



# FUSSI Newsletter

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**Front Cover Photo: Decoration in Coppermine Cave, Yarrangobilly. NSW**

**Front Cover Photo Credit:**  
Clare Buswell. Copyright.

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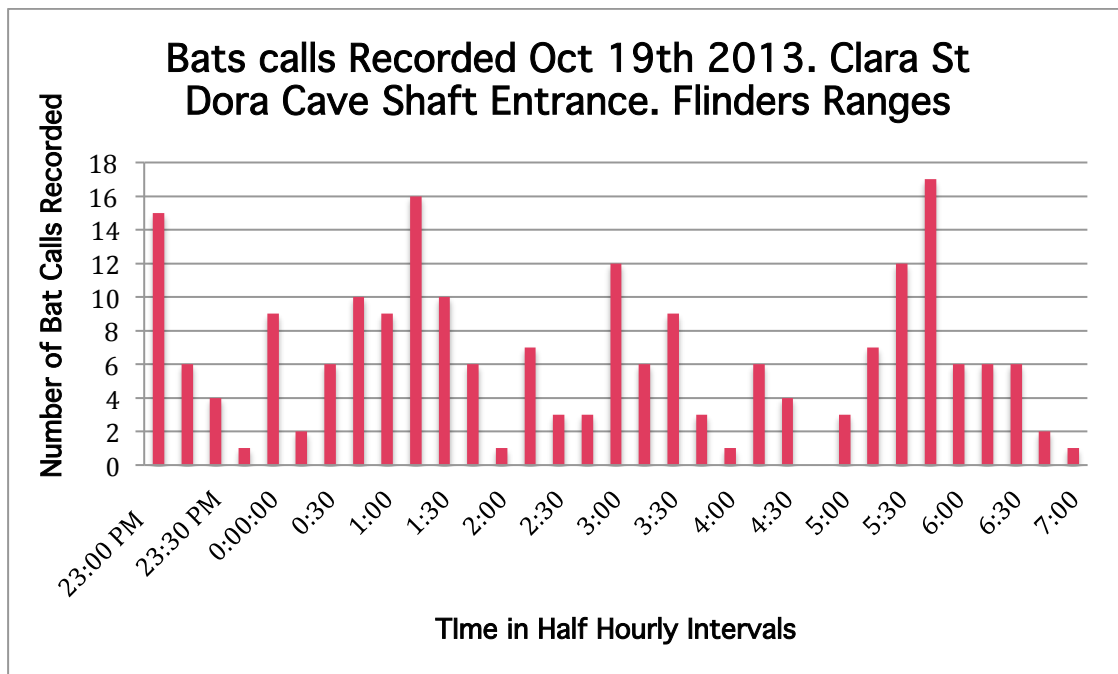
# Bats in the Flinders

Clare Buswell

Over the course of the weekend of Oct 18/19<sup>th</sup> 2013 a group of us set up a couple of Anabat bat detectors in the usual positions at Bagalowie Ck in the Flinders Ranges. That is, on the western side of the Hut and at the shaft entrance to Clara St Dora Cave. Over the past 8 years or so we have recorded bat activity at these sites and have now built up a small data set, which is held at the South Australian Museum.

This year the recordings showed up 8 different species of bats, none of which are true cave dwellers, but live in the area, opportunistically taking advantage of the shaft in CSD Cave as a suitable home site alongside their more usual dwellings in forests.

The graph below shows 209 calls recorded at the shaft entrance to Clara St Dora Cave, from 11pm till 7am on the 19<sup>th</sup> Of October 2013. There are 4 spikes indicating the peak times bats came out for dinner and other social events. Bats fly long distances to forage for food, as was discovered at Naracoorte when some radio frequency transmitters where placed on six bats and their flight paths followed to Penola and towards Edenhope. That is a long way for a party if you are a small furry creature<sup>1</sup>.



This trip the recordings identified eight species of bats, with the most prolific activity being that of *Momorpterus planiceps* - Long and Short Penis, *Nyctophilus geoffroyi*, *Vespadelus baverstoci* and *Chalinolobus morio*. A couple of calls from *Tadarida australis* were recorded, with a similar number from *Scotorepens balstoni*.

I would like to thank Terry Reardon from the South Australian Museum for supplying the bat detectors and for running his bat identification eyes over the calls!

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<sup>1</sup> Bourne Steven, 'Bat Research at Naracoorte'. The Australasian Bat Society Newsletter. No. 34. April. 2010. pp. 24-28.

# The Yarrangobilly Caves

Reprinted from:

The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW : 1842 - 1954) Page 7, Wednesday, 13 January 1892.

Accessed via TROVE: Courtesy: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/13867276>

Note: Some parts of the original text have been obscured by the binding of the newspaper. This is shown in the text as '??'.

(BY OUR SPECIAL REPORTER.)

In writing about the Yarrangobilly Caves one cannot help feeling these, and other formations of the same kind, must prove in enormous source of wealth to New South Wales in the future. To Jenolan already, the better known of our cave districts come visitors from all parts of the world the German savant and the English tourist, the travelled American and the polished Frenchman They unite in expressing their admiration of these natural wonders and they all, by their visit, directly benefit, and indirectly advertise the colony. Yet none of the people who come here for a brief stay see a tenth part of the known caves in this wonderful lime- stone range, which crosses the country from north to south. When all the caves are opened, and when the State has taken proper measures for their preservation, we shall be able to provide a spectacle never before equalled in the world.

At Yarrangobilly alone there are at least seven known caves besides many others the existence of which is only suspected by those thoroughly familiar with the district. There is the Castle Hill Cave, which I have already described the Jersey Cave, the two old caves, the Coppermine Cave, the Grotto Cave and another cave on the river. Of those the old caves and the Jersey Cave alone are properly opened to the public, the others can only be visited with more or less fatigue and danger.

