

# SPELEO SPIEL 348

**May - June 2005**





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**Front Cover:** Stuart Nicholas in the good old days of tight t-shirts and beards - 1986 (photo by Stephen Bunton)

**Back Cover:** Tony Morris in the entrance to Trog Dip, Buchan (photo by Amy Ware)

**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.



# Speleo Spiel

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## Editorial

In a little over twelve months of editing the *Spiel* I have now produced two issues that are largely dedicated to the memory of an exceptional member of the club (either in its current or former configuration). Hopefully this trend doesn't continue – not only are we losing good members of the caving community, but it also makes more material for me to edit...

I only met Stuart Nicholas on two occasions; once when he was flogging off all his old caving gear, and another when he came out of the shadows to give Damian and I some help on ideas for the 2004 Cavex mock rescue. My only other contact with him was via the STC list server, where I always enjoyed his quippy remarks in regard to various email dilemmas that unfurled over the ether (I believe Matt Cracknell always remembered him for this too...)

It's a shame he wasn't more active in STC since its formation; I do my best, but there's never enough sarcasm to balance out the serious people in the club.

The other main focus of this issue appears to be Dwarrowdelf. P-hanging is now complete there, with only the rigging guide to be completed. I wish I could say the same for Milk Run, but there are a few outstanding issues there (it couldn't have happened to a better bloke!)

That's enough rubbish from me – crack out the Tim Tams and start reading. Actually, since Arnotts turned down my sponsorship request, I'd better say 'crack out the home made rock cakes and start reading...'

Alan Jackson

## Forward Program

- General Meeting (Republic Bar)..... 3<sup>rd</sup> August
- Social Meeting (Video Night)..... 17<sup>th</sup> August  
-Venue to be announced
- General Meeting (Republic Bar)..... 7<sup>th</sup> September
- Social Meeting (Republic Bar)..... 21<sup>st</sup> September
- Christmas BBQ ..... 14<sup>th</sup> December  
- at Gavin and Claire's in Clutha Place



TASMANIA  
HOBART LAUNCESTON BURNIE

## Stuff 'n Stuff



IT IS GOOD TO SEE THAT THE MERCURY has finally acknowledged my editorship as the most significant event in the history of the *Speleo Spiel*. Unfortunately the multiple pages of detailed praise that this article contained could not be included in this issue due to copyright problems and space limitations. However, for those interested, the Editor is more than happy to

elaborate on his achievements over the last 16 months at the helm.

THE MIDWINTER EXTRAVAGANZA went off without a hitch in June. Thanks again to Arthur and Robyn for making Francistown available to the STC rabble. You'll all be relieved to know that your social secretary's voice came back to him. He promises to never put you through the torment of his silent treatment again... I have a feeling we'll all be back at Francistown again in the not too distant future for another shin dig. If any one has any ideas for a fun social activity then let Alan know.

THE KD TRACK has had some maintenance performed on it, with many of the larger wooden obstacles removed. We'll be holding wheelchair races there within the next couple of months...

CAN ANYONE HELP? Below is a full copy of an email recently received by the Editor from a fellow club member – if anyone can work out what they were trying to say to me then I'd be delighted to discuss it. I do believe this is the first use of a comma that I have witnessed from this club member: "*sounds good after this course i am keen to do some, it was not me with the sarge the other day i am at the academy school time*" I am led to believe that this person is an educated and upstanding member of our community – could have fooled me!



'Crazy Uncle Dave' keeps Dexter entertained at the Midwinter Extravaganza with his impersonation of an as yet unknown cave beastie? Photo by Steve Phipps



## Nettlebed (New Zealand) : 12 - 13 March 2005

Janine McKinnon

**Party:** Ric Tunney, Janine Mc Kinnon (STC) Steve Pawson, Simon Causer, Brian ? (CCC)

Our illustrious Editor told me this had to be brief, so here goes... *[I don't remember requesting this, but it was no doubt a good idea... Ed.]*

Nettlebed is in Mt Arthur on the northern end of South Island. It is an extensive system 24 km in length and a reasonable portion of the cave can be seen by doing a through trip going in Blizzard Pot at 1140 m a.s.l. on the Mt Arthur Range and coming out the Pearce Resurgence at 250 m a.s.l. in the valley below. It has been done as a day trip but more usually as an overnigher, which we opted for.



Gearing up at the entrance Photo by Ric Tunney

The walk to the entrance took about two hours (after a 45 min drive from our finishing spot) and the first person started down the entrance pitch at midday. There are about 9 pitches, all pretty much straight under each other, and the longest is 35 m. The dimensions of the pot are not particularly grand so it is quite a surprise at the bottom of the last pitch to enter the top of a massive chamber with an enormous rock pile on the floor disappearing off into the dark at a steep angle below us. This is "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road". We regretted not having a "Cave Blaster" light with us to really see the size of the place properly. The way on at the bottom was a narrow, steep rock pile - quite a contrast.

Next came the infamous "Funk Hole", a tight, vertical hole over a drop. There is a line with a loop for the feet, but it's hard to use when you can't see to put a foot in the loop. We had heard many tales about cavers having to strip to undies to get through here and some taking hours at it (remember it's a pull-through trip, no going back up!) so we'd been anticipating it with some concern. It was a non-event for people our size and luckily no-one on the trip was large. However a guy wouldn't want to be very "portly" or I could well imagine a rescue being needed.



Some pretty crystal pools Photo by Ric Tunney

The Funk Hole drops into the top of another even more massive chamber with a bigger rock pile called the "Knee Trembler" (not for nothing). It is about 200 m vertical height down to the bottom of this thing on loose small rocks and scree. We stopped half way down for an hour's side trip out along "Diamond Alley" – a side passage with beautiful crystal pools and formations leading off to other areas of the system.

A few meanderings later and we were at "Salvation Hall", our camp for the night. We had been underground 8.5 hours so far. The camp is well set up and the sleeping bags that have been there since about 1984 were surprisingly usable; nowhere near as putrid as I'd been dreading. We had a comfortable night and headed off at 7.30 the next morning.

The route out starts with a prussik from the camp site and has a couple of fixed rope abseils and a couple of ladder pitches and hand lines with nothing scary or difficult to be negotiated. The "Hinkle Horn Honking Holes" are a blast (literally!) as they are a series of squeezes that vent the entire system and are aptly named as the noise the wind makes roaring through them can be heard for some distance. The holes are just the right size to be plugged by a caver's body; it's quite breezy.

