

Newsletter of Southern Tasmanian Caverneers Inc. ISSN 2208-1348

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**Front Cover**: Henry's little sister's portrait of him caving. What's not to love about this. Note the harness. Drawing: Ingrid Garratt

**Back Cover:** Hand-model Chris McMonagle presents the new padlock on the South Mole Creek access road. Photo: Chris McMonagle

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

# Speleo Spiel

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The views expressed in the *Speleo Spiel* are not necessarily the views of the Editor, or of the Southern Tasmanian Caverneers Incorporated.

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## **Editorial**

I haven't left myself room to say much this issue. Many may think that a blessing. You will notice that the issue covers three months, not two. That will continue whilst I am Editor.

That means that this issue covers the AGM, which is held every March. Office Bearers' reports are in here, towards the back, so you can read the more entertaining stuff first.

The caving year has got off at a fast pace, as you will see. Given the enthusiasm amongst the current club members, I expect that to continue throughout the year. You can expect lots of exciting stuff to read in the coming months.

## Stuff 'n' Stuff

## Cave Animal of the Year

As you may have seen in Caves Australia, the 2023 Australian Cave Animal of the Year is Australian glowworms.

The merchandise is now available, and we've received lots of positive comments about the beautiful artwork and design. You can see photos of the merchandise at the Cave Animal of the Year website.

Glowworms | Australian Cave Animal of the Year

Cave Animal of the Year 2023 merchandise now available | Australian Cave Animal of the Year

We have the same range of award-winning products as per the last four years:

Bookmarks: this is our 'flagship' piece for spreading the 'Cave Animal' message. Free of change. Order for yourself and your friends. Can you take some bookmarks to distribute via places such as cave reserves, national park offices, outdoor shops, local school, Scout groups, Girl Guides, bushwalking clubs, etc.? Free of charge.

Posters: A3 in size and free of charge. But (as per previous years) these are intended for public spaces and not for private homes and offices. Outdoor shops, public foyers, universities, Scout and Girl Guide halls, classrooms, local library would all be great places to display posters.

Stickers: free of charge. Order for yourself and your friends, Scouts, Girl Guides, school students, cave visitors.

Tea/coffee mugs: \$10 each.

## Details I need re your order:

- 1. Exactly how many stickers and bookmarks you need. A lot of people ask for 'a few' which can mean vastly different things to different people.
- Where you plan to display any posters that you order.

## Payment:

I will email and invoice for any mugs and you can pay via bank transfer.

Any queries, please be in touch with me at: <a href="https://hello@caveanimaloftheyear.org.au">hello@caveanimaloftheyear.org.au</a>

#### Cathie Plowman



A glowworm, to brighten up the page and for those that don't know what they are. Although I doubt this will help.

Photo: Dave Merritt

#### Problems with Sassafras Cave block access solved

The property that borders the Sassafras Cave block of MCKNP (Baldocks, Sassafras, My Cave, etc.) 'Springwater Farm' has recently been purchased by a local landowner who is now running cattle on the block. He was unaware of the existing arrangement (recently moved to Tas from NT) and was not granting access. Unfortunately, the access arrangement that Parks had with the previous owner was not formal and Parks have since discovered that the reserved road we were using is not public, and therefore we didn't have a right of way without the landowner's permission.

Luckily, Chris McMonagle has come to the rescue (no doubt with a little help from his fellow Parks officials) and the problem has been sorted.

He is happy to advise that the PWS combination lock has been reinstated on the South Mole Ck access rd.

The combination is available for permit caving trips.

## Rescue training at Lost World

Jemma Herbert is continuing her excellent job of motivating and organising rescue practice training. The February event saw six of us playing aerial acrobats (well, only the patient got to do that) with stunning views on a wonderfully warm (but not too hot) and still Hobart evening. Ciara Smart volunteered to be in the stretcher.



A unique view of Lost World and Hobart.

Photo: Jemma Herbert

## **Trip Reports**

## Microplastics Sampling – Junee Cave (JF-8), Nameless Spring (JF-459) and Lawrence Rivulet Rising (JF-390)

18 December 2022

Chris Sharples

Party: Chris Sharples, John Webb

The Science Officer's job has turned out to involve more work – but to be more interesting – than I envisaged when I originally agreed to merely warm the Science Officer's seat at STC meetings. I will have more to say separately about the *Anaspides* project, but right now I think I should put on record that STC has also recently contributed to a global scientific survey of microplastics in groundwater.

Back in October 2022 the secretary passed on to me an innocuous-seeming email from one Anne Robertson who is a Professor of Ecology at the University of Roehampton in London, UK. She is managing a project which is seeking to sample groundwaters from boreholes, springs, and caves all over the world and test them for the presence of microplastics (i.e. microscopic pieces of humanity's abundant plastic throwaways). You can find more about this project at: <a href="Plastyx: Microplastics in Groundwater Ecosystems">Plastyx: Microplastics in Groundwater Ecosystems</a>. Given how widely microplastics are present on Earth (and even parts of Mars by now I suspect), it will probably not be surprising to find them underground. I understand this project is the first attempt to assess this issue at a global scale.

Anne's email was a request to undertake groundwater sampling at three Tasmanian karst springs from the same aquifer (however that may be defined) using equipment and a protocol she would provide. The only catch was I needed to get a stainless-steel water bucket (no plastic bucket contamination allowed), which I ended up buying for a princely sum from the local ship chandlers (Peter Johnsons). Yes, I know, but it's the first good quality bucket I've ever owned, and I'm so proud of it! The sampling kit arrived quickly in the mail comprising stainless steel gauze water filters of two very fine sizes and a means to hold them while water was poured through them.

After not too much thought, I selected Junee Cave, Lawrence Rivulet Rising and my favourite, Nameless Spring as three suitable karst springs in the Junee-Florentine karst aquifer (even if they aren't actually hydrologically connected, they are still in the same contiguous Ordovician limestone aquifer... I think...). John Webb was interested in assisting, so on 18 December 2022, we visited the outflows of my three chosen karst spring caves wearing as much cotton and leather and as little plastic as possible to avoid contaminating the water. That meant no polyester thermals, but we still needed our (plastic) helmets as a light platform (at least in Junee Cave) but specified we had worn them on the sample collection notes so this fact could be considered in evaluating the analysis results. But anyway, none of the sampled water touched our helmets, we were so careful!

We took it in turns to bucket 300 litres of water through the filters at each spring while another filter stayed dry in the adjacent ambient air for comparison. That was 30 buckets of water out of the spring and into the filter holder. A bit tedious but we got it done, then carefully packed the filters in glass vials with distilled water ready for a courier to get them quickly to a lab in the UK. Whether the thin film of "muck" we could just distinguish on the filters would turn out to include microplastic particles is the big question now! I am currently waiting to hear the project results with some trepidation. But as always in science, there may well be some surprises when the results come back.



John Webb sampling water in Junee Cave, just out of sight of tourists. Photo by Chris Sharples.



Chris Sharples sampling water at Nameless Spring entrance. Photo by John Webb.

# JF-237 Niggly Cave and JF-761 Delta Variant Project Continuation

## December 2022 - January 2023

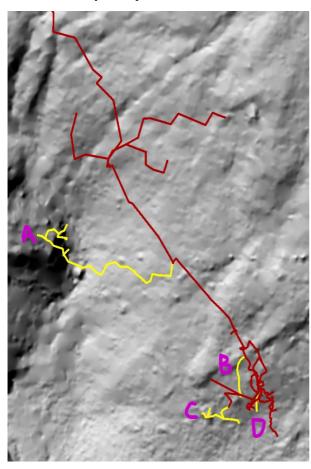
Stephen Fordyce (photos and text)

**Party:** Stephen Fordyce, Henry Garratt, Jemma Herbert, Ciara Smart, Petr Smejkal

Well by the time there were two camping trips and a couple of day trips, ten days were spent in Niggly/Delta over the month, including new year. The full range of fun times, tantrums, frustrations and silliness were experienced, but the Biohazard Sump was dived, the Gemstone Climb was conquered, nearly half a kilometre of survey (475 m) was added and the terminal "Meru" rockpile ended up with more going leads than when we started (dammit).

I'd better lay out the de facto nomenclature which seems to have emerged:

- A "Niggly trip" involves doing things at base level, even if accessed via Delta Variant (DV).
- A "Delta Variant trip" involves minimal if anything at base level and could be via either the JF-761 Delta Variant original entrance (now de-rigged), or the alternate entrance JF-758 Negative RAT Hole.
- Both caves are also part of the JF-36 Growling Swallet system, and since that's the lowest number, it technically takes precedence.



The downstream end of Niggly currently, with recent survey in yellow. A is Sliding Doors, B is Butterfly Effect, C is Dental Exception, and D is Sketchy Evens.

# 29 December 2022 – Niggly #1, day 1: DV rigging improvements, early dive fail

Henry hadn't taken too much convincing to make his first Niggly camping trip a 5-dayer, and I quietly said to a few people that one of us could well be crying by the end, and it probably wasn't going to be him. The first day turned out to be a bit longer than anticipated, as it was nearly midnight by the time we rolled into camp.

The plan was for us to carry in all the dive gear, as well as a drill and gear for polishing the Delta Variant rig and making it proper worthy of a trade route. So, it was a brutal slog up the hill, and only a bit less so getting through Superspreader with 4 bags worth of gear (2 of minimalist dive gear, 1.5 of camping gear, and 0.5 of rigging/survey gear) and only 3 bags to put them in. So, we wore our SRT kits and hung whatever we could off them. Joy. The Negative RAT Hole entrance was also found to be an EXTREMELY tight fit for our overpacked caving bags, and much kicking was required to get them down (this was improved later).

We reconfigured for vertical, did a radio check and headed down Daily Cases – shifting the single concrete screw which gave a rub. At some other point, we shifted the double anchor with 4 maillons a bit to rescue 2 of them. So Daily Cases was now sweet and we proceeded to Close Contact. At this point, a discussion was had about the dive gear – one of Henry's bags had made a loud noise. While not a true brown pants moment, it had been a bit unpleasant. Luckily, I hadn't told him how much TNT equivalent he was carrying.

The SCUBA tank in the bag was checked, the DIN plug found to be loose and the valve open. The tank was still covered in ice and was empty. The valve knocking open happens now and again, but the DIN plug being loose as well was a first for me. I hadn't packed anything to transfill with, and half-empty 3 L cylinders weren't very inspiring to push with. So, we abandoned the dive gear at the start of Close Contact, just remembering to collect the DistoX from its dive housing.

Perfecting the rigging in Close Contact took a long time, but we shared duties around. It hadn't really been touched since originally put in during an acute gear shortage. Thanks Alan for your detailed notes, a copy of which were taken in and cross-checked. There are now three pitches, with proper access lines, double anchors in all places best practice would dictate. A few tweaks for improved ease of use might be possible, but they are pretty damn safe. Some of the ropes are a bit long, so if 3-5 m of rope are needed elsewhere, it could be cut off in here.

It was getting pretty late by the time we signed off on Close Contact and went down Freedom Day. It was judged good enough, although traverse to the main drop would likely benefit from higher anchors at some point. Late as it was, the Niggly Waterfall Pitch definitely needed improving, although there was a lot less water than when we were here last in winter. The access to the pitch head and main anchors were good, but to mitigate the massive swing to the next rebelay that we'd all struggled with last time, I wanted to add another in between. A likely looking wall ridge proved to have a concrete screw hole in it already, so great minds think alike apparently (from the original aid climb rig). The swing was much more palatable and the last (double) anchor above the tyrolean was reconfigured. A few days later, Petr

improved this further by shifting one of the anchors to make the rebelay easier and avoid a rub. I reckon we can call that pitch fully optimised now.

We made a beeline for camp, arriving about 11:30 pm. The camp hadn't flooded (as expected, it was a very dry year) and the stuff stashed way up in Rockhampton was retrieved without trouble. Henry was suitably impressed with The Dunes campsite, became an aficionado of the pee-bag and slept well.

# 30 December 2022 – Niggly #1, day 2: Meru, Sliding Doors and Butterfly Effect

I think Petr might be the only one to have previously complained about being too hot in his sleeping bag, and Henry joined that club. Lucky bloody weirdos. The trip theme song "Caveman Dave" by Big Block Singsong got a good airing. My inflatable mat went down but the grungy foam mat underneath made life bearable. It was a bit of a struggle after the big day previous, but we had a suitable sleep in and allowed ourselves an "easy" day in Meru, as the terminal rockpile and approach passage is now named.

