



# 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](mailto:p1953@bigpond.com)  
Secretary: **Van Christensen** Phone: Email: [vanjamin6@hotmail.com](mailto:vanjamin6@hotmail.com)  
Treasurer: **Peter Bannink** Phone: 4092 6036 Email: [peter.bannink@derm.qld.gov.au](mailto:peter.bannink@derm.qld.gov.au)  
Caretaker: **Carol Davis** Phone: 4094 7036 Clubhouse, Cathedral St, Chillagoe 4871

## OCTOBER 2014

### NEWSLETTER

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

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#### CHILLAGOE SUSS/CCC 2014 - 1

(Alan Pryke & Felix Ossig-Bonanno)

Alan Pryke and myself flew out from Sydney domestic airport taking advantage of Alan's access to the Gold lounge. We arrived in Cairns that afternoon where we were lucky enough to have a lift, a place to spend the night and a car, all complementary of Nikola. We went out to buy some supplies, joining the frantic people, scurrying around in the pending doom of the category 5 cyclone Ita (which the BOM had predicted would pass right over Chillagoe!).

To prevent getting stuck in the city, we left early. On the way I was lucky enough to pick up a \$4 pair of overalls from Vinnies, Mareeba. As we drove across the Atherton Tablelands I was impressed by the numerous anthills that rose everywhere like small castles. We soon arrived at the Chillagoe Cave House, and after settling in and meeting Carol, we decided to fill in the remainder of the day with some afternoon caving at Hippy Tower.

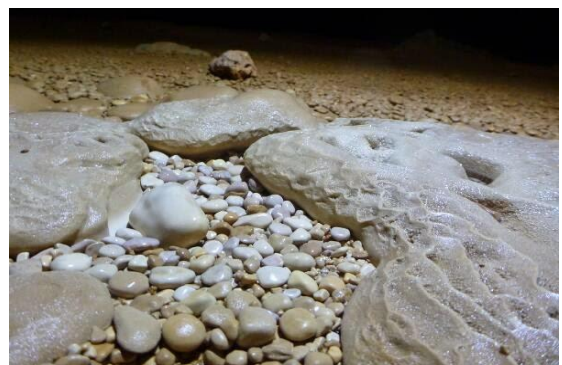
Having never done any tropical caving (nothing outside NSW actually), the karst tower was an impressive playground.

After a short climb down through a rift decorated with cave-coral, we emerged into a green oasis in the middle of the bluff. I wasn't used to seeing so much greenery whilst caving. We climbed down passing through a curved courtyard with beautiful straight walls encircling a fig tree with many bracing legs and fruit strangely sprouting from the trunk itself.

We passed through a low passage with impressive formations (including a large column with sizable rim-pools on one of its sides) and emerged into another daylight hole. Thoroughly impressed, we headed back to the Club House to enjoy the first of Carol's famous dinners.

#### **Geck and West Geck (Spring Tower)**

The light drizzle and made the walk to Geck a cool undertaking, we entered via the old tourist ladders. After negotiating a boulder pile, we emerged into a massive chamber with the grey sky visible through a couple of large daylight holes.



Shiny Oolites in Geck Cave.

© F. Ossig-Bonanno

The weather changed the atmosphere of the cave; drips of water could be heard echoing around us,

sometimes sounding like the not so distant voices of people murmuring to one another.

We passed around a large pool of water fed by a number of small streams and traversed across the room trying to find the least destructive path through the minefield of oolites. We dumped our stuff pausing for a moment to look at the stalactites silhouetted against the sky.

We then started surveying the Eastern side of the chamber making an attempt to have some overlap with the partial SSS survey we had. We didn't make much progress in that direction, but did get to see a Children's python opposite the Chocolate Fountain flowstone.

Next we went through a passage to the South which opened up into a huge chamber with two gaping holes to the outside world. Continuing south we discovered a cool exit via a small hole which allowed you to walk out onto a panoramic rock platform which would have been an ideal lunch spot if not for the rain.



© F. Ossig-Bonanno

Alan Pryke doing some sketching in Geck Cave.

We returned to the large chamber with the two daylight holes (one to the north and south) and climbed down some deep holes on the southern side of the chamber. They had drops of some 20m, but after some searching we found a safe way down through the rock-pile.

There was some nice formation in here including a fabulous botryoidal floor. One of the leads in the lower section of this chamber had a rift continued on and soon became phreatic. A low hole led to a similar parallel passage (another connection also possible). From here there were a further 3 connections to yet another parallel passage. This one had a large rift in the floor that dropped 2 - 3m to a dirt base with no further leads.



