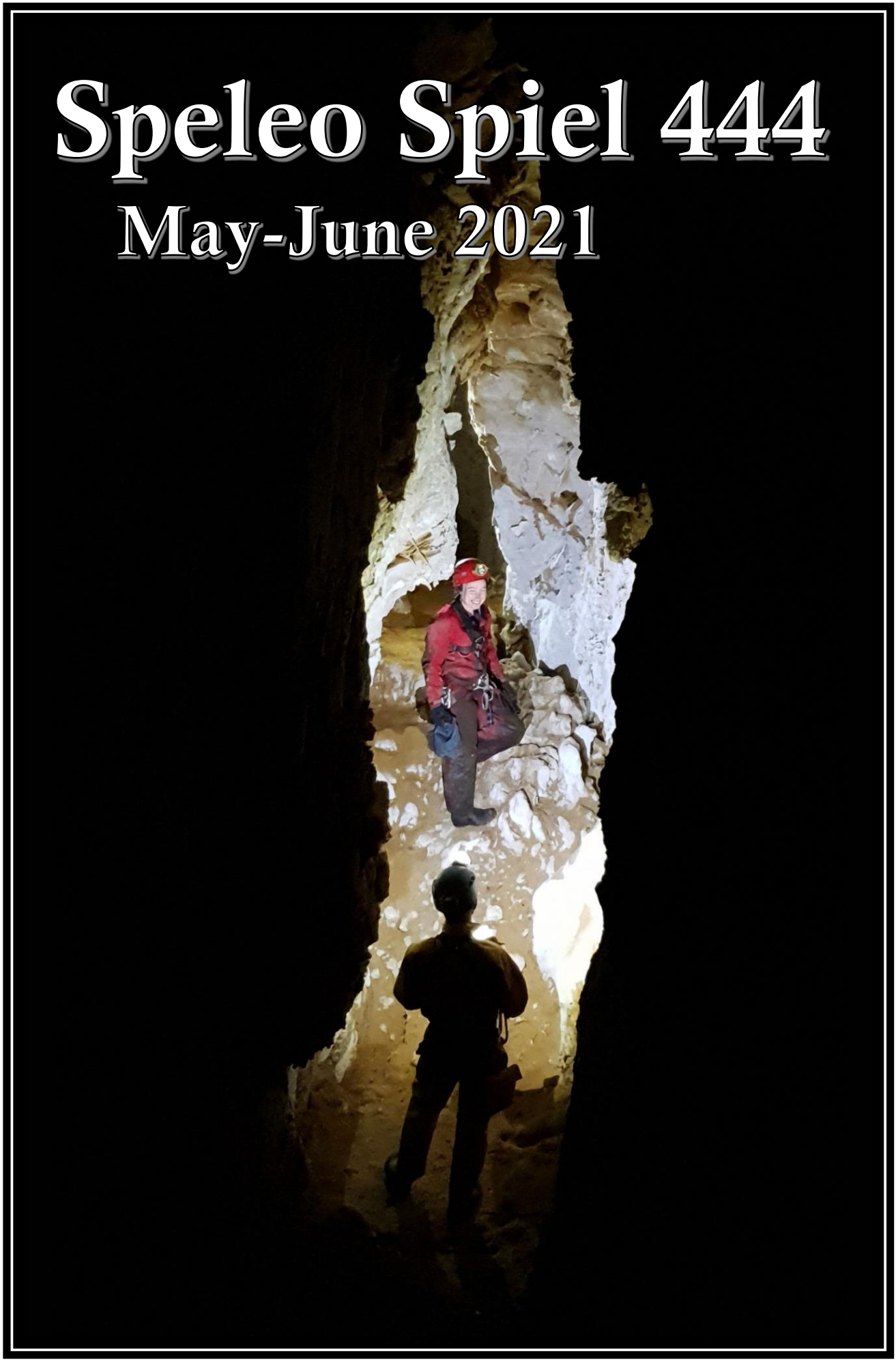
Speleo Spiel 444

May-June 2021



Newsletter of Southern Tasmanian Caverneers Inc. ISSN 2208-1348

STC Office Bearers

President: Chris Sharples
Ph: 0408 396 663
Chris.Sharples@utas.edu.au

Vice President: Gabriel Kinzler
Ph: 0473 388 344
gabrielkinzler@hotmail.com

Secretary: Russell Fulton
Ph: 0427 956 297
FultonRL@bigpond.com

Treasurer: Karina Anders
Ph: 0478 228 639
karina_anders@hotmail.com

Equipment Officer: Alan Jackson
Ph: 0419 245 418
alan.jackson@lmrs.com.au

Librarian: Greg Middleton
Ph: (03) 6223 1400
ozspeleo@iinet.net.au

Spiel Editor: Gabriel Kinzler
Ph: 0473 388 344
gabrielkinzler@hotmail.com

Search & Rescue Officer: Gabriel Kinzler
Ph: 0473 388 344
gabrielkinzler@hotmail.com

Archivist/Webmaster: Michael Packer
Ph: 0427 039 198
IamMichaelPacker@gmail.com

Public Officer: Bill Nicholson
Ph: 0417 139 259
w.r.nicholson59@gmail.com

Social Secretary: Phil Jackson
Ph: 03 6243 7038
pmjackson@dodo.com.au

Front Cover
Exploring MW-18.
Photo: John Oxley

Back Cover
The rearguard.
Photo: Bill Nicholson

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

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Issue No. 444 – May-June 2021

Contents

Editorial

Could this be the biggest ever issue of *Speleo Spiel*? Maybe someone with more spare time than me can crunch the numbers. Consider yourself lucky, I had nearly 40 more pages to add, but they will go into the next one.

Of course, it's not at all about quantity. Fortunately, there's plenty of quality material for you to digest this month. Enjoy!

Stuff 'n' Stuff

Overdue party in Mole Creek

There was another overdue party recently, this time in Soda Creek Cave, Mole Creek. Alan Jackson commented: "I think the lesson in yesterday's situation is the need to improve communication around call out times and trip expectations. All members of the party and the designated call out person need to be aware of what the call out time is. I was surprised when the answer to my question […] 'what time was callout set at?", was 'we didn't specify one'… So I guess not only do we need to have an established call out time which everyone is aware of, but we also need to aim for positive confirmation that the call out person has received and understood the message that the caving party is safe."

Owl Pot news

Rolan Eberhard submitted the photo below, which highlights the ancient owl roost deposit at Owl Pot (arrowed). He says: "Some time back, Petr [Smejkal] mentioned that the flagging tape which formerly marked off the bone-rich sediment cone had gone missing. Serena and I have since put in a standard string barrier. We also ran a string line up to the base of the first pitch, to define a single route across the soft mud (yes, the horses have pretty much bolted, but it seems worth a try)."

Photo: Rolan Eberhard

Welcome Stranger key

PSA: now there is a new gate on Welcome Stranger, the key has changed and you will need to contact David Holley at Parks to borrow it.

Sharples reports now in Archive – By Greg Middleton

Between 1993 and 1997 our esteemed President produced a series of reports for what was then the Tasmanian Forestry Commission (then Forestry Tasmania and now something dreamt up by a PR consultant) on landforms and geological sites of geoconservation significance in the various forestry districts around the state. The purpose of these reports was essentially to help Forestry staff recognise special earth features and systems ('geodiversity') so they could be managed in accordance with the requirements of the *Forest Practices Code*, first published in 1993. The primary focus is upon landforms and features (as studied in geomorphology) but many geological (bedrock) features are also covered. While many features other than caves (both karst and non-carbonate) are listed and described, there is much of interest to cavers in these reports. Although the coverage is focused on State Forests (where disturbance from forestry is greatest), Chris has managed to include, or at least mention, sites of interest which extend beyond State Forests or which, though on adjoining tenures, could be affected by forestry activities. (It's a great shame that we don't have as much information on geoconservation sites in conservation reserves – though some of the areas covered, like the Junee-Florentine, have in recent years been given greater protection in parks and reserves.)

I have recently OCR-scanned and placed in the STC Archive, the following reports by Sharples in this series:

1993 A methodology for the identification of significant landforms and geological sites for Geoconservation purposes.

1994 Landforms and geological sites of geoconservation significance in the Huon Forest District. Vol. 1: Inventory; Vol. 2: Description

1994 A reconnaissance of landforms and geological sites of geoconservation significance in the north-eastern Tasmanian forest districts (Eastern Tiers & Bass). Vols. 1 & 2

1995 A reconnaissance of landforms and geological sites of geoconservation significance in the State forests of Eastern Tasmania (parts Derwent & Eastern Tiers). Vols. 1 & 2

1996 A reconnaissance of landforms and geological sites of geoconservation significance in the Circular Head Forest District. Vols. 1 & 2.

1996 A reconnaissance of landforms and geological sites of geoconservation significance in the Murchison Forest District. Vols. 1 & 2

1997 A reconnaissance of landforms and geological sites of geoconservation significance in the Western Derwent Forest District.

Thanks to Rolan Eberhard for providing copies since Chris lost his originals in the big flood a few years back.

Not in this series, but of similar interest (from Chris' own scan):

1997 Karst Geomorphology and values of the Tarkine. (Prepared for the Australian Heritage Commission and Tasmanian Conservation Trust.)

Recommended interesting reading. Just go to STC – Public > Publications > Sharples Papers.

Greg Middleton, Librarian

Trip Reports

Lower Gordon River Trip

8-12 December 2020

Greg Middleton (photos: author unless otherwise credited, maps are found in the *Maps* section)

Party: Serena Benjamin, Rolan Eberhard, Greg Middleton

In light of the Parks and Wildlife Service's decision to update the (1998) Recreation Plan for the Lower Gordon River (part of the Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park and Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area), Department of Primary Industry, Parks, Wildlife & Environment Karst Officer, Rolan Eberhard, thought it was time to clarify just what was known about caves and other karst features in the Lower Gordon area (see Fig. 1). The earlier plan acknowledges that further work is required to assess the significance of the karst values. Because of my lengthy involvement with the area (since the 1970s and 80s), he was kind enough to invite me to take part in a mini-expedition, which also included Serena Benjamin.

Historic Background

Macquarie Harbour and the Gordon River were first recorded by Captain James Kelly in December 1815 while on a voyage of discovery around Van Diemens Land (Brand 1984). Kelly named the river after James Gordon of Pittwater who had lent him the boat for the trip. Kelly noted the very valuable Huon pine that grew along the river. A penal station was established on Sarah Island in January 1822 for the purpose of exploiting the Huon pine and coal which was found on the northern shore of the harbor. The convicts also quarried limestone on the river and burned it to make lime which was essential for mortar used in building. In 1827 2345 bushels of lime were produced (Brand 1984, p. 27)[1]. At least one limekiln ruin still exists on Limekiln Reach. This may have been only the second limekiln set up in Australia to burn limestone (earlier ones would have processed sea shells, often from Aboriginal middens) after the one at Limekilns in NSW, reported by William Lawson (1821).

Charles Gould, Tasmania's first Geological Surveyor, while looking for gold in the South-West in 1860, came across limestone on the Lower Gordon and recognised its similarity to rocks "appearing again and again at intervals of many miles in distance, at Point Hibbs, the Franklin River, the great bend of the Gordon and the Florentine Valley" (Gould 1866). Despite the scarcity of fossils, Gould was able to place the limestone "at the very base of the lower Silurian system" which is close to where we place it today, in the slightly older Ordovician. At that time, he was in the process of naming recognisable beds with "the names of those districts in which they are most prominently developed, or offer especial facilities for study". In this way he came to name what was to become the archetypal karstic rock of Tasmania, Gordon Limestone.

In 1908 adventurous photographer John W. Beattie is reported to have said (Anon. 1908):

> *There is a fine outcrop of limestone at Limekiln Reach, and 12 miles from the river entrance, which in the early days was quarried and burned by a party from the Sarah Island establishment. There are two kilns still in existence, which were patched up some years ago and used, I believe, to supply the late North Mount Lyell Company during their brief term of activity.*

As Nic Haygarth (2012) has observed: "Caves were probably discovered in the limestone karst during lime burning or logging operations along the lower Gordon during the convict era." However, to the best of our knowledge there is no record of any such discoveries. Haygarth (2012) has also meticulously documented plans by BHP to mine the Gordon's Marble Cliffs (see Fig. 1 for location of features) in 1914. This proposal was fortunately rejected by the government of the day thanks, in particular, to the influence of photographer J.W. Beatie.

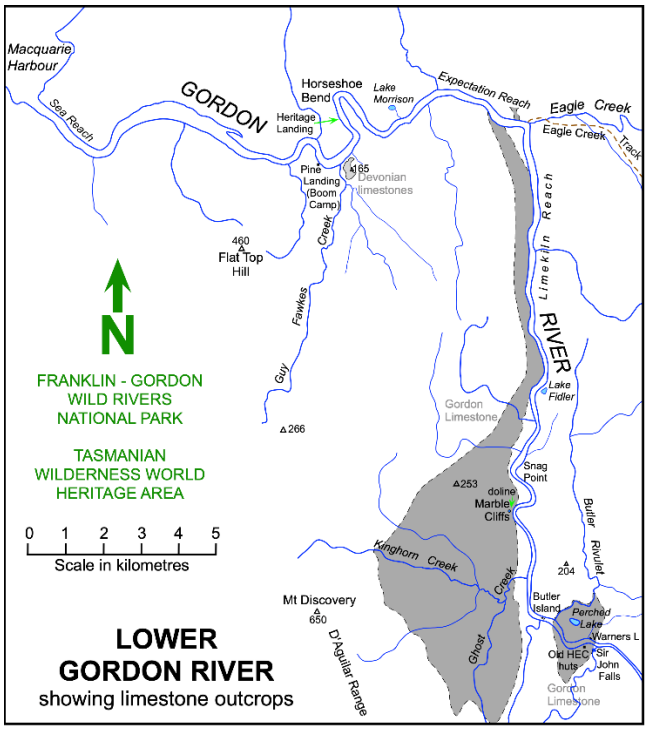

Fig. 1. Lower Gordon River map showing limestone outcrops and named features

Previous trips and recorded caves

Because of the difficulties of access and the many more easily accessed karst areas in Tasmania, the Gordon River and its tributaries have not attracted much attention from cavers. The Tasmanian Caverneering Club ran two trips to the Lower Gordon and Franklin rivers in 1959 and 1961. Unfortunately, these were particularly poorly documented. An anonymous report (probably written by Albert Goede) on the December 1959 trip says just:

[1] If my conversions are correct, this is equivalent to about 85.3 m^3. As quicklime has a density of about 450 kilograms/m^3, this represents about 38 metric tons. According to *howtopedia*, it takes about one ton of pure calcium carbonate to produce 560 kg of quicklime. So, the convicts would have needed to quarry 68.5 tons if the limestone was pure $CaCO_3$ and more since it would not have been pure. If the limestone had a density of 2700 kg/m^3, the convicts would have needed to quarry about 28 m^3 of limestone in 1827 to produce the reported 2345 bushels of lime. It was not a small operation.

CHRISTMAS TRIPS

A party of seven went caving up the Gordon and despite numerous punctures en route and some excitement when one member was caught in an S-bend all seem to have enjoyed the trip and some really good photos should be forthcoming (Anon. 1960).

Even less was written about the 1961 trip, just "… most of the club members being back at work after a very successful Gordon River trip" and "There have been a few trips since Christmas apart from the Gordon trip" (Anon. 1962).

Some information, presumably obtained on these trips, was included in *Speleo Handbook* in 1968 (Goede 1968):

LOWER GORDON

North-south trending synclinal belt of Ordovician limestone (Gordon limestone) along the Gordon River downstream from the upper Gordon-Franklin area east of Macquarie Harbour [see limestone outcrops, Fig. 1]. *10 miles long, width unknown. Dense vegetation. Cliffs along river accessible by boat. Visited only twice T.C.C. 1959, 1961. Eight small caves known. Good potential.*

A little more information about the 1959 trip was provided in Goede (1981):

… a TCC party first visited the Gordon River area in December 1959–January 1960. During this expedition the Eagle Creek Track was prospected for caves by one member of the party – Des Lyons.

No information was provided on activities in the Lower Gordon karst. The only other information that seems to be available from these trips is contained in a list prepared by Albert Goede and included in *Caves of Tasmania* (Goede, Kiernan, Skinner & Woolhouse 1973):

Named Caves:

(1) S-TRAP CAVE: small outflow cave at base of second cliff downstream from Marble Cliffs; two branches; some formation in upper one.

Unnamed Caves:

(1) Small entrance at river level; 180 metres downstream from Marble Cliffs; small creek; 18 metres of passage; one stalactite; narrow, wet and muddy.

(2) Small cave close to (1), 6 metres of passage; no formation.

(3) Old cave entrance; at top of Marble Cliffs; 60 metres above river level; blocked by collapse debris; promising dig; strong draught.

(4) Tiny cave; at river level, downstream from Marble Cliffs

(5) Small cave; in first large cliff downstream from Marble Cliffs; approx. 8 metres above river level.

(6) Small outflow cave; very close to (5); two branches

(7) Tiny cave; at river level; two entrances; in small limestone outcrop.

The next recorded speleological visit to the area was a reconnaissance trip by members of Sydney Speleological Society (SSS) and Southern Caving Society (SCS) in February 1974. Because this group was concerned to explore for caves in the area then threatened by the HEC's plan for a Lower Gordon Dam, little attention was paid to the area downstream of Butler Island, however a brief stop was made to examine a cliff on Limekiln Reach on the return journey (Hawkins, Kiernan & Middleton 1974):

Halfway between Champ Cliff [Marble Cliffs] *and the big bend we stopped to look at a limestone outcrop. About twenty metres back from the river on the west bank was a limestone cliff face going inland at an angle of forty-five degrees. We soon found a spring at the base of the cliff* ["LG8"].

About thirty metres further along the cliff we found our first reasonable size cave of the trip (LG9). Geoff and Steve went back to the boat for lights and surveying gear. We quickly explored the cave and made a grade 4 survey (see S.S.S. Map No. 419, page 192) [Fig. 2].

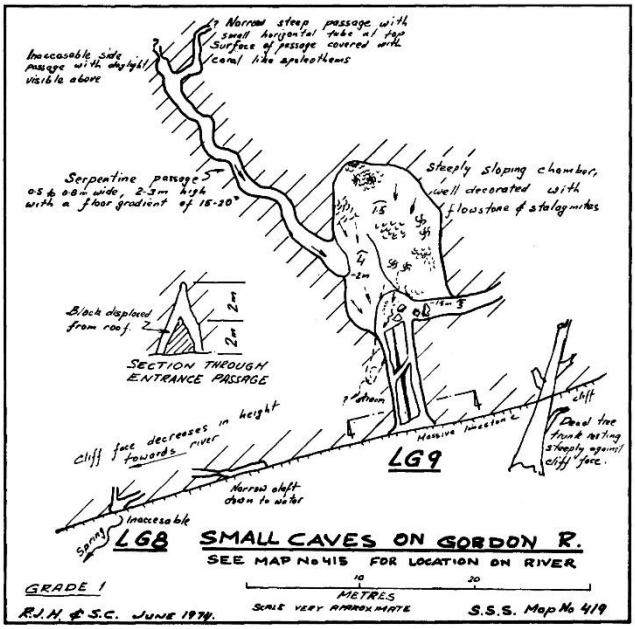

Fig. 2. Sketch plan of caves on Lower Gordon documented 1974 – from Hawkins, Kiernan & Middleton (1974)

The numbers "LG8" and "LG9" were allocated on the basis of there having been 7 entrances listed by Goede, Kiernan, Skinner & Woolhouse (1973) (though there were actually 8). None of these entrances, including those shown on Fig. 2, have been physically tagged.

Kiernan (1974) provided a "Revised cave list for Lower Gordon limestone area" as Appendix B to Hawkins, Kiernan & Middleton (1974). This included all the features listed by Goede, Kiernan, Skinner & Woolhouse (1973) together with:

LG9 Small outflow cave; negotiable for only a short distance; located 10 metres behind second set of cliffs downstream of Butler Island on western bank.*

LG10 Small cave 10 metres to one side of LG9; entrance 3 metres high and 6 metres wide; about 35 metres of passage; serpentinious upper level with daylight hole, some decoration.*

LG11 Entrance reported by H.E.C. workers on Butlers Rivulet; 100 metres upstream of river; unexplored.

**Caves LG9 and LG10 were discovered on 1974 trip.*[Shown in Fig. 2 as LG8 and LG9.]

The next speleological visit was in December 1974-January 1975. Again, attention was mainly on areas upstream of Butler Island but a brief visit was made to the Butler Rivulet karst on 31 December 1974. Bob Hawkins and Ian Sefton reported two caves, a spring and a sink (Middleton & Sefton 1975):

1. *About 750 m upstream from the Gordon River, about half the Rivulet sinks into a hole; there is no airspace.*
2. *At 1030 m there is a small spring on the southern side of the rivulet.*
3. *At around 1300 m upstream there is an overhang on the southern side with a passage going directly into the hill for about 12 m.*
4. *Near a red tag about 1450 m in is a limestone bluff with several dolines; one with over 30 m of passage.*

N.B. One of the above could be the "LG11" referred to by Kiernan (1974) as having been reported by H.E.C. workers.[2]

Distances above were taken from survey tags along the track which follows the rivulet upstream.

Following the 74-75 expedition, Kiernan (1975) proposed Butler Rivulet as a separate karst area from Lower Gordon, writing:

> *Immediately upstream of the Butlers Island damsite is an apparently fairly small limestone belt on the northern side of the river. While it has been previously regarded as part of the Lower Gordon belt it appears in fact to form a quite discreet outcrop, being separated from it by the elongate north-south ridge of which Butlers Island is a remnant. The most obvious feature of this area is a perched karst lake, some 60 m*[3] *above river level. This body of water, occupying a large sinkhole, is several hundred metres in diameter. A party briefly visited this lake and explored a number of holes in the area, one of which, in the bank of Butlers Rivulet, itself continues as quite a promising prospect.*

In *Wilderness Caves*, Middleton (1979) published a list of recorded karst features in the Butler Rivulet karst area. This is identical to the list in Middleton and Sefton (1975). Middleton (1979) also included a map of the Butler Rivulet area, sourced from the HEC, showing a 'fissure', a 'sinkhole' and 'main cave' (Fig. 3). It is not immediately apparent which, if any, of the features on this plan might correspond to any of those listed in Middleton & Sefton (1975).

The then current lists for Lower Gordon (as in Kiernan 1974) and Butler Rivulet (slightly modified from Middleton & Sefton 1975) areas were reproduced in *Australian Karst Index 1985* (Matthews 1985), with all numbers preceded by an 'X', indicating they are "temporary identification until a permanent number can be unambiguously assigned."

HEC CAVE SURVEY April-May 1983

Following the discovery of Kutikina Cave on the Franklin River and in view of the threat it posed to the HEC's dam plans, the Commission engaged in a desperate, last minute effort to find other caves of archaeological significance, outside the areas threatened by the dams, in an attempt to reduce the importance of Kutikina. The plan was not in any way successful but a few caves were located, including one on Kinghorn Creek, a tributary of the Lower Gordon. The search in that area was conducted by F.J. Baynes and party in April-May 1983. Baynes (1983) reported, *inter alia*:

> *Prior to the field work enquiries were made to local residents for information which might lead to the location of caves; this approach was not productive. Targets for search were located by the study of maps and aerial photographs and by helicopter reconnaissance. Steep breaks of slope with limestone outcrop were considered favourable areas. Such areas were then searched on foot by teams of surveyors and track cutters.*
>
> *Virtually all the target areas are covered by dense scrub or rainforest and access to these areas was predominantly by helicopter with some access by boat, 4WD and on foot. All caves located were flagged and caves considered to be of possible archaeological significance were surveyed, photographed and examined in detail. The search covered a small proportion of potential targets in a limited and non-methodical manner.*
>
> *Two further sites of possible archaeological interest were located; a 5 m diameter potentially inhabitable cave at Kingshorn* [sic – Kinghorn] *Creek ... and a potentially inhabitable 4 m overhang at Algonkian River ... . At both sites no evidence of habitation was observed although both the cave floors were obscured by large quantities of collapse debris.*

Baynes' daily diary recorded:

> *30 April* *Overcast and cloudy. Reconnaissance of Kingshorn* [Kinghorn] *Creek area, located limestone cliff. Searched area and found numerous Karstic features, small caves and one potentially inhabitable cave ... . The cave was 4-5 m diameter with a dry bottom, south case* [east?] *aspect and about 2 m from floor to roof at the rear. No evidence of habitation was observed, however, the cave was partially infilled with collapse debris. Four HEC cutters and myself.*

UNDERWATER EXPLORATION

The next recorded effort to find caves in the area was Janine McKinnon's Scuba dives at Marble Cliffs in December 2014 (McKinnon 2015). Due to the heavy darkening of the water by tannins, Janine found visibility was 15 cm at most, making exploration difficult. She did establish that there is "a groove in a wide ledge that runs along the wall just under the waterline" for around 55 m. It is effectively an underwater overhang but, while she and Ric Tunney "looked at the other holes along the wall for other potential caves," they could find no passage leading into the rock. They also walked over the area above the cliffs, finding many blind dolines and a perched lake with a dry stream course running to the cliff edge which may serve as an overflow when the lake overflows.

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[2] In fact, this is highly unlikely, if the reported "100 m upstream" is anywhere near accurate.

[3] Actually less than 40 m above sea level – see Fig. 3 – "Map 7" from Middleton (1979).

GUY FAWKES CREEK

Most of the karst on the Gordon and Franklin rivers has formed in Ordovician Gordon Limestone, but at Guy Fawkes Creek, near the mouth of the Gordon, there is a Devonian sequence, reported on by Gee, Moore and Pike (1969), which includes a lower interbedded limestone sequence (D2) in beds up to 6 feet thick and a crinoidal limestone (D3) (see Fig. 1) –

> *... exposed to a thickness of 80 feet but the base is obscured by mud flats. It probably forms the bed rock under these mudflats, although no sinkholes or depressions were seen. Small sink holes are present on the flat ledges of the small hill in the overlying rock D4 [upper interbedded limestone sequence] at an altitude of 130 feet a.s.l.*

There does not appear to be any record of anyone having investigated these 'small sink holes'.

This was the state of knowledge of the Lower Gordon and Butler Rivulet cave areas after SSS/SCS discontinued their Gordon and Franklin river trips in the early 1980s. With the defeat of the HEC's dam proposals by the High Court decision of 1 July 1983, the main threat had been removed and the relative inaccessibility of the area has tended to discourage further speleological activity.

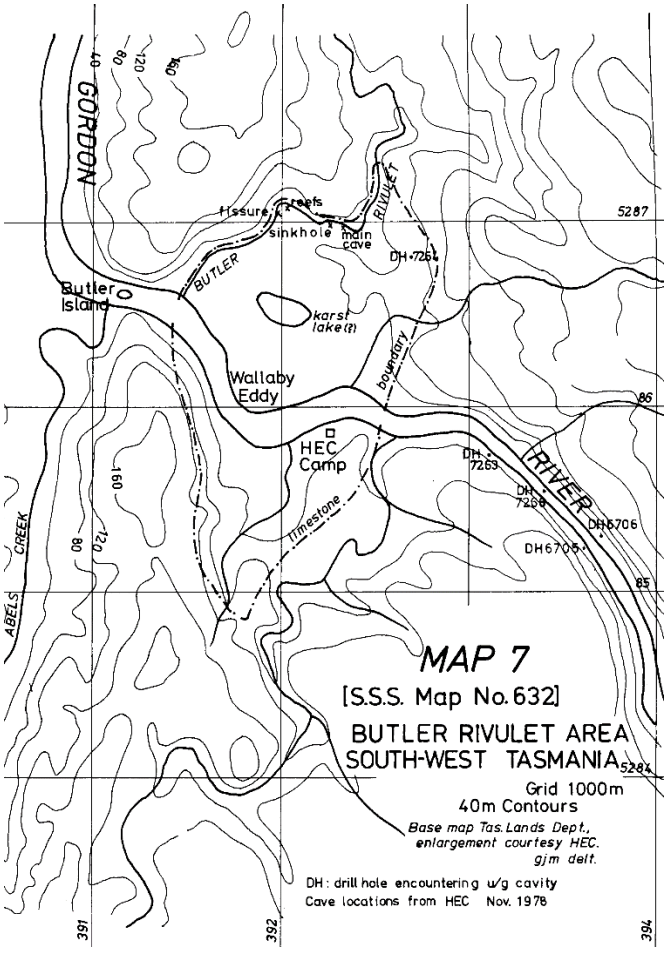

Fig. 3. Butler Rivulet area. HEC map showing its discoveries and extent of limestone – from Middleton (1979).

December 2020 trip with DPIPWE/PWS

The 'mini-expedition' to the Lower Gordon had to be concurrent with a scheduled visit by earth scientist Jason Bradbury of DPIPWE to the area to continue bank erosion studies which have been carried out on this section of river since the 1980s. As a result, our visit occurred in early December 2020.

Monday 7 December

In the afternoon Serena and I joined Rolan and Jason Bradbury for the drive from Hobart to Strahan. We put our gear into the PWS accommodation above the old Customs House in Strahan and went to Hamers Hotel for dinner. That night we enjoyed the relative comfort of rooms in the Historic Site.

Tuesday 8 December

After showering (our one bit of luxury), we were at Banjo's when they opened at 7 am for breakfast. We then took our stuff to the PWS base where we loaded it onto the devil cat, *Shearwater*. We all then moved to the (new) boat ramp where the cat was launched (Photo 1) and at around 8 we set off down Macquarie Harbour at about 50 kph. The morning was heavily overcast but with only a light breeze so we made it to the mouth of the Gordon in about an hour. Then began the slow (max. 5 knots) trip up the river. (The speed of boats on the river is strictly limited to try to prevent further erosion of sediments on the banks.)

Photo 1. Launching the DPIPWE devil cat, Shearwater, *at Strahan*

We stopped near the upper end of Limekiln Reach to look for a cave known to Jason in a bluff which can be seen from the river. We found a cave (#1) (which we later named Limekiln Reach Cave) (Photo 2), but Jason didn't think it was the one he had previously entered. (For initial reference purposes we numbered cave entrances as we found them.) The entrance was around 5 m high and gave access to a slot about 3 m wide which soon narrowed (Photo 3) – it appeared to be an enlarged joint and led up to a small daylight hole, high above. We saw cave crickets, spiders, snails and *Hickmania troglodytes*. We searched the cliff for a couple of hundred metres in either direction without finding other caves.

We continued on in the devil cat to Snag Point which Jason suggested was a good camp site. We reached it at about 13:30 and we immediately agreed it was an ideal spot to camp. We set up our tents and kitchen fly, and had lunch.

Photo 2. Jason at entrance to Cave #1 on Limekiln Reach

Photo 3. Serena & Rolan investigate Limekiln Reach Cave

At about 15:00 we set off upstream in the inflatable after a little trouble starting the outboard. We met up with Jason & James who were checking the stainless-steel rods by which erosion is monitored opposite Marble Cliffs. We went across and checked out a few small holes near water level in Marble Cliffs but saw nothing encouraging (Photo 4).

Photo 4. There were a few holes at the base of Marble Cliffs but no real prospects

Downstream of the main cliffs we went ashore at the first accessible landing place. We tethered the boat and struck inland through manky horizontal scrub and cutting grass. The ground rises steeply to the top of the cliffs and then undulates as you proceed upstream. There were many small dolines and some small valleys running towards the river. We headed for a lake that Rolan had pinpointed from the digital imagery. On the way we came across a vertical shaft (Cave #2), which we may call Champ Pot (from the earlier name of the cliffs, recalling a senior officer at Sarah Island, Ensign William Champ, who later became Commandant of Port Arthur, Colonial Secretary and, in 1856, the first Premier of Tasmania). Serena climbed in but said it got too tight (Photo 5). We pushed on in the upstream direction and found the doline occupied by a lake reported by McKinnon (2015) and noted by Rolan. It seemed remarkable that a permanent lake could exist perched about 20 m above a river in a limestone outcrop! Failing to find any other karst features, we bashed our way back to the river and returned to camp in the rain.

Photo 5. Serena investigating Champ Pot (Cave #2)

Wednesday 9 December

We agreed that we needed to check out Butler Rivulet today. Departing at about 9, we went up river in the inflatable past Butler Island to Sir John Falls. We walked up to the falls which were flowing very strongly. A track runs downstream to a former hydro camp where a group of older guys were making repairs "to maintain the heritage values" ('heritage' is clearly in the eye of the beholder). James and Jason were

working nearby and came to the landing. Serena was keen to collect some glowworm larvae (for an ongoing study authorised by Parks) but we had not seen any in the cave. Jason told us there were some on the rocky cliff just off the track to the falls. Serena was able to collect about seven.

We then crossed the river to the former HEC landing site (Warners Landing), where many protesters had been arrested back in the days of the blockade (from December 1982 to July 1983 – Law 2008). The wooden 'wharf' structure built by the HEC is still there, with a flat moss-covered area behind and a partly-overgrown road running up the valley to the north. It was about 11:45 so we had an early lunch.

We then walked up the former HEC road (now heavy mud and sphagnum) to a clearing (evidently greatly reduced in size from what it had been 38 years before). We found a taped track which we assumed would lead us to Perched Lake (the 'karst lake' shown on Fig. 3).

We followed the very wet and muddy track, eventually reaching the karst lake. Then Rolan navigated a route using GPS which would hopefully take us to the caves on Butler Rivulet reported by Goede and later, Kiernan. Once we hit the rivulet we followed the eastern/southern bank downstream. After a while we saw a limestone outcrop on the northern side and were able to cross nearby thanks to a large fallen tree (Photo 6). We soon found a small cave (#3) – which I will call Butler Rivulet Cave – which we thought would have been one of those reported earlier. (On reflection, it does not fit with any of the features recorded by the HEC as it is on the northern side of the rivulet while Fig. 3 shows all the features they reported were on the southern side; and it does not seem to fit any of the features described by Hawkins & Sefton.)

Photo 6. Serena crossing Butler Rivulet by a convenient fallen tree. Photo: Rolan Eberhard

Located right on the edge of the rivulet, the cave is a network of narrow passages with a very small stream and numerous cave crickets, but no glow worms. The walls of the largest passage featured unusual rounded nodules protruding from them (Photo 7). I carried out a survey *[see "Maps" section]* under difficult conditions as everything was wet and my glasses kept fogging up (Photo 8).

Photo 7. Passage in Cave #3 with unusual nodules protruding from the walls. Photo: Rolan Eberhard

Photo 8. Greg surveying in Butler Rivulet Cave. Photo: Rolan Eberhard.

We crossed back over the Rivulet and walked back to the boat taking as direct a route as we could until we picked up the taped track to the clearing and followed the road to the landing. We motored back down the river in rain showers.

That evening Jason came and set up his tent on Snag Point. James, as usual, slept in the devil cat.

Thursday 10 December

A little after 9 am we departed downstream for Limekiln Reach. We stopped at the first obvious limestone cliff just back from the river, where we had stopped on the first day. We had to go back to Limestone Reach Cave so I could survey it. I did this *[see "Maps" section]* while the others went exploring along the cliffline for other caves.

Photo 9. Entrance to Cave #4. Photo: Rolan Eberhard

Further along the cliff, Rolan and Serena found a waterfall with a cave (#4) immediately downstream (Photo 9). Serena, of course, had to check behind the waterfall in case it hid an entrance (Photo 10). Rolan sketched Cave #4 because he felt it was fragile and better for all of us not to go in.

Subsequently, I redrew his sketch in the style of our other surveys *[see "Maps" section]*.

A couple of metres further along the cliffline we came across another, larger, cave (#5). Part of the water from the nearby fall actually ran back into this cave, which had the largest entrance of any we found on this trip (5 m wide and 7.7 m high) but little actual passage. It did have a massive speleothem with flowstone and stalactites in the left (southern) branch and a great view out from this branch (Photo 12). I carried out a survey *[see "Maps" section]*.

Photo 10. Serena investigating behind the waterfall

Photo 12. Looking out from left branch of Cave #5.

We returned to the river bank for lunch and then took the inflatable to the next downstream bluff. Looking inland along the base of the bluff we found the entrance to Cave #6. Serena explored it and, noting many *Hickmania*, called it Cave of Spiders. The entrance has a distinctive 'A' frame shape with rock that has clearly fallen from the roof (Photo 13).

Photo 13. Greg and Serena at the distinctive entrance to Cave of Spiders, first recorded by Hawkins in 1974 – see Fig. 2. Photo: Rolan Eberhard

The passage leads to a well decorated section, containing the best speleothems we saw in any cave on this trip (Photo 14). I only partially surveyed this cave and, as we subsequently realised this was the cave reported as LG9 in Hawkins, Kiernan and Middleton (1974), it will be necessary for a full survey to be carried out on a subsequent trip. In the meantime, the reader is referred to the sketch in Fig. 2.

Photo 14. Knobbly stalactite in Cave of Spiders

We returned to the boat and started looking for the next downstream bluff but decided it was getting late and we were not sure of having enough fuel so we returned to camp.

After changing into dry clothes, we sat on our private beach (wrong – as Jason advised us – on a river it's a bar!) enjoying the first real sun of the trip before it sank beneath the horizon.

Friday 11 December

I got up about 7:45 to find Serena already finishing breakfast. Rolan decided to look for the cave on Kinghorn (or Ghost) Creek reported by Baynes (1983) following the HEC search. They had described "a 5 m diameter potentially inhabitable cave." I decided it was time for a rest day; the others would travel quicker without me. Their plan was to head west about 2 km downstream from Butler Island, across what they expected to be boggy/swampy plain, looking for the cave on Kinghorn Creek reported by Baynes.

Rolan & Serena returned about 15:00, reporting moderately easy going through rainforest and patches of horizontal scrub. They observed limestone outcrop on Ghost Creek a short distance below its junction with Kinghorn Creek. Finding no caves on the creek itself, they ascended a hill on the west bank. Several shallow dolines were encountered on the crest of the hill and one cavernous feature (Cave #7) below the crest on the eastern side. Rolan described the feature as: "Several small holes in base of a 10 m high limestone bluff on NE slope of Ghost Creek ridge and small dry overhang (not prospective for occupation). The principal holes are three narrow (~0.5 m wide) rifts trending SE for 2-6 m" (see Fig. 8). Hence Rolan named it Three Fissures Cave. This feature does not match the description by Baynes.