We made good time out there – with familiarity, it's really only 20 min to the Tennis Court rockpile, and another 30 min to the Meru rockpile. And since I had finally pulled together and tidied all the data from the last few years and drawn a map of the area (in the archive, but not suitable for publishing yet), route finding in the Meru rockpile was easy too. First, we went and did a proper scope-out of the Biohazard Sump – I'd forgotten a dive mask, but the water was surprisingly clear after we got down, and sticking the GoPro in showed it to be quite enticing, relatively speaking. We had a quick look at the Gemstone Climb nearby for the sake of familiarisation; it would be tackled in the coming days.

The detector was also swapped and Anaspides collected, so we didn't have to do that later. Then we did a thorough sweep of the south wall of the whole section between the Tennis Court and Meru rockpiles, which proved illuminating. The way through this large mostly streamless section of master cave is through and around large boulders and mudbanks, and the south wall in particular is often obscured. In 1993, Rolan Eberhard and Jeff Butt found a passage leading away from the master cave along here (see report and map in SC 58, p.25-26). They hadn't surveyed it, had reported a stream, and it was high time this bit of cave was revisited. Our recent dye tracing and survey results had suggested a decent-sized stream running south of the master cave, and perhaps there would be a way into it.

We found three leads heading away from the master cave, all at the base of the passage in rockfall. "Butterfly Effect" is a 50 m passage with clean-washed cobble floor going underneath Biohazard and ending with upwards muddy rockpile, or onwards clean-washed rockpile. Loose but scary (Petr poked at it later in the trip). The most direct (and clean-washed) entry is about 5 m downstream of where stream is found again under the Meru rockpile (and marked station K53), we made a cairn. There's another way around via a muddy slot from further back in the master cave passage.

The second lead that was found we couldn't relocate, despite several attempts! It's labelled #2 in mud writing (well below the flood line, so it will wash off). But right where the Jeff Butt sketch said it should be was the one discovered in 1993,

on the south wall, not far past where the stream disappears again, at base level behind some big rocks. We added a big obvious marked station (SH20) in the main passage, and headed on in, through a surprisingly tight but squishy diagonal mud squeeze. Presumably, this is what was dug out back in the day.

There followed a surprising amount of spacious, mostly walking passage (230 m of survey in total). We had increasingly high hopes for this well-documented but muchneglected lead - and it was named "Sliding Doors" for the movie of the same name where a small decision leads to two vastly diverging situations (clever name, I wish I could do that - Ed). Obviously formed by a stream, it is an enlarged meander, in some places up to 8 m high, but with solid ceiling visible. Other places are only 1 m high. There looked to be a few upper-level bypasses but nothing worth climbing up to. The floor and walls are noticeably muddy, without recent signs of flowing water, and the survey shows this passage converging with the master cave. So it's quite conceivable the stream it once carried runs parallel with the master cave for longer and converges later – that possibility is quite exciting, as it might bypass the Meru rockpile (as theorised by Jeff and Rolan too).

Towards the end, a mud slope joined the passage (I think Henry checked this and found it dead), and then another. Referencing Jeff's sketch, this was a good landmark and we followed it up through narrow rift passage with steep mud slope to a larger chamber (3 m x 6 m) with flat mud floor, 8 m aven, and another narrow rift passage leading upwards into tighter misery (Henry had a bit of a look, I didn't bother). There was no sign of recent water; perhaps this aven formed the bulk of the meander passage we'd followed thus far.

Back at base level, the horizontal passage continued onward, but in a muddy horizontal slot which narrowed quickly to become impassable. But from this otherwise unexciting slot came the sound of a goodly stream – which was given the suitably mythical name of "River of Babylon". Jeff's sketch had hinted at a small stream and a pool, but we could see no sign of either. The slot was later pushed on New Year's Day and thus named "Auld Lang Slime". It's still going...

Satisfied the day had been productive and mindful there was a lot to be done in future days, we headed back to camp, collecting a few Anaspides near the wash spot.

## 31 December 2022 – Niggly #1, day 3: Niggly science day

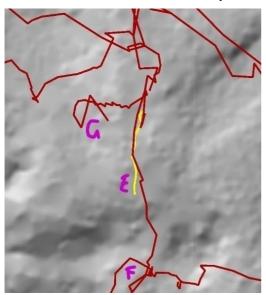
This was to be a light day for Henry and me, where we would travel fast and light to swap detectors, collect Anaspides and have a grand tour of the cave. The morning fortune cookie also correctly forecast that today "our joy would double" as Petr and Jemma arrived.

We first went to the DIY Sump and Mt Niggly, where we also took the opportunity to go into the big side passage near the original Mt Niggly campsite to look for junk floated in there by the great flood (a longstanding punch list item, as the lake up there stopped us previously). Stefan Eberhard had got there before us, as there were signs warning not to step on the mud formations and the clean-up had already been done.

Next, we zipped across the waterfall tyrolean to Atlantis and had a good stickybeak around looking at aid climbs – complete and prospective. Anaspides were collected (see

separate report), the detector in Downstream Atlantis was swapped, and we even had a bit of a poke around the rockpile where Vietnam opens up into Atlantis. It looked less interesting than I thought, although our look was pretty half-hearted.

We arrived back at the tyrolean just as Petr and Jemma were coming down the pitch – perfect timing! While Petr went back up to adjust things on the last rebelay of the pitch, Henry, Jemma and I went down to the base of the waterfall to survey the passage at the bottom. This is another item which has been on the punch list for a number of years and was great to check it off – there's about 30 m of quite nice walking passage before another couple of mud-choked awfulness which gets to a point of insanity. There's still a decent gap (~25 m) to where the water comes in via a sump in Atlantis Downstream, so it's academic really.



The base of waterfall passage is shown in yellow, it flows south (down) ending at E. G is the chamber up the waterfall, and F is where the water joins Lower Atlantis.

Camp was gained at a reasonable time, but Henry and I zipped out to nearly the Tennis Court rockpile to place a detector in anticipation of the JF-704 North Chrisps Swallet dye release that afternoon. Petr came too but used the small spade which has joined the ranks of Niggly tools to make the going a bit easier on the Spanish Mackerel mudbank and others.

As it was New Year's Eve, a celebration was in order. Chocolate mousse with unicorns was handed around and a banner was unfurled. The celebration was concluded when we went to bed at 9 pm.



Happy new year! (or more generically, "Party Ahoy")

# 1 January 2023 – Niggly #1, day 4: Gemstone Climb, Auld Lang Slime dig

Meru

Dye visual (thanks Lincoln)

Henry found bypass



100 dead Anaspides by your bed is a good recipe for nightmares (even if you only killed them with a permit, and for science)



Jemma whips something delicious with a fork taped to the drill...that's innovation

# 2 January 2023 – Niggly #1, day 5: Birthing day, Magic Beanstalk fail, Quarantine de-rig

The alarm successfully went off. Petr soon got sick of waiting for the rest of us and disappeared to de-rig Quarantine and meet us at the Negative RAT Hole entrance, where he would work on making it bigger while waiting for us. It turned out he had a lot of time to do that.

Jemma, Henry and I did pretty well by normal people standards and made our way up. At Daily Cases, we excitedly arranged for Jemma to stay at the bottom and clip bags on while Henry and I did stuff at the top station. The radios worked pretty well, although the signal got a bit patchy while Jemma was around the corner out of the worst of the waterfall wind at the bottom with the three bags. She would hook them on, the Magic Beanstalk would pull them up, and everything would be fine and dandy.

Sadly, the Magic Beanstalk tangled horribly almost immediately. In hindsight, the 0.5 m spreader bar at the top and no spreading at the bottom was unlikely to be a match for twist-prone Telstra rope. We faffed about trying to fix it, with a bag tangled in space, until hours had passed and all hope was lost.

There were two people with no bags at the top of Daily Cases ( $\sim$ 150 m) and one person with three bags at the bottom – this was an extremely crap situation.

Jemma started up with two bags, at least this would warm her up. I offered Henry the glory of being able to claim having climbed Daily Cases twice in one trip, he was tempted but sensibly declined. He'd already been up and down a bit, so by the time he went most of the way down to meet Jemma and collect one of her bags, it would have been near enough anyway. I also went down and we all got to practise overtaking each other as I went to the bottom to collect the last bag, as well as the empty SCUBA tank.

The second ascent was pretty grim, especially on top of the previous days of hard caving, and by the time I collapsed at Superspreader, Jemma was already back. My bag was confiscated and I was eternally glad of it, but I could manage the empty 3 L SCUBA tank and more or less keep up. We slogged out to reunite with Petr, who had completed all his jobs hours ago and had spent something like 4 hours making major improvements to the Negative RAT Hole entrance. We stumbled down the hill like zombies, with the exception of Henry, who was already excited about coming back again.

## Rigging Notes – Quarantine and access to Superspreader

All holes should have reflective parsnips and are for standard Hilti 65x6 galvanised concrete screws.

Quarantine Pitch (from top), rope lengths excluding knot:

- 2cs, 2 m (access line)
- 1cs, 2.5 m (access line)
- 2cs (y hang), 8 m
- 1cs, 8 m
- 1cs, 12 m
- 1cs, 18 m
- 1cs, 9 m

Short upwards pitch from base of Quarantine (access by following the water then free climbing up to Superspreader):

- 2cs (Y-hang), 6 m

Traverse line into/past Superspreader:

- 1cs in wall near Superspreader
- 2cs in wall towards Quarantine
- Approx. 10 m rope, allowing for an anchor in Superspreader (originally, rope went to a single cs in ceiling outside Superspreader)



Henry poses with our haul of Anaspides

10 January 2023 – Delta Variant resupply: shuttle dive gear, Magic Beanstalk adjustment, minor improvements



An interesting load went up the hill

As a self-professed rigging nerd, Henry was up for a re-jig of the Magic Beanstalk, and there were some other improvements I was keen to do to the new route to Daily Cases, via the JF-758 Negative RAT Hole entrance and Superspreader. With a few exceptions in the upper section, it's now possible if you are careful to walk the whole length of Superspreader while wearing a big bag.

So we had a longish day but at least got out of the cave in the last of the summer daylight. We also brought in the refilled tank, took most of the dive gear to the bottom of Freedom Day, and collected the weather station accidentally left with two Anaspides in it. Pro tip: dead Anaspides don't smell good, especially if left in the sun.

The Magic Beanstalk had previously been left comprehensively tangled and half the water bags had popped when they accidentally bumped a rock, so we tried throwing money at the problem. The 4 x 20 L water jerry cans were quite entertaining to get through Superspreader but were nice and solid. The expensive sailing pulleys were shifted from food bag to survey bag at the last minute and I couldn't for the life of me find them.

We had a careful radio brief, including what to do if they failed. I lectured Henry about not changing channel but managed to delete our agreed-upon channel on my radio. The universe was generally against the Magic Beanstalk, as on top of that, the stream was so low that the water supply bag wasn't filling and on trying to adjust it, a bowling bowl sized piece of the wall came off. Fortuitously, my single roar of "Rock" was the first ever successful communication the length of Daily Cases. Whoever taught Henry about falling rocks did a good job and he ran (in the right direction) as the rock fell 150 m, bounced off the gently sloping wall towards him and showered the back of his legs with shrapnel. We were both pretty shaken after that, but the radios were still working at that point, which was a massive relief. I'd thought that rock was pretty solid, but still a good reminder about doing stuff when there are people below, and another good reminder about a simple "rock" call, and a fast response.

The Magic Beanstalk was untangled by spreading the two ropes at the top, and brutally forcing a krab down between as I abseiled on the personnel rope. The tail strings were snagged on the waterfall, but broke, and then were also untangled mostly by brute force. The water bags were replaced with the hard containers, two anchors were placed on the floor to spread the tail strings and we managed a successful transition without a proper load, but also without tangling. The new pulleys were found later and left near the top for later. (Much later, as we didn't use it on the late January camping trip.) It's still a bit of a spiderweb opportunity for people passing by but actually looks like it might work, if anyone has the heart to try it. Some dedicated anchors for spreading at the top would be nice to do.

