

SPELEO SPIEL 345

November - December 2004

STC Officers

President:

Gavin Brett

Ph: (03) 6223 1717 (h)

gavin@keypoint.com.au

Vice President:

Dave Rasch

Ph: (03) 6227 9056 (h)

dave_rasch@hotmail.com

Acting Secretary:

Alan Jackson

Ph: (03) 6229 8365 (h)

ajackson@lmrs.com.au

Treasurer:

Claire Brett

Ph: (03) 6223 1717 (h).

claireb@keypoint.com.au

Equipment Officer:

Gavin Brett

Ph: (03) 6223 1717 (h)

gavin@keypoint.com.au

Librarian:

Greg Middleton

Ph: (03) 6223 1400 (h)

ozspeleo@optusnet.com.au

Editor and Search & Rescue Officer:

Alan Jackson

Ph: (03) 6229 8365(h)

ajackson@lmrs.com.au

Webmaster:

Dean Morgan

Ph. (03) 6229 4405(h)

dmorgan@tesa.com.au

Web Site:

<http://www.tesa.com.au/stc>

Front Cover: Crunchy white stuff hanging off the walls in Newdegate Cave (Photo by Gavin Brett))

Back Cover: Phil Rowsell enjoying one last ray of sunlight before a trip in to Growling Swallet (Photo by Alan Jackson)



The Speleo Spiel

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Southern Tasmanian Caverneers Incorporated

PO Box 416, Sandy Bay, Tasmania 7006

<http://www.tesa.com.au/stc>

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STC was formed from the *Tasmanian Caverneering Club*, the *Southern Caving Society* and the *Tasmanian Cave and Karst Research Group*. **STC** is the modern variant of the Oldest Caving Club in Australia.

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Editorial

Happy New Year. I hope Christmas was enjoyable for all and that the New Year yields plenty of caving.

It's been a busy couple of months and the Spiel is as full as a tick. It's a bit lacking in photos to break up the text, but you only have yourselves to blame for that. The beans have finally been spilt on the Mystery Creek discoveries. It turns out that the carton is still pretty safe, but it's great to see that a cave that has been hammered so hard for over 40 years is still turning out a few surprises – you just need to know where to look! A survey of the new stuff will appear in the next issue, maybe.

The new 'Smorgasbord' area in the JF is also generating some excitement. We've got more new holes up there than we have cavers, but we're slowly slogging through them.

The conference is no doubt in full swing as I write this, and probably finished by the time you read it. Well done to Bunty, Arthur and all the numerous others for organising it.

Phil Rowsell is back in town and always keen to be caving anywhere, anytime. So track him down if you want to go anywhere or do anything even vaguely cave related.

Enjoy

Alan Jackson

Forward Program

Social Meeting? (Republic Bar)..... 19th January
Don't know for sure if this is happening – keep your eyes on the list server.

General Meeting (Republic Bar)..... 2nd February

Social Meeting (Republic Bar)..... 16th February

General Meeting and AGM..... 2nd March

At the Bretts' House (4 Clutha Place, South Hobart),
@ 7pm – can people please bring a plate of food to share



Stuff 'n Stuff

THERE ARE NOW P-HANGERS installed in Slaughterhouse Pot (see the trip reports in this issue). These hangers have now been tested and the cave re-rigged. The rope on the bottom pitch has been replaced (the old one was kind of elliptical in shape instead of round!) The other two could do with replacing too – perhaps during the flurry of the conference.

KUBLA KHAN has also been P-hangered. We believe that a sensible balance of caver safety, cave conservation and reckless hammer drilling has been achieved! Ian Household is preparing a thorough run down of events (allegedly), but a brief locality guide is provided here for in between trips. The MC29 'top' entrance has not been changed. The short pitch immediately after the Khan Chamber has had two hangers installed about 5m back towards the Khan from where it is normally rigged (these hangers will have chains and a ring attached in the near future). The flowstone climb down in to the Sally's Folly area has had one P-hanger installed for attaching a handline (up and on the left as you look down). The Flowstone pitch to the main streamway will remain on naturals, however a long tape will remain in place to reduce friction and damage on the formations. The MC1 pitch to escape the cave has had two hangers installed. The top part of the pitch is still to be rigged off naturals, but at the ledge where one normally rigs of the little tree there are two hangers installed around the corner on the very large block above the tree. This creates an abseil/prussick several metres to the right (facing the wall) of the usual spot. This gives a nice hang and also allows two people on the rope, as the bottom section is several metres out of the way of any shit being knocked down by people on the top slope. If you're heading in for a trip then make sure you check with the rangers on the location of all the hangers and how they are to be used.

TRAINING SESSIONS – due to work commitments Alan will struggle to squeeze out too many more training sessions. If people are keen to be trained then all that is required is an email on the list server crying for assistance and one of the many other club members will be able to sort something out for you. As I think it has been stated in the last three or so Spiels – don't sit around hoping someone will spontaneously organise a beginners' trip for you, get out and show some enthusiasm and ask someone to run a trip. There is going to be caving and caving related activities possible almost every day for next two months (with Phil back in town), so get out there!

The Caving Display at the Museum is currently in full swing. Pop in and eavesdrop on the general public's comments – Gavin heard one person say that 'only fools go caving'! He probably wasn't far off the mark. Well done to Jo Eberhard and Robyn Clare for their efforts (and others too probably).

IB-10 Mystery Creek – scaling new heights : 16th October 2004

Alan Jackson

Party: Alan Jackson, Gavin Brett

The above and Rolan were intending to chase leads in Udensala, but a case of the 'lames' kicked in and Rolan's children infected him with the dreaded lurgy. To be honest I was kind of relieved as I wasn't looking forward to getting wet and cold (there was quite a bit of rain and snow in the preceding days) in Tasmania's most unstable pile of wet rubble. The prospect of having a cave free weekend was entertained briefly, but the last minute decision to get in and stop wondering about what may lay behind our 'lead' in Mystery Creek jumped up. We felt kind of guilty for not inviting along some of the other punters who'd shown an interest in this area previously, but the opportunity to take a two seater car with free petrol versus an eight seater truck with prohibitive running costs was too much to ignore. You can't be nice to everybody all the time, (to tell you the truth I find it hard to be nice to anyone any of the time!)

We did some last minute research on the use of the scaling pole – there were some scary accounts – and we blew off the dust from this 1960's relic. We also blew some dust out of our bodies with another 6 o'clock start. A truly magical drive awaited us with all the freshly fallen snow still hanging in the trees, and the ice still lingering on the corners...

At the car park we discussed strategies for moving the scaling pole. Eventually we bolted the whole shebang together (we decided that 4 sections should be sufficient) and set off down the track with our six metre erection (a task we were both used to). We managed to get all the way to the Matchbox Squeeze without having to dismantle it (without all that much effort either, surprisingly). Here we stripped all the bolts and angle brackets, lashed the four sections together and attached a tape for dragging the cursed hitch hiker through the crawl.

Just as we started in Gavin noticed the water start flowing in front of him (the previous days' rain had finally percolated through to us!) With much celebration of this joyous arrival we continued on our sorry way. About eight metres in the passage turns a right angle which we thought may be the end of it all, but some creative thinking (lucky we had an engineer there...) and we negotiated that obstacle. Dragging the pipes through this extended crawl was actually quite painless, as the bottom of the crawl is relatively free of snags and obstacles. The difficult part was getting our packs through stuffed with ladder, rope, bolt kit, angle

brackets etc... Gavin was actually making faster progress with his bag and the poles than I was with a bag only (mainly as a result of my long limbs not fitting as well as Gavin's short stubby ones!)

The crawl gets progressively wetter, tight and muddier with a couple of horrendously muddy sections (good old Ida Bay). We finally broke through in the final aven and prepared for our first ascent. Not long after and Gavin was standing triumphantly at the top of the pitch (about 5 metres up). I soon joined him and looked about to see that there was a steep and loose rubble slope heading up to another upwards pitch. It looked choked at the top, but we dragged up the scaling pole from below and had a quick poke and confirmed that it wasn't a goer. Disgruntled we headed back scouring the walls and ceilings for other places to scale. A bit further back we spotted our next contender and went up again. We crawled and explored through enormous piles of collapsed blocks and piles of mud, ever so slowly working our way up and around. A few hairy moments and squashed limbs occurred (it's a little loose in spots) and we eventually poked our head up into a large collapse chamber.

Much time was spent skipping over the large collapsed boulders in here probing the corners for Exit Cave. No such discovery was forthcoming, but some interesting development and formation was. We soon grew tired of finding new stuff so we headed back to the dreaded task of packing up the scaling pole and evacuating the area. I got the task of dragging the poles out the crawl and getting my self pointing backwards after the right angle bend only to find that the originally easy section at the start of the crawl was now a deep, wall to wall puddle (remember the water was just starting to flow here on the way in!) I got ridiculously wet (gumboots, gloves etc...) and then assisted Gavin through with a swift pull on his pack (he kind of flew over the whole puddle and landed on his bag on the other side).

We trialled packing out the poles as a bundle (dragged most of the way – the scaling pole is tough) which generally worked as easily as one long section, maybe easier.

A good day, a good find and home in time to wash everything and still mow the lawns (alpine starts are good). The 'heavies' have been informed (Government employees with string lines and gates) and a survey trip is planned.

IB-10 Mystery Creek – the bearded experts : 21st October 2004

Alan Jackson

Party: Alan Jackson, Gavin Brett, Rolan Eberhard

Following the findings of the previous weekend's jaunt in to Mystery Creek a considerable amount of excitement had been generated. Isn't it amazing what making a bit of stuff up can do...?

Gavin and I had assessed the forward program and decided that waiting till after the Mole Creek Madness weekend, and then Cavex, before returning was not acceptable. I pulled the pin on my planned four days at Mole Creek and we grabbed Hobart Show Day by the neck. We fooled Rolan in to believing there was something worth looking at and he tagged along too.



Alan natural abseils Nutburn, while Rolan watches on wondering what the 'delete' button does on his camera... *Photo by Gavin Brett*

Our pattern of alpine starts was destroyed when we had to attend the show briefly to check out some dogs and earn brownie points. We finally got to the car park at around midday! We met up with the team of bearded experts here and you could see the foam collecting in the corner of their mouths as they got progressively more excited. The local beards were showing some overseas beards around the area for a few days (the sirens were wailing on the 'IQometer'). The three of us headed off with the possibility of some or all of the experts popping in for a visit if they felt so inclined.

Rolan was getting sceptical as we dragged him through the extended crawl and zigzagged through the grotty, tight rock fall. He was pleasantly relieved when we broke out in to the chamber we'd found last trip. The general consensus was that the decoration in this chamber had primarily originated from 'pool deposits' (i.e. crystals that have grown on surfaces submerged in

water). Lots of photos were taken and theories developed for how it all came about. We then set about checking for leads (only a cursory look around had been conducted the weekend before). Gavin found a climb that was obviously promising (his voice went up a few octaves and started to echo). We scrambled into another chamber, this one significantly larger than the first. A magnificent shaft cut in at one side of the chamber, continuing both up and down, and a few high level passages headed off. We couldn't really tell what the roof looked like, because our lights weren't strong enough!

The most promising lead from this chamber had one obstacle in its way – a very nasty climb up. We got scared, chucked in a few chocks and tapes etc..., got scared again and started aiding up. A little more fear later and I was about four metres off the ground and had run out of features to aid on. I was pretty committed, so backwards was pretty much as hard as forwards, so I scrambled up (luckily everything is brown in here already so no one noticed me shitting myself). Gavin chucked up the rope and I had a quick look around. We didn't have any harnesses or SRT gear, so we decided against all ascending this climb (ropes can be hard to hang on to with muddy, gloved hands). I found a good anchor and then abseiled the old fashioned way back down (Gavin has proposed the name 'nut burn' for this pitch). I got back down safely, but almost cut in half, and we headed out.



A filthy Gavin Brett (his suit is normally blue!) *Photo by Arthur Clarke*

We convinced ourselves that to survey anything was too hard as it was already getting late and our hands

were shaking too much to read instruments anyway. I think we'll be back in the not too distant future, so we'll do it then.

We found the bearded experts lounging around admiring the glow worms, still donned in pristine trog suits (they'd had a big day, I think). Arthur asked us whether our new stuff was really as muddy as our trog

suits made it look and said that he'd never seen any one come out of an Ida Bay cave so dirty. Sections of this cave are truly squalid.

We now need to go back with some proper rope (the 11mm stuff!), rigging and SRT gear, a better attitude towards surveying and some bigger lights.

MC-119 King Solomons Cave & MC-13 Croesus Cave : 21st October 2004

Amy Ware

Party: Matt Cracknell, Serena Benjamin, Amy Ware, David Chitty, Tom Aberdeen

After a slightly uncoordinated start (blame it on the late Victorians and that hour difference), Matt Cracknell led a group of 5 into King Solomons Cave. While the cave guide experimented with light switches, the rest of us enjoyed some excellent decoration and began the "ooh-aah" chorus that would last the rest of the weekend.