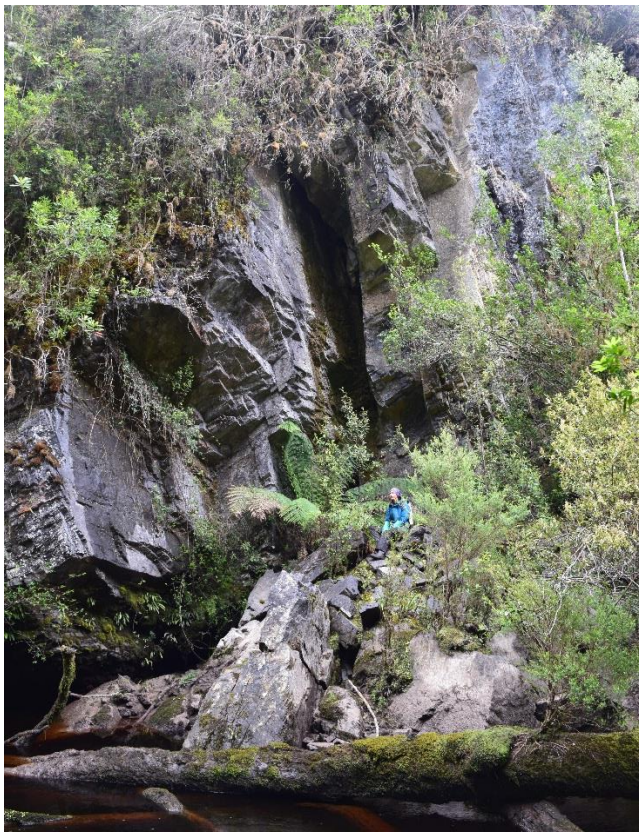

Photo 15. Limestone bluff on Ghost Creek. Serena is perched on talus formed by a rockfall which created the joint-bounded recess in the rock face behind. Photo: Rolan Eberhard.

On descending to Ghost Creek they found a 10 m high limestone bluff (Photo 16). Part of the bluff which had fallen away into the creek, creating an overhanging recess at the back (not a cave or habitable site by any normal measure). It seems possible that the bluff was spotted from the air by the HEC party and may have contributed to their decision to search for caves at this location. Although Serena and Rolan were unable to verify Baynes' report of a habitable cave, they did confirm the presence of other karst features on Ghost Creek.

Saturday 12 December

We were up by 06:45, had breakfast and dismantled our camp, packing everything into the inflatable. Leaving about 8:00, we motored down river to Limekiln Reach and looked at a small, almost hidden outcrop upstream of the large one we stopped at earlier. There was a spring from the base but no cave. We returned to the inflatable and continued down river, looking at outcrops. I tried to spot the site of the old limekiln(s) but did not.

At 10:35 we met up with Jason and James at Boom Camp (now a fishing hut site). We loaded the inflatable and our gear into the devil cat and proceeded downstream at a leisurely 5 knots, to the mouth, then 50 kph across the harbour.

At around 12:30 we reached Strahan, unpacked the boat and had lunch in the park in the main street, before driving back to Hobart.

Results

We had established the feasibility of a small, mobile investigation team on the lower reaches of the Gordon and renewed our familiarity with the area. We had relocated and better documented two caves in the Lower Gordon Area (#1 and #6) and recorded four 'new' ones (#2, #4, #5 and #7). We had also documented a cave in the Butler Rivulet Area (#3) which had probably not been previously recorded and confirmed karst features on Ghost Creek. We had not found, or at least not recognised, a number of others. Further investigations in these areas are called for.

Cave entrance numbering

Our proposal is to abandon all of the numbers that have previously been allocated in the Lower Gordon and Butler Rivulet areas and assign numbers only to caves that we can positively relocate (from GPS data). In making this recommendation we note that the existing numbers refer mostly to features with vague or inadequate descriptions and location information. This situation is confusing rather than helpful in establishing a systematic record of caves on the Lower Gordon. In due course it might be desirable to tag the relevant entrances, though this is not currently contemplated. Of course, should any of the described features be positively identified and accurately located in the future, they can be included in the list. We propose the following assignments:

LOWER GORDON

LG1 Limekiln Reach Cave (Cave #1)

LG2 Champ Pot (Cave #2)

LG3 (Cave #4, near waterfall)

LG4 (Cave #5)

LG5 Cave of Spiders (Cave #6) (formerly LG9)

LG6 Three Fissures Cave (Cave #7, above Ghost Creek)

BUTLER RIVULET

BR1-2-3 Butler Rivulet Cave (Cave #3)

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JF-706 and JF-667

January 2021

Rolan Eberhard

These two new cave numbers refer to entrances near Serendipity in the Florentine Valley.

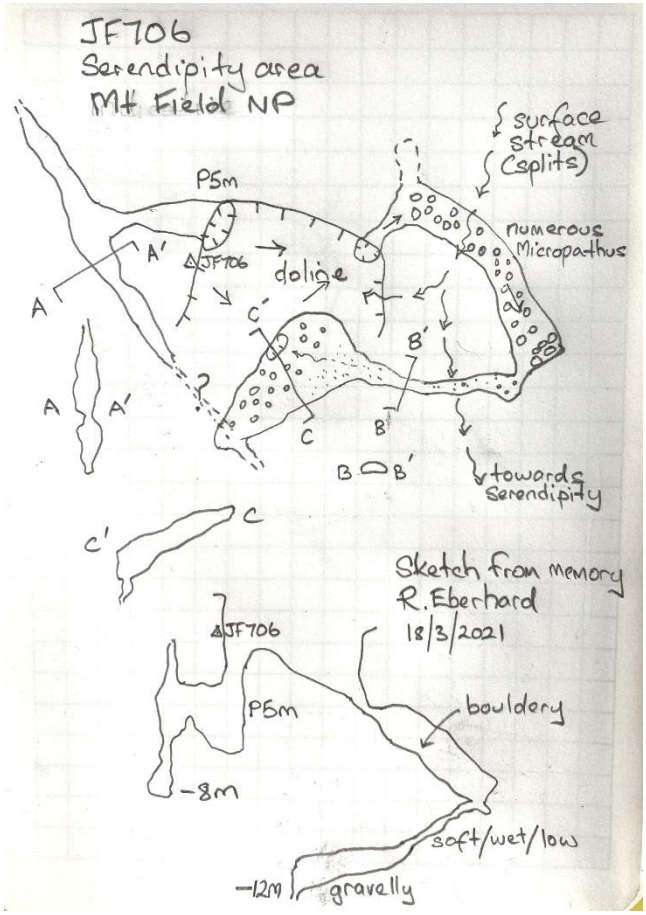
JF-706

The JF-706 doline has almost certainly been found before, being on the route between the Serendipity inflow (JF-344) and Dissidence (JF-382). The doline is the sinking point of a small seepage flow off the slope above. Interestingly, the flow bifurcates at the margin of the doline, which takes about half the water while the remainder drains downslope towards Serendipity. The doline is 5-6 m in diameter with a limestone wall on the upslope side. In January 2021 Steve Fordyce, Serena Benjamin and Rolan Eberhard noticed that a draughting hole had opened beneath a log on one side of the doline, revealing a short pitch. Steve later numbered this entrance JF-706. Serena, Rolan and Karina Anders went back in February and explored the cave, as well as finding a second entrance concealed beneath woody debris about 4 m away. In March Serena and Rolan explored this second entrance, which is yet to be numbered.

The first entrance (JF-706) provides access to a vertical rift about 5 m deep, requiring rope access. A few metres beyond the base of the pitch a second vertical rift cuts across the first, creating left and right options. The continuing passages rapidly become very narrow and are not at all promising. The cave entrance has a strong cold outward draught but this is difficult to trace inside the cave.

The second entrance (un-numbered) is a small hole at the lowest point of the doline close to where the water sinks. It provides access to a steeply inclined chute into a descending passage with a bouldery floor and many crickets. After 6-8 m this passage closes down and to continue it is necessary to squeeze around a sharp corner at floor level and enter a flattener. The crawl is initially over gravel but then enters a zone of wet sticky clay, at which point the passages commences descending at 20-30°. It continues in this manner for 4-5 m before joining a low chamber partly filled with gravel. The lowest point in the chamber is a cone-like depression in the floor against the cave wall. This hole takes the small flow of water in the crawl and seems the only real prospect for a continuation of the cave, albeit deeply infilled with gravel. Serena poked into another hole off to the side and muttered something about narrow and trending upwards.

A field sketch of the caves is attached. If the assumed distances and directions are correct, then the second cave doubles back on itself, with the result that the basal chamber is roughly underneath the doline and somewhat lower than the base of the rifts in the JF-706.



JF-667

The cave is also located on the eastern side of the Serendipity valley, a short distance uphill and north of the Serendipity inflow.

The entrance is a roomy pothole about 4 m in diameter. It is possible to climb down into the hole on one side, which brings one to a point overlooking a vertical rift. Further climbing is required to explore the rift, which becomes constricted after only a few metres.

The entrance was numbered in February 2021 but investigated some years earlier by Serena and Rolan.

NUCC Tassie Visit, Part 2 – Junee Florentine

Cavers: Lachie Bailey, Chris Bradley, Riley Baird, Corey Hanrahan, Jess Spargo, Austin Zerk, Hugh Mason (STC), Oxana Repina (SUSS), Jak Burges (MUMC), Andy Waddell, Andriana Stoddart

For a more extensive version, see *Speleograffiti* 27.1

Saturday 6 February

Lachie: Woke up early and ready to go! We had arrived at the JF at last! Unfortunately, five days of caving and running around like a headless chicken had finally caught up to me- my stuff was scattered to the winds and in such disarray that I had no chance of meeting the 9 am departure time for Junee Cave. Even when that started to creep towards 10 am, it was abundantly clear that I wasn't going to be ready to go anywhere soon, despite being desperate to go caving.

So I decided to pike and have a rest day, giving me time to organise our new camp, and sort my car out into some sort of sensibility. Plus, my cavesuit and SRT kit was still dripping with Big Tree Pot (getting out had been particularly vile and muddy in the rain after nearly a dozen caver-trips had been made up and down P1), so I really needed to clean it a bit. Chris was also after a relaxed day, so as the others headed off, we settled in to tidy up our new home under the gazebo at Left of Field. I think we did a good job – the resulting confection was happily christened the Chateau de

NUCC. We had a relaxed afternoon waiting for the threatening weather to break and soak us all… Chris cleaned all the leaves out of the Chateau to see if anyone would notice: they didn't. I think this upset me more than Chris; he was delighted that his subtle prank had worked.

The glorious Chateau de NUCC, an entirely classier establishment than the pre-existing Fortdyce. Photo: Lachie Bailey

Andriana: Oxana, Andy, Jak, and Andriana went to Junee River and JF-123. We woke up to lovely sunny skies after listening to the rain pummel our tents throughout the night. Thankfully we had the foresight to put up our tents around the puddles, however Andy still managed to get flooded (but inexplicably slept through it). After a few hours of washing ropes, we headed out to Junee River to check out the resurgence. The huge amount of rain from the last few days had led to the river being a good half metre higher than usual.

Innovative ways to ford a flooded Junee River to check Steve's habitat phone. Photo: Andriana Stoddart

We spent a good few hours helping Steve check out some of his sensors, crossing the river and trying to find detectors under the water. This included bush bashing around the river to find JF-31, to place a sensor at its mouth, as well as further downstream to catch any remaining dye from the dye tracing. Steve had given us the mission of putting dye into JF-123 and Owl Pot for his dye tracing experiments, and the sensor placements were part of it. In any case, it all went smoothly despite taking longer than expected, and made us aware of the leech problem we would face the rest of the day.

Oops, I think we might have promised Jak he'd have fun in Tassie? Photo: Andriana Stoddart

After the sensor placements, we headed out towards The Chairman (JF-99), which involved a two hour trek up through the forest along beautiful mossy taped paths. The path was very well marked until we reached the section around JF-123, so perhaps any future trips should consider bringing pink tape along. The leech situation was such that we dropped our packs to speed up the hike, which ended up being unfortunate. We had hoped to go down the first pitch of The Chairman, which was an amazing huge entrance covered in ferns. Next time! We did find JF-123 and released the dye for Steve's experiments though, so the day was a success.

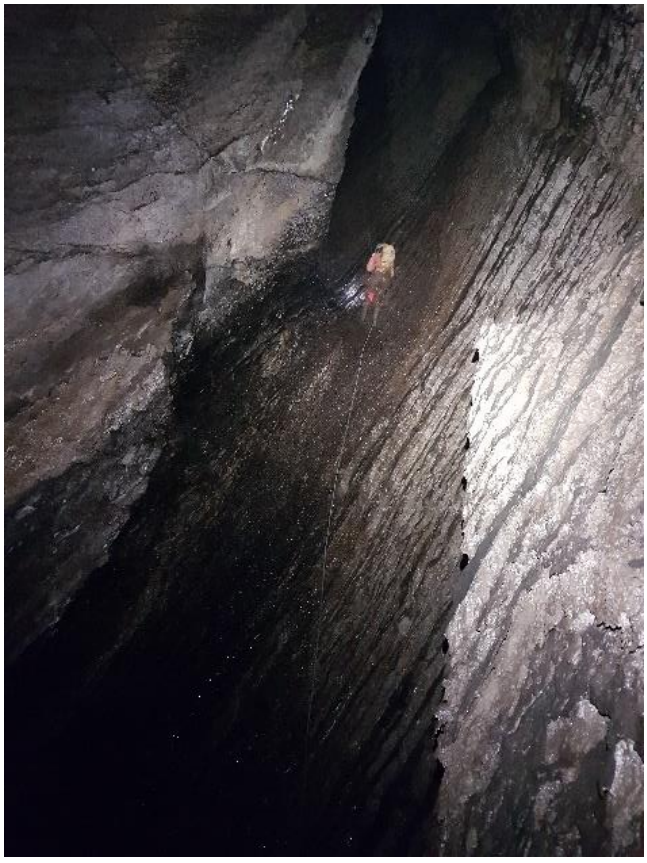
Careful or you can vanish into the rainforest. Photo: Andriana Stoddart

Corey: After an enormous amount of faffing this morning, almost the entire group (minus Lachie – who wasn't ready, and Chris – who wanted a rest day) headed to the Junee Resurgence for a look. It had rained for almost two days straight, and the Junee River was absolutely pumping! However, there was caving to be done, so Austin, Riley, Jess, Hugh and I bundled into a car headed towards Owl Pot (JF-221).

The aim for our group today was to complete a dye release at the Owl Pot streamway, between the third and fourth pitches. The logging roads were a maze of poorly labelled, somewhat overgrown trails. As a result, we struggled to find the carpark. To make matters worse, Hugh's GPS didn't show many of these trails. Eventually we found our parking spot, having driven through swathes of fern leaves along 'Nine Road'.

Reaching the cave entrance, we were unsure if we were looking at Owl Pot as no tag was visible. However, the rigging instructions seemed to fit the description, the bottom of the first pitch featured flagging tape marking an owl roost.

In the cave itself, I had a chance to rig my first deviation and Y-hang. Apparently, they were alright - there were no casualties on rope for the day! Other highlights included an interesting vertical squeeze, some cool speleothems and countless shiny water droplets reflecting the head torch light.



Pleasant caving in Owl Pot. Photo: Corey Hanrahan

By 4 pm we had reached our turn-around time, the stream still not in sight. After some discussion, we decided to push on for another 10 minutes. Exactly 7 minutes later we were pouring dye into an amazing looking stream, turning it a brilliant green colour. Despite my desire to continue downstream to the fourth and final pitch, we had run out of time, and turned around to head back to the car.

Jess on her way up and out of Owl Pot. Photo: Corey Hanrahan

Hugh: Everyone was up by 7:30 am and keen to get going, Lachie and Chris decided to have sloth days (this was about the point we discussed reinvigorating Ric Tunney's Speleo Sloth ranking system that Lachie had encountered whilst reading back-issues of *Speleo Spiel*) to rest and reorganise themselves. Once we were all fed and caffeinated, we headed to Junee Resurgence (JF-8) to be tourists (but also to do some work for Stephen Fordyce). We all headed to the cave entrance to be greeted with a torrent of water flowing out, it just so happened to have rained in the upper parts of Mount Field the preceding days. The river looked to be about 10 cm higher and with the extra flow you couldn't see the bottom. After some time taking photos and admiring the sheer power of the system, we headed back to the car park where one group was charged with fiddling with dye detectors that Steve had left, while myself, Corey, Austin, Riley, and Jess loaded into my car and headed to Owl Pot (JF-221) to rig it and do a dye release into the stream way.

Armed with a GPS point and a map out of *Vertical Caves of Tasmania* we drove out in search. We did get lost trying to find the correct road, stumbled across an echidna and then drove all the way to Westfield Road, before driving back to the start of Nine Road. We eventually found the 'right' turn off (fourth right, and has a sign pointing to Westfield Road), and drove upwards through a fern forest and muddy 4WD tracks. Although we did get lost one more time after accidently driving past the parking area. Once we doubled back, we unpacked, and made the long and hard five-minute walk to the cave entrance. I rigged the first pitch using a log (as backup/approach), slinged a solid looking rock and P-bolt. It was definitely a pitch to be done quickly, very muddy. At first we couldn't find a tag, but all the rigging notes lined up.

Jess and Corey rigged the second and third pitch off P-bolts, so it was very straight forward. Here is where I discovered NUCC's love for teaching the Figure-9 knot, it made a

continuous appearance in Owl Pot (*Lachie:* The Figure 9 on the bight is the best knot. Fight me.) Overall the cave was very pleasant, a couple of off vertical pitches, passageways on an angle and small squeeze above the third pitch. We descended and walked through some more slanted passageway, at this point it was 4 pm, and originally in the car I said we should turn back first at 3 pm and then 4 pm. But as we were already deep into the cave, I said we should keep going for 10 more minutes, and soon after we heard the rumble of the streamway. It was an impressive sight given all the rain we'd had; everyone was super keen for the dye release (and so was I). Pouring it, we watched the water turn green and flow off towards the Niggly Cave (JF-237) and down the valley. Job done, we headed out, and it was a bit slow going but made it back before dark and back to camp to a cooked dinner (which I couldn't eat, culprit was sour cream).

The Owl Pot streamway, the goal of today's caving trip.
Photo: Corey Hanrahan

Sunday 7 February

Austin: Today started like any other with me waking up, getting dressed and having breakfast. After a fairly uneventful morning we got to driving to the cave. Once there we cave suited up and put on our harnesses and headed to the mouth of the cave. After a gruelling three-minute walk to the first pitch, we started to descend.

The first pitch of Owl Pot was very muddy on the way down but is more of a climb than an abseil, the section between pitches 1 and 2 has a very pretty wall where there are tonnes of small water droplets which light up when lit with a headtorch. The second pitch is a bit difficult to get on to but has a very nice descent which can be a bit wet. Once at the bottom there is a bit of a horizontal walk with some rock hopping and you get to two small climbs. The climbs are easy enough and have a bit of water on them, but are nothing to write home about. There were a few climby bits where I like to implement my favourite climbing method. I call this method the beached whale method. It involves lying down to maximise surface area and then scrambling up any way one can.

There was a little squeeze through some rocks to get to the top of Pitch 3 but not too bad. Pitch 3 was an abseil at the top but turned into a climb section at the bottom. After a bit more horizontal caving and some crawling and getting lost we managed to find the stream way and walked along that to get to the top of Pitch 4.

Pitch 4 was a great abseil and had a wonderful view of the waterfall over the pitch. At the bottom there was a nice wind from the waterfall and we decided to see if we could find the sump. This involved some crawling and walking through mud, and we found the sump but it was nothing resounding.

What a resoundingly astounding sump…
Photo: Hugh Mason

We made our way back to the bottom of the first pitch without any troubles and started our way up. I always find prusiking much harder than anything else in a cave. After reaching the top of the Pitch 4 I made my way to Pitch 3. Oxana had gone ahead but once I had made my way to the top of Pitch 3, I found her there wondering which way the squeeze was to get to the next section of the cave. I found out yesterday that the squeeze was a bit tight to get through with my harness on, so I took it off, got through, and persisted on.

I thought Oxana had gotten ahead of us but, as I went to take off my jumper, she came in the passage behind us. She told us that she had gotten lost but after overtaking us and me affixing my jumper around my waist we made our way to the second pitch. After getting up the climbs and getting a bit wetter we had made it to the bottom of Pitch 2. After doing another prusik we had gotten to the top of Pitch 2. And finally, after some walking and another muddy climb out of Pitch 1, we had made it back to the top of Owl Pot. While our bodies were unchanged our minds would forever be different.

We then went to Tassy Pot. I went a bit of the way down the first pitch, was told to leave and stood around freezing my ass off. It was much worse for Hugh and Lachie, as they had to derig and cart the rope out of Tassy Pot.

Hugh: Did not expect to have a mini epic today. Headed into Owl Pot (JF-221) again with Austin and Oxana to rig P4 and

check out the waterfall and sump. Lachie, Andriana, and Jak headed to Tassy Pot (JF-223) on the other side of the road. The plan was for us to do the rest of Owl Pot and then head into Tassy Pot, which was to be rigged by the others for an 'easy' day. We made good time to the streamway (~45 minutes) and Oxana rigged the last pitch. It was a nice abseil next to the waterfall into a large chamber. The section to the sump required us to climb though the rock pile and do some interesting climbs and squeezes. The rockfall was caked in a thick layer of dirt, which became super muddy once wet. The sump was very unimpressive, a small pool into a rock wall with a muddy bottom. Headed out and left it all rigged.

Found Tassy Pot after getting a little lost, but with a 1-minute walk from the road it's very convenient. I shouted down expecting to hear or see someone, with no answer I descended to see where the others were. The rebelay at P1 was very short, so it required a little rope trickery to pass. The connection between P1 and P2 was also very awkward- a small pendulum was needed. I got to the bottom and inspected P3 and decided that we shouldn't all descend the cave, as it required a slightly sketchy down climb above a 4 m 'climb', which the others had rigged. I eventually met up with the other group as they were coming up. Oxana got a bit stuck on the rebelay and small pendulum, asking if she wanted to come further, she declined and headed to the surface. I heard Lachie had a jammed carabiner on the second rebelay of P4, so I descended with a spanner in hand to unjam it.

Some oaf with a bad haircut about to rig P4 of Tassy Pot.
Photo: Andriana Stoddart

The fourth pitch was really awesome but with my mission I didn't have much time to properly check it out. After a couple of hits, the carabiner moved freely, and I started the long climb back up, in retrospect I do wish I had gone to the bottom of the last pitch. However, it had already been a long day, and I had over 150 m of climbing to do, plus derigging the cave. The climb out was very exhausting especially with an extra 10 kg of rope attached (120 m of 9.5 mm). Lachie struggled on the rebelay of P1 for a solid 5 minutes (the joys of fighting with a stuck carabiner), while I chilled at the top of P2. On my way up P1 I almost had a loose fern dropped on me but luckily it stayed put and I climbed out safely (I did kick it down afterwards to remove the hazard). I did feel pretty wrecked once I got back to the car, chucked the rope on the ground and collapsed next to the car, definitely slept well that night.

Monday 8 February 2021

Hugh: I had a rest day after the Owl-Tassy Pot epic, we cleaned rope, gear, and ate a lot of food.

Hugh (and everyone else) having a rest day.
Photo: Lachie Bailey

Oxana: I fondly recalled the kilogram of Tasmanian raspberries that had been purchased on a SUSS Mole Creek trip a few years ago. Hence, after noticing the Westerway Raspberry Farm just down the road from Left of Field on the drive over from Ida Bay a few days ago, I fabricated a rest day for the purpose of giving the raspberry farm a visit. There was a vague excuse of needing to clean gear and rest before the Growling-Slaughterhouse trip scheduled for tomorrow, but it was still an excuse.

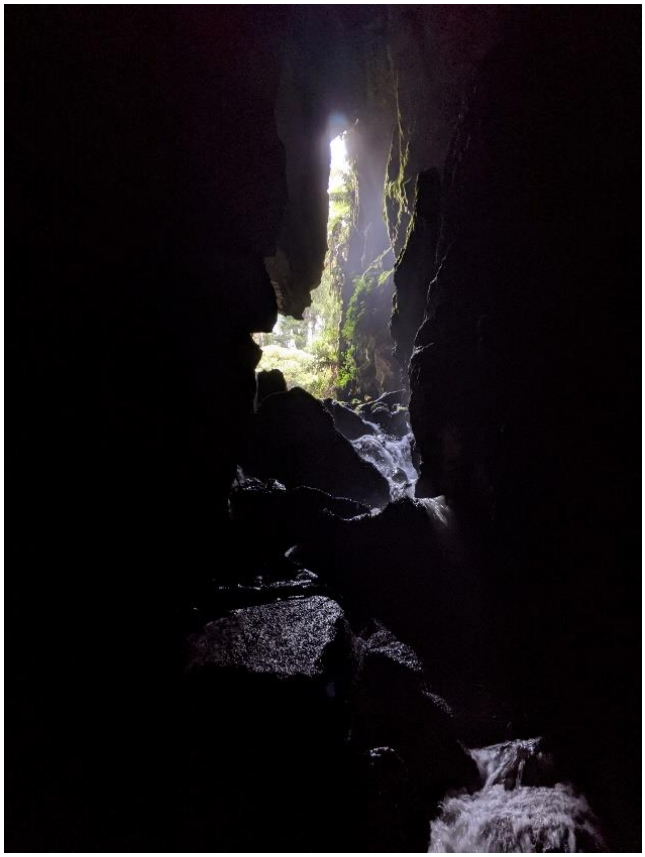
Raspberries did have to be earned somehow though, so Lachie, Jak, Austin and I drove to the Junee Resurgence for detector retrieval and attempted connection fixing. Thus ensued prolonged button-pressing, staring in confusion at coloured lights, peering at cables through bushes to test for line-of-sight, stumbling around in the river, general faffing, several phone calls to Steve, and the noble sacrifice of Austin's brand-new gumboots to the icy water. There was also the unfortunate instance of forgetting helmets and headtorches and thus resorting to using phone lights inside the Junee Resurgence like a tourist; a source of eternal shame (especially considering we were spotted by several tourists). Eventually, the tasks of the morning were finally achieved by mid-afternoon, with some members of the team perilously near mutiny, and we made it to the raspberry farm (and/or to the hammock back at camp).

The remainder of the afternoon was spent on video call with Steve trying to make sense of the detector data (unfortunately a negative result for the time being) – assisted by copious volumes of raspberries and hot cross buns. By this stage of the trip, nobody bothered to comment on the moral conundrum of hot cross buns in February. Only on the moral conundrum of consuming three to six buns per person, per day.

Tuesday 9 February 2021

Hugh: Lachie, Oxana, Andriana and myself planned to do the Growling-Slaughterhouse Pot through trip. Did most of the planning the evening before, and got packed to head off early the next morning. After arriving at the Eight Rd car park, we all got changed into caving overalls and SRT kits, considering we'd be heading straight in.

Arriving at the entrance to Growling Swallet we checked the water level, which looked as it was when I was there in early January. However, from the start things didn't look right, some of the streams flowing in did look like they had higher flows than I remembered. As we made our way down the Dry Bypass, which was quite drippy, we entered the International Chamber to see a gushing waterfall on the left, and smaller waterfalls that added to my worry. Upon inspection of the next climb, we mulled the prospect that all this extra water could have either sumped some pools lower down or at the very least raised the water to where we'd all get wet. After doing the down climbing and having a look below, I relayed what I saw to the others, and we collectively decided to bail. At the exact moment all motivation just left us all, slowly we made our way back out and to the car. However, we realised that the other group who were headed to Welcome Stranger (JF-229), which required the 'Eight Road' key. So we were stuck until they arrived to do their dye release.



The entrance to Growling Swallet is stunning. Photo: Andriana Stoddart

We did decide to have a peek in Gormenghast (JF-35), long story short it was a fairly miserable cave with lots of sharp rocks and very drippy – very much a smaller Growling Swallet. Soon after we arrived back at the car and drove towards the gate, we ran into the other group. We ended up giving Stephen Fordyce a call regarding our dye release and he gave us the go ahead. Afterwards we all headed back to camp for an early dinner and discussion of the day's exploits.

Corey: Today was a day of discovery and excitement for our group of Andy, Jack, Austin and Corey. We had planned a leisurely stroll through Welcome Stranger, followed by one of Steve's dye release experiments at the Growling Swallet entrance, then some exploring in the Growling cave. Chance (or fate) would lead to a different experience.

A slow start to the morning was compounded when we realised, 20 minutes into the drive, that the dye had been forgotten at camp! Eventually, with the dye in-tow, we arrived at the Welcome Stranger carpark. Because none of us had ever visited the cave before, we didn't realise that a flagging tape route existed. And so, we began to bush-bash our way towards our GPS coordinates.

About 10 minutes into our off-track adventure we came across a relatively non-descript hole choked with spider webs. We created a GPS waypoint, and Corey set to clearing the webs with a large stick. He then began shimmying down the soily slope and soon disappeared into the cave. Excited shouts followed; rest of the team also descended into the new cave.

Inside was impressive. The cave was filled with decoration: stalactites, straws, columns and an intriguing flowstone feature, with a human-sized hole heading further down. It was also heavily populated with at least four very large Tasmanian cave spiders. None of the cave looked trogged, and we didn't feel comfortable continuing without detrogging. The cave holds substantial promise, and we decided on the name 'Goodbye Old Friend' as a group. We will return later this week to survey and push the cave.

We followed up this discovery with an impressive Welcome Stranger visit. We thoroughly enjoyed the well-decorated cave. It is worth noting that the path out (when we eventually found the flagging tape trail) had many fallen trees. It seems like perhaps there was a recent landslide in the area.

Pretties in Welcome Stranger. Photo: Corey Hanrahan

Arriving back at the Eight Road, we ran into the other NUCC group, who had left for a Growling-Slaughterhouse through trip earlier that morning. Apparently, cave water levels were too high to complete their trip. The upside was we could all release the dye at the Growling entrance together. As usual, it looked very impressive, and we left for camp – satisfied with a successful day.

Wednesday 10 February

Lachie: I think we all got a bit pikey today. Chris and Oxana went into Hobart to dispose of Jak (he was well past his expiry date anyway). Andriana, Corey, Andy, Austin, and Hugh went up to Mount Field for a bushwalk around Tarn Shelf. I went for a drive out to Strathgordon to have a gander at Gordon Dam, as the weather was spectacular. Beautiful country to go with it too! Gordon Dam and Serpentine Dam were both looked at, and I managed to dodge sloth points for the day by walking into a 'cave' on the opposite side of Serpentine Dam. It even had speleothems!

View from the entrance the 'cave' I discovered in the Serpentine Gorge. Photo: Lachie Bailey

On the way back to Left of Field, I arbitrarily decided to drive off down Scotts Peak Road, to complete my dam trifecta and have a sticky at Mount Anne. That's some lovely mountain up there, must come back sometime for a closer look at Kellars Cellar and Anne-A-Kananda. Unfortunately, I decided to stop and take a second round of photos just before Celtic Hill. This had the rather distressing side effect of causing the dirt bank on the side of the road to crumble and pitch my X-Trail sideways down into the drainage ditch at a 40-degree angle. Oh shit, oh shit!

Jumping out, I quickly realised there was no chance of self-recovery. I'd chosen the worst possible section of ditch to get bogged in, and there was a real chance I'd roll my car if I tried snatching it. This left a tow-out as the best-worst option, and luckily two lovely ladies from Hobart soon stopped to check if I was ok. They were exceedingly kind to give me a lift out to Strathgordon, and gave me a hand as I sorted out a tow for tomorrow. Soon enough, Hugh rescued me from the lovely view in Strathgordon, and we were back at Left of Field just in time for dinner (pesto pasta again).

Hugh: Figured today would be a good non-caving day, considering it was (according to BOM) our last good weather day. So, a bushwalk was agreed on and a few of us (Andriana, Corey, Andy, Austin) headed up to Mount Field to do the Tarn Shelf bushwalk. We really were treated to the perfect day, pleasant temperature, no rain in sight. The bushwalk was divided into a couple of sections with some rock hopping, duck boards, and avoiding boggy areas. One of the highlights was seeing an echidna (we were told afterwards that it was a rare white echidna), and it wasn't bothered at all by our presence.

Everyone loves a cute echidna photo. Photo: Andriana Stoddart

Coming over Newdegate Pass we were surrounded by lots of little tarns and had spectacular views of both The Watcher and Mount Field West. Much of this section of the K Col track was on duckboards to protect the fragile bogs and mosses, which really isn't a bad thing, especially since it saved our knees for the time being. At the K Col track junction with the Mount Field West track we decided to high tail it back to the car so we'd be back in time for the pub. Unfortunately, the part over the Rodway Range was slowed down due to the boulder hopping. Everyone was feeling it in their knees and I wasn't an exception. We were glad once we made it past the boulder field and back to the main track to the car. We arrived at the pub early and I went in to check if the others had booked (they hadn't).

Stunning views across Tarn Shelf. Photo: Andriana Stoddart

Then we got news that Lachlan had car problems out near Mount Anne. He had parked on a verge to get some photos and it had given way under the weight of his car, so he had two wheels in the ditch and two on the road, but the angle (as he described) was very steep and made self-rescue too hazardous. He luckily hitched a ride with two women to Strathgordon. I decided to drive out to collect him, and definitely did so with great haste (won't have done if I had passengers). Finding an exhausted Lachlan in the Wilderness Lodge, we said our goodbyes to his rescuers and sped back to Left of Field. By which time it was getting dark, fortunately the animals we did spy had the good sense to head straight back into the bush. I would love to spend some more time out that way, particular around Mount Anne, Mount Weld, the Arthurs, and Federation Peak.

Thursday 11 February

Lachie: Up and at it very early – anxiety about my marooned Trucklet got me up well before my 9:30 am pickup by the tow truck from Derwent Valley Towing. All the others were slothfully getting ready to go caving for the day- I could see very few signs of much effort to get ready to go.

Getting back out to Scotts Peak Road, I was very relieved to find my Trucklet still upright, the windows intact, and the bits and bobs I'd used to chock the wheels still there. The two great blokes from Derwent Valley Towing had no trouble pulling it up out of the ditch, and towed me back to Maydena. Luckily, there was no damage to my car- the undercarriage had barely touched the gravel. No harm done, except a little damage to my pride and wallet (and a day of caving lost, I had originally been planning a daytrip to the upper reaches of Niggly)!

What a scenic spot to have to recover a car from. Photo: Lachie Bailey

Determined to get something out of the day, I trogged up, and planned to go crash the group that was probably busy having an epic in Dissidence. I figured that I could take a light pack, jump down their already rigged ropes, and escape before someone uttered the phrase 'de-rigging'. However, first I gave Steve a call to let him know I was ok, and soon found myself knee-deep in the Junee Resurgence trying to do a Steve Job. No success, and the habitat phone had a dummy spit.

Returned to camp in defeat, and valiantly fought off a chicken that was attempting to raid our food supplies. Cooked dinner (lentil soup).

Oxana: Straddling the pitch and leaning my body weight into the spanner, I noted that both outcomes from this situation were fairly glum – if the nut gave way, I'd probably lose my balance and fall down the pitch; if it didn't, any hope of descending Dissidence was gone. The latter eventuated. (A tiny centimetre-thick jug handle was the best natural anchor we could find, and nobody was game enough to trust their life to it).

After slogging from the Eight Road gate (having forgotten the Eight Road Key) to the Growling Swallet carpark to Growling Swallet and then one extra hour into the bush at a tangent to get to the cave entrance, we made it a grand total of roughly 10 metres into the cave. On the head of the second pitch, the nuts had rusted onto the bolts and the two backup bolts back from the pitch were loose within the rock. We turned back, cursing the Tasmanian bolts and infrequency of visiting caves.

Oxana enjoying Dissidence. Photo: Corey Hanrahan

Somehow, Oxana still has a smile on her face at this point. Photo: Corey Hanrahan

Andy and Corey had also scoped their newly found hole, 'Fern Cave', prior to starting Dissidence, and found it didn't

go. Was anyone really surprised though? It was a small and sad looking hole in the soil, covered by spider webs.

So we trudged back and gandered briefly into Growling. The water level was much lower than a couple of days ago – the waterfall pouring in from above us in International Chamber was entirely absent today. We made it a little further past this, before turning back in anticipation of dinner and fear of impending rain. The highlight of the day was the glow-worms – I hadn't seen them in Growling previously, we must have barrelled straight past when we had done the trip with Steve. The blue lights shone cheerfully in the darkness and rumbling.

Hugh: Today was the dreaded Sesame Cave (JF-210) derig day, luckily, I got help from Austin and Andriana for this somewhat unpleasant task. The backstory is that in early January, I'd been part of the team that had helped Steve haul gear down to the sump so he could dive it. It was the hardest day of caving I'd ever done, lots of belly crawling, small streams with low roofs, and the mud, the mud. So, to say the least I knew what to expect and did hype the unpleasantness up quite a bit throughout the trip.

Hugh, imagining that he's someplace other than Sesame Cave. Photo: Andriana Stoddart

We headed in and descended the four pitches and had some lunch before deciding to go for a walk to Veras Wet Hole. Veras Wet Hole is a section of cave where basically you're crawling on your belly for 50 to 60 m in 7-degree water, which touches your ear and cheek at one point, so definitely not a place to linger. However, we got lost in the mud chamber before Vera, and after some sketchy climbs with unstable mud we all weren't keen to continue, and headed back to derig. Andriana and I leapfrogged the derigging process to allow people to stay warm. With two bags (one very heavy with rope and metal) we slowly made our way back through the Nematode Crawl and to daylight. I did have to rescue one of Austin's gumboots after it slipped off his foot, but we made it back to the car in one piece, if a bit wrecked. Luckily, we arrived back at camp to hot food and slept well that night.

Hugh and Austin, someplace other than Sesame Cave. Photo: Andriana Stoddart

Andriana: I feel like Hugh hasn't emphasised the mud enough. It was truly incredibly sticky, and in some cases would act a bit like jelly. Truly exceptional mud, 10/10 would recommend. Would also recommend washing your gear afterwards, which I didn't manage to do before the next day's adventure.