## 19 January 2023 – Niggly #2, day 1: Get to camp at a lovely time

With Plan A for the Biohazard Sump dive having failed due to the empty tank, a group decision was made to shift the dive to Niggly #2 and call it a respectable Plan B. With the indomitable Henry set to join Ciara, Oxana and me, and Petr doing a gear retrieval day trip, it was still pretty doable (as the planned minimalist 2-bag dive) and not too miserable, especially since Henry and I had replaced the empty tank and

got all the dive gear down near the bottom of the cave. There was also sufficient redundancy in the personnel numbers, or so we thought.

Unfortunately, Oxana hurt her foot in Ice Tube and had to retire, then Henry was called urgently into work, had a dentist appointment and had to revert to joining Petr on the retrieval day trip. Ciara and I held a council of war (a ceremonial begging?), as this thing was starting to feel awfully like the Sesame dive last year. We decided to go ahead with the dive attempt, but to cut the trip from four days to three, and to avoid getting distracted with any other objectives. The middle day where we had only two of us to get the gear out to Biohazard and back again would be tough, but just doable. Thus, Plan C for the dive was born.

"Don't Worry, Be Happy" (not) by Bob Marley became the theme for the trip, and it was good 'un. Another theme for the trip was Ciara's new wrist cuffs, which turned out to be comically large and almost (but not quite) completely useless.

The trip in was quite delightful really with just our camping bags and the improved access/rigging, so we had plenty of energy (well, enough) to collect the two heavy bags of dive gear from the base of the pitch and get them to The Dunes campsite. We were at camp by 6 pm and enjoyed a (rare!) genuine relaxed evening in the underground ambience.

# 20 January 2023 – Niggly #2, day 2: Plan C for Biohazard Sump dive is a success

Finally, it looked like the dive was actually going to happen, but neither Ciara nor I were under any illusions that it would be a particularly fun day (shhhh, "Don't Worry, Be Happy"). We managed to fit the days kit into a bag each, but they were the sort of bags nightmares are made of. We told ourselves it was mostly easy walking and would be ok.

It sort of was until we got to the Meru rockpile and had to start picking our way up and through it. Two-person lifts were the order of the day, but luckily Henry's alternate route allowed us to skip the two nastiest mud climbs. We arrived at Biohazard somewhat the worse for wear and generally unmotivated and got our faff on. I'd decided to do the setup in two stages – put on wetsuit and prep gear in the spacious upper level, then go down the pitch to the sump and put everything on. This might have been slightly better in terms of a larger changing area, but made for a double-faff which was quite time-consuming (not helped by picking a stupid sloping spot to get changed).



Closeup of the Biohazard Sump (home side pool), note the start of the roof canyon

Eventually, we were both down the pitch and by the water — there was enough space for both of us, and the water was still pretty clear, excellent (the "guard" I'd excavated on the previous trip to funnel dropped crud away from the sump might have helped a bit). Ciara handed me the odd thing and helped when my ring bungee system disintegrated — this whole exercise was becoming a real drag, and spirits were not high. There was nothing for a guideline tie-off, so I used a siltpeg, with the tail of the line attached temporarily to the SRT rope. Finally, I was ready, standing in the squishy mud at the water's edge, ready to flop in — this is a good technique to avoid destroying the visibility, although as soon as you do flop in, you have to be off and racing ahead of the silt cloud.

Well, another epic fail ensued – as I flopped, both fins remained stuck in the mud and came off, ending up with the straps around my ankles. Howling in frustration underwater while Ciara looked on curiously from above, I resisted the urge to continue on as-is and reached back to fix the fins. Unfortunately, that was the visibility gone.

Reconfigured for a long swim, I felt my way forward along a gloopy mud floor. The passage was comfortably wide, not too vertically tight and was generally easy-going. When the floor started going upwards, I put in a silt peg to prevent the line pulling up against the roof (this was not very effective as I later found out!) and soon afterwards surfaced in another bathtub sized sump pool at the base of a mud cone. There was a bit of visibility here, so I quickly checked around in the pool for any sign of continuation. Satisfied there was none, I put in a silt peg, placed the yellow rectangular commemorative marker Ciara and I had made, and found a thread in the wall to use as a backup tie-off.

This new section of cave was later named "Dental Exception", in honour of Henry's most entertaining excuse for not being able to be there, and it was quite interesting. The sump pool was at the bottom of a spacious semicircular mud funnel, about 5 m high and 10 m across. There were possibly some sideways leads at the top, so I de-kitted, grabbed the DistoX and a backup light and headed on up. Kicking steps in the stiff mud with my wetsuit boots was... hurty, but I got up eventually (remembering belatedly that going up backwards and kicking heels in is much more pleasant). I'd been looking forward to writing it off quickly and heading out, but alas there was stoopy passage going in one direction and crawly passage going in the other.

I went left up the stoopy passage first, going up a gentle mud slope a short way until it ended in comprehensive mud choke with a bit of rockfall. There was a hint of a void up through a tiny chimney, but no draught and you wouldn't bother pushing it. I made a small cairn and left pre-labelled tape "2023-SF-BL-X3" there as a marked station.

The survey proceeded – with shots taken as for Topodroid, but left stored in DistoX memory for later successful download to the cave phone (~120 shots). I also recorded the survey legs without LRUDs on my Aquasketch as a backup and for additional notes. This went well, although I occasionally forgot to take splay shots, or got them in the wrong order. The cave was straightforward enough that I didn't run the GoPro (the video wouldn't have come out well anyway).

It wasn't far back to the top of the mud funnel and a shot down to the reel took care of survey tie-in. There was a flatter section around the top of the funnel where it was pretty easy to traverse around to get to the crawly passage on the other side (fortunately, the stakes weren't too high - a slide back down to the sump pool would be undignified but probably not much more). I was still enough of a sadsack to be annoyed when the crawly passage looked like it actually went.

It went weird – up a gently sloping mud-floored passage to a section of loose sand sloped at angle of repose, which led up through a choke point into a large chamber (6 m diameter) through a tight bit. The loose sand was bizarre, it was like a sand dune (although it was damp), just grit, with no mud to bind it together. Especially strange considering the liberal coatings of slimy mud over everything at JF base level.

The large chamber at the top of the sand slope had an equally surprising wall of clean washed rock leading up to a tantalising void with hints of horizontal development about 8 m above. It looked like a pretty textbook aid climb, but without much in the way of natural progression help. A continuing horizontal passage about 1 m diameter was completely choked with mud, and a cairn was made at the end with tape "2023-SF-BL-X6".

Satisfied that my job here was done and feeling slightly more motivated being homeward bound, I retreated to the sump pool. The short dive back was LESS straightforward as the guideline had pulled upwards into a ceiling canyon too tight for me, so after trying a few things, I had to roll on one side and keep my hand on the ceiling to get through. This wasn't a huge deal, but is something for any future divers to be very mindful of. The sump was surveyed and found to be a grand total of 9 m long (tie-off to tie-off) and less than 1.5 m deep (my computer didn't register a depth). That's probably more like 7 m long surface to surface. Total new survey including the dry stuff was 75 m.

Ciara was surprised to see me after little more than an hour, she had only just settled down in warm clothes to read her book. The tanks were emptied to save weight, and we slowly faffed and packed our way towards leaving. We de-rigged the rebelays (but left the initial Y-hang) to save future visitors from having to take SRT kit to Biohazard if they wanted to complete the de-rig, although the traverse and upwards mud slope beyond the pitch became quite interesting after the survey data was plotted.



Ciara calibrated her DistoX at camp

After an absurd amount of faffing, the bags were packed and a good deal heavier thanks to wet and muddy neoprene. We made it back to camp broken, yearning for a waist strap and cursing the world in general but had enough sense left to wash the dive gear before collapsing at camp. I tapped into some unknown reservoir of motivation and shuttled a bag of dive gear to the base of the pitches, so we didn't have to face four large bags between two of us in the morning. The unencumbered trip back to camp took 12 minutes!

Unfortunately, the crème brûlée (with rainbows!) made the night before was just a bit too brûlée (burnt) for us to stomach, so went uneaten – it's the thought that counts, though, right? The dehydrated pasta and 250 g of cheese went down well though, and we drifted off to an exhausted sleep about 10:30 pm.

#### **Speculations:**

With the survey plotted and a sketch completed, Dental Exception was found to be running parallel to but converging with Biohazard, which was also parallel to but converging with the main master cave line. Whoa. Biohazard and Dental Exception being relatively simple passages in solid rock with minimal rockfall was a good sign that a bypass of the Meru rockpile might just exist, or at least that there might be more to it. The climb to the upper levels of Meru is potentially very interesting, although before undertaking the desperation-squared complexity of an aid climb beyond a sump, the Biohazard Traverse should be written off, as it might connect across.

The sand slope is very puzzling. It's actually very consistent with a strong UPWARDS water flow, especially with the constriction formed by the horizontal rock ledge. Downward flow would drive the sand into the sump and/or make a channel in the mud at lower levels. Static flooding would see the sand coated in and covered by the slimy mud that covers everything at base level (including the walls), stabilising it.

The sump is short, shallow and showed no sign of being part of a stream (there was no sign of clear water pockets when I dived back through). I didn't think of it at the time, but there was also no sign of the large (fridge door-sized) chockstone which we had previously sent down the pitch into the water. The mud was pretty gloopy though, it conceivably could have been absorbed. Ciara reported noticing disturbances in the water for some minutes before I reappeared, this being another possible indicator that the sump was a pool only, not connected to any larger stream. Thus, without occasional flow events to clear the sump, it would be expected to block up.

So, at this point, my best guess (and it still seems pretty weird) is that the Biohazard Sump and Dental Exception are some kind of flood overflow. I.e. the main Meru passage and rockpile floods, seeping or spilling into the Biohazard Sump and rising to overflow into the clean levels above Dental Exception and go who knows where (perhaps the downstream master cave, or to the River of Babylon and upstream towards the likes of Boulder Jenga). The rock ledge constriction at the top of the sand slope would create high water velocity sufficient to push sand upwards, and the wide vertical section above could create a trap where the water velocity is insufficient to lift the sand any higher and it remains suspended until the flow stops. These occasional high flow events could also keep the Biohazard Sump clear, although it's surprising there wasn't more sign of channels and mud erosion in Biohazard and the approaches.

I can't stress enough though how loose and sandy this slope is. There are sand banks of a sort in the Growling Swallet main entrance, but they are mixed with silt and organic debris, much different.

## Diving Equipment:

- 2x 3 L tanks
- 7 mm semi-dry wetsuit
- 3 mm wetsuit gloves
- Sump harness (no buoyancy control)
- 100 m orange 3 mm line, 30 m white 2 mm line
- No fins
- No weightbelt
- DistoX in drytube, Aquasketch, pre-labelled tapes

## Gas Pressures:

- Start: 215/245 bar
- Far side of sump: ~215/230 bar (a negligible amount used)
- Home again: lots (not recorded)

Divers should note that originally, the DIN plug was loose and the valve was knocked open, causing the loss of gas from one tank. A good lesson in making sure the DIN plugs are tight? (Yes, tighten and undo with a spanner, and be sure to use stainless steel plugs with O-rings. – Ed)

## 21 January 2023 - Niggly #2, day 3: Birthing Day Again

Morning was bleary, and extra faffing was required to winterise the camp, stashing anything non-floodable way up high in the Rockhampton passage and putting rocks or tying on everything else.

With a mere three bags between the two of us, Ciara and I made good time to the base of the pitches. We left a heavy bag for the next day (desperately hoping that Petr and Henry were still up for it) and continued up with three bags we thought were manageable. The Magic Beanstalk was left unrequited – that sort of faffing was a not a risk we could take, especially considering the ominous fortune cookie that day "you will express your anger towards men".

Things went reasonably, even Close Contact and Superspreader were kind of bearable. However, the crux of the day came at Negative RAT Hole, where despite the significant enlargements recently made and the SRT rope, it was still an utter bastard to get through. We used SRT and towed a bag each (I hauled up the 3<sup>rd</sup> and lightest by hand). It was still very tight and ascenders had to be moved millimetres at a time due to lack of space for bent knees. Then, once the top of the rope was gained and the bags painstakingly unjammed, they still had to be awkwardly manoeuvred past you and shoved up through the hole above.

