

SPELEO SPIEL

Mar 1991 No. 268



Newsletter of the Tasmanian Caverneering Club
ESTABLISHED 1946

P.O. Box 416, Sandy Bay, Tasmania. 7005
Registered by Australia Post — Publication No. TBH 0201

Holocaust entrance pitch.

SPELEO SPIEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE TASMANIAN CAVERNEERING CLUB, Inc.

Newsletter Annual Subscription \$21.00, Each \$2.00 Non-members \$3.00

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FORWARD PROGRAMME....!

Wednesday March 27, 8pm - Annual General Meeting of TCC, Inc. To be held at the Wheatsheaf Hotel in Davey / Macquarie Street, Hobart. See official notice at the end of this edition of Speleo Spiel. Make sure you are there, not necessarily to be elected to an office or committee position, but to show your support for the best cave exploration / documentation group in Oz!

EASTER - Mt Anne Looks like there will be a reunion of the AnneAKananda Konquerers Klub... Ideas are for an easy few days in the only alpine caving area in Australia, doing such delights as Kellers Cellar (great entrance pitch of 100m+), some of the top pitches of AAK, Col-in-Cavern and a general wander in the great karst country of that area. You definitely need high mountain clothing, but if the weather is any good the temperatures are not too low and sunscreen can be the go! Camping is in the AAK doline so no tents are needed, but stoves and water bladders (empty wine cask bladders) are! Talk to Rolan Eberhard about this trip.

August 3 & 4 - not caving, but the annual Winter S&R exercise... Always good value and plenty of fun, these weekends can turn into minor epics if the weather does the right thing (and it usually does!). See Stu Nicholas for this one.

Other things worth doing before winter... KD (anyone interested?), Cauldron Pot new extension, another look at Niagara Pot along the "sand tubes" which proved interesting last time..., wandering in the bush further north west of the slip on Wherretts Lookout. Another SRT practice day for a couple of newer members (plus some of the rusty old ones!) as well. See Dean, Bob or Stu for some of these.

Around May or June - SRT Hauling day... Last year we had such a thing and it proved quite educational, so we're going to do another! The cave SRT S&R exercise has just been completed, but some familiarity with self rescue hauling systems and so on is vitally important for all vertical cavers.

EDITORIAL

The buzz word in the outdoors during the nineties is "accreditation". Not of the outdoor environment, but of people taking other people to see and experience this rapidly decreasing, but increasingly important resource. Litigation will become the norm rather than the exception in cases of accident, or even inconvenience.

Coroners are looking more closely at leadership qualifications of party organisers and leaders and the standards required to become a "leader" in a particular field of endeavour. What is a leadership standard in such things as climbing, caving, walking? Who sets them and acts as God in overseeing and examining underlings wishing to reach the sub-God standard (there can presumably be only one top-dog)?

These questions are required to be addressed **now**, if our sport (and many other outdoor sports) will be able to take on new people or run trips for non-member groups such as Scouts, schools and so on without the ogre of possible litigation should anything go awry. Public liability insurance will / has become essential, as for recognized specific first aid qualifications and some national leadership accreditation scheme (as per British caving). Many of these issues must be looked at by ASF if caving and speleology is to prosper. The (Tasmanian) Bush and Mountaincraft Board has established an umbrella group to oversee some of the issues needing to be addressed by individual sports groups, and produced a draft copy of a paper giving information on the subject, but it is up to the groups / sports bodies to produce the guidelines and "standards" necessary for setting of leadership "qualifications".

Stuart Nicholas

CALCITE CHATTER & OTHER CLATTER...

- Well, last month we had nice spiffy laser printing of the Spiel.... pity about the date and edition number being wrong inside! That's life in the big black hole of caving, I guess.

- For those around a few years ago, there was a book by Martyn Farr, a pommy caver and cave diver, called "The Darkness Beckons" and it was an excellent publication (some of the stories are "edge of the seat stuff"). Martyn has obviously looked far into the future and produced a new second edition of the book, due to be released soon. From all accounts it will appeal to cavers and cave divers alike, regardless of whether you have already read the first edition. The new edition has more than doubled in size (the original wasn't small!) and sells for £19.95 in the UK. Look out for it in.. well pommy catalogues I guess!

