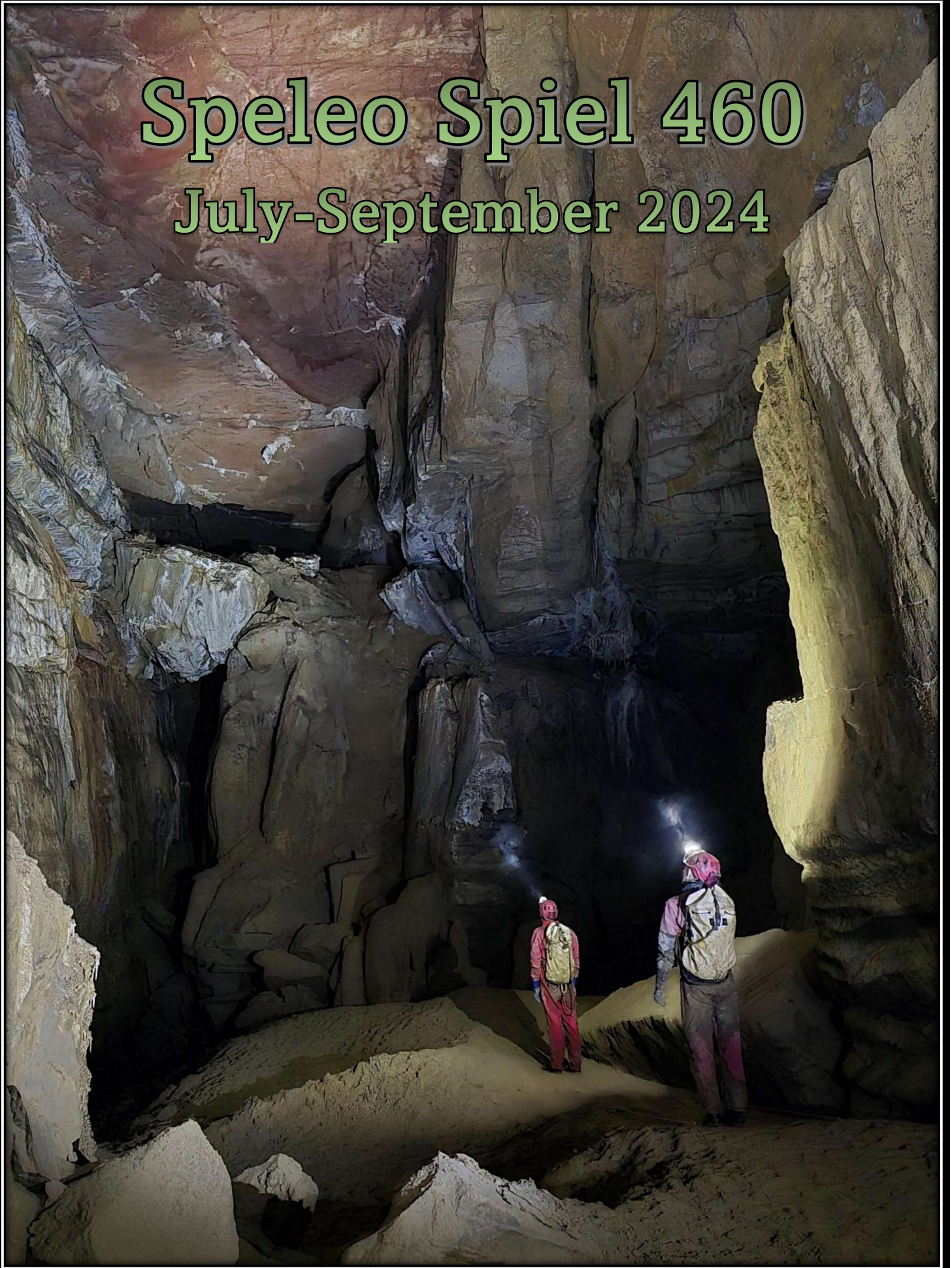


Speleo Spiel 460

July-September 2024



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Front Cover: IB-14 Exit Cave. Photo: Michael Glazer

Back Cover: Brendan Moore proudly displaying his home brew at camp in Niggly. Photo: Stephen Fordyce.

Speleo Spiel 460 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

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Editorial

New cave has been found, old cave has been visited and Hairygoat Hole remains woefully mislaid. Things change but largely stay the same underground. As usual, we've got lots of trip reports and interesting karst related sundries in the following pages. This issue covers 26 days of caving, across no fewer than 12 authors! Thank you to everyone who has been diligently sending me trip reports, keep it up! Three issues in as editor, I think I'm finally starting to unravel the function of the mysterious column break.

STC stalwart Alan Jackson recently had a go at the editor of this publication for being unable to read a cave map. The editor notes that she was perhaps a tad hasty in criticising Alan for failing to include a known section of JF-207 Voltera in his 2022 map (or at least drawing it so poorly as to be useless), see SS459, p.14. Alan was in fact digitising the original 2014 notes produced by Dickon Morris. Blame where blame is due - shame on Dickon. Conveniently I've never met Dickon myself and I'm assured he is now out of the country. There will be a slightly updated version of this map published at the conclusion of the current Voltera efforts, whenever that is.

Stuff 'n' Stuff

Recent Media



Henry Garratt on ABC News, 19 August 2024.

In recent years, the national broadcaster has been making a commendable effort to portray caving in a more nuanced perspective, going beyond the usual 'person has bad time underground' headlines. In August the ABC published a feature article about the process of mapping JF-761 Delta Variant. This was produced in response to a radio interview that Ciara Smart gave on 7 July, which in turn came about because someone from the ABC read the latest issue of the *Spiel* (you never know whose eyes will peruse your trip report!). See the web feature article here: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-08-19/tasmania-cave-system-delta-variant-mapped/104130234>. They also put together an audio feature, listen here: <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/pm/australia-s-deepest-cave-mapped-/104248882>.

In response Henry Garratt was thrown in the deep end and gave excellent television and radio interviews. A clip is in the archive to be retrieved at Henry's 40th to see how his hair cut has aged.

Barry sees the light

This is Barry. I'm sure you will agree he (or maybe she) is a handsome, if venerable, example of a *Vombatus ursinus*. He's currently the cleanest he's been in a very long time. Just look at those front choppers! He's recently seen the light after being carefully extricated from a paleontological excavation in a cave in Southern Tasmania. STC members have been supporting the project for some time (with bureaucratic oversight and all relevant permits).



Updated notes on the aid climb in JF-207 Voltera.

Here's an update to the rigging for the aid climb in Voltera (see SS458, p.13.). The climb was left with an 8 mm stainless steel through-bolt, and a 6 mm concrete screw equalised together with 5 mm dyneema cord to a central mallion. Both hangers are stainless. Threaded through this mallion is a 2 mm pull cord. Theoretically a future party could use this to pull a rope up through the anchor. Unfortunately, the cord is quite tangled, best of luck future generations. - Henry Garratt

Forward Program

STC now has an events calendar: <https://southerntasmaniancaverneers.com/events-calendar/>. It lists trips and social events. Contact an executive member for the password. Select events published below.

- 1 October: General Meeting, Civic Club, 7 pm.
- 11 October: 78th Anniversary Barbeque. Site 9, Waterworks Reserve, Hobart, 5-9 pm. RSVP to pmjackson@dodo.com.au
- 19-20 October: Rescue Exercise in Growling Swallet. RSVP to herbertjemma@gmail.com
- 5 November: Social Gathering. Details tbc.

Trip Reports

JF-36 Growling Swallet Dive (Coelacanth Sump and Well Beyond)

1 June 2024

Text and photos by Stephen Fordyce

Party: Kynan Bonnice, Stephen Fordyce, Henry Garratt, Jemma Herbert, Adrian Hills, Chris Jewell, Ciara Smart

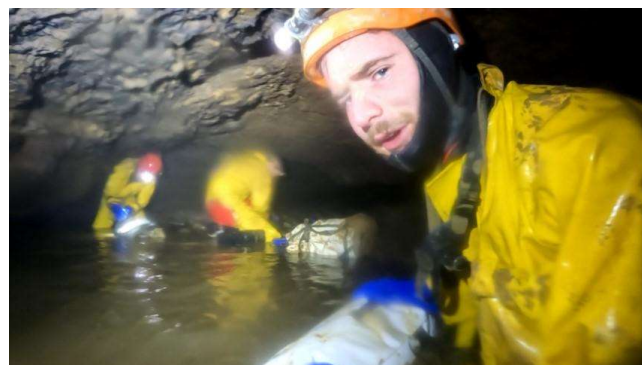
This was my 4th dive here, and the 2nd in this series. See SS459, p.19-23 for the previous report and background. The rest of the blissfully large crew helped carry dive gear and then went off to have their own excellent adventures – see the separate report by Ciara and Henry below.

Familiarity was good, and this trip was a lot smoother than the last, although we still made the last exit from Slaughterhouse at 2 am and there was minimal beyond-sump survey achieved. It was a carbon copy in terms of gear, but with a bigger support crew, who (supposedly, ha!) knew the way. It was great to see up and comers Cobra (Kynan) and Adrian coming back again so soon. Unfortunately, due to flight delays, a suboptimal amount of sleep was had the night before, which compounded the misery a bit but wasn't a showstopper.



General faffing at the dive base

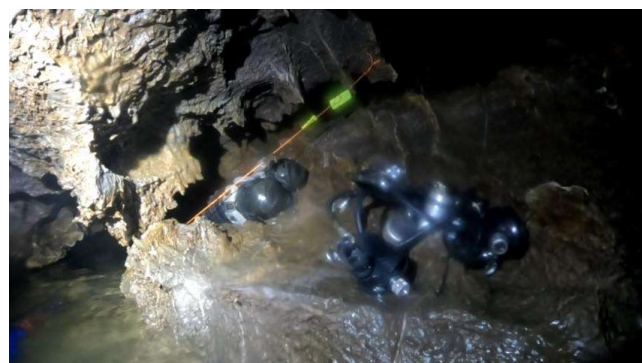
Getting to the dive base was uneventful, and we remembered to shift it 50 m or so downstream to a place with plenty of standing room, close to the stream and a nice rock bench - the occasional lawn bowl falling out of the bench was the only downside. There wasn't too much dive gear faffing as most of it was left at the sump – we proceeded through the roof sniffs in good order and said goodbye, planning for a five hour return to the Coelacanth/Living Fossils junction (and leaving pencil and paper there for writing notes).



Henry opines that it would be much better to put the roof sniff at the start of the cave

The dive gear hadn't been washed away and I started shifting rocks off it, finding the dive light lost last time, hooray! At that point, my digestive system decreed that a very inconvenient thing must be done and there would be no argument. Done it was, I'll spare you the details, but a bit of faffing time was gobbled up in the wetsuit removal and replacement. My recent record on this is admittedly terrible, some more drastic preparation/training will be done next time. The kitting-up was finished and the first dive was done. No stucksies this time, and a five-minute transit using a nice small amount of gas, and I had a poke about and tried to film beyond the restriction in case there was another surface somewhere. It didn't seem like it.

At the surface (far side of Sump 1) I noticed a meandering lead at water level and followed it a surprising amount before it crapped out (video recorded). Interesting, but not really worth pursuing – a choked upward mud slope. Regs were pulled off the tanks (dustcaps were an important item on the checklist) and bagged with fins and other stuff, and I grovelled through the Cloaca (it was comparatively quick and awesome) to Sump 2. This all felt pretty efficient but by the time I'd put the regs on the stashed little tanks, re-kitted and surveyed through Sump 2 to the far side, it was two hours since split time and only three hours were left. So I had one hour left to do meaningful stuff, plus a bit of stretch. I noted DRY PATCHES ON ROCKS in the hanging rock chamber of The Condor and wondered at the implications of that (draught and sump bypass?!).



Dive gear logisticing at the far side of Sump 1

Last time I was here, mojo, energy and pretty much all other metrics were low, resulting in pessimistic impressions. Fortunately (or otherwise), a fresh look yielded leads galore. With dive gear removed, I had a look at the lead left untouched last time, back from the Sump 2 far side guideline tie-off. Crawling in and looking left, I could see some little rocks I'd placed on a hunch just behind the tie-off, it just looped around (tightly). But looking right was a surprisingly wide if very low flattener.

It looked impassable but I went for a closer look and it kept going, about 1 m wide and 25 cm high (just enough to keep my helmet on) with a cobble floor that was muddier than usual. It had a draught! Some strings of foam gunge or something hanging off the roof were at a 45 degree angle towards me. The passage was straight and about 20 m long, I didn't want to get too distracted, but it was impossible to ignore, and felt like it was heading back in the direction of Living Fossils, implying a dry bypass to the sump. At the end was a small chamber where I could stand up, and to the right was a big black void with rockpile, and to the left was rockpile with smaller but possible leads. Whoa! This area is labelled ("The Hawk Rockpile") on my sketch.

I wanted to prioritise following the water before expending too much energy, so headed back to the tie-off and threw a few things in the bag for an adventure. I dragged it a grand total of 5 m to where the stream disappeared and dry crawling passage continued – I'd taken the dry passage last time and it ended up tight and nasty, I thought it hit the stream again but wasn't certain (idiot...). So I followed the water left and then around a sharp right to peek into awful tight, wet, sharp passage. Remembering the Talon Tube, the bag was immediately abandoned. This thing was awful, probably worse than the Talon Tube, although having the water made it slightly easier because sometimes I could get a bit of buoyancy.



An example of the grovel (the way is bottom left, in the water)

There was no way turning around would be possible, so I had to be pretty mindful of saving enough energy to back out. It was horrendously slow going but finally a parallel dry passage emerged on the right... complete with trog marks from last time. Oops. I had a quick

poke about, but the most prospective way was back in the stream, at least it didn't seem to be getting any smaller and was mostly cobble floor. I belly-wriggled along for an eternity, but if anything the cave was slightly bigger – not really enough to crawl, but enough to turn around in a few spots. A few sections had some deeper bits requiring a semi-roof sniff, but doable with head on one side and always with helmet on. I wasn't cold in my 7 mm dive suit, but I never got hot enough to take my dive hood off.

After a long time and no sign of the cave shutting down, hope of a Porcupine-style breakout into the master cave was growing. Time was getting tight, but a few minutes of stretch into grumpy caver time was worth it to see what happened when the grovelling eventually ended and enable better planning for the next push. A void appeared on the right and it looked awesome. Walking passage (named Soaring Passage to fit the bird theme) of lovely 3 m x 4 m proportions (ok, more like 1.5 m high and 3 m wide from the GoPro footage) running parallel to and above the stream and with mud banks and rockpile. I rolled the GoPro and wandered downstream – it sort of crapped out but would be worth another look next time. Upstream went further and I left it wide open – it could be a flood bypass to the master cave downstream of the junction, but was unlikely to be a quick and easy way to get there.



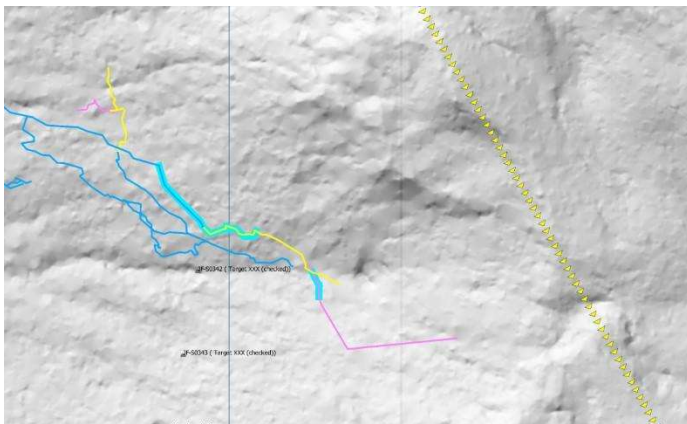
Soaring Passage!