Friday 12 February

Oxana: Today was Owl Pot de-rig and dye release II day. The descent to the streamway was uneventful, aside from noticing the rock on P1 holding half of the Y-belay wobbled somewhat in the mud as the first person descended the pitch. Having the rock fly out of the mud and down the pitch would be decidedly unpleasant, so we re-rigged it onto a different rock - more solid but also more prone to having the tape slip off. No matter, we were de-rigging the cave today anyway, so we left the rigging in semi-adequate condition and continued down.

Andriana starting down the mud fest at the top of Owl Pot. Photo: Oxana Repina

Abseiling P4 was just as fun as last time, and so was the prusik up - the trick is to start close to the waterfall at the bottom, so that you don't swing back into it once your weight is off the ground. The dye release at the top was spectacular, and worth nursing my DSLR into the cave for (though I

don't think the photos really did it justice; my cave photography skills need work).

Once the release was done, two of the group headed out of the cave while Lachie and I stayed to de-rig, as their gear was still wet from caving the day before and they were getting cold. On the way out, they may have gotten lost beneath P3 just as we were about to de-rig it (and one of them may have been in the cave for their third time). Nonetheless, everyone made it out in one piece.

P4 of Owl Pot. Photo: Andriana Stoddart

I was the first out and made another attempt to bush-bash to Three Falls Cave, unfortunately foiled again by a lack of time as we were late for the pub. I could hear the waterfalls from the entrance of Owl Pot and they would've been great to see after last night's rain.

The high-spirits sprint to the pub once everyone regrouped at the car was dampened as soon as we jumped out – 'Have you guys heard the news yet? Victoria is going into a five-day lockdown, starting midnight.' Dinner was stressful and dejected, as everyone glumly tried to work out how the drive between Port Melbourne and Canberra was going to work. Chris was the exception to this, as he took the news as an opportunity to delay returning home and instead embark on a week-long hiking tour of Tasmania, which sounded pretty awesome.

Hugh: After the mini Sesame epic I was very pro on a rest day, but it was my last full day in JF. While most other people were either going into Owl Pot for a dye release and derig (in many ways I didn't mind going back (third time lucky) but I could find other things), or hike out near Strathgordon, I chose to have a look and maybe do the first pitch of Slaughterhouse Pot. After cleaning ropes and gear from the day before, I headed out to the Eight Rd carpark. Travelling light I had a good look around the cave and headed home for tea.

Slaughterhouse Pot has such an inviting entrance. Photo: Hugh Mason

Saturday 13 February

Lachie: I was keen to go caving, as this was our last day available for any real JF caving due to the ridiculous pile of filthy gear to be cleaned tomorrow. Unfortunately, last night's news about the Melbourne lockdown rather delayed my plans – I spent several hours on the phone talking to several different COVID hotlines. End result: Canberra will still let us all in, even me (a Queensland resident). The catch: so long as we don't stop anywhere in Victoria. Still, there was caving to be done, and Corey and Oxana were rounded up for a visit to Slaughterhouse Pot.

Oxana, finally smiling about Slaughterhouse Pot. Photo: Corey Hanrahan

Oxana was decidedly less than keen, as she saw this as a downgrade from our original plan to investigate Satans Lair. Thankfully Steve had intervened, and warned us it was a nasty cave, and a pain to get to. This did seem to be a theme of the trip – we'd call Steve, and tell him we wanted to go do a cave, and he'd warn us it was small / cramped / nasty / muddy / not worth the effort. Was it all just a setup to get us to be more willing to tinker with his detectors at the Junee Resurgence?

Slaughterhouse was a cave that Oxana had sworn not to visit on this trip, unless it was on a Growling-Slaughterhouse through trip, but she was somehow convinced by Corey to come. I can only assume bribery or blackmail was involved?

Arriving out at the Growling carpark, we were very surprised to meet Fran – a landholder from near Borenore in NSW who has a potential sink on her property.

Trogged up, wandered out to Growling, then up to Slaughterhouse. Barrelled down the pitches, putting some new waterproof paper in the logbook on our way down. At the bottom, we checked out Trapdoor Streamway – that aven is certainly impressive! I think even Oxana agreed that it was worth the trip down Slaughterhouse.

Meandered back up and out, arriving on the surface late afternoon. The forest in the area is stunning with some nice golden late arvo lighting!

Gorgeous Tassie rainforest in the evening light. Photo: Corey Hanrahan)

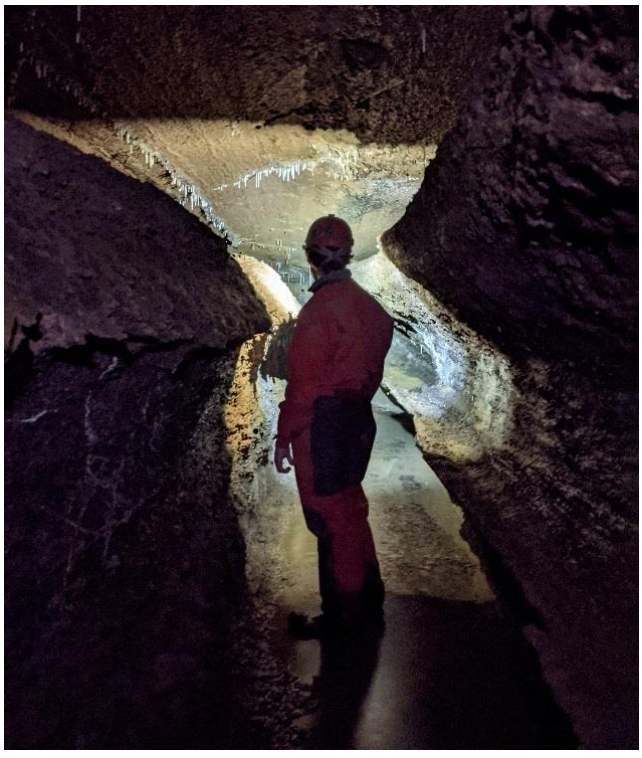
Andriana: Yay for rest days! All the hot cross buns, finished knitting a sock, and washed all my gear thoroughly. So satisfying. Also, I think it's worth mentioning how lucky some of us were (sorry Hugh) that we were leaving the day that we did… I managed to dodge the lockdown awkwardness by quickly rebooking flights to Sydney instead of Melbourne.

Similarly, Elisa rebooked her flights, and Andy and Lachie were able to change ferries to a little later on, which meant they were able to make sure that drivers wouldn't be stuck in Victoria. The whole situation really reinforced how lucky we were that the trip was able to go ahead, despite us coming into Tas from all the eastern states. Truly amazing!

Cleaning in progress…. Photo: Andriana Stoddart

Sunday 14 February

Lachie: Quiet day today. Went up to Welcome Stranger, took lots of photos. Pretty cave. Stumbled in the entrance, and was faced with two options: break me, or break my DSLR. Option 1 was chosen with little hesitation. Owwww, my back! Dunno how many Sloth Points I get for being broken by what is apparently JF's easiest cave, and in easy view of the gate and daylight?



Another gratuitous Welcome Stranger photo. Photo: Andriana Stoddart

On the way back, we stopped to pinpoint the Optus reception on the Florentine Road around Florentine Gap. It's only a small patch, and seemed vague at the saddle itself, but picked up as you move down the hill, although it was gone by the time we got to the Niggly track. We also found that Telstra had nothing, although no-one had access to the full Telstra network – being uni students, cut price third-party access was the way to go! I had decidedly more trouble accessing the reception with my older iPhone 7, compared to Andriana's Pixel 3a which could even pick up a 4G network. There were also spots of reception on the Florentine Road where it paralleled the Tyenna River - so backtracking to the Junee Quarry-Sunshine Road area is almost certainly a better option than running up Tim Shea in the event of an emergency!

Monday 15 February

Lachie: Packing day. We had a deadline to be on the road by 10 am, as people had flights to catch in Launceston. This of course meant that at about 9:30 am, we discovered a certain necessary key-shaped item was missing. Cue: much car unpacking, and head scratching, and it was decided that said item was at the Welcome Stranger carpark. Damn. I was duly despatched to investigate, and returned 1.5 hr later with the retrieved item. This of course meant that we were late, and Cory, Oxana and my slothful progress north turned into a sprint. Still, we still managed to visit a cheese factory and honey stall on our way north out of Hobart after dropping all the STC gear off at Alan's.

Dumped Oxana and Corey at Launnie airport, where Andriana had also been left by Andy a few hours earlier. Drove across to Devonport, and loaded onto the ferry. They let me keep my gas cylinders this time. Met Andy and Austin on the ferry, and enjoyed the view as we sailed out of Devonport. Discovered that, actually, I think Cascade is a lot better than Boags, but that neither are that great on a swaying ship. Promptly went to sleep once we were out to sea and the view receded.

Tuesday 16 February

Lachie: Not much to report for today... Woke up, and rolled off the ferry. Had a rather long and tedious drive to Albury from the Spirit terminal with no stops (thanks COVID). Said bye to Austin and Andy at the Dog on the Tuckerbox at Gundagai. Arrived back in Canberra late afternoon with my sore back from Welcome Stranger nearly killing me… Was very pleased to get home to Canberra, but also definitely missing Tassie already. That seems to be the way all long trips end: all the planning and frenetic activity fizzles out, leaving you sitting exhausted on a couch like you never left home. Still fizzled out on the couch has its uses: soon I found myself looking at cave maps and wondering if Tassie, Takaka Hill or the Nullarbor was beckoning more…

In glorious memory of the Chateau de NUCC… Seriously, Left of Field is a great camping spot, and Adrian looked after us extremely well. I can't plug it enough for any mainland cavers looking for a JF basecamp spot! Photo: Andriana Stoddart

Mt Weld Push – 2nd trip

12-15 February 2021

Gabriel Kinzler

Party: Serena Benjamin, Russell Fulton, Sarah Gilbert, Greg Jordan, Gabriel Kinzler, Greg Middleton, John Oxley, Michael Packer, Lauren Platzer, Robin Prisland, Amy Robertson, Ros Skinner, Ciara Smart

Day 1 – Friday

We'd decided not to relocate our camp site past the creek and up the hill, as it would just have been a pain to carry all of our gear, plus the need to go down/up the hill to get more water every day. Call us lazy, but it just makes more sense to camp at the creek and go up & down each day.

We arrived at our camp site mid-arvo and I really wanted to survey MW-4 Crysknife on the first day to get it out of the way for the rest of the weekend. This is when you realise there are really two schools of thought: of course, we are all doers, but there's clearly a divide between the "eagers" and the "faffers". Well, I just wasn't going to sit down at camp at 4 pm and wait for the night to fall!

So, I enrolled Amy, Sarah and Lauren and we went up the hill to get to work. Pax and a few others joined us a little later. We used the opportunity to take a whole pile of caving gear with us and stashed it at Crystal Cave overnight.

Back at Crysknife, I quickly discarded my idea of diverting the waterfall away from the entrance – too much work. On first impression, the cave looked nicer than what Ben had reported last time. The bottom of the pitch is a cosy chamber, with the waterfall taking centre stage, and it splits immediately in two opposing ways. Strangely, the waterfall doesn't flow either way; instead, it just disappears where it hits the ground.

We went left first, down a muddy slope over scattered boulders into a second chamber. Sarah was in an investigative mood and checked out the bottom – too tight. On the way back up, she noticed a side passage hidden behind an overhanging rock, which led us to a pitch. I quickly prusiked out to collect the drill and back down so Pax could rig it. Meanwhile, Sarah checked out the other side of the waterfall and reported another pitch. How swish!

Sarah investigates the first bottom. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

Pax abseiled and called us down: another bigger chamber splitting in two opposite ways again. One side twists and turns not very far. The other extends under the entrance chamber, where… the waterfall reappears! Right under where it disappeared. The passage ends in an aven. Sarah surmised the aven was likely to be the pitch from the entrance chamber. Several faunal remains were observed, including the back-end of an echidna with all its spikes still attached. On the way out, we visually confirmed the aven/pitch connection theory.

So Crysknife wasn't very deep or very long, but showed a unique configuration, essentially forming one big loop, and presented nice variety. A great little appetiser for the weekend. Greg and Ros, who trailed the main group on the way in, apparently never made it to camp and turned back a while before reaching it. We never saw them again (sounds sinister, but don't worry, they just went home).

Pax at the bottom of the entrance pitch of MW-4. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

Day 2 – Saturday

Now onto the pièce de résistance: MW-13. Having seen the massive entrance (not much smaller than Arrakis) last time, we were very excited to explore it and made it our top priority for the weekend. We split into two teams again: Ciara, John and myself to MW-13, while Pax, Sarah, Amy, Lauren, Robyn and Serena did their own thing.

Fabulous light accompanied us into MW-13's open-cast entrance. Photo: John Oxley

MW-13's massive entrance from the bottom of the first pitch. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

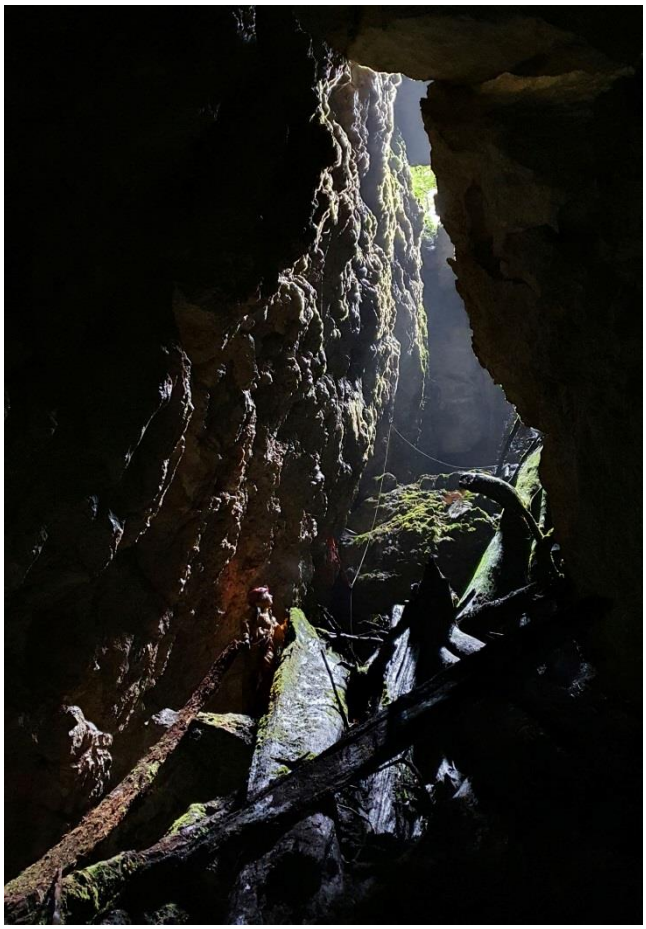
I was sent to rig the entrance, which is a huge, sheer gaping hole formed at the foot of a very tall wall (guesstimating 30-40 m). Using an obvious tree towards the left of the cliff as the main anchor, you can safely approach an equally obvious chimney below. I decided to install a redirect on an overhang located across the other side of the chimney. Totally beating my chest here, but it worked beautifully and the rope was free-hanging dead centre in the chimney. It was as if it materialised and came down straight from the sky. Rigging feels like an art form, sometimes.

Down the 22 metres of the chimney, the cave is still open-cast, but you reach much wider ground with several areas of interest: a broken-up corridor on the left-hand side that leads to more verticality, a giant and lumpy chunk of rock right in the middle that acts as a good multidirectional viewing platform, and a balcony extending towards the right and presenting a few vertiginous drops at its end. Going right is the best way on.

John affixed the cave tag 20 metres directly above me, which created a little scare, and Ciara descended the first pitch while I rigged the next one – an additional 10 metres with another redirect. Once at the bottom, you're still in daylight, but a wide slope covered in organic debris including a few logs then descends into the proper mouth of the cave. From there, it is a steep, 50-metre long and 6-metre wide tunnel to the finish.

The sad but pulchritudinous end of MW-13. Photo: John Oxley

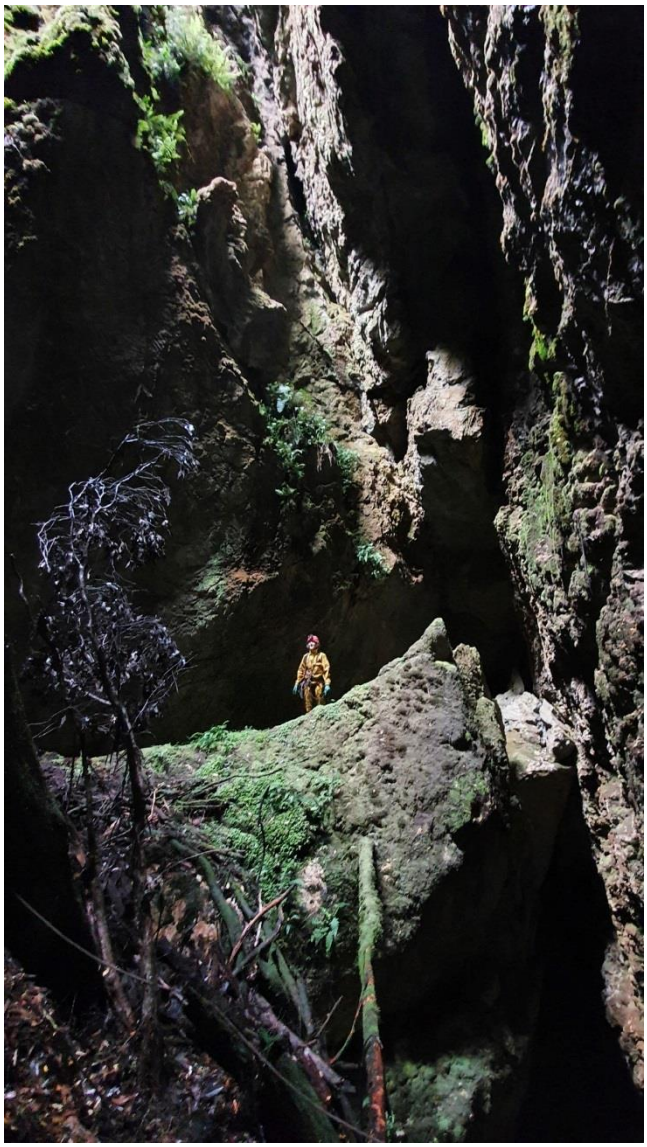
John joined us. I let him and Ciara do the honours, and they soon reached the end in front of me. The width of the cave stays the same all the way down. While disappointing, the space reached at the bottom has a lot of character. Weaving patterns cut in by streaming water decorate a big, dry mud pool, covered in a white crusty layer. Various sediments are exposed everywhere on the walls, roof and scattered boulders. There's dry and scraggy rock. Bones are plentiful.



Looking out the final tunnel towards the entrance. Photo: John Oxley

Disillusioned but content, we surveyed out and only observed a few more nooks and crannies. I have to mention that we did not go down the aforementioned left-hand corridor after the first pitch, as it wasn't very promising and we believed it connects with the main passage into the cave, but if anyone ever goes back, it may be worth a look. It does however connect to a rifty side entrance that can be accessed as follows: at the surface, when facing the cave, walk up left along the main wall until you find a breach in it (sounds like a video game walkthrough!). This is visible on the map (see the *ad hoc* section in this issue).

In-cave fungus of MW-13. Photo: John Oxley



Ciara on the "viewing platform". Photo: John Oxley

MW-13 has at least two little neighbours. One is higher up on the right, a very tall, 1-metre wide rift that goes for a good while before getting tighter. I had a quick look on the previous trip, but we didn't revisit it this time. Still needs a tag and a survey. The other is a small entrance immediately left of MW-13's main anchor. A small drop and gentle slope lead to a small pitch, itself to another 5-metre pitch. In the resulting small chamber, you crawl through a snaggy low-profile restriction, leading to another pitch. I could feel Ciara was ready to head back and couldn't vouch for John's enthusiasm when we first started discovering that it was extremely hard to drive in concrete screws in the heavily quartz-infilled rock, but also after a natural anchor I thought I'd use fell down on my lap as soon as I weighted it. Okay, maybe it was time to head out. That little cave is still untagged and needs a push and survey.

Because it wasn't that late, we decided to stop on the way back at a cave Ciara had found in the morning. A big, clear-cut oval hole, about 8 metres in diameter, with a straight drop in. Ciara volunteered for the first descent and John rigged the pitch while she geared up. We used a ~25 m rope rigged from a tree nearby. Unfortunately, it got very tangled with debris below and, being unable to see if it reached the bottom or not, Ciara decided to come back up. Things didn't get any better when we tried to pull the rope up, it was stuck...

Back-up plan: I rigged our 88 m rope (which we carried all day in the hope that MW-13 would do something grand), but this time from the upper rim of the hole (like I initially suggested, ha!). A bit overkill, but at least it was now free-hanging. Ciara was frustrated and asked me to go down first. The shorter rope was indeed wrapped several times around a spiky chunk of log.

As for the cave itself, a nice 17-metre pitch leads to your typical slope covered in sticks before crapping out pitifully. I still called Ciara down so it wasn't all in vain and we surveyed out. I saw a daylight hole while ascending the rope, which John had already found and taped on the surface. The whole affair took us longer than expected and, uninspired, we called the cave Late for Dinner.

Ciara, late for dinner. Photo: John Oxley

Day 3 – Sunday

After two fun days of proper exploring, it was time to be productive in a different way: tagging and surveying smaller holes found on the previous trip. None were promising to be particularly big and that proved to be the case… Or did it?

John and I dropped and surveyed MW-14, a small vertical entrance of 7 metres depth with just a few metres of horizontal projection, a few bones and not much more.

Meanwhile, Ciara found another small entrance 15 metres above us, surveyed by Sarah and tagged MW-17, with a daylight hole noted as well.

Forty-five metres east, Sarah & I visited and surveyed the small MW-11, after I spent half an hour trying to drive in my concrete screws to very limited success. Sarah being the geologist that she is explained it was because the dolomite was very rich in quartz. Thinking back, I did have similar issues bolting in Hastings. The thread of the screws just won't bite into the rock. John later experienced the same problem times a thousand in MW-12, which forced him to use questionable anchors down a pitch. After prolonged efforts, he reported the cave kept going but that we'd need to come back better prepared.

With our collective mood being resolutely down after such a meagre yield of passage, we started quizzically bashing past MW-13 towards MW-18. "Team Low" had discovered it on the last trip, so I hadn't seen it yet. I'm surprised no one raved about it, because take my word when I say it looks undeniably compelling. The entrance is a large horizontal opening into the hill, with tree roots reaching down from above and in front of it, which really makes it look like a window, in my mind. Despite said entrance being horizontal, you are first greeted by a steep, muddy slope reminiscent of the one in Owl Pot. And akin to the latter, it leads into a very big chamber straight away.

I rigged a hand line on a massive boulder right at the entrance, went down, and started freaking out: it was really big, looked pretty, went multiple ways and presented at least two promising pitches. After a long day of dejection, I was ecstatic. Sadly, my yelling and excitement didn't manage to convince anyone to come in. "Guys, it's the Holy Grail, it is The One!" – nothing. Everybody wanted to go home.

However, the team agreed we should leave all our gear at the entrance and come back the next day, our last on this trip. And so we did.

The alluring entrance of MW-18. The Editor's fist for inaccurate scale. Photo: Michael Packer

Jackpot! Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

Day 4 – Monday

Three days of mediocre vindication put a dent in our motivation, and I myself was hesitant to stay a fourth day. In fact, most people left the day before or early in the morning, including Ciara, who would come to regret this choice. Only Sarah, Pax, John and myself remained.

Fast-forward to the cave: this time, we entered in unison and while no one gasped, I could feel renewed enthusiasm. Sarah and I wasted no time and started surveying, while Pax and John busied themselves rigging the main pitch.

Down the entrance slope, the voluminous chamber curves left. On the left-hand wall, there is a restriction curling back on itself leading to a boulder pile near the entrance. Snail shells and general dryness were observed therein. At the junction between the restriction and the entrance chamber is a small pitch that still needs dropping at the time of publication.

Day 4 finally brought luck to a break. Photo: John Oxley

Continuing down the main passage, a series of tricky scrambles with a tall ceiling lead to a wide 7-metre pitch. Below, the slope continues, turning into more granular rocks, and forms what I like to call a "hub", from which different types of passage depart. The ceiling is high at 10 m. A small trickle was observed. The bottom is reached and gently slopes upwards again into a terminal, draughty squeeze, with remarkable, dusty white dolomite. Several full skeletons are found in this area.

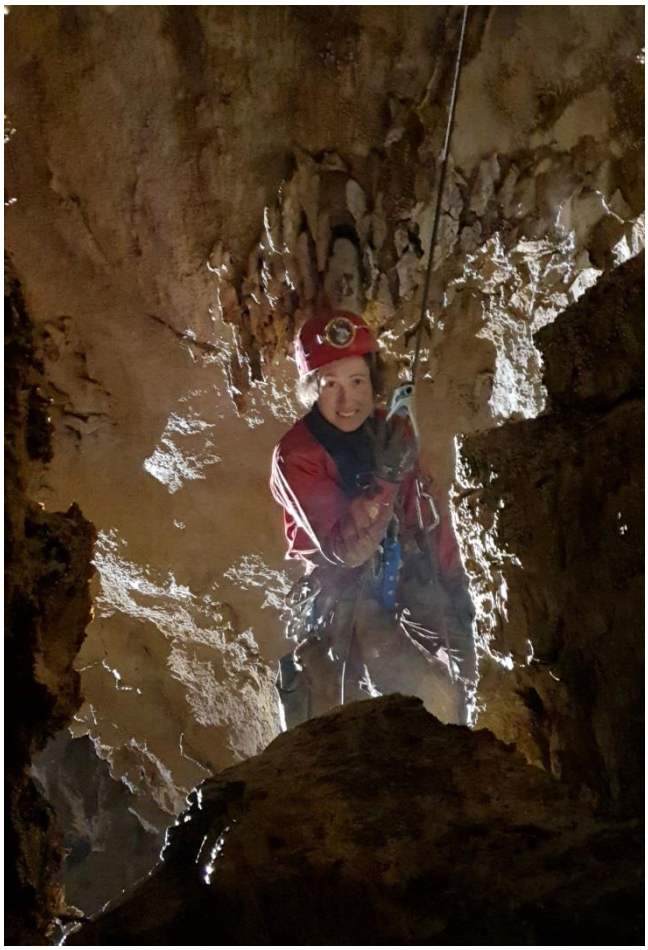
Back at the hub, two side passages go off perpendicularly but end up joining each other a few metres down. It gets noticeably smaller and narrower, but also prettier and more delicate. Stalactites, stalagmites and straws start popping out everywhere, too many to detail in this report. The passage twists and turns a few times, but ends up going generally in the same direction as the main passage (where the "hub" is).

Phalloids galore. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

It became all ducky and crawly, and very much fossilised. A few small chambers with decorations plentiful stopped our progress. It looked all but finished at a sudden back wall, but there is a tight crawl underneath and so we continued. Surveying in was naturally slowing us down, but in return allowed us to enjoy the spectacle.

The way on turned into a tall rift with more and more water in it! A few fun scrambles almost make it sporty! Flowstone started barfing all over us from inlets high above. Shawls, more phalloids and false floor. At this point, we alternated between awe and expletives. Will it end?! Finally, we reached another one of those hubs, but this time smaller, muddier and circular.

Enthusiasm: revitalised. Just like Sarah's crazy hair. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler



Sarah coming back up the pitch, which can be bypassed. Photo: John Oxley

At this final hub, there is a heap of rocks in its centre, atop of which we placed our last survey station of the day. With four different leads from there, it made our heads spin and before we knew it, we all let ourselves loose having dropped the survey kit somewhere behind us. The next section is a true maze of interconnecting 3D mud tubes. Eventually, they all drop into an actual streamway! I still can't believe it as I'm typing this. So very unexpected.

The next report on this cave will feature profuse photography of the cave's decorations. Photo: John Oxley

The streamway may be wet and flowing, but its banks still retain that fossilised, dry aspect. Pax and I stormed ahead for another 200 m or so and believe we found the end. It will need a second look however, with at least two unexplored leads. On the way out, I found a bypass to the main, 7-metre pitch: from the hub, looking out facing the pitch, there is a bouldery slope into a sketchy rockpile on the left. It connects with the entrance chamber. I had to shift a few heavy rocks out of the way, but it will greatly speed up the proceedings next time around.

Mt Wright revisited and Archlet located

21 February 2021

Greg Middleton (map in the *Maps* section)

Party: Michael Dempsey, Greg Middleton

I first visited Mt Wright to document its arch with Kevin Kiernan on 6 January 2015 (Middleton 2016). Reporting on that trip, I noted reports of another, smaller, arch higher up on Mt Wright. It took six years to get around to going back to find the second arch.

On 21st February 2021, Michael Dempsey and I drove out along the Florentine Road and other logging roads to the start of the Rasselas (or Lake Rhona) Track. This follows Richea Creek down to the Gordon River which is crossed on a convenient large fallen eucalypt. You follow the Rasselas Track until just after it swings north, where you strike out across the buttongrass plain directly towards Mt Wright (Photo 1).

There is no track; we just headed for the large arch, believing that we'd be able to find a way from it up to the higher arch on the skyline. Having been there previously, Michael had no doubt as to the way.

Photo 1. Mt Wright rises steeply from the buttongrass plain in the Vale of Rasselas

It took us about 3 hours walking from the end of the road to reach the big arch (Photo 2). It is located at an elevation of 960 m a.s.l., about 510 m above the Gordon crossing. We didn't hang about but pushed on up, heading south of the summit for what Lancaster (1947) called 'the plateau' (between Mt Wright proper (1112 m) and 'the southern peak' (1108 m).

Photo 2. The Mt Wright Arch is an unmistakable landmark high on the ridge.

We went straight to it as Michael had had the good sense to locate it with Google Earth. You can't really see the actual arch on Google Earth but you can pick a small tarn next to it.

It's quite an impressive, if diminutive, arch (Photo 3). While I was wondering about a (formal) name for it, Michael suggested "Mt Wright Archlet", which I think is original, and highly appropriate. Previously people have referred to it as "the small arch on Mt Wright" (to distinguish it from the much larger one) but I can't find any instance of a specific name being used. The Nomenclature Board seems to have tried to gloss over the problem by (incorrectly) labelling the main arch "Wright Arches" when there is only one arch at that site (see LISTmap online and zoom in on Mt Wright). The archlet, like the main Mt Wright Arch and, indeed, the whole mountain, is formed from conglomerate. To be more precise, it's a siliceous, well-sorted pebble conglomerate from. the Denison Group, of Late Cambrian/Ordovician age (Everard 2008)

Photo 3. The Mt Wright Archlet with Michael for scale, viewed from the north

After we had a bite to eat, I got down to the job of doing a quick survey (7GH15.STC498 – Figure 1) with some help from Michael, recorded the GPS location and took a few photos (Photo 4). The feature is at about 1025 m a.s.l., compared to the summit's height of 1112 m.

Photo 4. Mt Wright Archlet in its setting, viewed from the south. The tarn is visible in the right background.

We returned by a very direct and steep route, but fortunately encountered no vertical cliffs. My thanks to Michael Dempsey for facilitating the trip.

The Archlet has subsequently been allocated the numbers GH15-16.

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Gordon river wandering

5-12 March 2021

Janine McKinnon

Party: Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney

The weather report screamed "go west". So we did. At a couple of days' notice we loaded up our Stabicraft runabout with food for a week, camping gear and bushwalking gear, and whatever else we thought might be useful, and headed over to the west coast to spend some time mucking about up the Gordon river.

Why am I writing a trip report about that you wonder? Because there is limestone in them there hills. Lots of limestone. It's pretty much mostly limestone.

I'll save you all the chatter about lovely weather, wonderful mucking about in boats, bushwalking and just having fun. It's the cave potential you are interested in.

We did a walk (have patience) that we haven't done before. Up Goulds Track which starts on the river at Sir John Falls. It has recently been cleared by enthusiastic locals (for 2.5 km anyway). We passed a couple of blind dolines along the way. Yes, they were blind, but worth noting as a karst feature, I think.

The other item worth noting was a potential cave above Marble Cliffs. We had a long day's wander there a few years ago when we were based in the area for me to attempt to find underwater caves there (*SS* 406, p7.) We only found blind dolines (and a perched lake). This trip I did a short amble for an hour or so and found an actual hole. Of course, I didn't have a light with me, but it was a drop. Tight but never-the-less a drop. This is worth a look when next in the area, and needs a GPS location (I didn't have one of those on me either. You can tell I wasn't expecting to find anything). It should have a number too. If car park caves get numbers then this is worth one.

I suppose a bit more bashing around on hillsides along the river would be a good idea too, although all the horizontal scrub is a bit disheartening.

It's blind. It's a doline. It's a blind doline.
Photo: Janine McKinnon

DT-23 and DT-24

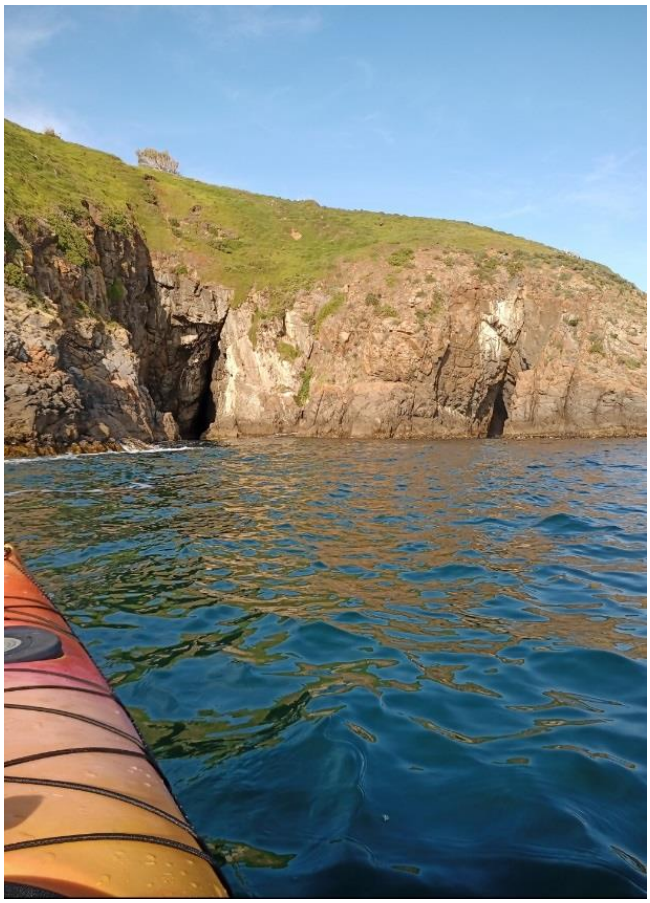
Luke Dimsey (photos and corresponding maps, found in the *Maps* section)

March 2021

Party: Luke Dimsey

Following discussions with the ever-knowledgeable Pax, the idea was put forth of identifying possible sea caves throughout the south-eastern portion of Tasmania. With known cave locations within the area such as Maria Island and Ile Des Phoques, it only strengthened the hypothesis that other islands would also harbour small sea caves as well.

With a sunny day forecast and low swell, I made the decision to scope out one of the closer islands, Betsy Island. Leaving from South Arm beach, it was a quick paddle out towards the northern-most point of the island.

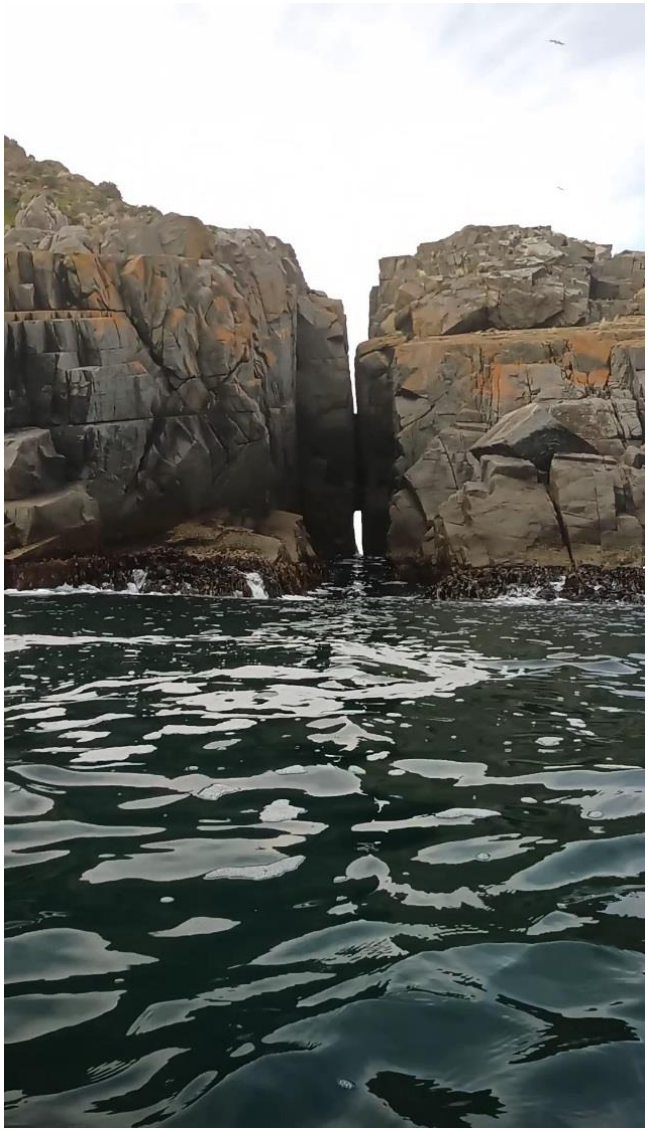


"I sea land!".

With the island's moderate cliff edges and southern face point (directed into Storm Bay) I knew there was a solid chance that there would be some interesting features. I can say with confidence that the island did not disappoint!

With large overhangs and huge cracks within the rock face there were ample areas of investigation. Of note where two large sea caves on the western cliff side of the island. The first being almost 10 metres deep and 7 metres high, the second being a similar length but only a few meters in height.

It should be noted that both these caves continued further on but with swell and narrowing it was impossible to see any further.



The not-a-sea-tunnel tunnel.

As I reached the southern tip of the island, I continued out and navigated around a small outcrop known as Little Betsy Island. Given its smaller size and height, it was unlikely to have anything of note. The prediction held true, apart from an abundance of sea birds, the island minimal in the way of notable outcrops of caves.

