

SPEIEO SPIEL 357

November - December 2006



Celebrating
60 years of
organised
speleology in
Australia
1946-2006

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Front Cover: Alan Jackson descends the entrance pitch in Midnight Hole (photo by Gavin Brett)

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

Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and all that guff. Sorry this one's a bit late but even I sometimes actually have work that takes priority over getting the *Spiel* out.

Quite a nice range of caving covered in this issue as well as a practice rescue exercise and a real rescue, albeit a rather lame one. This issue sees the return of the cartoon – thanks Bunty.

Cave hard in 2007.

Alan Jackson

Stuff 'n Stuff

WELCOME STRANGER ACCESS. Further to discussions at an STC meeting some time back, Forestry Tas has committed to a number of actions to provide greater security for Welcome Stranger Cave, which has been broken into several times in recent years.

The actions include: (1) repairing the barrier at the lower entrance, (2) updating signs at the entrances, (3) blocking off the spur road used to access the cave off Westfield Rd, and (4) ensuring that the cave key is only issued to ASF cavers.

ASF cavers can obtain the key to Welcome Stranger from Georgina Bachelor (ph: 6233 7453) at the Forestry Tasmania office in Melville St. Written applications on club letterhead will assist verification of ASF membership. FT require a deposit on all keys.

Closure of the access road will mean that visitors to Welcome Stranger will now need to walk an extra 500 m. The thinking is that the additional distance and the fact that cars left on Westfield Rd can be seen by others may deter some would-be vandals.
Rolan Eberhard

SKINNER TRACK FAIRIES. It appears the track clearing fairies have been at work again, this time in the Ida Bay area. Dion Robertson and Amy Ware recently visited Skinner track and observed a significant reduction in blockages, including many smaller saplings or trees removed and new steps cut into some of the larger fallen logs. The fairies appear to have worked down most of the hill from Benders Quarry, past the Milk Run turnoff but not down the last bit of valley to the Exit resurgence [*Lazy fairies!* – Ed.]. This should make the track a bit safer to use and quicker to travel, so thanks fairies!!
Amy Ware

GREENER PASTURES. Dean Morgan – past president of TCC, past holder of various other TCC and STC positions and all round hard-caver/nice-guy – is making a move to Newcastle. Dean hasn't been underground for a while but he has been playing an important role behind the scenes as our Webmaster and Mailing List Moderator for the last few years. We wish him and the rest of the Morgan family all the best. I hope the karst of Newcastle and the Hunter Valley can provide him with ample entertainment ...

Alan Jackson will be taking over Dean's roles as Webmaster and Mailing List Moderator.

Trip Reports

IB-22 Con Cave

Serena Benjamin

30 September 2006

Party: Serena Benjamin, Amy Ware

We went to Con Cave so I could get to rig a fully natural cave. Dodgy loose rocks to climb over in the entrance.

Interesting pitches to rig. Lots of invertebrate fauna – anaspides, spiders etc. Passages that turned to dimensions too challenging for my capabilities for contortionism. Very wet in bits. Slight chance of getting to Exit if you are prepared to dig – lots. Lots of fun and not a single rope rub.

Mole Creek and MC-X64 Westmorland Cave

Stephen Bunton

14 & 15 October 2006

Party: Stephen Bunton and Bob Cockerill

Three times a year I migrate to Mole Creek for the meeting of the Tasmanian Speleological Liaison Council meeting. This unconstituted body is merely a forum for sharing information between Tasmania's four caving clubs; STC, Northern Caverneers, Savage River CC and Mole Creek CC. Most of the meetings are concerned with the tedium of management and access issues at Mole Creek. The highlight of the evening is usually the STC report because so much more happens down here – not that there aren't management issues in the south, it's just that no one in STC seems to give a toss! [*Here here!* – Ed.] It is thus down to me to attend on all our behalf.

On every trip I try to do something interesting to justify the trip north. On this occasion I thought I'd attend to some

unfinished business from 25 years ago. In May 1980 I had a fall in Herberts Pot and was rescued (transported down the hill) by the farmer on his slasher attached to his tractor. In my recent discussions of Mole Creek issues, it occurred to me that I had never thanked him for his efforts. A recent note in *Speleo Spiel* by Bob Cockerill about his trip north to chat with the local farmers prompted me to procrastinate no longer. I invited Bob along on the trip to make the necessary introductions.

Bob also had some unfinished business in Westmorland Cave and since this was one of the caves presenting issues being discussed at TSLC meetings, I thought I'd take the opportunity to have a look firsthand.

We drove up to Mole Creek on the Saturday and had afternoon tea with Gavin and Ruth Linger who own the entrance to Herberts Pot but no longer let cavers visit the cave. They were a most pleasant couple and we chatted about things like lapidary and the joys of travelling around Australia. Bob was keen for us to talk cave politics but really all I wanted to do was meet them and say thanks for

evacuating me from the cave entrance. Coincidentally, Bob had evacuated himself from the cave after being injured on the initial exploration at a point which is now known as the Tombstone Traverse - the Tombstone fell on him.

Shortly after my accident there was another incident and then some cavers were lost late at night on the hillside. This group, we believe, were the Czech cavers who visited Mt Anne in 1986. Following this Gavin closed the cave mainly to reduce his public liability exposure. The fact that the cave has not been visited for twenty years has probably been the best conservation measure for the cave. Nevertheless the Lingers would rather not have the responsibility of managing the cave. They are sick of the lack of courtesy of people wanting to visit the cave. On one notable occasion the Police Search and Rescue turned up for an exercise and he told them that the cave was private property and they weren't welcome!

The Lingers have had their share of problems with cavers, mostly with respect to the water they derive from the Westmorland Cave stream, but by far and away their greatest grief was from dealing with government officials. Their biggest beef was to do with the price the government wanted to pay for their property - basically they want to buy it for an insultingly low price. Of course there were the issues of forestry practices on private land, which, because they are on Category 1 karst means that logging is not an option. Another option open to the Lingers is conservation covenants but these provide an ongoing financial liability for generations. Basically they just want to sell the karst on their property. Their experience has been of periods of frantic negotiations interspersed with long periods when they have heard nothing. There are of course the stories which circulate through the farming community about who has got what for selling a block of land.

I had quite a lot of sympathy for the Lingers and the other farmers in the area who like us feel as though they are often left in the dark by government instrumentalities.

Eventually we left and grabbed a lift into the Deloraine Hotel with Dave Wools-Cobb for our TSLC meeting. After the meeting Bob Cockerill stole the show with his 1:500 copy of Herberts Pot which takes up the area of several tables. A copy of this is in the State Archives and also the STC Archive. After the meeting I got the lowdown on access to Westmorland from Steve Blanden of NCC and SRCC. I'd spent the week drawing up the survey data of the cave which was in the STC Archive. This map didn't make much sense to Steve nor did Bob's old SCS map. Steve Blanden has located and surveyed most of the caves at Mole Creek and one of the important issues for future discussion will be ensuring there are backup copies of this information. DPIW also has this information and given that much of their knowledge was gained from the activities of

caving clubs over the years it would be good if we had access to it as well.

Next morning Bob and I headed to Westmorland Cave. After a bit of thrashing through the bush, losing the track, going up the wrong gully, using the GPS incorrectly and Bob not recognising any of it, we finally found the cave and then it all made sense. It's so easy to find caves when somebody leads you there!

Westmorland Cave is the first cave in the famous Mole Creek system where Mole Creek flows underground through Herberts Pot, Wet Cave and Honeycomb Cave. This water is important for the ecology of these caves and so a certain "environmental flow" is necessary. Just above the entrance, some of the water has been diverted down what is known as the "nine-foot" to service 13 farms in the area which are otherwise without surface water.

It was reported recently that due to an improvement in the dam, no water was entering the cave and the environmental flow was compromised. When we were there water was being diverted down the nine-foot but a good flow was going into the cave from two sources; percolation through the gravel and boulders in the streambed and overflow of the diversion channel which comes into the entrance from the north. Water also flows in from a side passage to the right 30 m or so inside the cave.

