

Speleo Spiel 446

September-October 2021



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Front Cover

Karina Anders & Petr Smejkal at Mole Creek.
Photo: John Oxley

Back Cover

Jemma Herbert exits this issue of *Speleo Spiel*.
Photo: John Oxley



Speleo Spiel

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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.

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Editorial

(Mildly) interestingly, most articles in this issue of *Speleo Spiel* are about cave maintenance and care: improving existing rigging, washing fragile features, taking out trash, closing off sensitive areas, tagging new entrances, relocating old ones, etc. The clean freak in you will certainly appreciate it.

Otherwise, it's more of the usual: your bimonthly dose of suffering and nonsense, with some historic trivia near the end.

Enjoy!

Stuff 'n' Stuff

Classifieds

Basic SRT training for beginners, SRT refresher training and practice, and vertical rigging training, are available to club members, by arrangement. There is a prerequisite of at least two club trips on beginner SRT training. Contact the training officer, Janine McKinnon (jmckinnon@caverneer.net.au), for details.

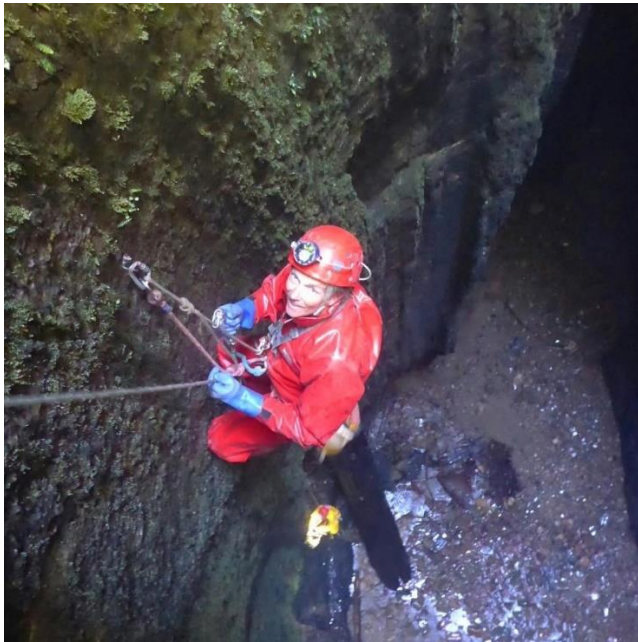


Photo: Janine McKinnon

Cave cricket survey

The club was contacted by Dr Perry Beasley-Hall from the Australian Centre for Evolutionary Biology and Biodiversity at the University of Adelaide asking if the club would be interested in assisting with a cave cricket survey, pending a successful grant application. The project is likely to commence around March 2022 if funding is achieved. Several members have already shown interest in assisting. Anyone interested in offering assistance is invited to contact Dr Beasley-Hall.



Photo: Australian Geographic.

Cave Rescue Training Push

Following Tasmania Police's "CavEx" at Mole Creek in September, a group of STC members led by Karina Anders and Bec Foxen decided to instigate regular training sessions focused specifically on cave rescue skills by revisiting the basics and eventually moving to advanced techniques.

Ideally, sessions will be held monthly. Once enough leaders are trained, the group will widen and aim to train more members.

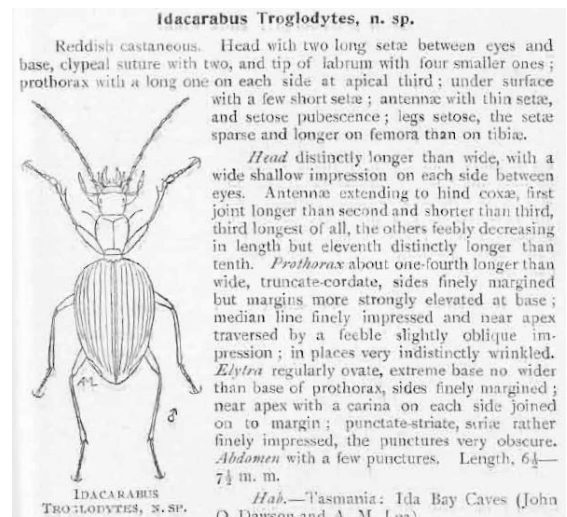


How not to rig a triple load share (missing twists and carabiners undone)! Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

Old article on cave beetles

A member of the ASF Facebook group unearthed an interesting article on Cave-Inhabiting Beetles, in the 1910 issue of *The Tasmanian Naturalist*, October 1910. You can read it here:

http://eprints.utas.edu.au/9193/1/The_Tasmanian_Naturalist_October_1910.pdf



Trip Reports

Wherretts Tagging Bonanza... Kinda.

24 July 2021

Gabriel Kinzler (text and photo)

We took a two-week breather from Turret Cave, but I had nothing better to do with my orphaned Saturday, so went up in an attempt to tag as many tag-less caves as possible. We'd found something like forty new entrances since January and only a handful had been tagged. My plan was to nail at least twenty. And because I wasn't too mission-centric for once, I also indulged in some faffing for Steve Fordyce, namely fixing his remote setup at Junee Cave and doing a couple of dye releases at Sour Hill and in JF-396.

I've become aware that newfound caves too often go missing, forgotten or neglected. Even with the best of intentions, years can pass by before you go back and explore, survey and tag a hole you found, for any number of reasons. So, even if you don't explore or survey them, tagging, GPSing and recording it in the *Spiel* is the very least you can and should do. It has the merit of cementing their existence in our records just by making them bear that undeniable physical marker.



JF-743 has a treacherous entrance. The bottom of the steep slope pictured here is a sudden drop.

The following is a list of what was tagged on that day. Unless otherwise mentioned, these caves still need exploring and surveying (and a name, in most cases). Survey priorities have been assigned to each one in the club's archive.

- JF-739 – Right in the middle of a gully, vertical 1 m hole turning into a steep slope, a rock throw goes for a little while.
- JF-740 – Further up-gully from JF-739, small doline with two small entrances, probably hard going, and a third slightly bigger entrance 1 m south of the doline, also hard going.
- JF-741 – 4 m deep pot under an overhanging wall, doesn't go.
- JF-742 – 3 m slope soon narrowing and crapping out.
- JF-743 – Scary slope under very thick horizontal scrub, with lots of exposed roots and stalactites, then a pitch of at least 10 m.
- JF-744 – 15 m clean pitch under big fallen log.
- JF-745 – Sizeable entrance near Turret Cave, with a big pitch.
- JF-746 – Neighbouring rift of JF-724 Close But No Cigar, goes for 5-10 m, then craps out.
- JF-747 – A nice little fossil cave, spacious, 10 m long, with another separate, small hole just next to it (left untagged but doesn't do anything).
- JF-748 – 4 m solution tube, doesn't go.
- JF-749 – Close to JF-747, 2 m slope with a few digging options; big chamber visible through a horizontal slot.

If you tally it up, that's only 11 caves tagged, and for that, I blame a dysfunctional drill and a scratched cornea, which has me wearing sunnies in front of my computer as I write this article two days later.

Postscript: a return to tag more caves at Wherretts is on the cards, see corresponding descriptions in one of the following *Spiels*.

Mole Creek Hammer Drill, Bag Tether and Bolt Fest (sort of...)

Alan Jackson (photos Gabriel Kinzler)

27 August 2021

Party: Rolan Eberhard, Alan Jackson

Popped into MC-43 Top Hole (one of the two back entrances to Croesus Cave) and placed two glue-in anchors on the right wall at the top of the second pitch (an action resolved under the recent Cave Zoning Statement for the cave/system). Epic day/late morning; good way to ease back into caving after a bit of a dry spell.

28 August 2021

Party: David Butler, Alan Jackson, Gabriel Kinzler

Did a Kubla through trip, modifying the anchor setup on the 'Rift Bypass Pitch' between the Khan and Sallys Folly. In order to achieve a free hang, the original setup on this pitch resulted in an awkward, low start. To make it more user-friendly for our less agile mainlander counterparts and ageing locals, two new glue-in bolts were installed high on

the wall adjacent to the pitch head so a nice standing start can be made... but ruining the free-hang. To fix the rub introduced by this approach, a redirect off a tape part way down the pitch was installed (or rebelay off the old bolts). Bonza.



Bolt installation in Kubla Kahn.

For shits and giggles we took the opportunity of a trip not encumbered with endless punter supervision and

photography to investigate a ‘lost’ part of the cave. While doing research for the great Kubla mapping project I read a lot of random old accounts of the cave’s exploration and early versions of maps. ‘Apollo Den’ appears on an old map sort of halfway between Pleasure Dome and Cairn Hall Pitch. An unpublished trip report, unearthed by David in the Northern Caverneers archives gave a few more clues:

Tasmanian Caverneering Club (Northern Branch)

Trip Report

Date – 19-7-‘69

Cave or area – Kubla Khan – Apollo Den. Exploration in Cairn Hall

Size of Party – 3 Robinson, Gourlay [leader and author], Dowde

Tackle Required – Personal lines 40’, body slings as footholds

General Remarks – Apollo Den on left hand side of Cairn Hall going in. About half way up the wall 200 ft approx. from the Pleasure Dome. Wall is flow stone and was free climbed by leader and safety lines used for other ascents and descents. Inside a rift goes vertical. This was climbed ½ way but insufficient tackle prevented further exploration.

