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# SOUTHERN CAVER



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"SOUTHERN CAVER"

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## EULOGY FOR THE FRANKLIN

by Kevin Kiernan

It seemed more like an expedition this time, such a total change.

Departure hour approaches but the weather holds and it is too conspicuous for a parka with nice big pockets crammed with excess baggage. Sweating instead in three pairs of trousers, two jumpers and innumerable underpants, a whillans harness underneath and mountain boots: "Hand baggage? Only this wee pack with my camera gear lady....thats OK? Good, thanks lady". A cannon ball of iron mongery pounds my back and pocketed ice-screws stab on the way through the metal detector, un-noticed, while an official murmurs quietly "Funny, should have picked up the metal lugs on those boots, better have it checked". That same music is still playing and the Tasman never ends. The forecast is bad - hot, and the hour long wait for baggage and customs leaves height decreasing like a snow-man caught out in the desert. "Smuggling anything? ....no (only jumpers and dirty underwear). Offensive weapons? ....how about body odour?"

Climate shock: This is ridiculous! Two days ago shivering, gazing out through the leviathan teeth of the mouth of a sub-glacial meltwater outflow cave, and now shedding skins like a snake that dozed through ten summers and is trying to catch up. Then welcome home and a long dreary bus ride across the state, and all that is familiar is the sleep when its all over.

Black coffee and burnt jaffles are not a good way to start a day's caving, especially after a day like that, but soon the beauty of the Gordon eases the flustered mind. The comfort of the tourist launch Denison Star ended at Butlers Island from where two jet boats skimmed us up through the H.E.C."mank" to the Franklin River, and a base camp established two days before.

It was great to be on the mighty Franklin again, Australia's last major wild river: the nearest approach to true wilderness in the mangled South-West, intact but for the traverse of its headwaters by the Lyell Highway, the last miles of the Mt. McCall H.E.C. road and the Jane River track. Here is part of the massive limestone belt supposedly sweeping southwards of the Jukes-Darwin area through to near the Davey River.

From a tent beneath a giant Huon Pine overlooking Verandah Cliff we paddled canoes upstream to entrances seen in impossible flow conditions two years before, to join the Sydney contingent in exploring them. The principal entrance was quickly dubbed Bingham Arch, for one of the politicians who will probably sentence the area to death beneath a hydro-electric project in coming years. An entrance about



40 feet in diameter follows the course of a tributary creek for a couple of hundred feet to another sizeable entrance beyond a lofty vault, lit by another large entrance high to one side. Just inside this a complex of decorated passages leads past two natural windows to a roomy chamber from which a decorated balcony looks out over swallows sweeping low above the deep burgundy tinged blue of the river, amid the lush green rainforest: a truly idyllic spot. Another small cave lies directly beneath the balcony.

The sequence of days dims in the mellow timelessness of a lost landscape: paddling up the gentle reaches between the deep green of the forest banks, stopping to inspect little effluxes where waterfalls pour out of weirdly fluted riverside cliffs; swimming in the warm water; drifting silently beneath the blue sky amid a kaleidoscope of blossoms and leaves suspended on the mirror black; at other times paddling full bore to ascend a rapid or struggling to portage around. Or just sitting and marvelling at the intricacies of the fossil corals and shells in the limestone.

On the second day out of base numerous holes were explored in a cliff by simply paddling into their welcome shade. A scramble over a low point led to a large entrance in a dry gully. A passage 20 feet in diameter to which there are three or four other entrances, was followed a few hundred feet into the hillside, past a thick bone fill and an area of well developed gours, to terminate in a decorated chamber. Viewed from within, the entrance to Fraser Cave is a complex of sunbeams on sparkling droplets floating down to ripple pools of crystal clarity, and of soft light filtered through the dense vegetation. A number of smaller holes were found inland in the same area.

There was a night when thunder threatened and a weird moon glowered through the trees surrounding our flood-bank camp, while a lamprey haunted the shore. And morning revealed a huge sea eagles' nest high in a dead tree.

