

SOUTHERN



C A V E R

▨ VOL.4 NO.2 ▨

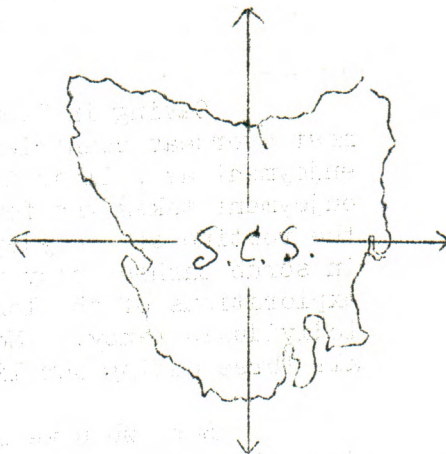
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CONTENTS

Cave Fauna, Part 1	A. Terauds	Page	1
Nibicon Note		"	3
Buchan M. Cole		"	4
Cave Archeology	A.P. Andrews	"	6
Safety No. 3.	D. Elliott	"	8
Exploration of 211	S. Harris	"	9
Glory of it All	A. Terauds	"	11
Precipitous Bluff	K. Kiernan	"	13
Society Note		"	17
June Ghost	K. Kiernan	"	18
Welcome Aboard		"	19
Aquavision	R. Mann	"	20
A Word from the Magazine Committee		"	21
Area Reports		"	22
Letters to the Editors Page		"	23

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Tasmanian Cave Fauna
Part 1 - Collecting

by Aleks Terauds.

Caving in Tasmania, as in the other Australian States and most overseas countries, offers one the opportunity for personal enjoyment as well as the chance to do something worthwhile. The enjoyment takes the form of relaxation in weekends, a change from the routine of everyday work or schooling; whether one takes part in scrub bashes, easy underground trips or depth-record breaking explorations of the longest and most difficult caves is left to the individuals' fancy. Most of us are involved in a judicious mix of all three during our lives as cavers.

But, when we survey or photograph caves, study rock formations or collect cave fauna, we are doing something worthwhile. Surveys and photographs remain as permanent records of our achievements and can, also, be of real benefit to future cavers; study of rock and cave formation increases our knowledge and appreciation of geomorphology; and collection of cave fauna (together with its identification) may form an important addition to the book of cave biology. Further, the discovery of unique species of cave dwellers is a very valid reason for insisting that a particular area of limestone be left undisturbed by miners or other 'developers' of the land.

It is this latter aspect, collection and identification of the beasties in our caves that I shall attempt to deal with from my point of view as a caver and biologist.

Several years ago S.C.S. members quite naturally looked for and collected specimens from the caves they visited. In a short period of time we found a number of as yet undescribed species of beetle, cricket and pseudoscorpion; we increased the known distribution of cave beetles, crickets and flies; and, we still had left over, specimens of other arthropods which were meant to be submitted for identification. Unfortunately, our energy for collecting and interest in getting identifications disappeared suddenly and at about the same time. Subsequently there has been a quiet period with minimal or no collecting at all being carried out.

Before proceeding any further and to stem a too avid an involvement in collecting, I must sound some stern warnings. DO NOT OVERCOLLECT. DO NOT COLLECT ANY FURTHER SPECIMENS FROM CAVES WHOSE FAUNA HAS ALREADY BEEN COLLECTED AND IDENTIFIED.

Both practices can remove important individuals from small communities with the result that the communities or populations could collapse. Similarly, and this as cavers we know and practice as part of our ethics underground, DO NOT POLLUTE: excreta, including urine, cigarette butts, carbide, even waste food can upset the relatively delicate ecological system present with the result that that particular environment might be altered to the extent where it is no longer suitable for the population and the population might cease to exist.

To the extent of our knowledge Tasmanian cave fauna consists solely of invertebrates. The non-aquatic members of this group are all arthropods (insects, spiders, mites, millipedes, harvestmen, pseudoscorpions, etc.). All of these beasties, like their counterparts above ground, are dependant on a fairly constant source of food for survival. They are, also, dependant on a number of environmental or climatic factors such as temperature and humidity and will perish in caves subject to constant flooding or long periods of foul air.

The most promising areas, then, for collecting cave fauna, will be those where the above conditions are met. Cave crickets, spiders and most inhabitants of the twilight zone have, of course, plentiful air; a relatively easy escape from floods in caves and an abundant food source. The depth dwellers, our true troglobites and troglaphiles, will normally be found only in active caves where a constant entry of water ensures an adequate food supply and in situations where they can retreat and survive from rising water levels. Small, sandy beaches extending away from an underground stream have produced beetles such as Idacarabus spp and the pseudoscorpion, Pseudotyrannochthonius typhlus Dartnall. Detritus in similar positions should yield mites, spring-tails, isopods, millipedes, and similar 'litter' inhabitants.

It is, usually, impractical to collect cave fauna during exploratory trips; members cannot 'drop out' to scramble on hands and knees examining promising spots while the rest of the dwindling party pushes on until the leader finds himself alone. However, a party may have a rest here and there and if the stops are near "wet" areas some searching for cave life can be done. Similarly, belay men underground sitting out long stretches waiting for a party's return may take advantage of their enforced leisure and attempt some sensible collecting.

The ideal thing would be to have specific collecting trips, planned in advance and equipped with all necessary collecting and storing gear. Areas or caves such as Tassie Pot, Khazad-Dum, Sesame 2 or Satans Lair would be chosen and the party led by a member familiar with the area or cave. The team would be briefed

beforehand of what might be expected to be found, where were the most promising search areas and what to do with the specimens or material collected. With each member of the party knowing his assigned duties a single trip to even the most difficult of our pot holes should be sufficient to find whatever fauna inhabits the cave or to enable us to say, with a fair degree of assurance, that the cave harbours no natural inhabitant.

In my succeeding articles of this series I shall attempt to detail what to do with collected material, what not to collect, and what has been collected and described from Tasmanian caves to date.

