

Speleo Spiel 457

October-December 2023



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Front Cover: Ben Jackson looking interested in decorations. Photo: Alan Jackson

Back Cover: I didn't have anything funny. Friendzone. Photo: John Oxley

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

Speleo Spiel

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Editorial

The last issue for the year, and it is a biggie again. Lots of people have been caving, doing all sorts of trips: exploration, beginner, fun, photographic, surveying, and fixing rigging. Probably other aims I have missed. That is one of the joys of the caving universe - there are so many niches you can play (or is that work without pay?) in. Opportunities for all abilities, fitness levels, enthusiasm, and interests.

If you check out the contents page, you will see that we have had reports sent to the *Spiel* from cavers from outside STC. They are interesting to read, and I want to thank them for taking the trouble to put fingers to keyboard for us.

Our Netherlands branch have also sent us a report on an annual above-ground caving weekend that makes me green with envy.

We have lots of great photos from some of these diverse trips, not to mention (but I am) a great montage from this year's rescue exercise.

This is probably my last issue as editor. Yes, I know, one more return and I'll be challenging Nellie Melba's record (google it). However, we have an enthusiastic applicant waiting in the wings for the AGM in 2024. So, I want to say now how much I've enjoyed doing it for quite a few years and thank all the contributors. You make the *Spiel* what it is.

Merry Christmas to all.

Stuff 'n' Stuff

Congratulations to Damian Bidgood, a long-term club member and sergeant with Tasmanian Police Search and Rescue team (TASPOL SAR). He was given a Long-Standing Contribution award at the National Search and Rescue awards (NATSAR) in October. This is very well deserved. He has been in the TASPOL SAR for 30 years and has been involved in countless rescues and searches, as a member of the helicopter team, a diver, bushwalker and of course caver. He has been our main police contact for our annual CAVEX practices for many years.

Congratulations are also due to Ciara Smart for winning the New Zealand Speleological Society's (NZSS) survey award for 2023 with her map of Bloody Box Game (BBG) (SS 456, p.31). At the AGM in October, her BBG Cave survey was selected by the Maps Officer as one of the final six maps to be judged for the survey award, and "after a lot of discussion was judged the best of the six". I think the discussion was that they didn't want the award to go outside NZ but couldn't pass on her map being the best! There is a trophy for the competition; however it is not allowed to leave NZ.

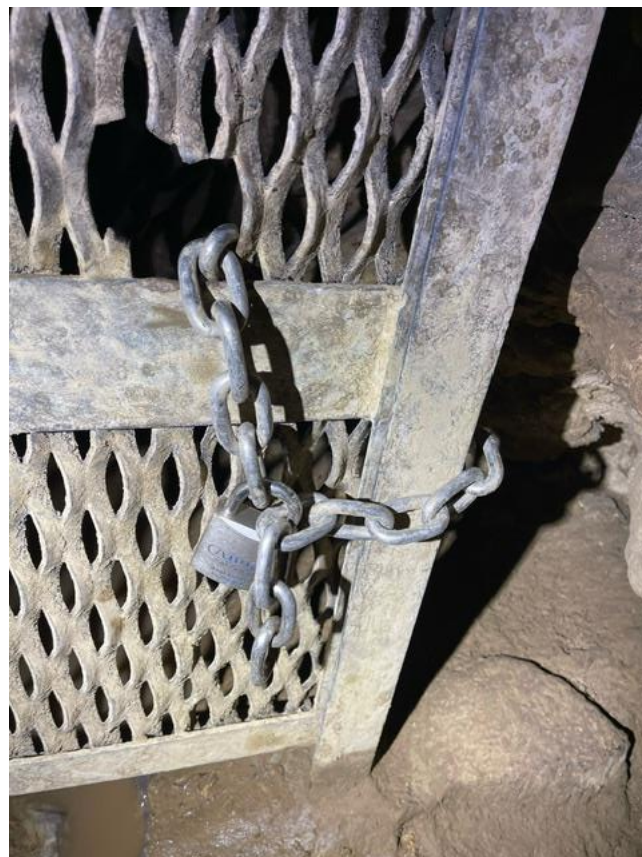
Ciara obviously keeps an eye on mainland news. Here is an item she found in the Sydney Morning Herald recently. They probably thought no one would get the answer.

5. What thin, curling calcite formations grow from the walls of caves in any direction, seemingly defying gravity: helictites, stalactites or stalagmites?

Helictites

We had a problem with the Exit main entrance lock on a recent trip (report this issue, p9). Thanks to new member Michael Glazer for sorting the whole thing with Parks very efficiently.

Competence, initiative, efficiency, and enthusiasm – what more could one ask for?



New lock in place. Photo: Michael Glazer

I thought this was interesting and worth sharing. Nothing to do with having a space to fill here:

"Dripstones, or speleothems, are unique natural archives -- like Earth's USB sticks. They store a wealth of information on past climate which helps us to better understand the environment in which early humans lived,"

Jenny Maccali explains. She is a scientist at SapienCE Centre of Excellence, and has lead the study, now published in *Climate of the Past*.

The editor would welcome any snippets that readers may come across related in any way, no matter how vague, to the subject of caving to include in this section.

She is starting to struggle a bit to find copy for "Stuff 'n' Stuff". She is probably even going to keep putting in words here for several lines just to fill in the gap that she can't think of anything else to fill it with.

So please, please take pity on her and sent something for her to include here for the next issue, and others beyond.

Interesting stuff would be best, but desperation isn't picky.

Trip Reports

JF-237 Niggly Cave (By the Rivers of Babylon)

13-16 July 2023

Text by Stephen Fordyce unless otherwise credited.

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Henry Garratt, Jemma Herbert, Bogdan (Bo) Muresan, Ciara Smart

This trip report nearly fell through the cracks, better late than never. July saw the first non-summer Niggly camping trip in a while (the last one was an all-mainlander trip in May 2021, “Don’t stop thinking about tomorrow”), and it might be the last for a while. The universe determined that anyone doing a PhD was not welcome on this trip, so Lachlan and Ciara had to bail at the last minute (Ciara literally made it to the entrance, getting her over the line for inclusion in the party) for worthy reasons. We went underground on Thursday 13 July, and came out on Sunday 16 July.

Since we had high hopes for the River of Babylon lead, the Boney M song “By the Rivers of Babylon” was selected by executive decision for the trip theme song. Mmm, 70s cheese.



Token photo of Ciara. Photo: Bogdan Muresan

Day 1: Rigging fixing (by Jemma)

Henry and I got a head start on the day so we could get in early to fix some of the rigging in Snot Monster before the others came down. It was about time we made the rigging more toward 'commuter' and less 'exploration'.

The first thing to fix was the tyrolean across the end of the traverse above Daily Cases. This pitch has been a bit of a personal nemesis to get rigged nicely.

It's still not nice, but maybe it's better than my previous 3 or 4 attempts? The previous iteration received significant constructive criticism! This time I put in an extra screw on the far side, so now there's 3 on each side, so it can be rigged tight. But I didn't have a biner big enough to be able to tension it with a munter on a stiff rope, so it's just as tight as I could tie a knot. Scooching across the tyrolean is fine now, you don't have to put your chest ascender on, and you land at a pleasant height to get off on the far side, but getting on is a pain. The bolts for the near side are too high to get on from the ledge (that's where the good rock is), which means you must ascend a bit before you transition onto the tyrolean. It ain't pretty, but it works good enough I reckon.

The next thing to fix was the Snot Monster pitch. Henry and Karina had a really hard time rigging this pitch the first time because everything is choss. Henry and I came back this trip with the intent of just looking harder, digging deeper under the surface choss and finding better rock somewhere. We banged and dug and de-chossed for over an hour in that little room and found zero good rock. We concluded that the existing location of the anchors is still the best place for them, even though it makes for a very awkward pitch head. We did manage to remove a little surface choss from their current location and screw them a bit deeper. We also found a small patch of good rock, around the corner, from which we rigged a much-needed access line. This pitch is still not fun, but a bit better than it was.



*Bunch of posers in the side passage just past Mt Niggly
Photo: Stephen Fordyce*

The last thing on our list of rigging to fix was the Boogie Monster pitch into the BSG chamber. Again with the choss, choss everywhere. We wanted to rerig this to go straight down the face, rather than swinging off to rebelay on the pillar. Feedback had been that unless you knew to keep to climber's left, you would naturally swing out right and drop off the chossy lip. So we put a redirect out to the left, then went straight down to try and find somewhere to rebelay where the wall (choss-mud-slab) steepens. As with my first venture down there, I failed to find any solid rock whatsoever, it's just fist sized rocks gooped together with mud for 40 m. So failing that plan, we reverted to the rebelay on the pillar. Now with the early redirect it's a bit easier to get to.

Again, as with all the rigging improvements, it's probably a little better than before, but not nearly as good as we'd like.



The Dunes mudbanks near camp, my new GoPro 10 was noticeably better than the 4. Photo: Stephen Fordyce

Day 1: Survey and Black Supergiant Assessment

Ciara, Bo and I headed out and up the hill at a more leisurely time than the early bird team. Bo and I followed them into the Negative RAT Hole entrance, while Ciara made the call to head back down the hill. It was Bo's first time in the system and he was suitably impressed (Bo is a fellow Melbournean, but an experienced expedition caver originally from Romania). I made the tyrolean look very difficult by not climbing up the access rope. We surveyed and sketched the remainder of Snot Monster, found the remains of a dropped poo tube and caught up with the early birds at the top of Boogie Monster.

I carefully assessed for traverses across the top of subsequent pitches but was compelled to agree with everyone else – no prospect. The aven above the BSG pitchhead has a flat roof which is easily visible, and this is at similar level to the top of Boogie Monster. Might be worth a look for a traverse (there's another window a few metres further on?), but it'd probably be easier to get there by climbing up the nice rock from near the BSG P-hangers. It's hard to tell, but looking at the ceiling, the BSG does not seem to have been formed from the direction of Snot Monster.

We surveyed and sketched the large BSG chamber – it is massive with one of the walls apparently made entirely of mud. There's actually a downward lead in rockpile in the far corner which sort of still goes. The way in from the Niggly entrance is not where you'd expect it in relation to Boogie Monster (they cross over).

Going down the Black Supergiant was pretty incredible, although a pain in the arse with the rope weight (I used my legs to help lift it). It was 5+ years since my only visit – a tandem ascent with Pax on one of the very early camping trips. I looked around a lot, some of the walls weren't visible. About 50 m off the deck, one wall disappeared with a section of flat ceiling going across and then disappearing up into a parallel shaft. I referenced this carefully and determined that this parallel shaft corresponds to the wall at the highest point of the gentle rubble slope that you land on. It would make sense that the Delta Variant water came down here before retreating back to the Freedom Day pitch – maybe traversing

across the top of that pitch would lead to something interesting.



Looking down the far slope of Mt Niggly

Photo: Stephen Fordyce

Henry and Jemma were ready for camp (and deserved it too) after all their rigging efforts, Bo and I made a classic "quick detour" to Atlantis to swap detectors and look at the Pool of Promise. We got wet feet for our troubles, and I rolled a giant rock on the detector and broke it. Luckily with a quick unplugging of the battery, the electronics could later be salvaged.

Back at camp, the stoves couldn't be found, so Henry was kind enough to put his kit back on and go looking for it. Shortly afterwards we of course found them! I had volunteered to cook the excessively complicated meal to one of Nadia's hiking recipes, with a few tweaks of my own. These all turned out to be disastrous, but the meal was well received, including the seaweed garnish packed in a snap lock bag (this will be relevant later).

Day 2: Climbing and Rigging In Meru (Bo & Jemma)

(by Jemma) Bo went up Sketchy Evens and rigged this to retrieve what we thought was the dynamic rope, which turned out not to be a dynamic rope, woops. It's now a single 8 mm thru-bolt up there, with just orange string threaded through the hanger.

(by Steve) Jemma and Bo then turned their attention to traversing over the top of the pitch to the Biohazard Sump, to an upward mud slope on the other side. They got there pretty easily, and it choked. With some confusion over whether that was the objective (it was), and plenty of enthusiasm leftover, they tackled a time-consuming and difficult ~8 m climb to the ceiling. Surprisingly, this was rewarded with a short down-pitch, then barrelling horizontal passage ("Breakfast Jelly", after Jemma's morning meal) which went approx. 150 m and ended in another undropped down pitch. A meander ("The Seaweed Bag", after the small bag which originally had seaweed garnish in it was repurposed as a supremely inadequate stepping stone between camp mats) came in from the side halfway along. It wasn't pleasant, but with considerable thrutching, was followed some distance to a bigger chamber with rockpile that needed to be pushed another day.



As usual, there was plenty of mud to contend with on every climb. Photo: Steve Fordyce

Day 2: Meru lead checking (Steve & Henry)

(by Steve) Henry and I went to the end of Rivers of Babylon, where Petr and Henry had spent many painful hours digging last trip. The prognosis was gloomy, but with fresh eyes, the dig wasn't so bad – there was room for spoil, and space for toil, but the way on was girt by sea (or at least, cave water). Kind of a squeezey roof sniff to small stream passage. We cleared a bit, then Henry went in feet first and kicked them around in the slightly bigger passage we could see, while submerged up to his neck. Full marks for enthusiasm. I elected to come back in summer with wetsuits (and best-case scenario water levels) and Henry reluctantly agreed. It was going to be super awkward for the first person to get through and dig a bit of space on the other side (and not to drown).

That job out of the way, we scooted over to Biohazard and saw the other guys on their climb. We scoffed and left them to it, and re-checked/re-surveyed Shopping and Parking, way up in the rockpile. If we could get through to the far side of the enlargeable squeeze up the horror of Sketchy Evens, that could be crossed off the list. Unfortunately, the resurvey turned up a survey error which shifted S&P away from SA, so that was annoying. The itch was scratched, S&P is finished. A small saving grace of the exercise was shoving myself up a little hole just to prove to Henry that it wasn't impossible. He was suitably impressed.

We reconvened with Jemma and Bo, heard their excellent news and hauled everything back to camp. It was a semi-civilised time, but we'd all been pushing hard enough to be ready for a quick dinner and early bed.

