

BMSC Trip Report - Cindy Mann

Cliefden 19-20th July 2014

Present: Brett and McKendry families, Mark and Holly Wilson, Cindy Mann. Rick Brett T/L.

The Bretts made an early start and spent Friday night at Cliefden, while the rest of us after a quick breakfast stop at Kelso Maccas, arrived by about 9 on the Saturday morning. By about 10:30 we had collected the key and dropped off the paperwork, and were walking down the bluff to Murder (CI-2). Our main objective was to find our way to the Pineapple, since we couldn't find it on our last visit. The Belubula was running higher than we'd see it in a long time, and it looked as though there's been a little rain recently.

The group for Murder was Donna, Ellen, Mark, Holly, Rick, Naomi and myself. We entered the cave and headed into the Dragon Chamber. The track was wet in places, but mostly dry-ish. However, once in the Dragon Chamber, we could see the little rim-pool on the far wall was full, and the dripline above it was active. I have not seen this much water in it for some years. We proceeded along the usual route to RDF 5, pointing out the crystalline structure that can be seen wherever there is a break in the plate-like rock in the cave walls. Amazing to think that so many of the features that just look like dirty limestone are actually crystal. I was looking for the small femur that I have seen embedded low down in the wall in this section, but was unable to find it.

We continued along to the dropdown to RDF4, and the nearby two "finger" pointing up. At that point we dropped through the floor and into the beginning of the pretty section. There is so much to appreciate in this beautiful and interesting cave, but the forests of straws are really something. These areas were very active, and very clean. I kept an eye out for the "Pope", but missed it, somehow, and took our time exploring to find the right way on (yes, I had forgotten to bring Denis's map...), and enjoying this wonderfully decorated part of the cave. Mark, Holly, Donna and Ellen had not seen this area before and were suitably impressed, and took lots of photos. Mark, who has never been in Murder before, actually found the taped-off grotto with the Pineapple. The cave features looked in good condition - much less evidence of recent visitor damage than we've seen in other caves, (much of which is from a by-gone era). However, there was one section, on the approach to the Pineapple grotto, where we noticed quite a number of broken straw. From their dirty and desiccated condition the damage look as though it had been done many years go.

Ascending back up RDF 4 into the upper passage, we headed for the Blue Stal at the request of Donna, Ellen, Mark and Holly who had not seen it before. I think they were surprised to see how blue it really is. Rick mentioned that there is a blue formation in Boonderoo, and another blue stal in Taplow. Presumably copper is responsible for the very distinctive colour. Would be good to know if the formation is aragonite or calcite. It is also maddeningly beyond the reach of our cameras (and especially flashes), but its inaccessibility has probably preserved it from the trophy-hunters of previous times. Made us wonder if previously there may have been other, more accessibly "blue stals" that have been removed. There is no doubt that attitudes to cave preservation were different 100 years ago.

We made our way back, exiting the cave at about 2:30, and heading up the bluff to meet the others after a very enjoyable trip. Most of the group went back to the hut, as they had to leave, Paul, Mark, Holly and myself decided to head to Transmission (CI-8) with Rick and the littlies. I was watching out for bats, in case any were overwintering here, but we didn't see any. I had forgotten just how dusty this cave is, and wished I'd brought a dust mask along. Andrew and Lilly Brett were very excited, and had waited so patiently for their turn to get underground. Lilly was particularly excited that she could fit into places that the adults couldn't. We spent about an hour in Transmission, an interesting little cave.

We had a pleasant night back at the hut, (luckily having missed the worst of the cold of the last few days).

Sunday

The original plan had been to do Deep Hole at Walli, but we were short one SRT caver, so for safety sake we changed the plan and decided to do Island. Paul, Rick, Andrew, Naomi and I set off for Island, and entered the cave at about 10 AM. Andrew and I waited outside the entrance while the others explored the first couple of chambers. Rick re-appeared and we helped Andrew through - however his poor little knees were sore from crawling through Transmission yesterday, so we had to pull him out again. The others explored a while and then I swapped places with Rick and joined them. Island is a lovely little cave, and Paul and I are keen to put it on the list for our next trip, as most of our members haven't seen it.

We also took a look in CI-60, which was only a small single-chamber cave nearby Island. The kids enjoyed it.

After exiting, we headed back, stopping to cut some firewood on the way to replace what we had used. A clean up at the hut, then Paul and I left Rich and Anne-Marie to leave the sign-off and fees at Dunhills.

A very enjoyable weekend - many thanks to Anthony and to OSS.