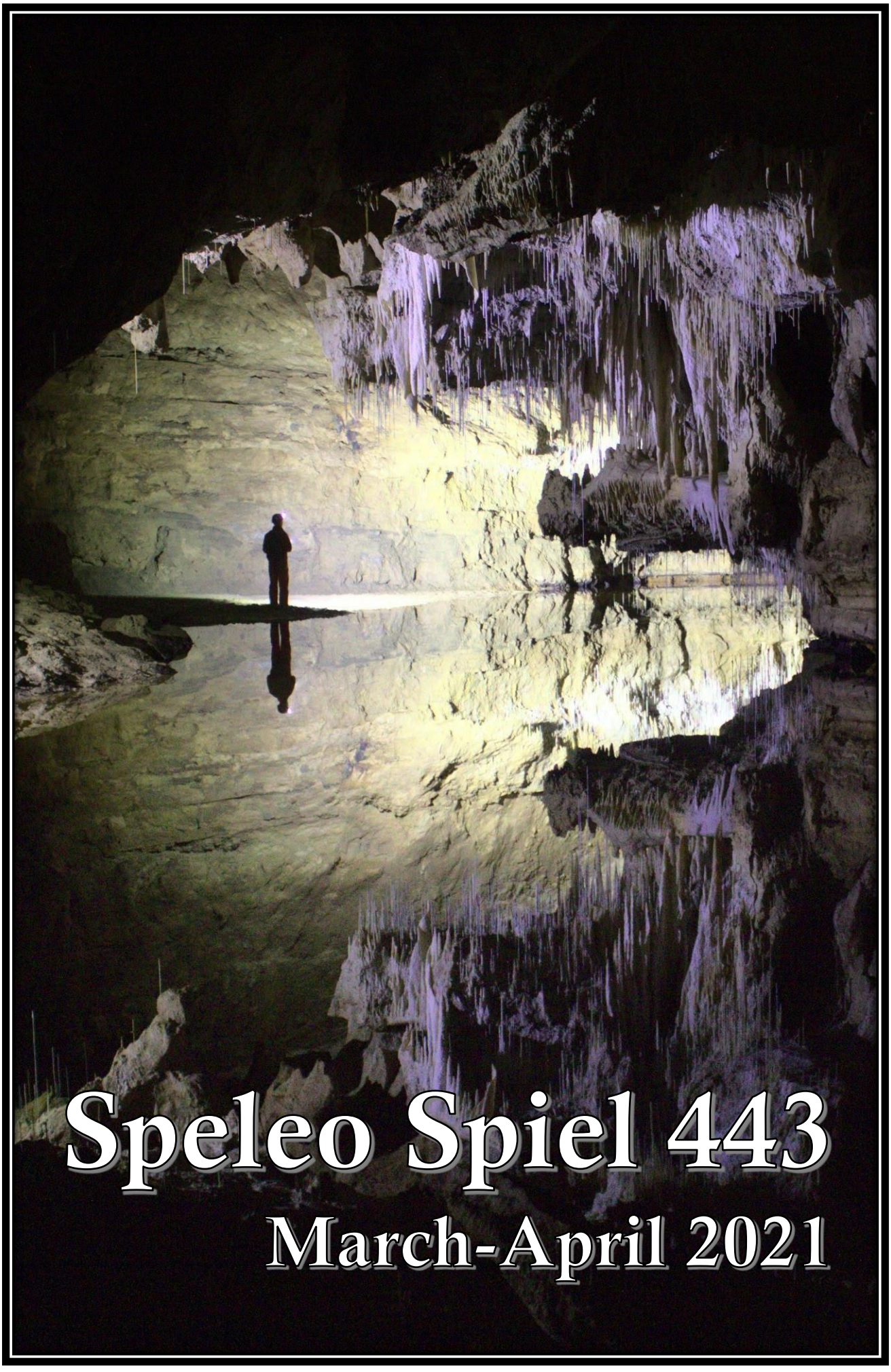

Speleo Spiel 443

March-April 2021

Newsletter of Southern Tasmanian Caverneers Inc. ISSN 2208-1348

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Front Cover:
Lake Pluto, Wolf Hole.
Photo: John Oxley

Back Cover:
The limestone cliffs of Wherretts Lookout.
Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

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
www.southerntasmaniancaverneers.com
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Issue No. 443 – March-April 2021

Contents

Editorial

Time flies in the 21st century. The constant sitting in front of screens and the frequent caving certainly make me feel older at a quick pace. What's that I hear? Whinging? Oh, what I have become…

Fortunately, since the second half of last year, the club has seen a steady influx of newcomers, of all ages, but particularly a few younger faces. I'll echo the outgoing VP's report (see next page) that it has been good seeing fresh blood, higher gender equality and a flurry of activity.

STC has the most members and active members of any caving club in the country, multiple trips happen each week of every month, we try to train and take beginners caving more now than we have in a while, everybody contributes actively, we welcome heaps of friends from the mainland on a regular basis, make smart financial moves, and lead the way technologically and in our S&R responsiveness and competency.

I for ~~one~~ two think our little ecosystem is in a great place. Sally forth!

Stuff 'n' Stuff

- Southern Tasmanian Caverneers extends its heartfelt condolences on the sudden passing of Ken Murrey to his family and friends. He was a caver and cave diver of VSA and a past member of STC (involved in the exploration of JF-633 Ring Hole and other projects around 2015). He will be missed by many in the caving community and remembered for his good nature, his love of Mars Bars and his many silly T-shirts.

It really is. Photo: Lily Murrey.

- ERRATA: in *Speleo Spiel* 440 p. 15, the photo of Ciara should be captioned 'H-16 Enthusiasts Retreat'. Additionally, in *Speleo Spiel* 441, the letter on p. 23 appears in the contents list as 'Letter to STC; Savage River Caving Club', when in fact the letter is destined to SES.

- Bill Nicholson shared a photo of the late John Boyle, whose story was told in *Speleo Spiel* 434 & 441. We felt it would be appropriate to finally put a face to the name.

Source: AFP Missing Persons

- A cave rescue scenario nearly developed in the north of the state on 8 March 2021, when a VSA caver started feeling sick in MC-64 Tailender, at Mole Creek. Janice March of NC followed protocol and alerted various points of contact including STC. Fortunately, the caver got out safely before any rescue services had to mobilise. Janice March said: "The lady is safely out of the cave with help of her party and may have suffered a reaction to an insect or leech bite."

- Congratulations to Deb Hunter for her photo that made it to the Tasmanian Greens 2021 calendar.

Office Bearers' Reports

President – Chris Sharples

The last year (in fact, roughly since the 2020 STC AGM although I'm sure that's merely co-incidental) has of course been dominated by the global COVID-19 plague, and this has affected some of STC's activities although not nearly to the extent seen in nearly every other part of the world that is unfortunate enough not to be Tasmania! Although our caving activities were initially halted by the closure of the national parks and reserves in or near which many of our most frequented caving areas lie, Tasmania's success in controlling the plague locally meant that these were soon re-opened and it was more-or-less back to "caving as usual", at least for local members. Unfortunately, this was not the case for our Victorian-based members and other frequent caving visitors who were locked out of Tasmania by quarantine restrictions until much later in 2020. Even so, some of our expat members used the break in underground activities to good effect, a particularly noteworthy effort being Stephen Fordyce's monumental collation of Junee-Florentine data alongside his development and deployment of some very advanced dye-tracing technology using Tasmanian-based cavers as his proxies in the JF!

The last several years have been notable for STC's efforts to acquire funding for new rescue equipment purchases and the investment of considerable effort in cave rescue training. This capacity-building proved its worth when a caving accident late in 2020 involving an experienced Tasmanian caver was brought to a successful conclusion with his rescue by members of all Tasmanian caving clubs alongside the Police SAR, SES, Paramedics and others. The co-operation between all these various organisations was pleasing and certainly has more than a little to do with the focus on rescue capability that has been fostered by STC members including Alan Jackson and Andreas Klocker in recent years.

STC continued to provide stakeholder input (including cave inspection trips) into the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service Cave Access Policy process driven by Carrie Southern (PWS) and Rolan Eberhard (DPIPWE) as we have done for the last several years, which in this year has resulted in STC as a club supporting the draft Exit Cave and Hastings Caves CAPZS policies.

I am happy to continue in the role of STC president for another year (my statutory limitation), but I don't mind if the club decides to give the job to somebody else.

Secretary – Philip Jackson

Thanks to the COVID pandemic it's been an unusual year with a few firsts for the club. While some meetings have not proceeded due to a failure to achieve a quorum, the April meeting was the first to be cancelled in my memory.

The May meeting was the first to be remotely via Zoom. While it was nice to stay in on a cold night the consensus was that the more social option of traditional meetings was preferable to the misnomer "social media" meetings. With the lockdown over we were able to continue with meetings at the Civic Club but with restricted numbers. In all but one meeting we reached capacity (13 persons), which actually exceeded winter meeting attendance for most previous years.

It was also the first time in several that we had no local trips for two months. However, Greg Middleton and Alan Jackson had three overseas caving trips between them. Alan was sent to his bedroom for two weeks for being late back in to Tasmania, better than two weeks on the naughty step I suppose.

In spite of the plague the club still had an active year averaging 7.4 trips per month. In the last 12 months we've had more than 25 new members. The majority of these have been in the last four months.

Early in the year the Australian Speleological Federation introduced the Google Groups forum to enable discussion and voting on ASF policies. This has been useful in keeping clubs informed and streamlining ASF processes.

Since we lost use of the Junee Homestead quite a few past and present members have been keen to re-establish some form of base in Maydena. Over the last year we've looked at a few different sites and options. Latest is we are waiting on a response to a request for a lease suitable for the club to construct infrastructure. Separately I have been working on a business plan to purchase an existing house in Maydena. A business plan will be a requirement for most funding sources that we may access. Preliminary calculations suggest it is an affordable, self-funding concept. I am happy to continue with this investigation.

I would prefer not to continue as secretary in 2021.

Vice President – Alan Jackson

Another year of fun and excitement on the STC Executive… I had to chair a meeting, which was quite an experience.

One or two would beg to differ, but I'm of the opinion that STC is in a great place at the moment, with a great level of activity and engagement across a broad spectrum of members and caving types. More active female cavers in the club than I can remember, old fogies hitting the hills, kids and beginners venturing underground and all the usuals doing their thing, be it hard-nosed exploration or jollies.

A big thankyou to the other three 'executives' and kudos to the way you have diligently and calmly trawled through the issues as they arose. I won't be putting my hand up for any Executive positions this year as I'll be unlikely to be able to attend any meetings or have much time to spare due to work commitments in the north of the state.

Equipment Officer – Alan Jackson

Nothing overly exciting to report on this front. Gear comes and gear goes. The fabled shed upgrade hasn't materialised so we're still stuck in a matchbox, but it seems to work ok.

I'm happy to continue in this role but am mindful that with my general absence from Hobart for work in 2021 much of the onus will fall on Loretta to deal with equipment borrowing. At this stage she's happy to oblige but people will need to be mindful of this situation if the gear store remains at Gormanston Road in 2021 – last second gear requests are unlikely to be serviced and 'opening hours' will generally have to be outside normal business hours, so get organised and give us plenty of notice.

Search and Rescue Officer – Alan Jackson

Quite an exciting year on the cave rescue front. DWC's rescue in October was obviously the main event. All the details are in the Nov-Dec 2020 *Spiel*, so I won't go there other than to repeat what a success it was and a great reflection on the huge amount of effort and money that has gone into rescue preparedness by all the clubs in Tas. Well done.

A rescue exercise to brush up on skills was held in Mystery Creek Cave in December 2020 which was a low-key affair compared to 2019. Thanks to those who make the time to come and train; as we saw in October, it pays off.

There is a big statewide cavex being organised by Police for mid-2021, so get ready to come along and work on developing the all-important relationships between cavers and emergency services.

I won't be continuing in this role in 2021 due to work commitments and a strong desire to get some others in the club in a position to get a rescue sorted (next time it might be me who needs rescuing). I look forward to helping a fresh face move into the role and deliver an effective 2021 training regime.

***Spiel* Editor – Gabriel Kinzler**

Similarly to when I replaced Nat as Social Secretary two years ago, I had arguably even bigger shoes to fill taking over the *Spiel* from Janine. But it went as smoothly as could be. She schooled me well and handed over all of her files, templates, instructions and workflows, which helped immensely. All I had to do was to pick it up where she left things off.

I love putting *Speleo Spiel* together, it's a privilege and a pleasure. I try to brush it up bit by bit, feeling my way along and trying various editorial things. I'm also able to upload the finished product to our website myself, which allows for more flexible deadlines.

People are regularly encouraged to submit material and I actively chase up any suggested/promised article. Hopefully this acts at least somewhat as a positive feedback loop, where people enjoy collecting data, sharing it, seeing it published and wanting to go back out for more. Please remember to take photos when possible, they play an essential role in story-telling.

My thanks go to all the contributors whether they're regulars or casuals, my sub-editors (Alan Jackson, Janine McKinnon & Ric Tunney, and Greg Middleton), Russell Fulton for taking care of the printed copy, and more generally anyone who goes caving and reports back in some shape or form.

I'd very much like to continue for a second year and convert the try.

Training Officer – James Barnes

After a shaky start to the year with my aspirations for lots of beginner trips being put on hold due to COVID the year has been pretty reasonable on the training front.

I would like to extend my thanks to Alan Jackson and Michael Packer for their prospective efforts in helping out with training days generally and for Pax for running some training for new cavers recently which from the photos looks to have been a big hit.

Overall a training session has occurred every 1-2 months and a handful of beginner trips have occurred in Midnight Hole and Wolf Hole. We have seen around 10-15 new prospectives come through, hopefully some of them will continue with caving, only time will tell!

Recently (21st and 22nd of February) there has been a police search and rescue training exercise that STC has been involved with. There was a significant surplus of STC members volunteer to assist with the event which is testament to the enthusiasm and commitment within the club to helping out on the training front which is great to see.

I am willing to continue in the role of training officer although I am more than happy to pass on the reins if there is someone else who is keen and has more time on their hands. With my shift work and other commitments, I must admit I have somewhat limited time to contribute.

Archivist – Michael Packer

A busy year! Having migrated from a full-time engineer who spent most summers in Antarctica to a slack-arse uni student with 16 weeks of holidays over summer, I now have been able to devote more time to actually doing the job of Archivist!

This year has seen a complete review of the old maps in the maps draws. Almost all of them have been scanned and digitally restored where necessary, with a few remaining tubes to be sorted and scanned. This process has turned up some really interesting finds including: an old survey map of the Mt Weld region, a map and location of the missing JF-234, a fairly good fix for Hairy Goat Hole (yet to be ground truthed), the location of some of the caves on Mt Ronald Cross, an extensive survey of the Mt Anne area, a heap of maps for the Precipitous Bluff area (thanks to Trevor Wailes for interpreting some of these) and many more interesting things.

All of this information has been entered into the Archive. Next mission will be to wade through the four-draw filling cabinet and integrate that into the Archive as well, there is a lot of info in there and sorting work to be done!

As part of sorting out the various cave areas I have embarked on a project to try and collate all the location data for all the caves around Tassie and have been able to pin down many, still a lot to go! Thanks to everyone who has heeded my constant nagging about grabbing a GPS and photo whenever they visit a cave!

Also, thanks for people further afield who have done the same at out of the way places like Frenchmans Cap. Thanks also to Chris, Jacko, Russell and others who've helped out with their knowledge of areas.

During the year I also built relationship with the NC and SRCC clubs and a special thanks to Paul and Lyndsey of SRCC who were kind enough to provide me with a bunch of info about their caves and copies of their publications. I have scanned the entire set of SRCC *Speleopod* and added them to the electronic archive (thanks to Greg for filling in the blanks on that, and sorry about pulling all the staples out of your copies!).

Thanks also to Jill Bennet and others from NC who helped me out with some of the Mole Creek stuff, which I need to follow up on. Hoping to continue building those

relationships into the future with the intention of capturing all the cave-related data in an accessible form.

