

SPELEO SPIEL

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Holocaust entrance pitch.

NEWSLETTER OF THE TASMANIAN CAVERNEERING CLUB

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EDITORIAL

This is the last issue of the Spiel for 1986, the 40th anniversary year of TCC and the organization of caving in Australia through caving clubs, since TCC was Australia's first Speleological society. In this issue we have a rare opportunity to reflect upon the developments of caving throughout this time. We seem to have taken for granted our current modus operandi and await eagerly the arrival of the Sydney University Speleological Societies Mt Anne Expedition. Though this is not the first mainland expedition to visit Tasmania with the sole purpose of exploration and exploratory expeditions have in the past visited other remote corners of Australia, expeditions have in recent times been organized mainly to overseas destinations. During this time Australians have become quite good at running expeditions and have achieved consummate success for their efforts. The trip by SUSS seems to have brought an overseas approach to the domestic caving scene with its helicopter support and heavy sponsorship. It is interesting therefore to compare this approach to caving with the note by Pat Wessing in this issue about the nature of caving forty years ago to see just how much we do take for granted.

One thing I do hope we don't take for granted is the cave and surface environment. A lot of people are visiting and using a very sensitive environment and it is only with the utmost care that the area will not be despoiled. I wish them a successful expedition. Meantime I wish all those in the club and other readers of the Spiel seasons greetings and may Santa Trog bring you the caving experience of your desire.

Stephen Bunton

LOOSE ENDS

Caving Equipment have completed their retailing diversification programme which started when they adopted an eagle, not a bat, as their logo. They have now changed their name to Wildsports. Aren't we all?

NEXT WEEK: AGM = MARCH 18 8pm WHEATSHEAF HOTEL BE THERE

Single Rope Technique Equipment of Mortdale in Sydney have been manufacturing high quality innovative copies of the latest Petzl, CMI and other leading types of SRT gear for several years. They have now moved into the mail order catalogue business, so expect a letter in the post. Who knows where these people get your address though?

The SMAPS programme has been running hot whilst enthusiastic cave surveyers plot the extent to which our planet is known to be hollow. Rolan Eberhard more than anyone is impressed, almost to the point of being addicted to the green screen, as is reflected in his comment; "This SMAPS programme is the best thing to happen to caving since SRT!"

REMINISCENCES OF EARLY CAVERNEERING - OR YOU YOUNG ONES DON'T
KNOW HOW GOOD YOU'VE GOT IT, GEAR WISE!

Next time any member is wailing about the weight of ropes to be carried, spare a thought for us early members who had none of your modern hardwearing, lightweight ropes. Hemp ropes were larger 1" or 3/4" and what they weighed when soaking wet or impregnated with clay, is anybody's guess. Until you tried to wash the clay out you would have no idea just how much could get in. As the quartermaster I was constantly in trouble with the authorities at the girls hostel in Davey St, where I lived, for leaving rope ladders draped over the wrought iron balconies to dry or arriving home at 2am from a trip and having the gear in its putrid condition, passed over the back brick wall.

ACW Most helmets were not the lightweight climbing helmets such as yours, but steel. They were "disposals", ex-wartime air raid types, with wide brims they were awkward and incredibly heavy on the neck. It was the time of the postwar shortages; boiler suits, nailed boots, gardening gloves were all hard to come by. Members finding shops with stock told their friends who quickly bought out the remaining short supply of stocks.

Lights? Well torch batteries were poor and in short supply which meant that we needed twice as many and similarly supplies were quickly exhausted. Even so we reserved their use for emergencies. Torches were mostly metal or bakelite, which cracked very easily allowing sufficient water in to corrode the terminals and rust-up the switches. Candles were obtainable, particularly in country stores such as at Fitzgerald which used to be the railhead near Maydena before ANM took over the Florentine. The main source of lighting was carbide, usually the large hand held miner's types.

Another point which will convince you that we were all but dinosaurs is that all this was pre-plastic. How, then, did we waterproof things? Well, if we wanted waterproof matches we poured paraffin wax on them and took some sandpaper, carrying them in old match tins. For waterproof jackets we boiled linseed oil and painted it on our clothes. Either that or we used ex-army rubberized canvas jackets which weighed a ton and creased and then leaked. They buttoned down the front and were most unsatisfactory when compared to the velco storm flaps of today's trog suits. One unsuccessful innovation was the use of rubberized groundsheets worn as capes to stop water pouring down a caver's back or into their pack. They usually twisted around so that the long side tripped you up and the short side decanted the water down your neck.