We exited the cave at midday and after lunch at the resurgence (20 minutes walk from the entrance) we started the 1.5-2 hour walk down the valley to the road head. Then it was only a 1.5 hour car shuffle before we could head off.

It was an excellent trip and surprisingly easy caving for such a long cave.

We did other caves on our holiday; Te Tahi, Babylon, Pentagon, Double Helix, Riwaka, Harwoods Hole (well half times 2, does that make a whole?) and Hollywood but they would take too long to report.

## JF-14 Dwarrowdelf : 8 May 2005

Alan Jackson

**Party:** Alan Jackson, Matt Cracknell

The weekend originally showed signs of starring many excited cavers, but the number quickly dwindled to two. I decided that it would be good to get Dwarrowdelf rigged for the impending p-hanger installation (this way you don't have to carry rope/rigging gear **and** the drill/batteries, and you get a look at how the existing rigging hangs and plan p-hanger placement). We only intended rigging to the top of the last pitch (no point doing a 67 m pitch unless you have to), so the day was lining up to be relatively stress free and lazy. This was a good opportunity for Matt to take the pointy end and fine tune his rigging skills, and for me to have a 'no brainer', tagging along behind with a couple of bags of rope.

Remembering which turn off was for Dwarrowdelf provided some light entertainment, but thankfully the junction tapes had 'Dwarrowdelf' written on them! The short track was very poorly marked, but is now tarted up a little.

The need for p-hangers in this cave was highlighted at the third (55 m) pitch. Bolt rash was prolific, and those that were useable were frightfully old and generally not properly installed. Progress to the last pitch was smooth, but a little wet on the second last pitch (I love my plastic suit). I also recovered my glove from the bottom of the third pitch which I had deposited there about three years ago with Madphil and the Wiseman.

Exiting the cave was a dream with an empty tackle sack and we were out and back in Maydena by 4:30 pm! Luxury

## JF-8 Growling Swallet – Avons Aven Revamp : 9 May 2005

Janine McKinnon

**Party:** Ric Tunney, Janine McKinnon.

On a trip from Ice Tube through Growling Swallet earlier this year we became reacquainted with the ladders in Avons Aven for the first time in many years; and were reminded why we'd always remembered them with dislike. So we thought it was about time something was done to improve the situation.

This trip was planned primarily to work out precisely what we were going to do to improve things, but we took along a 50 m 10 mm rope as we knew an abseil rope for coming down the drop was definitely the go.

We entered Slaughterhouse Pot at 10.30 am (I think it's a quicker way to access the back of Growling) and made our way uneventfully to the GS junction in an hour. After a bite of lunch (BEFORE we hit the mud; we're not stupid!) we moved on through Herpes to the ladders and up to the top. We looked closely as we climbed and agreed that the second ladder is the main problem. It runs diagonally for the last three metres to tie onto the top of the bottom ladder; making it very awkward to climb. When climbing down (unbelayed) this greatly increases the chance of a fall.

Ric rigged the abseil rope and we decided that we'd wander a bit further into the cave to remind ourselves of the route on. After a couple of short route-finding moments we arrived at "Mainline" and decided that was far enough as we still had work to do back at the ladders and didn't want to make an epic of the day. Back at the ladders I abseiled down (SO much better than climbing those damned ladders) and started cutting the abseil rope to length. This proved VERY slow as my (admittedly not sharp enough) knife struggled

increasingly with the job. After about 10 minutes of cutting it was done but we still needed to cut another length off the remaining portion of rope to reorganize the bottom of the second ladder. This my poor defeated knife was not going to do so we coiled up the spare rope and, not wanting it to wash away in the next flood, tied it to the bottom ladder for the next trip.

*Tip: not a good idea to carry a knife as your emergency cutting thing for many years without actually checking that it's sharp. (Can I guess that our editor will put a pithy comment in here?) [OK, I'll have a go: If only your knife was as sharp as your wit... Ed.]*

We then headed out via the GS streamway and arrived around an hour later at the entrance at 3.30 pm. The water level was up (about twice summer flow) and therefore quite noisy and drenching and the temperature of the water has dropped significantly. So we now have winter conditions in the streamway.

We still have to return to put a protector around the abseil rope at the belay point, redo the bottom of the second ladder and put a sign at the top and bottom of the abseil rope (it's a dynamic rope and is NOT safe to prussik on and is ONLY to be used for CAREFUL abseiling).

Each ladder is rigged off a single spit which we think are originals from the placement of the original ladders in the mid 80s. These spits still seem secure but discussion can be had by those club members interested as to whether they need replacing (or not) as a separate and later job. Each ladder is tied to the top of the next ladder, so even if a spit were to fail, it wouldn't be totally disastrous.

## JF-276, JF-278 – Smorgasbord Exploration : 15 May 2005

Alan Jackson

**Party:** Matt Cracknell, Joe Farrell, Alan Jackson, Hayley Shields

We headed back to the Smorgasbord area for a sedate day poking around some newish holes. It was a stunning day for traipsing around the forest.

We stopped at JF-276 first. It has a nice entrance doline with the obligatory large tree fallen over it and a narrow slot dropping away in the back wall. Immediately around the entrance was pretty loose, so rigging was an elongated y-belay off two trees many meters from the entrance. I descended first down the steeply ramped rift until it dropped off vertically about four metres down. A rock wedged in the rift here provided a rebelay and a further eight or so metres had me on the floor. One by one the rest of the party turned up while I had a better look around for any continuation.

Essentially the cave was a long rift running back into the hill, with the back end reachable via numerous small loose climbs. The lowest point was tight and loose, but issuing a light draught. I don't think anyone will return here.

The cave probably wasn't really deserving of a name, but enthusiasm was high that day and Hayley had managed to get her hair stuck in her descender on the way in leaving large clumps of hair on the rope for Matt to abseil past, so it was proudly called 'Hairball Hole'. A bearing was taken for the memory sketch and we moved further round the hill.

