Speleo Spiel 450

May-June 2022

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Front Cover: *Attempting to convince us that Sesame has some nice bits. Sesame Cave, JF. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler*

Back Cover: *(Very expensive) LiDAR in-cave action. Mystery Creek Cave, IB. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler.*

STC was formed in December 1996 by the amalgamation of three former southern Tasmanian clubs: the *Tasmanian Caverneering Club*, the *Southern Caving Society* and the *Tasmanian Cave and Karst Research Group*. ***STC*** is the modern variant of the oldest caving club in Australia.

Speleo Spiel

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Editorial

This issue is another relative biggie. It might even come close to being called the "Greg Middleton issue". Thanks to Greg for all the time and effort he has put into the articles published here, and the others he has sent, too, of course. All other contributors get an equally big hand clap as well.

The trip reports and articles are varied, so there should be something to interest everyone.

Documentation of our discoveries and activities is a major purpose of the *Spiel*. It has proved to be an invaluable resource for researching over the decades. It isn't just possible leads for exploration mentioned in old trip reports. Techniques that were used, practices that were standard, failures, areas surface-trogged looking for caves, even politics (heaven forbid) are all important pieces of STC (and caving) history to be retained. It is important that the generational knowledge is not lost as the cavers come and go. That is why everyone is encouraged to report their activities here. Even the simple, fun trips.

Past *Spiels* also provide excellent entertainment and general interest reading. I can lose myself for a few hours reading through trip reports of past decades. So many light issues in the last century, some hilarious (if a tad dangerous). "The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there". *The Go-Between by L. P. Hartley, 1953*.

So, send reports of your caving activities for inclusion in the *Spiel*. It doesn't matter what you were doing, it provides a window into, and lasting record of, who we are. Make your mark in STC history.

Stuff 'n' Stuff

It was first done seriously by Michel Siffre, in July 1962. There are many reports and references if you "Google" it. He wrote a few books, which are in the STC library, as he gave us a copy of all his books when Ric (Tunney) and I met him at his home in Nice a decade or so ago. They are in French, so maybe only Gabriel can read them properly.

Here is another go at it:

15 People Lived 40 Days in a Sunless Cave Without Clocks to Study Time

Participants lost their sense of time as the weeks passed during the multidisciplinary 'Deep Time' project, which studied human adaptation in extreme circumstances.

A link to the full article can be found here: https://tinyurl.com/yckndy8h

2022 southern cave rescue practice

Southern cave rescue exercise with Tas Police has been pencilled in for September 17th and 18th. Jemma and Alan met with Damian Bidgood and decided to have it at Mystery Creek Cave. Most of the caving action will be on Saturday.

So, pencil it into your diary. It will be a fun (I am not specifying what category though) and instructive weekend.

Photo: Gabriel Kinzler, 2018 practice in MCC

Training available

Basic SRT training for beginners, SRT refresher training and practice, vertical rigging training, are available to club members, by arrangement.

Also, possibly anything else you want training in that the Training Officer feels sufficiently skilled in to teach.

Contact the Training Officer, Janine McKinnon (jmckinnon@caverneer.net.au), for details.

Nick having heaps of fun. Photo: Janine McKinnon

Trip Reports

Lower Gordon River Revisited

13-17 December 2021

Greg Middleton (photos by author)

Party: Rolan Eberhard, Serena Benjamin, Greg Middleton

This mini-expedition was a follow-up to our successful trip in the previous year (Middleton 2021). The principal purpose of this trip was to progress documentation of the values and condition of karst features in the Lower Gordon River Recreational Zone (see Parks & Wildlife Service 1998). Once again, thanks to the organisational skills of DPIPWE (now Natural Resources & Environment) Karst Officer Rolan Eberhard and with the co-operation of NRE earth scientist Jason Bradbury, we were able to utilise Parks & Wildlife Service watercraft to access the Lower Gordon. This time it was the shiny new "Noosa Cat", *Yula* (an indigenous word for shearwater) and the same Highfield inflatable with a 9.9 h.p. outboard motor. For historical and geographical background on the Lower Gordon Karst Area see the report on the 2020 trip.

Getting there is half the fun – 13 December

We enjoyed a relatively comfortable night in the old Customs House in Strahan on 12 December and after breakfast in town on Monday 13 December we went to the main launching ramp where James Mundy (Parks Ranger at Strahan and our skipper) launched the *Yula*. We then proceeded down an idyllically calm Macquarie Harbour, past Sarah Island and into the mouth of the Gordon. At that point we slowed dramatically to 5 knots, as required, to minimise erosion of the river's sediment banks.

Limekiln on Limekiln Reach. Could this have been reconstructed for tourists?

On our way upstream, we paused on Limekiln Reach to relocate and investigate one of the limekilns, supposedly built by convicts from the Sarah (Settlement) Island station and used between 1822 and 1833 to produce lime for making mortar. We were somewhat troubled, however, by the fact that the kiln we located had a wooden lintel over its lower access point. Given the temperature that such a kiln must surely have reached, would it have been feasible to have a wooden lintel over this opening – and could such a piece of timber have weathered so well over 199 years? We wondered if at least the front part of the structure might have been reconstructed, perhaps as a tourist attraction, given the popularity of the river in the early decades of the 20th century.

We arrived at the old Hydro hut near Sir John Falls about 14:00, unloaded our gear and the inflatable, and had lunch. At this point Jason (assisted by James) commenced his regular twice-yearly bank-erosion monitoring program while we crossed the river in the inflatable to what remains of Warners Landing (the substantial landing structure built by the HEC in 1982 to initiate work on the Lower Gordon dam; fortunately little more work was done before the project was stopped by the Hawke Government in 1983). Our hope was to follow Butler Rivulet further upstream than we had last year and find more of the reported caves, or new caves, or at least more limestone. As it turned out, while we had a very pleasant walk up this highly aesthetic rivulet, we found none of these.

Serena crossing Butler Rivulet.

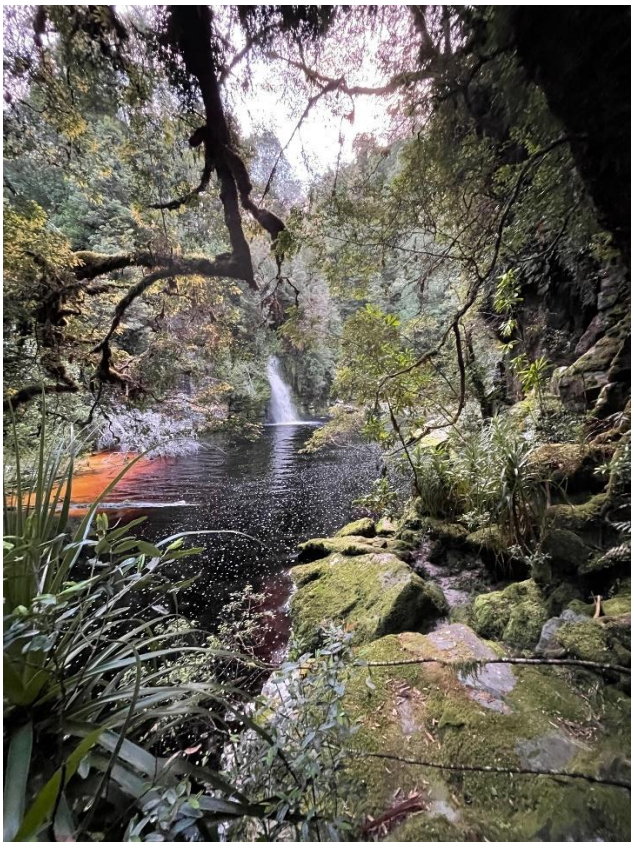
It seems that the HEC's 1978 map showing 'Main Cave' on Butler Rivulet (Fig. 3 in Middleton 2021) may have the cave in the wrong location (if it refers to the feature we recorded as Butler Rivulet Cave BR1-2-3 (Middleton 2021, pp. 9 & 71).

Back to Butler Rivulet – 14 December

Our second day we devoted to pushing even further up Butler Rivulet, lured by the prospect of more limestone upstream, based on our interpretation of the geological structure. North of the section we had previously investigated, the stream ran through a narrow gorge-like section (not in limestone) and then widened out somewhat. Our hopes of finding more limestone faded as we pushed further upstream and eventually we had to abandon the search.

The rivulet passes through a narrow gorge

On returning to the hut, we had time for a quick look at the highly scenic Sir John Falls.



Sir John Falls, on a tributary of the Gordon.

Back to Limekiln Reach – 15 December

On Wednesday 15th we packed up and moved down river, pausing to check out a few likely spots on the western bank on the way. At one place just below Marble Cliffs we came across exterior calcite deposits on a cliff face. While these were interesting features, we could find no significant cave at the site.

Rolan examines an exterior calcite formation, Limestone Reach

We stopped at the second bluff down from Marble Cliffs so we could return to Cave of Spiders LG5 and carry out a more careful survey. This cave had been first reported by an SSS party on 26 February 1974 (when it was designated LG9 or 10) and was sketched by Hawkins and Carey (Hawkins, Kiernan & Middleton 1974). I had carried out a partial survey on our last trip (Middleton 2021) but had omitted the "High Passage" at the rear – the longer section of the cave that links to a second entrance in the cliff face, high above the main entrance. This time we carried out a complete survey, the High Passage being included thanks to the efforts of Rolan and Serena (Map 1).

We continued on down the river, checking out a number of riverside holes more carefully than we had previously. One, a small passage containing a stream, not far below the limekiln, we decided to document (Photo 6). I did a survey and gave it the imaginative name of Riverside Drain LG6. The narrow passage reduced in size for a few metres, then rounded a bend and soon became impassable.

Looking out Riverside Drain LG6

A little further downstream we stopped to investigate a sandy bar which was littered with what was evidently broken limestone. This led to what was probably the historic cultural highlight of the trip: a heavily disturbed site that had probably been another limekiln and, on the bank immediately below, possibly some sort of stone wall or dock for loading the burnt lime.

Heavily built-up feature which may have been a limekiln or at least the entry point to one.

Riverbank erosion has exposed the interior of the structure, which included pieces of typical convict bricks and iron bars presumably used as reinforcing rods. If this was really a convict-era structure, it would have had to have been important to justify the use of iron bars which would surely have been in very short supply.

Eroded stone structure on the riverbank. Iron bars were used as reinforcing rods; pieces of brick were included.

Behind these features was a relatively open area covered in a remarkable forest of *Dicksonia antarctica* (man fern or soft tree fern); this gave the impression that the original forest may have been cleared. Immediately upstream of the site was a small cave just above river level but I did not consider it worthy of documenting.

We continued on down to Eagle Creek where we set up camp for the evening at a spacious campsite on the north/eastern bank of the river.

Guy Fawkes Rivulet limestone – 16 December

The unusual Devonian crinoidal limestone outcropping on a hill to the east of Guy Fawkes Rivulet (Map 3) has been known for a long time and its geology was reported on in detail by Gee, Moore & Pike (1969). Despite their reference to ‘small sink holes’, there appears to have been no investigation of this potential karst by cavers. We determined to rectify this.

The unremarkable hill to the east of Guy Fawkes Rivulet. Limestone outcrops on the right-hand side.

After motoring down from Eagle Creek and moving our gear into the hut at the old ‘boom camp’ (once the site of a floating boom to catch Huon pine logs floating down the river and now a fishers’ camp named “Yurata”) we took the inflatable up to Guy Fawkes Rivulet and were able to navigate a couple of hundred metres upstream before the waterway became too choked with fallen trees.

We had hardly gone ashore before we spotted our first limestone – with rillenkarren; a sure sign of karst development.

Rillenkarren developed on Devonian limestone.

We then proceeded to thoroughly search the western side of the hill (particularly the area designated D3 on Map 3) for caves or any other signs of karst development. We found heavily eroded limestone cliffs displaying near-horizontal bedding, many enlarged joints and a few springs at the base of the hill, but no holes we could enter.

One of four springs at the base of the hill. Geologists suspect the limestone continues beneath the alluvium.

After about four hours we reluctantly called it quits, in the belief that we had very thoroughly investigated the limestone outcrop. We returned to the camp where we were entertained by a local family of pademelons, evidently used to enjoying hand-outs from campers/fishers.

Grummet Island – 17 December

We departed Boom Camp on the *Yula* at 8:15 on 17 December, Jason recording his last three monitoring stations on our way to the Gordon mouth.

As we had sufficient time, it was agreed we'd pause at the small island off Settlement (or Sarah) Island – known variously as 'Small Island', 'Isle of the Condemned', 'Grummett Rock', 'Grunnet Island' and 'Grummet Island' (the latter being its official name today) – to check out a known sea cave at its base.

I had reported on a visit to this cave in 1974:

> Returning to the boat, our next stop was Grummet Island (also known as Isle of the Condemned) where we found a small rift cave in sandstone (Hawkins, Kiernan & Middleton 1974).

This cave was known at the time the island formed part of the Macquarie Harbour penal settlement (1822-33 and 1846-47). The island was the subject of a drawing by Commissariat Officer Thomas Lempriere which may intentionally show the cave.

"Grummet Island off Sarah Island" – drawing by Thomas Lempriere (from the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, State Library of Tasmania). The black dot immediately below the penitentiary building is at about the right location for the cave entrance.

Originally the penitentiary on the small island was used to house the eight female convicts at the station but this did not prove a satisfactory arrangement and the women were returned to Hobart Town (Brand 1984, p. 43). Subsequently it housed the worst of the (male) convicts and the island was the scene of at least one murder. Details were recorded by David Burn (1843):

> The most terrible crime was the murder of an obnoxious overseer, named George Rex; it was the work of nine men, six looking on, whilst the remaining three kept the struggling victim down until he was drowned in two or three feet of water. The island is full of caves, and from one of these the atrocity was witnessed by an unseen trembling spectator.

The murderers tried to escape but were captured, sent to Hobart and all were hanged in 1827 or 28.

We had not recorded details of the cave in 1974 but decided it was now time for a survey (Map 4). The cave has formed by erosion, probably along a joint in the sandstone/conglomerate which makes up the island. It is about 9.5 m long and up to 3.7 m high. The floor is composed of sand and gravel with accumulations of flotsam. It appears that the base is now just above the normal high-water mark but evidently water still enters during storms. Serena noted another, much smaller, cave on the opposite side of the island, possibly developed along the same joint.

Returning to the *Yula*, we made a cursory inspection of the northern coast of Sarah Island, from the boat, looking for a small sea cave vaguely remembered by Jason. Because of the numerous submerged rocks along this shore (*yes, we've hit one in our boat! – Ed)*, we kept a fair way off and were not able to identify a cave with any certainty. A description of this cave and a small coastal arch nearby are provided by Donaldson (2011).

We then returned to Strahan, successfully concluding a second mini-expedition to the Lower Gordon karst.

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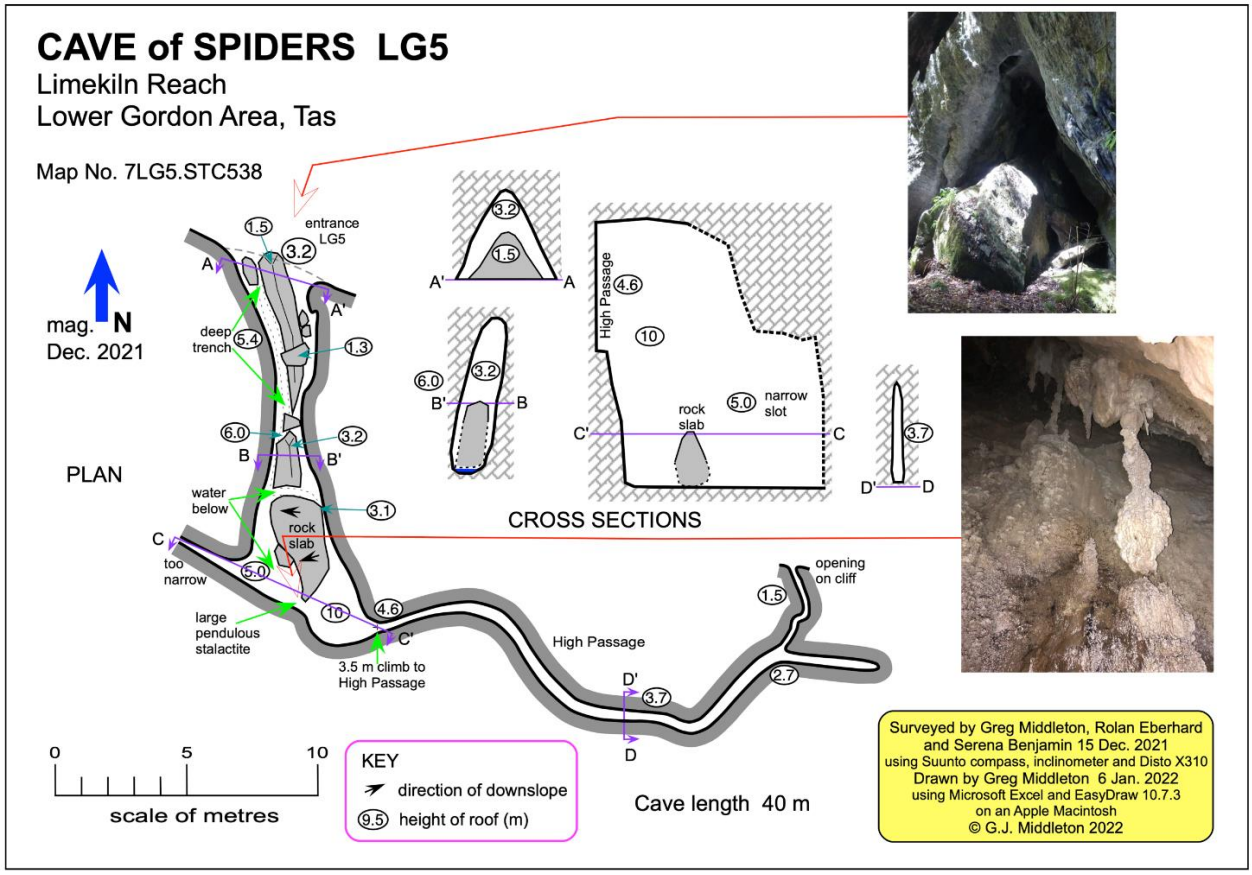
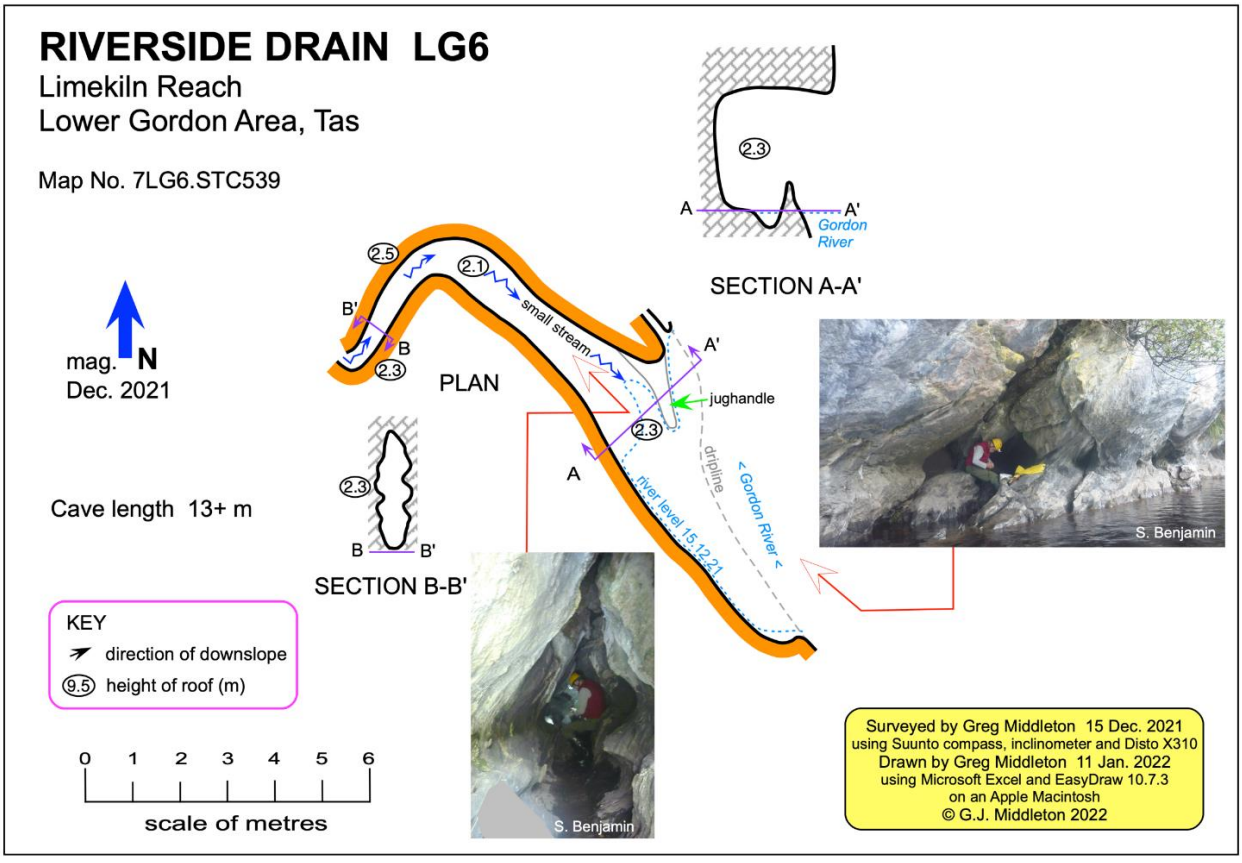
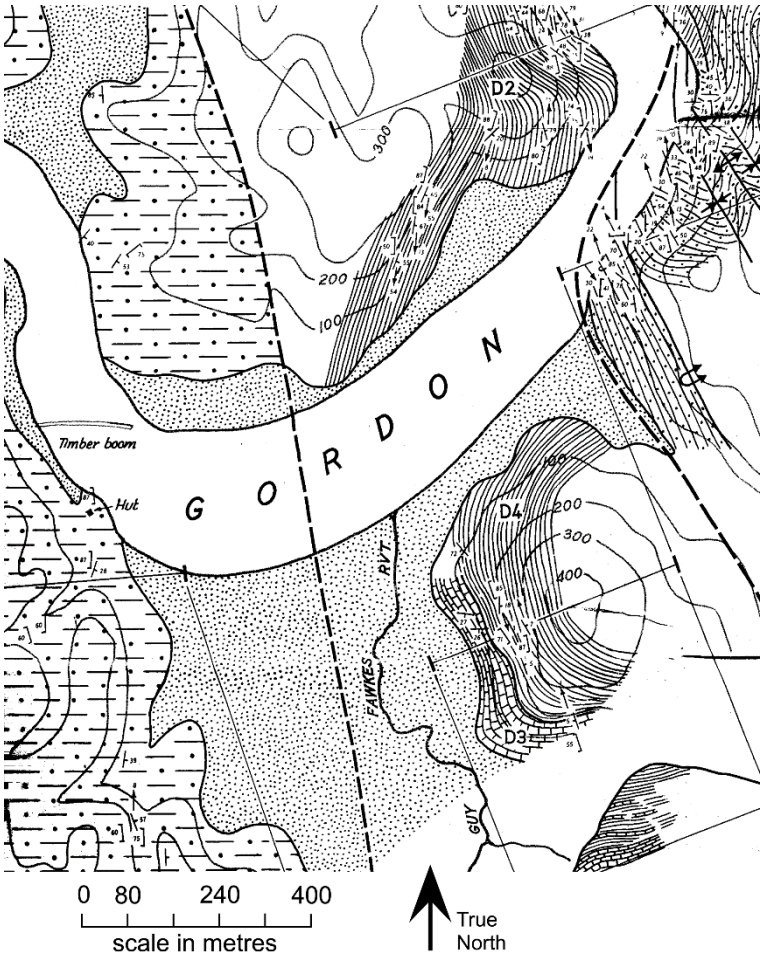




