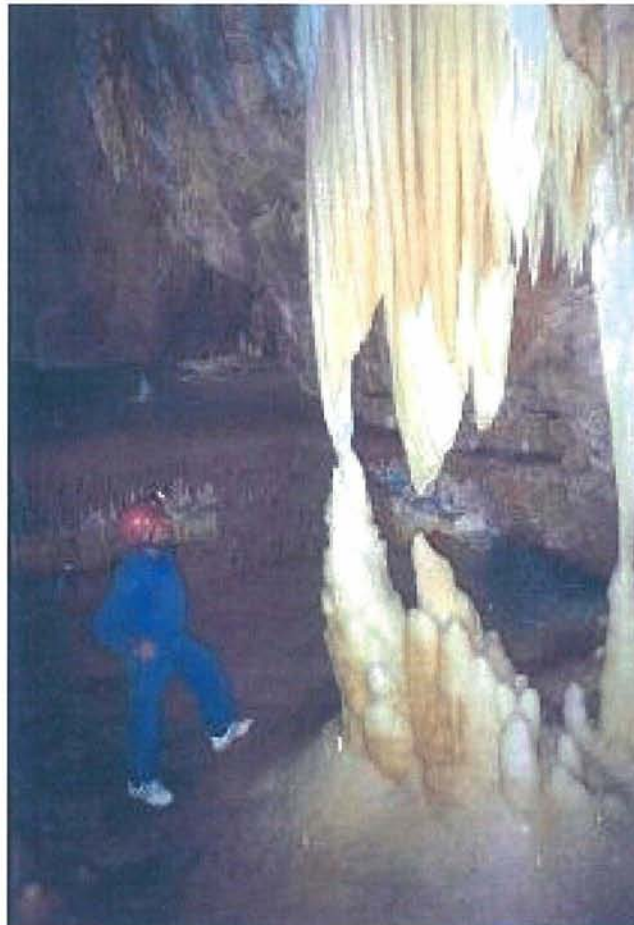


Oolite

Journal of the
Blue Mountains Speleological Club

Volume 30 Number 1 - July 2004



OOLITE

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Cover Photo: Rick Brett at the Wishing Well, in Chevalier Extension, Glass Cave, Jenolan.

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From the President

The last couple of years have been quite a trial for cavers generally and Blue Mountains Speleological Club was no exception. The difficulties of obtaining insurance has frustrated even the most patient caver. On behalf of BMSC I sincerely thank members of the ASF executive for their perseverance in securing adequate insurance for ASF members, so that we all may continue to pursue our interests in caving.

BMSC is not a large club, mostly family members and a few singles. Given the insurance problems and the juggling of increased workload, children's sports and other commitments, I am very proud that we have held together during this difficult period. Thank you to all for hanging in there.

Fortunately, we have now been able to undertake several trips. And some beauties at that. Well attended and thoroughly enjoyable. The excitement of our kids first serious abseil and/or climb into a cave, the wonders of Chevalier and Barralong at Jenolan, the arduous efforts in other caves at Jenolan, like Spider and Mammoth. The beauty and challenges experienced at Yarrangobilly. Then afterwards back at the camp or hut for a quiet chat around a warm fire on a cold night. Or a refreshing dip in the thermal pool at Yarrangobilly, preceded by a more refreshing dip in the Yarrangobilly River. What a wonderful way to experience life. Here's to many more years caving with BMSC.

Cheers,
Iain Lynch

From The Editor

Greetings BMSC members!

Thanks for the opportunity to try my hand at editing the Oolite. First things first, I would like to acknowledge the considerable effort put in by our previous editor, Cheryl Lynch. Cheryl usually held the post from 1998 to 2002, including through the difficult insurance-debacle crunch-time when membership fell away, trips were scarce and trip reports were even scarcer. Things are picking up now and membership is increasing. So I'd like to take the opportunity to ask all members to do their bit and contribute reports, articles, photos, cartoons, anecdotes, puzzles – whatever you've got – for future editions. All material will be considered for publication, from the accurate, informative and inspiring to the dubious, ridiculous and frankly libellous. It might not all get published, but it will entertain the editorial board who have to plough through this guff to ensure an appropriate standard of journalistic rigour (such as it is...).

So get those ideas rolling.
Cindy Mann.

Walli. May 11-12, 2002.

Caving Party: Rick Brett. (T.L.), Iain, Cheryl, Angel, Mitchell and Tommie Lynch; Rob, Cindy and Tim Mann; Phil and Matt Niciak, Michelle Coleborn,
Above ground: Ann Marie and Naomi Brett, Pop Niciak.

We all met at Cliefden early Saturday morning. After pitching camp, six of us departed for Walli, arriving around 11AM. After a scratch around to locate the visitors book, we finally un-buried it and had a read of the notes from the last Walli visits. This is always interesting. We trogged up and headed off to locate Defile which Iain located. Ring bolts were installed near the cave entrance which made our setup a whole lot easier. We rigged the entrance with both ladder and a rope which was backed up and doubled checked . This was due to the fact that we basically used the big aging log above the entrance as a rebelay so as to give the ladder and ropes a nice entry into the cave. We all abseiled into the cave however did not use the rebelay bolt point that had been set up in the roof just before the sharp edge of the flow stone. As per my memory a bit of an ugly maneuver had to be negotiated to complete the abseil. After filling in the visitors book we set off to explore and re-familiarise ourselves with the cave. My goal was set on locating a maze section of the cave where I recalled some great holes in the false floor. Wow this took some finding! It was at a higher level than I recalled. Eventually we found it, and took several photos before calling it a day. Generally we noted that the formation in the cave was rather active and one small sump had a few centimeters of water in it. I headed first up the ladder so the belay could be set for the remainder of the party. The good old stitch plate was handy as heck on the belay. Not even a swear word from Michelle! 6.5hrs all.

Back at the Cliefden hut we had an enjoyable evening with some great music and singing by Rob, with a little bit of back up on the BASS (didgeredoo) by Rick. Rob advised it was difficult finding that "G" and "H" notes! After this it was off to the recovery ward (BED) for a good rest.

Sunday

Well today was Mother's day, so it was up to the kids to give their mums a special treat. With the air full of excitement the kids were quickly trogged up in all their gear. Timmy, Mitchell and Angel were raring to go eager to go so they give their mums that special memory of their first big abseil into a cave.

We headed off for good old Horse Hole and what seemed like a thousand awful stinging nettles surrounding the cave opening. With a bit of manual whipper snipping the nettle problem was soon enough resolved which then allowed us to carefully rig the pitch for the 25metre abseil. I entered the cave first ensuring that the pitch was clear and that the bottom of the cave had no snakes as per the previous visit. Arriving at the bottom there were no surprises, so the all clear was given.