Bob was tuckered out by the time we reached the cave entrance so I soloed down to near the bottom of the cave, to where I had to crawl in the water. I didn't see any glowworms in the cave. The glowworm display here was supposed to be the second best in the state and their absence was a concern. It may be due to the fact that no water flowed into the cave during the winter drought.

The TSLC has written to the Minister for Tourism, Arts and the Environment to look into this matter but as yet we have only received courtesy replies. The situation is obviously complex. The farmers still want some of the flow and they need access to the dam should they need to fix it. They want this as tractor access through the newly acquired section of National Park. Certainly a tractor track to the cave would make it less likely that people like me got lost in the scrub but it would also increase the chances of Joe Average finding the cave. Gavin was unwilling to cross some other farmer's property because he doesn't like others on his land. Clearly there needs to be a formal agreement between the government and the landowners over access and flows especially as the climate changes.

Westmorland is a good little cave, worth a visit if you are in the area. The trip home was interesting also, with Bob pointing out various landmarks and features of interest known only to someone who worked in agricultural research and drove the old highway often on trips to Mole Creek in the sixties.

IB-50 and IB-224 Hissing Sid Hole

Alan Jackson

21 October 2006

Party: Damian Bidgood, Alan Jackson

Damian and I needed to pass some time while we waited for the rescue teams to come looking for us so we packed a rope or two to have a look at some of the nearby holes. We chucked a rope around a tree and bombed down IB-50. It

was about 6-8 metres deep and choked at the bottom. A narrow passage a few metres off the bottom over the back beckoned but didn't look interesting enough to warrant the climb. Three quarters of the way down another descending passage heads off. I climbed down these and it spiraled for several metres before similarly closing off. It wasn't large enough to justify surveying so we trussed up our SAR dummy and headed out.



Damian begins his descent of IB-224 – nice pitch.

Next we moved round the contact a few metres and rigged JF-224. The entrance pitch is a good 20 metres and quite enjoyable. I had wrongly believed that this cave had never had a survey published so Damian and I surveyed as we went. I later found the survey in *Southern Caver* 50 on page 20. The description of the cave on page 16 provides a good description of the name origin which I'm sure will make Greg squeal with delight. It pretty much looked just like the survey. Because I hadn't read SC50 before I visited the cave I hadn't seen the description of 'unsafe squeeze' on the survey. I had to remove my SRT gear and helmet to get through and there was no way Damian was going to fit!

The cave continued down, turned a sharp bend and trended more steeply down to a small aven with muddy seep/choke. I probably descended a further 8-10 m from the bottom of the entrance pitch. Because Damian didn't fit I couldn't survey it properly so I just sketched it. It's not worth publishing in the *Spiel* but I will scan it and send to be archived electronically.



Alan emerges from the 'unsafe squeeze'.

One our way out we were 'found' by Gavin and Serena who had just found the missing caver dummy, got bored waiting for their next instructions and had started wandering. IB-224 would make a good little beginner rigging exercise if there was need for it.

Mood Killer and Shitfunnel – Ida Bay

Matt Cracknell & Stephen Bunton

22 October 2006

Party: Serena Benjamin, Stephen Bunton, Matt Cracknell, Dale Pregnell, Tony Veness

Matt's bit:

After an intriguing days caving with the CAVEX mob where various scenarios were designed to test the breaking strain of caver's personal SRT gear and turn dry valleys into a thousand boot-prints, five STC members had arranged to stay over-night at the Ida Bay carpark.

Bright and early the next day five STC members all agreed to follow one STC member into the forest off the Southern Ranges track in search of some promising holes. Having walked south up a dry valley for about 150 m, five STC members came across a reasonably sized doline with a small crack at its base that had formed in a pile of muddy blocks. One STC member poked around in here for a few minutes but to no avail.

Then one STC member chirped up suggesting that something had been found in the wall of a neighbouring doline. Three STC members gained access to a cave entrance across wet logs and through knee-deep compost.

The opening dropped to a small chamber. Although it is small, the chamber has an astonishing number of arachnids scuttling about in it. A couple of short down-climbs with the aid of a handline opened to a drafting passage where a thin black crust coats the walls. A boulder filled chamber beyond this passage narrowed to a junction. Straight ahead a small pitch hampered progress so the gap between slabs

on the left hand side was explored. This route terminated in a room with a substantial soil-cone in one corner.

The 'Implements of Torture' were brought out and three STC members surveyed back to the junction. For some reason all three STC members involved were getting cranky; it was time to leave. One STC member, having forgotten to bring flagging tape, hopes to remember where the survey station is.

Above ground two STC members found a blind pit and ran about in the forest with a GPS (see associated report). Then five STC members regrouped on the surface and decided to call it quits for the day.

Bunty's bit:

Whilst Matt, Dale and Serena were engaged exploring Moodkiller and Tony stood vigil on the surface I went for a wander up the dry valley. The first doline uphill had some exposed limestone and a couple of small holes with humus slopes leading down into them. Above this the next doline was much more promising; a hole of about 5 m diameter and 10 m deep. The only thing detracting from this was that already there was a pink tape on a sapling in the doline and another up the slope to the East.

I returned to the others and convinced the already trogged-up to come and have a look. The holes in the first doline choked out. I rigged the rope from a tree down a slimy slope to a large bedrock bollard diving board which I circled with one of Tony's long tapes. This acted as a rebelay for the pitch when Tony promptly descended. After 12 m he landed on a large chockstone with two ways down to the small chamber below it where this second doline clapped out also. We derigged and returned to the others. Tony called it Shitfunnel

Latest Curse of the Porcupine

Stephen Bunton

4 November 2006

Party: Serena Benjamin, Gavin Brett, Stephen Bunton, Alan Jackson and Amy Ware ... and the Cascades

The aim of the day's entertainment was to relocate Porcupine Pot. Gavin's 4WD cave bus transported the troops to the Nine Rd where we were blessed with a choice of routes to follow. The original route to the cave was from further up the hill than Tassy Pot and then drop down to it. Modern thinking was that a new route to the cave, whereby it was all downhill on the way home, was much more preferable.

Alan had the waypoints in his GPS and having decided on the branch road to take Gavin began bull-barring through the bush. Eventually we stopped at a suitable point to get out our fighting gear and do some more serious road clearing. During this operation, Steve, who had had a very bad experience when last he visited the cave, had yet another. [*Bunty's first experience with this cave is quite entertaining and I suggest you dig it out of the archive: 'Wrath of the Porcupine' in SS213 – Ed.*] Whilst throwing slash off the road into the bush, he turned his head and collided with a very pointy stick. It seems that it's bad karma to cut bush in the national park. Gavin removed two splinters from between Steve's eyelids and the eyeball and he was able to continue the day's adventure.

The route we chose through the bush proved to be a good one since it was fairly clear up a snig track. We soon encountered the sinkhole marked on the map and then to a cave in about the right location. The cave wasn't tagged and unfortunately it didn't look familiar to Bunty, the only who had been

there before. In fact he swore he'd never been to a cave that looked like that before.

We bashed on over the hill and located the streamsink shown on the map. This was tagged as JF-388. From here we continued bashing until finally common sense prevailed and we realised the original cave had to be Porcupine Pot and we beat the retreat taping in pink. Only when we enter the untagged cave and it matches the Porcupine Pot description will we know for sure and only then will Bunty eat his words about having not been there!

After this we did a bit more community service on the tracks around the area. We then headed up to the top of the Nine Rd and tried to get a view. We found the old track takeoff which was sadly overgrown [*By the sounds of it being overgrown is the best thing for the old track – Ed.*]. As a last stop we visited the entrance of Tassy Pot which is now surrounded by trees and not at all familiar to Steve who hadn't been there for fifteen years. You can no longer see the peaks of the southwest.



IB-120 Valley Entrance – IB-14 Exit Cave

Matt Cracknell

11 November 2006

Party: Serena Benjamin, Matt Cracknell, Dale Pregnell, Grant Roberts, Tony Veness

Ric and Janine had caught a bad dose of bird flu in Asia and were unable to lead the planned trip into Exit for a bit of survey fun. A frantic ring around at the 11th hour got the group number up to five and a stop at Hastings about 9 am got us the key.

