The Very Latest

Volume 11

October 1994

THE VERY BEST OF FORTY YEARS UNDER THE EARTH

An underground history of the CANBERRA SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY INC.

1954 - 1994

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Volume 11
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The very best of forty years under the earth

Contents

Introduction

This is the first issue of *The Very Latest* in 15 years and is only the fourth published since the Society's Silver Jubilee celebrations in 1978. It follows in the vein of the retrospective *The Very Best* edition published to mark the 25th anniversary. Unlike the last Very Best, however, this volume boldly takes a look into the future and makes several predictions that you will be able to check for accuracy at the 50th anniversary celebrations in 2004.

Many of you will recall that the Society's Silver Jubilee was celebrated with a dinner in 1978. It was generally agreed that it was a fine evening even if, as several foundation members noted, the celebrations were a year too early. Determined not to make the same mistake again, the current CSS committee commissioned an in-depth study of archival material. So much valuable material was unearthed during this dig that the committee decided it should see the light of day once more. This volume is the result.

Material was gleaned from various sources including early issues of *The Very Latest*, the CSS library, archives of the National Library and from the personal records of Ced Pratt and Jim Webb, both former members.

In the following pages, you will read about the search in 1953 for Brian O'Brien, a Sydney caver who became lost in East Deep Creek Cave at Yarrangobilly. You will also read how several people from Canberra became involved in the search and found O'Brien in a new section of the cave. In Canberra, this event sparked what had been a relatively minor interest in caves and led to the establishment of CSS approximately one year later.

This special issue of *The Very Latest* zooms in on some of the preoccupations of the Society since 1954. The articles concentrate on special projects, but it should be noted that for all of the forty years, members have also enjoyed plain old caving and other outdoor activities such as walking, skiing, climbing and diving.

Since its formation, CSS (Inc. since 1983) has never looked back. Except perhaps for occasional retrospective publication such as this.

The editors would like to thank all those who helped to produce this special issue of *TVL*. Without their work, this volume would not have appeared. Peter Nicholson, Marjorie Coggan, Bob Dunn and John Brush extracted material from old journals and club records. Don Glasco spent hours in the National Library searching for newspaper articles on the Brian O'Brien episode and on the formation of CSS.

A special thanks is also due to Ced Pratt, who allowed us to borrow material from his personal caving records, and to Jim Webb, who gave us copies of his treasured press clippings.

Finally, the editors would like to thank Chris Bradley for the cover design and Jeanette Dunkley for arranging the printing.

Editors: Bob Dunn
John Brush

Student Found Unhurt In Hitherto Unknown Cave

SYDNEY, Thursday 17 December 1953.

Brian O'Brien, 19-year-old University science student, missing since Monday in a network of caves at Yarrangobilly, was found alive to-day.

O'Brien was found by a search party in a passage of the caves not previously known.

He suffered no ill effects, but was ravenously hungry.

O'Brien and a companion, Fred Stewart, of Burwood Road, Burwood, went to the caves on Monday afternoon. They are both members of the Speleological Society which studies cave formations.

The youths became separated. Stewart found his way out of the caves and went for help when he discovered O'Brien was missing.

MOTHERS THANKS

O'Brien was found in dramatic circumstances at the bottom of a 900ft cave.

The boy's mother, Mrs O'Brien, who was staying at the Caves House at Yarrangobilly, collapsed when she heard the news. After she recovered, she said: "Thank you so much everybody."

O'Brien walked out of the caves in a mud-spattered pair of overalls and a beret.

He had been without food, water or light for three days.

His first action on walking out of the cave with the search party was to fall on his knees to drink his first fresh water from a running stream.

There was a happy scene when the boy and his father met at the mouth of the cave.

Both embraced and Mr. O'Brien said: "He is a good boy and I knew he would not do anything silly."

Young O'Brien told searchers: "I was pretty cold down there and my acetylene light became exhausted, so I wandered round in the dark to keep warm."

He added that he was following his friend, Stewart, on Monday when they suddenly sparated in one of the arms of the cave.

"I saw an opening and walked further into the cave to try to find a way out," he said.

"I knew Fred would get out and go for help. In the meantime I tried to find a stream which runs through the cave and would have followed it to the open."

O'Brien's first words when found were: "I'm sorry for the fuss I've caused, but I think I have found a new cave."

He thought it was Wednesday when he was found, and told searchers he had probably had only about half an hour's sleep.

He kept awake in case he heard searchers exploring the cave.

O'Brien's main feeling was of being locked in a dark room, but he said he was not particularly afraid, as he felt it would not be long before he was found. He had no means of telling the time.

To-night, at the Caves House, O'Brien is catching up on much needed sleep.

Canberra Times Friday 18 December 1953

Student Found Safe After Cave Ordeal

Brian O'Brien, the 19-year-old Sydney University student who disappeared in one of the Yarrangobilly caves on Monday, was found uninjured yesterday afternoon.

O'Brien had spent almost three days in darkness in the caves without food or water.

A search party of five found O'Brien about 900 feet inside the cave.

He climbed and walked out unaided.

Weak, But No Ill-Effects

Apart from being weak from lack of food, OBrien suffered no ill-effects from his long stay in the caves.

O'Brien, of Arthur Street, Homebush, and Frederick Stewart, of Burwood Road, Burwood, set out on Monday to examine the unexplored caves about three miles from Yarrangobilly Hotel.

Both are members of the Speleological Society, which studies cave formations.

They split up, and Stewart came out of the cave alone. He could not find O'Brien and went for help.

Police, Snowy Mountains Authority workmen, and members of the Speleological Society from Sydney made extensive searches for O'Brien on Tuesday and Wednesday, but could find no trace of him.

One of the party which found O'Brien, Mr James Webb, said O'Brien was found in the set of caves he had started to explore on Monday. He said: "We found him about 4.30pm this afternoon and we were out of the caves by about 5.30.

"It is hard to measure distance in caves, but I would say he was about 900ft in.

Sitting On Top Of Large Rock

"He didn't know where he was.

"He was sitting on top of a large rock in a cave which was 60 or 80ft high in places.

"There was mud and loose rocks and water in the cave.

"It was quite a dangerous operation to get down to him.

Searchers Led By Footprints

"We found him eventually through systematically searching. We located a footprint on the rocks.

"We tracked these footprints down until they led us to the cave.

"O'Brien was the first person ever to enter this section of the cave.

"We had to enter the cave through a very small hole about one foot square.

"We had no food with us except an orange and a piece of chocolate which we gave to him.

"He climbed out with us. He went in the middle of the party. He's now asleep."

Herald Friday 18-12-1953

Reproduced on below and on the facing page are three newspaper articles that record the finding of Brian O'Brien at Yarrangobilly and the founding of CSS approximately one year later.

CAVE EXPLORERS FORM SOCIETY

Canberra, whose clubs and associations cater for a great diversity of interests, gains yet another organisation with the formation last week-end of the Speleological Society, for the purpose of exploring mapping, and preserving information about the limestone caves areas in the Southern Tablelands. Isolated groups of caves explorers and speleologists have carried out work in caves systems in this area for many years, but inadequate records, or no records at all, have reduced the value of the work already done. Office bearers elected are: President, Mr. J. Webb; vice-president and secretary, Mr. E. A. Lane; records officer, Mr. H. Black; treasurer and equipment officer, Mr. J. Leslie. All caving information and enquiries should be sent to the secretary at the Hotel Acton. The society's maiden venture last weekend was an investigation of the Clietmore Caves system and the "Big Hole" at Kiawarree. Members plan to descend the hole, 300 feet deep and 225 feet across, to discover whether it connects with any underground cave or river system. The society is seeking information about cave regions and limestone outcrops in the area so exploration trips may be planned. Members believe at least a dozen important and only-partly explored caves exist within a radius of 100 miles of Canberra.

Canberra Times Tuesday November 2 1954

The following is a copy of the first Annual Report of the Society.

CANBERRA SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT 1954-5

The inaugural year of the Canberra Speleological Society has brought together a small but enthusisastic group of cavers. Considering the small numbers, much has been achieved in the course of the year and we are now in the fortunate position of having a choice of several new fields of exploration for the coming year as a result of the previous activities.

