

Chillagoe Caving Club Annual Report 2016



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The Chillagoe Caving Club was formed in Chillagoe at an inaugural meeting on 23rd April, 1973 with 16 persons present. The intention of forming the Club was to bring together the active cavers already in the area to enable them to share their knowledge, expertise and equipment, and to foster caving as a sport and a science, particularly in the Chillagoe area.

The Club became an Associate of the Australian Speleological Federation not long after the Club was formed, and voted to become a Corporate Member at the Annual Meeting in 1995. The Club was incorporated under the Queensland Associations Incorporation Act of 1981.

Full Membership of the Club stands at 50 with an additional 29 Novice 'Introductory' Members as at the end of March, 2016. The Club has become well recognised by Australian and overseas cavers and scientists as an invaluable contact in relation to Chillagoe and the surrounding areas.

The Club has an established Clubhouse in Chillagoe for the accommodation of members caving in the area.

Chillagoe Caving Club
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ABN 52 614 187 726

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MINUTES OF THE 2015 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2nd May 2015.

1. OPENING

The meeting was opened at 19:30hrs. by the president, Paul Osborne

2. PRESENT

Paul Osborne, Peter Bannink, Kimberlee Bernays, Alan & Chrissie Cummins Van Christensen, Bruce Hewett, Grant Polomka and Dianne Vale, Keith Offer, Axel Buthmann, Graham Murray, Sue Jenkins, Max Emeny.

The President announced that a Quorum was present at the meeting. Thirteen financial members and life members were required to make the meeting duly constitutional.

3. APOLOGIES

Ray Deasy, Steven Morgan family, Mark & Catherine Beattie, Rob & Jonathan Ham, Daniel & Elwing Mitchell family, Judy Nickles, Winfried Weiss, Paco Murray, Tom Gilmore, Phil Harrison, Greg Gurnier family, Les & Beth Pearson, Ebony Murray, Horrie Garth, Robert Zmeskal and the Watson family, Mike Tarburton, Peter English, Barry Neale, Barry Wright and Alan Pryke.

4. MINUTES

Minutes of 2014 Annual General Meeting held on the 4th of October 2014 were read, Paul Osborne moved that the minutes be accepted (seconded by Max Emeny)

5. Business arising from the MINUTES

- None

6. ANNUAL REPORTS

Additions to the President's Report

- Paul thanked visiting cavers and members who have made anonymous donations to the club.
- Paul mentioned that a discussion about the 2017 International caving conference would be held over to general business

Additions to the Treasurer's Report:

- Peter highlighted the increase in camping income and introductory members is keeping the club financial. If the trend continues and clubhouse maintenance is less costly, the club should have some funds to spend on the club 'wish list'

Additions to the Building and Maintenance Officer's Report

- Alan mentioned the amenities block will have a final inspection on Wednesday.
- Paul mentioned the urgent need to replace the main water pipe to the clubhouse and Carol's flat.
- Alan will look into getting the club buildings inspected by a fire warden. The new fire hoses have to be connected.
- A deep sink is planned to be put in under the old school to facilitate washing up.

Additions to the Survey & Records Report:

- Peter has produced two new regional maps of Chillagoe showing the general layout of the karst. There is still work to do but members can view the draft versions at the club.
- Alan Pryke has completed numerous cave maps and will be continuing this work in June 2015, when members of SUSS visit again.
- Peter mapped four caves at Wallace Creek.

Additions to the Environmental Report:

- The proposed limestone mine at Wallace Creek is still on hold. The station on which it is located (Alkoomie Station), has been purchased by Kings Plains Station. The current landholder will resist the mining application. The club is welcome to do more work on the Wallace Creek Caves.
- There is no mention from the Federal Department of Environment & Heritage on the proposal of listing the Chillagoe/Mitchell/Palmer karst regions. A letter of support sent to the Department was sent back to the club (Return To Sender).

Tackle Keeper's Report:

- There are issues surrounding the extended use of helmets. Helmets are primarily available for Members and introductory cavers (who become members when they pay their introductory fee, This issue can be resolved through communication (via Facebook notification), formal arrangement and the return of the gear at the end of each trip/day. There was discussion relating to the use of club helmets by non-members. It was decided that some helmets should be left in the gear room if a large quantity are going to be hired out to non- members.
- Van has cleaned out the tackle room so it is ready for the active season. (Thanks Van!)

ASF Report

- None

Librarian's Report

- Bruce has not been well enough to accept the Library and Peter has not yet collected it from Miriam Robinson. This may be possible this year.

Photo Librarian

- No work was done on restoring the photo library.

7. MOTION

A motion was moved by Alan Cummins that the club ratify the management executive's actions for the year. Grant Polomka seconded this motion and the meeting carried the motion unanimously.

8. EINSTEIN AWARD

Paco was nominated by Paul (seconded by Graham Murray) for forgetting his camera batteries before visiting Hang Son Doong in Vietnam, the caving trip of a lifetime. All in favour.

Alan was nominated for coming caving for a week and forgetting to bring his helmet.

9. ELECTION OF OFFICE BEARERS

Paul Osborne declared all positions vacant at 8:20 pm and asked Alan Cummins to chair the meeting.

President: Paul Osborne was nominated by Grant Polomka, seconded by Keith Offer. Paul accepted the nomination and was re-elected unopposed.

Secretary: Van Christensen was nominated by Graham Murray, seconded by Max Emeny. Van accepted the nomination and was elected unopposed.

Treasurer: Peter Bannink was nominated by Alan Cummins, seconded by Keith Offer. Peter accepted the nomination and was re-elected unopposed.

Paul Osborne resumed the chair of the meeting for election of other office bearers.

Other Office Bearers: Paul moved current position holders remain unchanged. (Seconded by Sue Jenkins) Motion carried by all present.

Survey & Records Keeper - Peter Bannink (Position carried over)

Tagging Officer - Van Christensen (Position carried over)

Tackle Keeper - Van Christensen (Position carried over)

Safety Co-ordinator - Steven Morgan (Position carried over)

Training Co-ordinator - Paul Osborne (Position carried over)

Building & Maintenance Co-ordinator - Alan Cummins (Position carried over)

Membership Co-ordinator (encompassing ASF/ACKMA co-ordinator) - Position carried over

Webmaster - Winfried Weiss (Position carried over)

Photo Librarian - Peter Bannink (Position carried over)

Librarian - Bruce Hewitt (Position carried over)

Environmental Conservation Officer - Peter Bannink (Position carried over)

10. GENERAL BUSINESS

10.1 Clubhouse Caving Equipment -

- Paul asked members to have input on equipment which may need purchasing. Items discussed were a Hammer Drill, A few caving harnesses and SRT kits (for members to use).

10.2 Library - Still has not been moved from Miriam's house

- The current Librarian has been ill. Peter B will endeavour get the library from Miriam and store it until the Librarian is well enough to take this job on.

10.3 Les Pearson wants some thought about the future of the clubs old records Should they go to the Cairns Historical Society, be stored with a member (without cockroaches) or possibly go to the ASF

- Paul mentioned digitizing all the records. Peter mentioned it was not an easy task given the quantity of material and then archiving it in a computer in an easy access format would take a huge amount of time.
- Paul was concerned about cave records getting out into the domain of the general public. Everyone agreed Cave Maps and Trip Reports, Cave Guide (publication material), must stay with the club.

10.4 Future purchases for maintenance of clubhouse

- Paul mentioned the need to upgrade the clubhouse water pipe to 'Blue Stripe', Carol has mentioned the need for more fresh water storage. Also the purchase of a vacuum cleaner. Priority would be the Water tank and then the new 'Blue Stripe' water pipe.

10.5 Rigging Gear and permanent fixtures

- Paul brought the wish list of rigging gear requirements to the meetings attention. The club permanent rigging register was brought up for discussion.

- A committee was formed to establish a number of set routes through caves with any necessary permanent rigging with the pre and post International Caving Conference (ICC) trips in 2017 and also for introductory cavers. The committee is Paul; Peter B.; Keith; Max; Axel ; Kimberley; Greg; Van; Winfried and Alan
- Paul also volunteered to research rigging requirements of other National Park areas with a view to establishing some permanent rigging points in NP Chillagoe caves. Alan volunteered to assist with a list of suggested caves and routes.
- Paul mentioned the need to check and record all rigging in caves undertaken by members. Peter B. thought the rigging locations could be put on the maps. Keith has agreed to assist in documenting the rigging he has undertaken. Peter thought a photo log could be made of the rigging site.
- Paul mentioned the need to get a team together to generate several rigged routes through designated caves. Keith was in favour and will assist.

10.6 Clubhouse maintenance works

- Alan mentioned the need to extending the ceiling under the old school (servery area).
- There is a need for a light outside the old school facing BBQ area.

10.7 Alternative date and location to hold the AGM

- Peter again mentioned the low attendance to the AGM and would members prefer an alternative date and location to hold the AGM.
- Paul suggests trialling teleconferencing or using a SKYPE connection for members who cannot attend.

10.8 Speleo 2017 - (International Caving Conference)

- CCC asked to have a caving package finalized by December 2015.
- Estimated 80 – 200 visitors
- QCOMM?
- Paul suggested setting up a committee to develop a plan of the caving on the event.
- The club needs to plan set routes through the caves.
- The club needs to train extra trip leaders
- Pre-rigging of the caves needs to be established and a joint register developed. Paul, Van, Keith, Axel and Greg Gurnier are to develop this.

10.9 Development of Trip Leaders (relates to 10.8)

- Trip leaders required for the 2017 Conference Pre-Caving need to be specialised in the caves they are assigned to lead. Kimberlee highlighted the need to learn the cave, rigging & equipment requirements and the need for the leader to have a detailed map.
- Paul suggested there needs to be a Cave Difficulty Grading System so visiting cavers can be directed to the correct cave to visit.
- Paul asked for a commitment to develop a committee (e-mail group) to document a list of Chillagoe's best though trips. Members are currently Paul, Peter, Keith, Axel, Max, Van, Greg and Alan.

10.10 Ray Deasy's letter relating to club matters (Ray Deasy 22 Aril 2015)

To the Executive Chillagoe Caving Club Paul Osborne, Peter Bannink and Van Christensen. I gave a substantial sum of money for the purchase of essential equipment for haulage work to

assist cave rescue. The numerous items were selected and purchased by Paul and I saw these on a familiarization trip to Castle Cave in 2013 attended by Paul and myself. In 2014 an exercise at Macropodidae Cave gave a further 6 members the use of the equipment in a haulage rescue simulation. I would now like to see the following actions take place by the training coordinator for not only the equipment but inclusive of all emergency equipment.

Security and Identification

- All equipment to be inscribed with ID and ownership marks
- A discussion is required on the custody and access to this equipment.
- An Inventory of the equipment
- A fund to replace, repair and buy new equipment.

Familiarization of equipment

- For each item a user instruction sheet
- For each system (ie. haulage or counter balance, a descriptive in the form of topo & photographs
- A rescue exercise integrating the haulage, counterbalance and SRT Rescues

Rescue

- The appointment of a Rescue Warden
- Absolute clarity on comms and surface procedures

Finally the donated DVD of 'Speleo Vertical' by Any Sparrow on Vertical Cave Training, to be shown at club caving events.

Points for Discussion

- Paul suggested the current tackle keeper make up an inventory of all the rescue equipment.
- Paul suggested appointing Steven Morgan as the Rescue Warden as it fits well with the Safety Co-ordinator's role. To be discussed further with Steven and Ray.
- Instruction sheets in rescue equipment use to be developed by Van & Steven
- Paul suggested discussing the option for further rescue practice sessions with Steven.

10.11 Caretaker

- Paul suggested looking for an assistant for Carol during the caving season March – October. There is the possibility of offering camping location for Grey Nomads in return for general ground maintenance.
- Dianne mentioned the need for there to be a Code of Conduct tied into any agreement
- The executive will continue to investigate this option.

10.12 Wish List

- Paul will send out a copy of things which the club needs to purchase (rescue and general caving equipment) and projects members can aim to develop to improve the clubhouse.

No further business was raised.

Paul Osborne and Peter Bannink gave thanks to all members who attended the AGM.

Paul Osborne **declared the meeting closed at 22:00hrs**

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2016

An interesting year with some great successes and some organisational problems.

