

NEWSLETTER OF THE TASMANIAN CAVERNEERING CLUB

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FORWARD PROGRAMME

July 17 The Editor turns 30!

Aug 4/5 Ile des Phoques diving/sight-seeing one day boat trip. The more who go the cheaper it gets, so see Phil Hill if you are interested.

EDITORIAL

Funny how this group seems to be relatively inactive but there is actually heaps going on! Maybe it's because there are no epics happening at the moment. I guess everyone is more experienced and capable so trips that were rated in the 'off the end of the scale' category have slipped back in perceived difficulty and are now treated as average trips and in fact are average trips for our active members.

This raises the problem of new members. How does someone make the giant leap from Exit/Entrance/Midnight Hole type trips to the average Florentine Folly? To join in with Epics Unlimited on the typical weekend jaunt requires them to suddenly gain half a decade of experience, heaps of gear, determination and all the other things that go to make up a good 'hard' caver. It's a situation we are not faced with very frequently as new members seem to be an endangered species, but the few we have seem very quickly to get disillusioned and run away, never to be seen again.

Some of you honkies are going to say 'it's just another editorial'. Well, it's true! What else can I say about our dark underground activity?

STUART NICHOLAS

CLUB BITS

- Although a bit old now (this news, not the Editor, yet!), during the month before Easter we were blessed with the presence of an Italian caver called Alberto. His English was not '0' level (perhaps zero level!), but he was a great guy anyway. Unfortunately we had just had an active weekend so not much happened while he was here, but what he did do seemed to impress him. Apparently in Italy, whenever Australia is mentioned in caving circles, it is instantly translated to 'Tasmania' (in Italian of course!). His cooking while at the TCC itinerants and all-comers New Town transit lounge was a pasta as good, eh, how you say it?....tucker!
- Other visitors during the last few months have included a SUSS (very!) group over Easter as well as VSA at the same time. The infamous Steve Bunton was here during the summer school vacation and back again for two weeks during May with Al Warild and, for a week only, Anne Gray. Bunty will never learn - maybe that's why he's still at school!

- Why are our pub nights boring these days? It's almost a chore going along despite the good venue, crowd, atmosphere, and so on. Same faces, same conversation topics For those who don't know, we meet at the Doghouse Hotel most Wednesday and/or Thursday nights after about 9.00 pm. Be there and add a new face (or just bring the old one) to the group.
- Two editions after this one will be the 200th Speleo Spiel - quite an achievement for any organisation, particularly a caving club. A special edition will be produced, but ideas are needed so stir those rusty neurons into action and tell either Stu or Trev of your inspirations.
- Mid July, yours truly the Editor is off to NZ for a couple of weeks skiing, so if you are interested in going let him know real soon.
- Probably at the end of July, a party type thing will probably happen in and around Stu's New Town abode. July is his 30th birthday and it's also the month of the 200th Spiel as well as there being a call for a house warming thing. Maybe I should light the fire to warm the house, it would be cheaper but maybe less fun! An actual date will be revealed at some stage.
- For those contemplating going to the next IUS Conference in Spain, you now have an extra year to save your pesos. Owing to a few organisational problems, the Spaniards have postponed the whole show from July 1985 to September 1986. I don't know about rain on Spain's plain but it seems a strange time of year to hold the Conference. A few of the Sydney crew are going to Europe anyway next year - fewer people, no queues at cave entrances and so on.
- Anyone seeing two 100 m 9 mm ropes and one 78 m 11 mm rope - all Bluewater - please let the Quartermaster know. These three ropes disappeared from the store over the weekend of June 9 and 10, and do not seem to be in the possession of any club member. Wonder if there's any connection to the gear removal job at Rik and Janine's place?
- Annual Dinner - this year it has been suggested we go on the "Derwent Explorer" trip to Oyster Cove Inn. This would cost about \$25.00 so start saving now! These trips are great fun and should make for a great evening.

THE WORST CAVES IN THE WORLD

Sufferers: Phil Hill and Stephen Bunton

Tuesday 24 January 1984 - Most cavers get off on exploration, but unless you are a local, exploration ain't easy. It requires a lot of local knowledge to find anything. People like me from NSW where it is caved out, content themselves with tourist caving. Such is my quest. When in Australia I'd just like to do tourist trips down all the good, the best, caves in any area. The problem being again you need locals to help you. Quite often their opinion of what constitutes a good cave differs to yours.

