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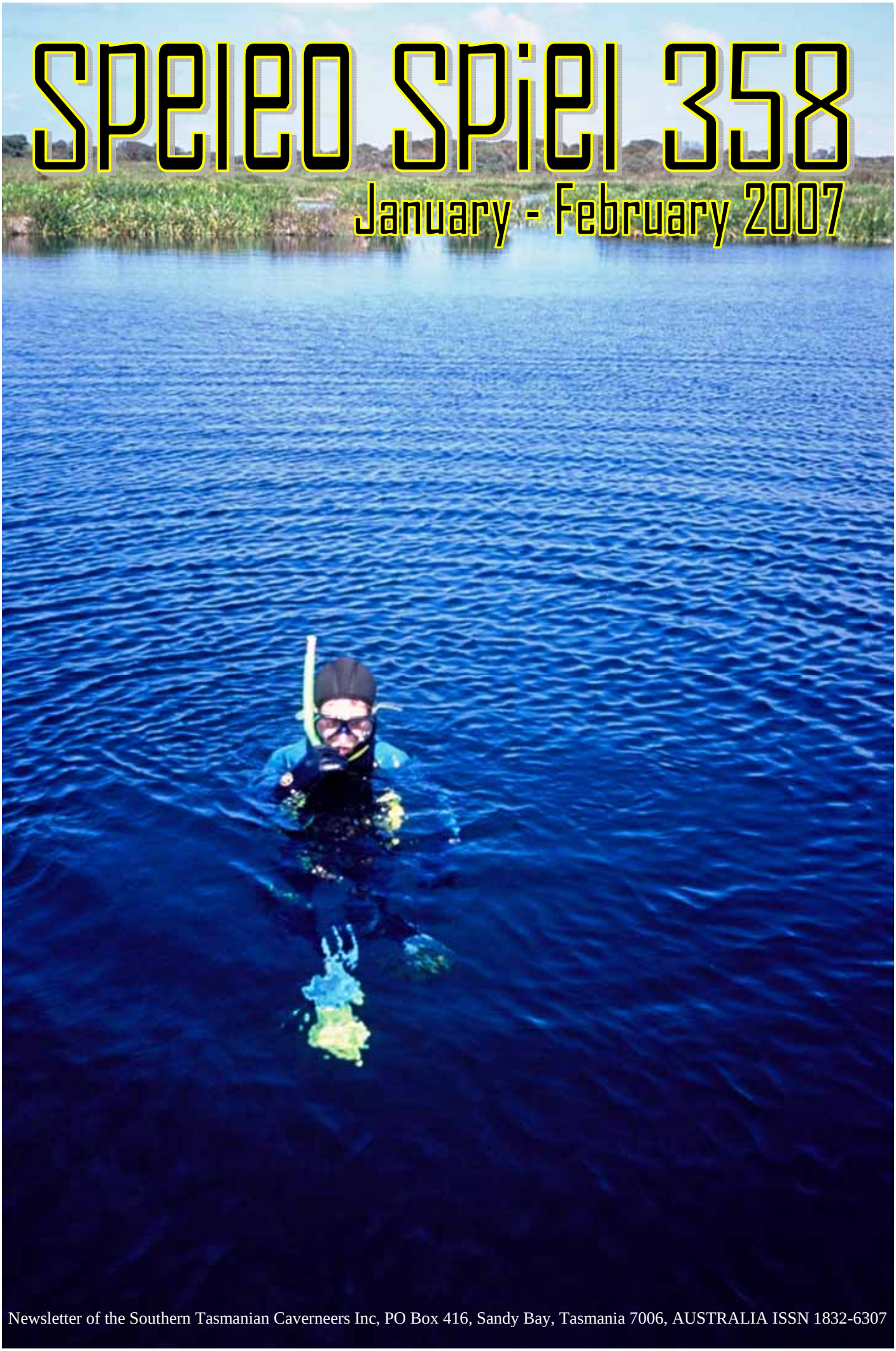
January - February 2007



Newsletter of the Southern Tasmanian Caverneers Inc, PO Box 416, Sandy Bay, Tasmania 7006, AUSTRALIA ISSN 1832-6307

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Front Cover: Grace Bunton snorkels in Piccaninnie Ponds (photo by Stephen Bunton)

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 (Rant)

It looks like I forgot to take my chill pill this issue.

Another ASF conference has been and gone and as usual it has provided me with some food for thought. I didn't attend the recent conference (in fact I've never attended an ASF conference) and I can only rely on the authenticity of the detail in Bunty's report and his account at the recent club meeting for the majority of my understanding. Bunty's report appears in this edition (down near the back where it belongs!)

Steve mentions the outcry regarding cave safety in regard to the report in *Caves Australia* 170 of caving on 8 mm rope and in parties of two – heaven forbid. It appears strange to me that members of ASF are so concerned about the safety of two very experienced cavers not following 'correct protocol' on a Spanish expedition not at all related to, coordinated by or under the jurisdiction of ASF. Instead of looking so far a field for breaches of the safety code why didn't they pipe up at breaches at the conference? Steve has several photos of the prussiking and SRT ropes course. Interesting that none of the people photographed partaking in these activities are wearing helmets at all.

Section 8.2.3 of the ASF Cave Safety Guidelines (available on the ASF website) states that '*A helmet with a four-point attachment CHINSTRAP should be worn for any vertical work, whether above ground or below.*' Section 8.2.4 illustrates another clear breach of the code when it states that '*Gloves should always be worn when engaging in SRT work.*' Fortunately for Bunty a cruel twist of nature means that it is unlikely that he could have been in breach of section 8.3.1. I couldn't actually find any section that suggested that SRT on 8 mm rope was not recommended under the guidelines.

By all means I encourage safe caving but let's think before we speak (that's a rich statement coming from me, I know). The ASF Safety Guidelines are exactly what they say they are – guidelines. They are not law. The guidelines also state that '*If you visit any cave, canyon, cliff or karst area or feature, YOU DO SO ENTIRELY AT YOUR OWN RISK.*' I think Al Warild would understand this and has obviously adequately assessed the risk of the many dangerous activities that he has partaken in over the years. I'm sure I would not be shot down in flames if I were to suggest that Al Warild would be eligible for the title of the greatest caver Australia has ever produced and one of the world's best also. If I was Al I would be insulted that people much less my equal in vertical caving experience are telling me how to cave safely. I sincerely hope that Steve engages his brain when he rewrites the safety guidelines, as he has been instructed to do on behalf of ASF. Regardless of whether he does a good job or not, I will not be reading them. I only dredged out and read the current ones so I could find more material for this diatribe.

The other issue that the conference never fails to raise for me is good old insurance. Apparently ASF has secured an insurance premium that not only allows us better flexibility and conditions but is also half the price! Well done to the people who coordinated this, I commend you. What I don't commend is the fact that 2007 subscription rates will not be reducing as a result. We at STC had always assumed that the bulk of our ASF fees were going towards the insurance premium. At the 2005 conference in Dover, after attending the AGM, our president, Gavin, informed us that while this was the case the amount we paid was significantly higher than the amount paid for the actual insurance premium. A large portion was being put away to lessen the impact of projected rapid increases in the premium in future years – just in case. STC resolved to clarify how the fees were divided up and requested a copy of the treasurer's report and a cost breakdown. Despite repeated requests we never received one. Now, with the lower premium that has been secured, an even larger percentage of our total subscription fee is going to 'just in case' money. We at STC want to know how big that percentage is now, how much it has been for the last few years and how much 'just in case' money has been collected across the country since the practice was introduced. There must be thousands of dollars of our money sitting somewhere earning interest.

The standard ASF defense is generally along the lines that membership is only $65 a year, which hardly breaks the bank. If you're a fully employed person then that may be accurate, but ask any person if they'd rather pay $30 or $65 for something and the answer is obvious. At STC we consider that the large ASF subscription rates seriously affect our membership numbers. A large portion of our new membership comes from university students and other similarly aged people. Money is tight for this group. Joining STC at around $15 a year is normally manageable but make it more like $85 including ASF membership and it frightens them off. Without an influx of new young members then all the clubs around Australia, including STC, will become aged care facilities. I guess then we can spend all of the money ASF is currently stockpiling on installing wheelchair access ramps into our caves so its members can continue to cave. The fact that ASF is now making even bigger savings on their premium but still charging its members the same amount is appalling. They've already admitted that they've been overcharging us for years, now they intend increasing the rip off! The case for STC remaining a member of ASF continues to weaken.

Alan Jackson

Stuff 'n Stuff

NEW TRACES. STC has three new wire traces. Our old traces were at least 35 years old and were made from galvanised steel wire, mostly 1/8" (3 mm), for use with ladders. The new traces are made from 3/16" (4.8 mm) stainless steel wire with swaged, thimbled eyes at each end. They are 2 m, 4 m and 6 m long. *Ric Tunney*

STC ARCHIVE VERSION II. Ric and his henchmen have been tirelessly adding more publications and other cave info to the club's electronic archives. A second official release is now available to those that have signed data use agreements. A fee of $5 covers costs with a little left over for STC consolidated revenue.

DEAN MORGAN KEEPS ON MOVING. In the last *Spiel* I mentioned that Dean was heading off to Newcastle. This almost happened but a last minute change saw him head to sunny Queensland instead. His new contact details can be found in the membership list.

WEDDING BELLS. Congratulations to Amy and Dion who tied the knot on February 3rd. When can we expect babies?

Trip Reports

IB-11 Midnight Hole

Alan Jackson

14 January 2007

Party: Sarah Gilbert, Alan Jackson, Sarah Robinson, Andy Laverick

Occasionally one has to pay penance and take some beginners through Midnight Hole. This was my trip for 2007.

It hadn't changed much. Everyone had fun except my feet – they didn't appreciate being squeezed into Gavin's gumboots which I had accidentally mixed up with my own. The toenails have almost grown back.

Despite personal pleas from Rolan and Damian defending their bolt placements on the last pitch I still thought they were ordinary. If I wasn't such an opinionated and obnoxious person then the *Spiel* wouldn't be anywhere near as interesting to read.

JF-270 Tachycardia – Bolting in the name of

Alan Jackson

24 January 2007

Party: Serena Benjamin, Alan Jackson

After several aborted and postponed attempts, we were off to Tachy again. This trip was aimed at getting the top section rigged and tidied up in preparation for a dig trip the following Sunday.

