

SPELEO SPIEL 373

July - August 2009

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Front Cover: Stream passage in IB-23 Little Grunt. *Photo by Matt Cracknell*

STC was formed in December 1996 by the amalgamation of three former southern Tasmanian clubs: 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

Newsletter of the

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers Incorporated

PO Box 416, Sandy Bay, Tasmania 7006

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

ABN: 73-381-060-862

ISSN 1832-6307

The views expressed in the *Speleo Spiel* are not necessarily the views of the Editor, or of the Southern Tasmanian Caverneers Incorporated.

Issue No. 373, Jul. - Aug. 2009

CONTENTS

Regular Bits

Editorial	3
Stuff 'n Stuff	3

Trip Reports

Wolf Hole, 1 Mar. 09	Matt Cracknell	4
Wolf Hole, 22 Mar. 09	Matt Cracknell	4
Wolf Hole, 1 May 09	Matt Cracknell	5
Cave Hill, 24 May 09	Phil Jackson	6
Cyclops Pot, 31 May 09	Sarah Gilbert	6
Cave Hill, 6 Jun. 09	Ken Hosking	7
Little Grunt, 8 Jun. 09	Matt Cracknell	8
Flyover/Hangover Caves, 21 Jun. 09	Matt Cracknell	8
Little Grunt, 4 Jul. 09	Serena Benjamin	9
Midnight Hole, 5 Jul. 09	Serena Benjamin	10
Sunshine Road, 12 Jul. 09	Alan Jackson	10
9 Road Surface, 19 Jul. 09	Serena Benjamin	11
Little Grunt, 25 Jul. 09	Alan Jackson	12
Revelation Cave, 2 Aug. 09	Janine McKinnon	13

Other Exciting Stuff

STC Mid-Winter Extravaganza	Stephen Bunton	13
Crocodile Buntree Does Kakadu	Stephen Bunton	14
What the Mainland has to Offer a Holidaying Tasmanian Caver	Alan Jackson	17
Hickmen Dreaming	Stephen Bunton	19
JF-444, 445 & 446 maps	Stephen Bunton	20

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Editorial

What an interesting couple of months since our last issue. It has been a bit light on for proper caving for me but it appears others have been having a go. The SCS Old Fart Brigade appear to be continuing their comeback, with their random Gen Y hanger-oners; the 'next generation' have been showing some initiative and knocking off a few classics; and the 'past their prime but still fighting for it' faction have been continuing to find and document some new stuff, despite most of them taking interstate holidays.

I reached the pinnacle of my caving career while in NSW recently (see page 17) and can now retire happily from the sport. I genuinely feel pity for our mainland counterparts and the lengths they are driven to.

Alan Jackson

Stuff 'n Stuff

YAHOOGROUPS EMAIL 'LISTSERVER' REMINDER – The club has two group email setups: 'stcaving' and 'speleospiegel'. The stcaving one is restricted to STC members only and is the most frequently used. It is used for planning and advertising upcoming trips; circulating minutes of meetings; general discussion of all things cave and or STC related; the occasional flogging of goods (this last activity is only tolerated if it is a giveaway or very good price!) The speleospiegel one is used only for notification that a new publication (usually *Speleo Spiel*) is available for download from the club website. Anyone can subscribe to the latter group.

Most of you know all this already but a recent influx of new members probably didn't. Any queries regarding the use of either system should be directed to Alan Jackson.

MYSTERY CREEK WINE – Tony Culberg informs us that the Black Buffalo is now stocking Mystery Creek Wines. Turns out there's a vineyard near Mystery Creek in Waikato, NZ. Until now the only Mystery Creek 'Whine' I was familiar with were the sounds made by cavers negotiating Plague and Pestilence on their way to the recent extensions. Tony has suggested it become the official STC drink but I fear the club has enough NZ influence as it is with Ken and Hugh.

TRAINING UP THE BEGINNERS – Janine reports that: "SRT training went ahead on Saturday 25 July as advertised. Three club members attended, including a brand spanking newbie unseen before. A good time was had by all and, more importantly, I think they even learnt something useful." For a tailored training session customised specifically for your needs, contact Janine. For a beginner trip to put your newly acquired skill into practice ... good luck. Nah, only joking – hassle Janine, Matt, Serena, Alan or anyone else in the club.

AN ON-THE-FLY UPDATE FROM OUR ROVING REPORTER IN TEXAS (ARTHUR CLARKE 27/07/09) – "Currently in Texas where the ICS 2009 has just finished up, being a week of temps. in the high 30s and low 40s, so nearly every one of the 1640 cavers registered for this congress wanted to go caving to escape the heat, though despite being slightly cooler, you get extremely high humidity. Greg Middleton is off to a tourist (show) cave tonight: "Caverns of Sonora", which I did on Tuesday and would

have to rate as the most highly/intensely decorated cave that I have ever seen.

Aside from giving a talk on the cave fauna of China, I've also been to another two show caves: "Natural Bridge Caverns" and the "Cave Without A Name", given that title because when first explored the young cavers/kids reckoned the cave was too magnificent/too pretty to be given a name.

I've also lashed out and bought some new personal gear, including a mix of krabs with screw gates and spring-loaded twist locks, plus a new Petzl double-strap waist harness with large D screw gate maillon and a new gear sack. I could not find any Raumer braking krabs for Serena, though there was a Petzl version here, but Serena turned it down.

The next UIS (IUS) conference or congress in four years time is being held in the Czech Republic. You might be interested to know that aside from the 8 day ACKMA AGM thing happening in Mulu in April-May next year, there is also the 14th International Vulcanospeleology Symposium happening in August, at Undara, inland from Cairns in Far North Queensland. Overseas again and the next international cave bio symposium is happening at Postojna, in Slovenia; in September I think.

In about five hours time (it's nearly 11.30 pm here now) we are having room inspections at 4.30 am here in our Schreiner University accommodation at Kerrville, before I board a 5 am shuttle bus from the Conference site to the San Antonio airport. Hopefully with Greg ensconced as well, we fly from San Antonio at 8.45 am Monday 27th our time (which is about 11.45 pm same day for you), flying first to Phoenix, then direct to Kona on the Big Island (Hawaii), the largest and easternmost island of the chain of Hawaiian islands, spending the next 9-10 days looking at lava tubes and their cave fauna, then flying a little less than two hours west to check out some limestone caves on the westernmost island (Kauai).

CHANGES OF ADDRESS – Now that the *Spiel* is largely electronically distributed, it isn't as important to keep the Treasurer abreast of any address changes – from an STC point of view. However, the ASF membership database is maintained by the various club Treasurers and this information is used for the mail-out of the ASF's publication, *Caves Australia*. Traditionally this wouldn't have mattered either, since it rarely came out; it is now a bit more regular. So the bottom line is: keep Sarah informed of changes of address.

LAKE LEA/VALE OF BELVOIR – Tony Culberg (with Cathie Plowman – NC) are planning a trip to the Vale of Belvoir karst area. Proposed dates are the weekend of 7-8 November. Contact Tony for more information if you're interested.

THE AGE OF BUREAUCRACY – With the karst bureaucrats currently crafting their plans for the southern Tasmanian karst areas, I highly recommend reading *Frog Call* by Greg French – a Tasmanian author and keen fly-fisherman. I found it an interesting read in its own right (it's not totally fishing oriented) but I found the author's occasional personal insights into bureaucracy an absolute delight. Ask me if you want to borrow it.

Trip Reports

H-8 Wolf Hole – Nun's Nasty

Matt Cracknell

1 March 2009

Party: Serena Benjamin, Matt Cracknell, Sarah Gilbert, Ian Houshold

Armed with an experienced geomorphologist, we set off to do battle in the far reaches of Wolf Hole. Our arsenal included 1 km of string line and a dozen skewers, the instruments of torture and one very squashed lunch. What more could we want? The Poms (and others) would say that electric drills and small explosives are indispensable, while the Yanks prefer to carry ice-picks and flame throwers. Luckily we haven't seen anything alive out there. We should be OK.

The instruments of torture appeared and the foot soldiers went into action continuing the survey, measuring legs in the theatre of battle. One sortie closed a loop with a chamber I had been in about 18 months ago. This connection was found after following a long rift jammed with palaeokarst that ended up in a very tight and nasty

squeeze. So tight I almost called for the medic to help with my (seemingly) crushed ribs.

Back in the main series of passages we collected our thoughts and counted the cost. Hedging our bets we pushed on, tying in another expansive lead ending in mud-filled chambers. How much mud is in these passages and what would they look like without it? It also begs the question; where did it all come from? The rest of the cave has its fair share of mud and silt but the 'new' extension is somehow different. There are no eroded and redeposited Permian gravels (unless they are under all the mud). The ceilings may have Permian (?) age deposits but the more recent stuff has been left behind from a large stagnant body (or bodies) of water.

It was time to retreat. The instruments of torture were put away for another day and the string-line appeared. It felt good to define the track we had made, after visiting Exit Cave a fair bit lately and experiencing the damage that can be done from multiple tracks through stuff that will never grow back. It was heartening to realise that we had thought carefully about our route.

H-8 Wolf Hole – The Only Way (Maybe) is Up!