It was someone's advice that Phil and I followed - "go and do 341, it's pretty good". Phil forewarned me that you come out covered in caramello shit, but there was a hope of new passage and good formation photos. I was sold on the idea.

We descended the worst section of calcite clay grovelling style climbs I'd ever done. Frigged our way down some ladders (I hadn't used these archaic implements of exploration for years). Then we rigged a single rope (I know how these work) and hence entered the good bits of the cave. The highlight of the cave - the lake - had been stolen, so low were the water levels. A few straw photos then it was up to Phil's Dig.

A few pleasant hours were spent here half covered in gooey wet mud, hammering out wall flakes with a rounded dolerite rock. The debris and mud we scraped out with a flake of calcite. Such palaeolithic technology yielded another half metre of passage. It would only accept the torso of a well activated Phil. With a lump hammer Phil's Palaeolithic Passage might go - it has to according to Sod's Law. As the pair of us struggled uphill with far too heavy packs I thought - all the disgusting caves are the ones which go somewhere.

Back on the surface we dumped our packs on the "Round the Mountain" track and went off looking for the Chairman. I'd never seen it. After an hour of bashing about the truncated tracks and past aborted tapes of some other era, we called it a day and returned to the car.

Our day was not complete. Driving down the Junee Quarry Road we were halted by the locked gate. Thus commenced the 3 km walk back to the ANM gate. We had previously been told that they'd prefer this than to have us exit via the Junee Homestead - the log having long since disappeared.

Despite the short jog it was no hardship and we promptly got a lift back to the car and were released by the gateman. It was quite late when we finally retired after dinner and gear washing in the Junee River.

Wednesday 25 January 1984 - At 5.30 am the squawk of my alarm cut my restful slumber like a knife. Breakfast and packing quickly saw us through the gate at 6.30 am and on our way up No 9 Road to the old Growling Swallet carpark. Alas, the snow damage was still over the road and the slow progress clearing the track, if it was the right one, caused us to change plans.

We quickly drove around to No 8 Road and instead of turning right to Growling turned left to do Gormanghast. The legendary quality of this cave as extolled by ex-Tasmanian cavers now long fossilized was as expected.

Phil and I soon became disappointed beyond belief and exited within an hour after Steve passed a motion of appreciation for the cave. We dined in the noon day sun "bopping" to the car stereo before returning to Hobart real early.

STEVE BUNTON

SLAUGHTERHOUSE POT TO GROWLING SWALLET THROUGH TRIP - 25/2/84

Party: Martin Carnes and Nick Hume

No-one else seemed to be able to "spare the time" to go caving this particular weekend, so I rang Martin on the off chance and found he was harbouring ideas about a certain through trip, just what I fancied!

My abysmal memory forgot the location of Slaughterhouse only temporarily (oh! how could I forget?), and we were soon grovelling through the tight entrance passage, smug in the knowledge that we didn't have to return the same way. I rigged the 28 metre Southgate Pitch with a sling made up of a short, chopped section of club Bluewater. Martin fed me the main rope which consisted of his 33 metre Bluewater, knotted to my 37 metre Beal. We abseiled the pitch on doubled rope, then pulled it down behind us. A fairly committing action, I remember thinking at the time, as neither of us had been that far before.

While down climbing the talus, immediately below this pitch, I was overwhelmed by an urgent need to defecate and as I had placed my caplamp immediately behind me, in the haste to remove overalls, the whole ghastly business was projected in silhouette, onto the opposite wall. All this was too much for Martin who went scurrying back up the slope, retching.

The neck formed by a large block leaning against the wall, provided a handy anchor point for the 18 metre (?) pitch. I abseiled past a hairy looking, suspended block to a gravel floored chamber, where I charged off to have a look see.

The lowest point of the chamber had been looked at by Stefan and Trev on the previous trip (see Spiel 191) who reported no continuations here. However, yours truly decided to capture some of the "flavour" of the cave by having another look, a piece of inspiration that nearly proved fatal. A low crawl ended in a pile of car sized boulders, which looked harmless enough. The way on was a very tight squeeze up through these into a flattener, where I followed Stefan's scrapes and cairns before coming to much the same conclusion he had about the place.

