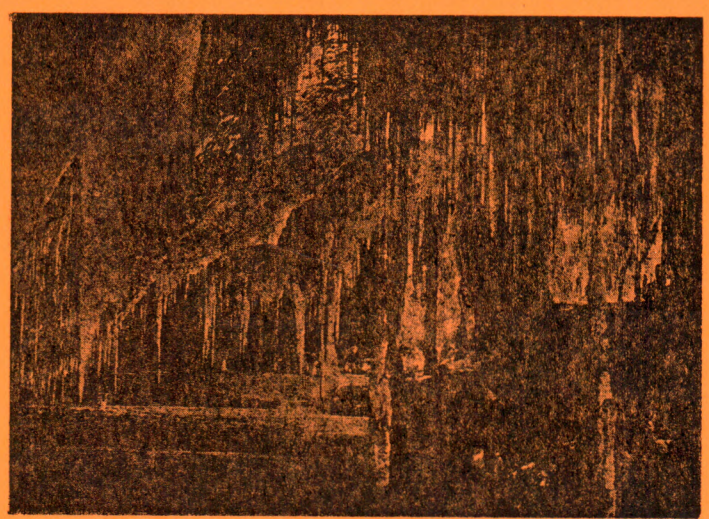
SOUTHERN CAVER



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"SOUTHERN CAVER"

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CONTENTS:

Recent Discoveries in Herbert's Pot
By Chris Harris.....Page 2

Continued Exploration at Mt. Ronald Cross
By Leigh Gleeson.....Page 6

Sexism in Caving.....By Margaret Russell..Page 8

A Constant Voltage Charger For
Lead Acid Batteries...By Steve Street.....Page 10

Area Reports.....By Stephen Harris....Page 13

A Note to Users of Wet Cave Campsite
By Mieke Vermeulen...Page 14

RECENT DISCOVERIES IN HERBERTS POT

By Chris Harris

The 1975-76 summer caving season has produced important results from work done in Herberts Pot which are of national significance. Exploration and survey teams have pushed Herbert's Pot into the position of the third longest recorded and surveyed cave in Australia with a combined surveyed and estimated unsurveyed length of passage of nearly six kilometres, and discovered possibly one of the most commanding formation finds of the decade. It is a unique display of helictites and rare forms of gypsum speleothems, concentrated in a passage which runs parallel to the Paragon Vaults extension. The several trips of discovery and survey will be here described.

In November 1975 Steve Harris, Lindsay Wilson, Graeme Bailey and Adrian Bowden whilst exploring upstream discovered some hundreds of metres of new passage extending from the talus chamber at the upstream creek convergence. Later this passage was named Star and Frog passage.

In December a team discovered the beginning of what was to later develop into a major new lead,,which it was hoped would bypass the upstream sump. At the beginning of the lead a beautiful display of helictites was found. The main stream passage was also extended on this trip. The water-filled main stream passage was negotiated for approximately 20 metres with great dificulty due to freezing water and minimal air space. This final section includes long sections of very low active stream passage and was to later provide tortured moments for the survey party forced to work under these difficult conditions. After 20 metres the team broke out into a small chamber. Beyond this they stared wearily into the deepness of an impenetrable sump.

During a three day period in January Lindsay Wilson Rod Hughes, Dave Montgomeryand Leigh Gleeson along with

two visitors from S.S.S., D. Martin and D. Drane, carried out water tracing tests between Herbert's Pot and Kelly's Pot in order to positively establish a link. Charcoal bags were placed at the Keyhole, the downstream tributary at its confluence with the streamway and at the campsite. The water levels were moderate when at 2.15 pm on the 24th, 11/2 lbs of fluorescene was released in Kelly's Pot. A positive visual observation was made at the campsite at 7am on the 25th and traces were noted until 3.30pm on the same day. Later laboratory analysis gave a strong positive result for the Keyhole monitor and a negative result for the downstream tributary monitor. Intentions of continuing upstream exploration and surveying on the same trip had to be abandoned near the Keyhole as the party had lighting problems. Instead the team headed downstream. Whilst negotiating the streamway Graeme observed an upperlevel passage which was promptly explored and surveyed. This added 200 metres of large dimension passage containing some good formation, particularly straws, to the downstream section.

