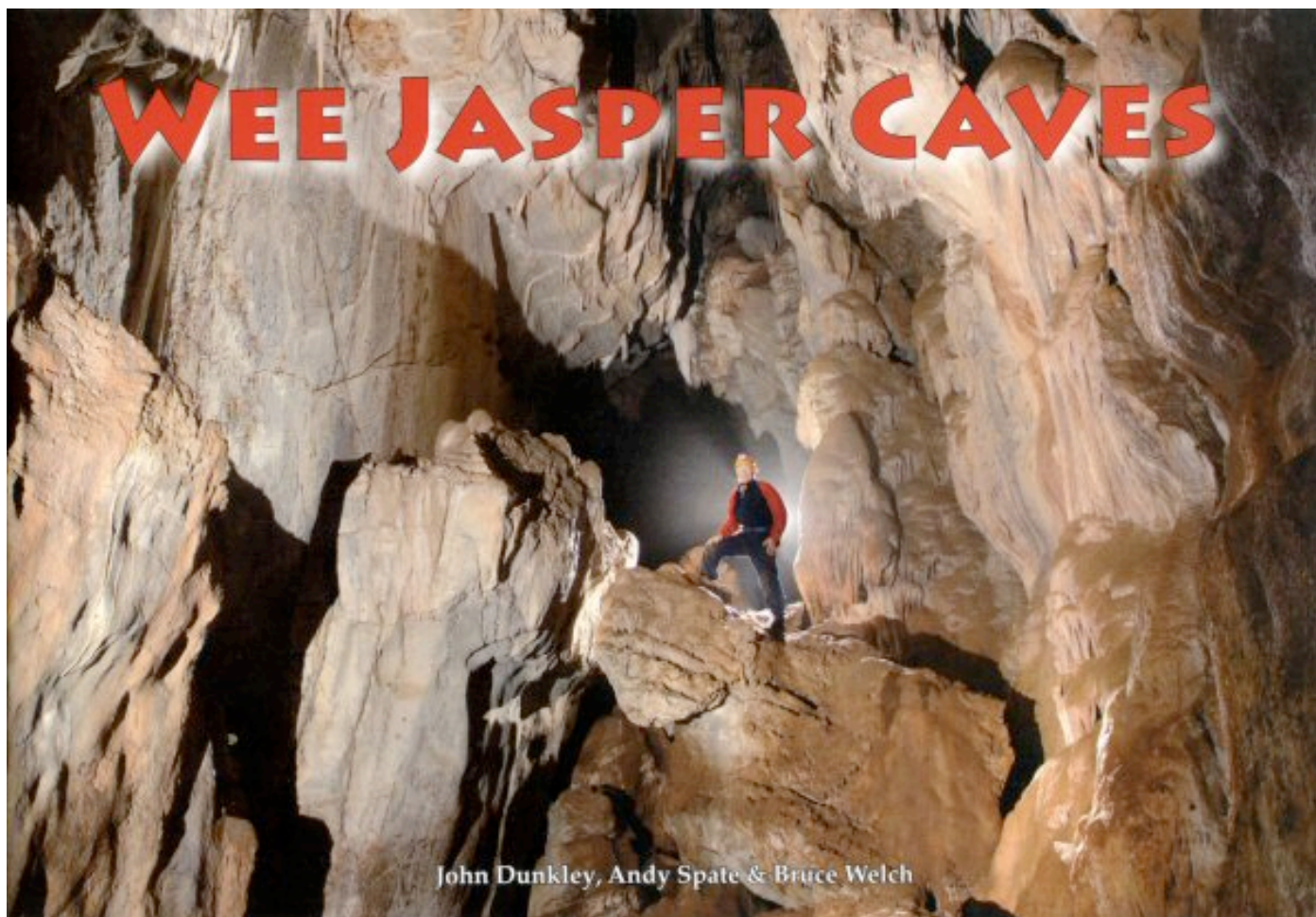


WEE JASPER CAVES

Reviewed by Ken Grimes



Wee Jasper Caves

by John Dunkley, Andy Spate & Bruce Welch.