NIBICON:

The A.S.F. Ninth Biennial Convention will commence on December 27th at New College, University of New South Wales, Sydney.

The Convention sessions will be held on December 27th, 28th and 29th, followed by field trips to major caving areas.

Those who attended the Eighth Convention held in Hobart will need no further prompting. For the information of members who have since joined the Society, symposia will include Biology, Geomorphology, Meteorology, Hydrology, Anthropology and Speleochemistry, together with the following Convention Seminars; Speleo Publications, Cave Physics, Maps and Diagrams for Cavers, Photography in Speleology, Systematic Exploration, Overseas Caving Areas, Electronic Communications, Survey techniques, Caving Techniques (Vertical) and Conservation.

by M.J. Cole.

To a Taswegian the Buchan District can best be described as a small scale version of our Mole Creek District. It is situated about 30 miles N.N.E. of Lakes Entrance, which is 179 miles from Melbourne on the Princes Highway. The population in the area relies upon dairy and beef cattle, wool, and timber cutting for their economic stability with the tourist cave reserve merely as a fluctuating flow of income to the township.

The limestone in the area is Middle Devonian with the main bed being approximately 12 miles long (North-South) and 5 miles across at its widest point, tapering off at the northern end towards the impressive Snowy River Valley, the area forming a rough triangle. It is divided into three principal caving areas - Buchan, East Buchan and Murrindal.

The Buchan area is situated around the township and most of the caves are in a belt of limestone about four miles long by half a mile wide. There are approximately 30 caves in the area, with the majority of these being in the Buchan Caves Reserve and the best decorated are the present and former tourist caves. With the Victorian Speleological Association I visited Spring Creek Cave, Moon Cave and Dukes Cave. These all appeared to be old tourist caves and consequently, a great deal of decoration had been destroyed by carbide smoke, man-made passages and tourists, etc. These caves were between 1000ft. and 1500ft. in length, which is average for the area and, much to my surprise, contained the first bats I had ever seen. Although the caves were unimpressive when compared to their Tasmanian counterparts the presence of the bats made them show a completely new sphere in caving and visits to the caves became an exciting venture for me.

The East Buchan area is the south-eastern corner of the main Buchan deposit and measures about 3 miles by 2 miles with a band extending a further 2 miles to the north. I visited Mabel Cave and Trogdip, which are two of the largest caves in this area of some 50 caves. The former is a series of passages with little formation leading to a sump, the latter was by far the most exciting cave I visited in Victoria. In fact, apart from Scrubby Creek Cave, which is in the Murrindal district, it would be the hardest test in Buchan. Principally, it consists of a main stream passage about 2000ft. long which passes through several talus sections and at least two water traps into some large fissures and chambers with a similar appearance to Hells Half Acre in Newdegate Cave at Hastings. This cave was the best test to my trog-suit and kneecaps I have ever been in as about 1000ft. of crawling had to be undertaken to get to the main chamber. There was little formation, but plenty of mud and water.

The Murrindal area lies between the Buchan and Murrindal Rivers. Its base is about three miles north of the Buchan township, is about two and a half miles wide at this point and gradually tapers to the north. This area contains the greatest number of caves at Buchan, with about 100 known caves. I visited Honeycomb, The Canyons, Baby Pierre and Baby Berger. The last two were pot holes, the deepest ladder pitch being 90ft., but they were both only about 150ft. deep. Honeycomb is one of the prettiest in the district. Although the formations are damaged in numerous places there are many excellent sections for the keen photographer. The quality of decoration and overall size of the cave would be very similar to, perhaps, Scots, Baldocks, or Cōw Caves at Mole Creek but the layout of the cave is very similar to Pyramid Cave, there being many chambers at different levels because of the fact that the cave is composed entirely of talus sections. Although I went to the end of all the caves I have mentioned the longest time I spent underground was only about two hours.

The Victorian Speleological Association is a large club with at least four times the membership of the Southern Caving Society. The exploration and surveying of all caving systems at Buchan were in a very advanced stage and all aspects of speleology were being studied. Perhaps one of the most interesting trips I attended was a mock search and rescue exercise. The use of a Neil Robbie stretcher and two-way radios between the search and rescue area vehicles and V.S.A. club house at Buchan proved to be very effective. Although there are no deep caves at Buchan, because of the low relief of limestone there is plenty of excitement diving the many sumps and I would thoroughly recommend any Tasmanian caver to make Buchan a must on their list of mainland caving areas as there is always plenty of action with V.S.A. as the hosts.

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Cave Archaeology

by A.P. Andrews

The recent discovery in the Florentine Valley of an almost complete skeleton of the "Tasmanian Tiger" or Thylacine (see Southern Caver V.4, No. 1) aroused considerable interest throughout the local scientific community and further drew attention to the increasing importance of cave archaeological "finds". The purpose of the present article is to lay down some suggested guidelines for the future collection of cave bone material and data.

1. ABUNDANCE For the reasons behind cave bone deposits see earlier articles (Southern Caver V.2, No. 4). Because of the fact that all surface dwelling animals are almost equally likely to find their way into underground caves either by a direct fall or by surface water it seems reasonable to assume that the more abundant of the surface animals will form the major part of cave bone deposits and vice-versa. This assumption is supported by the fact that the Brushtail possum (Trichosurus vulpecula) and Bennet's Wallaby (Wallabia rufogrisea), two of Tasmania's most abundant and widely distributed mammals, are also two of the most frequently found remains in cave deposits. Do not imagine therefore that all cave bones automatically represent rare "finds".

2. PRESERVATION When animal remains become trapped in caves they are largely removed from most of the destructive effects of the environment such as scavengers, weathering, etc. Once underground they become accumulated in low sections of caves where they may ultimately be preserved for thousands of years. Underground hazards faced by cave bones are largely the leaching effect of water and possible damage by falling rock, etc. (not to mention the heavy boots of cave explorers!). The effect of both these factors is very largely minimal however and has little effect on the scientific data that can be assembled from the deposit. Therefore there is no urgency in the collection of cave bones once found and important details are often lost by hasty or careless collection.

