



FUSSI

Newsletter

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Front Cover Photo Credit: Bronya Alexander.
Front Cover Photo: Michael in the sump in M4.

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INTO THE FIRE OF MT ECCLES

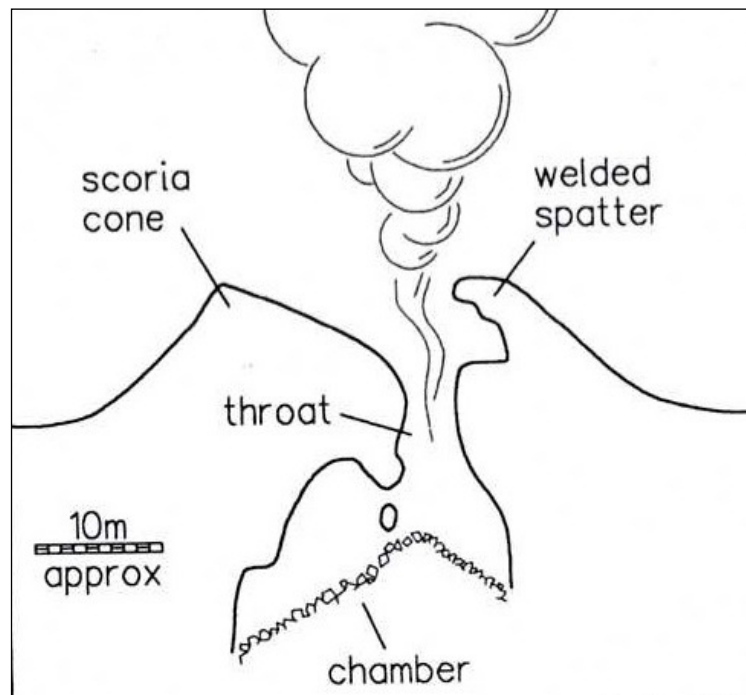
Clare Buswell

April 23-25 08.

Members on the trip: Matt & Michael Maynell-James, Heiko Maurer, Clare Buswell, Min Xumin and Bronya Alexander

H8 The Shaft.

The walk from the cars to the cone of the volcano was done in a relatively dry fashion, but as soon as the rope was taken out of its bag, the rain god decided that it loved us so much that we needed to be soaked to the skin. The six of us huddled under the overhang of the welded splatter of the cone, looking forward to the fire below, but somehow or other we were at least 20,000 - 8000 years too late! Yep, must have forgotten to set the alarm clock that day!



H8. The Shaft. Mt Eccles.

Source: *Vulcon*. Guidebook. 20th ASF Conference. Hamilton Victoria. 1995.

Drawn by K. Grimes.

This was the first experience of volcanic caving for four members of the group. Getting into harnesses and standing around in the rain reminded the two other members of caving in Tasmania. So began the abseiling and ascending into the cone of Mt Eccles. The entrance doline was slippery and in some areas fern covered, but once on rope the short abseil delivers a nice feeling of being a spider, landing in the blackness at the bottom of the cone. Blackness is the word here as the volcanic rock is black, not grey or cream, like some limestone. Your light just disappears into it, no matter how powerful the generator is. We spent time trundling around the bottom and lots more time getting out. By the time we had finished, the rain god had left so at least packing up was done in the dry.

We spent the late afternoon looking for Maze cave, but decided that a trip to the North Pole, H51 was required instead. Heiko however, remained on the "Mission to Maze", but was defeated

