

# SPELEOGRAFFITI

The Newsletter of the National University Caving Club (NUCC)

Volume 26 Number 1 2020

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Speleograffiti

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Volume 26 Number 1, September 2020

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**Front Cover:** Abseiling the last pitch in Macquarie Pass Canyon. Photo by Oxana Repina

**Back Cover:** Looking back up the awesome 60m second pitch in Long Gully Canyon. Photo by Oxana Repina

**Following Page:** Formation in Gong Cave, Wee Jasper. Photo by Britt Brockett *(Ed: yes, I know it's actually the Dip Series 4 Extension, and I don't care. I shall keep calling it Gong Cave)*







## Editorial

Thanks to COVID and the fires, this year has seen the rise of the National University Canyoning Club. Hence the canyon photos on the front and back cover!

It's been a hard year for caving clubs across the country. First we had the devastation of the fires shutting everything down in summer, and just as everything was opening up in early autumn, COVID-19 happened. So there went another three months of the year. The miracle is that despite all this, we've still had a good year and picked up some keen new members!

So please don't mind the 3 month intermission in the trip reports! I've done my best to try and wring trip reports out of people (thanks to those of you who volunteered), and it is a credit to you writers that *Speleo-G* 26.1 is here. As always, a nice selection of trip reports, articles, or other cave-ey stuff for the next edition would be fantastic.

However, you'll have to get in fast, as it'll be out in about a week's time.

What!?

I decided to split *Speleo-G* 2020 into two parts, as it was steamrolling toward 100 pages and breaking my computer. So stay tuned for the next installment, which will cover trips in the second part of the year. It's mostly written, formatted and edited, so it won't be long... In the meantime, enjoy a nice photo of the Wee J Valley!

- Lachlan Bailey, the Editor

### **CORRECTIONS FROM *Speleo-G* 25.1:**

Your Editor would like to clarify that he does not possess a time-machine, and that the trip report '*Cooleman Easter 2019*' was not in March, and actually occurred from the 19-23rd April, not the 19-23rd May, as claimed in *Speleo-G* 25.1. The second Mount Fairy trip was also actually on the 13-14th April, not the 12th. Oops.





## Caving News

This is the place where all the club gossip goes. As I (still) don't have any for you, there is more news. Cmon, someone do something gossip-worthy!

The next ASF Conference to be held in Ceduna SA has been postponed to April 2022, with exact dates TBC. As the Nullarbor caves will be just as specky then, there'll probably still be NUCCers going in 2022. The website for it has gone live: <http://asfconference2022.com/>

HCG has released a new edition of *Calcite* (48.1) that is all about Y395. Sadly, still no real map, but there are some useful stats: the cave is 144m deep and 3.3km long. This compares to 174m and 3.5km for Eagle's Nest

NUCC is going to Tassie in February 2021! So hopefully *Speleo-G* 27.1 will be full of tales derring-do and mild stupidity like those that graced the New Zealand trip report in *Speleo-G* 25.1

FUSSI has produced a spectacular special edition of their *Newsletter* (32.2) that focusses on telling the epic stories of the many accomplished women cavers of Australia. To read these amazing tales, have a look here: [https://fussi.caves.org.au/newsletters/FUSSI\\_32\\_2\\_20.pdf](https://fussi.caves.org.au/newsletters/FUSSI_32_2_20.pdf)

As you may have heard, there was a major cave rescue in Tasmania this year. David Wools-Cobb (Northern Caverneers/Savage River Caving Club) fell about 3m off a ladder pitch in Snowy River Cave (CP11)\* and suffered severe injuries. Thankfully, the subsequent rescue operation was a success, and he is expected to make a good recovery. For accounts of the rescue, have a look at the STC *SpeleoSpiel* 441:

<https://southerntasmaniancaverneers.com/spiel/>

On a rescue note, there have also been several major accidents and three fatalities in NSW involving canyoning this year. I won't go into details here, but suffice to say, people need to be extremely cautious about:

- The quality and construction of existing anchors
- Water obstacles in canyons that have a catchment that is fire-affected
- Whitewater obstacles in canyons in general
- Checking a rope is long enough on a canyon pitch
- Locking off FULLY when performing tasks mid-rope
- Making sure beginners and inexperienced members on trips have the skills required for an activity before setting off

Obviously, many of these concerns have caving implications too!

*\* Don't forget that cave tags are allocated on a state basis, so both Snowy River Cave at Mount Cripps and Clown Cave at Cooleman Plains have a CP11 tag (7CP11 and 2CP11 respectively)*

### PAPER COPIES OF SPELEOGRAFFITI!

Do you want your own copy of *Speleograffiti*, spiral bound, printed, and stamped with the official NUCC stamp?

Copies can be had of *SpeleoG* 25.1, 26.1 and 26.2 for \$4.50 each, so that your Librarian can pay for paper and replace his print-credit when it runs out. Email [caving@anusra.com.au](mailto:caving@anusra.com.au) the editions you want, and transfer your payment to the NUCC account (details here:

<https://nucc.caves.org.au/join/>).



## Trip Reports

### Abercrombie Project Work

10th to 12th January 2020

By Lachie Bailey

**Participants:** Lachie Bailey, Marilyn Scott (MSS), David Stuckey (MSS), Rod Smith (MSS), Garry Smith (NHVSS), Marcia Kaye (NHVSS), Colin Tyrrell (BMSC), Brian Reeves (NHVSS), Cathi Humphrey-Hood (MSS), Peter Dykes (CWSS), Phil Maynard (SUSS), Alan Pryke (SUSS)

With seemingly every other caving area in the state on fire or already burnt, I headed up to Abercrombie Caves for a weekend caving. This was an MSS trip to work on their book, but they kindly let me come along, as they needed a keen, thin and flexible caver to survey Rabbit Trap cave. Met up with Marilyn Scott and Dave Stuckey from MSS on Friday morning, and we headed down to one of the outlying bluffs to look for some missing caves. About 5 caves were missing, and we found two of them, climbing over the bluffs in grueling 40+ degree heat.

The tagging at Abers is a little haphazard- the original taggers were determined to reach 100 tags, so happily tagged wombat holes and anything else that looked remotely like a cave. However once they reached 100, enthusiasm obviously waned, because there are still many

wombat holes that they didn't grace with tags. Even David, who was responsible for placing some of the tags, was looking at them and asking himself "What were we thinking?"

We couldn't survive very much of this, so after maybe an hour on the bluffs, we beat a very brave retreat back to the cottage to sit in the shade and have cool showers. Well, not so much the cool shower bit- the pipes to the cottage are in full sun and the water was hot enough to make tea with by the time it came out of the tap. Garry Smith and Marcia Kaye from NHVSS showed up, and the afternoon was spent inside with the fan on. Real hardcore caving this... As the youngest person on the trip, I soon started collecting advice from the old fogeys \*cough\* experienced cavers. Apparently I need to get superannuation ASAP, and the fact that I don't have any is horrific (the fact that I have no income to put into it evidently doesn't matter). David, Marilyn and I went up to the Trunkey Pub for dinner, and it still does excellent pub grub. I was on the receiving end of more unsolicited advice there too, with instructions to never buy a farm, and never take up shearing.

That evening, we visited Long Tunnel (A4), a passageway off the side of the Arch. Special



Whoever said that cavers aren't trend setters? Pre COVID caving with facemasks  
(photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood)

access was granted for the Abers book, and we could only enter the cave after 10pm, as it is the site of a major bat roost. The passageway was both extremely batty and dusty, causing several jokes about histoplasmosis that had me just coughing my lungs up with laughter (yeah,





Dave admiring the formation in Long Tunnel (and all the guano) (photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood)

sorry, not sorry). I still had fun with several sketchy climbs, one of which was totally rotten from bat piss, and the other of which had no handholds about 4m in the air. Fun.

Saturday was the big project work day, and groups went everywhere: photos in the Arch, surveying in the Arch, surface surveying near the Arch, and geology on top of the Arch. Anyone spot a theme?

I headed up to Rabbit Trap (A42) a tight cave that MSS agreed to let me survey suspiciously quickly. Arriving there, it became abundantly clear why- the entrance was comfortably body sized, but inside I had a wonderful selection of bedrock flatteners to choose from. There was only one 'chamber' where it was just possible to sit and sketch. This meant that it was

exceedingly slow, as the sketchbook and the survey were usually on opposite sides of a squeeze or flattener. Eventually I got jammed, gave up, and headed down to the Arch to see what everyone else was up to. Typically, the cave goes on the other side of a squeeze, so I guess I'll be back with a microbod.