3. RECORDING Collected specimens are almost useless without accurate data, apart from the intrinsic value (if any) of the specimens themselves. It is therefore extremely important to record as much information as possible when the discovery is made. Do not commit details to memory. Write them down as soon as possible. A possible label for collected material should read as follows:-

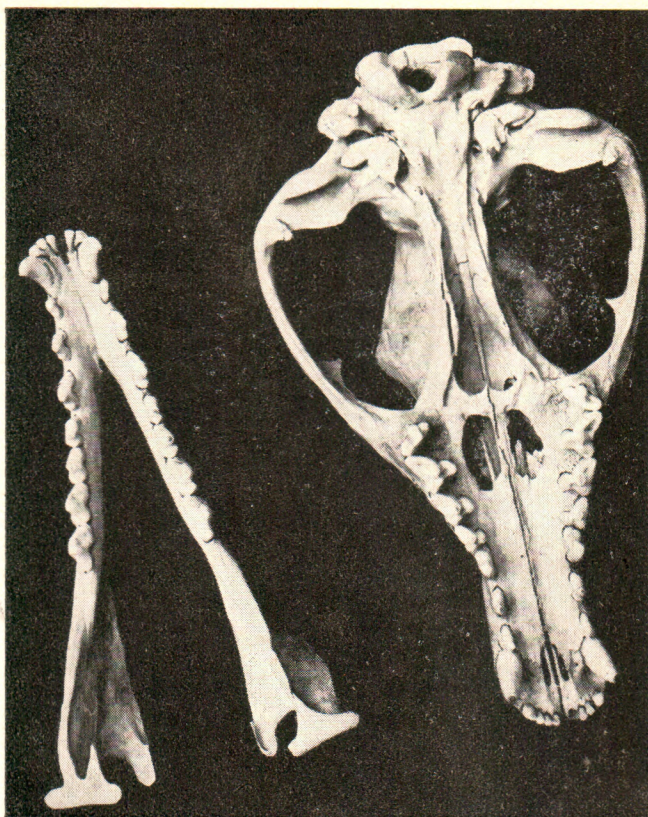
- (a) Cave name, number, and cave area.
- (b) Locality inside the cave. This should be detailed enough to enable others who were not on the trip to find the deposit without difficulty.

- (c) Type of deposit, i.e., a single skeleton, mixture of bone fragments and gravel, decomposed but intact skeletons, etc.
- (d) Situation. This should include information about how the deposit was formed, i.e., bottom of vertical shaft, bottom of talus slope, low point of stream passage, etc.
- (e) Identification (if known) and any other details of importance.

4. EXCAVATION This should not be attempted unless the facilities for removing and recording the material are available. If you do not have the equipment, record the position and leave it intact until you do. When material is removed carefully pack all material into plastic bags with appropriate labels and note any details about the position of the bones which could be important, i.e. articulated skeleton, skull smashed etc. If the material is embedded in mud and gravel as is frequently the case collect a fair sized sample of the surrounding material as frequently small bones and teeth, etc., are found here when the material is examined later.

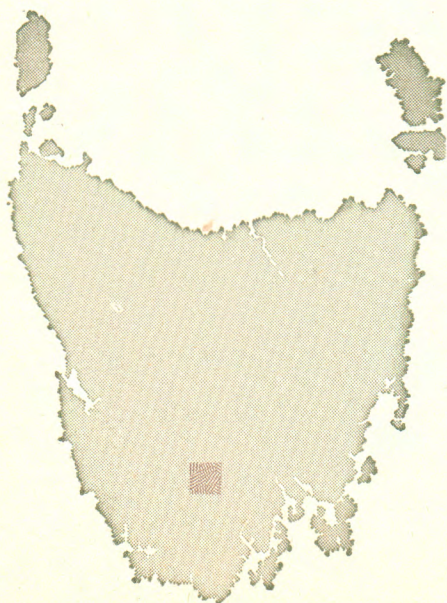
5. CARE & TREATMENT Having packed the material in plastic bags and removed it to the surface the next task of cleaning, drying, identifying and preserving the material is one which is best left to an expert. Careless cleaning and drying can cause important details such as charcoal and associated debris to be lost and very fragile material will frequently disintegrate completely if dried out too quickly. Usually a small sample is taken and dried out slowly under controlled conditions. If disintegration is evident steps can be taken to prevent it by coating the bones with a substance such as soluble nylon which will prevent sutures opening and teeth falling out, etc. The mixture of mud and gravel associated with the bones is usually sieved to recover loose teeth and small bone fragments. Cave bones once they are treated in this manner can usually be stored indefinitely without additional treatment.

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CRANIUM AND LOWER JAW
THYLACINE

(Photo A. P. Andrews)



LOCATION PLAN



Safety

by D.J. Elliott

In this, the third article of our series, we will consider some aspects of safety in the bush, remembering that Tasmania's only caving fatality occurred not in a cave but in the near jungle conditions of the Mt. Anne scrub. With cavers attempting to find access into more and more remote caving areas, much longer periods are being spent in often difficult bush conditions than was the case only a few years ago.

Personal equipment should consist of the best map of the area available, a compass and whistle, water resistant matches, a knife, small first aid kit and writing material. Warm clothing and a parka are essential.

Be sure that details of the route planned and estimated time of return are made known to responsible members of the Society.

Remember to regulate the pace to accommodate weaker members of the party. Every person should take the time to memorise physical features of the route.

The party must not allow its members to become separated. This means that an experienced person must bring up the rear, keeping an eye on stragglers.

Don't panic if you become lost. This is, unfortunately, a natural reaction and must be resisted. Use your map and recollection of the route taken to decide the best means of reaching safety. Ration your food if necessary, and blaze the path you have taken by making footprints in mud, scratching arrows, breaking green twigs and leaving stones on logs. Leave a dated note showing your direction of travel at each resting place.

Do not travel in the dark or in severe weather conditions. If you cannot extricate yourself, stay put. A smokey fire is an excellent idea. The standard distress signal is three whistle blasts or torch flashes together, repeated regularly.

