

# SPELEO SPIEL

Newletter of the Tasmanian Caver's Club  
ESTABLISHED 1946

P.O. Box 416, Sandy Bay, Tasmania, TAS

Registered by Australia Post - Publishing Mail



NEWSLETTER OF THE TASMANIAN CAVERNEERING CLUB

Newsletter Annual Subscription \$15.00, Single copies \$1, Non-members \$2.00

\*\*\*\*\*

PRESIDENT / QUARTERMASTER:

Trevor Wailes - 47 Waterworks Road, Dynnyrne, Tas 7005. Ph 344862

SECRETARY:

Nick Hume - 9 Primrose Place, Sandy Bay, Tas 7005. Ph 251934

TREASURER:

Chris Davies - 1 Fingerpost Road, South Hobart, Tas 7000. Ph 391419

EDITOR / TYPIST:

Steve Bunton - 7 Rupert Avenue, New Town, Tas 7008. Ph 283054

\*\*\*\*\*

EDITORIAL

Well the festive and festering season is over and once again I find myself on the RSI machine cranking out this illustrious newsletter, recording the exploits of TCC and others as they push back the barriers of inner space in Tasmania's caves, other places and inside their heads. It's rewarding work! Tough at the top, tougher at the bottom but always toughest during the derigging. Happy New Year and Good Caving!

Stephen Bunton

\*\*\*\*\*

I certainly owe the printed media an apology for doubting their integrity. Yes Nettlebed is an 867m through-trip! Anne Gray and Rolf Adams being the first Australians to do the trip.

\*\*\*\*

Bugman Stefan Eberhard has certainly been having an interesting summer on the end of an aspirator. He is currently working contract for the National Parks and Wildlife Service doing an invertebrate fauna survey of all the caves in the Southwest Wilderness. Stefan already has a reputation for having visited more karst areas in Tasmania than anyone (with the possible exception of Kevin Kiernan) and his visits this summer would make him the leading contemporary authority on the caves of this state. He like several other TCC members participated in the SUSS Mt Anne expedition.

\*\*\*\*

The Sydney University Speleological Society's Mt Anne Northeast Ridge Expedition certainly provided its share of summer fun and entertainment, not least of all with their vehicular transport, the mighty Harrison Ford. Unfortunately the trip was hampered by exceptionally bad weather with rain occurring on most days and occasional snowfalls. The expedition succeeded in exploring over a kilometre of

new vertical cave, the most notable find being Deep Thought (185m) near Kellar Cellar.

\*\*\*\*

Unfortunately those who fled the country, to ascend instead of descend, to the sunny slopes of New Zealand's Southern Alps were plagued with the same atrocious weather. The only difference being the weather's two day time delay as it crossed the Tasman Sea before increasing its ferocity with the increased altitude.

\*\*\*\*

In Papua New Guinea in 1978 and again in 1982 I was fortunate enough to learn the difference between the speleologists and the cavers. The speleos were the ones running around with bug bottles, or geo-picks smashing stal for analysis, or conned you into standing in water up to your armpits, with tapes, stadia poles, fluoroscein and floaties. I fitted-in comfortably with the cavers, there merely to have fun and find a lot of good cave. It's now five years since we found all that good cave during Mamo 82 and still I haven't seen a map of it. During the intervening time, space or continuum thereof, the world has changed and it now seems us funhogs have to lift our cerebral game to accommodate the whims of the computer-vege and video-junkie generation. I would really like a map of the 53km of Mamo Kananda to hang on my wall, it should cover most of it and with any luck I may never need to paint again but it seems this is impossible. The format of cave maps in the 80s has changed and I'm limited by my conventionality unless I get a computer with a Space Invaders-type joystick. If I'm brave I can now drive my own cave!

An article by Kier Vaughan-Taylor, in the latest Australian Caver 112, explains what has happened to cave surveys in the 80s. Now, fully computerized, colour surveys can be viewed from any angle, rotated to true north and cave passage width and height can be approximated to a series of ellipses that constantly change shape. Another programme can actually take you for a guided tour through the cave you surveyed and you can watch it change shape on the screen just like it did in reality. Go caving in your own TV! No more muddy clothes, smelly acetylene nor worn out gear! Adventure is only as far away as your electronic armchair! Roll on Brave New World!!