- On the subject of books, second editions etc., Alan Warild of Sydney has produced a new, completely revised and updated edition of "Vertical", that outstanding treatise on vertical caving equipment and techniques. The first one was good and I don't know how it could be improved, but those who know these things say it has, so there! It is available from Al at 41 Northwood Street, Newtown, NSW, 2042 for the old price of \$29.50 including postage. Buy it and learn even more about the hallowed art of vertical caving (not just SRT skills)!

- People trying to phone Stuart Nicholas at work from now on will have to dial a new number, namely 781248. You may just get a dreaded answering machine but the call will be returned!

- We are coming up to the end and beginning of the club year(s) with its obligatory AGM, elections, annual reports and all the other associated trivia. The date for

the AGM is March 27 at the Wheatsheaf Hotel in Davey Street, starting at 8pm (yes, we mean it !). There is an official notice at the end of this edition of the Speleo Spiel as we are now incorporated and must do such things.

- For those last minute eats and fuel on your way to Maydena and après-cave snacks on the way home, try the "middle shop" in Westerway. This has recently been taken on by previous operators of the Maydena shop, namely Roy and Joan Brazell. Friendly service is always assured and the chips are just excellent!! You can also buy cement and other hardware there, should the need arise!

- On the subject of refreshments, takeovers and such like, the Wheatsheaf Hotel, our social centre / meeting place / watering hole / etc. has recently been taken over by previous operators of the Doghouse Hotel, namely the Laskey family. Service is good - we even get some snack cheese and crackers if we smile the right way! Dennis Jacoorra has gone, so I don't know what Trev will do for an animated discussion, but no doubt something/someone will take his place!

- Tasmanian Ambulance Service in conjunction with Red Cross are setting up Wilderness First Aid and Wilderness Medicine courses to be run this year. The first is the Wilderness First Aid course to be run around the end of June at a cost of \$150 to \$200. Both courses are fully accredited and will involve considerable field work as well as theory, but in these days of increasing emphasis on accreditation requirements for leaders of any outdoor activity, it may be money well spent. See Stu for info or contact Sue White at Sport and Recreation.

LONGEST CAVES IN AUSTRALIA

1.	Exit Cave	Tasmania	17 km
2.	Jenolan	NSW	16 km
3.	Old Homestead	S. Aust.	14 km
4.	Corra Lyn	S. Aust.	13.2 km
5.	Mullamullang	W. Aust.	13 km
6.	Growling Swallet	Tasmania	12 km
7.	The Queenslander	Queensland	10 km
8.	Easter Cave	W. Aust.	7.6 km
9.	Five Corners	S. Aust.	6.5 km
10.	Cocklebidy	W. Aust.	6.2 km
11.	Colong Cave	NSW	6 km
12.	Pannikin Plain	W. Aust.	5.8 km
13.	Herberts Pot	Tasmania	5.7 km
14.	Johansen	Queensland	5.5 km
15.	Kalkadoon	Queensland	5.4 km
16.	Mimbi	W. Aust.	5.0 km

WHAT I THOUGHT OF THE CONFERENCE AND CAVING IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

by Stephen Bunton

"Those that do, do... and those that don't read Playboy!" Attending an ASF conference is a bit like that. If you haven't got a real caving trip to go on you could always fall back on going to the conference and talk about caving. Better still if you live somewhere where there aren't many caves to explore you could always occupy your time managing them, studying them or cleaning them up again after the non-cavers have been through and buggered them up. Such is mainland caving.

So it was that I found myself in the invidious position of having nothing better to do with my holidays than to attend the ASF conference. It gave me the opportunity to visit the caves of Western Australia, hopefully with a herd of enthusiastic local guides, also to catch up with old friends and acquaintances and to return via the Nullarbor to see some more of Australia's most notable caves. In short I achieved all these goals and had a most enjoyable time doing so. There were, however, many disturbing things that I saw which reflected on the current status of caving in Australia and indicated trends for the future management of our caves.

The conference was held in Margaret River 285km south of Perth. The caves in the area are documented and tagged as belonging to several areas, viz Augusta, Margaret River, Witchcliffe and Yallingup. The whole region is a tourist resort with nice shady trees, surfing beaches, pottery and handicraft places, wineries and tourist caves.