We've steadily worked through the Future Projects list (wish list) however, we still have some of the big ticket items to work on now like re-roofing and painting. The Clubs fiscal policies seem to be working and we have had sufficient in the account to pay for some of the big maintenance items that have come up unexpectedly over the past couple of years.

Group use of the clubhouse dropped off a little last year and efforts need to be made to increase this in the coming year. On the job list is to produce a flyer/brochure targeting school groups to use the clubhouse for school excursions in the 2017 year.

Mid-year I attended a seminar on grant funding run by the Department of National Parks, Sport and Recreation and as a result were able to ascertain that we were eligible for a grant. Peter put the application together and the club was successful in obtaining a grant for 8 sets of SRT equipment for use by new members. The grant is linked to increased participation and we hope to be able to inspire interest from new cavers during this year's caving season.

A major upset for the year was Carol's sudden illness and departure as our esteemed and much loved caretaker. Carol has been with us for so many years I can't remember. It's a sad loss for the club and I wish her well in her new life in Mareeba and also welcome Clare to the position of caretaker. Life member, Les Pearson also suffered a medical adventure that he fortunately survived. It was great to see so many club members visiting calling and generally showing support during his recovery and I know we all wish him all the best.

These events bring to mind that I'm not getting any younger either and it's time for me to take a break from the presidency and let someone younger step into the position. I've spoken to Winfried about this and have offered to nominate him to the position and he has accepted. Of course the field is open for all contenders.

I don't intend to shrink into the background but concentrate on other pet tasks that need doing within the club and offer support and assistance wherever I can to the new Executive.

Following consultation with the committee appointed to put together the proposal for the pre and post IUS conference trips to Chillagoe, I have submitted a proposal and am happy to remain as the contact person and follow through on the continuing project. Other projects scheduled for this year are the SRT training and grading as proposed and led by Max and the Broken River Trip in late June which I am happy to continue to organise.

I thank the membership for their overwhelming support during my time as President and have enjoyed the challenges of the position. It's time for some new blood in the position and I stand ready to help and support the incoming President in any way that I can to ensure a smooth changeover.

Paul Osborne (President) (April 2016)

TREASURERS REPORT 2016

It is clear this year that the clubs income dropped substantially due to reduced membership, fewer introductory cavers and a smaller camping income. This was due to reduced participation of active members to regular caving events and only one school camping at the clubhouse. Members of the executive did put in for an equipment grant from the Department of National Parks, Sport & Recreation and were lucky enough to receive \$7417, aimed at buying eight sets of vertical SRT gear, equipment bags, rigging gear and rope. This has boosted the clubs income figures substantially for 2016, however as this is spent in the next few months, it is likely that expenditure will exceed income over the next financial year. The club needs to increase membership and camping revenue in 2016. With the improvements in the club house and camping grounds this may be possible, the planned Easter caving period is a good start. Despite the clubs reduced income, maintenance costs in 2015-2016 were substantially lower maintaining the clubs financial viability.

P. Bannink (Treasurer) (April 2016)

CAMPING FEES 2016/2017

Full Members	\$ 6.00 per person per night
Novice/ Introductory Members	\$ 8.00 per person per night
Member Students (under18 school age) :	\$ 3.00 per person per night
Other ASF Member Clubs or Group Bookings:	\$ 8.00 per person per night
Non Members	\$ 12.00 per person per night
Non Member Students (under18 school age)	\$ 5.00 per person per night

Membership Fees for 2016/2017

30th April 2016 - 1st May 2017

Our Constitution indicates that fees become due on 1st May each year and must be paid by June 30th of that year to ensure that insurance cover available through the ASF Insurance Policy continues after June 31st of that year. To enable the Club to function, early payment of fees is necessary and the Management Committee would appreciate your prompt payment.

Fee Structure is as follows:

• Single Members (including full year ASF Fee)	\$98.00
• Family (including full year ASF Fees of \$119)	\$180.00
• Family – Single Parent (including full year ASF Fees of \$85)	\$120.00
• Student Members (membership - including full year ASF Fee of \$45)	\$75.00*
• Introductory Weekend Caver (novice membership - including 1 year ASF Fee)	\$55.00^
• Introductory Weekend Caver (student novice membership - including 1 year ASF Fees)	\$50.00^
• Inactive Life Members (ASF Fees only)	\$19.00
• Active Life Members (ASF Fees only)	\$68.00
• Single Club Members (without ASF Fees)	\$30.00#

* - Students including those attending Primary or Secondary Schools who cannot be included in a family membership.

^ - **As of January 2015 the ASF introduced a 12 month introductory ASF fee** of \$20 , Cavers who continue membership of the ASF after this time pay the annual fee of \$43 for Students or \$68 for adults as per their fee schedule.

- While it is intended that all active members join ASF some existing members, who are no longer active cavers, are continuing as Club Members only.

Please note: a major component of the ASF fees is insurance which needs to be paid by all active members of the club, especially those intending to cave in National Park area's and Reserves.

Membership Fees can be paid either by cash or cheque to the Treasurer, or direct to the Club's bank account. If paying by Internet Banking or by direct deposit please email the details to the Treasurer, Peter Bannink, preferably by **e-mail**: Peter.Bannink@dnrm.qld.gov.au or by phone (4092 6036) You must advise the Treasurer, the date of the deposit, the amount deposited, and it's purpose. It is possible for this information to be made available by your bank, please request that the detail of payee and purpose of payment be included for listing on the Club's account statement .For direct banking please deposit funds into the Club's Commonwealth Bank account at any local branch.

Commonwealth Bank - Account number : BSB 064804 A/C 00912281.

SURVEY & RECORD KEEPER'S REPORT

This last year has seen a small amount of surveying activity in Chillagoe by Alan Pryke and Peter Bannink. Five new vertical cave entrances have been located around the Ryan Imperial Tower due to the efforts of Max, Van and Paul. Alan Pryke and Van undertook several caving trips with fellow SUSS members, locating a large new cave down near the Walkunder Towers. SUSS will be back in 2016 to complete exploration and a survey. Peter Bannink began a detailed survey of Ripple and Angels Tears Caves in the Wallace Creek area of Cooktown, while Greg Gurnier is currently exploring a new cave in the Archways Tower. While a lot of these survey activities are still in progress the clubs surveys continue to be recorded and detailed documentation of North Queensland's karst continues to grow.

P. Bannink

BUILDING AND MAINTENANCE REPORT

Things are happening. There is a new water main extending into the clubhouse. No more mains water leaks! A large sink has been added under the old school and a small sink installed at the BBQ shed. The large fridge in the Clubhouse will be moved to the BBQ shed this year. The grey water pump failed due to a blockage in the pipe and has been replaced. The irrigation system has been repaired by Clare and Alan and is in use again. Drainage has been improved. The trench for the caretaker and clubhouse toilets has been replaced with a new one. I would like to thank all those who have worked at the Clubhouse to get the jobs done.

The club also purchases a new rainwater tank and this was installed by late June. Work has begun on the gardens as the drought killed off most of the grass and quite a few trees. Paul has thrown some fertilizer and seed around, the summer rains are likely get the place looking pleasant again.

Alan Cummins & Peter Bannink

ENVIRONMENT & CONSERVATION REPORT

The main issue the club dealt with this year was the proposal for the National Heritage listing of the Chillagoe and Mitchell/Palmer Karst Region. This proposal was not supported by a local Chillagoe action group called the Chillagoe Alliance. There was an incorrect assumption that this proposal was generated by the Chillagoe Caving Club. While the current executive supported the proposal, no one in the club had anything to do with this submission and our supporting letter was returned from the Federal Government Department unopened! Since then, the Federal Government, Department of the Environment have resubmitted the proposal, readjusting the proposed boundaries (after consultation with the Chillagoe Community) and this second proposal is currently being assessed (submissions closed on the 2 November 2015). The club has again written a supporting letter (which has this time been accepted) as it is the clubs constitutional aims to encourage cave conservation and as an affiliate of the Australian Speleological Federation have the aim to protect cave and karst environments around Australia. The work undertaken by this club other Australian speleological groups, have certainly highlighted the caves and karst features which are unique to this part of the world.

P. Bannink

FINANCIAL REPORT

STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR ENDED 28TH FEBRUARY, 2015

2015		2016 Membership	2016 Buildings	2016 Sales
	<u>Receipts</u>			
6,699.50	Membership Fees	4,872.00		
0.00	Tackle Hire	20.00		

2015		2016 Membership	2016 Buildings	2016 Sales	
	<u>Bank Interest</u>				
1.65	Commonwealth	0.80			
0.33	Bendigo Bank	0.33			
	<u>Chillagoe Property</u>				
2,900.00	Rent Received		2,970.00		
5,469.50	All Camping Fees		3,486.00		
0.00	Donations Building Fund		0.00		
278.00	Donations - Other		441.70		
150.00	Building Refund (Alan)		0.00		
37.21	Solar Power Credit		62.39		
40.00	TV Repayment (Carol)		0.00		
	<u>Fund Raising</u>				
0.00	Grant		7,417.00		
0.00	Club BBQ		0.00		
	<u>Trading</u>				
80.00	Publications			60.00	
0.00	Postage			13.40	
0.00	Ex - Conference Sales			15.00	
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\$ 15,825.39		4,892.63	14,377.09	88.40	\$ 19,358.12
		-----	-----	-----	
<u>\$ 15,825.39</u>	<u>Total Receipts</u>				<u>\$ 19,358.12</u>

2015		2016 Membership	2016 Buildings	2016 Sales
	<u>Less Expenses</u>			
3,053.00	ASF Fees	3,228.00		
63.60	Incorporation Fees	48.25		
31.70	Stationery & Postages	0.00		
107.00	PO Box Rental	115.00		
370.00	Website Expenses	0.00		
0.00	Audit Fees	0.00		
0.00	RFDS Donation	0.00		
169.20	Overpayment	0.00		
	<u>Subscription</u>			
0.00	ACKMA & Helictite	0.00		
	<u>Chillagoe Property</u>			
	Council Rates			
515.40	& Water Charges		594.45	
3,668.57	Property Insurance		3,669.97	
0.00	Electricity		0.00	
290.00	Workcover		304.50	
190.99	Gas Cooker Upgrade Supply		0.00	
4775.47	Amenities Block		0.00	
1,920.00	Caretaker's Costs		1,920.00	
1723.59	Maintenance		655.49	
310.00	New Fire Equipment		0.00	
0.00	New 2 nd hand Fridge		200.00	
0.00	Water System Maintenance		665.76	
0.00	New Water Tank		1,092.69	

2015		2016 Membership	2016 Buildings	2016 Sales
	<u>Trading</u>			
0.00	Purchase Book Resale			0.00
0.00	Annual Report Printing			0.00
	-----	-----	-----	-----
	<u>Sub Totals</u>	3,391.25	9,102.86	0.00
		-----	-----	-----
	<u>Receipts less Expenses</u>	1,501.38	5,273.23	88.40
\$17,188.52		<u>Total Expenses</u>		\$12,494.11
-----				-----
<u>(\$1,363.13)</u>	<u>EXCESS OF RECEIPTS OVER EXPENDITURE</u>			<u>\$6,864.01</u>

CASH BOOK BALANCE

6,100.77	Opening Balance as at 1 st March 2015	4,737.64
(1,363.13)	Less: Excess of Receipts over Expenditure	6,864.01
-----		-----
<u>\$ 4,737.64</u>	<u>TOTAL FUNDS – 29TH FEBRUARY, 2016</u>	<u>\$11,601.65</u>

BANK RECONCILIATION

4,547.38	29 th February, 2016 Commonwealth Bank Balance	11,300.81
82.00	Add: Outstanding Deposits	12.00
-----		-----
4,629.38		11,312.81
443.07	Less: Outstanding Cheques	262.82
-----		-----
4,186.31		11,049.99
551.33	Add: Bendigo Bank Account	551.33
-----		-----
<u>\$ 4,737.64</u>	<u>TOTAL FUNDS AS ABOVE</u>	<u>\$ 11,601.65</u>



A typical Karst Tower Landscape around the Mungana Area

TRIP REPORTS

Beetle Hunt

P.Bannink

In January 2014 Winfried and I photographed a small Carabid beetle in the deep recesses of Ripple Cave (WC2) thinking it was nothing special. The photo however generated much excitement at the Queensland Museum where Dr Geoff Monteith and Dr Federica Turco have been seeking specimens of this group of beetles.