\*\*\*\*

Sydney paid host to the umpteenth Biennial Conference of the Australian Speleological Federation. Speleotec 87 was actually the 16th. Matters of significance arising from the Committee Meeting were amongst other things the introduction of an individual membership scheme ideal for renegades and cynics such as myself and the non-affiliated fanatics who turn up cave on expeditions to all corners of the globe. Yes these Australians, that don't belong to ASF because they don't want to belong to a club, can now be accommodated.

Congratulations are in order for Stuart Nicholas who was awarded an ASF Certificate of Merit for his contributions to the caving scene.

\*\*\*\*

Australian Caver 112 is an excellent issue which (to my mind) reflects the cutting edge of Australian Caving endeavours. There is excellent documentation of the very successful Australian Mexico expeditions during 1985. These trips discovered 4.3km of vertical cave (and over 15km total traverse length), more than any previous speleological expedition. The details recorded will serve to enthuse the already swelling numbers of Tasmanian cavers hoping to join the next trip in January 1988.



\*\*\*\*

Go on an expedition to Tasmania! Yes it is happening again, another Easter Precipitous Bluff expedition. After the success of last year's trip Nick Hume (ph 251934) and Stefan Eberhard (ph 237038) are keen to return this year and would like you to contact them if you become suitably enthused. Again they intend to fly in and this time fly out as well. There are already about 4 or 5 interested persons and the trip starts on Friday April 17th for at least 5 days.

\*\*\*\*

Stocks of Vertical Caves of Tasmania - A Caver's Guidebook by Stephen Bunton and Rolan Eberhard still exist. Recently the authors have noticed numerous photostat copies in the possession of various miserly cavers who seem unwilling to part with their money for fear that they would contributing to our most unreasonable profit margin. It is a myth that any outrageous profit was to be made from this venture, in fact the authors don't really have the wherewithal to prosecute those who do breach the copyright. Besides our generous nature precludes us from wanting to resort to this form of action so we ask that you show yours. At \$15 it is small outlay compared to the cost we incurred during the production.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### NETTLEBED - A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE

24th January 1987

It was four years since I'd sat at Mt Cook watching the rain. Frustrated and unable to climb, I headed to Christchurch as I'd done on that previous occasion. Once again I imposed on the hospitality of Mick Hopkinson and Gill Wratt and their house of a thousand adult amusements. This year it was surf-kayaking, four years ago it was windsurfing! In between two fun-filled weeks I was able to slot into the Christchurch Cavers' routine of weekend's caving at Nelson, roughly in the style by which HH (624m) was pushed. Mick was keen to do the Nettlebed through-trip since he was almost the only one he knew who hadn't done it. Gill and I was enlisted as party with Ian Whitehouse of mountaineering fame. Ian only went on the good caving trips, his last was to the bottom of HH! Something I've yet to do!

We drove the seven hours to the Pearse River where we were to meet the local Nelson cavers including Ian Millar, the ATEA 78 biologist. They were going to ascend the 867m and derig as they went. To rig the cave we needed to borrow some of their ropes, otherwise, before we conned them into what could only be described as a miserable endeavour, we were prepared to do the first pull-down through-trip. With only an hour's drive they were an hour late which meant that we had to walk up to Arthur Hut (The Dog Box), from Flora Saddle in the dark. They spent the evening at Flora Saddle and descended what is now a well marked track down a ridge to the Pearse Resurgence near the Nettlebed campsite, fifteen minutes walk from the cave entrance.

The top entrance to Nettlebed is a cave called Blizzard discovered in January 1980 by Keith Dekkers and party on the same trip that found and explored Largu and HH (down to 300m). Keith doesn't like squeezes and the cave, though drafting strongly, was written off at a little over 100m depth. In September 1986 Trevor Worthy led a group of Wellington cavers to the area who re-explored Blizzard and using a crowbar were able to move the offending piece of rock, opening the way to unexplored depths beyond. Trevor was familiar with the state of exploration in Nettlebed when they descended Blizzard. When they found their way through a confusing section of bedrock

and collapse at the bottom of the cave and into the vast chamber of Yellow Brick Road, in Nettlebed, they decided it was easier to descend to the underground camp in Salvation Hall. They bivouaced here and continued their decent the next morning, making the first through trip in 25 hours.