Then on again past more weird convolutions in the sharp, hard rock. If Tasmania's wild western rivers be the place where cavers come in their declining years then it is also the place they have their last nervous breakdown, from the endless, exhausting assortment of river-flank holes, some of which are simply passed by.

The long haul up the rapid below the Jane junction, and a gentle paddle a kilometre or so up that delightful little river, then back down cheering in sheer exuberance at the freedom. Then back up the Franklin, and more holes, one a well decorated tunnel boring into a lofty bluff from beside a little arch and gallery complex.



At last the limestone stopped, and we paddled happily in the sun, drifting around quiet eddies on the swirl of floating colours darting among the afternoon shade bars cast by the myrtle, and nosing into the river bank to be showered by petals from the ti-tree, then just sitting awe-struck at the flood debris high above in the trees. After four trips to the Gordon and Franklin it seemed we had finally reached the upstream end of the limestone belt. We had seen the area in many moods: in storm and cloud; in raging flood and laughing gurgle.

But in all that time we had investigated only the river bank limestone, probably the least promising part of all, for it is at the margins of the limestone higher in the hills that one might anticipate the greatest promise. Yet all around us on the way up had lain caves but also reminders that many could be lost even before they are known to exist, and that this magnificent wild-land which in another time or place might have inspired a Grieg or a Delius, may soon vanish.

The canoes were left tied to a log to wander up to the head of a fast flowing trough where the river dropped in an impressive display. So inspiring was the scene that for a long time we failed to notice the high limestone cliff just upstream. So we had not reached the upstream limit after all! And the falling dusk ensured we would not that day. Somehow the detailed mapping and numbering that marks the trail of the speleo today, pushing back the unknown so finally, had seemed a little depressing and incongruent in this wild place, so the sight of a further cliff, stretching who knows how far up the river and the thought that we would not explore it, was a warming one. Perhaps the limestone really does extend most of the way through to Jukes Darwin, perhaps not. Its just great not knowing.

The trip back down to that night's camp near Flat Island was as exuberant and boisterous as the river ran, at times drifting on darkened pools beneath the green canopy, but then running and bucking and splashing through the rushing rapids of the shallows, up beside which we had earlier laboured.

Rain slowed the dawn. Memories of an epic on the Gordon, and the sight of one log jammed by flood at least 100 feet above the river, sent us gliding downstream again storming through energetic rapids, then gliding again. A gathering nor'-west storm escorted us for the last hour to camp upon a carpet of rain rippled mirrorscape. No-one slept as the hills rang late into the night with thunder that appeared as if upon us, while lightning flickered continuously through the weave of the tent wall for at least five minutes on one occasion, and long lit the night. It was a storm the like of which we had never dreamt, and we lay there listening later to the heavy dripping from the forest canopy and the hammering upon it. It was one of those marvellous displays of the inexorable might and indifference of nature which so



effectively puts presumptuous man firmly back in his place - our electrician was left muttering incomprehensibly about how he used to think it was impressive watching a spark leap between two little electrodes - the sort of exhibition that reminds man it is he who is the transient, not these flowing waters.

Caving was largely shirked as the rising continued. Early one morning we were greeted by four canoeists as they passed, having followed the Franklin's wildest reaches west and south of Frenchmans Cap. A cave left unexplored last time revealed a few hundred feet of exciting rushing streamway; elsewhere other small caves and a beautifully symmetrical natural arch. And one day high water permitted a canoe trip right through Bingham Arch. As usual, when our laziness permitted us to look further back than the river edge there were usually caves to be found, but with that timeless old river rolling so slowly down, there seemed all the time in the world.

But eventually some had to leave so all declared a rest day to help by sitting around watching, then sped off noisily down stream to take them to the Denison Star. The inevitable Gordon epic then struck. Just after turning past Pyramid Island, that flat expanse of rock and gravel that used to be rain forest but was swept bare in a flood, an unseen blade of limestone sliced deep into the hull of one of the jet boats, sending it and its occupants flying. There followed days of repair, caves, forest and sun.

