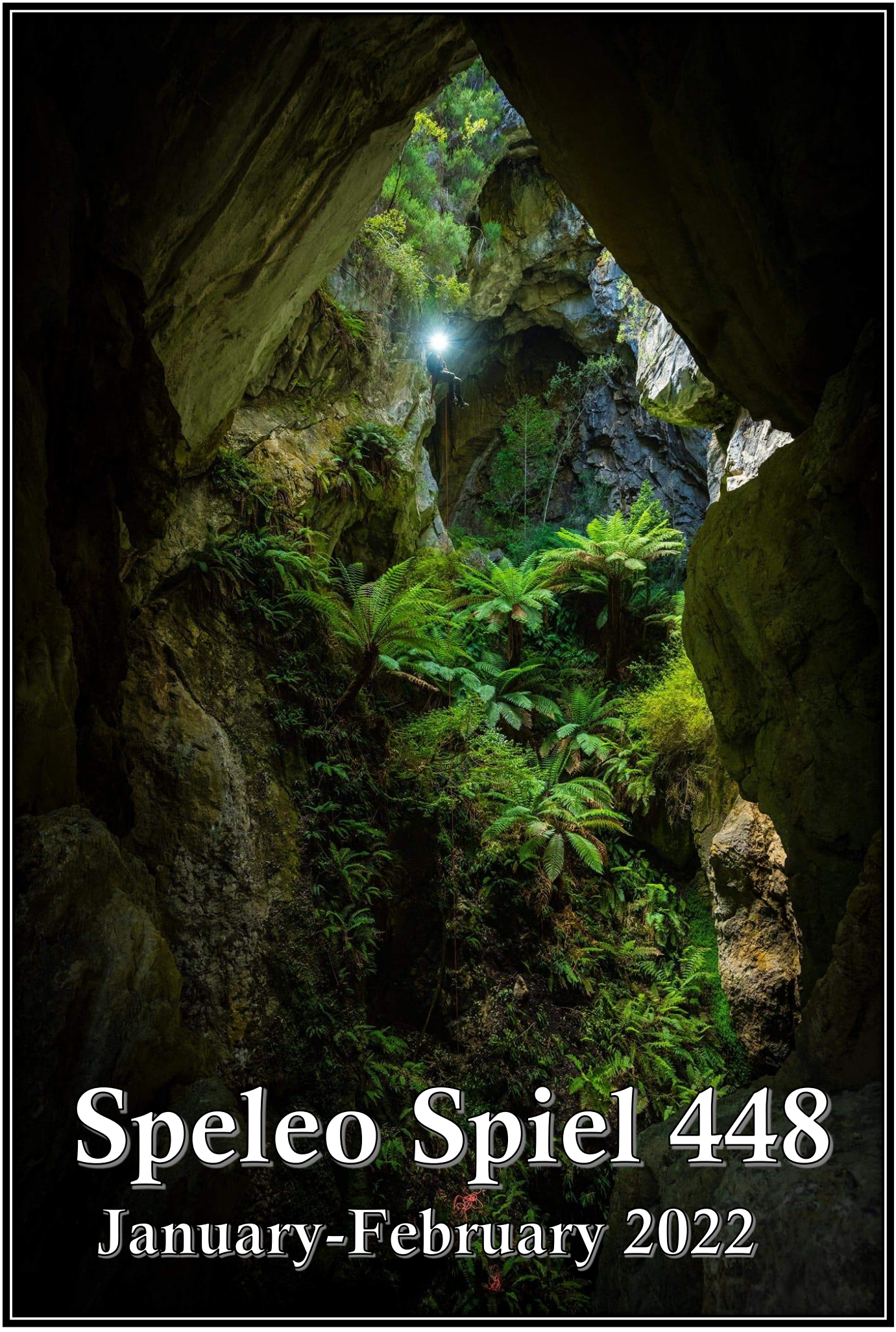

Speleo Spiel 448

January-February 2022

Newsletter of Southern Tasmanian Caverneers Inc. ISSN 2208-1348

Front Cover
Ben Armstrong into Arrakis.
Photo: Shaun Mittwollen

Back Cover
Ass/face.
Photo: Alan Jackson

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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Contents

Editorial

This is my last *Speleo Spiel* for the time being, I am bowing out. It was a real pleasure to deliver our journal for two years and, never say never, I am not shutting the door entirely, just taking an indefinite break.

You will be pleased to learn, if you haven't already, that Janine McKinnon will return with a vengeance from the next issue. As reported in my office bearer's report (to be published in *SS* 449), my deepest thanks go to all people who have so kindly contributed and made my experience all the more positive.

See you underground and happy caving!

Stuff 'n' Stuff

STC's Xmas BBQ

The Brett family kindly offered their home at Ridgeway for us to get together to burn a sausage or capsicum on Friday 3rd December 2021. By all accounts it was a hoot.

Photo: John Oxley

Photo: Alan Jackson

Log jam in Croesus (by Alan Jackson)

"Just a heads up that a large log/stump has toppled into the Top Hole entrance of Croesus sometime in the last few weeks. It hasn't damaged any infrastructure (gate or bolts) but has caused a bit of mayhem on the slope between P1 and P2 and at the base of P2. There are large pieces of timber at those two locations and I had to move a few newly dislodged rocks to more stable locations before I was happy abseiling below them. I gave it all a good kick and wobble and it appears stable for now but keep in mind that the P1-P2 slope is a bit loose and dodgy at the best of times and extra care should be taken on future trips to assess the log before surfing it. Parks/Chris McMonagle has been advised."

Cave Animal of the Year 2022

"Batting for Bats in 2022" is the theme this year. Contact Cathie Plowman to get your merch before it runs out!

ASF's new logo

The Australian Speleological Federation has a new logo, which was announced at the January council meeting. Here it is in all its splendour. Isn't it amazing? Does STC need a new logo too? The Editor doesn't think so.

Trip Reports

MC-120 Marakoopa, MC-9 Devils Earhole

29 December 2021

Deb Hunter (text and photos)

Party: Deb Hunter, Tom Maggs, Bogdan Muresan, Nadine Muresan

I facilitated some caving trips for Victorian cavers while they were holidaying here over the festive season. Nadine and Bogdan have been to Mole Creek a couple of times before and are gradually familiarising with all things cold and wet. They are originally cavers from Romania.

Tom and Nadine in Marakoopa I.

Both icon and non-icon caves were considered for caving trips. Two permits were obtained in the name of STC: Croesus and Marakoopa. Croesus was planned as the through trip and is delightful, and I wanted to check out the new hang but due to time constraints the permit was not used. On the other hand, a great trip was had into Marakoopa I & II including the Lake, followed by a trip to the cave pearl chamber in the Earhole and a dip in the pool above the waterfall at Devils Pot on a hot Tasmanian summer day. The highlight was water leeches in the waterfall pool. Not!

Entry to the Fireplace which is off the Marakoopa show cave path is not permitted in peak tourist season due to tourist trip demand, as stated on the permit conditions.

Bo in the vadose canyon at Lakes Entrance, Marakoopa II.

These friends will be back in mid-February (Exact dates are being worked out) to try out more delights at Mole Creek, maybe not any icon caves. If the weather is good, we will include Machinery Creek Canyon (big day 8 pitches; all on SS chain and hangers). If any Southerners are interested in joining us please get in touch with me.

Looking over the short pitch into the cave pearl chamber, Devils Earhole.

JF-743, JF-744, JF-745 and JF-739

2 January 2022

Gabriel Kinzler (text and photos)

I wanted to tick off a number of caves at Wherretts (on or near the Turret gully), but no one seemed available or interested, so I went alone. On the menu today: JF-739, JF-743, JF-744, JF-745 and, if I had enough time left, JF-750.

I arrived at JF-739 in the Turret gully, stopped for a second, but chose to skip it for now: too unimpressive an entrance, all I could think of was JF-745. Got there 15 minutes later. It's a large entrance (about 5 m in diameter) with a straight drop, located in a position similar to Turret's: on a ridge flanking the big gully. I rigged an approach line from an obvious tree and bridged across the void to install a Y-belay on the wall opposite the cave tag (which is located left when looking down from the sloping side of the hole). A clean drop of 20 metres led to nothing but a couple of scrambles and bones. Disappointing, but I was trying to remain unboastful. Next!

The drop into JF-745.

It took me a few tries to relocate JF-744. It's hidden under a big fallen log, which isn't a terrifically helpful description… All I can suggest is to keep looking in a radius of 15 m of the GPS coordinates (oh and the log is pointing downhill). The entrance is a 2 m deep depression filled with bits of rotting wood of all sizes and collapsing under your weight, gotta tread lightly. Then, immediately under the tag (located on the back wall of said depression), there is a 10 m pitch. I rigged a Y-belay next to the tag and found the usual lot of bones but not much more.

Nearby, the elusive JF-743 was again true to its nature: really hard to find under the thick horizontal scrub. It's a scary slope leading to a beautiful 15 m pitch. The tag is installed a few metres in (LHS). I rigged from a massive tree at the entrance to a Y-belay across both walls. A massive chunk of detached flowstone adorns the bottom. I used it to rig an approach line to the next pitch of 8 m. A literal pile of bones, including the intact skull of a feral cat, and probably one hundred snail shells, were all I found. On the way up, my aging chest harness decided to explode. Yeah, time to go home… JF-750 will have to wait.

My first feral cat.

Back in the Turret gully on the walk back to the car, I decided to stop and check JF-739 after all. I and ten other cavers had walked past this entrance about ten times in total in the last twelve months (on our trips to Turret). We always dismissed it and never checked it out. It is a small round hole (75 cm diameter), right in the middle of the gully, you can't miss it, with its tag 50 cm down on the left. It easily slopes and scrambles down for 4-5 m, then, to my extreme stupefaction, turns into low gradient stream way (extremely low flow through moon milk) and runs away like there's no tomorrow.

The so-called "Angry Turtle" in JF-739.

I was alone, but that didn't stop me from expleting many expletives, I was bewildered. Not only does it go for a while, but it also branches off into bigger chambers and even has a bloody draught!

I stopped where it got a bit tight, but it could be made passable.

IB-14 Exit Cave

19 January 2022

Nik Magnus

Party: Alan Jackson, Anna Jackson, Ben Jackson, Nik Magnus, Craig Stobbs

Alan organized the permits and the key was picked up from the Hastings cave ranger station.

We went in one car from Huonville, parking at the Mystery Creek Carpark and headed up to the top of the quarry, the track quite overgrown with cutting grass and pampas. The forest track down to Exit Cave was pretty, with lots of lyrebirds; some points were a little indistinct and we doubled back to find the right track. Lots of mosquitos at the entrance to Exit Cave.

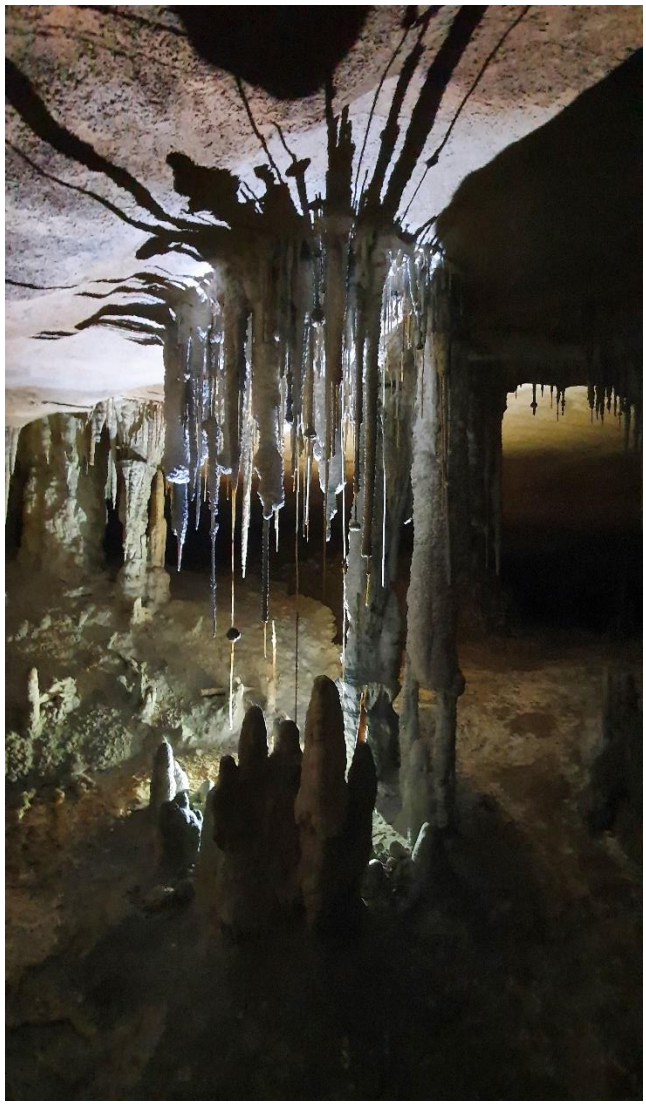
The key worked fine to the entrance gate, although the can of lubricant was empty. After a short crawl, it opened up to a series of large chambers following the creek, with gravel beaches and the way was straightforward with little scrambling. We explored the section at the confluence of rivers and stopped to admire the glowworms.

We found a yellow 15 l caving bag under some gravel - turns out to be Janine McKinnon's lost upstream many years ago.

Tannin power! Photo: Nik Magnus

We wandered up to the large rock pile, then turned back doing a few side trips – The Ball Room and the Colonnades were beautifully decorated.

The route was stringed which made navigation easy – it made sense to protect the delicate formations from careless feet and banging helmets.



Welcome to MONA… sorry, Exit Cave.
Photo: Alan Jackson

The party was well prepared and were warm and well fed. Total time inside the cave was about 3.5-4 h. We made an uneventful return to the entrance, locking the gate behind us and changing our gear in a flurry of mosquitos. The climb back to the car park seemed longer and more tiring than expected.

