

Nambung Springs, WA

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IN ITS PURSUIT of new cave diving sites in WA, the cunning crew from CEGWA has been exploring new ground and researching old legends.

Here we provide the results of our efforts in locating springs on the coastal plains within Nambung National Park, which is part of an amazing section of coastal limestone, some 200 km north of Perth. The karst area is designated South Hill River, where I am the ASF's designated karst coordinator.

The legend of SH25 Scoop Spring is that when the land on the coast near Cervantes was private property, the farmer tried excavating a spring so he could use it to pump

water and make it more accessible to his stock.

He used his tractor to pull a scoop through the shallow pool and in the middle the scoop and tractor disappeared holus-bolus into a bottomless chasm. Given that all this occurs in limestone, you can imagine the excitement of cave divers to locate and explore this hole.

Some divers did apparently find and dive this hole but it was found to be a muddy, shallow pool, with no sign of the caverns measureless to man they were hoping for.

In 1974 a remarkable thing happened. The Nambung River flooded, backed up and hydraulically pressured its way through

the choked conduits under the limestone hills to gush out of the coastal springs.

One was in fact dye traced to emerge 13 km from where the river disappeared into a cave.

Bob Shoosmith was a keen caver who was fortunate enough to witness this event and the water geysering up out of solution tubes on the coastal plains. There is little doubt that the springs would have been flowing handsomely at that time as well.

Roll on 37 years and the location of SH25 Scoop Spring was a bit vague, but may be somewhere now inside the boundary of the current Nambung National Park.

The roads and tracks had been changed,



Missing Spring SH150

MIKE NEWTON



Nambung Spring SH 147

which made relocating karst features that little bit more difficult. After doing our research and with the invaluable help of Bob Shoosmith, Barry Loveday and Google Earth, we vectored in on the springs. An old map was unearthed which gave the position of Scoop Spring, but it also identified several others, so it was finally time to do some ground-truthing.

Roger Howlett and I did a bushwalking reconnaissance of three of the springs in late 2010 and then Mike Newton, Kim Halliday and I headed out on 23rd January to document them and check diving potential.

Four springs were documented: SH25 Scoop Spring, SH146, SH147 and SH149. Springs SH147 and SH25 are located close together and are similar in structure—shallow, 15 m diameter pools of clear fresh water with plenty of long-necked turtles and reeds. Mostly knee-deep, there are deeper points in the middle of them, probably mud-choked solution tubes, but no obvious flow sources.

SH146 was a different thing—a ‘larger’, 5 m diameter flooded sinkhole surrounded by shallower water with lots of reeds and frogs. This is also a favoured site of the local wallaby population.

Kim Halliday free-dived this hole to several metres depth and confirmed that

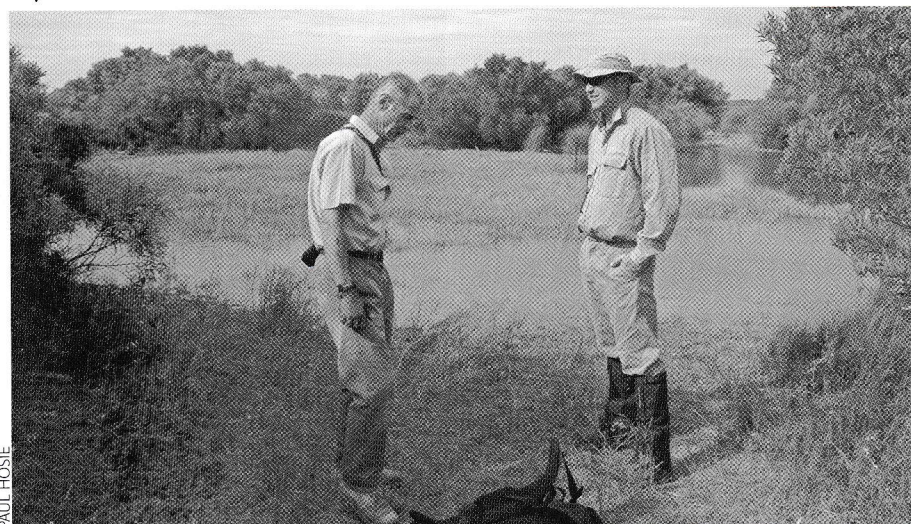
it is also blocked with mud and sand. We discovered and documented SH149, a small spring pool under some bushes not too far from SH146.

A week later, Mike Newton was in a light plane flying over this area when he spotted and photographed another very promising spring in the same area, designated SH150. Christie Allen and I walked to this a few days later and found that it was similar in

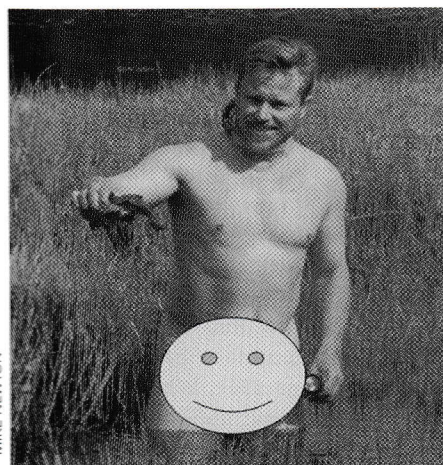
structure, but smaller and shallower than SH146. It is strongly suspected that when the Nambung River next floods, these springs will once again get flushed out.

When they become accessible, the cave diving should begin.

There is potential for many kilometres of diveable passages, but if our experience cave diving a little further north at Eneabba is anything to go by, it won't be easy.



Mike Newton (left) and Kim Halliday at SH 25 Scoop Spring



The author with a long-necked turtle in SH25 Scoop Spring



Kim Halliday happily exploring SH146