Excitement in the club was mounting over these new discoveries. Herbert's seemed to be opening up in a big way and disclosing some of its more beautiful secrets. Herbert's veterans sensed that a major breakthrough was imminent. Hence it was with a great deal of optimism that Steve Street, Chris Harris and Graeme Bailey went underground, again into Herbert's during February, to continue exploration of the recently discovered upstream extension which it was hoped would bypass the sump. The party went underground at mid-day on the 24th February and quickly reached the upstream waterfall as the travelling was a delight in the low water. The party reached what has been christened Duck-off Chamber. Progress now centered on the upper level passage. The party passed the limit of exploration along this passage. After negotiating a difficult

rift traverse a way down to the main stream was found which in the opinion of the party was without doubt upstream of the sump. However a ladder was needed to descend to the stream so the team unequipped for this new obstacle retreated disappointed. But their disappointment was soon to be forgotten. Whilst in the midst of a weary retreat to the entrance one of the members noticed yet another new lead. In silence the party climbed upwards toward the opening in the ritual of "checking out" familiar to all cavers. As veterans to Herbert's the party was almost blasé about the discovery of a new passage but they were unprepared for what was to meet their eyes. As they wandered in turn along the dry horizontal passage they were gripped by awe. A sight such as this had never been seen by any of them. As one member of the party later remarked this sight was the ultimate experience in his six years of trogging. They were in a passage encrusted almost completely with calcite and gypsum formation. The floor literally sparkled at their feetand it continued for hundreds of metres. Steve, Chris and Graeme filed gingerly through this rich gallery. Its name sprung spontaneously from their lips: "Holy Hell Passage". Apart from the more common calcite helictites there were waterfalls of gypsum fibres curving from the walls. In continous profusion were exquisite white formations and some of the helictites were a beautiful green.

On the 13th of March another party comprising Steve Street, Chris Harris, Leigh Gleeson and wilderness photographer Chris Bell returned to Holy Hell Passage to photograph and survey it.

The party in 16 hours underground also continued to explore the major lead beyond the sump but found to their astonishment that the passage had taken a recurved route which returned them to their original starting point near

the major U-bend of the stream well down stream of the sump. A rather confused group of explorers discussed this remarkable turn of affairs before beginning the long journey back to the entrance.

The Southern Caving Society considers Herbert's Pot as a major underground wilderness area that, since its first visitation in 1959, has offered a constant challenge to cavers. Perhaps now is the time to consider the ultimate fate of such remarkable areas as Holy Hell Passage and Paragon Vaults with a view to their ultimate preservation.

CONTINUED EXPLORATION AT MT. RONALD CROSS

By Leigh Gleeson.

In 1974 an S.C.S. team made substantial cave discoveries in the Mt. Ronald Cross dolomite on the west coast of Tasmania -(see Southern Caver Vol.6 No.1) As a result of that trip it was concluded that there existed verl good potential for deep caves in the area. During Easter 1976 a five man team (L.Gleeson, L.Wilson, S.Street, C.Harris and P. Russell) returned to the area in the hope of realising some of that potential.

A considerable footage of rope and other equipment were air-dropped into a site near the tarn to facilitate exploration attempts. The team proposed to continue the search for caves in the steep gully one kilometer to the north east of the campsite. It was here that 9 caves were surveyed and numbered on the previous trip, the deepest being Libra(MR208), Capricorn(MR204), and Scorpio(MR209). All of these are in the order of 50 metres deep and characterised by spectacular entrances. Furthermore the team hoped to investigate the stream which drains the tarn to the south east and drops away to the Surprise River, 300 metres below. The stream normally carries in excess of 2 cumecs of water and had never been checked by cavers.

We had the benefit of extremely pleasant weather during the climb to the tarn basecamp, but this was to deteriorate rapidly soon afterwards. The subsequent heavy rains, hail and snow reduced the opportunity to make optimum use of the available five days on the mountain.