Beetles from the genus *Mustropomus* are dark brown or black ground dwelling predatory beetles found in cool rainforests along the east coast of Australia. As a form of defence the beetles are able to blast or 'crepitate' a volatile cocktail of toxic gas from the tip of their abdomen, like the famous Bombardier Beetle.



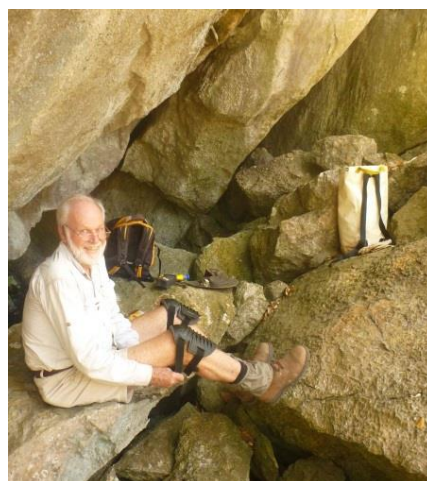
Mustropomus sp. – in Ripple Cave

Two species are currently described in Australia, *M. regularis* found in high altitude rainforests of the Wet Tropics in Queensland and *M. subcostatus* from rainforests in NSW and in several caves at Mount Etna (near Rockhampton).

The biologists think that the Mt Etna cave population may be a new species and are examining the beetle's DNA, to determine if there are clear genetic differences between cave and non-cave specimens. The recent sighting of this beetle genus in caves near Cooktown has again raised the possibility that yet another isolated population inhabits caves in far north Queensland.

In early November I got a request to assist Dr Geoff Monteith in an attempt to collect live beetle specimens from the Wallace Creek Caves. Only two caves had the potential to harbour the beetle, JNJ Cave in the 'Western Area' and the

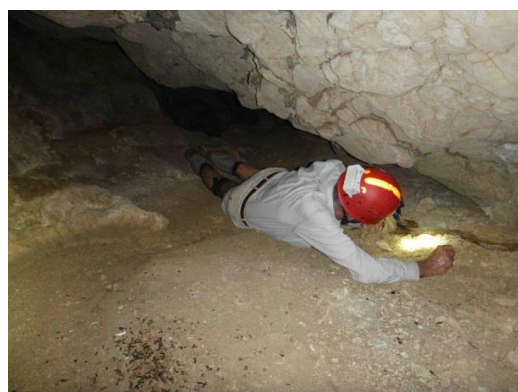
upper section of Ripple Cave in the 'Eastern Area'.



Geoff kitting up before entering JNJ Cave

Geoff kindly did all the logistical planning and driving from Mareeba and we made it out of JNJ Cave by 10.30am. It was already steaming by the time we walked to the entrance. I had explored this cave briefly in July and was keen to see the rest, as the survey showed quite a network of interesting passages.

We entered the cave just as the midday heat started to intensify. A five metre climb up a small phreatic passage leads to the main upper chamber which is about 20m long and only high enough to crawl along. While Geoff set about collecting, I undertook a count of the resident bat colony. When the bats had dispersed deeper into the cave, I followed up the leads on the survey plan.



Geoff collecting in JNJ Cave

The first was a very low squeeze into a small rift (4 long and 1m wide). A crawl back with a very large mygalomorph spider made the return journey interesting. The second major lead

involved a careful 6m climb down to series of lower rifts. One branch ended in small (tiny) drafting squeeze which did not look very enticing after a second large spider made an appearance.

I returned to Geoff to help collect insects however there were no beetles (as previously reported in 1994) and on the whole there was not much about at all, not even in the bat guano. We made an early exit after climbing down into a larger 'Tree Root' chamber, this section was also devoid of insects. On the whole this is a very small cave and we were happy to leave the small sinuous passages to the bats.



Looking south towards Mount Emily at sunset

In the late afternoon Geoff drove about 12km on bush tracks to the hilltop ridgeline which provided access to the Eastern Area, and Ripple Cave. The sunset and evening were sublime with the hills being much cooler and breezier than the plains. A walk to the ridge top gave fantastic views of the surrounding distant ranges. We left camp by 7:30am to undertake the 3km hillside walk before it got too hot. Hot fires had scorched the ridgelines leaving no shade at all, so the pace was quite slow. We made the top of the hills by 9:00 and got down into the cave by 9:30.

The main objective was to search for the beetle in the upper section of the cave and it did not take long to climb the 'cascade' and get into the main phreatic 'stream' passage.

While Geoff again searched for beetles, I began looking for further leads. The upper section has one main side branch which leads to an 8m high aven with shear walls. Half way to the aven, an upper passage junction was noted. Climbing up to this another small sinuous phreatic passage was located running just about parallel to the main side rift.



Tea time at Ripple Cave Entrance (WC2)

Crawling to the right, the phreatic passage descended through areas of rubble in the direction of the main cave passage below. To the left, the small tunnel widened to a narrow rift and on to another high aven with light penetrating from high up to the RHS. There were no other leads except an exposed climb to the right which joined the upper section of the aven.



High roof of new side passage in Ripple Cave

© P. Bannink

After a thorough search for beetles, Peter returned to Geoff who had found some old beetle fragments. The search for beetle larvae continued and Peter continued to explore the main 'stream' passage for further leads, but none

were found. After about 2.5 hours we called it quits and returned to the main entrance for lunch.

Geoff did some further collecting in the rainforest during lunch, and we got underway by 1:30pm for the long walk back. The trip was a partial success, beetle fragments for the biologists and a further extension to Ripple Cave for the cavers.

For further reading on these unique beetles please link to the article highlighted below. Navigate to <http://blog.qm.qld.gov.au/2011/06/> . Any cavers sighting these small beetles in caves in North Queensland, please contact the Queensland Museum.

Keefs Cavern

P.Bannink

Van Christensen, Peter B., Peter English and Marta del Pozo Fonseca – 21-22 March. Three club members headed out to Chillagoe in late March with Spanish caver Marta del Pazo Fonseca (who was visiting Cairns).

Marta is fluent in four languages, so there were no communication barriers to overcome. She is a member of the Spanish adventure group 'Madteam' who cave in Cataluña, the Pre-Pyrenees and the Pyrenees. Having excellent vertical caving and rock climbing experience, there were no restrictions to where we could go.



Marta and Peter B. at the main entrance

Marta was very keen to see what Tropical caves in this part of the world looked like, although many Australian caves are on a much smaller scale than anything in Europe.

Consensus on the first morning got the team out to do a Keefs Cavern through trip to Ryan Imperial Cave. The cave is not that technically challenging but only Van had been there before and he knew the route through. We all got out there by 10.30am and headed into the entrance chamber, Marta keeping an eye out for her greatest caving fear (meeting one of Chillagoe's large cave spiders).

The first obstacle is a 5m deep pit, with no belay points it took a little time to organise a system for everyone to cross safely, then all the bags of gear. The second obstacle is called 'the guage', where larger cavers are restricted from continuing on. Peter E. gave it a good go, but 15 years of sedentary life looking after kids, had added a little too much to his waist line.



Transferring bags over 'The Pit'

The two Peters returned to the main entrance, so Peter could walk around and enter Ryan Imperial Cave and meet the team at the junction. We continued on, climbing up a very narrow rift to an upper junction. There were three alternative routes, each with its own challenges. The Birth Canal was one squeeze Peter did not want to repeat so the least challenging 'Laundry Shoot' was chosen.

I got a bit lost at this stage but we found ourselves in a deep rift system with one branch leading up to the link into Ryan Imperial Cave.

The tall narrow rifts are very impressive in this section of the cave. No swiftlets were evident however there were a few nests on the ground after being washed off the walls above. Van rigged the 14m pitch with a doubled 30m rope, so we could pull through once down the other side.

A short walk got us into the old tourist section of the Ryan Imperial system with the wooden walkways and ladders all still in very good condition. After a quick look around we exited and walked over to Markhan Tower for a trip through Markam cave via an un-tagged back entrance. Marta was relatively impressed with the decoration, daylight chambers and old graffiti, despite a lot of the old formation being taken as souvenirs long ago.

We got back at 5.00 pm for a swim at creek and a local pub dinner, washed down with a couple of beers. The next day we decided to head out to Bubo Cave with the possibility of visiting Geck Cave as well. Bubo Cave (CH215) is in a small tower at the far western end of Spring Tower complex. The site is near the old abandoned Red Dome mine site (which has long since been dismantled).



Van abseiling the 15m pitch (last down)

Heaps of mining rubbish still litters the landscape. Van did not take long to find the main doline entrance and we were all soon exploring the main series of passages. The main drag follows the deepest section of the cave, which is quite well decorated. Great care was taken in the

lower section not to make a trog route as there was still moisture in the lower section.



Peter English in Bubo Cave entrance

Peter B. found a small population of Plant Hoppers but they were not adapted to cave life, the adults having large eye's and the body a grey colouration. Various sections were discovered and explored, after about 2 hours we found time had really run out and we headed back to the clubhouse to head back home.



Marta admiring formations in Bubo Cave

With three cavers carrying cameras, a large number of photo's were taken on the trip and quite a few turned out to be quite stunning. Many thanks to the team for making this a great weekend, and thanks to Peter English for driving most of us out to Chillagoe and back.

Vietnam -The Kingdom of Caves

(Winfried Weiss)

Every sport has a mecca, every occupation has a headquarters, every dream has a nirvana. I know we are all different but it's hard not to argue that Vietnam doesn't fit that bill. Vast underground cathedrals, abundant exploration potential, prehistoric rainforests, gorgeous formations –

you have to ask yourself what Vietnam doesn't have.

In March 2015 the Chillagoe Caving Club decided to find out for itself and Paul, Paco, Grant and myself went to check the place out. We decided to find out if Vietnam really did have it all – and we found out in style by visiting the world's biggest cave – Son Doong.

Our journey really began in 2014 out at Chillagoe, when Paul (over a bottle of decent red by the way) suggested that we should spread our wings and begin to explore caves in far flung parts of our planet. Sounded like a great idea to those of us present, and the planning began.

There was the initial Google query about the world's largest cave, yielding some amazing photos and fulsome quotes about 'gargantuan passages' and so forth. Then we moved on to reality and began thinking about specifics – ie how much time and money was this going to cost..... always a significant concern.

Eventually those problems came into focus and a group of four club members decided to commit to going with a company called Oxalis (the only way to get to see Son Doong) who had a very good website. Let me tell you, transferring several thousand dollars to a foreign country, via a website, without actually knowing if it's legit, is kind of exciting. Luckily for us this was no scam, and we did get confirmation of our booking.

I should mention here that for 2015 only 500 people are able to visit Son Doong, due to the strict permit rules set by the Vietnamese government for conservation reasons. Last year it was only 250 and next year there may be no trips at all. We later found out that our little Aussie group were amongst the first 10 or so Australians to ever set foot in these caves.

Anyway, the four of us decided to meet up in Da Nang, Vietnam. Da Nang is the closest international airport to our eventual destination, a little village called Phong Nha in Central Vietnam, not far from the border with Laos. Da Nang is a vibrant, busy place and was my first introduction to Asian traffic, scooters and motorcycles. UNESCO should list the traffic in Asia as a cultural heritage icon! It's that amazing.

There are rules, but no one really follows them. It's a mixture of knowing the right thing to do and just moving with the flow. As long as you keep moving, steadily, in the direction you want to go, everything will be fine. Most of the time

anyway. Seeing a family of five travelling on a Vespa scooter, or a mattress being delivered on the back of a motorcycle is worth the price of admission by itself.



Family of five on a scooter !!!

The Waterfront Bar in Da Nang shall forevermore be the CCC hangout in Da Nang. Copious quantities of San Miguel Beer were consumed that evening at the enormous cost of about 800,000 dong each. Granted, this seemed to have been the most expensive bar in Da Nang, but that still equates to food and drink for a whole evening at about \$40 each. Not bad at all, and all served with a smile and great quality.