I reluctantly got back in the water grovel and continued, feeling the pressure to turn considerably more, but reasoning I'd save a bit of time on the way back with better routes. The misery of the grovel was now tempered with excitement and it was also a bit bigger, crawlable in a few places. Finally, the grovel was truly over – the stream flowed into a large (5 m x 5 m) chamber and disappeared into the middle of a big rockpile. Could this be the master cave?! I couldn't hear a big stream, and the rockpile was... intimidating. I had a quick poke, worried about getting lost and all the other rockpile things. I also regretted having left the bag with Disto and spare lights way back near the sump (I had food stashed in my socks, so that wasn't a worry). I had my primary helmet light, with a separate backup light, but being solo with only two lights wasn't

the greatest thing. Shearwater dive computers have been used for lighting in a pinch, but I didn't really want to be testing that today.

The rockpile was given a last wistful poke and I wished Petr was there to work his magic and find the way. I knew rockpiles need time, energy and mojo to solve and I was going to need the dregs of all those for the way back. Being out there alone is something I'm constantly assessing, and a bunch of complex rockpile on top of everything else to get there may tip the cost/benefit/risk analysis towards a second diver in the not-too-distant future.

With carefully marked shortcuts, the going was bearable on the way back, and I kept an eye on my dive computer compass to get an idea of the direction. The pencil on my Aquasketch (dive note taker) had broken and a tiny nub was all that remained – making notes was still possible but very painful. Plus this needed a diligent survey anyway and I'd conveniently left the Disto way back, so estimates would have to do today. These have gone into the latest survey plot and been used for sketches to show all the open leads and the most optimal ways to go – hopefully I got them right, my penance for not surveying will be having to re-do them again later. The bird song naming theme was continued with the lines after the Condor. Having left this trip's commemorative marker in the bag, it was placed next to the previous one on the Sump 2 far side tie-off.



Current state of play (magenta surveyed or estimated this trip, yellow arrows show theorised master cave between Niggly and Porcupine)

On the way back through Sump 2, I did a careful assessment of whether this could be done without tanks. The visibility had cleared, I was going upstream and so could have a good look from below the water at the air bells. I had a reg in my mouth just in case, but did everything breath-hold, and decided this was completely viable. It will make things heaps more efficient to be able to leave dive gear back at Sump 1.

Here are directions for negotiating Sump 2 without tanks:

From the home side:

- Dive hood and mask highly recommended
- My sketch should be reasonably accurate with regards to air bells
- There is currently 3 mm orange guideline on the floor, I plan to replace this with 7 mm Telstra rope closer to the surface
- Stick to the right wall pretty much the whole way
- The passage is 1-1.5 m high the whole way, quite convenient for having your feet on the bottom and hands on the ceiling, you shouldn't end up swimming or not being able to touch anything
- Do the obvious easy roofsniff, about 1 m long, 10 cm airspace
- Somewhere here there are some rocks on the floor and you have to get a bit horizontal, although it's not tight
- Do a less pleasant roofsniff, about 0.5 m long. 5 cm airspace
- There might be a third unpleasant roofsniff
- This gets you to a small airbell – just enough space to get your head out of the water, and about 1 m x 0.5 m
- The final bit is a duckunder about 0.5 m long, best done at a vertical crack in the ceiling in the onwards direction
- You can feel the airspace by reaching your hand through and splashing while your head is still in the last airbell
- The chamber beyond is a big airspace with plenty of headroom (although the ceiling slopes gently out of the water, so go a bit further for easier breathing)

From the far side:

- Opposite of above
- I.e. stick to the LEFT wall!
- The airspace beyond the duck under you will have to do first is relatively small and low, make sure you hit it and be prepared to retreat if you don't (hold the guideline)
- The visibility will probably have cleared, so a dive mask will let you see the airspace from below
- Helmet off is probably a good idea in case you pop into a bit with less airspace
- You should be able to reach out a hand and splash in it, but might need to be pretty sniffy on the ceiling to get close enough

So I put the 2.7 L tanks in the bag and dragged a very heavy bag out through the Cloaca, through Sump 1 in good time and back to Coelacanth. There was a gratifying amount of gas left in the big cylinders (probably enough for at least two more goes) and the pile of stashed gear was left how I'd found it (but with plugs in the cylinders this time). I was pretty knackered both physically and mentally, and it was lovely to catch the rest of the crew at the junction point again – that makes three for three! Getting my restrictive dive wetsuit off and some hot coffee* in worked wonders and large team bottlenecks were the worst thing to happen on the way out. Cobra progressed to carrying a tank and Adrian also carried a very respectable bag, both all the way out. It was great to have Chris's extensive experience and stories along. Henry, Ciara and Jemma were awesome as usual of course. The last exit was at 2 am – a bit over our par of midnight, but better than 4 am last time.



Ciara goes for a little whinge

With leads galore, a shameful lack of post-sump survey and plenty of gas in the cylinders, a return beckons. But it's going to need a lot of time beyond the sump, and these post-midnight finishes are getting pretty lame. Luckily Ciara was the first to vocalise the idea of camping, so I can share the blame for the first(?) multi-day game of Mastercave or Bust in Growling Swallet...

*Coffee (and maybe eating a bit of gnar) turned Jemma into the terminator – she carried a truly heroic bag out, and also came back through the entire Slaughterhouse rockpile to confiscate my rather light one. Not bad considering she wasn't up for this much of a sufferfest and only came at the last minute due to FOMO.



Kynan goes for a little swim

Stocktake of stashed gear:

- At Condor Sump (Sump 2):
 - Nothing (the 2.7 L ally tanks came out and back to Hobart)
- At Coelacanth Sump (Sump 1):
 - Fins
 - Reel with ~60 m orange line
 - Spare spool with white line
 - Hoe with string, double ender, stubby holder
 - 2x large caving bags with foam bottom pads, with tethers (SS clips)
 - Weightbelt with 4x 1.5 kg weights (confirmed 1.5 kg)
 - Spare loose 1.5 kg weight (probably don't need it)
 - 2x 9 L CF tanks, rigged, 3x 1.5 kg weights on each, 3 bungees each, now with DIN plugs
 - Wing/BCD with 2x double enders
- At the Black River dive base:
 - The foam padding for the 2 big cylinders
 - A small drop weight or two.

Dive gear used:

- Same as previous dive (2024-04)

Gas and time notes:

- 11:00 – went underground
- 13:00 – first group arrives at dive base, the rest within thirty min
- 14:15 – leave dive base
- 14:40 – split at Living Fossils junction
- (aim to return to here in five hours)
- 15:30 – Start Sump 1 dive, gas 240/160 bar (9 L CF)
- End gas 200/160 bar
- 16:15 – Start Sump 2 dive, gas 180/170 bar (2x 2.7 L ally)
- End gas 150/170 bar
- 16:35 – Go exploring
- 17:40 – Turn for home
- 18:10 – Reach Sump 2
- Quick break, re-kit, dive, de-kit and prep for more crawling
- 18:40 – Leave Sump 2
- Grovel back through the Cloaca and re-kit
- 19:20 – Start Sump 1 dive, gas 200/165 bar (9 L CF)
- End gas 160/170 bar

- Dive (5 min), de-kit, stash things, meet others, back through roof sniff to dive base, pack up, get changed, hot drinks, general faff
- 22:00 – Leave dive base
- 01:00 (guess) – first exit from Slaughterhouse
- 02:00 – last exit from Slaughterhouse
- 04:30 – bed at Maydena

Gas analysis and forward planning:

- Sump 1 only (do Sump 2 without tanks)
- Out: used 360 L (40 bar from a 9 L)
- Back: used 360 L (40 bar from a 9 L)
- Remaining after #2 dive: 160/160 bar (1440 L/1440 L)
- Keep 100/0 bar for reserve, plan 0/100 bar consumed each return trip
- After #3 dive: 110/110 bar
- After #4 dive: 110/10 bar
- If more dives need to be done, the 110 bar tank can be left in the cave and the other replaced (equal tank balancing would mean both tanks would need to be swapped)

Punchlist for next time:

- My armpits chafed pretty badly in the wetsuit, presumably from all the grovelling – wear a top underneath next time
- Do another tie-off at the far side of Coelacanth Sump (there is only one)
- Do Sump 2 as roof sniff/duckunder
- Bring some 7 mm rope to rig as a stronger guideline in Sump 2
- Consider bringing a crowbar for the rockpiles
- Bring a phone and sketch pad to do complex electronic surveying and navigation
- Take the hoe, as winter flows may block up the Sump 1 restriction again
- More beyond-sump time is needed! Camp at dive base...?
- Pre-emptively poop better, or something

Dive Profiles and Transit Times:

See previous report. Updated Sump 1 transit times are added below.

- 2023-08 out 25 min
- 2023-08 back: 14 min
- 2024-04 out: 12 min
- 2024-04 back: 4.5 min(!!)
- 2024-06 out: 5 min
- 2024-06 back: 5 min



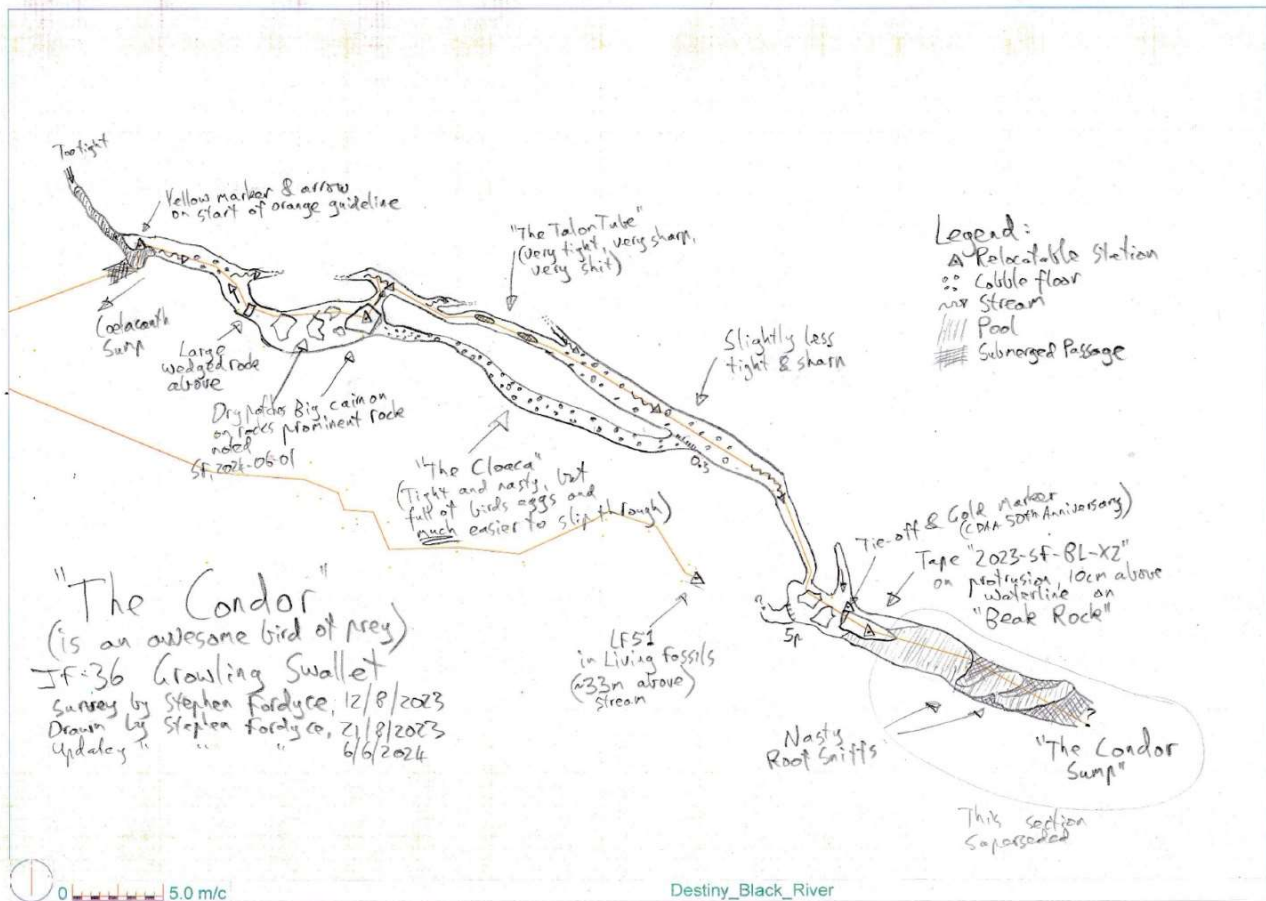
Chris contemplates life, sleep and the excellent caving ahead



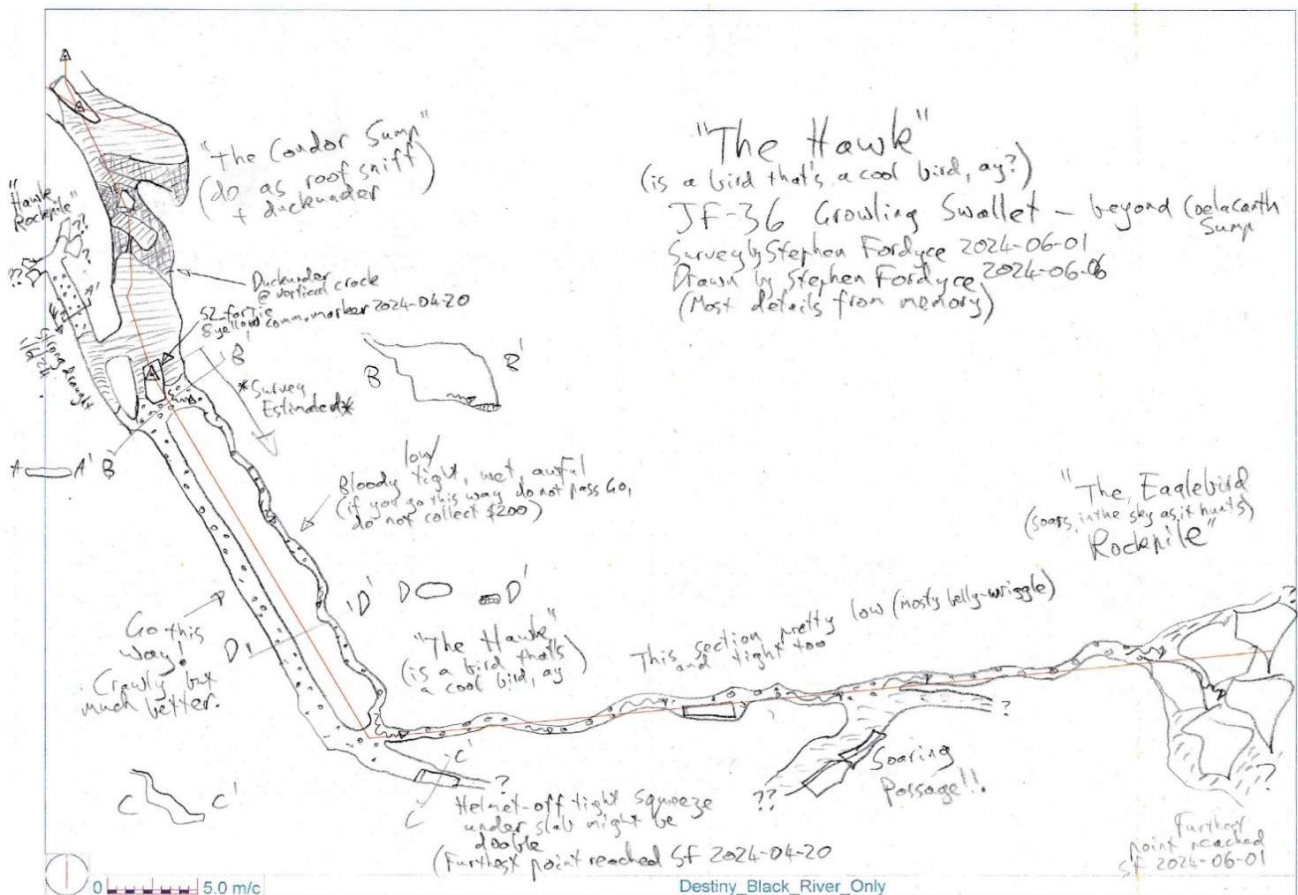
Adrian's hair was just as good as a dive hood



Jemma, pre-coffee, but post-gnar



Updated sketch of The Condor (properly surveyed). Credit: Stephen Fordyce



Sketch of The Hawk (survey estimated, this will be re-done). Credit: Stephen Fordyce

JF-36 Growling Swallet: Living Fossils

1 June 2024

Ciara Smart

Party: Kynan Bonnice, Stephen Fordyce, Henry Garratt, Jemma Herbert, Adrian Hills, Chris Jewell, Ciara Smart

Every time I do a dive trip with Steve, I dream of sitting around drinking cups of tea while awaiting Steve's return after finishing all the dry leads in good time – this dream is yet to eventuate. We saw Steve off at 2:40 pm with the agreement to rendezvous in five hours. The six of us headed into Living Fossils with the aim to locate a few aid climbs and at least one dry horizontal lead. Living Fossils was pushed by the Eberhard duo in 2012-2014 (see SS411, p. 5-7), and revisited a handful of times in the last four years in the hope that it might provide a bypass to Coelacanth Sump (see SS443, p.10 and SS437, p.16). All the obvious leads have been long consumed, but we'd kindly been left a few scraps in the too hard/too pretty/didn't see basket.

