



FUSSI Newsletter

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Sil, looking for bats at the Beach.

Front Cover Photo Credit:

Clare Buswell.

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LOOKING FOR CONNECTIONS

Chris Kalinis

27th-29th April

Joint SA clubs trip. Upper South East.

Chris K, Joe B, Clare B, Thomas V, Margaret T, Graham P, Mark Sefton both from CEGSA.

Friday the 27th of April found ourselves convening once again for a trip down to Naracoorte for another weekend of darkness and rocks. An uneventful drive south after a tasty pizza dinner had us settling into the Naracoorte Caves Bunk House known as Wirreanda where we met up with Graham and Mark from CEGSA, and Margaret. A quick discussion of the next day's plan was followed by an early night in anticipation of the caving fun.

After a quick breakfast we were on the road to S102 and SOS caves, located next to each other. Both caves required safety lines and ladders to descend the solution tubes, so while Clare and Thomas worked their magic, we admired the size of the local cows, dreaming of steak. Once we were rigged up, we descended into S102 cave first, carrying down various jimmy bars and other digging equipment. Graham intended to cut a path through to a potentially new cavern, to which he quickly scurried at the far end of the cave. (His plans were thwarted by a bunch of fossils: *Protemnodon*, roechus or anak, (a large kangaroo, from the Pleistocene period, typical of the Fossil deposits at Naracoorte.) The rest of the group took things a little more slowly, enjoying the new sights and the wide-open chambers. We also used this cave for photographic experimentation.

After escaping S102 we gathered around SOS for another ladder descent. This particular solution tube has quite a small diameter right at the bottom, so some buttering-up and breathing-in was required for a semi-comfortable egress. Once down, however, we were greeted by a tall, spacious cavern with soft sand to lie in. After a quick exploration, I discovered a small frog quietly watching



Margaret in SOS

me, unmoving, apparently unfazed by

my bright torch. Once the group had finished climbing Clare led us off to look at a wall covered in "Moonmilk", a soft white fungus-like growth that only grows on certain sections of the cave wall. Certainly a bizarre sensation to put out a hand expecting cold hard rock, and have it sink into a something moist and squishy instead! Following the moonmilk we had a look at some thin, scaly white deposits of calcite. This snowy layer covers the floor in areas where water used to lie, the calcite crystallising as a thin layer on the surface. Any disturbance of the surface would cause the layer to break up and sink, lining the bottom with the little white shards. Nowadays, the water is absent, but the delicate layer of calcite shards shows where the water used to lie.

LOOKING FOR CONNECTIONS

Clare again led us onward, now through a very tight tunnel, labelled "Australian Crawl". This had us testing the hardness of our bellies, as we slithered along using mostly elbows and ankles. We were rewarded with several caverns, with room to walk upright. One labelled "Black passage" was a passage between two caverns and was, indeed, black due to a type of black mould (fungus?). Red tape thoughtfully laid out by past cavers indicated a path where you would not step on crystal growth and calcite flakes. After exploring a few of the caverns, we gathered to sit and enjoy the quiet and the darkness, until Clare let slip that she had a beer waiting for her back at the caravan park. At this point Thomas decided it would be an excellent time to try and beat Clare back, and a race for beer was begun. Escape from this particular cave was not quick, however, due to having to renegotiate the Ozzie Crawl and

getting ourselves and our gear through the very thin solution tube.



Mark escaping SOS. No helmet as he can't get through the bottom section of the solution tube with it on!

Thomas climbed halfway up the solution tube to a small ledge, from where he could help guide equipment and other climbers upward. Joe was first to make the full climb, while Margaret and I sat back and watched Clare take handfuls of dislodged sand straight to the face as she held the ladder still for those ascending. An experience she thoroughly enjoyed. (*Not really. Ed*)

With Joe safely out, I said my goodbyes to the small frog (which had not moved throughout our entire trip) and clipped myself on to the ropes. Ascending this particular tube was an interesting exercise. The tube was too narrow to bend a leg far enough to reach the next rung on the ladder, so a combination of upper body strength, chimneying and blind flailing was required to make it to the open section. Once out, it was Margaret's turn to ascend, for which she had a unique technique. With Joe and I on the pulley rope, we heard the call of "haul" indicating we should try and haul her up a short distance by the pulley. We did so, and didn't stop. Margaret flew up the tube without the chance to put her foot anywhere near the ladder. Thomas flattened himself against the side and watched her fly past. Giggling, she reached the top and wanted to do it again. Finally, it was time for Clare to ascend, for the second time that day. Thomas was reminded of a Japanese saying "He who does not climb Mt Fuji is a fool. He who climbs it twice is an even bigger fool." but he wisely refrained from quoting this to Clare until after the trip had ended!

