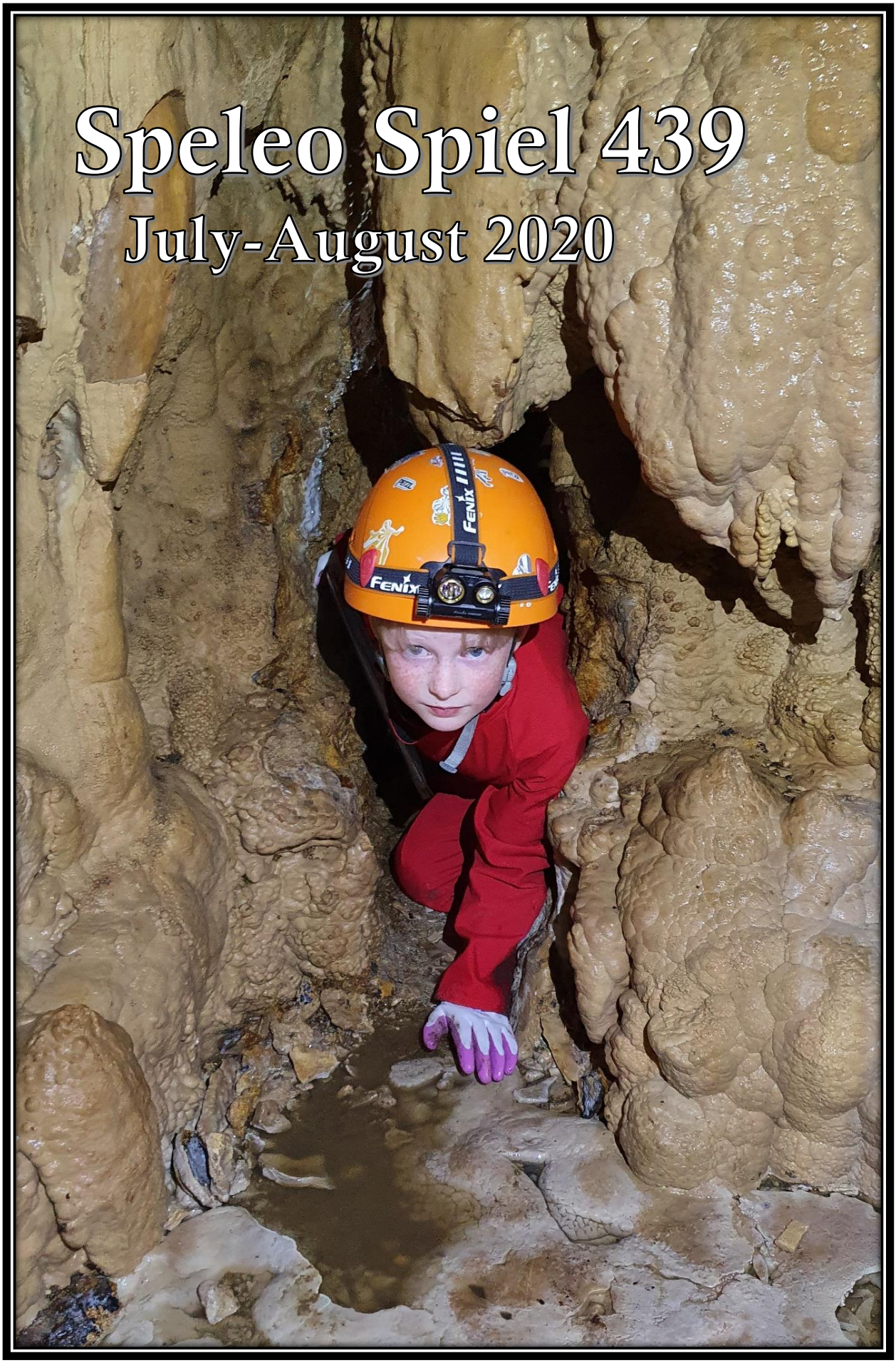
Speleo Spiel 439

July-August 2020



Newsletter of Southern Tasmanian Caverneers Inc. ISSN 2208-1348

Front Cover: *We carefully fit the caver to the hole. Ben Jackson in King George V Cave. Photo: Alan Jackson*

Back Cover: *Fashion on the Field. Photo: Alan Jackson*

Speleo Spiel

Newsletter of the Southern Tasmanian Caverneers Incorporated

PO Box 416, Sandy Bay, Tasmania 7006
http://southerntasmaniancaverneers.wordpress.com/
ABN: 73-381-060-862
ISSN 2208-1348

Issue No. 439, July-August 2020

Contents

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.

Editorial

I usually struggle to fill this box – not that I have to this time anyway: there is so much to share that I had to save some material for the next issue of *Speleo Spiel*. Perhaps this will be remembered as the shortest Editorial ever?

Stefan 'n' Stuff

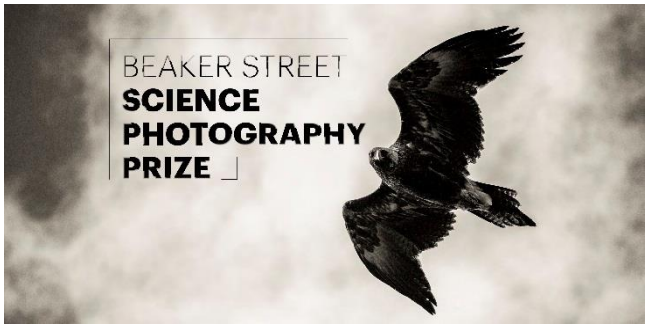
- Congratulations to Stefan Eberhard and Bronwen Prazak, who were married in Coningham on Tuesday 18th August 2020. All the best to you both for the future. Don't let matrimony interfere with the important things of life – such as caving!

The two love birds in their love nest.
Photo: Peter Bell

- On 20th July 2020, Stefan Eberhard gave a fascinating talk nicknamed "Floating through the dolines" on ABC Radio Conversations, with host Richard Fidler. The interview was broadcast on both local and national ABC networks. You can listen to the recording online here: https://tinyurl.com/yxaw8rr8

Photo: Adrian Slee

- Stefan features again (again!) in this issue with his submission for Beaker Street's annual Science Photography Prize. The competition accepts photographs that capture Tasmanian and Southern Ocean/Antarctic content, and which enhance scientific understanding. Voting is already closed, but Stefan's picture will be on show at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 22 August - 20 September, as part of Beaker Street Festival 2020. Find more information here: https://www.beakerstreet.com.au/photos



Source: Beaker Street

- The 18th International Congress of Speleology 2021, to be held in the French region of Savoie during the last week of August 2021, has now opened its ticketing. Provided it will be possible and reasonable to travel to Europe then, the relatively affordable tickets are certainly alluring. Have a look at the UIS' official website and see if you fancy a holiday to the world's most beautiful country: https://uis2021.speleos.fr/

Source: Union Internationale de Spéléologie

Trip Reports

West Styx Karst

28 May 2017

Russell Fulton

Party: Russell Fulton, Greg Jordan

It looked like it would be a damp day but not a wet day, so a good day to wander about in some rather nice myrtle forest in the upper Styx River area. The 1:25,000 geology map shows dolomite within about 500 metres of the southern boundary of a logging coup accessible from the Mueller Road and the Forestry Tasmania LiDAR image displayed the characteristic pockmarking of a karst terrain.

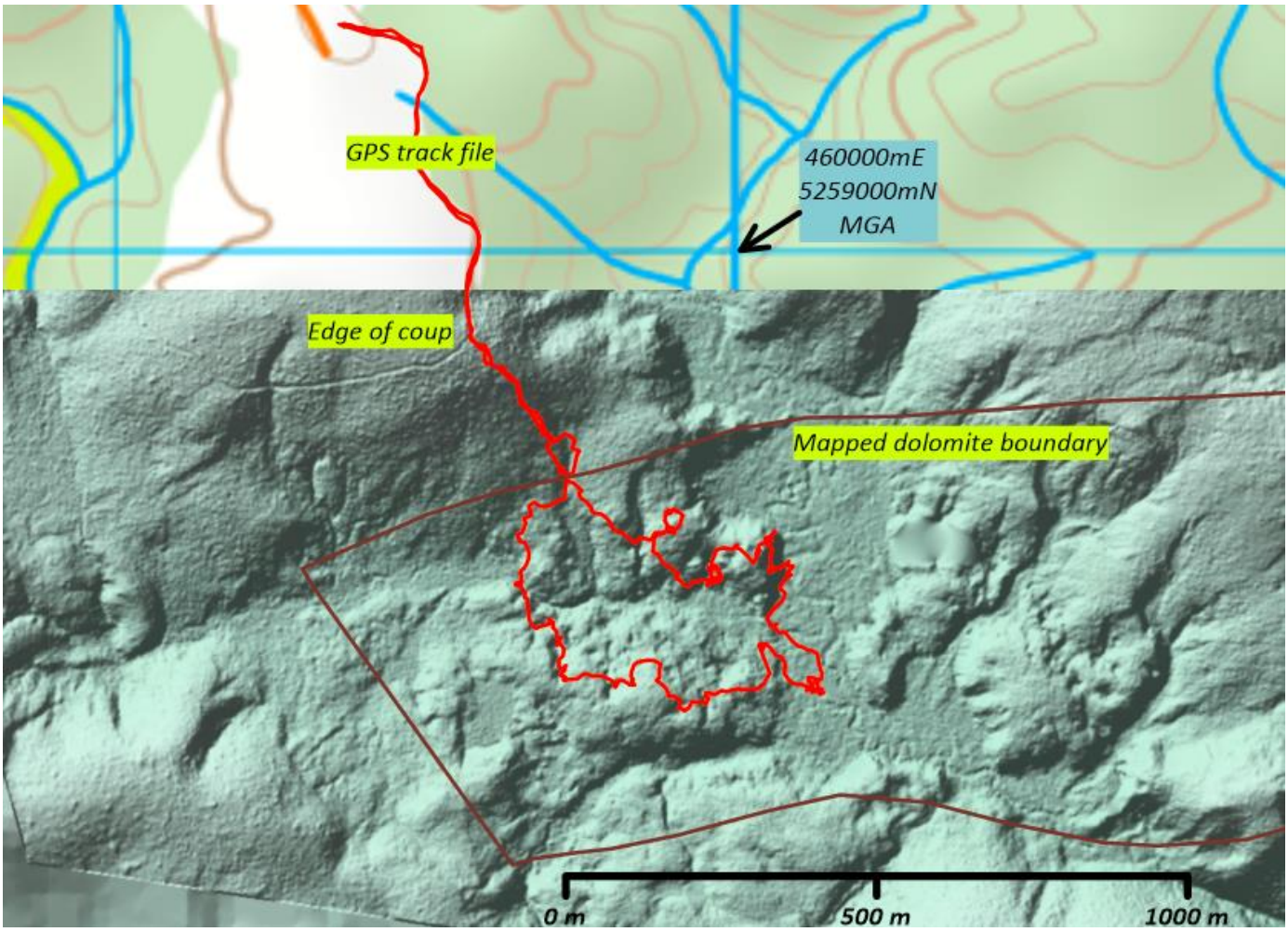
The access road from the Mueller Road into the coup was in good condition and driveable to the end (leave Mueller Road at 459560mE/5260775mN). We parked the car about 500 metres from the edge of the coup and could follow a snig trail down to near the SE corner of the coup. The transition from the coup to the rainforest was remarkably civilised, for a change, with an acceptable amount of fallen and/or bulldozed timber to bar the way.

The forest was easy to traverse with a very open mossy floor beneath large myrtles and the odd eucalypt. Except for that one 50 m wide band of horizontal scrub…

We crossed an eastward-flowing tributary of the Styx and found a little bit of dolomite outcrop on the bank. The excitement was not prolonged as the numerous dolines we encountered in the area were almost all devoid of outcrop. We worked our way down to the Styx and then worked our way back up towards the coup. One area of dolines had outcropping dolomite with a few cracks and small entrances, at least demonstrating that cave formation had taken place.

About half a kilometre to the east, the LiDAR shows another cluster of dolines in an area of greater topographic relief. Even if that elusive dolomite show cave is not to be found here, it is worth another trip just to wander through the forest.

According to the geology map, the dolomite continues for several kilometres to the east before trending southwards between the Jubilee and Snowy Ranges. The area we looked at represents the westernmost known occurrence of the Weld River Group dolomites in the Styx River basin.