Day 3: Lazy Day

We were excited to get back to Breakfast Jelly and survey it (Bo did some estimates using the compass on his watch and sketches). Alas, the cave had other ideas. The water levels had been noticeably wintery yesterday (we all got wet to at least the knees), and they had gone up slightly this morning. Memories of the forecast were compared and differed – the one of 30 mm rain was conservatively adopted and the master cave survey day written off. I was secretly glad to have an excuse to head over Mt Niggly and collect the detector at the DIY Sump. We also admired the mega side passage near the original campsite and wrote off the "Secret Side Passage" next to it. It quickly pinched out into nothing.



Starting off the Lightbulb Climb. Photo: Bogdan Muresan

Next on the long-neglected to-do list was going to Rockhampton and following up on the previous visit in May 2021 where Keith found a pitch in nasty rockpile. It was close enough to camp to have a hot lunch first!

(Rockhampton pushing by Jemma) So apparently Rockhampton is north of the Hume Highway. Both in the real world and in the naming of features in this cave. Haha, very good whoever did that, we had the totally confusing discussion that I'm sure it was designed for. We went for a bit of a more thorough check of Rockhampton, there was supposedly a pitch worth dropping out near the last survey station, but we'd also just have a poke around for anything cool or new. We got into the rockpile on the right side (looking from camp) and it required a too-big step across over a too-big potential fall for my likings. Luckily for me, the poop in my pants was well camouflaged by the mud. Once in there, there were lots of ways to go. Steve chose one and did some digging above his head to create his own poop pants moment, before a tactical retreat. Bo had a look at where the pitch was meant to be and deemed it unworthy.

It wasn't too hard to find our way to the top of the rock pile. We poked around at roof level for a little while, then left to

go do something more fun. We came down the opposite side to the way we went up, and it was much more sane.



Henry on the Lightbulb Climb. Photo: Bogdan Muresan

With Rockhampton written off and the makings of a souvenir scar on my cheek, we'd had a productive day. The trouble was it was only early afternoon. A compromise was made – we would go back to camp at The Dunes, and anyone with spare energy would take it in turns to aid climb into the aven above. Apart from being a potential lead, it would be handy to be able to haul the camping gear up there instead of stashing it up Rockhampton above flood level.

We made a human pyramid to get things started, then Henry and Jemma tag teamed their way up. There was a roof section and a lip that took ages, lots of mud and general things. Henry got a lot of practise and even got serious a few times. I got into my sleeping bag and hurled much helpful advice from there. Bo ran around staging and taking some great photos. Hot drinks were provided for the belayer. Jokes about changing lightbulbs were made (and it was named "Lightbulb Climb"). About 10 m of vertical progress was made – not quite enough to keep it above a big flood this time around.

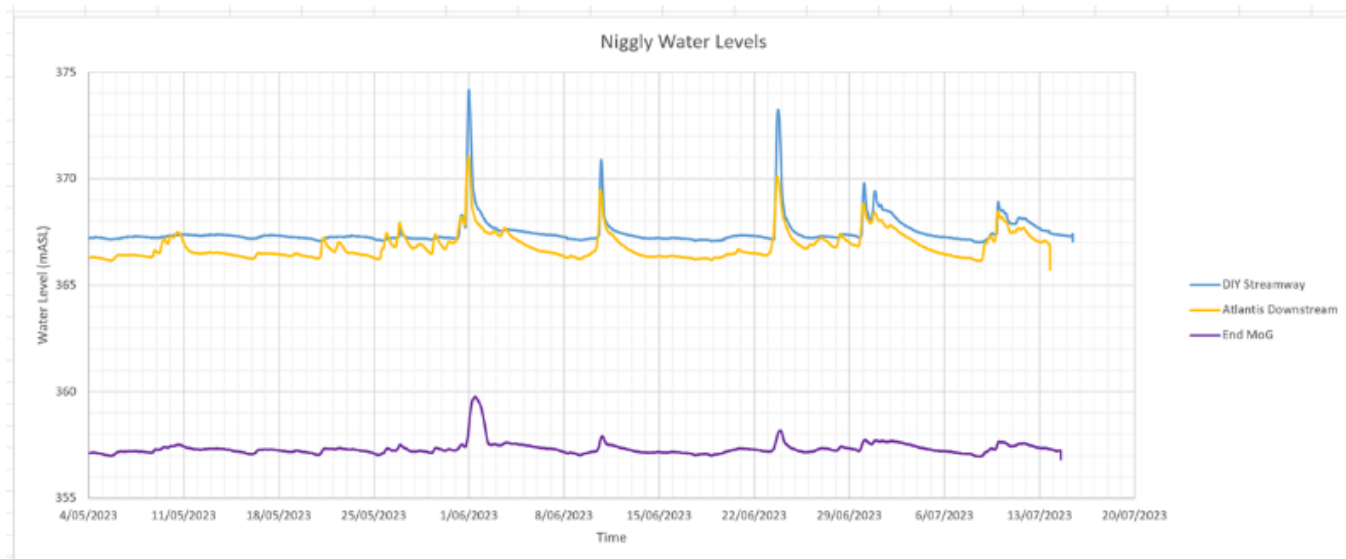
Water Level Data:

I plotted depth info from the three retrieved detectors and it's really interesting. A plot of water level at different points in Niggly is below (Y-axis factors in the cave survey station altitude to give water level in metres above sea level rather than local depth). Each rockpile acts like a dam and the flood levels are quite independent – i.e. on 1 June, there was a 7 m flood upstream of Mt Niggly, a 5 m flood in Atlantis/Dreamtime Sump, and a 2.5 m flood at the downstream end of Mother of God. Flooding also has a lot more to do with snowmelt than rainfall and/or very localised precipitation.

Day 4: Birthing Day

"Rivers of Babylon" shredded the silence as we did the packup, stash, and leave. Jemma and Henry tandem prusiked up the BSG, while Bo and I went up the Daily Cases route to save time and show Bo that way. The water was pumping, and although the rigging nicely kept us out of direct showers, there was a lot of spray and noise at the base of the big pitches. We weren't fast, but we hit the surface and were back at the cars at least an hour before them! Luckily Ciara had realised that four of us plus gear were not going to fit in to Jemma's Yaris, and we were supremely grateful to see she had just arrived to pick us up.

Bit of a mixed bag of a trip – some surprising and exciting finds (Biohazard is another Petr find that just keeps on giving) and a reminder that winter trips are a bit more uncertain. Some good stuff to get our teeth into on the next trip in summer.



JF-337 Slaughterhouse Pot

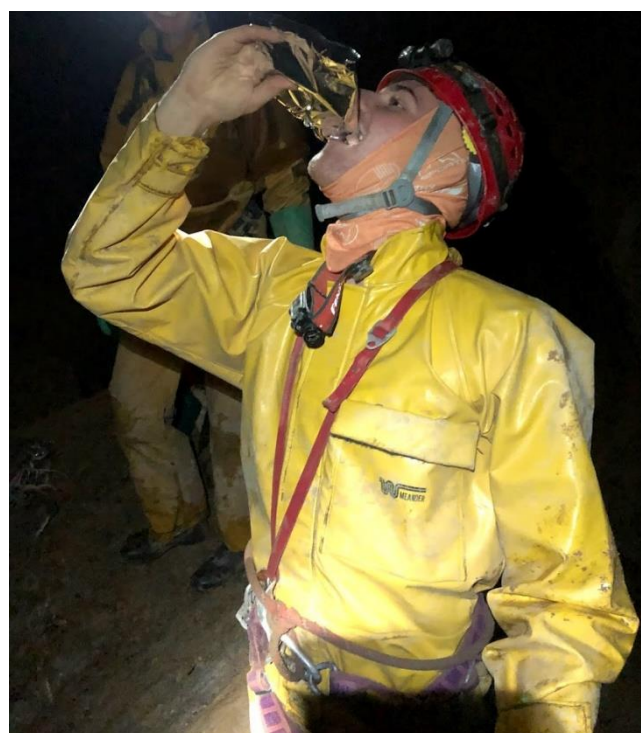
30 July 2023

Ciara Smart

Party: Serena Benjamin, Henry Garratt, Penny Player, Ciara Smart

I'd originally hoped to do the Slaughterhouse-Growling through trip, but upon arrival at the Growling entrance, it became apparent that water levels were too high. As a result, we descended just the first three pitches of Slaughterhouse Pot. A cruisy day underground, with little of note to say.

Henry is a convert of the 'shapes for lunch' philosophy
Photo Ciara Smart



IB-131 Old Ditch Road

30 September 2023

Janine McKinnon

Party: Michael Glazer, Deb Hunter, Janine McKinnon, Chris Sharples, Ric Tunney

I had planned this trip to be an opportunity for moderately fit and basic SRT competent new cavers, or regular members who aren't interested in, or able to do, the hard exploration trips currently the mainstay of club activities. I can't say I was killed in the rush, but I did score a very capable new caver in Michael, and a few of the old crew who know each other well.

A brief digression: A few of us had wandered the track all the way to the Exit main entrance the previous weekend to check out the state of the track. We took 4 hours to get there but had a much faster return of 1.5 hours. The track was clear

BUT very soft and muddy, and very slippery. We hoped it would dry and harden a bit before this weekend of the caving trip.

As 'twas the day before daylight saving started, I decided that an early start would set us up for the change-over. Thus, we left Hobart at 6.30 am, picked up Chris at Huonville and met Michael at the carpark at 8 a.m. Michael had picked up the key from Hastings as the plan was that most of the party would do a through trip and only some (in fact one) would de-rig Old Ditch Road (ODR). I had had a few problems organising the key as it seems that a new ranger was in charge of issuing the permit and wasn't aware that a key was needed or how to allow us to get it. Fortunately, we sorted it by Friday.

It had rained heavily (50 mm) two days earlier and our walk to the cave was even slipperier than the previous week. It was a very unpleasant walk, with a few places that were quite

hard to get up little 1-2 m climbs. We reached the ODR turn-off after 1.25 hours walking.

The drop down into the ODR doline was equally slippery and very muddy. The cave entrance had a LOT of loose, wet dirt fallen into it. I don't think anyone has been there since our last trip in 2016. It wasn't any harder than usual to get down the short climb and along to the first pitch, just a lot muddier.

We planned to do something about the rigging of the first pitch, which has a single P-hanger installed under the window at the top of the pitch. After looking around for a way to rig from directly above P2, and finding nothing but flowstone, we opted to stay with the current rigging but add a concrete screw above the window to improve ease of access to the pitch head. Ric did this, and as he was sitting in the window to install the screw he then proceeded down to continue and rig P2.

I decided I should come last, and so the other three followed Ric. All found the P2 pitch-head a bit of a challenge as it is on a wall opposite the ledge that P1 lands on, with the pitch in-between. There's nothing like a good opportunity to practice varied rope skills though, and they all calmly worked out a method that suited them.



P3. Photo: Michael Glazer

The pitch is lovely, with beautifully shaped windows into a parallel shaft visible from the bottom of the cave. It was quite drippy though, a surprise from my last trip.

The rest of the pitches are pretty straight-forward and we all made it to the bottom 2.5 hours after starting into the cave.

A quick lunch, and then off to the Ball Room for a look. I left the others after this and returned to ODR to de-rig the cave whilst the other four made their way down to the river and out the main entrance. The plan was that two of them would come back into the crawly top section of ODR to help get the ropes out from the head of P1.



The Ball Room. Photo: Michael Glazer

I had a relaxed and fun trip back up the cave by myself and was back at the small room at the top of P1, with all ropes ready to go into packs to be hauled out of the cave, an hour after I started up the bottom pitch. I expected to have to wait for the others for an hour or so but was pleasantly surprised to hear then about 30 minutes after I was ready. They hadn't brought in packs so we coiled the two big ropes (I had the third in my pack) and passed them along as we exited.

They informed me that there had been a problem with the padlock on the gate, with it opening but jamming, and they had had great difficulty getting the key out of the lock. They had decided that they needed to take it back to Parks to fix – if they'd replaced it on the lock the next party may very well not have been able to open it.



More Ball Room photos, 'cause you can never have too many....and I had space to fill

Photo: Michael Glazer

The walk back to the top of the quarry was even less pleasant than the walk in as the ropes and our personal gear were very wet and muddy, and thus much heavier. Those of us carrying the communal gear had very heavy packs and we all found the ice-rink nature of the track particularly frustrating. Kudos to Michael for carrying by far the greatest weight.

We were back at the cars by 5 pm and had a lovely snack of thick homemade soup courtesy of Deb and Focaccia (handmade!) by Michael.

It was a very enjoyable trip however I think I will leave any more caving involving walking that track until later in summer when it has dried out.

Updated rigging notes have been made and are available in the archive, and below.

Addendum

Michael took the broken padlock to Parks in Huonville the following week, collected the replacement lock when it became available a couple of weeks later, and walked into the cave and replaced the lock. He also put a can of Inox Lanox in a ziplock bag tucked away in a crevice next to the gate. Finally, he took a photo of the new lock in-situ and sent it to Parks.

It is keyed the same as the old lock, so no problems with using the same key for both the old lock on the Valley Entrance lock and this new one.

Thanks Michael.

IB-131 Old Ditch Road Rigging

Ric Tunney
October 2023

Pitch	Rope	Rigging
P1 7 m	14 m (guess)	Climb up to the window off the balcony. CS and hanger RHS. It is possible to attach descender below lower hanger and lower self for descender to take load.
P2 38 m	43 m	Two hangers across void on wall opposite ledge. Use P1 rope to reach hangers.
	57 m	One rope for P1 + P2 as single pitch. This length allows big loop (3 m) so people can get off at ledge.
P3 12 m	18.5 m	Two hangers LHS for Y-belay. Rub point at -4m; short redirection (0.5 m) from CS RHS.
P4 35 m	42 m	Y-hang from two hangers RHS. Rebelay from hanger LHS 7m down. (This rebelay is not necessary for pull-down trip.)

Rope lengths quoted allow each rope to be tied to head of following pitch.

Jeff Butt advised 110 m will do whole cave; length given above is 117 m.

Notes:

All directions are looking down.