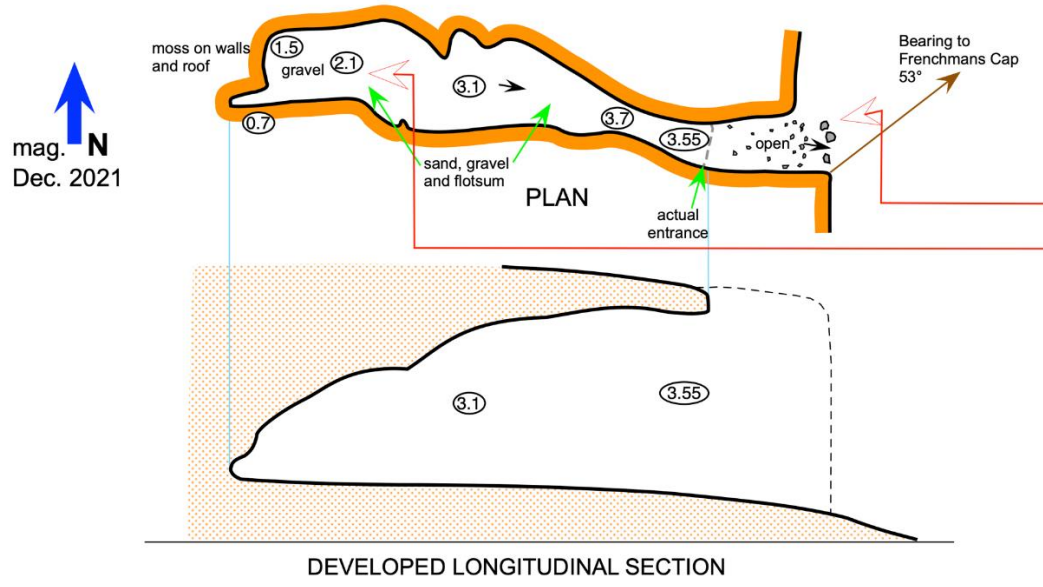


Map 3. Geology in vicinity of Guy Fawkes Rivulet, Lower Gordon River (from Figure 5, Gee, Moore & Pike (1969)). The beds designated D3, to the E of Guy Fawkes Rivulet, are composed of massive, coarse-grained, pure, bioclastic, crinoidal Devonian limestone, outcropping over a range of about 80 feet (25 m).

GRUMMET ISLAND CAVE GH17

Macquarie Harbour
Gordon-Huon Region, Tas

Map No. 7GH17.STC540



0 2 4 6
scale of metres

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

Cave length 9.5 m

Surveyed by Greg Middleton 17 Dec. 2021
using Suunto compass, inclinometer and Disto X310
Drawn by Greg Middleton 11 Jan. 2022
using Microsoft Excel and EasyDraw 10.7.3
on an Apple Macintosh

January 2022 Junee-Florentine (JF) Extravaganza: Part 2

The chronicles of Stephen Fordyce. (Photos by Stephen Fordyce unless otherwise credited).

(Due to the extensive nature of this report, it will be appearing in serialised form over two Spiels*. The first part was in* Spiel *449. Note the trip reports will NOT necessarily be in time-order. They will be published so that they tie in with others' reports of the same cave/trip- – Ed)*

Mon 3rd[d] Jan: Sesame "shakedown" and dive gear portaging

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Brendan Moore

Brendan is a pretty hardcore kind of guy with the right mentality (being a cave diver, with army training and a general doer of silly outdoor things), but it was his first time caving in Tassie, so a shakedown was in order before the Sesame camping/diving epic he'd signed up for later in the week.

Brendan Moore: a bright and shining hero about to begin his Tassie caving indoctrination

So what better way to prepare for Sesame than by doing Sesame!? I had four heavy bags of dive gear ready to go at the entrance, and while Ciara and Jemma had done an excellent job of most of it, there were still two pitches left to rig. So we sorted out the rigging and got two bags to the start of The Wet Hole. Brendan was suitably shaken down, relatively unbroken, and was treated to one of my pre-cooked frozen meals that evening.

Wed 5th Jan: JF-8 Junee Cave dive to For Your Eyes Only

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Brendan Moore

I'd promised Brendan a dive, and this was the best window of opportunity (so much so that we'd carried a bunch of the dive gear back from the Sesame entrance). At the Junee carpark, we ran into the erstwhile Bill, Callum and Liam Nicholson and had a nice catch-up, then Dave Holley from PWS showed up and also joined the party. Good times, and most efficient.

The dive was good and Brendan acquitted himself well in the cold and dark conditions – nice one mate. The patch in the buried line I'd made last year on the gravel entrance was still nicely in place, but the line was broken further in, and broke in my hands a bit later. Suboptimal, but presumably from rubbing on sharp edges – annoying that it seems to be starting to go, since this is the 7 mm Telstra rope installed only approx. 2014 by Janine and co. (*I wondered how well it would last. The original lasted a few decades but was 11 mm rope. A bitch to remove – Ed)*. The line wasn't very buried in the silt bank near FYEO.

We ooh'd and aah'd at the prettiness in For Your Eyes Only but a glint in one of the pools caught my eye. About 1.5 m down, wedged in a crack was a light head. Brendan was keen enough to put up with the mother of all ice cream headaches to duck-dive several times without a hood to dig it out. It turns out this was lost by Grant Pearce in about 2009 and was made by Light Monkey *(funny how none of us have seen it on repeated trips in there – Ed)*. It was in awful condition but not flooded… and still worked!

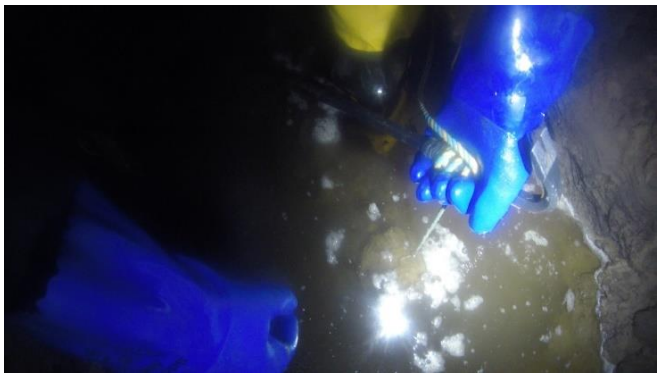
They don't make 'em like they used to (photo by Brendan Moore)

Thurs 6th Jan: Growling Swallet main streamway and bonus Wind Hole

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Brendan Moore

Brendan was keen to make the most of being there, so a light day with some pleasant caving seemed like a good idea. The JF-36 Growling Swallet main streamway was useful contrast with four days of Sesame, there were depth loggers to (literally) dig out, and it was nice to have a dress rehearsal on route finding before Ice Tube and assess the state of the mud bank below Windy Rift. By this time the faffing had built up to a point where we left camp at midday and called it a win.

Digging the depth loggers out was a bit epic, but happened eventually, and a new one was left where it hopefully won't get buried too. The Windy Rift mud bank hadn't changed much from previous visits by those descriptions. From roughly where the stream pools, there is a rope (in reasonable condition) going up about 5 m to a single (gah!) concrete screw in the ceiling. A slightly precarious traverse 5 m across leads to another single concrete screw, and a 3 m knotted line goes down a slippery mud slope (with 3 m steep mud slide to pool below it) and around to a half-sticking-out concrete screw and Windy Rift. The setup works ok, but all the anchors are pretty suboptimal, and the knots in the handline make it hard for fatigued people who would prefer to SRT it. We took a drill through Ice Tube intending to fix the anchors, but didn't have time to do anything.



Retrieving the buried depth logger (finally!)

We were able to bridge our way around thigh-deep water to the bottom of Windy Rift at water level, and then scramble up the exposed mud slope with boost assist. I wasn't comfortable with climbing up second unassisted.

JF-451 Wind Hole was something I'd had my eye on for a while, and Craig Stobbs/John Webb had recently relocated and GPS'd it. It wasn't far away, so with a bit of motivation left after Growling, we rolled our suits down and drove over. The Ken Murrey River (upstream sump dive) in JF-387 Porcupine Pot is making a beeline for this area (not far below the surface too), and Wind Hole is the only candidate (with a couple more LiDAR targets to check). The scant report (in *SS*362) was found to be fairly apt – a very tight slanting entrance in a shallow dry gully with a couple of metres of development and a good draught. The squeeze in was not fun, and I questioned my choices a bit on the way out. I had a thorough poke around a few possible leads with my weapon of choice, while Brendan yelled encouraging things from the surface. It was all pretty desperate in there and the draught came and went – eventually we realised it was related to the wind gusts on the surface, although not directly, somehow.

We gave up and headed back to the car, having thoroughly written it off.

Fri 7th Jan: Brendan goes to Hobart

Finally, with the Sesame epic looming, we had sufficient excuse for a rest day. Brendan left camp way too late for his list of optimistic things and I hung back to catch up on admin, prep/pack and generally faff the day away. By this point COVID had started to bite and it dawned on me that Hobart was a seething hotbed of infection, best avoided if possible.

Sat 8th Jan: Sesame Epic, Day 1

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Brendan Moore, Ciara Smart

Sesame will get a separate report, which will be an epic covering the 2021 visits as well as the 2022 visits. Two dives, maps, the works. Brendan was already hooked, and Ciara Smart was convinced by the idea of making history. Dan Treacy had to sort out things on the home front, so we were down a player but made it work (just). Day 1 was ridiculously epic, with the three of us getting five bags of camping and diving gear down to The Wet Hole, and seven bags from there to Camp Squelch and the sump, with extra time spent faffing with rigging beyond The Wet Hole. I regretted my promise to do The Wet Hole twice with two bags each, but had to make good on it.

The only significant rain in January (15 mm at Tim Shea) had been the day before, so The Wet Hole was a little (a lot) wetter than expected, with Brendan and Ciara having a delightful experience in what might be better described as a roof sniff. Ciara proclaimed it was much worse than The Horrible Crawl in Porcupine, so there you go. The Little Wet Hole also didn't fail to punch us in the face right at the end of the day.

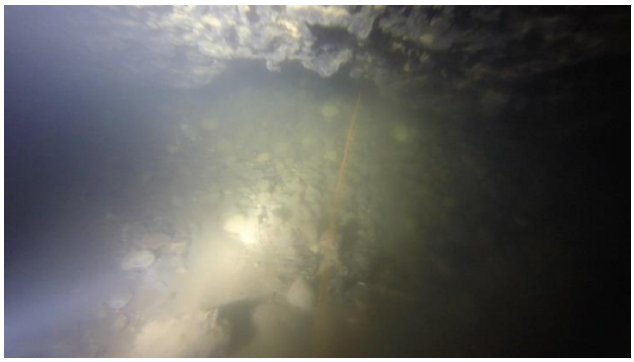
The misery was compounded for me by spending three days caving with two left gloves

The whole premise behind camping was to allow the water to clear and so I could have visibility during the dive. This meant that for mission success, everything had to be at the sump (or at the aptly named Camp Squelch) before day 1 could be declared over. It took everything we had, and then some, but it got done.

Sun 9th Jan: Sesame Epic, Day 2

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Brendan Moore, Ciara Smart

After our ridiculous efforts the day before, no chances could be taken on muddying the water. Brendan and Ciara were to stay in bed until I'd definitely started diving. One of the hardest things I've ever done was dragging myself out of bed and going to dive the sump, but it happened eventually. The visibility was excellent, but this allowed me to see (and record) how tight and crappy the sump really was. I was able to get about 10 m further than the previous dive, before being stopped by a restriction, impassable with kit and mojo levels (a major underwater dig effort required). It was a relief to comprehensively write it off (although tips for anyone in the future will be included in the main report).



Visibility in the sump was useful for seeing how unenticing it was

Ciara wisely elected to have a rest day, while Brendan impressed everyone by finding enough motivation to get up and thoroughly lead-check the main streamway section. I stayed in my diving wetsuit and checked the wet ones. Fortunately, nothing showed any sign of going, so the whole miserable place and cave could be written off in good conscience. Detectors were deployed and I made some more rigging fixes and with some help from Brendan, then shuttled bags of dive gear until the wetsuit rubbed my shoulder raw and I ran out of steam.

Screenshot of GoPro footage where I mumble notes to self about never coming back again

Mon 10th Jan: Sesame Epic, Day 3

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Brendan Moore, Ciara Smart

We got an early start and spent the day shifting stupid numbers of mud-caked bags and yearning for the pub. All seven bags made it to The Wet Hole, and we got five of them through (a second trip was considered unbearable). I made a captain's call that'd we'd only attempt to get four bags all the way out and this turned out to be useful when the hitherto indomitable Brendan regretted his heroic decision not to use the poo tube all trip.

Ciara negotiates the crux of The Wet Hole (dry version)

The term "pooped out your mojo" now has a treasured place in caving vernacular and I'll save the full story for some comic relief in the main report. Fortunately, we only lost Brendan's mojo for about three hours. We set a land speed record down the Sesame track and bested it on the Florentine Rd, but made the pub at Giant's Table (new, highly recommended, last orders 8 pm) four minutes before the kitchen closed.

It had been a history-making epic, probably the hardest thing I've ever done, we were still on speaking terms and my dive gear had a fighting chance of seeing the light of day again. Cool.

Tues 11th Jan: Dye releases and recovery after Sesame

We woke up pretty seedy, but there were now detectors in Sesame and that was exciting. I found some energy somewhere (the thought of bounding through the bush with only a bottle of dye was surprisingly compelling after recent days of epic mud and epic loads) and picked some low-hanging fruit – doing dye releases in JF-364 Tarn Creek Swallet (on the Rescue Pot route) and JF-568 Chrisps Creek Swallet (on the Tachycardia route). The rest of the day was dedicated to much washing of awful Sesame mud from gear and hopefully our memories.

Thurs 13th Jan: Goodbye Brendan, hello Craig

We'd been vaguely keeping up with the news and the latest was that Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) for COVID were now all the rage, acceptable for interstate travel and also in very short supply. The website "Find a RAT" was getting more hits than a bolt installed in the good old days before cordless drills. I'd bought a couple of boxes of RATs before Christmas before they became popular, with the idea of testing all the mainlanders a couple of days after arriving, in case they picked up COVID in transit. Well, suddenly I was handing them out left right and centre, and feeling even more like King Dick than usual. Good times, and another unhealthily satisfying pat on the back for my forward thinking.

Anyway, by now (thanks to the Omicron variant) COVID was finally out of control in Tasmania and we mainlanders looked on fondly as they went through the various stages of panic and/or apathy. A pleasant wave of self-righteousness washed over me as I realised that after two weeks out in Maydena, for the first time in two years, I was a lower COVID risk than the general Hobart population!

With all that in mind, we shifted the STC social event online to Zoom (thanks to Phil, Andrew, Val and others in the ASF crew for sorting out the licence at short notice). I bid a fond farewell to Brendan at the airport (leaving him to his COVID fate), ran some errands, and had a nice evening at Craig's place, hosting the online social event. Thanks Craig!

Fri 14th Jan: Fresh meat

Grocery shopping was completed, and a new group of caving buddies arrived. Lachlan Bailey from Canberra, Corey Hanrahan from Wollongong and Lauren Hayes (with her partner Ben) from northern Tassie. Sadly, the plans of David Rueda-Roca and Oxana Repina fell victim to COVID complications, although Oxana managed to join us later.

The peak expansion of Camp Carnage at the end of the Brendan era

Camp Carnage had (hurriedly) contracted but expanded again. My second trip to Hobart in two days was testament to minor disorganisation but was a good chance for forced relaxation in the car and to subtly interrogate Corey on the way back from the airport. Unsurprisingly, he was found to be of excellent character. Lachlan was left at camp with strict instructions to get his faffing out of the way.

All were warned of a strict leaving time for our Ice Tube day tomorrow.