In severe conditions one of the greatest dangers can be exposure or exhaustion. Speedy recognition of the symptoms and immediate treatment are essential, as the victim can lapse suddenly into unconsciousness and death. Circumstances that may develop into a dangerous situation are lack of suitable clothing, getting wet or cold, drinking alcohol, lack of quickly digestable food, or shock. The symptoms are staggering, lethargy, slurred speech and lack of muscular power.

The victim must immediately be put into his sleeping bag and tent while his body still retains the ability to keep warm.

To continue walking could result in death even after shelter has been reached if body temperature has become too low.

Remember that proper equipment, a little knowledge and some commonsense might save your life.

Exploration of J.F. 211 (Florentine Valley)

by Stephen Harris

The A.S.F. Newsletter of March, 1972, provisionally lists Australia's longest and deepest caves. A cave recently explored and surveyed by members of this Society in the Florentine Valley would appear in fourth position on the "deepest" list with a surveyed depth of 720 feet.

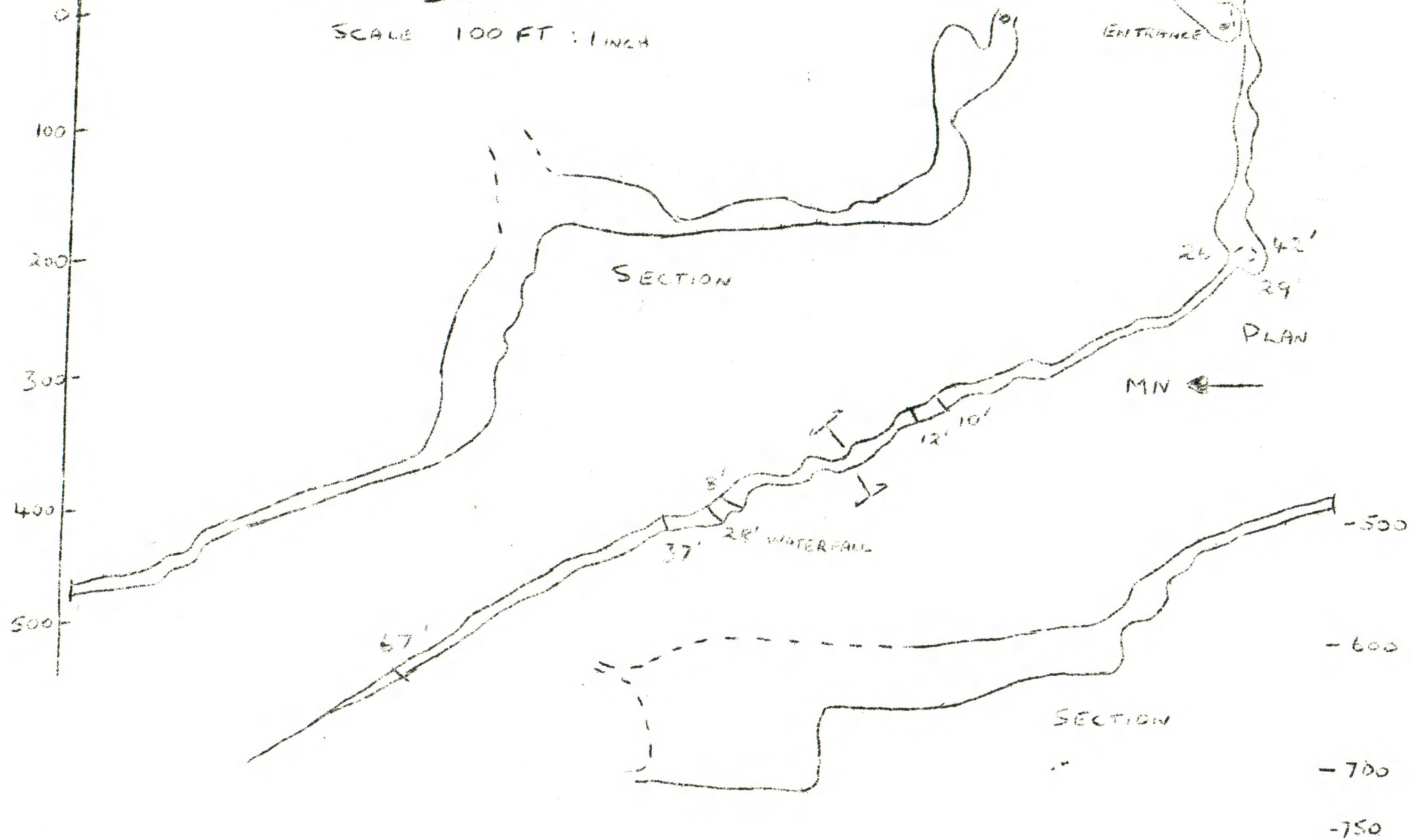
The exploration of Sesame Cave (J.F. 211) is notable for the relative efficiency with which it was carried out. Exploration required several trips but these followed on almost successive weekends. The cave was more or less surveyed as it was being explored.

A wide moss-lined shaft on the slope of a hill above Chrisps Road surrounded by thick wet sclerophyll regrowth leads into the cave. A magnificent large tree stump existing beside the hole served as an anchor for the ladders and belay rope. The entrance was a 20 ft. pitch which finished on a small slope of boulders and rotting vegetation. The 6 cavers on this first trip gave the hole only cursory inspection and found it extended horizontally, over a bank, followed by a 20 ft. free climb down into a small chamber. One keen fellow grovelled among some talus blocks on the floor and found a small squeeze which must have looked promising to enthusiastic eyes.

