



# CHILLAGOE CAVING CLUB

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## JULY 2014 NEWSLETTER

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### Wallace Creek

(P Bannink)

In late June I joined another expedition to the Wallace Creek Karst region. This time to support an investigation into the bat species present in the known (and easily accessible) caves in the Eastern Karst Block. While not an official CCC caving trip, it was an opportunity to investigate fully a few new cave entrances located in December last year and to hopefully find some new caves.

On the first day the team went to Tower T5005 to look at Semoni and Swiftlet cave. Tim had also spotted an large overhang, just off the top of the main ridgeline. Within 15 min, one new entrances was discovered in the vicinity of the existing caves, a small doline with a small fig tree growing out of the entrance.

Further along the ridge line, Chris and I looked at the large overhang which Tim had spotted. This initially revealed little in the way of passage, the floor was a jumble of large boulders and intersecting phreatic passage at the back of the overhang terminated after only half a meter. At the far end a slot between two boulders lead into a small entrance chamber which intersected a classic 2m phreatic rift. The sight of bats further in indicated there was more passage beyond. We

halted exploration until the right equipment could be prepared to detect and record the bats calls. The rest of the team were assembled and we all slowly entered to what seems a small phreatic network. It was not long before Olivia, descending small side passage to reviled even larger passages beyond.



© P.Bannink

The upper phreatic passage with roosting bats.

Back under a false floor, a side branch gave way to a sizable chamber (40m x 20m and 10m high) with a flat floor. A steep boulder pile dropped in from the other side and the faint glow of another entrance could be seen high above. The whole area was very easily navigable so Olivia and I briefly explored the chamber to find some more upper phreatics and a squeeze down to a deeper rift below.

A small bat roosting area was found with bat skeletons on the floor and some lovely formation. We all sat in silence for a while taking in the amazing discovery. Back at the entrance, exploration of the upper phreatics lead to a side passage which ended up at the other side of the large chamber, explored just before.



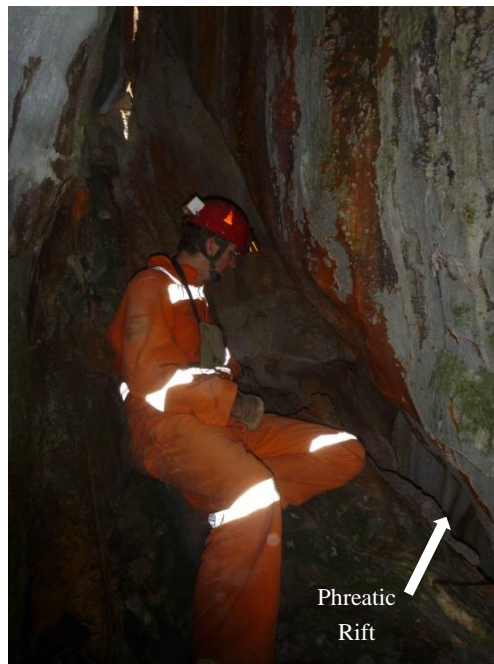
© P.Bannink

Olivia looking down the next 6m pitch

Another lead continued down into a very narrow 4m deep rift, bridging this, the passage continued on. To the LHS a small phreatic zone was encountered, which descended into a 8m deep narrow rift (rigging required), to the RHS another large deep chamber, descending about 10m to the bottom. A careful climb gets one halfway down, but a hand line would be needed for the last 5m. Bats were seen continuing the descent into further passage below and under our vantage point.

There are still more passages to explore in this cave and the upper phreatics may reveal more surprises and squeezes, the narrow descending rifts for now remain unexplored.

Our next challenge was to explore Swiftlet Cave, which had in the meantime been relocated by Chris. The entrance is a lovely smooth phreatic rift (~8m deep) just under a large block of limestone. The rift was just too narrow (25cm) for me to feel comfortable descending. I was also not sure if one could prussic out of it, maybe a very thin caver!



© P.Bannink

The entrance to Swiftlet Cave

The Fig Tree Doline located a few hours before was only 15m away so it was suggested to try to enter the cave from this entrance (the caves might join).

Semoni cave entrance (only 30m further down) is also a squeeze between large boulders. A short hand line helped us descend a short 4m rift into a small cave. A main passage continued on for a few metres between the boulders and narrow rifts, to a flood zone. A small bat colony resided in the lowest level, a lead between rocks at the base continued to another small chamber, with daylight from another entrance. Any leads were very small and seemed not worth the effort.

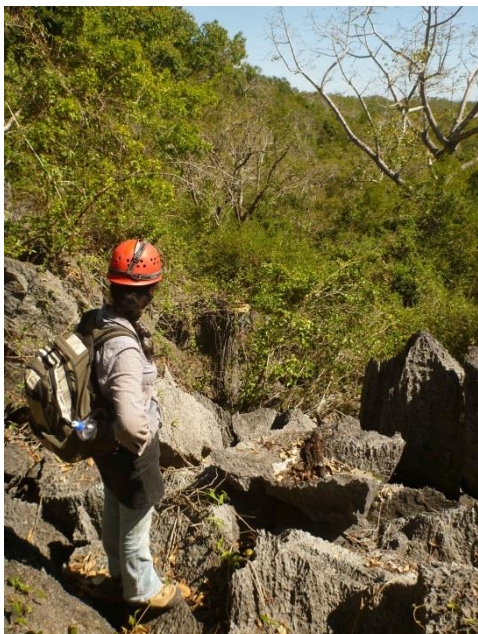


© P.Bannink

Looking up Fig Tree Doline

Our last challenge for the day was to descend Rubble Pit, an entrance about 100m further down the tower. Four of us trudged over the lower karst area for a whole hour (with all the vertical gear) before finally giving up. It's a tiny entrance dropping into a 4m wide x 8m deep rift, but you could not spot the entrance from 10m away. My trusty old GPS (due to poor reception) kept on saying it was another 100m away, which confused the issue. It was very frustrating to not find it.

