

CAVE RESCUE AT NARACOORTE

- Steve Bourne

Naracoorte Caves was the scene of a dramatic cave rescue on the afternoon of Saturday, 24 August. Three members of the same family, while exploring the inner reaches of one of the larger caves at Naracoorte, had descended a deep, narrow shaft and were unable to extricate themselves.

It was only the alertness of researchers and Park staff and their prompt action that averted a serious tragedy. While the rescuers efforts should be applauded, it should also be acknowledged that for experienced cavers they were guilty of ignoring most of the principles of safe caving, namely;

- failure to notify park staff of their intended trip.
- failure to apply for the necessary permits.
- failure to take adequate light sources.
- failure to adhere to the recommended minimum group size of four.
- lack of knowledge of the area of the cave they were exploring.

University of Adelaide student Tim Moulds, and his party were surveying the mounds of guano in Bat Cave in the initial stages of a project investigating the *guanophyllic* invertebrate fauna of the cave. This cave is quite extensive, mostly walking passage, but with several large deep holes. These are the legacy of guano mining in the cave during the period from 1870 to the 1890's. Surveying had been proceeding without incident until one of the survey team stumbled upon the poor unfortunates trapped at the base of the deep shaft (see figure one).

It was not immediately apparent how many were trapped, nor how they came to be there, and it was only after prodding with a long stick that any sign of life was noted. Given the lateness in the day, and the amount of time required to raise the alarm, the survey party decided to attempt a rescue with the equipment they had on hand. The party worked together, with one holding a light, one working with a long rod and the other trying to guide the rope to the trapped victims.

Weakened by the length of their entrapment and the cool cave temperature, they were unable to

assist in any way by grabbing the rope and had to be lassoed and hauled, one by one to the surface. The three victims lay together on the floor of the cave, reflecting on their luck that they were found in the nick of time. The dangerous shaft was blocked to prevent further incidents and the three intrepid cavers ventured from the cave a little worse for wear, but grateful for their rescue.

This not so dramatic rescue took place with three bats who had fallen into a hole left by taking a core sample of guano about three weeks previous to the incident. The hole was about a metre deep and only 7 cm in diameter.

In seven years of watching bats on the infra-red cameras placed in Bat Cave, I have only ever witnessed one land on the guano. To find three bats the victims of a pitfall trap, albeit a small one, was very surprising but highlights the need for such holes to be filled in after research has been completed.

The pitfall traps that Tim requires for his invertebrate investigations will be closely monitored and capped when ever not in use. By the way, after about ten minutes of warmth, the three pitfall victims did fly away and live happily ever after.



The victims dramatically rescued at Naracoorte!!

