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JSSS



**THE NSW CAVE RESUE SQUAD**  
**MULTI-AGENCY ANNUAL TRAINING EXERCISE - 22/10/2022.**

*Chris Curtis.*

I don't normally report on our training exercises, but this one was not our usual. Not everything ran to plan...

Every year CRS runs an annual training event in October, usually held at Jenolan Caves. Every second year these are multi-agency, which means we invite Police Search and Rescue (SAR), NSW Ambulance Special Casualty Access Team (SCAT) and other VRA personnel to attend.

This year's plans were off to a bad start as Jenolan Caves access is already in a mess, from both directions from road damage.

The weekend before our exercise, all roads were closed, so we had to quickly come up with an alternative plan as we didn't want to cancel it altogether.

Bungonia Caves was next on the list of options as we have had plenty of exercises there before. Drum Cave was our proposed alternative, so three of us, myself included, headed down to Bungonia during the week to measure CO<sub>2</sub> levels and check rigging options, bolts, etc. The hope was that we could start our rescue from the Drum extension.

The cave had very low CO<sub>2</sub>, less than 1%. We installed three glue-in bolts at the top of the extension pitch for a tyrolean (Photos 1, 2).

We looked at where to start the extraction from exactly, but the extension passage had no anchors and is either flat or down big muddy slopes. So the stretcher could really only start from the top of the pitch. We did notice a huge amount of bat activity, more than I have ever seen before!

### **Day of the exercise**

The weather forecast for the day had showers planned for late afternoon, but no storms.

The day started off going a bit slow, but otherwise ok. We had the patient down from the Extension and up the second pitch just near the start of the crawl section before the main pitch.

Just as we were doing our patient swap, we received a call from the surface about a large storm coming past and dumping a lot of rain.

We were all told to quickly grab our bags, leave all rigging and get to the bottom of the main pitch as quickly as possible. If we didn't there was the potential for many of us to be trapped in the cave and have to wait for water levels to drop before being able to exit.

We all managed to get through the squeeze passage no problem, but we all got wet. Luckily there wasn't too much water on the floor, only a few inches, it was certainly moving fast though (Photo 3).

As we exited the squeeze we could all see an impressive sight as what is normally a dry pitch was now a full scale waterfall (Cover photo, page 325).

As impressive as it looked, we all knew that unless we waited it out, we were going to have to climb up the waterfall.

Unfortunately none of us were prepared for it in terms of clothing. Luckily there were still of few members on the surface and they quickly made changes to rigging to get two more access lines down the pitch.

Many of us got cold very quickly trying to stay out of the water spray and the cold wind. We all managed to get out, but many of us were very cold and tired.

The next morning we de-rigged the cave, luckily all the water was gone.



**Photo 1 :** CRS Bungonia exercise. New bolts installed for top of the Extension rigging, Drum Cave, Bungonia. **Photo:** *Chris Curtis.*



**Photo 2:** CRS Bungonia exercise. Top of the Extension, Drum Cave, Bungonia. **Photo:** *Chris Curtis.*





**Photo 3:** CRS Bungonia exercise. Water coming under our feet, time to go! **Photo:** *Chris Curtis*.

This exercise proved that even for the best of us things can still go wrong.

Because of our training and level of experience, nobody panicked and we changed

our plans accordingly to keep everyone safe.

Everyone still had a great time, even the three SCAT guys who were really impressed with how we all handled the situation.

*JSSS*