Rest of wall was looked at but no other interesting joints could be found

I also recall reading a summary of early Kubla exploration and nomenclature but I can’t find it now nor remember where I found it originally (something in a *Spiel* by Albert Goede seems the most logical though). Apollo Den was described in that as ‘up high and like a smaller version of the Pleasure Dome’ or something like that.

Where we looked was gained by crossing the River Alph at the base of Cairn Hall Pitch (heading for MC-1 entrance), up the silty slope and departing the normal through trip track at the high point (before you drop back down the slippery muddy chute with a few smatterings of flowstone). The right-hand wall here is effectively vertical and clad in flowstone, but there is a very large detached block (about 3 m thick, 7 m tall and 10 metres long) that sits about 1-1.5 m off the actual wall. A couple of metres of climbing is required to get into the ‘rift’ between the wall and block. With some very wide chimneying skills (leave Janine at home) the top of the block can be reached, the surface of which is covered with small rounded river cobbles, stranded from a bygone era. At the ‘upstream’ end of the block the gap across to the wall proper is not chimneyable (is that a word? Is now) but above the ‘corner’ created by the detached block a large flowstone boss about 2 m in diameter is located about 3 m up. I was able to lasso a rope around this boss so that both ends trailed down to Dave and Gab below. I then chimneyed back down and we attached one person to one end of the rope while another prussiked up the other side. Once up, Gab fixed a line for Dave and me to join him.

From this location, some ten metres above the floor of Cairn Hall, an obvious line/series of ledges endowed with various large speleothems could be seen off in the ‘upstream’ direction leading to a small alcove appearing to act as the ‘source’ of the massive flowstone feature on this wall. A belay was set up around the big boss used to get up the ‘pitch’ and I set off to boldly split an infinitive (or my head

if it went pear-shaped). It started easily, with a wide ledge and ample handholds. The ‘insufficient tackle’ theme of 1969 was re-created and I used caving pack haul lines scavenged off our three packs for placing runners off various largely speleothems along the traverse. In other spots the stals were so large and tall that simply traversing in behind them meant they’d provide an auto-catch in the event of a fall. After a particularly tall stal the line of weakness had some up in it, too, and the ledge narrowed, was rounded instead of flat and the number of speleothems offering their services for providing protection started becoming as sparse as the number of bag tethers I had left to place on them. Out of bag tethers, I used the tether on the drill (which we had for drilling the p-hanger holes earlier in the day) as a runner on a small series of stal columns. The drill was tied on with a rethreaded tape knot too tight to easily undo with fingers, so the drill was dangling from the ‘runner’. Possibly the funniest thing I’ve ever clipped on a lead climb.

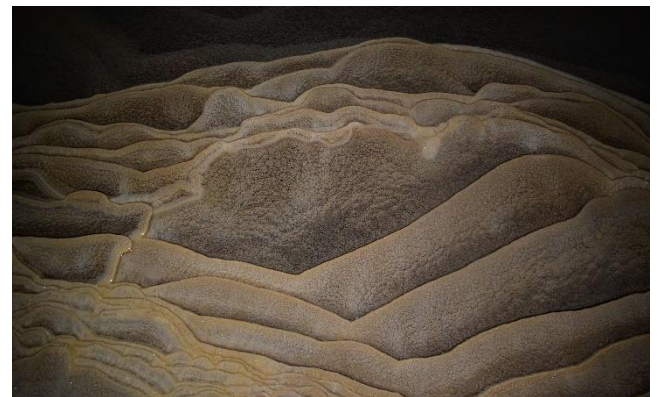
About 7 metres short of my target (the alcove ‘source’ up at roof level) a very exposed steep flowstone ramp presented itself. I was informed by my distant belay team that there was only about 3 m of the 40 m rope left to feed out to me. I retreated to the drill, took off my cowstails from my harness and placed them around two higher, bigger stals and created a three-point anchor with them and the drill to belay Gabriel closer to me. He came over as far as the set of really big stals halfway across the traverse/climb and he in turn set up a new belay point there. This enabled me to tackle the final obstacle with sufficient rope. It was the crux move and I was soon standing with my head near the ceiling of Cairn Hall.

Unfortunately, it only went about 7 m before pinching out. Lots of nice straws, stals, anthodites etc. (but no better than the plethora of the same elsewhere in the cave). A tall, very narrow rift/vadose canyon was present overhead but didn’t look worth pushing. Considering it a ticked box, we gingerly retreated to the ‘big boss’ and abseiled to the floor of Cairn Hall.

All in all, quite high on the list of fruitless pushes I’ve been involved in and even higher on the list of stupid underground improvisations; there is more than one way to use a drill. Good clean fun.

Did we really find Apollo Den? Not sure, but we had fun going boldly.

The Pleasure Dome was flowing nicely and a pleasant treat on our way to departing the cave.



Sadly, the Editor didn’t have a photo of the aforetold story, which was truly a sight to behold. Instead, here’s a picture of rim pools at the Pleasure Dome, shortly thereafter.

29 August 2021

Party: Alan Jackson, Gabriel Kinzler

A quick dash back into Kubla, in and out of the top entrance, to load test the two new bolts on the Rift Bypass Pitch. They passed, which is nice. We transferred the chains and ring from the old set up to the new and I look forward to someone complaining that they're too this or not enough that.

We then transferred to Top Hole, driving around in full caving gear and SRT kit (hoping that the Police would pull us over and look a bit confused), and quickly lobbed in and tested the two new bolts in there, too. They passed, which is nice.



Welcome aboard the Kubla-Croesus Cave Shuttle.



Top bloke at top of Top Hole.

JF-229 Welcome Stranger – Another wash day

3 September 2021

Chris Sharples

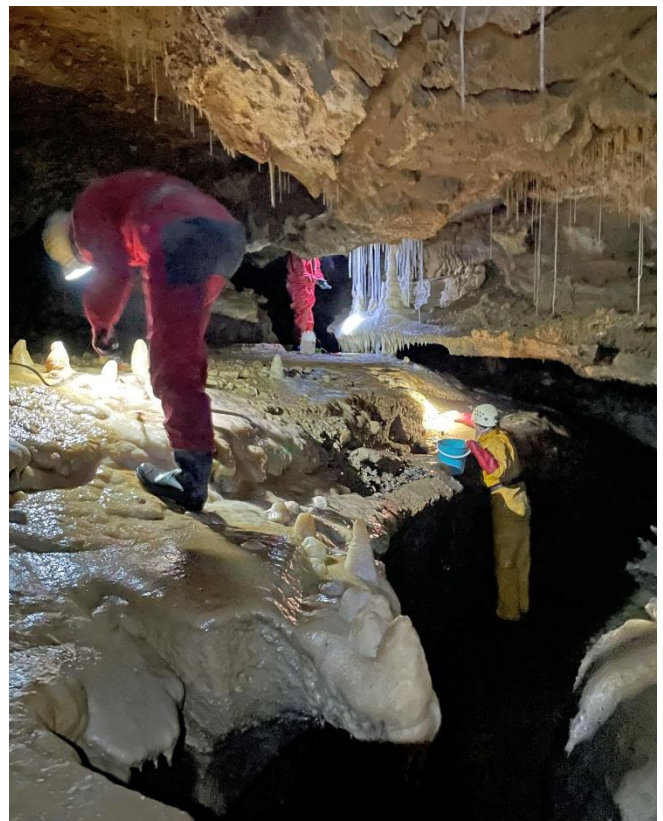
Party: Serena Benjamin, Rolan Eberhard, David Howell (Parks & Wildlife Service), Greg Middleton, Chris Sharples

Emboldened by an initial cave-cleaning expedition to Welcome Stranger on 11 July 2021 as documented in *Speleo Spiel* 445, Rolan decided to have a go at cleaning a couple more grot hot-spots in Welcome Stranger.

This time there was no hanky-panky about trying to combine a dye insertion with a clean-up (a fine oxymoron!). We went in clean, and by the time we came out, the cave was cleaner than it's been in a few decades. Well, certain bits of it anyhow.

On this occasion we focussed on a couple of extensively trogged flowstone areas Rolan had targeted for special attention. It's fortunate that flowstone is hard, given the amount of scrubbing that our efforts entailed. You can't clean moon-milk like this! (you can't clean moon-milk full stop!)

By the end of the day we had cleaned a fair bit of obviously trogged mud off several areas of flowstone beside the main streamway, and felt content that we had made a significant difference. The thing now of course will be to see how those cleaned areas fare over the next few years. A photo-monitoring project for someone, perhaps?



*The clean team hard at work in Welcome Stranger.
Photo: Greg Middleton*

JF-221 Owl Pot, JF-223 Tassy Pot – Rigging training trip

5 September 2021

Janine McKinnon (text and photos)

Party: Karina Anders, Jemma Herbert, Janine McKinnon, Chris Sharples, Ric Tunney

We'd done the 3-hour evening theory session, we'd done the 4 hours at Fruehauf Quarry, now we were going to take what they'd learnt and apply it in a real cave.

The day started auspiciously with Jemma attempting to superglue her glasses back together on the drive up. Apparently, she can see squat without them. Two individual monocles didn't seem likely to be very successful so with the glue a fail she moved to tape. You can wait in eager anticipation for how that went...

As we had three trainees, we decided that two standing around waiting for their chance to shine would be a bit boring so we had divided the group into two; a "half day" swap-over would be done.