A large tree that had recently fallen (in the past year) hampered progress on the walk in. We were geared up and in the IB-120 entrance by 11:30 am.

The trip ran smoothly. We took our time to look about and take in the enormity of the cave. Matt was especially excited by the evidence of faulting in Broken Stal Chamber where we had our first lunch stop. A brief side trip into Damocles Passage for a bit of bling-bling kept the group's spirits up. This was followed by the obligatory minor track loss though "The Rock-Pile".

After a casual 6 hours underground we emerged at the Exit resurgence to be greeted by the final hours of sunlight.

JF-387 Porcupine 'Not'

Alan Jackson

18 November 2006

Party: Gavin Brett, Alan Jackson

The trip almost didn't eventuate when we caught up to a D8 being floated up the Florentine Road. We thought the driver might need some help unloading the dozer and we considered following him instead of caving. Little did we realise that despite resisting this temptation the trip didn't really eventuate anyway.

The new track was in and was officially timed as 9 minutes from car to cave with full packs – a vast improvement on the old route by the sounds of things. The track might be better but I don't think the cave has improved at all. All accounts seemed to point towards the first pitch being a ladder pitch. We had dismissed this as people clinging to the past and took rope instead. We soon discovered that not even I could fit through the hole at the top of the pitch with SRT gear on and that it was indeed a ladder pitch. Being fundamentally opposed to both the use of ladders in the

21st century and passing through passage of such small dimensions, we took our bat and ball and went home, vowing never to waste our valuable time on such a cave again.

It had proven to be a short day and we thought that if we arrived home at such an early hour that it may set a nasty precedent. We can't have the ladies in our lives entertaining unrealistic expectations, so we went surface bashing.

When you look at the 1:25 k topographic map of the area there are two very large sinkholes marked. The northern one is JF-388, Porcupine Pot sits more or less in the middle of them and the bottom one doesn't seem to be mentioned as significant in any of the literature. We bumped into it expecting to find a mud choked nothing full of Eberhard footprints. Instead we found three holes with easy digging and howling drafts. We dug furiously with nothing but our bare hands and made surprising progress. A return with proper tools is in order and I mean 'proper tools'!

We still managed to return home at a dangerously early hour.

JF-221 Owl Pot

Tony Veness

18 November 2006

Party: Stephen Bunton, Sarah Gilbert, Tony Veness

The aim of the day was to undertake an introductory SRT trip for those interested. In the end, few were actually interested, but it was a good excuse to escape the bustle of Hobart for the depths of the Florentine.

After a 7:30 am departure from West Hobart, Tony's new (well newish) cave vehicle made it along the spur road to within cooee of the entrance. The three Owl Potters met briefly with the Porcupine Boys who were passing through on their way to secret business to the East, in their Toyota Bulldozer. After pleasantries\verbal abuse, the lads left us and we headed for Owl Pot.

Steve found the entrance without fuss and away we went. The rigging notes from *Spiel* 352 were invaluable, saving us lugging more gear than required, or searching for non-existent P-hangers. The first three pitches went without incident, after which we dropped into the stream and headed downstream to the head of the final waterfall pitch. After a brief lunch-stop, we made our way down the final pitch, next to a very nice (but cold) waterfall.

The stream below the waterfall sumped a few metres down a squeeze, so our choices were limited - we headed back to the car the same way we came in. All went swimmingly well, apart from the usual expanding rope problem on derig. Pitch three was more of a steep climb-out on self belay than a prussick. The only squeeze of the day was within five metres of the head of the third pitch, requiring some shuffling of muddy wet gear.

The highlight (?) of the day was getting back up the entrance pitch, which was a 45 degree slope, gumboot deep in humus\mud\owl poo. Both Steve's and Tony's gumboots\jumars lost traction of the ground\rope at about the same time, making the final five metres quite an adventure of Willy Wonker proportions.

After much grunting and groaning, we were all free of the non-resident Owl's clutches and headed to the car post-haste. After stripping out of our somewhat deflowered caving suits, we had a quick look at the Tassy Pot entrance before heading south. Views from Tim Shea were appreciated on the way out to the road and a brief stop was made at the Brooker car-wash pressure-blaster to relocate most of the debris from the ropes onto the rear of the car, and the wall of the carwash.

A fun & muddy day in the bush.

JF-414 ☠-Jolly Roger-☠

Alan Jackson

2 December 2006

Party: Gavin Brett, Alan Jackson

The previous weekend we had intended revisiting this new hole to have a proper dig. Unfortunately events conspired against us and the trip was aborted before we got past Glenorchy. (In brief: we discovered Rolan had busted the tip off our long 8 mm masonry bit when he'd used it to ruin the entrance to Welcome Stranger. We stopped at

Bunnings on the way and bought a shiny new one. While approaching the Elwick Road intersection I pulled the plastic hook off the end of the new bit and hit the side window with the pointy end and obliterated the window. The day ended there).

With the new drill bit safely stowed in a bag in the boot (i.e. out of my hands) and a new shiny window in the 'cruisa, we made a second attempt at this cave. We stopped briefly at Maydena to borrow some safety glasses from the nice people at the shop as we'd forgotten to pack ours. At the Nine Rd we noticed that there had been a large amount of traffic on it (there has been a stack of concrete culvert

pipes at the intersection for a few weeks now). The road had been cleared back and new culverts put in up to the Westfield Rd intersection and then several hundred metres past that on the Westfield Rd. Further up the Nine Rd at the intersection of the road we take to our new track there were numerous blue tapes hanging about. Later consultation with our Forestry contacts (Amy and Dion) confirmed that thinning operations are planned in this area and that the blue tapes indicate a coupe boundary – so watch out for extra traffic in this area over the next few months.

We loaded up with digging gear and endured the nine minute walk to the cave, trogged up and got to work on the first obstruction that made the entrance climb more awkward than it should be. Down inside the small but roomy entrance chamber we made light work of the numerous blocks obstructing the way on. Following the howling draft, we continued maneuvering our way through the rockfall with a combination of traditional and modern digging techniques. Gavin had a few hairy moments at the pointy end and then found a good way on that needed some enlargement. During my maneuver to overtake him a large (500 mm diameter) block came loose and threatened to kill Gavin. We stabilised this and continued on! It turned out to be easy digging and I was soon posting myself feet-first around a right angle bend and down a slope that led to a ~8 m pitch. We excitedly inspected the pitch which was complete with howling draft, solid bedrock walls and the sound of water at the bottom (it sounded like the same amount of water that sinks at the bottom of the doline). Unfortunately there was a deadly stack of boulders and clay matrix forming a precarious bridge over the pitch head. After some 'gardening' we realised that if we removed this bridge in an effort to make the pitch safe then we may cause the approach slope to let go too. We sat agonising over what to do for several minutes until a crashing sound somewhere up above us hastened our decision making. We rapidly exited the unstable pile of crap masquerading as a cave.

On the surface we cleaned ourselves up, attached the tag '414' to the entrance (on the back wall overhanging the small entrance) and then I jokingly suggested that we should go back in and survey it. Gavin replied that a quick sketch of a skull and cross bones would suffice and before we knew it the cave was called Jolly Roger. Anyone with a death wish is welcome to return and scoop this cave's booty.

It was turning out to be a short day so we passed some time by continuing past the parking spot on the newly cleared access road. Someone had obviously had a great time smashing about the countryside in a bulldozer in days gone by – ah, the good old days when the forest industry didn't even pretend to have any ethics ... We earmarked the area for a future surface day and came home.

Some notes on the new access to this area:

Take the Nine Rd off the Florentine Road (as per normal access to Owl Pot/Tassy Pot)

About 900 m later the signed Westfield Rd continues to the left and the Nine Rd continues to the right (note, the 1:25 k Tasmapi applies different road nomenclature in this area). Take the right turn.