Lunch at The Ball Room. Photo: Alan Jackson

January 2022 Tasmania Expedition Highlights

Stephen Fordyce (text and photos, unless otherwise credited)

Introduction

I've just come back from a month of caving (with a few dives) in Tasmania, and have a tonne of things to catch up on, data to process and reports to write, but here is a brief update on some of the best (and worst). It was great to be back and somewhat decadent to spend so long there, but there was a lot of lost time to make up for thanks to COVID, and it turned out to be a very good time to be absent from Victoria. Lots of people from all over the place came and went, and it was great to hang out and go caving with old friends and new. Getting to Tasmania proved quite difficult, and COVID also messed up plans for several participants – sorry guys.

This is really only a placeholder, please forgive my lack of organisation, forgetting people, details, etc.

JF-761 Delta Variant (Australia's new deepest cave?)

The best would have to be the discovery of a new and very exciting cave: JF-761 Delta Variant, and the delicious and most cringeworthy COVID naming theme. I.e. The Omicron Inlet joins about halfway along the long and winding passage (the Test Station Queue) to get to the first pitch. The Alpha Inlet is old and dried out, but it joins part way along, too. The first pitch is named Quarantine, and past the junction with the Nasal Passage there is a 16 m pitch which seemed like a good thing initially, but then got a bit outdated and we stopped using it. This second pitch is named COVIDsafe.

The Delta Variant entrance is under this log.

The third pitch is named Daily Cases, because at that stage of January, the only thing bigger than this pitch was daily COVID cases. It's as-yet undescended, but if you drop a rock (and it needs to be a big one) there is silence for 6.5 seconds before the distant boom. We reckon that means it's about 150 m – or 154.4 m according to Jemma Herbert's spreadsheet. We did two push trips plus the discovery trip, good times with Brendan Moore, Ciara Smart, Gabriel Kinzler, Lachlan Bailey, Corey Hanrahan, Lauren Hayes and Jemma Herbert.

In a spectacular case of being overlooked by generations of cavers, JF-761 Delta Variant is literally 10 m from the entrance of JF-237 Niggly Cave, the current deepest cave in Australia and the subject of a long and ongoing project.

Brendan in the Delta Variant entrance.

There is a large stream going into Delta Variant (a small trickle splits, and flows over a low cliff into Niggly), which we dye traced to a large and previously mysterious waterfall at the bottom of Niggly. Even more satisfying than finding the cave was me being right in my theories about its existence, and in the character of what it would do. That was some top-notch ego stroking! Oh, and if the cave connects into Niggly as we expect (and the survey data yields no unpleasant surprises) we should be able to add about 4 m to the depth and take the cave depth to 402 m. Hoorah!

Brendan enjoying (!!) the Quarantine pitch.

Happy days in Delta Variant – "she goes!"

Brendan enjoys a distraction from the Test Station Queue in Delta Variant. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

JF-211 Sesame Cave – Push Dive

Another major undertaking of the trip was a push dive at the end of Sesame Cave. I'd done one last year and wasn't satisfied it could be written off in good conscience, due to lack of visibility (it's a downstream current, and just getting to the sump silts it out). For all that it's the epitome of awful, the prize is off the charts – 5 km of missing master cave between Niggly and Junee. This year, it took 7 days and 2 nights underground for the 30-minute push dive (2 days for rigging/derigging, 2 days staging dive gear, 3 days for the push trip).

The push trip was 3 days and 2 nights at Camp Squelch by the sump, so the water could clear overnight, and almost certainly the most miserable and difficult thing I've ever done. Brendan Moore (on his first Tassie caving trip!!) and Ciara Smart did a spectacular job helping shuttle 7 stupidly heavy caving bags through the dreaded "Wet Hole", 11 out of 10 mud, and assorted other nightmarish scenarios. The plan for visibility was a great success, although it allowed the tight and nasty sump to be fully appreciated. 10 m further than last year, the dive choked (fairly) comprehensively and I was supremely glad to be able to write it off. Brendan lead-checked the dry section of the streamway, so that the entire cave can be left for some eternal optimist in the next generation.

The horror of Sesame began at the entrance, with 2 left gloves for my next 3 days of caving.

We (just) made it to the pub, and the phrase "pooped out your mojo" was coined due to a hilarious episode on the way out, so it wasn't all bad. Big thanks to Ciara and Jemma Herbert for rigging, and to Lachlan Bailey for hauling out a load of dive gear later on. The final detector-retrieval/derig trip is yet to happen, as more dye releases need doing at time of writing.

Before the breaking-in process begins, everyone is a shiny hero (particularly Brendan).

JF-237 Niggly Cave

The month also included 7 days and 6 nights in Niggly Cave across 2 trips, continuing to push the downstream terminal rockpile (remember that 5 km of missing master cave?). Not the most pleasant caving, although the 1.5 km commute from The Dunes campsite at -350 m is pretty awesome. Petr Smejkal's intuition paid dividends again (this could well be another Atlantis moment) when he and Jemma Herbert shifted a rock in an obscure place and gained access to what seems to be a converging separate streamway and a big new chamber named Biohazard. The second trip (with Oxana Repina and Lachlan Bailey) came back with gear to drop the 15 m pitch and to our surprise found a deep pool which appears to be a sump, but not the expected streamway.

The second Niggly crew after 4 days underground (L-R: Lachlan Bailey, Oxana Repina, Stephen Fordyce).

It was immediately declared that the Biohazard Sump was way too hard/awful and should never be dived, but the fact that it had eaten a large (80 cm x 60 cm x 20 cm) dislodged chockstone with not a trace was interesting. I figured we should come back next time when the water was clear and at least assess it for diving. I mean, with 3 l cylinders it might be possible.

Jemma apparently enjoying surveying an unhealthy amount in the Niggly terminal rockpile.

We dropped and surveyed some other pitches and surveyed everything in minute detail – it's a very big and complex rockpile (the extents of the surveyed leads are 43 m high and 60 m wide, with leads everywhere) and in light of the prize behind it, hopefully in 3D we can get a feel of what it's doing and maybe just break through.

There is still heaps left to survey, some aid climbs and a traverse – now that we know there is something interesting in the Biohazard area, we will have to push harder in what was previously a low-prospect sideways direction. And of course, the sump almost certainly needs to be dived. As Lachlan pointed out, it's amazing how things change over time…

COVID precautions in the depths of Niggly – Oxana uses a RAT in case she got COVID in transit from NSW

A great triumph in Niggly was the use of orange cave line to sew up Lachlan's suit when he tore a gaping hole in it on day 1 of 4. Another triumph was finally derigging Game of Thrones and hauling 60 m of awful muddy rope and 5 kg of rigging gear out of the cave. Ironically, it'll almost certainly end up in Delta Variant, a few hundred metres away.

Orange cave line is excellent for stitching up large holes. Photo: Oxana Repina

JF-8 Junee Cave

Brendan jumped at the chance to have a dive in Tasmanian conditions (murky 7°C) and check out the wonders of For Your Eyes Only, the superbly-decorated streamway passage after sump 1. The 7 mm Telstra line (which we carefully assessed as we went) was broken in one place and snapped in my hands in another place – suboptimal, but probably just from local abrasion with winter flows. We were able to fix it and continue.

We spotted the glint of treasure in one of the deep pools in the streamway and Brendan heroically duck dived without a hood to eventually dig it out - apparently the ice-cream headache was pretty epic. It turned out to be a light head with E/O connector, which we later found out was lost by Grant Pearse about 12 years ago. It was pretty shagged but not

flooded and… still worked!!! The brand was Light Monkey, in case anyone was wondering.

It works! Photo: Brendan Moore

Other stuff

My electronic dye detectors and depth loggers had done well, some were still going after 11 months underground! We retrieved a bunch, left some more, and released some dye, mostly targeting the detectors which are still in Sesame – only one more trip is required to retrieve them and derig. There's a whole lot of data analysis and further tweaks to be done there.

In mid-January we did a pulldown trip going into Ice Tube and out the main entrance of Growling Swallet – this is quite committing as you pull the ropes down behind you, so the only way on is forward. It's a classic if epic Tasmanian through trip, with some fantastic big pitches and a long traverse along the streamway, although with some nasty tight bits too – Herpes III being a particularly nasty squeeze. This was always set to be an epic but getting out of the cave at 2 am was a bit more epic than hoped for. Fortunately, we managed to call off the cavalry before they left Hobart (an incident report is in the works) and bounce back ok the next day.

Sadly, the mid-January social event was moved online due to the COVID explosion, but perhaps that gave more people a chance to attend anyway. I still had a nice catch up with Craig and family; thanks for hosting me, and nearly hosting a social event.

We discovered and tagged a bunch of caves in our travels doing dye releases and generally having fun-times, although only Delta Variant was particularly exciting. Choice names including Brigadier General, Bush Poo, Booster Pot, Nuns Nasty, Suboptimal Pot, Shock Relter and Bum Steer. The last was when the undescended 25 m pitch had the decimal point omitted...

My last caving day was with Karina Anders and we did a whirlwind tour of JF-387 Porcupine Pot collecting detectors. We also left Ken Murrey's mask as a memoriam at Trump Rock, the gear-up spot before The Ken Murrey River (500 m+ of sump dive which we pushed in May 2021).

More (so many more) reports to come…

MC-44 Honeycomb Cave

28 January 2022

Alan Jackson (text and photos)

Party: Alan Jackson, Anna Jackson, Benjamin Jackson

A delightful jolly poking around Honeycomb Cave with the kids. Entered and exited via Abseil Hole to give Ben a bit of vertical practice (his first in-cave ascending a rope). The outside weather was warm and humid which made for atmospheric conditions around all the entrances where that warm air cooled down and created mist.

MC-13 Croesus Cave

29 January 2022

Alan Jackson

Party: Alyce Heap, Alan Jackson, Anna Jackson, Benjamin Jackson, Stewart Jackson

Karina's planned trip to Croesus didn't work out so well for her, with illness derailing her trip north. Alas. We had a good time without her!

The party completed a Top Hole through trip (i.e. abseil in and cave horizontally out). Outside was too hot and inside was too cold. A large log/stump had fallen in the Top Hole and caused a bit of mayhem, but safe descent was still possible. Things could move in the coming years as the log continues to rot away, so take care if heading there.

I'd not done the passage upstream of the Golden Staircase before and I was surprised by how much extra cave there was. A nice way to do the cave, especially in that you only have to do the really wet/cold stuff once.

Ben in Honeycomb Cave.

Minnow Falls

30 January 2022

Alan Jackson (text and photo)

Party: Alan Jackson, Anna Jackson, Eleanor March, Janice March, Janine McKinnon and a cameo from John Oxley

We needed some vitamin D so settled for an above ground day. John joined us for the walk but not the canyon. Water levels were sporting but not scary, higher than my previous trip a couple of years ago.

Drop, pool, drop, pool, drop, pool...

Spectacular trip but not for the faint-hearted! I took the correct rope lengths this time, which helped.

MC-75 Mersey Hill Cave

31 January 2022

Alan Jackson (text and photo)

Party: Claire Capper, Alan Jackson, Catherine Stark

MCCC had expressed an interest in getting to know Mersey Hill Cave a bit better and I was happy to oblige while in the area.

Access proved to be a slight problem this time round, it being the first trip since NC members Lyn and Haydn Steadman sold the property we historically parked on and jumped the fence from. Contact had not yet been made with the new owners about access and the keepers of the phone number were out of range.

We took our chances with a friendly door knock. The new owners politely indicated that they preferred the quiet life and weren't really keen to have cavers or anyone else using their property for access to the neighbouring PWS block, so Plan B was required.

We popped into the next house back down the road and spoke to owners Michael Scott and Kathryn (Catherine?) Smith. They were happy for us to traverse the 50 m or so of their property to get from the end of Miles Road to the PWS land to the north and expressed their thanks that we'd asked and not just trespassed.

Michael informed us that he'd just subdivided that area of his land into four smaller lots and that they were on the market. Hopefully someone nice buys the one convenient for MHC access! With the access situation solved we wandered down hill. Another hot sunny day, so the cool of the cave was very welcome.

Lots of fresh wombat poo in the entrance crawls and many animal tracks. We found a wombat in residence on the left a short distance up from where the active stream passage is intersected (i.e. a good 70 m in).

We went as far as the top of the pitch and then checked out various side passages on the way out. DWC and co's karstcare cleaning job and stringline at the super white flowstone side passage was noted and applauded.

Must be time to get back in there soon and finish the surveying job!

A scenic lunch.

MC-130 Devils Pot

31 January 2022

Janine McKinnon

Party A: Eleanor March (NC), Janice March (NC), Janine McKinnon, John Oxley

Party B: Lachlan Bailey (NUCC), Deb Hunter, Ric Tunney

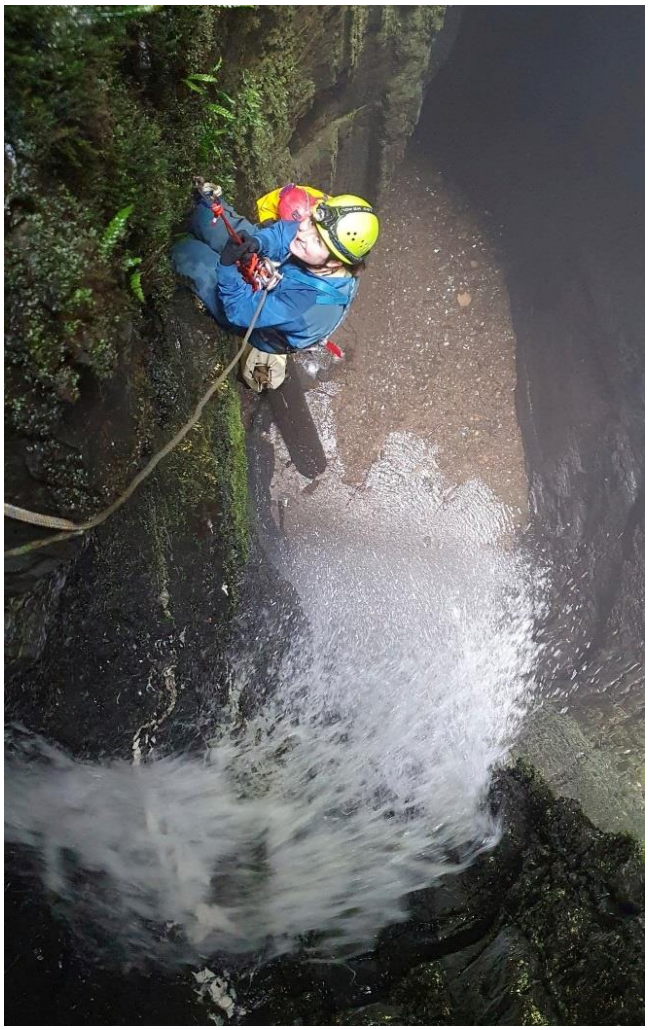
Names came and went in the planning phase of this trip and when the day finally arrived, we had a nice mix from both major Tassie clubs, with a mainlander thrown in to give it that international flavour. My plan had always been an exchange trip between the traditional route and the canyon route, given reasonable water levels in the canyon (it has been a very wet summer) and enough bodies to rig both routes (although two each way is enough to do that).