It was superbly dry in the cave – just the odd trickle here and there. It was still muddy as all hell and moderately unpleasant to be in but the absence of constant rain from the ceiling was a nice change from the conditions we left this cave in earlier last year. The approach to the first pitch, a very steep loose slope, was originally rigged off naturals in a little side chamber. This had progressively disintegrated during our many trips and was no longer safe to use (if it ever was!) We whipped out the new whiz-bang drill and popped in two bolts in the left hand wall (true) just before the nasty little step down to the old rigging point. This allows for much safer access and keeps the rope up off the floor on the way down to the pitch head proper.

Next stop was the climb below The Dig. We installed a single bolt to hang the short (10 rung) ladder off. This had originally been dangled from a rather dodgy natural several meters above the climb. The bolt is on the left wall immediately above the short drop (after one has negotiated the zigzag descent at the chockstone). The following rockfall, Gypsyland, was as unpleasant as ever.

Serena rigged On the Rope Again pitch, where I found a krab we'd left behind in May 2006 – this pitch is disappointing in that it is rigged entirely off naturals; it needs a bolt, surely. I placed a hand-line on the climb-up and then instead of turning back under to Art Deco we continued climbing up and across into the lead I had looked at quickly on the first derig trip last year. A short section of passage leads to a pitch with similar water levels as that which joins half way down Art Deco. Two bolts later and we were down this ~10 m pitch. The mud and filth on this pitch was incredible. The way on was down through more filth via numerous short steps and it was pretty obvious that this was indeed leading to Art Deco (the hard way). We turned around as there was no point destroying more mud than we had to – it was actually quite pretty looking mud until you touched it.

On the way out we quickly dashed over to the short pitch that leads to the Starburst Passage. This was our route for the next trip and the first time we had gone down here the rigging had been what can only be described as 'exploration' style. We whacked in another two bolts at the pitch head (Rolan would be having homogenised nightmares at the thought of so many bolt placements!) We then departed the clutches of the cave.

JF-270 Tachycardia – digging Creation of Man

Alan Jackson

26 January 2007

Party: Serena Benjamin, Gavin Brett, Alan Jackson

Back again so soon. Unfortunately the wet conditions were back again too and lots of rain had rendered conditions in the cave almost as wet as we'd seen them. It was truly hideous. We made our way to the end of the Starburst Passage and prepared the 12 m pitch. This had a bad rub on it that we'd always intended to 'knock off'. A few caps later and the rub was gone. Unfortunately a piece of fly rock whacked the little finger on my right hand which resulted in a steady flow of blood (cave karma). There is now blood splattered on the walls at the pitch head and we have a name for this pitch – Blood Bath. A short length of survey ribbon/tape bound tightly around my finger stemmed the bleeding (the first aid kit was unsuccessfully searched for before the trip) and we continued on – no doubt in breach of the ASF Safety Guidelines ...

The dig at Creation of Man pitch proved to be much more laborious than we had anticipated. Gavin did all the hard work at the coal face, I managed material supply in the constricted space above Gavin and Serena acted as back up material supply back at the base of the previous pitch (as well as slowly freezing to death). Many, many caps later the rock finally yielded and we had ourselves a hole worthy of a caver. Unfortunately at this point Gavin moved a large dodgy rock from the pitch head and as it crashed down the pitch it broke off God's finger! You may remember that two fingers of rock reaching out to one another had inspired the name of this pitch based on Michelangelo's work in the Cistern Chapel. It was very disappointing, as was the ensuing section of cave. Serena

got the honours (her first new pitch descent, I believe) as a reward for silently suffering in the cold as we dug. The news was not joyful and I joined her to concede that things didn't look hopeful. There were two possible spots that one could squeeze a small body through but I wasn't inspired enough. The skanky narrow rift could wait for the next generation of moronic cavers. The pitch was measured at ~ 11 m.

The journey out was as hideous and nasty as it gets in Tachy – wet, muddy, cumbersome packs and one very sore finger.

JF-291 Cap It Cave and other digging projects

Alan Jackson

3 February 2007

Party: Gavin Brett, Alan Jackson

Following our unpleasant trip to Tachycardia the previous weekend Gavin refused to waste what was possibly going to be his second last caving trip before impending fatherhood strips him of his caving rights (i.e. ever). Instead he mooted a return to the dig in JF-290 Cap It Cave. I also saw this as an opportunity to get a bit more of the outstanding surface surveying completed in that area. This is not to say that surface surveying in this area is especially exciting but rather that it hadn't been done yet!

We headed to Cap It Cave first, via Slaughterhouse Pot and then up the route we originally pioneered to Lost Pot. We added a few tapes to the route to make surveying of this section easier on our return. After reaching the 'permanent' survey station we had left on a tree on the ridge when we had last surveyed up this way (putting a traverse between JF-407 Wait Cave and JF-289), we bumbled off through the bush. We became surprisingly disoriented but eventually stumbled across our pink taped survey line to Cap It Cave and surrounds.

Gavin had done all the hard work the previous weekend so I was sent down the hole this time. I hadn't seen the results of Gavin's previous efforts in this cave and I was disappointed at what was now the digging front. He had made good progress but his description of a 'difficult but rewarding' dig was way off. It was difficult all right, but far from rewarding. I cleared one rock to gain a better view of the tight descending rift and told Gavin he was dreaming. He concurred and we left Cap It Cave to be forgotten about until some up-and-coming caver rediscovers it in 20 years time with renewed interest and rock dissolving potion.

Alan heads in to Cap It Cave still looking clean and virginal.

We were now scratching our heads for something to do. It was only about 11 am. We were going to bring a short section of ladder to at least inspect JF-289 nearby but I had somehow managed to not put it in. I suggested we take another look at JF-287 in the bottom of the gully (just down from the very large streamsink). Neither Gavin nor Janine had seemed remotely enthusiastic about this entrance when I had found it with them many months ago. A quick inspection, the cold draft and the rattling of rocks brought Gavin around. I went back for the digging gear while Gavin started clearing the smaller rocks from the entrance. Soon we only had two large loose boulders and two wedged rocks impeding our progress. Capping at the surface is a dream – so much space to work in!

By this stage the extreme nerdiness that Gavin secretly harbours had come forward. The cave number, 287, made him think of when the '286' was the pinnacle of computer technology and to make them slightly more capable they bunged a 287 coprocessor on the side. Wikipedia puts forward the following:

*The Intel **80287** ('287') was the math coprocessor for the Intel 80286 series of microprocessors. It was used to perform floating point arithmetic operations directly in hardware.*

The cave was now called Coprocessor. If you've seen the photo of Gavin as a teenager in the 80s with his enormous Bill Gates style glasses on then you'll completely embrace his inner nerd. I shudder to imagine the names that sections of this cave will get if it goes anywhere significant.

The nerd climbed down into the entrance and found himself standing on a large bridging boulder at the head of an ~8 m pitch. He didn't realise it was bridging, and not bedrock, till after he was clambering over it. He soiled himself as a result. Having not brought any ladder or rope we headed out again. We shall return.

I quickly popped down JF-288 which is in the cliff face only five metres from 287 and detected a light draft at the bottom but nothing worth digging at this stage. We packed up and started heading back to do some surveying.

Again, thanks to my superb navigational skills, we became slightly disoriented but this time found a new entrance. Gavin probed it to its seven or so metres of depth and declared it all over. We'll find it again one day and survey it in and tag it. We then found the enormous blind doline and used it to guide us to JF-283 Greasy Pole. We dropped packs and quickly surveyed in the nearby holes JF-281, 282 and 291. Ideally one should continue the short distance from 281 to Lost Pot and 269 to make a survey loop. Next time …

Next we headed off to find our survey tree so we could tie in JF-284 Carpark Cave III and 285. Again I got us lost and again we found another entrance. Gavin had spotted a small shelter cave type entrance with a tight slot leading in. I tried in vain to squeeze in so the digging gear came out again. Two dull thuds later and I was slipping in with ease.

JF-287 Coprocessor entrance photo taken on the day of discovery and tagging – 21 January 2006

It was a very interesting little cave which started with an elongated passage about 8 metres long with a low ceiling which was covered with white crunchy stuff and heaps of crickets and spiders. I noticed many other types of invertebrates that I hadn't seen in caves before – there was so much life in this cave that even Arthur couldn't make a dent in the population with a pack full of ethanol and little glass jars. At the end a wombat skull (*Vombatus ursinus*) sat with no evidence of the rest of its body – perhaps it was having an out of body experience. A small slot allowed me to squeeze down into a lower flat section with loose cobble floor which in turn lead to a small opening into a long but narrow passage. This passage continued either side of my breakthrough point for about 8 metres and was beautifully adorned with white moonmilk, cave coral and a multitude of other beauties in white. A small echoey chamber could not be squeezed into at the down hill end. Under a rock in this section I discovered a small fungal colony. I had seen fungi in caves before but mainly only as hyphal growth (deepest I've seen is at the first sump in KD feeding on the plethora of organic material washed in by the stream) but these were three little caps (i.e. Basidiomycetes) in an area not overly flush with organic material. They seemed very out of place. Everything about this cave seemed strange – we were in the Junee-Florentine yet we had found a dry, horizontal and well decorated cave. Matt – you would love this cave.

The new and improved entrance to Coprocessor. It is now looking a little less pristine and a little more used.

On the way out we were guided by a Tasmanian cave tiger; a species presumed extinct which is in fact alive and well! After some discussion we declared the cave 'White Wedding' in honour of the extensive white decoration and the wedding that was taking place in Geeveston on the day (Dion and Amy) – Billy Idol, unfortunately, was nowhere to be seen.

We had now chewed up too much time and the planned surface survey was abandoned. We've got two more entrances to survey in now too. Alas.

JF-337 Slaughterhouse Pot thru trip

Dale Pregnell

3 February 2007

Party: Grant Roberts, Dale Pregnell

We arrived at the Slaughterhouse Pot entrance at 9:30 am. The weather was lovely, as was the forest and we enjoyed the day as we changed into our gear and entered the cave at 9:45 am.