The gem of them all was waterproofing ex-army leather boots! This is the way that

Leo Luckman used to do it, guaranteed not to give you blisters; "Throw the boots into a bucket of water and soak them overnight. Walk them dry so that they take the shape of your feet. Make a mixture of equal parts of castor oil, mutton fat and paraffin wax. Melt this down and paint it on the outside of the boot, especially around the welt. With about half a cup left heat it up again again and tip it inside the boot and slosh it around to waterproof the inside. Repeat as and when necessary." This seems a far cry from today's Wellington boots and neoprene!

MORE REMINISCENCES OF EARLY CAVING - TRIPS AND TRANSPORT

We had to be careful of petrol - it was at a time when we still had rationing and those of us who had a car used to load it beyond the Plimsoll Line. I remember one trip when four of us and the driver were in the front of some-one's ute, with all the gear for the trip in the back, when we were stopped by the Huonville police and told that two of us would have to get in the back. The police then insisted that Frank Brown and I, who lost the toss, get under the gear, rather than sit on top of it, "Better that IT falls out than you!" was his comment.

When we went down with the first Christmas camp at Hastings we had the old two-roomed forestry hut near the chalet, across the road from the pool. I was made to sleep in a separate room for the morality sake of the patron, Prof Carey, who had very definite views on the place of women in those days. He had often talked older women into acting as chaperones!

Most days we had a sort of paddling swim early, as they emptied the pool so that it filled again by about 10.30 a.m. We then walked up the road to Newdegate Cave having no spare petrol for short trips. David Elliot, Frank Brown and I were very proud of ourselves when we made the club's first cave discovery, Christmas Cave discovered on Christmas Day... Very insignificant, up the underground river from Newdegate Cave, through the Pophole and We Three Crack and into the cave. It went nowhere and was quite small. Some time later, we found, by tracing smoke that it had an opening to the outside too small to admit a person.

Many early members will remember our early bulk transport, the old ex-signals van belonging to the Geology Dept of the Uni which could pack in ten or twelve people plus gear. It had seats along the side in the back and a trapdoor in the roof. Even the hardest members got carsick and we'd take it turns to sit on the roof with our feet dangling through the trapdoor, getting down just to go through towns to escaping the notice of the police. One member used to think he had a monopoly on the driving but his efforts were best recorded as "He always turns every corner three times; too tight, overcompensates out again and then he comes back in again!"

We had a contract with the Tourist Bureau, who ran the caves in those days to do a survey of Newdegate Cave. After the constant interruptions of the tourists it was deemed necessary to continue the work at night. We walked back in the dawn, had our morning swim and fell asleep waking eventually with the heat or to the sounds of the mosquitos and tourists. Understandably we were quite exhausted by this routine and it was a miracle that the closure on our survey was only a few miles out in the vertical plane and almost closed in the horizontal.

Early trips to Mole Creek are worth remembering also. They were eagerly looked forward to because of their scarcity due to the lack of petrol. We mostly stayed at Lynd's Farm on the opposite side of the Mersey River to Lynd's Cave. Early mornings were glorious, though frosty, and we waded across the Mersey to do our day's caving. The early trips to Croesus were magic! Beyond the splendour of the cave, a highlight of our first trip there was two great meals. One was at Deloraine behind Huetts's garage. Mrs Huetts used to make us strong tea, stacks of toast with bacon and eggs, convinced we would starve to death before reaching Hobart after a long

day's caving. The other was the Saturday evening meal cooked by Corrie Lynd. She would greet us in an ordinary voice "You're here love," throwing her arms around the nearest member "and now we'll have to feed you up!". Then with an ear-piercing scream she said "Les, get your gun and kill a goose." Our dinner was roast goose, with apple sauce and the gooseberry pie. It all seems a hospitality that may well belong to a bygone era.

Pat Wessing

KHAZAD-DUM - DWARROWDELF

The semi-permanent rigging of KD and Dwarrowdelf, in a combined TCC / SCS effort during October, allowed half a dozen trips or so to the bottom. The original aim was to dive sump 2 but with heavy spring rain and snow, the resulting torrential waterflow made diving an unreasonable proposition. Nevertheless, with the cave rigged a variety of liesurely through trips or simple descents and ascents were possible. In fact the abundance of water made the KD streamway even more exciting than usual, rather similar to Greenlink in New Zealand.