The little guys were soon enough on the rope and in control of their own destiny. As we had double ropes set up the adults were able to abseil beside the kids as they entered the cave whilst bottom belays were steadily maintained. Tim , Mitchell and Angel did a grand job on their respective abseils. They showed the normal butterflies, however all quickly overcame their fears and abseiled like little champions into the cave. The abseil was too fast and over with in a fairly short time for all. Rob, Michelle, Phil, and, Matt came next.

This being a small cave we moved the party down the small scree slope to where the cave continues on. Phil and I both noticed that the large pile of rocks which made up the scree slope were being held completely in position by a rather thin and what appears to be a rapidly deteriorating log which has a diameter of only 50mm, crossing the cave horizontally just above the hole that is they way on into the cave. The younger guys were unperturbed as they carefully passed on by the "retainer log" down the slippery flowstone and into the lower chamber area of the cave. The floor in this section was noted as being completely dry although moist, with evidence of fine calcite all over. Well that was about it for the cave so it was simply now a case of reversing what we had done on the way in.

I led out and Cindy assisted at the top with the belay set up. We rigged a prussic device which resembled a hauling system and belayed the little ones up the ladder. All went extremely well with Mitchell being the only one to get a little twisted in amongst the ladder. 6 hrs for all.

We departed Cliefden after dropping the hut fees at Anthony's place and headed for home...When passing through Mandurama guess who's at the Pub..ROB, CINDY and Timmy. No folks not for a beer...a rock had punctured Rob's fuel tank and he was almost out of fuel. Rob and Timmy stayed at the pub for two days whilst the car was fixed...Rumor has it that the Mandurama pub "Rocked" for two nights solid...

Good on Ya Rob ...A true blue BMSC member.

Rick Brett.



Angel, Mitch (top) and Timmy, learning the ropes in Horse Hole

Jenolan - 22nd -23rd June 2002

Chevalier Extension

The Lucky Few: Iain Lynch (T/L) Rick Brett, Michelle Coleborn, Phil Niciak and Cindy Mann.

9:30: Arrived at the Guides Office to pick up the key, chatted with Barry Richardson and headed off to the hut. We were pretty excited at the prospect of getting into this restricted cave, as we trogged up, sorted the gear and lugged it all to J-17 (Glass Cave). Everyone was carrying either 2 packs (we had lots of photography gear between us), or one pack and a set of scaling poles, kindly lent by John Bonwick.

12:30 Descended Glass. There is a squeeze at the start, a gap which was tricky to cross with the gear, then up to the approximately 50-foot fixed ladder which despite its age is in reasonably good condition. No doubt about it, they built 'em to last back then! It was quite a job getting the gear (scaling poles and a couple of short ladders and a rope) through this section, (or at least it was for those who were doing it). Iain roped the gear on, and Rick, sitting at the top of the pitch, was hauling it up, with Michelle guiding its descent. When it was all finally down the rest of us followed and looked for the spot to set up the scaling poles. Iain found it – a handy, longish crack in the top of a flat rock. He and Rick assembled the 6 poles for the 8m pitch. Iain climbed first and then belayed the rest of us (Note: the wall against which the pole was placed was of brown and white flowstone dripping down from the top of the pitch – quite a pretty wall).

I followed Michelle up and she pointed out the truly amazing walls of fossils of what appeared to be small marine invertebrates, possibly small bivalves and perhaps barnacles. It was remarkable. There were also fossils that looked like large leaves, and we figured we were standing in the transformed remains of a primeval mangrove. It was hard to move on from this exciting area, but time was pressing.

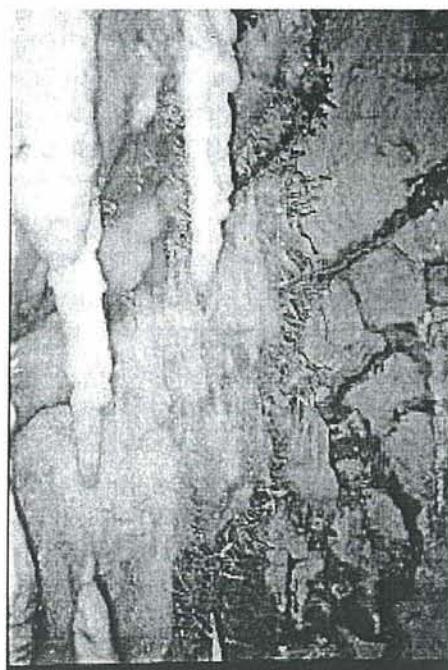
Continuing on, Rick located an area through which we could glimpse Louben's Extension – however this would have to wait for another visit, as time was definitely not on our side. We'd already been in 5hrs, and blown a bit of film. Pretty soon we were at the 2m pit, after which there were 2 short, easy ladder pitches of only a few metres each. It was about 12 to 15°C in the cave which was quite pleasant.

We continued on to a squeeze, then on to the clean area, where we all changed into clean shoes before continuing in to Chevalier. There was an area of beautiful red microgour, after which we turned right in to the Wishing Well area. Adjectives fail me! We spent some serious time taking photos, then headed off in the other direction. We saw cave coral, small aragonite flowers, helictites, and, at the end of this passage, some pools with calcite rafts and the loveliest dogtooth spar I've seen. Also in this vicinity was the Dreamdust Passage. We all wondered what the guys who discovered this section must have thought. We spent a lot of time and and blew a lot of film in Chevalier, our only regret being that we didn't have more film. When it ran

out, we amused ourselves watching Rick set his flash off behind various decorations, making them fluoresce.

We headed out the way we'd come and exited the cave at around midnight, after almost 12 hours and shambled wearily back to the hut. We slept really well with a lovely fire through the night.

Cindy Mann.



Iain on the scaling pole pitch, and some of the pretties in Chevalier extension

Spider

Sunday, we woke up at 8:00 to find Shane, Allie and Dave Noble had arrived and were expecting us to go caving. Talk about bad manners. But we dragged ourselves out of the sack, ate quickly and headed off to do Spider. The Spider group comprised Iain (T/L) the recent arrivals and me. Rick, Michelle and Phil had to leave for home. We descended at 10:30, using a handline at the climbdown past the inside gate. We squeeze through the series of squeezes and up the mud slope – all very much drier than I've ever seen them. Then on through the Boulder Pile, through another squeeze and a visit to the Khan Passage and then the Glop Holes, and on to the lake. I managed to keep the water out of my boots with some judicious stepping.

At the lake David and Iain went in to do the duckunder, Allie and Shane picnicked on the shore and I caught some seriously-needed zeds. After our intrepid icebreakers returned we started to head out. Iain noticed some decomposing human faecal matter along the way (better than the fresh product, I suppose), and was all for removing it, but, shucks, we didn't have a bag to carry it out in.

We exited Spider after about 5h. Very enjoyable, although Iain and I were seriously stuffed by now!

Cindy Mann.