The first cave that I visited in "the area" was Strongs Cave which is famous for containing the world's longest straw which is now 6.37m long. Strongs is a gated cave and permit access is restricted to members of an ASF affiliated club. The purpose of our visit was to remeasure the straw and give a more accurate estimate of its length. There is no real track to cave and the location of the cave has been deleted from the 1:25,000 series map sheet as a means to protect the cave. In fact there are two gates on the cave as an extra safeguard since gates are regularly blown off caves or pulled off with 4WDs. I tended to think "No wonder!" since there was no sign stating as to why the cave was gated nor who to see for access if you were sufficiently curious. Only on one cave in WA, Dingo Dig which is an archaeological site, did I see such a sign.

Inside the cave was a "pitch" which required a 10m ladder and this acted as a further deterrent to would-be visitors. I was a little disappointed to find out that, what rated as a 10m pitch in WA requiring belays etc, would have required a 6m handline home here. I was more disappointed for an elderly visiting Chinese professor of Karst Geomorphology who didn't visit the cave solely on the grounds of an overrated ladder pitch. This was a pity since the rest of the cave is quite pretty and fairly interesting since it has a base level stream. So it was that six of us carried in the gear required to measure and photograph the straw and having done that exited for lunch. In the afternoon I let someone else take my place among the six and I went elsewhere in search of caving fun.

My place was taken by a few decent young chaps from the University Caving Club (sic). They were now doctors or computer engineers, yes well meaning, intelligent, conservation minded types but because their club wasn't affiliated with ASF they weren't able to do many of the caves in their own state. The ploy seemed to be that they needed to suck up to one or other of the two "official" WA caving clubs, either Cave Gaters Pty Ltd or Stal Scrubbers Inc. to gain access. These being the two major endeavours of WA caving clubs, along with track marking in caves and "high accuracy" (substitute "low speed") mapping. Somehow these lads weren't into that sort of thing and obviously didn't fit into the mould of a fossilised caving club member. Their primary interest was exploration and to this end they were exceptionally enthusiastic attempting to visit and push as many of the caves in the area as possible. I did a few caves with them later.

Whilst the lads had conned their way into Strongs I went off with some members of The Other Speleological Society (TOSS) to see a few different caves. We visited Bride Cave a cylindrical collapse doline overhung on all sides. On the tall side where you abseil it was 45m to the floor and on the short side where you ladder out it was 15m. No belays here! It was all Gung-Ho! Single 11mm Bluewater down over the edge, a figure-8 and a glove, high speed and stopping just above the deck, then touch down but don't touch the descender yet. "The problem round here is that there isn't really much to do now that we've mastered vertical caving." I suggested

they buy Al Warild's book which was being remaindered at the conference in preparation for a reprint this year.

It was refreshing to be amongst adventure cavers again, people who wanted to do caves not just see caves, people who wanted to tick them off the list. The other thing they wanted to do was set a record through Giants Cave entrance to entrance. Giants is quite a novel trip since it goes under the main road. The cave is designated as a wild cave which means anyone can go there anytime. What this means is that when the surf's not working the tourists go caving. This didn't surprise me since I pulled a pair of thongs out of the cave. Only one was broken. I also had the dubious privilege of burying a really smelly turd that some poor undesirable was too lazy to take out of the cave with them. We even rescued a party of people who were lost in the cave with only one operational torch between them. As the name suggests Giants is huge and I felt ill-equipped with my little low power light which normally illuminates only my prusik rig and not much further afield than my feet. To me the cave was just a walk in the dark. Each year an estimated 25,000 people enjoy this walk in the dark. Rauleigh Webb arrived at this figure with a home made pressure pad counter. Even with this weight of numbers, cave users, tax-payers, the WA National Parks budget didn't run to electronic beam counters. This seemed an absurd anomaly considering the undisguised opulence of Perth and its people.

A function of the litigation mentality, which seems to be sweeping Australia like McDonalds and other American plagues, are "Cave Risk Area" signs which are The National Parks and Wildlife Service's feeble attempt at a disclaimer on their public liability insurance. "You were warned!" The following day we visited Jewel Cave which is a fairly famous tourist cave in the area, it contains the world's second longest straw or "the world's longest straw in a tourist cave". So replete with stal measuring gear we trogs set off into a tourist cave exempt from fees and the constraints of guides, because we were special, bona fide cave scientists or their hangers on. There's a lot of this goes on in Australia, Marakoopa, Jenolan. At Jenolan with the resurvey of the tourist caves, they are now up to 16km of passage - Australia's second longest cave! With this and Old Homestead Cave running at 14km, everyone at the conference was keen for us Tasmanians to resurvey Exit. I took this as an indicator that most of them thought that we, like them, had nothing better to do with our time.