With some difficulty and swearing, I managed to get the first two bags and myself up and out of the way eventually. The cookies fortune then came true with a vengeance as Ciara managed to unknowingly clip her bag onto the rope and wallow (rage?) in the Negative RAT Hole for an inordinate amount of time. The words "I would take the Test Station Queue over this any day" were uttered, much to my horror.

To her credit, Ciara was able to rationalise and solve the problem despite her rapidly fading mojo, and a hug was shared as we both gained the surface. It had been another hard trip (I really owe Ciara something better than these

awful desperate dive attempts) but even as a Plan C the mission had been a success, and that was worth something.

# 22 January 2023 – Delta Variant retrieval: The last of the dive gear comes out

Petr had graciously offered to collect the last of the dive gear, and Henry was up for that too. I'd vaguely considered going with them out of solidarity but could barely drag myself out of bed when they arrived at Left of Field at some early time. Figuring (correctly) that I'd only slow them down, I swallowed my pride and left them to it. This turns out to be

wise as they had bounced the cave and were back at Left of Field with the dive gear by 3 pm.

It was a big relief for me to get all the dive gear back, and have a couple of rigging tweaks completed (like replacing the stiff entrance rope with a better one), and I was eternally grateful not to have to face the cave again myself. A slick end to a big series of trips only made possible by the amazing people who came on them. A couple of weeks later, I can almost contemplate what might be next...

## **JF-772 Regulation Hole**

## 3 January 2023

John Webb

Party: Gabriel Kinzler, Chris Sharples, John Webb

Following advice from a third party that only lean cavers need attempt entry of a recently discovered small vertical entrance at the STT-operated Florentine Valley Eleven Road quarry, Chris and Gabriel volunteered to survey the cave. They carpooled to New Norfolk and after I completely ducked Chris's witty one-liner response to my greeting, we headed off in my Mitsi via Banjos as I'm not the leanest caver and, with respect to cavers, by definition not a real caver either.



Gabriel fits in nicely, one might even say snuggly

Photo: John Webb

Following arrival at the quarry, the entry was quickly located after a leisurely 150 m walk. Gabriel and Chris then entered and bottomed a climbable narrow shaft without rope and not much passage [note by Gabriel: entrance in the side of small rocky outcrop, 50 cm wide steep slope over 3 m, then climbable 6 m drop, with a small amount of very short lateral extension half-way down]. Given that feedback, I reversed out of my seldom used half-donned Aspiring suit and began drilling holes for the tag that Gabriel brought with him. I'm even rusty at that, as I spent time looking for a driver bit to fit the screws in the plastic anchors after drilling too many holes from another silly assumption I will not go into further.

When Chris and Gabriel surfaced with the survey completed after 20 minutes or so, we took a quick look around the two dolines excluded from quarry operations for any other caves on the way back to the car before touring leisurely back.



Reverse view: Chris waiting his turn
Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

In summary, the trip was an easy year starter and I technically have not been caving yet in 2023. I'm happy the cave isn't significant, can easily be avoided during continued operation of the quarry and hasn't posed an unknown risk to previous operations. Thanks again to the volunteers, and I should note that Karina volunteered too and I hadn't followed up Karina's offer and apologise for any offence.

There are a number of possible caves evident in the area east of the quarry, including at least one lost tagged JF cave found during quarry planning that I'll survey and forward to the archivist before the end of 2023. May need more volunteers.

[Note by Gabriel: the name of the cave refers to the potential for operational quagmire due to caves threatening quarrying activities. We thought it better not to name it "Regulator's Nightmare" so as to not offend anyone.]

# JF-36 Growling Swallet Rigging and Black River

## 5 January 2023

Stephen Fordyce

**Party**: Tom Elms, Stephen Fordyce, Megan Grainger, Tom Maggs, Bogdan (Bo) Muresan, Nadine Muresan, Edmund Muresan

A crew from my home club, the Victorian Speleological Association (VSA), were caving up north and generally enjoying Tassie in early January, but it was great to schedule in a JF hook-up so we could calibrate expectations in anticipation of future trips.

I'd originally planned an ambitious January schedule which involved a push dive in Coelacanth Sump, but for lack of porters and a desire to enjoy life, the dive was pushed back to winter, and a comprehensive setup/checkout trip was done instead. This was an excellent opportunity to test out the VSA crew on something decent but not too crazy. I'd overestimated how far 4-year-old Edmund would be able to get in, so he and Nadine peeled off at the entrance, and Megan had a quick look, as planned, before joining her. This left me, Bo, Tom and Tom.

It was great to have a trip where I could faff in good conscience without jeopardising some larger mission, and faff we did. With plenty of people to carry stuff, we took a drill and plenty of rope/rigging gear. At the base of Windy Rift, we swapped depth loggers (the data was disappointing, 4 m the maximum flood over the past year) and finally cleaned up the rigging there where the mudbank has washed away — see separate Growling Swallet rigging updates report, this issue. We also added a rope in the chimney/window climb to make it more idiot-proof.

Carrying on to Destiny Pitch, we rigged it very pleasantly with concrete screws and collected Anaspides at the bottom,

and in a few places along the way (see separate report on Anaspides collection) to Black River. There was no need to scare the mainlanders off by contemplating the roof sniff (and they were probably up for it, which would mean I'd have to) and the main aims of collecting Anaspides and placing a detector were achieved. This will be an excellent opportunity for testing the source of the Black River water, as it can be collected when the dive is done in winter. Dye releases were later done at the base of Windy Rift, main entrance, and the Garths Creek fork well up the valley from the main entrance. Another one, say 500 m upstream of the main entrance, would be nice.

We made acceptable time on the way out and brought with us the ladder just inward from the Slaughterhouse Pot entry, it was pretty shagged. Fun was had by all, nobody was too broken, the mission was accomplished and expectations were suitably calibrated.



Vials of ethanol were serialised beforehand to help make it easier in-cave. Photo: Stephen Fordyce

## **JF-387 Porcupine Pot**

## 7 January 2023

Karina Anders

Party: Karina Anders, Steve Fordyce, Ciara Smart

We were off to a promising start but got held up with a bit of faffing and meeting the cave shrimp people before leaving the campground for the day. Nothing out of the ordinary.

It also took a fair while to get the car up the road, dodging some fallen branches. But we did make it into the cave and descended the pitches in good time. We had a short lunch break at the bottom of the pitches and then were told we were only 30 minutes away from the aid climb. After what felt like three to four times longer than 30 minutes, including an accidental U-turn in the Miraculous Bypass taking us back to where we started, and plenty of climbing, crawling and

squeezing, we finally made it to said aid climb. Steve made the trip worth the while by letting me do the aid climb, the first time for me. I thoroughly enjoyed myself. And we even had music to create a little ambience. Superb. The aid climb didn't go very far. It was a steep boulder that leads into a rock pile which Steve said looked pretty terminal but would be worth another look and a survey next time.

Once the clock neared 6 pm, we turned around and made our way out. We made it back to the campsite by about 11:30, where Steve cooked up one of his famous soups out of a tin. Surprisingly delicious. Since it was a clear night, I decided to camp outside under the stars, I was rudely awoken by a possum about 1 m from my face at some point, but otherwise slept like a baby (ha ha, been there – Ed). Ciara slept in the shipping container – perhaps a wiser choice – and was out like sleeping beauty until 9 am. Then we cleaned all the gear in the morning.

## **JF-40 Assessment**

## 11 January 2023

Stephen Fordyce

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Henry Garratt

JF-40 is right on the Khazad Dum survey line and literally within earshot of that cave. Its survey is within metres of connection with JF-10 Splash Pot in the Mad Englishmen and Dogs area, which would give access to a whole lot of good stuff without having to negotiate Close to the Bone. Chiefly, access to the 100 m+ Harrow The Marrow, if you're in a pitch-bagging kind of mood, and also a tantalising aid traverse across the top of it, which Alan assures me will get you to kilometres of master cave.

JF-40 was surveyed and pushed by Jeff Butt, and then resurveyed, dug and pushed a bit further by the 2018 Irish expedition (see *SC* 71, which has good background and info). It's so close to a connection that (with a lot of survey legs to get there) it can't get any closer, it just needs to be poked at to find the right spot. Incidentally, the same can be said for Khazad Dum and Splash Pot, after I shifted their surveys around recently. Alan suggested JF-40 might be worth another look and it proved to be a good light day for Henry and me between Delta Variant and Porcupine.

I immediately found the cave more interesting and prospective than the map and Irish report indicated. Right from the entrance, the cave develops along the ~45-degree tilted bedding plane, with multiple levels in multiple layers, which is quite confusing and extensive, this theme being revisited now and again in getting to the bottom. The map was pretty instrumental in finding our way to the bottom, and squeezes which the Irish had got through were pretty respectable. Considering the ultra-dry surface conditions, the cave was also surprisingly wet.

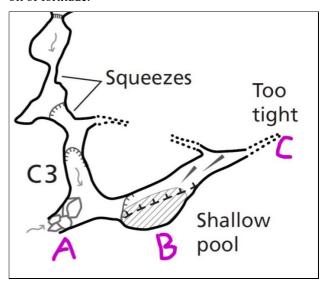
We dug increasingly sloppy mud out of the shallow pool at the end (marked B). There was the hint of a gap, but it became more and more unappetising, as the only place to really put the spoil was into the trickling stream, which liquified it. The lack of draught was also ominous. We diverted the trickle of water via a more direct route, so that the mud could solidify, and a future attempt might have somewhere to stash it.

I went up the "too tight" rift at C, finding it NOT too tight, and that it actually connected back to an upper level of the cave, emerging in the ceiling of a large chamber (probably C3 on the map). So with that recurring theme of development in adjacent bedding planes, maybe there is more to be found.

But the rockpile up a 2 m climb from the pool (marked A) was definitely the most interesting thing, more so than I'd thought from the map and report. There was plenty of draught, but also a trickling drip, and the draught actually seemed to be circulating around my marked points A and C. Weird and frustrating. It was tight and squeezy passages to get to the relative spaciousness of the A chamber (2-3 m in all dimensions), through solid rock, or through small, consolidated rock. The map doesn't show it well, but A is actually a blocked steep upwards passage of good size, choked with boulders, including microwave sized dolerite, and a stream kind of trickling through them.

This passage and the stream actually continue downwards against the wall, and through more rock choke, which is workable. The stuff above seemed reasonably stable (and we were pretty sure the cut-to-size logs were props brought in by the Irish) so we did a bit of work on it with the crowbar. Henry was suitably impressed at what could be achieved, and a dubious downwards hole appeared. I gingerly got down in that, but it didn't feel right, so we filled that hole with spoil from further in. The chief protagonist rock at this point would be much better dealt with if it was broken in half, and the Chinese water torture right on my back while working was getting annoying (a small tarp highly recommended for diverting it, PVC suit also a good idea). So, we beat a retreat, getting annoyingly lost on the way out. For all that it's a small cave, it's not a complete cakewalk.

Considering the prize, I think this is well worth a return visit by <someone>, properly equipped with advanced digging and shifting techniques, a careful and patient mindset, and a bit of fortitude.



Annotated extract from map 7JF40.STC440



Cordura was not a good choice of suit for a Chinese water torture dig. Photo: Stephen Fordyce

## **JF-387 Porcupine Pot**

## 12 January 2023

Stephen Fordyce

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Henry Garratt

Henry needed to experience the Horrible Crawl, Anaspides collection from upstream was highly desirable, and I had an itch to follow up a lead. We ticked all the boxes and were out in daylight.

With the super dry conditions, the Horrible Crawl hardly lived up to its name, and we only just got wet feet in the master cave streamway (but chickened out of going to the actual sump, stopping just past Trump Rock instead).

There's an unpublished Word document in the archive in which Trevor Wailes describes exploration of Porcupine, and a particularly juicy bit says: Directly across the main drain from the flattener a ramp was followed to a fossil passage which appeared to run in both upstream and downstream directions – neither of these passages was followed to any conclusion but the downstream lead could, with some luck, bypass the sump area and traverse into new passage beyond the known sump.

Having spent a lot of time in Porcupine trying to reconcile known bits with that document (and having checked pretty exhaustively opposite where the Horrible Crawl joins the master cave), this one always puzzled me. I wondered whether maybe "the flattener" was actually further upstream in the master cave, where you crawl near the master cave stream, then pop sideways through a small hole (near station PC-69) into mega passage. We always turned left and headed to regain the stream 50 m away (where the prominent 1.5 m stalagmite is on the floor in the streambed), and there was some big rockpile up there which hadn't been looked at in recent years. Apart from when people missed the hole anyway. So, we had a look, and it was big and impressive up there, but didn't seem to be going anywhere.

