



# Speleo Spiel 458

## January-March 2024



**STC Office Bearers - from 5 March 2024****President:** Janine McKinnon

Ph: 0427 889 965

jmckinnon@caverneer.net.au

**Vice President/Science Officer:** Chris

Sharples

Ph: 0408 396 663

chris@sharples.com.au

**Secretary/Training Officer:** Karina Anders

Ph: 0478 228 639

karina\_anders@hotmail.com

**Treasurer:** Russell Fulton

Ph: 0427 956 297

FultonRL@bigpond.com

**Equipment Officer:** Alan Jackson

Ph: 0419 245 418

alan.jackson@lmrs.com.au

**Librarian:** Greg Middleton

Ph: (03) 6223 1400

ozspeleo@inet.net.au

**Spiel Editor/Public Officer:** Ciara Smart

ciara.m.smart@gmail.com

**Search & Rescue Officer:** Jemma Herbert

herbertjemma@gmail.com

**Webmaster:** John Oxley

Ph: 0409 129 908

joxley@bigpond.com

**Archivist:** Stephen Fordyce

Ph: 0437 356 322

stephen.fordyce@gmail.com

**Social Secretary:** Philip Jackson

pmjackson20@yahoo.com.au

**Front Cover:** The outgoing editor, about to do something serious. Photo: Ric Tunney**Back Cover:** Push day done well, featuring Henry Garratt. Photo: Ciara Smart*Speleo Spiel 458 was prepared by Ciara Smart, with subeditorial assistance from Janine McKinnon and Ric Tunney*

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

# Speleo Spiel

*Newsletter of the Southern Tasmanian Caverneers Incorporated*

PO Box 416, Sandy Bay, Tasmania 7006

<http://southerntasmaniancaverneers.wordpress.com/>

ABN: 73-381-060-862

ISSN 2208-1348

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

## Issue No. 458, January- March 2024

### Contents

2

#### Regular Bits

Editorial	Ciara Smart	3
Stuff 'n' Stuff	Ciara Smart	3

#### Trip Reports

JF-229 Welcome Stranger & JF-007 Frankcombe Cave	Karina Anders	5
Weld River Arch (attempt)	Janine McKinnon	6
JF-40 Assessment	Henry Garratt	6
JF-758 Delta Variant/JF-237 Niggly	Henry Garratt	7
June Quarry Surface	Stephen Fordyce	7
Khubla Khan	Henry Garratt	8
Croesus	Henry Garratt	9
Satan's Lair Surface	Stephen Fordyce	9
Marble Hill	Janine McKinnon	10
JF-36 Growling Swallet	Stephen Fordyce	10
Sunshine Rd Surface	Stephen Fordyce	11
JF-36 Growling Swallet	Stephen Fordyce	12
JF-402 Burning Down the House	Stephen Fordyce	13
JF-387 Porcupine Pot	Stephen Fordyce	13
Khubla Khan and Croesus	Alan Jackson	15
The Quest for JF-15 Hairy Goat Hole	Stephen Fordyce	16
JF-390 Lawrence Rivulet Rising	Janine McKinnon	19
Florentine Rd First Bridge	Stephen Fordyce	20
JF-11 Rainbow Cave	Stephen Fordyce	21
JF-8 June Cave	Janine McKinnon	22
JF-30 The Letterbox	Janine McKinnon	23
JF-207 Voltera Surface	Stephen Fordyce	25
Nine Road Clean Up	Stephen Fordyce	26
Chronicles of JF-207 Voltera:		
30 December	Ciara Smart	26
3 January	Stephen Fordyce	28
6 January	Stephen Fordyce	28
12 January	Henry Garratt	32
17 January	Henry Garratt	32

#### Other Exciting Stuff

JF-30 and JF-31 Historic Numbering	Ric Tunney	34
Phaethon/Scurion Cave Light Review	John Oxley	34
JF-36 Growling Swallet Rigging Updates	Stephen Fordyce	37
Fossil Deposit Discovery	Stephen Fordyce	39

#### Office Bearer's Reports

Various 41

#### The Last Page

45

This work is STC copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism, or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission from the publishers and the inclusion of acknowledgement of the source.

## Editorial

This is my first *Speleo Spiel* as editor, taking on the role from Janine McKinnon. It seems Janine has been editor for a mere 27 issues across two separate stints, beginning in 2017. Making the conservative assumption that a *Spiel* averages 15,000 words (this longish edition is nearly 23,000 for example), that means Janine has edited more than 400,000 words! Surely that's some sort of record? On the subject of longevity, Greg Middleton also deserves an honourable mention, having recently been re-elected as club librarian for the 26<sup>th</sup> year!

I certainly have no intention of besting Janine or Greg in my tenure, but I'm quite happy to have taken on the editor's chair. Sometime last year, I heard a Kiwi caver describe the *Spiel* as the best caving publication in the Southern hemisphere. I was surprised to realise the *Spiel* had such a wide fan base outside of STC. It is a slim number of clubs who have sustained the consistent publication of a high-quality journal. For those that don't know, my day job involves trawling the depths of various poorly categorised archives in a largely futile attempt to rediscover some version of historical truth. Because of this, I am acutely aware that most events are condemned to obscurity by the haze of time, unless they are (1) *written about*, and (2) *published in the public domain*! Often, the value of a hastily composed piece of mumbo-jumbo is only realised once the author is comfortably deceased. And so, a plea: even if you think a perfunctory account of your umpteenth trip down Growling Swallet is not worth the submission of a trip report, think again. Trip reports crystallise moments in individual lives (think of your grandkids), while providing commentary about society's values and recreational activities at large (think of the historians). And of course, proper documentation is essential to facilitate exploration projects far in the future (think of the cavers!). For example, recent breakthroughs in JF-207 Voltera, documented in this *Spiel*, would not have occurred without the thorough reportage of the original explorers (and the eventual publication of the map, but that's a separate rant). And so, read on for an informative (at times exhaustively so) and occasionally entertaining account of caving in Southern Tasmania over the last threeish months.

## Stuff 'n' Stuff

The 2024 Cave Animal of the Year has been announced as the charming but elusive Nullarbor Blind Cave Spider. According to the project, an adult female specimen was first observed in 2021, and scientists are yet to view a living adult male. Read more: <https://www.caveanimaloftheyear.org.au/>



## Recent Media

STC members have recently given several radio interviews about caving. In December, Deb Hunter spoke on ABC National about her experiences caving on the mainland. In February, Ciara Smart spoke to ABC Hobart about recent exploration in JF-237 Niggly, but you'll have to wait for the next *Spiel* to read about it.

The inaugural meeting of the STC sewing group was held recently at Karina's place. All declared it a resounding success when, after an hour and a half's effort, a short piece of material was stitched successfully on the old Godfrey Sterling machine. Most participants instantly scarpered, before this achievement could be reversed. Alas, for those few who remained such reversals did occur. A lesson from someone's great grandmother might be useful, anyone have one available?

– Janine McKinnon



Jemma, for one, is convinced. Photo: Janine McKinnon

## Growling Swallet Streamway Changes

I went down Growling Swallet streamway in mid-February in normal summer flow conditions. I was very surprised to find that the stream has changed route yet again. Most of the water was flowing down the Yorkshire Drain with almost none going down the Dry Route or the main streamway. The Cascades were dry, with only small pools at their bases.

– Janine McKinnon



## Yet Another Award

Just when you thought he'd got them all, Steve has snagged another prestigious award. Mel, Adrian, and Quinn at the Left of Field campground presented the below certificate for assistance in placing a gas bottle painted like a Lego head on the stump of a branch about 8 m up in a tree. Yes, it's empty, and it's chained on as well.



There has been a seismic shift in ranking among Australia's deepest caves (see p.28-30) with JF-207 Voltera gaining 5m to overtake JF-382 Dissidence for fourth place, at 323 m. The editor feels that an updated version of the list of Australia's deepest caves is in order for publication later in the year. To those with skin in the game, you have been warned.

**General Meetings:** A reminder that STC's general meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month. 8 pm at the Civic Club at 134 Davey Street, in the first room to the left. All welcome, including prospective, relapsed, and recurring members.

## 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual ASF Conference

Registration is now open for the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual ASF Conference, titled 'Caving in the Moonlight.' The conference 'will combine a thrilling caving experience and magical nights under the stars, with the newest scientific discoveries in Australian speleology.' This year's conference will also involve cartography and photography competitions in addition to the usual pre- and post-conference caving trips. It will be held 12-19 January 2025, in Buchan, Victoria.

Read more here:

<https://www.asfconference2025.com/>



## STC Christmas Party

16<sup>th</sup> December 2023

Philip Jackson

**Party:** Too many to name.

The party started at the scenic but rather sterile Spotty Dog Brewery in Lutana. The food and brews were excellent, and in the spirit of Christmas, gifts were handed out.

Just as the party was approaching a lower level of merriment The Spotty Dog called last drinks, in spite of their social media claiming they were open late on Saturday nights. 9.00 pm isn't late, I guess the spotty puppies must've needed their puppy naps.

A motion was quickly moved and carried to adjourn to Winstons where the brews proved to be just as good.

With the merriment level increasing rapidly at the less sterile and more convivial Winstons, inhibitions waned.

There was none of the pyrotechnics that often occur at STC parties but there was plenty of banter, embarrassing yarns, baby photos, joy, and frivolity.

Of course, the rules of all good underground events as per Wilfred's Bite Club, and the IT Crowd's Street Countdown, what happens there stays there. So, if you want to know what really goes on at STC Christmas events you'll need to be there.



## Trip Reports

### JF-229 Welcome Stranger Cave and JF-007 Frankcombe Cave

9 December 2023

Karina Anders

**Party:** Karina Anders, Emma Bonwick, Allison Chase, Michael Glazer, Dylan McPherson, John Oxley

It was a cruisy start to the day, everyone met at the Mt Field visitor centre at 9 am to pick up the key for Welcome Stranger. It was easy to find Welcome Stranger, we had an enjoyable meander through the streamway passage. John took some lovely photos. Lunch was at the car and then we used the club GPS to find our way to the beginning of the track to Frankcombe cave. We missed the beginning of the track and found our way to the entrance by following the GPS (on the way out we saw the entrance of the track about 30 m down the road from where we parked, it is an obvious spot to pull the car over and there is a thick metal rusty cable half buried in the ground there). There was a lot of crawling in Frankcombe cave, knee pads would have been useful for this one. There were also a couple of enjoyable squeeze crawls towards the end of the cave. Unfortunately, there was a very nasty smell, perhaps a dead animal had been washed in, we never found the source. A very enjoyable day.

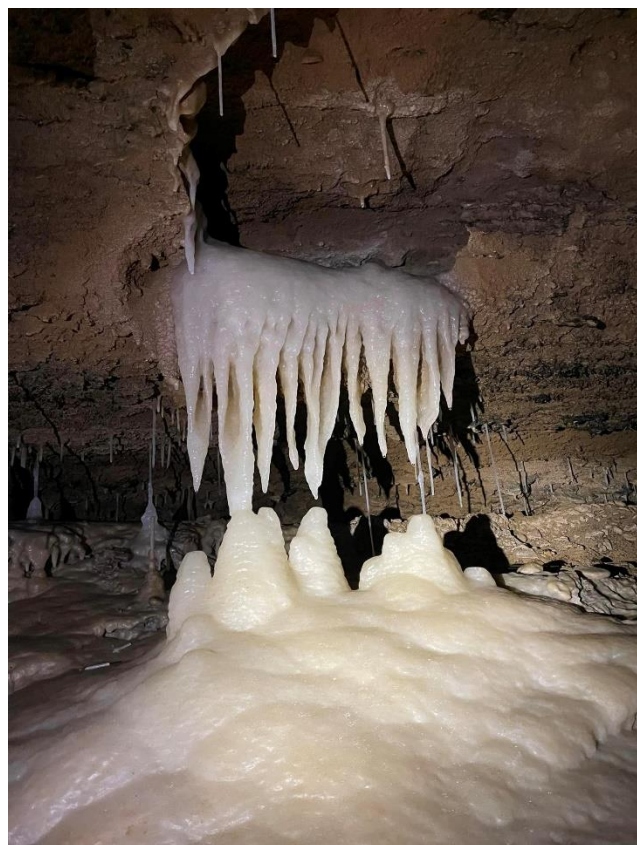


Photo: Michael Glazer

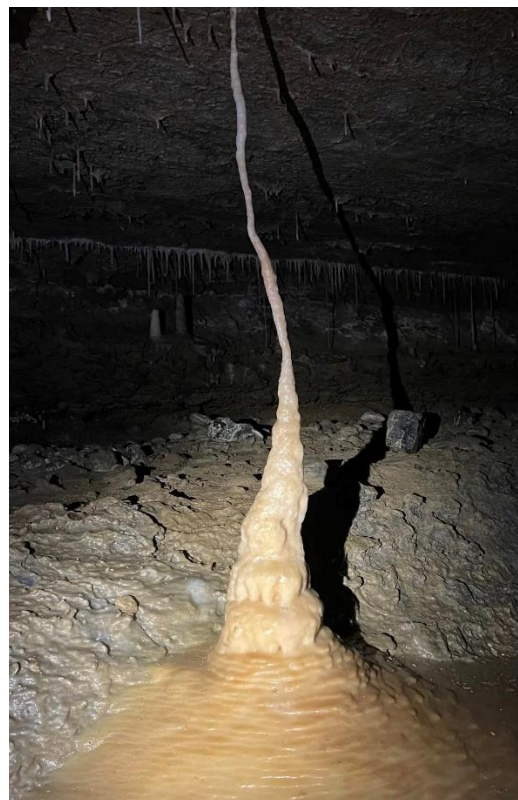


Photo: Michael Glazer



Photo: John Oxley



Photo: John Oxley



## Weld River Arch (*not quite*)

10 December 2023

Janine McKinnon

**Party:** Deb Hunter, Janine McKinnon, John Oxley, Ric Tunney (plus two visiting relatives).

In the last few months, Ric and I had done three previous reconnaissance trips from the start of the track along to the first meeting of the Weld River (John joined us on the last one). We had found the route the deteriorated track followed and were happy that this time-saving measure would make a day trip all the way to the arch possible without turning it into an epic. We weren't quite correct.

We started walking at nine a.m. and had a fairly quick and easy (for the terrain) walk to the river, arriving at ten. We were running a GPS and the distance walked was 4 km. We were confident that we would be able to walk the remaining 6 km to the arch in a reasonable time.

After a coffee break, we started looking for the onward track. We could follow it, but had frequent stops, and lost a lot of time looking for the route. Three hours after leaving the first river meeting, we stopped at the small creek running down to the second (and final) meeting of the river and decided to have lunch. We had travelled another 4 km and had about 2 km to go.

With the slow progress finding the way we estimated another hour at least to the arch. This was more than any of us were keen for, so we turned back from here. The trip back was faster, of course, but still made for a nine-hour day.

The route as far as we went will be easier for any future parties to follow, at least for the next few years.



*Photos above and below: Janine McKinnon*



## JF-40 Assessment

10 December 2023

Henry Garratt

**Party:** Henry Garratt, Will Grant, Petr Smejkal

On December 10<sup>th</sup>, Will Grant, Henry Garratt, and Petr Smejkal went to JF-40. Enthused by the closeness of two survey stations in Splash Pot (JF-10) and JF-40, and the presence of rockpile at the extent between these, we went off to investigate if a connection was possible. A connection between these two would allow us to bypass the nasty entrance series 'Close to The Bone' in Splash Pot. Despite our best efforts with Will using a 5:1 to move some things, Petr's crowbar work and my enthusiasm for tight squeezes, the connection eluded us. The lack of draught and humanly impassable squeezes thwarted our attempt. It was a rather short uneventful day, having us back in Hobart at 4:15 pm, the earliest I've ever finished a caving day, leaving Will and I free to go climbing on the Organ Pipes that afternoon.