Almost 600 m further up there is another junction. Keep straight ahead (left branch) to get to Owl Pot et al. Veer to the right for the new access.

This right hand branch contours for ~500 m to another junction. The left hand branch is blocked with vegetation and the right hand branch has been cleared. There is a red and white star picket just before this junction which indicates the location of the McCallums Track (old access for Gormenghast, Growling and beyond).

Most vehicles would make it to this point but another ~130 m can be driven along the right hand branch if you have 4WD and good tyres (the Landcruiser with mud terrain tyres spins all four wheels in the mud and moss up this section).

A large fallen silver wattle marks the turn around and parking point – you can't miss it!

From here the new walking route heads more or less due east up through a large cleared 'log landing' area and then follows a very obvious snig track for some 200 m before turning off the snig track to the right through a flat ferny glade strewn with enormous felled logs and stumps – all left behind to rot! The track then enters young rainforest and contours around the northern side of the first (western) large doline marked on the 1:25 k Tasmapi. JF-414 is located near the bottom of this doline (about five metres from the lowest point where the small trickle sinks into a drafting choke and tight rift). JF-387 is a further 50-80 m east of the JF-414 doline in a large walled doline – we haven't been able to relocate the tag. A further 100 m east gets you to the second large doline (the eastern one marked on the map) and streamsink which is tagged JF-388.

All of this and you're only ten minutes from the car!

JF-4 Khazad-dum – Serpentine Route

Ric Tunney

9 December 2006

Party: Serena Benjamin, Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney

The weather forecast was for hot and sunny with a total fire ban for Tasmania. It looked like being much cooler underground. We were underground by 10:30 am.

This was Serena's first trip to the Serpentine. Janine and I hadn't been there since 1999. Since then Jeff Butt and Janine had installed P-hangers (in about 2000). She remembered lots and lots of P-hangers. We thought this would mean "clip rope onto P-hanger, no thought needed"

rigging. We didn't have a rigging guide, but we did have a rope list from our 1999 trip (see *Speleo Spiel* 313). So we had lots of carabiners (for the lots of P-hangers) and three tapes "just in case". Unfortunately we had forgotten Jeff's minimalist attitude to rigging (and Janine's notoriously faulty memory). The five "P-hangered" pitches have a total of two P-hangers. Point four of a P-hanger per pitch means the route is not heavily endowed with P-hangers!

Janine and Serena alternated the rigging while I sat and offered the very occasional but exceptionally useful, and greatly appreciated advice. (I can get away with saying this because I'm writing the trip report). [*Don't forget who edits it though, you silly old hack!* – Ed.] Only having three tapes meant they had to use some innovative rigging.

Our leisurely descent got us to the streamway in two hours. The water was nice and low so we had a look at the first streamway pitch and poked around the bottom of the waterfall pouring down near the "70 foot" pitch.

We kept together on the way out as we were having too much fun to rush, but derigging was straightforward and we were out by 3.30 pm. It was very hot outside but the rainforest was delightful.

The KD Serpentine is a great route for beginning riggers, so here are some rigging notes:

JF-4 Khazad Dum (Serpentine Route) Rigging Guide

(All directions facing downstream)

P1 (23 m) 30 m rope. Carrot on LHS (take rock-climbing bracket) for approach. P-hanger on LHS at pitch head. Rebelay (tape) around flake at lip of big shelf 10 m down. Temporarily tie rope to small bollard on RHS to assist with 2c below pitch.

P2 (15 m) 22 m rope. Jug on RHS before pitch head. Rebelay on P-hanger on RHS opposite big ledge 8 m down. (Getting back to ledge on way up is fun; don't prussik too high.)

P3 (8 m) 8 m rope. Small knob on RHS above pitch near base of P2. Back up to P2 rope. A short trace would be useful.

P4 (9 m) 13 m rope. Knob on RHS above pitch (tape is useful), with backup to knob on LHS.

P5 (5 m) 13 m rope. Pitch head is at lowest point in chamber. Belay from jug 5 m above pitch head (approach from top of boulders). Redirection on LHS 3 m above pitch head (approach from pitch head).

[Jeff Butt also published rigging notes for KD in Speleo Spiel 337, page 29. One would have expected Ric, with his head full of infinite wisdom, to have found these notes in his masterpiece, the electronic STC archive. However, one is often left disappointed when one holds anything but contempt for Ric's wisdom – Ed.]

JF-36 Growling Swallet – Destiny

Janine McKinnon

16 December 2006

Party: Serena Benjamin, Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney

After an absence of twenty-odd years we decided that it was time we revisited this part of Growling Swallet. Serena was keen (as always) and we knew the water levels were low, which would make all the wet bits a lot easier.

We got underground at 10 am, via Slaughterhouse Pot, and made our way uneventfully to the junction with Growling in 1 hr 10 min. We checked the ropes as we went and decided that it is probably time to replace the top two. They are very gritty and as far as we can determine, from previous trip reports, they haven't been replaced for quite some time (see note below). Ric replaced the redirection on the second pitch with a stainless steel crab to overcome the chronic problems with the aluminium ones corroding and being hard to open. (There's a rock on a ledge near the first redirection to help with opening the gate, although the crab there is a reasonably new old one.) He was going to replace the crab on the top pitch but the rope he had was too thick for the keyhole of rock used for the rigging point; there's only room for tape. A job for next trip. The bottom pitch rope was in much better condition and doesn't appear to need replacing yet.

While descending pitch two, Serena found the rope loosely laid on the ledge at the redirection. This meant it did not reach the bottom. From the logbook, the previous trip had been an SRT training trip in June. One of the reasons for leaving Slaughterhouse Pot rigged is as an escape route from Growling Swallet in times of flood. We don't know if the rope had been deliberately or accidentally left hanging on the ledge (it's hard to see how it could have been accidental), but unless the ropes reach the bottom of the pitches, they can't be used to get out of the cave.

Another job for the next trip is to put some protection in the middle of the rope ladder (leading further into Growling) where it is abrading on a rub point.

We made our way downstream and found the turn off to Destiny with no trouble, thanks to Ric's remarkable

memory. We had been to the pitch head about 20 years ago (apparently; it was news to me) but no further.

We rigged the pitch as a beautiful free-hang (details at end of report) but it did involve a tight, awkward pitch head.

After some hunting around at the bottom we found the way on by climbing up from the passage leading away from the base of the pitch. A somewhat slippery, mud-covered rock-pile followed, with a couple of old hand lines in place on the slipperiest climbs, and then we found ourselves at the Black River junction.

We explored both upstream (as far as the START of the final low, wet crawl; we're not silly!) and downstream to the sump. Also the length of the side stream that comes in at the junction. This is a very pleasant bit of cave that even has some formations in it. This part of the cave hadn't taken very long to look at, but we had spent a fair bit of time rigging the pitch and finding our way to the Black River Junction so we decided it was about time to start out.

We still had the Hyperspace Bypass and Servalane areas to see (and find) and that would take more than the time we wanted to spend on the rest of this trip.

We started out from the Junction at 2:30 pm (or thereabouts) and were out of the entrance into a beautiful sunny, warm afternoon at 4:10 pm.

We even made it to the raspberry farm at Westerway with 15 min to spare on their 6 pm closing time. So it was a good day all round.

We have left Destiny rigged for a return trip next weekend and also a 13 m rope at the pitch head to use on one of the two drops from the Hyperspace Bypass into Servalane (if our reading of the survey is correct!).

Rigging notes for Destiny:

Pitch head is at end of high-level passage running over the top of the pitch. There is a large chock-stone here. The traditional rigging was just around the stone, hanging down the near side of the stone, with no backup. However, we rigged down the far side of the stone. The primary anchor was around a jug on RHS 3 m above the stone, with a 5 m backup tape around the stone. A 34 m rope was ample. It's

a bit tight at the pitch head for 20 cm. There are lots of loose rocks too.

Notes on the Slaughterhouse Pot ropes:

A search of the Archive seems to give the following dates for the installation of ropes.

P1 7/3/98 (*Spiel* 306) Bluewater II ropes installed on all pitches.