On the way in, we'd also had a bit of a poke around in big master cave rockpile around PC-56 or PC-60, not far upstream of where the Horrible Crawl joins the master cave. The rocks were massive (shipping container size) and the rockpile extended to the north quite a way. This side of the master cave is interesting because the major stream from JF-221 Owl Pot should run parallel to Porcupine on this side – dye tracing results indicate Owl Pot doesn't join the master cave until after the current downstream limit of Porcupine.

It looked vaguely promising and we didn't fully write it off. We didn't survey it either, which could prove interesting. It's a shame that Porcupine always seems to have been a "B" cave, although we've done a reasonable job at pushing it in various directions so far. Maybe that could have another look while a follow-up dive in the sump to Gormenghast is being done.

# JF-345 Ice Tube to JF-36 Growling Swallet Through Trip

## 14 January 2023

Stephen Fordyce

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Henry Garratt, Oxana Repina

My cunning plan to reunite long-ago-caving-buddies Ciara and Oxana on a caving trip for some kind of entertaining result was foiled when Ciara succumbed to a tummy bug from the Overland Track to miss Ice Tube, and Oxana hurt her foot and later had to bail on Niggly. Fortunately, Henry was keen and made up numbers for the planned Ice Tube through trip.

We left camp at a good time and got into the cave at some kind of respectable time (10 am? 11 am?). Unfortunately, not long after we'd pulled down the rope and committed to the long through trip, Oxana slipped on a climb and hurt her foot. She also caught her backup light on a rock and thought it had chipped a tooth when it twanged back.

Fortunately, the tooth was good, but the foot was hurty. The mojo was also definitely not in a good way. The foot injury wasn't the ankle, nothing seemed to be broken and it wasn't obviously different to the other one and could bear some weight so that was nice. We pronounced it good enough, confiscated her group gear load and put some Voltaren and a compression bandage on it to act as a placebo.

Progress down the pitches was efficient – we used a 105 m (Bluewater 9.5 mm) rope which worked quite well (plus a backup 40 m and some string) and the crowd cheered as my score for getting ropes stuck in Ice Tube was brought up to 1:1. The tight stuff to get to the main stream was long and

torturous, and I underestimated it again - we got to the main stream later than hoped, by mid-afternoon. Oxana's foot wasn't any worse and even injured she was getting serious FOMO (that's Fear of Missing Out, for all you old people) about the Dreamtime/Frownland detour we'd optimistically planned for.

So, we compromised and went to Dreamtime to collect the detector left last year, and of course some Anaspides. We also sighted the 2014/15 orange 3 mm dive line (callout was next morning, no pesky midnight deadlines this year) into Dreamtime Sump and it looked pretty intact. A small dye release was done to see the flow time to the detector in Niggly at the other end of the sump.

Oxana was still chugging along ok, although not quite at her usual clip. We made fewer route-finding errors than last time and were reasonably efficient in getting to Avon's Aven, our next port of call. Two hours of faffing with rigging at some ridiculous hour of the night ensured - Oxana has experienced such things before and didn't mind having a rest. But I hadn't managed to get anything other than cheerful enthusiasm out of Henry in our eight days of caving together, and this was my last chance - if unnecessary latenight Steve-faffing didn't get to him, nothing would. Alas, I had to settle for some minor grumbles about mainlanders (and an actual sleep-in the next morning) before he perked up again and chatted all the way out. I pointed out that it was nice to get a proper epic under the belt now and again (even if it could have been avoided), to give confidence for a rescue or some such. That excuse is unlikely to work a second time, though...

Anyway, we rather painstakingly dismantled all the old Avon's Aven rigging, replaced it with new 11 mm rope (see the separate report this issue), and stuffed as much old ladder and rope as we possibly could into our extra-large and now extra heavy bags, going through the Herpes III squeeze about 1 am. We got to road test the other new rigging and it was reasonable. The main entrance was reached at 3 am and Oxana's foot conveniently went from "hasn't got any worse" to "I need a walking stick" just as they became available.

A scan of the foot the next day was inconclusive, and there wasn't much in the way of middle ground between the doctor's order to rest it for 2 weeks, and 4 days of Niggly. So, the sad but wise decision was made to go home early and rest it – a full recovery was made a few weeks later.

I don't think we took any pictures, so here's what was all around the campsite at Left of Field this year. Maybe because of the dry weather? Photo: Stephen Fordyce



## **Mysteries of JF-35 Gormenghast**

## 16 January 2023

Stephen Fordyce

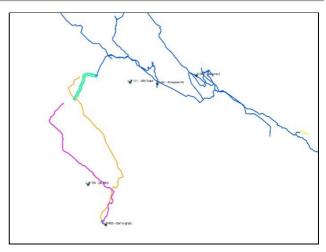
**Party**: Stephen Fordyce, Lena Gotz, Christoph Hopel, Louisa Hopel

After they came back from the Western Arthurs, I took the German Anaspides researchers (Christoph, Louisa and Lena) into JF-35 Gormenghast. It was good fun, surprisingly well decorated in the bottom section, and was a good way to get them to base level to see and collect cave Anaspides in situ without needing SRT. It was also a good excuse to resurvey the cave and see what the deal was with the possible connection to Porcupine on the dive trip with Nina and Djuke in August last year (see SS 452, p.16-18). The existing maps were good enough, so we didn't sketch as we went.

We were underground for about 7 hours, as the surveying (500 m of it) was a bit torturous, there were a few different route options to choose from, and there were Anaspides to collect. A rope was taken but not used, and with very dry conditions, we didn't get wet except for a bit of minor dampness in the grovels at base level. The Germans had a good time and did very well – two of them on their first caving experience. There was enough energy and motivation left at the end of the day to detour for a quick look at the Growling Swallet main entrance.

Well, the Gormenghast terminal sump was reached, and the yellow 1980s guideline was still there, with no sign of the white one I tied off in a foamy sump pool. Thus, the caves are not connected, the official hat-eating ceremony will be announced shortly, and another push will be required sometime (probably this coming winter, from the Porcupine side).

The new survey data (safely committed to the archive) shows a major discrepancy with a tracing of the 1970s map (the actual data was lost), and the location of the sump is 85 m horizontally different between the two surveys. The new survey data is consistent with the non-connection and the Porcupine survey, indicating a small section of streamway cave remains.



Survey plot, shows Porcupine (blue) with the dive section (aquamarine), 1970s Gormenghast (orange) and 2023 Gormenghast (magenta).



Lena does a dye release at the entrance after we came out (and after the Anaspides collection was finished!)

Photo: Stephen Fordyce

## Mt Cripps

## 19-21 January 2023

Gabriel Kinzler

**Party:** Chris Brown, Graeme Brown, Stefan Colling, Paul Darby, Lyndsey Gray, Gabriel Kinzler, Maurie Richards

I hadn't visited Paul and Lyndsey at Mt Cripps in years — with the last outing being a rescue — and the recent discovery of new entrances sealed the deal for me. I didn't manage to attract any Southern souls despite the promise of three continuous days of suffering in Cripps' legendary horizontal scrub, go figure. Instead, I teamed up with a team led by Graeme Brown, of the North West SAR Unit. His team consisted of his brother Chris, good friend Maurie (also a SES volunteer) and youngish lad Stefan visiting from Germany. Paul and Lyndsey provided support at the beginning and at the end of our foray.



The hard-team (named above), off, off and away

Photo: Graeme Brown

LiDAR data was recently made available for the area and Graeme wanted to check out a selection of features, as well as a number of entrances found on his previous trip there in late 2022 (see *Speleopod* 91, p.16). The caves being at least three arduous hours from Th'ut, and with much ground to cover, we decided to make it a camp-out weekend. With the help of Paul and Lyndsey, we planned a two-car setup, walking into the new area from an old forestry road north of the karst, and walking out using the Philrod Track.

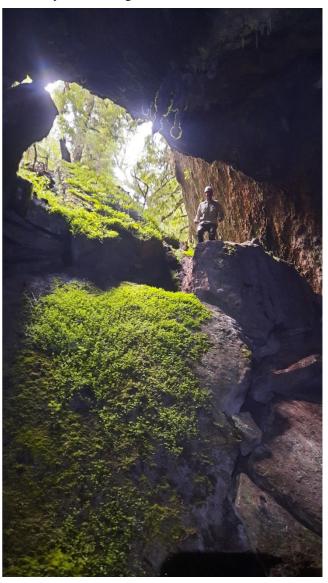
## Thursday

Getting to Mt Cripps from Hobart takes forever, but it's always a fun and scenic drive on the A5. Paul and Lyndsey were waiting for me and it was a joy to catch up with them around dinner and a beer in the freshly repainted SRCC hut. I was presented with a hand drill from the 1940s as a means to install tags during the weekend. I had packed my Milwaukee drill but didn't think I'd need the 5 mm drill bit. Bummer, we'd have to take two drills, one of which would at least be the source of much hilarity.

## Friday

Sun out, sky bright, not a breath of wind – glorious conditions that would prevail throughout the entire weekend. We cheerfully descended the hill to reach our first target, CP-252 Bleakfall Cave. This cave was found by Lochlan McLaren (of Northern Caverneers, I believe) a few years ago, but hasn't been properly explored. The scenery at the entrance is spectacular: a massive overhang with a very pronounced and visible dip angle. In reality, Bleakfall has

two entrances: one (not tagged) is an obvious streamsink with very good flow even in dry weather, the other (tagged) is wide, moss-covered fossil passage soon dropping into the corresponding streamway at base level. Ill-equipped for wet caving, I chose not to venture into the streamsink, as staying dry would be nigh on impossible. It doesn't look very wide in there anyway, but perhaps worth a peek with PVC. One at a time, we all had a good look inside the dry entrance. I estimated that rigging and surveying this cave properly would take several hours. Having heard that someone else from NC had expressed interest in surveying it and with no other caver on the party, nor appropriate gear for everyone, we decided to move on. In retrospect, I think we could have squeezed it in, but it would have resulted in at least three very bored party members, and I wasn't going to impose my caving urges like that on people I'd just met one hour ago. I'm sure Janice and friends will take an interest though -Janice, if you're reading this, it beckons.



CP-253 entrance. Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

We resumed our trod down-valley, picking off targets. A recurring theme this weekend was blind dolines. However, it didn't start off too badly when Stefan and I found two small entrances near one of them. His was named CP-253 Contour Down, mine, slightly higher, CP-254 Contour Up. The story goes Graeme and Maurie once went on a bushwalking trip with some military bloke who was very

offended when they kept using the terms "contour up" and "contour down" while navigating. He was adamant that one cannot possibly contour a hill in any other direction than horizontally, and the more they insisted, the more he lost his nerve. We spent the rest of the weekend employing such fantastic lingo for almost everything, i.e. contouring up and down, contouring diagonally, contouring on ourselves, contouring oneself a cup of tea, contouring to the toilet, contouring home, etc. Both caves have a sloping entrance leading to a drop. CP-253 is the more interesting of the two, nicely decorated and containing a lot of moonmilk. A bit further, we tagged CP-255 Pizza Express – owing its name to Maurie's fabled portable pizza oven – a tight tall rift of about 10 m long with a bit of flowstone at the end.



Something you don't see every day; SES goes cave-tagging

Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

We set up camp in an ideal spot, on lovely flats at the junction of two streams, and central to everything else we were targeting this weekend. Before dinner, we hypothesised that Bleakfall's resurgence wouldn't be too far from camp, and so we went for a little evening walk hoping to locate it. Sure enough, we found it less than 100 m away, in the form of a small sump at the base of a limestone wall. Not tagged, but georeferenced.



A lovely spot to camp... lucky it didn't rain

Photo" Gabriel Kinzler

## Saturday

Saturday was meant to be the day of great discoveries. We headed east towards Vale River and ticked off blind doline after blind doline, finding nothing in-between. We stopped at CP-243 Blocked Rift and CP-244 Rescued Pot, two small caves found by Graeme and Maurie back in 2013. Both quite small, the former does some interesting stuff over ~20 metres and contains vast amounts of moonmilk and a few pretties. The latter doesn't do much, just a bit of rickety crawling and clambering.



Rigging old school... minus the rope protector. They still have their occasional value.

