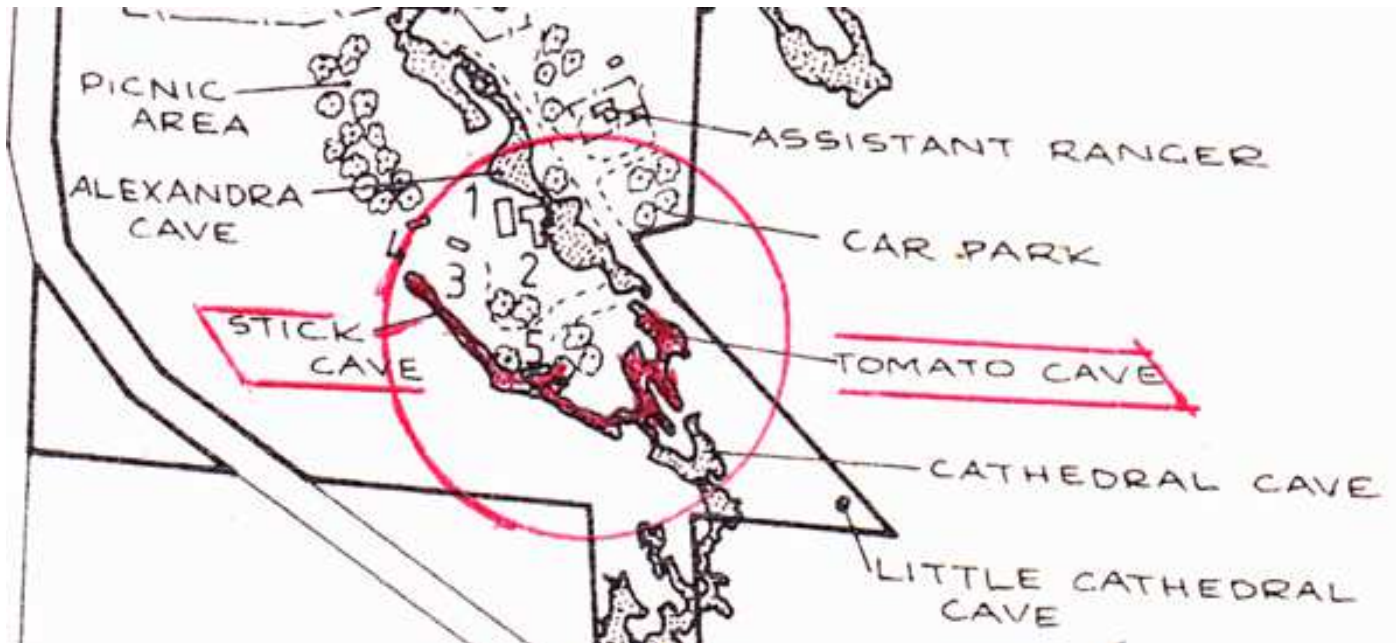


Fun in Stick and Tomato Caves – Naracoorte 1963

Dennis Rebbechi

In 1963, the Naracoorte Caves Reserve in South Australia was not quite Wild West Country, but was definitely primitive. Stick Cave was designated S 9 and Tomato Cave was designated S 10. In the Australian Karst Index 1985, they were combined as Tomato-Stick Cave, and Wet Cave was designated U 10 and described as being Pothole type, dry and having four entrances. It stated that development was interconnected passage and domes. Today, it is a developed self-guided cave experience.



The Editor of our Journal and Andy Spate have asked for contributions for the December Journal. I checked my memoirs for the period I spent in Naracoorte, as I remembered a funny, but serious, event that occurred during that period. I found my account of this event and have copied it verbatim below, without correcting grammar. Please note this article has no scientific value whatsoever.

MEMOIR EXTRACT.

On 17/8/1962 I commenced at Coles Naracoorte Store No 202 in South Australia as a D Grade Sub-manager on the princely monthly salary of Ninety-Two Pounds Six Shillings (\$184-60).

I was keen on Caves and the Naracoorte Caves are amongst the best in Australia. Quite often on Sunday morning, I would rise at first light leaving Doreen and Suzanne sleeping and drive out of town to the Caves Reserve. There was a cave out there known as Stick-Tomato Cave that had two pothole type entrances behind fences. From each entrance you could climb down into the cave. A road ran over the top of the cave. I would climb down into the Stick entrance on the west side of the road and emerge on the east side of the road exploring along the way. Over time I became very conversant with the layout of the cave. There was a very low roof in one section that may have led to the cave having two names. At the Tomato end you ascended a narrow open path until you reached the ladder to exit the cave system. This was perhaps the only dangerous spot in the cave, but with light it was not a problem.