David Chitty in Croesus Cave – either the water was deep or Dave is short *Photo by Amy Ware*

There was some interest in the remains of the old carbide lighting system, and the eaten-away texture of the rock and decoration caused by this lighting (we think). The tunnelling used to create the tourist path was also impressive. We left the cave after about 45 minutes with a cheery farewell to the *Hickmania* spiders clustering around the entrance.

On to Croesus Cave, and after a fiddle with the gate key we were in and "ooh-aahing" at the pearl-like balls spread across the stream bed. These concretions were lightweight for their size and had a fine cauliflower texture across their surface.

With cameras flashing behind, and Tom and David wide-eyed at the lavish decoration and spacious dimensions (compared to Buchan), Amy led the way up the streamway. There was one deeper bit where David proved the way NOT to go, and a smooth traverse around one pool about halfway to the golden stairs. At the stairs, Amy recalled the eye-eating cave leech episode she experienced 6 months ago, but the culprit was nowhere to be seen. Meanwhile David tested the depth of the pool and found a depth exceeding 5 feet, though he didn't quite get to swimming.

The return was uneventful, apart from more ooh-aah practise and another (not quite successful) bathing attempt from David. We were underground for a bit over 3 hours, and keenly headed back to the campground for showers, dinner and gear-drying while it was still daylight.

MC-38 Genghis Khan & MC-14 Lynds Cave : 22nd October 2004

Tom Aberdeen

Party: Matt Cracknell, Henry, Serena Benjamin, Tom Aberdeen, Amy Ware, David Chitty

Day two of the CCV expedition to Mole Creek dawned, and the sleepy cavers awoke. Today's schedule was Ghengis Kahn and Lynds Caves. Both included by locals in the "big" "must-do" permit caves in the Mole Creek region. Expectations were high, and the caves did not disappoint!

After a bit of a bushwalk, the gated entry to Genghis was unlocked and the team entered the cave. Ghengis is

known as Kubla's little brother, and as I descended the rock fall in the initial passage, I thought maybe I should've been in Kubla instead. However as a low ledge was passed, a large cavern came into view. And I mean LARGE. It took a few minutes of looking around to realise actually how large it indeed was. Thankfully my Victorian made Laury Light was up to challenge, and illuminated the walls of the chamber a good fifty metres away. In fact it may have been a hundred! I am not good at judging distances underground, but believe me when I say it was big.

However at an initial glance the decoration seemed sparse and mostly dead. I emphasise the word 'initial'. We set off to start to explore the massive space, and as I looked more closely I started to observe more and more decoration. Large crystal deposits, massive straws and columns were found. As we descended, we came to a grotto that was straight out of a fairy tale, with some truly world class decoration.



Serena admires some weird stuff on the roof in Ghengis
Photo by Amy Ware

The rest of the cave was periodically explored including finding an interesting thirty odd degree flattener. In general I saw what I now consider to be the best decoration I have ever encountered. The cave is basically some climby rock fall and a big chamber, but you can easily spend a few hours in there as we did, observing the amazing visual sights and exploring the trogged routes. Much of the cave is un-trogged and paths need to be picked carefully. We agreed that there was probably much more to see, but this would be impossible without damaging the cave further, so we left Ghengis Kahn still with some sense of mystery remaining. Amy had to be literally pulled out of the cave!!

After lunch, we headed down to the river and Lynds Cave. It was a pleasant twenty odd degrees in what was reputedly very un-Tasmanian October weather, and a dip in the river was refreshing (but VERY slippery). We got to the entrance and waded up the streamway, to the waterfall near the entrance. We were told to slowly edge across the overhanging wall, and then ascend beside the thundering spectacle. Luckily nobody fell into the pit (which looked to be a good three or four metres deep). NOTE: It is a LOT easier (but a bit wetter) to go around the edge of the pool and up the other side. Oh well, we know for next time.

The cave is magnificent, and soon opens up into a series of massive chambers with a streamway at the bottom. The streamway meanders on for a few kilometres, with plenty of great flow stones, stalactites, stalagmites, and some very interesting damage from recent earthquakes in the region. Lynds is another cave with great decoration. One thing I enjoyed immensely was the crawly section around 3/4 of the way through the cave, which gives a stark contrast to the leisurely walking in the rest of the passageway. Ahh, it even reminded me of good old Britannia Creek cave in Warbuton.

The final part of the cave that we saw included some great straw formations, including one resembling a pine tree. We were told that the cave went further, but that it was inaccessible and potentially damaging to the cave to continue. We were happy to head back, and all agreed that it was a fantastic cave.

It is hard to decide which was the winner for the day. In fact I would call it an impossible choice. If you are heading to Mole Creek, be SURE to do both caves! And try and get a great leader like Henry from STC, who made the day immensely enjoyable with his commentary. The caves are permit only, the reason for which is obvious when you see how good and pristine these caves are.



Riverdance in the Mersey River en route to Lynds Cave
Photo by Dave Chitty

Thanks again to STC for their great hospitality. Together with the other caves we did, it was an unforgettable five days. The only cave unconquered by the Victorians was to be Kubla, but you can bet that I will be back to do that one! Thanks Tassie, and see you again soon. Back to Buchan I go.

MC-64 Tailender Cave & MC-32 Baldocks Cave : 23rd October 2004

Matt Cracknell

Party: Gavin Brett, Claire Brett, Matt Cracknell (STC) Dave Chitty, Amy Ware, Tom Aberdene (CCV)

The Kubla Kanners had left to do their thing early Saturday morning, we however were off to a different kind of paradise. Armed with keys and cameras our party of six zoomed around the tight corners risking our

lives to go caving, eventually stopping at Croesus reserve on the banks of the Mersey. We kitted up, double checked keys, talked to claustrophobic tourists and admired the prolific orchids, all before we found the first cave of the day. Tailender Cave, intermittent outflow with pebbled floor and corroded calcite, Much of the lower level had great karren sculpting, there were also buckets of great fossil beds exposed in the walls and ceilings. We stopped at an intersecting rift and stood and looked around for a bit. Taking photos and generally enjoying ourselves.

Sticking to the lower levels we travelled along a passage through a squeeze and then into a dry stream bed, admiring the fossils and stals covered in black-grey-brown stuff*. In the next rift we stopped again and ate snakes (jelly ones). Turned right and followed the obvious path up the bank. The ceiling disappeared above us and the walls were thick calcite shawls with the mole crk trademark of contrasting colours, rich browns and brilliant whites. We treaded carefully, up and down following the passage until we met a wall of flowstone. A loop of cord was tied off to a nearby stal. There was a way on, we didn't have any rope and none of us really cared, maybe we go there another day? Back at the stream bed, we followed the pebbled tunnel to a sandy bank and some water, I was too busy spinning out on the clastic around the edges so didn't get a look at the sump, and besides there wasn't exactly much room for six people to bathe in the sensitive ecosystem. I think Tom stuck his feet in there to test the water temperature, Melbournians are a different breed of people but I reckon it is better than the storm drains under the city! Having had a good look around we headed on our way back to the surface. It took an hour or so to negotiate the several hundred metres of crawl way, past cricket and spider colonies, through the corroded steel gate and kind sign from Forestry Tas telling us they had the key.

Above ground the world was a warm sunny spring day, I eventually got to enjoy it after wrestling with the lock. We chatted amongst ourselves on the short walk to the river and lunch. After soaking up sufficient ultraviolet radiation we got back in the flash cars, roared up the road and met at the Mole Creek Tea House..... after some of us stopped to find out exactly where Baldocks Cave could be found. I felt like a tourist retracing the steps of those who would have visited this cave 100 years ago, some of us had Devonshire tea while others bought souvenirs. The major difference was that we didn't come by horse and cart, we did however make several phone calls to ensure that the wrath of the "private landowners god" didn't strike us down for using the gated road. This is Blairs Rd and there is a phone number on the gate, it is from what I understand a public access road made to look like a private one, approx 2km down gets you to a large Eucalyptus in open paddock. We parked here because of the ruts that were developing but you could easily drive all the way to the active creek. With the directions we had, the cave

was quite a simple find. How novel.....Across the creek and paddock to you right there is a dry stream bed duck, under the fence and head for the limestone mound.



Gavin and Claire find a romantic corner of Baldocks Cave Photo by Matt Cracknell

Baldocks Cave is a series of interconnected passages that had at one stage been used as a tourist cave, this was evident in the immediate entrance with the carbide plant sitting quietly in the corner, many crickets and spiders were spotted in the twilight zone. Trogging well worn paths, scrambling over rotted stairs and fern trunk steps, past old light fittings and carbide soot surrounded by some good decoration. The track diggers of old had done a great job of cutting through flowstone and sediments so as not to bump your head. We spent a few hours having a casual explore which eventually led us to the water table, a blue-green lake. Took some happy snaps and made our way to the outside and the beautiful afternoon.

All in all a great day out.

*Black-gray-brown stuff.

Most of the stream ways had what seemed to be coatings of organic compounds from the rich humates in the forest, but we also noticed thick layers of black sediments that were obviously part of the original strata of the rock.

MC-1 Kubla Khan – the first stanza : 23rd October 2004

Geoff Wise

Party: Yoav Bar-Ness, Serena Benjamin, Janine McKinnon, Steve Phipps, Ric Tunney, Geoff Wise

Some may have called it a waste of the only permit the club gets to Kubla this year. The trip was only going to be from the bottom entrance to the Pleasure Dome and back. This was done in an effort to get more inexperienced members into the cave, and I wasn't going to go until it was revealed that there were two spots still available. I couldn't bear to see one go to waste so I jumped on board.



Decoration in the Pleasuredome Photo by Geoff Wise

It was fairly non-eventful, the walk up the hill from the cars wasn't the most pleasant in a wetsuit and there was a bit of pissing about getting everyone down to the streamway. The stream level was down, there was only one real swim and a few sections of wading in deep water. Once at the Pleasure Dome, we had something to eat and then continued to head downstream to the point

where you abseil off the balcony to join the stream if you are doing a through trip.

The others were going to head further but Ric and I headed back to the Dome to start some photography. After changing footwear we headed up into the Pleasure Dome itself. I found that as the calcite is a red orange colour, I could get away with using a cave blaster as a light source for photos. Ric was having some trouble with his flash setup.



Serena and Yoav on the 'changing room', preparing for the Pleasuredome Photo by Geoff Wise

By the time the others had arrived I was just about ready to go. It is a marvellous place but to me (having seen the whole cave before) it felt like reading the first couple of lines of the poem and stopping, knowing that there is heaps of other impressive parts you've missed.

Marakoopa 1 & 2, Honeycomb 1 and Wet Cave : 24th October 2004

Ken Hosking

Party: Yoav Bar-ness (Honeycomb and Alum Cliffs only), Serena Benjamin, Matt Cracknell, Ken Hosking, Amy Ware (Victoria), Dave Chitty (Victoria), Tom Aberdeen (Victoria)

Day four of Mole Creek Madness dawned fine and clear, and an intrepid team of six cavers, armed with a permit and a key, set off for Marakoopa Cave. After a harrowing walk to the cave entrance (about 120 metres) and after following the tourist path for a short distance, the party summoned its courage to head into the real cave by heading down to stream level. From there the cave passage followed the stream as it flows down inside the hill.

The most interesting feature of the early part of the cave is the profusion of intrusion dolerite boulders, some being of very large proportions, littering the stream bed. Their presence raised the question, given the small dimensions of the stream passage, as to how they got in there.

There were plenty of photo stops, as scenic meanders, glow worms and cave dwelling insects caught the attention of the group. Eventually the upper entrance of Marakoopa 1 was reached and a short walk through rain forest took us to Marakoopa 2. Marakoopa 2 is as pretty a cave as you could wish to see, not so much because of the decoration as for the beautifully scalloped stream passages and areas of black and white marble. As there had been in Marakoopa 1, there were a number of colonies of glow worms.

The climb was relatively gentle and, apart from the occasional crawl, progress was easy. The cave is almost entirely free of mud. Towards the upper entrance is an area where abandoned high-level passages can be found. Of particular interest was the top half of a phreatic passage, visible in the roof of a chamber about 15 metres above the present floor level. It was interesting to speculate how the remains of this

passage came to be isolated in such a spectacular manner.



Amy Ware in Marakoopa 2 Photo by Dave Chitty

On emerging from the upper entrance of the cave, the plan was to walk back to the Marakoopa 1 entrance overland. However, within a very short time our magnificently equipped exploration team found itself lost in the bush. Naturally, nobody had thought to bring a compass or GPS. An hour or so of bush-bashing led to the conclusion that the best course of action was to go back to the cave and do a reverse trip. There seemed to be less chance of getting lost that way. Eventually the cave entrance was relocated and we

descended through both caves to the original starting point.

By this time the others at the caravan park had become a little concerned at the lateness of the time and were driving towards the cave to find out what had occurred. An attempt to send a message to Ric and Janine to assure them that all was well caused great puzzlement to the recipient of the message, who knew nothing of overdue cavers, as might be expected since we somehow had the wrong number!

