

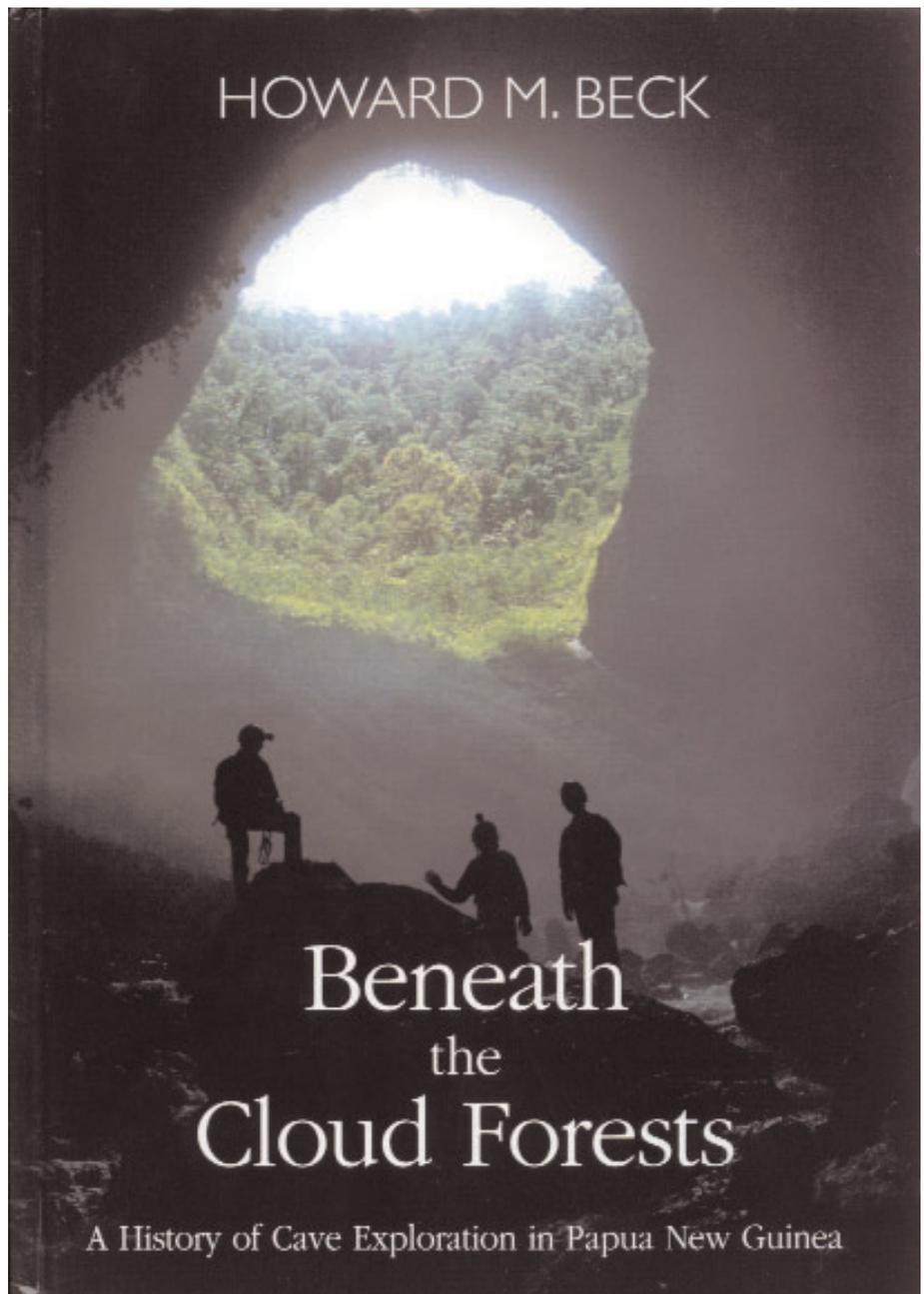
Howard M. Beck. *Beneath the Cloud Forests*. Speleo Projects, Caving Publications International, Switzerland, First Edition, 2003. 352 pp. Maps, figures, photos, appendixes, bibliography, and index.
Review by Aaron Bird

In *Beneath the Cloud Forests*, Howard Beck recounts the spelean adventures of almost forty years of exploration in the caves of Papua New Guinea. Each time an author relates the events of cave exploration for the world to know, a gift has been given in which we all can share. Beck, however, goes far beyond just retelling the chronology of events. Rather he has described the account of each exploration with so much detail, the reader feels like they too are a part of the expedition.

Beck begins the detailed recounting - and sets the literary tone for the diligent reader- by describing the first-ever expedition to the region in 1965, when Australians, Britons, and French teamed up to reconnoiter the potential for caves. This first expedition met with little success, however the experience gained from working with the indigenous peoples and local expatriates lead to the great accomplishments of later expeditions.

Perhaps the single biggest attraction for expeditions to New Guinea were the great megadolines, which from the vantage point of a low-flying airplane take on the appearance of gargantuan sports arenas able to hold hundreds of thousands of spectators. The largest of these is 1 km long and almost that wide and has been declared the largest sink-hole on the Earth. *Beneath the Cloud Forest* contains a number of fantastic photos of these karst features to give the reader the perspective enjoyed by members of the second and later expeditions. A single glance at such a feature is enough to give any caver an adrenaline rush at the least and at the most to motivate one to go to New Guinea to see the caves for themselves. This is exactly what happened to many cavers from Britain, Australia, France, Japan, and the United States over the next four decades.

In total, Howard Beck describes no



fewer than 25 major expeditions made to Papua New Guinea, including several to the nearby island of New Britain. Over the course of the exploration history, 21 caves were pushed to depths greater than 300 m and nearly 50 caves were surveyed to over 1 km in length. The longest cave, Mamo Kananda, was surveyed to 54.8 km, and the deepest in New Guinea -and all of the Southern Hemisphere- was simultaneously pushed from the top down and the bottom up until teams met in a lower streamway to confirm the depth of the system at 1,178 m. With deep vertical drops, many river crossings via highlines, and a diveable sump in the middle, Muruk Hul, is per-

haps the world's most sporting through-trip cave.

Beneath the Cloud Forest is a complete study of the caving expeditions of New Guinea and as such, will require use of the included figures, maps, and tables in order to keep track of the detailed information. Particularly helpful are the appendixes, which list the chronology of expeditions and the long and deep cave lists. A glossary, bibliography, and index are also included to help the reader navigate this historical treatise. The book is a worthwhile read in its entirety, but can also be flipped through for those more interested in photographs and cave maps.