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Southern Caver

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EDITORIAL

1.

The cost of further hydro electric development in Southwest Tasmania should not only be measured in hundreds of millions of dollars.

The cost is also: wild and beautiful rivers, gorges, waterfalls, unexplored limestone terrain including caves, and ancient rainforests of inspiring beauty.

As speleologists, we are aware of: the vast tracts of limestone in Tasmania's Southwest, its diversity of karst landforms, its interesting limestone flora, its unique and hardly known cave fauna and its archaeologically rich cave deposits.

Most limestone and dolomite in the Southwest occupies foothill and valley topography and large karst areas are therefore threatened by complete elimination under hydroelectric impoundments.

The Australian caving community is a highly mobile and a fairly affluent one and trips to remote areas requiring expedition logistics are becoming more attractive and more popular. Many such trips have been carried out in Tasmania in the last decade but venues for such trips are in danger of being further depleted by dam building and road building in the Southwest.

There are many thousands of people fighting against the building of dams in Southwest Tasmania and for many good reasons. The arguments against dams in speleological terms alone should compel cavers to speak out against further hydroelectric depredations in the Southwest wilderness.

2.

The attempt by the State Nomenclature Board to alter the name of Fraser Cave is deplored. With the name now so firmly embedded in the literature,

on film and indeed, in folklore, what point will there be in inscribing an "official" but unknown name on a page of the Government Gazette?

The name Fraser Cave already has a "meaning-through-association" not only with a cave of immense importance to the interpretation of Australian prehistory, but with a specious cave in a sublime setting. The cave is hopefully more durable than its namesake and its archaeological significance may fashion new allusions to the words of its name, when present political leaders are long forgotten.

Present political leaders however have the power to determine whether caves exist or not, whether valleys, forests, rivers and great swathes of Southwest Tasmania exist or not. If the naming of a cave on the Franklin River after any politician were of the slightest help in preventing its destruction then I would agree with it.

Who wants a cave with a nice euphonious and apolitical name which is situated amid silt and rotting vegetation beneath the murky black waters of a hydro-electric impoundment?

3.

As from this issue, *Southern Caver* becomes an occasional publication. Vol.12, no.4 was the last of the old series. This issue is simply number 49 - the 49th magazine to come out since Volume 1, number 1. Future issues will be numbered consecutively from here and will appear when enough material warranting publication accumulates. Although magazines will be dated there will be no regular date of issue.

STEPHEN HARRIS

ICE TUBE INCIDENT

Stefan Eberhard

Whilst the 1981 SAREX (Search and Rescue Exercise) was being conducted at Mole Creek on 5th-6th December, a serious incident was narrowly averted in Ice Tube.

Ice Tube, located in a remote corner of the Florentine Valley, is a deep, sporty cave which has only been partly explored. The cave descends very steeply down a series of waterfall shafts to an estimated depth of 160 m.

A large contingent of T.C.C. members, accompanied by a visiting inter-state caver, intended to further explore the cave on Saturday, 5th. At this stage there was no reason to doubt the visitor's competence.

By the time the base of the second pitch was reached it was decided to abort the trip to the bottom. This proved to be a wise decision since it soon became apparent that the visitor had never done any prussiking before! It took him an hour just to ascend the 20 m. waterfall pitch. His S.R.T. rig was both inefficient and dangerous, and it was necessary to persuade him to wear a safety loop on his upper jumar. Furthermore, the chest ascender was supported around his neck by a single loop of climbing tape - this being a certain way to ensure death by hanging.

The next 24 m. pitch involved a pendulum and a second tie-off around a large spike. This secondary belay was removed, as it was considered too risky to allow him to perform the potentially dangerous act of crossing over between the ropes. (How he managed to pass this obstacle on the descent remains a mystery, but it was certainly unorthodox.)

Due to the re-arrangement of the rope and consequent redundancy of the rope protectors, it was necessary for someone to re-descend part way and hold the rope off the knife-sharp edge while the visitor slowly prussiked up past the critical section.

