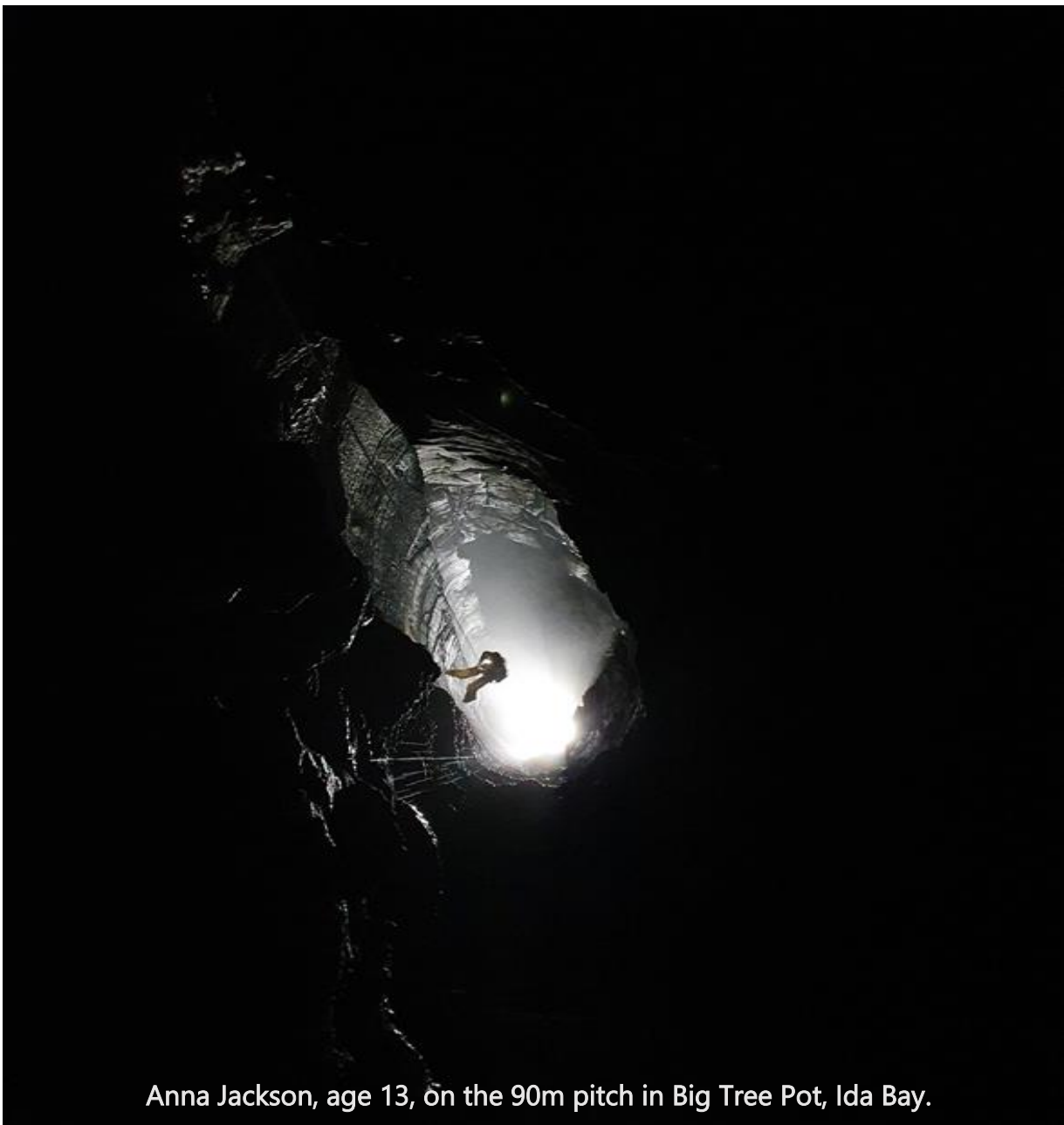




# FUSSI Newsletter

SPECIAL EDITION: WOMEN CAVERS OF AUSTRALIA Vol. 32 | No. 2 | 2020



Anna Jackson, age 13, on the 90m pitch in Big Tree Pot, Ida Bay.

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# MESSAGE from the EDITOR

Sil Iannello

**It is a great privilege to produce the first of its kind, a special edition of the FUSSI Newsletter, Women Cavers of Australia.**

Looking back over my caving life since 2009, with respect, it isn't that long compared to the inspirational women who have been caving before me for more than 50 years! and whom I've had the pleasure to meet. I have come to learn how integral women are to caving and even more so, those who continue to take the lead in speleology: cave science, exploration, leadership, rescue, and karst conservation.



Sil Iannello, Britannia Creek Cave, Victoria, June 2020.

Photo: Scott Lewis

Each woman caver's story is unique, and how they came about falling in love with the underground world is something I have always

marvelled over. So, in May 2020 when I was granted the position of the FUSSI Newsletter Editor, I instantly saw this as an opportunity to express my passion about sharing stories. This is my second Newsletter to be published since taking on the position and I am humbled to present the first of its kind 'Women Cavers of Australia' and their caving life's journey. The stories featured in the Newsletter are truly inspirational. I hope these stories inspire all women of all ages, as I have been. Words cannot describe the gratitude I have for the **Twenty-five women** who have shared their caving stories in this Newsletter, I cannot thank you enough. It is an edition that will be forever read by many other women cavers and who will be inspired to pursue their caving to the very end.

🔊 My Caving Journey can be listened to here:

[https://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/cavingpodcast/episodes/2020-04-01T12\\_46\\_39-07\\_00](https://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/cavingpodcast/episodes/2020-04-01T12_46_39-07_00)



Sil Iannello, Caving, SA, 2012. Photo: Topaz Aral

# JANICE MARCH, CAVING JOURNEY

Northern Caverneers Caving Club

**“Caving has shaped my life in more ways than I care to admit.”**



Janice March in Paragon Vaults, Herberts Pot, Tasmania.

Photo: Ben Lovett

After an Easter trip to Mt Etna while studying Dentistry at the University of Queensland, I was pretty much hooked on caving. I soon organised the next trip there with a different group from my UQ bushwalking club. A bushwalking trip to Tasmania in 1992 proved to be life changing after I contacted the ASF conference convenor and became involved with the post conference trips at Mole Creek where I met my husband Andrew. While staying in Launceston for a day after that, I met my future employer and now business partner.

A week after moving to Launceston for this first job, I attended a meeting of the Northern Caverneers and spent the next few years regularly caving at Mole Creek and occasionally down south pushing my skills, buying better gear, learning how boring a surveying trip can be, and how I liked to push tight spaces.

I had a ten-year break from caving while the children were young except for a yearly kid trip to easy caves – one child loved it, one didn't but they are both outdoorsy which is the main thing. In about 2010 I started caving again and there were a few new faces in the club to spice it up a bit. In 2013, the southern Tasmanian cavers arranged a day of cave survey training after it was realised that there were very few digital maps of Mole Creek caves. Having always been interested in maps, I was hooked again.

Over several days in Kubla Khan and Genghis Khan caves, I honed my in-cave sketching skills and learned a fair bit about that side of the surveying process. It was far from boring and gave me another reason to go caving. My own project in a small multi-level cave called Hailie Selassie wasn't going so well though. I was entering all the data in the cave survey program Compass and getting some lovely line surveys on the screen that looked good when spun around all multicoloured, but I just couldn't get the motivation to learn how to use the Inkscape program that I needed to digitise the sketch in layers.

The instructions looked so detailed, and my sketches were a mess after all the morphing and merging I'd done to them on Compass. I had plenty of caving related distractions to blame for my procrastination. Helping with the organisation of the International Congress of Speleology for about three years and then the Devonport ASF Conference for another two years took up most of the spare time that I was willing to spend looking at a computer. I was grateful for all the amazing people I met and caving things I learnt from being involved with these two events, and I'd recommend at least attending caving conferences to everyone because it expands your knowledge and provides you with new contacts around the nation or the world, to possibly go caving with in the future.

## JANICE MARCH, CAVING JOURNEY

The cartography salon at the ICS was an eye-opener for me. I digress. Thankfully I was stuck at home for four weeks in April 2020 and the opportunity to learn to digitise a cave map was staring me in the face, so I took it. With help from other Tasmanian cavers more advanced than me in their experience of computer drawing programs, I have mastered the Inkscape program, enough to get a cave map ready to publish in the near future. The online tutorials are really useful and there is still a lot more I could learn, but I'm feeling good and it's a useful skill that might see me caving in some areas further afield in the future.

*PS.* My most memorable trips are the most epic ones: The far end of Herberts Pot, Mini-Martin/Skyhook Pot, Arakis. And I do enjoy the social atmosphere of a big southern cave search and rescue practice.

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## LYNDSEY GRAY, CAVING JOURNEY

Savage River Caving Club



Lyndsey Grey caving in NSW 1970s. Photo provided by author

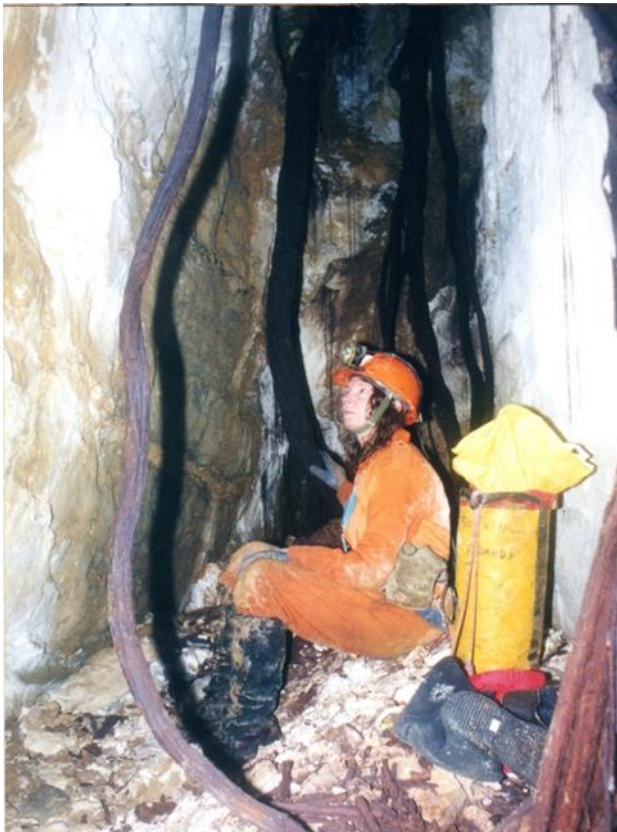
My first caving trip was to Wee Jasper with the Sydney Bush Walkers, in the late 1950s, this adventure motivated me to join the Sydney Speleological Society (SSS) in 1958 at the young age of 16.

At that time there were many social and other projects being pursued by members of that club. I was interested in the more serious exploration of caves and, in due course, participated in helping Peter Wellings with his cave detection device, assisting Neville Michie when he was developing his telephone system and helping Ben Nurse with surveying in Mammoth Cave within the Jenolan System in NSW. Later, I was fortunate to help Ben Nurse again, with his Efflux project at Bungonia and I was involved in the SSS 1972 campaign to stop the Bungonia Gorge from damage by mining and dumping of subsequent waste. We were, unfortunately, unsuccessful in preventing the extension of the quarry into the gorge to the northern edge of the slot canyon.

## LYNDSEY GRAY, CAVING JOURNEY

As a Committee Member of SSS I introduced a system where, to gain membership of the club, the prospective member had to put forward and complete a project. To participate in this, my project was "Comparison Photography at Colong Caves" documenting the damage done to formations over the years. I was on the Committee for many years occupying many positions including editor of their publications. I continued being a member of SSS until 1976 when I left NSW for another type of adventure: 18 months of overseas travel. Whilst overseas I caved with members of the Cave and Crag Club (Derbyshire UK) and the South Wales Caving Club (UK). Visiting the continent for the following 7 months I ventured into the many tourist caves in France and Yugoslavia.

Upon returning to Australia in 1978, I decided to relocate to Tasmania, and secured work at Savage River, an Iron Ore Mining town on the West Coast. I immediately joined the newly formed State Emergency Service and was a member of that Unit until it closed down in 1996. Whilst at Savage River a group of fellow outdoor types joined forces to bush walk, explore old mines and participate in recreational caving at Mole Creek. In 1988 our group was contacted by APPM Forests management, who were working in the Mt. Cripps area. While assessing the trees for logging they came across various holes and caves, so work was stopped and



Lyndsey caving Mt Cripps CP211 Sojourn shaft. Photo provided by author

our "small band of cavers" were asked to investigate these caves. We then formed the caving entity "Savage River Caving Club Inc."

The wilderness and caves at Mt. Cripps presented an opportunity of a lifetime; a new limestone area, awkward to get into and not previously explored. The area is the only polygonal karst in Australia with an untouched temperate rainforest cover. Being older and wiser in life I decided that, with this unique situation in front of us, we should treat the area with respect. The club decided to thoroughly explore the area, to position each cave, and to tag, survey and photograph all the findings.

In those days the GPS, Digital Camera and Disto had not been invented. Henry Shannon took on the job of surface surveying and when he left to move to Launceston I took over this job. With my obsession for recording and documentation I was in my element working in the Mt. Cripps area. With evidence of Karst unique in the surrounding environment we were able to save the area from logging. The club managed to have the area included in the Reynolds Falls Nature Recreation Area and the club has, up to present day, diverted any efforts to mine the Limestone.

I am passionate to recording Mt. Cripps as an Eco System with all that it entails. Our club members and visitors have had their eyes opened as to what is surrounding them. I have invited various experts in their fields to visit the area to find, identify and document findings. We now have a comprehensive list not only of Caves, but Flora, Fauna, Fungi, Ferns, Mosses & Liverworts, Birds, Bones and Fossils. We have had megafauna finds in 3 of our caves; 2 different species of giant Kangaroos and 1 giant Wallaby. These finds are attributed to Stephen Blanden, Paul Darby and Deb Hunter. These fossils have been officially identified by palaeontologists whom we invited to visit and to confirm the findings.

# LYNDSEY GRAY, CAVING JOURNEY

## *Savage River Caving Club Journal: "Speleopod"*

I started to produce our Savage River Caving Club Journal called "Speleopod" back in August 1990 and initially produced 6 issues. I offered to be editor again in 1999 and I remain in this position to the present day. I have produced 61 issues to date.

Other publications include:



1996 with David Heap published: "*Beyond The Light, the Caves and Karst of Mt. Cripps*"



2007 with Paul Darby published "Beyond The Light, the Caves and Karst of Mt. Cripps, Eleven Years On."



2018 with Paul Darby published "Beyond The Light, the Caves and Karst of Mt. Cripps, 30 Years of Exploration"

I have produced Three Record Books: - "*A decade of Caving*", - "*XV Years and then Some*", "*A Record of Caving, 25 years*". I was instrumental in starting and then contributing to a series of publications titled "*Tasmania Underground*", "*Wilson River*", "*Keith River*" and "*Eugenana*."

"Over the years at Mt. Cripps I have jointly found 9 caves, 15 karst features and 4 landmarks, and surveyed 25 caves and 1 karst feature. With the surface surveying I have been involved with surveying some 37km using a Suunto sighting compass, an inclinometer and a 30m tape.

Over the past 62 years of caving, I feel privileged to having seen much of Tasmania's natural beauty not only above ground, but below ground. Our cave systems are remarkable, and Mt. Cripps stands alone in its uniqueness. Although I have slowed down, age catches up with one, I am persisting with my recording and documentation on behalf of the Savage River Caving Club and loving it. I have been a passionate member of this club for over 32 years, and I was bestowed Life Membership in 2018.

To this day our members are still exploring and finding caves at Mt. Cripps and, health willing, I will be there.

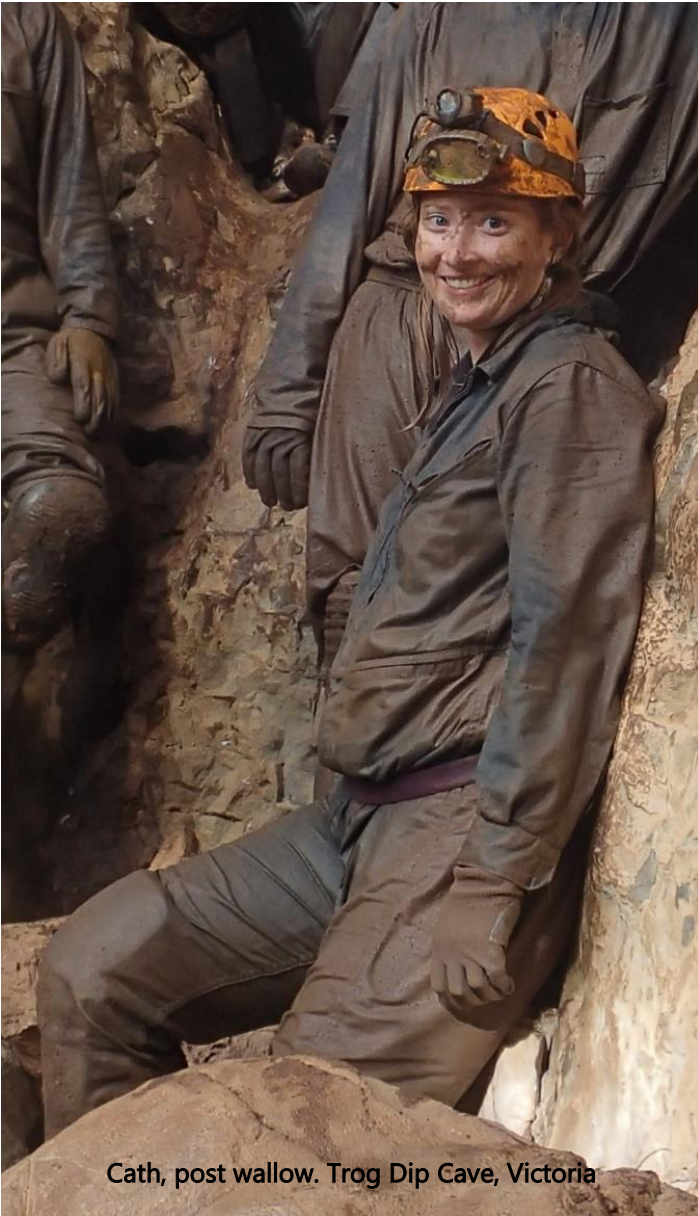
Editor's note: The publications mentioned are available from the author,  
please contact Savage River Caving Club for details.



# CATH HEMLEY, CAVING JOURNEY

Northern Caverneers Caving Club

There was a moment. I was inching along through a flattener, just following the soles of the boots in front of me. The place was Bungonia, it was a Rover Speleological Society (RSS) annual Ranger Guide Caving Weekend, and it was my first real caving experience.



Cath, post wallow. Trog Dip Cave, Victoria

The ceiling was low enough that I couldn't turn my head with the helmet on unless I lined it up just right in the right spot. I had to keep my boots partly stretched so they wouldn't get wedged as I pushed myself along a little at a time. It was a very slow process, there was probably chatter, maybe some grunts and a little cursing going on around me.

I was warm with the exertion; however, the rock was cool beneath me. The boots in front of me had paused, and I just had this moment. While I waited, I started thinking. Hmm I have no idea what is above me; there is 10, maybe 20, maybe 100 metres of rock and dirt hanging just above me, maybe even a mountain. It is just sitting above me, hanging there, weighing down, above me. I remember taking a deep breath, assessed my body, assessed my space, banged my helmet a couple of times, contemplated this some more. Finally, I relaxed, I did a mental shrug, you know what, I am ok with that.

Since then I have been hooked. I grew up in Brownies, Guides, Ranger Guides and eventually Rangers. I wasn't one of the girls crazy about badges and awards, crafts were definitely not my thing. It was always about my friends and the outdoors for me.

Through Guiding I had some amazing experiences that I probably would never have had the opportunity to do growing up; hiking, camping, gliding, abseiling, kayaking and caving. To me caving is just another way of exploring the wonders of the outdoors, maybe a form of extreme hiking, in the dark.

I have been caving now for well over a decade, have made many amazing friends across Australia and the world, particularly caving in Victoria with the Victorian Speleological Association and now with the Northern Caverneers in Tasmania. It has been a privilege to visit some amazing caves in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, Italy, Western Australia, and Indonesia.