Party division was a random thing done at the top of the doline, with the proviso that Ric and I went in different groups (no, not because we bicker if together, although I won't deny the truth of that). Janice wanted to rig the canyon route, with oversight, and Ric was the only other who knew the cave and rigging.

The water levels in the canyon were fun but not scary. We had a rope that was 104 m long to rig that route and hoped it would reach all the way to the bottom of the waterfall. We had an 18 m rope as extra in case it didn't.

Rack 'em and stack 'em! Photo: Deb Hunter

Janice decided to start with the long rope at the top of the first pitch. She rigged down and I followed. The other party had arrived at the viewing ledge at the bottom of the first pitch on the traditional route as Janice started rigging out onto the wall. This gave them a great vantage point to watch us heading down the wall. We got to watch them watching us.



A girl and a swirl. Photo: John Oxley

The rope reached the bottom, with about 10 m to spare.

We couldn't find the bolt at the handline drop and used a flake of rock instead to rig a handline. That worked fine, so is acceptable if the next party has the same trouble.

Nice view. Photo: John Oxley

All went smoothly to the bottom and we met up with the other party for lunch, and then reversed sides. We got to watch Ric de-rigging up the canyon wall.

We were all out of the cave after 4 hours underground. It was a very smooth and efficient trip.

A video can be found here: https://youtu.be/w3FlNec7_64

IB-14 Exit Cave

30 January 2022

Jemma Herbert

Party: James Barnes, Jemma Herbert, Ian Houghton, Owen Lennon, Mark Robinson, Chris Sharples

We went and checked out Exit Cave. It was pretty pretty.

This was Owen and Mark's second cave in Tassie, and one of Ian's first caves in the last 25+ years. They all smashed it. Despite the pretty long day, there were still smiles all round at the end.

The team, minus Jemma, before. Photo: Jemma Herbert

Everyone turned up with all the right gear, some of it just never left the car. So there was a little bit of reshuffling of gloves, helmets and lights at the entry, but it all worked out.

Chris knows the cave pretty well, so he was our tour guide for the day. We learnt the names of all the side passages, and the geology and the history of the cave's exploration. He even printed us all out pretty maps.

Mark was excited for the Dawdle of Doom, but also disappointed that falling off doesn't land you in the Well of Despair. Fortunately, nobody fell off The Dawdle OR into The Well.

We got a fair way down the Western Passage before turning around. We checked out The Ball Room on the way back.

My favourite parts were:

- The big flat red roof in the Western passage. It's so flat! How come no chunks have ever fallen out of that section?

- The Ball. It looks so improbable. A fist sized sphere dangling on the end of a long skinny straw. Nature is metal.

- The circle rock markings. Chris pointed out these rocks in the Western Passage that have faint markings on the surface. Apparently, nobody knows what they are! There are just a few boulders, all in the same area, that are totally covered in these markings. The markings are concentric rings, all rings equally spaced, equal width, constant colour. On a single rock there would be 100 or more of these circles. And the circles run into each other, but never overlap. The pattern only seems to be on the surface of the rocks. Could it be created by a worm? Or a stress concentration? If anyone knows what they are, please tell!

The mysterious circles. Gummy Bear for scale. Not even the resident Science Officer (who's also a geologist, by the way) knows what this is. Please write to the Editor if you happen to know. Photo: Chris Sharples

Other exciting stuff

Destructive Rope Testing

10 February 2022

Alan Jackson

It had been too long since we last destroyed rope in the name of safety and risk management. As ever, we conducted the testing as unsafely and with as little management of risk as possible.

A busy caving calendar in 2021 meant large portions of the club's ropes were on active duty in holes in the ground but by mid-January 2022 most of it had come home to roost so we could get a bit from every parent roll. Jemma had a good stout pine tree in the backyard of her rental with a branch at the right height, so the planets aligned.

I won't go into the detail of how and why we do this, other than to say that representative samples of each type of rope we have in the gear store was subjected to repeated Fall Factor 1 drop tests (80 kg mass falling the length of the rope sample with figure 8 on a bight tied at each end – our version of a standard international test).

Our home-made test rig isn't perfect and we are under no illusion that we're recreating the international standard FF1 test scenario, but it's close enough (or is it? – refer to Discussion and Conclusion) for a bunch of rag tag laissez-faire troglodytes.

Results

The table of results is shown below *[better seen on a computer screen -Ed]*, arranged alphabetically by rope prefix/label. When we buy a roll or acquire a rope from any particular place it is assigned a unique letter so we can keep a track of them (yes, I'm aware that you'll notice we had two B ropes once you look at the table… mea culpa). We often have multiple ropes of the same brand and diameter but bought years apart and how old/scungy they look isn't always a true indicator of how old they actually are.

The headings on the columns in the table are pretty self-explanatory. Some rope ages were estimated but are mostly gleaned from the information tape running down the core of the rope – a handy system introduced 20 years or so ago by manufacturers.

Rope prefix	Year of man.	Rope Description	Knots	Failure mode	Fall 1	Fall 2	Fall 3	Fall 4	Fall 5	Comments
C	(2004)	Roca 10 mm static	Figure 8 on bight	N/A	Pass	Pass	Pass	PASS	-	Year of manufacture estimated, but was donated to STC by Gavin Brett in unused condition in early 2000s
Ba	2013*	BlueWater 9.5 mm static	Figure 8 on bight	in knot	Pass	Pass	FAIL	-	-	Donated by Abdel and Emily circa 2018 in very lightly used condition
Bb	(1990s)	Unknown brand 10 mm static	Figure 8 on bight	in knot	Pass	FAIL	-	-	-	Year of manufacture estimated. Was in the club gearstore when AJ joined the club circa 2001! Heavily used.
F	2013	Tendon 9 mm static	Figure 8 on bight	in knot	Pass	FAIL	-	-	-	Purchased new by STC. Heavily used.
G	2017	Tendon 9 mm Speleo static	Figure 8 on bight	in knot	Pass	FAIL	-	-	-	Purchased new by STC. Heavily used.
G	2017	Tendon 9 mm Speleo static	Figure 8 on bight	mid-rope	FAIL	-	-	-	-	Severely water damaged rope from Niagara Pot - sheath and 50% of core was already severed prior to test.
H	2018	Beal Spelenium 9 mm	Figure 8 on bight	in knot	Pass	Pass	FAIL	-	-	Purchased new by STC. Heavily used.
I	2018	Tendon 9 mm Speleo static	Figure 8 on bight	in knot	Pass	FAIL	-	-	-	Purchased new by Irish expedition and donated to STC immediately after exped. Heavily used.
J	2019	Beal Spelenium Gold 9.5 mm superstatic	Figure 8 on bight	in knot	Pass	FAIL	-	-	-	Purchased new by STC. Moderately used.
JB	2017	Tendon 9 mm Speleo static	Figure 8 on bight	in knot	Pass	Pass	FAIL	-	-	James Barnes' personal rope. Moderately to heavily used.
JB	2017	Tendon 9 mm Speleo static	Bowline on a bight	in knot	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	FAIL	James Barnes' personal rope. Moderately to heavily used.
K	2020	BlueWater 9.5 mm static	Figure 8 on bight	in knot	Pass	Pass	FAIL	-	-	Purchased new by STC. Very lightly used.
L	2018	Bluewater 9.5 mm static	Figure 8 on bight	in knot	Pass	Pass	FAIL	-	-	One of three 200 m rolls donated to club by Stephen Fordyce for 2019 Niggly re-rig - moderately used.
MoG	(1990s)	Unknown brand of 9 mm static	Figure 8 on bight	in knot	Pass	FAIL	-	-	-	Handline from Mother of God access installed by Eberhards circa mid-1990s and removed 2020
N/A	(2010)	Unknown brand of 11 mm dynamic	Figure 8 on bight	N/A	Pass	Pass	PASS	-	-	Unknown year of manufacture. Recently retired safety line on club hand ascender/SRT kit.
N/A	2010	Bluewater 25 mm tubular tape (black)	Tape knot	N/A	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	PASS	Very lightly used tape tied in a loop (i.e. doubled).
N/A	(2004)	Edelrid 25 mm tubular tape (white)	Tape knot	N/A	Pass	Pass	PASS	-	-	Heavily used tape tied in a loop (i.e. doubled).
N/A	(2004)	Edelrid 25 mm tubular tape (white)	Tape knots on bight	N/A	Pass	Pass	PASS	-	-	Heavily used tape tied with tape on on a bight at each end then doubled.
N/A	unknown	25 mm tubular tape (white)	tape knot	mid-rope	FAIL	-	-	-	-	Severely degraded tape from Organ Pipes rap point.
Niggly (2 mark)	2018	Bluewater 9.5 mm static	Figure 8 on bight	N/A	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	PASS	One of three 200 m rolls donated to club by Stephen Fordyce for 2019 Niggly re-rig. Tested section was unused other than initial washing
Niggly (3 mark)	2018	Bluewater 9.5 mm static	Figure 8 on bight	N/A	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	PASS	One of three 200 m rolls donated to club by Stephen Fordyce for 2019 Niggly re-rig. Tested section was unused and unwashed.
R&Ja	2012*	Bluewater 9.5 mm static	Figure 8 on bight	in knot	Pass	FAIL	-	-	-	Ric and Janine personal rope. Moderately to heavily used.
R&Ja	2012*	Bluewater 9.5 mm static	Bowline on a bight	in knot	Pass	Pass	Pass	FAIL	-	Ric and Janine personal rope. Moderately to heavily used.
X	Old!	Bluewater 11 mm static	Figure 8 on bight	in knot	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	PASS	Very old, stiff 11 mm which was retired from use a few years ago as it was too stiff to tie knots in easily anymore, but has been used for permanent handlines and pull-through y-hangs in places like KD and Ice Tube in recent years. Sample had been doused with Loctite 12 months prior to testing. Passed in excess of 10 drops (we stopped counting) but didn't eventually fail while testing random bits of hardware during the novelty phase of testing (see discussion).

(####) – dates in parenthesis are estimates only.

* - Dates with an asterisk are best estimates based on the coloured thread marker system BlueWater ropes use for batch tracing. Of course, being an American company, they don't use a small range of easily discernible colours for their system, but interchange things named 'slate', 'coyote', 'flavine', 'olive drab' etc. Just in the greens alone you need to know your 'spring green' from 'forest green' from 'neon green' from 'green' from 'sprout'. Muppets.

Discussion

As ever, a few curve balls were thrown.

Fat rope doesn't die, it just gets fatter

My proudest moment was finally breaking some 11 mm Bluewater, so arguably fat rope does die. In the past we've always run out of enthusiasm before this indestructible shit would break, so much so that we rarely even test any of our 11 mm ropes these days for fear of falling asleep. This time was different, however, as while I had opted to retire the 'X' Bluewater 11 mm rope in the store from active duty, I had been using bits of it for 'permanent' rigging in a few caves (e.g. access lines and pull through y-hangs in KD and Ice Tube). When replacing the manky rusting chains in IT a couple of years ago I opted to do it on the cheap and use old 11 mm. I had no concern re the strength of the rope for that job, but during the installation I noticed that in a few locations I spilled a bit of blue Loctite thread locker onto the rope while treating the various maillons connecting the pull through rings and bolts. So, I got a bit of that rope and doused it liberally with Loctite all through the knot (where things usually break) and the middle of the rope section. It then stewed for a year or two in the shed. We used this rope during our setup to test the rig for correct alignment the evening before, so it got somewhere between 5 and 10 drops in the range of FF0.7 and FF1.1 while we adjusted chain lengths to get it all FF1-ing nicely. We then used that same rope the next evening to test various bits of corroded hardware (crabs and maillons) and during that process it eventually failed. Not sure of the precise number of drops, but it would have been well in excess of 10 and probably more than 15. Of course, we don't know if it broke earlier than it otherwise would have (sans Loctite) but even if the Loctite weakened the rope then I'm happy that it's still uber strong stuff!

Exploding rope. Photo: John Oxley

The perils of being thin and stiff

One a more serious note, some of our skinny rope wasn't up to scratch. At our last rope testing session, we realised that Tendon Speleo 9 mm had a short shelf life (sheath was quickly visibly chewed and broke on FF1 drop two). We still had two rolls of this in the store (G and I ropes, manufactured in 2017 and 2018 respectively). G is a roll STC bought brand new and I is the best part of a roll donated to us by the Irish after it was bought new by them and used on their summer 2018-2019 expedition. Both G and I ropes failed on the second test. Based on previous experience, we were anticipating this.

The F rope also failed on the second test and will be retired. This was also Tendon 9 mm rope, but just the basic static variety, not the 'Speleo'. It was manufactured in 2013, so it has done pretty well and I wouldn't be averse to buying it again (although it is pretty bouncy to prusik on – more on this concept later).