It is a 1 1/2 hour walk to the cave entrance from Arthur Hut. Overnight it had snowed before clearing to a spectacular dawn. After another 1/2 hour or so spent trogging-up I led the descent with two tackle bags, a cunning ploy enabling me to leave one behind for the derig team and still have a second for my lunch, prusik gear and spare carbide. I chose a suitably small one from the Hopkinson spare gear store, three karabiners, two too-big boots and a trogsuit that didn't fit me. On the twelve-hour through-trip, my true love sent to me...

The rigging in Blizzard is exceptionally easy down 170m of almost continuous shafts in mostly solid rock. We were guided merely by a grotty survey and a magic formula for ropelength which we memorized as 9,10,100,42,10,9,35,15m. Needless to say we were hampered by an excess of rope. The cave could be done as a pull-through trip with two 50m x 9mm ropes and one bolt bracket. Enlisting a local cave guide would save a deal of time though Anne Gray and Rolph Adams did it without.

Yellow Brick Road is a boulder floored chamber similar to Knee Trembler and Hammer Heights for those who have been into Nettlebed before. It was discovered by pushing the squeezes in the Funk Hole which is at the top of Knee Trembler. This discovery took Nettlebed to an incorrectly reported height of 720m in January 1985. From Blizzard the route goes through a confusing breakdown area before joining Yellow Brick Road which descends 150m. The Funk Hole is where some of the largest boulders abutt the roof and 75m is lost in a series of tight vertical squeezes. The descent of Knee Trembler similarly loses height quite quickly down to the familiar series of ladders and handlines into the camp at Salvation Hall. The route to Soft Rock Cafe and the other 700m high section of the cave goes off near the top of Knee Trembler, through Diamond Alley to Antlion Chamber, Sandworm Chamber, Hammer Heights and beyond to Rubik's Room and the like.

There is still camp gear in Salvation Hall which could be utilized if parties were running short of time. It is 3-4 hours caving to the entrance and then a further 2 hours walk down the Pearse River or alternately up through the bush to Flora Saddle. From Salvation Hall there is a 25m prusik up to The Ancient Briton series, take a cowstail for the rebelay! A 40m pitch then descends into Reprieve Alley and the associated passages which lead down to Rockfall K. From here it was a familiar hours caving to the entrance through those most infamous of overrated squeezes the Hinkle Horn Honking Holes.

The Pearse with its ten creek crossings, nine o'clock at night, ate all my scroggin, seven kilogram pack... was no joy. We had a pre-arranged car swap but even so it was after midnight when we crashed at Gill's parents place in Stoke near Nelson. Recovery the next day was a pleasant family dinner affair whilst waiting for the derig team to return with the gear. Their trip had taken 17 hours. I estimate a pull-through trip would take 16 hours return to the Dog Box, including 12 hours in the cave.

After a mega-gear sort and a pleasant tea we were once again on the road to Christchurch having "knocked the bastard off" to quote a famous kiwi. For the third night in a row it was after midnight when my head hit the pillow.

Stephen Bunton

\*\*\*\*\*

NORTHEAST RIDGE OF MT ANNE - JANUARY 1987

Well... SUSS bopped into town, vast hordes of them; Danielle, Patrick, Keir, Phildo, Guy, Anne, Leonie, Dave, Mark, Rolf, Martin, Derek, Paul and a computer whose name escapes me. They had organization by the bucketfull and it became rather apparent that they weren't here to tourist the classics. They also had another rare commodity amongst the caving fraternity, money and consequentially a helicopter was going to do the hard part of the expedition's logistics. Thus began the assault upon the last unexplored alpine karst region in Australia.

The locals were a bit lost amongst all of this Stefan, Rolan and myself making up the token presence, sort of warden Tasmanians to oversee any new discoveries. It was their show, we were only the audience, Mt Anne was a bleak stage with the weather consistently atrocious backdrop.