## CATH HEMLEY, CAVING JOURNEY

As cavers, we know caves and caving is special, and it is complicated.

There are so many facets. To me, seeing and learning about the unique environments that are rarely seen and trying to understand them is amazing and humbling. There is the skill and art of surveying, though I make a great laser target rather than an artist.



Cath exploring Borneo caves, 2019. Photo: Adam Spillane

The physical challenge of moving through difficult and alien environments, especially problem solving for my personal strengths and weaknesses, and the friendships you strengthen, supporting each other through such challenges. The technical skills involved in SRT. Trying to capture a little of the beauty and action in a quick photo with little light. The geeking out over new tech and ideas; lights, batteries, survey instruments, mapping. There are many things I love about caving, ultimately though I think it is the mystery. Just where does that go? What is around that corner?

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# JANINE MCKINNON: THIS CAVING LIFE

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

**“Caving has been a big part of my life for most of the 40 years that I have been pursuing this less-than-mainstream activity”**

It has shaped who I have become to a significant degree. I think. It has certainly given me a bag of skills I would have struggled to find elsewhere. It has given me friendships and a sense of community. It has also required me to toughen up mentally, physically and socially, particularly in the early days.

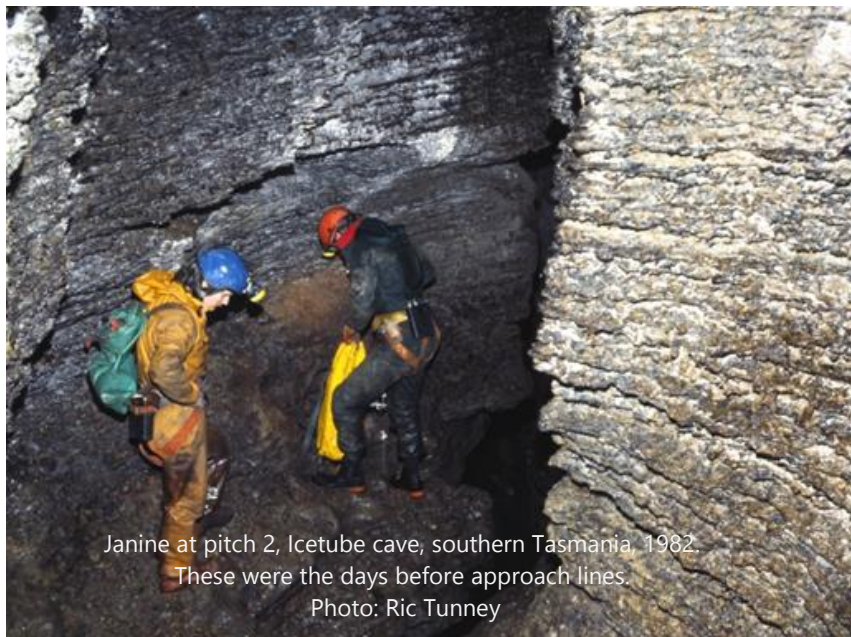


Janine at Cooleman Plains campsite, NSW 1979/80. Photo provided by author

## **Where my Caving life Started.**

I do not come from a caving, or outdoorsy, background. I had to discover the wonderful world of outdoor pursuits myself. These weren't largely advertised or known about in the early 1970s, as I reached University age. I did know about scuba diving from those TV shows of the 1960s, like Seahunt with Lloyd Bridges.

I wanted to scuba dive. So, I did a course when I was 18 years old. What has this to do with caving you wonder? Well, I had no idea caving existed, but after a couple of years of ocean diving, I discovered cave diving. Myself and a couple of diving mates trained ourselves and started diving a few sumps in NSW. We went to SA and did the Cave Divers Association of Australia test to be certified as cave divers. Then I discovered that caves have dry bits! I did a trip or two with NUCC (I think it was) as I was living in Canberra at the time and soon after, in 1979, I moved to Sydney and joined HCG, and later SUSS. My caving life had started.



Janine at pitch 2, Icetube cave, southern Tasmania, 1982.  
These were the days before approach lines.  
Photo: Ric Tunney

## JANINE MCKINNON: THIS CAVING LIFE

These were early SRT days and we all trained together, teaching ourselves how to do it, with mixed results. It worked well enough though, we thought. It wasn't that hard, as rebelays and tyroleans didn't exist yet and passing knots was as technically tricky as it got. Mind you, Cowstails hadn't been invented yet so that added an extra dimension of excitement on some pitch-heads. Our caving was all sport caving. It was fun, and personally challenging. They were a great bunch of people who became friends. I skied with them in winter, canyoned, bushwalked, and even picked up a husband along the way.

This might be a good point to touch on gender issues. After all, it was the 70s and beginning of the 80s I am talking about here. Not exactly times of male/female social enlightenment. I found my world of work a mixed bag of patronization, sexism, some misogyny, a little sexual harassment, and some equality, and I was in a better environment than most of the female workforce found themselves in. Caving was a breath of fresh air in comparison. Yes, the girls with big breasts got ogled a lot, and a few inappropriate comments were thrown our way from time to time, but it was pretty innocuous for the times really. You have to realise that the age of almost all the cavers was late teens to late 20s. Most retired from caving by their early 30s back then. It was a young person's (almost all male) world. That was my experience at least.

So, I saw any sexist stuff thrown my way as immaturity rather than the intentional sexism I found elsewhere in the community. I found I was treated equally by all the guys I caved and did these other activities with. If I could do the job, then that's all that mattered. Then Ric and I moved to Tasmania in 1981 and I had a big culture shock. I won't dwell on it but in the interests

of honesty here I have to say that the misogyny I found (and I was the only regularly caving female) was more than unpleasant. It wasn't all the cavers of course, we had some wonderful caving buddies, but it was pervasive and not subtle. Still, battles have to be fought by someone. Eventually the culture changed and today it is irrelevant what sex you are. A lot of trips I am the only female and I can't say I notice the fact.

There are so many avenues one can run down in the world of karst and caves. Sport caving, photography, exploration, surveying, various scientific areas, training new cavers. The list goes on. I have been involved in many of these over the years. I have been STC training officer at times. I like training new cavers, particularly in SRT. When you see someone get it right it is very rewarding. Especially if you then go vertical caving with them regularly and don't have to wait hours as they prussik inefficiently up the pitches because they can do it well and have a well-tuned rig!



Photo: Janine rigging Devils Pot cave, 2019. Photo: Adam Hooper

## JANINE MCKINNON: THIS CAVING LIFE

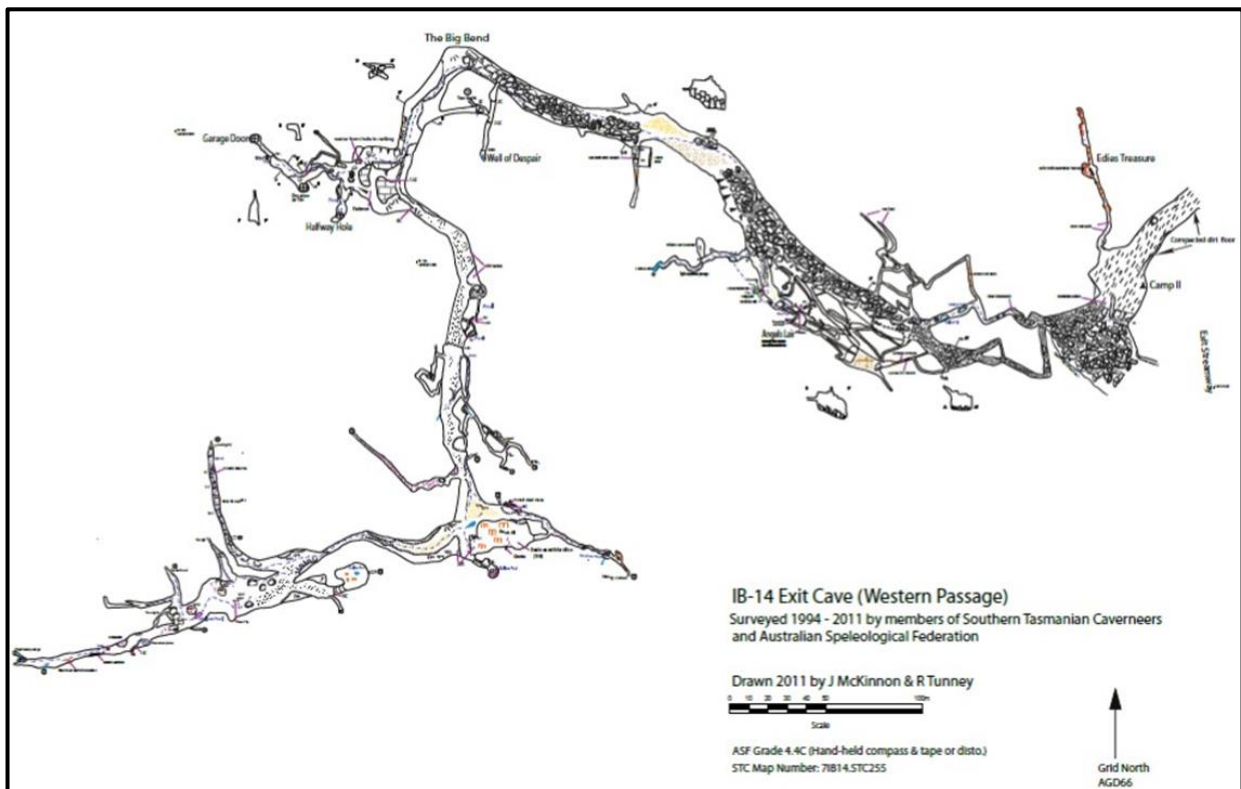


Janine diving Jaunter, 1979. Photo: Ric Tunney

I have been involved in exploration projects, both wet and dry caving, and have done a lot of surveying over the years. For many of the classic Tassie caves I have been on the survey team. I like instruments. I used to be quite good with Suunto and clino, but the new disto X2 makes instruments a breeze. No more lying in the stream in 6C water trying to get a shot along the passage. I rarely do book, only on solo cave dive surveys or short caves, as I am abysmally terrible at sketching. I totally lack the gene to draw. Back in the day the book person also had to draft the map by hand and it really required someone with great skill.

Illustrator and Inkscape have made map-making available to all we lesser artistic types so, for the last 15-odd years, I have been able to produce maps digitally.

Mind you, there are still levels of skill in this and my maps are accurate and serviceable but lack the artistic beauty of some others I have seen. I'll keep trying.



IB-14 Exit Cave (Western Passage) Surveyed 1994—2011 by members of Southern Tasmanian Caverneers and ASF Drawn 2011 by J. McKinnon & Ric Tunney.



**Exploration** is very exciting and a major buzz when you actually find something significant. From my experience though, a lot of time is spent grovelling in small, unpleasant places hoping for the big win. Sump diving for exploration is just more of the same but more so. The grovelling is grottier (in 6-8C water in Tasmania) but the wins equally more exciting, I find. To surface in a chamber no-one else has

# JANINE MCKINNON: THIS CAVING LIFE

seen (or is probably likely to) is an amazing feeling: a combination for me of excitement and trepidation - being alone beyond where anyone can reach you. I have had to kiss a lot of frogs for that odd princess though. I call myself "Queen of the 30 m sumps" because I have spent a lot of time diving blind in small, dirty sumps that choke off after 30 m. The next one might go through ... optimism is definitely a requirement.

I did have a win in D'Entrecasteaux Passage in Exit cave a few years back, around 2012 and 2014. Multiple dives over several trips and a couple of years resulted in about 1 km of new cave passage (sump and "dry" cave). That was hard work, particularly the solo dives and exploration beyond the sumps, but very rewarding. I would be very happy to find something like that again. I gave a bit of an overview of those trips in some Caves Australia articles.

I am still actively caving and doing multi-pitch vertical caves. Carrying heavy cave packs with lots of rope is becoming harder now though. I have had to start playing the "pathetic old woman" card a bit in that respect. Unfortunately, in these egalitarian days, it doesn't work as well as I would hope. I want to keep vertical caving as long as I can, so very soon bribery might need to be employed when heavy gear is being distributed.

Some videos of different trips can be found for anyone interested here: <https://tinyurl.com/y9fjsodk>

Caving has given me so much. I sometimes wonder how differently my life would have gone if I had never discovered it. I doubt it would have been an improved version of a life. I expect caving to be a part of my life to the end, eventually becoming of the armchair variety. There is a lot you can contribute to the caving world without leaving your house.

---

## A GATHERING OF WOMEN AT THE TOWN WELL

Clare Buswell

*Reprinted from FUSSI Vol 7. No. 1. 1995*

Nov 27th, 1994. Cross-club FUSSI and CEGSA Women's Only Trip. Members Present: Clare Buswell, Tania Wilson, Belinda Skuja, Janine Kraehenbuehl, Anne-Marie Hubycz.

So, there it was, 6.30 a.m, both of our cars at the gate and neither of them starting. I needed to be 45 kilometres away by seven a.m. The 1967 Morris 1100 decided, as it had not been driven for a couple of weeks, that, to be asked to get up so early and help out with jump starting the more modern New Bits are Missing 1985 Colt, was just too much! Of course, the Morris was prepared to collect the jumper leads from the next-door neighbour a kilometre away without any problems, but as for co-operating with the jump start, that was insulting! Now it stalled blocking the driveway. Heiko did his best to placate the Morris's mood by invoking the most British thing he could think of (apart from Margie Thatcher): he recited the complete genealogy of the Royal family. When this failed to start the car he reverted to threats revolving around the local dump.

In the meantime, I tried to ring Anne Marie or Tania to tell them that I would be late, an hour late No luck there either. As time ticked by and both Heiko and I waved spanners and curses at motor cars, it occurred to me that as this was a female only trip, Mavis, (the club gremlin), was clearly upset that she hadn't been invited. It appeared therefore that she was practicing her newly cultivated love for motor mechanics on us. What to do?

# A GATHERING OF WOMEN AT THE TOWN WELL

*Reprinted from FUSSI Vol 7. No. 1. 1995*

Breakfast, when I eventually arrived at Anne-Marie's was mangos and more mangos. We managed to resist eating the entire 15 or so and got on with packing her 1968 Valiant with SRT gear, ropes, a deck chair and gourmet lunch. A few hours later saw us gather at Town Well Cave and send down ropes, like women do in many countries around the world every day, to draw water. Our purpose however was very different, and we began to set up re-belays and engage in muddied fun.

Belinda was first down, negotiating the water, logs and remaining bits of pipe at the bottom of the pitch. She was followed by Anne-Marie and Janine. I went down and set up the re-belay and Tania took up watch position at the top. The watch position required being in charge of the deck chair, eating more mangos and having several

confrontations with the ants that insisted on gate crashing our lunch.



Women at Townwell Cave. Back Row: L- R: Tania Wilson, Belinda Skuja, Clare Buswell. Janine Kraehenbuehl in front. Photo: Anne-Marie Hubyez



Women at Townwell Cave. Back Row: L- R: Tania Wilson, Belinda Skuja, Anne-Marie Hubyez. Janine Kraehenbuehl in front. Photo: Clare Buswell

Meanwhile thirty-three metres below, Belinda, Anne-Marie, Janine and I visited the squeeze sections of the cave and tried to sort out why a lot of women we know, don't like this sort of thing! Granted the caving helmet doesn't do much for a beehive coiffure but getting a free mud-pack whilst looking at some good speleothems certainly beats paying for a facial at your local beauty centre.

## A GATHERING OF WOMEN AT THE TOWN WELL

*Reprinted from FUSSI Vol 7. No. 1. 1995*

Having decided that it was Tania's turn to play elevators, I ascended and had a more thorough look for one of the new bolts that I had missed on the way down. On spotting the said bolt, I must say, that the Bolt Fairies engaged in a great deal of magic in this cave. Tania and I changed positions with her giving me strict instructions concerning "ant combat". This involved esky inspection every few minutes and non-violently beating the shit out of it to get the ants to fall off.

I sat back in the deck chair, munched on another mango and waited. Eventually Janine arrived suitably attired in ascending gear and grotty overalls, Priscilla had nothing on this! Janine and I changed places, I descended to one of the new bolts, clipped in and hung around taking photos of Anne-Marie and Tania in ascent mode. Eventually we all exited, packed up the gear and then set to on the lunch, and/or evening meal, as it was 5.30 p.m.



Tania Wilson at top of pitch: Photo: Clare Buswell

There were stuffed chickens, tabouli, kartoffel salad, marinated olives, bread, sun dried tomatoes, coffee, tea, orange juice, chocolates and more mangos. We drove back to Adelaide, fixed the light fuse on the Anne-Marie hoon mobile and wondered if the guys had a good time at the Tupperware party they were going to organise as an expression of their solidarity for our venture. Or did they spend the day mowing the lawn and doing boy things?



# KIM VAN DYKE, EXPLORATION JOURNEY

Victorian Limestone Caving Team

“It is very hard to put a whole life of caving into one article”



So many things, heaps of wonderful projects – too many to list, but all in all it was a wonderful period that encompassed most of my life. As a child I always wanted to be a palaeontologist. I drove my parents mad digging caves in sand hills looking for bones. I was lucky that I never had a collapse happen, but Mum and Dad kept telling me it could happen all too easily.

I did find an Aboriginal skull which has since been returned to the local tribe for proper burial. During the time I had it in my possession, I always treated it with the greatest respect.

The minute I entered my first cave in 1977 (the Lucas, at Jenolan Caves, NSW), it was a complete revelation. I didn't want to be a paleo. I wanted, and somehow needed, to be a caver. Some people get religion. I got caving. Thanks to a wonderful guide at Abercrombie Caves, NSW I got my first taste of wild caving. A visit to Buchan and we brought a house there, just to be close to the caves.

I started serious, as in: almost full time, caving in 1983. I remember Zeb my eldest son once asking what I loved most, my children or the caves. Tragic I know, but I had to think. My first major project was six months cleaning the Blackwood Chamber in the Fairy cave, Buchan. A total transformation turning a grotty muddy chamber to a pretty, white one, with pearls on the floor. The guides used to not turn on the lights and keep heading up the steps to the cave exit. It has since been turned into a special wheelchair access cave in its own right and guides turn on the lights on regular Fairy tours.

**Caving Gear** for wild caving was a JB Climber helmet, a Mammut sit harness, a rack, a free running Gibbs and an Oldham for light. I did get a full SRT kit but only used it when I went to Tassie. Also used it to practice because, if called to a rescue and the cave was rigged for SRT, I needed to know how to do it safely. I always preferred ladders as most Buchan area caves do not have many caves suitable for bothering with SRT. Abseil down and self-belay up the ladder using the abseil rope and the Gibbs.

**Exploration** - I loved to dig and explore new caves (just must know what is there) and I have been involved in opening up or extending 70+ caves. There is nothing like the thrill of being the first human to be there. Being the skinniest, and the first to get caving gear on, I was always the first down into new caves I'd dug open with others. At the start it was John, my husband, and Wally Sady, a local caver who knocked on the door the day after we moved in and said how rapt he was at finally having someone to cave with. He and his brother opened a lot of caves before we moved to Buchan. With his brother no longer caving and no equipment he could finally dig and cave safely again. We opened a lot of caves. Later, I caved mainly with Eric Munro and Laurie Brown: Victorian Limestone Caving Team (VLCT), Geoff Hammond (VSA) and family.

# KIM VAN DYKE, EXPLORATION JOURNEY

## *Favourite finds, Buchan, Victoria*



**Serendipity cave** A very fast dig. Moved a few rocks and there it was. Not an easy cave by any stretch of the imagination but a very interesting and pretty one. Jude Walker was with John and I on the first trip. A short vertical drop leads to a nasty rift to an even nastier tight pitch covered in cave coral. We have made one route down it to save the rest. Not easy mentally to make the decision of where the path of least resistance is. A nice horizontal passage led into a small chamber with a dyke running along the roof. The dyke is too high to climb up to. It is sand coloured and stands out in the other very dark rock. There are bones galore in some suspended sediments. Later the museum sent someone to collect samples of the bones which were all from megafauna.