## JF-758 Delta Variant / JF-237 Niggly Day Trip

29 December 2023

Henry Garratt

**Party:** Tom Elms, Henry Garratt, Chris Jewel, Bo Muresan, Nadine Muresan, Laura Trowbridge

The New Years Niggly camping trip had become quite the cat herding exercise. It involved the usual crew, plus a smattering of mainlanders and international visitors. Steve and I were the only two camping, but the others planned to come for a day trip on the way in, and maybe another day. It all came to a screaming halt, however, when Steve got The Lurgy. This left a very rapid change of plans, seeing me on a Niggly day trip, with the visiting crew. The plan was to go up to Delta Variant for a fun day, with one team going all the way

to camp and back, and the other just going as far as Daily Cases. We slogged to the top of the hill, with some complaint from team members who had elected not to wear gumboots. The next challenge was to get through the rather nasty and tight Negative RAT-Hole entrance (JF-758). After much deliberation with the squeeze, we eventually split the party. Laura climbed down through RAT Hole without too much fuss and then decided it wasn't for her. Her seven shoulder surgeries were making her apprehensive about being able to climb up at the end of the day. Perhaps wisely, she chose to climb back up and head back to the cars. Nadine accompanied her. After a red-hot go, Nadine couldn't quite negotiate her hips through the tight rift. This left Chris, Tom, Bo, and I to descend to the Dunes and back without issues. Tom and Chris were suitably impressed with JF caving and are keen for more.

## June Quarry Surface

1 January 2024

Text and photos by Stephen Fordyce

**Party:** Stephen Fordyce

After spending my first four days in Tassie laid up with the flu or some such (no, it wasn't even COVID), New Years Day was the first time I could contemplate leaving Camp Isolation. Some easy pickings and a quick win would be nice, so I picked a juicy LIDAR target 150 m from June Quarry and headed out with the tagging kit.

The going was reasonable, and the pickings were easy – a 3 m diameter pot about 6 m deep. Free of any adult supervision, I finally placed the saved tag JF-777 and named the cave “Like The Garlic”. A long time ago I was camping on an island with a group of diver friends and we had a very long and complicated debate about how many garlic cloves to put in the communal pasta. The final consensus was seven, and to this day any time that number comes up, it is pronounced “seven like the garlic”. This then inspired Garlic Day (where seven divers completed seven dives and had many hilarious shenanigans), but that's another story...

I was keen to check the bottom and write it off but hadn't brought any rope, so the lack of adult supervision kicked in again and I spent an inordinate amount of time getting a log into the hole to be able to shimmy out. The cave didn't go, and the shimmy was a bit more exciting than expected, but I did escape. Luckily there was phone signal, so I'd notified Ciara of my location and pole dancing shimmies.

I headed back to the quarry, finding another cave within sight of the top. A small shaft 1.5 m deep led down a slope to a room big enough to stand up in, and no chance of going further. Tagged JF-781 and practically named Not Quarry Hole. I was still up for a

bit more and elected to try sorting out the location of JF-46 Quarry Hole, and tag a hole at the back of the quarry that Corey Hanrahan found two years prior. I flogged about looking for JF-046 (tracks in QGIS). It was hot, and I gave up. Corey's cave was tagged JF-782 and named “Benched As” (because it's on the quarry bench and was benched for two years until someone got back to it, also because of the Beached Az whale cartoon). It's a steeply sloping slot against the rear wall of the main quarry (up on the first bench) probably exposed by blasting, and looks worth checking out. A quick shimmy leads to a small chamber and nothing else of interest, although it was notably cold.

JF-46 Quarry Hole is referenced in SS85, p2 as being “beside the quarry.” A map in SS86, p3 shows it to be about 30 m deep with 2 entrances. I couldn't find it, but wasn't up for looking properly, Rolan's Z-map has a location at the south of the quarry though. The SS85 report mentions another “very deep” hole known by quarry workers “at the rear of the quarry.” The trip leader (Laurie Moody) was going to have another look in a few weeks. Perhaps this “very deep” hole was JF-782, and Laurie saw it and didn't bother writing about it.



*If you look carefully in this picture of JF-777 Like The Garlic, you can see the shimmy-poles*





*JF-781 Not Quarry Cave got my hopes up for a sec*



*JF-782 Benched As isn't much to write home about*

## Kubla Khan

2 January 2024

Henry Garratt

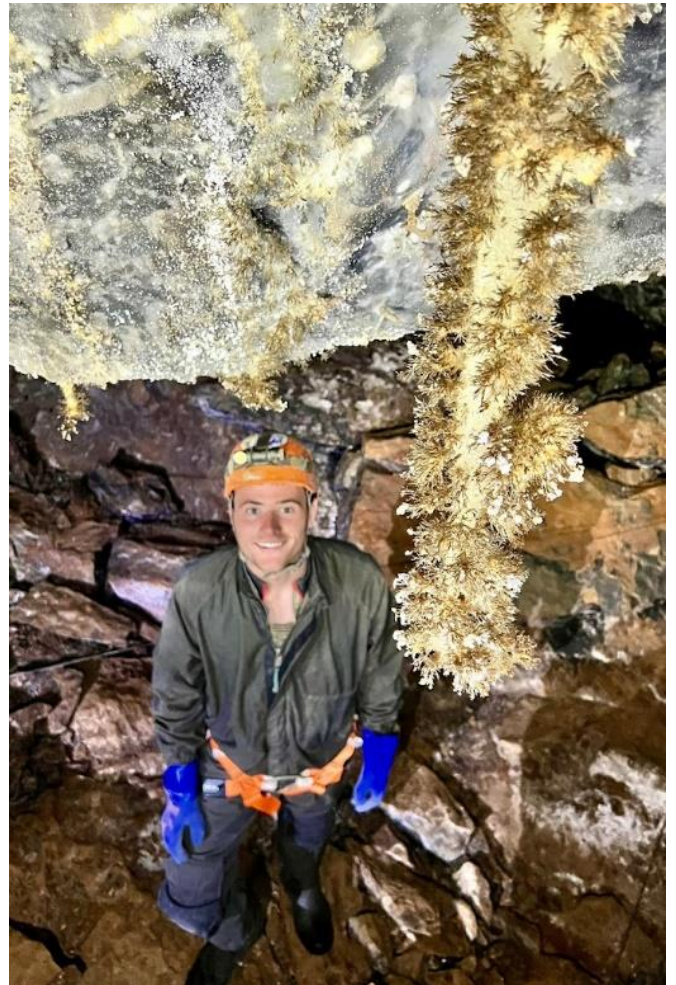
**Party:** Tom Elms, Henry Garratt, Chris Jewell, Janice March, Nadine Muresan, Laura Trowbridge,

After much logistical reshuffling with Steve getting sick and canning a Niggly trip, Overland work, and visiting cavers, I ended up on a last-minute Mole Creek trip. On Monday, Nadine told me there was a spot available on a Kubla permit the next day, and I started work on the Overland on Thursday. So, after packing for guiding, and caving I drove north that day.

I was fortunate to get a place on a Kubla Khan trip with some visiting mainland cavers. We had a lovely, mostly uneventful trip. We had a slight hiccup with the first pulldown, but would it be a pull-down trip without at least one bit of rope spaghetti? The cave is very pretty. The international visitors were particularly impressed by the boot wash stations and the effort put into cleaning and conservation.



*Above, The Silk Shop. Photo: Henry Garratt*



*In the Opium Den. Photo: Chris Jewell*



## Croesus

3 January 2024

Henry Garratt

**Party:** Henry Garratt, Chris Jewell, Eleanor March, Laura Trowbridge

We headed into Croesus the day after our Kubla trip. I didn't have a wetsuit but was very pleasantly surprised at how warm the water was, it was a balmy 26 degrees on the surface! Wallowing through the water was a welcome retreat from the heat. Mole Creek wet caving is significantly less miserable than JF wet caving. We were back in Launceston early in the afternoon, giving me time to go climbing and swimming in the gorge, before starting my Overland shift the following day.



*Croesus Streamway. Photos left and below: Henry Garratt*



## Satans Lair Surface

4 January 2024

Text and photos by Stephen Fordyce

**Party:** Stephen Fordyce, Craig Stobbs, Ethan Stobbs

Craig was up for a surface day above/around Satan's Lair and brought his teenage son Ethan along. First, we wandered cross country to JF-678 Blackberry Hole. Despite our best efforts to cover some new terrain, we ended up rediscovering JF-778 Inauspicious Undertaking, which was still worthy of the name. JF-678 had barely a trickle of flow and we spent an hour or two digging it – mud, logs and rocks yielded about 2 m of progress down the rear rock wall, and although there wasn't a draft, enthusiasm actually increased through the dig. Next time, a saw is recommended for a particularly annoying chunk of log. We had to tear ourselves away and get on with the big mission of the day, searching for an unknown awesome above Satan's Lair (ala Delta Variant).

We did a big loop well above the contact, crossing the multiple gullies above Satan's Lair at 700 m ASL and establishing there was only the one major stream (thus no unknown awesome), and a couple of trickles which

likely joined it. Damn. We found limestone and contoured around (passing just above JF-681 French Surrender), also finding lots of thick and nasty sapling scrub on steep slopes, which was quite unwelcome at this stage of the day. Eventually we could crash our way downhill to JF-365 Satan's Lair (the stream was sinking somewhere upstream, so Ethan didn't even get his promised dye release) and followed the track back to the car.



*No photos, so here's a platypus in the Tyenna River*



## Marble Hill Meanderings

7 January 2024

Janine McKinnon

**Party:** Julia, Kelly and Michael Glazer, Janine McKinnon, John Oxley, Chris Sharples, Ric Tunney

Michael is very keen to undertake jobs and projects in the Ida Bay karst, partly because he lives nearby. If he is to do “stuff” out in the field, then it helps to have some knowledge of said field. There is no point blundering around inventing your own wheels, so I had offered to take him on a walk around some (most) of the cave entrances around the back of Marble Hill. We do have a lightly taped line past them, however it is not particularly easy to follow. Local knowledge of the route is very useful. We started walking around 9 am via the Southern Ranges track direction, and then took the route to Valley Entrance of Exit cave. We had a look at this entrance and were quite bemused for a few minutes as we couldn’t find the gate. After some poking about we found it buried under debris in the floor. We cleared this out and then proceeded on our route to Halfway Hole via Garage Door entrance. Lunch was at the delightful Garage Door. Various other entrances were noted, and GPSed, and we reached the junction of the Mini-Martin track with the Exit track around 5 pm.

Michael had carried a large GPS unit he has access to from work, which he used to track our route and locate the cave entrances - to an impressive level of accuracy. This is what you get when the GPS unit is the size of Gandalf’s staff. Full marks to Michael for lumbering through the bush with the damn thing.



*Garage Door. Photo: Janine McKinnon*



*Cave Divining. Photo: John Oxley*

## JF-36 Growling Swallet #1

8 January 2024

Text and photos by Stephen Fordyce

**Party:** Stephen Fordyce, Chris Jewell, Laura Trowbridge

This was the chance to show Chris and Laura (experienced UK cavers) some classic “nice” southern Tasmanian caving, and portage three bags of dive gear in the direction of Black River. There had been some rain, and the gauge rock correctly indicated some excitement was expected (a surprising amount for summer). We went in the main entrance, skipped swapping the depth logger at base of Windy Rift and headed up. Some unflattering comments about the ladders and climbs were noted. The call was made to leave the dive gear with the rescue cache at base of Slaughterhouse aven (it was subsequently moved to the top of Destiny Pitch) and head out that way. The rope

on the top pitch had rubbed alarmingly, with enough core exposed that an alpine butterfly was added. This was dealt with on the subsequent trip.



*Chris demonstrates the Zoidberg Manoeuvre for testing the fit of suits*



## Sunshine Rd Surface

9 January 2024

Text and photos by Stephen Fordyce

**Party:** Stephen Fordyce, Chris Jewell, Marika Kuhne, Laura Trowbridge, Philip

After another hack at it the week before, Sunshine Road was clear and passable by my 2WD Ford Territory to the end. Albeit pretty scratchy and requiring lots of traction control. Beware of the initial bit after turning off the well-kept logging road, the bushes have been cut down leaving sharp stumps which could puncture tyres if you stray out of the wheel ruts. Russell had been up here a couple of years ago and had told me about some untagged caves that needed a second look.

We followed the (poorly) taped route up a clear spur, it was nice going, a bit less so as we got higher and then headed west around the contour. It was karsty with occasional outcrops, and the first target was tagged JF-783, and named... something. Due to errors in record keeping and memory, it's in the register ironically as "Forget Me Not". A 2 m deep hole, only just worthy of a tag (and even then, early morning enthusiasm probably got it over the line).

We continued around, passing JF-428 and arrived at the main aim of the day – an undescended pit at least 20 m deep, with several other potential targets around it, in a gully thick with ferns and crud. They all turned out to be duds, but the deep pit was nice – a Disto shot went 19.2 m (Azi 63 deg magnetic, Incl -76 deg). Lunch, faffing and cave exploration were undertaking.

The cave was under two large ferns, so it was named "Tree Fern Temple" and tagged JF-784 (the tag is down a fair way but should be visible to the careful observer without SRT kit). Chris was dressed and sent down, while the rest of us watched and tried not to drop things on him. Laura summed it up with "that's a bloody cave all right", although having decent proportions, the walls were made of cheese and Chris reported no chance of any way on.

The other targets were identified and weren't worth tagging, so we headed back slightly higher to cover different ground. Near the track back to the cars and with motivation flagging, a group decision was made for a "small" detour to a "near certain cave" LIDAR target. This took us into a gully, rougher terrain than hoped for, and a surprisingly steep traverse. The afternoon was hot, the target was a bust (others were ignored), the detour was long and full of terrors, and the proverbial Jan was not happy (for those reading this in the distant future, look up the icon "Not happy Jan" Telstra).

Eventually we traversed back to the taped route and headed back down to the cars. Morale was banded with ice-creams back at Left of Field. It's an interesting

and seldom visited area, with various LIDAR targets and outcrops visible on LIDAR. Lots of exposed limestone too, and right over where the master cave should be. Worth more attention I reckon. Our track and various points of interest are on QGIS.



*The extent of JF-783*



*"It's a bloody cave all right"*



*Chris enters the Tree Fern Temple*



## JF-36 Growling Swallet #2

11 January 2024

Text and photos by Stephen Fordyce

**Party:** Kynan “Cobra” Bonnice, Stephen Fordyce, Henry Garratt, Marika Kahle, Eleanor March, Brendan Moore



*Youthful enthusiasm over Chris & Laura’s leftover food was unbounded, but as Laura said “they would have been just as excited if we left them a bag of leaves”...*

The motley crew of mainlanders, northerners and Henry had been put through an extensive training program in the tree at Left of Field and were now more or less expert at everything SRT, so it was time to test them in Growling Swallet. Water levels were back to “low” and everyone was happy enough negotiating the climbs and such down the main streamway. We replaced the depth logger just before heading up Windy Rift (the data showed a disturbing amount of time over 5 m deep during winter, with a peak of 27 m the same day we were in Porcupine connecting it to Gormenghast and discovering Friendzone, yikes!).