The 1974 trip had left a most promising cave(Scorpio MR209) with exploration incomplete. The 20 metre pitch which held up exploration then was negotiated, however yet another pitch(possibly 10 metres) stopped the return party once again because time ran out. A large waterfall could be heard in the hole suggesting it to be a goer, but this was soon doubted when a resurgence was found 100

metres further down the same gully. No new caves presented themselves in the upper limits of this gully or on the adjacent hill slopes and ridges. The sections of the gully below the 900 metre contour have as yet not been investigated and may well accomodate additional caves to those already found.

The stream draining the tarn was followed for its entire length through splendid rainforests to the Surprise River junction. At no stage could it be seen to sink, and in fact its discharge increased as several tributaries joined it. This disappointing result could probably best be explained in terms of the extreme steepness of the gully.

On the return climb to the tarn campsite from the Surprise River no caves were stumbled upon up the gully sides. A dry overhang, or shelter cave and a 5 metre cave were found, but not surveyed or numbered.

The results of this trip must cast a certain amount of pessimism on what was considered to be a very good potential for caves on the mountain. By the same token it would be unreasonable to suggest that scope for further exploration is non-existent. A substantial surface area is yet to be explored and when it is, it may reverse any pessimism that accrued on this trip.

Foot-note: A map of cave locations including cave descriptions and surveys is available from club records.

SEXISM IN CAVING

(An indepth report by Margaret Russell, written in five minutes.)

History shows us that caving was not always a mans sport. In fact it may be argued that it was the woman who really understood and loved the cave first. In prehistoric caves women made homes for their families. Using their superior intellect women soon realised that the cave provided shelter and warmth from the elements. Cave dwellers lived comfortably in their subterranean habitats for centuries and the woman played her role in founding the noble pastime of speleology.

The male usually kept to the outside world- hunting and fishing while the woman concentrated on the more aesthetic pastimes of washing the flowstone and dusting formation. During her spare time she devoted much attention to wandering about the cave discovering new and interesting passages with formation. Later when the male chauvinist caveman did turn his attention to the cave it was only to draw pictures all over the walls, vandalising the heritage of future generations of cavers.

Down through the centuries the woman was gradually made to feel inferior until she finally developed a complex and took to living in huts or houses. She was delegated to the more uninteresting chores of cooking and fire-tending.

Today little has changed. All too often we see the devoted little woman browbeaten into campsite duties. If she ever gets underground it is usually to be left to wait in the dark until the men have finished pottering about. She is made leave the cave first- forced up the ladder first. Her initiative is smothered and male egos reign supreme.

It should be noted that women are in many ways more suitably adapted to caving;

1. They have fatty deposits on the buttocks and legs which enable them to slide easily down mud slopes, also giving greater warmth underground.

2. Their keen brains make them psychologically more suitable in the demanding situation.

3. They are more considerate and patient with fellow cavers, they are positive thinkers and never give up.

4. Biologically they are the most important members of the team as they produce more cavers.

There are many more points which I could call to mind but this article could not contain them. Women have gradually infiltrated the ranks of the Southern Cavers bringing with them more members, more money, and better social life. Last year was International Womens year- this has brought with it a renaissance. Women are taking their rightful place on the rockface and enjoying once again the cold, damp exhausting glories of caving.

A CONSTANT VOLTAGE CHARGER FOR LEAD ACID BATTERIES

The circuit and details of the charger were submitted by Steve Street some time ago but due to various reasons have only now been published.