The name given the older caves is, from a geological view, contradictory, for in point of age they are younger than the Jersey Cave, which is higher up the hill. It is only because they have been known to man for 40 or 50 years that they get the name "old," though the space of 50 years is but an insignificant proportion of their actual age. The wild animals, the bats and the wombats, have lived in them for thousands of years, to judge from the deposits of guano, and yet man, with his self-sufficiency, calls them old because he has known them for perhaps half a century.

The entrance to these caves is an easy one, in fact it is noticeable that the Yarrangobilly caves are much more readily accessible than those at Jenolan. The two branches, the right and the left, open off a magnificent domed recess, perfect in its shape, and probably a couple of hundred feet in height. A wide archway leads into this dome, and a flood of light streams down through a round opening at the top hence the cave is not inaptly known as the Glory Hole. From this superb vestibule the two branches of the cave open, the right-hand branch being by far the most interesting and extensive.

It is rather unfortunate that these caves have been accessible to the public so long, for as a consequence most of the beautiful decorations have been carried off, the walls have been defaced with writing, and the roofs blackened by smoke from the primitive torches used for exploring in early days. Since the Government appointed a caretaker, five years ago, all this vandalism has been stopped, but unfortunately it is too late to undo the mischief already effected.

A huge stalagmite, just at the entrance to the right-hand branch, has been christened Lot's wife, because, I presume, it is supposed to resemble a pillar of salt. Inside the cave there is an abundance of shawl formations, and less remarkable stalactites, and at some distance up the way is blocked by a great mass of fallen rock, which is named the "Cathedral Ruins," from its resemblance to the wreck of a huge building. The most distinctive feature of this cave is met with a little further on.

# The Yarrangobilly Caves

The passage suddenly takes a sharp turn to the right and narrows into a small hole, through which it is just possible to creep. A strong draught blows continuously down this opening, the air rushing out of the cave with sufficient violence to extinguish all the candles. The place is appropriately named "The Blowhole."

The large chamber beyond is chiefly remarkable for the whiteness and purity of its formations, which are of every possible variety, and without any trace of colour. The cave extends to a length of 600ft., several other chambers of a large size being passed through. The most interesting, undoubtedly, is the grand domed cavity at the very end. The dome, somewhat conical in shape, reaches upward to the very top of the mountain, and when the lights are put out a narrow ray of daylight can just be discerned struggling through a small hole above. The opening is near the coach road which leads to the Cave house, and a stone dropped down it will fall with tremendous force into the interior of the cavern. In this cave, as in all the others, there are many formations which have taken distinctive shapes, and have been named accordingly. It is impossible within the limits of an article to indicate their exact position, but amongst the more noticeable may be mentioned the Mistletoe Bough, the Wedding Cake, the Chancel Window, &c.

The right-hand branch of the Glory Hole Cave consists simply of two large chambers, placed end on and chiefly noticeable for the richness with which the roof is decorated. Stalactitic growth has had the preference in these chambers, and whilst the floors are wellnigh free from formations, the ceiling is almost covered with long pendent stalactites of a highly decorative order. The rooms have been named the King's and Queen's chambers, and beyond these the cavern contains little of interest.

We now come to a more recent discovery, the Jersey Cave, about which more has probably been written and said than about any other of the Yarrangobilly attractions. For many years past the people who know the place have been aware of a small cavern leading into the top of the mountain nearly above the site of the present cave-house. The chamber ended abruptly in a precipice 40ft. deep, and until March ?? no one seems to have had the courage to explore further. Beyond lay all the glories of the Jersey Cave, untouched by vandals, and only waiting for someone to descend the precipice.

In the month mentioned, Mr. E. G. Brown, M.L.A., together with Mr. Kerry, and several other gentlemen, paid a visit to the caves, and during the course of their stay determined to find out what lay beyond the precipice. Mr. Kerry was the first gentleman to be lowered down, and therefore may fairly claim to be the discoverer of the Jersey Cave. As the party proceeded into the depths of the mountain, they were astounded by the wealth and beauty of formation which met their eyes. In comparison with its size, the Jersey may fairly claim to be the most profusely decorated of any yet known cave, either at Yarrangobilly or Jenolan.

Situated 400ft. above the level of the Glory Hole caves, the Jersey is, in a geological sense, much older than the lower caverns. Hence the formations have had more time to grow, thousands of years probably; but how many thousands no one knows ? The age of these caves is always a problem, even to a scientist. He will tell you that the limestone mountain belongs to the Siluro-Dovonian epoch, and that a small pipe-stem stalactite will grow an inch in 70 years. The larger formations, of course, grow infinitely slower; and in reality no one, during the brief span of man's life, can make a measurement which will accurately decide the rate of growth of these formations, and thus provide data for ascertaining the age of the caves. In the course of a few hundred years something might be ?? by means of carefully preserved records, handed down from generation to generation, but unfortunately, life is too much of a rush for this sort of thing nowadays. So we must leave the age of the Jersey Cave undecided for the present.

# The Yarrangobilly Caves

The chamber at the spot of the precipice, now safely reached by means on iron ladder, is the largest known at Yarrangobilly. It measures 100ft. in length, and 60ft. in width, and has been called "Chaos," on account the heaped-up masses of fallen stone which cover the floor. From this vault the two branches of the cave divide, each being of equal interest and full of the most fantastic growths. Passing the "Leaning Tower" a stalagmite 10ft. in height, which has a distinct divergence from the perpendicular, the "White Chamber" is entered. The roof and walls are covered with a snowy deposit, whilst the ?? in strange contrast, is stained black. This black formation is very common in the Jersey, and is by some attributed to the presence of bismuth in the water forming the deposit.