*Obligatory entrance photo*

Everyone did well negotiating Windy Rift, and the rest of us soon caught up to Henry and Eleanor who had been sent ahead to replace the last of the cursed ladders and replace with slightly less cursed 11 m bluewater

SRT rope from the gearstore. Henry and I fuffed with this while the others went ahead to stickybeak – see separate report on this.

We reconvened at the base of Slaughterhouse Aven (our planned exit, so the newbies could show off their SRT climbing). Morale was excellent, so we grabbed the stashed dive gear and carried it to the top of Destiny Pitch. Cobra had too much energy so was sent to bounce the pitch to light up the bottom for everyone else to enjoy. I was tempted to go further, but headed for home to leave plenty of time for callout, and this turned out to be a wise call.



*Cobra starts the ascent*

The enthusiastic Henry and Eleanor were sent ahead again with Brendan to replace the core-shot rope on the top Slaughterhouse pitch. Marika, Cobra, and I followed not far behind, with some good practise route finding in the rockpile, and some more good practise carrying heaving bags of old ladder (none was left behind!).



*Obligatory group photo*

I was surprised to catch the rigging crew, but it had been a vexing exercise and Henry had had to replace a lot of stuff including some anchors (separate report on that). The five of us down below got to experience a long, cold bottleneck wait while one person fuffed – excellent practise for future epics and it wasn’t even



me doing the faffing! Chuffed as. We spent another half an hour sorting out an impressive spiderweb by an unnamed person on the new rebelay. They did well in staying calm and verbalising the problem so it could be solved together, well done.

## JF-402 Burning Down The House

12 January 2024

Stephen Fordyce

**Party:** Kynan “Cobra” Bonnice, Stephen Fordyce, Brendan Moore

A moderate day of usefulness was in order between Growling and Porcupine, so this was a good opportunity to retrieve the detectors I’d left at either end of the major stream. An unnamed member of the party forgot their kneepads and regretted it in this rather grovelly cave. The detectors were retrieved, and a dye release was completed. Anaspides were looked for (to be collected for the Germans) but none could be found.

We poked at the terminal rockpile (beyond the improbable squeeze getting you through to the last big chamber) in low water levels, noting a wet grovel under a big rock that might go for those suitably dressed or hardcore. We shifted rocks and made a few metres of progress in a few spots around and in the rockpile, but nothing really looked like it went. Actually, up a chimney above the wet grovel there is some scope for continuation, but with a 40 kg rock in an inconvenient spot, it’s a scary proposition (even with the rock in a slightly less inconvenient spot now).

We were underground for 4-5 hours, and only got lost in rockpile once (making a line of rocks to indicate this is the wrong way). We also removed an old handline

Callout was getting uncomfortably close now, so Henry and Eleanor hightailed it out to prevent embarrassment and the rest of us followed at a more leisurely pace. It was a solid full day underground (nine hours or some such), with goodly jobs completed. Everyone benchmarked themselves very well.

from an up-climb (on the way in) through a chimney not too far into the cave – the single anchor was a bit sketchy. By climbing up at first opportunity rather than crawling further to last opportunity where the handline was, the handline isn’t necessary. The climb is a bit exciting, but on par with other climbs in the cave. We made a line of rocks across the floor here too to stop future visitors going too far and missing the first climb spot.



*Cobra gives a sense of scale of the large stream. Dye tracing has shown this to be the main feeder of the Porcupine branch of the master cave (with a ~2 km gap from BDTH to Porcupine). Photo: Stephen Fordyce*

## JF-387 Porcupine Pot

13 January 2024

Text and photos by Stephen Fordyce

**Party:** Kynan “Cobra” Bonnice, Stephen Fordyce, Brendan Moore

Porcupine hadn’t had a visit yet this January and was desperately in need of the last few jobs being knocked off so it could be derigged. It’d be a good next step for Cobra, and good fun for Brendan. We made good time down to the rockpile and the stream, stopping to take some pictures of Anaspides habitat for the German collectors.

Through the Miraculous Bypass we had a quick look for Sketcher’s Nightmare (the passage leading to the base of the 30 m pitch discovered in ~2016, which could do with re-sketching). Not super obvious, a job

for next time. The detector was swapped, and the team was a bit unenthusiastic at Humanitarian Corridor, but it was better than getting wet. We reached the Gift Horse Rockpile and I went up the aid climb Karina did last year (SS454, p13), while the other guys headed into the rockpile – poking at the end previously reached and finding nothing new.

Looking up from below (and back from the climb), there are two windows in the top of the chamber, and Karina had climbed up the sensible route to the right-hand one. We’d checked above the anchors last time and found only flakey rockpile that closed out quickly. About 2 m below the anchors I was able to crawl left into a space between giant boulders and get off the rope. Following this space in a bit of a zigzag got me looking out the left-hand window, cool! A going high level lead went off into horizontal(ish), walking(ish) passage.



The left wall was solid rock, and the right wall was breakdown, and everything was coated with gloopy mud – it went up to 11. There were occasional holes and leads which I checked later but none were inspiring. Just as I was starting to actually get excited, it crapped out. I made a cairn and tried to rationalise not surveying, as the kit was way down the bottom of the pitch. The other guys were off being enthusiastic, so I had to painstakingly renegotiate the pitch and the mud. It was a bit lame, but the survey was done. Lacking any marked survey stations nearby, I surveyed back out of the cave until surely that was far enough to match. It didn't match well, but I reckon I've done a reasonable job of fudging it in. Considerable faffing was required to rig orange string and retrieve the rope, but it was done.

#### Rigging notes for Karina's climb:

- Anchors left: 2x SS hangers (1x gal concrete screw, 1x 8 mm SS throughbolt), dyneema Y-hang with bowline + overhand stopper knot directly onto the hangers, figure-8 central knot with SS maillon.
- Orange string left in maillon: a continuous loop of standard 3 mm braided dive line, approx. 15 m each side. Runs down further than it needs to so you can get a better angle on pulling.
- Suggest 20 m rope, 15 m if you're feeling lucky.
- The hang is terrible, there are 2-3 nasty rub points and some plate sized rocks which might come down if you get unlucky (sorry). So be super careful going up, and be ready for a difficult pull (consider rigging a backup string loop in case the primary one breaks)



*Screenshot from GoPro video of the anchors at top of the climb*

Brendan and Cobra got back in time to wait around and get cold, so we were all ready to head for home. Brendan requested a stop in the Palace Rockpile (in lieu of Palace Hotel Ballroom) to test our recollection of the introduction monologue and lyrics of "Everybody" from the Blues Brothers. Cobra hadn't seen the movie but was more concerned with whether to be horrified or impressed at these two old dudes getting loose. Excellent.



*Brendan and Cobra having Shapes for lunch (all the cool people do)*

We proceeded out at a leisurely pace. Brendan was unstoppable and seemed to enjoy his first JF trip that wasn't a ridiculous epic. Any time Cobra didn't look shattered enough he was given the heavy bag, which was most of the way. I finally managed to break him at the tight and nasty pitch head and confiscated the bag in the interests of making our 11 pm callout. Bloody good effort for his second ever day of vertical caving, he's all the better for it and keen for more.



*Anaspides habitat*



## MC-1 Kubla Khan

13 January 2024

Alan Jackson

**Party:** Matt Ferdinand, Jemma Herbert, Alan Jackson, Anna Jackson, Ben Jackson

Matt was our partner in crime on the 2023 Baxter Cliffs, Nullarbor expedition. Matt was over from NSW and keen to see some of Tasmania's underground. The kids were keen to cave with Matt again. Jemma is simply keen. Kubla was Kubla.



*Ben exiting Kubla. Photo: Alan Jackson*

## Croesus

14 January 2024

Alan Jackson

**Party:** Matt Ferdinand, Alan Jackson, Anna Jackson, Ben Jackson, Darren Wunder, Eli Wunder

When in Mole Creek for the weekend you might as well knock off two classics instead of just one. We did a through trip, which adds some nice abseiling to the

trip (and some shit crawling) as well as only being wet and cold for half the trip instead of all of it. We swapped Jemma out for a pair of adventurous friends of mine from the NW coast who had been keen to do some caving since I introduced them to canyoning the year before. Croesus was Croesus.



*Ben entering Croesus 'Top Hole'. Photo: Alan Jackson*

## The Search for JF-15 Hairyoat Hole Continues

14 January 2024

Text and photos by Stephen Fordyce

**Party:** Stephen Fordyce, Henry Garratt, Brendan Moore, Ciara Smart

### *Introduction, and the story so far*

The legend of JF-15 Hairyoat Hole (a.k.a HGH) has become STC folklore – a high prospect drafting cave in an interesting area, discovered over 50 years ago but also lost for nearly as long. Successive generations have tried hard to find it and failed, and it was our turn to do both on attempt #5. However, with the benefit of extensive research, previous trip reports and data

collected on this one, I'm optimistic that further searching is warranted.

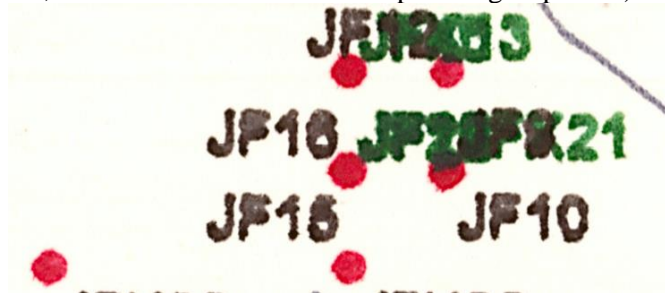
By all accounts, the best way to find Hairyoat Hole is to adopt the original technique that found it in the first place. The instruction manual for "Hairyoating" can be found in *Speleo Spiel* 51, and I would encourage would-be Hairyoaters to read it. We consulted the manual and added a protocol that once Hairyoating commences, if you found a prospective cave, you must make an enthusiastic hairygoat noise. It was a day of hilarity and silliness (at least until we started getting sick of it mid-afternoon). The tradition of applying goat-related names to new finds was continued, with "Not This Goat", and "Just Kidding", joining the likes of "Bald Pig" (Bunty proclaimed it clearly wasn't a hairy goat) and the less imaginative "Not HGH".





*The original hairygoat illustration from Speleo Spiel 51 (1970)*

The last attempt at finding JF-15 was in 2021 (SS447, p4). This was brought on by Pax finding an old map with cave locations (file name “June Area - Cave Locations - Date Unknown maybe mid80s.tif”) in the archive. My interpretation of the map is that it’s way too rough to be of use (it was pre-GPS, JF-10 is way off, and the cave dots are in a suspicious grid pattern).



*Excerpt from the old map showing perfect spacing between cave locations (red dots)*

Previous to that, a party led by Alan Jackson put in a big effort (SS392, p4, p8, with the major write-up a few years later in SS403, p17) to tidy up a mass of confusing data in the HGH area. This includes references to previous attempts by Jeff Butt et al, and additional background.

In the midst of that, Peter Shaw (being one of those people who had actually visited Hairygoat Hole) had seen Alan’s trip report in 2012 and responded (SS400, p25) with some photos of a cave which was not JF-15 but was close to it. The photos show enough distinctive features that the cave should be easily identifiable. This beta wasn’t mentioned in the 2021 report, so perhaps they missed it. I contacted Peter in 2023 for the original photos and with some other questions – the photos are scans of slides so aren’t super high res, but they are in the archive now.

### ***The hairygoating***

So, the four of us went to do the thing. Just like everyone else, we went to JF-10 Splash Pot first (we

tried and failed to find the tag), and tried to follow the description of the route by the original hairygoats. It was novel to feel the terrain rather than following all our newfangled electronic devices. It was also interesting to swap notes with Peter Shaw - he was surprised that the plotted locations of stuff were so different to his conceptualisation of the area.



*Dare I accuse the new editor of being a tree-hugger?*

We spread out and fuffed a lot, contouring around steepish but open terrain. I stayed high and the others stayed a bit lower, picking up assorted tagged caves (JF-494, JF-498 and everything in between). There was a mark from the STC GPS called “JF-8M-SFT” (8 m shaft?) which was thoroughly looked for, but it was way too high, there was mudstone everywhere, and definitely no 8 m shafts hidden in the open forest. Super poor satellite fix when recorded probably.

Next we allowed ourselves to be guided over to the JF-19 area. We located and checked all of the tagged caves in this cluster and checked them against Peter Shaw’s pictures (see table later), none were a good match. We then headed SW and up onto a ridge with limestone outcrop – nice! The undergrowth was pretty thick on the ridgetop, the going was slow and potential caves were obscured. However we found two caves with similar entrances to JF-15, so that was interesting (and goat noises were made). JF-785 “Not This Goat” is a body sized hole going down 3 m in rock before it ends, no draught. While Henry enthusiastically went in to write it off, Ciara and I less enthusiastically tagged it and Brendan cast about for more.

An “EHHHHHHHHHEEHEHHHHHHHH” saw three of us fighting our way through the thick undergrowth to Brendan, who had found another tiny entrance, sloping down a few metres to a drop. However this one was a bit more interesting, with Henry spending fifteen minutes negotiating a rift/shaft about 8 m deep, beyond the entrance slope. Total depth estimated 15 m. We put some tape on a nearby tree (as we had for JF-785) as these things would be really hard to find and easily obscured in a few decades. The tags are in far enough that if you find the cave you should be guaranteed of finding the tags. This was prime location for JF-15 and



is firm proof that previous parties were not exhaustive in their searches.



*Spot the Henry in JF-786*

It was hot and getting to the point in the afternoon where swims and ice-cream were looking better than pushing further in the bush, but there was a bit left to do. We left prime location, and picked up JF-529, JF-18, JF-17 and JF-734 – none were a good match for Peter Shaw’s photo (which by this point we all could draw from memory with photo-realistic accuracy). We also checked marks from the STC GPS “New” and “NewA” (recorded in SS392, p9 and mentioned in Alan’s report SS403, p17), which we decided were JF-734 and a small hole not worthy of a tag.



*Spot the Henry in JF-786*

JF-16 was still conspicuously absent, and this was annoying. The tagging summary (SS56, p2) describes JF-16 as “small vertical entrance to 30’ deep shaft with unstable floor, small side chamber. Numerous bones – skulls collected. Number on rock 2 ft above entrance”. The finding report (SS56, p4) has JF-16 to the SW of JF-17, probably on the contact, and marks the furthest SW point the party reached. JF-734 Lost Sock is an obvious cave in a small doline on the contact where JF-16 would be expected, and I had a hunch they were the same. Having a look in JF-734, the depth is about right, although it was more of a steep slope than a shaft, the presence of a side chamber was debatable and there weren’t any bones on the rocky floor. Given the lack of bones, I’d guess that JF-16 is still out there, perhaps in obscure undergrowth between JF-734 and JF-17 (we did kind of look there, but were pretty over it by then) or downhill of JF-734.

Having knocked all that over, it was well and truly time to head for home. We did one more pass through the high probability area and didn’t find anything more (although it felt right, with lots of limestone outcrop). The beeline to the KD track was blissfully reasonable and we were back at the cars quick smart, and swimming in the Tyenna River almost as smartly. We didn’t find JF-15 Hairygoat Hole, but we got a good feel for the area, recorded a bunch of useful data and I’ve spent ages processing that and re-theorising (see next section).

These hairygoats will be back.  
EHHHHHHHEHHHEEEEEHHHHHHH!



*Brendan put all his years of musical AND army officer training into his hairygoat call. It was amazing and terrifying.*





Henry's hairygoat call was... more of a strangled goose.

