



CAVERNDISH

NSG's NEWSLETTER

August 2010

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From the Editor:

Hello Readers, Cavers

Winter is well underway and pleasantly mild.

No snow caving for us this winter as yet, though plenty of other caving has been done.

A recent highlight for me was going down to the bottom of Swiss Maid to the Green Link connection on a rigging trip in preparation for the grand crossover trip. The following weekend two teams of four met at the hut. All night it rained, heavy at times. In the early morning drizzle it was decided to postpone going anywhere near Green Link. Having still never been into Green Link I could only imagine what they were talking about. Watergate sounded wet at the best of times. A quick change of plan, we crossed the road and took advantage of the ropes already down Middle Earth, headed down to Smaug's and then off to explore Andrew's recent discovery in Bilbo's Batch. The day involved some interesting twisting tight manoeuvres through rockfall, some belly crawling and the awesome sight of a 25-30mtr waterfall pounding straight down from a hole high above. We exit the cave into a clear starry night and wondered what Green Link was doing.

A great trip and how lucky we are to have such great caves so close to home and only a stone throw away from the car parking. The cross over trip still awaits us.

This edition of Caverndish comes with thanks of appreciation to Michael who has kept us updated with his adventures in Middle Earth.

I do wonder though how Piglet and Kanga managed to fit into the Lord of the Rings theme. Surely Smaug would eat such creatures! ☺

It is great to get articles, so please, if you have done some caving related activity, I want to hear about it, even if only a few lines, I am more than happy to receive it...SO SEND IT!

Now on a different note...

NSG will hold a 50 years celebration on August 21st.

The invite is open to all past, present and future members.

Details are available on the website www.nsg.org.nz

It is vital to return a Registration form to confirm your attendance ASAP.

And a big welcome to new member Bruce Davies, hope you enjoy your time with the club ☺

Make yourself a beverage, sit back and enjoy the latest edition of Caverndish.

Dawn ☺

Editor

From the President:

Well it's an exciting time in caving at the moment.

Following hard on the heels of Piglet's Palace and the bolting of Powelliphanta shaft we have new passages left and right off Smauge's Hall. These passages have been walked past year after year and even resisted discovery when three people were stuck there for an extended length of time. I am talking about Middle Earth cave of course.

The Mid winter Doo was yet another success with Darryl releasing secrets regarding the cooking of the lamb and guest appearances of the Air Heads, Santa and the two Ronnies.

But looking forward we have a Swiss Maid X Greenlink trip which Seb and my self have worked on for some time, this is a fantastic trip and I'm quite looking forward to it.

Little Harwood's is also not far away. This is a great photographic trip with many protected pretties in the cave, protected because of the 50m pitch entrance.

Mid August is host to the big event of the year and that's our 50th Jubilee.

Anyway I'll see you at the Entrance.

Andrew

We have had "Where am I?" and "Myth Busters", this time we have a couple of "what am I?"

What am I?

What am I?

I have 5 sliding fingers

You have the thumb

My best friend is Dee and Crab

I have a fetish for nylon and polyester

I will pull your hair if you dangle it in my face

What am I?

I am down trodden

I'm often kicked left and right

My gums are white and often left unclean

Michael's Adventures:

By Michael Brewer

Saturday, November 7th – A big find!

This time James Alker, Heidi Godfrey and I headed back to Ablution stream way for more drilling and climbing. On the way in we went via the upper levels by going up Bungee pitch. We stopped to put a new bolt in at the top of the pitch to back up the single 1992 terrier and also we rigged a rope down the Hopkinson rock pile to avoid the horrible little crawl Mick had pioneered.

The weather was dry and the cave was a lot quieter than the previous trips until we reached Ablution which seemed as wet as

always. The ropes we had rigged up the climbs were also still depressingly in the wet. Half way up the ropes we noticed a snail shell sitting on one of the ledges!

James rerigged and led a part of the climb which had been derigged the last trip and then we were climbing up towards the last rope he had rigged previously. We sent James on ahead into the unknown while Heidi and I settled down for a brew. After 10 minutes of silence from James I began to get more interested in going up the last rope to the limit of exploration. Soon afterward James was heard yelling that he had found a large chamber, this sent Heidi and I both scrambling for our gear.