Coming out into cold, dark, evening rain was slightly unpleasant, so we quickly threw our gear into the cars and drove back to camp. Looking forward to a hot shower, and hearing the gushing of hot water from the women's bathroom, a few of us gentlemen made our way to the mens. We were not, however, greeted by steaming waterfalls of hot water, but by empty, unresponsive hot-taps. Extremely demoralised, we played around with the taps on the water and heating units outside, but eventually gave up. By this stage, the ladies had finished and graciously offered us the use of their bathroom. So with a guard standing outside,

LOOKING FOR CONNECTIONS

warning all: "beware, naked men inside" we finally washed our dirt and bruises with the delicious steaming water.

By this stage as it was getting late, we quickly cooked up our various decadent dinners, accompanied by the sorting of muddy gear, cheese, and giant moths.

On Sunday, at the crack-of-8:30am we dragged ourselves awake and packed up our accommodation. Our first stop on Sunday was a couple of relatively new caves under a farmer's house. The entrances were being dug out (some of it by the farmer's young kids) and surveyed on the surface. A few people went in to look, but found that both caves were not particularly extensive, much more excavation would be required.

Leaving Graham, Mark and Margaret at the farm, the rest of us moved on to the final cave of the weekend, Wrecked Car Cave, a 'cave without walls'. While somewhat confusing to imagine, this label soon made sense. After no small amount of grumbling, Clare led the way on her belly into the entrance. A short crawl through some tight spaces soon opened out into a low, but very wide, series of caverns. The cave did indeed have no discernable walls. There were points where layers of rock would come close together, or rows of stalactites

would prevent movement, but there were very few areas with a solid wall of rock.



This cave was extensively decorated with stalactites, crystal growth, fungi and tree roots. Joe and I were fascinated by the optical properties of some thin-film surfaces on the fungi, which produced beautiful blue-violet colours. This is what happens when you take two physics students down a cave. I was kicking myself the entire time for not dragging my camera with me, because despite being the roughest, it was easily the most beautiful cave of the weekend. The majority of our movement consisted

of crawling on our hands and knees, trying to prevent ourselves from bashing the decoration apart, so the opportunity to sit up a little (and even stand at one point!) was much appreciated. The initial aim was to navigate our way through to a second opening; however no map and a few wrong turnings meant we had to eventually turn around and crawl back the way we came. Crawling back the way we came, however, quickly turned into crawling back through not-the-way-we-came, which meant more u-turns as we crawled every which way to try and find the path back. We eventually succeeded by emerging onto our original path through a completely different passage. Que sera, we got to see some new sights we would not have otherwise seen.

We found our way back to the surface world, and after cleaning up and changing, Thomas revealed the existence of some chocolates from Haighs. A perfect way to end a caving experience. So after some final packing up, were back on the road to Adelaide late Sunday evening and arrived back at Clare's place, where Heiko promptly prepared G&T's for those so inclined. A refreshing end to a great weekend of caving.

BATS DO COUNT

Heiko Maurer

Members present (at least in body): Clare Buswell, Heiko Maurer joined by Sil Ianello from VSA, Kevin Mott and Fred Aslin, CEGSA.

And so it came to pass that on Friday 21st July, after just two days of solid packing, we climbed into the remaining space aboard the Outback and, right on the knocker of 5pm, set sail for the Upper South East to proudly carry the honourable and ancient FUSSI standard that Clare had been carefully restoring all these weeks. The occasion was the Winter Bat Count to check what was happening to them little winged squeaky critters that often call caves 'home'. We were to join Sil Ianello (VSA) who was doing a placement with DEWNR in Mt Gambier and Peter Ashenden and his Muttley Crüe (University High) at the Wirreanda camp ground, fortuitously vacated by the scouts for our use.

After tea at the Chinese Dragon restaurant in Naracoorte we arrived at our digs at 9:15, to find the place deserted except for James and the lovely Sil fretting about the lack of support crews. Once we explained that the Adelaide people could be expected to arrive at 10:30 she was much reassured and, true to form, Peter and company rolled in right on cue.

The following morning we were standing around the shed at the Naracoorte caves at 8:30am!! (Is this really legal under the ASF's OH&S guidelines??) We were briefed on the day's activities by Kirsten Lear. Here we learned that we were to be the number one team and were given U33 (Marcollat), U172 (Flat Refusal), U43 (Standing cave), and U199 (Bin Bin), all in the Padthaway area, to survey for bats. The honorific ('number uno') was well deserved as we finished half of the assigned caves before the others had even started: Steve Bourne advised that U172 had never, ever, had any bats in it and we could skip it. Ditto for U43.