### Data updates and theories

There are a lot of karst features in the area, and fortunately for us they were already pretty well organised thanks to the efforts of those previous (particularly Alan's table in SS403, p17). We added to the knowledge (and updated QGIS with):

- An assortment of mudstone/limestone outcrop points, and a few non-tagged karst features
- Some terrain marks (ie. limestone ridge line)
- Our GPS tracks of the day
- STC GPS marks "New", NewA" and "JF-8M-SFT" checked and written off
- JF-785 & JF-786
- Checking an assortment of caves against Peter Shaw's picture (see table below)

Additionally, I've used LIDAR data to fine-tune the location of caves in the area, and then applied that to existing surface surveys to pull the rest of the locations into place and give us better accuracy than GPS, and high accuracy relative to nearby caves to assist with further detective work.

Arthur Clarke noted on Facebook that he had left a short crowbar beside the nearby tree (a stringybark, maybe) to HGH. So, if someone gets desperate enough, a metal detector might be worth a shot.

JF-597 is currently the best unchecked cave for matching the picture, and it being quite a way below the contact could indicate that JF-15 is also below the contact. This might explain why all the people faffing about up there have managed to miss it. I feel the ridge which JF-785/786 sit on feels right and matches all the info. Establishing the route of the original track(s?) could help, and a fine-tooth comb through the trip reports of the day to match descriptions of things with now-tagged holes might be useful. In any case, more trudging and systematic recording is required. Meanwhile, I'll put my research notes in the archive.



Steve found a Henry!

Caves in the JF-15 search area which might be the one in Peter Shaw's picture:

Cave	Description check	Eyeball check
JF-19	Possibly	Good shape but details don't match (horizontal entrance not conducive with log in photo)
JF-20	Maaaybe	Good depth but doesn't look wide or vertical enough
JF-18	Maybe (guess mostly likely from other context)	Close but not quite. Literally under giant tree.
JF-474	Unlikely	Very close generally, but details don't match
JF-475	Not	Def not photo
JF-476	Unlikely	Def not photo
JF-529	Unlikely	Right depth but lacking features
JF-499	Unlikely	??
JF-528	Not	??
JF-262	Not	??
JF-264	Not	??
JF-473	Not	??
JF-17	Unlikely	Not the same characteristics
JF-734	Not	Def not photo, I went in, it was tight and no bones
JF-785	Not	Def not photo
JF-786	Not	Def not photo
JF-597	Possible, entrance photo not super inspiring though	??



**Questions for the elder Hairygoats (anyone who actually went there):**

If you have any recollections around the following questions, I would love to hear from you – please email me at [Stephen.fordyce@gmail.com](mailto:Stephen.fordyce@gmail.com) or call 0437 356 322.

- Trip reports reference a "yellow track" from JF-10 Splash Pot to, past or near HGH.
  - Why was it called that?
  - Who made it and how was it marked?
  - Where did it go to past HGH?
  - Was there another track to HGH? Possibly one from when it was first found?
- Trip reports reference a "special" marker tree - a junction, or perhaps cave marker.
  - Any more information on this?
  - Is this the same as the tree at the HGH entrance?
  - Species? Size? Notable features?
- I'm under the impression that the final approach to HGH was up a gully (or was it down a gully?) after JF-10 Splash Pot, but the cave was on a ridge.
  - Which side of the gully was HGH?
  - Is HGH on the very top of the ridge, or down a bit? Which side of the ridge?
  - Did the yellow track go up or down the gully to HGH?
- Was HGH above or below most of the holes nearby?
- Was it tagged? Where was the tag?
- Can you confirm these are photos of the entrance? Do you know the photographer or recognise the cavers?



*Above and below: photos from the STC archive, thought to be of Hairygoat Hole entrance (photographer and people unknown)*



## JF-390 Lawrence Rivulet Rising

**14 January 2024**

Janine McKinnon

**Party:** Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney

We have had the tag for this cave on a shelf in our garage for several years. Laziness is the main reason we haven't placed it. Getting chest-deep in the water to get to rock added to the lack of motivation.

However, a sudden burst of enthusiasm inspired us to plan a trip on a day's notice to do this, and for me to dive the cave again to pull out some old, broken line and check the thicker line I placed a few years ago (SS400, p6 for initial reports. I can't find a report for finishing the job – forgot to write one?).



*New tag. Photo: Janine McKinnon*



The short track to the stream was in very poor condition, with most of the tapes gone. It looked like no-one had been there since my last visits. So much for thinking a permanent line would be useful to tourist cave divers!

We took my gear down to the entry pool (after coffee, of course) and Ric cleared some of the fallen branches away whilst I got organised. Flow was very low, so getting into the tight entrance wasn't going to be a problem. (This cave really pumps after rain). I found my permanent line primary tie-off still attached to the tree, which was good, but it was a broken, frayed mess after 2 m, not so good. I had come prepared for this though, so tied in my exploration line and headed into the entrance.

I found the permanent line still good and in-situ just past the entrance vertical restriction. It had a frayed end just past a tie-off, so the rope had been worn and broken by heavy vibration through the entrance restriction.

I followed it to the second restriction at 18 m depth, where I had terminated my 7 mm line. The thin exploration line was still in place beyond there. I followed it for some distance past the restriction, with it being tight and in place. Then I turned around.

There was a mess of old, thin line near my tie-off and I brought this out of the cave with me.

Meanwhile, Ric had placed the tag directly above the entrance restriction. This was an excellent choice of location as previous parties have always had to hunt

around a bit to find the entrance to the dive; all the fallen trees and branches obscure the view a bit. He had also tidied up the track somewhat and put in a few more tapes.



*Janine diving. See also front cover. Photo: Ric Tunney*

## **Florentine Rd First Bridge**

**16 January 2024**

Text and photos: Stephen Fordyce

**Party:** Stephen Fordyce

Not long after it starts, the Florentine Road goes over two bridges, and I vaguely assumed they were both the Tyenna River. But my cave diver curiosity had wondered about the clear, blue-tinged water that was there at times of low rain – this was a sign of a spring. I'd stopped to have a look earlier in the month and noted with some surprise that the first bridge (B) was over a large pool of still, crystal clear water, whereas the second bridge (A) was overflowing, tannin-stained water – obviously the Tyenna River.

With rain on the way (but a week of none beforehand), an uncomfortably hot afternoon was the last chance to examine this interesting mystery in more detail. Using a drop of fluorescein, the clear pool was very slowly but definitely flowing, from SW to NE (ie. towards Mt Field). I was tempted to go for a snorkel, but walked

instead – following the clear river upstream (my track shown at C). The hope was to find a single large spring gushing clear water, which could be dived (ala Florida). Sadly, the large clear river (and at least for the first bit, it was indeed a defined river several metres wide) was fed by a series of tiny little springs many with air bubbles and a maze of swampy channels, although many of these were currently bone dry.

I fought through annoying and prickly bush until the last trickle more or less disappeared, then made a beeline for the road. Oh well, it had been worth a try. I was curious where the water for the springs was coming from, and how it managed to avoid picking up the tannin staining that all Tassie surface water seems to get (including that from June Cave, which has a bit even in summer).

I also had a quick look at a large pool noted in QGIS as “ANM Spring” near the old gatehouse near the start of the Florentine Road. The pool was certainly large and impressive, and at least bits of it looked clear enough to warrant a snorkel (other bits were nasty and full of algae).





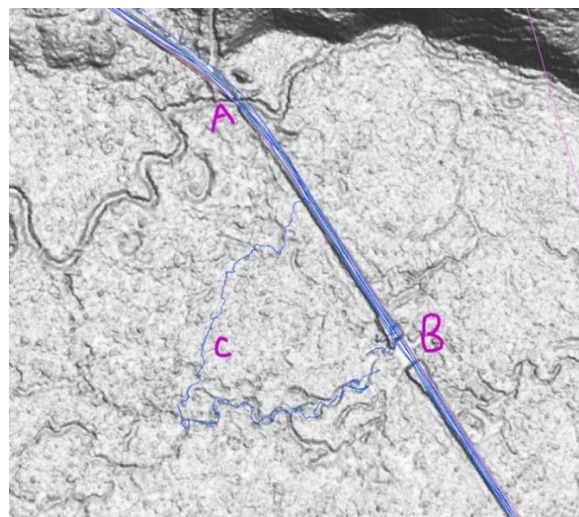
*One of the many small bubbling springs*



*View from the bridge showing water clarity/colour (disregard the drop of fluorescein!)*



*The “river” flowing through the bush*



## JF-11 Rainbow Cave Sump Checkout

16 January 2024

Text and photos by Stephen Fordyce

**Party:** Stephen Fordyce

JF-11 Rainbow Cave piqued my interest because it had a sump and might provide alternate entry to the master cave upstream of Porcupine. I'd just thoroughly confirmed that Rainbow Cave DOESN'T go to nearby JF-402 Burning Down The House (per Rolan Eberhard commentary SS277, p6) and this made the sump worthy of a second set of eyes, and in super dry summer conditions. It had apparently only been dived once before – by Janine in November 2014 (SS406, p4).



*At least it was a nice spot to kit up*



At least the access to this sump is a cakewalk, and quite suitable as a complete solo effort. I carried everything the five minutes to the entrance, and then carried one of two bags of dive gear the five minutes to the sump. With the catchment heavily logged, there was a chance the sump was heavily clogged, but had been de-bogged in the nine years since Janine's dive. As I'd hoped, the stream at the entrance wasn't flowing.

The sump was about 2 m lower than when I'd previously seen it taking up the whole end of the passage. It was a small (75 x 100 cm) pool down a slope of washed in debris angled back underneath the passage to get here. The water was tannin-tinged but with visibility. I was able to slide down the slope head first and get my mask and GoPro in to have a look. It didn't look promising, with a tiny hole hooking left to complete a full loop and head underneath the debris pile and in the same direction the entry passage went. While there, I had a look at the area around the sump and found no hint of an alternative way on.



*Selfie looking down the debris slope into the sump*

Pretty unlikely it was going to do anything, but I headed out, changed into my 7 mm dive wetsuit and came back – no point in any dive gear, but I wore hood and mask. Before destroying the visibility, I slid down

head first and was able to get eyeballs on the situation up close – it was spectacularly uninspiring. The one little underwater hole was waaaaay too small and seemed to get smaller. The obvious flooding hinted at a major constriction somewhere, and by thrashing around in the water I'd released a ton of hydrogen sulfide gas from the rotting vegetation and the smell was nasty.

So I bailed out and got everything back to the car. At least finishing a JF mission by lunchtime was nice.



*Screenshot from the checkout videos (which turned out quite well)*

## JF-8 Junee Cave

**3 February 2024**

Janine McKinnon

**Party:** Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney

I haven't been into this cave since before Covid. It seemed like about time to check how the permanent line was doing, and remind myself what cave diving is about in preparation for an upcoming holiday doing just that. Sure, our caves are darker, colder, higher flow and have less visibility than where I am holidaying, but at least it is wet, dark and an overhead environment.

As the old body(s) are struggling a bit carrying heavy weights I decided that a pair of seven-litre tanks would be enough to get through sump one. Spoiler alert, that would have been true if it hadn't rained in the previous few days and the current was stronger than I was expecting.

Anyway, we went in via the old track from the Florentine Road. That way no one was at the parking area and we could leave gear at the car without stressing about theft. I had packed everything into four packs, so two trips each to the resurgence entrance. We met tourists as we shuffled gear. Then I dressed and we headed in... we met tourists as we walked the third time to the entrance.



Ric, bless him, did three trips vs my one, shuffling gear up the stream to the sump. I headed into the sump around 11 am, a little surprised at how strong the current was for a summer where I didn't think it had rained much (I should have checked the previous week's rainfall in the catchment shouldn't I?). I checked the line with reasonable care as I swam and found it in surprisingly excellent condition. It is now ten years old and surviving the periodic floods very well.

Along the way I found a cave diver's marker peg randomly sitting on the line. Very strange as they are used to mark junctions, (or at the start) and there aren't any along that dive. The owner has been found but the story remains elusive. It is testament to the power of clothes pegs that it is still there after many heavy floods since it was placed in January 2019. Is that useful information for you all? I'm not sure.

I didn't make it all the way through the sump as the moderately strong current and slow swimming as I checked line meant I reached my turn pressure in my tanks with about a quarter of the dive to go. I knew I would use less gas swimming out with the current, but I am a conservative diver and so wasn't going to break my gas-use rule. The rest of the line-check, and a wander around For Your Eyes Only will have to wait for another day. Probably next summer.

We met tourists as we brought the gear out the entrance. There are a lot of tourists walking to the resurgence.

*Right, the suspect peg, and gear-up zone. Photos: Janine McKinnon*



## JF-30 The Letterbox

### Sump dive – Episode two

18 February 2024

Janine McKinnon

**Party:** Karina Anders, Henry Garratt, Michael Glazer, Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney (surface work)

Yes, we have the next instalment in this somewhat drawn-out saga. The interval between visits is getting shorter. It must be my conscience nagging more persistently as the years roll by. Anyone wishing to check the history of this cave can follow the leads in my last report in SS443, p20.

This time I had gathered a very strong team. Jemma Herbert had been part of it too but sadly she had to bail as a week's illness had not cleared by the evening before the trip.

The crew were somewhat in awe of the not-epic walk required to get to the cave. So as not to disappoint them

too much by making it too easy, Ric and I managed to have a few senior's moments finding the entrance. This added at least 100 m of distance and ten minutes to the walk, making about fifteen minutes to the cave. Much more respectable.

Gear was passed down the entrance short drop and I found myself at the back with no pack. All five packs had disappeared ahead. This was looking promising!

If you have read the previous trip report you may be amused to hear that I was remarking, as they wrangled packs along the crawl (and I do mean "they"), on how the cave was smaller and muddier than I remembered from last time. Maybe more mud had come through in the intervening two years I mused aloud. My memory is ever-reliable in its unreliability.

At The Letterbox restriction fun was had as usual, packs were passed through, and all managed to fit.... except Michael. Those shoulders were just a tad too broad. So the poor man decided that he would



valiantly sit there and await our return, to help with taking the gear out. This was really appreciated.



*Janine looks thrilled. Photo: Henry Garratt*

At the dive site we found my dive line in situ, but we had bought bolting gear to put in a primary and secondary anchor point that was more reliable. We discussed where they needed to go, and then Henry and Karina helped unpack and assemble my dive kit. Once I headed into the sump they planned to place the bolts.

The water was clear and I actually managed to get into it with some visibility left. Quite good visibility actually. Thus I was able to see in the sump and confirmed my “feeling” from last time that it was a straight sump of 2 m width with no side passages (not that I was expecting any). I surfaced after a 90 second dive. The difference being able to see and not laying line makes.

My silt-stake anchor for the line at this end was still in place but it did look a little wonky. There wasn’t much I could do about that one, just straighten it, push it a bit lower into the mud, and be VERY careful not to tug on the line when diving the sump. Maybe I’ll place a second stake-anchor next trip.



*Gone to the world beyond. Photo: Henry Garratt*

My plan was to look at the next sump, maybe go into it, and definitely survey the dry passage between the sumps. I had bought a DistoX for that. The walking wearing my dive harness (tanks off) with 4 kg weights and various other stuff in the very sticky and slippery mud was as draining as I’d remembered. I took off the harness half-way along the passage.



