

SCRUBBY CREEK CAVE PROPERTY and PURCHASE by RIMSTONE COOPERATIVE

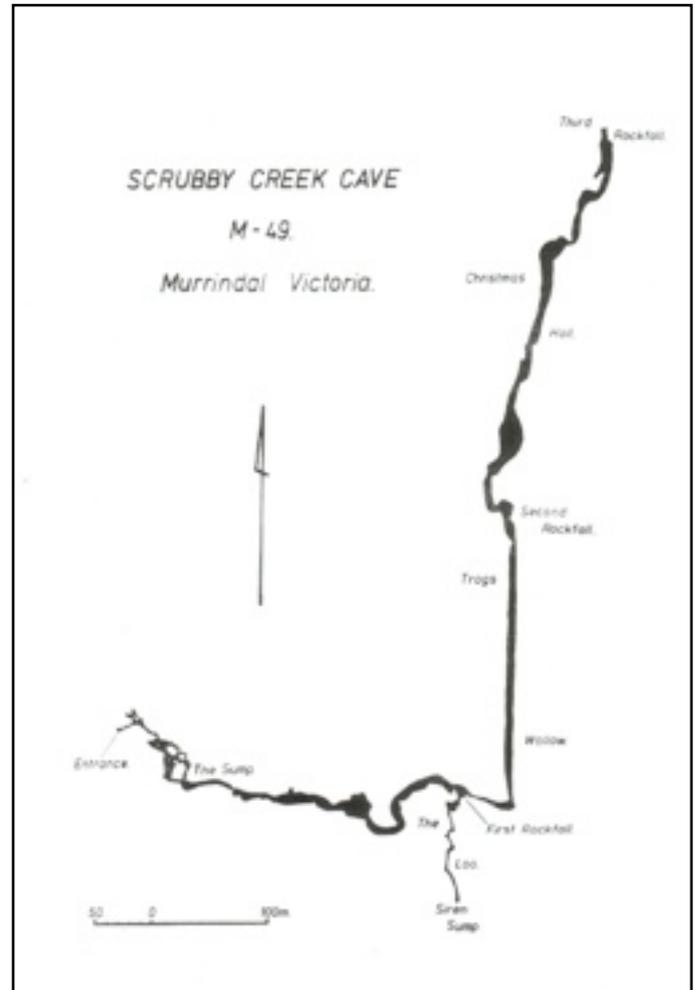
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For many years I have applied myself to the better management of caves. Most of the thrust has been through influencing the caving community to not damage caves. In fact Rauleigh Webb was the first to extend the sort of cave conservation principles to something with a more modern grab - the ASF's "Minimum Impact Caving Code". This has been enormously successful and has been adopted by various management agencies as a guideline document for caving in protected areas. The other side of the coin is to have important cave areas put into protected status or to have important private land cave properties acquired to protect the caves. This is effective and in recent times such acquisitions have included Allotment 22A at Murrindal, Victoria "The Potholes" with at least 20 important caves which was acquired by the State. In SA in recent time the Sand Cave Property was acquired by the state for addition to Naracoorte Caves National Park. Several properties around Mole Creek, Tasmania were acquired by the State using Federal Funds as part of the Regional Forest Agreement for addition to the Mole Creek National Park, including the Herberts Pot Property.

Not all cave properties are such that they belong in Parks. This is not to diminish their value, just that a balance needs to be drawn between what the State spends its money on and what private individuals protect themselves. In 2009, I went to the UIS Conference in Kerrville, Texas. I made a point of spending a few days with Emily Davis and Mike Warner looking at the North East Cave Conservancy properties. These properties were among the first caves to be acquired by private institutions to protect caves and provide for both conservation and recreational interests. On a separate trip in 2011, I was able to go Hawaii caving on the island of Hawaii, which has a large number of lava tubes as they call them. The Hawaiian Cave Conservancy is actively acquiring properties with lava tubes on them. The organisation seems to be able to acquire several properties each year with lava tubes. This is partly because the land is almost barren due to recent (less than 1000 years old) lava flows and is subdivided into residential blocks and bought by US mainlanders for winter holiday retreats.

