

F U S S I



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The Quarterly Newsletter of the

Flinders University Speleological Society Incorporated

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Photo Credits:

Front cover photo: View of the Cerkevnik Bridge over the Reka River. Skocjan Cave Slovenia.

Source: Debevec, Albin., et al, Peric, Borut., (ed) Translated by Basa, Manica., The Skocjan Caves - in the bosom of classical karst. National University of Knjiznica. Ljubljana. 2004. p.17

Photos and Maps on pages: 4, 5 are from the same source. Photos of Proteus is from a post card.

Photo on page 6: Train Station in Postojna Cave. Photographer: Clare Buswell

Photos on pages 8 & 9 are of Fox Cave Naracoorte. Photographer: Brendan White.

CAVING BY GUIDES AROUND CAVE LAND

Way back in July of this year, Heiko and I visited Peter Wallis, a friend and ex FUSSI member now resident in the Peak District of the United Kingdom. The Peak District lies between Manchester and Sheffield, and is one of the premier karst regions in England. Peter lives in Smalldale near Bakewell, a picturesque, verdant part of the district (a bit like the rest of it), noted for paragliding, walking, caving and the Bakewell Pudding. (Goons fans stop reciting lines from the Batter Pudding Hurler, it's not the same.) The region is known as the Castleton Karst area and lies at the northern end of the Peak District limestone.

As our time in the area was short we opted for a walk up to Mam Tor which is essentially a landslip that dominates the Hope Valley. This ten *mile* walk took us past about four tourist caves, (Peak Cavers (aka the Devils Arse), Speedwell, Blue John and Treak Cliff Caverns) through a couple of little towns and a chance to taste the local ale at the end of the day. All in all a very satisfactory experience, particularly as we decided that we would go and do the tourist caving bit in one of the caves if we got back early enough. Well you know how it is ... We arrived back at the entrance to the Peak Cavern ten minutes past closing time.

Not to be deterred we got there the next morning, (before coffee was had) and entered a world of history, water and cold. Our guide was one from out of the box: full of songs, film star impersonations, a teller of historic tales - all complemented with a strong Yorkshire accent. This entrance to the Peak Cavern is known in show cave parlance as the Devils Arse and is situated in a blind gorge, 280ft (84 metres) below a vertical cliff, that once formed part of the defence structure of the now ruined Peveril Castle. It is also the largest natural cave entrance in Britain and geologically speaking is around 300 million years old. (The Flinders Ranges caves are around 350 million years old.)

The entrance cavern, which is the resurgence for the Peak Cavern stream way, was once the site of a rope works industry, which lasted around 400 years. The cave tour begins with a hands on rope making demonstration and history tour. Heiko got conned into being the labourer and made a very good piece of rope, which was no doubt placed on sale at the front office later on. The cavern roof is scarred with smoke from the cottages that were built to house the rope makers and their families. On display are reconstructions of these houses and yards, which held livestock. As a visitor you certainly get a sense of the industry that went on here, as well as the living conditions of the workers. Imagine a constant temperature of 10 degrees, the smell of yarded pigs, sheep and other livestock, smoke from fires and being flooded out in winter. (Dickens' description of poverty in rural England in the 18th century doesn't come near it.)



The tour continues through the entrance chamber into a stooped walk way known as the Lumbago Walk. This passage has been blasted out to allow better access. Originally, paying guests, including one Queen Victoria, were put in a small rowboat, and at the lowest point had to lie down in the boat so as to get through the passage which was around a metre high and two or three wide. Now the passage bypasses the streamway, except for high rainfall events when the place floods. From here you emerge, via Rogers Rain House, into a large chamber called Pluto's Dinning Room, which is used as a special occasions banquet room. Rogers Rain House is a veil of water falling from a mineral vein that has a streamlet at surface level as its source. The tour, which ends at Pluto's Dinning room, covers about 100m of the cave. The cave itself links into the Speedwell cave system, and is approximately 3km long. There were 6 people on this trip including the guide.