A gazebo goes a long way.

We sorted gear at the car, with each group using the rigging notes for their cave to pick what they needed to take to do the job. The Tassy Pot first crew (Jemma and Karina) were each (separately) going to rig down to the top of the second pitch, including rigging that, and also find somewhere to put in another rebelay off naturals somewhere on the first pitch. Chris and Ric were heading into Owl Pot to rig to the bottom of the second pitch.

Each group would de-rig and swap caves after lunch.

Karina was rigging Tassy Pot first. She headed on down with me following behind to watch what she did and check her rigging as I went. Jemma had to amuse herself on the surface. This proved to be quite easy as we heard cars coming whilst I was sitting at the first rebelay. I sent Jemma back to keep an eye on the car as we had left everything open, not expecting visitors. It proved to be two cars with a large family in them who had come to see Tassy Pot. Apparently, it is on some maps. Jemma was kept alert and occupied worrying about the 4-year-old running around near the top of the pitch.

Meanwhile, I continued down after Karina. She had fun rigging the second pitch. It took some thinking and a few plan changes. A very useful learning exercise. I joined her to check her second pitch rigging and then went up after her, de-rigging as I went.



Karigga.

Next it was Jemma's turn. She headed down and I followed again. She chose the same natural belay as Karina had for the added rebelay. After checking her rigging of pitch two I went up first and Jemma de-rigged.

It was now around 12:30 pm, so we had lunch at the car, where we found Ric and Chris. They told us that neither of them had been able to find the re-direction through a natural thread on the second pitch, although they had found a hero-loop of pink cord lying on the slope of the ledge. Chris had tried to rig a re-direction using that cord off a (very) small jug but he didn't trust it enough to use it to continue down the pitch. Ric had come to the same decision when he went down and checked Chris's rigging. This re-direction is necessary.

We now reversed caves. My team had slightly different plans for this cave to our first. I didn't want to go all the way in and out twice to give both girls rigging opportunity of both pitches (I HATE that entrance mud-slope) so they would share rigging pitch one (very easy anyway) and swap over at pitch two.

Again, Karina went first rigging pitch two. Lucky for her she got to untangle the large knot that had mysteriously appeared in the rope. This took some time and much faffing. Finally, she was happily rigged and headed down. She spent quite some minutes trying to find the natural thread for that first re-direction, unsuccessfully. She then looked for an alternative. No luck. Back up she came. And de-rigged the pitch.

Jemma then rigged it again and went for a look for the mysteriously absent re-direction. She had a long look and then tried for something else to use. She found a blade of rock some distance around the wall but wasn't happy about its structural integrity. So she came back up too.

This will now need an artificial anchor before anyone else can continue down the cave.

The exit up the entrance pitch was as horrible as I recall.

We were back at the cars before 3 pm. Ric and Chris were waiting, having been back about 30 minutes. A very relaxed day it had been.

All participants claimed to have enjoyed themselves and, more importantly, learnt a lot and been able to rig without the time-pressure experienced trying to learn on a regular caving trip.

This is the first time I have trained rigging this way and I think it has a lot of benefits:

1. The theory evening, with notes and resource links, ensured that they fully understood the principles of rigging, physics behind forces and angles, safe and correct rigging practices, knots to use and where, gear strength and use, and most of what they needed before they rigged.
2. A short day at Fruehauf allowed them to practice a bit in an easy environment and discuss “stuff” as they found problems and questions.
3. Because of the prior theory and practice, when they started to rig a pitch, they felt confident that they knew what they were doing, why they were doing each part, how to do

it safely and use-ably and felt comfortable hanging alone on the pitch getting on with the job.

4. They were able to problem-solve and be imaginative because they knew what would be safe and what not, and what they were trying to achieve. This isn’t as obvious as it seems.

5. We had time and a comfortable cave situation (not cold/wet/noisy etc.) to discuss their rigging as we went. I could give feedback and suggestions at the time (not that much was needed after their preparation), again without time-pressure.

6. We had time for relaxed debriefs, where we discussed alternative rigging options to the rigging notes (where applicable), and the reasons for which option was best. They had the background theory to discuss this intelligently. They could ask questions about their rigging without an audience.

I think Tassy Pot was an excellent choice, with its combination of naturals and artificial rigging, dry conditions and ease of access. Owl Pot I won’t be in a hurry to use again for this purpose. That mud-slope outweighs the benefits of the rigging lessons available on a half-day activity.

And Jemma’s glasses? The tape held together, although I am sure I saw a slowly increasing sag as the day progressed.

JF-588 Resonance, JF-385 Wherretts Swallet 1 and JF-386 Wherretts Swallet 2

8 September 2021

Ric Tunney

Party: Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney

We walked in from Eight Road as normal. Janine detoured to Growling Swallet to dump some dye, while I examined blockages on McCullums Track. At the Constitution Hole turn-off, we turned off and then onto the taped Warhol route. We followed this up the dry valley to its highest point, about 70 m from Warhol where it makes a sharp turn marked with two tapes. From here it was only 130 m up the steep, slippery hill to JF-588.

We dumped some dye and had lunch. The area above JF-588 is very wet. Some of this wetness gathers and becomes the stream feeding JF-588, but lots is bypassing this swallet as a boggy area on the right (looking downhill). About 20 m to the left a small stream also bypasses and continues down the hill.

As on our previous visit we set out to make the 350 m traverse to JF-385. Our seemingly random progress proved to duplicate our route from a fortnight earlier. We came across the same obstructions, passed them the same way and fell over at the same places.

At JF-385 we searched for and easily found JF-386 Wherretts Swallet 2. Both swallets are in the same feature. Two streams fall down one cliff line. The cliff line is limestone overlain by conglomerate. The cliff line is broken by a small rockfall between the two waterfalls. The right-hand waterfall (looking downhill) is into JF-385, which is a rift some 30 m long and 2 m wide. The left-hand waterfall is into JF-386, which is a hole about 3 m diameter. This seemed

to need a line to climb into. The two waterfalls are only about 15 m apart.

Our next task was to find an “excellent LiDAR target”. This shows as a lovely little circle and is obviously “excellent”. JF-590 was on the way, so we stopped by. From there it was 325 m to the target. Most of this was in open rainforest. At one point, there was a bare limestone ridge with expansive, open views across the valley to Mt Field West and Florentine Peak. Then 100 m of tree ferns and fallen timber caused us to detour a lot.



Where’s Tunney?

The target is a circular depression about 15 m across and 3 m deep. There is little limestone outcropping. The bottom is covered in small fallen timber and dirt. There is no stream or dry valley leading in. There is no dry valley on the hillside below. There were no signs of any caves. We were disappointed but the walk had been enjoyable.

From here we walked down the hillside to McCullums Track at the Constitution Hole turn-off and had an easy walk back to the car.

East of Cave Hill, Junee

14 March to 11 September 2021

Bill Nicholson (text and photo)

Tea Party Deviants: Alex Hormann, Philip Jackson, Kirsten Laurie, Bill Nicholson, Callum Nicholson, Tamara Shearing

Just a brief summary of our exploits stumbling through this area since March this year.

To date we have located numerous holes but only three that showed any promise of which two were tagged, none went anywhere. JF-688 Tea Pot, JF-735 Afternoon Tea Pot and Y'all Hall.

The area shows promise or is it just wishful thinking?

I did say it was brief, eh.



Found the yellow Power Ranger.

In search of IB-23 Little Grunt

13 September 2021

Janine McKinnon

Party: Janine McKinnon, John Oxley, Ric Tunney

Search may be a bit of an exaggeration. Reminding ourselves precisely where it is is probably more accurate.

Little Grunt has not been visited since around 2009. Our memories of the cave are a little vague now, as is the precise location of the doline and entrance. So, in preparation for a planned revisiting this coming summer, we thought checking the condition of the track and identifying the correct doline was a good idea.

John hasn't visited the area and was keen to see what was there.

The Exit track as far as the "B" turn off is in surprisingly good condition; this made for a quicker than expected walk to the turn-off. The track is wet and incredibly slippery at the moment. Damn those lyre birds.



One searched past the Eagle's Nest. Photo: John Oxley

We left our packs at the turn-off and headed down to where our GPS said IB-23 is. The problem with that is that the area is full of dolines and the GPS is not that accurate, so we had a choice of two dolines to check out. Memory wasn't proving to be able to distinguish between the two either. We all went in different directions and grovelled down deep and slippery dolines. The ground was ridiculously mobile. Is mud-glissading a new sport for Tassie in winter?

The next challenge was finding tags. All three of us finally converged in the right-hand doline where I had found a promising looking hole. All three of us failed to find a tag. Back to the other doline, where John had already failed to find the tag. John and I were studiously engaged in tag-hunting near the cave entrance when we heard a cry from Ric, back on the doline edge. He had found it. He could, in fact, see it from 10 m away. Nowhere near the cave entrance but 15 m away on a boulder in the side of the doline. They had tagged the doline, not the cave at the bottom of it. This proved to be IB-101.

Aha! So maybe the tag for IB-23 was further away from the cave entrance than we had been looking. Back to the neighbouring doline we went, slip-sliding to the bottom. We looked again further afield, but again failed to find the tag. Some research as to its position may be necessary...

However, we are pretty confident (almost certain in fact) that this was Little Grunt, our objective.