Hangers are glue-in P-hangers installed 2003.

CS are concrete screws installed Sep 2023.

This rigging guide is a reworking of guides by Jeff Butt (2003) and Ric Tunney (Apr 2016).

5ème édition du Rallye Spéléo de la Basilique

(25-27 August 2023)

Tony Veness & Jane Pulford

STC's representatives in The Hague

At the end of the northern summer, Brussels-based caving club Spéléo Redan ran their first outdoor fun-and-games rope parcours since COVID times - under, over and around the imposing National Basilica of the Sacred Heart. The club has their clubhouse/bar in the basement of the basilica, but that's a whole different story.

Multiple rope parcours over multiple days saw a large turnout of cavers from across Europe (and UK of course). We had a bash at a single course on the Sunday. We made a weekend of it, driving three hours south and camping in Ghent from where we trained/biked to and from Brussels and the basilica. Our coal-fired VW Transporter campervan is becoming less and less popular in city centres as Low Emission Zones pop-up across Europe.

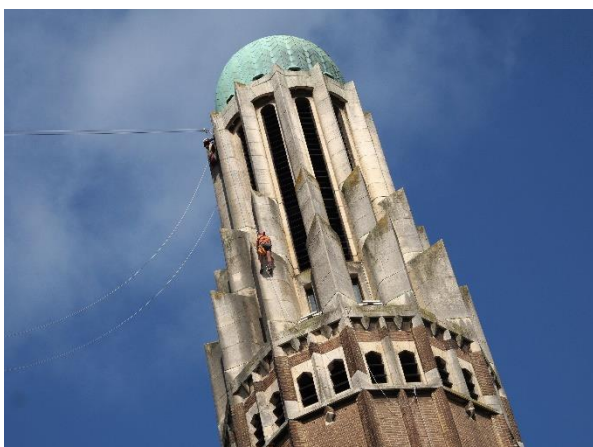
After perusing the pop-up gear shoppe, we selected our parcours and demonstrated in the clubhouse bunker that we

could safely go up, down and sideways on a rope. And away we went. Dodged an exciting thunderstorm and it being late in the weekend, we avoided getting stuck behind other groups or holding anyone else up.

Lotta ropes, wires, pulleys, anchors and bruises. And exposure. Plenty of exposure.

Here is a montage of photos from this amazing vertical "caving" experience. What a pity we can't do this here!:





JF-387 Porcupine Pot Connection (with Asterisk in name only) to JF-35 Gormenghast

16 September 2023

Stephen Fordyce, photos by Stephen Fordyce unless credited otherwise.

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Henry Garratt, Michael Glazer, Ciara Smart, Petr Smejkal

Avid readers of the *Speleo Spiel* and/or purveyors of juicy caving gossip will be aware of my series of embarrassments with regards to the Porcupine and Gormenghast connection, or lack thereof. Fortunately, with the support of an all-Tasmanian crew, the thing was finally done, another half-finished job in Porcupine can be crossed off the list, and that project can inch one step closer to completion (annoyingly, the support crew took two steps back in that regard – see Ciara’s separate report in this issue of their spectacular find).

For detailed context of the story up to this point, refer to:

SS452, p16 for detailed report of the previous connection claim

SS454, p16 for report of the Gormenghast resurvey, and “disconnection”/hat-eating

The dive was a carbon copy of the one just over a year previous – all the same gear with the exception of my precautionary brown undies. Bright green was very nearly a fatal mistake, but I’ll get to that later. Having previously negotiated (and escaped from) the awful wet flattener at the start, it was less intimidating, but still took a solid 10 minutes to find the method to get through. I’d turned around at streamway passage of pleasant crawling dimensions, so at least there wasn’t any unattempted awfulness on the horizon, with the possible exception of the sump dived in the 1980s from Gormenghast.



The awful wet flattener Photo: Michael Glazer

The visibility was non-existent, but the guidelines were all still in place and while it still wasn’t pleasant, familiarity helped me get along “The Asterisk” to my previous turnaround point (the far side of the 3rd-ish miserable sump) in under half an hour, with plenty of mojo still intact. Crawling over cobbles through sloping stream passage, in 30 m a yellow guideline (about 6 mm, twisted) hove into view and disappeared into another sump. Thank goodness for that, the connection was now definitely made. If only I’d gone that little bit further last year.



The visibility of an untouched sump – not great!

I followed that guideline through a 4th-ish short/shallow sump that was among the pleasantest I’d dived so far, although that wasn’t saying much. Surfacing, the distinctive shawls at the caver-accessible end of Gormenghast were obvious and were recorded properly for good measure. The water levels weren’t concerning for me but would have made access to/from the Gormenghast entrance pretty exciting (we later found out there was a big dump of rain while we were in – Petr reported the master cave stream as pumping, and the Horrible Crawl as impassable).



Definitely Gormenghast this time

Annoyingly, I’d lost my collection of arrows and markers (right back at the start of the dive it turned out), so I couldn’t place the commemorative marker signed by all of the team. It was later placed back at the Porcupine end, easily accessible by visitors. The original yellow line wasn’t knotted but I estimated lengths and surveyed back – that sump was 8 m long and like all the sumps in this section, shallow enough (<1 m) not to be recorded on my dive computer.

I surveyed the 30 m of new dry section with dive computer compass, armlengths and estimated height changes – wet finger and piece of string sort of stuff, but... the loop closure turned out to be a gratifying 1.1 m in the vertical and 11 m in the horizontal (and that’s hung off GPS co-ordinates at the two entrances which aren’t super accurate anyway). So, all the different survey teams from across the ages can bask in their accuracy (with the exception of the original Gormie surveyors – sorry guys). With Gormenghast at about 500 m, Porcupine at 4100 m and the newly discovered Friendzone at 400 m+, the combined system is now just over 5 km, huzzah! The depth (213 m) is unchanged as the Gormenghast entrance is lower than Porcupine. As always, a stellar effort by and many thanks to everyone involved – on the day, on previous/leadup attempts, and on previous projects.



The survey plot: JF-387 Porcupine Pot in blue, with new bits in orange (light blue background is sump sections). JF-35 Gormenghast in magenta.

I got back to the gear-up spot well before being due, however had to keep stopping to have stern words with the lower end of my digestive system. Disaster was averted by the slimmest of margins, and for better or worse nobody was there to witness the fastest de-kit of all time (and join in on

the motivational yelling). Not soiling my bright green undies (or the cave) was truly my greatest achievement that day, and this was proudly proclaimed when the rest of the party returned.

They were kind enough to hear out my tales of misery with straight faces, before breaking the news that they had discovered caverns measureless to man (or woman) and that it was the most decorated cave in the world. It was indeed pretty damn good, and more importantly, good for them coming back and carrying dive gear next time. I'd mostly packed up, so the dive was consigned to the annals of history and we hustled off to ogle and survey the new find (eventually getting out of the cave after midnight instead of what would have been a much more respectable time).

Gas Pressures (in 2x3L cylinders) and times

- Start: 255/255bar, 13:10 (aim to be back by 16:00)
- Passed entry restriction: 13:32
- Reached previous turn point: 190/240bar, 13:53
- Reached 1980s guideline: 14:03
- Back at previous turn point: 190/220bar, 14:20
- Home, after poo & change (sic): 140/150bar, 15:25

Friendzone: A major new discovery in JF-387 Porcupine Pot

Trip #1

16 September 2023

Ciara Smart

Party: Steve Fordyce, Henry Garratt, Michael Glazer, Ciara Smart, Petr Smejkal

The objective of this trip was to porter gear for Steve's dive. As usual, Steve had dangled some tempting incentives to encourage us to carry annoying heavy things for him. He'd promised new leads and 'fun things to do,' while he was off doing the connection dive to Gormenghast. It didn't take much to persuade the four of us: I needed something to do other than my PhD, Henry had exhausted his options to use females as a distraction from his final year of school, Petr likes Porcupine, and new member Michael had experienced only one previous caving trip and didn't know any better.

The trip down the pitches went smoothly, and we watched Steve kit up and grovel into a horrific helmet-off wet squeeze. We left him to his fate, and the four of us went off to chase the promised lead. Petr knows Porcupine well, so he led the charge. After only a few minutes, Petr pointed to a small hole in the passage wall near the stream. This wasn't the lead we were looking for, but it seemed like we ought to poke our heads up. The lead immediately turned to rockpile, although it was obviously new territory. While it was rockpile, it wasn't particularly annoying, and the navigation was easy. At some point, the bag with the survey kit was inadvertently abandoned. Ah well, it's always more fun to push without survey faff.

The rockpile followed a surprisingly straight direction. As the rocks got a little more stable, we could feel a draught, and began to feel quietly excited.

We started to see some small formations, mostly crunchy cave coral on the floor, or encrusting small stalactites. At one point we reached a significant hole in the floor. It looks to be about a 10-metre pitch into a moderate-sized chamber with a small stream. We earmarked this for the future and continued through a small upwards hole.

We broke out of the rockpile into spacious walking passage. By this point excitement was rising and we could see big leads in multiple directions. Up a slope, we could see a dark void and feel a strong draught, a sure sign of a large space. Sure enough, we headed up and broke out into a very large chamber. To our astonishment, we realised we'd made a very significant discovery. One side of the chamber was dominated by a very large flowstone column, of at least eight metres in height. Two smaller, but impressive columns stood alongside. At their base were many square metres of pristine flowstone cascading down the sloping floor. The other side of the wall was marked by extensive straws. Suffice to say, the whoops of delight were prolonged.

Exploration caving doesn't come much better than this, and this find was entirely serendipitous. While it would be preemptive to make comparisons with Kubla Khan, I'm going to anyway; the large column is the Khan of the Juneeflorentine. In terms of names, this first large, decorated chamber has been named 'Whole New World,' because of the marked change in the quality of the cave from this point. The three large columns in this chamber have been named 'Pillars of Creation,' after the famous Hubble Telescope image.

After some serious high fives, we inspected the chamber a little more thoroughly. The extent of the flowstone meant that we couldn't look at all potential leads closely, but one low-priority upwards lead was noted near the base of the largest column. A little further on, two straws hung unusually, they bend unnaturally towards each other in reflective 'c' shaped curves.

I've always understood curving speleothems to be influenced by wind direction, but something else must be going on here.

After this chamber, the cave returned to spacious passage. A little further on we found another unusual formation. A long, isolated straw of about 2.5 metres in length hung down almost to floor level, where it dripped onto a short stalagmite. To continue the astronomy theme, this has been named 'Celestial Drip.' To the left of the straw were several metres of stalactites and shawls suspended above a large flowstone massif.

While the passage continued ahead, Henry noticed a lead to the right of this formation. After a brief squeeze, we found a short unclimbable drop, looking into a large chamber. We could see and hear a stream of significant volume in the chamber. We suspected this to be the 9-Road Streamway.

Continuing through the main passage, we came to another extensively decorated section, now titled 'Cosmic Colonnade.' Dozens of 2-3 metre columns decorated the walls of this chamber, which were also clad in large white shawls. The far wall was marked by extensive flowstone interspersed with yet more stals. After this section the cave broke into a large chamber decorated with many straws. The way on here was up a loose mud wall. Beyond here, the passage remained very spacious, and we came to a section of decorations reminiscent of 'The Forbidden City' in Kubla Khan. A cluster of large milky white stalagmites stood with pristine white flowstone at their feet and twisted shawls above.

Eventually we reached what we believe is the terminal chamber. Here we found perhaps the most remarkable speleothems in the passage. On the right-hand wall, we found many square metres of large anthodite formations. These anthodites are of very high quality, arguably better than the Opium Den in Kubla Khan! Beyond the anthodite wall, the chamber sloped downwards and was extensively decorated with yet more stalactites and shawls. This chamber has been named 'Czechmate Chamber,' after Petr who should be credited for identifying the start of this new find. Although 'Czechmate Chamber' appeared to be the end of the passage, we didn't look closely at the furthest wall as we were running late for the rendezvous with Steve.

On the way back we took a slightly different, easier route through the rockpile, which also emerged almost level with the stream. We made it back to the sump to find Steve waiting for us. His dive had been a success. This is the second dive trip in a row where Steve has emerged from the depths to find the return of his porters delayed by the discovery of barrelling passage.

We let him tell us about his dive first, although he mostly wanted to talk about how close he came to crapping in his wetsuit. By this point it was about 5 pm, but the five of us headed back to Friendzone to start the survey. I sketched, while Steve imported the data electronically. It was tedious work through the rockpile and the sketch considerably pushed my repertoire of speleothem symbology. Petr and Michael departed early to get a head-start on the pitches, and to allow Petr to do some dye detector faffing. I halted the survey sometime around 8:30 pm. We'd surveyed 379 m of new passage, but we stopped about 100 m from the known end, and we still have the two vertical leads to push, meaning we'd achieved about half a kilometre of new cave.

The three of us headed up the pitches, which were surprisingly wet. It had been raining heavily on the surface. We caught up to Michael on the penultimate pitch. Considering this was his second ever caving trip, he'd done well to manage such an involved day. We emerged onto the surface in the early hours of the morning. It was blowing a howling gale. We made the poor decision to leave the chainsaw with Steve, who was staying an extra day. The four of us departed in Michael's ute, but our passage was quickly impeded by multiple fallen trees. Hand-sawing a log at 1 am, after a full day of caving, is a novel form of peak wretchedness, but we were all in bed before dawn.

This new passage is a milestone discovery for the Juneeflorentine. I'm going to stick my head out and say that this is probably the most decorated section of passage in the Juneeflorentine discovered to date. Those that have seen more of the JF than me have confirmed that the passage is more extensively decorated than JF-341, and New Feeling in Growling Swallet. Large speleothems in the Juneeflorentine are few and far between. Those that do exist tend to be covered in mud and debris. It is rare to find such extensive and pristine decorations. Alas, the significance of this find means that Michael's exploratory caving career can only go downhill from here, this being only his second ever trip.

