



CAPE PENINSULA SPELAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER: MAY 2026



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CAVE BUGS ON CPSS MEETS BY PETER SWART

It's only the end of April, and it's great to see that CPSS is active once again, with 4 trips under its collective helmet this year. Unfortunately, I have only been able to attend the Cape Town meets, but as long as I can get underground I am happy, especially when bugs are involved, and I have not been disappointed.

On our first trip to Boomslang, I decided that I was there to cave and not look for bugs, but 5 minutes into Boomslang, a cave I have visited many, many times, I found something I had never seen before. A live velvet worm in Kalk Bay. This is only the second velvet worm I've seen in Kalk Bay caves, and the first one I found was dead, floating on a polluted pool a little further into the cave. The velvet worm was identified as *Peripatosis balfouri*, which is well known from surface environments on the Cape Peninsula. Blue *Peripatus* Cave on Table Mountain is named after the same species. The bugs on the rest of the trip were the usual suspects, a few spiders, bristletails and cave crickets.

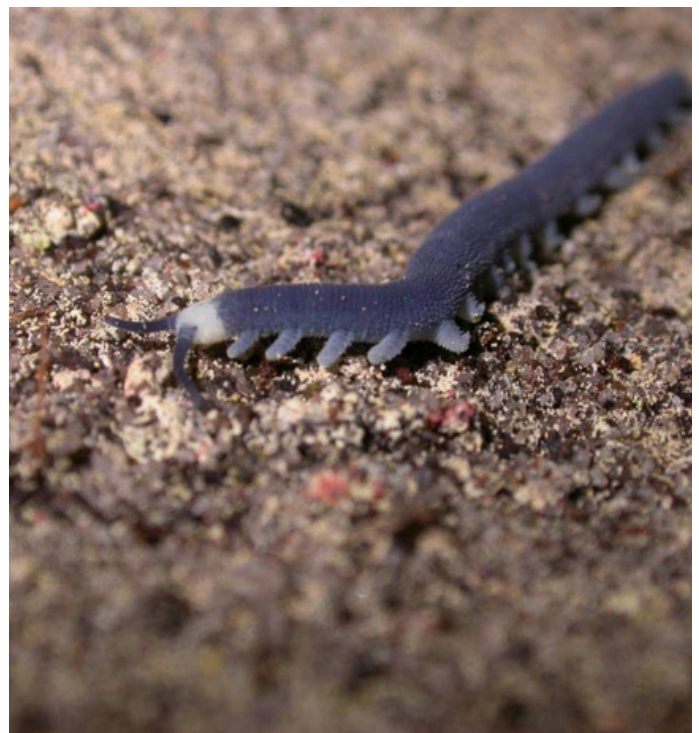
As there were only three cavers on the second trip to Tartarus cave, I selfishly turned it into a bug hunt. Luckily Josh and JJ did not need much arm twisting and were soon finding things that my old eyes missed. The entrance zone to Tartarus yielded lots of little spiders and cave crickets and we found a few harvestmen. True to form these small, eight-legged bugs were sitting very still on wet wooden logs and sticks that had fallen into the cave.

The most existing find was a tiny cave isopod. On 17 December 1960 a Mr N. Leleup visited Boomslang Cave and collected nearly 70 small isopods. These were later described by John Grindley, a SASA member, who named them *Protojanira leleupi* in honour of the discoverer. They were later collected by Chris Gow, (another SASA zoologist) in Tartarus Cave. The only place I have seen anything similar is in Wynberg Cave. On this CPSS trip, at the very bottom of the canyon passage in Tartarus, was a small muddy pool full of cave shrimps, a Table Mountain Fishfly larva and host of flat worms, *Protojanira leleupi*. Another Kalk Bay first for me. Even though the large ones are about 1.5mm long, there were so many that they were easy to spot.

Moving on from Tartarus, we stopped off at a tiny alcove called Fairy Den, which is hardly worth being called a cave. It was however home to a dipluran. Although diplura have six legs, they are not considered true insects. This one was a member of the family Japygidae, and even though it is not a cave dweller, it is often found in the soil and leaf litter in cave entrances.