It was an opportunity to investigate a few leads I had noted during a descent of Dwarrowdelf in 1981. The first was a stream passage roughly at the midpoint of the tunnel between the bottom of Dwarrowdelf and the waterfall chamber in KD. Where the ceiling lowers to form an elliptical passage, by crawling over some slabs into the corner on the righthand side (if facing towards KD), I was surprised to discover a stream canyon. In 1981 I did nothing more than memorize the location. from the edge of the tunnel a stream can be faintly heard some distance below. This time I traversed along the top of the canyon to emerge in a reasonably spacious chamber. The water was showering from an aven on one side, the stream being only small but still of significant flow. I followed the water as it flowed back the way I had entered but at a lower level. It descended steeply in a narrow canyon, the walls were jagged and the rock was unpleasantly friable. Before long I stopped at a 3-4m drop where a rope or ladder would be required. The lead is not an attractive one and it may be that the water is one of the inlets between Sumps 1 and 2. Still it remains a question for the next trip... perhaps?

The other lead was one Stefan and I looked at on the final derigging trip. It is a small ascending passage reached by climbing up the rubble and scree slope in the final chamber of KD (to the NE of the waterfall). I followed the sharply ascending passage for 30-40m to where it became almost vertical, although it would be possible to continue without too much difficulty. Gypsum formations are a feature of this small section of the cave. In some sections the walls are completely covered with wonderful sparkling crystals, there were some good gypsum flowers plus something resembling fairy-floss, presumably another type of gypsum formation.

The derigging of KD by the two of us was a minor epic. Struggling along the Serpentine Passage dragging packs stuffed full of wet rope with several additional ropes attached elsewhere to our bodies, was no picnic. It had, however, been a satisfying series of trips and a good chance to look at the sumps and plan the dives which will occur when the weather is drier.

Rolan Eberhard

AT LAST! THE GREAT KHAZAD-DUM - DWARROWDELF EXCHANGE SHOW!

Dwarrowdelf Party: Jeff Butt, Rolan Eberhard, John Salt and Jeff Watson. K-D Party: Vicki Bonwick, Dave Green, Nick Hume and almost Martyn Carnes.

The early part of this trip was spent trying to convince Martyn that he should continue down the cave and that it was probably easier than returning to the surface. I then bounced down the next pitch and yelled "rope free" hoping this would act as a cue for Martyn. I again yelled some bland encouragement but only noticed the glow of his lamp disappearing accompanied by another sonorous "no" that only left me to converse with the patter of water droplets.

Vicki and Dave, being both keen and fit, zoomed on ahead. I calculated that as the Dwarrowdelf party still had some pitches to rig, there would be plenty of time before I needed to be at the bottom so I promptly stopped for a "smoko". The Serpentine route in KD is narrow in places, making the escape into the mainstream a pleasant change. In this apparently luxurious place I caught up to Vicki having a silent argument with her carbide lamp. Dave was just around the next corner toying with his new camera, a fancy yellow brick that flashed and dazzled amongst the spray. KD is always nice, a classic! The stream roars and gurgles making communication both difficult and superfluous. We continued our almost casual wanderings, barely alert for each next pitch, when before long we were at the top of the last pitch.

Away on the other side of the terminal chamber, seemingly at a level about halfway up our pitch, were the waiting Dwarrowdelf party, much to our amazement. A bit of hooting during the abseil is a fairly standard way of adding atmosphere to such an impressive place as this. We then scratched our way up that slimy little embankment to join them.

Rolan and I took off to inspect the sumps as diving possibilities while the others headed up their respective pitches. A wind howls through the crawl before the static pool, hinting at cave yet to be found. More crawling led us into an eroded boulder pile through which Rolan squeezed on the way to the sump. It was not a place that I would want to drag diving gear through, particularly wearing a wetsuit, however, sillier things have been done.

I returned to the streamway in the main chamber and had a brew of coffee ready by the time Rolan returned. We consumed the coffee and discussed the possible return dive trips without much enthusiasm. Much drier conditions would be preferable. We then went our separate ways just as the last persons were making their ways off the tops of the pitches. That bottom pitch in Dwarrowdelf was wet and seemed to take forever. Once done, though, the rest of the cave is easy. We emerged to some banter on the surface about 2 p.m. after a thoroughly enjoyable trip. Martyn was enjoying the sunshine we had missed out on, having just composed a new song for one of his two current bands.

