



CHILLAGOE CAVING CLUB

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NEWSLETTER

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It's already near the end of another year!
While the executive have not been as busy as in other years, clubs members have, with quite a few expeditions to the Broken River Region. A large number of new cave entrances have been located and tagged in Chillagoe and at Broken River.

Note that is likely to be the last newsletter for the year as the caving season closes during the wet.

New cave on Piano Tower!

It was about 9.00am when we headed out to the eastern section of the Piano Tower complex. We took some basic equipment to explore the new doline Peter has located in September. The walk is about a kilometre, and with a bit of scrub bashing the entrance was easily located. Peter rigged a small ladder to enter the small collapse doline (only 4m deep), a large nearby tree located provided a convenient anchor point.

Once down, Kimberlee descended the entrance rift and reported a 6m pitch beyond the entrance. Peter put on his vertical gear, rigged a rope and descended carefully into a small chamber. A quick scout around indicated there were more rifts to explore, so Kimberlee and Ellen then climbed down using some convenient footholds and the rope as a handhold.



CH Kimberlee exploring a large rift P.Bannink

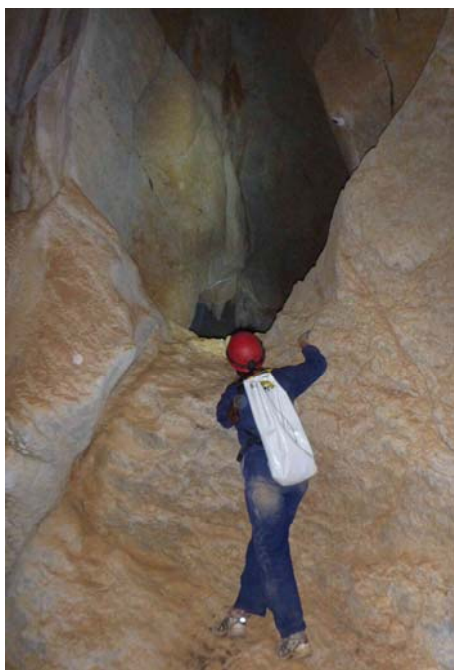
The entrance chamber contained some great formation and above opened up as a large phreatic rift. Leading off the main rift (to the left) were three intersecting rifts smaller in size and about 20m in length. At the far end the passages all closed down to impassable

rocky passage with little prospect for further extension.



CH View of formation area P.Bannink

Beyond the third rift the passage sloped upward into a small upper section with a few small passages, all closing down (with no air movement). Peter spent some time carefully sketching the cave; we forgot the survey gear again.

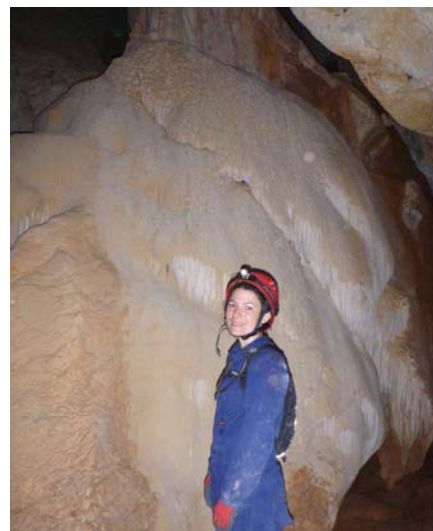


CH Kimberlee examining an upper rift P.Bannink

There were no bats and the only wildlife seen were spiders and some cave crickets in the upper rifts. One passage was not explored as there was delicate formation to cross, but it looked to have little prospects.

The cave was tiny covering an area of only (20x60m) and it was disappointing that none of the leads extended further into the outcrop.

The cave is large enough to document, so Kimberlee thought of the name Beethoven's Blimping Boutique Bar, (shortened to B4 minor), as it's a minor cave on the outcrop - the name has nothing to do with actual acoustic scales. Once out we examined a second entrance rift nearby which did not join to the cave we had just explored. A small team still has to go back to push this one, the second entrance is a little more difficult to enter (a 40cm wide, 6-8m deep narrow rift with very sharp limestone). December Christmas Party anyone?



CH Ellen with large flowstone formation P.Bannink

Bungonia

My first impression of Bungonia was that the camping ground was completely full. Admittedly when we arrived it was 11pm on a Thursday night, but we certainly didn't expect dozens of PE teacher students to have converged on our particular patch and taken all the best spots. So, like most cavers who arrive late at night, we chucked up a tent beside the car and didn't worry about the niceties of finding a level (or soft) patch of ground.

The next morning we were up early, keen to begin the day exploring one of the more famous caves of the area – Drum cave. Breakfast consisted of bacon and egg burgers which we deliberately cooked on a BBQ in the middle of the campground. The sounds of despair arising from the PE teacher tents as the bacon smell wafted around gave us some small revenge for the previous evening – they obviously weren't as well provisioned as we were.

After breakfast it was off to Drum Cave which was a short 500m drive along a nicely kept gravel road. We could have walked I suppose, but why strain ourselves? After all, we were then forced to actually walk another 200m to the doline containing the entrance.



Drum Cave Entrance

The entrance itself is a reasonably large opening at the base of the doline, leading into a small chamber. The first obstacle encountered is a 4 metre pitch leading to a ledge just beside the main pitch of 60 metres. The cave is bolted the whole way through making it much easier to rig.

Once on the first leg of the main pitch I was struck by the clean rock surrounding me. The abseil is spectacular as it drops down a circular shaft, before belling out slightly into a large chamber at the bottom. A rebelay about halfway marked the free hanging part of the pitch and was passed without incident.