Sat 15th Jan: Ice Tube/Dreamtime epic

Party: Lachlan Bailey, Stephen Fordyce, Corey Hanrahan, Lauren Hayes

The efficiency and general readiness were frightening, and there was real danger of me being last, but a few cheap tricks fixed that. Much hype, many phone calls and messages, and checking of references had been carried out in anticipation of our pull-down trip into Ice Tube and out the main JF-36 Growling Swallet entrance.

We were pretty chuffed to be up the hill and heading underground about 10:20 am, said goodbye to a fast escape when we pulled the first rope down, and made good progress down the cave with three experienced canyoners (and me). Anyone who thinks old dogs can't learn new tricks should have seen me in action with my new-found chin-Krab! Alan's notes (which I will add to the archive) were good and while there was more meander/horizontal than expected, they in conjunction with the rigging notes saved us from a few route-finding red herrings.

We left a giant stainless clip on the new rebelay at the top of Maelstrom as noted by Alan in his directions, and used the new mid-point anchor on Killing Joke (to avoid "the bastard snags on the mid-point ledge"), neglecting the wise advice to avoid bunching up there and getting sprinkled on. Apart from what followed, the rigging and pulldowns were all quite nice.

Unfortunately (and embarrassingly) the well-oiled canyoning machine came to a grinding halt on Maelstrom (the 2nd last pitch) with a snagged rope. We had spares, so eventually gave up and tied it out of the water. Our theory is that there is a long and a short rope tied together, and the long one was pulled instead of the short one (taking the tail of the short one out of reach and the knot wedged on the anchor). Fortunately, they were NUCC ropes! Even more fortunately, another group has already been and collected it – pronouncing a general twisty tangle as the problem. Much less numpty than our theory.

I don't think anybody took any photos, so here's a random one of Ciara's gumboot which was sent with a ransom note.

So we lost a bit of time there, and a good deal more with route finding and negotiating the really awful horizontal section which links Ice Tube to the main Growling streamway *(It isn't named "Fallopian Tube" and "Mothers Passage" for no reason – Ed)*. I'd been warned it was awful, but hadn't fully appreciated just how much! Everyone perked up when we finally popped out and had a good break. We detoured out to the Dreamtime Sump to collect two detectors placed there eleven months before – one still happily flashing away, the other having run out of battery not long before. There was no sign of any significant flooding with most tracks still visible (and the detectors confirming a maximum flood of about 1 m).

The trip out from there was familiar ground for me (and still well marked with pink tape from the 2014-15 dive trips), but I'd warned everyone about not counting their chickens – no claim other than there being a long and horrible list of nastiness between us and the surface was allowed. All had been warned of an epic and vetted accordingly, and acquitted themselves well on the homeward grind. Unfortunately, one of the party ran out of steam, and by the time the fire was stoked and a full steam ahead exit (at 1:45 am) was made, we were two hours past our callout time, and only just able to stop Alan and Gabriel leaving Hobart to come and look for us – thanks everyone who was awake looking after us. A separate incident report will be published *(Ok, my bad. It is in previous* Spiel, SS*449 – Ed)*.

That trip with Brendan turned out to have been very valuable, as we definitely didn't have bandwidth for anything like digging out depth loggers or fixing rigging.

Sun 16th Jan: Post Ice Tube quarry fun-times

Party: Lachlan Bailey, Stephen Fordyce, Corey Hanrahan, Jemma Herbert

We were rudely baked awake after a mere 3-4 hours sleep, but found sufficient enthusiasm (especially when Jemma and canine companion Xena arrived, freshly released from self-isolation) to head to Junee quarry to practise things with drills. We placed concrete screws, did some aid climbing and made some loud noises. Satisfied and running out of steam

(despite the steam-inducing heat in the shadeless quarry) we headed back to camp for an early night.

Quarry fun-times! (and the only photo I have of Corey, alas there are no photos of Lauren)

Mon 17th Jan: Sesame dive gear retrieval

Party: Lachlan Bailey, Stephen Fordyce

Corey and Lauren staged a justifiable mutiny and were shipped off in a metaphorical small boat with supplies to revisit Goodbye Old Friend, the nicely decorated entrance which Corey and the NUCC crew found near Welcome Stranger back in February 2021. They did a surface survey and some sketches (to be tidied and published later), but it looks like it probably deserves a proper tag.

Meanwhile, I managed to convince Lachlan that retrieving dive gear from Sesame would be a worthy thing. As a sweetener, we would take my 18 V cordless drill which has some interesting non-rotating functions, and a lump hammer. On an unrelated note, the nasty pitch head (3rd drop of the entrance series) seemed easier this trip.

Lachlan: suitably impressed (actually, I somewhat unfairly grabbed this from just after we discovered Daily Cases a few days later)

Lachlan was suitably impressed by the nice parts of the cave, the 11 out of 10 mud and the weight of the three bags full. He declined my generous offer to join the exclusive club of The Wet Hole veterans, but I was so overjoyed at the prospect of getting my dive gear back that hauling two bags through was not so bad. We were still a bit shattered after Ice Tube, and Lachlan adjusted his definition of heavy bags, but through epic effort and much shit-talking we managed to get all three bags out of the cave and to the car, and be back at camp at a vaguely acceptable time to use the pressure washer.

The others were suitably impressed when upon weighing in, each caving bag was in the order of 18 kg.

Wed 19th Jan: Rest & prep day before Niggly

A rest day was well overdue and only one was a bit suboptimal. So much so, that Lauren and Corey made a sensible decision to save their mojo for a different Niggly trip (I gave them clearance on survival, but not necessarily on enjoyment). Everyone was too chicken to tell a highly enthusiastic released-from-quarantine Oxana until she landed - I'd like to say she took it well, but the phone call once she found out… indicated otherwise. Fortunately, on arrival at Left of Field, she was her usual unruffled self and I only copped a mild scolding for breaking everyone.

Faffing was faffed, packing was packed, and eventually three of us were ready for Niggly in the morning.

Thurs 20th Jan: Niggly(2) Day 1 (Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow)

Party: Lachlan Bailey, Stephen Fordyce, Oxana Repina

The route up the hill was looking awfully familiar (number six or something for me) and the weather was delightful. Going down the cave, Lachlan reminded us that bad things come in threes – I can't remember what the other things were, but the Tigertooth Passage ripped the arse out of his caving suit, which was most suboptimal on day 1 of 4.

We "cleared" some rocks from the top of the 105 m pitch to give Jemma some data points for her spreadsheet (5.4 sec). Then while I swapped weather stations at Mt Niggly, Oxana used her knowledge of the cave to show Lachlan the highlights of the Mt Niggly chamber, chiefly The Pissoir. Much collective giggling was required afterwards.

Camp at The Dunes was gained at a reasonable time and the evening was spent in pleasant conversation, selecting of a theme song (I had forgotten) and fixing of Lachlan's suit. After much searching, the kiddies picked one of the few songs/artists they actually recognised – "Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow", by Fleetwood Mac, and it got a good playing over the next few days.

For Lachlan's caving suit, we used some of the 3 mm orange string (dive guideline/climb retrieval) as heavy-duty thread, and used the screw out of a parsnip (heated in the stove) to punch holes for it. My Leatherman pliers finally came in handy, and the final repair was so neat and robust it lasted the rest of the trip. Great success!

Successful stitching of Lachlan's arse hole

Fri 21st Jan: Niggly(2) Day 2, Third Opinion, and Biohazard Sump

Another day of grinding away at the end of Mother of God – luckily it was still a lovely commute, which was appreciated by all. It was Oxana's second Niggly trip (the first repeat offender in ages), so naturally we had to teach her the second verse of Advance Australia Fair.

It was very dry, as expected – we should really have taken the opportunity to push at stream level, there were previously flooded leads going beyond where I'd left the detector in May water levels. We made the investment of going back until we could find some large rocks to successfully use as stepping stones in the wet-feet bit. It took us ages to find our way back to Biohazard, the key being to drop into an unlikely looking hole in the floor even though you want to go up (you duck under a rock, and then go further up), and I had to reverse engineer the survey data. Even harder when it was still tied into the wrong station!

First, we dropped down the short pitch immediately encountered in Biohazard – an auspicious (?) place for Oxana to install her first ever concrete screw. The area was named "Third Opinion" because a second opinion was not enough. The initial 6 m pitch was quickly followed by another 6 m. It was mud-coated and rockpile-y and we poked about in leads at the bottom with no success, although there was some significant stuff going further and up, and some draught. Hard to tell, but we were probably/generally up against the same wall as makes up the NE side of Biohazard. According to my GoPro notes: SOL1-SOL4 is going up into an aven (SOL1 is labelled with a tape), the draught seems to be going up into a hole to a void, there might be another way around. A downwards lead from about SOL6 leads to an impenetrable triangle slot with no draught.

Looking up through the draughting hole at the end of Third Opinion (approx. SOL4)

Rigging notes: Third Opinion

- Gear: ~20 m rope, 4x concrete screws/hangers/krabs
- Y-hang in rock face same side as entry
- Second Y-hang (obvious)
- Reflective parsnips left in all four holes

Third Opinion was written off and we set our sights on the Biohazard traverse and larger pitch (making the most of having lugged the drill so far). Both Lachlan and Oxana had some quality time with the drill and a less straightforward rigging exercise.

This pitch was a bit weird, going slightly back under itself, and with sounds of splashing as the copious amounts of displaced mud went down it. Lachlan placed the second rebelay but couldn't shift a hanging chockstone which was right in the way of the glimmer of water at the bottom. I tagged in and managed to get a rope under it to lift and send it down. Mojo boost! Easy slipping down a steep mud slope rift, until a sharp turn under itself again and an abrupt termination in a still pool – the Biohazard Sump.

Rigging notes: Biohazard Sump Pitch

- Gear: 35-40 m rope, 4x concrete screws/hangers/krabs
- Initial Y-hang on the left wall
- Go about 10 m down a slippery slope (with rope rub to be avoided) to a single concrete screw rebelay.
- Then 5 m down to a concrete screw rebelay on the opposite wall
- 3 m vertical then steep mud slope another 10 m.

We left a mess of rope and some stainless hardware there in the process of recovering alloy krabs used for quick rigging. Parsnips will be left when it's derigged properly.

Well that was weird – no flowing water, just a pool bounded by rock on three sides and the mud slope on the other. It certainly didn't look inviting (a muddy cesspool after what we'd been showering into it) and I didn't think much of it for diving, until it dawned on me that the aforementioned, microwave-sized chockstone had been completely eaten. It was definitely more than gumboot depth, and I had insufficient mojo left to be getting wet feet at this point in the day. I figured it needed a look with clear water and beat a hasty retreat.

This would seem to be part of a parallel/converging streamway (evidenced by the alignment of Biohazard) joining the master cave somewhere in the rockpile. It might well be diveable, but the thought of dragging dive gear to this remote location didn't bear thinking about (I've since discovered boundless enthusiasm). Before that happens, we should try to get a GoPro into clear water and also push sideways further back in Mother of God. I suspect the likes of Boulder Jenga and JF-396 would feed this – they have been traced to Junee, but given negative results for Frownland/Mainline in Growling Swallet, and all of Niggly. Still waiting on the Sesame results, which is the other obvious option.

It was turning into a big day and we were fast running out of mojo. Going through the squeeze out of Biohazard, Lachlan did a spontaneous dig and was surprisingly successful at shifting rocks using his thrashing legs. These were removed and we carried on, but we noted: draughting lead in rockpile at start of Biohazard (instead of turning right into the big stuff, look left and up in loose rockpile).

I think I'd been wise enough to do the detector faffing on the way, so we could beeline for camp, arriving at some unpleasant hour after midnight. It had been a big but productive day, and a warm sense of idiocy enveloped us as

we stood in a circle, sharing delicious shit-in-a-bowl powdered chocolate mousse.

Sat 22nd Jan: Niggly(2) Day 3, Game of Thrones de-rig

The theme song reminded us in great detail to not stop thinking about tomorrow (and considering it'll soon be here, that was easy enough). A short day was in order, but Lachlan had to experience the waterfall tyrolean for his Niggly experience to be complete. Oxana had had a couple of days to develop COVID symptoms after transiting through assorted airports (that's a Rapid Antigen Test for you confused futurites) but was clean.

The first RAT in Niggly was negative

The tyrolean was somewhat character building, but we all got across (and back again). It was very cool to look at the waterfall and finally know where it came from (the dye results confirmed it)! We fiddled a bit with detectors and faced the main order of business – de-rigging Game of Thrones. It hadn't been visited in two years, really wasn't going to be, was the last bastion of unrequited tidying and had a bunch of useful gear that could be thrown at Delta Variant.

Rigging notes: Game of Thrones

- Gear: 40 m + 10.5 m ropes (as cut to size, was new 9.5 mm Bluewater, so allow a little extra), 11x concrete screws/hangers/krabs
- P1: Use the 40 m rope, find lots of anchors (most are double) pretty close to each other, following the ceiling/wall down. Look for the reflective parsnips. I have detailed GoPro notes in my personal archive if anyone really wants more info.
- H1: ~3 m left in place, to help you climb up into the crawlway. Good flake anchor, but rope has a tendency to fall off. First person doesn't need the rope with a boost.
- P2: Use the 10.5 m rope. Pair of concrete screws in ceiling/wall with view to La Douche.

That was plenty enough for the day, so we went back to camp. Actually, I then found some motivation and leftover drill battery, and hustled 10 minutes down MoG to install a 8 mm SS throughbolt and knotted handline (one of the old 11 mm club ropes down there) at the nasty mud climb which requires much grace and poise, and where David Rueda-Roca famously greased off and went for a swim. On reflection, I suggest this particular obstacle be named "Spanish Mackerel". It would have been nice to have an extra metre of rope, but I wedged the bottom knot into a crack – be warned it may be swept up out of reach by winter flows.

Sun 23rd Jan: Niggly(2) Day4, Birthing Day

We hadn't stopped thinking about tomorrow, although the great overnight battle for electrons between phone, drill battery and Lachlan's light was lost by the phone, so we had an extra hour of sleep accidentally. But we were packed and away in good time, and despite heavy bags of mud-encrusted Game of Thrones stuff the way out was bearable. Well, mostly – there was a tiny bolting bag to rule them all (and in the darkness it bound us). For such a small thing, it was an immense burden on mind and body, bringing misery to (and sapping mojo from) all who carried it. Being the most fair of heart, Oxana was the bag-bearer for most of the journey, but after the Tigertooth Passage, trusty sidekick Lachlan (who really just wanted to get back to his sweetheart in the shire) took on the burden for the last bit out of the cave.

There were plenty of places the One Bag could have been disposed of in what would pass for the fires of Mt Doom, but in a twist that nobody saw coming, it was gladly returned to the dark lord of Mordor and I (miserably) carried it down the hill and later used the contents for nefarious purposes. Weighing back at camp saw the little bastard tip the scales at 5 kg.

Corey met us at the pub having singlehandedly defeated the orc armies of MONA, and generally enjoyed a couple of days of pottering about. We swapped stories and enjoyed the lovely weather.

The weird Lord of the Rings thing represents the last of more than 11,000 words for this report, and the associated delirium.

The Fellowship of The Bag

Mon 24th Jan: Recover from Niggly, do airport and stuff in Hobart

I dropped off Oxana and Corey at the airport and went shopping for my 3rd (4th?) Niggly mat and some groceries. The pressure washer got a good go at Left of Field and the 10 kg or so of stuff that came out of Niggly was reduced to a lot less. A satisfying day, although I was starting to realise that keeping up with the admin was a lost cause.

The contents, of the One Bag to rule them all

Tues 25th Jan: Southern Wherretts Lookout surface walking

Party: Lachlan Bailey, Stephen Fordyce

I was pretty desperate to get in a day of dye releases targeting those Sesame detectors, and there were plenty of other useful things to do in the same area on the south side of Wherretts Lookout. A particularly enticing note from the Pax & Gabriel 2021-01 extravaganza about an entrance with an undescended 25 m pitch was enough to convince Lachlan. Permission to tag and drop was confirmed. Our tracks are in QGIS although mine are a bit patchy.

Another "easy surface day" in the JF

From our good parking spot on Florentine Rd we went a bad way – up an increasingly steep and thickly wooded ridge to its summit. Do not recommend! The going was pretty good after that, to the base of the bluffs which were our target. Here we split, Lachlan went straight to find and start rigging the awesome entrance pitch, I would do a loop out to do the dye releases and back, we also had emergency beacons each and contingency plans of when to give up waiting for the other.

I got enthusiastic with recording a whole lot of Points of Interest (POIs) that weren't worthy of tags, but also did what I was supposed to do and tagged JF-765 Hammerhead Pot (yep, it's vaguely in the shape of a hammerhead). Quite interesting, and very cold in the sizeable steep-sided hole. One end might be pushed by an enthusiastic someone. Climbing in was difficult, and a 10 m rope would be highly recommended.

I stumbled across JF-135 which Russell had recently relocated, it looked quite interesting, and found my way across to the next gully, with the Z-82 stream and several points of interest that needed following up. The swallet (small, but to my relief, flowing nicely in the very dry summer conditions) was tagged JF-766; it has clean rock and 3 m+ of passable/climbable (if damp) vertical development. Someone really needs to get in there! About 5 m down the gully I tagged JF-767 which is similar but dry and a bit smaller. I was less excited than the Pax/Gab description of "good passage, draught, goes towards nearby swallet" (paraphrased), in fact I was unimpressed enough not to bother naming them – feel free if you go there.

Much faffing had been required and I was perilously close to the point where Lachlan would abandon our rendezvous and head down the hill. I hightailed across the contour, passing JF-135 again despite my best efforts. Getting to the correct(ish) gully, an 'eyyyyo elicited a response, so I uncharitably went 50 m in the wrong direction to do a dye release in JF-131, which was the most miniscule of trickles and a bit desperate really. Having given Lachlan false hope, I bombed down the gully in search of the thrashing noises.

Lachlan had had a less than ideal time of it – despite my prolonged faffing time, he'd not managed to find any 25 m entrance pitches around the bluff area and GPS co-ordinates, just an uninviting little hole or two. We put our heads together and puzzled about how the only vaguely prospective hole was right on the GPS co-ordinate, but only about 2.5 m deep, not the 25 m in the notes. Lachlan's mojo had taken a pretty big hit by this point, so I volunteered to shimmy down and see what it did. I already had a sneaking suspicion, and applying an anti-enthusiasm filter and a decimal point to the description ("Vertical shaft 25 m descending still going, skull, good decorations definitely needs a tag and survey!") confirmed it. Ears may have burned in Hobart that day, but the temptation to utilise the three bars of Telstra signal was resisted, and the cave was viciously designated JF-768 Bum Steer.

JF-768 Bum Steer (and then some!)

Worth a tag, perhaps 50 m of downward sloping passage and a squeeze to a small terminal chamber, but really not still going. Interestingly, there was an old tape on a tree and scraps around the entrance. The only possible candidate for an existing tag was JF-141 (with spectacularly vague description of location the best I found in the archive) but the description didn't match that well, and the tag could easily have been buried by tree roots or moss (we looked hard).

Mojo in tatters, we'd had enough. Lachlan went straight down the hill, while with my last vestiges of motivation I detoured to tag JF-769 Shock Relter. This is a triangular-shaped walk-in rock shelter cave at the base of a bluff with nettles growing in it. Not huge, comfortable, warm, or free of drips, but it looked vaguely like the sort of place which might have piqued the interest of First Nations peoples. I don't really know what I'm looking for, but there were no obvious signs of campfires, rock art or refuse piles.