Meetings. Trips were undertaken by members of the Society to caves in the following areas:-

Bungonia(2 trips), Cheitmore, Cooleman(2), King I., Michelago(3), Mount Fairy, Wombeyan, Wyanbene(4).

Pioneering Work. At Wyanbene, the following new work was done. A new chamber was reached by a corkscrew passage from the main chamber of Wyanbene Cave proper; this was mapped. Advantage was taken of the extremely low water level of Feb., 1955 to penetrate upstream from the Extension of Wyanbene Cave along a flat crawl, normally filled, to gain access to an aven of approximately 25 ft. height. A new small cave was opened and entered ; a previously discovered pothole of promise was examined but only partly explored.

At Cooleman a previously unknown cave was entered and partly explored. This has been named the 'White Fish Cave' after an unpigmented rainbow trout , caught in the cave and forwarded to the Australian Museum, Sydney.

Equipment. The Society has placed an order for two 25 ft. duralumin rung and steel wire ladders. In addition two 25 ft. wooden runged rope ladders were constructed by members of the society and this, together with the necessary safety line, now forms our first club property.

Constitution. The Society is still without a Constitution and consideration should be given to drafting and adopting one in the ensuing year.

Federation of Australian Speleological Societies. The Society has approved the idea of a Federation and has forwarded ideas to Sydney for consideration.

This first year's activities of the Society has been successful, much has been accomplished and it is to be hoped that in the ensuing year the same interest will be maintained.

Signed J. Webb,

Date 5th October 1955 President.

It is interesting to note that the plea in Jim Webb's inaugural annual report (see above) that the Society consider drawing up a constitution fell on deaf ears. It was not until some eight years later that members saw the need for a formal constitution. Even then, members had mixed feelings. As *The Very Latest* No 34 of October 1963 notes:

> September meeting was historic. CSS decided to have a constitution. Some were enthusiastic, some were resigned to it, others remain unconvinced. For the writer the decision does not signify decadence or progress but just recognition of changed circumstances.

The same issue of *The Very Latest* also mentions the purchase of a scaling pole. The pole had been hired from a scaffolding company and taken into the inner reaches of Dogleg Cave, Wee Jasper. Trouble is, shortly after, the sumps flooded and stayed that way for months. The CSS committee eventually decided, outright purchase was more prudent:

> The club has also decided to lock up some of its liquid assets in capital equipment and the key to the lock is the weather. Answer to conundrum for members absent from meeting - a hired scaling pole between the water traps in Dogleg!

From *The Very Latest* No 25 of November 1962 comes a potted history of CSS:

Next comes a brief account of our club by the President

CANBERRA SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Graham Young

The following outline of the history of C.S.S. is presented for the benefit of new members. It is compiled from trip and annual reports, and because they are pretty scrappy, the accuracy of this story cannot be guaranteed.

Records of the actual formation of the Society do not exist. Prior to 1954, caving was carried on as an insignificant part of the activities of the Canberra Alpine Club. Some of the interested people in this group were engaged in the search for a Sydney speleo who was lost in the Yarrangobilly area in a cave. It was these three who found the lost caver and this incident really sparked off the establishment of the society late in 1954. The only names recorded from this time are Jim Webb, Vic Pickering, Harry Black and Ted Lane. These were quickly followed by Joe Jennings, Derek Moore, Don Fitzsimon, Graham Young, Jack Leslie, Bill Lucas, Hugh Mahon and others. The first two mentioned were experienced English speleos, and their entry into the society gave direction to what had been until then an uninformed approach to speleology. Unfortunately no records of the full membership at this time are now available.

In the light of our activities since the first year, it is hard not to think of C.S.S. without associating Wee Jasper with it. It was not, however, until October 1955 that the society made its first trip to this area. The purpose of the trip was to look at the Micalong Creek Limestone; we did not know of the Dip Cave or the caves on Punchbowl Hill at

that time. Despite the lack of activity at Wee Jasper, the society during its first year, nevertheless, did a lot of caving with trips to Bungonia, Cheitmore, Cooleman, Michelago, Mt Fairy, Quidong, Wombeyan and Wyanbene.

The Dip system at Wee Jasper was first entered by the society in October 1955 when only part of number 1 and number 2 were known of the 5 interconnected series of chambers and passages to be established. In November 1955 the society's second trip to the Dip Cave led to the discovery of number 4. This was quickly followed by numbers 3 and 5 and later on by extensions to 3 and 4. This represents the society's first major effort.

As a result of these finds the society concentrated on the Wee Jasper area. The major part of Punchbowl Cave and the whole of Dogleg Cave were explored for the first time as well as work being continued on the Dip system.

Dogleg cave was penetrated past the second watertrap for the first (and so far the only) time late in 1957. The best we have been able to do since then is to get as far as the second watertrap but no further. Numerous efforts to locate an alternative entry to this lost part of the system have been fruitless. During 1957 and 1958 a good deal of time and effort was put into digging a passage between Signature and Punchbowl Caves. This project was completed in 1958. Its success was largely due to Edith Smith's determination and Jim Webb's gelignite.

By 1959 the society's interest was turning to Yarrangobilly and a number of trips have been made to that area since then. Most of our work has been directed at proving (or refuting) the reputed link-up between the Coppermine Cave efflux with influxes on the plateau.

Occasional trips have been made to Cooleman Plain, where the first explorations of River and Fish Caves were the result of early activities of club members and where there is a great deal of work still to be done. It was as a result of the discovery of a blind fish in Fish Cave at Cooleman that the society achieved some publicity. The fish was subsequently identified as a rainbow trout.

No outline of the society's history would be complete without a reference to Dave Purchase and his bats. Dave started this study in 1959 as a private interest, but the work was later recognised by the C.S.I.R.O. and is now included as part of the Australian Bird Banding Scheme. By the time he left for Macquarie Island in 1962, Dave and his assistants had banded over 10,000 bats and had published 2 papers on bats.

The society has supported from the outset the establishment of the Australian Speleological Federation, and we have provided one president for the federation. We were also hosts to the third biennial conference of A.S.F. in 1960.

Unfortunately no figures of membership from year to year are available but it seems to have fluctuated about the 15 to 20 mark. There seem to be reasonable prospects of 1962 being a record year in this respect.

Matters of safety and training have always been close to the hearts of members. Current members would be interested to know that in 1965, the following rules were agreed on. One can only speculate on the reasoning behind the decision to implement the rules "at a later date as and when necessary". Also of interest is the apparent last minute change of heart about the training necessary for trip leaders. Could the deletion of surveying be the result of last minute lobbying efforts by Neil Anderson?

REVISED SAFETY PRECAUTIONS TO BE USED IN C.S.S.

(Decided by the CSS Committee, less C Pratt, absent, apology, on Tuesday, 22 6 65.)

The Presidential decree of 27th May, 1965, is rescinded in favor of the following rules which will be implemented at a later date as and when necessary.

1. An Official Trip is one carried out with the full knowledge and consent of the Committee. Members on non-official trips will not have access to club equipment unless by prior agreement with the committee. Club members who go on non-official trips do so as individuals and not as members of CSS and the club is therefore not liable for them in any way.

2. Trips will be conducted by trip leaders approved by the Committee, and will have passed such requirements as laid down by the Committee.

3. Trip leaders will book out and in with Search and Rescue.

4. The trip leader's authority is absolute. His instructions will be obeyed.

CAVING PRACTICE CODE:

1. Three sources of lighting will be carried.
2. Each person will be capable of tying a bowline.
3. Effective head protection will be worn.
4. Life lines will be used effectively on all pitches over 20 feet and elesewhere as required by the trip leader
5. Ladder pitch techniques, including tandem pitches, and control thereon will be under rigid control of the trip leader.
6. Other codes of caving practice will be issued from time to time.

DISCIPLINARY ACTION:

This will be in the hands of the Committee, who will discipline according to the severity of the offence. Offenders wll be able to appeal at a FULL meeting of the club.

TRIP LEADER'S QUALIFICATIONS:

A qualified trip leader shall be any member of the Society judged by the Committee to have satisfied the following conditions:—

1 He shall have sufficient sense of responsibility and the necessary temperament to ensure the safety of his party, the conservation of caves, and the well-being of he Society.

