

NEWSLETTER OF THE TASMANIAN CAVERNEERING CLUB

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

\*\*\*\*\*

PRESIDENT / QUARTERMASTER:

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

SECRETARY:

Stefan Eberhard 13 Paternoster Row, N.Hobart, Tas 7000. Ph 341473

TREASURER:

James Davis 30 Greenacres Road, Geilston Bay, Tas 7015. Ph 439367

EDITOR / TYPIST:

Nick Hume / Leigh Douglas / Stuart Nicholas C/- Ph 283054

\*\*\*\*\*

EDITORIAL

This is the true story according to Nick Hume of what transpired on the TCC mini expedition to Precipitous Bluff in late December '87 and early January '88.

The aims as ever were to find kilometres of virgin cave and to defile it with the TCC flag. However, team members Chris Davies, Lew Mitchelmore, Nick Hume and Trevor Wailes had a few more mundane chores to accomplish first.

Overland surveys took precedence to link entrances of Damper Cave, Cueva Blanca and Bauhaus. It was felt before the expedition that these had a chance of being related to a common water flow, in which case creating a system of up to 3 km+. Unfortunately, this is still not confirmed although the overall impression is that they are. The next trip to the area will confirm this, or otherwise totally confuse us.

Of the 8 days at camp we had only one half day of rain, the weather was idyllic and not particularly productive to caving. We all got very slack, and morning starts got later and later. Nick Hume did his best to motivate a motley crew, and in fact all our aims were realised. We did connect all entrances with an overland survey, we did clear up the question marks from the first trip ('86), ie, Cueva Blanca and upstream Bauhaus including survey completion, and we did find new cave Xymox, Nick Cave, etc. However, it would have been nice to find some more systems like Bauhaus, the terrain is severe and the dolines very densely vegetated to the point of looking carefully where your feet are going at each step. Holes appear out of nowhere.

This is the first of two issues devoted to P.B. The second will contain surveys and give some explanation to the geology and hydrology of the area. Damper Cave survey data has not yet been located (if anyone can help with this information please contact us), so a rather large piece of this hydrological jigsaw is missing off the area plan. Photographs shown in both issues were taken by Nick Hume on the '86 and '88 expedition and Chris Davies in '88.

TREVOR WAILES

"NOTHING LIKE MESSING ABOUT IN BOATS....."TCC Expedition to Precipitous Bluff

28 December, 1987 to 9 January, 1988



Porting gear up New River Lagoon to base camp.  
Precipitous Bluff in the background.

Expeditioners: Trevor Wailes, Chris Davies, Lew Mitchelmore,  
Nick Hume and (briefly) Phill Hill.

Cover Picture: Surveying along the Bauhaus connector passage,  
into Xymox.

Sunday night, Trev's BBQ..... but where was Trev? Not normally so unsociable, we caught him in a backroom, amidst a frenzy of packing. "We sail for Precipitous Bluff tomorrow at 6am.....!", he exclaimed with furrowed brow. Surprise news to all of us, as we hadn't expected the fisherman to be off so soon. Shakes of the head were the only advice we could offer him, preoccupied as we were with our own thoughts about the dilemma.

Monday and a perfect day for boating. Trev was sombre on our arrival - his news was of five metre southerly swells; not a perfect day for boating. Again we were in limbo..... oh well, manana possiblementemente.....

Mick Garland was an amiable sort of character, making us feel as though we had been deckies all our lives. When the "Margaret B" left the wharf on the Tuesday, it was soon apparent that the passengers were really landlubbers, becoming squeamish at the enlarging seas. "Captain" Mick assured us that if we could round South East Cape, then all would be well.

The first attempt met enormous seas, virtually breaking on deck. Alas we beat a retreat to shelter in "Moulders Hole", spending the night cowering in the bilges. Very early next morning, like 3am, we had another go. We were keen, keen enough to face Neptune himself. However, Neptune won again and we went back, this time all the way to Recherche Bay.