Another cool aspect of the island was a tunnel formed at the south-east point of the island. At some point an arch-way has been present which has now collapsed. The collapsed boulders still wedged between the gap and covered with a layer of topsoil give the impression of a complete sea tunnel. Unfortunately, on closer inspection, it is evident that this is not the case.

With the entire island scouted by water I headed back to the beach. The entire journey talking a bit over 8 hours and ~16 km of kayaking.

IB-1 Revelation Cave

Gabriel Kinzler

24 April 2021

Party: Gabriel Kinzler, John Oxley, Lauren Platzer

Revelation Cave is quickly becoming a fan favourite again for vertical beginner trips. Fairly easy and accessible, and impressive enough to produce a few gasps. It's a good initiation.

Lauren wished to further practice her SRT skills and John wanted to have a sneaky beak. My secondary objective was to re-rig the last pitch. Note: the track to the cave was re-taped where gaps existed.

This fun little feature, an inlet forming a column and tight passage going for a bit, doesn't appear on the 2014 map, neither does any of the streamway! Photo: John Oxley

Happy chaps at the end of the cave. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

Pitch #3 was originally rigged with a natural feature, backed-up to a distant, single throughbolt. The natural is a sharp blade which is not located directly above the pitch. The blade itself contains a smaller notch into which you slot your rigging tape, but if the tape was to move out of it, it could get interesting. This setup also introduces a dull yet extensive rub on the way down. More importantly, the blade is difficult (and arguably dangerous) to reach, requiring you to bridge between two walls a few metres above ground, right next to the pitch head.

The downclimbing immediately preceding the pitch is relatively easy without a rope if you're not a novice, but otherwise a handline is recommended, which is what the existing back-up bolt is for.

My solution for a revamp was to add an anchor at the actual lip of the pitch, itself leading to a free-hanging Y-belay on the left-hand wall. A few advantages: increased safety, faster rigging and the introduction of a rebelay, which is great for beginners who thought the first two abseils weren't exciting enough.

The last pitch is now a straight drop. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

New rigging notes (via IB-233 Chorale Cave entrance)

Needed ropes: 12 m, 22 m, 28 m. Permanent hangers: 7.

P1 Mud Cake (7 m): 12 m rope. Tape around horizontal fallen log above pot, back-up to base of *Dicksonia* next to it. A couple of glancing rubs down the pitch, can be mitigated with a rope protector.

P2 Baguette (19 m): 22 m rope. Belay from 2x 8 mm bolts on LH wall, level with top of large boulder. It is much easier to take-off from a ledge 2 m down-pitch, approached from underneath the boulders (obvious way forward). 5 m approach line helpful for beginners/very cautious cavers.

P3 (18 m): 28 m rope. Back-up to 8 mm bolt about 6 m vertically above pitch head on RHS (this is not easily spotted; look out and around corner when climbing down to pitch head). Do NOT abseil on the single bolt; use it as a handline for the downclimbs. Then, tie in to 2x 8 mm bolts LHS on last platform at pitch head, and finally to another 2x 8 mm bolts above the pitch on LHS.

All bolts have hangers as of April 2021. Rope lengths are approximate. All directions looking down. Bolts are 8 mm Powers Through Bolts, installed 12/2011 and 04/2021.

JF-337 Slaughterhouse Pot

Gabriel Kinzler

1 May 2021

Party: Luke Dimsey, Lauren Hayes, Jemma Herbert, Gabriel Kinzler

I advertised an "intermediate" trip for a batch of beginners who were showing clear promise, and we completely hit the mark. Jemma, Lauren and Luke all had previous experience, but hadn't yet been on a sporty trip. They all did very well.

On a sunny day but with moderate water levels, we entered Slaughterhouse at 10:30 am and completed the through-trip in around three hours. We could probably have shaved off 30 minutes without the mandatory glow-worm stop and some technical faffing on the way. Not too shabby for a team of four.

The mud washaway past Windy Rift is now nearing completion. Down at stream level, some blocks of sedimentary mud still retain water to form deep pools, which are difficult to pass over without falling in (wading or even swimming required). There is an alternative however: using the existing semi-permanent rig high up on the banks that we installed with Serena two years ago. While the others had their lunch break, I modified the setup slightly to accommodate the new conditions.

Coming out of Windy Rift, you still climb a knotted rope fixed at both ends (for the weak-armed, and given the fair exposure, clipping into this line is reasonable). Once up on the bank, you clip into a horizontal line to traverse along the cave wall. At the end there, a knotted handline used to descend back to a bolt, which was originally level with the muddy ground, but was now "flying" five metres above the streamway. I removed the bolt and de-knotted the rope to turn it into an abseil line.

We will have to return in order to make the abseil safer, by adding a second bolt at the top for a Y-belay.

I inspired the others to stay dry. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

The "before" photo. Lauren already looking sceptical. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

May 2021 Junee-Florentine Extravaganza

Stephen Fordyce (text and photos unless otherwise credited)

Party: Keith Chatterton, Stephen Fordyce, David Myles, Oxana Repina (for Niggly) and others here and there as mentioned

Introduction

My 4-week January extravaganza was great fun, but there was still lots to do on the dye and exploration fronts, and ferry tickets were cheap so I pushed life aside (I'm paying compound interest on that now) and booked another extended JF trip. The word was spread and as well as a varied cast of local cameos (camels?), fellow mainlanders David Myles (Sydney) and Keith Chatterton (Melbourne) were keen to join for the whole time. Oxana Repina (Wollongong) was keen on the proffered 4-day Niggly trip. Great times were had, great things were achieved and nobody greatly hated anyone else by the end. Great success!

This article/report/diary covers most of the trip, only Porcupine is detailed separately. I still have a few things outstanding from the January trip, but have not forgotten them.

Just a small subset of the 27 devices which are currently deployed in the JF.

Wed 5 May: Ferry nice to see you again

It's a mad last-minute rush, but not as bad as January – that was spectacularly last minute and disorganised. This means that I have time to pack slightly more intelligently and leave more things behind – my car is only moderately overloaded.

Just another boring Tasmanian scenery picture taken on the way north.

Thu 6 May: Prepping day

I'm too excited (and well organised?!) to sleep much on the ferry, and also stay up late working on QGIS. Ferry faffing happens and I make it to Hobart for more associated faffing, including collecting gear and supplies from various places in Hobart and picking up Dave Myles from the airport. He's come off night shift and we have many interesting conversations which I mostly have no recollection of.

We eventually get to Maydena and meet Keith, who has been off bushwalking in the wilds around Mt Anne for the last 5 days (and looks it). I manage to find enough motivation to get to Junee Cave for a late evening detector and weather station setup in anticipation of a busy schedule and many dye releases.

This Junee rain gauge was destroyed by what I can only imagine was a terminator pademelon from the future.

Fri 7 May: Shakedown in Porcupine

A notional shakedown day in Porcupine, since I haven't been there for 2.5 years and we're meant to be doing the upstream push dive tomorrow. It's nice to see the 200 m of 9.5 mm Bluewater and all new concrete screws, hangers and maillons in place, and the cave accessible to everyone again. Keith bails early and manages to get to Hobart by close of business to do some shopping.

Sat 8 May: Diving "The Ken Murrey River" in Porcupine

Huzzah! 420 m of Junee-Florentine master cave is added to the survey collection in my upstream push dive in the "Ken Murrey River", while the rest of the crew find an excellent bypass to some miserable bits. We also place 4 electronic dye detectors (including at the start of the Ken Murrey River upstream sump) and a weather station. Un-huzzah, a falling rock breaks my little toe on the way out. See the separate Porcupine report for every tiny detail of the day, and the separate incident report for my broken toe.

Sun 9 May: X-Rays and Dye Releases

My throbbing (and now swollen and bruised) toe wakes me up and I figure it probably should get looked at before I commit to another 10 days of hard labour. It's Sunday, so the only way to get an X-ray seems to be a trip to the emergency department at Royal Hobart. I hope to surprise Serena, but alas Tasmania isn't quite that small. Eventually the cheery folk confirm my toe is broken and there's nothing to be done but strap it up. Cool, just as we all suspected.

Meanwhile Keith and Dave go on a surface mission – to do a dye release in JF-232 Udensala targeting the Porcupine detectors. They also try to relocate JF-389 Snow Person Pot and can't find it, but thoroughly check a big blind doline in this area. Later checking of the description ("a small hole off the Udensala route") and an old surface survey give an estimated position 50 m to the west of this doline. A good lesson in doing your (my) research properly. Oops. There is another dye release to be done and a few nice LiDAR targets in this area that would make for an easy but productive half-day exercise.

Mon 10 May: Tassy Pot, other dye releases and lovely admin

I realise that I'm not as organised as I thought, and chicken out of going underground so I can catch up on admin and get ready for upcoming dye tracing stuff. My now officially broken toe is a major impediment to walking in sneakers, but barely noticeable in gumboots, another day of semi-rest seems like a good idea too.

Keith and Dave plan to do JF-223 Tassy Pot but faff spectacularly and leave after lunch – they redeem themselves by bottoming the cave in excellent time and doing a dye release in the base level stream which is later picked up in Porcupine (hoorah!). The source of the water in Tassy Pot still baffles me – there are no good surface candidates within cooee (according to dye tracing results, Udensala almost certainly goes northwest, to the Ken Murrey River). At my suggestion, Keith has a poke at the dubious wet flat bits at the bottom, and suggests there is a chance a keen wetsuit-clad caver might make a bit of progress.

Traffic control with dye is going to be an issue otherwise, so I drag myself away from delicious admin and head off into the freezing drizzle/thick ferns to do a dye release in JF-665 Cryptic Cowrie Cave and check a few LiDAR targets. CCC was an impressive doline although I didn't go in and have a look at the cave. The LiDAR targets were lame (and notes made in the Point of Interest register) but at least are ticked off.

Anyone with knowledge of geology reckons that the Westfield Syncline will direct JF-665 away from Junee Cave, but stranger things have happened. If anyone wants some detectors to place in possible resurgence points to the north, let me know.

Dye is fun, and the grass is always greener (remember it's non-toxic, tiny amounts are released, and we have a scientific permit to do it).

Tues 11 May: Tachycardia surface day

Big bold letters in the itinerary and multiple electronic reminders ensure that I successfully "CALL NADIA FOR WEDDING ANNIVERSARY". My wife of 2 years is amazing. Apart from that, today is an all-important surface day, setting up dye release devices in anticipation of Niggly detectors we will set later in the week. New STC member Salwa joins Dave and I despite my efforts to explain the misery she will be up against. Keith finally succumbs to the lure of a rest day and sits this one out (perhaps he also noticed what was billed as a "moderate surface day" would be slightly more involved than that).

The Tachycardia track is pretty familiar after Gabriel and I finished JF-703 Jimmys Window in April (gah, yet another report on my backlog), and at least today there's no snow as we slog up to the contact. We deploy oneshot dye release devices at JF-280 and JF-273, then continue around the taped route to JF-277 for another (along the way Sal's foot discovers a hole with limestone walls, but it's not deemed worthy of tagging). Dropping down to JF-704 North Chrisps Swallet, the crowbar is waved threateningly at the small hole with suspicious limestone where the tag is, and the stream sinks in summer (today it's going almost down to JF-240). Any chance of entry is obviously hopeless because there's a static puddle there.

Salwa's Foot Hole wasn't quite worthy of a tag.

Morale is further shaken when the dye dispenser (with a little pump) I set up clogs with crud and requires painstaking rectification. It's going to be a month until the last dye release so I am super paranoid about it. By the time we leave we are pretty chilly, and despite blue skies have barely seen the sun all day. It's becoming obvious that the off-track bit we now face is going to end up being at least partly in the dark. This possibility is planned for, so we carry on.

We follow the JF-704 gully down, with Sal and I sticking to the gully, and Dave enthusiastically bird-dogging up the west bank looking for caves but finding none. We relocate JF-240 pretty much exactly where expected – how nice (approaching from the south is really painful though, up a vertical bank with thick ferns, it would be much easier from the north). It's a cool horizontal incised fissure entrance in a doline which looks to terminate the JF-236 Bunyips Lair gully, and Dave* checks it out, finding it quickly chokes. It's been checked before (by Trevor Wailes and others) but there's scant detail in old reports.

Dave disappears enthusiastically into the JF-240 entrance.

Next on the agenda is what I've been billing as an epic first descent – a cave that Russell previously stumbled across and tantalising noted as having a 15 m entrance pitch. This is back towards the Tachycardia route, but contouring around - on the way we tick off a few lame LiDAR targets. The cave is found and tagged JF-729 (with a vertical entrance approx. 0.5 m x 1 m), at this stage it doesn't have a name, although one may yet materialise in the cave register. Dave is the designated caver, and the only one to have brought caving kit so excitedly bombs down off a mostly solid couple of tree anchors. About 8 m down is a ledge where a caving bag is used as a rope protector. After another 8 m of more or less free-hang the floor is reached and the cave declared dead*. It's a shame, as it's quite spacious, in the order of metres in both horizontal directions. Russell's enthusiastic instruction to "Go for it!" when I asked if we should tag and drop the cave is put into better perspective. Still, it had interesting potential.

JF-729 beckons Dave in.

It's pretty well dark by the time we're packed up and leaving, so we especially enjoy some patches of nasty thick bush as well as more open terrain as we stumble along. We get on one of the shelf-like features obvious on the LiDAR data and that kind of helps ease the way. Finally, we merge with the Tachycardia route and start heading down.

As we get close to the Chrisps Creek crossing and the home straight we lose the route and Dave nearly falls down a 10 m hole. Cool! Sal is still alive and chatty, apparently unphased at the bizarrity of this situation (my microscopic management of her expectations probably helped too). Dave is keen, and I'm secretly pretty over it but can't face the thought of coming back here, so we tag it JF-730 (also no name just yet) and rig off the large log over the entrance to send Dave down. He reports a shaft of about 10 m, also a metre or two wide in all directions after the initial 0.5 m x 0.5 m hole. Sadly, it's dead* again, but happily that means we can get the hell out of here.

We spend about 2 hrs fumbling about in the dark but get back before callout (and have the Sat Text anyway). The stage is set for dye releases targeting Niggly detectors even though they are only deployed later.

Gah, another cave that needed tagging (JF-730) and dropping.

It's an interesting area up there and I have a few more things which need checking out (including a possible source of the Niggly waterfall), so if anyone is interested in spending a day up there let me know. It would also be nice to get the dye release devices back at some point!

In case you were wondering, we didn't do any dye releases because they might interfere with the dye already in the system after it runs through Porcupine.

*Dave is an awesome dude and his enthusiasm for everything caving is spectacular, but after he later missed both of the ways on in JF-1, feel free to take his "it doesn't go" reports with a grain of salt.

Wed 12 May: JF-1

Ben Armstrong joins us and is keen and fresh, unlike the rest of us. We don't have much time for faffing because we're heading to Hobart for the STC social event this evening. I've been keen to get back to JF-1 since relocating and checking it out several years ago. It's right over where the master cave should be, and the only decent major cave recorded for this area (certainly, it's an impressive entrance). There's a bit of a draught in some points (although inconclusive) and the

final bit (which I hadn't quite got to last time) ends in a tight bit which may go.

We approach from the south this time, only suffering moderate paint scratches and one broken wing mirror to get to the parking spot. Walk-wise, this is much preferable to approaching from the east as we did in 2018 (which required crossing several fern-choked gullies), and it's well worth punching straight into the thick ferns from the carpark marked on QGIS as we discover on the way back. Approaching from the west might be even better again (depending how far you can drive), especially given we found an old snig track (marked in QGIS) that might help things.

Salwa looks like a pro on the way to JF-1.

The second half of the way up has lots of exposed low-relief limestone and spindly little trees, quite karsty but not much in the way of caves. We check one lame LiDAR Target, and the western gully a bit. Dave is ahead and checks a big entrance which sadly doesn't go. It turns out this is actually JF-1 and it does go (in 2 ways, which link up). Much hilarity and subsequent asterisks ensue.

We rig down the entrance slope with a 25 m, 11 mm rope. Nice to have as a handline, doable without, since we had SRT kit we used it. At the bottom of the slope looking downward, to the right is an alcove with an upward squeeze to a small chamber. Going left through a crawl gets you to the bottom of the in-cave pitch and to the promising lead. Going right after the squeeze gets you into a spacious inclined rift passage which goes horizontally for a while before ending in a chamber with a muddy pool.

Back at the bottom of the entrance slope, to the left and up there is a climb into a decent sized chamber with a dubious pitch in a tight rift ahead of you – Keith and Dave carefully rigged this before I caught up to them (sorry guys) so there will be concrete screw holes there. So ignore the rift and climb up to the left after you pop into the chamber. This is kind of back over where you climbed up from the bottom of the entrance slope. A spacious way goes up another couple of ledges into a big room with nice pretty decorations and a big daylight hole. The in-cave pitch proper is here, approx. 6 m (use a 12 m rope and a tape, concrete screw hole for start of access line, awkward Y-hang between sling on stal and concrete screw). Not that you'd bother – go via the squeeze instead. Thanks to Keith and Dave for rigging this so we could throw Sal at it.

From the base of the in-cave pitch, whichever way you get there, is a nasty tight squeeze, which only Keith, Ben and I felt the need to push through. Beyond that is a small chamber, and a tight inclined downclimb which looks worse than it is (where I stopped in 2018). This is effectively the end – the rift continues down into total mud choke requiring a nerve-wracking semi-vertical insertion of your body head first to discover. However, a metre or two back up from there is a horizontal slot between rocks which looks to terminate in a rock wall. But if you manage to get your head in far enough in there, a sharp left turn into another slot has some moderately tantalising blackness beyond (although no draught). Both slots are horrendously tight and nasty, and were only slightly improved with manual efforts by Keith and Ben after I left (the blackness remained out of reach). There were some indications of trog marks in the second slot, but it didn't look like anyone had done more than regret getting that far.

There is more to do in this cave – I'll definitely get back there at some point, or will give instructions if anyone else is keen.

Sal is none the worse for her first STC field trip yesterday and kitted out in various club and hand-me-down gear, she is put through her paces in various ways and seems to enjoy herself. I do a quick survey on the way out to get a feel of the way the cave is trending and the depth (25 m, a long way yet down to master cave level).

With time fast running out, Dave and I leave the others to derig and hightail it back to Maydena to make emergency repairs on Dave's suit before Niggly. We are only a bit late to the social event!

Thu 13 May: Prepping for Niggly

Today is a rest day in anticipation of 4 days camping in Niggly, and we also have to check out of our Maydena AirBnB in the morning, which requires jamming all our crap into cars. Fortunately, we anticipated this and left a pile of it in Gabriel's shed in Hobart (thanks!). Oxana is picked up from the airport and we all busily faff into the evening back at Maydena.

Fri 14 May: Niggly Day 1 (the grand tour)

Niggly day dawns with frost, drizzle, cold and snow down to low levels on the hills – I'm getting a bit nervous about water levels. We do much car packing, shuffling and stashing, slightly complicated by mine no longer having a rear windscreen (it spontaneously shattered!). Eventually we slog up the hill in the miserable weather, stopping at Boulder Jenga to set up a oneshot dye release for later. We also set up a weather station with rain gauge near the Niggly entrance, where there are still patches of overnight snow.

None of these guys have done Niggly before so they only have my briefings to go off. Excellent! The cave is deliciously warm, dry and pleasant compared with the outside world, and we proceed down in good order and general happiness. Various detours at the bottom are necessary to place detectors in the DIY streamway, a weather station on Mt Niggly, and 2 detectors in Atlantis. The crew are gratified to see waters emerging from Porcupine and from Growling Swallet in various places.

On the way to the Mother of God campsite, it's approaching 8 pm by the time we get to the slippery slot with handline down to the water, and where we get to see just how wet it will be to progress. I'm rather dreading this, but the others are blissfully unaware. After the surveying effort by Karina, Ciara and I last trip, I know there is the end of big walking passage not far above this point, but the idea of pushing through gnarly rockpile at this late stage of the day is not a pleasant one.

The chance of a quick win is taken and it turns out this is an excellent investment! A couple of short easy climbs up spacious chimneys get me to trog marks and a marked SCK survey station almost immediately. The nasty wet squeezing and horror climbs which have been the only way to Mother of God for several decades are now replaced by this easy climb and 5 minutes of walking in railway tunnel – my trip is made already! This new section of the cave is named "The Hume Highway" in honour of it being the link between our mainland homes in Melbourne, Sydney and Wollongong. I guess this is just what happens when you leave a group of mainlanders unsupervised.

"The Dunes" campsite at the start of Mother of God is found to be excellent, with plenty of flat ground, close proximity to water (while being above most floods, but below the major flood line) and we settle in to enjoy 3 excellent nights here. Keith sleeps particularly well due to his pillow of fruit buns.

Dave relaxes at the "The Dunes" resort.

Sat 15 May: Niggly Day 2 (Mother of God)

I wake up still elated with the discovery of the Hume Highway, and pump out the official trip theme song ("Eye of the Tiger") to start getting it stuck into everyone's heads. Alas the follow up song "White Tiger" gets stuck in mine for the day and I somehow feel dirtier than usual.

We faff a spectacular amount (I am in good company) but finally head to the end of Mother of God, placing a detector just below camp, and another just past the Never Never Sump, in the furthest extents of the terminal rockpile. We also leave a weather station at the Tennis Court – so we can compare barometric readings between the two ends of the cave and the surface, and see if anything interesting to do with draughts presents itself.

The day is not stupidly long, but it rather feels that way, as we painstakingly check leads and survey things in the terminal rockpile. We focus on the lower leads leading to the concrete screw, comprehensively writing off that section. We re-survey the upper lead going to the concrete screw and Keith heads up into the leads above (where Petr and I checked approx. 2017), reporting not much. I'm getting a better feel for this area though, and notice a section of upward leads further back in the rockpile. They are following the ceiling up, which is pretty cool, and they are untrogged, which is even better. One may be a pitch and require aid climbing – probably a better prospect than the one which Gabriel and I have worked on further back in the main passage. I'm working on notes and sketches of this area, that will probably only be finalised (in an excessively detailed report all of its own) once we've either given up or broken through.

Everyone enjoyed the transit through the spectacular Mother of God passage and put on a good show of getting the dirty work done. Special mention to Dave who decided that digging was easier WITHOUT gloves because he liked the feel of the mud on his bare hands.

Surveying with a wet finger and a piece of string just like how Trevor Wailes said they did in the good old days.

Sun 16 May: Niggly Day 3 (Rockhampton)

The itinerary says it's Nadia's birthday, so we make a special video singing happy birthday over one of Keith's fruit buns with a lighter stuck in it. Did I mention my wife is awesome? Today is an "easy" day where we are going to hit up some stuff close to camp.

Happy birthday dear.

At the far north-western end of MoG and close to our camp is the dry borehole passage leading to The Hume Highway. From a distance, the south wall fades into rockpile obscurity and I'd heard rumours of a large aven checked by Rolan in the distant past. Well closer inspection shows a giant rockpile chamber and upward sloping passage in gargantuan proportions, so while Keith and Dave expend themselves on lead checking, Oxana and I plod behind, surveying and sketching (we also sketched The Dunes large dry section). This later provides an excellent place for stashing camping gear above even major flood levels, and given its location above the Hume Highway and the many rocks (duh), the rockpile is named Rockhampton. To put it in perspective, it's 5-10 m higher than Mt Niggly.

Getting on top of the rockpile is a bit exciting, as it's above the glutinous rock level and is the loose black flakey stuff. We push around the north side of the rockpile in some narrow stuff, but following a pumping draught coming towards us (incidentally, there was an obvious draught going past camp too, heading into MoG). Too soon, things constricted into a tight drop of sorts that would need a fair bit of work and some rope. It was a one-person job so while Keith did that, the rest of us repeatedly sang the national anthem.

Surveying with a wet finger and a piece of string was unsuccessful.

This may seem oddly patriotic, but Oxana had admitted the anthem was the only thing she had left to learn before taking her citizenship test. I see a golden opportunity to ensure that she will think of this Niggly trip and my hilariously idiotic tendencies any time the national anthem plays, and take full advantage of the situation. So Dave, Oxana and I exercise our vocal cords and correct each other (we only have ONE soil, thanks very much, and we are in fact one and free, unlike the version I was indoctrinated with in primary school). Bastardisations are also explored, and it is pointed out that for those (like Oxana) who've come across the ditch, we've boundless caves to spare. Meanwhile down the hole, Keith is advancing Australia, and doing a fair job of it. The toil to wealth ratio is not exactly what was advertised in the immigration brochure, but the hole is girt by breeze so that's something.

Eventually we rig an awkward semi-belay (only Oxana has a harness) and Keith manages to get down to the next level. It continues, and probably needs better rigging gear, so given we are all freezing from sitting in the draught and sick of being patriotic, we bail out and leave it for next time. The lead is heading towards Mt Niggly, which is interesting because at this level there's a whole lot of solid rock in the way. Maybe there's a big aven up there somewhere.

Oxana still has some beans left so while the others go back to camp, we go to check out Ninja Junction to see what was missed by taking The Hume Highway. We get to a point where we would have to get very wet, shudder in disgust, give up and are glad we don't have to get out that way.

A pleasant evening is had lounging about camp, and consuming as much leftover food as possible. Oxana's cast-off avocado wraps are only a little bit slimy and are a highly valued commodity. Dave's dehydrated group dinner tastes interesting but does the job. Keith's fruit bun pillow is considerably diminished but apparently still quite serviceable.

Keith and his nutritious pillow.

Mon 17 May: Niggly Day 4 (birthing day)

After epic alarm failures on birthing day last trip I have sent multiple, and Eye of the Tiger is played at the appropriate time. Several hours later I reflect it's probably a good thing there aren't any Tasmanians on the trip, as the faffing this morning is off the charts. The empty gas canisters are viciously crushed and bartering over the carrying of various

unpleasant loads is a stimulating experience. Oxana's OCD is on a level approaching mine when it comes to keeping her sleeping bag clean (ok, several orders of magnitude more). A near disaster involving proximity of the smelly gas canisters to clean sleeping bag is narrowly averted by some quick load swapping and morale is restored by a well-timed rendition of the national anthem. Dave's joyful strains have torn the crotch out of his caving suit days ago, but he continues on in a fine baritone anyway.

The 5 Niggly detectors won't see the light of day again until next summer.

The pitches make for excellent acoustics and we continue being patriotic. Unfortunately, the spacing and the speed of sound are not conducive to choirs, but fortunately I was singing so loud that I was easily able to ignore the others. I much prefer the sound of my own voice anyway. The crew is excited to see the surface again but I've got a pretty good idea what it'll be like and am not so much. As expected, it's freezing, drizzly and nearly dark.

I offer to catch up, but everyone has enough motivation left to want to come across to Bunyips Lair to do a dye release (wow, this is most unprecedented!!!). This is probably regretted, but by then we are committed, and we get back to the car in the dark, probably about 6:30 pm. The faffing is reversed as we shuffle cars and get back to Maydena, spending a busy evening in a different AirBnB ("Funky Old Maydena", ha!), unpacking, sorting, repacking and getting ready to head back to Hobart in the morning.

Our pre-frozen meals left in my camp freezer are delicious, the heater finally warms the old place up, washing machines and bins are well used, and we crash out pretty hard.

Happy campers after Niggly.

Tues 18 May: de-mobilisation

No rest for the wicked – Oxana and Dave are flying out, and I'm on the ferry tonight. More mad rush packing and sorting, and I manage to get to Junee to collect results and come back as the last of the stuff (mine) is being thrown into cars, half an hour after checkout. Thanks guys. We have a nice lunch in Hobart and disperse gear and people, with no transport being missed or significant stuff forgotten. Great success! I'm chuffed that everyone professes to have enjoyed themselves – I certainly did.

JF-389 Porcupine Pot – Diving "The Ken Murrey River"

Stephen Fordyce (text and photos unless otherwise credited)

Party: Keith Chatterton, Stephen Fordyce, Gabriel Kinzler, David Myles, Ciara Smart, Petr Smejkal

Summary and preamble

Spoilers: a utopia of new rigging! 420 m of new JF master cave (The "Ken Murrey River")! A lovely dry bypass!

Apart from the JF-36 Growling Swallet/JF-237 Niggly Cave system and the JF-08 Junee Cave resurgence, JF-389 Porcupine Pot is the only other section of accessible Junee-Florentine master cave – 1.5 km of large scale streamway passage which carries water from many small feeders. It's upstream of Niggly, with a gap of about 1 km between their extents (and the Living Fossils section of Growling Swallet is punching right for the middle of this gap). The Porcupine downstream extent ends in somewhat inconclusive rockfall, while the upstream extent ends in a rather remote sump which had been known for decades but only dived in recent times.

It had been 2.5 years since the December 2018 dive in Porcupine (refer *SS*429) – a sordid affair with 300 m of new underwater cave but no survey. The intervening years saw everyone distracted by breakthroughs in Niggly and caving politics. Both having been (mostly) resolved in late 2020, Porcupine could now be visited again, and the black mark on my surveying record could be expunged.

Track Clearing & Rigging

Back in April, Gabriel and I couldn't bring ourselves to actually go underground after a punishing day finishing off JF-703 Jimmys Window (report and map still on the list), and ended up spending hours clearing the track anyway. Alas the gouge in the door of my Falcon attests to our failure to cut all logs back far enough.

Keith, Dave and I had a shakedown and played with new rigging on the first day (Friday 7th) of our 2-week May 2021 JF trip. Delicious new Bluewater 9.5 mm rope (we had 2 m to spare off a 200 m roll), new concrete screws/SS hangers/SS maillons are installed throughout, mostly using the same concrete screw holes. I covered the cost of most of this gear (SS hangers and maillons from Niggly were re-used) but while it's in Porcupine it should be considered club gear. I'm hoping to get reimbursed by a grant I've applied for, in which case it will become club gear in perpetuity.

So please take the opportunity to visit this significant and interesting cave!

A few changes and simplifications were made, including converting many rebelays to redirects and a new route down a final pitch rather than around the awkward traverse. I was quite proud of the new rig, but the grumblings from the Sherpa team (and my broken toe!) suggest that the rigging is likely to evolve over the next little while, so we'll do detailed notes once it's settled.

The old rigging was completely removed by others. It was in surprisingly good condition considering some of the concrete screws had been there since 2016!

The dive gear made for 6 reasonably acceptable bags.

Push Day

Saturday 8th May was the day, and a hardy team of 6 met up at our AirBnB in Maydena to faff with gear and packing - we got away at a suboptimal but not totally unreasonable time. As usual, I was not one to waste an opportunity and we split into pairs to enact dye missions on the way. Petr & Dave headed into the cave straight away, to go through the miraculous bypass and place a dye detector as far downstream as they could get without getting really wet. Ciara & I went to set up a dye dispenser at JF-414 Jolly Roger, and Gabriel & Keith went to set up a dispenser at JF-388 (these are the big dolines flanking the Porcupine one). The dispensers were programmed to drip slowly for 6 hrs and allow us to do a visual dye trace, and another slug release in a few days once things had settled. Cross pollination of mainlanders and Tasmanians was also achieved. Nobody complained of hay fever, so that was good.

Dye missions achieved, we met up with impeccable timing at the bottom of the rockpile (damn my plans are awesome) and proceeded. The Horrible Crawl (75 m wriggling on your belly in the stream) lived up to its name but the team remained undaunted and we popped into the master streamway. There was no sign of dye from the dispensers, but we put out a detector to catch water from the various inlets (and the main stream from JF-35 Gormenghast) feeding the Horrible Crawl. We also put a detector in the master cave streamway upstream from the junction, and a weather station to record atmospheric pressure up the bank opposite the HC. The 4th and last detector was eventually installed near Trump Rock and the upstream sump. It was interesting to note that flood marks from the intervening years were no more than 1.5-2 m (contrasted with the 20 m+ floods we know happened in Niggly over this time). Interesting indeed.

With Petr and I veterans of the 3 (4?) previous dive attempts, route finding was easy, despite the intervening years. Improbable wet squeezes, rib-cracker rocks, stoopy wades and precarious rockpiles were remembered with fondness and enjoyed by all. The newcomers were impressed with the proportions and significance of this section of master cave.

Porcupine veterans discussing the finer points of caving light design. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

Trump Rock (a large and belligerent orange thing which sits alone and out of place in a large room) and a cache of old gear was reached. We had brought all our own stuff except weights, but figured we probably should use the 2.5-year-old gas canister first… Everyone pitched in to get me dressed and help me get to the water, saw me off (about 3:30 pm) and headed back to look at the pretties and work on a lead Petr had in mind. They found a bypass to some of the worst of the squeezes between the 2 rockpile sections! We went back that way, but I'm not sure I could find it again…

The obligatory "Goodbye" pic. Photo: Keith Chatterton

The Dive

Arrrgh! I screamed in terror as the friendly but unexpected 2 m bull ray disappeared back into the murky darkness from whence it came. This was not supposed to be in the cave. Neither was the fisherman who tentatively hooked me, the puffer fish, rusty junk or giant mutant starfish with spikes. I was also overdressed and overheating in the autumn warmth of northern Port Phillip Bay. This was my dress rehearsal night dive, a few days before heading to Tassie – as I often do, I ran through a simulated push dive including line laying, surveying, GoPro'ing and generally practising all the mental and physical skills I might need. The cave would be much more pleasant.

I had optimistically underestimated the effort required to get the gear between Trump Rock and the sump proper (we'd previously always done it with two people). It's low and shallow enough to be really painful, and I recommend asking the Sherpas to help as much as possible – using a low/dry bypass up to the left, it's possible to get quite close to the sump, while the diver can float on their belly through a low semi-submerged section. I recommend not kitting up properly until the actual sump.

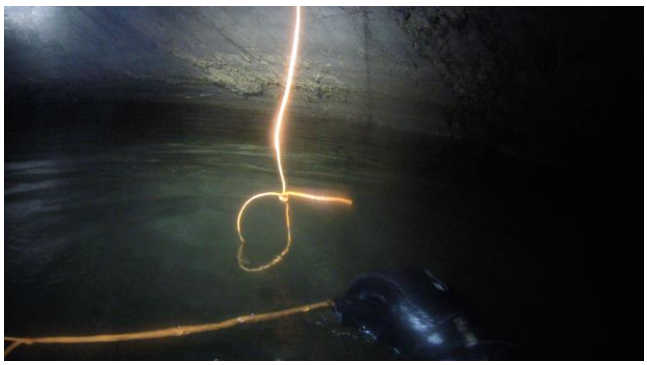
After ~30 m of easy floating past the point where Sherpas would have to get properly wet, a 2 m section of awkwardness is required between pools – it's cobbley streambed, too low to crawl and bloody annoying. I recommend kit off, especially on the way out. The sump pool is extensive but also low, the roof is perhaps 0.5 m high.

Making a decent tie-off on this rock (it subsequently disintegrated).

Once in the sump pool proper (it's an upstream sump, so you don't have to worry about thrashing about and silt going where you want to see) the hard work is over. The sump is a joy, typically at least 1 m in any dimension, and often 2 m or more. I had been a bit concerned about the state of the 260 m of unsurveyed line laid by Andreas and I last time, but it was in great condition and better laid than I remember doing. The only thing I had to do was pull it out of siltbanks on occasion. The visibility was great – maybe 5 m – and the GoPro footage was quite decent (I will keep this in my personal archive in case anyone ever needs it). Water levels in the master cave that day seemed pretty normal, and flow on the dive was not appreciable, although while surveying out I did notice a silt cloud tended to catch up with me when I stopped.

The underwater passage is almost entirely free of rockfall or breakdown, with clearly defined walls (usually vertical, sometimes pinching out horizontally) and often a ceiling too high to easily see (although I did check for airbells). The rock sticking out of the walls and sometimes on the floor is brittle and breaks easily – fairly typical of other JF dives I've done. Mostly, the floors are mud/silt, with dolerite cobbles noted primarily on the floor of airbells (interesting?). There were plenty of *Anaspides*.

I hooned along the existing line although was a bit dismayed at the amount of gas I had used on surfacing in the airbell previously named "The Room of Correct Terminology" (RoCT for short, and the politically correct result of a conversation had last dive). Last time while diving in a wetsuit I had used about 1000 L to get here, but with the added drag of a dry suit and many bulky undergarments this time around, I had used 1400 L. Compressibility of gas (you get less bang for buck at the high pressures the tanks were filled to) was probably also a factor.



I'd left a loop at the end of the old line waiting and ready.

Into the Unknown

Another complication which had loomed was my buoyancy. The carbon fibre tanks and the double layer of undergarments made me quite floaty, and I'd put what I thought had been a ridiculous amount of weight on to compensate at the start of the dive. However, by this point in the dive, I could tell that I didn't have much reserve sinkiness left and as I used the gas in the tanks (about 2 kg in each tank!) I would get lighter as the dive progressed. There was a long way to go before this became a survival risk, but was something best dealt with sooner rather than later. There was also the matter of how uncomfortable bulk surveying would be while struggling to stay off the ceiling (my dress rehearsal dive was awful for this). I had been looking for good rocks and finding none, but fortunately the RoCT floor had plenty of dolerite cobbles – I filled my drysuit pockets as if they were gold (the density of gold would make it excellent for dive weights).

I still had a chunk of gas left before having to turn for home, so I attached Ken Murrey's reel and headed out. Ken was a friend of mine and fellow caver and sump diver who passed away recently (see last *Speleo Spiel*) and this seemed like a good way to honour him. I also decided to name the whole upstream sump section the "Ken Murrey River" in his memory just to make sure honour was fully satisfied. The character of this new sump was similar to previous, but it was very straight and consistent, arrowing down to a deep point (15 m) and then a sharp right and up again in similar fashion, surfacing after 93 m total length. Still no restrictions or anything other than easy going – this was exploration cave diving at its finest!

Where the RoCT was more of an airbell, with barely a place to get out of the water, this new dry chamber (named "The Undressing Room") was bigger, with a nice dry shelf 40 cm above water level big enough to stand up, and a bit more length to it. Neither air chamber had any sign of dry leads (although both had dolerite cobbles). I would discover an annoying shallow bit requiring annoying crawling/wriggling to progress into the next pool and some straws on the ceiling – significant for consistently ending about 50 cm above water level. They were also clean. It would seem like these indicate the maximum long-term flood level here.