While this is a delicate section of passage, fortunately the caving community has little to fear from excessive visitation. The pitches themselves are not beginner friendly, which will prevent visitation by novice cavers, and the turn-off is quite discrete. In terms of a name for the whole passage, Henry had suggested naming it after Steve if he failed to return from the sump. Thankfully this wasn't necessary, leaving us free to think up something more appropriate to the passage's splendour than 'Fordyce's Folly.' Henry suggested 'Friendzone'. Henry had not planned to be on the trip, originally intending to spend the day with a female peer. Unfortunately, during the week, Henry had been informed that she would prefer to remain as friends. As an 18-year-old male caver, it is perhaps unremarkable that Henry then decided to bail on their joint weekend plans and go caving instead.



Obviously a "before" photo...and by Michael Glazer



Wow, just wow. Photo: Michael Glazer



How's finding this on your second-ever caving trip? Photo: Ciara Smart



Seriously impressive, for anywhere let alone the JF.

Photo: Michael Glazer

JF-207 Voltera Swallet

23 September 2023

Text and photos by Stephen Fordyce

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Henry Garratt, Ciara Smart

It was ladies' choice day, and Ciara chose rigging in Voltera. Expectations were managed such that, if we did a big day, we could probably finish the rigging and check out the sump. Things began well – we left the cars about 9 am, the route to the cave wasn't too bad and we finished marking it (including the previously missing section). It was remarked that each team member had a decade to themselves (30s, 20s and teens) and wasn't that cool.



The 20s and teens elements of our decade-each party

No GoPros were dropped, and horizontal bit of The Fistula was negotiated without too much trouble (I unbuckled my harness, the kiddies slipped through with ease). Henry emulated Dickon by enthusiastically sliding down the vertical bit and then needing a handline to get back up. We replaced the single concrete screw (2014 vintage), fuffed a bit with an etrier extended by a tape, and figured we'd see how it was on the way up. Spoiler: it was awful.

The 12 m Cue Cards pitch was rigged and dropped, and we began negotiating the Stairway to Niggly meander – it didn't look that bad on the map. Of interest, trog marks even a mere 30 cm above water level were still there, reassuring considering the large amount of rain which had fallen in previous days. Well the meander got worse and more miserable, with transit time in the order of 1 hour with our heavy rigging bags. Lunch (at about 1 pm) was required in the blissfully spacious chamber at the top of the 20 m pitch.



Lunch, with the last of the Stairway to Niggly visible just above the bag in the pic

I don't know how this was originally rigged (apart from a triple load sharing anchor at the top), but the hang was uncomfortably close to the stream, and we also had to add an unexpected redirect on a ledge near the bottom. A short but miserable and confusing section of meander with a 2 m pitch followed (it'll be easier now we know the way), and the 30 m pitch. This was actually pretty nice, although at this point we were a bit beyond enjoying such things and in the interests of speed I took charge of rigging this one.

The holes were marked here (thanks Alan, your straws were excellent) and the rig was textbook, if not simple (a Y-hang with redirect, down and across to a ledge with Y-hang rebelay to stay clear of the water). Despite bringing a 37 m rope for the 30 m pitch and using short bits for the rebelay, I ended up 2 m off the floor with no choice but a knot crossing onto the spare rope I had in my bag. Henry spent a while making the rebelay painfully short and lowered the knot crossing such that your bag was on the ground (but you still had to do it).

This had real potential to be the death knell for the trip but we were so close that just a little bit of motivation was found to continue on. The tiny hole down to 6 m pitch (per the map) we had thought to rig as a shortcut to the sump was stupidly tight and nobody managed to stuff themselves down it, so we went the long way round, which wasn't too bad if you stayed high. Base level mud was noted and wallowed in.



The Pit – definitely looks the part

There was an exciting down climb in a rift we weren't expecting, and we reached The Pit – pro tip, if you're not sure, you aren't there. Climbing down into it to the lower levels and the way on in both directions required taking a gusher to the crotch and trusting your life to some dubious looking handholds. One of these broke off as I climbed down, and four-letter words were required – it was pretty obvious this thing needed rigging, it was also pretty obvious Ciara and I had had enough. Henry was still full of beans, so he went back to collect the rigging gear, and in no mood for taking chances (or hauling the drill in again) we put in a Y-hang plus an access line.

Henry also checked the mud lead following the hard floor (Dickon's "troublesome shale band" – per SS404, p7) past The Pit and going down dip. He reported gloopy mud, horror and lack of enthusiasm for digging. We later contemplated diverting water over The Pit and into this original flow path, maybe it'll clear out.

About 6 pm, we turned for home, looking forward to a light, quick and easy exit. Sadly, it was not to be, and we hit the surface some 7 hours later at 1 am, and the car an hour after that. We spent ages trying to make the 30 m pitch rigging work with the too-short rope but failed in a comedy of errors and miscommunication (see punchlist section later). We did leave this and most other ropes coiled at the top of the pitches. The Stairway to Niggly was a slow grind that each tackled in their own way, which included me at the tail end taking a wrong turn and ending up in "But Wait, There's More" in a painfully ironic situation. Henry and Ciara at the base of the 12 m pitch could see my light and yell rude things but there was no viable way through.



Henry embraces the way of the Shapes, while Ciara eats a bakery treat

The Fistula vertical assistance we'd left (etrier at the end of a tape) was painfully inadequate and it was still a nasty, energy-sapping climb. More painstakingly tight and awkward faffing was needed to rig this better, and at one point the drill was dropped on Henry's head to check if he was still awake and wearing his helmet (he was, good lad). We didn't have any rope left, so left the lower section rigged as a pitch (with a Y-hang) and the upper section rigged as tape + etrier (off another Y-hang). The bags were also hauled up and stashed/staged forward.

It was one of those uneven distributions of team energy, with the guys below getting cold and grumpy, while at the top I got hot, bothered and fatigued from the awkward hard work.

It was a relief when I could finally undo my harness and head sideways in the homeward direction. This relief soon wore off when I got stuck. This part of The Fistula is nasty – it's a vertical rift, and the only bit big enough for hips and chest is 1 m off the floor, and even then, only at the right angle. I got my chest through but couldn't for the life of me get any further. Then I couldn't get back. I could feel myself slipping down into the tighter bit, but couldn't find or get back to the bigger bit.

It was a pretty bad time – and I had to inform Henry and Ciara in no uncertain terms that no I wasn't faffing about with bags and needed all my focus for dealing with this compounding problem. I could feel genuine panic (how interesting), although it was controllable. I was aware that this was a serious problem which needed to be rationalised and reasoned, and a big danger was me running out of physical strength and energy, or panicking. Stopping to catch my breath and calm my mind between struggles was key. Eventually, I was able to start removing pieces of kit from my harness – footloop and cowstails running across my chest, and finally even my caving belt. This did the trick, and I finally slipped through, negotiating the second squeeze without issue and needing a good long sit down to catch my breath and contemplate life while the others dealt with the bags and made it all look easy.

In hindsight, it would have been useful for the next caver to come up next to me – to help get things off me, observe and suggest things, maybe even do some shoving or careful supporting. Undoubtedly a good exercise for Ciara and Henry to add this flavour of "leader in trouble" to their caving experience bank. The complacency of not fully removing my harness is another thing I'd do differently next time. Finally, we have the technology, this piece of cave should be embiggened in the very near future (*Should it? Should every restriction be enlarged to fit every sized caver? Slippery slopes... – Ed*).



The bean-filled Henry (showcasing the mud he encountered past The Pit)

We were almost relieved enough to forget our fatigue, and the climb up the spacious 80 m pitch was a straightforward delight after all the previous trials. Ciara and Henry played with rocks in the streamway at the entrance for a bit too long, but we all made it out safely (at 1 am) in the end, and zombied our way back to the cars at 2 am, and for the other two, back to Hobart at 4 am.

Henry was none the worse for the day and proclaimed Voltera most enjoyable. Ciara managed a bleary day of gardening on the Sunday and bounced back a few days later. I was the most broken I can remember being and hobbled round like an old git with aching everything. Like Alan after his 17th August 2014 trip (SS403, p13) - I'm too old for this shit. Voltera is a hard cave.

But please come and help me dive the sump in January, it'll be fun, I promise ☺.

JF-4 Khazad-Dum Pre-rescue exercise planning

21 October 2023

Janine McKinnon

Party: Damian Bidgood, Jemma Herbert, Alan Jackson, Janine McKinnon, Ciara Smart

The annual all-teams cave exercise practice was scheduled for 31 October, and so it was thought that a look-see at the route and rigging ideas before-hand was a clever idea.

We rigged the traditional route down to the junction with the stream, left it rigged for access during the exercise, and started back up - checking rescue rigging options as we went. At the rock pile at the bottom of the Dry 90 we rigged down the wet-way route to the bottom of that pitch and checked out the idea of running the stretcher from the streamway up that route. It looked viable so was declared a good idea.

We continued up out of the cave, via the Scaling Pole pitch to discuss moving the stretcher that way. A route was selected and we all went home very happy we had a viable plan.

JF-337 Slaughterhouse Pot

28 October 2023

Ciara Smart

Party: Mike Allen, Jason Bilborow, Keith Chatterton, Jemma Herbert, Ciara Smart

With so many visiting cavers in town for the rescue exercise, I figured I'd run a tourist trip to show off a famous Tasmanian cave. Unfortunately, but perhaps not unsurprisingly, the gauge rock in Growling Swallet had water flowing over the face of it, indicating a 'brown pants' sort of day. With the snow still melting on the mountains above, and a thunderstorm predicted for the afternoon, I didn't want to risk the embarrassment of getting stranded in the streamway. As a result, we opted to do a bounce trip down Slaughterhouse Pot instead.

The five of us proceeded down Slaughterhouse without issue. At the base of the final pitch, we decided to undertake a bit of community service and remove some old rigging tat. We headed down to Avons Aven. This gave Jason and Mike their first taste of proper Tasmanian mud in the delightful

Voltera To-Do List:

- Consider diverting water across The Pit
- Bring a 2 m bit of rope or dyneema & maillon for Y-hang rebelay on last/30 m pitch to save length of the main rope and remove knot crossing. We already did this for the top Y-hang.
- Rope for The Fistula (~12 m bit to replace tape & etrier)
- Embiggen The Fistula!!!
- Reccy the sump, find the best spot to get changed
- Aid traverse over the top of the 30 m pitch
- Check out other leads

Herpes III (why does it smell like cattle shit here? *Ah, one of life's great mysteries-Ed*). After retrieving some old ropes and ladders, we descended Windy Rift to have a look at the main streamway from below. I'm not very familiar with how the streamway looks in normal conditions, but it was definitely pumping. This reinforced our decision not to do the full through trip. After a bit of touring, we swapped out the rope on the mudbank traverse at the base of Windy Rift. Then we headed back up Windy Rift and exited via Slaughterhouse without incident.

Rigging Update: The rope on P1 in Slaughterhouse is now starting to show the effects of a minor rub. I suspect the wear has accelerated because we've had multiple recent trips that have ascended the ropes, instead of the more usual one-way descent. It might be time to think about replacing this rope and putting another redirect on the LHS wall. However, P1 will be good for a few more trips before this becomes critical. The ropes in general on the three Slaughterhouse pitches have suddenly become quite muddy and extremely slow. I found them very painful to descend on a Stop, especially P2. I could only descend in excruciatingly small increments by brutally forcing the rope into my Stop. Rigging the Stop in the 'c-rig' configuration proved much more practical. This is something to keep in mind if you are taking beginners down on Stops, especially anyone who doesn't weigh very much.



Jemma putting another entry into the "silly facial expressions" competition. She and Karina are in fierce competition.

JF-223 Tassie Pot

29 October 2023

David Taberner

Party: Brian Evans, Dane Evans, David Taberner, Greg Tunnock

Having arrived fresh off the boat that morning, driven to our Airbnb in Maydena and unpacked I was having a serious case of itchy feet.

I pitched the idea of Tassie Pot to the group, the first JF cave I'd ever done and considering the long break I'd taken from caving in the JF, it did have a certain symmetry to it. To my surprise this was well received with the group and it wasn't long before we'd packed up a selection of ropes and were off to the 9 Road around 3 pm.

Brian sent a quick txt with the Airbnb door code out to Andrew Perry (AKA chicken legs) who, having arrived a day earlier was off in Niggly with Petr and others. As we'd later find out it would have been handy if this message was sent before we'd left phone coverage area... details, details.

The 9 Road was more overgrown than I'd remembered but surprisingly free from fallen trees.



Shiny new suits. Photo: David Taberner

After gearing up at the car, and with Brian leading the rigging for the 1st pitch, we were off!

Things were going well until the third pitch, where I noticed the 40 m rope had been used instead of the 30 m rope, being last however I wasn't in a position to do much about it.

That's going to make the final pitch interesting I thought to myself, we'd be left with a 50 m and 30 m, but I recalled using a bit of rope at the top for the approach so getting all the way down might be a tad complicated.

We used a few lengths of Dyneema cord to reduce the approach usage and after a bit of figuring out if we use the long or short rope first we found a combination that allowed for us to join ropes at a rebelay, and have enough rope to get off the bottom, so it wasn't a total disaster (For those planning their own attempt at this game, use the 50 m rope first.).

There was certainly more water falling on the last pitch than I recalled and this time I went and poked around under the blocks in the floor following the water. There was more cave down there than I was expecting, worth the visit (*several hundred metres or more of horizontal passage – Ed*).

The others had decided that the water didn't look as inviting and were already mostly up the pitch when I returned.

The trip back was uneventful with the exception of various items Dane decided to drop on the way up, secretly I think he was trying to see how many times he could make me redo pitches before I got irritated.

It was dark by the time we piled back into the car and moments after Brian had expressed how enjoyable a trip it was I managed to make everyone's head hit the roof after forgetting about the ditch in the road just before the turn around spot...

Arriving back at Maydena we located Andrew (chicken legs) who'd had almost as many adventures locating the Airbnb as he'd had in Niggly, turns out having the address AND the lock code would have been handy for him, who knew?! On the bright side he'd only been waiting a short while and I think had provided the locals with some light entertainment.

