

Don Matts

Don Matts died at home on 29th October 2001 as a well known and highly respected member of the Australian Caving fraternity. He was a Member of the Chillagoe Caving Club for some years and is remembered by the older age group of Club Members.

Don was born in 1931 in Paddington NSW and grew up in Sydney. He met Grace when he was 20 and married in 1956. Kaelene arrived in 1958 and Terry in 1962.

Don and Grace came to Chillagoe in 1968 and formed a lifetime association with Spring Cave - they still haven't mapped all its passages. At one stage Spring Cave looked like causing a divorce. In Chillagoe Don met Vince Kinnear and they formed a lifelong friendship.

Don and Grace were involved with Brother Nicholas Sullivan of New York and assisted him in planning his 1989 and subsequent scientific expeditions to Chillagoe. On one of these expeditions Brother Nick and Don discovered that it was not wise to do as they had done when they gave directions how to find the entrance to Manhattan Cave that they were then trying to relocate. They eventually located the tree with the misshapen limbs which was a key point in the directions - unfortunately it had burnt down and the misshapen limb was still smouldering on the ground..

Don organised a cave rescue exercise for the ASF at Bungonia and from this developed the NSW Cave Rescue Squad. For his efforts in cave safety and the Squad Don was awarded the first Life Membership in 1989.

In 1993 Don was awarded the OAM for his services to cave rescue and to speleology.

Don, like Vince Kinnear, suffered from emphysema which made walking any distance impossible and then he developed asteo and his spine degenerated making him stooped and with constant back pain.

Don is now at rest - that is if he and Vince haven't met up again as they planned to do. They wanted to sit on adjacent stools and talk about some good caving again.