Undress for Success

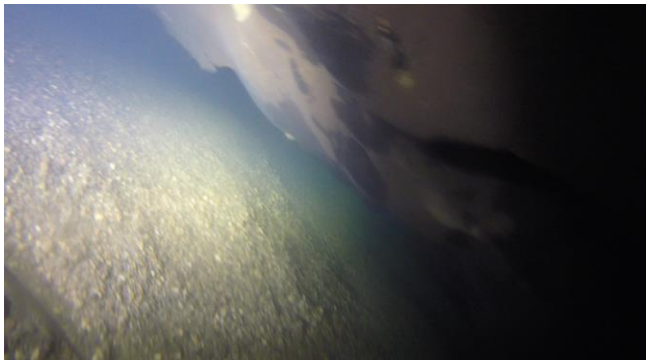
I didn't have much gas left before I would have to turn for home, but enough to check out the next sump and see what it was doing. However, the rocks in my pockets weren't

being very effective (hard to beat the density of lead for negative buoyancy!) and I wanted to deal with the floatiness issue a bit better before going any further. Having taken tanks off to scope out the dry chamber, I took stock of things. A lot of rocks were going to be needed – my pockets were full and I didn't have a bag to put any in. I could flood the case containing the DistoX… that was set aside for later. I still had 350 m or so of orange guideline which floats a bit, but leaving that would be poor form. Aha! I was wearing 2 sets of undergarments and had been if anything slightly too warm from the various exertions and breaks out of the water. Carefully taking off the top half of my dry suit, I removed my 2nd jumper and bundled into a ball, tying it up with a spare spool of guideline. It hurt to do, but I submerged it and squished the air out of it. This made an excellent difference and I had a more comfortable amount of negative buoyancy – great success!

There was no shortage of guideline. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

Leaving spare reels and unnecessary junk clipped to the guideline since I wouldn't have gas for more than a quick checkout, I negotiated a short/shallow/dry section with tanks and fins off and then re-kitted. The 3rd sump headed down a slope and I reached the first proper restriction for the whole day. A classic JF gravel slope on angle of repose meeting a roof step, about 5 m wide and with obvious bigger passage the other side. It didn't seem steep enough to give way and bury you, but was loose enough to give pause for thought. Aha, this is the sort of thing I had wanted to have a quick look for.

The gravel was loose and shifting it to get through in the centre would be possible, but take a bit of time. Fortunately, I thought to check out the entirety of the restriction before starting on that, because at the far left (looking upstream) of the restriction it was big enough to get through in reasonable comfort, although as a precaution against gravel slides, I went in feet-first. I got the line sitting as best I could, but future divers be warned if it's going to break anywhere (or get pulled into a line trap), it will be here.



A peek down the gravel slope.

Homeward Bound

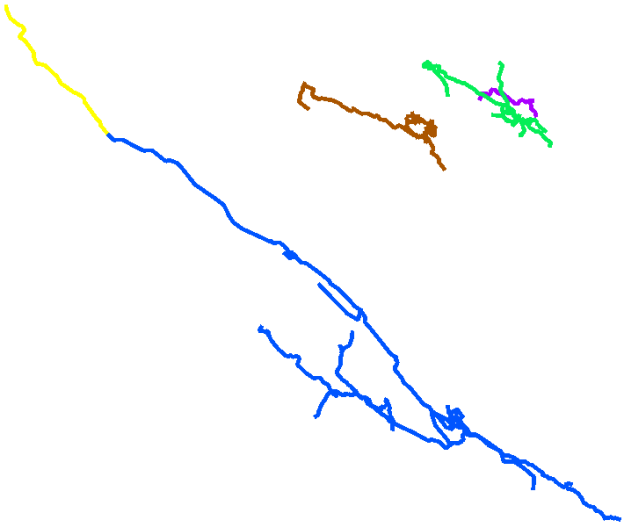
Once through, the cave opened up again and I knew this was the time to turn around. I tied off the guideline beyond the gravel slope, attached a commemorative marker the Sherpa team had written messages on, and cast a wistful look into the gloom as I began to survey out. I left it at a depth of 12 m barrelling off in 2 m x 2 m passage. It turned out that this point is 420 m of fairly linear cave from the end of the dry survey, following largely the same line as the rest of the master cave.

What does the commemorative marker say? You'll have to go there to find out.

The trip out was reasonably uneventful. Stress levels peak at the far end of the push, where you are furthest from home and have the least amount of reserve gas. At this point you should have in reserve at least the amount of gas needed to get home if one cylinder fails. But by halfway back, this reserve is twice as much as you need to get home, and that's very reassuring. Some of this spare reserve can also be used if extra time is needed for surveying or line fixing, but I came out with plenty left – I think the slight current helped. Surveying out was pretty straightforward (the water was pretty clear) and despite my lack of the 2nd jumper, temperatures were tolerable. Towing the ball of jumper

behind me in the water was easy, but on the occasions when it had to come out of water, the sodden thing weighed a ton!

Surfacing in the home sump pool (about 6:30 pm) and recording the last survey leg were nice, but the unanticipated epic effort of awkwardly de-kitting and getting gear back to Trump Rock was a rude and painful shock. I'd been away for some 3 hours and the Sherpa team were settling into hibernation after a successful excursion to the pretties and finding a nice bypass of some of the painful bits. Still, I was well before callout time and we were all in good spirits after the successes of the day, and there were hot drinks and only occasional whinging as we slowly faffed our way towards packing and departure. The soaked undergarment jumper was not appreciated by whoever had grabbed the undergarment bag thinking it would be a light option!

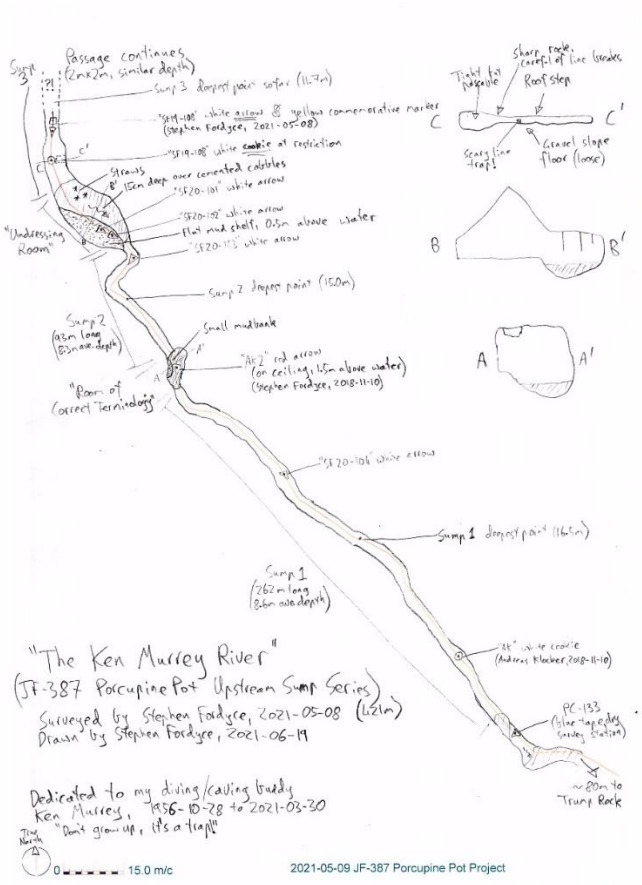


New state of play – Porcupine in blue with dive shown in yellow. Tassy Pot, Owl Pot and Three Falls Cave also shown.

Taking One For the Team

We left the old kit at Trump Rock with an intention to collect it when retrieving/swapping the detector (I did record a stocktake video). Since then, the old dive wing and fins were removed. The intention is for the only things left there to be lots of weights, but that will be confirmed later. Spirits remained high as we headed out, only briefly dampened when a falling rock broke my little toe at the base of the pitches (very lucky it didn't hit anything more important - see separate incident report). Fortunately, it would seem little toes are unimportant for caving and my next 2 weeks were more or less unimpeded.

We arrived back at the cars sometime after midnight after about 14 hours underground, and my attempts at an inspirational speech were quickly quashed – the cretins were admirably nonchalant about the discovery of several hundred metres of JF master cave. Offers to collect the dye dispensers were admirable but unnecessary – these still had programs to run now that the detectors were in place. Nobody had noticed any coloured water, perhaps I had been overly conservative with the amounts, or estimated the transit times wrongly. Stupidly, I'd forgotten to arm the team with coloured lights, giving us a much better chance of spotting the fluorescent dye. Keith and I happened to be recovering after our return through the Horrible Crawl when the detector there went off and we saw Fluorescein there from JF-388. Buggered if we could find where it came in with our white lights though unfortunately. Oh well, that's an easy one to repeat.



Sketch of The Ken Murrey River

The Future

It was great to get back into Porcupine, especially carrying off a pretty audacious plan with near perfect success – awesome work by the whole team, who even all seemed to enjoy themselves. The detectors will be left in there over winter to record water levels, and many of the dye traces targeting them have already been done (but please, help with releasing dye desperately needed if we are going to get every single inlet!).

The closest thing I could find to a group photo. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

There are more things to be done in Porcupine in the next little while, like push the downstream rockpile and perhaps attempt what should be a very short dive to connect to JF-35 Gormenghast. The upstream sump is going on the

backburner until dye tracing results are in, and options for finding a way in from the other end are re-checked and exhausted. Even then, pushing further would be a much larger logistical undertaking requiring a whole lot of Sherpa (and diver) enthusiasm. One day, perhaps I'll be that diver, perhaps not. In that case, I hope I'm still around to meet that diver, and I hope this report is useful to you. Good luck, have fun, and don't die.

Dive gear used

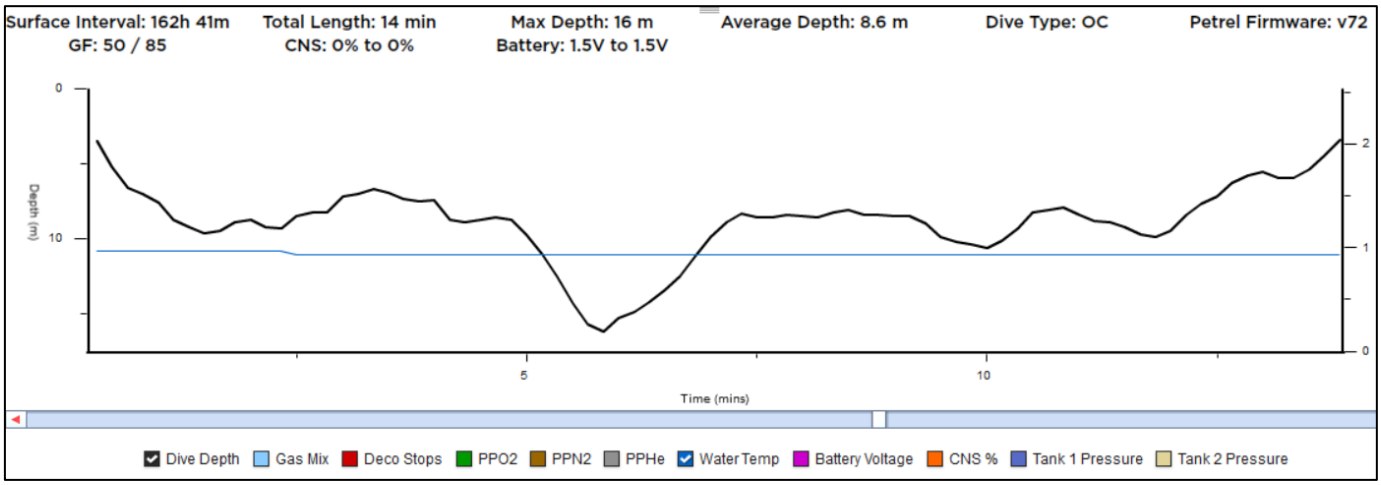
- Drysuit, with 2 pairs explorer socks, polypro thermals, 2-piece Fourth Element Artic (top removed, would omit both next time), 1-piece Fourth Element Halo3D
- Nomad XT sidemount wing/harness, fins
- 2x 9 L carbon fibre tanks (with 4x 1.2 kg weights on each)
- 7x 1.2 kg weights on belt (NOT ENOUGH!), 4x 1.2 kg weights per CF tank. Beware of the trap of assuming 1.2 kg weights are close enough to 1.5 kg weights.
- Breathing gas: Nitrox 32 (to reduce risk of The Bends)
- Line: all is orange 3 mm polypropylene floating cable-hauling line, knotted at 3m intervals. There are frequent arrows and a few cookies marking it.

Gas usage

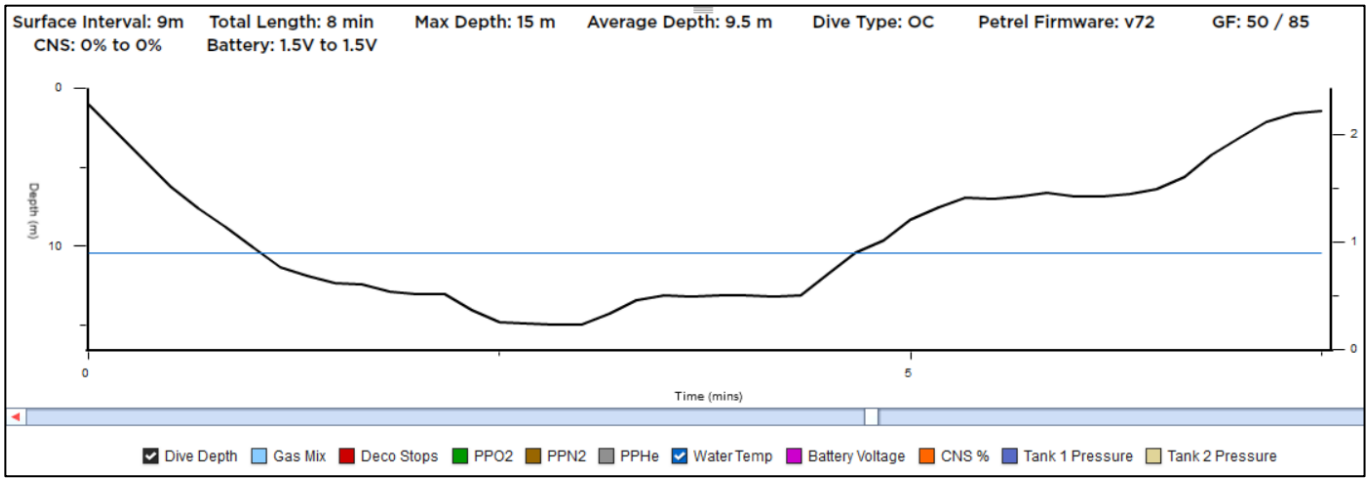
- Gas pressures:
  - Start: 295 bar/290 bar
  - At Room of Correct Terminology: 280 bar/200 bar
  - At Undressing Room: 220bar/210 bar
  - (Turn pressure: 200 bar/200 bar)
  - Back at Undressing Room: 200 bar/170 bar
  - Home: 130 bar/5 0bar
- Litres of gas used:
  - Sump 1 transit (in): 945 L
  - Sump 2 transit (in): 450 L
  - Sump 3 (total): 540 L
  - Return through sumps 1 & 2: 1710 L

Distances (from survey data):

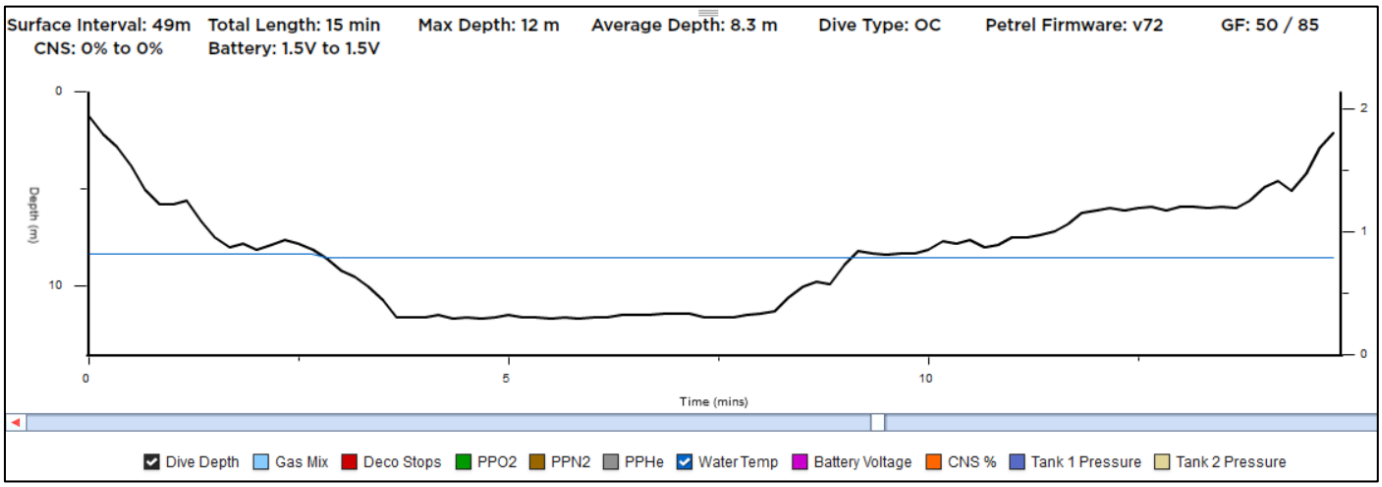
- Sump 1: 262 m long
- Sump 2: 93 m long
- Sump 3: 40 m penetration
- (see dive profiles for max & average depths)



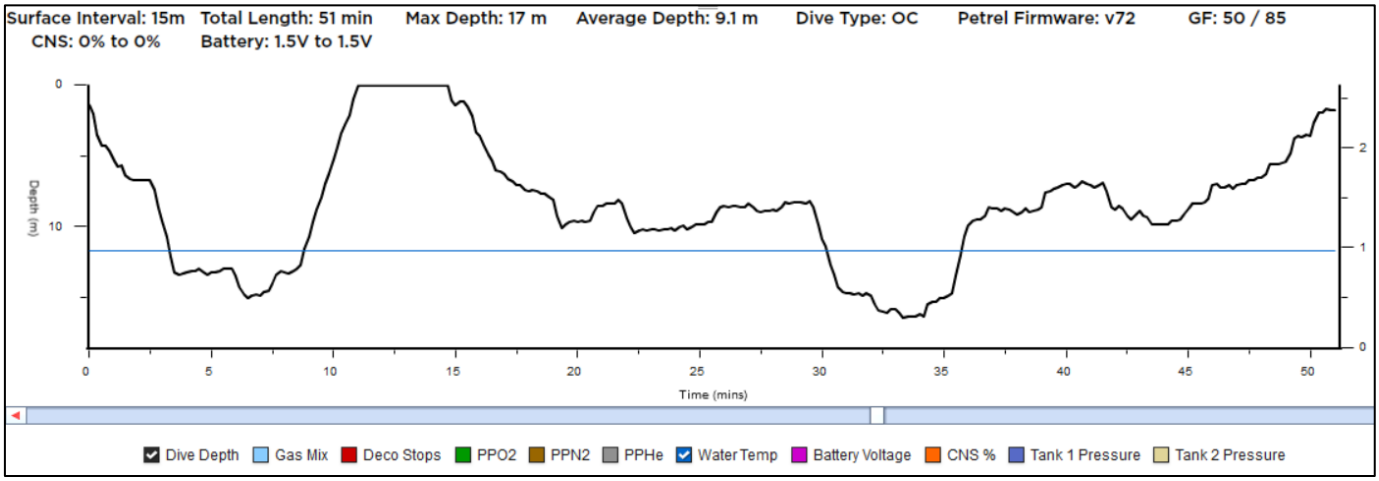
Dive profile #1 (Sump 1): start 15:44



Dive profile #2 (Sump 2): start 16:06



Dive profile #3 (Sump 3 out and back): start 17:02



Dive profile #4 (return through sump 1 & 2): start 17:32

Incident Report

Stephen Fordyce

This report was sent to the STC exec and also relevant ASF people.

Where: JF-387 Porcupine Pot (Junee-Florentine, Tasmania).

Who: A 6-person team from STC

What: a long dive-support trip

When: Saturday 8/5/21

Details: I was at the bottom of the lowest pitch, contemplating getting on the first rope (standing next to it). There were 4 people above me on a series of pitches and the rope was free – so while I should have stood further away until committing to it, I could also have been there legitimately.

Without any noise or warning, a rock about the size of a small dinner plate impacted my foot and the rock I was standing on (Keith Chatterton saw this) - enough to give the smell of impacted rock, and to break (and spectacularly bruise) my little toe through a gumboot, explorer sock and neoprene sock. I'm rather glad it hit something relatively unimportant, and the break was pretty textbook. Much swearing was required at the time, but getting out wasn't a big deal, and 2 days later I don't feel anything.

It's unclear where the rock came from, but it could have been unwittingly knocked off by any of those above, even the top of the big pitch (i.e. the start of the rope) likely has an alternative way down. We did note a few loose rocks near the top of the long pitch (i.e. the start of the rope), so some better tidying would be a good investment for the future. The cave has had a moderate amount of traffic by Tassie standards.

It's a good reminder to be careful, especially when heavy bags and weariness at the end of a long trip are involved.

Postscript: I went into Royal Hobart emergency (nothing else was open) and got it checked out on the Sunday. They confirmed it was fractured, strapped it up and said to wear stiff shoes ("Gumboots? Perfect."). It didn't stop me doing anything for the rest of the trip. I must admit I was perversely chuffed, it's my first broken bone.

The day after – some good swelling and bruising.

JF-237 Niggly – A non-caver-y report

14 May 2021

Oxana Repina

Party: Keith Chatterton, Stephen Fordyce, David Myles, Oxana Repina

I wish I could say I signed up for the Niggly trip as a hardcore caver eager to go and aggressively push improbable leads in the bottom of Australia's deepest cave and break through to kilometres of barreling streamway passage… but I can't. In fact, I signed up as a retiring caver who thought camping in a cave would be kinda cool to do once before stopping caving altogether and dedicating my weekends to canyoning and surfing. In the lead-up to the trip, my enthusiasm progressively waned as I mentioned the trip to various people and from their responses became increasingly convinced that I was mad, the whole thing was going to be utterly miserable, and I would possibly perish.

Oxana and her spotless campsite (most commendable). Photo: Steve Fordyce

Meanwhile, Steve, Keith and David all appeared to be the epitome of hardcore cavers eager to go and aggressively push improbable leads. So, I started the trip already a bit miserable and dreading what I'd gotten myself into as the major weak link of the team. This was not helped by subsequently managing to forget my spare torch in the car, wearing through my (steel) rack partway down the pitches, getting stuck on the flying fox across the waterfall, and then having my main torch stop working properly in the streamway.

Nonetheless, after spending most of the first day feeling like an incompetent menace, I cheered up considerably when we set up camp. I'd survived the first day, and camping was wonderful! I'd been expecting it to be similarly horrible to snow camping but with extra mud and grime. In fact, it was super civilised – warmer, drier, plenty of running water, and you didn't have to deal with a howling gale and sleet when it came to pooping into a bag. Using a tarp as an island in the mud meant that all camping gear stayed perfectly clean (maybe except in Steve's case, where it was a bit unclear which side of the tarp was meant to be clean and which was meant to be muddy).

For the rest of the trip I had an awesome time, with highlights including:

• Walking up and down the master cave streamway, which is super cool (but ignore what Steve says about dry feet, and bring neoprene socks).

• Pouring dye into the master cave streamway.

• Evaluating different accommodation facilities in Niggly. The original campsite past Mt Niggly – 3 stars. Not very flat looking and the water was miles away. The Tennis Courts – 1.5 stars. Apparently drippy, and terrible access to water. The Dunes Resort – 4.9 stars. Excellent camping and comes with a complimentary hot drinks service every morning. Sunrise not included though.

• Keith's awesome food, including an amazing pasta dinner, a piece of Keith's fruit bun pillow to celebrate Nadia's birthday, and gourmet chocolate to provide morale on the last day.

• The theme song of the trip. It was apparently meant to be 'The Eye of the Tiger', except the instigator of the theme song concept proved disloyal to his chosen theme song and kept humming an alternative song, something about a white tiger on a rollercoaster.

• Discussing the "Envelope of Acceptable Sliminess" in relation to wraps containing avocado and lettuce (made up to four days in advance…). It turned out that different members of the group had widely varying envelopes of acceptability.

• The really cool bit at the end of Mother of God with climbing over and through boulders in the streamway, with no trace of mud.

• Discovering that it was possible to wash my Cordura suit in the river before bed each night and having it sparkling clean and only very slightly damp the next morning, thanks to the breeze through camp.

• Learning the words to Australia's national anthem for my citizenship ceremony, but having to come back to Niggly again to learn the second verse (I totally would). A totally awesome rendition coming back up the pitches, where the acoustics were impressive enough to bring a tear to the eye of any Australian (even if the timing was a bit off).

• Secretly thinking that the Tigertooth Passage was really not that bad at all.

• Making streams pink and waterfalls green upon exit, even if my fingers froze as a result and I couldn't feel them for half of the walk down.

Oh, and thanks to the trip, I decided not to retire from caving anymore – only to be super selective about which trips to go on. Does that include future Niggly trips? For sure!

Oxana beats the second empty gas canister into submission. Photo: Steve Fordyce

IB-11 Midnight Hole

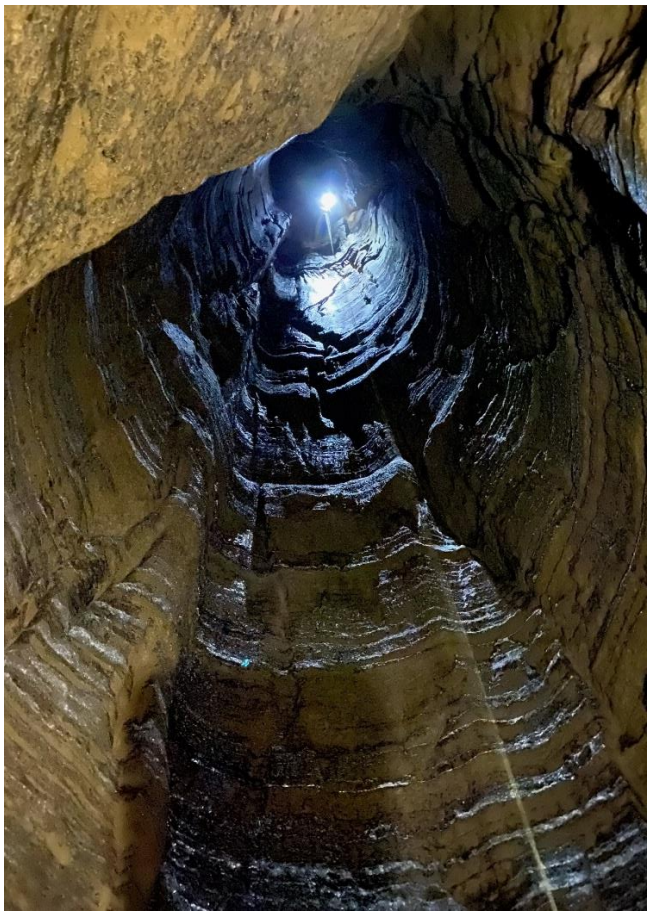
22 May 2021

Alan Jackson (text and photos)

Party: Alan Jackson, Anna Jackson, Ben Jackson, Nik Magnus, Lauren Platzer

Just a delightful doddle down Midnight Hole to sate childish urges to cave. I took the chance to lengthen the chain on the new sixth pitch anchor setup while going past. It should now be a bit easier to pull across and rig.

Spirits were high after negotiating Matchbox Squeeze, so we took the indirect route out via the Back End. A very pleasant day out.



Guess the pitch.

One is much more experienced than the other.

Anna helping her brother... wow.

Nine Road area, plus JF-226 & JF-227

23 May 2021

Gabriel Kinzler (text and photos)

After two years of broken promises, I finally indulged in a dedicated trip to go on a "Fordyce Mission". With a wide-cast net of detectors throughout the JF and a narrow time frame to get in dye traces, I went on a little bash to collect data and fill some gaps in the club's archive.

I walked up the overgrown branch of Nine Rd located directly east of Burning Down The House, heading south towards a dry gully. Bashing up the gully, I soon reached my target: a sinking swallet, basically a collection of standing puddles with no apparent flow, despite fairly high volumes of water feeding in from the creek above. No sign of a proper cave-like swallet, just puddles in the mud, and a completely dry gully below them. Weird.

Uncharacteristic of anything I've seen in the JF before, I found a very pretty tarn close to the creek, about 20 to 30 metres in diameter, perfectly still, which was an enchanting surprise. I wanted to officially name it Tarny McTarnface, but it's possibly been spotted by Nick Hume before, and if not, at least by loggers or other randoms, so I refrained.

The other item on the agenda was to relocate, geo-reference and photograph JF-226 and JF-227, which form a nice little system. All I had to do was to follow the dry gully back downstream and cross that overgrown branch of Nine Rd again. JF-227 has an impressive, horizontal main entrance. A secondary high entrance is easily spotted, but was left untagged by the original explorers. The existing map shows a few more high entrances, of which I think I found two, all untagged. They're all aligned in a straight line covering about 100 metres. The last entrance of the lot is JF-226, which sits high in a doline in the vicinity of the Burning Down The House/Sump Pot/Trouble Pot group.

JF-226's entrance.

"Tarny McTarnFace", unofficially.

JF-29 Niagara Pot

29 May 2021

David Rueda Roca

Party: Keith Chatterton, Jemma Herbert, Gabriel Kinzler David Rueda Roca, Ciara Smart

Trips to Tasmania are never easy for people coming from the mainland. This time, my flight was postponed from Friday to Saturday morning due to the Melbournian COVID mini-crisis. Since COVID, there are almost no direct flight in the evening from Sydney to Hobart and therefore all the SYD-MEL-HOB flights and vice-versa had to be converted into direct flights SYD-HOB, avoiding MEL, being therefore postponed one day.

So, Jemma, Ciara, Keith and Gabriel waited for my arrival on Saturday morning. We hit the road to Maydena and arrived at the cave entrance at 12:30 pm approximately.

Rather wet. Photo: Keith Chatterton

The water levels were higher than normal but not as dramatic as they were last April. We descended the cave at a normal pace and found that no rope or gear has been damaged (good rigging!).

Once at the bottom, after some requests, we visited the horizontal touristic part of the cave (people were talking to me about the "pretties" and I still wonder what pretties they are referring to).

Just gotta look a bit harder. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

As some of the members of the bunch were wet, waiting for rigging the two last pitches was not advisable. Besides, water levels were slowly increasing (ascending the 24-metre pitch was like taking part in the movie *Singing in the Rain*) and I did not want to split the team as we were very fond of each other, and a team that stays together wins together.

Gabriel removed the bolts and hangers at the top of the two continuation pitches and we started heading up. Accidentally, I overloaded Jemma with too many ropes thinking we would not have enough packs for the 10 ropes to be removed from the cave. I recovered my drybag with my drill and drill bits, my bolting gear, the STC hammer, etc.

In the end, we arrived in Hobart in a more than decent time. For me, apart from the fact that we could finally recover all the gear and ropes, the best thing of this trip is that people had fun and were happy with their day underground.

I have been trying to attract STC members' interest to this cave, because I consider that there is a huge number of things to do in it, like mapping and exploring (and not only in the two last pitches that we didn't descend). I think that the cave has not been completely explored. So far, I could not find many committed members to help me apart from friends, however I will continue trying to push this cave with anyone who wants to join next time. My plan is to come back once the weather improves (end of spring or summer). Meanwhile, I will do some other Tasmanian caving with Stephen or anyone else (I need a break of rigging the same pitches all the time).

Additional thoughts by Gabriel

Having now seen the main sections of Niagara, I entirely share DRR's opinion that this cave is far from having given up all its secrets. I think it needs a complete resurvey, exhausting the abundance of clearly unchecked leads if the existing map is any indication of the level of punctiliousness by early explorers. One could even fathom an overnighter on the sandy flats of the 1972 extension, as this wouldn't be a painless task. Its ideal position between Cauldron Pot and Threefortyone is a big plus. Maybe something for my retirement, one summer, if no one bothers until then…

MC-202 Herberts Pot

31 May 2021

Gabriel Kinzler

Party: Jessica Bertels, Keith Chatterton, Lauren Hayes, Deb Hunter, Gabriel Kinzler, Catherine Stark

Deb needed further technical expertise on a mission aiming to assess rescue scenarios far upstream of Herberts Pot, namely past the Westmorland Stream and into Paragon Vaults and Holy Hell. She is going to present her "Herberts Rescue Pre-Plan" at Exmouth.

Alan Jackson couldn't make it anymore, and so the job was delegated to me and Keith Chatterton, who'd been recommended to Deb by head of ACRC Brian Evans.

Unfortunately, we ended up not making much progress on that front, as our party of six turned out to be significantly too slow to venture all the way to the back of the cave without the day turning into an epic. Once we reached the Westmorland Stream, Jess decided to take Cath back out, while Deb, Keith, Lauren and I pushed on to accomplish at least a bit of work.

We did take some notes, but a more focused trip with fewer people is still needed to carry out the assessment properly. We at least got a chance to enjoy some of the pretty formations of which you can see one example opposite.

Anthodites and frostwork on a stalactite. Photo: Keith Chatterton

JF-731 Potiful Pit

5 June 2021

Gabriel Kinzler (text and photo)

I am starting to take a liking to solo bush walking. With a clear plan in mind, efficient navigation tools and no distractions, it allows for quasi-military execution; it's great. As is becoming customary these days, I used the need for time-critical dye releases for Steve Fordyce as an excuse to go out and look for new holes. This time I was led to the Porcupine area on a very rainy day.

The area, particularly around 550 m ASL, is insanely ferny. Many LiDAR targets are actually clearings and/or snig tracks from relatively recent logging, which is an absolute bonanza for tree ferns. Progress was going to be laborious all day and I got a taste of it early on.

I had a decent look at the big, elongated slope north-north-west of Porcupine and Jolly Roger, which is surrounded by the Tassy/Porcupine Pot branches of Nine Road. It is very rich in limestone outcropping, but rather poor in cave entrances… There was one find however, JF-731, a small unexpected pot, approx. 5 metres deep, with some flowstone and a complete & undisturbed macropod.

Other bones were scattered around it, and it made me wonder why we never find more than a couple of skeletons at a time, nor actual bone pits. And then thought some more and realised this was probably a bone pit, just filled with layers and layers of dirt hiding older carcasses. A few plays on words later heralded "Potiful Pit", don't ask…

Bone-a-fido.

I then contoured east and slowly sunk into the gully where I was supposed to kill off another of Rolan's caves: Z-91. I'm not entirely sure I actually found it, but I did find a couple of karst features, including a trickly swallet. I think it was decided that was in fact Z-91. Good enough.

Instead of walking back to the car the way I came, I decided to check out a few more "shadows" on the LiDAR map north of the gully. The terrain really didn't seem to lend itself to holes, but I must've gotten lucky because I found one, and it was deep too! I would come back better equipped.

JF-4 Khazad-Dum – A gentle introductory wander

6 June 2021

Janine McKinnon

Party: Jemma Herbert, Nik Magnus, Janine McKinnon, John Oxley, Lauren Platzer, Ric Tunney

Sadly, dear reader, you will not be getting an exciting, inspired, entertaining and novel account of this pleasant trip into the top parts of the classic route of this cave. I did try quite hard to get one of the new club members to write this report and thus give us a new take on this well-visited cave. I failed. So, the default is me recording a trip to where I have been many times.

Ric and I were the only party members who had been down this route before. We got underground at 11 am and I sent the others on side trips down the top part of The Serpentine, and also to drop the Scaling Pole pitch to play in the top part of the stream, to avoid boredom whilst Ric set up a safety line on the traverse past the first pitch.

We decided to put in some concrete screws (using the holes still in-situ from the last time someone did this) and a safety line across the traverse, as a fall could be fatal and it would not be difficult for an inexperienced caver to fall. We also decided to leave the line in-situ and to discuss at club level the possibility of putting in a permanent safety line across there. The concrete screws will not be safe to leave for a long period as they are corrodible.

All crossed safely and we wandered down to the "90 Footer", dropped it, wandered around down the rockpile, and came back out. Everyone seemed to have fun.

As we excited the cave at 3:30 pm Ric dropped a pile of fluorescein into the stream, as per an arrangement with Steve Fordyce. Flow was above winter base-level.

Like a giant overlooking a tiny city.
Photo: Nik Magnus

JF-732 Fernacula, JF-733

31 May 2021

Gabriel Kinzler

Party: Gabriel Kinzler, John Oxley, Ciara Smart

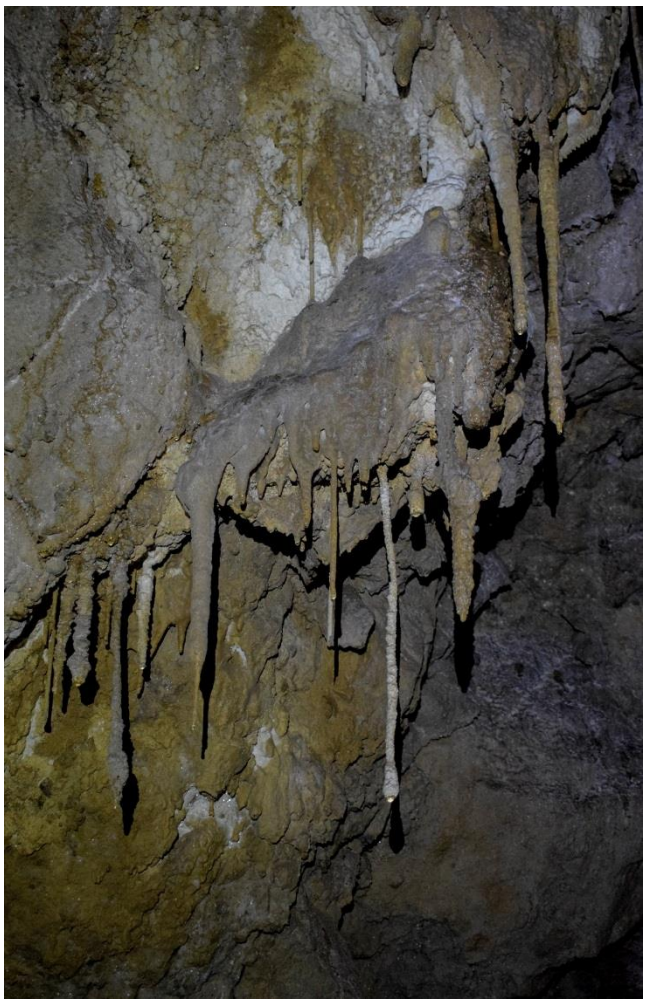
Back for more, and this time I lured in punters with the promise of new cave. While it rained 20 to 30 mm in Hobart, the sun was out in the JF, incredible! We had myriad data collection objectives.