We made our way through the cave and down the two pitches to the boulder-pile climb-through. This was great fun and a small challenge as I was leading Grant through and I had only been there once before.

We found the third pitch and descended it, stopping at the bottom for some lunch and to make a decision as to our next move.

A joint decision was made to not go further into the cave as we would have been too embarrassed to have Alan and Gavin come looking for us if we were to get lost, so we started to make our way through the Windy Rift.

As we did the bottomless squeeze I had great pleasure in seeing Grant try to get through with his pack and left arm behind him. For some reason this helped him become somewhat wedged, and as I was already through it gave me an opportunity to laugh very hard at his situation.

Grant quickly sorted out his problem and we then made our way to the streamway.

As we made our way up the streamway and the climbs Grant surprised me by not requiring any hand lines or a belay (the man can climb).

I made two wrong turns as I was finding my way out of Growling Swallet but these were quickly realised and rectified.

Before we knew it we were standing in the sun enjoying the lovely view of Growling Swallet entrance at 2:15 pm and we both agreed it was a great trip.

JF-341 Threefortyone

Alan Jackson

11 February 2007

Party: Serena Benjamin, Gavin Brett, Sarah Gilbert, Alan Jackson, Dave Rasch

Despite the lure of JF-287 Coprocessor we trundled off to Threefortyone to look at Dave's bolt climb lead. Originally the trip was going to consist of two parties – one to climb and one to tourist. Various events conspired and the numbers dwindled to five (Ric injured his green thumb in the garden).

The only thing of note on the way down the pitches was the installation of a bolt for an approach line to the third pitch (15 m or so). There are two or three excellent natural anchors out over the pitch head but one has to bridge the rift initially to rig them and once rigged the rope is then at full stretch to grab and attach yourself to for the descent. Last time I was here I found a fairly dodgy natural thread around a dolerite boulder wedged in the floor several metres back from the pitch but I couldn't find it this time. The 8 mm bolt is located a few metres back from the pitch on the left hand wall (true). No doubt the Old School Cavers Against Homogenised Karst members will frown against this bolt placement but 21st century caving is a bit different to that undertaken in the late 20th century – i.e. we value our lives and don't partake in illicit drugs before caving.

Raschy's climb was in the first chamber after the first crystal pool (which was bone dry). I free-climbed to the point that Jeff Butt had previously reached (I could see his foot-prints) and then scoped the tricky bit. Everything was coated in flowstone of unknown quality and depth with equally unknown quality of underlying bedrock. In some sections the 'bedrock' was simply gravel and mud deposits. Neither Gavin nor I were prepared to put much faith in bolts installed in this surface. I think the best option would be to return with three or four sections of the scaling pole so that you could gain access to the right hand side (as ascending) of the passage. Here there is exposed bedrock that would provide a much nicer substrate to place bolts in.

Our new plan was to head 'Into the Dinosaur' and suss out another bolt climb that Raschy had on his wish-list. On the way we installed a handline on the tricky little climb up just before the site of the original TCC dig. Whether it made it any easier or not is unknown, although it did save Sarah's bacon on the way out! We made it to the Milky Way before Gavin pulled the lame card on us. His last trip (possibly ever …) and he goes soft! Lame. Gavin and Dave headed for the ropes while I killed some time showing Serena and Sarah the Dinosaurs Mouth and the pretties in the large chambers on the way to the Enterprise Extension. I somehow managed to refrain from walking all over anything pretty. Not a bad day out in the end. Sarah is showing all the right signs of becoming a very competent caver. Gavin, on the other hand, is showing all the wrong signs for a post baby caving career.

Optimistic Depth Record Search

Alan Jackson

18 February 2007

Party: Stephen Bunton, Alan Jackson

The track to Tachycardia was out of shape and we had some activity planned for there in the near future so we spruced it up a little. While we were up there we searched the area on the surface above the large chamber at the first pitch. Quite a bit of water enters here and we had long dreamed of a higher entrance that would add some more metres to the depth. We found a depression in the right spot but nothing overly cave-looking. It looks like we'll have to do it the hard way by adding extra depth at the bottom end.

JF-36 Growling Swallet – New Feeling

Tony Veness

25 February 2007

Party: Banana Man, Serena Benjamin, Dale Pregnell, Blueberry Boy

Twas the last weekend before uni started, so Banana Man and Blueberry Boy thought it was time for some cold wet underground action. At Serena's suggestion, the super heroes, along with teamsters Serena and Dale, headed north to the Florentine Valley in the Red Rocket, departing Hobart at 0800 on a sunny Hobart Sunday.

After a sugar, dairy product and petroleum top-up at New Norfolk, the team headed on to the Growling car park and were underground by about 1045. The Dry Bypass route was followed from the entrance, down through the (dry) Cascades and onto Stal Corner, where the serious exploration\getting lost was to begin.

After a series of drafty low crawls and rock filled low points, which tested the team, a red 6 mm haul cord hanging conveniently down the wall of a two metre wide, ten metre tall passage was located. An 11 mm belay\hand rope was found a few metres further along, which Dale made short work of. After confirming that a) the 11 m rope was attached to something and b) the 6 mm cord wasn't, the others followed, using the cord for pack hauling. The cord was left tied into the rigging of the 11 mm rope. A further few metres of vertical scrambling took the team into the large(ish) New Feeling Chamber, which served well as a lunch spot and camera testing station.

Following the red survey tape through the heavily decorated chambers and passage, a 12 metre pitch was found at the end of a short clean section of phreatic tube.

Eric (Matt) IS Banana Man.

Serena rigged the pitch using a Y-belay from the two somewhat rusty 10 mm bolts and hangers on the left-hand wall of the pitch (looking down), backed up, ten metres back up the tube, to a pair of natural anchors, rigged by Banana Man. The teamsters made it down the very clean pitch to the boulder strewn floor in no time and leaving their SRT gear behind, went in search of the 'mini-Khan'.

Decoration in New Feeling Chamber.

A short, heavily decorated section of level narrow passage leads away from the bottom of the 12 metre pitch and on to a short climb into the bottom end of the 'mini-Khan' chamber. Traversing around and up the right-hand side of the 'mini-Khan', past the low turnoff to next pitch, an unstable dirt\rock floor was climbed up past the top of the 'mini-Khan'. Excellent views of this large chamber, with large formations were gained from a flat high point.

Expanding bladders and growing lethargy meant the time had come to turnaround, and after gingerly\bum sliding back down the loose slope, the team made their way back to their SRT gear and back up the pitch.

Serena admires the stals in New Feeling.

Blueberry Boy's sandwich was recovered from the lunch spot in New Feeling Chamber and Banana Man and his bladder led the way out, back through the low squeezes to the main streamway at Stal Corner.

A crystal pool in New Feeling.

The Cascades still weren't cascading and the Dry Bypass was still dry and the team were back in the afternoon sunlight in no time (1730ish actually). After a serious wash of gear and bodies in the stream, food and clean clothes were sort in the Red Rocket. A trip to Tim Shea lookout was undertaken on the way home, to enjoy the fine Sunday afternoon views and to check on the state of the fire at the Northern end of the Florentine Valley.