A whole day idling on board boat was a bit demoralising with the crew prepared to mutiny if we failed again. Trev hopped in the dinghy to lay graballs, ironic for a caving trip. All that was caught were more stiff southerlies.

On Thursday we emerged tentatively from the bilges; no wind, an abating swell and a perfectly glorious morning. The massifs of the South Cape Range were shedding their mantle of storm clouds (somewhere up there, Phill Hill was wandering in to meet us New River Lagoon). We were away!

Bobbing beside the cape, Jonah struck again. Clunk.... we lost steerage..... disbelief! Serious stuff, serious enough to wake the captain, who was below at the time. Trev proved to be useful, his mechanical expertise brought to bear on the cable linkage. Some jemmying and mallet blows brought us into the weather, in time to avoid foundering on the rocks.....  
pew.....

Rocky Boat Inlet was our preferred destination, being only an hour's walk to Prion Beach. Unfortunately, broad swell over the attendant reefs ruled out a landing. We had to try elsewhere watching the spectacle of Precipitous Bluff drift further away. Prion itself was impossible, as was Tarua Beach. Eventually the captain said OK at Deadmans Bay. Nick and Chris knew what that would mean in terms of gear portage, Trev and Lew remained blissfully unaware.

Slippery rocks and a farewell to the dinghy; ".... you blokes are mad going bushwalking with all that gear....". The decky was right! At 11.00 am on the Thursday the farce began. We each had two enormous packs, so we were faced with doing three trips over the intervening distance to get it all to New River Lagoon. The

practical solution was to carry one burden until entirely fed up with it and walk back for the other. A soul destroying task, but one that you could switch off to, after awhile.

Deadmans Bay to Tarua was a bog. Tarua to Prion sported a lengthened section of newly cut track, fast and dry, but not overly appreciated at the time. Trev found lots of snakes, some of them twice! On the beach, he "really didn't want to know" and was reduced to doing single kilometre carries along the eight kilometres of sand. A group of bushwalkers approached us; overwhelmed no doubt by the spectacle of our advancing / halting / retreating method of operation. Sporting gumboots as well must have given us the appearance of very purposeful madmen!

The day was sweltering. Trev came down with blisters and was prepared to die in the dunes when we finally made the lagoon, brackish to his disgust. Nick was instructed to get a drink out of his pack, from which he sustained a nasty gash to the hand thanks to a hatchet that had been secreted there. Shame on Trev! Camp was made on the opposite side of the outflow at 8 pm after an estimated 35 kilometres of walking.

Friday was fiery, 37 C being recorded in Hobart. We waded the several kilometres up the lagoon to the caving area. This was facilitated by using K-Mart "rubber duckies" in which to haul gear. So easy was it that Lew towed the eight packs and two snoozing passengers at one stage. Though he didn't suffer the indignity for long.

Further up the lagoon the near-shore was bedded in slimy rocks and managing the rafts became quite irksome. A constant stream of moans from Trev sent Chris and Nick racing on ahead in an attempt to escape both. Meanwhile, peering over the ramparts of PB, Phill spotted this ungainly convoy floundering its way toward the campsite..... TCC had arrived!

That afternoon we set up camp and sorted gear, some of it sustaining an immersion from the rafting fiasco. Nick's camera gear had drowned! Phill emerged from the jungles, all of us suffering dehydration from the hot days in getting here.

Ironically it poured with rain next morning. We turned out early with the exception of Phill, keen to get into a bit of caving. Cueva Blanca was looked at to push a lead left over from the 1986 expedition. The chamber beyond the entrance proved to be a welcome refuge from the weather. We checked for signs of aboriginal occupation with this in mind, finding none. Though charcoal at the base of a daylight hole attested to bushfires from very long ago.

