



CHILLAGOE CAVING CLUB

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NEWSLETTER

WWW.CHILLAGOECAVINGCLUB.ORG.AU

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CHILLAGOE SUSS/CCC 2014 - 2

(Felix Ossig-Bonanno & Alan Pryke)

Uncle Harry's Cavern (or Uncle Harry's Retreat) – Pinnacle Ridge

The book accurately describes the entrance as a "crawl over rubbly floor which turns into a flattener with a left-hand turn down hill". This led us into a "substantial chamber" with a little daylight peeking in. It wasn't a very flat cave and the first thing offering lots of climbing opportunities. We thought we had exhausted most of the cave so headed back out. Instead of exiting we took the 'Barbed Wire Passage' under the entrance which opened up into a small room. A squeeze to the left brought us into yet another smaller chamber. Yet another smaller squeeze, brought us into another smaller room with a pit which could be freely climbed.

It was about 6m to the bottom and once down I get pretty excited; from the way the floor crackled beneath me, I was almost certain that we were in virgin cave. We were in a large chamber with columns to the left as well as some sparkly formations. To our right was large false floor with flowstone on top. As we approached the bottom of

the room we encountered our third Children's Python for the trip.

We took a para-phreatic rift which went a significant distance before releasing us (past a precariously balancing rock) into another large chamber which we named Coexistence Chamber due to the fact we observed first guano and feathers; and then bats and swifts.



© Alan Pryke

Felix in an unmarked entrance to Patzanne Cave.

One of the leads we followed became quite narrow before opening up into yet another huge chamber with fabulous fossils visible almost everywhere you looked. We climbed down but encountered a 4m

wall which prevented us from entering a room above it. I discovered a small hole which emerged into a climbable rift that gave me access to the top. It was a high chamber and had a large number of roots reaching down some 10m from the ceiling. Walking through the roots revealed another hole, with another lead to the right and one to the left.

We definitely didn't explore this cave in its entirety, but were happy to extend the known size of the cave by about threefold!



© Felix Ossig-Bonanno

Felix and Alan returning from Spring Tower.

After lunch we then dropped down to the southern side of the ridge exploring a collapsed area in which two entrances were found. The one to the right (east) went a short way down and could be entered from two places. There were some nice formations at the bottom.

The other was on the left and started with a pitch. We rigged a ladder, but about half way down I confirmed that our 10m ladder was about 3m off the floor. I climbed back up and we left it for another day. Some signatures were found at the entrance to the pitch and Alan read one that said 'New York' so we nicknamed the cave 'Old York' since we thought it hadn't been discovered yet.

We headed back around the end of the ridge dropping as we went. Along the way we startled a rock wallaby who quickly disappeared and unintentionally led us to yet another cave. It consisted of a number of narrow muddy rifts which seemed to cross over each other. We didn't fully explore this area as it was after 6 and we needed to get back to the car. We named this section of cave 'Afternoon Maze' after 'Morning Maze' further west on the ridge.

Volcanic Echidna (Tower No 5214 – Volcanic Tower)

After the surprising sight of seeing a small child emerge from the bush with a small pick axe in hand we made our way past some mullock piles and continued to the Tower No 5214 - Alan had

identified it as a potential spot for new cave. After looking at the existing walk-in cave we headed in an anti-clockwise direction around the tower. We continued around past another possible lead (which we revisited later the next day) and soon split up; Allan looking around the base whilst I slowly spiralled up the tower. There were some interesting kamenitza pools amongst the rillenkarren and I was amazed to see a rock wallaby fleeing across the top of the tower.

I continued looking down a few holes, but most choked about 10m down. Further exploration located a volcano-like hole in the centre of the tower. Despite my efforts I couldn't find a way down so rendezvoused with Alan on the southern side of the tower beside a deep rift. With some difficulty we climbed down a parallel rift which linked into the larger rift, but there weren't any extensive leads.

Further around I located an interesting lead and had soon dropped in with great excitement. We emerged into a large chamber and began making our way down through the rock pile; strangely glimpsing light occasionally below us. After some effort we made our way down to the volcano chamber I was trying to access from the top of the tower.



© Alan Pryke

Felix in Pharaohs Tomb.

Off this room was a crawl that led into some muddy passages heading generally north. We emerged into a small chamber followed by another crawl where we saw around three Scutigermorphs (a type of centipede). Some roots were reaching down from the ceiling in the next chamber and the water ran from here through some deep trenches to a final chamber where our progress was impeded.