Nick Hume

GROWLING SWALLET AND MAINLINE

16th November, 1986 Rolan Eberhard and Nick Hume

The last trip into this area was some months ago when a group went in to dive the Mainline and Dreamtime sumps. Returning along Mainline on that trip, Rolan noticed a lead some 100m or so beyond Mothers Passage, on the entrance side. He explored this to a point overlooking a pitch into a sizable aven, complete with waterfall and assumed he had found a less painful connection into the bottom of Ice Tube. Rolan was keen to return with tackle to verify the connection whilst I needed the exercise, so back we went. A steady pace enabled us to reach the start of the passage in 1 1/2 hours from the entrance. The cave gets a bit monotonous on the umpteenth time! Bunty's rope ladders were the only new features upon which to rest our jaded eyes. Rolan wasn't impressed when one of the knotted rungs popped in Refuge Aven but no damage done this time fortunately.

The lead begins with a short crawl into good size ascending passage. This narrows to a sidling, stooping, crawling type rift, though only for minimal duration. The pitch drops down a narrow rift to one side of a large aven. Everything in the area was rotten and covered with particularly tacky mud. Rolan trusted a neck of rock as anchor and I watched with interest as the weighted rope sank several centimetres into supposedly solid rock. I lamely tried to tieback a tape to an equally dubious nubbin by which time Rolan had descended the 15m pitch, finding himself in something that definitely wasn't Ice Tube.

I gradually sank into the mud of the floor and waited, cursing that I didn't bring SRT gear, shivered in the draught and waited some more. Rolan was persevering in yet more muddy rift that was the only way on from the aven. this presumably headed back under the way we had come, towards Mainline but unfortunately it tightened off with no chance of yielding the bypass we sought.

Peculiar noises wafted back up to me, the sounds of Rolan returning through wall to wall mud. There seemed to be no future in this passage so we didn't bother starting a survey. The aven and waterfall may be associated with the surface holes below Ice Tube. Indeed a small watercourse crosses the IT track and disappears at those holes. Such is the speculation! Having little enthusiasm for anything else we slithered our way back to Necrosis. We installed two Bonwick ladders in Avons Aven with the help of two bolts. The climb is now much easier than before and does away with the awkward bridging up to the start of the aging TCC ladders with their copper crimps. The old ladder was taken out but the handline was repositioned for future service.

Stefan was lounging about the entrance, having just done a Slaughterhouse through-trip. He had also popped a rung on the ladder in Refuge Aven. These ladders are meant to last longer than the wire ladders with their corrosion problems but since they were made from fairly stiff rope some of the knots have not yet tightened. Care should be exercised and a good grip is needed on the outside rope. More things to do in Growling Swallet include the survey to the Mainline Sumps down from Mainline Corner, pushing Frownland and pushing the terminal sump in Coelocanth, though who knows when these will occur.

Nick Hume

SERENDIPITY AREA

7th December, 1986 John Salt and Rolan Eberhard

A pleasant late start saw us at the end of Eight Road to tidy up some loose ends of surveying. First a surface survey to link Warhol and other various small holes (JF 391-395) with the main survey of the area. A sunny day made this task an enjoyable one.

The entrance series of Serendipity, down to the top of Cathedral Pitch, is surprisingly complex. The original survey of this part of the cave was a number of years ago in a bit of a rush and in the drafting of the map I encountered several minor problems. We therefore commenced a resurvey from the entrance down to Cathedral Pitch. It was an opportunity to check some side leads; none went very far, although an ascending passage near the top of the pitch led to an aven carrying a trickle of water. From the aven it was possible to climb back across the main route down the cave at another point, past some interesting patches of calcite formation.

It was an easy day that has now finished all the necessary surface and underground surveying in the Serendipity area. The fruit of many hours of cave exploration, surveying and not to mention time on the computer (under Stuart's much appreciated guidance) over the past 4 years will be available in the forthcoming TCC Exploration Journal, which may be out before the end of the decade... either this one or the next!