Down at the Arch, Phil Maynard, Alan Pryke and Marilyn had gotten distracted from their survey by a potential lead that would ordinarily have been obscured by water. This was more interesting than my plans to survey a possible extension in Stable Cave (A26), so I crashed their lead. More fun sketchy scrambling and we got to a seeming dead end with a breeze. Alan investigated this, proclaimed that he was going to die if he tried getting through it, and went through it anyway (complaining all the while). This revealed a nasty muddy pit, which sadly dead ended (guess which idiot got sent down to investigate, it wasn't Alan). The breeze vanished, and we thought it was coming down through the mud and rock roof.

The afternoon was getting on, so we called it quits after that, and everyone trooped up to the cottage for happy hour. Alas, we had another date with Long Tunnel that evening, this time to survey it. So once again, we trogged up and were heading underground at 10pm. Marilyn and I drew the short straw, and were dispatched to survey from the far end of Long Tunnel, meeting up with the others at the batty chamber. This took us until well the other side of 1am, as it was quite tight.

The midnight caving session meant a slow start for Sunday morning. Eventually everyone was moving, and we all congregated in the Arch. Some useful bunnies sped along with the survey, but others of us were content to just sit and watch the show. Lassitude eventually overtook the trip, and we all finished up our tasks just after midday to head home.



## Wee J Surface Trogging

8th February

**By Lachie Bailey**

**Participant:** Lachie Bailey

Sadly, due to unfortunate timing, no one else could be enticed out to Wee J with me for some surface trogging. Wandered into Dip Cave to check it out for the planned cleaning trip with ANUMC, and did some GPSing of cave entrances.

Drove up Wee J Rd a bit to get a Truckletload of yummy blackberries. Headed back,

doorknocked some of the houses on the road out to Careys Cave. Some very promising karst in this area just north of Wee J township!

Was directed over to meet the Cathles, who were very friendly and gave me contacts for many Wee J landholders. They were keen for NUCC to do a census of karst features in the Wee J valley. Watch this space... I'm keen to do some project work in the area. *Ed: typically, I have been slack, and made nearly no further progress here in 2020...*

Also met the landholder for the property immediately south-east of Dip Cave. He's a

lovely bloke, and is keen for NUCC to come and apply some enthusiasm to a couple of sinks on his land. Watch this space... *Ed: again, I've been slack and let this one slide*

Got stormed on and went home.



I really need to cut this habit of randomly stopping on summer trips to munch on the raspberries and blackberries that infest so many caving areas  
*(photo by Lachie Bailey)*

## Mount Fairy Beginner's Trip

22nd February

By Cecily Reid

**Participants:** Cecily Reid, Chris Bradley, Lachy Deakin, Lachie Bailey, Guyver Fu, Rohit Rao, Anjali Jackson, Jack Thomas, Claud Tomkins, Phoebe Edwards

I joined ANU's caving club quite by accident in the haze of O-Week. I was with a friend, fully intending on going to the Mountaineering stand when I suddenly found myself not only holding a caving flyer, but also committing to attend the first caving trip of the year – the beginners Mount Fairy one.

Between saying that I would attend and stepping out of a car at Mount Fairy, I thought remarkably little about what I had signed up to. I knew that I had to get some batteries and had a vague memory of walking through an old mine near Broken Hill. As such, my only guesses about the upcoming experience was that it would be dark, that people would be pointing out things on walls and that I'd be following people around.

Well, while it turns out that these three guesses are key components of being in a cave, the experience was significantly more

engaging than I could have guessed. Almost immediately, I found myself going through a squeeze that was not only surprisingly long – but also rather difficult to get through. The novelty of being in a situation where I felt both incredibly exposed and as though I was experiencing something unique was exhilarating.

The rest of the trip followed a similar pattern. As someone who is notoriously bad at spotting animals, the reality that we saw a wombat (in its house!) and had to change plans as a result of this encounter was embarrassingly exciting. The opportunity to hike up mud slides and shimmy through puddles was also wonderful.

I don't think that I expected the trip to be particularly engaging. Before being at Mount Fairy, I associated caves primarily with planked footpaths, slightly bored guides and the multitude of ways people rhyme the difference between stalagmites and stalactites (*Ed: the only one you need is that stalagmites might touch the ground one day, and stalactites hold on tight!*). The reality that we scrambled out of a variety of caves, covered in mud was utterly unexpected.



A very placid wombat in a cave! (photo by Lachie Bailey)

The Mount Fairy trip was a wonderful introduction to the idea of caving. It was accessible enough to not be overwhelming, but also diverse enough for everyone to see the opportunities associated with continuing to cave. The fact that we also saw an echidna on the drive home was the cherry on the top.





Before and after... Everyone got a bit muddied up by the crawl into the Kokoda Extension in Main Cave, but most came back with bigger smiles on their faces afterwards! *(photos by Lachie Bailey)*



## Macquarie Pass Canyon

29th February 2020

By Oxana Repina

**Participants:** Lachie Bailey, Chris Bradley, Michael Larkin (ISS), Oxana Repina (SUSS), Corey Hanrahan, Kong Tin Yi, Priya Singh, Paris Capell, Anjali Jackson, Ramon Dickens, Cecily Reid, Emma Buckland, Milie Maccallum, Guyver Fu

This was one of the first trips of the year after Market Day, so it was a big four-car convoy that left the regroup point at Robertson. We were relieved that the smoke had now definitely cleared and the fires had stopped – even on Market Day, it hadn't been entirely certain whether the trip would go ahead. We were not alone. It seemed that everyone this side of Sydney was eager to make the most of what now remained of summer, and the road through Macquarie Pass was busy. The tiny carpark at the canyon trailhead was crammed to overflow. Our four cars obviously didn't fit, and we shuffled three of them to the exit straightaway and left one on the road shoulder.

The atmosphere of our group was friendly and excited; for many, it was their first time canyoning. While the first pitch was rigged

with a dry route and harnesses were fine-tuned, some of the more experienced canyoners abseiled directly down the waterfall. There had been precious little opportunity this summer to experience that feeling of water spray as the rope slides through your rack, your harness takes your weight and you step back over the edge – it was good to savour that now.

At the bottom, treading water, I fumbled with my rack. I was a bit out of practice, and slower than I would have liked in getting the bars off as I tried not to inhale the waterfall pouring down the rocks. Much later in coronavirus lockdown, reading a canyoning book written by a New Zealander, it was interesting to note that over there they prefer figure-8 descenders and rigging the rope, without the end knotted, to hang just touching the surface of the water. That way, canyoners simply abseil straight off the end of the rope into the pool. In New Zealand, where the volume of water barrelling through a canyon is much greater than here, it seems that faffing with rack bars under a waterfall is much more dangerous and best avoided.



The team ready to go at the head of the canyon (photo by Oxana Repina)





Surviving the jump/slide (photo by Oxana Repina)

The middle sections of the canyon passed smoothly in a series of abseils and one optional jump-slide – each one framed by dark rock, white water and verdant bush. With the excuse of nursing a camera, I avoided the jump and took photos of others down the bottom instead. Our group became faster and more efficient at getting down the pitches as we

made our way through the canyon, but by the final pitch, shivers and stomach rumbles were inevitable. We had intended to do the canyon as several sub-groups leapfrogging ropes, but the number of other groups in the canyon had made that impossible and turned the trip into a long day.



One of the scenic pitches near the end of the canyon (photo by Oxana Repina)

I was impressed by the walk out – no huge, near-vertical uphill slog like Bungonia; no marathon cross-country bush-bash like Claustral. Instead it was a mild, short walk along a tourist path to the carpark. Lolly snakes were shared around and dry clothes gratefully put on. It was a great trip to start the year and introduce many new club members to the sport.

## Wee J Cave N Clean

1st March 2020

**By Jess Spargo**

On Sunday 1st March ANUMC and the National University Caving Club (NUCC) joined forces and held our first Clean Up Australia Day event. 18 members across both clubs headed to the Wee Jasper Reserves in the Goodradigbee River valley, NSW, where they removed rubbish from the trails leading to the popular Dip Cave system.



The cave and clean gang, pre-mud (*photo by Jess Spargo*)

But why so much rubbish? Well, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these caves were used as dumping grounds by the landowner at the time where anything from old shoes to entire cars could be made to disappear! Not long after the cave system became an attractive location to cavers for exploration. Fast forward to the 1990's where several caving and Scout groups came together over two weekends to haul a lot of the rubbish out. Since then there have been

more informal efforts to make the space safer and more enjoyable.