Greg and I managed, with the support of the other clubs around the state, to get the Background Areas proposal off the ground and we now have a way of numbering and recording non-carbonate and isolated caves that pop up around the state (Lost World needs adding!).

Thanks to Bunty for giving me info on the Hillwood talus caves and Janice March for info on Davern Cavern.

I have put the archive fully into the cloud with a purchase of a Google Drive 2 TB subscription. Maybe by the time this makes the press I will have gotten around to sending out the links to all the current holders of the Archive (fingers crossed!). Once I do, everyone will have access to the most current version of the Archive. The archive is also backed up offline on a regular basis as added security.

Steve F has created a GIS project for the JF region that is capturing a lot of really useful information about that area (locations, possible targets, tracks, etc.) and I have created similar projects for other areas (Risbys Basin, Mt Weld, Mt Anne etc.). Thanks to Chris, Russell, Jacko and others who have contributed a lot of their knowledge to these projects.

Various maps have been drawn and added to the Archive by Gab, Alan, Janine, Greg and Jacko – great work guys, keep it up!

I'm happy to continue as the electronic Archivist for the next year (or ten).

Webmaster – Michael Packer

This year has seen a couple of significant changes to the web setup, we have migrated to a new hosting of our website and the email list has moved from Yahoo Groups (now defunct) to Google groups.

I can't personally claim the glory for either of these achievements. Gab and Yoav have been entirely responsible for carrying them out – thanks guys! They have also done a fabulous job of looking after the website and maintained it.

Despite not actually doing anything other than nodding and saying 'go for it' I am happy to continue to be Web Wizard. Mind you if anyone else feels a desperate urge to take on the roll, I'll be happy to hand over the reins!

Public Officer – Bill Nicholson

Apart from a flurry of forms to sign last October it has been a quiet year as expected in this role. I would prefer not to take on this role this year but if no one is willing then I will.

Librarian – Greg Middleton

Since February 2020, the Library has received only 16 new paper journals/newsletters (only half the small number we received last year), bringing our holding to 5,057. Some of these we also received in digital format. The end of the hard copy journal is at hand.

Last year I said we should consider discarding the large number of duplicate copies of journals and newsletters which take up a lot of space.

There was a view that they should first be offered to other club libraries. I have put out an offer to librarians via Ozcavers.

Digital copies of journals are stored on a 1 TB hard disk and backed up. Additions in the last 12 months include:

ACKMA Journal: #118, #119, #120, #121

ASF Annual Report: 2019

Caves Australia: #211 - #214 (2020)

CEGSA News: Vol. 65(1)-(4)

ISS Newsletter: Vol. 26(2)-(3)

J. Sydney Speleo. Society: Vol. 64 (2020), 65(1)

Speleo Spiel: #437 - #441

SUSS Bull.: Vol. 57(3), (4)

The Western Caver: Vol. 59 (2019)

Trog (KSS): Vol. 55(7) – 56(5)

Troglodyte: 30(2) Dec. 2020

NSS News (USA): Vol. 78(3)-(12), 79(1))

J. Cave & Karst Studies (USA): Vol. 82(1)-(4)

Cave & Karst Science (UK): Vol. 47(1)-(3)

Seven new books have been accessioned, mainly gifts of A. Culberg. Our holding stands at 433. A list of major books is on the website; a digital catalogue is available.

Our CD/DVD collection is unchanged at 52.

No new issues of *Southern Caver* have been produced this year.

I'm happy to continue in the position.

Social Secretary – *vacant*

[Serena Benjamin relinquished the role of Social Secretary in May 2020, -Ed]

Treasurer – Russell Fulton

2020 was a year of significant increase in the club's coffers. The club made a surplus of a bit under $3,700 and there will be approximately $8,900 in the operating account at AGM time, as well as $10,000 in the interest-bearing account.

The surplus is made up largely of two significant donations totalling $2,500. David Wools-Cobb gave the club a donation of $2,000 to be used for cave rescue equipment purchases and Paul Darby and Lyndsey Gray donated $500, also to be used on the purchase of cave rescue gear.

Aside from donations, funds were also boosted by a substantial increase in the number of Introductory memberships. Ten Introductory memberships were extended for a period of twelve months due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

The ASF has increased its fees by a small amount for the coming year. I recommend that the club absorb the increase and keep the total fee at the same level as last year, except for the two Life Member categories, where there is no club component.

Based on 2020 membership, the club would be down approximately $100.

Income and Expenditure Statement

For the period 1 January 2020 – 31 December 2020

INCOME ($)	**2020**	**2019**
Membership fees	$6,042.35	$5,010.50
Donations	$2,600.00	$387.50
Speleo Spiel subscriptions	$75.00	$55.00
Gear hire	$155.00	$330.00
Interest	$101.42	$253.01
Refund from ASF	-	$155.00
TOTAL INCOME	**$8,973.77**	**$6,191.01**
EXPENDITURE		
ASF fees	$3,613.50	$3,030.50
ACKMA membership fee	-	$50.00
Civic Club membership	$50.00	$50.00
Audit fee	-	$123.75
Website hosting fee	$65.34	-
Annual Return fee	$64.80	$63.20
Gear Custodian honorarium	$99.00	-
Gear purchase and repair	$590.56	$1,642.84
Speleo Spiel costs	$192.30	$177.90
PO Box rental	$211.00	$205.00
Bank fees	$12.10	-
Search and Rescue airfares	-	$171.74
Sundries	$381.20	$190.65
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	**$5,279.80**	**$5,705.58**
SURPLUS (LOSS)	**$3,693.97**	**$485.43**
BALANCE SHEET as at 31 December		
CommBank Business Transaction Account	$8,931.72	$5,237.75
Term Deposit	$10,000.00	$10,000
TOTAL MEMBER FUNDS	**18,931.72**	**$15,237.75**

Notes

1. Funds raised under the Donations category included $2,000 from David Wools-Cobb, $500 from Paul Darby and Lyndsey Gray and $100 from Iain Webb (one of Tony Culberg's clients).

2. Sundries include $10.00 refunds of overpaid member fees, $25.00 for video conversion, $120.00 for a key to Roberts Road (to access Risbys Basin karst), $102.20 for digital scanning of cave maps and $124.00 for catering for the S&R exercise at Ida Bay.

3. The accounts were audited internally by Alan Jackson.

Membership breakdown as at 31 December 2020:

CATEGORY	**NUMBER**
Single	23
Single – less ASF	6
Household	22
Concession	8
Introductory – New	23
Introductory – Extended	10
Life – Active	4
Life – Inactive	2
TOTAL	**98**

The proposed new fee structure (to be voted on at the AGM) is:

FEE STRUCTURE - 2021					
Category	**STC component**	**ASF component**	**2021 fee**	**2020 fee**	**STC nominal factor**
Single	$35.00	$70.00	$105.00	$105.00	1.00
Family	$60.75	$123.00	$183.75	$183.75	1.75
Concession (student, unemployed, pensioner)	$27.00	$46.00	$73.00	$73.00	0.75
Introductory	$18.50	$20.00	$38.50	$38.50	0.50
Life – Active	$0.00	$70.00	$70.00	$68.00	-
Life – Inactive	$0.00	$21.00	$21.00	$20.00	-
Friend of STC	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	-
Spiel subscription (members only)	$25.00	$0.00	$25.00	$25.00	-

Office Bearers

The following were Office Bearers as at 31 December 2020:

Public Officer	Bill Nicholson
Executive Committee	
President	Chris Sharples
Vice-president	Alan Jackson
Secretary	Philip Jackson
Treasurer	Russell Fulton
General Committee	
Equipment Officer	Alan Jackson
Librarian/Archivist	Greg Middleton
Karst Index Officer	Michael Packer
Science Officer	Chris Sharples
Editor	Gabriel Kinzler
SAR Officer	Alan Jackson
Other office bearers	
Training Officer	James Barnes
Social Secretary	*vacant*
ASF Delegate	Pat Culberg
ASF Email Delegate	Kirsten Laurie
Webmaster	Michael Packer

AGM Results

Below is the list of Office Bearers for 2021.

Position	**Elected**
President	Chris Sharples
Vice President	Gabriel Kinzler
Secretary	Russell Fulton
Treasurer	Karina Anders
Equipment Officer	Alan Jackson
SAR Officer	Gabriel Kinzler
Librarian	Greg Middleton
Editor	Gabriel Kinzler
Social Secretary	Philip Jackson
Training Officer	Janine McKinnon
Science Officer	Chris Sharples
Public Officer	Bill Nicholson
Electronic Archivist	Michael Packer
Webmaster	Michael Packer
ASF Representative	*To be filled by whoever is available or attending at the time of ASF meetings.*
ASF email representative	Kirsten Laurie

Trip Reports

Post-COVID Junee-Florentine Extravaganza – Additional Reports

Stephen Fordyce (photos: author unless otherwise credited)

These would be worth reading in conjunction with my day-by-day report, published in *Speleo Spiel* 442. More are still pending, hopefully they will be ready for the next *Spiel*.

JF-8 Junee Cave

2020-12-31

I had to do a shakedown dive before push dives later in the month, and it was also a good chance to do some dye stuff.

Detector placement in For Your Eyes Only.

I ran a reel the entire way for practise, this made it possible to have complete freedom to thoroughly explore and check the north wall for leads on the way in – none were found (but I made a GoPro video of the whole thing).

The detector was set up attached to the guideline in For Your Eyes Only and set to running. It being fairly late on New Year's Eve and with detectors at either side of Sump 1 (and at the carpark), I took the opportunity to release some fluorescein at the far end of For Your Eyes Only to get summer flow times through these sections.

2020-01-15

Simone Lee and I retrieved the detector, and made a narrated GoPro video of For Your Eyes Only, which was given to DPIPWE (Rolan Eberhard) and Parks & Wildlife (David Holley) to help them with managing the cave. There were few places where impact by cavers was obvious. We also patched the line in Sump 1 where it went under an isolated rock on a gravel slope not far from the entrance lake – using a twisted blue and white rope from my car and using rolling hitches, hopefully this survives. Be warned this rope unravels extremely easily if cut, and it would only take 2 m of Telstra rope to make a better repair. I tried quite hard to dig the existing line out and had to give up.

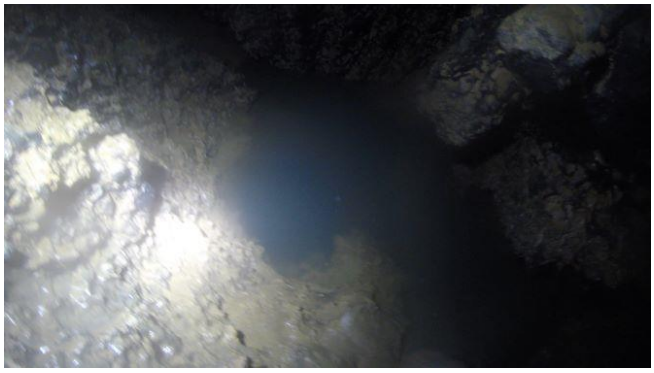
JF-234 Sump Pot

2021-01-20

The archival saga about this cave is the subject of an entire article in *Speleo Spiel* 441, and it was great to relocate it. Getting to the cave (from the north) via JF-402 and JF-228 and the associated gullies and dolines was horrendous, and took the best part of an hour to traverse 250 m in thick ferns, horizontal logs and steep slopes. I suspect an approach directly to Sump Pot from the road to the east (a similar distance) would be much quicker as the ferns were thinning in that direction.

The cave itself was fairly true to Jeff's map, although a few sections would have better shown it for the small and uninspiring thing that it is. There are two entrances, the lower of which is near the tag (located per Jeff's sketch) and the upper approx. 2 m higher and 5 m away. Both are obvious, but not large. I went in the lower entrance near the tag and it was only mildly sketchy free-climbing down a few metres. A 10 m rope as a handline wouldn't hurt (length needed for distance to belay points). I did stumble on a cave/shelter perhaps 20 m away from the tag, and it would probably be worth a proper scout around the doline. The JF-234 entrances are some 5 m above the bottom of the doline.

After the entrance climb, the passage is narrow, squeezy and crawly (although really only a short and minor inconvenience), with a steep bedding plane which the cave sometimes follows and sometimes punches through. At least there's no rockfall – it's well defined cave. There is a small chamber (big enough for a few people) preceding the nasty muddy chimney climb down to the water. Not knowing how bad this would be, I'd brought full SRT kit and installed two concrete screws (these were removed and the holes plugged with "parsnips" [see picture in the next column] for future use). I'd suggest bringing a 10 m ladder and screws/kit to use the holes next time. It would be pretty gnarly trying to do it without gear, although at least mud dropping from the vertical section has a reasonable chance of not ending up in the sump pool. There weren't any obvious natural anchors. The vertical bit of the climb is about 6 m, to a small chamber from which the sump pool is visible through a sloping rift/squeeze about another 6 m away.



The sump for which the cave is named
[ah yes, you can see it clearly, -Ed]

Despite my best efforts, the miserable little sump pool at the bottom (approx. 1.2 x 0.8 m) was pretty turded by the time I got down, and preserving it while climbing down seems impossible. I recorded a GoPro video (ask me for it!) of the chimney climb needing the ladder, the subsequent squeeze, the ledge next to the water and stuck the camera underwater, for the all the good it did. The mud caked all over the walls (and the flood debris) was a gloomy sign of frequent flooding, and the obvious assumption is that the bottom is choked and it's basically a well.

However, the rock around the sump is relatively mud-free, the water was deeper than gumboot and the sump surprisingly enticing – it looked like the chimney keeps going down. By this point in the trip and in the day, I didn't have enough hardcore left to go for a swim to find out.

Perhaps it represents a local water table connected to sumps in nearby JF-402, JF-228 and JF-11 – comparing relative water levels of these would be interesting (I can't find survey data for JF-11 and JF-234, but it wouldn't take much to redo them, or to do a surface survey connecting them more accurately than GPS). JF-228/402 is ~70 m deep, which would put its sumps much deeper than the bottom of JF-234.

Looking down through the sloping squeeze to the sump.

I think it's worthy of a dive – not that I am particularly enthusiastic about it. I suggest wetsuit, 3 L cylinders on a sump harness (no wing), no fins. Put on the wetsuit at the entrance (it's not far, 5-10 minutes), and put on the cylinders near the sump.

To preserve visibility, a tarp could be rigged just above the sump to catch falling mud on a trip the week before the dive – a drill and screws would be required. It's probably possible to stand on the mud-ledge, and do an ungraceful forward somersault into the water for a head-down diver entry and a chance of getting into clear water ahead of the silt storm. Suggested rigging gear: 10 m rope (11 mm) for entrance handline (with optional tape/krab), 2x concrete screws/hangers/carabiners, 10 m wire ladder. No SRT kit.

Parsnips installed.

JF-36 Growling Swallet (Living Fossils)

2021-01-05

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Oxana Repina

After a pleasant trip in through the main entrance with a larger group, Oxana and I bid them farewell and headed down to Black River. Despite having been to the top of the first Slaughterhouse pitch and back (to collect SRT kits left there in anticipation of a different plan), Oxana was still keen to continue, even in the face of my tentative enthusiasm and mumblings about an impending epic.

We both wore 3 mm wetsuits under our caving suits (Oxana later wore hers all the way out via Slaughterhouse Pot, and I got changed at the top of Destiny Pitch) and this worked pretty well. The sniff was tolerable and we had a stickybeak at Coelacanth Sump, where I'd dived a few days earlier and then headed up into Living Fossils.

Reaching the junction (such as it is, quite hard to pick) with Middle Age, we continued past for a lot longer than I'd realised was necessary to reach the end. Somewhere along here was a grotty little ~6-10 m pitch on the north side of the passage which, given recent exposure to such things in Sesame, I suspect might be worth dropping - it'd need concrete screws though (a chance this is the side passage at LF30, but I doubt it). There were also sections of surprising prettiness in the main passage. The northward leads shown on the Living Fossils map weren't obvious, not that we were very diligent in looking.

