

# South African Speleological Association

Cape Peninsula Speleological Society

Po Box 4812 Cape Town



## September 2010 Newsletter

### Quartzite Caves of Oorlogskloof

*Anthony Hitchcock*

The Oorlogskloof Nature Reserve was established in 1983 through a financial grant from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and some government funding. The reserve forms part of the Bokkeveld Mountains near Niewoudville and ranges between 500 and 900m above sea level.

The Oorlogskloof River rises in the Roggeveld Mountains near Calvinia and flows southwest passing south of Niewoudville where it has carved its way through a thin layer of Table Mountain Sandstone which is metamorphosed sandstone known as quartzite.

Once the river cut through the quartzite layer it exposed the softer lower formations composed of shale and siltstones forming a formidable gorge. The landscape is generally flat with the gorge ranging between 80 and 200m wide and 100m deep. The quartzite upper layers are exposed on the upper plateaus and escarpments overlooking the river. The binding material cementing the quartzite grains is chemically weathered through a process known as grain scaling. Moisture seeps into the rocks and through seams and joints resulting in the formation of interesting geometrical erosion patterns that look similar to karst weathering of limestones.

I booked the hiking trail in September 2007 and armed with the trail map went exploring. The first day of the hike from Groot Tuin to Brakwater is only 4km long and left plenty of time to explore after we had stored our heavy packs at the camp. The last section of the first days hike takes one over a large rocky area named Spelonkkop. I left the camp and climbed back up the hill to look for caves that the name of the 'kop' promised.

My explorations took me to a junction in the path with the sign 'Leopards Trap Trail'. I had not discovered anything looking like a cave so far so I went to look for the leopard trap. The trail led down a rocky corridor in the fragmented cliff-line made up of enormous blocks of rock. A side corridor led down to a depression that looked promising so I went to investigate. I eased my way down between boulders into a fractured passage. The passage descended steeply and I slid down accompanied by a cascade of sand and leaves. This led into a small chamber with a passage down to a second chamber. This low chamber extends to the left and right, but limited by a solid straight wall on one side. I crawled across to the wall and was surprised to find a vertical slot along the length of the wall. The vertical crack is narrow and about 4m deep and might continue on the one end, but I was exploring alone and therefore decided to leave further exploration until I had more backup. I made a grade 1 sketch of the cave and estimated the depth to be about 9m. I named the cave 'Leopard Trap Cave' after the local feature which I failed to find.

Encouraged by this find, I moved on exploring the many cracks and grikes in the eroded escarpment. I found a corridor off the main track that looked interesting. I soon found more cave with passage on the right complemented by a passage on

the left. The right-hand passage is low and narrows after a mere 4m. The left hand passage was more rewarding extending as a 0.5m wide vertical joint for about 10m to a junction with a passage leading off 90° to the left and parallel to the original corridor. This passage is also 0.5m wide and about 25m long and brings one back to the trail. The cave is about 40m long and I completed a grade one sketch for the record. Faint light filters down from a small hole in the ceiling prompting me to name it 'Twilight Cave'.

I soon found a third cave which begins as a low shelf under one of the escarpment blocks. I slid into the shelf and found a low cave on the upper side and a passage in the other direction. This passage continued as a vertical crack for about 10m. I had brought a tape and survey instruments so mapped this cave as it was easy to survey on my own. I found one insectivorous bat in the cave and therefore named the cave 'Single Bat Cave'.

I had had a successful afternoon having found and sketched three caves. All three caves were located in the rather formal weathered boulder blocks forming the edge of the plateau escarpment.

Spelonkkop is however a complicated area with a significant part of it consisting of a very promising valley. It looks as though the 'kop' has collapsed in the middle forming a huge doline filled with weathered boulders similar to, but larger than the collapses in the region of Bats Cave on Table Mountain. The doline is not the only feature as a valley littered with eroded boulders and large trees lead down the hill like a great drainage valley off Spelonkkop. My gut feeling was of excellent potential for cave development in this karst-like area. I spent the rest of the afternoon clambering down boulders and looking into many recesses, but alas no more caves. The area looks so promising that I think we should bring an exploration team to spend more time searching the area.

### Sequel

I was excited by the potential of the area, but it is quite far from Cape Town. We were in any case fully occupied with exploring, discovering and mapping on our doorstep on Table Mountain.