Recently I took a Cub Scout pack through there only to have them ask why these caves were littered with broken glass when none of the others had been. The disappointment of sharing the human impact people had had on the caves saddened me, however I did feel inspired when I told them the efforts people, including Scouts, had gone to so far to improve it. So much so that I was inspired to organise

another clean up. With Clean Up Australia Day just around the corner, I thought it would be a great opportunity for ANUMC to participate.

There was a lot of enthusiasm from the club and talk of a possible collaboration with NUCC, who were only too keen to get involved. Leaders from both clubs worked hard to bring it all together. The 18 participants were split across three groups and were rotated between cleaning the trails around Dip Cave and caving in Gong Cave. The good vibes and great banter



during the cave clean was fantastic! People were mining for 'amber' (pieces of glass bottles), and there were competitions of who could find the most interesting can of food or number of shoes. The caving groups enjoyed the caving ladder pitch into Gong Cave, and the formation in Gong Chamber, where total darkness with lights-out was experienced.

The groups stopped for a well deserved vegetarian barbeque lunch before heading

back to the Dip Cave area for the afternoon session. All up we managed to collect six large tubs of rubbish, as well as a large pile of metal, which was removed from the site. Furthermore, this initiative sparked so much enthusiasm in ANUMC that the club is now looking to their next event, a clean up of the Queanbeyan River.

I would like to thank ANUMC's Committee for funding the barbeque lunch, the three NUCC

leaders:

Lachlan

Bailey, Britt

Brockett and

Chris

Bradley and

the fourteen

wonderful

participants

who

volunteered

their time.



Gong Chamber formation (*photo by Britt Brockett*)

## Wee J Beginner's Overnighter

7th to 8th March

By Oxana Repina

**Participants:** Chris Bradley, Lachlan Bailey, Petal Wang, Corey Hanrahan, Arunav Kumar, Cecily Reid, Emma Buckland, Gyver Fu, Oxana Repina (SUSS)

The road to Wee Jasper passes through beautiful rugged country – I was impressed. Maybe it's because I was used to driving to and from caving areas late at night with SUSS when the surrounding countryside is invisible.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, the landscape here sits over fingers of limestone cut through by shale, pyroclastics and other things, and it does make for a scenic drive.

We set up camp when we got there and some more time was taken carrying rigging gear to the entrance of Punchbowl Cave only to realise a large school group were already getting ready to go into it. This may have been the same group whose tents we saw across the campground from ours, all identical and all neatly pitched in a row on a 45° slope. We

hastily transferred gear to Dip Cave instead, and abseiled in.

It was the first time caving for some of the team, and dropping down into the first chamber on a rope was an impressive way to start. We pottered around some passages and did some jollying, turning away from one section because of bats. Dip Cave consists of a series of parallel sections, named 'Series', and we worked our way across them.

When we made our way out, it was already evening. Everyone was tired and hungry; several pitches had made it a somewhat taxing day of caving, especially for those new to the sport (or those out of practice by about two years – i.e. myself). I ventured about the scaling poles we had still sitting in the back of our car, which had rattled with us all the way from Canberra and on which I had impaled my elbow several times getting in and out of the passenger seat. The plan had been to use them to reach a small but tantalising hole in Dip Cave, several metres above ground, over a sort of overhanging climb. The suggestion that we



Cecily getting on rope to abseil into Dip Cave (photo by Oxana Repina)

<sup>1</sup> On this trip some sly comments were made about SUSS's tendency to arrive late at night and have even later mornings the next day. It was joked that NUCC entered caves the same time on a Saturday as SUSS did, but having driven over that morning rather than the night before. It is

plausible there was some element of truth in this but the author hesitates to comment further lest SUSS reads this article and evicts said author from their club (*Ed: Don't worry, I'll throw you to the wolves next time I'm on a SUSS trip*).





The ungodly mess of caving and camping gear that spewed itself out of Lachlan's car (photo by Oxana Repina)

have a go at that now was mostly met with a reaction ranging somewhere from "that sounds interesting, but probably not for me," to outright disgust.

As majority of the team headed back to camp, showers, dinner and a campfire, Gyver, Lachlan and myself carried the poles to the cave entrance and began what was probably the world's worst attempt at scaling pole use in the history of caving. Neither Gyver nor myself had the faintest idea of how they were supposed to work. Lachlan had initially seemed to vaguely indicate that he had experience with them. It later turned out that his experience related more to disassembling scaling poles than to really setting them up or using them, and in fact this was probably the first time these particular poles were being used in several decades.

The enterprise began well. We devised a functional (and only slightly unsafe) method of lowering them down the entrance pitch into the cave, carabinered together and guided by one person standing on the chockstone halfway down. Ferrying them from the bottom of the pitch through a slot and into the chamber where they were needed also proceeded smoothly.

The trouble was that we assembled our poles on the ground, horizontally, but had no chance of levering the resulting monstrosity up several metres to reach the target hole. We had four poles bolted together; each an aluminium tube something like 10 cm round and 2 metres long. Together they were very heavy, very unwieldy, and very, very difficult to manoeuvre into place without obliterating formations from the roof or dropping it on our feet or heads – though we persevered,



Chris giving a bottom belay in Dip Cave (photo by Oxana Repina)

grunting with effort, for some time. In retrospect it is perhaps fortunate that we were unable to get the poles up to the hole because the whole structure may well have failed drastically when someone began to climb it. We lacked a spanner to tighten the bolts so Lachlan had used the pliers of his Leatherman to do it instead. I'm not sure how well the bolts would have held. Exhausted, and confused by the whole process, we dragged the poles back out of the pitch, de-rigged, and dragged ourselves back to camp. I couldn't decide whether I wanted to join a SUSS trip involving scaling poles to learn how to use them properly, or whether to avoid such trips and never have to lay eyes on the darn things again.

Day 2 began with a sleep-in.<sup>2</sup> We then explored Punchbowl Cave – another fun cave for jolly. There was an informal climbing competition, followed by an informal squeezing competition (the latter somewhat strangely undertaken directly after lunch). There was an interesting grotto that was subsequently identified to be low in interest and high in bat poop. There was a sneaky climb to a little plateau looking over a large, formation-filled chamber criss-crossed by

fluttering bats. There was a dubious flattener to a very dubious helictite. And there was the 'Laundry Chute', which some party members were enthralled by and others napped outside the entrance of.

Just before we left for the carpark, I convinced Lachlan and Corey to come with me through Dogleg Cave. The cave is a short, rocky streamway that twists and crawls through several S-bends before terminating in a sand trap. The sand trap is much like a sump, but filled with sand instead of water. Somewhere beneath the sand is a gate, and somewhere beneath the gate are very beautiful passages. Unfortunately, neither of those are likely to be seen anytime soon. Nonetheless, the sand trap itself was actually quite impressive and not something I'd really expected here, reminiscent of a sea cave or a little quiet oasis in a rocky desert. Noting that there were only one or two pairs of kneepads between three cavers and the entrance was 15 minutes of crawling back over gravel, the sand was an oasis in more ways than one.

Back at camp, everyone was 'caved out' – it had been a great weekend. No stamina

remained for the little creek/canyon that was meant to be in the area. Earmarking that for next time, our convoy of cars filed back towards Canberra – the scaling poles rattling gleefully in one of them all the way home.



The team ready to go underground (photo by Oxana Repina)

<sup>2</sup> A NUCC member might have commented we were *almost* as late as SUSS getting started that morning.



## Buchan Visit

5th to 8th June

By Oxana Repina

**Participants:** Oxana Repina (SUSS), Andriana Stoddart, lots of other Victorians

If you put aside the time spent driving, seed spraying, wood chopping, pancake cooking, jaffle crafting, dining out at the pub, roasting chestnuts over a campfire, and stopping at the coffee shop each morning... this caving trip was packed full of caving. We had some fun on the first day doing the Magical Mystery Tour in Honeycomb, which features descending, spiralling down, weaving through passageway and little squeeze bits, going down a bit further, and then conveniently rounding a corner to arrive at the entrance. Mysterious indeed.

On the second day I successfully convinced some of the others to show me Elk River, the only streamway (*Ed: well there's more than that, the other main ones are just hard to get into*) cave at Buchan ("if it doesn't have roof-sniffs, is it really a cave worth doing?"). Descending the first section brings you to a long pitch into Baby Berger, but swinging into a small chute partway down takes you to Elk. The chute is small diameter-wise, but really quite long length-wise, and takes a bit of effort to squeeze self and pack through.