Late night out at Da Nang

After making our way back to the local hotel (Dai A hotel rocks – much better than the Westernised ones!) we did some sight seeing in the morning (ask Paul about how I got ripped off at the Marble Mountain lol) and then caught the sleeper train north to Dong Hoi. I recommend a sleeper cabin because that at least has air conditioning. The trip itself was fine, except that Paul was sure we had boarded the wrong train and were heading to Ho Chi Minh city! We did however board the right train, and drank the beer cart dry during the 6 hour trip north.



Grant relaxing on the train

Oxalis was true to their word, and we got a pick up from them upon arrival in Dong Hoi. It was dark, so we didn't get to see much, but after a 45 minute car ride we ended up in Phong Nha, at Ho Khang's Homestay – the guy who found Son Doong in the first place.

Our accommodation was very good for the \$30 we were paying a night. Vietnamese architecture is unique, long and narrow, and our rooms were situated at the back of the family house, in a traditional style house facing the river. Comfy, if somewhat firm, mattresses, fans and mossie nets (think Cairns in summer) made for a decent first nights sleep. The food was excellent too – delivered on a scooter from down the road from a menu brimming with interesting items – I still stand by Wonder Balls. Simply the best!



Vietnamese architectural style of our accommodation

The next morning we had a day to sightsee, and we joined a tour encompassing Paradise Cave, Dark Cave and some local cultural and historical sites. Fantastic little trip and highly recommended if you only have a few days in Phong Nha. Paradise Cave is simply spectacular – the formations and sheer size are awe inspiring. It's a shame the tour only takes in the first

kilometre of the cave, but what you do see is lit beautifully. The whole system is over 30km in length and – so we were told – contains some of the best river passage anywhere.

Then there is Dark Cave, perhaps the antithesis of pretty. The trip to that cave starts with a 300m zip line across a river. This is a fairly exciting experience when you weigh about twice what a normal Vietnamese man does. Paco hit the earthen stop wall, and I managed to break the safety tether on landing! 100kg does get a bit of speed up ☺.



The crew enjoying the mud wallow

After the zip line everyone swims into Dark Cave and makes their way, barefoot, through the cave. Again the whole cave (6km) isn't explored, but there is a fantastic little side trip to the most amazing mud I have ever encountered. Close your eyes and imagine swimming in thick, smooth, chocolate cream and you will have some idea of what this little experience was like. It's like swimming in the Dead Sea, you actually float on top of the mud. Amazing.



Dawn over the river at Phong Nha

From what we saw on our little tour it was hard to imagine anything larger, bigger, better. The caves were already enormous – how much wider,

higher could they actually get? A lot more it turns out. That evening we had a briefing at the Oxalis headquarters and met up with our guides and team. Adam and Ruth were our UK caving guides, both experienced and great company and Thanh was our local guide – and one of the funniest blokes out there.

The next day dawned in a sea of pink over the river, highlighting the fascinating landscape surrounding Phong Nha. Huge towers of karst frame the landscape everywhere you look. Apparently there is a huge cave just across the river from our accommodation – but no one has found the way into the river system yet.... Maybe one day when they get bored of all the other caves out there.

The bus ride to the national park that covers most of the karst was easy enough and everyone was just a little on edge to get going. Our group was multinational – Canadians, Chinese, Vietnamese, Aussies, Brits, - and we had all been told about this long, tough walk to get to the caves. On our way to the trek trailhead the road passed large areas beside Highway 20 (the Victory Highway, also part of the Ho Chi Minh trail) covered in vines and impenetrable scrub.

This, we were told, was a legacy of the rainforest being massively bombed and never recovering. The history of this land is replete with death and suffering, and hearing it from the Vietnamese perspective is sobering. One example was a bridge named the Bridge of Blood and Diesel – so named because many people lost their lives carrying canisters of diesel on their backs across the river during the Vietnam War. People carried the canisters because trucks were too easy to bomb... and many died.



One of the many river crossing on the trek in

KM 33 marked the trailhead for our adventure. There was a small shed there where we sorted our packs and gear, and the walk began. The trail

meandered downhill steeply through the rainforest. The path is well trodden because a small village uses it as their sole access to the outside world. After about an hour, we encountered flat ground and began to follow a creek, criss-crossing it many times. High ridges of limestone surround us at all times, but eventually the valley opens out into a small plain where a local village is situated. The houses are wooden and situated on tall stumps as there are floods every year. The people were friendly but do not speak English at all. The green tea they offered us was nice, although our guide insisted that drinking too much would make us drunk. After a brief stop we left the village and headed on, following the river downstream as it snaked past imposing pinnacles of limestone.



Winfried with the entrance of Hang En behind

After another hours walking we were able to see the massive entrance of Hang En in the distance, kilometres away. A huge arch in the cliff face quickened our pace – we were all keen to get there.

The river took a sharp turn and split, part of it spilling into a low, wide opening in the cliff – the lower entrance to Hang En. The group took a break and our guides handed out helmets and lights (Hope R4s) to eager hands. Finally we were in a cave!

The river snaked its way through banks of river pebbles along a low passage and we followed it for about a hundred metres before diverging to the left and up over boulders. The passage led upwards and opened up onto a large boulder overlooking the massive main chamber of Hang En where our camp had been set up by the porters.

The sheer scale of this cave is almost impossible to portray. I climbed up the scree slope to the top of the main entrance and from up there the tents looked like small yellow specks.



Looking out of the lower entrance of Hang En

After at least an hour of exploring and taking photos I descended into the camp, past the hot and cold swimming pools (hot river, cold cave water) and found my tent, neatly labelled and set up. No way could I complain about the service in this trip! The Oxalis crew was amazing. Our porters and cooks were world class at setting up camp and keeping us comfortable with minimal gear.



The evening feast in preparation

The afternoon was given over to more photos, exploring and swimming to wash off the sweat of the day. The water was cool and pleasant – with accompanying fish to nibble at your toes. Then it was time for dinner which our chef – yes a real chef – conjured up from supplies carried in by the porters. Roast pork, omelette, tofu, vegetables, roast chicken, noodles, rice – you name it we had it. The food was better than at a five star restaurant. And all cooked over an open fire in a cave! And of course the meal was accompanied by the local rocket fuel – rice wine.

At about dinner time the swiftlets started arriving back into the cave to roost. Literally thousands of birds nesting on the roof and walls above us. Adam, our guide, pointed out some sketchy vines leading up to the roof which, apparently, some local tribes people use to climb up and catch the birds as a rite of passage. When I say sketchy... I actually mean non – existent. The guts it would

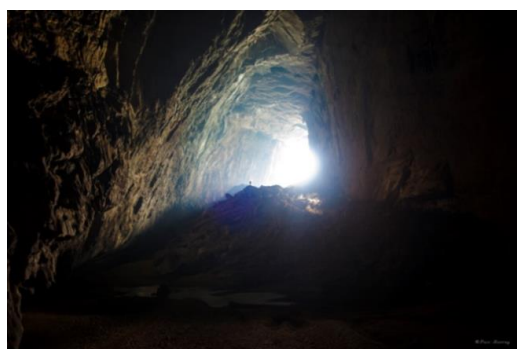
take to make that climb over a 100 metres up without a safety is something I don't think I would have.



Campsite in the main chamber at Hang En

As the light faded, the world's big issues were discussed, in a place that can only be called special. Hang En is maybe not the world's largest cave, but it certainly is one of the most spectacular and special.

Day Two of our Son Doong adventure dawned slowly. I could see the mist coming in from the main entrance of Hang En and flowing through the cave. It was almost hypnotic, except for the cacophony of birds waking up to greet the day. Breakfast was again 5 star and I went for an explore on my own. Hang En is basically a huge river passage heading straight through the mountain and exploring it on your own only makes it seem bigger. I climbed high up a scree slope behind the cave, to a saddle that allowed me to see the dim light of the cave exit in the distance. By the time I got to the top the camp had faded into silence and darkness. I was just alone in this huge underground space, something I won't forget for a long time.



Main passage – Hang En

We broke camp and began the trek through Hang En. The place is huge and the river twists and turns between silt and pebble banks 50 metres high. Our guides tell us that during the wet

season this cave can fill almost totally with water. Halfway along, at the top of a huge earth bank there is a boulder with a huge tree trunk perched on it – seeing that made me believe them.



The Hand of Dog – Son Doong

The exit of Hang En is of course gigantic and leads into a narrow river valley flanked by limestone cliffs hundreds of metres high. It was an oasis of butterflies at the exit (hundreds of them). After an hour of following the river we stopped at the stream sink into Son Doong – impassable we are told. A short but steep 20 cave.



Exit of Hang En (Paco in the middle)

It's kind of underwhelming actually. There is no huge entrance, it's just a 20 metre doline leading to a smallish entrance with a huge breeze blowing out of it. The entrance drops away steeply across flowstone formations and drops some 80 metres in total to the river below. When we entered the cave a heavy fog enveloped us as we descended via handlines to the river.

This cave is so large it has its own weather pattern and on some days it can be totally clear, other days foggy and damp. As we reach the river it's difficult to gauge the size of the passage. It's large and wet, and there is a lot of breakdown to cross as we make our way along the right bank. The rock is sharp and black and the huge whorls and jagged points in the rock are a testament to the volume of water that must thunder through here in the wet season. The river level on our trip was low, making for a pleasant wade in most places.



Camp One – Son Doong

The river was crossed twice on our way to the Hand of Dog further along the passage. It's no exaggeration that once you begin to climb up from the river along the passage you can literally see for over a kilometre towards the first daylight of the cave, called Doline One. The fog continued to roll in and out, making photography difficult and giving everything a sort of eerie glow. It was fascinating to see the lights of other cavers ahead of me glowing in the distance, toiling up the next steep slope or over a formation.

Camp 1 is situated near Doline One, hard up against one side of the cavern wall. It sits high above the river on a sandy ledge, overlooking a spectacular vista of stalagmites, boulders and gigantic gours. Being behind the main group I was just able to tag onto a party heading down to Fossil passage, near the river level. Fossil passage sports beautiful black limestone, worn smooth, with brilliant white fossils everywhere.

The passage itself leads on, water filled, for many hundreds of metres, down to the main river. I decided to take a swim and spent an

awesome half hour or so swimming along the passage, deep blue green water disappearing underneath me and the enticing passage ahead. I stopped eventually, foiled by a 2 metre high flowstone waterfall that was just a tad too slippery to free climb back up. Still, the 300 metres of the passage that I did see solo, were beautiful and majestically silent. Just me and the cave. A little reluctantly I swam back to join the rest of the group and headed back to camp.



Card game antics – Paco on timer

Dinner was soon served back at camp. Another feast, followed by rice wine and a game of cards with Thanh, our local guide. Some things never change – and playing cards with penalties is one of them ☺.

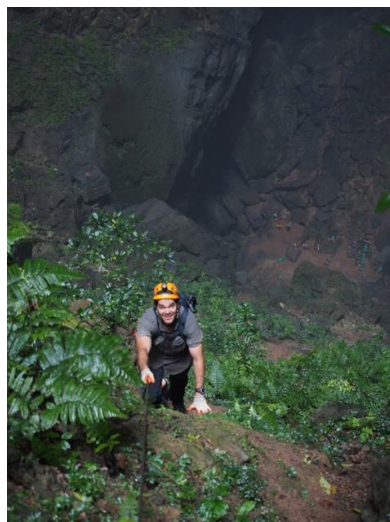
Day Three commenced with a climb through some house sized boulders and breakdown. The rock was very sharp and jagged and the track snaked its way through, above, below and around the rocks terminating at the bottom of a very steep slope, perhaps 100m high, heading towards the top of the doline breakdown pile. The slope was climbed a few at a time as it was very loose and wet.



Negotiating the boulder choke

The top of the doline exhibited my first experience of a full grown rainforest in a cave. Although dwarfed by the 100m cliffs rising

towards the surface the trees were still imposing at 20 metres in height.



Paco climbing up Doline One

Of note is an awesome set of gours that form a spiral pinnacle at this point. This vantage point allowed some spectacular views, and I could just make out the glimmer of light denoting the second doline further into the cave.

A short descent led us to some more awesome gours and formations and perhaps the most photogenic spot in the whole cave. Son Doong has many qualities and the combination of greenery and clean limestone rock made for perfect photographs. After a short lunch break we moved on along the gargantuan main passage of Son Doong. The river had left the passage at this point and we were making our way across enormous formations, testament to the age of the passage.