Matt Cracknell

22 March 2009

Party: Serena Benjamin, Matt Cracknell, Sarah Gilbert, Geoff Wise

Starting where we left off on the last trip and armed with some more skewers (80 cents each!) the track marking continued. Once again we ran out but this time most of the trogable stuff has been designated out of bounds. Next we pushed a series of low mud-filled passages. What a surprise ...

A veritable labyrinth of phreatic tubes was explored. One large chamber displayed a vaulted ceiling similar to those found in other places of major collapse. It could be accessed from several different sides by clambering over mud banks. Where the breeze was strongest, near the very end, we found water. In reality we found the obvious signs of water that had flowed recently, a dark patch of mud. Presumably this was the result of the previous weekend's thunderstorm. A draft was cranking through a very tiny slot in the rock.

We surveyed out with both Greg's automatic disto (measures distance, compass direction and inclination with the press of a button) and the traditional means. The majority of shots were within 2° for both orientation and inclination for the old and new way. The difference between the two seems to increase with an increase in inclination. I don't know if human error or bias in the black box is to blame.



Sarah chills out at the end of the cave.

Once we had connected back to the previously surveyed passage, Serena and Matt poked their heads up into one of the rifting climbs. They both balked at the prospect but somehow Matt found his way up. A tube led into a calcite-covered, friable, palaeokarst-filled side passage where the walls were coloured a brilliant red. There were no handholds and no solid wall. Not even a drill would work up here, unless of course the bolts were 300 mm long and you were lucky enough to pick a spot to insert them.

Once again the blur of the nasty squeeze to get out seemed to pass us by. The trashed mud banks that have taken the full force of our prostrate bodies tell a tale: a tale of humans in a place they will forever leave their mark. Only to be wiped clean when the cap rock gives way and the elements return.



Track marking (string and skewers) in FMD.

Sarah Gilbert does her version of Blue Steel; she is really really ridiculously good looking. Photo by Matt Cracknell →



H-8 Wolf Hole – Tidy Up

Matt Cracknell

1 May 2009

Party: Guy Bannink, Serena Benjamin, Matt Cracknell, Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney

Matt surveyed on his own in passages to the south, branching off the Dune Room. He was back for lunch confirming that they were all dead ends. He did see some skeletons, probably of rodents. Poor critters, wandering around in the dark getting more and more lost in the mud maze. It begs the question, where did they enter the cave? So far there are about half a dozen skeletons of very similar-looking species in different parts of this area.

Guy, Serena and Matt, all with soft soled shoes and no baggage, surveyed another series of low mud filled phreatic passages, some of them you could stand in. We negotiated a slotted squeeze and found our way into the same type of passage but now with some of the mud

removed. The hollow was about 2 m deep and had been drained via a seep.

Up ahead we turned a corner into a small rifting passage, characteristic of Wolf Hole. The passage has formed along a narrow sloping rift that dips at $\sim 60^\circ$. At either end, the narrow rift pinches out into impassably tight slots. The fracture that controls the orientation of this passage is filled with a soft green-red clay fill. Silica box work stands proud, coincidentally oriented with the plane of fracture. This time I found a stratigraphic indicator: unique sedimentary structures that could be traced either side of the fracture plane. These were very useful for measuring the small amount of vertical displacement (see figure 1), which turns out to be normal faulting. Not only that, I also got clear bedding, strike and dip, with opposing readings either side of the rift. This suggests that the movement across the fault has caused drag, altering the orientation in the bedding planes.

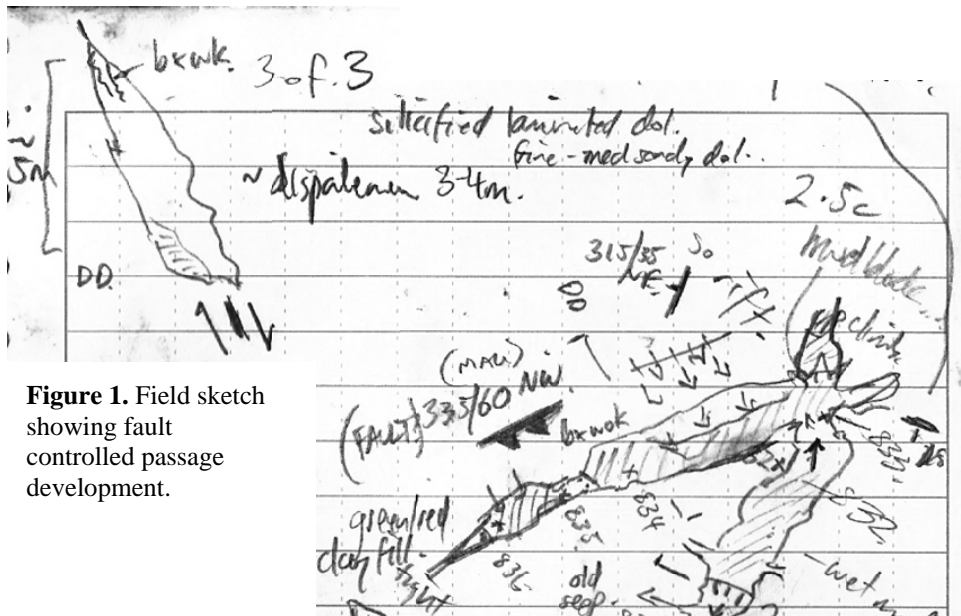


Figure 1. Field sketch showing fault controlled passage development.

Cave Hill

Phil Jackson

24 May 2009

Party: Philip Jackson, Simon Billings, Will Vennell, Stewart Jackson

Will, who is indexing some *Spiels*, was curious about this cave surveying business so we decided to kill two birds with the one stone. The plan was to surface survey some of those holes on Cave Hill and verify the directions offered to the previous weekend's party.

Everything proceeded smoothly until shortly after we left the car. My surmised short cut to the alleged track ended up being an uphill wade through three-metre-deep leech-infested slimy logging trash. I would rate this as a seven on the leech-ridden ditch bagging list. After about an hour we emerged in a familiar area for a spot of R & R. This area is the clear area of about 50 m diameter, with an obvious R & R log, located approximately 100 m SW of Tarn Creek Swallet. The ridge track between Zulu Pot and Rescue Pot (or whatever still exists of it) should lie within 200 m west of this area.

After the R & R we headed for the swallet. Will waited until we had completed a few irreversible gravity assisted

plunges through stunted myrtle before he yelled out, "Jacko, is this a cave?". After an expletive assisted return, "yes". How very serendipitous, 'how many fine caves start with a poxy little entrance like that?', I thought. A breathing six metre, one person diameter (which person is yet to be determined) drop leads to a sloping mud floor that appears to open up. One side of the drop is solid limestone; the rest appears to be mud and limestone. Given its proximity to the swallet it is well worth further investigation. Will deferred his right to be first down to anybody else. This deferral had unanimous support within the party; thus it was resolved to return with an expert. In view of Will's work, we've named this cave Index Pot.

From Index Pot we went to Tarn Creek Swallet. This is a substantial karst feature with a frustratingly inverse amount of cave. A large stream sinks into a substantial doline. Others in this or recent *Spiels* may have a description of the cave that exists here. From here we went west up onto the limestone ridge and back to the car via Index Pot and slightly less logging trash. In summary, total distance surveyed – 0 m; total directions verified – about 5%, new caves found – 1. If anyone was really bored there are lots of limestone outcrops and overhangs on the western side of the leech-ridden ditch.

IB-57 Cyclops Pot – A Retrospective Pleasure Trip

Sarah Gilbert

31 May 2009

Party: Serena Benjamin, Matt Cracknell, Sarah Gilbert

We left the car park by 10:00, making good time up the hill to be underground shortly after 10:00. (Note – quoted times may vary by 1 hr, but I have tried to stick to 'real time' rather than 'Sarah time' where possible). With Matt's good navigation skills we headed straight uphill from IB-166 Oh Yeh and made a bee-line to the cave. A very picturesque entrance, with the curved line of the cliff showing the beautifully exposed unconformity between the limestone and Permian sediments.

Matt rigged the tight climb at the entrance with a hand-line which doubled as an approach-line to the first pitch. The head of this pitch was slightly awkward to get on and off: a tight rifting squeeze to a low, bolted Y-belay, but resulted in a nice free hang down the large aven. All four big pitches in this cave were superb.

The second pitch, immediately below the first, was rigged with the same 100 m rope; this time a much easier approach to another bolted Y-belay. Due to a bit of rain over the last few days, the second pitch was rather wet down to the redirect on a spur halfway down. This brought the rope out from under the waterfall and was much more pleasant, especially on the way back up, although water is always a good incentive for tired arms to prusik faster. This was a cave where I was very thankful for my nice,

shiny, new, virgin PVC suit. Needless to say I stayed a little drier than others in the party who had insisted they would be fine with just a few Cordura rags hanging from their shoulders.

The third pitch was rigged off the prominent spur and around the large column above the pitch. The fourth pitch was rigged with the same 70 m rope. Another impressive, free-hanging pitch, rigged with a Y-belay off two bolts and a slightly sketchy tie-back. The pitch head was an experience in itself for people with short legs; you get that wonderful airy feeling of doing the splits over a 40 m drop.