Jenolan - 29 June 2002 Barralong

But Wait – THERE’S MORE

As if Chevalier was not enough! This week we were back at Jenolan with the fortune of visiting Barralong Cave. It was to be a day trip only, and we all arrived early to a brisk Jenolan morning. All the guests’ vehicles had a good layer of ice.

We warmed ourselves at the Guides office and waited for Steve Reilly. After a short chat we all headed up to the cars to get ready and subsequently met Steve at the entrance to the Binoomea Cut.

Too early for the tourists, we had a clear run in the caves, and it was not long before we turned off to Barralong – where waters meet. We negotiated the rockpile reasonably easily, although this author is not getting any smaller and struggled a bit through the tight triangular squeeze. A bit of scrape here and there was well worth the trouble as we soon entered highly decorated passage that gives Barralong its well deserved reputation.

Steve led us through the length of the majestic formation passage, and down to the sump. At this point we turned around and commenced hours of photography and study of the wonderful formations. Such a wide variety of beautiful and impressive formation in such a short length of passage. It truly was a grand experience which we all enjoyed thoroughly. Again we felt extremely privileged to be there.

After much photography and a final group shot very carefully near the long straw, we proceeded to exit the cave, emerging at the Binoomea Cut just as our long-time and good friend Barry Richards came in with a group of tourists.

An appropriate way to finish a marvelous trip in this beautiful cave.

Members Present : Iain Lynch (Trip Leader), Michelle Coleborn, Cindy Mann, Phil Niciak, Michael Materazzo.

Iain Lynch

Barralong, 29th June 2002 (Cindy’s log)

Winners of this week’s BMSC Lottery: Iain Lynch (T/L), Rick Brett, Phil Niciak, Michelle Coleborn, Mike Materazzo, Cindy Mann.

A very cold morning, with snow at Hampton, Lowther and even quite a way down from the top of the five-mile. We arrived at the Guide’s Office to wait for Steve Riley who got the gig of showing us through Barralong (there’s worse jobs a bloke could get, I suppose). As on the previous weekend, we were pretty excited at this rare chance to experience the beauty of an-

other restricted access cave.

Steve Riley arrived about 8:40 and we trogged up and headed off for Temple of Baal. We were in by 9:00. Steve led us through the tourist route and on through the Binoomea Cut, from where we accessed Barralong. It certainly was a fabulous cave, and not difficult at all. We carried all our gear in 2 packs only. At about 15°C, it was far warmer in the cave than outside it, and I was starting to wonder if I'd overdone it with the thermals...

We walked and crawled along the river passage that, here underground is known as the Styx, but on the surface is Surveyor's Creek. When we made it to the duckunder, the perennially hardy and presumably neurologically challenged Iain opted to wade across to see the Ladder to Nowhere on the other side. Rather him than me.

The way on was through a squeeze, past the incredible Chocolate Flowstone. At one point there was a 4m tape descent anchored from a piton in the mud floor which looked a bit dodgy but was okay under load. There was also a hole to cross and Steve very gallantly stood in it and let Michelle and I use his shoulder for a foothold. Hope we don't get his chiropractor's bill!

There was lots to see in Barralong – notably a straw a couple of metres long, helictites, aragonite, spar, incredibly beautiful but not, I think, as spectacular as Chevalier, partly because there were no amazing walls of fossils. As in Chevalier, we blew several metres of film and still wished we had more. We exited after 7.5 hours, wondering if we'd ever get this much luck in a single fortnight again.

Cindy Mann.



Phil, Mike, Michelle and Cindy in Barralong, and the Chocolate Flowstone, also in Barralong.

Jenolan, 23rd-24th November 2002

Wiburd's Lake Cave

Caving Party: Iain Lynch (T/L) Cindy Mann (Trainee T/L), Rick Brett, Phil and Matt Niciak, Allie and Shane Anderson.

I met Phil and Matt at their place and went out with them, meeting Rick and Iain at the Caver's Cottage around 9:45. A coolish day, which was a relief after all the hot weather we've been having lately. At 11:00 we started off and parked at Mammoth Flat. We stopped briefly at Mammoth where Iain picked up the key from one of the guides who was leading an adventure tourist group through. We continued North onto Wiburd's Bluff, about 3 km, more-or-less following McKeown's Creek, which, as usual, was dry. We were looking out for some ruins that Rick had told us about, which would indicate we were in the ballpark of Wiburd's Lake Cave.

There are many entrances to WLC, and we were looking for J-58. None of the many trip reports in Oolite from decades ago actually specified where it was, but one did mention lots of nettles. This, together with the fact that none mentioned a stiff climb, I figured it must be about at river level, which it was. Rick eventually spotted it while the rest of us located several other tagged entrances. The tag is not obvious, but he found it by noticing the gentle sway of long grass which hung down in front of it. When we got closer we could feel the cold chill rushing out of it. The hole will be easy to find next time: Looking up the bluff and slightly to the left of the entrance is a very obvious orange wall.

We descended through J-58 at 12:30, and shortly afterwards come to a choice and went left. As far as I could tell we actually did make the Lake Chamber. I am supposing this was it because there was evidence of rounding of the contours of the walls and also of the large-ish rocks strewn around in the deeper channels. They looked very well tumbled. Was it big enough to float a Manly ferry? Perhaps. Especially given that the 1908 versions were probably smaller than those of today.

We headed through a streamway passage that Phil ("The Ferret") found. He and Alison explored it and then told the rest of us. It was worthwhile and ended in a drop of about 3.5m, and as far as we could tell from an old SUSS map was possibly in the Yawning Gulches 1 section. Rick and Iain rigged a handline for me and the 3 of us descended. There was heaps to look at down there. The others meanwhile had gone back to the Dykes area and Allie and Shane went to explore the area near the unstable rockpile and the 35' shaft.

We only did what we could do without ladders and ropes. Iain thought we might be at the bottom of Yawning Gulches 1, but we didn't get there from the top, although Iain climbed to an area well above the start of the 3.5m drop.

Eventually we headed back to the Lake Chamber and went along another passage to the region of J-92 entrance (or exit in our case). We poked around a few short passages that either choked off or were blind, and we decided to head out after 5h down. Surfacing, we decided to check out the ruins. We took a few more photos and tried to imagine the lives of those who once called this place home.

This cave was very enjoyable, but there remains a lot of it to see. According to a SUSS trip

report, Pitter Patter Passage is probably the best prospect for a new lead. It would also be really great to visit the Upper Chambers.

Walking back we poked our heads into Hennings and the guys showed me the famous phallectite. Impressive certainly, although perhaps a little overstated, and lacking the anatomical perfection of the one Wendy and I saw in Dwyers. But I can see why people would photograph it. We continued our way in the by-now stinking heat, across dry, dusty, dead grass in this El Niño year. Eventually walking back to the hut we cleaned up, had some tea and all headed off to the bar at Caves House. Coming back around 11:00 pm we saw an echidna near the hut. Rick, Shane and Allison left for home.

Cindy Mann.