© F. Ossig-Bonanno

Looking down from Hornet Highway to Van in the chamber below.

Exiting these we found another phreatic lead that went only a short way before ending in a small hemispherical amphitheatre.

Whilst Alan continued adding some final artistic sketching to the survey, I climbed out the eastern daylight-hole where I found a narrow rift populated by numerous wasp/hornet nests (named Hornet Highway). To my surprise this continued for some way and came to a large hole in the floor which amazingly looked down into the area Alan was sketching.



© A. Pryke

Van illuminated in Geck Cave

Two weeks later we returned with Van and Paul. By this time the effects of the cyclone had pretty much passed. The upside of the heat was a fantastic display of sunbeams!

We then made our way over to West Geck which had a huge entrance that looked like it might what was left of a once giant chamber. After exploring



and surveying the area we soon realised that West Geck got really close to Geck and that with some more time a connection might be possible.

### **Nettle Pot, Reunion (Spring Tower)**

On the third day we startled some Bustards on the way over to Nettle Pot. We climbed through the (not so) secret hole on the right side. On the climb down I passed a small circular hole which seemed to drop and flange out only a short way in...

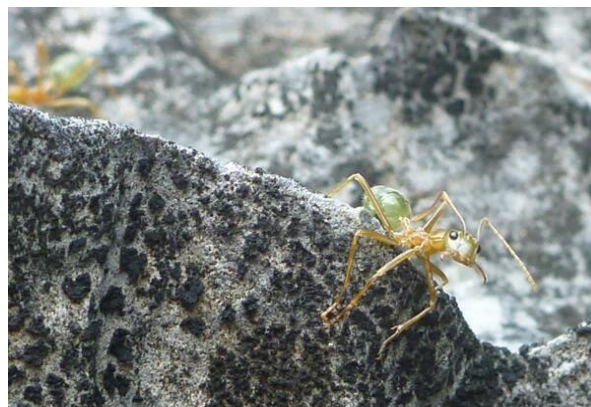
We negotiated the Stinging Trees before dumping our stuff and selecting a suitable survey station. Whilst back-surveying to the tag we found an opening to the north. We went in and it opened into several chambers covering an area much larger than expected. Off this were several more chambers, as well as a connection to the porthole we passed at the bottom of the climb-in. There was some nice formation, the highlights being some delicate rim pools as well as some pompous cave coral near the way we came in; we named these The Faceless Aliens.

After surveying The Faceless Aliens, we watched a lizard catch a fly and then joined him/her for some lunch. Whilst eating we watched some other flies that shot in and out of small holes built in the dirt floor.

We then returned to surveying, heading down the left hand side, past a small lead to the right (which we looked at later in the trip) and into a large room full of decoration surrounding a large hole in the floor. We skirted around to the right and then went up through a hole. A passage to the left brought us up onto a balcony overlooking the room we had just left.

We climbed to a higher level home to a small pool and continued through a sharp crawl to some fabulous large pendants at the top of a sloping chamber. The room at the bottom was massive, and after passing through a convenient doorway it led to yet another room with a large false floor and continued further around a corner.

Not much further on we reached a large 'mite at the centre of a natural crossroads. Instead of passing through a portal to a large daylight chamber we took a passage to the left which led to a large aven with a muddy floor. A specially placed spiral staircase allowed us to climb up. Whilst Alan finished sketching, I climbed up to the left and located the tag for Reunion Cave. I spent some time exploring the rock-pile finding a large chasm with an unclimbable drop of roughly 15m. Before returning to help survey I studied some Green Ants making the way across the surface of the rock.



© F. Ossig-Bonanno

A Green Ant at the entrance of Reunion Cave.

Went returned to the crossroads and went up a fun climb along a small sloping ledge. At the top was a long, very narrow stal' some 6m long. It looked extremely fragile. We then went through another connection to Nettle Pot, coming out at the pretty room with the hole in the middle.

We returned later in the trip with Paul and Van, this time going through the small hole near the Nettle Pot entrance. There proved to be a lot of cave on this side. After a climb-down we emerged into some large passage. I chimneyed up a slot on the right which dropped down into a giant funnel-like room (at a guess 20m across). We didn't survey up this way but instead continued to a large room with some fantastic cuboid oolite pools which were quite protected inside a deep rim.