Two short waterfalls and about 20m of passage later we found ourselves in a very impressive chamber which our inlet had obviously cut into. The chamber (probably to be named Piglet's Palace) is 100 -150m long, 10- 15m wide and 10 -15m high. The floor is predominantly mud, calcited boulders and flow. There are numerous small stalactites but the main feature is an enormous flowing column 10m high and 4-5m in diameter. This is unfortunately covered mostly in a layer of fine mud but around the back it is pristine white. Another feature is the 'beehive' which is a stalactite about 3m tall rising to a point with a broad base.

The chamber seems to end with the lower end being blocked by a rockfall and the upper end being blocked by calcite flow. There is a pitch down out of the floor which may lead somewhere interesting.

After this we returned to the vertical area and James abseiled down a shaft which seems to run parallel with our climb. Unfortunately he ran out of rope but could see what seems to be a flat floor beneath him.

We then packed up and returned home via the upper levels to avoid the Greenlink stream way. We emerged at midnight after a 15 hour trip.

This is certainly the most significant find in this system for some years. Altogether I estimate that we have found about 300m of new passage although a lot of it is vertical. The potential for more seems very promising. There is still another inlet to explore off our aven and then there is the parallel tube. What formed this new chamber is unclear as our inlet seems to have cut into it coming out of the roof a little way into the chamber.

There must be more!

January 1st, 2010 - Middle Earth rigging and Surveying trip.

James Alker, Bruce Mutton and myself spent eight hours replacing the ropes on the Smaug's Hall pitch and the Connection pitch as well as re-rigging the ropes to remove any rub points and to make getting off and on them easier. We also replaced the rope in the Slot (the beast of a slot!) but this needs further re-rigging.

Having done this we then did the first paperless surveying in NZ caving history! Using our handheld computer and our electronic instrument (DistoX) for measuring distance, bearings and gradient we surveyed and sketched 150 m of passage. This was done successfully and after the trip the data was transferred electronically to my home computer enabling the map to be drawn up within an hour or two. The accuracy of the survey using this method was impressive with less than a 1% loop closure error, ie less than 1m out over 100m.

The trip out was a bit unsettling as apparently there had been heavy rain for 2-3 hours while we were underground and things were wetter than when we came in. The entrance pitch was wet for the first 5m going up and there was water running through the entrance rock pile.

The other significance of this trip is that the Greenlink, Middle Earth, Swiss Maid system has now reached a total survey length of over 10km.

More will follow!

Sat 20th Feb, 2010. The lead that should have been

Bruce, Seb, Andrew Smith and I entered Middle Earth about 9.00am with a 12 hour deadline so that Bruce could be home by 11pm. On the way in Seb and I stopped to finish rigging the slot by putting a bolt in so that the hanging of the rope would go through the widest section. In the meantime Andrew and Bruce went off on a mission to the bottom of Double Dekker pitch to sort out a surveying issue.

We took about three hours to get to the bottom of the pitch series in Ablution stream way. At this point Seb and I geared up for a bolt climb up into what I hoped would be a massive phreatic tube that would lead us not only to the lower part of Perseverance cave but also conveniently bypass the terminal rockfall in Greenlink. This was an ambitious plan that the cave gods rebelled against, handing out instead an alcove which went back about 5m from the top of the climb. This took about 7 bolts and an hour and a half to discover! Is there a market out there for an underground climbing wall?

In the meantime Bruce and Andrew moved off to climb up into Piglet's palace via Piglet's inlet to survey it. On the way they disturbed a couple of large boulders which fell about 50m to the bottom of Powelliphanta shaft. Having found Piglet's palace Bruce's conscience got the better of him and he decided to come back down the rope series and check that the ropes hadn't been damaged. They hadn't been which was lucky as Seb and I had started coming up them.

Conditions in the cave were as dry as they had ever been. We all gained Piglet's palace soon after 2.30 and hurriedly started surveying. Seb went ahead with flagging tape to mark a course through this remarkable chamber. Bruce was drawing on the PDA and Andrew and I took turns using the DistoX to send Bruce a bewildering amount of information. We soon learnt that we had to slow down with our multiple dimension shots or poor Bruce was going to be left behind with a confusing mass of data. The DistoX proved to be great at being able to define the dimensions of the cavern accurately as well as pinpointing some of the formation.

We surveyed only 175m before time was up and we started exiting the system. Alas Piglet's palace remains disconnected from the rest of the cave but Bruce has done an estimate drawing of where he thinks it lies.

Bruce and Seb rushed off and got out by 9.30 while the boys with the heavy packs surfaced at 11.15pm.