Photo: Gabriel Kinzler

Back to camp for lunch and off again, this time due south. We aimed for a strange, very large LiDAR feature, which appears to be a sort of flat reservoir with a shallow rim perched atop a hill. Graeme said it looked like a volcano and so we started referring to it as "The Volcano". Still no new cave and we were starting to get desperate, when finally one doline gave way and Graeme and I found an entrance pitch, CP-256 Magma (because it's on the side of The Volcano, ya see). Hard to tell how serious it was, but a decent drop. I rigged from a log and placed a rebelay halfway down to reach the bottom. What we had was a 16 m pitch and a trickle flowing into continuing, but mud-obstructed, passage. A dig is possible but desperate, by my measure.

On the way back to camp, we stopped at previously found and now tagged CP-257 SES Pit, named for obvious reasons. Like Bleakfall Cave, it is another impressive streamsink with an overhanging roof, albeit much less wet. There are three drops. The main drop is a 10 m climb which can benefit from a handline. It reaches base level, where the water reappears

briefly before ending in a small sump. An aven above the sump proved to connect with the second drop at the surface. The third drop is just limited passage in rockfall. We observed vegetal debris everywhere high up on walls and concluded that the cave must flood to the brim, which we imagined would be a sight to behold.

## Sunday

Time to go home. The horrible horizontal scrub never eventuated and we managed to reach the Philrod Track largely unscathed, with a few more targets checked on the way. We had lunch at Th'ut with Paul and Lyndsey to debrief, only missing Deb Hunter narrowly – she watched over us from the summit of Mt Cripps. Only thing remaining was to go and retrieve the other car, and the party dissolved.

A really nice weekend in the bush with great people. I was impressed by the bush skills of the SES bunch, certainly delivering on their training and experience.

## JF-337 Slaughterhouse Pot

## **26 February 2023**

Gabriel Kinzler (Photos and text)

Party: Gabriel Kinzler, Issi Port, Petr Smejkal

A simple tourister to introduce my friend Issi to more serious caving. He's a geologist, but didn't know all that much about cave specifics, so it was a pleasure listening to him as he discovered and commented on all things rock and mineral as we progressed through the cave. No visit recorded since my last trip there in May 2021, although I suspect not everyone signs the logbook.

Petr joined us as he was keen to find his way into New Feeling. It didn't take him long and we enjoyed a part of Growling that's very different in character. Issi was impressive for a newbie, in particular in New Feeling, where he freeclimbed exposed bits sans a fret, kudos.



Introduction to the low bits



Geologising by an enthusiastic expert. One of the joys of Limestone.





Some of the pretties in New Feeling. Arguably the most decorated section of cave in the JF.



## JF-2 Cauldron Pot

#### 5 March 2023

Janine McKinnon

**Party:** Jemma Herbert, Janine McKinnon, Penny Player, Petr Smejkal, Ric Tunney

Sometimes, you just want to have fun, to paraphrase an old song. That's what Petr and Jemma were looking for on this trip. They deserved it after some hard caving this past year. Ric, Penny and I just wanted to go caving on a trip that wouldn't break us. Personally, I wasn't too sure Bills Bypass would leave me functional at the end, but I was willing to see.

The plan was that Jemma and Petr would rig down the cave and we slower bods would saunter along behind. I had organised the gear so that each pitch's rope was labelled and the required carabiners/tapes, etc. were in their respective bundles. Caving by numbers. That should make the rigging much quicker. I have never seen the point in doing a cave with rigging notes and then faffing around trying to find who is carrying what rope... and invariably finding the rope you want is with the person at the back of the party, half an hour behind. In this case, Jemma and Petr had all the ropes (other than the entrance pitch), so that wasn't an issue.

I followed Penny down and waited at the start of Bills Bypass to see Ric arrive at the bottom of the entrance pitch. I then followed Penny down the cave. (As it happened, we didn't see Ric again until back at the car. He had gone some distance down Bills Bypass and decided it was too hard and headed out.)

All, except Petr, had worn PVC suits for the usually wet streamway pitches, although Penny was wearing a PVC-light piece of cheap crap borrowed from the gear store. It and Bill took an instant dislike to each other and started feuding.

Spoiler alert: final score at the end of the trip... Bills Bypass 1, Penny's suit 0. Anyway, when I saw how low the stream at the top of the doline was, I thought I had selected the wrong suit for the job (again). I was pleased to see that as I went down the streamway, I was still getting quite wet, despite the low flow, so it had been a good choice. The downside was that Bills Bypass is harder in plastic than Cordura, I think anyway.

When Penny and I arrived at the bottom chamber, Petr and Jemma headed off to have a bit of a look along the horizontal section past Au-Cheval pitch. They planned to take a couple of hours to do that and start the de-rig out. Meanwhile, Penny and I had some lunch and started up.

I led up but waited for Penny at the top of each pitch. I also led up Bills Bypass. Penny found it quite hard going as we started up. It is quite tight at the distal end and the steep angle does not work in one's favour going out. Petr caught up to us part-way up the Bypass and took Penny's pack, as well as the massive one he was carrying. We three continued slowly up the bypass. Jemma caught up somewhere along the way, also with a heavy pack.

Petr, then I, went up the entrance pitch and waited in the lovely warm afternoon for the other two to arrive.

Penny was still smiling, despite her more-than-anticipated battles with Bill. Jemma and Petr sounded like they had had a fun, relaxed and "chill" day, despite doing all the hard work. Although I spent little of the day with Jemma and Petr, it was really good to be caving with them again.

I finished the trip surprisingly unscathed. My 2-year hip dramas seem to be over, or at least in remission. Time (and punishment) will tell.

Note: Updated rigging notes in STC archive.

## **Other Exciting Stuff**

#### STC Washing Kit

## Stephen Fordyce

At the rescue exercise late last year, my pressure-washerdriven rope cleaner was introduced to the caving fraternity and quite well received. A subsequent meeting agreed to cover some costs in putting together an STC Washing Kit which could be borrowed by members or taken to big group exercises. The rope cleaner itself was donated along with many of the hoses and fittings, STC paid for a pressure washer, extension cable and a few odds and ends.

Below is a photo showing the entire contents of the washing kit laid out (not shown is a large plastic tub donated by Alan). It was put to good use over January at my Left of Field campsite and has been returned to the gear store.

#### A few notes:

 The shade cloth is to protect grass from pressure washing.

- The three hoses and T-pieces allow for pressure washing and normal hosing to happen at the same time.
- There are plenty of tap and hose fittings for all occasions.
- A waterproof cable joiner is included for less watery electrocutions.
- The pressure washer can feed the rope cleaner or can be used with the normal nozzle for washing of other gear.



The kit. Photo: Steve Fordyce

## JF-36 Growling Swallet - January 2023 rigging Updates

### Stephen Fordyce

Over two visits (reported separately), some significant changes were made to the rigging in Growling Swallet which will be encountered by anyone doing a Slaughterhouse Pot or Ice Tube through trip. SRT kit is definitely required to progress into/beyond Windy Rift.

## So here are the updates:

- Base of Windy Rift anchors (concrete screws (cs)/SS hangers/SS maillons) replaced and doubled, rebelay added. So from Windy Rift (2 cs start access line), 3 m up over mud lip (2 cs), 8 m traverse on mudbank (to 2 cs), 10 m down with 1 rebelay (1 cs). Some of the rope is super stiff 11 mm and needs replacing. Beginners will struggle as it is.
- 2. Mid-Windy Rift window/rift/climb rigged (2x cs/hangers/maillons in Y-hang, going to a boulder through the window at bottom) in anticipation of a dive attempt later in the year. Newish 11 mm static (black).
- 3. Destiny Pitch rigged with access line from bomber natural, to 1 cs, then 2 cs in a Y-hang above the pitch (much nicer than the bollard on the floor). 11 mm static (black), could possibly be repurposed for Windy Rift after use.
- 4. Ladder pitch downhill of Slaughterhouse Pot (away from Windy Rift) ladder removed, existing 11 mm rope inspected and left (nice natural anchors).
- 5. Avon's Aven ladders and dynamic rope replaced with newish 11 mm Bluewater static rigged for SRT, with 2 rebelays (using existing anchors). Tightrope at top replaced with same. The top anchor rope (stiff 11 mm) was reused as we ran out of rope.

## To do:

- 1. Base of Windy Rift: take 15 m of rope to replace the really stiff 11 mm that has been in there for a couple of years already.
- 2. Windy Rift: replace ladders with 11 mm static rope (inc. a bottom anchor for when it floods?)
- Avon's Aven: Haul out a bag of old ladder/rope (and check/remove the old rescue cache at top) and take
   m of 11 mm plus a rope protector to replace the upper anchor original rope.
- **4.** Assorted P-hangering, and/or assessment of the existing anchors (i.e. Avon's Aven)

## Discussion:

The ladders have scared the crap out of me ever since I first experienced them in late 2014, along with many of the newer generation (many of whom weren't even born the last time those ladders saw the light of day). Not only because of the exposure, and sometime lack of safety lines (or a tendency not to bother using them), but because of the tails disappearing into knots, exposed core, deteriorating quick-fixes and other horrors. A pretty good example of "normalisation of deviance" and unnecessary risk taking which I'm as guilty of as anyone.

The ladders were put in at a time (circa late 1990s) when there was lots of exploration happening out the back of Growling, and those involved decided that being able to get there without needing to bring SRT kit was worth the considerable setup effort of the ladders. Attitudes towards ladders have changed in the intervening decades, especially considering their role in the recent Mt Cripps rescue, and with the mudbank at the bottom of Windy Rift washing

away, SRT kit is now required whichever way you access the back end of the cave anyway.

There's been a (very) slow-burning debate about what to replace the ladders with – standard SRT or some variation on the ladder theme, which hasn't helped the cause in removing the old ones. I'm not too fussed where that ends up but am keen to see all the ladders replaced with SRT ropes in the interim. (Anyone feel like tackling the Windy Rift ladders?)



This definitely counted as a "heavy bastard bag" (Henry had one too). Photo: Henry Garratt









Pictures of damage (from the ladder near the Slaughterhouse Pot entry, which was by far the worst). Above and opposite. Photos: Stephen Fordyce

# **JF-772 Regulation Hole**

Junee-Florentine, Tasmania

7JF772.STC549

**Southern Tasmanian Caverneers** 

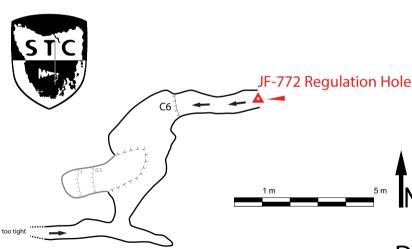
**ASF Grade 44** 

Surveyed by Gabriel Kinzler, Chris Sharples (03/01/2023)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (January 2023)

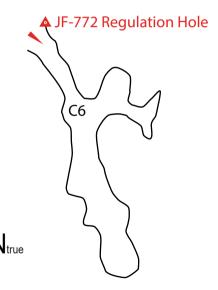
Surveyed Length - 9.2 m

Surveyed Depth - 8.6 m



PLAN

passage wall
passage wall - conjectural/continues
passage wall - underlying passage
drop off/ledge - with height (m)
ceiling step
direction of floor slope
entrance
cave tag



DEVELOPED VERTICAL SECTION 0°-180°

# **CP-243 Blocked Rift**

Mount Cripps, Tasmania

7CP243.STC550

**Southern Tasmanian Caverneers** 

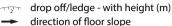
**ASF Grade 23** 

Surveyed by Gabriel Kinzler (21/01/2023)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (February 2023)









entrance



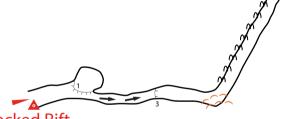
cave tag moonmilk



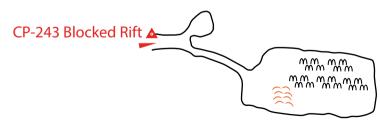
flowstone







CP-243 Blocked Rift







**VERTICAL SECTION** 

## **CP-244 Rescued Pot**

## **Mount Cripps, Tasmania**

7CP244.STC551

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

**ASF Grade 23** 

Surveyed by Gabriel Kinzler (21/01/2023)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (February 2023)