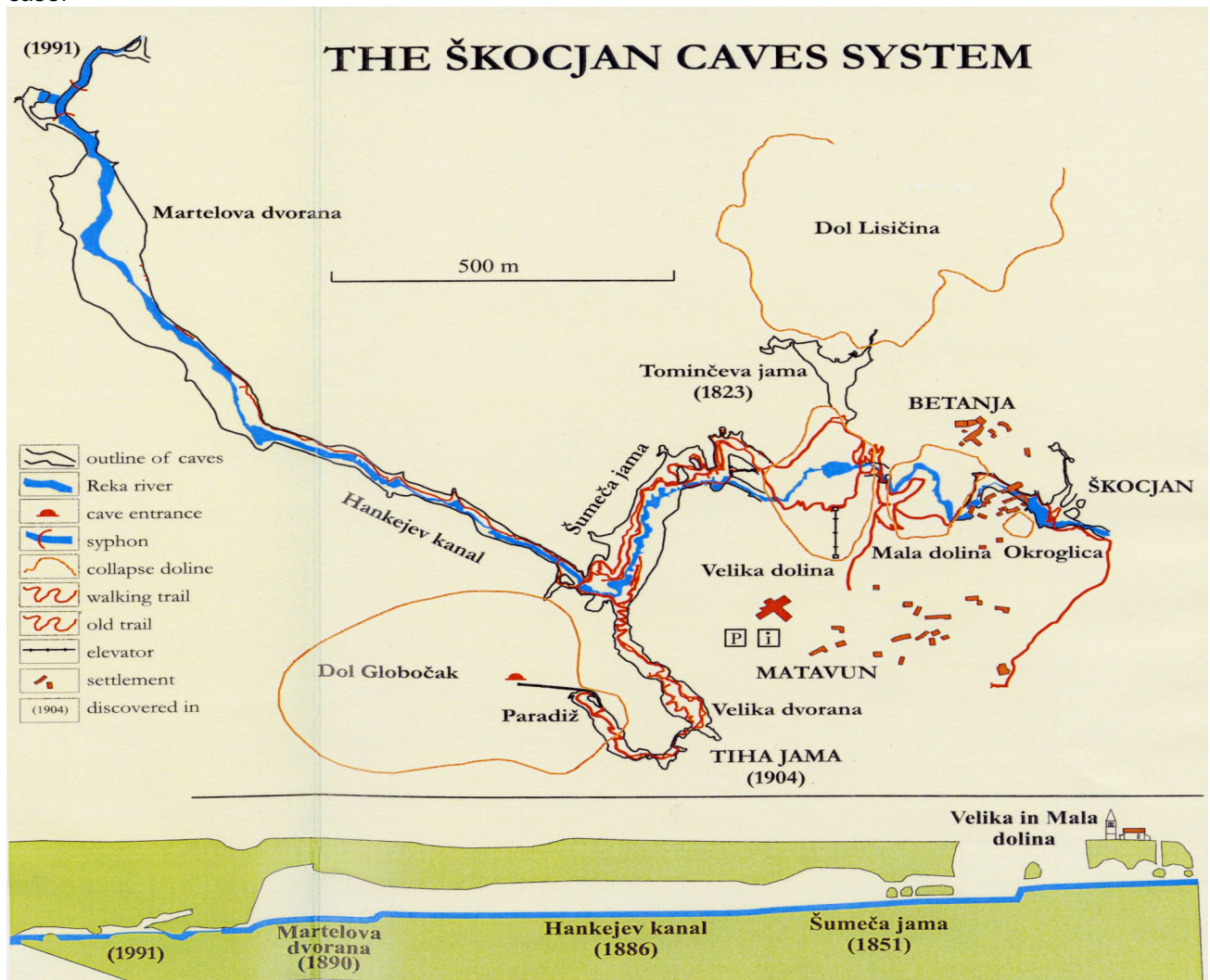
The next guided experience was in Slovenia, the home of speleology. Slovenia was part of old Yugoslavia and is bordered by Austria in the north, Italy on the west, Bosnia (what was Croatia) on the south and Hungary on the north-east corner. It also has 35km of seafront along the Adriatic in the West. The country has around 7000 caves that have been recorded. The deepest, Cehi II on Jelenk Peak, is near Bovec, at 1370m. There are about twenty-four show caves open to tourists, and the caving regions lie in the north - the Gorenjska and Primorska sections of the Julian Alps

CAVING BY GUIDES AROUND CAVE LAND

and in the Notranjska karst area of the Postojna region. Heiko and I visited two show caves in the Postojna region.

The Skocjan Caves

The Skocjan cave system was and is being carved out by the Reka River, which has eroded a double doline entrance to the system. If you thought that the doline to Old Homestead Cave or Weebubbie was big, then you need to magnify it until you take a brisk half hour to walk around it. If you think that what is about to be described is big, then you are wrong, HUGE is definitely the case!



This is the official description of the cave.