The only horizontal section in the cave followed to the top of the fifth and final pitch – rather tight and muddy. We used two rather dodgy-looking tie-backs off protrusions in the squeeze, but they did the job. Again this pitch was a little drippy, but not as much as the second pitch. Another low Y-belay round a corner, with a nice slick climb and a tight notch to get stuck in on the way back up.

We ate a late second lunch at the bottom at 14:15, took a look at the supposed dig potential in the sump, then headed back up again. We made pretty good time despite lugging up all the wet, muddy rope – 3½ hrs on the way down and 2½ hrs on the way out, or thereabouts (see previous note).

We were all a little tired by the time we reached the car at about 18:30, but otherwise a good day out. After the memory had softened somewhat on the drive back home, we all agreed that it was a very pleasant trip – just like a walk in the park dragging four car tyres behind you. Certainly a spectacular cave and well worth the visit.

Cave Hill

Ken Hosking

6 June 2009

Party: Serena Benjamin, Simon Billings (Simmo), Ken Hosking, Phil Jackson (Jacko), Stewart Jackson, Amy Robertson, Will Vennell and Ping the Maltese Terrier

This expedition was a follow-on from two previous trips to the area, on 10 May 2009 (*Spiel* 372) and on 24 May 2009 (page 6). During the latter trip a drafting hole had been found about 50 metres to the southwest of the Tarn Creek Swallet doline. This hole, named Index Pot in recognition of the indexing work being done by its discoverer, Will Vennell, had not been descended.

Our intrepid group, inspired by Jacko's description of the horrors of the state of the bush immediately to the east of Cave Hill, decided to head up the valley that leads to Sesame I & II. This meant that a brief stop at the spectacular Sesame doline had to be made. Heading over the bluff above the Sesame I entrance, there was momentary excitement when a gaping and apparently untagged hole was found, but the excitement subsided when a tag was found identifying the entrance as Sesame II. After some considerable bush-bashing, we intersected Tarn Creek, and followed it down to the swallet. The diversion of the stream away from the obvious way on that had been done on the 10 May trip had left the downclimb quite dry, but it still looked horrible and there were no volunteers to tackle it. It might be more attractive in summer.

We moved on to Index Pot, to find a narrow drop of about five metres into what appeared to be a more spacious area below. Some time was spent enlarging the upper section of the entrance until finally Serena judged it to be large enough to try. She slid down carefully, found the right footholds and disappeared from sight. Before long she was back, reporting a series of short climbs into a terminal chamber, with only a faint possibility of a continuation. I then descended, finding that the initial climb led to a small chamber with another down-climb into an old stream passage. An obstructing rockfall proved to be able to be bypassed by crawling under the fallen slabs and a short climb upwards led to a position where a five metre drop could be seen. I was unwilling to try this down climb without a hand line but my 10 metre rope that I usually carry was back on the surface. On my return, Amy decided to take the rope and try the climb. She successfully reached the bottom, and followed the continuing passage. Unfortunately the passage closed down rapidly. We attached the JF-441 tag and joined the others.

While we had been tagging Index Pot, Ping had sniffed out an opening a short distance away that appeared to drop down about five or six metres. While the discoverers were waiting for the cavers to arrive from Index Pot, another hole was found a few metres away from the first hole. This second hole began as a ramp-like entrance, which led to a

two metre drop into a dry chamber. The chamber was quite extensive and had a sloping floor heading towards the other hole. The slope led down to another short drop into another chamber with a daylight hole. Not surprisingly the two entrances were part of the same system. I found a high level continuation from this chamber and followed this through a highly decorated area. Eventually this passage closed down, but I found it was possible to get my head into a slot in the wall and, by looking up, found a small aven with daylight at its top. Clearly this was a third entrance but it looked very small, and we could not find it from the surface.

I exited the cave by the first entrance, which proved to be a far easier climb than it appeared to be from the surface. In honour of the little dog that found the cave, we named it Ping Cave and the second entrance was named Pong Cave (we added the tags JF-442 and JF-443). Ping/Pong Cave is a complex maze that needs to be surveyed to clarify its layout. It probably has about 50 metres of horizontal passage, but the depth likely would not exceed about 15 metres. The cave is heavily decorated and has some very fragile areas.



Amy attracting attention to herself (as usual) with a hi-vis bust at Index Pot.

Meanwhile, Simmo had found yet another entrance, this being a five metre deep shaft about 50 metres to the southwest of Ping Cave. The entrance belled out and could not be free climbed after the first two metres, but there was no draft and no obvious way on could be seen from the lowest point that we could access without rigging the pitch. With no draft, no sign of a way on and with the day nearing an end, we decided to leave this one for another day.

We headed out by walking straight down the gully below Tarn Creek Swallet. This proved to be a poor choice of route as the bush was amazingly thick and infested with cutting grass. Eventually we managed to cross the gully to easier going on the old snig track and, with some relief, intersected the road and headed back to the cars.

On the ridge between Cave Hill and Tarn Creek Swallet there is apparently no difficulty in finding new cave entrances. The question, that only time and more trips to the area will answer, is whether any of these will be of major proportions.

IB-23 Little Grunt

Matt Cracknell

8 June 2009

Party: Serena Benjamin, Matt Cracknell, Geoff Wise

The objective for the day was to rig Little Grunt. We set out with enough rope (or so I thought) and buckets of rigging gear. Then after sliding down the muddy slope from the Skinner Track a few minutes were spent inspecting the numerous dolines for our quarry. Thankfully we weren't looking for a quarry, although that may have been the case if Bender's Quarry had continued digging.

The descent went smoothly and the rigging wasn't too tricky but it was gear hungry. In most cases two anchors were available such as a spit and a natural. The naturals required trace, sling or a nut and all ropes were tied end to end as some protection was needed when approaching pitch heads. Several approaches were tight; one in particular required a certain amount of belief in the rope as you slithered out into thin air.

We made it to the top of the second last pitch (the last pitch on the R. Eberhard map I found) in a few hours and then promptly ran out of rope. I had not listened to those fairies at the gear store when putting *back* the 35 metres of 11 mm and hadn't taken into account the extra rope used for the entrance pitch (not marked on Rolan's map). There is always a next time.

Geoff was in front heading up the very tight pitch head when he got a stuck. Bag, suit and SRT gear all got thoroughly snagged in the narrow confines of the squeeze (one of the nastier ones I have ever had the pleasure of negotiating). After about 15 minutes of swearing and cursing Serena and I became a little concerned that we were going to be stuck with Geoff but he eventually extracted himself. [*Déjà vu, Geoff?* – Ed.]

The rest of the trip went quickly and smoothly, I even had a bit of time to admire the fossilised coral reef and ponder the origins of small pink sand lenses exposed in the cave walls. We made it to the surface while there was still light in the sky ... SOFT!



M. Cracknell collection

Matt the Monkey gets into the swing of things.

MC-X148 Flyover Cave - MC-X149 Hangover Cave

Matt Cracknell

21 June 2009

Party: David Butler, Matt Cracknell, Deb Hunter, Cathie Plowman, Henry Shannon, Wayne Tirrol(?), David Wools-Cobb and other NC members

It had been a typically wet and miserable evening at Mole Creek but I was warm, dry and dreaming about caves in the NC hut; what a delightful place. At 9 am an armada of cars rendezvoused at the Mole Creek shop before heading off to the South Mole Creek Rd for a spot of caving. The trip planned was a Hangover/Flyover exchange. Not a bad idea really as the two cave entrances are ~250 m apart and contain almost 1 km of passage between them. From what I could gather, the area the caves are located in had recently become accessible due to the poor financial health of Southern Forest Resources. Even so this did not prevent us from encountering locked gates. The locals were livid; they would have to walk to the cave!

After a lovely stroll in the drizzle and through a weed infested Blue Gum plantation we proceeded to get rather confused as to the location of the cave entrances. With

people off in all directions the 'Davids' convinced themselves were we at the entrance to Hangover. The entrance was rigged (I use the term loosely) and we set off on our underground adventure.



M. Cracknell

The NC crew clears the first hurdle.

It had been quite a while between trips at Mole Creek for me, a couple of years at least and I had forgotten what it was like. Wallowing through the voluminous glacial and fluvioglacial deposits, transferring your newly acquired

coating of muck to flowstone that had been glistening in the light then immersing yourself in water percolating from the farmer's long drop above ... the interminable joys of Mole Creek caving. No wonder the locals get so worked up about this stuff, it gets into your blood (the heavy metals that is).

In actual fact the trip was utterly delightful. It had drama and suspense, David (Wools-Cobb) got jammed in a squeeze because he has a big chest. It was also full of action and danger, most notably when clipped into a rope. There were distractions and subplots in the form of pretties and nerdy rock stuff. I was blissfully content with the quartz(?) rods protruding from a particular bedding plane, imagining incompetent bedding planes grinding past each other over long periods of deformation. This had resulted in pressure melting of the minerals and subsequent recrystallisation into elongate habits parallel to the movement of bedding planes. This main zone of displacement occurs proximal to but not at a fold hinge (see figure 2). A good analogy for those who have not been subjected to 1st year geology practicals is a ream of paper: bend the ream and the individual sheets will slide past each

other when accommodating relative differences in curvature.



