

# UNDERGROUND RIVER CAVES AT MT BUFFALO

- Peter Ackroyd & Kent Henderson

In beautiful weather, on Sunday 9 November 1997, Elery and Angela Hamilton-Smith, Peter Ackroyd and Kent Henderson drove up to Mt. Buffalo in central Victoria at the invitation of David Chitty, the Operator of Adventure Guides Australia. The aim was to view "Underground River" (NE-1) and to advise on its management, especially in relation to its glowworm population. David, an ACKMA member, runs a range of eco tours, including caving.

Arriving at midday, we met Peter Jacobs, the Parks Victoria Ranger in Charge at Mt Buffalo National Park. A few minutes later we met up with David at the lookout, where he had been running an abseiling activity.

After changing, we walked the few hundred metres to the cave entrance in its boulder filled gully. The cave is a classic granite boulder in-fill cave with a boisterous stream. In the larger sections of the cave is found an unknown species of glowworm, which is as yet unidentified. After a brief discussion concerning the cave's management, particularly that of its fauna, we scrambled up over the boulders and tors in the dry stream bed above the cave for several hundred metres to view the surface habitat. Elery was particularly interested in food sources for the glowworms. Given that the cave has a large number of roof entrances, he formed the preliminary view that the glowworms' insect food was primarily midges and other shade-loving small flies entering through the roof holes rather than from the streamway. If this proves to be the case, they will be less vulnerable to adverse effects. It was made clear that a faunal survey of the cave is needed, particularly given its usage for adventure tourism, and we discussed the possibility that a grant may be available within the next 12 months for Stefan Eberhard to carry out such a survey.

We also discussed ideas with David Chitty for faunal monitoring in the interim, which he is most keen to do. We were all impressed with David's dedication to developing an appropriate management regime for the cave, his professionalism as a tour operator and his commitment to environmental considerations.

Upon returning to the downstream end of the cave, David, Elery, Peter and Kent entered the entrance area for a quick look. David and Peter then

continued through about one third of the cave's length before returning in a somewhat moist condition.

The cave is approximately 300 metres long, and is quite sporty, involving partial immersion, a couple of tight spots a small waterfall and a few pool traverses. The cave had many glowworms, several spiders (probably epigean species) and an impressive orange coloured flowstone (probably of amorphous silica). Peter noted that the cave is quite robust and therefore an excellent choice as an adventure cave.

Peter took some photo tag pictures and some GPS co-ordinates for records purposes. The cave has not yet been surveyed, but Peter intends to return to Mt Buffalo at a later date with the area cave tagger for that purpose.

After a pleasant lunch in the Mt Buffalo Chalet kiosk, we headed up the plateau road towards The Horn to look for a second reported cave. The Park management had no knowledge of this cave, although its existence had apparently been mentioned in Rosengren's Sites of Geomorphological Significance. Peter had done some research prior to our departure, and he had a map of the area with the location of the cave marked with a "dot on the map". After taking us to the approximate area, he took some GPS readings and, comparing these with the map, he determined that the cave should be about 120 metres south-east of the road near where we had parked.

Intrepidly, we tackled the bush, and soon came across a watercourse, which we followed, and behold, we found a cave! It was, not surprisingly, another granite boulder in-fill cave, only about 25 metres in length and without much of a dark zone. The cave probably has been named, historically. David and Peter had a quick look inside the cave and then Peter took some GPS and compass reading to enable it to be subsequently relocated.

Returning to the Chalet area late in the afternoon, we took in the sights, in particular following the recently constructed Crystal Brook track which had been rather well done. After bidding David farewell, we headed back to Melbourne, a most successful day behind us.