Mammoth

Sunday 8:00 We were up and getting ready to continue to Wiburd's again, but the looming swelter and the proximity of Mammoth (not to mention the cool blast emanating from it) made us change our plans. We descended at 9:30 through J-13. We headed for Mammoth Squeeze which is my preferred route, but the guys all went through the Rockpile, which meant I had a wait for them at the squeeze exit, and was very glad of my 2 thermals. We continued on towards Lower River, and Iain took a detour looking for Grinning Monster Lake, but couldn't find it. Next time. The water was lower than I'd ever seen it here, and while the rest of us lazy cavers slouched around Lower River, Iain got motivated and bolted off to Slug Lake. He came back in about 15 minutes and we decided to head out, through the rockpile, checking out Horseshoe Cavern and the Railway Tunnels on the way. Iain told me of a very narrow squeak he and Kevin once had down from the Skull and Crossbones (Glad he didn't tell me that *before* our Great North Cavern trip)!!

We surfaced about 1:30, chalking up 4h, and shambled back in the sweltering heat to the Devil's Coachhouse. Phil very gallantly offered to walk back up to the hut and drive around to collect us. Then it was time to pack up, clean up the cottage and we said goodbye to Jenolan until next time.

Cindy Mann.

WIBURD'S AGAIN?– NOT TODAY THANKS

Well, Sunday came and we headed up McKeown's Valley again, with some potential of re-visiting Wiburd's Lake Cave. It was a hot day, so I stopped at Mammoth turn off for a re-view our plans. Unanimously, we decided that Wiburd's Lake cave could wait for cooler climes, and we headed into Mammoth. I already had the key, just in case. So we headed in with the specific aim of giving Cindy full reign as trip leader to test her qualities. We opted for a trip to Lower River, which would provide the challenge of finding the rock pile and negotiating the stream passage down and back. We all enjoyed the relaxed trip. The water in Lower River was about 500mm lower than usual. Cindy demonstrated fine qualities of leadership and further developed her abilities as a trip leader.

Members Present: Cindy Mann (Probationary Trip Leader), Iain Lynch (Trip Leader), Phil and Mathew Niciak

4 hours. *Iain Lynch*

Yarrangobilly / Cooleman, 26/12/02 to 31/12/02

SUMMERTIME FUN

With the festivities of Christmas sitting heavily in our stomachs, at the sound of the Sydney to Hobart starter's gun, our family convoy set forth down the mighty Hume Highway towards Gundagai. Despite the long drive, we all enjoyed the trip down, stopping for a break now and then and a bit of car swapping. We reached the guides office just before closing time and collected the cave keys and the keys to Cotterill's Cottage. Our home away from home for the week.

We rumbled into the car park at Cotterill's and moved in. The people in the camping area must have wondered what all the fuss was about and who were these unruly people moving into the mansion on the hill, whilst they were left to ponder their makeshift dwellings. The commoners call them tents...I believe. Anyway. Once we were nicely settled and well fed, we planned the next day, which would lead us all to the wonders of Cooleman Plains and the Blue Waterholes.

27 December 2002

Cooleman was our destination today. Six adults and four children packed into two cars, and took the long and winding, and dusty, road to the Blue Waterholes campsite. I once proposed winter cross country skiing trip to Cooleman. That was before I had actually been there. Now I am not too sure. It would be quite a long trip on skis.

It was a great day, with three generations of our members visiting Murray's cave and a through trip from CP 2 to CP1.

Murray's Cave

Despite the long drought, Murray's cave was quite active and wet, with the first sump presenting a cold duck under. So we ventured as far as this but still had a great time, with the kids. Watching them learn and experience the world of caves, teaching them about the formation of caves and experiencing their excitement.

Members Present: Iain Lynch (Trip Leader), Cheryl Lynch, Mitchell Lynch, Angel Lynch, Thomas Lynch, Terry Coleborn, Louise Coleborn, Lionel Baker

Visitors: Gary Coleborn, Travis Coleborn, 3 hours

Cooleman Plains 1 & 2

On the walk back to the vehicles, we stopped for look into CP02. We visited the entrance chamber and generally explored the southern passages. Again, there was a fair amount of water in pools, despite the drought conditions.

Several of our party decided to explore the wombat run and connection into CP01. So Terry and Louise took young Thomas back to the cars, whilst the rest poked ourselves into the Wombat Run. Angel did not like the cold floor and tight holes, so she dragged Lionel and

Cheryl back out. That left Gary, Mitchell, Travis and myself. After much balking at the tight connection, which also had a pool of water that was difficult to avoid, I forced myself through. Gary followed and showed how easy it really was, and then the boys popped through barely needing to get on their hands and knees. The little rats.

Well, we climbed down a 6 metre rift and proceeded along a long stream passage. Again the kids reaped the benefits of youth, being able to walk through, whilst Gary and I subjected our knees to a torrid workout on the bumpy and sometimes rocky floor.

After about a half hour of torture, we emerged from the entrance of CP01.

Members Present: Iain Lynch (Trip Leader), Cheryl Lynch, Mitchell Lynch, Angel Lynch, Thomas Lynch, Terry Coleborn, Louise Coleborn, Lionel Baker. Visitors: Gary Coleborn, Travis Coleborn
1 hour

Back at the cars, we supped on some sandwiches, fruit and fine soft drink, before reloading the vehicles and heading back to the comforts of Cotterill's Cottage. A short rest at the cottage, we headed to Yarrangobilly and down to the thermal pool for refreshing swim.

Night Time Fun

The first night set the trend for what was to become a post dinner ritual during our time at Yarrangobilly. Back at the hut we fed and then, kindled by memories of his youth, Gary led the kids out on a rabbit hunt. "Be Wery Wery Qwiet. I'm Hunting Wabbits". Well, Elmer Fudd we are not. After stalking around on foot for a while, a couple of cars were brought out to speed up the chase and light up the targets. Crazy driving, bright lights and excited kids exploded into the quiet camping area. It was a riot, but very successful, with many a darting rabbit was found. The kids enjoyed themselves thoroughly. Back to the hut the kids hit the sack, and we stayed up for some star gazing and chatting till the early hours of the morning.

28 December 2002

This was to be a reconnaissance day. I led Lionel, and Mitchell down to try and locate North Deep creek and East Deep Creek. We were joined by Phil, Matthew and Michael who had arrived the night before. Phil and Matthew having made a marathon trip from Forster. We enjoyed the walk in the stinking heat, a searched had little trouble stumbling across East Deep Creek. We looked around a bit, and headed back up the long ridge to the cars. Despite the heat and flies, it was quite enjoyable.

The others drove into Talbingo to reconnoitre the lake's fishing potential, and also to stock up on essentials like chocolate, chocolate, alcohol and more chocolate. Well we needed something to calm our nerves after another intense game of bunny hunting.

29 December 2002

Those with a thirst for pain returned to East Deep Creek for some serious caving. Mitchell, Matthew, Phil, Michael and I again enjoyed the heat and flies on our walk down (and later back up) the hill.