Protruding quartz (?) rods.

Thanks to all the NC crew who dusted off their vertical gear to go caving with me. I would love to return the favour down south sometime in the future.

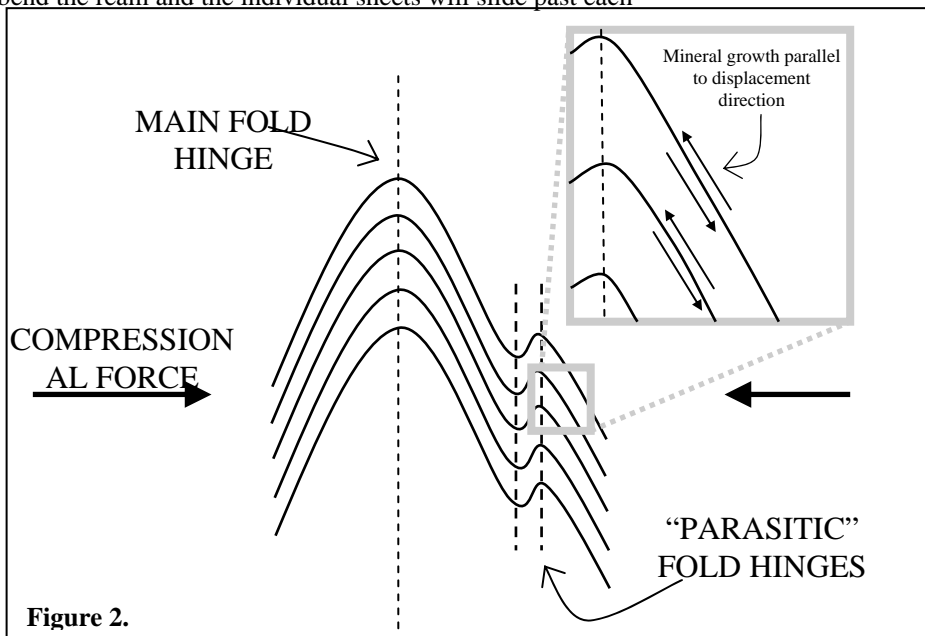


Figure 2.

IB-23 Little Grunt

Serena Benjamin

4 July 2009

Party: Serena Benjamin, Matt Cracknell, Sarah Gilbert, Michael Helman, Jane Pulford

Sarah and Jane weren't prepared to see me without lunch on top of my lack of sleep so our already delayed departure from Arthur's place got extended as we circled back there to pick it up. Luckily we'd only made it to the end of Francistown Road. We made it to within five kilometres of the car park before a call came from Matt to see if we were still coming. After quickly adorning our thermals we toddled up to Little Grunt and, with me in the lead, quickly descended the pre-rigged pitches. Despite concerns about the amount of rainfall we'd had in the past week and overnight, the water levels were nowhere near what Matt and I had experienced on our previous trip. Down at the base stream-level we wandered upstream from the bird skeleton, noting along the way that the short section of

overflow stream was now dry. Also, where the stream was flowing was a lot less silted up. Keeping an eye on the time we then decided to head downstream for a while. In the end, we made it to the spectacular aven that Matt and I had reached before and once again looked at the next section of wet crawl fairly unenthusiastically. We were right on schedule for our proposed turn around time and on the way up things ran smoothly. This week for me it seemed easier as I had much less hassle on some of the pitch heads; almost seeming to horizontally levitate off them in some circumstances. It's amazing how some days you just seem to be clumsy while on others things just seem to work. Back on the surface two and a half hours later we were greeted by some high winds and (when I got there) a light sprinkling of hail. Ah, winter trips. Hot soup beckoned so we made a hasty retreat to the cars.

That night we were joined for the mid-winter festivities at Arthur's by Bunt and Amy where some nourishing soups, nibbles, fine wines and great conversation were had by all. A perfect way to round out the day.

IB-11 Midnight Hole

Serena Benjamin

5 July 2009

Party: ‘Sabrina’ Benjamin, Matt Cracknell, Kate Edney, Michael Patterson, Bruna Ragaini, Simon Sprent, Dan Mannix

Motivation was at an all time low as I’d managed a sum total of two hours sleep. Matt’s need for assistance thwarted my efforts to bunk from the Midnight Hole trip, so I dragged myself to the car. It wasn’t until we’d made it past Esperance River that I realised I’d left my gumboots back at Arthur’s. With a clear sense of déjà vu (for me) we circled back and passed the others on Francistown Road. At Arthur’s it was discovered that my boots had been nabbed. So I picked up my knee pads and we hooned back down the road to find my boots sitting up proudly on the roof of the red rocket. I grabbed them, Matt grabbed a Stop and we flew back down the road. In an attempt to combat more of the same, I broke out my rapidly diminishing supply of chocolate-coated coffee beans. Arriving at the car park ½ hour later, the others sorted out all their gear; Matt and I got into our inspiringly cold and clammy gear and we finally got underway at around 11 am. The faint trickle of adrenaline as we approached the Mystery Creek crossing began to defrost my toes and with it came some anticipation of the caving ahead. The crossing was fairly

low but we were concerned about the levels inside the cave so we went first to the Mystery Creek entrance as far as the pinch point to be certain that we would not be caught by high water levels. Satisfied that nothing short of a flood pulse would make it unsafe, we made the decision to continue with the through-trip as planned. With Matt rigging and me in tail end Charlie mode, we proceeded through the cave. This is the first time that I had been here since the latest rigging and testing had been completed, which I believe was a while ago. A big thankyou to Kate, who, with loads of climbing experience, was able to assist me with the pull down to make sure it was a smooth and efficient operation. For me it was interesting to see how the nerves displayed on the first pitch slowly gave way to rising confidence as we descended through the cave. Also of note was that, while the water levels in the creek itself weren’t overly high, the input creeks were up resulting in seven pretty wet (and some slightly cold) cavers. Despite the late start (underground around 1 pm) the trip ran smoothly enough that we emerged out of the cave in the last glimmers of daylight and made it back to the cars while still twilight. All in all a very good day’s caving. Yes, it is amazing how some days you just seem to be clumsy while on others things just seem to work. This seemed to be the flip side of the coin. I’ll go see if I can find where I left my brain.

JF-444 thru JF-449 – Sunshine Road Caving

Alan Jackson

12 July 2009

Party: Serena Benjamin, Gavin Brett, Stephen Bunton, Alan Jackson

After dispensing of a large wattle at the bottom of the road, we assembled at the usual point near the end of Sunshine Rd. We affixed a number tag with “CHD 00” stamped on it to the permanent survey station that Bunty and I had established the last time we had been up here (SS372:7-8). With this achieved I was ready to go home again; I could feel my body succumbing to the flu that both Loretta and Anna were recovering from.

Despite my protests we slogged up the hill to “E1”, the cave Bunty and I had found back in March (again, see SS372:7-8). A rope was rigged at the southern end of the slot and Bunty descended – ‘ten metres deep and finished’ was his verdict. By this point Serena had been off wandering and returned looking anxious about another new hole. She collared Bunty and went back to it while Gavin descended “E1” to confirm Bunty’s diagnosis and tag it. It was tagged JF-444, the tag located about 2-3 m down at the southern end of the entrance slot. Gavin confirmed Bunty’s previous thoughts and named it Bunty Goes Down. See map on page 20.

We contoured east a bit and then dropped down the slope to find the other two. Serena’s new cave was a very impressive entrance down in the gully. Apparently it was all over though (one of those “down a bit, along a bit, over a bit” caves). Bunty went into it first down the sloping



More evidence of his ‘Hexcentric’ side – Bunty demonstrates that he has big enough nuts to endure a hard day’s surface bashing.

entrance to a small chamber and climbed up into a rift on the far side that was too small an aperture. When Serena joined him she was able to slide herself down the rifty squeeze into the next little chamber but the way on was a

continuation of the rift below the squeeze rift. It was tagged JF-445 (on the left wall a few metres into the cave – affixed while attached to a rope) and named Michael Jacksons Comeback Tour because it was sort of black, a bit too thin and it died before it got going. Unfortunately we forgot to GPS this entrance. See map on page 20.



Bunty goes down into JF-444 Bunty Goes Down.

Nothing new was found before we located the spot Bunty and I had reached on our previous trip. JF-439 was inspected with a light – to very disappointing results. In hindsight this feature should not have been tagged. Bunty checked out the large doline directly west of JF-439 while the rest of us headed off in random directions. When I

stumbled back across Gavin and Bunty they were eagerly rigging a large deep slot less than 30 m up hill from JF-439. It had two blue tapes (from the 80s) and a yellow tape (from Jeff Butt and Co.). A quick read of SS317:11-12 suggested that this was a hole Stef found in the 80s (blue tapes) and was called “Hole 29” by Butt et al. in 2000. According to this report, neither party had descended the second pitch so rigging continued. Serena returned from up the hill a bit and reported another good entrance.

While Gavin and Serena kitted up and descended, Bunty and I surface surveyed from JF-439 to the tapes at “Hole 29”. I then sat down for some more reading and promptly discovered that Butt *et al.* had returned to this cave, fully explored it and produced a survey (SS320:17-18). It was JF-X98 Pitfall Pot. Unfortunately the other two were out of earshot so we left them to have fun while we checked out Serena’s alleged cave up the hill a bit, unaware that she’d already explored it.