We reached the terminal marked survey station (LF51) and poked around it. Oxana had gone a bit quiet by this point, so was handed the crowbar and a dubious muddy choke to stay warm and distracted while I checked a few squeezy leads. There were bits and pieces joining back into each other but it felt rather mud-choked and terminal. Perhaps a better option would be to try further back and higher, above the worst of the mud.

Oxana enjoys the second roof sniff.

With the primary objectives of orientation and reaching the current end vaguely achieved, and having had a late start, we didn't stick around too long. Morale improved markedly with beef jerky, being homeward bound and having a pee. An old rubbish cache (including half-rusted tins and mangy old plastic) was discovered in Black River which was too extensive for us to take out – we moved it to an obvious spot, bring a spare darren drum next time? We made good time heading out but it was 1:30 am when we exited Slaughterhouse Pot, albeit still in a reasonable mood. Oxana seemed unsure whether to be delighted or dismayed at the time but proudly exclaimed that this was the latest she had ever got out of a cave and that it had been a good day.

I must admit I took scant notes and waited too long to write the report, so my "orientation" of the far section was a bit average. I find this to be a fascinating area, especially given the proximity to the big gap in the master cave between Porcupine and Niggly. I hope to go back again.

JF-36 Growling Swallet (Dreamtime/Perfidy)

2021-01-16

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Petr Smejkal

I covered this trip by Petr and me in fair bit of detail in the "Daily Summary" report. The detectors have since been replaced and follow-up dye traces conducted, ~~with convincing negative results for Boulder Jenga (JF 398) in Perfidy, Mother of God and even Junee (!!!). It would appear that Boulder Jenga is part of a separate system. Most unexpected.~~ (Edit, the negative Junee result was later found to be due to sub-optimal detector placement and a positive result was had from the dark zone detector. Most expected.)

I mentioned the ancient dive gear cache near Dreamtime Sump to Stefan Eberhard, who recalled that one of the fins had been washed away in the 1980s, not long after the cache had been left there. This fin would have to be the one which I discovered 50 m the Niggly side of the connection point during the Niggly/Growling connection dive in 2019. So there are two dive gear caches, not far away from each other, perhaps 50 m back from the Dreamtime Sump in mud-floored dry passage, on the left wall when looking downstream. They contain:

- 6x 1.5 kg threadable weights, single fin, ancient mask, piece of foam (at chest height on a mud bank)
- 11x 1.5 kg threadable weights (at floor level, tied with orange string and sheltered by a big flake rock)

Just upstream of Tiger Mountain Petr noticed a mud-choked lead at ceiling level. He and Gabriel went back in late February to climb and check this (and swap detectors), but it didn't go.

I noticed a sizeable waterfall coming into the Trapdoor Streamway from an aven perhaps 100 m upstream of Herpes III, which Petr said was always present. This would be interesting to link to a surface swallet – if anyone knows of any contenders, I would appreciate you letting me know.

The 1980s cache (sans one fin).

JF-36 Growling Swallet (Coelacanth Sump Dive)

2021-01-03

Party: Nina Birss, Stephen Fordyce, Simone Lee, Dan Mitchell, John Oxley, Oxana Repina, Petr Smejkal

I've been keen to see the end of Coelacanth Sump for myself for ages. It's been dived several times before, but the proximity to the master cave between Porcupine and Niggly, and several major flood events since the last dive attempt, made it worth another look. My modest diving successes nearby provided the ego-laced icing on the cake, and a support crew of almost all keen(ish) mainlanders made it happen, dragging gear in and out over several trips. Thanks guys, awesome work.

Here are some key references to previous dives in Coelacanth Sump:

- *Speleo Spiel* 411 (Stefan Eberhard 2015 dive)
- *Speleo Spiel* 235 (Nick Hume 1988 dive to the end)
- *Speleo Spiel* 210 (first 1985 dives in Coelacanth)
- The *TCC Exploration Journal* has a few things

On dive day, I offered the support crew the option of coming through the roof sniff or staying dry with the stove – the latter option was unanimously chosen. This distinct possibility had partly driven the decision to use 7 L steel tanks and one less undergarment layer, so that I could be more comfortable walking with full kit to/from the Coelacanth Sump. "Comfortable" was a relative term and it was pretty hot and hard, but on the plus side it made flopping into the sump pool most pleasant. I left the support crew about 4:35 pm and it took 25 minutes to get myself to the sump.

Most of Coelacanth Sump is lovely

The sump proved to be exactly as per Stefan's 2015 description, right down to the terminal blockage at the end. It only took me 3 minutes to get there at a depth of 18 m, and a similar time to get back to the surface (plus a safety stop) – visibility was generally excellent both in and out. I was mindful of how old the line was, but it seemed fine and I left it in. I checked the walls and ceiling carefully for leads but nothing was apparent.

I really hadn't grasped the aptness of Stefan's description of the end of the cave. There is a spacious room approx. 2 m x 2 m, and 1.5 m high, and it's almost like the far end of it has a stained glass window – such is the variety (white, black, grey and more), beauty and cleanness of the rocks apparently completely blocking the upward sloping passage – which is also dismayingly small considering the generous size of the underwater passage to get to this point. 7 L steel cylinders had been selected for their low profile and better squeezing ability, but there was no chance of squeezing in there (although the line did indeed disappear up into the pile).

The rocks are all rounded and vary in size from birds' eggs to tennis balls. They are all completely loose and don't appear to have any smaller gravel or major silt associated with them. Closer inspection hinted at a small gap between rock slope and ceiling – but a single touch started the entire slope gently rolling down. I was still safely in the larger chamber, but this was quite sobering. A fine mist of silt rose up the slope and that was the end of trying to see if there was a larger void not far up slope (it didn't look too promising).

The rubble slope leading into the unknown.

I spent 20 minutes or so pushing armfuls of rocks to one side as more came down to replace them. There was plenty of space to do this safely, and the automatic feeding mechanism was a joy to work with. Eventually the auto-feed was less effective and I had to start reaching a hand up the slope to pull rocks down.

I could feel enough space to get into, and managed to gingerly get a body length or so up the low continuing passage – perhaps 25 cm high and 75 cm wide. The slope seemed stable now but the passage was tight enough that an unplanned avalanche would be quite suboptimal. My bubbles running up the ceiling and the shifting slope had obliterated visibility so it wasn't possible to see what the cave was doing ahead. It didn't feel like it was getting any bigger but my experience with underwater gravel slopes in other JF caves is that there is often a pinch point with a roof step. Admittedly, all those slopes are with pea-sized gravel or smaller.

Gas and thermal reserves were reaching limits not conducive to further pushing, so I retreated. In hindsight there was plenty of gas left for more digging, just not for pushing restrictions. I did a long safety stop as a nod to the time spent at 18 m and the exertion required post-dive. This was also a factor in choosing Nitrox32 (32% oxygen, compared with the 21% of air) as the breathing gas, which helps reduce the risk of decompression sickness (the bends) a surprising amount.

The stumble back to the support crew did a good job of warming me up again and they were pleasantly surprised when I was well short of the 3-hour callout time. This trip and two subsequent others eventually got all the dive gear out of the cave, leaving only the weights (4x 1.5 kg threadable, 2x smaller line weights) from Stefan's 2015 dive trip. A dive in upstream Pendant Pot is still waiting for someone to attempt!

My best (and most tantalising) glimpse up the rubble slope, early in the dive

Thoughts for future divers:

If the dive was more accessible, it'd be easy digging and a red-hot lead. Given that there are dry leads well beyond the end of the sump and the effort required for a dive, it's rather less so. Still, I would love to find out what impact my efforts made, and similar efforts will eventually yield dividends, at least on passing the rubble slope. And at least the underwater passage is well defined and free of rockfall.

I have GoPro footage – ask me for it. I'm still getting to editing and posting a video.

The rubble slope is strange in that the bottom is a well-defined line and it sits on a hard-flat floor

In reviewing the GoPro footage, I noticed a potential infeeder at the base of the left wall (looking downstream) at the very start of the line (i.e. the pink tape on the wall). This might be where the Black River flow rejoins the sump, which would be nice to pin down.

The terminal room and the final line tie-off are such that your bubbles don't go up the onward slope until you stick your head close to it. I tied off my reel to the existing line, got light and GoPro sorted, and then held my breath to have a peak up the slope while the visibility was still clear. Highly recommended – you may need to get eyes close to the slope, but should be able to look up through the area I've cleared.

I would assume that the rocks I've cleared are sufficiently far away from the constricted areas to be unlikely to be washed back up the slope. None of the previous dive reports indicate any serious attempt at digging. However, the line disappearing into the slope does suggest that sometime in the past 33 years an event(s) occurred to bury it and the lead weight that Nick Hume used as the final tie-off point. The flat rock floor and distinct line where the slope starts is ominous though.

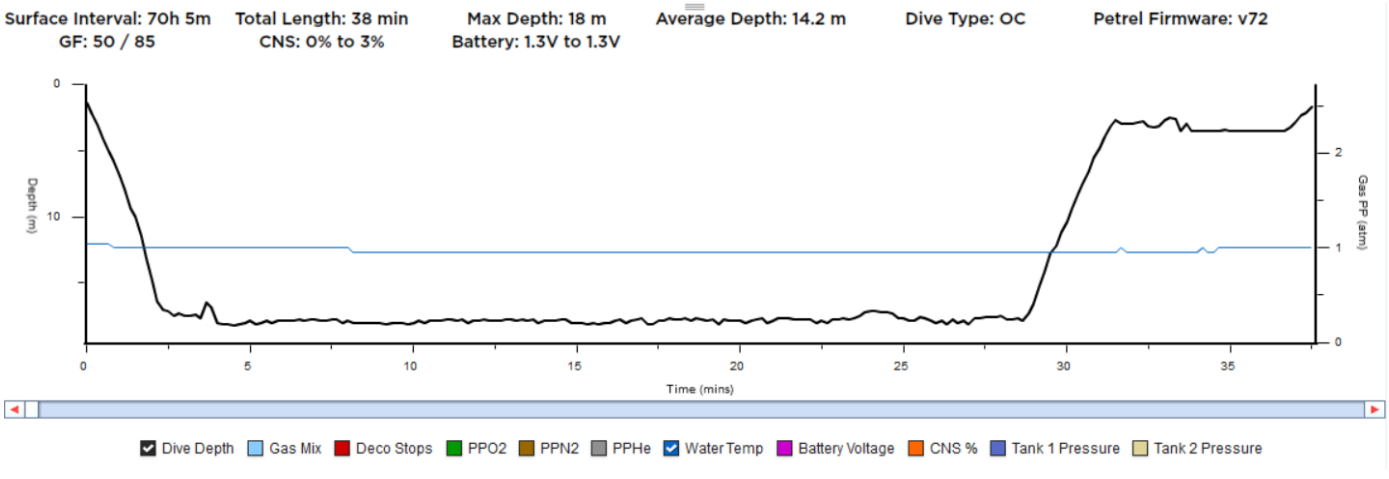
Closeup of the bottom of the slope

The dive gear was most appropriate, if I do say so myself. I wouldn't change 7 L steels or contemplate a wetsuit (too deep – it will compress and be cold). Using nitrox was mentally nice. Dive time and gas required to reach the coal face is small – calculate turn pressures accordingly. It might be a good idea to plan for a sequence of dives, to allow for actual viewing of dig results. Perhaps in this case, a 9 L carbon fibre could replace one of the 7 L steels for a long initial digging dive (or several), really clearing out the lower, more accessible sections. Without apparent water movement, it would be safest to wait a week if you want proper visibility, although overnight might be sufficient.

Dive gear used:

- Drysuit, with one less undergarment layer than I normally would use for a leisurely dive in Junee
- 2x 7 L steel tanks
- Mix: Nitrox 32 (nice considering time at depth and post-dive exertion)
- Gas: start pressure 250 b/250 b, end 90 b/130 b (total 1960 L used)
- 4x 1.5 kg weights
- Nomad XT sidemount wing/harness, fins

Dive profile:



Wherretts Lookout Bash #1 – Twenty-seven new caves in 24 hours

21 January 2021

Gabriel Kinzler

Party: Gabriel Kinzler, Michael "Pax" Packer

The following is a botched summary of a fabulous trip. Or, note to self, why you should always write your report immediately after it happened. Darned procrastination.

Pax dragged me on an overnighter at Wherretts Lookout, my first visit to that part of JF land. We went up the Niggly track and veered off west at Boulder Jenga.

Capt'n LiDAR. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler.

We had approximately eighty (!) LiDAR targets to check out. After one hour of finding not even dolines, or any other sort of remarkable feature where said targets were to be, I disgruntledly decided to leave Pax to his next-gen navigation and spread out a little, flying by the seat of my pants. Two minutes later, I smugly found our first cave of the day, JF-708. A small, sloping hole, whose only reward is a lump of flowstone at the bottom.

Further up the hill, a bunch of dye releases were operated, including at JF-396, which I'm sure Steve Fordyce will cover in one of his pieces. We then found a small doline taking a steady drip, with an entrance showing a bit of promise if your hobby is moving fair-sized boulders out of the way on weekends: JF-709. Not entirely hopeless, but definitely bottom-tier of the list.

Steve had suggested we go take a look at a big LiDAR feature, located vertically above Frownland, which he labelled "Sweet Thing". Sweet Thing became the name of the game in our minds and naturally we expected great things. Spoiler alert: things were neither great nor sweet. Well… that's a bit dishonest, since the area was quite pretty nonetheless, in lush forest and with a nice creek running above the contact.

Our sights were reset south-west towards the 2014 "Klockerfest" series of caves, with a few more targets along the way. We didn't go very far until we stumbled upon a cluster of eight caves plus a few daylight holes, all in close proximity, most of which are formed on the bank of a steepish gully. This cluster was named the Sour Hill Series, because it came after the anticlimactic Sweet Thing.

Sour Hill is very interesting, because it contains two swallets taking a good amount of water each. One, JF-713 Latrines, is a tight rift with a waterfall right above its entrance which sadly fizzles out in a small hole swallowing the stream. The other, JF-710, is a more spacious and twisty cave with carved shelves and water dripping everywhere, with a few climbs down to another miserable hole.

The other caves in that area, JF-711 Anytime, JF-712, JF-716 and JF-717 are mostly horizontal and not exceeding 20 m in length each. Of course, we didn't carry enough tags with us, so left the tagging, exploration and surveying for our next visit. Another tiny entrance was found about 20 m below the Sour Hill cluster, tagged JF-714.

The Sun was setting and so we set up camp at the foot of Sour Hill, in the aforementioned gully. Dinner was gulped before mozzies could get to us, and our high-tech bivy bags did a great job of protecting us overnight.

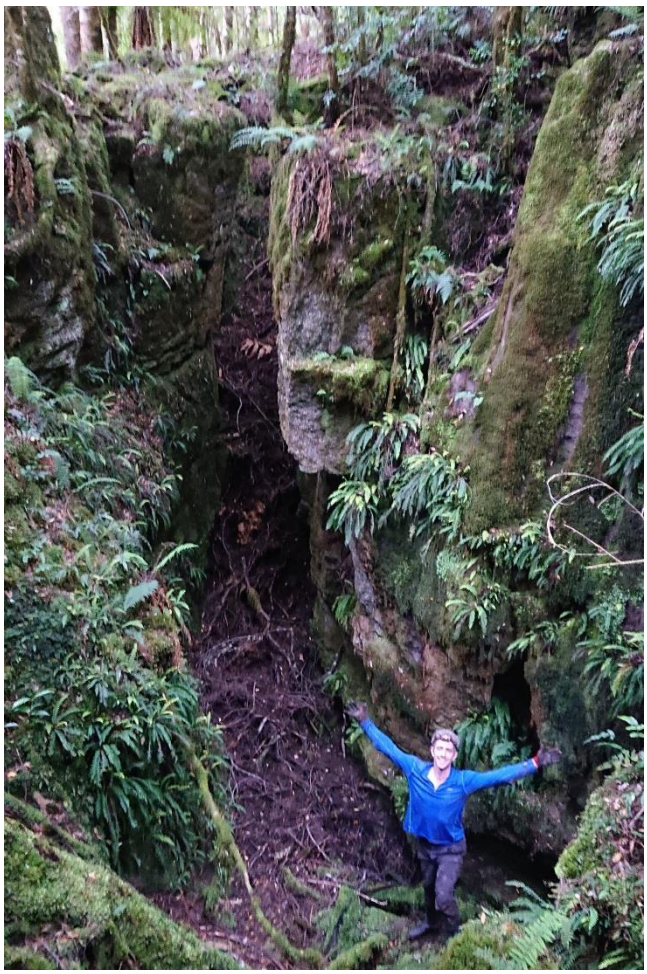
Camping at Sour Hill. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

In the morning, we resumed our traverse to the JF-620/JF-630 series. On the way, I found a nice little cave (GK001 in my notes) that still needs a tag and survey. A bit later, we approached a huge gully surrounded by cliffs on its eastern bank. Right atop the cliff, I found another entrance,

wide and welcoming. I used a handline to get in, but later found it was actually climbable. This cave would eventually become JF-719 Turret Cave, because it has three different entrances that are aligned vertically and opening on the gully, like in an elevator.