The first night of the conference was a get together BBQ. It was good to catch up with Julia and Al again at the conference. Their attitudes to caving, exploration, expeditions and general fair play seemed so reasonable in comparison to many others I had recently encountered. It had been nearly five years since I'd seen them and it was surprising how little they'd changed and reassuring just how much we still had in common. Stefan distinguished himself that night as "the bloke who drove from Cocklebidy, by himself, in a single day!".

The conference was very well organised and well run thanks mostly to Rauleigh Webb and Norm Poulter who are by now old hands at it. The papers were varied and interesting. John Webb's geological studies which demonstrated the antiquity of Australian caves, not just the carbonate rocks but the cavities too, was pretty interesting as was Julia's sulfuric acid and gypsum caves paper. The star of the show was probably Professor Zhu Xhu Wen talking on Karst in China. The next IUS conference is in China in 1993 and the next ASF conference is in Launceston over Christmas 1992, so start saving now. Unlike the Western Australians who flocked to participate in their own conference and lead people through local caves, we in Tasmania have a reputation as the ones who boycotted their own conference in 1984. In all fairness though, I must say that Tasmanian caves are very much a case of do-it-yourself something which is impossible in WA since the positions of caves aren't published anywhere, few maps of caves exist and permits and keys further impede interstate visitations. I would like to personally thank all those locals who took me caving.

December 1990

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - MARCH 27 - WHEATSHEAF HOTEL

Possibly the best trip I did was a trip into the Christmas Star extension of Crystal Cave. For all my criticisms of mainland "conservation strategies" this is an inspired piece of work. After passing two gates and two very tight squeezes you emerge into a chamber the like of which I've never seen. The floor is solid white calcite except for a small blue pool, there are some large white flowstone slopes and the roof is almost completely covered in straws and helictites. Only six parties of four are permitted to visit this place each year and over twenty years since its discovery and management there has hardly been any degradation. At the start of the chamber you sit on a rock masonry constructed seat and take off your boots and overalls before following a series of clear plastic paths through the pretties. Needless to say my photographic skills seemed inadequate when confronted with the task of recording the beauty of this place during my brief and privileged visit.

Possibly the nadir of the conference was a theoretical management exercise hastily conceived by John Dunkley. Between sessions we were asked, as workshop groups, to give our answer various questions and give ideas on conservation along certain lines of thought. One of these was basically "What were acceptable land-use practices for caves?" Most people were in agreement; tourism, science, recreation were, some said no to digging, all said no to smoking but to my surprise and abject horror most also considered education and personal development as not legitimate activities for caves. How can you educate a population into respect for caves and the environment and get the majority of people to vote for the preservation of caves, if they aren't allowed to go down them? The whole thing reeked of a holier than thou elitism. You can only visit our caves if you join our clubs and do the right thing. How do you learn the right thing to do? Join our club and find out. It sounded like the same perverse logic as the Masonic Lodge uses in its recruitment strategy... and ASF wonders why it is doomed to become extinct like the masons.

Basically the Dunkley exercise culminated in an exercise "Here is a new and very significant cave, with lots of varied and valuable resources, "How would you manage it?" In the comfort of a conference centre and with no vested interest in the cave it was very easy to adopt the bureaucratically expedient alternative of exclusion and most people did. Not even the group who found the cave were allowed in. In expedition caving pirating other peoples' caves is the ultimate sin - there is an ethic which reserves explorers' rights. In America, "the land of the free" where this type of exclusion principle is well established, a caver denied access to Carlsbad Caverns, because he was not a member of a recognised club went off to find his own cave. This cave turned out to be Lechiguilla Cave, the USA's second deepest cave and arguably its most spectacularly decorated. We saw a set slides of Lechiguilla Cave during the proceedings of the conference. Anyway, as soon as the significance of the cave was apparent National Parks once again restricted entry to the cave and this caver was denied entry to the cave he found. The other anecdote I heard along these lines was of a WA caver who once shat in a cave twenty years ago. Over this period of time he has been trying to join either local caving club so that he can visit certain caves but no-one will endorse his membership thereby excluding him from most caves. Sure this guy sinned but in Australia you don't even get twenty years for murder!

It also seemed that expedition caving was not really a legitimate land use activity because of its destructive potential. Certainly one of the non-cognoscenti would think that bolt driven exploration at all cost was the ethic and that it's OK to do this in a third world country but you wouldn't do that at home but this isn't the case. From my experience expedition caves have always been left in almost pristine condition, done once mapped, photographed and never visited again, undisturbed from then on. What could more wholesome than that! It's only when caves adopt the status of classics that they get trashed.