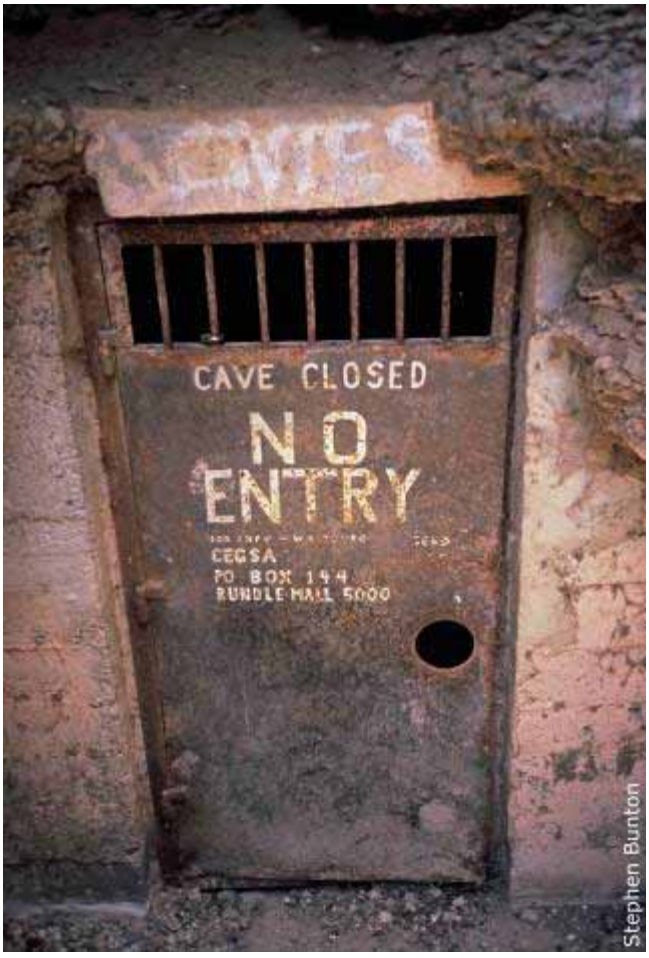
Other Exciting Stuff

Notes on the 26th ASF Biennial Conference – Caves, Craters and Critters,

Mt Gambier, South Australia. 6-12 January 2007

Stephen Bunton

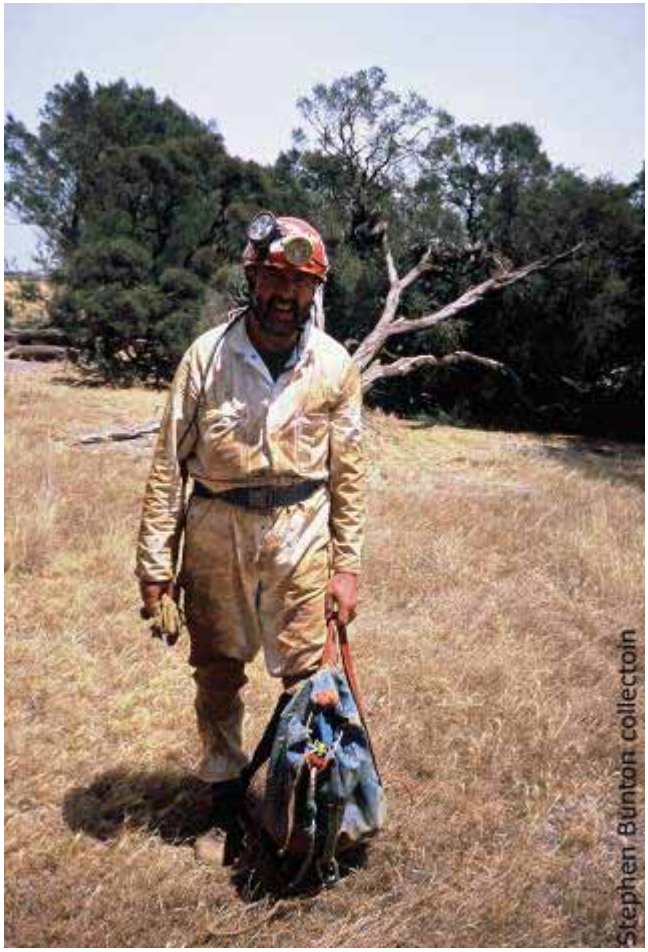
Corra-Lynn (5Y-1) is a cave I've wanted to do ever since the mid-seventies when it caught my eye in a list of Australia's longest caves published in an *ASF Newsletter* that I was reading on the train going into Sydney Uni. Rather than reading over my lecture notes and making valuable use of my time, I was planning future caving trips. Corra-Lynn is on the Yorke Peninsula of South Australia and is one of the oldest known caves in Australia. It is Australia's 6th longest cave with 14 km of passage which is all crammed in to an area 250 m by 450 m. Needless to say the passage isn't very big and there are lots of squeezes and crawls! The cave is a complex maze developed on three levels and having someone to guide you would be most prudent. The Buntons took the opportunity of doing this as a pre-conference fieldtrip led by CEGSA member Paul Harper, who arranged the permit.



The Corra-Lynn gate – Rolan can only dream of achieving such a professional looking job.

I was reassured when I met Paul that he was not some young, skinny cave rat but a more mature fellow whose build exceeded mine in every visible dimension. I knew then that I wouldn't get stuck in anything. Paul took us for a three and half hour showcase tour of the highlights of the cave which involved several fixed handlines and even an interesting tree-climb. Many passages seemed to return to Grand Central and the final highlight was returning via Bandicoots Bypass, a passage not unlike Matchbox Squeeze except that it was 50 m long and triangular in cross section that gradually narrowed to something much tighter than Matchbox squeeze for the last 2 m.

The cave's temperature of 22 degrees with 100% humidity makes for the greatest challenge, although the cave contains only about 25% walking, with 25% belly crawling or squeezing, the remainder involves crawling on your knees. We were equipped with knee pads but not the serious models that were to be seen from mainlanders throughout the rest of our trip. Many thanks go to Paul for showing us this cave. Opening the cave gate, a dirty big door, was like opening the oven as we exited into a 38 degree day complete with a howling northerly wind.



Bunty after Corra-Lynn as we're used to seeing him – puffed and sweaty.

The Conference was held at Mt Gambier, somewhere we'd only briefly passed through before, although Kathy and I had taken a more serious look at nearby Naracoorte on previous occasions. In the end it was an ideal location, offering all the facilities of a large regional centre with plenty to do in the vicinity. The caves in the area are more famous for the fact that they are flooded and thereby offer greater challenge to cave divers than people like me who

don't mind exploring an environment without light but draw the line at going without air.

Our next fieldtrip was to **Ewens Ponds** (L-159, 160, 161) which at first glimpse is an uninspiring pool amongst reeds beside a dairy farm, where the number of flies spoils any ambience. It looks rather lovely on a summer's day but looked foreboding when we last visited it in winter. This time we brought our snorkelling gear and wetsuits. The water flows from the floor of the pool and then through a series of other pools, 2.8 km to the sea. (On a later trip Kathy followed it all the way to the sea.) Beneath the water it is a lovely place with rocks and reeds set out like a life size aquarium, although the algal growth, probably as a result of eutrophication due to nutrients entering the groundwater upstream in its catchment, spoils the effect somewhat. Old photos show it as a much nicer place than what we saw.

The other snorkelling highlight was **Piccaninnie Ponds** (L-72) which is also a flooded doline but this one contains a "bottomless" pitch called The Shaft. This just looked like a normal entrance pitch but it felt quite funny floating over it in snorkelling position. You knew you weren't going to fall down it but I still seemed to think that I needed to be in abseiling position to be getting this view.

Around the town of Mt Gambier are several other sinkholes and one evening we visited **Engelbrecht Cave** (L-19) which is named after its former owner, a brewer and distiller who was its most noted polluter. The cave has been cleaned out and now operates as a tourist cave. The most notable feature of which is the fully rigged cave-diving mannequin suspended from the roof such that you can get cave diving look-a-like photos with the appearance of crystal clear water.

The 'air diver' in Engelbrecht Cave.

Northwest of Mt Gambier we visited **Tantanoola Cave** (L-12) which is one of the smallest tourist caves I've ever visited. At least we were admitted free by showing our conference nametags. This is a dolomite cave (like Hastings) and very well decorated. It was formed as a sea cave which was then closed off with a sand dune, the same type of sand dunes that form the limestone (aeolian calcarenite) in which most of the local caves are formed. The local cavers refer to it as soft limestone unlike our hard marine limestone.

Kathy and Grace attended a limestone carving workshop with a local artist who sculpts this lovely pale yellowy rock into rather sensuous figures. They look more like sandstone than what we know as limestone.

The conference itself was held at the Mt Gambier racecourse which was a good venue with a bar upstairs and the downstairs meeting area set up for the presentation of papers. Over 150 people attended to celebrate ASF's 50th year. I caught up with a lot of people I knew; some I only met at CaveMania and some I hadn't seen for 25-30 years including former ASF Secretary Chris Dunne, who I've known since I was 12 when we were in the same scout group!

One of the highlights of the conference for me was the opportunity to meet Andy Eavis the well known British caver who has run expeditions to all corners of the globe for 30 years. He still does due to the fact that he is rather well off. (He was in Australia to watch the cricket until someone hijacked him to Mt Gambier.) He talked about being a sherpa for the making of the *Planet Earth* episode on caving and how he was disappointed with some aspects of it because the cavers didn't have much editorial control – you know how those horrible sensationalist bits creep into the commentary! Andy then showcased two new films; one on his China Caves Project and the other on a cave diving history in Wookey Hole. (Read Martyn Farr's *The Darkness Beckons* if you want a few sleepless nights!) For his next expedition he was recruiting cavers who were good at SRT, weren't afraid of big water, nor snakes. I tried to get Serena to say "Take me. Please take me." But she was too shy. ("The meek shall inherit nothing." Go for it Serena!) If only I hadn't got a job, got married, reproduced and lost any fitness I ever had, I'd still want to be an expedition caver. You just can't beat it!

Nor could you beat the Taswelshmen in the Caving Quiz Night. Our STC group had Dave and Jessica Wools-Cobb from Northern Caverneers and Bob Kershaw (ISS) of Bullita fame as ring-ins. The name was derived from people like Greg Middleton and myself who came from NSW and moved to Tassy. Our secret weapon was Henry Shannon also of NC, who likewise hailed from NSW. Between Henry who has been into nearly every cave in Australia and Greg who has read and abstracted everything ever written about caves in Australia, we thrashed them all, including the kiddies table who Grace informs me bribed the officials for all the answers.

The main fieldtrip day was an excursion to Naracoorte. Two tour buses took most of us up to the area. First we enjoyed a trip through **Victoria Fossil Cave** (U-1) which we had visited before. This cave has the mega fauna digs in it and the reconstructed skeletons of a marsupial lion and browsing kangaroo. After this we toured the megafauna display at the visitors centre which is remarkably well done. Very life like and life sized audio-animatronic models growl at you as you travel through something resembling a nocturnal house. Interspersed with this were a few taxidermed currawongs etc which would have been the contemporaries of the mega-fauna.

After lunch we heard "antique caver" as he refers to himself, Elery Hamilton-Smith give a lecturette in **Blanche Cave** (U-4, 5, 6). We then braved the 38 degree heat and hot northerly winds to venture off to a number of wild caves. I'm not sure what Serena and Greg did but Grace did **Stick-Tomato** (Wet Cave U-10, 11) and Kathy and I did **Blackberry Cave** (U-8, 9) which was pretty pathetic

really. As a consolation prize we were invited to explore **Cathedral Cave** (U-12, 13) where we created a slight diplomatic incident by continuing on to the fossil dig. This was the high point of the trip. Being carpeted later for our efforts was probably the low point. Apparently and unbeknown to us or even the local subordinate rangers, this area was off limits. The head ranger had a different perspective and created a mountain out of a mole hill when in the heat of the day wrote a letter of complaint to Jay Anderson, ASF President, instead of just asking us for an explanation. (They even left the gate open! Surely if 150 people were coming over the hill and it was off limits, then they'd lock the gate!!!) All in all, the situation was rather incredible! What is it with some cave managers that reminds me so much of Monty Python's Black Knight? ("None shall pass.") The rest of the day was occupied with a BBQ tea, lots of beer and then a visit to the **Bat Cave** (U-2) and Bat Cave viewing from the bat viewing centre which uses infrared cameras to spy on the caves below.

Kathy gets to know a life size Diprotodon.

In the end, many thanks must go to Steve Bourne, Naracoortes's Chief Ranger, for accommodating and entertaining 150 people in the National Park for the day and providing them with a very full and interesting itinerary. Things went well despite the outrageous heat and the nasty little incident with the communication breakdown.

I would have liked to have seen all the conference papers, good or bad, relevant or irrelevant but with so much other stuff to do I missed a few. One particularly good paper, was presented by Graham Pilkington on using Google Earth to accurately position and then correct his map of a particular cave on the Nullabor. *No trees* is the operative word. It wouldn't work in Tasmania!