Bugs from second trip on iNaturalist https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?on=2026-03-28&user_id=peterswart&verifiable=any Ref: Grindley, John. (1963) A NEW PROTOJANIRA (CRUSTACEA, ISOPODA) FROM A CAPE PENINSULA CAVE, https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/AJA00411752_339

PHOTOS OF THE INTERESTING CAVE BUGS FOUND ON
THE RECENT MEETS IN THE CAPE PENINSULA REGION



**BACK UNDERGROUND: CPSS 2026 BEGINS
BY STEFAN DU PLESSIS**

In January this year, the Cape Peninsula Spelaeological Society held a beginner cave meet on the slopes above Kalk Bay. It was also a special trip for another reason — the first expedition led by Joshua, the friend who first introduced me to caving years ago.

The group was a mix of familiar faces and complete newcomers. Some drove from Langebaan for the weekend, while others were Cape Town locals joining their first caving trip. Between us sat years of experience, and for a few, this would be their first time underground.

After meeting at the start of the trail and introducing ourselves, there was an immediate sense of connection. Calm yet excited, everyone shared the same curiosity about what lay ahead. As we climbed the steep path of Echo Valley — always more stairs than you remember — Joshua and Peter, one of the more experienced Cape Town cavers, shared stories about the club's history, its focus on cave conservation and ethics, and the knowledge built up through years of exploring and documenting caves in the region.

The first cave eased everyone in. A short section on all fours opened into an extensive walking passage through the mountain. Inside, everything quieted to footsteps, echoes, and the faint squeaks of bats. For many, it was their first time underground — nerves gradually giving way to curiosity and wonder.

We also spent time cleaning as we went, filling a trash bag with litter throughout the system. Unfortunately, this cave is regularly vandalised and littered by visiting religious groups. Most of the visible waste is now gone, hopefully giving the cave's fauna a chance to recover before further disturbance.

When we emerged on the other side of the mountain, we stopped for a while overlooking the suburbs and ocean below, had a quick snack, and then headed on to the next cave.

The second cave tested different limits. Tight passages and sandy floors quickly had us crawling on our knees, eventually moving prone through sections barely wide enough to pass through. It was the kind of cave that forces you to confront claustrophobia directly. Yet what stood out most was the energy of the group. Jokes started coming out more in the tighter sections to keep the mood light in what can be a pretty stressful situation. Surprisingly it didn't take long before most of the crew were comfortable squeezing through the narrow passages.

At one point we switched off all our headlamps and sat together in complete darkness — it was surprisingly peaceful, but you couldn't see your hand in front of your face.

By the final cave, the group had settled into the rhythm of the day. Curiosity kept us moving — drawn forward by whatever lay around the next corner or through the next tight passage. Peter, as always, searched carefully for insects and cave life to document, while Joshua moved through the cave capturing photographs and leading the group onward. At the end of the system, a narrow beam of sunlight cut into the darkness through an opening in the ceiling. One of the most memorable moments was near this sunbeam chamber. Tucked away above the main passage was a small chamber where we entered only a few at a time due to the limited space. Inside, there were delicate roots hanging from the ceiling in a chamber of pale white sandstone, with tiny droplets sitting on the root hairs. When you shone your torch on them, they glittered. We sat together silently in the cool darkness. It was one of the most peaceful moments I can remember underground — so calm that I could almost have fallen asleep, and by then the group felt more like a crew than strangers. It was a really good first trip with this group, and it makes me excited for what's ahead for the club.

What stayed with me most wasn't just the caves themselves, but how the group approached them — carefully, respectfully, and with real curiosity. Even in the tighter sections, there was patience and a good sense of looking out for one another.

It felt like more than just a beginner cave meet. It felt like something starting up again — an exciting thought that a caving club in Cape Town is becoming active again, and that it could once more build a community around an interest in speleology. If this trip was anything to go by, the future of caving in the Cape looks promising.