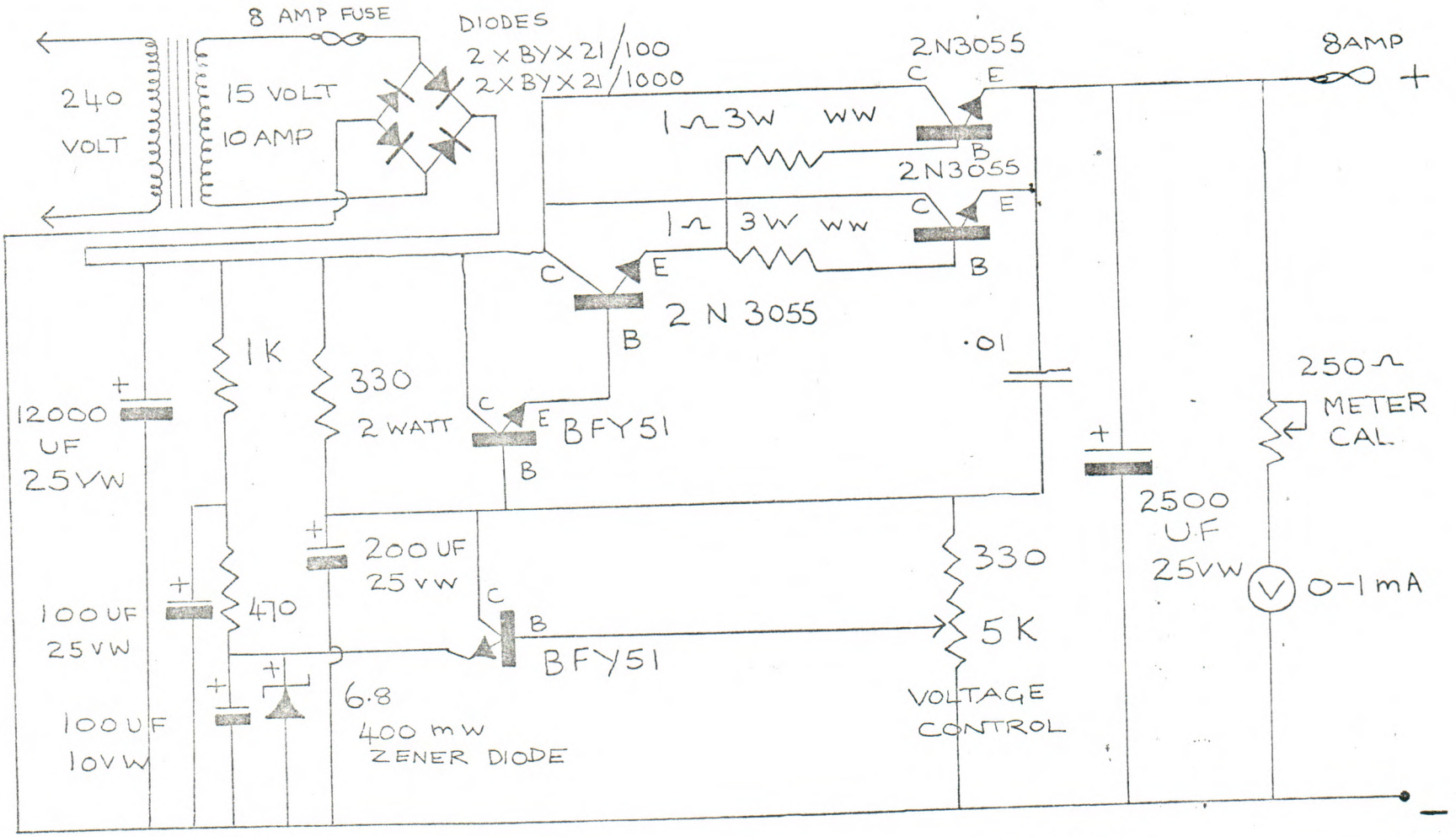
With the charger set at 4.5 volts, each battery draws approximately 2 amps, if it has been discharged for a number of hours. The time taken for the current to drop to approximately 100ma will depend on the discharge time. With this value of current (100ma) the batteries can be left on the charger until required.

Care must be taken that the number of batteries connected does not draw more than 8 amps, the value of the fuses. The power transistors become very hot at 5 amps and could be destroyed unless proper heatsinks are used.

There is another way to overcome this problem and that is to convert the charger to a Constant Current Charger and the number of batteries able to be charged is raised to twelve. This system, however, has many disadvantages. Each battery takes 500ma from the time it is put on the charger until it is taken off. If the battery is charged for twice the discharge time, at half the discharge rate, (500ma), then the original discharge time has to be known if the battery is to be fully charged.