It would be hopeless to attempt to recapitulate the glorious sights of this cave. It is full of wonders. There is the "Grotto, ' rich in stalactitic growths, ?? the end of the right-hand branch; the Dome in the left-hand branch; and more remarkable still, a chamber known as the Centennial ?? from the fact that it contains a formation ?rually resembling an organ. There are the "Cloisters," "Cleopatra's Needle," and enshrined in a beautiful little niche, a slender statue resembling the Madonna. The end of the left-hand branch is formed by a corridor, 300ft. in length, known as the Grand Cave, which, under the magnesium light, reveals astonishing vistas of ?? ion.

No two parts of the chamber are alike, the growth is everywhere ??ified, in parts the corridor resembles the aisle of a cathedral, owing to pillars which ??de the passage. In other places the eye is drawn by isolated formations, such as Pompey's Pillar, an immense fluted column. The most remarkable things in the cave, however, are the flowering shrubs, some 2 or 3 ft. in height, which are formed from masses of calcite crystals, deposited one on top of the other. These shrubs grow, as it were, out of the floor, the stem being comparatively narrow for a few inches, and then branching out into a flower-like mass. In some mysterious way these crystals have grown or been deposited here, for they are not, like stalagmites, formed by drops falling from the roof. Altogether the left-hand branch extends 600ft. into the mountain, whilst the right-hand branch is only half this length.

With the Jersey the list of caves at present accessible ends, if we except the Grotto, an isolated chamber about a mile away. It is entered direct from the mountain side, and is full of stalagmites, which take the form of statuary, giving the place the appearance of a sculptor's studio. The imaginative can see figures of all kinds -busts and full-length studios, men on horseback, women and children. A curious circumstance in relation to this cave is that it must have been known to man many years ago. It was re- discovered by Bradley quite lately, and when he examined it closely, he found in an out-of-the-way corner two human footprints. They were those of a man wearing boots - a large and heavy man evidently, for the footprints were 14in. long, and deeply sunk in the soft mud. Many years must have elapsed since this giant in the matter of footprint visited the cave, as the grey mould which forms in the moist atmosphere, had already covered them.

One word more with regard to the Jersey cave, and this time to make a suggestion. In naming this cavern an unfortunate mistake has occurred, doubtless owing to an oversight on the part of those in authority. When the place was discovered there was already a Jersey cave in existence, at Jenolan. This was first entered in January last, on the day the Governor arrived in the colony. Therefore it was most appropriately named. But to have two Jersey caves, one at Jenolan and the other at Yarrangobilly, can only lead to confusion. A way out of the difficulty was suggested by Mr. Anderson, the geological surveyor, and Mr. Leigh, the Superintendent of caves, who made a very able report on the cave in April last, soon after, its discovery. They recommend an aboriginal name, "Jillabenann," which appears to be most appropriate. The cave is remarkable for the abundance of black-tinted stalagmite which covers the floor, and as "Jilla" is the native word for black, and "Benann" for cave, the designation would be in every way fitting. It would also have the advantage of preserving another of our aboriginal words. I feel sure that a suggestion from his Excellency would at once bring about the change of name.



# The Yarrangobilly Caves

Visitors to the Caves need now have no fear of undue hardship. The place is under the charge of the Government caretaker, Mr. Murray, who has been there for the past five years, and the accommodation provided is of a homely but comfortable character. An addition has recently been made to the staff by the transfer of a trained guide, Mr. Wiburd, from Jenolan, and the caretaker's son-in-law, Mr. Bradley, has also had great experience of the Caves. Either of these guides is competent to give the fullest possible information to visitors.

Last year over 400 tourists inspected the Caves, and this year, after the grand advertisement of a Governor's visit, a much larger number may be expected. Even setting the Caves on one side, there are many other things worth seeing at Yarrangobilly. There is a hot spring, pleasant to bathe in, and said to be good for rheumatic disorders. There is the river itself, a secluded little stream of the purest water, nestling at the foot of gigantic mountains, from the top of which it looks but a mere silver thread winding in and out among the gullies. There are mountain views of the most superb character, and, above all, there is the fine bracing air of this elevated region, and a climate which, in summer at any rate, leaves nothing to be desired.

The great drawback is the distance from Sydney, as the journey cannot, in any case, be accomplished in less than two days. The most convenient route is undoubtedly via Gundagai and Tumut, and across the Talbingo Mountain to Yarrangobilly. Leaving Sydney by the 9 p.m. mail train the passenger reaches Gundagai at 9 in the morning. From thence to Tumut is a 20 mile drive, and from Tumut to the caves 45 miles. The roads all the way are good, the scenery magnificent, and accommodation of a superior kind is to be had at Tumut. Another way of reaching the caves is via Cooma, the distance by road in this case being 71 miles.



The Glory Hole, The emblem of Yarrangobilly Caves.  
Photo: Neville Skinner

# A Caver Finds Tru Luv: Rockpiles

Text and Photos by Neville Skinner

I left home around 6pm on the Friday night and drove to Clare & Heiko's, where I met up with Thomas. After unloading my car and repacking my gear into Thomas', I parked my Forester in their shed and departed in Thomas' vehicle at 7pm, arriving in Tooleybuc around 1am. Here we stayed the night with Clare, Heiko & Mark, who had arranged accommodation at the local caravan park. The room was hot and cramped, and the air-con was noisy; however, we survived the ordeal.

On Sat we drove from Tooleybuc to Deniliquin, up to Finley, then onto Lockhart where we stopped for fuel. The temperature was about 41-42 degrees in the shade and the bitumen was melting in the main street, so imagine my horror when the service station directed us to the public toilets that had no open windows or ventilation (at all)! I estimate the temperature inside the toilet blocks would have been about 50-60 degrees Celsius. Never take a toilet stop at Lockhart in summer!