The top entrance of Turret Cave. Photo: Michael Packer

Crossing the gully, we spread out and while Pax was rather unsuccessful, I continued my discovery frenzy, including a rather big entrance which would later become JF-724 Close But No Cigar (because it had all the ingredients of a great find, but it just wasn't enough). It is an open-cast swallet with some cave passage. Low and wet, probably not going far. Still needs a survey and proper push.



JF-724 Close But No Cigar has some room left to go. Photo: Michael Packer

Moving on, we tried to relocate the old JF-118, whose old coordinates were nowhere near its actual location. Finally arrived at the JF-620/JF-630 series, we did another dye release and I actually found the old JF-118 tag in a very obvious spot… on a cave entrance since double tagged JF-630 (see separate article in this issue).

No-show at Klockerfest. Photo: Michael Packer

We then crossed The Slip. For me, it was interesting seeing what a big landslide can do to the forest and what it looks like under all the vegetation. I can imagine how it will all become invisible again in a few decades (touch wood, pun intended). Pax tagged one of his old finds, JF-694.

A late-in-the-day find needing a return. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

The rest of the day saw us descend back towards Florentine Road, with another 10 or so finds, including some really interesting ones near big limestone cliffs Russell Fulton could tell you about all day. Because we had run out of tags, time and motivation, we took coordinates and left them for another day. We did relocate one old Z cave however, which was a good win. A final stroll along the old Adamsfield track saw us out.

The Slip. Photo: Michael Packer

JF-36 Growling Swallet – Tiger Mountain adventure

27 February 2021

Petr Smejkal (photos Gabriel Kinzler)

Party: Gabriel Kinzler, Grant Rees, Petr Smejkal

This trip was initiated to recover/install Steve's fluorescence tracking detectors. Steve and I left one detector at Bloody Smokers and another at Tiger Mountain during his month-long caving adventure (Dec-Jan). The detectors were collecting data for the last two months and were ready to be taken out. Steve sent two detectors and a depth logger to Gabriel.

Grant returned from marriage.

We entered via Slaughterhouse Pot to avoid water for as long as possible. All went smoothly. We spent some extra time at Dreamtime Stonedown where we installed a rope to replace the rope ladder from the '80s (still in place, the rope gives you an alternative).

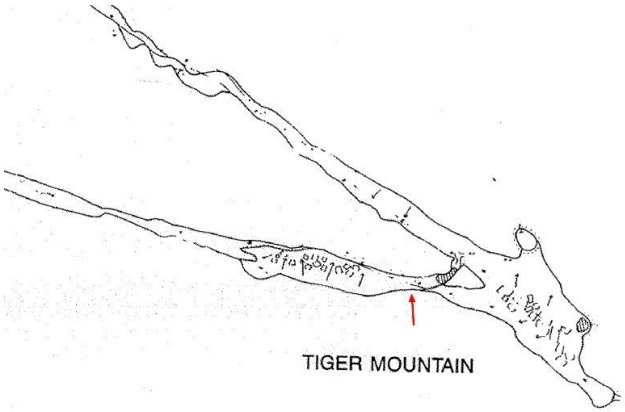
At Tiger Mountain, I intended to do a short climb that we noticed on the trip before. The climb was simpler than I originally thought, the window at the top was filled with sediments and I spent most of my climbing time digging.

Petr on the way up to the dig.

After half an hour, Grant and Gabriel got closer to hypothermia, the hole I made seemed big enough but my shoulders did not let me through.

To keep the party warm, Gabriel had to take over, and after another five minutes of digging, he slipped through to discover a little chamber that was filled with more sediment. Comment for the future generations: if we ever run out of projects, plenty of digging left there.

After that, we recovered the detector at Tiger Mountain, swapped one at Bloody Smokers and installed a new one close to Mainline Sump accessed via Overflow passage from Dreamtime Sump.



At the base of Tiger Mountain, where the stream turns right towards Frownland, there is a high ledge (about 15-20 m above the water), with a sloping window and a very tight squeeze.

Petr climbed his way up and dug, but couldn't fit through. I went after him, dug a bit more and managed to break through.

It opens into a decent phreatic roof chamber, but craps out. Red arrow above shows the approx. location. -Ed

On our way back, we released fluorescein at Dreamtime Sump, at the mainline before the climb up towards Bronchial, at Windy Rift and also in the GS entrance. We also installed a depth logger at the Windy Rift (and forgot to pick up the old one).

The mission took eight hours, we managed to get out in daylight, and Gabriel was on time to join a party.

Grant wishing it was over already.

Unfortunately, this great success didn't come without paying a terrible price. On our way home, we managed to run over an albino peacock! Someone reversed into Grant's car parked in Chigwell (but left a note with name and number). And I was wrecked for the next two weeks.

Wherretts Lookout Bash #2

5 March 2021

Gabriel Kinzler

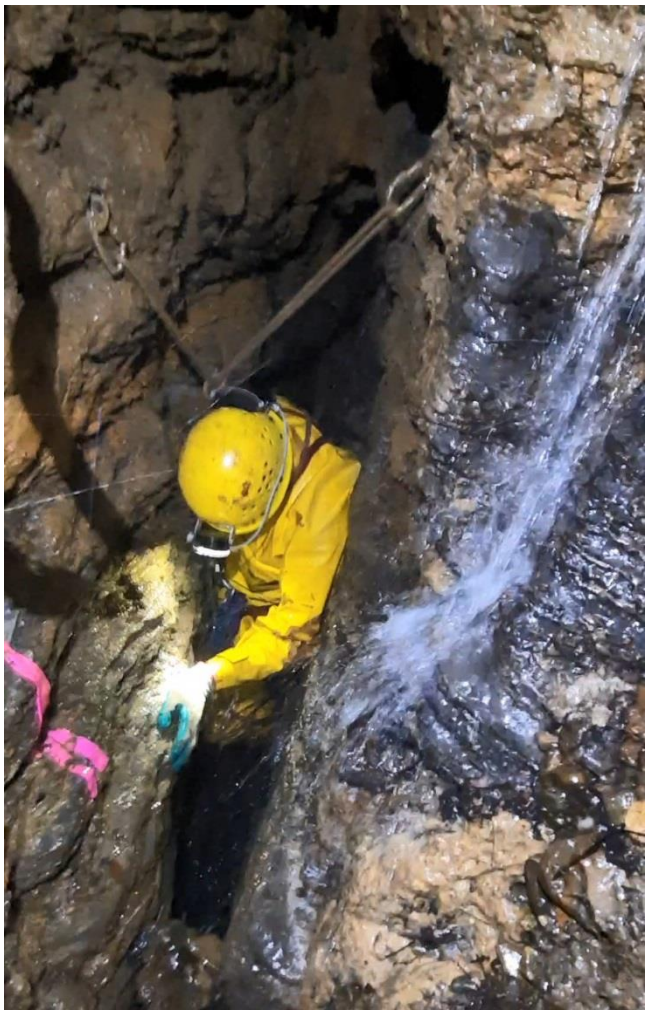
Party: Luke Dimsey, Gabriel Kinzler, Michael "Pax" Packer

Back at Wherretts with fresh objectives:

1) generally, tag & survey as many of the previously found caves as possible
2) explore and survey the Sour Hill Series
3) relocate the JF-630 tag (see separate article by Pax)
4) drop JF-118
5) check a LiDAR target we'd circled around last time, and
6) do a couple of dye releases.

Luke Dimsey joined Pax and me for the day, keen to learn more about surveying. As the tradition goes, we got the newbie to carry the drill and the rigging bag for us. Gotta prove your worth. But Luke obliged, and he's not that much of a rookie anyway.

Up the Niggly track again. Wet, bummer. Pax tried walking in his PVC suit to mixed feelings. We did our first dye release at Boulder Jenga in order to get a better fix on what the water does before reaching Junee. We then beelined north-west up the hill, I found a little cave, surveyed and tagged JF-710, then straight towards the Sour Hill Series: JF-711 to JF-717 are now tagged there.



If it's yellow let it mellow, if it's brown flush it down. Pax catching a lucky break in JF-713 Latrines. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

The cluster is a group of eight entrances plus a few daylight holes. One in particular grabbed our attention: JF-713 Latrines, a 6 m deep tight rift with a steady inflow from a streamlet above the entrance. I rigged a Y-belay while Pax and Luke explored the other caves. On their return, Pax proceeded to descend in wet agony, and quickly discarded the dud.

We then headed south-west towards JF-630 by following the contact in the hope of finding more new stuff. On the way, I found a small but featured vertical entrance tagged JF-718. We also tagged the previously discovered JF-719 Turret Cave, which remains unexplored, as well as its two other entrances below, JF-720 being the middle entrance and JF-721 the lower one.

JF-718. Photo: Michael Packer

In the massive gully below it, we tagged a little solution tube JF-722, hidden underneath a fallen log, then found a new small doline with three entrances, each going nowhere (the lot being tagged JF-723). This is nearby JF-724 Close But No Cigar, which took us surprisingly long to find again given its awesome size, and tagged it. I found a different entrance on its upper skirt, which only goes for a few metres – insignificant and left untagged.

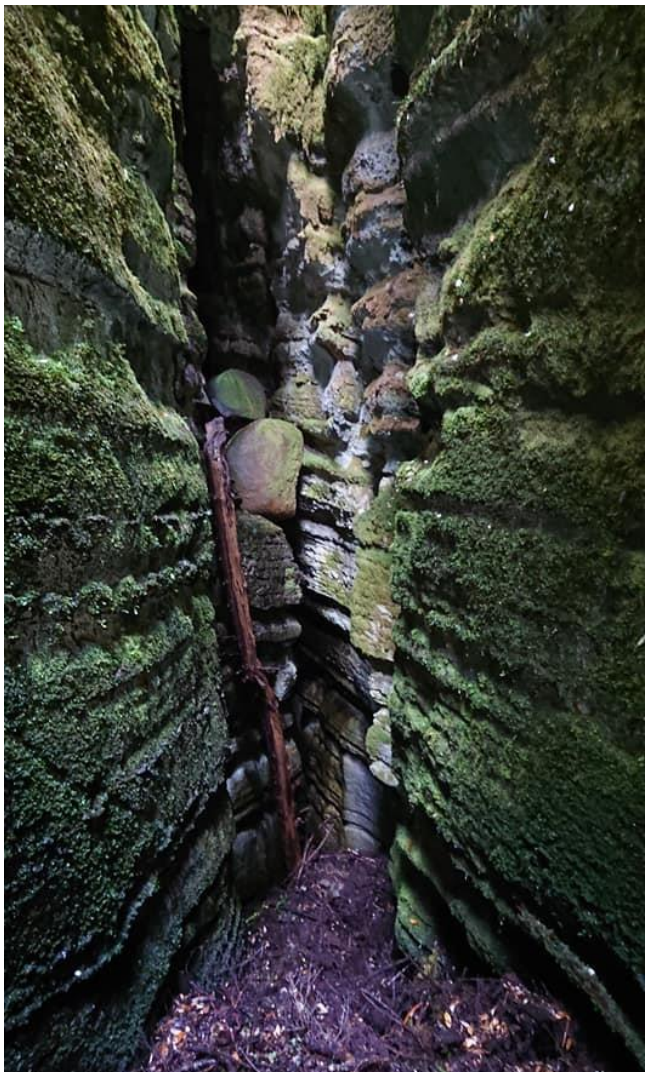
We then reached the doubly tagged JF-118/JF-630. As far as we know, this visually impressive entrance pitch was never dropped. While Pax got busy removing the JF-630 tag, I rigged the entrance with an approach line to a Y-belay on the overhanging wall, free-hanging nicely. I abseiled the lovely 20 m pitch to a sloping floor. A few downclimbs lead to a mud pool and a characterful, waist-high vertical squeeze, through dry and clean limestone. No trog marks anywhere. Luke and Pax joined me.

Pax tried to fit through the squeeze but couldn't. We sent Luke who made it look relatively easy. He reported a spacious, tall rift and an upward slope into a terminal rock pile, probably headed towards one of the neighbouring surface entrances. I joined him on the other side of the squeeze and we started surveying out. For some reason, getting back through the squeeze was a whole different ballgame and we both struggled to the point of needing assistance from Pax, as gravity was wedging our waistline

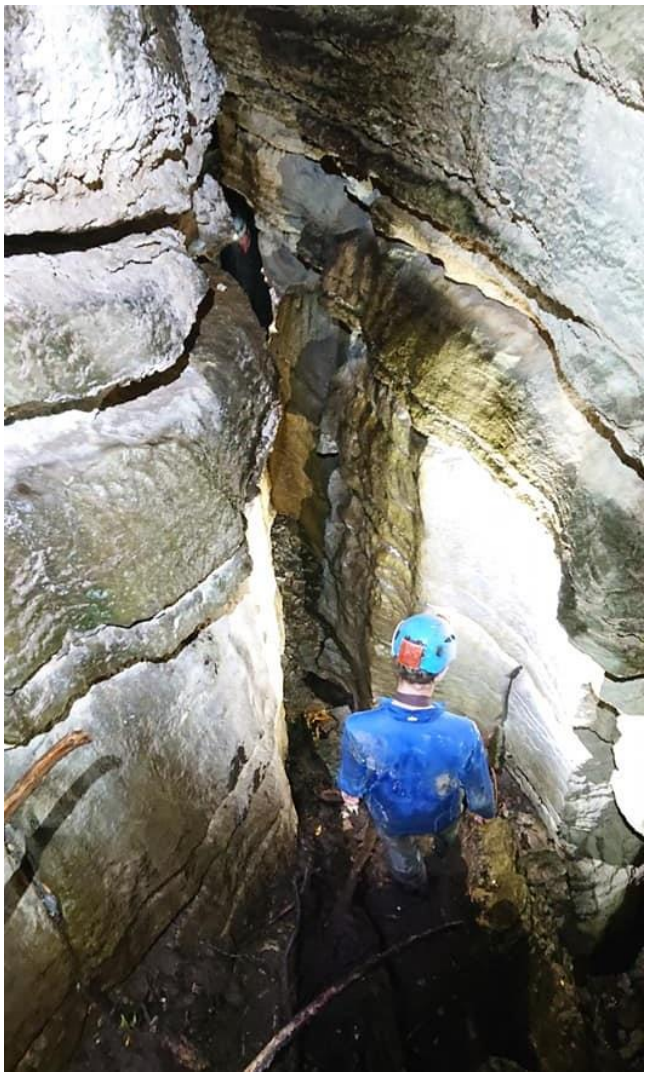
into the squeeze's nook, leaving our arms and feet dangling desperately.

Back outside, I derigged, Pax placed the JF-630 tag on another entrance of the series which, for some reason, was the only one not adorned with one, and Luke executed a dye release. The newly tagged JF-630 still needs exploring at the time of publication. We decided to start heading out straight downhill, without crossing The Slip.