Pontificating about absolute rights and wrongs is best left to the legal profession and whilst there is no consideration of the morality of an action it is pretty easy to put such an action in some sort of perspective using the logic of precedent. Two papers of significance here were Kier Vaughan Taylor's layman's summary of the events and legalities concerned with mining at Yessabah. The other was Pat Larkin's professional view of the events which led up to the destruction of Speaking Tube cave at Mt Etna. Kier's paper was rather cynical reflecting his disenchantment with mining companies, bureaucrats and lawyers. Pat's paper was vaguely optimistic in that the Mt Etna case created a number of legal precedents and in the meantime caused sufficient furore that perhaps the mining companies will tend to be a little more cautious in future especially with respect to "bat caves" and their supporters. Pat considered that the law and in particular environmental law, was evolving at a very rapid pace such that ordinary people can make legal challenges to the rich and powerful mining companies. Too often I was asked "What are you going to do about Benders Quarry and Exit Cave?"

The highlight of the conference was a superb set of slides on bats, commercially available from the Save The Bat Foundation.

Possibly the most controversial paper at the conference was one which Stefan and I missed when we were out wine tasting for morning tea, Margaret River's other big tourist attraction. Norm Poulter presented the notion of "Cave Rights for Troglobites". It was the same sort of argument that we present for continued existence of national parks but which is currently being taken to its logical absurdity by the green movement to press for total no go areas to stop human impact on other species. It's the same type of nonsensical argument extremist vegetarians use when they say "I can't see any reason why a cow's life should be less important than mine!". Based on this logic, and some fairly dubious other logic concerning the disappearance of some spiders from The Dome in Mullamullang Cave. Norm lobbied for the ASF Committee Meeting to accept a ten year moratorium on visits to The Dome - he was moderately happy when they accepted two years.

The other significant thing to come out of the Committee Meeting was proportional representation in the voting. This was SSS's major complaint with ASF since they had the most members and a say that was only equivalent to everyone else's. The problem with ASF and the club mentality is that it is all so incredibly tribal. As the world marched inexorably towards war in the gulf, the ASF heavies discussed caving in a very similar mindset to the world's warmongers.

After the conference I had but one day to do the cave I really wanted to do in WA, Easter Cave. Reputed to be one of Australia's most beautiful caves, it is also quite complex and contains an entrance pitch which demands some level of skill, experience and respect. Understandably it is not a beginners' recreational cave and rightly so. The cave has been fully surveyed and the data reduced by computer but as yet no map has been produced. When I asked why one hadn't been printed out I was told that "A map might easily fall into the wrong hands!" What? We're all living behind enemy lines, are we? Right throughout the conference I was confronted with this trench mentality of "us and them". The bona fide caver versus the tourist yobbo and whenever I made noises about bridging the gap by educating the population I was looked at with incredulity.

Unfortunately we didn't get to see Easter Cave because of some foul-up with the wrong set of keys and calm as I was at the time, in reality I was pretty pissed off. Excluded by incompetence. Stefan and I cut our losses and went off to Yallingup Self-Guided Tourist Cave. Both of us had, in our Tasmanian World Heritage Submissions, lobbied for self-guided tourist caves to educate the population. This cave would not be a model to follow, it was an ugly cave poorly presented, overlit and what few signs there were, were banal in the extreme and of no interpretational value whatsoever. The only thing I could conclude was that the self-guided arrange-

ment was a cynical exercise in saving staff salaries. The other tourist cave we visited in the area was Lake Cave which was truly magnificent but again overlit and with a significant algae problem.

Along the lines of educating the population, treating them as intelligent creatures and not writing them off as idiots and teaching them some respect for caves, Bill Humphreys told a very interesting and seminal anecdote in his paper on the invertebrates of Cape Range. This is a place where Australia's only blind cave fish is threatened because water is being drained from the caves to supply the local town of Exeter.