We marked the route back to the Exit track. It was now lunchtime, so we moved further along the track some 200 m to the "D" turn-off leading to Pseudocheirus, Comet Pot and Giotto Pot. Lunch was followed by a wander down the route to these caves, checking the location of Giotto Pot (IB-104) and taping it, and then on to Salt and Pepper Pot (IB-99), where we tatted up the tapes. As this was an improvisation to the day, having had time to spare, we had GPS locations for cave numbers but not names. So we thought we had found Comet Pot when we found IB-99. It didn't look familiar but I put that down to all dolines looking the same in this area. I was wrong.

We taped the route back to the Exit track.

That was enough for a slack day. The Exit track was so wet and slippery we weren't motivated to continue further along it just to check its status. That can be a task for a dryer time of year.

We were driving by 2 pm. Ric checked the archive when we were back in internet range (wonderful that we can access it now that way) and found that IB-99 isn't Comet Pot. That cave is IB-98. Further down the hill. Damn.

IB-11 Midnight Hole

29 September 2021

John Oxley (text and photos)

Party: Jemma Herbert, John Oxley

Jemma had some free mid-week time and hadn't been through Midnight Hole or Mystery Creek caves so took the opportunity to do the trip before the predicted rain later in the week.

Upon entering the cave, it was immediately clear that it was wetter than I had seen it before. The bottom of the entrance pitch was very muddy and slippery and there was a steady trickle of water flowing over pitches 4, 5 & 6 and on into the Matchbox Squeeze. Just inside Plague and Pestilence was a pool of water with a steady flow out into the main passage.

After a lunch stop in the Confusing Chamber in Mystery Creek, we had a quick look up a side passage with some nice pretties then on via the Laundry Chute to Shipwreck Chamber and a side trip to the waterfall for a photo or two. Cephalopod Creek was only slightly higher than I'd seen it on previous trips.

We emerged back into daylight after only 3 hours underground.



That's not a rock wearing a helmet, just Jemma.



Exiting Entrance Cave.

JF-719 Turret Cave

3 October 2021

Alan Jackson (photos & map Gabriel Kinzler)

Party (but felt like more of a funeral to me): Alan Jackson, Gabriel Kinzler

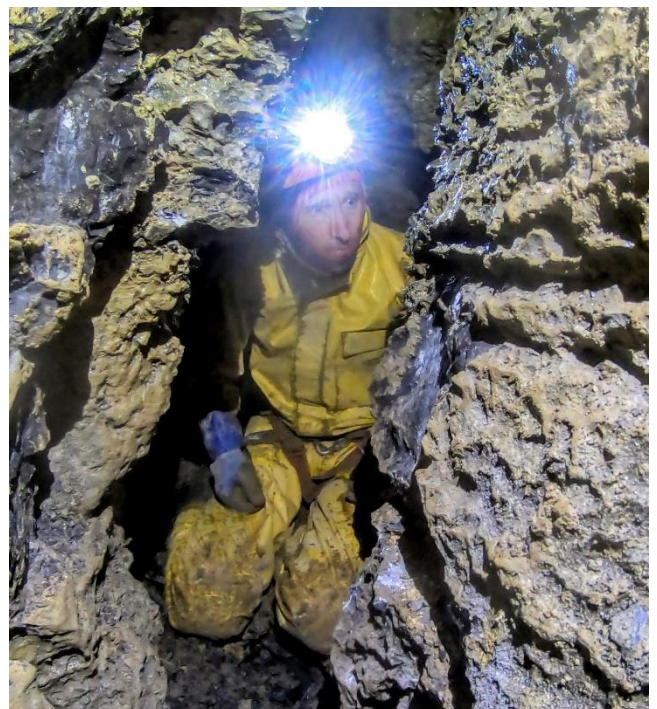
Turret is a Four-Letter Word.

A lengthy period of being ludicrously busy with work and other mundane tasks had led to an equally lengthy period of very little caving, all of which had been simple and pleasant. I should have known better; Admiral Ackbar would have undoubtedly called it for the trap it was.

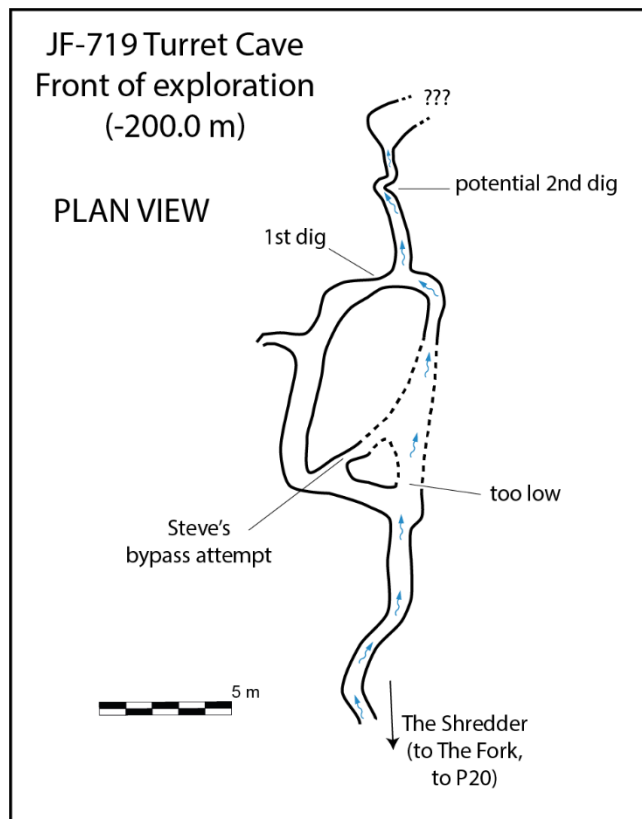
Gabriel assured me he had the track down pat now and that fellow visitors' declarations that he should tape the route were unnecessary. Had we managed to follow any of the official route to the cave after we left the Niggly track near Boulder Jenga then I'd be in a position to comment on his position.

The entrance is nicely located in an improbable spot on the end of a narrow ridge. The name Turret Cave made sense upon arrival. Nothing else nice happened after that. For a 200 m deep cave, it took a surprisingly long time to get down it. There were few easy metres amongst an obstacle course of shitty climbs, gymnastic rock pile manoeuvres, gnarly pitch heads and mobile 'floor'. A few pleasant pitches near the bottom lulled one into a false sense of security that things were on the up and up ... and then we entered the crawly shit at the bottom. In one bit we had to disgorge the contents of the cave pack to get it to fit through but generally liberal use of profanities kept things moving. We arrived at the exploration front (a dig) with a modicum of enthusiasm left.

Digging honours were shared and after a few rotations the way was open, however, I use the term 'open' in alignment with what can be considered 'open' in the rest of the cave (i.e. not very). It didn't go far. The small trickle was regained and, a few metres later, a narrow meander with 'midgets and 7-year-old kids only' written all over it blocked our path. Beyond the meander more generous passage awaited. 0.15 nanoseconds were spent contemplating commencing another dig; we packed up and headed for home.



Alan on the other side of the dig.



Note: a comprehensive map of the cave is in the works.

Suffering was the main theme on the exit. I spent considerable time in a narrow uphill meander pushing a heavy bag in front of me with my face contemplating if this was what leisure time was really created for. Gabriel grunted a lot, even for a French man, and delivered a dead pan intention to never come back again but instead make a cash donation to the club to cover the cost of the rope he would leave in the cave.

Two sore and brutalised individuals traipsed down the hill to the car. It was nice to see 95% of the correct route on the way out. I think a little bit of me died in this cave.

A few days later the aching has stopped, the bad memories have faded and there is discussion around how the next dig isn't going to be all that bad, the draught is awesome and the potential for connection with Growling is at least 1.5%. Maybe someone will go back again. I look forward to reading their trip report.

Additional comments by Gabriel

Here's a couple of quotes by Alan, that I couldn't resist sharing. Speaking of exiting the meander under McSlurry: *"This was the first time in my caving career I was ready to give up, I started thinking I might not make it. I reckon this was the hardest caving with a pack I've ever done"*. Then, 24 hours later: *"Most broken I've been post-cave in a long time"*. In Alan's defence, I was so exhausted I had no choice but to welcome his help with my own pack. He did most of the heavy lifting on the way out, very impressive.



Brutalised individual #1.

JF-4 Khazad-Dum – Serpentine Route

10 October 2021

Janine McKinnon

Party: Karina Anders, Jemma Herbert, Janine McKinnon, Ciara Smart, Ric Tunney

And the rigging training blitz continues. I have lost two starters, and picked up a replacement (sort of), but the train rolls on.

This trip was the next level of rigging from the Tassy/Owl Pot day by facing the delights of the Serpentine Route in KD. There is a reason it isn't visited very often, and that is the rigging, because it's a nice bit of cave. That's my assumption at any rate.

It is currently a combination of a (very) few Jeff Butt placed P-hangers and naturals. The naturals can be described as "interesting" in many cases. The rigging notes are a bit vague in places. So this was a great opportunity for the rigging-trainees to attack something a little more challenging.

The stream running into the KD entrance was almost as high as I have ever seen it. It has been wet lately, apparently. So everyone got pretty damp ducking past the entrance waterfall and into the Serpentine passage. Maybe my advice that the cave would be "pretty dry" wasn't quite on the mark.