I used my favourite trick out of the book of profanation and reverse psychology by decreeing we would certainly not find anything else for the rest of the day, and surely enough, we found some amazing new caves a few minutes later as we tumbled down the hill. This includes a big open-air rift which does some interesting stuff but doesn't go, tagged JF-725. I betted there would be more in its continuation and indeed, another open-cast rift as well as a medium-sized, sloping cave entrance await us next time.



JF-725 was a very nice find. Photo: Michael Packer



It shows some level of complexity. Photo: Michael Packer

JF-725 looking up. Photo: Michael Packer

The JF-118/630 double tagging saga and its correction

Michael "Pax" Packer (text and photos)

Whilst wandering around on the eastern slopes of Wherretts releasing dye for Steve Fordyce and looking for the much hoped for surface entrance to Frownland, Gab and I thought we'd confirm the locations of the various caves in the area. Steve Fordyce had several caves listed with very approximate locations, one of which was JF-118, and was keen to get more accurate GPS fixes. After stumbling through some very thick bush, Gab and I arrived at the indicated location for JF-118 to discover… nothing. A wider search of the area failed to turn up anything that might be described as a cave, even by my traditionally optimistic interpretation. We declared Steve's estimate to be wildly inaccurate and wrote off JF-118 as having vanished for the time being.

Pushing further west along the contour, we headed towards JF-628, which was to be our next dye release. Just prior to JF-628, we located JF-630 exactly where it was meant to be (luckily nobody had moved this cave on us!). We stopped to locate the tag and get a decent picture of it and the entrance (a nice clean 20 m pitch) for the archive. Gab wandered closer to have a look and noticed that there was a second tag affixed to the rock less than 2 m away from the JF-630 tag. Upon closer inspection, he easily identified it as the missing JF-118! Two tags, one entrance, dang!

Upon returning home, I delved deep into the archive and, with the assistance of AJ's awesomely helpful JF cross reference, was able to locate only a single reference to JF-630 in *Speleo Spiel* 414, pp. 4-5. It seems that JF-630 was tagged as such just prior to 'pub time' on the final day of 'Klockerfest' back in 2015. I can only assume that the prospect of beer overcame the desire to do a careful search for any previous tags. That said, the location of the JF-630 tag required clambering right past the JF-118 tag… the beer must have been occupying a lot of attention!

What to do? In light of the fact there is only the single oblique reference to JF-630, I took my life into my hands, and made the call to remove the JF-630 tag and set the record straight in this article. Accordingly, I took considerable pleasure in peeling the tag off the entrance and leaving the JF-118 tag in place when Gab, Luke and I explored it properly (see p. 16 above).

In what is probably an even more controversial move, I then applied the old JF-630 to an entrance between JF-627 and JF-628, which had for some reason not been tagged along with the rest in this series of physically close entrances. I have updated the archive, the GPS coordinates and the spreadsheets accordingly and this article will hopefully serve to sort out any confusion that might arise about the correct location of JF-630. I shall now retire to the relative safety of my underground bunker and await the deluge of abuse…

The new JF-630.

IB-11 Midnight Hole

9 March 2021

John Oxley

Party: Luke Dimsey, Lauren Hayes, John Oxley

Luke at the waterfall in Mystery Creek Cave. Photo: John Oxley

Lauren had an extra day off work following the long weekend and suggested she'd like to go caving somewhere in the south. I suggested Midnight Hole and Luke was also keen. Neither had ever been to Midnight Hole.

Lauren in Matchbox Squeeze. Photo: John Oxley

With just the three of us we moved pretty quickly down the pitches in Midnight Hole. In Matchbox Squeeze, we used one of the ropes to haul our packs through which works very well, providing they don't get snagged in the tight bit.

Once out in the larger passage we rolled up the ropes and stuffed them into packs but it appeared we were one rope short. Each of us thought the other had it but apparently it was still on the other side of the squeeze! Lauren volunteered to go back and get it.

This looked way too leisurely. Photo: John Oxley.

Once reunited with all our ropes, we headed out into the larger chamber for lunch. On the way out we stopped at the waterfall for the usual photo then headed down the creek to loop back into the main chamber further into the cave!

We were out of the cave at about 15:00 after a leisurely trip.

JF-30 The Letterbox

19 March 2021

Janine McKinnon (photos Serena Benjamin)

Party: Serena Benjamin, Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney

In April 2015 Alan Jackson surveyed this cave and found a sump at the end that he thought I might like to check out (*SS 407*, p. 3). Later in April I went for a look and decided it was worth a dive (*SS 407*, p. 6*)*. Thinking it was worth a dive and actually being enthusiastic about doing it aren't exactly the same thing.

So, it went on my "get around to it soon-ish" list. "Soon" turned out to be six years later, after sufficient time had passed for my notoriously reliable memory for forgetting the crappy bits to have done its job.

This cave completely sumps in wet weather, so it can only be visited during dry spells. That was the second reason it had taken me so long to come back – I seemed to only remember it when it was too wet. Luckily, we were in the middle of a dry spell after a dry summer when it popped into my mind again (mainly due to data Steve Fordyce was putting around about surface surveys in the area), so it was a good time to do the dive.

We had the dive gear distributed across four packs, mainly to keep the weight of each pack reasonable for the dragging and pushing through the restriction. I had packed the minimum gear needed and was thus diving in a semi-dry suit (which I wore into the cave) and using 2 X 3 litre tanks. If the dive proved extensive then I would come back with bigger tanks! I was not hopeful.

Ric didn't plan to come through the restriction but was helping get the packs that far. The cave was smaller, crawlier and muddier than I remembered (note comment above about my memory's operation). I went through the restriction first and Serena passed the packs through and then followed. Any tighter and we wouldn't fit.

Ric planned to return in an hour (at 12:30 pm) to help get gear back out from the restriction.

Tie-off points at the sump were almost non-existent. The cave was smooth mud; wall and floor. Luckily, I found a small formation about 6 m back from the pool. It was facing down but I managed to tie my line to it. Secure, I would not call it. My secondary tie-off point didn't exist so I put a silt stake into the mud and tied to that. Another very dodgy attachment. My plan for line security now was Serena making sure these tie-off didn't come off, or at least that the line didn't disappear into the sump if they did.

I kitted up at the pool edge as carefully as possible (hoping to keep the water clear) but slid in half way through the process as it was very slippery. One now very murky sump. One of my fin straps broke as I was putting it on so I decided to do the dive sans fins. I expected it to be tight and nasty and short, and thus fins not really needed. Woops, another mistake that turned out to be.

The sump was zero visibility of still water (flashes of sight now and then) and about 1-1.5 m high and 2 m wide. So plenty of space but a problem trying to move with no fins and very floaty (wetsuit-booted) feet. Propulsion was pushing off from the ceiling. Not exactly textbook cave diving style but no one was there to see (or could see if they were there) and it passed the major test of working.

Literally every dive sherpa reading this has dive sherpa'd to better-looking sumps.

I was surprised that I was actually getting somewhere, and I was even more surprised when I surfaced 10 minutes later in dry passage. I put in another (small) silt stake and tied off the line and cut it.

You don't get much more badass than this.

Then I went for a walk along the new passage. It was very similar to the other side: stand up passage about 1-1.5 m wide and coated everywhere in thick mud, both floor and walls.

This passage twisted and turned a bit and ended in another sump. I would guess it was about 30 m – 50 m of passage. Unfortunately, I didn't have a Disto with me as I hadn't actually expected to find dry passage.

Off she goes. The cave too.

I thought about having a look in the next sump but I had a bit of a problem. I had REALLY thought this dive would go nowhere, and so I hadn't had a clear discussion about return times with the others. I was worried that if I didn't return for a couple of hours, they would be very worried, and I didn't want to go back through the sump twice more to talk to them, as well as go into this next sump, all on 3 litre tanks.

Seeing this, what you're thinking is probably true.

So I decided to head out and come back to finish (continue) another day. It's not like it's epically hard to get to it. I had my underwater survey gear but with no visibility I couldn't survey out. As this will always be the case some creative surveying techniques may be needed. Survey by braille coming up.

I surfaced in the main cave just as Ric could be heard arriving back at the outside of the restriction.

Packing all the gear up and getting out took about an hour so we were all settling down to coffee and Jackman & McRoss Easter buns in the sun and warmth around 1:30 pm.

So the cave continues. The next sump needs diving. Survey of the dry passage needs doing, survey of first sump too.

Checking how much line I used through the sump (minus that from primary tie-off to sump edge) I find the sump is roughly 15 m long and shallow.

Anyone who's been to The Letterbox will recognise the heinous restriction.

A short video of the trip can be found using this link: https://youtu.be/kKyH5i2EyUA

It is very "fly on the wall".

JF-90 Vandal Cave *et al.*

21 March 2021

Alan Jackson

Party: Loretta Bell, Ben Jackson, Alan Jackson, Anna Jackson

I can't remember why this cave jumped into my sphere of interest during 2020 but it did. Adrian Slee (Forest Practices Authority) guided me in the right direction, having recently looked at it for some planned logging in that area, and I located and GPSed the entrance last year. I figured a couple of Steve jobs would be doable too while in the area of Junee Cave.

Steve job 1a was fiddling with the detector he had installed in the Junee River downstream of the carpark at the end of Junee Road.

As ever, it turned into a slightly longer than anticipated exercise – do not underestimate the power of the faff side. It wasn't behaving so lunch was taken while Steve fixed some corrupt files remotely and got it going again.

JF-90 was next. The tagged entrance is quite obvious and can be free climbed without much effort, but a ~5 m ladder takes the sting out of it. The second (untagged) entrance is small and difficult to spot amongst the ferns (located about ten metres more-or-less along the contour to the west). Ben, Anna and I investigated the cave's upper levels but refrained from wallowing in the alleged filth of its lower levels. Not the most inspiring cave I've ever been in and no surprise that it hasn't ever made it onto the Junee-Florentine's greatest hits list. Even the kids were underwhelmed. I'll go back to survey it one day though and appreciate the mud down below.

Steve job 2 was next – fiddling with/updating the Junee Cave detector. This proved as frustrating as the Junee River one, but without the benefit of real time tech support from Steve. Several trips in and out to the entrance to call Steve were made but in the end, we decided to pull out the detector for troubleshooting. Steve job 1b was then completed (re-installing the now-functioning Junee River detector).

Not the most exciting or productive day but better than lounging about at home (just).

IB-1 Revelation Cave

21 March 2021

Janine McKinnon

Party: Jemma Herbert, Gabriel Kinzler, Janine McKinnon, Jon Neville

You have got to love trips that manage to combine taking beginners on their first underground experience with getting some personal caving objective ticked off. I may not have had an objective beyond running a trip for STC newbies but Gab did. More on that later.

The walk to the cave was uneventful except for Jon losing the club light he had borrowed. He had strapped the club helmet to the outside of his small day pack and somewhere along the way the light fell off the helmet. Gabriel went back part-way to look but was unsuccessful, so Jon borrowed a spare for the trip.

Jemma and the bug. It bit her. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

Gabriel went in first to rig the second pitch whilst I got the others sorted and into the cave. All went smoothly, if slowly. Jon found the climbs and slope of the cave passage hard work and tired quickly. It was decided about half way to the third pitch that this was far enough for him and he and I returned to the surface whilst Gabriel and Jemma continued to the bottom to start digging. I was coming back to join them after taking Jon out.

Gabriel seemed to have plans for lots of digging. My plan was to eat lunch and encourage him from outside the dig.

Having deposited Jon in the sunshine and warmth outside the cave (it was a glorious day), I returned to catch up with the others.

I was somewhat surprised to meet them just at the bottom of the cave as they were exiting. It was less than an hour since I had left them. Where was my opportunity to relax, eat and offer words of digging encouragement from a comfortable distance? Alas, Gabriel had not proved to be the champion digger I had anticipated. He had declared the dig not worthwhile and too unpleasant in what appears to have been nanoseconds.

I probably won't be the last to dig here, but I really should. Seriously, it does not go. Photo: Jemma Herbert

We had a relaxed and efficient trip out of the cave. Gabriel de-rigged and left the hangers in-situ, as planned. We were out by 2:30 pm. We looked for the lost light as we walked back but to no avail.

A few of the markers on the track have fallen so a tart-up would be good by the next party.

MC-64 Tailender

28 March 2021

Craig Stobbs

Party: Sean Cadman, Claire Capper, Geoff Capper, Deb Hunter, Craig Stobbs

After arriving at the Mole Creek Memorial Hall to find out that recent rains had flooded the planned destination of Mersey Hill Cave, I stood by as debate raged between the more invested about where to go as an alternative. We eventually settled on Tailender, particularly as a clean-up task was pressing for a return. I was satisfied to have some purpose to our trip beyond tourism.

After parking at a campground beside the Mersey River, we found the cave trail followed the river valley upstream before turning into the hillside a short distance to arrive at the cave entrance. On the way we noted a tiny flowering orchid on the path that nobody could remember seeing anywhere before [*Chiloglottis reflexa*, Deb]. The cave entrance was low, requiring awkward crawling, and there was a locked gate. The entrance becomes a resurgence in heavy rain.

The cave is essentially a linear system, so we would be retracing our steps to return to the surface.

In the light zone of the cave, we noted the typical orb spiders, cave spiders and crickets as we crawled and shuffled our way in. I missed the cave spiders on the way in, but saw many on the way out, a good sign of recovery after historic flooding, Deb noted.

The next section of the cave involved scrambling over rock falls and an exciting little squeeze over a mobile platform aptly named the floppy disk.

After regrouping and passing through a refreshingly higher chamber, we returned to crawling and scrambling through some small spaces to arrive in a dryish, but muddy ephemeral streambed (not flowing under normal conditions) with interesting dark stalactites (coloured by mud). The streambed continued for some distance, with a mix of mud and gravelly base, and substantial mud/clay banks. After crawling and stooping along for a while we left the stream passage to climb up a muddy slope and into some nice flowstone chambers ending at the only pitch for our exploration.

The pitch was about nine metres upwards, with a very muddy fixed rope. The view from the pitch was interesting as it is surrounded by nice flowstone. It was a bit awkward at the pitch head as the final fixture point was some distance up a slope from the precipice. Just past the top of the pitch was the first boot-wash station and the beginning of the most protected parts of the cave. While I relaxed in the dark, waiting for my comrades to ascend, Claire undertook the cleaning up task at the top of the large chamber we had just arrived in.

At the top of the large chamber, the way onwards passes through a tall restriction before arriving in a comfortable-sized passage with a second boot-wash station. After a short strip of blue matting, we arrived at the pristine Reflection Pool and the first examples of the exquisite white calcite formations that dominate the deeper regions of this cave.

The Crystal Umbrella Pool. Photo: Deb Hunter

After some interesting walking, with mud banks and interesting scenery, you arrive at the well named White Sharks Teeth. We admired the Sharks Teeth and then continued on where the passage dropped to a small low crawl with many delicate cave formations to carefully pass by.

The Sharks Teeth. Photo: Geoff Capper

When the passage opened out again, we were delighted by numerous white formations including helictites and anthodites (splayed crystal clusters). Here we settled our packs for lunch and continued a short distance in pairs to the final chamber we would reach on the trip.

The final chamber included a formation named the Crystal Umbrella Pool, however, this chamber had numerous formations of interest. Scrambling, carefully, back to the chamber where we'd left our gear, we had lunch in preparation for retracing our steps out.

Helictites, straws and anthodites. Photo: Deb Hunter

I had never seen the intense white of the formations in the deeper parts of this cave before, perhaps simply as I am new to caving in Tasmania. But this cave appears well preserved, facilitated no doubt by the four wash stations and access controls in place. As new to caving in the approach taken here in Tassie, I learnt the benefit of light weight gear, realising the several old large steel carabiners could be upgraded to lighter versions, and indeed already have been.