PHOTOS FROM THE CAVE TRIP TO THE CLASSIC KALK BAY CAVES
24 JANUARY 2026



STROOMWATER CAVING EXPERIENCE ON 15 FEBRUARY 2026 BY DORET MOORE

The only caves I visited before, involved a few shallow coastal caves along the St Blaize trail and mostly overhangs in the Outeniqua mountains. Exploring these did not at all require the amount of contortionist skills I had to apply when we visited the Stroomwater cave system in February this year.

Our group of newbie cavers from George met up with the seasoned cavers from Oudtshoorn at the Congo Mountain Resort. The original plan was to visit Efflux cave, but it was found to be too wet due to the recent rains in the area. Next stop, De Hoek, where we parked the cars and headed off to the second option, Stroomwater cave.

I felt a bit nervous as we set off towards the cave and started to scan the surrounding cliffs, hoping to spot the entrance. After a short walk and some bundu-bashing, we reached a very unassuming opening at the bottom of a rockface. Sinead gave us a briefing about the cave and on what lay ahead. Stroomwater is an open ended cave system with a total length of 2.3 kilometers. We would only do the first half of the system and return the same way, since the other entrance is on private land. She also explained that we would do a bit of crawling for about the first 120 meters until we reach the sump which will hopefully be dry. From there we would be able to walk upright.

In my mind's eye I saw myself leopard crawling through a very long tunnel, but nothing could be further from the truth. I had to channel my inner contortionist for this one. There was some crawling, but mostly bending, folding and squeezing as we made our way through what I experienced as a maize-like pile of rocks. I have renewed respect for the first people who ventured through this obstacle. By now the initial nervousness has vanished and we all just had fun!

In one of the larger openings between the rocks we saw something move. It was a baby porcupine, all alone. We speculated that the mom was most probably deeper into the cave, so it was decided to leave the little one, hoping that the mom would return.

When we reached the sump, I was very happy that it was dry. From here onwards we could focus on exploring. As we proceeded deeper into the system, we walked through what felt like corridors opening up into bigger chambers. According to Sinead there isn't as much mineral being deposited into this cave and therefore it has less formations than some of the other caves in the area. We saw mostly stalactites and stalagmites, a few columns and even some helictites. I learned that stalactites start out as fragile straws before developing into stronger formations as more mineral is being deposited around the outside.

Some of the stalactites were huge. Others had a honeycomb look and others formed a curtain. We walked through an area that looked like a curved canal, clearly formed by a strong river. You could also see where water made ripples in some solidified sand. Another chamber had huge formations in the roof that looked like solidified mud. I love the variety this cave system has to offer. I was also surprised by how large some of the chambers were. Didn't expect that at all, since it felt so cramped when we entered the cave.

After about two hours of exploring, we started to head back. We were approximately 1.2 kilometers deep into the cave. Going through the maize-like rock pile second time round, was even more fun. It felt totally different approaching it from another angle.

The little porcupine had to be rescued, since we saw no sign of a mommy porcupine. Sinead took it to the Congo Wildlife Ranch in Oudtshoorn. It was aptly named Stroompie and is going from strength to strength at the ranch.

We exited the cave dirty and full of dust, but all smiles. This is definitely one for the books! Stroomwater ticked all the boxes, providing adventure, satisfying curiosity, showing off a variety of formations and we could even save a life. Thanks, Sinead for introducing me to this type of adventure!

PHOTOS FROM THE CAVE TRIP TO STROOMWATER CAVE
15 FEBRUARY 2026



**BACK UNDERGROUND IN OUDTSHOORN: A NEW MEMBER'S
RETURN TO CAVING, YEARS AFTER THE FIRST CRAWL.
BY MEYR KRUGER**

A few years ago, on a bit of a whim, a friend and I decided to join CPSS back in Cape Town. We were after adventure, and crawling through tight spaces to face down our claustrophobia sounded like exactly the right kind of trouble. We managed a handful of trips into Cape Town caves before life got in the way — I moved, the distance became impractical, and caving slipped quietly to the back of the cupboard. I always told myself I'd get back to it one day.

