

# Scrubby Creek Cave, M-49

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VSA

**F**OR SEVERAL years now, I have talked up the idea that cavers acquire caves to both protect the caves and provide an educational and recreation resource as owners. Several trips to the US enabled me to examine properties of the North Eastern Cave Conservancy which are owned and operated by cavers in New England and also the Hawaiian Cave Conservancy which is acquiring lava tubes.

Little did I realise that the Scrubby Creek Property at Murrindal near Buchan in Victoria, was to come up for sale and for cavers to get the inside running on purchasing it!

Scrubby Creek Cave holds a special place for Victorian cavers. Scrubby Creek in its upper reaches for the most part is dry, its water having been captured from seepage along the contact of the volcanics and the limestone. The water emerges at the foot of a bluff depositing extensive tufa as it flows down a waterfall to rejoin Scrubby Creek on its way to the Buchan River.

This resurgence was recorded by A.E. Kitson in 1907 and Frank Moon in the 1930s tried to free dive it. However, it was not until 1960 that Sub Aqua Speleological Society (SASS) tried to dive the resurgence with little success, but then looked at a small hole slightly above the outflow at the base of the bluff.

With a bit of enthusiastic digging, progress was made and several trips later SASS managed to get back down to the water and which disappeared into a sump after several hundred metres of beautiful passage. Water levels were high and it took several trips before this sump was passed. Several more trips were needed to get as far as a muddy passage known as Trog Wallow. This led to a large rock fall that was difficult to find a way through but which opened into a large chamber, now known as Christmas Hall.

Along the floor of Christmas Hall the stream can be followed to where it emerges from rocks. The cave now extends for some 1.5 km of passage, including the high level extensions. Since these first major discoveries, there have been several high level decorated galleries discovered, as well as a passage which leads to Siren Sump which is related to Storm Water Tunnel, M-43, a related cave which takes a lot of water after rain events. There was a series of unsuccessful attempts to climb to what



DARYL CARR

Neil Wilson in sump, 2011

appeared to be some high level passage in Christmas Hall and various cavers have, to no avail, poked at the rock fall at the end of Christmas Hall where the stream emerges. SASS and subsequently VSA have worked with the owners, the Woodgate family, for some 50 years to ensure that all caving was responsibly conducted. My first trip into the cave was in about 1967 and involved using woollen long-johns and a cotton boiler suit. For some reason I was made to carry the rope safety line through the sump. My first attempt had me reverse out and take my helmet off and swim with nose and one eye above water, so-called "sniffing the breezes", until after about 30 metres, headroom increases until one can stand in the shallow stream. The stream from here was flowing over freshly deposited white calcite.

The whole trip was memorable and the only thing which has changed since then



VSA SLIDE SET

M-49 Stream way and decoration



VSA SLIDE SET

Daryl Carr at the end of Trog Wallow, 1967

is that there are wetsuits and caving suits available which can make the caving more enjoyable and reduce the risk of serious exposure. Each trip I have done since still has provided the full gamut of anticipation and adrenalin rush as each new obstacle is overcome in this very exciting cave. Now that the property is for sale it was the opportunity to put words to deeds, hence the Scrubby Creek Acquisition Project. Rimstone Cooperative Ltd decided to sign a purchase contract to buy the cave. We sought and received support from the Karst Conservation Fund.

Rimstone Cooperative Ltd is a Community Advancement Society with speleological aims. It cannot distribute dividends or property to members but on winding up it has to give its assets to an organization with similar aims. Rimstone Cooperative has for 38 years owned and operated Homeleigh at Buchan for its members and the caving community. It is an ideal vehicle for establishing a caver owned and operated Karst Conservancy in Australia.

The Scrubby Creek Cave property is 105 acres and will be managed to protect the caves and karst. VSA will be asked to continue the Scrubby Creek Cave leadership scheme that it has had in place for several decades and advise on cave access. The tufa terraces will be protected from stock and blackberries and weeds removed. The property will be available for stock agistment to provide income for rates, fencing and other improvements. Rimstone will work towards a protective covenant for the property. There is an opportunity to develop an interpretive karst walk showing the tufa terraces and the remnant rain forest vegetation along Scrubby Creek.

All it needs now is further donations by cavers to support this purchase. The property will be used to protect the caves and karst. For further details contact me directly via email: [nicholaswhite@netspace.net.au](mailto:nicholaswhite@netspace.net.au)

Donations can be made by following the instructions on the donation form downloadable from the Karst Conservation Fund page of the ASF Website at [www.caves.org.au](http://www.caves.org.au)

## REFERENCE

Lloyd Mill, Scrubby Creek Cave ASF Newsletter 85, (1979).