I next visited Oorlogskloof on a work field trip in November of 2008. We made Brakwater our base camp and headed out each day to work. One trip took us along the trail past Swartkliphuis and on to Dwarskloof. We stopped for lunch at the escarpment overlooking the Oorlogskloof River. It was a hot November day so we followed the beacons trail in search of shade amongst the rocks forming the escarpment. The beacons route was quite confusing, but nevertheless revealed another cave. I found the cave by following the beacons down a slope into a small chamber. A passage on this level led to an exit about 15m away. I negotiated a tight vertical squeeze and managed to climb down into a second passage immediately below the first. This passage is a vertical corridor at least 20m long with another opening on the cliff.

A third passage leads down a slope and extends in the opposite direction from the first two passages. It begins as a scramble down a low passage into a corridor and then rises to continue as a short crawlway to an exit in an open corridor orientated at 90° to the cliff. There is an interesting side passage off this passage that appears to lead down to a passage below. It was very tight and I decided to leave it for another time when I had backup. I estimated the cave system to be about 100m long.

I found one insectivorous bat, many spiders and strange ball-shaped web nests hanging from the ceiling.

The Oorlogskloof escarpment presents good potential for the discovery of small quartzite caves. The area is large and rugged and will require lots of walking and clambering amongst the cliffs, but nevertheless well worth the effort.

## Silvermine Meet, 4<sup>th</sup> July

Marc Burman

Caves visited: Crassula, Amy's Squeeze, Tea Time, Lunch, Dripdrop, Johles and Ystervark.

It was an enthusiastic bunch that gathered bright and early on Sunday at the Silvermine parking lot on the east side of Ou Kaapse Weg. From an expected turnout of around 21, we were down to 11: Anthony Hitchcock (leading) and a happy Labrador, Ron Zeeman, Parry Pavlis, Raymond Maclean, Llewellyn Bietjie, Marc Burman, Rashad Jakoet, Emilie Galley, Dave Ward, Louise Moolman, and Jayne Vlok.

The winter's morning was cool to start but the day proceeded to become unseasonably dry and warm. We set off on a south-easterly bearing, hiking about 3 km around the valley before coming to the site of the first cave. After a few minutes' searching the entrance was found, and we explored this grotto for a while. This involved an easy passage into a tall inner chamber, followed by a few metres' crawl to the left into a smaller chamber, still tall enough for one to stand in. At this point another low crawling passage heads to the right for some distance, into a rather damp sump. Some of the team braved this water and returned to us a little muddy but satisfied with the good crawl. Ron's duct-tape came in handy here for fixing my helmet strap which allowed me to cave safely. After about half an hour the warm sun drove us off in search of the next cave and some shade.

The caves which we visited in this area are mostly of the belly-crawling variety, consisting of tunnels and chambers between horizontal layers of sandstone. The next cave was found after much scrambling around, and was explored by a few. We stopped for a brief tea at Tea Time, another shallow grotto, and visited Lunch, a very large, open hole with a steep sandy entrance and space at the top for a party to sit comfortably. Finding Lunch to be already occupied, we marched on to Dripdrop, a spacious and shady spot, where a decent lunch was had by all. Here some of us explored the west passage which extends quite a long way (I think someone mentioned a distance of 60 metres), but becomes extremely tight in places after the first 15 metres or so.

After lunch we tootled on to Johles which may well have been very exciting, but of which I mysteriously have no recollection whatsoever, and ended the day with the most challenging and interesting bit of caving, at Ystervark. This cave goes quite deep and is a low crawl throughout. The first 15 metres or so are narrow and straight. At an intersection this tunnel continues straight, and has two tunnels to the west, the first much lower than the second, and something off to the east as well. The expedition headed into the slightly taller passage to the west with a radio and transponder, with the intention of giving Anthony a transponder reading at the end of this tunnel. Reaching a point about 20 metres along this tunnel we came to a spot where the tunnel opens up to the north again, and the entrance to this hole (Survey point F) is marked with 'Danger' painted in red. We tried to look into this passage, where we were supposed to be venturing in to find the northern-most spot, closest to the rockface behind which Anthony and Ron were waiting. It appeared to have filled up with sand and would require quite a bit of digging before one would feel secure venturing in. All in all, this prospect didn't look too enjoyable and we retreated. Some of the party then explored the rest of the system for a while longer, and we began the homeward trek down and across the valley at about 3pm. At that point my old boot sole came loose and Ron's duct tape once again proved invaluable. After a relaxed stroll back along the jeep track we reached the parking lot at around 4.