Reminders along the way

Two years ago, I moved to George. Not long after settling in, some friends and I went through to Cango Caves on a tourist visit. When the guide asked whether we wanted to pay extra for the "adventure route" — the one that has you squeezing through the smaller passages — I remember thinking: no, that's not really caving. The real thing is what CPSS does. But I didn't act on the thought. It sat there, dormant.

It only properly resurfaced when I was driving through to KKNK in 2026. Somewhere on the road I remembered conversations with CPSS members years earlier about the limestone systems around Oudtshoorn, and how the Cango Caves are really just a small public-facing fragment of something much larger.

That was the nudge. As soon as I got home I went looking for CPSS online (this was just before the website was updated), and fired off emails to whatever addresses I could find. Most bounced back. Andre replied within the hour, sent me the latest newsletter, and put me in touch with Sinèad. A trip was set up.

Oom Abrie's Cave

I'll be honest — I was a little anxious about the long drive and about meeting a group of people I didn't know. None of the worry was warranted. It was a fantastic day out.

We headed to the farm where Oom Abrie's Cave lies, the first time the landowner had allowed cavers onto the property in many years. The route in turned out to be more of an exploration in itself: the road we were meant to follow ended at a fence with no obvious way around. It had been so long since anyone last visited that the access track effectively no longer existed. Finding our way to the entrance, hunting for the right line through the veld, turned out to be half the fun — and a fair reminder that, in caving, you often have to work for the doorway before you've even started.

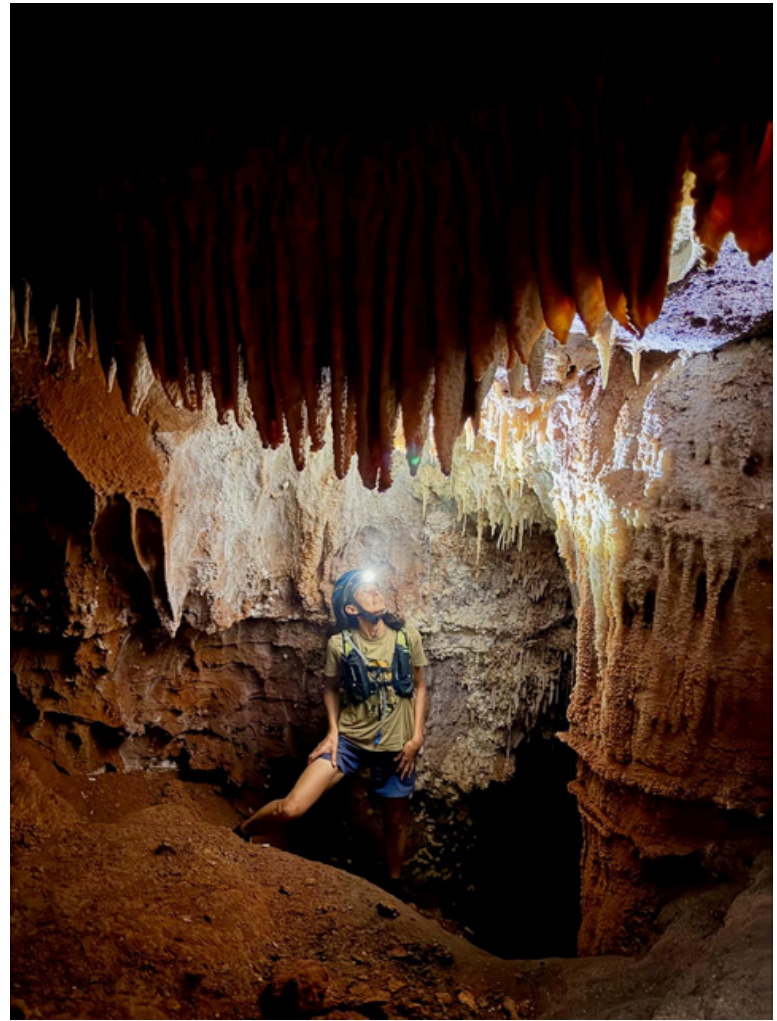
The cave itself is something of a vertical maze, with side passages and turn-offs branching at every level. It would be very easy to get disoriented in there. At one point I spotted a small hole and decided to try it feet-first, sensible-like — only to feel a drop on the far side and lose my nerve. The smallest member of our group went in head-first instead and reported back, slightly amused, that the "drop" was barely waist-high. A useful lesson in not catastrophising in the dark, and an equally useful reminder that caution still belongs in the kit bag.