Martin caught up with me on my "nth" attempt to get back through the squeeze. Cursing and sweating, I asked him to hang about as I was having a bit of trouble. My sore hip bones just weren't going back through what they had so recently passed, and it slowly dawned on me the reason why. The bloody hole was getting smaller (!) and as I struggled violently to extricate myself, the damned thing was getting smaller, faster! Halfway out, I returned the pressure the block was suddenly putting on my legs, to discover it was not just teetering in balance, but was a case of genuine subsidence. No contortionist could have removed himself from that death trap quicker than I did!

Lying in the flattener, bathed in sweat, my imagination wandered over the consequences of getting stuck while halfway through a situation like that, urch! Fortunately, what nature takes away she/he also giveth and with Martin's guidance I managed to squeeze through the enlarged gap on the other side of the block into the low crawl. I wandered back to the 18 metre pitch, shaken and confused, to collect the gear, during which time Martin had located the way on.

A pile of spent carbide (thanks Trev) indicated a dubious route down through the rock-pile, beginning with a squeeze through loose blocks which left me with a certain sense of deja vous. Martin had to strip off several jumpers to get through, but afterward described it as a piece of something or other. Martin's call of "below" reached me at exactly the same moment the rock did. I felt a dull blow, pain between the shoulder blades, while in mid stride, bridging down a rift. I shook off the offending object and it went crashing past me, fortunately I was wearing a full rope pack at the time. A worried looking Martin's next comment was ".....phew!"

We followed many and frequent cairns that led, torturously, through rockpile and rift for some considerable distance before coming to a spray lashed 20 metre pitch and, further on, a second pitch of 25 metres. The latter looked vaguely familiar and distant rumbles from the Trapdoor stream could be heard. We opted for doing the 25 metre pitch, even though it required two bolts, as the other aven looked closed from above (for future trips, the 20 metre is ok and easier to rig), anyway, "bolting" is such good, clean fun (ask Rolan). Abseiling into the familiarity of Growling was pure pleasure and we made a leisurely exit after an interesting five hours underground.

NICK HUME

THE SECOND EPIC I.T./GROWLING THRU TRIP - SATURDAY MARCH 17 OR ... THE EPIC SECOND I.T./GROWLING THRU TRIP

Party: Martin Carnes, Stuart Nicholas, Mike Edwards and Rik and Janine McTunney

Some say Growling is a classic, others say it is awful. Some even enjoy going caving With all these factors in mind, or not in mind as the case may be, everyone managed to assemble themselves at the ANM gate at precisely 0730 - quite an achievement really, but then a certain English person (to be spoken in a French accent) did IT thru GS a few weeks ago!

One car was left at the gate, the other being somewhat stuffed with trogs and their associated paraphernalia while dodging mega-loaded log trucks as well as being in four wheel drive. More about cars later in this bulletin.

The stagger up the hill was relatively not unpleasant and with astounding speed all descended into the earth around 0945 armed with one 45 m and two 100 m ropes. Spare rigging gear, a bolt kit and one prusik rig was also in various overloaded packs.

Descending through Ice Tube was almost amazing, in fact quite mind blowing, as none of the bods present had been below the third pitch. For anyone who has not seen IT (and I guess that's most cavers in the world!) the shafts are quite fantastic - rather like a giant version of Midnight Hole with a stream added for extra effect at no extra cost. The descent was not the most efficient possible but the team arrived at the bottom ok and I guess that's the aim of the exercise really. All the ropes pulled down without any hassles at all, but that is not to say problems won't occur on future thru trips. From that point on the trip really begins - no longer do you clip the pack onto your harness, yourself onto the rope and hop off the edge while popping neurons inside your head add to the astral awareness of the cosmic space factor surrounding your being. Instead you are very much down to earth and battling to drag yourself and your pack through the dreaded Fallopian Tube into the not so dreaded, and in fact almost pleasant Mother's Passage.

