

South African Speleological Association

Cape Peninsula Speleological Society

Po Box 4812 Cape Town



March 2012 Newsletter

Oudtshoorn 3 -7 January

Alf and Vic were the enterprising planners of this meet in conjunction with Mike Lombard who provided the accommodation at the Adventure Centre. I unfortunately did not do much caving as I had dropped a small table top on my one big toe. On the other foot my little toe had decided to go the other way around the bed leg. My boots and toes thus had serious differences of opinion. Anyway let the others tell the story.

Day one, Oudtshoorn trip.

Clint Howes

Entered Efflux using Mike's trusted iron bar and rope. Vic was concerned that if any dam sluices were opened upstream we would surely drown. We convinced him that we had been through the cave in much wetter conditions and had no problem.

Reached the Post Box and did the sharp 90° turn into the Eternal Crawl, definitely my favourite part of the cave. After that we reached the calcified crab. Gerhard, our Potch Potholer, found a real live crab, which I'm convinced permanently live there, and showed the other cavers. Vic says they are washed downstream from outside so it's a debate we need to work on over a "Spin" around the fire. Mike took us to see the chamber at the start of the Anthony-Dave's alley where he always takes his adventure clients.

Freds's Cow.

Gerhard

The afternoon was kicked off with a short hike to the cave, but finding the entrance proved to be a challenge. This was due to excess vegetation growing on the hill. Fortunately the entrance was found quickly, a rope as a handhold rigged and our trusted guide, Mike, braved the slippery slope first. Everyone met up in the main chamber but only six of the ten continued down the Corkscrew. Initially the Corkscrew seemed a bit dodgy but as we continued down it became clear that climbing down wasn't the main worry, it was the bad air. With CO₂ levels increasing as we went deeper the thought of having no oxygen kept surfacing in the

back of our minds. Finally we reached a 5m slot which we chimneyed down and found a clay cow left by the first cavers who had also surveyed the cave. Clint of course insisted on making another, but not being a talented artist, we ended up with a "Worshond" like unicorn. At least he tried. We were stopped by a 10m drop and not having any



equipment we couldn't continue so we headed out in good time, leaving only footprints and only taking memories.

That evening we were joined by Charlene Janion from Stellenbosch University and David, Anna, Louis and Mark from the Museum of Natural History in Paris. Their main focus was a continuation of their search for Colembola or Springtails. Gerhard, a student at Potch university, was also interested in finding Pseudoscorpions. Jan Blacquiere joined us in the evening and slept over, laying his mattress outside in the open, (where he could gather maximum dew???)

Day two

Lene Tempelhoff

It was with great anticipation that we all headed for Stroomwater graveyard entrance. Entering, it wasn't long before I encountered soft going, things looked bad. Sure enough the sump was full of water. However the researchers had a ball looking for their Colembola.

In the mean time Jan had set out to locate Fountain cave for us, and he did, but did he have to look through every thorn bush. First-aider Renee did some cleaning up.

Fountain is one great cave. It actually connects to Skeleton cave if you could get over the near vertical rock slab barrier. Much of the cave is in thigh deep water with the roof at times dropping to about 40cm above the water.

This is definitely one cave to do here.

Glittering Grotto. Glittering grotto neighbours the World Class limestone climbing crag in De Hoek where the routes have interesting names such as Sid Vicious and Squeeze Play. Seven of us ascended up to the grotto's grand entrance chamber, called Bushman's cutlery sharpening chamber - deep incisions left by the San are clearly evident in the cave wall.

This is a five star cave with a great view of the valley and surrounding mountains. The in-house art gallery has a collection of paintings depicting a baboon and some human forms, some of which have strange long extensions coming off their heads. The cave also has a distinct mystical quality to it. Exploring the interior of the cave started off with a horizontal mini crawl to descend down a comfortable circular chimney (no need to act skinny!) into a chamber called porcupine pot which had a compressed guano covered floor. Next one encountered an inviting rope with loops in it going up a very slippery and steep slope. This is where the parabats and seals in our group came to life.

Going through the arch at the top one's, next vista was that of a crystal clear, wall to wall pool. The highly reflective nature of the water made it difficult to discern where mediums changed from rock to water. Clint stepped into the pool known as Satan's Sinking Sands only to discover that he had stepped onto a false bottom that gave way pulling him down into the depths. The camera in his hand stayed very dry but nothing else.

This pool room had a suspension rope strung across the water, probably about 7metres long and 1 and a 1/2 metres above the water level. Challenges to get across to the other side, - most of us opted for a bat hang upside down, prizing oneself along the semi taught rope until one encountered the wide rock (things became very sweaty at this point) which one had to traverse before hitting the other side.