On the right side of this room was a 5m climb, a challenge I happily accepted. Once up I walked up a rising slope which turned out to be a large false floor. At the back of the slope was a small histoplasmosis room with a window blocked with columns resembling prison bars.

I went back out and dropped into another lead on the left (south) of the slope, this proved to go quite a way into a number of crossing passages. Through one, I managed to get a voice connection with Alan to a rift just behind the oolite pool. Some further exploring brought me to a daylight hole which was quite easy to exit to the surface. I went back to let the others know and we decided to come in from this untagged entrance. As soon as we got in Alan recognised the large chamber as the spot we had finished our survey in Re-Union. Sure enough I found the hidden climb down and located our last station complete with the yellow ribbon we had left.

We continued the survey completing the loop and discovering several more side passages, including one that led to the other side of the Prison Bars.



© A. Pryke

Felix behind the Prison Bars

Next we the southern section of Reunion. In a rift on the south-western side it started raining quite heavily. We retreated into some passages to the left and after mapping them crossed the rift to the opposite side, emerging into a large daylight chamber. Up to the right revealed yet another room with a loose climb down through a hole onto a balcony overlooking a rift, the bottom was 6m down an impossible climb.

We returned to the previous chamber and found a pleasant way out, which spiralled gradually up. All was going smoothly until Paul climbed up a rock to get a GPS reading and popped out his shoulder. We laid him down on the sharp rillenkarren and tried, without luck, to push it back in. We turned to plan B which was getting to the car. We decided to go down via the southern side and follow the old railway line back. I scouted a path for Paul whilst Alan went back to grab our gear.

I went as far as the railway before returning to help an emerging Alan. I grabbed a pack and we headed back to the car.

Once we were at the hospital we tried getting the shoulder back in with the nurse, but after many attempts it was 8pm (about 3hrs since the dislocation) and we were out of options. The nurse rang somehow secured a plane to fly in. Alan and I left to have some dinner as the plane's ETA was 9:30.

I drove down at 10 and was told that I couldn't come in. I climbed up onto an air-conditioner and saw Paul on the bed with four people around him. He looked pretty drugged up, presumably unconscious. An hour or so later we got the call that Paul was fixed and ready for pickup.

## The Disney System (Royal Arch Tower)

The original plan was to locate High Cavern and survey it to Disney but we ended up locating Richard's Cave, which needed surveying too. It wasn't an overly pretty cave but I really enjoyed it due to it's sporty nature. It started with a small climb-down followed by a standing squeeze to the top of a large pit. A squeeze to the left brought us to the top of another short climb down. I then swung around some flowstone above a hole whilst Alan went some alternate way which ended in a drop to an oolitic floor. I climbed back out to get the tape and survey gear (good exercise I guess). Once we were both safely down we soon located the last survey cairn of the Disney survey. I back tracked and climbed up onto a false floor which allowed me to enter an adjacent chamber which involved another tricky climb-down. This chamber also had a pit though much deeper (~10) which could be climbed.

As I was climbing back up I saw Alan's light through another hole and found an alternate way out which wasn't as tricky as the way I had come in. Once Alan was through we found yet another way down that might have been easier yet again; though I found that whilst it wasn't as exposed there where no decent handholds. Surveying proved quite tricky in this cave due to the multi-level nature of the cave and the numerous deep pits.

Beyond this chamber was yet another pit, further on a slippery death slope dropped into Central Station. Through a small hole above this slope was another high ceiling chamber (the difference in height from the floor of Central to the top would have to be around 30m). There was another pit in this chamber which dropped down into Central Station.



© F. Ossig-Bonanno

A green praying mantis between Richard's and High Cavern.

Once this area was surveyed we headed back, surveying our way out of the cave. We then headed around the cliff to locate the entrance to High Cavern. On the way a green praying mantis grabbed a ride on Alan and once we got him off I grabbed a



few photos of it.

We retreated into the entrance of High Cavern, escaping from an approaching storm. We passed through some easy walking passage, dropped down a step and at a pit climbed down through a hole that was 'blowing a gale'.

In the next room a ramp to the right led us to a familiar muddy phreatic section. We wandered around here for some time trying to find the fabled connection to Dineny. During our search we came across another Children's Python clinging to the roof (very impressive climbing technique!).



A snail shell in High Cavern.

After searching all the leads we could find we went back for a closer inspection of a taped off section near an alternate exit. We didn't cross this pristine section so maybe the connection is there but it seemed unlikely and we probably just missed the lead....