A more arduous and downright nasty piece of cave passage would be difficult to find, as well as being impossible to do if it was found. Without heavy packs (15 kg), F-Tube would almost be fun, except that you are completely isolated and must get through to reach the real world, and pubs and things, again. I guess that's the challenge of caving - a controlled survival exercise! Strangely no-one sensed the isolation, maybe because it was all basically known cave. There was little of the usual buzz when underground and a long way from the comforts of Florentine Valley rain forest. Considerable time was spent ripping caving gear to shreds and destroying various bits of the wearers as well, but eventually everyone collapsed onto the mud bank in Mainline, thankful that one ordeal was over. There were only three or four left (ordeals that is).

Unfortunately, Martin was feeling the pinch, but as well as that was also cold, quite tired and suffering fairly severe cramps. A tricky situation when a couple of kilometres of fairly arduous cave had yet to be negotiated - some of it quite wet. Mike did a great job of route finding through Mainline and particularly Necrosis, certainly far better than the author! A couple of stops were had on the way for R&R plus a few of Stuey's infamous jelly beans.

The rather unique (other names were also used) rigging of the Herpes III pitch had everyone guessing, but it was negotiated without incident as was the suitably wet Herpes III. At this point Martin's pack contents were spread between Mike and Stu to relieve him of some of the physical work needed to extricate himself. A bad exposure victim in this area would have little chance of survival, despite it being possible to reach the entrance in about half an hour from this point when reasonably fresh and unencumbered with packs and so on. Getting the packs through Windy Rift proved easier than expected and it wasn't too long before the moonlit forest was reached, although the top (entrance) section of GS was fairly slow for all concerned!

After ten hours of interesting caving IT was over - the second only IT/GS thru trip. All in all a fairly amazing trip and one I would recommend to anyone capable of it. However, do not underestimate the severity of what appears on paper to be fairly easy. The water was low for this trip although perhaps not as low as for the first trip earlier in the year. Higher water would make a small epic into a major undertaking, with the added problems of greater cold, more work to battle against the water itself as well as the risk of being trapped by a flood somewhere in the system. Anyone of any bulk should think twice before committing themselves

to getting through Fallopian Tube - it is not big and there is no other way out.

Back at the car a slow transformation took place as five weary trogs turned back into real human beings. Most of the gear was loaded into or onto the Subaru and off we went. Arriving at the gate our friendly gatekeeper let us out despite it being after 9.00 pm. Apparently there had been a misinterpretation of the exit time on the permit, but that was no problem. After the gate had closed and the gatekeeper had gone back inside, the author found that his car keys were not actually with him but still at the top of the Eight Road! To actually prove this required the complete unpacking and subsequent repacking of the Subaru. We all went home in that, leaving the Sigma parked waiting for collection the following day when Nick suggested a dive in the Junee to make the return trip worth the cost and effort.

Definitely one of Australia's classics and one that will be hard to beat in the future - in fact IT's fairly amazing really, to quote the author of one of the reports from the first trip.

A note to future parties - there is a Petzl bolt and hanger at the top of the second pitch which belongs to yours truly and he would like it returned. When using that bolt anchor be extremely careful as it is very suspect Most of the other rigging points looked ok at this time but always take enough expendable tape and so on to rerig the whole cave.

STUART NICHOLAS

P.S. A note about the note to future parties: During Easter and after, all the rigging gear was removed from IT. Hence anyone or ones considering IT, should take all the slings, bolts, hangers, and so on required for the trip. The bolt anchors are, of course, still there.

JUNEE RESURGENCE - A SWIM THROUGH AND CAR RETRIEVAL TRIP - SUNDAY 18/3/84

Bods involved: Nick Hume and Stuart Nicholas

Following the IT/GS trip on the Saturday there was a problem of retrieving a certain car from outside the ANM yard and its keys from the end of the Eight Road. The need to do this led to the demise of the TCC expedition to the Rockceston rock festival in Launceston, much to the disgust of the two bodies named above.

Nick suggested a swim in Junee would be useful to test a recently completed diving light and take a few more pictures of the dim dark world of sump diving. And so it came to pass that we bought out Roy's shop and then retrieved the Sigma, thanks to ANM who let us in at short notice and Mick Flint for finding the keys and leaving them on the front of his car at the end of the Eight Road.