*Gross. Photo: Henry Garratt*

The second sump goes. I don’t know how far as I only stuck my helmet into it but it’s looking good. As the dry passage stays the same size between sumps, and the sump looks the same width, and both of these dimensions are bigger than the cave on the outside of The Letterbox restriction, I am feeling it is a good prospect. I thought about lugging my dive kit across to go into it but there were a few reasons I chose not to:

1. It was hard work just walking. Moving diving kit was going to be time consuming and very tiring.
2. I had told the others I would definitely be back before two hours. That was probably not going to happen if I dived the sump at all. I would be very slow getting kit to and from that sump. I needed more time. I had under-calculated how long everything was taking. I WILL NOT be away longer than I have said on these sorts of trips by choice (unless something has gone seriously wrong). The waiting crew deserve clarity.
3. Of the three possibilities going forward, only one meant no future trips, and that was if the sump crapped out very quickly. I didn’t think that likely.
4. I definitely needed to survey the dry passage now, and that was going to take time.



5. I had slid down the small bank at the sump and had some difficulty getting back up on the slippery mud. I would need a plan to get dive kit back up. It's only a very small slope but packs a punch above its dimensions.

So I surveyed back to the first sump, and returned to base. I had taken about an hour and a half.

The survey data will be added to the map of JF-30.

Karina and Henry had very efficiently placed the two bolts. I was impressed with the secondary one as the rock was all very friable.

They packed all my kit as I had a bite to eat, chatted, and generally took advantage of their kind natures. I like this type of sump diving.

Michael was still faithfully sitting just beyond the restriction and helped get the gear through. Apparently, he had some downloaded videos on his phone to entertain himself during the cold wait. He is also working on a survey device that he was ground-testing. I think that filled in a lot of the time very successfully.

Sadly, I did have to move a pack a few metres somewhere along this egress. I consider this a failure

on my part in the “avoid heavy work” category of caving.

We were back at the car for a late lunch and beer in the sunshine. Ric had returned from his explorations up the ridge towards The Chairman but had not reached that target.

The German Anaspides researchers appeared by coincidence, so we had a pleasant chat with them for an hour or so.

I found this a really pleasant and fun trip, mainly due to the capable and fun crew.

Time-frames are getting shorter, or at least the plans for them are. We plan to return next summer for the next stage in this exploration. I will dive sump 2 as far as I can safely get on 3 litre tanks - or see what dry passage lies beyond a short sump - and we'll progress from there...

For anyone interested, a video is here:

<https://youtu.be/g3uJKX3-Cvg>

I will also put a copy in the archive. Warning, it is a bit boring, but it shows the passage beyond sump 1 for a record in the archive.

## JF-207 Voltera Surface

21 January 2024

Text and photos by Stephen Fordyce

**Party:** Stephen Fordyce, Patrice Galatis

An old friend from Melbourne, Patrice, was in Tassie with a day free after doing a compressed Frenchmans Cap hike. Neither of us were up for the brutal surface day I'd originally planned above Niggly, so a gentler mission to check some targets just beyond Voltera was selected instead. The Voltera entrance was shown as an example, and we headed around and over the ridge to the next gully, finding a nice doline (3 m deep, 6 m wide) with signs of a small stream going into it. It obviously didn't go (and no hint of draft or cold air) but considering that there was some outcrop and it was an intermittent swallet, it was deemed just worthy of tag JF-787 and the name “Turbojelly Swallet”. So-named because Patrice's post-Frenchmans legs had turned to jelly by that point and we had experienced a turbochook gang war that morning.

While Patrice had lunch, I zipped up the gully to two other LIDAR targets, finding them to be just logs or gully corners, and suspecting they were above the contact anyway (there wasn't any outcrop, just lots of dolerite in the trickling stream bed). Given the trickle wasn't obvious in the JF-787 doline, maybe there's

hope of another swallet, but I'd be surprised. Either way, nothing seemed big enough to account for the stream feeding Ram Raid streamway in JF-207 Voltera, which sits underneath and parallel to the next gully (which LIDAR indicates feeds JF-633 Ring Hole), so further inspection there would be a good idea. We beat a retreat with morale intact and enjoyed a trip to the Growling Swallet and Junee entrances.



*“See this? This is what we're looking for, it might just be a bit smaller...”*



## Nine Road Clean Up

24 January 2024

Stephen Fordyce

**Party:** Stephen Fordyce

I was packed and ready for Niggly and the subsequent trip home, and had a few hours free. It was time to take a chainsaw to the poorly cut log on the Porcupine Road which took a chunk out of my old green falcon in 2021. This was duly performed, and I cleared a few other things on the way to Porcupine. Then I went to see how far past the Owl Pot carpark I could get (there are some interesting LIDAR targets where the road splits and follows the contour). The road was clear albeit scratchy to the fork, and my 2WD Territory made it up ok. Both branches of the fork were going to be a major and probably futile effort to clear so I headed home.

As I'd discovered earlier in the month, there is a gate across the start of the Nine Road - one of those temporary ones attached to a shipping container that the loggers have started using. It's still possible to access the branch to the caves, by going further along Florentine and turning right on Westfield, then right again onto the other end on Nine Road (both junctions signed). You can't drive all the way to the other side of the gate, there's a massive log that has been placed to

block the road, and presumably the current or pending coupe. So, if you go on a weekday and the gate is open, you'll still get stopped by the log.

It's only a short section of the road we can't access, but it makes an annoying detour that adds about 15 min each way.



*The temporary gate at the start of the Nine Road*

## The Chronicles of JF-207 Voltera

30 December 2023

Ciara Smart, with contributions from Henry Garratt

**Party:** Karina Anders, Henry Garratt, Jemma Herbert, Ciara Smart

It had been nearly two months since our last epic down Voltera. Last trip, we had rigged the cave down to base level, but were too knackered to investigate any leads. Over the intervening months, Henry and I had forgotten Voltera's annoyance factor, and couldn't stop thinking about Voltera's potential. At base level, Voltera sits tantalizingly close to where the master cave must run. Although it was pushed hard in 2014, the publication of Alan Jackson's 2022 map revealed a few more leads for the current generation (SS451, p21).

It took some time to get a date for us to all line up for this trip, and in the end, Henry joined as a last-minute add-on, having had his Niggly trip cancelled after Steve came down with a lurgy. In the morning we dropped by Steve's Covid-infested arboreal ward to deliver some groceries. He sounded very sorry for himself. The efficiency of our get-away was further delayed by the fact Henry forgot his gumboots in his car, parked on the main June Road, requiring a

double-back from the Voltera carpark. But there were to be no gumboots left behind today.

Unlike the last time the four of us had caved together, this time we were carrying two timepieces. Unfortunately, they read different times, leading to considerable confusion. We were either running quite efficiently, or a bit slowly. I'd like to believe it was the former. On the drive in, with the anticipation of a master cave breakthrough building, someone started singing the theme song for the latest Indiana Jones movie. It was duly recited throughout the whole day, except for when we got tired, cold, or despondent, which was frequently.

We entered the cave at 11 am - or possibly it was earlier. After the first 60 m pitch, 'The Great Erotic Vagina' (thanks Alan...), the four of us passed through the infamous Fistula. The Fistula is an annoying rift squeeze, but it's just tolerable if you have a slim build and average length tibias. It also makes a big difference with light bags, which is a rare luxury. Once we were through, Henry realised he'd left his cowstails on the other side. Luckily, we were carrying spare rope to fix some rigging issues, so Henry was able to tie a quick



make-do set, rather than doing the Fistula twice in a trip.



*Don't be fooled, this is before the cave, but Henry clearly doesn't believe in washing his trog-suit. Photo: Ciara Smart*

After the Fistula, we faced the never-ending meander that is the 'Stairway to Niggly.' The time trial runs in Delta Variant's 'Test Station Queue' served us well here as we sped down the meander with light bags. After the 20 m pitch, Jemma fixed some rigging issues on the 30 m 'Date of Release' pitch, eliminating the irritating knot crossing 2 m off the deck.

By 2 pm, or maybe it was earlier, we had reached base level and the furthest point of last trip, 'The Pit.' Last trip we had rigged this short 4 m downclimb as a pitch, after Steve pulled off a handhold while being buffeted by the waterfall. While Jemma was standing on the edge of The Pit, part of the floor gave way. Luckily, she was attached to the approach line. While I understand it may have been more efficient for previous generations to leave sketchy climbs unprotected, the current generation has fewer hang-ups, for which I am quite grateful.

From there, we followed the map upwards, heading towards our point of interest. According to Alan's 2022 map, our main lead was a 'small muddy sump' in the 'Mud Bath' passage, which Steve hoped to dive. I had told Steve I would under no circumstances carry dive

gear here without an initial trip to inspect the sump. We also hoped that the summer conditions might have dried out the sump, and it would be an easy crawl into the master cave.

The navigation to the 'Mud Bath' passage was straightforward, but we were all confused by the complete lack of mud. The passage was almost completely dry and mud free! As we traversed the narrow passage, excitement built – surely we were about to pass through the dried-up sump and emerge into barrelling master cave! Alas, it was not to be. The passage became quite low, and eventually we reached an impassable low grovel where we figured the sump would have been. We thought we could feel the faintest draught, but perhaps we were imagining it. The floor here was muddy cobblestones, and we could see about 2-3 m in front through a low grovel. It was unclear if it continued. We spent a few minutes prodding at this choke, but it was extremely difficult without proper tools, and eventually we gave up. It would be a possible summer dig for future generations, but it would be a tremendous effort (*Ed. I underestimated the extent to which others seem to enjoy digging, see p.32*). We were relieved that this sump would not require a dive, and I was pleased I'd insisted on the reccy trip before agreeing to assist Steve in carrying his gear.

From the dead end, Karina headed back up the Pit, while the rest of us headed down 'Reconviction Choke' for a look at the deepest point of the cave. This passage takes the bulk of the water in the stream. On Alan's map, the furthest surveyed point is marked as a 'cobble choke' and I assumed it would be an impassable wet grovel. As we approached the furthest extent of the passage, the roof lowered and the stream became wider, taking considerable water from the 'Ram Raid Streamway.' The passage turned into a sloping, low cobble streamway. Eventually it became a wet grovel, but we could see it flattened out in a low, wet pool. Henry elected to push through the lowest point of the grovel, which turned out to be a serious roof-sniff.

### **The Roof-Sniff**

(Henry) We arrived at Reconviction Choke to find a small innocuous looking sump; Ciara called me down to take a look at it. It looked like there was a bit of an air gap for some of the way, so I positioned myself to slide in and see if it was roof sniff-able. I edged in boots first, groping around feeling for the water level and to see if it got bigger. It turned out there was an air space, however it was somewhat limited. While it wasn't overly tight, I had my eyeballs underwater and was only breathing through a puckered mouth and nose at the worst of it.

This short yet chilly roof sniff led to a barrelling walking passage. The feeling of stepping into big passage no human has ever seen before is indescribable, I was extremely excited about the prospect of this being master cave. However, a short



walk forward led to a big sump. This was a big clear sump, with a plume of mud in the middle from where the murky creek I had just been grovelling in joined. Excitedly I walked out into the water and swam around, hoping this would be another roof sniff or duck under. I quickly lost my depth and was then treading water quite aggressively in my heavy waterlogged PVC suit and gumboots. Without a wetsuit I lacked flotation and quickly retreated to the mud bank content to return with Steve and dive gear. I went back through the sniff to excitedly tell the girls. I got my phone in a dry bag and went back through a second time to get photos of the glorious sump on the other side for Steve.



*Henry's light visible on the far side of the roof sniff. It's low. Photo: Ciara Smart*

#### **The Exit:**

*Ciara:*

After Henry returned for the second time he was seriously cold from his complete immersion. Karina and I helped pull out his dry clothes and get him warmed up, and he was soon feeling much better. It took about four hours to exit the cave, and we were back on the surface by 8 pm, or maybe it was later. We were delighted to find it was still daylight outside!

After some discussion Henry initially decided to name the sump, 'Teenage Wet Dreams,' because, in his (teenage) words, the sump created a moment of great excitement, it then made a lot of mess, and was ultimately unproductive. Alas, propriety won out and the sump was eventually named 'Recidivist Sump.'

#### **The Next Focus:**

*Ciara:*

We had mixed feelings about the day's achievements. On the one hand, finding this sump opens the possibility of a connection into the master cave system. On the other hand, it does mean that we will need to carry dive gear in, which will be a pain. The sump is remote, and, as multiple others have remarked, 'Voltera is a hard cave.' It also made me think about the reason we were there in the first place. In late 2022, Alan Jackson finally published his map of the 2014 exploration. This had pointed to a number of leads. Cave maps are inevitably a product of artistic interpretation, but they also crystallise a moment in time. In this case, Alan's map reflected a wetter version of the cave, that made several leads indistinguishable to the original surveyors. Their 'cobble choke' in 'Reconviction Choke,' was in fact a low roof sniff. The 'wet and muddy sump' in 'Mud Bath' was in fact a low dry gravel. There is also a part of me that is pleased to have rendered Alan's map in need of an update, after only two trips. It goes to show the importance of producing detailed maps. Although it is a huge amount of effort to turn a cave survey into a legible cave map, the dividends are significant. Without Alan's map, navigation would have been significantly harder, and the leads would likely have been left for many more years, if not forever.

### **JF-207 Voltera Reccy**

**3 January 2024**

Stephen Fordyce

**Party:** Stephen Fordyce

This was a good chance to head into the upper reaches of Voltera and do some tidying up. I went to the bottom

of Cue Cards (just below the Fistula), grabbed a roll of black hose to bring out, and tweaked some rigging. Strangely the Fistula seemed quite a bit easier on my way out - it was still awkward, but it was now possible to negotiate the whole thing with harness on and manage a decent bag without help.

### **JF-207 Voltera Dive & Push**

**6 January 2024**

Stephen Fordyce

**Party:** Stephen Fordyce, Jemma Herbert, Chris Jewell, Ciara Smart

Henry's passing of Reconviction Choke was as delicious as it was tasty, and having a sump there meant I could almost get off scot-free with being wrong in my blind faith assumption that Mud Bath would be diveable and worth an attempt. As explained multiple

times to anyone who would listen, it was also excellent that the sump could be dived at the start of January, so follow-ups could be done in the next few weeks while I was around.

Chris (a visiting UK caver and sump diver of considerable renown) was up for a taste of some "real" Tassie caving, Ciara was easily persuaded, and Jemma wasn't tired enough after coming back from Federation Peak and wanted some "training". Even with four people and minimal dive gear, I had to promise that



nobody had to worry about carrying dive gear out of the cave, that could be done later...

So we got to the Ram Raid Streamway and I kitted up fully. Then needed to poo. Remembering the nearest of misses in Porcupine recently, I let my digestive system win this one, and fully de-kitted. Ever the gentleman, Chris assured everyone this was quite normal before a push dive.

The leadup to Re-Conviction Choke was surprisingly long and inclined, but easy enough to drag everything (2x 3 L tanks, pair of fins, reel and my favourite digging tool) over the cobbles while I slithered backwards. Near the bottom, I found the lid and diaphragm of a regulator! And it was mine! I put it back together and was slightly more careful about dragging everything. Henry's awful wet squeeze was moderately tight and nasty, even with the luxury of a warm wetsuit and lying face down with a reg in my mouth. Pushing that thing initially was next level – it was shorter, but I'd put Henry's effort in the same league as Vera Wong's in Sesame.

I went through feet first and dragged all the bits through after me. At least the bastard thing was only a body length long, and it was an easy couple of strides through the short "No Gumboot Left Behind" stream passage to the luxurious pool (~4 m wide, 3 m out to the far wall) of "Recidivist Sump" (the names finally settled on by Henry). The visibility was already turded (0.5 m) by this point, and I could see no way to avoid this apart from the horror of camping by the sump (it'd be doable, even for a few people, but the height of desperation). So I made a leisurely tie-off on the ceiling (later leaving the yellow commemorative marker here) and another on a silt peg closer to the water.

