

# CAVERNDISH

*NSG's NEWSLETTER*

*May 2007*

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## **From the Editor:**

Hello everyone,

Yes it has been some time since the last newsletter. Moving house and settling in to the new place has taken it's time. The old Windows 95 has had an upgrade with a few teething problems, all sorted now and ready to bring you news from the deep.

Last Newsletter's "Where Am I?" was Gary's trip into Little Harwood's.

Queen's Birthday weekend is just around the corner. Always a great get together in Charleston with lots of caving to be had. If you are planning to be there then please contact Alice ASAP if you need to arrange accommodation. Places are filling up fast. We have contacted the Pyramid Farmstay on the Nile for bookings, again contact Alice for more details and to get booked in. Also if you intend having a meal on the Saturday night together with the Clubs then Alice needs to know those numbers too. It is quite vital that the Hotel knows how many to cater for. The meal is \$20. per head. This

includes roast meat and vegetables, dinner roll and tea/coffee. Salad and veggie quiche as a vegetarian option... Always nice to dine together so get your orders and bookings in, time is of the essence.

Send to [alice@caverock.net.nz](mailto:alice@caverock.net.nz)

I am always seeking caving stories, so please send them on to me for future editions. They always make a good read. It doesn't have to be a long tale, maybe you have some bloopers to share, it's always nice to hear what our club members have been up to.

Oh and did you know?

**SPELEOLOGY** also means "Tree Frog Breeding".

That's what Oz tells those that ask. ☺

I like it!

Dawn ☺

## **Where Am I?**

My name is of an exotic location many years since gone. My gate keeps intruders at bay, but helps descent and on the return. Ray is a regular visitor and finds himself reaching where man should not reach. His series of ladies are beautiful, beyond reproach. Where am I?

## **Past Trips in brief:**

**Blunderback Area.** Mid April, Oz, Deb, Yoni, Sarah, Andrew and I spent 3 days prospecting the area. A great place, lots of little holes, tunnels and great excitement. Andrew descended a large hole and found himself in Blunderback at Leaf Litter. Another Interesting cave was found on a previous trip with Oz and Yoni and Sarah, further exploring found it to be a through trip with about 300mtr of large easy travel passage. We decided to call it Torch cave. Plans to return to the area to survey and do more prospecting. Fungi of many types were quite prolific and made for some interesting photography stops.

**Olympia Cave.** First trip was cancelled due to Claire's biking mishap. Glad to see you're well recovered. A few weeks later Claire and a band of 5 cavers eventually made it to Olympia and had a good time.

## **Future Trips:**

**Summit Tomo.** Andrew and I have planned 2 trips into Summit Tomo "Boots Off" area.

**26<sup>th</sup> May.** This trip is "Stage One" for looking at the protection of Boots Off. We plan to take measurements and access the area for a seat to be bolted in place across the entrance to Boots Off.

**9<sup>th</sup> June.** "Stage Two" will be to put in place a metal bench seat, a wash station with instructions, rubber scuffs and information regarding conditions of entry into "Boots Off".

It has been agreed that the Club will cover any costs incurred for the protection of Boots Off.

If you are interested in taking part in either stage then please contact Andrew Smith.

**Greenlink 19<sup>th</sup> May.** Mike Brewer, Claire, Seb, Bruce and Jane are to take part in a follow up trip with some exploring and surveying to be done.

## **Mount Owen Expedition. December 2007. One Month.**

This December Claire plans to venture around the Mt Owen area for a month with friends from the UK. She has opened the invite to anyone else that would care to join them. The Club still intends to have its annual Expedition and Claire's trip plans to meet up with the Club. For more information contact Claire.

**WaiTui 19-20 May.** A trip to John Richards property celebrating John's Birthday. All welcome. 4x4 country. Contact Andrew Smith if interested.

## **Hut News:**

**Mid Winter Do at the Hut 23<sup>rd</sup> June.** Should be nice and cosy again this year, a load of firewood expected any day now and a brand new shiny axe to try out. More details will surface as we get closer to the date.