We headed back out without looking at further leads as Alan said we shouldn't 'scoop the booty'. As we were exiting the cave I heard a noise. When I climbed up we saw an Echidna at the entrance! And so we thought of the name Volcanic Echidna.



© Alan Pryke

Felix engrossed in the immensity of Spring Cave.

When Alan returned from collecting some water and the survey gear he wasn't alone: he had ran into one of the cavers Carol had told us where arriving with Van. We surveyed the entrance chamber discovering a second chamber to the right of the rock-pile (along with a couple more Scutigeromorphs).

Once we reached the volcano chamber we went to a couple of small chambers on the left. I pushed a lead at the end of the room through a rock-pile. Three squeezes later, I was at the bottom of CH209. We didn't know if we should be pleased or not as it seemed to detract from the discovery.

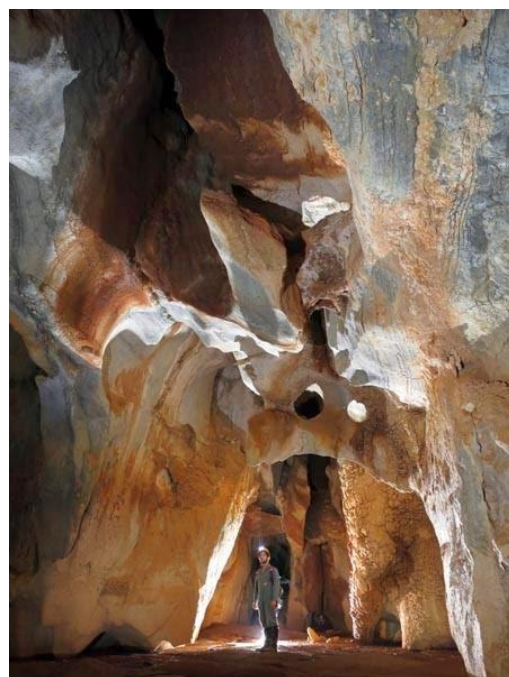
We returned to the cave the next day joined by Paul, we made a party of four. We spent some time photo faffing in the Volcano chamber, watching the sun creep down the side wall; and then continued surveying through 'Scutigeromorph Raceway'. In the end chamber we spent some time taking photos and found some fossilised bones.

On the way back I climbed up an aven with a number of roots reaching down. It was about a 10 meter climb up the first bit which brought me across to a small area lit by the sun peeking through a small hole above me. I went left into a chamber (approximately 13m long). A small hole was breathing on the left but it didn't think anyone human could fit through.

We finished linking the survey to the CH209 tag and went to look at the holes Alan and I had passed the day before. The first was quite deep and whilst I watched Van rig the ladder, I was attacked by some green ants (I did have my shoulder on their nest).

Whilst Van was still exploring, I went to look at the

other hole I had passed yesterday. After a 2m climb-down and a slide down an 8m slope, I was surprised to find myself in a large chamber littered with snail shells, and boasting multiple leads into the tower. Excited, I rushed out to let the others know. Alan was pretty quick to jump in but unfortunately we were soon out of obvious leads. One lead that we couldn't push was a climb up an aven. I got up several meters but couldn't find a way to traverse to the other side where there might be a way on.



© Alan Pryke

Felix in Pharaohs Tomb.

Once I climbed back down I spotted Alan's legs sticking out of a hole in the rock-pile we had passed. I followed him through the somewhat dodgy pile. It was pretty horrible, but on the way back out I found some really nice formation in a small room on the right. It's a nice feeling being pretty confident that you have been somewhere that no-one has been before.

It was getting latish so we went to look at a nearby outcrop of limestone. It didn't look like much but I amazingly found a sprawling cave on the far side with several chambers (named Echidna Outpost). Once Alan and I had been through most of the cave we rendezvoused with Van and Bruce on the grass in front of the entrance and returned to the cars.

I really enjoyed these two days, finding one rather extensive cave and two smaller ones.

Sack Cave (new) near the Archways

After a somewhat restless night, I awoke to a cool morning and actually got a jumper on. The four of us headed out to Castle Cave for some SRT

practice. We then decided to walk anticlockwise around The Archways seeing if any more 'Blind Sides' existed. I back tracked a little thinking we wouldn't cover that area once we walked around the tower. I discovered a small horizontal hole, it didn't seem to go in very far, but I yelled out that I had found something and preceded to explore. It was quite flat and went in some 10m. At the back was a section you could stand up in and see a small daylight hole. There was a little more cave including a connection to another entrance Alan found, but nothing that went.

We exited and found Van looking down a hole some 10m in depth. Seeing no safe way down, we rigged a ladder and I climbed part way down and found a potato bag before confirming that the bottom of the ladder was at least 2m off the ground so added an additional length of ladder.