There is then a passage with a cracked hard clay floor that leads to a stunning shallow pool surrounded by calcite of pure white and some blood red. That was the limit of the first trip. Then the survey started. From the first end, a 4m climb up to the top of a 16m pitch, a bit more horizontal before another up-climb to a pitch. This pattern continued throughout. We always had to go up several metres to the next pitch. Some very creative rigging was needed in places. There were three side passages, all leading off from the same level of the main passage. The cave was highly decorated all the way through and it had a lot of muddy floored areas where passage was horizontal. We used a lot of heavy-duty plastic in some areas and hospital booties over boots in others. It ended in a rockfall chamber.

Had the cave been running with the dip we would have named it 'The Big Dipper' because that is what it was like – up, down, up, down, but it runs with the strike, so I named it Serendipity. I liked the sound of the word and it was a semi-serendipitous find. We gated the cave using a one bar gate at the landowner's request. We had already surveyed (M-44) SSS cave so did a surface survey link which only took a few shots. Putting both cave maps on paper it was clear that there are two digs that with a small amount of work will link the two caves.



**Paleo Pot, one such cave.** We dug it open and when we reached the bottom, the first thing I noticed, were the bones. Lots of them, everywhere over the floor. These were not recent but clearly megafauna.

To take care near the bones, I cleared a path to the three leads, then we all set off in different directions as was our norm if there were multiple leads. I was left with the tight but high rift. About half way through I needed to turn my head around which involved a manoeuvre so I was looking at the ceiling. I looked again and sure enough. There was a huge set of teeth grinning down at me. I wiggled up to get a better look and if it wasn't so tight, I would have fallen.

I was looking at the complete skull of *Palorchestes azael*. I called the museum and spoke to Professor Tom Rich, head of invertebrate palaeontology, who knew that I knew what I was talking about and was most likely correct. Like me, he was very excited and came down with some young, fit museum staff. We removed it and, as well as the skull, we sent up bags of other bones of exciting stuff. (Thylacoleo, koala, barraging birds &c). The *Palorchestes* skull was cleaned up and is now on display in the Melbourne Museum. When we found the cave, it was private land, as Parks Victoria didn't take possession until six months later. Parks Victoria later gated the cave, but you need to get cavers to gate caves, so cavers can't get in. I can get in. Wish I could still cave, as there are so many unexplored leads there. I wrote out a report for the Museum and Parks Victoria and named it Paleo Pot, but Laurie Brown had written an article for *Outkarsts* and named it Bunyip cave. It should not be too much of a mystery for caving historians in the future as they both were allocated the same number.

## KIM VAN DYKE, EXPLORATION JOURNEY



### ELK River cave a mistaken dig, but glad we did it.

I was so used to having free digging access on private properties that, when walking over the Potholes Reserve and I spotted grass waving in the bottom of a doline, I just started to dig. I was with John, Eric and Laurie. It was all dirt for a depth of 3 metres then rock and cave. Went in for a quick look and realised that we would need to come back with vertical gear.

The next day the two guys and I went in. John remained with a sore

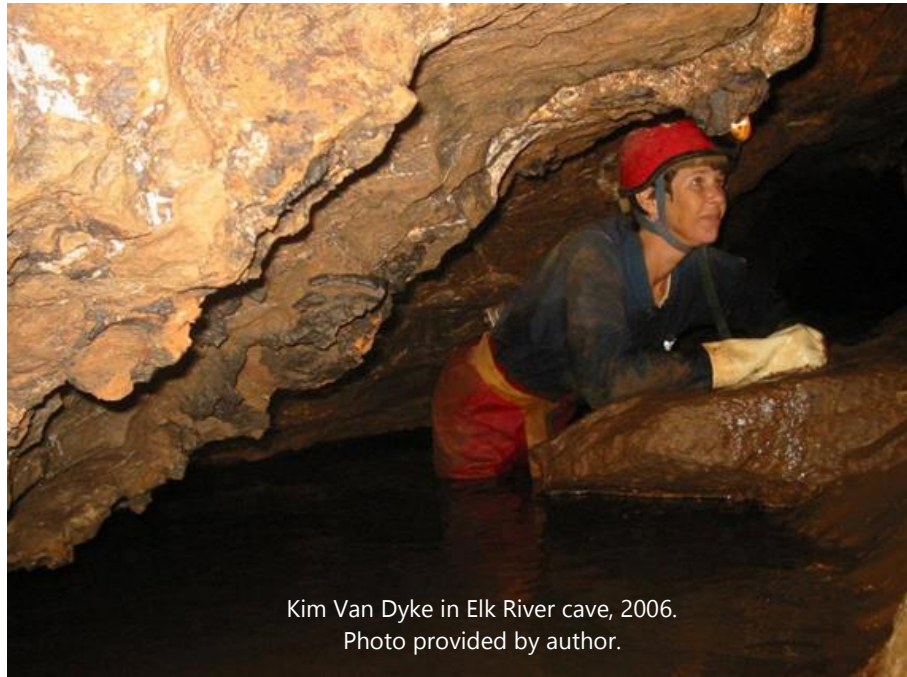
back, on the surface. I was first down the pitch, which is three, nice drops of 10 to 14 metres. I assumed it would go like most caves at the bottom, just a dead end, but there was a lead, so I yelled for the guys to stay put while I checked it out. The lead was a tightish rift which ended in a T intersection with a river flowing. I raced back and yelled for them to come down. They thought I must have bashed my head because everybody knew there was no river under the reserve.

I went back and sat down crying with happiness and disbelieving what I was looking at. **A real river. Not a dead end!**

With the guys down, and after they went through similar emotions, we set off exploring. Downstream we came to a small waterfall over flowstone which sumped. Heading upstream we passed through stunning walking passage then came to a roof sniff. I was part way through when something splat on my face just before the very low section. I have never back-backed so fast. It was a frog. I needed a bit of time out. Eric went through and came back saying that there was a speleothem that looked like an elk antler then the upstream sumped, but there was a lead heading up. Exiting the cave John was shocked to see we were completely wet and didn't really believe us until he saw the photos. Digital cameras are good things.

**Surveying started** – survey as you explore policy with the exception of a quick look to be prepared for what was needed. The climb up when we got there was not easy. We had a grappling hook and almost killed John a few times before we got the hook to catch. The survey started to show we were close to M-14 (Baby Berger) and sure enough a few more trips and we were in Berger. Tears again as I listened that night to an old recording of Frank Moon (who was the first to bottom Berger) saying how sure he was that there must be a river there somewhere and was convinced it was in Berger but missed the squeeze near the top of the pitch we entered from. I like to think he would have been proud of us. We proved him right. My brother (Stewart Germon) being a cave diver was called over and he pushed the downstream sump but recognised it needed a bit of digging to pass through.

He backed out, as he was solo and figured safety was the better part of valour. It took a few trips for the next diving teams to clear the way through and it remains pretty tight. I later googled elk horn and realised that our Elk was nothing like the animal elk but we kept the name as leaving out John it made our initials. Eric, Laurie & Kim. Okay you are not supposed to name caves after yourself, but we did and



Kim Van Dyke in Elk River cave, 2006.  
Photo provided by author.

## KIM VAN DYKE, EXPLORATION JOURNEY

bad luck to anyone (and there were a few) who hated it and wanted us to change the name. It has stuck. Divers have since extended the streamway to more than 3km and some gave me a beautiful framed montage of photos by Richard Harris and Ken Smith. It is 1m high and 75cm wide, with a thank you on it from Jim Arundale and *Agnes Milowka*.

We had a major problem: this was an illegal dig on Government land. However, being so significant we knew Parks Victoria should get all the info about it. I must give our local Politian a lot of credit. He managed to get an amnesty for us. We thought that the cave would do a hard-west turn and the river would come out in Scrubby Creek cave. Wrong. It did the total opposite and although the divers have not been able to connect a few caves due to rockfalls, a dye test was put into it and showed the water is exiting into the Murrindal River via M-26 (Sub-Aqua cave). There is still a lot of upstream to be pushed.



**Whacking Day Cave, always was a problem for me.** Every time on entering this cave there was a snake, always in the same place. I have a major phobia about snakes so, after the first time we met face to face, I always made sure someone went before me to put the snake in a bag, bring it to the surface and release it far away from me.

The cave has an amazing draught but after 10 metres you hit a rockfall floor. There was a super tight window at this level and we spent a long time trying to widen it. We even carried a generator and kanga gun down the hill to the cave which meant up-hill all the way back with two heavy loads of caving gear as well as an array of metal tools and general caving gear (ladders, rope) also in packs. I got to carry the five packs, better than the very heavy machinery. Finally, I was just able to squeeze through. It went 1m left and 1m right, had a solid floor and by my reckoning the roof was only 30cm from the surface. The draught was clearly coming up from the floor. It remains a damn promising dig and was named Whacking Day after a Simpson's episode and because of all the whacking we did in it.

**Other cave finds include Carolina cave, The Promised Land, Mandelbrot cave and B-32 – (B2) Moons system.**

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# TRIBUTE TO AGNES MILOWKA

## PASSION DARING ADVENTURE

### *Agnes Milowka*

1981-2011

It didn't take long for Ag to become hooked on blowing bubbles - after her first underwater breath she thought 'this is what I want to do with my life!!' Indeed, after that diving was at the very centre of her existence. Initially fascinated with reefs and fish, it wasn't long until the focus shifted to wrecks.

Captivated not just by their sheer beauty but also by their stories and history, she went from being a keen and avid wreck diver to a maritime archaeologist and did a Graduate Diploma in Maritime Archaeology at Flinders University. Her desire to pursue untouched and pristine wrecks meant going ever deeper and having to play with more gear and gases to do so.

Ultimately though, it was caves - both wet and dry - that enthralled Ag, being most passionate about the exploration of never-before seen passage. Ag spent a year living and diving in Florida's cave country, where she got her first taste of laying line. It is a phenomenal feeling to reach a place that no other human has ever seen before and she was hooked. Ag kept coming back to Florida and kept laying line in the caves. She laid several kilometres of line across a number of cave systems, the most significant of these being the connection from Peacock Spring to Baptizing Spring, and as a result extending the system by over 3 km.

Ag saw the far reaches of some of the most beautiful caves in the world in Australia, the US and the Bahamas. In Australia she became one of only a handful of divers to dive to the back end of Cocklebidy Cave, Australia's most notable cave dive site. In her home state of Victoria, she pushed through numerous sumps in order to discover in excess of 1500m of dry cave passage, in what has become the deepest cave in the state. Ag went where no person has gone before, exploring and pushing new cave systems and bringing back images from her adventures. She was also an underwater photographer and brought back images from her adventures and exploration. She was part of a National Geographic Team on a project to the Blue Holes of the Bahamas and worked as a stunt diver on the 3D James Cameron cave diving feature film 'Sanctum.'

Tragically, Agnes passed away whilst diving in Tank Cave, South Australia, on the 27th of February 2011. At the time of her death, Ag was arguably one of the most active and elite cave divers in Australia, and her contribution to cave diving was incredible. In recognition of Ag's achievements, The Agnes Milowka Memorial Environmental Science Award has been established by Mummu Media for underprivileged schools in the area of science, marine studies or exploration. Further to that, In May 2011, Agnes Milowka posthumously received the Exploration Award, in recognition of the outstanding and dedicated service to the National Speleological Society Cave Diving Section. She has also had several cave features named after her in Australia.



Image: <http://www.agnesmilowka.com/> Wes Skiles

## TRIBUTE TO AGNES MILOWKA PASSION DARING ADVENTURE

Ag had a moving farewell ceremony in San Remo, near Phillip Island, which was attended by many hundreds of people. Ag was an extraordinary individual and is missed by everyone who knew her. However, her cave diving legacy lives on, and she will never be forgotten.

Donations to her charity are warmly welcome. For more information go to:  
<http://www.agnesmilowka.com/awards>



Image: <http://www.agnesmilowka.com/>

Mick Green

*FUSSI Editor would like to thank Tom Aberdeen for providing this article based on Ag's biography, which can be read at <http://www.agnesmilowka.com/about-agnes/biography>*

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## CAVING, COOKIES & CANOEING

Reprinted from the FUSSI Newsletter Vol.5 No. 3&4. 1993.

### Caving, Cookies and Canoeing Sounds like another glorious women's camp to me



*Each time I embark on a trip with the Women On Campus group, I find myself attempting something new-something I wouldn't normally have the courage or opportunity to try. This camp was no different. I found myself twisting and crawling underground in the Naracoorte Caves. How a claustrophobic managed to get several feet underground in spaces often only a couple of feet wide still leaves me confused. It must have been the supportive and caring environment always pervasive at any Women On Campus*

*event. It also helped that our guides, Clare and Tania, were as patient and supportive as any one could hope for. These women never criticised our ability to conquer any cave in a single bound or grew impatient with our stumbling feet groping for the loops in the ladder Clare had created. Clare Buswell and Tania Wilson willingly gave their time to introduce the Women On Campus group to a sport not normally open to amateurs and possibly even less to women. **THANK YOU VERY MUCH***  
**CLARE AND TANIA**

# Dee Trewartha Caving Journey

Flinders University Speleological Society Inc, President 2020

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea.  
....  
But oh! that deep romantic chasm...  
A savage place! as holy and enchanted

As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted ....  
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil  
seething,  
As if this earth in fast thick pants were  
breathing,  
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced  
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst  
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail.

Extracts from Kubla Khan by Samuel Taylor Coleridge



Dee, Mt Arapiles. Selfie

Apparently, it takes an unusual type of woman to crawl around in the dirt underground, abseil, camp in remote areas, face the perils of underground streams, endure long treks with a wayward GPS, and someone else's camp cooking. For me, these things are what life is for. Adventure, nature, and the wild places. Caving is a special kind of wild. The impenetrable dark and the complete silence is primal and comforting. The long crawls through dust and dirt, the squeezes, the beautiful fossils where the ocean fauna or the creatures long passed from the surface wait timelessly deep below the ground, the sudden opening into vast chambers, the magical crystals, stalactites, helictites, underground rivers. There are few places unspoiled and uncluttered by human beings on this earth and the ancient underground is one such place for me.

As a woman in the current gender climate it can take courage to partake in physically demanding activities, but more I think it takes resilience. The constant proving of your own capabilities to yourself and the world can become exhausting over time. The caving community has been welcoming and encouraging, accepting and fun, whether in recreational, rescue or scientific endeavours.

It has only been five years of speleology, but I have done so many great things, had so many interesting opportunities and been to so many great places and met so many awesome people! I am looking forward to my next five years of caving and I have no idea what they hold for me but I'm certain it will be good! Besides, caving has all the good things; spiders, bats, pseudo scorpions, glow-worms, fossils, crystals, great company, and it doesn't even matter if it rains.



Dee Canyoning, Tasmania: Photo David Mansueto



# EDWINA VIRGO, CAVING JOURNEY

Flinders University Speleological Society Inc

I first started caving with FUSSI way back in March of 2010. Prior to that, my only caving experience was some adventure caving with the Girl Guides when I was a kid, but I'd loved it and was always keen for more. I stumbled upon the FUSSI stall on an Orientation Week club's day at Uni, and naturally had to give it a go. My first trip with them was a weekend down in Naracoorte, and I was really nervous about it because it was my first time away on holiday without my parents, or anyone else I knew. I had no need to worry though – I rose to the challenge just fine and was well looked after by a great group of friendly, experienced and dedicated cavers. To this day I still recall the very first cave I went in. It was quite the challenge for a relative newbie like me. It contained a large pitch entrance, which had to be navigated with ropes and ladders, and was shortly followed by a long, low crawl in deep sand. I might have been thrown in the deep end, but I was as happy as a pig in mud (or is that a caver in mud?). The trip was guided by Clare and Thomas, two of FUSSI's long-term and most experienced members, and I found myself in good hands.



**Photo Left:** Here's me (3rd from the right) looking terribly young, along with the rest of the FUSSI crew, after an adventure through one of the Naracoorte caves. Other familiar faces are L-R: Thomas Varga, Michael Maynell- James, Nate Cock, Edwina, Bronya Alexander and Clare Buswell. Photo provided by author

Ever since that trip, I was hooked. I have since been in countless caves, accumulated a distressing quantity of caving gear (still not enough) and a vast array of skills and experience (also not enough). The latter includes SRT (single rope technique), map reading, first aid, and cave rescue, which I am particularly passionate about. I still love the long narrow crawls, and tall pitches, and anything in Naracoorte, and will be just as excited about them now as I was ten years ago. I have also had the opportunity to lead groups through caves, take on organisational roles within FUSSI's committee, help organise an upcoming national caving conference, and learn to operate unique caving equipment, such as through-ground radios. Special mention must be made of all the many friends I have picked up along the way, who have mentored me, trained me, challenged me, guided me through caves, adventured with me, and become some of my closest friends.

As of late March, this year, I have celebrated my 10th anniversary of caving with FUSSI and couldn't be happier. I look forward to what the next ten years will bring.

## DOROTHY ROBINSON, CAVING JOURNEY

Illawarra Speleological Society and Judbarra Gregory Special Interest Group



After a Wyanbene Trip. Left Dorothy, Right Kathy Knabe, 1976.

Photo provided by author

I was born in Perth 1940 and grew up in Western Australia. As a teenager I visited the three tourist caves in the South West. My family met Lloyd Robinson in Albany in 1957 and he kept in touch with them. He needed a model for a photograph he wanted to take in November 1963. My mother asked me. I had time off between jobs. We had a lovely afternoon. The next day we went to Yanchep for a trip through the Tourist Cave. We were married six months later in Perth, spent some time in the South West and visited numerous caves, especially the Augusta Jewel Cave. (See Lloyd's story in his booklet available through tourist venues in the South West.)

Then moved to Wollongong in New South Wales. Lloyd continued caving, sometimes I went with him, many times did not. The three children went on trips to mostly Wyanbene over a period of five years. In 1977 we set out in the short wheel base Landrover through Bourke and Western Queensland, across the Northern Territory to West Australia's Kimberley where we met up with others from Illawarra Speleo Society.

Three children, clothing, camping gear and food supplies were my business. Lloyd took care of the car maintenance and photographic gear (always plenty of that!). 1979 Lloyd and Dave Dicker constructed a trailer specifically for the Landrover. That certainly, made camping easier.

Wyanbene and the Kimberley were the family events, Other trips were all Lloyd. During this time, I became involved first with Brownies, then Guides for a period of eight years till 1981. I gained a First Aid Certificate, camping qualifications, and a Lifesaving Award of Merit. Then five years nursing handicapped children, a one-year break, and five years neonatal nursing, still with caving trip intervals.

In 1995 Lloyd and I joined Miles and Rhonwen Pierce for a week caving on the Nullarbor. Rhonwen and I went into two caves.

## DOROTHY ROBINSON, CAVING JOURNEY

The weather was kind. All good. Through the South West, Perth and up the West Coast, visiting the Tourist places on the way to the Kimberley, then a time in Keep River National Park. Parting from Miles and Rhonwen, we joined the Canberra Speleo group in Gregory National Park. This became an annual event every winter. I could not contemplate long days of caving and it became obvious that my staying in camp meant that others could have longer to achieve more in the time available. Our last Gregory trip was 2012. Lloyd was diagnosed terminally ill weeks later and passed away in November 2013.

His County 90 Landrover and trailer went to a new home in Victoria. Lloyd had promised David Brand, the then Premier of Western Australia in 1960 that he would write up the history of the Jewel Cave. He had notes but had problems. In 2008 I persuaded him to let me put it onto the computer so that he could sort out the problem areas without re-writing everything. Then Bruce Welch asked Lloyd if he could publish for him. Bruce and his wife visited us, went through photographs and tidied it all together.

When he became ill Lloyd gave up on the process. He Died in November 2013. The following year the booklet, *Discovery and*



Left: Dorothy, Right: Lloyd, Napier Downs  
June, 1976. Photo provided by author.

*Development of the Augusta Jewel Cave* went to the tourist outlets in the South West for sale at \$10 each. Now I'm settled in a Retirement village in Wollongong. My caving is now limited to Facebook pages.

