



CHILLAGOE CAVING CLUB

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AUGUST 2015

NEWSLETTER

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New Zealand – Easter 2015 (Part 2)

Steven Morgan

Clearly, the weather was no good for a Wednesday start, and we pushed back to review Thursday night. That left things rather tight for our return flights and meant we had to look at trying for a two day trip through the cave rather than the three day trip we were planning. The weather evolved further, by Tuesday evening we again reviewed the situation and believed there was a window for us to head into the cave on Thursday morning. Andrew Smith (the local) was not quite so confident and pulled out but Chris was up for it and so were we. So it was on. Tuesday night and Wednesday morning we made our preparations and we headed up to the Flora car park on Wednesday evening into scungy conditions. The idea is to get an earlier start by spending the night at the Flora car park. We checked a few weather sites in the morning and it looked okay, although we were clouded in for the most part. So now it was really on and we belted up the hill, above the tree line and to the Stormy Pot entrance. For the most part, it remained cloudy and with some light mist, enough to be unpleasant but not enough to seriously deter us.

As we kitted up at the entrance of Stormy Pot, I should mention a little history. With the exploration phase of Stormy Pot over, the locals had recently derigged the cave and put in anchors to enable the Stormy Pot series to be rigged “pull through” style. We were the first party to do the trip as a pull through. The locals were referring to us as the “crash test dummies” and I suspect that Andrew Smith was doing his sums as to which side of the rescue he would prefer to be on. We were heavily dependent on our guide as at this stage, maps of Stormy Pot have not been drawn and although we have heard that there is a guide of sorts out there somewhere, we didn't have it.



Hello camper! - At Mt Arthur Hut

© D. Tapp

In actual fact, we don't enter Stormy Pot, but a slightly higher entrance Big Friendly Giant (BFG). BFG is a series of countless vertical pitches, some in the order of 50P, some of them with enough drips to make them quite wet. All of them rigged pull

through. As crash test dummies we discovered that some of the rigging could do with some extra work with our ropes being damaged in four different places – sufficient for us to cut the ropes at the damage points. (We started with two x 60m, 1 x 35 & 1 x 25m lengths of 9mm rope.)

After the BFG series of vertical pitches and a few more pitches and the squeeze through the Gates of Troy we arrived at the first camp at the Chocolate Room. The camp was equipped with sleeping bags and mats and some cooking utensils and a quantity of white spirits. More on the white spirits later.

Now would be a good time to mention what the conditions are like in all caves in the area – cold and often wet. For those of you not familiar with cave camping in these conditions, the campsites are damp and mud proliferates. To keep our packs to the minimum, we take a few sparse extra items of clothes which we put on over the thermals we have been wearing throughout the day and survive being tolerably cold and never warm, although tucked up in the sleeping bag there are moments where you could achieve a pocket of warmth. Food is kept basic. There is no breakfast, dinner and tea. It is just a meal in the morning, a meal in the evening and nibble throughout the day, with the meal being something like 2 minute noodles. We have to carry out our solid waste. You use a large zip lock bag big enough to open up to a suitable sized target to shit in, then double bag it, then in something else again.



Late Lunch at the Soft rock cafe

We came close to disaster on the first morning when I mistakenly tipped a couple of cups of white spirits in to billy while it was cooking over the metho burner, then made a hot drink out of it and

gulped down a good mouthful before I realised what was going down. White spirit poisoning was the least of our concerns. Had the white spirit made any contact with the open flame – kaboom. A lesson was learned about the risks of using lemonade bottles for fuel storage.



Steve Morgan in the river of clowns

We continued on from the Chocolate Room to the River of Clowns. The locals when exploring the cave first travelled through this area in wet suits, but then decided it was too much bother and just sucked it up and got wet and cold. There are a number of long deep wades (about nipple depth). Being north Queenslanders we were quite concerned about the cold, and even southerners Al and Greg weren't too keen on the "suck it up" approach. In the end Al had a dry suit inner and Greg, Damien and myself had brand shiny new pontos freshly imported from Europe. These are latex body suits (don't go there on Google!). You climb in the top and it is waterproof up to your nipples with two shoulder straps to hold it up. It goes on over your thermals and under your oversite. And (drum roll) they work!! Brilliantly. We all got through the River of Clowns feeling quite warm and pleased with ourselves, but poor Chris had to sit and shiver while waiting for us to get in them and out of them before and after the River of Clowns as they are too hot for continuous caving.

From the River of Clowns we got into a huge chamber and then on and beyond and eventually to the connection to Nettlebed. We stopped off at the Soft Rock Café for lunch. Soft Rock Café is another established camp site in the system. From there we are in more familiar Nettlebed country, descending Hammer Heights up the Antlion pitch,

© D. Tapp

© D. Tapp

down Diamond Alley, down the Knee Trembler, through the clambles and to our second night's camp at Salvation Hall.