JF- 237 Niggly-JF-758 Negative RAT Hole pull through trip

29 October 2023

Petr Smejkal

Party: Mike Allen, Serena Benjamin, Keith Chatterton, Ben Lovett, Janice March, Andrew Perry, Petr Smejkal

Since the discovery of the Snot Monster, I have been toying with the idea of running the upper parts of Niggly as a pull-through. I suggested it a couple of times, but there was never much positive feedback. With the SAREX coming up, I thought, "Let's advertise and see if I have any luck recruiting from outside STC." To my surprise, it was a success; I managed to gather a reasonable group to make the trip happen.

Organizing the meeting point on Sunday morning was a bit of a mystery. Some were landing in Tasmania over the weekend and were unsure of their exact whereabouts. Somehow, it worked out, and we all met at the bike park in Maydena at around 9:30 am. We put our gear on at around 11 am.

During the Delta Variant exploration, some of the water was redirected through Niggly to reduce the flow of water through DV. It wasn't very effective, but it turned Niggly's first pitch into a proper shower. No one was eager to get soaked at the beginning of the trip, so the first step before entering Niggly was to redirect the stream flow back to DV. When this was done, I rigged the first pitch and sent Andrew and Keith to rig the second.

Slowly, I watched everyone descend into the darkness. I went last, and at the bottom of the first pitch, I did the unthinkable: I pulled the rope down.

From now on, the only way out was to go deeper into the cave and exit via the rigged Snot Monster.

Andrew rigged the second pitch, and the team continued through the Tigertooth Passage. When I reached the bottom of the second pitch, only Ben was still there. I started pulling the rope down, but when I looked up, I noticed a knot at the end of the rope. Seeing that didn't make me feel great because the end was already hanging quite far out of reach. I climbed as high as I could, and with great relief, I was able to grab it. I don't think Ben was very impressed witnessing this.

The next milestone was crossing the Scary Rift. I went first and set up a traverse line to make the crossing more comfortable for everyone on the team. Mike went last and derigged the line.

To get to the third pitch, you need to downclimb a 20 m deep rift. The climb isn't difficult, but we added a rope, just to ensure everyone's safety.

By the time I reached the third pitch, Keith had finished rigging it. As before, I went last and pulled the rope down. The same scenario repeated for pitches four, five, and six. This got us to the Black Super Giant chamber, where we took a short pause and had a quick snack.

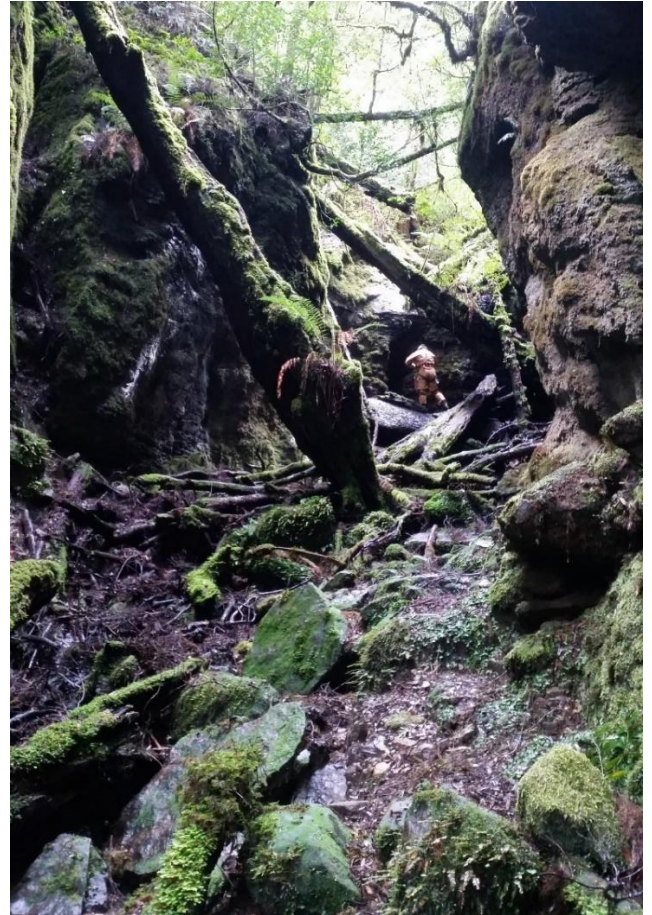
It was already around 4 pm, and there wasn't much time left for dilly-dallying. We climbed the Snot Monster, crossed the Strollout Traverse, and headed towards the Negative RAT.

Negative RAT was the icing on the cake, the very last challenge just before the end of the day. Andrew is a skinny guy, but he's quite tall. I was a bit worried that he might not be able to fit, and I bet he had the same thought at one point. There was some pushing, going back, taking off his harness, pushing up again. Millimetre by millimetre, he managed to get out. The last person to exit the cave was Ben, and it was around 7:30 pm.

If anyone is interested in repeating this, I took 30 m, 20 m, 2x15 m ropes, a 4 m sling, and a few carabiners. We also had a drill, a bunch of hangers, and concrete screws, just in case we ran into any trouble. All the pitches were rigged the usual way. I did the derigging when others were safely down using the shorter ropes to pull down the longer rope. We alternated 20 m and 30 m ropes as we went down. First pitch starting with the 20 m, second 30 m, downclimbing rift with the 20 m rigged off naturals, third pitch 30 m. The pitch four was a bit of a complication as there are only naturals, but luckily it is a short pitch, and I could safely downclimb it using a short rope hanging from a natural bollard as a handline. Pitch Five we used 20 m and pitch six we used the 30 m.

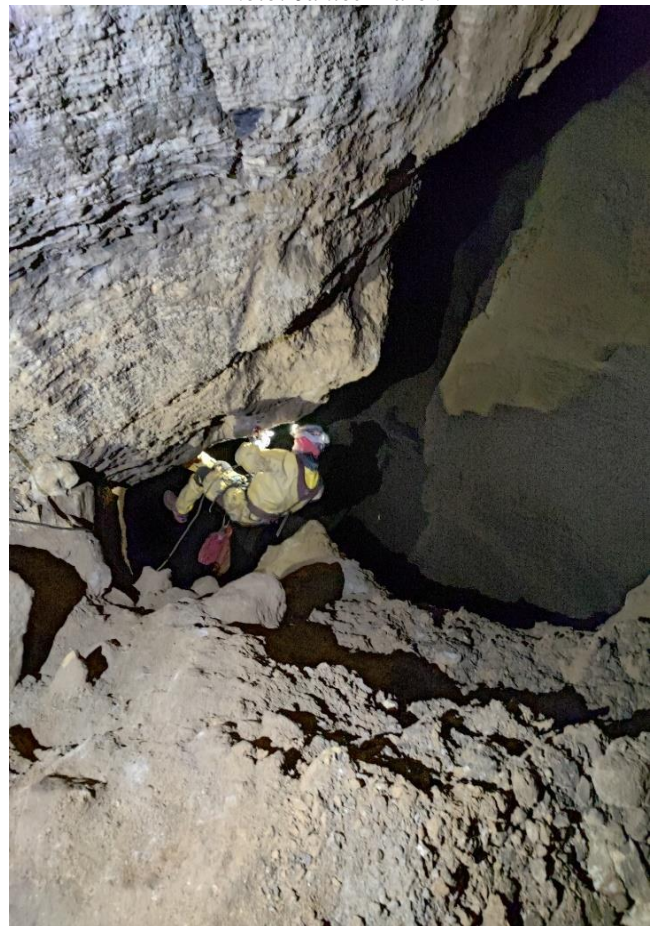
It was a fun day, can recommend, just make sure the Snot Monster route is rigged.

(opposite) Keith rigging the third pitch. Photo: Mike Allen



Ben getting ready for his first trip to Niggly.

Photo: Janice March



Cave Search and Rescue report

Southern Exercise

31 October 2023

Janice March

About 55 people attended the big STC and Police cave rescue exercise on Tuesday Oct 31 including a goodly number of Southern Region police and plenty of ring-ins from NZ and the mainland. Five Northern Caverneers took part in what was a shorter day than originally expected, going by previous exercises that have sometimes finished after dark. We gathered at Maydena at 7.30 am in drizzly rain, and since the police were still half an hour away we formed into our teams in the shelter of the bike park under cover area, gathered equipment, and listened to the briefing when they arrived. After a bit of car shuffling along the muddy road we were all walking 40 minutes through beautiful forest, until we arrived at the impressive influx entrance of Khazad Dum (KD) at 10.30 – 11.30 am depending on which group you were in.

It would have been tricky for the organisers working out the rigging teams to have a mixture of skills and personalities over 12 teams, but it worked well on the day. I was assigned to be a deputy Underground Controller in the upper section overseeing eight teams together with Sgt Damian Bidgood and was kept busy climbing around the cave, moving pulleys between teams, checking rigging and that teams assigned roles and rehearsed their tasks before the stretcher arrived in their area. I had not been in this situation before and it was interesting being free to move about and get an overview of the different teams' progress. It was plain that about half the people do all the work and the rest sit around socialising – this is contrary to how I'd thought these things worked as I would normally delegate all the tasks to my team members and try and keep them busy, and make sure everyone learns something on the day (since it is a training exercise) (*Not all team leaders take the effort to do it your way, unfortunately – Ed*).

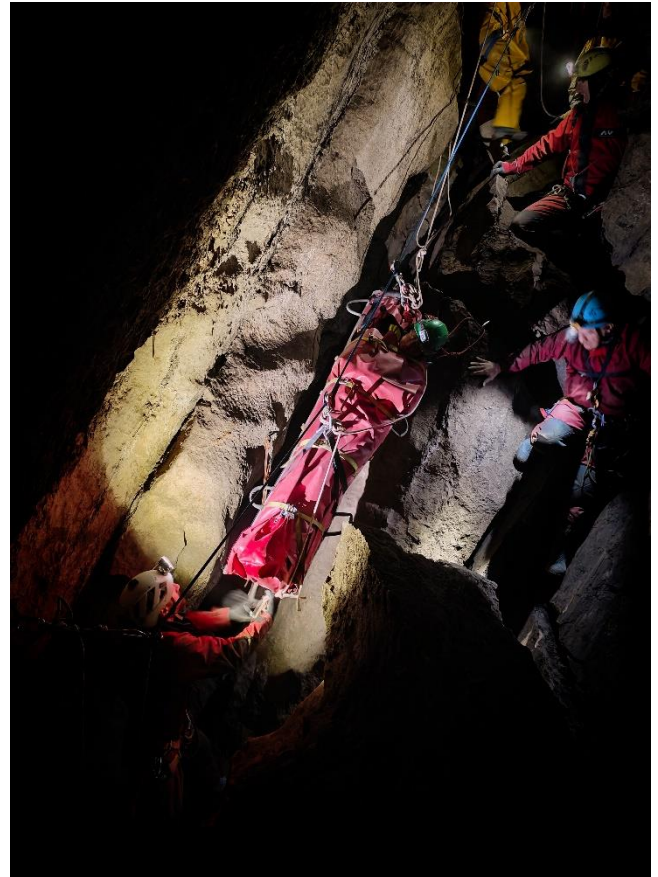
Communication was with UHF radios in the wet noisy lower section, but they apparently had to resort to shouting when Team 3's radio failed. The Michie phones in the upper section worked better and a slow stream of updates filtered back via the cave entrance base station to the Incident Controller at the carpark in the Police van. Some teams formed super-teams sharing ropes and Michie phones because the assigned areas were quite close and due to a lack of rigging gear, so incoming calls were fewer and could be handled by one outside comms person. She was kept company by Teams 11 and 12 who rigged tyroleans in the entrance and doline for the final stretcher egress and so the non-caving observers from NSW VRA had something to observe.

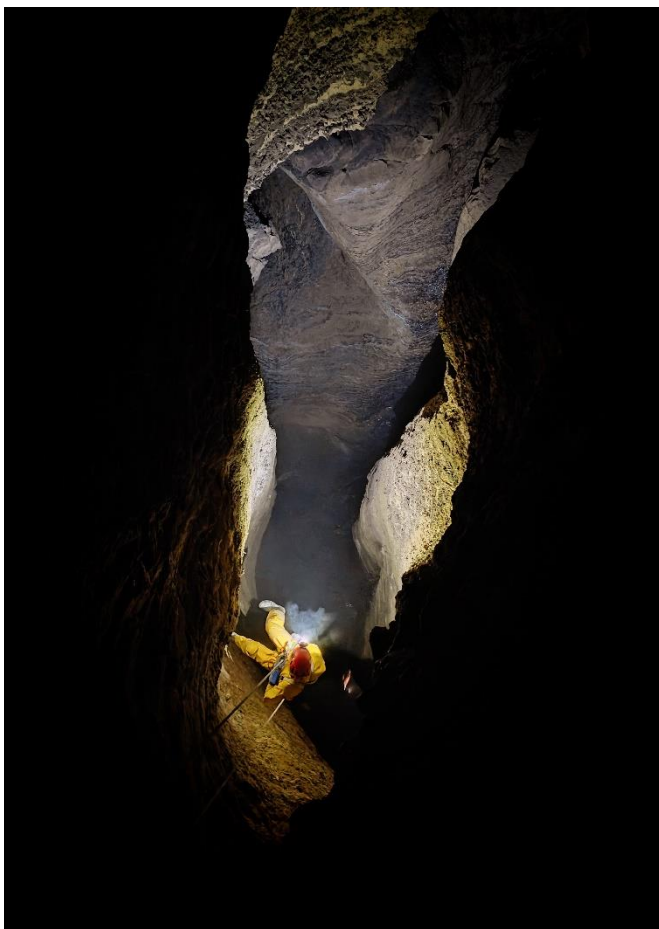
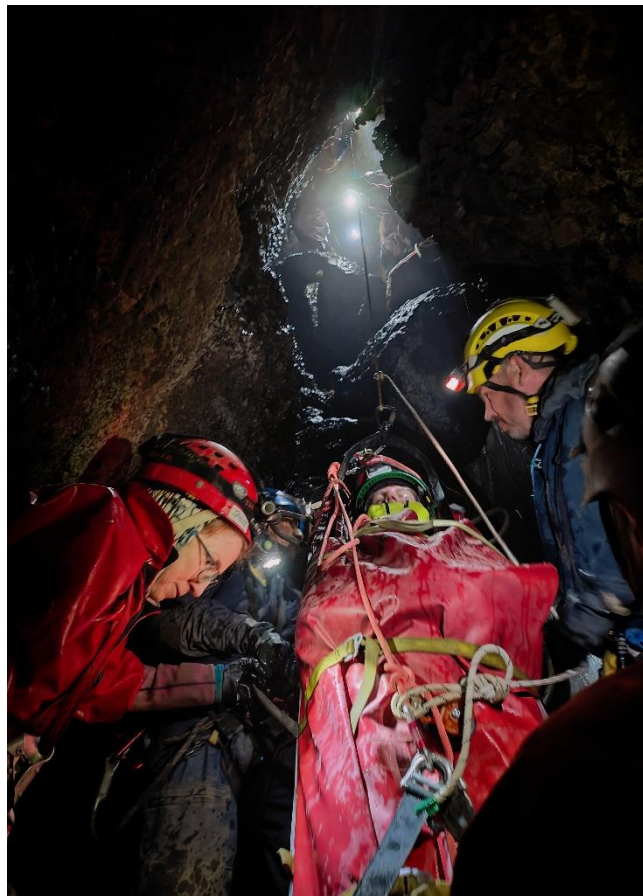
Feedback from the casualty was positive with various cavers caring for her along the three-hour transport of the stretcher in the upper section, but she cautioned us against moving the stretcher too jerkily or without warning. With her eyes closed for most of the trip out of the cave, her sense of hearing was heightened, and she explained that she would have preferred not to hear comments like "What the F is this?".

