



CHILLAGOE CAVING CLUB

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NEWSLETTER

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New Zealand – Easter 2015 (part 1)

Steven Morgan

The concept of yet another NZ trip slowly evolved with Easter 2015 emerging as a concrete date. Chillagoe Caving Club was represented by members Ray Deasey, Damien Tapp and Steven Morgan.

Whilst in NZ on other business last year, I bumped into Kieran McKay and had discussions about Stormy Pot which resulted in Kieran offering to guide us through the Stormy Pot/Nettlebed through trip. Following the vertical cave rescue training I was in contact with Al Warild about some other matters and mentioned the Stormy Pot trip. Al and fellow caver Greg Tunnock swelled the number of Aussie cavers and contributed hugely to the expertise of the group.

Ray unfortunately injured his shoulder leading up to the trip, but bravely came across notwithstanding, and did get some caving in whilst nursing his injury.

With Kieran's offer, the Stormy Pot/Nettlebed through trip was number one on our agenda. For those who are not aware, Kieran and friends made a connection between Stormy Pot and Nettlebed in January 2014 giving an epic through trip with vertical elevation of 1160m.

On my first trip to the area (with Paul Osborne, Paco, Kiwi and the Irvins') we had talked about visiting Legless. Legless has 16 pitches on the survey and is mostly vertical with a depth of 362m. It is a yoyo trip. Down then back up again. I have had my heart set on that cave ever since and over a number of visits located the entrance, then eventually got in a short distance with Ray, doing the first four pitches. Getting to the bottom of Legless was my other objective for this trip. And any other caving in the area would be a bonus.



The campsite at Patarou

© D. Tapp

Ray, Al and myself rendezvoused in Nelson on Sunday 29 March and we made our way immediately to our base at the Nelson Speleological Group hut on Takaka Hill. Al and myself made a solid start on Legless on Monday 30 March. With hardly a break between pitches we made our way down to well down the 60P where we ran out of rope and rigging. We had some excitement coming out at the last pitch. I was ahead and disturbed a rather unstable section of rocks and material. Although on the pitch below me, Al thankfully was off to the side and out of the path of the falling debris. A good wheelbarrow load of material (well it sounded like it) with watermelon sized rocks continued to break away from the very unstable

area. At the top of the pitch the take off point is a large rock wedged in the crack. We deemed it stable. Other than the confined entrance and then the awkward rift at the top of the first pitch there were no tight sections at all in the cave as far as the 60P. Just vertical, vertical, vertical.

Greg joined us on Tuesday and for one reason or another we didn't get any caving in. On Wednesday (now 1 April) we headed in to Greenlink to pre rig the cave (four pitches) in readiness for a through trip. Greenlink gives you the feeling of being in a storm pipe and definitely not the cave to visit if there is any rain on the horizon. Greg and Al completed the rigging with Ray and myself turning back not long after the third pitch.



Steve Morgan descending in Legless Cave

© D. Tapp

On Thursday local caver Mike Brewer took us into Swiss Maid for a through trip Swiss Maid through to Greenlink. Swiss Maid and Greenlink both connect with each other and with Middle Earth. Ray was feeling up for it so we were now four Aussies plus Mike. There were some awkward squeezes and pitches as we made our way into Swiss Maid and I couldn't help but wonder how Ray was going to manage with his shoulder getting back out. (The plan had been for Ray to exit Swiss Maid with Mike, and Al, Greg and myself to continue through and exit Greenlink.) It seemed the better option for Ray was the Greenlink exit, so Ray and Greg swapped places. Al, Ray and myself then successfully made the connection and derigged our way out of Greenlink while Greg and Mike did some exploration and digging work in Swiss Maid before making their way out.

Thursday was also the day for Damien to arrive, and then Friday morning we headed out to Paturau to join the NZ speleos annual Easter family cave camp. We joined in a couple of "easier" trips to Baby Grand and Twin Forks. These were both horizontal trips, both with some wet sections. When we first got to Paturau it was very windy – a

good thing as there were no sandflies. Windy turned to rain and we made our way back on Saturday afternoon to the more comfortable accommodation at the NSG hut.