The entrance (and most of the extents) of JF-769 Shock Relter

I 'eyyyyo'd from habit *(whatever happened to Coooeee?-Ed)* on my way down the hill and lo and behold, got a response about halfway down! As I got closer and could discern words, it seemed that a cave had been discovered. How annoying. What's more, it was the best one of the day, a 3 m diameter shear sided pit about 12 m deep, much better than the one we'd spent all our motivation in trying to find. Lachlan had hauled his caving gear, SRT kit and rigging gear around in vain all day, so found motivation to use it while I sat and hoped for it be pronounced dead so we could go home. The tag was placed a fair way down in the cave. Having just spent four days in Niggly with Oxana (who was no longer there to defend herself), we opted for an apt (by this point) Oxana-ism and designated the cave JF-770 Suboptimal Pot. Lachlan vetoed my proffered Lachlanism: The Embuggerance, but it's in the barrel ready for the next one. I suspect the world needs no more Stephenisms…

It was agreed that we definitely wouldn't find any more caves, and we made the car without further distraction. With a final burst of motivation, I had a quick look for JF-235, which is apparently an unexciting cave that Alan tried to relocate using Rolan's Z-map (see *SS*406). There is a GPS co-ordinate from the club GPS in QGIS, but I think that's just derived from the Z-map. I didn't stray too much beyond that, but my feel is the terrain (a gully) around the GPS point is wrong, as the Z-map indicates it's on a ridge.

Lachlan puts his SRT gear to good use in Suboptimal Pot

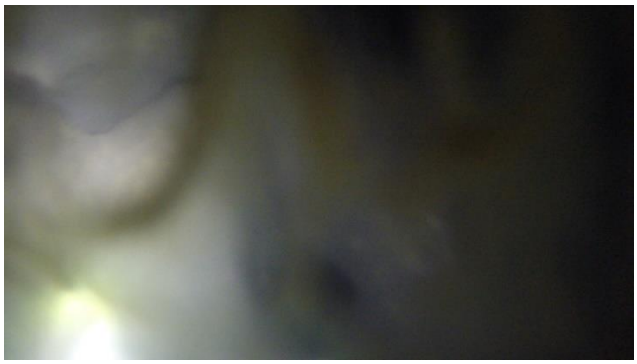
Wed 26th Jan: Porcupine grand tour

Party: Karina Anders, Stephen Fordyce

My last caving day was with Karina 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 (*see* SS*444, p. 42*)).

The cave was dry – awesomely dry, and I realised Porcupine has been shoved into the category of "winter backups" for too long. We stayed almost entirely dry through the Horrible Crawl, and only got wet feet in one section going downstream. In collecting the downstream detector (at the start of the sniff), this was my first time back to downstream since the last push trip in 2017(*see* SS*421, p.11)* – the route through the Miraculous Bypass was reasonably easy to follow, and the large cavern just as impressive. The roof sniff to access the ~300 m of additional cave pushed in 2017 by Andreas, Petr, Pat and myself (*see* SS*424, p.4)* had an estimated 40 cm of air and perhaps 20 cm of water in dry conditions instead of the other way around, which was really exciting. Hopefully we can squeeze in another trip to have a look in dry conditions before winter – surely there's JF master cave to be had! (We did, and were able to find not only a shelf to wriggle around the water, but the tubular bypass on the north side.)

Another noteworthy event of the day was my emergency poo bag not only being used, but fought over. We dabbled with the idea of a dual poo, but in the face of not many squares of toilet paper being split in half, I graciously bowed out and successfully held on. Karina became at least the second person to poo in Porcupine, although probably the first to actually carry it out (there is a fossilised turd from the 1980s in the rockpile not far from the base of the pitches – DNA test anyone?). The exercise was a worthy one.



From my GoPro in Porcupine – perhaps Karina's poo?!

Thurs 27th Jan: Booster times

With COVID running rife back home in Melbourne and my wife becoming a close contact, a panic-boost was in order, and I hastily extended my Tasmanian stay. It turns out Brighton is pretty close to Maydena and had vaccine appointments with two hours' notice. Cool.

Fri 28th Jan: Southern Wherretts Lookout

Party: Lachlan Bailey, Stephen Fordyce

Lachlan had finally realised that if he stayed I'd keep finding things for him to do (plus, he had a date with some actual nice weekend caving in the north), so hightailed it out of there. Mega commendations for taking everything I threw at him over the best part of two weeks, and it was a lot.

Meanwhile I felt pretty right, trusted my immune system and had increased 5G reception post-booster so took the opportunity for more Wherretts dye releases. The Pfizer apparently doesn't like walking up hills, and it was a bit slower than usual battling upwards, so a LiDAR target which was a viable cave was designated JF-771 Immune Response (The Embuggerance remains in play though). A hole approx. 3 m long and 1 m wide, with some possible downward leads, and it was very cold in there, definitely worth a better look. I had a good look around this area at other targets, but none were karst related. Unfortunately, my phone died a few days later before I'd recovered the data, so my tracks and a few points of interest are lost (The GPS position I could recreate accurately from LiDAR).

Admittedly, I was a bit over it by then, so wasn't being too thorough anyway. I slogged over to JF-647 The Slip Swallet and the bloody thing was dry after all that effort. So I headed back around to JF-256, which fortunately had enough of a trickle for a proper dye release and vindicate the day, despite the very dry summer conditions. On the way back to the road, I had a half-hearted look at a few bluffs and things, but didn't find (or record) anything of interest. With a bottle of dye unreleased, I chanced a look at Gabriel's new swallet not far off the road – JF-756. Alas, it wasn't flowing either, so that bottle was unrequited.

A brief bit of faffing at Junee rounded out the day and I went to bed early!

Sat 29th Jan: Junee faffing, break camp

The day was consumed by much faffing at Junee – getting everything replaced and working properly (including auto-uploading of data to the cloud each day), and obsessively checking everything three times.

It was also camp pack up day, and fitting everything back in the car was epic and desperate as usual, but I managed to get into Hobart to catch up with Ciara and Vito. A lovely way to spend my final evening, but I now feel ever so slightly basic when I eat iceberg lettuce.

I enjoy faffing at Junee Cave, and iceberg lettuce

Sun 30th Jan: Goodbye Tasmania

A lazy day, mostly dedicated to breaking into people's houses to leave piles of gear. I toyed with the idea of hiding the anchors for Delta Variant in Gabriel's shed in a poo tube labelled "Warning, Unsanitised" but decided that wasn't necessary.

How could these possibly be unsanitised?

A nice catch up and dinner with assorted Jacksons (thanks guys) in Devonport rounded out my time in Tassie very well.

Mon 31th Jan: Home again, home again

After five weeks away, home was sweet, our household was COVID-free, and most of my gear was already washed, so that helped with the unpacking a little.

Big thanks to everyone who came along, helped out, or gave me favours large and small. I hope the stupid amount of detail I've put into this report gives a little back.

JF-387 Porcupine-Downstream revisit

21 March 2022

Petr Smejkal

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Gabriel Kinzler, Petr Smejkal

It has been more than four years since we visited the downstream parts of Porcupine. The last two visits happened in 2017 (*Speleo Spiel*-Issue 424, page 4).

The first visit, with Andreas Klocker, Patrick Eberhard and myself lead to the discovery of a new overflow passage that runs parallel with the mainstream. This passage ended after ~200 m in yet another rockpile. The second trip aimed to map the newly discovered area was with Andreas, Steve Fordyce and myself.

We planned another visit, but it took quite a while before we finally made it happen. Nearly five years! It happened on Monday, yeaaaaaah.

Happy campers (or cavers) at the start

Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

Again, a trip of three, this time Steve, Gabriel and me. The main plan was to push through the final rockpile at the end of the overflow passage. Just in case, we packed wetsuits but hoped the recent dry weather would mean we could do without them. We entered the cave after 9:00 am, fixed a couple of redirections and rebelays on our way down and left our SRT gear under the last pitch at ~10:30 am.

Despite the low water levels, we chose the Miraculous Bypass to enter the low downstream parts of the cave.

Slightly less clean and happy-looking camper.

Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

The roof sniff that cannot be avoided (yet anyway) wasn't as dry as I had hoped but we decided not to use our wetsuits. Steadily we rediscovered the passage that led us to the final rockpile. Gabriel did most of the work and really pushed the crawl leading right through the centre of the rockpile. This got too tight, and he returned.

We tried to fit through a few more holes until Gabriel managed to find a tight vertical crawl that opened into a big chamber. The excitement was immense! The chamber was big and clearly there was a lead forward, but I ruined it all by saying "welcome back to where we started from". Hence, we decided the final rockpile chamber shall be called "Gift Horse Rockpile" (*I just love clever cave-naming. It's a talent – Ed).*

After that we prospected a few more leads but the final verdict was we need to come back another time, with more gear, push up and maybe dig a little. On our way back, we surveyed the wet passage further. Just to get a better idea in which direction the water flows. No one liked it much and Steve thought a nice name for it would be "Putins Palace".

Yet another caving bum shot.

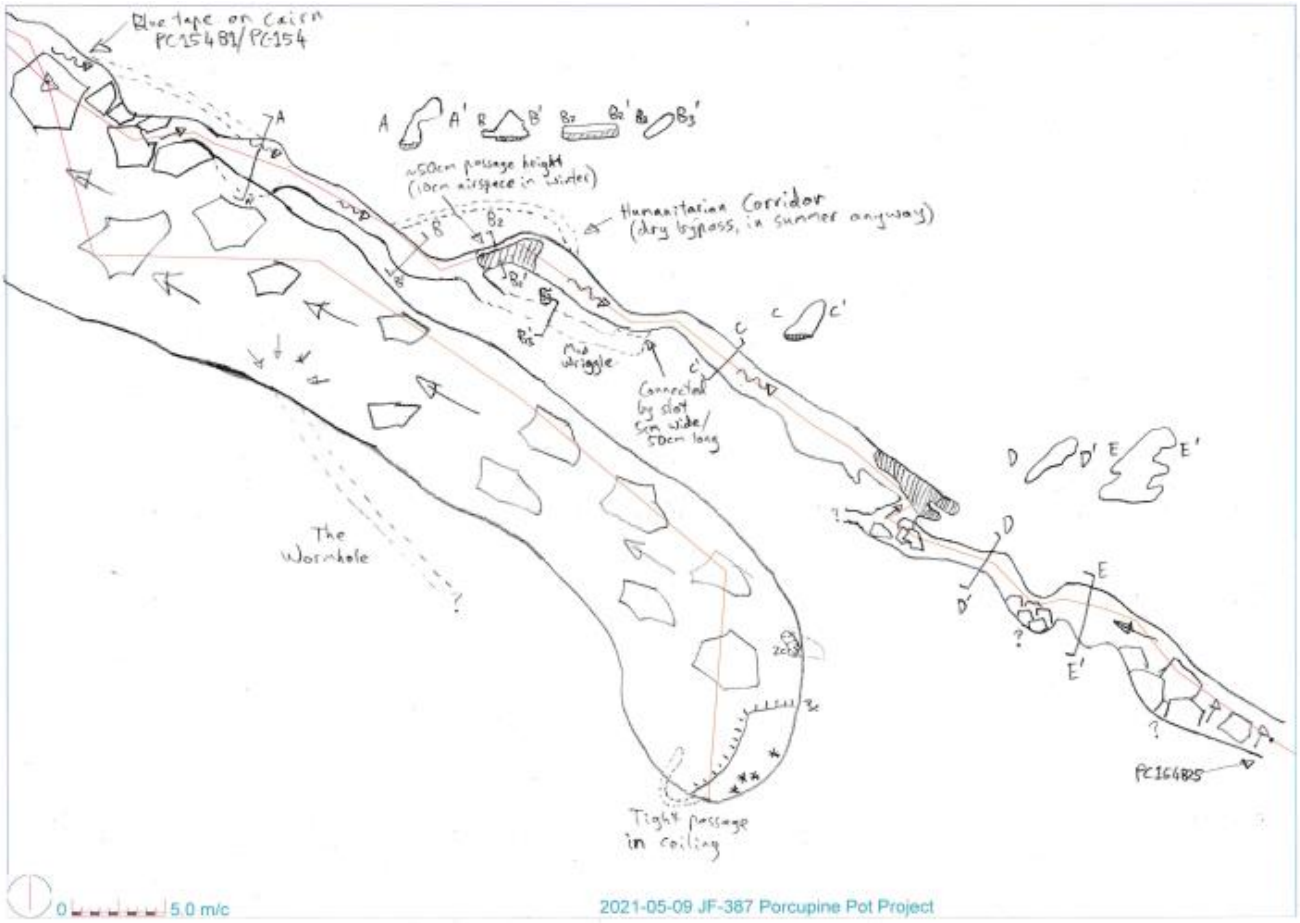
Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

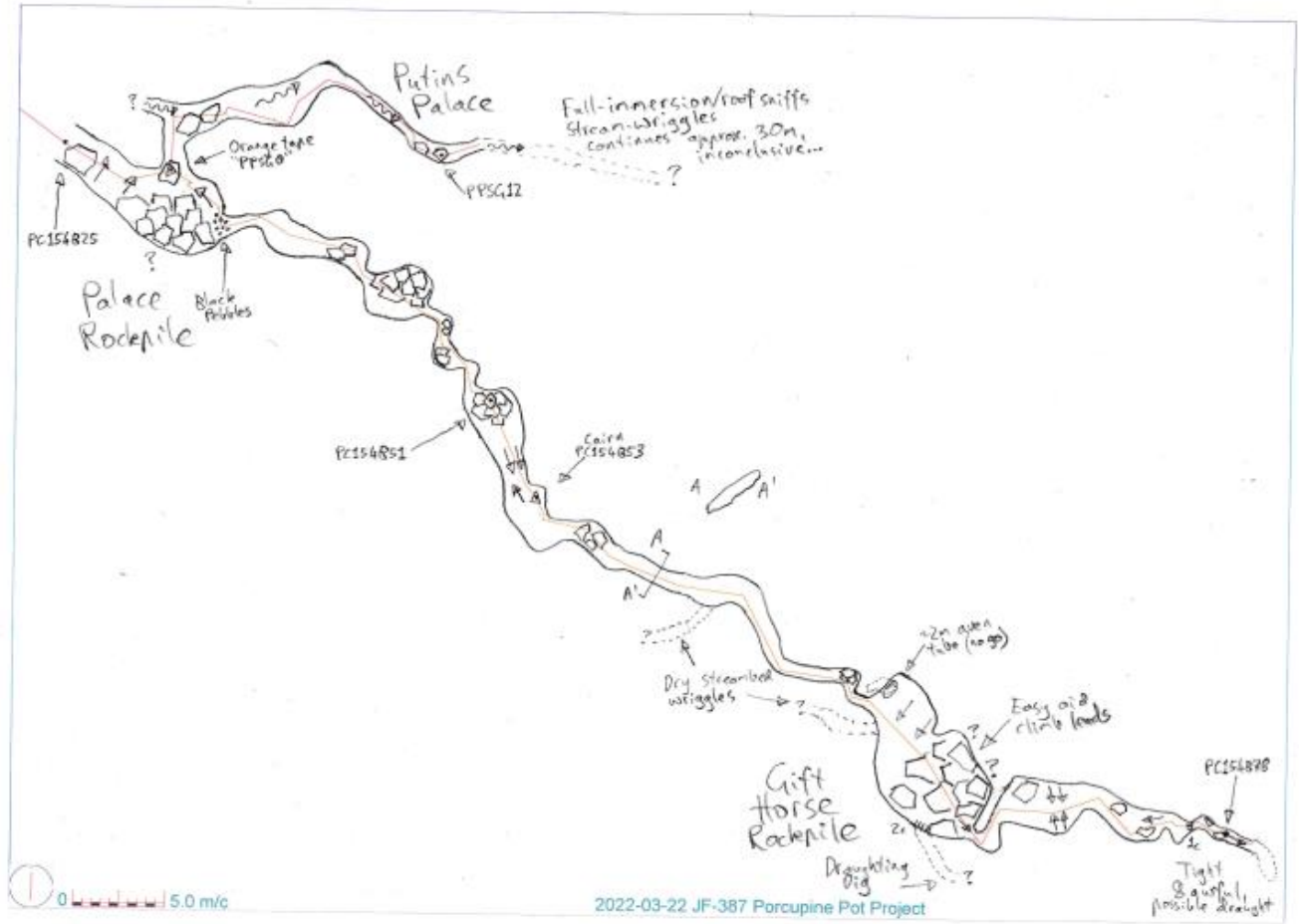
After that we started heading out. Oh well, we got distracted by a couple of little leads, of course. These were heading right under the rockpile in the big chamber at the original end of Downstream Porcupine. We all liked the idea of avoiding the roof sniff by finding a little bypass. We did not find it, but we could not be more than a couple of metres from sticking our heads out.

Back at the roof sniff we noticed a little sideway crawl. While Steve was bravely submersing through the roof sniff, I had time to check it out. It turned out to be a dry-ish bypass (this would be only at dry season) thanks to which Gabriel and I kept dry socks! Steve did not see it yet but came with a noble name for it "Humanitarian Corridor".

And that's it, one last stop to redeploy one of Steve's detectors right in front of the "Humanitarian Corridor" bypass and out we went. It was 6:15 pm when we climbed the last pitch.

We did not find what we were hoping for but we had lots of fun, and found other stuff. It was a great day out and I had to go to work one day less.





Sketches of the newly surveyed parts of the cave.

Anne-A-Kananda gear carry

25-27 March 2022

Lauren Hayes (photo credits not submitted)

Party: Keith Chatterton, Matt Dunwoodie, Lauren Hayes, Ben Hazell, Alex Williams

Late on Friday 25th March, my partner Ben and I set off for the Southwest to meet up with fellow mainland cavers Keith Chatterton, Matt Dunwoodie and Alex Williams. The caves of Mt Anne were calling, and we were excited for the weather window the mountain had put on for us. The mainlanders had nine days of food packed, while I was only planning on staying for six days. Ben and I arrived just shy of midnight only to be unable to sleep after the long drive of dodging pademelons. Meanwhile, Keith was sitting waiting at Hobart airport for Matt and Alex after countless delays to their flights. Right on 2 am we heard the rest of the team pull in and set up camp for the night. Keith, Alex, Matt and I met during my uni days through the RMIT Outdoors club. Arriving in remote locations in the middle of the night, only to get a few hours' sleep before the sun was up, sure did remind me of the countless interstate trips we all used to do together when I lived in Melbourne.

I decided to let everyone sleep in, so I waited until 7.30 am to awake the others from their bivvy bags. Despite my consideration, they still seemed to be unimpressed by my excited voice. Alex and Matt spent the morning loading their packs while Keith and I went to stash my bike at the bottom of the Bombardier Track.

Mt Anne peeping through the clouds from the car park

After Keith and Stefan Eberhard had done a few recces in the previous weeks, we decided to ascend the regular Mt Anne Route from Condominium Creek and take the ridgeline past Pandani Shelf to get out to Anne-A-Kananda rather than taking the overgrown Bombardier track on the way up (*A bold decision, in my experience – Ed).* After just a few hours, we were beginning to question this decision.

At approximately 10.30 am we were ready for our final pack weigh ins and to head up the track. I picked up my pack again to find it feeling slightly lopsided. I opened it up and to my surprise the guys had stashed a bottle of whisky at the top of my pack. Had they taken an extra two minutes to put it in the middle of my pack, it was unlikely I would have even realised! Despite my protests and the fact that I don't even like whisky, I was vetoed as I had the lightest pack in the group… After final weigh ins, our packs ranged from 27 kg to 39 kg. We donned our gumboots and made our way to the track.

Left to right: Alex Williams, Lauren Hayes, Ben Hazell, Keith Chatterton, Matt Dunwoodie.

Keith had told us that High Camp was only an hour away so carrying only a litre of water should be adequate. To avoid carrying extra kilos, we all obliged. However, heavy packs and a warm day hampered our progress and meant we were extremely pleased to refill our water bottles by the time we made it. We were making relatively good progress until we hit the boulder hopping up to Mt Eliza. It was our plan to reach Anne-A-Kanada by nightfall, but by the time we got to Mt Eliza, we realised that we needed to start reassessing. We refilled our bottles once again in the tarns of the plateau and continued towards Mt Anne.

Scrambling up towards Mt Eliza

The view from Mt Eliza

As we passed the turn off to Shelf Camp we were at a dilemma, do we head for Shelf Camp with guaranteed water and campsites, or continue on through the boulder fields past Mt Anne. We decided to continue, making as much use of the light as we could and decided that worst case, we could always turn around and head for Shelf Camp to get water with light packs. Luckily, just as the sky was turning orange, just below the summit of Mt Anne, we found a small rock shelf with some small tarns that we decided to call home for the night. We watched what was definitely my best sunset ever in Tassie and then headed towards our campsite. As we made it down to the shelf, we found that it was on a definitive slope and the nice-looking tarns from above actually turned out to be rather average puddles of water. Sunrise in the morning made up for all of this.