2 He shall have attended seven or more official trips as a member of the Society.

3 He shall be proficient in the following:
   (a) knots—bowline, prusik, "modified carrick bend";
   (b) belaying—preparation for, and use of, a lifeline, including holding a body in a simulated fall;
   (c) abseiling—on rock face and overhang for 30ft with or without a karabiner.
   (d) care and handling of all equipment at the Society's disposal;
   (e) ladder and prusik climbing tehniques.

4 He shall have training in: (a) cave first aid, (b) safety, ~~(c) surveying~~.

In 1968, attention focussed on Cooleman Plain where drought caused the sump in Murray Cave to open. The two articles that follow are reprinted from the February 1968 edition of *The Very Latest*. While the claim that the sump was open for the first time in 65 years is open to question, it nevertheless was a noteable discovery.

The sump last opened during the 1983 drought and the way things are going at present, it could dry up again next summer.

THE VERY LATEST

EST. 1953 — Published monthly by the Canberra Speleological Society — PRICE 5¢

Vol. 3. No. 5. Post Office Box 530, Canberra City, A.C.T. 2601.
February, 1968.

MURRAY'S SUMP OPEN.

The sump in Murray's Cave on Cooleman Plain was open for the first time in 65 years, thanks to the current drought.

A C.S.S. party found 1200 ft. of passageway and signatures dated 1902-1903 of well known Canberra pioneering families.

The decoration is the best to be found in the area, and, taking full advantages of the open sump, a survey and R.D.F. work has been done.

Full trip reports follow.....

COOLEMAN, 20th JANUARY, 1968.

The party consisted of Neil and Carol Anderson, Peter and Cassie Aitchison, John and Mary Mendom, and Roger, the only batchelor.

Saturday was spent on a walk to the waterfall, which had no water flowing in it, as the creek had vanished into a sink about 200 yards upstream. A concentrated search in the limestone about the sink and a short dig by Peter Aitchison brought to light a small cave which connected with water from the sink but could not be pushed any further as the water vanished into fissures and the limestone was shattered and very unstable.

The next cave to be investigated was Fisk Cave which had no water flowing into it. A pool of deep cold water was still there. Although the lower section of the cave had dried out, nothing new was found.

The Easter Cave efflux was looked at, but the river level had not fallen enough to allow entrance to the upstream without scuba gear.

On Sunday an argument as to the distance of Murray's Cave from Blue Water Hole resulted in the party walking up the gorge; on the way a quick look into Cooleman and Right Cooleman was made. After about 1 to 3 miles Murray's Cave was entered and the final sump was

found to be not so final IT WAS OPEN.

Neil, John, Peter and Roger, (and that veteran among cavers, "PUP"), started an exploratory trip. The first 400 ft. had some of the best decoration on the Cooleman Plain. Two more small sumps were met, one of which had a small puddle containing a transparent Trout about 6 ins. long. Two fissures were explored , one containing two avens of approx. 125 ft.

After about 1200 ft. the cave terminated in a waist-deep pool of icy water and a boulder choke which was pushed for another 30 ft. but was not passable.

The names and dates of the last visitors to this part of the cave showed that the sump was last open in 1902 to 1903 and had been closed for 65 years.

The party returned to the surface to find that it was raining heavily and the road out of Blue Water Hole had turned to mud, making our return to Canberra very difficult.

Roger Curtis.

COOLEMAN PLAIN, 24th JANUARY, 1968.

The party consisted of Ian Nankivell, (Trip Leader), Roger Curtis, Ced Pratt and Phillip Pratt.

The objective was to survey past the sump in Murray's Cave.

It was reported on the previous Sunday that Murrays sump was open, and exploration had revealed about 1200 ft. of passageway. This party found the sump open, (despite heavy rain over the weekend,) and had a quick look through before surveying. It was found that water had blocked the third sump, (which had been dry on the Sunday,) and that the second sump was visibly filling. A miners' dial and tape survey was done from the top of the first sump through to the third sump, a distance of only some 600 ft.

On completion of the survey, R.D.F. work was begun with Roger and Ian in the cave, and Ced and Phillip on the surface. Six stations were taken in the cave and plotted on the surface - and it is very interesting to see how the cave lies in relation to the surface topography.

Several names were seen in this new section of cave - M.E. Gifford,(25/2/1903), Malcom Southwell and several with the surname of Sheedy. These would tend to indicate that there has been no access to this part of the cave for up to 65 years.

Ian Nankivell.

A summary of the Society's work in Dogleg was recorded in The Very latest in 1967. This is reproduced below. As an aside, observant readers will note that the newsletter states the Society was established in 1953. Little wonder that our Silver Jubilee Celebrations were held one year too early, in 1978.

The Very Latest

Est. 1953. (Published monthly by the Canberra Speleological Society) Price 6d.

President: N. Anderson, Flat 27, Lyndon Court, Chauvel St., Campbell.
Secretary: I. Nankivell, 1 Harding Street, Watson.

Vol. 2 No. 10 Address: Box 530, Canberra City. June, 1967.

Brief History of Dogleg Cave, Wee Jasper (WJ. 13)

The first recorded entry of this cave by C.S.S. members occurred in October 1956, when the party almost reached the Lake Chamber despite the fact that the efflux was flowing. The Lake Chamber obviously dried out very quickly, and the Opera House chamber was first entered in early 1957, but progress was stopped by water-trap.

In January 1958, during a severe drought, the third water-trap opened, and general exploration and a survey were pushed up the right-hand passage and along the 300 ft. fissure. Little exploration was undertaken up the water-filled left-hand passage.

The drought broke, and blocked off the water-traps and also the sand trap - Dogleg was open for 9 days.

Several trips were made to dig through the sand trap (and this process has had to be continually repeated over the years as water entering the cave from near the entrance flows back into the cave and washes sand into the trap.)

There are no recorded trips from November 1958 to February 1961.

Dogleg reopened at the end of March 1963 but closed again at the end of April. During this time telephone wire was laid up the right-hand branch. It was noted that once there was an air space at the third water trap then the water level tended to drop on an average by about 6" per week. (One can tell if the third trap is open if there is a draught blowing through the sand trap).

From June 1963 there was a concerted effort to try and link several of the holes on the Punchbowl Hill with the Dogleg system - these were tied in on the survey map of Dogleg (held by Ced Pratt).

In the most promising hole, a descent of 125 ft. was made, but further progress was stopped by CO_2. In June 1964 when a further descent was attempted, it was found that the CO_2 was 50 ft. higher than on previous trip.

About this time C.S.S. initiated a syphoning programme to clear the third water trap which has always been the main obstacle in the cave. Between the second and third water traps a mud dam was built and this had the effect of diverting water down Andy's Hole and gives the second trap longer to try out i.e. when the volume of water drops sufficiently to allow Andy's Hole to take it all with no overflow into the second trap.

In late May 1964 the third trap opened again, and the left-hand branch was explored to a deep sump. It closed early in June 1964. Numerous attempts were made to get the syphons in trap 3 working, but were unable to drain it.

It was not until May, 1967 that the trap opened again - during a drought. Radio location gear was borrowed from the Highland Caving Group and a series of important points - the top of the sand trap, the third water trap, the junction of the left and right hand branches, etc., were located on the surface. In this manner, several holes on the hill have tied in very well with the cave, and prospects for another entrance into Dogleg are very good.

During the course of exploration up the left hand branch a large cavern was located - this is quite out of character with the rest of the cave - which tends to be very high and narrow.

The telephone line was extended up the 300 ft. fissure in the right hand branch and about half way to the double duck-unders up the left hand branch. We have been very lucky that little damage had been done to the telephone wire in the first section of the cave. This system of communication proved very useful when using the radio detection gear.

This cave can be very dangerous, especially during heavy rain and should be treated with caution.

Further information can be obtained from the Secretary if anyone is interested.

Ladders were another preoccuption with members in the 1960s. The strength of homemade ladders was a major issue, as can be seen below, but money was another one. Not, as might be expected, the cost of the Bonwick alternative, or the cost of raw materials. Instead, it was more a question of how much profit could be made by knocking up 150 feet of ladder in a weekend to sell to a customer. Research reveals the customer was the ANU, though not,one suspects, the ANU caving club (NUCC).

