

CAVE SURVEY COURSE

- Jane Gough*

I was fortunate in being able to attend, with Jackie Taylor from Bungonia, the second training course in Cave Survey in November 1999. Mike Lake, Phil Maynard and Jill Rowling conduct this course over two days at Wombeyan.

Mike explained that he wanted to pass on his experience and techniques he has been shown from other cavers in 'art' of cave survey. Hopefully this will help fellow cavers to produce functional and quality maps - not always the case. The cost of the course covers accommodation and course materials (including course notes and Survex software).

The course has a practical emphasis, which includes the surveying a section of the Victoria Arch tourist cave, reducing the survey data and producing a cave survey map. It's not all just crawling around caves and getting dirty. There are sessions on map standards, cave ethics, party organisation, welfare and evaluation of software currently available for cave mapping.

Eight students attended the course this year, a mixed group of cavers and cave managers, with some or no cave survey experience. I fall in to the later category. Students were arranged in teams of two, to map sections of cave in the Victoria Arch. Part way through the final day I was still wondering if my team would be able to produce a map of the

high standard on display from the first course run in 1998. Neither of us had any experience in cave surveying. I believe that the standard of the map we produced reflects the energy, enthusiasm and high standard of the instructors.

While I hope to have the opportunity to practice my new found skills in the near future, above and below ground, the value of the theory sessions cannot be over looked. I'll certainly think twice before criticising a cave map and have a better understanding of what it takes to prepare a good quality map - artistic flair and good data. I also now have an appreciation of what is not shown - which may be equally or more important than what is illustrated irrespective of if the map is being used as a navigation or management tool.

The course was recommended highly to me and I must concur with this. I would consider that it is a valuable opportunity for cave managers even if they hope to never use the surveying skills. It is an opportunity to understand what use a surveyed cave map can be for management, recognition of the effort that is required, and develop an appreciation of a good cave map.

(* Jane Gough will be acting as NSW NPWS Karst Officer while Andy Apate is in Antarctica - Ed.)