Paul Osborne relaxing on giant gour pool formation

About an hour of walking led us to a vantage point over Doline Two. Unfortunately the misty weather did not help the photography and we continued on to another rainforest inside the

cave. Crossing this damp piece of primeval forest was reminiscent of Jurassic Park. I think no one would have been surprised to see a pterodactyl flying above us.



Winfried climbing through the 'Garden of Edam'

The climb down into Campsite 2 was easy and brought us to a comfortable dry camp, on white chalky sand. It wasn't far to the end of the cave from here, well at least to the end of the easily accessible part. Some fabulous dry passage led us towards an increasingly muddy passage that morphed into a small stream dwarfed by huge mud banks on either side. Passing beneath the mighty Wall of Vietnam, the stream eventually sinks into an impassable sump where everything is coated in mud. At this point our guides pointed out the bolted route up the Great Wall. This leads to the alternate exit to Son Doong, although rarely used due to the difficult climb up the Wall and loose rock.



The sump at the end of Son Doong

The return to camp offered many opportunities for photographs, although without large flashes, doing justice to these cathedral like passages was practically impossible. The fog came in again, thick and heavy, enveloping the camp while we

had dinner. Everyone seemed a little tired that evening and bed was an early affair.



Camp 2 at dusk looking back to Doline Two

Our final day in Son Doong dawned slowly and quietly. I decided to take a short trip down Cormorant Passage before breakfast and was rewarded with the sight of a river of calcite crystals flowing through a sea of mud. The passage terminated in a tight little crack reminiscent of Chillagoe and the return to camp was over crust covered boulders and cave coral.

After packing up we commenced the walk back out of Son Doong. Our camp tonight was to be back in Hang En and walking back out and through Son Doong allowed us to enjoy the cave without taking photographs at every step.



Weather in Son Doong!

There is something to be said for just travelling through a cave, enjoying its beauty without trying to record it. I was lucky enough to be the last to leave Son Doong on this occasion, and I was sad to go, vowing to return one day.

The return trip to Hang En was spectacular, if uneventful. We were given another opportunity to enjoy the stupendous river passage that is this cave, actually the 3rd largest in the world. Instead of crossing the river banks we decided to follow the river as it meandered along the passage back

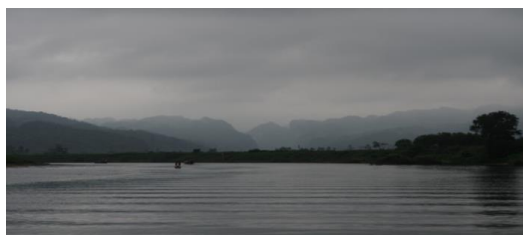
towards camp. It offered a different perspective on the cave, particularly in one low and wide section beside the main passage.



Main river passage – Hang En

The walk out on the following day was relaxing. Heading out of Hang En was almost sad, knowing that a return to this magical place would not be for a long time. We walked out in approximately four hours. Of particular note was the last hill, which had everyone except Grant gasping for air – he made it up in less than 30 minutes, apparently a record for non Vietnamese folk.

The trip back to Phong Nha on the bus was luxury personified. Nice soft comfy seats always feel great after going without for a few days and a cold drink was very welcome. Part of the deal that Oxalis provides is to put people up at the Sun Spa Resort in Dong Hoi after completing Son Doong which was a nice taste of luxury at the end of the trip.



Karst and more karst – west of Phong Nha

We returned to Phong Nha the following day, and then embarked on another three day caving trip to an area called Tu Lan. That's another story for another edition of the newsletter. Suffice it to say that Tu Lan is vastly different to Son Doong.

It's a maze of river cavers, interconnected and allowing cavers to move underneath and through mountains as easily as going over them. It just goes to highlight that Vietnam has an enormous supply of caves and caving. The area we visited is over 2000 square kilometres of karst, with

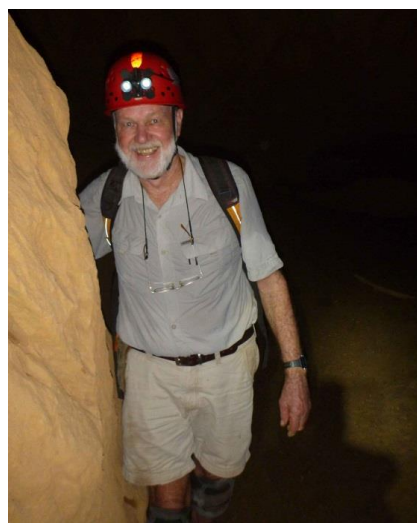
more across the border into Laos. Perhaps 20 percent of it has been explored and who knows what other wonders, what other Son Doongs lie in wait for the intrepid caver. One thing is for sure – one day I will be back!

Rare Beetle Found!

Peter Bannink

In April Peter B. and entomologist Geoff Monteith (from the Queensland Museum) again travelled out to the Wallace Creek Karst region (for the day). This was another attempt to find specimens of the unusual *Mystropomus* beetle (in Ripple Cave), which has eluded collection on four previous occasions.

Despite initial dismay at not seeing anything in the daylight area, six specimens were soon found running around the base chamber, further into the cave. Geoff was also lucky to find two larval stages, which live in tiny burrows under rocks. All the rainfall from the week Cyclone Nathan crossed the coast of Cooktown, must have created the perfect conditions in the cave, for the beetles to become active.



Geoff Monteith ecstatic at the find

We each experienced the wrath of the beetles as they were picked up, getting burned by a cocktail of chemicals that were sprayed at our fingers. The chemical 'jet' is so hot that smoke is generated and the smell of burned cordite becomes prevalent in the air.

Distinct morphological differences indicate that the cave specimens are very likely to be a new species, being larger in size, and having significantly longer legs and antennae.



An adult *Mystropomus* beetle in Ripple Cave

Since then Geoff has been able to make direct comparisons with the closest epigeal (surface) population on Mt Lewis, over 100km to the south.



The predatory larval stage extracted from its burrow

A few of the specimens will now be sent for genetic analysis in the USA, where their unique relationship with other *Mystropomus* populations revealed. On the whole this was a very successful trip. Many thanks to Geoff for passing on the details of the insects he collected.

New Zealand – Easter 2015

Steven Morgan

The concept of yet another NZ trip slowly evolved with Easter 2015 emerging as a concrete date. Chillagoe Caving Club was represented by members Ray Deasey, Damien Tapp and Steven Morgan.

Whilst in NZ on other business last year, I bumped into Kieran McKay and had discussions about Stormy Pot which resulted in Kieran offering to guide us through the Stormy Pot/Nettlebed through trip. Following the vertical cave rescue training I was in contact with Al Warild about some other matters and mentioned the Stormy Pot trip. Al and fellow

caver Greg Tunnock swelled the number of Aussie cavers and contributed hugely to the expertise of the group.

Ray unfortunately injured his shoulder leading up to the trip, but bravely came across notwithstanding, and did get some caving in whilst nursing his injury.

With Kieran's offer, the Stormy Pot/Nettlebed through trip was number one on our agenda. For those who are not aware, Kieran and friends made a connection between Stormy Pot and Nettlebed in January 2014 giving an epic through trip with vertical elevation of 1160m.

On my first trip to the area (with Paul Osborne, Paco, Kiwi and the Irvins') we had talked about visiting Legless. Legless has 16 pitches on the survey and is mostly vertical with a depth of 362m. It is a yoyo trip. Down then back up again. I have had my heart set on that cave ever since and over a number of visits located the entrance, then eventually got in a short distance with Ray, doing the first four pitches. Getting to the bottom of Legless was my other objective for this trip. And any other caving in the area would be a bonus.



The campsite at Patarou

Ray, Al and myself rendezvoused in Nelson on Sunday 29 March and we made our way immediately to our base at the Nelson Speleological Group hut on Takaka Hill. Al and myself made a solid start on Legless on Monday 30 March. With hardly a break between pitches we made our way down to well down the 60P where we ran out of rope and rigging. We had some excitement coming out at the last pitch.

I was ahead and disturbed a rather unstable section of rocks and material. Although on the pitch below me, Al thankfully was off to the side and out of the path of the falling debris. A good wheelbarrow load of material (well it sounded like it) with watermelon sized rocks continued to break away from the very unstable area. At the top of the pitch the take off point is a large rock wedged in the crack. We deemed it stable. Other than the confined entrance and then the

awkward rift at the top of the first pitch there were no tight sections at all in the cave as far as the 60P. Just vertical, vertical, vertical.

Greg joined us on Tuesday and for one reason or another we didn't get any caving in. On Wednesday (now 1 April) we headed in to Greenlink to pre rig the cave (four pitches) in readiness for a through trip. Greenlink gives you the feeling of being in a storm pipe and definitely not the cave to visit if there is any rain on the horizon. Greg and Al completed the rigging with Ray and myself turning back not long after the third pitch.



Steve Morgan descending in Legless Cave

On Thursday local caver Mike Brewer took us into Swiss Maid for a through trip Swiss Maid through to Greenlink. Swiss Maid and Greenlink both connect with each other and with Middle Earth. Ray was feeling up for it so we were now four Aussies plus Mike. There were some awkward squeezes and pitches as we made our way into Swiss Maid and I couldn't help but wonder how Ray was going to manage with his shoulder getting back out. (The plan had been for Ray to exit Swiss Maid with Mike, and Al, Greg and myself to continue through and exit Greenlink.) It seemed the better option for Ray was the Greenlink exit, so Ray and Greg swapped places. Al, Ray and myself then successfully made the connection and derigged our way out of Greenlink while Greg and Mike did some exploration and digging work in Swiss Maid before making their way out.

Thursday was also the day for Damien to arrive, and then Friday morning we headed out to Paturau to join the NZ speleos annual Easter family cave camp. We joined in a couple of "easier" trips to Baby Grand and Twin Forks. These were both horizontal trips, both with some wet sections. When we first got to Paturau it was very windy – a good thing as there were no sandflies. Windy turned to rain and we made our way back on Saturday afternoon to the more comfortable accommodation at the NSG hut.



Steve Morgan in Baby Grand Cave

The drive out to Paturau is through stunning scenery. Joining the annual camp at Paturau is highly recommended for anyone travelling in this area around Easter.

Sunday was our "push" day to bottom Legless. After we managed four bodies (Al, Damien, Greg and myself) and packs through the entrance squeeze we discovered that our "solid" platform at the top of the first pitch wasn't. It was gone. We lost a good hour gardening this area to a stable state before we headed down the first pitch on a spare rope (in case the main rope had been damaged in the rock fall).

It turned out that there was no damage apparent to the rope on the pitch, but several cuts where it lay on the ground at the bottom of the pitch. And the "solid" take off platform – that rock made it about half way down the pitch before it wedged in a slot – firmly enough that we weren't too concerned about it.



Al Warild crossing a rebelay in Legless

We made up for lost time now hooning down the pre rigged pitches to the pointy end, then not long to the top of the 70P and beyond, eventually reaching the bottom of the cave and having a look around at the Cactus Room and the (too) tiny stream way where the cave possibly continues.



Damien Tapp crossing a rebelay

This was a bounce trip. Down and then back up, and now the hard work began. We had over 500m of rope in the cave as well as rigging and it all had to come out. I got the first load and changed down to first gear and struggled my way up the 70P, then the 60P, then the 40P – you get the idea – this was really hard work. It was in the wee hours of the morning some 14 hours after we first entered the cave before we were all out. I can't understate the high level of fitness that a trip like this demanded, not to mention the high level technical SRT skills for pitch after pitch of varied rigging, rebelay, deviations and the like (and yes, even a knot crossing). Needless to say, Monday was a lay day and Ray was due to head home on Tuesday.

Our original plan was to set up for the Stormy Pot trip on Tuesday and head in on Wednesday morning. But that was not to be. Kieran was not available and we had one of the other Stormy Pot explorers, Chris Whitehouse as our guide. Local caver Andrew Smith was planning to come too. And so was the weather.



Google view of the trip

The Stormy Pot entrance is high on the alpine plateau of Mt Arthur and we needed half decent weather to get there. Furthermore, about half way through Stormy Pot there is a river section (the River of Clowns) which had flood potential, so we didn't really want to be arriving there after heavy rain. And finally but not quite as important was the walk out the Pearse River. This is crossed eleven times, so not the thing to do when flooding. This is an alternative to walking out the Pearse River, but much harder work.