Jemma Herbert is the real Hulk. Photo: James Barnes

Most disappointing was the J rope. This was purchased in 2019 and is Beal Spelenium Gold 9.5 mm. It is marketed as a super static rope with greatly reduced bounce for cavers (prusiking). It certainly is a pleasure to ascend. But it failed on the second drop and is still very young and not heavily used rope. It would appear that the price you pay for super static (non-bouncy) rope is that it doesn't last as long, or at least doesn't fare as well when subjected to FF1 tests; this is supported by the difference between the Tendon 'Speleo' and standard static ropes (generally 3-4 years versus 8+ years). Beal quote FF1 figures on their 9 mm Spelenium and 9.5 mm Spelenium Gold as 8 and 5 respectively, so even when brand new the skinnier rope has more guts than the fatter, less bouncy one. Tendon don't quote their FF1 figures, but do provide UIAA figures. For the 'Speleo' versus the standard it is 8 versus 15, so again, the 'caving specific' less bouncy rope can't handle large fall factor numbers. Maybe we need to suck up the bounciness in the interests of saving the club's $ and our impact on the environment.

The BlueWater conundrum

Bluewater 9.5 mm static continues to produce irregular results. The club currently has five different parent rolls and we also tested some of Ric and Janine's private rope. Ba is a small bit donated to us by Abdel Soudan and Emily Shepperd a few years back; then there are three rolls all bought in 2019 for the infamous Niggly re-rig (L and two rolls yet to be assigned a prefix – we'll probably call them all L, TBH, as they're all the same year of manufacture and entered service simultaneously) and; a new roll acquired in late 2021 labelled K. R&J's rope failed on the second drop (gulp!), Ba failed on the third (ok …), two never used bits of the Niggly collection passed all five drops and another bit which had seen moderate use underground failed on the third, but most surprising was that the very lightly used K rope failed on the third drop, too. Three consecutive FF1 is brutal punishment and even a single FF1 while caving would require a high level of creativity and/or stupidity to achieve, but still, Bluewater does seem to be a bit all over the place. It will be interesting to see how the heavily trafficked 'L' ropes on the main route in Niggly perform when they eventually come out.

Ten out of ten

After years of scoffing at testing 10 and 10.5 mm and having it never fail, we finally got an early failure from one. Bb is super old and was in the club's stores when I joined the club over 20 years ago. It is so old it doesn't have a manufacture details tape or thread down the core. It broke on the second drop. It can be gracefully retired in the knowledge it has served the club very well.

The C rope continues to soldier on.

Stupid games, stupid prizes

In the novelty section we tested some 25 mm tubular tape, some private rope of James' (2017, 9 mm Tendon Speleo), various dynamic ropes and some crusty hardware. The good and moderate condition 25 mm tubular tape wouldn't break (yay!) but the hideous bit of manky tat tape Jemma scavenged off a rap station on the Organ Pipes recently didn't pass the first test (UV, ice, snow, wind and algae aren't good for tapes…).

Technically still a carabiner? Photo: Alan Jackson

The hardware consisted of two heavily pitted alloy crabs I found at the bottom of Niagara Pot a few years ago (both failed on the first test), a slightly corroded alloy snap gate from Jemma's Organ Pipes location (survived lots of drops and we got sick of it – buy it on eBay next week if you like), and a lightly pitted alloy 10 mm maillon I inherited from Jeff Butt's rigging stash when he died (i.e. 25+ years old) refused to yield and the 11 mm Bluewater it was attached to failed instead!

The dynamic rope consisted of one of my old 9 mm Tendon cowstails which had been retired because I'd worn the sheath through (exposing the core) on the barrel knots from abrasion against cave walls (survived lots of drops unscathed), a bit of 11 mm recently retired from the club SRT kits (survived lots of drops unscathed) and a bit of old 8.5 mm from Jemma's personal collection which we lost count on in the end but it was drop 6 or 7 when it finally failed (mid rope and not in the knot). Dynamic is what you want if you intend taking big falls!

The most interesting series of tests for me, though, was what we did with James' length of 9 mm Tendon. First up we did a standard figure 8 at each end and it failed on the third drop (totally acceptable). Second, we used a bowline on a bight at each end and it broke on the fifth (wow!). So, then we did the same with the left-over bit of R&J's 9.5 mm Bluewater and it failed on the fourth (compared to second for previous figure 8 test). Then we tried a bit of James' rope with a figure 8 in one end and an overhand knot in the other, which broke on the third drop … at the figure 8 end!

It's nothing new that figure 8 knots in skinny ropes should be avoided. Figure 9 used to be the go-to knot but the bowline on a bite (which is the norm in Tasmania in recent years) is obviously a great alternative as it is evidently super strong and is much easier to undo than a heavily loaded fig 8 or fig 9.

Conclusion

I'll be recommending that we retire the Bb, G and I rolls. I'd like to discuss the J roll further. It seems a crime to ditch it after only about two years. I think an acknowledgement of the outrageous forces involved in the repeated FF1 testing regime compared to anything even remotely likely to ever happen in a cave has to be made. Falls over sharp edges is what cavers need to be scared of and 9 mm will always perform poorly at this, so concentrating on good anchors should be your priority rather than stressing about how many consecutive FF1s your rope can handle. We also need to factor in that we are giving our samples about 30 seconds to 'recover' between drops and UIAA tests specify something like 3 minutes between tests, which is significant as ropes do regain some of their elasticity as time passes from a big stretch.

Maybe it's time to consider if relying only on FF1 testing is appropriate for the club. The club already has a 3-tonne dynamometer (bought for some bolt testing I haven't quite got around to doing yet …) which we could use to see how our older ropes are stacking up in that area, too (i.e. a breaking strain number under a near-static pull instead of FF1 shock loads). All food for thought.

Binning ~600+ m of rope will put a significant dent in the rope supplies and I'd suggest we'll need to grab at least another 200 m roll in early 2022 to keep the regulars happy. The majority of the I rope is not in general circulation, so losing that won't affect general rope hire/trips, but nearly all the short bits of rope in the six SAR rigging bags is I rope, so we will need to replace that promptly. Each bag has 3x 5 m, 1x 6 m and 1 x 10 m lengths, so that's about 180 m of rope that we'll need to swap out there. Some ACRC funding might cover 50% of that if we're lucky.

DT27-28 Snug Point Cave, Coningham

Greg Middleton

This cave (Photo 1) wasn't difficult to find. It was marked on the (now discontinued) 1:25,000 Barnes Bay sheet as 'cave' on the shore south of Coningham. It is still shown on the LIST base map. The land tenure is now Coningham Nature Recreation Area (NRA) and it surrounds what used to be a school kid's holiday camp (now apparently abandoned). The PWS webpage for the Nature Recreation Area refers to the native plants, wildlife and scenery but does explicitly mention the cave.

Photo 1. The impressive entrance to Snug Point Cave DT67. The secondary entrance, DT28, is to the right.

Aboriginal site?

Under 'Cultural Heritage' PWS (2021) states: "The area is highly valued by the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. It provides evidence of occupation and use and may have formed part of a travelling route to Bruny Island". No information is given as to the "evidence of occupation" but this could be shell midden sites, which are common behind beaches and other coastal sites, or a cave or shelter site with evidence of occupation. I can find no record of any cave site in this vicinity being archaeologically investigated though there is one clear report of a burial site in a midden exposed by erosion at Coningham (Wallace & Stockton 1979). While the location of this site is not given (as is usual in such cases), it is described as a one metre high bank immediately above high water mark, so the cave shown on the TasMap can be excluded.

Other websites/blogs claim or suggest that the cave has an Aboriginal connection but this may be simple conjecture. One site refers to the "Coningham Aboriginal Cave Shelter Walk" and marks the cave site on a Google map, but gives no supporting information or evidence. Another site refers to 'Coningham Cave walk' (Cowirrie 2021), suggesting that 'Coningham Cave' is a formal name. It quotes another source saying "This well-appointed cave offers shelter, seasonal water, and a hole in the roof for smoke…". (Note that the car park near the cave and the road to it from Old Station Road are both now closed. The cave is now about a 30-minute walk from the closest accessible road.)

While there is no formal management plan in force for the NRA, there is a Management Statement (PWS 2009) which is being implemented, subject to availability of funds. The management statement contains a Statement of Significance which includes:

> "The reserve was an important launching place for Aboriginal people moving from the main island of Tasmania to Bruny Island. The reserve contains many midden sites and a number of highly significant sites including an occupation cave" (PWS 2009, p. 6).

The cave is further mentioned in section 4.3 Aboriginal Heritage:

> "There is a cave located on the coast that was once occupied by Aboriginal people. It is an important Aboriginal site as it is the closest departure point for swimming to Bruny Island. It would have been used as an overnight shelter and contains midden material. There was a failed attempt to disguise the track to the cave to discourage use and a hazard sign erected.
>
> "The walking track to the occupation cave is actively eroding and carries surface run-off which enters the cave through a large hole in the cave roof.
>
> "The Aboriginal occupation cave is located on a section of coastline that has been identified as having potential for rock-falls, collapse or slumping of rock faces by Sharples (2006).
>
> "Because there is potential for the cave roof to collapse, a fence was erected along the cliff-top to deter visitors from walking on top of the cave roof but visitors can still skirt around the fence and visit the cave. Recently a section of the fence was removed by visitors to enable easier access to the cave. Visitors recreating at or near the occupation cave are exposed to the risk of injury in the event of the cave roof collapsing.
>
> "The Aboriginal community would prefer that people not visit the cave out of respect for the place and for those who once lived there (PWS 2009. p. 23).

The management statement suggests closing the access track to the cave as it is diverting run-off water onto the cave roof and accelerating erosion. It suggests a sign should ask visitors to respect the Place by not visiting the cave. It also proposes replacing the sign on the fence above the cave (Photo 2) with a modern hazard warning sign.

Photo 2. Sign warning of hazard walking on the cave roof.

Visits, April 2015 and July 2021

Ros Skinner and the author first visited the cave on 11 June 2015. I prepared a sketch of it but subsequently misplaced it. We returned on 2 July 2021 and did a full survey (Fig. 1), noting a few extra features of the cave, including the small black sand/shell midden on the northern side of the larger entrance, the nodules and tafoni on the back wall and the

pronounced joint running through the smaller roof hole (Photo 3). This will provide a line of weakness which may ultimately result in the front part of the cave falling away from the cliff.

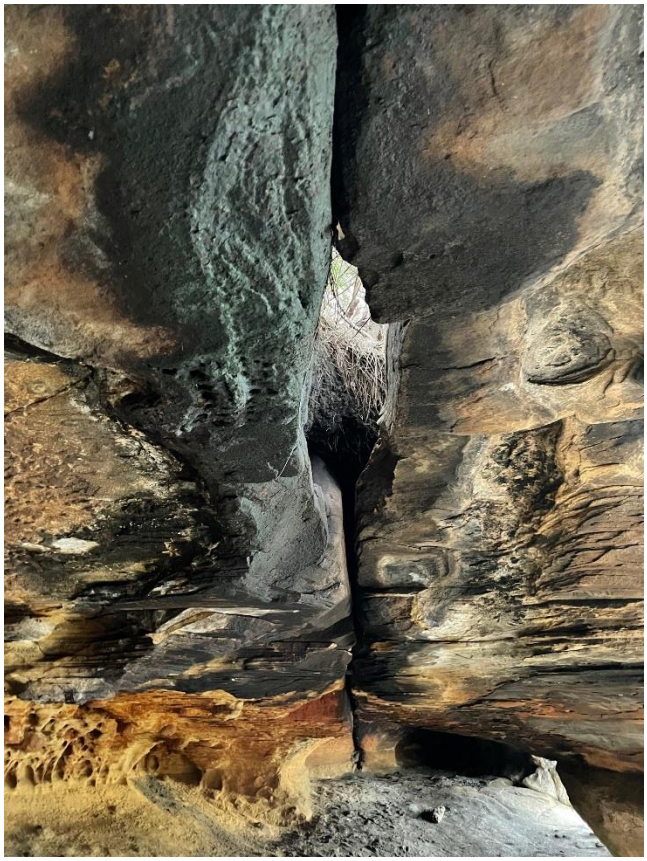


Photo 3. The prominent joint running the length of the cave roof, part of which has enlarged to form the smaller roof hole.

As mentioned previously, a notable feature of the cave is the large hole (seen by some as a 'chimney') in the roof (Photo 4). Unlike the thinner slot, the main hole does not seem to be related to a joint. A ranger who was previously in charge of the reserve believes that the main hole only formed, or at least significantly enlarged, about 15 years ago (i.e. around 2006) (P. Dimmick pers. comm.)

Photo 4. The two roof holes. The very thin bedding in the Triassic sandstone is notable.

All-in-all, for a small sandstone rockshelter, it is quite impressive (Photo 5). It would have made an ideal Aboriginal occupation site, confirmed by the midden material around the pillar between the two entrances.

Name

In the absence of any other formal or apparent established name, we propose to call it Snug Point Cave in view of its location. As it lies in the Derwent Region it has been numbered DT27-28.

Photo 5. Snug Point Cave from the back; note tafoni weathering on back wall (right).