Unfortunately some absent minded fool of a trip leader had left the key in the car, so we could not go to the detrog section. We entered East Deep Creek and wound our way down to the lower stream passage. We followed this about half way to the end chamber, and as is the case at Yarrangobilly, found ourselves quite wet and cold. Added to the threat of a thunderstorm outside, we retreated back towards the entrance and back to the outside world.

Members Present: Iain Lynch (Trip Leader), Mitchell Lynch, Matthew Niciak
Phil Niciak, Michael Materazzo. **4 hours**

As we returned Cotterill's Cottage, we met Gary and Terry at the top of the track. They had come to help us out thinking the road would be slippery. There had been a fairly violent thunderstorm sweep through the camp site. It cut its way through a narrow belt, as we had not seen a drop of rain. As we drove back to Cotterill's we could see the remnants, the sky still being very dark.

Terry, Louise, Lionel, Cheryl, Gary, Travis, Angel & Tom spent the day successfully searching for Aboriginal sites around the area. They also undertook the self guided tour at Yarrangobilly. **1 hour**

The end of the day was spent down at the thermal pool – of course.

That night, the rain had cleared up and we undertook a far more expeditious adventure through the pine forests and fire trails searching high and low for bunnys!

Another successful outing, culminating in Gary re-enacting his childhood, by catching a rabbit by hand. Stealthily he stalked upon his prey and leaping like an eagle into flight, he pounced on the suspicious rabbit, quickly and accurately. There was no chance for escape – the rabbit was his, and the trophy was transported back to the hut to show off, to be later released in an adjoining field.

30 December 2002

Terry and Gary woke in darkness and headed to Talbingo for some fishing.

At a more reasonable hour, Phil, Matthew, Michael and I returned to East Deep Creek today, this time with key in hand. Quickly we located the gate and proceeded to the detrog section. The purity and unspoilt beauty was a sight to behold. We thoroughly appreciated the experience.

With deep regret we left this beautiful place, our hearts filled with joy and wonder, uplifted by this rare experience. Just as well, as we exited the cave and climbed back up the arduously long hill. We returned to the hut for lunch and prepared for the afternoon's activities.

Mitchell joined the cavers for trips into Harriets and one other, both of which had been for-

mer tourist caves.

Members Present: Iain Lynch, Michael Materazzo, Phil Niciak, Matthew Niciak **8 hours.** Mitchell Lynch (3 hours only) .

We were scheduled to rendezvous at the thermal pool around dusk, so Mitchell and I walked and waded down the river from below the caves. Phil, Matthew and Michael met us there, enjoying a swim, before heading back to the cottage. Around dusk, Terry, Louise, Lionel, Cheryl, Gary, Travis, Angel and Tom arrived. Terry and Gary cast some lures and flies in the river for a couple of hours, whilst the rest enjoyed an evening swim. It was quite late when we returned to the cottage for supper and another night of star and satellite gazing.

31 December 2002

New Years Eve. Time to head home. We packed up, did the housekeeping, returned the keys, and got ready to go. The trip back was much the same as the trip down and we all returned home safely, ready for the New Year, returning to work and planning our next trip to Yarrangobilly

Iain Lynch.

Walli, 24th-25th May 2003

Deep Hole

Rick Brett (T/L), Iain Lynch, Steve Hallam, Mike Materazzo, Shane, Allison, Rob, Tim, Cindy, (others also present but I can't remember exactly who).

Made it to Cliefden by 10:00, pitched camp, trogged up and all drove to Bingara. Rick very kindly ferried people over to the cave.

Rick and Steve Hallam rigged the entrance pitch and the Deep Hole party descended at 9:30. The entrance pitch is, I think, 80 feet or so. Tim was all set to abseil, but this time without the benefit of me right beside him as we only had one rope, but he did just fine. I went ahead and clipped into the ladder on the halfway ledge, but it was Steve who roped him on and talked him down the start. He did very well and was much more confident than when he did Horse Hole last year.

The cave was fairly dry, and we explored in the opposite direction than we took last year. We found lots of mazey passages, some quite lovely decorations and noted that there was some physically noticeable level of CO₂. We all felt it, and needed a few rest stops.

Lots of nice little climbs, and the cave was really very warm (as usual), definitely warmer than outside. Other lovely sights included a broken step of mud-covered flowstone on ground level, the exposed cross section of which sparkled with crystal in the beam of my LED. Really beautiful.

We managed to get ourselves quite lost at one stage, and spent more than half an hour trying

to figure out where we were. Eventually we did, and made our way upwards, exiting up the ladder. Again, Timmy had no problems (but then he only has to haul 30-odd kg). Steve had set up a mechanical belay and demonstrated the finer points of it to Timmy and me. We were all out by 5:30 and Tim was ecstatic at the fact that 5h was the longest time he'd been in a cave.

We had a great evening back at the hut. The OSS dudes showed up and it was really great to catch up with them again. Rob and Rick jammed on til the wee smalls (Rick is really getting good on the dij). Beer flowed freely and there were a few sore heads and hoarse throats in the morning.

Cindy Mann.

Piano Extension.

Everyone was playing footy when Steve Hallam started hassling about doing Piano Extension, and it's just as well he did, and that he's such an accomplished nagger, because it was a fantastic cave. Rick and Iain decided to take Naomi and Angel into Piano, and they were breathless with excitement.

Steve, Mike and I entered the Extension, rigging the pitch off the bumper bar of Rick's ute. The entrance descends about 3m to a tiny chamber – room for 2 only. We clipped on the rope at this point (too restrictive to clip in any earlier), then abseiled to a ledge 50' or so down. Then it's simply a matter of continuing down the most obvious route another 50' or so and you're in the Main chamber. There's some passage that's definitely worth a look, with rather high avens and a climb up that leads to more passage. We made our way to the voice connection where we talked to the others. I gave Steve some chocky to pass through to the littlies. Walking back towards the Main chamber, we located the remains of the skull of (reputedly) a pre-historic wombat – at least that's what Rick is fairly sure it is – we'll have to ask one of the OSS guys. It's on the l.h.s. of the passage as you walk back, at about shoulder level. It certainly is impressive, and I bitterly regretted having run out of film yesterday...It's quite large, and has 2 tusks protruding from the layer of sediment which had deposited in a cleft in the rather uneven wall. Under it the wall is somewhat recessed, and the floor had many smaller bones and fragments of bone. The skull remains look very large, and it was quite a thrill to see it.

The cave was dry and warm, as was Deep Hole. I laddered out using my ascender as a self belay. We only spent 2h down here. Rob and Tim had arrived by now, having already mostly packed up. We said our goodbyes and left beautiful Walli and Cliefden, sad as always to be going.

Cindy Mann.

Jenolan, 23rd - 24th August 2003

Spider: (Cindy's version of events).