Still more surveying to do and a couple of possible leads.

27th March 2010. Upper Ablution Streamway

Dion Richards, Richard Bramley and I returned to the bottom of Greenlink to do a bit more surveying and hopefully a bit more exploration. It was Dion's first time to the depths of this cave whereas in contrast Richard had been there just the week before with Bruce. Richard claimed that his body really hurt after that trip but as he was happy to return a mere 7 days later I suspected he didn't really know what pain is!

We had a 8am entrance into the cave and reached the survey bolt just after the traverse near the top of the Powelliphanta shaft in about 3 1/2 hours. From here we crossed into Upper Ablution Streamway and surveyed upwards for about 4 hours with a break halfway to re-climb a 16m pitch that Geoff had originally climbed back in November. The hangers were still on the bolts and so all that was required was to aid up. I did the climb with Dion belaying me.

We used our paperless survey system again which worked really well. The main problem was that the Bluetooth function seemed to go to sleep once in a while and so it needed rebooting. One survey point was weird. Suddenly the compass reading was swinging by about 60degrees and we concluded there must have been some metal around in the rock?? The survey came to 160m with a vertical gain of about 60m.

The dig at the end seemed a real goer for awhile. Lose shingle soil and a good draught through a hole. After about an hour I managed to get my head down and look through the hole and it looked like a sizeable chamber on the other side. Alas after a bit more digging and a serious squeeze I gained the 'chamber' to find that it was only about 1/2 meter in height and full of water! The possible exit looked small and required serious wallowing to get to it! I retreated.

We packed up and took about 5 hours to get out exiting at about 22.30 with the only real event being the snagging of the entrance rope when we were pulling it up. Richard kindly went back down to free it. Dion was very apologetic for having left the knot in the end of the rope.

Housekeeping

- Retied the knots on the re-anchor half way up Powelliphanta shaft to allow more slack on the rope above. This could still do with some more thought to reduce rubbing.
- Put a 25m rope on cannonball alley as a hand line.
- Took a 25m static rope part of the way out leaving it at the top of the Pitch of Gloom (30p)
- Most of the gear is still stashed at the survey bolt. 25m of dynamic rope. 3-4 slings and the bolt bag, bolting hammer etrier etc.
- Took out the two fertiliser bags
- Left the hangers on the pitch in upper ablution but no rope.

Saturday the 26th June 2010 Middle Earth System now over 11km in Length and growing.

On Saturday the 26th June 2010 when most NSG members were rolling over in bed dreaming of the coming nights, mid-winter dinner, Bruce Mutton, Kip Mandeno and Michael Brewer were groveling their way down Middle Earth to Smaug's Hall.

The plan was to survey some streamway passage to connect in the recent Bilbo's Bach find to Smaug's then to have a look around for more leads. While Bruce was abseiling down the Smaug's Hall pitch Kip and I decided to have a quick look up the flow on the true left of the stream at the pitch head. After a couple of easy scrambles up rock piles we suddenly realised that we were in new passage. Soon afterwards we broke into a large chamber (now named Shirlob's Lair so as not to break tradition with the Lord of the Ring's theme). Without looking any further we returned to Smaug's Hall to start surveying with Bruce.

Kip soon took to surveying using the DistoX and hand held computer. Trying to stop him from painting every inch of the passages with the laser DistoX beam became quite a problem.

After lunch we returned to Shirlob's Lair and surveyed up a large chamber with one wall covered in flow and decoration. The chamber finished in a slab rock fall that we pushed for a few minutes but then retreated home to pretty ourselves up in preparation for the midwinter dinner.

We surveyed 330m of passage with several leads still remaining. The top of Shirlob's Lair is level with the bottom of the Entrance pitch. The total surveyed length of the Greenlink-Swiss Maid-Middle Earth system now adds up to 11001m!

By Michael Brewer

Trip Stories

Smaug reveals treasures.

By Andrew Smith

Friday, not the usual day being a week day to go caving but Richard was chomping at the bit to get under ground. Richard is leaving for the island off the western coast of New Zealand on Sunday and will be there for some time.

The objective was to bolt climb a going waterfall lead off Smaug's Hall in Middle Earth cave.

The whizzing sound of the rope through the rack has always been music to my ears and today's whiz was no different. The main pitch was rigged and down the three of us went. On reaching Smaug's Hall a short while later Michael lead the way into an unlikely looking pile of rocks. Crawling, climbing, he kept us going with promises of what might lie above and beyond this newly discovered waterfall lead.