Our camp just below Mt Anne

Sunrise looking towards the East over Lightning Ridge and Lots Wife

Sunday morning, we packed up our things again and said our goodbyes to Ben who was only planning on walking for the weekend. Unfortunately, as we hadn't made it to camp the previous day, the extra gear that Ben was hauling up the mountain had to be distributed. With Alex already on almost 40 kg, and night owl Matt who had decided to depart us after dinner and keep walking through the night, Keith and I divided up the extra 10 kg of gear into our packs and we set off. It was a slow start with more rocky boulder hopping.

Lauren with a loaded pack

After about two hours, we decided that the weight was no longer feasible and made a gear cache. Returning to my, what now felt light, original 27 kg pack weight, I felt like I was floating. We scampered along the rocky ridge to Anne-A-Kanada in the heat, again having to be careful of our water consumption and finally made into Anne-A-Kanada in the mid-afternoon. We were pleased to find that Matt had safely made it and found Stefan at camp too. Keith, Alex and I jostled for best tent and bivvy spots. Lucky there were only five of us; flat spots were hard to come by. We headed back up to the plateau to enjoy the last of the summer-like weather, share a dinner and pull out the celebratory whisky. An early bedtime was in need and as I crawled into my bed, I decided to turn on my phone and see if I had reception, hopefully having a message from Ben that he had safely made it down from the mountain and had made it back to Launceston. A safe message from him, I did receive, but also a message saying that he had done a RAT test when he had returned home only to find out that he had tested positive for COVID.

Uh oh, I was now a close contact and while I felt fine, I knew that there was a very likely chance that I would also test positive in the coming days. After the hardest part of actually making it to the cave, I knew I had to get off the mountain ASAP and wouldn't see a day of caving. Monday morning, I ate breakfast by myself and packed up my things. I said a

distant goodbye to everyone and made my way down the North East Ridge. I filled up 2 L of water to take with me after hearing that most of the water sources along the way were bare after the dry summer. I decided to drink my first litre of water and conserve my second litre. The Bombardier track is quite overgrown and involves crawling under and over many logs. So late in the morning when I took my pack off for a short break, you can imagine my disappointment when I found that my full water bottle had fallen out and all I was left with was my empty one. After already being dehydrated from the previous two days this was not ideal. I pulled out my map to find that there was likely a running creek a few hours away. I made sure that I didn't stop until I reached Sandfly Creek and sat down for quite some time, quenching my thirst. After emerging from the bush on Scotts Peak Rd in the late afternoon, I dropped my pack, pulled my bike from the scrub I had hidden it under, and finished off with a 10 km ride to reach my car. I made it to Maydena by nightfall and continued the drive home to start my isolation. Two days later I tested positive for COVID. Luckily no one else on the mountain tested positive, and while having COVID was an unpleasant experience, I was very thankful to have gotten off the mountain safely before my symptoms kicked in.

The rest of the team had a great time descending into numerous caves. Luckily Mt Anne is not going anywhere, and there will be a next time for me.

Goodbye Mt Anne

IB-10 Mystery Creek Cave – LiDAR Survey Trial

17 April 2022

Gabriel Kinzler (with notes by Craig Stobbs)

Party: Reena Balding, Gabriel Kinzler, Craig Stobbs, Ethan Stobbs, Oliver Stobbs

This year, Easter Sunday turned into a family caving tech-trip for me, Craig and his family. The company he works at, Fulcrum Robotics, kindly let us borrow a portable 3D scanner, namely an Emesent Hovermap, which uses LiDAR surveying technology. We chose Mystery Creek Cave to trial it out, in what could be a Tasmanian first.

The Hovermap unit shoots hundreds of thousands of laser beams every second and in all directions. LiDAR data is processed onboard in real time to produce a local 3D map of the surroundings. It is then possible to use this data in various ways, including for simple 3D visualisation on any device. Colourisation is possible too for a more realistic look.

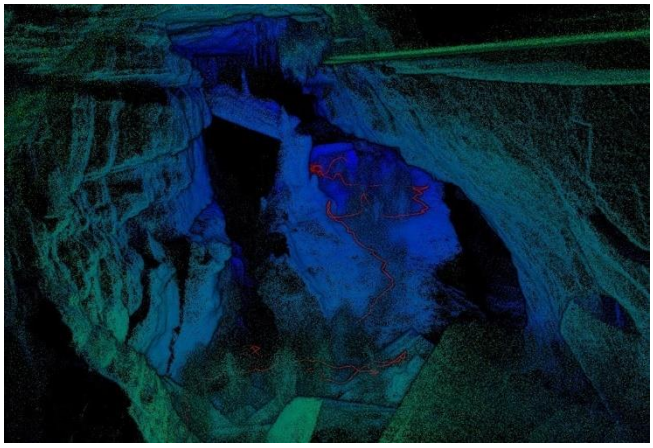
It was decided we'd tour the cave (first visit for the Stobbs) before starting to play with the device. The kids enjoyed hunting for the Boiler Room, then we continued along The Skyline and turned around, down The Laundry Chute, to return to The Broken Column via the lower levels. There, Craig took the Hovermap out of its rigid backpack case. The main purpose of the backpack is to protect the unit during transport in harsh environments. The Hovermap uses a battery that can either be attached to the device itself, or housed inside the backpack (in which case a power cord is connected from the device to an external port on the backpack, which contains the battery plugged in internally).

Craig then proceeded to walk back towards the entrance, holding the Hovermap at an arm's length. We went with him through the Shipwreck Chamber, the Walls of Sorrow, Glowworm Chambers 1 & 2, and stopped just before the Entrance Chamber. A video fly-through of the cave can be viewed on YouTube: https://youtu.be/WdW6yft6EEQ. Unfortunately, the bitrate on YouTube breaks down completely because of interframe compression (when there's heaps of small dots, i.e. snow, particles, etc.), so email me if you would like a link to another version in native resolution and higher quality.

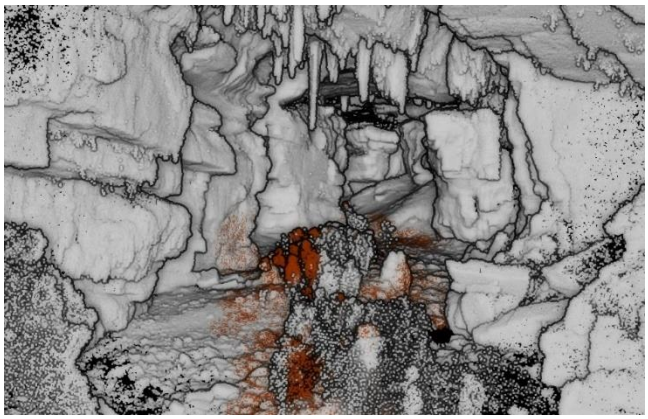
The next part consisted in importing the data on a computer. Different professional software suites are available for point cloud processing, but there's also open source programs available to the layman, like CloudCompare.

In Craig's chosen settings, the Hovermap shot approximately 150,000,000 points over a 15-minute scan, so roughly 10 million shots/minute, or ~166,666 shots/second, which amounted to a 1.5 GB file. Ideally, though, you want to work with a x10 subsample (150 MB), unless you have a very powerful CPU and GPU.

The point cloud can then be adjusted with different parameters: you can cut out certain parts, populate dark zones, change visual settings, etc. There is a plugin that allows you to convert the point cloud to a mesh (polygons/surfaces instead of a constellation of points), but this takes a lot of computing power (and thus time).

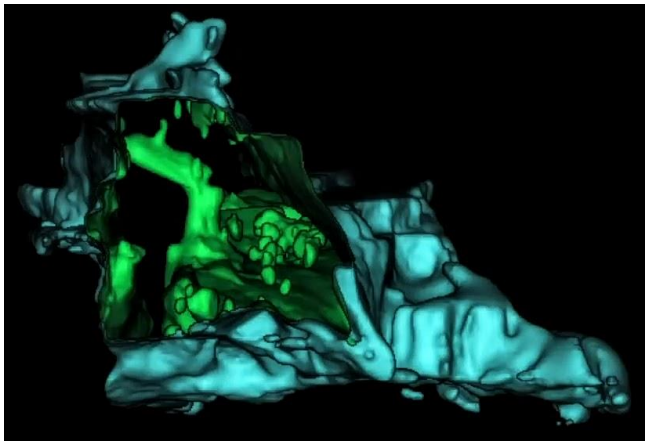


A view of The Broken Column as a point cloud.

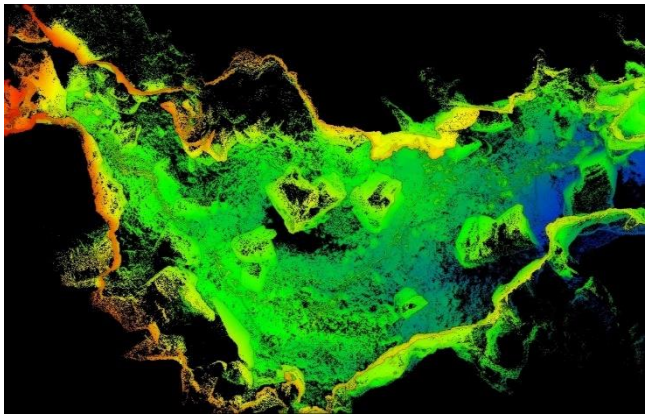


Looking through Glowworm Chamber 2. The stuff in brown is movement (us people) not filtered out

The obvious application for cavers is the creation of detailed cave maps. In future, two versions of a map could coexist: a "raw" version composed of the point cloud and used for 3D visualisation, lead checking, science (geology/hydrology) or even art, and a "clean" version using traditional drawing tools such as Adobe Illustrator, where you'd simply draw over the extremely accurate contours of the point cloud.



A cross section after converting the points into low-polygon shaders (plain surfaces). A much more detailed result is possible with higher computing power and more time.

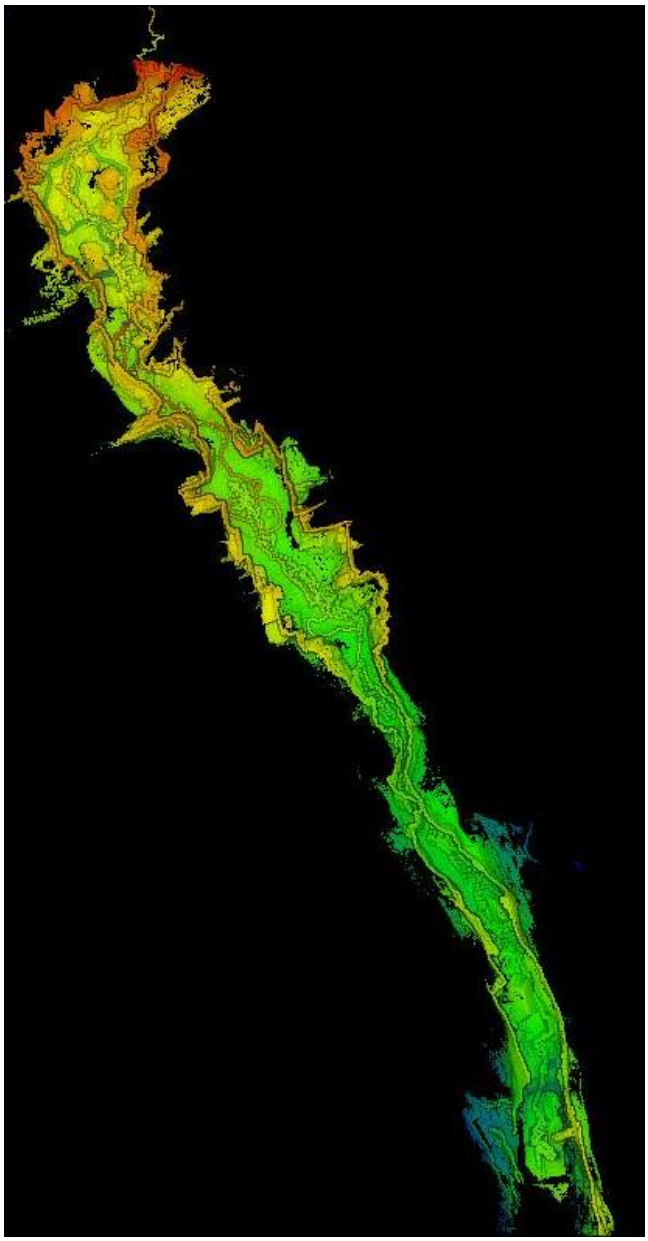


A more conventional benefit: "orthophoto" cutaways as a surrogate for mapping. This is the Entrance Chamber (East up). The colour represents height, which clearly indicates the fall of the cave with the stream flow, and also helps visualise accessibility.

This technology, commonly used in the mining industry, remains prohibitively expensive today (~$180K for the Hovermap), but the industry is moving fast and this could well become the surveying technique of choice for cavers in the future. Other comparable devices are already in the $60K price bracket. More affordable solutions are also being actively developed by industry disruptors, i.e. start-ups and enthusiasts taking advantage of cheaper materials and increasingly miniaturised technology. STC actually has its own small think-tank currently working on such a product out of a garage. A relatively cheap, rugged and ultraportable LiDAR survey device may not be far off.

We will continue to look into short-term applications with the Hovermap, as long as we have Fulcrum's blessing. We are concept proving at the moment, and Craig said he was happy to map anything, but would like to be strategic about it (i.e. take club guidance; inquiries and comments welcome!). The way I see it, possibilities are plentiful and STC could lead the way in years to come.

Thanks again to Fulcrum Robotics for the loan of the scanner.



Orthophoto cutaway of the extent of our scanning so far oriented (North up).

JF-757 & JF-739 Pink Panther

23 April 2022

Gabriel Kinzler

Party: Gabriel Kinzler, John Oxley, Ciara Smart

Two recent trips in JF-761 Delta Variant revealed that one particular section of the cave reaches back very closely to the surface. This section, called Superspreader, is a wide, active (trickles) inlet passage with partially fossilised sub-sections, which runs from the surface directly to the top of the Daily Cases mega pitch. An early theory is that Superspreader used to be the main sink into Delta Variant, and that the current entrance series (aka "The Testing Station Queue"; doesn't exactly roll off the tongue, does it?) supplanted it over time, channelling the vast majority of the water inflow... in annoyingly narrower passage.

The survey of Superspreader, displayed against our LiDAR surface data, showed what Steve Fordyce coined "a negative dig", because our highest survey station virtually sticks out of the ground by a metre or two. Of course, in reality, margins of error in both the quality of our survey and in the LiDAR data itself make this improbable: we definitely didn't shoot a leg out of the cave, but we probably weren't too far off, perhaps by less than 10 or 20 m, optimistically. This oddity in the data associated with a decent draught and signs of entrance artefacts (vegetal debris, full skeletons, live crickets and dolerite boulders) made our hypothesis so much more compelling.

Thus, the idea for this trip was to go exactly where the negative dig was supposed to be on the surface, hoping to find a new entrance, which would critically give us a much-needed bypass of the annoying main entrance series and first pitch (Quarantine Pitch, 50 m).

After 90 minutes of going in circles around the designated area (a flat relief surrounded by small cliffs) and achieving only to relocate two old caves (JF-490 and JF-491) in wildly different spots than their legacy coordinates, I was ready to throw in the towel. But after lunch, Ciara convinced John and me to have one more look in the area, widening the circle a little. I had the winning ticket, in that I found the only new entrance of the day: a 2-metre wide hole under a rocky overhang. I called Ciara and John and we got to work.

Gabriel in JF-739. Photo: John Oxley

The entrance needed a bit of rigging, as it is a 3-metre pitch, probably climbable if your life depended on it, but not if this is to become a point of heavy traffic in the future. While Ciara and John geared up, I installed the tag, JF-757. Keen observers will notice that this number is anterior to that of Delta Variant, which was discovered first. For that I blame a mismanagement of JF tags. Tags seem to be skipped every now and then, either because some go missing, or because certain sets of tags are held by people for long periods of time. I placed the lowest available tag, even if it was lower than Delta's "761", as I didn't want to initiate yet another tagging sub-scheme of my own.

Ciara was the designated rigger. She installed a tape on an obvious natural above the entrance, backed to a tree, and descended. No "oohs" or "aahs", it didn't go far, maybe 10 metres down a slope. Unsure of hers and John's understanding of what a dig could really mean, I joined them to see for myself. At first, it appeared pretty desperate indeed, with only a few hollow spaces between stacked rocks. But as my two defeated companions prusiked out of the cave, I kept at it and found a new angle of attack. From a certain position in an alcove on the right, you can see downwards diagonally for 5 to 10 metres, with diggable soil and movable rocks. Cue Arnold: "I'll be back".

The cave doesn't yet have an official name, but it was decided it would follow the COVID theme of Delta, either "The Exemption" or "False Positive" depending on the outcome of the dig. An exemption to the nasty entrance of Delta if it connects, or a false positive if it doesn't.

John in JF-757. Photo :Gabriel Kinzler

We weren't going home yet, however, as I had a backup plan in case the day was cut short: JF-739, first introduced in *Speleo Spiel* 448: "*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 Cave and the slopes of Wherretts). 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."* In the time since my last visit, I named it Pink Panther, because it is such an inconspicuous entrance, hiding in plain sight, which had inspired me to whistle the catchy original theme song all day. No diamond to be found, but a pretty little cave nonetheless.

The entrance drops vertically for ~10 m through some relatively easy climbs and soon turns into low gradient fossil streamway, which wriggles to the end over ~60 m. There are three notable chambers on the way, each containing interesting speleothems. The cave gets tight into rockfall at the end, but with a noticeable draught and ongoing passage. Unfortunately, trying to open it up, I moved a rock in the way rather than out, which makes progress now significantly more difficult.

We helped Ciara to carry out her first full-cave survey and left. Not a huge prospect, but if you've got nothing better to do on a boring weekend, it does something and is pretty enough that it wouldn't be an absolute waste of time. Interestingly, the cave is headed north-east and passes right under JF-740, which is a low priority entrance dig just up-gully. This would explain the draught felt in Pink Panther.

Sesame JF-210

30 April 2022

Lachlan Bailey (photos Gabriel Kinzler) and Karina Anders

Party: Karina Anders, Lachlan Bailey, Steve Fordyce, Gabriel Kinzler

Steve lured some helpers onto another one of his Tassie trips, with the promise of getting to go back to Delta Variant and derigging Sesame. With Gab generously providing somewhere for Steve and me to stay Friday night, we were off to start the Sesame derig Saturday morning with a party of FOUR - Steve, Gab, Karina, and me.

We were keen to make a quick start, as derig tasks often have a habit of stretching a little. So we were all down P1 of Sesame II (the vertical entrance) by 9:30 am, and headed on down to the bottom of the cave. I noticed there was an interesting side passage entering on the true right where the flowstone bit starts. It's obviously very choked with old calcite, but still has a trickle coming out.

Down to the handlines and Alan's 11/10 Mud, which Gab declared to be only about 8/10, and nothing on select patches in Niggly. The rope on the second 'handline' (normally done as a pitch) was spotted to be core shot after the second use. On inspection, there's a few nasty rub points, so future connoisseurs of Sesame, beware.

A quick slither down the other side put us at the Wet Hole. After an inspection, an early lunch was had as an excuse to postpone grovelling in it. Interestingly, despite 20.8 mm being recorded at Tim Shea in the 24 h to 9 am Saturday, the Wet Hole was still pretty close to summer levels. It was certainly not even remotely as high as it was on Steve's dive trip in January, and there had been less rainfall on a dryer catchment then. There were even some traces of fluorescein still visible in perched pockets of water. Perplexing.