The Reka flows initially from springs below the Sneznik Mountain along a 55 km course as a superficial stream. After ... [making] contact with the limestone the river erodes and deepens its bed and flows through a 4km long gorge, at the end of which there is a mighty wall under which the Reka disappears underground. About 200 meters beyond this the cave ceiling collapsed, most likely in the early Pleistocene period (2-300,000 years ago), the consequences are the present collapse dolines Vekija dolina, 160 m deep and Mala dolina, 120 m deep, divided by a natural arch, which is the only remaining part of the original cave ceiling. In the Velika dolina the Reka finally disappears underground and emerges on the surface as far as 34 km away in the Timavo springs. This part of the Skocjan Cave system, the Murmuring Cave (Šumeča Jama), is in fact an underground gorge, 3.5 km long, 10-60 m wide and up to 100 m high. The length of the whole system is approximately 6 km with 205m of vertical difference between the highest entrance (Okroglica), and the lowest known point, the siphon. The system also contains the world's largest underground hall, the Martel Hall 308 m long, 123m wide and 106m high.¹

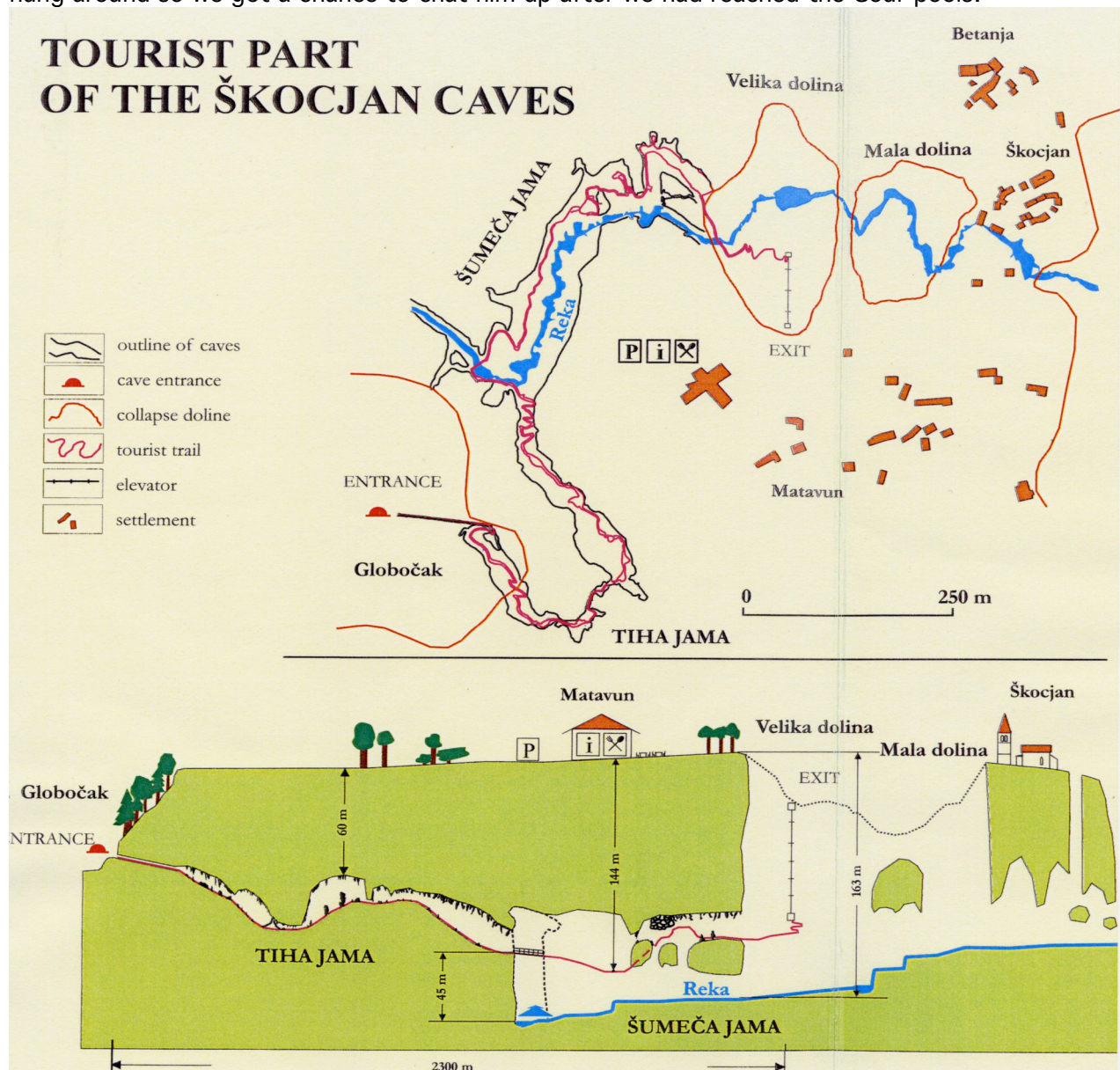
CAVING BY GUIDES AROUND CAVE LAND

You get the idea. HUGE!