Rudolf had his own style in getting across the water and decided to literally run along the cavewall with his body horizontal to the water. Lets just say none of us were able to stay dry or qualify for the Cirque du Soleil.

Going through the cavern of the dry lake one came into the glittering grotto which had an incredible 3 dimensional calcite formation known as Giants Palette. One gets the feeling that this is a busy cave - numerous broken off stalagmites suggests souvenir hunters. Towards the back of this cavern the stalagmite configurations reminded one of organ pipes. Layers of smallish stalagmites created an incredible "wow" ambiance in this last chamber. We spotted one bat suspended from the cave wall/ceiling.

Going back, as normal was much quicker as tightrope/trapeez skills had tightened up. Some of us however had to take a final swim like myself - when I reached for Clints shoulder, who was sitting at the edge of the pool there was no shoulder to hold onto, words like "hold me hold me" had no impact - he slid straight into the water followed by myself- needless to say Clints camera stayed dry. What an incredible compact system Glittering Grotto - truly a luxury penthouse/cave.



Day three. Some two years ago we found that after all the years that Reflux cave had been full of CO² it had drained out via a small hole where past cavers had been digging. Now was our chance to find out what's behind this hole, there must be more cave. Alas, after rigging ladders and belay rope for the 10m descent Rudolf, Lynne and Renee reported even more CO² than before. They could not even light a match. It's a mystery why it re-collected so soon.

Reflux Grot

Rudolf Hattingh

Ons is Bely op tou die leer af deur die klein ingang maar sak in n' groot kamer in. Halfpad teen die leer af is ek uit asem en dink ek is onfiks maar na tien minute is ek steeds uit asem. Teen die tyd was Lynne en Renee ook onder. Hulle het probeer n' kers aansteek maar die vuurhoutjie wil nie eers vlam vat nie en die carbondioxyed dwing ons om weer uit te klim. Buite het ek gou herstel met net n effense kopseer.

On sal weer kom en probeer om die gas uit te suig. Ek kan nie wag om te sien wat daar agter le'.

Conflux. With the disappointment we headed for the nearby Conflux.

Die klein ingang begin in n' rivier stroom dan oor in deur gevalle klippe. Dis n' bietjie moeilik vir lang mense maar ek het dit gemaak. Daarna volg ons die indrukwekkende rivier stroom op tot ons by n' groot kamer kom. Daar het die Franse insekte uitgehaal vir spesie toetse .

Die grot is indrukwekkend en ek sal weer daar deur gaan.

Rudolf Hattingh

The visiting scientists left us at this point to search the Swartberg Pass. Some cavers returned to base while some wanted to try Marcus Mudcrawl.

"FAIRYLAND AND WATERFALLS - How the Fairies met Marcus of the Mudcrawl"

Lynne Ramsay

The Fairies were relaxed that Tuesday evening, after having spent a day exploring the forbidden cities of the Cavelands. Their long time friends, The BB's were arriving that evening to help explore, though they were on their own mission too. The BB's were a group of Scientists (3 from France, 1 from England living in France and 1 from Stellenbosch University). These Bug Brigade Fairies were on a mission to find the elusive tailless scorpion; and other weird and wonderful things which most of the Fairies could not even pronounce. They fortunately had help understanding the mission, from the Fairy trusted friend Gerhard....he was also visiting, from the far off Fairyland of Potch!

The Fairies were discussing height, and the short Fairies of Renee and Lynn were bragging just a little that being short had some advantages - this was proved 2 days later. However, being short and/or tall, was certainly not as advantageous as being flexible like Fairy Lene. Unbeknown to all, she would have most Fairies gob-smacked the following day with her water defying antics. Before this however, bugs and spiders were to be found.....and lots of them!

The following morning some of the Fairies (Vic, Alf, Clint, Ruddolph and Rene) were naughty and slipped out of Stroomwater Cave early. They bumped into the "negotiated out" Oom Jan, who had spent a half hour negotiating with authorities to get us onto land. Oom Jan decided to show them the far more interesting

Fountain Cave, as Stroomwater was blocked at the sump. The naughty Fairies had left Gerhard, Lene, Lynn, Ron and The BB's behind. The Fairies still in Stroomwater decided they would not feel left out and quickly made their way through the maze of Cow Farm and Forest. On the way, they bumped into Oom Jan - he was lying in the sun full of scratches and tears which Lene nicely cleaned up.