After several hours Richard had made good progress and made fast an anchor to ascend, I was the first followed closely by Michael. The passage way was small with several smaller waterfalls just to test our resolve. Eventually we crawled into an aven which along with the cooling effects of the water shower was the end of the lead. This is where the surveying started.

Something I haven't told you about was that when Richard was working on the waterfall climb Michael and I did a little exploring of our own, in fact we found a way on through the rock fall into a small chamber. This looked promising for a start but then all leads closed down.....except of one small squeeze unlikely slot at our feet. I got down and had a look, looking through a calcited area almost too small to fit through I could see an area that looked like a bedding plain that you might get in limestone.

I slid through the gap between two calcited rocks and found to my surprise a passageway heading left and right. The rock fall area was behind me, I was now in blue marble cave passage.

Michael enquired as to whether or not it was worth his while coming through the squeeze, my reply was "Hell yes"

After a bit of grunting and words whispered under his breath, like "This better be worth it" he too slid through.

The passage was low with limited standing room but we continued. We were travelling along an ancient stream way, straws everywhere. All of a sudden the way on changed, we were forced down and onto our tummies, wriggling with about 200mm above our heads we proceeded. Very soon we could hear the sound of a waterfall ahead, and not just a small amount of water either. The closer we got the louder the roar. I wondered what the way on would be like, we were on our tummies trying to make progress wending our way between the formations but there is a large water fall ahead somewhere, it was hard to make sense of it. I could now feel the draft and the cool that one feels when near a large amount of moving water.

Then there it was! We found ourselves on a ledge half way up the waterfall. Looking down about 15meters and looking up 27meters. The chamber was large and upon exploring we found a large passage hidden behind a big column. The going was now easy; in front of us an up climb and a down pitch. We both looked at each other and decided that we had best get back to where Richard would have finished his job.

Richard was wet and cold but to show for his work there was now a rope coming from the roof above his waterfall.

After Surveying Richards passageway we decided to continue the survey down stream to our newly found way on.

We surveyed to the centre of the large waterfall chamber where we made a monument marking the survey station and our achievements.

The rockfall back out to Smaug's Hall held no surprises except for appearing to be longer than on the way in.

Richard Bramley, Michael Brewer, Andrew Smith

Nettlebed Camera Rescue

By Nicolas Barth

This is the story of a successful cave rescue despite a 92 day response time! To explain:

Back in October I led a two-day trip through Nettlebed Cave; down Blizzard Pot, "over-nighting" at Salvation Hall, then heading out the Nettlebed entrance 890m below the Blizzard Pot entrance. On the second day, at some point between Ancient Briton and Rockfall K, I managed to lose my waterproof camera. Carefully reconstructing my memories of where my pack was open led me to determine the bottom of the Overlander to be the most likely place to find it. Here I dropped my pack into the small streamlet at the base of the pitch and it was picked up by someone else in the party. Perhaps the camera could have fallen out here. As we were pressed to get out of the cave before our callout time and join the first night of the NZSS AGM, steps were not retraced and we headed out. This camera had some important photos on it pertaining to my PhD research as well as some other photos I would rather not lose (not to mention the camera!).

Luckily two separate groups were planning Nettlebed trips in the next two weeks so I gave a detailed description of the camera and where it could have been lost. Rewards were offered. Unfortunately both trips were cancelled and my camera sat, hopefully, safely and quietly in the depths.

Months passed by. Months during which some photos of hard to reach rock outcrops were sorely missed. Nettlebed remained unvisited; a camera sat. It is a horrible thing to know where something is but to realize there are formidable obstacles between it and you (like a ten hour drive, a steep bush tramp, and several hours of caving).

January arrives and I find myself on the Ellis Basin expedition, all too aware of my proximity to my camera. I hiked out over the tops to Flora Saddle. So close! The next time I could be up this way could be a long time off. I set a callout time and got an early start the next morning.

Call to action! Rescue initiated! Scattered showers all night ensured a long hike through wet bush. I was drenched before long. Going downhill I found that I had veered off the markers on the ridge which amounted to an extra hour traversing obstructed bush to get back on track. After some time, I arrived at the Nettlebed entrance where an ominous fog emanated from the darkness. Luckily my in-cave navigation was far more effective and I had no trouble finding my way in other than some modest navigational wonderment initially finding the Prickly Tube. I passed through the slight constriction beneath the Overlander and intently searched my way up the stream. There, on a rock in the middle of the stream in its black neoprene case, I found my camera resting quite happily. I was thrilled to not have to return empty-handed (or to put on SRT gear and go

further into the cave).