I had a glance in the JF-277 swallet and noticed a bit more to it than on previous visits, but still couldn't muster the enthusiasm to climb in. We continued to JF-278, the shaft Madphil had found on our tagging and surface surveying day back in January (see SS 345:22). I can't remember if we'd noticed the parallel shaft at this entrance when we first located it. Matt dropped the first shaft to a fill floor at about minus eight metres. He pronounced it a 'no goer', but there was a tiny connection to the parallel shaft. Joe dropped the second shaft and enjoyed descending this lovely dry round tube to the floor about 15 m down. Joe reported that there was scope for a continuation, so I joined him. The other two joined us with more rope while Joe and I

applied our physics knowledge to our next obstacle. After a short climb up and then down again from the base of the entrance pitch, a subsequent chamber with a pitch is reached. This pitch was blocked by several large, but loose rocks. Joe and I debated for several minutes on whether the offending rock would fit through the hole, or whether it needed to be dragged back up out of the way. Joe was right, and the rock turned, dropped and crashed mercilessly down the next pitch. Thankfully all the other loose rocks in the area didn't follow.

A bit more gardening and I headed down, found some reasonable natural rigging and descended the first ten or so metres to where the pitch opened out into a medium chamber with enormous teetering boulders strewn about the place. The pitch continued below me, but all the rocks made me nervous. You know it's a bad place when you can move 500 kg boulders with one finger. I gave my finger a work out, repositioning several tonnes of rock, then continued down a further eight or so metres to the floor. From here a short horizontal passage headed to another medium chamber, the floor of which was almost totally covered with skeletons. With my limited knowledge I identified a wombat and several ringtail possums, but I shall have to return with a camera and my skull book to get a broader picture of the species here.

At the other side of this chamber a couple of short climbs followed a small trickle of water downwards, but it soon reduced to tight, and then impassable passage. It was late in the day, so I shot back out and we derigged. This cave is big enough by my standards to warrant a proper survey, so we'll head back to complete this at some stage and have a better look for leads. This cave is quite close to the choked major stream sink nearby, so a back door entrance to another KD would have been nice!

I decided that this cave's name should somehow reflect on the abundance of dead animals in its lower chamber. I thought that something along the lines of 'mass grave' would be good, and it all fell in to place when Gavin handed me a 'French English Speleo Dictionary' a few weeks later, and one of the words was *charnier*, or 'mass grave'. Henceforth the cave shall be called Charnier.

## JF-14 Dwarrowdelf – P-Hanger Trip 1 : 4 June 2005

Alan Jackson

**Party:** Damian Bidgood, Gavin Brett, Alan Jackson, Janine McKinnon, Amy Ware

The first p-hanging trip for JF-14. Damian and Gavin surged to the bottom pitch to start drilling while the rest of us dribbled down behind. The rock seemed

somewhat marble-like and proved very hard to drill. Holes were slow to drill and batteries rapidly discharged.

The bottom pitches were particularly wet and unpleasant, so the two plastic suit clad people got the

job of drilling and gluing there. Two p-hangers were installed in a similar position to the previous spits on the bottom pitch. The two spits installed for a safety/approach line to this pitch head will remain and were not replaced with a p-hanger, as the need for these bolts is not enormous. The rebelay spit on the second last pitch was replaced with a p-hanger located about 3 m below and 1.5 m out from the original spit. This will hopefully keep people a little drier on future wet trips. A p-hanger was also installed to replace the first rebelay off the natural boulder wedged over head (on the right wall looking down the pitch). Another hanger will be installed on the next trip at the head of this pitch to complement the natural rigging off the floor of the pitch head to remove the rope rub over the lip to the first rebelay.

We installed two p-hangers on the short fourth pitch. One adjacent to the existing rebelay spit and another higher up towards the previous pitch base to allow a rub free approach to the rebelay. The large natural rock on the floor can still be used to back this pitch up, but isn't compulsory.

At this stage, after installing six hangers, we were almost out of drill power. We managed to drill the first inch of a hole at the head of the 55 m third pitch.

Exiting the cave at around 4 pm was a delight. We now need to return to finish the job (if there's enough p-hangers left in the store...)

### JF-14 Dwarrowdelf – P-Hanger Trip 2 : 13 June 2005

Alan Jackson

**Party:** Damian Bidgood, Alan Jackson, Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney

Australia (except WA) was celebrating the Queen's birthday (at least she's good for something...), so we seized the day to get back into JF-14. On the previous trip we'd managed to drill 6 holes, and we'd theorised that we would need at least 8 more hangers to finish the cave. We chucked in some extra batteries to make sure the drill went the distance.

Strategies for the day were discussed at length on the way up. In the end Damian and I shot down the cave while Ric and Janine followed more sedately. Damian drilled the additional hole required at the top of the fifth pitch while I tested the two hangers on the fourth. Damian then went back up to drill his way out with Ric to the surface, starting with the first rebelay on the third pitch (55 m). I then headed down to test the four hangers installed further down the cave, while Janine came to the top of the fifth pitch to make sure I didn't get in a pickle with no one to save me. The bottom three hangers were particularly wet and the plastic suit once again did its duty. All installed hangers passed the 5 minute 5 kN test. Phew!

Janine glued the new hanger on the fifth pitch and I then took off to glue out of the cave (trying to save

nozzles). During the early days of p-hanging the nozzles cost about \$7 a throw, so minimising wastage was imperative. Nozzles are now sourced for about \$2.50 each, but old habits die hard and we still frantically rush about to save nozzles. Janine followed me out, re-rigging the fourth pitch onto the p-hangers as she passed.

Battery, glue and nozzle supplies held out and the cave is now finished, with only testing to be completed. Two hangers were installed to create a Y-hang at the head of the 55 m third pitch. A back-up/approach line hanger was also installed near the old carrot bolt at the base of the second pitch. The second pitch had two hangers installed as a Y-hang out near the existing spit and a back-up hanger to compliment the natural back up nearby. The entrance pitch rebelay is to remain on the natural rock spike, and the pitch head has had two hangers installed on the 'back wall', to be approached on a rope tied back to the large Sassafras near the entrance.

In all the cave has had sixteen hangers installed. An official rigging guide will be produced following testing and re-rigging. We are now almost ready for our KD-DD pull through exchange extravaganza!

### IB-10 Mystery Creek Cave – Buggin' Around : 18 June 2005

Matt Cracknell

**Party:** Arthur Clarke, Matt Cracknell, Heather Nichols

Gollums Grovel was thought to be too wet so a bug finding mission to Mystery Creek Cave was decided upon. After lengthy preparations (coffee, newspapers and nicotine fixes) we made it to the cave at about 1230 pm.

Matt wanted to show the others a small decorated chamber off to the right of the main entrance passage.