Please remember to pay your fees for use of the hut.

The new rate for hut fees is as follows:

**Members \$4.00 per night**

**Non Members \$6.00 per night**

## **SAR News:**

**Foundation Ropes Course** coming up on the West Coast. The Club is looking at covering fuel costs for a vehicle. Interested Parties should contact Sarah Brewer.

Oz has been looking at the SAR **contact list** and asks that any change in your details be sent through to him so that records can be kept up-dated. That goes for Caver too.

## **Library News:**

### **New Editions to the Library**

Thanks to the generous donation by Mart in Grinsted of his collection, the library now has the following magazines available:

Descent Magazine, UK, Numbers 20-39, from between 1972 and 1978

Caves and Caving Magazine, UK, Numbers 1-63, 1978-1994

BCRA Bulletin, Numbers 1-20, from 1973-1978

A full listing of the magazines and books available is on the website

<http://nsg.org.nz/mainpages/library.htm>

### **Coming Soon**

2 x Dept. of Conservation Magazines.

DVD on SRT – Copies available for purchase through Kevin Mountford \$20 each

DVD on Ghar Parau – Copy to be donated to the Library from Hos. Thanks Hos. Oz plans to have a viewing night of Ghar Parau, a date is yet to be confirmed.

## **Treasurer's Note:**

### **Re: Club Fees:**

If you pay your Club Fees through "Auto Banking, PLEASE make sure you also send all your details through to Seb. Thank you ☺

## **General:**

**Mountain Safety First Aid Course** coming up on the 22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> **September**. Cost for the course is \$130. this includes a very comprehensive First Aid Manual and Workbook. Registration needs to be in ASAP for a position on the course. The Club hopes to be able to subsidise interested Members. Registration can be done through the website, contact Ian Macgregor for details.

## **Special Feature:**

RRCPC Newsletter

Volume 36 Number 2 Article 3

June 1999

### **Edgar Sixtus - One of the Early Cave Personalities**

**By Moira Lipyeat**

*This article was forwarded to us by Dave Edland. It originally appeared in the November edition of 'Cavity', the newsletter of the Canterbury Caving Club in Christchurch, New Zealand. It was written by Moira Lipyeat of Christchurch, and is reproduced here with permission. A few minor amendments by Steve Glasgow of NZSS have been included.*

Some years ago I was asked to do a history of Harwood's Hole for a Swedish film crew. While doing this, I became fascinated by the history and geology of the whole area. Edgar Sixtus was a key figure in the early discoveries of that area but I found very little about the man.

At Easter this year (1998) I fulfilled an ambition of mine; I found Edgar Sixtus himself! Each time passing through Motueka over the years I had quizzed various people, with no results. But this time a butcher I talked to put me in touch with a very alert and interesting Edgar Sixtus. He was willing to be interviewed and could recall the events of fifty years ago quite vividly.

Although Edgar Sixtus just died on 14 September 1998, at 88 years of age, and had a stroke four years ago, he was able to keep his listeners thoroughly enthralled for many hours until the end of his life. I particularly enjoyed his tales about the early exploration of Harwood's hole, and the history and geology of the surrounding area.

As early as 1810, Maori refugees from the attacks of Te Raupraha had roamed the area but had feared the hidden valley home of Taipo (meaning 'thundering underground waters'). In 1843, the explorer Charles Heaphy described the most remarkable of the geological features; "immense crater-like hollows, terminating in dark cavernous wells with subterranean drainage". This was named The Land of Eccentric Landscapes, a mysterious area named after Canaan in the Holy Land, "The land flowing with milk and honey"; Joshua 5, verse 7.

In 1897 R. and T. Pattie named this area while out looking for wild cattle from Riwaka. H. Harwood, the Mansons and M. Horton came across the area when out hunting and discovered a knob of quartz. Harwood took up the land soon after. This was part of the Mt Arthur marble - up to 500 million years old and some of the most ancient rock in the country. The ridge terminating at Harwoods Hole was known to the locals since the first survey but had not previously been named.