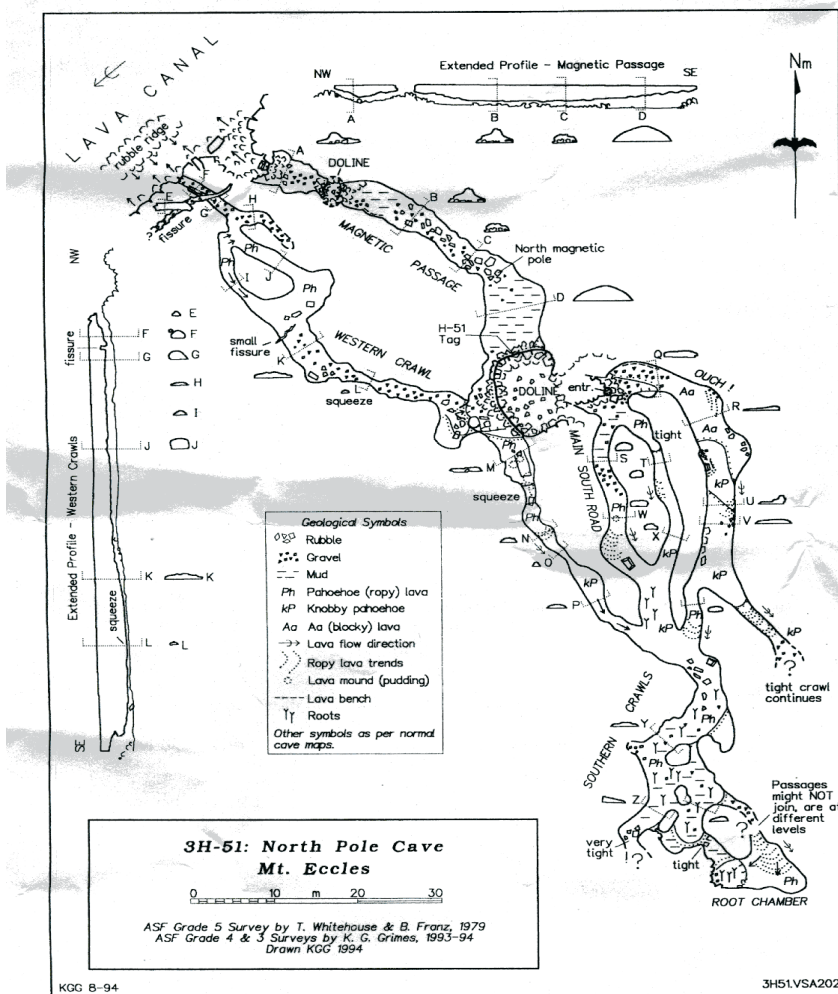
INTO THE FIRE OF MT ECCLES

in the end by a lack of daylight. Our theory was that Mavis had moved the cave thus preventing Heiko from GPSing its co-ordinates! Meanwhile back at the North Pole, Michael and Matt were discussing the tight crawlway that runs parallel to the "Main South Road". They were discussing the 'can I fit' and 'what lies beyond' theories and decided that it was a tad small. Clare was, later on, to trundle on into it, removing bum bag and helmet and was a happy trog! We explored the Magnetic Passage, the Western Crawl and then trogged our way out to the Southern Crawls. All in all the usual volcanic caving experience with lots of "arrgh arrgh, ouch, I love my kneepads, fully padded overalls would be a great invention" type statements being uttered. Yep, volcanic caves are hard, overall-eating beasts that love to raze one's skin to bits. But it was also good fun!

We landed back at camp for a late dinner with a musical base beat being maintained by two

Koalas having some sort of conversation in a nearby tree. Soon after their conference ended, the local possum came over for a visit, wanting to share some of our evening meal. Min took pity on it and whilst moving it on, managed to pat it!

The following morning we trundled off around Lake Surprise to enjoy the views and look at the water levels. The water level varies throughout the year due to underground springs, rain and runoff. The last few years of drought showed up with the northern section of the lake being dry. There was also a nice layer of algae covering a good deal of the surface of the water. However it was a good walk with views out to Portland and surrounding farmland.



Source: *Vulcon*. Guidebook. 20th ASF Conference. Hamilton Victoria. 1995.

It was an enjoyable trip, a little short on time but how often can you, in response to your friend's 'what did you do

on the long weekend?' reply: "I spent the weekend abseiling down the throat of a volcano"!

Rigging Details. 1 X 50m rope and a six - eight metre tape. Rig from a bloody great big tree, which is around ten metres from the edge of the welded splatter side of the crater.

Ladder: 1 X 50 foot ladder and rig from rocks on the ledge just below the overhang of the welded splatter.

DOING SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Sylvia Z.

May 23/24 08.