Eventually the convenient excuses to avoid the Wet Hole expired, and we all headed in - Steve first, then Karina, Gab, and me. It certainly lived up to its reputation- 60 m of unpleasant streamway grovel. The worst of it is at the upstream end; a delightful dipping pool that requires you to half-submerge your face in a 7°C pool while inching forward whilst jammed between the roof and the river cobbles. The nasty bit is only short (maybe 6 m), but the rest of it sure helps make you question your life choices, too.

There's minor reprieve on the far side, consisting of two pitches (up from the streamway, then back down to it) separated by a bit more 11/10 Mud. Once you're through this, you're back down to stream level at the Little Wet Hole. Gab nearly mutinied at this point, but Steve talked him into coming through. The Little Wet Hole is short, and not nearly as vile as the real deal lurking upstream. This spits you out into a glorious (but short) section of master cave, before the sump. Camp Squelch was examined, and I pronounce it the most awful camp spot that I have ever seen.

Coming back, we'd just grovelled back through The Little Wet Hole, when Karina joyously exclaimed that that was the worst of it past. Amazing the protective qualities of the human memory, able to wipe out any recollection of the Wet Hole. Steve had the melancholy duty of reminding Karina about what was coming. Gab particularly enjoyed his journey back through the Wet Hole, getting his helmet jammed in the crux, where you have your face (and the rest of you) partially immersed in the chilly water. Fun.

This gives some idea of the mud rating

The rest of the trip out was just a derig slog. Nothing exciting there, just increasingly heavy packs as we neared the surface. Gab and Karina missed the turn off Sesame Street into Sesame II; there's two tricky left turns one must keep an eye out for. Karina had a box of excellent homemade choc-chip muffins waiting for us in the car, which was a godsend- we were out a little too late for the planned parmie at Giants Table. Still, a wonderfully relaxed evening was had around the fireplace, chatting with Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney, and Deb Hunter about our respective days- they had had a good one visiting Welcome Stranger.

Incident report – 30 April 2022 – Karina Anders

I got to the top of one of the pitches in Sesame, I was requested by one of the party members to take the heavy pack left at the top of the pitch. After I had called rope free, I grabbed the pack, giving it a big tug as it was very heavy. There was a rock that I had not seen, which was dislodged when I pulled the pack. I managed to see it and had enough time to call "MOVE" (s*hould be "rock" or "below" -Ed*) to the person about to get onto the rope at the bottom of the pitch. The rock (about the size of a human head) landed where the person was standing. No one was hurt but it could have been bad.

Lessons learned:

1. Don't leave a pack right at the top of a pitch head.
2. Don't move a pack that is right at the top of a pitch head when someone is below it.

JF-229 Welcome Stranger

30 April 2022

Janine McKinnon

Party: Deb Hunter, Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney

Deb was down for the weekend and wanted some pleasant, fun, relaxed caving. That suited us. We advertised for others, as this is an excellent beginners/chilled cavers trip, but to no avail. So, it turned into the most relaxed and quiet trip in there that I have ever done. We had plenty of time to really look at the cave without lots of distractions, as has been the case in my previous experience. I was surprised at how decorated it is. Far more than my memory suggested. Really good, actually.

The cave is now a permit cave. The gate is locked, as it has been for decades (but it is a new lock which works well, although it is in one of those "security" box-things that make it a bit difficult), but now Parks hold the key, not us, so a formal permit request must be sent through the club secretary to the Mt Field office. Names were required but I am hoping it isn't that bureaucratic when they formalise the process. The paperwork process hadn't been worked out at the time I applied so we just organised to pick up and drop off the key from the ranger at the visitors' centre. Thanks to the ranger, David, for allowing this access.

No key deposit was required, and I am told won't be once the process is completed. There is an "after hours" drop box available I was told.

The ranger gave us a "boot wash station" to place in the cave where the entrance scramble joins the stream. We did this but couldn't put water in it as there wasn't any. The stream didn't start until around halfway into the cave. It flowed out of the sump at the end and disappeared down a hole halfway along the stream bed. Water levels were very low.

We spent a couple of very quiet and pleasant hours poking about and taking photos.

Pretty, pretty. Photo Janine McKinnon

Note that some string lining has been placed after the cave clean that Parks did a while ago. The side passage can still be visited, just do it within the string lining.

The track from the car park is easy to follow. We tarted it up a bit. Be sure to keep an eye out for the entrance in the gully. The taped line continues past the cave and up the hill to another depression, so it's easy to walk past the cave if you aren't paying attention. We placed some tape at the cave entrance to aid this.

Frankcombe Cave (JF-7)

1 May 2022

Lachlan Bailey

Party: Lachlan Bailey, Deb Hunter

Sunday brought with it much lassitude and a general disinclination to do anything. Steve, Gab and I were all feeling pretty ratted after Sesame yesterday. So the original plan was updated several times, with the end result that Steve went up Wherretts to retrieve a modified one-shot, and Gab was going to meander up the Niggly track to check it was in good condition. Steve also went for a scenic drive out Scotts Peak Rd to retrieve some detectors placed there for the Melbournian Mt Anne expedition a month before.

Unfortunately, Janine, Ric and Deb's plans were completely derailed - the new CAVE ute had a fatal fault[1] that saw them limping back to Hobart rather than going caving. This left Deb at a loose end, so I joined her to visit Frankcombe Cave- Janine, Ric and Deb had originally been planning to assess it as a potential STC beginners cave option.

Despite a little thrashing in the man ferns, Frankcombe Cave was pretty easy to find, and has a rather impressive entrance. Some numpty has decided that the entrance really needs two (identical) cave tags, despite both of them being seemingly obvious and easy to spot. The whole entrance chamber is well covered with moonmilk and is quite fragile in spots.

Quite fragile in spots aptly summarises Frankcombe Cave. There are parts that are deliciously muddy and indestructible, but the main passageway is graced by some extremely delicate rimstone pools and flowstone that is quite tricky to avoid mudding. At one point, there's a well-trogged, but easy to miss up-and-over that avoids the first patch of really delicate rimstone pools that cover the entire floor.

More pretties for this page. Photo: Deb Hunter

Deb and I eventually decided to cease and desist, as we were worried about damaging the formation after the large chamber where the main passage jinks around to trend north-west. We decided that it would make a potential beginners cave, as it's very easy to access (although it is a LONG way down the Florentine Valley), being no more than a 10 min stroll from the Florentine Road. However, we both think that it should be trackmarked and stepping pads installed before beginner trips are contemplated in there, to limit the spread of damage. Beginners would also require VERY close supervision due to the proximity to nice and well-decorated stuff. There's also a good range of bedrock and geomorphic features to talk to new cavers about. However, JF-229 Welcome Stranger is a better beginner cave than Frankcombe Cave- it's not as fragile as Frankcombe Cave, it's gated and it's not as far to drive.

On the way back, we followed the tape alignment from the cave back to the road, replacing markers as needed. It should be relatively obvious for anyone who wants to get there now - follow the snig track from the parking spot (there's some old steel cable to help you spot the right place to go bush). This is a bit overgrown with tree ferns, but easily followable with occasional tapes. There's an obvious tree in the snig track with 4-5 tapes where you do a right turn to get to Frankcombes Cave (via a random doline), and this last section is very well marked.

Deb headed home, dropping me off at the Niggly Carpark to wait for Gab and Steve. Both had successful days- Gab declared the Niggly track to be in excellent condition, and Steve even got a bonus dye release in. Back to Maydena for more faff, while Steve debouched to go and faff around with his Junee detectors. Gab left Sunday evening (after cooking some excellent pasta), and Ciara replaced him an hour or two later in preparation for Monday.

[1] Shoddy wiring. What did Ric expect when he plastered BEWARE on the back of his ute? *(Ric is really disappointed that now two of our caving community are sufficiently classically educated to get his joke, Ciara being the other. I hope no more pop up or his fun will be even more seriously dented – Ed)*

Delta Variant JF-761

2 May 2022

Lachlan Bailey

Party: Lachlan Bailey, Steve Fordyce, Ciara Smart

Delta Variant was the designated target for Monday. It is still currently graced with a range of going leads - the Nasal Passages have only been lightly pushed by Lauren Hayes, the Alpha and Omicron Inlets only received a quick squiz from Corey Hanrahan, Daily Cases goes DOWN, there's a tantalising rift in the roof of Daily Cases, and Superspreader has numerous possible pushy bits. Who knows what it does between the bottom of Daily Cases and the waterfall climb in Niggly; there could be another entire extra level in there.

Lachlan heading up to the entrance doline a generation of cavers somehow missed. Photo: Steve Fordyce

We got a slowish start (packing…), and the slog up the hill was a wee bit painful, thanks to Sesame. The new entrance rope up the Niggly Gully is fantastic, avoiding much painful bushbashing and providing a nicer place to kit up. The flow was a little up from summer, but nothing particularly noteworthy in the entrance series. All the ropes on Quarantine were in good condition still and well clear of the flow, although it was hardly high-water conditions.

I quickly started bolting the rift at the top of Daily Cases, trying to work around to see where the rift was going (and if it was worth the effort). Meanwhile, Steve and Ciara tried calibrating Gab's DistoX2, taking four attempts to get an acceptable error. The rock at the top of Daily Cases is terrible; chossy, and at one point an entire bollard of seemingly solid limestone peeled away under simple body weight. Unfortunately, the rift swings back on itself and continues to meander away, widening to present more precarious bolting conditions at the same time. So with no breakthrough, the drill was surrendered to Ciara to push the main part of the pitch, and I wandered up Superspreader for a gander.

Superpreader is a very interesting streamway. It clearly has some surface connection, as there's a liberal coating of dead mammals along its length. The majority of the flow was entering through the true left DVF9 branch, not following the obvious main rift. I suspect that Superspreader is a fossil version of the Test Station Queue, and the Nasal Passages could be an intermediate between the two. Superspreader itself is clearly too substantial for the meagre stream it takes, although the obvious canyon disappears somewhere around DVF62 (possibly into the scarily boulder choked lead of DVF63, but the passage could also be dendritic). The ends

of the Negative Dig area (DVF53, DVF46, and DVF49) are all seemingly comprehensively dead, although there was some evidence of a surface connection in the area (cave crickets and small mammal skulls). The area past DVE1-DVE3 has some unpleasant crawly prospects, and there's an aven at DVE3 that has a trickle but needs an aid climb. All super cool and fun to poke around it (almost more fun than rigging Daily Cases)!

Conveniently, Steve, Ciara, and I all rendezvoused at the top of Daily Cases at the same time (6:30 pm), and headed out. Ciara had added a good 30 m of rigging to Daily Cases, and tweaked some of the existing placements. Alas, my failure in Negative Dig meant we got to enjoy the Test Station Queue once again. It was 11 pm by the time we were all back in Hobart, thanks to all the inconsiderate marsupials trying to ambush Ciara's car. The fun discovery for the evening was that Mood Food at New Norfolk is open 24 hr, serving all the deep-fried goodness a hungry caver can ever want. (Steve was rather incoherently excited about this, but we did collectively pronounce the burgers, chips, and spring rolls to be good). Sated, we all dispersed to our respective beds, satisfied with the conclusion of an excellent weekend of caving.

JF-761 Delta Variant

14 May 2022

Jemma Herbert & Gabriel Kinzler (with additional notes by Ciara Smart)

Party: Jemma Herbert, Gabriel Kinzler, Ciara Smart

Ciara in the not awe-inspiring entrance. Photo: Steve Fordyce (alright, from a different trip... but still, it is the entrance, and she was on that previous trip.)

Team Daily Cases – Jemma

Whilst Gab & Ciara went off to explore Superspreader, I had been given the honour of having a go at rigging the massive Daily Cases pitch. I faffed around at the top until I ran out of excuses and then headed down to the previous low point.

I had some difficulty getting onto the rope above the last rebelay. I couldn't pull enough slack up to be able to thread my Stop and I thought maybe the rope had gotten caught on something below. With my ascenders and some jiggery pokery I managed to get enough slack to get onto the rope and descend. As it turned out, the rope wasn't stuck, it was just 150 m of rope weight where the extra ropes that had been left were hanging off.

From there I was into new territory. My goal was to place rebelays every 25 m or so, alternating double and single bolts, constantly traversing to abseiler's left and away from the waterfall as much as possible.

The biggest challenge was traversing. Whilst I could swing all over the place, it was hard to find a stable position to hang around and place the bolts. Where the rock quality was good the face was almost featureless with nothing to hook. I ended up swinging across and placing a hook out to the left in some bad rock, then leaving that in place as a redirect and rapping a few metres further down into a band of better-quality rock. Once I'd put in some bolts down there, I gave the rope a good flick and my hook fell back down to me.

The next section was just totally featureless and there was nothing at all to hook, but it was still uncomfortably close to the waterfall which was throwing off a lot of spray. I spent a good 20 min running back and forth along that wall like an absolute hooligan, trying to catch this crack I could see way out to the left. I would run across the wall as far as I could and try and catch something with my hook, fail, and swing off back into the depths of the waterfall. And repeat. And repeat. And repeat (*that mental picture has made my day – Ed)*. It was infuriatingly close. I was getting enough distance maybe 1 in 5 swings, but not finding anything to catch the hook. Ultimately, I gave up on the hook, took a glove off and caught a slopey hand hold in the crack.

From there it was plain sailing, and I reached the bottom at about 2:30 pm. I had placed 5 rebelays (8 bolts) and used the remainder of the 80 m rope, and added a 76 m and a 48 m with maybe 3 m of rope to spare on the ground. So that's about 200 m of rope used and about nine rebelays in total. You can take a guess at how long that makes the pitch (my fingers are crossed for 154.4 m - *come on Jemma, I'm sure you can be a bit more precise than that - Ed*), but we'll have to go back and survey it to tell.

The bottom is relatively flat and open, but not huge. It's about 2 m wide and 15 m long before the rift really constricts in the downstream direction. There was a bit of a ledge in the main waterfall maybe 20 m above the bottom which makes the spray go everywhere, and it's really windy, so it's not a very pleasant place to hang out.

Downstream the rift stays high, but gets very narrow at stream level. I found it easier to traverse a few metres above the stream where it's a little wider. The stream continues along in the same direction as the main rift in a sequence of

pool-drops and a few small climbs. I stopped where it came to a ~10 m pitch. Beyond that it appears to keep going but stays pretty narrow.

Interestingly, there are four separate waterfalls that join the stream down there. There is the main waterfall; a trickle 5 m downstream in its own slot; a fairly significant other waterfall just around the corner from that; and a fourth, pretty small one that comes in partway down the narrow section. I wonder where they come from.

I meandered out again with plenty of time to spare before our scheduled meeting time. I tidied up the rebelays as I went. On the way up, I also noticed a rub point that will maybe require moving a bolt in the future. Just 2 m below the previous low point/last survey station there is a slight bulge which the rope just touches. I didn't fix it then and there because that rebelay is in the middle of a rope attached at either end to other rebelays, so it'll be a bit fiddly to change.

I arrived back at the meeting spot a smidge early. Just enough time for a quick power nap before Gab and Ciara turned up again frothing from their adventures. There must have been some change in gravity during the day because our packs were all way heavier on the way out.

Team Superspreader – Ciara & Gabriel

We've hypothesised that we must be getting very close to the surface at the end of Superspreader (SS), informed by a number of different clues, including intermittent draught, some vegetal debris, live crickets, countless small mammal skeletons and even snail shells, plus lots of dolerite. Meanwhile, LiDAR data also confirmed that we should be merely a few metres away from poking out of the ground, at the far end.

Ciara and I left Jemma to her own devices in Daily Cases and went up SS to take on our hottest lead, located at station DVF62. There, the main trunk of the SS streamway forks into two branches: a SW branch which peaks at the highest surveyed point up until now (only 10 m lower than the cave entrance) but doesn't go, and a SE branch, a steep boulder-filled rift with a visible void behind it. The latter is what we planned to work on.

After showing Ciara the bits of the cave she hadn't yet seen, I got to work on our lead: the cramped boulder choke at the very top of the steep rift. Above head, four dolerite boulders were in the way: the smallest the size of a watermelon, the biggest the size of half a washing machine. I finally managed to dislodge the two smaller ones, which went tumbling down the rift towards a sheltered Ciara, who was playing digger assistant.

[Ciara: The thrill of being actively involved in the excavation process didn't quite seem to match up with the apparent risk. Consequently, I'd found a nicely positioned alcove from where I could watch rocks fly down and crash, filling the chamber with the characteristic gunpowder aroma of freshly smashed dolerite.]

The two bigger boulders took a while longer, but finally gave way. Unfortunately, despite what I thought were reasonable precautions, the half a washing machine one had nowhere to go but on me. It landed on my bent knees and flat on my chest. It spanned from my crotch up to my neck, and I was holding it, or rather it was holding me, pushing me hard against the cave wall and roof. I couldn't move my body, except for both my arms, but these couldn't achieve any mechanical advantage in that position, and the weight of the boulder was pressing against my rib cage. I started freaking out a little, warning Ciara that it was looking pretty bad. She couldn't possibly help me either, because the space was too cramped and she would have put herself at huge risk. Not being able to move in over a minute, I started contemplating death, which would have been by exhaustion and suffocation, probably in under an hour, long before going hypothermic.

[Ciara: At this point the cascade of rocks ceased, and I could hear Gab swearing. There was a tone in his voice I hadn't heard before which suggested he was in genuine strife. I assumed a rock had pinned him and I immediately had visions of 127 Hours, except probably worse.]

The only wiggle room I seemed to have was undesirable: under my bum. But without any other solution and with the clock ticking, I tried lowering my torso under the boulder. To no avail: my helmet got stuck between the top of the boulder and the cave wall. Thankfully, my arms did serve a vital purpose, as I managed (just) to unbuckle my helmet with my left arm while giving the boulder extra support with my right arm. This allowed me to finally lower my torso and my head under and away from the boulder. This in turn gave me more leg room and so I could slowly squat and spread my knees, and then legs, to open a gap for the boulder to slide/plunge through.

It was a huge relief and… the cave was now wide open! We ate some lunch and pressed on. Through the newly created gap, a small chamber waited for us, with even more dolerite. It still went up steeply and soon got a bit tight again, but I dug more crud out of the way and made it just passable. There, at DVH7, a climbable aven departs NE in sculpted limestone and gets a bit narrow after 7 m up, but someone thinner and more game than me should try pushing it. It is fairly comfortable and there's plenty of solid footing and handholds.

[Ciara: While Gab was clambering about in space above me, I eyed off a fairly unlikely looking squeeze. I could see an inviting, airy passage just beyond that was too tempting to leave undone. The squeeze itself was short, but tight and sharp looking. I decided to give it a go, and to my surprise, with a bit of pushing, I just fitted through. I immediately checked out the passage beyond and realised that it was a worthy prospect. Returning to the squeeze I found Gab looking a bit bewildered. No matter how he contorted he just wouldn't fit through. While I collapsed in a fit of giggles Gab attempted to thump the offending corner into a more comfortable shape, but the rock wouldn't give an inch.]

Incredibly, next to the squeeze was another squeeze leading to the same spot, except that this one could actually be enhanced. Thus, we both dug yet again so I could fit my fat ass through it.

[Ciara: Initially I'd discounted this prospect as it looked impossible. It was a tight upwards squeeze without handholds or footholds. However, we were able to dig the floor out so Gab could just fit through, but not without significant difficulty. It was about this time that I realised that even if we found an alternative entrance in this passage, the squeezing and loose boulders would make it only a dubious preference to the current entrance.]

On the other side of the squeeze, the cave takes two 90° turns interspersed with wide corridors. Eventually, we were met with yet another uphill boulder choke. This one, however, was looking a lot scarier than the half a washing machine one. Much larger, it was formed of big dolerite boulders in a massive matrix of soft clay, with visible passage behind it. Not having had enough near-death experiences for one day, I started digging it out. While we did run out of a draught and other hints of the surface's proximity, we'd gained so much elevation at that point that I felt we had to keep going.

[Ciara: Wary from the adventures earlier in the day I stayed well back as Gab began prodding. A few small rocks fell out and I backed down into a nicely sheltered niche further down the slope.]

