

VALE CLYDE STIFF – A Cave Great

– Kent Henderson et al

ACKMA Life Member and cave management doyen, Clyde Stiff, died on 25 August 2009, in his 88th year. He will be sorely missed, and I am certain all ACKMA members join me in expressing deepest sympathy to his family



Clyde (front left) with Steve Bourne, at Mick Chalker's Retirement Dinner.

Clyde was the manager of Wombeyan Caves for 33 years from 1948 until 1981, and the predecessor of Mick Chalker. Clyde was buried at Taralga (the nearest town to Wombeyan) on 31 August. Andy Spate officially represented the ACKMA Committee, and presented a sympathy card to the family.

Attending along with family and friends were current Wombeyan staff included Geoff Lang (acting Wombeyan manager), Corin Smith, Laurie Dunn, and Peter Moore as well as field staff from the NSW NPWS Kanangra Area, including the District Manager, Kim de Govrick. ACKMA member John Wylie was also present.

Clyde was a great character, in ever sense of the word. He was also a cave management 'tiger' (or 'tyrant', to some...). I only met him twice. The first was at the ACKMA AGM Weekend at Taralga over 9/10 June 1996, where he drank the likes of Mick Chalker and Andy Spate 'under the table' – no mean feat (he was about 75 at that time!). The second and final occasion was at Mick Chalker's retirement dinner on 14 March last year. Although in a wheelchair, Stiffy was the life of the party – he had Steve Bourne spellbound, for one! A few comments from others:

Professor Elery Hamilton-Smith writes:

Stiffy was the greatest friend of cavers, but they didn't appreciate that at first. Before he went to Wombeyan, it (and Jenolan) were very poorly managed and many cavers treated both with great disrespect. Soon after he arrived at Jenolan a large caving group arrived in the middle of the night, unloaded everything, and scattered themselves and their gear all over the campsite. Stiffy dropped in on his early morning work and

woke them all up by bellowing: 'Right Ho. All get up, pack up and go!' One of them said, 'But Mr Stiff, we have a caving permit.' The reply: 'I don't care what you've got! Nobody litters my campsite like that. Now go.' Of course the cavers then complained to the Department of Tourism but they had already recognised that they had to get their act together and backed Stiffy up totally.



Clyde Stiff and Mick Chalker at Mick Chalker's Retirement Dinner.

Alan Griffin writes:

I naturally heard a great deal about Clyde including some fabulous stories on how he organised-acquired (!?) funds to protect and upgrade the facilities at Wombeyan.

Unfortunately, I only got the opportunity to talk to Clyde at a Sydney Speleological Society function at Wombeyan in 2004 but he was one person who certainly lived up to his reputation. Although wheelchair bound, he was as sharp and discerning as anyone at that function (actually sharper as the night went on!) and provided me with some good insight into the heritage of Wombeyan and cave management in general.

I agree he will be missed as he did make a difference and along with his colleagues and successors he has left a huge legacy at Wombeyan to allow future generations to marvel at the wonders of the caves.

Finally, with these few reminiscences, I publish the fill eulogy delivered at Clyde's funeral by ACKMA member Ken Fleming, a very long-term guide at Wombeyan:

Clyde Ernest Stiff, BEM, JP, was born on 18 December 1921, to Walter and Addie Stiff, at Blayney, New South Wales.

Known as 'Snow' to his family and friends, Clyde started school at Abercrombie Caves where they were living at that time. He then went on to finish his schooling at Trunkey.

He left school at 15 years to work at Trundle on a wheat farm, then went with a shearing contractor up to Winton in Queensland and became known as an excellent roustabout. After coming home he worked around Trunkey for around two pounds per week and also worked as a cave guide for his father and mother at Abercrombie Caves. There were four other brothers and sisters – Lyall, Aub, Mercy and Joyce.

Clyde enlisted in the Army on 22 January 1942 and stayed in service until 22 May 1946. He was in the 2/7 Battalion, 17th Brigade, 6th Division serving in New Guinea and other places. On leaving the army he share-farmed, growing cauliflowers for a while.

He married Phyllis June McKeller on 6 September 1946. On 18 December 1946, Clyde started work at Jenolan Caves – a job promised to him prior to the war. In January 1948 he came to Wombeyan Caves as an engine attendant for a few weeks before becoming Caretaker where he spent the rest of his working days until his retirement on 18th December 1981 – his 60th birthday.

Clyde and Phyllis had four children – Walter, Ken, Veronica and Peter. There are now 18 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren.



Clyde (centre front), with Wombeyan Staff, past and present, at Mick Chalker's Retirement Dinner.

In 1980, Clyde was awarded The British Empire Medal for his achievements at Wombeyan Caves and the Taralga District. I will go through some of these:

- 1948. Commenced planting of exotic trees in the Reserve.
- 1950. Water supply from Mares Forest Creek.
- 1952. Tennis Courts rebuilt.
- 1955. Kui Kiosk built.
- 1960. New toilet blocks, with septic tanks.
- 1961. Commenced re-wiring of Wollondilly, Kooringa, Junction and Mulwaree Caves.
- 1961. Worst flood ever at Wombeyan – huge clean up.
- 1964. Walking track widened to top of hill.