After avoiding these things for 30 years and making Gavin go two years ago, it was now my turn to attend an ASF Council Meeting. These are where all the boring business takes place, over two long sessions! I won't include all the details here because we will deal with stuff when the minutes arrive at one of our general meetings. I "volunteered" to rewrite the Cave Safety Guidelines after there was a mini-outcry about the unsafe practices recorded in the last *Caves Australia* where people were caving on 8 mm rope and in parties of two etc. I can't believe some of the pre-historic attitudes and practices! The major breakthrough I can report, however, is that we succeeded in getting a cheaper insurance option and Greg stirred the possum about *Caves Australia* never coming out on time. [*I think the possum is dead – Ed.*]

The other not to be missed event was the **Speleosports** which this year had a novel theme whereby you were clipped to a long line with a cowstail. This led you over, under and through fences etc before the final jelly crawl under the black plastic flattener. Grace's kiddies team won the children's section. After having won it at CaveMania she now has a record to defend! She's already planning her team for the next conference which is to be held in eastern Victoria, somewhere near but not at Buchan. Serena joined the elegant ladies team which posted a good time before she entered the **Prussiking Race**.

The elegant ladies team – Jessica Wools-Cobb, Serena Benjamin, Jay Anderson and Cathie Plowman.

Serena posted a time of 1 minute 56 seconds for the 30 m which was only 8 seconds slower than the fastest male (Ross Anderson, who actually works as a high access person i.e. he's a professional prussiker!). Kathy came in second female with a time of 3:13, beating Steve by 48 seconds. Steve's excuse apart from too much Christmas pudding was that he was tuckered out from the **Technical Ropes Course**, a traverse of the grandstand over a number of rebelays etc in 7 minutes 14 seconds. Ross Anderson halved this time but I don't reckon he clipped all the ropes, which was one of the rules as I understood it.

The conference organisers had a great range of good prizes for the winners of these events and the **Photographic Competition** categories. These were presented at the **Cavers Dinner**. This was a real highlight and had a real festive atmosphere which in effect is what it was – ASF's 50th birthday party complete with a birthday cake! Quite a number of the founding ASF members from 1956 were there as special guests along with most of the past Presidents. The usual awards of Merit Certificates and the Edie Smith Award were presented. John Dunkley was made a Fellow of the ASF for his long term contribution.

Really he should be made "Timekeeper of ASF" because he represents the corporate memory of the organisation.

Occasionally the ASF presents awards of distinction for various contributions including exploration. After some negotiation from STC and a lot of hard lobbying by Cathy Plowman of NC, ASF decided to name the ASF Award of Distinction for Exploration, the Jeff Butt Award. This was awarded to Paul Hosie who is one of the younger generation of cavers and cave divers, responsible for discoveries in the Kimberly and on the Nullabor. Jeff's parents and brother were in attendance and enjoyed the occasion immensely. Sarah Boyle was in attendance and spoke brilliantly about Jeff, caving and the excitement of discovery. She moved me to tears and it was only then that people realised the significance of this award and what ASF had done to perpetuate the memory of Jeff Butt. As the first recipient Paul Hosie was deeply honoured.

Bunty ties himself in a knot on the technical ropes course – (note the absence of helmet and gloves recommended under the ASF Cave Safety Guidelines – Ed.)

After the conference we headed north towards Naracoorte to visit **Monbulla Cave** (5L-5, 21). As part of the registration for the conference we all received a fieldtrips guidebook. This is one of the best things about going to conferences; the locals are always willing to showcase their best caves. Monbulla happened to be the covergirl of the conference guidebook or at least an impressive silhouette of the map was. This cave represents one of the best examples of syngenetic karst i.e. the cave was eroded at the same time as the sand dunes were being glued together to form the limestone. Water at the water table dissolved passages horizontally in all directions to form an interesting maze, of little depth. The cave was also well decorated and with a bit of formation to confuse the route finders. We were only keen to see a bit of a sampler of the cave and started through towards the L-21 entrance 200 m away. After too long on our knees, we were keen to turn back but realised that we were closer to the other entrance and it was better to keep going.

Here we met our "guide" (he who pointed us at the entrance), Graham Pilkington, who was photo-tagging the entrances. After this we had a quick look into the other entrances which involved stooping through passages between daylight holes and larger chambers with bell-holes in the roof. This was an interesting cave but Serena summed it up nicely when she said "What is it with these mainlanders and length? Haven't they heard of depth?"

Kathy cooking to death in Monbulla Cave.

We said our farewells to Serena and that afternoon we drove over to **Mt Eccles** National Park in western Victoria where we met up with Greg Middleton who was in his element amongst lava tube caves. Ken Grimes organised the fieldtrips from this base and we thank him for his efforts. The next day a seeming cast of thousands headed north to **Byaduk Caves** in the Harman Valley on the side of Mt Napier. Again we traipsed through the oppressive heat of another 38 degree day to look in at **Harman Cave 1 and 2** (3H-11, 12). The smallest cave I've ever seen; **Turtle Cave** (H-90) which is 1 m long 1 m wide and 30 cm high. We descended into **Church Arch** (H-16) which is almost an impressive 20 m wide and 10 m high tunnel. My impression of lava tubes were that they were all of this magnitude but alas that illusion was to be shattered just as I was to be battered. The next two caves were on the wall of a collapse depression and descending a few metres by ladder was by far the most challenging part of the exercise. Crawling and squeezing through very lumpy passages over really hard rock doesn't count as a challenge but an ordeal. I didn't even bother to visit the **Chocolate Surprise** (H106, 108, 74) the feature after which the cave gets its name because it involved a deflate of the chest type of squeeze and I was over that by this stage. I've been over that sort of challenge for years but somehow it's still a thing amongst mainlanders to see who can get through the tightest squeezes.

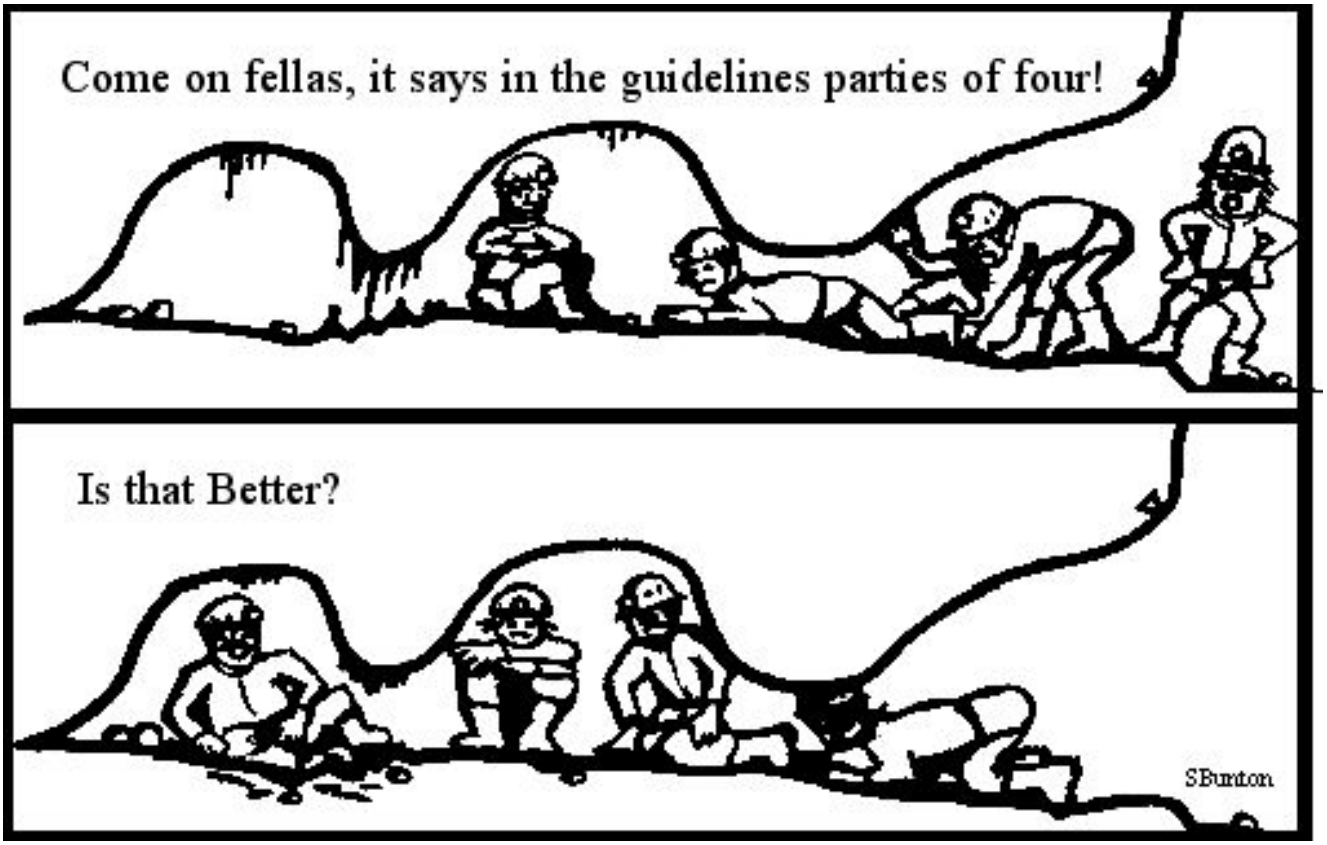
The next cave in the area was worth seeing. **The Theatre** (H-33) is like a good though short limestone cave in its architecture being on three levels and requiring a handline and a ladder for the exploration. Belaying on Italian Hitches (Munter Knots) was a blast from the past too! The highlight of the cave was a lava stalagmite one of Australia's largest but for me it was quite underwhelming. It's a bit funny when people have to point out to you and give you directions of where to look to see a stalagmite about 30 cm tall. The thing is that lava stalagmites are black for some strange reason in the depths of my psyche I was looking for something big, white, rounded and sitting in the middle of the passage not against the wall. The walk

back to the cars, over the cobbles hidden in the grass atop a black lava flow, was rather energy sapping.

The following day was even hotter, closer to 40 degrees and again we were walking around poking our heads into lava caves, this time at Mt Eccles. We traversed most of the longest cave in the area **Carmichael Cave** (H-70, 71, 79) which involved a few deflate the chest squeezes. Then did **H-53** which was the most perfect of the lava tubes in the area that I saw despite the fact it was only 3 m in diameter. We finished off with a cave called **North Pole** (H-51) which was so named because it contains a rock which is so magnetic that a compass needle points to it thereby stuffing up any survey you may be undertaking.