By the time the top of the shaft was reached, he was completely exhausted, and no doubt suffering from the cold. The last 3-4 hours of the 5 hour trip had been entirely spent gaining the 2 pitches and by the time the surface was reached it was nearly dark.

It is strongly felt that a major accident was narrowly avoided, if not through a catastrophic gear failure, than simply through exhaustion and exposure.

This episode exemplifies the need for adequate competence and experience, in the exploration of Tasmania's hard, wet potholes, especially the deep systems at Maydena. The caves are characteristically cold (6°C) and thick woollen clothing or a wetsuit is essential. Experience and general efficiency in SRT is also compulsory as this reduces the amount of time wasted on pitches. Physical fitness also increases the safety of the caving being undertaken.

If some of these essential pre-requisites are adhered to, then the chance of a major search and rescue callout is greatly minimised.

OWL POT :

DESCRIPTION AND PITCH DETAILS

Rolan Eberhard

Owl Pot was recently extended by members of S.C.S. and a later survey showed the depth to be 24.4m (*Southern Caver*, 11(3)). The cave can be tackled in under 7 hours by an experienced team and is a very pleasant and worthwhile trip. It is possible to stay dry in normal weather conditions and the pitches are all straightforward, although there is on section of loose talus.

Pitch Details

P.1. A 20m. handline is needed to negotiate the mud slope leading into the entrance chamber. A short climb down brings one into a dry passage which leads to the first shaft.

P.2. This drop of 30m is rigged from a large rock situated in the passage. 7m before the pitch. About 2 protectors are necessary near the top and a further one or two two-thirds of the way down. The latter is not obvious as the rope does not come into contact with the rock until the cave has been descended well past the point of abrasion.

Several short climbs follow to a large chamber. On the left hand side a section of Talus must be surpassed, and as some of the rock is loose reasonable care is necessary. One very awkward squeeze brings one to the top of a steeply sloping slab.

P.3. About 20m of rope has been used as a handline for the descent of this obstacle, anchored around a large talus block. However, it may be wiser to rig this as a pitch proper, requiring a short trace and some protectors, depending on the choice of an anchor.

Ignoring a drop into a chamber on one side, a steep climb down over loose rocks leads to a well defined rift passage. This can be followed virtually unobstructed until it intersects an active stream passage, which meanders down to the final waterfall.

P.4. This pitch is 30m long and a boulder some 10m from the edge of the drop provides an anchor point, with only a couple of protectors needed at the top. A superb freehanging abseil beside the waterfall brings one into a large chamber. Reaching the sump involves a 200m long section of mud and talus which starts to the left of where the stream sinks near the base of the waterfall.

Exploration Prospects

(1) It is possible that the talus filled rift before the sump contains some leads as this section has not been systematically searched.