We rigged the first pitch, descending to a mid level floor, rather than continuing down to "Inundation". Surplus rope was rigged around some columns as a handline for gaining the lead in large passage on the right. From here, an apparently second stream could be heard, which was surmised to be the waters in Damper Cave itself. Once everyone had negotiated the handline, another rope was rigged from nubbins down eight metres or so of rift. This proved to be free climbable on inspection and continued to some inlet avens above a loose breakdown slope.





Stefan Eberhard with formations  
in Cueva Blanca 1986.  
Photo N Hume.

The sound of a distant waterfall emanated from a 40cm wide hole in the floor of this rift. The hole was, in fact, the top of a ten metre pitch in meandering canyon and was rigged by Nick using the rope dropped down the previous pitch, by Lew.

Trev descended on a very intermittent carbide light and dead electrics, arriving in streamway in complete darkness. A brief episode of the TCC comedy show ensued; Trev had no carbide with him, but was positively swimming in water. Meantime, Lew, who was two pitches back, had all the carbide but no water. Nick and Chris darted about to correct the problem, accompanied by moans and groans coming from each end of the cave.

Nick descended the pitch to placate Trev with an acetylene fix, recognizing the stream as Inundation, just above the sump pool. The lead was a false alarm, simply returning to a known bit of cave. We had a brief look in "White Room" on returning to the first pitch. An awkward drop at the end of WR leads down to streamway and though undescended, is certainly another way back to the "Black Curtains" waterfall. The formation in this area is particularly pristine and delicate. The less traffic it receives the better. In fact, the same could be said of the rest of the cave.

Emerging to a now sunny day was inspiring enough to start us on the considerable overland surveying necessary to tie in the caves suspected of being hydrologically connected. This job went begging from the previous expedition. We first linked Cueva Blanca back to the entrance marker (TCC 1960 ?) of Damper Cave. Here, Chris left us for a bit of touring, escaping what soon becomes a most monotonous task.

The remaining two kept on surveying uphill on the long haul to the Bauhaus / New Order entrances. Nice views of the lagoon provided some relief. The survey was closed at the New Order doline with everyone too stultified to even bother peering down the thing. We headed into a glorious sunset en route to camp, PB all aglow in yellow. The fine weather would remain with us for the whole time we were there.

By midmorning on Saturday Phill and Lew headed off to have a look in Quetzalcoatl Conduit. Phill was restricted to horizontal caving, not having brought any SRT gear or helmet on his long walk in.

The rest of us bombed on into the Bauhaus doline. Nick keen to impress Trev and Chris with the trees swaying in the entrance gale of the cave. The draught is a product of the chimneying effect with the New Order shaft. Trev acknowledged that it was an impressive find after negotiating the greasy entrance slope in to the main chamber.

Nick attempted some multiflash photography of this huge place. Unfortunately his flashes died from previous maltreatment. We attempted to scale the steep slope above survey station 75 to gain a major borehole passage. This became featureless several metres short of the lead and had to be given up on. We retreated to the second pitch bypass over the prominent hole in the floor, climbing over a mat of dead vegetation in one place, the origin of which defied any sort of explanation. We negotiated the muddy



Bauhaus entrance, inside and out.

down climb using a twenty metre handline. This led to a series of breakdown chambers, the first of which had a sunlit floor, cast from New Order some 80 metres above.

Myriad leads ran off into some quite ancient development. Chris explored a small streamway trending 120 to 130 magnetic, while Nick procrastinated over the correct way on. Trev, in a continuation of the Petzl comedy show, manage to drop the screw-in jet assembly of his carbide light (crucial to its operation) down a gravel slope. Wailing "I don't believe it, I don't f.....g believe it!" he fell to his knees, staring myopically at the floor. Nick found it a bit hard to believe too, wondering how anyone could so vandalize their only light source. Anyway, after "sieving" several cubic metres of mud, the thing turned up in a tiny crevice some astonishing distance away.

We regrouped and found the way on to the major streamway. Downstream, the cave is of impressive dimensions. Upstream however (not looked at previously) the lead falters to a couple of wet grovels before opening out again, becoming reasonably pleasant serpentine passage. Water action has incised deep and angular meanders in the high quality limestone. Upper levels proved to be the drier and usually easier way on.