Caving Party: Iain Lynch (T/L), Rick Brett, Michelle Coleborn, Cindy Mann.

Surface Party: Anne-Marie and Naomi Brett, Cheryl, Mitchell, Angel and Tommy Lynch.

I caught a lift out with Rick, Chubb, Naomi, Iain, and Michelle, and we arrived at the

Guides office just before 10:00. We then dropped the others at the hut, and those of us who were caving started off for Mammoth Flat. We headed for Spider and entered the cave about 11:45. The descent is fairly confined and the triangular gate is well inside the entrance. Although it isn't really necessary, we tied a rope off to descend to the entrance chamber. Then follows the first, and perhaps tightest of the squeezes. It continues quickly with the second squeeze, then quite a long walk through a couple of chambers and onto the sticky Pirate's Delight. It was much easier than any previous visit because it was so dry that the mud wasn't quite so grabby. We made the Bus Stop in pretty good time.

Next comes the Rockpile, which took us 30 mins to negotiate. It's easy enough if you just follow the polished rock though, and keep on the track when you get to the junction. Eventually we made the incredible Khan Passage which has truly exquisite decoration. I shot my whole roll of film here. We followed as far as the signs would allow. Then on to the Glop Holes – bugger-all glopping though; there's not enough water. Rick found 3 in which the layer of muddy water had completely calcified – they looked lovely, like gems in the mud, a bit opalescent in the beam of the LED.

We were on our way down to the river when Rick and Iain decided on a bit of a detour. Iain went through a flattener and Michelle and I followed. At the end we came to a ledge above a reasonably substantial drop to the river – 13m or so, perhaps. Michelle had hurt her elbow, and decided to rest where she was, so Iain and I went on. The ledge leads onto a really interesting section of Spider. Iain crossed over and I had a look at where he went and said something along the lines of “WTF ?? !!!” (expletive abbreviated). “Yagoddabekiddin’ me!” But not wanting to succumb to the Inner Coward, I followed after some (well, a lot of,) hesitation, and then found it really quite easy. Onto the Singing Shawls section, which was most enjoyable. The shawls really do sing. Even if you scrape past them they ring with a weird, dull, stoney sound, a bit like a muffled gong.

Back over the traverse (which you have to do on your stomach), we had to be very careful on account of a large loose rock which is somewhat in the way. When we were back in the “comfort zone” we relaxed a minute before heading back through the squeeze, then down to the lower level and into the streamway. It was flowing, but still below the top of my boots. Rick and Michelle waited by the streamway exit, But Iain and I made our way upstream, because Iain (hardy soul that he is), wanted to do the Duckunder in Pike Lake. I was to give him 10 minutes. I watched him go up to his shoulders in that freezing water but he decided against continuing, probably because he knew that, with me as backup, he was dead meat if he got stuck on the other side. We then headed to the streamway exit, the Glophole Gallery, the Rockpile (only 15 mins this time), the Irreducible Minimum, Pirate's Delight, and eventually up past the climb to where Michelle hurt her elbow, which was by now really giving her curry. We eventually surfaced at about 5:50, after about 7h under. A great cave!

A noisy night back at the hut, with Cheryl, Chubb and all the kids. Poor little Naomi had gastro and a high temperature, so Chubb didn't get much sleep.

Cindy Mann.

Spider According to Iain, 23rd August 2003

Well here we were again at Jenolan. And ready for more punishment, but always reward-

ing. Spider was on the agenda for Saturday. Cindy, Rick, Michelle and myself were the lucky bunnies. Ann-Marie and Naomi stayed at the cavers' cottage, to be joined later by Cheryl, Mitchell, Angel and Tom.

Those caving headed for Spider and entered the cave about 11:45. The descent in was uneventful and soon we found ourselves in the entrance chamber, perusing the skeletal remains of unfortunate animals. But, you can only feign interest in zoology for so long and eventually we had to resign our efforts to the first of the squeezes. Why do they seem to be harder each time? Once through the first, the second was much easier and soon we had reached Pirate's Delight – my favorite. The others zipped through with apparent ease leaving me to fight my own battles. Down the ever committing mud passage into the base of the squeeze. No problems here – it was dry again. Up the other side a way then I decided to try rolling over onto my back. Well how easy is that. Hope all you first timers read this report before you go in. So with relative ease we were all the Bus Stop in pretty good time.

Onto the Rockpile. About half an hour's worth. No skinned skins either. Soon we were reviewing the incredible Khan Passage. Then on to the Glop Holes – not much glopping though. In fact there was not one drip to be heard. Almost eerie silence given the constant drips experienced on previous forays.

We headed towards the river, but detoured up to window overlooking the river. I traversed the ledge towards the singing shawls section of Spider. With a little coaxing, Cindy was across the ledge as well. We took a brief tour of this area. Absolutely marvellous.

Cindy and I headed back across the traverse, then down to the lower level and into the streamway where we caught up with Michael and Rick again.. It was flowing well, but Cindy noted it was still below the top of her boots. Rick and Michelle waited by the streamway exit, Once again I was determined to go through the duck under in Pike Lake. Once again I found myself less determined than I thought. You would think that a quick duck under is not too difficult, especially after swimming up to your neck to get there. But no I couldn't do it. So back down the stream passage, reclad in caving attire and we headed on out. Up through the Glop-hole Gallery and back through the rockpile in only 15 minutes. Down Pirate's Delight, through the remaining squeezes and out for a brisk, late afternoon tramp to the vehicle and up to the warm comfort of the cottage..

Spider Cave was notably dry throughout, particularly the glop holes. The river level was down, perhaps by 20 cm.

Members Present: Cindy Mann (Probationary T/L), Iain Lynch (T/L), Rick Brett, Michelle Coleborn.

Iain Lynch

Rho Hole 24th August 2003

Sunday dawned cold and drizzling with rain. After a long night with Naomi being crook, Rick and Ann Marie headed home. Michelle, having hurt her arm slightly yesterday, decided to join them. In their stead, Phil Niciak arrived with Laura. And so it was that Phil, Cindy, Laura, Mitchell and yours truly headed back down to Mammoth Flat on our way to Rho Hole. Fortunately Rick left his 4WD drive with me so we did not have to trudge the whole way down.

We found the entrance to Rho Hole without any problems and dropped in. Right from the start the caves were really wet and our clothes got fairly damp just going up the flowstone and through the first squeeze. None of us having been in here before, we inspected several chambers and obvious passages. However, being mindful of the cold, wet conditions and not wanting to venture into places that are off limits, we generally stayed around the main chambers. In turn we all pushed through to a small crystal room – very pretty.

On the way back, Phil found a passage leading up to some amazingly calcified tree roots which looked really great. Back in the main chamber, there were little leads everywhere, and we looked at quite a few. Most led to sections which were quite well decorated. It was wonderful. After 2h underground we exited, back into the freezing rain, although we were quite warm. We headed out through Raptures Retreat, where it was sleeting, then through Duckmalloi and Hampton, through gale-force winds with trees down everywhere, and back to a major black-out at gale-ravaged Blue Mountains. And so ended another great Jenolan weekend!!!

