

# 17<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS of SPELEOLOGY YARRANGOBILLY PRE-CONGRESS EXCURSION

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An international caving congress in southern Australia in the middle of winter (to fit in with the northern hemisphere summer holiday season) is one thing, but to even think about a field trip to Yarrangobilly and Cooleman Plain in the Snowy Mountains of New South Wales seems a little crazy.

Nevertheless, the Canberra Speleological Society Inc (CSS) and Sydney-based Metropolitan Speleological Society Inc (MSS) somehow agreed to organise a field excursion during the week leading up to the congress, which was held at Penrith, NSW in July 2017.

The excursion attracted 11 participants from 5 countries (USA, Switzerland, UK, Netherlands and Tasmania). The participants were looked after by a team of 16 locals from CSS and MSS, who did all the driving, catering and cave guiding. Several ACKMA members, including Marjorie Coggan, Dirk Stoffels, Regina Roach and John Brush, were involved in running the trip, and in addition, David Wools-Cobb was one of the participants.



*Participants and local guides at Caves House, Yarrangobilly  
Photo: Dirk Stoffels*

The field excursion was based in the warmth and comfort of Caves House Yarrangobilly, which was greatly appreciated by everyone as it rained and snowed the whole week, apart from the last day, when the sun made a welcome appearance after an overnight snowfall. As our group took over the whole building, we had the run of the place with its 3 kitchens, 4 lounges and a function room. The function room was temporarily converted into a gear storage and drying area by stringing clothes lines everywhere and placing tarpaulins on the floor to catch any drips and mud balls.

To cater for the varying interests of participants, and also to keep all the locals gainfully employed, we organised a comprehensive trip program that offered 3 or 4 options at any given time, including trips into moderately challenging wild caves, visits to easy show caves or former show caves as well as non-caving and local touring options that included trudging through deep snow around the old gold-mining sites of historic Kiandra.

On the first day in the area, all participants were introduced to the Yarrangobilly area through special guided trips into several



*Mark Tringham (UK) about to climb into the upper level  
of Coppermine Cave  
Photo: Sabrina Honegger*



*John Brush and Jozx Burgers (Netherlands) in Coppermine Cave  
Photo: Sabrina Honegger*

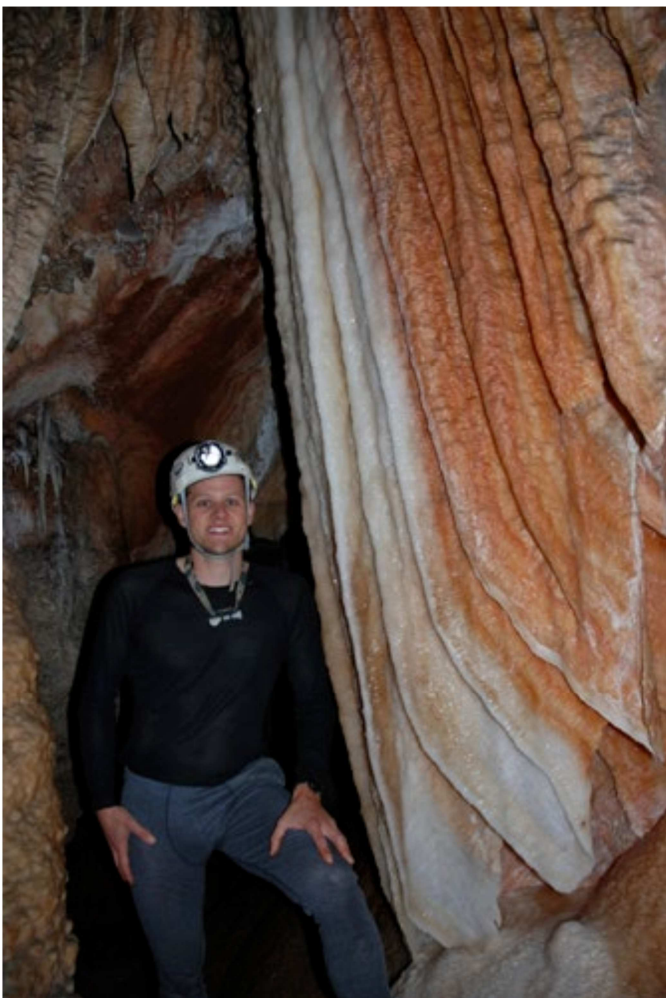


*Sabrina Honegger and Andreas Christen in the crystal streamway area of Eagles Nest Cave  
Photo: Cathi Humphrey-Hood*



*Jozs Burgers (Netherlands) negotiating snow-covered logs at the stream entrance of Barber Cave, Cooleman Plain  
Photo: Sabrina Honneger*

of the show caves. However, most participants were more interested in seeing some of the wild caves in the area and the most popular caves proved to be East Deep Creek Cave, Restoration Cave, Coppermine Cave and the Eagles Nest



*Andreas Christen (Switzerland) in the beautiful upper level area of East Deep Creek Cave  
Photo: Sabrina Honneger*

System. On our final day in the area, we were granted permission to access the Cooleman Plain area which gave participants an opportunity to see some of the major caves of the area, such as Barber and Murray Caves, as well as experience the serenity of the Cooleman Plains area under a thin cover of snow. It also gave them some insights into the difficult issue of trying to manage the feral horse problems of the area. During the day we must have seen at least 100 horses on the high plains of the area.

Everyone appeared to have a good time and seemed to be impressed with the (relatively small, by world standards,) caves at Yarrangobilly. Organising the trip – and trying to herd a group of 27 cavers – was a lot of work, but looking back, it was really enjoyable. The trip would not have been possible without the huge effort put in by all the locals, especially the catering team led by Marjorie Coggan and the caving and driving teams lead by Beth Little. I also acknowledge the assistance provided by staff of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, in particular George Bradford for the Caves House and show caves arrangements; Glenn Stroud for allowing access to Cooleman and participating on our trip to the area; and to Simon Allender for providing special access to, and showing participants around, the restored courthouse building at Kiandra.



*Participants and Ranger Glenn Stroud at the entrance to Murray Cave, Cooleman Plain  
Photo: John Brush*