## **LEGEND**

passage wall

passage wall - conjectural/continues

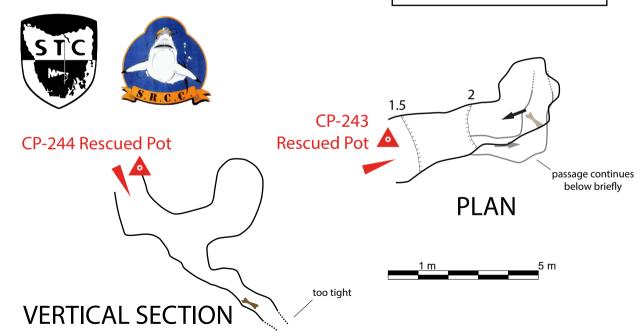
passage wall - underlying passage drop off/ledge - with height (m)

direction of floor slope

entrance

cave tag

fauna remains



# **CP-253 Contour Down**

## **Mount Cripps, Tasmania**

**VERTICAL SECTION** 

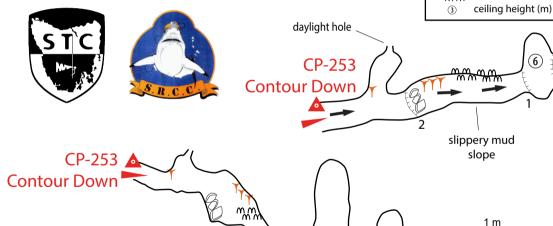
7CP253.STC552

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

**ASF Grade 23** 

Surveyed by Gabriel Kinzler (20/01/2023)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (February 2023)



## **LEGEND**

passage wall passage wall - underlying passage

drop off/ledge - with height (m)

direction of floor slope

entrance

cave tag

large rocks/boulders stalactite

stalagmite

coralloids/popcorn moonmilk

**PLAN** 

5 m

# **CP-254 Contour Up**

Mount Cripps, Tasmania

7CP254.STC553

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers
ASF Grade 23

Surveyed by Gabriel Kinzler (20/01/2023)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (February 2023)



## **LEGEND**

\_\_\_\_

passage wall



passage wall - conjectural/continues drop off/ledge - with height (m)

direction of floor slope

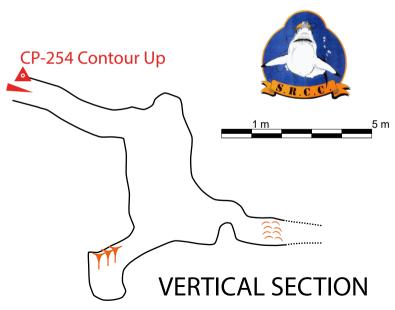


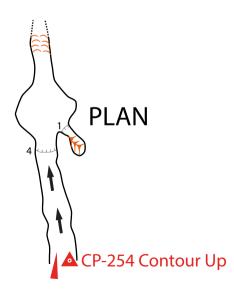
C S

cave tag stalactite

flowstone

entrance





# **CP-255 Pizza Express**

## Mount Cripps, Tasmania

7CP255.STC554

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

**ASF Grade 23** 

Surveyed by Gabriel Kinzler (20/01/2023)

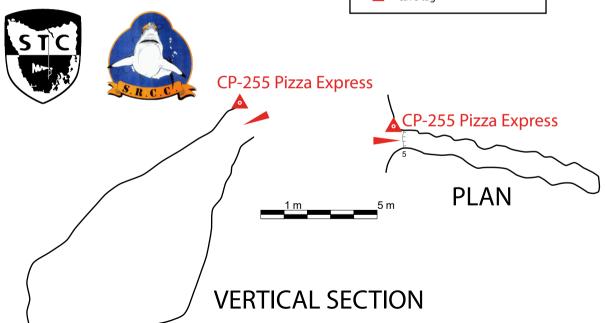
Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (February 2023)

## **LEGEND** passage wall

drop off/ledge - with height (m)



entrance cave tag



# CP-256 Magma

Mount Cripps, Tasmania

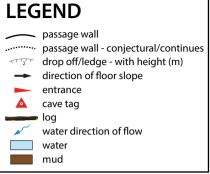
7CP256.STC555

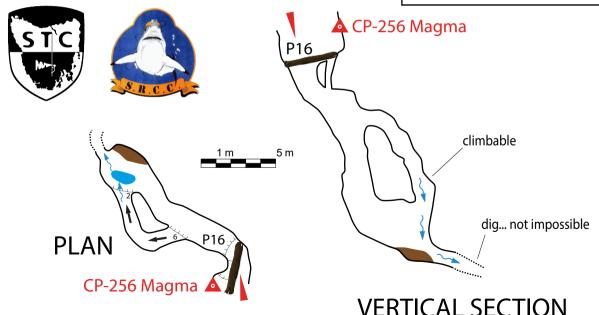
**Southern Tasmanian Caverneers** 

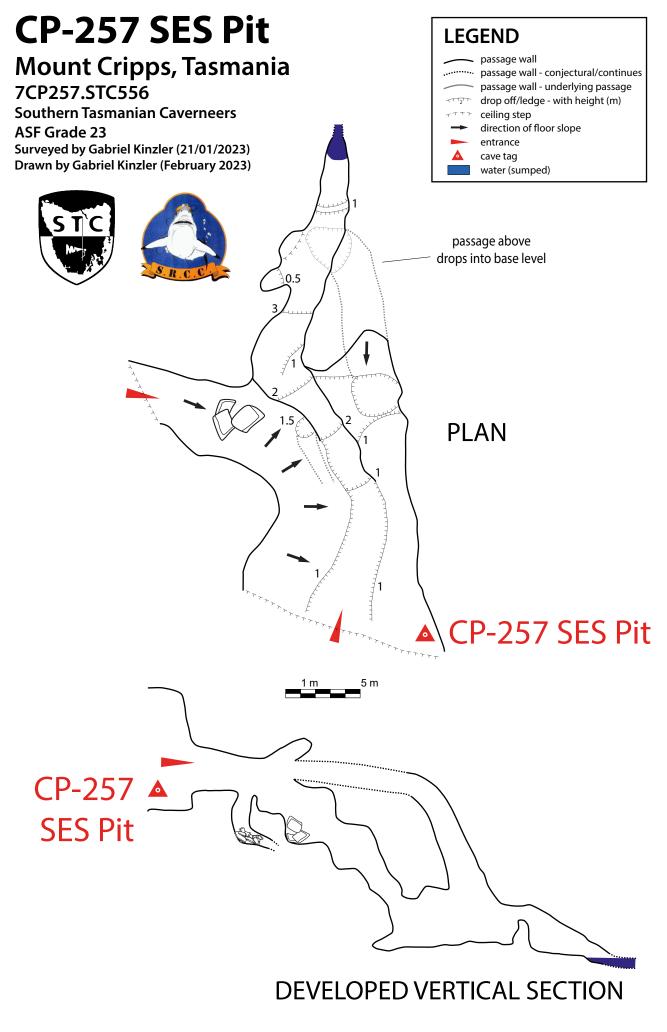
**ASF Grade 23** 

Surveyed by Gabriel Kinzler (21/01/2023)

Drawn by Gabriel Kinzler (February 2023)







## **Office Bearer's Reports**

## **President**

Janine McKinnon

It has been a very busy year for the club, on multiple fronts. We are a club with many and varied interests and skills. Lots of new cave has been discovered and explored, including, arguably, cracking the 400 m depth record in Niggly. The media took a lot of interest when that was claimed. That was a bit of positive press for both the club and caving in general.

Much other caving has also occurred; for fun, to train new members, place permanent rigging, survey, aid in research, and other stuff I have probably forgotten to mention here. We have been involved with several organisations; helping visiting overseas Entomologists find and collect specimens, helping with pollution research (more on both of those from our Science Officer), being consultants and safety officers for an inaugural UTAS Extreme Sport medical course, and our ongoing relationships with Tasmanian National Parks and TASPOL Search and Rescue.

I don't want to steal other officers' thunder so I will leave them to report on what has happened in their respective domains. Suffice to say we have been very busy and productive.

I have been very impressed by my fellow executive members. They have performed their various duties efficiently, capably, and promptly, and have been a delight to work with. Their input to all problems and issues that have come across our path that needed dealing with in-camera (and there have been a few) has been calm, sensible, considered and prompt. I wish to thank them publicly for all their efforts.

Whilst I'm on this subject, all office bearers in the club have fulfilled their duties efficiently. This is not to be assumed to happen even in the paid workforce, let alone a volunteer organisation.

Thank you to you all.

We are an organisation to be proud of, especially as we are an amateur, volunteer club, as I have mentioned several times! We punch above our weight.

#### Vice President

Gabriel Kinzler

I don't have much to add to what the President wrote. I think the club is in a great place, continues to achieve a lot, and it's an honour to be a part of it. I'm looking forward to what's in store this year.

#### **Public Officer**

Gabriel Kinzler

Nothing to report this year.

## Secretary

## **Russell Fulton**

I did my secretarial thing:

- Took minutes at meetings and sent them to the group, usually within 3 days.
- Emptied the STC mailbox at Sandy Bay. Mostly bank correspondence these days and just the odd letter. Even the junk mail has declined in volume.
- Replied to enquiries from people contacting the club through the website. About 50% of enquirers could be bothered responding to my well-penned response to their enquiry.
- Acted as second authoriser for the CommBiz account.

The lifting of COVID-19 related travel restrictions led to an increase in caving trips with mainlander member

participants. A significant number of those trips occurred in and around Niggly Cave/Delta Variant, culminating in a new Australian depth record being set. The club was subsequently inundated with requests for interviews from the media, both local and international. The media liaison team performed admirably.

The average attendance at GBMs through the year was 10.8, down from the 12.9 average of the previous year. I think it is likely a consequence of the opening of national and international borders with members travelling again. Meetings averaged 59.8 minutes duration, which was substantially down on the previous year's 75.9 minutes. Again, people with places to be and things to do...

The minutes show that 78 trips to caves or karst features were reported during the year.

## **Treasurer**

Karina Anders

## NOTES

- 1. Income sundries comprised entirely of selling old bits of rope.
- 2. Expenditure sundries comprised of \$50 civic club fee, \$24 USBs for treasurer and \$101 membership fee refunds.
- 3. Accounts to be audited internally by Alan Jackson.
- 4. No changes to ASF Fees (awaiting response from ASF treasurer to confirm whether ASF component will remain the same or not).
- 5. Noted that Equipment officer honorarium has not been paid out in 2 years. They are due 30% of the income received for all gear hire. For 2021 and 2022 Alan is due \$99.60.
- 6. Membership breakdown as at 31 December 2022:

CATEGORY	NUMBER	
Single	27	
Single – less ASF	4	
Household	21	
Concession	10	
Concession (non ASF)	1	
Introductory	12	
Life – Active	5	
Life – Inactive	1	
TOTAL	81	

## **COMMENTS**

The club was at a gain of \$1371.04 this year, with approximately \$10,100 in the operating account at AGM time and \$10,000 in the term deposit. Funds were spent primarily on the purchase of gear, spending \$120 on survey sheets, \$51.35 gear store items and \$679.95 on new rope (half of which, \$339.97 was paid for by the ACRC grant)

## **Income and Expenditure Statement**

For the period 1 January 2022 – 31 December 2022

	2022	2021
Income		
Membership fees	5960.25	6055.75
Speleo Spiel subscriptions	25	25
Gear hire	236	96
Trip fees	0	0
Donations (to STC General Funds)	0	464.12
Grants	339.97	0
Interest	30.06	71.09
Sundries	95	3065
Total income	6686.28	9776.96
Expenditure		
Spiel & Sthn Caver production	153.4	236.54
Corporate membership (eg ACKMA)	0	0
ASF fees	3712	3597.7
Gear purchase and repair	851.3	1800.35
Website hosting	0	65.34
Google 2Tb subscription	124.99	124.99
Equipment officer honorarium	0	0
Annual return fee	66	89.1
PO Box Rental	221	215
Bank fees	11.55	18.7
Training	0	0
Sundries	175	3799.08
Total expenditure	5315.24	9946.8
Net surplus (loss)	1371.04	-169.84
Balance Sheet		
General Account (bank balance)	10132.92	8761.88
Fixed Term Deposit (bank balance)		10000
Less unpresented cheques		0
Plus receipts to be deposited		0
Total cash position	10132.92	18761.88

## **Digital Archivist**

Stephen Fordyce

Being DA is a good role for me as it's cloud-based and easy to do from my lair in Melbourne, and this report marks a year since I took the role over from Michael "Pax" Packer. My biggest achievement was in fact pinning Pax down on the handover of various hard copy items from assorted storage places. It's taken a year, but the final lot is tantalisingly close, and hopefully will be transferred by AGM time. Thanks to Gabriel Kinzler and John Oxley for collecting these and to Ric and Janine for providing a new storage location (and to Ric for being Physical Archivist). A bunch of suspected-lost Sesame/Ring Hole data was found, hooray!