Much discussion of how to rig each pitch ensued as we progressed down. Some concrete screws were placed in the odd spot, after much group deliberation of need and position.

The trainees placed all the rigging, under supervision. Well, almost all with one exception.

The cave was a little damp. It got a little damper as we progressed down. The stream, whilst a poor shadow of the main KD streamway, was flowing pleasantly. The cave was very cold. There was a lot of sitting whilst discussing rigging options so everyone got cool; the Cordura-suit-wearing more so than the plastics mob. The snowmelt from Mt Field wasn't helping.



Happy.

At the third pitch the cheer seemed to have dimmed in the group so the consensus was that this was far enough for the

day. This pitch was rigged and dropped by one party-member, to see the rigging worked well, and then we started our retreat.



Unhappy.

The chatter and laughter increased as the crew moved up the cave and warmed up.

There was more water on the way out. The old “snow melt increase” was doing its thing. It may have rained a bit outside too.

We de-rigged the ropes as we went but a return to finish the job and get to the KD steamway will happen sometime, hopefully in the next month or so.

The rigging-training train continues but has to be slowing for the terminal station for this group now. At least in terms of specific trips.

Observation: Running rigging training specific trips allows the learners to take their time assessing the multiple factors involved in rigging (even P-hanger rigging), not to feel pressured to be quick, to learn how to do it properly by having the time to do so, and for the trainer to have the time to discuss the various aspects of the rigging. Everyone can be relaxed as there is no “target” to get to, and all on the trip know what the purpose is. No impatient people allowed along.

IB-14 Exit Cave – Taking out the trash

11 October 2021

Chris Sharples

Party: Rolan Eberhard, Chris Sharples

A long, long time ago I can still remember when a hot political issue in Tasmania was protecting Exit Cave from the effects of quarrying in the nearby Benders Quarry, which was known to be intersecting cave passages draining into Exit Cave. I don't think a definitive history of those events has ever been pulled together and published, however I have a few dodgy memories of those times (circa 1992 or thereabouts).

As I understand it, one of the pivotal events in the campaign to protect the cave was a water quality monitoring project implemented by Ian Household to compare the quality and

chemistry of water draining into Exit Cave from the quarry, and that draining in from an undisturbed natural catchment.

The monitoring gear was lugged in over the old wet lowland track from the South Cape Road in a heroic effort involving quite a few people (according to Tony Veness *pers. comm.*). Two sets of water monitoring equipment were set up in the Eastern and Western Passages of Exit Cave to measure the chemistry, turbidity, and other characteristics of their respectively disturbed and undisturbed water catchments.

After a period of careful equipment maintenance and regular data downloads, the hands-down winner for quality water input to the cave was the Western Passage, with the Eastern Passage being outed as a polluted quarry drain. Not good enough for one of Australia's longest and finest caves. The final outcome was the closure and rehabilitation of Benders Quarry, and the incorporation of Exit Cave into the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.



*Ric at the Western Passage monitoring site, March 2020.
Photo: Chris Sharples*

Water quality eventually returned to normal in the Eastern Passage, and there matters rested for the next 30 years. No longer needed, the two sets of monitoring equipment sat festering in the cave, their batteries depleted and their circuit boards gradually growing weird secondary minerals and organic(?) “things” in the humid cave atmosphere. The main components of the equipment – aluminium boxes housing the electronics and the aluminium arms deploying stream sensors – were sporadically seen and sometimes whinged about by cave visitors, but for many a year no effort was made to do anything about tidying up. However, eventually – and quite recently – the Cave Access Policy Zoning Scheme process (CAPZS) managed by Rolan Eberhard did create an opportunity to make removing the old and by now quite derelict monitoring gear a planned management action for the cave.



*Janine with the Western Passage monitoring equipment,
March 2020. Photo: Chris Sharples*

Necessary approvals and the like were obtained, and pretty soon (well, sometime in early 2021) Rolan, Serena Benjamin and Pax (Michael Packer) made the first trip to begin the process of removing the gear. They managed to unbolt and detach all monitoring components at both sites but left them for later removal.

After several unsuccessful attempts at cat-herding, the return ended up being just two – Rolan and Chris. We arrived at the cave on Monday 11th October 2021 planning to just transport the various components to a central location in the main streamway for later removal by a larger group... but ended up taking half the gear all the way back to the car anyway.



Rolan sorting the monitoring gear (the aluminium circuit box is already attached to the red frame pack and wrapped in plastic), October 2021. Photo: Chris Sharples

A feature of the day was the two old-fashioned external frame packs which Tony Culberg had acquired for the work on the grounds these would be needed for getting awkward metal objects out of the cave. Well, the red Karrimor pack had a sort of ‘ledge’ at the bottom of the frame which did prove useful for firmly attaching one of the aluminium circuit boxes to, although Rolan swore the frame was doing damage to his shoulders. The other pack had no frame ledge and a bag which forced miscellaneous items to be packed rather high on the frame, making a top-heavy load that shifted awkwardly whenever one had to bend or lean in any direction. Suffice to say the packs made the rockfall quite “interesting” to traverse and reminded me of why external frame packs went out of vogue a long time ago! Considering the amount of grunting and botheration that was involved in getting the gear through the rockfall, out of the cave, up the hill and back to the car it is potentially miraculous that I got out of bed the next morning *without* a stiff back!



*Chris with frame pack on back and sensors in hand,
October 2021. Photo by Rolan Eberhard.*

At the time of writing, one little pile of disassembled old monitoring gear remains in Exit Cave to be carried out. Three lucky people will make an easy job of it for sure!

Other exciting stuff

Tasmania Police 2021 CavEx – MC-44 Honeycomb Cave, Mole Creek

18 & 19 September 2021

Gabriel Kinzler and Alan Jackson (photos G. Kinzler)

Participants: Tasmania Police (North, West & South), SES North, Ambulance Tasmania, PWS, STC, MCCC, NC, SRCC

A major cave rescue exercise – one for the history books – took place over the weekend of 18-19 September 2021, at Honeycomb Cave, Mole Creek. Against what you might expect, it wasn't the sole doing of STC. Rather, it was officially an exercise facilitated by Tasmania Police with the blessing of Parks & Wildlife Service and the help of all Tasmanian caving clubs, as well as State Emergency Services and Ambulance Tasmania. Local media even made the trip, notably *The Examiner* and Seven News. No definitive attendance numbers were shared at this stage, but we counted anywhere between 80 and 100 participants in total, with 15 from STC.



Cavers and Police worked hand in hand.

While TasPol was effectively at the helm under the impulse of Damian Bidgood, the format, venue and activities were fashioned by leaders of all major Tasmanian caving clubs, with Alan Jackson, Deb Hunter and Janice March doing the heavy lifting alongside Damian. The club's wealth of experience in search and rescue techniques and recent history, along with a renewed push this year to develop and reinforce relationships with TasPol, including shared training workshops in simulated and real environments, culminated in this one massive state-wide SAR exercise. After two real cave rescues in the last four years, Police felt it was necessary to investigate and become more proficient in cave environments, and so one of their goals was to jump in with both feet and to train some of their future top dogs in the process.



Ambulance Tasmania was there, and not just at the pub.

There were great outcomes from a relationship standing, i.e. cavers and emergency services. This was probably the main goal of the exercise, above actual skills practice. Previous joint training and this exercise made things move much more smoothly and with an undercurrent of mutual like, trust and respect in both directions. This can't be valued highly enough and is one of the key drivers behind the success of our previous two genuine rescues. We shouldn't rest on our laurels, however, and need to keep working on it. Not least, the social aspect of the event was a success. It simply was good fun. Not trying to put on a sob act, but the camaraderie was real between all parties, individuals and backgrounds. Good moments were had both above and underground. Camping was available on site, people went to the pub and hung out joyfully.



TasPol's Cameron Rennie and Ben Austin.

Another goal was to bring advanced rigging techniques to the north of the state. Historically, there has been a gap, and exposing northern cavers to the rougher aspects of SAR and to leadership roles could only do good. Getting permission from PWS (with the invaluable help of Chris McMonagle and Rolan Eberhard behind the scenes) to use bolting gear in order to rig Honeycomb Cave, which is located in a National Park, was crucial to that effect. Despite the massive attendance, we believe minimal impact practices were observed strictly and the cave saw only very little disruption thanks to the selection of a route which avoided potentially sensitive areas; plus, bolt holes are really (really!) hard to locate.



Not even a logistical mess. Photo: Janine McKinnon

The chain of command and structures of Police versus the “laissez-faire” approach of cavers was a focus point. Police have their systems and manuals to abide by and had to follow those processes (it was their exercise). Cavers take a much more egalitarian and loose approach. The key aim of the exercise was to expose each ‘side’ to how the other does business so it doesn’t come as a surprise and cause problems in a genuine rescue – i.e. Police ordering cavers off the job for being reckless or cavers abandoning in a huff because the Police are ordering them about or not taking them seriously.

Of note, general observations were made on the surprisingly well-balanced ratios of female to male in the various squads. Cavers in particular were very well represented by women, SES and AT had a good number of women too... while Police less so. Lots of women were in team leader roles and respect was afforded to them by their male counterparts, team members and other agencies.



Feminine representation was very strong amongst the cavers. I'm willing to bet there were actually more women than men in our demographic.