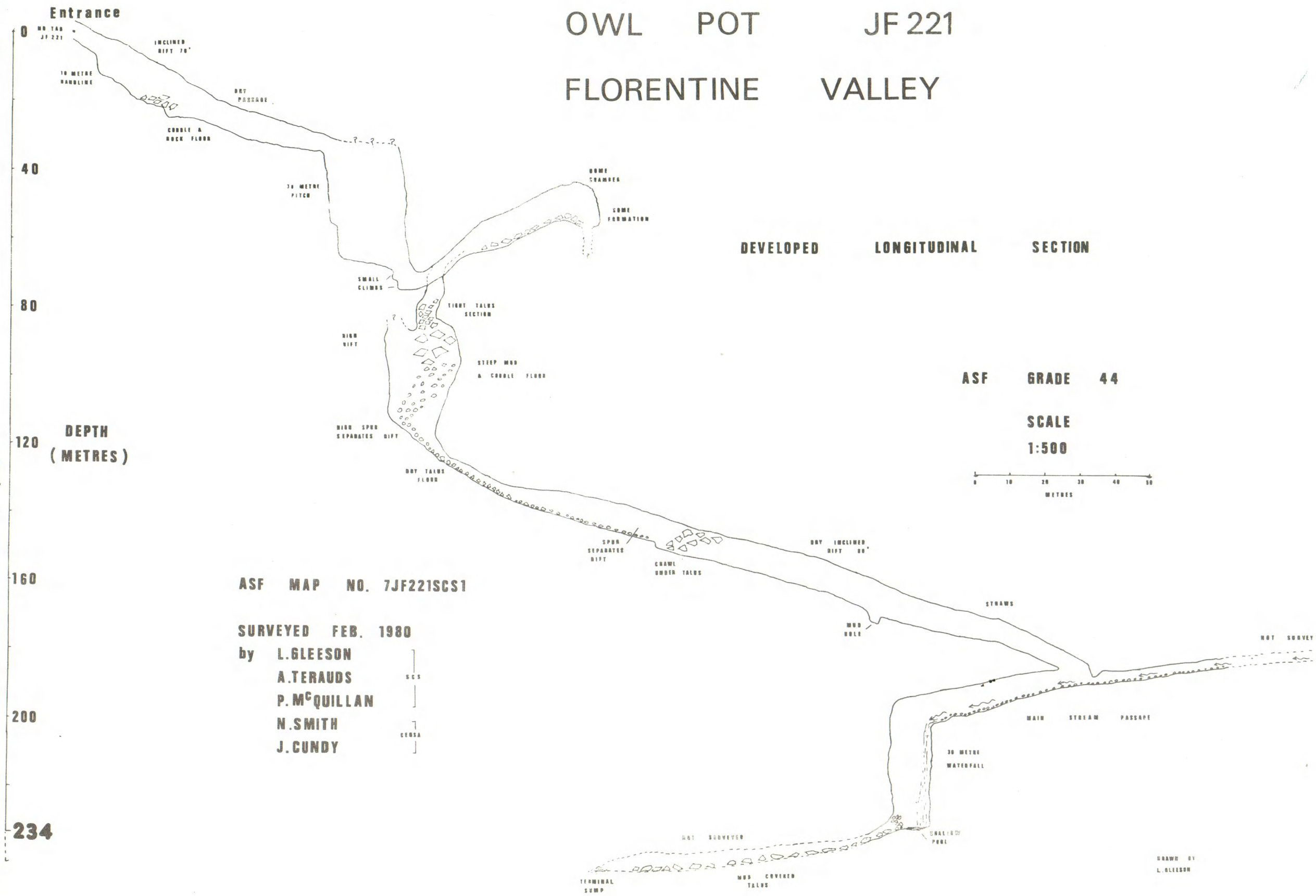
(11) Following the water upstream of the last pitch could be productive as the stream almost certainly originates in nearby Three Falls Cave, which contains an as yet undescended 30-40m waterfall at a depth of over 100m.

CAVES

There are times
when we stop
by mutual consent.
Listen.
An ageless drop of water
alone has the right
to throw a pebble
in the pool of
Silence.

Richard Hortle.

OWL POT JF 221 FLORENTINE VALLEY



ASF MAP NO. 7JF221SCS1

SURVEYED FEB. 1980
 by L.GLEESON
 A.TERAUDS
 P.MCQUILLAN
 N.SMITH
 J.CUNDY

SCS
 CENSA

DRAWN BY
 L.GLEESON

SEA CAVE DIVING AT WATERFALL BAY

Angie Lister

About 2½ years ago, shortly after I first qualified as a scuba diver, I took part in a cave dive at Waterfall Bay with the Tasmanian Scuba Diving Club.

Waterfall Bay is about 5 Km south of Eaglehawk Neck along the east coast of the Tasman Peninsula. Here spectacular cliffs of limestone rise for some 150 metres vertically out of the sea. This coast is well known for its interesting geomorphological features associated with coastal limestone, including The Blowhole, and the Devils Kitchen.

