

# GIRL GUIDES NSW & ACT ANNUAL CAVING WEEKEND for members aged 14-30

16/17/18 May 2008, Wee Jasper, NSW.

## REPORT

The 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Senior Guide and Olave Program Caving Weekend was held in May at Wee Jasper in May. The Wee Jasper Valley is a lush area an hour from Yass, with spectacular views on both the scenic drive into the valley and from the campsite. The area offers beautiful bushwalks, streams and rivers, and great caving in the surrounding limestone mountains. Thirty participants from Girl Guides NSW & ACT, including Leaders, attended the event, from areas such as Wagga Wagga, Cessnock, the ACT, the Southern Highlands, and various Sydney Districts. Twelve members of the Rover Speleological Society (RSS) came along to share their caving skills, knowledge and love of exploring the underground with Guides. Three camp staff, the Leader in Charge, First Aider, and a Quartermaster, were on hand to facilitate the running of the event.

Upon arriving Friday night I was greeted by the Ku-ring-gai girls, who had arrived earlier and were in the process of cooking up a storm and huddling around a very welcoming campfire. It was well after dark when everyone else arrived, so camp was set up quickly due to the dropping temperatures. Warm beds were a welcome sight. It was certainly a chilly night, with snow in the area predicted over the weekend!

We woke on Saturday morning to varying stories: some of us experienced very little sleep due to the cold, and others slept cosily all night! On rounding up the Rover Speleological Society members who were leading our caving groups we divided into skill level groups, geared up, partook in the compulsory safety brief and set off for our full day of adventure!

Beginner Group 1 set off with Jenny, Pam and Evelyn of RSS to explore Signature Cave. This is a 'roomy' cave that can be explored largely by standing upright for most of the time and walking ... a real caving luxury, and a great introduction for the novice caver! After lunch this group then visited Dog Leg Cave, and discovered what is like not to stand up straight for a number of hours! Dog Leg is accessible in dry seasons and is an active stream cave where for most part the roof is no higher than 1m and the floor is rough and rocky; this is a real test for your knees and hands.

Beginner Group 2, led by David and Jordan, visited the Dip Series Cave. Dip Series is a group of side-by-side fault-line-like caves connected by small squeeze tunnels. They are labelled Series 1 to 5, with entrances



GIRL GUIDES  
AUSTRALIA  
NSW & ACT



ROVER  
SPELEOLOGICAL  
SOCIETY (RSS)



*'Thanks for the weekend, it was absolutely fantastic! So much so I am looking to join the RSS!'*

Aimee



*'Thank you very much, it was a really great weekend!! Everyone did a great job organising it and it's always a lot of fun! I really liked the caves we did and dinner was great (pass on the compliments to the QM's!). Wee Jasper was a good spot for caving; it's just too bad there's not that great kitchen and inside area like Bungonia. Thanks again for another great weekend!'*

Erica Hansen

in 2 (walk in at the 'Rubbish Tip' and abseil the 'Daylight Hole' entrance) and 4 (abseil only). Series 4 has two sections, the main and the 'Extension' area, with its own ladder in an external entrance, and connection to the main Series 4 by voice only, through the 'Impenetrable Slit'. Beginner Group 2 entered through the 'Rubbish Tip', so called because this entrance is large and was used as the Wee Jasper village tip for many years in early history. The group explored series 1 and 2 and after lunch laddered via the 4m-ladder climb into Dip Series Extension 4.

Intermediate Group 1, with Andrew, Al and Peter from RSS, tried some more 'tricky bits'. They disappeared into Dip Extension 4 in the morning, laddering in and out on a caving ladder. Caving ladders have wire edges with thin rungs about 30cm apart. Two feet cannot fit on the same rung, so balance is maintained by hooking one leg behind and using heel then toe to climb. A harness is worn, and a belayer at the top controls safety. After lunch they visited Dip Series 1 and 2, and met up with the group doing the full 'Through Dip Trip', as we call it, and exited together.