# WOMEN, CAVING AND OPPORTUNITY

Clare Buswell

Reprinted FUSSI Newsletter. Vol. 5 No. 3 & 4 1993

Naracoorte Women's Caving day 1993. Present: Leaders: Tania Wilson, Clare Buswell plus 7 children and 8 other adults. (Some of which chose not to go caving)

I would like to address a couple of issues raised in the article on the women's camp and their caving experience at Naracoorte. Firstly, the issue of opportunity to get into caving and secondly the level of support by Tania and myself. This is the second time I have been involved in organizing women's only caving trips in the state. I organised these trips for a number of reasons. Firstly, women are under-represented in caving in the state and the country. Secondly, caving with only women makes for a different type of caving trip. Thirdly, FUSS is in a position as a university club to offer such an activity without some of the liability hassles that are beginning to affect other caving organisations.

The public perception of caves as claustrophobia-inducing, grotty holes in the ground means, thankfully, that caving is not up there in the latest fad sport ranks, though the increasing number of commercial operators may change all that. Getting prospective members to carry on in the "sport" is, as all caving clubs know, difficult. Let's face it, a weekend of caving leaves some of us looking as if we had been bashed up in a dark alley. Not something easily hidden if you are going to put on your favourite mini skirt and go to work the next day. Further, a trip to the Nullarbor for ten days drastically reduces your chances in the keep yourself nice stakes. So, to start with, caving draws from a very narrow base.



Clare, The Encouraging Face of a Role Model.

Given the pressures placed on women by society to spectate rather than participate in sports, to accept that they can't do something because they are female, and even when they do find the courage to do something outside accepted norms, they are often subject to ridicule and/or a lack of support. As a result, the base becomes even narrower. Added to this, caving can be difficult for people to access due to long travelling times, the increasing paper work and liability problems, and equipment expenses involved in vertical work. Most clubs try to provide a structure in which to deal with the paperwork, and gear to help offset some of the expenses involved. To provide two opportunities in three years for women to go caving on their own, is a minute achievement in many ways. However even that would have not occurred without the moral and organisational support by fellow Fuss members, the Women on Campus Group and the Women's Officer of the Students Association. For that I am thankful.

For Tania or myself to be critical of the way in which people went up and down a ladder or the way in which people placed themselves, would have undermined the self-esteem that was being built up. The support the women offered each other reinforced their self-esteem and gave them the courage to attempt something else. For myself, watching the growing realisation by which their bodies and increased confidence associated with the skills they gained, was a great reward. Some of the women I have taken caving find overcoming the portrayal of what they are supposed to do, or be, or look like, or the criticism associated with stepping outside the norm, as big a psychological barrier, as those first steps ever taken

## WOMEN, CAVING AND OPPORTUNITY

abseiling into darkness. For other women the task of getting to the caving area is a feat in itself. Of the women who attended the day at Naracoorte three had children with them under the age of 8.

If more women are to be involved in caving, then attention should be to the reasons why women are not there in the first place and try to provide opportunities to overcome those difficulties. Providing women



Getting ready: Women Only Caving Trip Naracoorte 1993.

only weekends is one way of doing it, subsidizing the costs of those weekends is another. Having women who are prepared to act as role models is essential. Putting women who are aware of the constraints on women's involvement on committees of policy making is imperative, but they must have support within the structure if they are to achieve anything. (Has anyone stopped to think about what effect for example, the National Leadership Scheme will have on women's ability to participate in caving? Why was it that of the 90 participants who attended the NORLD weekend here in Adelaide three or four weeks back, only 13 of them were women?) Providing opportunities for women to participate in caving is important and I am glad that FUSS members are actively involved in that process, but we have a long way to go.

# NINA BIRSS: THE JOURNEY TO THE SCURION

Flinders University Speleological Society Inc



Nina trying to smile nice in exponential pot, 2016.

Photo: Liz Rodgers

© Liz Rogers 2016

My first experiences in Caving were back in 2012. At this time, I was just starting out in my career as a professional outdoors girl. Yes, it's a career that exists and it's amazing. I was completing a degree in Nature Tourism and Outdoor Education that taught me Rock Climbing, Bushwalking, Sea kayaking, words like phyllode, macropod, passerine and the leadership skills necessary to guide groups through the variety of landscapes and weather that Australia has to offer, safely. I was also involved in groups which participated in Urbex, (the exploration of the urban environment, eg, of abandoned houses, factories) and spent most of my weekends gallivanting around Victoria and SA putting my new skills and knowledge into practice.

The VSA was the first caving club I joined and, at the time, this eclectic crew and the strange hobby that is speleology, was exactly 'my jam'. As a typical Victorian my caving began with trips to Buchan, Mt Gambier and Naracoorte.

My progression into vertical caving came easily given my experience in hanging about on ropes above ground (although it was alarmingly different once underground). Still to this day I'm a little unnerved by just how much a static rope can stretch when it's wet, muddy and supported by slimy stalactites.

Soon after joining the VSA I was asked along to a number of special trips featuring Kubla Khan in Tassie and Exponential pot in Buchan, both permit caves with fantastic decorations! I also participated in an international venture to Thailand with a UK club to assist in mapping and surveying. But the most special trip always the ones where I'm carrying a scuba tank for some reason. My Caving experience is somewhat fragmented thanks to my various other life pursuits. The largest of these breaks was when I moved to the Scottish Highlands and took up White Water Rafting.

Although other hiatuses have seen me escaping to live on an 'outback' property near Chinchilla in QLD and working as a tour guide on Kangaroo Island in SA. But, that's not to say I haven't spent a fair amount of time spelunking! To keep things short and sweet I've picked a couple of my best stories to share with you.

# NINA BIRSS: THE JOURNEY TO THE SCURION

## The favourite cave I've ever visited?

**Kubla Khan!** How can I not say this was one of my favourites. It was the first time I had visited any Tassie caves and Kubla Khan was just spectacular! Our adventure was made even more hilarious and incredible by the insane leeches and photo shoots of someone wearing a bikini in a paddling pool mid-way through the cave. We ran around in our socks in the pleasure dome, a mansion-sized room filled floor to ceiling with glittering decorations and flowstones, the socks were to ensure our cleanliness and I learnt a terrible lesson about eating muddy m&m's. I'm sure there's a trip report somewhere if you're after more details, or you can simply leave these shenanigans up to your imagination.

## Worst cave?

Drick Drick. Not because it was a bad cave, I do remember some spectacular passages and decorations and it was fun helping with some explorations and digging. It was the exhaustion and mud. I just remember being knackered as usual for the return journey and struggling to come up with more efficient ways of crossing the sticky sinking mud. The more effort you put in the harder it was. Walking, rolling, crawling, doing the worm. The only way forward was just to keep sticking on. Just to make things better, we completed this journey whilst also lugging around a huge heavy and awkward pelican case of camera gear which often accompanied us on trips in those days. No surprise the camera had gotten damp on this trip, so we didn't even use it.



## Most interesting exploration?

Being convinced by Peter Freeman that he's got this great hypothetical lead he'd like to explore. After clambering down through Rubble Pot right to the very bottom, we sat looking at this narrow slot where Peter explained to me just how much he was convinced, according to previous surveys, relationships between local hydrology and geology that there was a potential lead worth investigating. If only one was willing and able to get down there and have a look. I recall feeling like a star fish had been turned into a floppy disk and



slipped into very awkward place. The slot was only about 30cm wide, 2 or 3 metres deep and 1 or 2 metres wide. And although a disjointed cartwheel maneuver allowed me to glimpse that the floor level lead did not exist, it was the climb out, fighting gravity, a lack of space and any holds that had me considering who's more crazy, Peter for saying this was worthwhile, or me for believing him.

# NINA BIRSS: THE JOURNEY TO THE SCURION



## What Caving means for me today?

I love the science of it, the geology and mapping, the flora and fauna, the strangeness of the world right under our feet that we know so little about. I love the adventure of it, the 12 hour expeditions where you feel like you've been underground for days living off chocolate bars, and the joy that comes with resurfacing. I love the crowd of people that it attracts. I love problem solving that comes with accessing these places, whether it's the rigging, planning, mapping or even just the moves that your body needs to make to fit through a tight space. As a guide and Outdoor Educator, I regularly find myself interacting with people who have somehow developed a couch-orientated life.

To many it's a wild and foreign concept that someone like myself or my friends actually exist and do what we do every day. When they ask 'why?' my answers vary just as much as the seasons do. But I love that simply meeting me and hearing my stories is often the inspiration they remember for many years, and often pushes them to try new and adventurous things in their own ways.

For so long I admired those who had been around for long enough to be designing and engineering their own lights and in some ways, I was dependent upon theirs to gain a larger glimpse of where I was. 'Big' was how I described any chamber where my little head torch couldn't fully reach. This trusty little head torch has lighted my way on so many after-dark camping trips, bush walks, abseils and other strategic after-dark mountain retreats. But to me, the darkness underground has a much heavier quality about it. So just before I was asked to write this article, I bought a Scurion. Yup. I'm so excited by this lifelong achievement I set for myself. Larger than buying my first PFD, or my first set of rock-climbing cams or having my own Mountain Bike. A Scurion has always been this investment that I've held in my mind as the one and only step into the professionalism of caving. And now I finally have one! **It's Pink!**

The biggest thank you's to the special people who introduced me to this world, and through their own passions have inspired me to find mine. Sill Iannello, Peter Freeman, and a shout out to a very long time ago Dr. Ruth Lawrence. To the cave divers, Stephen Fordyce and Liz Rodgers, may the weight of your tanks forever frustrate the Sherpa's that you enlist and continue to deter all who are not dedicated. There are so many opportunities for me to explore simply by being willing to carry that useless crap with me.

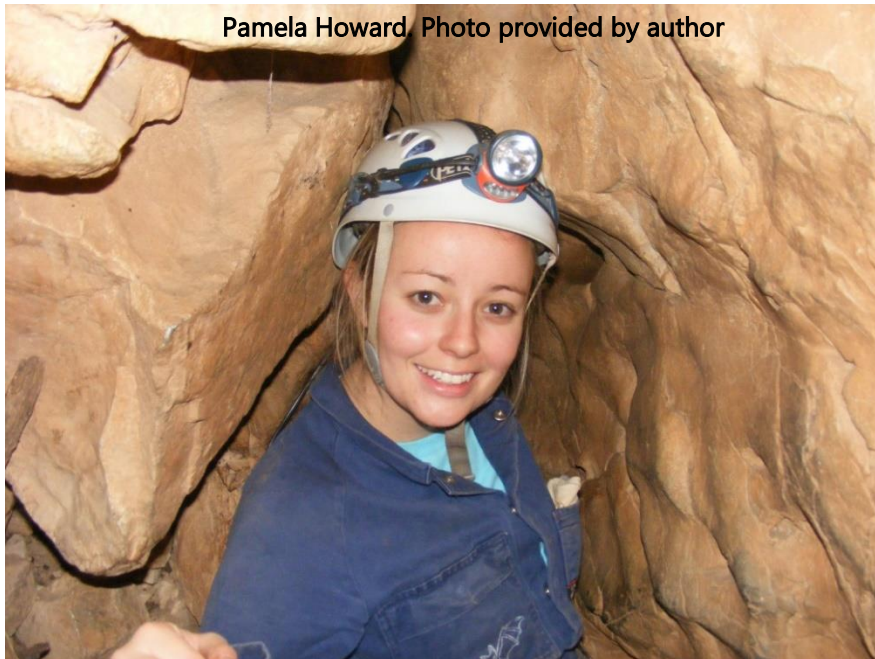




## PAMELA HOWARD, CAVING JOURNEY

Rover Speleological Society & Leader in Charge for State Caving Events Girl Guides

When asked by a teenage girl if she will like caving or if it is scary I always have the same answer, "You will either love it and cannot get enough, or you will say 'been there, done that but I am happy to not cave again'". These are the two types of responses I have seen in 17 years of being the Leader in Charge for State Caving Events for Girl Guides NSW, ACT & NT.



I have been a member of Girl Guides Australia since 1990 when I joined as a Brownie. In the late 1990s. Once I was in the 14-17 years age group, Senior Guides, there was an event on our NSW State calendar called the State Annual Caving Weekend for Senior Guides and Olaves (18-30 years).

As it was held that year in my local area at Bungonia Caves in NSW, and my Guide friends and I loved an outdoor adventure, we had our Leader sign us up.

We all fell into the first response bracket for sure as we attended every year from that time on. I personally lived for this event each year and looked forward to climbing into harder caves as my skills increased. As a teenage girl I felt all powerful and awesome dressed in my overalls and harness heading off to a full day's caving with the instructors, who I thought were very cool people! And at the end of the day I felt as though I had conquered Everest.

From the very beginning of this annual event in 1990, Girl Guides has worked closely with the Rover Speleological Society, who came on board to run the caving activities. RSS, while initially born in Scouts Australia in the Rovers section (18-25 years old), had moved under the ASF umbrella in the early days. The majority of RSS members to this day come from, or still are, members of Scouts Australia and Girl Guides Australia. Coming from these similar leadership backgrounds RSS members have a strong focus on training and working with youth to introduce safe and minimal impact caving practices.

In 2004, as a 20-year-old Senior Guide Leader, I received a phone call from our State Outdoors Advisor asking if I could take over running the State Caving Events, as the current Leader in Charge was finishing up. I could not say yes quick enough! Leading Region events and working on State Teams was something I already had some experience in but this was like being offered my dream job!

That first year I co-ran the event with the outgoing Leader in Charge and by the end of the weekend RSS had no trouble encouraging me to also join them. When you combine the caving humour with the Scouts and Guides connections it is a very addictive mix! In those first years there was hardly a trip that I missed, and my skills progressed from being led to being a Leader.

Running caving events for non-ASF groups has many challenges and each year without fail some hurdle appears in front of me just when I think everything is ready to go. There has been the Girl Guide insurance company, who, one year, the week before the event, decided that caving was too risky to cover but potholing was approved as safe. The time the campsite booked 60 our party in with 200 rogaining participants on the same site. The year that a request came through to send a film crew to camp to

## PAMELA HOWARD, CAVING JOURNEY

produce the training video on working with children with special needs, and these producers had never camped before let alone caved. And then there was the year that RSS ran a special event for the offsite activity for the International Guide Jamboree based in Sydney, only for me to then find out after committing us, that I was due with my first baby that month (Luckily, he waited another 2 weeks to arrive, but my camp first aider was a very nervous women!).

But the benefits far outweigh the challenges. I estimate in my time as Leader in Charge that our RSS team has introduced over 600 girls and young women to caving. A third of these are the first variety of Girl Guide cavers and come back many years in a row. And before me there was 13 previous events not included in these figures. This is one of the few, maybe only, channels for young women to try caving. The essence of adventure for these girls and young women is trying the unknown in difficult circumstances. RSS believe that the Girl Guide weekend is successful due to the lasting memories created through laughter and tears whilst caving. A heady mixture of fear and learning, during physical activity while being safe and supported by friends and leaders. They know it is going to be hard but choose to try it anyway. And even if they chose that caving is not for them it still creates a lasting memory and experience.



Girl Guides and RSS group. Photo provided by author.

Each year the event books out within 2 days. We take usually 45 Senior Guides and their Leaders, and Olaves, and have 15-20 RSS members in attendance. I plan participants into skill groups and assign them to caves and RSS Leaders. Through this fine planning I ensure girls are challenged but not exceeding their abilities and keep a high ratio of RSS to Guides.

Over 20 years later I still live for this event! Just like myself, many women have joined ASF clubs through attending this event, and while most are in RSS, a number have also moved within Australia and internationally so maybe check and see if you have any in your club! **At times the female count in RSS is so high we have had many a female only attended trip.**

My attitude has been never to conform to what some expect of a woman. I believe in following your passions and interests, do not set limitations, drive down barriers, and sometimes shock people a little!

## PAMELA HOWARD, CAVING JOURNEY

I admit that I do love the shock factor it has on many when you say you are a speleologist. I trained and worked in the high Fashion industry for many years, loving dressing up, while spending my weekends caving, camping, and driving my loud aggressive country ute.

My fashion (and very fashionable) workmates did not understand my need to climb around underground getting dirty and wearing (gulp!) hiking boots, older generation Guide Leaders have told me on many occasions my ute was inappropriate for a Girl Guide Leader, and friends in my ute circle think Guides is girly. I once left a job in fashion for a position on a sheep station in the outback and it was something my workmates could not comprehend! My parents have been the drivers behind my life's varied experiences. They always extended the same opportunities to me as my brothers and I never heard that I could not do something because I was a female. My father made sure I could help rebuild an engine as an important skill before giving my first driving lesson!



Pamela Leader in Charge: State Caving Event for Girl Guides

The members in RSS are my caving family, my closest friends, and my actual family with both my very supportive and patient husband getting involved with running the Guide caving events and joining us on trips, and my brother being a member of the club. The RSS members from my early days are still there and each year we welcome more to the club. I love the mix of experience and young fresh excitement that RSS has. RSS work hard as a team to bring new young people into the Australian

caving community by training them in appropriate caving methods. I am passionate to play my part in introducing caving into the next generation and in turn ensuring the future of caving and cave conservation in Australia. I believe in the need to pass on all the skills and knowledge, that all our clubs work so hard at preserving, to our young cavers to ensure the work is not wasted and the legacy left from those who explored before us can live on.

In my personal caving there is so much more I want to see and try. Soon the time will come to pass on the Girl Guide Caving Events Leader in Charge role to another very capable young women in caving/Girl Guides, and then I will go searching for my next role or project. But for now, I continue to welcome our next generation of cavers. I am proud of what I have built this up to over the years and I am honoured to leave my little mark on the caving community in Australia, and in the fond memories of many young women.

# LAUREN HAYES, CAVING JOURNEY

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Outdoor Club - RMIT Outdoor Cavers

Waking up, half on my sleeping mat, half on the dirt, I wondered where I was. It was cold, dark and all of my muscles ached. Then it hit me, after 16 hours straight of hiking and caving the previous day, we were not even halfway through the Stormy Pot; the deepest cave in New Zealand. It was the morning of New Year's Eve and we still had a long day ahead of us to reach our next camp, Salvation Hall. We wanted to make sure that we made it to camp within the year! Spending 3 days travelling through the Stormy Pot Nettlebed system from the top of Mt Arthur to the bottom of the Pierce Valley was a trip that I will never forget. It was my first multiday cave and one of the hardest, but most rewarding experiences of my life.

After reaching our next camp at 10 pm on day two, all I wanted to do was fall asleep, but forced myself to stay awake to celebrate at midnight perched atop a cliff at Salvation Hall. Something that I would have never imaged when I started caving just over five years ago. I began caving with the RMIT Outdoors club in my first year of uni. I was lucky enough to meet some amazing people in the club who were happy to show me the ropes (literally!) and teach me SRT.



Lauren cave bouldering with consequences. Photo provided by author.

While I spent my first year mostly caving around Buchan in Victoria, I became truly hooked after visiting Jenolan and Yarrangobilly caves. I love the feeling of exploration when caving and the amazement when I visit incredibly decorated chambers. Convincing myself to do duck unders and roof sniffs is one of the most challenging aspects of caving for me, however, knowing that so few people get to visit these amazing places makes it all worth it.

I have now completed two caving trips to New Zealand caving mostly in Takaka and Waitomo. Both places that I would return to in a heartbeat. The next caving destination at the top of my list is Tassie! Over the next few years, I hope to be able to cave in many different countries and continue to encourage others, (particularly women!), to upskill in the sport.



Lauren on Abseil, 178m down Harwoods Hole, New Zealand. Photo provided by author

# ANNA JACKSON: SHINING BEGINNINGS

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

## Notes from Dad – Alan Jackson (STC)

Anna's first real caving was at age five (a few easy horizontal things). Then she ramped it up with a Midnight Hole-Mystery Creek Cave through trip just before she turned six. Since then she's done a Slaughterhouse Pot-Growling Swallet through trip, bottomed Owl Pot (~220 m), Tassy Pot (~240 m with a 70 m pitch), Mini Martin (~210 m, with a 110 m pitch), Big Tree Pot (~190 m with a 90 m pitch), been half way down both Khazad-Dum and Niggly Cave, done a couple of Kubla Khan through trips and joined expeditions to Thailand and the Bunda Cliffs/Nullarbor.

**She's 13 currently,  
2020**



Anna and spectacular gypsum in Schrödinger's Bat, Bunda Cliffs, Nullarbor.  
Photo: Alan Jackson

## INTERVIEW WITH ANNA JACKSON, August 17, 2020

*Sil: What are your earliest memories from when you started caving?*

**Anna:** I don't really remember too much from back then, but I do have a memory of going through Midnight Hole and doing the Matchbox Squeeze. I was caving with Serena Benjamin and I went through the squeeze quite easily, but Serena was getting a little stuck and I was unsure what was going on, [Anna Laughing] as I thought it was fine and that she could get through easily.