Ever there, was Father of the Fairies - Ron. He patiently carted the Fairies around and led them into the Cavelands, showing safe passage. He did this when the Fairies entered Fountain Cave...however the BB's seemed to split up, and some went into the water and some over a hill, however all the Fairies and BB's ended up being in the water anyway. This they found refreshing, and after a little while negotiating water and low ceilings, they came to a large rock face which lay at a very steep angle. Gerhard was almost tempted to see if he could "run" the WALL, but decided to search for bugs instead. The group had a great time and took many photo's of small 1000 year old stalactites and found some interesting bugs, including the all elusive!

By the following day, every fairy was "caved out", barring the 3 of Gerrit, Rene and Lynn. Ron was nice enough to show the 3 Fairies where Marcus lived. Vic travelled with....to give Marcus the once over!

The 3 Fairies had the crawl of their lives! 500m there and back in MUD, MUD and more MUD (did I forget to mention the Guano? ;-). They did meet Marcus at the end of the cave though, and when exiting - Vic and Ron were told the following:

"This cave must be done at least once!"

New discovery

On the 10th March 2009 members of the society took Charlene Janion from Stellenbosch University, Cyrille D'Haese and Louis Deharvene from the Museum of Natural History in Paris for a visit to Wynberg cave. Their mission – to search for Colembola or Springtails.

Of the Genus *Tricantella* there were 22 species recorded in the world, 6 from Europe and Asia, 8 from Australia and New Zealand, 7 from South America and 1 from North America but none from Africa. All are found exclusively in forest leaf litter.

Imagine their surprise to find a new species in bat guano in Wynberg cave yet search as they might none were found in leaf litter outside.

This is the first find for Africa and in bat guano and is morphologically similar to *T. vogeli* from Chili in South America and appears to be a Gondwanian relic. It has taken this long to fully describe.

And the name – *Tricantella madiba*.

Our caves continue to surprise.



CAVE FAUNA IN OUDTSHORN CAVES

Lené Tempelhoff

A group of CPSS cavers met up with some researchers / taxonomists from the Natural History Museum, Paris and the University of Stellenbosch to explore some caves and gather specimens in the Oudtshoorn subterranean World a few weeks ago.

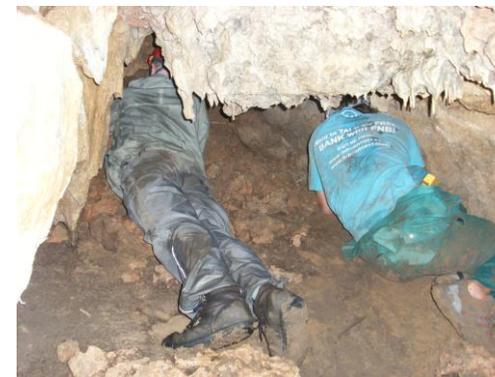
The researchers in our party were part of the Franco/South Africa Protea bilateral incentive which sponsors projects. The Centre for Invasion Biology (University of Stellenbosch) and the Natural History Museum, Paris initiated a collaborative project which aims to document the taxonomy (classification of species) and genetic diversity of Collembola in the Cape Floristic Region.

Collembola otherwise known as springtails are wingless invertebrate which are 1-2 millimetres long. Springtails seem to be more closely related to crustaceans than to insects. They are one of the most abundant macroscopic animals in the world and inhabit all terrains including the interiors of caves. Recently 15 new Collembola species to the scientific world were identified in Grootbos which is one of the largest remaining Milkwood forests in South Africa. A new springtail species was also found in some bat guano inside Wynberg cave on Table Mountain.

Charlene Janion a Phd student from the University of Stellenbosch gave us some pointers as to the crucial role that Collembola play in the ecosystem. Collembola feed on algae and bacteria and break down organic matter such as leaf litter and can play a role in the microscopic forming processes of soil. Springtails are food sources for predators such as spiders, pseudo scorpions, mites, frogs and reptiles.

The research teams mission in the caves was to collect both classified and unclassified species. It was an extraordinary view to see

bodies lying face down on cave floors literally nose to the ground hunting for macroscopic signs of life. Insect aspirators were also used by the researchers whereby specimens were sucked up through a flexible tube into a collecting chamber / jar. Pseudo scorpions otherwise known as false or book scorpions which do not have a tail and are classified as arachnids were some of the samples that were preserved in alcohol and flown to Paris for analysis. Loius Deharveny and Anne Bedos have kindly forwarded a number of pictures of the cave fauna



Just a few of the critters



Darryl's milestone

Friday 3rd February Darryl and ten friends rendezvoused at the Peoples' Trail hut to celebrate his 50th birthday with a good party. Unfortunately we had to vacate the place by 10:00 the next day as it had been booked. Our camp commandant this time was a student parks ranger, Blessing Mutiti, who was a real pleasure to have with us.



Miffed



Editor: Ron Zeeman