The air inside was dusty enough that we agreed to come back another time with masks and a longer day to spend. We left feeling like we'd barely scratched the surface — which, as it turns out, is the standard feeling after any decent caving trip.

"A cave is NEVER finished." — Dr Jacques Martini

That line, from one of South Africa's most prolific cave explorers, kept coming back to me on the drive home. Oom Abrie's certainly isn't finished. Neither, I suspect, is my own caving — and I'm grateful to CPSS for letting me pick up where I left off.

PHOTOS FROM THE CAVE TRIP TO OOM ABRIE'S CAVES
11 APRIL 2026



CAVING IS MORE THAN A HOBBY BY SINEAD HATTINGH

As a young kid growing up in Pretoria, I was always fascinated by caves. Family trips often took us to the well-known show caves like Sudwala Caves and Sterkfontein Caves. At that age, you don't really realise that there's a whole hidden world beyond those lit pathways and guided tours. Wild caves—raw, untouched, and unexplored—aren't something that's widely advertised, and back then, they felt almost like a secret waiting to be discovered.

That discovery came in January 2007. My uncle and I joined an adventure company near Krugersdorp that offered a proper wild caving experience into Bats Cave. I still remember that first trip vividly—the darkness, the silence, the feeling of squeezing through tight passages with nothing but a headlamp to guide the way. It was challenging, exciting, and completely different from anything I had experienced before. From that moment on, I was hooked.

It wasn't just about visiting caves anymore. I wanted more. I wanted to explore, to search for new systems, and to push deeper into the unknown. That sense of curiosity and adventure became something I couldn't shake.

In September 2010, after relocating to Cape Town, we joined the Cape Peninsula Spelaeological Society (CPSS). This opened up a whole new chapter. The Cape Peninsula offered a completely different caving environment, and exploring its caves was an incredible experience. No two caves are ever the same—each one has its own character, its own challenges, and its own story to tell. Every trip led to new opportunities, new skills, and new friendships.

It was during this time that I learned the art of cave surveying from one of the greats, the late Anthony Hitchcock. That knowledge added another dimension to caving for me—turning exploration into something that could be documented, mapped, and shared with others.

For me, one of the most exciting aspects of caving has always been pushing limits—navigating tight squeezes, committing to those narrow passages, and emerging on the other side knowing you've gone just a little bit further than before. It's in those moments that caving truly comes alive.

Fast forward to 2026, and I'm still proudly part of CPSS, now leading cave meets in the Oudtshoorn region. There's something incredibly rewarding about introducing new people to their very first wild caving experience—watching that same spark ignite in them, the same one I felt back in 2007. You can see it immediately: the excitement, the challenge, and the moment they realise this is something special.

Caving, for me, is far more than just a hobby. It's one of my greatest passions—a lifelong pursuit of adventure, discovery, and pushing boundaries. And as long as I'm able to, I know I'll keep going underground, chasing that same feeling that started it all.





Thank You!



A heartfelt thank you to all the new visitors and members who joined the **Cape Peninsula Spelaeological Society** on the four meets we've hosted so far this year. It has been fantastic to see such enthusiasm, curiosity, and passion for caving and exploration. Your energy and willingness to get involved have made every meet memorable, and we truly appreciate everyone who took the time to join us underground and become part of the CPSS community.

We look forward to many more adventures, discoveries, and friendships together in the months ahead.



CPSS