I made it back to the entrance in 45 minutes. The water level in the Pools and Ducks were very low and the dry gum boots were much appreciated. The Hinkle Horn Honking Holes were raging unlike I have experienced before. My small pack size made the squeezes quite easy to pass. I acted the part of a wet sponge on the slog back up the hill as lightning and thunder and torrential rain were apparently localized directly overhead. I have never before seen waterfalls dripping off individual trees before!

What was seen as a chore actually turned out to be quite enjoyable in the end. Somewhat amazingly, after charging the battery and allowing the camera to defog, the camera still works like new!

Ngarua (Hobson) Cave, Takaka Hill

By John and Katrina Richards

In late October, 2009, John Richards went to Golden Bay for the Annual Meeting of the NZSS. Several caving trips were run over four days and he managed to get underground on the Saturday. He went through the local public caveNgarua (also known as Hobson). Moira Lipyeat had arranged a lower rate for caving club members. Five people went: Moira with her walking stick, John with his walking stick, Catherine (pregnant), Katrina, and Jennifer.

The Cave Guide issued plastic helmets and took us on an unhurried trip through. She unlocked the door and we went to a lower level down a wooden staircase. It was all very civilised: we were on wooden boardwalks part of the way and there was a discrete electric light system installed throughout. The cave is not disappointing: it has some nice formations, the path winds up and round, and up and down, following the natural cave contours, and it does not feel over civilised. There are bones at one part: a small moa, I think. Unlike most caves around Canaan, the temperature was not cold... 11 or 12 degrees. Some people have even been married at the nice cavern called (I think) the Wedding Chapel.

According to the map in the Cave Atlas, Ngarua is about 200 metres long. Near our exit, which was discovered first, many names have been written in pencil on the formations. The earliest date found is May 1876. There are also some candle remains from the early days.

To get out, we sent Katherine up first. She had to climb the stainless steel ladder and open the escape hatch. Then we could all exit through a small tomo, and walk round the grassy paddock and down the road back to the car park.

There are several rocks to sit on along the way back, if your legs need a rest. Toilets and a gift shop at the main office.

There were tours starting every two hours from 10 am until 4 pm at that time of year. It costs to get in, but it is worth it, especially if you want a short trip that is easily walked by all ages, in a not-cold cave with no gloves or lamps needed, that is close to a car park!

The Hole's the Goal

(A first descent into Harwood Hole - by Darryl Ware)

When I first came to Nelson, twenty years ago, I was a scuba diver. But I was a spoiled scuba diver, having lived in Northland for over a decade, and then working all around the Pacific Islands during my first Nelson decade. So my dive gear was old when the century ended, (like me) and needed replacing (like me). Besides, the diving around Nelson just didn't compare with what I had been experiencing.

But replacing the gear was going to cost a four figure sum, and would probably outlast me, due to the fewer appealing opportunities now. I made a resourceful decision - or a cunning plan. Why don't I go for the asset-rich environment of caving in Nelson, swapping the concerns of depth, carnivorous animals and available air underwater for just one concern (absent underwater) of gravity?

I looked down Harwood Hole, or I thought I did. I peered over the edge, I walked and climbed around its maw, trying to see what might be entailed in getting into it - and what might be entailed in getting out again. It called me.

So I made inquiries as to how to go caving and who with. The Information Centre came up with one name, Ian Millar. I filed that name away and got on with diving the world's top spots while my employer paid for my air fares and time, knowing such a sinecure must end some day. When it did, I sat back and said "Well, that was good. Now let's have another look at that big hole in the hill".

Just then a small notice in *The Nelson Mail* offered an 'Open Day' by NSG, a chance to try out caving. So I tried it out and it was good, even if some of its adherents appeared a little, well, odd. (*Who are you calling 'odd'? - Ed.*)

I assembled the SRT gear and the clothing, encouraged by the fact that I already owned a lot of well-worn clothing with holes in it, just like a real caver. I went on caving trips and talked utter rubbish with cavers. They encouraged me, and things got to the point where I felt ready to achieve the hole that was my goal.