Day 2 and we decided to descend Fig Tree Doline to see if it connected to Swiftlet Cave. A five metre pitch between fig tree roots ended on a pile of boulders, however another parallel shaft could be accessed too one side. Though quite narrow, the next shaft was very smooth and required more rigging. Dropping another 6m, the shaft now only (1.2m x 0.8m) wide ended on a solid gently sloping floor, intersecting a horizontal flattener, only about 30cm high.



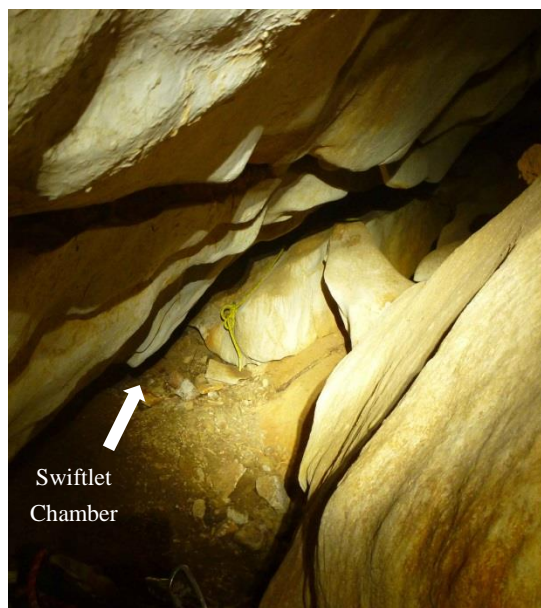
Olivia examining the potential (rubble & rainforest)

© P.Bannink

Sliding through, we found a small area of tiny phreatic rifts, one can could only crouch in. What a disappointment after getting down such a great doline. The swiftlets could be heard flying around in a larger chamber, less than 2m away. The link is the horizontal flattener at the base of the pitch, but only 20cm high. There is only one squeezable section, and I was not happy even thinking about getting in. Another tiny squeeze runs parallel to the flattener, but I could not hear the birds down this passage and it is unlikely to connect.

I spent the next half an hour surveying the small phreatic section and then another 20min looking for

my blasted gloves. A slow ascent (surveying out) took another half an hour, finally getting to the top to de-rig, I found my gloves sitting on a rock at the top. In all the excitement, I forgot I did not have them down there after all!!!!



The phreatic rift at the bottom of Fig Tree Doline

© P.Bannink

The afternoon was spent identifying the calls of bats inhabiting Ripple Cave (WC7). We managed to get up the smooth "cascade" and explore the upper section again. All the leads seemed to be going up into avens above. Failing battery lights halted further exploration, so we called it a day.



Passage in Yam Cave (WC11) - Western Karst Block

© P.Bannink

The third day was spent at the Western Karst Area. The karst landform consists of low rounded karst hills rather than razor sharp towers. Four small caves had previously been documented in the main block in the early 1990's.

A small cave was located by Tim & Sally on the northern side, this consisted of two 10m long intersecting rifts. A perfectly round impassable link (10cm wide) at the end of the main rift leads on into a small hot humid bat chamber. The cave has been called Yam Cave after a distinctive feature at the entrance and assigned the number WC11. We surveyed the cave and then explored further around the outcrop, to relocate WC8 and WC9.

Another phreatic cave located by Olivia had evidence of Ghost Bats feeding at the entrance and is currently thought to be part of WC10. A brief trip report and maps of the new caves are being prepared for the club.

### **CH69 Survey Continues** (P Bannink)

Last week a few members joined SSS on the last days of their Chillagoe expedition. A small team assembled late in the morning with the aim of surveying the new extension to Rescue Cave explored in May. The cave has more vertical rather than horizontal passage, so you are endlessly climbing and descending rifts. It took about half an hour to find the area of the new link and start the survey.

Paul had his trusty and modified Disto X, making recording all the reading for a single shot, compacted into a one second bleep. Paul also used a cave survey [App] on his mobile phone to put the data straight in and draw up the cave on route.



Paul drawing up the survey – on route

The start of the survey was in a large chamber, with the 'link' high up on the opposite side. To the left, there is a connection with a large aven and a 12m deep pit, which was currently unexplored. After

some careful rigging, we surveyed our way down to find we were in the new section explored in May.

We pushed the lower level to another daylight aven, where a 5m pitch links to the rest of the new section. This can only be accessed from the 20m abseil explored in May. Thanks to Paul for a great trip and successfully adding more cave survey to Rescue Cave.



Geoff ascending the 12m pitch.

### **AGM**

All members will soon receive a letter inviting participation in the AGM and provide input into planned changes to the constitution; the minutes from the last general meeting (in May) will be included. The new date for the AGM has been set for the October 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> (long weekend), when southern members will be visiting Chillagoe.

### **Sewerage Issues**

The executive have had to call in the plumbing experts to resolve Carol's plumbing issues. Until this is resolved, can members refrain from using the downstairs toilets in the clubhouse.

### **Up and Coming Events**

#### **July**

- 12/13<sup>th</sup> July - Club Weekend at Chillagoe

#### **August**

- 9/10<sup>th</sup> August - Club Weekend (expressions of interest for a Trip Leader)

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#### **September**

- 9- 12<sup>th</sup> – Mundoo High School at clubhouse
- 13/14<sup>th</sup> - Club Caving Weekend at Chillagoe

Go Caving!

Peter Bannink & Winfried Weiss (Secretary)