The Very Latest

Est. 1953. (Published monthly by the Canberra Speleological Society) Price 6d.

President: N. Anderson, Flat 27,Lyndon Court,Chauvel St. Campbell.
Secretary: I. Nankivell, 1 Harding St., Watson.

Vol. 2 No. 8 Address: Box 530,Canberra City. April, 1967.

WANTED

Willing workers!!

We are having a ladder-making weekend on 15-16 April at the Pratts. It would be appreciated if as many members as possible would turn up to help.

We have a buyer for 150 feet of ladder, and we want to make as much of this as possible over this weekend. If we are able to successfully complete this assignment, the Society's finances will be greatly improved.

NOTICE: Thanks to the great hospitality of the Andersons, a party will be held **in** their flat - No. 27, Lyndon Court, Chauvel St., Campbell on the evening of 15th April. Everyone invited - bring your own drink.

LADDERS.

Several months ago the question of the strength and durability of our newly-made ladders was raised. Tony Swan undertook to test the pressures at which the ferrels on these ladders did in fact slip. These experiments have now been completed and a report presented to the Committee.

Briefly, the results of the tests have shown that aluminium ferrels with two crimps began to slip at 20 foot-lbs. and that once slipping had commenced the wire afforded no friction to the ferrel.

Copper ferrels on the other hand, with two crimps, did not slip until 35 foot-lbs, and that a constant pressure of 20 foot-lbs had to be maintained to keep the ferrel slipping.

Aluminium ferrels with three crimps were also used, and these did not slip until 35 foot-lbs and like the copper ferrels maintained a resistance of 20 foot-lbs.

The model used was designed so that to work out the pressure at which the ferrels would slip the foot-lbs were multiplied by 16. Thus for copper ferrels with two crimps and aluminium ferrels with

three crimps , each ferrel could withstand 560 lbs (i.e. 35x16) so that the strength of each rung on a ladder would be approx. 1120lbs - quite a reasonable safety margin.

Tests were also conducted on the C-links at the ends of the ladders, and it was found that that this link is the weakest point in the ladder - giving at about 960lbs.

It is therefore proposed that in future we use either copper ferrels or aluminium ferrels with three crimps.

The Visitor book project

Marjorie Coggan

In 1979, CSS embarked on a program to find out who was visiting some of the local caves and how often.

Some twenty books were placed in caves at Yarrangobilly, Wee Jasper, Cooleman, London Bridge, Wyanbene, Marble Arch and Deua, a new area discovered by members in 1978 and located midway between Wyanbene and Bendethera.

Because some of the caves were known to be wet and others were suspected of attracting yobbos, members pooled their plumbing and engineering skills to construct visitor books and containers that were impervious to both water and vandals. Our endeavours were partly successful. The synthetic, untearable paper and plates of aluminium used for the books stood up to the toughest of conditions, but were hard to read. In wet caves, plastic pencils were successfully used, but they did tend to walk. The containers, made from PVC plumbing fittings and bolted to the cave, never broke or rusted, but were sometimes found wrenched from their mounts. The damage appeared to be the result of sticking lids, rather than pure vandalism.

By the time the project wound up in 1983, members had concluded that:

- Members of ASF clubs formed only a small percentage of those visiting caves at places like Wyanbene, Wee Jasper and Marble Arch;
- Most people caving at Cooleman obviously did not have, and probably did not know they were meant to have, a permit to go underground;
- Visitor books did not put an end to cave graffiti, as had been hoped;
  - in fact, in Signature Cave, it appears some made use of the pencils CSS had so thoughtfully provided;
- In one or two caves, most of the usage resulted from CSS checking the books; -
  - such caves were usually remote and or wet;
- It was not very easy checking the book at the inner end of Murray Cave;
  - soon after the book was installed, heavy rains brought an end to the 1983 drought and returned the water traps to their normal state;
- Perhaps they should concentrate on caves in more remote corners of the world.

FORTY YEARS OF TRIPS
Bob Dunn

With the Fortieth Anniversary in mind the Club librarian had a look through some of the old files. He discovered that CSS actually has quite a good collection of old trip reports. But if any of you have a collection of your own, please let us know as we would love to check for any that are missing from our fine old collection. The following are some selected "quotable quotes" from these treasures. In most cases, just the person writing the report is mentioned, and where the writer is not obvious, the trip leader was assumed to be the writer. Dates given are for the actual trip rather than the date of writing the trip report.

CAVING

Well, this is what it's all about, isn't it?? Here's a selection of some real caving history, told by those who were there in their own words.

What appears to be the Society's first descent of Dip Cave is recorded as:

> *Rather late in the day we now turned our attention to a big descending cave mouth of which Gordon Flaherty had been informed by a local earlier in the day. Rubbish of every conceivable nature had been hurled down the sloping mouth, apparently from the beginnings of settlement in the area, in the hope of blocking it no doubt. Fortunately they hadn't succeeded and the pile of debris was negotiated on the rope's end to lead into the cave, Moore leading the party once again at the entrance.....Glimpses of outside light revealed an alternative roof entry, a small hole partly blocked by timber.....However, the floor and walls of the main chamber were not fully examined and there are certainly some side openings. A fissure in the right hand wall from the entry showed a passage below, but there was not time to try it.*
> J N Jennings, 16 October 1955

Linking up the Dip Series:

> *The third passage leads back towards the Dip Cave, and it was in this passage that Vic and Derek discovered the link up between the two sets of caves. The joining passage had to be forced, and a ticklish roof traverse negotiated before the way through was discovered. The passage comes out in the Stalagmite Cave, about 40 feet above its floor, and more ladders are needed before the round trip through the entrance of the Dip Cave can be completed.*
> Graham Young, 6 December 1955

> *Returning to the chamber, Joe was climbing up a possible further development going west close to the entrance to the chamber when he heard a voice below and to his left. It was Edie. She moved nearer and seemed to get right under him. Descending, he then could see Edie through a narrow slit. Edie was at the east end of the Main Chamber near to the entrance into No 5. This was at a point Jim had thought promising on a previous trip.....So we had at last found the renowned extension to No 4 predicted ever since the survey of the Dip had been plotted. It was an exciting moment!!*
> J. N. Jennings, 29-30 June 1957

The discovery of Canberra Hole at Bungonia:

We then moved across to B30 which proved to be no more than a few holes in the rock. On our way across to B8 Terry stopped to throw a rock down a small hole to the ground. We estimated the depth at about 30 ft. We then opened it up from about 6" diameter to about 3 ft. We tied my carbide lamp to the nylon rope and lowered it down the hole. The lamp went down about 105 ft and didn't touch the bottom.
Reg Homer, 18 May 1965
On Sunday, Bill Price and Neil Anderson descended the new hole near B8. Bottom was reached at 105 ft. Further progress down a gently sloping passage was blocked by an extremely concentrated level of foul air.
Neil Anderson, 18 July 1965

The discovery of Shatter Cave, Cooleman:

We headed for the cave Purchase, Bain, Nankivell and Jennings had found in June....But lack of tackle prevented further work at this time....The rock is very strongly cleaved and yields very dangerous material on people lower down. Jennings left his lamp at the entrance....
J N Jennings, 1-4 October 1965
However, the effort of carrying four ladders and three ropes was poorly rewarded.....On the descent Ian Nankivell accidentally dislodged a stone which neatly cut one ladder wire in two as if done with tin snips, and a large pair at that. Everybody was convinced that Joe's emphasis on the instability and the angularity of the collapse material had not been exaggerated and that the appropriate name for the cave suggested by Terry Evans was Shatter Cave.
J N Jennings, 26-28 November 1965

The discovery of Caesar's Hall, Wyanbene:

