

# South Pacific goes **DOWN** **DOWN** **DOWN**

Tuglow Caves are situated on the Kowmung River, 4,500ft.-up in the Blue Mountains area of New South Wales.

Due to no previous dives being made in this caves system, it was not known if the sump was 20ft. or 200ft. below the original level of the caves' floor, which is 210ft. below ground level.

Two vehicles (a short base diesel Landrover and a Holden panelvan) met at Jenolan Caves and proceeded to the Kowmung River whereupon all gear was transferred to the Landrover which was then driven across the river and up to the caves where it was unloaded and then taken back to pick up the rest of the party.

In the group, led by Grant Warren, were John Allen, Bob Scott, Colin Linklater, Dave Allen and Alan Moule. After arriving at the caves and setting-up camp the party decided to sleep, as none had been had in the previous 24 hours.

After sleeping till noon on the same day, party entered the caves at 1.00 p.m., after descending for 2 hours they finally reached the bottom and a suitable site for a base camp was located. Further exploration of the caves was made to find ways of getting the gear (which was comprised of 3 aqualungs, 5 kitbags, 3 cameras, 1 underwater camera housing, lamps and a 2-way radio with 180ft. of cable) down to the base camp. After sites were chosen, a trip was made up to the Waterfall which is 40ft. high and about 300 yds. from the base camp. This waterfall is a terrific sight when one considers it is 200ft. underground.

Upon returning to the base camp, 4 members decided to take the easy way out by swimming down the river. Due to the fact that the water was (a) Wet. (b) Cold, the temperature being 48°F. and (c) The Caves temperature a very humid 52°F. 4 members were very cold and exhausted when they reached the surface 2 hours later. The other two (chickens) were just exhausted. After arriving above the ground at 5.00 p.m. the party had tea and slept soundly until 8.00 a.m. the following morning.

After rising and having breakfast, the gear was assembled at the top of the daylight chamber, which is an 80ft. vertical shaft through which

light penetrates most of the day. The gear was lowered from the top of the shaft to a narrow rock bridge, and from there, 40ft. down to a passage and then man-handled 200ft. along a squeeze (a very narrow tunnel) to the Diamond Mine, which is also a vertical drop of 75ft. On this drop, two members staged themselves at certain positions to guide gear over outcrops of rocks to the cave floor, from there it was carried 200ft. parallel with the river to the base camp.

The lowering of gear took 6 men 5½ hours of solid labour, this, accompanied by no food or rest, sapped the energy of the party, which possibly accounts for their lack of staying power in the water.

After the 4 divers suited up, the diving gear was lowered a further 20ft. by hand down to the water. After setting up lights and lines the first dive was made by Colin Link-



*Grant Warren absealing down 75ft. shaft.*

later at 5.10 p.m. and the second dive by Grant Warren. Each spent 10 minutes in the water exploring for possible surface extensions, diving operations were then suspended till the following day. The party returned to the surface at 7.15 p.m. after being underground for 9 hours, a discussion was held during tea, on the day's activities and on the whole, it turned out to be a very good idea as everybody learned where he went wrong, either in the caves or in the water. Party slept very soundly until 7.00 a.m. next morning. For something to do, somebody took the air temperature and it was 38°F. whereupon there was a great rush for firewood.



*John Allen, Colin Linklater, Dave Allen and Grant Warren discuss diving gear at Base Camp, 210ft. underground. (Photo Bob Scott.)*





*Bob Scott surfaces after narrow escape in tunnel.*

Party entered caves at 9.00 a.m. and the first dive was made by John Allen at 10.55 a.m. He descended 70ft. down a vertical shaft only to find that his line had become snagged 20ft. from the surface so that he had to surface after only 5 minutes in the

water. At 11.05 a.m., after a brief discussion on this hazard, Bob Scott entered the water and proceeded down another passage only to find that it was a dead-end and he then surfaced and after a few words to his standby diver he again went down. This time down another passage. After going 20ft. it started to become smaller but by going down feet first he was able to keep going, but was only able to gain another 10ft. before he was forced to stop, due to a mud-slide from the roof of the passage. After a few anxious minutes he was able to free himself and ascend to the surface. Grant Warren did the next dive at 12.06 p.m., returning to the surface at 12.14 p.m. after making a mental map of the first 10ft. of the passages, at 12.21 p.m. Colin Linklater went down but due to the water being black he was not able to carry out any worthwhile project and he returned to the surface at 12.26 p.m.

After packing up all gear the party headed back to the top, all gear being out of the cave at 6.00 p.m., thus spending a further 9 hours below, making a total of 22 hours per person. Being completely wrecked, party had tea and slept until 6.00 a.m. next morning. After packing Landrover with gear, party hiked back to river crossing and went their own way back to Sydney.

## SUMMARY

*The object of these dives was to try and discover if there were any further extensions to this system of caves, but due to limited air supply and extremely poor visibility, this aim could not be achieved. The initial exploration of this system will be of use to other divers and to ourselves on future dives.*

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