The “culture” of Search and Rescue practice is very different from the experience of a real rescue scenario. The activities we plan ahead and execute on the day are not meant to replicate exactly what would happen in a real rescue. It isn’t meant to be realistic. With that in mind, many of the lessons that participants learnt and criticisms they drew from them should be taken with a grain of salt. Improvements can and will be made to future proceedings, but not necessarily to make it more lifelike. Slowing things down, giving difficult tasks to individuals out of their comfort zone, adding unnecessary steps rather than removing them, all of this is bespoke.

That being said, here are some key points and observations of various challenges that were faced:

- team leaders should know their team members and their capabilities before starting/tasking and be mindful of late arrivals/team members changes mid-rescue (which is quite likely to happen);
- there were various frustrating delays to getting things started on the first day, particularly because of a lack of pre-allocation of teams and stages, which won’t (and shouldn’t) always be pre-chewed, as opposed to an on-the-fly approach;
- only a few individuals have a really good grasp of the skills and techniques across the full spectrum and we need a larger number of people across all these skills and competent; more training is required in the form of small intense sessions focusing on skill groups;

- there was a general lack of order or control/documenting of gear distribution to teams;
- there is a clear need of more cavers to step up and become proficient in oversight roles;
- the observation was made that the general skill level in the caving community is not good enough with regard to technical rigging. Recent focus has been on implementing skills rather than acquiring them, as acquisition focus had been strong in previous years, but this year saw a large number of ‘newbies’ with little or no previous experience with the techniques in use. More theory and basic practicals need to be run in coming years to get them fully across the basics.



Rope spaghetti. Photo: John Oxley

Many thanks to every participating organisation/agency and their respective leaders and key players, and more generally all attendees. And an even bigger thank you to people who voiced concerns and made suggestions as the event unfolded. Many of these were taken onboard and paid positive dividends on the second day.

Long Micks Cave (or A Tale of a Wronged Irishman)

Greg Middleton

Ross Ellis of S.S.S., knowing of my interest in ‘unusual’ caves (especially ones with interesting backgrounds), is always on the lookout for historical references to little known or forgotten caves in Tasmania. Recently he forwarded a copy of an extract from a report in a 1931 newspaper:

"LONG MICKY," BUSHRANGER.

By A.W. Burbury.

IN a drawer of an old piece of furniture, bought at a clearing sale of effects on an old Tasmanian farm, was found a clipping from an early newspaper of an account of the execution of "Long Micky"- or to give his real name, Richard Ennis - for the murder of George Sturgeon in 1857 [date of the execution; the murder was the year before].

On a stone by the wayside, near the homestead of Glen Morey, in the Midlands, is an inscription, which reads: "This stone marks the spot where the body of George Sturgeon was murdered on the 15th of July, 1857" [sic – 1856].

The trial and execution of Ennis must have caused a considerable stir in the district, for when I went to live at Glen Moray 30 years later the incident was by no means forgotten, the general opinion being that Ennis was not the murderer. He was a well-known bushranger, but was said to have been guilty of robberies only, and never with violence. His camp - or one of his camps - was a cave situated on a hill-side, close to the scene of the murder, and is still called "Long Mick's Cave." A hole has been cut in the roof to allow the smoke to escape, and the marks of the chisel are still plain. On one side of the cave a bunk has been carved out of the soft sandstone; the roof of the cave is smoke blackened (Burbury 1931).

Shortly afterwards Ross followed this with an extract from the Burbury family history:

On the Sugarloaf Hill at Glen Morey is "Long Mick's Cave" which still shows the marks of the chisel employed to cut a hole in the roof of the cave to allow the smoke to escape, and, plainly also, the smoke begrimed walls. I have heard that the English clergyman of Oatlands was so convinced of Ennis' innocence of the murder that he quarrelled with the authorities about it and left the Colony. That incident occurred eighty-three years ago, and there is still living, in July, 1939, a man who saw and spoke with Sturgeon on the morning of his death (Burbury 1939).

Richard 'Long Mick' Ennis

These items were enough, of course, to arouse my interest. Who was this 'Long Micky' or 'Long Mick' – and could we locate his cave in 2021? I discovered that the Southern Midlands Council has a 'Heritage of the Southern Midlands' website which records:

One of the last bushrangers to terrorise the midlands, Richard 'Long Mick' Ennis was neither the most brutal, nor the most successful bushranger, but his name lived on in the collective memory long after his

execution at the Oatlands Gaol in 1857. And the reason for this is that he was widely believed, both then and decades later, to have been innocent of the crime for which he was hanged, dissected and anatomised. He is also remarkable for having been imprisoned at Oatlands twice (a decade apart) and both times tried at the Oatlands Supreme Court (Southern Midlands Council 2020a).

It seems Ennis was transported to Tasmania from County Kildare, Ireland, for seven years, in 1843, for vagrancy. He was first sent to Maria Island, then Westbury, from where he absconded. On being recaptured he was sentenced to six months' hard labour at Jericho Probation Station. He escaped from there with three others and they robbed the local blacksmith. After being recaptured they were tried for burglary. The others were acquitted but Ennis was found guilty and sentenced to 'transportation for life'. This time he was sent to Norfolk Island. His sentence was commuted to three years but for breaches of discipline he served six years, after which he was returned to Van Diemens Land in June 1852 and given a probationary pass. After only three months with an employer he was sentenced to hard labour for disobedience. He absconded again in October 1853 and headed for the bush. He was recaptured and absconded again three times over the next three years. The only way he could live was by bushranging – robbing settlers and travellers. About this time, he acquired the name 'Long Mick' as he was Irish and 6 ft 2 in (1.88 m) tall and he fell in with others including the notorious John 'Rocky' Whelan (who frequented a number of caves around Hobart). The Southern Midlands Council website continues:

In the case of 'Long Mick', he appears to have spent time hiding out in the Lakes district, at 'The Den' near Bothwell, and in a cave near Antill Ponds. This cave, still known to locals as 'Long Mick's Cave', shows the marks of a chisel having been used by Ennis to cut a rough chimney into the roof, and the smoke blackened walls attest to its having been one of his favourite haunts. Standing six feet one inch, a 'tall, rawboned man with dark hair and whiskers', Ennis must surely have made an alarming figure as bushranger when he emerged from his cave.

One blustery afternoon in July 1856, a party of constables were scouring the bush around Antill Ponds in quest of two men who the day before had committed an armed robbery on the local postmaster, Charles Drabble. The constables didn't find the bushrangers, but they did find something else – the bleeding corpse of George Sturgeon, a prosperous local farmer, who had been shot in the head in the afternoon of 17 July 1856, leaving a wife and small children to mourn his loss.

Police immediately connected the armed robbery with the murder, and on that basis set about finding two (later three) bushrangers. According to newspaper accounts published a few days later:

"there is little doubt of them having been the same men who committed the robbery at Drabble's, joined by a third man, at present unknown"

As is sometimes the case with flawed police investigations, an early error made by police contaminated the entire course of the investigation. That error was the insistence that the men who robbed Drabble must be the same men who murdered Sturgeon. At first glance, this seems reasonable; the murder occurred within 24 hours of the robbery, the robbers were known to be armed and heading towards the scene of the murder, and there was some (limited) evidence to suggest that the gun stolen from Charles Drabble may have been the murder weapon. But the investigating constables failed to recognise that the murder may well have been unconnected to the robbery.

Ultimately at least ten men were charged with Sturgeon's murder; eight were discharged and the ninth, Dennis Doherty, was tried but acquitted (though convicted of other criminal assaults). The police then charged a tenth man, Richard 'Long Mick' Ennis with the murder. It seems there were two reasons for charging him: he was identified by an unknown informant and, according to the police, he incriminated himself at the time of his arrest. No record of his trial survives, other than the 'guilty' verdict (Southern Midlands Council 2020b).

As recorded by Cantwell (n.d.):

Long Mick had a shelter of sorts [his cave] where he mostly lived, on a hill near the murder scene. On the evidence of the wife of a shepherd living on the Braes property close by, Ennis was charged with the murder of George Sturgeon, convicted and hanged at Oatlands Goal in October 1857. The shepherd's wife claimed that Ennis had called at her residence the day of the murder and she had given him food, and she later heard a gunshot. However, a good distance away, near Fonthill, one of the Tabart sons swears to seeing a man he believed to be Ennis on their property that day, and at a time which would have made it impossible for Ennis to have been at Woodbury, at the time of the murder.

The Braes shepherd and his wife appeared to have "come into money" soon after these events, and moved on to better things.

Residents of the district never believed Ennis to be guilty of the murder, and Ennis maintained his innocence, as did a local clergyman attending him while held at Oatlands Goal. This clergyman gave a lot of effort into having Ennis freed, but to no avail.

The man strongly suspected at the time of killing Sturgeon had recently arrived with siblings to join an extended family in Van Diemens Land and was working on a family owned property nearby. He did, in fact, confess to the murder when he was an old man and near death, but much too late to benefit Long Mick.

It seems clear that our Irish cave-dweller was unfairly tried and improperly executed – but where was his cave?

Search for Long Micks Cave

Ros Skinner and the author set out to try to find Long Micks Cave on 4 March 2021, armed with the information dug up by Ross Ellis, some confirming details from the Southern Midlands Council website and a modern topo map.

