

SCALING IN TEMPURONG. (Continued from M.C.G. Newsletter No. 41)

The rotten ladder which we had chanced upon led up an exposed vertical rock face which I attempted to climb. However, after a few tries I considered that it could not be done without some preparation in the form of scaling gear. In fact, that evening I said that I did not think we could make it, but Norma said that if the guano diggers could get up, so could we. This

comment increased my determination - but not my confidence!

Next morning we again attempted to climb the rock face. After breakfast we made a 10 mile round journey to Gopong to buy some wire which I thought could be useful. The $\frac{1}{4}$ mile trek to the cave entrance through blazing sun (about 105 degrees F.) and very high humidity was not as tiring as the previous day when we carried a number of wooden scaffold poles; none the less we were relieved to reach the cool 77°F. of the cave. We followed the streamway much depleted of water due to being diverted by tin-mining operations; then up a rock climb between stal formations, and across an immense chamber to our vantage point. Having rested, we assembled our gear and scaling poles at the foot of the decaying ladder. Firstly I took a roll of wire to the vertical face as I had noticed a number of solution holes which went into the rock several inches, then curved out again a few inches away. Five or six loops of wire were passed through. I anchored myself by means of snap-link and waist loop whilst removing some of the rotting wood. A firm tug broke a mooring and the whole structure started to creak, crack and fall outwards. One strut brushed close by and momentarily I thought I would overbalance. However I avoided being dragged with it and the whole structure plunged downwards with a great roar. Once cleared of the old ladder the climb was much safer and easier. I was standing on a 12" ledge and the rock in front was curved to make an open chimney which was not circular enough to back up. There did not appear to be any good handholds at head level, and in order to gain a few feet it was necessary to place one's hand in a crack ahead and lay back. The guano diggers had put in a cross strut, and I resolved to do the same. Where the old scaffolding had collapsed a natural posthole was revealed and I decided to reuse this as it would enable my pole to lie directly beside the route I wish to follow. To increase stability I wired my cross strut to the upright pole. It was also possible to put several loops of wire through some small solution holes to make a running belay for the lifeline. The cross-member enabled me to reach a chokestone handhold which I did not know about, and this, combined with a foothold some 18" above the wood strut, led to easy going just above the pitch where I found a platform.

This was in fact a recess beneath an enormous boulder which at first appeared to be a difficult obstacle as it caused an overhang. Fortunately a number of solution holes were available to give hand and foothold. Once over this mass I found myself on a steeply sloping shelf with the wall to my right and a dangerous looking incline to my left; about this time a distant flash of light showed that I was in another enormous passage, for an entrance was illuminated by lightening and the walls of the cavern were faintly lit by a bluish light. The lightning was followed almost at once by a clap of thunder which echoed round the cave and gave the feeling that the whole lot was falling in. This violent storm lasted about 5 mins. before the peals of thunder died away.

Once silence reigned I was able to communicate with Norma who said she wanted to come up. She was as surprised as I had been to see how large the continuation was. We could only go upwards alongside one wall because of the large drop on our left; this drop continued the length of our climb and prevented us from entering the passageway which led to the new entrance. All my efforts to get into a forward continuation failed, which was disappointing as we had a tantalising glimpse of a stalagmite above in the middle of our way. Near our terminal point we found a couple of bottles which had probably been used as candle-holders. There was also a small adz which I decided to keep for my collection.

Our exploration and last journey into the great cave had ended as it began, with more cave having to be tantalizingly left behind for speculation. We often muse on trips we had within, and remember the sound of the stream rushing over the pebbles and the strange music produced by water falling onto resonant calcite deposits.

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