The room was so large and strewn with boulders that there were far too many leads to cover. We spent some time exploring but couldn't find any connections.

The Throne Room (Spring Tower)

On the way to a fun photo trip in Spring Cave, we stopped by the Throne Room to survey it. This took longer than one might expect. During the mapping I found a really cool transparent isopod.



Transparent isopod in the Throne Room.

Bottleneck Cave (Wallaroo Tower)

After de-burring my socks (I forgot my gaiters) we began exploration on the eastern side of the tower. It wasn't long before Alan had located a potential hole. We left our packs, and dropped down through a series of short climbs into a day-lit collapse to what looked like quite a large entrance. However, as we explored further, the majority of the leads only went a short way before terminating. Just before giving up, we located a hole which looked like it dropped into some room.



Alan admiring some rim pools in The Throne Room.

We spent some time lifting rocks out before I managed to squeeze in. Sure enough there was a 5m long room with a couple of leads. I worked on the entrance from the inside and we were soon both in and searching. I headed down a rift behind a boulder but had no luck. Alan went up to through a tight section to the left and I was soon following him up through a second squeeze and then left down a climb to a chock-stone and then another squeeze down some flowstone and around a couple of shawls. From here we went through the 'toilet bowl' and then left through yet another squeeze to the left dropping down a few meter into a significant chamber some 12m long.



Time to retire my trusty Volleys.

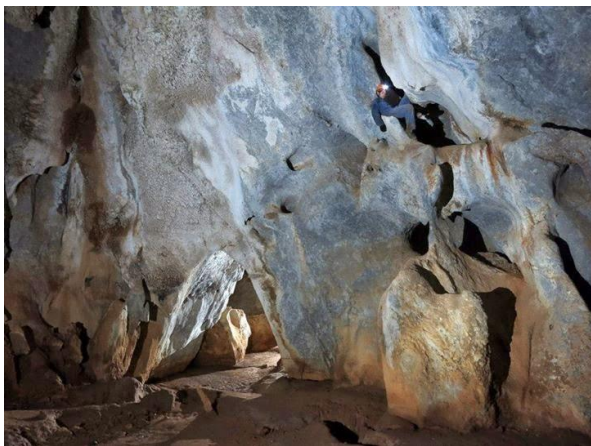
We explored this room and then eventually pushed through a triangular passage. Our long grovel brought us into a large flattener chamber. The way on brought us to yet another chamber. This one had quite a large pile of guano on the left. Further inspection revealed half a dozen swiftlet nests on the wall. The pile looked fresh, but the nests looked like they had been abandoned. However when we exited the cave we came across two swiftlets. One was resting in a nest (quite likely a smaller baby/chic) whilst the other was flying about echo locating. We used our lights to toggle the audible clicking and then left the birds in peace.

After lunch we continued over the top of the tower, popping up to the top for some fabulous panoramic views with heaps of dragonfly whizzing for company. On the way back down, a magpie lark starred at us perhaps wondering what on earth we were doing at the top of a karst tower. Further down was a locust hiding behind a branch; as Alan moved around, the locust would mirror his movements, always keeping the branch between them.



Alan in Wallaroo Cave.

Next we headed to Wallaroo Cave to inspect some of the question marks on Alan's survey. The first ones were dead ends, but in the process we located an unmarked way around a large boulder which had some horrible squeezes that I could barely fit through.



Felix taking a nap in Spring Cave.

We then went for a gander of the 'Dress Circle' and then went to look at the easterly lead that had good potential to join up to the cave we had just discovered. I climbed down through a large rock pile and located the rift Alan described. It veered off to the left through a narrow slot. I reversed a little and climbed over the top and looked down into a sizable chamber, the floor of which was covered in oolites. You could probably squeeze through the prickly cave corral but there was a 2m drop so there would be no way to get back up without an aid.