Next morning it was cooler and we finished of visiting **Tunnel Cave** (H-9) which is accessible to tourists. This too is a nice lava tube of more considerable dimension. We then escaped from the caving madness to the beaches of western Victoria and the surf coast and worked on our surfing and suntans for a week before catching the ferry home.

All in all we had a great trip and saw a lot of interesting caves of different types. Although some of them would only rank as grotty little holes and individually they wouldn't constitute a destination, cumulatively they made for a great trip. I would recommend attending an ASF conference to anyone wanting to see a different part of Australia, knocking off some good caves, meeting some great people and having an enjoyable time.



ASF Escapades - 6-12 January 2007

Serena Benjamin

My recent escapades on the big island began with a short stint in Melbourne – the first time I'd been able to experience more than what the airport had to offer. While I got to see Port Melbourne, St Kilda, the hills and Mornington Peninsula, perhaps the most enduring image of my stay there will be getting stuck on an un-air-conditioned tourist tram, packed in like sardines, in 35^{o}C heat!

Escaping the urban concrete jungle I got a lift with some other conference attendees and arrived at the racecourse on the outskirts of Mt Gambier on a suffocatingly hot afternoon on the 6th. Steve's report probably summarises in more detail what went on at the conference so I'll be lazy and provide some of my highlights before a brief summary of my post-conference caving activities. Aside from the fabulous array of presentations, excellent food, wine and company I got to do a couple of the touristy things around town. This included going to Cave Garden – a large sinkhole in the middle of town with, you guessed it, a developed garden surrounding it. A karst tour that took us to a cave that had previously had dairy effluent channeled into it, a limestone quarry, karst pavement, numerous cenotes and Earls Cave. This last feature had a fascinating history with it formerly being the town swimming hole before a large bushfire killed 10 000 or so sheep. The powers that be decided that this hole in the ground provided as good a place as any for them so in they went. Unsurprisingly not many people swim there any more despite recent clean-up attempts. Far nicer are both Ewens and Piccaninnie Ponds, the latter containing a spectacular feature called the chasm which suddenly yawns out beneath you and disappears into the depths.

Earls Cave – minus the dead sheep.

13th January 2007

On the day after the conference I joined a convoy of ten cars to go on a 'three hour' sinkhole tour starting at 9 am. Despite the projected time, Ian Lewis, our guide, had a vast amount of local knowledge so the last people got back to camp sometime after 8:30 pm. So what did we see on such an extended tour? Well, we started off by touring around the sinkholes in the area. This included Circuit and Caroline sinkholes and then to Hells Hole where we saw a large group of divers getting prepared in the car park. Then, at Ewens Ponds, three of us split off from the main group and went to Piccaninnie Ponds, as mentioned above, for a snorkel. Later, we miraculously rejoining the by now whittled down numbers of the tour group where the creek from Ewens Ponds meets the sea. After this we headed to Port MacDonnell to look at some of the most beautiful limestone cliffs I've seen. Among the stunning erosional features it was here, unfortunately, that the municipal tip was once located. While some is still visible the sea has swallowed up a lot of the town waste including the stuff that they'd recovered from Earls Cave. Once again three of us split off from the tour as they headed off to their last stop at Mt Schank.

14th January 2007

In a mustard yellow van I got to my next destination – Naracoorte via Monbulla Cave. With permission from the landowner previously arranged we made our way to Cave Range (don't blink or you might miss it) where we parked right beside one entrance. Half of us started through this while the rest went further up the 'hill'. This cave contained low, mazy phreatic passage with heaps of decoration and one particular chamber with curtains of tree roots draping down. As a through trip when we popped out the second entrance and retraced our steps above ground one could see that the cave paralleled the nearby dry creek. Following a quick lunch we ducked into Monbulla proper. Higher up on the hill this cave has forty or so entrances in a small area which provided lots of scenic karst windows to look out of.

Karst features at Port MacDonnell.

Head for the hills!? Walking towards 'Cave Range' and Monbulla Cave.

15th January 2007

We headed off to the double solution tube entrance of Beekeepers, once again being able to drive within metres of it. After a dusty ladder climb down and a few squeezes the cave opened out into spacious breakdown chambers with the now familiar 'cream-puff' rock that was full of fossils. What a marked contrast to Tassie caves! That afternoon, and after we'd gotten permission from the landowner, we headed to S102 located in a small fenced off area in a paddock. With a 15 metre ladder pitch this solution tube entrance proved interesting as a draft blowing through a small constriction halfway down blew the dust right into your face. Needless to say I was carefully laddering with my eyes shut part of the way. Once on the bottom we passed a hapless gecko on the way to a large sand cone which we skirted round and up via a narrow vertical crawl before breaking out into the main section of the cave. Typified by large chambers with collapse boulders, sand cones and some (mostly dry) lakes with calcite rafts and lots of interesting fossils, this was a very pleasant cave to spend the afternoon in.

16th January 2007

With a forecast of 40^{o}C for Mt Gambier, the inland town of Naracoorte looked set to be hot. So what else would one

do but go surface trogging? While some in the group went off to check a potential dig the rest of us looked at a couple of other sinkholes and even moved a load of rocks to find an old well (which we promptly moved the rocks back onto). Back to the others and we found that they were enthusiastically starting a dig at the base of a sinkhole which was filled with all manner of junk and the pungent aroma of a dead sheep. As the temperature soared and as I'm a fundamentally lazy person and my insanity does not extend so far I retreated to the nearest patch of shade and watched as the bucket brigade got into full swing. Ultimately their efforts were rewarded with 15 metres of passage that opened out into a chamber with the prospect of more digging. To find some relief from the heat we called it quits and spent the afternoon at the Naracoorte swimming lake.

Is there a cave down there? South Australia's latest 'hot' prospect.

17th January 2007

This was the last day of caving at Naracoorte so we started off by joining the tour group into Alexandra Cave. This show cave comprised of several large well-decorated phreatic chambers connected by low sand floored passages with such delights as the fairy castle and the last straw. A nice change of pace – no crawling involved. Another look into Wet Cave (where I heard all of two drips) and its fabulous example of bell-holes in the ceiling before heading out to another farmer's property. Two of our group were already at one of the caves here in order to survey it. Stobie Hole seems a fitting name as it was discovered when the farmer put a hole in for a power pylon and punched through into it. The rest of us went to survey a small cave with a wombat sized entrance which opened into a small chamber of breakdown. The two of us that would fit investigated and surveyed a lead towards the back which looked like it had been dug previously. On the way out I got my pulse racing when I brushed the ceiling and a piece of rock the size of my head dislodged and glanced off my ankle. Time for the next cave!

Off limits at certain times of the year because of its importance as bat habitat, Cave Park Cave [*Sounds ominously like Car Park Cave to me – Ed.*] had a fairly large entrance with a tangle of blackberry and ivy at its base. While the 3 metre ladder was being rigged I went for a quick recce and found a small fox hole sized gap some 50 metres away. In the cave we gave a small drafting upward crawl in the southern side a cursory look before heading north where we were told the bulk of the cave was. We spent some time here poking around in rockpile hoping for a break-though into large passage that never happened. When we'd had enough of this, three of us went back to the southern lead and managed to climb up into a decorated chamber. From here it flattened out with a deep layer of dirt on the floor. Dennis, who was before me, pushed on and called back to come through so I ploughed through with the flattener at times only just large enough for me to get through until I emerged into the glare out of the hole I'd seen before. John, who was behind me decided he wouldn't fit so went back to the ladder where we met the others as they came out. Back to Stobie Hole to check on the others and they made a request for two people to check some leads. Down I went, where I had the great pleasure of pushing through a squeeze over a pile of old sheep bones. The other lead was keeping them more occupied and with surveying still going on we left four of them there and made our way back to camp.

18th – 19th January 2007

I got a lift back to Mt Gambier where I joined up with David and Jessica Wools-Cobb, Henry Shannon and Garry Smith for some more tourist activity. So back to Blue Lake (worth a second look) we also walked up to Centenary Tower before heading off to walk up Mt Schank, visit Hells Hole and Piccaninnie Ponds before heading to Port Fairy for the night. Had a morning walk to a lighthouse past mutton bird nests on a small island there before hitting the road. I then got my first taste of the Great Ocean Road the highlights of which included the Arch, The Sentinel, Loch Ard Gorge and the Twelve Apostles. Quite spectacular coastline with as many tourists as flies despite the salt spray and smoke that obscured the view. At Loch Ard Gorge we walked to the base of the cliffs and went into one of the coastal caves which contained a surprising amount of formation including straws and flowstone. With time being of the essence we got out of tourist mode and joined the Princes Highway back to Melbourne where they dropped me off at the airport before heading to the ferry. What a wonderful trip.

Reconnaissance mapping of the Eddy Creek karst system in the Lower Weld Valley, Tasmania

Matt Cracknell

Introduction/Aims

During the summer of 2005/2006 several field reconnaissance trips to the Glovers Plain/Eddy Creek area of the Lower Weld Valley were undertaken by members and associates of the Weld Valley Blockade (WVB). This was done in attempt to improve the knowledge of the Eddy Creek karst system and its features. Several cave entrances, dry valleys, areas of dolines and other karst landform features were discovered and documented during these trips. There is potential for more discoveries of this nature in the Lower Weld Valley.

Methods

Basic methods of reconnaissance mapping during this period included; GPS co-ordinate locations of cave entrances, dry valleys, dolines, karst boundaries and

unusual landform features (see Figure 1 – page 17). Cave entrance features were sketched (EC-X2 and EC-X3) and one small cave (EC-X1) was surveyed and mapped (see Figure 2 – page 18). All cave entrances can be identified from dated and labelled flagging tape tied to nearby trees.

Results

Three vertical cave entrances, numerous dolines, several dry valleys and a cave efflux have been found in the north-east corner of the Eddy Creek valley on the western flank of the Back Camels ridge.