© D. Tapp

Late Lunch at the Soft rock cafe

Greg broke the early morning silence – he had enough of sleep in the endless darkness where there was no marker between night and day. Things went to plan for our trip out the bottom section of Nettlebed. The ducks were dry. (This is an area that can sump out from time to time.) The Hinkle Horn Honking Holes were as intimidating as ever. Cold, tight, awkward and noisy. This is a series of three squeezes with quite small chambers between, with the third finished off with a corkscrew twist. Too bad if you have come all this way and can't fit! The locals suggest a test fitting before doing the through trip. All of us had been through the Hinkle Horn Honking Holes previously so we weren't too concerned.

Our first day down BFG was 9 hours of caving. Our second day was the same – 9 hours. The third day was shorter – somewhere in the order of 5 hours. This is definitely a three day trip. To have tried it in two would have wrecked me. Thankfully, the Pearse was not high and we had no trouble on the walk down to the cars.

I should mention that this trip is a very serious undertaking. Our party had one of the original explorers, Chris Whitehouse (who in terms of caving fitness is somewhere around "superman"), Al Warild a renown expedition caver and Greg Tunnock who it turns out also has a very long CV of expedition caving. So we had a reasonably strong party. Without a guide the trip would be quite a bit longer. And it doesn't take Einstein to figure out that if something went wrong any rescue

would be a lengthy and difficult exercise. If my white spirit had gone kaboom it would have been a very serious situation. If I had sustained severe burns it might have been 4 days before rescuers arrived at the Chocolate Room to discovered what the problem was.

If you are prepared to train for it (really seriously train for it) and take good advice on the correct equipment and are with the right group of people then this trip is the caving trip of a lifetime.

We had two days left in the country, Sunday and Monday. On Sunday it snowed on Mt Arthur. On Monday the Pearse River was flooding.

The trip was so satisfying, not just because we had done the Stormy Pot/Nettlebed Trip, but we had snuck through a very small window in the weather, and had a few feathers in the cap along the way – the first pull through trip and the first Aussies to do it that I am aware of.



© D. Tapp

Walls covered in crystals (BFG to Nettlebed trip)

President's Notes August 2015

Paul Osborne

Hi All,

We are moving forward in setting a number of standard through trips that we can use for introductory cavers and also for the pre and post conference trips associated with the International Congress of Speleology in 2017. The routing and set safety rigging is well on the way and we have begun to assign specialised trip leaders for each route. Some of the advantages of these set routes are that they can be done safely with almost anyone coming caving and at the same time minimise

equipment needed and impact on the cave.

As one of the few assessors left active, I have started a system of encouraging prospective trip leaders to specialise in one of these routes and then build their repertoire to 3 to 5 caves where a full trip leader status can be applied. I.e. endorse members as trip leaders for certain routes as a preliminary to becoming a full trip leader. I see this as an easier way to introduce members to trip leading and would welcome any comments either for or against.

One thing that I would also like to encourage is members becoming more responsible for their own caving projects instead of just tagging along. To that end I suggest that we start a club project list that is a living document available to all members so that members coming to club weekends can have some idea of what projects are in progress and which ones they wish to be involved in as well as adding their own projects.

Finally, this is your club so please feel free to contribute by emailing feedback to me or openly in a "letter to the editor".

Paul.

Water Tank Update

Thanks to Paul, Ken (a caver visiting Chillagoe with Paul) and Van, the new club water tank is now plumbed in and waiting for rain. They also cleaned the roof gutters and placed a few bolts in the roof as a safety belay for any future cleaning work.

Up and Coming Events

August

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

September

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

October

- 3/4th - Club Caving Weekend at Chillagoe.

Peter Bannink & Van Christensen (Secretary).



Steve Morgan in the entrance rift into Legless Pot

© R. Deasey

New Introductory Members

Quite a few new members joined the club since March this year. Please make welcome.

Jasper Preece
Anna Braun
Marta Del Pozo Fonesca
Amy Scanlan (RSS)
Troy Crawford
Wuthipong Piamaree
Laura Johnson
Ryan Mc Paul
Danniel Turner
Rachael Trevarthen
Phillip Duffey
Rodney Kiely
Katie Keophilaph (SUSS)
Denis Stojanovic (SUSS)
Sarah Abbot
Chris Cox
Bernadette Becher
Stephen Nenke
Erin Ellison
Emily Holt
Adriana Uzqueda
Sam Noonan
Rone Bakuwel
Kevin Smith
Barry Lacey