After two minutes of digging, the whole thing started to come apart. The clay was getting soaked presumably from a pool of water above and quickly liquefied into sludge (à la McSlurry, in Turret Cave). This was not a good sign, because the large boulders above could rapidly be undermined and collapse. Of course, my hubris got the better of me again, and sure enough, a large boulder knocked my helmet (somehow ripping off the lid of the battery case, never to be found again) and triggered a bloody avalanche of giant boulders, rocks, crud and slime. I quite literally started to run for my life, leapt and slid down the rocky slope without looking at where my feet were landing and sprinted away from the falling chaos behind me, never once looking back at it.

(Spoiler alert) they survived! Maybe that's why they look so happy. Photo: Jemma Herbert

About 10 m back, I turned a corner and threw myself into an alcove where Ciara was already taking cover, alarmed by the unfolding cacophony. A torrent of crap flew just past us in a deafening roar. This went on for a good 10-15 seconds, then it slowed down. I peeked around the corner to see if more was coming our way and indeed the whole structure was still deconstructing in real time. More stuff came down, including some big dolerite blocks. Ciara started worrying we'd get caved in, for good reason. Eventually, things subsided and the slope consolidated enough for us to leave our hideout safely. I scaled the debris field to retrieve my book and Disto, which fortunately had been left out of the way. It now looked a bit less unstable, although the sludge was still actively moving gravel around and trickling down on every visible surface.

[Ciara: This was by far the most dynamic movements of material I've ever seen underground. Audibly, it sounded like a dam wall had burst, releasing a torrent of liquid, sludge and large boulders all at once. From our small alcove, we could safely watch huge boulders fly down the passage in front of us. It was incredible, and terrifying. We had awoken the cave and it was not pleased that we were there.]

On the bright side, the way on was open again, but this time we decided we'd let it settle for a few weeks… In the next 30 minutes of surveying out, we would keep hearing stuff coming down in the distance. Truly terrifying.

[Ciara: In order to get the Disto shot up the newly opened lead, we had to leave the sheltered alcove and lean out into the exposed passage. Trying to get a shot at a moving slope while watching for rocks being hurled in our general direction was an experience I'll not soon forget.]

We tied this new section into DVF62 and felt it needed a name of its own, because it's so different from the rest of SS. We thought of different monikers in theme with the cave, and Pandemonium (pandemic/chaos) was the one we used throughout the rest of the day to refer to it, so I think it'll stick (*There is Pandemonium Rift in Pendant Pot already – Ed)*. The top of the horrible collapse is only 15 metres lower than Delta's entrance, and must in theory be extremely close to the surface, since it's also further downhill.

Back down at the DVF69 hub, we decided we had time to tick off one more lead before we were supposed to meet Jemma back at Daily Cases, around 5 pm. I suggested the grovel behind the young stalagmites and Ciara obliged. A 4-metre long, very low-profile crawl in water and slime reopens nicely into fossilised passage. There it forks into two narrow shoots, the left one going up into a nice little pocket of decorations (a hurl of very clean flowstone and stals/straws), the right one mirroring the left but without the pretties.

With 82 m of new passage hard won, we returned to a victorious Jemma, who easily defeated Daily Cases, finally. We were elated. Hugs, high-fives and banter ensued for the remainder of the day. It was an epic, excellent day, although I am very much aware that things could have gone very wrong. I am not sure how much was down to luck or resilience, but a combination of both probably kept us safe that day. I certainly learnt some lessons and I think I found my limits on this occasion.

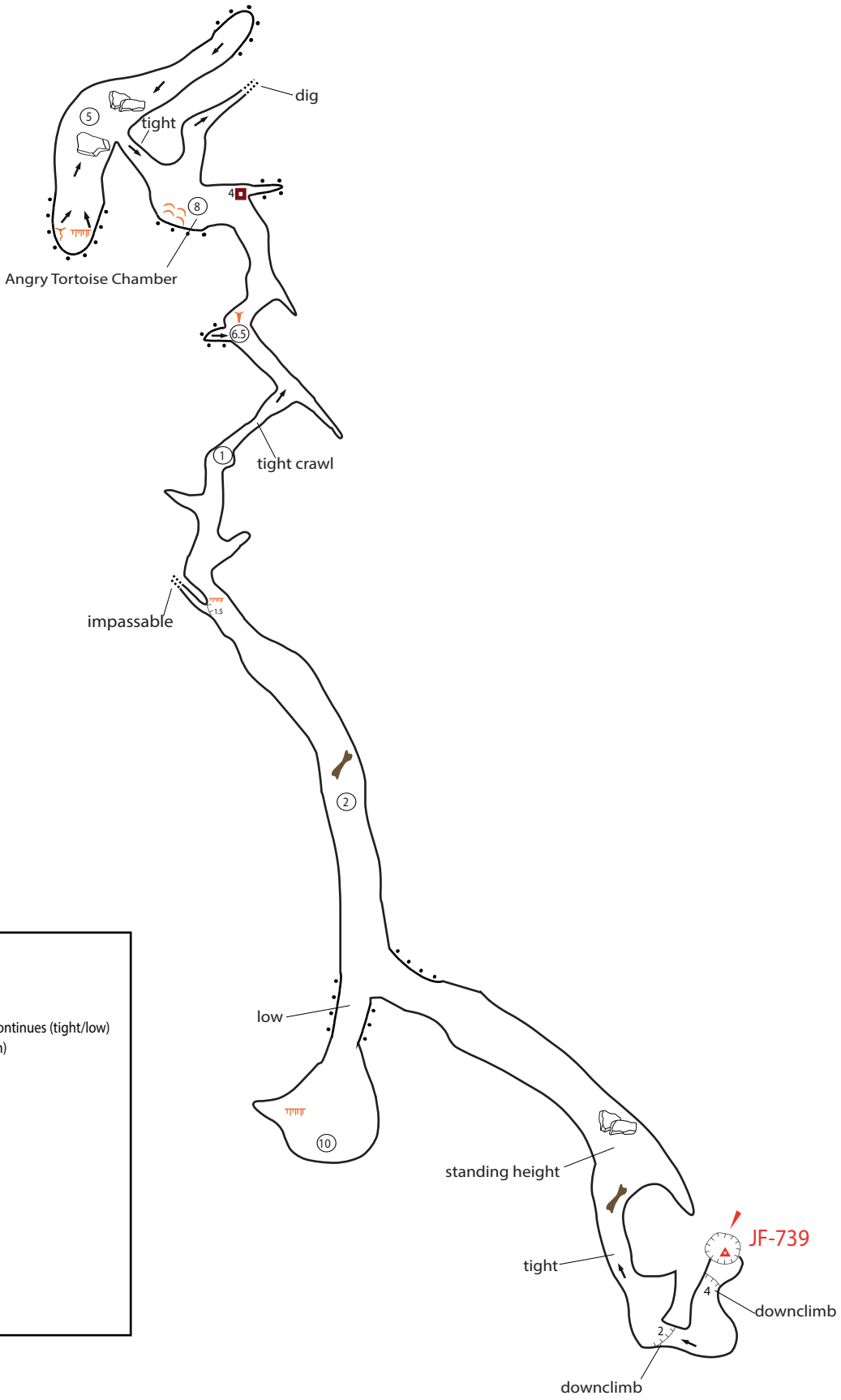
The three musketeers.

Photo: Jemma Herbert (in selfie mode)

JF-739 Pink Panther

Junee Florentine, Tasmania

7JF739.STC541
Surveyed by Ciara Smart, Gabriel Kinzler, John Oxley (23/04/2022)
Drawn by Ciara Smart (May 2022)
ASF Grade 54
Surveyed Length - 88 m
Surveyed Depth - 19.2 m



Other Exciting Stuff

ASF Insurance, and how to be covered

In the event of a serious accident, or worse, it is not uncommon for relatives or dependents of the affected person to seek compensation, especially if their income-earning capacity is reduced.

To be covered on a trip, it needs to be an official club activity - not a group of members going on a jolly.

The club must be up to date with ASF payments and the club members who participate need to be financial in the club.

Individuals, and specifically trip leaders, are covered by the insurance if a party member, or their family member, sues over a mishap on a trip, assuming it is an official club trip.

All ASF members are covered by the insurance, regardless of whether they are a member of the club running the trip.

If the trip includes a non-ASF member:

If ASF members caused a non-member to suffer a (physical, financial) loss on a trip, the ASF members are insured as usual (this was the case in Midnight Hole – see *SS* 422). If a non-member caused ASF members to suffer a loss on a trip, the non-member is not insured by us. Important: Landowners are always insured if it's an official club activity.

The STC rules determining an official club trip:

1. Each participant must have signed a disclaimer. There is a disclaimer in the membership application form, so this condition is probably met for any current financial member.
2. There should be an approved Trip Leader. They must be "rated" for the level of the trip (horizontal, vertical, exploration). *We have a list of Trip Leaders which is reviewed and updated from time to time.*
3. The Trip Leader shall notify the Public Officer, or a member of the Executive in the interim, **before a trip occurs** with the date of the trip, the location of the trip and the proposed participants. The method of notification is determined by the Executive. An SMS, or email, to the Public Officer is a good enough means of communicating the required information. If you can't contact the Public Officer (PO), then a similar means of contacting an executive member will work. *Names and contact details of the PO and Executive are on page 2 of* Speleo Spiel.
4. The implications from not following point 3 (Rule 8.1 (c)) is that the Trip Leader, and party members, may not be indemnified in the event of an accident and subsequent legal action.

It's not hard to do, so I recommend we all take advantage of the insurance that we pay for and make sure our trips are covered. It's up to Trip Leaders, but if a member of a party wants to ensure they are covered if someone sues them for an occurrence on a trip then make sure your Trip Leader has covered the bases.

STC Trip Leaders

To qualify as an official STC trip there needs to be a club-recognised Trip Leader. There is a list of these. We even have four categories; Horizontal, Ladders (yes, old hat but this is there), Basic SRT, Exploration SRT. This list is reviewed from time-to-time.

I will publish an updated list in the next *Spiel.* For now, I want to cover a few points to remind you all of what the procedure is to become a Trip Leader, and the responsibilities you take on in that capacity. I'll try to be brief:

- The procedure to become a Trip Leader is pretty easy. You tell the Executive that you would like to be a Trip Leader. That's it. Usually you start at Horizontal, and the SRT later if you wish, after some experience leading groups without the added dramas of ropes. In some cases, the Executive may approach a caver and suggest they apply. Asking to be one doesn't automatically mean you will be made one. The Executive need to be confident that you have the skills, knowledge, concern for your party members' safety, common sense and good judgement skills to lead a party.
- The Trip Leader is ultimately responsible for the members allowed on the trip and the decisions made on the trip. The more inexperienced the other party members the more responsibility the Trip Leader has for their safety. A beginner's trip would be the epitome of this. For experienced groups of cavers, it is considered within STC that the dynamics of peer group caving with the sharing of leadership and knowledge, and the changes in leadership roles within these groups, makes it a much less rigid experience. However, for insurance and legal reasons, there is still a Trip Leader designated, with final responsibility.
- Applying to the level of trip they are leading, Trip Leaders need to have:
    - Sufficient physical skills and fitness
    - Technical knowledge
    - Knowledge of risk factors relevant to the caving trip
    - Minimal Impact caving knowledge
    - People skills – including the ability to judge members of the party's skills, mental state and physical state.
    - Ability to deal calmly in an emergency

Of course, the list of attributes one would expect to see in a competent Leader could be very long, but the above covers the basics. The take-home message is that it isn't just about being able to do the cave yourself, however easy or challenging, that's what a party member needs to be able to do, it's about having the skills, knowledge and personal attributes to LEAD others and look out for their welfare.

Janine McKinnon STC Training Officer

USA: Washington and Oregon Coasts, 2019

Greg Middleton

After a cruise through the Northwest Passage across the top of Canada in September 2019 which finished in Vancouver, BC, I took a road trip south into the NW USA. I was accompanied by a friend from Vancouver, Ale Saldarriaga.

On 5 October we drove to the US border at Blaine and crossed at the 'Peace Arch'. We had minimal delay as I had entered the US only a couple of weeks before at Nome, Alaska. We drove south on US-5 through Seattle, WA and Portland, OR as far as Roseburg, where we turned west to the Pacific Coast. We reached it at Brandon and drove south. This coast is pretty wild with lots of sea cliffs and remnant sea stacks.

We stopped at Otter Point where we saw our first sea cave, a quite impressive arch (Photo 1).

Photo 1. Large sea arch at Otter Point.

There was clearly no way we could get down to it and anyway, the arch had the sea running through it. Walking south around the cliffs, we spotted the entrance to a sea cave (Photo 2) but again, entry was not possible.

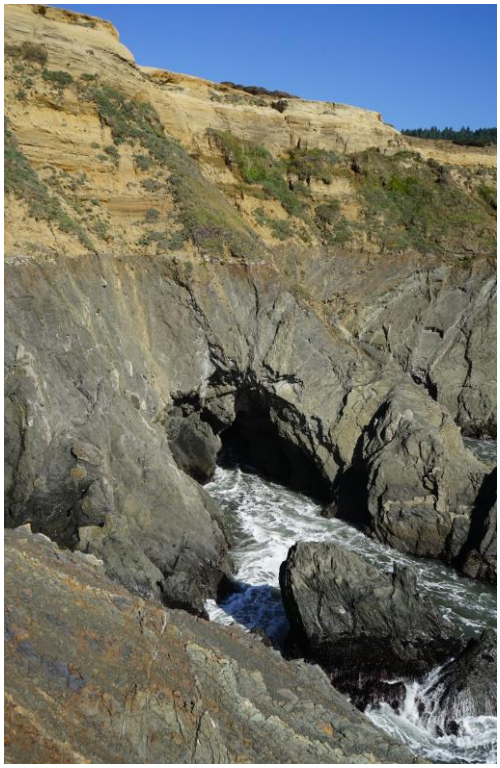


Photo 2. Sea cave on south side of Otter Point.

Travelling further south, we came to Cape Sebastian and then, Myers Creek Beach with its Cave Rock. The rock is an elongated island with a large sea cave through it, forming an arch (Photo 3).

Photo 3. Cave Rock and its central sea arch.

Continuing south, we came to Arch Rock Point in the Samuel H. Boardman State Scenic Corridor which, of course, provides good views of Arch Rock (Photo 4). The reserve is named in honour of the first Oregon Parks superintendent.

Photo 4. Arch Rock.

A little further south along State Highway 101, you come to the lookout point for Natural Bridges. There are at least two natural bridges, probably more, in the maze of steep rock stacks, rocky inlets and rocky points along the shore here (Photo 5).

Photo 5. The Natural Bridges.

To the left of the left bridge there appeared to be another cave through which waves were surging (Photo 6) and another sea cave behind.

Photo 6. The higher Natural Bridge and the apparent inlet on its south side, in the foreground. There appears to be another sea cave in the background.

We tried, unsuccessfully, to reach a better viewpoint to see into the cave from which water was emerging but the topography and the light were against us (Photo 7).

Photo 7. Another angle on the left Bridge and the outlet to its left.

I found a great image on the web which purports to be another angle on this site (Photo 8), clearly in different light.

Photo 8. 'Samuel H. Boardman State Scenic Corridor' – Vadim Mynaylovsky, May 2019.

From here we drove south via Brookings and into the State of California to visit a particularly fine redwood grove, Stout Grove, in the Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park.

Next morning we turned north to drive back up the coast on Highway 101. Our first stop was at Cape Arago where the Simpson Reef (Photo 9) hosts vast quantities of noisy seals and sea lions.

Photo 9. Simpson Reef, Cape Arago.

Further north we came to a sign advertising 'America's largest sea cave' (Photo 10).

Photo 10. Sign proclaiming 'Sea Lion Caves' as America's largest sea cave.

At the site we found a huge gift shop perched on the cliff above the cave. Inside, by the ticket desk, is a sign reading:

> *"Sea Lion Caves is the world's largest sea cave.* [If they were so sure of that why not upgrade the roadside signs?] *It is a naturally formed underground cavern accessed by elevator. This area may be subject to natural events and geologic processes such as earthquakes, erosion and landslides as well as earth, water and rock movement. Visitor agrees to assume all risks of these hazards."*

A diagram showing the lift and walkway in the cave provided the only hint at interpretation (Photo 11).

Photo 11. Cutaway diagram of the lift to the cave and walkway inside.

A large monitor showed an apparently real-time image inside the cave (Photo 12).

This image appeared to show there were no sea lions in the cave at the time. I bought some post cards and we continued on our way north.

Photo 12. Real-time view in the Sea Lion Cave.

Next stop was Cape Perpetua where a road bridge carries Highway 101 right over Cooks Chasm (a narrow inlet in the volcanic rock) and Spouting Horn – a blowhole that was not spouting under the prevailing sea conditions. Nearby, Devils Churn, another narrow inlet, was also not displaying.

A few kilometres further north we came to Devils Punchbowl State Natural Area, containing a large unroofed sea cave known as Devils Punchbowl (Photo 13).

An interpretive sign nearby claimed that at the time of a stormy high tide, this is a scene of "a wild party" – not this day. The sign went on to suggest that "Devils Punchbowl likely formed when the roofs of two adjacent sea caves fell in." Perhaps there is evidence below but I wondered why it is necessary to imagine two adjacent caves had to have collapsed here, when one would probably have sufficed. In any case, it is a dramatic landscape feature.

Later we drove the Three Capes Loop via Pacific City and the aptly named Haystack Rock, with its odd little side arch (Photo 14).

Photo 13. Devils Punchbowl – an unroofed sea cave.

Photo 17. Twin Rocks off Rockaway Beach, Oregon.

Photo 14. Haystack Rock and its side arch.

Then, further north, from Andersons Viewpoint, we got a first distant view of Three Arch Rocks. These three islands are so far distant that it is hard to see the arches – one in each island – with the naked eye and I did not have a telephoto lens for my camera so I tried, with limited success, to photograph them through a binocular lens (Photo 15).

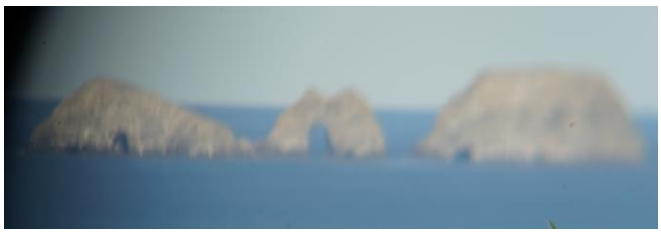


Photo 15. A blurry image of Three Arch Rocks.

As we approached these rocks, at the northern end of Netarts Bay, we were at the wrong angle to see the arches so could not get a better picture.

The rocks are again visible from Cape Meares, to their north, but only two of the arches are visible and then, not well (Photo 16).

Photo 16. Three Arch Rocks from Cape Meares

Continuing north, one comes to Rockaway Beach with its spectacular 'Twin Rocks' just off the coast. One of these (it is actually a single island) has a huge sea arch (Photo 17). According to the local website (http://www.rockawaybeach.net/see-do/natural-wonders/twin-rocks/) the rock is 26.8 m high and the opening of the arch is 10.6 m across. The Twin Rocks are comprised of 20-30-million-year-old marine sandstone. The rocks are the town's signature feature and form an element of the local police badge (Photo 18).

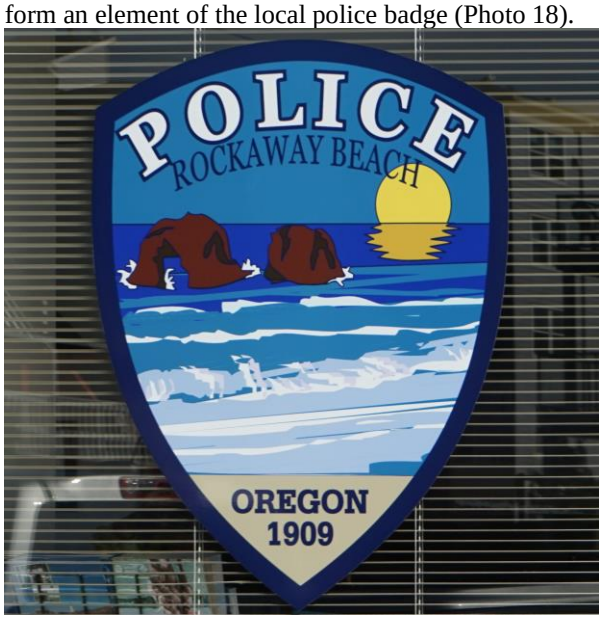


Photo 18. Twin Rocks and their large sea arch feature on the badge of Rockaway Beach's police.