The bypass squeeze, discovered by NUCC was easily located. and a further 100 plus feet of fairly easy going led to the base of the series of pretty, red, rimstone pools. It was noted that although unnecessary, the NUCC party had climbed over the right side of the pools, causing deformation. An easy ascent past the pools led to a large flat roofed cavern in which the party divided. Ian and Brian pushed to the right until stopped by a 25 foot deep pit in the floor. Neil and Kel, climbed a rockfall on the left and after some acrobatics emerged on top of it. The ascent to the right to the peak of the rockfall was not attempted but to the left a steep 200 foot descent down scree and boulders gave access to the stream. The cave was not pushed beyond this point but the large cavern continues out of sight. The dimensions of these caverns are too large to be estimated, the roof height in places easily exceeding 150 feet. No footprints were found after scaling the rockfall, thus it appears that NUCC were confined to the area between the rockfall and the pit.
Neil Anderson, 8 May 1966

The discovery of the Gunbarrel:

A few doubtful steps cut in mud comprised a rather lethal traverse, which was named "Temporary Traverse" because of the nature of its construction. The cavern continues for a further 140 feet over blocks of sharp limestone. A wide slot in the left hand wall afforded a view of a floor some 40 feet below and a roof which was only assumed to be present, for it could not be seen. A 30 foot ladder was used to descend the slot and a short scramble then opened into an almost circular aven, 45 feet in diameter, having

solution flutings 3 feet wide running 40 feet up the walls and roof height conservatively estimated at over 150 feet. This figure is merely nominal since the combined beams of three Oldham cells could not reach the ceiling.
Neil Anderson, 28 May 1966

This may have been the first trip to Frustration Lake:

Having completed our oral transaction [they met MSS and Blue Mountains speleos in the cave] *we steamed off towards the objective of our trip, which was to reach the Bitter End of Wyanbene Cave or die in the attempt, unless we got fed up and went out instead....The newcomers were suitably impressed by the size and grandeur of Caesar's Hall. They were soon to be depressed, oppressed and suppressed by the deep mud in the next section of the cave. In spite of the playful and carefree attitude of the group, no one was actually drowned, or strangled by the rope during our progress through the Mud Series. The "difficult chimney" was climbed and laddered, then the ladder was drawn up and rigged for the descent to the "final lake". Having reached the lake, we all feasted on chocolate and waterlogged sandwiches, an occasional cigarette was lit by an equally occasional smoker, and we all enjoyed a 20 minute rest.*
Neil Anderson, [undated]

EXPLOSIVES, CLEARING, DIGGING AND BLOCKING AGAIN

In those days explosives and digging were frequently used. Of course, these things are "politically incorrect" now but back then, such activities were enthusiastically embraced as necessary tools of the trade:

In some places impenetrable fissures appear to open out to a passable width in a few feet. In view of the nature of this widening, it is unlikely that brute force and hammers could effect an entry, and it is recommended that explosives should be employed....In addition, it would be wise to knock down the chocked boulder in the pitch leading into Bone Chamber, as this boulder is not very well supported, and a potential source of a severe headache for the one on whom it lands.
D. Moore, Anniversary Weekend meet, Dip Cave, [1955?]

On the way, [Fish Cave] was turned into a volcano by dint of firing the driftwood choke. Jennings the fire-raiser had to beat a rapid retreat to avoid suffocation as the conflagration had to be started on the updraught side.
J Jennings, 15-17 June 1956, Cooleman

Apparently, the first reference to the famous dig between Punchbowl and Signature:

We then went to Signature Cave where we started to dig through the block closing the passage between Signature and Punchbowl Caves.
John Kirkpatrick, Dave Purchase, Edie Smith, 2 March 1958

The digging appears to have gone on for some time, perhaps a year or two, while the first reference to the connection being used seems to be:

> *Edith left with Prof Brown's party at about 8.45 so she could go over the surface with them. The rest of us finished breakfast and joined them in the Signature Cave and carried on through to Punchbowl Cave with her.*
> Dave Purchase, 14 August 1960

And occasionally, very occasionally, CSS actually puts back what it has taken away:

> *The cartage of six bags of cement to the site in the cave was accomplished without difficulty but lots of sweat. The mixing spot was chosen just inside the inner mouth of the tunnel....to cut a long story short, a 6 foot thick plug of rock and concrete was constructed filling the inner end of the tunnel in a time of 6 hours. The six bags of cement were found to do the job neatly with no wastage and approximately 30 gallons of water were used in the mixing.*
> Neil Anderson, 3-4 September 1966

Then there was the time when those involved got a very big fright and immediately wished they could put it back! Thankfully it turned out not to be their doing:

> *On our return to the shaft, we found that we were not quite through to the measureless caverns previously mentioned, and therefore, a second charge was placed. This was detonated at about 4.25 pm and the party waited at the top of the shaft for the smoke to clear....At 4.36 pm a loud subterranean rumbling accompanied by a pronounced trembling of the ground was felt. Convinced that we were dabbling with forces beyond our control, we inspected the shaft once more and returned to camp....After tea it was decided to examine Punchbowl and try to replace the roof of Far Chamber before Joe Jennings found out that we had accidentally relocated it. Our peace of mind was restored when we found the cave completely intact except for the majority of the bats which had fled to places unknown..[on Sunday]..we climbed our own ladder into the No 3 series...On trying to descend through the boulder pile into No 3 extension, some difficulty was experienced in finding the correct route, which Anderson put down to his own bad leadership, and too much grog the night before. However, on closer examination, it was seen that the rubble had settled, and effectively blocked the route. We have since discovered that the collapse was caused by an earth tremor located within a radius of 70 miles of Canberra.*
> Neil Anderson, 24-25 June 1967, Wee Jasper

And at Cooleman, the work on the [infamous] South Branch dig started thus:

> *This has been on the Club's books as it were from the beginning of the club but nothing has been done. As it is very promising indeed, it is really worthwhile borrowing shearlegs, block and tackle, and bringing up gelignite, etc. We really ought to get busy on this.*
> J N Jennings, 4-6 December 1962

And continued: *A really heavy crowbar proved its worth when the sledge "went west" for making cracks as well as for its more usual use as a lever. However all these would have carried us no further without Harry Black's skilful use of Polar*

Plastergel. Careful mud packing and the innovation of water filled plastic bags laid on top of the mud were the probable secrets of some very effective blasting of the large rocks.
Joe Jennings, 15-17 March 1963

By the mid-60s though, a conservation ethic was becoming evident:

The formations of this cave are both clean and well preserved, with almost every type appearing at its best. To preserve this state of affairs, it would be necessary for parties entering this cave to insist on rubber soled boots only. With rubber or leather, the only damage to formation would be the smearing of mud, which can easily be washed off. However, with tricounis, clinkers, or hobnails, the scratches left when crossing the formation are permanent, and will soon destroy much of the beauty to be found in this cave. It would be better for a party to enter this cave barefoot, than to use footwear, which would permanently disfigure the formation.
Neil Anderson, 15-16 January 1966, Yarrangobilly, on Coppermine Cave

WEATHER AND OTHER UNPLEASANT THINGS

Back in the mid-50s stalwarts frequented Church Cave, Wee Jasper almost as often as the bats they were banding, blissfully unaware of the presence of histoplasmosis as this account testifies:

First call was at Church Cave to investigate the bat and air situation. The bats were there all right and the air was better but not good....We didn't go in beyond daylight as though the air was better, it smelt foul and hot in the cave and we didn't like to risk going in too far.
John Kirkpatrick, Dave Purchase, Edie Smith, 2 March 1958

Caves are generally located 'in the bush', so cavers in this age of acronyms are really "OPWAPs": Outdoors People With A Purpose. As such, they inevitably encounter fires, storms and tempest, and things that go 'bump' in the night:

.....also a minor flood was experienced on Sat. night and on Sunday evening. The Slater-mobile passed by a bushfire [while a] snow storm on Sunday night completed the series of crises with the elements.
E Slater, 4-6 October [1958?]