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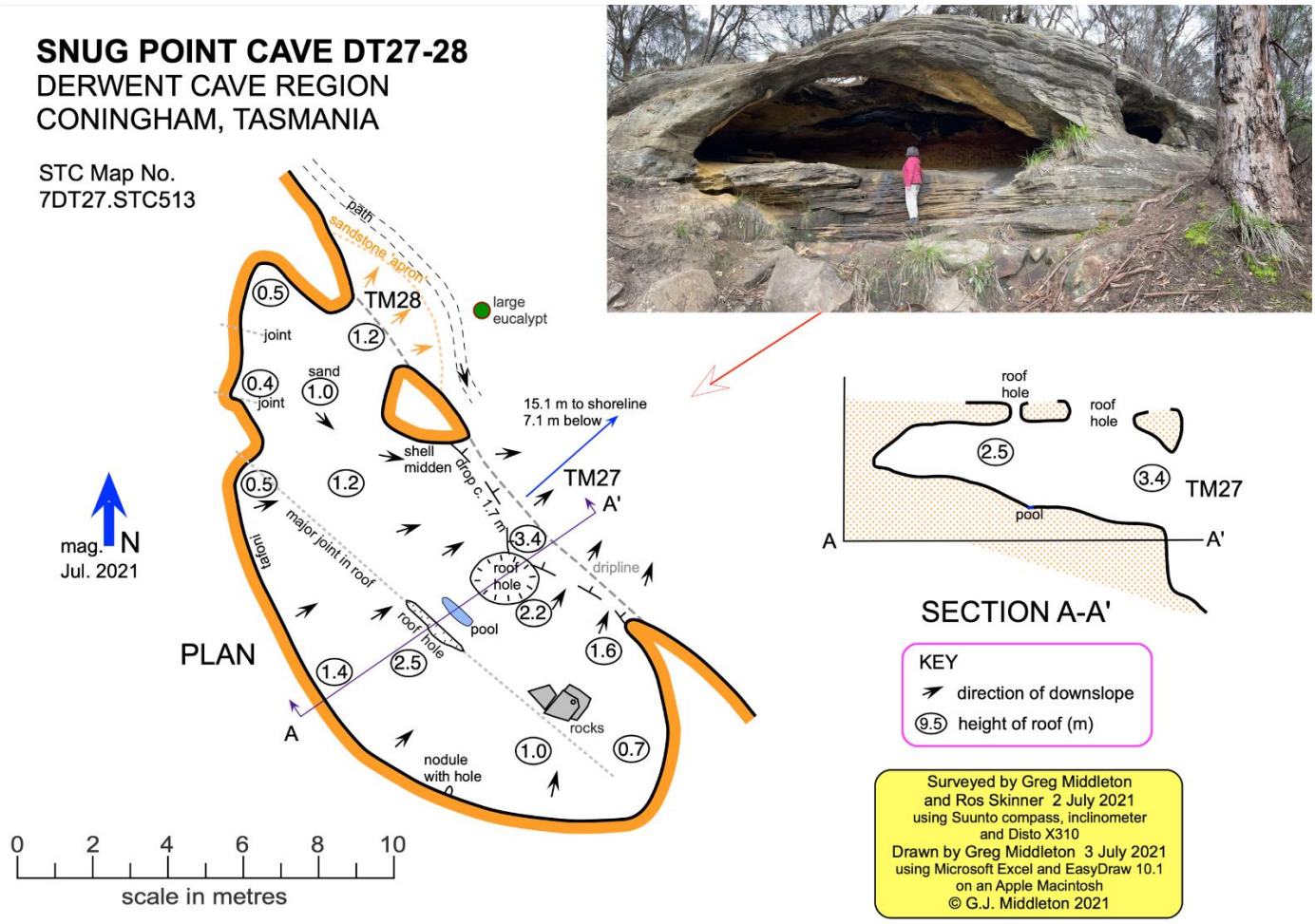


Fig. 1. Survey of Snug Point Cave DT27-28.

Return to Black Snake Gully, near Granton

Greg Middleton

Following our survey of Black Snake Cave in Black Snake Gully near Granton (Middleton 2021), and encouraged by locals referring to 'other caves' 'up there' (in the hills), Ros Skinner and I, on 21 May 2021, followed up other 4-wheel-drive tracks out of the gully. One of these led us to a quite impressive band of sandstone which crossed a small tributary gully, resulting in a sheer cliff, cutting across the valley below. The site looked prospective for the development of overhangs/caves in the sandstone below. As it looked too dangerous to try to climb down, we resolved to find a way up to it from Black Snake Gully.

The opportunity for a further trip arose on 29 July 2021. We walked up the main gully and struck off to the south from the fire trail, following a tributary which we guessed would lead to the sandstone cliff. It was surprisingly easy going, mainly following wallaby pads through the open undergrowth. In only about half an hour we could make out the sandstone barrier ahead, blocking the valley.

As we approached the base, we could see that it was undercut, as we had hoped, creating rockshelters at the foot of the cliff (Photo 1). We decided that two of them were of sufficient size and interest to be worth recording and surveying.

Photo 1. The valley ends abruptly in a sheer sandstone wall, with significant undercutting.

I began with the one on the south side which, in recognition of the large sandstone cliff, we called Big Wall Cave. A particular feature of this cave is the apparently weathered flowstone near its eastern end. Presumably this is calcite that has been dissolved out of the sandstone/shale cliff and redeposited on the surface, before being eroded by rain and dripping water. Some of the deposits look as though they may have taken the form of stalactites (Photo 2)

Photo 2. Eroded remains of aerial speleothems.

The other notable geological feature was the exposure of a band of rock rich in brachiopods (Photo 3), reminiscent of those in the limestone deposits on Maria Island. In my experience they are not very common in sandstone/shale sequences. Presumably they are all Permian.

Photo 3. Brachiopod fossils exposed in the back wall of Big Wall Cave.

I completed the survey, here presented in Fig. 1.

After a bite of lunch I surveyed the other cave which adjoins the western end of Big Wall Cave and runs across the cliffline at the end of the gully. Structurally these could be seen as a single feature but I felt that the break in the overhang necessitated recording them separately. We called the second cave Dripping Moss Cave as a small flow of water cascaded from moss on the cliff above. At times this may constitute a waterfall but it is probably short-lived after rain as the flow has not been sufficient to dislodge the moss from the dripline. The survey is shown in Fig. 2. Further north of this cave in the same beds there are a couple more overhangs but I felt they were too small to warrant survey.

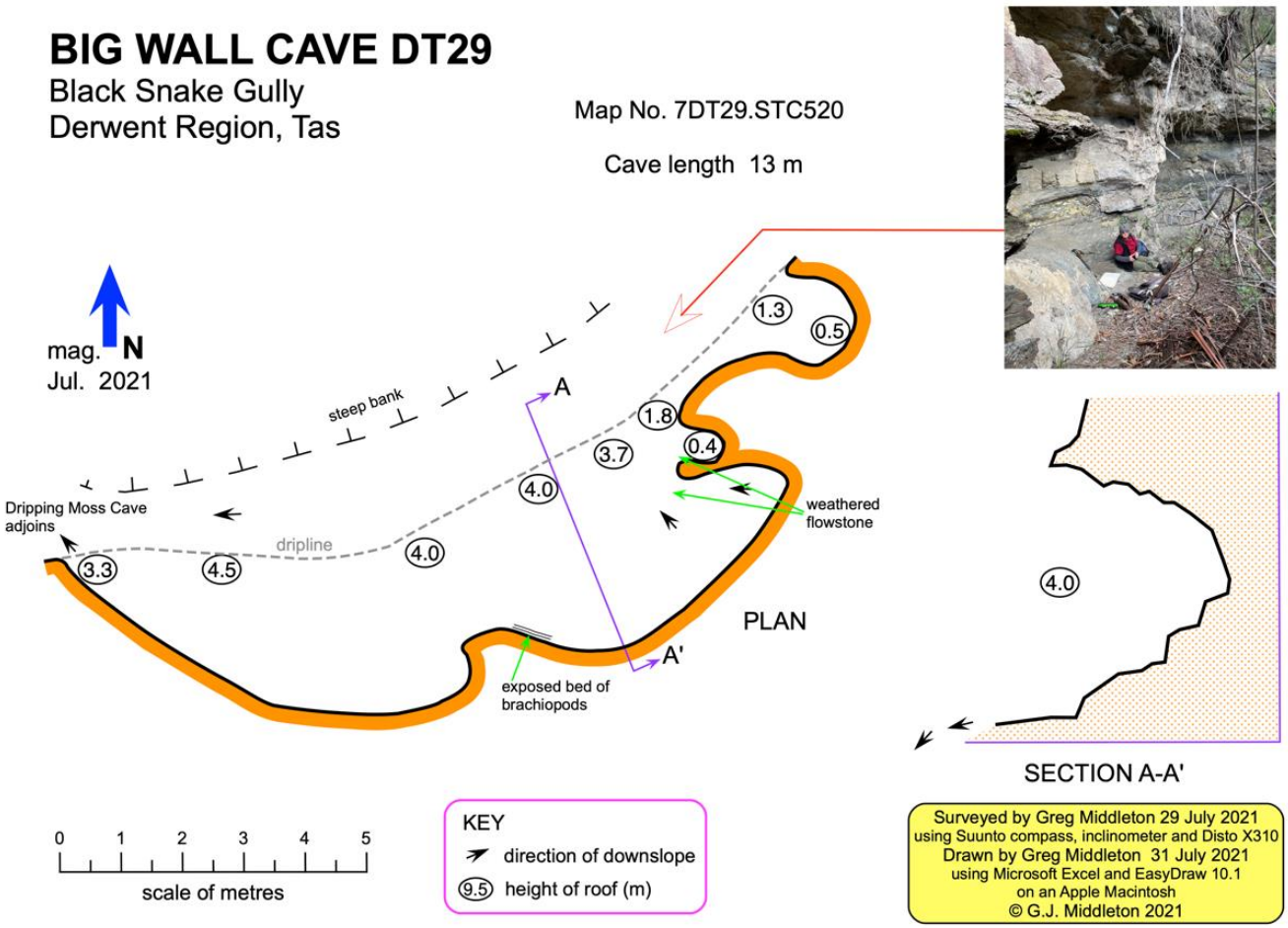


Fig. 1. Survey of Big Wall Cave DT29.

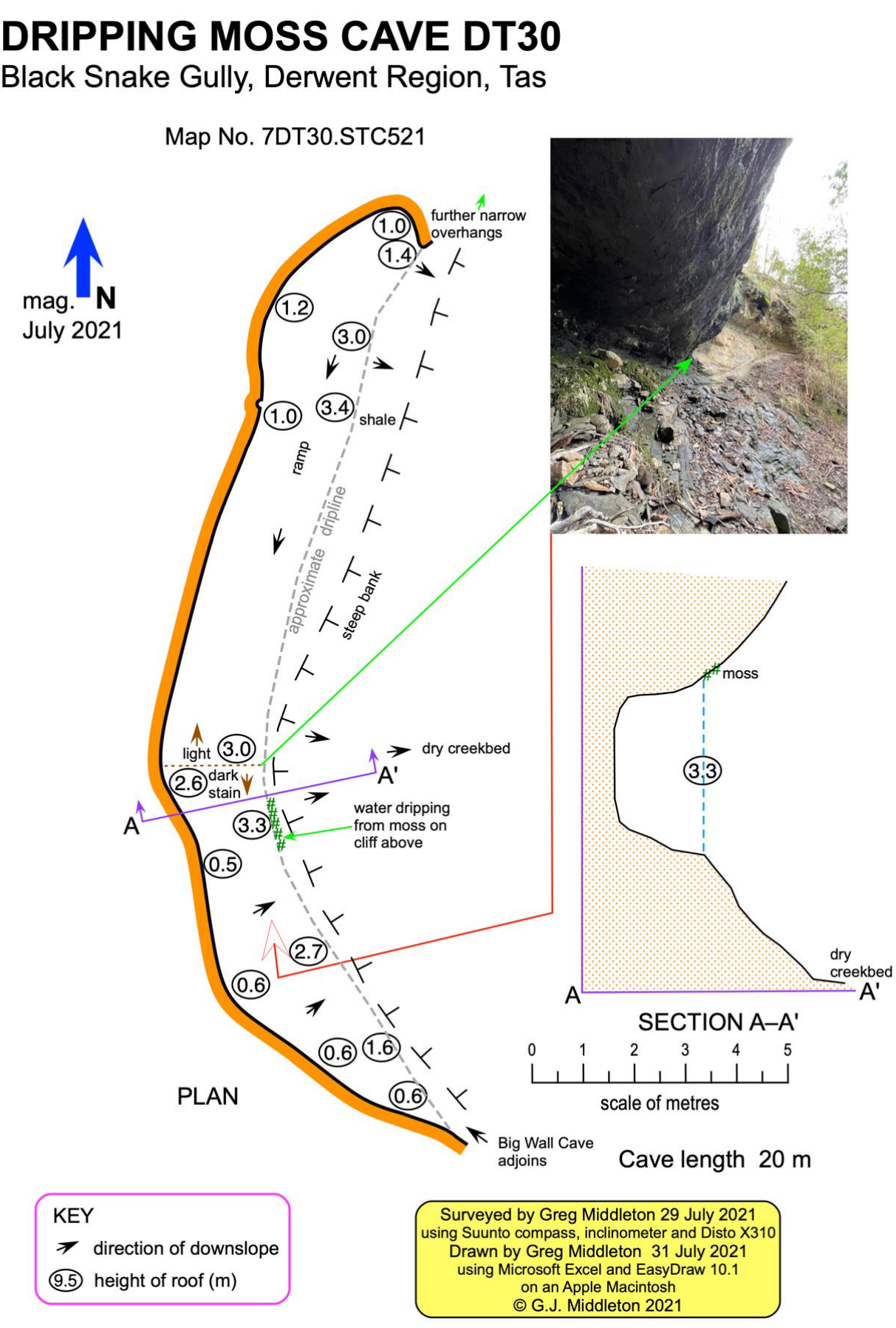


Fig. 2. Survey of Dripping Moss Cave DT30.

Looking up the cliff above Dripping Moss Cave from the dry creek bed it was possible to make out an upper level cave which, though evidently not having a very high opening, was too intriguing to ignore. I was not at all sure I could find a way up, but felt compelled to try. The southern side of the gully seemed the more steep, so I tackled the northern side. I passed the other small overhangs and scrambled up until I could see a way back to the west and south that would take me above Dripping Moss Cave. With a little care I was able to make it onto the narrow ledge that gives access to the narrow horizontal-slot entrance to the upper cave (Photo 4). In light of its position I called it Upper Big Wall Cave.