Epilogue

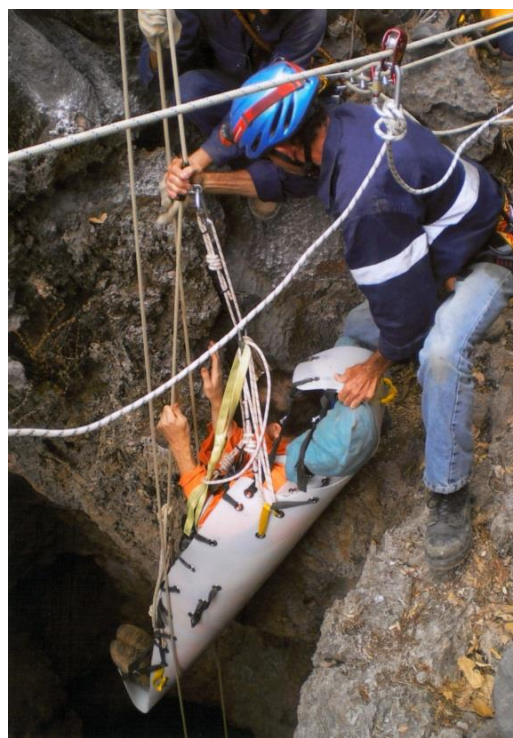
And so ends the tales of the work and discovery of this year's Chillagoe trip. Many thanks to Alan for making the trip possible, Nikola and his wife for their hospitality, Carol for making our expedition a pleasant one (any chance of moving to Jenolan?), and to Van and Paul for company.

With so much left unfinished on our 20 day trip, I would really like to visit again.

Rescue Practice

P.Bannink

On the AGM weekend a planned rescue practice (using the new stretcher) took place in Rescue Cave at the new 20m entrance pitch. This is quite a difficult cave to work in with lots of vertical, sections raising the level of difficulty. I cannot comment too much on plan, as I was the patient, trusting that everything would run smoothly.



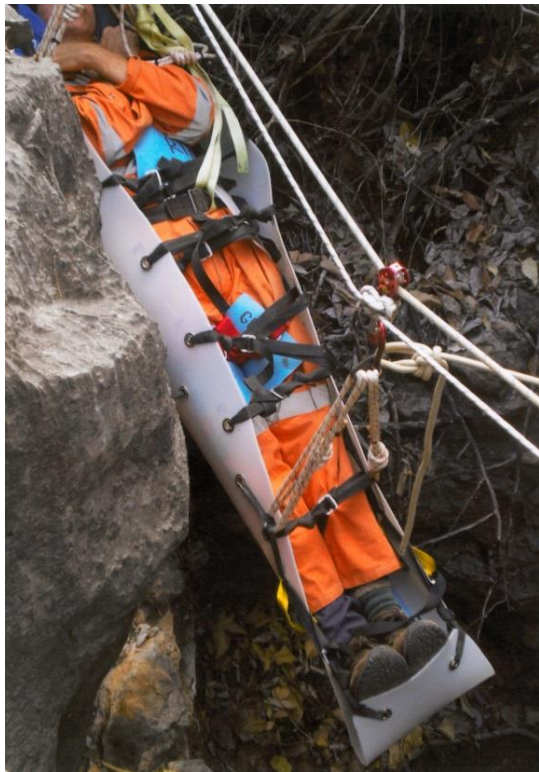
Jamie adjusting the stretcher at the top of the pitch ready for transfer onto the tyrolean traverse.

Steven counter-balanced the stretcher to hoist it up the pitch. This worked better than planned, although Steven required a few extra kg of weight. The transfer to the tyrolean traverse proved difficult and the pulleys became slightly twisted at 45° to the rope, so it became difficult to pull it over the doline to the landing spot.

Another minor issue was that with the extra weight the tyrolean traverse line dropped too low and the stretcher 'head' got snagged under a boulder at the

edge of the doline. Brian sorted out this problem.

As the patient I cannot complain too much and it was quite comfortable for a while, but in being bound up for two hours, pressure points can get very painful. At a 45° angle, hoisting felt better as my weight was taken up by my feet and I could wriggle a bit to relieve any pressure points.



© R. Deasy

Landing the stretcher, with slightly twisted pulley.

A very complex but successful training exercise. Thanks to Paul, Steven and Brian Evans (ISS) for organising the exercise.