On the following weekend, 3 bods fought their way through the constriction. The first one through (or halfway through) was confronted with a small surprise - a 30ft. stretch of nothing, below a pair of flailing legs. However, the aforementioned bod is no mean climber and he descended quickly to the bottom. The other two (and everyone since) wisely preferred to use a ladder at this spot. At the bottom of the pitch on a ledge in a fissure, the team was confronted with the need for yet another ladder which was quickly joined to the bottom of the one just descended. Negotiating a tight squeeze at the top of this new ladder, the descent of slightly more than 30ft. was made into a small elongated chamber. Pessimism reigned while it

SESAME II JF 211

SCALE 100 FT : 1 INCH



was thought this was the end but searching revealed a low passage leading away from the low end of this little chamber. The team crawled and walked with a stoop along a short passage. To their pleasant surprise the passage stopped at the junction with a larger passage in which they were able to stand up. The cave so far had carried them deeper and further than expectations, as, right from the start there had been an air of doubt about the cave's continuing. So here they were in what looked like a dried out stream passage. The floor was damp and in places there was quite a thickness of clayey silt. To the left the passage got lower and when looked at later the party found that it closed off into an impassable crevice. To the right though, the passage invitingly curled away into the unknown in which direction they now proceeded. The party was intrigued to find a large number of skeletons and corpses (in various advanced states of decay) of rodents and other small animals embedded in the clay on the floor. Obviously the passage was subject to frequent flooding.

After a brisk walk of several minutes along the passage they came to a divide. The left fork was followed into a drainpipe crawl for 50ft. and ended abruptly looking out over a large chamber. It would have been difficult to descend into this so the party retreated and took the other fork which led by way of a scramble over banks of poorly consolidated fluviially deposited pebbles and into a chamber. On the opposite wall the end of the drainpipe crawl was recognised.

Over some very loose rock the expedition wound its way to the lowest point in the chamber and stopped over a fissure. As there were no more ladders the team sadly retreated from the cave, hauling out the gear. The following weekend a party of 3 again descended the hole and surveyed to the "loose rock chamber".

A party of 5 again descended the cave a week following. A ladder was then descended below the chamber and onto the floor of a long fissure. This fissure, devoid of any formation, was followed for several hundred feet; the fissure was very high and a small stream flowed underfoot. Progress was halted at yet another drop which looked to be about thirty feet. This pitch was descended in company with the stream which inconveniently splashed to the floor via the sleeves and neck of the climber. At the bottom, the passage, still in the same large fissure, continued for another hundred feet where the party was confronted with yet another vertical drop, this time of about 20ft. but there were no more ladders or ropes left. Although attempted in frustration, free climbing was out of the question because the rock was too smooth and there was a small pond of unknown depth directly underneath. Below and beyond, however, a tunnel could be seen to continue on. Five weary people retreated from the cave leaving the gear rigged. It was proposed to return the following weekend with more gear.

The fifth journey in J.F. 211 comprised 4 people who were to explore and survey to the end of the cave in a solid fifteen hours exertion. After finally reaching, and descending, the 20ft. pitch some of the party continued part way along the main fissure - the roof of this could only just be sketched out with torch beams - however the fissure closed to nothing. The main fissure dropped a further 60ft where it narrowed to 2 ft. with the water seeping through the floor. After carrying survey measurements to the end of this, the team slowly retreated, packing up the very large pile of equipment en route to the surface.

Sesame Cave is in an area that abounds with sinks and holes all with equal promise. Entrances to many known holes in this specific region have been linked by survey and it is eventually hoped to work out the relationships of all holes in the area - hopefully there will be some interconnections between holes & the possibility of a larger underground system.

Members of exploration and survey parties into J.F. 211 - number of trips in brackets:- L. Gleeson (5), J. Ward (5), C. Harris (3), J. McCormack (2), K. Dedenczuk (2), S. Harris (1), M. Cole (3), K. Kiernan (1) and D. Elliott (1).

The Glory of it All

by Aleks Terauds

There must be something terrific to be known as a caver. You know, one of those brave, dedicated, fearless young men who defy death to explore the stygian caverns beneath us. Not for them the safe pursuits of racing cars, parachute jumping or penetrating the unknown jungles and crossing the arid deserts of the world. The cavers need something more exciting, more perilous, more rewarding.

But, how can you tell the world you are a caver? It is not enough to meet comrades from another club somewhere underground and be greeted with the cry, "Hey, Caver !!!" (accompanied by the familiar gesture). An improvement to this occurs when a party of visitors in some tourist cave such as Newdegate, stumbles over a group of speleos who, blinded by the arc lights, have accidentally wandered into the tourist section. The "Ahh's !!!" from the women and children are most soul satisfying, the looks of wonderment and admiration from the strong men gratifying indeed. But still, the vast majority of the populace is ignorant of us.

Cavers, however, are not only a courageous and select breed; they are, also, inventive and imaginative. So, they make badges to wear on their clothing - "Look, Mum, there goes a caver !!!"

Southern Caver (11) October, 1972

and badges to stick on their cars - "Look at him go! But, after all, he's a CAVER and driving at 140 m.p.h. on this winding road must be nothing compared to the real thing, the excitement of caving !!!" And helmets, when not worn may be prominently (and for some, permanently) displayed on the back window ledges of cars where torches and batteries yellow in the sun while cloggers and karabiners gather dust but do point to our status as cavers; for even if you don't do it it is nice to be thought that you do do.

It all reminds me of my younger days when a conversation like this was almost overheard on a Herston bus:-

"Excuse me, please, but are you a medical student?"

"Yes, how did you know? Was it from the surfical jacket I am wearing?"

"No."

"From these scalpels in my breast pocket?"

"No."

"Oh! Perhaps from this stethoscope which is accidentally half falling out of my side pocket?"

"No, I hadn't noticed it."

"Well, was it this volume of 'Gray's Anatomy' in my lap, which somehow has come open on this gory illustration of a dissected leg?"

"No."

"Was it this 20ft. length of small intestine which is protruding from my open briefcase that gave me away?"

"No."

"It must be, then, this bundle of human bones beneath my arm."

"No."

"I give up. How did you deduce I am a med. student?"

"I don't really know. Just a wild guess."