From there we drove to Wagga Wagga where we did our grocery shopping for the trip and had some dinner (if you could describe buns as dinner) before heading off to Tumut, where we made our last fuel stop to ensure all tanks full. I was very surprised to find that the temperature in Tumut was also about 40 degrees, and extremely uncomfortable. Once refuelled we continued the last 70 or so kms onto Yarrangobilly Village (camping grounds), arriving around 5 - 5:30pm. When the camp was set up we settled down to a G&T or three, before retiring for the evening.

## Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb

One of our main objectives for this trip was to locate and explore Mutmut Cave. We started the day by discussing how to best locate the cave, given all we had was sketchy data on how to find the cave. After that we visited the Yarrangobilly Caves tourist office, which was some 10 or so kms south of our campsite at Yarrangobilly Village on the edge of the Yarrangobilly River. Yarrangobilly Caves are located in steep terrain, with gravel roads built onto the sides of the mountains and with no railing on the roadsides to prevent cars from going over the edge, so due care is required at all times when driving in the area.



Yarrangobilly River, adjacent to the tourist caves

We were made to feel at home in the Parks Office and even invited behind the counter to use their phone to ring George Bradford, the Parks Manager, who had apparently expressed disappointment that he had missed catching up with us when we first arrived. In fact I was very impressed with the attitude of the staff, who actually seemed to enjoy and get satisfaction in being able to serve the public. While we were there we picked up access keys for the caves we planned to explore.



Once we had the keys, we headed off to check out the Yarrangobilly River in the caves area to ascertain how open it was and how deep, to



Vandalised gate locking bracket.



## A Caver Finds Tru Luv: Rockpiles

ascertain whether accessing Mutmut Cave via walking down the River to avoid the dense scrub was a viable proposition. It wasn't! We then proceeded to drive to Lobbs Hole/Blue Ck to see what the vegetation was like as an alternate option of accessing Mutmut. That was when we discovered that the 'locked' gate on the track leading to Mutmut Cave had been forced open with the use of what appeared to be either a very large boltcutter, or some industrial equipment, as a piece of 25 x 5mm steel bar had been snipped in two like a piece of paper. We photographed this for the Parks Manager, but declined to enter the gate without proper authorisation. Clearly, there were some highly motivated 4WD users of this track that saw it as their right to enter as they pleased.

We then trundled off to Y-12 **"Coppermine Cave"**.

Although this cave does not require a key to access it, there is a padlocked gate on the track to it, and having the key to this saves a 2km walk in (and out).

At one stage Heiko, Thomas, Mark & myself got out to shift a large log off the track while Clare, stayed in the vehicle. However it quickly became evident that only Heiko & Thomas had the energy required to move the log, so while Mark took on the role of Supervisor, I picked up a small branch and started to pretend that I was whipping the two workers to make them go faster, while at the same time pointing to the

logs that had to be moved, and to where they should be moved. Clare thought this was very funny and was still laughing at my gesticulations after we arrived at the cave.

Once there we donned our wetsuits, (well, Mark more or less pulled, pushed and spilt bits of his ancient and decaying suit in the process of getting into it!) and we entered a wet and very cool cave at 3:15pm.

The cave has a lower level (creekbed) and an upper level, which was apparently quite muddy and is kept locked to stop

cavers from trampling mud through the lower section.

Heiko checked out part of the upper level that was outside the gated section while Clare, Mark, Thomas & myself went to the end of the lower level. This was a very pretty and interesting cave with lots of pictures taken by Clare & myself, and was a great way of escaping the heat outside.

Some of the smaller areas either side of the creek level were stunning.



An elevated rim-pool just off to one side



Mark & Thomas inspecting the roof decorations.

Below: More of the wet section



## A Caver Finds Tru Luv: Rockpiles



Not water, but flowstone, from the ceiling to the floor!



Heiko examines where the water flow has eroded the floor of the cave. The classic Y12 photo!



Heiko acting as the scale model!

We left the cave at 5:30pm, Mark cut off his fast expiring wet suit, consigning it to the bin of history, and we then headed back to camp.

### Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb

Clare went to Tumut to meet up with Parks Manager George Bradford to discuss access to Mutmut Cave, and other issues such as fire bans and gate access.

At the same time Thomas, Mark, Heiko and myself went to Y-50 “**Restoration Cave**”. We had some trouble finding this at first, because the direction of the cave as given by the GPS’s suggested it might be shorter if we went around the RHS of the doline, as we approached it. I



## A Caver Finds Tru Luv: Rockpiles

should say at this point the doline consisted of a sheer drop of some 30-40m on the facing side, with steep rocky inclines on the adjacent two sides, along with a generous serving of blackberry bushes, scrub and things that stick to your socks on the 'easy' approach! We would later realise this was typical of most dolines in this area. So after about 45 mins of climbing large rocks and the trunks of large fallen trees, and bashing through the scrub in 35-40 degree heat, we decided to retreat back to where we came from and go up the left side instead.



Thomas at the Doline with Y50 on the left & the other on the right

That proved to be the right decision, but even then, as we reached the top LHS of the doline, a difference of opinion between two GPS units saw Heiko going one way with his GPS and Thomas going the other with his, while Mark & myself sat under the shade of a tree and pretended we felt cooler. Luckily, after 10-15 mins Thomas reported back they had both made it and Heiko was at the cave entrance waiting for us. A quick check of the cave ID disc near the entrance proved we had the right cave. The time now was 11am.



Entrance to Y50 cave (yes, that hole near the middle)

In fact, there was another very easily accessible cave just 2m away from where Mark and Heiko had started to get their gear sorted prior to entering the 'Y50' cave, which Thomas & myself checked out as well. There wasn't much to see, but it was cool inside and that was a good reason for checking it out. Actually, it wasn't much more than a chamber sitting under a rock fall, with some fossils up against the back wall.