Then the clear still dawn of the day of farewell, drifting and paddling silently and alone down the last few kilometres to the confluence, almost embarrassed to paddle for fear of breaking the silence, and with a sad, lost and hollow feeling, a kind of loneliness, that this may be the last time. Then down the Gordon, still a wonderful valley despite the hacked trees, the cacophony of blasting and drilling and compressors drowning out the birds and the breezes, and all the pervading stench and litter. It used not to be like this.

Further down a strong breeze sprang up and efforts to make headway almost led to capsizing of the empty and light canoe. A quick paddle up a tributary to the beauty of Sir John Falls, then (with a log in the bow for weight) to Butlers' Rivulet to sit reflecting on the quiet beauty of the place until the others and then the Star arrived.

Canoes stowed aboard amid a hundred camera clicking tourists: having their six hour wilderness experience for \$12.00 per head, then escape away downstream to the crumbling remains of the old convict lime kiln relocated only last year. Choppy water nearer Macquarie Harbour was of some concern in view of the hasty patch covering one of the jet boat's injuries from three days before. In the Harbour it became evident what a week of north westerlies could do to twenty miles of water aligned in that direction. After a quick stop at Settlement



Island to await the Star, we followed her shelter across the Harbour, yet even then the jet boat hulls were well clear of the water on many waves, the buffeting sufficient to split an aluminium jerrycan of fuel. The tourists probably enjoyed it more than we as they clicked and pointed and giggled and did all the other things that tourists do. The trip will be best remembered for a million pictures of Grandma standing in front of the splashy little boats: Golly.

Postscript: In all the basin of the Franklin there is little sign of man's hand, and much of what does exist could be fairly quickly erased. Rising in the high country south of the Cradle - St. Clair national park, the Franklin flows southward through the Lyell Highway State Reserve and on to form the western boundary of the Frenchmans Cap National Park, then joins the Gordon to enter another State reserve.

It is wild and magnificent country this, a basin of wide plains, of dew-lit spider webs stretched between grasses of the early morning; of dense forests; of ferocious gorges carved beneath soaring mountain faces wreathed in scudding sou'wester mists; of gentle shingle rapids and quiet, placid reaches beside insanely fluted rock-scapes; of winter's snow-clad peaks and the burning skies of summer. This Franklin is a land of contrast, and with the wild ranges westward to the Prince of Wales could be the crown jewel of the South-West National Park, a last wild artery free to pulse life and energy through a primordial wilderness.

But if the good Lord had meant rivers to flow He wouldn't have invented avarice or myopia. As any engineer will tell you, this land cries out for beautification, for vast lakes upon which crippled men in fast boats may zap back and forth, and drink beer from cans, never thinking, never knowing, what lies beneath, until impaling themselves upon the drowned trees along the fringes. Any of the element in society who would crush up a cathedral for road metal will tell you the Franklin cries out to be tamed, so that its waters can serve man and cease to serve life; and that indeed all life too cries out to help man's quest for progress.

And why shouldn't it? What has the earth to lose from furthering the pace of man's demise? Perhaps it is time for the wild to lay down its existence, that nature may the sooner re-establish itself.

Franklin River. Born in the snows. Died in the 1980's from the furnace of man's haste in the 1970's. R.I.P.



## JANE RIVER UVALAS

by Leigh Gleeson

The Jane River area in western Tasmania has had relatively little attention given to it over the years by speleologists. This is despite the fact that dyeline maps of the area reveal numerous sink-like depressions, some of which are thirty metres deep and between one and two hundred metres across. Although no geological map coverage is available it is thought that the Jane River dolomites are continuous with those at Mt. Ronald Cross to the north east. This latter area has yielded a dozen significant caves and has demonstrated the ability of the dolomite to hold large caverns.

The area of particular concern in this report is that in the vicinity of the Everlasting Hills some 7 KM south west of Mt. Ronald Cross. It is more easily reached however by following the Jane River mining track (4 wheel drive track) some 10 KM (approximately) from the West Coast Highway. This track passes within 2 KM of the uvalas (compound dolines) as can be seen from the map. This map is taken from the Project: King Franklin dyeline sheet 1:15840.