Steve Morgan in Baby Grand Cave

© D. Tapp

The drive out to Paturau is through stunning scenery. Joining the annual camp at Paturau is highly recommended for anyone travelling in this area around Easter.

Sunday was our "push" day to bottom Legless. After we managed four bodies (Al, Damien, Greg and myself) and packs through the entrance squeeze we discovered that our "solid" platform at the top of the first pitch wasn't. It was gone. We lost a good hour gardening this area to a stable state before we headed down the first pitch on a spare rope (in case the main rope had been damaged in the rock fall).

It turned out that there was no damage apparent to the rope on the pitch, but several cuts where it lay on the ground at the bottom of the pitch. And the "solid" take off platform – that rock made it about half way down the pitch before it wedged in a slot – firmly enough that we weren't too concerned about it.



Al Warild crossing a rebelay in Legless

© S. Morgan

We made up for lost time now hooning down the pre rigged pitches to the pointy end, then not long to the top of the 70P and beyond, eventually reaching the bottom of the cave and having a look

around at the Cactus Room and the (too) tiny stream way where the cave possibly continues.



© S. Morgan

Damien Tapp crossing a rebelay

This was a bounce trip. Down and then back up, and now the hard work began. We had over 500m of rope in the cave as well as rigging and it all had to come out. I got the first load and changed down to first gear and struggled my way up the 70P, then the 60P, then the 40P – you get the idea – this was really hard work. It was in the wee hours of the morning some 14 hours after we first entered the cave before we were all out. I can't understate the high level of fitness that a trip like this demanded, not to mention the high level technical SRT skills for pitch after pitch of varied rigging, rebelay, deviations and the like (and yes, even a knot crossing). Needless to say, Monday was a lay day and Ray was due to head home on Tuesday.

Our original plan was to set up for the Stormy Pot trip on Tuesday and head in on Wednesday morning. But that was not to be. Kieran was not available and we had one of the other Stormy Pot explorers, Chris Whitehouse as our guide. Local caver Andrew Smith was planning to come too. And so was the weather.



© Google

Google view of the trip

The Stormy Pot entrance is high on the alpine plateau of Mt Arthur and we needed half decent weather to get there. Furthermore, about half way through Stormy Pot there is a river section (the River of Clowns) which had flood potential, so we didn't really want to be arriving there after heavy rain. And finally but not quite as important was the walk out the Pearse River. This is crossed eleven

times, so not the thing to do when flooding. This is an alternative to walking out the Pearse River, but much harder work.

June caving at Chillagoe Peter Bannink

The June club trip coincided with the presence of four keen SUSS cavers staying at the clubhouse. Several new members and a few more introductory caves took the opportunity to get underground.

Peter and Van took Joy's group of four cavers back to Keef's Cavern to experience all the challenges this cave has to offer. Max and Sue took a large group of new members to Wallabadorie Cave to investigate the potential for rigging a through trip.

The next day we joined SUSS in exploring some of the southern karst near the Walkunders. We were all kindly driven ~15km south of Chillagoe in Van's trusty new ute. Peter, Robert, Goy and David went to explore September Cave (which was extensively mapped in 1978 by CCC and CEGSA), while Van and the SUSS crew walked south to see Uncle Ron's Cavern. Alan and Van gave vague guidelines as to where the main entrance to September Cave was located but it took about 40 min to find CH219, it was much further into the karst grikes than we had expected.



© P. Bannink

David in September Cave phreatics

September Cave was unexpectedly large with multiple daylight. Without a map we had no idea where we were going or what to expect. Aside from large entrance chambers bathed in soft daylight glows, there is an internal maze section with some great phreatic passages and crawls. We did not find the link to the southern section of the cave, but everyone have a great time.