The only access to Waterfall Bay is by boat. The morning of the dive was bright and sunny, but fairly windy, and with a choppy sea. By the time we reached Waterfall Bay I felt quite green, so quickly got kitted up and jumped in. Whether it was the cessation of the boat's motion or the sudden shock of immersion in cold water, the seasickness instantly vanished.

Diving in pairs for safety, we slowly descended to about 60ft. The water was beautifully clear and visibility was good. Diving down has to be done slowly to avoid ear damage. At 60ft of water, the pressure is about three times normal atmospheric pressure. As the air inside the body contracts under the increasing pressure, it has to be replaced. Frequent stops are necessary to equalise the pressure in the ears, by forcing air in gulps along the eustachian tube. Failure to do this would result in a burst eardrum.

There were two caves which the club planned to explore. One had just one entrance, and the other was an underwater tunnel. One of the members was diving with hookah, that is, a long hose which takes air down to the diver from a compressor operated from the boat. Its main advantage is that the diver can stay down indefinitely, or at any rate, until the fuel in the compressor runs out. He and his companions were to explore the single entrance cave, as they would have to re-trace their route

along the hookah line.

The rest of us with tanks, including myself, were to swim through the tunnel. It was wide enough to accommodate two or three divers together. Each diving pair was equipped with an underwater torch, and so we gingerly made our way forwards into the darkness. The sides of the tunnel felt as if they were padded. A closer look in the torchlight revealed a coating of pale cream spongy growths. The water inside the tunnel was relatively still, quite a contrast from the surges and swells of the seacurrents outside.

The tunnel swim probably took no longer than ten minutes, although the eerie journey seemed much longer. It was rather disquieting to know that it was impossible to surface without a lengthy swim back or onwards through the tunnel. Indeed one of the members made a sudden bee-line for the exit, when he thought he was running out of air.

The rest of us took our time and it was with a mixture of regret and relief that we finally reached the end of the tunnel to find ourselves once more in bright sunlit water, surrounded by colourful weeds and darting fish, and being tossed around again by the swell.

We surfaced slowly as it's just as important to relieve the air pressure in the body gradually during the ascent. If the ascent is made too quickly, air in the lungs expands faster than it can be exhaled, resulting in a burst lung.

All that remained now was to snorkel around the cliff that we had just swum through, back to our waiting boats, and compare our impressions of this very unusual and magical diving experience.

MINI MARTIN (IB8)

Stefan Eberhard

This discovery of a pile of logs at the base of an aven in Exit Cave provided evidence for the existence of another entrance.

The entrance of the "Big Log Hole" was located by Brian and Jeanette Collin in July 1967 following 70 underground survey stations and 170 above ground.

The first exploration attempt by the Tasmanian Caverneering Club was made in the same month. The bottom was not reached but a new Australian record of 110 metres for a single ladder pitch was set.

On August 19th, 1967, the pothole was linked with Exit Cave to set the Australian depth record at 219 metres. An analogy was seen with the then world's deepest cave, Pierre Saint-Martin, and so the cave was recognised as "mini" Martin.

After the initial epic ladder descents Mini Martin was left alone until January 1980 when Gordan Taylor, John Briggs and Tim Rudman (NUCC) re-cut the old track to the entrance and made the first complete descent of the cave. Their trip has set a precedent and several parties have subsequently visited the cave.

The following is a tackle description used on a recent SCS trip down the cave. It is intended as a *guide* only.

Entrance Pitch: At 110m this pitch is the highlight of the trip. The large tree near the entrance shaft provided an ideal anchor with 20m of trace, however, 10m is probably adequate. To eliminate the risk of rope abrasion a further 10m trace was hung down the initial face - the remaining 100m is entirely free-hanging. A short tail rope was therefore necessary for transferring onto and off the main rope.

Second Pitch: A loose, muddy slope leads to the top of the next pitch of approximately 30m. A large rock was used as a belay point, although the large log has been utilised on previous occasions. 16M of trace was used

before attaching the rope directly at the head of the pitch. A 15m hand-line proved useful for negotiating the slope to the pitch. Two protectors required: one at the lip and another at the overhang.