## Robin Hood

Ozzy (AKA Christopher Osborne)

Leader: Christopher Osborne and his glamorous assistant Ninja Chris (AKA Chris Jones)

Members: Alf Alfreds, Raymond Maclean, Ron Zeeman, Stephen Craven, Parry Pavlis

Guests: Andrew Steyn, Bernard Chirol, Andrew Stephen, Simon Pauk, Jacques du Toit, Lloyd Barclay, Chris Jaquet

This was my first time leading a caving trip. The plan was to lead a small group through Robin Hood Cave (Kalk Bay). As it was my first time leading a group I enlisted the help of Chris Jones who was also familiar with Robin Hood. The day got off to a hectic start. My alarm didn't go off and I woke up (in Claremont) 25 minutes before I was supposed to be in Kalk Bay. Panic! Despite this blunder I rocked up a mere 5 minutes late. I understand that by South African standards this is still within the realms of being on time. On arriving I noted the so called "small group" had turned into a 14 strong crew. Everyone was very enthusiastic so we set off up Echo valley. We were blessed with great weather. We reached the Amphitheater in just over an hour. Several of our crew set off exploring while we waited for a couple of stragglers. Once every one was together Raymond gave a safety briefing. We all got changed and made our way into the underworld.

A good leader never shows doubt or fear and I think I did that reasonably well :-)  
In fact the only part I was concerned about was locating the entrance. It is less than obvious. Already within the first few meters of Robin Hood the excitement builds. Most people will remember the section where you have to contort yourself around a rather inconveniently placed rock with not much wriggle room. In fact I think Andrew will tell you that going in is a lot easier than getting back out. We made steady progress to Junction Chamber. At this point most people decided to check out the end of "The Narrows" and see what all the fuss is about. It was also Raymond's first opportunity to see what this side of The Narrows looked like; as on a previous occasion he had to abort due to... how shall we say... size constraints. Too much of the good life Raymond?  
Once all were correct and present we pressed on for the "Main Chamber". I find the section between Junction Chamber and Main Chamber the most fun. It's certainly the section that requires the most gymnastics. We all tried to keep our feet out of the water on the side crawl, but judging by the select words coming from behind me, some were unsuccessful.

We stopped to rest and admire Main Chamber before pressing on through Dogs Leg Pass. Right at the very end of Dogs Leg Pass we found a small chamber that everyone just about fitted in. I started a bit of a challenge to test our skills by squeezing through a very tight vertical hole/crack. I was the first to give it a go. Then others followed. Of course everyone wanted to do better than the previous guy. Ninja Chris raised the bar by doing it head first downwards. What can I say, boys will be boys... It was then time to turn around and make our way out. Just past Junction Chamber, while waiting for the group to consolidate, some of the team took the opportunity to brush up on their French language skills. Thanks to Bernard (our visiting speleologist from France) we were able to perfect essential phrases such as "volay vou ou choo".

All in all we were underground for a little over 4 hours.

Thanks Chris for being my sidekick and thanks to Ron and Steve for looking after our packs while we were underground.

## Oudtshoorn 6-9 August

Alan set it all up for us – a visit to the Oudtshoorn caves. Most of our new members have never had this pleasure. Our host, member Mike, provided the subsidised accommodation at the adventure centre at Melville House. Fourteen ventured from Cape Town: Raymond, Tarryn, Charl, Jason, Ron, Alf, Darryl, Chris (Ozzy), Emilie, Clint, Louise, Dave and visitors Chris and Jacque. Port Elizabeth provided three: Ruth, Trefor and Jason. Renee popped up for the day on Sunday from Mossel Bay.

**Saturday.** First stop was a visit to Cango 2 while the cavers were still clean. A grateful thanks to head guide, Steve Mouton, for the privilege. While the twelve had the pleasure, accompanied by a guide, the five oldies; Darryl, Ruth, Trefor, Alf and Ron went in search, in vain, for the small cave up the adjacent valley. Later, tired of waiting, Ruth, Trefor and Alf returned to camp while Darryl and Ron waited for the adventurers. For interest Raymond took my altimeter along. The height difference between the Cango entrance and the stream is 100ft or 30m.

### Cango

*Louise Moolman*

We assembled promptly at 10h00 at the entrance to Cango 1 on a pleasantly warm winters day. Steve, the main Cango guru, could not lead us due to prior commitments, so, as he handed us over to Theo he bade us farewell with a stern warning not to destroy the fibre optic cables, or, for that matter, anything else underground.