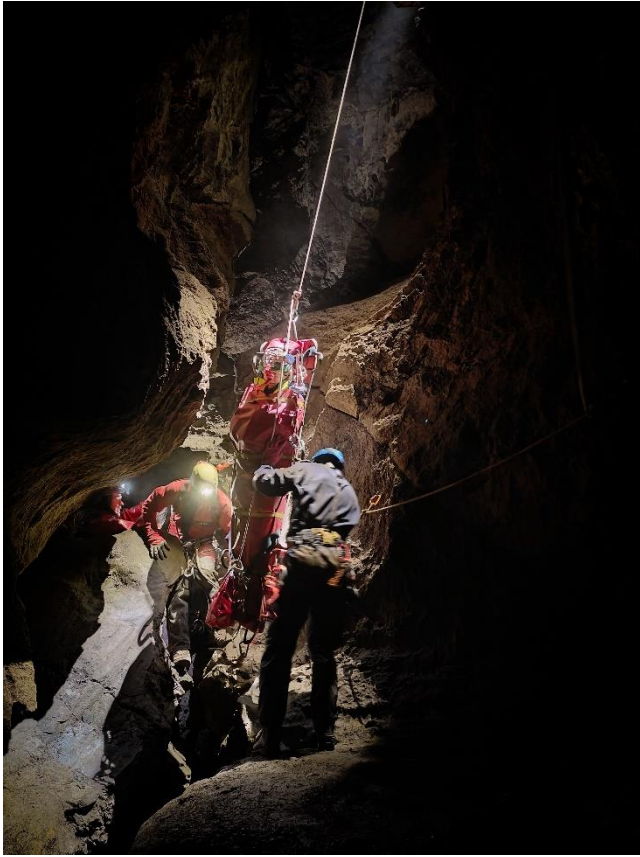
Other points from the debrief were that it would be good to practice with Tas Ambulance, and for certain injuries they may require that the stretcher is transported horizontally more than we normally do. The paramedics would require good comms to travel with the casualty. If it was a bigger rescue, we would need two or three complete rescue teams and enough resources for cavers to be substituted out of the cave for a rest. We may need cavers from the mainland or NZ to assist us, so it was good to practice together.

I didn't receive any reports from STC bods, and I could put something in myself, but Janice has covered it really efficiently, so that will do. Ed

Here is a photo montage of the day: Photos by Nadine Muresan.







JF-14 Dwarrodelf

2 November 2023

David Taberner

Party: Andrew Baker, Andrew Perry (Chicken Legs), Brian Evans, Dane Evans, David Taberner, Greg Tunnock

I've done KD multiple times, but somehow I'd never done this classic. Ropes were worked out and after a quick call to Alan (Jackson) to get access to *Spiel* version with the rigging notes (*Spiel* 350, page 12, for those interested) we bundled into the cars and up the KD road.

First two pitches were straight forward and dropped us into a nice chamber to hang out while the next pitches were rigged. I'm not sure of the significance of the orange plastic Triceratops that was hiding in an alcove at the pitch head, based on the draft around there he must be a very cold Triceratops! (*Old STC joke – Ed*)

I had the rope for pitch 5 so I jumped out and followed Andrew Baker down, who was making the finishing touches to his handy work.

Bottom of Pitch 5 was becoming decidedly drippy and made Pitch 6 look like a whole pile of fun.

Dane decided he was too cold at this point and made a retreat, I suspect he'd spent too much time hanging out in the draft with our friendly Triceratops or he didn't like the look of a slightly damp Pitch 6, maybe both!

Off the bottom of the 67 m Pitch 6 we headed over to KD. It was a great sight with the waterfall in fine form with all the recent rains/snow. Much to Andrew's frustration the iPhone really proved its underground photo taking ability at a fraction of the weight, I've no idea how they make a 3 second exposure not blurry even when hand-held.

After our touring we headed back to the base of the pitch for the return journey, I'd agreed to take the 75-metre rope that was used on the last pitch so I'd be last up.

Walking around to keep warm while I waited for a "rope free" I looked back at the pitch and couldn't see a rope, strange I thought and I looked harder, nope, absolutely no rope was visible. Needless to say, I went from 0-100 in the blink of an eye and have a heart rate graph on my watch to match, thankfully Andrew was still in ear shot on the pitch and was able to answer my pained cries and ensure the rope actually reached the bottom again, always a bonus. Apparently, my complaining was heard at least one pitch further up, seems a longer than planned stay at the bottom wasn't something I was too keen for!

The remaining trip out was smooth with the most complex part being escaping the cave without throwing a pile of dirt down the first pitch! Even the sun was still out, I could get used to this coming out in daylight caving business.

All in all a very good, straight-forward day out and a lovely piece of vertical caving.



Final KD waterfall

JF-758 Negative RAT Hole

Daily Cases-Black Super Giant circuit

5 November 2023

Petr Smejkal

Party: Andrew Baker, Jemma Herbert, Andrew Perry, Ciara Smart, Petr Smejkal, David Taberner, Greg Tunnock

This was an after SAREX trip with the intention of getting mainlanders' help in derigging the Snot Monster - Black Super Giant (BSG) route. The plan was to split into two teams at the top of the Daily Cases, meet at the bottom of Niggly, and exit the cave using the other team's entry route. To a certain degree, this plan really worked, and three of us had the fantastic privilege to truly appreciate the extraordinary circuit.

Since there were two teams, Ciara joined me in writing this report to tell you about what I missed.

Ciara, Jemma, and I left Hobart at 7 am to meet the mainlanders at 6 South Crescent, Maydena, around 8 am. After a short briefing, we started the route and reached the Negative RAT Hole a little after 10 am.

We entered as a single team but split into two at the top of the Daily Cases. My team of four (Jemma, David, Greg, and me) generously waited for Ciara's team to traverse the Vaccine Strollout to avoid any unpredicted rock showers while hanging on the rope. Fifteen minutes seemed to be generous enough, and the descent began with me leading to check if all the concrete screws were still in place. Our team made good progress and reached the bottom of Niggly right after Andrew P. began his descent of BSG. By the time he joined us, I was ready for a warm-up in the form of a sightseeing trip to Atlantis, which Andrew P., Dave, and Greg joined me on, while Jemma decided to wait for the rest of Ciara's team. We took it slow, and by the time we reached the bottom of Mt. Atlantis, Andrew B. had united with us. From there, we headed back to meet Ciara and Jemma, who were preparing for prusiking the BSG.

Before the climb, Ciara was still a bit shaky from her descent, which got complicated after she found that her Petzl Stop locking mechanism was damaged. She didn't have much fun going down that pitch and then had to bounce it back! With encouragement, we sent her to finish the hard work. Jemma joined her in tandem, and as soon as they started the climb, Greg and Andrew P. headed for the Daily Cases. Halfway through BSG, Jemma untied the knot and dropped 100 m of rope for Dave and Andrew B. to pull out of the cave. While waiting for Jemma to drop the other 100 m rope, I went to check if Mt. Niggly was still there (yes, still there). By the time I returned, the girls' team was finishing the second half of their ascent. A few minutes later, the rope fell down, hitting the ground with a mighty whip and a bang from a falling rock the rope took with it (*maybe from near the rebelay rock at -5 m? – Ed*). I wasn't very happy when I noticed part of the rope was also stuck, hanging about 10 m above the ground at three different spots. Fortunately, I could pull it down, which was a big relief with many exclamation marks! While packing the rope, I found two spots where the rope got cut, possibly by the fallen rock. I started my ascent with the fear of Alan's reaction on my mind. By the time I got to the bottom of the Daily Cases, Andrew B. was finishing it, and by the time I

reached the top, Jemma and Ciara had made it to the traverse. What perfect timing, really.

The last of us left the cave at around 6:20 pm. On our way to the car park, the mainlanders managed to send an SMS request for dinner, and by the time we got to Maydena, it was almost ready. There was even dessert!

What a day! We left Maydena with our tummies full of yummys!

Ciara's part – The Snot Monster and Black Super Giant Route

Andrew P., Andrew B., and I split off from the rest of the group and headed over the Vaccine Strollout traverse. The rigging on the tyrolean at the end of the traverse is now much improved, but all three of us still managed to get tangled. The Snot Monster pitch was as loose and muddy as ever. We popped out of a window and descended Boogie Monster, landing in the giant chamber above the Black Super Giant.

Ever since I started caving in Tasmania, I have heard about this ridiculous 187 m free hanging pitch. No one ever has much good to say about it, other than, "it's spectacular, but do it once." Based on previous experiences on massive freehangs, I wasn't particularly keen on dealing with the excessive rope weight and friction. Alas FOMO can be a strong motivator, and there are those annoying pitch-bagging points...

Andrew P. went down the rope first, followed by Andrew B. With the knot crossing halfway, both took about 30 minutes to descend. We used whistles to communicate, which worked surprisingly well. When my time came, I had some troubles lifting the 20 kg+ of rope weight to feed into my Stop (*I used an ascender to take the weight both times I did it. That made it much easier for my puny lack of strength – Ed*). In the process there must have been a moment when the rope weight was sitting on the plastic spring-loaded safety catch in my Stop, without it being fully open/closed. The plastic catch cracked and bent, preventing the Stop from fully opening and easily accepting the rope. I didn't realise this at the time and spent too long wrestling with a very uncooperative Stop. Eventually I got on the rope and repeated the frustrating process at the knot crossing. I rigged my Stop in the 'c-rig' configuration for the top 100 m which worked quite well, once I was able to actually get on the rope. Anyone have a second-hand Stop for sale?

At the bottom of the pitch, the seven of us reunited. This was the first (and probably last) crossover trip between Delta Variant and the Black Super Giant. Jemma and I then tandem prusiked back up the Black Super Giant. Tandem prusiking is definitely the more enjoyable way to do it. When we reached the knot at the half-way point, Jemma untied the rethreaded figure-9 knot with surprising ease, and dropped the rope so that someone could start ascending Delta Variant immediately. Jemma dropped the final 100 m from the very top for Petr to carry. Unbeknownst to us, the rope must have hit the wall at some point and collected a boulder on the way down. The boulder landed on top of the rope, slicing it into three pieces. Oops.

We headed back up Boogie Monster, derigging as we went. Jemma placed parsnips in (most) of the boltholes. While I was waiting for Jemma at the top of the Snot Monster pitch, I was disturbed to hear a call of 'help' coming from the bottom of the pitch. Fearing the worst, I jumped on the rope

immediately, but I was slightly confused by the cheeriness of Jemma's call. I figured the situation couldn't be too bad if she still sounded that perky. Reaching the rebelay, I realised I'd made a pretty dumb mistake. Part of the rope had caught itself over a blade of rock partway down the pitch, meaning Jemma couldn't quite reach it. It was a good reminder to me to do more than just glance at the rope below while transferring to upper rebelay.

All the Snot Monster route has now been derigged, except for the hard-won Vaccine Strollout traverse and tryolean. Hopefully no one ever needs to go back through the Snot Monster bypass. Rigging notes will be available in the archive. Should anyone ever have the misfortune to repeat that route, the rigging could still be improved if you can locate better rock.

We rendezvoused with Petr at the Superspreader junction. The timing worked out perfectly. He was the last of the party going up Daily Cases, and he had only arrived a few minutes earlier. The three of us hauled the heavy bags out of Negative Rat Hole without too much difficulty and were back on the surface at 6:20 pm. Quite respectable timing for a big trip with large numbers!