A fairly uneventful dive in great viz should provide some good pix of the sump. The new light was excellent even if I do say so myself. There are actually walls and a floor and roof in the sump!! A couple of interesting leads were also noticed which were possibly unknown before. The main submerged chamber is certainly worth a look now that it can actually be seen! In fact a new light has been shed on the (w)hole sump diving scene. Roll on Sump Two

A leisurely stroll up through For Your Eyes Only occupied some more time before we donned weights and tanks, battled with free flowing regulators and swam back out again to be met by light rain and a muddy track back to the cars. And so ended an unusually active weekend but one that at least kept us off the streets and away from the evils of rock music!!

STUART NICHOLAS

Easter 1984 - Friday 20 April, Khazad Dum-Dwarrowdelf Exchange Trip

KD - Serpentine Party: Mark, Phil ("KD"), Jim, Kerry and Leanne (Sydney based).

Dwarrowdelf Party: Dave, Ed and Shane (Sydney based), Rolan (TCC) and Nick (SCS/TCC).

Walking the KD track on the Friday night, with such a large group, was quite a social experience. The conference should be this good. Each caver designated a pitch, queued up at the entrance, while I struggled to get my caplamp working.

Rigging was somewhat slow and Rolan decided to pike at the bottom of the second pitch. I watched him ascend with something approaching envy, but was keen to press on regardless as I had not been this way before. The use of 9 mm rope resulted in some fairly technical rigging and an inspection of the bolt arrangement on the last pitch was a highlight of the trip.

Four hours spent "touristing" and waiting around for the exchange party at the bottom of KD, had the effect of ruining my original enthusiasm, so collecting the group's surplus rigging gear I headed back up Dwarrowdelf, at about 5.00 am! We met up with the emerging parties later that afternoon and together with Pete Cover, who had dropped in to the homestead, enjoyed an amiable fireside chat and feed, up at the start of the track.

Sunday 22 April, Pendant Pot survey, push and derig trip

Those involved: Martin Carnes, Rolan Eberhard and Nick Hume

The cave was left rigged from the previous bottoming trip owing to the risk of an "overnight stay" in the concession. This was a boon to us and we were able to take our time surveying in, looking for possible "Growling" connectors.

In the huge bottom chamber I checked a promising lead involving a climb, assisted by some two inch tape. This ended in constricting, ascending rift from which issued a tiny trickle of water. Martin noticed a lead over the superb downstream sump, but it was impossible to reach. Rolan attempted to gather an anaspides specimen with a flying rugby style tackle, succeeding in wetting himself and myself, observing nearby at what I thought was a safe distance, bad luck Stef.

Rolan considered the upstream sump prior to us heading out. An apparent alternative way on from the base of the second pitch was looked at without success, floor markings indicated Stefan had already been thereabouts. Meanwhile Rolan derigged the last pitch and collecting a bag of tackle zoomed off never to be seen again!

Later, Martin and I had an interesting diversion when my light failed while free-climbing Pandemonium, the worst possible place! Considerable delay ensued, during which the paradox of me knowing the way but being unable to see combined with Martin's not knowing, but could, led us to a small blind chamber in the roof. This was entirely new to me and after banging my battery against the wall in frustration, the thing inexplicably started to work again, so we left poste haste.

At the squeeze above the top pitch, it was Martin's turn to lose his cool and after announcing he was about to do his 'nana', some novel conversation transpired before he escaped the tangle of headers and ladders. I particularly admired his descriptive "cessbag" uttered in full voice through clenched teeth as applied to a humble pair of jammed kneepads. A man possessed! Marginal abseiling on two inch tape ended the hard work and an excellent day's caving.

At the car we met up with Jim, one of the Sydney cavers, who had retired hurt from an Ice Tube, Serendipity "exchange" trip underway at the time, another case of "Epics Unlimited". A hectic visiting session involving Stuey's computer

(unfortunately unattended) and Trev's master survey ('there be caves in them hills, lad') proved unenlightening as we had neglected to tie in the cave entrance to the Ice Tube track, expecting this to have already been done.