Bunty did his thing in the hole, which didn’t go far, tagged it JF-446 (on the back wall a fair way in) and then we surface surveyed it back to Pitfall Pot. The others had returned, having insufficient gear to drop the second pitch fully. They agreed that the survey matched the cave. A rope was rigged on the western side of the slot and Bunty descended to place a tag (about 5 m down). JF-X98 is now JF-447 Pitfall Pot. See page 20 for JF-446 map.

It was getting late and I had full bodyache and a splitting headache; we headed for home. A line was chosen that contoured down below the contact zone. We were quite happily finding nothing (so I could reach the car and die in comfort sooner) until we hit the area east of JF-424 Dead Heat. Gavin found two caves of significance which were explored to their ends, GPSed and tagged (JF-448 and JF-449). With no more tags left, Gavin was banned from finding any more caves. We picked up some dozer tracks and made a fairly direct and easy return to the car. I took some more painkillers, gave the keys to Gavin and curled up in the front seat prepared for my slow agonising death. Alas, it didn’t come.

Nine Road Surface Stuff – Alphabetised Alliteration

Serena Benjamin

19 July 2009

Party: Guy Bannink, Serena Benjamin, Sarah Gilbert

Assembled at the agreed time. Before buzzing along the Brooker towards our beginning point and a day of bumbling around in the bush. Caves aplenty in the karst area so we concentrated on cruising along the contact. Deep into the depths of *Dicksonia* we dived, discovering dolines in every direction. Everyone eager to explore, enjoy and re-energise. Ferns and the faded fragments of forest giants framed our findings. Grappling with the GPS gave us good entertainment. However, we had a handy

map. It gave us insight for our investigations. Just a jump away from the jeep track was the first point of our jaunt. Karst, karst everywhere, we could barely keep ourselves contained. Lunch was lavish. Munched under the manferns. Now back to what happened, notably we’d had a near miss of a nameless cave. Ogling of Owl Pot had occurred at the outset. Perambulating around the pock-marked place. We quickly came to a quagmire. Readily the raucous rabble rollicked through. Squelchy squishing through slippery sediments. Three Falls towered above the trees. Ultimately, Udensela just looked unstable. Very vivified by the verdant valley. We wobbled and wriggled amongst waratah and wood back to the wagon awaiting. eXtremely pleasant escapades. Yes, we even had a yarn about yoga. Zzzz time. [*Sleep deprivation does strange things to Serena’s mind – Ed.*]

IB-23 Little Grunt

Alan Jackson

25 July 2009

Party: Serena Benjamin, Gavin Brett, Alan Jackson

I hadn't been to Little Grunt since somewhere around 2002, with Madphil. There were a lot of repressed memories that needed to stay that way but I figured that seeing the good bits of the cave again were worth the risk. The main reason for a revisit was a drafting lead in the far reaches of the Northeast Passage. I remembered it as fairly pleasant stream passage with a calcite/flowstone blockage that, with today's improved digging technology, could be fairly easily removed. It was to become apparent that seven years is a long time.

Lots of digging gear made for full packs. Precious items were carefully stashed in dry bags in preparation for the numerous wet bits. The never-ending (and well rigged) pitch series was negotiated (easy in the down direction), SRT gear gladly left behind on a ledge and then on to the ever-widening horizontal passages. The first few short wet crawls were manageable with 90% dryness retained. The long, low, wet crawl that had stopped the previous two trips, while sporting much lower water levels, was the first good dunking – bags happily bobbing along behind us like faithful tenders. The good-going down to the first junction was appreciated; the second junction was soon reached; now for the bit I wasn't looking forward to – the Sheep Dip. Mid-thigh was the worst it got though.

I'd forgotten about Don't Make Waves, which was a rude surprise. Soon we were at the junction with the target passage. I was disappointed to rediscover that this passage had several low and wet sections too – I'd remembered it as upright walking passage the whole way. The target blockage was soon reached (about an hour from the bottom of the pitches) and we climbed up the flowstone to check the lead. It was a bit of a rude shock really – the drafting hole was much smaller, the preceding passage tighter and the quality of the flowstone crappier than I'd remembered. A thin layer of calcite over crappy muddy fill was not an ideal digging material for the tools we had with us. After numerous apologies from me, we dropped back down to the blockage at stream level. The same crappy flowstone causes the problem here but there is more room to swing appropriate implements – but you'd have to tunnel through more than 10 metres of it to break through! Gavin and Serena got excited about 'ducking' under the blockage; Serena more so than Gavin. All of a sudden Serena was stripping off her dry layers and disappearing, helmet off, into the sump. It was the most amazing thing I'd ever seen, while at the same time the most hideous. Who was this woman and what had she done with Serena? Gavin and I were gob smacked. With about 4 inches of airspace to work with and up to her ears in frigid water, she

disappeared out of sight. A minute later she returned to tell us that the airspace disappeared about 5 m in. Gavin and I remained gob smacked. Serena shook the water out of her ears, put her dry clothes back on and off we went.

We ignored The Silty Tributaries but stopped for a tourist up the Major Groan Series. The crawlway at the start was hideous but the little dry chamber and the following aven with waterfall were grand. I explained to the others that the aven, waterfall and draft in this passage provided the inspiration to scour the surface above, which led to the discovery of Rocket Rods Pot back in ~2002. We also checked the other main tributary just before the Sheep Dip (Pikers Sump Passage). Madphil and I had unsuccessfully attempted to siphon the sump at the end of this passage. A return in summer with a buck or two and maybe a small hand driven water pump is still a worthwhile exercise in my opinion (the same approach in other sump might be worthwhile too). Strangely, this whole passage seemed to stink of ammonia. We gave the Crystal Way a miss, mainly because I'd not been in there before (Madphil and Jeff Butt had surveyed all this) and I wasn't exactly sure where it was accessed from. A post-trip look at the survey indicates that it heads off at the same junction as Pikers Sump.

Back at the first main stream junction (where the Masochistic Way water comes in), I convinced the others that they needed to see the dry fossil passages. All of us were impressed by the gypsum, sparkly crystal walls, false calcite floors, huge silt banks (and associated pits of death!) and the numerous other spectacular things to be found up there. Of most interest to Gavin and me was the red mud coating the roof at the far end of this passage (and again back near the junction with the Masochistic Way stream). It is exactly the same stuff as coats the roof and wall of the phreatic borehole in the upper reaches of Mystery Creek Cave. The day was getting on now, so after a minute silence at the start of the Masochistic Way, (I have some really bad memories of that place), we headed for home.

The slog up the pitches was quite challenging with the heavy packs. Only two of the 12 or so pitch heads could be described as easy. It had been a fairly long day (around 8 hours underground) but worth every minute. Little Grunt is a superb cave and should be sampled by all; however, I don't recommend carrying large amounts of heavy gear to the back end just for fun. The only downside of the trip was that it caused me to realise that all the new stuff Madphil, JB, Geoff Wise and I surveyed was never drawn up (it has been drawn to scale but no final map). I have added it to my list, which is now: Mystery Creek Cave, Splash Pot, KD-Dwarrowdelf and now Little Grunt. Splash Pot is the only one on the list less than 3 km long (just, at 2970 m ...) Crap.

IB-1 Revelation Cave

Janine McKinnon

2 August 2009

Party: Chris Chad, Kate Edney, Janine McKinnon, Adrian Slee, Ric Tunney

This trip was a “Claytons” beginners trip. Chris was on his first trip underground, with his introduction to the club (and caving) being the SRT training session I had held the previous week. The other two, however, had done a couple of prior trips, although Adrian had not prusiked in anger before. So only one real beginner.

Revelation cave seemed like a good compromise to cover the varied experience and give everyone a good time. Besides, it had been raining so much in the previous few weeks, with more predicted for this day, to limit the choice of cave considerably.

I won't bore you with the getting there details, except to say that the tapes on the track were in good condition and we were at the entrance at 11:15 am. Amy arrived, with a VSA friend in tow, around 11:30 am, to say “hello”. Amy's friend, almost immediately on arrival, very kindly started talking about ASF insurance to increase the speed that Ric and I got everyone organised and the entrance pitch rigged. They kept the party company until we all disappeared underground.

All went smoothly on the trip down. Everyone was happy with the descents and climbs and we reached the terminal dig after about 2 hours, having toured up a few side passages along the way.

The stream level was not much higher than the last time I was there, during summer, despite all the rain and the ground on the walk in being absolutely saturated. The cave was hardly dripping and the pitches were all dry.

So I didn't need the plastic suit. Picked the wrong one again.

The journey back up the cave was an excellent imitation of a typical Australian party; the girls in one corner, chatting, and the boys in another, talking “boy stuff” no doubt. Except this time the girls corner was at the back, derigging.

Kate used my foot ascenders on the 16 m pitch, to try out different styles, so I got the club set. Oh joy.

We were all out at 4:15 pm. Surprisingly, it was only drizzling lightly, not bucketing down as the forecast had predicted, so we had a fairly dry walk back to the car. As a bonus, it stopped even that whilst we changed in the last light.