Sil and Heiko at one of the entrances to U33. Note bridal creeper at the entrance

Armed with no less than three (four if you count the tourist map) location maps, report forms, instructions, pens, GPS co-ordinates and cave maps we were quickly away in the might-ee Outback (Sil giving her Liberty a well-deserved rest), to see if we could, against all the odds, get lost.

But not before some excellent coffee, even better hot chocolate and almond croissant revived the soul in the Naracoorte Patisserie – these French know a thing or two about cookin' 'n stuff.

After an hour or so (had we drawn the short straw?) of driving on good (but damp – the weather was otherwise kind all weekend) dirt roads we went into perambulatory target acquisition mode, navigating the last 100m by (ancient) GPS, and, to our surprise, quickly found the many entrances to U33, conveniently filled with rubbish such as gates to use as aides to climb into the entrances. U33 is a series of rockpiles and shallow, wide chambers. Sil was right in her element and quickly checked all the less inviting (read: knee and elbow pads essential) leads, while the more senior team members surveyed the easy

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(read: kneepads useful) and pretty (some stals, tree roots) ones. Apart from evidence of earlier live bat and previously live (but now very dead) animal habitation no actual bats were found. Resulting count: zero.

And so to U199. The map showed this to be a little way off the road with two 'tracks' in. We chose the one by the farmhouse to let farmer know not to take pot shots at the, by now covered in dirty overalls, cavers. Alas the farmer was away, working or at the footie, so off we roved, following the 'clearly visible from the sky' track as supplied in the aerial photograph and introducing Sil to the gentle art of farmgate wrangling (see, us 'oldies' are not totally useless). The track went from rutted, sandy and boggy to faint to non-existent. We were now sitting in an open paddock, miles from the



Sil and Heiko at U199

nearest road and no recognisable feature on the horizon. Suddenly and briefly and for the only time the ether vibrated into life and Sil with her new-fangled wireless 'device' 'fired up' an 'app' and confirmed our location on Google Maps: the track had indeed ceased to exist. Nothing for it but to drive on regardless and guess the right direction, something Clare is extraordinarily good at. But we soon found the treed edge of the open paddocks blocking progress and the heroic Outback could carry us no further (in truth it was just bracken, but it did look threatening – besides we wouldn't want to muss the paintwork). Nothing for it but to 'do' lunch.

Still, we had GPS co-ordinates and a 1.6 km stroll through the rolling hills seemed easy enough. And so it was – our honorific was well deserved.

U199 has a small but distinctive entrance: it has a very large gum tree growing up from its floor, taking up a good half or more of the entrance. The cave itself is pretty much one large, low flattener with an often sandy floor, requiring reasonably comfortable crawling. Apart from evidence of very recent wombat visitations and faint evidence of an old bat roost, nothing of interest (even Sil was less than enthusiastic) could be found, let alone move our bat count from zero.

So we retraced our steps into the setting sun, admiring the Yaccas and the wildflowers. The farmer was still away and we took the longer, bitumen road home, picking up a local red brew for the usual pasta and salad feast and to lubricate the tonsils for the inevitable midnight gab fest in which we were joined by Ian Lewis (CDAA) who had teamed with the Ashenden gang and reported nothing in Monbulla and actual bats in Gran Gran, to much wailing and gnashing of teeth (or perhaps dentures) from the 'until-recently-number-one' team.

The Sunday plan was to meet up with Fred and Kevin Mott by 10 in Robe at the servo to look at a couple of sea caves, so another(!) early start was required (Peter Ashenden had a bemused, sleepy look as he bade us farewell).

We made good time and rendezvoused with the Forester of Fred and Kevin as planned, and they took us to the car park near L302 where yet another Subaru was parked! The right location was easily found, an anchor secured and the young and adventurous were enticed to

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abseil the four or so metres to the sea cave. And there was evidence of recent bat habitation, perhaps even a bat wing. But NO BATS.

Resulting count: still zero.

So we had one last chance to redeem our honour: L429. With hope in our hearts we took off.

When we got near our destination we were fortunate to meet one of the locals who offered to guide us to the cave – but not the sea cave; rather one at the bottom of a cliff seaward of the track to L429. We left the checking of it to our return and headed for the sea cliffs. We soon found the right spot and Motty rigged a bolt and reasonable back-up anchor before we sent, guess who, over the edge once more. Alas, the tide was up to the point where entry to the cave could only be gained with a severe dunking and the danger of being swept onto sharp rocks – not a pleasing prospect at the end of a six or so metre abseil.