Members Present Cindy Mann (Probationary Trip Leader), Iain Lynch (Trip Leader), Mitchell Lynch, Phil Niciak, Laura Niciak

2 hours

Iain Lynch

Yarrangobilly - 10 - 13 October 2003

After the success of the trip last Christmas, we could not wait to get back to Yarrangobilly again.

After work on Thursday, Cheryl, Thomas and I headed down to my brother's place near Wyndham to say G'Day, catch up a bit and pick up Mitchell who had been there for a holiday that week. The next day we left my brother's headed towards Yagby, via Cooma. It was pretty cold and there were patches of snow on the Monaro Highway heading towards Cooma. A quick stop for some provisions and we were on our way west towards Adaminaby and on to Yagby. Well.... We didn't get far before driving into a flurry of snow. It was the long weekend in October and it was snowing! Heavily! The kids loved it, dancing around in the falling snow, getting plastered in it. Not to mention Cheryl and I who enjoyed watching them. We took plenty of time to get to Yarrangobilly, stopping several times on the highway to play in the falling snow. We also took a quick trip up to Mt Selwyn to see how much had fallen there. Well the place was all but deserted, but was covered in a good 10cm of fresh powder. Who would have expected this in October? We played around in it for as long as our bare hands could bear and then headed down to the guides office and off to set up shop in Cotterill's cottage.

Rick, Naomi and Michelle arrived early in the afternoon, just in time for another flurry of snow at Cotterill's. Not enough to settle on the ground though. When Phil and Laura had arrived and unpacked we all ventured up the highway to Mt Selwyn for some late afternoon fun. Mt Selwyn was a bit like a scene from *The Shining*. Totally deserted and covered with snow. But there was to be no horror movie here today. The snow balls were flying, snowmen were emerging and we were having a great time. Unfortunately, no one had thought to bring a toboggan at this time of year, The esky lid proved no use. But higher up the moun-

tain we found a large flat round bin lid. This started another round of fun as we took turns in launching each other down the snow slopes. The lid was just wide enough to jam your feet in one side and your butt in the other, with your knees wedged under your chin. This meant a total lack of control, which generally resulted in some tumbles and turns and a lot of snow on the wrong side of your clothes. We had an absolute blast and only returned to the cars as the light of day started to fade. Reluctantly we all headed back to Cotterill's to thaw out and settle in for the night.

Michael, Shane and Alison arrived next day in time to head on down to East Deep Creek with myself. We enjoyed an easy trip into the pretty section. Everybody appreciated the grandeur of this cave from the entry, through the rock pile and down the large rift. Carefully we sidled around the sump and climbed up to the detrog section. What a grand experience. Everyone appreciated the beauty and wonder of this section of the cave.

Nothing else could compete with this, so we redressed and headed out, taking some time to explore the side passages around the main chamber.

Members Present: Iain Lynch (Trip Leader), Michael Materazzo
Shane Anderson, Allison Anderson. **6 hours**

After returning from the cave, we all headed down to the thermal pool at Yarrangobilly Caves for a cleansing swim. 1st though, the full submersion in the river, before dashing (painfully in bare feet) to the thermal pool. How Invigorating!!

Saturday Night was clear and dry, and therefore very cold. A warm fire kept us in good spirits until late in the evening.

Next day, amongst various levels of enthusiasm, we split up. Several of us played around at Cotterill's Cottage, some went walking, whilst Shane, Alison, Phil, Laura, Mitchell and myself headed into Old Inn. It was freezing cold as the melt waters from the previous snow rushed in the entrance. The entrance itself seemed quite unstable. The fires in January 2003 had burnt away the vegetation, and the dirt embankments had really suffered the effects of water, with many cracks and loose boulders.

No problems getting in however and we all headed down the small waterfall into the cave. We snaked our way along the stream passage, then up over the dry section and back to the stream passage. We explored as much passage as possible, searching for the elusive formations. Eventually Alison, Mitchell and I found the chamber fully of formations and carefully explored this section of the cave. After some time, I brought Mitchell back so we could send Shane down to this beautiful section with Alison. Laura and Phil headed out 1st and soon we were following, emerging into daylight after 4 hours.

Members Present : Iain Lynch (Trip Leader), Shane Anderson, Mitchell Lynch, Alison Anderson, Phil Niciak, Laura Niciak. **4 hours**

The plan was to stay another night, but most people had things on the next day, so we packed up, except for Michael, who planned to stay and explore the Snowys a bit longer. Cheryl, Mitchell, Tom and I rendezvoused with my brother and mother at Yarrangobilly

Caves, so that we could transport Mum back home.

Another wonderful trip to Yarrangobilly.

Iain Lynch.

“The Caving Man”
Words by Iain Lynch

(with apologies to Billy Joel).

It's nine o'clock on a Saturday
And it looks like we've settled in
I've been lying here in the Flattener
Wishing I was still thin.

We're already down the Percolator
I'm not really sure how we'll go
About getting back up, without getting stuck
But I know it will be very slow.

Sing us a song we're in Dwyer's, man!
We're in for a hell of a night,
The caving is cold, yes it's challenging
I hope that we get out all right.

All on the trip are good friends of mine
Caving is like this you see,
They're quick with a joke, when you're stuck in a choke
But there's no place that you'd rather be

You cry and you scream 'this is killing me'
As you're jammed up in a tight space
If only I was much smaller
So I could get out of this place

Sing us a song we're in Dwyer's man,
It's hard and the squeezes are tight
It's muddy and cold where I'm lying here
Thinking 'what's the world doing tonight?'

Now we're down near the Chocolate Box.
Like Chocolate? The mud here is rife!!
When my gear goes into the wash at home
I'll be shot by the 'trouble and strife'

And discussion turns to talk politics
I'm not sure why this is condoned
But it eases the pain and the physical strain
Whilst we rest and get chilled to the bone.

Sing us a song we're in Dwyer's man,
Sing us a song tonight
Anything other than politics
I'm sick of this topic! All right!

It's a pretty good cave for a Saturday
Work's over, it's time to smile
It's the weekend and there is no better way
To get away from it all for a while

And the mud in this cave is incredible
It's so thick and it's covered the gear
If only I can get someone else
To clean it, while I down a beer.

Sing us a song we're in Dwyer's, man.
We've had the time of our life
And I wonder what the rest of the world
Was doing this Saturday night.



The famed Dwyer's Phallectite –Photograph
C. Mann. But the spotter's fee goes to Wendy Cole-
born.

Giant Crystals in Mexican Cave

Ever wondered what it would be like to get inside a geode? I guess cramming ourselves into the little grotto of dogtooth spar in Cliefden Main is the nearest any of us will ever get. But, who knows, if you ever make it to Mexico, you might be able to avail yourself of the real thing, if you can stand the heat!