He told of a seemingly worthless cave in Britain which contained a unique population of cave spiders. To protect this population which was endemic to this cave the cognoscenti spidersmen let no-one else know of the population's existence. This was OK until the local management authority wanted to build a road over the cave, or dig it up for gravel or something. The local management authority asked cavers if the cave was worth saving and since none of them knew about the spiders, the cave was destroyed and the spiders went extinct. Bills' basic point was that freedom of information is the only way to protect things. I could not have stated my case more profoundly! It seemed that cavers wanted it both ways; they want wilderness areas which you can't visit "just to know that they are there" is sufficient justification for their existence but similarly they cannot wrap their minds around the concept of preserving things cultural and natural significance unless they can visit these places themselves. The spidersmen knew this and couldn't trust the cavers to know and not touch. As for Mullamullang it seemed like a pretty strange place to make a no-go area. It was akin to making the summit of a mountain off limits. "You can climb the mountain but not go to the top!"

Stefan and I then once again went our separate ways. He stayed in Margaret River and was lucky enough to see Easter Cave, which he said rivalled Kubla Khan as Australia's prettiest cave, before visiting Bill Humphreys and other bugmen in Perth. I headed to the Nullarbor with Julia's crew in an attempt to tick off as many caves as possible in that neck of the woods, to use a totally inappropriate cliché.

We met at Pannikin Plain Cave where the cave still looks pretty unstable after the flood disaster there in November 1989. A sign telling you to keep out even explains why. If you do go into the cave there is another reasonably worded sign along the lines of OK you've made it this far, for your own sake follow the track markers. After this I floated around the Cocklebidy Lake and snorkelled in Tommy Grahams Cave, my reward for helping lug tanks in and out caves for Kier and his diving mate Merv. Julia's plan was to visit as many of the caves on the Nullarbor as possible to sample water from their lakes, even utilising the divers to sample at various depths. She was also concerned to see the salt weathering effects of gypsum and halite as well as Rauleigh's new speleothem the Stegamite. We packed a lot into two weeks on the Nullarbor mostly due to the presence of Graham Pilkington who knew the whereabouts of most of the caves such that we never needed to back-track.

The highlight of the adventure was a trip to the end of Mullamullang, yes The Dome. At 13km Mullamullang is currently Australia's fifth longest cave. The Dome is the furthest point into the cave at 5.5km from the entrance and between the entrance and The Dome there are 39 rockpiles to scramble over the highest of which is 60m high. The cave is an enormous trunk passage and the rockpiles are a result of collapse from the ceiling. The temperature in the cave is constantly above 20°C and therefore armed with two litres of water each we prepared for an 11km underground bushwalk plus other side trips to fill in the day. On the Nullarbor the idea was to get underground each day before the sun got too hot and stay under there until it was well into the evening when there was only enough daylight to cook tea. This

proved to be a wise strategy since on the day we did Mulla-mullang the thermometer reached 50°C in the shade.

My other preparation for our mindless slog was to load up the walkman with fresh batteries. So, with Peter Garrett blurting out songs about planetary responsibility and a fair go for all, I traipsed off to violate some spider's sacred site. I justified my moratorium breaking stance on the grounds that this ban was based solely on the fact that no-one had seen this particular spider there for over four years. To me this seemed like pretty bogus logic and the sort of bullshit restriction which should be flaunted out of hand. One of the rules of teaching is "Never make a rule you can't enforce!" The concept of ASF making a ban on trips to The Dome is absurd, it won't work, it didn't work, I went there and trod carefully. I knew this would upset Norm who was a good host to me in Perth but I didn't want to have a heated debate in his home and spoil the congeniality.

The sorts of other people who have visited the Dome in the last year or so, that may not have trod so carefully are those from 4WD clubs crossing the Nullarbor or the commercial tour operators who include Mulla-mullang on their adventure itinerary. What ASF should be concentrating on is ensuring that when these people visit the cave they do so in a gentle manner and possibly track mark to minimise disturbance in places like The Dome, not banning its own members from visiting the end of the cave. A case in point is The Dune just near the entrance where a sign asks people to keep off its sandy slopes and people have obliged. A similar sign at the entrance to The Dome asking people not to continue beyond this point might hopefully be equally as well respected. Relocating the visitors book at that point would also help the spiders' cause.

Anyone expecting Mulla-mullang Cave to be a wilderness experience would be seriously disappointed. The cave is littered with evidence of the 1966 CEGSA expedition which camped in the cave. Most of this stuff should, in my opinion have been removed by now but coming on for a quarter of a century later it seems to have assumed the significance of cultural heritage. Relics at various points along the way, sit like shrines to mark the progress of those on their pilgrimage to the end of the cave. Obviously our thinking and our attitude to the environment has changed in the last twenty five years and thankfully so but it annoyed me intensely to think that those who camped in Mulla-mullang are now making rules to exclude the younger generations from visiting the cave's end. To think that they do this in the name of cave conservation or preservation seems hypocritical whilst ever their litter lingers on.