P2 23/8/02 (*Spiel* 332) Bottom two ropes replaced.

P3 16/12/04 (*Spiel* 345) P-hangers tested and bottom rope replaced.

If this information is complete, the top rope is almost 9 years old!

JF-36 Growling Swallet – Destiny again

Janine McKinnon

23 December 2006

Party: Serena Benjamin, Janine McKinnon, Dale Pregnell, Ric Tunney

After our introduction to the Black River series last weekend we were heading back to have more of a look around the distal end of Nix Inlet. All arrived at the now traditional meeting point of the Jackman & McRoss bakery in New Town on time, sober, not hung-over and with all their gear. (You can tell I've been perusing old *Spiele*s for information again, can't you?)

We got away from the cars at 9:25 am in fine weather, although it was forecast showers and had rained overnight. As we passed the Growling Swallet entrance Garths Creek looked about double the flow it had last weekend, but still nowhere near high enough to worry about.

We had an uneventful transit to the Slaughterhouse/Growling junction. Ric replaced the redirection on the first pitch, that he was unable to do last trip, with a new tape and stainless steel crab.

We had lunch at the bottom of Destiny, with Dale amazing us with the gourmet quality of his lunch. A pasta dish with Ferrero Rocher chocolates to follow (which he kindly shared, ensuring he will be encouraged to join future trips) made our Vegemite and cheese rolls seem very boring. Serena had again (somehow, beyond my understanding) managed to get grapes, cherries and a J & McR muesli slice to this point undamaged, without putting them in a container. Some talent that. Our lunch was now looking very lame.

We moved quickly through the (very slippery and muddy) rock-pile this time, as the route was now familiar. Interestingly, it also seemed a lot easier and shorter the second time round. We moved together to the terminal rock-pile of the right-hand branch of the Black River and then separated to look around for any leads. Dale found some cairns at water level, confirming that previous exploration parties had pushed the rock-pile at stream level. Both Serena and I climbed up through separate leads in the rock-pile until we reached climbs that didn't look advisable in the extremely friable rock. I was looking up a small (body sized) hole with a good trickle of water coming down a 10 ft drop. I couldn't see how wide the

passage beyond was but it didn't look particularly promising. I spent some time trying to work out how to get up there but although there was an easily climbable route, none of the rock would stay in place when I tested it for holds, so I wasn't game to climb.

Three of us rejoined at stream level and started looking for Ric. We found him just before the downstream end of the rock-pile climbing down from higher levels that he had been pushing and which were still going. There was no sign anyone had looked up there before, so up we all went (VERY carefully). The area was quite unstable but had good going leads for about 30 m vertically up.

I had a bit of a fall (about 2 m) when a hand and foot hold on one of the climbs in said crappy-rocked rock-pile unexpectedly (do you use holds you expect to give way?) relocated. This was very noble of me, I thought, to remove these unsuitable projections, as Dale and Serena were then able to climb up safely. They continued up a bit higher, to join Ric, and we were all just starting to think this was very promising when all leads shut down. As the bits of me I had landed on (and the bits where loose rocks had landed on me) were feeling a bit bruised and tender, we decided it was a good idea to start out.

We had seen most of the surveyed cave below Destiny pitch and covered all the likely spots in this area of the cave for undiscovered extensions (we think! It wouldn't be the first time new cave was found where everyone thought it was finished). The area above Destiny could be visited on a future trip without ropes.

Dale had a buckle on his Petzl leg lines snap about half way up the pitch. Amy has apparently had a similar gear failure and as Dale had only had the gear for a few months, and used it a handful of times, it doesn't seem like a reliable piece of equipment.

The rest of the trip out was uneventful, with us gaining the surface just over two hours after the first person started up the Destiny pitch, which was derigged. Dale really enjoyed his first trip through the Windy Rift and out of Growling with no aids up the climbs, all of which he negotiated with ease.

We were sitting in the sun at the entrance watching Serena clean her gear in the stream at 5:10 pm, after an enjoyable 7 hour trip.

IB-11 Midnight Hole

Alan Jackson

23 December 2006

Party: Gavin Brett, Alan Jackson

Our original intention to go to Tachycardia was thwarted due to the disappearance of a section of the capping bar and the new drill bit. We settled on an easy trip down Midnight Hole to check the tops of the pitches for any possible horizontal extensions.

We played silly buggers on the first pitch and abseiled simultaneously – the p-hangers are strong. At the third pitch I traversed out to and beyond the spits for SRT rigging but found nothing worth pursuing. We then climbed up the well decorated side passage that joins at the bottom of the third pitch. We gained many metres but found nothing interesting.



Dumb and Dumber – Alan and Gavin enjoy being able to both get in the one photo half way down the first pitch

At the start of the small dimension passage that joins the third pitch to the top of the fourth there is a little climb up and a tight passage allows one to traverse over the top of the fourth pitch to the top of the fifth pitch. From here an assault could be launched to investigate an interesting looking little hole on the far side but we had been zapped of enthusiasm by this stage and had well and truly plunged into lameness. Instead we continued down the cave singing and taking millions of photos (most of which were crap – the art of cave photography is too difficult).

The top of the sixth pitch is now an abomination thanks to the efforts of the only two ‘professional cavers’ in the club (i.e. people who actually get paid to do it). The two newer p-hangers have been installed far too low such that it is now a real challenge to reach them. Beginners would find this very difficult. The bolt position does allow for a superb hang down the pitch but if only they’d been installed a metre higher! Not far down from the top of the sixth pitch a fissure in the right hand wall (as abseiling) is worth a look. Once again we were too lazy to swing over.

We then doddled out, managing not to get lost in ‘Confusing Chamber’ like the previous weekend’s trip.

Hastings Area

Matt Cracknell

23 December 2006

Party: Matt Cracknell, Sarah Gilbert, Dion Robertson, Amy Ware

Sarah and I made our way to rendezvous with Amy and Dion at their Southport shack at the reasonable time of 10 am. We then spent a bit of time playing “Where’s Amy?” and then we were finally ready a little after 11 am.

I led the way up the old track to Fossil Creek Swallet (H-4), a place I had been to many times before but never having gone in. There was no water flowing into the clast and log filled entrance pit but the logs were slippery none-the-less. Loose sediment greeted us most of the way down to the siphon/sump as did some black flowstone, forest debris and unusual layered humate deposits. I had a brief look at an upper level climb that Arthur had mentioned to me once upon a time.

Next we explored up the dry valley to where a tributary (dry) joins in from the north and a small stream sinks into the abundant regolith that coats the dolomite. We then moved up onto the ridge to the south in search of an untagged cave. We walked closely by a small saddle that has some banded chert outcrops lying close to dolomite on both flanks. Could this possibly be part of the palaeokarst unconformity (i.e. relict doline) or is it a feature of secondary silica replacement dolomite from hydrothermal alteration?

Lunch was had at the entrance of the untagged cave (tentatively tagged H-X40) before we set in to have a look and survey if need be. The cave is literally full of ‘cave coral’ protruding from a substantial flowstone floor that covers the sloping main room. A couple of photos and six odd survey legs were taken with minimal disturbance.



Sarah and Amy park their bums in the squalor of H-4

I then dragged the group through the scrub and fallen trees to a series of small sinks in a shallow doline somewhere above Newdegate Cave. Sarah and I surveyed the doline and the only accessible hole (again tentatively tagged H-X41). This very tiny slot opens right on the contact and features very weathered banded chert/dolomite and extensive silica boxwork. Amy and Dion walked around on the surface intrigued by the obvious blazed survey markers on nearby stumps.

Last stop was at what turned out to be a tagged entrance (H-202) in the bottom of a large (for Hastings) doline. I stuck my head in the entrance and almost swallowed a spider and a few crickets.

During the precisely navigated walk back to the carpark we passed by a deep sinuous depression near Hot Springs Creek. This was plugged into Dion's GPS that had been following our course all day.