Following a quick lunch we made a brief trip to the Alum Cliffs, followed by a visit to Honeycomb Cave. By this time we had been joined by Yoav, who was keen to take some photos in his quest to reach his personal Nirvana of having one of his pictures on the cover of Spiel. This cave is certainly well named, and a series of passages were explored, all intertwined in a complex manner to the point where one could never be certain that the pair of boots ahead of you in the twisting little passages were not your own. There are some interesting deep pools in this cave, and plenty of mud and forest debris. There are so many entrances to this cave that we were rarely far from daylight.

Some of the levels were clearly well below that of the main stream passage and must fill with water in flood conditions, but with the low water levels prevailing at the time, only the ample vegetation that has been washed into the cave gave a visual indication of what it must be like when the tide is in.

A quick visit to what little of Wet Cave may be visited these days (unfortunately we did not have the invitation that is required by the friendly land owner to visit that part of the cave which lies under his land) rounded off a day of easy and enjoyable caving.

IB-10 Mystery Creek – a lunar eclipse : 28th October 2004

Matt Cracknell

Party: Gavin Brett, Alan Jackson, Matt Cracknell

I got a call one early Thursday morn – “Let’s go to Mystery Creek’ – I had the day off! I packed my gear and made the rendezvous with Big Aven Ratt and Anal Jackson at the usual car park. It was an auspicious day to be underground; a partial eclipse of the moon was occurring at about 1400, the two city boys seemed oblivious. Geared up and charging we entered the cave and followed the well trodden paths, walking, climbing, and groveling our way into the unfolding mystery that is Marble Hill. I was excited but cautious; the possibility of exploring new areas of a cave that I had grown to treasure was basically a reality. I had a huge responsibility, we all did, and we were about to effect change on an environment that is ultra sensitive, a footprint here, a hand mark there. These concepts were constantly reminding me.

“Rope Free!”, it was my turn up the short rope that led into the messy talus, thick piles of goopy IB mud and rubble. Somehow there was a way through this chaos and we emerged at the bottom of a reasonably large breakdown chamber. There were some interesting bits of flowstone mixed into the floor.....mmmmmmmm crystal. Anal and the Ratt were keen to push on; they’d seen it all before. Up, up, up into the ceiling, then pop into a bigger space where trickling water and the voices of men possessed disturbed the darkness. By this point in time we had calmed down a little and were carefully making our way up the really unstable rock pile towards the base of another rope. Up this rope about 10m, past the kacky edge to the top. Alan had a look up ahead. The rest of us stopped at some coraloids that reminded me of similar decoration in Rocket Rods Pot, formed over a pool of water that had long since gone.

Alan reported back that there was another chamber accessible via an awkward pitch, but that it most likely joined with another unpushed lead from the main chamber. We decided against going any further here for the moment and retraced our steps exactly across the delicate sediment floor, down the rope past the kacky edge. I got a good glimpse of the main chamber that all the leads ran off. High in the ceilings were remnant passages adorned with large decoration while the floor of the chamber was covered in gravel, silt and boulders, at the eastern end there was a hole. This was our next destination.

I had a bite to eat and absorbed the view (back cover of spiel 344). A bit of webbing, some trace and a song or two we were set to go. The hole was a little bit deeper than the rough calculations of our intrepid engineer, so there was a small knot to pass 8m from the bottom. This was Gavin's chance to introduce me to his special 'How to tie two ends together and get them apart easily after loading' knot. It basically consists of a reef knot with the tails tied in a double-fisherman's knot. I needed a little bit of persuasion; if the reef knot did slip then all it would do is end up as a nasty bundle that wouldn't completely fail. We got down safely but before I could get off the rope I was instructed to climb up in to the small gap in the wall where water trickled into the shaft on the far side. It took several swinging attempts to finally wedge myself into the gap. A sling was placed into a big keyhole so I didn't fall too far, encouragement was yelled from below and I eventually got myself up onto the edge where the water flowed around me and not on me. But alas, there was too much spring in the rope and I couldn't disengage my croll. I gave up and Alan had a lash. The rocks that had been calcified into the floor were distracting me and I didn't notice how Alan made it up the climb *[I think it was a combination of sheer skill and ingenuity. Ed.]*, he scouted around and then called for the survey gear. He'd found another large shaft but the only way on was out of reach, no one was coming back here. While the solo survey went on above us Gavin and I pondered the problem of missing 10m of rope we needed for the next abseil. No solution could be seen so I headed up for some photo time. The rest followed after a bit of survey work.

With all 3 of us back in the big chamber the decision was made to push the flattener that Alan had seen earlier on. With much glee I passed the kacky edge.....again, the rope had made a nice channel to rest in as it rubbed vigorously across the rocks. Somehow Alan had climbed this particular spot to get the rope anchored in the firstplace! *[Skill and ingenuity once again...oh, and fool hardiness. Ed.]* Carefully stepping in our previous footprints, past the awesome coralloid things ballooning out of the wall. Up the mud bank into the slot, through the flattener and down a 6m abseil. Sounds easy? The spot that was the result of this endeavor, floors covered with ancient klastic, was well worth the effort. Gavin christened this place the 'Mississippi Chamber'. We surveyed and checked the possible leads but it was a dead end. Time to leave, one by one jamming ourselves into the tiny flattener, SRT gear getting flogged about (meanwhile Peztl are making money), delicately back past the coralloids surveying as we went.



Crystal in the Mystery Creek extension Photo by Matt Cracknell

It was now starting to get late, on the way out my two colleagues and I took a brief side trip to see the dogtooth spar stalactites..... mmmmmmmmm big crystal! More than an hour later we emerged to the last fading rays of the day. About 8 hours underground meant that we arrived back at the cars muddy and tired from the day's adventures. Anticipating the next time we have the honour to experience the underground world.

IB-10 Mystery Creek – jokes, lies and deception : 14th November 2004

Alan Jackson

Party: Gavin Brett, Alan Jackson, Dave Rasch, Rolan Eberhard

Back again to drop 'The Next Pitch' below Tarzans Pit. This time Dave tagged along so he could see what all the fuss was about before his departure to the frozen land down south for a few months. Rolan had escaped his parental duties and also came along (he'll have to spill the beans on how he manages to do this one day!).

Things progressed uneventfully until the start of the crawl. Despite the very low water levels in Mystery Creek itself, the crawl was flowing strongly and both

the plunge pools were full. Wet gumboots, bellies and gloves before we'd even started! At the top of the climb we found a rather amusing present from a keen caver. A small laminated sign reading 'A valid Exit Cave permit is required to proceed past this point' with a Parks logo, and a small troll figurine, blocked the way on. We theorised on who might have left it*, admired their determination to crawl all the bloody way in to place their joke, and promptly ignored its guidance!

The usual grotty squirming ensued and we broke out into the chambers and made our way straight to Tarzans Pit. We had more sensible rope lengths this time, so no

knot crossing 5m off the deck, and began preparing the Next Pitch. It turned out to be about 10m long and the stream dribbled on down into a choke. A side passage headed off a few metres up from the floor which terminated in a tight squeeze that visibly flared out on the other side. Even Mr No Chest couldn't get through, so this little lead that heads almost due South, and drafting gently, remains to be expanded at a later date. We surveyed out from here, (the pink survey tape swaying suggestively in the breeze), to the top of Tarzans Pit, joining in the side aven survey that we had completed last trip.

We then shot over to the lowest point in the boulder collapse in the main chamber and dropped a hand line down. I soon found myself back in the collapse under the first chamber again, so another way in was found.

Disappointed, slightly worn out and cold we headed out.

We still haven't found the enthusiasm to survey the muddy crawls and climbs up into the first chamber yet, and this needs to be done so we can see how close or far we are from known parts of Exit. Depending on the results of this will show us how much enthusiasm we need to return with to the drafting squeeze or other apparently terminal areas of the cave.

**It turns out that the culprits were Dave and Hugh. They headed in while everyone else was up at Mole Creek indulging in some madness. It all resulted in some bad karma, a broken toe and a touch of disappointment. Oh well.*

Gourlay Bush Bash : 17th November 2004

Ric Tunney

Party: Matt Cracknell, Alan Jackson, Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney

It was Matt's birthday, so what better a way to celebrate than to bash around in the scrub above Maydena? Dave Rasch had given us the GPS locations of some features he had found a few weeks earlier and Ronnie Harrison, a Texan caver interested in big trees had passed on a cave location he had got from a forestry worker, Nigel Youd. This cave was 2-3m in diameter and near an 80m high *E. regnans*. They had triangulated this tree from Maydena and plotted it on the 1:100,000 map – a procedure that does not give a very precise location!

We left our car on the grass where the Junee Road crosses the Junee River and headed for the quarry nearby. The road to the quarry and the road leading up the hill from the quarry make for easy access for the first 300m. We followed the eastern side of the north-running ridge line, keeping high enough to avoid the steep valley side to our right (east) but low enough to avoid lots of scrubby regrowth after fire along the crest of the ridge. Mostly we were in a sort of semi-open rainforest which made moderately easy going. We were headed for the point BD1 (see map).

A couple of hundred metres before BD1, we found a taped track! This was surprising. We hadn't anticipated this as Dave hadn't reported any track. Neither Alan nor Ric had any JF waypoints in their GPS, so we didn't know what was going on. We decided to postpone the search for BD1 and follow the track north up the hill.

JF121 & JF137

The track led us to a sharp turn with three orange tapes and following west for 100m through open rainforest

we came to some dolines just below the track. The higher of these was tagged JF121 and the lower JF137. This was exciting as we didn't have our cave list with us. We had relocated some lost caves!

While Janine and Matt investigated the caves Alan and Ric followed the taped track west, around the hillside. At a spot where three pink tapes lay on the ground Alan followed a taped track up the hill while Ric followed the tapes a few hundred metres further west.

Report from Matt:

JF-137 tight vertical slot that led into a steeply descending passage. Started off with a 10m handline rigged to a tree near the entrance. This ended up being better utilised about 10m into the cave where the passage becomes almost vertical. Many large spiders and webs stretching across cave passage. SRT gear is require ,it's very exposed. I threw some pebbles down and could hear splashing water but I could not see the bottom.

JF123 (Deep Throat) & JF99 (The Chairman)

On rejoining, Alan reported he had found a survey stake – 004 – and an enormous doline, so big he had called it "FBH" in his GPS, and a swallet tagged JF123. Revisiting this hole made both Ric and Alan very excited. We'd have to come back and drop this hole. Why didn't we know about this? Who had been working around here secretly?

(When we got home and plotted our GPS readings we discovered that the FBH was The Chairman. As we had approached this from the east and weren't expecting to be anywhere near here, we were unsurprisingly confused.)

BD1

The party gathered together. JF121 and JF137 had not been very exciting, so we headed to BD1, the first of Dave's features. This was in a valley bottom and was not very exciting either.

Report from Matt:

BD1 Trickles of water on my bare skin..... I'm wearing shorts in a cave! Lots of cave fauna, original passage terminates 5-10m in. Choked with debris; reasonable water flow into cave and a possible lead halfway in on true left hand side.

JF143, JF144 & JF145

Dave had found three holes close together. Two of these were dolines taking small streams that rose out of the soil just above the dolines. Janine dropped both dolines and returned covered in mud to report they were soon choked. The third hole was a perfectly cylindrical shaft on the hillside. Janine dropped this to report it was about 20m deep and choked. Matt found a JF144 tag sort of nailed to a tree root.