Sometimes the enthusiasm of early CSS members seemed to know no bounds: Talk about "tough"!!:

To Thermal gate. Monty & Bill sleep in a four wheel machine from Germany that doesn't require water. After two hours of sleepless sleep, two contorted pieces of sub-human driftwood agreed that greater comfort is to be had in limbo. So, Bill and I decamped to a house (still on wheels) that hadn't a roof but did have one door and a small square hole in the floor useable only in extreme nocturnal emergencies... The floorboards were harder than concrete.... During the night, one of the ceiling plaster panels suddenly decided to change its angle of repose at which fright poor Bill kicked violently against a long plank resting against the wall. The plank fell against the back of the door and rammed it shut with a violent thud. [This was OK though] as the gale wind was now deflected from the 100% ventilated window upwards through the Milky Way roof.
Monty Morgan, 16 November 1963, Wee Jasper

And speaking of things that go 'bump' in the night:

> *During the heavy rain a second nefarious and unseen rock came crashing down from the cliff above. This was the second time that night!! The first was when some animal dislodged a smaller rock which missed John by inches.*
> Bob Dunn, 5-6 February 1977, Colong

And if you think Monty Morgan and crew were doing it tough, try a bivouac in mid-winter:

> *It was too late to return to camp that same day as had been previously thought. [Instead] a bivouac was made. A large fire was built and Purchase Constructions Pty Ltd erected a bracken fence to keep out the chill valley winds....the party settled down for the night in a variety of somnambulistic poses. Whenever the fire looked like going out (ie, when the flames were less than 20 feet and reduced to a dull roar) more trees were heaped on it - this all leading to the inevitable complaints of one, Purchase, who stated that another, Jennings, with malice aforethought, attempted to roast the aforementioned Purchase by propelling the fire towards him. Nankivell heroically stayed awake most of the night on account of being unable to sleep on steeply-inclined ground without gradually slipping into the inferno.*
> T. D. Bain, 11-14 June 1965, near junction of Cave Creek and Goodradigbee R.

Or this night at Yarrangobilly:

> *....Surface traverse of high accuracy in southern area - all went well in spite of shocking weather conditions - overnight minimum of -15°C at Cotterills Cottage.*
> [Well, one <u>will</u> insist on going to Yagby in mid-winter!!--Ed]
> A P Spate, 11-14 July 1974

MOTOR CARS AND OTHER MOBILE DISASTERS

Cavers have always made extraordinary demands on their motor vehicles and CSS was no exception. The tracks were rough, loads were heavy, and conditions unpredictable. Exhaust systems and fuel tanks were often damaged, and getting bogged was commonplace! Well, they say that getting there is half the fun!!

> Getting into Wyanbene Cave: *Therefore the southern bank was used by the party, with some interesting results. Bogging was frequent in the black soil, and negotiation of the scant mile and a half occupied three hours. However the campsite in the clearing rewarded all the strenuous efforts, even if it was not reached until after dark.*
> Harry Black, 28-29 July 1962

> On the way out of Cooleman: *But the Land Rover party came unstuck. Warning should have been taken from the fluke which had already happened, namely an acetylene lamp had ridden all the way from River Cave to the gate near White's (Spencers) Hut on the bumper bar of the Land Rover without being bounced off. Another unlikely thing happened on the way back. The first crossing of the Goodradigbee near the Bluett's place was made without difficulty although the river was somewhat high, the second [crossing] stopped the engine 3/4 way across. It*

dried out and the car came out easily. But the fan belt was freed for the final and worst crossing. Once across the fan belt was returned to position but in the gloaming a tyre lever was left in the bonnet. We went all the way along Brindabella valley and got nearly up to the top of the hill when lights and engine failed. Open up the bonnet and what do we find? A tyre lever jammed tightly between oil filter and radiator, neatly shorting straight across the battery terminals. The battery was quite flat.
J N Jennings, 4-6 December 1962

At Cooleman: *After lunch it was planned to go to the cave which we had failed to find through misdirection the day before. However Frank Young of SUSS who was also at the Blue Waterhole, but fishing, had burst his engine through not draining (the temperature was 22F) and on two cylinders couldn't get out onto the road.*
J N Jennings, 12-15 April (Easter) 1963

At Bungonia: *Party left Canberra 8 am arrived at Bungonia at 10 am proceeded straight to the new found hole located approx 10 yards south 88 yards west of trig point 9 (it is also on the line between B7 and B8. The first thing to be done was to remove the tree, which had apparently been felled by vandals, to a position across the top of the hole, while moving this tree into position the battered VW became more battered.*
Reginald J Homer, 20 May 1965

The Kimberlies: *My West Kimberley trip of May to August this year was an eventful one, including such items as getting 5 flat tyres simultaneously* [must have been car and trailer-- Ed], *driving 1000 miles without a foot brake, and having to boil the radiator water daily on the return through the cold nights of the Centre in order to get the vehicle started.*
J N Jennings, 24 September 1970

GEOGRAPHICAL AND OTHER EMBARRASSMENTS

Cavers almost never get lost as such, merely "geographically embarrassed". This next quote will sound awfully familiar-- even to new members of CSS:

On Monday, an attempt was made to locate the "Maze" Cave. Unfortunately, this proved fruitless due to imperfect instructions and the day was spent swimming and practice rope work under the instruction of Les Hall.
Blair Hunt, 26-28 January 1963, Cliefden

But having a map and compass does not always improve things either, at least not in CSS, as this confused and confusing account proves:

We reached Fossil Cave entrance where Neil set out on Terry's bearing taken off a borrowed map. Neil had to walk along bearing 164°and I had to walk along 29° but still was the wrong way so "Boy Wonder" said "Ah! It must be a back bearing" so he decided it must be 209°. The theory was that Neil walked along 164° from Fossil and I walked along 209 and where we crossed must be B18....Ten minutes later I reached B15 and no sign of Neil or Terry.....We decided that something had gone wrong [A brilliant deduction--Ed]. *After studying the map for some minutes the "true" location of B18 was found. But upon arriving there we found a small hole going down 10 ft., and in about 20 ft., to make matters worse, there was a large '6' chiselled into the rock. This was not what we were looking for, so we gave up in despair.*
Reg Homer, 18 May 1965, Bungonia

If one cannot embarrass someone else through faulty directions, one can always embarrass one's self:

> *[Neil Anderson] was sucking the petrol from the car's petrol tank up a tube so that he could fill his primus. He however was using a carbide lamp for light, and he got a mouth full of petrol, spat it out all over the lamp and flames promptly began to lick around the lip of the petrol tank. The fire was extinguished but Neil was happy -- he wouldn't need to shave for a week!*
> Terry Evans, 1-2 August 1964, Wee Jasper

Cavers are not only hard on their motor cars, but extremely demanding on their gear:

> *After Evans had climbed up to the ledge he was nominated to stay there whilst a goods lift was effected. Spate at the bottom tied on the goods weighing approx 60lbs but Evans after hauling it up about half way lowered it to be halved in weight. Then he proceeded to haul it up again. When Evans had the packs about 10' below his hand they suddenly removed themselves as one of Spate's knots or a karabiner came undone and dropped 130' to the floor. The packs happened to contain Evans's 6 day old £30 camera, Spate's heap about £8 worth, Tony Hart's camera worth about £35, along with numerous flash gear, spare lenses, bat banding gear, ships flares, lamps, etc etc.* [One of these cameras was actually repairable--Ed]
> T Evans, 23 August 1964, Drum Cave, Bungonia

Some other things have also been "let loose", but with lesser or even greater 'effect' depending on your viewpoint:

> *The party below consumed a frugal lunch of what had commenced the descent (via gravity) as a packet of prunes.*
> Neil Anderson, reporting from the bottom of Big Hole, 7 May 1966

Then there was the time CSS as a club managed to (somewhat) embarrass itself, and finally acknowledged that it needed more than one ladder:

> *Some slight difficulties were encountered especially among the newer cavers when the cave party was ascending the 60 foot pitch using the Club's only 29 foot ladder.* [!!!] *There were some mutterings among the SSS members about passing round a hat at their next meeting for the benefit of less privileged societies. We assured them however, that as soon as materials were available, we would knit some more ladders.*
> Neil Anderson, 3-4 September 1966, trip to seal Edie's Tunnel between Signature and Punchbowl

In retrospect, could it all be true??? It seems a shame that we haven't continued with the grand tradition of writing up trip reports. On the plus side however, future cavers won't be able to black mail us with articles like this!!!