A week or so later we returned to Disney Cave with Van and Paul. We headed to the chamber near the Evil Hand to explore a section that hadn't yet been surveyed. We got to the drop that had previously proved troublesome, and managed to find a climb-down that came out underneath a second ~10m pitch. There was a sizable chamber but we couldn't find any further leads.

Van and I laddered down into Central Station and headed to some passages that cave very close to High Cavern. In one of these passages we saw four scutigeromorphs - Van named this passage Scutigeromorph's Ski-slope).

We then headed to another lead where we did a full de-trog to climb over some flow stone, this continued to a fabulous Disneyland of micro oolites. I carefully edged forward until I spotted the red and white tape which was all I needed to know that we had found the connection!



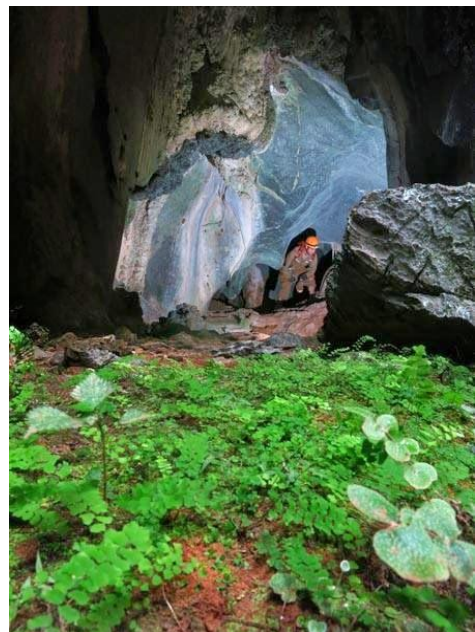
© F. Ossig-Bonanno

A speedy scutigeromorph near Central Station.

With Richards and High Cavern surveyed I think most of the Disney System has been completed.

### Tall Tree (Tall Tree Tower)

It was quite a walk out to Tall Tree Tower from the Royal Arch car park, but the going was easy and we soon arrived at CH139. The first thing we did was inspect a window about 1.5m up the wall that went into a phreatic hole with a mud floor. With some help I managed to get in and after a 5m crawl was surprised (along with a bat) to find myself in a small room with an aven about 10m in height. Unfortunately there wasn't much more cave than that, so I wormed myself out.



© A. Pryke

Felix coming out of Tall Tree.

Further on we entered a large chamber with a collapsed side letting the sunlight filter downwards. We pushed several leads to the right with the aim of

finding some new cave that might link to some pitches that had been found on the surface on trips in past years. Most of the leads choked, but one had a small hole with lots of airflow. I couldn't fit in but could glimpse a circular aven-like chamber (couldn't see the bottom or top).

A short crawl brought us into a large impressive chamber with light bouncing around the walls. We surveyed what we could, finishing in a large section with fabulous flowstone and rim pools. Apparently there is another exit above this room, but we returned to our packs and soon picked up a convenient cattle track which guided us most of the way back to the road.

After convincing Van that the walk wasn't that bad we again headed out to Tall Tree, this time with the plan to explore the northern end of the Tall Tree bluff. We soon located a large hole (with pitch) in the centre of the tower, but there didn't seem to be any easy way down and we didn't have enough gear. In the next section of limestone (past a large bush turkey mound) we found a large opening which led to a pitch zigzagging downwards. Once the ladder was rigged I climbed down the first step (about 4m down) - the ladder was just touching the ground. The next climb was about 3m onto a shelf which was sloping back under the others suggesting there might be a hidden chamber.

The climb was too dicey so Van used a tape on the anchor so the ladder could be lowered. Once I was down I saw a large chamber beneath where the others were sitting. I resisted the temptation to have a look in there and continued down the steps, chimneying down a drop of 3m and across a 2m drop to the other side where it was easy to climb down to a constricted muddy floor. I wriggled through a narrow opening before emerging into a large day-lit chamber where I could climb-out amongst the shaded lilies and walk around to the others.

We decided to leave the muddy squeeze to later and keep clean whilst exploring further. Of course we forgot to go back, so never found out what was in that large chamber... In the next room I had a strange Déjà vu inkling and suddenly realised that this was the lunch spot from the day before... we had come much further south than we had realised... we spend some time admiring fiery light and then went for a look at The Ugly Mite – probably the ugliest 'might you'll ever see'!

We finished some more survey finding the other exit Alan remembered from previous trips.

Continued in the November issue....