The only obstacle was a very tight squeeze that ended up being too tight for most of the group (this squeeze has probably saved the fine decoration from oblivion). We slowly made our way down the main stream passage looking under rocks and inspecting pools of water for invertebrates. Snails, shrimp, harvestmen and the usual collections of crickets were noted. In Cephalopod Creek we bumped into Dexter etc... Arthur, armed with his camera had fun blinding us with his flash.



Next stop was in the upper levels near The Laundry Chute. There is a small pool of water near an active stalagmite that is crawling with life. A few hours were spent looking at ants, weevils (Arthur sampling a large proportion of the population) and various other critters. Arthur hypothesised that this explosion of activity was a result of the recent flooding, many of these bugs could have been washed in with the debris and are now striving to survive deep in the cave.

On the way out we marvelled at the debris piled below The Laundry Chute. The constrictions in the rock pile in this area resulted in reduced water velocity of the stream and subsequent deposition of material. Most of this organic material is now feeding colonies of moulds and releasing some funky smells, similar to those odours encountered at Herpes III in the Growling system.

All in all a pretty relaxed and informative caving trip; we spent about 5 or 6 hours underground. By the time we got back to Francistown it was late. Late enough for

some people to be getting worried about us - maybe it was the fact that they couldn't wait for entree.



Arthur Clarke bombarding cave beasts with photons in IB-10 Photo by Matt Cracknell

## IB-38 Milk Run : 18 June 2005

Alan Jackson & Amy Ware

**Party:** Claire Brett, Gavin Brett, Dave Chiam, Alan Jackson, Janine McKinnon, Net (Bob) Swinnerton, Ric Tunney, Amy Ware, Geoff Wise

### ***Bottoming party – Alan Jackson***

The original aim of this trip was to have fun and test the bottom for p-hangers installed in the cave almost a year ago! Unfortunately Ric misplaced part of the tester, so we were forced to just have fun.

Ric, Janine, Dave and Alan bottomed the cave and had a brief look around at the pretty avens at the bottom. All the others just came down the first pitch and socialised.

The p-hangers make this cave a breeze to rig (down in about an hour!)

Although we failed to complete the testing, the trip was bonza fun with lots of socialising and pleasantries exchanged.

Jolly good show, old chaps.

### ***Entrance pitch party – Amy Ware***

We had graciously let those with greatest enthusiasm leave first for a trip into Milk Run, so Gavin, Claire, Net and I took our time getting to the Mystery Creek carpark via a logistics stop at Francistown. Heading up the hill, we identified a clump of Pampas Grass about halfway up the quarry track, and will report this week for removal before it gets a hold here. [*This Pampas Grass was noted some time last year – see 'The Chronicles of Adamson, Part 2, Spring 2004' on page 26 of SS345. The article suggests that it was 'reported to the authorities', so one can only assume that it is*

*being slowly digested by 'The System', and it will be removed sometime before 2010. Ed.]* Also of note was Forty Minute Creek, which was totally dry on its surface where Skinners Track crosses it, Gavin thought this was unusual and its cause may even inspire some investigation in the future.



Claire Brett prepares to descend in to Milk Run, with Gavin Brett 'supervising' Photo by Amy Ware

We were pleased with the weather, and arrived at the Milk Run entrance to find that Geoff was also enjoying

the pleasant temperature outside. Having lost his enthusiasm on the walk in, he had gone halfway down the first pitch and then back up again - barely even into the dark zone! Us walkers had been too noisy in our approach to catch him snoring, and friendly banter over lunch soon turned to gear-sorting as we heard a voice from in the cave, indicating the others were on their way back up the deeper pitches.

This was my first Petzl Stop pitch underground, and I was pleased, although the squeezing was tiring on my hand muscles. Ric, Janine, Dave and Alan appeared from below as we four latecomers touched down at the base of pitch 1. In a social atmosphere the ascending began, and was uneventful until I knocked a rock down towards Gavin and Claire remaining below. Alan

yelled down from above, "where did you find that from in that totally smooth-walled pitch?" I don't know either, but I think part of the very bottom of the solid-looking decoration must have let go when I nudged it with my foot while prussiking against the wall [*Not only a danger to others, but a cave vandal to boot! Ed.*]. Not a pleasant experience!

Back on the surface the parade of cavers set off for the cars and Arthur's place. The Mystery Creek party was not yet back and made a late arrival, just in time to catch the first course of dinner. Despite the absence of Robyn that evening, we enjoyed a feast, Dr Who, quiz and a bonfire.

## JF-14 Dwarrowdelf – P-Hanger Trip 3 : 25 June 2005

Alan Jackson

**Party:** Alan Jackson, Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney

Mustering up support for this trip proved to be a little difficult, but Ric and Janine came to the rescue and postponed their bushwalking plans to help me out (I think STC would be as good as dead without these two stalwarts). I had received numerous messages from people that my plan to put a safety line on the rock pile at the bottom was not necessary, (Madphil, Wisey and I had used one on a trip there about four years ago, but my memory was sketchy), so rigging to the bottom of the last pitch and testing the other hangers were now the only jobs.

We'd remembered all the pieces of the tester this time, so we all descended to the top of the fifth pitch and I continued down re rigging onto the p-hangers tested on the last trip while Ric and Janine started testing. To say the fifth pitch was wet would be an understatement; to say it was warm would have been a crime punishable by death. I spent an eternity rigging the last pitch, as I couldn't remember what the hang was meant to be like, so I had a few goes at it and then headed down to make sure the rope reached the bottom (I was originally happy that I had enough rope, but Ric and Janine mentioned that they thought it was longer than the 65 m that I thought it was). I hadn't been able to find a rope long enough in the gear store, so I had to join a 17 m bit

of old 11 mm Bluewater with a 63 m 10.5 mm. The resulting difference in rope diameter and flexibility made the joining of these two ropes quite difficult. Using the Gavin Brett rope joining method certainly makes untying the knot afterwards very easy, but it refused to sit properly with these two particular ropes. As a result I spent about 10 minutes spinning around in a freezing waterfall about 55 m off the ground abusing two bits of rope. The knot finally cooperated and I bounced the pitch, satisfied that the pitch was indeed about 65 m.

By the time I returned to the drier area of the cave Ric was testing the rebelay hanger on the third pitch. All three of us then slowly made our way out re-rigging and testing as we went. It was a very sedate day with the walk to the car commencing at about 1530. All hangers passed the test and Dwarrowdelf is now officially p-hangered.