Note: rigging details are not included as they have been published in a prior trip report (SS356:3-4). However, we have now decided that the redirection on P2 is not necessary.

Other Exciting Stuff

STC Mid-Winter Extravaganza

Stephen Bunton

July 4-5th 2009

Present: Serena Benjamin, Stephen Bunton, Siobhan Carter, Arthur Clarke, Matt Cracknell, Sarah Gilbert, Michael Helman, Jane Pulford, Amy Robertson

Again Arthur generously made his Francistown home available for our annual winter bash. By the time I arrived those that had been caving for the day were showered and respectable [*It takes more than a shower to make that lot respectable – Ed.*]. The food was being warmed and the nibbles were on the table. It was time to crack the first beer.

Alan Jackson wasn't going to be there and I could tell that it was going to be a good night when Arthur broke out a new set of knives. So we spent some of the night involved in character assassination, which was then derailed when Facebook was mentioned and Bunty demonstrated the extent to which he is a technological Neanderthal. Of all the questions I asked about the new communication, the only one I didn't get a satisfactory answer to was; “Why?”

All discussion was routinely interspersed with various helpful suggestions for Matt as to what he should do with a bunch of beginners, some rope and not enough SRT gear, given it was cold wet and windy outside.

The hearty soups, stews and copious quantities of homemade bread ensured that we were warmed on the inside.

Amy appeared before the inquisition about rumoured new karst areas in the Huon forests but remained true to her professionalism. There was a degree of optimism about the chance of Forestry Tasmania getting the process right this time, after the dress rehearsal of Riveaux Cave and a bunch of newbies in the Geeveston office. Certainly cavers would be very keen and flattered to be asked in to do a cave survey in the newly discovered area.

Arthur supplied the necessary social lubricant in the form of his fruit wines. Siobhan was very diligent about washing up in the background. Everyone was stonkered after dessert and sufficiently tired and merry by the time they retired to bed. A good night was had by all.

Our thanks again to Arthur for enabling this wonderful tradition to continue.

Crocodile Buntie Does Kakadu

Stephen Bunton

Long before there were sciences like speleology there was superstition and people lived in caves long before there were cavers.

Visiting Kakadu is not so much a speleological adventure but a good insight into the mindset of those people who sheltered in caves in Australia from as far back as 60,000 years ago. The caves I visited were mere overhangs and contained no dark zones but all of them are still bigger than Carpark Caves I & II.

The feature that makes them of interest is that almost every square inch of rock that can be reached was adorned with cave art. In a land where it is bloody hot and shade is so valuable, or it rains like all hell has broken loose, you can appreciate why rock overhangs are important. One of the reasons why cave art has flourished in the Kakadu area is the fact that food is plentiful all year round and so it can sustain a sizeable population, with sufficient leisure time to indulge in such activities and people have done so almost continuously for millennia. Indeed much of the art features the species that were hunted for food. The drawings depicted barramundi and other fish, kangaroo, turtle, magpie geese, frilled-necked lizards and even thylacines.

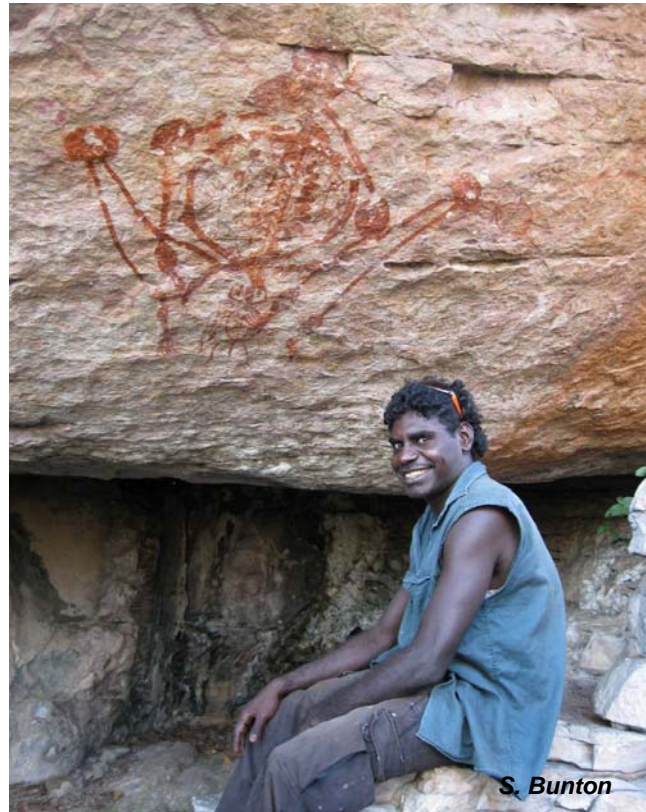
We visited the more popular tourist sites of Ubirr and Nourlangie Rock, which can be visited by anyone, anytime, as well as Injalak Hill which overlooks Oenpelli, in Arnhem Land. A permit is required to visit Arnhem Land, since it is Aboriginal land but permits are easily arranged over the phone. However, it is only possible to visit some places on a commercial trip. For our daytrip we were accompanied by an Aboriginal guide, called Alan. (Whenever we travel we prefer to spend our money employing locals.) Alan was able to give us some insight into the painting and his culture and this proved to be a fascinating contrast to the situation with Aboriginals and caves in Tasmania.

The first most significant difference was that we were allowed to photograph the art and reproduce it as we liked. In fact one piece of the artwork at the Injalak Hill site was depicted on the one-dollar note.

Much of our understanding, or rather misunderstanding, of Aboriginal art and culture stems from the language barrier. Alan preferred not to use the term *sacred sites* but preferred the term special places. The term sacred sites dates to missionary days and it is easy to see how this term was coined for special places. We were not allowed, however, to photograph burial sites, although we could visit them and did see human remains tucked into a crack in the rock at the back of a cave.

Other significant themes in the artwork were the Rainbow Serpent who created the geological features, the Creation Mother who populated the land by dropping babies from her many dilly-bags, as well as other creation spirits called the Mimis and the lightning man Namarrgon. There were different styles, which had developed over the ages, and these could be dated and in many cases had been. There was a willingness for Aboriginals to respect white fellas' science although they don't necessarily believe in it. For this reason I am willing to reciprocate and whilst I don't

believe in the Rainbow Serpent, I am happy that the story is told and retold.



Aboriginal guide, Alan, at Injalak Hill, Arnhem Land.



Creation Spirit with all the right equipment ... a helmet!

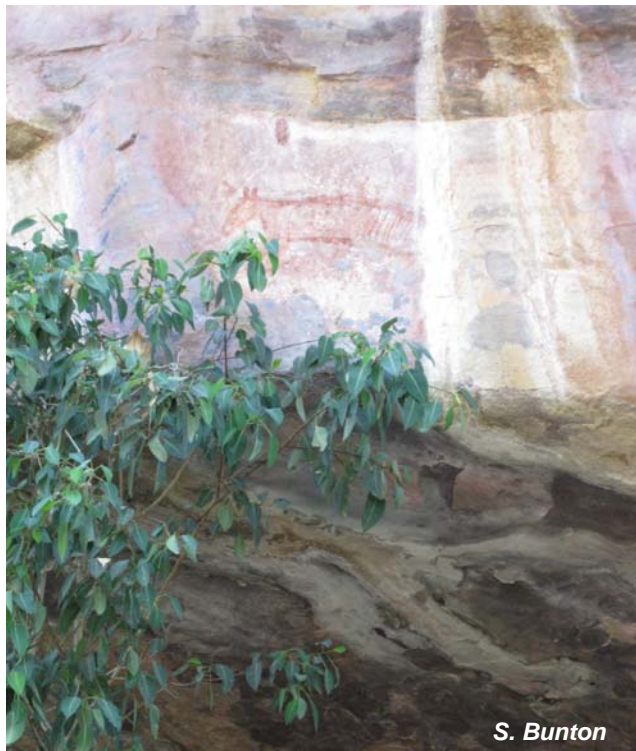


Creation Spirit with dilly bags of children.

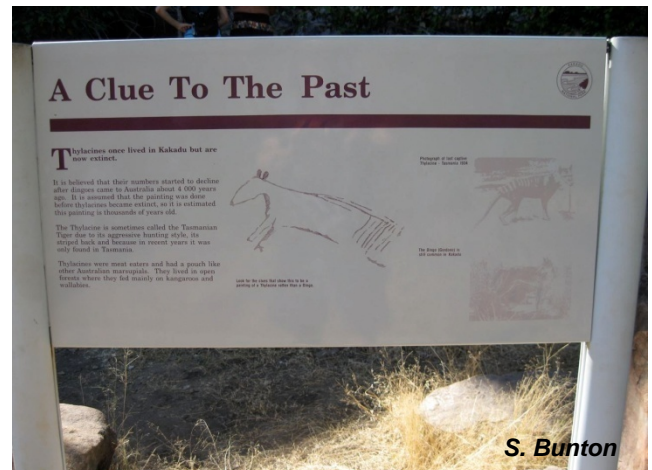
The rock which makes up the Arnhem Land escarpment and outlying hills is a metamorphosed sandstone which is almost 2,000 million years old. This is over 40% of the age of the Earth! Given that in some places it was a conglomerate and included quartz pebbles eroded from an even older sedimentary structure, I found it rather amazing. The rock reminded me of Mt Arapiles: hard, steep and really featured. Except for the oppressive heat it would have been spectacular climbing, although in Kakadu all climbing is banned.