In winter the Jane River track is often inaccessible even to 4 wheel drive vehicles and so it was that the exploration team of K. Kiernan, G. Middleton, B. Graham and the writer made their way to the Everlasting Hills on old push bikes. This new approach proved highly successful as a means of negotiating the steep muddy hills and waterlogged flats. Notwithstanding all the nonsense that took place the distance was covered in about two hours.

After leaving this track the best approach is to contour around the north east side of the Everlasting Hills for its slopes are covered in some of the most beautiful temperate rainforests one could have the good fortune to come across and certainly more easily negotiated than the wet heath scrub and button grass on the valley floors.

During the two days spent in the area no large caves were found. Details of each of the uvalas is given below.

### UVALA 1 (see map)

A surface stream sinks into an enterable cave which becomes impassable after 4 metres. No other sinks were looked for or found in this depression.

### UVALA 2

Two streams were followed, the first yielded a cave with a depth of 2 metres. The second stream flowed into a large boulder choke but was unenterable. At least twelve small dolines to the west of this boulder choke (some with minor trickles) were inspected but none



were enterable.

UVALAS 3a and 3b

It is difficult to separate these two in the field. In the western side (3a) two streams sink into separate dolines. One goes into a cave 3 metres long, the other goes into a cave which was explored for 10 metres. This latter hole may be pushed still further despite the fact that its dimensions are relatively small. Unreliable lighting deterred the explorer from continuing. This cave is the only real prospect (if one can call it that) in the area.

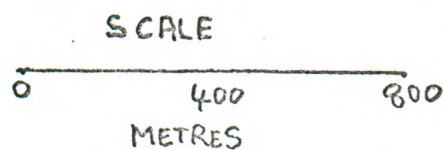
In the eastern side (3b) a small stream sinks into a non enterable cave.

All of the uvalas are covered with thick vegetation making them difficult to cross and also difficult to study their exact form. Certainly more work needs to be done in this area although indications are that this series of uvalas is not particularly promising.

A more hopeful area for a return party is the dolines situated at a higher altitude midway between Mt. Ronald Cross and the Everlasting Hills.



EVERLASTING HILLS DOLINES





## AREA REPORTS

By Ron Mann  
Kevin Kiernan

There were fourteen trips to eleven different areas in the period February 1st. to the end of April, 1977.

### Mole Creek: (3 Trips)

Early in March there was a photographic trip to upstream Herberts Pot, led by Graham Bailey. Fred Koolhof brought back some excellent large format slides of some of the more spectacular decoration to be found in this cave. These slides were shown to an appreciative audience of S.C.S. and T.C.C. members later in the month.

A four day trip at the beginning of April spent some time photographing in Honeycomb 1 and Honeycomb 2. High water levels in the lower passages of Honeycomb 1 and 2 provided an interesting background to some of the photos.

The dolines behind the old Kelly farmhouse on the Kelly's Pot track were checked but with disappointing results. The doline taking the small stream was thoroughly checked but the water sumps just inside the entrance of a small hole.

The location of a stream reported to have been heard under a patch of limestone many years ago was again searched for without success. A small cave in the dry valley below Kelly's Pot was explored by Leigh Gleeson who found some formation and evidence of previous visits.

Several small holes nearby were shown to the party by Pat Kelly but they did not go.

During the Anzac Day long weekend Fred Koolhof, Steve Harris and a visitor photographed in Shishkabab and Wet Caves. No doubt the results will be up to Fred's usual high standard.

### Ida Bay: (1 trip)

On March 6th Stewart Wilson led a large party into Exit as an introductory trip for some prospective members. He reported that the water level was very low and the party caved in Hammer Passage, returning to the entrance after four hours underground. It was also noted that the track to the cave is well marked and dry.

Flowery Gully: (1 Trip)

In March, Kevin Kiernan, Karen Hughes and Alison Davies visited the Flowery Gully Cave and reported that the downstream entrance was unstable because it is located in a quarry face. They also visited Vanishing Cave which Kevin notes "...must have been really incredible before the blasting and vandals".

Checking a quarry on the other side of the ridge to Vanishing Cave they found "...a couple of holes and a bloody great tiger snake".

