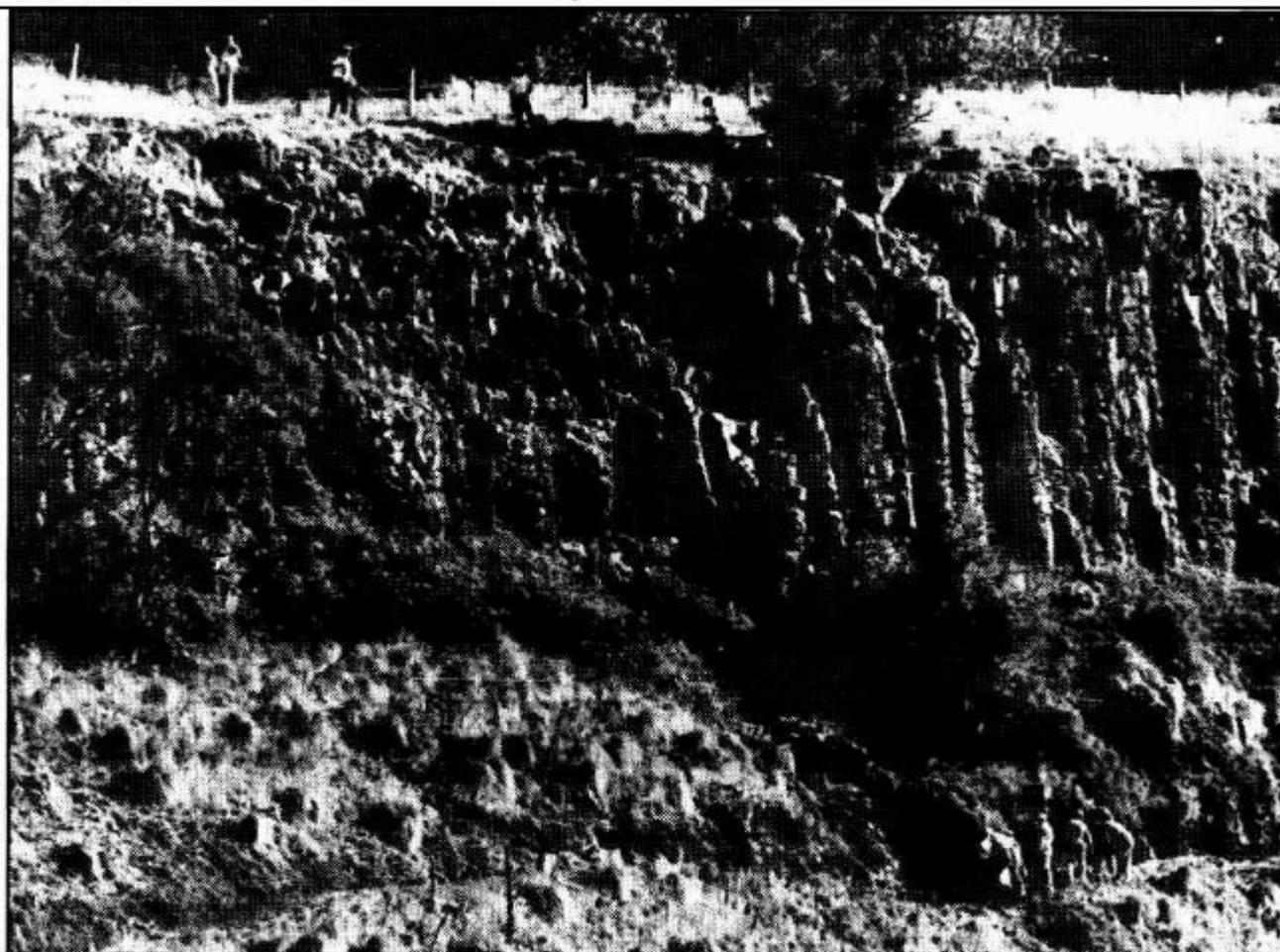


Two children die, 13 hurt in rock slide



Pictures: The Age, Melbourne

The cliff where two schoolgirls lost their lives yesterday. BELOW: A student and her mother leave Ballarat Base Hospital.

MELBOURNE: Two schoolgirls died yesterday when falling boulders hit them as they climbed down rocks at a waterfall in central Victoria.

The girls, Danielle Rundle, 12, of suburban West Melton, and Natasha Karlich, 13, of Melton, were among 15 children abseiling at a 30m cliff at Lal Lal Falls, a popular scenic spot 20km South-west of Ballarat.

Police said they had been standing on a ledge halfway down the cliff when struck by rocks dislodged by a climber above.

Another 13-year-old girl suffered a possible broken collarbone, and 12 more children went home last night after treatment for minor injuries at Ballarat Base Hospital.

All the children were from the private, co-educational Mowbray College, Melton, whose principal, Alan





Patterson, said he considered the two dead girls as his own daughters. He would "cry privately".

"I love the children, and, for me, it's a tragedy — personal, deep and complete," he said. "This is a terribly

caring school and we all know the children and their families exceptionally well and it's that caring that will help us all survive.

"You know them [students] intimately, you share their griefs and loves. I lost two daughters today, not personally, but two of my charges.

"Teachers accept a terrible charge of providing an interesting, challenging answer to children's curiosity."

Thirty children were on a school excursion at the falls, and 15 bushwalked while 15 abseiled with two teachers and two instructors.

A coroner attended the scene, and a geologist was called to examine the cliff.

Police said a physical-education teacher had been in charge of the group.