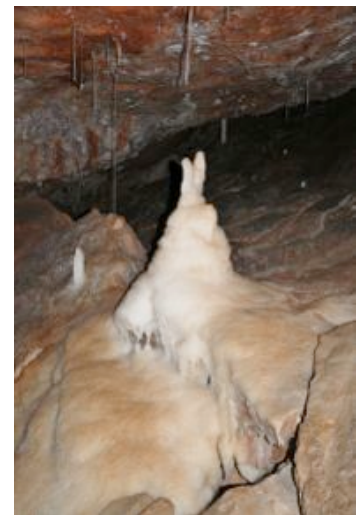
These fossils had been collected and put together; some were on an old ground sheet.



First Chamber of Y50, Mark Modeling.

That said, it provided a cool spot to gear up in and the two of us availed ourselves of the opportunity to catch up on some rest in a

cool area, while Heiko & Mark spent 10-15 minutes just outside the cave entrance in the heat, cursing and pulling the prickles out of their clothing.



Rabbits Ears

Restoration Cave had a quite small, almost insignificant, entrance with an eyelet in the wall some 2-3 metres just inside the entrance, at a point where one has to drop down about 2m into a narrow fissure. The cave basically had two chambers, the first was reasonably large and the second was huge with massive boulders covering the floor, such that it would have been dangerous to try to

## A Caver Finds Tru Luv: Rockpiles

navigate them. And around these boulders there appeared to be lots of crystal formations that would be easily damaged by cavers trying to navigate the floor section. This would explain why cavers are asked to remain on a small section of marked track and not deviate.



To avoid issues with slave strobes, Mark & Thomas photographed the first chamber while Neville and Heiko photographed the second chamber. When done, we swapped over.

This cave had some quite pretty sections and was worth the effort in getting there, but it really needed several large slave strobes to light up the second chamber for the camera.

We left the cave around 2:30pm and arrived exhausted back at camp around 5pm, which was two hours later than expected, but we were pleased to see Clare had arrived safely back from Tumut with more keys from George.

While dinner was being prepared, Heiko met up with a French overseas visitor named Jean, who had come to Australia to visit his son in Melbourne and had set up camp right next to us. It turned out, coincidentally, that Jean was a very experienced caver and was very pleased to see us, and keen to do some caving whilst in Australia. So we invited him to join us for dinner, after which he showed us his portfolio of pictures taken in the caves he has visited recently in Laos and Vietnam. Very impressive photos!

### Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> Feb

The next day we all went to the Y3 Eyrie entrance of the Eagles Nest system. We reached the cave at 12:30pm, after having to clear the 4WD track on the way through and then having to walk about 850m to get to the cave.



At left:  
The walk... followed by relentless searching...

Below Right: GPS says we're there... it must be underneath us...

When we entered, we were faced with climbing down a large rockpile, only to end up on a ledge looking down an almost





## A Caver Finds Tru Luv: Rockpiles



A section of the entrance chamber of Y3

sheer drop! After some searching we found a way around the left hand side from where we were and were then able to get to the bottom. Sadly, when we did so we had trouble finding the way on, so after 10 mins searching I found a way out that looked good, except that we ended up in another room, with another sheer drop to a lower level.

This time it was decided that Thomas would drop down on his own to investigate, as coming back the same way did look quite challenging, and better to have one caver stuck in a pitch with three cavers to help, than to have four cavers stuck in a pitch with no-one to help. Thomas had a good

look around and then returned, saying he had found himself in the bottom of pitch with moss growing in it and he could see daylight coming in above him. From this we deduced that he had been on the bottom of the Y1 entrance pitch. Thomas reported there appeared to be no other lead out of the lower area. How did we manage to end up here? This wasn't planned!



A White Rimstone Pool, Y3 Entrance Area

To assist Thomas in getting back out, Mark & I set up a short handrope, and after 10 mins of huffing & puffing, Thomas rejoined the group.



Wonderful ironstone stained rocks Y3.

Meanwhile, Clare and Jean had scouted around and found a short cut that took us straight up to the first chamber, bringing us out directly underneath the rocks we had stood on while we pondered how to get down in the first place!

That said, we can be excused for not seeing it on the way down, because the location was such that it was a tad scary to come out on the side of a 10m pitch, about 350mm from top, having to reach above and use a stalagmite to help pull oneself up onto the rocks whilst taking care



# A Caver Finds Tru Luv: Rockpiles

not to lose balance and fall backwards down the pitch.

So where does the Y1 entrance take people that choose to enter that way? By now we didn't really care, we had had enough of rockpiles and were starting to dream about that G&T that was waiting for us back at camp. So we left the cave around 5:15pm, returning to camp totally disillusioned with the day's caving.

## Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> Feb

Mark started the day by finding he had a flat front tyre caused by the side wall being penetrated by a finger-sized splinter from the previous day. After replacing the tyre with the spare, it was decided it would be best if Mark went into Tumut with Thomas, about an hours drive away, to get the tyre replaced.

While they were in Tumut, Heiko, Jean & myself headed off with Clare in Mark's vehicle to go back into **Y12 Coppermine Cave**, to show Jean a very pretty cave (as opposed to another rockpile). While Clare showed Jean through the cave, Heiko and I investigated the upper section looking for the gated tunnel. Unfortunately Clare & Jean returned just as we were closing in on the area where Clare had suggested the gate was likely to be, so we ended up leaving without having sighted it. At that stage we really didn't have the time to look as we were concerned that Mark & Thomas would already be waiting for us.

After having some lunch, Thomas & Heiko announced they would go and look for Mutmut cave, while Clare, Mark, Jean & myself would go and check out the Y4 entrance to the Eagles Nest system.

After locating the Y4 cave entrance, we entered at around 5pm. In an afternoon that was very reminiscent of the previous day, we worked our way down through the rockpiles not finding anything particularly interesting until we discovered a rock with the name of L. Hoad scratched in it, and the date "... 8<sup>th</sup> 1894". Sadly we couldn't read the month as it was long gone. We continued on and soon came to a visitors log station. This was a short section of 8" PVC tube sealed on the bottom with a lid on the top, and with visitors book inside to enable people to sign and comment.