Loongana: (1 Trip)

In late March, Kevin Kiernan led a party of five which visited Mostyn Hardy Cave and Swallownest Cave. At Mostyn Hardy Cave they encountered a camp full of State Emergency Services personnel who had staged a cave rescue exercise the day before.

Kevin remarked in the trip report that there is a "...superb glow worm display in the final area before the sump..." in this cave. The party then decided to float down the river on lilo's to reach Leven Cave which is in the opposite bank. The river was in mild flood and excellent sport was obtained trying to gain the entrance which is two thirds of the way down a rapid.

Maria Island: (1 Trip)

The Piranha section of Tear Flesh Chasm was visited by Kevin Kiernan and visitors Ian Brown and Basil Rathbone and a further limestone headland examined without success.

Mt. Anne: (1 Trip)

Lake Timk was 15 cm too high in late March to permit exploration by a party consisting of David O'Brien, Kevin Kiernan and visitors Ian Brown, Karen Hughes and Alison Davies. A return trip is planned for next summer.

Franklin River: (1 Trip)

Another major expedition to this area was held by SSS in February and is the subject of a separate report in this issue. A number of new caves were explored. Tasmanian participants were Kevin Kiernan, Barry Blain, Karen Hughes and Greg Middleton.



## NEW AREAS

### Everlasting Hills: (1 Trip)

A new caving area visited for the first time this quarter, this dolomite outcrop lies south of the Lyell Highway a few kilometres east of the Jane River mineral exploration 4 WD track. Greg Middleton, Kevin Kiernan, Leigh Gleeson and visitor Bob Graham used push bikes on the track, and recommend them as a most enjoyable and quite ridiculous way to get there slower than walking, and probably with less impact due to the lack of power and tendency to sink into mud at high speed and stop. The area is set amid superb rainforest, but although some large dolines are present little was found in the way of caves - see separate report by Leigh Gleeson.

### Mt. Weld: (1 Trip)

Another new area discovered this quarter, Mt. Weld is actually the closest known caving area to Hobart! Kevin Kiernan, Chris Bell and Sydney visitor Ian Brown have located a number of holes on the south-eastern flank of the mountain, the most promising of which is a shaft of 50m, with a ledge at 50m which was the limit of exploration due to shortage of gear. The rock is Precambrian dolomite.

### Cheyne Range: (2 Trips)

A preliminary attempt by Kevin Kiernan, Greg Middleton and Ian Brown, in early April, to reach a large depression visible on air photos N.W. of Mt. Gell, failed when the party ran out of time. A second attempt by the same trio, together with David O'Brien and visitor Alison Davies, was made over the Anzac long weekend. Foul weather conditions left refugees all over the mountain, but Ian and Kevin eventually reached the feature to find an enormous sinkhole blocked with dolerite clay and talus, but with negotiable holes around it. Although set in rainforest, the doline has an inverted treeline, and is floored with alpine grasses, with some cushion plants, dwarf pines and peripheral pandani groves, making it a truly idyllic spot. The grassed area is 150m wide by 6-700m long, but the full extent of the depression is very much greater, probably well over a kilometre wide. The area is situated north of the Lyell Highway in the upper Franklin basin, and will attract further visits for its scenery and alpine vegetation alone, let alone the caves which await exploration. The rock is Precambrian dolomite.

Upper Loddon River: (1 Trip)

During the Anzac Day long weekend Leigh Gleeson, Peter Russell, Steve Street, and Lindsay Wilson attempted to reach a large doline in the headwaters area of the Loddon River. They left the Lyell Highway at the Jane River track and followed this for about four miles then followed the Loddon River upstream for about two miles.

They then headed into the catchment ridges looking for the doline. It is marked on the King William dyeline map and is at an altitude of approximately 2700 feet and has a diameter of about 100m and a depth of 50-60m. A small stream appears to run into the depression. The rock is expected to be the same dolomite that appears at Mt. Ronald Cross.

Because of thick vegetation in the headwaters the party ran out of time before the doline could be located. The finding of a blazed track in the magnificent open Myrtle forest along the Loddon River helped the party and will be valuable in saving time on a return trip.



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