Base data courtesy of the LIST and 1:50,000 Tasmap Series

JF-665 Cryptic Cowrie Cave

March 2020

Rolan Eberhard (text, photos and illustration)

Party: Rolan Eberhard, Peter McIntosh, Adrian Slee

JF-665 is located on the northern flanks of Mt Field West, south-east of Westfield Quarry. The cave was numbered and explored by Adrian Slee, Peter McIntosh and Rolan Eberhard in March 2020. Adrian found the entrance prior to this by following up on features visible on LiDAR imagery. JF-665 is the largest and most southerly of a series of depressions which form a line extending for about 200 m along slope at 720 m ASL. Of these depressions only that containing JF-655 seems to have been investigated to date.

The cave is situated within a 25 m wide by 15 m deep depression with steeply sloping to vertical sides. A small surface stream cascades in from the higher, upslope side and sinks into boulders at the base of an overhang on the opposite wall. We found and numbered a dry cave entrance about 6-8 metres north of the sink, below the lowest point on the rim of the doline. At the time of our visit this entrance was draughting outwards. It presents as a belly crawl across sediment fill on the base of a low chamber several metres in diameter.

Adrian savouring new passage in JF-665

Adrian and I went in for a look-see. Chasing the draught brought me to a constricted hole at the back of the chamber. Through this hole I could see open space above, so I wormed upwards and gained entry to a moderately spacious passage. This continued horizontally for a few metres to a second constriction, this one sloping downwards. Beyond this the passage continued sloping downwards, now with a few speleothems here and there. It looked like a pitch was coming up so at this point I decided to terminate the reccy and head back to find Adrian.

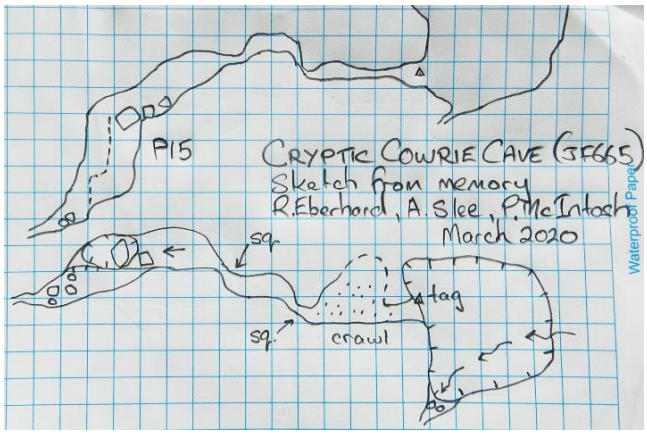
Adrian had explored off to the right in the initial chamber. He reported entering a small room with excellent marine fossils. Adrian's enthusiastic description of the fossils persuaded Peter to crawl in to see them. Meanwhile, Adrian and I went to further investigate my lead. We soon verified that the point where I turned back was indeed close to the head of a vertical shaft. Here, as elsewhere in the cave, the rock is rotten and prone to disintegration, so finding trustworthy natural anchors and avoiding potentially loose boulders were a priority. A further complication was that our one rope seemed a bit short given the apparent depth of the hole.

Various tapes and traces were brought into play to secure the rope while preserving maximum length for descending the pitch. Time was moving so we decided I should go down for a quick look and report back. This I did, giving away a few metres of rope as a re-belay towards the bottom of the pitch, which turned out to be about 15 m pitch in several steps. There was just enough rope to get fully down.

Peter exiting JF-665

The base of the pitch was drippy and depressing. The quality of the rock had not improved – think wet Anzac biscuit! The way on was a narrow descending fissure. I pressed on for a few metres but stopped at a point where to keep going required real squeezing and/or moving rocks. I rate this as a 'might go but I won't be rushing back' kind of lead.

The estimated length and depth of the cave are 60 m and 40 m respectively (sketch map attached). Although modest in scale, JF-665 is interesting from several perspectives. Firstly, the geological setting is novel, because parts of the doline and cave are formed in bouldery Permian conglomerate rock, which overlies the limestone on the slopes of the Mt Field Range. The conglomerate crops out at the overhang where the stream sinks and within the cave, where it forms the ceiling between the first squeeze and the top of the pitch. Below the pitch the cave is developed entirely in limestone, although large siliceous boulders weathered out of the conglomerate have fallen to the base of the pitch.



Field sketch of JF-665

Secondly, JF-665 lies on or close to likely northern limit of the catchment of Junee Cave, 12.5 km to the south-east. Rainbow Cave, 1.5 km west of JF-665, has been traced to Junee Cave, whereas stream sinks north of JF-665 are known to drain in a broadly north-westerly direction to Lawrence Rivulet Rising, 7.6 km away. It is not presently possible to confidently say whether JF-665 drains one way or the other. It could be an extreme northern tributary of the Junee Cave

system, or it could be a southern outlier off the Lawrence Rivulet system. On balance, a connection with Junee Cave seems more likely, because JF-665 is not so far from Rainbow Cave and higher upslope, within the same surface drainage line. If this interpretation is correct, then JF-665 cuts across a geological structure known as the Westfield Syncline (large scale dipping structure with younger rocks at the top). At Westfield Quarry, the axis of the syncline is occupied by a core of siltstone rock (Westfield Beds), which in the past have been quarried for roading material. I previously inferred that the Westfield Syncline defined the northern limit of the Junee Cave catchment. However, limestone is continuous beneath the siltstone core of the syncline and, conceivably, an underground stream could flow beneath it at depth.

Finally, the name Cryptic Cowrie Cave references the fact that we found a small cowrie shell tied to flagging tape on a tree at the cave. The flagging tape but not the cowrie was put there by Adrian on a previous visit. Therefore, some other person had been there and, for some obscure reason, left a marine shell. We removed the tapes on the way out.

Postscript: I've since heard via Alan Jackson that the JF-665 doline and others nearby were investigated by Russell Fulton and Greg Jordan in March 2018. It appears they explored the blocked entrance where the stream sinks in the base of the doline but perhaps not the dry entrance concealed by ferns which I tagged on the opposite wall. Based on an estimate of dip, Russell calculated that the base of the Westfield Beds at the core of the syncline probably deflects underground drainage from JF-665 towards the NW, rather than SW to Junee Cave.

IB-11 Midnight Hole

14 June 2020

Gabriel Kinzler (text and photo)

Party: Gabriel Kinzler, Matty Lawler, Emalisa White

I had never bothered to check the small side passage after pitch 3: it's worthwhile for its pretty flowstone, and in this particular case also for the fresh remnants of an unidentified animal decomposing there. I wager that it didn't come down the normal way – it would have had to clamber its way up the tricky (for a disturbed rodent) 4-m climb – but rather that it used a different entrance unknown to humans.

John Oxley tipped the lost soul to be Antechinus swainsonii, but time will tell.

JF-8 Junee Cave, JF-35 Gormenghast

27 June 2020

Bill Nicholson (text and photos)

Party: Kirsten (Slasher) Laurie, Bill Nicholson

"We might just have to bunker down for the night"

We had two objectives for this frolic, the Junee Resurgence up to the first sump (seriously do you really think we would go further… forgot the snorkel) and to check the streamflow into Gormenghast. Despite the best intentions we weren't able to accomplish any of this, but we did have an interesting time filled with much fun, drama and tea.

Approximately attired for the Junee Resurgence

Appropriately attired we entered the Resurgence but the streamflow was really pumping (too strong) to make the crossing. Me (tall and dry) watched on whilst Kirsten (not so tall and wet) made a number of heroic attempts to wade across but to no avail. Then on to Gormenghast and this is where it gets really interesting. We headed off along the track a bit later than planned but all would be good for our return in daylight – what could go wrong?

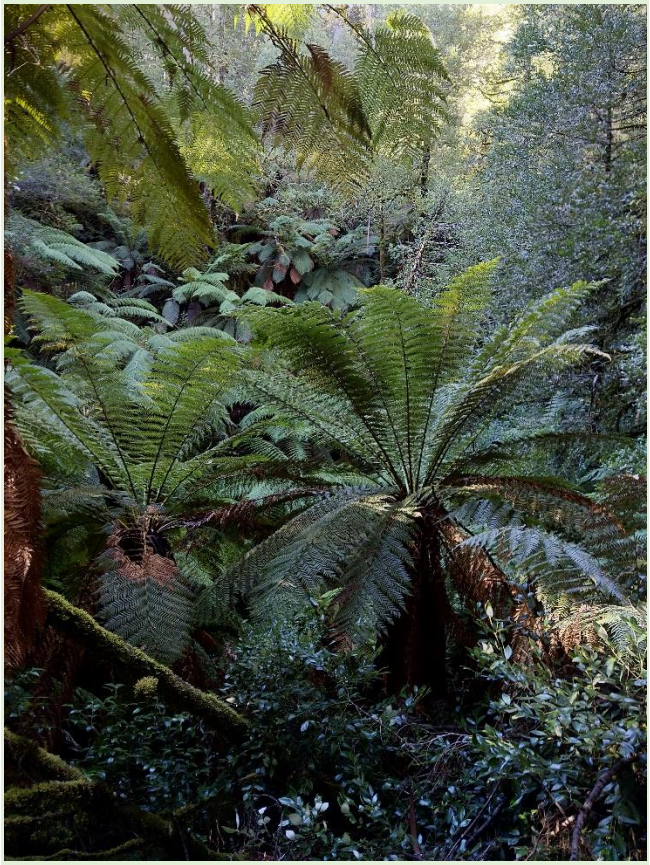
Not taking into account the recent rainfall, we headed off track to the sound of running water "Yes this must be Gormenghast", but not to be. A small stream disappearing into a choked-up swallet within a fern-clad doline appeared with the typical broad dry karst below.

Following and removing most of our tapes back to the main track, we now proceeded along towards Gormenghast.

Daylight was failing, a meeting was called, our position was evaluated, decision made to continue for just a wee while as it would be dark anyway before we got back to the car.

Off track and into a patch of scrub, getting quite dim by now so we turned back.

Picking up the track and markers became more difficult and the sections which were obvious in daylight, not so in the dark. Navigating the detours became a challenge but fear not for we had a plan; we leapfrogged between markers and were comfortable with the prospect of bunkering down for the night if the next marker was not found – wandering aimlessly through the forest was not an option.



The doline with choked swallet

Well, we got through and arrived back at the car rather late and without mishap. Poor time management on my part was the culprit, me bad. But all is good, a great experience, old school bush navigation and lessons learnt for both of us.

Seeking the Wet Spot – A Tale of Three Suits (and a Dress)

5 July 2020

Alan Jackson

Party: Serena Benjamin, Alan Jackson

A few jobs on the list for the day and they mostly involved getting a bit on the moist side.

Job 1 was to raise the bar in Bill's Facebook 'Fashion on the Field' challenge in the Junee Cave carpark. Serena dolled herself up and I donned the pink flared suit I bought twenty years ago to upstage my sister at her own wedding *[Editor: see The Last Page]*. A few stupid poses later and the only dry job for the day was completed (only a few moments before some tourists came by… phew!).

Job 2 was swap out Steve's detector in Junee. There had been multiple attempts to do this job in the previous weeks but high-water levels had thwarted every one. Suitably clad in neoprene (pink suit to wetsuit) I assessed the water levels, decided they were far too high, then did it anyway. Crossing the river was a bit hectic (a handline tied slightly upstream helped – good advice, Steve). It was mid-thigh deep and flowing swiftly. The entire detector placement was fully submerged (tie back anchor and 'please don't remove this' sign included). I stood in crutch deep water and fumbled around under water up to my shoulders trying to untie the bloody thing from various nubbins of rock. Then the even more difficult task of tying the new one on while the current tried to steal the string and detector. I think it went in well-placed, secured and hopefully turned on…

Junee River crossing
Photo: Serena Benjamin

Job 3 was derig Niagara. David RR is trapped on the mainland for goodness knows how long and his ropes in Niagara were at risk of getting trashed in high winter flows. The entrance waterfall was flowing very nicely but didn't look like it was enough to prevent safe entry. A Steve experiment was performed (the waterfall briefly matched the verdant rainforest around it). Still wetsuited up, with a PVC suit added on top, we ventured into the maelstrom. Tying all the ropes up tight on the way out on the previous trip had kept them from certain trashing. The only damaged bit of rope was a tieback to a natural back up anchor at the top of the fourth (handline) pitch, which had obviously seen some seriously high-water levels and vibrated against an edge. No sheath left and not much of the core either. Thankfully only a metre or two from the end of the rope so no real damage done to the safety of the rig or the hip pocket.