The stream was flowing down a steepish slope into the water, and the flow did seem to stay on the surface and go horizontally out towards a large crack on the far wall that might just fit a human. I put the fins on, did final checks and forward-flopped in – it didn't matter, the visibility was still pretty much nothing. I spent the next half an hour feeling my way around the sump, which had a silty floor sloping steeply down at angle of repose. The walls merged into sloping ceiling which eventually met the floor at a funnel-like constriction at the deepest point, and all leads eventually took me to here. This was full of gloopy mud the consistency of cream – enough to totally obscure my full-power head light, and to change the density of the water and make breathing... weird. The constriction felt defined by rock, definitely on walls and ceiling, and way too small to pass. I tried for quite a bit to dig the mud, but it was too runny.



*Just about to forward flop in*

I spent about 30 minutes in the water trying different things including:

- Follow the left wall/floor down
- Follow the right wall/floor down
- Follow the middle of the floor down
- Follow the crack in the middle of the ceiling down (I was actually able to surface in here about 1.5 m further in, but it didn't look or feel like it went any further)
- Go down the ceiling until I found a ledge and follow it around trying to get under it (some were perhaps 1 m of overhead, and quite crumbly, but I'm pretty confident didn't lead anywhere)



*Looking from the far end of the sump back towards the small stream cascading in*

All roads led to the constriction at the bottom, I'd run out of ideas and the cold was getting morale-sapping. It was a bit surprising that this enticing sump didn't go, but considering the smallish flow and heinous bedding plane perhaps not. I cut the line (leaving a ~1.5 m section only, out of the water) did a low-quality survey out and regretted immensely leaving my tanks on to go through the nasty thing. They got stuck on everything and it was too small to be able to take them off, so lots of swearing and energy was required to get them and everything else through. Slithering up the cobble slope was also much less pleasant but it got done in the end.





*Some leftover mud from the terminal constriction (on right hand, holding hoe – left hand holding reel for comparison)*

The others were off bagging passage (see Ciara's addition later), so I resurveyed from the last marked station down Re-Conviction Choke to tie into my earlier efforts (later finding the original survey went near enough to the nasty thing to just add onto it), de-kitted and started packing up. A worked-up sketch was made later and is in the archive. The other crew came back in time to faff a lot, have hot drinks, and a mid-conversation spew. Chris pronounced Voltera to have world class mud and squalor, which had the rest of us bursting with pride (perhaps he was just being nice though).

Promises of not having to carry dive gear out were notionally honoured, but only a small amount of

begging and peer pressure saw everything except the tanks and digging tools come out. Thanks team. The way out was lame but uneventful, even the Fistula, and we hit the surface somewhere around the respectable time of midnight. The cave had been extended, the increase in depth from the dive pushed Voltera up to #4 deepest cave, and although the game of “master cave or bust” had been lost this time, it was to be played again soon...

### *Diving Equipment*

- 2x 3 L tanks
- 7 mm semi-dry wetsuit, boots, hood
- 3 mm wetsuit gloves
- Sump harness (no buoyancy control)
- Fins
- No weightbelt
- Digging tool (small hoe)
- Reel with ~150 m 3 mm orange guideline

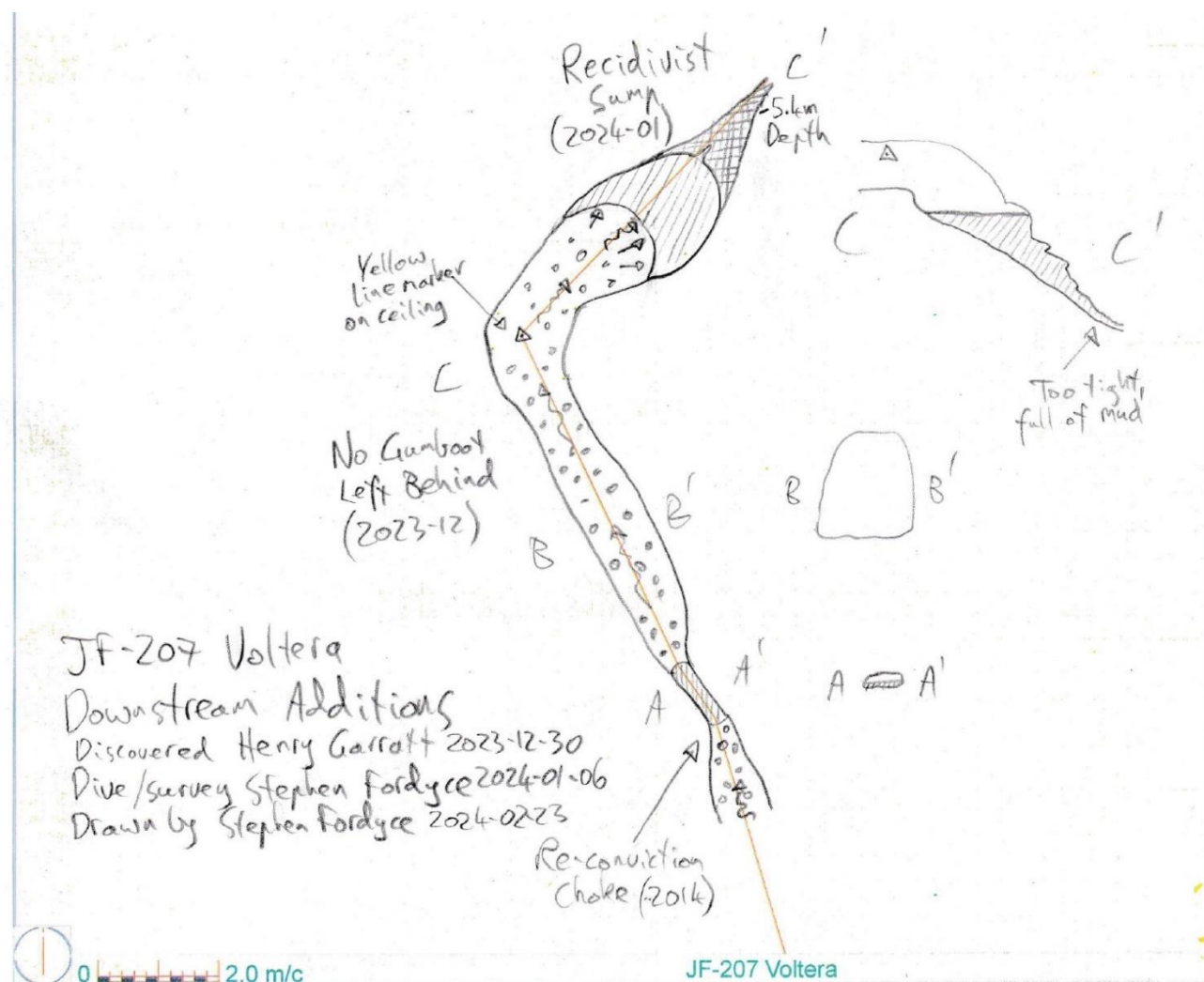
### *Gas Pressures*

- Start dive: 220/220 bar
- End dive: 110/110 bar



*Dive profile (one foray missing)*





Sketch of new downstream section: Stephen Fordyce

### 'Turn the Other Cheek' Survey Team

(Ciara) We left Steve to his fate and headed back upstream. The first lead I wanted to check out was just upstream of where Ram Raid streamway joins Hardened Criminal. On the map, it is shown as a small inlet, described as 'tight and wet.' I took one look at it, and decided the description was apt, and we would not be surveying it. I am inclined to agree with Alan Jackson's assessment that this is most likely the water from The Pit and is not worthy of further investigation.

From there, we headed up into the low levels of Parole Passage. When we reached the turn-off to Mud Bath, we continued straight ahead into 'Turn the Other Cheek.' This upstream passage had been poked in 2014, but the survey party turned around when it became 'small enough to be annoying.' Alan Jackson temptingly wrote that it 'would almost certainly yield to someone who hadn't surveyed hundreds of metres of much more pleasant passage in the hours before,' (see SS451, p20). Scooping up Alan's leftovers sounded good enough to me, this generation has to take what it can get.

After negotiating a few tricky freeclimbs, it didn't take us long to reach the point where we surmised Alan and co. had turned around. Conveniently, their final flagged station was still in existence, making it easy for us to pick up the survey. We surveyed through a tightish, scratchy crawl. It immediately opened into barrelling, friendly passage. We surveyed 70 m of wide, meandering streamway passage. Surprisingly, this turned out to be the nicest section of the cave I've seen to date (although I'm yet to visit Ram Raid Streamway). The passage was very dry, with a stream that was scarcely more than a trickle, although it would be a different story in winter. Eventually we hit a small climb of about 4 m in height. Unfortunately, the rock was choss, and the freeclimb was too high on the sketchy scale, so we had to turn around. Above this climb we could see the passage continuing for some distance. If we can find decent rock, this would be a simple aid climb. Being an upstream lead, the passage is unlikely to go anywhere significant, but pushing it would at least give the pleasure of making Alan's 2022 map a little more outdated.



**JF-207 Voltera****12 January 2024**

Henry Garratt

**Party:** Henry Garratt, Eleanor March,

Eleanor and I had been staying at Fort Fordyce at Left of Field and caving with Steve. On our last day we went off to have a look at Voltera. A pleasant relaxing day was the goal, so we only went as far as the Fistula and turned around there. The crux of the exercise was

getting my very low clearance Peugeot up Chrisps road to the car park. We slid our way up without too much hassle and didn't crash into any trees. We headed down the Great Erotic Vagina (GEV) uneventfully, then arrived at the Fistula. We both slipped through without much issue. After enjoying some tight stuff, we turned around and headed for the surface. GEV was Eleanor's longest pitch, at 80 m which she dispatched of with efficiency and ease. We were back on the surface by early afternoon, leaving us plenty of time to drive back to Hobart via a swim in the Derwent

**JF-207 Volterra 'Mud Bath'****17 January 2024**

Henry Garratt

**Party:** Henry Garratt, Stephen Fordyce

After exhausting the Sump in Voltera the next best leads to break into master cave were now aid climbs or digging in Mud Bath. Two 3 L dive tanks also needed to be recovered from Steve's dive before the end of January.

After spending the month dreaming about the open space on the other side of the squeeze at the end of Mud Bath, I was very keen to get back with Steve. We met at Left of Field at 0800 and headed up to Voltera together.

The first item on our to do list was to suss out some water tracing around The Pit. We wanted to see where the pit water went and to assess the possibility of a water assisted dig.



*Water diversion across the pit using screwed-together pipe lengths. Photo: Stephen Fordyce*

Dickon Morris had theorised that the downward sloping muddy squeeze following the bedding plane across the top of The Pit may be what causes Reconviction Choke, and that by digging it you might pop out on the other side of the choke (SS404). As such we planned to redirect the water across The Pit into this dig, hoping to make it humanly passable. After diverting the water, a second muddy waterfall appeared in Hardened Criminal (a few metres to the east of the trickle inlet coming in from the ceiling). A visual fluorescein trace confirmed this to be the diverted Pit water. Thankfully this writes off the prospect of that horrible dig, and several potential others along the slimy passage which Sandy and Alan excavated, and which gains access to a balcony chamber overlooking the start of Hardened Criminal.

From this balcony we assessed for an aid traverse to the trickle stream (airy, but straightforward, although not super exciting), upwards in this chamber (a long one which didn't look super prospective) and in an intermediate chamber along the way (a 4 m climb on crumbly rock not quite doable without protection, to some interesting void and possible horizontal passage).

We looked upstream in Hardened Criminal, finding a small static sump after not long – logically this should be where the water draining from The Pit should emerge again. We stared at it, wondering if it was worth putting a swimming goggled face into it. After we fuffed with a few other things and came back a few minutes later it was no longer a static clear pool but was overflowing with water. This most likely corresponded to heavy rain on the surface.

Rhodamine dye was added to the water at the base of The Pit, disappearing roughly on the northside. After several perplexing dye free minutes, it appeared from a small inlet on the south side of Hardened Criminal, just upstream of our downclimb point. Yep, the opposite side to what was expected, weird.



*GoPro screenshot showing Rhodamine coming in from a tiny inlet on the right (a bit is bleeding into the pool on the left, which is the upstream end of Hardened Criminal). Photo: Stephen Fordyce*



*The coal face, with a hint of tantalising blackness beyond. Photo: Stephen Fordyce*

Satisfied with our scientific exploits we grabbed the dive tanks and then headed off to Mud Bath to start digging. We spent five hours digging in Mud Bath. We moved approximately two square metres of mud and cobbles. Steve's favourite dive hoe was used to great success to flick cobbles towards us in the tight awkward coal face.

At the end of the dig, it looked tantalisingly like it was opening on the other side to.... is that open space? Is that a mud bank? It needs another session.

We made our way out of the cave with our burden of dive tanks, reasonably shattered by our exploits in the dig. It was an excellent full body work out. We emerged from the cave fairly late, seeing me opt to stay at Left of Field rather than drive home by myself.



*"Before" shot of the access to the dig (Henry's legs for scale). Photo: Stephen Fordyce*



*Craziness was a useful thing for digging motivation. Photo: Stephen Fordyce*



## Other Exciting Stuff

### Notes on the numbering of JF-30 The Letterbox and JF-31 Tom Smiths Cave

Ric Tunney

When these caves were explored in the 1970s, JF-30 was given to the cave near the Junee River and JF-31 to the cave further up the hill. So, JF-30 was Tom Smiths Cave.

When the caves were re-explored around 2020, there were no tags. Tags were installed, but the JF-31 tag was placed on the cave beside the river. This was in accordance with the JF Caves Master List at the time. I think the error was created when the original manual records were converted to digital. The number swap had already occurred by the time the original digital archive (on DVD) was created. All reports from 2020 on have used the reversed numbers.

From *Speleo Spiel* No. 121 March 1977:

“JF-30: "Tom Smith's cave" - Tom Smith (now deceased) grew potatoes on the flats up the river from the caves - he was the discoverer of both JF-30 and JF-31 and showed them to Max some years ago. JF-30 is situated on the left bank quite close to JF-31. It is described in the ASF cave list as "an inflow cave taking a small part of the Junee River". We feel again that this cave may be fed by an underground system, as well as the Junee in high level times. John Parker negotiated the cave (the entrance of which drops 2 metres below the river level) through head high water to a length of 30 metres but further progress was stopped by a tight squeeze. It seems almost certain that this cave comes up to join with JF-31. In view of our findings we feel that a search of the hills

behind the river might bring to light interesting finds and perhaps a small underground system, separate to the Junee Efflux system.”

From *Speleo Spiel* No. 121 March 1977:

“On 12th February JF-31 was explored by a TCC party in 1972, to a length of 90 metres. JF-31: "The Letterbox" due to the sensation of being posted through the squeeze. "JF-31 is a horizontal cave, approx. 15 yards up from the left river bank, midway between the efflux and the bridge. After a number of attempts, John Parker and myself finally negotiated the squeeze at the 90 metre point which was the previous limit of exploration. From here we walked along a further 80 metres of dry stream bed - which finally ended in a shallow sump, very similar to that in Welcome Stranger. Emerged covered in mud, overalls in tatters - easily the muddiest cave we've been in. This cave does not appear to be fed by the Junee river but rather by an underground system fed by caves in the hills behind. Judging by the height of the stream passage and the well worn stones on its bed, the cave must take a large flow during the winter, which would appear to seep into the Junee from a point under the squeeze. The first 90 metres of passage is very muddy and must act as an overflow passage or perhaps was the old streambed.”