"Screaming Stals" just went and went including numerous feeder avens and oxbows to explore. Some possum skeletons were found associated with the former. The stream size diminished gradually as we moved past feeder streams and waterfalls. Eventually the cave changed to more sloping streamway, finishing in an issue of water from amongst breakdown (largely cobbles). Chris checked a narrow phreatic tube above the blockage pronouncing it doubtful, but no real push was made. A few metres back from this point on the left side, a way was found through breakdown blocks to "Amyl Aven", some ten metres in height and unscaleable. From there, we began the long survey out.

The trio set about this task at speed, realizing that it was getting rather late in the day. So fast were we that several legs were taken up a blind side passage, before we realized the error. Here with the job only half done, we succumbed to slackness deciding to return the following day rather than risk thrashing about in the scrub after dark. As it was, we only reached camp on dusk. On the way out of the doline, Nick checked an entrance on the opposite wall to Bauhaus. A closed rift, it gives way to a short pitch into probably infilled passage. No draught could be discerned, so the drop was left undescended. Above and to the left of this entrance the rampart of an inosculating doline was noted (later found to contain Xymox cave).

Horror in camp. During the day blowflies had struck Trev's wool jumper. This prompted a rare occurrence, Trev actually had a wash in the lagoon, probably in fear that the blowies would get him next. Blowfly bashing suddenly became very popular! Trev, ever keen to stay up late, chatted to Phill into the small hours.

After a latish start, Phill wandered off to tourist Damper Cave, thereby resting his ears or curing his hangover, we weren't sure which. For the remaining four, it was back up the hill to Bauhaus, by now becoming a most monotonous chore. Following a

readjustment of the previous day's error, it took us less than two hours to complete the survey back to the known station at the streamway junction.

Nick donned Lew's lightweight wet suit in anticipation of some poking about in the downstream sump, toward which we all headed. Various leads were checked on the way, Chris and Trev finding a hundred metres or so up the first major dry passage on the left. Nick and Lew checked an inlet aven, again on the left, that steepened dramatically above slopes of moonmilk.

The major streamway is wide and very easy going, with exception of a "constriction" (about halfway to the sump) where you almost have to duck your head. The draught fairly howls through this point. However, immediately beyond it disperses, apparently into a complex of breakdown filled rifts above. Lew climbed into these seemingly continuing upward for some twenty metres without conclusion. Meanwhile, Nick became preoccupied with a particularly filthy mud wallow in a side passage below.

We all eventually teamed up again, moving downstream to where things became a bit nastier. Deep swirlpools became interspersed with wet crawls, Nick disappearing into one of these up to the neck, at which a faltering Trev exclaimed "...This is as far as I go...!". Now alone, Nick went on for another fifty metres to where the passage takes an abrupt right hand turn into a lake series, "Floating Anxiety". This was fed by a short waterfall over smooth rock and was suspected to lead fairly directly to a sump.

He slid into the cold water and only had to swim some few metres to confirm that the V shaped roof did indeed meet water. Regaining the waterfall was somewhat desperate. This sump is presumably connected with the upstream one in Cueva Blanca, though only Stuart can tell us the intervening distance between the two (and hence the through dive prospects) when he processes all the data. Nick bolted out of the cave for some warmth, the others still checking every nook and cranny for bypasses.

Back at camp it was Trev's turn to play "chef" and a familiar theme followed: "Have you seen any.....?"; "Where did you put the.....?". Trev treated us to a gourmet's cabaret, with plenty of movement, light and a continuous stream of one-liners. He was in his element. Phill left us for the "sanity" of Hobart, walking out via the South Coast track.

On Monday Trev "flexed off", ostensibly to clean up the survey notes and repair various bits of expired caving gear, notably his carbide light. Chris Lew and Nick went back up the hill yet again to do some bushbashing into parts hitherto unknown.