Rope lengths will not have changed significantly from what would have been deemed necessary from the old way of rigging. All hangers have a retro reflective red or white tag attached.

Now it's time to pull through KD in winter water levels and back out Dwarrowdelf.

## A Tribute to Stu – Stuart Nicholas, in Memoriam

Stephen Bunton

For those of you who didn't know him as well as those that did...

Stuart Nicholas passed away in late April aged 50. Stuart was a very keen and inspirational caver from the early seventies through into the eighties. He was instrumental in many of the deep cave discoveries in Tasmania which occurred at the time, including Khazad-dum when he was a mere schoolboy! Other notable caves which Stuart explored included Cauldron

Pot, Niagara Pot, Splash Pot, Ice Tube and Growling Swallet. He endured many long, cold, wet caving trips despite being an insulin dependent diabetic for almost the whole of his life. Many people remember the large plastic chemical jar he carried full of jelly beans and his staple lunch of fairy bread.

Stuart bridged several generations of Tasmanian cavers. He was one of the few who started caving on ladders

and made the transition to SRT, enjoying the exploration benefits it provided.

Stuart was a maintenance service engineer by default and entered the world of computing at the very ground floor. With the rise of the throw away society he found it increasingly difficult to survive as a maintenance engineer and eventually began trading shares for a living. Nevertheless there wasn't a piece of technology old or new that Stuart didn't know how to fix or how it worked. Despite lacking any formal qualifications, he was an extraordinary man in this respect. His house was like a museum, there was always something interesting either broken and lying around waiting to be fixed or just lying there because "Everything has to be somewhere!" He would have been great as the curator of a technology museum. My favourite was the cracked piston of a lawnmower engine which sat on the sideboard. When anyone fondled it he would always quip "Piston broke! A bit like me really!"

Stuart was the TCC quartermaster for ages and was invaluable for charging the club lights, fixing and making things. In the old days it was wire ladders, later PVC and nylon rope ladders for permanent installation in Growling Swallet. Then it was bolts and drivers and who knows what else? Often it was technology related to cave diving. Although Stuart could not swim he was a keen cave diver and went on some epic cave dives including the one kilometre Kubla Khan to River Alph Resurgence through trip.

"So, how far can you swim, Stu?"

"How deep's your pool?"

Stuart showed a great interest in diving physiology and was a member of South Pacific Underwater Medicine Society (SPUMS). He also worked as a technician on The Royal Hobart Hospital's Decompression Chamber, which is now used not just for the bends but for high pressure oxygen therapy for a number of conditions. He had qualified to do medicine at Uni but somehow chose engineering. He dropped out when Hobart CAE became Hobart College and he was required to move to Launceston or Melbourne. He wanted to stay in Hobart to be with his father and be close to the caving in the Florentine.

Stuart was always in and out of "The Royal" sometimes as a patient but mostly to service the endoscopes. In the world of increasing litigation no-one would service these vital pieces of apparatus for fear of being sued. Stuart had no insurance for such an eventuality but always backed himself, his skills and perfection in these matters. He didn't need insurance; there would be no stuff ups.

"Really Stuart?"

"Absolutely"

Just in case though... Stuart was the sort of person who had all bases covered. He left nothing to chance. He was always over prepared for any eventuality and every care was taken in planning any undertaking, down to the last detail. He wrote lists and then lists of lists and

enjoyed nothing more than crossing things off. If other people stuffed up he was the club's Search and Rescue Co-ordinator and during his time in this position he organised many practice exercises. This wasn't to say that he didn't avail himself of their services. He endured a few cold overnights, one in Khazad-dum and the other in Growling Swallet. He once reassured a cautious but nervous novice, who was foolish enough to ask what rescue precautions the party had taken: "Oh, I always carry a bag of cement and a hand gun." Imagine being told that on your first caving trip!

Stuart was amongst the very first few "individuals" - he called everyone individuals - in Australia to launch caving into the computer age. All the cave survey data was crunched at his place on the SMAPS program which ran on the ancient Kaypro. Stuart was one of the couple of people in the world trusted to run new SMAPS updates to give feedback to the designer and check them for bugs. Cavers would forever drop in at his home in Rupert Ave to key in their survey data and expectantly await the printout. Even if Stuart wasn't on the trip he always took a keen interest in developments and these generally met with an approving "Good stuff!"

The Tasmanian Caverneering Club met at his home for the best part of a decade, and when it was formed, the Tasmanian Cave and Karst Research Group did likewise. Cavers were forever coming around to borrow or return gear and to key in cave surveys. He was amazingly tolerant since most of them smoked and he didn't!

Stuart edited over 70 *Speleo Spiels* and co-edited at least another seven, spanning several periods from August 1982 until June 1996 as well as the *TCC Exploration Journal* and a Membership Handbook. As the *Spiel* editor he injected his unique brand of humour into the club and the wider Australian caving scene. This was the perfect outlet for his laconic wit and atrocious puns. He would have been a great newspaper sub-editor with classic headlines like "Cauldron Pot Boils Again" or "Calcite Chatter and other Clatter" and the invention of characters such as "Santa Trog". His sense of humour often corresponded so well with mine that there were times when I was with him that I felt I had never laughed so much in all my life.

Stuart was the TCC representative for the Australian Speleological Federation and was ASF Vice President for two years. He was Convenor of the 1984 Speleomania Conference and he gave me good advice for CaveMania 2005. He often spoke out against elitism and the TCC clique. Stuart always took the high moral ground and was often perplexed when others succumbed to more human foibles. "How can they do they do that? Just what makes them tick?" He genuinely tried to unite caving clubs and cavers in Tasmania and provided opportunities for this to happen. I remember the outrageous parties and fireworks celebrations on May 24th, which was Empire Day - Queen Victoria's Birthday (On one occasion I fell into

that great rusty half 44 gallon drum which held the bonfire, it was alight at the time. "Trust Bunton. That'd be right!")

Another one of the highlights was that Stuart was able to bring several generations of cavers for the TCC fiftieth anniversary celebration at Juneec in 1996.

Despite his efforts at unity, Stuart quit caving in 1996 when THE Tasmanian Caverneering Club amalgamated with the "opposition" Hobart clubs to form the Southern Tasmanian Caverneers.

"But we've lost the name!"

"Stuee it's only a name?"