The cap-rock is particularly hard and this has allowed the formation of the overhangs upon which the artwork is painted. In a number of cases the overhangs are no longer reachable and it is on surfaces such as this that the thylacine paintings can still be seen. These higher, older style paintings were explained in terms of the Mimi Spirits being so strong that they could lift the rocks down to paint on them before putting them back up again. Despite the fact that there were huge fallen boulders everywhere there was no consideration of the fact that the floor had eroded away from underneath the overhangs. In a land where the rock is so hard and erosion is so slow, I can understand why the Aborigines did not come up with the Principal of Uniformitarianism. They probably never saw evidence of a rockfall in their lifetime, unlike we visitors to Mystery Creek Cave!

The Aborigines constantly paint over previous artwork because the act of painting is more sacred than the picture itself, so the thylacine paintings really only remain where painting had ceased due either to erosion of the rock below it or due to some hiatus in the painting, often coinciding with changes to climatic conditions and a stylistic break. There were some paintings where the meaning was lost and the contemporary Aborigines had no understanding of what the painting was about. I had seen art like this previously at Tunnel Creek, Kimberly, WA. For this art the Aborigines would say, through our cultural filter, that the *songlines* have been broken.



Thylacine art on a now isolated rock face.



Thylacine interpretive sign.

Viewing this artwork with interpretation from a person who is actively involved with the painting caused me to reflect on the situation we have here in Tasmania. The art that has been discovered in Tasmania, mostly by cavers, was unknown to the local Aborigines. Mostly it dates to the last ice age and so the contemporary Aborigines have no knowledge of it, nor any living link to it. Even the Tasmanian caves are unknown to them; their songlines have been well and truly broken! It therefore seems strange to me as a caver, with a living colonial history and culture of cave exploration, that these caves should be given Aboriginal names, basically for no other reason than political correctness or to assuage the guilt of the population at large. Vale Mr Judd.

Even in Kakadu and Arnhem Land there is renaming of places. Oenpelli is known to the local Aborigines as Kunbarllanjnja. Where did Oenpelli come from? It is not an English word! With about eight Aboriginal languages in the area it would be easy to see how some places would have at least two names. (English was our guide's seventh language!) With cultural imperialism it is easy to see how Mumbai became Bombay. Of course there was geographic confusion by the colonialists too. Nourlangie Rock is not Nourlangie Rock and should be called Angbangbang, Little Nourlangie Rock (Nawlurlandja) is the real Nourlangie Rock. The National Parks interpretation signs tell you this and quote Aboriginal folk asking for it to be called by its correct name but the Parks handout guidebook still perpetuates the existing wrong name. It was good to see that in such an iconic national park there was some sense that the left hand and the right hand didn't know what each other were doing.

Whilst handbooks and interpretation signs don't give you the whole story it was good to see that many Aborigines were willing to share their stories with us. To many Aborigines in the area, telling *balanda* (white folk) about their culture was one way of ensuring that it was recorded in books and somehow survive in the face of overwhelming westernisation. There were differences of opinion on this. The two interpretation centres at Kakadu; the Bowali Visitor Centre and the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre were both excellent, although, I would like to see some more white-fella interpretation. (How do the crushed up leaves of some plants act to deoxygenate the water so that the dying fish float to the surface?)

Whilst there were Aborigines working in the area as guides and rangers there were also Aborigines living fairly

traditionally. Our guide, Alan, goes hunting with his grandfather every Sunday, on his day off from guiding and he is planning his initiation as an elder.

There was an interesting contradiction in the Aboriginal view of the world, indeed there are probably many. Aboriginals believe that there have always been people inhabiting this land, they didn't come across a land bridge from Indonesia, they have always been here. Most indicators were that they believed that they belong to the land, not that the land belongs to them and yet they are quite happy to have designated Aboriginal Land. No doubt this is as much about Aboriginal identity as it is about land management and ecology. The fact that "fire-stick farming" is still being practiced is a good thing for our biodiversity.



Traditional land-use practices; burning off in the dry season.

Whilst I was studying art at college, one of my teachers commented on the number of Tasmanian Aboriginal students who wanted to paint dot paintings. This is not a feature of the Tasmanian Aboriginal culture but that of western desert Aboriginals. The fact that it has been appropriated into the art of Aboriginals from other areas has been seen as a good thing for cultural unity within this

country and it can be quite justified on these terms. There were many dot paintings being done by local artists and sold in shops or displayed in galleries in Kakadu and Darwin.

It was interesting to note that whilst the culture of the Aboriginals in the Northern Territory was being preserved it was still evolving in the influence of western civilization. Alan gave us an interesting lesson on the symbols used on message-sticks, which are common across the languages, meaning that this form of communication predates their splitting into tribes. One of our group asked "So do you still use message-sticks?" Alan took his mobile phone from his top pocket and said "This my message-stick now." To that extent he is more engaged in the twenty-first century than I am!

Being able to visit caves with art in them, get permits to enter Aboriginal land, take photos of the art, have someone willingly tell you the story behind it (although it may not have been the whole story – I may not yet have the privileges to this special information), to see Aboriginals employed as guides and yet go hunting in the traditional way, as well as to see them incorporate other tribal art into their own local art, as a means of strengthening national identity, was a real treat. It was such a contrast to the situation we face in Tasmania.

I was reminded sadly of something I heard recently on ABC radio where the topic was something to do with Tasmanian Aboriginals. Michael Mansell was on his hobby-horse of all white fellas are bad, for no other reason than his shameless self-promotion. A listener phoned in to express his opinion to Tim Cox that "It seems like Michael Mansell is the only person in Australia who does not understand the meaning of the word reconciliation."

It seems like (at least some of, if not the majority of) the Aboriginals of Kakadu and Arnhem Land have reconciled their place in a modern world and I was glad to see that as well as their caves and their art.



What the Mainland has to Offer a Holidaying Tasmanian Caver

Alan Jackson

Judging by the title alone, this article should be pretty short. It will be.

My three week sojourn in QLD and NSW was more aimed at temperatures above 10 degrees than subterranean experiences, yet I managed to make a few chance discoveries of some natural features that satisfied a criterion or two of my definition of a cave.

Early on in Brisbane I was interested to see that Bunty isn't welcome on the City Cat ferry service



Brisbane City Cat sign.

My first 'almost caving' experience came at Sea World. There was a ride there called The Bermuda Triangle which I figured might have been based on the 170 m pitch in Tachycardia. It was wet, dark and moderately exciting in spots but, all in all, not a patch on the original. I was happy not to have to spend three hours cleaning all my gear at the end though.



Me and some random Indians on Research Probe 2 after our trip.

We sponged off Dean Morgan and family at Upper Coomera that night. In reality this was probably the closest I got to Tasmanian caving for the whole three weeks. We exchanged a few stories, bagged out TCC/SCS cavers past and present, poked the family turtles (no, this is not a metaphor) and lamented the lack of caves in southern Queensland. It was good to see Dean and it served as a timely reminder of what not to do to with my life (i.e. have a

second child, lose my cave fitness and move 4000 km from the nearest decent caving area).

Dean suggested we head up into the scrub behind the Gold Coast on our way south to see Natural Bridge National Park. It's not limestone, but rather basalt; a sizeable creek/small river has carved itself a lovely hole to pour into. A 'cave' of sorts has formed behind the waterfall/arch which allegedly contains bats and glow-worms. The QLD Parks Nazis made sure that sufficient signs and fencing were in place to prevent you from having any fun and going for a proper look. It was a lovely spot.



A. Jackson



A. Jackson

Natural Bridge – inside and out.

The next week was spent at the beach at Byron Bay, so nothing overly cave-like to find there. Although, one day on the beach I excavated a significant tunnel in the wet sand that was big enough for my two-year-old nephew to drive his 300 mm high Tonka truck through. SSS would have surveyed it and named it Truck-Park Cave had the tide not come in and destroyed it.

Passing through Port Macquarie I spotted the Kenny Walk at Nobbys Beach. I did my best impersonation of Ken Hosking walking (the ‘laid back, legs out in front the rest of your body’ one).



No caption required.

Next major stop was the Blue Mountains behind Sydney. The old railway tunnel at Scenic World (Katoomba) was pretty cave-like but artificially made. I raised the bar significantly a couple of days later though when I finally managed to complete my life’s ambition of experiencing the highly acclaimed caves at Mt Piddington. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, it is true – I have conquered the original and the best; Carpark Caves I & II. Unfortunately I didn’t have a copy of the surveys from JSSS (49(12):375-377) so I had to make sure I could see my hire car at all times to avoid getting lost. (I was fortunate enough to get a Toyota Camry Sportivo as my hire car, so I now consider myself an honorary member of the “Camry Sporting Driver’s Club” – it was a rare privilege to be indoctrinated into two such prestigious groups on the one holiday.)



Me and the Sportivo in Car Park Cave I (top) and CPII (bottom).