The end of the chute conveniently ends in a two-metre pitch (presumably to filter out any cavers not paying attention). I spent some time precariously manoeuvring on the small, muddy, downward-sloping ledge above it, still half-stuck in the squeeze chute, trying to find a suitable orientation to downclimb in. Eventually, hearing the next person

approaching, I resorted to the "semi-controlled tape-assisted fall" technique.

Some snaking passageway and another pitch delivered us into the water, and the first downstream roof-sniff was not far along. There was some hesitation in our group. It seemed that if ever there was a cave to do a roof-sniff in, it would be this one – the cave was sporty and the air temperature very warm (a surprising contrast to outside, where hot teas and down jackets were essential). Nonetheless, there's always a certain psychological hurdle that must be overcome.



Beautiful gypsum formation adorns some of the walls of Elk River Cave  
(photo by Lachie Bailey)

In this passage there were two roof-sniffs; as an out-and-back trip, that meant four deep breaths, four times that helmets scraped against the roof and water lapped at eyes and nostrils, four times that cold water re-flooded through the collars of cave suits. It was worth it though. The streamway was beautiful, the water very clear. It finished in a big rimstone pool with water cascading over it into a sump.

Ascending the ropes back out was a welcome way to force muscles to generate heat in a more useful way than shivering. When I got to the bottom of that two-metre pitch below the



The mysterious Elk Antler formation at Elk River (photo by Lachie Bailey)

been weighing on people's minds). Nonetheless (with some enthusiastic encouragement from certain people who had never been to Buchan before) we went down some wombat holes, did Twig-In-Ya-Ear (*Ed: the KID has it as Twiginyaear*) without headtorches, and rigged our way down Gyorgidig to contribute three more mud animals to the collection at the bottom.

chute, everything was thoroughly lubricated with mud and water. I shouldered my pack, squarely jammed my feet into two holds, and went to pull myself onto the ledge. The smooth, sloping surface and the knotted mud masquerading as rope were each perfectly frictionless and I watched my hands slide across them for a few moments before falling straight back over the pitch. Alex and Keith caught my boots on their shoulders and heaved me back up. Dripping mud, I forced my way through the chute.



The Potholes Reserve has beautiful sunsets (photo by Lachie Bailey)

Nearing the entrance of the cave in the late afternoon, we passed a second group just starting on their way. Some concerned conversation and a long wait in the dark and cold by the cave entrance after dinner were unfounded; everyone made it back safely.

On the final day, the feeling of the group seemed to be that Elk River had constituted sufficient caving for the weekend (to be fair, the 7 hour drive to Melbourne may also have

It was an interesting weekend. A common phrase said by the Melbourne crew was "...because it's Buchan!" – an answer given to various questions as an implication that everyone had been there at least a million times before, could navigate each cave with their eyes closed, and couldn't really be bothered with the place anymore. And yet, as we packed our cars and went to set off, plans were set to come back in a fortnight. Why? "Well, because it's Buchan."



## Almost-Dry Canyoning: Tiger Snake and Jugglers Canyons

3rd to 5th July 2020

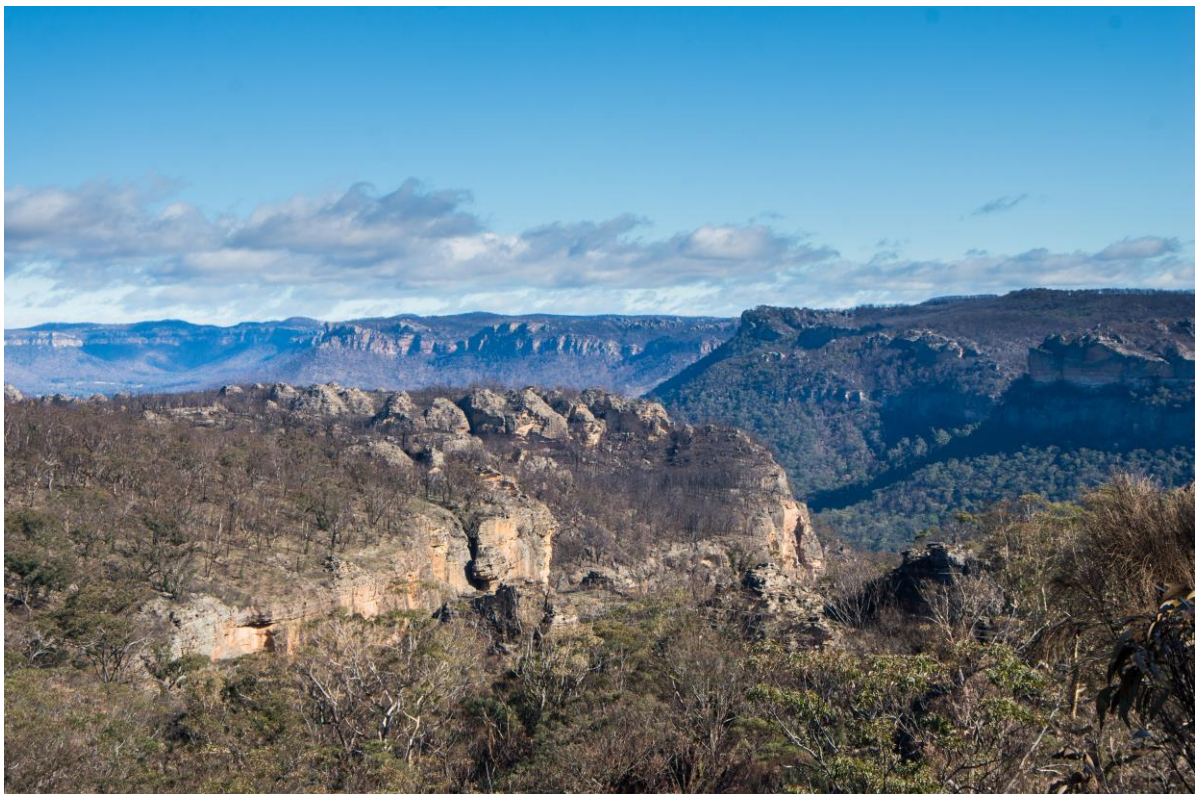
**By Chris Bradley**

**Participants:** Chris Bradley, Michael Larkin (ISS), Priya Singh, Lachie Bailey, Paris Capell, Oliver Andrews, Britt Brockett

This was our first club trip in almost 4 months. We decided to do some dry canyons in the Blue Mountains since it was far too cold to be swimming and most all caving locations in NSW were shut from either the fires or COVID. We went up Friday night and quickly discovered that every man and his dog(s) had also decided this was the weekend for the Blue Mountains, presumably a side-effect of being stuck inside for so long. The campground we'd planned on using was full to the brim, so we went another 20 minutes (away from the canyons) and found an overflow campground that was also pretty chockers, but enough space for us. Our neighbours had the ingenious idea of leaving their engine running most of the night for heating - thankfully I had earplugs.

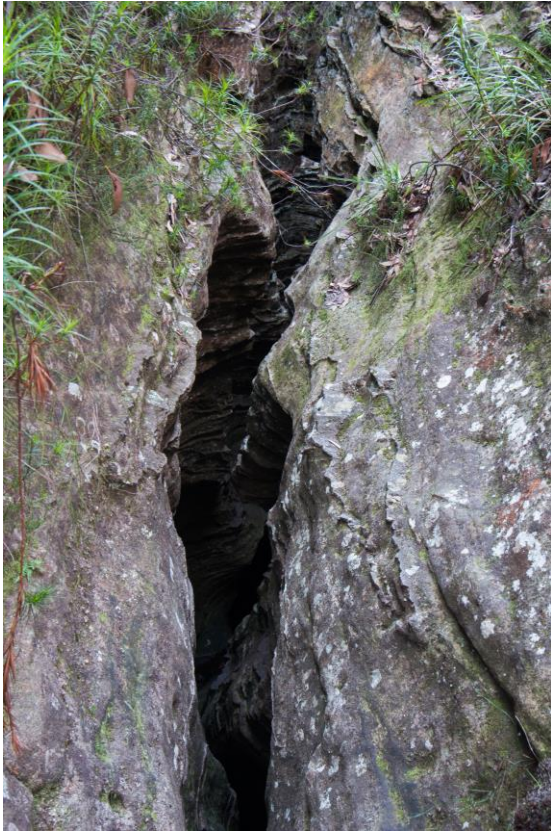
On Saturday we headed up to Tiger Snake canyon. The drive there gave a taste for the kind of scenery to expect – burnt trees as far as the eye could see. As we approached the turnoff to the canyon, a convoy of 4 cars came up behind making us a little worried about a potential traffic jam inside the canyon. But they had a quick look at the signs and decided they weren't up for a 3km walk, never mind a canyon. The walk to the canyon was quite pleasant ridge-walking and very open, but there was a distinct lack of the colour green. There was some regrowth, but also lots of plants with no regrowth at all. Tiger Snake canyon really shouldn't be open yet if we want the vegetation to properly recover.