- 1964. Additions to Kiosk including Caretaker's residence.
- 1968. Fig Tree Cave re-opened to the public.
- 1972. Caravan park opened.
- 1973. New stone bridge over creek.
- 1973. Toilet block erected near Dorms.
- 1974. Communal kitchen opened.
- 1977. Fig Tree Cave made self-guided.
- 1979. Power down to pump at Mares Forest Creek.

This is only a part of his achievements at Wombeyan, as the general running of the Reserve, paper work, cave tours, etc. also had to be done.

One of the worst disasters at Wombeyan was in November 1961 when we had 24 inches of rain (600mls) in four days and thunder storms on the 4th day. This brought the creek down to wash away years of Clyde's work – huge holes in the camping ground, large logs everywhere, tennis courts gone, septic tanks washed out, bridges gone, caves flooded, Mittagong road closed for months and the water supply from Mares Forest Creek gone.

This was more than enough to make an ordinary man give up! But not Clyde. He soon had extra men working on the clean-up, rebuilding tennis courts, bridges, septic tanks, water supply etc. – not only rebuilding, but making them stronger against floods in the future with stone walls around the tennis courts, cottage and bridges made stronger.

Clyde was involved in many organizations in the Taralga District namely: the R.S.L., Bush Fire Brigade, Sunset Lodge, Taralga-Wombeyan Caves Tennis Club, Wombeyan Caves School Bus Committee, Taralga P. & C. Swimming Pool Committee, and Taralga Bowls Club. If something went wrong, any where in the district Clyde and Phyllis would always be the first there to help and they helped many others that very few of us ever knew about.

Clyde was the local Justice of the Peace. which is important to an isolated area, as it saved miles of travel to have something witnessed or signed by a JP.

Shortly after Clyde and Phyllis retired to the Berrima/Moss Vale area, Phyllis became ill and died on 25/7/84. This was a great loss to Clyde and the family who hadn't anticipated this happening so early in their retirement.

Clyde liked to enjoy himself with his family and friends around him. Many 'Happy Hours' have been spent down at the Kiosk well into the late hours of the night. Another favourite spot was over at the Marble Quarries in the tree house, where parties went on for long periods into the early hours of the morning, but work and cave tours still had to take place the next day.

Clyde always looked forward to Anzac Day, marching and meeting with his army mates and even in the late years when he couldn't march he was still there enjoying himself in his wheelchair.

Fishing was a hobby Clyde enjoyed and he knew of all the good fishing spots and walked miles to enjoy them – the fish didn't have a chance!


While Clyde's life is now over, Spring is here and his trees at Wombeyan will burst into new life as

a tribute to him and this will go on each year, though other things may change in the valley he cherished and where he spent the happiest years of his life.


Vale Clyde Stiff, truly one of the greats of Cave Management. His memory and testimony will long linger.

CLYDE ERNEST STIFF B.E.M., J.P.

NX85171 Australian Imperial Force 22 January 1942
 Discharged: 20 May 1946 Rank: Private
 Operational Service New Guinea: 13 October 1942 to 30 December 1942
 New Guinea: 17 April 1943 to 7 October 1943
 New Guinea: 11 November 1944 to 29 November 1945
 Principal Unit: 2/7 Australian Infantry Battalion
 Medals: 1939-45 Star
 Pacific Star
 War Medal 1939-45
 Australia Service Medal 1939-45
 Australian Service Medal 1945-1975 with Clasp PNG



Clyde (Snow) Ernest Stiff, B.E.M., J.P.
 "Fuja"
 18th December 1921 – 25th August 2009



Stonequarry Cemetery
 Monday 31st August 2009
 12.00pm

We wish to thank all our relatives and friends for their thoughts,
 Love, support and prayers.
 Following the burial, please join us at The Taralga Hotel.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS Ken Stiff

A man knocked on the pearly gates
 His face was scarred and old
 He stood before the man of fate
 For admission to the fold
 What have you done St Peter asked
 To gain admission here?
 I served in 2/7 Australian Infantry Battalion 1942-1946
 The pearly gates swung open wide
 St Peter touched the bell
 Come in and choose your harp he said
 You've had your share of hell

A TIME TO REMEMBER AND GIVE THANKS

Eulogies Ken Flemming
 Peter Stiff

R.S.L. TRIBUTES Neil Crocker

THE COMMITAL

PRAYER

Let us bow our heads as we say together

Our father who art in heaven
 Hallowed be thy name
 Thy kingdom come, thy will be done
 On earth, as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread
 And forgive us our trespasses
 As we forgive those who trespass against us
 And lead us not into temptation
 But deliver us from evil
 Amen

CALL BEARERS

Anthony Stiff
 Clinton Alders
 Paul Stiff
 Craig Alders
 John Alders
 Lauchlan Stiff

Grandchildren & Great Grandchildren release balloons
 during the playing of The Band Played Waltzing Matilda.

The funeral card for Clyde Stiff (inside and out)