Niagara landscape
Photo: Alan Jackson

At the top of the last pitch, which is bloody awfully wet even in low to moderate flows, we called it. I'd pulled all the rope up to the top on the last trip, so there was no need to go down to rescue any other rope at risk of water damage. We turned around and stripped the rigging as we went (see notes at end of this report for what is left in the cave). Mission accomplished, we toddled back to the car.

Three Falls Cave and Serena
Photo: Alan Jackson

The day was still young (not long after lunch), so we headed for Job 4. Up to the Nine Road and some Steve jobs (Steve Jobs?) at Three Falls Cave. We noted that someone had (very recently) tarted up the track to Owl Pot – re-taped, fern fronds pruned and some little steps/benches cut on the slippery clay bank near the start. Not cavers, I'd say, but some other members of the general public. The cut fern fronds were super fresh, as if they'd been done no more than a day or two before. Over at TFC the three (arguably four or five this day) waterfalls were raging. Very beautiful spot. We recovered Steve's 'oneshot' device placed way back in February or thereabouts, made a new sacrifice to the Gods of Green and headed out. A random Victorian uni student drove up as we were getting changed out of our wetsuits for the first time that day. Luckily, he'd not been home to Victoria since the start of the year, so he was safe to talk to! He was just having a sticky beak up any roads he could get his Patrol up looking for pretty things. We pointed him in the direction of Owl Pot and TFC to admire the scenery and headed home. We got back to Hobart before dark! Lovely, productive, no fuss and short day.

Niagara gear/rigging situation:

Pitch 1 – totally derigged (including bolts and hangers).

Pitch 2 – totally derigged (as per P1) with exception of the second/lower offset rebelay. I left the bolt and hanger on this rebelay to make it easier to re-rig in the future (and easier for me to escape drowning on the rope trying to de-rig it).

Pitch 3 – totally derigged.

Pitch 4 (handline) – totally derigged.

Pitch 5 – totally derigged with exception of a rebelay (bolt and hanger still in place)

Other – There is a ~60 m 9 mm rope in the dry chamber below the fifth pitch and the bolts and hangers we placed on our February trip for the dry pitch lower down are still in place. All bolt holes (6 mm concrete screws) have a red wall plug inserted with a reflective marker (and a loop of fishing line to keep them on the maillon/carabiner when it's next rigged.

Damaged Niagara rope
Photo: Alan Jackson

JF-35 Gormenghast

12 July 2020

Bill Nicholson (text and photo)

Party: Philip and Stewart Jackson, Bill and Liam Nicholson, Tamara Shearing

Just a bit more of a tidy up of the track and lunch at the Gormenghast doline, more work to be done on a detour or two around fallen trees. Tam, always out for a bit of adventure, got herself hopelessly bogged but fear not for Stewart was a gentleman and dug her out.

Gormenghast. Tammy, Stewart, Liam.

IB-11 Midnight Hole

18 July 2020

James Barnes (text and photo)

Party: James Barnes, Tionne Hilder, Phillip Kapudija, Ciara Smart

My initial aspirations for running heaps of beginner trips this year has been largely curtailed due to COVID however with things getting back to normal it was time to get back on track and make things happen!

Tionne showing no fear

I ran a training session the evening prior (Alan kindly did a lot of the work here) to make sure everyone was up to speed and had equipment sorted out. This turned out to not be required as this was the easiest 'beginner' trip I have ever run! All participants had heaps of rock climbing/caving/canyoneering experience.

After rigging the first abseil I largely sat back and took pictures and let everyone else do the rigging and look after themselves. This is certainly a stark contrast to my last trip down here that involved a lot of top belaying and talking nervous participants through getting on rope.

Still managed to get some strained expressions in Matchbox Squeeze so that's good, wouldn't want the trip to be too easy or it might damage my reputation…

Overall a nice trip which has me keen to get some more beginner-friendly stuff happening in other caves, looking at the log book I've been down here quite a lot!

H-214 King George V Cave

18 July 2020

Linda Robertson

Party: Anna Jackson, Ben Jackson, Alan Jackson, Amy Robertson, Linda Robertson, Ray Robertson

Yesterday we went to King George V Cave. Linda, Ray, and Ben navigated.

We also found some fungi along the track, and an orchid.

In some spots it was a tight squeeze.

We stopped for a snack in the furthest chamber of the cave.

Adventurer Linda and her comrades munching away
Photo: Alan Jackson

We also found some straws and stalactites.

On the way out of the cave Ben carried Amy's pack and Alan's pack.

Anna was a brilliant help reading the map when the boys got lost and wouldn't listen to me.

My most fun part was the ladder at the entrance.

By Linda Robertson.

H-15 Chromosomia – H-11 Big Mama

18 July 2020

Gabriel Kinzler (text and photos)

Party: Ben Armstrong, Gabriel Kinzler

I sometimes think of ongoing caving projects as a chore, because of the sense of obligation and responsibility they carry, but that feeling is always immediately lifted when I arrive on site and remember why I do it in the first place: it's awesome. Eight months after my last visit and a pandemic later, we return to this baby mammoth of a cave. Still not quite the Junee-Florentine and still not quite as extensive as some other caves in the same karst, but at least twelve labours and then some.

Hoping to make a serious dent in the survey job, today's plan was to re-rig the cave entirely, survey the bits found last time with Serena, and tick off a couple of leads. Happy to report we did none of those and instead connected a secondary entrance and unveiled yet another battery of leads and open passage.

We clocked a new personal best of 40 minutes from the car – 30 minutes should be possible without a heavy pack and when you know exactly where to step (and you're not unfit like me), compared to the hour-and-a-half it used to take us! On arrival at the doline, I put Ben to work, because luring the ace that he is to Hastings already felt like asking too much, I wasn't also going to strip him of the opportunity to have some fun.

The foreground is actually a fallen tree

The (previously suspected) second entrance is a seemingly round sinkhole of 3 m in diameter located on the south-east edge of the doline, at its rim. Chucking a bowline around a tree and protecting the corner with a pack, Ben started the descent but soon stopped when a big chunk of what we thought was the wall – but really rotting wood – detached and sat down neatly on his lap. Turns out the hole is not round, but rather elongated into a rift towards the main entrance, under a massive organic bridge formed around a flattened log… which I was standing on… and from which I swiftly retreated to a safer spot. Ben proceeded however, judging it to be statically sound enough.

The Chromosome, right above the entrance

The shaft is 68.5 metres deep, fairly vertical with only a few slight bends and a bit of sloping ground on the way down, otherwise relatively free-hanging between each rebelay, of which Ben installed four, not helped by some uncooperative concrete screws. It reaches the main chamber through an aven that Chris and I bet our money on months ago. One 80 m rope is enough to reach the bottom, just. But this shan't matter in the future, as the main entrance is safer and way more spectacular – next time, we will de-rig this secondary entrance, now named H-15 Chromosomia, in reference to a big, menacing four-legged tree trunk overarching the vicinity of the hole, that oddly resembles an X chromosome.

Next up was meant to be a re-rig of the rockpile pitch leading to The Handkerchief, but I couldn't resist showing Ben an open lead under the main entrance pitches: the downward squeeze. He got through gruntingly and started dropping a 5 m pitch waiting on the other side, while I made the squeeze a bit less squeezy with some bespoke tooling. The pitch was worthy and landed at a crossroads of passage clad in flowstone and surrounded by straws, with the prospects of another pitch and a slope leading to a stream at base level, which I presume is the cave's main stream that Chris tried to dig out in vain at the bottom of the Main Chamber a year ago.

Ben inaugurates the Durex Squeeze

We left it rigged for another day and exited. I surveyed the new entrance while ascending, a first for me, but not as painstaking as I'd imagined.

The secondary entrance is 14 m above the main one, which means the depth record in Hastings has finally been broken from 72 m (H-207 Trafalgar Pot) to 80.0 m currently, hopefully more once the new section is surveyed. I know depth talk is mostly wank, but to me it's a motivator like any other. Numbers are fun.

JF-337 Slaughterhouse Pot – JF-36 Growling Swallet

25 July 2020

Alan Jackson

Party: Serena Benjamin, Alan Jackson, Janine McKinnon, Ciara Smart

Semi-tourist/pleasure trip to Black River with multiple scientific deployments en-route.

We retrieved some things, dangled some air pressure loggers in the forest, dangled some air pressure loggers underground, placed a detector in Black River, painted the town green, sank a water pressure logger in the Growling sump and figured out how to negotiate the ever-changing silt banks at the Growling sump.

There won't be any silt left there soon, which will make it easier to negotiate in some ways, but will mean that an annoying swim or wade will be required if water levels are anything but low. Fun.

A pleasant trip in pleasant company.

Florentine Valley

26 July 2020

Bill Nicholson

Party: Philip Jackson, Bill Nicholson

A fine day for a bit of serious silliness and wayward adventure. Many an untold story of weird stuff that permeabilises through the forest decays over time and this report is no different.

We were given a number of points of interest to investigate by Stephen Fordyce, of dolines noted on LiDAR late one night through a fog of drinking Corona beer, in his quest for the mythical lair of the Florentine Jabberwocky.

We ambled aimlessly through the forest aided by a GPS thingy until we located the first doline, beside the track and another close by.

The first was dry and choked by eons of debris, the other being the one Kirsten and myself mistook for Gormenghast on 27 June.

A thought in process
Photo: Bill Nicholson

Stephen requested we tag and survey these and future features. Upon consideration the request was deemed of value and we agreed to lower our standards to comply. *[Editor: but this never got done.]*

With some time to spare for further dubious adventure, a bit of 4-wheel driving with the old Commodore was the cry.

"Will she go?", "Can we make it?", "Gunna need a cut lunch to reverse out of this", and "Can you smell the rubber burning?" concluded the day with panache.

Growling Area Surface Bash

28 July 2020

Alan Jackson

Party: Serena Benjamin, Alan Jackson, Gabriel Kinzler, Janine McKinnon, John Oxley, John Webb

I didn't think anyone would be interested in a maintenance day to Ice Tube followed by some scrub bashing to unlikely prospects. I was wrong. Apparently, everyone wanted to come along.

Many hands make light work and Ice Tube was reached in time for an early lunch. Our next mission was to check a line of five or so large depressions running along where the contact should be (if it wasn't covered in doleritic slope deposits). These are visible on the LiDAR data set. We found all the depressions and, while large and clearly karst-related, all of them were 'subjacent' so to speak and not an ounce of limestone or enterable passage was observed. None of them were taking an obvious surface stream. Alas.

Sticking out like a sore thumb
Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

The next lot of targets were placed well to the west (more or less on the same contour) and had been identified by Steve. Again, hopes weren't terribly high, due to the known level of slope deposit crap in the general vicinity, but a big LiDAR depression is a big LiDAR depression and you never know if you never go (the main drain between Porcupine Pot and Niggly should run directly under this area). In addition to 'hole in the ground' depressions, some horizontal scrub-induced depression was also experienced. Not all the forest was bad though, with enough stunning tall delegatensis forest and open rainforest to help you forget the horrors of the horizontal. Every target was found and confirmed as close but no cigar.

We made a dash (or was it a crash and bash) to the point on Garths Creek (Growling stream) where the two main branches come together at about 650 m a.s.l. We performed an experiment with the aim of testing the 'Garths Creek stream bed leakage is the source of the Black River With White Bits In It' theory and paid a heavy price in the form of debilitating horizontal scrub. Only Serena seemed to enjoy it, but she'd just come off night shift and wasn't necessarily actually awake. Thankfully, once we stopped letting John (Webb) choose the path, we stumbled into magnificent open (callidendrous) rainforest with soaring emergent regnans. Magnificent (and much easier going).

Three last large, choked depressions were inspected then we picked a path of least resistance to the traditional log crossing over Garths Creek and bombed back out to the cars.

One carload headed east for the city lights while the other did a quick diversion to the west to visit the entrance of JF11 Rainbow Cave in the interest of hydrological science.

A good, productive and surprisingly well-attended day out. No excuses to not start the Ice Tube project now.