## **September Caving** (P Bannink)

Four members turned up for the September club weekend. Paul suggested we continue the Rescue Cave survey, to tie in another entrance found a few years ago. We all got out there by 10:30 am, to find the place as dry as a chip. Seems the all the plants are struggling after the poor wet (400mm this year).



Van dangling off the pitch linking into the main cave

We climbed in on the northern side of Currajong Tower to find the entrance high on the tower. Van set up two ladders to get us into the main section of the cave. From there, another 12m abseil got us down to the Bat Chamber. Surveying all the way in, we finally joined into Alan Pryke and Paul's survey from 2012.

We had a brief lunch and then did another hour, surveying a loop off the main drag. This was quite complex and the climbs up, down and through rock piles, got me very confused. By now I was getting a little tired but Paul pressed us back to the base of the main entrance pitch we had entered.

From here Van and Peter climbed up a very loose rock pile to look for a lead Paul had been to before. For about 20min we climbed and squeezed between rocks, sometimes over deep drops to find ourselves always heading back to where we started. Paul had to come up and get the team on the right track. It took another 40min to eventually survey back out to the unsurveyed entrance, the survey showed the caving route to be an almost direct spiral upward, however the second upper entrance exits on the other side of the tower.

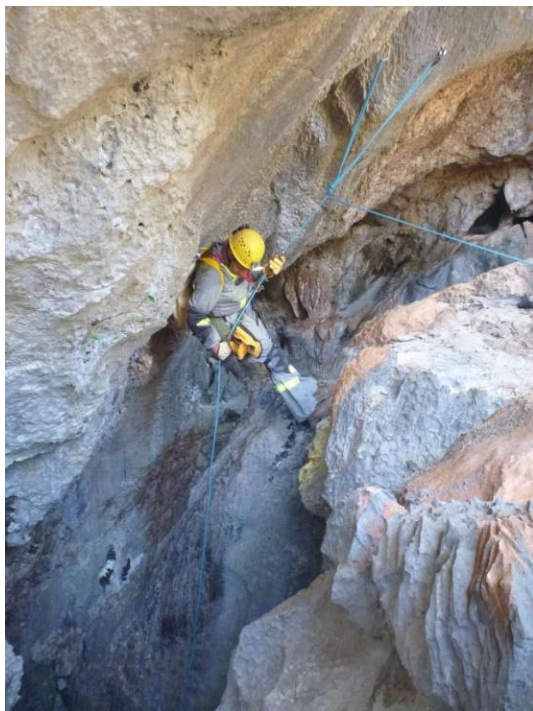




© P. Bannink

Jamie Ellicott at the base of the entrance pitch.

Pope John Paul I (CH227) was the challenge for Sunday. There is the possibility that CH227 links to Reunion Cave (CH230), only a few 100m away. The 2m entrance pitch described in the guide turned out to be about 12m, so there was some miscalculation on what rigging was required. After some detailed planning, the team, finally abseiled into the entrance chamber. While Van and Jamie explored the system, Paul and Peter started the survey.

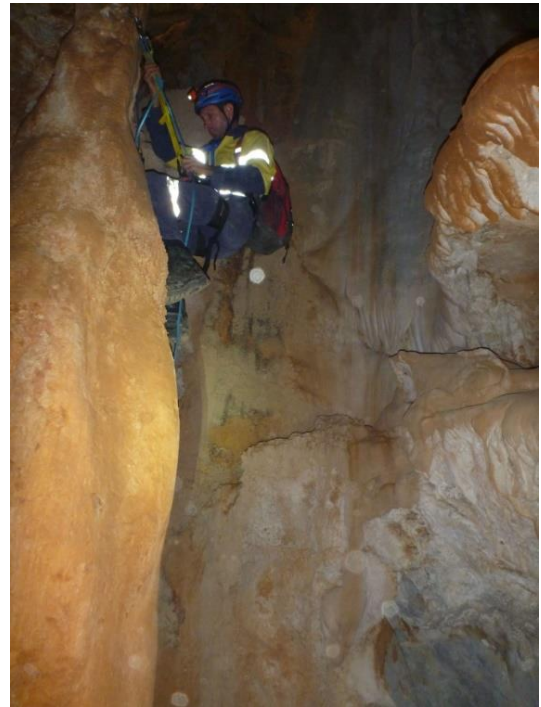


© P. Bannink

Paul starting the abseil into the entrance

It was a couple of hours before we caught up with

the explorers. The main entrance chamber leads to a small rift, where you climb 6m up into a small chamber. The back of this leads into rock piles and small remnant sections of passage. There is some good decoration and little evidence of anyone exploring this region. Despite the faint flow of air, the area needs to be explored some more to find the elusive link between the caves. Once Paul links the survey to the Reunion (via the surface entrances), explorers will have a better idea where to push for a link between the two caves.