Anyway, we got down to the first pitch and found it to be quite technical. It involved bridging out about 5m while on rope before lowering yourself and hoping not to pendulum back into the slot and get stuck. It had me a wee-bit worried about the rest of the canyon, but the next pitches all proved to be less challenging. I was expecting Lachie to get very wet on the second pitch, but he showed off



Looking out over the Wolgan Valley from the Tiger Snake ridge (photo by Lachie Bailey)

some impressive balancing skills across a log to remain dry. The third pitch brought us out of the slot, so we returned to bushwalking much to Michael's disappointment.



View down into the Upper Tiger Snake constriction from P1 (photo by Lachie Bailey)

We had lunch in the sun before finding our way to the next pitch. The obvious rigging point was a tree we didn't trust as it was badly burnt so we did a little exploration for another way in. Michael was the first down and found out that this was a pitch for headtorches. The pitch descended into a mesmerising snaking slot that was 10-20m tall but only 1-3m wide and wiggled and winded its way for at least 50m lengthwise. Definitely the most spectacular part of the canyon for me. Given the lack of light and constricted walls it felt somewhat cave-like.

We emerged from the slot and were greeted by some fairly thick bush-bashing before finding our gully for exiting the canyon. The walk out wasn't too bad except for one climb over crumbly and loose rocks that had me

petrified, but I think that's just my fear of heights – the others didn't seem to have much trouble.

The second night was a whole lot colder than the first, the inside of Brit's tent flap frosted over within an hour of opening it in the morning. The cold meant we had a much slower morning but were still on the road by 8.30am heading towards Juggler's canyon. The road got progressively worse and we ended up parking around 1km before the actual parking lot as we were driving at pretty much a walking pace anyway.

The track was in very good condition all the way to the canyon and the vegetation was all unburnt which was a pleasant contrast to yesterday. The first pitch was absolutely picturesque – water trickling down the multicoloured rocks with ferns and an abundance of greenery all round. It set the tone for the rest of the canyon as the trickling creek and luscious plants continued throughout. We abseiled down a slide that jumped over a ledge with a 3m drop, then



Britt enjoying herself moments after soaking Lachie's lunch (photo by Lachie Bailey)





A sunny paradise for lunch near the end of Jugglers Canyon (*photo by Chris Bradley*)

abseiled through a rocky outcrop before arriving at a much larger 20m-ish drop.

Michael went first and discovered (a bit late) that he had to walk through chest high water. Not ideal in the middle of the water, he was absolutely freezing. Meanwhile Chris had gone walkabout as he often does and had come across another rigging point. There was a resounding yes from Michael when inquired as to whether we should relocate the rope, and the rest of us had a quite spectacular 30m abseil and didn't get wet. Luckily, we soon emerged into some blazing sunlight meaning Michael was no longer hypothermic.

The rest of the canyon continued to be absolutely beautiful but was much less eventful. We had lunch at the intersection of Juggler's and Grand Canyon before jumping on the main track and walking past gawking tourists. We made a bit of a fool of ourselves by going off-track early but soon found the way

back to the cars which was a super obvious path, although a little bit steep. After arriving at the cars we packed up in record time, I barely had time to get changed. To top the trip off we did a little side trip to see the stunning views from Point Pilcher. That rounded off a very enjoyable canyoning trip, I'm keen to get out to the Blue Mountains again.



## Daring to Drum

11th July 2020

By Mía Stone

**Participants:** Mía Stone, Chris Bradley, Andy Waddell, Lachie Bailey

On our second trip after COVID restrictions eased we headed up to Bungonia National Park to explore Drum Cave. One of the more spectacular caves in the area (or so I've been told) it can normally only be visited for a brief window during winter due to high concentrations of foul air over summer. After a forecast of rain, the day was surprisingly crisp and clear (although it did rain while we were underground!).

Unfortunately we didn't get off to the greatest start. Lachie and Andy went ahead to do the rigging, leaving Chris and Mia to realise just a fraction too late that they had no idea where the cave entrance was. There were three

possible paths from the carpark. Of course it turned out to be down the last path we tried. Third time lucky.

Eventually there, we experienced an impressive 50m pitch, some excellent tunnelling and beautiful chambers. We were unable to do the second and third pitches because of increasing foul air, although I suspect some of us didn't mind too much (Mia, wondering whether she'd have the stamina to get back up even the first pitch, Andy because of an unfortunate incident involving the spraying of bat excrement up near his collar bone).<sup>3</sup>

The ascent proved a little tricky for one unexperienced in the art of rebelay, but with a mighty effort on the part of all involved, experienced and novice cavers alike emerged intact and feeling accomplished.



Mia abseiling down the awesome 50m mostly free-hanging pitch in Drum (photo by Lachie Bailey)

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<sup>3</sup> Ed: we turned around at the top of the second pitch (20p), as even though the air was ok, it was getting foul. I figured the air would foul up on the

pitch somewhere, and didn't feel like rigging all those rebelay for no reason



## Bungonia and Marble Arch Bushwalking

18th to 19th July 2020

By Oscar Parra

**Participants:** Oscar Parra, Austin Zerk, Chris Bradley, Lachie Bailey, Andy Waddell, Chris Bradley, Lisa Bradley, Margaret Bradley

### *Day 1. Bungonia National Park.*

The trip started at 0800 in front of ANU Sport. We divided the luggage between the cars and started heading to Bungonia National Park. Once in place we unpacked, set up the tents and headed to the starting point of the walk.

We started a quick descending around 1000 into the Bungonia creek where we had an amazing view of the walls of the canyon. Once at the bottom we headed towards the Shoalhaven River, first by crossing big white rocks, and once out of the canyon we walked following the creek, surrounding beautiful green and blue ponds on the way through. After a couple of kilometres, we stopped to have lunch in front of a big turquoise pond.



The awesome walls of Bungonia Slot-Canyon tower above us (photo by Lachie Bailey)

Once fed, we followed Bungonia Creek until we met with the Shoalhaven River and had a fun time throwing flat stones and making them jump over the water. After taking a group picture and a couple of tired arms, we started to return following the White Track. We made it to the carpark around 1700.

Once there, we set up the abseiling gear to practice some ropework. We picked a pitch on Hogans Wall and practiced a bit of rigging, knots, and descending on rope. After that we

packed and move towards the camp, where we cooked, some ate a lot of food prepared by others, took showers and then we went to the tents practicing social distancing.

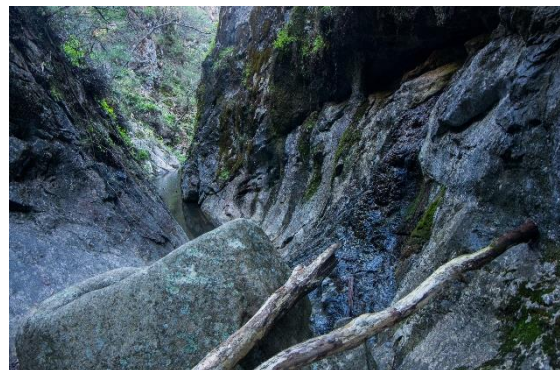


Stone-skipping on the Shoalhaven (photo by Lachie Bailey)

### *Day 2. Deua National Park.*

Starting at 0700 we dismantled the camp and headed towards Berlang Campground in Deua National Park. We stopped in Braidwood to have a quick breakfast on the way. At Berlang we met with Chris's family who joined us for the walk.

We started fording the Shoalhaven River, and after a quick re-setup we started walking towards Marble Arch passing by The Big Hole. After a Friendly and beautiful flat walk in the middle of the bush we got inside Marble Arch, where we had lunch, and some went to explore other small caves inside.



Marble Arch canyon (photo by Lachie Bailey)

After lunch we had fun around the rock formations of the creek for a while before heading back to the carpark. Once re-grouped at Berlang, we headed to Canberra and made it to the city at 1800.