I had been in this section a year ago with Alan, Petr and Henry, during Steve's second attempt at Coelacanth Sump (SS456, p.6). Kynan and Adrian had been there six weeks ago during Steve's third attempt at the sump (SS459, p.25). Jemma, Henry, and I had received a thorough route-finding brief from Alan a few days prior, and we felt reasonably confident in our ability to pick our way through. Unfortunately there was no trip report from last year's dry push for me to cross-check (*ed. who to blame I wonder?*). Alan has digitised the in-cave sketches from the Eberhard era, resulting in a map of Living Fossils that is lacking in detail, but vaguely correlates with reality. Armed with this map, and a mismatch of assorted memories, we headed in. What followed was a spectacular comedy of navigational errors.

After splitting from the stream, Alan had instructed us not to take the first left, so we dutifully ignored the first left, and followed Kynan off into very large passage. I was a bit confused, and eventually we realised we had performed a lovely big circle, landing back in the stream. Mistake one.

We retraced our steps and followed a different high-level passage through a cleft on the left. At this point, Henry realised he had forgotten some critical aid climbing gear back on the other side of the roof sniff! Mistake two, ouch. Henry and Jemma scarpered off to go collect the gear (and go back through the roof sniff!) while the rest of us puzzled over the route. This high-level route was cairned, and I could distinctly remember being here last year. What I did not remember was a very significant downclimb. Chris and Kynan negotiated the downclimb, but I was sure this was not the route. Chris circled back and quickly found

a much easier route, which was in fact the *first* left. This route required an easy crawl, rather than a sketchy downclimb, much better.

From there, the navigation was mostly straightforward. Henry and Jemma caught up to us, and we continued through open passage and rockpile breakdown. We failed to find the 4 m aid climb on the right-hand side identified by Steve near station LF9. Perhaps this is incorrectly marked on the map? We passed the start of Middle Age and Kynan pointed out some of the pitches they had identified last trip. Presumably these will drop into Middle Age, but you never know. We passed the wet passage that also leads up into the decorated section of passage we were aiming for, but Alan had suggested a different passage would be an easier approach, so we turned hard left at Survey Station LF34. We came into a large open chamber (Survey Station LF12), which was the point at which Henry and Jemma broke off to find their aid climb on the right. This was the aid climb first sussed by Rolan and Stefan Eberhard a decade ago. The Eberhards had even dragged Alan Jackson in to climb it on trad gear. He sensibly refused (see SS411, p.6). Clearly it was time for the current generation of push cavers to have a stab.



Can you spot the Adrian? Photo: Henry Garratt

Before heading off to the aid, Henry and I both agreed that a slippery 4 m climb in the left corner of the chamber was the route we had taken last year. We both recalled Petr heading up this and setting a handline for the remainder of the party. Jemma dutifully headed up and looped a rope around a buttress. Even with this handline, the slippery climb was still very difficult, like climbing through 'peanut butter' as Kynan noted.

Adrian got up it first and gave a meat anchor and extra hand when needed.

After much flailing, a bit of wailing, and significant exertion, the four of us were up the top. At this point, I realised that my memory had been quite selective, (I do have a significant birthday coming up). I strongly recalled the entire party last year climbing up this blasted thing, but I had failed to remember that it was a dead end. Now I could see the passage below where we wanted to be, but it required a deathly downclimb that was untrogged. Mistake three. Apologies were proffered, moaning was had, and the four of us renegotiated the slippery downclimb. Back in the big chamber with no clear way on, and now completely coated in mud from head to toe, we were feeling stumped, and mojo was low. At this point we spotted a hole in the floor. We could see a climbable 3 m drop with open passage below. This was trogged and made sense on the map. It was easy to climb down, but we set a rope to get back up. This granted us entry into the passage with the trickling stream which was where we wanted to be. Finally! The alternative route into this passage would be via the wet inlet on the left prior to SSLF34. This route would be shorter, and not require annoying climbing. Let's go that way next time.

At the bottom of the downclimb the route finding was much easier. We headed upstream. This is the nicest section of Living Fossils, spacious meander with decent decorations. We reached Survey Station LFE103 (a cairn on the wall) and pulled out the survey gear and headed up the unsurveyed left passage. Henry had dashed up this passage last year and reported that it was ongoing. I was keen to survey it, but we'd wasted so much time with route finding that we were not going to have long. Rolan Eberhard had decided not to survey this section to protect the decorations, so we were very careful where we put our feet. Thankfully the decorations were limited to the walls and were easily avoided. A few metres into the passage we had to negotiate an awkward 3 m climb up a flowstone wall. Footholds were limited, so we strung some bag tethers together and looped them through the flowstone. This was not great, but workable with a bit of teamwork. A tape would be much better.

After this climb, to my surprise, the passage became much wider. We reached a series of avens, the highest of which was nearly 40 m. Several small inlets came in on the left, but we did not have time to push them. We headed up another easy climb, and then reached a major junction (Survey Station CCA13). At this point it was 6:20 pm, and we were due to rendezvous with Jemma and Henry at 6:30, so I regretfully had to call time on the survey. Chris scooted up the forward passage, and Kynan headed up the passage on the right. Initially Chris went low and found annoying crawly passage. The higher route above him was open and easy. Chris reported going passage. Kynan also

reported going passage on the right inlet. So much for closing off leads!

This section of cave will require another dedicated survey trip. Without so many navigational blunders, it should be reasonable to finish in one trip. Unfortunately, this section of passage is going in the wrong way to bypass Coelacanth Sump. As an upstream lead, it will probably end in avens or unclimbable passage, but there is a good chance of finding some quality decoration. If for nothing else than ease of identification, this northwest section of passage has been named 'Pommie Dreams'. I felt sorry having to call Chris back when we ran out of time, with barrelling passage headed off in multiple directions - certainly the stuff that English cavers can only dream of.

The four of us then headed back down the passage to meet up with Jemma and Henry. The six of us headed out Living Fossils without navigational incident, being only ten minutes late for the meet up with Steve.



Mud. Mud for days. Photo: Stephen Fordyce

Aid Climbing 'Numpty Mash'

(Henry) Splitting from the others, Jemma and I headed off to find the two aid climbs. We located the first climb, a very nice chimney in good rock. Jemma headed up first, soloing up the chimney as high as safely possible to suss out its potential. This led to excited reports that the climb would be too long for our 25-ish metre rope! Multi-pitching in a cave, on good rock too! I attached both of our bags to the rope, and then climbed up to join Jemma on the small belay ledge, we hauled our packs up hand over hand and excitedly started faffing with the bolting kit to build a belay, taking care to not drop anything (including ourselves).

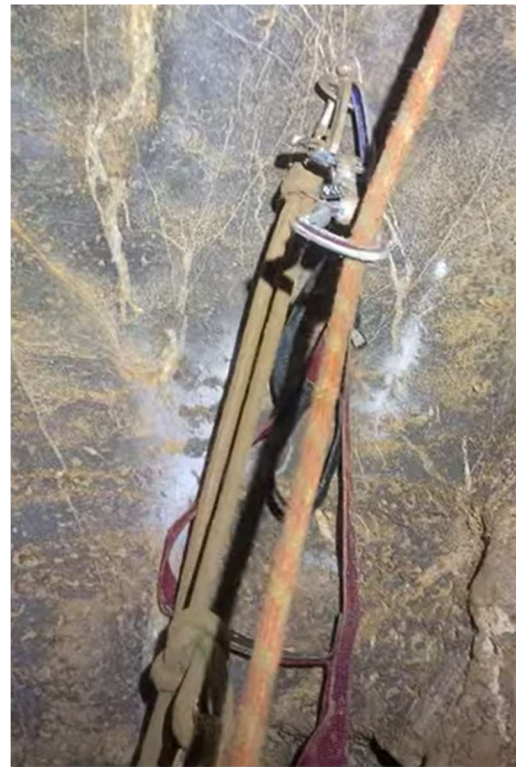


Jemma looking up the chimney [ed. note the climbing in gumboots and plastic suits with wetsuits underneath]. Photo: Henry Garratt

The drill was... struggling. It persevered through one 8 mm hole (using new 8 mm removable bolts rather than 6 mm concrete screws), but only managed about 7 mm of the second hole before suppressing all desire to hammer, spinning sadly and halting progress. This led to some revision of our plans, we settled on a suboptimal single bolt belay, rather than the double bolt belay we soft modern climbers are accustomed to. Options for naturals were limited with our lack of gear, there was an abundance of tri-cam placements but no tri-cams. Jemma then valiantly led another metre or so, placing a runner on a dubious flake before we decided to bail.

The chimney is ongoing and has plenty of natural gear in good rock, and a very alluring looking hands-fist crack. We intend to return with hexes, tri-cams and nuts. The comedy of errors involved in both finding, and failing to climb the climb this inspired the name Numpty Mash.

After being defeated by the Numpty Mash we headed over to suss out the second climb. It is a short corner climbing up the back of a rift, mostly free climbable except for an overhanging bulge. Last year I had attempted to squeeze through the back of the corner, bypassing the bulge but it was too tight. Jemma attempted the same squeeze but also proved too big. Climbing out wide over/through the offending bulge wouldn't be difficult, a simply mantle on to a slopy ledge - but with a very high consequence if you fell... With a well-placed bolt and an attentive belay, it would go free. Above this bulge the rift continues sideways.



The belay. Photo: Henry Garratt

JF-4 Khazad Dum

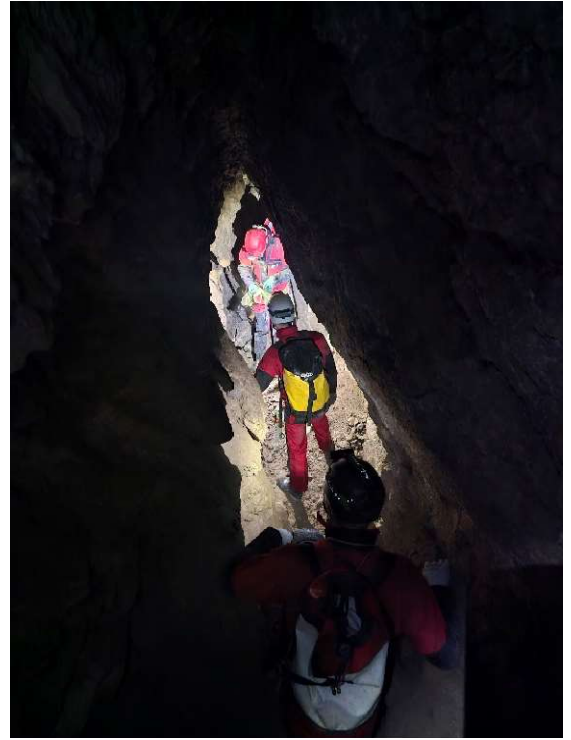
9 June 2024

Raelene Watson

Party: Michael Glazer, Alex Motyka (SUSS), John Oxley, Raelene Watson

This was my first trip to KD, and third caving adventure in total. The trip was led by John Oxley with Michael Glazer and Alex Motyka rounding out the group of four. While we had no specific objective, our goal was to explore the cave at a leisurely pace. In

effort to stay dry and warm, we descended only the first four pitches of the Traditional Route to the streamway before stopping for lunch. Afterward, we took a short walk to check out the next pitch - the first one with water flowing over it. Michael and I, being in the middle of our Push-Up Challenge, couldn't resist doing a few reps in front of the waterfalls as we passed them. Alex kept our spirits high with his impromptu singing, while John expertly managed our safety, rigging and derigging for us throughout the journey. All in all it was a great day, exiting the cave at 3.30 pm.



Photos: Raelene Watson

Midnight Hole

10th June 2024

John Oxley

Party: Alex Motyka (SUSS), John Oxley

Alex was visiting from Sydney and asked if he could be included in any trips STC was running so I arranged a trip to Khazad Dum (see separate report) with Michael Glazer and Rae Watson. Alex had not previously been to any caves in the south of Tasmania so I thought a trip to Midnight Hole would also be appropriate.

The walk in was the usual muddy affair with lots of fallen trees over the old tramway track. Water level in the creek was a little low for this time of year.

With just the two of us we moved pretty quickly alternating turns down the pitches. The dead echidna at the bottom of pitch three was still very stinky. When we first observed it in February it hadn't been there long. Decay in the cave environment will be much slower than on the surface.

Unfortunately, the ropes we had were a bit too short for the final pitch. When abseiling the rope stretched just enough to land safely but the pull-down rope was several metres off the ground. Luckily I had anticipated this problem so I also had a ten metre rope which was enough to extend the pull-down rope. Back at home I measured the two ropes to be 49 m and 47 m.

We called in to the waterfall and Cephalopod Creek on the way out.

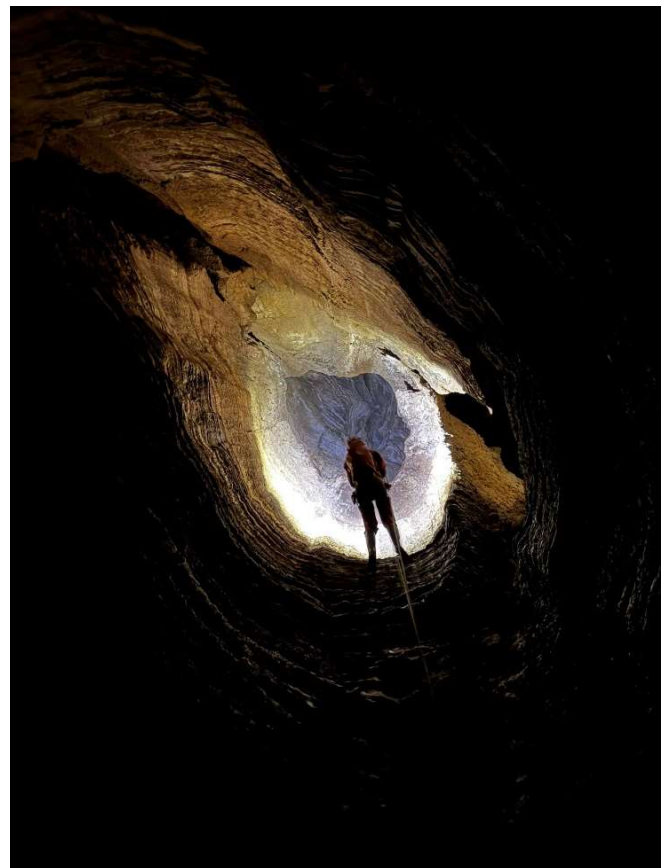


Photo: Alex Motyka

STC takes TASPOL 2024 SAR recruits caving

JF-4 Khazad Dum

18-19 June 2024

Janine McKinnon

Party: Karina Anders, Alan Jackson, Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney

A couple of years ago TASPOL SAR asked STC to take their new potential recruits caving. The plan was for us to see who was likely to be suitable to go underground in a real rescue. This was the first time we had been asked to participate in their recruit training, which they run every year or two, or maybe three... We chose Owl Pot - the first two pitches - and the trip was repeated morning session and afternoon session, over two days.