At the town of Astoria, we crossed the Columbia River back into the State of Washington.

Much further north, at La Push, there are many more in-shore rock stacks (Photo 19).

Photo 19. Rock stacks offshore at La Push.

At the end of Second Beach, La Push, we spotted a narrow sea arch (Photo 20).

Photo 20. Arch at Second Beach, La Push.

At La Push we heard about the Hole in the Wall to the north and, after a failed attempt mislead by Google Maps, we drove to Rialto Beach, north of the Quileute River, and walked north along the beach, eventually reaching the Hole (Photos 21, 22).

Photo 21. Hole in the Wall from the south.

Photo 22. Hole in the Wall close-up.

It was quite easy to walk through this arch at the low tide level we encountered. The view is probably better from the north side (Photos 23, 24, 25).

Photo 23. Hole in the Wall from the north.

Photo 24. Reflection in pool on northern side of Hole in the Wall.

This is a great arch, well worth the effort of the 3-4 km walk to get to it.

I can thoroughly recommend the drive along the wild Pacific coast of Washington and Oregon.

Photo 25. Looking south through Hole in the Wall to a large rock stack.

Sandstone Caves near Risdon Vale

Greg Middleton

U3A Cave, above Risdon Vale

In our continuing search for non-calcareous caves in southern Tasmania, Ros Skinner and I were tipped off about the existence of yet another a cave in the Meehan Range, this time above Risdon Vale, by a bushwalking blog (Pindell 2014) which stated: "After a good climb, we reached another turnoff for the caves and Morning tea. This was had in Bob's Cave, named for our leader." Also included was this photo, which placed this cave firmly on our "To Find" list:

Photo 1. This pic convinced us this cave was worth looking for. [Photo from Pindell 2014

As usual, the blog post didn't give location details for features visited so we just had to try to follow the described route, trusting it would lead us to the cave. We set out to do this on 21 October 2021.

Although this cave turned out not to be on a formed track, the sandstone outcrop in which it is located is readily visible from one so it was fairly obvious when we should start looking. It didn't take us long to identify the cave – Photos 2 and 3.

Photo 2. It was clear this was the cave reported by the U3A group.

It didn't take long to carry out a survey (Fig. 1).

When considering a suitable name, we declined to adopt "Bob's Cave" used by the U3A group but instead called it after the institution from which the group came, hence 'U3A Cave'.

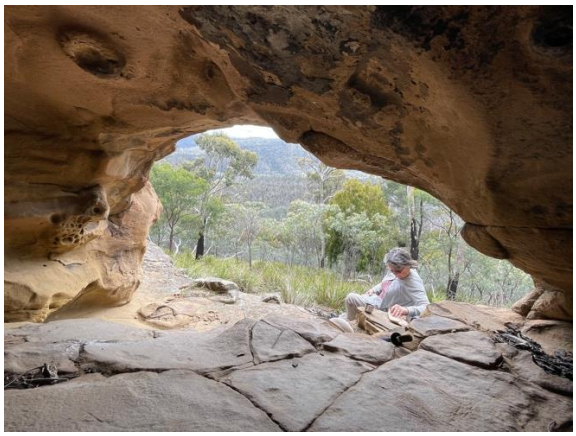


Photo 3. Looking out of the U3A cave.

In searching the sandstone outcrop, we found only one other cave of any size, slightly higher up. Someone before us had clearly noticed the cave as they had built a crude barrier of sticks across the entrance (Photo 4). It was a marginal case, but in view of its small size I didn't consider it worth surveying.

Photo 4. Small cave with entrance partly covered by wooden barricade. Someone had had a fire and left a cooking pot.

Caves in Sugarloaf Hill

We were alerted to the existence of caves in Sugarloaf Hill, between Risdon Vale and Lindisfarne, by STC member Bill Nicholson. Bill had told us how, in his youth, he had played in a large sandstone cave on this prominent, though hardly sugarloaf-shaped, hill (Photo 5). On 4 August 2021 we went looking for the cave. We approached the hill from the north (Risdon Vale) side and soon spotted outcropping sandstone.

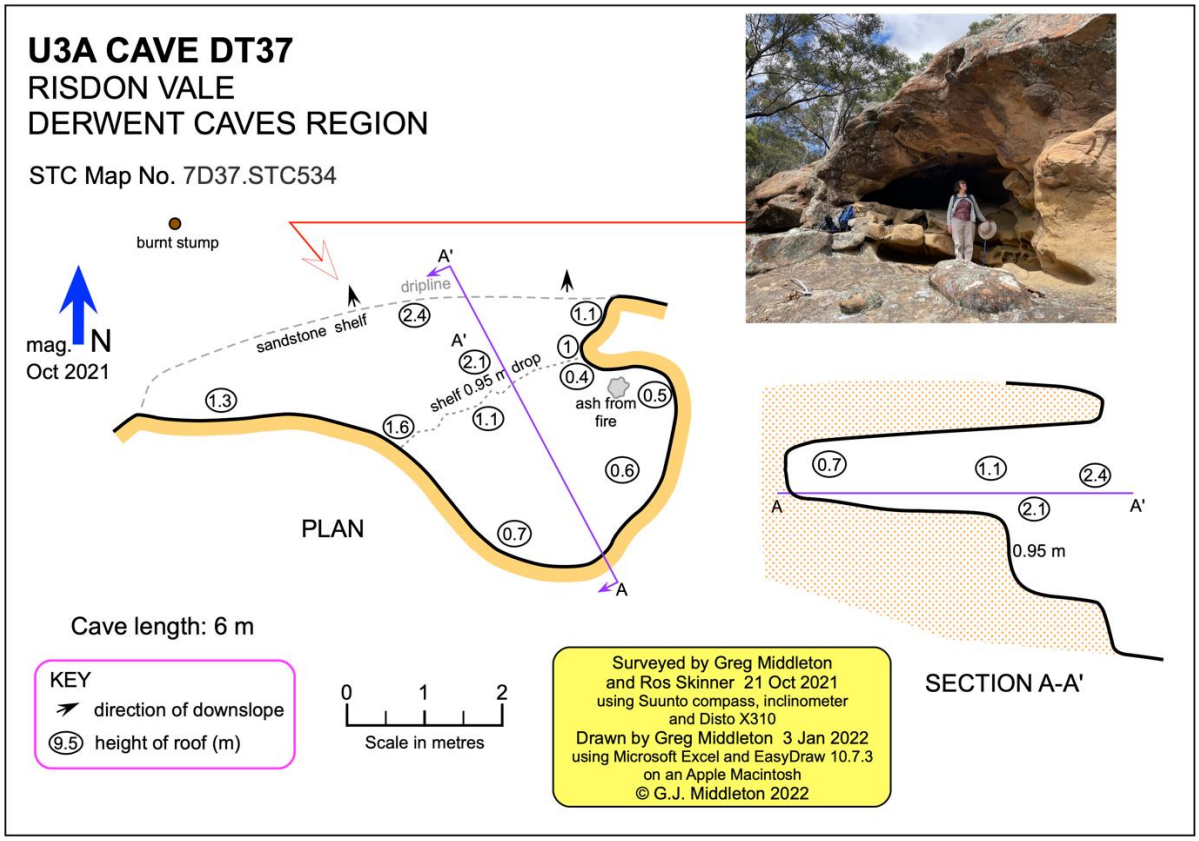


Fig. 1. Survey of U3A Cave DT37.

Photo 5. Sugarloaf Hill from Risdon Vale; prominent, but hardly a 'sugarloaf'.

Unfortunately, the outcrop, and what appeared likely to be the cave, were obviously on private property (i.e. they were fenced). We went to the house which seemed most likely to be the owners' (Photo 6) but they told us they had sold that land to their son-in-law. We contacted him but found him less than enthusiastic about our visiting the cave(s). After further negotiating he eventually came around and agreed that we could look at the cave, provided he accompanied us.

It was not possible to arrange a 'joint' visit until 26 November 2021, when we gained access to the land higher up the hill, in the company of the owner.

Photo 6. View from the house, 4 August; surely the cave Bill had told us about but this is as close as we could get.

We approached the hill from the south and east and the owner showed us a few small caves, implying that was all there was. I was keen to get to the northern side where I was sure the large cave was located. On the way, however, we did find a couple that attracted our attention.

First, there was a small opening, about 0.8 m in diameter, in a vertical face. Graffiti artists had attempted to improve its appearance, but failed (Photo 7). It is a quite unusual cave in sandstone, consisting of a near-round tube going straight into the rock and opening up to form a chamber – as shown in the survey (Fig. 2) and Photo 8.

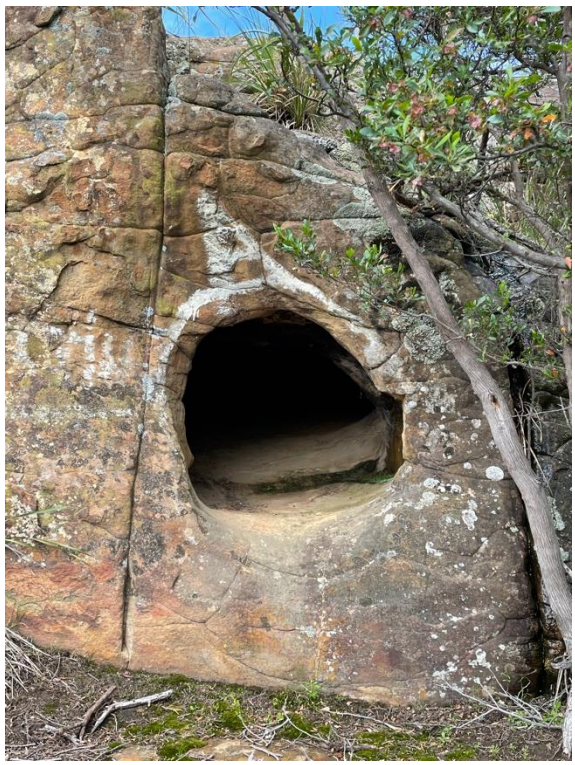


Photo 7. Entrance to Sugarloaf Tube DT38.

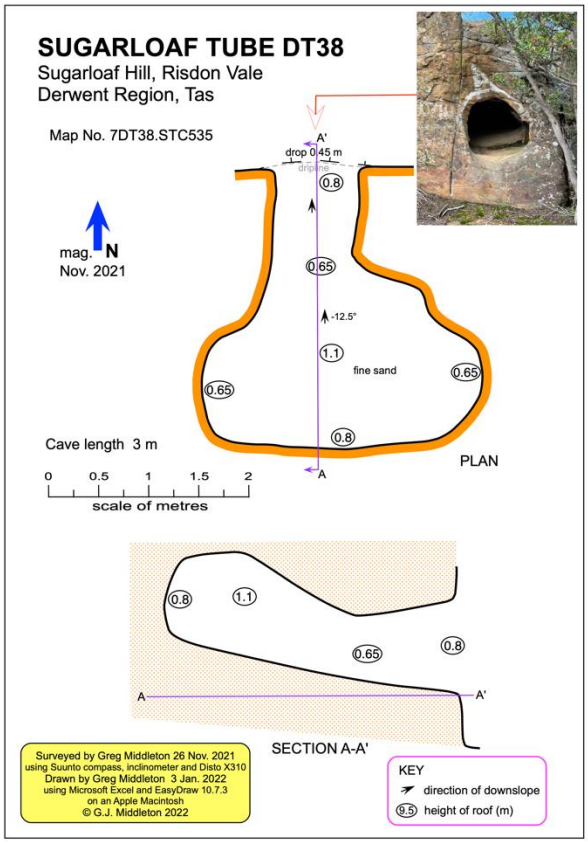


Fig. 2. Survey of Sugarloaf Tube DT38.

The chamber contained many spiders and their webs. The ceiling was coated with a black substance which may be soot but there was no evidence of recent fires. The chamber was remarkably dry. Low-level sound resonated unusually well in the chamber.

Photo 8. Looking out the tube to the entrance of Sugarloaf Tube DT 38.

Next, we found a small, single-chambered cave which seemed worth recording (Photo 9).

Its most distinctive feature is a ledge, about 35 cm wide, across the roof just inside the entrance, displaying tafone erosion, as shown in Photo 9.

As it was the second cave we recorded here we called it just Sugarloaf Cave 2 (DT39). I carried out a rapid survey (Fig. 3).

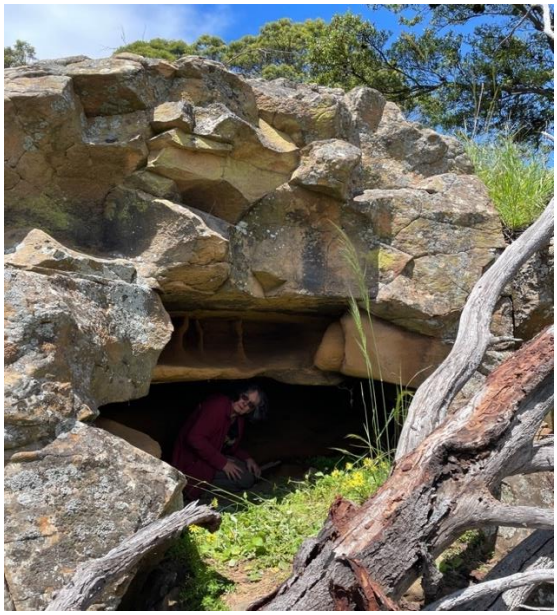


Photo 9. Entrance to Sugarloaf Cave 2 DT39.

As our host was indicating our time was running out, I hurried on to find the large cave we had come here to record. A short distance further around on the north face of the hill, we found it. The cave, as we had glimpsed on 4 August, has an impressive, north-facing entrance (Photo 10). At first glance it appears to be a high overhang, littered with breakdown boulders and not very deep. Closer inspection reveals a passage going in and a comfortable chamber at the back of the overhang. I had to complete the survey quickly (Fig. 4) as the owner wanted to end our visit early.

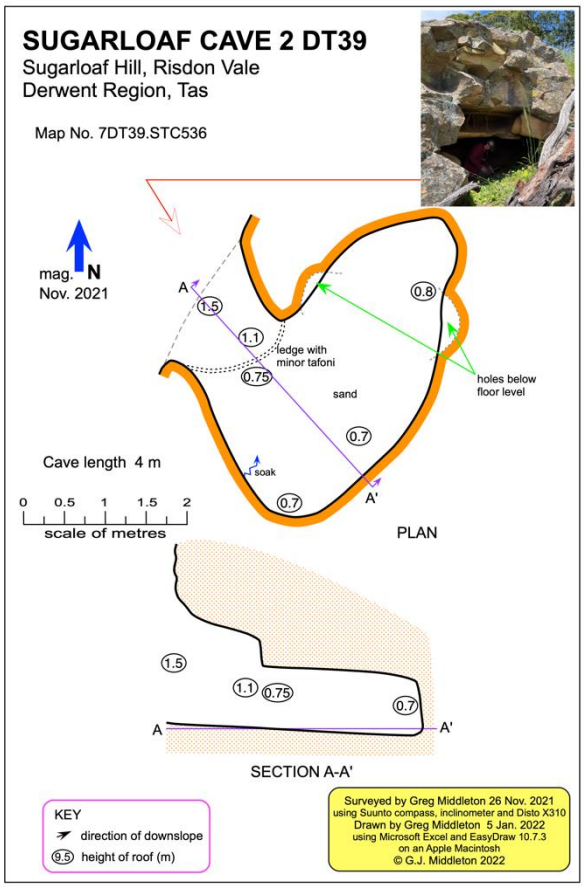


Fig. 3. Survey of Sugarloaf Cave 2 DT39.

Photo 10. Sugarloaf Cave entrance (compare with Photo 6)

There are other caves on the hill which may justify recording but our limited time prevented further work on this occasion.

REFERENCE

Pindell, Jack 2014 Risdon Vale (2). Ramblings (Unofficial posts of U3A Kingborough Bushwalkers). https://ageramblings.blogspot.com/201

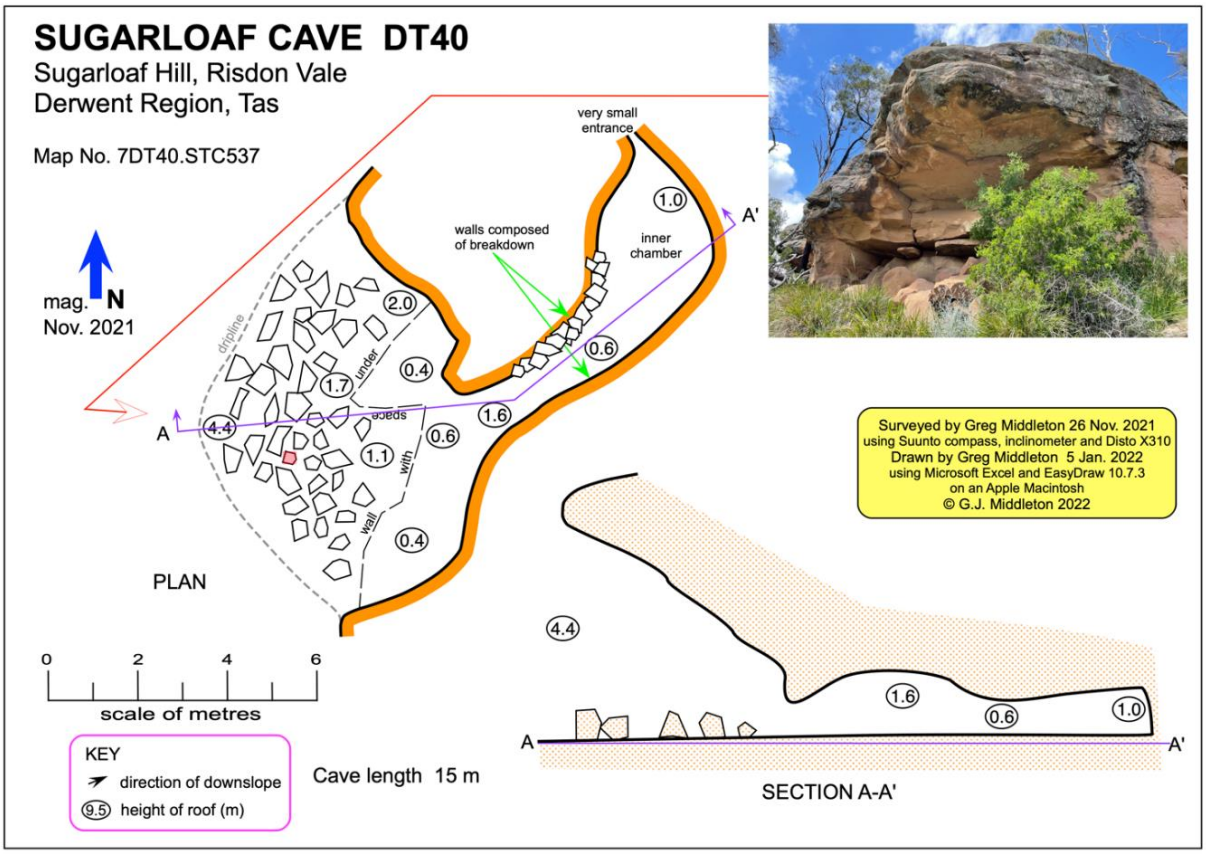


Fig. 4. Survey of Sugarloaf Cave DT40 (the inner chamber is approximate due to having to end our visit at short notice.)

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