The day that we visited so did about 100 people. That is, 100 people went on the same tour we us. (Huge is beginning to be insane.) We were broken into 4 language groups: Slovenian, Italian, English, and French, with 2 guides. You enter the cave via the 116m long tunnel that was constructed in 1933. The cave temperature is 13 degrees. We took up the tailend Charlie position.

The first chamber, known as Paradise, is covered with spelothems from top to bottom. From here the tour descends into the Podorna Dvorana (Collapsed Hall), with its boulders on the floor that were once on the ceiling. You continue through the Labyrinth, to the Velika Dvorana (Great Hall,) with stalagmites that are up to 15m tall. Australia's tallest stalagmite, the Khan in Kubla Khan Cave, Tasmania is 17m tall. The Khan is on its own, here in the Velika Dvorana, are at least half a dozen. I was too awestruck to keep counting and would still be there except that the guide turned off all the lights.

From here you begin to hear the river Reka and soon the cave opens up into the gorge that is Semeca Jama (the Murmuring Cave) with the river at its bottom. The section of the chasm that the tourist trip covers is mind blowing. You cross the Cerkvenik Bridge 45m above the river, just where the river enters the Hanke Canal and you can't hear your self speak above the noise of the water. Somewhere ahead of us were 97 other people, we didn't care as Heiko and myself just hung around trying to take it all in. If you looked up from the bridge you could see the remains of the previous bridge built 65 years ago and 20 metres higher than the one we were on. The guide also hung around so we got a chance to chat him up after we had reached the Gour pools.



CAVING BY GUIDES AROUND CAVE LAND

We learnt from the guide that the cave averages 800 people through it each day, so let's say that equals 288,000 people per year. (Naracoorte caves gets 75,000 people visiting each year.) The management authority employs 16 people to deal with them. Like Naracoorte Caves National Park the Skocjan caves are on the UNESCO's world heritage list of natural monuments. The cave has a long history of human habitation and the first known written record of it dates back to Posidonius of Apamea (135-59 BC). Archaeological work has found evidence from the Mesolithic period through the Iron Age, classical antiquity and the Middle Ages up to present days. Recorded tourism dates from 1819 when a visitors book was introduced. The first plan map of the cave was drawn by Anton Hanke in 1888. The oldest printed maps from the 16th century marked the Skocjan caves on them. The dolines are home to 250 varieties of plants and five different types of bats.

We left the bridge over the river and continued down to the Bowl Hall, which is filled with gour pools, and reminded me of the pools in Kubla and Croesus caves, although not as extensive here. We came back into daylight at a large cavern, Schmidl Hall, that opens on to the Velika doline. At the bottom of this doline the river exits the cave via a waterfall into a small lake. It then disappears again underground for its journey out to sea 34 km away. We tourists in the meantime walk past Tominc cave, the site of pre historic settlement, and catch a funicular car back up to the top of the doline about 100 metres in elevation from the exit point. The tour took us about 2 hours but most of the group had well and truly gone by the time we got anywhere near the surface. Both of us longed for our own caving gear and heaps of holiday time so we could join the local speleo group and venture under ground with them for the remaining 5km of passages. The tourist section of the cave is 2300 metres long. Our thanks go to the guide who put up with our lingering and endless questions.

Our next cave was Postojna Jama. This is one of Slovenia's prime tourist sites and it has been visited since the 13th century, if the graffiti in the Gallery of Old Signatures by the entrance is any gauge. In the last 185 years 30 million people have visited Postojna. It is the largest show cave in 'classic karst' and the most visited show cave in Europe. The cave system is 22km and tourist get to see 5.7 km of it. Cave temperature is a chilly 8 degrees so it was definitely beanie time. It was also culture shock time, as 500 people, plus one dog – a laptop sort, boarded an electric train that shuttled us through 4km of lit cave passage at 20km an hour. First impression is that they like *fast* cave tours, but eventually the train slows down.



Heiko, in red, in the distance, about to board the train in Postojna cave.