So this year we have been asked again (which is good). It has been suggested to us that Owl Pot is not politically suitable, so we chose the top part of KD instead. Yes, it involves spending forty minutes each way just walking, but the cave does have lots of different options for caving experiences. Balancing that, the new rules on how long they can be “working” have been enforced since the last time we did this. So we were asked to get them back to Hobart by 5 pm (!!!).

As a brief bit of background, these are all currently working police. They can apply from all areas of the force (I think!), so many/most are general duties, but they come from all over - one I spoke to was crime scene analyst. Some have only been in the force for a year or so, others many years. They apply, are initially vetted, the ones that pass the paperwork phase do the course, and if they make it through, they have practical tests on site at the end.



Photo: Janine McKinnon

There were about 22 recruits - similar to the numbers for last time - and so they were divided into two days. They did separate northern police from southern police, which was interesting in practical terms I found.

Day one was for the southern recruits. We STC bods drove up together and met the police in Maydena at 9 am, from whence we convoyed to the car park. The walk in was brisk – they have been on this course for four weeks already and are fit. The plan was to all visit

the same parts of the cave, but in two groups to limit delays. Karina and I had one group, Ric and Alan the other. They self-selected into these two groups, and we asked them to even out speed and perceived abilities in their choices.... which they didn't do (you will see how we knew at the end of the day). It was just like those old PE teaching days, when selecting teams for basketball (song reference - do you know which song?); teacher picks teams or students self-select, a mess both ways leading to life-long trauma for some.

Karina and I headed into the Serpentine first and went as far as the top of the first pitch. We had considered dropping that but the time constraints, and unknown nature of the SRT skills of our recruits, suggested that wasn't wise. This proved to be a good decision.

After returning from there we made our way down the 4 m pitch and over the traverse over P3 on the traditional route aiming for the top of P4 the “90 Footer”. As we traversed the traverse (!) we met the other group prusiking up the P3 drop. As we had wanted to add some vertical stuff to the experience we had added this as a “loop” – traverse/corkscrew climb, then back up pitch. The other group had managed to rig that, go to the 90 Footer, rig it and put two members down and up it, in the time we had done our Serpentine meander. Self-selected groups for “evenness” of speed and fitness did not seem to have been achieved.

They took a while to do the traverse as they found it a bit intimidating and tricky. We forget what we do in a normal day's caving. All made it across without drama though and down we went. None wanted to do the 90 Footer, so we re-traced and dropped the first pitch of the Wet Way in the main stream before exiting the cave. We arrived back at the surface precisely on the time calculated - 2:45 pm. The others had been a bit racier and had been waiting for 45 minutes or so.

Day two was rinse and repeat. Their two instructors were repeats too, so that made it a bit easier as they knew what to expect. We STC leaders stayed in the same caving pairs and repeated our routes. However these recruits were using different abseil devices with a prusik knot for “safety”. Slow doesn't do it justice. Glacial pops to mind. Even with two short abseils of 5 m each participants took 5-10 minutes to descend. They also managed to strip the sheath totally off the permanent rope at the Scaling Pole pitch. Luckily those were the only abseils we did. The 90 Footer was definitely out of the question! Both groups were of similar speed and just managed to fit the planned route into the time allocated, having not done the first pitch of The WET Way.

Whilst each trip was very slow, all coped well and none refused to do anything. It was a very intimidating experience for most as none had ever been underground before (tourist caves don't count). They really did well psychologically. However, none seemed to have found their next passion-hobby either.

JF-36 Growling Swallet: Numpty Mash Part 2

22 June 2024

Henry Garratt

Party: Karina Anders, Henry Garratt, Jemma Herbert

After Jemma and I tried and failed to climb these two climbs on Steve's previous dive trip (see above, p.11) we were heading back for a rematch. This climb is exciting because it is in a good location to bypass Coelacanth Sump and let us dry cavers help push the rockpile on the far side.

We'd returned with trad gear, and a functioning drill this time.



Jemma leading up the nice chimney. Photo: Henry Garratt

After making efficient time down to Living Fossils we proceeded to get thoroughly lost. Jemma and I thought we remembered the way but proved very wrong. After going too far we decided we'd ended up in Middle Age and it was time to retreat to the last marked survey station to consult the map.

Having lost significant time in living fossils we arrived at the base of the climb at 14:20. We made up for this by racking efficiently and were climbing at 14:30. After spending four hours on the climb we headed for the surface seeing us back at the cars around midnight.

The climbing itself was all free climbing in a chimney, following a crack that took hexes fairly well.

There are two 50 x 8 mm holes at a belay, bolts removed 10 m off the ground.

Then from here another 9 m up takes you to another double bolt belay, with two 40 x 8 mm Ramset Dynabolts. These have been left in place with mallions, as we abseiled off them.

Another 8 m above this is a single Dynabolt with a mallion on which Jemma was lowered off.

We didn't find the miraculous bypass to the Condor sumps we'd hoped, but I am still optimistic about the potential, one more trip....

It is regrettable that it was not rigged with an attempt at being retrievable with string, but it could be re-lead by a future climber with a number 2 and 3 hex and some 8 mm x 40 mm dynabolts.

It is interesting to note that this climb was first discovered by the Eberhard's back in 2013, they returned with Alan Jackson and climbing gear but wrote it off in the too hard CBF basket. We returned with youthful enthusiasm and optimism about a bypass to the sump spurred on by Steve's post-sump dry discoveries.

JF-10 Splash Pot

29 June 2024

Henry Garratt

Party: Henry Garratt, Jemma Herbert

Splash Pot is a cave near JF-4 Khazad Dum. It has a long and storied exploration history, and great potential with ongoing leads, including some BIG Aid climbs! Cool enough climbs to peak Jemma and my interests. However there is just one issue... Close to The Bone (CTTB). CTTB is a thought-provoking series of squeezes only about 100 m long, that take 1.5 hours to traverse with bags. The vertical nature of CTTB's cruxes make it deceptively easy to slip IN to the cave,

leaving the unsuspecting caver to wonder if they will be able to wriggle back up them.

We rigged the first pitch with a single 67 m rope, had some snacks and readied ourselves for Close To The Bone (CTTB).

Close To The Bone (CTTB) was interesting. It was not quite as terrible as we anticipated on the way down, but we were conscious of the number of gravity assisted manoeuvres we had performed. Jemma went first and did the bulk of the route-finding while I took up the rear and wrangled the bags. Jemma had an interesting time on the way down, getting her leg quite stuck in the diagonal rift climb squeeze, I offered encouragement and accidentally kicked her unhelmeted head a few times.

We arrived on the other side of CTTB proclaiming it not too bad and not knowing what the others had complained about....until we had to go back UP.

We headed down to the top of Harrow the Marrow to gawk at the pitch and oogle the aid traverse. Sufficiently stoked on the aid traverses' prospects we stashed the drill and headed out.

This aid climbing lead is intended to gain access to fossil passage on the far side of CTTB.

The whole cave was rigged down to the top of Harrow The Marrow, using all naturals except the two stainless bolts on Tend 'n' Down.

We were back at the cars at a respectable 6:30 pm having spent a lovely eight hours underground.



Henry enjoying his new favourite caving lunch, a big slab of chicken snitty

A Not-So-Short Easy Trip: LiDAR Target Exploration at Ida Bay

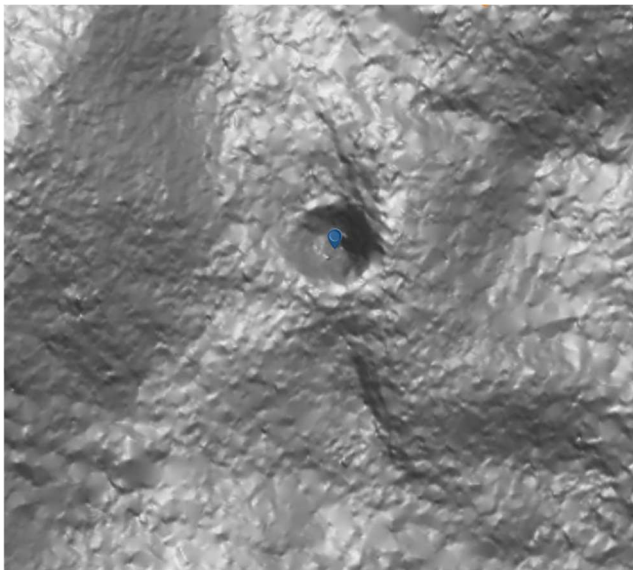
30 June 2024

Text and images: Michael Glazer

Party: Julia Glazer, Kellie Glazer, Michael Glazer, Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney

What was supposed to be a quick and easy surface trip to check out a LiDAR target at Ida Bay turned into an adventure that reminded us of the importance of trusting our instincts and having backup navigation methods.

Our team consisted of myself, my wife Kellie, our daughter Julia (who was learning to drive), and Ric and Janine. We kicked off at 10 am with Julia at the wheel, making our way to Ida Bay where we met up with Ric and Janine at the car park.



The goal.

The journey started innocently enough with a quick jaunt down a track before we branched off towards our target. The initial bush was open and easy to navigate, lulling us into a false sense of security. However, we soon found ourselves battling through solid cutting grass, which not only slowed our progress significantly but also left us with plenty of cuts to remember the trip by.



Ric looking for the next sink of dishes to wash

Escaping the grass, we thought we'd caught a break. That is, until we hit dense horizontal scrub. While it was technically an upgrade from the cutting grass (fewer cuts, at least), it was no picnic to traverse.

As we pushed on, our GPS showed we were making progress, with the distance to our target steadily decreasing. At 180 metres out, we hit a steep section and the landscape changed. We were still fighting through heavy bush, but now on an incline, forcing us to cut across the hillside.

Another GPS check showed 140 metres to go, but something felt off. It seemed like we'd covered much more ground than that. By this point, it was 1:20 pm and with winter's short days in mind, Janine wisely brought up the remaining daylight. I agreed and made the call to turn back.

Here's where things got interesting. As I checked our return bearing, I noticed our position on the GPS hadn't changed. Red flags went up immediately. Despite the app on my phone showing a Bluetooth connection, the GPS unit itself was reporting as disconnected. After a few fancy words being mumbled to myself, I closed the app and reconnected to the GPS. Lo and behold, we were about 300 metres past our target!

This was a stark reminder of why we always carry backup navigation tools. I pulled out my trusty Suunto compass to verify our direction and confirmed that the GPS was now back in action. As we traversed back down the hill, we ended up right on our target – about an hour later than planned.

The target turned out to be a fairly substantial doline, but despite our thorough search, we couldn't find any cave entrances.

At the end of the day, we accomplished our mission, but not without learning (or rather, re-learning) a valuable lesson: Don't blindly follow technology. Always have a backup and, most importantly, trust your instincts. When something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. While it wasn't the short, easy trip we'd anticipated, it was certainly a memorable one. And isn't that what caving is all about?

JF-207 Voltera: 'The Horse'

2 July 2024

Henry Garratt

Party: Steve Fordyce, Henry Garratt

Steve and I returned to the Mud Bath dig with varying levels of enthusiasm: Steve as optimistic as ever, and me ready to write it off and derig.

We took accurate rigging notes on the way down, Steve narrating into his GoPro, and left a bundle of Parsnips on the access line at The Pit.

We arrived at the dig relieved to find it had not sumped. There were signs of flow, the water had carved a channel of clean pebbles through the spoil pile and had washed silt into the first section of the dig. There was a small puddle of water and foam in the low point of the dig, but the mud was not particularly sloppy.



Henry in the dig. Photo: Stephen Fordyce

After two hours of digging, tagging in and out from the coal face and spoil moving duties, Steve was able to post himself through a horrible keyhole squeeze into the tantalising space on the other side. The open space was barely big enough to crawl, just roomy enough to go foetal position and turn around, luxury. Steve dug the squeeze from the far side until it was big enough for me to grovel through.

The next obstacle was a 30-degree downward sloping tight wriggle with a hard rock floor and ceiling. It looked desperate, the only diggable part was the mud bank on the right. The only viable digging technique was to take a fist full of mud and throw them back up hill into the bucket. Eventually this got too tight and not diggable. At this stage I was ready to write it off, my optimism and enthusiasm for improbably tight muddy horror having been expended.

Steve had felt with his feet that it got larger at floor level, so in a last-ditch effort he kicked the remaining 30 cm of mud down instead of up. This opened up a downward leading mud squeeze: the worst kind of sloppy sticky mud, where you can slide down by shoving yourself down assisted by gravity, but which takes significant effort to haul yourself back up.

Steve managed to get his lower legs dangling in space. I tagged back in and slowly submitted myself to the squeeze kicking with my gumboots. I got my thighs dangling in free space but was apprehensive about going further without having gone back up the hill. I clawed my way back up, using the hoe as an ice axe to gain traction. It felt like it was getting bigger, and maybe it would drop into a pitch: not the place you want to fall and need a rescue.

I set off back to the spoil pile for a nap. I was snuffling and coughing, unfortunately coming down with a nasty cold and I was exhausted.

My rest was interrupted by the enthusiastic yelling of Steve echoing up through the dig: “I’ve got walking passage!”

I was instantly excited and started grovelling my way in to join Steve in what had to be Master Cave!

While I’d been napping Steve had got through the mud squeeze into a 2 m x 2 m chamber, which lead to about 18 m of rift heading off to another dig: not quite Master

Cave, but definitely good. We named this new section of cave ‘The Horse’, as Voltera Rides again. Albeit briefly, you could fit a horse in that chamber!

The next dig is solid rock walls and roof with diggable dolerite cobbles in the floor. It looks a bit desperate, but so did the first one. Definitely worth another dig.

We headed back out, having spent five hours at the dig. Four hours to the surface carrying the pipes saw us returning to camp at the Voltera carpark around midnight.

Hairygoating (searching for JF-15 Hairygoat Hole)

3 July 2024

Text and photos mostly by Stephen Fordyce

Party: Liz Canning, Hugh Fitzgerald, Stephen Fordyce, Henry Garratt, Ciara Smart

After the previous hairygoating day (see SS459, p.29) drastically narrowed the search area by locating the cave-near-HGH in Peter Shaw’s photo, hopes were spectacularly high for finding Hairygoat Hole (a.k.a JF-15 or HGH). Recent hairygoaters Steve, Henry and Ciara were joined by veteran hairygoater Hugh (he was part of the Dave Rasch/Jeff Butt wave about 25 years ago) and his wife Liz. The cave was last seen in 1970 and each generation of cavers has another go and finding it again – this was the third trip of the latest attempt.

Spoiler alert: we didn’t find it. But we had a fun day out in cold but nice weather with good company doing useful stuff.

First we beelined to JF-500, and checked it against Peter’s photo. All agreed it was a highly probable match, and we took photos this time for armchair caving (full-res versions in the JF-500 folder of the archive). Taking that as our reference point, we all excitedly wandered about on the ridge above (search area roughly 150 m along the ridge, and 100 m wide), focussed mostly on the top and a bit on the NE side.

I got a bit too excited and made my goat noise almost immediately, having found JF-501. Oops. I was also apparently too excited to turn my GPS tracking on, so my wanderings on the NE side of the ridge weren’t recorded.

After some hours, we regrouped, somewhat crestfallen we hadn’t found HGH. But Hugh had found a doline with some outcrop and a diggable entrance that we got excited about (there was another less exciting one the other side of the doline). I didn’t believe him initially, but finally we established the cave beyond the dig had light in it, leading us to find JF-507. We used the map in the archive to find JF-506, and Ciara wandered a bit

further and found a new cave – a lame little dead-end shaft, but worthy of tag JF-789 and named “Bleating Hell”.



Henry demonstrates Bleating Hell, and wearing shorts like a good hairygoat

Some lunch was probably consumed, and some other punchlist items actioned. Hugh and Liz combed the ridge some more, while I headed around to look for JF-22 Stuck Hole. Henry and Ciara had already been over there and found the stupid little fern hole I was sure was it from last report, but they were sure it wasn’t, but I was still sure it was and they hadn’t checked properly. Some credibility points changed hands when I realised they were in fact right. I had another desperate look, figuring the GPS co-ordinate was probably wrong, but finally (with the loss of even more credibility points) I found the bugger. The GPS was a bit off but close enough, the hole was obscured from one side but obvious from the other. I put flagging tape on the closest tree to help the cause next time – I reckon it’s worth re-bottoming the cave at some point.