I think the swapped numbers should continue to be used. The caves have been more-mentioned with the swapped numbers than without, undoing the error would require physically swapping the cave tags, and maps would need redrawing.

### Review of the Phaethon Dual Caving Light and comparison to the Scurion 1500

John Oxley

When looking to spend big money on a caving light people generally think of the Scurion as the automatic choice. Lots of cavers use them and they have proven to be robust, reliable (mostly), bright and give long run times. However I have often said to people that they should consider the Phaethon. They're not so well known but their specs look very good and they are considerably cheaper than the Scurion.

I've had a Scurion for many years and have been quite satisfied with it, although it has a couple of features that I find less satisfactory. So, on a trip last year when my Scurion plunged me into darkness part way up a pitch (in Dissidence) I decided on the spot that I would get a

Phaethon and make the comparison. The cause of the problem was the battery connector, but more about that in a moment.

#### So what's wrong with the Scurion?

Not much, but a few things I've noticed:

1. I have found the knurled knob to be very difficult to move with wet muddy gloves. The knurling is not coarse enough to get a grip. I haven't heard other people comment on this so perhaps it's just the type of gloves I use. (*Ed. me too*)
2. The whole combination of helmet, light and battery pack is quite heavy and causes minor problems with the neck muscles. I haven't had such a problem with this but have heard this comment from others. Back in the “old days” we carried the

heavy batteries on our waist belt, so our helmets were lighter.

3. Scurion uses a custom battery pack which is only available from Scurion and is quite expensive, although I have made a couple of packs for much less than Scurion charge.
4. The battery connector is inadequate and prone to failure - my main gripe!

### What is it about the Scurion battery connector that is so bad?

Scurion battery packs come in two different flavours depending on the model of light in which they're used. Some models use a moulded plastic pack with plated contacts containing the four cells. The pack is dropped into the case and there is no wired connector to deal with. These are the battery packs used on the "Basic" and diving versions of the light.

The second type of pack, and the one used in the Speleo 1500 model, has the four cells along with the over charge/over discharge circuitry packaged in heatshrink plastic with floating wires to a "JST RCY" connector. Every time you charge the battery the cable needs to be disconnected from its mating connector and connected to the charger. This type of connector is not designed for lots of connect/disconnect cycles, and it is very easy to put strain on the wires and break them from the crimps inside the connector shell. Also, the connectors are rated for a maximum of 3 amps (when perfectly mated). The Scurion will draw twice that on its highest power setting.

I know of several cases where wires have broken at the crimp inside the connector shell but in my case the wire was still making precarious contact until, in Dissidence, that little bump moved it.

Apart from losing light I'm also nervous about a loose wire in the battery case. A short on the battery could cause some nasty fireworks.

Another issue with the connector I found on one occasion was the socket was too loose and the mating pin was making only intermittent connection and probably getting hot. I now keep a small stock of spare connectors for repairing otherwise unusable battery packs. The poor quality of the battery connection system is in contrast to the otherwise excellent quality of the other components of the Scurion system.

### A quick Scurion/Phaethon comparison.

Phaethon offer two versions of their light; the Phaethon and the Phaethon Dual. This comparison is between the Dual and the Scurion Speleo 1500.

The Phaethon as I bought it consisted of: Dual lamp, two 3400 mAh 18650 cells, GoPro helmet mount, elastic headband (for using the light without helmet), case for two spare cells, Allen key, spare plexiglass lamp cover, spare O-rings. I swapped the charger for the helmet bracket and spare cell case.

**Price.** The Scurion "1500 Speleo" from Access Gear in New Zealand (Scurion's official reseller for AU and NZ) costs approximately \$1180 + postage.

The Phaethon "Dual" is only available directly from the manufacturer in Greece. I paid €480 (including €45 for postage!). That's about \$800.

Both normally include batteries and charger for that price.

**Weight.** The Scurion weighs 461 grams. The Phaethon weighs 395 grams.

**Options.** Both lights are available with a choice of various colour temperature LEDs. Phaethon also offer the option of four different spot spread angles.

The Scurion has a battery charge indicator in the form of five green LEDs with the option of a projection system so that the user can see the state of charge without removing their helmet. The Phaethon uses brief blinks of the main LEDs to warn of low battery charge.

**Water resistance.** Both lamps are completely waterproof. The Phaethon is a true dive lamp and according to their website has been used to a depth of 262 metres. That should suffice for most weekend caving trips.

**Operating modes.** Both lamps have two independently configurable LEDs. One for spot and one for flood. The Scurion can be configured with up to ten combinations of LEDs and power levels. The Phaethon has seven. Both are user programmable although the default settings in the Phaethon should be adequate for most people.

**Batteries.** The Scurion uses a custom-made battery pack. Scurion battery packs consist of four 18650 cells in 2 series/2 parallel (2S2P) configuration (they also sell a two cell version).

The Phaethon uses two "free" 18650 cells in parallel. i.e. the cells are not bound up into a special pack.

**Runtime.** Because the Phaethon uses only two cells its runtime will be significantly less than the Scurion (it can even run on one cell). I've only done a few trips with it so far, the longest of which would be about 7 hours on the 2023 rescue exercise in Khazad Dum. On that occasion I was using only low power most of the day and I didn't need the second pair of cells. Runtimes are shown in more detail on the respective websites.

### What I like about the Phaethon.

1. The battery system using off-the-shelf cells. There are no wires and flimsy connectors to break. I carry spare cells in my pack.



2. Extra cells are relatively cheap and easily available.
3. Excellent build quality. The lamp housing and battery case are cut from solid aluminium and appear to be extremely robust.
4. Both the lamp housing and battery case are relatively small. The lamp is attached to the helmet with a GoPro mount and the battery case is attached with shock cord. Both are easily removed from the helmet.
5. The lamp uses a LED controller made by U.S. company Taskled. It allows the user to configure a wide range of options including brightness for each LED independently, voltage warning thresholds, thermal protection thresholds, button click timing etc.
6. Price. It's not cheap but it's cheaper than the Scurion. Off-the-shelf 18650 cells are much cheaper than the Scurion battery packs too.

#### What I don't like about the Phaethon.

1. The battery case is held closed with two long M5 screws. This is very secure but requires an Allen key to open and close the case. I keep the supplied key on a cord attached to my spare battery case in my pack so it's not a big problem.
2. The light is controlled by tapping a single piezo button on the top of the housing. Successive taps cycle through the various modes. The default configuration allows only forward cycling through the modes whereas with the rotary knob on the Scurion both directions are possible. This is only a very minor criticism, and it can be changed through the programming procedure. Switching on and off requires a sequence of 3 quick taps. Getting the timing right requires some practice.
3. The reprogramming procedure is complicated. There are 13 parameters each with multiple sub items all configured with a combination of short and long presses of the single button. Feedback is via different brightness levels and flashes from the LEDs. However, it's not something that needs to be done often and most people will probably never need to do it.

Overall so far I like the Phaethon very much.  
Would I recommend the Phaethon? Certainly.

Websites:  
phaethoncavinglight.com  
scurion.ch



*Scurion and Phaethon comparison. Photos: John Oxley*

*Ed:* I can't help but mention another argument in favour of the Phaethon. Surely it has the better name, taking it from Φαέθων (Phaethon), the infamous son of the Greek god Helios. According to the story, Phaethon took his father's sun chariot out for a joyride one day. Unfortunately, he let the horses take the sun too close or too far from the earth. After one too many complaints, Zeus killed Phaethon with a lightning bolt.

A cursory search fails to reveal the etymology of Scurion, but a species of troglobitic spider has been named *after* the light in some strange bio-corporate sponsorship deal.

## JF-36 Growling Swallet Rigging Updates

Text and photos by Stephen Fordyce

At last, all the ancient ladders have been removed from Growling Swallet, and I think this was best summed up in an email I received saying “Thanks for removing those silly ladders that had no sense in the 21st century”. For more righteous commentary and history about the Growling Swallet ladders, refer to SS454, p21 for the 2023-01 rigging update.

This January, the two Windy Rift ladders and their associated anchors were removed and pulled out. With the exception of a small section of particular horror that I’ve souvenired, it was cut up and disposed of in various bins along the way back to Hobart. They have been replaced with 11 mm Bluewater rope, with the natural anchors re-used and 19 mm garden hose (this is bigger than standard garden hose) used as rope protectors (threaded on the rope).

The base of Windy Rift horrible stiff rope was replaced with stuff a bit less bad.

At the lower of the ladders, an extra anchor (around a massive column) is added higher up, with a rebelay on the original natural (big spike) to protect the greasy climb above if you choose that instead of the squeeze slot. There is a slight tendency for the rebelay to be pulled off the spike though, so be mindful of this. There are also no bottom anchors, so the ropes may be pushed up by a flood.

At the upper of the ladders, a single concrete screw redirect is added to prevent rubbing on a ledge near the top.

At the top pitch of Slaughterhouse, we replaced the old orange rope and attempted to improve the rigging situation. At the top remains a confusing array of different access/safety ropes. About 10 m down is a Y-hang rebelay (2x concrete screws with stainless

hangers and maillons) in the ceiling replacing the previous redirect, in an attempt to get rid of the rub. This Y-hang is a bit awkward, and has high potential for inexperienced cavers to get tangled. This was at the end of the day so nobody could think of better options, but no doubt they exist.

### *Future Recommendations:*

For minimal ruffling of feathers and maximal getting the ladders out of circulation (and the cave), we focussed on switchover to SRT ropes that will do the job for the medium term, without full optimisation of the new rig.

Being the popular classic it is, and the number of inexperienced cavers who use it (and international cavers who we show it off to), I would be keen to see the rig down Slaughterhouse Pot and particularly the new SRT section through Windy Rift upgraded to show off our best gear and most utilitarian rigging: nice rope (new 9.5 mm Bluewater), rigged alpine with no rubs or awkward bits, with P-hanger anchors. The stiff/fat 11 mm rope is already a headache for descending, and the natural anchors cause rubs and are impractical for checking for wear.

There hasn’t been a Windy Rift flow event in the last 4 years, and the ~10 mm rope of the ladders wasn’t ever destroyed by such events, so I think 9.5 mm is worth a try. Worst case, it gets cut into small pieces and goes to the gear store for general use.

This is related to Ric’s 2023 application for an ASF grant for a Slaughterhouse Pot re-rig, with the notable difference in whether to use 11 m Tendon or 9.5 mm Bluewater rope. Windy Rift could be done as part of that project or separately. Some new P-hangers will be needed. Nearby areas which might also be worthy of P-hangers include: route to Avon’s Aven, Destiny Pitch, main streamway climbs.

### *Growling Swallet Rigging status and to do list:*

1. Slaughterhouse P1 (30 m)
  - A. Replaced rope (11 mm Bluewater)
  - B. (To do) Access lines at top are confusing.
  - C. There is a new Y-hang rebelay ~10 m down instead of the redirect. Sort of hanging and awkward but removes the rub.
  - D. (To do) Serviceable, but needs a re-think. Maybe with some acrobatics a different rub-free redirect could be found.
2. Slaughterhouse P2 (15 m)
  - A. Untouched
  - B. (To do) Maybe would benefit from longer access line.
3. Slaughterhouse P3 (18 m)
  - A. Untouched
  - B. (To do) Add a bottom anchor so rope can’t be messed about by floods. Should be able to drill a thread somewhere nearby.
4. Windy Rift ex-Ladder 1 (~7 m)
  - A. Replaced ladder with 11mm Bluewater rope for SRT.



- B. Extensive rope double natural anchor, with redirect (concrete screw) ~3 m down
- C. (To do) Assess anchors and consider drilled anchors.
- D. (To do) Add a bottom anchor so rope can't be pulled up by floods.
- 5. Windy Rift ex-Ladder 2 (~12 m)
  - A. Replaced ladder with 11 mm Bluewater rope for SRT.
  - B. More 19 mm garden hose (take 5 m length) would be useful if the naturals are to be used.
  - C. Mega column single anchor, 4 m down to ledge and original ladder anchor
  - D. Rebelay on spike (original ladder anchor), may have tendency to pull off with upward jiggling.
  - E. (To do) Assess anchors and improve or use drilled anchors.
  - F. (To do) Add a bottom anchor so rope can't be pulled up by floods.
- 6. Windy Rift ex-climb/chimney/rift (~5 m down and ~15 m across)
  - A. Unchanged from previous (11 mm rope with Y-hang at top)
  - B. (To do) Consider an intermediate anchor in the vicinity of the chockstones.
  - C. (To do) Assess bottom anchor (boulder) and consider drilled anchor(s) instead.
- 7. Windy Rift bottom mud bank
  - A. Replaced rope with slightly less stiff 11 mm.
  - B. From Windy Rift, 3 m up to top of mudbank, 5 m traverse, 10 m down to stream via 1 rebelay.
  - C. (To do) Add a bottom anchor so rope can't be pulled up by floods.
- 8. The ~10 m pitch to Trapdoor Streamway could do with conversion from IRT and rope protectors to alpine style rigging as part of the effort (at least do the anchors). Destiny Pitch might be worthy of some P-hangers.
- 9. General:
  - A. (To do) Make updated rigging notes to include rope lengths for the whole way down Slaughterhouse to base of Windy Rift



*Sheath abrasion at split section of rung*



*Core shot caused by abrasion of rung*



*Core showing from rock rub*

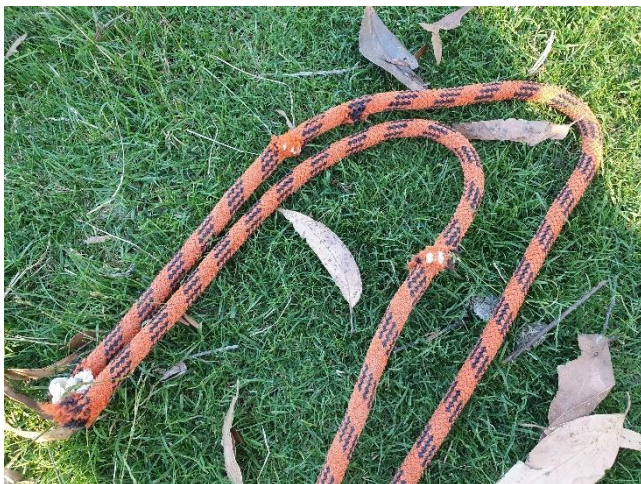


*It was one diameter of rope for the tail length coming out of a knot, right...? (NO!!! it's 10+)*





*The rope used for anchors – garden hose rope protectors survived ok, but the woven ones not so much (the rope wasn't damaged though)*



*The core was showing at 3 points (1 major) on the top rope from Slaughterhouse Pot*



*A mess of old Windy Rift ladders*

## Fossil Deposit Discovery

Stephen Fordyce

In the course of my travels (or is it someone else's travels...?) a significant fossil deposit was discovered. Much like Predator Pot, the cave will be given the pseudonym "Boney Moroney Cave" to avoid revealing the actual cave or location. Yeah lame (apart from the sweet name), but we'd never live it down if the bones got pilfered.

There are large, dark-coloured bones embedded in a mud matrix. They are obviously megafauna, being larger and much chunkier than kangaroo bones. It appears to have been visited by humans previously as there were marks consistent with access and a few of the bones had been disturbed.

Parks and DPIPWE, as well as the STC exec and science officer have been advised.

It might be nice to consider formulating a proposal for a formal paleontological extraction (ie. a collaboration of STC members and professional palaeontologists). Obviously, the bones must be left as they are in the meantime.