Your destination for the start of the tour is Big Mountain (Velika Gora), where you stand under your lighted language sign, an electric florescent light which is never turned off until the end of the day. Five languages are catered for. It was a bit like standing around waiting for a train in the London underground. Mind you, so important to the economy of

CAVING BY GUIDES AROUND CAVE LAND

Slovenia was this cave that it received electric lighting in 1884 two years before the nearby town did. The initial railway lines went down in 1872.

Just to get a different guiding experience, Heiko decided to join the German language group whilst I trundled off with the English and Slovenian group. The walking section of the tour is 1.7km and is really a self-guided walk through the cave. The guide met up with our group at four strategic places on the one and a half hour tour, so most people set off at their own pace. The cave system is vast, and every chamber is full of speleothems except one, which is devoid of them as the Partisans blew up a Nazi fuel dump in it in 1944. The walls in this chamber are still blackened. From the Velika Gora you wind your way through a 500m long chamber, known as Beautiful Cave, to the Russian Bridge, so named as it was built by Russian prisoners of war during WWI. You cross the Bridge and meander your way through another kilometre of heavily decorated caverns which carry such names as the Winter Hall, or the Pillar Column or the Brilliant Stalagmite. The latter has become the symbol of the cave and appears on all official cave gear, guides uniforms etc. It is not hard to see why this cave attracts the tourist population in droves and how it is set up to deal with them.

Before you leave the cave you pass by a concrete constructed diamond shaped bath. In it are live specimens of *Proteus Anguinus*, a kind of salamander for which Postojna Cave is famous. It was a very sad sight to see troglobitic fauna subject to a barren life under light. The six that were in the tank were all huddled together trying to escape the glare of brightness. They had nowhere to hide and no water to swim in.

From here you move into the Concert Hall, which is the largest in the system and has been known to hold 10,000 people for musical performances. It has a gift shop to one side from which you can buy cave souvenirs. The roof of this chamber is partly covered by green lampenflora that results from the light that comes from the gift shop.

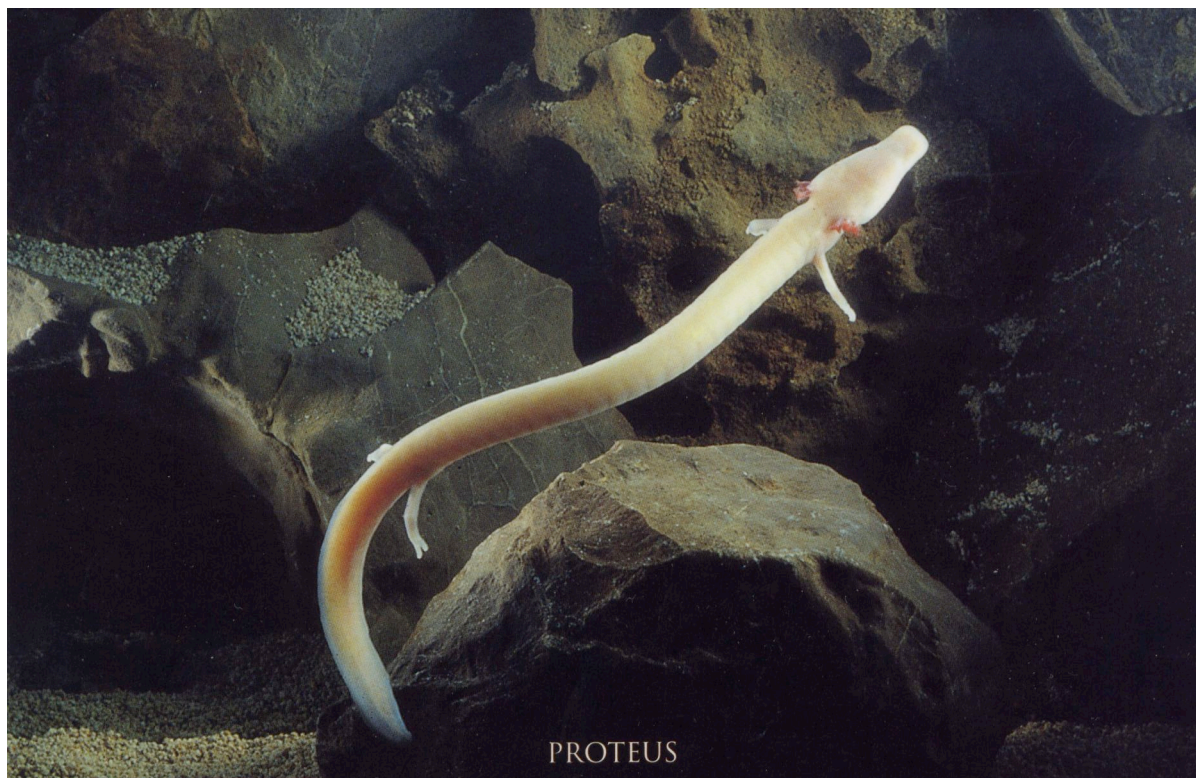
Once again I managed to get hold of the guide at the end of the trip and talked to him about the issues of cave management given that such a huge impact tourists have on the cave. He told me that there is a fair amount of scientific work carried out on the 190 different species of fauna, including beetles, bats, cave hedgehogs and of course, *Proteus Anguinus*. The biospeleological station is the hub of this work. There are large problems with lint, damage done by tourists touching the cave formations, lampenflora, and ethical issues subjecting endangered troglobitic fauna to six hours of light a day so as to make money. The other side of this is that Slovenia is not exactly a wealthy nation, although it has not suffered as much as some of the other ex-Yugoslavian countries, such as Bosnia for example.