IB-27 Chicken Bone Pot (almost) & IB-211 Track Cutters Cave – Lame chickens enjoy a lovely day out

Janine McKinnon & Matt Cracknell

30 December 2006

Party: Serena Benjamin, Matt Cracknell, Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney, Amy Ware

Author's Warning: Due to the ongoing recalcitrance of almost everyone I seem to cave with, you'll have to put up with another trip report written by me.

A lovely day it was and we were off to visit Chicken Bone Pot (IB-27), a cave none of us had been to before. Our instructions, from an old (1986) trip report, gave us two options to reach the cave from the Skinner Track:

1. Up to National Gallery and then 18 minutes(!) around the contact and "voila" you're there, or
2. Continue on the Skinner Track until a limestone knoll and then go straight up the hill for 5-10 minutes.

We, of course, chose the wrong option.

We followed the National Gallery track to near its namesake with no problems. Something like one and a half hours (or so it seemed) later of twisting and scrambling through the limestone outcrop and log strewn forest (but who was timing) hadn't got us to our destination. At least it was a lovely day for a wander in the bush. We tried a bit lower and Matt found himself back on the Skinner Track. As it was midday by now we decided it was lunchtime. At least it was a lovely day for a leisurely lunch "outside".

Now to try option two, but as we were losing confidence of finding the damn hole we decided to try without our packs. That way, according to Murphy, we would find it, and we did. 17 minutes (Amy was timing!) straight up the hill from the knoll. We are obviously not the heroes of yesteryear who quoted 5-10 minutes, presumably WITH heavy caving packs (not a lot of point in going there without the gear).

So now we were there, but not our gear. Inspired by the enormous amounts of apathy floating around in the air we decided to create an instant tradition: No starting underground after midday into a cave with more than two pitches and a party of more than four, two days before New Year.

Well, we didn't really, I just made that up, but the decision was the same. No-one wanted to go back down, lug the gear up again and start caving at 2 pm on such a lovely

day. [Rather than use a 20 year old trip report to find the entrance why not use the archive to discover that the most recent trip to this cave was in January 2005, documented in Speleo Spiel 346. The first thing one notices is that Madphil was on this trip and therefore if he knows where the entrance is then he has surface surveyed it in. I have converted all of Madphil's surveyed entrance coordinates into GPS friendly format and regularly update a select group with this data. Ric/Janine, Matt and Amy are all members of this group and so it is beyond me that at least one of them didn't manage to put that data in their GPS and use that to find the cave in half the time. I'm surprised you guys managed to find your way home at the end of the day! – Ed.]

To save the day from complete 'cavelessness', IB-97 Pseudocheirus (that should be "Pseudocheirus Cave", but our conversation wasn't precisely precise) was mentioned, but enthusiasm was at a VERY low ebb (maybe because it was such a lovely day?). Then some bright spark mentioned IB-211 "Track Cutters Cave" (a.k.a. "most looked in cave") and the decision was made.

Two and a half intrepid souls (Serena got kitted up and climbed down 1 m into the entrance before deciding she didn't want to go in) headed in to explore and report to the others. Matt even did a memory map survey in case it hasn't been surveyed. Such professionalism and dedication to Speleology [A survey of IB-211 appears on page 17 of Southern Caver 50 – Ed.]. This filled in 30 minutes whilst the lazy two enjoyed the lovely day on the surface.

We were back at the cars by 3 pm and so stopped for a tolerable cup of coffee at the Ida Bay Railway (it's running again) cafe.

It had been a lovely day (have I already mentioned that?).

Matt's bit:

Having lost our impetus to drop Chicken Bone Pot it was convenient for a couple of us to pop into Track Cutters Cave (alternatively known as "Most Looked in but Never Visited Cave").

The entrance consists of a 4 m downclimb that features a distinct lack of holds. This opens into a small chamber with a mud and organic debris pile feeding down to a small slot in the floor. This squeeze/climb drops to another small chamber with some decoration (many broken), mud, numerous pulmonate gastropod shells, bones of unfortunate marsupials and the remains of a semi-decomposed lyrebird (Hooray!)

Other Exciting Stuff

CAVEX 2006 - Summary

Alan Jackson

I'm writing this over two months after the event, so it is likely to be brief and inaccurate!

The scenario was that two cavers (one local and one mainlander) were reported overdue from some surface bashing and hole dropping in the Pot Holes area at Ida Bay. It turns out that the local guy falls in to IB-50 (just

along the contact from IB-47 National Gallery) and breaks a few limbs. The other member of the group heads out to raise the alarm, but being unfamiliar with the area, overshoots the Skinner track and becomes lost down the hill somewhere. The scenario was actually quite similar to a real rescue callout several years ago when a lone caver went surface bashing in this area, got lost and eventually found his own way back to the carpark via the back side of the hill and the Southern Ranges Track the following day (before any of the rescue party located him).

I was out with Damian placing the evidence so I don't know exactly what happened during the initial briefing. I think essentially the caver/SES/Police/Project Hahn attendees were split into four or so groups and assigned an area of the Pot Holes to search, with known cave entrances being the first ports of call. The group assigned the National Gallery to Cyclops Pot contact zone soon found evidence of a problem at IB-50 and all other surface crews were instructed to rendezvous at IB-50 and to await further instruction. Someone dropped down IB-50 and found that there was only one person and subsequently a surface search for the second person was instigated while one team set up the vertical haulage system to extract the first patient.

The second person was soon found (I was hoping he'd play harder to find than he did!) and soon everyone was back at IB-50 watching the haul. The haul didn't go well as the stretcher didn't get trussed up properly. After an hour or two of wrestling we gave up, emptied the rocks and mud from the 'dummy' and called it quits.

The most valuable part of the day came at the debrief in the carpark. Everyone was invited to have their say and some good constructive criticism was put forward by many. The main outcome was that we need to eliminate the 'well, in a real rescue situation we would have ...' statement that is used every year to justify why particular things didn't occur. All agreed that we need to make our practice rescues as realistic as possible (keeping safety and minimal environmental impact factors in mind) and treat them the same as if it was a 'real rescue situation'. As long

as event organisers plan carefully to ensure that sensitive caves are not used then we should be right.

Thanks to all those that attended and to Damian Bidgood (Special Agent 172) for his efforts.



The pinnacle of Tasmanian cave rescue - Damian Bidgood takes the post exercise debrief a little too seriously.

Midnight Hole Rescue – the real thing!

16 December 2006

Alan Jackson & Matt Cracknell

I woke up on Saturday morning with a whole day ahead of me and nothing planned. This all changed when my breakfast was interrupted by the phone ringing (about 8:30 am). The caller was the husband of a member of a party of four who had gone into Midnight Hole the previous evening and not emerged yet. He found my name as the Search and Rescue Officer on the STC website and called me to ask if he should be concerned yet (they were expecting to be out at around 3:30 am – it was a proper midnight Midnight Hole trip!). I asked him all the right questions (party member names, ages, experience, last contact times, vehicle make and registration etc...) and took the next step.

I tried ringing the Hasting Visitor Centre first but no one answered, so I then tried the Huonville Parks office. Through this office we managed to organise for Hastings Ranger, Rob Wass, who was in the Ida Bay area, to do a quick check of the carpark for the party's car. He

confirmed that the car was there and that there were no intentions left in the log book for that party. I contacted the Police radio room and started the ball rolling. Sgt Paul Steane had drawn the short straw and had his morning surf interrupted! Between the two of us we organised a rabble of a dozen or so Police, cavers and SES personnel and we were on the road by a bit after noon.

We basically banked on it being one of three scenarios:

1. The party got lost in the section between the Matchbox Squeeze and the Laundry Chute;
2. The party got their ropes hung on one of the middle pitches and are stranded halfway down;
3. Somebody had hurt themselves.

The possibility that they hadn't even found the cave and were lost somewhere in the bush was also entertained in our minds.

It turned out that it was the first option. This exact scenario played out a few years ago when a couple failed to negotiate the 'Confusing Chamber' area of the cave on a Midnight Hole through-trip. It may be sensible to place

some form of route marking through this section to save a repeat performance in the future.