JF-29 Niagara Pot – The Great Universal Flood

9-13 April 2021

David Rueda-Roca (photos: David-Stephen Myles)

Party: Phil Maynard, David-Stephen Myles, Mark Norman, David Rueda-Roca

"I sent my ships to fight against the English, not against the elements" – Phillip II about the Spanish Armada

One year and three months after my last Tasmanian trip in January 2020, we had planned to try for the third or fourth time to visit my favourite state in Australia, that is Tasmania. The March and April 2020 cancelled trips were already left far in the past and brought me an important Virgin Airlines future travel point account. The planned January 2021 trip was also cancelled due to the Sydney Northern Beaches COVID-19 crisis. Indeed, it has restricted our free movement around Oz. Moreover, a silly government decision banned NSW cavers from caving in their state. So only canyoning and vertical walls abseiling has been possible for most of us, with regards to the use of ropes, in NSW. Anyway, I was committed to continue with the humble project that I started in 2019 in order to improve my caving skills (mainly bolting and rigging techniques).

We were excited to come back to Tasmania. Easter had been very hot in Hobart. However, our faces turned green when we read the weather forecast for the following weekend and we discovered that an Antarctic wave was going to hit Van Diemens land. Anyway, we did not want to cancel the trip as we could not help ourselves in our desire to come back to the Junee-Florentine. I prepared the typical checklists. First the one where I list all the gear that Alan Jackson can get us from the STC shed. Then the one for the luggage, etc. Since the start of the pandemic, Virgin has cancelled almost all direct flights from Sydney to Tasmania, so we had to fly via Melbourne and then to Hobart. This meant that we had to arrive quite late in Hobart. Phil, Mark and I flew on Thursday the 8th, and David would join on Saturday evening the 10th. Serena had bought me a new Aspiring caving pack (my old one had to be repaired after carrying so much cave diving gear from others) and this pack and the whole requested gear finished at Gabriel´s place, as well as the food that he kindly picked up for us in Woollies. It was great to meet someone from STC again. We arrived in the "f****** cold Maydena" (remember the rap song) just before midnight.

The following day we were excited with the idea of coming back to Niagara Pot (NP). As it had been raining the whole night, we were a little bit concerned that our expensive SUV would not be able to reach the carpark of KD. However, as it had been raining for only 24 hours, it made it. Phil´s 4WD skills helped a lot too. We started walking loaded with heaps of ropes and material. I was concerned about the current status of the track to NP and the possible fallen old tapes. As usual, we carried two roles of pink tape, just in case we needed to reinforce the marking of the track… and we did.

Niagara Pot certainly deserves its name.

We found the cave quite quickly in comparison with my blurred memories from past trips (I remember carrying the same amount of material just for David Myles and me).

We got changed and I prepared my rigging gear, as usual. I looked at the entrance of the cave. The waterfall had a little bit more water than usual, but it was not a big concern, although we knew that with the rain that was falling it would get bigger and bigger throughout the day. We went into the cave, sliding down among the entrance boulders. Once inside, we went to the end of the entrance chamber and turned left through a squeeze above the ramp, where the water slides down. I looked at the water falling down through the ramp and I realised that the water levels were higher than usual. I was a little bit worried for Mark as he was just wearing a Cordura suit while Phil was wearing one of my old PVC suits. However, I know that Mark is a tough bloke, so I was thinking about rigging as fast as possible to reduce the time the others had to wait. I must confess that I could never rig well with PVC gloves on, so as soon as I took the spanner and the first concrete screw, I started working without them. When you are in a hurry with the screws and you do not have a refined screwing tool, what happens is that you hit your hand against the rocks of the wall (especially when you try to tighten the screws as much as you can). So, after the third screw my right hand was already bleeding a bit. Nothing that the waterfall pitch could not wash later anyway. I bottomed the first pitch and I was glad to see that the rope reached the bottom perfectly.

As soon as I landed, the small waterfall of that pitch was already splashing my face, which is something I have not experienced before. I continued walking down the chamber to its bottom left where I squeezed through a hole that brought me into the second small chamber with the 3-meter pitch that can be down climbed. From here we continued through the rift to the waterfall pitch. I started screwing the first two anchors on the right, while I was cleaning the blood in the cold water of the waterfall. I rigged a Y-belay and saw the next anchor on the roof. I told Phil to continue bolting, so we decided to ignore this anchor and to descend to the two new bolts that were partially protruding from the cave wall on the right of the waterfall and that had been bolted by Al Warild in a recent visit to the cave. After rigging the cave there with another Y-belay, Phil descended the pitch. When I descended it, I again felt some splashing of the waterfall on my face, but I decided to go on. I took the rigging gear and decided to rig the next pitch. When I started screwing the first screw of the next pitch, part of the rock where the screw hole was fell down. I tried to screw the anchor as deep as I could, but obviously not the whole length of the screw would be inside the hole, so the hanger was not very steady and compressed against the rock. Fortunately, this anchor is made of two hangers, so I was not very concerned about the situation. I installed the third screw (rebelay) and descended the pitch. I continued with the 55-metre rope that I used to descend the pitch rigging the rift. It took me more time than expected to screw the bolt in the roof of the cave. I waited till everyone arrived where I was and then I descended the rift.

Raining cavers and dolines.

At the bottom of the rift I could see that the amount of water flowing in the cave was increasing more and more. I decided to go on anyway. I found the next hole to install the next screw at the bottom of the rift and I did the traverse to the two bolt holes that Alan had made in January 2020. I started working on them even before Phil had descended the rift. I prepared a Y-belay with the next rope and started descending the last pitches series to the mapped bottom of the cave. I screwed and rigged the next rebelay and descended to try to find the one on the top of the 24-metre pitch. I was looking and looking at the wall trying to find the reflective tape that is always attached to the red cap that covers the screw holes in the wall. I could not find it. I knew that I did not have enough rope out of the bag to descend the 24-metre pitch, so I continued looking for it. Then I saw something metallic. It seems that the last person who derigged the cave had not removed this hanger due to its difficult position. I tried to reach the hanger, but I couldn't. I decided then to swing on the rope trying to reach it with my hands. At the beginning I could touch it. Then I could grab it although the swing was so strong that the hanger slipped through my fingers. Then I could insert one of my fingers in the hole of the hanger. However, when I tried to substitute my thick finger for a maillon, I always finished swinging to the other side of the pitch. After several attempts, I decided to prusik to the top of this 6-metre pitch and to let Phil to do it. He struggled a little bit too, but he could finally do it using a chain of two maillons. While we were waiting for Phil, Mark arrived at the top of the 6-metre pitch. As soon as he landed, he started feeling very cold (in this pitch you get some water splashing too) and after studying the 6+24 metre pitch and the waterfall that falls parallel to the rope, he decided to start prusiking and leaving the cave. I told him that he took the right decision and while he started going up, I started descending the pitches to the bottom of the mapped cave. Once I landed to the bottom of the 24-metre pitch, I felt again quite a lot of water splashing on my face coming from the top. I went through the passage that brings you to the dry area of the cave and unloaded my pack. I showed Phil the 1990 continuation that is marked with the pink tape tied by Alan in our last January 2020 trip and asked him if he wanted to continue with the "new" pitches (they are not new and were explored in the 1990s, but I call them so because they do not appear in the 1984 book caving map). Phil answered me wisely that it was not safe to be only two people bolting and rigging in the cave and that he did not feel comfortable. I agreed, despite the fact that this was exactly what David Myles and I had done in our first successful bolting trip in this cave. However, I was concerned about Mark and his Cordura suit. I opened the two dry bags where I was carrying my drill and the drill bits to remove its battery to bring it back to the surface, just in case I could not recover the gear in the following days. I also left my rigging gear and the STC hammer in my yellow rigging bag underneath the ropes that I found there. It is curious how our memory plays with us. All this time I was sure that we had left a 60-metre rope that Alan and Serena forgot to take on their last derigging visit to the cave in winter 2020. However, I found a 37-metre rope, a 9-metre rope and a 17-ish metre rope. I also left a 67-metre rope that I was carrying for the two "new" pitches.

I started prusiking the pitches and Phil was following me. While I was prusiking, I realised that the amount of water that was falling was increasing more and more since we had descended. When I reached the waterfall pitch (the second pitch of the cave), I got soaked before reaching Al Warild´s bolts. So, once I reached them, I decided to use one of my krabs to create a rebelay with the peculiar anchor that David Myles had bolted in December 2019 and that even Alan Jackson had not removed in his derigging trip with Serena. We exited the cave and met Mark. We left our harness and SRT gear at the dry area of the cave entrance and walked the way back to the car. We were more than happy to get changed by the car without being in the rain.

That night, Mark told us that he wanted to have a break next day, so Phil suggested to have a nice tourist visit inside Growling Swallet. People who know me are aware that I have been caving in Tasmania several times already. I have taken part in some cave diving projects as a dry support caver and visited some classic caves. However, I have missed most of the beginner caves and the initial part of Growling was one of them. Yes, I have never been in Growling, and this would not change in this trip.

The next day, Mt Tyenna appeared covered in snow. We decided to go to Growling and have an easy day in that cave. We did not have the key for that gate, so we had to park the SUV at the main road and walk on the road all the way to the carpark and from there to the cave. It had been raining heavily the whole night long. When I reached the cave (I had seen the entrance of Growling once in a previous trip to Dissidence when we had missed the turn to the Serendipity valley) I got shocked. I did not know that the river to the cave was so wild that even rafting in it could be dangerous. I waited for the others and we approached the entrance of the cave on the right side to avoid being dragged by the water. Once we reached the entrance, we saw dangerous hydraulic currents and white water everywhere. The river hit a boulder and jumped one metre to fall into the cave entrance. It was quite spectacular. Obviously, descending into the cave was impossible, so we decided to make the call to return to the car. When we crossed back to the track, we realised that in just 20 minutes while we were watching and taking videos and pictures of the entrance of the cave, the water level had increased even more.

Old friends reunited. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

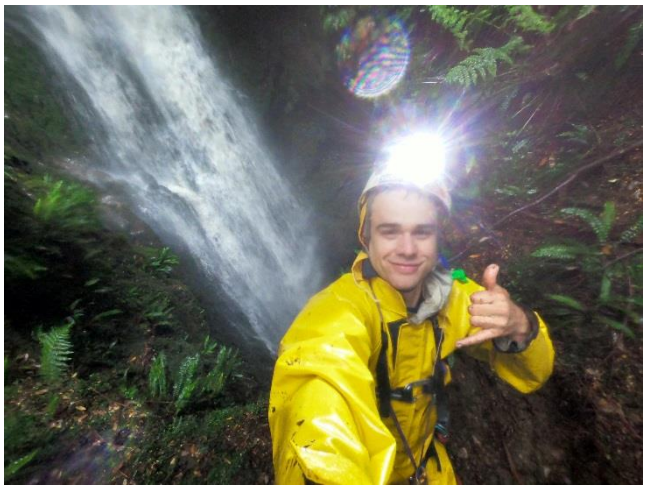
That afternoon, as our caving plans had been ruined, we decided to do something different. We always focus on caving when we go to Tasmania and nothing else. So we decided to visit Lake Pedder dam and Lake Gordon dam. When we arrived at the end of the road at Lake Gordon dam it was snowing. We came back to Maydena and then Stephen Fordyce and Gabriel Kinzler arrived at our AirBnB. Gabriel brought us an additional 40-metre rope for NP and Stephen

showed us his latest inventions in the tracing detection world. He is a really clever guy! It was very nice to see them again like in the old times. David Myles arrived a little bit later while Phil cooked us some pasta for dinner (this time with much more than the one that we ate the day before that had just tomato sauce (I need to improve my Spartan shopping lists). Mark continued feeling too wet, however I knew that with David Myles in the team, Phil would be keen to try to bottom the cave again. Stephen showed Phil all his secrets about the JF hydrology and gave us a little bit of fluorescein to be dropped at the entrance of NP the following day. It rained the whole night long one more time.

Absolute madness. The video footage of this is some of the most incredible I've ever seen. -Ed

The following day, Phil, David and I went to NP with the intentions of bottoming the cave. The snow had been falling to 600 metres above sea level. Soon we could hear the noise of the waterfall at the entrance of the cave. It was funny because it sounded similar to the Cauldron Pot waterfall. Once we reached the cave, we could see that the trickle that usually falls into the entrance boulders was a full waterfall. Phil started laughing. I picked up both his and my harnesses and SRT gear. David started taking GoPro videos of the situation. Then Phil decided to drop the fluorescein that Stephen gave us. There was so much water that it did not taint the main water flow at all. Then we thought about the ropes. Usually we rig the cave in such way that the end of one rope is in the maillon where the next one starts. This allows us to reduce the number of bolts and to protect the end of the ropes. However, this is not always possible if the pitches are not very close to one another. David Myles and I decided to rescue the rope from the first pitch. While David was taking a video, I slid through the entrance boulders. I could not see anything apart from four curtains of water, one after the other that soaked my body completely. I was just wearing a thin thermal underneath my PVC suit.

When I reached the bottom of the entrance, I could only see white water around my feet. There is a hole in that area that directs the water to the first ramp where the water falls, creating a waterfall. I could not see that hole, but I was determined to reach and save the rope. I did not want to get an angry response for ruining the first rope rigged in the cave. I coiled the rope at the top of the first pitch and decided to come back to the surface. It is good to know this cave, because there was so much water that I could not see the usual daylight that you can see at the entrance chamber. I crossed the four curtains of water on the way back to the surface and I was more than happy to see Phil again. Once outside the cave, Phil told us that the waterfall was rapidly increasing. We decided to go to Cauldron Pot to see the entrance waterfall. It was impressive!



Cauldron looking legit.

We came back to Maydena and started washing our gear. Stephen and Gabriel came back a few hours later. We had dinner together like in the old times and went to sleep.

I had planned to do the typical and great Tarn Shelf trip with Mark and David the following day. However, it was impossible with all the fallen snow and the clothes and gear that we had. We had to make an alternative plan for the following day. Phil went back to Hobart very early in the morning to fly back to Sydney, while Mark, David and I farewelled Stephen and Gabriel. The three of us visited the Russell Falls. Then we decided to do something that Stefan Eberhard recommended to me a couple of years ago. As we had to go to Mole Creek for our next canyoning trip, we decided to do it via the central Tasmanian lakes and their alpine territory. We were very lucky that Mark was with us. He worked before at the Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens and knows a lot about plants and their environment. Obviously, as we are a little bit childish, as soon as we found snow by the road, we stopped to throw snowballs one to each other. It was great to discover trees like the pencil pine and all the endangered plants of the alpine area. As soon as we arrived in Mole Creek, we visited the pub and had dinner. We prepared our gear and decided to do Machinery Creek canyon the following day instead of Dove Creek for safety reasons as with all the snow melting down the dangerous hydraulic zone in Dove Creek could be tricky. Mark decided to skip the canyoning trip too. My friend Lauren Hayes decided to join our canyoning trip. Machinery Creek is not an impressive canyon. Actually, we did it in less than 3 hours. However, it made our day considering the circumstances. Lauren gave David and me a lift back to Launnie where we were going to take the plane back to Sydney. As David suggested, one of the most notorious places in town is the monkey park. So, we spent half an hour looking at macaques of Launceston.

Well, I must confess that despite the rain, despite the snow, despite the cold, despite the floods, it was great to come back to my favourite state in Australia and to see some of my caving friends again. Besides, now I have a very good reason to come back to Tasmania at the end of May and to rescue the gear and ropes left in NP. I just hope that next time the weather will respect me a little bit more.

Other exciting stuff

The significance of sample sites for monitoring the ecological health of Exit Cave

Stefan Eberhard

This article was prompted by recent interest in the history surrounding the old water quality monitoring equipment in the Western and Eastern Passages of Exit Cave. Amid plans for removal of the old water equipment, a suggestion was also made to remove the small stringlined quadrats located in the stream beds nearby. Unlike the redundant water equipment however, these quadrats continue to serve an important functional purpose for monitoring aquatic cave fauna. Firstly, some background context.

When the Lune River limestone quarry was operational sediment-laden runoff and pollutants flowed directly from the quarry into Bradley Chesterman Cave and caused local extinction of its stygofauna (Eberhard 2001). In the mid-1980s this was the main, localised, impact known to be occurring to the Ida Bay karst, along with the quarrying away of ASF Pot, a small shaft in the middle of the quarry.