Rolan Eberhard

NOT THE JUNEE - FLORENTINE : CHEYNE RANGE, MT RONALD
CROSS and BUBS HILL

There have been a number of recent trips to the remote karst areas in western Tasmania. The principal objective of these trips has been to collect cave dwelling fauna as part of the directed wildlife research currently being undertaken in the Western Tasmanian World Heritage Area.

I visited the Cheyne Range over a 3-day period in early December but turned up little in the way of caves and even less in the way of cave fauna. Notwithstanding, the dolomite in this area has a relief of 350m.

Bubs Hill (named after its resemblance to a womans breast) provides somewhat easier access, the deposit being traversed by the Lyell Highway. An account of the area is provided by Kiernan (1977). It was late on the afternoon of 29th December as I wandered along the transmission line which parallels the northern flank of Bubs Hill. Partway down I struck southwesterly into the bush in search of a large stream cave Nick Hume and I had first explored on a previous trip (Speleo Spiel #221). I failed to relocate it such is the nature of Bubs Hill with its uniform topography and dense scrub covering an extraordinary number of holes. Anyway, I ended up in a normally dry gully which bisects the lower western slopes of the hill. A series of orange tapes traverse the gully and connect back to the transmission line. These tapes are possibly a relic from the mining exploration undertaken in this area, the whole hill being traversed by transect lines.

It was in this gully, some 100m east of the the western peripheral creek, that I came across an entrance. The cave had obviously been entered previously. Pleasant fossil-type, walking passage extended some 35m along the strike to a silt blockage.

ACM

Continuing north around the perimeter of the hill I encountered a large ravine issuing a small stream from the base of a rock wall. Minimoria (BH 202) is a resurgence cave located at the base of the slope only about 20m north of the transmission line. The entrance is adjacent to the surface stream which takes a brief diversion underground at this point. I installed a drift net in the cave stream and collected some Carabid beetles, probably troglobitic and probably a new species. The air temperature in the cave was 7.8 C whilst the water temperature was 8.0 C. Another resurgence cave Thylacine Lair (BH 203) was not visited but is apparently situated only a short distance further north.

Mt Ronald Cross is a high altitude dolomite area which is clearly visible from the Lyell Hwy in fine weather conditions. Nick Hume, Jeff Watson and I visited this area in late December but the unfavourable vicissitudes experienced deprived us of any caving. The initial 1 1/2 days it poured with rain whilst the latter 1 1/2 days it snowed. Our retreat from the mountain during the summer solstice was conducted through 20cm of snow. The only occasion that caving gear was utilized on the whole trip was to negotiate a tyrolean traverse over the swollen Surprise River!

For my second attempt on Mt Ronald Cross I had the dubious benefit of fine and hot weather. The route up the mountain starts from the Lyell Hwy at an old road cutting 4.2 km beyond the King William Saddle Lookout. A 160m descent to the Surprise River, where there is a flying fox, bring your own sit harness, preludes the long grunt (520m elevation gained) up the northeast ridge. Originally supporting pure rainforest, much of the area has been burnt out some years ago. The resulting fallen logs, scrubby vegetation and chest-high bracken, not to mention the uncomfortably close encounter with a tiger snake did little to sustain enthusiasm throughout the walk.

AN AC Aquarius (MR 201) is a swallet hole engulfing the stream draining the gully to the northeast of the summit. I did not bother to investigate it but continued steeply down the gully some 300m to where a gaping shaft halted further progress. This was Capricorn (MR 204) where some steep climbing conveniently bypasses the 40m entrance pitch. The effort required in getting to this ghastly place proved worthwhile in the end since I managed to collect some interesting troglodytes. The air temperature in the cave was 5 C and the water temperature was 4 C. The cave has been surveyed to an approximate depth of 80m but by negotiating a side passage near the bottom I came across a squeeze through some perched slabs and could see the rift continuing downwards.

I arrived back at the car 12 hours later, half-heartedly vowing, like Nick and Jeff, never to return. Although Capricorn was the only cave I visited, some 10 caves have been documented by S.C.S. The dolomite has a relief of at least 400m and there is considerable scope for further exploration. For further information on the early exploration and the cave surveys at Mt Ronald Cross refer to Gleeson (1974, 1976a, 1976b). The following day it was pouring with rain so I collected the drift net from Minimoria at Bubs Hill before returning to Hobart for a night of New Years Eve indulgences with TCC at the House of Usher.

Stefan Eberhard

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MARCH 18 8pm WHEATSHEAF HOTEL BE THERE