In the end the cavalry didn't quite make it to Ida Bay before the party was located by Parks employees. The media got a hold of it somehow and left messages on both my home phone and Gavin's (website once again I imagine) and they were waiting in the carpark to interview the rescuers and the rescued. It must have been a slow news day as it was the lead story on the ABC's 7 o'clock news. The story also made it into the three Tasmanian papers. Matt's version of events below covers what happened at the Parks end. Thanks very much to those cavers that made themselves available to help out.

Matt's bit:

The following is a personal account of the Mystery Creek incident where a group of cavers were found in good condition after becoming lost. All times are approximate.

1000 hrs: Alan Jackson (AJ) calls the Hastings Caves Visitor Centre. He advises me that there is an overdue group of 4 cavers that have not returned from a Midnight Hole through trip. He instructs me to prepare for search and rescue. He also informs me that the police are preparing to leave Hobart at 1200 hrs and that Geoff Murray (GM) who raised the alarm is on his way down to Ida Bay.

Senior Ranger Rob Wass (RW) confirms that the caver's vehicle is still at the Southern Ranges carpark.

1100 hrs: AJ calls to instruct me to make my way to the Southern Ranges carpark and act as communications link with the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) and the Police Search and Rescue (S+R). He also instructs me not to enter the cave on my own and wait until S+R arrive.

1130 hrs: I arrive at the carpark to find the Dover policeman, Max Miller's (MM) car but no MM. I notice in the log book that Jason Gardener (JG) and Alice Liddell (AL) have signed in. They note that they are heading into

Mystery Creek, presumably to look for the lost cavers. I try to contact them through hand held radio without success.

I set up mobile phone and radio link with PWS and S+R (through AJ) advising them of my position and the information that I have at hand.

1200 hrs: GM arrives at the carpark with the wife of the overdue group's trip leader. I give them a brief rundown of the situation and pass on the instruction to wait until further notice.

1230 hrs: MM arrives back at the carpark. He has made an attempt to find the track to Midnight Hole but without success.

1245 hrs: RW and District Ranger Mike Garner (MG) arrive at the carpark. A decision is made to send RW and I, with hand held radio and phone, to the entrance of Midnight Hole to confirm that the overdue group had entered the cave.

1315 hrs: RW and I find a bag and note left by JG and AL at the Midnight Hole track junction confirming that they had entered the cave in search of the overdue group. We leave a note to inform them of our movements.

1330 hrs: RW and I hear voices from the vicinity of the Mystery Creek Cave entrance. It is impossible to understand the message so I head back down the hill to establish the situation.

1335 hrs: I arrive at the bag at the track junction to find a note confirming that the group had been found in good condition and were on their way out. I relay this information to RW so that he can establish contact with PWS and S+R and inform them of the successful search.

1345 hrs: JG and AL emerge from the cave with the overdue group. I confirm the situation with AJ via phone.

1415 hrs: All groups back safely at the carpark. I check that I am not needed for the preliminary debrief and head back to Hastings to finish off some cave tours.

Bunton's World of Karst – Part 3 – Western Australia

Stephen Bunton

This is the report of caving related experiences enjoyed on the second part of our Long Service Leave in 2006.

After a quick six days at home over Easter to check the demise of the bank balances, we headed off by car and ferry to explore the big island. The ultimate goal was to visit Ningaloo Reef (before they stuff it up with a mega-resort at Coral Bay!) and go snorkeling with the whale sharks (before the Taiwanese slaughter them all for shark fin soup!)

Flinders Ranges

After meeting our friends in Adelaide we headed off to enjoy a few days in the Flinders Ranges. The nearby township of Quorn was the site of the 21st ASF Conference in 1997. The spectacular tilted rock strata give this place its photogenic appeal. Some of the beds are limestone and you can see cave entrances from some of the tourist drives. We didn't do any cave exploring but stuck mostly to some peak-bagging bushwalks. The most interesting thing is the trip back through time visiting the

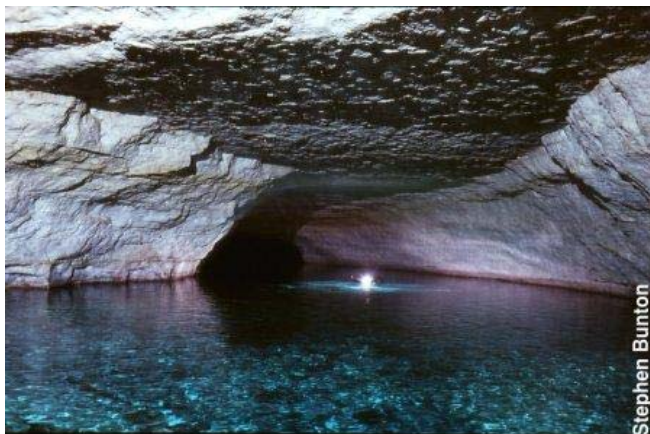
fossil sites as you do the Brachina Gorge drive. I recommend this to anyone and everyone.

Nullarbor

We couldn't drive across the Nullarbor and not do a cave or two. Many are marked on topo maps although some do require permission to visit them. We camped the first night at Weebubbie, which is still closed from a rockfall in 1997. The sign at the entrance says that you should see Eucla Police for details. The main problem was that the old steel ladders have been removed. You could down-climb the first 3 m section to the right of the bolt-farm, that marks the former site of the ladder. At the bottom, for the longer vertical section, there was now a wooden ladder of dubious quality.

The main drama was that the flies here were horrendous. We are lucky in Tassy that we don't get bad bushflies. As fly numbers go, this was almost as bad as I can ever remember from my formative years on the mainland. Trying to swat flies whilst attempting a dodgy down-climb into a cave that was clearly marked with no entry signs was more risk than I wished to take. I'm not so worried about dying but smashing yourself up could really hurt! Worse still would be the embarrassment, especially when you have a bit of a public profile. I hope I never see the

headlines "Semi-famous caver stuffs up big time". [Don't flatter yourself *Bunty*. – Ed.]



Weebubbie Cave.

The other dilemma is that once you have children, you try to teach them the right thing to do; obey the "Don't walk" sign, the "Don't litter" sign etc. It's hard therefore to go into the cave and say that the "No entry" sign only applies to lesser non-caving mortals. Arrogance, ignorance and pride cometh before the fall.

Next morning we visited Abrakurrie which is an easy walk-in and then a boulder scramble down to an incredible, huge, flat-floored chamber. This cave is easy and spectacular so it should be on everyone's tick list. That afternoon it was a rush to get back onto the bitumen before the impending rain transformed the rough tracks into muddy bogs. Once on the highway again we drove west into a ferocious storm and it rained all night.

Next morning we didn't attempt to visit Cocklebidy as planned because of the likely state of the road. After charging us for an overpriced room, the manager of the Cocklebidy Motel gave us some free advice, that the cave was closed by CALM, the WA Department of Conservation and Land Management.

When we got to Perth we met up with Stefan Eberhard who had just spent two weeks(!) in the area on a diving trip. His opinion was that the flies were "torture". He gave us the lowdown on Cocklebidy. We also caught up with Fran Head in Perth who gave us a hit list of lots of great things to see and do in WA. We were extremely grateful for this.



Abrakurrie Cave.

Other Western Australian Areas

Despite Fran telling us that the tourist caves at Yanchep just north of Perth weren't worth visiting we went anyway.

The grounds are very pleasant, the old buildings are great. They are made out of timber and stone, or the glued together sand and shells that passes for limestone in this part of the world. There's a koala exhibit and plenty of endangered Carnabys Black Cockatoos which seek refuge here and are gradually defoliating the place. We stopped for a picnic.

Just south of Cervantes is Nambung National Park. This is famous for the pinnacles. These are strange phallic pillars of limestone up to 5 m high which have been exposed when the more sandy stuff in the rock has been removed from around them. This sand makes a series of dunes parallel to the coast which starts the next cycle of limestone and cave formation.

Slightly further north is Stockyard Gully, a place I'd never heard of until Norm Poulter won a prize in the CaveMania Photographic Competition with a shot of the entrance to Stockyard Gully Cave. Unfortunately the road to the cave was too sandy for our toy 4WD, Subaru, to get through.

