run. The software enables you to add different filters to help inter-

pret the radargram image. You can also add markers in the radargram to things of interest (water filled tunnels, of course) which can then be seen overlayed on a Google Earth map. This allows you to see trends forming between adjacent survey lines.

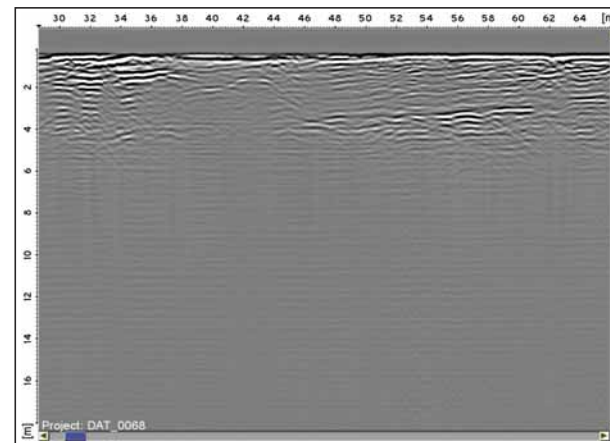
The CDAA GPR is a fairly simple bit of kit to operate and collect data. Interpreting this data can be challenging but we do have members experienced in this. It has the potential to help us discover completely new sites and extend existing ones.

I've dreamed about doing a GPR survey of our property in Mount Gambier since before we owned it. As the newly appointed GPR officer, it was important I familiarise myself with the unit and this provided the perfect opportunity. There are no obvious caves but to me, potentially having a diveable cave on your property is like having a lotto ticket that you haven't checked. The scale of your winnings, what do you have? Nothing, or is it the jackpot - Tank 2.0!

Did I win the jackpot? Not so far, but I'm still working on my interpreting skills and hoping for a 2nd or 3rd division prize. So members, let's get your projects organised and get out there and play GPR Lotto.

The CDAA will be organising a "GPR come & try" day at the Tank Cave property in 2021 for any members who want to learn more about the GPR, see it in action or get some hands on experience using the unit.

In the meantime, if members have a GPR project in mind, and wish to find out more about the SMR Permit application process, please email national@cave-divers.com.au



Vertical training exercise with the SES

By Peter Buzzacott

It takes a lot of people from various agencies to rescue an injured caver. With this in mind, the Western Australian Speleology Group (WASG) usually invite various DFES State Emergency Services (SES) crews to participate in simulated rescues of an injured caver. In September, while the weather was very pleasant in southern WA, the SES held a vertical rescue exercise at the sea cliffs of Wilyabrup, and they were kind enough to reciprocally invite local cavers to join in.

My alarm went off at 4.30am, I turned on the kettle on my way to the bathroom, climbed into my overalls on the way back and was on the road by 4.45, travel mug of hot coffee in hand. Dawn, as always in rural WA, was a joy as I headed south towards Margaret River, famous for fine wine, great food and world class surfing. First to arrive at the roadside car park, I was soon joined by fellow cavers, and a number of SES crews from Perth and towns around the south-west. We piled our SRT gear into a couple of 4WDs and then set off towards the cliffs on foot. White Arum lilies filled the brook we crossed along the way, then soon we could hear waves,

then it was time for the safety briefing. Our leader for the day had been nominated for a leadership award and so a media unit were on hand to film him leading. From the outset the exercise seemed well organised, and the mission (he explained) was for the SES and the cavers to familiarise ourselves with each other's gear and procedures, because we are certainly going to have to work together when a caver needs help. We split into two teams and took up our positions atop the 45m sea cliffs, which are world class beautiful. We were each given roles to assume, I landed the edge attendant to start with, so anchored myself to a large boulder and

stood on the edge, keeping an eye on the SES rescuer below. The Westpac Lifesaver Helicopter joined in, hovering around us, and then the dolphins arrived, leaping out of the perfect azure blue waves as they rolled in and dashed upon the massive rocks below. Of the vari-



Pre-exercise safety briefing

ous training days I've taken part in over the years, this was by far the most spectacular setting.

I was interested in the SRT set-up the SES use. They were all wearing identical SRT kit, using ISC D4 descenders, which I hadn't tried before. They also use Skylotec rope access harnesses which are good for cliff rescue, but are too bulky for crawling around in a cave.

They had some very sexy toys in their hardware satchel, like rigging plates in the shape of a bears paw for building anchors, and Rock Exotica Omni Block pulleys, (beautiful, but a bit pricey for the average caver, when a Petzl Rescue pulley or similar would do).

Next up they called for someone to be the

stretcher escort and I won it, so we set up new anchors, a safety belay rope, and I tied in. This was very unnerving, not using my own descender and instead having someone up top raise and lower me. My job was to walk backwards at 90 degrees to the cliff, holding the litter out and away from the rock face, while the waves pounded on rocks far below me. It was wonderful fun. When it was time to ascend, the team above hauled me upwards, the rope passing through a D4, meaning if they suddenly let go the descender would bite and I would not fall. Getting the stretcher over the edge was rather tricky and I may have left some paint on the sea cliffs. Never mind.

The day ended with deploying a Larkin Frame,

similar to our A-frames but with a 3m reach and capable for hauling up both a patient and a rescuer. This time I was on the hauling team and we used a pulley to redirect the haul line 90 degrees, meaning we had to build an opposing anchor. We also constructed a 3:1 bolt-on system which was added to the 2:1 that was attached to the head of the Larkin Frame. All up a 6:1 haul system and we simply walked backwards down



Taking a moment to watch dolphins leap out of the waves



Setting up the Larkin Frame

the footpath while raising the stretcher. All-in-all, it was a fabulous day and I would like to thank the SES for inviting us cavers. We all seemed to learn quite a bit from each other, for

example I did not realise you can build a solid anchor by tying off to handfuls of spinifex (no, I am not joking). I was also impressed by their system of checking themselves, then having a



Stokes litters



Anchor rigging



Preparing to raise the litter using the Larkin Frame














buddy check them, then having the team leader give a final check, before anyone goes on rope. When I moved away from the edge and came off rope to get something, as soon as I came back on rope the three checks were done again.

Next year a large cave rescue exercise will be conducted in north-west WA, near Exmouth, in a 65m deep cave in the Cape Range, taking possibly 12-14 hours and with an estimated 30-50 rescuers.

Acknowledgements:

This successful inter-agency exercise combined training between DFES-SES, DBCA, WASG, CLINC, and MRBTA.

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