

## WILD CAVING: RANGITAWA CAVE

David Wools-Cobb

As part of the ACKMA pre-conference caving, and not being quite ready for the title of "Arm Chair Caver" I had signed up for a vertical trip into Rangitawa Cave.

The party consisting of David Butler, Tim Moulds, Cameron James & me, hosted by locals Travis, Neil and Chris all met at the HTG hut. I must say this hut is a bit too luxurious for us Northern Caverneers (which anyone who has seen our hut in Mole Creek will understand).

Travis had kindly rigged the four exit pitches previously to make the trip possible, which was much appreciated.

The cave is about 12 minutes drive from the hut, on private property. David Butler and I were a bit concerned when all the locals were donning wet suits and had brought along one for Cameron and Tim. In Tasmania we only wear a wet suit when it's REALLY cold; we Tasmanians were going to tough it in thermals. We walked down to the large doline (tomo) , about 10 minutes from the cars, however it took the locals quite some time to decide where to rig from, for the 85m (estimated by me) pitch. Initially we had a hand line which became more of an abseil to the main rig point. Who-ever was in front of me yelled out that "take care.....there's a little "nick" in the sheath of the first rope: when I got there about 2/3 of the sheath was frayed and as we saw later with each subsequent pass all the sheath became removed for about 50cm!!!!



Photo: Tim Moulds

The pitch head was a big tree, with the majority of the pitch being against the face; a pleasant drop with a sloping ramp about 6m from the bottom before the final drop. Using a rack, I had to add an extra bar about 2/3 of the way down. Some of us had carried car tubes to

assist with a swim later, however it was decided than just one would be needed. We all grouped up at the base for a drink and snack, and then a further 12m abseil down an unstable rock pile with a short vertical component, ending up in a pool of water. This required each caver to retrieve the tube from the previous caver's throw, then swim/float/climb along a wall in deep water for about 10m. I'm not sure the tube kept me any drier!

A mere 10m further on and that was the end of the horizontal caving for some time, as we'd come to the first pitch heading out. This was about 10m up with a very awkward pitch head: I watched how Tim struggled at the head, but frankly didn't do it all that much easier myself. A further 15m through a very muddy rift brought us to the second pitch, part of which was a small waterfall, so it was impossible to stay dry whilst waiting for the pitch to be free. This was about 30m, and was hard work after the first 20m (some of us not as fit/young as we'd like?).

The pitch head on this was excellent and easy to step off into a long meandering high rift. Eventually I came to a cave pack hanging over a tiny hole in the side of the passage, so assumed this was the route. This side passage became serpentinous and quite tight in places, with a few awkward climbs causing me to doubt my interpretation of the hanging pack, however eventually I came to a rope indicating the next pitch, a 15m easy prussic. Shortly after that was the final 10m pitch out, however it required a climb up over a challenging lip, which fortunately Tim was available for an extra hand-hold. This pitch was directly in the stream way, so we all got quite wet. Once outside, Tim & I waited for quite some time- two of the group had been de-rigging as they came out. Others in front of us had gone around to the entrance pitch to retrieve the rope.....so we had an easy time of it. Fifteen minutes back to the cars ended a very enjoyable vertical trip. Many thanks to our hosts for sharing a good fun cave.

### Back Cover: 2013 Waitomo Conference

*L-R. Standing: Dave Smith, Grant Gartrell, Travis Cross, Greg Middleton, Van Watson, Nick White, Sasa Kennedy, Dan Cover, Barry Richard, Andy Eavis, Andy Spate (partially obscured), Steve Bourne, Tim Moulds, Pete Crossley, David Summers, Kerryann Flohr, Haydn Stedman, Scott Melton, Patrick Nykiel, Pat Culberg, Celina Yapp, Cath Sellars, Ian Millar, Sam Webb, Dave, Rowling, Benjamin Deer (front), Mark Gibson, Siobhan Carter, David Head, Mary Trayes, Arthur Clarke, Chris Hendy, Mary McCabe, Phil McGuinn, Lillian Eavis, Rauleigh Webb, Judith Dixon, Ted Matthews, David Wools-Cobb, Tony Culberg, Trish Deer, Matt Gillies, George Bradford, Ann Augustyn, Dale Calnin (mostly obscured), Tim Stokes, Judy Christensen, John Ash, Angus Stubbs, Ann Musser, Greg Martin, Geoff Deer, Cameron James.*

*L-R. Kneeling: Regina Roach, Troy Watson, Dave Merritt, Julia James, John Brush, Marj Coggan, Pete Chandler, Libby Chandler, Lyn Stedman, Kirsty Dixon, David Butler, Cathie Plowman, Susan White, Moira Lipyeat, Tom Summers.*