The outstanding faunal and geomorphic values of the adjacent Exit Cave system caused it to be inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1989. At that time there appeared to be no obvious risks to Mystery Creek Cave and Exit Cave, both situated within a kilometre of the quarry, however the south side of Marble Hill behind the quarry had been little explored for caves and there was speculation about the origin of the large Eastern Passage in Exit Cave (Spate and Houshold 1990). In 1990 a proposal to expand the quarry operation southwards into an area of deep unexplored potholes on Marble Hill triggered further cave exploration and a series of environmental studies including water tracing which proved that the stream in National Gallery, and more surprisingly, water sinking in the quarry, flowed all the way into Exit Cave.

Little Grunt Cave, so named after a particularly awkward and strenuous squeeze at the top of one of its pitches, was pushed through a constriction to breakthrough into a major base level trunk passage which barrelled off towards Exit Cave. This was a very significant caving discovery which bolstered the case against the proposed quarry expansion.

Multiple impacts were observed including: increased sedimentation of fine clays in Little Grunt and the Eastern Passage of Exit Cave; recurrent turbidity in Eastern Passage and Exit Creek; changes in pH, conductivity and sulphate concentrations; acidified waters from oxidation of sulphides in palaeokarst fills exposed by quarrying and reduced densities of aquatic cave snails in stream passages draining the quarry (Houshold 1992).

The fine clay sediments impacted stream habitats by smothering the natural hard-bottomed stream beds which typically consisted of cemented coarse gravels. The deposits of fine sediment limited the distribution and abundance of small aquatic snails, which only dwelled on the hard-bottomed gravels and not on the soft-bottomed clay sediments. Quantitative studies of the snail populations confirmed a significantly lower density of snails in sediment-affected streams (North Tributary and Eastern Passage) compared with nearby reference streams (South Tributary and Western Passage) (Barmuta 1989; Eberhard 1999, 2001) (Figure 2). This research finding significantly strengthened the case for immediate closure of the quarry.

The obvious impacts to cave ecology, combined with the potential for impacts to other outstanding natural heritage values of the Exit Cave system, forced closure of the quarry in 1992. A quarry rehabilitation program commenced which sought to minimise further erosion and restore native soil, vegetation and infiltration characteristics. Monitoring of snail populations and water quality continued twice yearly over an initial period of three years in an attempt to detect ecological and hydrological recovery.

During the initial three years of monitoring, no evidence for an increase in snail densities at the impacted Eastern Passage sites was detected (Barmuta 1989). This may be because the recovery of snails from sedimentation, and possibly other water quality changes, will be a slow gradual process. Recovery may be impeded because significant amounts of mobile clay sediments from the quarry remained in the cave stream. Water quality changes may also have affected the snails, which build a shell of calcium carbonate, and are thus prone to pH changes and acidification. It could take many years and even decades for the quarry sediments and sulphides / sulphates to be flushed through the cave system, if at all.

One of Barmuta's recommendations included repeating the three-year sampling program sometime in the future, to see if snail densities in the Eastern Passage have increased in comparison to those in the Western Passage. Resampling these study sites would increase understanding about the resilience of cave stream fauna, and their capacity to recover, or not, from sedimentation impacts. Thirty years down the track this remains an intriguing research question that serves a practical conservation management purpose.

Fig. 1 Snail monitoring quadrat site in the Western Passage, Exit Cave. Photo: Stefan Eberhard

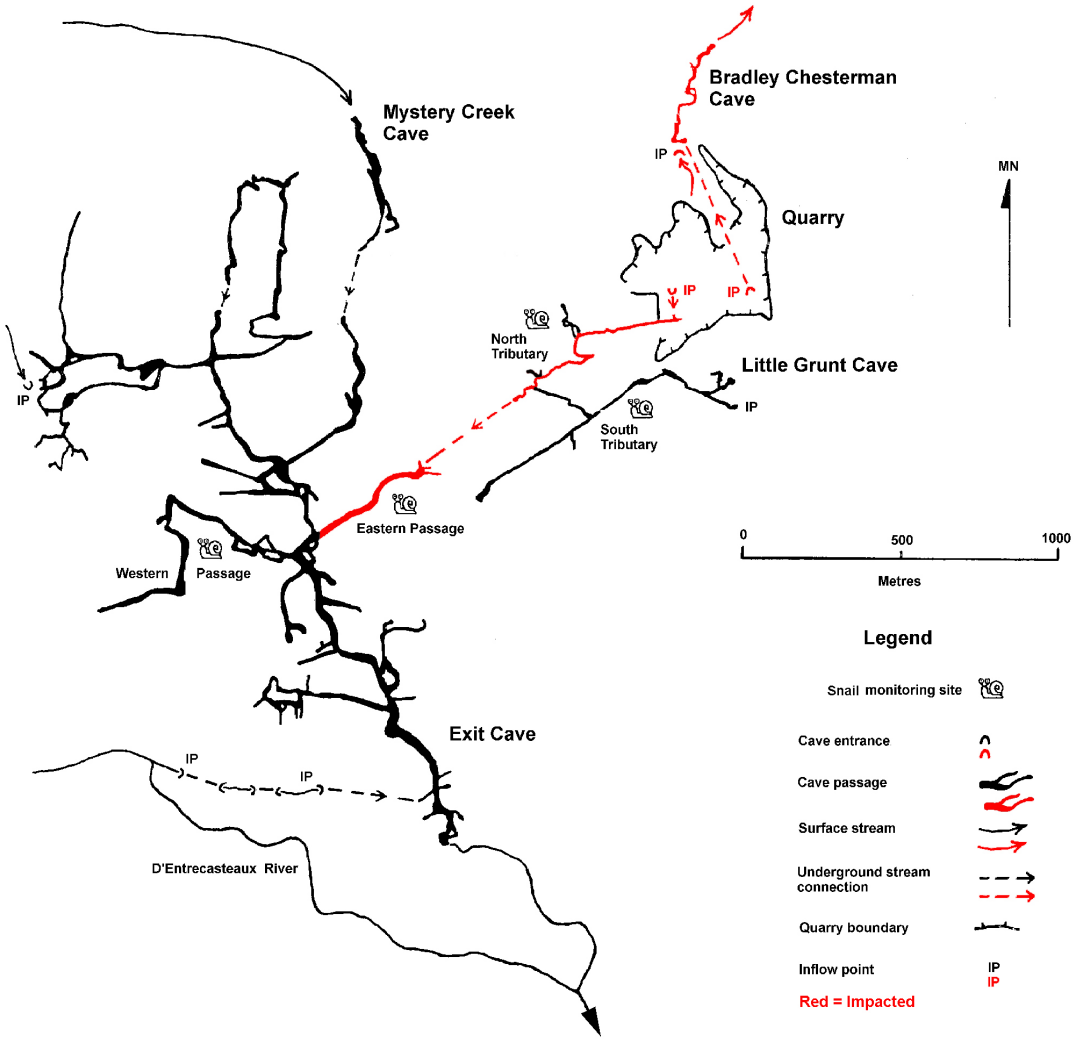


Figure 2: Ida Bay karst system showing the quarry in relation to mapped caves, surface streams and inflow points, underground stream connections established by dye tracing, snail monitoring sites. Modified from Eberhard (2001).

So, to the present. The small stringline rectangles in the stream beds of the Western and Eastern Passages of Exit Cave, and in Little Grunt Cave, are important quadrat sampling sites for monitoring the population densities of the snails (Figure 1). The quadrats can be used at any time in the future to monitor and assess the ecological health and recovery from impacts originating from the Lune River quarry. In the mid-1990s a decision was made by the Parks and Wildlife Service to retain the quadrats for this reason. If the stringline marking the quadrats is removed then the option for sampling replication will be lost.

A broader important finding from this research is that these aquatic snails, which include many species in the Family Tateidae (formerly Hydrobiidae), are sensitive indicators of sedimentation and potentially other water quality and trampling impacts in Tasmanian cave systems generally. The snails, and their habitat, are very vulnerable to being trampled underfoot by cavers. In Loons Cave for example, most of the snail habitat has been severely impacted / destroyed by trampling, and undisturbed habitat is limited to passages not visited by cavers. These tiny snails, typically less than 3 mm long, are barely visible to untrained eyes, yet they play an important role as 'sentinel species' for assessing aquatic cave ecosystem health, including impacts that may be originating from far away, as well as impacts close by.

The stringlines demarcating the quadrats serve a double purpose: (1) Alerting cavers to the presence of the sample sites, so they can avoid trampling and disturbing them; (2) Providing for future monitoring with sampling replication. The lack of sampling over the last two decades does not diminish the importance or value of the quadrats for future research and monitoring.

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DT-18 Sixpence Cave, Waterworks Reserve, Hobart

Greg Middleton (text and images)

The fact that there was a small sandstone cave called Sixpence Cave in the Waterworks Reserve (or perhaps more correctly, Ridgeway Park) in South Hobart was brought to my attention when it was visited by STC members as part of a car rally in 2009 (Jackson 2009). In that report it was referred to as "a lovely little sandstone cave (locally referred to as Sixpence Cave)", and it was illustrated by two photos, of the entrance and the interior, by Arthur Clarke, but, in good speleo style, the location was not revealed.

The cave is, however, frequented by rock climbers at times as its overhanging entrance provides a bit of a challenge – and they are far less circumspect about revealing locations (e.g. theCrag n.d.). Armed with information from this site, Ros Skinner and the author set out on 23 July 2020 to find this cave and survey it.

With very little difficulty we located the cave on the ridge south of the Upper Reservoir, and surveyed it (Figure 1). It's located in the Derwent Region (under the new background regions for numbering non-carbonate caves) and received the number DT-18.

A few photos will give a fair impression of this interesting cave (Figures 2, 3, 4).

Figure 2. Entrance to Sixpence Cave – Ros Skinner provides scale.

Figure 3. Sixpence Cave entrance – view from the south. Old fireplace in foreground.

Figure 4. Looking out entrance, Sixpence Cave.

SIXPENCE CAVE DT18

WATERWORKS RESERVE, DERWENT REGION, TAS.

STC Map No.
7DT18.STC453

mag. N
July 2020

PLAN

dripline

roofline

face drawn on roof

stump

rock

A

A'

3.8

2.2

1.5

1.6

1.1

0.6

0.8

fireplace

sandy floor

break in

eucalypt

0 1 2 3 4 5

scale in metres

Cave length: 9 m

SECTION A-A'

Surveyed by Greg Middleton
and Ros Skinner 23 July 2020
using Suunto compass, inclinometer
and Disto X310
Drawn by Greg Middleton 16 Aug. 2020
using Microsoft Excel and EasyDraw 9.5
on an Apple Macintosh
© G.J. Middleton 2020

KEY
direction of downslope
(9.5) height of roof (m)

Figure 1. Plan and section, Sixpence Cave DT-18, Waterworks Reserve.

Figure 5. Panoramic view from rear of Sixpence Cave, showing intricate erosion patterns in the roof, sandy floor and ridges resulting from more resistant beds on ridge.

I could find no historical references to this cave, though it must have been known for a long time, but, with a little perseverance, Ros was able to ascertain that it was named by a local bushwalker, John Grist of Hobart Walking Club, in the 1980s after a sixpence (the Imperial version of 5c) was found there.

John was later contacted by someone from the then Lands Dept. and the cave was put on their maps (initially in the wrong place) (Ros Skinner, pers. comm. – following discussion with the namer).

The cave is mentioned and illustrated on a number of bushwalking websites but no background information seems to be provided.

The website 'theCrag' (n.d.) reveals what a rock climber sees when presented with a small sandstone overhang (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Entrance to Sixpence Cave as seen by a rock climber – just a series of routes. (source: theCrag, n.d.)

REFERENCES

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theCrag n.d. Waterworks Cave: All bouldering. Retrieved from:
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Maps

JF-118

Junee-Florentine, Tasmania

7JF118.STC488

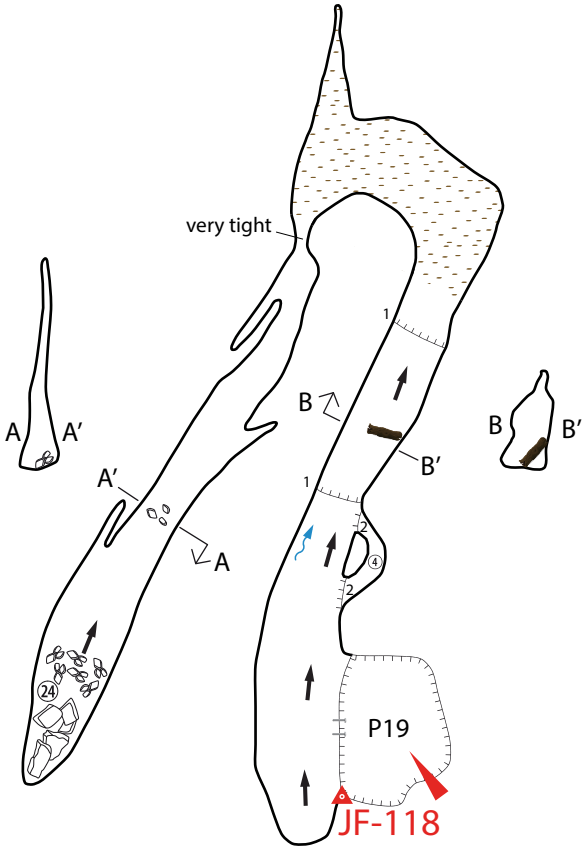
Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

ASF Grade 22

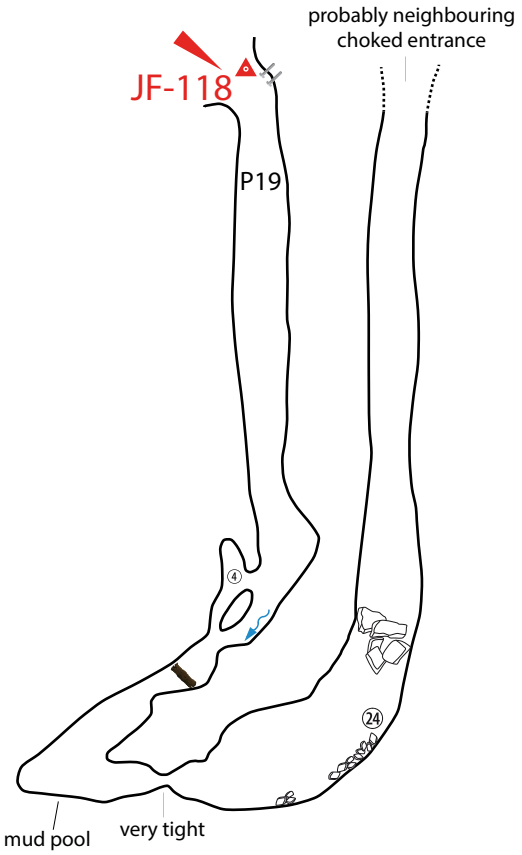
Surveyed by Gabriel Kinzler, Luke Dimsey, Mickael Packer (05-03-2021)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (April 2021)

PLAN



DEVELOPED SECTION



LEGEND

- passage wall
- passage wall - conjectural or continues (tight/low)
- drop off/ledge - with height (m)
- ceiling height (m)
- section (with view direction)
- direction of floor slope
- entrance
- cave tag
- 6 mm bolt holes
- large rocks/boulders
- log/timber
- mud feature
- water direction of flow

JF-708

Junee-Florentine, Tasmania

7JF708.STC489

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

ASF Grade 22

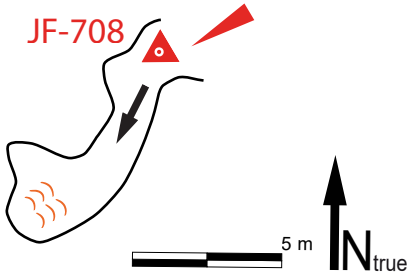
In-cave notes by Gabriel Kinzler (21-01-2021)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (April 2021)