As a large number of Guides with caving and abseiling experience attended this year, an Intermediate Group 2 was set up and led by Neal and Darryl. This group spent the full day in the Dip Series and set about rigging the 'Balcony' so they could ladder climb up and explore the cave from an alternative route. This was the first time this route was taken on a Guide excursion, and it proved to be much fun for the Guides. To exit they scrambled through the 'Rat Hole' that connects Series 3 to 2, abseiled the 8m to the floor of Series 2, and exited by walking out of the 'Rubbish Tip' with another Guide group.

With our large number of regular and skilled attendees, an Experienced group was organised, and Jason and Chris led this group. They packed equipment for a full day of caving, climbed to the top of Punchbowl Hill and entered Punchbowl Cave. Punchbowl Cave is a large system accessible only by entering the huge entrance chamber, bathed in daylight through numerous holes in the roof, and abseiling down a 35m pitch that drops off in the corner. This vertical set up requires much time and consideration, as exiting the cave means by coming back up this pitch. We chose to set up a ladder climb over, ascending up the rope we abseiled in on. This gives the climber more chance to rest midway as well as being able to be put on belay by RSS.

The highlight of Punchbowl Cave is exploring the lower section and visiting the 'Ballroom'. This is a massive chamber and can only be truly admired with everyone lighting all sections. In the middle of the roof hangs a massive formation made up of many joined stalactites and shawls known as 'The Chandelier'.

With stomachs grumbling for dinner, hasty retreats were made to the campsite. Everyone arrived at the same time from separate areas. Our camp staff served up a hot and delicious meal of savoury mince and veggies, pumpkin soup and a dessert of apple crumble and custard, enjoyed by all the hungry and cold cavers while sitting around a raging fire.

Sunday morning we enjoyed a moving Guides Own and some 'knotty' team building games while RSS set out our gear needed for the day. Groups then re-formed and set out for a half day caving.



*'My feedback from the caving weekend is all positive! I had a fantastic weekend and really enjoyed caving (it was the first time I had ever been). The RSS was excellent and I think it's really nice that they volunteer their time for weekends like this and it's much appreciated. The actual caving was also the perfect amount of challenge and I loved getting muddy! It was great coming back on Saturday night and having dinner provided as I'm sure the last thing anyone felt like doing was cooking! Thanks again for organising such a great weekend!'*

*Christina*



*'It was my first time through the famous caves and I cannot wait till next year for even more squeezes and hopefully some abseiling, as an intermediate. I thought the caving weekend was a blast! The campsite was beautiful and the food was comforting and warm. Congratulations on such a well organised weekend, and thanks heaps. You can be sure to see me there next year. The RSS were brilliant and made the whole event that little bit better. They were very friendly and accepting. Looking forward to the next year!'*

*Myriam*

Beginner Group 1 and Intermediate Group 1 went into different walk-in sections of the Dip Series. Beginner Group 2 visited Signature Cave and explored the 'Phriatic Area', which is a maze of small interconnecting passages that all lead back into the main chamber. Intermediate Group 2 and the Experienced Group both abseiled into Dip Series 4 and set about exploring different sections before meeting on the 'Rat Hole' abseil and exiting via the 'Rubbish Tip' together.

We all returned for a late lunch and campsite pack-up before saying goodbyes and going our separate ways until the next Guide event.

The weather did get very cold over the course of the event but luckily we did not get the forecasted snow at Wee Jasper. All up, the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Senior Guide and Olave Program Caving Weekend was a huge success and all attending had a great time. Some feedback:

Many thanks to Maureen Bedford (QM) and Vivienne Rae (First Aider) from Mittagong District Guides for coming to Wee Jasper as camp staff and for cooking a delicious hot meal on Saturday night for us.

Thank you to Lauren Adams from Northern Beaches Olave Program for the fantastic Guides Own.

Also to the members of the Rover Speleological Society who continuously put in so much work, for their ongoing dedication to offering caving to Girl Guides NSW & ACT over the past 18 years. This annual trip is a success because of the voluntary time RSS put into planning and running caving groups to suit all skill levels.

And finally, the Guides who came along with so much enthusiasm and so ready for adventure — that makes this event so much fun year after year!

***Next year's event is proposed to be at Bungonia on the weekend of 15-17 May 200.***

Pamela Bedford  
LIC Guide Caving Weekend



*'The Girl Guide Caving weekend was awesome, so no complaints, and I would REALLY REALLY like to join RSS!'*

Amy