Helpfully, the 1:25,000 Faddens topo map shows Glen Morey Road, the Glen Morey property and, nearby, Brents Sugarloaf. Could this be 'The Sugarloaf' referred to in Bradbury (1939)? We were pretty sure we were on the right track. The location of the inscribed stone 'by the wayside' appeared to be a vital clue but we were not sure what road it was on. While there is a photograph of it in Southern Midlands Council (2020b) (Fig. 1), the caption reads only "Roadside memorial to the site of George Sturgeon's murder". We felt our first objective was to find that stone.

As we approached Oatlands, Ros suggested we could ask at the local historical museum; they might know more about Ennis, the death of Sturgeon and even about the memorial stone. Although the lady there was very helpful and they did have a few papers referring to the 1856 murder, the only new information we found was the Cantwell (n.d.) paper quoted above. They had nothing more on Long Micks Cave and nothing helpful on the memorial stone.



Fig. 1. Photo of memorial stone marking the site of George Sturgeon's murder, 17 July 1856. From Southern Midlands (2020b).

We drove on north to the localities of Antill Ponds and Woodbury. At Woodbury we turned east onto Glen Morey Road. The excitement was building. After a couple of turns the road runs almost straight for about nine kilometres to the Glen Morey property.

I went to the Glen Morey homestead where I spoke to Tom Burbury (who I assume to be the owner of the property). He is surely related to the A.W. Burbury who had written the 1931 newspaper report. The Burbury family have been major landowners in the Tasmanian midlands since the 1830s. He readily agreed to our going to look for Long Micks Cave which he confirmed was on Brents Sugarloaf; indeed, he indicated its approximate position on the map I had of the area (Fig. 2). He clearly knew the cave though perhaps not all the history. He also knew of the memorial stone and said that one of his gates very close to it would provide our easiest access to the hill.

We drove about half a km further down Glen Morey Road where we came across the memorial stone, still standing within its square fence (Fig. 1). We had no doubt now we were in the right locality.

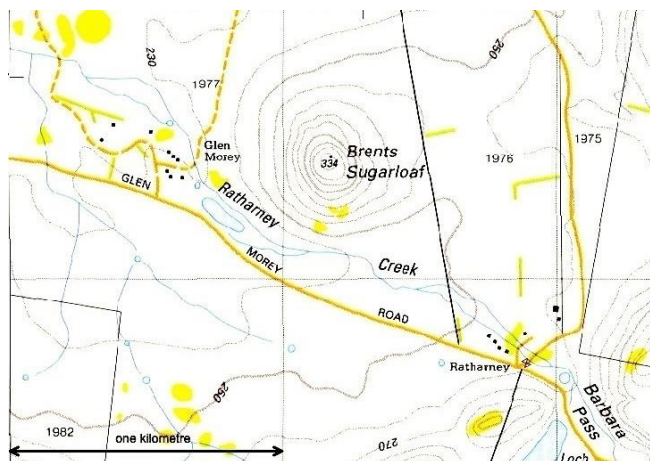


Fig. 2. Map of vicinity of Glen Morey property – from Faddens 1:25,000 Tasmap.

After a bite to eat we set off to climb the Sugarloaf (Fig. 3). As we ascended the thistles got thicker on the southern and eastern sides and it appeared there was more sandstone outcrop on the western side.

These considerations led us to veer more to the west than Mr Burbury had advised. Nevertheless, at about 300 m elevation on the western slope we came upon a cave entrance which seemed likely to satisfy our quest (Fig. 4).



Fig. 3. Brents Sugarloaf from Glen Morey Road.



Fig. 4. Entrance to the first cave we located.

I set about surveying the cave while Ros did a bit more of a recce on the western and northern slopes of the Sugarloaf. The single chamber was ‘cosy’ and at a maximum of 1.5 m high, one could not fully stand up inside. The floor was part rock, part sand, covered by a lot of sheep droppings. In a low part on one side there was actually the rotted carcass of a sheep, fortunately having progressed past the unpleasant smelling stage. The only other occupants of the cave were a couple of mud nests of Welcome Swallows.

At the rear there was another entrance (Fig. 5), rather larger than one would expect of the “hole cut in the roof” reported by Burbury (1931). In fact, such an ‘exit’ might be seen as a bonus by a bushranger, likely to have to beat a hasty retreat in the event of Mr Plod stumbling on his abode. There was no sign of the reported “carved bunk” or the blackened ceiling.

It’s often difficult to know how accurate descriptions of caves are when they originate perhaps a hundred years earlier. Memories and reports get distorted and, of course, physical changes can occur over time. As this was a suitable cave in approximately the right location, I tried to convince myself it was the one that had been occupied by Long Mick. Besides, it has a great view over the property and the approaches from the Midlands – a very desirable set-up for a bushranger (Fig. 6).



Fig. 5. Ros looks out the rear entrance of the cave.



Fig. 6. The view from the cave entrance over Glen Moray.

After completing the survey (Fig. 7), I followed Ros in checking out more of the rocky outcrops on the slopes of the Sugarloaf. Although there were a number of overhangs and eroded cavities, neither of us found anything else we thought worthy of recording as a cave on the southern, western or northern slopes.

Identification of Long Micks Cave

As we were departing, Ros insisted we complete our search of the hill by covering the eastern slopes too. Of course, I went along with the idea, we returned the way we had come but pushed around further on the eastern side. Fighting my way through huge thistles, I caught a glimpse of a low rock face from which two Bennetts wallabies were rapidly and noisily decamping. They had evidently been sheltering in the low hole which then came into view (Fig. 8).

Not only was there an entrance to some sort of cave, there was a small higher opening which might well be the “hole cut in the roof to allow the smoke to escape” reported by Burbury (1931). I crawled in, rather painfully as there were dry spikes from the thistles all over the ground. Inside, I could stand up! It was bone dry and there, at the back was the “bench” mentioned by Burbury (1931) (Fig. 9) – we had positively found Long Micks Cave.



Fig. 8. The low entrance to a cave in a small sandstone outcrop.



Fig. 9. Ros sitting on the ‘bench’ at the back.

I would beg to differ with the earlier describers of the cave, however, in that I believe both the “bench” and the “hole cut in the roof” are natural features of the cave, not the work of bushranger Ennis. The one reported point that was not fully borne out was the almost complete lack of soot on the roof. We surmise, however, that in the 164 years since the bushranger inhabited the cave, erosion of the relatively soft sandstone surface has resulted in the soot layer largely falling off. Like the earlier one, this cave contained two Welcome Swallow nests attached to the roof.

I proceeded to survey the almost perfectly round, flat-floored chamber (Fig. 10). With a maximum height of 1.8 m, I could stand but Long Mick would have had to stoop slightly. He would have trouble crawling in the present entrance but it is possible that sand has built up on the floor and that the entrance in earlier times was somewhat higher. Nevertheless, combined with a bit of vegetation outside, this entrance would have been quite difficult to see from even a few metres away, creating for him a quite secure hideaway (unless he gave himself away by having a smoky fire).

We scrambled down off Brents Sugarloaf, happy that we had succeeded in our quest to find and document Long Micks Cave and another, bonus cave (which we decided to call Brents Sugarloaf Cave in view of its location).

Our thanks to Ross Ellis for providing the information which initiated this search and to Mr Tom Burbury for permission to access the site.

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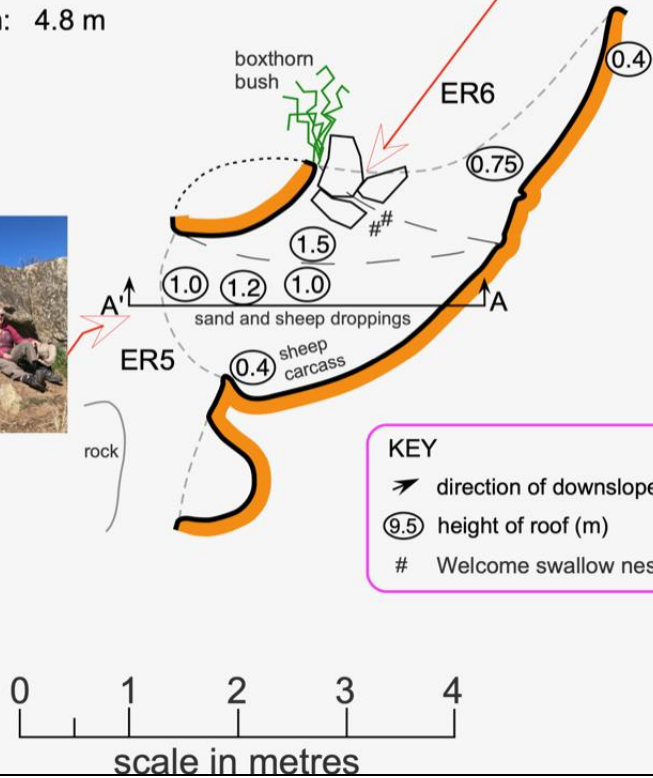
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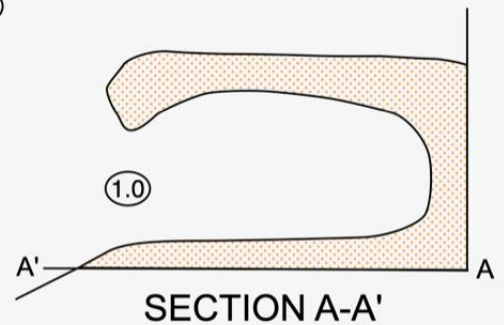