We trudged well above the contact to a prominent hillock off to the right of the track. This feature forms the uppermost section of the ridge, dividing New Order gully from a parallel and similar one (Xymox gully). We virtually fell into the latter following an exploratory course of 120 degrees magnetic, descending back into karst. The gully floor abounded with blocked dolines, which we followed only briefly before resuming the previous bearing.

Ascending another ridge revealed a less detailed gully beyond and led to broader slopes with only minor holes. The plan had been to continue south east, but the lack of going cave enforced a change of mind. Chris suggested criss-crossing (!) the earlier gullies, back to the west (ie lower down). More minor holes were found, but nothing that looked promising until we had returned to within a few hundred metres of Bauhaus. Chris chanced upon a sheer sided gully/doline, unfortunately blocked. However, immediately beyond this was a large doline hard up against the walls of Bauhaus, the same feature that had been espied two days previously.

The descent into this was interesting, dodgy vines over loose rock and vertical mud, landing us beside a multi-entrance cave, Xymox. The larger entrance exuded considerable draught and dropped some 10 metres to a rubble slope below. Nick rigged this with 9mm rope, a rebelay pulling it away from a decidedly tentative block on the lip.

The abseil was a bit fast (using only a piton brake descender) into huge borehole passage. Dry, oxidised decoration attested to the extreme age of the place. Its size resembled that of the upper levels of Bauhaus, indicating a likely interconnection between the two caves. Following the draught disclosed what was more a linked series of chambers, than continuous borehole, with avens stretching up to thirty metres high in some instances.

A side passage to the left diverted the breeze. Below the floor of this a mid-level rift series offered alternative ways on. Similar to the upper level meanders in Screaming Stals, it probably represents a fossil feeder to the main streamway.

Nick was using Chris' electric light instead of carbide, the water supply having been consumed earlier in the day. Mid-stride over some rift, the bulb happened to blow, confirming Murphy's Law. Fortunately Chris had insisted that he carry a torch as back-up. During the momentary spell of darkness, a faint glow was noticed coming from a lead above. This was climbed into a balcony overlooking Bauhaus the floor of which was some ten metres below. The connection had been made.

Rather than pursue the various leads running off this area with a torch of unknown quality, Nick retreated along the connector passage to the major continuation. At the juncture is a huge chamber, "Ormis Aven", perhaps the most voluminous piece of cave in Xymox. It is coated in moonmilk suffused with black stripes from carbonaceous material entering from some twenty metres above. Below the level of the main passage it drops ten metres to a step ("Trubbles Pitch") with a further drop evident beyond. These weren't descended.

Nick pushed on over some yo-yoing collapse slopes to be finally halted by a flowstone blockage of the major passage ("Eves Volcano"). Returning back past the entrance pitch, the opposite end of the borehole was found to be short-lived ("Velvet Underground"). Stopped this time by a drop of several metres the base of which appeared to be closed. The passage continued via a rift on the other side of this obstacle, but could not be gained. After prusiking out, the visitation was marked on blue tape tied to a surface stal.

Meanwhile Chris and Lew had been battling the neighbouring terrain in search of more cave. Nothing was found on the slope immediately to the north of Xymox, however a large shaft, "Orpheus" (TCC 1988 £2) appeared in the next doline east. Further up the gully was a minor rift entrance (£3) between Orpheus and a third doline. That contained a slot in the wall entrance with a howling draught, "Nick Cave (£4)". Chris also found two adjacent shafts in the south wall of the Xymox doline, losing his watch in the process, hence "Pseiko Killer"!

The crew skirted the sheer drops of Bauhaus retreating to safer havens below Damper Cave. Here we met Trev clearing the track from the campsite. He greeted us by leaping from the undergrowth, brandishing his hatchet and screaming in Gaelic. A more terrifying spectacle would be hard to imagine.