Sil descending into the depths!
Cliff face near Beachport.

Disheartened we left Fred and Motty to check the new cave and retreated, defeated with nought (in terms of confirmed bat sightings) to show for our efforts. Sil to Mt Gambier and we uneventfully homeward, making the Wellington ferry at last light.

Distance driven: 1,222kms. Bats counted: nil, zero, niente, zip. (Correction, we found one bat wing in L302! This has now been confirmed as being attached to a bat. So our count is one.)

WHY DO BENTWINGS GO MISSING?

Clare Buswell

So why all this counting business? *Miniopterus schreibersii bassanii*, commonly known as the Southern Bentwing bat, which lives in the Lower South East of South Australia and in southwestern Victoria, is on the critically endangered list under both the Federal *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) and the *Fauna and Flora Guarantee Act 1988*, of Victoria. Bat numbers have declined significantly over the past few decades due primarily to loss of habitat but also maybe due to climatic factors. The change of habitat in both the Upper and Lower Southeast of South Australia and southwest of Victoria from native woodlands, swamps and open forests, to that of viticulture, grazing, mono-culture forestry and drained swamps has been dramatic to say the least. It has of course, been accompanied by the use of herbicides and pesticides and the use of cave

WHY DO BENTWINGS GO MISSING?

dolines and entrances as rubbish dumps for farm waste: everything from car bodies to chemical containers.¹

It has been known since the mid 1960s that Naracoorte caves and in particular Bat cave and Starlight Cave at Warnambool, are the only two maternity sites of the species. At these two sites, from late August to March, bats breed and raise their young. At Naracoorte the bat numbers were then estimated at 100,000-200,000.² Summer counts done by Terry Reardon from the South Australian Museum put the number between 30,000 to 36,000 in 2001 and down to 21,000 in 2008.³ A peak number of 40,000 bats was recorded mid February 2012.⁴ However over summer large numbers of bats will leave Bat cave and go visiting to surrounding caves, so the fluctuations in numbers counted may also be a reflection of less than perfect counting systems. That is how frequently and when the summer counts were carried out. We also know that around 10,000, bats are born each year in Bat cave and that about the same number die.⁵

Since winter bat counting began in 1999, in both the Upper and Lower South East, the data we have is incomplete and patchy with only 6 years of data collected between 1999 and 2012. We have data for 1999, 2002, 2003 then 2009, 10 and 12. The data is cave specific and reflects sighting of bats in caves over the years by cavers, land managers and owners. It is also contingent upon the time of year the count occurred, as it is well known that bats disperse over late June/early July. All winter counting, except for 2012, has been carried out in mid June. The low numbers counted in 2012 really reflects that the bats have already moved away from well-known bat caves, L5 Monbulla, L60, Gran Gran for example, and U37, Cave Park Cave or other known bat caves within the Naracoorte National Park.

This year's count involved around at least 30 people counting bats in 55 of the known 798 odd caves spread from Padthaway, to Robe, to Mt Gambier. Other caves were counted on the Victorian side of the border. The South Australian side was divided into 6 groups. The Friends of Naracoorte caves, and some Park staff counted around and on the park itself, whilst the rest of us divided up the remaining sites between 3 groups.

Despite our best efforts to standardize the actual counting process, that is to take photos of the bats hanging in situ and then count from the photo/s, logistics intervened. Some groups, due to the lateness of the day, counted individual bats as they flew out of cave entrances. Others took a small section of a cluster and then multiplied the result by the area of the cluster. In this method you use an estimate of 100 bats per 30cm x 30cm. Others counted individual bats as they found them. As you can tell standardizing the method of counting is not easy. But the aim is to minimize the disturbance to the bats and to increase the accuracy of the count. Sometimes the field-work just bites back!

¹ Allinson G. Mispagel Cindi. Kajiwara Natsuko. Anan Yasumi. Hashimoto Junko. Laurenson Laurie. Mayumi Allinson, Shinsuke Tanabe. 'Organochlorine and trace metal residues in adult southern bent-wing bat (*Miniopterus schreibersii bassanii*) in southeastern Australia.' *Chemosphere*. Volume 64, Issue 9, August 2006, pp. 1464–1471

² Dwyer. P.D., and Hamilton-Smith E. 'Breeding caves and maternity colonies of the bent winged bat in southeastern Australia.' *Helictite* 1965. 4, pp. 3-21.