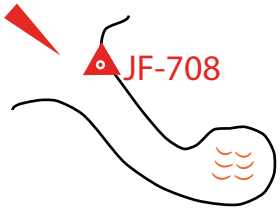
LEGEND

- passage wall
- direction of floor slope
- entrance
- cave tag
- flowstone
- log/timber

PLAN



SECTION 330° - 150°



JF-709

Junee-Florentine, Tasmania

7JF709.STC490

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

ASF Grade 22

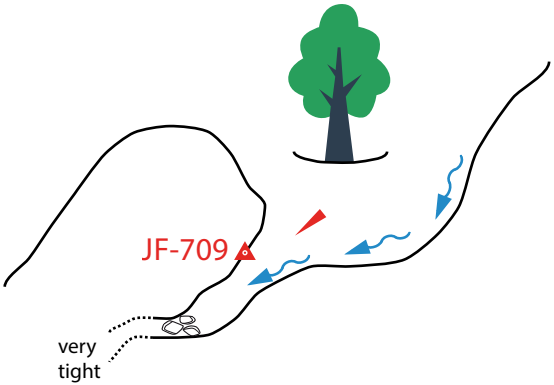
In-cave notes by Gabriel Kinzler (21-01-2021)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (April 2021)

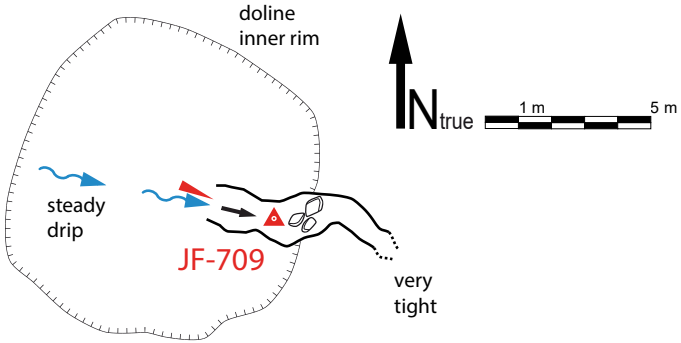
LEGEND

- passage wall
- passage wall - conjectural or continues (tight/low)
- direction of floor slope
- entrance
- cave tag
- large rocks/boulders
- water direction of flow

SECTION 20° - 200°



PLAN



JF-710 (Sour Hill Series)

Junee-Florentine, Tasmania

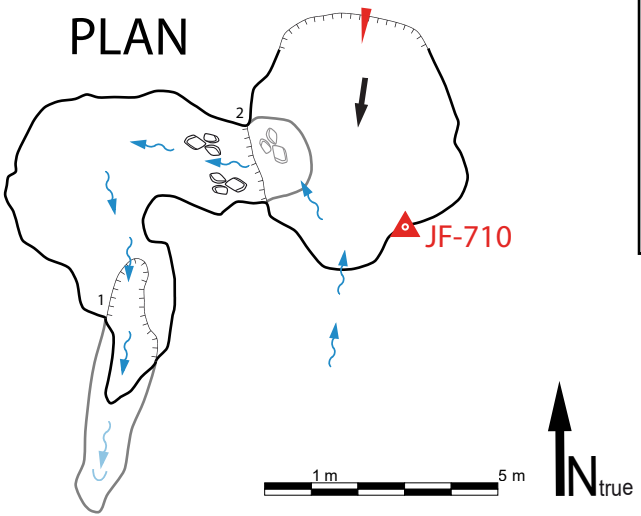
7JF710.STC491

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

ASF Grade 22

Surveyed by Michael Packer, Gabriel Kinzler, Luke Dimsey (05-03-2021)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (April 2021)



LEGEND

- passage wall
- passage wall - underlying passage
- drop off/ledge - with height (m)
- direction of floor slope
- entrance
- cave tag
- large rocks/boulders
- water direction of flow
- water direction of flow (outlet)

JF-711 Anytime (Sour Hill Series)

Junee-Florentine, Tasmania

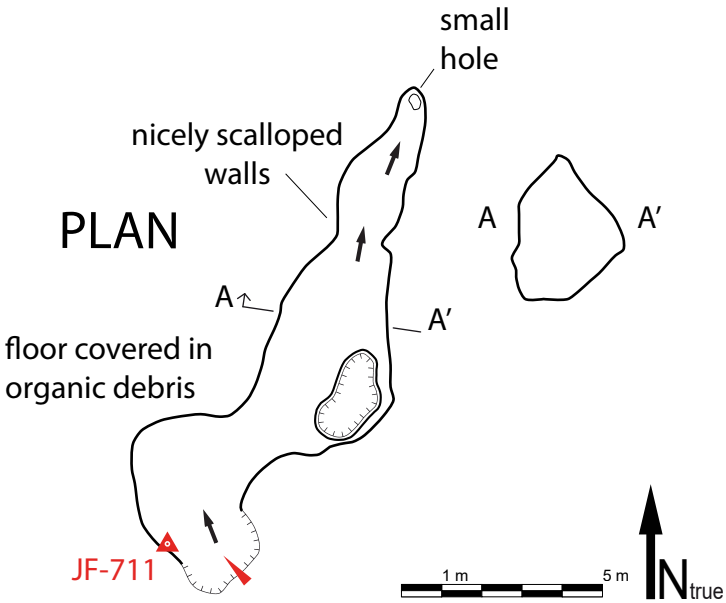
7JF711.STC492

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

ASF Grade 22

Surveyed by Michael Packer, Gabriel Kinzler, Luke Dimsey (05-03-2021)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (April 2021)



LEGEND

- passage wall
- drop off/ledge - with height (m)
- daylight hole
- section (with view direction)
- direction of floor slope
- entrance
- cave tag

JF-712 & JF-717 (Sour Hill Series)

Junee-Florentine, Tasmania

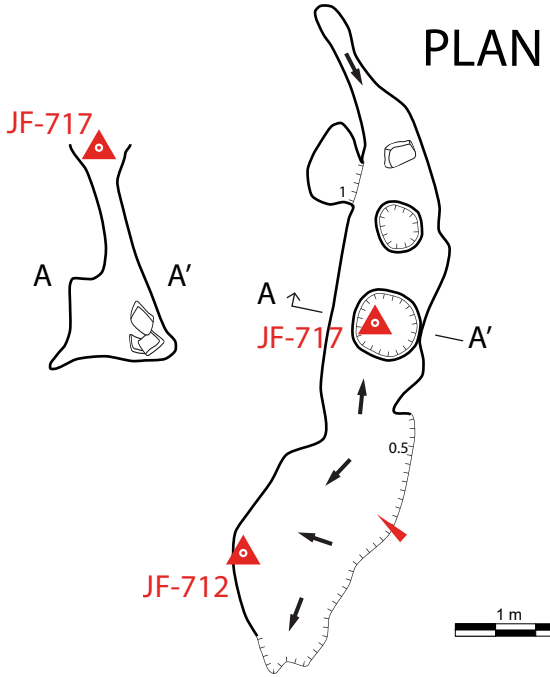
7JF712.STC493

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

ASF Grade 22

Surveyed by Gabriel Kinzler and Michael Packer (05-03-2021)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (April 2021)



LEGEND

- passage wall
- drop off/ledge - with height (m)
- daylight hole
- section (with view direction)
- direction of floor slope
- entrance
- cave tag
- large boulders/rocks

JF-713 Latrines (Sour Hill Series)

Junee-Florentine, Tasmania

7JF713.STC494

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

ASF Grade 22

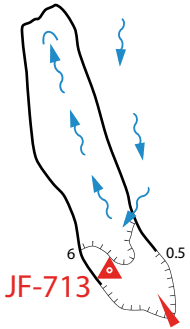
In-cave notes by Michael Packer (05-03-2021)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (April 2021)

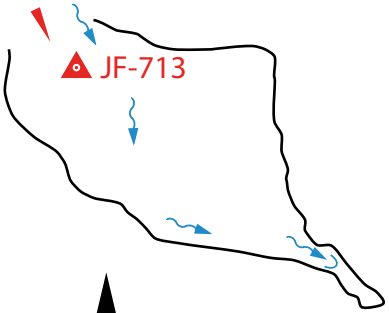
LEGEND

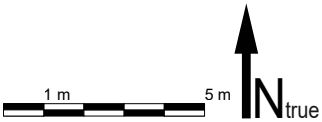
- passage wall
- drop off/ledge - with height (m)
- entrance
- cave tag
- water direction of flow
- water direction of flow (outlet)

PLAN



SECTION 70° - 250°





JF-715

Junee-Florentine, Tasmania

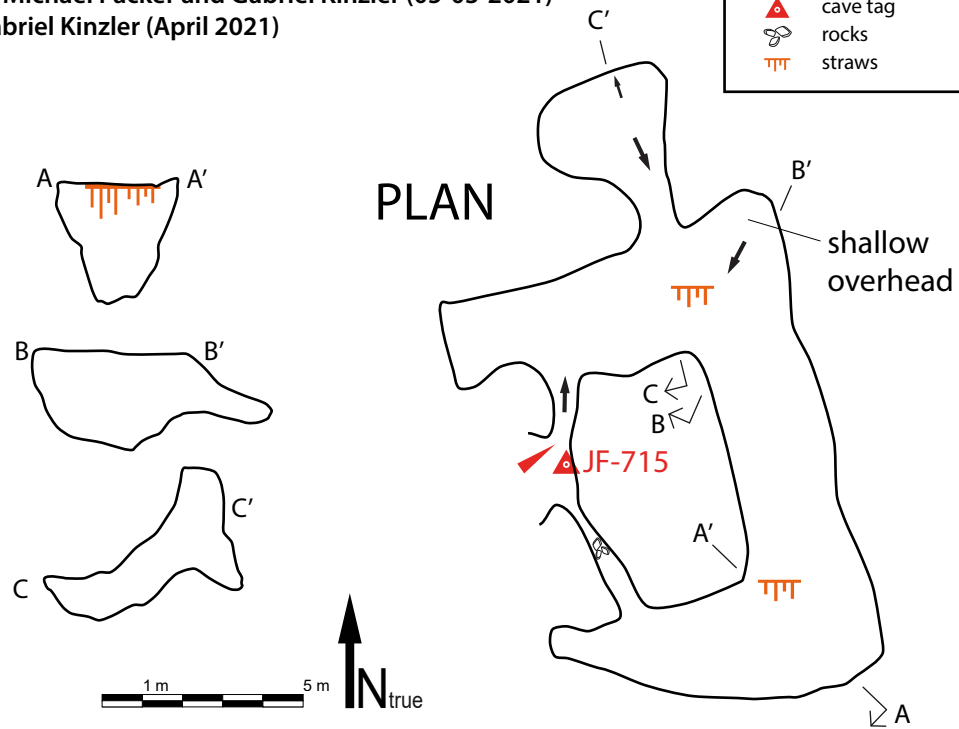
7JF715.STC495

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

ASF Grade 22

Surveyed by Michael Packer and Gabriel Kinzler (05-03-2021)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (April 2021)



JF-716 (Sour Hill Series)

Junee-Florentine, Tasmania

7JF716.STC496

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

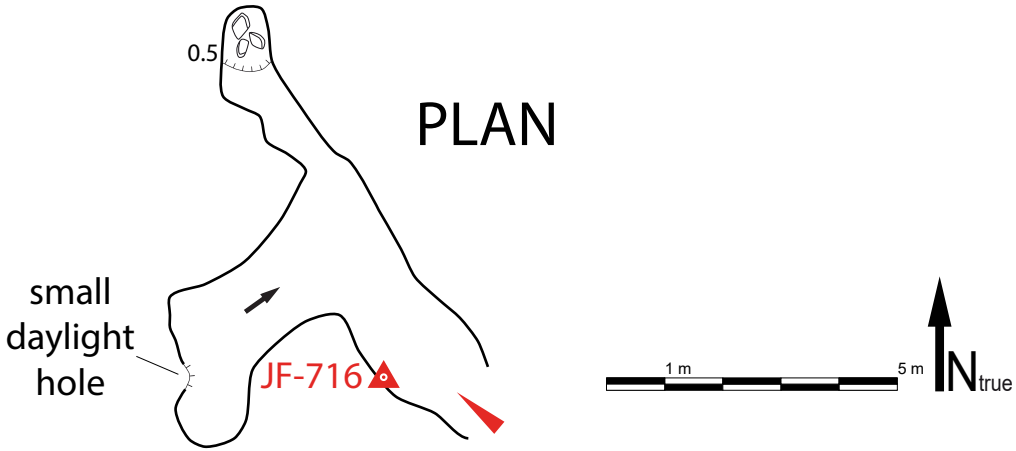
ASF Grade 22

Surveyed by Luke Dimsey (05-03-2021)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (April 2021)

LEGEND

- passage wall
- drop off/ledge - with height (m)
- direction of floor slope
- entrance
- cave tag
- rocks



JF-718

Junee-Florentine, Tasmania

7JF718.STC497

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

ASF Grade 22

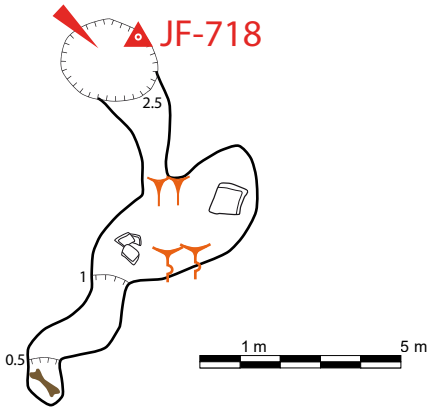
In-cave notes by Gabriel Kinzler (05-03-2021)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (April 2021)

LEGEND

- passage wall
- drop off/ledge - with height (m)
- entrance
- cave tag
- large rocks/boulders
- stalactite
- shawl
- fauna remains

PLAN



Fun and Diversions

Comic

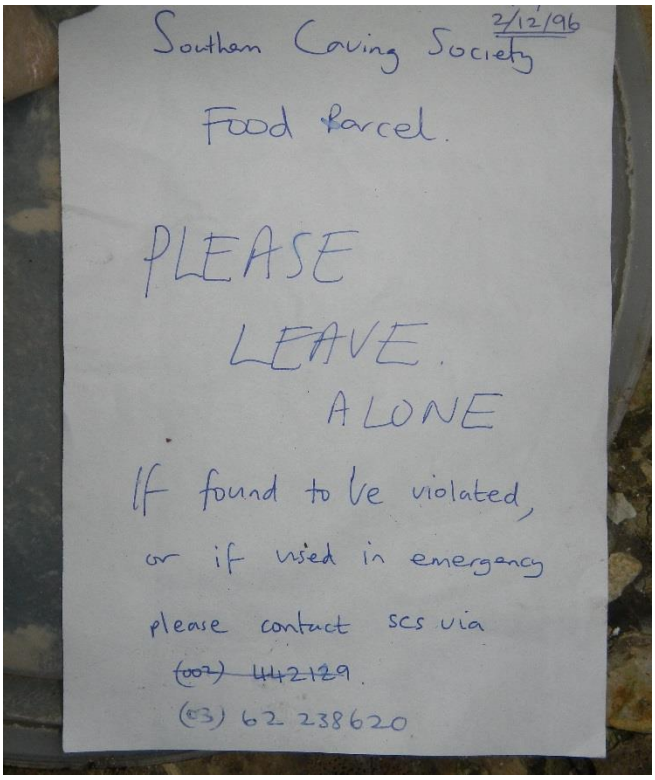
Original comic by Tom Gould, adapted by Janine McKinnon.

Rolan's Junk

The Editor is thinking of starting a new section in the *Spiel*, showing off Rolan Eberhard's various discoveries of litter in caves. This should act as a lesson of what not to do underground. But also, it's hilarious. Here is his newest submission.

"In July 2018 I found a drum of SCS food stashed under a boulder at the bivvy site [at Arrakis, -Ed]. The note in the drum dates the stuff to Dec 1996. Some images attached.

We decided it was just cave junk so we took it out of the doline, unpackaged the food and buried it. Tessa was amazed at the natty 20th century roll-top using key sardine tins!"



The Last Page