Members on the trip: Bronya Alexander, Anthony Kakosanke Clare Buswell and Sylvia

We began our venture into the wilderness late on a Friday evening, heading south-east bound for the town of Penola. A five hour drive south-east of Adelaide, I was embarking on my very first caving adventure. Excited to be leaving the hustle and bustle of city life and temporarily detaching myself from the demands of uni work, I peered out of the window, vast empty plains rushing past, an almost full moon and the clear night starry sky above the vehicle, packed to its limits. Filled with four keen cavers and a boot overflowing with plenty of caving gear we were all set for a weekend full of fun and adventure.

Tales of previous caving trips and general travels were reminisced about along the way. We clambered out of the cosy vehicle for a leg stretch at a petrol station, to be met by a chill wind, revealing how cold the night had become. In a matter of a couple of minutes we could bare the cold no longer, we piled back into the sheltered capsule of warmth and were on our way again.

A place called Whiskas Woolshed was going to be our base over the weekend while we weren't out exploring the depths of the earth. On our arrival a cheerful fellow by the name of Andy (a.k.a. Whiskas) introduced himself to us. He welcomed us in and gave us a tour of the impressive comparison to my initial expectation of a woolshed. The humble abode was a shearing shed fitted up to accommodate visitors. Bedrooms filled with warmth from oil



Bore Holes in Considines Cave

heaters, beds to sleep on, a fireplace in the common room and topped off with hot showers, which was a much appreciated addition to the refurbished dwelling. Weary eyed from the long drive, we were all looking forward to settling in for the night. An early rise of 7am was due for the following morning.

We huddled around the common room fireplace, dressed in layers, munching on some breakfast to fuel up for the jam-packed day ahead. The biting chill greeted us once again outside. We packed the necessities for the day into the car and set out for our first cave destination – Considines Cave. Described as having a five metre vertical entrance and two main chambers with some ‘nasty crawlways’ along the way. We spent what seemed like one hour

carefully rigging, only to realize on our descent, it would have been much easier to just literally climb down the five metre drop.

DOING SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Once we were all in, our head torches revealed dusty surrounds. We navigated our way through crawlways and edged cautiously down rocky slopes. As we got deeper, we spotted stalagmites and stalactites galore. The sounds of dripping emanating from the main chamber indicated the liveliness of the cave. There were large impressive boreholes created, penetrating deep into the ground surface as a result of persistent dripping. A pool of crystal clear water, which was very



Is it Edible? Fungi in L322.

difficult to spot because of how beautiful and clean it looked, had also formed along the edge of the main chambers. After all the exploring, we took some time to switch off the torches and rest in the pitch black stillness. Nothing, apart from the consistent dripping could be heard, which actually proved to be quite soothing. Realizing that any of us could have quite easily fallen asleep at any moment; we decided it would be best to press on, with so much to see and so little time. Heading back the way we entered, we emerged hungry for lunch.

Our next stop was the infamous cave L322... It took some extensive searching to find the entrance. Was Mavis, the club gremlin up to her old tricks again? It seemed the cave entrance had been moved. But sure enough, we eventually found the well-hidden entrance shrouded by many trees. The eleven metre vertical descent of this damp cave entrance definitely required rigging. The first three or four metres descending in were a bit of a squeeze but was nothing compared to the physical contortion required to ascend back out of it. The remaining seven or so metres of the drop