It was wonderful to see all the familiar, enchanting features of Cango 1 again. The immensity and agelessness never cease to instil awe and admiration. But anticipation was mounting as we made our way through the Adventure Tour, our journey becoming progressively more difficult as the cemented path reverted back to the original rocky cave floor. In King Solomon's mines we saw him with his bearded face and crystal crown, sitting on his throne, mounted on an inverted protea. Up the iron ladder and then a tight squeeze through the Tunnel of Love. Into the Ice Chamber with its fascinating stone ledge high up around the outer wall indicating the level of a pool from a bygone age. On to Cango2.

Stopping briefly to photograph the glass-rose garden in a shallow pool and the pure white cauliflower-like features protruding from the walls, making sure to give the straw stalactite a wide berth, as excessive vibration and even breathing could cause it to break. A quick game of hide-and-seek among the sheets of flow stone which resemble giant tobacco leaves. But, alas, there was no hiding from Clint's ever-vigilant, cling-wrapped video camera (worse than Big Brother)!

In the chamber with the amazing translucent crystal wall, we were surprised to be following a trail of blood drops, wondering if Dracula resided here, but found out that bare-footed Jason had cut his toe. Lucky for Raymond and his first-aid kit! We did, however see the skeletal remains of bats and a civit cat deep into the cave.

We proceeded through the next, very smooth, wax-like tunnel on our posteriors as many had done before us. We finally came to the crystal clear underground pool which separates Cango 2 from Cango 3. Charl, Chris, Jason and Emilie obviously immune to the heart-stopping temperature, shed their muddy overalls and took the plunge. On the way back, Emilie, delighted to find herself in a mud chamber, indulged in a deep-cleansing mud facial which scared the tour group we passed on our way out.

We finally emerged into the blinding sunlight about 6 hours after entering the caves - a sweaty, dishevelled, mud coated, overall torn, but jubilant group of enthusiastic cavers. Thanks to all those who organised the weekend.

## Fred's Cow Pot

*Raymond MacLean*

Ron, Mike and Jan Blacquiere took the group to Fred's Cow pot. It is quite different to other caves in the area in a sense that it just keeps on going down, down and down, in a sort of spiral, if I recall some 60 meters deep. It is also a very hard cave on the knees and elbows. As you enter the cave into the first chamber, you meet Fred's famous cow, well, at least what's left of the cow. The cavers split up into two groups with Trefor leading the first group down and Alf taking the second group. When I entered the cave, the first group had already descended down a precarious little hole and were quite a distance down. Our group decided to follow and we were quite surprised on the number of twists and turns in this cave, at one stage, Alf and I thought that we had taken a wrong turn. We eventually made contact with a very exhausted first group as they were trying to make their way back up. They had a single ladder with them and set up the ladder on the first pitch, the ladder was unfortunately not long enough to make it past the second pitch and the group was exhausted. We let them pass and they exited in a hurry.

We decided to call it for the day and we all headed for the surface, when we popped out of the hole into the original first chamber, we were greeted by a familiar face, Darryl had waited for us in Mike and Ron's stead. We were very relieved to get out to the surface about 6pm. Unfortunately we did not come across the little clay cow model in the cave and a bunch of very tired and dirty cavers headed back to Melville house for a well deserved shower, it was time for supper ☺.

**Sunday** – Stroomwater. Thanks to Jan, who joined us again, we had permission to trespass and an unlocked gate

### Stroomwater Cave

*Charl Souma*

On day 2 of our Cango weekend, we left a little earlier and were parked and walking to the entrance of Stroomwater cave by 9AM. We had incidentally driven past the conveniently situated cave exit on our way to the caves entrance. Our walk seemed very quick, and immediately the rope experts amongst us began setting up a rig for descending into the cave. The rope was strictly for additional security as a belay down the 20m ladder.

As this rig was put together, the rest of us nibbled on snacks and wandered around the surrounding base camp. The belay was solid, and some experienced members who knew the entrance descended first, and shortly thereafter a messaged was relayed to those above ground that there was a blockage very early on in the cave, and we should take our time descending. As the small party of diggers set out to try clear the sand blockage. The manner of entering the cave, along with the spacious reception hall, and misleading side passage make this a very memorable cave, even though we didn't see any more of it from this entrance before it was decided we would rather abandon our efforts to dig through and use the cave exit to gain entry. This plan had a risk of its own along with the dark rain clouds which were gathering in the distance. We took a walk back to our vehicles and setup camp at the exit of Stroomwater, on the other side of the hill. As we each arrived, we entered through the derelict gate which had been erected by some fortune seeking entrepreneur hoping to create his own Cango cave. Our local cave expert was Mike of TBI, Ron and Alf were the experienced leaders from Cape Town and Trevor from PE. Louise, Emilie, Dave, Raymond, Christopher Osborne, Renee, Clint and I made up the remainder of CPSS

members; and for the weekend, guests Chris Jones, Jacques from Cape Town and Jason from PE made up the entire group.