For our last day, Alan suggested a survey trip to Nettle Pot which links to Reunion Cave CH230. This is a stunning cave with lots of vertical climbing through large decorated rifts. The section we explored had many daylight openings, so shafts of light lit up the large decorated chambers.



© P. Bannink

Looking into the doline entrance of Nettle Pot

I spent some time taking photo's while Alan showed the survey team to the current exploration frontier. The exploration team spent most of the time climbing and exploring a massive boulder collapse in Reunion Cave, heading in the wrong direction. Needless to say nothing new was found and we had in fact doubled back and were exploring back in the direction of Nettle Pot.

I unfortunately left early so I did not hear if any new links had been made with any of the neighbouring caves in the area. Alan has hopefully exhausted all the leads and completed his survey. It was a great conclusion a fantastic weekend visiting three caves I have never explored before.

Up and Coming Events

July

- 17-19th - Club Caving Long Weekend at Chillagoe.

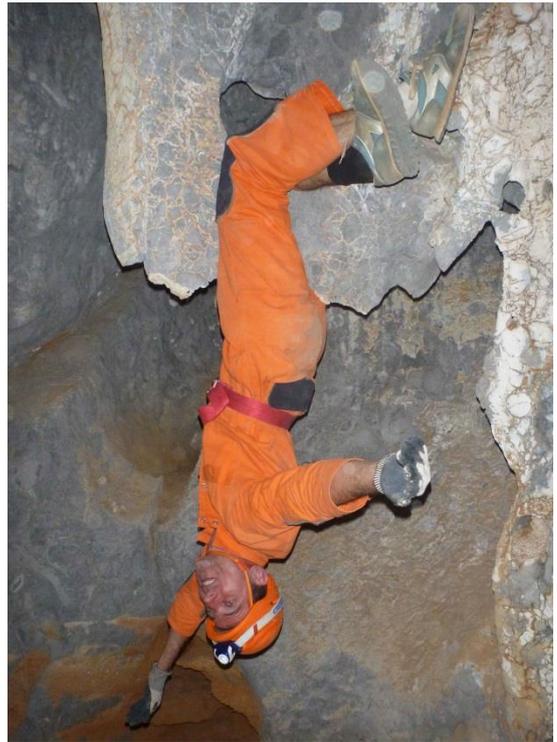
August

- 8/9th - Club Caving Weekend at Chillagoe.

September

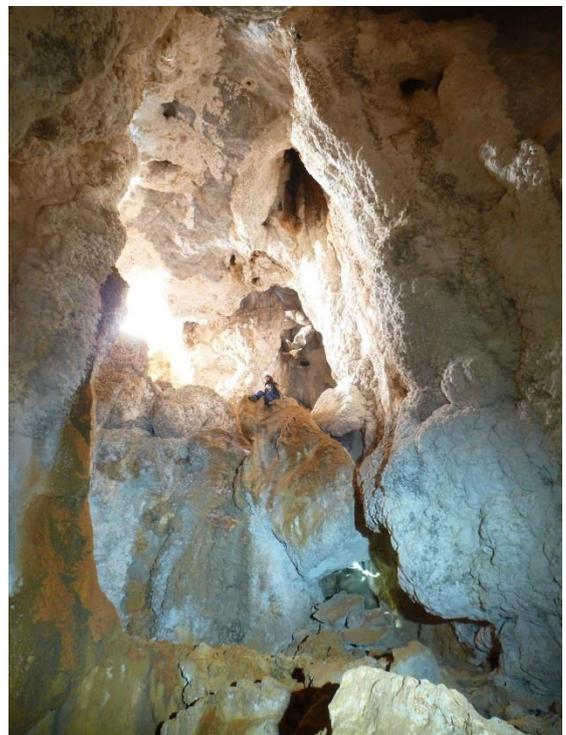
- 12/13th - Club Caving Weekend at Chillagoe.

Some more photo's from Chillagoe.....



© P. Bannink

Robert undertaking some acrobatic antics in September Cave



© P. Bannink

Katie in Reunion Cave CH230

Peter Bannink & Van Christensen (Secretary).