The 1894 Graffiti in Y4, put there by early explorer, L Hoad

This seemed odd to exist in the middle of the cave, so I checked out another tunnel adjacent and reported back that I could see daylight. I then climbed up and exited the cave to check the ID disc and found it was the **Y5 entrance**. This was a blow to our morale and we decided to head out of the Y5 entrance at around 6:30pm to avoid going back through another rockpile! The look on Mark's face as we left said all that had to be said.

...

## A Caver Finds Tru Luv: Rockpiles

After the 1 km walk back to the car through thick scrub, followed by the slow drive back along the track, we (Clare, Mark, Jean & myself) arrived back at camp at 9:40pm, exhausted.

By then Heiko & Thomas had also returned from their adventure, and Heiko reported he and Thomas had successfully located Mut Mut cave - "armed with metre-accurate GPS co-ordinates and a good description of the approaches to the cave, we chose a modified route via the Natural Bridge, rather than the Blue Creek fire trail or wading up-river to try to locate Y222 Mut Mut cave. As we had the key to the gate and instructions to clear the track, we drove as far as practicable (about 900m) along this trail (that also leads to Y11/2).



The look on Mark's face suggested it was time to return home

The trail was tight in parts and somewhat under-used. Parking the car, we then checked our options, deciding to head for the river about 400m south of the Natural Bridge, as this seemed the least scrubby and most direct route to Mut Mut, but it was steep for about 150 vertical metres (and less steep for another 100). But progress was good and we avoided most of the Blackberries, Briar Rose, native Raspberries, Prickly Acacia, etc, etc, and made the river quite easily. We crossed it carefully, as algae made the bottom slippery in parts and made us grateful not to have attempted to gain



The tag proved it!

access  
by fol-

lowing it. We found a relatively clear, but equally steep, slope to access the area we thought that Mut Mut was in. Alas, a lot of pointless bush-bashing followed until we eventually were forced to the conclusion that the GPS location was wrong and we were needlessly collecting thorns and wasting our time. (Note: Gaiters AND tough gloves are recommended.)

Mut Mut should be here....

We were about to give up when Thomas had a brilliant idea: Check the map datum! We had no idea. If it wasn't WSG84, what could it reasonably be? Try AGD66. The new location was about 200m northeast of our current location so we walked along the contour to our new co-ordinates and, sure enough, there it was! In a clear but steep patch by a sharp, narrow, high, rocky ridge protruding perpendicularly from the

## A Caver Finds Tru Luv: Rockpiles

river valley hillside, about 100m up from it. We had seen it and the small patches (there are three entrances) of pink-hued rock on our approach from the east side of the river valley, but dismissed it as being in the wrong area.

We had a quick look in the cave, as far as the first pitch, got an accurate GPS fix and then more-or-less retraced our steps to return to the car by 9 and home by 9:30. From the cave, the Natural Bridge is just visible to the left, but the way over to it seemed quite steep. Until the route via Natural Bridge is tried, the scramble slightly north of due west seems the preferable route in. Though not trivial: allow 90mins or so, 2 hours if the track gate is locked. Hard yakka in the heat, particularly if carrying the full SRT kit and ropes, required to explore Mut Mut”.

Clare had just turned the gas on to start cooking spaghetti at 10pm, when suddenly at 10.05pm a loud bang that lasted for a couple of seconds was heard near the bridge. This happened just after a car had gone past the cottage where we were cooking dinner. Without discussion, the gas was turned off, Mark ran to get the First Aid Kit, and everyone else ran for the bridge. This was one of those days ...

We were expecting the worst, so were surprised to find a vehicle, appearing relatively okay on all sides, parked in the centre of the bridge. There was significant damage to the LH guard rail leading to the bridge, with the first 10-12m bent at 90 degrees and facing down the slope away from the road. There were also parts of the underside of the vehicle strewn across the road.

As we got closer I could see the driver had just gotten out of the vehicle and was walking to the back of his Mitsubishi Triton, where he complained of a sore knee. Apart from that he looked okay, stating that he had swerved to miss a Brumby, which seemed a little odd as this in was the middle of a camping ground. At the same time other campers from the adjacent section of the camping ground below the bridge were arriving on the scene.

Clare took control of the First Aid side of things and insisted he move away from the middle of the bridge to the side where she could check his leg, but even then it required the support of the other campers to convince him to do so. He was insisting the leg was not bad enough to warrant inspection and all he wanted was help to carry his camping gear and set his tent up so that he could spend the rest of the night in his tent and call for a tow truck in the morning.

After the driver finally agreed to Clare checking his leg and finding nothing obviously wrong, Clare applied a compression bandage to his right knee and suggested he go to hospital for a more detailed examination.

While this was happening, I had activated the vehicle hazard lights and cleared the road of debris, while two other people set off to locate themselves 200 to 300m either side of the bridge to warn oncoming traffic of the bridge closure ahead. This was an extremely dangerous situation because the bridge sat in a steep valley in a 110kmph zone between two corners, used by large transport that went through all hours of the night. And the damaged vehicle was right in the middle of the bridge with one flat tyre and one shattered alloy rim, surrounded by 9 or 10 people who had nowhere to run should a loaded semi trailer suddenly appear around either one of the corners.

Mark went to his vehicle and brought back an 8-10 tonne rated snatch-strap, while one of the other campers came back with his Landcruiser. This allowed the vehicle to be dragged backwards to an area clear of the bridge and off the road. After that, everyone retired to their beds for the night.