We left the cave via the train and came back into the madness of daylight tourism, as outside the entrance is a motel, and a shopping precinct with every imaginable cave related trinket for sale. One thing that we did not see for sale was bits of spelothem. That was a relief. Postojna Jama is one massive cave system that leaves you overwhelmed by its decorative enormity. Going cave touring with 500 people and a dog is something to remember, but all Heiko and I wanted to do was to spend hours just wandering, admiring and soaking up the uniqueness of the place. Once again, our thanks go to the guide for the chat at the end and for doing a job that must be exceedingly difficult given the production line of tourists that visit. (The dog by the way coped quite well).

End note:

1) Debevec, Albin., et al, Peric, Borut., (ed) Translated by Basa, Manica., The Skocjan Caves - in the bosom of classical karst. National University of Knjiznica. Ljubljana. 2004. pp 30-34.

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Proteus Anguinus is the largest cave dwelling vertebrate known. It matures at age 18 or so, lives for around 100 years and has been known to go without food for long periods of time. It measures about 25-30cm long, has a long tail that it uses for swimming, but it also uses its four legs to propel it around. Having no need for eyes, it has an excellent sense of smell and is sensitive to weak electric fields in the water. It uses these senses to find food and communicate. It breathes through gills when submerged and has rudimentary lungs for breathing when it is outside the water. Its skin has no pigmentation, but gets the pink colour from its blood circulation. Yep, weird. The sad thing is that despite the export of the species being banned from Slovenia, it keeps turning up in fish tanks and pet shops throughout Europe. It is rumoured that the biggest customers are ... scientists.

SLUMMING IT AT NARACOORTE

Bronya Alexander

Email from Clare:

Hi Bronya.

It appears that at this stage there are only 3 of us going. Also the weather is going to be bloody awful. So can you ring the Naracoorte caravan park and ask what sort of vans and cabins they have for 3 persons for 2 nights.

Ta Clare

And so began our rather luxurious caving trip, not a tent in sight. The Bureau of Meteorology's "showers and local hail" forecast for the region provided sufficient rationale not to question Clare's cabin motives. Actually, the weather over the weekend was not too bad really. In fact, we even spent much of our out-of-cave time in a t-shirt on Saturday, although Sunday saw Clare and me rugged up in jackets whilst Brendan remained in shorts and a t-shirt - sheesh!

SLUMMING IT AT NARACOORTE

Naracoorte cave number one on Saturday was 'Fox cave'. We met up with the local National Parks ranger (Barbara Logan), and the four of us headed into the walk-in cave. Exploring became intermingled with photo sessions as we passed many interesting tites, mites, shawls and other wholesome structures. Clare had her proper SLR camera; Barbara and Brendan had digitals; and I had my trusty point and shoot. But alas, only a short while into Fox cave, Clare ran out of film. All those magnificent structures that could have made such wonderful photos! It was all too much for her ... until she acquired a digital camera, and Brendan, for some odd reason, didn't take many more photos.



Early on, I had noticed how fast Brendan was crawling over the often-painful cave floor. Disgruntled, I continued at my careful pace thinking how macho he must be to handle the pain. Some time later, it came to my attention that both he and Clare were wearing knee pads and I wasn't. Now who's the macho one, hey?!