Clearly, the weather was no good for a Wednesday start, and we pushed back to review

Thursday night. That left things rather tight for our return flights and meant we had to look at trying for a two day trip through the cave rather than the three day trip we were planning. The weather evolved further, by Tuesday evening we again reviewed the situation and believed there was a window for us to head into the cave on Thursday morning. Andrew Smith (the local) was not quite so confident and pulled out but Chris was up for it and so were we. So it was on. Tuesday night and Wednesday morning we made our preparations and we headed up to the Flora car park on Wednesday evening into scungy conditions. The idea is to get an earlier start by spending the night at the Flora car park. We checked a few weather sites in the morning and it looked okay, although we were clouded in for the most part. So now it was really on and we belted up the hill, above the tree line and to the Stormy Pot entrance. For the most part, it remained cloudy and with some light mist, enough to be unpleasant but not enough to seriously deter us.

As we kitted up at the entrance of Stormy Pot, I should mention a little history. With the exploration phase of Stormy Pot over, the locals had recently derigged the cave and put in anchors to enable the Stormy Pot series to be rigged "pull through" style. We were the first party to do the trip as a pull through. The locals were referring to us as the "crash test dummies" and I suspect that Andrew Smith was doing his sums as to which side of the rescue he would prefer to be on. We were heavily dependent on our guide as at this stage, maps of Stormy Pot have not been drawn and although we have heard that there is a guide of sorts out there somewhere, we didn't have it.



Hello camper! - At Mt Arthur Hut

In actual fact, we don't enter Stormy Pot, but a slightly higher entrance Big Friendly Giant (BFG). BFG is a series of countless vertical pitches, some in the order of 50P, some of them with enough drips to make them quite wet. All of them rigged pull through. As crash test

dummies we discovered that some of the rigging could do with some extra work with our ropes being damaged in four different places – sufficient for us to cut the ropes at the damage points. (We started with two x 60m, 1 x 35 & 1 x 25m lengths of 9mm rope.)

After the BFG series of vertical pitches and a few more pitches and the squeeze through the Gates of Troy we arrived at the first camp at the Chocolate Room. The camp was equipped with sleeping bags and mats and some cooking utensils and a quantity of white spirits. More on the white spirits later.

Now would be a good time to mention what the conditions are like in all caves in the area – cold and often wet. For those of you not familiar with cave camping in these conditions, the campsites are damp and mud proliferates. To keep our packs to the minimum, we take a few sparse extra items of clothes which we put on over the thermals we have been wearing throughout the day and survive being tolerably cold and never warm, although tucked up in the sleeping bag there are moments where you could achieve a pocket of warmth. Food is kept basic. There is no breakfast, dinner and tea. It is just a meal in the morning, a meal in the evening and nibble throughout the day, with the meal being something like 2 minute noodles. We have to carry out our solid waste. You use a large zip lock bag big enough to open up to a suitable sized target to shit in, then double bag it, then in something else again.



Late Lunch at the Soft rock cafe

We came close to disaster on the first morning when I mistakenly tipped a couple of cups of white spirits in to billy while it was cooking over the metho burner, then made a hot drink out of it and gulped down a good mouthful before I realised what was going down. White spirit poisoning was the least of our concerns. Had the white spirit made any contact with the open

flame – kaboom. A lesson was learned about the risks of using lemonade bottles for fuel storage.



Steve Morgan in the river of clowns

We continued on from the Chocolate Room to the River of Clowns. The locals when exploring the cave first travelled through this area in wet suits, but then decided it was too much bother and just sucked it up and got wet and cold. There are a number of long deep wades (about nipple depth). Being north Queenslanders we were quite concerned about the cold, and even southerners Al and Greg weren't too keen on the "suck it up" approach. In the end Al had a dry suit inner and Greg, Damien and myself had brand shiny new pontos freshly imported from Europe. These are latex body suits (don't go there on Google!). You climb in the top and it is waterproof up to your nipples with two shoulder straps to hold it up. It goes on over your thermals and under your oversite. And (drum roll) they work!! Brilliantly. We all got through the River of Clowns feeling quite warm and pleased with ourselves, but poor Chris had to sit and shiver while waiting for us to get in them and out of them before and after the River of Clowns as they are too hot for continuous caving.



Late Lunch at the Soft rock cafe

From the River of Clowns we got into a huge chamber and then on and beyond and eventually to the connection to Nettlebed. We stopped off

at the Soft Rock Café for lunch. Soft Rock Café is another established camp site in the system. From there we are in more familiar Nettlebed country, descending Hammer Heights up the Antlion pitch, down Diamond Alley, down the Knee Trembler, through the clambles and to our second night's camp at Salvation Hall.

Greg broke the early morning silence – he had enough of sleep in the endless darkness where there was no marker between night and day. Things went to plan for our trip out the bottom section of Nettlebed. The ducks were dry. (This is an area that can sump out from time to time.) The Hinkle Horn Honking Holes were as intimidating as ever. Cold, tight, awkward and noisy. This is a series of three squeezes with quite small chambers between, with the third finished off with a corkscrew twist. Too bad if you have come all this way and can't fit! The locals suggest a test fitting before doing the through trip. All of us had been through the Hinkle Horn Honking Holes previously so we weren't too concerned.

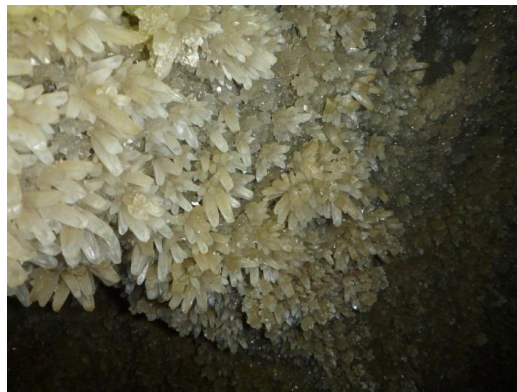
Our first day down BFG was 9 hours of caving. Our second day was the same – 9 hours. The third day was shorter – somewhere in the order of 5 hours. This is definitely a three day trip. To have tried it in two would have wrecked me. Thankfully, the Pearse was not high and we had no trouble on the walk down to the cars.

I should mention that this trip is a very serious undertaking. Our party had one of the original explorers, Chris Whitehouse (who in terms of caving fitness is somewhere around "superman"), Al Warild a renown expedition caver and Greg Tunnock who it turns out also has a very long CV of expedition caving. So we had a reasonably strong party. Without a guide the trip would be quite a bit longer. And it doesn't take Einstein to figure out that if something went wrong any rescue would be a lengthy and difficult exercise. If my white spirit had gone kaboom it would have been a very serious situation. If I had sustained severe burns it might have been 4 days before rescuers arrived at the Chocolate Room to discovered what the problem was.

If you are prepared to train for it (really seriously train for it) and take good advice on the correct equipment and are with the right group of people then this trip is the caving trip of a lifetime.

We had two days left in the country, Sunday and Monday. On Sunday it snowed on Mt Arthur. On Monday the Pearse River was flooding.

The trip was so satisfying, not just because we had done the Stormy Pot/Nettlebed Trip, but we had snuck through a very small window in the weather, and had a few feathers in the cap along the way – the first pull through trip and the first Aussies to do it that I am aware of.



Walls covered in crystals (BFG to Nettlebed trip)

June Caving at Chillagoe

Peter Bannink

The June club trip coincided with the presence of four keen SUSS cavers staying at the clubhouse. Several new members and a few more introductory caves took the opportunity to get underground.

Peter and Van took Joy's group of four cavers back to Keef's Cavern to experience all the challenges this cave has to offer. Max and Sue took a large group of new members to Wallabadorie Cave to investigate the potential for rigging a through trip.



David in September Cave phreatics

The next day we joined SUSS in exploring some of the southern karst near the Walkunders. We were all kindly driven ~15km south of Chillagoe in Van's trusty new ute. Peter, Robert, Goy and

David went to explore September Cave (which was extensively mapped in 1978 by CCC and CEGSA), while Van and the SUSS crew walked south to see Uncle Ron's Cavern. Alan and Van gave vague guidelines as to where the main entrance to September Cave was located but it took about 40 min to find CH219, it was much further into the karst grikes than we had expected.

September Cave was unexpectedly large with multiple daylight. Without a map we had no idea where we were going or what to expect. Aside from large entrance chambers bathed in soft daylight glows, there is an internal maze section with some great phreatic passages and crawls. We did not find the link to the southern section of the cave, but everyone have a great time.

For our last day, Alan suggested a survey trip to Nettle Pot which links to Reunion Cave CH230. This is a stunning cave with lots of vertical climbing through large decorated rifts. The section we explored had many daylight openings, so shafts of light lit up the large decorated chambers.



Looking into the doline entrance of Nettle Pot

I spent some time taking photo's while Alan showed the survey team to the current exploration frontier. The exploration team spent most of the time climbing and exploring a massive boulder collapse in Reunion Cave, heading in the wrong direction. Needless to say nothing new was found and we had in fact doubled back and were exploring back in the direction of Nettle Pot.

I unfortunately left early so I did not hear if any new links had been made with any of the

neighbouring caves in the area. Alan has hopefully exhausted all the leads and completed his survey. It was a great conclusion a fantastic weekend visiting three caves I have never explored before.

The Mendip Rescue Organisation

Ray Deasy

The Mendip Hills area south west of Bristol (UK), contains many limestone caves and some small mines in addition to many complex underground stone workings. In May an opportunity arose to see the range of equipment stowed and ready for action at the H.Q. of the Mendip Rescue Organisation (MRO).



Layout of equipment room

The MRO responds to emergency callouts involving caves and a significant number of mines in the surrounding caving area. The primary rescue area are the Mendip Hills and the stone mines around Bath and Corsham.

The MRO is quartered in a small (fire proof) stone building in the grounds of the headquarters of the Bristol Exploration Club (BEC) near Priddy (Somerset). The BEC HQ is known as 'The Belfrey' and the club motto is Everything to Excess. You have to know the locals to understand it's true meaning, needless to say the local pubs are well frequented.

The emergency call is 999 and this goes to the regional police, it is essential the caller requests cave rescue. The MRO rescue warden responds to the caller whilst other wardens are contacted in a phone link. The police take overall control leaving the MRO to coordinate and action the rescue. Other services may be called (ie ambulances or fire rescue). Over lapping of surface duties may occur but the MRO deal only with the cave rescue.



Equipment bags set and ready to go!

MRO's stone building HQ provides surface and underground communications for the network of wardens, who also pick and distribute the required equipment. All the wardens are competent in cave craft and they mobilize as individuals to then arrive at the headquarters or rescue site.

Equipment and communications have to be dispersed to the rescue site on the surface. Equipment is chosen to suit the rescue. The kit is in double labelled bags for easily identification of it's contents. One label is kept on the surface to ensure a record of the kit is taken.



Cave text transceiver set up.

Down below the communication methods are via the use of the HEY phones, which are being replaced over time by the NICOLA system. A message system called CAVE TEXT is used to transmit and receive text messages that can be stored. This saves an operator being on call continuously and prevents nosey parkers from overhearing. This is all going to work like a precision operation, providing the critical intel is sourced and pro-actively sorted.

The MRO is likely to use man haulage in rescues rather than technical rigs due to the small nature of the cave passages in the Mendip Hills.

The easy access to the Mendip Hills is quite different to the mountains and moors of Wales and Yorkshire. An all-wheel drive rescue truck is used by the North Pennine Mine and Cave

Rescue. Photos and descriptions are included for your interest.



A rig for a nylon stretcher or slick (UK term) - converts from vertical to horizontal without having to rehang it.

Keefs Cavern Extension

Peter Bannink

During the July club trip Max and Van spend some time around Ryan Imperial Tower counting swiftlets late in the evening. While climbing the tower near the main entrance to Keefs Cavern, three vertical entrances were located in quick succession. All appeared to be quite deep holes worthy of intensive investigation.

The next day Max and Van rigged the first option, a 4m deep entrance quite high up on the tower with one side against a high wall. Once rigged, you can step off and hang over the 2m wide slot and descended 26m straight down into Keefs cavern (just at the start to Gun-barrel passage). The link was no surprise, as the new entrances are in the same direction as cave, just way above it.