Chrisps Creek area

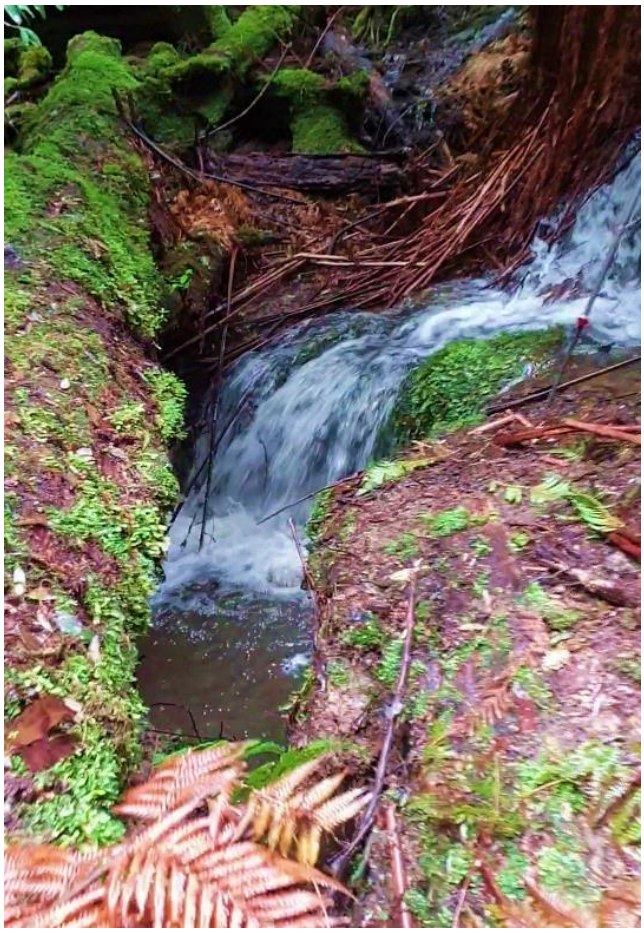
2 August and 16 August 2020

Russell Fulton (text and photos)

Party: Russell Fulton, Greg Jordan

I have become somewhat interested in the geology of the Junee-Florentine karst and the degree to which the individual characteristics of the three different limestone formations that occur there influence the development of cave systems. The geology of the Junee-Florentine has been mapped at 1:25,000 scale by Mineral Resources Tasmania for all but a small part of the karst area and that scale of mapping is good enough to delineate the three formations that comprise the Gordon Group: the Karmberg Limestone, the Cashions Creek Limestone and the Benjamin Limestone. A majority of caves in the JF, especially significant ones, occur in the latter two formations. The area that is not mapped at that scale is located between Wherrets Lookout and Cave Hill and the mapped scale here is at 1:250,000, which is not particularly useful. However, there is a map at a reasonable scale that was created as part of a limestone resource survey carried out by MRT in the 1990s and it extends the good coverage northwards about a kilometre or so in the Cave Hill area. The map shows Cashions Creek Limestone to the west of the east branch of Chrisps Creek (west of Cave Hill) and the LiDAR imagery for this area displayed a similar texture to that at Cave Hill, indicating potentially good outcrop. Given the lack of numbered caves in the database in this area and the obvious potential, an exploratory trip was planned.

Sunday the 2nd of August. As we drove through Maydena the view towards Tyenna Peak and beyond to Mt Mawson and the Rodways revealed virtually no snow and as it had been an unusually dry July, with the forecast for showers developing later in the afternoon, we anticipated a relatively dry wander around in the forest. We headed up the Niggly Track until it veered to the east away from the Slip track. A little way further up the track, at the first outcrop we came to, we turned right off the track and started to contour around the hillside towards the east. We quickly encountered a couple of small blocked dolines in an area that looked like it could host more. As we continued, the vegetation became a little less hospitable and a few patches of horizontal had to be negotiated. Luckily, the horizontal was still mostly vertical, so more of an inconvenience than a barrier. We saw the odd piece of limestone, but not much, and eventually crossed what was probably the major branch of Chrisps Creek. No water flowing but the presence of small gravel/pebble banks a metre or so wide suggests that it does take water after significant rain or snow melt.



Take Two - Stream sink below JF-568

We crossed another gully and on the other side encountered a bluff of limestone that indicated we had reached our target area. We clambered up fifty or so vertical metres and headed for our first LiDAR doline target. It turned out to be a flat shelf beneath a 2-3 m high limestone wall. A false positive which would have been easy to detect if the LIDAR imagery used a sun angle from the south rather than the north-east (we were using the standard imagery from *theLIST* website). We continued around the slope towards the next target and after about 60-80 metres found a small cave (not one of our targets). A 2-3 metre vertical drop that we left for another day as we didn't have a ladder, only tapes. Another 100 or so metres took us to the next target which turned out to be a good-sized blocked doline. The next encounter was a substantial shaft a few metres around from the doline. The entrance was 4-5 metres across at the top and the shaft looked to be 10-15 metres deep. An exciting find until I noticed that I was standing next to an old red tape. The cave had no obvious number and is not in the database. We then noticed other red tapes that delineated a taped route. We followed the tapes down the hill towards the west branch of Chrisps Road. Not far down the hill we encountered a junction with a pink taped track which took off up to the north – the Tachycardia track. We followed the track of many tape colours down to Chrisps Road and then walked back along the road to the Niggly parking site.

Two weeks later, Sunday the 16th, the forecast was for a wettish day and getting wetter. Taking a chance that it would not be that bad we headed back to the start of the Tachycardia track. This mission was to find JF-251, which is an old SCS cave that purportedly lies down the valley past JF-568 and was the stream sink for the east branch of Chrisps

Creek that now sinks at JF-568, and also to check out an obvious (LiDAR) doline feature in the valley about 250 metres below JF-568 and then to locate the old Adamsfield Track. JF-251 is a 9 m wide by 4-5 m deep doline entrance that was only partially explored in the 1970s, so it should be easy to locate.

Ye Olde Adamsfield/Great Western Railway Pack Track

At least it wasn't raining while we got changed at the car. We quickly reached JF-568 and headed down to the bottom of the valley a little below the stream sink. Surprisingly, we encountered the stream again. It must rise about 20 or so metres below the JF-568 entrance and it then sinks again into a pool in the creek bed, a sump rather than an entrance and with no limestone visible. We then headed down the valley towards the obvious feature which turned out to be a collapse in the dolerite overburden with no visible limestone. It is about 6 m wide and 3-4 metres deep. We did not see anything else that looked like JF-251 but looking at our GPS track, we did get forced to the left-hand side of the valley because of logs and scrub at one stage so maybe we missed it.

We then located the old Adamsfield Track, which was adjacent to the doline, and followed that west to the remains of Chrisps Huts and a bit beyond. The track is still in pretty reasonable shape and easy enough to traverse apart from the odd fallen tree. The track was originally constructed around 1900 as a pack track for surveyors and their horses who were working on establishing a route for the Great Western Railway, a railway link between Hobart and the West Coast that was never built.

At Chrisps Hut (now a pile of timbers on the ground) there were some newer pink tapes that headed down the hill towards the Florentine Road and also continued west along the track. As the rain increased, we decided to head back along the track and work our way up the hill to look at the shaft we saw on the last trip. We traversed around the hill a little higher than the previous time and found another cave next to the red-taped track. This is a 3-4-metre-deep hole which Greg explored and found blocked. We thought about GPSing the red-taped track up the hill to whatever its destination might be, but we were wet and expecting to get wetter, so we headed back.

JF-221 Owl Pot and Other Missions

14 August 2020

Alan Jackson

Party: James Barnes, Alan Jackson

Steve was itching to get his hands on the Junee Cave detector so some extra plans were made up to make it worth the trip. James needed some more beginner suitable caves under his belt to assist with his future carrying out of Training Officer and beginner trip guru duties. Quite a few trees down on the Nine Road after all that snow but we came prepared and made short work of them. Plenty of snow still lying around at Owl Pot level.

Owl Pot with two competent cavers is a quick trip and we were done and dusted by lunch time. I got caught out by the problem of having another member of the household who has a PVC suit and accidentally brought along Anna's (a Janine hand-me-down); it was a fraction on the small side so I did the trip in my wetsuit, which I'd packed for Junee Cave activities later in the day. Dickhead!

Dickhead!
Photo: James Barnes

A quick side trip for a 'this is where Welcome Stranger is' was next on the list, but we didn't go in (no key with us).

Junee Cave carpark next, where we ticked off a few jobs. Waypoints for JF-30 and JF-31 didn't exist for some reason, so we collected those as well as running quick surface survey between the two tags so we could overlay the two existing surveys with more accuracy (a preliminary fiddle recently indicated the extent of Janine's push a few years ago places the end of JF-31 directly under the entrance of JF-30. It took a while to find the JF-31 tag as it was half a metre under water…

Next we set up a weather monitoring station in a clearing beside the Junee River to do a field test on the rainfall measuring thingy upgrade to Steve's air pressure and

temperature sensor doovy-lackers. Should be good unless the local pademelon population decide to vandalise it!

Lastly the most unpleasant task was conducted – swapping over the Junee detector. Water levels were mildly unpleasant and very cold but not stupidly high as most of the catchment is still frozen solid. The swap was completed and we came home. A very pleasant and short day. I'm enjoying this transition to lame caving and pretty soon I'll be mostly heading out on mind-altering circles in the bush with Jacko and Bill if I'm not careful.

JF-221 Owl Pot Familiarisation Trip

14 August 2020

James Barnes

Party: James Barnes, Alan Jackson

I had been bugging Alan for a while about some more interesting options to run beginner trips down. Midnight Hole was starting to get a bit routine. Alan had agreed to show me around Owl Pot and with our schedules finally aligning we met at 0700 and drove off to the Junee-Florentine.

Alan had packed his chainsaw which certainly was required. There were quite a few trees down! We got in to a routine of getting out and clearing the road before moving on. Soon enough we were at the parking area.

The walk in was pretty cushy, a 2-minute stroll is definitely a nice change from other epics of late. There was still snow on the ground which made for pleasant conditions.

We soon arrived at the entrance and I began rigging things up with Alan's instruction. This was an interesting opportunity to mess around with some different knots that I wasn't used to which was good fun.

Soon enough we were down the four pitches and looking up at the waterfall. This is a pretty cool cave and unfortunately my photos don't do it justice. Definitely need to get back with some more lights and a tripod. Overall a pleasant and straightforward day out!

[Editor: a video of James' exploits can be watched here: https://youtu.be/02-YhUZBxSE]

H-8 Wolf Hole – A CAPZS Inspection

18 August 2020

Chris Sharples

Party: Serena Benjamin, Rolan Eberhard, Chris Sharples

The Cave Access Policy Zoning Scheme (CAPZS) has been developed over the last several years in a process driven by Rolan Eberhard of DPIPWE and the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, and is an important element of cave conservation strategies in Tasmania.

A variety of stakeholders including all Tasmanian caving clubs have been involved and have provided input to the process. With several CAPZS largely resolved, a Hastings CAPZS had recently been discussed via teleconferencing, *à la mode* in these days of plague and social distancing. The online meeting identified the most appropriate extent of a Special Management Zone (SMZ) in Wolf Hole beyond Lake Pluto as an issue requiring some *on-site* discussion.

So it was that on a freezing cold winter morning Rolan, Serena and Chris descended yet again into Wolf Hole, having signed a variety of documents, and undergone various briefings on social distancing and plague risk management which qualified us to go caving with other people.

The warmer temperatures inside the cave were a genuine winter relief, which started to make the thought of having to wade through Lake Pluto seem less daunting. Nonetheless a certain amount of dithering in South Park and the boulder pile on the north-east shores of Lake Pluto served as a procrastination opportunity thinly disguised as preliminary inspections.

Eventually, the inevitable could not be avoided and we made our way along the far southern lake shore in freezing waters that reached a metre deep…as it says on the cave plan…but no worse. In retrospect (i.e., once cosily back at home) it did not seem so bad.

A brief inspection of the side passage heading towards Lake Charon showed we would need to churn up a fair bit of mud and water to proceed further so we did not. This rather trashable section of the cave is the key section proposed as a new SMZ for that very reason.