## Twas Indeed a Really Long Gully

25th July 2020

By Claud Tomkins

**Participants:** Claud Tomkins, Lachy Deakin, Lachie Bailey, Oxana Repina (SUSS), Corey Hanrahan, Michael Larkin (ISS), Cecily Reid, Paris Capell, Chris Bradley, Andy Waddell,

It's 6:30am and here I was standing outside ANU Sport in what felt like -5 degree weather. In comes decision one of the day; take Lachie's car with the check engine light on, or take Oxana's little (and low to the ground) hatchback. Hatchback it is. One and a half hours later, here we were standing on the edge of a quite rugged dirt road as Oxana's car sat perched on the top of a hill, one wheel in the air, tyres spinning. However, with a couple of attempts, and admirable skill on Oxana's part, we safely made it to the carpark where we would start the walk out to the Long Gully Canyon.

After a short walk that aided in bringing our body temperatures up above freezing, we reached the first abseil. However, after searching the area high and low for an anchor and coming up empty, out came the trip notes: "the first abseil is about 8m, with an anchor about 5m back on the left". The search

recommenced – high, low, left, right –... and then we found it. However, was it "5m back on the left" where it was meant to be? No, there it was, sitting at the bottom of the drop. But fear not for we had brought MacGyver. A couple minutes later Michael had thrown a rope around a pointy part of the cliff face, added a couple of rocks on top for some extra safety, and made his way to the bottom of the abseil. We were back in business. *Ed: we used a 5m tape to construct the anchor, but removed it afterwards, as the main option for a natural anchor has very poor abseil dynamics. It needs bolts.*

Lucky for us the remaining 8 or so abseils went a lot more smoothly. The next couple of hours were filled with a 56m abseil with stunning views, a few wet shoes, and a lot of scrambling over loose rocks. And although there was fear we would be walking out in the dark after the delay of the first abseil, we had made it down the canyon by lunch. This left us with ample time to enjoy the view, soak in the sun, and do a bit of exploring. Perhaps we had too much time, as Oxana and Andy found themselves taking a dip in the freezing cold water to swim across the Shoalhaven (mad respect).



The audience watching a rather sketchy P1 being rigged (photo by Oxana Repina)





Paris descending the extremely impressive 60m P2 (*photo by Oxana Repina*)

Then suddenly all the fun and games where over. The moment we had been dreading the entire day was upon us. It was time to walk out. It's safe to say that the 350 vertical meters of elevation over 1km was my least favourite part of the day, however, after much huffing and

puffing we were out of the canyon and cruising along back to the carpark. Once there we were greeted by Chris, who had taken a different route out in order to collect Michael's handy work from the first drop, and carrots were passed around. All in all, it was a great day.



Looking upstream to the Blockup Gorge on the Shoalhaven (*photo by Oxana Repina*)

## Bungonia Main: a winter attempt

2nd August 2020

**By Corey Hanrahan**

**Participants:** Michael Larkin (ISS), Lachlan Bailey, Oxana Repina (SUSS), Corey Hanrahan

Michael's version: *"We went. You guys are soft so we went home."*

Lachlan's version: *"We went. Corey, Oxana and I are soft. Michael had fun with his Hydrobot. We went home."*

Oxana's version: *"We went. Corey and Lachlan were soft. Michael swore lots at his tangled rope. Oxana got concerned by both. We went home."*

Michael's defense: *"Michael comes from a family of shearers/farmers. What happened was tame swearing."*

Corey's version is a little longer...



The stunning view from P1 Bungonia Main down the canyon (photo by Lachie Bailey)

Lachlan, Oxana and I had camped at Mount Fairy overnight after a caving trip the previous day. We met with Michael at Bungonia for our canyon attempt. Being the middle of winter, we were well aware that a wet canyon such as Bungonia Main would be very cold.

During the walk in, Lachlan and Michael were discussing wetsuits. The confusing part is that they convinced themselves that springsuits (like the one Lachlan brought for the trip) would be more than warm enough, and

Michael's full wetsuit would be too hot for the trip. While it's true that Michael is always warmer than the rest of us in canyons, I thought these conclusions were bold.

After walking down the gully to the creek and following downstream, it wasn't long before our first swimming section. We changed into all the warm layers we had (which for most of us was thermals underneath wetsuits). Despite these layers, the water was probably the coldest I had ever been in!

The first drop was meant to be about 35m. To be on the safe side, we tied our two 70m ropes together. Unfortunately the ropes tangled, and Michael spent a long time trying hard to untangle them at the top of the pitch. After a while, Michael changed tactics and threw (the still very tangled) rope down the pitch, hoping that it would untangle itself.

Michael was first to descend, and about half-way down he stopped. After spending a while half-way down the pitch and shouting some things we couldn't quite hear up the pitch, he indicated that he was re-ascending the rope. Thankfully, Lachlan had rigged a stone knot at the top, making the ascent straightforward. Apparently, the rope had not magically untangled itself, and untangling it halfway down the pitch was no more successful than untangling at the top of the pitch.

At this point, both Lachlan and I were too cold to continue through the canyon, and Oxana had become concerned at Michael's failure to descend the first abseil. It was therefore decided to call the trip off, and return back to the car.

There were a few learnings from this canyon. Firstly, canyon water in winter is cold (surprise!), so thicker wetsuits and/or spray jackets, as well as continuous movement are needed to stay warm. Secondly, the best rope management technique is to avoid tangling the rope in the first place. But if the rope IS tangled, then it is always easier and safer to untangle the rope before descent- not after!



## Wee Jasper Overnighter

15th to 16th August 2020

**By Oliver Andrews**

**Participants:** Andy Waddell, Lauren Schenk, Claud Tomkins, Bradley Hearn, Oliver Andrews + SUSS and MSS

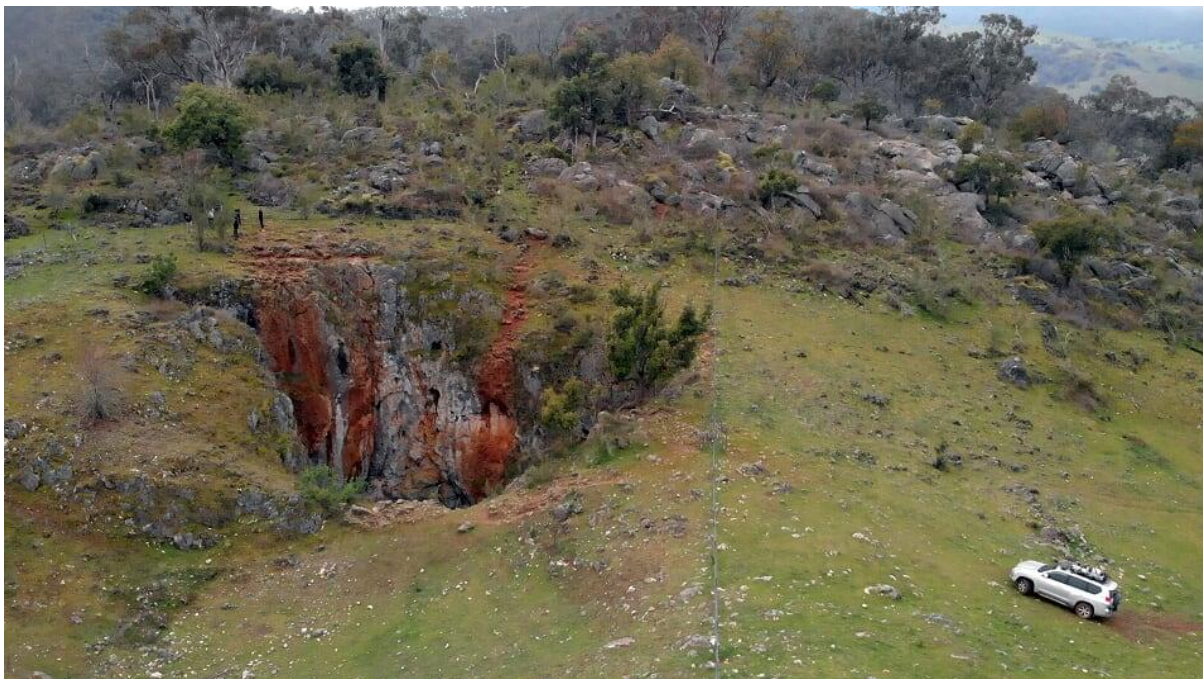
This trip was one of the first trips back out of Canberra after the COVID-19 pandemic cooled down in NSW and things started opening back up again, and as such there was quite some excitement to get back out into the outdoors! Upon learning that MSS and SUSS were planning to head to Wee Jasper for some surface exploration and abseiling, NUCC decided to pitch in a team of its own to help trawl the surface for new caves – but no caving, as the caves at the reserve were temporarily closed for COVID-19. Some exploration of the privately-owned thermal paddock nearby was intended, but the rain and mud excluded us from doing any of that.