There must be something terrific to being a medical student. You know, one of those dedicated young men who sacrifice their youth to study so that as doctors they might devote their lives to help the unfortunate humanity, risking infection from highly contagious diseases, undaunted, going forth holding the shining torch of Aesculapius high above their heads, brave but happy in the knowledge

Conservation: Precipitous Bluff & Mining

by Kevin Kiernan

The first major conservation battle for Tasmanian speleologists may well be the looming issue of exploratory and mining leases in the limestone areas in the Precipitous Bluff - New River Lagoon area in the south west of the State; and it is quite likely that the speleos will be dragged into it rather than take the initiative themselves. Early chip samples of the limestone there have indicated a CaCO_3 content of 98-99%, enough to make any quarryman drool. Fortunately, the area's remoteness has to date kept the exploiters out: P.B. is two day's walk from the nearest road. The same reason has, however, served to keep the speleologist out, too, so what might be lost in caves is largely unknown. But even the saving of the surface scenery, regarded as some of the finest in the State, is worth fighting for.

The Limestone

Sweeping down the steep flanks of Precipitous Bluff (4000ft.) to the shores of New River Lagoon, Gordon Limestone (ordovician) outcrops extensively. The beds are contained in a syncline striking generally north, enclosed by underlying quartzites and conglomerates, and overlain unconformably by a fairly flat lying succession of Permian marine sediments (Hughes, 1957). Along the western flank of the mountain the limestone stands out boldly as cliff faces, but to the south the terrain is low and the limestone largely obscured by sand deposits. The limestone is generally of light to dark grey colour with much distributed crystalline calcite and is nearly horizontal.

The nature and the structure of the limestone bears a strong resemblance to the karst areas at Ida Bay (Exit Cave) thirty miles to the north-west, and at the Cracroft River ten miles to the north. It has been suggested that the limestone is one large body continuous beneath the mountains.

Cave Development

Although I have stated, above, that cave loss by mining exploitation of the Precipitous Bluff area is largely unknown it is no contradiction to say that cave development in the area is considerable. On the higher flanks of the mountain, particularly towards the unconformity, a number of vertical shafts appear to have been developed, while lower down numerous outflow caves are rumoured to exist. In many ways P.B. seems to qualify as perhaps one of the best potential caving areas in Tasmania. As early as 1938, the geologist, Blake, reported the presence of numerous caves in the limestone, there. The one major, caving trip to the area to date

was in 1960 when a handful of speleos were ferried in, one by one, in a Tiger Moth seaplane from Cockle Creek to New River Lagoon, and carted out again a week or so later. Unfortunately, from our point of view, the party seems to have spent more time absorbing the tranquility and grandeur of the place and avoiding the difficult scrub than looking for caves. They examined only one of the eight creeks flowing into the lagoon from the limestone area. This creek was found to emerge, someway upstream, from a small, decorated tunnel (P.B.2), beneath the spur of a hill. Further upstream, a tributary was seen to emerge from a cave (P.B.3) with deep water at the entrance and little air space (consequently left unexplored); the main stream was an efflux of a sizeable cave (Damper Cave, P.B.1). The party explored this for a quarter of a mile, past decoration and talus, to a draughty passage where deep water stopped progress; the party did not have a boat or raft to push the cave further upstream.

Since that 1960 trip it appears that P.B. has remained undisturbed by A.S.F. speleos, although there are rumours that a, to us unknown, mainland bushwalking club did intend to go there at one stage. A couple of trips have been planned by Federation speleos but they failed to eventuate. But, now, with the urgency of a pressing conservation issue at stake, a trip to examine the area is on the drawing boards for January, 1973.

The Current Situation

A threat has now appeared. In December, 1971, Mineral Holdings (Australia) Pty. Ltd., applied for an exploration licence in respect to an area of 20 square miles of limestone country. Formal objections against granting this licence were lodged with the Department of Mines by a number of bodies, including the South-West Committee and the Tasmanian Conservation Trust, but were subsequently declared invalid. Fortunately, the application itself was later also declared invalid. About one month later the company again applied for an exploratory licence, this time covering 25 square miles. Objections were lodged by a number of bodies, including the Southern Branch of the Tasmanian Conservation Trust and the South-West Committee. The objections were based upon the popularity of the area for bushwalking, that it was intensely scenic and it was included in the recommended extensions to the South-West National Park. The South-East Cape Committee, also, lodged an objection, based on seven points, but this body failed to meet the 28 day deadline for the lodgement of objections. The S.E.C.C. seems to have been the only group where some objections pertained directly to caves; the relevant clauses were as follows:-

"that such application is contrary to the public interest in that it:

(f) would prevent Australian speleologists undertaking detailed explorations of reported underground caves

(g) would prevent speleo-biologists undertaking investigations into possible endemic troglobitic fauna."

In returning the objection and fee the Director of Mines, Mr. J.G. Symond undertook that the objection would at least be looked at "on an administrative basis" (Symons, 1972 - personal communication). The S.E.C.C. objection assumed that mining operations would quickly follow the explorations.

The matter is due for hearing in the Mining Warden's Court at Devonport, on Monday, December 4th, 1972, before the Warden, Mr. Temple-Smith. However, there is some confusion as several objecting parties have not been advised as to the date while conflicting dates have been given to other interested parties. (S.C.S., after a request for clarification, was advised that the hearing would be on 10th December; a letter one day later informed us that the information given in the last paragraph of the first letter was incorrect and that the date of the hearing was December 4th).

The Company Involved

Mineral Holdings is a small show at best with a paid up capital of around \$9,000.00 (nominal, \$50,000), incorporated in Victoria, registered in Tasmania on April 2nd, 1969. It certainly does not appear to be in a position to develop the deposit; a sell-out, to a company such as Pickards Mather or BHP seems much more likely. The company has other leases of 40 acres at Mt. Balfour in the north-east and 110 square miles at West Takone in the north-west. Its directors are four Victorians (Thomas, Freeman, Roach and Shelmerdine) and one Walter St. Clair Marson, a former Launceston Mines Department Chief. The Tasmanian agent is Richard Martin Green, Mayor of Launceston from 1969 to 1971.