JF110 (Victory 75)

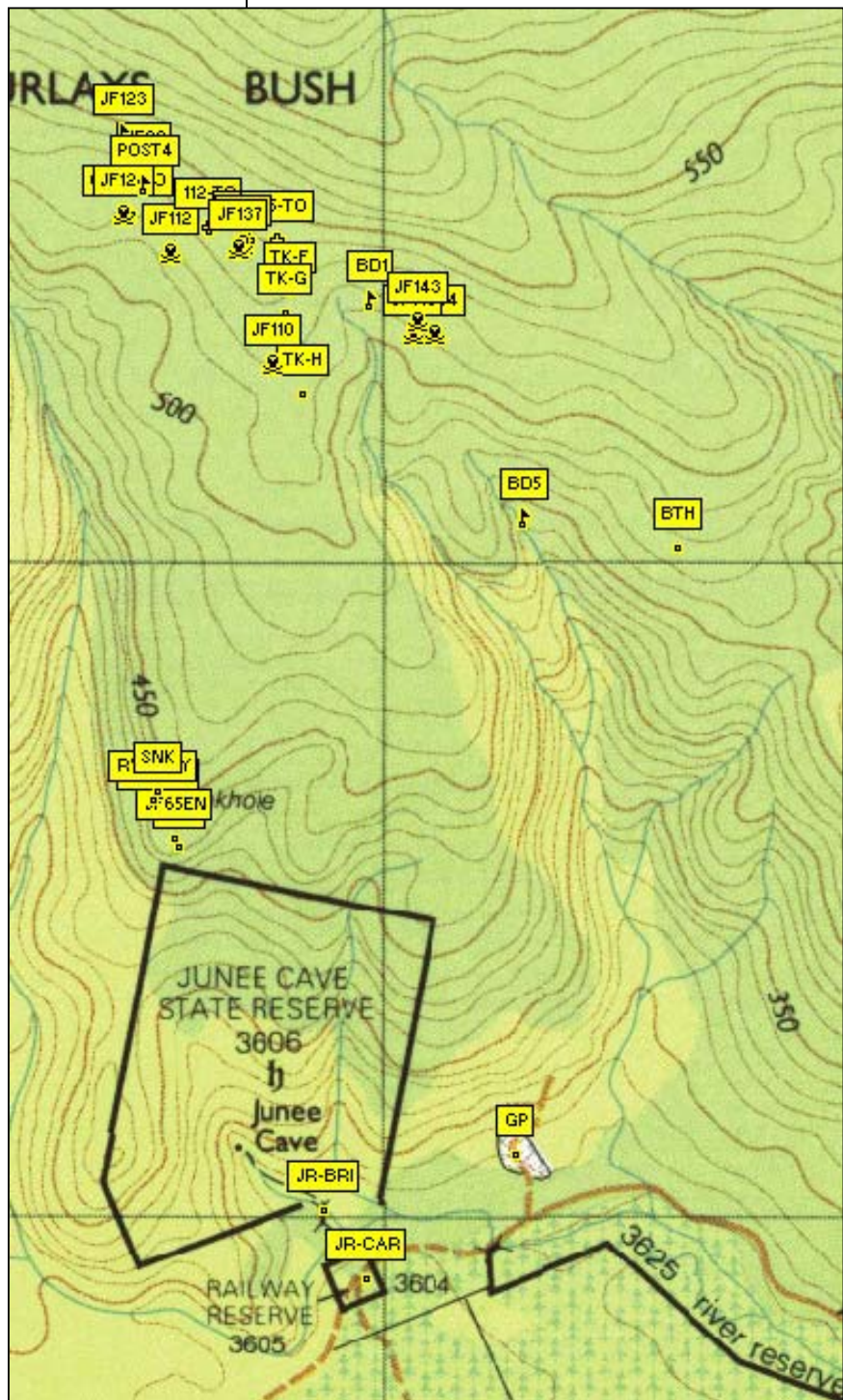
While Janine was dropping the dolines, Ric returned to the taped route to follow it down the hill (south). It led to a tagged cave JF110. The taped line ran south for a further 100m before seeming to stop suddenly.

BD5

BD5 was another of Dave's locations. It was a straight-forward walk down the side of the valley through large *E. regnans*. BD5 is a small doline with a small hole in the valley floor. 30m upstream there was another small hole which takes water. Neither was entered. There is a particularly fine *E. regnans* near this location.

BTH

BTH was the location reported to us by Ronnie Harrison. We thought at the time it was an actual GPS location. We arrived, in an area of old selective logging with *E. regnans* stumps with platform notches, to find nothing. Our two GPSs agreed to within 20m and we



Map of Gourlay Bush area showing approximate hole locations

cast around for 100m without finding a cave or an 80m+ high *E. regnans*.

We gave up and headed south down the reasonably open spur to the valley floor and followed this through open tree ferns to the Junee Road.

A note on JF143 & JF145

The three caves in the area are described in the STC Archive as:

JF143

*From Speleo Spiel No. 135 June 1978
Entrance is large fissure. Cave fully explored to depth of 36 metres. It has a muddy floor and further exploration is blocked by debris. The cave is located to the left (downhill?) of 'The Chairman' track, approximately 400 metres before reaching the cave.*

JF144

*From Speleo Spiel No. 135 June 1978
Entrance is cylindrical hole - such a perfect shape that it looks man-made. Twenty-four metre ladder pitch to floor. At the bottom a very narrow squeeze with out-going draught not entered. Located very close to JF-143.*

JF145

From Speleo Spiel No. 135 June 1978 A seven metre entrance pitch followed by 15 metres of muddy passage. Approximately 20 metres from JF-143

From the found tag and the description, JF144 is obvious. The location of JF143, very close to JF144, but *to the left (downhill?) of 'The Chairman' track* is confusing, as the current access to JF99 is from the west so to the left is uphill, and if it were near The Chairman track it would be at least 400m further west. However, Stuart Nicholas, Albert Goede, Dean Morgan and Steve Bunton have each reported that the original access to The Chairman was from the east, from John Bull Road. So that explains that. As JF144 is *very close* to JF143, JF143 must be the higher, eastern swallet and JF145 the lower, western swallet (further from JF144).

Chrisps Road Exploration : 20th November 2004

Alan Jackson

Party: Alan Jackson, Gavin Brett, Ken Hosking

We had been given a tip off by Rolan of limestone relief beyond comprehension and the presence of gaping sinkholes on the contact above Chrisps Road. Being the wholesome and trustworthy guy that Rolan is, we placed our faith in him and headed off equipped with a 28m rope and enough GPS's to bog the 'cruiser. We were under strict instruction that if we got below 100m (unlikely I admit with a 28m rope), or our heart beat went above 120 bpm that we were to halt and get Rolan before proceeding any further (bloody booty scoopers!)

The area along the contact in the couple of kilometres east of Niggly Cave appears to be unusually blank in the archive or any GPS databases that we could find access to. Rolan had walked through the area in the early/mid 90's completing a survey for Forestry and had noted some good holes. Searching the archive has also shown that Nick Hume had taken a wander or two in these parts, but either hadn't found much or didn't get around to exploring anything he found.

We started at the end of Chrisps Road (where the turning circle is marked on the 1:25k map). The continuation of this track on the maps isn't as easily navigable as the maps suggest and we were soon thrashing through regrowth rubbish. We stumbled across the major swallet in the gully at about 470m a.s.l. The swallet is not enterable and judging by large silt deposits in the dry gully below, it often overflows. It is interesting to see how so much water has managed to stay on the surface in this cave ridden area. Drawing on my vast geological knowledge I would theorise that the area has been subjected to a significant amount of inundation by doleritic boulders and other rubbish. We encountered plenty more of it in areas above the creek. An impressive limestone cliff line flanks the northern bank of the creek, in which Gavin and Ken located

tagged entrances (JF230 and JF253). I followed the top of the cliff and found a few minor untagged entrances. We met up again where the main split in the creek occurs. The water comes from the eastern fork; the western fork, though marked with a blue line on the map, is dry. A large blind doline was found in the fork. I was sick of the sound of crashing water so we headed up the ridge between the two gullies. No exposed limestone was to be seen, only dolerite, so we crossed to the western side of the dry gully and encountered on and off again limestone (and quite a bit of horizontal scrub!)

Eventually things started to smell like caves again and we encountered the swallet responsible for robbing this gully of its water. It was marked with triple pink tapes, which we assume was the work of Rolan or Nick Hume and associates back in the late 80's/early 90's. We spread out here and headed west along the contact. I found a cylindrical entrance blocked at about 4m and then the forest erupted with Gavin's excited tones (he'd found a hole too). Gavin's hole also had triple pink tapes and was a vertical entrance a couple of metres in diameter with a good 20m drop. We set about rigging it and I got the honours. Two rebelay later, (one of them not the most confidence inspiring), and I was off rope with 3 inches of excess rope – perfection (JB would have been proud!) The smallish entrance quickly flairs out to be a long rift extending 10m+ either side of the entrance shaft. No obvious ways on were found and I had a good look with SRT gear off. A pendulum from about half way up provided a down climb to similar depths attained initially. A brushtail possum skeleton was found at each of the low points, easily distinguished by the distinct depressed V in the top of its skull and omnivorous dentition.

While I was away Gavin had found several other holes. The first was a large collapsed rift entrance completely full of logs and soil and all the others were small holes

taking water along the contact, but none worth pursuing. A large blind doline was also found 30m below the contact (in which Ken managed to lose the lid of the marker pen while issuing some orange ribbon!)

Further west we stumbled across to two adjacent dolines (a pink taped route lead from the possum trap to here). A good poke in the larger of the two yielded a little depth but not much promise.

A blank spot was traversed for 100m until I came across a fallen *E. regnans* blocking my path. I considered taking the 40m trip around one of its ends, but noticed a fork in the middle that could provide a crossing point. Scaling the fork I looked down and found a gaping hole between my legs. Richie Benaud would have called it “plum”, while Thorpey says “it’s fully sic”. It was Ken’s turn at the pointy end and finding a suitable rigging point wasn’t particularly challenging. While exploration progressed I had a look down towards the crown of the tree and found a tight rift like entrance issuing a strong draft and accepting rocks willingly for 10m+. I stayed as surface support for Ken, and Gavin leapt off in to the surrounds seeking more holes. Ken suggested that rigging gear was required for a further pitch, so I joined him at the bottom of the 12m entrance pitch. I considered the further pitch to be climbable and hopped down a further three or four metres. Here the cave ended in a large puddle. Quite a spacious cave with plenty of nice white squishy stuff on the walls and a few minor leads that were satisfactorily investigated. The name Fork Pot sprang to mind.

Gavin’s heart beat could be heard as we neared the top of the pitch, but he was no where to be seen (Rolan’s heart beat limit was being seriously tested). In his place was a small shaking blob of excitement (I think he’d found a good hole in the ground). Ignoring my drafting hole we headed further along to Gavin’s

drafting hole, (there’s scope for a rude joke here, but I’ll abstain), pointing out the four other features he’d spotted on the way. A tight window opened out in to a medium chamber with a climb down into a smaller chamber with a squeeze at the bottom. I just got through with my SRT gear on, but it hurt, and Ken tried but had to remove his, (‘no chest’ wins again). The other side opened out into a very large tunnel heading down a 45 degree scree slope (10m wide by 15m high). We scrambled down, probably to a point about 40m below the entrance before it started getting too steep and an ominous 10m drop off lurked up ahead. We scoured the place for signs of previous exploration and found something that vaguely represented a foot step, but discounted it after viewing the damage our feet had made to the muddy slope in one simple pass. On the surface again and I found a tiny piece of blue flagging tape lying in the leaf litter. It would be fair to say that the entrance has been spotted before, but we can’t work out if it has been entered. No tagged entrances were spotted in the area, so who knows.

It was getting late so we prepared for the walk back. The satellites had all migrated to low in the horizon and getting a fix was impossible. We worked out on the map where we must be, took a bearing for the car and headed off. About half way down the hill we finally got a fix and found that we had done too much south and not enough east. We corrected our course and found a choked entrance that we marked with tape. A bit of horizontal followed and we stumbled back out in the sweet sight of bulldozer lines and windrows, and best of all, ‘cruisers’.

Most of the significant features that we found (and some not so significant) were tagged with orange flagging tape and labelled “STC 20/11/2004 C#”. Labels ranged from C1 through to C18, with a few gaps in numbers for various reasons. A brief description of the caves found is listed in the report for the second trip into this area below.

Chrisps Road – again : 28th November 2004

Alan Jackson

Party: Alan Jackson

Surprisingly very little interest was shown in a Midnight Hole trip that I put round the list server so the job of placing a redirect bolt on the bottom pitch is still outstanding. Everybody was too tired, busy or disinterested to go anywhere with me, so I decided to entertain myself by finding an easy way into the new area receiving attention in the June-Florentine. The idea was to find a vegetation free route for faster access to the area and have a poke round for more new holes.

On the 1:25k map there is a turning circle marked on the left hand branch of Chrisps Road. This is the point to which one can drive (unless you own a D9), but on the maps there is a further 400m of road/track marked. I intended checking this out (we’d failed to find it last time) and see if it offered a more enjoyable walk into

the area, as re-growth from logging activities has rendered the area pretty nasty going. I failed entirely to locate the track (it would have helped if I had looked in the right place!) Instead I ended up half following a pink and blue taped route that leads more or less straight to the swallet in the major creek (C1). From here I skirted to the left of the cliffs then cut back NE to follow the cliff top, and then headed straight up the fairly open ridge, hitting the contact at the cave marked C8 (Toss Pot) from the previous weekend’s travels.

From C8 I followed the contact west and continued to C17 (the most promising hole from the previous trip). I then set about GPSing all the karst features that we had found last trip but not marked or GPSed. I found two new features, one of which had red flagging tape nearby. I also had a good garden around the hole down the hill from Fork Pot. The entrance is extremely loose

and scary, but was issuing an impressive draft (any dust, leaf litter or twigs that I knocked down the hole flew back out and went in my eyes).

Continuing west along the contact I stumbled on a large doline with a narrow rift at the back (drafting and accepting rocks for 5+ seconds). It was already marked with three pink tapes. Further along a small doline with a narrow drafting slot was found. A tiny shelter cave was encountered and then a large choked swallow. The terrain then became steeper with lots of exposed limestone outcrops and cliffs. A small stream that had made it past the contact was followed downstream until it disappeared in the soil uneventfully. From here I could hear the main stream in the large gully that runs down to join Chrisps Creek near the Florentine Road. This creek also made it past the contact (along with many other smaller streams joining from the eastern side of the gully), but eventually sank in the creek bed a hundred metres down from the contact. Where the stream crosses the contact is a spectacular series of 5m waterfalls which was a pleasant change from the usual surface stream absence of karst country.

On the western side of this creek a tree with three blue tapes signalled the start/end/middle? of a blue taped route. I was now within 600m of Niggly Cave and assumed it contoured to that location. This side of the creek saw a return to usual JF country – lots of holes! Several drafting holes were found within 50m of the creek, one of which had a pink tape. At this point it started threatening to rain, and it was after 2pm, so I headed back. A few other new features were found on the way. From C8 it took just under 30 minutes to get back to the car. With a pack full of rope and a days caving under one's belt, this would no doubt be a little longer.