60m pitch

From the first pitch the cave then continued along a narrow boulder floored passage before coming to the 'squeeze'. Joe had warned me that this bit was tight, and might cause some difficulty. Being a bit larger than most cavers I was a bit worried about this, and when I turned around to ask where the squeeze was I was told that the metre long and half a metre high grovel I just went through had been it! Lol.



The tight bit.....

The cave then continued along the rift and opened out into a series of chambers containing some formation and fossils. The cave kept descending and soon we were at the next pitch of about 20 metres. The rock at this point was wet and slippery, but posed little drama as the bolts were well placed and easily accessible. The final part of the pitch dropped some 6 metres back into the streambed and the beginning of the cave's largest chamber – the Railway tunnel.

Climbing down over a series of large cascading rimstone pools allowed me to appreciate the size of this part of the cave – some 30 metres of passage, 15 metres wide and 20 high. The rock in this part of the cave was inky black and seemed to absorb our light, as did the silt and mud on the floor, but luckily Joe had his version of the venerable 'bat fryer' along. It seemed an obvious place to stop for a breather (about 3 hours in) and it also gave us the chance to use another piece of specialised equipment I had never used – the CO2 meter.

Bungonia is noted for its high levels of CO2 in various caves, and Drum cave proved no different. Ambient CO2 levels in the atmosphere are usually about 0.038% or thereabouts, but in these caves can rise to well over 5 percent. At higher levels (2% and above) it is possible to notice that breathing becomes harder and that everything requires more effort. Higher levels still can lead to serious complications for cavers and are best avoided.

In our case, the initial reading obtained was 0.5%. This level didn't affect me at all and was for all intents and purposes negligible. However as we continued to explore the cave we noted steadily increasing levels, peaking at 3.5% in the Drum Cave extension. Needless to say we all noticed that at that concentration of CO2 breathing became much harder. Luckily our stay in that part of the cave was relatively short.

From the Railway tunnel we made our way down to the Drum Cave's current end point, the sump. Another short (6m) pitch led us into the final part of the stream passage which dropped down over mud and gravel banks to where the cave roof met the murky water of the stream. I noted that the high water mark was at least three or four metres up the wall, which was covered in sticky mud. Combined with high CO2 this was not a particularly inviting place to linger.



The end.... Sump 1 at the bottom of the cave.

After bottoming Drum Cave (about -120m) we made our way back to the Railway tunnel, which held a surprise. Sometime during the reign of the dinosaurs (i.e. more than 20 years ago) a very enterprising group of cavers looked at the roof, and noted a large hole about 15 metres off the floor. As there was no way to climb to it a scaling pole was used to get up there and Drum Cave extension was found. A pull through rope was then installed for future trips.

We spent 20 frustrating minutes pulling our rope through, finally securing it correctly. Then we prusiked up into the extension. The extension itself is a single oval shaped tunnel of quite large dimensions. It sits almost directly above the main passage of the cave, and extends beyond the 'first sump' before coming down to its level and also sumping out. To me this was the best part of the cave, with interesting formations, particularly the scalloping on the tunnel ceiling. The tunnel is also a really classic example of passage that we don't often get up in the Chillagoe area.



Drum Cave extension

The CO2 content was very high in the Extension (2.5 – 3.5 %) and after taking an easy stroll to its end, we abseiled back down into better atmospheric conditions in the main cave.

We spent the next few hours slowly working our way back out of Drum Cave, de-rigging as we went. I won't lie and say the prusik back up the main pitch was a breeze... it was a solid

effort. But it was worth every minute and every bead of sweat. Drum Cave is an awesome sporting cave and after 8 hours of exploring its depths all I can say is that I would love to come back and explore the rest of Bungonia's treasures.



Back up the main pitch

My thanks go to Joe Sydney for organising a great trip for myself and Seamus. We are always happy to return the favour in the north!



The team after 8 hours in Drum Cave.

Total Solar Eclipse

I am sure all members made an effort to get to Cairns or the Tablelands to view this spectacular event. Having only seen a partial eclipse back in the 1980's, I was absolutely awe-struck by the actual total eclipse.

Lucky enough to be viewed from my front door, the family all waited in anticipation, as the sun got cooler and cooler as the eclipse proceeded.



Photo through the special glasses P.Bannink

The moment of Totality was an absolute highlight (all 100 seconds of it), and I spent more time fiddling with the camera than actually watching the spectacle.



Moons shadow appears at the start of Totality P.Bannink

I was also worried about eye damage as you could not see Totality through the special glasses and had to view it with the naked eye. As totality proceeded some stars appeared in the background and Belinda saw strange shimmering over the ground. I would recommend the experience to anyone, it was just amazing.



Close up of the Totality V. Manley

I have included a few photo's, only one or two actually came out, a work colleague got a better shot of the totality.



It got quite dark (half way through) P.Bannink

Club wins Grant

Thanks to Kimberlee the club has won a equipment grant from Brothers Leagues Club in Cairns. A \$1000 worth of rescue equipment has been ordered by Paul. What an effort Kimberlee, this is a welcome addition to the clubs equipment store.

Christmas Party

Members are encouraged to gather at the clubhouse in early December to catch up, swap stories and do some caving. It's BYO with food and spirits, the BBQ will be fired up for the event.

Up and Coming Events:

November

Caving Club weekend 10th & 11th November

- Kimberlee possibly caving.

14-18 November - SSS visit to Chillagoe

December

Caving Club Christmas Party

- 1st and 2nd of December

January-March

No specific caving planned for the wet season, but we are bound to head out there! Give someone from the Executive a call if you want to come.

Go Caving!

Peter Bannink & Winfried Weiss (Secretary)