mag. N
Mar. 2021



KEY

- direction of downslope
- ⑨.5 height of roof (m)
- # Welcome swallow nest



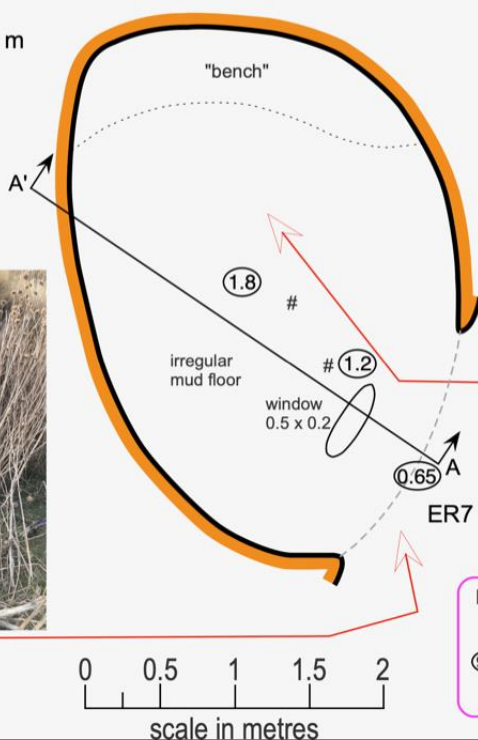
Surveyed by Greg Middleton
and Ros Skinner 4 Mar 2021
using Suunto compass, inclinometer
and Disto X310
Drawn by Greg Middleton 8 Mar 2021
using Microsoft Excel and EasyDraw 10.1
on an Apple Macintosh
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LONG MICKS CAVE ER7 ESK-RINGAROOMA CAVE REGION SOUTHERN MIDLANDS, TASMANIA

STC Map No. 7ER7.STC487

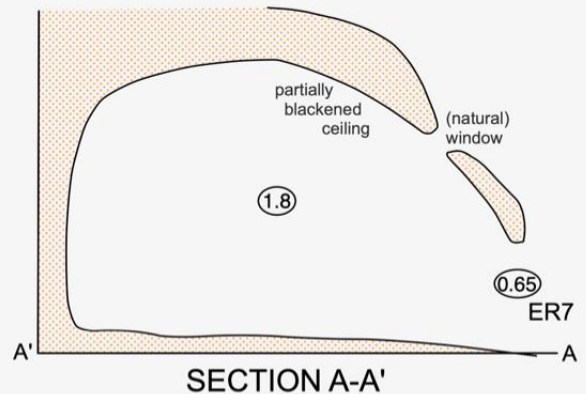
Cave Length: 3.5 m

mag. N
Mar. 2021



KEY

- direction of downslope
- ⑨.5 height of roof (m)
- # Welcome swallow nest



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The Up-It – A Story of the first ever mechanical rope ascender

Frank Salt (with thanks to Lyndsey Gray and Paul Darby)

In the days prior to SRT in the UK, it was customary, when doing caves with multiple big pitches, to leave a lifeline man at the top of a pitch to get the first returning person back up the pitch safely. On the classic Yorkshire potholes, with big and very wet shafts, this could result in a number of people being left in wet and cold locations throughout the cave to provide protection/safety for hours at a time to get a lucky few to the bottom and out again. To overcome this problem, a Cave and Crag Club member in the UK, Owen Clarke, produced what he called The Up-It around 1957. This enabled the last person to come down the pitch on a fixed rope using the classic abseil method with the rope passing through a snap link on the waist and over the shoulder.



*Lyndsey was kind enough to show off her relic.
Photos: Gabriel Kinzler*

On the return the fixed rope was threaded through the Up-It, which in turn was clipped to the waist length on the ascending caver, and held vertically at chest level by a light cord around their neck.

At the time the first unit was made the C&C, and many other clubs in the UK, were still using 20 mm hemp rope for lifelines, so the vee groove that clamped the rope was sized to suit that. Around 1958, Owen made the vee groove smaller, to suit the nylon ropes of that era, and gave several of the

revised design to members going on trips to France in 1959. Of interest is the fact that one of these units was passed on to Petzl who was looking at a similar system.



Petzl Ascension (left), Up-It (right). Supplied: Paul Darby

In the UK, the use of a doubled rope to provide safety on pitches continued into the 1960s, with the successful Berger Expedition of 1962 still using ropes with lengths long enough to allow life-lining from below, via a double rope and pulley, to be used on the pitches. However, by then American cavers had been using the Prussik Knot to provide the same service for years whilst the success of Petzl's device enabled a caver to clip on to any point along a rope without the need to thread it through the Up-It from an end. Thus, the Up-It became a paperweight and Petzl became a rich man.



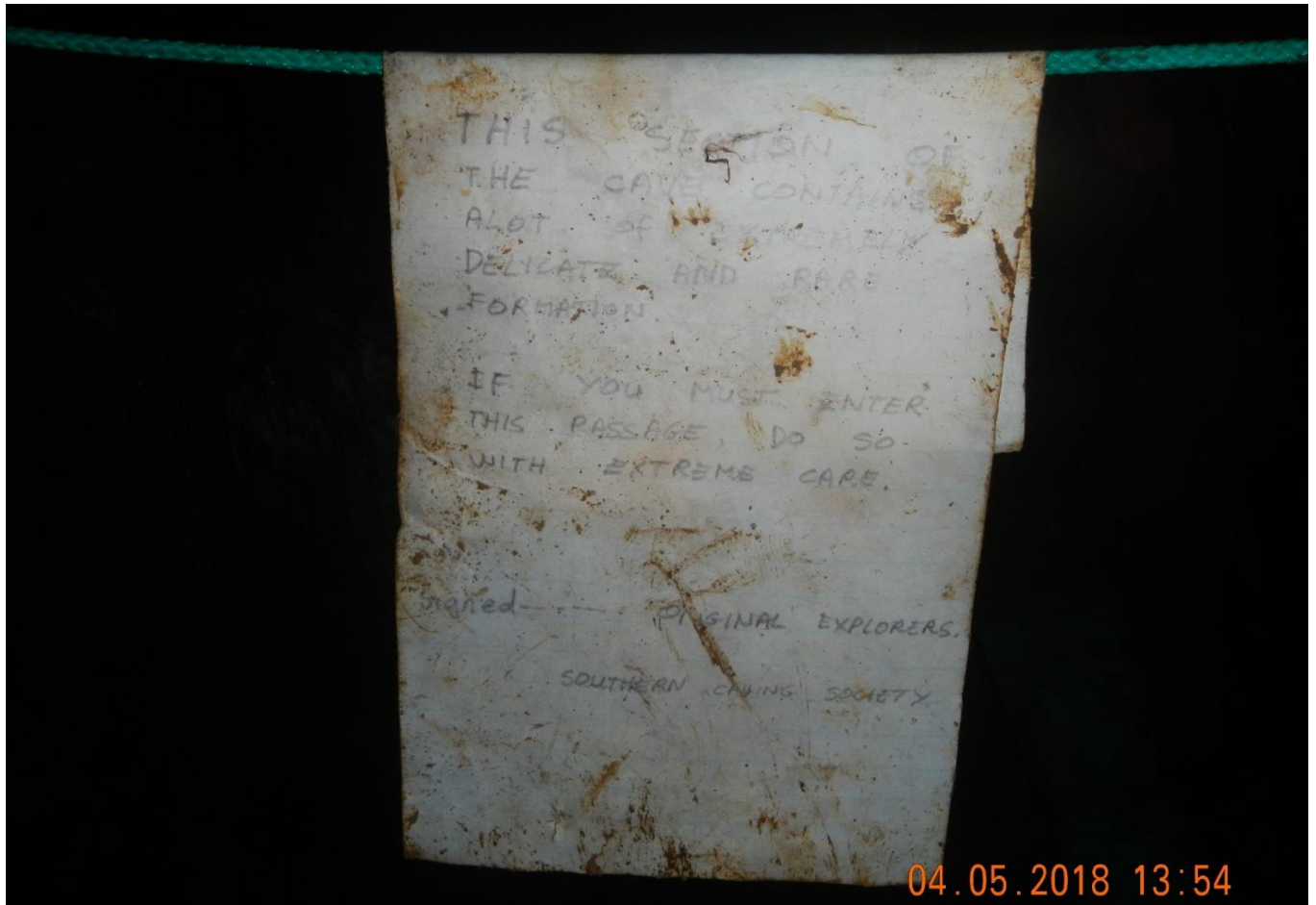
Fun and Diversions

Rolan's Junk, by Rolan Eberhard

This one is a reflection on caving attitudes rather than junk. The sign dates to the 1970s and was placed at the entry point to Holy Hell in Herberts Pot. It says:

“THIS SECTION OF THE CAVE CONTAINS A LOT OF EXTREMELY DELICATE AND RARE FORMATION.
IF YOU MUST ENTER THIS PASSAGE, DO SO WITH EXTREME CARE.

Signed ORIGINAL EXPLORERS
SOUTHERN CAVING SOCIETY”



BLUES SONGS FOR CAVERS



Original comic by Tom Gould, adapted by Janine McKinnon.

The Last Page

