

Enid Blyton

Was she a closet caver?

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Abstract

Enid Blyton (1897-1968), is often recognised as one of the most prolific children’s authors of all times. According to the Enid Blyton Society’s website <http://www.enidblytonsociety.co.uk/a-biography-of-enid-blyton.php>, she is believed to have written around seven hundred books, as well as magazines, articles and poems. Many of her books were written as part of a series, such as “The Famous Five” as well as “The Adventure Series”. A common theme that becomes evident to anyone reading these two series, as well as numerous others of her works, is her reference to caves, both in written and illustrative form. One must ask if she was a “closet caver” or whether her use of caves in her writings was simply as a place of refuge or a means of escape or simply a metaphor for adventure. This paper will endeavour to explore her use of caves in her writings, utilising both written and illustrative examples to see if a conclusion can be drawn. The primary source document is the third book in the Adventure Series, “*The Valley of Adventure*”, first published in 1947 by Macmillan.

Introduction

During a family holiday at Woolgoolga (near Coffs Harbour NSW) in May 1977, it rained and in a three-day period an accumulated 36 inches fell; resulting in the Pacific Highway being flooded both south and north of Woolgoolga. In order to keep a then eleven-year-old amused in a caravan, my mother purchased (for 40 cents) an original cover version (minus the original dust wrapper) of Enid Blyton’s book “*The Valley of Adventure*” from the Woolgoolga Meals on Wheels Book Exchange. This book, which I have read numerous times since, introduced me to the wonderful world of Enid Blyton stories. Not only that, it further excited my then fledgling love of all things caves, as the central story line in the book involves four children and their adventures in a lonely valley, resplendent with caves, in Austria just after the Second World War. Of course it also meant that my mother then only had to keep my eight-year-old brother amused during those rainy days at Woolgoolga! During my lifetime, I have collected numerous Enid Blyton books and the more I read, the more I realised that caves and secret passages do

play a central role in many of her stories. I therefore thought that this aspect of her writings might provide the basis of an interesting article for an issue of an ACKMA journal.

In this story, four children (Jack, Lucy-Ann, Phillip and Dinah) are excited at the prospect of an overnight trip in Detective Bill’s new aeroplane. At the airport, they mistakenly get on to the wrong plane and end up in a deserted valley in Austria. The children need somewhere to hide from the two men and find a cave whose entrance is hidden by fern fronds, this making a great “home” for them. While Jack & Philip are raiding a supply of cans of food, Lucy-Ann & Dinah find a small passage (a solution tube?) at the back of their cave and decide to explore. This passage eventually opens up into a large chamber which they call the “Cave of Echoes”; another passage eventually emerges onto a ledge behind a large waterfall. While here, the girls spot the men following the boys and they “caper about”, to draw the men’s attention away from the boys who have no idea that they are being followed. Despite several attempts to reach the ledge, the men cannot.

The men return with a third man and their prisoner, an Austrian named Otto who the men believe knows the way to hidden treasure. Otto leads the men on a false trail to the treasure but Jack rescues him temporarily. During this time, he then draws Jack two maps; one showing the way to the only pass out of the valley and the other showing the way to the treasure. After an aborted attempt to reach the pass (which has been bombed), the children decide to follow the other map in an attempt to locate the treasure. This they do and soon come to a series of caves; the first one being richly decorated with stalactites, stalagmites, columns and shawls. Subsequent chambers contain jewel bedecked church statues, large paintings, old books and documents and chests of gold coins. The children are surprised to find at the end of the series of treasure caves two additional chambers that are home to an elderly Austrian couple (Elsie and her husband) and their hen Martha; left in the caves to guard the treasure. The men eventually locate the treasure caves and lock the children and the elderly couple in the last two chambers (there is a stout wooden door). Lucy-Ann is

upset at everything that is happening so Elsie removes a picture from the wall, revealing a convenient solution tube. Phillip follows this tube and it leads back to the waterfall ledge and their home cave. Phillip makes good an escape from the valley in one of the by now several planes to summon help. Jack and the girls subsequently use the tube to escape as well. Jack then manages to lock the men into the last two chambers (after convincing Elsie and her husband to leave beforehand).