After farewelling Barbara, we enjoyed a well-earned lunch (although Clare was quite put out that she had forgotten to bring olives - apparently the olive paste she had brought was not an acceptable substitute!). Then it was cave number two time - 'S102'. Rigged to my car, we abseiled down the entrance (I love this bit!) and spent the next couple of hours exploring. Whilst waiting to ascend the ladder, we noticed a green caterpillar attached to the bottom. This was obviously not a cave caterpillar (if they exist?), but we weren't sure how to save it. We hoped it would continue to cling to the ladder and thus be hauled out eventually. But, when it came my turn to ascend, the caterpillar was no longer attached. So our little green buddy was carefully placed in my chest pocket to accompany me to the top. My fears of opening my pocket to find only green sludge soon vanished. Beaming, I safely handed over the crawling caterpillar to Brendan. Definitely one for the caterpillars!

Our two evenings were happily spent sipping port (thanks Brendan!), eating Clare's wonderful pre-cooked spag bol and peering over cave maps and GPS handbooks. At one point, the question of physical training for caving was brought up. It was decided that the best way to train for caving is to cave, but if you want to train for it at the gym, Clare

SLUMMING IT AT NARACOOORTE

suggests you crawl around underneath all the equipment. So girls, the next time you're at the gym and a guy crawls right under your equipment, don't worry – he's probably just a caver ... yeah right guys!

Day two was exploration day. We had a map where, you guessed it, 'x' marked the spot of some small caves. We drove to Robertson's cave which was locked, but marked it on the GPS, then headed further down the track into the bushes before parking and setting off in search of several big crosses that ought to have showed us where the cave entrances were (needless to say, we never did locate any big crosses at all). Throughout the weekend we drove on a few 4WD tracks. I drive a Hyundai excel - hardly 4WD status. I suppose the tracks weren't that bad, but I'd recently had my car serviced, big time. Besides the usual service, it had to get four new tyres, new horn, new rocker cover gasket ... the list goes on. Believe me, I remembered all these expensive items driving down those sandy tracks!

We never did locate the caves, but I did come across an echidna digging into the sand. Also, at one stage, Clare mentioned that she must have lost her hair clip - to which Brendan promptly replied "Oh, was it a family hair-loom?!"

Lost hair clips and elusive caves aside, we all agreed it was a successful trip and headed back to Adelaide, all the more merrier.

Just in case you didn't read the above and skipped to this last paragraph, our trip went like this: long drive-sleep-eat-cave-eat-cave-eat-sleep-eat-explore-eat-longdrive-happy cavers!

Our thanks to Barbara for coming along with us.

- Bronya Alexander

A NOTE ON STATIC ROPES

Static rope, used mostly by cavers and in some rescue situations, is designed to minimise stretch and dirt penetration into the core of the rope. In caving the ability of a rope to limit the dirt penetration, is as you will appreciate, very important. The lack of stretch means that static ropes, when in use, must be kept as tight as possible as their ability to absorb shock is marginal, particularly along short lengths of rope.

This means that virtually all the shock load of a fall is transmitted to the safety system, (anchors, karabiners, harnesses etc) and the human body.

In a climbing situation, a very short fall can develop enough force to be critical. Slings and runners are just like static rope. So a fall of less than four feet on a static rope so sling, can create enough shock force to cause serious injury or death.

Bearing in mind that the human body can only handle for a brief instant a shock force of 12kN with out risking serious injury, you don't want to go around absorbing 18kN.

Also 18kN is close to, or over the minimum limits set by the UIAA on all the gear in your safety system: Anchors (bolts): 25kN, Karabiners:20kN, Slings: 22kN Harnessess:15kN.

Gearlist for Yarrangobilly and Bungonia

The following gear lists are designed to make your life easier for the forthcoming trips to two caving areas in NSW.

Yarrangobilly:

Average temperature of the caves is 10 degrees. However, Y1, Y2 and Y3 are around 4 degrees. A number of the caves are outflow caves and the water is freezing. So the aim of the exercise is to keep yourself as warm and dry as possible.

Clothing:

- Thermal underwear: Peter Storm brand. Don't be sold on the lighter varieties, Peter Storm is more expensive but it is worth the money. (You will have to shop around for it and probably have to have it ordered in.) If you have woollen thermals that will be fine, they will just take a little longer to dry out each day if they get wet.
- Gloves, rubber for general use. Obtain the strong rubberised type used for protection when spraying herbicides etc. Make sure they are tight fitting. Thermal gloves are useful if they fit under the rubber gloves.
- Beanie that fits under your helmet.
- Fiberpile jacket or old woollen jumper.
- Walking boots are fine, but in a couple of caves your feet are going to freeze without some sort of wetsuit boot protection. A fair amount of walking to and from caves and along the odd river is part of caving at Yarrangobilly, so be prepared.
- Wetsuit booties, not slippers. Booties provide far better protection for the soles of your feet than slippers.
- Normal caving overalls are fine. Bring some elbow/kneepads to suit.