The walkman was a good idea. It blocked out all those dull thuds of boots on rock and the rumbles as the loose boulders sway to and fro. All in all it was like doing the Tasman Glacier bash except without garbage gully to mark its end and sans a New Zealand ice-cream as reward for surviving the ordeal.

Many of the passages of Mulla-mullang demonstrate a fairly common cave phenomenon on the Nullarbor - salt weathering. The Coffee and Cream formation in the Easter Extension shows gypsum (calcium sulfate) in its two coloured forms. We visited the Salt Cellars where huge halite (sodium chloride) formations abound. The salt weathering processes at work in the Nullarbor caves became better clarified with visits to other dry caves. The dry caves i.e. non-diving type caves that we visited included Moonera Tank, Nurina, Madura Cave, Thampanna, Witches, Webb's, Chowilla Landslip, Winbirra and Abrakurrie. The last three were vast collapse doline features. Abrakurrie being another walk in the dark with huge passage dimension and a flat dirt floor. Photographing in this was just something else thanks to the Mark Bonwick mega flash with a light output equivalent to 24 powerful flashguns.

Thampanna is well-known for its 1.5m circular blowhole entrance. During the day the caves of the Nullarbor breathe out and at night they suck in, due to the pressure

changes mostly associated with diurnal temperature and hence pressure changes. We amused ourselves with this new toy by throwing hats down the cave's entrance only to have them spat back out due to the force of the wind. Once inside we found that there were numerous dead birds that had been sucked into the cave whilst flying haplessly by one evening. Most of them died thinking that they'd never get out of the cave but they were wrong. As people laddered down into the cave against the gale force winds we ruffled their feathers a little with a reanimated dead bird exiting the cave high speed. Another childish game for the whole family to enjoy!

Graham showed us through some of the newer extensions of Thampanna and these contained much black calcite, both as stalactites, stalagmites and as huge flowstone bands. Also chocolate brown gypsum crystals that decay to sand and also huge white gypsum formations. Much of the black calcite was subject to modification by a coating of white gypsum. In fact white stals often had black centres as could be seen in the cross sections revealed in broken stals. Julia and I discussed this phenomenon in depth especially with respect to Rauleigh's stegamites which now appear to be remnants of stalagmites erosive features not depositional features.

Witches Cave was one of the most demonstrative in showing the decay of calcite formations due to salt weathering. Because gypsum and halite are evaporative formations this process is more pronounced closer to the entrance. Salt leaching out of the rock has wedged huge slabs of calcite from the roof.

The cave that was probably the most fun on the Nullarbor was Weebubbie. The lake in the cave is 30m wide and 150m long big enough to train a swimming team, I did my laps. We all carried in tanks etc for Stefan, Kier and Merv. While they were submerged the South Australian National Parks Ranger arrived. Julia had been trying to contact him with regards to a permit for Koonalda. As he sprung us in Weebubbie, he was confronted with the sight of bathing children, semi-naked females, naked males, photographers, porters reading quietly or even doing needle-point. All were relaxing and enjoying the cool of the cave and its waters. His barrage of questions went something like this - "Who is in charge here?", "How many people are in the cave?", "Do you know where they all are?" Julia answered. I wish Trev was there to give him the line "No-one's in charge. We are all adults. We are all old enough to be responsible for our own actions. We don't need leaders!" I couldn't believe the man's very old-school thinking. It's just amazing how entrenched the traditional leadership mentality is in our community and especially in caving circles.

Whilst Koonalda is easily visited, Julia needed to obtain official permission if she was to publish anything about it in the results of her water sampling programme. Ever since I was a teenager I wanted to visit Koonalda Cave. Via the medium of TV I'd learned that it was the site of subterranean aboriginal flint mining activities which pre-date the cave paintings in Europe. This I found a pretty mind-blowing concept. In a culture where there were no personal possessions, everything was a renewable resource except flint which was a commodity traded across vast areas of the continent. Koonalda could well be the original site of capitalism in Australia but like the cave paintings of France you can't go there, unless you're a scientist, or in the same car as a scientist. I went to the beach at Eucla instead and saw the telegraph station being buried by sand.