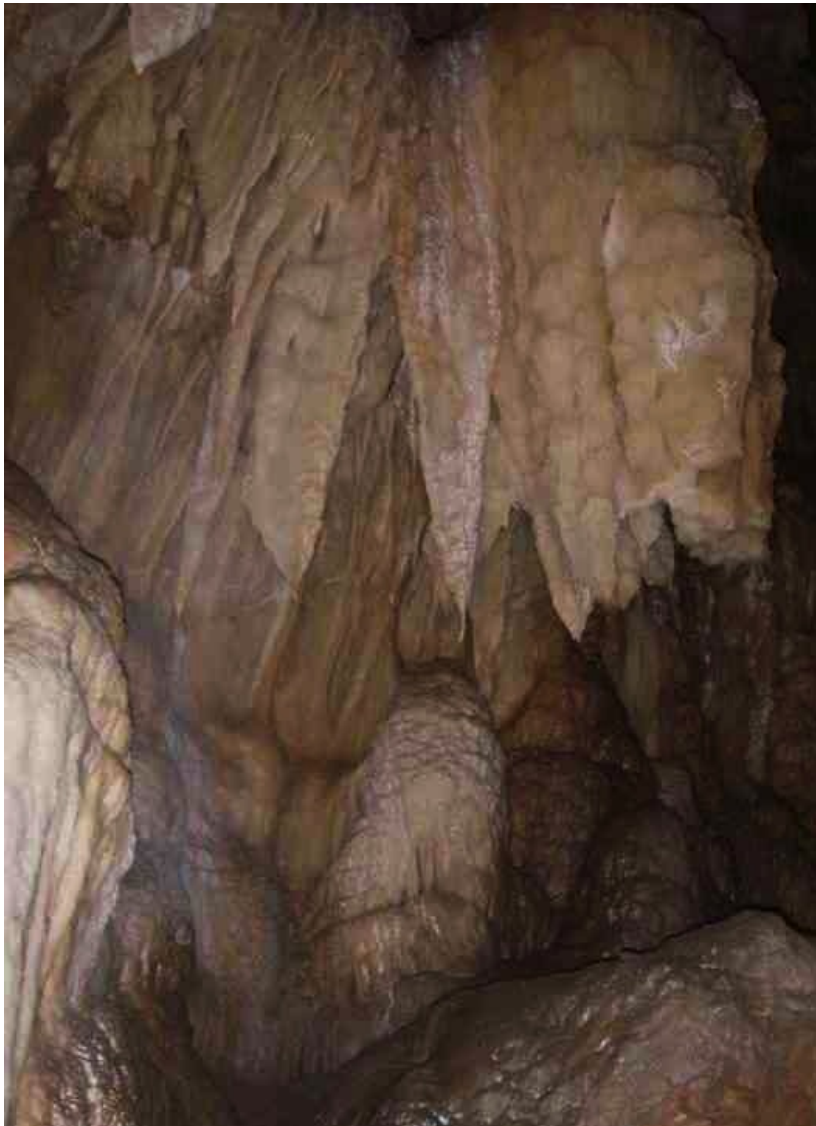
opened out into a very large, main single chamber. The base of which was filled with an undisturbed sand cone that sloped down into a flatter surface, that once again had pretty limestone formations and even an intact skeleton of a small animal, likely to be a baby kangaroo.

After some more happy snaps, it was time for the super challenging task of getting out of the glamorous pickle we had landed ourselves in. It proved to be a lot more difficult than getting in there in the first place. The entrance seemed like it was only physically possible to descend and ascending was another story. Clare was the first to tackle this killer entrance. Using the single

DOING SOMETHING DIFFERENT

rope technique (SRT) she didn't really have a problem making her way up the first 7 metres of open chamber.

Reaching one of the first constriction points, it became evident that even the battery pack of the 6 volt head torch was too much bulk. So while suspended in a tight constriction, Clare managed to strip off the battery pack and also had to remove some of the SRT gear as this was also too much to fit through the ridiculous tight squeeze. This was not the end of it. An inconveniently placed choke stone in the S bend meant that at the next constriction point, it was almost impossible to bend your knees in order to boost yourself up to fit through an already outrageous tiny gap. (This part wasn't a problem on the way down!)



Decoration in L322.

After much contortion, vocal and physical exertion Clare was the first to conquer cave L322. Now there were just three of us left to wrangle our way out. Clare's words of advice and assistance helped us all out. Anthony was the next out. Being the least experienced caver out of the four of us, I expressed my concern and doubt that this would be a conquerable challenge. But when you have one of two choices, to remain stranded and die a horrible death, vis-a-vis the baby kangaroo, or live, something compels you to opt for the latter. With the reassuring guidance, support and patience of my fellow trustworthy caving buddies, sheer brute force, contortion, plenty of grunting and enough screaming to have just given birth to triplets I emerged - exhausted, relieved and covered in filth. Bronya was the last of us to escape the most physically challenging thing I've done to date.

What seemed like nearly two hours spent just on the ascent, the day had reached an end,

the moon was high and night was upon us. All exhausted, relieved and in need of a hearty feed, we packed all the gear up, trying very hard not to fall back down the ol' L322. After everything and everyone was loaded back in the car, we were ready to go.