The Tasmanian Premier and Minister for Mines, the Hon. E.E. Reece has recently been quite vocal about conservationists, spreading a well timed smoke screen, perhaps? All good politicians believe in the broad concept of safeguarding the environment but can never be drawn to support any of the individual elements of that concept. So it has been with the Premier, claiming conservation to be a good thing but castigating 'irresponsible people' who exert pressure.

Of chief concern at this stage is the means of prospecting to be employed. Even should the ultimate outcome be that the area is not to be quarried, very severe and irrevocable damage could be occasioned to the area's scenery, and some of the finest rain forest country to be found ruined by the criss-cross of survey trails, creek diversions, roads and jeep tracks permitted under the prospecting provisions of the Tasmanian Mines Act.

Associated Developments

Concern has been expressed regarding facilities to cater for a quarry development. The Hobart Walking Club recently received an anonymous letter, supposedly from a sympathetic official of BHP Ltd., to the effect that that Company had some involvement in this area and proposed the construction of a railway from Cockle Creek (recently saved from usage as an army firing range) along the route of the South Coast track to New River Lagoon. Other rumours suggest a road. Both would be expensive propositions. The latest story involves a jetty and breakwater near Prion Beach; New River Lagoon, itself, could not be used as a port as it is quite shallow, especially near the mouth. Perhaps an extension of the logging roads planned to be built up the Picton to Pindars Peak would be attractive.

Why?

It is possible that one day the thought of an electricity surplus promoting a supply below cost price may attract to Tasmania a sizeable secondary industry. The State Government's latest front page claim is that a ferro-manganese plant might be set up in the State. The report stated that this would require large reserves of high grade limestone. Some people immediately thought of P.E. but personally, I thought it unlikely. If such an industry were to be established it would seem logical to site it close to the power source at a good port, as at Bell Bay (where there seems to be quite a lot of electricity lying around with nothing to do these days). This would be close to high grade limestone at Flowery Gully (perhaps all leased) and within reach of other reserves at Mole Creek, Railton, etc. However, the ferro-manganese works is the 49th new industry promised to Tasmania since 1968; of these, only one has eventuated. Draw your own conclusions about its future. But, whatever future lies ahead for the Precipitous Bluff limestone, one thing is for certain, any development there would have to be on a large scale; and that would be that as far as the scenery and the caves go.

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Kevin Kiernan, besides being a very able caver is a keen conservationist. The views expressed are his own and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editors, magazine committee or Executive of the S.C.S.

The Editors.

SOCIETY NOTES:

Barry James, the Society's first president, has made a good recovery after being hospitalised for removal of a king-size appendix.

STOP PRESS ITEM: A trip has been scheduled for December 3rd to Gunn's Plains, Loongana and Moina that will take in the Court hearing on P.B.

Southern Caver

(17)

October, 1972

by Kevin Kiernan

It all started on a lonely night some months ago when a solitary caver who shall remain nameless but is quite short, snuggled down contentedly in his cosy sleeping bag beside the fire in the comfortable middle bedroom of the old Junee Homestead, to sleep. And sleep he did. But at 3a.m. he awoke, uncomfortably: footsteps! Unmistakeable, slow footsteps, with boots on, walking up the hallway, through the kitchen door without a sound of it opening, and then silence. Some days later, still visibly shaken, he told the tale, swearing never again to spend a night in there, alone.

We scoffed, but it happened again; on a quiet night, four people sleeping off a long trip were awakened by the same phenomenon. Three men, one girl, all white faced. But, still we scoffed.

Almost by accident five of us came to spend a night there in the cosy middle bedroom. Two stayed awake! At about 12.30a.m. they heard it, too: footsteps along the hall and then, the sound of the kitchen door opening. To their shock (and horror) they heard it three times but no one was to be seen. Now, dear reader, you must know that the kitchen door fits tightly and jams throughout its span, yet the sound of its opening was as smooth as silk ... The night wore on, the noises increased. One listener suggested that the thumping, tapping and scuffing of feet was that of a party being held in the kitchen (? by ghosts). Things quietened and we slept, only to be awakened by one girl member screaming. She was on her feet! The sound of THAT door opening again had woken her! And the 'party' started again, with thumps and crashes and the noises of the door. Your intrepid scribe sought to calm the terror-stricken throng by claiming that a possum could have been responsible for all that they were hearing, although in his heart he knew, and ardently hoped (for indeed, science destroys art too often), that it was not. And at just the right moment one of those fluffy friends from the animal kingdom dropped onto the roof from a nearby tree and all were convinced... Until the morning, when looking at the whole thing with clear heads, we just could not explain it all by the possum, theorise as we might.

Later that same week we heard a tale from several former residents of the area. We heard enough to stop all mirth, as the true history of the place emerged in all its gruesome detail. The Junee Homestead, it seems, has a reputation for strange goings on. A fellow living there years ago is alleged to have murdered a miner at Adamsfield. He burnt the body and buried the bones beneath a log (where?). He then attempted to hang himself in the old Junee Homestead and was thereafter known as the Hangman of Junee.

Why has not the haunting been heard before? Is it because others have slept more deeply, or, more likely, does the centre room only have to be occupied before the ghost walks? Perhaps it was not heard during the 1971 ASF field trips, or at least not noticed, because there were 30 people in the other rooms and footsteps would not have seemed strange.

So, who stalks the June Homestead? Does the poor murderer's spirit lurk there, wishing his suicide attempt had been successful? Or, does the victim seek his killer? Perhaps it is the schizophrenic spectre of a living mainland caver pining for the depths of Khazad-Dum.

I make no attempt to explain, I only report the facts as I know them. Joke, if you will, aye, as we did, but now ten have heard the sounds and very few of them will sleep there alone or even with you for company.

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WELCOME ABOARD

The Society is pleased to welcome the following new members :

Karen DEDENCZUK

Chris BELL

Kathryn MEDLOCK

Rosalind BELL

Andrew SKINNER

"Ant" and Judy SPRENT

"Ant" and Judy are formerly of UQSS.