Chris Sharples (STC Science Officer) and Rolan Eberhard (in his capacity as NRE Tas Karst Officer) made a follow up trip and confirmed it was a valuable discovery. Rolan noted that:

- The bone-bearing sediment is a fissure fill accumulated below a former surface opening, now blocked. The base of the fill has been undercut by stream action, causing portions of it to slump downwards and expose the bone-bearing layer.



The presence of tree roots growing in the fill confirm a nearby connection to the surface.

- The disordered (re-worked?) appearance of the sediment suggests an absence of fine-scale sedimentary structures which, if present, would be of interest from a geochronology perspective.
- The matrix in which the bones are preserved is gravelly clay, suggesting a flux of moderately coarse material coeval with deposition of the bones and potentially consistent with slope instability under colder climate conditions? The lower portion of the fill is covered by more recent silty sediment deposited by the cave stream.
- The bone-rich layer is at least 0.5 m thick and extends laterally for at least 1 m. It may be part of a larger body of bone-bearing sediment, or it may be a relatively discrete lens which pinches out a short distance away. The density of bone content is high, and we can confidently assume the presence of hundreds of individual bones.

- The large piece of tibia and pelvis displaced on the base of the undercut hole are from a very large macropod. Other bones indicate a mix of modern species including wallaby, devil, and quoll
- As reported, the bones are quite mineralised and are clearly 'old'. Some are fractured but many appear to be virtually complete. For example, quoll is represented a more-or-less complete jaw with teeth.
- The practicality of conducting an excavation is aided by reasonably easy access. However, excavation would require removing material from below a mass of sediment lodged in a fissure extending upwards above the worksite. The effect of this on the stability of the fill will need to be considered. Prior approval from PWS would be required before initiating any further disturbance to the site.



*The fossil deposit (backup light for scale). Photo: Stephen Fordyce*

## Office Bearer's Reports

### President

Janine McKinnon

Yet again, it has been a very busy year for the club in diverse caving-related areas. This is testament to the many and varied interests and skills we have amongst us.

More new cave has been discovered and explored, including the amazing discovery of Friendzone in Porcupine Pot, a cave quite well-visited in the last few years, and heavily explored in the few years after its discovery. It reinforces that old adage about never assuming something is finished just because many people have looked at it.

Training new members in SRT was again busy, a couple of projects to place permanent rigging were completed and lots of surveying was done.

On the science front, we have again been involved with helping the visiting overseas Entomologists from Germany find and collect specimens. They must just like coming to Tassie I think, this must be the fourth trip at least. We have also been helping with the on-going excavation of Megafauna samples in a cave.

Again, one of us was the cave consultant and in-cave safety officer for the UTAS Extreme Sport medical course. They must have liked last year because this year the cave rescue element comprised two rescues and was the major focus of the training day.

The annual rescue exercise was a major effort, with multiple agencies and cavers from lots of places. We should be very proud of how well this was performed. Several of us were interviewed by the media again this year, a couple of us more than once. This was not due to any specific news-worthy event, but just general interest by the media in caves, speleology, and caving. I see this as an interesting development; we are (at least a little) on their radar now. This is a bit of positive press for both the club and caving in general.

My fellow executive members have performed efficiently again and are a pleasure to work with. All office bearers in the club have fulfilled their duties efficiently too. That is worth noting anywhere, let alone a volunteer organisation. Thank you all.

We are an active and vibrant club and I look forward to seeing where this coming year takes us.

I am willing to stand for my third, and final, year. I am also very happy to step aside if someone else wants the role.

### Vice President

Chris Sharples

Normally there is nothing much to say in a Vice President's report, however this year I can report that there were several absences of the President and the

Secretary from General Business Meetings

(fortunately never at the same time), as a result of which I stood in to either Chair the meeting or take the minutes on a number of occasions. Apart from these, no other tasks were required of the Vice-President.

I am happy to stand for the Vice Presidents position again.

### Secretary

Russell Fulton

I did my secretarial thing:

- Took minutes at most meetings and sent them to the group, usually within three days. Thanks to Chris Sharples for filling in when I was away.
- Emptied the STC mailbox at Sandy Bay. Mostly bank correspondence these days and just the odd letter or caving journal. Even the junk mail has declined to virtually nothing.
- Responded to the couple of enquiries from people contacting the club through the website.
- Acted as alternative authoriser for the CommBiz account.

The average attendance at GBMs through the year was 9.8, down from 10.8 in 2022 and 12.9 averaged in 2021. I think it is at least partially likely the ongoing consequence of the opening of national and international borders with members travelling more widely again. Meetings averaged 56.2 minutes duration, down from 59.8 minutes in 2022, which was substantially down on the previous year's 75.9 minutes. The minutes show that 57 trips to caves or karst features were reported during the year, down from the 78 trips reported in 2022. I have completed my three years as Secretary, so it is now time for someone else to have a go!

### Equipment Officer

Alan Jackson

The gear store is still full of gear and people come and get stuff from it. Most of the time they bring it back again in a timely fashion without me having to whinge about it. We haven't really made any significant purchases or gear replacement this past twelve months that I can think of. Andy Spate donated a collection of new and old gear late in 2023 which I sorted through and repurposed any of the good stuff. Rope stores are pretty good and seem able to accommodate both a semi-permanent rigged cave or two by the JF keen beans concurrently with random vertical day trips.



It all takes up quite a bit of room in my shed and I'd be more than happy for someone with suitable space and a central location to relieve me of the burden in 2024, but failing that it won't kill me to keep housing it a while longer yet.

### Science Officer

Chris Sharples

The main project requiring the Science Officer's involvement this year was my involvement in the ongoing assistance of STC members generally with the Anaspides DNA study being undertaken by Christoph Hoepel and Professor Stefan Richter from the University of Rostock in Germany. Together with Shane Ayang from the Australian Museum, after several visits in recent years, these researchers have returned to Tasmania to obtain further specimens of Anaspides from caves at the Junee-Florentine, Hastings, Mole Creek and Marble Hill. At the time of writing these researchers are currently in Tasmania until the end of February, and guidance to a number of caves and other assistance is being provided by myself, John Oxley, Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney and Steve Fordyce of STC.

The other project falling under my purview in the last year has been the megafauna bone excavations at Predator Pot (Junee-Florentine karst) that have been undertaken by Rolan Eberhard with members of the Nicholson clan and Phil Jackson. I visited the site for an inspection of the excavation in late 2023 and was duly impressed by the bones exposed.

No results have been received from the groundwater micro-plastics sampling study that STC participated in during 2023, however I live in hope that we haven't been entirely forgotten. No further word has been received about a cave cricket study that was mooted by a South Australian researcher several years ago.

I am happy to continue in this role for another year.

### Speleo Spiel Editor

Janine McKinnon

All issues of *Speleo Spiel* were published within the allocated timeframe this past year. I like to think they were all fascinating reading. Certainly, there were plenty of trip reports to read. Thanks to everyone who wrote one. You are all wordsmiths as they were invariably informative, and entertaining as well. Not always an easy feat to accomplish. Several members also submitted interesting article. This adds a nice diversity to the magazine.

Digital maps, and updated rigging notes have also been provided for publishing. This means that our club magazine was always a healthy size, included currently

very useful information and shows what an active club we are. I wish to thank my sub-editorial team of Alan Jackson and Ric Tunney for their (literally) invaluable efforts. The quality of the production, particularly in terms of grammar, accuracy, and typos, is down to them. Many commercial publications don't do as well.

As we have an enthusiastic person wishing to take on the job I will not be standing for this role at the AGM. Time for the younger generation to take over.

### Webmaster's Report

John Oxley

The STC website continues to operate satisfactorily. The only changes being the regular addition of *Speleo Spiel*.

### Social Secretary

Henry Garratt

Some socialising did take part throughout the year, despite me being social secretary. Regrettably I neglected a number of things this year, schoolwork and cave executive duties being left behind in favour of caving and other pursuits. Finishing year twelve and starting university was more time consuming than I anticipated. I am apologetic for my performance as Social Secretary and will not be looking for an executive role this year. I am keen to run more caving trips though.

### STC Librarian / Archivist

Greg Middleton

Since February 2022 the Library has received only nine paper journals/newsletters (11 last year, 22 in 21-22). Four of these were *Speleo Spiel*. Our total holding is now 5,100. It is fair to observe that hard copies of speleo magazines are no longer being exchanged. Digital copies of journals and newsletters are stored on a 1TB hard disk which is backed up to another and most are now available to all members through our digital archive. Additions in the last twelve months include:

- ACKMA Journal: #130 - #133
- ASF Annual Report: 2022
- Caves Australia: #223 - #225
- CEGSA News: Vol. 68(1)-(3)
- ISS Newsletter: Vol. 29(1)-(3)
- J. Sydney Speleo. Society: Vol. 67(3)-(12), 68(1)
- Speleo Spiel: #454 - #457
- Speleopod (SRCC): #92 - #93
- Trog (KSS): Vol. 58(1) - (5)
- NSS News (USA): Vol. 81(3) - (12), 82(1) - (2)
- J. Cave & Karst Studies (USA): Vol. 85(3-4)

- Cave & Karst Science (UK): Vol. 50(1) - (3)

No new books were added to the library this year. A list of major books is on the website; a digital catalogue of all 459 books is available. No new CDs or DVDs were added. Our CD/DVD collection stands at 67.

Loose papers and articles (numbering 852) are stored in a series of binders. Many more remain to be accessioned. No new issues of *Southern Caver* were produced. I'm prepared to continue in the position but as this would be my 26th year in the position I'm more than happy to hand the position – and the considerable volume of books and papers – over to someone else.

## Physical Archivist

Ric Tunney

Almost everything in the physical archive has been digitised, so there is little physical activity. Occasionally we find something undigitized and process it. Very rarely, someone wants to see originals and usually we can find them. Very few are sending in the originals of survey bookwork, which they are supposed to do. Aside from the space occupied, this job has little impact, and I am happy to continue

## Digital Archivist

Stephen Fordyce

This is a good role for me as it's cloud-based and easy to do from my home in Melbourne. Thanks to Ric and Janine for providing a storage location for the physical records, to Ric the Physical Archivist, and to Greg (both of whom add and tidy things). Also, to Jemma, who is briefed on relevant stuff in case I get hit by a bus. Not a whole lot of new cave data was received this year, although the partly completed Delta Variant map and associated scans were a boon in the last few months. The shared JF QGIS project continued to grow in content and complexity, and noises were made about doing one for Ida Bay.

Remember that the spirit of the data agreement and archive is "you show me yours, and I'll show you mine" - data and information need to flow in both directions. STC would rather have messy half-finished stuff now than wait forever for a tidied complete version. Please send anything and everything you want included in a specific cave folder (publishing in the Spiel isn't a guarantee it will get filed) organised and ready to put in. You can submit your data to me, Ric, Greg or Jemma.

## Search and Rescue Officer

Jemma Herbert

All jolly on the S&R front. No rescues were needed this year. Training has been ongoing, with a solid regular crew attending most sessions.

We've done about fifteen weeknight rescue skills sessions this year (intermittent fortnightly), practicing stuff like:

- hauls, lowers, tyroleans
- transfers between hauls lowers and tyroleans
- scenario at Lost World
- comms protocols and familiarisation with Deb Hunter
- trying out different stuff we learnt in NZ, like jiggers and edge kits
- and of course.... 1001 ways to muck up a pick off

We did our big rescue exercise in KD in October. We rescued a patient from the streamway in twelve sections. We had about fifty people involved including locals, northerners, mainlanders, NZers and police. It went pretty good I reckon. We did some informal testing of 6 mm concrete screws loaded in shear. The were no big surprises, and we remain happy to use them in rescue.

Club members have been attending rescue exercises organised by other clubs too. Some people made it to the NC events doing deobstruction training at a quarry in Railton in May, as well as vertical rescue training at Mole Creek in October. A few members attended the NZ deep cave SAREX in Bulmer in March too. Relations with police are still good, but unfortunately our long term cave ally in police, Damian Bigwood, has retired. We're still working on Ambulance Tasmania to get some paramedics allowed to attend our training exercises. The VRA is keen to assist us where they can. I'm happy to stand for the position again this year.

## Training Officer

Karina Anders

There were a fair number of people that attended training sessions this year. I ran around a dozen. Thanks to all the club members who helped with organising gear and running sessions with me. It is definitely a lot easier with a couple of people if there are two or more trainees. A number of beginner trips were also run, I did a couple. Thanks to those in the club who ran beginner trips as well. We've got some keen beans who have purchased gear and need to go on some more trips so let's try keep it up. I'm happy to continue as training officer, happy to share the role with anyone else interested.

## ASF Google Groups Representative

Ric Tunney

ASF send out information to all the member clubs. This job is just to forward the information to the STC Googlegroup, to the STC Executive, or to Trash. This happens about once a fortnight. It's easy and I'm happy to continue.



## Treasurer's Report

Karina Anders

### Income and Expenditure Statement

For the period 1 January 2023 – 31 December 2023

	2023	2022
<b>Income</b>		
Membership fees	4448.3	6055.75
Speleo Spiel subscriptions	15	25
Gear hire	120	96
Trip fees	0	0
Donations (to STC General Funds)	28	464.12
Grants	0	0
Interest	263.24	71.09
Sundries	400	3065
<b>Total income</b>	<b>5274.54</b>	<b>9776.96</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>		
<i>Speleo Spiel &amp; Southern Caver</i> production	66.3	236.54
Corporate membership (e.g. ACKMA)	0	0
ASF fees	3307	3597.7
Gear purchase and repair	430.28	1800.35
Website hosting	0	65.34
Google 2Tb subscription	43.99	124.99
Equipment officer honorarium	0	0
Annual return fee	68	89.1
PO Box Rental	235	215
Bank fees	4.95	18.70
Training	0	0
Sundries	50	3799.08
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>4205.52</b>	<b>9946.80</b>
<b>Net surplus</b>	<b>1069.02</b>	<b>-169.84</b>
<b>Balance Sheet</b>		
General Account (bank balance)	11201.94	10132.92
Fixed Term Deposit (bank balance)	10000	10000
Less unrepresented cheques		0
Plus receipts to be deposited		0
<b>Total cash position</b>	<b>21201.94</b>	<b>20132.92</b>

## NOTES

1. Income sundries comprised of selling inReach mini Sat-Text.
2. Expenditure sundries comprised of \$50 civic club fee.
3. Accounts to be audited internally by Alan Jackson
4. No changes to ASF Fees (awaiting response from ASF treasurer to confirm whether ASF component will remain the same or not).
5. Noted that Equipment officer honorarium has not been paid out in 3 years. They are due 30% of the income received for all gear hire. For 2021, 2022 and 2023 Alan is due \$135.60.
  - a. Note: I didn't pay Alan for 2021 or 2022 last year, just wanted to check if there was a reason for that or if I just forgot?

### Membership breakdown as at 31 December 2023:

CATEGORY	NUMBER
Single	15
Single – less ASF	5
Household	17
Concession	9
Concession (non ASF)	0
Introductory	17
Introductory (non ASF)	2
Life – Active	4
Life – Inactive	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>73</b>

*Comments:* The club was at a gain of \$1069.02 this year, with approximately \$11,300 in the operating account at AGM time and \$10,000 in the term deposit. Funds were spent primarily on the purchase of gear, spending \$199.65 on a new bolt tester part, \$190.93 on a pressure hose and \$39.70 on face goggles for the rescue kit.



*The outgoing treasurer. Amused? Photo: John Oxley.*