First, we went to Three Falls Cave for a dye release. I had heard about it time and again and, for some reason, always believed it was harder to reach. It lives up to its reputation. Back at the car and a short distance up the road, we recorded GPS coordinates for JF-222, JF-223 Tassy Pot and later JF-224. We couldn't find any of the physical tags however, does anyone know about their respective placement?

Such an incredible place. I love out of character locations in the bush. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

Next up was the much anticipated (by me) exploration mission of JF-732, found a week prior. Picture a narrow hole nestled between thick patches of ferns, in a small depression on the steep hill of a gully. Initial rock throws indicated at least a 20 m drop. I rigged off a tree and soon confirmed it was a serious pitch. I quickly rigged a Y-belay ~5 metres below the entrance while observing a nice patch of stalactites and straws.

It was a dead vertical drop, free-hanging, the 40 m rope reaching the bottom with little to spare. A few bones, one recess pinching out, a couple of small avens, and one restriction continuing under the pitch. I called John and Ciara down, decided to keep some of the fun for them. Ciara descended and was sent down the small hole. Alas, it petered out immediately.



Grotty pretties. Grotties?
Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

The survey showed the cave to be 39.4 m deep, with the pitch accounting for 35 m of that. Not bad for a dud. There was even a one metre tall stalagmite that none of us had noticed near the top of the pitch. Ciara, who's apparently a Scrabble champion, helped with naming the cave. I first wanted to call it "In Ferno", or "Inferno" (because of the ferny horror in that area, ya see), but that's too strong a name for this kind of cave, and it quickly morphed into what it now is.

Moving on, we attempted to obliterate yet another Z cave. From the Porcupine car park, we wandered towards Gormenghast. Success was achieved when I managed to locate Z90, an active stream sink, now tagged JF-733. John was adamant he'd found it further down valley, but really, he'd located Gormenghast. Very gloomy piece of forest here.

We recorded GPS coords and I dug out two very draughty holes right above Gormenghast (about 20 metres from the entrance). Must be small in-feeders. One of them is actually humanly enterable. Low priority, but needs checking for funsies (sorry, I meant for science).

Other exciting stuff

IB-1 revelations and other Ida Bay cave stories

Arthur Clarke (text and photos)

Ashamedly, this is a very long overdue report to *Speleo Spiel* and STC…

The formerly known (and IB-1 tagged) narrow rift entrance to Revelation Cave was discovered on Saturday 7th June 1969, by a party of Tasmanian Caverneering Club members during surface exploration following their trip to Hobbit Hole (Collin 1969). During a subsequent exploration trip just a week later on 14th June 1969, *Anaspides* shrimps and *Idacarabus* cave beetles were collected from the lower reaches of Revelation Cave (Goede 1969).

This IB-1 rift entrance is (or was) a quite narrow, awkward, steep and often greasy/ slippery way into the cave. Early access involved either several handlines or short ladders to access the near vertical sections of the entrance rift. Sometime in the late 1970s, perhaps early 1980s, the late Andrew Skinner showed Mick Flint and myself the site of a much easier entry point into Revelation Cave that didn't require ropes or ladders. This was the entrance where we two, plus Alec Marr, guided Rolan Eberhard, Nick Hume and Martyn Carnes to, on 29th August 1984 (Clarke 1984; Hume 1984; Eberhard 1985).

Serena Benjamin exiting IB-233's entrance, 27/12/2005.

Several years ago, Ric Tunney was musing over the mapping of Revelation Cave (Tunney 2015), having difficulty reconciling reports of a second entrance (Clarke 1986a) and comparing recent survey efforts (McKinnon 2012a; 2012b) with the previous survey (Hume 1984). Confusion about the "mysterious" second entrance to Revelation Cave is similarly alluded to by Hosking (2005a; 2005b). Hume (1984) also reported that "*a small hole just above Revelation contained a short pitch that probably provides a link to the avens mentioned*…". As Hosking (2005b) surmised, this "*small hole*" is the IB-233 (Chorale Cave) entrance into Revelation Cave via one of avens reported by Hume (1984).

A short distance downstream/down valley from the original IB-1 tagged entrance, there is (or was) a swallet, first reported by Goede (1969). Subsequently recorded by Clarke (1984; 1986b) it was reported by Marr (1984) to be "*about 30m downhill from Revelation*." Listed as "IB-25 (Yodellers Pot)" in Clarke (1986b), this multi-pitch vertical cave has an estimated depth of 110 metres+, based on pitch rope lengths of the three main shafts (Marr 1984). The 50 m shaft in IB-25 was likened by Marr (1984) to the bottom shaft in Midnight Hole and seemingly "…*destined to become an Ida Bay classic… clean, a bit damp and free hanging for all but 6 metres of its length*."

There was subsequent speculation that the stream in a draughting rift at the bottom of IB-25 might connect with Revelation Cave. The relationship (if any) between Yodellers Pot and Revelation Cave is yet to be determined by survey (Eberhard 1985). Unless the swallet opens up again, we will never know about any potential connection, because the entrance to Yodellers Pot was engulfed/ smothered by the same landslide event that affected the IB-1 tagged entrance.

Upslope bare rock end of the February 2005 landslide.

The landslide of Permian glaciomarine sediments appears to have also led to an overland solifluction mud flow event. STC member Amy Ware and Peter McIntosh from the Forest Practices Authority mapped the path of the landslide (McIntosh & Ware, 2007). Recorded as the "JAN 05 LANDSLIDE" (McIntosh & Ware, 2007), I think it's more likely that this event occurred in early February 2005. Re-visiting my rainfall records here at Francistown (Dover), we had above average rainfall for January 2005, then 19.5 mm of rain on Wednesday 2nd February, followed by a little over 85 mm of rain on Friday 4th February, with 60 mm of it falling in just 2-3 hours. On that same day (4-Feb-2005), 101 mm of rainfall was recorded at the Hastings Chalet weather station (McIntosh & Ware, 2007). Hosking (2005a) also suggests that February 2005 was the likely month of the landslide.

Sadly, I have to report this landslide/ mud flow event has also blocked the "*second entrance*" (Clarke 1986a) or "*upper entrance*" to Revelation Cave (Tunney 2015). If this landslide and overland mud flow event had not occurred there would have been three known entrances to Revelation Cave!

The "second entrance" is (or was) in fact located at the base of the small rubble-filled collapse doline lying approx. 8-10 m west-southwest of (and obviously quite near) to the new IB-233 entrance. A clue to this second entrance's location at Revelation Cave is given by Clarke (1986a) who records the "…*upper (collapse) entrance enters cave onto rubbled slope*…" McKinnon (2006) correctly suspected this collapse doline might be the "*original IB-1 entrance*", but

this phrase is confusing, because the second entrance (in Clarke 1986a) was not the original entrance! The (now buried) and tagged IB-1 site was the original and first explored access into Revelation Cave and (was) previously the most well-known entrance. Tunney (2015) also initially considers the collapse doline as a contender for the 1984 survey "*upper entrance*" site. However, in concluding comments, *Spiel* readers are told this doline couldn't be the upper entrance location (Tunney 2015).

Recovering manferns in a scene of devastation in Revelation Cave gully.

The confusion in the minds of some STC members is from mis-interpreting the 1984 (7IB1.TCC197) survey plan. A survey reference point on the plan view of this survey map (drawn as a triangular mark with a central dot) shown near the entrance, has been incorrectly interpreted as a number tag. Perhaps also there is confusion in some cave reports, when there is mention of going to IB-1, instead of talking about trips to Revelation Cave.

Ken Hosking exiting IB-233's entrance, 27/12/2005.

I don't recollect there ever being a number tag or flagging tape at this second (upper) entrance. The 1984 survey by Eberhard, Hume and Carnes (Hume 1984) includes the survey reference start/ finish point, presumably located on the wall of the collapse doline above the entry point, possibly near the doline rim. In discussion of the 1984 survey map (7IB1.TCC197, drawn 30.9.84 by Rolan Eberhard), Tunney (2015) reports that: "…*it shows the tag as being just to the left of the entrance. (This map and entrance was to be a source of later confusion by me.) There is no indication of a second entrance*." It is obvious that the survey reference point was mistaken to be a cave number tag.

This 1984 trip was possibly just my second or third visit to Revelation Cave via this entrance. Given this was 37 years ago, I don't recollect if the original IB-1 tagged entrance was ever mentioned during the 1984 survey trip. So, this collapse doline was probably the only entrance known at the time to Rolan, Martyn Carnes and Nick Hume.

During the years when this second entrance was open, entry to Revelation Cave involved a short down climb into this small cliff-walled collapse doline, then a squirm underneath the northern headwall… on the downhill side. To memory, this horizontally-aligned entry point was not particularly spacious; at best probably just 25 cm high, perhaps 30 cm at a pinch in places. It was also quite jagged (above and below) where you slithered in… the jaggedness attested by Martyn Carnes in late August 1984, ripping his trogsuit during the entry (Hume 1984).

Briony Jones exiting IB-233's entrance, 27/12/2005.

To memory, the slithering entry squirm heads downwards almost immediately but initial progress is quite confined. Heading downslope slithering and half crawling over mud and moonmilk-covered rubble (derived from the entrance and cave roof), you are wishing you remembered your knee pads! After a short downclimb, the cave opens up; looking back, you can't really see any daylight! From this point you descend the steep rubble slope, with no indication that you are in Revelation Cave (if your only previous knowledge had only been via the IB-1 tagged entrance). This rubble slope is actually depicted on the most recent (2014) survey map of Revelation Cave (7IB1.STC389, drawn by Ric Tunney; p.18, *Speleo Spiel* #406). After continuing to clamber down a steep slope of mud-caked rocks and loose rubble you come to a 4-5 m down-climb and then you are at the top of what we knew as the "sixty (60) foot" 18 m pitch.

I imagine that it's possible the collapse doline with its forest debris and mottled silty clay-covered rock fragments could be exhumed again. Using a short crowbar or pick, it might be possible to expose the base of the doline headwall and second entrance again… but be prepared for some mud and/ or forest debris and don't forget your kneepads!

The exploration of the IB-233 (Chorale Cave) entrance into Revelation Cave is described in several articles (e.g., Hosking 2005a, 2005b, 2006; McKinnon 2006). The re-survey of Revelation Cave itself is detailed by McKinnon (2006; 2012a; 2012b) and Tunney (2015). During the re-

survey of Revelation, McKinnon (2012b) refers to cave surveyors seeing daylight up a rift, being the "*old way in*" (the IB-1 tagged rift) now largely filled by the landslide debris.

Although less obvious, the IB-1 tagged rift still potentially provides another entrance into Revelation. Hosking (2005a) reports that on 20th August 2005, Amy Ware "…*had located a rifty entrance that she explored until it eventually led into trogged passage, with several downclimbs.*" This suggests that Amy gained access to the inner reaches of the IB-1 tagged entrance passage from higher up in the rift, above the now blocked previous entry site. McKinnon (2012b) also reports having gone "…*around to the old entrance tag and climbed down as far as I was game. I was looking down a rift that looked a dare-devil climbing job to me. Maybe bridgeable but you would have to be desperate*." It would seem that entry to Revelation Cave could still be gained by SRT or ladders down this rift.

Some vaguely related footnotes:

Something for everyone to think about. Revelation Cave (IB-1/ IB-233), Hobbit Hole (IB-15) and Yodellers Pot (IB-25) are (or were) three relatively nearby caves at similar elevations. Ranging from around 110-120 m in depth, these caves must surely extend to base level with passages in Exit Cave. It would be intriguing to see where these three vertical cave systems sit on a map in relation to a plan view of Exit Cave.

Similarly, I'm wondering where the much lower elevation IB-22 (Con Cave aka Disappointment Pot) plots in relation to the Conference Concourse section of Exit Cave. To memory, the bottom pitch of IB-22 empties into a relatively large chamber with a sandy floor amongst boulders, a site that might have potential to be dye traced and/ or possibly excavated. Con Cave is situated, south of and almost adjacent to, a lateral (glacial) moraine with the course of Mystery Creek on its north side.

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Ida Bay cave sub-areas, devised with Phil Rowsell

June 2021

Arthur Clarke (text and photos)

Another very overdue report to STC and *Speleo Spiel*

Long-time members of STC will remember an English caver named Phil Rowsell. Dating back a couple of decades, Phil Rowsell was a semi-frequent visitor to our caving fraternity. Although answering to "Phil", he seemed to like being known as "Madphil". From a recent email with Alan Jackson, he says: "*There were three Madphil tours, I believe. One before I was on the scene (he didn't do much caving, mostly cycling and hiking). Tour 2 was when I met him and did lots (2001-2002, maybe to 2003). Then he came back out circa 2005 for a bit*."

Around 2002-2003, Madphil and I began GPS locating/ relocating caves in the widespread Ida Bay karst area. Given my knowledge of the extensive karst region, Madphil suggested that we establish a number of sub-areas to broadly delineate the regions where the known, recorded or number-tagged caves were located at Ida Bay. We came up with seven sub-areas, listed below with examples of some of the caves known to me.

My excuse – in part – for not writing this information up years ago, was simply for lack of having a map. Almost 15-16 years ago now, Madphil promised me that he would produce a map showing the location of these seven sub-areas, but it obviously has not eventuated. He also asked me not to write up this info until he had produced the map. Phil Rowsell had promised (most recently) that the map of Ida Bay cave sub-areas would be ready in time for our attendance at the 16th International Congress of Speleology, held July 2013 at Brno in the Czech Republic… 8 years ago!

The Ida Bay cave sub-area information known to me relates to cave numbers from IB-1 to IB-202, plus 211-213 and 224-235, plus 242-248 and several of the untagged IB-X number caves. I have no information for cave numbers 236-241. Although I personally have no sub-area information for the more recent cave numbers: 249-259, I believe there may be some published information in *Speleo Spiel* and/ or help with whoever is now the keeper of STC cave records.

Cave numbers IB-203 to 205 are assumed to be located in the Marble Hill North sub-area, with IB-205 (Moonlight Cavern) reportedly near to/ behind the old Benders Quarry weighbridge (pers. comm. the late Andrew Skinner). There appears to be no recorded cave information for cave numbers IB-206 to IB-210 and IB-214 to IB-221. Three of the subsequently allocated former "SCS" cave numbers have been reassigned: IB-222 is now IB-56, IB-223 is IB-52 and

IB-225 is IB-50; IB-224 (Hissing Sid Hole) is still a known cave. Some of the recorded caves known to be in the respective sub-areas have not been relocated. From the information known to me, the un-named IB-259 is last recorded cave in the Ida Bay karst area, tagged 30th June 2012.

La Perouse Track West

A broad area adjacent to and west of Blayneys Quarry and near to, or west (right hand side) of the La Perouse walking track, running from Blayneys Quarry to the start of Moonlight Flats track.

Examples: IB-1 (Revelation Cave); IB-13 (Chockstone Pot); IB-15 (Hobbit Hole); IB-22 (Con Cave); IB-26 (Hooks Hole); IB-43 (Rotten Log Hole); IB-48: (Bottleneck); IB-70 (Weta Bix); IB-72: Kens Hole; IB-77 (Conglomerate Cave); IB-126 (Big Doline); IB-233 (Chorale Cave).

Ida Bay Tramway

Caves lying near South Lune Road or between South Lune Road and Quarry Road, extending eastwards to the route of former Ida Bay Railway including nearby caves, some associated with the two former Commonwealth Carbide Company quarries and the lower reaches of Benders Quarry.

IB-2/3 (Loons Cave); IB-4/5/6 (Bradley-Chesterman Cave); IB-110 (Arthurs Folly); IB-111 (Tram Stop Cave); IB-127 (North Creek Swallet aka Sewer Pot); plus several untagged caves and karst features.

Skinner Track Contact

Uphill side of Skinner Track, running from start of track on the saddle between Lune Sugarloaf/ Marble Hill, i.e., south of former Benders' Quarry down to Halfway Creek. These include caves along, near or downhill from the limestone/ mudstone contact running south of the quarry to Halfway Creek.

Examples: IB-27 (Chicken Bone Pot); IB-47 (National Gallery); IB-52 (Gendarme); IB-57 (Cyclops Pot); IB-61 (Mini Master); IB-64 (Marred Pile); IB-166 (Oh Yeh); IB-211 (Trackcutters Cave); IB-224 (Hissing Sid Hole).

Phil Rowsell prusiking out IB-166 (Oh Yeh).

Pot Holes Area

An area generally south or east of, or downslope from Skinner Track, mainly vertical caves but also incl some decorated horizontal caves such as IB-91 (Straw Cave). This Pot Holes area includes a relatively small area of rarely visited polygonal karst with nested narrow ridge dolines containing deep vertical caves such as IB-98 (Comet Pot); IB-99 (Salt and Pepper); and IB-104 (Giotto Pot).

Other examples outside of the polygonal karst area: IB-23 (Little Grunt); IB-46 (March Fly Pot); IB-97 (Pseudocheirus Cave); IB-106 (Coralline Cleft); IB-132 (Loo Lane); IB-178 (Copyright Fiasco).

Exit Contact

Caves uphill from the Skinner Track along or below the Permian mudstone/ conglomerate contact over Ordovician limestone, specifically south of the fault-line area as delineated by so-called "Halfway Creek" along Skinner track (running from former Benders' aka Ext Cave Quarry to D'Entrecasteaux River/ Exit Cave).

Examples: IB-7 (Log Rift); IB-8 (Mini-Martin); IB-9 (Big Tree Pot); IB-35 (Coffee Pot); IB-38 (Milk Run); IB-107 (Machete Pot); IB-113 (Baader-Meinhof Pot); IB-131 (Old Ditch Road); IB-136 (Halfway Hole).

Jeff Butt with survey tape at Coffee Pot (IB-35).

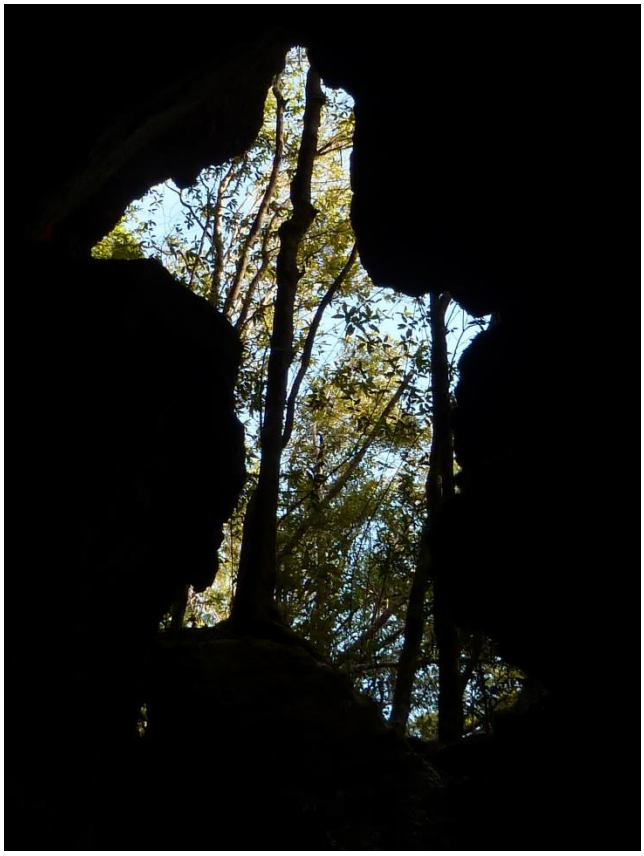
Marble Hill North

Probably the broadest area, it includes caves on north side of Marble Hill, east of the La Perouse track (excluding those caves assigned to the La Perouse Track West and Ida Bay Tramway sub-areas. In general terms, the area uphill from the two main limestone quarries extending up to the Permian Mudstone/ Conglomerate contact on Marble Hill. This sub-area includes caves in the karst east of the main walking track (former Ida Bay tramway) running from registration Booth to Blayneys Quarry) and caves situated north or east of the Mystery Creek course. This region also includes caves located in the old Benders Quarry such as IB-143 (EMP Pot) and IB-202 (ASF Pot aka Quarried Cave).

Jol Desmarchelier, Jeff Butt & Hans Benisch & ASF Pot.

(Just a little historical note: ASF Pot was discovered during one of the field excursions associated with the 1970 Aust Speleo Fed conference at Hutchins School in Hobart. In 1970, ASF Pot was reportedly located as being 80-100 metres behind the backwall of what was then known as Newlands Quarry. Almost completely exhumed by the quarrying, you can still see the outline of the cave shaft walls in the lowest front-wall face of the quarry. Phil Jackson once suggested to me that the cave is actually still there, it's just the rock around it that has gone!)

Other examples: IB-10 (Mystery Creek Cave); IB-28 (Gollums Grovel); IB-45 (Holocaust); IB-89 (Lost Lens Doline aka Toblerone Pot); IB-122 (Mudstone Cavern); IB-130 (Gastropod Grotto); IB-135 (Beetlemania); IB-146 (Quarry Sitters Track Cave); IB-154 (Arthropod Alley); IB-171 (Rocket Rods Pot); IB-175 (Exits Nostrils); IB-243 (Mystery Creek Cave - upper fossil entrance).



IB-135 (Beetlemania) entrance, 19/06/2010.

D'Entrecasteaux/Exit

Caves located along or near the D'Entrecasteaux River, including the four gated entrances: IB-14 (Exit Cave); IB-86 (Slip-In); IB-87 (Drop-In); IB-161 (Bobs Hole).

Other examples include: IB-191 (Salvation Cave/ Seilja Porec); IB-227 (D'Entrecasteaux River First Sink); IB-230 (the incorrectly named "D'Entrecasteaux Fossil Cave"); and IB-232 (D'Entrecasteaux River Third Sink) entrance into Exit Cave.

Valley Entrance/Western Creek

An area south (or left) of the La Perouse/ Moonlight Flats walking track, predominantly on the western side of Marble Hill, but south of the ridge top.

Examples: IB-18 (Western Creek Swallet); IB-20 (Thun Junction); IB-29 (Smelly Cave); IB-120 (Valley Entrance); IB-190 (Side Door); the genuine untagged "D'Entrecasteaux Fossil Cave", probably IB-X70 (Flat Top Roots).

Walking passage with tree roots in IB-X70.

Footnote

Two other possible sub-areas might include caves found on the western side of Lune Sugarloaf (which could encompass some that are presently listed in Ida Bay Tramway. A second sub-area could be Marble Hill South/ Southwest, the karst uphill/ upslope from the D'Entrecasteaux/Exit sub-region. This latter area would presumably include the "missing" caves found by the Croatian cavers in March 2003 which we assume could be in this area: IB-192-194 and IB-196, some untagged caves such as IB-X70 and possibly some of the caves currently listed as "Exit Contact".

D'Entrecasteaux River canyon.

The south side of Marble Hill tends to be rarely explored for caves, due largely in part to its distance from any of the known or established cavers' tracks. It was for this reason – its relative inaccessibility – that STC and NPWS gave permission for the visiting expedition of Croatian cavers to establish a campsite in this WHA karst, beside the D'Entrecasteaux River canyon in March 2003. A condition of their permit was that NPWS and STC receive a copy of their report with maps and cave surveys, but to my knowledge this has never been forthcoming!

There are uncertain allocations including IB-121 and IB-128 (Dismal Hill Pot), tentatively assigned by Phil Rowsell to the Valley Entrance/Western Creek sub-area; number tags not located.

Tasmania Police Academy – Rope Access & Rescue Trainer/Assessor (RARTA) Course ’21

May 2021

Alan Jackson & Gabriel Kinzler

Police officers from the three districts of Tasmania Police (Southern, Northern and Western) came together for two weeks around the state in May to complete a rope access and rescue course, taking in a variety of approaches ranging from the heavy handed Tas Fire Service approach through to lightweight alpine climbing and caving techniques. The Florentine Valley was the stage for the last two days, where trainees learned to use dedicated cave rigging techniques and equipment, which aren’t typically found in the Police’s arsenal and guide books. STC was asked to provide assistance.

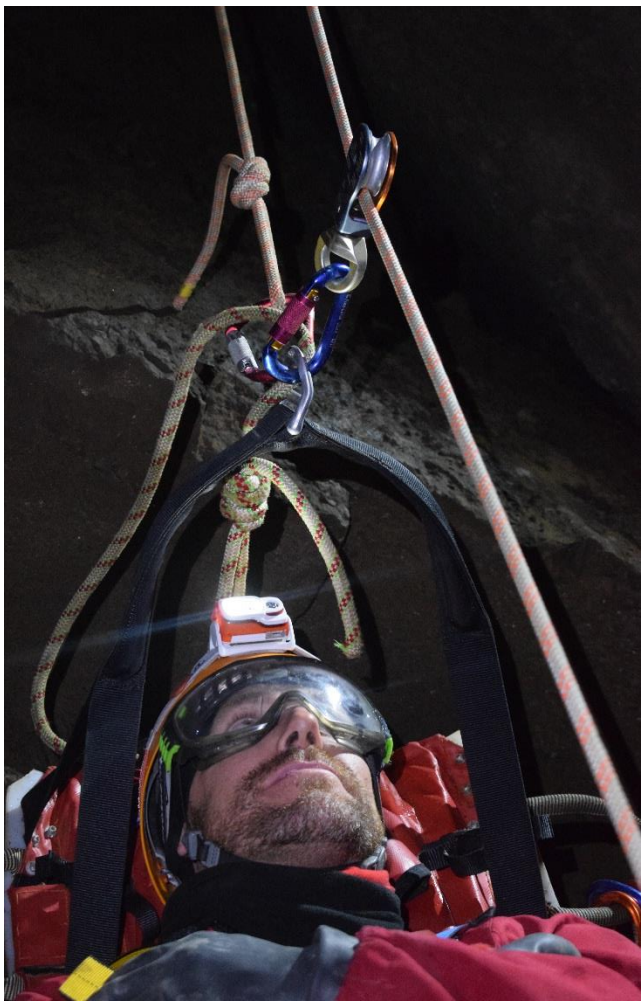
Five-O! Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

Alan and Gabriel met a group of eight bods: Damian Bidgood and Dean Wotherspoon were the assessors, and Cameron Rennie, Jono Hitchens, Damo G, Simon Triffet, Callum Herbert and Elmar Van Breda were the hopefuls. Accommodation was provided in the form of a comfy AirBnb in Maydena and we had a good evening together at the end of day one.

Alan showing Police the ropes. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

Rather than head underground on the first afternoon, we mucked around with our Petzl Nest and showed off the basics of how the cavers rig (concrete screws, counterweights, tyroleans, carries, etc.) on the surface at Dewhurst Quarry, reusing holes/setups from previous STC training exercises. On day two, we went to Growling and recreated setups from the 2019 exercise, with a few modifications.

Some of the things that were novel to many of the attendees included: reusable/removeable bolts (concrete screws); dynamic load share anchors (i.e. not knotted off prior to loading) and how much the direction of load can change in a typical caving setup; live patient in the stretcher; transitions (e.g. counterweights to tyroleans and vice versa, tyroleans to tyroleans etc.); the Petzl Nest stretcher and how comfy and well setup for transitions it is; that gumboots are truly the caving shoe of choice and much grippier and versatile than first believed.



Jono Hitchens. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

It was an invaluable exercise with the chance to not only bring Tasmania Police’s leading SAR Team members up to speed with how the Tasmanian caving community runs cave rescue rigging but to forge stronger personal and professional relationships between the two parties. Both will go a very long way to improving the cohesiveness of any future authentic cave rescue in the state.

From what was seen, the SAR Team members present proved themselves to be professional, skilled, engaged and motivated, quick to pick up new skills and, most importantly, a bloody good fun bunch to kick around with. We look forward to working with many of them again at the September statewide cave rescue exercise at Honeycomb Cave.

Junee-Florentine Experiments Update

June 2021

Stephen Fordyce

Grand scale scientific experiments (in accordance with the permit granted by Parks & Wildlife) in the Junee Master Cave system continue, and here is a quick update. My May trip saw many new devices placed, there are now 27 deployed at last count! 5 detectors, 3 weather stations and 5 dye release devices in and above Niggly. 2 detectors and 2 water depth loggers in Growling Swallet. 4 detectors and a weather station in Porcupine. 2 detectors, 2 weather stations and a phone for cloud-syncing at Junee Cave. Phew!

A few devices were retrieved (like the detector at the end of Niggly which had been there since December!) but there weren't any particularly mind-blowing results. JF-556 traced to Niggly, but nearby JF-274 convincingly didn't, so that was interesting (I suspect it goes to Sesame). There were a couple of flood pulses in Niggly, but none more than 2 m or so (small change compared to the 25 m flood that obliterated camp in 2019). Even 43 mm in one day on Tim Shea didn't do much, with some interesting implications there.

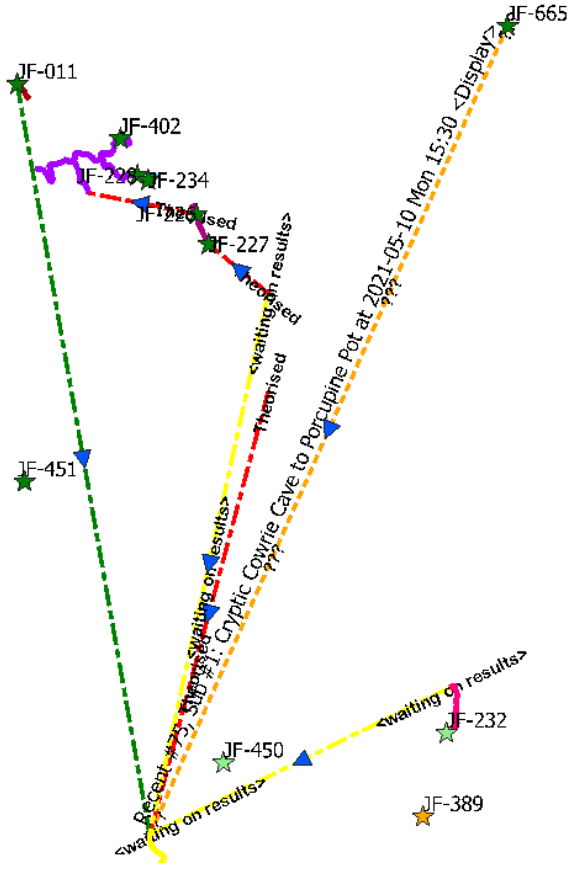
Since I got back to (and subsequently stuck in) Melbourne, STC members have done a great job of getting out and doing dye releases, mostly targeting the Porcupine detectors, which were retrieved after a month for some excellent round 1 results. We've managed 37 separate dye releases (most in the order of 25 g of dye) since the start of May, but there are plenty more (both easy and hard) before the detectors are programmed to reduce sensitivity at the end of August to save power. Please help – the more swallets we can trace into the system and the more data points, the better it can be understood. I can't do them all myself. The Porcupine results do confirm that winter is unfortunately the best time to be doing it…

Porcupine round 1 results were generally nice, with positive traces from Rainbow Cave, Sinking Stream Swallet, Udensala (probably), Jolly Roger, Tassy Pot, JF-388 and a few other obscure things. Yes, Tassy Pot!! A faint but almost certain peak showed up, hydrologically connecting this significant cave into the master cave system. I would love to re-do it with a bit more dye though.

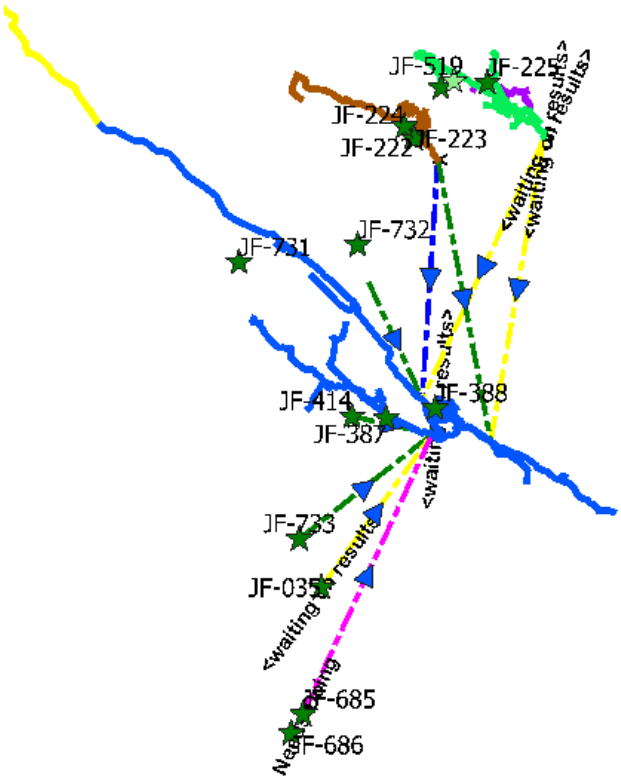
I've done a bit more work on the myriad spreadsheets and links to improve data visualisation in QGIS. It's still a work in progress, but is looking pretty good. In the pictures, green is a confirmed trace, blue is a convincing negative, and the other are uncertain, waiting on results or need doing.

Did I mention there's plenty left to do?! Dye is in an easily accessible cache off the Florentine Rd, and there are useful release points as little as 5 minutes from 2WD parking. Releases in Rainbow Cave and Growling Swallet are valued any time, as the dye peaks will go past up to up to 8 detectors, and provide data showing what happens to the peaks as they travel through the cave, under different conditions.

Dye releases expeditions have also led to the discovery of quite a few new caves and interesting things like Gabriel's "Tarny McTarnface". There are also a few spare detectors available for traces to other possible resurgences, like Lawrence River, The Chairman and a few small springs.



Traces to the Ken Murrey River (upstream sump in Porcupine).



Traces to central Porcupine.

Rocky Whelans Caves

Greg Middleton (photos and corresponding maps, found in the *Maps* section)

Rocky Whelan was born John Whelan in the UK, was convicted for stealing and was transported to Australia in April 1827 for a term of seven years (Convict records, 2021). He was said to be known as 'Rocky' because of "the crags and deep pock marks of his face" (Daly 2013). He is said to have escaped from Sydney and taken to highway robbery. He was arrested, transported to Norfolk Island and tried to steal a boat. He served 18 years on the island before he was sent to Hobart Town where he was assigned to a public works gang. After only two days he absconded again and took to the rugged bushland of Mount Wellington (Daly 2013). He subsequently admitted to five murders with robbery and was hanged in Hobart on 26 June 1855.

Rocky Whelans Cave

Anyone who has done much walking on Mt Wellington is likely to have come across this cave which is located on a short branch track off Woods Track between Fingerpost Track and the Pinnacle Road. Looking at this very meagre shelter, it's hard to imagine it ever actually serving as a hideout for a vicious bushranger.

Yet people have asserted that Whelan lived in it. 'Aramo' (1888) wrote:

> *The outlaw, grown audacious from long security, was one morning trying on a pair of boots in a shop in Hobart Town, thinking himself sufficiently disguised to defy the police even in the city, whence it would be easy to return, as he had done before, to his cave. This rocky room is close to the roadside; a projecting crag covering the entrance, so that people touching it as they passed did not suspect the rock was hollow. The inside is large enough to live in; and it contains a stair-like ascent to the top of the rock, from which the bushranger actually looked down through a natural window at the soldiers seeking him. It is called 'Rocky Whelan's Cave'.*

The "stair-like ascent to the top of the rock" can only be the narrow passage shown on the accompanying plan (Figure 2), leading to the 'rear' entrance, DT20. It would be difficult for a fully-grown man to squeeze through the passage and out the low opening at the top end. Even from there it is a steep scramble to the top of the rock. The idea that this passage could have served as an escape route for Whelan is, in my opinion, as fanciful as the idea that he actually lived in this shelter for any length of time.

It was reported in 1907 that a Mr W.J. Clarke had found an easy route to Mount Nelson, via "an old cave he had discovered years ago; which goes half way through the saddle of Mount Nelson" and "he says an underground rail can be put through this at very little expense" and "That the historical Rocky Whelan sheltered in this cave in the fifties" (Anon. 1907a). This doesn't seem to be a reference to the cave on Mt Wellington. It seems more likely to be an exaggerated report on Rocky Whelans Cave II (see below).

Other references to RWC in the press include a report on the apprehending of one James Lynch for being "idle and disorderly" – and for having "no fixed place of abode, beyond Rocky Whelan's Cave" (Anon. 1905). Lynch was sentenced to a month in gaol – just for living in a cave! The poor bastard was dead in less than two years: "The deceased's body had been found on Tuesday at a place known as 'Rocky Whelan's Cave,' near the Waterworks. The evidence tendered at the Inquest was brief. It disclosed that Lynch was a feeble old man of 79 years of age. He had made the cave his home, eking out a precarious existence by the making of clothes pegs and props" (Anon. 1907b). (This could be a case of misidentification, as there is another sandstone shelter, Sixpence Cave DT18, actually in the Waterworks Reserve which would have been much more liveable.)

Another reference in 1909 leaves no doubt that people believed Whelan actually lived in the cave. Anon. (1909), reported that a track had been cut to the cave which was "but a quarter of a mile walk into the bush" and that Whelan had "told the police after his capture that when hard pushed he used to make this cave on Mount Wellington his hiding place for a year or two, also a hollow tree close by."

Rocky Whelans Cave survey

Ros Skinner, Kevin Kiernan and the author checked out Rocky Whelans Cave on 4 June 2020 (Figure 1a, 1b). They observed that it is difficult to see how this narrow shelter could have been useful for a bushranger. There is hardly room to lie down and harder still to find anywhere that might have been comfortable. Although, as a shelter, it is very small, they resolved that it should be surveyed, if only because of its notoriety. Ros and the author returned to carry out a survey on 3 September 2020 (Figure 2).

Figure 1a & 1b. Ros and Kevin try to figure out how a bushranger could have used this tiny shelter as a hideout.

Figure 1b.