To enter through the exit of Stroomwater was very hopeful as not far from the exit the Ooze Cruise and the sump which according to our experienced members has never been dry in their experience of the cave. Well on this day the sump was dry and dusty. So dusty that breathing through your mouth you could taste the sand. The exit is very hard on the knees and elbows, gigantic square and rectangular boulders were strewn down the sandy passages. We crept and crawled through the sandy tunnel until our head lamps shone into pitch darkness, we were through the sump and standing in a spacious and a lofty cave, with signs of Congo stalactite formations clearly evident.

Knowing that the hardest part was over I was quite relieved as the day before I had a panic inside Fred's Cow Pot and was worried I wasn't over the initial fright. We now walked for what seemed over an hour along the stream which is a reminder of the caves origin and history. There were a few slips in the mud, and an option to have a mud face pack applied when you got to the end. I chose not to have the latter but I had no choice when it came to slipping in the mud.

You can't help feeling sad when stopping to admire the mud covered formations and wonder how they must have looked like when they weren't covered in centimetre thick mud. We made it all the way to the end of the cave where the digging had left us on the previous attempt and as such didn't go any further. We all headed back and explored as we went along. Once we emerged from Stroomwater to our party who decided to sit out this exercise ; Ruth, Trevor, Darryl, Oom Jan and Jason Souma who had a nasty nose bleed for the duration while we were in the cave were all outside waiting to hear what it was like. And as we all emerged one by one a cloud opened above us and it was a fast dash for the cars, transport arrangements needed to be sorted for those who were going to see Emerald Lake next. Ahh Emerald Lake

### **Emerald Lake**

*Emilie Galley*

Anyone driving along the road to the Swartberg Pass that Sunday, seeing a group of bedraggled, muddy guys standing in the rain, peering down into a manhole, might not have realised we were there out of choice. But in fact this motley crew were the newly formed Congo Cave Sump Swimmers (Me, Chris J, Charl, Raymond, Jacques, Jason, Alf plus cameraman Clint and key-bearer Ron), about to have our second dip of the weekend.

Escaping the rain and cold, we climbed down the wobbly ladders into the warm chamber leading to Emerald Lake. It really does live up to its name, with beautiful, still, crystal clear water, which glimmers blue-green in the torchlight. Amazing! I couldn't wait to get in.

Kitted out in underwear + headtorch (not an outfit I often wear!) we waded into the magical water and began exploring. The lake is a stunning place to swim and explore. To the left of the main pool, the ceiling closes in, apparently leading to a deep submerged tunnel, whilst to the right a wriggle and a climb lead to another smaller chamber.

Eventually it was time to leave so we climbed back out into the real world, piled into Ron's bakkie and drove back to Mike's, feeling lucky to have swum in such a remarkable place and looking forward to the next subterranean swimming adventure!

### **Efflux**

Sunday, 'twas a dark and stormy night. Mike had said "lets have an early start tomorrow" so we rolled out at 6:00 Monday morn to find snow on the Swartberg mountains.

Now past storms have somewhat modified the entrance to Efflux. The old entrance is totally blocked with sand and a 3½m chimney is now the only way in. Fourteen dumb souls ventured on through the cold water crawl and tip-toed the underground stream, which then fortunately finds a better way down. My wet feet got rather numb – sort of comatoes you might say.

Mike's knowledge of Efflux extended to the Sling chamber and thence towards Anthony-Dave's Alley but unaware of the tight continuation crawl, ( me included). After exploring that chamber extension it was time for the Eternal Crawl. Damn, that Post Box is high. All the pretties are unfortunately still covered in mud. Time constraints set a limit of exploration to the Flowstone Chamber before heading back to the surface.

Returning to Melville House it was dive for the hot showers and lunch before heading for home.

I love the challenge of this cave.

Jan said he had dug a deviation ditch to try and stop the river from flooding Efflux. Ditch!!! It's a channel that would make the canal engineers of old England proud. I think he fibs about his age. I'd like to check his birth certificate.



### **New members**

Welcome to our new members; Jacques du Toit, Sinead and Rudolf Hattingh



**Happiness Is**

*Editor: Ron Zeeman*