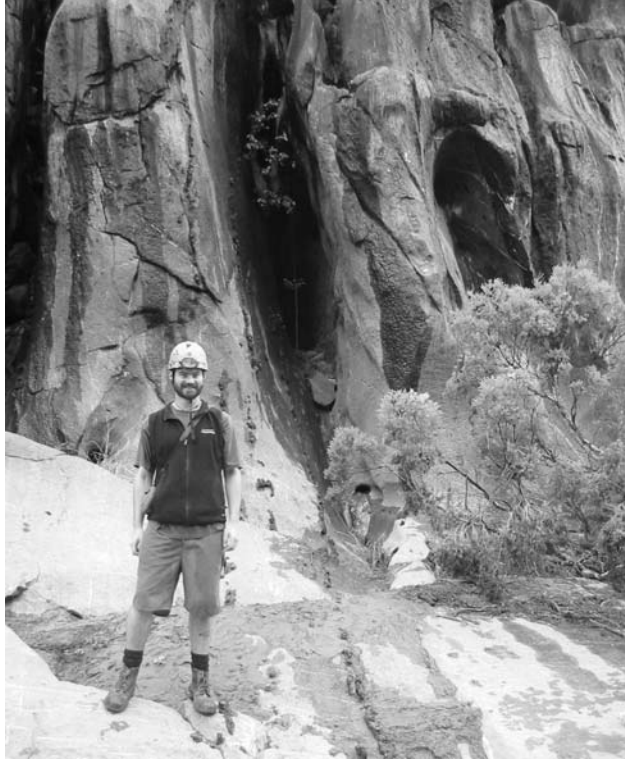


AN EXPEDITION TO BROKEN RIVER: THE 15TH ACKMA POST-CONFERENCE FIELD TRIP

- Andy Spate

Tim Moulds outside Blind Fish Cave,
Jacks Gorge, Broken River



Following the highly successful Chillagoe/Undara ACKMA Conference a number of select ACKMA members joined the Central Queensland Speleological Society in a week-long excursion to Broken River about 200 km west of Townsville. About 20 people camped at Jacks Gorge on Broken River through the week. This was a wonderful site with a large swimming and fishing hole immediately downstream of the spectacular limestone Jacks Gorge.

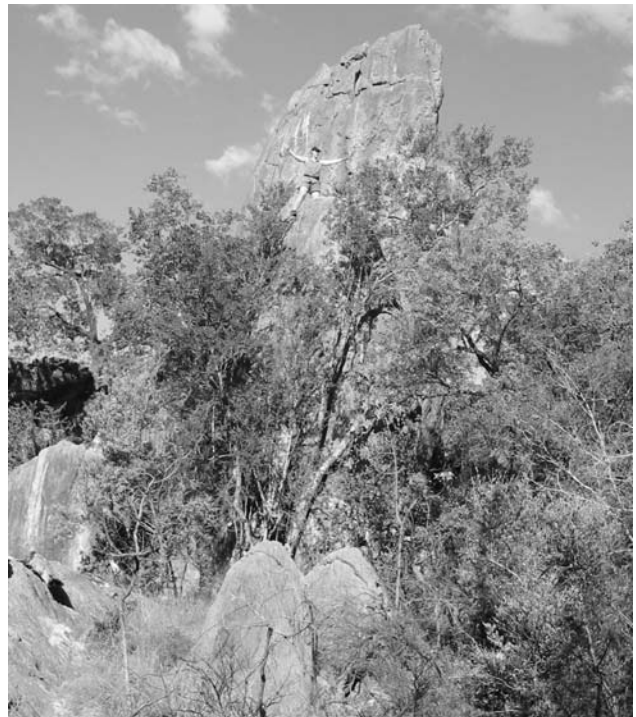


Jacks Pool at campsite, Broken River

Although there was a considerable amount of rain the enthusiasm of all participants wasn't greatly dampened. The expedition had been planned as an opportunity to convey John Kersey's intimate knowledge of the area to CQSS and others so that the re-invention of wheels is minimized. A week was not anywhere long enough.

Mick Cockburn of NPWS Chillagoe established an encampment for the ACKMA contingent adjacent to the very sophisticated CQSS establishment – hot water showers, dunnies etc! The ACKMA camp was distinguished by an excess of cabbage and chocolate!