Instead we headed out to The Mud Brick Factory (a whole lot of bigly mud-cracked clay showing more evidence that this cave was once rather more water-filled than it is today) and further on to Extremita, being mainly a region of ceiling-breakdown boulders to be negotiated by tiresome crawling and slithering. Although white gypsum wall coatings are a feature of this area, the overall impression is nevertheless one of resilience and, well, lots of bare broken rock of limited aesthetic appeal.

Some time was put into string-lining the Mudbrick Factory to minimise damage to the mud-cracks and the story they have yet to tell, then it was back through the dark limpid waters of Lake Pluto to a picturesque lunch spot overlooking the lake, where Rolan brewed up hot soup for the troops. Then we went home.

Serena pausing by the shores of a sunless sea, aka the far (western) end of Lake Pluto. Shame about the well-trogged mud. Nobody said it was a nice sandy beach, but you can wish! Photo: Chris Sharples

Other exciting stuff

Peter Duddys Cave – A large sea cave at Blackmans Bay

Greg Middleton

The tip-off

On 20 November 2014, knowing of my interest in documenting the non-calcareous caves of the island, Rolan Eberhard sent me an e-mail:

> *Greg,*
>
> *When you have a free moment, Peter Duddys Cave at Blackmans Bay would benefit from your mapping skills. About 30 m long, 8-10 m wide and very accessible…*
>
> *Regards, Rolan*

Accompanying this brief note were two intriguing images (Photos 1 and 2):

Photo 1. Entrance to Peter Duddys Cave
Photo: Rolan Eberhard

Photo 2. Looking out Peter Duddys Cave to Derwent River
Photo: Rolan Eberhard

Historic Background

I subsequently did a little digging to find out exactly where this cave was and to try to find something about its history. I could find no previous reference to it in the speleological literature but I did find it mentioned in the Nomenclature Board of Tasmania's "Placenames Tasmania" register (www.placenames.tas.gov.au):

Peter Duddys Cave, Kingborough, mentioned in Hobart Walking Club

Circular No. 345, Nov. 1976, p. 14 concerning walk to be led by P. Allnut. He says he has seen this name on an old map (but can't remember which) (1/11/1976). 3 sets of initials dated 1889 in cave. Allnut 30/6/77: spoke to G. Wilson & A.J. Ranger of Blowhole Rd, Blackmans Bay who knew of name since ~1920, although derivation not known. Page 42 of Hobart Atlas.

This establishes that the official name of the cave is Peter Duddys Cave. I also found that the cave is marked on the 1:25,000 Blackmans Bay map, about half a kilometre north of the better-known (Blackmans Bay) Blowhole.

Next move was to try to find something about the origin of the name. Who was Peter Duddy? A search of convictrecords.com came up with:
https://convictrecords.com.au/convicts/duddy/peter/105732

This showed that a Peter Duddy was "one of 300 convicts transported [from the UK] on the *Coromandel* on 27 October 1819". It gave his birth as 1773, he was a farm labourer who died at age 69 on 19 November 1842. He was convicted at the York Assizes and sentenced to 14 years transportation but his crime was not recorded. He arrived in New South Wales on 5th April 1820 and transferred to Van Diemen's Land.

The Convict Records website provides for Community Contributions and in this case one D. Wong has added (28 April 2016):

Peter Duddy was 46 years old on arrival in VDL. His native place was Lancashire. No crime found. Peter was 5'6" tall, brown eyes, black hair, nearly bald, pockpitted.

1832: T[icket] O[f] L[eave] 2/5/1833: CP [conditional pardon?]

Peter was living in a cave at Blackmans Bay *[my emphasis]*

31/5/1836 Colonial Times, Hobart:
Peter Duddy, an old hand at Brown's River, was charged with being an idle and disorderly person, having no fixed place of residence. He satisfactorily proved he worked hard for his living; and had occupied a cave for years past. He was discharged, and advised to get a better dwelling.

January 1841: Admitted to the New Norfolk Colonial Hospital with debilitas.

19/11/1842: Died at Hobart, aged 72 of Debility. Listed as a Labourer.

So, it seems we have the origin of the name: the cave was inhabited by a pardoned convict named Peter Duddy for some period of time between his release in 1832 and at least 1836.

First visit – 27 September 2016

Although I was interested to see this obviously large cave, it took until 27 September 2016 for me to arrange to go looking for it with Ros Skinner.

Although Rolan had said it was "very accessible", we did not find that it was easy to access it. The 1:25,000 topo map shows no coastal reserve at the cave's location [but Rolan believes there is a public reserve there] and we could not find any public access, from either Mirramar Park (street) or Powell Road, both of which run east from Huon Highway (C623), Blackmans Bay.

Eventually we decided we would have to seek access through private property so we asked at No. 35 Powell Road. A woman there was quite helpful, agreeing to our going through that property and even offering to let her daughter guide us down! We went down and partly through No. 33 and probably a bit of No. 31. A rough track, tending upstream, leads down to near an official-looking metal box which may relate to water or sewerage.

In any case, a fancy pathway leads down to it from Mirramar Park and we realised this was the path with the gate and "No Admittance" sign between Nos. 79 and 81. From the metal box a highly eroded steep path with a large hawser for a handrail leads down to the rocky shore (Figure 1).

At the water's edge we first turned left and our guide showed us a small, narrow sea cave right at sea level (Photos 3 and 4). We noted this but we were looking for something larger.

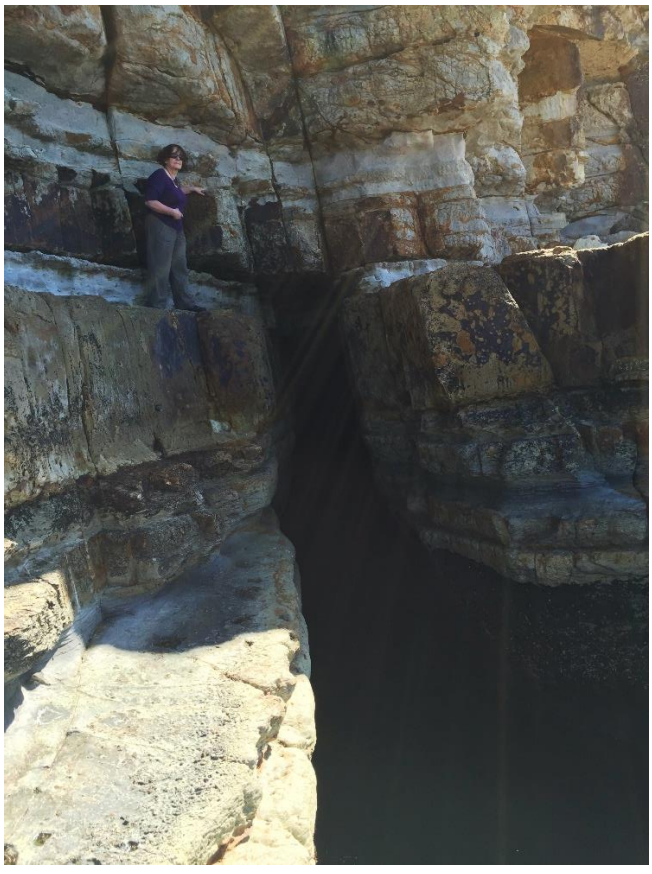


Photo 3. Narrow eroded slot.
Photo: Greg Middleton

Photo 4. Looking directly into narrow sea cave.
Photo: Greg Middleton

We returned to the end of the track down and continued south on a rock platform which widened slightly as we progressed.

We rounded a bit of a point where the platform ceased amid a jumble of fallen boulders and there was our goal: Mr Duddy's former sea-front residence (Photo 5).

Photo 5. Peter Duddys Cave. Ros provides scale.
Photo: Greg Middleton

As this had been intended only as an exploratory trip, we had not brought the survey gear, so we just looked around, took a few photos and returned to Powell Road before going on to look at other nearby features such as the spectacular Blackmans Bay Blowhole.

Most of the floor of the cave, though less so towards the back, is littered with breakdown but it is quite dry and the cave must have provided Mr Duddy with relatively comfortable and dry accommodation. There is a large (recent) square of carpet laid out on the floor and evidence of fires having been lit adjacent to it, presumably by picnickers. There is some graffiti on the walls (a leafy green plant has been painted at the entrance and 'XXXX' written at the deepest point) but the cave is not badly disfigured. We did not notice the reported initials and 1889 date.

The only sign of animal habitation is a large amount of bird guano on the floor and evidence that they have been roosting on ledges on the ceiling. Feathers on the floor seem to indicate sea gulls are responsible.

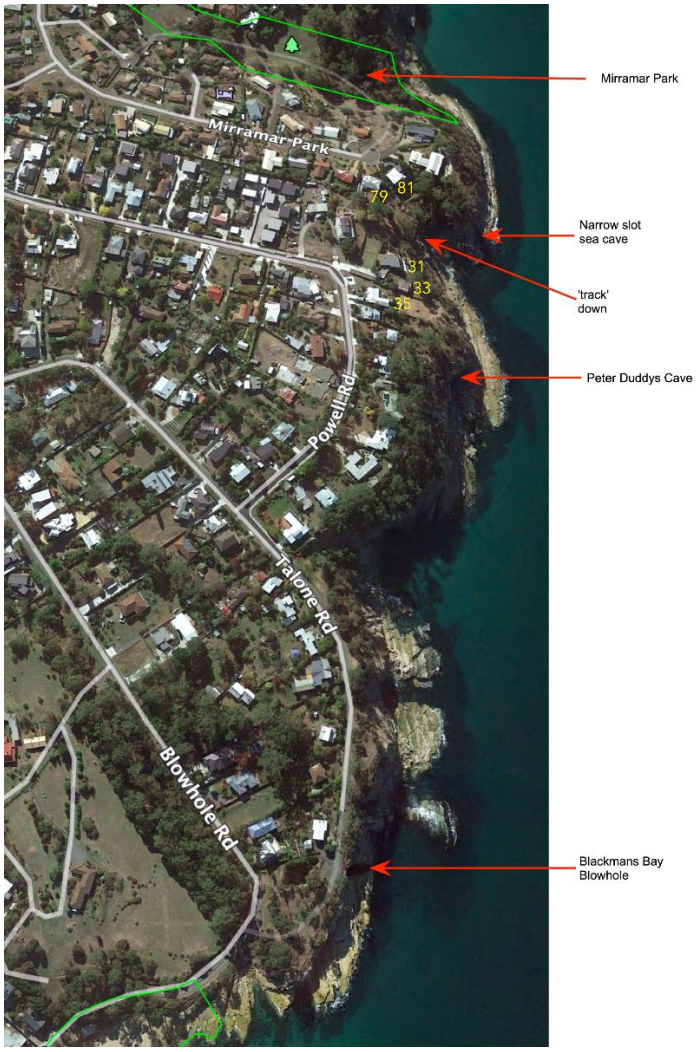


Figure 1. Google Earth image of coastline just north of Blackmans Bay, showing location of Peter Duddys Cave and other features.

Geology

The cliffs along this part of Blackmans Bay are formed of Permian Parmeener sedimentary rocks. More specifically, according to the Hobart 1:250,000 geology sheet (SK55-8), the rocks are an upper glacio-marine sequence of pebbly mudstone, pebbly sandstone and limestone. At the site of the cave the rock appears to be predominantly mudstone with some bands of grey shale but we thought we also saw some rocks looking like limestone.

The cave is no doubt the result of marine erosion along a line of weakness (probably the joint evident at about the centre of the ceiling) but there is no evidence that the sea (here the Derwent estuary) currently floods the cave. The cave may have been formed when sea level was a little higher but there is a mass of fallen boulders and rubble in front of the cave and these presumably prevent ingress of the sea at the present time. Sub-aerial erosion continues to modify the cave and cliff retreat is likely to shorten it over time.

Second visit and survey – 13 October 2016

Ros and I returned to the cave on 13 October (Photo 6) to carry out the survey. This we accomplished with little difficulty as the cave is pretty straightforward. We did, however, return on 27 May 2020 to check a couple of points, after which the survey was drawn up (Figure 2).

The cave is located in the Derwent (non-calcareous cave) Region and has been allocated the number DT-10, though this is just for recording purposes and is not likely to be affixed as a tag.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Rolan Eberhard for alerting us to the existence of this cave and for clarification of the likely speleogenesis; also to Ros Skinner for assisting locating the access and with the survey.