Tuesday and back up the hill, this time with Trev in tow, to explore the undescended shafts of the previous day and to survey in Xymox. We returned to the hillock on the ridge divide, retracing our steps to the bottom of the gully then following this down to the Xymox area. Nothing else of significance was found.

Orpheus was rigged from a manfern, rebelayed at a bollard on the shaft edge. A rope pack tied to the rigging krab allowed this 25 metre pitch to hang free. Chris and Lew descended past a narrow ledge to a large scree slope below. From here the cave divided, one passage closing down to unnavigable rift. The other lead was pushed to about -50 metres in gradually narrowing rift and contained abundant snail shells and nondescript bones, the large entrance hole being an ideal collector. The lowest point reached was in infilled rift with many tiny tunnels continuing further down. A slight draught was still present.

Trev and Nick checked hole £3 only some fifty metres or so away. This took the form of a wall entrance into serpentine passage. A hands and knees crawl dropped into tightish rift and a short foray by Trev realized our fondest expectations - it didn't go. We moved on to Nick Cave which with its howling entrance draught appeared a much more promising prospect.

Trev squirmed through the hole in the wall to emerge in reasonable sized passage. This terminated very soon after at a 40 metre pitch. Nick rigged this from a wedged block in the floor, rebelayed to a bollard protruding from the left wall. This just managed to produce a total free hang. Descending some twenty metres or so against the right hand wall he swung over to a ledge when the aven began to "bell out". Determining that the rope being used wasn't long enough to reach the deck, a second was tied on. The abseil continued in blackness, the carbide light not making much of an impression on the distant black walls. The base of the pitch was in chamber, several metres wide and about ten metres long, due to a secondary aven.

A rift intersecting the lower wall of this was the only way on. It was some 30 to 40 cm wide and appeared bottomless. Nick lacked extra rope to explore further, however the total absence of draught did not indicate much chance of a continuation. A



thick coating of moonmilk would have made a mess of him and it, had he tried. Total estimated depth is about -60 metres.

The howling gale at the entrance was not present in any form lower down the cave. The reason for this proved to be the chimney effect created by a concealed shaft adjoining Nick Cave but on the opposite side of the doline wall. Chris almost stumbled into this in his wanderings.

Everyone regrouped at the entrance, derigging the pitch from there. We then headed back down the gully to Xymox. Once in the cave, we made our way to the balcony overlooking Bauhaus. Chris and Lew meandered through the mid level rift to the pool rock underneath the New Order shaft. Just to be different, Trev and Nick strolled into Bauhaus along a fair sized passage, emerging above survey station £75. Strangely, this lead had not been noticed on the 1986 trip.