The best picture I got of JF-500, alongside Peter's pictures (the resemblance is better when you're actually there

I headed back up the ridge and found Hugh and Liz, we headed up to where the surface survey crosses the ridge near the contact, hoping to find the limestone cairn on a log noted by Dave Rasch (SS315, p.14) and the cairn sandwich later by Alan Jackson (SS377, p.11). We looked at a few fallen logs and wondered at the futility of trying to find a few rocks jammed between them. But then we stumbled on a likely candidate, and I bet the last of my credibility points on crawling inside to check – luckily there were rocks! Hugh got so excited that he made a triple-tape trees on either side.



Liz and Hugh (who wore his delightfully wacky hat) at the cairn sandwich

Meanwhile...

(Ciara) Henry and I separated from the others to investigate JF-788 London Bus. On the previous trip this had been partially explored. Henry rigged a 4 m pitch off a tree and I dropped down into a small chamber. I could see a 3 m drop down a rift. I chimneyed down this, and unsurprisingly, the cave

ended. It concluded in a small 2 x 2 m chamber littered with bones.



Limestone rocks in the sandwich between logs

On the way back to the others I spotted a tiny crack in the earth beside a limestone outcrop. I could feel it exhaling warm air. It looked highly improbable, but the earth was soft, and I could easily expand the opening. I could see a 1.5 m drop, then continuing passage, all of small dimensions.

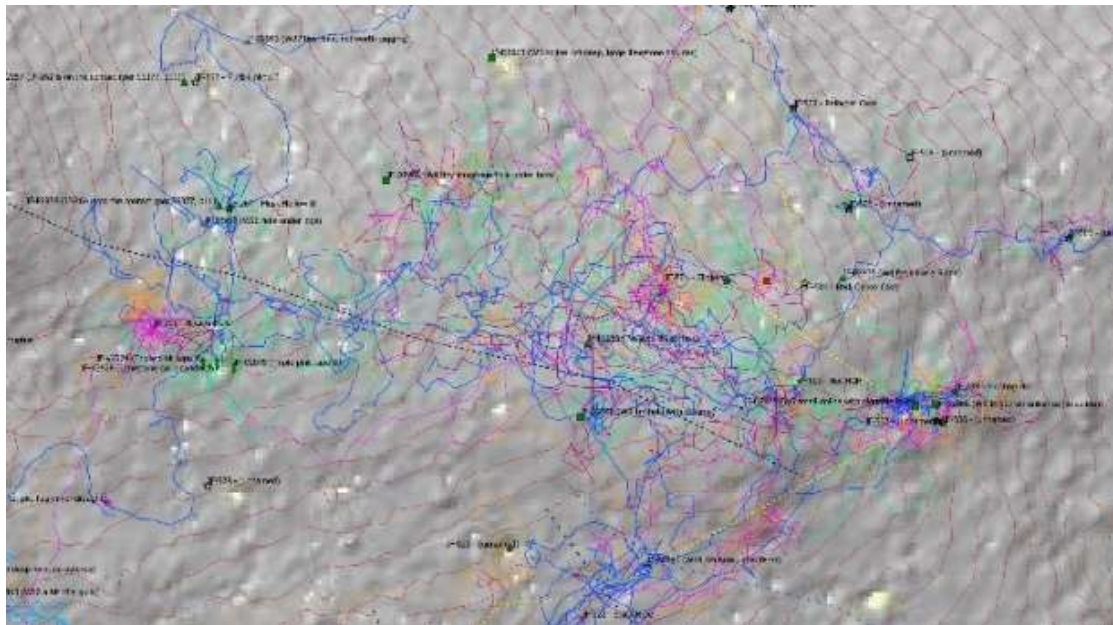
Henry and I spent about forty minutes digging it, enabling me to almost fit through the first constriction before we ran out of time. I wouldn't have bothered with this, but it was draughting outward significantly (on a cold day, in the middle of a record-breaking week-long high-pressure system). It needs more excavation. It was named 'Hircine Hole' for goat related reasons. It is tagged JF-790.



Henry demonstrates JF-500, youthful enthusiasm, and a beard fitting for a hairy goat

(Steve) JF-790 was close to the cairn sandwich, so we reconvened at the new cave and expressed varying levels of enthusiasm. Ciara and Henry were left enthusiastically digging, and the rest of us combed the ridge some more. Eventually, motivation started running low. Hugh and Liz headed back to the cars, the rest of us not long after. Ciara, Henry and I couldn't face the detour to tag the find from the previous trip (POI JF-F2954 in QGIS) but went via JF-502, JF-505, JF-503 and a couple of dolines on LIDAR that had outcrop but didn't do anything interesting.

When I crunched the data back home, we'd combed the ridge depressingly thoroughly, especially the prime search area. Worth doing the flanks better, and maybe going a bit higher, make sure we are above the contact. After that, hmmm. The low hanging fruit is nearly picked, and the next step might need to be boring systematic searches, probing the ground, or metal detecting for the tag (or Arthur's crowbar). Does anyone know any detectorists? At least the search area is small enough to make it viable, and I now have a very good feel for the area – might even re-read all the contemporary trip reports in case some new theory jumps out.



Crunched data

JF-2 Cauldron Pot

13 July 2024

Ciara Smart

Party: Karina Anders, Michael Glazer, Jemma Herbert, Janine McKinnon, Ciara Smart, Raelene Watson

This trip was conceived to scope out Cauldron Pot as a potential site for a rescue exercise later in the year. Karina and I had never visited this cave while Jemma had only visited in a period of very blurry vision

immediately after her laser eye surgery. New member Raelene Watson came along and did exceptionally well for someone on her fourth caving trip.

Jemma did an excellent job sorting the ropes by pitches ahead of time. Karina's delegation skills saw us each handed a neat load and appointed to a logical spot in the queue – very efficient! Jemma rigged the first pitch, and I headed down after her. This pitch lived up to the various photos I've seen online, it's a stunner. Bills Bypass wasn't quite as tight as I expected, but it was unexpectedly long, I can see that it would be annoying with big bags.

In the streamway proper we took turns leapfrogging each other to get the next few pitches rigged. The streamway was loud and splashy, but we could mostly stay dry on the way down. Janine reported that this was average water conditions - even low for winter.



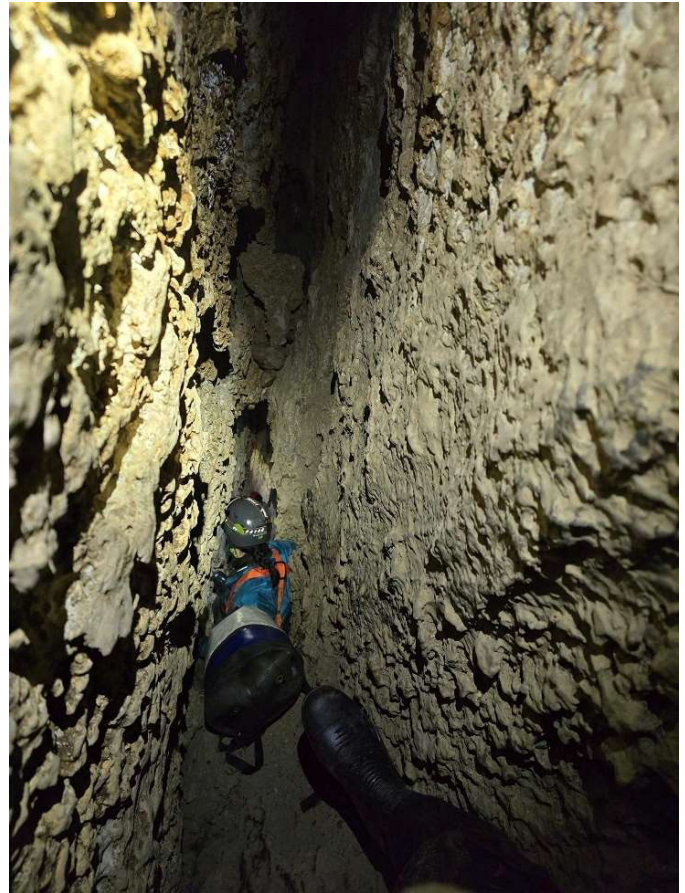
Photo: Michael Glazer

A bad time was averted when I noticed a damaged section of rope in the process of rigging a pitch. The damaged bit was easily isolated, but it's a good reminder to always check ropes before and after use. When rigging the top of Pitch 4, I discovered a corroded carabiner hanging off the bolt. I wonder who forgot this? I believe there may have been a few photography trips in the last three years, but alas I can locate no trip reports, so I don't know who to accuse of a sloppy derig! The nut on the rebelay for Pitch 3 also seemed a bit corroded and wouldn't tighten, but there was plenty of thread before it would pop off.

On the way down Michael pulled out his FCL (Friken Cave Laser) survey machine (see SS459, p.31) to test it in wet conditions. While the machine looked very functional, and the numbers on the screen looked practical and helpful, we were particularly impressed that Michael has managed to print a shark (with friken laser beams on its head) on the device itself.

To conserve time and energy, Michael, Rae and Janine did not descend the final big pitch before the big chamber. I was impressed by the size of this chamber,

and its relative quietness compared to the streamway. We didn't bother with the Au Cheval Pitch, but it would be nice to see the remainder of the cave, it seems disappointing that it doesn't humanly connect to a bigger system!



Bills Bypass. Photo: Michael Glazer

On the way back up we all got thoroughly soaked ascending through the water. Happily, we did not have to derig as another trip is planned in a fortnight. We caught up with the others at the top pitch and we were on the surface in the last dregs of daylight.

Having experienced Cauldron Pot in winter conditions we agreed that it is unsuitable for a major rescue exercise. The exposure to cold water is too great, and the first pitch is too challenging for cavers with minimal SRT experience. But it's a very nice cave, would recommend.

JF-36 Growling Swallet

14th July.

Jemma Herbert

Party: Karina Anders, Jemma Herbert, Alan Jackson

We've been scoping out options for where to run this year's rescue exercise. I thought Cauldron Pot would be fun and hard. Alan thought Cauldron Pot was a

terrible idea. After visiting Cauldron on Saturday I was forced to agree.

So on Sunday, I, Alan and Karina went to scope out Growling Swallet instead. It will be much better, there's plenty to do in there, including lots of interesting stuff that's been done before and lots of new and tricky stuff. Windy Rift might be too hard without some kabooms, but we can skip that.

JF-761 Delta Variant**15 July 2024**

Henry Garratt

Party: Henry Garratt, Sarah Haas

Sarah is a keen climber and wanted to join the dark side. What better trip for a climber who wants to ascend ropes as much as possible than a 163 m waterfall pitch? We headed into Delta Variant on a day when Maydena was forecast 50 mm of rain.

We replaced the aluminium hardware on the tyrolean, that had been there for over a year. Poor practice, but it didn't break which was good. I slid over thinking light thoughts whilst on belay from Sarah, with a rescue plan in place with her ready to haul me back up on the lead

line redirected up through a high pulley. Sarah zipped across the tyrolean and poked her nose into Ken Behrens Corridor, before we headed for the pitch.

Daily Cases was exciting, spectacularly loud, and wet. We made it down to Close Contact, had a look and decided it would be very scary to climb up or down with that much water. We had cheesecake for lunch and headed for home. To further compliment her caving training I made Sarah carry a heavy bag of Magic Beanstalk detritus out [*ed. the infamous bag hauling system*].

It is good to note that this is not an average beginner trip. While yes it was Sarah's first time caving, she had practised her SRT skills above ground a lot. And she was already a very competent climber.

JF-10 Splash Pot**21 July 2024**

Henry Garratt

Party: Henry Garratt, Jemma Herbert

Having rigged the cave it was time to head back and start traversing across the top of Harrow the Marrow.

We headed down Close to The Bone (CTTB) with three bags between us, with a heavy load of ropes and climbing gear. After the first nasty bit of CTTB we ditched the 40 m static, only carrying the 80 m static to the pitch. The intention was to carry enough rope to drop the pitch and climb, but enthusiasm soon waned as our bodies contorted through the tight thrutchy menace.

The actual climb itself across the top of Harrow the Marrow is quite nice, easy bolting across good quality gently overhanging limestone. Jemma set off placing 40 x 8 mm Dynabolts interspersed with shallow 8 mm bat hooks.

Jemma had been inadvertently sandbagged by my provision of a rather slippery adjustable daisy chain. It turns out the abrasive nature of the muddy rope over a

few cave pitches has eaten through the aluminium cam of the daisy chain and was making it extra easy to lower out under tension.

The bolt traverse was largely uneventful apart from Jemma taking a rather large whipper when a bat hook ripped. I happened to be belaying hands free at the time, eating chocolate with the belay device tied off. I was very rudely yanked tight on the rope as I heard Jemma yell as she took a free rope swing.

We've traversed 18 m to the left from the pitch head. The climb is ongoing, but the far side belay is 2 m above a ledge that will aid sideways progression. A Tyrolean is rigged using an 80 m static rope across the drop. It is rigged on 3 x 8 mm stainless steel through-bolts on either side: with all stainless-steel hardware on the far side, but all aluminium locking carabiners on the home side.

Our intention is to traverse along the top of the pitch, and then abseil down the far side so as to rap into the fossil passage on the far side.

CTTB was markedly awful in the up direction with heavy bags. But you should definitely come on the derig trip! It's a good cave! The straws are pretty!

JF-2 Cauldron Pot**27 July 2024**

Alan Jackson

Party: Adrian Hills, Alan Jackson, David Rueda-Roca

Another party had conveniently rigged the cave a week or so before, so we didn't have to suffer carting lots of crap down the cave, but did have the task of carting it in the other direction.

It had rained a lot since the previous trip and things were all a bit wet and sporty on the various pitches. It was the first time I'd made it all the way down this cave and I'd taken the 'I'll just follow the rope' mentality

which was fine until I failed to notice the rope for a sketchy climb above the last big pitch had been coiled neatly on a ledge to protect it from water damage. It was quite an exciting freeclimb in high water! Ah well – no one died.

We sniffed around the bottom chamber to see if we could find the way on to Au Cheval pitch or whatever it is called. We found a few base level streams and shot up various grotty side passages but didn't find it. Whatever.

Out was a bit in your face. David's chest harness failure in the middle of a wet pitch was entertaining for him. Bills Bypass is a prick; it disintegrated David's Raumer

Handy breaking crab on the way down (gate pinged out) but we found it on the way out and repaired it the following day. The arse in David's suit will need repairing, too ...

Part of the reason for the trip was to eyeball the bolts in this cave and see if there's a case to put in P-hangers. It's a mix of nice 8 mm stainless steel expansion bolts with permanent hangers, a few Loxin eyebolts from the 1970s, two recent concrete screws (for a handline in

Bills Bypass) and some galvanised/mild steel 8 mm expansion bolts with permanent hangers. The latter are a concern (they're rusting away happily). The Loxins seem as bombproof as ever but are generally placed poorly for SRT (too low). There are quite a few single bolts where prudence suggests two would be better. Not an urgent priority, but this cave could do with a safety upgrade on the bolting front. Volunteers needed to drag heavy crap through Bills Bypass, please.

IB-11 Midnight Hole

27 July 2024

Ashlee Bastiaansen.

Party: Ashlee Bastiaansen, Michael Glazer, John Oxley

The adventure begins with a lovely stroll through the forest, stopping to look at the reminders of past logging and mining in the area. Crossing the low but steadily flowing Mystery Creek we had been lulled into a false sense of security before we came to the uphill trek to the entrance of the cave.

Nerves were high as I was gearing up for my first entrance into a cave, guided by my fellow experienced cavers. All nerves quickly disappeared and were replaced with nothing by joy and bewilderment at the beauty of being inside a mountain.

We abseiled our way through the cave, greeting our friend the echidna on the third pitch down, who was still holding itself together despite how long it had been in the cave.

Venturing out of the cave we took the time to turn our lights off to witness the soft glow of worms and Michael showed us his hidden collection of seashell fossils at the entrance. Great cave, great party, great experience.