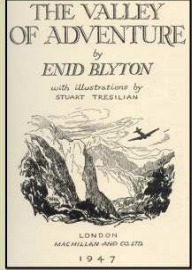
Detective Bill arrives and using the system of solution tubes, they manage to surprise the men who by now

realise that they have been locked in. Phillip is reunited with the other children and arrangements are made for Elsie and her husband to be looked after. Word is also received that Otto is ok as well after being left outside of a hospital. Having read all of the adventure books, this one is my favourite, mainly because of the ingenious weaving of the caves into the story.

Following are a selection of slides from my PowerPoint presentation made at the 2018 ACKMA Conference at Margaret River on Friday 11th May. These slides demonstrate the life like illustrations by artist Stuart Tresilian.

When initially formulating the concept for this presentation, Alison, one of our guides at Jenolan Caves who is a past high school English teacher, suggested that I should look at Enid's use of caves both as a place of safety & refuge as well as a means of escape.

Both of these themes are well represented in her book "The Valley of Adventure".



THE VALLEY OF ADVENTURE
by ENID BLYTON
with illustrations by STUART TRESILIAN
LONDON: MACMILLAN AND CO. LTD.
1947

THE VALLEY OF ADVENTURE

Book three in Enid's "Adventure Series", following the exploits of Phillip, Jack, Dinah, Lucy-Ann, Kiki the parrot and their good friend detective Bill Cunningham with original illustrations by artist Stuart Tresilian. An adventure set high in the Austrian Karst...!!!



Near a huge waterfall Jack finds a cave whose entrance is hidden by fern fronds...


"...they passed through the green curtain into the cave behind".

The children's main worry at first is that they have very little to eat!

"An adventure was one thing — but an adventure without anything to eat was quite another thing. That wouldn't do at all."




Above: Great karst discharge!
Above: Safe in the cave with food!



While the boys are retrieving a sack of cans, Dinah falls asleep. Lucy-Ann looks for Kiki the Parrot who she believes is hiding at the back of the cave...


"Why — there's a hole there!" said Lucy-Ann in surprise. "That's where Kiki must have gone!" The hole went upwards slightly, a round, narrow tunnel...It was almost as round as a pipe. Maybe water had forced its way through at one time, but now it was dry.

Above/Below: Exploring a classic phreatic solution tube.



Dinah wakes up and realizes that Lucy-Ann is missing and searches the cave. She stared in amazement when she saw two shoes sticking out of a round hole about as high as her shoulder.

"Lucy-Ann! ...Where are you going? What's up that hole?" "I don't know Dinah. I found it by accident. I think Kiki must have gone up it. Shall I go up and see if I can find her? You come too?" "All right," called Dinah. "Go on up"




Lucy-Ann wriggled further up the narrow pipe-like tunnel. It suddenly widened out, and by the light of her torch she saw below her another cave — but a vast one this time. She managed to get out of the hole, and had a look round at the cave. It was more like an underground hall. Its roof was very high indeed. "Kiki! So you are here!" cried Lucy-Ann, and then listened in astonishment to the echo that sounded immediately.

Dinah subsequently joins Lucy-Ann in the chamber. Both girls are scared by the echoes repeating all that they say.

Then Dinah recovered herself. "It's only the echoes," she said. "you often get them in enormous caves like this. I wonder if anyone has ever been here before."

"Never, I should think," said Lucy-Ann, flashing her torch all around. "Fancy! We may be treading in a place that no one else has ever trodden in before!" "Let's explore the cave a bit," said Dinah. So they walk slowly round the great dark cave, their footsteps repeated a hundred times by the echoes.

Above: In the Cave of Echoes



"Look at that!" said Dinah, surprised. "A passage! Do you suppose it leads anywhere?" "It might," said Lucy-Ann, and her eyes gleamed. "Don't forget, Dinah, that those men are after treasure."

The girls decide to follow the passage which was narrow and rocky and their torches gleamed in front of them. The passage was also very winding, led downwards and the floor was very uneven to the feet, causing the girls to trip and stumble often; at one point the roof came down so low the girls had to crawl underneath it. Could this low spot be a sump when flooded?