In 1890, one of the Sixtus brothers who had immigrated from Germany in 1843 applied for a section on Canaan Hill. By now there was great activity on the hill, clearing the bush and prospecting for gold. Some of the earliest possums had been liberated near Takaka and trapping them had become a source of income. A licence was required to do this and two pounds a year seemed excessive so Homestead Creek was a good place to hunt and trap the animals for the young son Edgar. It was on one of these expeditions that he found the gaping abyss we now know as Harwoods Hole.

Life was hard in those days. Edgar had left school at 14 and helped his father. A bush fire had burnt their house in 1920. Life was isolated and only tracks led up from Takaka (Rameka Creek) and 11 km in from Takaka Hill. The land was cleared and farming was hard. Edgar had always had a great interest in the minerals of the area. He retained that to the end of his life and had a great collection. He was very active in lapidary societies.

In 1951 the Abel Tasman National Park was extended to include some of this area. Max White, the first ranger, was remembered for his erection of huts and building paths. The area was becoming known to the outside community. Botanists explored the area finding rare plants. It was a noteworthy breeding ground of the rare giant land snail *Paryphanta hochstetteri*; these are now protected. By 1955 geologists were searching for uranium. I. J. McKee, of Lime & Marble at Mapua, identified other minerals. Valuable scheelite was found. Intrusion of molten granite into original limestone under temperature and pressure had formed marble, which had become valuable for building.

### **Now enter the cavers...**

1958 The first caving expedition to the area from Auckland consisted of Frank Walton, Les Kermodie, Paul Weston and David May. They were prospecting for caves. Edgar Sixtus suggested they look at a deep shaft at the termination of a shallow valley known as Harwoods Flat, following Homestead Creek. This was named after an earlier settler who had grazed sheep there. Edgar Sixtus showed them the "Hole", suggesting that they call it "HARWOODS HOLE" and the cavers agreed.

The New Zealand Speleological Society had been formed on 1 October 1949 with one member, Henry Lambert. Speleo Bulletin 26 (June 1958) recorded the above visit. It was noted that E. Sixtus had not dared look down before! Rocks were thrown down, and the depth was estimated as 700 ft (215 m) with sides rising another 200 ft (61 m) on three sides. The gaping mouth of the hole was estimated as 140 ft by 200 ft (43 m by 61 m). A winch would be required. These had been used in European caves before, but it looked difficult. They decided to investigate via Gorge Creek, so Dave Kershaw and Peter and Helen Lambert of Nelson did a reconnaissance trip up Gorge Creek and found an entrance blocked by a pool 20 ft by 60 ft (6 m by 18 m) - and very cold!

NZSS Bulletin 29 (March 1959) records that another party of seven visited the hole. Ropes and ladders were considered to be too exhausting, so a winch had been supervised and built by Richard Scott at no expense to NZSS. One thousand feet of 3/16" galvanised steel cable with breaking point of 1.2 tons was used. The winch weighed 5 c.w.t. and was

powered by one H.P. Villiers four-stroke engine and gearbox, and a clutch from a Matchless motorcycle. The chair was adapted from a parachute harness with a steel seat. Anyone interested in the above can view it at the Waitomo Museum of Caves. The person in the chair had a leather flying helmet with built-in headphones. The Press had a reporter present recording NZ's biggest cave project so far.

### **The First Assault**

24 December 1958. Peter and Helen Lambert were first on the spot at Edgar Sixtus' farm. Canaan Road had been put in but was rough and took one hour to get in from the turnoff. The rain was heavy as the Auckland group arrived, although by Christmas day, 1958, there was less rain.

Boxing day. The winch was set up at the top left-hand side of the scree slope. All unstable rock and shrubs were removed. An aluminium ladder was used for a belay and volunteers on the ladder took two hours to put in the peg. A clothes line and prop analogy was used.