Some rearranging of the digital archive was done and there is a folder of useful resources available that wasn't before. Most of the random scans were identified and filed, and the Junee-Florentine QGIS project continues to evolve in complexity (not to mention the JF master list finally got finished). Gabriel tidied up the data agreement and made it possible to do digital signatures. The cloud subscription was changed from 2 TB to 200 GB, saving us \$100/year, with offline backups being kept instead of cloud-based ones. Jemma Herbert was briefed on relevant stuff in case I get hit by a bus.

Remember that the essence of the data agreement and archive is "you show me yours, and I'll show you mine" - data and information need to flow in both directions. No nude pictures though please.

## **Map Archivist**

Ric Tunney

I look after the paper-based part of STC's mapping effort; Steve Fordyce looks after the digital part. There is a map case for the maps (obviously!) and a filing cabinet for small maps, the written bookwork and other bits and pieces.

This all lives at my house in Lindisfarne.

Almost all the work has been done by others. I must particularly acknowledge the constant nagging by Steve Fordyce to get Michael Packer, the previous archivist, to hand over the majority of STC's property. Also, thanks to Gabriel Kinzler and John Oxley who moved the stuff from storage in Kingston to Lindisfarne.

Michael Packer still has, as I understand, several boxes of stuff including cave data forms. Steve has, thankfully, volunteered to continue his nagging. Michael Packer has never replied to my emails about this. I condemn Michael Packer for his inconsiderate behaviour and his unethical treatment of STC's property.

As we move more and more to digital mapping, less will be added to this archive. In fact, this year's additions have been practically zero. Images of survey bookwork are being stored digitally and maps are not being drawn on paper. The old paper maps have been scanned and are in the digital Archive. So, this role is more custodial than active.

## Librarian / Archivist

Greg Middleton

Since February 2022 the Library has received only 11 paper journals/newsletters (22 last year, 16 in 20-21). Our total holding is now 5,091. Many of these we also received in digital format.

Following my suggestion that we get rid of a lot of duplicate copies of journals and newsletters (including *Spiels* and *Southern Cavers*) which take up a lot of space, the ASF Librarian offered to take any duplicates we don't require. I delivered two boxes of duplicated copies to the ASF Library in NSW last December.

Digital copies of journals and newsletters are stored on a 1TB hard disk which is backed up to another and most are now available through our digital archive. Additions in the last 12 months include:

ACKMA Journal: #126-129 ASF Annual Report: 2021 Caves Australia: #219-222 CEGSA News: Vol. 67(1) ISS Newsletter: Vol. 28(1)-(3)

J. Sydney Speleo. Society: Vol. 66 (2)-(12), 67(1), (2)

Speleo Spiel: #448 - #453

Speleopod (SRCC): #90 - #91

Trog (KSS): Vol. 57(1) - (6)

NSS News (USA): Vol. 80(3)-(12), 80 (1), (2)

J. Cave & Karst Studies (USA): Vol. 83(4), 84(1)-(4)

Cave & Karst Science (UK): Vol. 48(3), 49(1-3)

Nineteen new books have been accessioned, mainly thanks to Prof Ralph Crane. The most notable of his contributions was *Encyclopedia of Cave and Karst Science* edited by John Gunn (2004) – the foremost reference book on caves. Our holding now stands at 460. A list of major books is on the website; a digital catalogue is available.

14 new DVDs were added. (Three of which remain on loan.) Our CD/DVD collection stands at 67.

Loose papers and articles (numbering 852) are stored in a series of binders. Many more remain to be accessioned.

No new issues of Southern Caver were produced.

I'm prepared to continue in the position but as this would be my 25<sup>th</sup> year I'm more than happy to hand the position – and the considerable volume of books and papers – over to someone else.

## **Search and Rescue Officer**

Jemma Herbert

We did some training:

- southern rescue exercise with TasPol at Mystery Creek thanks a bunch Alan and Damian for making that happen.
- northern rescue exercises x 2 thanks to NC for running them
- regular(ish) after work skills or scenario training. Mostly at Fruehauf.

We got some new rescue gear (half funded by an ACRC grant).

- replacements for all the short ropes in rescue kits
- a face shield to protect patient in stretcher

Thanks to Janice for organising the grant and researching all the face shield options.

We put together a callout list - available here https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1quzxRk-CqwnwmKx80sD5bOrx4QOsH6GDbfpkRCqMkEQ/edit?u sp=share\_link

If your personal details have changed, update them anytime here: https://forms.gle/oeDUtmw5ywYtocPm6

## **Science Officer**

Chris Sharples

When I agreed to do this job in 2022, I imagined there would be nothing much to it; as it turns out however, the main business for the year has been STC's involvement in two significant international projects related to caves and groundwaters.

The first project was the continuation of a DNA-based study of the evolution and genetic diversity of Tasmania's iconic Mountain Shrimp Anaspides, which as it turns out is not only widespread in mountain lakes and tarns in Tasmania, but has also spread into numerous cave systems where the surface species have evolved into blind, white, cave-adapted species. In about June 2022 I was contacted by Christoph Hoepel, a PhD student from the University of Rostock in northern Germany (on the Baltic Sea coast where gas pipelines get blown up mysteriously) and his PhD supervisor Stefan Richter, who were asking for assistance with information and guidance to a variety of southern Tasmanian caves (they were also assisted by Cathie Plowman and Dave Butler of Northern Caverneers). The project had actually commenced several years ago with prior Tasmanian fieldwork but was interrupted by the pandemic. Christoph and several coresearchers and assistants have now spent two more field seasons in Tasmania (Nov-Dec 2022 and Jan-Feb 2023), for which I was able to organise cave and access information for him (and I must thank Steve Fordyce who also put a lot of effort into helping with this). I also managed to arrange local guides for many of the caves they wanted to visit, particularly at Junee-Florentine and Hastings, and I particularly thank Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney, John

Oxley, John Webb, Rolan Eberhard and Arthur Clarke for their help as guides and amateur Anaspides catchers. Of course, I also ended up visiting quite a few of the caves myself in the course of helping the project. I think Christoph and his various offsiders have had a great time in Tasmania, which included several other exciting excursions including a full traverse of the Western Arthurs (sampling the lakes for shrimps) and a helicopter-support week in the Precipitous Bluff caves with Stefan Eberhard. More details will appear in a forthcoming *Speleo Spiel* and I for one am looking forward to Christoph's published papers on his findings!

The second project originated in an approach from Professor Anne Robertson of the University of Roehampton (UK), who has been undertaking a global study of the prevalence of microplastics in groundwater, including cave springs and outflows. I agreed to sample groundwater from three Tasmanian cave springs using a sampling technique she specified, and as a result John Webb and I spent a day at Junee Cave, Nameless Spring and the Lawrence Rivulet Rising, dressed in nothing but cold cotton and leather boots to avoid microplastic contamination from polyester thermals and synthetic boot materials. The sampling involved bucketing a huge amount of water from a stainless-steel bucket through two very fine filters, which have now been returned to the UK for analysis. I am awaiting the results with quite some interest, and there will be more details in the Speleo-Spiel soon.

Apart from being kept quite busy by these two projects, nothing else happened in the Science Officer portfolio. I am happy to continue in the Science Officer role, as long as it isn't always quite so busy!

## Speleo Spiel Editor

Janine McKinnon

All issues of *Speleo Spiel* were published within the allocated timeframe this past year. Due to the enthusiastic caving practices of club members, and their reliable writing of trip reports, I always had plenty of trips to publish. Several members also submitted interesting articles occasionally. The publication of digital maps in the *spiel* has also been regular, if not a complete record of what surveying has been happening. Updated rigging notes have also been provided for publishing. This meant that our club magazine was always a healthy size, includes currently very useful

information and shows what an active club we are. The detail in reports is to be commended also as this leaves a useful record for future club members as a resource for research, plus interesting and fun reading. If you have never read old *Spiel* issues, I recommend it. Hours can be lost following old exploration tales and even just who was doing what and when.

I wish to thank my sub-editorial team of Alan Jackson, Gabriel Kinzler and Ric Tunney for their (literally) invaluable efforts. The quality of the production, particularly in terms of grammar, accuracy and typos, is down to them. Many commercial publications don't do as well.

## **Training Officer**

Janine McKinnon

Four basic SRT training sessions were run in 2022. 2 by me, and 1 by Karina and 1 by Karina and Jemma when I was away. That was for a total of 9 trainees.

A couple of other sessions fell through when the potentials cancelled before we got to the wall.

Thank you to Karina and Jemma for stepping in in my absence, and Jemma and Ric respectively for each helping on one of the sessions I ran. It makes it much easier to train 2 or more people (particularly if they are finding the whole thing difficult) if you have help.

We have kept two of those trainees so far, so not a bad result as these things go.

## **Equipment Officer**

Alan Jackson

2022 was another year of equipment officer in absentia (work sucks). Thank you to those who facilitated access whenever I was away. We had a few minor working bees to retire old rope and label new and re-cut stuff. A few donations happened (thanks Janine and Ric). A few bits and pieces were replaced. People came and went, borrowing gear. Nothing overly exciting springs to mind.

Rope and equipment stocks in general are pretty good. I don't see an urgent need to buy new rope or other gear. Happy to field suggestions from members if you think something is looking a bit shabby.

2023 looks like I might spend more time in the southern half of the state than the north, so I'm happy to commit to another year in the role and hopefully will get some of the small jobs that need doing in the gear store sorted out.

#### Webmaster

John Oxley

The club's website;

https://southerntasmaniancaverneers.com

continues to perform well.

Site statistics show that during the year there has been a continuous trickle of website visits with a marked spike in late July to early August 2022. This corresponds to the time of the media publicity around the connection between Delta Variant and Niggly caves.

Also, it appears that the website is appearing frequently in Google searches containing terms such as "caving Tasmania", "caving club Hobart" and other similar terms.

## **ASF Googlegroups Representative**

Ric Tunney

Australian Speleological Federation (ASF) communicates with its member clubs through a Googlegroups group. The task of the STC Rep. is to decide how to react - get our Executive to action it or send it to the STC Listserver for club members to do something, and later to coordinate STC's response.

I haven't counted the number of communications from ASF this year. It's between one a month and one a week. Our super-efficient Secretary Russell Fulton also lurks on the Googlegroup and actions the messages if I'm not fast enough. This is a good thing and I give myself a tardiness Brownie point when he beats me. Anyway, the system seems to work which is the intention; we haven't missed anything this year (I hope!).

## **Social Secretary**

Phillip Jackson

The year was quiet as far formal social events went.

There were a few casual pre-meeting drinks and burgers at the Prince of Wales, a social caving trip to Mole Creek and Christmas drinks at the HBC.

The Mole Creek trip participants included many STC cavers and associates and a large contingent of Northern Caverneers.

The Wet Cave campsite was also besieged by a swarm of rudderless "which way is it to the cave?" tourists in their mobile pop top palaces.

STC and NC cavers did joint trips through Devils Pot and Croesus Cave. Between times there were casual meanderings in and out of Honeycomb and Wet Caves and lounging about in the sunshine with drinks, food and talk of

fine things. I think there may an Abel or two bagged along the way. A great weekend in a cracking place.

Christmas drinks at HBC was most convivial. Although it was short notice enough hardy members and associates turned up to make a pleasant evening. The drinks, conversation and company were great, the only thing missing was some pyrotechnics. Perhaps the next Social Secretary can write some RAs, JSAs and SOPs so that we can poke balloons filled with acetylene or hydrogen over the HBC fire pit just like we did in the good ol' days.

There were probably at least fifty informal social activities in the form of training days, SRT practice and general caving trip.

Well done to President Janine and the Executive for another well-executed year.

I am happy to continue doing little in this position unless somebody would like to take over and possibly do more.

# **The Last Page**