Photo 4. Entrance to Upper Big Wall Cave DT31.

The entrance is a full 18 m wide but not much of it is over a metre high. There is a steep drop some 16 m to the dry creekbed below. I began to wonder if this cave was worth the effort of getting to it.

As I crawled into the cave, I was struck by how dry it was. Water dripped from the cliff above and continued on down to form the shower at Dripping Moss Cave but none of it entered the upper cave. The whole of the floor is constituted of fine sand and dust in which there were numerous tracks of small mammals. Entering from the northern side I soon noticed a low passage disappearing into the dark (Photo 5). As we were just investigating sandstone overhangs, I hadn't contemplated needing a light! A few meters further across the entrance there was a second passage, almost parallel to the first and also disappearing out of sight. Of interest, on the far side of this, against the southern wall of the cave, was a pile of neatly placed sticks of wood (Photo 6). The sticks appeared to be quite old, very dry, all of similar size and length and apparently broken, with no signs of axe or saw cuts. Its presence invited the questions who had placed it there, why had they brought this wood to this remote and difficult-to-access place (there was no sign of a fire or smoke staining on the roof) and how long had it been there?

Photo 5. The more northerly low passage at the back of the entrance area.

Photo 6. The opening to the more southerly passage and the woodpile.

I carried out a survey of the outer parts of the cave, leaving the deeper passages for a later visit.

The mysterious passages were too intriguing to ignore for long. On 19 August 2021, I convinced Kevin Kiernan to join me in returning to investigate them. Due to rain on previous days water was flowing much more strongly down the cliff.

Although we crawled further in than I had on my own, we found that both passages became too low and difficult to push very far. While we believed we could see the limit of both passages (e.g. Photo 7), it did appear that both widened towards the back and it is even possible that they might join, though this would be very low (<20 cm). I extended the survey a few metres and guesstimated how the passages ended – see Fig. 3.

Photo 7. The Disto beam (red dot) striking the end of the more northerly passage. Though extremely low, it appears that both passages widen towards the rear.

So, the Black Snake Gully area turned up more than we initially expected – and it may not be finished…

REFERENCE

Middleton, G. 2021 Black Snake Cave DT26, Granton. *Speleo Spiel*, 447:14

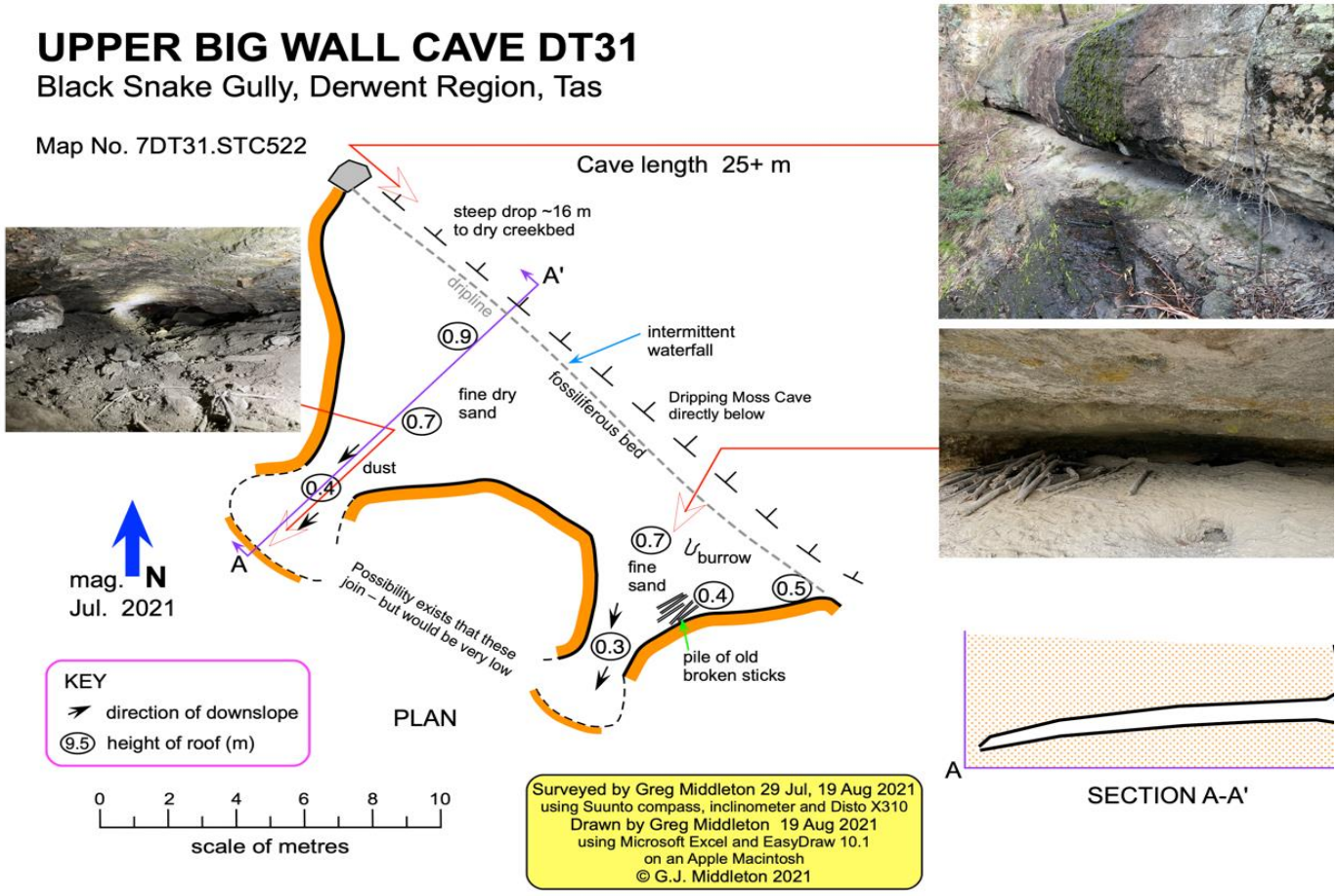


Fig. 3. Survey of Upper Big Cliff Cave DT31.

Catchpole Gully, above Risdon Brook Dam

Greg Middleton

As with many of our non-calcareous cave finds, Ros Skinner and I were tipped off about the existence of caves in this area north-east of Risdon Brook Dam, in the Meehan Range on the eastern side of the River Derwent by a bushwalking blog (Pindell 2017) which included a photo of a small sandstone cave, captioned: "Inside is fine sand which has numerous footprints" (of small mammals). While a map of the whole walk was included, there was no information as to the cave's actual location. The group did virtually the same walk in 2019, this time other photos of sandstone rock shelters were included, including Photos 1 & 2 (Pindell 2019):

Photo 1.

Photo 2. Pindell gave no location information on either of these shots.

We figured our best chance of finding any of these caves was to try to follow the walk on the basis of the maps provided and keep a look out for them.

On 11 March 2021 we drove to Risdon Brook Dam and headed to the east into the Meehan Range, up what the Richmond 1:25,000 topo map labels Catchpole Gully. After walking a couple of kilometres, we started noticing large sandstone outcrops, some with significant erosion cavities (Photo 3).

It was necessary to climb up the ridge above the fire trail we had been following in order to investigate the openings but eventually we were rewarded with one that was certainly big enough to record (Photo 4).

Photo 3. Eroded sandstone beside the fire trail; not of sufficient size or interest to document.

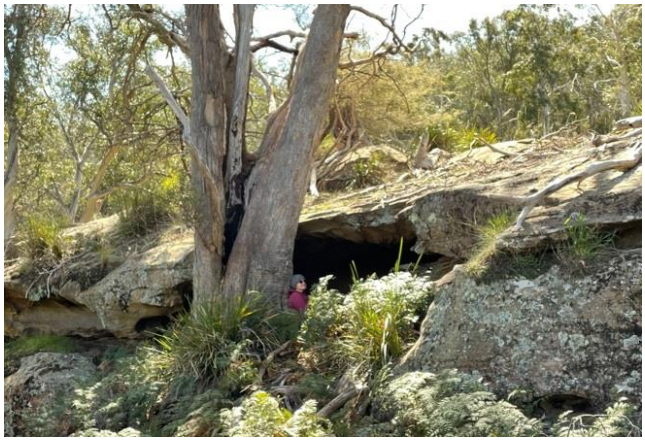


Photo 4. Higher on the ridge was a cave big enough to have served as a hermit's shelter.

We were interested to note that it had a flat, dry sandy floor and had evidently been occupied a few years before. However, we were disgusted by the amount of rubbish and cooking utensils the troglodyte had left behind, including a foam sleeping mat (Photo 5). A tongue of rock sticking out from the back wall at about half the height of the chamber might have served the occupant as a crude table (Photo 6).

Photo 5. Domestic rubbish left by a recent occupant. Note erosion patterns in roof.

Photo 6. A protruding tongue of rock might have served as a sort of table.

We are always on the lookout for occupation sites but have in mind something considerably older; any evidence of Aboriginal occupation of this cave would have been obliterated by the more recent use. Nevertheless, we noted the location, as I had not brought survey gear. We returned to carry out a survey on 7 October (Fig. 1). While the domestic materials were a notable feature of this cave, we decided against commemorating this in a name, preferring instead to note the great view of Mount Direction from the entrance – hence Direction View Cave DT32.

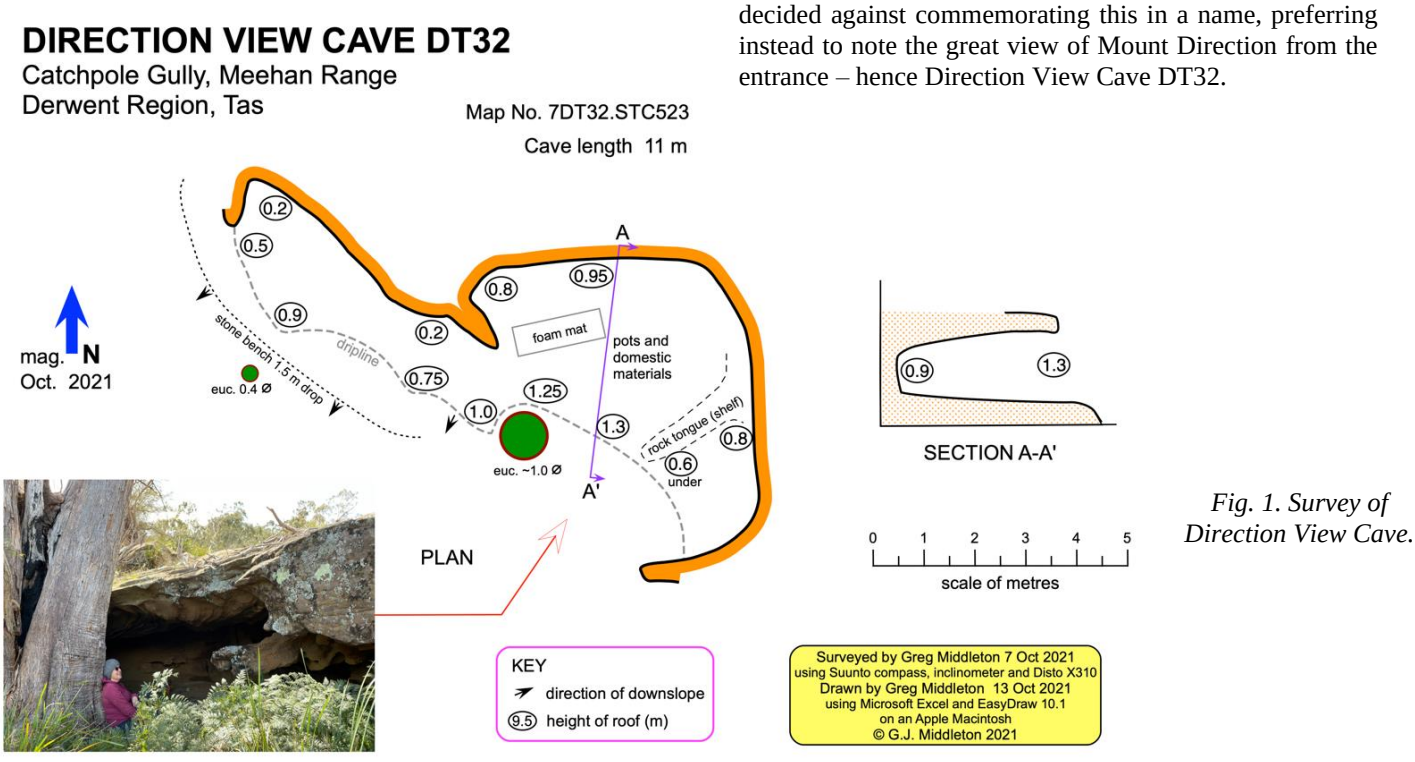


Fig. 1. Survey of Direction View Cave.

Following the line of the low outcrop north, we soon came to another cave of similar size and orientation (Photo 7). It showed no signs of occupation – ancient or modern. It had a similar dry, sandy floor but this sloped at up to about 25°, making it unsuitable for sleeping in. The ceiling, however, displayed a very interesting array of eroded roof pendants (Photo 8). Ros likened these to 'sandcastles in the air', so we adopted this as a suitable name (DT33). These might be a form of tafoni or honeycomb weathering, the more usual form of which, eroded boxwork, also occurs at the site. Some are rounded but many have a flat end, suggesting they may have been broken off. We also surveyed this cave on 7 October (Fig. 2).

Photo 7. Eroded sandstone shelf at Sandcastles in the Air Cave.

Photo 8. The distinctive eroded roof pendants which suggested the name for the cave.

We scouted around further in this vicinity but found no more sizable shelters and the rocky ledge we had been following appeared to peter out. As these caves hadn't appeared in Pindell's photos we returned to the fire trail and continued north. Noticing a side track which seemed to lead down into the gully, we followed it and, to our satisfaction, soon came upon what was, without a doubt, Pindell's 'Comfortable shelter' – compare Photo 2 with Photo 9. As the cavity could indeed provide shelter for wildlife, or perhaps a small person, we decided to adopt the name suggested by Pindell for DT33 – again, surveyed 7 October (Fig. 3).