³ Bat Research at Naracoorte. Steven Bourne. *The Australasian Bat Society Newsletter*. No. 34. April. 2010. p. 25. Reardon T. Population size estimates and conservation of the southern bentwing bat *Miniopterus bassanii* in South Australia. Report Wildlife Conservation Fund. Committee. 2001.

⁴ http://bird.net.au/bird/index.php?title=SWIFFT_meeting_notes_26_July_2012 Accessed on the 13th August 2012.

⁵ T. Reardon, Pers Com. Aug, 2012.

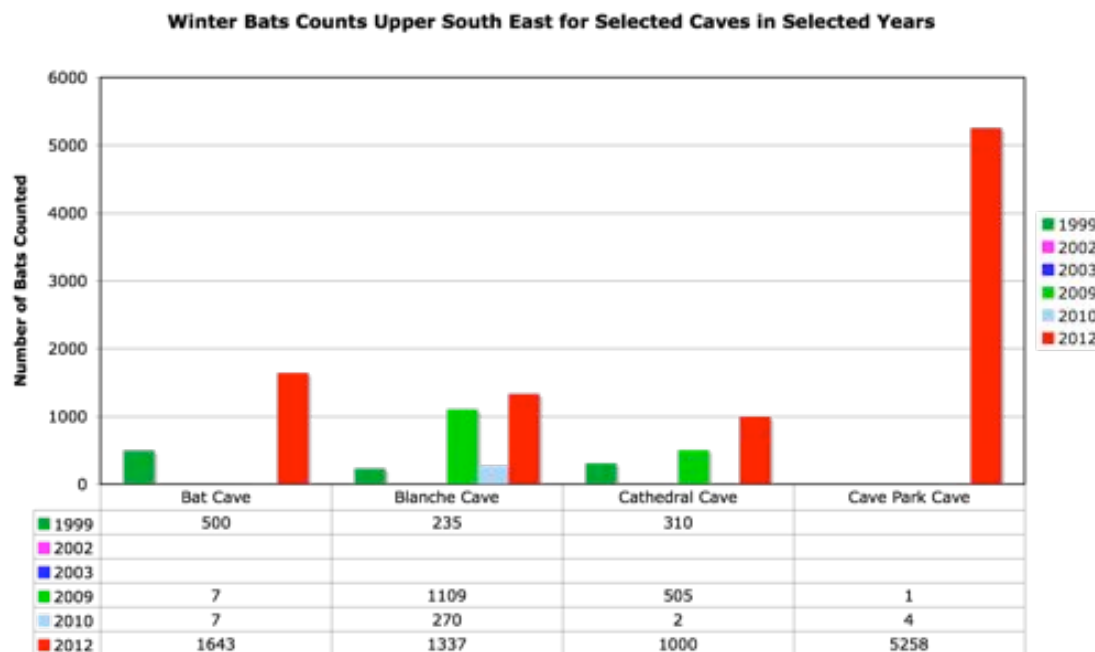
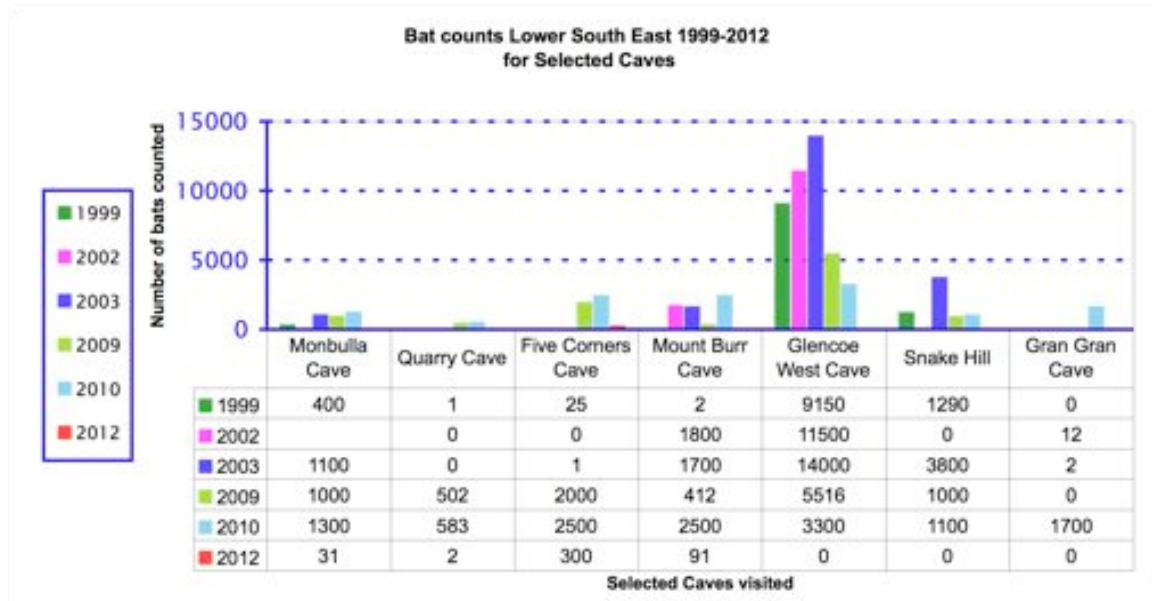
WHY DO BENTWINGS GO MISSING?