Photo 6. Entrance to Peter Duddy Cave, 13 Oct. 2016. Photo: Greg Middleton

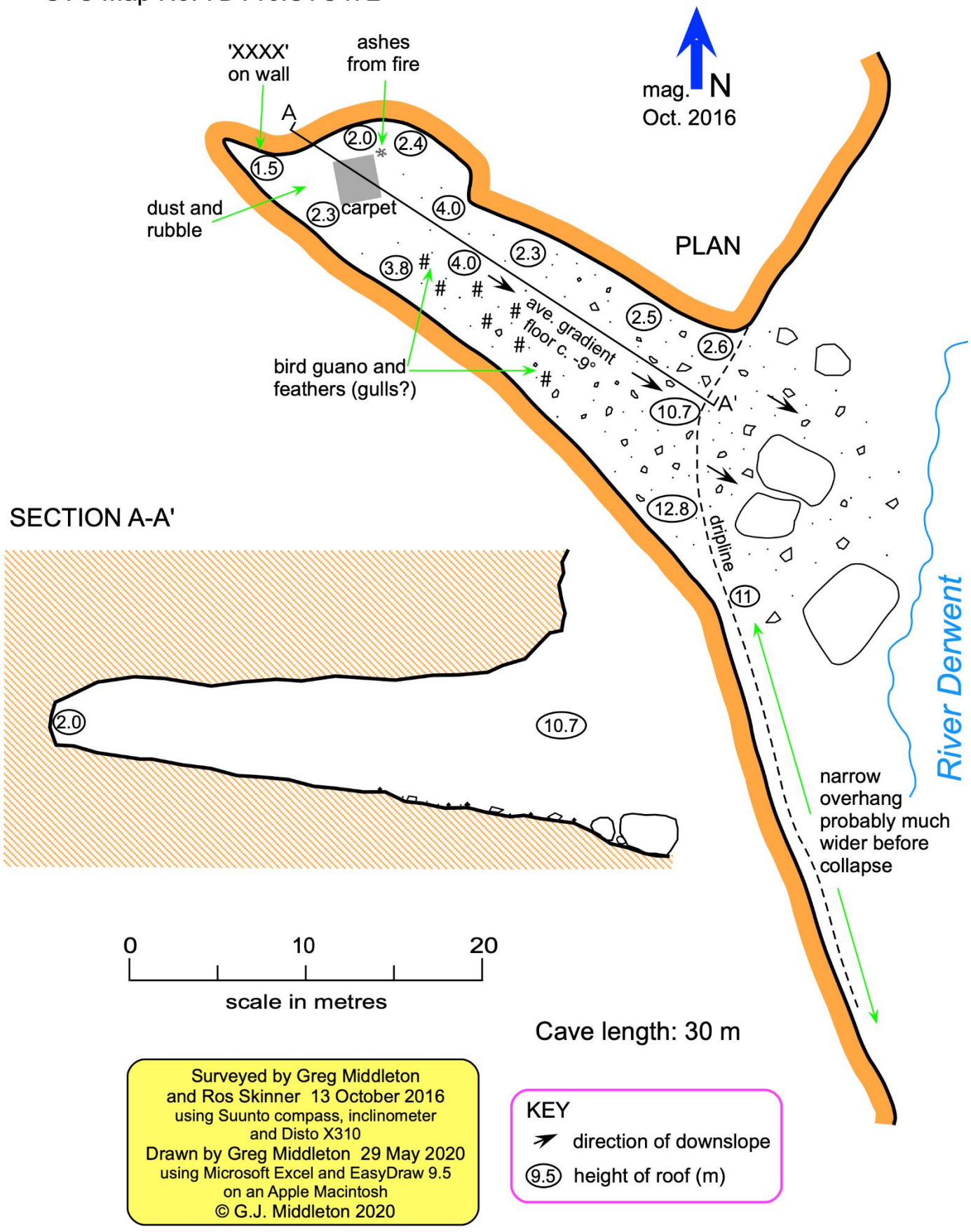


Fig. 2. Plan and longitudinal section of Peter Duddys Cave, Blackmans Bay.

Junee-Florentine Experiments Update

25 July 2020

Stephen Fordyce

Inspired by various things, including previous dye tracing and water logging experiments (i.e. Rolan Eberhard's 1993 forestry report, Petr Smejkal's dye detectors), I have been spearheading some experiments on visits to the JF. Since being locked down in virus-riddled Melbourne makes this a bit hard for me personally, big thanks to all the STC crew who have been incorporating experiment-related missions into their visits to the JF.

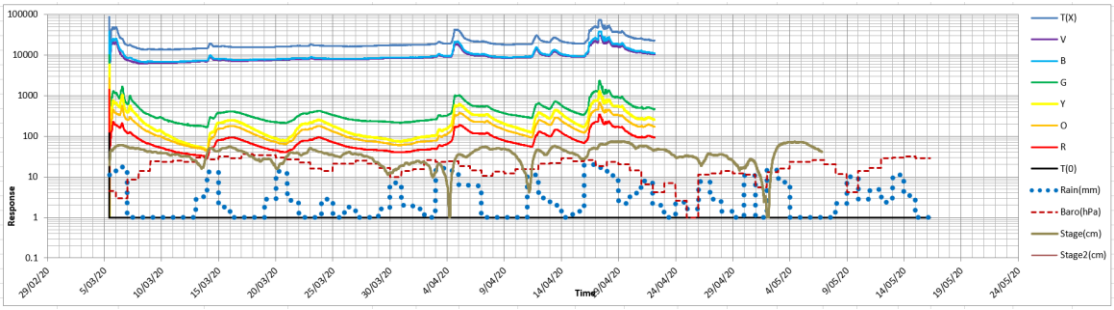
On my last trip to Tassie in March, stage (water depth) loggers were left in the stream at the upstream end of Niggly (the DIY Streamway) and the Junee resurgence, to see what the levels would do in response to rain, and see the characteristics of flood pulses. Since the good old 'rona hit us shortly afterwards, the results from these are the main things to report at the present time.

The Niggly logger was replaced on the first attempt, however we got up to plan F and about five different candidates (thanks all!) before the Junee detector could be prised from the hands of mother nature and general apathy. About six weeks of data had been logged, indeed thanks to a (now rectified) subtle bug in the firmware, several million readings were collected. Not only stage, but also background fluorescence and turbidity were logged. These were correlated against BOM rainfall data from Maydena, and barometric pressure from Ouse. The Ouse barometric data (the closest available) has some correlation with the data but it's some 40 km away and on the other side of the mountain range. Rainfall in the period was somewhat mediocre, and only two smallish flood pulses were noted.

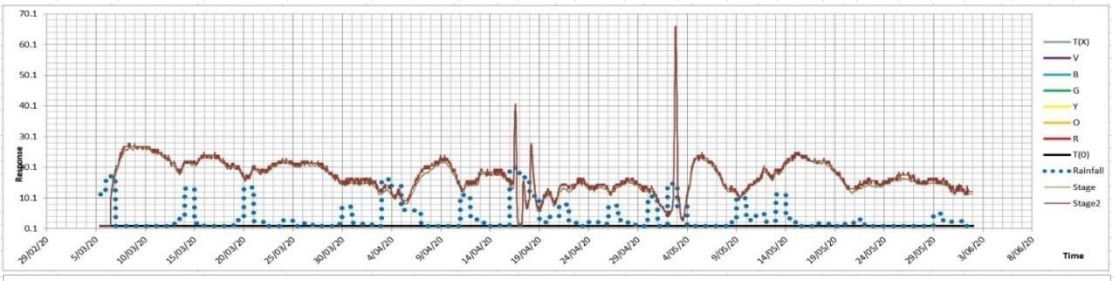
You will see from the results that there are some strange artefacts, the most curious being a big drop in stage just after a flood. Jacko wins a prize for pointing out that since the stage logger had no reference to local air pressure, it was being greatly impacted by this. The difference between bog standard low and high pressures weather systems is about 400 mm of water (who knew?!), so easily overwhelmed the water level's changes in the order of a few millimetres. The recording of flood pulses, was ok, but for the low-level stage logging, it's back to the drawing board!

Adding an atmospheric sensor to the stage logger is possible, but a headache when considering the implications of a major flood (the sensor has potential to be damaged). With surprisingly little headache, I was able to turn the stage logger design into a basic weather station - recording temperature, humidity and the all-important air pressure (and an option for rain gauge, plus expansion ports for other sensors). These can be installed near a stage logger but above even the most epic of flood levels. Bonus feature is they can be used in other parts of the cave and at entrances to investigate draughts and cave breathing, as well as collecting local surface rainfall data, which will be very useful for feeding into the flood pulse analysis.

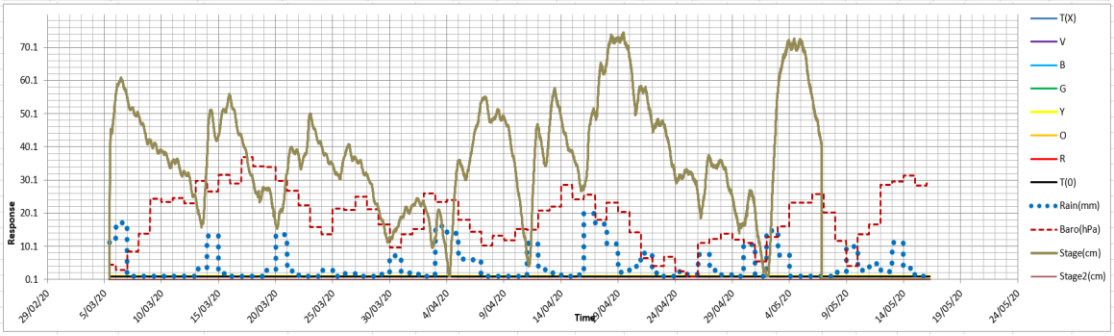
This opens the door to a whole new area of study to be explored – I've sent a couple of atmospheric loggers down for install and concept testing in JF-36 Growling Swallet. A stage logger is also about to be left at the bottom of the main streamway to record flooding characteristics. There is going to be data coming out my ears – if anyone is interested in processing and interpreting it, help would be most welcome! If you would like to help with further experiments (there is plenty of easy surface stuff to do, as well as moderate and gnarly in-cave stuff), please get in touch – stephen.fordyce@gmail.com. Doesn't look like I'll be allowed back down to Tassie any time soon…



Results from the Junee fluorimeter/stage logger (spectral response to ~6W of blue LED)



Niggly DIY Streamway stage, no allowance for atmospheric pressure changes



Junee stage, no allowance for atmospheric pressure changes, & BOM barometer readings from Ouse

2020 Cave Animal of the Year 'Australian Cave Cricket' Short Film Project

Sil Iannello (text and photos)

Late last year I was invited to work on the 2020 cave animal of the year project. I was thrilled by the invitation and delighted to contribute as much of my knowledge as I could. The cave animal of the year project is an international initiative, commencing in Germany in 2009 with the aim to raise awareness for subterranean ecosystems and animals, and point out the urgent need for research and conservation in this field.

The launch of the 2020 Australian cave animal of the year in January was exciting, and great to see so many cavers attend the event in Tasmania. Since the launch, things have quietened down and with COVID-19 taking the world by surprise, I got thinking what else could I do to raise awareness for the fascinating golden spotted leg creature, the Australian cave cricket?

I thought back to the 2019 ASF conference 'The Darkness Beneath' and I recalled how well received the film 'Sixteen Legs' was by the caving community. Also, how captivated I was to see the Tasmanian Cave Spider *Hickmania troglodytes* on screen. The only other time that I've had the opportunity to see this creature up close and personal was in Croesus Cave, Mole Creek, where it scared the bejeebers out of me in the entrance way. So, I got thinking, why not make a film about the Australian Cave Cricket too! Not that I am a film maker by any means. However, a film is a great way to celebrate the Australian cave cricket with a broader audience and community.

Just prior to going into lockdown, I gathered a small team together to help kick start the process to make a short five-minute film. First task, writing the script. With support from entomologist Dr Perry Beasley-Hall, Cathie Plowman and a friend Bec Cross, the script came into fruition.

