



The Complex of Mega Mania

NEIL SILVERWOOD explores a new-found cave system in need of protection.

Mega Mania lies 'in the middle of nowhere' (somewhere in the west of Kahurangi National Park) and hidden by West Coast bush. Though it is one of New Zealand's largest and most impressive cave systems, the truly amazing thing about Mega Mania is the date of its discovery. Isolation and rugged bush covering held the cave system secret until 1994.

Over the last 50 years many of New Zealand's ancient limestone cave systems have suffered irreversible damage. The recent discovery of Mega Mania and its relatively pristine state has given us one last chance at properly preserving a large cave system.

At the age of 16, and relatively new to caving, I was lucky enough to be on the

first trip into Mega Mania. On a helicopter flight over the Heaphy River area I spotted the massive entrance way. A grid reference was noted down by the local chopper pilot for us. After bush bashing our way through copious amounts of cutty grass and supplejack we discovered the impressive main entrance into the unexplored caves.

Over the next three years we explored and mapped out a total of over 15 kilometres of underground passages. For West Coast cavers these were exciting times. This was a dream come true for many of us involved in the exploration.

During the exploration we discovered an amazing variety of passages in Mega Mania. Much of the 15 kilometres is made up of young active stream ways and passages recently abandoned by water. Many

of these passages flood after very heavy rain. This only happens once or twice a year.

Higher up, well above the flood level, we discovered older cave passages long deserted by the streams which formed them. The only trace left of these ancient streams is a fine layer of dirt, which covers the floor. These age-old sedimentation layers have lain here undisturbed for hundreds of thousands of years.

Apart from the aesthetic values the potential scientific value of these sedimentation layers is immense. Each layer of dirt tells its own story about the world above. These innocent looking layers of dirt also hold another treasure, the fossilized remains of many extinct birds.

Connecting Mega Mania's passageways