EC-X1 was surveyed and found to be 5 m in depth. The cave has developed along a narrow rift trending NW. The walls are coated in cave coralloids. There were numerous Cave Crickets (*Micropathus* spp.) and Cave Spiders (*Hickmania trogolodytes*) observed in EC-X1 and a thick layer of organic debris covers the floor directly below the entrance. Interestingly there is no associated doline with the EC-X1 entrance. 50 m west of EC-X1 an intermittent stream channel was found, the bed of this intermittent stream is approximately 10 m below the floor (absolute depth) of the cave.

The EC-X2 and EC-X3 entrance dolines were sketched. EC-X2 is estimated to be approximately 8-10 m deep and found to have a stream flowing at its base in a south-west direction. This stream is evidently connected to a clear flowing spring approximately 100 m down slope from the EC-X2 doline. EC-X3 is a small vertical entrance no more than 20 m down slope from the dolomite/quartzite contact. The entrance is estimated to be approximately 3 m deep and the cave continues via a small squeeze.

Many shallow dolines were recorded below the dolomite/quartzite contact on the western flank of Back Camels ridge. Often closely situated dolines displayed linear arrangements suggesting that sub-surface streams were present. Further west of Back Camels ridge along the northern flank of the Eddy Creek valley areas of outcropping carbonate rock were found to be intersected by dolerite slope deposits consisting of weathered angular to sub-angular clasts.

Discussion

The Neoproterozoic carbonate rock sequence in the Eddy Creek area is a part of the Weld River Group dolostones. It is situated on the northern flanks of the Weld River and consists of partly silicified and partly 'marbleised' (skarn altered) dolomite (Sharples, 1994; Calver, 1999). The (poorly) known impounded low-relief karst boundaries are situated in a shallow valley running to the north of Glovers Bluff, between 60 m and 300 m (a.s.l.) Carbonate rock in this area is mostly covered by a mantle of Quaternary slope and valley deposits of varying thickness (Sharples, 1994).

Throughout the period of reconnaissance the amount of water flowing from the resurgence below the largest cave found (EC-X2) varied considerably. This stream continued down into the valley, flowing on metamorphosed carbonate bedrock and cutting a channel up to 2 m in depth through the regolith. The water chemistry of this stream is quite unusual and the discharge rates suggest that there could be a possible sub-surface breach of the Back Camels drainage divide.

In conjunction with surface karst features he found, Morrison (1993, pers. comm. in Sharples, 1994) speculates that there is sufficient evidence from aerial photos to suggest that beneath the mantle of unconsolidated material underground solution features and drainage are present.

The majority of slope deposits on the Eddy Creek valley flanks consist of Jurassic dolerite talus that may be a result of palaeoclimatic regimes during Late Cainozoic glaciations. Alluvial deposits on the valley floor may be of glacio-fluvial origin (Kiernan, 1987 in Sharples, 1994) and there is potential for glacio-karst interactions (Sharples, 1994).

The entire Weld River catchment drains through the Glovers Bluff area (Sharples, 1994). The Eddy Creek karst system may have connections not only with Eddy Creek but the main trunk of the Weld River. This could have important implications for future studies into the evolution of the Weld River drainage basin, regional climate fluctuations and associated changes in fluvial regimes throughout the Quaternary period.

Marble karst features are very rare in Tasmania. The Eddy Creek karst may be one of a kind; the author has not as yet come across any other references to karst bedrock of this type in Tasmania. The dolomite in the Eddy Creek area may have been metamorphosed to marble during and after Jurassic intrusive activity. A sample of galena taken from a silica vein in a nearby sedimentary hosted skarn deposit (Au, Pb, Zn) has been dated at 150±20 Ma B.P. (Sedimentary Holdings Ltd., 2001). This karst area could potentially host hydrothermal silica deposits similar to the ones found in small caves situated in the Mt. Weld and Hastings karst areas (Sharples, 1994).

Conclusions

Three vertical cave entrances, numerous dolines, several dry valleys and a resurgence have been found situated in the north-east corner of the Eddy Creek valley on the western flanks of Back Camels ridge. Further investigations and reconnaissance are needed to determine the extent of metamorphosed carbonate bedrock in the Eddy Creek area and its associated karst drainage. This will ensure the future conservation and protection of the unique, unusual and relatively unknown Eddy Creek karst area.

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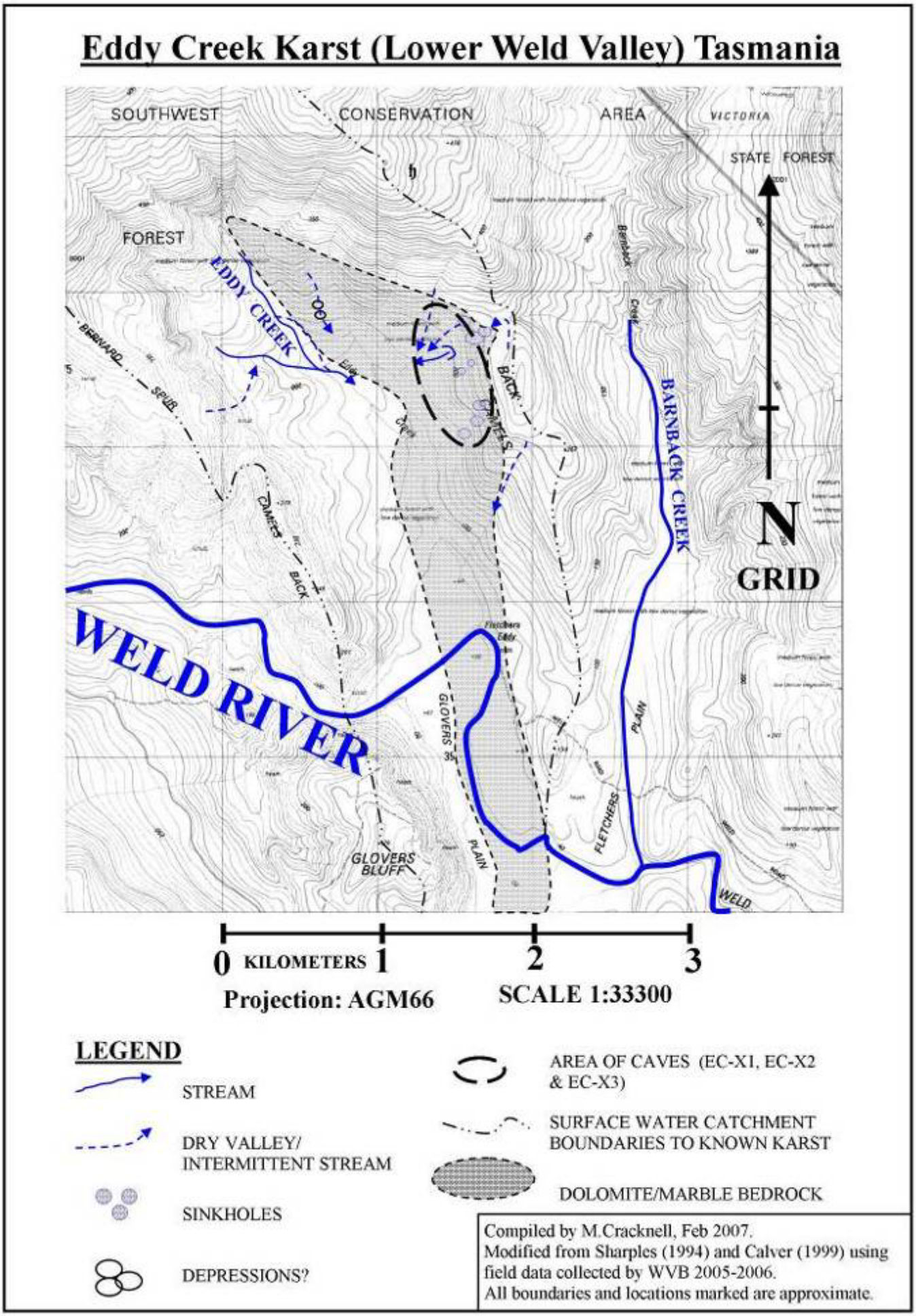


Figure 1. Map of the karst boundaries and landform features in the Eddy Creek area.