Segment from the script:
Laying quiet and still in the middle of a World Heritage site, the Victoria Fossil Cave in the Naracoorte Caves National Park is known as a site of exceptionally preserved fossil deposits. The limestone cave contains chambers with an array of magnificent stalactites and stalagmites. Palaeontological digs have revealed it was the last resting place for ancient Australian megafauna like the marsupial lion and Diprotodon. These large, charismatic vertebrates have received the majority of the public's attention, but what about the animals still living in these caves and calling them home?

Secondly, lock in film maker Blue Starling Films and a sound recordist. And lastly, shoot the film.

Fossil cave filming, left Jan B.

The last weekend before lockdown in March, the Naracoorte Caves were still open to the public as well as the lighting shop where I needed to get film lights from. With the last open window of opportunity to shoot the first part of the film, I and a small crew drove to South Australia and filmed in the Victoria Cave Fossil Chamber. I would like to give a big thanks to Barb Lobban ranger/caver in making this happen.

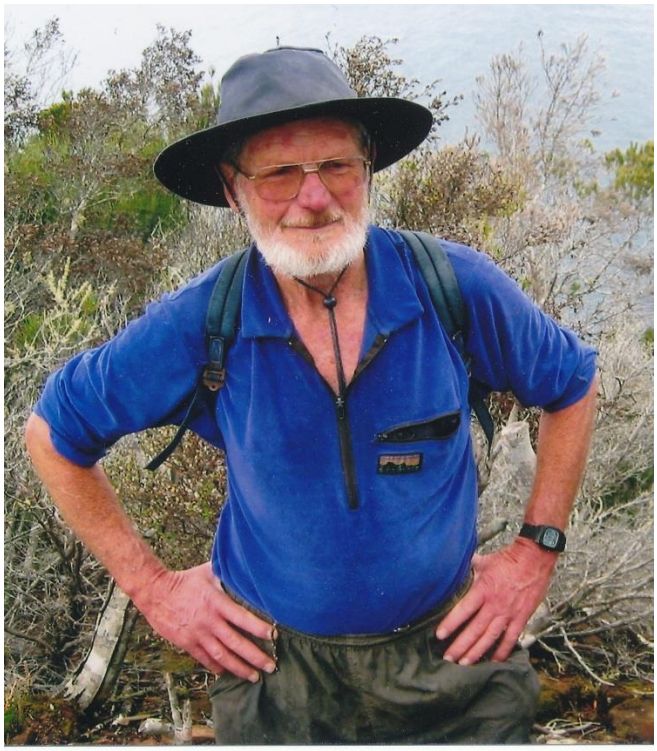
Fossil cave filming, top Sil Iannello, bottom Scott Lewis

As Victorian restrictions are currently in place, we cannot shoot the second part of the film until much later. So, in the meantime I continue to fine tune the script, work with Blue Starling films on the footage from Naracoorte Caves and keeping my fingers crossed that the recording studio I would like to use opens up soon. The film is due to be released in October. There will be ample opportunity to see the film online and on the big screen at the 2022 ASF Cave Conference.

Obituary

Brian Collin

Brian was a legendary member of TCC and died at his home in South Hobart suddenly on Friday 3 July, 2020 at the age of eighty-eight years. He was born in Sydney on 29th September, 1931.



Brian on a coastal bushwalk.
Source: Collin family

We know very little of his early years. We do know that he had some caving experience in NSW and was involved in the exploration of Tuglow Caves (Haygarth, 2015).

He also acquired qualifications in engineering and hydrology. He came to Tasmania in early 1966 and obtained employment with the Hydro-Electric Commission as a hydrographer. He joined the Tasmanian Caverneering Club at a time when its activities were at a low ebb following a breakup in the previous year that led to the formation of the Southern Caving Society.

Brian revitalised TCC. After serving time as vice-president and treasurer he became equipment officer in April 1969. He had married fellow club member Jeanette Maclaine in 1967 and a couple of years later they bought a house in South Hobart where the family has lived ever since. Brian's garage became the equipment store. His skills as an engineer meant that the club equipment was well looked after. Working bees were held at his house to manufacture wire ladders and he also constructed a climbing pole that was used to investigate the high-level passages in Mystery Creek Cave.

Under his leadership the club thrived. He attracted new members who were already involved in rock climbing and bush walking. He was a very competent man in the bush and initiated a systematic search of the boundary between the limestone and overlying younger rocks at Ida Bay and the Junee-Florentine. This led to the discovery of numerous new caves, most of them with vertical entrances.

As a result, club members became obsessed with breaking the Australian depth record.

Brian also founded the Manuka Club, an informal group that was interested mainly in cutting tracks to some of the remoter karst areas to facilitate access. Brian invested in a lightweight chainsaw that could be carried in a backpack. The first track cutting effort provided a low-level route to Exit Cave that meant that the cave entrance could be reached in an hour from where the vehicles were parked. This led to a spectacular breakthrough in the cave that for a while made it the longest in Australia. A lot of surveying was required to understand the structure of the cave and to identify places for further exploration. Several vertical entrances were eventually also connected to Exit Cave. The most spectacular was Mini Martin with a vertical entrance pitch of 110 metres.

An access track was also cut to the north-east ridge of Mount Anne where there was a large karst area in dolomite rock.

Brian was a major force in exploring the vertical caves of the area. All this was done on ladders by cavers who were extremely fit. Keller Cellar presented a vertical drop of 128 metres and was named after Alan Keller, the first man to reach the bottom. Another vertical cave, Anne-A-Kananda, was partially explored and was later bottomed using vertical rope techniques to become one of the deepest caves in Australia.

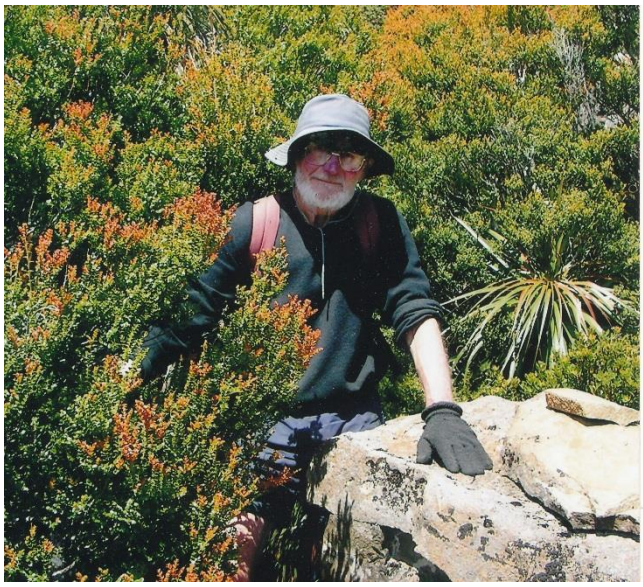
Brian admiring extreme alpine vegetation on The Boomerang, southwestern Tasmania, November 1974
Source: Albert Goede

Another Brian project was to cut an access track from Hartz Mountains to the Picton River valley and from there to the Cracroft area and what was known as Judds Cavern, now Wargata Mina – a large a large outflow system. This Aboriginal site had been rediscovered by Henry Judd in 1881 but had ever since remained unvisited. In March 1974 a party reached the cave and surveyed the stream passage until they reached a siphon. It was free dived by Atilla Vrana who showed that the cave continued. Meanwhile the Forestry Department had constructed a new road along the Picton River that shortened the access walk to a day. On a subsequent reconnaissance trip Brian and I surveyed and taped routes to a number of other cave entrances in preparation for a nine-day major expedition in early 1975 with invitations extended to members of other ASF clubs.

Brian organised an airdrop for the large party so that we could walk in with reasonably light packs. A second entrance to Judds Cavern was discovered (King Billy Hole). That meant that the siphon in Judds Cavern could be bypassed and the rest of the cave was surveyed to a final syphon. Our activities were written up and published by Goede (1977). The State Government decided to return the area to Aboriginal control after ice age hand stencils were discovered by archaeologists in the entrance passage of Judds Cavern. Other prospects remain unexplored to this day.

Many discoveries of the period 1965 to 1980 were documented in Reminiscences of a Tasmanian Caver – The Golden Years, in *Speleo Spiel* 415 in August 2016 (Goede, 2016). By 1980 Brian had given up active caving as a new generation of cavers had taken over using single rope techniques that made the exploration of deep caves much easier.

Jeanette Collin, although hampered by a young family, made her own contribution to the exploration of remote karst areas when she and Atilla Vrana became the first white people to reach the Vanishing Falls, a remote area in southern Tasmania where the Salisbury River plunges over a large cliff and then disappears into the limestone. They confirmed the presence of caves that were later explored by other cavers using helicopter access. The area is approximately halfway between the Cracroft and Precipitous Bluff karst areas and remains extremely remote.



Brian in thick bush at Hartz Mountains
Source: Collin family

Brian will always be remembered for the great and lasting contribution that he made to the exploration of karst areas and caves in Tasmania. After his retirement he continued to take an active part in conservation issues.

We could not find an image of Brian in caving gear. Perhaps he never stopped long enough to have his picture taken.

He is survived by his wife Jeanette, son Peter, daughter Sandy and son-in-law Stephen.

Albert Goede

REFERENCES:

Goede, A. 1977 Cracroft Expeditions – Survey results, scientific observations and speculations. *Journal of The Sydney Speleological Society*, 21: 55-63.

Goede, A. 2016 Reminiscences of a Tasmanian Caver – The Golden Years. *Speleo Spiel*, 415: 19-21.

Haygarth, N. 2015 *Wonderstruck – Treasuring Tasmania's Caves and Karst*. Forty South Publishing, Hobart. pp. 153-154.

Mount Anne, MA-1: Col-In-Cavern

"Massive sinkhole entrance with 55 m pitch to a large descending tunnel that reaches a depth of 119 m below the top of the pitch. A natural bridge (col) spans the entrance. Explored in 1971 on an ASF Conference field trip. The name is a play of words on TCC member Brian Collin's name and the natural bridge at the entrance. Brian led some of the first caving trips to Mt Anne by TCC in the 1960s, when the entrance to MA-1 was found."
Speleo Spiel, 334, February 2003.

Midnight Hole Discovery

"Brian and Jeanette Collin discovered the entrance to what became Midnight Hole on the north side of Marble Hill on the slopes above Mystery Creek Cave. By August a series of shafts had been descended and the hole bottomed to a tight horizontal squeeze (Matchbox Squeeze). One of the explorers left a matchbox in the hope of finding it from Mystery Creek Cave as a survey had shown that it was very close. A thorough search of the relevant part of Mystery Creek Cave discovered the other end of the squeeze and also found that it could be negotiated by slender bodies. The physical connection was made and Mystery Creek Cave-Midnight Hole became Australia's second deepest cave at 177 metres."
Speleo Spiel, 415, August 2016.

Lucky Escape in Exit Cave

"On Sunday some time was spent examining Entrance Creek passage with no major breakthroughs. On the way back Brian had a very lucky escape when he dislodged an estimated 1000-pound rock with which he dropped fifteen feet onto a rockpile. Fortunately, he managed to reach the floor after the rock and escaped with minor cuts, a sprained wrist and bruised ribs."
Speleo Spiel, 71, August 1972.

Bill Nicholson's recollection of Brian Collin

Brian was known for only putting in a track marker every few kilometres.

"When it comes to scrub, Brian is a beast", Stuart Nicolas to Bill, talking about Brian's exploits at Mt Anne & Forest Hills Depression, 1976.

"If you are leaving the track or route, keep your rucksack on, don't leave it behind because if you lose your way you will need your gear", Brian Collin to Bill Nicholson, 2018.

Midnight Hole. - 11-8-68.

Party:- Brian Collin(leader), Allan Keller, Ray Alsop, Bill Hodge, Rodney Hughes, Simon Stephens, Peter Helman, Janet Hansen & Cathy.

The trip was successful in that one person reached the bottom at a depth of 580 ft. of which 550 ft. of laddering was involved. The cave is consequently the second deepest in Australia but a connection to either Exit or Entrance Caves still eludes us.

The story of this trip is not so much one of caving technique but one of personal feelings and personal hardships during the 15 hours underground between 9 a.m. and midnight.

Only Allan knows his thoughts as wet through he reached the end of 120 ft. of ladder on the last pitch and had to climb up again and call for another 60 ft. to complete the pitch. Only Rodney knows his thoughts as he leaned over the top of the 120 ft. pitch clutching onto a large,loose rock as Allan climbed unaware of the little drama on top. What of Bill's, Simon's and Peter's thoughts as they manned there solitary posts for over 12 hours, Ray on his second trip involving ladders with 340 ft. of ladders to be climbed out, Cathy and Janet on the surface, possibly debating the purpose of a caving trip and not going underground. My thoughts were centred on whether or not I would ever be allowed to lead another trip.