*Sil: What fascinates you about caves and how did you get started?*

**Anna:** My dad is the main reason for all my outdoor activities, yeah, he dragged me along when I was a little kid, so it became kinda normal for me to cave. I am not one hundred percent for sure what makes me go back to caving all the time, it's kinda the same with my rock climbing, you get a thrill out of the achievements when you make them. It's always nice when I can see the approval in other people eyes. Sometimes, I am a bit anxious when it comes to other people's opinions normally, so it's always nice when dad tells me how well I have done something, [Anna smiling and feeling joy] it makes me go yay! [Anna smiling].

*Sil. Do you have a favourite cave and one you like to go back to?*

**Anna:** I don't have a particular one, but Kubla Khan is always amazing to go to. It's a really pretty cave and I love how easy-going the cave is. You can walk around and not have to worry too much about things, you can just walk around and take in the environment and everything around it. Also, the boot washing

## ANNA JACKSON: SHINING BEGINNINGS

stations for some reason, I really enjoy those [Laughter]. I have done Kubla Khan a few times, each time with my dad.

*Sil: How far have you gone in Kubla Khan?*

**Anna:** I think I've been to the end each time [Laughter] I am not very well-versed, I don't look at the maps or anything [Laughter] I kinda just go where everyone else is going. However, I have been to all the good spots, Silk Shop and Pleasure Dome, those kinda places.



Anna kitted up and ready for Mini Martin, Tada Bay  
Photo: Alan Jackson

*Sil: What's your worst cave, Anna, one which you're not in a hurry to go back to anytime soon?*

**Anna:** Most of my caving trips have been quite enjoyable, but there was one time when I was in Khazad-Dum, Tasmania and it was really wet that day, and we were on our way out of the cave and the water was everywhere [Anna Laughing] and I was getting really wet, I was soaked as I was prusiking my way up and so I ended up going up underneath my dad [Anna Laughing] so he could stop me from getting wet. So yeah, it certainly was a very miserable prusiking trip. But otherwise it was quite fun.

*Sil: Do you have a favourite cave animal?*

**Anna:** Most definitely the cave spider. [Anna smiling] Whenever I see them, I always walk up to them and examine them, they're so beautiful [Anna smiling] you know... The way they hold themselves and walk around. I have a friend who is terrified of spiders. I have deliberately showed her some of the pictures of the cave spiders and she is just freaked out [Anna with a cheeky grin]. I say to her "there's nothing wrong with them, why are you getting so freaked out." [Anna laughing]

*Sil: Mine are the cave cricket, as you know already [Sil smiling]*

**Anna:** Ew yuck. [Anna pulling a disgusted face gesture] I am not fond of cave crickets, they are too unpredictable [Anna pulling a disgusted face gesture and cringing at the idea of cave crickets] I do think they are a little stupid sometimes, because they will freak out and jump into the water. [Anna smiling] I speak to them and say "what are you doing, you're killing yourself, [Anna laughing] sure I dislike you, but you don't need to kill yourself."

*Sil: What caving friendships have you made along the way, since starting caving at a young age?*

**Anna:** Well there are not many people my age who do caving, but there are a few people who I trust quite a lot. One of those people is Gabriel Kinzler, I cave with him a fair bit. I first meet Gabriel caving in Wolf Hole, Tasmania. Normally, my dad helps me with everything and does everything for me which is always a nice perk [Anna Laughing]. However, these days Gabriel tends to help me get up tall spots because I am still a little stubby, which is annoying. [Laughing]

## ANNA JACKSON: SHINING BEGINNINGS

*Sil: The thrill of finding, naming and exploring new caves ('Rocky Hollow' in the JF with Nelly) tell me a little about that?*

**Anna:** [Anna Laughing] Yeah... that's a cave Nelly named. Nelly is Gavin Brett's daughter, my dad when he used to find all sorts of caves and caved a lot, Gavin was his main partner. Nelly has been a very good friend of mine since we were very little. So the story goes, some people including my dad, were going down Pooshooter and Gavin wasn't going down, so we were all hanging out and started looking for caves, as Gavin was pretty determined to find a cave further up the hill, Nelly found a hole first, so she went around looking for rock to throw down the hole, cause... it's obviously what we wanted to do [Anna Laughing], you just have to do it. In the process of Nelly finding the rock, she found another hole, which was another entrance to the same cave. We later on went inside the cave, and it was really cool. Nelly doesn't know how to abseil or prusik, so she had to use one of the ladders. It was kinda exciting to go in somewhere where nobody had been before. There were spiderwebs and everything, that were undisturbed, so basically, everywhere you stepped things just fell down. There was also wood everywhere and lots of leaves that had fallen in the cave over time.

*Sil: From what your dad has described you have done some big abseils in caves. How do you prepare for something like that? Do you get nervous at all? or is it exciting?*



Anna exiting Red Carpet, a mid-cliff cave on the Bunda Cliffs, Nullarbor. Photo: Alan Jackson

**Anna:** Well, I can describe when dad said we were going to do Mini Martin, which has a 110m pitch. He said that it's really big and because it's the entrance, it's going to be quite open. That was his plan to expose me to those kinds of exposures and prepare me for the Nullarbor, because the Nullarbor is very exposed! But... Mini Martin, I didn't really feel terribly worried about what was going to happen, I was like ok, that's a lot bigger than I normally go. But honestly, I didn't really feel any sort of fear at all or not wanting to do it beforehand or when it was happening, I just wondered how pretty it looked. It's kinda weird, but when I went over the cliffs for the first time on the Nullarbor, my dad said he was expecting me to be a little bit freaked out. I just found it interesting, I surprised myself by not going "oh my god!" [Anna Laughing]

*Sil: Have you been in a cave and found something which you thought was awesome? Tell me about that?*

**Anna:** Yeah, there was a cave, Schrödinger's Bat, on the Nullarbor, which has massive bat poo at the front, yeah that was fun to crawl through [Laughter]. Later, in the cave there were yellowy and white flowstone and the way it came out was in these big spikes, they were really, really cool because they were everywhere and the broken bits, which we were allowed to pick up, were like big, thick glass. (See photo on p. 27 of Anna looking at spectacular gypsum in Schrödinger's Bat, Bunda Cliffs, Nullarbor).

## ANNA JACKSON: SHINING BEGINNINGS

*Sil: Anna can you tell me the story about 'Gritty Knickers' cave?*

**Anna:** [Anna Laughing] This was on the Nullarbor, we got to name the cave. It was a new one and interesting, and it also looked like it was going to go. We were in there with Mieké Polman-Short, and I can't remember exactly how it happened but ahh, Mieké got a bunch of silt and other kinda of things dumped down the back of her overalls, and they got all the way in and everywhere [Laughter] and she said "you've gotten it all the way down in my undies" [Anna Laughing], and my dad's like "so you have some Gritty Knickers" [Anna Laughing] and so we decided to name it that.

*Sil: You have a little brother named Ben who's eight, what's caving like with Ben?*

**Anna:** Yeah... Ben has been down Midnight Hole a couple of times and came into Wolf Hole with us recently. [Anna Laughing] He's kinda annoying sometimes, only because my dad normally like, babies me, when it comes to helping me put my gear on and those sorts of things and then all of a sudden Ben's there, and I am like... [Humour] what about me?, what about you helping me? I have to do things by myself now [Anna Laughing] I guess it's probably for the best, but at the same time, I am still a little bit annoyed at him.

*Sil: What next for you Anna? Do you have any cave trips coming up?*

**Anna:** Nothing planned yet, unless my dad has got something new installed for me. Normally, I get presented with an idea and if I think it's cool, I'll agree, and we go. Shortly though, my dad wants to take me to Niggly Cave, at some stage. I have been down part way, but dad wants to take me there for an overnight trip, which I am not sure I am keen on. Purely because it means I am going to have to have powdered milk [Anna & Sil burst out laughing]. Of all the things, that is my problem, I dunno, it just doesn't taste very nice.

*Sil: what about being cold in the cave? [Laughing]*

**Anna:** um, no [laughing] I think the only thing is, it might be a little horrible to get back into my soggy clothing in the morning, but I'll survive.



## ANNA JACKSON: SHINING BEGINNINGS



Anna Jackson, on the 90m pitch in Big Tree Pot, Ida Bay.  
Photo: Alan Jackson

# BARB LOBBAN, CAVING JOURNEY

Flinders University Speleological Society Inc. and Naracoorte Caves National Park

**Where do I start?** I'll call it an interesting, fun and rewarding journey.



Barb, in Fox cave, Naracoorte Caves – Awesome!  
Photo provided by author

I started as a caver on the 8th of April 2002 when I started in the position as Casual Cave Guide, at which I think is one of the most amazing cave systems in the world, Naracoorte Caves National Park, World Heritage Fossil Mammal Site.

I remember my first day as a day full of wanting to dive into it all. So much

information to absorb, lots of reading at home and then on my third day I remember walking into my amazing work place and being thrown in the deep end. I was about to do my first official tour with a group of about thirteen visitors. I guided my group through Alexandra Cave. Being a pretty honest person, I do remember telling them it was my first tour. I returned to the fossil centre feeling YES! that was just the best.

During my first few days I was told something while training, that I will never forget. Those words were. This job will either just be that or it will be part of your life. That journey is still going after eighteen years. I have met some great people along the way from visiting other caves on family holidays with my husband and two sons, cave guide conferences, functions at work, representing our site at field days and the list goes on. By the way, now my title is a Site Interpreter. My position at the Naracoorte Caves involves walk through guided tours with the public, coach groups and school groups including adventure caving. I certainly find it to be the most rewarding and fulfilling job I've ever been in.

What an amazing group of people I have worked with and met over the years. Trips to other cave systems include Jenolan, Buchan, Yarrangobilly, Tasmania, New Zealand, The Nullarbor and probably my most memorable MULU National Park World Heritage Site, Sarawak, Borneo. Let's also say every cave system is so very different, so I have great memories from them all. I'm very lucky to say that I have a job that allows me to educate and share with many visitors about cave conservation and how we have guidelines set in place to protect our very fragile environment. Over the years in my employment or being involved with several caving trips with groups like FUSSI (Flinders University Speleological Society Incorporated). These trips have been looking at and putting in place ways to protect our cave systems including, track marking stations to clean footwear before going into other cave areas.

There is so much I could share from my time being involved with caves but a couple that are

## BARB LOBBAN, CAVING JOURNEY

probably my best memories include Mulu National Park, Sarawak, and Borneo a special place I will never forget. The cave system is amazing and the caving so very different from what I am used to. Yes, ours are very dry you could say, but Mulu is very wet and humid. Those of you that have visited there will

know what they are like. It is the most unforgettable place. I still keep in contact with a couple of the guides there. That trip to Mulu was ten years ago now!

Finally, The Nullarbor - This blew me away. This was a research trip with FUSSI, which included camping done properly, morning tea very important for cave energy and great company. This trip was a working holiday, but I saw some amazing caves, built up my caving skills with help from some great people and had the chance to see some amazing sites in the landscape and not just caves.

**CAVES ROCK!**

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## CIARA SMART: WHAT CAVING IS TO ME

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

Is there any sport quite like caving?



Ciara on Abseil, New Zealand's North Island. Photo: John Oxley

A sport that combines human athleticism, teamwork and scientific meticulousness with the thrill of the purest modern form of exploration and discovery. How could anything compare to the possibility of being the first human to lay eyes on a resplendent new chamber or to be the first to splash down a glittering streamway passage? Or to wallow in mud or breathtakingly cold water, performing ridiculous manoeuvres like 'roof sniffs' in the desperate hope of adding another metre, or maybe even kilometre, to a system?

I started my caving career only five years ago when I was living in Ireland. By luck I fell in with a fantastic club: Dublin City University Caving Club. Ireland's caving scene hardened me to the cold, wet and tight side of caving. The club itself was raucous and often chaotic but very active and I travelled all over Europe caving with them across several years. Although we were frequently disorganised and often abseiled into the wrong cave or ran out of rope/hangers/food/alcohol, it was a great deal of fun and the university fully sponsored our international trips, allowing international caving on a student budget. One of my fondest memories is driving continuously for 48 hours from Ireland to Southern France, via two ferries and England, with five of us in a tiny hatchback and 500m of rope strapped to the roof.

## CIARA SMART: WHAT CAVING IS TO ME



Ciara caving New Zealand's north island Photo: John Oxley

Back in Australia I began to transition out of the purely recreational side of caving. I gained my cave guide qualifications and began teaching basic caving through the Scouts Association. Meanwhile, I was active with Sydney University Speleological Society and I was beginning to catch the bug of exploration caving. Add in a few exploratory trips to New Zealand, the thrill of discovering my first cave, an eye-opening trip to decorated caves in Northern Tassie and I was totally, irredeemably hooked. I've had some time off caving to focus on a significant Himalayan expedition and I now find myself in Tasmania caving with STC in an island state with unrivalled potential.

While projecting caves can be an obsession, I have come to realise that you often learn as much from the people you cave with, as the cave itself. Meanwhile, every time I head underground, I feel I am reset, emerging back into the light ready to appreciate the world anew. I consider myself very fortunate to be so enthralled with a sport that has taken me to indescribably beautiful places all over the world with wonderful, interesting people. I am excited about where caving will take me and about who I will cave with in the future.

# MEGAN PRYKE, CAVING JOURNEY

SYDNEY University Speleological Society

I was excited to receive an invitation from Sil Iannello (FUSSI, Newsletter Editor) to contribute to an article on the theme of women in caving. When it came to getting words it felt a little too egotistical an act. Has this something to do with the nature of caving? Is the physical side of caving in itself a metaphor for the nature of this pursuit? Extraordinarily down to earth as you enter the realm of the underground.

I started caving in 1998 in the midst of SUSS's 50th celebrations. I have been lucky to be a caver and for when travelling the world, it makes you more than just a bog standard tourist. You share something in common with an activity that is not, as a percentage of the population, that popular. With a group of seven cavers I visited France. After being tested on our vertical skills by demonstrating a pick off we got into the Gouffre Berger. While this is an iconic cave, being the first cave to be proven to be one kilometre deep, due to rain risk we did the first half kilometre down.

In the US, Alan and I went canyoning one year. We hooked up with a group of cavers. Using our SRT kit we did a few canyons bounce style which avoided long walk outs. . For some, heading back up rope is drudgery. However, I have learnt to enjoy it. The challenge, the exercise, the extra time to enjoy views from a different perspective while ascending up rope. My caving mentor is Carol Layton. Carol taught me about SRT efficiency and having gear set up to achieve this. Being the same height, I simply copied Carol's set up.

Caving can suit smaller people with good flexibility and strength. Being a woman is not a disadvantage other than adding a more anatomically correct funnel product (such as a she-wee) or wide mouth pee bottle to your pack for trips that are going to take a long time. Caving can be like yoga around rocks. It stretches your muscles, it is weight bearing exercise and can be aerobic. For the most part, you can take things at your own pace which makes it an inherently safe activity compared to competitive ball sports where speed contributes to the severity of injuries. The only way to get caving fit is to go caving. Crawling may seem undignified to some. A good crawl exercises core muscles, which is a foundation for good posture.

Navigating through a cave can be daunting. While I am an experienced caver, I have done so many caves that remembering a specific route through a cave I find I need visual triggers to recall the order of



Megan's discovery: "Under Storey Cave". A decorated chamber. New Zealand, Photo: Alan Pryke

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obstacles. I like to have a small bushwalking compass in my kit as a way to confirm direction of predominant travel.

I love the dry savannah country and over the decade I have spent a lot of time in the top end of Australia and also more recently the Nullarbor. Alan, my husband, and I have also spent a lot of time caving on the north island of New Zealand. Last January I discovered a stream way cave which has a few very nicely decorated chambers, a pleasant surprise after the hundreds of metres of crawling through a water trough! I have been involved with the discovery and mapping of a lot of new passage within caves and also unknown or forgotten caves. However, no achievements are ever truly solo and the greater community of cavers has to be acknowledged. Cavers are truly the most down to earth people I know and have had the privilege of being around and getting underground with for so many years.

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## CATHIE PLOWMAN CAVING JOURNEY

Northern Caverneers Caving Club



Cathie at Machinery Creek, 2016 Tasmania  
Photo: Alan Jackson

There's nothing particularly 'good' about my caving skills or achievements. I live with a fungal allergy issue, so sometimes cringe 'knowing' that I shouldn't be in some of the places caving takes me... But, I love caves, they are special places and I feel very privileged to have seen the caves I have, and grateful for the people who have assisted me along the way.

Sitting here typing, scenes cross my mind, from beautiful caves: Genghis and Kubla, Croesus and Marakooa, and sights from Slovenia, Slovakia, Mulu and Jeju. Spectacular, mesmerising beauty that I can't possibly describe with words. I especially love the transition near cave entrances: entering again the world of darkness and quiet, enjoying the peace and seclusion from the outside world and the anticipation of what is ahead. I have happily sat alone many times deep in a cave, awaiting my companions when I feel I lack the skills or stamina to proceed further, but happily 'biding my time' in the black silence. And to sit 'alone' with glow-worms is perfect peace. I'm feel very lucky to have had these times.

The excitement of my first caves sits strong in my memory. It was 1968 and I'm not quite 10 years old. There are five children in our family and my parents have arranged a September school holiday bush trip to some of their old haunts in the Blue Mountains. After a few rainy days at a remote shack they announce to us kids that we are going to Jenolan Caves. I can still feel the excitement of us five kids and remember many details of the trip including the narrow winding road descending to Jenolan with the 'sound horn' signs at narrow bends, the magnificence of the Grand Arch, even the clothes that my parents wore in the dining room (not because it was finery, but as they were trying to 'spruce up' their bush clothes to fit the Caves House dinner

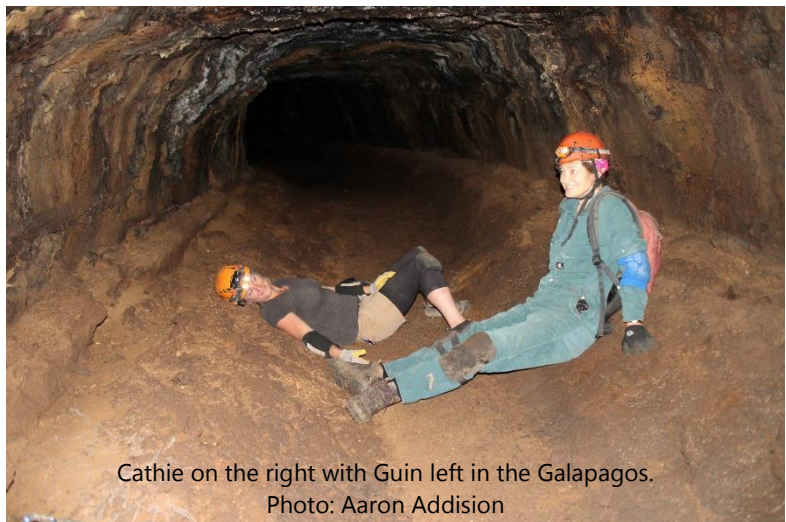
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dress-code). The River Cave was my very first cave and I can still see scenes from the tour, especially the blue-green light illuminated water of the pools. It was fantastic, and there was more to come with a Lucas Cave trip. Looking back, we were lucky children, money was tight in the sixties and our parents worked tirelessly. The foundations stones of my parents' marriage were bushwalking and their Catholic faith. Books on the shelf were few, but all were about mountaineers and the bush. One volume called 'Rucksack Sports' particularly intrigued me, and just one chapter of it, the one on Caving. (I was 10 years old when this book, like Jenolan Caves cast their spells.) But that was it for then, caves were occasional exciting features of bushwalks in my teens and early 20s and my life ebbed and flowed between nursing, conservation campaigns, working in the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, and bushwalking. Parks and Wildlife Service work in the early 1990s took me to Mole Creek. The local cavers were outgoing and keen to include me. My manager firmly instructed me 'not to fraternise with the Northern Caverneers as it would compromise PWS values'. Without any knowledge of access issues and other complications, I largely ignored the instruction and enjoyed the friendship and caving trips offered by NC (though one member cautioned the others against trusting me due to my workplace). But happily, life took me on this twist which opened up caving to me and the joys and beauty of many caves, led to my marriage to David and countless cave-based friendships especially in my 'home-base' of Northern Caverneers.