Max noticed on the first abseil down, that one could swing across and gain access to an upper ledge, 5m above the base of the pitch. A bit of exploration of this area lead to a very small slot at the top of a 5m chimney, a new section to explore. The new exploration targets for the August club event were set.

I arrived late on the Saturday August 12th, to find all three pitches already rigged for exploration. I first descended the pitch Van discovered, called Chock Snake (after he disturbed a Red Banded Tree Snake, while looking for a chock stone). The entrance is only half way up the tower but descends about 28m (possibly more) in three successive 10m pitches to a terminating sump. It's was quite difficult getting on the start of each pitch as the passage became very narrow where each pitch is rigged.



Max and Van at the Chock Snake Entrance

After a brief look, Max and I ascended, but while de-rigging the bottom pitch I unfortunately I dropped one of Paul's slings and had to re-rig it to recover the sling from the bottom. This proved quite challenging while hanging off the safely line, taking off my backpacks and digging around for another (without dropping anything else). A lesson in patience and 40 min of stuffing around was enough for me not to want to revisit the place again. We still have to survey it though. \



Some rope practice at the base of the new pitch

The afternoon was taken up watching the clubs new introductory cavers (6 in all) practice on the big pitch into Keefs Cavern. It was an ideal place to relax and discuss issues in the cool breezy passage.

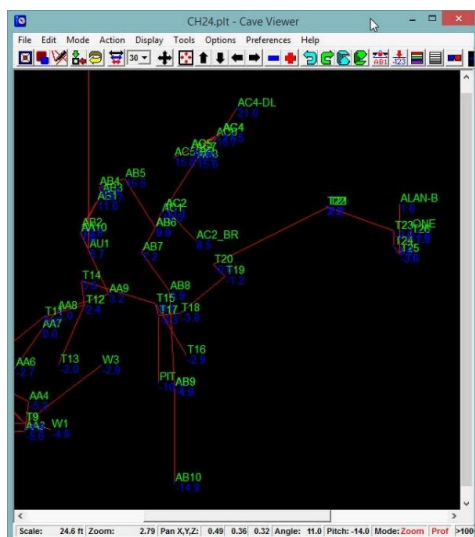
On the Sunday Max, Sue and Deanne with Laura and Wuthipong (Boy), explored Max's major new lead in Keefs, while I started a new survey from the tag. The new section is just as challenging as everything else in Keefs cavern, with a small narrow slots to negotiate, followed by a steep 8m climb into a rift complex. Beyond this, a second deep 14m pitch down a long fissure, which ends suddenly. An upper branch, lead to another entrance (chocked with small rocks) and a sliding horizontal slot which sits about 15m somewhere above Gun Barrel Passage. Needless to say it took the whole day to survey this area.



Laura climbing the narrow slot into the new section

On the whole it was a fantastic weekend, with a bit of challenging caving thrown in for good measure. I hope our introductory cavers enjoyed it as much as I did.

Below is the survey of the new section in COMPASS. The survey line is in 3D with the 'T' stations being the main old survey of Keefs Cavern. AB section is aligned towards the viewer, T section (Gun-barrel Passage) is aligned away from the viewer towards the 'Gauge' and 'Pit', AB10 is the base of the new deep rift.



September Vertical Caving Weekend

P Bannink

A small group of enthusiastic cavers (Ray Deasy, Van Christenson, Emily Holt, Jamie Ellacott and Peter Bannink) assembled at the clubhouse for the September club event. First up was some SRT practice at the new abseil into Keefs Cavern (Keefs Abs). This is an excellent location, where you can literally step of a rock and head down without much fiddling around.



Emily enjoying prussic practice

Emily impressed us all with how little you could use to climb ropes, by just using prussic knots and a small descender. Change overs did take a longer time but she certainly has honed this technique. Our group spent much of the day going up and down till we had finally had enough.



Jamie just about at the free hang!

On the Sunday we thought of abseiling the large daylight into Blue Sky Cave, something a little different and a bit more of a thrill (as it is much more exposed). We were surprised to find 4 bolts available to anchor and backup the rope. The lead over the edge was however over very rough terrain requiring a number of bags and rope protectors. The rigging site is very sunny, so we ended up cooking on the limestone terrain for an hour at least till, we finally got all the rigging sorted.

Setting up the rope protectors at the lip of the free-hang proved quite difficult, as the protectors have a tendency to slide down the rope quite unexpectedly (if they are not secured properly). Ray was the first to descend followed by Jamie and Peter.



At the base of the Blue Sky doline, Jamie 'On Rope'.

The chamber is very spacious by Chillagoe standards, offering a spectacular decent into the cave. Once in the cool chamber, a few of us practiced change overs, while Emily and Jamie went exploring. Van took on the challenge of prusiking out to de-rig, while the rest of us chose a leisurely trip through to the closest exit.

Visit to Scaramouche CH259

Peter Bannink

In October eight cavers turned up for the club weekend. After the first day spent doing a Keefs Cavern through trip, the second day was a planned abseil into Technicolour Pot (in the Spring Tower Complex).

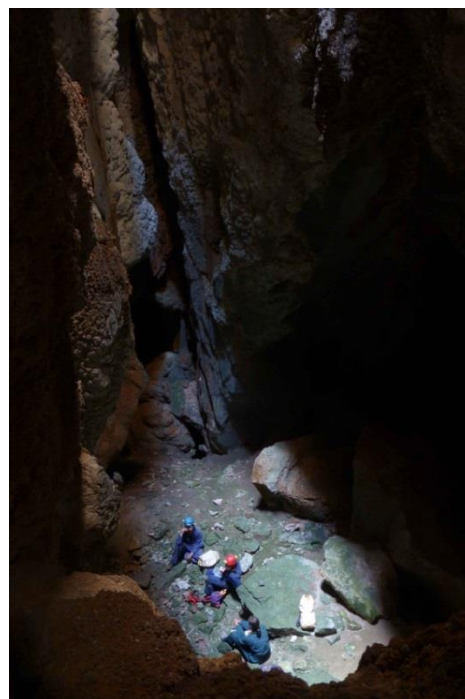
An hour into the trip and everything was going horribly wrong. We forgot the locality map and did not know any of the tag numbers, this was not helped by the fact that we had not been there for fourteen years. All these factors weighed heavily, as Van and Peter scrabbled over the same area of karst in the sun, convinced the entrance was nearby.

Another half an hour went by and by now it was very hot (34 °C) and everyone was getting thirsty. We all had a very limited amount of water to last the day. There was a final unanimous decision to just get into the nearest cave we could find, as Van had found a few tagged entrances close by. Sarah and Joy disappeared down a small fissure at CH259, reporting a steep climb down a narrow rift, with a right angle squeeze at the bottom, blowing air.



Sarah entering the squeeze

While the rest of the team contemplated whether it was worthwhile coming down, Sarah was able to get through the squeeze and report that it opened up further down. I was able to make the hole a little wider, making this a relatively easy obstacle. Further in, a distinctive flowstone filled rift identified the cave as Scaramouch. A cave which I last visited in 2000, over 15 years ago.



Lunch in the main rift of Scaramouch Cave

With everyone safely down the steep climb, groups of two or three set about exploring the various deep rifts and lower passages, where we were occasionally dazzled by spectacular light displays.

Lunch was a most relaxing affair and everyone had a great time exploring in different directions, most of the leads looped back and no links were discovered to any caves nearby. Paul Osborne reports that there is a connection to Good Black Friday via a squeeze, but this connection was not found.

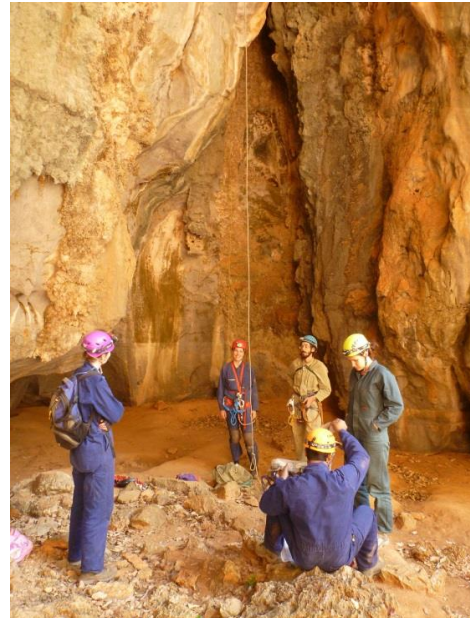
We all headed out in the early afternoon to catch a swim at the Chillagoe Wear. Despite the drought there was still enough water to wallow around in. Laura even found that swing rope worked quite well.

That evening everyone headed to the pub to catch a few cold beers and watch the footy. Sunday nights have the added bonus of throwing dice for your beer (an even number = free beer). I was pretty happy with two free beers to carry the evening forward. Van was ecstatic with the NRL Grand Final result, and all in the last few seconds of play. All together an unbelievable weekend.



Joy watching the sun beams

Van sorted out all the rigging, anchoring the ropes to two large chains, which have been bolted over the drops. This creates two neat free hangs, which can both be accessed from the same rest area.



The base of the free-hang pitch

Castle Cave Abseil Practice

Peter Bannink

On the Monday Van suggested some abseiling practice at Castle Cave. There were two descent options, a free hang and a re-belay. Not everyone had all the right prusik gear, but those without could walk out. Few in the group had visited Castle Cave before, so there was the added option of some cave exploration as well.



Gearing up at the top of the pitches

At about 28m, the descent into the softly lit doline is thrilling. It was a great confidence booster for the new vertical cavers. Some members had new Hydrobot descenders, although these seemed small and flimsy (almost like a belay device), however everyone reported they worked well.

Once down, we all entered Castle Cave and explored the area for about an hour. Peter had fun taking lots of daylight photo's while some members pushed some of the smaller leads in the cave. Those with prusik gear climbed the ropes, (the re-belay being a challenge for some ☺), while everyone else walked out. Thanks for another great vertical weekend!

Technicolour Pot

Peter Bannink

In October a great team of seven cavers turned up for the weekend highlights. The misadventure from the previous trip ensured Peter B. was well prepared to find Technicolour Pot, and knew where to look.

We all headed out quite late on the Saturday after waiting for the last two members to arrive, but we did find the cave in record time. The doline is quite large, dropping about 28 meters into a spacious chamber below. Peter and Ray took so

much time setting up the rope that the rest of the team climbed into the nearby entrance to Good Black Friday, to escape the heat. From there they rigged a ladder through to the same chamber.

Ray and Mark headed down the pitch while Peter went into GBF to check the ladder and rig the 6m belay.



Ray sorting out the rigging point

The phreatic connection to Technicolour Pot is an amazing place, and quite unique in Chillagoe. You can climb up, down and around, never quite knowing if you are heading in the right direction. The passages are like a massive sponge-work of holes confusing anyone who enters.



Climbing up to the formation chamber

By the time we got everyone down, Laura had a raging headache (probably due to the heat). The

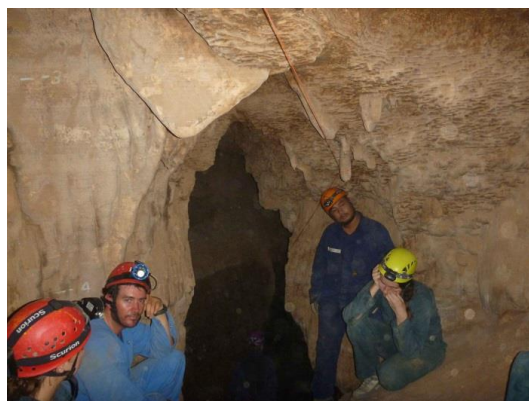
Pot is not that large but it lives up to the name, as daylight dazzles the side formations in a range of different colours. There are spectacular formations in different sections of the cave. The 'Bathtubs' can be accessed via a steep climb, and have to be just about the largest rim pools to be seen in Chillagoe.



Grabbing some shade after the exiting the cave

After lots of photo's were taken, we all headed out, climbing up the ladder to exit via the small fissure entrance into Good Black Friday. It was about 2.00pm and temperatures were reaching about 38 °C, so we planned to head back into another cave to cool off.