The lake in Koonalda has been used as a source of water for cattle and therefore the surface area is denuded and the lake level depleted. Underground archaeologists have pretty well created a similar mess. It seemed ironic that one of Australia's most trashed caves was now one of its best protected. Did the management authority expect it to heal, or did they know why they weren't letting anyone into the cave, or was this just a good idea? More importantly, did they realise that access to this cave was solely at the judgement of one man, a bureaucrat who had spent seven years in the wilderness and had very little caving experience?

To placate the ranger we took him into Warbla Cave. Stefan and Co wanted to dive it, Julia wanted water samples again and the ranger wanted to see it for himself before he locked it away for ever as a "reference cave", the flavour of the month term for no-go areas. The whole definition of a reference cave and the philosophy behind it is particularly dubious and Stefan had a semi-animated discussion with him regarding this point.

So here we were about to be the last people ever to enter this cave with no justification for this privileged position than that we were here with a scientist, a Category 3 cave diver and an inquisitive ranger - he'd not even seen the cave himself! There seems to be a creeping mentality, it's actually been established for quite a few decades now, that certain caves are only to be used for scientific research. This means that only scientists and their helpers, usually friends and not always cavers, are allowed to visit the cave. This is OK if you are one of the lucky ones who knows a scientist but the whole notion stinks of chronic cronyism. It is the same pretence that enabled me to get into Strongs, Jewel and numerous other caves throughout my career. It is, like so many other things in our supposedly egalitarian society, a case of "not what you know but who you know" and it is wrong.

In the last year my view of ASF had changed from being supportive in the TSF debate, to basically irrelevant with respect to the fact it couldn't lobby sufficient support to prevent Speaking Tube being destroyed. Then from being elitist in its treatment of affiliated versus non-affiliated clubs to now a view that it was positively exclusivist, with only real cavers and real scientists able to go caving.

South Australia is in a particularly poor state for caving. At some time past they decided that SA caves should be managed by a responsible authority such as the National Parks and Wildlife Service. When NPWS drew up their management plan they banned recreational caving. This means SA cavers are effectively locked out of their own caves unless they are cronies with a scientist, since science is still a legitimate land-use activity. Considering that most of the science that occurs in Australian caves is mere stamp collecting this is such a travesty, people justifying their visits to caves with pseudo-science. If anyone has ever glimpsed at the proceedings of past conferences they'll realise that it's all pretty low-brow science that's being done in Australia. There were a few heavy papers at this conference and of course there are always scientific journals and *Helictite* where the findings of hard scientific investigation can be published and my bias probably stems from having not seen much of these but...

There was only one complication in Warbla Cave - bats. Just before the sump was a roost which we were sure to upset with our large entourage. I reported this to Stefan, Julia and the ranger but knowing nothing about bats other than this was the breeding season I left them all to make up their own minds as to what the best course of action. "They're all responsible adults, it's up to them to make up their own minds as to the best course of action!" I thought. Self-regulation being infinitely better than a dogmatic dictatorial solution. I left the scene before Kier and Merv arrived. They'd have been disappointed if the decision not to dive was forced upon them, and I was responsible for its inception but no, the curiosity of the ranger prevailed.

So it was that we drove out of the Nullarbor's post-holocaust landscape to arrive in Ceduna only to find that it had occurred... George Bush had plunged the world into conflict. All the worries of a few cavers that disagree over the best management strategy for Australia's caves for long term preservation, recreation and study all suddenly seemed profoundly irrelevant in a world which now potentially had an expiry date.

December 1990 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - MARCH 27 - WHEATSHEAF HOTEL

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF TASMANIAN CAVERNEERING CLUB, INC.

DATE: Wednesday March 27, 1991, 8pm

VENUE: The Wheatsheaf Hotel, Davey Street, Hobart - back meeting room

AGENDA: Opening
 Apologies
 Minutes of the previous AGM
 Business arising
 Reports - President, Secretary, Treasurer + others...
 Election of officers and committee
 General business
 Close

Usually a General Meeting is held directly after the AGM for the completion of normal Club business. The Easter trip will be finalised then as well.

Make sure you are there - the usual cliché applies: if you aren't there, don't complain about who is running the Club and how they are doing it!!

[A note to office bearers: please have your reports completed and ready to present to the meeting, in order to smooth over the whole show and enable easy transfer to any new office bearers.]

We need to look at applying for a Tax File Number and/or exemption from TFN declaration.