DOING SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Back safe at Whiskas Woolshed a nice warm shower was in order for each of us before a serving of Clare's delicious vegetarian spaghetti bolognaise. Aside from the confidence booster that conquering L322 brought with it, this delectable plate of spaghetti bolognaise was rewarding, making the evening's events all the more worthwhile. Clean, well fed, rugged up, relaxed in front of the fireplace with a glass of red wine, great company and pleased with the day's accomplishments I was feeling highly satisfied. The next day would bring with it only horizontal caves - not nearly as physically demanding or time consuming (without the need to rig). This was a much welcome change of scene as I figured I would have some very tired muscles over the next few days.

A sleep in until 8am that Sunday morning left me feeling well rested and ready to accomplish L322 all over again! – well... not quite. We were all packed by 9:30am and ready to venture to the next destination – Wrecked Car Cave, (so named because a car wreck used to be situated near the entrance.) This turned out to be a fun cave. Lots of crawling and wriggling – my idea of fun! There was plenty to see inside, mainly lots of straw stalactite formation and calcified matter on rocks and the floor was soft, moist clay dirt. With no defined walls it required a high level of navigation ability (and the assistance of a compass), reasonable sense of direction and a good memory for remembering the way you came.

In Wrecked Car Cave, almost any path looks as convincing as the next so it is worthwhile to remember that cavers generally choose the wider paths to go through. Heading in a north-easterly direction eventually leads to an alternate entrance which also makes for an easy exit. As a hint, it is advisable to know what direction this exit is, relative to the entrance you go in, just so you have a general idea of bearings.

We surfaced all grubby to find that a few drops of rain had started to fall. After a brief wander, we headed back to the car and back to Whiskas Woolshed for the last time to have lunch and load the car before heading back to Adelaide.

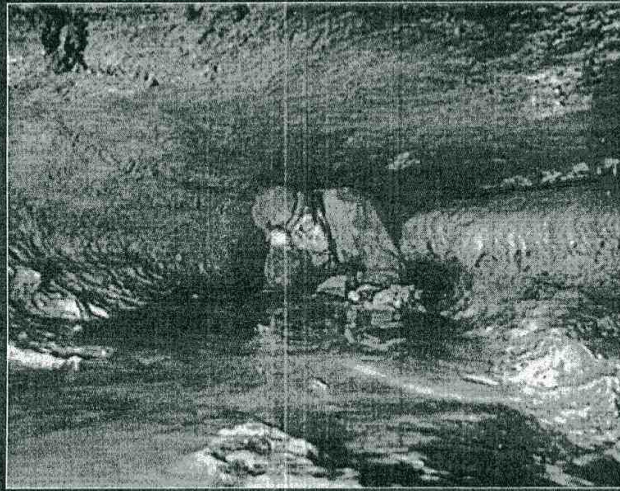
The long drive back gave me lots of time to reflect back on my weekend, I felt good about my accomplishments and learnt that caving is such a fun and social way of working on the fitness and seeing more of the world. Thanks to Clare for organising the trip, and to Clare, Anthony and Bronya for coming and making my initiation to FUSSI so memorable and enjoyable. Also, special thanks to Andy Clifford (Whiskas) for providing us with warmth, shelter and interesting conversation. Thanks to the property owners who granted us permission to access all the caves.

CUTTINGS FROM THE PRESS

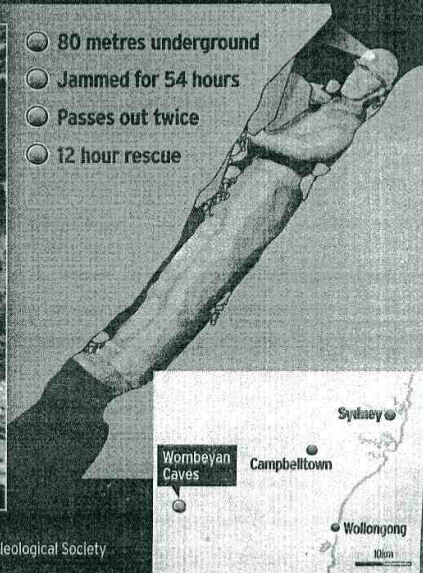
From: The Sydney Morning Herald: Tuesday 21. May. 08. p.1.