This is an interesting area, as it would appear to have been looked at in the past (various coloured tapes, some of considerable age) but there are no number tags to be found or evidence of trips reports in old issues of the Spiel etc... Considering the depth potential in this area (probably over 400m), it is surprising to see that not much has been pushed. We have a project for the summer!

Cave summaries (in order of appearance!):

Found 20/11/04 (orange tape)

- C1 – silt choked swallow well below the contact in the creek immediately north of the car park.
- C2 – narrow slot above cliff line, down climbed to around -7m. No leads
- C3 – 2m diameter pot east of C2. Appears choked at -3m, but needs further inspection (note that C1,2 & 5 were not taped, and C4 does not exist)
- C5 – large blind doline in the fork of the wet and dry gullies

- C6 – choked? swallow on the contact at head of dry gully
- C7 – small doline with 2m continuation in back wall. Large *Hickmania* with egg sacs and babies
- C8 – ‘Toss Pot’ 3m x 1.5m vertical entrance with 20m pitch. Choked at bottom.
- C9 – large rift entrance, choked with mud, logs etc...
- C10 – impenetrable swallow on contact east of C9
- C11 – impenetrable swallow on contact east of C10
- C12 – impenetrable swallow on contact east of C11
- C13 – large blind doline south of C10-12
- C14 – large doline/collapse entrance with water, 40m west of C8
- C15 – smaller doline 4m down hill from C14
- C16 – ‘Fork Pot’, located under the fork in a large fallen *E. regnans*, 100m west of C14. 12m pitch followed by 3m climb down to terminal pool
- C17 – ‘Tachycardia’, 40m NW of C16, 0.5m diameter drafting hole. Opens up into medium sized chamber with downward continuation
- C18 – choked doline well below contact, west of C1-3
- C19 does not exist.

Also JF 253 and JF 230 were relocated at base of cliffs upstream from C1

Found 28/11/04 (white tape)

- C20 – 20m north of white taped route between C15 and C16. 3m diameter pot, taking water with a downward lead
- C21 – blind doline 10m east of C17
- C22 – drafting hole with 3 entrances, 15m east of C17
- C23 – small pot taking water on contact, 10m NE of C17
- C24 – awkward narrow slot 30m south of C16 (Fork Pot). Drafting strongly and gladly accepting rocks for 15+ metres.
- C25 – blind doline 30m ESE of C24. Maybe a dig.
- C26 – large doline on contact 60+m west of C17. Narrow rift at back drafting and rattling rocks for 5-6 seconds. 3 pink tapes
- C27 – narrow slot in small doline 40m west of C26. Accepts rocks for several metres and good draft, but will require digging to gain entry
- C28 – tiny ‘shelter’ cave (2x2x0.5metres). No continuation
- C29 – largish, collapsed and probably choked swallow. Smaller stream also sinks on the NW lip of the doline, also choked
- C30 – water sink spot in main creek/gully. Water obviously continues past this point at high water levels
- C31 – large doline with drafting narrow slot in back wall. Rocks accepted for 10+m
- C32 – doline with small drafting hole in western end
- C33 – largish overhanging entrance with two? (it was dark!) downward leads and a draft? Two pink tapes
- C34 – small drafting vertical entrance leading to a steep mud slope
- C35 – tight drafting rift/slot with vertical drop
- C36 – pot approximately 30m east of C26

JF-270 Tachycardia and friends : 4th December 2004

Alan Jackson

Party: Alan Jackson, Gavin Brett, Rolan Eberhard, Matt Cracknell

Rolan had been informed of the discoveries in the area now known as ‘Smorgasbord’ and a return was promptly initiated. The aim was to drop the pitch in the now named Tachycardia (C17) and break on through into Niggly...

The newcomers were suitably impressed with the dimensions of this cave as we barrelled on down to the pitch. The pitch turned out to be about 20m and dropped into a large collapse chamber. Much prodding was done and we discovered gumboot prints in one section (Bata brand) and ultimately a rock cairn. Clearly someone had been in here before. What a shame they hadn’t got around to tagging, surveying or documenting their discovery in any way! Just plain bloody useless really. At the lowest point in the large room we chased some water into rock fall (where we found the cairn) and were stopped at a drafting squeeze. This will need to be persuaded at a later date. We surveyed out (we’d got to almost 100m I think) and considered our next move.



Alan re-rolls his flagging tape after dropping the entire thing down a hole in the rock pile – buggar! *Photo by Matt Cracknell*

There are several holes in the immediate vicinity of Tachycardia (C21-23). I headed down 23 and got to a choke at around -10m. The others investigated 22 and got to a vertical squeeze blocked by a large tree root at -3m. I am now the designated squeezer, so they waited for me to arrive. I didn’t fit, so we got the saw out on

Gavin’s Leatherman and started the slow process. A few minutes later I was through into a small chamber with a superb draft and downward leads abounding, but enthusiasm was being focussed on C24 by now, so I was called out.



Alan offers some helpful advice to Gavin as he enters Pooshooter *Photo by Matt Cracknell*

C24 had been a particularly nasty entrance until I had cleaned up a few kilograms of loose rock at the entrance the previous weekend. Because of its unsafe feeling and the amount of crap that we’d shot down the entrance Gavin and I had given it the temporary name of ‘Pooshooter’ and decided that we’d let Rolan have first go. Rolan was suspicious of this act of kindness and wasn’t keen. That was until Gavin did some more gardening and an 8kg rock could be heard thumping down the cave out of ear shot. Rolan suddenly showed some interest and exploration fever set in. Rigging was less than friendly and we had 9mm rope, but progress was made until the shout of “I need the bolting kit for the next 20m pitch...” Gavin headed in with supplies while Matt and I went surface bashing to fill in the time. We had a closer look at C25 and detected a draft and a tight continuation that needs a keen Englishman to expand and then found a new cave further east again (labelled C37). This I down climbed to -8m and found a tiny little hole with a draft (I think we need to rename the whole area ‘Windy Hill’ as there is an excess of drafting caves). I also had a quick look into C20 and got to a climb at -15m that needed a hand line. We then headed back to C24 to check on progress.

Gavin and Rolan were almost out of ear shot by now and were glad to have surface support again. “More rope” was the request, so I shot down to join them. They were at about -30-40m and atop a further 6m pitch. We rigged and I descended to find a probable end to exploration (a bit tight, but needs a proper look). On the way out we noticed a window in the 20m pitch that was stealing all the draft, so we’ll be back for that one.

Having had enough we packed up and headed out to the car. The new route in was fairly pleasant walking and

probably just needs cleaning up in a couple of spots and it will be a super highway.

JF-337 Slaughterhouse Pot – P-hanger installation : 11th December 2004

Alan Jackson

Party: Phil Rowsell, Alan Jackson, Damian Bidgood

Slaughterhouse had been on the list for a while now. We were heading up to P-hanger Kubla Khan, so we thought we'd kill two birds with the one tube of glue and do Slaughterhouse on the way. Madphil had returned to our shores the previous Thursday and came along to provide assistance.

At the first pitch Damian was assigned drilling duties (he had been whinging about how he hadn't had a good go with the new SAR drill yet), Madphil was 'Cleaner Boy' (a role he took very seriously – with a southern American accent...), and I was chief glue squirter.

1st Pitch – The existing backup/handline remains (around the decoration). Two P-hangers were installed in the vicinity of the existing bolt, one on the left wall above the spit and the other on the opposite wall – thus creating a Y-hang. The redirect a few metres down (tape on decoration) remains unchanged.

2nd Pitch – Two P-hangers were installed at the pitch head in the vicinity of the existing bolt. The redirect spit remains unchanged.

3rd Pitch – Following some discussions I had with a SUSS member a few months back we considered installing a back up/approach line for this pitch. After closer inspection we decided that the pitch head was safely approachable as it is and that the extra hanger would be a waste. We'd also read that one of the existing bolts was a glue in and probably wouldn't need replacing. We had a look and decided that it did need replacing! There are now two P-hangers in similar positions to the original bolts at this pitch.

We then proceeded through Windy Rift and out of the cave in nice low water levels.

Damian and Phil intend returning soon to test the new hangers and maybe replace some or all of the ropes, which have now been in place for around 2 years since their last change.

Buchan Area : 11th & 12th December 2004

Matt Cracknell

Party: Matt Cracknell, Amy Ware, Members of VSA(Victorian Speleological Society)

Amy Ware had promised to show me some caves in the Buchan district of East Gippsland in Victoria. Our first stop was a rendezvous with some Victorian cavers in a paddock that had not been completely surveyed; there was the chance that we may also find some previously unknown caves. This turned out to be a little more involved than I had anticipated, the 'new' caves were hidden somewhere in large dolines full of nasty thickets of blackberries. The method was to pick a spot where it looked as if there may be a slot in the rocks and then hack your way in with 'The Hook'. An hour or so was spent getting heat exhaustion in the sun before we turned our attention to freshly tagged BA-24. Amy and I went in for a short look, gingerly climbing down the 3m past the blackberries and nettles, it wasn't a huge cave but it contained some interesting things. For instance, a swallows nest in the entrance (most of the caves I saw had a least one of these), a fresh rabbit corpse, sheep (or goat) skull and a resident trogloditic gastropod. Dead things in caves!

After a stop for lunch Amy and I headed off with the dog to Wilsons Cave (EB-4), stopping on the way to admire a red-bellied black snake. This cave was on a state reserve and many people had walked its floors. There had even been a film shoot inside the main chamber. The cave is not very well endowed with

decoration so the props guys hung a stalactite from a bolt in the ceiling. There were some nice climbs and squeezes but nothing too dangerous, a good place to take beginner cavers. I was enjoying acclimatising to mainland caves, different smells, rocks, and surface features..... paddocks.



Brett and Eric (VSA) go cave searching in the blackberries *Photo by Matt Cracknell*

It such a glorious day we decided for a look at the facilities at the Buchan Tourist Caves. The show caves had shut for the day so we dangled our feet into the spring fed pool. I wanted to know what temperature the water was coming out of Dukes Cave and into the pool. A gentleman on one of my cave tours had mentioned

that the water in the pool could get to -2°C! I wasn't too sure that it was possible, for obvious reasons, so to set things straight we conducted the experiment, 17°C was the outcome with Amy's fridge thermometer. We also saw a water dragon, white winged choughs and discussed the strange orange colour of the stream emerging from Moons Cave, supposedly it is due to biological activity(?). However, the recent rains had given the Buchan River a murky brown texture. The repercussions of the 2003 fires were still acute.



Amy and Matt in the Centipede Flattener Photo by the automatic timer on Matt's camera?

That night was spent at Homeleigh, this is a building owned and run by a co-operative. It has the facilities to cater for lots of dirty cavers, no gear inside! Some of the photos on the wall were a testament to the days when the place was full. Caving tales and a few quiet beers were enjoyed over dinner with the few that were there on Saturday night. The next morning the sun shone radiantly, these cool damp caves were very enticing. The first caves of the day were to be found at 'The Potholes Reserve' approx. 15min drive NW toward Merrindal from Buchan. There are many caves here and also some cattle. M-41 (Honeycomb Cave) had a beautiful large Eucalypt above the entrance, a short climb in is often rigged with a ladder for beginners. Parks had installed some stainless steel rings to make the rigging safer (this was dubious because the rings had been concreted in, not drilled then glued), it wasn't a long drop. Honeycomb cave was very pretty, it had had a lot of traffic but it still contained pristine transparent helictites concealed in small grotto in the ceilings. The development of the cave was essentially phreatic, the walls were beautifully sculpted limestone. We climbed around for a couple of hours then went back to the searing sun to water the dog and dodge the cows. Next stop was Centipede cave, M-258, very tight entrance squeeze led into steeply descending series of rift climbs that were filled with breccia. Somewhere in this pile of debris we found a perfectly transparent

hexagonal calcite(?) spar! Moon milk deposits, crinoid stem and gastropod fossils surrounded us. The very bottom of the cave was a flattener, there seemed to be recent digging works in the area but they had gone nowhere. At this point Amy and myself both noticed a considerable draft heading out of the cave. We didn't know this but at that moment an intense storm cell was passing over. Time for photos and admiring fossils, outside it was damp and cool.

One more cave for the day (best till last) M-4, River Cave, nice and wet with three sumps, two of them passable in low water. Crawly stream passages with many stalactites, it was progressively getting wetter. 100m in is sump 1 and time to go 99% immersion, I was a bit thrashy in the water and the waves were making it difficult to breathe. No worries, slow down and relax, the rest of the cave was spent crawling or lying in the water except for some high rifting chambers that reminded me a little of Croesus cave. Some excellent decoration and drip holes in the sediment floors, I was shivering by this stage, I needed to keep moving just to maintain body warmth. Before and after sump 2 in the dry parts of the stream way there could be found many calcite rafts that had been left high and dry from receding water levels. We hit the terminal sump after about an hours caving. Both of us were cold wet and running late for our expected return so we turned around immediately and headed for the light.