Third Pitch: A bolt was placed on the righthand side of this 24m shaft (hanger required). A tie-back to the previous pitch was also used. The pitch is against the wall and requires two rope protectors.

Finally, a scramble down a talus slope leads to the creek in Exit Cave.

A SEARCH FOR CAVES IN THE UPPER WELD

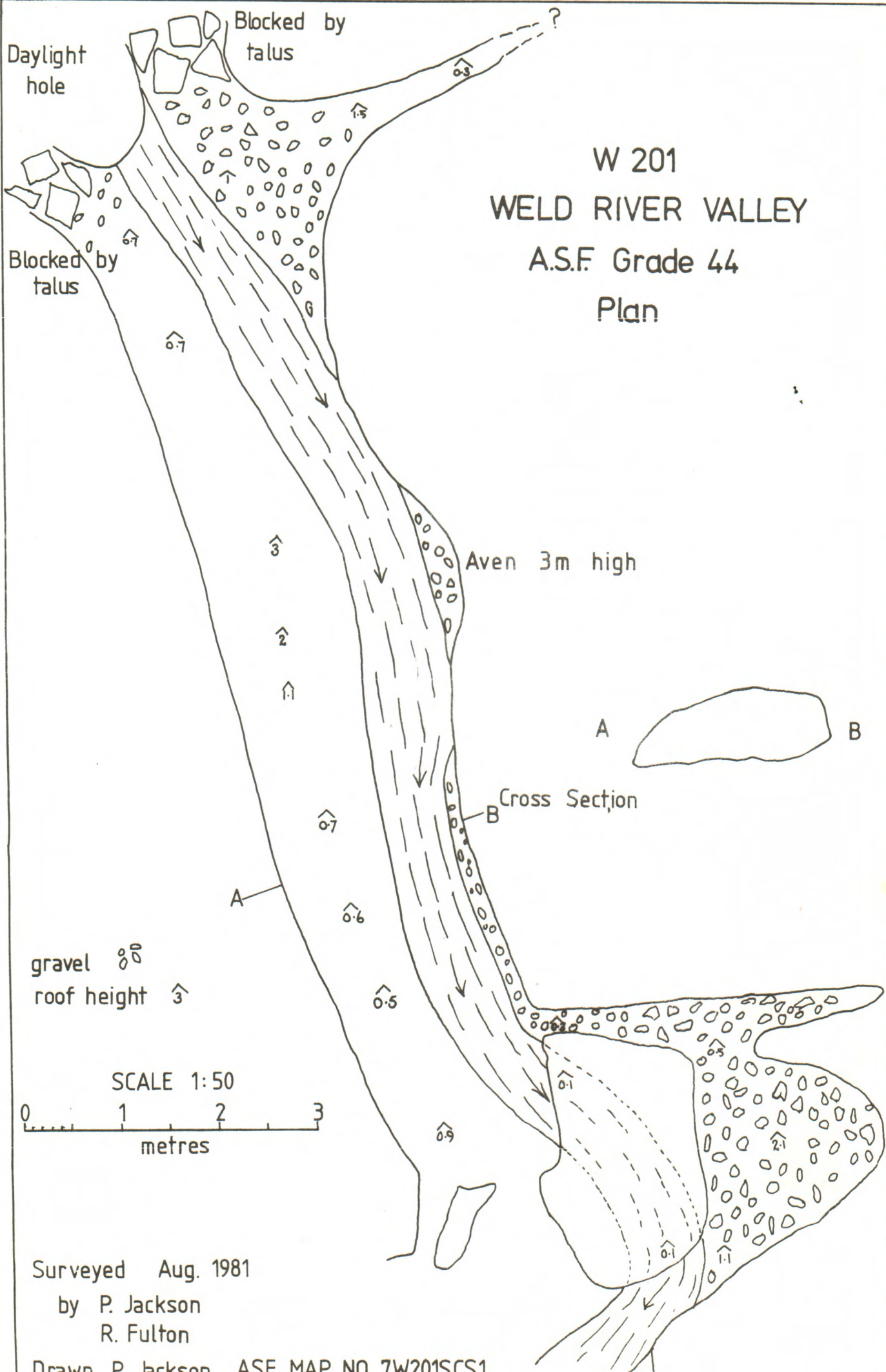
Phil Jackson

The Upper Weld Valley consists of a complex drainage system cutting through low relief dolomite that extends from 2 to 3 kilometres on the southern side of the H.E.C. Strathgordon transmission line, to the northern side of Mt. Anne.

In several cases the smaller tributaries flow under dolomite arches and through small caves of insignificant size. The large tributaries flow through narrow dolomite gorges containing many small holes, many too small to enter, or of insignificant size. Some may go with a bit of digging. Some of the hills surrounding the streams were looked at and found to contain many choked sinkholes. There were also a number of dry blind valleys.

The largest cave found recently, during two weekends of casual rambling in the Upper Weld Valley was a small efflux cave (W201, see map) of about 17 metres length, in a small hill, about two kilometres down the Weld River from the transmission line access road. The vegetation in the vicinity of W201 is predominantly rain forest with an open understorey. Some smaller patches of horizontal scrub occur in places, as well as dense tea tree thickets in the low lying swampy areas.

After the two weekend assessment of the area, I feel there is potential for some excellent horizontal caves. The dolomite is well within the range of day trips and I have been informed that access can be gained to the transmission line road, through the A.N.M. gate at Maydena.



AREA REPORTS
APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 1981

Rolan Eberhard and Phil Jackson

MOLE CREEK

In April Stefan Eberhard showed a number of visitors through Kubla Khan, as well as doing the through trip from Georgies Hall to Wet Cave