This charger can be used for charging a 12 volt car battery when set at 13.5 volts or a 6 volt battery when set at 7 volts. The fuse wire is the usual 8 amp household type.

CONSTANT VOLTAGE CHARGER FOR LEAD ACID BATTERIES



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AREA REPORTS

by Stephen Harris

The following area by area summary of trips is for the period from February 2nd to the end of April 1976.There was a total of seven trips working in three areas.

MOLE CREEK (5 trips)

On February 24th,ateam of three,comprising G Bailey, S Street and C Harris made a spectacular discovery - a formation passage in Herberts Pot with helictites and with calcite and gypsum forms which exceed in quality anything hitherto discovered in such concentration in any other Tasmanian cave. The passage was named " Holy Hell Passage"and its location will not yet be generally revealed due to the high probability of damage. On the 13th and 14th March a second trip was conducted to the same section of the cave,this time including Chris Bell,an accomplished photographer. Chris took several colour slides in Holy Hell Passage but did not change films because of the danger of getting grit into the camera. The passage was surveyed before the party turned for the entrance which they reached in the early hours of Sunday morning.

On the 20-21st March five people (Steve Harris,Anita Spaander,Dain Bolwell,Annie Alexander and Lindsey Wilson) caved at Mole Creek and descended Shishkebab cave. On the sunday they travelled through Wet Cave to Georgies Hall. Anita,a novice caver,managed to get ahead of the rest of the party and forged the entire distance of Eureka Link in the stream.

A party of six headed for Mole Creek with the specific intention of furthering a lead in the lower talus section of Shishkebab which was reached by Bob Cockerill during early exploration. The present team,led by Bob included Margaret Russell,Mieke Vermeulen,Chris Harris,Leigh Gleeson and Rod Hughes. They reported that"... although the lead was narrow it was pushed past the previous limit marked by a cairn which was possibly placed by John Morley. Unfortunately,due to the difficult angle no one this time could get past a nasty S-bend even though the lead seemed to continue. Margaret,Leigh and Chris sweated over the problem for some time but at last gave up. There is a small possibility of further extension but the attempt should only be made by a dwarf equipped with a jackhammer"

On the 23rd April a familiarisation trip into Herberts Pot was made by a small diverse party from Hobart consisting of Bob Cockerill (SCS),G Galloway (Police S&R),Col Hocking (Climbers Club of Tas.) and Bob Woolhouse (NC). The trip was in preparation for a forthcoming search and rescue exercise. The group reached the Keyhole.

FLORENTINE VALLEY (1 trip)

On the 22nd March Bob Cockerill, S Nicholas, P Watts, R Bridge and nine members of the Police Search and Rescue team were led into Welcome Stranger. The trip aimed to orient the Police to caving as a first preparation for the combined S&R exercise at Mole Creek on the 1st and 2nd May. Worth noting is the fact that not only was no formation broken at all but some flowstone was washed down.

MT.RONALD CROSS (1 trip)

Easter(16-20 April)was the time for yet another assault on the caves in this area. Leigh Gleeson, Chris Harris, Steve Street, Lindsey Wilson and Peter Russell aimed to continue surface and underground exploration but as it turned out they were bullied by cruel weather conditions. Tents at night were filled with spray from the rain and snow fell for some of the time. The overflow waters from the tarn were found not to sink. Only one cave, five metres deep was found and this was left un-numbered.

A NOTE TO USERS OF WET CAVE CAMPSITE

It comes as somewhat of a shock to the system when one wanders into the idyllic spot at the creek sniffing the goodly country air and treads on old rusty tins and broken bottles left by thoughtless cavers.

Surely in this enlightened age we would expect people to recycle those few tins and bottles that they bring to the camp, or at least take them home to their respective rubbish bins.

No wonder new-comers drop their garbage when they see old-timers chucking junk into the bush.

A little more thought and effort would make the old campsite much more pleasant.

Mieke Vermeulen