*

by Ron Mann

Browsing through a local bookstore recently I noticed a small book stuck in a corner alongside some electronic manuals. The unusual title, "Aquavideo", caught my eye and perusal of the pages revealed that the book was about underground water location. I read a bit more thinking of the possible relevance to caving if the methods worked. One of the editors of the "Southern Caver" could not suppress his mirth on being informed that I might write an article on the subject and even suggested that it could be classified as Humourous.

A section in the book brought to mind a technique used by some P.M.G. linemen to locate buried pipes and wires when a metal detector is unavailable. The method was demonstrated to me by my father and I found that it also works for me. Unfortunately it only seems to work with some people but for anyone who wants to try it here is the method.

Take a piece of ordinary fencing wire or even a metal coathanger and straighten it out. Then bend the wire into an "L" shape or right angle. The base of the L should be about 5-6" long and the longer side between 12-24". The shorter length fits down between the closed fist, being held just tight enough to prevent it slipping down, yet allowing the long side to swing free. The two fists are brought together with the long sections of the wire pointing away from the body and parallel to each other and the ground. Walk slowly over a known buried pipe and if you have got what it takes the wires will swing apart until they form a straight line. The pipe should be almost directly below at this point. If the wires are held about a foot apart and still parallel they will swing inwards.

It is possible to locate a pipe or wire on one pass yet on another pass over the same spot the wires will not move. This is done by deliberately willing the mind (or whatever it is that moves the wires) to do so.

The wires can be put into a glass, plastic or some other type of container and the swinging effect is still apparent although the author of the book notes that if they are moved over an object without a person's presence they will not move. I will leave the explanation of that to you!

According to the book these wires may be used to locate underground water along with other methods probably more well known such as those used by water diviners. These are "switches" of trees and are a "Y" shape. When the diviner is over a supply of water the switch bends toward the ground.

As mentioned before these methods could have great possibilities in the field of caving. I intend to try them out in the field over a flat paddock area where it is known that a stream flows underneath although its actual course is unknown.

If results are positive you will certainly hear about it.

A Word from the Magazine Committee

This issue, like the previous one, is slightly late in appearing. Our lead article was delayed, we waited as long as we could, then rearranged the material on hand. The job was made harder by the fact that some of the pages had been typed with the page numbers included and the stencils run off. Still, we are satisfied with the end result and hope that the reader is, too.

Our previous issue (Vol.4.No.1.) proved exceedingly popular and was a sell-out. We have, therefore, increased the number of copies of this issue and will be able to supply a limited number of extra copies to those desiring them. Similarly, we had a request for reprints of A.P.Andrew's article on the Thylacine discovery. We were happy to oblige and in the future will provide reprints of any article published in the 'Southern Caver', Vol.4. for a nominal charge to anyone interested.

Vol.4.No.3., due out early in February, 1973, is already in the 'composition' stage. Among the articles therein will be 'Solut on Caves' by G.Watt, 'Tourist Caves' by K.Kiernan (and, knowing K.K., there will surely be something else), 'Cave Numbering' by Bob Cockerill and 'Tasmanian Cave Fauna, Pt.2.' by Aleks Terauds. Ron Mann might have a follow up on 'Aquavision' With that line up, all that is left to say is "Good reading!"

Area Reports August 1st to October 31st.

Mole Creek (2 trips 16 persons)

Trips to this area were mostly tourist trips to show new members and prospectives some of the better caves. Kubla Khan, Shishkebab and Cow Cave were explored.

Ida Bay (2 trips 10 persons)

Some scrub bashing was done and Loons Cave explored. Several members traced a survey trail near the new quarry and going towards Entrance.

Jukes Darwin (1 trip 8 persons)

The aim of the trip was to explore limestone deposits in the area but due to poor weather the trip turned into a conservation weekend with the members investigating aspects of pollution in the vicinity.

Hastings (4 trips 24 persons)

Two of the trips to Hastings were scrub bashing with nothing of interest to report.

Kevin Kiernan and Dave Mitchell investigated hydrological aspects of the general area near Newdegate.

A trip was organised to show a party of Venture Scouts the splendours of Hastings mud. The scouts were taken through the Binney Tunnel to Hells Half Acre and appeared to thoroughly enjoy themselves.

Maydena (6 trips 31 persons)

Welcome Stranger was popular this quarter with three trips into this well decorated cave. All the trips were tourist jaunts to show prospectives that good formation does exist in quantity in caves in the Florentine. Exploration of holes in the Chrisps Road area and a trip to Bone Pit (JF 203) were enjoyed by all who took part.

*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sirs,

Mystery Creek Diversion Threat

Late in July information reached the South-East Cape Committee of a proposal by the Australian Commonwealth Carbide Co. Ltd., to divert Mystery Creek from its present course (into Entrance Cave and through to Exit Cave), to the site of their Ida Bay limestone quarry.

Inquiries to the Rivers & Water Supply Commission were referred to the Mines Department who were informed by the Company that only 30 gals. of water per day would be required. To suggest diversion from over a mile away for this amount of water provoked a rumour that all the water was required for sluicing overburden.

A letter from the S.E.C.C. to the Company drew their attention to the creek flowing from Bradley Chesterman Cave only a couple of hundred yards from the quarry which would easily supply the supposed requirements, to which the Company responded that it had no present plans.

Subsequently survey trails were reported to have appeared along the track between the quarry and Entrance Cave, and track clearing has occurred. Information has now been received that these have appeared merely because the Company is consolidating its lease boundaries. A letter from S.C.S. to the Rivers & Water Supply Commission gained the response that no proposal for diversion of Mystery Creek had been put to them as any must to be legal, and should any proposal come to hand S.C.S. would be given the opportunity to object.

The threat seems to have been met by over-reaction, but at least the problem now appears to be resolved. It would seem the Company was unaware of the damage the diversion of Mystery Creek would cause to Exit and Entrance Caves, and having been made aware ceased all consideration in this regard. However, it may be as well for members to keep their eyes and ears alert to any similar situation developing in future.

Kevin Kiernan.

