



CHILLAGOE CAVING CLUB

P O BOX 92, CAIRNS QLD 4870

ABN 52 614 187 726

President: **Paul Osborne** Phone: 4068 5259 Email: p1953@bigpond.com
Secretary: **Winfried Weiss** Phone: 40966 028 Email: [mailto: wmweiss@westnet.com.au](mailto:wmweiss@westnet.com.au)
Treasurer: **Peter Bannink** Phone: 4092 6036 Email: peter.bannink@derm.qld.gov.au
Caretaker: **Carol Davis** Phone: 4094 7036 Clubhouse, Cathedral St, Chillagoe 4871

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NEWSLETTER

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Thanks to all members who have renewed their membership. There are still a few members outstanding who have yet to pay membership fees. Membership cards will be mailed soon.

Piano Tower Exploration!

There is a planned expansion of the Red Dome mine in the direction of Piano Tower National Park. An examination of the existing cave locality maps indicated very little speleo work has ever been done in the area. Two major karst towers with no caves recorded in them at all. This is a bit of a mystery!

Peter and assistant Ben took the opportunity in late September to explore the area for new caves. Limestone towers are rarely solid rock but you never know, this area could be like the Ramparts just east of Chillagoe Town which have very few documented caves.

It was about 10.00am when we got going and drove out to the locked gate near the Red Dome pit.



CH View over eastern section P.Bannink

Walking in along the old railway track (very easy), the limestone towers appeared to be larger than first thought. We started on the eastern side and walked up the back (northern slopes) of the outcrop, encountering lots of scrub and boulders. Near the top the distinctive smell of a bat colony wafted through the air but we could not find where it was coming from (under the boulders?).

We worked out way west through thick scrub along the top of the tower and eventually around the base of a distinctive tower block. Only one small entrance was located, but this closed down very quickly. Climbing down the southern face nothing was located, all promising hollows leading nowhere.

We had lunch at the bottom and then walked around the western part of the outcrop and

finally located a most promising vertical entrance and a deep narrow grike (7m) nearby.



Piano Vertical rift (7m deep) P.Bannink

With no vertical gear, exploration would have to wait for another time. We then walked west onto the next massive tower but found nothing significant. The top of the Tower did offer magnificent views over the whole area. Hot and bothered by 2.00pm we got out of the area before the heat really began to set in



Piano (central) View south P.Bannink

Colless Creek Grikefield (CK)

The September school holidays began with the ambitious plan to visit Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park near the NT Boarder about 1000km west of Cairns. Three days of driving with hyper-active kids really tested our resolve, but we got there in the end.

Close to the camping area is a large karst area in which are reported to be four cave entrances. I thought a day walk to the area would make a nice change from the days of swimming and walking we were doing around the gorge.

I started off at 5.00am and got half way there before a brilliant dawn signalled the start of the coming heat wave. Crossing the river above the upper gorge lookout, the first outcrops of Thornton Limestone were encountered. A short climb up the moderately steep side of the gorge, allowed access to a ridge-line which lead to the Colless Creek Grikefield, after about a 1 km of walking.



CK Surrounding country side P.Bannink

The walking was very easy and trusting my field map I reached the outcrop by about 7.15am. The area is very like karst at Bullita in the Northern Territory. A very large flat lying limestone outcrop (karrenfield), with increased levels of karst exposure and development as one trend towards Colless Creek. The area is quite large 1.2km x 700m so I was not quite sure where to start..



Colless Creek Karst Landscape P.Bannink

The first objective was too relocated and GPS the existing entrances but as I proceeded walking on the exposed outcrop, navigation became very difficult. I encountered quite a few vertical entrances which dropped into rifts about 7m below the surface. I decided to instead walk around the perimeter and record any entrances which I located.



Colless Creek Vertical Entrance P.Bannink

I only had an hour before I had to head back and this was just enough time to record the locality of four entrances, two of which looked to have good prospects. My boot began to fall apart at the start of my return journey so I had to hobble back at a slow pace. I nearly missed the ridgeline I used to climb out of the gorge (which would have been a horrible mistake), but got down to the river for a cool swim before the long walk back. Despite the loss of one boot I still got back at me estimated time of return (10:15am) the thermometer was just reaching 36 C (it was 40.5 by 12.30pm).

It may be best to visit the area in June/July and camp in the karst area as the 3.5km walk (one way) will become a little tiring. It's a long way to drive for a few days caving but the gorge and local walks in the area are worth a look. Take an extra tyre, we got a flat 10km from the gorge (on the return journey), but luckily made it to Normanton without another.

Broken River - revisited

Paco, Alan Pryke and four other cavers took the opportunity in September to revisit the BR

region again and continue to explore the caves they are mapping out there.

Beehive Cave has been extended to 1.3 km while the Three Avenues increased to 1.9 km. This is a massive effort to all involved. Below are two photos provided by Alan showing some amazing passages found in the caves.



Michael Casteleyn in Geologists Find A.Pryke



Michael Casteleyn in Three Avenues A.Pryke

SSS visit

I noted in the last journal of the Sydney Speleological Society that a few SSS members are coming up the north to view the eclipse of the sun in Cairns. An additional caving trip to

Chillagoe is planned from the 14th – 18th of November.

I am sure they will not mind if some of our members join them at that time. It's a good opportunity to share our caving knowledge with SSS members, though I am sure they will know there way around.

Up and Coming Events:

November

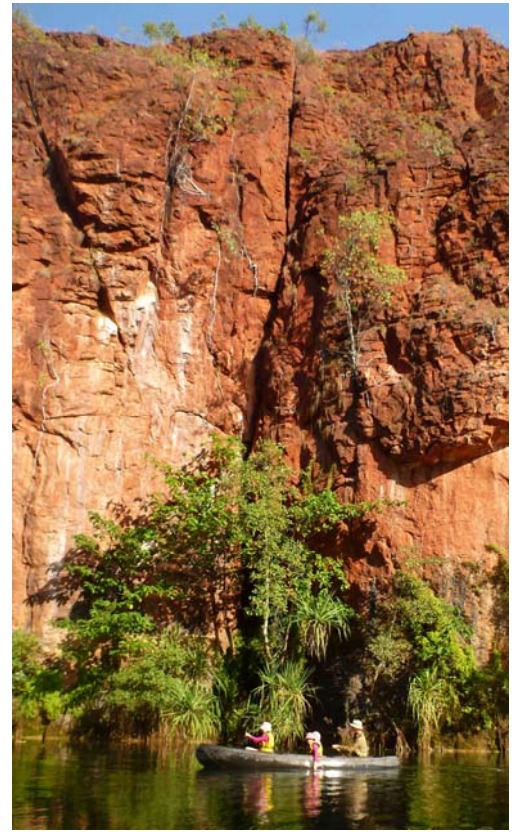
Caving Club weekend 10th & 11th November re-
- Kimberlee possibly caving.
14-18 November - SSS visit to Chillagoe
17th Nov. - Peter Bannink possibly caving!

December

Caving Club Christmas Party 1st and 2nd of December

Go Caving!

Peter Bannink (acting Secretary)



Lawn Hill Fantastic views! P.Bannink

Some additional photo's....



Lawn Hill Canoeing up the gorge P.Bannink



Lawn Hill Indarri Falls J.Crane