As above, I'm not a highly skilled caver and haven't achieved any 'notable' cave-related feats, but while some people may do great things in life, I'm a believer that most of us will add 'little bits' to what others have done. I've had the privilege to add a few 'little bits' here and there. I managed the Mole Creek caves in 2003-04 and my work in that period included working with Neil Kell who designed and coordinated a new lighting system and infrastructure upgrades in King Solomons Cave. I've edited the NC newsletter, Troglodyte, since 2006. Another publication effort was to write and publish a small book on glow-worms. There's no money to be made on small, self-published books, but I greatly enjoyed the close connections with the people who made this book happen and the learning that came with it. There have been three conference organising teams to be part of since 2011. A lot of effort but rewarding and all successful.

For the past two years I've been on the ACKMA committee and am very pleased to be part of the team coordinating an award (being launched in September 2020) celebrating excellence in cave and karst presentation and interpretation. My 'pet' cave project in recent times has been getting the Australian Cave Animal of the Year program up and running.

At the moment, I'm getting organised for 'year 3' of this event and as 2021 is going to be the International Union of Speleology's 'International Year of Caves and Karst', all the countries that have cave animal programs are having a united approach re which group of cave animals is focussed on. While we planned that this would be bats, unfortunately COVID-19 arrived and some in the group believed a focus on bats would do more harm than good. So, bats will have to wait in the wings... As I write this, COVID-19 means that many cavers around Australia are stuck above ground, and cavers in Victoria can barely leave their homes.



Cathie on the right with Guin left in the Galapagos.  
Photo: Aaron Addison

# CATHIE PLOWMAN CAVING JOURNEY

Despite restrictions we might feel, here in Tasmania we are relatively lucky and can go caving, and Peter Bell from NC and I are working to map Baldocks Cave and document historic artefacts in it over the next few months. I'm going to enjoy doing this with Pete and learning more re survey and taking photos underground from him. The future is exciting. How lucky am I. Thanks to Sil for her invitation to write this piece, and for her support and efforts for the Cave Animal of the Year program.

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## LAUREN HANSEN: WHAT I LOVE ABOUT CAVING

Rover Speleological Society



Left: Guide friend, Emily Jackson, Right: Lauren Hanson

we had abseiled down into a cave before informing our trip leaders. We had no idea how to use the ascending gear we had with us or how to cross a rope mid-climb. While they weren't too happy teaching us "in the dark" we luckily found we were quick learners and safely made the climb back up with minimal tears. It's a lesson we haven't forgotten - I still remember how to ascend after the panicked underground lesson, and we now practice with new cavers on trees outside the caves before heading underground!

Discovering whole new worlds; both physically — everything looks so different underground, it just amazes me every time that this is underneath us, and mentally — this whole different space to move and work within. By putting yourself in (sometimes literally) tight, hard places you discover a lot about yourself and others! You really need to believe in yourself, that you have the strength or stamina to make it through a crawl or get up a wall and believe in the team around you who you work with to set the ropes and tell you where to put your feet when climbing.

One of my friends and I joke about 'geriatric caving' where we rely on the other person to literally place your feet on holds when needed — this kind of trust really implants that your mate has got your back! There is nothing quite so satisfying as clambering out of a cave, covered in mud having spent the day underground with good company! As a Guide leader my motto is "fun, friendship,

Adventure" — caving gives me a chance to enjoy all three of these — and now to bring these opportunities to younger girls as well. The exhaustion and sheer joy on all the girls' faces after their first day of caving is fantastic to witness! Every year we hold an annual event and we get the chance to take new Guides underground to see what caving is all about or learn new skills and take on increasing outdoor leadership roles. There is no better way to learn leadership than under the pressures, challenges and "real-life situations" thrown at you by the outdoors!



# JENNY WHITBY, CAVING JOURNEY

Illawarra Speleological Society

Years back, my parents had honeymooned in the Blue Mountains and went to Jenolan Caves. They were given a book "Blue Mountains and the Jenolan Caves: A Camera Study" written by Frank Hurley. I always remember being intrigued by the cave photos in this book as a child. This is where my fascination with caves was ignited. This book now proudly sits in my Cave Library collection today.



Jenny's very first trip into Lechuguilla cave, where she met and caved with cave microbiologist Hazel Barton (Journey to Amazing Caves Movie).

Photo: Gary Whitby

My first ever visit to a cave was on a family trip when I was about eight years old. I went into the Lucas Cave at Jenolan, and still have the souvenir sew on patch to prove it! I remember more about the drive into Jenolan, there were "sound horn" signs on the blind corners of the precipitous drops of the Five Mile road which is carved into the hillside. My brother and I were scared, sitting silently in the back, fearing death should a car come at the same time we rounded a bend. Now that I'm a grown up, I love that drive into Jenolan.

People often ask me how I got into caving, well the answer was because we went White water rafting. Huh? When collecting a photo after a commercial white-water rafting trip down the Tully River south of Cairns, we saw a flyer for a newly started adventure caving company, and we thought let's give that a go. The trip was to some wild caves in Chillagoe. As it turned out, my husband Gary & I were their first customers, and we were

instantly bitten by the caving bug! Once home, back in NSW, we then sought out information about caves and found a caving club and have never looked back. Before I got into caving, I had been to tourist caves in Australia, China, New Zealand, USA and UK.

Whether it be running a beginners' trip, or participating in a recreational, survey or photographic trip, caving is something that I thoroughly enjoy. It's hard to pinpoint what draws one to caving and the lure of the underground. I think limestone soothes the soul! I often say caving is like being a little kid again, wanting to explore and find out what's around the next rockpile. Then there's the sense of challenge and achievement at testing one's body and mind and being in tune



Above: Jenny at the Three Amigos (made of gypsum) Lechuguilla cave, USA. Photo: Gary Whitby

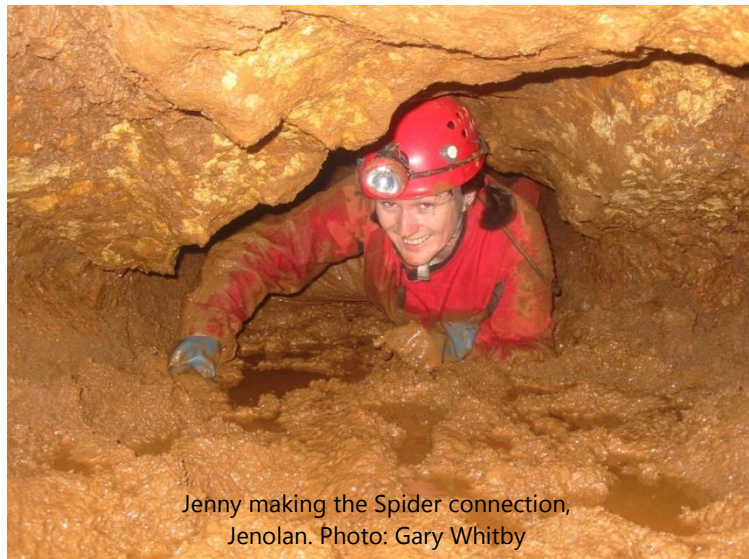
## JENNY WHITBY, CAVING JOURNEY

with mother earth. Plus, the sense of comradery when your group returns to the surface after spending the journey together and sitting around at the end of the day talking about it. Then reliving it again at a slideshow at your next caving club meeting! Caving brings together people from all walks of life, and I have made many cave friends around the world.

I have been caving in every state in Australia, and also internationally. I've been on trips into 5 of the top 10 longest caves in the world (all from USA) being on survey/expeditions to Mammoth Cave, Jewel Cave, Wind Cave, Fisher Ridge and Lechuguilla. I have had the privilege of spending over a month of my life in Lechuguilla Cave in New Mexico, where both Gary & I have both had the opportunity to join four separate eight day trips into this amazing cave. Like the t-shirt says, Eat, Sleep, Cave that sums up Lech, they were full on survey exploration expeditions, long but rewarding days. Closer to home, I have been on extended exploration and survey expeditions to Bullita NT, and the Ning Bings in the Kimberley, WA. I have also arranged and participated in numerous trips to Tasmanian caves, and attended ASF conferences, and also the UIS conference in Sydney. I was honoured to receive a Certificate of Merit at the 2013 ASF conference in Galong NSW for my contributions to speleology.

As a member of the Cave Conservancy Hawaii and Hawaii Speleological Society, I have been a part of many exploration, survey, scientific, photographic, and archaeological trips in the Lava tubes (pyroducts) on the Big Island of Hawaii, annually since 2010. These include surveying in the top 4 longest lava tubes in the world. My family also attended the 2016 International Vulcano-Speleology Symposium in Hawaii. We had some remarkable trips in the USA in many states, California, Colorado, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, New Mexico, South Dakota, Hawaii, and have attended several NSS conventions. This year would have been 20 years since my first NSS convention and it was being held at the same place at it was 20 years ago in West Virginia, but due to COVID-19, it was held virtually this year, so I still got to attend!

Closer to home, Jenolan Caves is a second home to me, despite being a 4.25hr drive away. I regularly lead trips there with my club Illawarra Speleological Society. Being involved with discoveries of new cave passages at Jenolan over the years and surveying them is exciting. The signature of first caretaker of the caves at Jenolan, Jeremiah Wilson (appointed 1867) got me interested in the history of the place, so now I am passionate about all aspects of Jenolan Caves. I'm President of the Jenolan Caves Historical & Preservation Society and do a lot of historical research and writing about Jenolan. I am a committee member of the Jenolan Cavers Cottage Association, but sadly our cottage burnt in the fires at Jenolan on 31/12/2019. As a member of the Jenolan Caves Survey Group I have been involved with mapping of the Jenolan show cave system. This was a great way to keep my caving hours up when I was pregnant!



Jenny making the Spider connection, Jenolan. Photo: Gary Whitby

My daughter's first introduction to caving was a six-hour survey trip of the Lucas Cave when she was just five weeks old. Kate is still a keen caver, now aged 11, the next generation of female cavers! In early 2020, the three of us travelled to the North Island of New Zealand, with some American caving friends, for a holiday which of course involved caving. I feel so fortunate to have arranged this trip especially

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now since COVID-19 changed the world in which we live. Who knows when we will be able to travel and go caving again, even within Australia or my own state, as caves in NSW National Parks are currently closed. But even in these strange times I can still read, research, write and dream about caves and caving!

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## STEPHANIE BLAKE: FIRST TIME I WENT CAVING

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers and Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology



Steph emerging from the depths and standing tall in the sun.  
Photo provided by author

When I heard about the opportunity to write about women and caving, I thought it was a great opportunity to talk about the first time I went caving. About 15 years ago I was working as a counsellor with young women who had experienced significant trauma in their lives. I was running a weekly group for young women aged between 14 and 16 that went for 10 weeks. We often used activities in group work, as challenging activities in a supportive environment can be very therapeutic. I'd never been caving — but I thought that it could be a good activity to do with the group. Before the group started, we let all the young women know that we would be doing a day of caving at about week 5 of the group. One of my clients said, "no way — you'll never get me in a cave", I said that was absolutely fine, but we hoped she'd come on the day and she could stay above ground. We were able to organise an outdoor-ed person to take us — it was also my first-time caving and we went to Britannia Creek.

On the day all the young women went into the cave and had a fantastic time, supporting each other. One young woman said it was the best time she had ever had. It was amazing for me as a worker to see how much the young women enjoyed it and got from it. Two years later I was still working with the young woman who initially thought she's never go caving. I was at the County Court with her and she was about to give evidence against a family member. She turned to me and said, "it will be ok — once I went through that cave I knew I could do anything." It was such a powerful experience for me — the confidence and resilience that the young woman had gained by facing her fears in a supported way.

About 10 years later I joined RMIT Outdoor Club and started going caving. I was having a difficult time in my life as a 24-hour carer for a family member. I found that caving was a great way to have space away from the hard stuff. I find I am very 'in the moment' when caving — it really is like being in another world.

I love the way caving challenges and also delights (the amazing formations etc) and the teamwork, care and patience that cavers have for each other.

# JESSICA BERTELS: FRIENDS FOREVER

Mole Creek Caving Club

Eight years ago, when I started caving, I meet an amazing woman, Deb Hunter. My first ever caving report that formed an amazing friendship, I'll share with you from 11.08.12

I live smack bang in the middle of cave country; Mole Creek, Tasmania. Since moving here 12 months ago I've been swept up in the natural beauty of this amazing area. The mountains, the waterfalls and rivers, the farm land and of course the "CAVES". My first ever cave experience was as a 2-year-old on my mother's back in the Jenolan Caves, NSW the whole time was silent and very happy. Perhaps, this was the start of something to come.

Over my life I have visited heaps of show caves, but always wished I could go further into them. While living here, I've been riding my horse around a property with caves on it, so my interest grew. My partner and I at the time, knew of a local caving woman. By chance she drove past one day, so I followed her to where she had parked under the BIGGEST gum tree I've ever seen. I told her that I'd like to be part of the next trip and that I'd love her job. Two weeks later I was off. First up was a beautiful old show cave, on entering the cave I was amazed about the cave spiders (living fossils).



Jess giving us her best after cave muddy shot.  
Photo supplied by Author.

Travelling through I noticed smaller holes leading off and I thought to myself "I hope we don't go in there", next minute we are. I followed as I didn't want to be left behind. I went through and came out with the massive smile on my face that wouldn't go away. Something had just happened to me, a limit or a mental block I had, just lifted. It's like I was stuck in a dark tunnel in life, and I needed to go through a real one to realise were in life I was travelling, like I saw the light, but in the dark.

This experience has made me look at my whole world with new open eyes. There is something truly magical about being underground. The second cave sealed it for me, stunning flowstones, wombat trails, and glow worms, WOW! All this is such a treasure to have in my back yard. Thank you so much Deb Hunter for opening my eyes to the new path in my life. Since then, Deb and I have been working together in her Wild Cave Tour company and have travelled to many caving areas throughout mainland Australia, mapping and helping to record cultural sites and bones of significance. We have also been on two New Zealand trips together. Deb has been an amazing mentor, and teacher, but most of all a great friend.

# AMY ROBERTSON: CAVING AS A PARENT... FAMILY CAVING

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

Reprinted from *Caves Australia* No. 183. December 2010

## Intro

Yes, I have to admit that I'm a caver and a parent. The caving came first – chronologically – but somehow the family priority seems to have now relegated it to second place. Caving has progressed in my priority list from the obsession of a young adult student to the recreation of a full-time professional to now the release of a working parent. I'm still passionate, but



Amy in King George V cave, Hastings, Tasmania, 2020.

Photo: Alan Jackson

I'm weary. It's made me wonder if I'll ever again be a devoted caver. And how would I go about regaining that devotion? Part of that involves considering how my family obligations may change in future, and part on how this all came around in the first place. Oh, I should note that I've got no relevant qualifications at all in this field and that if pain persists, ... please see your doctor.

## Partners

Obviously, this is the first (but not necessarily a permanent) ingredient in the family recipe. I'm not going to deal with the issue of how to find one, but usually it doesn't involve a cave. I'm constantly amazed by how many outdoorsy blokes I meet who 'put up with' indoorsy girlfriends/wives. I can say that 'cos I'm not one – either a bloke or indoorsy. And my other half shares my love of the world around us, though not so much where it involves getting wet or confined. So, we have enough in common to share a lot of our recreation, but some differences that drive us to more individual outlets too. 'Put up with' isn't quite the right expression either, since suppressing the qualities that define and enthuse you will only lead to resentment. I think that any deliberate exclusion of your partner is also going to be counter-productive. The solution lies in respect – everyone's different and that's what makes life such fun – and in the communication that creates understanding of those differences. From what I can see, the dual-caving couples out there use those sharing and difference principles to manage their relationships too. While they might make us jealous that they don't have to deal with a non-caving partner, each relationship will still have its differences to deal with (see the 'short' story in CA... for an example). Everything's relative, and the bonus for those of us who hone our interpretation skills with a non-caving partner is that we'll also be able to apply those skills to most of our broader family, friends and colleagues.

## Conception

This shouldn't be cave-related, and I'm not going to mention dark wet holes.

## Pregnancy

Begins with an oops or a yay, or occasionally both. I haven't known very many pregnant cavers, so this discussion is based on me. I found pregnancy challenging but not impossible to integrate with caving. That first trimester – when some women see little else than the inside of a bucket – is unpleasant. There's the weariness of trying to metabolise enough energy for the new alien taking over your body, the hormone-induced constipation weighing you down, and the unknown of whether you'll

## AMY ROBERTSON: CAVING AS A PARENT... FAMILY CAVING

need to bring that bucket along. You are also probably not telling anyone about this, waiting till that 13th week when the belly shows, and the miscarriage risk drops off. All grumpy and no sympathy to help. The second trimester is great. As your body comes to grips with its hormone load, your systems resume normal function – or close to it. A friend called this 'superwoman' trimester, as in comparison to what you've just been through you now feel like you could do anything. But a bump in your belly is changing your centre of gravity, so you're not as light on your feet as you used to be, and your trog suit doesn't do up so the ventilation makes you cold. Back to good news, your caving harness still fits round your bum and hanging in it actually relieves pressure round your belly, so you're still ok for a pull-through trip (I did the waterfall pitch in Growling's Yorkshire Drain at 21 weeks). And it's wonderful how peers now volunteer to carry your share of ropes and rigging gear, though you may not want to part from the bag of nibbles in your pocket to keep the fuel supply up. Now I don't know much about the third trimester, since my daughter was born early at 27 weeks. My plan was to concentrate on surface work... supplying scones for morning tea at the entrance, encouraging hubby in his track-clearing endeavours, and drawing up long-forgotten survey data. The parasite dwelling in your core now steals your caver identity. It uses this for its final act of revenge, which earns you the pity and respect of all cavers, as you become the cave and bring into the world a new caver through their very first squeeze.



Amy and Linda (aged 8 months) on Exit track, Tasmania Photo provided by author

### Baby

It was really all easy up to here, and maybe even fun at times. But now you're chief feeder, changer and settler of a real baby. Or at least the partner of the chief. Babies are noted for their unpredictability and demands. Cavers with grand plans of scheduled 'me-time' are swiftly brought back to the surface by the rock-penetrating screams of a baby (or its mother). If only we could channel this into new Radio Direction Finder technology for use in cave rescues, following the path of other infant-derived caving equipment (e.g, nappy harness, fuzzy suit). It's not just what comes out of a baby that is difficult to manage. While breastfeeding forms the best nutrition for an infant and is wonderfully portable, it's not entirely liberating.

I had daydreams of lugging my pump along to 'deflate' as necessary during a trip, but in practice it's not that appealing to get your norks out in a cold and breezy cave. They're also bigger and more sensitive than they

used to be, so though the belly bump is gone, big bazookas are now blocking your view of footholds and snagging in that squeeze. And of course, you may find yourself

missing your bub. Despite all its tortures this critter attracts your love, and just as a partner may once have stolen some of your passion, so will a child. The integration of family priorities is the key here, and adapting your cave trips to be shorter, less tiring and more efficient allows fulfilment of the passion while still leaving enough energy to cope with your family afterwards.

## AMY ROBERTSON: CAVING AS A PARENT... FAMILY CAVING

### Child

Slowly but inevitably, the baby will become a child. Walking, talking and potentially caving now become part of its skill set. But there are some important differences between the child caver and the parent caver. A child's smaller body can tackle the physical challenges of a cave in ways we only wish we could. With a relatively big head and short legs, a toddler's centre of gravity is close to the surface they're on, so it's not just playdough under their fingernails that allows them to do a great Spiderman impression. Conversely the older child whose legs and arms have shot outwards in Inspector Gadget style, will make you jealous as they wriggle narrow abdomens through vertical squeezes with the greatest of ease. Other differences in language, perception and responsibility may be more subtle and either useful or difficult to manage in a caving situation.