Another Rocky Whelans Cave?

A number of the early references hinted at another 'Rocky Whelan's Cave'. In 1895 there was a report of a deranged youth, when apprehended at Fern Tree, announcing he intended to "take up his abode in 'Rocky Whelan's' cave at the back of Mt. Nelson" (Anon. 1895). The 1907 story of the cave "going half way through the saddle of Mount Nelson" (Anon. 1907a) appears to place it well to the south-east of Mt Wellington. Another report under the heading of 'On Dit' notes "That another cave has been discovered in the vicinity of Forest road. That Mr Verrell says that this cave once sheltered Rocky Whelan" (Anon. 1907c). And yet another: "That another cave in which that notorious desperado Rocky Whelan found shelter has been discovered on Mount Wellington" (Anon. 1908).

In 1931 a Sydney newspaper carried a report saying "John Whelan was an ex-Norfolk Island convict, who took to the bush in Tasmania, and has at least two caves near Hobart named after him" (Ingegoodye 1931).

While searching on the Internet for information on Rocky Whelan and his cave(s), we came across an interesting photo in the Tasmanian Archives, by Jack Thwaites, captioned: "Proctors Road - Rocky Whelan's Cave" (Ref. NS3195-1-1144) (Figure 3).

Now, this was a serious piece of evidence that there was, indeed, another RWC. John Barrass ('Jack') Thwaites (1902-1986) was a very well-known bushwalker, conservationist and photographer. He was the first secretary of the Hobart Walking Club (from 1929), administrative officer of the Tasmanian Government Film Unit (1946-58), a member of the Scenery Preservation Board from 1958 and its secretary and Superintendent of Scenic Reserves (1961-67) (Kleinig 2008). The problem was that the only clues to the location of this cave were the words "Proctors Road" and that it was clearly in sandstone.

Figure 3. "Proctors Road - Rocky Whelan's Cave" – photo by Jack Thwaites, possibly taken around 1954.

Determined to follow up this intriguing lead, I walked what I thought was the full length of Proctors Road, from King Street, Dynnyrne up to the Southern Outlet between Mt Nelson and Tolmans Hill, on 18 July 2020. I noted that, for this entire distance, Proctors Road is cut into dolerite, yet Thwaites' photo was clearly of a cave in sandstone. What I did notice was where Proctors meets the much newer Southern Outlet, it encounters sedimentary rocks – apparently mudstones and, perhaps, some sandstone – and that on the western side of the Outlet, it continues as what is now called "*Old* Proctors Road". This obviously deserved further attention. On 23 July 2020 Ros Skinner and I followed Old Proctors Road south from Tolmans Hill. We noticed some sandstone but it didn't seem to outcrop very prominently and we didn't notice any cave. On our return, however, we met a local woman who told us there were, indeed, caves "up there". It was a vague lead but worth following up. On 27 August we walked the road from where it appears to enter private property. We were not sure it was still (Old) Proctors Road – but we had to check it out.

We walked past some sandstone but from below it did not seem to have developed enough of a cliff for a cave to form. The road took a hair-pin bend and climbed up above the outcrop of sandstone. We determined the best way to check it out was to go up the road and climb back down over the outcrop. I looked for one way and Ros took another, parallel but not so steep. After a couple of minutes, she called out that she had found a cave! I was sceptical but had to have a look. A cave it was, sure enough, but quite unlike the one in Thwaites' photo – until one looked a little more carefully. Clambering down and around the outcrop, we came to a second opening. This one was much more rounded and was clearly the very entrance photographed by Thwaites! We – that is, Ros – had found the other Rocky Whelans Cave which we could not do other than call Rocky Whelans Cave II. We immediately surveyed it (Figure 4) and were quite

impressed by the size of the main chamber – it measured about 10 m by 8 m, with 1.8 m of headroom and parts of the floor were near flat and certainly smooth enough for bushrangers to have lived there. This seems much more likely to have been a real hideout of Rocky Whelan. Although the cave has two entrances, they are so close together that no one could imagine that one would serve as an escape route if The Law was approaching the other.

The cave is evidently inhabited by some small mammals and a few insects. There is some graffiti on walls but the cave has suffered little damage over the years.

Figure 5. Looking out the larger entrance to Rocky Whelans Cave, DT21.

Subsequently, in the course of further investigations of the Tasmanian Archives' online photographic collection, I came across three other photos captioned "Rocky Whelan's Cave". One, again by Jack Thwaites, was obviously a close-up of the lower entrance to the narrow passage in Rocky Whelans Cave leading to DT20 (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Captioned just "Rocky Whelan's Cave", this photo of part of the cave on Mt Wellington, was taken by Jack Thwaites, possibly in July 1974. It is registered in the Tas. Archives as NS3195-2-2403.

More interesting, however, was a photo by one Richard C. Harvey, captioned "Sunday Walking Club - at Rocky Whelan's Cave - Aug" (Figure 7) – apparently taken in 1934. It is a great shot of the larger of Rocky Whelans Cave II's entrances (DT21) with suitably attired gentlemen bushwalkers of the day. The second entrance (DT22) appears at the lower right.

Figure 7. "Sunday Walking Club - at Rocky Whelan's Cave" by Richard Harvey. Registered No. NS1029-1-375. This shows the larger entrance, DT21; the lower entrance, DT22, is partly visible at the bottom right.

This was a very interesting find and confirmed that this second cave of Rocky Whelan's has been well known for many years.

A third cave of Rocky Whelan?

Perhaps there is yet another shelter which may have been used by the notorious Mr Whelan. A report in 1912 stated:

> *A correspondent wishes to say that the real Rocky Whelan's Cave is on the property of the Cascade Brewery Company, just off the Huon-road, and that he was not aware that the Bluff overlooking the Cascade Factory was called after the notorious bush outlaw. For over a week Whelan was concealed on this Bluff, which in those days was thickly covered with scrub and trees. It was at the foot of this Bluff that Whelan tried to murder a travelling hawker, who, however, escaped by showing the desperado that he was armed. The very next day Whelan crossed the Huon-road and committed the Stony Steppes murder* (Odd Man Out 1912).

This report would appear to merit some follow-up.

The third interesting photo in the Tas. Archives, also captioned "Rocky Whelan's Cave" is clearly not at either of the known locations (Figure 8). It appears to show a rectangular opening at the foot of a vertical cliff, which appears to be a quarry face.

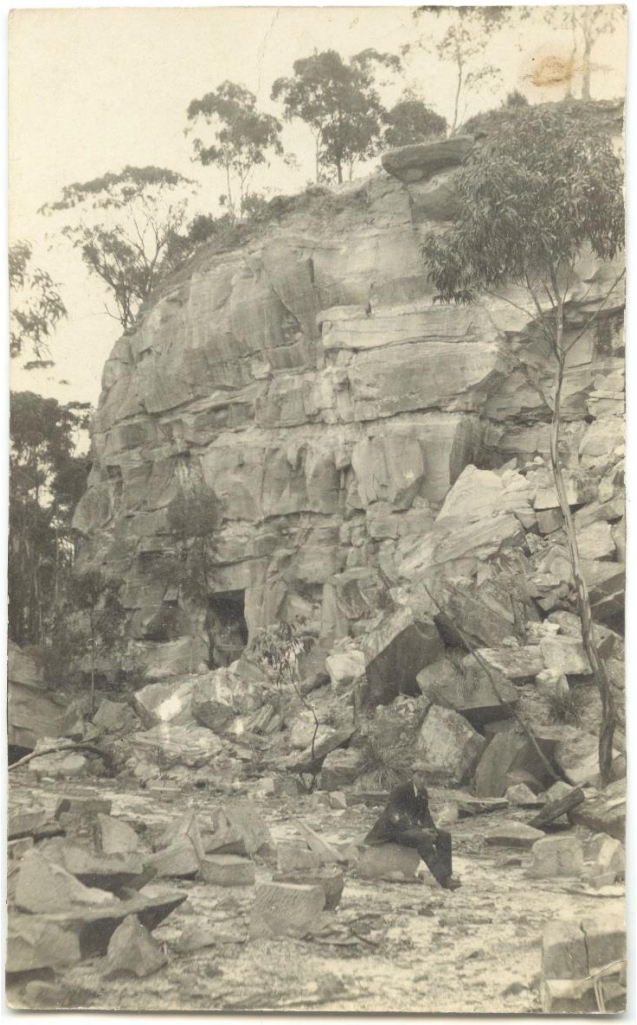


Figure 8. "Rocky Whelan's Cave - Mt Wellington c 1900s" – photo by James Chandler. Registered No. NS869-1-354.

Without further information, this lead seems difficult to follow up but is, nevertheless, intriguing.

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Anon. 1905 City Police Court. *Tasmanian News*, 7 September 1905, p. 2.

Anon. 1907a On Dit [One says] *Tasmanian News*, 8 November 1907, p. 1.

Anon. 1907b A lonely death. *The Mercury*, 4 October 1907, p.4.

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Anon. 1909 Tracks on Mount Wellington: What is being done for tourists. *The Mercury*, 9 February 1909.

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Kleinig, Simon 2008 *Jack Thwaites: Pioneer Tasmanian Bushwalker & Conservationist.* Forty Degrees South, Lindisfarne, Tas.

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Mole Creek System - Mapping and Diving Project Update

June 2021

Stefan Eberhard (text) & Peter Bell (maps)

This project has two main objectives:

1. To generate georeferenced maps of the entire Mole Creek cave system.
2. To use cave diving techniques to extend the exploration and mapping of caves in this system.

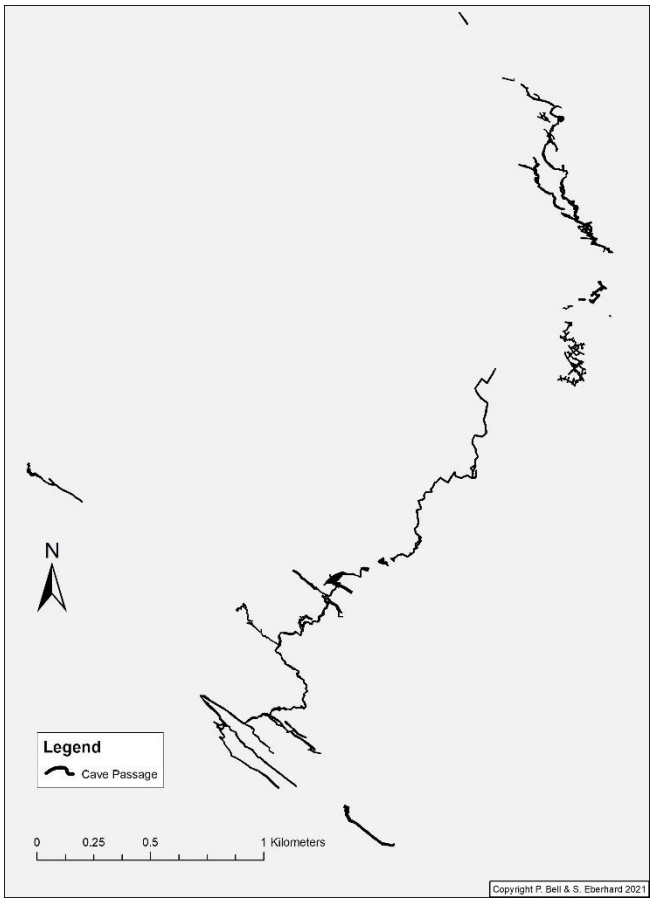
The Mole Creek karst drainage system comprises the extensive network of hydrologically and speleogenetically related caves that ultimately drain to Scotts Rising. The system encompasses Westmorland Cave, Kellys Pot, Herberts Pot, Shishkebab, Dangerous, Wet Cave, Honeycomb, The Arch, Pyramid, Spider, Blackshawl, Cow Cave, Roaring Hole, and numerous other caves and dolines.

Mapping

The mapping part of the project started as a desktop research exercise sourcing historical data and information including cave names, numbers, entrance coordinates, maps, trip reports and the all-important cave survey data. Several people generously shared their local knowledge and made survey data and historical reports available – thank you Phil Jackson (STC), Miles Pierce (VSA), Bob Kershaw (ISS), Steve Jacobs and Dave Butler (NC). Early TCC Northern Branch trip reports and sketch maps from the 1950s and 1960s were a priceless source of information, as were Leigh Gleeson's field survey notes of Herberts Pot and Ron Mann's survey notes for Kelly's Pot (both SCS). Tracking down a copy of the original VSA survey notes for Wet Cave was a bonus for Tasmanian speleological archives. Sadly, the original survey data for Rob Sexton's 1959 mapping masterpiece of Honeycomb Cave remains missing (not in CEGSA archives). In situations such as this, where the original data is missing, we were able to regenerate plan data from published plans using a handy tool in Compass, however elevation data cannot be reverse engineered so easily. This means that to generate vertical profiles and 3D models, Honeycomb and some other caves will need to be resurveyed. Our desktop research was followed by ground-truthing with GPS to verify entrance locations and map additional features. It was surprising how inaccurate some entrance coordinates were, and uncertainty persists around some cave locations and names. Over the decades, some

caves have been referred to by different names, and in some cases the same name has been applied to more than one cave. There is still plenty of ground-truthing and cave survey work to be done, especially the numerous smaller caves in the lower part of the drainage system. A simplified version of the map follows, which shows the layout and current mapped extent of the system, with 13.4 km of surveyed cave passage.

Map 1. Overview of the Mole Creek cave system as currently explored and mapped with 13.4 km of surveyed cave passage. Cave surveyors and individual cave maps by members of the Australian Speleological Federation, including Cave Exploration Group of South Australia, Illawarra Speleological Society, Mole Creek Caving Club, Newcastle & Hunter Valley Speleological Society, Northern Caverneers, Southern Caving Society, Southern Tasmanian Caverneers, Victorian Speleological Association. Compilation map by Peter Bell and Stefan Eberhard.



Diving

The caves with sumps that were initially scoped out for their diving prospects included Roaring Hole, Swiss Cheese, Honeycomb complex (1, 1.5 and 2), Cow Cave, The Arch, Cow-Blackshawl-Spider-Pyramid complex, Westmorland, Herberts Pot and various other un-named holes in the lower Mole Creek system. A previous report published in *Speleo Spiel* 438 (May-June 2020) covered exploration dives in Scotts Rising and Roaring Hole; these dives are briefly reiterated below and give context to more recent exploration in Roaring and Westmorland Cave which are reported following.

Scotts Rising

Scotts Rising was first dived in May 1995. On this occasion I reached a depth of 24 m in a silty shaft jammed with logs. The poor visibility, cold water and large loose logs that could trap a diver deterred any follow up exploration until December 2018 when I returned with better equipment and more experience. The shaft continued steeply down before levelling out and after passing a narrowing in the passage I tied the line off at a depth of 39 m. The 2018 dive was done in wetsuit with air-filled side-mounted tanks, which made passing the narrow point easy but narcosis and cold were factors at depth and during decompression. On the next trip in March 2019 I used a dry suit and rebreather with trimix. Unfortunately, I was unable to pass the narrow point at the bottom wearing the back-mounted rebreather. Everything silted out very quickly so I retreated to -33 m and laid some line up an ascending side passage. The next dive will be made with a side-mounted rebreather.

Roaring Hole

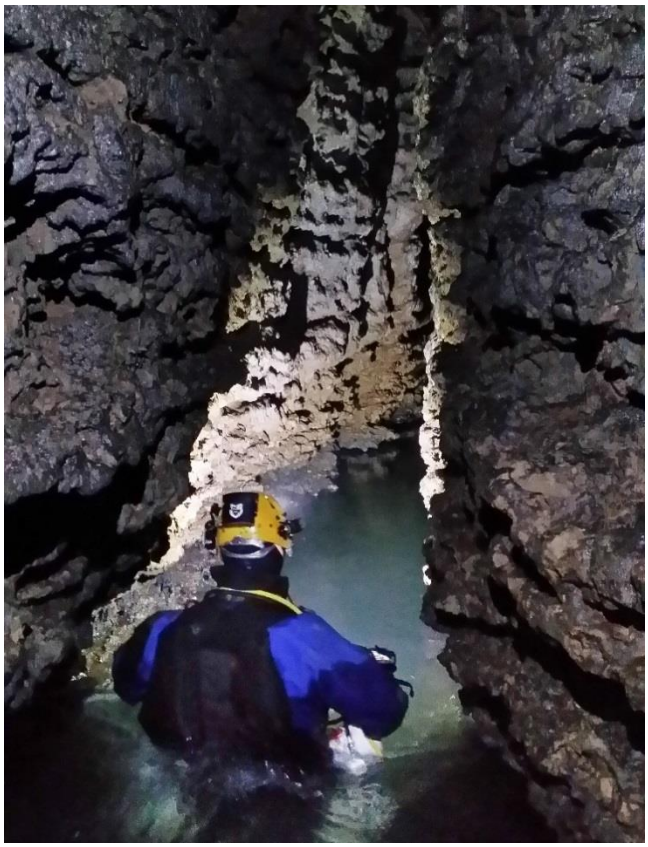
Roaring Hole upstream sump was previously dived in March 2019 when the first sump was passed after 70 m followed by a deep lake (Chamber 1) leading to a second sump which was explored for around 40 m before air supplies dictated the turn-around point. An attempt to continue the exploration in May 2020 was thwarted by rainfall and high stream flow which precluded diving.

The next dive in upstream Roaring was on 13th May 2021, supported by Pete Bell, Ben Watkins-Davis and Janice March. While I dived, the others photographed and surveyed the upstream portion of the cave and doline to the surface and a GPS tie-in point. I dived with twin 7 litre tanks and quickly reached the previous end point in Sump 2 where I tied on a line reel and continued upstream. Within 15 m I surfaced in a stream passage (Chamber 2) which extended for around 30 m to a deep pool at the start of Sump 3. The submerged passage, which had been wide and shallow (< 3m deep) up to this point, abruptly changed character and dropped straight down a vertical shaft to a ledge at 14 m depth. From the ledge it continued straight down a long and narrow vertical rift less than 2 metres wide. Almost out of line I found a tie-off point on the wall at 25 m depth, the bottom of the rift was not visible when I turned and surveyed back out. Overall the upstream section was extended about 80 m heading roughly southeast towards and underneath Spider Cave. The next exploration dive will be done with a rebreather and some helium added to reduce the effects of nitrogen narcosis if it goes much deeper.

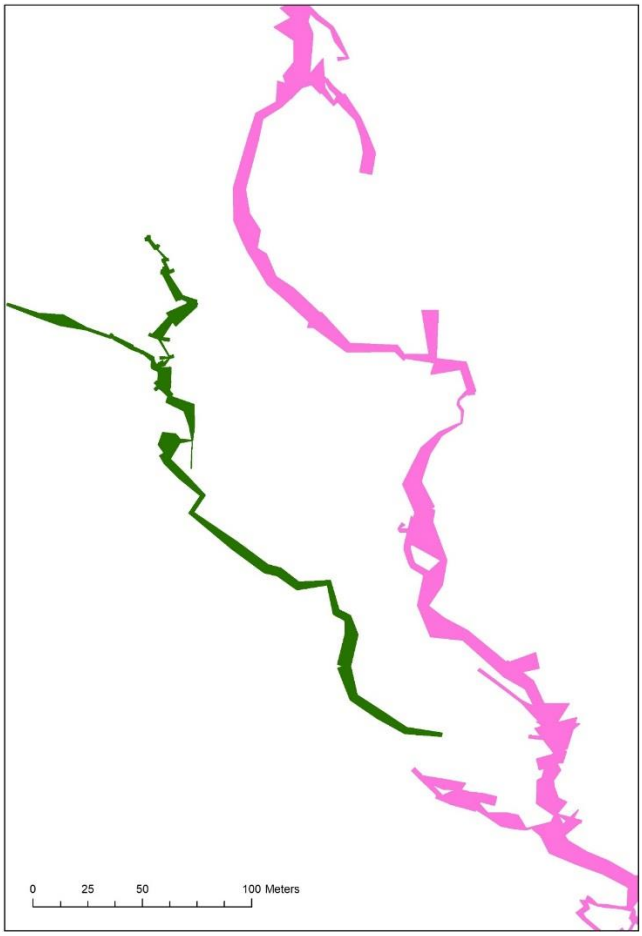
Roaring Hole team May 2021, left to right: Stefan & Bronwen Eberhard, Ben Watkins-Davis, Peter Bell. Photo: Janice March.

Roaring Hole start of upstream sump, May 2021. Diver Stefan Eberhard. Photo: Peter Bell.

The next day, 14th May, Ben and I surveyed the downstream sections of the Roaring Hole doline, and I did a quick recce dive using the gas left over from the previous day. The downstream end of the doline has two numbered entrances: MC-450 which carries the active stream and soon sumps; and MC-451, a usually dry flood overflow and crawlway that passes beneath a daylight hole and eventually ends in a deep static sump. After completing the survey Ben helped with ferrying dive gear to the active MC-450 sump, which was flowing vigorously after overnight rain and snow. I proceeded slowly and cautiously, mindful of the current pushing me into the cave, and the poor visibility as the stirred-up silt flowed downstream and obscured the way ahead. Thankfully the passage was shallow and straight with fairly uniform dimensions and no serious line-trap hazards. I followed the walls for around 50 m until I finally found a tie-off point for the line around a tree fern log, where I cut the line and exited. Overall this was a very successful, satisfying and enjoyable trip with great company and support with the diving and surveying.



Roaring Hole start of downstream sump. Diver Stefan Eberhard. Photo: Ben Watkins-Davis.



Map 2. Preliminary map of Roaring Hole - Mouse Cave complex (left, green) with 2021 dive extensions showing relationship to Spider-Pyramid Complex (right, pink). Spider-Pyramid survey data courtesy of Bob Kershaw (ISS). Roaring Hole- Mouse Cave survey by S. Eberhard, P. Bell, B. Watkins-Davis, J. March. Compiled by Peter Bell and Stefan Eberhard.

Westmorland Cave

Westmorland Cave was first dived by Nick Hume and me in 1982. Nick dived first with a single back-mounted tank and reported: "…made headway along a treacherously shallow, thirty-metre-long tube, to a more pleasantly open passage at nine metres water depth. No tie-off point was available to assist in re-entering the return slot, so a push very far beyond this was not made. Banks of flocculent (white!) silt that were encountered were also responsible for us giving up so easily (*Speleo Spiel* #176, 1982)." After Nick returned, I dived but couldn't see anything or find the way on as Nick had reeled the line back in. That was nearly 40 years ago.

I returned to dive the Westmorland sump again 10th April this year. Stephen Jacobs and Bob Pennington very kindly helped with transporting the dive gear. Even with two small 3 litre tanks the rest of the dive gear amounted to heavy loads to be carried along the low passageway leading to the sump. Many thanks to Steve and Bob; your help was greatly appreciated!

I had high hopes for the Westmorland sump however the dive turned out to be very disappointing. The way on appeared to be down under the left wall where it levelled off at around four metres depth with a low and extremely silty void extending laterally. I didn't push into this any further as the conditions were constricted and unpleasant with zero

visibility and no flow to clear away the silt. There was nothing to tie off the line to; the rock was very rotten and everything I touched broke off. Eventually the line was secured to a knob on the roof a few metres back up the wall, and less than five metres from the start of the dive. The sump has changed dramatically since 1982 and probably silted up during the extreme flooding and debris flow events of January 2011 and June 2016.

Both the 2011 and 2016 flooding episodes were initiated by extreme rainfall events that delivered 300 mm and 400 mm of rainfall, respectively, over a period of several days and had devastating impacts for Caveside landowners further downstream (Kain *et al.* 2017). Both these rainfall events, which occurred within six years of each other, were more than double the highest 3-day totals (160 mm) ever recorded at Caveside since records began there in 1906.

The 2011 event triggered a landslide on the Great Western Tiers escarpment which entered the Westmorland Stream and became a debris flow which scoured the mountain stream channel along a 2.9 km length. The debris flow blocked the original stream inflow entrance of Westmorland Cave with large boulders; fortunately, entry can still be gained via the twin upper entrance shafts approximately 20 -25 m deep. The 2016 event was driven primarily by long-duration stream flooding and erosion of alluvium. Both flooding events would have delivered large volumes of sediment-laden water into the cave. The interesting report by Kain *et al.* (2017) is referenced at end and can be found online.

Stefan gearing up. Westmorland Cave, April 2021.

Reference

Kain, CL, Mazengarb, C, & Rigby, EH (2017) The Caveside flood events of 2011 and 2016: A field investigation and modelling analysis. Tasmanian Geological Survey Record UR2017/01, http://www.mrt.tas.gov.au/mrtdoc/dominfo/download/UR2017_01/UR2017_01.pdf

Fun and Diversions

Rolan's Junk

In this month's edition of "Rolan's Junk", we look at a pile of detritus found stashed on Mt Anne by mainland caver Keith Chatterton a couple of months ago. But whose could it be? The Editor has his suspicions, but if anyone else would like to venture a guess, please get in touch! Thank you, Keith, for bringing this junk all the way down!

Fun and Diversions (continued)

An Imaginary Trip Report

John Oxley, with apologies to STC (Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

'twas a Winter's day in twenty twenty
with Covid lockdowns 'round a plenty,
but we in Tassie mostly free
to wander where we pleased to be

So instead of living in despair
I thought I'd get myself some air
and take a walk among the hills
as an antidote to Winter's chills

Now, long ago I'd heard a tale
about a place along a trail
where in the past some miners found
the treasures hidden in the ground

In their time and for their toil
great wealth they dug out from the soil,
but the little town that was their host
is now no more than just a ghost

The day was cool as off I set
through the forest lush and wet,
the little stream in dappled light
hurried on, as fast it might

Along the track with twists and turns
past regnans tall and tiny ferns
with ancient myrtle branches bent
and sassafras gave up its scent

With bryophytes across the ground
and Blechnum minus all around,
on rotting logs the fungi blue
and all the other colours too

So on I went but then I saw
the trail I followed was no more,
I must have missed a vital turn
or a marker lost in last year's burn

I pushed along so not to worry
there's plenty time, no need to hurry,
I'd walked quite far, good time I'd made
then chanced upon a grassy glade

The sun was warm, I thought it best
to take some time to have a rest,
to eat some food and drink a sip
or just lie down and have a kip

So down upon the grass I lay
but suddenly, to my dismay
something made me look around,
a man appeared without a sound!

He was old and gnarled with features rough,
he'd clearly led a life quite tough,
his skin was tanned, his beard was white,
but his gait was strong, and his eyes were bright

Then on a nearby log he sat,
I saw he wore a battered hat
and hobnail boots I also saw;
the kind old miners often wore

A moment passed and then he spoke,
perceptive words from such a bloke;
"I think those clouds will bring some snow.
"I've seen before, I ought to know"

We talked a while 'bout nothing much,
'bout life and times and other such,
but then one comment caught my ear;
he said he knew a cave quite near

"A cave", I thought. Now this was good.
So I asked him kindly, if he would
lead me there so I could see
where this secret cavern be

So off we set to find this place
each moving at a spritely pace.
We walked through creeks and over rills,
we skirted rocks and climbed up hills

We waded swamps with croaking frogs,
we climbed 'round stumps and over logs.
To cross a lake we built a boat
and plugged with wax to make it float

Sometimes the scrub was awfully thick
with no way on that we could pick.
So we climbed a tree to get some height
to see our way as best we might

We followed ridges through the bush
and in horizontal scrub to push
we came across a devil's lair
and Tassie tigers everywhere

Then half way up a mountainside
(where caves like ours prefer to hide)
we came upon a rocky bluff
with roots and vines and other stuff

But my disappointment was intense
we'd come this way at great expense
and now we'd reached our final goal
to find a little wombat hole

I said to Tom, ('cause that's his name),
to come this far is such a shame.
But Tom was strong, he did implore
me go inside and to explore

He said he'd been here once before
but never in the cave he saw
beyond the entrance rocks so tight
because he didn't have a light

So in I squeezed 'tween narrow rocks,
over pebbles, under blocks,
then in a while the passage grew
'till I was sure of getting through

I moved along a vadose bed
where long ago a stream had led
and all the walls were gleaming white
with crystal sparkles from my light

But then I thought I'd seen the end
No, wait! there's more around the bend
and then the passage opened wide
with decoration side to side

I came upon a great big room
with crystal flowers full in bloom
and 'tites and 'mites on roof and floor,
with helictites and straws galore

Up high on walls there rippled down
great coloured shawls white, tan and brown,
then on the floor a little nest
of oolites showing off their best

And all along protruding edges,
glowworms hanging from their ledges,
dangling down a sticky line
for passing insects to entwine

Then on the ground with frozen features
lay the bones of ancient creatures,
all were species long since passed
now preserved in calcite cast

And over on the other side
a little stream its course had plied,
spilling over gours and pools
to make a million sparkling jewels

The stream had come from parts unseen
with just a hint of fluorescein;
a measured drop of dye injected
to further downstream be detected

It then continued down a pit
and when in time the bottom hit
it made reverberation loud
and billowed mist up in a cloud

But without a ladder or a rope
of getting down I had no hope,
so I left it for another time
or someone else to risk the climb

And all this while I never saw
a single footprint on the floor,
nor broken straw or muddy cone
no survey marker on a stone

Then while I pondered this huge space
I felt some water on my face,
it wasn't from a stal' up high
but a raindrop from the sky

It seems that I had been asleep
so clearly dreaming of the deep
and when I lay down in the sun
this story in my dream was spun

Now in the west the sun sank low,
the gathered clouds were dripping snow
and breezes blew with icy chill
that funnelled down from off the hill

I gathered up my things around
that I had scattered on the ground
and shoved them quickly in my pack
then headed home along the track

But as I started on my way
I spied an imprint in the clay,
a pattern one could not refute;
was clearly made by hobnail boot!

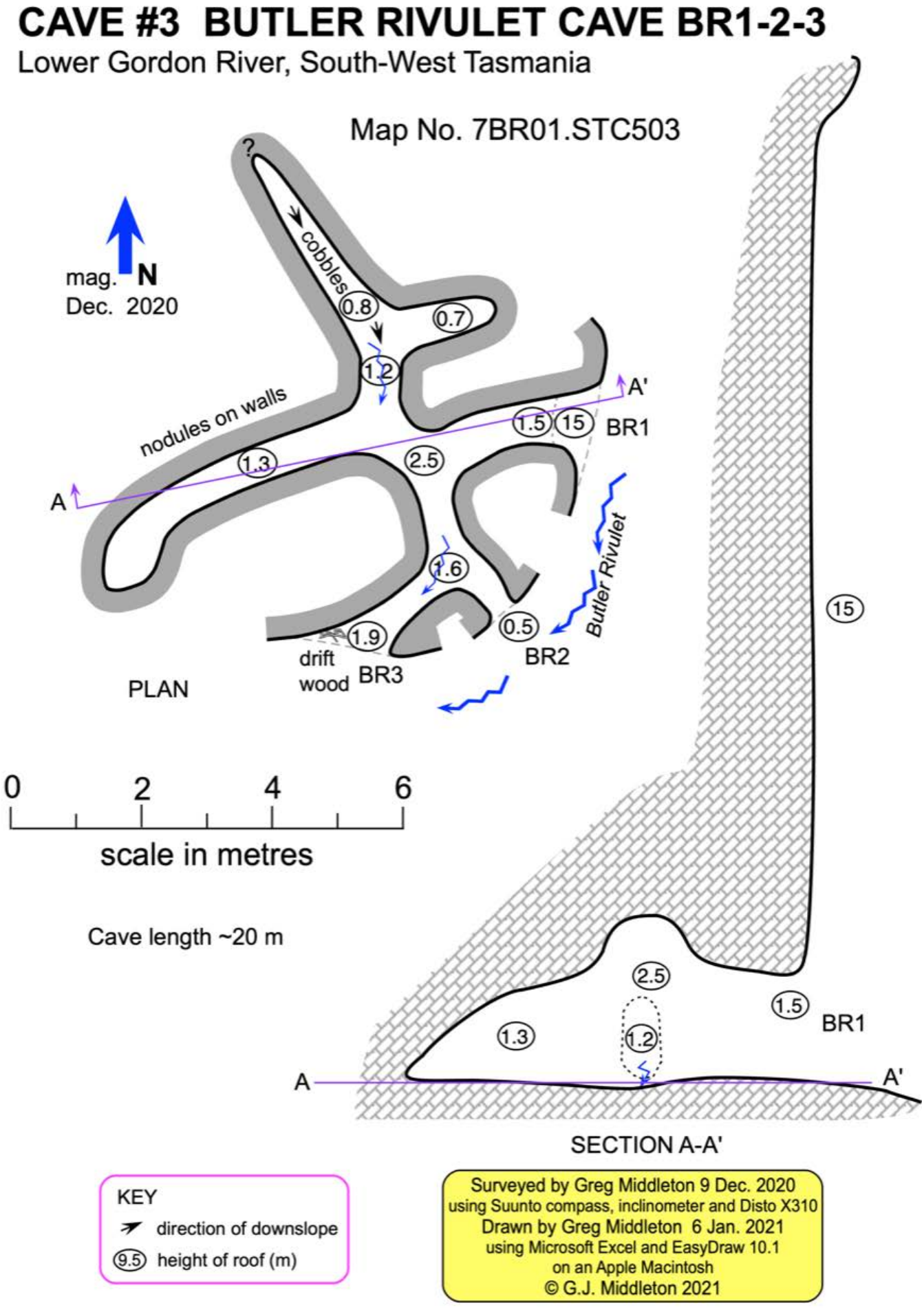
So if you're ever out that way
and bump in to old Tom, please say,
you'd like to have him show you 'round
to find some mysteries underground

And whether they are real or not,
it clearly matters not a lot.
As real our caves may always seem,
who's to say they're not a dream?

2020 in a nutshell. Thankfully, 2021 knows much better logistics.

Original comic by Tom Gould, adapted by Janine McKinnon.