The following day was a big step down from the dizzy heights achieved the day before but was still good fun. I met up with Peter Brady (UTSSS and NSW Cave Rescue Squad member who attended the Cavex in Mystery Creek a couple of years back) and he took me canyoning. The winter weather dictated that our original plan of doing the classic Claustal Canyon was abandoned but we still had a very pleasant time in Pembrose and Tiger Snake Canyons (which are not quite so wet). The sinuous sandstone slots were superb and some spots were downright dark! The Blue Mountains are truly spectacular and a return to knock off a few more of the classic canyons is high on my list.



About to drop into the slot at the start of Tiger Snake Canyon.



Bottom section of Tiger Snake Canyon – a beautiful forested canyon floor with towering cliffs and tree ferns.

Hickmen Dreaming

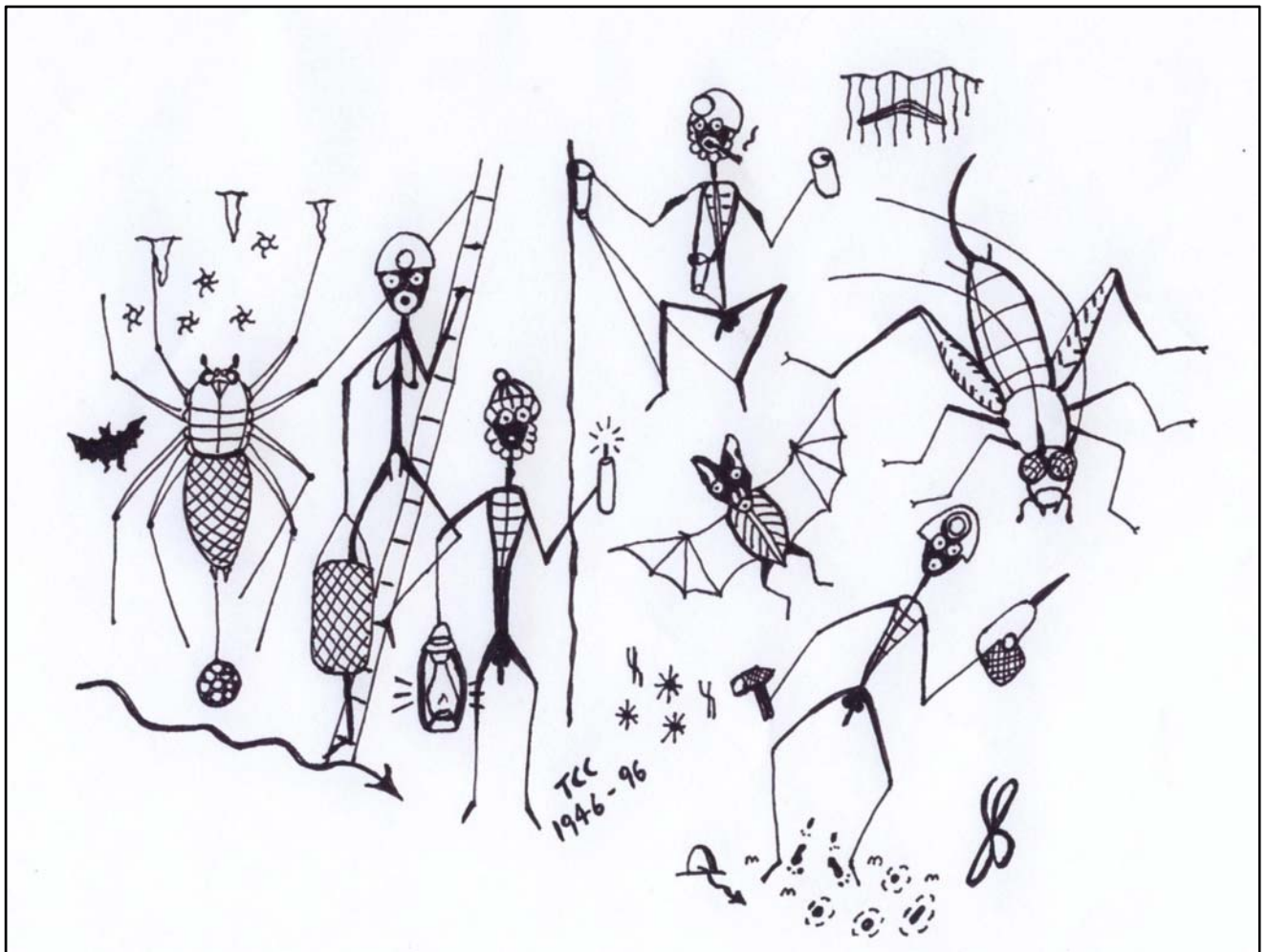
Stephen Buntton

Inspired by my recent trip to Kakadu, I was motivated to go in search of cave art that depicts the origins of caverneering in this state. I was lucky enough to find this interesting pictograph at a cave location that I cannot reveal (actually, according to the ASF Code of Ethics, I can't reveal the locations of any caves!) I was unable to photograph it either due the fact that I still had the lens-cap on the camera but I was able to copy it down and make some vague interpretation of it.

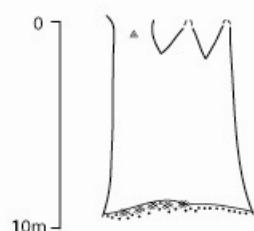
Tasmanians have always been known as country "hicks" and rather than the story depicting stickmen, it shows the Hickmen. This is incredibly significant because the ancient caverneers believed that a giant cave spider now known as *Hickmania* guarded the entrances to their caves. However, if the Hickmen brought offerings in their dilly-bags she would spin webs of silk that enabled them to climb down into the caves. The first figure on the left is the great cave mother whose name is not known. (Most ancient cave women were known by their husband's name and to some extent that tradition still exists in caverneering clubs.)

The cave mother is timeless and here she is depicted as being younger than her son, *Cub*, who, like the early caverneers, wore beanies and carried only primitive lighting devices: kerosene lamps and candles. There is some conjecture about whether or not it is a candle since *Cub*, due to a mysterious accident, disappeared and took with him the cave that bears his name. The other two figures are *Rana* and *Ryobi*. *Rana* said that one day he would eat Hickman but Hickman outsmarted *Rana* by spinning only a single thread of silk. It took *Rana* a long time to discover how to climb the single thin thread. *Ryobi* is the maker of caves and he goes wherever and whenever he pleases. It is interesting that in these pictographs women are generally drawn with their mouths open and men have them closed but in *Ryobi*'s case it is shown as open. Notice also that *Ryobi* does not have a beard yet.

This picture also gives us a glimpse of past cave life, with giant cave crickets and bats which are no longer present in Tasmanian caves. It also offers an explanation of the way in which glow-worms got into caves. Notice that hand-stencils don't figure in the art but graffiti sometimes does appear and that it often allows us to date the picture.



JF - 444 Bunty Goes Down



Depth 9m Length 8m
Explored G.Brett and S.Bunton 12.7.09
Drawn S.Bunton 13.7.09
ASF Grade 1.2
Map Number JF444.STC143

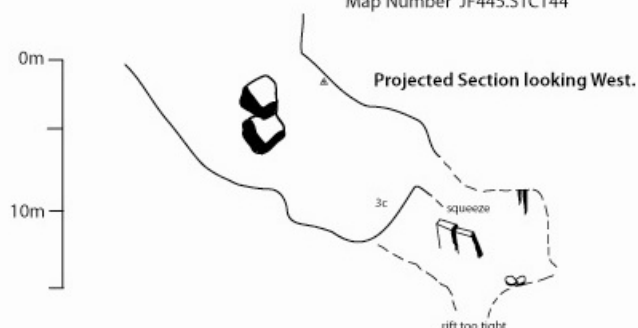
Projected Section looking West.



Plan

JF - 445 Michael Jacksons Comeback Tour

Depth 15m Length 20m
Explored S.Benjamin and S.Bunton 12.7.09
Drawn S.Bunton 5.8.09
ASF Grade 1.2
Map Number JF445.STC144

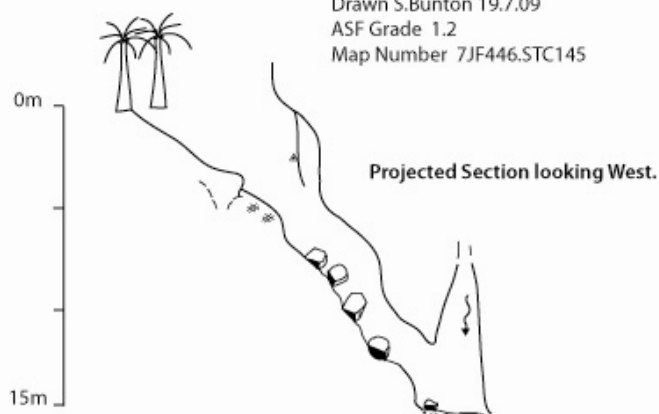


Plan



JF - 446

Depth 15m Length 20m
Explored S.Benjamin and S.Bunton 12.7.09
Drawn S.Bunton 19.7.09
ASF Grade 1.2
Map Number 7JF446.STC145



Plan