Without having learnt a lot of the conventions and assumptions that adults use to guide – and constrain – their communication and problem-solving, a child can be a revelation as they honestly and openly describe their feelings and approaches to moving through the cave. But the explorative and naive child may also be more difficult for other cavers to manage, as they do the unexpected and rely to a greater extent on the care and attention of an adult for their needs. I've met a number of cavers struggling with parent-child caving, in particular where they seem to discover a difference between the established behaviour of their particular relationship and the more flexible standards often present in peer caving groups. This difference can be difficult to reconcile – sometimes existing behaviours can't mesh with the peer caving context, and sometimes caving teaches much more than outdoor skills and becomes a defining part of a child's progression to an independent adult. Learning to manage children can give you greater skills in managing adult cavers too – and not just the 'immature' ones. Seeing through assumptions and listening better to verbal and non-verbal communication can help us with adults who are out of their comfort zone, or in unexpected situations where improvisation and stress are influencing behaviours. Indeed risks, and the dangers inherently present in caves, are an interesting topic where children are concerned.

Safety is a – usually the – highest priority in a caving trip, and the unpredictable and potentially difficult behaviour of a child may be most safely managed by keeping them out of the cave. But experts agree that exposure to risk is an essential part of development, from gaining motor skills in early childhood, to learning the skill of persistence in the face of difficulty or uncertainty – if that learning is through taking control and creating our own outcomes (reference). Safety for children lies not in removing the challenge or the risk, but rather in managing the severity of the consequences and keeping them closely linked to the child's own choices and control. In this sense, it's not much different to how we'd manage a beginner adult caver by running their first trip in a dry horizontal cave and letting them learn from some 'safe' mistakes. Kids too are learning self-care in an unfamiliar environment and tagging them along on a trip that's addressing your priorities rather than theirs is asking for just as much trouble as bringing a novice into Ice Tube. Further, experience and capacity in a child don't necessarily bring an ability to negotiate one's own care requirements, or the same priorities as you. Yes, you may know your child can do this, but you need to respect their choices and fears and to understand that they'll only really learn from their experiences if they recognise them as resulting from their own choices.

### Conclusion

Everyone grows up eventually. And just as you did, one day your kid might grow up too and become a caver. Or not. Learning to evaluate, take and survive physical risks is an important part of a child's development, and caving can be a useful part of this. So, get out (or in) there and practise your listening, negotiation and respect as you learn as much from a child as they do from you.

## AMY ROBERTSON: CAVING AS A PARENT... FAMILY CAVING



Amy, today with the kids, Linda and Ray, in King George V Cave. Hasting Tasmania. 2020,  
Photo: Alan Jackson

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# ANN-MARIE MEREDITH, CAVING JOURNEY

Western Australian Speleological Group

I started caving in July 1987 with our current ASF president, John Cugley. John and I were in Rover Scouts together and as he had been caving for a few years, I thought I'd go along and check it out.

My first cave was Block Cave in the Leeuwin Naturalist National Park (LNNP) in the South West of Western Australia. I remember feeling quite nervous in this first subterranean encounter, but by the end of the weekend, hitting my straps and feeling that being underground was the most natural thing in the world. By the following year, I was helping John lead scouting trips in the LNNP on a monthly basis. The WA Scout Association formed a State Branch Caving Commission and John was appointed inaugural Branch Commissioner, with myself as Secretary. Our monthly caving weekends continued with gusto until it was becoming apparent access to the wide range of wild caves we were visiting was about to be cut off to us with the implementation of the LNNP Cave Permit System. The only way we could continue to visit these caves was to become members of an ASF caving group, so six of us Scout Cave Trip Leaders made the eventual pilgrimage over to WASG.



Ann-Marie surveying at Bullita. Photo: Tim Moulds

It was when I joined WASG in 1993 that I really started my caving journey. New caving areas were opened up to me, new techniques were learned (I was ascending using prussic knots up until that point...), and new friends were made to head underground with. I started caving in karst areas north of Perth and learned how to survey, but the highlight of my first year in WASG was my very first trip out to the Nullarbor in September 1993. A small group of WASG cavers joined a larger national expedition at Old Homestead Cave and it was here that I discovered my passion for exploration.

During the week we were out on the Nullarbor, Max Hall took us to a large doline recently located by the late John Carlisle. We abseiled down and found a note left by Carlisle stating that the doline was 'blind'. Despite that, we had a look around and pushed a few leads; one of which eventually led to an enormous Mullamulang-like tunnel littered with undisturbed 'coffee and cream' deposits throughout. That long prussic back up to the surface was all the sweeter for knowing we had just discovered the next great Nullarbor cave! We decided to name the cave Carlisle Cave after John Carlisle and thus began my love for and long association with the Nullarbor.

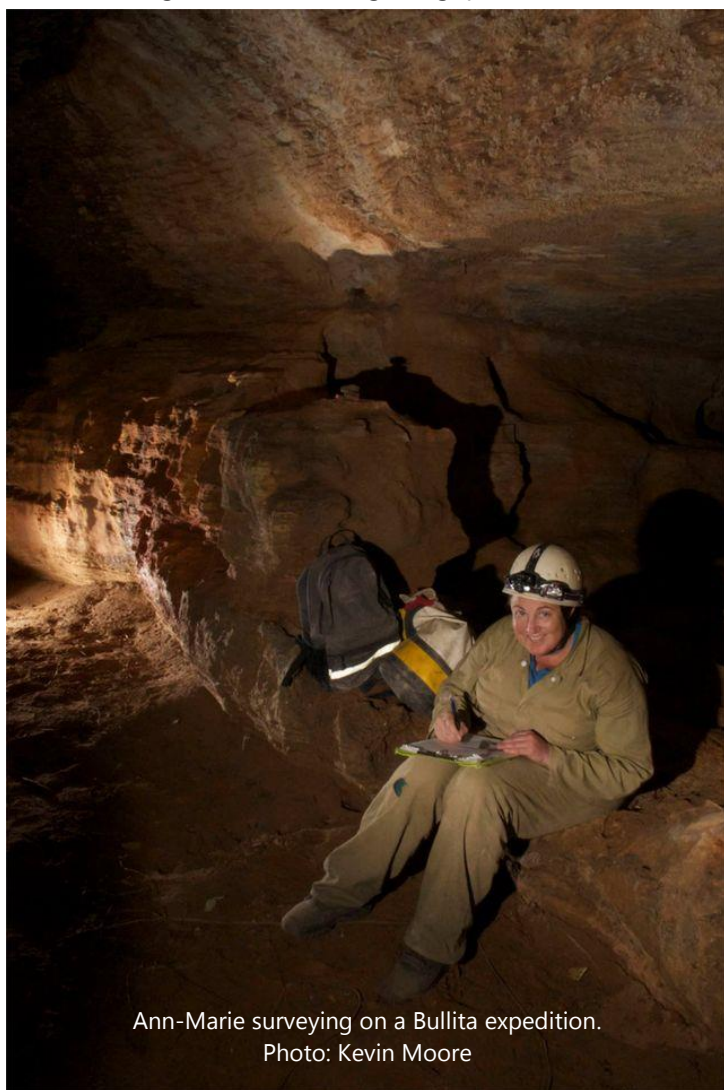
Shortly after that Nullarbor trip, I travelled to Bali and Java for a holiday. Wayne Tyson had been running caving expeditions in the central part of Java and asked if I would take some photos of the karst in the western area I would be travelling through. I started making enquiries about caves in the area when I got there and found a local lad who took me to a large nearby cave. I did a sketch of the cave to show Wayne when I got back as well as taking photos of the karst. Wayne convinced me to run an expedition there myself so I proceeded to put a small Australian team together.

## ANN-MARIE MEREDITH, CAVING JOURNEY



At that stage, the protocol for foreigners running caving expeditions in Java was to arrange permits through a local Indonesian caver by the name of Robbie Koh. Koh would organise everything and arrange for all the obligatory meetings with dignitaries, etc. Wayne had emailed Koh to say he was coming to Java with me to the new area and had received a Christmas card from him saying he was looking forward to seeing Wayne in July. We then lost contact with Robbie Koh. Armed with nothing more formal than Wayne's Christmas card from Koh, I decided to proceed with the expedition and we made our way to Blitar in East Java for a month-long expedition in July of 1994.

The local lad I met the previous year had organised a mini-van to transport us from his uncle who decided he would take a month off work and accompany us. Despite this man being one of the most unpleasant human beings I have ever had the disservice of encountering, his presence ended up serving us well as he was high up in the Indonesian military. Thus, we had some 'grease' to mitigate the fact we had no formal permission to be in Indonesia running a foreign caving expedition. Overall, the expedition was very successful as we surveyed and mapped over 10 kms of cave passage in two separate areas. I had started leaning Bahasa Indonesia as part of my university degree the previous semester which was extremely helpful as most people could not speak English. It did mean I spent more time above ground than the others talking to locals and getting permission to enter areas, but my team did an awesome job underground.



Ann-Marie surveying on a Bullita expedition.  
Photo: Kevin Moore

I remember one day dropping a survey team at an outflow and telling them they were not to come back until they had connected with a nearby cave we suspected was part of the same system. Not only did they make the connection, they found another entrance to boot! One thing about that expedition I am particularly proud of is that I was the first (and to date only...) Western Australian woman to lead an overseas caving expedition and to my knowledge, only the second Australian woman. Come on girls - we've got some catching up to do! In July 1998, I got a call from the late Lyndsay Hatcher to see if I would be interested in helping him out getting some scientists in and out pit entrance caves in the LNNP. I readily agreed and travelled down to meet the group.

Tim Flannery and Rhys Jones had partnered up to conduct a huge research project to try to determine when and how the megafauna died out. This research led to the publication of Tim's famous book 'The Future Eaters' and changed our understanding of how long Aboriginal people had been in this great country.

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The guys were great fun and I ended up being daubed 'Madame Lash' by Rhys Jones as I harnessed them up each day to abseil into the caves they were collecting samples from. On the last day of LNNP field trip, Tim Flannery found a small frog down the bottom of one of the entrances. He seemed quite distressed

that this little frog had fallen in and would subsequently die and as such insisted that I prussic back up with the little critter! Fortunately, he then found a small colony of said frog, so I was saved the trip.

In 2003, I went along with a small delegation of cavers to meet with the Managing Director of what is now Department of Parks and Wildlife WA to push a case for better protection of the Nullarbor karst.

We were informed there was a National Rangelands Project about to get underway which was looking at providing funding for such causes and that the one the Nullarbor would fall under was in a couple of weeks in Kalgoorlie. As I was the only one who could get the time off work, I hastily contacted the organiser and arranged to have myself included as a last-minute registration. The week was spent workshoping the many environmental issues facing a huge area which covered the WA Goldfields and Nullarbor Plain. Five pots of funding were up for grabs. The first four went to the power players of pastoralists, Aboriginal groups and environmentalists and the fringe players were jostling for the final pot of funding. As I had only just returned from living and working in the Goldfields for the past few years, I had a great time connecting with the other delegates who all knew someone I knew from my time there. When it looked like I might miss out on my mission of getting the caves over the line, I hurled my hand down on the table and appealing to the room cried out, "Come on guys, what about the caves?". Everyone laughed and agreed that would be the final project.

I ended up going on three field trips to the Nullarbor with land managers, scientists and Aboriginal elders to do the ground-work for what eventually became the first management plan for the western karst of the Nullarbor Plain. Over the years I have combined caving with my other great love of grass-roots backpacking and have lots of caving/travelling tales to share over a glass of wine by a campfire. From mistakenly being feted as a VIP by a mini-bus driver after visiting the famous Cango Caves in South Africa as a guest of the Cave Manager, to having Raul Castro asking after my welfare after breaking my ankle on a caving trip in a remote part of Cuba. I think one of the highlights of my many adventures, though, is being invited to cave on a private property in Guatemala and going into a small cave which had only that morning been uncovered and unvisited by humans since ancient Mayan times. The floor was literally littered with ancient Mayan artefacts and it was a very special experience indeed.

In June 2015, Denis Marsh made a pitch for volunteers to join the committee organising the 2017 UIS Congress in Sydney. I had heard about the Congress and was keen to be involved in some way. As I scanned the job list, I decided that the Marketing role would suit me best and put my hand up. From that point on I was involved in an ever-increasing whirlwind of meetings, social media posts, e-bulletin production and the organising and worldwide distribution of promotional materials. It was a crazy time but one I am very proud to have been a part of. Together with a core group of dedicated cavers, we managed to pull off a highly successful international caving congress and firmly put Australia on the caving community map.

At the 2017 Congress, I met British caver Adam Spillane who had been looking at a karst area in East Kalimantan that I did a reccie with Rauleigh Webb in 1995. He had done his research as to whether anyone had previously visited the area and found my report published in the *Western Caver* but also discovered no-one else had visited the area since. At the time of the reccie, access to the caves in the area was extremely difficult as individual Dayak families controlled them and their highly lucrative birds' nest contents. Rauleigh and I were taken to one large cave, however, were then held in suspicion by the other family groups and hence not able to gain access to any of the other caves. This was not helped by the fact

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that no-one spoke English, Rauleigh spoke no Bahasa and I came down with a malarial type fever within half an hour of arriving at the tiny village and could barely put a sentence together in English half of the



Bottom right Ann-Marie, top left Cath Hemley, Goa Tarip, Ujoh Bilang, East Kalimantan.  
Photo: Adam Spillane.

time! Yet, we still managed to assess the area as to its potential and I wrote it up upon returning home. After discussions with other Indonesian cavers who were at the Congress, it appeared that the access issues preventing an expedition in 1995 may have been resolved, so we planned to do a fresh reccie the following year.

Adam and I met up in Kalimantan in July 2018 and spent three weeks in the Long Bangun and Long Apari region of East Kalimantan. We visited several caves in various parts of the region and discovered that the access issues of previous years had recently been circumvented by the Indonesian Government providing funding for independent birds' nest towers following years of civil unrest surrounding control of the caves. We decided there was definitely potential for a small expedition to survey and map what we knew was there and do further exploration of the area. On the very last day, we managed to locate one of the two Dayak men who had taken Rauleigh and myself into the field back in 1995. He remembered us as we were the first foreigners he had seen in his village! It was an extremely special and emotional time. Adam and I returned to Ujoh Bilang last year (2019) with Australian caver, Cath Hemley, for a small-scale expedition and were planning on returning again this year with a bigger team to continue what I expect will be a life-long project given the amount of productive karst. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has put a hold on our plans temporarily...

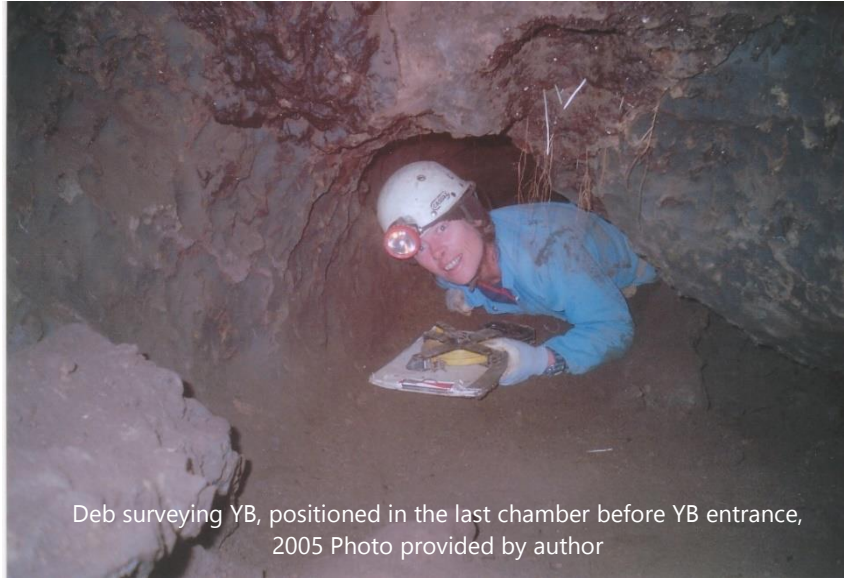
After caving for over 30 years in many karst areas in Australia as well as overseas, I consider myself so fortunate to have had the experiences I have had and met the wonderful people I have met over the years. To me, caving is very much a huge part of my life and I cannot envisage a life without it. So, whilst there are exciting new karst areas to explore and good people to explore them with, I can't imagine I'll be hanging up the old boots for quite some time to come.

# DEB HUNTER, CAVING JOURNEY

Mole Creek Caving Club

Sil Iannello (Editor) has asked a bunch of women, including me and my mate Jess Bertel, if we would contribute our stories as women cavers to inspire other women and see where it leads! We met Sil during lockdown by vid-link to discover her vision for an article in the FUSSI newsletter as a starter. Who knows? It could lead to a women's long weekend at Mole Creek and on from there.

I have always loved caves. My story began as a child playing around my bushland home on the edge of Kuringai National Park north of Sydney, in sandstone outcrops and exploring Aboriginal shelters and rock art of Bantry Bay and along the Hawkesbury on our family boating weekends. I remember swimming through the Natural Arch in southeast Queensland about age 9 and I still have my certificate for exploring Lucas and Chifley caves at Jenolan on a primary school excursion.



Deb surveying YB, positioned in the last chamber before YB entrance, 2005 Photo provided by author

However, it was not until I moved to the Mole Creek area

as a young adult that I experienced real caving. I still live in the area and most of my caving has been here. By 1979, aged 23, I was learning the new Single Rope Techniques thing. A young member of the family, whose farm I was working on, had returned from Sydney with a new awareness of the notoriety of the caves of the Mole Creek karst and we were off caving on the weekends and sometimes at night. We may have been the first group of cavers in Australia to start with SRT and not a Bonwick ladder in sight.

There were not many active women cavers then. Now my club, the Mole Creek Caving Club, has three female caving leaders. I like being in caves because for me the setting differs more from daily settings than even sitting on a Tasmanian mountain top after a steep climb. The value of immersion in nature as a healing and refreshing break from modern life is well established in the literature. This is part of it for me; and yes, there is the stimulation of real danger. But much more than all that I have reached a profound awareness that caves are not malevolent towards us but ambivalent. I must respect the ambivalence of a hostile environment and use my wits in order to be able to relax there and admire the particular beauty and feel the wonder only found in karst caves.

Finally, I have always relished the strenuous and technical side of caving, enjoying the sense of my strength and fitness, luxuriating in the fatigue of the trudge back through the bush to the vehicles; filthy, wet and beset by leeches. I'm not the only caver who feels that the longer I've been a caver the more acutely I've become aware of the potential threats. Is it more a woman's (mother's) perspective than a man's? For me, becoming a mother made a difference. Anyway, a lot of this acquired wisdom is directly due to accidents and near misses; some from rescues and some from search and rescue training and simulations with people who don't know what they're doing and who nearly cause an "authentic". I know that a sense of "edge" makes you a safer caver and that it is the same headspace of awareness that enables mindfulness of good conservation techniques while caving.

Mole Creek's Kubla Khan Cave has a special place in my heart. I first explored it in the later 1970s, after Canberra and Tasmanian teams had established the through trip and mapped the main routes. By 1983/84, I was working with people from the Northern Caverneers cleaning, remarking, rerouting and

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mud-proofing the route ahead of the Speleomania ASF conference of January 1985. The conservation principles we implemented were pioneering ideas, including the still-radical approach of keeping clean and walking only on the flowstone, avoiding clay floors. Cavers who wanted a through trip during the 1985 post-conference activities would provide a couple of hours labour towards the project. Keeping Kubla clean is a constant effort, since good practice techniques are harder to apply when clay drops out of the ceiling quite naturally and cavers not used to avoiding mud, do make mistakes. Today, most trips in Kubla still take on a task and play a part in the maintenance of the cave, without which the cave would soon become damaged.

Kubla is nothing short of iconic. The history of its care is part of that. Kubla has a grandeur uncommon in Australia's old, old karst landscapes. Huge drippy chambers just chockers full of multi-coloured speleothems and large clusters of aragonite. It has all the ingredients — through trips over 2 kms with several side trips take up to 12 hours including several pitches.