Between a rock and a hard place: a 54-hour jam session

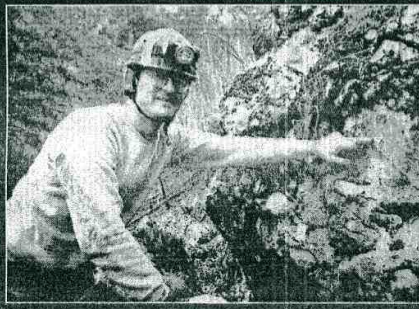
TRAPPED BELOW THE EARTH



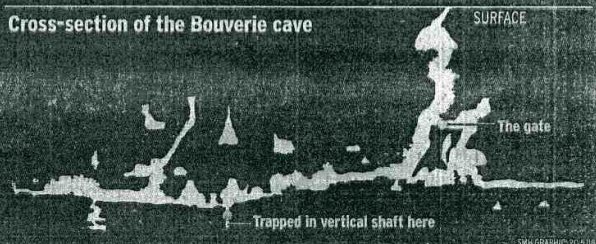
- 80 metres underground
- Jammed for 54 hours
- Passes out twice
- 12 hour rescue



Geoff McDonnell, adventurer.
Photos: Sydney University Speleological Society



Cross-section of the Bouverie cave



Les Kennedy and Arjun Ramachandran

PINNED by two rocks 80 metres underground, the diabetic caver Geoffrey McDonnell was freezing and passed in and out of consciousness at least twice.

The 47-year-old was stuck for 54 hours after he tried to descend feet first down a vertical crack, which would have taken him to a rarely seen chamber within the Bouverie Cave system, west of Bowral.

About 9am on Sunday a rescue team chanced upon Mr McDonnell's caving pack near the entrance to the crack. Their helmet lights illuminated his hard hat and they could see a rock pinning him by the shoulder. He was barely

conscious and uttered some inaudible words. By now he had been trapped alone in the darkness for 42 hours. Hypothermia had started to set in despite his nylon overalls designed to dry quickly and retain heat in the cold and at times wet caves.

It would be 12 more hours before he would see the surface after an operation involving more than 100 men and women, comprising police rescue, ambulance rescue, NSW Volunteer Rescue and volunteers from the NSW Cave Rescue Association.

On Friday Mr McDonnell, the vice-president of the Sydney Speleological Society, set off from his St Marys home to join members of another group, the Sydney University Speleological

Society, for a weekend of camping and exploring some of the 400 caves that make up Wombeyan Caves in the Southern Highlands wilderness.

The University of NSW botanist arrived well ahead of the others and had set up his own camp, but it was not until Saturday morning the group realised no one had seen him during the night.

They alerted rangers when they realised Mr McDonnell's camera equipment and his caving gear were missing.

A rescuer, who asked not to be named, said Mr McDonnell's enthusiasm for taking photographs was well known.

"It was thought that he must have entered the complex to take some photographs and it was deduced that one of the caves he

might have gone into with colourful, pretty formations was the Bouverie," the caver said.

The Bouverie is one of several cave systems off limits to the public due to the fragility of their formations and ecosystems, which include bats and rare insects.

Metal gates bar access to novices and a special key is required to enter.

Once past the gate there is a drop into the next chamber and it was at the top of this that the initial search team discovered Mr McDonnell's wire-and-metal collapsible ladder that he used to make his descent to a small underground streambed.

Among the rescuers assembled on the surface were Joe Sydney and members of the Bankstown-Continued Page 2

Trapped caver between a rock and a hard place

From Page 1

based Volunteer Cave Rescue. They set to work widening parts of the cave to enable a collapsible stretcher to be carried through. Later they widened the gap again to allow Mr McDonnell to be pulled through it on the stretcher.

All the while they tried to not damage the cave.

Mr Sydney said his team carried airbags into the cave to help move rocks and set up a series of vertical-haul systems to lift Mr McDonnell.

They also installed traverse lines to carry him horizontally over and around rough ground, including boulders the size of cars.

While the team worked to widen the squeeze space to allow the stretcher to be pulled through on a trolley, rescuers who discovered Mr McDonnell worked to dislodge the first of two rocks pinning him.

"It was barely wide enough for a man. He had climbed into it and two rocks dislodged, one pinning him by the hips and one by the shoulder, but he wasn't able to reach down and free himself," Mr Sydney said.