Photo: John Oxley

JF-237 Niggly Cave

“Monster Mash” (4 day camping trip)

25-28 July 2024

Text and photos probably by Stephen Fordyce unless otherwise credited

Party: Karina Anders, Stephen Fordyce, Henry Garratt, Jemma Herbert, Brendan Moore, Ciara Smart

Introduction

(Steve) With a break required from the horrors of 4 am post-Growling bed-times, what better thing than a winter Niggly trip?! It was a productive and exciting trip, and fun was even had – helped by Brendan Moore joining the team for his first Niggly camping experience with the theme song being “Monster Mash”. Water stayed conveniently frozen in the catchment, and water levels in Mother of God were only just above gumboot depth. While the much-anticipated Temple of Doom pitch connected into

Sliding Doors (bringing the most remote point of the cave back under 3 km), Butterfly Effect was pushed to large parallel streamway, and there was much rejoicing at this potentially monumental breakthrough. The Magic Beanstalk was fully derigged and removed (sigh), Vaccine Strollout was mostly de-rigged and the cursed Biohazard traverse was de-rigged also. Seaweed Bag was finally surveyed, and fortunately could be more or less written off.

Day 1: Team Early Bird enter, and have a sobering experience

(Steve/Henry/Ciara/Brendan)

(Brendan) Brendan enjoyed his first entry from Negative RAT Hole, glad to escape the clutches of the Test Station Queue, so nice he did it twice (carrying Beanstalk parts with Ciara), before enjoying the descent beyond the familiar territory of party whistle room and past Mount Niggly before the group retired for the night at The Dunes.



Team Early Bird. Photo: Henry Garratt

(Henry) After various attempts at making it functional it was time to de-rig the Magic Beanstalk for good. The plan was for me to head down Daily Cases without a bag and cut the lines free at the bottom while Ciara and Brendan carried a load of stuff out to the surface. I'd then ascend back up and help with derigging at the top.

All was going well until the Magic Beanstalk tried to kill me for the second time. On a previous trip a falling rock nearly smote me while I was at the bottom, this time I'd have a brown trouser moment at the top of the pitch. There was a diving lift bag positioned over at the opening to the waterfall to feed the beanstalk. I was headed over to de-rig it. Steve had told me "Don't derig the access line over to the waterfall, as we might need to get there in future, but you can head over and retrieve the lift bag if you want."

As I was ascending the pitch I saw the "access line". A loop of static rope stretching down and up to the waterfall. I did some straightforward jiggery pokery and got onto the access line with my stop, descending into the loop then transitioning to ascending up the other side. I arrived at the yellow lifting bag and began to look at how to derig it. At this point I saw what the rope I was on was attached to... a single concrete screw that was extremely rusty from its position in the water. With the rope tied in by being poked through the hanger and a double barrel knot jammed on the other side... NOT kosher SRT rigging at all.

I began cursing Steve and assessing my options for retreat. There was a second concrete screw in the floor

in the water, even more rusty than the one I was initially on, it was not tied to the "access line". I roughly tied that screw into the rope with what tat I had available at some attempt to equalise myself onto two suboptimal points and thought light thoughts as I gingerly descended then reascended back to the safety of properly rigged SRT ropes on the home side.

To my utter horror when I arrived back on the home side, I found this "access line" was rigged equally terrifyingly. It was a Figure 8 on a bight clipped through a stainless-steel snap gate... positioned to be cross loading the biner terribly and looking like it was begging to unclip itself from the snap gate. The snap gate was connected to a 6 mm concrete screw that was tied to a second concrete screw with a section of red rope tied with a barrel knot jamming in the second hanger.

This incident is a good example of complacency in SRT technique, both on my behalf for not inspecting the anchors before I jumped on the rope and for Steve for rigging it. I confronted Steve about it when I got back to the top, rather grumpy with him. He explained that it was never intended to be life support and instead expected the user to use it as a "handline" to "pull themselves in" while descending on abseil on a separate rope. That separate rope I had derigged on a previous trip (see SS430, p.22).

It is my opinion that it is very poor practice to rig something with rated rope that looks legit in a half assed way: especially in the context of a pitch which is rigged for commuting, and with so much going on as with the Beanstalk. Had that line been rigged with say Telstra rope rather than static rope I would not have gotten on it. But it looked at first glance like a loosey goosy tyrolean as we've had installed on Vaccine Strollout and at Splash Pot. He had not foreseen someone would be accessing the waterfall from below, and not foreseen someone using it as a rope for SRT.

On abseil it is apparently more intuitive to pull yourself across with it. It is poor practice that I did not inspect the rope system before I jumped on it: especially poor I didn't notice the home side was rigged cross loading a single snap gate. I did have a look at the rope briefly before I got on it, saw a static rope stretching from two concrete screws above the rebelay I was at, over to the yellow bag. Initially it looked ok. There was too much assorted clutter on the anchors to see well. But in future I will be wanting to get a good look at those two screws before committing to them. It is not uncommon for concrete screws to loosen themselves as people use them, not inspecting an anchor well might kill you that way, not just by poor rigging.

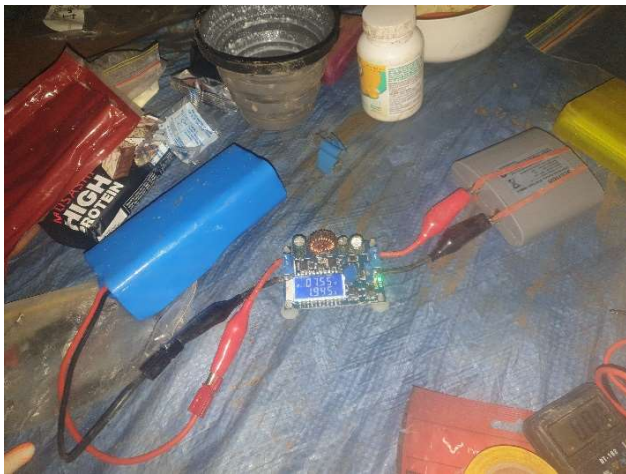
(Steve) Guilty as charged – sorry Henry! The horizontal rope facilitates an easy swing across while on the pitch rope (with bottom untied from anchor below), or the separate rope hanging from nearby independent anchors.

It was so obvious to me that I didn't consider someone might use the rig differently, that's a good lesson for me and for everyone. It also illustrates how things can slip through the cracks, I.e.

- I'm an experienced and I would like to think conscientious rigger, leader and known overthinker
- Henry soaks up technical stuff like a sponge, and is fast becoming a rigging expert
- A bunch of competent people have been past in the two years it was in place

Food for thought. Best practice even when it seems silly, and a healthy dose of distrust in all rigging could save a lot of bother.

(Steve) While the others were doing their Stage 1 missions, I spent about two hours working on the Negative RAT Hole entrance and pitch. Joining the others at Superspreader Junction, Henry and I went out along Vaccine Strollout and set up camp, one each side of the tyrolean. With the two of us safely ensconced and not knocking off any rocks, Ciara and Brendan went below us down Daily Cases while we reconfigured rigging and placed through-bolts. We'd agreed on a 3-syllable call when they were clear of the drop zone – it was fortunate the actual words couldn't be heard...



Scurion battery recharging and general camp carnage

I was on the far side and did my work first, replacing two of the concrete screws with stainless through-bolts (and removing the third) and rigging for retrieval of the rope. We had already passed a loop of orange string across, so when I finished rigging, I clipped everything onto the main rope, and Henry hauled it across to where he was on the home side using the orange string. He also replaced two of the concrete screws with stainless through-bolts, then retreated. We'd been faffing for a long time and decided to retrieve the last traverse to the tyrolean on the way out (perhaps unsurprisingly, this didn't happen). It will need a bit of reconfiguration of the home-side tyrolean anchors, but the orange string

loop is in place as are the SS through-bolts (no drill needed).



Sending the drill across the tyrolean

The saggy down-then-up rope worked well-enough and I gained the home side of the traverse and retrieved the rope without too much tangling, and leaving the continuous loop of orange string. I dictated rigging notes into the GoPro and will publish complete rigging notes when it's fully de-rigged next time.

Henry and I proceeded to camp in good time, arriving about 8 pm having spent a bit more time than anticipated on all the productivity.

Day 2: Team Early Bird goes to Breakfast Jelly

(Brendan) Whilst awaiting the sunrise, coffee and various gourmet-and-not-so-gourmet breakfast options were savoured, still clad in the comfort of sleeping bags. With great effort, Team Early Bird embarked on their commute downstream, where Brendan marvelled at the acoustics at Mother of God, before the team enjoyed the Meru rockpile for what may turn out to be the last time and extended the roped egress from the Biohazard Traverse. After a quick look at Temple of Doom, Henry and Brendan checked Seaweed Bag (not getting to the end) and nearby leads with no further progress but lots of glorious mud (7/10), whilst Ciara and Steve played with rigging.

(Ciara) Six months after discovering an undescended pitch at the far end of Breakfast Jelly, today we were set to drop it. We had high hopes that this pitch might lead to a possible connection into fossil passage or perhaps a parallel streamway.

It took several hours to get to the far end of Breakfast Jelly from camp, including crossing the messy Biohazard traverse/pitch. We ditched our packs in the big chamber just before Temple of Doom and then crawled over to check out the undescended pitch. Leaning over the edge, Steve started laughing manically; he could clearly see the footprints at the bottom of the pitch which myself, Petr, Karina and Jemma had all overlooked.

To our great disappointment, this was not an amazing new pitch into big passage, but rather a pitch that would take us straight into Sliding Doors! The survey gap was 17 m, an annoyingly large error! We figured we'd rig the pitch anyway, because it would create a much faster route into the Breakfast Jelly area, rather than going via the annoying Biohazard pitch.



POV (while laughing maniacally) and a rare moment of Ciara being spectacularly unphotogenic

Disappointed, we had lunch in the big chamber before Henry and Brendan scarpered off to check out Seaweed Bag. Rigging the pitch was awkward, and I got tired quickly. Steve finished it off with a rebelay in the ceiling, and one rebelay part-way down. By this point the others had rejoined us, defeated by Seaweed Bag's muddy squeezes, and we all rapped into Sliding Doors.



Ciara demonstrates her sick sketching ability

On the way back we continued the resurvey of Mother of God. Henry is learning the intricacies of sketching, so he sketched alongside me with Steve on instrument and Brendan on point. Although Mother of God is a delight to sketch, we were all freezing and knackered, turning the survey into a bit of a chore. Henry had to bail at the final corner as he was shaking too violently to hold a pencil. Back at camp, Henry's sketches were

pronounced to be highly acceptable, but he does need to work on his handwriting!

(Henry) It was time for me to learn some sick new surveying skills. We are resurveying and re-sketching Mother of God - it is some truly awesome big river passage. It was a good introduction to sketching, but I got very cold, and my sketches steadily decreased in quality as we progressed. We got it done, and Ciara consistently produced amazing sketches. I have newfound appreciation of Ciara's sketching ability.

Day 2: Team Night Owl joins the party (Karina, Jemma)

(Jemma) Karina and I didn't want to blow a valuable day of leave. We figured we could just nip into camp after work on Friday night. Apparently it's been done before, with mixed success. We were determined to be at camp by bedtime at 10:00 pm. We left straight from work at 4 pm. It was raining and dark as we walked up the hill. We must have walked down that hill in the dark at least twenty times between us, but somehow going up in the dark was different and we wandered off track numerous times.

Psych was dwindling by the time we got to the entrance, peeled off our sopping clothes and kitted up. It was almost 8, which is awfully close to my bedtime, and it'd been a particularly slow walk up the hill. But we figured that by this point it was actually less time and effort to get to camp in the cave than to turn around and go home.

Spirits picked up as we bombed it down RAT Hole and Superspreader, using the human pinball technique - just point yourself downhill and bounce off the walls wherever you happen to hit. Not great for trog suit longevity but real fast and easy. From the top of Daily Cases we said "see ya at the bottom" and reconvened at base level maybe an hour later. From there it's a half hour jaunt into camp, where we arrived around 9:45 pm, less than 2 hrs from surface to camp. It was great to find the others at camp, already cosy in their sleeping bags and frothing on the day's discoveries.



Team cohesion extended to the licking of mud off each other's lights

Day 3a: Team Early Bird Minus Steve (Eventually) Have A Grand Adventure In Butterfly Effect

(Ciara) Henry, Brendan and I split from the others at the junction to Sliding Doors. We headed off to find the start of Butterfly Effect. Butterfly Effect is a short, clean-washed passage. It sits adjacent to Meru, which is the impenetrable rockpile at the end of the known master cave. Butterfly Effect ends in a good lead identified by Steve and Henry in January 2023 and worked on by Petr the same trip (SS454, p.6). I had visited it with Henry and Steve in January 2024 (SS459, p.5) and we were hopeful that we might be able to use Butterfly Effect to bypass Meru.

Unfortunately, we struggled to find it. Initially, we correctly identified the passage which is marked by a double line of rocks. However the passage appeared to sump, and we didn't investigate it properly as neither Henry nor I remembered any water here. Instead, convinced we were wrong, and the rocks were in fact an anti-cairn, we headed back into the Meru rockpile. We thrashed around in desperation for another ninety minutes. We went as far as the Never Never Sump before retracing our steps. I'm confident saying there are no other leads on the south wall of the Meru rockpile between the Never Never Sump and Butterfly Effect. Eventually we realised we were right the first time, and headed through the low, muddy sump, that in fact was only a winter puddle (it was dry in summer).

Butterfly Effect has a good exhaling draught, but terminates in a small, messy rockpile. At the edge of the rockpile is a tight, 2 m shaft between the boulders, with a cobble floor visible from above. When I visited earlier in the year I had pronounced this squeeze too loose to attempt without rectification. I'm not sure what's changed for me in the six months since, but this time the squeeze didn't look so bad. Perhaps it was the fact I could see foam at the bottom, confirming the theory that this is a flood overflow.



These three had a grand adventure

We had planned to use a pulley system to shift some of the boulders in the squeeze, but upon inspection, we realised this would be very difficult. The boulders were

all very large and tightly wedged. The roof, floor, and walls were also boulders, meaning there was no place for a solid anchor. Master plan defeated, Henry opted for brute force, using the drill and hammer to chip off the sharpest corner of the most protruding rock in the middle of the squeeze. This worked surprisingly well. After Henry removed about 10 cm of corner, I was cold enough to pronounce it good enough. It looked marginal, but with the drill there, I figured Henry and Brendan would be able to MacGyver some sort of rescue system if I couldn't get back up by myself. The squeeze was challenging, but not horrific, but there's always the psychological factor of being the first person through an exploratory squeeze. The hardest bit was passing my shoulders through. The difficulty of the vertical squeeze was increased by the fact the passage floor immediately turned into a tight horizontal tunnel at a right angle to the squeeze.



Ciara's shoulders are not large as you can see from this picture

I got through, and raced off down the tunnel to check if the others should bother attempting the squeeze. I say 'raced,' but there's only so fast you can grovel on your stomach. To my delight, it went, with a healthy draught. To my dismay, it was clearly not going to be barrelling passage. I could see fresh flood debris scattered through the passage. This was exciting, it was clearly a flood overflow.

Back at the squeeze we passed just one cave pack through with the survey kit and a bit of emergency gear, there was no way we'd want three packs to manage here. Brendan then attempted the squeeze, but he couldn't quite get his shoulders through. He retreated and Henry got through with a bit of effort. I was wary of encouraging Brendan through a challenging downwards squeeze in new section of cave.

After some discussion, we reluctantly agreed to leave Brendan behind with the drill, but on the last attempt, he made it through.



Brendan in the Weightwatchers Squeeze. Photo: Henry Garratt

The first ten metres after the squeeze were decidedly average, requiring crawling through a tight, right-angled slot in a puddle. We started surveying in a small chamber, leaving a flagged survey station high on the left. There was no way to get the marked survey stations above the flood level here. Unfortunately, we didn't tie the survey back into Butterfly Effect properly - too hard basket for a cold push trip.