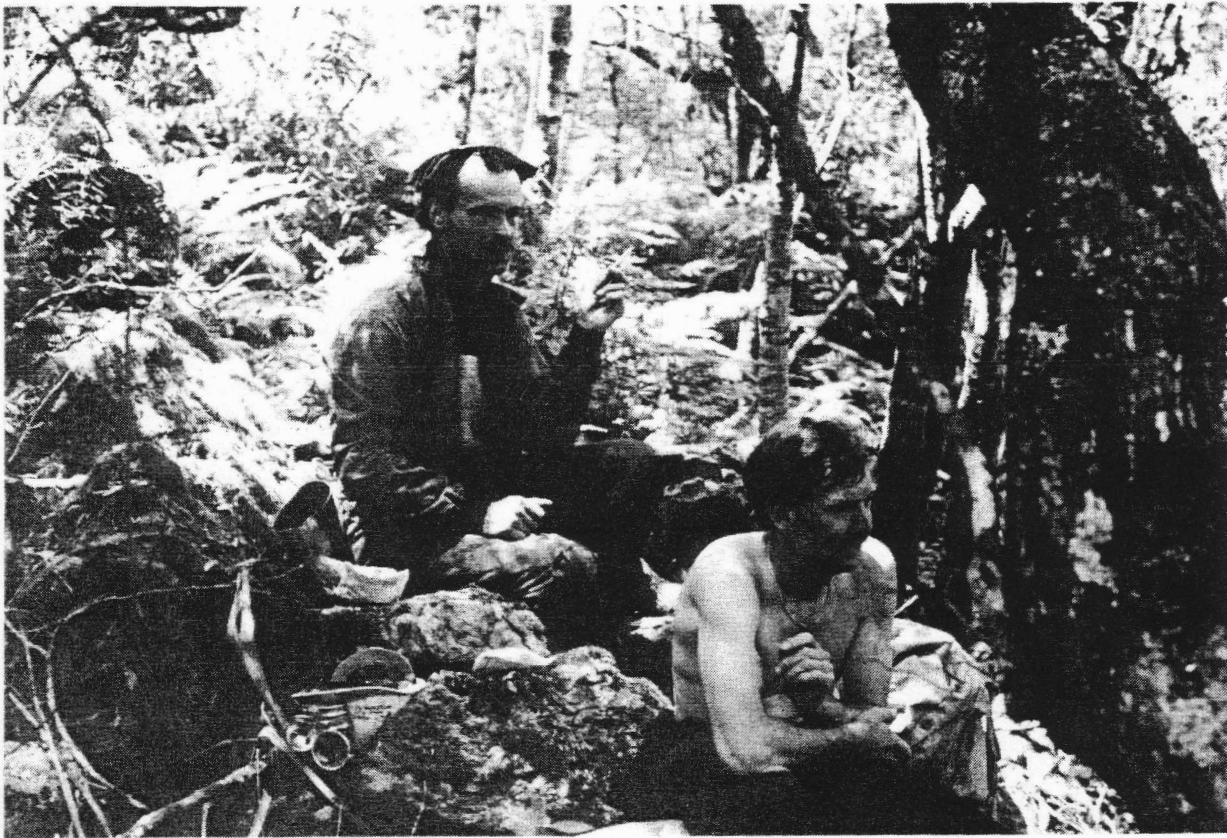
Surveying back into Xymox from here was very easy, most legs being ten to twenty metres or more. Nick hindered the process with some photography and lead checking. One climb on the right just after the balcony led over some lacerating ground to an inlet aven. From Ormis Aven, several radial shots were taken along the main chamber to its terminus at Eves Volcano. Back towards the entrance pitch, another large aven was found above breakdown blocks on the left. A radian was also run into Velvet Underground, before we prusiked out.

Pseiko Killers, the twin entrances nearby, draught quite strongly. They weren't descended but most likely connect to Xymox via the unentered rift at the far end of Velvet Underground. They may be accessways to a continuation of the old upper level borehole passage that is a feature of the Bauhaus / Xymox series. However Nick Cave should be another accessway, if such a route was practical.

Wednesday was the final day of exploration, with none of us very keen to tackle the slopes again. Instead, we decided to trog the plain/slope juncture to the south of Damper Cave. Some hundred metres or so past this cave, the ridge line takes a sharp turn easterly. A small stream was followed coming from a corresponding direction. The waters performed a disappearing act into unenterable sub-surface rift on occasions. The creek dispersed into a multitude of fossil stream gullies, a number of which we followed to blocked dolines at the base of the new ridge line.

We traced a circuit around this line until chancing upon the old yellow tapes belonging to PB2. A short climb over the ridge above this outflow entrance brought us to the same stream entering PB2a. Fifty metres upstream, Quetzalcoatl Conduit was draughting strongly due to the warmth of the day. Our original idea of surveying the "Lowlife" extension here became drowned in waves of apathy. Working totally immersed without much airspace for several hundred metres somehow simply did not appeal. Instead we opted for the less exciting task of surface surveying to Damper Cave. This brought to an end a very pleasant day.

Nick Hume



Vegetation above the dolines relatively open!, and in the dolines horrificly dense, it seems every type of fern known to humankind is packed into these tiny isolated pockets.