Activities included cave surveying, surface exploration (= wandering around aimlessly or lost), cave inspections, some ANDYSEZing and much photography. We only scratched the surface in terms of covering the whole area. The first limestone we encountered *en route* to the camp was about 35 track kilometres distant.



Limestone pinnacle, Broken River.
Jay Anderson is near the top, for scale.

Travel across the top of the ridges on most Australian tropical karsts borders on the impossible and when it is attempted one is confronted by vertical entrances innumerable. In much of the area horizontal entrances are far more elusive. I am reminded of the impossibility of a Head Office request made of Lana some years ago to identify all the 'confined spaces' on her parks...

Post conference field trip campsite at Broken River



This area is more remote than Chillagoe and Undara in that it is about 65 km off the highway and there are no XXXX supplies nearer than about 150 km! There are a number of strike-controlled limestone ridges in an area of about 30 x 30 km.

It is difficult to get around as there are few tracks – and those are subject to change through wet seasons and lack of use. Although there has been a fairly long (20+ years) period of exploration and documentation by the Chillagoe Caving Club and others – notably John Kersey and family – there are clearly many interesting features yet to be found and documented.

There are other interesting areas nearby such as similar ridges to the south at Christmas Creek and elsewhere. Systematic investigations of both areas would take forever and require an enormous labour force. But I think the effort would pay dividends.

The topography of both Broken River and Christmas Creek is both reminiscent of, and different to, the tower karsts of Chillagoe and further north. The bluffs are lower and longer but as highly dissected (= sharp!) as those further north. Often the limestone (Devonian) is highly fossiliferous.



Jacks Gorge just upstream of the campsite, Broken River

The sequence of limestone (and its many facies) and non-limestone beds is fascinating and well revealed in the cross-sections created by the river.

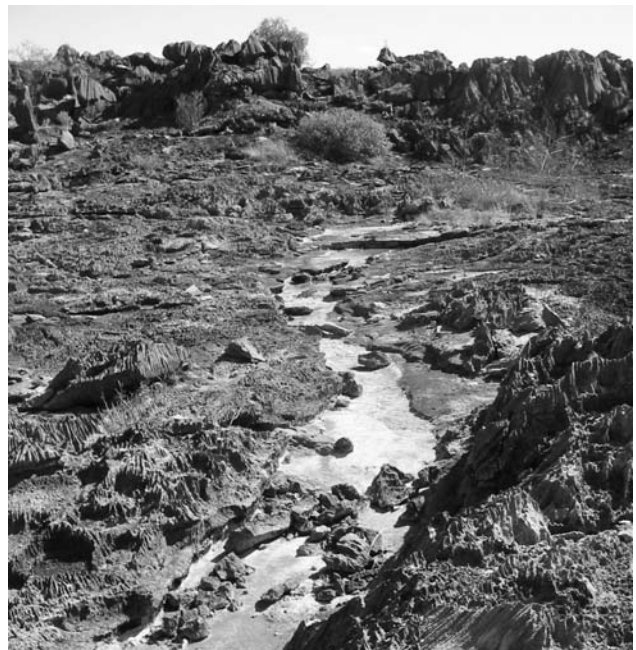
The ridges are usually covered in a dry rainforest scrub denser than that at Chillagoe. There are significant bat and swiftlet roost caves, sub-fossil and possibly fossil bone deposits, Aboriginal art and surface campsites and, clearly, an interesting cave invertebrate fauna. One feature of interest, but of unknown significance, is the near one-to-one correspondence between cave entrances and Australian brush turkey nests!

Broken River possesses some 'unique' features such as the immaturely developed Turtle Creek Tower and the unusual (for tropical Queensland) sinking/rising stream cave system several hundred metres long. It was complete with an abandoned dry valley! And flowing while we were there!

All-in-all an interesting few days for ACKMA, CQSS and one stray Canberra Speloleological Society attendee. My thanks to all who made the expedition possible and provided much congenial company on site. Especial thanks to John and Dwayne Kersey for knowing where things were and for their background information.

My own post-post conference trip home involved a brief stay with Ann and Ken at Capricorn Caverns – a great site – and visits to Ashford, Wellington, Borenore and Abercrombie Caves on my way home. The temperature gradient was noticeable!

P.S. While I have been writing this I have been listening to a very spectacular CD of lyrebird calls recorded by Barry Cubitt at Abercrombie. Well worth \$10 and postage from Barry. A great gift for overseas friends.



Solutional streamway on the top of the enigmatic Turtle Creek Tower, Broken River