"NO. The name is everything! We are THE Tasmanian Caverneering Club!" He always emphasised the THE and never referred to the others by name. In truth his active caving days were over by that stage. He never really recovered full fitness after an accident in Serendipity when a rebelay failed and he pendulumed into the wall, damaging his hip. A situation he rationalised with "Old age has struck."

Nevertheless Stuart always kept a keen eye on caving's big picture and occasionally added his two cents worth to the Ozcavers email forum. It was as if he was always looking over us. A role he no doubt will continue to fill. Really, he should have been timekeeper at the Tasmanian Caves Museum!

As well as caving he had numerous other strings to his bow, most of which he kept quiet about. He was very shy and quite modest. He could play the bagpipes and at some stage he was Tasmanian Rally Car Champion (sometime? about three years in a row? I think? I never knew for sure.) He always kept the various parts of his life separate and was always quite quiet about them. He would have been "A Perfect Spy", he was like one of the characters from one of his favourite authors John LeCarre. He was a great lover of music; he had a state of the art stereo and went to lots of concerts, but none with me, although I often did see evidence of his driving skills.

A journey around Tasmania became quite entertaining when Stuart announced "You know, I've been in that paddock!" I was once a passenger in his Nissan Bluebird standard station wagon when he showed me what he could do coming off the Tasman Bridge in that tight curve on the Glenorchy slip lane at over 100 km/h! Travelling up the Florentine at good pace was a thrill but my last trip in his car was a bit too thrilling when we ended up in the scrub after running off the first bridge. When the car came to a halt after narrowly missing a big tree, Stuart calmly stated "Oh No! Looks like I broke my car."

Stuart was my first friend in Tassy. He never really made close friends but he was a good and reliable friend to a lot of people. His economy of words and frugality with material possessions went to being downright stingy with money. He never once brought a

bottle of wine to dinner at our place. "What's wrong? You were going to drink yours sometime soon."

On the other hand he was a generous host to many overseas and interstate visitors who stayed at his place over the years. Many of them would be familiar with Max the jug, it had his name on the inside of the spout above the fill line, it said "MAX". Likewise he christened the fancy eggslice *barbie mate* "Ken" and the bottle capper he made me "Warwick" – Warwick capper.

Stuart was also very generous with his time. He would never refuse anything you ever asked him to do for you, whether it be a repair or to make something. Mostly it was the satisfaction of finding out how something worked that was sufficient. He would look at some piece of technology, suck the arm of his glasses and say to himself "That's clever! Bloody clever! Good stuff!" or alternatively "How the Hell do they make that work?"

Having fixed something, he would never throw anything out. He was frugal by nature and as a result he collected just too much junk... and as Rupert Ave hung like an albatross around his neck he finally mounted sufficient courage and made the break.

Stuart sold the family home, downsized and moved into rented accommodation. It was the best thing he ever did and for the last few years of his life he was the happiest. He displayed amazing generosity by shouting us a wonderful night out at The Lark Distillery for his 50th. Then whinged about it afterwards; "Over six hundred bucks? How can people drink that much...? and that didn't even include the food!"

Stuart was a fifth generation Australian, his ancestors having arrived in Tasmania in 1823(?) from Wales. His family survives by two cousins who live in the Midlands on what is left of that great parcel of land owned by the Nicholas clan. As Stuart advanced in age he became more interested in genealogy, an interest first kindled by the fact that genealogy packages are the largest selling type of software, after word processors and he was keen to try one out. Having no immediate family he went to great lengths to unravel his family history and to some extent determine his place in this world. He often asked;

"What I want to know is why are we all here?"

If I was ever foolish enough to answer one of these God type of questions and say that I didn't know, or that it's the same question humans have been asking for millennia, he'd just reply;

"No I guess it's just that we aren't somewhere else."

He was just too logical! Often he was too matter of fact for his own good and sometimes too morbid.

He was always aware of his impending doom with his diabetes and I once thought "If Stuee goes, who'll fix all the old cars?" These days no-one fixes old cars and it became a matter of solving computer problems, explaining mobile phones, internet banking security,

antivirus codes, Mars missions, oxygen re-breathers and GPS scramblers?

Now I'm thinking "God knows who I'll turn to now, to debug that recalcitrant computer?"

To which Stuart would have answered "Still that's his job!"

I will miss him, we all will, including some of the "sweet young things" he kept secret from us.

Stuart's ashes were put into the Khazad-dum streamway on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2005. It would have been his 51<sup>st</sup> birthday. He will complete the first through trip to June Cave.

## Life Underground – A Précis

Stuart Nicholas

*[This piece was uncovered by Stephen Bunton amongst some of Stuart's 'stuff'. Ed.]*

\* Lost mother age 11, only child, fairly solitary father and protected family / home life.

\* Noticed a book in the State library on exploration of caves at age of about mid-15.

\* Immediately was grabbed by the idea of the activity, tho had NO concept of or experience in the Tasmanian bush.

\* A book in my school library covered Australian outdoor activities including caving - It had contact address for the ASF. I wrote to the address and some months later (nothing's changed!) received a reply from Norm Poulter, the then ASF Secretary listing the two local clubs at the time, viz Southern Caving Society and Tasmanian Caverneering Club.

\* Wrote to both clubs receiving a positive reply from TCC, tho not from SCS. This was about the time of my 16th birthday, the earliest the club would allow.

\* Went to a social meeting at Brian Colin's place and was invited on a trip that weekend to Exit Cave, walking in from the Lune River Road across the swamp (Reece's Bog!) Used hand held carbide lights with which I was totally unfamiliar: had an old canvas army pack, cotton overalls, cotton "thermal" underwear, woollen jumper and not much else. TCC was taking a visiting caver from NZ into Exit. Went thru the Rockfall upstream into Eddie's Treasure, Camp 2 and so on. I soon impressed both myself and the others with my climbing ability, finding a new way over and around the rock called "Sally's Folly"! A late afternoon exit from the cave and cleaning up beside the stream had me make a bit of an error!! I noticed someone apparently cleaning their dismantled carbide lamp in the stream, so I did the same... Only my lamp still had all the spent carbide in it while the other person had previously emptied theirs into some other container and merely rinsed the largely empty container in the stream!! A big white spent carbide deposit was left in the stream bed. Naughty Stu! I wore a club helmet with no brim - someone commented on me looking like a

Japanese soldier wading through the swamp on the walk back to the cars.