On 2nd June, Leigh Gleeson, Rolan Eberhard and Richard Hortle spent 7½ hours in Herberts Pot. The upstream sump and the Paragon Vaults were visited, with high water levels making it a sporting trip.

HASTINGS AND IDA BAY

Over Easter Leigh Gleeson, Lindsey Wilson and Rolan Eberhard joined a large party of V.S.A. members staying at Ida Bay. On the 17th separate trips were conducted to Mystery Creek Cave, Wolf Hole and Newdegate Cave, while on the following day some of the big shafts on Marble Hill were tackled. Leaving the pitches rigged one party descended Midnight Hole and walked out Mystery Creek Cave. A small team also abseiled the spacious 110M entrance drop of Mini Martin before meeting up with another party in Exit Cave, and walking out the horizontal entrance. Sunday saw visits to King George V Cave as well as another descent of Midnight Hole. Both shafts were derigged by the Victorians on the 20th.

Exit Cave was the site of some exploration by a small party led by Stefan Eberhard. Some passages and significant areas were located in the vicinity of Mini Martin, but surface exploration failed to reveal any potholes which could be linked with these. It seems probable that the partly descended IB1004 shaft, which is part of the Mini Martin system, will prove to be corrected.

On the 12th July, Rolan Eberhard, Richard Hortle and Stefan Eberhard surveyed Bradley Chesterman Cave to the second impassable rockfall.

On 23rd August R. Eberhard and Richard Hortle examined parts of Exit Cave. Some rubbish was carried out from camp 2. N.B. Please take your rubbish out of the cave! On the same day Mystery Creek Cave was visited, where

evidence of vandalism was found to be extensive.

On the 30th August, Phil Jackson led a party into Wolf Hole.

MOUNT ANNE

Stefan Eberhard spent three days in late May exploring the difficult terrain of Mount Anne's North East Ridge. The impressive entrances to Keller Cellar and Col-In-Cavern were located as well as several other holes. The superb scenery and cave potential will ensure a return trip.