Last month, NSG's *El Presidente*, Andrew Smith said "We go down on Saturday 10th April. As it's an 11-12 hour trip, we'll stay in the hut on Friday night, so as to get an early start on Saturday." So here I go. I am going to do this thing, and it will be done one-way. Ascending the same rope is not an option, for I just don't have the strength. Starlight Cave is the only way out for me, and if there's a slot I don't fit, I will have to stay there and starve till I do.

Despite the call for an early start, the party of cavers, except me, stayed up till about midnight. Next morning, finding myself alone in one room, I charitably assumed nobody wanted to interrupt my sleep with their snoring. But they felt it was the other way around. OK, we'll leave it at that. No point in upsetting hut companions with allegations about snoring or farting. I might

need their help!

The new 200m rope was produced and we all paid obeisance to it in the manner of a blues song:

Oh rope, oh baby, you know I gotta go

Let me down easy, let me down slow

Saturday was another brilliantly fine Nelson day – not that we were going to see a lot of that once down the hole. The rope was rigged and for a ‘first-timer’ like me, I suppose I went through the feelings most first-timers go through, e.g. “Panic is not an option. Remember your training and advice. Don’t look down, just at the rock in front of you. Further down, the rope will go through the rack faster, so control it firstly with your thumb, pressing the last bar against the rope, then wind the rope around your gumboot. Panic is not an option.”

I was the second one to go down, after Andrew had reached the bottom. I moved confidently down the access rope, rigged at a 45 degree angle till it reached “The Ledge”. I felt this was a bit of a misnomer because it was a small lip of rock about 20cm wide, beyond which was the abyss. I did not look that way, as I had been urged not to. But I knew it was there. My heels were sticking out over it.

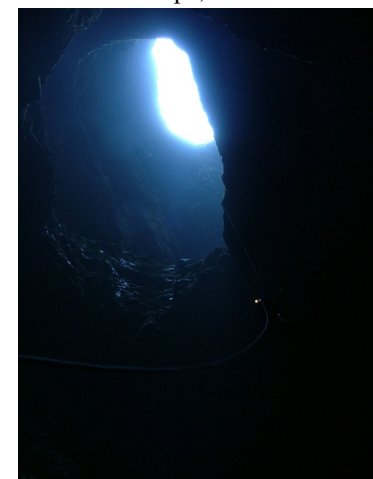
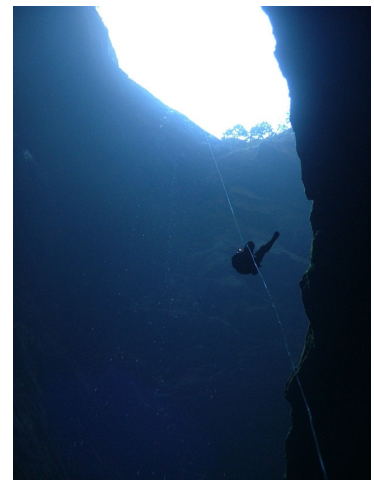
Now to change over to the main rope, dangling 176m into the place I was not looking. Carefully, oh so carefully, I attached my cowstails to Rope One’s terminus, and detached my rack from it. There was a problem with threading my rack onto the main rope because it weighed about 15kg, so much of it dangled below. Clipping my jumrah onto it upside down and hauling it up seemed a good theory, but in practice I did not have enough elbow room (I felt) to gain enough slack to do the job. But Dawn Wood and Seb Head were there to talk me through the process, and I made sure my weight was on the rack on the main rope, and unclipped my cowstails. I was now truly at the point of no return. Hallelujah!

I began cautiously pulling myself down. As the rope was new, and I was keeping the rack tight, not knowing just when it might become “easier”, this entailed effort. I watched the rack and the rock face beyond. But I did not look down. Oh no. Then I came to a bit of an under hang (well, that’s what I was doing, hanging under it). Without my consent, I rotated slowly on the rope. The view was somewhat larger, and always, there was the opportunity to look down. I resisted that, and continued pulling the rope up so I slid, no, lowered myself.

Just about at the point where I thought that I am getting rather tired in the right arm with all this pulling, it got easier. At the same time I found I was hanging over the void. I tried to look only at the rack. But – curse my peripheral vision – I was only too aware of where I was, somewhere I had never been before, and it felt good. I felt I was going to do it, as long as it did not get too “easy” on the descent.

But it did, just as the others had said. The rope got thinner, and therefore faster.