Matt emerges from a wet bit in River Cave Photo by Amy Ware

All in all a great weekend spent sightseeing very different and diverse karst. I would love to thank Amy for giving up her weekend to show me around Buchan and also thanks to Eric, Paul, Marg, Gary, Darren and Fiona from VSA for their hospitality at Homeleigh.

IB-176 (Still) Measureless to Man : 17th December 2004

Alan Jackson

Party: Phil Rowsell, Alan Jackson

Madphil was looking for people to cave with (just for something completely different!), and I decided that I could convince my boss that there was no way I was going to be able to come to work the day after our office Christmas party. We headed south to Ida Bay (that way I didn't have to drive into town and risk going on the breatho!), and got away at about 8ish. The day was also a kind of test run for Phil's newly acquired Magna, which performed admirably, I must admit.

We arrived and decided that we'd get into IB176 (a cave Jeff and Phil had discovered on the contact east of Midnight Hole last time Phil was out), to push the squeeze and get the survey finished. We also intended pushing and surveying IB73 (Lime Pot?) as I'd stumbled across an old trip report (Spiel 272) where Arthur and co had explored a cave that they guessed might come out in the passage near Matchbox Squeeze that has been receiving so much attention recently.

We headed in to IB176 via the Midnight Hole track and suited up. The cave then lived up to its name again, as Phil had left the measuring tape in the car! Much self abuse followed and we headed in anyway. The tight bit was negotiated and the immediately following pitch rigged of various naturals. The pitch of about 12m dropped into a spacious rift with the remains of a lyre bird on the floor (one down, six million to go). At each end narrow passage headed off, both of which

terminated after 20m or so. One could have been pushed further, but it was heading up hill, had a pool of water in the bottom and was unpleasantly tight.

Phil did survey drawings, cursed some more about the tape and we derigged. Unfortunately a return trip will have to be made to finish the survey and file the cave away into the 'never visit again' box.

Without the tape there was no point going to IB73, so we decided we would head back to the car and see if we had enough time to finish exploring and surveying Big Grunt, another newish cave with leads near the car park. Instead of going back via Midnight Hole we headed straight down the hill. This resulted in the rediscovery of IB144, 148 and 149. These were caves that Phil had not found last time he was out and so they had not been surveyed in to the grand master Ida Bay location and drainage plan. We were happy with these discoveries and assumed that with a little more looking we would also find 145, 146 and 147 in the same area. The going was quite open and we very quickly found ourselves back on the old tramway track about half way along.

Enthusiasm was waning back at the car, and the measuring tape was laughing at us from the boot, so we chose the soft option and headed home, avoiding the large hole that has appeared in the road. No doubt someone at the conference will want to survey it and give it a name and number tag...

JF-337 Slaughterhouse Pot – P-hanger testing : 16th December 2004

Damian Bidgood

Party: Phil Rowsell, Damian Bidgood + 3

The planned trip was to take three members of "Fusion" to do a Slaughterhouse Pot/Growling through trip using ladders and test the new P-hangers at the same time.

On arriving at the entrance to Growling that was soon changed to a bounce trip in Slaughterhouse as the streamway was way too high. Phil started to test P-hangers as the Fusion three began rigging a ladder at the first pitch. This was the beginning of a slow day, as by the time Phil showed the first two down to ladder the second pitch and went ahead to test the other hangers it was already about 1330.

By the time the second pitch was descended using the ladders it was about 1530 and Phil had returned from the bottom pitch after testing. Two of the Fusion people were taken through the rock pile by Phil whilst I took the other up to the top of the second pitch to do some rigging. We were all out of the cave by 1900.

There are now two hangers in at the top pitch in position to set a "Y" hang over the pitch, two hangers on the second pitch at the top beside the old bolts (one of which has been dismantled) and two hangers set at the top of the bottom pitch to set a "Y" hang over it. The bottom rope has been replaced and the existing redirects on top and second pitches are still in place.

JF-268 Pooshooter and JF-271 Sawn Off Pot : 18th December 2004

Alan Jackson

Party: Rolan Eberhard, Gavin Brett, Alan Jackson & Mapdphil and Bunty in JF271

Rolan, Gavin and I were champing at the bit to get back to one of our new caves, and Madphil and Bunty (yes, that's right, he does still put his trog suit on occasionally) joined us. There wasn't really room for

five of us in 'Pooshooter' (the terrible name that seems to be sticking for C24 – some members of the club think it's called 'Peashooter'! No doubt the nomenclature board will have issues with our name, but they can call it what ever they want – I'm happy with Pooshooter and I found the cave, so ner!), so we sent Bunty and Phil off to investigate some other holes we hadn't got around to yet and to rekindle old friendships...

At the window on the second pitch we climbed/were blown into the parallel development. A bomber natural got us down to the head of a 10ish metre pitch where we installed a spit to act as a redirect. From here there was an obvious way on with a pitch, but the draft had gone, so we went searching for it. At the other end of the room we climbed a large boulder and dropped down to the head of a sloping pitch of around 40m+, with a superb draft. Rigging was once again completely

lacking and loose rock was abounding. Gavin and I sat perfectly still after doing some imaginative back up rigging while Rolan got started on another spit. 8m down and another spit was required, and then a further 15m down Rolan was describing the need for a y-hang with another two spits! Gavin and I, having not moved for 45 minutes for fear of killing Rolan were freezing to death in the draft and called Rolan out (this proved to be a challenge with such a good lead still beckoning). We surveyed out from the spit at the top of the sloping pitch, including the dead end we got to on our last trip. There was a draft down there this time, but it seemed to come down an aven from the surface, then hook back around and in the direction of the window that we had been exploring through today. Interesting.

On the surface we caught up with Eeyore and Pooh who had spent the day in C22 (Sawn Off Pot), which is still going well and drafting.

JF-36 Growling Swallet – tourists to the back end : 23rd December 2004

Alan Jackson

Party: Alan Jackson, Phil Rowsell

Phil and I had both been independently keen to get down to the far reaches of the Growling Swallet system for some time now. We'd originally planned an assault for the previous week but had been rained out. This time the water level was pretty good (there was a bit of water going over the measuring rock with a fine day forecast) and we headed underground at 1100.



The changing tray and some sexy pommy legs *Photo by Alan Jackson*

Some parts of the 'dry' bypass in the top section were wet and we were generally damp after reaching the sump. Having no SRT gear or rope in our packs was a real pleasure – we had so little gear that Phil was able to take his Dragon 'man-bag' (it was called several other things too, but in the interest of preventing legal action against the club we shall call it a 'man-bag'). He looked like a 14 year old girl with one of those ludicrously tiny back packs strutting down the street.

I had only ever been as far as the Trapdoor Streamway junction, so it was all new for me after there. Truckloads of mud and silt, some lovely big avens and then the hideous Herpes III. The mud here smells just like a North West dairy farm! Avon's Aven was relatively painless, although I must admit it was a pretty good effort to scale initially without the aid of a fixed ladder. Phil had been through Necrosis once before and had a few mud maps drawn to help him through again (he had spent quite a bit of time going in circles in here a couple of years back with Joe Farrell and Dave Chiam). It was certainly a confusing place, but the presence of a strong draft aided in its navigation.

Mainline was soon reached and we bombed downstream, negotiated the 'low wet crawl' (not a nice place to be in a flood) and had a rest and a bite to eat at the Dreamtime Sump. It had taken us 2.5 hours to get to here. Phil had a quick English moment at the sump (dreams of somehow finding or excavating his way through) and then we headed up the Dreamtime streamway to Dreamtime Stonedown. The mud in these enormous passages is wickedly slippery which, combined with Phil's reverse grip gumboots, made for an entertaining spectacle of cavers falling on their bums repeatedly.

At the rock fall we found a hand line coming down, but ignored it and negotiated our way through the rock fall. After reading some trip reports after the trip it would

appear that the only previously known route through involved using this handline, but I couldn't be sure without talking to one of the GS gurus. The big mud banks in here were treacherous even for me in my grippy gumboots, so we turned back to look for the dry fossil bypass. This was easily found and provides a nice short cut back to the junction to Ice Tube. From here we exited the cave, only getting mildly confused in Necrosis, and were back on the surface at 1700 (only 1.5 hours from Mother Passage to the entrance). Water levels had gone down a touch and we gave our gear a

jolly good wash in the stream. We need to have a chat to some of the ancient GS gurus and plan a return trip to have a better poke around. Ice Tube is now on the cards again too, after God only knows how many years since the last through trip.

It was a spectacular day on the surface so we shot up Tim Shea on the way out and gave Phil the general finger pointing tour of where all the various caves are situated on the hillside.

JF-268 Pooshooter : 29th December 2004

Gavin Brett

Party: Gavin Brett, Alan Jackson, Phil Rowsell, Rolan Eberhard.

Christmas had got in the way so there had been a long wait for the next visit to Pooshooter. Rolan had been pushing for a mindset of savoring the new discoveries, but this was getting too long. We had left the cave at half way down the SoS pitch with about 15m to go, so we knew we had something ahead, but what?

We all gathered at the entrance and geared up. Mad Phil put on his Teletubbies costume and went off with Rolan to surface survey in Tachycardia, and Sawn-off Pot whilst Alan and I went in ahead to put in a few bolts. At the bottom of the first pitch (Bug-Me, named after the excessive amount of flying insects that require turning off your light so you don't swallow too many) I realised I had forgotten the hammer, so had to go back!



Madphil (a.k.a. Tinky Winky) relaxes before a hard day underground

This didn't take long and did increase my savoring. We pressed on through the Orifice, which is a hole about 4 metres off the bottom of the second pitch and then down the third and fourth little pitches to start on SoS pitch. I went on down and put in a Y-hang about 10m from the bottom. Whilst doing this I got a message yelled from Alan that was yelled from Phil, that Rolan had soiled his long johns and had to go back to the car for his spare! This came as quite a surprise, but I managed to rig the pitch and get to the bottom. I called Alan and Phil down then started to confront the next rigging problem.

We were in a medium sized room with about a ten metre pitch in front of us. I put in a couple of bolts then noticed stuff raining down on me; Rolan had made it to the top of SoS. I hid in the alcove and we called him down, whence I found out he hadn't actually soiled himself but just left his thermals in the car. This came as a disappointment as I thought it was truly in the spirit of the cave, at least it did increase Rolan's savoring with over an hours extra walk. Alan named this room Long John Silver, and grabbed the rope and went down. The bottom was not too inspiring by the noises we heard from him, so Rolan and I had some lunch while Phil and Alan poked in the rock fall. After a while we went down and found where they had gone and could just hear Phil yelling out, "It's just like Mendips! We can cap this easy!" It turns out they had found a narrow rift that goes to a >50m pitch and a huge echo. No digging gear today so we surveyed up the pitch to regroup.

From here there is a traverse to the other end of the chamber. Alan did this using the rope from the SoS pitch and called us over excitedly. There were two clear ways on, both pitches, one into a large room, the other into a mid sized canyon. This is where competitive caving comes in. Alan and I took the canyon pitch and Phil and Rolan were on the room. The canyon was fairly easy to rig with naturals and I was down it pretty promptly just to find another pitch. I called Alan down with more gear and we dropped this as well. Here we found a hole that is just a bit too tight but leads to another drafting pitch, looks good!

Meanwhile back in the room Phil had to put in a bolt and was complaining that the rock was too hard. Anyhow, Phil eventually dropped the pitch to a boulder choked room. Rolan descended part way down and swung across to a saddle to another big boulder choked chamber with avens above and an intermittent stream way [very large dolerite boulders where strewn about this rock pile – over 1m in diameter. Ed.] After rooting around he found a way through to the bottom, leading to another large chamber, but it is terminally choked. A way down was potentially possible following the steam path, but would require excavating in unstable conditions. It was left. Alan went down as well and the three of them started to survey. I was feeling a bit

crook so I had a bit of a poke in the rock fall in Long John and found that there is a way on there as well.

Pooshooter is a bit of a coy cave, full of false leads, so far we have got 115m in depth, but there is more to go

Smorgasbord Area – tagging and surface surveying : 3rd January 2005

Alan Jackson

Party: Alan Jackson, Phil Rowsell

Gavin was still getting over his sniffles from the previous days, so Phil and I headed back up to the flavour of the month to do some important surface work and maybe drop a new hole or two.

Packs were heavy and we were suitably stuffed upon reaching the contact. We dumped our gear at C20, armed ourselves with drill, tags, and surveying equipment and toddled down to Pooshooter to start the survey. We tagged Pooshooter, (a list of tagged caves and their various names and numbers is at the end of this report), and headed west tying in Fork Pot, Sawn Off Pot, the C23 swallet and Tachycardia. We then toddled off looking for C26 and went too low, but found another cave that was tagged JF-275. We then re-found C26 and tagged it, followed by C27 (which didn't deserve a tag). From here we set a traverse to the C29 swallet and then down to the major stream, finding two new entrances on the way. We ended the survey traverse at C35, but did not survey in C30-C34, as we were bloody hungry and all our food was back at C20! On our way back we found another small hole about 10 metres NW from C26 and also tied in C36. We then of course found three more holes between here and Tachycardia which were surveyed in (one had an old blue tape near it from an era long gone, before keeping records of your discoveries was important).