Other information recorded during the count included descriptions of the habitat around cave entrances: did it consist of native bush, was it a rubbish dump for farm chemicals and waste or was it situated in the middle of a vineyard or an open paddock and, further, what sort of protection was afforded to the cave itself, that is was the cave gated and locked or fenced off. The table below shows the totals of the number of bats counted during the 6 winter counts that have taken place.

Table 1. Winter Bat Count Totals, Upper and Lower South East, of SA.

Year	1999	2002	2003	2009	2010	2012
Total	12274	14110	22010	13802	14896	15478

These totals do not show the variations of bat population distribution over the caves visited for the count in the upper and lower southeast. The two tables below show the count numbers for the highest number of bats in *selected*⁶ caves in the LSE and in the Upper SE.



⁶ For both the USE & LSE data I have chosen the data from caves that recorded high numbers (above 1000) of bats over the 6 years of available data. The graphs therefore show only data from 11 caves out of a total of 55 caves that were checked.

WHY DO BENTWINGS GO MISSING?

The graphs show the almost halving of the known summer bat population from both the Upper and Lower South East over winter. Further, for the years 2002 & 2003, the data is missing for the Upper South East. So hence why the picture is rather scant. Where all these bats go, we simply do not know. We cannot inspect all of the known caves in the Upper and Lower South east of the state and south-western Victoria or afford to set up monitoring equipment in all 55 caves that are visited for the winter count. We know that bats will fly long distances in summer, hunting food sources⁷ They also sleep around, so counting in one cave one night or day may miss those who have gone visiting. Counting bats at the moment is by no means a flawless process, but it does give speleos and batty bods, an opportunity to meet with landowners and spread the word about the importance of bats to the environment and the need to protect their habitats. There is more counting to be done, so next year set aside a weekend in June to be a census collector!

Acknowledgements:

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www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicspecies.pl?taxon_id=76606#illustrations

⁷ Bourne S., *Journal of the Australian Cave and Karst Management Association*. No. 78. March. 2010.

KNOCKING OFF THE RUST, OR AN EXCUSE TO USE A ROPE

Clare Buswell

Sometime during late April, some persons known as the 'nutters who like S&M', decided that a few trips to Mt Remarkable Blowhole were required to so they could practice with ropes, knots, bolts, and bits of steel. Trip one followed the usual format: get out of bed at 5am collect Thomas at 6, Bronya at 7, drink a substance that may or may not resemble coffee at Port Wakefield, arrive at the Northern Star Hotel at 1, to drink more coffee and discuss tactics. By about 2pm head towards the cave and all be underground by 2.45 if you are lucky. Then about 5.30, you start exiting, de-rigging and hauling gear back to the car, return to pub, and leave for home about 7pm, arriving back in one's bed about midnight. And so it was.



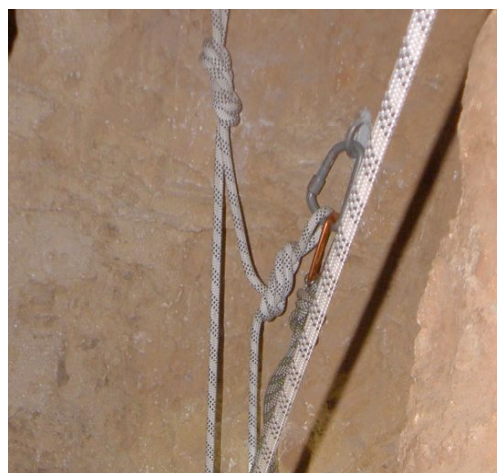
Bronya tying knots for rebelay number one.

All went well, and all made mistakes and all said to each other we could have done it that way or the other way, so we agreed we really need to do this again. And so it was.