The caving was unpleasant. It was all snaggy crawling passage, interspersed with the occasional deep puddle. Things took a turn for the worse as Brendan was manoeuvring through a particularly deep puddle in a passage that was about 1.2 m high and 1 m wide. He bumped a large boulder which fell out of the roof onto his hip, pinning him down. He yelled for help and Henry dropped the Disto and raced in, grabbing the boulder and preventing it from forcing Brendan any further downwards into the water. With great effort, Henry was able to hold the boulder off Brendan who was able to wriggle backwards to safety. Amazingly, Brendan was fine. I'd say the boulder was about 100 kg, maybe more. It was at the limits of Henry's lifting abilities. It was a scary moment and a sobering reminder of the reality of pushing new passage.

We were all a bit shaken, and we had some serious discussions about whether to proceed any further. The boulder had stabilised against the passage wall, so we could safely pass it, but we were going to have to grovel through a deep pool of water. We were all cold already, and very far from home. Lured on by the

promise of master cave (Henry was certain he could smell it), we decided to proceed... gingerly.

After more crawling, we broke out into a larger chamber of 'living room' sized proportions. Here, the character of the cave changed. We could walk (!) on a higher mud level above the cobble floor. By this point we were freezing, and I had lost enthusiasm for the sketch, so I called the survey to an end and left a marked survey station (BCH10) at a cairn. From here, we would indulge in survey-free pushing.



Henry's newly acquired manly beard was instrumental in lifting the rock off Brendan (and also useful for wiping dirty hands on). Photo: Henry Garratt

A little further on, we heard the thing that cavers dream of - the low rumble of a major stream (or perhaps a flood pulse coming our way). To our delight, after one final crawl, we broke out into a major passage. In front lay what appeared to be a spacious sump, and through a window to the right we discovered a major streamway! While Brendan was investigating the sump like a good sump diver (it turned out not to be a sump at all), Henry and I clambered into the streamway.

We were a bit too cold and battered to take it in properly, but this was a big moment. Conveniently, the phone died at this exact point, so you'll have to take our word for it. The streamway was taking a very large amount of water, I'd estimate it to be carrying the same amount of water as the Mother of God section of master cave (in winter conditions). In relation to us, the stream was flowing from right to left. The streamway was about 4 m wide, maybe more, and I could see about 10 m upstream, and 10 m downstream. Unfortunately, the ceiling was rockpile, but it was much more open than the Meru rockpile. The ceiling was about 2 m high, more or less. Upstream looked a little friendlier, so I ventured enough to see that the passage was going, although some manoeuvring through rockpiles would be required.

Downstream was also going, but again, manoeuvring through rockpile would be required. After the earlier incident with the boulder, I wasn't keen to press my luck any further, and by this point we were all on the edge of being stupidly cold.

I confess that my initial response was one of disappointment; if this was master cave it was annoyingly rockpiley. But the direction of the flow didn't make any sense. After thinking about it, I realised that this was probably not master cave, but rather the long-theorised convergence with any of a number of other possible caves, probably Boulder Jenga. There are a few caves which must join the master cave somewhere beyond the Meru rockpile. If this is correct, then we should be able to follow the stream straight into the master cave. Simple, surely?!



Henry took this excellent picture of Ciara looking cold and battered, with bonus points for someone having a wee in the background. Photo: Henry Garratt

The survey data later revealed that we had indeed pushed just past the border of the Meru rockpile, so the Boulder Jenga theory could hold water. Perhaps, just perhaps, we've made the biggest breakthrough of the project in years, but I hope the whole thing isn't rockpile. Streamway convergences tend to create rockpiles, but with luck this one won't be too long, and we'll hit solid streamway passage quickly (wishful thinking perhaps). As usual, although we pushed it, Steve was the one who suggested this was a worthy lead. But project caving works best as a team obsession I suppose, and it's best to be generous about building on the work of others (thank god the Eberhards missed this one). We'd made this breakthrough on the third

visit to Butterfly Effect, showing the importance of not writing something off prematurely.

The return to camp was uneventful, but it did take a long time for us all to negotiate the squeeze. Brendan lost his belt in the process, so it's in the rocks somewhere. We got back to camp about 1.5 hours late, completely shattered. Somewhere along the way I'd managed to spectacularly rip the arse out of my suit and spent the evening sewing it up with dental floss. The stitching lasted all of two minutes the next day.



Unfortunately, Ciara's suit repair skills weren't as good as her surveying skills

After the trip, we decided to call the streamway 'Chrysalis Streamway.' This ties in thematically with Butterfly Effect, and hopefully is the precursor to prettier and grander things. The tight passage between Butterfly Effect and Chrysalis Streamway is called 'Heavy Lifting,' as a nod to Henry's Hulk manoeuvrer with the boulder, and the failed attempt to lift boulders out of the squeeze. The squeeze at the start of Heavy Lifting is called the 'Weightwatchers Squeeze'. I can't wait to push Chrysalis Streamway, even if I'm a bit terrified of falling rocks. The push will have to wait until summer though, it's too wet and hard. It's also a long way from camp now, so if it goes, it may be necessary to relocate camp. The next chapter awaits.

Day 3b: Team Night Owl Plus Steve Tackle Seaweed Bag

(Jemma) Karina, Steve and I set our day's mission to survey and push Seaweed Bag. Seaweed Bag is a passage Bo and I found a year or so ago after the aid climb through Biohazard.

It branches off the delightful Breakfast Jelly passage, but is not at all delightful. It is narrow, very muddy and very very slippery. Last time we were there I couldn't get up a 2 m climb in a perfect chimney width passage, despite a good number of attempts. I absolutely love chimneys, but it was just soooo slippery. Bo has mad mud-fu skills and got a little further by himself but turned around at a rockpile.



Surveying and mud-encrusted stals near the start of Seaweed Bag

Whilst it was very disappointing to hear that our exciting lead into the Temple of Doom actually just joined into Sliding Doors, the upside was that it makes for a waaaaay easier approach to Seaweed Bag. This much easier approach was essential in order to arrive at Seaweed Bag with enough energy to mud wrestle our way out there and enough motivation to survey back.

It turned out that energy and motivation were all it required, and it wasn't quite as horrible as I'd remembered. With some teamwork, a mud-axe (aka. mini crowbar) and a good amount of giggling we made it to Bo's rockpile.



"Karina just squatted me!"

It seemed pretty terminal at the low level and the mid level. There was a small chance it'd go at the high level but Steve and I wrote it off as requiring an easy but too-consequential climb to get to. Whilst we lamented at how shit it was going to be to come back here with a rope to protect the exposed climb, Karina pointed out a

hole in the ceiling. Steve and I thought it was too small but Karina was keen to have a go. With the aid of a human step ladder and a few interesting noises, she was up there in no time. Eventually we all wriggled on up and found it doesn't go. Maybe with some Petr level brave and determined crow barring it could go a tiny bit further, but not promising. A modest draught seemed to be going away from us into the rockpile.



Screenshot from video of the final rockpile - "Petr would eat this for breakfast"

We surveyed out, making full creative use of the 360-degree canvas of mud for marking survey stations. We were all glad to be done with that nonsense and never return. Afterwards we went out the old way so we could derig the giant traverse across Biohazard.

(Steve) Having vowed yesterday never to return to Biohazard (as we could now access Breakfast Jelly via Sliding Doors, much preferable to negotiating the Meru rockpile), it ironically seemed like a good idea to exit that way, and de-rig as we went. The new pair of concrete screws installed higher up on the Breakfast Jelly side rendered the two intermediate single anchors obsolete, so they were removed – giving a straight shot diagonally down from the new pair of anchors to the pair that Bo & Jemma originally placed. From those, we did the traverse across to Biohazard, removed all the hardware on the Biohazard side, and threw the rope down (the end was in sight, well short of the bottom). Holes were parsnipped, rigging notes for Biohazard Sump pitch as published SS459, p.12 are unchanged.

We exited Biohazard via the Meru rockpile and vowed again that it would be the last time. The Breakfast Jelly side was left rigged as I anticipated visiting the sump again in the future – hopefully the Chrysalis Streamway will make this unnecessary though. After a comprehensive wash back in the main stream, it seemed a bit early (about 4:30 pm) to go back and I suggested a fifteen minute return detour to Butterfly Effect to see what was going on. Ok, maybe twenty minutes return. Karina and Jemma took a surprisingly small amount of convincing! But then self-control (and a bit of old age softness?) kicked in and it all seemed a bit pointless, especially when the others were probably waiting for us back at camp.



Karina – do not mess with

So I wussed out and we headed back (possibly for the first time ever arriving at camp before my promised time of 6 pm), noting that the pre-arranged signal (a muesli bar wrapper left in the direction of travel) was missing, and eventually accepting that the others were in fact still back there behind us, either doing something exciting or inefficient (or both). We got warm, changed, had naps and dinner and got the camera ready for return of the heroic explorers.



*Mid-way through the process of getting changed.
Photo: Henry Garratt*

Day 3c: Entertainment

(Karina) The fortune cookie this morning quoted “The one you love will give you a nice surprise”. We understood the one you love to be the cave and it proved to be correct, not in team Karina/Jemma/Steve but in team Ciara/Henry/Brendan with their breakthrough in Butterfly Effect. You could also argue it held some truth in team Karina/Jemma/Steve’s day,

as Seaweed Bag didn’t go which resulted in a short day in Seaweed Bag (to Karina’s delight) and resulted in us being able to do a few other things (to Steve’s great pleasure) while still getting back at a reasonable time to have a movie night (of course the most important part of the whole trip).



The fortune cookie was a fortunate one

We watched *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, hot chocolates and popcorn were made and I think four of the six of us fell asleep during the movie, so it must have been good!

Day 4a: Team Night Owl exit

(Karina) Jemma and I did our usual thing of getting out early. I’m learning the route through the rock pile and only took one wrong turn... I think. We collected some gear from the top of Daily Cases (from the dissembled Bean Stalk) on our way out. Getting out of the Negative RAT Hole exit proved to be somewhat more challenging without a third person, especially when that third person is Petr. We had one person at the bottom attaching the bags to the rope and another at the top of the pitch collecting the bags. Without a third person hauling the bags out of the narrow and twisty exit, it was rather a scramble of bags and people climbing over each other and resulted in me dropping my bag down the pitch and having to go down and collect it again. Luckily the poo tubes are very durable. Our hard efforts were rewarded with fat snowflakes and a dusting of snow in the forest. Even though it was cold, it was a beautiful walk back to the car. The allure of strategically placed pastries in the car made the walk feel a little quicker.

Day 4b: Team Early Bird exit

(Steve) The bird-related team names were now ironic, as the speedy team was long gone by the time the remaining four of us so-called “Early Birds” left The Dunes camp. The rest of this crew were a bit the worse for their long day of excitement yesterday, so I beelined out first to work on Negative RAT Hole a bit

more, and to inspect the dusting of snow on our packs. Very pretty, but I was glad the cave was draughting comparatively warm air out! Jemma and Karina had carried out a heroic amount of Magic Beanstalk junk, and Brendan/Henry/Ciara brought the final bag with them. Henry was too broken to score bonus points by

finishing the Vaccine Strollout de-rig, but fortunately not too broken to natter all the way down the hill. We got back to the car – complete with frozen windscreen - in the dark (maybe 6:30 pm), noting patches of snow even down at Boulder Jenga level. Brrrr.

IB-1 Revelation Cave / IB-233 Chorale Cave

10 August 2024

Michael Glazer

Party: Michael Glazer, Janine McKinnon, John Oxley, Raelene Watson.

In the days leading up to our subterranean adventure, Janine decided to play "Trivia Master: Cave Rigging Edition" with yours truly. Little did I know, initially this was actually a sneaky coaching session, and very helpful one at that.

Armed with ropes, harnesses, and a healthy dose of excitement (or was that fear of doing a re-belay loop too long and cop the wrath of Janine?), we descended into Revelation Cave. I, Michael, was tasked with putting theory into practice under the watchful eye of Janine.

Surprisingly, I didn't turn the cave into a giant knot. In fact, I dare say I impressed myself with my newfound skills. Janine's expert tips were like little whispers of wisdom in the darkness.

Things were going smoothly until we hit the third pitch. While setting up the re-belay, I encountered a section of rope that felt funkier than a 70s disco. Not wanting to risk any Saturday Night Fever moves mid-descent, I tied a knot to isolate the suspicious section. Safety first, dance moves second!

While I was channelling my inner Spider-Man (I'm more of a Deadpool kind of guy though) with the ropes, Rae and John were busy capturing some awesome photos.

At the bottom of Pitch 3, we stopped for a bite to eat. I seized the opportunity to whip out my latest toy - the improved FCL survey tool. As I demonstrated its new bells and whistles, John's eyes lit up like a kid in a candy store. Before long, he and I were deep in a geeky discussion about code and electronics, while Rae and Janine exchanged knowing looks and went off to explore the cave's end.

Thanks to the upcoming newbie trip led by Karina, we got to skip the de-rigging process and made a swift exit with Rae excited to try out her new Pantin and Janine impressing us all with her climbing skills. We emerged into the daylight by mid-afternoon.

I can't thank Janine enough for her patience and expertise. Updated rigging notes are now in the archive.



Photo: Michael Glazer

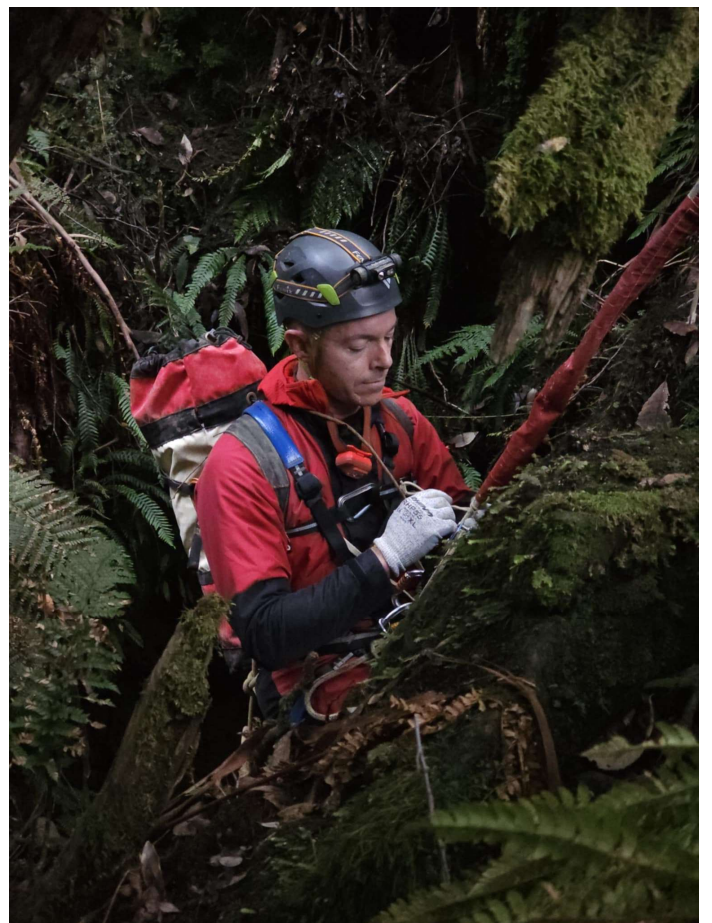


Photo: Raelene Watson

IB-14 Exit Cave - IB-120 Valley Entrance Through Trip

24 August 2024

Michael Glazer

Party: Michael Glazer, Adrian Hills, Alan Jackson, Ben Jackson, Ciara Smart

Our quintet decided to spice up a regular Saturday by diving into the depths of Exit Cave. We convened at Mystery Creek Car Park at 9:30 am, looking like a bunch of lost hikers with an unhealthy obsession for darkness.

After a brisk walk to beat the incoming rain, we reached Valley Entrance at 11:30 am. The padlock put up a fight, clearly not a fan of weekend visitors.

Valley Entrance welcomed us like a claustrophobic's nightmare, tight and narrow in spots, and slightly annoying - especially for yours truly. Ciara and I found ourselves playing an unintended game of "how high can you go?" well above the pitch head. After some awkward backwards shuffling, Ciara managed to slide down a slot the right way. Then came the Alan show. I watched in disbelief as he progressed under me, slipping through the narrow passage like a buttered noodle - does he carry a bottle of extra virgin olive oil in his caving kit?