Lunch was over three hours late, and much appreciated! C25 and C37 were tied into Pooshooter and then we shot across to the C6, tying in C14, 15 and 8 (Toss Pot) on the way. Phil got excited at the C6 swallet as the hole adjacent to where the water goes in was 'sucking in like a ...' (insert your own demeaning word here). We proposed the name 'Suck it and see Swallet', after a little modification of the originally suggested name. This area seems to be attracting a lot of 'out there' names – perhaps the era of ultra conservative cave naming is coming to an end...? All that was left to do was to tie in C20 and we headed for home. A very productive day, and a surprisingly tiring one too.

Tagged Caves:

268	C24	Pooshooter
269	C8	Toss Pot
270	C17	Tachycardia
271	C22	Fork Pot
272	C16	Sawn Off Pot
273	C23	unnamed swallet
274	C6	Suck it and see Swallet
275		new cave 50m SE of 276
276	C26	unnamed doline
277	C29	unnamed swallet
278		new cave down dry gully from 277
279	C14	unnamed
280	C20	unnamed doline

Mole Creek Karst National Park Management Plan 2004 – a summary

Greg Middleton

The Parks & Wildlife Service published the new Mole Creek plan (Parks and Wildlife Service 2004) in August 2004, following its approval by the Governor in February. This is probably the most significant official cave-related document to be produced in Tasmania for many years. It will govern what is probably the State's most visited karst for the next five years. The lengthy process has entailed:

- publication of a draft plan in 2001 (Parks and Wildlife Service 2001);
- review of public representations on the draft by the Resource Planning and Development Commission (RPDC) in 2002 (including a public hearing in June);
- publication of a report by the Commission to the Minister in October 2002; and
- revision of the draft by the Parks and Wildlife Service in light of the Commission's report to produce the final plan.

The Commission's report (RPDC 2002) is a detailed and thorough review of the draft plan in light of the 33 representations received and the Director's responses to them (contained in Appendix 2). Although it is not the purpose of the present paper to detail the RPDC Report, it is worth noting that it didn't pull any punches – when the Commission disagreed with the Director, it said so. On the other hand it simply dismissed objections (and there were many) which were outside the scope of the plan (eg that there was not sufficient consultation with caving interests and adjoining landowners before the park was created). The Commission recommended 24 changes to the draft.

PROVISIONS OF THE MCKNPMP

The plan contains a good deal of background and introductory material, explaining the layout of the reserves (in 11 separate land parcels), the reserves' importance ("contains a diversity of caves which are widely recognised as some of the most spectacularly decorated in Australia" ...), the threats to the reserves (direct, to speleothems; indirect, from inappropriate catchment management; hydrological, atmospheric and visitor impacts), the park's creation 16 September

1996 from existing State Reserves and Crown land, its area (NP 1,345 ha, CA 68 ha) and its relation to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (which includes the Marakoopa Cave block, which it is also subject to the WHA management plan. In the event of any inconsistency the MCKNPMP overrides, since it is more specific).

There are useful and clear maps showing location and the complex land tenure. There is a statement of the vision for the park and formal statements of the purposes and management objectives of national parks and conservation areas, some specific management objectives for these reserves (which understandably focus on karst, but also include threatened species, World Heritage values, conserving sites of geoconservation significance, providing recreation and tourism opportunities, enrich visitor experiences and improve public understanding of the park's values and goals).

Zoning is simple, it comprises visitor services zones over the show caves (Marakoopa and King Solomons) and their associated day use facilities, and the parts of Wet Cave and Croesus Cave blocks used by day and overnight visitors – and a natural zone over the rest of the land. High quality visitor facilities may be provided in the VSZ while the natural zone “will be managed primarily for conservation objectives and use by self-reliant recreationists”. Camping will be permitted at the Croesus Cave block but only basic facilities will be provided; camping will continue to be permitted at Wet Cave unless it is decided to proceed with an interpreted karst walk at Honeycomb Cave. There will be some “low grade” walking tracks but virtually no other developments will be permitted.

Section 3 deals with conservation; it contains further background information and sets out actions, objectives and policies that apply to various elements, such as topography, climate, geodiversity, hydrology, flora, fauna, World Heritage and other values, Aboriginal and historic heritage. There is a list of outstanding examples of karst features such as the breach of the Grunter surface divide, a subjacent karst uvala, subsidence dolines, blind valleys, streamsinks and resurgences. Of the 360 entrances recorded in the Mole Creek karst (at 2000) 33 are located wholly or partly within the plan area. A brief overview is given of the values of the various cave systems (admitting that generally only parts of them are reserved and hence subject to the plan). A number of actions are prescribed which relate largely to recording data and producing management prescriptions; “cooperative arrangements” with [other] land managers and freehold owners are to be promoted to protect vulnerable karst features. There is an interesting discussion of the complex hydrology and a useful map (which incidentally shows how much of the limestone/karst is not subject to the plan).

The flora section mentions the presence of the threatened old-growth forest communities *Eucalyptus viminalis* grassy and wet forests, shrubby *E. ovata* forest and *E. regnans* forest. There are also unusual *Sphagnum* peatlands in some sinkholes and a diversity of bacteria, algae and fungi underground.

The fauna section deals with surface fauna, which appears not to be exceptional, and the cave fauna which includes at least three invertebrates which are endemic to the Mole Creek karst, *Tasmanotrechus cockerilli*, *Hickmanoxymma gibbergunyar* and the extremely rare *Pseudotyrrannochthonius typhlus*. A number of actions are listed concerning fauna surveys and monitoring.

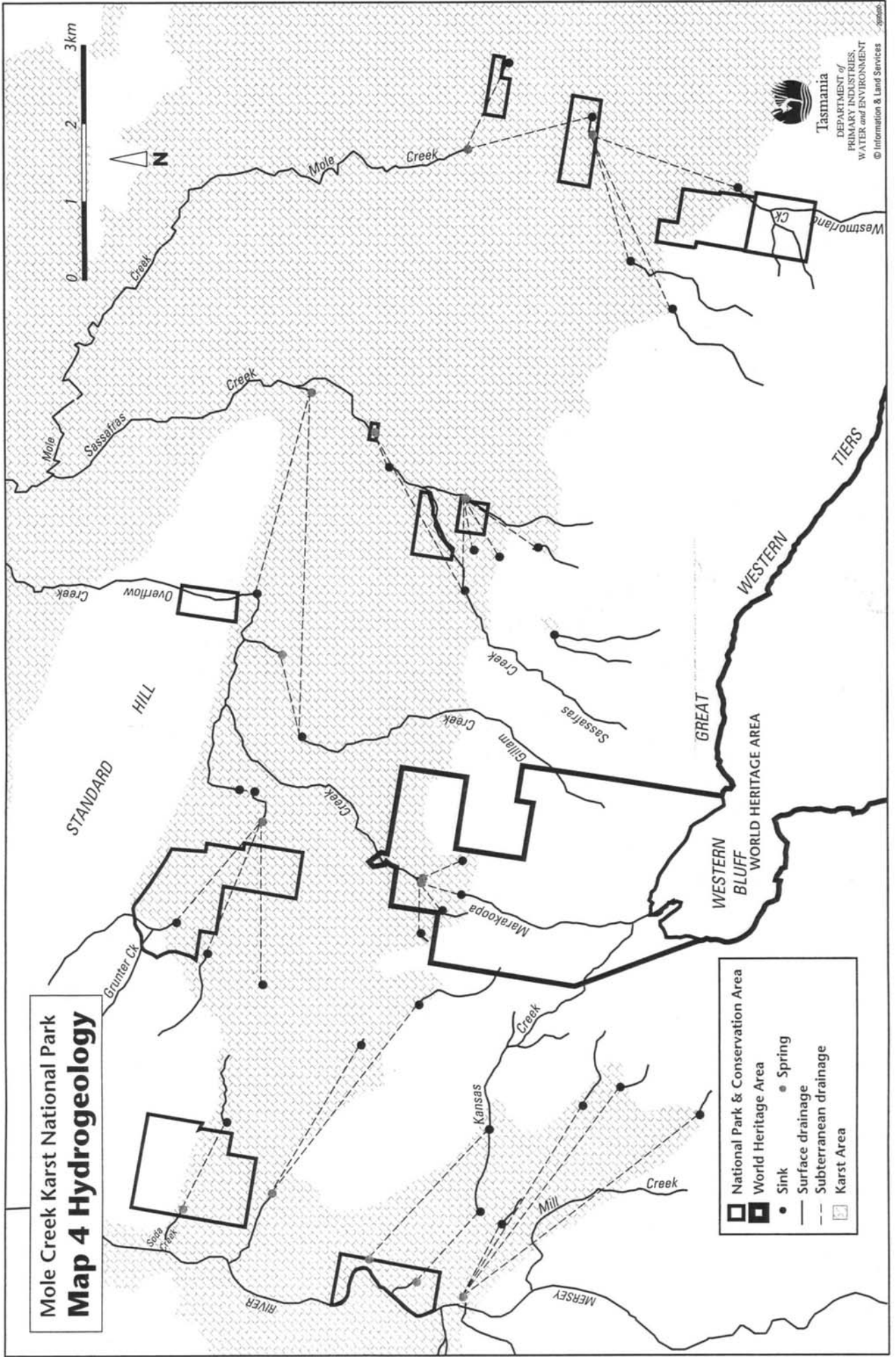
Policies are set out for dealing with sites of Aboriginal significance and protection of Aboriginal heritage and historic heritage. A conservation plan is to be prepared covering historic values within Baldocks and King Solomons caves relating to early cave tourism infrastructure. There is a requirement for an investigation of the historical significance of ivy growing at the entrance to Marakoopa Cave (!) and a requirement that it be maintained and contained.

Section 4 deals with protection. This covers fire management, pests, weeds and diseases, soil conservation and erosion control (there is specific reference to erosion around some entrances on the Wet Cave block and requirements for (a) liaison with upstream landowners/managers “to identify mechanisms for minimising soil erosion where it enters the park” and (b) monitoring of sediment deposition within caves), natural landscapes and water quality (data on water quality in karst aquifers is to be collected and signs are to be erected warning that some water may be unsuitable for drinking), catchment management (another area requiring liaison with adjoining landowners/managers).

Section 5 covers tourism and recreation. Three categories of visitor are identified: day visitors taking guided tours, day visitors who visit Wet Cave and/or Honeycomb 1 Cave and “small groups of cavers ... who visit undeveloped caves”; those who take adventure cave tours are also mentioned. In the 5 years 1994-99 there were 178 visitors to Kubla Khan Cave, 118 to Genghis Khan, 260 to Croesus and 260 to undeveloped sections of Marakoopa. One licensed commercial tour operator uses Baldocks, Cyclops, Wet, Honeycomb and Croesus caves; between 1994 and 1999 they had 553 clients. This section also deals with promotion of the park, interpretation/education, visitor services, visitor impacts, development proposals and access. Conditions are set out for consideration of new tourism and recreational opportunities, facilities or services (must be ‘environmentally sustainable, etc; input from karst specialists will be required). Among the policies listed are limestone sand from local quarrying is the preferred material for maintenance work in caves or for bag ‘stepping stones’ in Kubla Khan; materials used in cave development must be chemically and physically inert and should be easily removable; route marking materials used in undeveloped caves are to be “as visually unobtrusive as possible as the purpose of the marking permits”.

Caving is addressed under 5.7.5. The role played by cavers (especially the members of ASF-affiliated clubs) in the discovery, mapping and management of the caves is acknowledged and the role played by clubs in fostering awareness of cave safety and minimal impact caving is recognised. On the other hand it is observed that caves contain sensitive features and all visits to caves cause some level of impact. A cave classification system comprising public presentation caves, special value caves and wild & unclassified caves is adopted (based on the system developed by ASF). The problems raised by cross-tenure caves is addressed (see section 7). Some caves are ‘restricted access caves’ requiring a

Mole Creek Karst National Park
Map 4 Hydrogeology



permit to enter which will generally only be available to ASF-affiliated groups. The existing requirement for approved leaders to run trips to Kubla Khan will continue. This could be extended to other caves if monitoring indicates it would be worthwhile, but only in consultation with cavers. The requirement to obtain a key to access Baldocks Cave will continue and will also apply to Diamond Cave. A table lists gated and restricted access caves. Related policies include recovery of costs where staff are required to conduct groups, charging a fee for authority to film, photograph or undertake other commercial activities in the caves, Abseil/Blackberry Hole will continue to be the only site managed specifically for abseiling, use of carbide lamps is prohibited in caves, excavation in caves requires written authority of the Director [this is covered by the general regulations which require such authority anywhere on reserved land], camping is not permitted in caves, smoking is not permitted in caves, a system for marking tracks in caves will be formalised and moving off designated routes will require the written authority of the Director [a hard one to enforce!]. In addition to designated restricted access caves, access to caves may be restricted “if it is considered necessary to protect cave values”. PWS staff may join any party visiting a restricted access cave and maximum party size for such caves is six, including the leader; a trip report must be provided within 8 weeks. Annual trip limits will continue (Kubla 12, Croesus, Genghis and Lynds, 25; no more than one trip per group per year; limits don’t apply if undertaking “approved management works”); no authorities for Herberts Pot until a management study has been completed and access policy determined. Actions to be taken include, in consultation with clubs and other key users, the development of guidelines for entry to caves for management purposes, liaison with caving clubs “as part of any management process likely to affect access, development of information sheets detailing site-specific minimal impact caving techniques.