The second trip followed the usual format: get out of bed at 5am... Arrive back in one's bed about midnight... This trip however was to try to: "get the knots the correct length, or pick on Thomas for making every knot and rebelay too long or too short or the wrong shade of blue, lets kick some more rocks on each other and generally argue over most of what we did and did not do. To top it off we almost got lost getting back to the car as we exited in the dark. After such an event we decided, (if not somewhat grumpily), we needed to do it all again. And so it was.

Trip three followed the usual format: ...The only variation being the search for a decent coffee. (Which failed!) This time we had

ourselves sorted: rigging tapes were the right length, taking the correct loading, knots were short, cows tails were clipped into the correct part of the anchor, rebelay loops were pretty much right. Rock dropping only really happened at the bottom of the pitch and rolled into the pool at the unseen end of the cave. Thomas, in an effort to regain some sort of personal dignity after the 'issues' raised during the last trip, insisted that Clare should go first down every grotty, sloping, unstable, rock catching crawl. He even resorted to being "a Sir Galahad" by personally digging out a couple of support rocks, in order to widen a section of narrow passage just so Clare could be enticed to slide uncontrollably closer to the unseen water table. A retreat was made when Clare, halfway down the newly excavated slide, determined that the narrow reptilian tail protruding from under a rock belonged to a snake. (They live on the frogs found at the bottom of the cave.) Bronya, in the meantime, listened and watched the goings on from a safe distance with much quiet amusement.



One version of the end result!

KNOCKING OFF THE RUST, OR AN EXCUSE TO USE A ROPE

Part of the retreat process this time was to become more efficient in retrieving and packing ropes. This cave allows for only one person on the pitch at a time due to rocks falling from above, the entrance chamber is narrow making it difficult for people and gear to pass up and out. Further, by the time we got near to exiting it was beginning to rain, so hanging around outside would have made for wet and grumpy cavers. Bronya de-rigged and then hauled up the rope whilst Clare simultaneously packed it into a bag. This was found to be more efficient than one person doing the whole process. The bag was handed to Thomas who hauled it out of the hole. Bronya and Clare exited and then we did a mad pack up, so as to avoid a repeat of getting lost in the dark looking for the car, which was parked about a kilometre or so away. We have of course determined to repeat this exercise in the not too distant future and add in a few more rope tricks just so we can claim that we have got it right. And so it will be.

WHAT IS ON

Corra Lynn	Aug 26 th	Search and Rescue exercise.
Naracoorte/LSE	Sept 8/9	Joint State (SA and Vic) cavers trip. A weekend of caving, meeting cavers from over the boarder and lots of fun.

Flinders Uni Mid-Semester Break 17th Sept – 2nd Oct.

Nullarbor	21 st Sept to 1 st Oct.	Ten days of dust, desert and caves like no others.
Bungonia, NSW	Oct 13/14	Cave surveying course.
Lecture:	18 Oct 4pm	Noel Stockdale Rm, Main library. Flinders Uni. Topic: Cave art, perception and knowledge on some epistemological issues seen through the example of cave area studies. Dr Mats Rosengren, Professor of Rhetoric, Södertörn University, Sweden.
General Meeting	Oct 18 th	Anthropology and Caves. Guest speaker. 6-8 pm. Rm TBA
Southern Flinders	Oct 27/28	Bats and track marking
	Nov 9 th - Dec 1	Swotvac/Exams
Lower Sth East	Dec 1 st /2 nd	Glenelg River

Yearly break Dec 3rd till Feb 25, 2013

ASF Biennial Caving Conference. Jan 6 th -11 th		Galong NSW. FUSSI may combine this with a trip to Yarrangobilly Caves NSW
Tasi	Feb 2 nd - Feb 10 th or Feb 17 th	Trip is full. (Dates to be confirmed.)

IN THE FLINDERS, JUST FOR A CHANGE

Clare Buswell

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People on the Trip: Joe B-W, Chris K, Thomas V, Clare B, Heiko M, Richard B and a drug runner known as Mavis!

It being dinner time a discussion of food consumption and where this was to occur in the township of Clare occupied the mobile phone service of those on the trip for a period of time. Some of the starving hordes opting for the pub, whilst others opted for a nosh-up at the local Chinese as distinct from the local Asian eatery. The fact that latter two are right next door to each other and in the same building can be confusing. At any rate both eateries provided reasonable victuals. Clare and Heiko, arriving at camp first, set themselves up and watched falling stars until midnight. The later crew duly arrived about 12.30 am talking of hitting a kangaroo and of having to dispatch it. The blood on shoes etc. provided evidence of its demise. Port or something similar was consumed. It was sometime around here that Heiko noted that Mavis had joined the trip uninvited.