Upon arriving at Fitzpatrick Trackhead campground, we ran into the Sydney crews coming back from a wander up to Devil's Punchbowl and set up camp. After a relaxed lunch at the SUSS/MSS campground and a run-in with the local cave-dog, we decided to again head up towards Devil's Punchbowl to do some

abseiling. Having completed some slippery and muddy 4WDing up to the top, we started setting up for the abseil. The cave-dog accompanied us the whole way up, scaring most of us half to death with some acrobatics on the high edge of the punchbowl.

Andy Waddell led us through setting up an anchor on some boulders above the high edge, and we took turns abseiling down and poking noses into the small cave sections at the bottom of the abseil. One of the Sydney members had brought a drone, and got some pretty impressive footage of both the abseiling crews and the doline.

This dronery was followed by some more surface trogging and some poking of our heads into the bigger caves on our way down to the campsite, but nothing new was found, and we arrived back at camp and started an early campfire while two of the Sydney members drove off to go doorknocking. The hope was that some local landowners would let us go surface trogging on their land, as the majority of caves in the Wee Jasper region are on private property – however in this instance we had no luck finding locals willing to let us run amok on their property.



One of the very impressive photos of Devils Punchbowl from the air (photo by Alan Green)



We didn't let this deter us, however, and sat down to an A-grade campfire. Us NUCCers being poor uni students, were not expecting to have any sort of lavish meal beyond our two-minute noodles and pesto penne that night, but fortunately for us one of our Sydney friends surprised us with an absolutely incredible open-fire roast!



An amazing dinner being eyed off by our cave-dog  
(photo by Andy Waddell)

This surprise meal was accompanied by storytelling and getting to know members from the other clubs – a really great example of inter-club bonding and making new connections, as well as perpetuating some amazing oral histories from all clubs.

The morning after, we again enjoyed a stellar breakfast of bacon and eggs, courtesy of the Sydney clubs. We then ambled up the hill to find more caves – Alan brought his drone out again to search from the air, while the rest of us slogged through rock and blackberry. This time, unlike last afternoon, we did manage to find some entrances! They all looked as if they linked down to Dogleg cave which ran below us, and they were all tagged, but exciting and interesting nonetheless.



The NUCC crew above one of our cave finds (photo by Alan Green)

While this surface slog was occurring, a hopeful crew was sent out to doorknock, but unfortunately they returned a few hours later with the same result as the previous evening. We packed up camp and returned to ANU at about midday.



The whole lot of us the morning after, getting ready to head back out to trawl the surface for new caves  
(photo by Alan Green)



## Mount Fairy Features and Findings

27th September 2020

By Riley Baird

**Participants:** Corey Hanrahan, Oxana Repina (SUSS), Chris Bradley, Andy Waddell, Milie Maccallum, Jess Spargo, Riley Baird, Austin Zerk, Bradley Hearn, Laura Bewicke

Rising early, the contingent arrived at ANU Sport around 8am, then set off to Bungendore. In Bungendore, we found a nice cafe where we were able to get caffeinated and well-fed, then continued our journey on to the caves. Upon arrival, we changed into caving gear and headed to Main Cave.

Valiantly fighting our way through blackberries covering the entrance, we went into the cave, made seats in the mud and readied ourselves for Corey's presentation. The presentation raised questions like, "Why are caves important?", "What animals and food sources can be found in caves?" and "Do caver crumbs count as a food source?". Answers were discussed and written down on small cards with highlighter.



A nice clean workshop outside of Main Cave  
(photo by Brad Hearn)

From this point, we started exploring the cave. Starting from a relatively easy entrance, the difficulty steadily increased, as did the features to be seen. Stalactites, stalactites, columns and straws. Cafe graffiti dated to the 1970s. Long, slippery, muddy inclines we needed to pull each other up. A tunnel filled with water to crawl through, and an even tighter tunnel you need to crawl through on your back. Sleeping bats. A sump which stretches further than can

be seen. And in the final chamber, cave bacon to replenish us.

Leaving the warmth of the cave, we proceeded to have lunch and take part in the next half of Corey's presentation, where we were able to experiment with chemicals to observe how various rocks dissolve. For those of you playing along at home, chalk and vinegar is a highly recommended combination.

From this point, we split into groups to explore different caves. There was an abandoned mineshaft, which was easy to get through, and which looked awesome. We tried finding a cave called Fox Hole (MF12) on our maps. We found this, and in the process at least three of



And a rather more filthy workshop later after exploring! (photo by Brad Hearn)

us climbed down a wombat hole thinking that we had the right one. *Ed: It's Mount Fairy, the wombat holes and caves are interchangeable!*

For our last cave, we climbed a mountain and saw a hole in the ground. To get through this, we threw a ladder into the hole and began to climb. At the base, there was a good series of chambers with very bright cave formations. With this cave however, the real challenge was getting out. As it turns out, climbing up a swinging ladder through a narrow gap is much harder than climbing down. Nonetheless, we were all successful, and to the best of our knowledge nobody was left behind in the cave.

The caving being complete for the day, from here we returned to the carpark, sorted out our gear and began the drive back to Canberra.

## 2019-20 Fires Final Update

By Lachie Bailey

So this is pretty much what the final outcomes following the fires was for the major karst areas around Canberra

**Abercrombie-** Abercrombie was not burnt, but suffered severely from the drought accompanying the fires. Abercrombie KCR was open for large periods of the summer, and seemed to get an increase in visitors.



A fire-generated bloody sunset over the Brindabellas (photo by Lachie Bailey)

**Ashford-** Kwiambal NP was not burnt, although there were significant fires in nearby conservation estate

**Bendethera/Deua-** As far as I'm aware, no cavers have visited these karst areas since the fires. However, Bob Kershaw (ISS) was in contact with NPWS which reported that the karst and the endemic *Acacia* forest it supports burnt extremely hot and destructively.

**Borenore-** The fires did not reach the Borenore karst

**Buchan-** The fires around Buchan were generally very severe. Most of the karst got

burnt, and many building were lost. Thankfully, Homeleigh survived (due to a heroic effort), and the Caves Reserve did ok. It was patchy in spots, but large areas of karst were burnt extremely severely and were still not recovering very well in December 2020. In parts, the fires were hot enough to severely damage the surface of the limestone itself.

**Bungonia-** Bungonia was unburnt, with the fire remaining on the eastern side of the Shoalhaven River in Morton National Park. However, the park was closed for a long period

of time because of the fire threat, and for feral animal culling following that.

**Church Creek-** Church Creek was probably burnt badly, although its position in the valley may have afforded some protection. The remote sections of Kanangra-Boyd NP were closed for almost all of 2020. As far as I'm aware, no one has visited the area since the fires.

**Cleifden-** Wasn't burnt, but there is still limited access to the karst around Cleifden

**Colong-** Colong got burnt out, and was closed for the entirety of 2020. That didn't stop the numpties from LostMountains wandering in there with flaming torches and posting the photos on Facebook...

**Coolleman-** Coolleman got mildly singed by the Orroral Valley fire moving across the border from the ACT to NSW. Thankfully, it seems that most of the damage was light and superficial, with the area opening to public access relatively quickly.



**Jenolan-** Poor Jenolan got badly roasted. Several buildings, including the Cavers Cottage were destroyed. Caves House and most of the historic precinct survived, thanks to the heroic efforts of RFS and NPWS. The fires were quite severe, and left a lot of loose soil that was subsequently washed away in major floods in early 2020. The floods also severely damaged the Guides Office, and filled the Blue Lake with gravel. This has all led to an acceleration of the planned rebuilding of the Jenolan Cavers tourist precinct. Cavers still have no accommodation at Jenolan yet.

**Marble Arch-** The main blaze did not reach the Berlang Section of Deua NP, as it didn't proceed any further north than Appletree Creek (the next creek south from Moodong Creek). There was some backburning in the upper Appletree Creek catchment and across



Post-fire regenerating forest in Blue Mountains (photo by Lachie Bailey)

to Wyanbene Mountain. No karst (Marble Arch Cletmore, Big Hole) was affected. This part of Deua NP reopened relatively early.