"Fortunately, they were able

to lean down into the slot and pull the rock from his shoulder and then somehow they managed to move the rock pinning his hip. Then they pulled him free, arms first. He was just conscious at the time."

Mr Sydney said the rescue operation was arduous.

"We had to widen some sections of the cave. It is hard rock, like getting someone through the tight point of an hourglass."

Other problems confronted rescuers. Entering and leaving the cave, they had to clamber over the decomposed remains of a kangaroo that had fallen through a crevice on the surface and whose remains had slowly been washed down through the gate.

At 9.10pm on Sunday the rescuers finally managed to bring Mr McDonnell to the surface, where he was then taken by ambulance officers to Goulburn Base Hospital and then to Liverpool Hospital for treatment for dehydration.

His condition was said to be serious but stable yesterday.

"He was thankful to everybody as we were bringing him up, but also remorseful we were all called out to help him," Mr Sydney told the *Herald*.

At right: *The Australian*. May 20, 2008. p. 7

MORAL TO THE STORY.

Always tell people where you are going caving. Give them the cave location, time in and expected time out. Also give them a 'come and find me if I am not back by' time. Leave this info on your car dash board if no one is staying in camp.

How diabetic caver got stuck in an off-limits 'squeeze'

Lauren Wilson

EXPERIENCED caver Geoff McDonnell is about as familiar with the caverns at Wombeyan Caves Karst Reserve as anyone.

But on Friday night, when he tried to squeeze his way through a tight passageway in an off-limits pitch-black part of the cave about 70m underground, Mr McDonnell got stuck.

It wasn't until 9pm on Sunday that a co-ordinated rescue mission comprising police, paramedics and volunteer caving



units was able to help the 46-year-old diabetic get out of the cave.

Peter Brady, a member of the Cave Rescue Squad who has known Mr McDonnell for a number of years said: "If he hadn't been involved in the accident, he's probably the first one we would have called."

Mr McDonnell remained in a serious but stable condition last

night in the intensive care unit of Liverpool Hospital, west Sydney. NSW police said they were investigating the circumstances surrounding the incident.

It is understood that on Friday afternoon, Mr McDonnell, who has been researching the Wombeyan Caves, entered the Bouyerie cave alone, walking, crawling and squeezing himself about 90m into the dark labyrinth.

Gary Raymond, president of the NSW Volunteer Rescue Association, which assisted in the rescue mission, said the area Mr

McDonnell chose to explore was off limits, and even experienced cavers "don't consider it to be safe". It is understood Mr McDonnell became trapped when he attempted to make his way through a tight vertical drop, known to cavers as a "squeeze".

"He dislodged a rock half the size of an average suitcase and it trapped him," Mr Raymond said.

The rock, believed to have weighed about 30kg, crushed Mr McDonnell's shoulder and pinned him against the cave wall. The experienced caver spent

almost 48 hours drifting in and out of consciousness. Eventually, without access to his insulin medication, Mr McDonnell went into hypoglycaemic shock.

Members of the caving community realised something was wrong when they arrived at the Wombeyan Caves Karst Reserve campsite and found Mr McDonnell's tent empty.

At 5pm on Saturday, almost 24 hours after he entered the cave, the cavers notified park authorities and local police that he had not returned to the site.

"It was my understanding no-one knew he was caving," Mr Brady said. The rescue mission was prolonged and complex, he said, and some of the passages had to be "microshaved", or widened, to allow rescuers to get to Mr McDonnell.

"It's surprisingly hot and humid in there and very hard to move around," Mr Brady said.

Ambulance NSW paramedic Paul Featherstone said a number of complicating factors made the rescue difficult. "He was deteriorating towards the end when we got him out," he said.

COMING UP!

May 24th /25th

Lower South East.

For more info, contact Bronya.

June long weekend

Flinders Ranges.

For more info, contact Bronya.

Aug 23-30 Vercoors.

International Union of Speleology Conference. France.

September/Oct (Date TBA)

Week long interstate trip: Nullarbor.

For more info, contact Bronya.

27 Dec 2008- 5 Jan 2009 Yarangobilly caves.

January 2009 ASF Conference Buchan, Victoria.