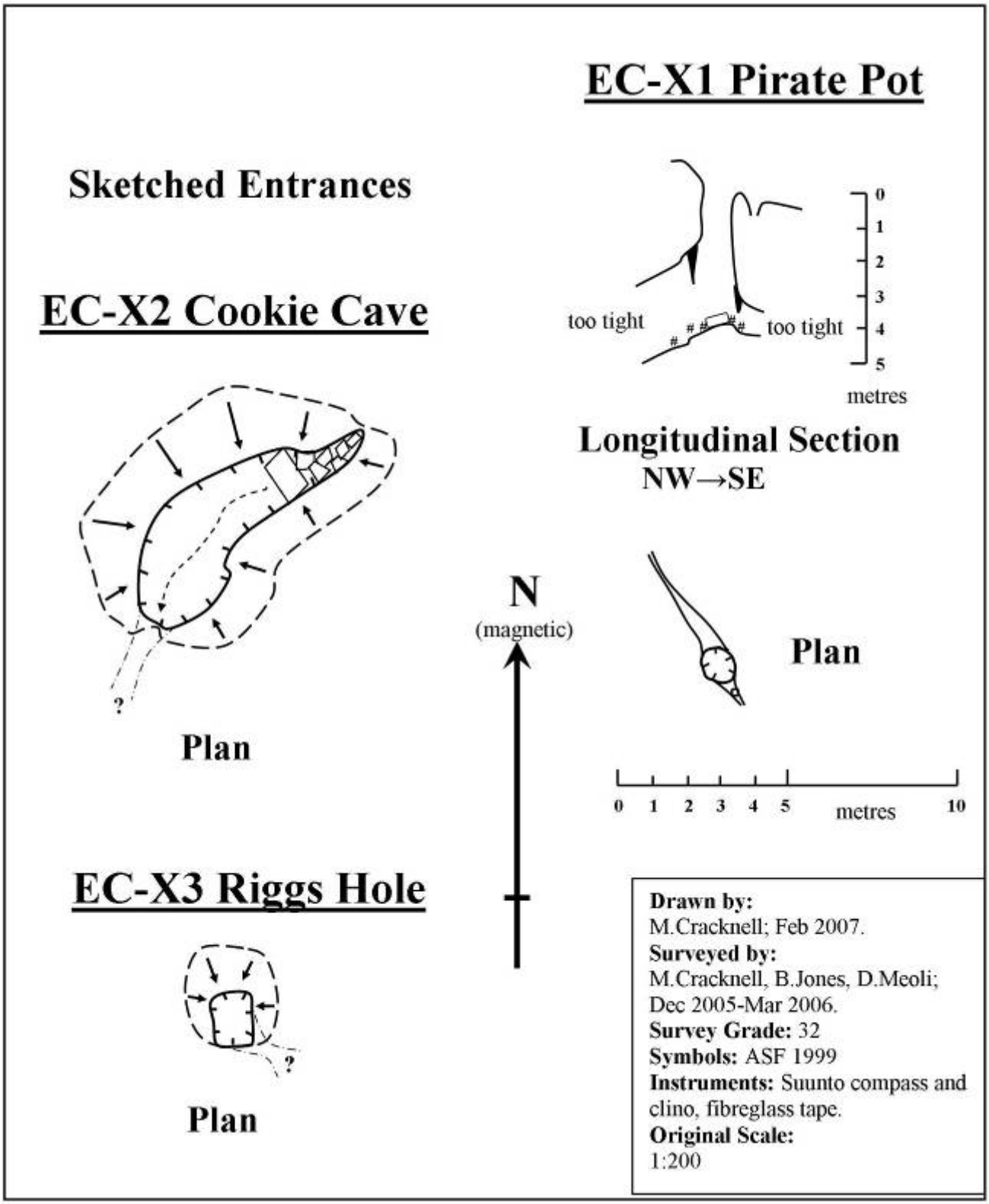
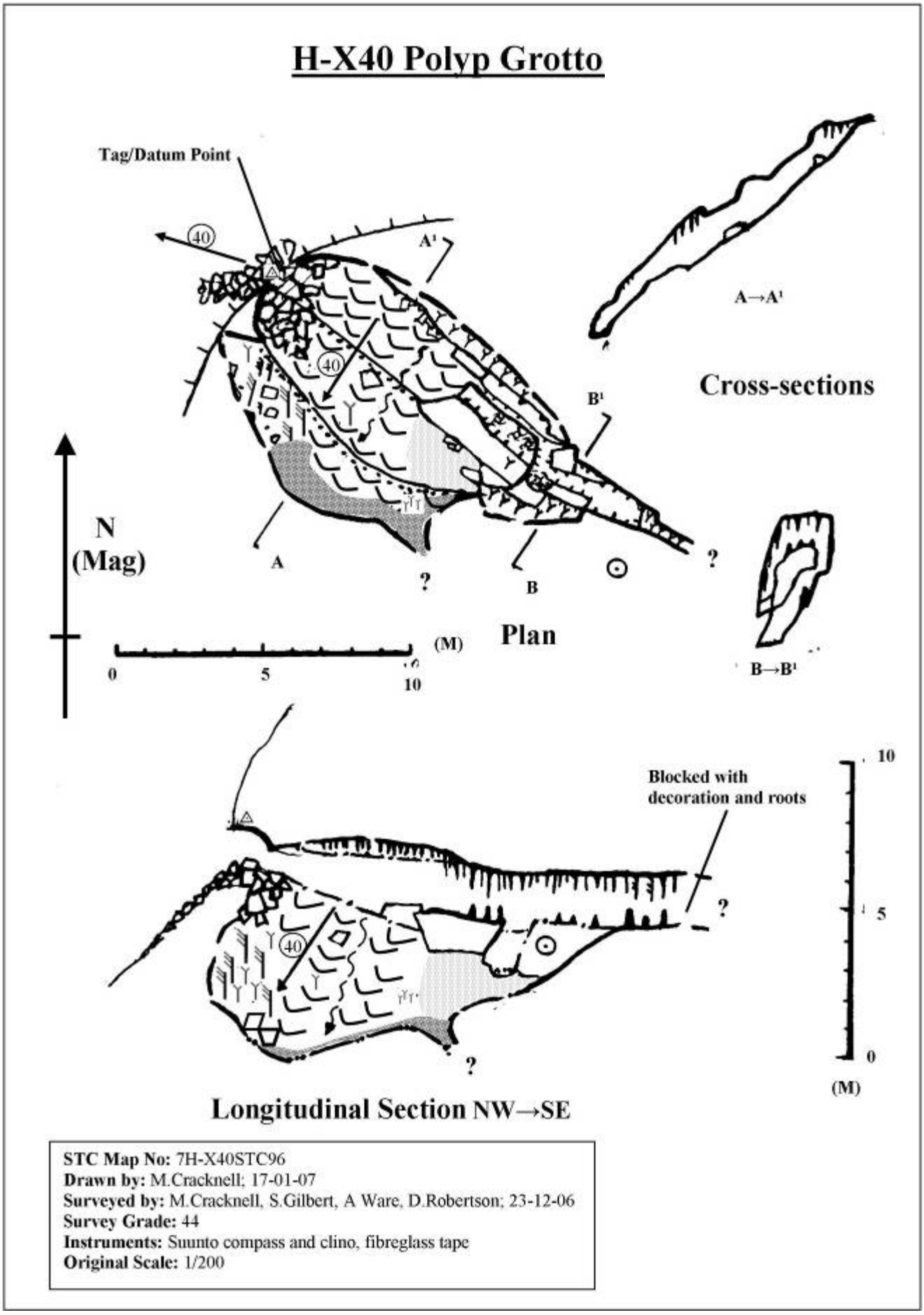
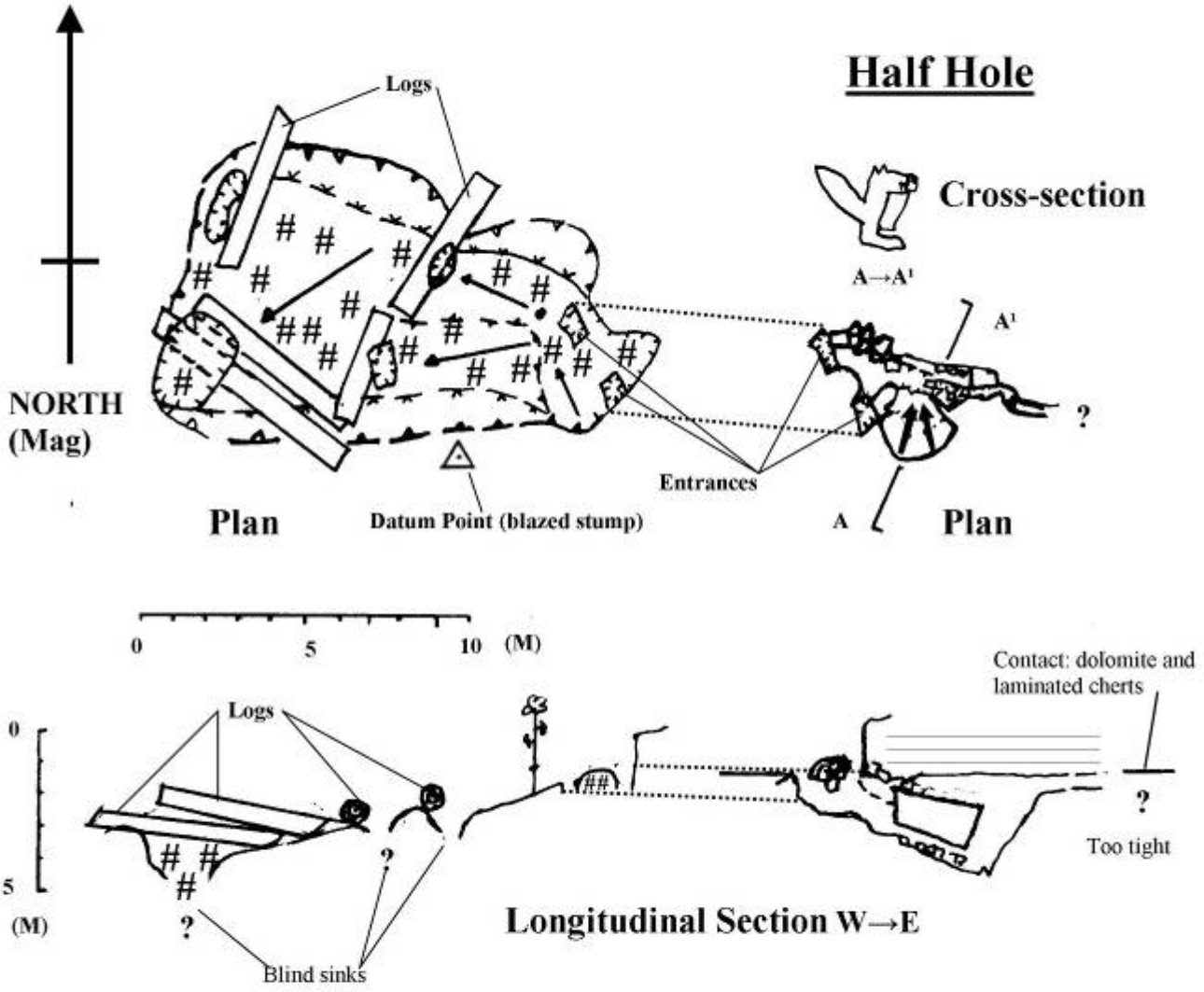


Figure 2. Cave survey (EC-X1) and sketched entrances (EC-X2 and EC-X3)

Hastings Karst Cave Surveys – notes on discovery and exploration of these two caves were published in *Speleo Spiel* 357 – page 11.



H-X41 Four and a Half Holes



STC Map No: 7H-X41STC97
Drawn by: M.Cracknell; 18-01-07
Surveyed by: M.Cracknell, S.Gilbert; 23-12-06
Survey Grade: 44
Instruments: Suunto compass and clino, fibreglass tape
Original Scale: 2/100

More giant crystals in Mexico

A new giant crystal cave has been found in the Naica Mine in Chihuahua, Mexico. More stupidly large selenite (gypsum) crystals have been found in an equally stupidly hot chamber (60 degrees Celsius and 100% humidity.) The bloke in the second photo is sweating accordingly. There is plenty of info on this stuff on the net; http://giantcrystals.strahlen.org/america/naica.htm has some reasonable background. I have no idea who took these photos – they just came via a random email. *Alan.*

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