**Mount Fairy-** There was no fire anywhere near Mount Fairy, and it has probably gotten more visit this year from bored cavers than normal

**Timor-** I don't have personal familiarity with the area, but I gather the reserve was spared fire, but it got close. Some of the outlying karst areas were burnt.

**Tuglow-** Like Colong, Tuglow has been closed for all of 2020 due to the fires. A lot of the fire seemed to stay up on the ridgetops, which were badly burnt.

**Wee Jasper-** Nothing in the area got burnt, thankfully. Although the caves were closed around New Year when there was a risk of the high country fires spreading north.

**Wellington-** Fire? What fire?

**Wombeyan-** The Wombeyan karst had not burnt for a long time, and got severely burnt. There was significant disruption to the landscaping, and several buildings were lost. However, a reasonable amount of the old trees and camping facilities survived.

#### **Wyanbene-**

Wyanbene has been closed since the fires, so there's very little intel on the area. Apparently, the karst was burnt by a low-intensity backburn, with the main fire stopping around Wyanbene Caves Mountain (burning northwards).

**Yarrangobilly-** Yagby was impacted by a massive and severe fire. The entirety of the karst burnt,

except possibly some small patches around Yagby Village. Cotterills Cottage and the Yagby Caves precinct were valiantly defended by NPWS and RFS, and saved with minor superficial damage. Regeneration has been slow, but is occurring in the bush.

## A Caver's Coronavirus Quarantine Chronicle: a timeline

March/April/May 2020

By Anonymousse

1. I think at this point things are ok. We'll just have to wait and see."
2. Things are not ok. The world falls into devastation. Accordingly, recreational travel and caving, camping, and canyoning are prohibited.
3. "It shouldn't be too long before things are back to normal."
4. It is obvious that it will be a long time before anything begins to resemble normal.
5. Extreme disappointment as trips are cancelled and there is no respite from the relentless onslaught of sad and terrible news.
6. Identify a small silver lining in being forced to stay home for the first few weeks, as there is finally enough time to get through a stack of books, project ideas and to-lists that had been endlessly put off between work and weekend trips away.
7. Avoid reading the news because things are very bleak. Instead, read a bunch of caving literature: 'Caves: New Zealand's Subterranean Wilderness' by Marcus Thomas and Neil Silverwood, 'Vertical: A Technical Manual' by Al Warild, the SUSS Bull, NUCC's Speleograffiti...
8. Exhaust supply of caving literature. Switch to canyoning literature: 'Canyoneering: A Guide to Techniques for Wet and Dry Canyons' by David Black, 'Canyoning: Technical Manual' by Grant Prattley and Daniel Clearwater...
9. Practice tying knots.
10. Tie self into knots (metaphorically) as cabin fever sets in.
11. Rig assorted SRT arrangements off the table legs.
12. Tie shoelaces with double fisherman's.
13. Just kidding. No leaving the house, so no need to tie shoelaces.
14. Flour becomes available again. Bake more than ever before. Make a mental note that homemade three-layer chocolate mousse cake with crispy tuiles and fresh raspberries is not typically on offer during caving trips.
15. Go for a stroll up a small hill in a Canberra city park. Remorsefully recall extreme overindulgence in mousse cake.
16. Cabin fever deepens.
17. Intermission: weeks pass by. Every day is Wednesday, and is spent wearing pyjamas.
18. Virus cases begin to plateau..!
19. Compulsively refresh the NPWS website for updates on when national parks will re-open.
20. Restrictions begin to ease... Tentative discussion in the group chat... The first committee meeting back approaches...
21. ?

*Ed: Anyone think they can ID Anonymousse? Any amusing attempts will get published in the next edition of Speleograffiti!*



A three-layer chocolate mousse cake with crispy tuiles and fresh raspberries (photo by Anonymousse)



## Australian Caving Community Online Directory

By Sil Iannello (FUSSI)

Reproduced, with additions, from *FUSSI  
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### Australian Speleological Federation

<https://caves.org.au/>

Facebook @asfcavers

### New South Wales Speleological Council

<https://nswsc.caves.org.au/>

### Flinders University Speleological Society Inc.

<https://fussi.caves.org.au/>

Facebook  
@FlindersUniversitySpeleologicalSocietyInc

### Cave Exploration Group South Australia Inc.

<https://cegsa.org.au/>

### Victorian Speleological Association Inc.

<http://caving.org.au/>

Facebook @ Victorian Speleological  
Association

### Sydney University Speleological Society

<https://suss.caves.org.au>

Facebook @suss.caves

### Rover Speleological Society

<https://rss.caves.org.au>

Facebook @RoverSpeleos

### Orange Speleological Society

<https://oss.caves.org.au>

### Newcastle and Hunter Valley Speleological Society

<http://nhvss.org.au/>

Facebook @nhvss

### Metropolitan Speleological Society Inc.

<http://mssadventure.org.au/>

Facebook @MSSAdventure-group

### Kempsey Speleological Society

Facebook @www.kss.org.au

### Illawarra Speleological Society Inc.

<https://iss.caves.org.au/>

### Hills Speleology Club Ltd.

<https://hillsspeleos.org/>

### Highland Caving Group

<https://hcg.org.au/>

### Cavers & Adventurers of the Snowy Mountains

Facebook @CASM - Cavers & Adventurers of  
the Snowy Mountains

### Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

<https://southerntasmaniancaverneers.com/>

Facebook @SouthernTasmanianCaverneers

### Under Victoria

<http://under-victoria.com/>

### Rimstone Cooperative

<https://www.rimstone.org.au/>

Facebook @Rimstone Co-operative

### Northern Caverneers Inc.

<http://northerncaverneers.com/>

### Mole Creek Caving Club

<http://molecreekcavingclub.org/>

### Blue Mountains Speleological Club

<https://bmsc.caves.org.au/>

### Chillagoe Caving Club Inc.

<https://chillagoecavingclub.org.au/>

Facebook @chillagoecavingclub

**Canberra Speleological Society Inc.**

<https://canberraspeleos.org.au/>

Facebook @Canberra Speleological Society

**National University Caving Club**

<https://nucc.caves.org.au>

Facebook @National University Caving Club

**Western Australian Speleological Group**

<http://www.wasg.org.au/>

Facebook @ The Western Australian Speleological Group

**Cavers Leeuwin Incorporated**

<https://caversleeuwin.com/>

Facebook @caversleeuwin

**Cave Animal of the Year Australia**

<https://caveanimaloftheyear.org.au/>

Facebook @caveanimaloftheyearaus

**Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association Inc.**

<http://ackma.org/>

Facebook @ACKMA

**NSW Cave Rescue Squad Inc.**

<http://caverescue.org.au/>

Facebook @nswcaverescue

**Cave Rescue Gippsland**

Facebook @caverescuegippsland

**ROC Cavers**

<https://roc.org.au/>

Facebook @ROCCavers

**Sydney Speleological Society**

<https://www.sss.org.au/index.htm>

Facebook @SydneySpeleologicalSociety

**International Union of Speleology**

<https://www.uis-speleo.org/>

**FFS - Fédération Française de Spéléologie**

<http://www.ffmpeg.fr/>

**National Speleological Society**

<https://caves.org/>

Facebook @NationalSpeleologicalSociety

**New Zealand Speleological Society**

<http://caves.org.nz/>

**British Caving Association**

<https://british-caving.org.uk/>

Facebook @BritishCavingAssociation

**Derek Bristol: Gear reviews**

[https://youtube.com/channel/UC66bwy1N0BVQ\\_gu3Zg-fnw](https://youtube.com/channel/UC66bwy1N0BVQ_gu3Zg-fnw)

**Kieran Mckay**

<https://www.youtube.com/user/mckaycaver>

**Meridianpost (Alan Green, SUSS/MSS)**

<https://www.youtube.com/user/meridianpost>

**Vertical Cavers Facebook @Vertical Cavers**

**Cavers of Facebook @caversoffacebook**

**Australian Cavers Facebook @Australian Cavers**

**Women Cavers: Extraordinary Women Leaders in Speleology**

Facebook @WomenCavers



## Photo Gallery!

*Details and authors of photos in order presented, starting p36:*

**Photo 1:** COVID desperation--- Lachie Bailey doing some SRTree (photo by Robyn Wells)

**Photo 2:** The pumping waterfall at the top of Rainbow Falls in Macquarie Pass after a week of solid rain (photo by Lachie Bailey)

**Photo 3:** Exploring possible side-climbs in Long Tunnel, Abercrombie (photo by Cathi Humphrey-Hood)