WELD VALLEY

Two trips, on the first two weekends in August, set out to examine the potential of part of the Upper Weld for caves. See the report elsewhere in this issue.

JUNEE/FLORENTINE

In May a last attempt to continue exploration of Serendipity before winter was abandoned a short way in, due to the small size of the party and high water levels. Instead the team of Stefan Eberhard, Andrew Briggs (T.C.C.) and Rolan Eberhard, with the support of Steve and David Harris descended a nearby shaft, since named Frost Pot. It was found to terminate after pitches of 30M and 20M with a very narrow rift.

June saw eight ambulance officers introduced to caving in Bone Pit and Welcome Stranger, on a trip led by Phil Jackson.

On the 28th and 29th August, Rolan and Stefan Eberhard continued their exploration of the Icetube. Roland wrote after the trip: "Much rain meant we were wet after the first 20M pitch. 30M of rope was lowered down the next unexplored pitch, which turned out to be about 20M free-hanging beside the waterfall, also wet. After a short section of passage another waterfall of about 10M was reached, however by traversing along the rift it was found possible to climb down to the stream again. After some short cascades a 7M waterfall was descended which led to a further pitch of unknown depth. At this point a dry side passage was negotiated and found to lead to the top of a large dry pitch into a chamber, and the stream could be heard at the bottom. At this point time had run out, so we headed out, reaching the surface after 4½ hours underground and

leaving the ropes rigged.

"The next day we returned, and found a dry bypass of the last 7M waterfall which led to the top of the last undescended pitch via 8M and 20M drops. The pitch was rigged and turned out to be about 30M into a very large chamber with the stream returning via a waterfall. A short section of passage led to another waterfall estimated to be 30-40M. Lack of time and gear prevented descent of this and we reached the surface after 5½ hours underground. This was followed by a 2 hour walk back to the car in the dark with 60 pound packs of wet rope, etc.

"The cave is very promising with a present estimated depth of about 150M to the top of the undescended waterfall. A summer assault with a larger team is necessary."

On the 8th September, R. Eberhard and R. Hortle explored a new extension in Three Falls Cave. S. Eberhard had previously reported an extension at the "bottom" of the cave, including 2 pitches, the second unexplored. It was intended to push this lead, however at the base of the second pitch a very large side chamber was found. After climbing through some talus the party came to a spectacular waterfall of at least 30M. This was not descended but almost certainly leads into Owl Pot. The pitch would be free hanging but very wet. The difference between the surveyed bottom and the top of the waterfall is an estimated 20M. Note that the 2nd pitch can be rigged dry by traversing along the rift below the 1st pitch and hanging a 20M rope down from a large spike. 3-4 protectors are required.

On the weekend of the 5th and 6th of September a party consisting of P. Jackson, R. Fulton, L. Wilson, L. Mulquinny, N. Smith (C.E.G.S.A) and Paul (Sydney) attempted some exploration in Udensala as well as visiting other caves in the F9 Road area and Welcome Stranger.