© P. Bannink

Jamie working on the re-belay (entrance pitch).

## AGM

Many thanks to the members who made an effort to come all the way out to Chillagoe, and attend the AGM. We only just had enough members to make a Quorum, but that was all that was needed. Special Resolution 1 was passed unanimously by all members present and by all the votes received in the post. Many thanks for passing this single change to the constitution. This was issue that had been waiting to be resolved for over three years.

Van is the new club secretary, many thanks to Winfried who has been a part of the executive for many years now. It was suggested we hold the next AGM in Cairns, please give feed back to the executive on this suggestion and a location where we could hold it. Other changes include a new librarian and a re-description of a few positions within the club.

## **New Office Bearers are:**

**President** – Paul Osborne

**Secretary** – Van Christensen

**Treasurer** – Peter Bannink

**Survey & Records Keeper** – Peter Bannink

**Tagging Officer** - Van Christensen

**Tackle Keeper** - Van Christensen

**Safety Co-ordinator** – Steven Morgan

**Training Co-ordinator** - Paul Osborne

**Building & Maintenance Co-ordinator** - Alan Cummins

**Membership Co-ordinator** (encompassing ASF/ACKMA co-ordinator) - Peter Bannink

**Webmaster** - Winfried Weiss

**Photo Librarian** - Peter Bannink

**Librarian** - Bruce Hewitt

**Environmental Conservation Officer** - Peter Bannink

**Publicity Officer** - Position temporarily absorbed

**Auditor** - Kevin Ridgeway

**Solicitor** - Robin Smith

## **Clubhouse**

Many members helped tidy up the recent building work done at the clubhouse. The upper bunk room was dusted and cleaned with extra help from Dom and Kerry (and Kimberlee a few months ago). Many thanks for helping keep the place in good condition.

## **Up and Coming Events**

### **October**

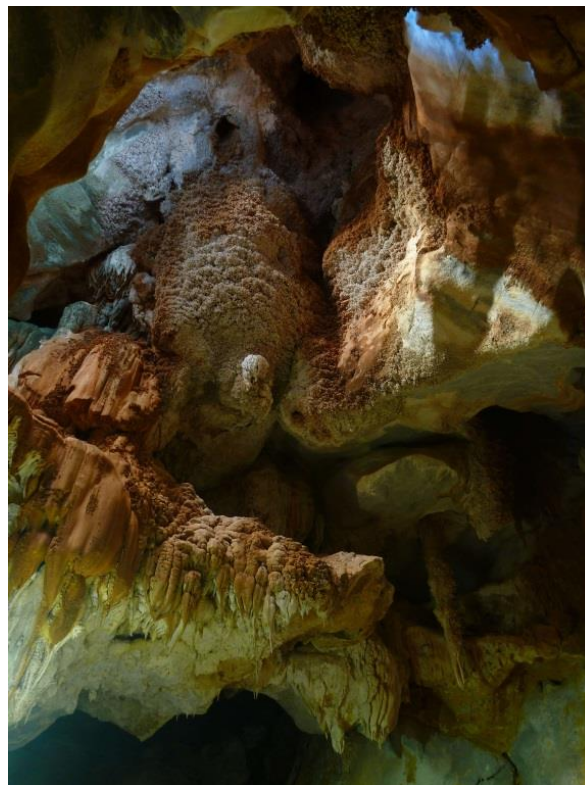
- 4- 6<sup>th</sup> – AGM & Club Caving Weekend at Chillagoe.
- 22- 24<sup>th</sup> – Babinda State school at clubhouse.

### **November**

- 15/16<sup>th</sup> - Club Caving Weekend at Chillagoe (last official club trip for the year).
- 16<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> – Army staying at clubhouse and caving with Down Under Caving
- 29/30<sup>th</sup> Rockhampton Caving - mostly SRT please contact [steven.morgan61@gmail.com](mailto:steven.morgan61@gmail.com) if you plan to attend.

### **January**

- 4- 6<sup>th</sup> - Still being planned



Stunning formation at the base of the entrance pitch to Pope John Paul I (CH227)

© P. Bannink



Paul and Jamie walking through Rescue Cave (CH69)

© P. Bannink

Go Caving!

Peter Bannink & Van Christensen (Secretary).