Maps


CAVE #3 BUTLER RIVULET CAVE BR1-2-3
Lower Gordon River, South-West Tasmania
Map No. 7BR01.STC503
mag. N
Dec. 2020
?
cobbles
0.8
0.7
1.2
A'
nodules on walls
1.5
15
BR1
1.3
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A
1.6
Butler Rivulet
15
1.9
0.5
drift wood
BR3
BR2
PLAN
0 2 4 6
scale in metres
Cave length ~20 m
2.5
1.5
BR1
1.3
1.2
A
A'
SECTION A-A'
KEY
direction of downslope
9.5 height of roof (m)
Surveyed by Greg Middleton 9 Dec. 2020
using Suunto compass, inclinometer and Disto X310
Drawn by Greg Middleton 6 Jan. 2021
using Microsoft Excel and EasyDraw 10.1
on an Apple Macintosh
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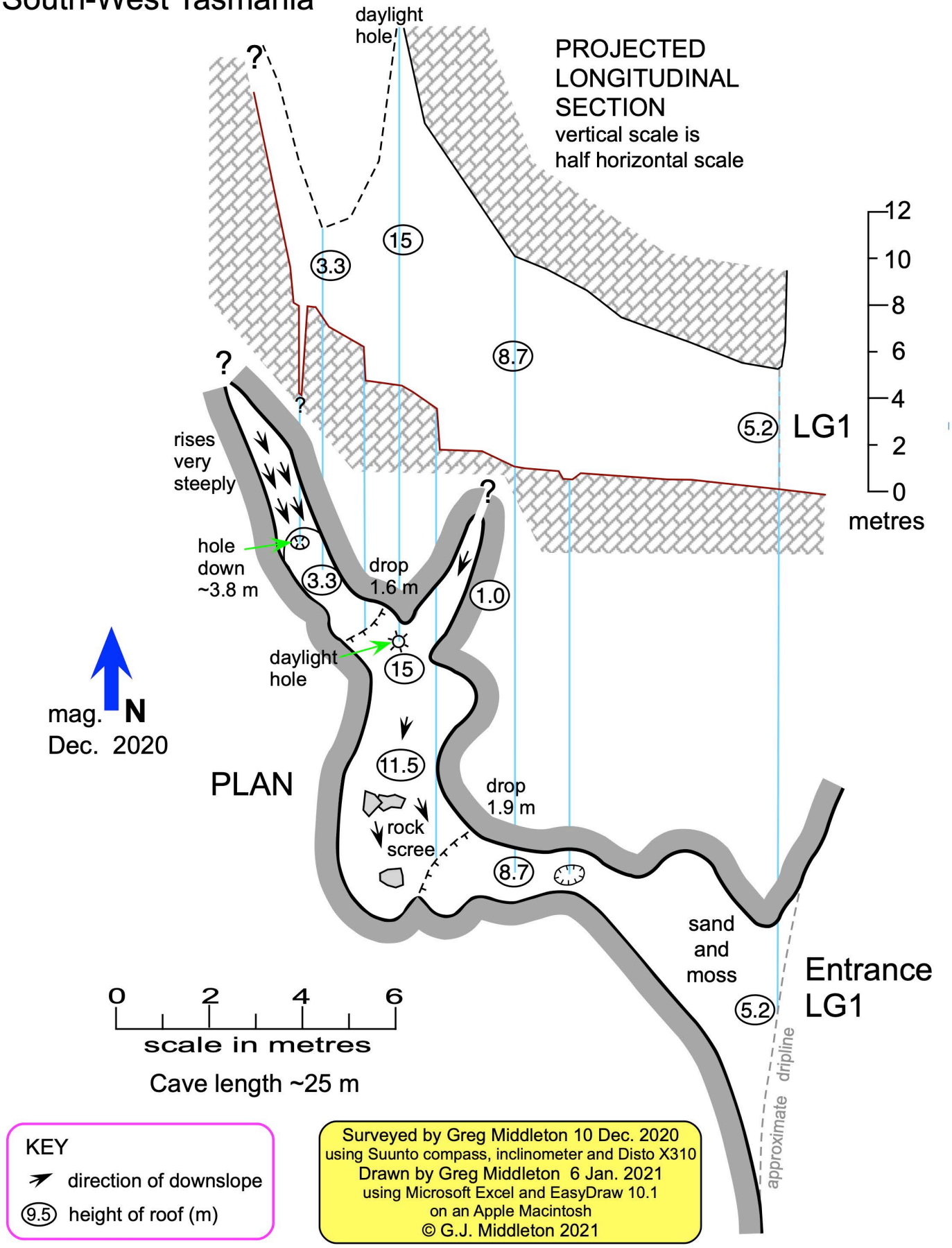
CAVE #1 LIMEKILN REACH CAVE LG1

Lower Gordon Area,
South-West Tasmania

Map No. 7LG01.STC499



KEY

direction of downslope

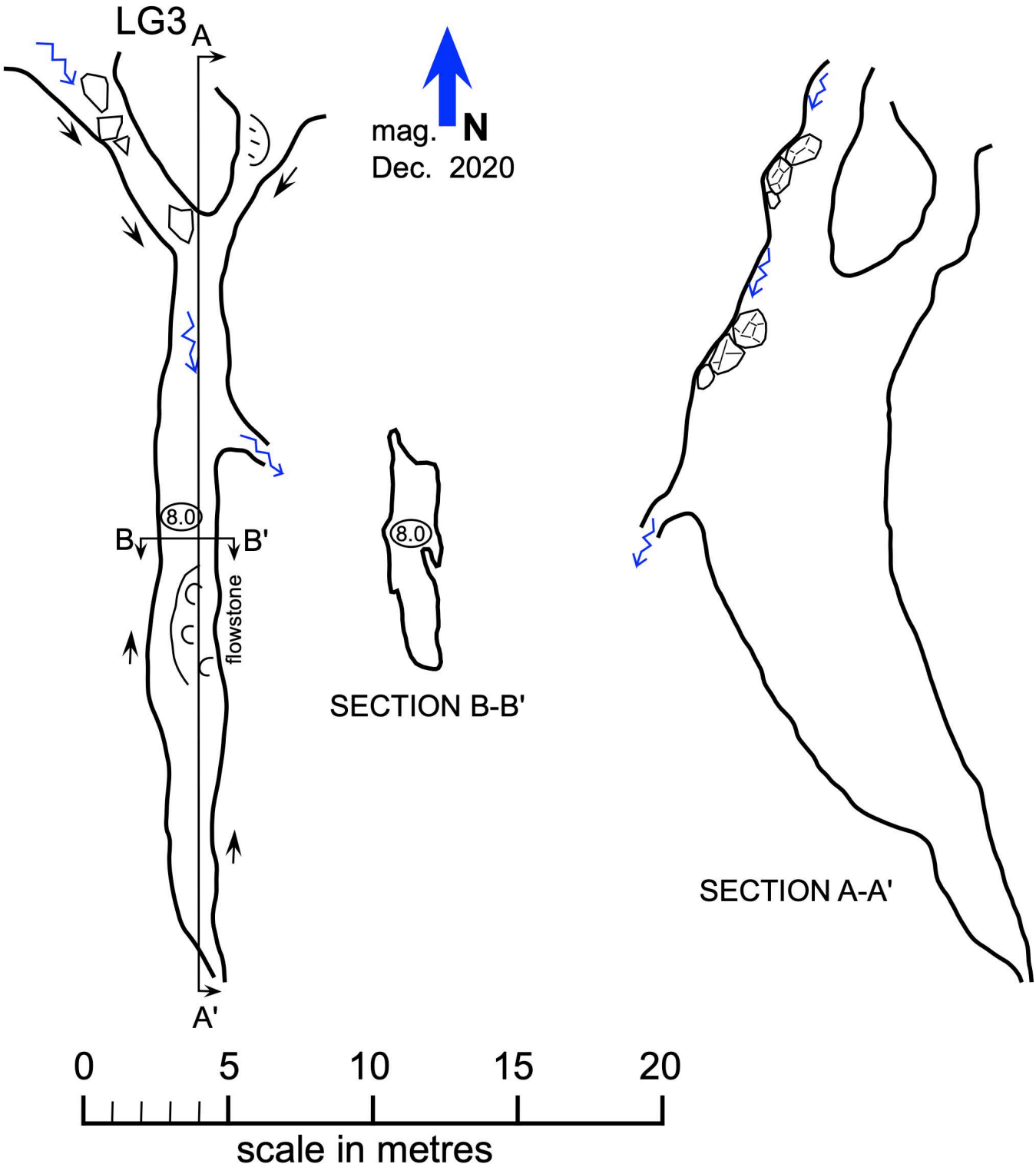
(9.5) height of roof (m)

Surveyed by Greg Middleton 10 Dec. 2020
using Suunto compass, inclinometer and Disto X310
Drawn by Greg Middleton 6 Jan. 2021
using Microsoft Excel and EasyDraw 10.1
on an Apple Macintosh

CAVE #4 LG3

Limekiln Reach, Lower Gordon Area
South-West Tasmania

Map No. 7LG03.STC500



KEY

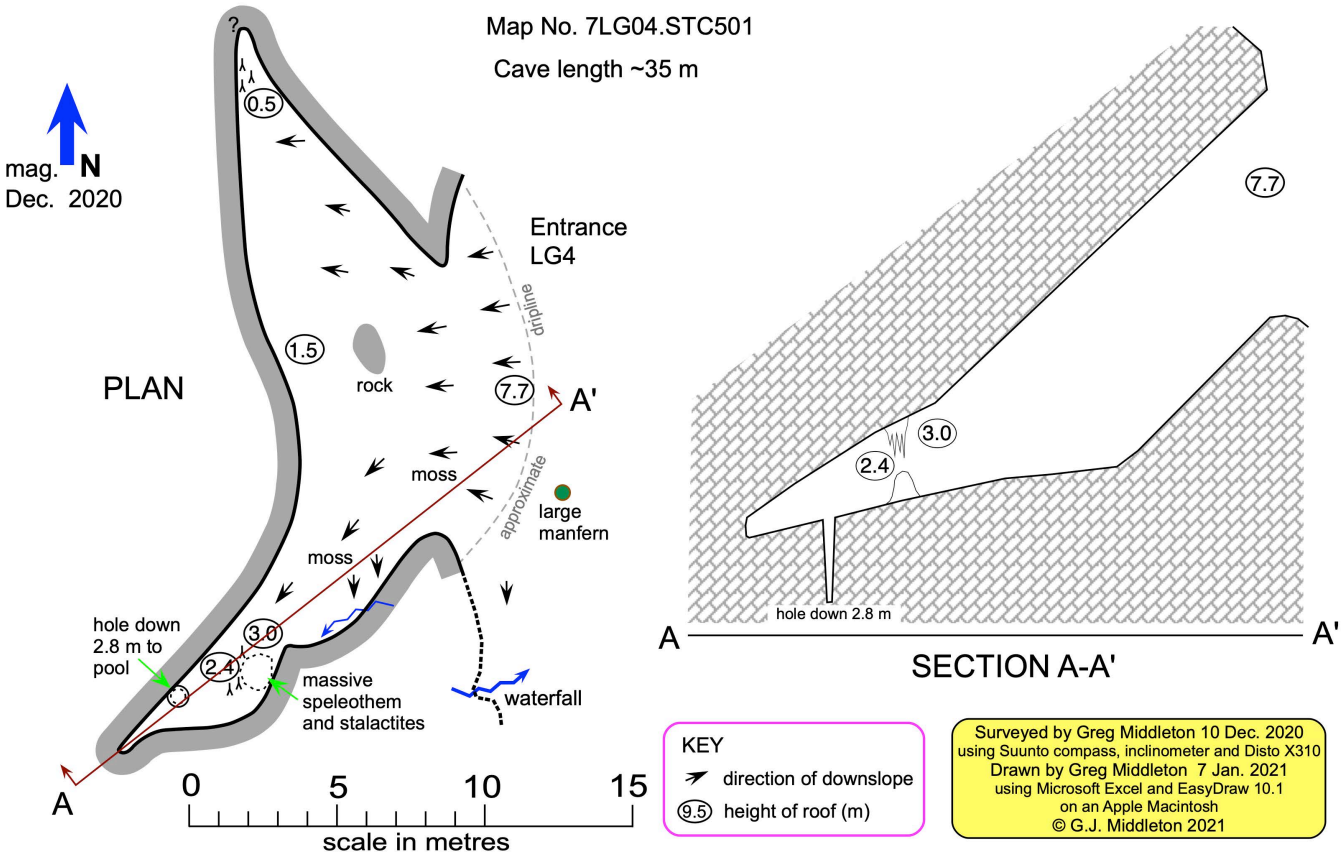
direction of downslope

(9.5) height of roof (m)

Sketched by Rolan Eberhard 10 Dec. 2020
Redrawn by Greg Middleton 27 Apr. 2021
using EasyDraw 10.1
ASF Grade 22

CAVE #5 LG4

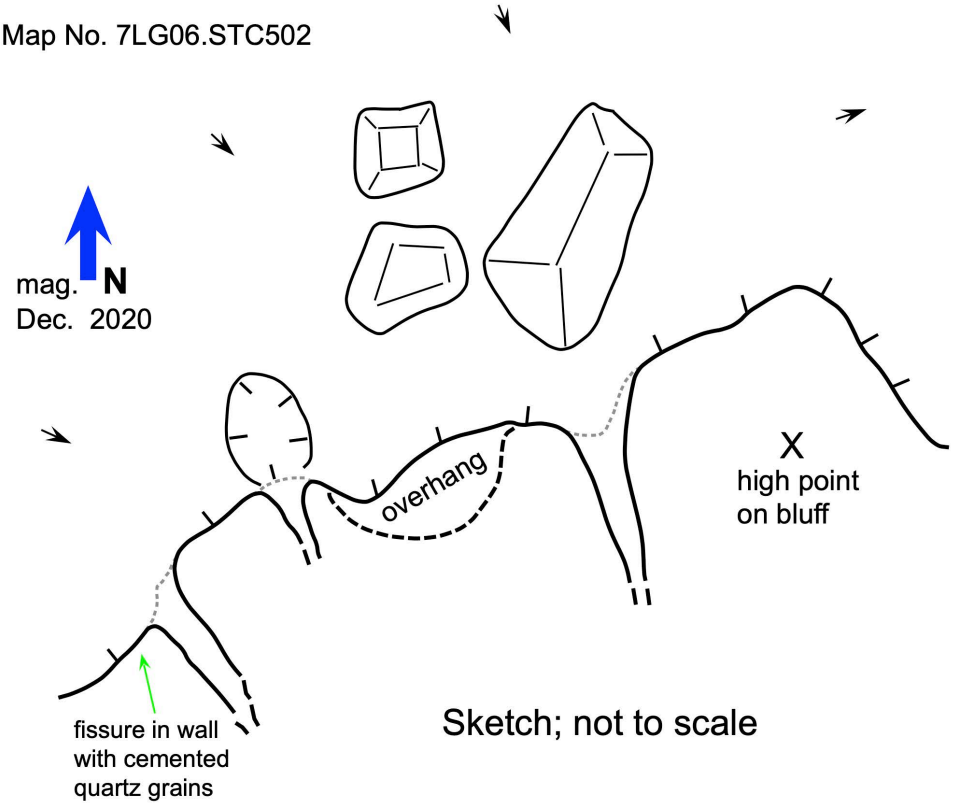
Limekiln Reach, Lower Gordon Area, South-West Tasmania



CAVE #7 THREE FISSURES CAVE LG6

Ghost Creek, Lower Gordon Area
South-West Tasmania

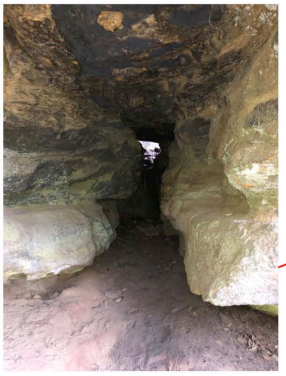
Map No. 7LG06.STC502

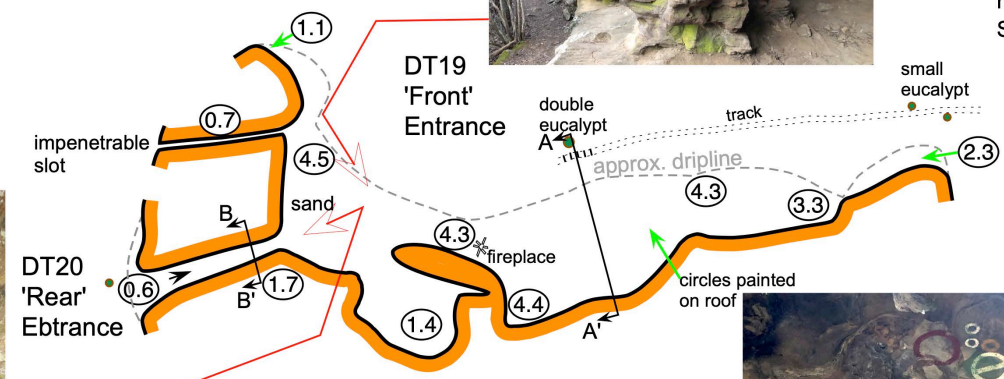


ROCKY WHELANS CAVE DT19-20
WELLINGTON PARK, HOBART
DERWENT CAVE REGION

STC Map No. 7DT19.STC482

Cave Length: 25 m





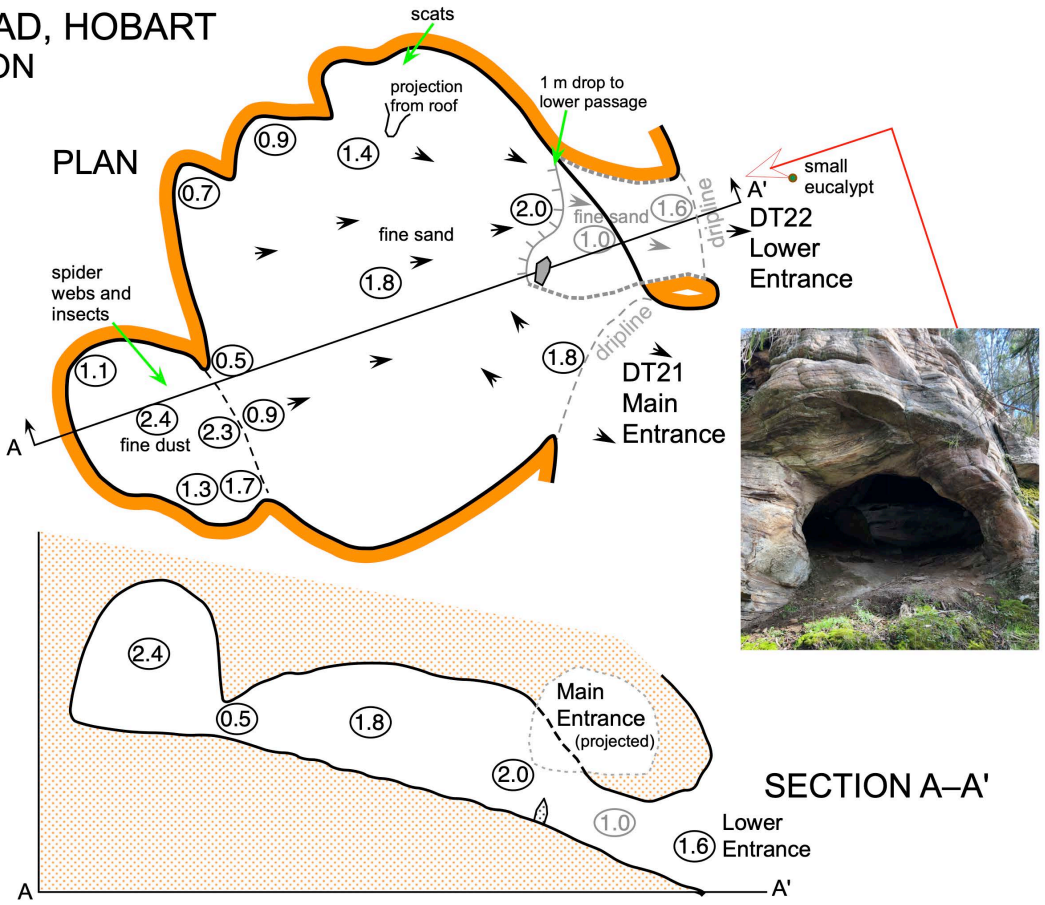
Surveyed by Greg Middleton
and Ros Skinner 3 Sep 2020
using Suunto compass, inclinometer
and Disto X310
Drawn by Greg Middleton 23 Sep 2020
using Microsoft Excel and EasyDraw 9.5
on an Apple Macintosh
© G.J. Middleton 2020

ROCKY WHELANS CAVE II DT21-22
OLD PROCTORS ROAD, HOBART
DERWENT CAVE REGION

mag. N
Aug. 2020

STC Map No. 7DT21.STC483

Cave Length: 14 m



Surveyed by Greg Middleton
and Ros Skinner 27 Aug 2020
using Suunto compass, inclinometer
and Disto X310
Drawn by Greg Middleton 29 Aug 2020
using Microsoft Excel and EasyDraw 9.5
on an Apple Macintosh
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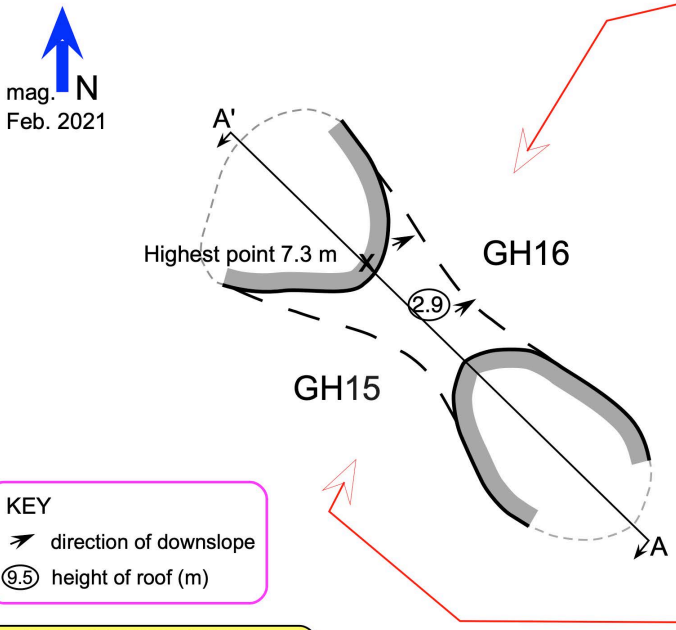
MT WRIGHT ARCHLET GH15-16

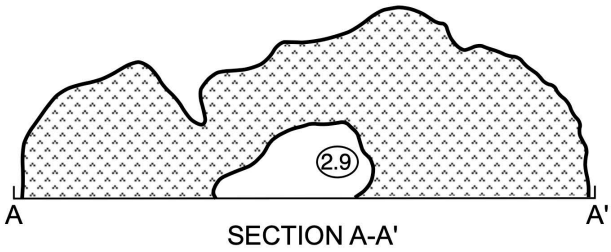
VALE OF RASSELAS, GORDON-HUON REGION

STC Map No. 7GH15.STC498

Photo: M. Dempsey

Archlet viewed from NE





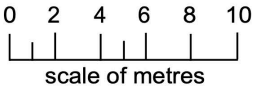
SECTION A-A'

KEY
direction of downslope
9.5 height of roof (m)

Archlet viewed from SW

Surveyed by Greg Middleton
and Michael Dempsey 21 Feb 2021
using Suunto compass, inclinometer
and Disto X310
Drawn by Greg Middleton 14 Apr 2021
using Microsoft Excel and EasyDraw 10.1
on an Apple Macintosh

Cave Length: c.10 m



Twisting Veins DT-023
Betsey Island, Storm Bay
Derwent Cave Region

N

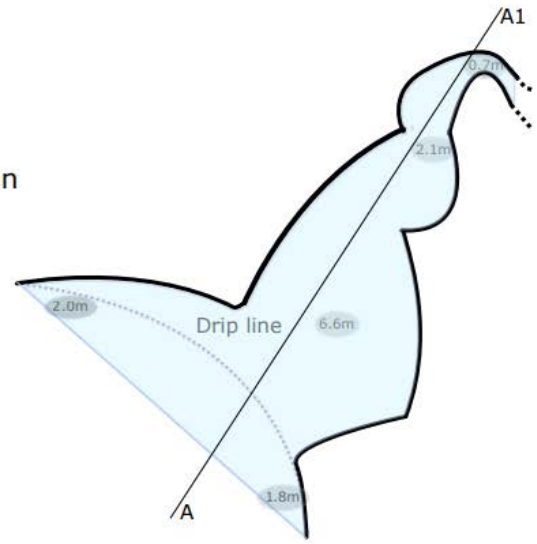
STC MAP NO: 7DT23.STC484
Cave Length: ~12m

Scale

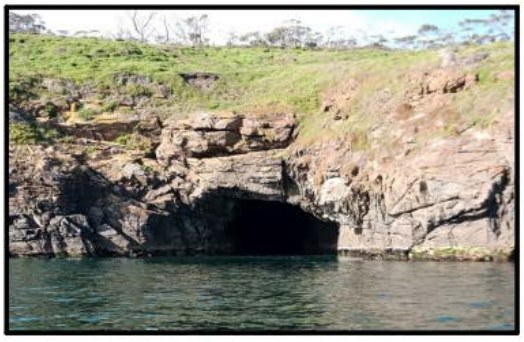
0m 2m 4m 6m 8m 10m

Surveyed by Luke Dimsey - 10 Mar 2021
Drawn using Inkscape - 19 Mar 2021
ASF Gade 23

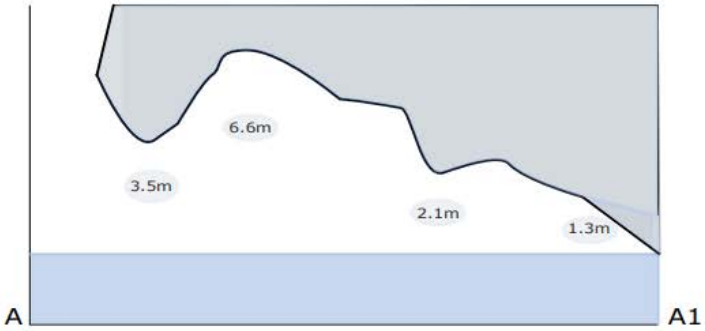
Plan



Entrance



Section A - A1



Mixed Direction DT-024
Betsey Island, Storm Bay
Derwent Cave Region

N

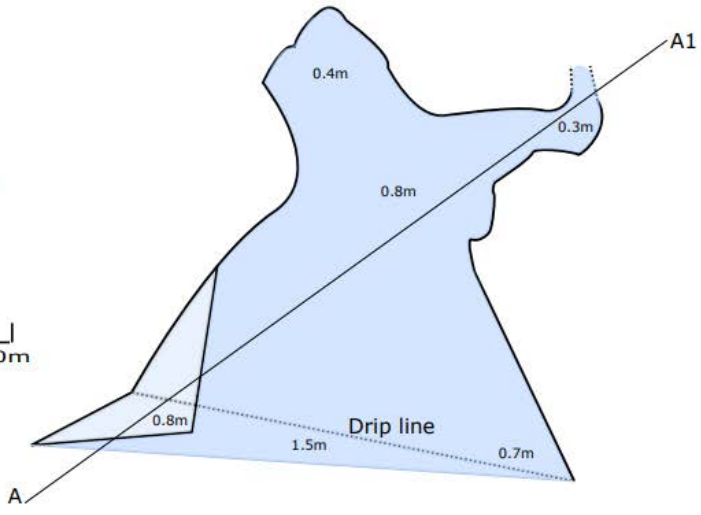
STC MAP No: 7DT24.STC485
Cave Length: ~8m

Scale

0m 2m 4m 6m 8m 10m

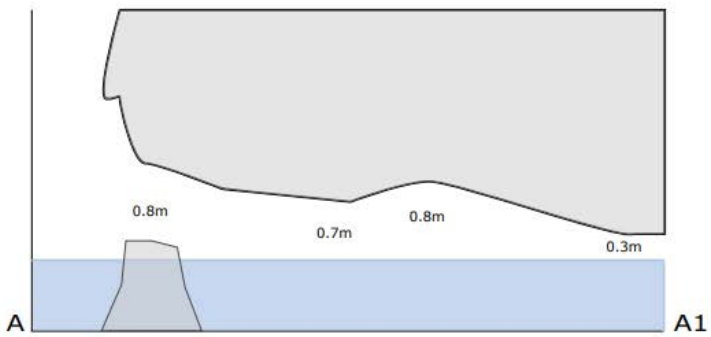
Surveyed by Luke Dimsey - 10 Mar 2021
Drawn using Inkscape - 20 Mar 2021
ASF Gade 23

Plan



Entrance

Section A - A1



MW-4 Crysknife

Mount Weld, Tasmania

7MW004.STC506

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

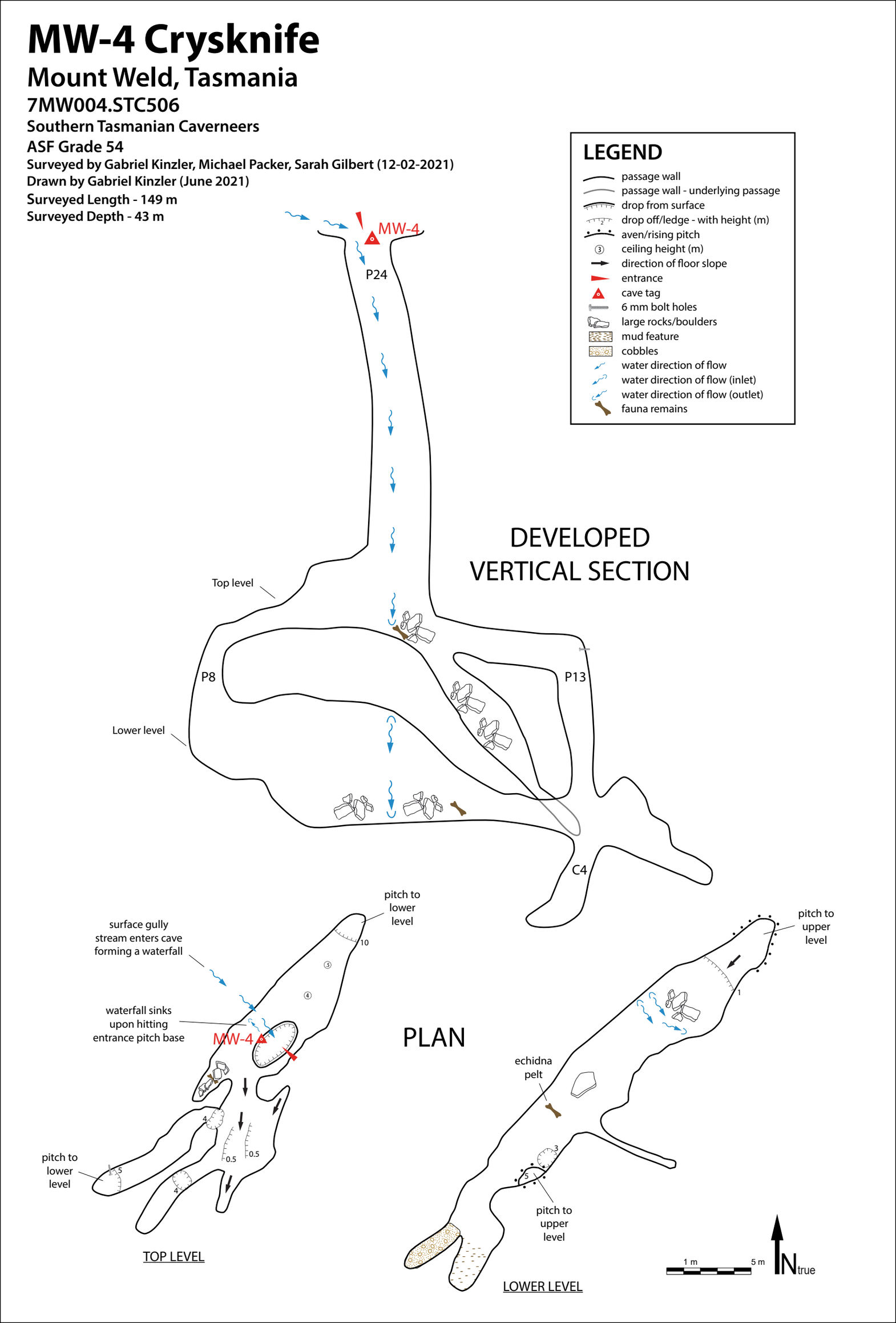
ASF Grade 54

Surveyed by Gabriel Kinzler, Michael Packer, Sarah Gilbert (12-02-2021)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (June 2021)

Surveyed Length - 149 m

Surveyed Depth - 43 m



MW-13 Flummoxed

Mount Weld, Tasmania

7MW013.STC508

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

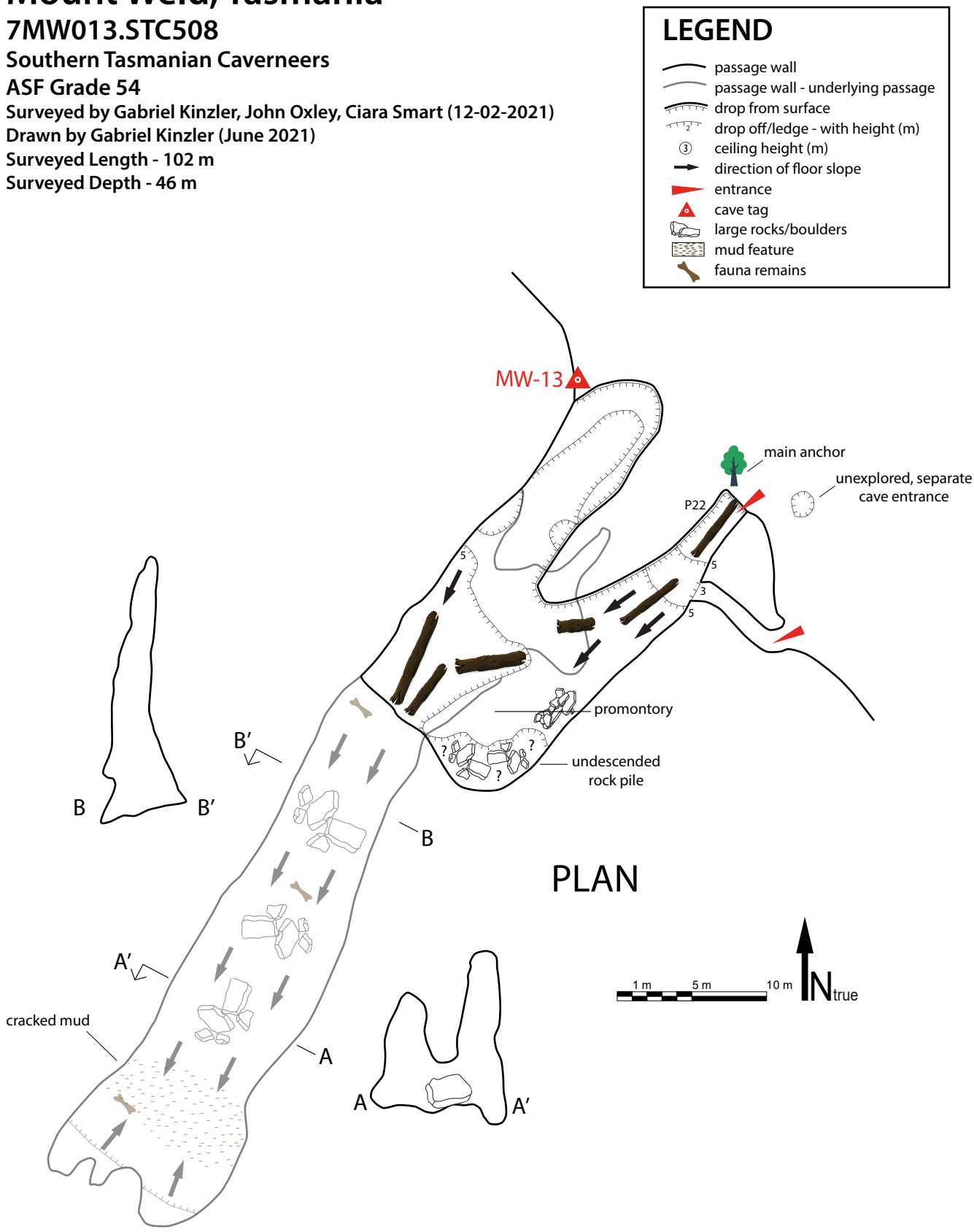
ASF Grade 54

Surveyed by Gabriel Kinzler, John Oxley, Ciara Smart (12-02-2021)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (June 2021)

Surveyed Length - 102 m

Surveyed Depth - 46 m



MW-11

Mount Weld, Tasmania

7MW011.STC507

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

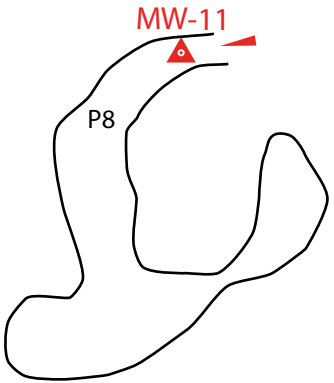
ASF Grade 44

Surveyed by Gabriel Kinzler, Sarah Gilbert (15-02-2021)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (June 2021)

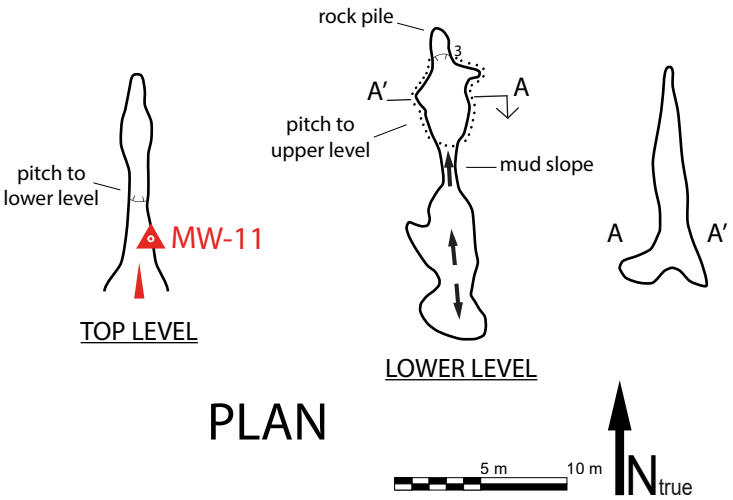
Surveyed Length - 20 m

Surveyed Depth - 9,5 m



VERTICAL SECTION

125° - 315°



MW-14

Mount Weld, Tasmania

7MW014.STC509

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

ASF Grade 22

Surveyed by Gabriel Kinzler, John Oxley (15-02-2021)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (June 2021)

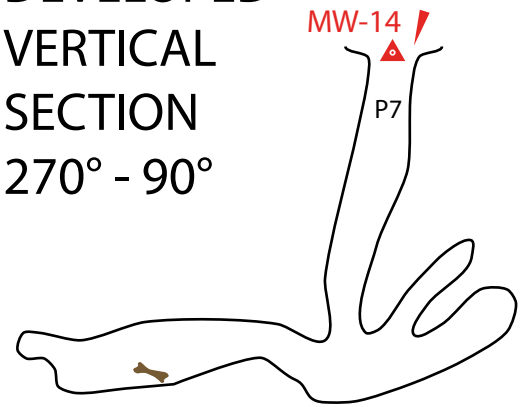
Surveyed Length - 22 m

Surveyed Depth - 7 m

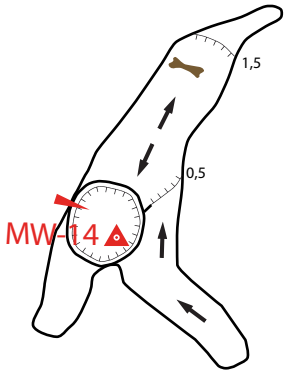
LEGEND

- passage wall
- drop from surface
- drop off/ledge - with height (m)
- direction of floor slope
- entrance
- cave tag
- fauna remains

DEVELOPED VERTICAL SECTION 270° - 90°



PLAN



MW-16 Late for Dinner

Mount Weld, Tasmania

7MW016.STC511

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

ASF Grade 42

Surveyed by Gabriel Kinzler, Ciara Smart (15-02-2021)

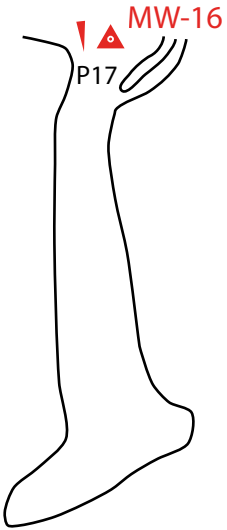
Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (June 2021)

Surveyed Length - 26 m

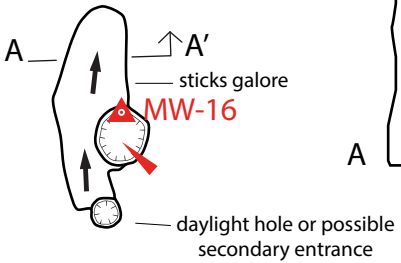
Surveyed Depth - 22,3 m

LEGEND

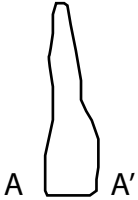
- passage wall
- drop from surface
- drop off/ledge
- direction of floor slope
- entrance
- cave tag

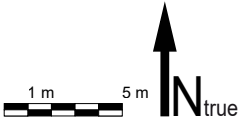


VERTICAL SECTION 180° - 0°



PLAN





MW-17

Mount Weld, Tasmania

7MW017.STC510

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

ASF Grade 24

Surveyed by Sarah Gilbert (15-02-2021)

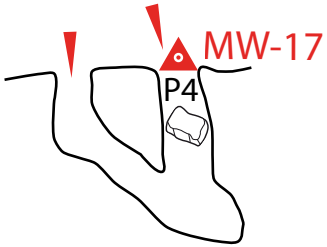
Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (June 2021)

Surveyed Length - 7 m

Surveyed Depth - 4 m

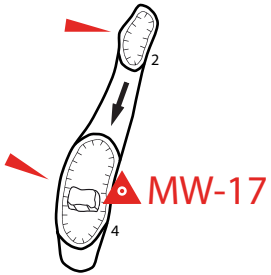
LEGEND

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

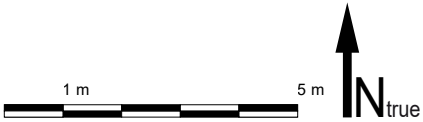


VERTICAL SECTION

290° - 110°



PLAN



The Last Page