

BOOK REVIEW

Dark Zones: Exploring Caves by Julie Haydon. Published 2001, by Nelson Thomson Learning, 102 Dodds St., South Melbourne, 3205. ISBN: 1 86961 489 5. Price: \$Aus 12.00.
Reviewed by Ken Grimes.

This is a small (33 pages) introductory book about caves for children and young adults — something that cavers tend to shudder away from! However, do not be put off by the rather lurid cover; inside is a text that manages to instruct as well as arouse interest and which has none of the sensationalism that one sometimes meets. The photographs are excellent; some are by professionals (including some you may recognise from other books) and some were contributed by Australian cavers, such as Norm Poulter and Ken Boland. I should admit to possible bias here - there are also some photos of mine!

Julie did some serious research and turned up at a meeting of the VSA asking for advice - which she got! She has obviously listened to what they told her. However, the book is aimed at a world-wide audience, so there is little specific information about Australian caves.

The book is glossy with all pages in colour, including colour (or black) backgrounds to the text. Fortunately, the graphics designer has avoided some of the problems that can result from this and the text is all quite decipherable. There are 10 chapters, each running from one to five pages, though the contents sometimes drift away from the chapter title. Half or more of each page is taken up with photos so the text (and science in particular) is fairly basic, a necessity given the age of the audience and the limited size of the book. But all aspects of caves that we would expect get at least a brief coverage. Most of the photos are quite relevant to the section they appear in.

The chapters comprise:

- ☞ What is a Cave? — definitions and a section on how caves are formed with a pair of block diagrams to illustrate underground solution.
- ☞ Cave Formations — a couple of pages on stals etc (including **that** Poulter straw photo), and then breaks to a pair on Other Types of Caves (Sea caves, Lava caves and Glacier caves) which might have been better in the previous chapter.
- ☞ Cave Inhabitants — Defines Troglodites etc, and has a good double page on bats. Examples include photos of both Australian beasties (possum) and overseas (bear) as well as various invertebrates that could be from anywhere!
- ☞ Food Chain — essentially a "who eats who" of the underground.
- ☞ Caving — Lists personal & group equipment, potential dangers, and safety rules. Here and in the following chapter there is an emphasis on group activities and the need to learn from experienced leaders. I was fairly happy with the overall tone of this, it is not going to encourage kids to go racing off on their own.
- ☞ Caving Techniques — walking, crawling, climbing and diving(!). The treatment of the last should cool off most newbies!
- ☞ Getting Started — Join a club, take guided wild tours, practice above ground, read on the internet & books.
- ☞ What is a Speleologist? — What scientists do in caves (very brief)
- ☞ A Fragile Environment — Cave softly, with brief guidelines.
- ☞ Famous Caves — Carlsbad, Waitomo, Chattanooga and Sarawak Cavern. (Mammoth (US) and Lascaux have been mentioned earlier. Australia dips out (which is perhaps a good thing?) but Australian cavers will recognise some of the photos (which do not have their locations indicated).

There is also a 31-item Glossary of terms ("abseil" to "twilight zone"), A three-item "further reading" list, a list of web sites (Australian and overseas) and an index. Scattered through the book are a series of "Cave Quiz" boxes - with simple questions (e.g. what is the difference between a cave and a mine?) and the answers (printed upside-down).

Recommended for your caver-kids, for schools and should sell well at "kiosks" at commercial caves and cave-oriented National Parks. The publishers appear to specialise in schoolbooks, so this book may not appear in normal bookshops unless you ask for it.