This story begins in 1794, in the Naica Hills (“Naica” is a Tarahumara Indian word meaning “shady place”) near Chihuahua, Mexico, when early prospectors found silver. However, mining didn’t start in any serious way until 1900. Then in 1910, at a depth of 120 meters, mine employees discovered a cavern of about 70m diameter containing crystals of selenite typically ranging in length from 1.2 to 1.6 meters. Now known as the “Cave of the Swords” it has been fitted out with paths, lighting and ventilation. Even with the ventilation, conditions in this cave are 40°C and 100% humidity.

Since 1961, the Naica Mine has been in the hands of the Peñoles group and has been mined for silver, lead and zinc, although management are probably now considering a future in tourism. In April 2000, brothers Eloy and Javier Delgado were blasting away at a new exploration tunnel in the mine when they noticed a small opening about 300 meters down. Eloy squeezed through, into a cavern full of truly immense crystals. “It was beautiful – like light reflecting off a broken mirror” he commented. About 6 weeks later, another group from the mine found a larger adjacent cavern also full of crystals. The awesome sight was described vividly: “translucent crystals the length and girth of mature pine trees lie pitched atop one another, as though moonbeams suddenly took on weight and substance” (Ross, 2002). This part of the system has been named the “Cave of the Crystals”. Mine officials, anxious to prevent vandalism, kept the location of the find secret. Below is an extract from a web-based article by prominent cave science writer (and avid caver) Michael Ray Taylor:

"Walking into either of these caves is like stepping into a gigantic geode," said Richard D. Fisher, an American consultant with the mining company to develop the discoveries as tourist attractions. Fisher said that most people can endure only a few minutes in the caves due to their high temperatures. The smaller of the two, which is about the size of two-bedroom apartment, is 100 Fahrenheit (40°C). The large chamber, which Fisher describes as the size of a Cathedral, is 150 (60°C). While the mine company is currently limiting visitation of the caves to scientific experts, mineral hunters have destroyed locks and broken into the chambers twice since they were first opened by mining equipment last April. One man was killed when he attempted to chop out a gigantic crystal that fell from the ceiling and crushed him, according to Fisher. (Reproduced from Michael Ray Taylor, Discovery News web report).

What Is Selenite?

Selenite is a crystallized form of boring old gypsum (you know: black-board chalk, gyprock, etc). Chemically, selenite is hydrated calcium sulfate: $\text{CaSO}_4 \cdot 2(\text{H}_2\text{O})$. It may also have inclusions from its environment which will affect its colour. Selenite crystals are transparent to translucent and are usually white, colourless or grey, but can also be shades of red, brown and yellow. Hardness is only 2 (on a scale of 10), so selenite can be scratched with a fingernail. The usual raft of esoteric properties have been attributed to this mineral (If your powers of past-life recall have had the richard, you should apparently try selenite. Flagging libido, probably also impotence, baldness, who knows ??? Just *you* try googling selenite and crystals!)

How Did The Caves Form?

Whelll...There are a couple of *Theories*, and probably some serious *biffo* on the scientific horizon before they get it all sorted, but here's the view from the august halls of academe... Or at least from an article by Tony Burton:

The Naica Hills are comprised of 97 million year old (Early Cretaceous) limestones. Pressure from a chamber of magma forced mineral-rich fluids upwards into cracks in the limestone. Over time, deposition from these fluids filled the cracks with sulfide-rich ores of metals such as gold, silver, lead and zinc. So, precisely how did these crystals form? No-one is yet 100% sure but there are two main theories.

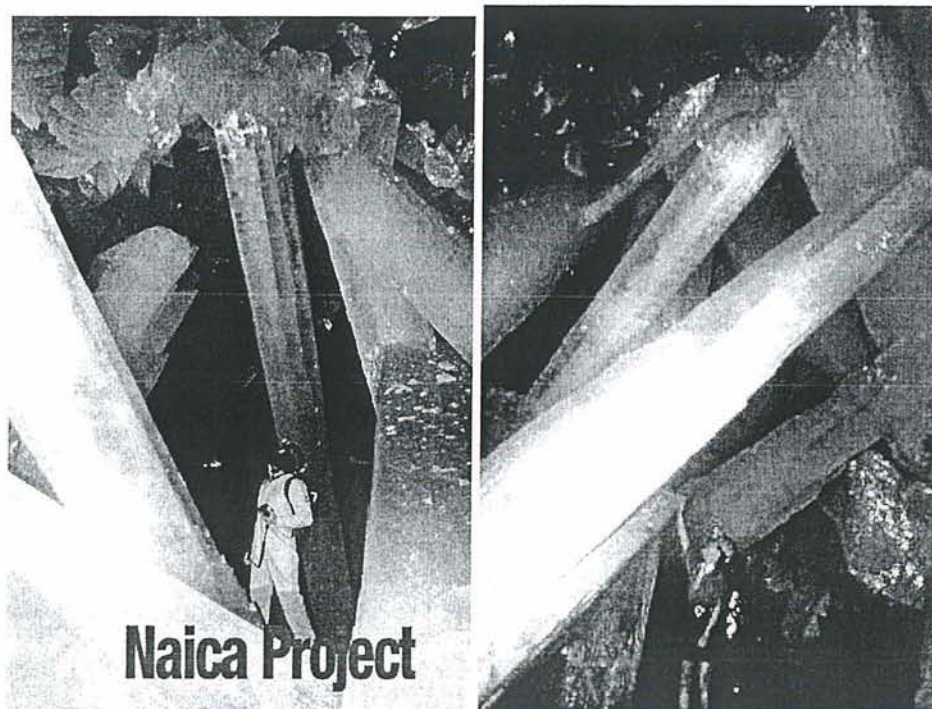
The first is that the selenite crystals began to grow in pre-existing steam-filled caverns as a direct result of the same hydrothermal fluids that formed the ore deposits. This would mean that the age of the crystals would be similar to the age of the ores, but it would also suggest that we might find metallic ores contaminating the formations in the caverns, which, to the best of my knowledge, we don't!

The second possibility is that, after the mountains and ores had been formed, rainwater percolating through the rocks dissolved some of the sulfide ores, producing sulfuric acid. This acid then reacted with some of the limestone (calcium carbonate), producing gypsum (calcium sulfate). This gypsum was still in solution, but was later precipitated out of solution as these astonishing selenite (hydrated calcium sulfate) crystals when the water containing it seeped into caverns.

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The Future?

Looking rosy. The mines management seem a fairly enlightened lot and have taken steps to protect the system from looters. At present they are mostly allowing only scientists in, although one source notes that there is restricted public visitation also allowed. However, the extreme conditions in the Cave of Crystals dictate visiting times of several minutes, rather than hours, duration.



(Photos from: La Venta Exploring Team; and Michael Ray Taylor, Discovery News)

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