Optional

- Waterproof overalls.

Caving gear

- 3 x Caving lights. Make sure they are waterproof.
- Spare bulbs for all torches.
- Spare batteries for all torches.
- UIAA approved helmet with four points of attachment.
- Caving gear bag.
- Light charger from a car battery source. There are no recharging facilities at Yagby.
- Medical cards. eg., Medicare.

Rescue

- Light weight space blanket or
- Large plastic garbage bags (the orange ones) if you have to bivvy or wait around for a while.
- First aid kit in a waterproof bag. Heavy-duty snap-lock bags are good. Available from supermarkets.
- Triangular bandage, crepe bandage, etc.

Bungonia

The caves at Bungonia are vertical and require competent vertical skills. They also contain CO₂ which is a tad deadly if found in high concentrations. The temperature of the caves is similar to those in South Australia.

Clothing

- Fingerless gloves.
- T-shirt, shorts.
- Boots.

Gearlist for Yarrangobilly and Bungonia

- Normal caving overalls are fine. Bring some elbow/kneepads to suit.
- If you have long hair then a hair net comes in handy to stop those loose ends from getting hooked up in SRT and descending gear.

Caving gear

- A lighter or packet of matches, carried at all times.
- Chest harness
- Sit harness
- Dynamic cowstail
- UIAA approved helmet with four points of attachment.
- Ascender with foot loops for feet.
- Dynamic loop from foot ascenders to harness
- Chest ascender to sit harness
- Chicken loops
- Whaletail or rack
- 3 x Caving lights. Make sure they are waterproof.
- Spare bulbs for all torches.
- Spare batteries for all torches.
- Light charger from either 240volts or a car battery source. There are recharging facilities at Bungonia.
- Medical cards. eg., Medicare.

Optional

- Caving gear bag, large for carrying ropes.

Rescue

- Spare ascender
- Pulley
- Short length of rope for counter balance rescue 2-2.5m
- Lightweight space blanket
- Large plastic bags in case of bivvying
- Prussik cords
- First aid kit

Suggested reading: All of these are in the FUSS library and can be borrowed.

- Padgett and Smith, *On Rope*.
- Warild A., *Vertical*.
- Montgomery N., *SRT*.

The book *The Caves of Bungonia* is available in the Flinders University Library.

FOR SALE AUSTRALIAN KARST INDEX

This is the book where you find out all you need to know about access to caves, pitch details, whether you are going to get covered in mud or dust, and if any maps have been made or not. It is a great read, if only for the cave names.

\$10.00 a copy
See Clare

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What's On

Oct 5 th Wed	3–6pm	Bridge jump. Chris co-ordinating. You must let him know that you are coming so he can get the right amount of gear out. Meet at 3pm at Clubs and Soc's Office. Contact: phone: 8387 2449. wood0334@flinders.edu.au
Oct 10 th Mon	3–6pm	Bridge jump. Chris co-ordinating. Details as above
Oct 17 th Mon	3–6pm	Bridge jump. Chris co-ordinating. Details as above
Oct 24 th Mon	3–6pm	Bridge jump. Chris co-ordinating. Details as above
Oct 29/30 th		Flinders Ranges trip. All welcome, but this is predominately an SRT training trip. Clare co-ordinating. 8333 9516

Swotvac 7th–11th Nov.

Nov 7 th Sat	Morialta training day. Time TBA.
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Exams 12th–26th November

Nov 27 th Sun	2pm onwards	Club T Shirt printing, library day, gear cleaning and final planning moments for Yarrangobilly Trip. At Brendan White's home, Belair. Contact Bronya on: alexander.bronya@saugov.sa.gov.au or Ph:0419 373 350. BYO plate of food to share for the evening meal, plus, plate, knife, glass and vino of choice.
Dec. 3 rd to 11 th		Yarrangobilly, Bungonia. NSW. Chris co-ordinating. See the details of the gear list provided in this issue. Also note that the above training days on the bridge are required attendance for Yagby and Bungonia. The dates are currently subject to permits being granted by NPWS NSW.

THAT'S ALL FOLKS