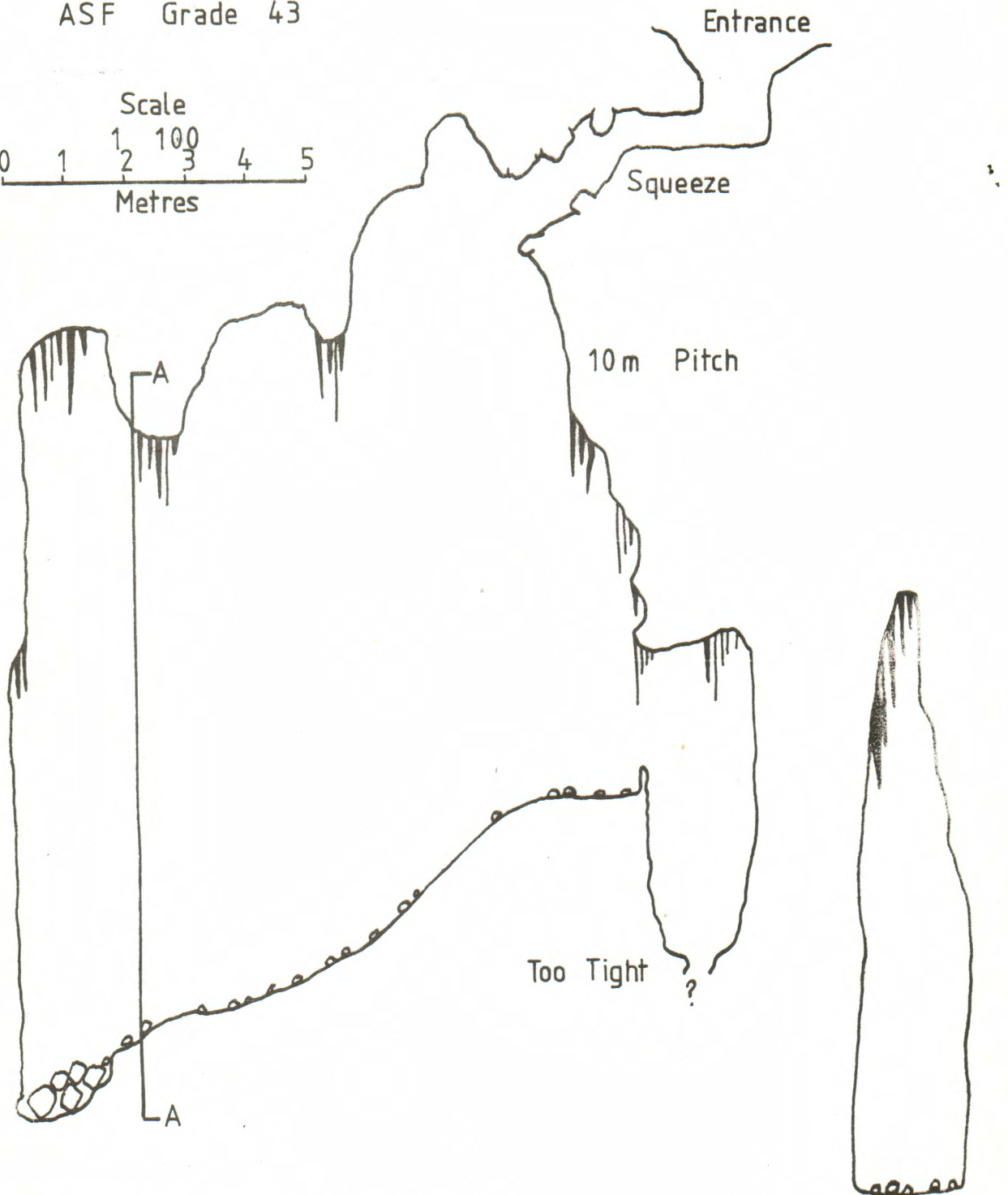
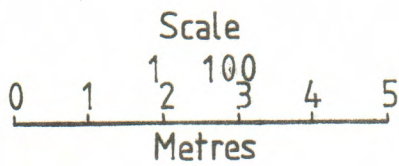
Two weekends later a significant exploration trip into Serendipity led by S. Eberhard, pushed an estimated 250 metres to the "bottom" of the cave. At this point is a horizontal low wet crawl which was not explored by the party. They spent 10 hours underground.

On the 20th September, a party ventured into Rift Cave to introduce novices to caving. More novices were introduced to caving in Welcome Stranger the following Saturday.

EXCAVATION POT IDA BAY

Longitudinal Section

ASF Grade 43



Surveyed Dec. 1980
S. Eberhard

Section AA

the Franklin needs friends!



THE FRANKLIN FLOWING FREE ...

The Franklin and Gordon Rivers need friends and generous people. The State Government is spending thousands of dollars to promote its decision to dam the wild rivers forever. But the Tasmanian Wilderness Society, fighting for the rivers, gets no government funds. It relies on public donations.

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