Meanwhile, looking like I was wearing a Velcro suit and after plenty of jiggling, I eventually made it through, leaving behind only a little dignity, and any illusions I had about my flexibility.



Ladder installation. Photo: Michael Glazer

The one and only pitch awaited us, which we all conquered with varying degrees of elegance. Adrian and Ciara had already started finishing the lovely ladder project. Upon completing it, Alan quickly

progressed back up the rope to tie off the newly finished ladder and then coming back down it.

The rest of the cave was a breeze, filled with chambers so big you could fit a small country in them. Ben trooped on like a champ, with only minor violin-worthy moments. Alan's singing and jokes provided a soundtrack that made us appreciate the cave's acoustics - and silence - even more.



Photo: Michael Glazer

Pictures never really do some of these places justice. Adrian and Ciara were fantastic at noticing when I was taking pictures and providing suitable light.

We crossed the D'Entrecasteaux River, filling our gumboots with water. Exited around 5:20 pm, followed by an hour of "are we there yet?" back to the cars. All in all, a Saturday well spent. Who needs sunshine when you can have cave mud and questionable jokes?



Photo: Michael Glazer

H-8 Wolf Hole

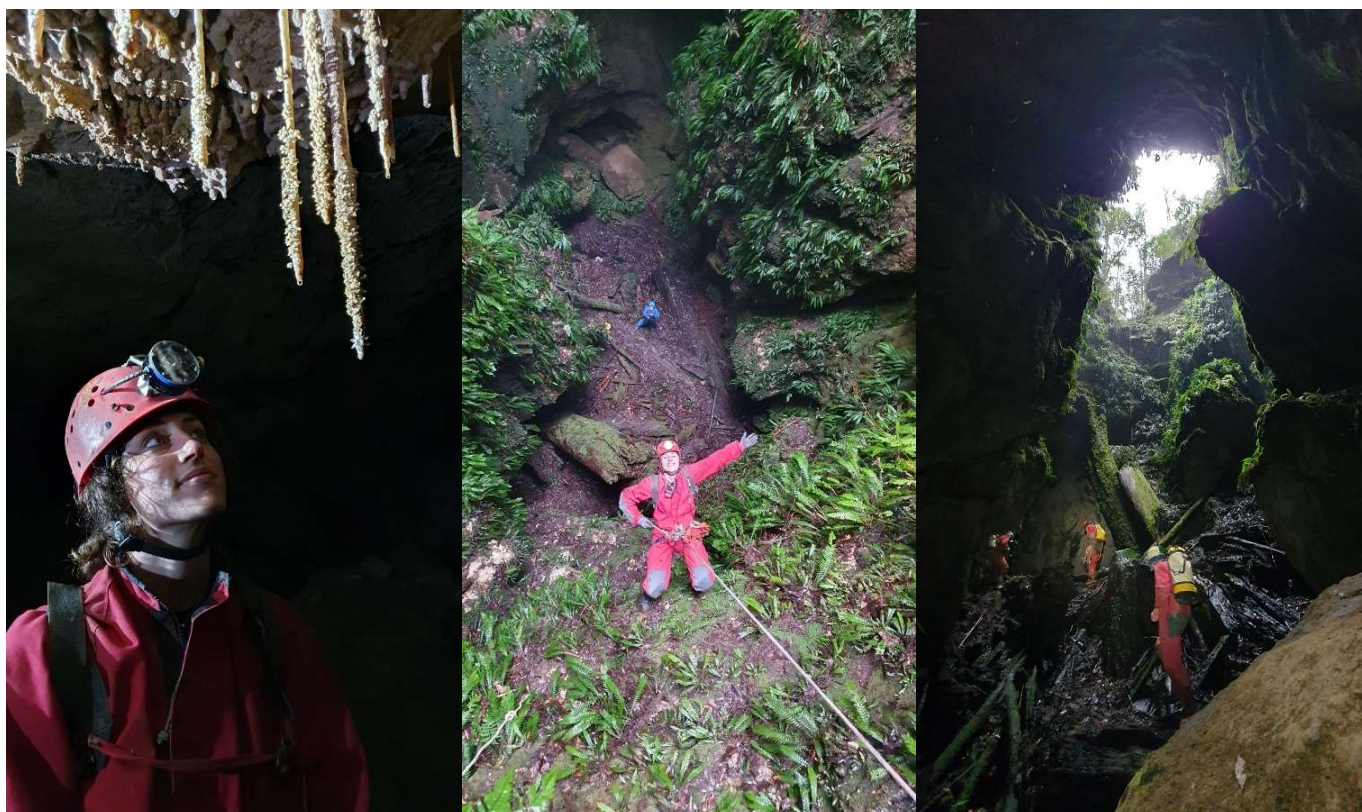
24 August 2024

John Oxley

Party: Ashlee Bastiaansen, Deb Hunter, John Oxley, Ronnie Sammut, Christ Sharples

This trip was planned primarily for the new members Ashlee and Ronnie. Deb was also keen to see the cave and Chris jumped in at the last minute just because he likes the cave.

We'd had a couple of rainy days and this day was also forecast to be quite wet. We were lucky that very little rain eventuated however the previous days' rain made a nice little waterfall into the doline. Inside the cave was also quite wet and drippy. We made our way slowly through to Lake Pluto then to Southpark on our return to the entrance. The logbook in the bottom of the doline has been completely full for some time so Parks asked us to retrieve it and return it to them. There have been about 26 recorded trips since 2012. The aluminium box in which the book is kept is looking a bit manky with rusted hinges and latch. Parks have been asked for a new logbook and box.



Photos: John Oxley

IB-1 Revelation Cave/IB-233 Chorale Cave

25 August 2024

Karina Anders

Party: Karina Anders, Ashlee Bastiaansen, Deb Hunter, Liam McArthur, Ronnie Sammut,

The troop rallied at my house early Sunday morning and we made our way south towards the Mystery Creek

Cave track. Revelation Cave was nicely rigged from Janine's trip a couple of weeks previously. We de-rigged on the way out. Everyone had a good time, all beginners had no problem on the ropes and moving across the knot put in to isolate a part of dodgy rope on the third pitch. Overall, a lovely day out, nice conversations with some new members of the club. A good day practicing SRT skills.

IB-11 Midnight Hole

25 August 2024

Henry Garratt

Party: Henry Garratt, Flynn Robertson, James Sampson, Luke Smith, Kentaro Watts, Lawrence Wonhas, Sergio

I finally got around to running a beginner caving trip. Midnight Hole was lovely. It's a very good cave for beginners. Everyone enjoyed it and fitted through the squeeze. We were very efficient on the pitches and had a pleasant day

Major flooding event

1 September 2024

Janine McKinnon

Party: Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney

The forecast was for damaging winds and major flooding. A trip down Dwarrowdelf that eight of us had planned to do on the Saturday was cancelled. This proved to have been a good decision, as when Ric and I went up that way for a look at conditions on the Sunday we found the road closed at the end of the main street in Maydena due to numerous tree falls.

We stopped in Westerway for a look at the Tyenna River, which was almost bursting its banks. Then it was on to check out the Junee resurgence. This was pumping impressively.

The Tyenna at the road bridge near Giant's Table was flooding the surrounding low areas. I took video of the Junee Resurgence and Tyenna River, which have gone into the archive.

We really wanted to get to Growling Swallet to check it out as I am sure Garth Creek would have been awesome. Alas, said road closure stopped that. I suspect there were many trees down along the Florentine Road that would have stopped us in any case.



Tom Smiths Cave



Junee River near resurgence



Junee River near resurgence



Near Giant's Table

Blackshawl-Spider Complex cave system rescue pre-planning “management” trip

8 September 2024

Deb Hunter

Party: Deb Hunter, Alan Jackson, Ben Jackson

Blackshawl-Spider is that part of the Mole Creek system downstream of Honeycomb Cave. Between Cow Cave MC-46 and Spider Cave MC-19 (north to south), it was a three-hour trip through the 2½ km system. The aerial negotiation of a pile of pine trees felled into the large entrance doline was probably the most dangerous part of the trip. The Letterbox and

Pyramid Rockfall competed for the title of the Most Unpleasant part.

The calcite gours and other speleothems were at their very best, following heavy rains in the previous two weeks. The only part of the cave that had flooded to the ceiling in these conditions was the final sump, just 120 m from the end.

This cave system was once popular with Scouts and schools in the 1970s and 1980s, with the result that its extensive calcite floors and gours sustained a lot of damage and crystal thieving occurred. The cave system was “closed” by the private landowners in the mid-1990s for political reasons. It was finally purchased for addition to the conservation estate in 2004, with the

second tranche of the Karst Forests Program funding. However, it remained off limits for caving.



This old streamway rarely flows, but its gourds overflow with seepage water. Photo: Alan Jackson

With the advent of the Cave Access Policy (CAP), the system was mapped over several trips by a multi-club ASF team in 2014 in preparation for reopening to caving trips. The system CAP Zoning Statement is complete and ready to be signed off. Hopefully it will be signed off soon. Bits of the cave system at each end are deemed Experienced Leader zones, while the main cave from the Letterbox to Spider Rockfall is to be limited to permit trips (ASF caving groups). Over the course of intervening decades, the abundant cave formations have largely recovered and string-lining to protect them is in place.

Cave rescue pre-planning involves assessment of each section of a cave for moving a casualty in a stretcher towards the surface. The greatest purpose of cave rescue pre-planning is to show the police that we know what we are doing and how they can deploy us (because they are in charge, not us). It may also reduce the damage inflicted on the cave by a rescue, since optimal routes and most requisites for extraction are previously identified. Guesswork is minimised on the

day and team co-ordination and deployment will be more efficient.



Gours cover floors in the middle passages, between the two big rockpiles in the Limited Access section. Photo: Alan Jackson

On the walk back to the car, we passed through Honeycomb 2 and walked over The Arch (“ooh, aah”). The tall gourds were overflowing at H2. It was noted that the boobook roost was occupied once more (murder and mayhem indicated by all the discarded remnants of dinner on the cave floor). A car shuffle was completed and Hobartians detrogged for a probably snowy drive home over the Plateau



Recently hatched cave spider egg sac with spiderlings getting ready to disperse. Photo: Alan Jackson

Fun and Diversions

THE CAVING PERIODIC TABLE OF SUBSTANCES					GROUPS	
As Ascender					Metaloids	
Cr Croll	La Lanyard	LI ⁵ Light	Cr ⁶ Cricket	Po ² Pot	Elongated Circumstructures	
Pu Pulley	Co Cowstails	I ¹⁰ Illuminations	Ba ¹¹ Bats	Ho ⁷ Hole	Ethers	
				Ga ¹² Gallery	Antientropics	
					Delithified Solids	

Credit: Janine McKinnon

You're never too old to cave

Osteoarthritis and caving – the odd couple. Tips for their happy co-existence.

Part 3 of an occasional series: Part 1: Caving for the height challenged, SS363, p.17; Part 2: Tips for beginner cavers, SS439, p.24.

Janine McKinnon

Warning: Those that are concerned about insufficient respect being shown to mature-aged cavers should read no further.

When it comes to refusing to face reality when it doesn't suit us, Baby Boomers win the generational prize. There are quite a lot of us still about in the caving world, valiantly continuing to go underground, and generally terrifying the young things that we'll need rescuing, or body recovery after that inevitable heart attack, on a trip.

I can't give much advice regarding the heart attacks, but I am ready-to-hand with tips for continuing to cave as osteoarthritis steadily takes over all those joints that are very useful in caving.

1. **Prior planning and preparation** are the first key to a successful caving trip for the age-impaired. It is much easier to do this if you are the trip organiser as you can happily allocate all of the communal gear (ropes, rigging gear, drills, etc) to all the young things and surreptitiously carry a handbag of personal gear to the cave whilst loudly claiming that you have some very heavy, but very small, gear in your handbag.

This becomes a bit more difficult if someone else has organised the gear and is handing it out at the car park. Various, not as subtle, gear-carrying avoidance techniques can be employed:

- Sneak your allocation into someone else's pack; the young'uns will never notice.
- Point to your tiny pack and sadly point out how you don't have the space to carry anything, much as you'd love to.
- Pump up the egos of one or two others about their strength in carrying big loads. This works best on very young males but can be tried in desperation on anyone.
- Finally, when all else fails, play the dodgy knees card. This is very useful as it is also probably true.

2. **Who do you cave with?** This one is difficult. It really is part of prior planning I suppose.

- If you cave with the fit, young things then you have the advantage of point 1, above. They can also be relied upon to drag most (all?) of the heavy gear around underground. Their enthusiasm and enjoyment of the pain is encouraging and cheering and makes for a good atmosphere. However, these advantages come at a cost - namely trying desperately to keep up with them (and failing miserably) and displaying your rapidly disappearing skills to those in their prime. You also risk escalating their frustration levels beyond recommended health standards by your slowness and increasing incompetence.
- If you cave with your contemporaries, you avoid all that embarrassment of poor performance. This is good. However, there is no one to carry all the gear as all the party have employed one of the tactics outlined above. There is a lot more complaining about aching joints too.

Pros and cons have to be considered and a choice made.

3. **Walking to the cave.**

In southern Tassie, most of our caves involve a reasonable walk, and many quite a long one with hills to climb. The most important thing to consider if caving with the young'uns (after point 1 has been dispensed with) is to be sure you are walking at the back of the party. This way they can't see how slow and stumbly you are. As they frequently wait for you to catch up (because they are nice people, and considerate, unlike back in "them good 'ol days") you need to have a grab-bag of excuses for your tardiness: re-tying the shoe laces on your gumboots, toilet stop, jumper off (or on), pack strap broke, big tree fell behind the person in front of you and it took ages to climb over (this one may not be as convincing, and risks being exposed on the walk back). Be innovative. The important point is that no one is behind you to see the truth.

4. **In-cave techniques:**

So nothing bends anymore, your eyes don't work well and you have no strength. Never fear, adaptations to your techniques of yore just need to be made.

- **Glasses.** The bane of an old caver's life, because we never wore them when young we haven't learnt how to do it as we got old. We cover them in dirt, lose sight as they fog and get wet, and drop them down pitches. The answer is to not wear them. Learn to tie knots

by feel. Prusiking and abseiling are fine – just learn to identify rebelay through a blur. Pitch heads can be a bit tricky but I’m sure you’ll be safe if you just put your light onto high beam and feel around to make sure there is rock under your feet and handholds to grab.

- **Climbing.** You have little strength and no flexibility. This is not a problem. Wilful refusal to accept your limitations will get you there. That, a few (pointless but psychologically uplifting) prayers, and help from the young things in those really desperate moments.
- **Crawling and grovelling.** Don’t do it. You may get down onto your belly but you’re unlikely to get back up at the other end. And you have to come back too.
- **Swimming.** Here is a bright spot. This is as easy as it ever was. Floating, great for old bodies.
- **Prusiking and abseiling.** See “Glasses” above. Also, various ploys to avoid prusiking with a heavy bag of rope need to be activated. Turning back part-way down the cave and going out is very effective. DO NOT offer to de-rig. Fun though this is, it ensures a heavy bag of rope up many pitches. Those days are to be remembered fondly and left to the young’uns to do in your now-advanced years.
- **Keeping up with the young things.** Again, just don’t try. It is embarrassing and potentially leads to death.

Lots of chocolate. Maybe some “no doze” too. Sugar and stimulants, always helpful.

Finally, just remember, once in the car and driving home at the end of the day, NEVER get out of the car until you are safely home and no one else can see you attempt to hobble into the house. Yes, a bit tricky if you travelled in someone else’s car, but face needs to be saved at least a little.

For other equally useful advice on this subject just ask one of the still-active “mature” cavers frequently seen hanging about where cavers congregate. But be warned, you may have to listen to tales of the “good ‘ol days” as part of the process. You will fortunately avoid the “how great I was when I was younger” speech as that is saved for during the caving trips.



Niggly. Ric's 70th birthday. Those young things proved helpful carrying party hats. Photo: Janine McKinnon



Salamandrom Cave, Nice, France. Can the Roman number system cope with their combined ages? Photo: Janine McKinnon



JF-30 The Letterbox. Glasses and grovelling. Janine fails to take her own advice. Photo: Henry Garratt

