

WILD CAVING: MANGAPOHUE CAVE

John Brush

Another day and another pre-trip briefing at the HTG Cavers Hut. On this fine Sunday morning, what could be better than a leisurely trip through a nice stream cave on the Stubbs family farm. Or so Angus Stubbs was suggesting.

A short time later, six of us (Cathie Plowman, David Butler, Brett Dalzell, Cameron James, John Brush and Marj Coggan) headed off to the farm with Angus. Here, he borrowed his father's ute to save some paddock walking. A kilometre further on, we left the vehicle at the edge of the grassy paddocks and headed into the thick bush. Angus explained that the rugged karst terrain with its thick cover of native bush at the back of the farm was covered by a QEII open space covenant. This is a terrific system New Zealand has for protecting privately owned lands that have significant natural or cultural values. A QEII covenant is a legal agreement between a landowner and the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust. It is entered into voluntarily by the landowner and binds current and all subsequent landowners in perpetuity. The covenant is recorded on the land title.

It was just a ten minute walk along a rough path through the lush bush to the cave entrance. Initially the cave was a nice walk-through size, 1-2m wide and 2-5m high. There were many wetas in the outer section, lots of glow worms and quite a few moa bones. These were mostly on ledges, put there out of harm's way whenever Angus came across one exposed in the cave gravels. Angus said the cave was about a kilometre long, and about half way through, its character changed, the roof got lower and the water got deeper. At one point we were meandering through a forest of stalactites that extended to within a few centimetres of the water. Throughout the cave, all the rocky surfaces that were often water covered were coated with a black manganese layer.

Navigation in the cave was easy. We just followed the stream and we emerged from the lower entrance after a really pleasant two and a half hours underground. Angus took us on an extended walk back to the vehicle, taking in a deep karst canyon and a lookout at a high point on a ridge. Then it was back to his house for a welcome cuppa and, when they dropped in to say hello, a chat with his parents.



Cameron James and glowworms in the streamway passage.

Photo: John Brush