I wandered along the ridge hindered only by a daypack and a light blizzard. On a ledge amidst the scrub of Pandani Shelf stood the unusual spectacle of a huge marquee tent and a generator making it hum with life. Rolan had beaten me up the ridge and was lounging amongst the flotsam of the dining area. Most of the "expeditioners" were out on the day shift, either down a cave or looking for caves. Stefan, Kier and Martin were out pushing Deep Thought, a cave which went to 185m, intersecting an interesting streamway. I listened, learned and prepared myself for a few days of lousy weather and misery. Stefan, Rolan and I did some cave bashing below the Anne-a-Kananda doline, finding some reasonable shafts some exuding highly promising drafts. We half seriously tagged these TCC #1 and TCC #2 etc. Some of these entrances had been noticed by Keir and Rolf the previous year, the others were looked at on subsequent days and none went deeper than 60m.

Snow! What Joy! Precious little was done on wednesday due to an apathy virus which had infected everyones pile of wet grots. Some fools did go out, their return and the weather forecast on the radio schedule were the only significant events of an otherwise forgettable day. Neither event brought good news. Something had to be done, I couldn't lie there forever. At a latish hour next day we slithered into wet caving gear, the screams echoing off the ramparts of the ridge. Stefan went home to sample bedbugs or something. Phildo, Martin, Paul and I headed off to tourist, finish surveying Deep Thought. Still others went off tracklaying along the twin ridges "Sodom" and "Gomorrhah" to places hitherto unknown.

The entrance to Deep Thought is simply a manhole in a cliff face. It is so proximitous to Kellar Cellar that the fact that they don't connect is quite surprising. The cave had been left rigged and the ropework was very good except for a knot on the first pitch which had been redirected somehow to give a 60m pitch. Below this the cave got bigger while the diameter of the rope got smaller. The final 20m pitch into a superb breakdown chamber was done on 7.5mm rope! At this point a stream could be heard. Surveying commenced while I poked around in the streamway which is an unusual piece of cave for the region. Numerous feeders converged in the same area giving rise to high stream levels which sumped suddenly. The cave was finished.

Friday morning actually brought sunshine, the first for over a week. Paul broke out the board shorts but Rolan was less impressed and left. A few wandered off to ascend Mt Anne during which time the wind strengthened ferociously. I attempted to follow but was "blown back to camp". From the marquee we watched the others descending like a parody of ground parrots in a hurricane.

Vicki Bonwick arrived to do some line of sight surveying to tie in the various cave entrances. This was not immediately successful due to the resumption of foul weather. Me? Urrgh... I had had enough and was positively eager to escape. I

stormed off the ridge, muttering darkly, to be surprised by sunshine on the plains. Nearly out I met Leigh with Rik and Janine, followed by Graeme Smith, Louise, Mark Stanford and someone else. This group was going up for the weekend and Leigh was the only one I could talk out of it.

It must be noted that this report only represents my story of the events which covered only a brief period in the duration of the whole trip. A full report will no doubt appear elsewhere in some other auspicious publication.

Nick Hume

\*\*\*\*\*

#### GORDON RIVER CRUISE

17th - 23rd February 1987. Stefan Eberhard and Nick Hume.

Kevin suggested that we could strap our rafting paddles to the helicopter rotors for extra lift. A plausible idea because where else could we put the things? Stefan and I were about to fly into the Denison camp for a week of bobbing up and down the Gordon River, looking for caves and sampling their fauna. First point on the itinerary was a quick visit to the Maxwell River.

We landed on a shingle bank midstream, the pilot promising to return for us if the river didn't rise. That prospect, contemplated whilst dodging the blades, sort of sent shivers down my spine. Stefan seemed to know where we were and I sighted the Prince of Wales Range far off, from which I concluded that we were miles from anywhere. After thrashing about in scrub for ages we were still unable to locate the still secret Stencil Cave but we did find some grungy holes on the other side of the river for some collecting. Later in the day we were whooshed off to the Denison River for a relatively luxurious stay at the Hydro camp. Landing at the site was interesting enough as the downdraft blew away some of the helipad planks and we finally had to land in a nearby patch of bracken, after which we were on our own.

The drier than usual Denison River took a little negotiating on the following day. We eventually joined the larger flow of the Gordon River and made landfall a good campsite some few hundred metres above Bill Neilson Cave and Kayak Cavern. Some exploration turned up several shafts and quite reasonable entrances that had not been previously described.