Now for those of you who do not know of the reputation of Mavis and her involvement with FUSSI, she has both a malevolent side and a charming way of ingratiating herself. She is known for her kleptomania, stealing coffee cups, spoons, screwdrivers, sunglasses, maps and is quite capable of moving cave entrances. At the same time, if you throw enough parties to celebrate her birthday and declare an International Day of Mavis she will not set your car alight, or let down anything that inflates such as tyres, air mattresses etc. At one stage, her activities required the FUSSI executive to create a special position, the Mavis Abatement Officer, just to give club members some peace! This position was filled by a geologist, who ended his career by CT scanning rocks and writing reports about grains of sand. For some years now it has been believed that Mavis moved to Hobart and took up residence with a couple of FUSSI refugees who spent a lot of time guarding her with their dog George and a garden gnome. So it was with both fear and surprise and a fanatical devotion to the pope that Heiko announced that his drugs had gone missing. This was a major blow as the club was completely unaware of Mavis's bkie connections let alone her need for Executive Vit. B and Pramipexole. On a more serious note, it meant that Heiko would get no sleep.

After a night of dreams (or not) etc, we managed to clamber into Clara St Dora and instruct Richard in the ways of dust, letterboxes, and squeezes, whilst Joe and Chris got the camera working. Now as you all know, caves are generally quiet, peaceful and relaxing places, but Thomas became quite confused when, after the letterbox squeeze he heard music. Richard not only plays violin and loves the music on his iPhone, but was getting his head around the new meaning of letterboxes and breathing in dust by listening to music on the said iPhone. By the time the weekend was over, letterboxes were a mere trifle for him. Clara St Dora is a wonderful little cave that gives great delight for small effort. Lots of pretty things to look at, generally admire and photograph. Chris and Joe made sure they used up as much battery energy on their flash units as possible. Yay, guys!

The next cave we visited was False Wall. This requires a bit of rigging anchored onto a dodgy rock and an even more questionable dead tree about 20m from the cave entrance. The cave is typical of the Flinders, short, dusty and in this case provides a permanent home to those who fall in! By late arvo we trundled off to Mairs Cave and set about rigging it for the next day's excursion. Thomas and Clare finished the task just on dark and then set about collecting their gear from the back of the car for the walk back to camp. A small discussion was had over first aid kits, did we both have our 'in cave' ones still on us and what was back at camp. As it seemed that first aid was well catered for back at camp it was decided to leave the main large FUSSI kit in the car and head on back to a nice warm fire, a beer and dinner. The walk to camp involves a pleasant stroll along the wide creek bed for about 1km.

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So we set off, only to go about 100m when Clare was stung just below her right eye by a bee. The bee, it seemed, was smitten by the brightness of Clare's Scurion and went into full attack mode. After much improvised dancing around and utterances of arrgggh, ouch, oooUUUCCCHHH, Thomas managed to extract the sting. We then returned to the car to get the instant ice pack out of the large FUSSI first aid kit. Only it was not there as the safety and gear officer (the same person who had just been bitten by the bee) packed up the wrong kit! Clare spent part of the night hugging a cold beer to her face and on returning to civilisation late the next day did an ice crawl home via selected pubs so as to bring the swelling down! Ah the joys of bees in the Flinders!

The next day dawned with Heiko, who by now had no sleep for 24 hours, having spent part of the night driving the car slowly up and down the road to keep warm. As sleep was impossible he considered this the best way of passing away the night hours. Clare had a swollen face, and all the rest of the crew wondered who was next in line for a reaction to a loss of drugs, insect bites, or other maladies. Yes, Mavis was indeed back! Thomas, in the meantime, double-checked all the rigging to make sure that no kangaroos or passing emus



had taken a liking to bits of it and, importantly, so that no more mishaps could occur! So we found our way into and through Mairs Cave, with Thomas, Chris and Joe in photographic mode, Clare leading Richard into ever decreasing crawls, and Heiko, opting for the illusion of sleep, staying in camp.

Mairs cave, like Clara St Dora, is an old guano mine and are entered through a dug tunnel in the case of Clara St Dora or a dug shaft in the case of Mairs Cave. The shaft makes for a great little abseil of 17 metres, or ladder descent and ascent. The landowner, a number of

years back, fixed the ladder in. At any rate a good time underground was had by all, with Joe thinking of charging Chris for damages to his retinas due to the fact that Chris gave him the job of flashy photo model.

After a bit of time spent packing up, we returned to camp for lunch and for the five or so hours drive back to Adelaide. A great weekend in the dust, so lets do some of it again soon.