**Project caving:** Veronica Schumann invited me to join the CSS's Gregory National Park trips exploring the remote Bullita cave system of the NT. The main central cave is now over 140 kms long,



Self-portrait: Deb Hunter. Bullita

much of it mapped with Suuntos and tape. CSS had begun annual trips in 1992. By 1997, when I joined, it had become clear that the main cave and others offered huge potential and annual two-week trips of 6-14 people were established. I was to attend 17 years as an explorer and sketcher (surveyor). Single discoveries were linked underground into a system by concerted effort over the years, made possible by the mapping co-ordination established by Bob Kershaw. Complexities, inconsistencies and transcription errors are mind-twisting and have to be sorted out next expedition. The caving was mostly horizontal beyond some tricky entrance series amongst razor-sharp tropical dolerite towers and rifts, however chimney climbs, traverses, squeezes and rockfall passages have made links

between levels and under valleys.

There were (and still are) many challenges out there. Long walks up to 1½ hours greet the beginning and end of each day across the dry, tropical savannah. There are King Brown snakes, even at night, and saltwater crocodiles in waterholes and river crossings. Sometimes we were navigating over 1 km underground to get to the limit of previous exploration and begin discovery and surveying for the day. The maze system screws up your head and several times cavers have been overdue for rendezvous with

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another team before the return walk. Simple accidents and medical problems can quickly become critical and satellite phones do not always work for a range of reasons. Nevertheless, the country got under my skin and I have always loved the two weeks away from everything to focus on such an amazing project. The cultural side of things has a lot more to do with the Aboriginal legacy than European and includes cave burial sites. Ancient art sites mark resting, camping, fishing and hunting localities and trading routes.

I attended a series of Nullarbor caves expeditions 2014-2017 supporting a scientific project initiated and driven by Clare Buswell, who will tell her own story. Nevertheless, it was wonderful to be involved in this karst science and archaeology project. Women were very well represented on the project, which included documentation of Aboriginal flint mining heritage, chemistry investigations contributing to our understanding of speleogenesis, finger-fluting analyses, cave-dives seeking evidence of flint mining in the Last Glacial and baseline surveying. As at Bullita, ancient culture is more tangible in Australia's deserts than in wetter places, where the British have greatly altered landscape appearance and obscured evidence. I find assisting cave divers fascinating because of what's at stake. Their concentration in preparation and sense of anticipation is intoxicating.



**Herberts Pot** became a project only in the summer of 2018/19, but it's a project like no other. The cave had been closed since the 1990s and is famous among Tasmanians as the sportiest cave in the Mole Creek district; the longest and possessing the finest speleothems. Some passages in Herberts Pot contain extremely fragile and extensive fine erratic speleothems. The cave's closure has protected these features throughout a period that saw expansion of caving at Mole Creek.

My first trip made a strong impression on me. It was with the Southern Caving Society, led by Steve Harris, probably in 1980. The group of local cavers I was then caving with were using only SRT, so this was the first time I had used a Bonwick caving ladder! I was unprepared for this when I joined the trip. There is only one pitch, but it's a ghastly 25 m, being non-vertical for the bottom third, requiring skill and good technique on ladder. The line went down and we abseiled in, but Phil (who had only come in this far to rig for us) set up a ladder and safety line for our return. We explored as far upstream as the (then recently named) Tombstone Traverse, where we turned around. After several hours caving we returned to the pitch exhausted and in various stages of hypothermia (Angie being quite unwell). The whole experience was fairly gruelling and sporty as well as cold and wet, then and now. There were no such luxuries then as trog-suits and thermal undersuits. In those days we wore heavy drill cotton overalls with woollens underneath. The only reliable lights for long, wet trips were heavy Oldham mining units, of which two were required. After the pitch, we still had a considerable ascent to the entrance, unrelenting with strenuous and slippery free-climbing sections. I took the wrong lead and had to back down with jelly legs.

COVID-19 halted the Herberts Pot "conservation project" but it will be resumed soon I hope, as I am partway through reconnaissance for Herberts cave rescue plan. A small group of committed cavers are leading trips sanctioned by a Cave Access Policy process. Each trip has specific conservation objectives such as identification of fragile areas and route definition or affixing minimal rigging to assist the more dangerous climbs, preparing to "reopen" Herberts Pot to ASF caving groups under the Parks and Wildlife permit system. The cave was one of several in the highly valuable Mole Creek system (caves hydrologically connected by the Mole Creek stream) that were closed in 1997 by the owners, who were making a stand in protest at the Australian Heritage listing of the cave system and some real and/or imagined limitations on land use. Over the subsequent decades, negotiations by government representatives continued quietly to gradually purchase much of the land containing the cave system, in accordance with Kevin Kiernan's 1984 vision. And so Herberts was purchased and gated against such time as appropriate management of cavers could be decided and implemented. I doubted I would ever return, let alone after 40 years. I am stoked.

## DEB HUNTER, CAVING JOURNEY



*Simosthenurus occidentalis*  
(short-faced kangaroo) jawbone.

I found in a cave at Mt Cripps, NW Tasmania in 2005, contributing to research establishing the close temporal relationship of megafauna extinction to the first human migration, as elsewhere in Australia.

Photo provided by author

caves, I found a jawbone that excited SA researchers and contributed to confirming the relationship between megafauna extinction and the first human migration to Tasmania that you will read about in Lyndsey's contribution to this series. I also hold Chillagoe (FNQ) dear to my heart. I love the remoteness and type of caves there and at Cape Range (WA). My Australia wide interest is one reason I served on the ASF Exec from Jan 2009 to Jan 2019.

I had never been overseas when my aunt insisted I join her for a look at the UK in 2017 during the Australian winter. I was in my final postgraduate year and the break was welcome. I booked flights, but my aunt couldn't make it. So I used my opportunity to concentrate on UK caving. Being a Quartermaster of a small club in Tasmania meant I had made friends from around the world who promised to return hospitality, should I ever make it their way. So I looked up Sion Way of South Wales. Sion hosted me for some truly mind-blowing caving under the Brecon Beacons and Clydach Gorge near his home.

The highlight was our two-person trip through Dan Yr Ogof (pretty much all of it except the northern passage). We found ourselves struggling against a waterfall making our way back to the Longer Crawl en route to returning to the entrance. That's where I did my rotator cuff. There was a scary, rapidly flowing river and an almost roof sniffer swim almost back at the gate into the tourist section, where if you'd missed a roof handhold you would easily be swept into the sump.

From there I became a guest of the Red Rose Caving and Pothole Club, treated to some amazing experiences by Bill Nix, especially a through trip in the Ease Gill system from County Pot to Lancaster Hole, relatively dry conditions allowing for exploration of lower vadose canyons not always seen.

Science and speleology have been important to me since soon after I began caving, because I tagged along helping Kevin Kiernan during the fast and furious year of 1983 when he undertook his reconnaissance survey of the Mole Creek karst. He is a driven man. I particularly recall the palpable sense of wonder looking across the landscape as a geomorphologist, at the way each valley dips towards the margins and the caves, realising the glacial sculpting of the landscape and the true hydrological function and genesis of Mole Creek's caves. I'm so grateful for this formative experience that ultimately drove me to study science myself, researching hydro-geochemistry at Mole Creek and on to research recent geo-history of the Tasmanian landscape, including the two waves of human migration.

I have been privileged to be welcomed at Mt Cripps (NW Tasmania) many times by **Lyndsey Grey** and Paul Darby. Among other work documenting the karst and



Deb at the bottom of Corkscrew Takaka Hill NZ.  
Photo: Brian Evans



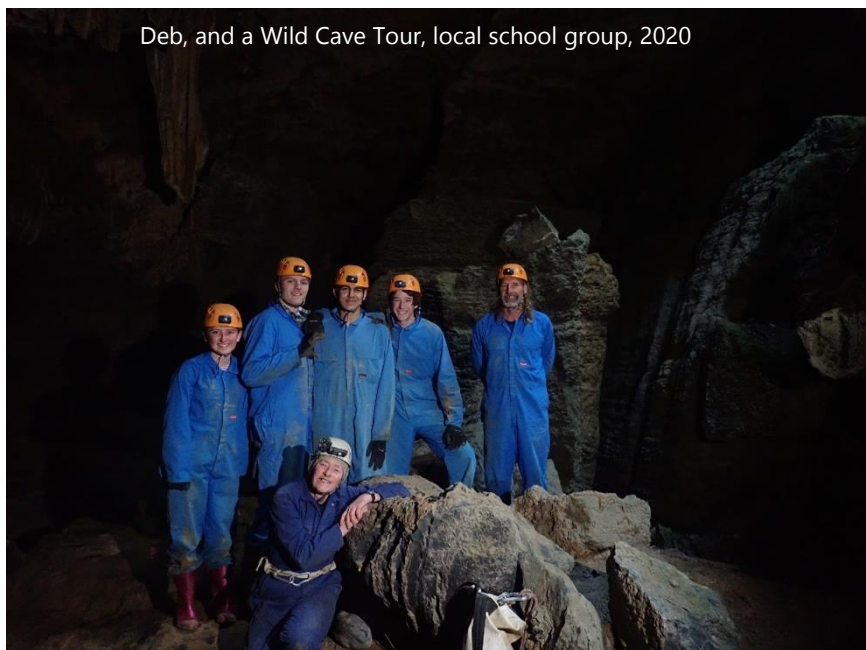
## DEB HUNTER, CAVING JOURNEY

Of course, New Zealand was next now I had a passport. I was to cross The Ditch twice: June 2018 with Jess and Cath, enjoying the South Island hospitality at Charleston and Nelson, and returning for the first cross-Tasman participation in New Zealand's three-yearly national Deep Cave SARex, followed by caving. Assisting in a small way during a dive connection project was very exciting. COVID-19 laid waste to the planned return in April this year.

I call myself a karst educator and conservationist. When wood chipping for export expanded in Tasmania in the late 1970s local conservationists were alarmed at the effects of clear felling on forests and other values such as amenity, water supplies and a dawning awareness of karst. I was involved in forestry silviculture at the time. Because I was a caver, I was asked what I thought would happen if broadacre clear felling was to go ahead across the catchment of the Mole Creek karst systems.

I asked the then president of the ASF, John Dunkley, what he thought. John came over to see for himself what was happening in the karst catchment and so began a long association with John, as well as the self-publication of a report on "Effects of Development on Karst Resources" in 1982 and a relentless series of political and community activities trying to influence managers and mitigate adverse land use outcomes for caves and karst. The Mole Creek Caving Club was established in 1990 with other conservation advocacy objectives as well as a locally-based gear store and building a caving community. MCCC member Phil Gregg and I, were part of the environmental advocacy. We took it further, establishing Wild Cave Tours the same year.

We hoped to make a bit of money in summer season from tourism, but the overall driver was to establish a safer and more environmentally aware professional caving service that was readily available locally and provided by club cavers. By example, we were countering a destructive sporting or self-fulfilling attitude to caving. This continues today, as part of a lifestyle choice I committed to then and which became integral to my conservation profile and practical involvement in projects. The business is the commercial arm of the club. It is licensed, insured and all of that.



Deb, and a Wild Cave Tour, local school group, 2020

It delivers genuine conservation-oriented speleology to some Tasmanian schools and some visiting schools. However, the most significant of my club's conservation projects has been the conservation of the Sassafras/Mayberry divide, a former state forest.

Land use and management issues are politically difficult anywhere, as is challenge to caving practices, however in Tasmania division over land conservation activism get really personal. It is indeed a small island community. Resource exploitation for profit, for economic expansion was having a multi-pronged attack on the caves and karst values of Mole Creek. I know that without the systematic efforts of my club

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in documenting caves of the Sassafras/Mayberry Divide, my stubborn political advocacy and networking, finally the adjoining riparian land purchase by the Tasmanian Land Conservancy, the boundary of the

Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area would not have been extended finally in 2013 to include this topographic corridor. An update in this ongoing effort to protect these caves and karst is in progress for publication in the next edition of the club's occasional journal.

Meanwhile, the 2013 TWWHA extension contains the most accessible undeveloped/wild beginner-level caves, meaning my Wild Cave Tours clients spend time cleaning up mud damage and rubbish after other groups. The positive side includes that management measures such as string lining and bootwash stations are finally being implemented to serve as educational prompts for groups. Also, after many years of participating in my speleological programs (not just outdoor recreation!), a local school is conducting a senior secondary Vocational Education and Training (VET) conservation unit, which will actuate karst window rehabilitation works following recent alpine peat fires in the catchment and consequent increased flood events.

Finally, a note on my work in cave rescue. I had a nasty caving accident Christmas 1992 that put me on my back for six months and left me in chronic pain and limited function in one leg and foot to this day. But worse, the accident interrupted cave rescue events. Our club was working with the police and SES whenever we could get a group of them to come out to Mole Creek. Caving clubs came together twice annually to a long table club update meeting at the SES's Northern Search and Rescue Liaison Committee, and so key people from the clubs (caving, walking and other clubs) kept in touch on a first name basis. Many of us attended quite amazing inter-agency northern land SAR events: all the various land, sea, caving and horseback groups across the north. But I was particularly keen in developing caving club specific interactions, for both good camaraderie and skills. Coinciding with a rise in activity by the ASF Australian Cave Rescue Commission (ACRC), I held a series of Tasmanian interclub events from 2011 with ACRC trainers. It was a thrill to see the interest in becoming more accountable in cave rescue among the caving clubs.

They became twice annually since then. The 2011 occasion when the first cave rescue stretcher and Michie phones were received in northern Tasmania was well attended by cavers across the state and it just went bananas from there. How good to have cavers all working together. The first rescue plan I wrote was Kubla's, which is now up for review. There is now a better protocol for developing complex cave rescue plans after NZ's model. Australian cavers have been working with NZ. At the first NZ national Deep Cave caveSARex attended by Australians last year, I learned heaps from every aspect of the operation and I looked forward to progressing to operation organisational roles, using my experience to help cave rescues run smoothly and accountably. NZ cavers also came to Australia to our first national rescue workshop... but you know about that.

I would do it all again in a heartbeat, body willing. I have seen some caving friends leave us in recent years, friends without whom I could not have done all these things and more. They know who they are if they are watching. The big constant in my life has been my son Evan, whom I admire tremendously and who constantly inspires me.

# CLARE BUSWELL: PASSION

Flinders University Speleological Society Inc

"We are trying to work out who has the smaller set of tits", said Mark. "You or Aimee". Aimee and I looked at each other. Clearly, we were wanted for our bodies. We both roared with laughter. As a pick-up line, it was bad! This was however, really about fitting through some chest crunching space that the blokes couldn't manage. Caving's like that if you are a woman, tolerated if you can fit through things and then ya have to cook dinner.

The Nullarbor is one of my favourite caving areas, but as every caver will attest, competition for that spot is fierce as each caving area is different. There are the amazing karst landscapes and caves of Slovenia, the Peak District in England, the Ice caves in Austria, then there is cave art - Niaux in France or Bullita or the Nullarbor. Then there are bugs and bats! That's the reason why caving and speleology has been a passion of mine for 40 odd years. Karst Landscapes never cease to amaze me, with massive underground rivers like the Reka of the Škocjan caves or the sand dune in Mullamulang cave. What's not to love? What places on the earth can you explore knowing that you are somewhere where few have been before or you witness the presence of past histories via archaeology, cave art or even graffiti. You can cave your way around the world, via the underground given the speleological community's warm welcomes.



Clare, Janis Cave, Yarrangobilly.  
Photo: Ken Smith

After years of introducing, and training up hundreds of people to go caving, my caving passions are wide ranging. I've been fortunate that caving has given me the skills to be the Safety Officer and by default the training person within FUSSI for a long time. (Let's face it, who else wants the responsibility for other's lives!). Building self-rescue resilience has also been a passion of mine, but it is hard work when there is such a turn-over of cavers, particularly within a Uni club. Within the Safety role, my motto has been to provide safe, friendly and fun caving opportunities as I believe cave and karst environments are something that everyone should experience. They are not the privileged domain of paleo's or

biologists, or commercial tour operators or the able-bodied.

I've a long-term interest in cave management, caver access and cave conservation. Always hot topics in a country hell bent on destroying natural environments. In the wider context of conservation battles in Australia, cavers have fought some of the earliest and longest. For example, the battle to save Mt Etna Caves in Qld, started in 1962, ending in 2008 when it was finally gazetted in a National Park. I was involved with the unsuccessful attempt by SA cavers, and many cavers from interstate, to save Sellicks Hill Quarry Cave, south of Adelaide in 1993/4. Endless hours of meetings, research, co-ordinating legal representation, writing articles in newsletters and much more. To this day, I refuse to buy any cement products, lime for soil PH conditioning or road base from this quarry. In 2018, the company that owns it, Southern Quarries, placed plans for a further extension of its activities at Sellicks, with the Department of Energy and Mines. Public consultation closed in March 2019 and we await further developments.

There seems to be a correlation between the hours spent caving and the hours spent writing about it in my life. I have been the long-term Editor of the FUSSI Newsletter and a short-term Editor, issue numbers, 127-136, of Caves Australia. Now Sil asks me to write for this special issue! So, I got to thinking about another passion of mine and that is the gender imbalance that pervades caving and speleology in this

## CLARE BUSWELL: PASSION

country. Why are women almost invisible, rarely heard and acknowledged are questions I have consistently asked myself over my years spent caving. I'm tired of looking at caving expedition photos with one or two women and 10 men in them or going to caving club meetings where I am one of three women in a group of 15 men!

So, I went looking for a few stats. I started with the ASF's awards to see if my observations about it being so male dominated was true. Why the ASF awards, I hear you ask, because of Edie Smith. The Edie Smith Award one of, if not the, ASF's most prestigious, is named after the first woman to become president of a caving club in Australia, the Canberra Speleological Society. She was elected as its president in 1958, four years after the club was formed<sup>1</sup>. Served in that position for one year and became its secretary in 1960. Edie was, according to records, a prime mover and driver of the club's speleological activities.<sup>2</sup> She was the first woman to graduate as a geologist from the University of Tasmania<sup>3</sup>. She was a life member of TCC, becoming its vice president in 1954.<sup>4</sup> Edie was passionate about caves: involved in survey work, exploration, vertical work, digging, and arguing for their protection.<sup>5</sup> Edie Smith died in 1967.

On another trip to Wee Jasper during the 1950s it was Edith who found the long passage between Dip 4 and 5. That was a discovery, "was an exciting moment!!" [Plate



Edie Smith at Wee Jasper caves. Circa 1959-1960.  
Photographer unknown.  
Source: ASF Newsletter  
No. 154.

The Edie Smith Award was first presented to Dr Aola Richards<sup>6</sup> and Ted Lane for their joint 10-year editorship of "Helictite" in 1972. It has since been awarded 31 times: 28 times to men and 3 times to women! The last time it was awarded to a woman was in 2007, to Grace Matts. The ASF award, the Certificate of Merit, which is for 'valuable service to speleology above normal involvement', has been awarded 103 times, 88 times to men and 15 times to women.

So, what is going on here? Are we not passionate enough? We need our many voices heard and our faces seen! If we do nothing, then women's contributions to speleology will continue to be marginalised, lost and forgotten, and those expedition photos of a couple of women and 10 blokes will continue.

So, I put out a challenge: run some women's focused events during the *Women's International Year of Caves and Karst* in 2021. Put on your those sequined overalls; all the better to shine a light on the caves and karst that inspires so much of our passion.

<sup>1</sup> Organized speleology started in Australia in 1946 with the establishment of the TCC. The ASF was established in 1956.

<sup>2</sup> Norman Poulter, Dr. Albert Goede. 'Who was Edie Smith'. Paper presented at the 23rd ASF Conference: A Cave Odyssey. Bathurst. 2001. <https://www.caves.org.au/resources/send/37-conference-proceedings/302-23rd-asf-conference-proceedings-1>

<sup>3</sup> This was in 1949. Ibid. p.4

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.4

<sup>5</sup> In particular Punchbowl cave.

<sup>6</sup> Aola Richards. Worked at the School of Biological Sciences, Discipline of Entomology UNSW. There were only four women employed at the school when she joined in 1965. When she retired 33 years later in 1994, there were only two. On her retirement to London her position was not replaced. She was a world-renowned entomologist, studying, glow-worms, cave crickets, ladybugs. Her collection went to CSIRO, Canberra. Croker, Graham. Entomological Era Closes at UNSW. *Uniken* No. 4. 31 March 1994. UNSW Public Affairs Unit.

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Kim Van Dyke	VLCT	Jessica Bertels	MCCC
Agnes Milowka and Christopher Milowka	CDA, VSA	Amy Robertson	STC
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Lauren Hayes	RMIT	Tom Aberdeen	VSA
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