Photo 9. The Comfortable Shelter noted by Pindell (2017, 2019).

Photo 10. Ros looking in the small hole on the side of the chamber.

We then followed the old track, which had turned south, further down into Catchpole Gully. It ran along below a series of low sandstone outcrops in which we checked out a few overhangs before finding the largest cave of the day (not one mentioned by Pindell) (Photo 11). This site would have been very suitable for occupation, having a relatively level, dry sandy floor and, in part, headroom over two metres. Towards the southern end a protruding eroded shelf suggested the head of a lizard, which gave rise to a suitable name (DT34). We also surveyed this cave on 7 October (Fig. 4).

Photo 11. The spacious Lizard Head Cave on the side of Catchpole Gully.

Photo 12. Ros at the 'lizard head' shelf, showing the flat floor and tafoni on the roof.

REFERENCE

Pindell, Jack 2017 Almost Grasstree Hill 2017. Ramblings (Unofficial posts of U3A Kingborough Bushwalkers). https://ageramblings.blogspot.com/search?q=almost+Grasstree+Hill

Pindell, Jack 2019 Almost Grasstree Hill 2019. Ramblings (Unofficial posts of U3A Kingborough Bushwalkers). https://ageramblings.blogspot.com/search/label/Almost%20Grasstree%20Hill%202019

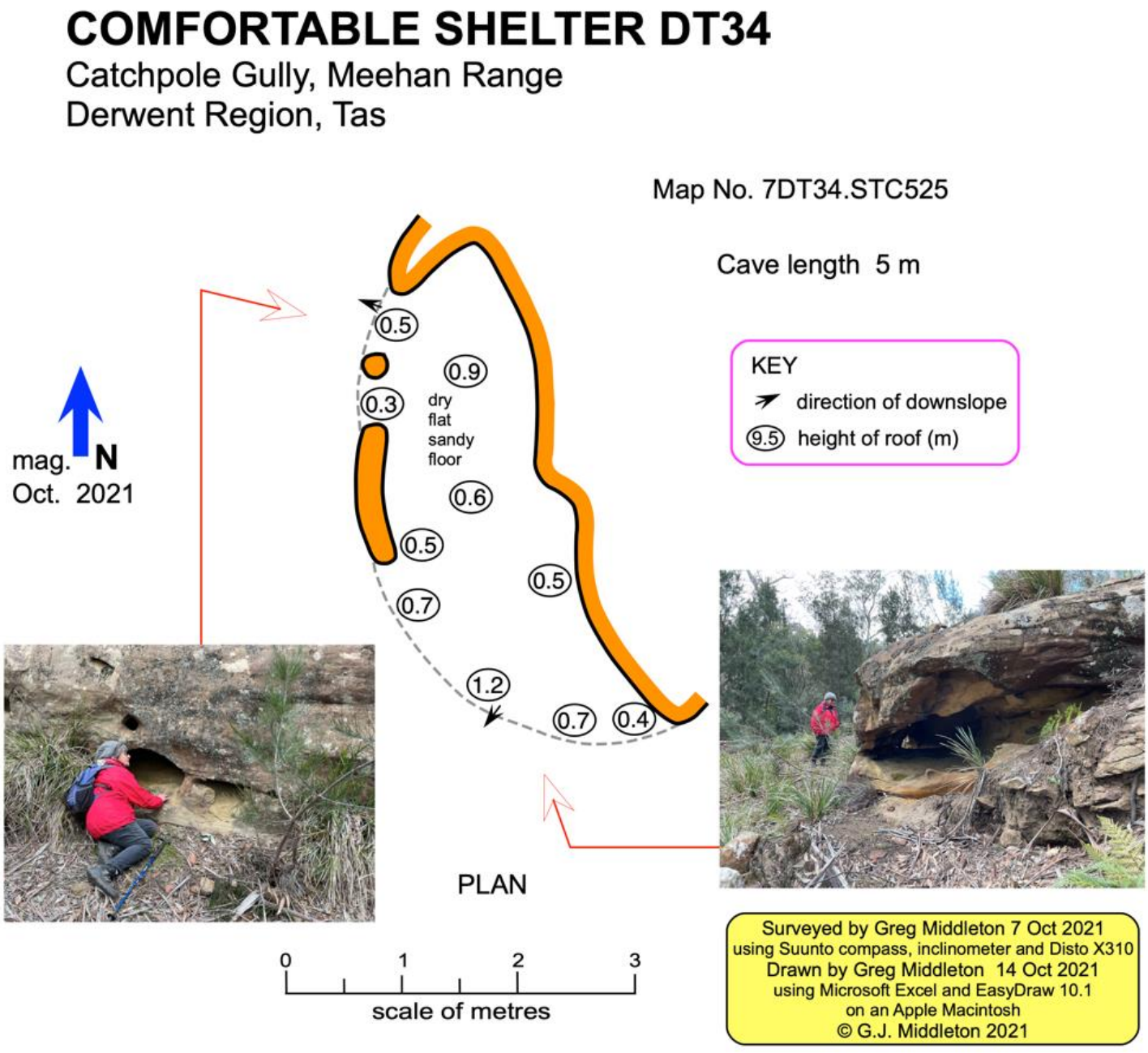


Fig. 3. Survey of Comfortable Shelter DT34.

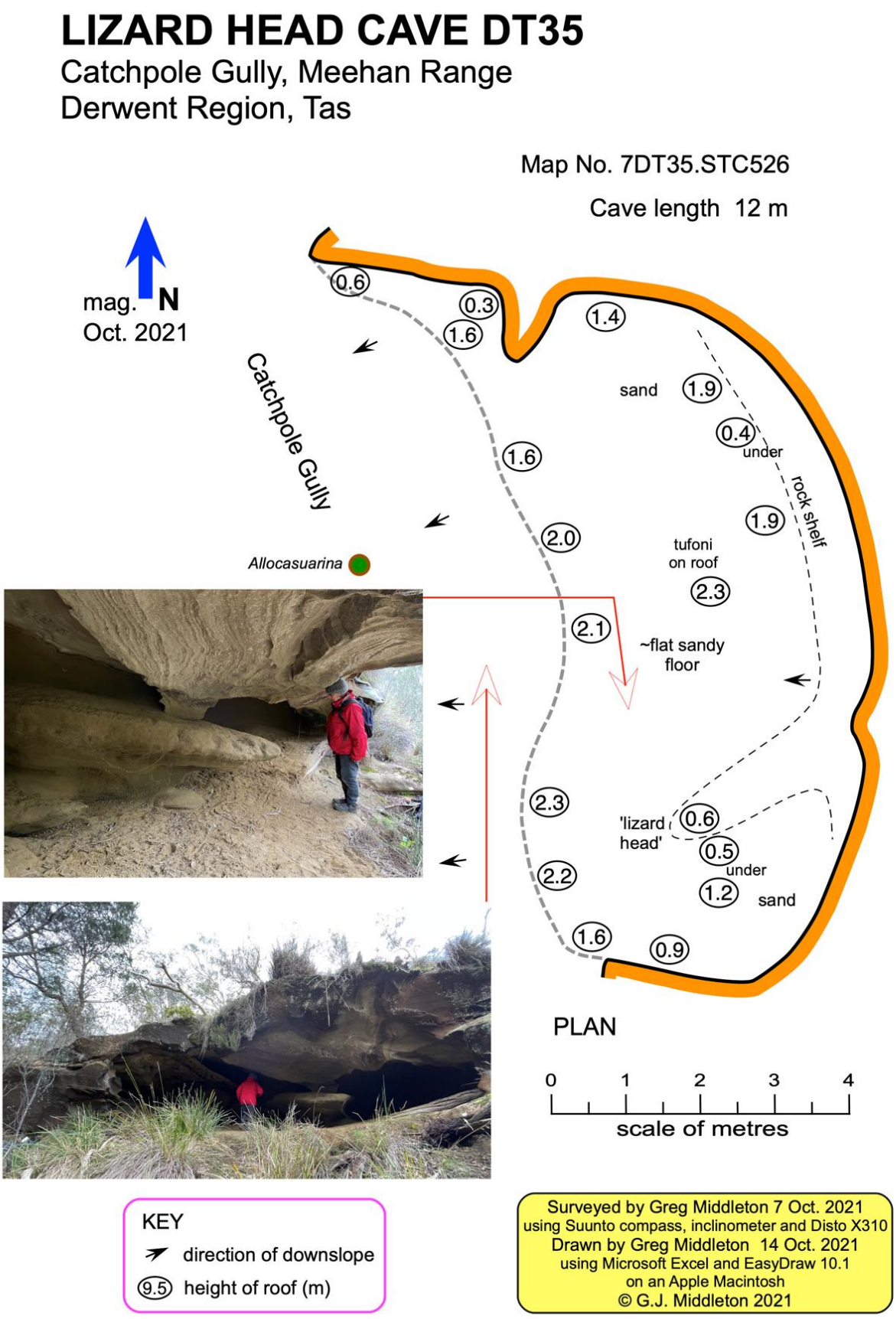


Fig. 4. Survey of Lizard Head Cave DT35.

Blast from the past

Supplied Frank Salt

Frank Salt, an ex-Tasmanian caver (SRCC) now in his eighties, started writing his memoirs in 2020 and agreed to share some of his stories. Below is an amusing if terrifying excerpt, which tells of Frank's adventures exploring caves with explosives... Very much a sign of the times!

Thanks to Stefan Eberhard and Luca Vanzino (ex-SCS) for the liaison with Frank. -The Editor.

I've still got all my fingers…

Frank Salt

There is something about explosives, and blowing things up, which appeals to every child; and as most cavers are children at heart it is logical that this passion should extend into that sport. […] I once again moved around the globe and by the late 1970s I had settled in Tasmania. This was caving heaven as Tasmania contained the longest and deepest caves in Australia. It also, at that time, had some of the slackest regulations on the purchase and use of explosives that I had ever come across.

Explosives could be bought over the counter in most rural hardware shops with the only requirement that one signed a register and give a name and address. The only down side to all of this was that Tasmania had so many caves and so few cavers that the locals had never been pushed into digging for new systems. Just to mention the word banger in a caving club had members crossing themselves and stamping the word rejected across a membership application form. There was obviously a need to form one's own club and to this end I was assisted by Dave Pountney, who had also moved to Tasmania.

There followed a few, golden summers where under the warm Australian sun we pottered from one potential dig to another removing boulders from surface sink holes and enjoying picnic lunches. Local caving friends, who accompanied us upon these outings, would shake their heads and leave us whilst they searched the surrounding bush for caves. On a few occasions they returned with stories of open shafts and promising holes but we refused to break from our chemical pleasures in the sunshine. The last thing we need was to spoil a good dig by finding a cave.

In the middle of these happy years I had my one serious accident. This occurred whilst attempting to photograph a large chamber in a cave using homemade magnesium flash powder. Due to a defective fuse the mixture exploded whilst I was crouched over it, causing serious burns to my right hand, removing most of my beard and leaving the front of my overalls looking like a lace curtain.

Unfortunately, I was nearly 2 kilometres from the cave entrance at the time so getting out was both painful and difficult. Once out there was a dash to a hospital with a stay of a week while the skin fell off the burnt bits. Later the photo that was being taken at the time was developed only to find that my crouched body had cast a large shadow on the chamber wall.

Alas all good things come to an end and the sudden tightening of access to explosives that followed the 9/11 incident set the seal. The supply of explosives from hardware shops stopped, and over the next year or so the ability to obtain exotic chemicals became increasingly difficult. The golden era was over.

These days my shot firer has become a piece of memorabilia to gather dust on a shelf, the steel ammo boxes are empty and the last of my supply of ammonium nitrate has fertilized the lawn. Such are the things that are forced upon one by family, friends and the authorities. There is the belief that once one passes 70 such enjoyment must cease; however, I can still dream and to this end I still have a small amount of flash powder hidden in the garden shed.

I have to admit that I was responsible for the SRCC. When Lyndsey, John and I first arrived in Tasmania/Savage River, we initially gravitated to the Northern Caverneers and all our trips in the first 12 months were with them. Then, around 1979/80, the SES unit was formed at Savage, so Lyndsey and I soon got a handful of its members caving. This group was augmented by the arrival of Dave and Nita Pountney into Savage in late 1980.

Shortly after this, a brief article appeared in The Advocate which said that a group of AFH line cutters had found 4 caves whilst working in the Mt. Cripps area with a small article by one Rod Walters having been published in an in-house AFH newsletter.

At that time, the Cradle Mt. link road was still a pipe dream and the only access to the area was via locked forestry roads. I made contact with AFH and Forestry asking for access but, as this was at the heat of the dams issue and with anti-green feeling running red hot, it was denied. The answer was to produce an anti-green caving club stocked up with west coasters and operating out of Savage River. With this in the offering we were accepted with open arms.

In the first 12 months, and with the assistance of Rod Walters, we greatly emphasised the potential hazards of attempting logging operations over cockpit karst with the result that the area was put initially into a deferred status before being dropped completely around 1984-5. The S/R SES at its heights probably had about 6-8 active cavers before Paul Darby and Bevis Dutton joined in the mix just after we had won our red neck acceptance from AFH. Although Bevis always says he was key in this, his main value was that he and Rod Walters had been in the Scouts together.

Once AFH dropped its interest in the area, and as the construct of the link road progressed, AFH/Forestry removed their locks from the access gates and allowed us to fit our own, on condition that they had copies of our keys for their access. Then, around 1988, the move started to give the Vale of Bevior some degree protection, the SRCC turned a slight shade of green and pushed to have this extended to cover the Cripps karst. This culminated in a hearing in early 1990 before a judge, with opposition from the then owners of the Henty Mine and with yours truly representing the SRCC.