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, CSS members were frequently turning up new passage in local areas such as Wee Jasper and Cooleman Plain. Trips were run almost every weekend and areas were covered very thoroughly. The result was that it became increasingly difficult to make new discoveries. Even at Yarrangobilly, it had become hard to make new discoveries and little remained unmapped by the end of the 1970s.

CSS members started to look further afield and the style of caving started to change. Trips became less frequent, but were of longer duration. Expeditions to more distant places like the Nullarbor became more common and members participated in expeditions to New Guinea. During the 1980s Thailand was the major focus. Since 1983, CSS members have participated in six major expeditions to Thailand. The trips resulted in the discovery and exploration of two large stream caves and many smaller ones.

More recently, the main focus has been the Gregory National Park in the Northern Territory. Four expeditions have been held since 1991, resulting in the exploration of several large caves.

Reproduced below are accounts of two typical CSS expeditions, one to Thailand and another to the Northern Territory.

The following article is based on a draft manuscript for the as yet unpublished second edition of the *Caves of Northwest Thailand.*

Highlights of the 1988 Expedition to Thailand

John Brush

There are many Tiger Caves in Thailand and we were beginning to wonder if Huoy Khun Cave should have been another. We had just found a set of unfamiliar animal tracks in the narrow passage. They looked very fresh. Were they there on the way in? Nobody could remember.

It was the last day of the expedition, we had just finished surveying an extension to the cave and all we wanted to do was get back to the lodge for a quiet Mekong (the local whisky). Suddenly we were worried. Were the local tigers carnivorous? Was this to be our last cave? Had we had our last Mekong?

Subconsciously we moved closer together and slowly continued out. Around the next corner a pair of eyes loomed out of the darkness. Now we were really worried. How would we get out now? The men in the party unanimously agreed that Dorothy should go first and not so much pushed her to the front as stepped back faster than she did. Bravely, Dorothy inched forward, shining her light at the eyes in an attempt to blind the beast. Soon there was a shriek and a call for help. We rushed to her aid. Alas, we were not quick enough. By the time we arrived, she had already dispatched into specimen bottles, the two phosphorescent insects that had been clinging to the cave wall.

So much for tigers. An adrenalin rush over something that was really quite ordinary for this part of the world. In a way it seemed to sum up the expedition.

Two weeks earlier, the expedition members - all 14* of us, excluding locals - met up at Wilderness Lodge in the wilds of Thailand's Golden Triangle. As a group, we seemed a little more tense than last time. Was it the recent murder of an Australian woman in a nearby village? Was it the even more recent knife assault and rape of a German tourist in the next hut? Perhaps it was jet lag or culture shock. Whatever, we shouldn't have worried. John Spies, our local host, was not taking any chances. He poured an extra round of evening cocktails and told us he had hired two policemen armed with M16 automatic rifles to protect us. We felt completely safe. Except for Carol, who, on a slippery climb the next day, was offered an arm up. It was an M16, barrel first.

The policemen turned out to be enthusiastic cavers, heading underground at every opportunity. Their gear was limited to the bare essentials: torch, M16 and a pack containing ammunition and a pistol. It took several days to convince them that protection, if it was required at all, certainly wasn't needed a couple of kilometres underground. At this stage though, we weren't worried about tigers! We later heard stories were circulating in local villages that we were looking for gold hidden by the Japanese during the Second World War. Could this explain police interest in the caves and the underground weaponry?

Our first objective was Nam Lang Cave, first entered by John Dunkley in 1983 and further explored on the 1985 and 1986 expeditions. It is a spacious stream cave, with the first 4km of passage rarely being less than 20m high and wide. With about 9km of passage, it is Thailand's second longest cave. We wanted to photograph a 30m stalagmite in Sala Khan Thai, an upper level section, and check out a couple of possible extensions. One lead was a pitch at the inner end of the upper level. Neil and John B abseiled 30m to discover some nice decoration, but only 200m of passage. No sign of the fabled great north extension. Other high level leads in the outer kilometre or so of cave revealed only short extensions. Perhaps we felt inhibited by the police hardware.

Several days later we moved camp to the upstream entrance of Mae Lana Cave. Our entourage had swelled to about thirty, with cooks, cleaners, lamp-lighters, furniture makers (our bamboo furniture was made on site) supervisors, the police escort and several porters from a nearby Lahu hill tribe village. Camp was set up in the bottom of the doline some 200m from the main entrance. While we were there, a couple of rain showers proved that our makeshift tents - large sheets of plastic - had seen one camp too many.

Tham Mae Lana (Tham = Cave), named after a nearby village, was first explored on the 1986 expedition. At that time more than 6km of stream passage and some large, well decorated upper level chambers were found. Since then, further discoveries have increased total length of the system to more than 12km, making it the longest cave in Thailand and, as John D says, the longest known in mainland southeast Asia.

There were several forays into the cave for exploration, sightseeing and photography. Some 2km from the entrance, we mapped 2km in a tributary stream passage. Despite some impressive decoration, the tributary was not a nice place with thick mud and foul air. Other discoveries included about 600m of spacious upper level passage and about 1km of streamway in a karst window in the doline.

Several people followed John T to look at a shaft he had discovered high on the northeast side of the Mae Lana doline. The shaft, which had two entrances just a few metres apart,

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* John Dunkley, Neil and Carol Anderson, Ken Boland, Marjorie Coggan, David Carmichael, Sheryl Wolfenden, Kerry Hamilton, Mark Sefton, John Taylor, Dorothy Nichterlein, Roger Curtis, Wolfgang Pröstler and John Brush.

appeared to drop some 80m. For an expedition of armchair cavers, this was getting to be pretty serious stuff. A rope was rigged and John T dropped in, much to the amusement of some passing Lahu villagers. His voice was soon echoing sounds of amazement and his first comment is immortalised in the original name of the cave (Shit It's Big, now commonly known as Tham SIB). John B joined John T and they soon found some large passages and another pitch (13m). The pitch ended on a small ledge from which they could hear a stream. Having run out of rope, they climbed back to the surface, vowing to return one day. Two years later the pitch was bottomed. It dropped 24m to a 200m section of the Mae Lana streamway. Unfortunately, it sumped at both ends.

When we left the Mae Lana area, most climbed directly out of the doline, but Neil, Carol, Ken and Mark chose the plughole route. Their trip through the cave took about 8 hours.

The party then moved to Ban Tham where we stayed at Cave Lodge run by John Spies and his wife. From this comfortable base we did a number of day trips. At times there were as many as three simultaneous trips, ranging from strictly tourist to the deadly serious. A few had a look at Pha Mon Cave, discovered a few years earlier by a French expedition. Tham Pha Mon is an active through cave some 4km long. It has a spectacular upper level with huge flowstone cascades and turquoise stalactites (copper stained?). Others, led by Roger, indulged in an epic air mattress through-trip of Tham Lot. Among the hazards endured were sharp rocks, submerged branches, heavy fallout from swallow and bat roosts and strange looks from the locals.

Other highlights included the discovery of blind white fish in Tham Pha Daeng (Red Cliff Cave) and location of several coffin caves. Some of the coffins had intricately carved handles and were so well preserved that adze marks were still visible. They looked like they could have been carved yesterday, rather than hundreds of years ago. One day while searching for coffin caves, a local villager told us about a bottomless pit; rocks thrown in never hit the bottom. We did not have time to check it out, but made a mental note to return one day with an endless rope.

And so we came to that exciting final day of the expedition. Three Johns (S, T and B) and Dorothy went to Tham Huoy Khun in search of extensions and tigers. They pushed the cave 2-300m beyond the 1986 limit of exploration and found those worrying animal tracks. On reflection, they think the 'tiger' tracks were made by a porcupine.

Meanwhile, Marjorie, Dave, Wolfgang, Carol and Sheryl entered Tham Pha Puek (White Cliff Cave) and climbed down a considerable distance before being halted by a pitch and a moving boulder pile. If only they had brought more rope and courage.

A third party (Kerry, Neil and Ken) checked out a series of blind valleys and found several caves. One cave contained remains of an archaeological dig. We later concluded it was Steep Cliff Cave, described in the literature some twenty years earlier by the late American researcher, Chester Gorman. Their biggest find was Long Snake Cave. The trio explored an estimated 2km of cave before being halted by, yes, a pitch. In a sense it was a fitting end to the trip as it provided a good reason to return to this delightful country.