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This 64 page booklet provides an excellent summary of the caves, karst and geology of the limestones at Wee Jasper, NSW. The text covers a broad array of topics in considerable detail and the two-column landscape format allows a versatile layout of supporting maps, photos and diagrams (e.g. a panorama of the main chamber of Careys Cave is spread over two pages, as are several of the cave maps). There are some excellent photos – both historic and modern (the latter mainly by Alan Pryke and Geoff Kell).

A 7-page history section starts with Aborigines and covers the early settlers and later developments and individuals such as A.J. Shearsby, a local pharmacist-geologist-photographer. There are many delightful extracts from contemporary newspapers dating from 1832 to 1921, and an additional two pages in the later section on Careys Cave reproduces part of an account of a visit in 1919.

Three pages on the geology describe the Devonian limestones and their structure, but there seems to be some confusion between "dip" and "strike" in the text and a figure caption – apart from a NW-plunging syncline at the southern end of the valley, the beds mainly dip west and strike NNW, parallel to the valley. A few dip symbols on the map would have clarified this. A further three pages describe the fossils: both the Devonian fossils in the limestone, which include excellently-preserved primitive fish, and the bone fossils in the cave sediments.

Biology is restricted to short notes on the cave bats and the limestone vegetation. References to other more-detailed sources would have helped here.

The rest of the book deals with the caves, which have considerable diversity. It starts with Careys tourist cave. This describes the cave in general and the

features within it, which include extensive rock sculpturing by slow moving phreatic waters. It also mentions the various activities available to visitors, including underground workshops. The two-page cave map by HSC is impressive, but confusing in spite of the colour and bedrock shading. I suspect part of the confusion is because there are several areas in the middle of the map which have missed out on the shading used to indicate bedrock.

The Wild Caves section starts with a page of warnings, access details (i.e. "contact the Wee Jasper Reserves Trust"), mention of ethics and minimal impact caving, and a suggestion that would-be cavers should join a caving club. It then works through the three major wild cave systems of the area: Dip, Punchbowl-Signature, and Dogleg Caves, and also describes the Devils Punchbowls (surface dolines). The caves are described in detail: their history of exploration, descriptions of their form and contents (sediments, speleothems, fossils), followed by a discussion of the genesis and hydrology. This is all assisted by some magnificent photos, mostly by Alan Pryke, and the excellent Jennings maps, which are separated into multiple levels with numerous profiles and cross-sections. The Punchbowl-Signature map set takes up 9 pages in all. Although prepared in the 1960s, these maps are still outstanding object lessons in the art of systematic cave mapping.

The three cave systems are quite different in character. Dip Cave is a classic example of structurally-controlled

phreatic passages following the strike of the steep-dipping beds, although the extensive collapse modifications make the details difficult to see.

Punchbowl-Signature Cave is a complex multi-level system which is in strong contrast to the Dip Cave as structural control is much less obvious. The four levels represent a series of still-stands as the water level dropped and the numerous flat ceilings mark the upper limit of solution beneath each of the old watertables. Meandering passages and wall notches indicate strongly flowing streams immediately beneath these watertables (i.e. epiphreatic). Contrasting with this are tall narrow passages which indicate vadose incision of those streamways as the watertable dropped from one level to the next.

Dogleg Cave is an active, and commonly flooded, meandering stream passage representing the present and lowest level of the Punchbowl drainage system, though there is no connection between them.

The final two-page spread is a diagrammatic map of the Wee Jasper valley showing the location of features and campgrounds, but not the wild caves.

In all this an excellent publication, and sets the standards for future efforts. Strangely, it is not mentioned in the Publications page of the ASF web site!



Dip Cave, Wee Jasper. Photos: Andy Spate