Peter chose Marachoo Cave, as everyone was keen for a cool crawly adventure, after enjoying such spacious cave passage. The entrance to Marachoo cave is quite small and very close to the car park, minimising any time walking around in the sun.



The final little chamber in Marachoo Cave.

While being a small cave, passages do extend down to the water table and cavers have occasionally documented the water level over time, since the cave was dived back in the 1980's. The route was cool and spacious in sections with the odd rock-pile to confuse everyone.

It took a while to get everyone down there but we finally made the connection at minus (-) 6m of the set base level. The old dive guide line is still in place and the route on only looked like a 1m duck-under. This was the lowest I have ever seen the water level in Chillagoe, I will refer to club records to see if it has ever got this low. The impact of the drought is reflected in the very low water levels evident in Marachoo Cave at the moment.

Exiting cavers were still keen for more, so a quick trip to Surprise Packet Cave completed a massive day of caving. I was for that matter, was totally stuffed!

New Cave Explored at the Archways

Peter Bannink

On the Sunday, with Peter suffering a muscle strain and Emily ill due to dehydration (from the day before), the rest of the cavers depended on Tim and Greg Gurnier, with Catherine and Mark Beattie to take them out to something interesting. Greg and Tim had a planned to explore a new doline in the area of the Archways Tower, so we all headed out by 8:30am.

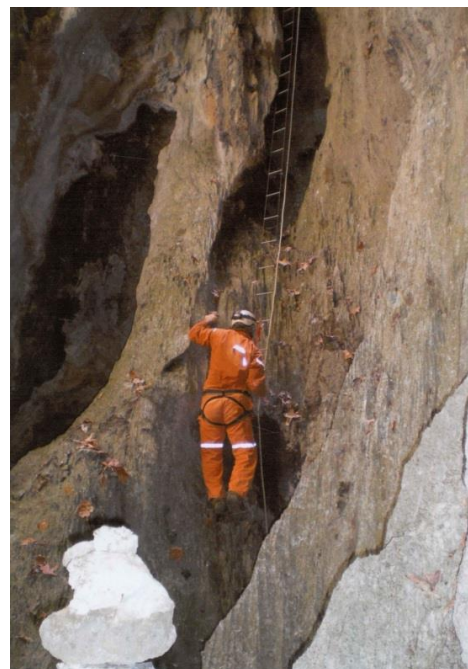


Looking into the doline, cavers at the bottom.

It took about half an hour to locate the new entrance via a difficult route over some very large boulders and through some very spiky vegetation. A large deep doline, nestled between the tower spikes. The hole was least 25m deep with sheer sides, making rigging very difficult. With some exploration of the site, a rigging point

was located 5m below the first viewing point, the sharp rock requiring an extended ladder pitch with a belay. At this point I left to catch up with Emily to work around Ryan Imperial Tower.

After about 3 hours I returned to find the last few team members exiting the cave. Catherine reported that a small section of passage was explored, and that they were not the first to enter the cave. Small cairns were found about the place indicating some-one had been there before, possibly getting in via another entrance. So we will have to return and try to figure how this cave is related to Royal Archway Cave (CH3) located on the southern side of the Tower.



Greg starting the climb out

Thanks to Mark, Catherine, Greg and Tim who did a fantastic job getting everyone up and down the ladder, in very difficult conditions.

Appendix A

Recommendation for Life Membership – Paul Osborne

It is recommended that Paul Osborne be awarded Life Membership of the Chillagoe Caving Club Inc. at the 2016 Chillagoe Club Inc. Annual General Meeting.

Paul qualifies in all respects with the requirements for Life Membership, as set out in Clause 4B of the Club Constitution, as follows:

(a) He has been a Club member for a long period

In 1979 Paul came from the most open air sport of all, skydiving, to the least open air sport, caving. He quickly became proficient in vertical caving. On the Easter 1980 Mitchell Palmer Expedition he really excelled, along with Alan Isgar, they found Deep Throat and Boob Tube on Mordor Tower. At about 80 meters these caves are the deepest caves in Queensland. Over the next twenty years Paul gained extensive caving experience, training in SRT caving, and in 2000 become a club caving instructor and assessor. This year Paul would have been caving (on and off) with the club in North Queensland and beyond, for almost 37 years.

(b) He has taken a responsible attitude in Club Leadership

In the 1980's Paul ran his own successful tandem skydiving operation, **Paul's Parachuting**, and rose to be Director of Safety of the Australian Parachute Federation. He has brought those skills to the club and in 2000 became one of the clubs few SRT caving assessors, he also assisted in setting up the clubs standards for Trip Leader assessment in horizontal caving and SRT. He has always shown leadership in the many caving projects and expeditions he has undertaken in Australia and overseas. Paul has also lead by example in supporting many of the developments at the clubhouse being the building and maintenance officer between 2005 and 2010. In this time he totally refurbished the kitchen and supported various working groups as the old school was refurbished. More recently he installed a second water tank, and re-layed the water mains to the clubhouse. A sign of his continued true commitment to the caving club and its presence in Chillagoe.

For the past five years Paul has taken on the task of President of the club. His many years of experience working with the Australian Parachute Federation, and in business management, risk assessment and Public Liability, have helped guide the club over this period. His knowledge and experience in SRT caving is extensive and he has given time and effort into training fellow Club members, encouraging them to enhance their skills and take on leadership roles.

(c) Paul is recognized in caving circles for his skills knowledge and experience

Wanting more challenges, Paul often went caving in New Zealand (NZ) and Tasmania where the caves are seriously big (and cold). He has established close relations with the cavers at Nelson in the North of the South Island and with the Mole Creek Caving Club. Paul organized the legendary 2009 CCC trip to NZ. Highlights were the 28 hour through trip of Nettlebed Cave and the 176 metre pitch into Harwood's Hole. For the NZ trip he organised multiple training sessions to ensure everyone was able to cross re-belays and change direction while on rope. Skills hardly needed in Chillagoe, but vital in NZ. His gear is always the latest, he is very safety conscious and he raises the standard of all cavers around him.

Douglas Irvin & Peter Bannink

Nominated by: Winfried Weiss

Seconded by: Alan Cummins

MEMBERSHIP LIST 2015/2016

Executive

Paul Osborne	(President)	El Arish	1979
Van Christensen	(Secretary)	Dimbulah	2003
Peter Bannink	(Treasurer)	Mareeba	2000

Club Members (non caving)

Les Pearson	(Life Member)	Brinsmead	1973
Beth Pearson		Brinsmead	1991

Club Members (caving)

Belinda Bannink & family	Mareeba	2011
Kimberlee Bernays	Kairi	2011
Mark & Catherine Beattie	Atherton	2014 & 1995
Alan & Cummins (Life Member)	Gordonvale	1973
Chrissie Cummins	Gordonvale	2014
Peter Cummins	Atherton	1983
Jeff Cotter	Kawarra Beach	2014
Ray Deasey	Bundaberg	2013
Peter English	Redlynch	2014
Max Emney	Silkwood	2002
Greg Gurnier & family	Gordonvale	1997
Jonathon Ham	Bayview	2011
Robert Ham	Bayview	1988
Phil Harrison	Cairns	2007
Chris Head	Flying Fish Point	2007
Bruce Hewett	Mt Sheridan	2013
Sue Jenkins	Silkwood	1992
Katie Keophilaph (SUSS + ASF)	Fairfield Heights (NSW)	2015
Wendy Lander	Yungaburra	1983
Daniel Mitchell & family	Mareeba	2000
Steven Morgan & family	Mackay	2007
Paco Murray	Townsville	2007
Graham Murray	Herberton	2008
Ebony Murray	Herberton	2008
David-Stephen Myles (SUSS)	Blacktown (NSW)	2015
Barry Neale	Herberton	1994
Keith Offer	Mutchilba	1975
Grant Polomka	Tully	2001
Alan Pryke (SUSS)	Yowie Bay (NSW)	2013
Denis Stojanovic (SUSS + ASF)	East Kurrajong (NSW)	2015
Mike Tarburton	Blackburn South (Vic)	2011
Deanne Vale	Tully	2001
Winfried Weiss	Tolga	1993
Barry Wright	Bayview Heights	1975
Robert Zmeskal & Watson family	Manunda	2013

Introductory Members (caving)

Berrend Akkerman	Kuranda	2010	Rodney Kiely	White Rock	2015
Sarah Abbott	Smithfield	2015	Alison Kempe	Kuranda	2014
Rone Bakuwel	Sarina Beach	2015	Emily Holt	Trinity Park	2015
Bernadette Becher	Mt Victoria (NSW)	2015	Barry Lacey	Balangowan	2015
Joy Burton	Yorkeys Knob	2015	Ellene Liddle	Woree	2013
Chris Cox	Cairns	2014	Stephen Nenke	Lithgow (NSW)	2015
Kirsten Cox	Mount Sheridan	2014	Sam Noonan	Townsville	2015
Troy Crawford	Gordonvale	2015	Wuthipong Piamaree (Boy)	Manunda	2015
Phillip Duffey	Caravonica	2015	Amy Scanlan	Bowen	2015
Greg Elsley	Cairns	2014	Kevin Smith	Mt Pleasant	2014
Jamie Ellacott	Yabulu	2014	Rachael Trevarthen	Brisbane	2015
Erin Ellison	Westcourt	2015	Danniel Turner	Kangaroo Point	2015
Marta Del Pozo Fonesca	Spain	2015	Adriana Uzqueda	Hermit Park	2015
Micheal Gailer	Caravonica	2015	Sage Weikel	Smithfield	2015
Laura Johnson	Manunda	2015			

Clubhouse Protocol

1. Members have access to the Club area on the ground floor of Clubhouse building. The upstairs back residence, together with the garage and laundry area on the town side of the Club area and the adjacent yard area, are for the private use of the Caretaker.
2. The Caretaker has a lease on her part of the property and the Club has only the limited access allowed under the Residential Tenancies Act. Therefore, Members should contact the Caretaker upon arrival and before departure, but otherwise, enter the private area only on the invitation of the Caretaker.
3. Members, when intending to stay at the Clubhouse, should have the courtesy to telephone or e-mail the Caretaker to advise her in advance. If the Caretaker is absent, an email message can be sent to the current e-mail address [cavingclubcarol@gmail.com].
4. Members, when in Chillagoe, may use the Clubhouse facilities, even if not staying at the Clubhouse. However, it is courtesy to tell the Caretaker before using the facilities.

5. Mutual courtesy between Members (and their guests) and the Caretaker is to be expected at all times.

6. Responsibilities of Caretaker are to:

- (a) Maintain grounds in tidy and safe condition and do any minor maintenance to buildings etc.
- (b) Keep Clubhouse clean when not in use by Members
- (c) Maintain supply of toilet paper, cleaning supplies and cleaning equipment for use by Members
- (d) Keep refrigerator and freezer ready for use by Members
- (e) Ensure security is maintained for lights, tackle and other Club property
- (f) Ensure trip book is accessible and, as much as practical, monitor trip book, particularly for the safe return of caving parties.
- (g) Collect Camping and Tackle fees on behalf of Treasurer
- (h) Report to Club Executive any problems he encounters with Clubhouse, Members or guests

7. Responsibilities of Members are to:

- (a) Keep Clubhouse and the outdoor toilet and shower block clean and tidy, while in residence. Cleanliness should be checked to be satisfactory before leaving.
- (b) Avoid use of the toilet and shower inside the Clubhouse as we have soakage pit problems which show up after there is much use of these
- (c) Park cars in an orderly fashion at the allocated parking area and keep vehicle speed down to walking pace to minimize hazard and dust.
- (d) Report to Caretaker any deficiencies in cleaning supplies, equipment etc.
- (e) Use trip book if caving
- (f) Dispose of food scraps and rubbish at the Chillagoe tip on a regular basis and when leaving
- (g) Camping inside the Clubhouse should be avoided except in emergencies (i.e. if drenched in heavy storm)
- (h) If using Clubhouse at night, keep noise down, particularly after 10pm.**
- (i) Behave in the town and at the Clubhouse in such a way that the Club's reputation is enhanced and not diminished.
- (j) Report to Executive any problems encountered in using the Clubhouse and make suggestions where improvements are needed.

Authorized by Committee of Management 27th April 2013.



**A daylight shaft
Scaramouche Cave; Spring Tower
Chillagoe**

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