On a return visit two years later, Long Snake Cave was found to have some 5km of passage, including about 1.5km below the pitch that stopped the 1988 team. At the far end, the passage size reduced and became choked with sand and gravel. The passage appeared to be heading straight for Tham Huoy Khun, of tiger fame, a couple of kilometres to the north.

The following piece is based on an article which appeared in *Australian Caver* (formerly *ASF Newsletter*) No 136, 1994.

CSS in the Top End

John Brush

In July 1993, seven members (Jim and Niki Campbell, Dave Carmichael, Marjorie Coggan, Veronica Schumann, Bob Dunn and John Brush) escaped Canberra's winter for CSS's third annual expedition to the Gregory National Park, NT in search of caverns measureless. The two previous expeditions would be a hard act to follow.

On the first expedition in June 1991, John and Jeanette Dunkley, Neil and Carol Anderson, Bob Dunn, Jean Casburn and Doug Abbot explored and mapped nearly 5km in Two Fishes Cave. They also explored and mapped several small caves (ie less than 2km long).

The story in 1992 was similar, with the highlight being the exploration of 4km in BAA29. The team comprised John Dunkley, Bob Dunn, Chris Bradley, Byron Deveson and John Brush as well as four VSA members (Nick and Sue White, Norm and Coral Hite) who arrived by Cessna.

The 1993 expedition kicked off well with the discovery of a large cave on the second day. The party split into two teams and over the next six days explored and mapped 11.3km of passage. We decided to call our find Berks Backyard Cave. A brief description follows.

A return to Gregory this year saw further exploration in the Berks Backyard complex. The small team (Veronica Schumann, Don Glasco and John Dunkley) found a connecting passage under a narrow valley to another maze complex into the next bluff. They called the new series Berks Frontyard. With their 5km, plus the 11.3km from 1993, and passages mapped by the Top End Speleo Society (TESS), at least 18km have been mapped in the complex, making it one of the longest in Australia.

Over the four CSS Gregory expeditions, members have explored ten major caves, numerous small ones and mapped a total of more than 30km of passage.

Berks Backyard Cave

Why Berks Backyard Cave? Backyard because is easy to get to (only 30 minutes walk from a 2WD road), and Berks because that's how we felt for not having stumbled into it years earlier. Also, with ferns, leafy entrances and numerous fig tree roots, the cave has a definite garden feel about it.

The main entrance is about 10 metres wide by 2m high and immediately drops into a flat floored airy chamber 10-20m wide, 35m long and 6m high. Passages lead off in several directions and one eventually leads to the main part of the cave. However a second entrance 120 metres to the southwest gives more direct access. It leads through the Garden of Edam (a favourite lunch spot) to the Bruce Ruxton Way (BRW), which goes on and on and on and can be followed to the far end of the cave. Other notable features include the Hanging Gardens of Babble On, an attractive area of decoration in the BRW; Lunar Park, with its barren rubble floor; Hide Park, a large, low roofed chamber it is easy to get lost in; Queue Gardens with its line of thick fig roots; the Rein Forest, a curtain of

long fibrous roots; Fern Pteris, a bed of ferns beside a (dry) waterway; and the Sterling Moss, a large area of what, in the wet season, is obviously a very high quality patch of moss.

Apart from bats and wetas, beasties we noticed included spiders with either luminous red or green eyes. We also saw evidence of echidnas (droppings) and wallabies (polished trails and droppings) throughout the cave. Wallabies also appear to occasionally drop in from above. Pet Corner and the Road Tested Wallaby are two such places.

Berks is essentially a horizontal maze-like fissure system with several entrances and innumerable daylight holes. Most passages are joint-controlled fissures and many trend in a south westerly direction. In places there are up to nine parallel passages. Typically, passages are 0.5-2m wide and 1.5-5m, or more, high. However there are also several large, flat-roofed chambers. These are 20m or more across and 1-3m high. Small phreatic tubes also occur, but were rarely pushed. The far end of the cave, some 1.5km (straight line distance) from the main entrance, is a maze of collapsed blocks. It is in this area of the cave that TESS discovered a connection from a nearby cave it was exploring. The connection was made in September 1993.

Like other caves in the area, Berks is developed under a deeply dissected karst pavement formed on a gently dipping massive dolomite unit approximately 20 m thick. This unit, the Supplejack Dolomite Member, occurs in a sequence of thinly bedded dolomites and dolomitic siltstone named the Skull Creek Formation.

While minor surface solution features occur in the flaggy dolomites, features such as grikes, rillen karren and cave entrances are confined to the Supplejack Member. Moreover, little significant karst development at Gregory appears to take place until the Supplejack is exposed. Once overlying beds are eroded away, solution of the Supplejack takes place along joints and forms the fissure passages. When the fissures reach through the Supplejack to the underlying flaggy dolomitic siltstones, karst development continues, but passage morphology changes dramatically. Passages become very wide with the base of the Supplejack forming flat roofs. Continuing breakdown and removal of the siltstone walls creates large chambers with flat roofs supported by little more than occasional pillars. In places, pillar removal/collapse results in large dropped blocks of Supplejack, 10-20m square and bounded by fissures, abruptly terminating the passage.

Many leads remain to be explored. Most of the obvious walk-in ones that have potential to lead to virgin territory have been pushed. We could start pushing the crawls, but this would be against a fine CSS tradition. Nevertheless, the thought of leaving such a large cave only partly explored is becoming unbearable. Any takers for another trip next year?

Where to from here?

Caving in the southern states of Australia is becoming increasingly restricted, regulated and crowded. It goes without saying that discovery of a new cave or extension is now a rare event in this part of the world. So it is likely the society will continue its current interest in more distant karst areas, either in Australia or overseas.

While CSS's recent stamping grounds in the wilds of Northwest Thailand and the Gregory National Park undoubtedly have more secrets to reveal, the scope for major

new discoveries is diminishing even there. In Thailand, we are running out of rivers that vanish underground, or just as suddenly emerge from the base of cliffs. At Gregory, only a few more areas of easily accessible karst remain to be thoroughly investigated.

So what does the future hold for CSS?

A gaze into the CSS crystal ball reveals:

- Another trip to Gregory, during which 4km more will be discovered in Berks Backyard which, by linking up with caves discovered by TESS, will produce Australia's longest cave with more than 25km of passage;

- One more expedition to Thailand, concentrating on the Kanchanburi area, where members discover the world's most beautiful cave;

- The first CSS expedition to Laos, where we find a long-lost cave packed full of buddha statues;

- Two members become so conversant with ASF caver accreditation documentation, that they leave their mundane 9-5 jobs to establish the Australian School of Caving in the former Caves House at Yarrangobilly;

- Permit systems in National Parks will be abandoned in favour of high volume adventure tourism ventures, ie pay caving:
  - parking meters at Wyanbene, Blue Waterholes, Yarrangobilly and Bullita;
  - ticket dispensing machines at the entrance gates of popular caves such as Wyanbene, Eagles Nest, Y58 and Berks Backyard;
  - ticket machines on the fixed abseiling ropes provided on all popular pitches at Bungonia (special discounts for frequent 'fliers');
  - postcards, souvenirs and snacks will be available at the kiosks in Caesars Hall, Red Crystal Room, Rawlinson Chamber and The Garden of Edam.

- No longer will you have to rely on a muddy trail to guide you through an unfamiliar cave. In fact this won't help because passages will be uniformly trampled. Instead, cavers will be required to wear a navigational device on their wrists. These CPS* units will tell you where you are in a cave and, more importantly, will continuously inform management authorities of your location.

- By the time of CSS's 50th anniversary, most cavers will find it cheaper and more exciting to go Virtual Caving. Just think, you will be able to do any major cave in the world without having to leave the comfort of your lounge. Simply call up the speleo channel on the cable network or plug in your computer; we expect Nintendo and Sega will each have their own versions. No longer will fellow speleos make disparaging remarks when you say you are an armchair speleo. In fact, they may even praise you for your commendable cave conservation principles.

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* Caver Positioning System