The next day was taken up exploring these and looking uphill from Bill Neilson Cave for higher entrances. The vertical potential for the Gordon Limestone seemed reasonable but the horizontal was quite unreasonable and a great deal of effort was required to battle to the bottom of the dolines. Several of these held the major cave stream, however, it tended to resurge in one side of each depression and sink again in breakdown on the opposite side. The first swallet encountered contained a short section of cave passage that closed off in a breakdown which is also present at the end of Bill Nielson Cave proper. I was surprised to find a flow gauge outside this swallet, which probably indicates someone knows a lot more about the caves in this area than we do.

Bill Nielson Cave itself is quite huge; a wide and high tunnel frequently breaking through to daylight holes. It is 503m long and is a extremely pleasant stroll. A very strong draft is created by the surface shafts, a long rent occurring near the end of the cave. Here it retreats into a boulder pile that resisted our pushes. Stefan spent a whole day chasing about for bugs in this cave, a useful retreat in the worsening weather. Another day and we were floating off downstream on the long haul to Angel Cliffs. The scenery was varied, easy but interesting rapids generated

a bit of excitement and frequent limestone outcroppings allowed sampling from small cave sites. The limestone cliffs are often eroded into overhangs and we "anchored" in some of them to shelter from the electrical storms that rolled through the valley during the day.

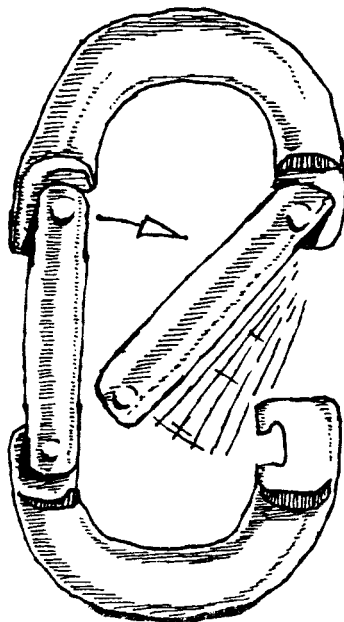
We spent a night on a shingle bank opposite Rocky Sprent Cave. I half expected a flood pulse to carry us away on our lilos during the night. The Gordon is fairly controlled and only rose about 30cm, due to the very enthusiastic Sprent River entering just upstream. Rafters on the nearby Franklin were having a much more interesting time we were to hear later. On the last day of the trip we floated down to the Franklin junction and on past the proposed dam site to the jetty at Sir John Falls. The falls themselves were quite spectacular under the circumstances. We were fortunate enough to catch the last tourist boat back to Strahan, within the halfhour.

Knocking back Boags draught and complimentary hot-dogs while still in our wetsuits was a suitable finale we thought. Strahan had quite a contingent of rafters and canoeists and a pleasant evening was spent listening to their tales in Harmer's Hotel. We had no option but to catch the bus back to Hobart, a forgettable day after an otherwise highly enjoyable trip. Many thanks to Kevin Kiernan for the lift to Strathgordon in the first place.

Nick Hume

\*\*\*\*\*

**NEW !  
Wonder  
KRAB !!**



Wonder more people aren't using it !

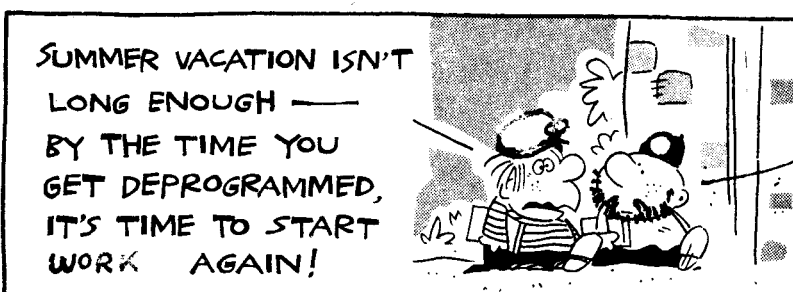
Wonder no-one thought of it earlier!

Wonder no-body, who's used one, told you about it !

Wonder myself sometimes?

**COMPLETE WITH A LIFETIME GUARANTEE.** (Only available to the purchaser.)

\*\*\*\*\*



We could always go caving?





