



# CHILLAGOE CAVING CLUB

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## MARCH 2014

## NEWSLETTER

[WWW.CHILLAGOECAVINGCLUB.ORG.AU](http://WWW.CHILLAGOECAVINGCLUB.ORG.AU)

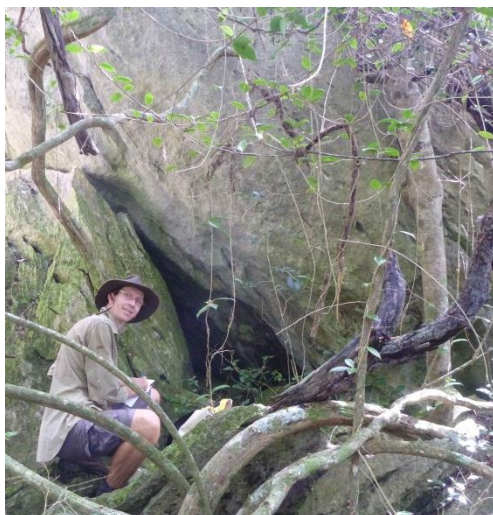
### In This Issue....

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### Wallace Creek Karst Expedition

Peter and Winfried were fortunate to get permission to travel to Kings Plains Station in early January to examine the Wallace Creek caves documented by CCC back in 1983. The aim was to confirm the location of the existing tags and to venture further a-field and explore the smaller karst towers to the north.

The caves previously documented are all located in a massive limestone tower (T5006) known as Melody Rocks. From the aerial photo, the area looked relatively easy to navigate, but conditions were very different on the ground.



The 'slot' entrance to (WC7) Ripple Cave

On the first day we ventured into thick rainforest scrub down the western side of Melody Rocks. It would have been fine but stinging plants were scattered everywhere, and just about every shrub had to be examined carefully, so as not to touch it.

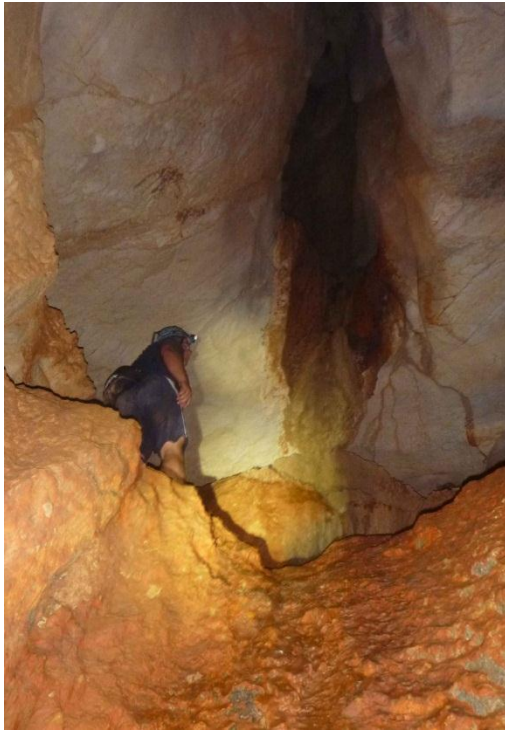
The first cave entrance encountered was recognised from a 1983 photo as an entrance to cave WC3 (though no tag was found). The stinging trees became so numerous we had to venture onto the karst itself, slowly climbing down the eastern side to the base of the outcrop.

A small doline was soon encountered near the base and we ventured further down and around to look for an efflux. We did not go far before a slot revealed passage beyond. While Peter took GPS readings Winfried went in for a good look around. Once inside the slot opened up between large boulders to a wide chamber, lit up by a larger entrance on the right hand side.



Ripple Cave showing phreatic roof pendants

The sculptured roof was stunning and passage extended deeper into the outcrop. Further in, a large sloping chamber was revealed with a small dry stream way meandering between 2m high mud banks. After about 60m the chamber terminated at a 5m slippery cascade with passage extending on above. With a little assistance, Winfried carefully climbed up and set up a tape.