Tuesday 24 April, Surface surveying, etc

Those involved: Stuart Nicholas, Trevor Wailes and Nick Hume

Trev and Stuey surveyed the entrances of Pendant and Slaughterhouse from the walking track, while I poked about. Trev manipulated a large slab, with considerable ingenuity and muscle, from the entrance of a tight lead I had found. This led over a dangerous block to a threatened chamber where a tight downclimb led to more promising ground. The area was heading towards and felt very much like Slaughterhouse and included a tiny stream, this sumped in a gravel bed however at about 20 metres depth. A slack but productive day.

NICK HUME

SESAME - 17/5/84

Steve Bunton, Al Warild, Rolan Eberhard

Not having been back to Sesame since an extremely cold and wet trip on ladders in 1981, I decided to join a Warild/Bunton expedition to see if the cave was really as bad as I remembered it. From the higher Sesame II (JF 211) entrance, we descended the initial four pitches and followed the Sesame Street streamway to Big Birds Nest, a large chamber full of much loose rock. Al climbed down to the top of the next shaft, however, Steve and I had read the tackle notes and rigged a handline as specified. At the base of the 30 metre drop we proceeded along the most enjoyable section of the cave, a high rift interrupted by some rockfall and a couple of short drops. Steve is well and truly convinced of the benefits of thin rope technology, and at the 10 metre Oscar's Pitch he pulled a length of 6 mm cord from his pocket and rigged the pitch with it.

While the other two descended the final short drop I explored the rift that continues above. A short distance from the top of the pitch a chamber containing one aven, a small waterfall and several assorted boulders is reached. Climbing over the loose talus pile, showered by water from above, I was somewhat surprised to find myself in a spacious tunnel heading downstream. A couple of hundred metres of passage later my growing sense of euphoria was dampened by the appearance of thick but generally dry mud in increasing quantities. Before long a rockfall choke covered in mud barred my progress. It may be possible to push this rockfall but the prospects are slim. A survey of the new passage would be desirable and it may prove to increase Sesame's depth slightly.

By the time I arrived back at the top of the last pitch Al and Steve had ascended and were munching on small dried objects. Our exit from the system was uneventful and at Hoopers Hall I left the derigging of the upper pitches to the other two, opting for the crawls and squeezes of the route out Sesame I.

ROLAN EBERHARD

18 May, Serendipity

Those involved: Al Warild, Stuart Nicholas, Steve Bunton and Nick Hume

Conditions of high water, in other words floods, forced the Sydney cavers into abandoning this cave without derigging it. A suitably epic finale to their Easter Expedition. The result of all this, for us, was a cave completely rigged with new 9 mm rope, with the prospect of a connection to Growling Swallet as an additional

lure. Almost too good to be true.

Very recent occurrences of rockfall inside the entrance series have almost closed off the cave. Only a small squeeze over a loose keystone bypasses what will probably be a complete blockage before too long. This would end the Serendipity saga once and for all! (Ed's note: Bewdy Norm! Rolling stones forever).

Descent was exhilaratingly easy and uneventful save for the almost severed green two inch tape placed as handline in the waterfall down-climb. I was too clever to fall for that one! We arrived at the bottom in about one hour, still fresh and keen to push the dwindling supply of leads here. Moving to the well known windy sidepassage, my minor lead was ignored in favour of a previously checked offshoot. This was in the nature of a horrible, wet crawl into sizable chamber which ascended to a talus pile at the apparent end. Al pushed a tight slot in this to emerge in a pleasant stream passage. Stuart and eventually myself, after checking a blind, followed.

Yet another lovely, wet crawl led upstream to a tight draughting passage that forced us high above the stream into the roof. Climbing back down to the stream lost the promising draught, but Stuey's wanderings revealed no other way on. Further upstream a waterfall aven appeared to be the end of things, however, a small window to the left intercepted an awkward serpentine passage running to a particularly grotty sump. Ironically, while floundering about in the mud we noticed a fragment of Trev's famous yellow raincoat. The same raincoat that has decorated so many tight passages throughout the Florentine!

The flicker of hope that we had broken into Growling, died when we realised that the moulting Trev had been this way before, albeit via an upstream continuation of the awkward serpentine. Al and Stuey headed out by this continuation while I, for no clear reason, returned by the way I had come. We had added perhaps two hundred metres to the known cave.

A black jelly bean binge, provided by Stuart, fortified us for the slog up the pitches, a highlight of which was the sight of "Bunty" emerging from the rift above, the second last pitch, festooned with headers and rope. Unfortunately, we couldn't keep all the tackle that came out of this hole, Al and Steve restoring the stuff to its rightful owners in Sydney.