They start to hear a muffled roar and can't imagine what it is. Dinah suggests it is the roar of a mighty fire which scares the more timid Lucy-Ann. She wants to return but Dinah suggests they continue. They must have produced incredible torch batteries in the 1940s!

The girls suddenly realise it is the roar of the waterfall and are surprised when they emerge onto a ledge behind it, just in time to caper about to attract the attention of the two men who have been following Jack & Phillip as they return to the "Fern Cave" with more tins. The girls return the way they came & relate their tale to the boys.

Above: Capering behind the waterfall!



...after following various signs on the (treasure) map, the children come to a collection of caves and passages in the mountainside.

Note the well drawn bedded rock layers and the elliptical, phreatic nature of the cave entrance which could possibly represent an ancient river outflow.



The first cave is festooned with stalagmites and stalactites which have joined to form columns and Jack says:

"It's like an enormous underground cathedral — it just wants an organ to begin playing a grand and magnificent hymn."

Note the well drawn speleothems in this excellent representation by Stuart Tresilian.

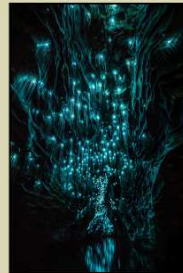
"Do those stalactites shine in the dark?" asked Dinah suddenly. Jack switched off his torch...for up in the roof and over the walls there glowed thousands of tiny stars.

"Gracious! What are they?" whispered Dinah, amazed. *"Are they alive?"*

The boys didn't know. They watched the shimmering, flickering stars, that seemed to go in and out like elfin lights.

"Might be a kind of glowworm," said Jack. *"Aren't they lovely?"*

The flickering stars were most entrancing to watch.



Now to spoil the children's cave adventure... This image is not an Austrian Glowworm Cave. *(It is somewhere in NZ.)*

www.glowworms.org.uk/worldwide.html advises the following about glowworm sightings in Austria:-

Bisamberg (10 km NE of Vienna)
2 or 3 glow worms in garden, June 2001. (Mykola). Also one seen June 2003.

Is this a great example of poetic licence by Enid Blyton?

Continuing their exploration of the cave, the children find a door and open it. What lies beyond? Could it be the treasure?



The Treasure!
All the caves fill the children with awe and wonder and the treasures they contain are breathtaking. There are richly-adorned statues taken from churches (above) and chests of gold coins (right). Other caverns contain rare books, documents and paintings.

But wait...

What will the children find next?

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A Chicken? Yes – a chicken!
In a cave, deep in the Austrian Karst...



Bill, Bill's colleagues and Phillip fly back to the valley and are led to the entrance to the treasure caves by Phillip. They are reunited with Jack, Dinah, Lucy-Ann and the elderly couple.

Jack leads Bill and some of his men through the various connected caves through to the hole behind the picture. They surprise the men in the "Cave of Statues". The men are captured and as like all Enid Blyton stories:-

All's well that ends well...!!!

"Hands Up! We've got you cold!"

A Summary – Caves as a place of refuge & escape in the "Valley of Adventure"!

Refuge

- Fern Cave* - for the children;
- Treasure Caves* - for the treasures and the guardian couple;
- Treasure Caves* - for the men sheltering from the rain with stolen treasure;
- Cave of Stars* - for the children and the guardian couple.
- Cave of Stars* - for the glowworms that escaped from New Zealand...!!!

Escape

- Cave of Echoes* - for Kiki the Parrot to escape from the Fern Cave when the boys refuse to let her go with them;
- Cave of Echoes/Waterfall* - for the children when the men are following the boys;
- Treasure Caves* - for the children to escape their disappointment when they find the pass out of the valley blocked;
- Cave of Statues* - for Phillip to hide pending his escape from the men;
- Hole behind the Picture* - for the children to escape from the men.

The valley of Adventure – various cover artworks.