In the past, caving clubs had failed to win in such cases as the law specified they had to have some degree of ownership

over the disputed area. The miners said that previous examples should be followed and the case dismissed.

My case was based around the fact that for over 7 years, we had maintained the accesses to the road and to that end, Forestry used a key which we had issued to them. At no time had we been called upon to pay any form of rent, as we also had a dwelling within that area (The Hut). I suggested that as our use of the area had been accepted without hindrance or complaint by the mining company, AFH and Government bodies for over 10 years we had, in effect, obtained a natural right to that area (Squatters Right).

On the final judgement day, the judge was more than pissed off when the Henty team failed to show up and found in favour of SRCC. Whilst not totally safe from mining, the area is now protected and lumped in with Reynolds Falls being controlled by P&WL assisted by SRCC.

The 1978 Cave & Cliff Rescue Team

Bill Nicholson and Philip Jackson

A multi club & agency exercise was conducted in 1978 in Herberts Pot at Mole Creek and there was a view at that time, briefly, to form a Cave & Cliff Rescue Team comprising of cavers and climbers. Bill Nicholson and Philip Jackson recall a few of their memories of this for the Spiel. *-Ed*

Bill: "I got involved with the TCC Search & Rescue in 1977/78. We organised a couple of exercises in Herberts Pot and Beginners Luck. We managed to kill the patient in the first 30 seconds! A lot of the climbers came along."

Their business is saving lives

By Jane Armstrong

TAKE about a dozen of the fittest men in Tasmania, fully skilled in rescues, climbing, mountaineering, and first aid, and you have a "supersquad" capable of handling any emergency.

The "supersquad," a special emergency rescue team, comprises the Police Search and Rescue Squad, Southern Tasmania Ambulance Board members, and members of mountaineering, climbing and caving clubs.

They provide a rescue service unmatched in Australia.

And at the weekend squad members gave a display of their skills, and their nerve, with a special training exercise.

The exercise at Maria Island, provided National Parks and Wildlife Service trainee rangers and the media with a spectacular display of courage and precision.

Craggy peaks

Participants and spectators went to Maria Island and scaled the craggy peaks of Bishop and Clerk for a simulated rescue.

Conquering the 630 metre twin-peaks was a task in itself. Then one of the trainee rangers, Chris Rathbone, acted as the "victim" of a climbing accident and had to be rescued from a ledge 400 metres below the cliff pinnacle.

While Chris was perched precariously on the ledge with "lower leg injuries," the wind blew, and the sea roared below him.

Meantime, the "supersquad" was preparing for the rescue.

The Climbing Club of Tasmania's Mendelt Tillema directed the operation.

With winching gear and climbing equipment in place, the first rescuer, Col Ransley, a station officer with the Southern Tasmanian Ambulance Board, was lowered down the cliff face.

Armed with a walkie talkie built into his helmet, Col was able to report the condition of the patient to the operation leader, and a special harness was hooked up to the gear on the cliff top.

Climbing expert Greg Hodge was lowered down the cliff in the harness, and returned to the top with the patient in pick-a-back style.

The steel cable and a safety rope were lowered a third time to bring Col Ransley to the top.

Another climber, Phil Robinson, was lowered to the ledge to aid Col in his ascent.

During the rescue, the State Emergency Service's training officer for Southern Tasmania, Col Hocking, gave a commentary for the trainees and the media.

He said if a ranger was faced with a rescue situation, he or she must know his or her capabilities in dealing with the situation.

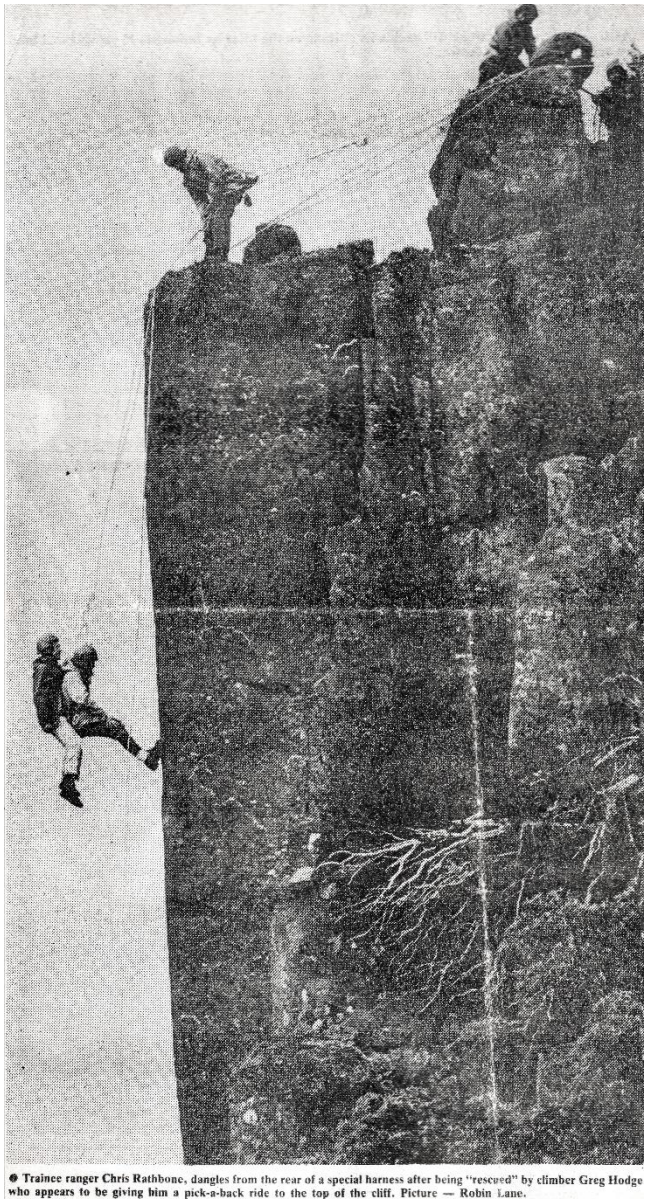
The trainee rangers will stay on Maria Island until Wednesday to continue practical training.

Article from an unknown issue of the Mercury from the late 1970s. Supplied: Bill Nicholson

Philip: "There was a lot of cross-pollination in the background. In the 1980s, we had combined exercises with SES, Ambulance, Police, all caving clubs and the climbers' club. That's when they used to have big budgets, the Police had big exercises, and the caving exercise was the only combined state-wide police exercise at the time.

We always had those at Mole Creek. Basically, it was just an idea of introducing coppers to caving, we'd do a few hauls, like hauling a stretcher out of the entrance of Kubla. We would have had 20 coppers, 10-15 cavers, we had a couple dozen Ambulance officers. The Ambulance guys were pretty into it.

These things continued for a few years and then the helicopter came into play. So, what then happened was that they no longer needed great numbers of people. So a lot of the budget from SAR exercises went to pay for the chopper, so they had to cut back on the exercises. From that point on, in the late 1980s, there were no more state-wide exercises."



● Trainee ranger Chris Rathbone, dangles from the rear of a special harness after being "rescued" by climber Greg Hodge who appears to be giving him a pick-a-back ride to the top of the cliff. Picture — Robin Lane.

Bill at the top right. Allegedly. Supplied: Bill Nicholson

Fun and Diversions

Rolan's Junk, by Rolan Eberhard

Obscure marks in Exit Cave

These images were taken at various times during the last decade in passages such as Camp Pie Circuit, Great Expectations Tributary, Skeleton Creek and Lost Squeeze. These are some of the more remote, less frequented parts of the cave, implying that the marks were put there by club cavers, not casual visitors. The medium is soot and the tool probably a carbide lamp. The same method has been used to mark direction arrows and what appear to be numbered surveyed stations, for example in Eastern Passage. I suspect this is TCC handiwork from the 1960s or 70s work, but I'm not sure of its meaning or purpose.

JF-743

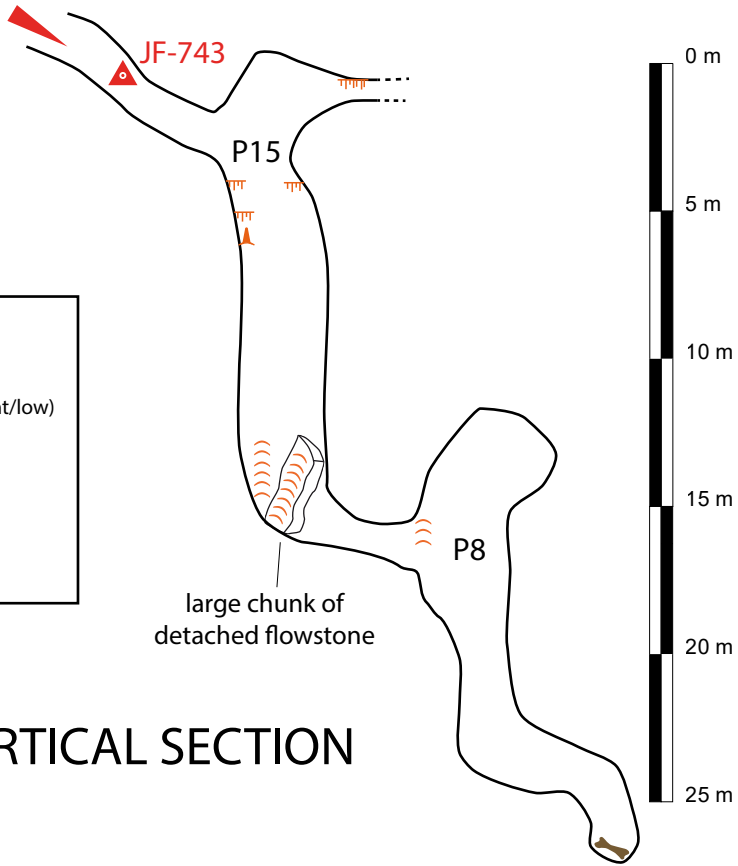
Junee-Florentine, Tasmania

7JF743.STC528

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers
ASF Grade 22
Surveyed by Gabriel Kinzler (02/01/2022)
Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (January 2022)
Surveyed Length - 35 m
Surveyed Depth - 27 m

LEGEND

- passage wall
- passage wall - conjectural or continues (tight/low)
- entrance
- cave tag
- straws
- stalagmite
- flow stone
- fauna remains



VERTICAL SECTION

JF-744

Junee-Florentine, Tasmania

7JF744.STC529

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

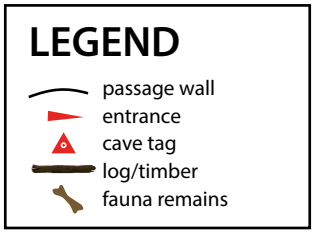
ASF Grade 22

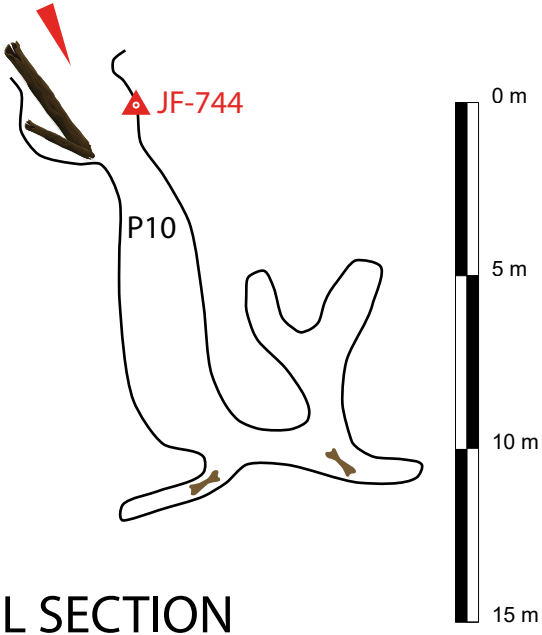
Surveyed by Gabriel Kinzler (02/01/2022)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (January 2022)

Surveyed Length - 18 m

Surveyed Depth - 11 m





VERTICAL SECTION

JF-745

Junee-Florentine, Tasmania

7JF745.STC530

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

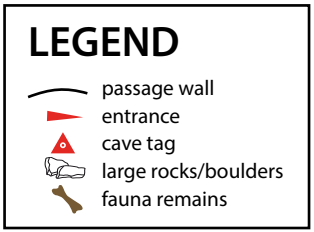
ASF Grade 42

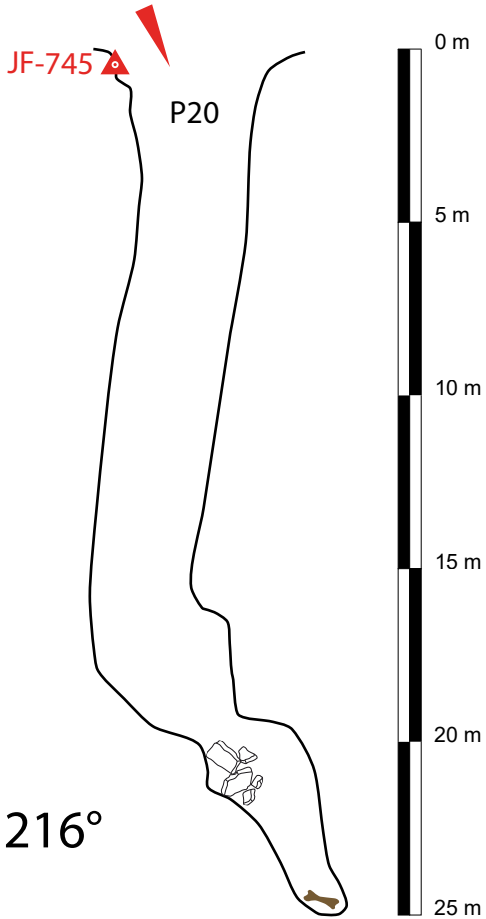
Surveyed by Gabriel Kinzler (02/01/2022)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (January 2022)

Surveyed Length - 29 m

Surveyed Depth - 25 m





VERTICAL SECTION 36° - 216°

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