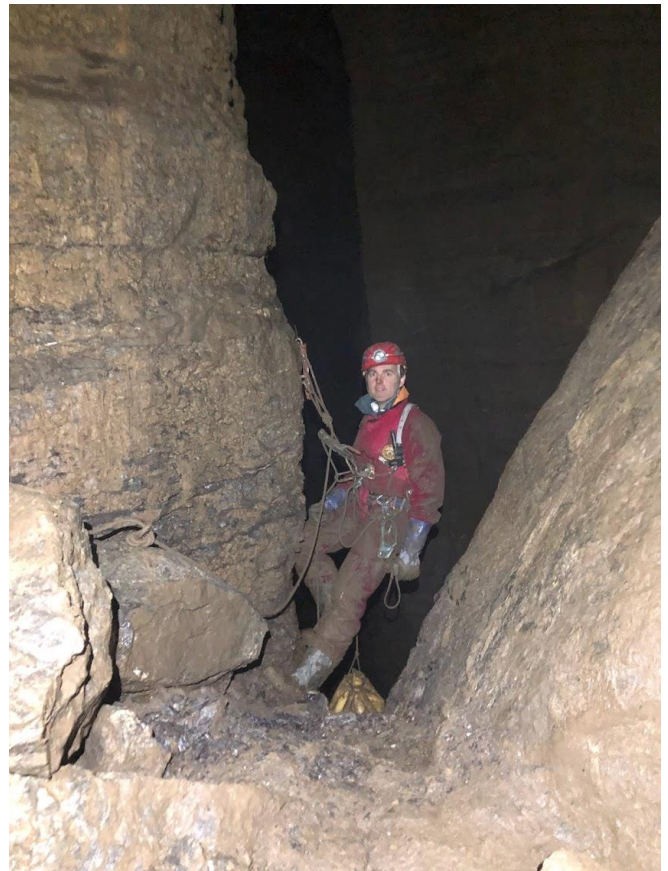
That is certainly a damaged rope. Photo Ciara Smart



The closest thing to a group photo. Photo Petr Smejkal



Dirty but happy. Photo Petr Smejkal



Andrew Baker about to descend the BSG

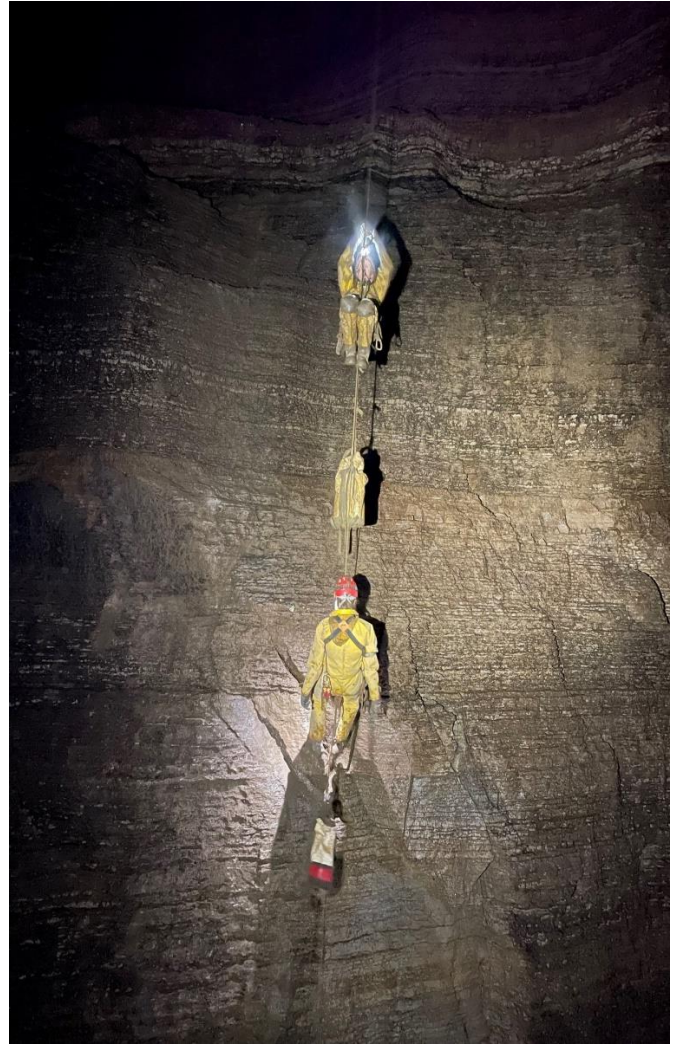
Photo – Ciara Smart



Andrew Baker negotiating the tyrolean Photo: Ciara Smart



Mainlanders out and happy. Photo by David Taberner



Ciara and Jemma climbing BSG. Photo by David Taberner:

Rigging Notes

JF-761 Delta Variant: Snot Monster and Boogie Monster Pitches, accessed via Vaccine Strollout traverse.

Ciara Smart

Derigged 5/11/2023.

Most concrete screw (CS) holes marked with parsnips. Directions given looking down the passage/pitch unless otherwise noted. Rope lengths denoted including height of knots.

Nomenclature: Snot Monster derives its name from the general Covid theme of Delta Variant, but specifically because someone dropped out of one of the early push trips. The participant told the group they felt like 'a snot monster.' Pitch is sufficiently gross and muddy to suit the name. Boogie Monster so called to continue the theme, and because it a warmup to the monstrous Black Super Giant.

P1: Snot Monster

50 m rope recommended, inclusive of approach line length.

- 3.5 m approach line, anchored from 2xCS Y-hang on RHS wall.
- Pitch anchored from 2xCS positioned in terrible rock. CS holes are directly above each other, approx 1 m apart. Use stainless hardware here as it is under a drip.
- Drop 17 m rope length down a drippy pitch to rebelay. Very loose pitch, make sure no one is below.
- Rebelay anchored from 2xCS Y-hang in good rock to abseiler's right - drop 20 m to deck.

P2: Boogie Monster

50 m rope recommended, inclusive of approach line length.

- 5 m approach line anchored from 2xCS in LHS wall.
- Pitch starts from window veering to the right of the approach line, not down the hole.
- Pitch anchored from 2xCS Y-hang - lean out over pitch and look up to see this.
- Drop 21 m, passing redirect approx 7 m down (off 1xCS to abseiler's left)
- Stick to the left of the protruding pillar, don't go too far right.
- 2xCS rebelay anchored in decent rock off the face of large protruding pillar, drop 10 m down.
- Rebelay anchored off 1xCS in good rock, drop 5 m to deck.

JF-221 Owl Pot

6 November 2023

Brian Evans

Party: Phil Maynard and Brian Evans

Phil was recovering from whatever cold he had, and I was just claiming a pathetic state of fitness. Most of the others were heading off for an expected epic in Niggly and Delta Variant. Dane was the current holder of the cold, and taking another day off, so Phil and I were looking for a cave...

I'd never done Owl Pot. Phil hadn't done it for a long time, and the rest of the lads had done it as part of a double header a couple of days ago... so, David Tab scribbled out some rigging notes from memory, and Andrew B sent through Alan Jackson's excellent notes from the *Spiel*.

What an opportunity to test Alan's enormous cleverness against reality!

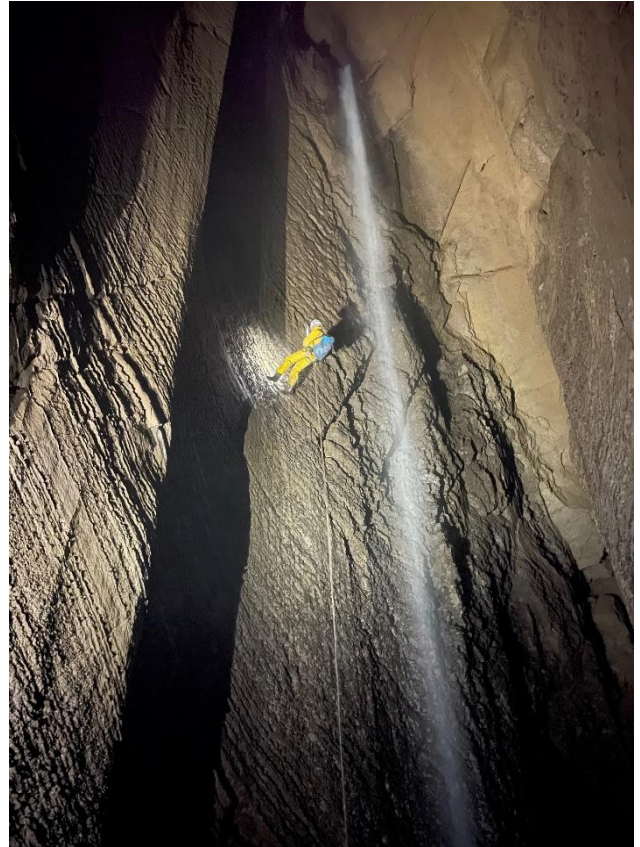
We packed the ropes and borrowed Dave's patrol – no way the Tesla was heading up the Nine Rd!

Nothing if not easy access, we drove to the entrance, followed the tapes through that gorgeous forest and I eyeballed that dreadful, muddy, entrance pitch – not so bad, really!

Phil rigged it and slopped down through the peat. Worse than it looked from the top, but really pretty average for caving down here!

Following the stringlines and then scrambling through blocks we poked on down. A nice cave. Dave's notes said "when you get to a scary climb look for another way down, multiple paths here". Alan did not tell us about this. I got to an ugly little climb down, but lowered myself satisfactorily, and found a foot hold, then helped Phil. It was only on the way back that we recognised that there had been a better way!

At P2, it was easy to find the two anchors, and I stressed after reading Alan's notes: "The first 15 m or so is free hanging, and then you find yourself on a sloping ledge/bowl halfway down the whole pitch. The next bit of pitch is sloping, so you end up with a rub up above. When standing comfortably on the aforementioned ledge it is possible to locate a tiny natural thread in one of the protruding beds of limestone. A short tape through here gives an excellent redirect." Would I find this tricky natural?



Bottom pitch. Photo: David Taberner

However, Dave's notes: "Approach bolt left hand side. Y hang over pitch. Redirect a dyneema thread about 15 m down." together with Phil's comment that "No, the dyneema is already in place!" made it easy – I just looked down, and, hey presto, there was some white dyneema cord hanging off the wall. I clipped in to the remarkable natural and continued down. One up for Dave!

I had the rope for P3, too, so I followed the stream down, following David's notes: "Couple of down climbs then up a dirt hill, then left and down into the rock pile. Eventually you'll have a vertical squeeze against the wall and a flat plate of rock. Down that and back under and you're at the next pitch. Approach bolt out to a rebelay bolt for a sloping pitch." There'd also been some discussion about which way to face, and a plea to "not go too far down the squeeze – you go out the side of it to find the pitch head." Easy enough to go up the hill, follow the polish down through the rock pile, and locate the squeeze. I stopped at the first little chamber and looked across.

Yep, I can see a bolt. Through there, call Phil down, and we add a thread to the bolt, following Alan's suggestion.

Down the sloping pitch. What a great view off the side!

Very loose for the next 20 or 30 m so I ran ahead and found some shelter to cower in.

We followed the tapes and added an extra cairn just past the crawlway to make it easier to find our way back. Dave and the boys had warned us that they'd failed to follow the correct route back up.

We reached the beautiful streamway eventually and headed off downstream. Phil rigged P4 while I ate lunch, and then down that beautiful pitch beside the waterfall.

What a ripper pitch! What a lovely cave! Not stacked verticality like Tassie Pot, but lots of really nice passage, and some stunning pitches (2 and 4, for sure) and beautiful streamway.

The chamber at the base was very damp and breezy, so we had brief forays in the appendices at the base, but did not push hard...

I abandoned Phil to eat at the top of P4 again and followed the cave upstream past the junction. I made my way past two showers and was intrigued that the (1980) map we were using showed unfinished exploration on the upstream side. Plenty of potential extension down there – I trust it's long since been "done"?

I returned to the junction, in time for Phil, and we wandered up the side passage, found our way past our new cairn (easy), through the crawlway and then missed the route in another place, poking around up several climbs while thinking, 'I don't remember a climb/step-across/boulder like this'. Eventually, the brain caught up and we returned down the climbs to find a bit of tape on the ground in some small passage! Bugger, so that's where we missed the turn!

Back out before 2 pm.

So, an evaluation of Alan's 2005 rigging notes? It's hard to complain :-). They work!

David's of a couple of days earlier? Very brief. Effective.

Friendzone(d) Again: JF-387 Porcupine Pot

Trip #2

11 November 2023

Ciara Smart

Party: Henry Garratt, Michael Glazer, Alan Jackson, Janice March, Janine McKinnon, John Oxley, Ciara Smart

It had been nearly two months since our last visit to Friendzone. This was enough time for Henry to sit most of his final-year exams, but also to find a new female of interest. In a remarkable coincidence, two days before this trip, she informed Henry that she would prefer to remain as friends, leaving Henry free to come caving with us. As Henry remarked, Friendzone appears to be aptly named, or cursed.

It ended up being a large group of seven that headed down the cave - word had gotten out that this was a passage to see. With a big party, we were able to split into multiple teams. We started by surveying Petr's shortcut starting at the beginning of the rockpile. Last trip's survey data indicated that Friendzone sits directly above the 9-Road Streamway, surveyed some decades ago. Henry and Michael split off to confirm that the two vertical leads in Friendzone were in fact looking down onto the 9-Road Streamway. We dropped tape down the vertical drops, while Henry and Michael travelled up the 9-Road streamway. They found the tape without issue, confirming the overlap. They reported that the far reaches of the 9-Road Streamway are also very decorated, which makes sense considering it sits just underneath Friendzone.

In the meantime, the rest of us busied ourselves surveying the end of the main passage and taking photographs. We took our time here, soaking in the formations. We considered string lining a few spots, but this was deemed unnecessary.

The group agreed that the passage's inaccessibility and obscurity is a much better defence than stringline.

We had a thorough look at Czechmate Chamber, but it appears terminal, or at least choked off by formations. On the floor of the chamber there is some dogtooth spar which has formed a delicate garden of geometric crystal spikes. We also noticed some unusual heligmite spikes growing directly upwards off some normal flowstone formation. This seems quite unusual. I was pleased that Alan and Janine (who've been around a tad longer than me) both agreed that these are the most extensive decorations in the Junee-Florentine, justifying the hyperbole of my earlier report.

The exit was quite slow, with a big group and many messy pitchheads. Unlike our previous trip, the exit pitches were completely dry, and we sweltered in our PVC suits.

I was curious as to how Friendzone had formed in karst area not generally decorated. After talking to a few people in the club, Russell Fulton confirmed that Friendzone is sitting directly in the Cashions Creek Limestone band. There are three limestone bands in the Junee-Florentine - the Karmberg Limestone, the Cashions Creek Limestone and the Benjamin Limestone. The Benjamin Limestone hosts most of the caves, while the Cashions Creek Limestone is a narrow but high-quality band. It has yielded other decorated passages or caves, like Welcome Stranger and For Your Eyes Only in Junee. The fact that Friendzone is so dry, and not subject to flooding, has enabled the growth of significant formations.