Piano Tower Exploration

Monday Oct 6th 2014

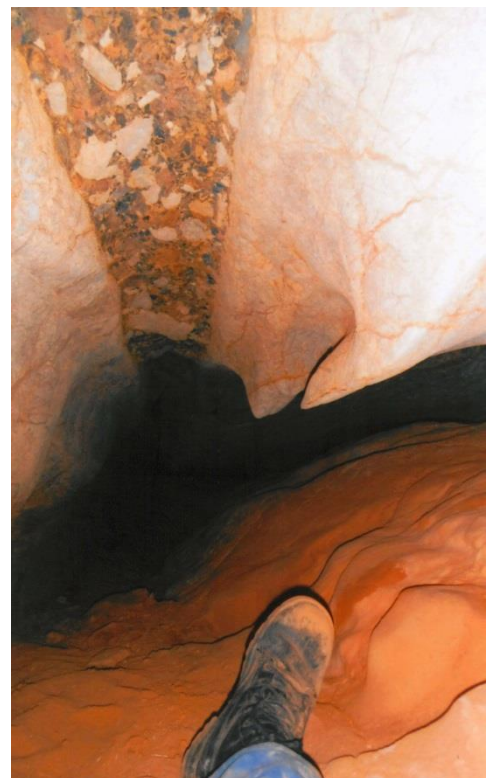
by Ray Deasy

The last day of the club AGM Long Weekend saw P. Bannink, R Deasy, J Ellacott and S Morgan visit the Piano Tower adjacent to the Red Dome Pit. A cave found last year in the southeast end of Piano by Peter and Ray revealed a developed system. This time round the object was to bottom two deep rifts and see what else was accessible inside

The entrance is 2/3 up the northwest side of the tower, flanked by two tall evergreen trees. Peter made a direct approach to the entrance and found it. The vegetation was minimal, what with the drought, this made the task easy.

The cave soon develops from karst boulders into phreatic chambers, descending steeply. About 30m inside an incline rift showed daylight and this was entered feet first. Another few metres at 90° proved an exit. Ray went outside and was certain this was the same side of the tower as the original entrance (this was not the case). Re-entering, Ray and Jamie caught up with Peter and Steve just laddering the first deep cross rift which stopped exploration last year.

This part of the cave is unique, a wide thick sand floor bedding plane is intersected by two deep joints and in places remnants of breccia pipes filled with chert and some ironstone fragments.



© R. Deasy

A breccia pipe in eroded limestone at 1st crossing

The cave was already being developed before the breccia was deposited. It was not the result of igneous flow, more like the close packing of floor debris. The limestone cavities now vacant of breccia are slightly larger, being subject to corrosion during the time of losing the breccia debris. The breccia is mainly insoluble silica chert. It will be interesting to study the relationship between the breccia lost in the cavities, to the large pile of dust and fines in the second rift.

The 1st cross rift was descended to 12m, with a floor of solid mud cake. There were no ways on. The rift was a metre wide and provided a sporty chimney climb.



© P. Bannink

Steven setting up a safety line to cross the 1st rift

Next the 2nd cross rift was approached, Steve chimneyed down into one end and onto a steep floor of dust. There was the sound of a mini-avalanche, as dust cascaded downslope due to Steve's progress. The dust was ankle deep and later resulted in a respiratory issue for Steve.

We all went down the rift and explored a lower series of chambers with interestingly well-developed anastomoses (or early sponge corrosion) in the limestone. Again there was a faint daylight reflection in the roof of the lowest chamber. Steve and Ray pushed upward, then Steve climbed through a slot and was soon at another 3rd exit.



© P. Bannink

Steven at the bottom of the second rift

Leaving Steve, the three of us tracked out of the cave. Jamie and Peter went out the second entrance, while Ray continued out the original entrance. It was a surprise to see both new exits were on the Red Dome side of the tower, much at the same level

and separated by some distance horizontally. The original entrance is on the other side of the tower as mentioned.

So we have a cave so-far unnamed in the small to medium size and length category for Chillagoe. Three entrances or exits with unusual features: Breccia pipes, the fine dust of considerable volume in the second rift. The dust may contain organics but nominally it is likely to be calcite or chert. How it got there needs inquiry. A fine slender stalagmite on its own before the entrance to the bedding plane is an additional curiosity. If one is able to judge a caves' aura, I would put it in the category of a friendly cavern.

New Permit Conditions for 2015

The club has received it's Special Activity permit to cave in the Chillagoe/Mungana National Park. A new set of conditions has been applied which the club must strictly follow.

- The use of carbide lamps is prohibited.
- The Principal Holder must ensure the ratio of trip leaders to novices is **one trip leader** to no more than **five novices**.
- The Principal Holder must ensure that for each caving trip there is a minimum group size of 3 persons.
- The Principal Holder must contact the Ranger-in-charge at the QPWS Chillagoe office on 07 4094 7163 prior to conducting activities.

Please Note: The use of caving ladders is no longer banned. The minimum group size is three and the **Ratio of Novice Cavers to Trip Leaders** of **(5:1)** is to be followed.

Up and Coming Events

November

- 15/16th - Club Caving Weekend at Chillagoe (last official club trip for the year).
- 16 - 23th – Australian Defence Force staying at clubhouse.
- 29/30th Rockhampton Caving - mostly SRT please contact steven.morgan61@gmail.com if you plan to attend.

Club Caving concludes for 2014!

Peter Bannink & Van Christensen (Secretary).