I passed through a rim of rock, a huge circumference, and somewhere, at the edge of my vision I saw a light below, of Andrew holding the end of the rope. All I had to do, he said, if I felt I was going too fast, was to holler, and he would pull on the rope, so as to increase the resistance where it went through my rack. I had to believe this, but I did not holler. I tried the idea of winding the dangling rope round my right gumboot, but abandoned that for hand control. The right glove got a bit warm and left some of its palm rubber on the rope, but I arrived at the bottom in a controlled and relieved manner.



Then I looked up. What a feeling! It was like an intestinal parasite suddenly seeing the sphincter to the outside world. There I was in a huge bowl-shaped chamber, with a rim of rock, then another chamber leading to a small opening to the sky. Of course that opening was not small, but from the bottom it looked like something no bigger than a plughole at the end of a drainpipe.

And from the outside world away up there dangled a gossamer-thin thread. Surely that could not support my 84kg body! But it had, and look, there was a tiny bulge on it now, slowly, very slowly, approaching.

One by one the party abseiled down to Falling Rock Landing Zone A. It got a bit cold waiting for all to get down, but after a time most surely of wonder, the caving party was down, Andrew, me, Dawn, Seb, Carl and Shane, time to move off.

The first stage was to get down the chunky scree slope to the stream bed in Starlight Cave. We passed the memorial to Peter, who died 50 years ago when a rock fell on him while he was descending. His cairn is topped by his helmet and ancient carbide lamp, and his soccer (sorry, foot) ball. The area is kept swept clean of rocks and gravel. It is a fitting memorial.

Once we reached the series of clear, deep pools, Seb began the realisation of his goal, to swim through each pool, like Burt Lancaster in that 1968 film “The Swimmer”. Only Seb’s submersible progress was not as ultimately depressing as Burt’s Connecticut swimming pool odyssey. In fact Seb had a great time. He’d always wanted to do this. I can’t argue with that. I had also wanted to be here. For twenty years I had wanted to be here, and here I was.

The water level was pretty low, so squeezes like Shorty’s Terror were not as damp as they might be, though I learnt the hard way to go into it high. There is a pinch gut crevice at the bottom of the crawl, and it’s a place you don’t want to wedge your hips in.

We emerged at 4 o’clock onto a sunny, steep rockfall where somebody had designated a slightly flat-topped rock about 1.5m square to be a helicopter landing pad. Shane said he’d been down to it via helicopter once, and it could rest one skid on the

rock, that's all.

After a brief warm up in the sun, we took to the least popular part of the expedition, the scramble up the unrelentingly steep but well-marked 'track' to the lookout ridge. That took an hour and a half. Then it was down to retrieve the rope and back to the car park. Dawn and I got there by 7pm. So, from an 8am start, yes, there it was, an 11 hr round trip.

That's the thing about caving. You can never say "Yeah, yeah, seen one, seen 'em all." Every one is unique. I have never seen one like this before, and it was a triumph. I've knocked the bastard off!

Book Review

A review by Gary Willis

Kahurangi Calling

Gerard Hindmarsh

I requested this book from Jane as soon as it was ordered as I was hoping that it would fill in some of the gaps in my knowledge of this National park since I am still considered a newcomer to the area despite my being a Nelson resident for 9 years now.

Gerard Hindmarsh has done some excellent research for this book and that comes through very clearly once you start to read the book. He details the early days before even the state forest park existed through to the creation of Kahurangi National Park in 1996. He talks of the men and women who lived, loved, farmed and otherwise worked in the area from Eel fishermen to Graziers right up to the present day with stories of caving on the Garibaldi ridge.

The story begins with the creation of the forest park and its management by the forest service right up until the change to a National Park. Hindmarsh discusses each group in depth including the Asbestos mine owners, foresters, cavers, farmers and including the latest group with aspirations on the park mountain bikers trying to regain access to the Heaphy track. What comes through clearly is that the author has a view biased only on his love of the area and provides an excellent history for this unique place on our doorstep. There is mention of little known huts, even less known areas and forgotten wildlife. Anyone with an interest in the National Park and its history and environment will go a long way to find a better book about the area. Everything from the Wild West coast to the tranquil interior, the Cobb hydro project to Mt Arthur is included, well worth the time taken to read. I thoroughly recommend this book to everyone.

Gary Willis.

Hut Fees:

Members \$4.00 per night

Non Members \$6.00 per night

NSG AGM is the Next Meeting:

To be held Thursday, 26th August 2010, 7.30pm
At Dawn and Andrew's Place

See you there
Dawn Wood
Editor ☺