Scrubby Creek Cave holds a special place for Victorian cavers. Scrubby Creek in its upper reaches for the most part is dry, its water having been captured from seepage along the contact of the volcanics and the limestone. The water emerges at the foot of a bluff depositing extensive tufa as it flows down a waterfall to rejoin Scrubby Creek on its way to the Buchan River.

The Scrubby Creek resurgence was known but it was not until 1960 that the Sub Aqua Speleological Society (SASS) tried to dive the resurgence with little success, but then they looked at a small hole slightly above the



Scrubby Creek Cave map Copyright M. Pierce and VSA

outflow at the base of the bluff. With a bit of enthusiastic digging, progress was made and several trips later SASS members managed to get back down to the water and after several hundred metres of beautiful passage the stream disappeared into a sump. Water levels were high and it took several trips before this sump was passed. Several more trips were needed to get as far as a muddy passage known as Trog Wallow. This led to a large rock fall that was difficult to find a way through but which opened into a large chamber, now known as Christmas Hall. It was so named as the explorers had a camp during the Christmas week to further explore, map and collect invertebrates. Various people including John Driscoll, Peter Matthews, Peter Robertson and Elery Hamilton-Smith participated in this and the other early trips which explored the cave. Along the floor of Christmas Hall the stream can be followed to where it emerges from rocks. The cave now extends for some 1.5 km of passage, including the high level extensions.



Neil Wilson in sump, 2011. Photo: Daryl Carr

Since these first major discoveries, there have been several high level decorated galleries discovered, as well as a passage which leads to Siren Sump which is related to Storm Water Tunnel, M-43, a related cave which takes a lot of water after rain events. There was a series of unsuccessful attempts to climb to what appeared to be some high level passage in Christmas Hall and various cavers have to no avail poked at the rock fall at the end of Christmas Hall where the stream emerges. SASS and subsequently VSA have worked with the owners, the Woodgate family for some 50 years to ensure that all caving was responsibly conducted.

Now that the property is for sale it was the opportunity to put words to deeds; hence, the Scrubby Creek Acquisition Project. Rimstone Cooperative Ltd decided to

sign a purchase contract to buy the cave. We sought and received support from the ASF Karst Conservation Fund.

Rimstone Cooperative Ltd is a Community Advancement Society with speleological aims. It cannot distribute dividends or property to members but on winding up it has to give its assets to an organization with similar aims. Rimstone Cooperative has for 38 years owned and operated Homeleigh at Buchan for its members and the caving community. Rimstone Cooperative Ltd is an ideal vehicle for establishing a caver owned and operated Karst Conservancy in Australia.

The Scrubby Creek Cave property is 105 acres and will be managed to protect the caves and karst. The Victorian Speleological Association will be asked to continue the Scrubby Creek Cave leadership scheme that it has had in place for several decades and to advise on cave access. The tufa terraces will be protected from stock and blackberries and weeds removed. The property will be managed in a sustainable manner to minimise any adverse effects on the karst. It will be available for stock agistment or lease to provide income for rates, fencing and other improvements. Rimstone Cooperative Ltd will work towards a protective covenant for the property. There is an opportunity to develop an interpreted karst walk showing the tufa terraces and the remnant rain forest vegetation along Scrubby Creek.

Rimstone Cooperative Ltd will be able to settle the contract to purchase the property in May 2012 due to the support already received plus the personal loans of a number of supporters but more donations are needed to cover these loans. The property will be used to protect the caves and karst. For further details contact me directly via email <nicholaswhite@netspace.net.au>.

Reference: Lloyd Mill, *Scrubby Creek Cave* ASF Newsletter **85**, (1979).



Daryl Carr at the end of Trog Wallow 1967, Credit VSA slide set.



M49 Stream way and decoration, Credit VSA slide set.

Donations can be made by following the instructions on the donation form downloadable from the Karst Conservation Fund page of the ASF Website at;

http://www.caves.org.au/i_giftfund.html