Next stop after getting changed was the ranger's house at Hastings, one Roy and Pat Skinner, with whom the trip leader and in fact the club were friends. A strange bloody trail was noticed across the floor... It was blood from a leech bite complete with leech on my lower leg - another new experience for the rapidly learning Stu. Home probably by 10pm or so after a day like no other to that point in my life, but one that unknown to me at the time had laid a very strong foundation for my future recreational activities and interests.

Another trip the next weekend I did not go on - it looked a bit boring!! However two or three weeks later I was invited on an exploration trip to the Florentine Valley!! Yep my second ever caving trip was to the then recently found JF10, or Splash Pot as it was later called. A short wire ladder climb to a narrow descending rift.... We went down with piles of ladder and belay rope (laid nylon climbing rope). A couple of guys rigged the ladders and another new recruit to TCC, one Phil Robinson from the UK descended the unexplored pitch. There I was - one of TCC's recent new recruits on an exploration trip! The club had several new members and members to be at the time: myself with absolutely no experience, Phil Robinson from the UK with plenty of hard caving experience and Peter Shaw from Queensland with good fitness and very keen though again without much underground experience. Pete also drove a little red Toyota Corolla, wore a leather driving jacket, driving gloves and sunglasses - quite a Mr Trendy! An earth sciences PhD student at Uni Tas, one Noel White, combined with Albert Goede, a Geography lecturer got Phil a job in Geology as the Analyst, a position he still holds (as of 2003). Peter was an IT person, getting a job with a local firm. I was very much still at school. Unknown at the time, but TCC's new hard exploration (team) had formed itself.

**Photos on page 12:** *(All photos from Stuart Nicholas collection – except 1, 4 & 8)*

1. Stu Nicholas, Andrew Briggs, Trevor Wailes, Chris Davies, unknown and Nick Hume prepare to venture underground *Photo by Mike Martin*
2. Stu's rally machine – Mitsubishi Lancer GX
3. Stuart astride a Great White pointer shark behind the DooTown wharf, on the Tasman Peninsular, after a dive trip on the wreck of the *Nord*
4. Stu in 2004 *Photo by Gordon de Lacy*
5. Stu track clearing near Growling Swallet 1983

6. Stu climbing at Rocky Tom

7. Stu in SCUBA gear

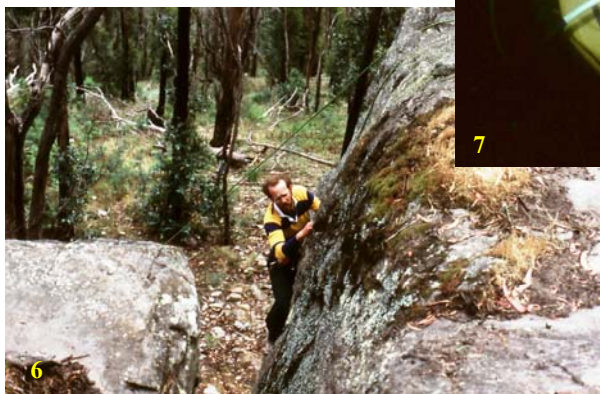
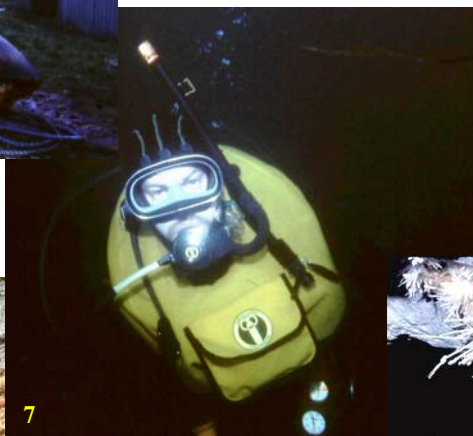
8. Stu in Genghis Khan *Photo by Mike Martin*

9. Stu crunching data into the computer at New River Lagoon campsite on the 1990 Precipitous Bluff Expedition

10. Stuart climbing ice on a Geoff Wyatt Alpine Skills Course in the Mt Aspiring region of New Zealand circa 1985

11. Stuart reclining (right) in caving gear April 1980







## Arthur Clarke on Stuart Nicholas

Arthur Clarke

[Correspondence from Arthur Clarke to Stephen Bunton regarding some caving history on Stuart Nicholas. Ed.]

While doing some recent research on the dates when Gollums Grovel and Rotten Log Hole at Ida Bay were discovered, I noticed that in *Speleo Spiel* #207 (July 1985), there is an obituary article by Albert Goede about Stuey's father Ted Nicholas passing away on January 20th 1985. In his dedication to Ted, Albert talked about Stuey's father doing much of the early maintenance on the TCC caving lights after Stuey became Quartermaster, as well as repairing TCC members' cars. It seems like this passion of Ted's was passed from father to son.

I remember when I started doing some early historical research on the history of Newdegate Cave at Hastings, Stu would relate how when he was just a young kid and even earlier long before Stuart was born, his father Ted used to be on call out to maintain the old diesel electric generator for the Hastings Caves lighting. Stuey told me that when his father was working for Headbergs (which later became Nettlefolds) in Hobart, they were the agents for Kelly and Lewis motors, so his father used to frequently get "call-outs" in the late 1930s/ early 1940s to ride south in all types of weather on the rough gravel roads on his ancient (vintage) motor bike to attend to repairs to the diesel engine, often working by candle or torchlight late at night. I often wondered whether his father's occasional interest in the caves down there might have been a large part of what attracted Stuey to caving!!

After Stuey's funeral, Robyn was telling me that her brother Justin was a canoeing/kayaking instructor who used to often take Stu and neighbour Greg (who spoke at the funeral) out on their regular canoeing trips, so you may get some further insight into Stuey's love of the water from Robyn (or Justin).