Section 6 deals with **management of particular blocks of land**. Major caves in each block are described and management issues for each block are outlined (eg cross-tenure caves, lack of boundary fences allowing access by stock).

A site plan is to be developed for the Sassafras Creek blocks to address surface and underground issues. An environmental monitoring program is to be initiated for Baldocks, Cyclops and Sassafras caves. Caves crossing boundaries are to be mapped “to clarify management responsibilities”. Options for securing public access to Sassafras Cave block are to be pursued. Liaison is to take place with adjoining owners regarding complimentary management of cave catchments, fencing relevant boundaries to control stock, protecting and revegetating streambanks and access issues. Appropriate trackmarking is to be installed in Baldocks, Cyclops and Sassafras caves; fauna management prescriptions are to be implemented at Baldocks Cave; a fauna sanctuary is to be considered at the MC33 entrance to Baldocks; a conservation plan for historic relics in Baldocks Cave is to be developed; trackmarking and matting in Cyclops Cave is to be assessed and removed, cleaned or replaced as necessary. There is to be liaison with the owner of Cow Cave [just outside the Cow Cave block] about cave management.

There are a number of issues relating to the Croesus Cave block, involving Croesus and Lynds Cave. The collaborative management with Forestry Tasmania under the “joint protocol” is to continue but PWS nevertheless recommends “that the Mill Creek-Kansas Creek catchment be formally protected in order to ensure protection [of] karst values”. Soft-soled footwear is to be worn in Croesus Cave to protect flowstone and rimstones. A site plan is to be developed for the Croesus block to address surface and underground management issues. The joint protocol with FT is to be implemented but concurrently PWS will liaise with FT “regarding the most appropriate tenure option for a reserve to cover the Mill Creek-Kansas Creek catchment”, the options being: a Forest Reserve managed by FT under a jointly prepared management plan, or revocation of the State Forest and extension of the national park. An environmental monitoring program is to be initiated in Croesus and Lynds caves, comprising photomonitoring to determine speleothems and cave sediment degradation and track monitoring. The gate on Lynds Cave is to be redesigned to better accommodate use by owls and bats.

In relation to the King Solomons Cave block, there is to be a site plan for the visitor services zone to address surface and underground management issues; the environmental impacts of the proposal to create another entrance to KSC are to be assessed; an environmentally-sustainable sewage treatment system is to be developed; options for managing visitor numbers are to be assessed; alternative car parking arrangements are to be assessed; programs to monitor visitor impacts are to be developed; entrances to the Diamond-Kohinoor-Maze Puzzle system in the park are to be gated and negotiations re gating are to be held with owners of other entrances.

Within the Kubla Khan Cave block there are a number of restrictions on access to, and within, Kubla. These appear to be the same as in the draft plan and apparently were not the subject of representations. As with others, there is to be a site plan for the block; boot washing stations are to be monitored, sediment collected to be removed from the cave; alternatives to the current bag ‘stepping stones’ are to be investigated; the cleaning program is to continue in conjunction with clubs and existing gates are to be maintained.

The Wet Cave block is to have a site plan, as with others. There has been some angst in relation to a proposed karst interpreted walk and the continuation of camping. The plan says if the walk does not go ahead camping will continue, subject to monitoring, but if the walk is installed, camping here will cease. The visitor services zone is “not to be allowed to evolve into another developed camping area”. However, a “suitable” toilet system is to be installed. It is asserted that Abseil Hole is an appropriate site for abseiling and the entrance to Wet Cave should not be used for this purpose. There is to be liaison with adjacent landowners on the management of Wet Cave [one can but hope ...]. Works are to be carried out to facilitate abseiling at Abseil Hole, there are to be signs, trackmarking, etc.

The conservation area north of Westmorland Falls [acquired land which will presumably be added to the park] is important because it contains at least part of Herberts Pot, but apparently not the entrance. Liaison with the neighbour owning the entrance is the key to effective management here; a detailed management study of this cave is to be undertaken and site-specific planning to address cross-tenure issues, access issues and management generally.

Involving the Community is addressed in section 7. Given the local ill-feeling towards the park, this is a most important section. Policies include consulting neighbours and other groups when their interests may be affected, developing partnerships with local and other communities, encouraging volunteers, recognising that effective management of cross-tenure caves and cave catchments will only be achieved through collaboration and not accepting responsibility for policing trespass on [or under] private land. A Cave Management Advisory Committee is to be formed “as a forum for communication between stakeholders and PWS on cave and karst management at Mole Creek.”

Under **Boundaries**, in section 8 (Other issues), actions include addition of the conservation area to the park, assessment of purchased karst properties and adjacent Crown lands for possible inclusion in the park and liaising with neighbours re rationalisation of boundaries at Cow Cave (perhaps swap land for the cave entrance). In relation to **leases**, Honeycomb 1, Baldocks and Cyclops caves are identified as “suitable for commercial cave tours where the clients are inexperienced cavers”; the cave classification process is seen as the appropriate context for deciding which caves are suitable for commercial cave tours. Caves used for commercial tours will be monitored and changes will be made if unacceptable impacts are detected. Limited continuation of grazing may be permitted but will be monitored. An extensive program of **monitoring** is envisaged, involving Marakooa and King Solomons (show) caves, all restricted access, gated and “other significant undeveloped” caves; cave fauna to be monitored at Marakooa and Baldocks caves, visitor numbers at Wet Cave, Honeycomb 1, Cyclops, Sassafras and Soda Creek caves, Devils Pot, Devils Anastomosis, Devils Drainpipe, Snailspace, Baldocks and Diamond caves and restricted access caves.

The plan is rounded off with a glossary and appendices covering reservation history, list of significant surface karst features, caves wholly or partly in the reserves, flora and fauna, the protocol for the Mill Creek-Kansas Creek catchment and the ASF code of ethics & conservation and minimal impact caving code

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- PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE TASMANIA 2001 *Draft Mole Creek Karst National Park and Conservation Area Management Plan 2001*. Dept. of Primary Industries, Water and Environment: Hobart vi + 112 pp.
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- RESOURCE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION 2002 *Report on the Mole Creek Karst National Park and Conservation Area Draft Management Plan 2001*. The Commission: Hobart iv + 60 pp.

The Chronicles of Adamson – Part 2, Spring 2004

Matt Cracknell

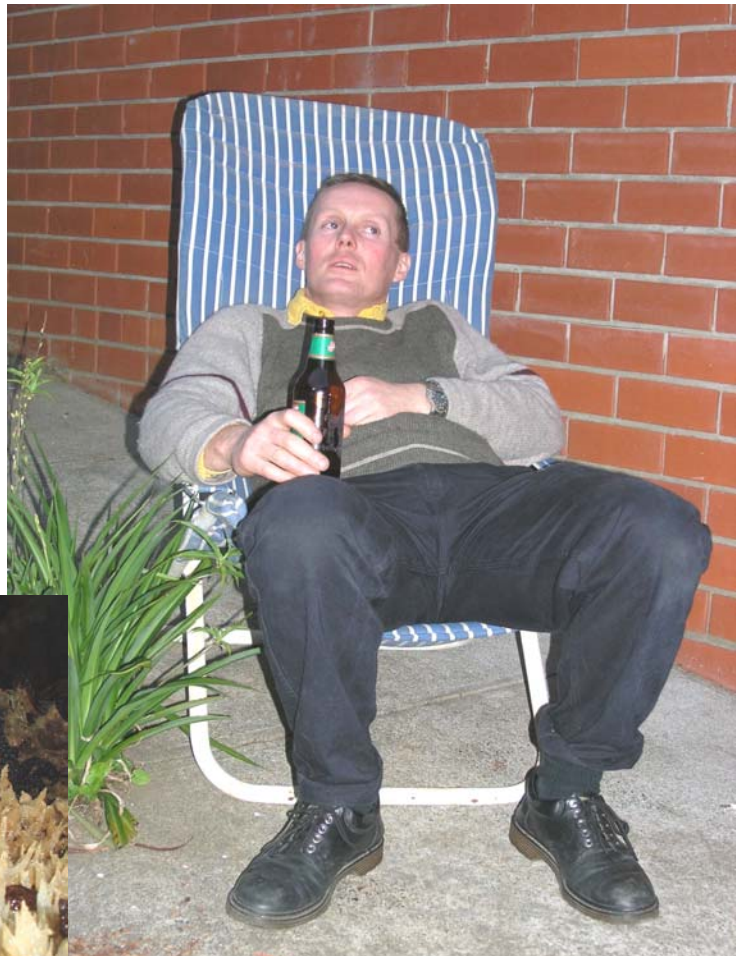
Spring had sprung so over the September school holidays Hastings decided to close the pool for about 4 weeks while being refurbished. A brand new fiberglass lining complete with a good sol' sand blast, we were still cleaning out the pink sand from the pump system for several months after. To contain the angry swimmers, 'National Threatened Species Week' conveniently diverted their attention to some of the unique species found in the local caves. Roger Griffith organized some interpretation displays for Newdegate Cave waiting area. It was such a big hit that it has stayed in place. During September it was noted that the sump/chute in King George V cave was backing up with water.

October saw new guides being trained for adventure caving, Alice Liddell and Claudia Pulko, it also saw the current adventure guides get some training. Jason Gardener and Matt Cracknell along with the Paul's from Mole Ck, successfully completed their Certificate 3 in Caving Specific Rope Techniques over the weekend of the 16th and 17th. The first day was spent on some rocks at Waterworks reserve in Sth Hobart, one-on-one rescues, basic SRT techniques and rescue hauling systems were all demonstrated. The second day culminated with a caving trip to Owl Pot in the JF karst. The team included the 4 students and the assessor Damian Bidgood. We took turns at rigging the four pitches while Damian watched on. Three of us dropped the last waterfall pitch had lunch and then commenced the long haul out, a few hours later we emerged exhausted from the big weekend but with big grins because we had passed. Benders quarry had some volunteers scour the re vegetation areas for the removal of plastic tree guards. The areas that had been broad cast with native seed are doing better than the areas that were planted with seedlings, in most of these areas there has been less than a 20% strike rate. Pampas grass has been seen in the quarry area, this has been reported to the authorities.

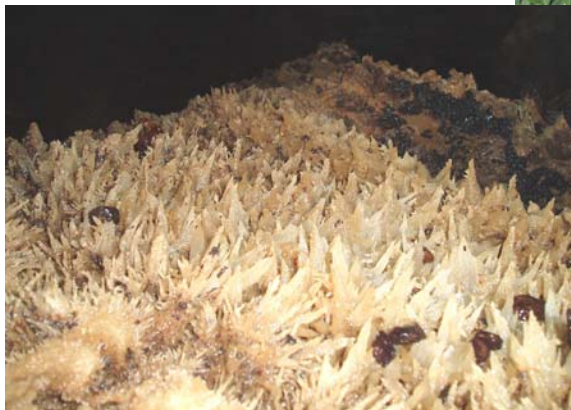


Creekton Falls [Come one Matt, keep it cave related! Ed.] Photo by Matt Cracknell

Early in November, Parks officers removed the last of the bits of the treated pine bridge from the Mystery Creek track, that saves me from carrying it out piece by piece [*what about the pieces on the quarry side of the creek? Ed.*]. A couple of times that month I went for a look around the Creekton Rivulet area, a well defined track runs beyond Duck Hole Lake to the rivulet and then up stream to Creekton Falls. The last 500m is a slippery climb up the rivulet over many cascades, the rocks are peppered with fossils and Bryophite colonies, some had the appearance of coral! I hacked my way west along the base of the escarpment; there was a large section of recent landslip and several different colours of tape hanging in the trees. I guess these are in the vicinity of the connecting trail to Adamsons Falls walking track? I diverted back to the rivulet and made my way downstream, hopped over large boulders and tree falls, marked an intersecting tributary that on the map is the flow from Adamsons Falls. I continued downstream, it took me 3 hours to negotiate the twisted and choked waterway back to duck hole car park. In the next walk out that way, about a week later, I went back to the tributary that I had marked. I wanted to see if I could make it to Adamsons Falls. After an hour climbing and crawling through *Anodopetalum biglandulosum* [*that's horizontal scrub to those less educated folk. Ed.*], I reassessed my situation and turned around to make my way to the rivulet and back down the track to Duck Hole Lake. On the way out I bumped into two of the members of the Savage River Caving Club (sorry I have forgotten your names) who were having a look around the area before coming to the Dover Conference.



British caving at its peak – Madphil is back and firing on all 375mL [*I was going to insert a thought bubble, but decided that to suggest he was capable of thinking was taking it too far. Ed.*] Photo by Gavin Brett



Some strange calcite stuff in Tachycardia Photo by Matt Cracknell