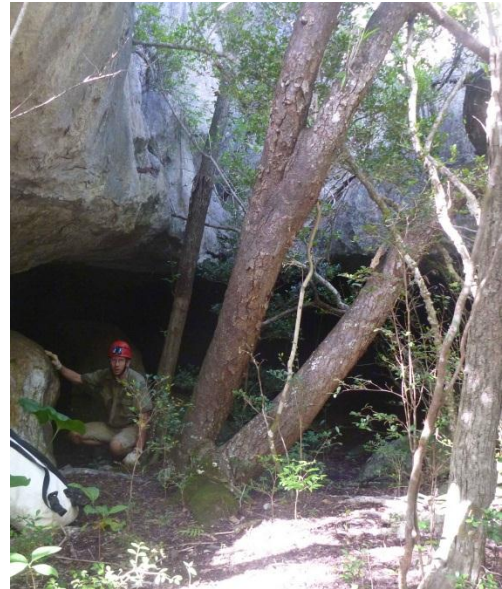


Winfried above the slippery 'Cascade'

Above the climb, phreatic passages extended off in different directions, with an 8m aven intersecting from above. Winfried explored further along the largest phreatic tunnel, which continued on for about 100m before opening out to a small doline collapse. The cave proved to be the base chamber of Ripple cave, though we did not find a tag on the entrance. Exiting just before dusk, we walk back up to the top on the eastern side. Comparing the GPS readings, the tower appeared to be about 80 - 100m high.

The next day was set aside to explore smaller towers to the north. A team of biologists had explored the area few weeks earlier, and recorded four new cave entrances. Our aim was to add to the list as best we could. A 6.00am start got us down to the new caving area in about 20 min. We first encountered a tiny doline, and thinking it to be Keyhole Cave, started to document the tiny feature. Crawling through the low undercut passages (60cm high), Winfried spotted some stunning ancient Quinkin art figures painted on the roof.

We then moved further down to a small creek crossing the exposed limestone. Back against the outcrops we found 'Echidna Cave' and pushed a few leads, but none seemed to go. Echidna cave is another traditional art site and the cave was obviously used for habitation with a domed roof and a wide side passage you could just throw your swag onto.



Echidna Cave entrance

We then decided to walk to the most northern part of the limestone outcrops and work out way back. It took half an hour to pick out way north along the creek line in mostly flat open country with limestone pediment. The northern outcrops where low scattered ruiniform karst blocks (4-6m), with little cave development.



Creek flowing over karst pediment



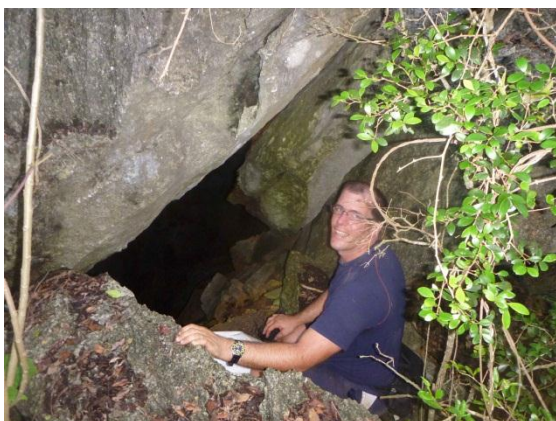
We did encounter small phreatic tunnels in the limestone blocks and a few overhangs showed further evidence of human habitation, with scattered art, grinding rocks and limestone tools. Nothing was disturbed.



Rock shelter with tool grinding rock

The first large outcrop we encountered (~ 16m high) still had limited cave development. We found three 8m deep narrow grikes (indicating there is passage below), but we could not find a negotiable entrance. The area looked to have little promise for caves of any real size. After lunch we had travelled back to the gorge and walked to Tower T5005.

Although smaller than Melody Rocks, the biologists had found two deep vertical entrances at the top of tower just alongside a ridgeline. We climbed down northern end, over massive blocks, shrouded in thick vines. Nothing was encountered in this area and we became quite frustrated picking out way over the boulder piles.