[This is just another mysterious facet to Stuart. I never knew about this and yet it



**NICHOLAS, Stuart.** — 17.7.1954 — 29.4.2005  
The Tasmanian and Australian Caving community is saddened by the loss of such a good friend and reliable colleague. Stuart was part of the epic exploration of Australia's deepest caves in the Junee-Florentine and other areas. His interest started as a schoolboy in the sixties and spanned over three decades. He was a stalwart member of the Tasmanian Caving Club, as quartermaster, editing its newsletter and other publications over a period of 14 years, as well as keeping electronic records of cave maps and surveys. He was involved with Police Search and Rescue as a caving representative and also the diving community. He was an accomplished cave diver. His other interests included jazz and rallying where he was Tasmanian Rally Car Champion on several occasions. Stuart worked most of his life as an electronics and computer service and maintenance engineer. As such he repaired nearly everything scientific in Tasmania, most importantly the state's hospital's endoscopes, a job others refused due to insurance concerns. Stuart had no insurance, the quality of his work was his guarantee. Without formal qualifications he had an extraordinary grasp of technology both old and new and was extremely generous with respect to his time in solving technical problems. Stuart was a quiet and modest man with a wonderful sense of humour, a great wit and a fantastic repertoire of puns. He was a wonderful host, a font of knowledge and inspiration for cavers visiting from the mainland and overseas. He represented Tasmanian cavers at the Australian Speleological Federation and his many contributions will be sorely missed. The Southern Tasmanian Cave-meers and Australian Speleological Federation thanks you sincerely.

doesn't surprise me, despite the fact that he couldn't swim! Stephen Bunton]

As mentioned to you at the last business meeting, unless Stuey got involved in caving with SCS earlier, I don't remember him being involved with TCC till around late 1971. I note that in the June 1972 *Spiel*, it shows that his cousin (Bob Reid) became a member of TCC in May or June that year.

I still have a few of Stuey's hand written letters to me relating to various aspects of caving, including SMAPS stuff and his later involvement with TCKRG; I think at least one of these old letters (maybe down at Dover) is written on the letterhead for Selby Scientific where I used to often visit Stu at New Town in early days. Stu used to talk about how he was in regular contact with Fred Dotson: the guy who developed the SMAPS software and gave Dotson feedback about problems and/or inadequacies with different versions of the software. Stu would tell me that he was often one of the first few cavers to be sent Dotson's latest update to test it for glitches. I still have some early versions of this now ancient software that Stu gave me.

The first record of Stuey Nich's name is in *Speleo Spiel* #51 (October 1970), where he is recorded as being a party member on a trip with Albert and others, lead by Noel White on September 26th in the early exploration of JF-10 and then again on October 3 1970 on a trip led by Bill Lehmann. (It was a period when I was less involved with the club, being very diligent in my first year - first stint - at Uni.)

In *Spiel* #52 (November 1970), it records that at the last General Meeting, a number of new members were elected including:

Stuart Nicholas, 7 Rupert Avenue, New Town. Elected as a "Junior member".

In that same issue (*Spiel* #52) there is an article about the exploration of Hairyoat Hole on October 18, where Stuey Nich and I are amongst a party of six TCC members and two SCS members.

STC/ASF death notice from The Mercury →

## Hans Benisch on Stuart Nicholas

Hans Benisch

I met Stui only a couple of times, he sold some of his caving equipment to me, and I couldn't understand his reasons why he actually gave up caving, he was very interesting to talk to, and I loved his sarcasm ... I tried to invite him for a trip, but he refused, basically: If its not hardcore, its not worth doing ... where I had to disagree. But on the other side I could understand it...

Some of the caving gear I bought off him was labelled: STU-EEZ - but other items were marked STU-EAZY.

[Pronounced *It's too easy!* Stephen Bunton.] Funnily enough they always come to my vision at the right moment, I actually meant to email him about it, but it's too late now. And I can honestly say, that it made a lot of jobs much easier, simply by putting a smile on my face, and follow the instructions...

tears,

Hans

## Hastings Stuff – June 2005

Matt Cracknell

In an attempt to simplify things a little I have decided to change the title of this article to something a little less pretentious [formerly '*Chronicles of Adamson*'. Ed.], but not quite as cryptic as the old TCC '*Alley Oop's Piffle Page*'. It is also a feeble way of hiding the fact that I'm not at Hastings much at the moment and I can never really remember/learn about everything that has been going on in the area. The long and short of it all is that I will write something when I feel that I have something that I can write about.

At the end of the last financial year a decision was made by Hastings management to cancel all adventure caving tours. This has happened partly because the operations had trouble breaking even. These extended caving tours had been running at Hastings for about five years and started with trips into King George V Cave; I'm sure that the cave will enjoy the rest that it is about to receive. Tours into Mystery Creek cave were initiated three years ago. Taking complete novice cavers into delicate and sometimes dangerous environments was an enjoyable and challenging part of my job and I will miss the opportunities that it gave me.

The repercussions for the local caves from the floods in Feb. of this year are continuing to become apparent. Slow changes are occurring to the organic debris that fills certain areas of Mystery Creek Cave. These piles of forest litter are now being decomposed by numerous colonies of fungi and mould, some of which appear as fine hairs in thick mats creeping through the deposits. The increase in food in the form of microbes will increase populations of insect communities in the cave. The remains of many stone fly nymphs have been seen in the first 100 m and the glow-worm colony is quietly re-establishing itself.

From recent trips there seems to be some species of surface invertebrates that have washed into the cave and are now part of the underground system. Arthur Clarke has pointed out to me ants with large eyes

moving very slowly in areas where bugs have not been noted in such abundance before. Again this significant cave comes up with surprises and I'm sure that it will continue to do so for a long time to come.

The second trip completed by a CEGSA/SUSS team that surveyed H5 (Chain of Ponds) has appeared in a report in the latest CEGSA News (Grindly 2005). From the tone of the article it seems as if the group was hampered with the snowy weather and a lack of local experience. In 3-4 days caving more than 300m of passage were surveyed (specific totals are not given) with several leads unattempted. A map of this survey was released at the ASF conference in Jan 2005. Water chemistry samples and black, red and brown deposits sampled in the streamway are to be examined and documented. Numerous skeletal remains and fragile sediment banks along with mud and calcite decoration are reported to occur in the cave.

There is a recommendation in the article to restrict access to this cave in order to preserve the cave's scientific research values. It is also apparent from the report that the World Heritage Area is the immediate catchment network for the many cave inflows. This cave has unique possibilities for studies into dolomite cave development and has potential to assist research into methods of cave rehabilitation. Gating was due to take place in June. I am not completely sure of the details but it seems that the remote nature of the cave and the awkward rifting entrance has resulted in the postponement of this project.

Quote of the month - 'When I retire I am looking forward to being able to grow my nose hairs long enough to braid'

### REFERENCE

GRINDLY, D. 2005. H5 "Chain of Ponds" Discovery, Tasmania, Part 2 of 2, July 04. *CEGSA News*, 50(2):32-36

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