That is, except for Thomas and Clare, who had taken the driver off in Thomas' vehicle to Tumut to receive medical treatment. It was not until they reached Talbingo that they had mobile phone reception (SOS only), and it was then that the Police and Ambulance were contacted to report the accident and request medical assistance. By this time the driver involved in the accident was



## A Caver Finds Tru Luv: Rockpiles

lapsing in and out of consciousness on the back seat, causing Clare & Thomas some grave concern (pun intended). Approximately 10kms out of Tumut, they were met by the Ambulance from Tumut, and then some two minutes later by the Police, who had come from the Talbingo direction.

The injured person was then asked to climb onto a stretcher, which was subsequently found to be too high for him to climb onto. Despite this, and to Clare's disgust, after she requested that it be lowered (it wasn't), no assistance was offered to the patient by the Ambulance drivers, and after some considerable struggle he finally got onto it.

After the police had heard the account of the accident by Clare and Thomas, they both returned to camp, arriving back at around midnight. This was barely 10-15 minutes after we had gone to bed, as we had not been able to start cooking dinner until 11pm.

By the time Clare and Thomas had eaten, cleaned their dishes and finished discussing the night's events between themselves, it was 1 - 1.30am before they got to bed. This had been a long day ...

### Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> Feb

In the morning we got off to a slow start, and learnt from the other campers that the Police had arrived at 3am, along with a tow truck. They checked the scene, spoke to the other campers about what they knew and retrieved the damaged vehicle. They also told the others that alcohol was involved. A check of the area the next day revealed that all 6 of the impact absorbing plastic posts that held the first six rail posts in place had been sheered off, allowing the railing to slide down the embankment. It was at the start of the section where the



The crew: L to R:  
Mark, Clare, Thomas, Heiko, Jean, Neville



remaining steel posts were concreted into the ground that the railing was bent at 90deg. The vehicle then continued to bend the next seven concreted posts, before jumping back onto the road and continuing for another 47 metres, where it stopped in the middle of the bridge.

At left: A moment of relaxation after a hard day and night!

# A Caver Finds Tru Luv: Rockpiles

Friday 7<sup>th</sup> Feb

We spent the morning sorting gear so that all excess gear could be loaded into Mark's vehicle, as



Clare and Thomas examine the roof pendants in Y2



Calcified mud covering rocks in Eagles Nest (Y2)

we otherwise believed we would not get it all in Thomas' vehicle. Mark and Heiko departed for Adelaide at around 12noon and arrived back in Adelaide at about 12:30am.

Clare, Thomas and myself had elected to stay on for another two days of caving and after we bade Mark and Heiko farewell we went to the Y2 entrance of the Eagles Nest system.

Initially, in error we went to the Y1 entrance, but upon realising our mistake

we beat our way 100m north to the Y2 entrance, through the Blackberry bushes and wild roses, arriving there around 2 - 2:30pm. This was a small triangular shaped entrance with some cork screwing through the gate and the start of the rock pile before we hit the LH wall of the cave, which we then followed down until we hit some red guideline. This had been installed to assist people through the cave and came with a warning to keep to the marked track. It became evident



## A Caver Finds Tru Luv: Rockpiles

very quickly why this was so important as the site is in almost pristine condition with all trog marks confined to the specified tracks.



**Thomas checks out the long string of small rim-pools which make up the Crystal Streamway**



**The start of the rim-pools**

After we came down through the “Railway Tunnel”, we entered a large cavern with literally dozens of gigantic limestone roof pendants hanging from the roof. These were some meters high and had been sculptured in-situ by the effects of water erosion over thousands of years. They were very impressive. Just after the “Roof Pendants” the ceiling rose up to majestic heights; possibly 25–30m above the rock pile we were traversing.

## A Caver Finds Tru Luv: Rockpiles

After that we entered a smaller more narrow section, where we discovered a series of rim pools and crystalline features that ran either side of the track for about 20–25m. At that point we stopped to recalibrate our visual sensors, as the bar had been suddenly raised substantially. This part of the cave is some of the prettiest I have seen, well, except for a distinct boot print in one of the pools that was virtually on the track, and just after a short section where we walked through the middle of a dried up rim pool that had a small natural bridge to allow people to cross. In retrospect, one wonders if it might not have been better to place a plank across this rimpool for people to walk across.



Thomas taking in the vista, Eagle's Nest System

We then continued onto the Crystal Chamber, which is also beautiful, before turning back. We exited the cave around 7:30pm, changed back into more comfortable walking clothes and then started the long walk back to the vehicle. It was dark before we got there, but at least it was cooler.

### Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> Feb

We started the day by returning the keys to National Parks, and booked ourselves into a tour of Jillabenan Cave at 1:30pm, followed by a self-guided tour of the Glory Hole Cave afterwards, which turned out to be at 2:40pm.

It was short drive up the hill to **Jillabenan Cave**, which is a stunning little cave, probably about half the size of Tantanoola Cave. It was packed full of stalactites, stalagmites, straws, rimpools and all the usual pretties, and it was very photogenic. The guide allowed us to wander through of our own accord, but with a time limit of one hour as the next tour would start then.



Stunning Jillebenan rim-pool

The walk to the **Glory Hole cave** is about 500m from memory, and is located on the side of a steep hill facing the Yarrangobilly River, such that you walk 500m from the carpark to the cave entrance, and exit separately at a point

about 40m from the carpark. Once inside you are climbing steps most of the way, or at least that is how it felt. This cave is very large and majestic, and has one small section of roof that has the shape of a gabled roof, because the roof has reached the final stage of its progression where it is now inherently most stable and therefore least likely to further collapse.



# A Caver Finds Tru Luv: Rockpiles



At left: The ceilings in Jilibanann Cave are totally packed with stalactites

At various points throughout the cave there are interpretive signs explaining how each formation was formed, and the history of the cave. It was a very pleasant tour and worth doing.