Nearby Exmouth is the main town on Northwest Cape. The backbone of the cape is a limestone ridge with some 4000 caves. Much of the area forms part of the Cape Range National Park and much of the cave exploration in this area was carried out by local caver Darren Brooks, who is known to some of you. Darren was on an expedition to Christmas Island at the time of our visit so we didn't do any trogging. A trip up the limestone gorges on the east side was worth the look but it's a hot and rugged place to look for caves. The saving grace is that it is so dry there are few trees to impede your view but this also means no shade.

Unfortunately tourist trade and growth in the area has placed increased demands on water supplies and the underground aquifers are being lowered. The karst area made it to the international stage when it was listed as one of the 10 most endangered karst systems on Earth by the Karst Waters Institute. Many stygobiotic species are threatened.

It's hard when you go to these areas because they are spectacular and you want to appreciate them but then realise that you are contributing to the problems they face.

Nullarbor Again

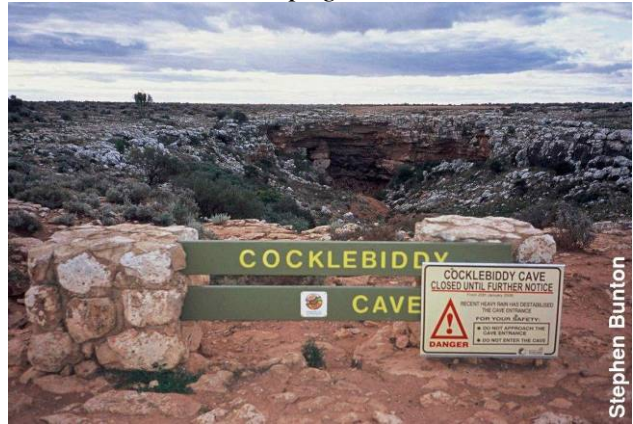
On the way back home we were determined to see Cocklebidy Cave for no other reason than it was famous, gaining good media coverage as various teams attempted to make it the world's longest cave dive.

At the turnoff to Cocklebidy Cave and then again when you arrive at the cave there are CALM signs that the cave is closed. If you go beyond these you pass more signs on a similar theme until you get to within a metre of the entrance and are confronted with a fence and another sign. After stepping over the fence you see that only the bolts remain from where the old steel ladder was. I had forgotten that there was a ladder there at all. In 1991 it seemed like an easy cave, just a walk in and this is how I had described it to Kathy and Grace. Now faced with a desperate down-climb I wasn't sure what to do. Should I do the responsible dad thing and say "Well we really should follow what it says on the signs...." As it was my hand was forced.

Grace just said "I'm sure I can climb down here" and so that was it! I decided to go first down the almost overhanging wall of death. We down-climbed the 5 m drop

being very careful not to dislodge any of the cobbles that were loosely held in amongst a few Barina-sized boulders. The rest of the cave is a walk in or boulder hop down to the lake without walking straight into the absolutely clear water because you couldn't see it. Peering into the dark depths across the lake it was hard to imagine that this cave extends over 6 km underwater.

All we had to do was retrace our steps, ascend the wall of death and we were safe from embarrassment. "Oh goody, we lived!" I always celebrate with this saying after a heart in mouth caving trip. For us there was nothing more speleological on the sports plan. All there was to look forward to was the long drive home.



Warning sign at Cocklebidy Cave.



Cavex 2006 – a few photos (clockwise from top left):

- Rolan contemplates the use of unhomogenised milk in his coffee
- Briony and Tony wait for the police to get organised in the carpark
- Captain Ski-Patrol (Bunty) strikes a pose (are hats like that legal?)
- Alan and a friendly policeman (Tim?) assess the hole



IB-211 Track Cutter Cave

STC Map No:
7IB211STC88 &
7IB211SCS1

Drawn by:
M.Cracknell; 07-01-07
P.Jackson; 19-02-82 (original)

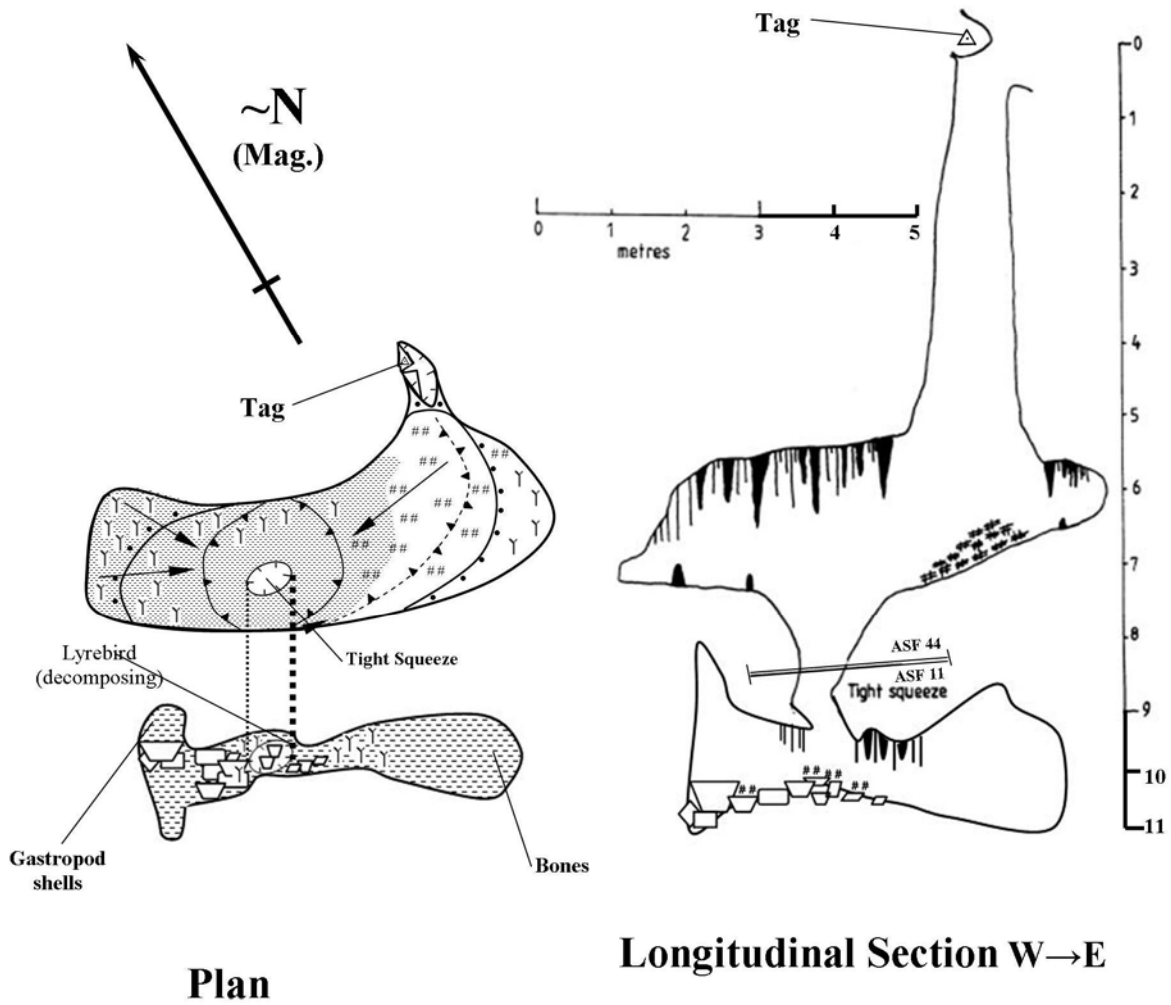
Surveyed by:
M.Cracknell, 30-12-06
P.Jackson and R.Fulton, 09-02-82 (original)

Original Scale: 1/50

Note: Section modified from P.Jackson,
Southern Caver, Vol.50, p. 17.

Survey Grade:
11 & 44 (original)

Symbols: ASF 1999



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