All at some stage must have(I did) secretly sworn to give up caving for ever, that this pitting of human against nature was senseless eepecially in our affluent society where far more physically pleasant pastimes are readily available. But what price the feeling when the last man was up to stand around a blazing fire and to realize it was all over.

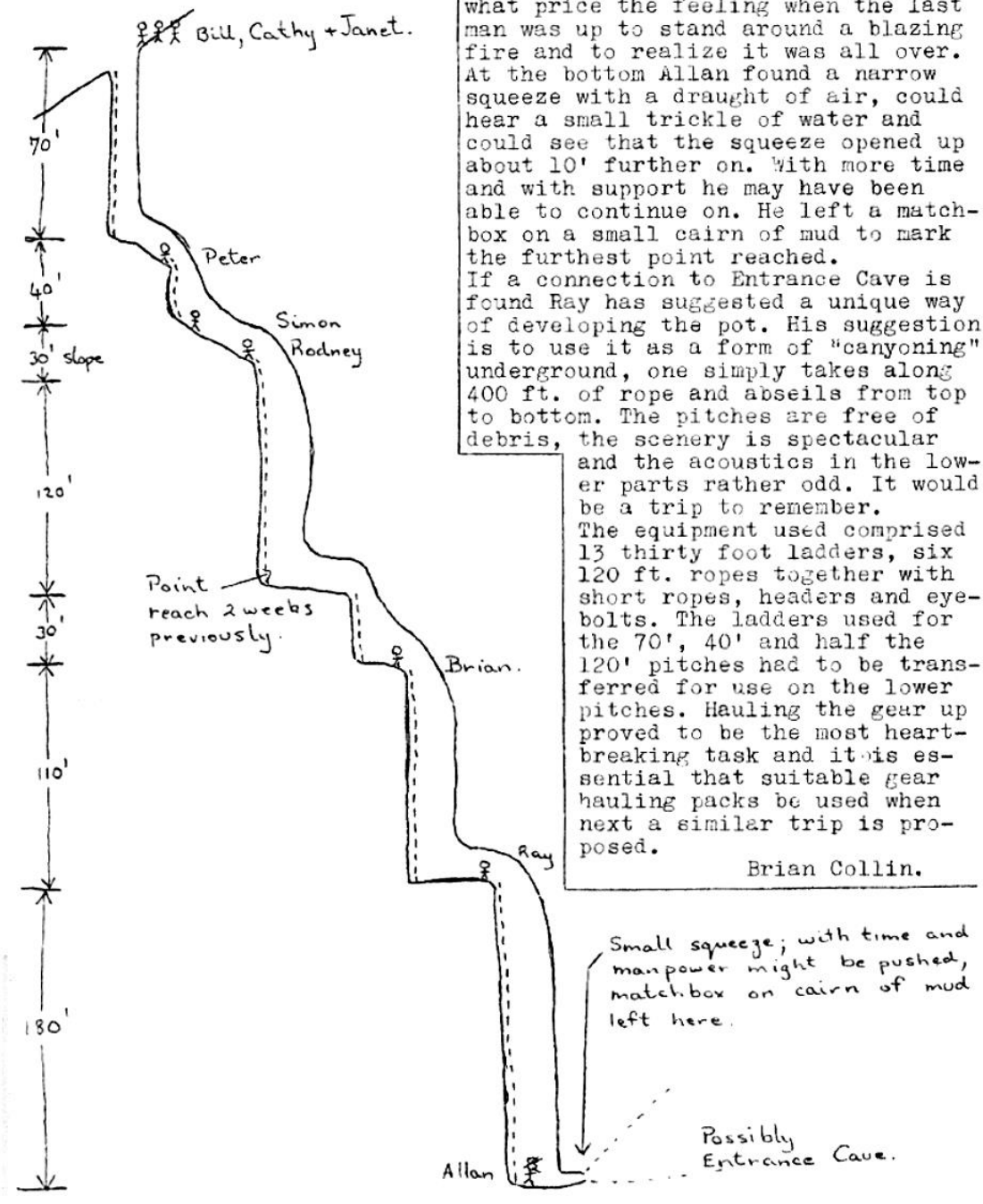
At the bottom Allan found a narrow squeeze with a draught of air, could hear a small trickle of water and could see that the squeeze opened up about 10' further on. With more time and with support he may have been able to continue on. He left a matchbox on a small cairn of mud to mark the furthest point reached.

If a connection to Entrance Cave is found Ray has suggested a unique way of developing the pot. His suggestion is to use it as a form of "canyoning" underground, one simply takes along 400 ft. of rope and abseils from top to bottom. The pitches are free of debris, the scenery is spectacular and the acoustics in the lower parts rather odd. It would be a trip to remember.

The equipment used comprised 13 thirty foot ladders, six 120 ft. ropes together with short ropes, headers and eyebolts. The ladders used for the 70', 40' and half the 120' pitches had to be transferred for use on the lower pitches. Hauling the gear up proved to be the most heartbreaking task and it is essential that suitable gear hauling packs be used when next a similar trip is proposed.

Brian Collin.

MIDNIGHT HOLE.



Fun and Diversions

Tips for beginner cavers

Janine McKinnon (text and photos)

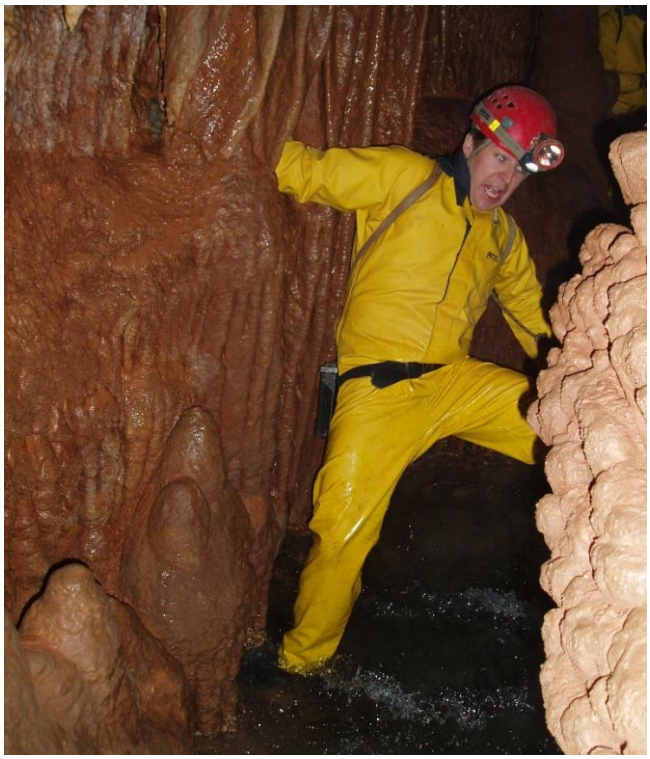
The club has had an influx of potential new cavers recently and so I thought this was an opportune time to share some of the wisdom I have gained over the decades. This will hopefully steer you away from some of the blunders one can make at this exceedingly early stage of one's caving career.

Of course, these tips aren't the full compendium of useful advice available, but it should be enough to help you get started.

1. Phobias

There are lots of them out there. Don't assume yours will destroy your caving career before it starts. There are ways around these things. Here are some very useful examples:

a. **Agoraphobia.** Easily fixed. Only cave in small places. There are lots of choices. Small and horizontal. Small and vertical. Or if you want to combine the two, small and on an inclined plane.
b. **Claustrophobia.** Stick to big stuff. There's heaps out there. Getting to it may prove challenging with this phobia but it is possible. Unfortunately, I don't have space to elaborate here; that is for another article in itself.
c. **Fear of the dark**. Only do entrance dolines. It's still caving. Sort of.
d. **Arachnophobia.** Keep your eyes shut in the twilight zone. If it moves under your hand pretend it's the breeze.
e. **Fear of heights**. See d. where necessary. Pitches come to mind. Learn to do SRT blind-folded.
f. **Hydrophobia**. Easy peasy. Only cave in dry caves**.**



2. Getting to the cave

As you contemplate booking on your first post-training trip, when you are about to go out to play with the big boys and girls, there are a few pitfalls to avoid.

a. **How far is it to the cave?** Unless a precise distance to two decimal places is given with assurance assume it will be at least 10 times as far as the estimate ("oh, it's only a hundred metres or so, maybe a little further, maybe a couple of hundred or so, or…)
b. Subset to this is how long it will take to walk there. Assume five times as long as suggested.
c. Continuing this theme, how much climbing is involved in the walk? If precise elevation difference to those two decimal places isn't forthcoming assume three times the climb you are told.
d. **What is the terrain like?** If the phrase "caver's track" is used, beware. This means hard to follow, muddy, lots of logs to climb over, lots of vegetation to push aside. If the phrase "caver's track not used in a while" pops out of the potential leader's mouth, run away… If the phrase "it's cross-country" is whispered… run away very fast. Don't even contemplate going on a surface cave-search trip. You will be lucky to return alive. If the leader looks like he runs a marathon every second weekend then ignore all the above and run away as fast as you imagine he does.

3. What to wear

This is another decision fraught with danger. Not only do you have your sartorial reputation to consider but the less important reality of staying alive.

How cold is the cave? How long will we be there? Is it wet? Important questions, the answers to which aren't as straightforward as you may imagine.

a. **Is the cave wet?** Or, more specially, will I get wet? This seems straightforward doesn't it? Such ignorance can be dangerous. Unknown unknowns. To enlighten you about the risks of relying on the answer to this question I recall a trip only last year. It was a canyoning trip but they are really just caves without a roof, so the lesson applies. A South Australian caver (remember, they don't know what water is) asked me if they would get wet on this proposed trip. My answer (meant honestly from my memory)? "No, just maybe up to you mid-calves". As I climbed out of the fourth swim across a plunge pool, I considered that my advice hadn't been all that accurate. Lesson learnt? Don't trust my memory. Also, always take a wetsuit on a trip, just in case.
b. **How many sets of thermals should I bring?** You can never have too many. Maybe stop at ten sets though.
c. **Will my thongs be good enough for footwear?** Yes. If you are stupid enough to ask that question then you deserve the experience.
d. **Do I need gloves?** No. See c.

4. What to bring

Everything that you may think could be useful on a trip. After all, you don't want to be embarrassed by not having packed something necessary. The list includes, but is not limited to: full paramedic's first aid kit, 3 litres of water, enough food for 5 meals, food for the rest of the party for man-sized snacks - make them tasty, that wetsuit mentioned earlier, full SRT kit (even on horizontal trips – you want to be prepared just in case), 100 m rope (see previous point), set of pulleys and rescue gear, five spare lights, small tent and sleeping bag (in case of emergency overnight stay).

That should be enough for your early trips. You will be expected to contribute more to the group emergency gear as your experience grows.

5. Phrases to beware of

If, when discussing the nature of the trip you are contemplating joining, the leader utters any of the following phrases, **HANG UP INSTANTLY:**

a. Bring an extra-large caving pack, make that two.
b. Only a couple of the pitches are under waterfalls.
c. There's just a little mud.
d. The rockpile is only a little unstable.
e. I THINK you'll fit through the squeeze at the bottom of the pitches on the pull-through trip. Possibly.
f. I'm pretty sure I remember the way on that through trip.
g. How are you at holding your breath? We may need to do some sump free-diving if that rain arrives.

6. At the car park

You have decided on the appropriate trip for your first outing. You are at the car park, getting ready to start to the cave. If any of the following is observed, start hitch-hiking home:

a. 3 km of rope and a small wheelbarrow of metalwork is dumped on the ground and the two of you are asked to carry it.
b. All the rest of the team start pulling on four layers of thermals, a plastic suit, gumboots, wetsuit booties, and pack wetsuits into their packs and you have failed to take notice of Point 4 and have arrived with your thongs, shorts and t-shirt and possibly a set of cotton overalls.
c. The word "epic" is uttered.
d. Survey instruments appear.
e. All the other members of the party look like they are AFL footballers, unless you look like that too.

Please note: I take no responsibility for any outcomes resultant from following this advice.

The Last Page