After that we packed all our caving gear away, grabbed our toiletries bags and headed off to the Talbingo Caravan Park, where for \$5 they are happy for people to use their showers. Since we had not washed with soap for a week, and this scruff really needed a shave, this was heaven. After taking our showers we lingered



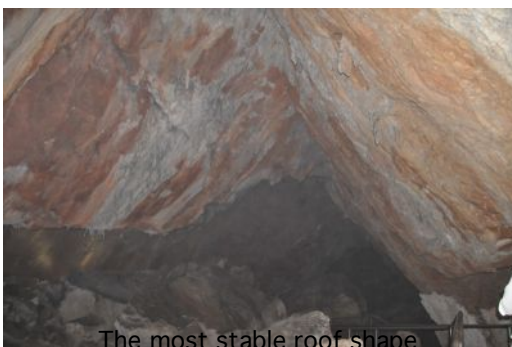
Under the grand entrance dome of the The Glory Hole

on the lawns outside, in the shade of the trees, and watched the kangaroos as they mowed the lawns around



First section of the Glory Hole Cave

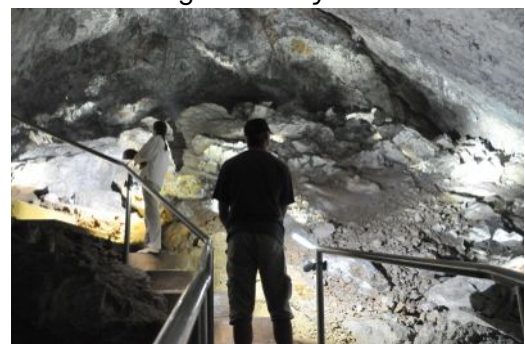
us. Very pleasant. Of course it was still around 38 degrees outside and we really



The most stable roof shape

needed to get to the Talbingo Country Club where we planned to have dinner, so we left for the club.

Walking into the air-conditioned Country Club



felt great; we chose our table, checked out the salad bar and then ordered our meals. On the menu that night was Rump Steak, Fillet Steak and Smoked Trout, along with several other selections that looked just as good. The food service was excellent. Clare ordered salad only and Thomas & I chose the locally produced "Snowy Mountains" premium wood smoked Trout. We had barely paid for our meals when the barmaid announced she was going out the back to get our meals. Wow, that was quick I thought, we should come here more often ...

## A Caver Finds Tru Luv: Rockpiles

Imagine my surprise when she reappeared barely 35 seconds later with two plates, and on each of those two plates a vacuum packed plastic bag containing one "Hot Smoked + Ready to Serve" trout! ...

"Yer can heat 'em outside on the barbeque ... you'll find they're already turned on and hot", she exclaimed. "An' help yerselves to the salads!". At that point I was thankful that I did not order the Rump Steak. So, with little choice and no-one to complain to, we did as we were told and went back outside in the 38 degree heat to cook our own dinners. I wished I had gone for the vegetarian dish ...



The orange spot top-centre of the pic is a small section of lit path; can you see the person in the enlarged pic?

### Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> Feb

As agreed the night before, we were up at the crack of dawn and had completed our breakfast and were finalising the loading of the car by 7am. This gave us a good early start, and in my mind justified the pending roadside coffee stop that was inevitable, in accordance with standard FUSSI Rules and Procedures, Number 1.

When we reached Wagga Wagga we sought out a suitable coffee shop, ever mindful of the fact this was Sunday morning, but to our surprise we discovered one of the nicest Hot Chocolate shop I have ever been to (and which also served good coffee). They explained their chocolate was made on the premises, and it was clear this was indeed a very swish choc shop, with an array of takeaway chocolate sweets, lounges for patrons, oil paintings covering the walls, and even a children's creche/nursery for the Mums. I imagined this would be the meeting place for most of the local Mums in the area, and was surprised that Clare was not aware of this place before. Perhaps she was, but wanted it to be a surprise. This shop is owned by one very smart entrepreneur, I thought.

With that drug habit temporarily satisfied and with the FUSSI cavers' coffee-cup fingers no longer quivering, we headed for Deniliquin for lunch. It was about 42 degrees in Deniliquin when we arrived, but we were pleased when we discovered a takeaway shop called the "Laughing Chicken", which had an amazing selection of fresh salads on offer. I would happily go back there again, and recommend it to everyone, should you be in the area.

Then on to Adelaide, where we arrived at Clare & Heiko's at about 8:30pm. It took us about 30 mins to unload, identify all our gear, repack my vehicle and Thomas', before we were heading home.

Many thanks to Clare & Heiko and others involved for organising another very memorable FUSSI trip.

# What Is On

March 7–10. Wet and Wild Trip: Mt Gambier.  
Clare, Thomas and Heiko co-ordinating.  
RSVP 1<sup>st</sup>. March at the latest, or as soon as you can.  
*fussi@fussi.org.au*

April 6<sup>th</sup>. Sunday. One Day trip. Corra Lynn. York Peninsula.  
Thomas Coordinating. **RSVP 26<sup>th</sup> March 12 noon.**

18<sup>th</sup> April, (Easter Friday) to Sunday the 27<sup>th</sup> of April.  
Nullarbor. 10 days of expedition caving and  
exploration. Clare and Mark Sefton co-ordinating.  
**RSVP 2<sup>nd</sup> of April** if you want to go.

May 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday FUSSI AGM. 6pm. Noel Stockdale Rm. Central Library.  
**A night of bribery, blackmail, chocolate, and  
bondage.** Bronya coordinating.

For the long term

## FUSSI 40th Birthday Celebrations

Be there or you'll miss the party of the year!  
Go on, don't be afraid, get down, get dirty and sell your soul to the devil.

October Long Weekend, Naracoorte caves

### OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

#### **May & June ASF Vertical Training Course**

May 10 Personal rope skills – St Ives, Sydney;

May 17–18: Vertical rescue 'theory' skills – St Ives, Sydney;

June 14–15: Vertical rescue 'practical' – Bungonia National Park.