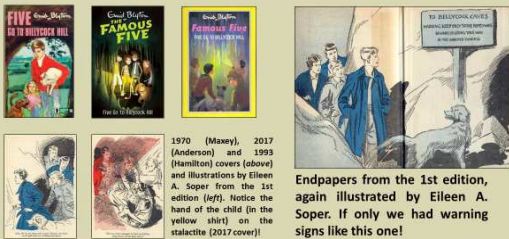
Five go to Billycock Hill

Another well known Enid Blyton series is "The Famous Five", which follows the exploits of siblings Julian, Dick & Anne as well as their cousin Georgina (George) and her dog Timmy. Like many other of Enid Blyton's works, caves and secret passages feature in many of the Famous Five stories.

"Five go to Billycock Hill" (# 16 in a series of 22), first published in 1957, is significant as the children actually visit Billycock Caves which have been set up with "roped ways" to assist with a visit to the caves. Intending visitors are warned by a sign, part of which reads "...Beware of losing your way in the unroped tunnels". Like "The Valley of Adventure", Enid Blyton presents a fairly accurate description of a visit to the caves and the sights to be seen.

One of my favourite parts of the book, being a cave guide, is when some spooky noises scare the normally unflappable Famous Five and they "race pell-mell out of Billycock Caves"! "Five go to Billycock Hill" also has some great cave illustrations...

A sample of illustrations from "Five go to Billycock Hill"



Endpapers from the 1st edition, again illustrated by Eileen A. Soper. If only we had warning signs like this one!

Just in case you are wondering why the name "Billycock Caves"?



Charlie Chaplin wearing his signature "Billycock Hat"

Because in the story Enid Blyton makes reference to the hill that the caves are located in as being shaped like a "Billycock Hat", more commonly referred to as a bowler hat.

The bowler hat is believed to have first been designed in 1849 to protect game-keepers from low hanging tree branches while on horseback.

Five go off in a Caravan

"Five go off in a Caravan" (# 5 in the series), first published in 1946 is also significant as the Famous Five are again exploring caves and come across hidden treasure, this time being the proceeds of robberies committed by some circus people who they have become acquainted with. Like in the "Valley of Adventure", the children are held prisoner in the cave with one of them escaping to raise the alarm. Again, there are a variety of covers and illustrations depicting caves and underground watercourses.



More illustrations – "Five go off in a Caravan"



(Above) Dust wrapper from the 1957 (Soper) edition.

Five Run Away Together

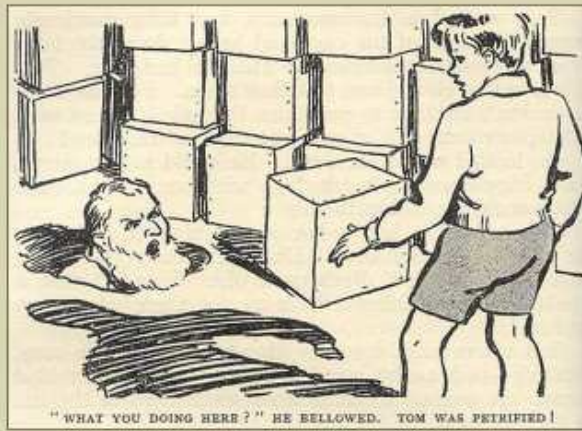
"Five Run Away Together" (# 3 in the series), was first published in 1944. In this story, the Famous Five run away to Kirrin Island to escape from the Stick family who have been employed by Georgina's parents on a temporary basis. In true Famous Five form, they need shelter so they find a convenient cave which figures prominently in the latter part of the story. Like other Famous Five stories, there are a variety of covers and illustrations depicting the cave.



A selection of cave images from "The Adventurous Four" Series.



And finally, from "The Adventurous Four Again"...



The resemblance is so uncanny...!!!

Conclusion

So, while there is no direct evidence that Enid Blyton was a caver, she either possibly knew people in her life who were or had read up on the subject of caves. As any scholar of her writings will point out, caves and secret passages feature prominently in many of her writings!

Acknowledgements

With thanks to:-

- My parents for buying me "The Valley of Adventure" in 1977;
- Alison for suggesting exploring the theme of caves as a place of refuge and escape;
- The Enid Blyton Society <http://www.enidblytonociety.co.uk> for the images used in this presentation; and
- To all of you for listening to my presentation!