With the survey now complete, and photos taken, it seems unlikely that anyone will revisit Friendzone in the near future. If future trips are planned, they need to be conducted in line with cave conservation standards, and ideally accompanied by someone who knows where Friendzone is!



Dogtooth spar. Photo: Ciara Smart



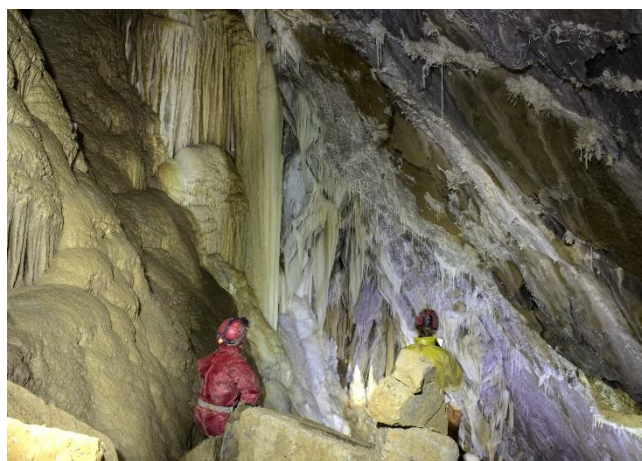
Photo: John Oxley



Photo: John Oxley



Photo: John Oxley



Photos opposite and above: John Oxley

A Muddy Adventure in Loons Cave – IB-2

25 November 2023

Michael Glazer

Party: Alan Jackson, Ben Jackson, Allison Chase, Michael Glazer

The call of Loons Cave at Ida Bay beckoned our small band of adventurers for what promised to be a memorable beginners' excursion. Led by the experienced Alan Jackson, his son Ben - the budding 12- year-old caver, Allison Chase, and myself, Michael Glazer, set out for a day of subterranean exploration.

Our journey commenced beside a forestry road, where the ritual of gearing up attracted curious glances from passing tourists. Clad in harnesses and brimming with anticipation, our group's initial pristine appearance was a stark contrast to what awaited us.

The cave's entrance greeted us after a short hike, presenting the day's first challenge: a 27 metre pitch.

When Alan graciously offered me the chance to rig the descent, I was quick to snap up this learning opportunity, albeit with a tinge of nervous excitement. The responsibility of setting up our path downwards was both exhilarating and daunting, marking my first practical step in caving rigging.

At the bottom, an assembly of cave spiders offered a hint of the natural wonders and humorous anecdotes to follow.

The cave's interior was a blend of tight spaces, intriguing formations, relentless mud, and pools of water. Allison's encounter with the cave's muddiness was immediate, marked by a noticeable tear in her suit. Ben, displaying an almost Spider-Man-like agility, adeptly navigated through the muddy terrain, seemingly untouched.

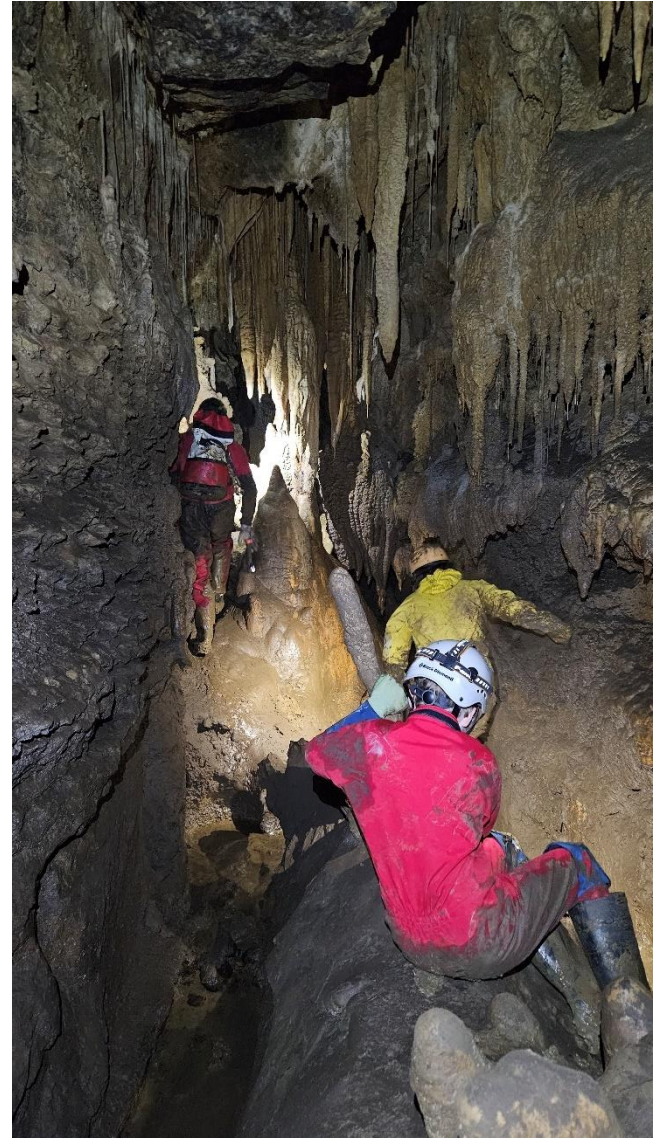
Our traverse through the cave was a blend of awe and amusement. The cave's formations and geological features, including the striking flood lines etched on the walls, captivated our attention. Yet, the frequent and comical encounters with knee-deep mud, threatening to claim our gumboots forever, kept the mood light.

A notable section involved an easy squeeze into waist-deep water, where Ben miraculously maintained his dry streak. Further along, we marvelled at pristine pebble floors and stunning avens. A highlight was attempting to recreate a photo of Alan and his son with a striking cave formation.

The return journey was punctuated by Alan's educational interlude on sexing cave spiders, a topic that led to unexpected laughter thanks to Ben's timely humour.

Ascending the pitch again without any trouble, our group reflected on the day's journey as we emerged back into daylight and a light drizzle of rain. Allison mentioned some leg tiredness, a subtle nod to her break from caving adventures.

Nonetheless, the trip was a resounding success – a perfect amalgamation of mud, exploration, and laughter.



The fun bits at the bottom. Photo: Alan Jackson

IB-1 Revelation Cave (via IB-233 Chorale Cave entrance)

2 December 2023

Karina Anders

Party: Karina Anders, Michael Glazer, Emma Bonwick and Dylan McPherson

It was probably the quickest caving trip I have been on. Emma and Dylan, who I hadn't met before, turned out to be very efficient and competent cavers. There was no faffing at the car park, a brisk walk through the forest to the cave with

no issues locating it. Michael did a superb job rigging the first pitch. The horizontal log across the top is still in working order backed up to the *Dicksonia*. Emma then rigged the second pitch, definitely worth bringing the spanners as all the bolts in the cave needed tightening. Dylan rigged the third pitch and I did the rebelay before we made our way to the bottom. And then we made our way out just as efficiently. Back outside by 1:20 pm we decided to show Emma and Dylan Mystery Creek cave, we had a spectacular show of glow worms. Home by 5pm. A very pleasurable day.

Other Exciting Stuff

September 2023 Miscellaneous JF Wanderings and Dye Tracing Updates

Text and photos by Stephen Fordyce

I did a lot of zipping about in the JF while I was in Tassie for two weeks (separate reports for the key caving trips into Porcupine and Voltera). The JF dye tracing permit expires in April, so I realised the last chance for winter experiments was fast evaporating and a couple of things that were unlikely to work in summer had to be done. I've been a bit distracted by other things, and to be honest have been pretty unenthusiastic about analysing dye results – but I'm committed to finishing all the fieldwork and keeping the extensive dataset tidy so that it can be dealt with at some point.

It's coming up for four years, and annoyingly there hasn't been a decent master cave flood in that time – here's hoping. However a quick look at some of the Niggly data in a moderate flood indicates each section of cave floods to its own level (i.e. the water level behind Mt Niggly was way higher than that in Mother of God). So that gives slightly more hope that it isn't impassably choked.

The JF was pretty dry for September when I arrived, so I was a bit worried I'd missed the boat. Then it dumped enough for a moderate+ master cave flood on the first Saturday, and another 30 mm mid-week, which also played a bit of havoc with the dye tracing.



Water level comparison at the bridge across the Florentine River

Key experiments:

- JF-402 Burning Down the House sources (x2 detectors) – releases were done in an assortment of places to see if they go through the short section of streamway. Detectors need to be collected. Particularly interesting to see if Udensala goes via BDTH on its way to Porcupine.
- JF-99 The Chairman destination, shown with reasonable certainty to emerge* at JF-31 Tom Smiths Cave on the Junee River, NOT at the Junee Cave entrance.
- JF-248 Four Road Swallet – trying to get an idea which way it goes (detectors in Tyenna, Florentine, Junee and Lawrence Rivers!). Needs more analysis of results.
- JF-270 Tachycardia to Niggly Cave (narrowing down the entry point). Detectors need to be collected.

*Another experiment was the flow direction at JF-31 Tom Smiths Cave. Alan has previously looked at this, but I wanted to see for myself. In moderate water levels (tag ~20 cm underwater), fluorescein dropped in the otherwise undisturbed pool at the tag (at different levels), all slowly but definitely made its way INTO the cave (I have video of this) and did not seem to emerge again. This inward flow was also observed in much drier conditions previously. Fluorescein dropped into the Junee River just upstream of JF-31 went under the lip and continued down the river, but did not appear in the pool near the tag. The detector was placed in the Junee River about 25 m downstream of JF-31 at the next bend, where it seemed the fluorescein had emerged. Later with very high water levels (Junee River ~10 cm from breaking its banks), fluorescein at the tag seemed to move very slowly outward, but it was hard to tell. All a bit puzzling, but considering eyewitness accounts that there is a south-flowing stream in JF-30 (heading straight for the Junee River), I might leave that to someone very pedantic to look into further.



Fluorescein experiments in JF-31, at night

Here is a quick summary of places visited and roads cleared (there were a lot of trees down):

- Junee Quarry Rd/341/The Chairman (14th Sept) - but a ~20 cm log blocks the road about 300 m shy of the 341 carpark
- Nine Road/Porcupine (17th Sept)
- Eight Road/Growling Swallet (24th Sept)
- Nine Road/Owl Pot (17th Sept)
- Nine Road/Westfield Rd loop (22nd Sept)
- Road to Rainbow Cave/Burning Down The House/Quarry/Cryptic Cowrie Cave (but there's a nasty ditch across the road just shy of BDTH)
- Chrisps Road west/Tachycardia (17th Sept)
- Chrisps Road east/Voltera (23rd Sept)
- Sunshine Road (22nd Sept) - a work in progress
- Beyond Westfield Road, logging operations have blocked a section of the Florentine Rd with two sets of gates (opened on the weekend), and Tiger Rd and Lawrence Rivulet Rd with large logs. A detour via Westfield Rd gets you back onto the Florentine Rd, and another (pretty muddy, but 2WD-passable) detour via Cashions Creek Rd gets you to Lawrence Rivulet Rising and Tiger Road. Hit me up for maps/more info if needed.



The Eight Road gate was very treed, but it was cleared and Ciara's orphan sock was rescued from the Growling Swallet carpark



Sign and gate on the Florentine Rd, just after Westfield Rd

Things of particular note:

It was my first trip into JF-402 Burning Down the House, and even in dryish conditions, the stream was big, wow! Gotta be the feeder of upstream Porcupine. I looked at other streams marked on maps with the idea of putting a detector in them but didn't bother – they were tiny. I carefully followed the map in and after 15 confusing minutes came back to the entrance – much better success following my nose. The far downstream end had a surprisingly squirmly little rockpile to get there but was very interesting. Well worth a bit more time to poke about there when we go to collect the detector.

On Friday 15th, I tagged JF-779 Sinking Stream Swallet (was JF-X146, mentioned in Nick Hume's thesis, visited in recent history by Gabriel and by Craig Stobbs, and associated with Gabriel's "Tarny McTarnface" just upstream of the sink) which is the biggest swallet in the area, and the small but healthy JF-780 Frank Swallet (found by Craig, and named for his grandfather). Both are only worthy of a tag as they are the only swallets in this area, and even then, it was borderline – they have no outcrop and the water just sinks into the ground over 5-10 m. I also went all through JF-227 looking for the stream(s) shown on the map – plenty of signs of flooding and water flow, but no stream anywhere thanks to the dry conditions. But when I returned to the area on Friday 22nd after lots of rain, Sinking Stream Swallet was overflowing and plenty of water was flowing into the JF-227 entrance (photo in the archive). I didn't have a chance to go in.



The stream which sinks at JF-779 (and a oneshot dye release device)

The luxurious mattress and sleeping-in-my-car setup was excellent, and I had a lot of very comfortable nights out in the bush (and one in Chigwell). It was the envy of those still faced with a two-hour drive back to their beds in Hobart, and by getting a two-hour head start in the morning, I was able to achieve readiness before everyone else for the first time in living memory. Great host, well-appointed lodgings, 5 stars, will stay again.

On my way to Tachycardia, my foot went through a log (to the mid-thigh) and I fell forward against it very hard. Luckily my femur didn't break, I managed to escape, and after five days could walk almost normally again. It was not a good experience. We might be getting rid of the STC sat text, but I'll continue taking a PLB on all surface activities.

JF-389 Snow Person Pot was relocated (not entered), thanks to an old surface survey and some wandering (third time lucky). A couple of extra connecting holes at the entrance were noted, and there was quite a bit of exposed karst around which was interesting. An optimal route to JF-232 Udensala was established, recorded, and added to QGIS.



The JF-389 tag felt the first touch of human hands in several decades.

The flooding made for some character-building detector retrievals. I went for two semi-swims where the water had come up a lot. The Florentine River had dropped nearly 2 m when I came back to collect that detector (but it was still in the water thanks to attaching it to a long stick). I'd wedged the detector under a large log in the Tyenna River, but it turned out this was floating, and it settled onto the detector. Lots of levers and cursing were required for that one.

I set a personal record, putting 2 L of fluorescein solution (0.5 kg of powder) into Four Road Swallet, but the dilution factor with flooding and going into large rivers made the results inconclusive. Better that than turning any rivers green though.



The new and excellent detector spear technique