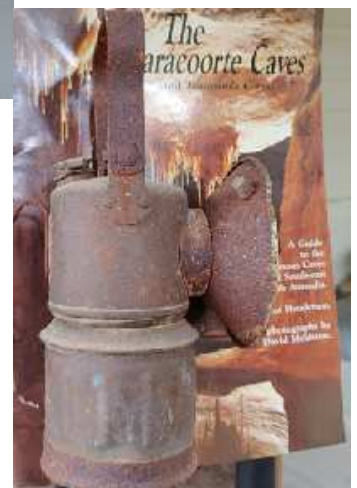
I always took three alternate sources of light. I took a carbide lamp, a candle in a holder and waterproof matches in one of my pockets plus a torch. The carbide lamp had a running life of about ten hours before

running out of water, although there would usually be plenty of carbide remaining. Most times there is water in caves, so you could use your torch until you refilled the water chamber of the lamp. The lamp had a flint mechanism, so it was easy to restart. This cave was about 500 m in length.



Left and Below—Photos insert into memoir by author for illustrative purposes only.

They are not the original items of equipment carried by him!



One Sunday morning I did not arrive at the Caves Reserve until after 8.00 am. I descended via the Stick entrance. I had gone quite a way along the passageway when I could faintly hear someone calling. Caves have remarkable acoustic characteristics. There are never any echoes. As I moved further, the yelling became louder. I called back. I could hear voices calling that they were lost.

I found them in the low roof area, in the dark. There was a guy and his girlfriend. As they had crawled, the guy had laid his torch on the floor while helping his girlfriend crawl through the low roof section.

She apparently crawled awkwardly and kicked the torch that rolled away and extinguished. Panicked, they felt around, crawling backwards and forwards in the low area and losing all sense of direction. With my lamp, I soon found their torch that had rolled into an even lower area against the cave wall. I reached in and pulled it out.

I guided them to the Tomato exit. The girl, using my torch, was almost panic stricken as we ascended the open path with the drop on one side. Outside the cave I gave them a good spirited lecture. I pointed out that although the caves were not securely sealed off, the public were not really supposed to enter them. In fact, very few people did. If I had not come along, they could have been inside until someone who knew where they had gone raised the alarm. I could tell by the expression on their faces that no one knew where they were.

They realized that without the torch, they would never have found their way from the cave. I explained the three principle – always have three sources of light and never explore with less than three persons in the group. If one person became sick or injured, the second person can stay with that person while the third goes for help. The girl smiled and suggested that they were lucky that I had not waited until I had two other guys to come with me that day.

I admitted that familiarity tended to make you careless with the rules, but showed them the candle holder and matches in my overall's pocket. I told them that my wife knew where I was, and what time to expect me home. The girl sheepishly handed me back my torch. I recommended that they take a tour of the Victoria Cave before leaving because it would make their day

worthwhile.

Next day I was helping Miss Burmeister, the window dresser to change the display in the windows to feature the new specials, when the guy and his girl wandered in the door carrying a box of Southwark Beer. They had waited until the Pub opened to buy the box to thank me, not only for the rescue but also because they had really enjoyed the Victoria Cave tour. I think it took Lou and me three nights to drink that box at our end of day meetings.

LATER MEMOIR EXTRACT FROM 8 JANUARY 1989

Carol and I were on duty at Shades of Death Cave at Buchan, Victoria on a stinking hot day. We had one group just after 11.00 am. Geoff, Graham and Warren decided about 2.00 pm that the Buchan Pub had more to offer than the Cave. Carol brought sandwiches from our house. I brought cold stubbies from the Engine Room Fridge. Eventually Sylvia who was playing on the swings yelled that a man and woman had arrived.

They were about my age. I gave them a good tour. The temperature made it great inside the cave. I switched off all the lights and explained how without light, you were hopelessly lost. The guy said that they had once been lost in a cave in Naracoorte. The bells rang and I said "you must be Dwayne." What an amazing co-incidence! Back in the Entrance, I gave them a stubbie each. Carol had to explain that she was my second wife. Dwayne had married the girl whose name I had forgotten. Deidre talked to Carol while I proudly showed Dwayne our huge 75KVA generator. A stinking hot day became a day to remember.

AFTERTHOUGHT

Unfortunately, once Coles moved me to another store, I never visited Stick-Tomato Cave again. I passed through Naracoorte 7/6/2016, but the cave was closed and I could not enter. Earlier this year, I had booked to go to the AGM and spend extra days in Naracoorte. Unfortunately, my brother took ill and I had to cancel. Hopefully, I will eventually repeat the trips of 1962 and 1963.

THIS ARTICLE HAS NO SCIENTIFIC VALUE. WHEN WITH YOUR WIFE, IT IS ALWAYS WISE TO NEVER REMEMBER ANOTHER WOMAN'S NAME.

2021 is the International Year of Caves and Karst

This will be the biggest and most important speleological event ever. Participation as part of the global cave and karst community is crucial. The purpose of the International Year of Caves and Karst (IYCK) is to teach the world about the importance of caves and karst. Public understanding and support of caves and karst is currently very limited. As a result, funding, regulations, and opportunities for exploration, research, and management are also very limited. The International Union of Speleology (UIS) has declared 2021 as the IYCK in a major effort to make the world aware of how caves and karst are valuable to all people. To make this possible, the UIS is calling on all of its member countries and other organisations to begin planning a series of public lectures, programs, demonstration of techniques, and others activities for 2021.

The IYCK website is now open at <http://www.iyck2021.org>. It is designed to teach the public about caves and karst, and so it has a great amount of educational information. It also has information on how to become involved in the IYCK.