Hopefully this trip closes the era of sack hauling epics for TCC. The expertise gained from rigging 9 mm rope should pave the way for the broadening use of cord techniques in future trips. Rolan and Martin are leading the way in this regard and the rest of us will probably not be far behind. This will open up the remaining potential in places like Mt Anne and elsewhere for relatively small groups of cavers. Viva la corde!

NICK HUME

26 May - Junee Resurgence; one hundred feet and the surfs up!

Divers: Attila Vrana and Nick Hume

Overenthusiasm on the part of Attila's free range goats resulted in a late start. In spite of this we didn't rush things, hoping to answer some of the questions posed by this enigmatic and deepening sump. In response to a logistical problem regarding a big team push, Attila decided to wear triple steel tanks, while I carried the all too familiar twin aluminium set, plus line reel and tie off weights for exploration.

Attila negotiated the various constrictions in the first sump with surprising ease considering his additional burden. I rocketed through in ten minutes, attempting to minimise my repetitive group. Just to prove that things go wrong in multiples,

Attila suffered an inversion ascending the steep mud slope, below the airspace. This allowed him to walk upside down on the ceiling of the chamber (!), where the valve of his spare tanks was accidentally bumped on, causing further consternation.

Meanwhile, waiting in the airspace, one of my helmet lights blew a bulb so I was pleased to see his lights approaching the surface. This feeling of relief turned to one of sheer horror, for I watched the placid sump pool turn into a roaring spa bath. Gaping at this unearthly spectacle, I initially thought that he had a puncture in his dry suit, however lunging into the water I heard the "fut-futting" and turned off the half drained tank, freezing my gloved hands to the valve in the process.

That bit of excitement over we proceeded along the stream passage with difficulty, discovering the waters to be in flood and rising rapidly, unexpected given the prevailing weather. Attila gave up the fight being unable to make headway in the raging current with his twinset.

Barely making headway myself, once in the constricted entrance of the second sump, combined with the claustrophobia of one and a half metre visibility, made me wonder what the whole game was about. The current soon eased off and I reached the end of the fixed line in about ten minutes which was pleasing. Unclipping the linereel to form a hero loop on the tie off, I figure I must have incompletely reclipped back to my waist, which unfortunately resulted in the loss of the line reel later on.

Immediately beyond the tie off I bonked into a vertical wall of clean, white limestone, ascending a few metres then traversing left revealed no way on. I eventually by-passed the obstacle on the right and descended to a wave shaped wall, exploring to the right appeared to lead back the way I had come and working back left, opened up a low channel with strong flow. I clipped a lead weight onto the line at this point to prevent drift, then continued down a steep, fine gravel slope to one hundred feet by my capillary. An additional explored distance of perhaps less than 20 metres. Sticking within my dive plan and decompression parameters, I decided to go no further.

Unable to find a suitable tie off, I reeled back to the previous lead weight and cut the line. The cold suffered due to suit compression at that depth made me eager to quit the place. On ascending, I bumped my helmet against the roof, dislodging a large block which formed an unpalatable sandwich with my head and the floor. Pulling myself free, I moved on quickly, expecting the whole roof to follow, the joys of exploration changed to the joys of pure survival.

Decompression was carried out wherever there was a suitable boulder to cling to against the raging torrent. Back in the airspace I became aware of the loss of Chris' linereel and plunged once more into the sump. Fighting the current in the still rising water was virtually impossible and certainly futile in that visibility so I gave up looking. The mental picture of Phil struggling with loose coils from an open reel, at Mole Creek the following week brought laughter, thus fortified I headed back down the streamway. The prominent waterfall, a drop of 2½ feet normally, was virtually level and presented an awesome spectacle.

Attila was a welcome sight exhibiting dutiful concern and some signs of heat exhaustion. We kitted up and were thankful to leave the flood. That first beer, back at the car, tasted very, very nice.

NICK HUME

P.S. Warning: This is serious diving, with the "bends" almost certainly a fatal possibility.

This will be the last issue of Speleo Spiel unless Subscriptions are forwarded.

Subs are now past being due.