27 December 1958. After an early start the group drew straws and Peter Lambert won. He hung in space, in the mist, rotating as he descended, but became tangled in the vines and had to be winched up again. David May was next. He hooked his thumb, screamed and was saved, but eventually went down in a normal descent. Enthralled, cheering and laughing, those still at the top celebrated with several bottles of beer. The total time taken to reach the bottom was from 1:25 pm to 3:03 pm.

30 December 1958. All were up early and Malcolm was down in 15 minutes but took two hours to untangle wires at the bottom. Catherine Donald, a Scottish girl, was staying, and she went down in 10 minutes. They made coffee at the bottom and explored the cave, finding numerous formations and bird bones. Kakapo bones had been identified and also a blind beetle, genus *Duvaliomus*. Later there was a large rock fall and the winch was dismantled for that year. Following press publicity 13.10 pounds was donated towards the project.

Starlight Cave was discovered in January 1959. This was blocked by a calcite dam which was lowered 18 inches with a chisel and spade. It was named "Starlight" after reflected lights in the pool. Three heligites were named after the three wise men.

NZSS Bulletin No. 34, p.59 records "Christmas Expedition Goes to Deepest Hole Outside Europe. Total depth 1210 ft - exciting adventure - 21 on trip". Peter Lambert and Dave Kershaw (from the previous trip) led the party. There was more fluoro testing, photography, comradeship and exploration. Dyes and gelignite were used. On Monday 4 January 1960, the winch was in continuous action. Heather, the sixteen-year-old daughter of Edgar Sixtus, went down. At 8:15 Peter Lambert started his ascent. The motor purred. There was the usual excitement and anticipation, but then the motor stopped! Peter was near the top, when a deafeningly loud crash was heard! Peter Diamond and Peter Reid just escaped the rock fall but Peter Lambert landed the full impact of the rocks. He was drawn up and cut out of the harness. Help was sent for. Everyone knew how serious it was, and Peter died soon after, having never regained consciousness. His helmet was knocked to the bottom. A memorial was subscribed immediately. It made a sad ending for an expedition.

In 1971 we read that the first descent by single fixed rope technique (SRT) was by Keith Dekkers, Fred Kahl, and Ashley Cody. This was after six months planning and the experience was available only to the few who owned a break bar descender (rack), jumars, and webbing harness. A life line was used for security on the first trip. Walkie talkie radios were considered essential, as well as a notice to warn sightseers at the top not to throw rocks. The trip, using 200 m of Donaghy's spinnaker cord, was successful.

By 1979 UK cavers had heard of Harwoods Hole from Mick Hopkinson and together with Fred Kahl and Keith Dekkers, planned a trip to do some filming. This is the first record of people thrashing and marking their way to the top of the bush by the lookout rather than follow Gorge Creek down.

No record of Harwoods Hole would be complete without mention of those many people who have been lost (mis-laid) coming up that path and the man-hours spent marking the route with hundreds of sections of Venetian blind. The onga-onga always remains an obstacle.

I hope this has been of interest to those many cavers who make Harwoods Hole one of the highlights on their caving calendar. Very few accidents have been recorded but this shaft deserves the maximum of respect and common sense. The hole continues to be enjoyed by many each year, whether they have the courage, expertise, and equipment to descend or for those who only watch in awe. It is good to recall Edgar Sixtus and his band of intrepid cavers who first accepted the challenge. Until his death Edgar Sixtus kept all early records of Nelson Branch and I noticed their first meeting was 4 July 1960, no doubt excited by the discovery of this great cave. The name of Edgar Sixtus will continue to be remembered because another cave near his home, which he showed the visiting cavers, was named after him - "Ed's Collar".

*Maira Lipyeat*

**Next Meeting:**

**Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2007 @ 7.30pa**

**Leo's House.**

See you all there.



Dawn Wood  
Editor

**New Trip List due out July,**

Get your trips in to Oz soon as. 😊