Winfried at Rubble Pit entrance

Climbing back up towards the tower through thicker rainforest, we came upon a steep doline descending 12m into passage below, a promising find. We called this Rubble Pit, due to all the loose material at the entrance. We were very tired when

we finally made it to the top for a rest and to enjoy the view. The vast expanse of Cape York faded into the distance and Australian Swiftlets zipped around us in the late afternoon.



Winfried on top of tower T5005

On the way back we thought we might tackle more karst around the base of Melody Rocks and do a drawing of the cave we had found the day before.

After a steep descent, we again entered thick rainforest scrub, large blocks of limestone occurring on the right hand side of the valley. We picked out way over the karst looking for entrances, zigzagging up and down the karst as we moved up towards the main tower. The scrub and vines were formidable, 3m deep gullies were encountered in more intact sections but none of these karst features lead to any real caves. By the time we reached the main tower we were pretty much exhausted, happy to finally arrive back at a cave. Peter spent an hour sketching the main chamber while Winfried found a small phreatic tunnel leading to two 8m deep pits. With fading daylight, we headed out and walked back to camp, after nearly 10 hours on the go.

We only had a few hours on the last day to continue exploration. We decided to tackle a new tower seen nestled in a deep rainforest valley to the west of Melody Rocks and only 500 metres to the south of T5005. It was bad choice, as the scrub was the thickest seen on the trip. So thick, we had to crawl along pig trails for the first hour before the vegetation opened up little, under thicker rainforest.

The first karst blocks encountered were just rubble and that was all we found. We had walked off the ridgeline too far along and had missed the most intact section of karst. We found a large fig tree holding up some monster boulders of limestone, masses of tangled vines, stinging tree's and endless scrub. Once we had ventured into the vegetation,

we could not see very far ahead and Winfried's GPS kept us going in the right direction.



Floating boulders held up by a very large fig tree

By the time we got back up to the ridgeline, we were hot, soaked in sweat, with numerous cuts and abrasions. The obvious choice was to head back up to Melody Rocks for a look at the view, and the welcome breeze. The top of the tower has an impressive karst landscape with deeply incised solution flutes (rillenkarren), pinnacles (spitzkarren) and flat floored runnels. We found it very difficult to climb about, encountering the occasional deep grike. By 10.00 am we headed back to camp to pack up for our return journey.

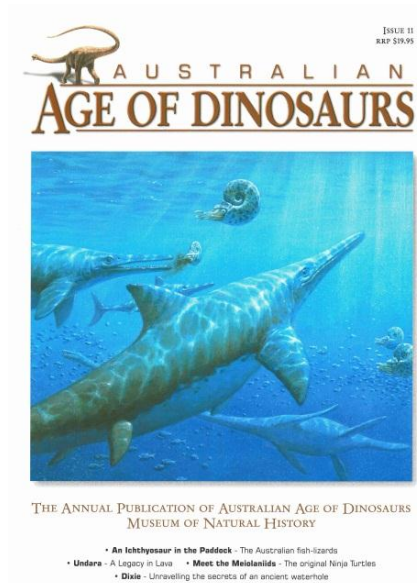
What a totally amazing remote place, different from any of the other caving regions in North Queensland. I am sure the area still has many caving surprises and if all the caves on Melody Rocks are joined, the possibility of mapping the deepest cave in Queensland. We hope to return.



An 8m deep vertical shaft in Ripple Cave (WC7)

## **New Undara Article Published**

The club recently received a copy of a very well written article on the Undara Lava Tubes, by Dr Gilbert Price. The article is printed in Volume 11 of the 'Australian Age of Dinosaurs'. A copy will be available to read at the AGM to read or look at the website below to purchase a copy.



<http://australianageofdinosaurs.com>

## **Up and Coming Events**

### **March**

- 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> - Club Weekend caving at Chillagoe. Please contact Peter or Winfried if you plan to attend.
- 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> - March Mt Etna Weekend (Rockhampton). Please contact Steven Morgan at [steven.morgan61@gmail.com](mailto:steven.morgan61@gmail.com)

### **April**

- 18<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> Club Weekend Trip at Chillagoe

### **May**

- **Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> May** Club AGM (7.00pm start)

Go Caving!

Peter Bannink & Winfried Weiss (Secretary)