# Speleo Spiel 467

## November-December 2025

Newsletter of Southern Tasmanian Caverneers Inc. ISSN 2208-1348

***Front Cover:*** Looking up out of the entrance doline of MA-9 Anne-A-Kananda in early December 2025. Image: Jemma Herbert.

***Back Cover*:** When does graffiti become of historic value? Henry Garratt looks disapprovingly at scratches made sometime last century in JF-90 Vandal Cave. Image: Ciara Smart

*Speleo Spiel* 467 was prepared by Ciara Smart, with subeditorial assistance from Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney, Greg Middleton and Alan Jackson.

***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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## Issue No. 467: November-December 2025

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# Editorial

Notwithstanding an actual white Christmas, summer is finally here. Caving of all sorts has been happening, including some particularly exciting stuff up on Mount Anne. It seems it is time for the ever-photogenic doline of MA-9 Anne-A-Kananda once again to grace a *Spiel* front cover. Read the prelude to the summer expedition in this issue. I'll also point out that this issue contains a piece on Daverns Cavern, a little-known cave of historical interest near Frenchmans Cap.

Alas, we're saying goodbye to Chris McMonagle in his role as the Karst Ranger for Northern Tasmania. Chris is moving into another role but is still within Parks. Thank you, Chris for all your support over the years.

# Stuff and Stuff

## Notice of Annual General Meeting

The 2026 Annual General Meeting of the Southern Tasmanian Caverneers is coming up on 3 February 2026, 7 pm at the Civic Club, 134 Davey Street, Hobart. The meeting will be followed immediately by a regular Business Meeting. All welcome to attend, it's usually over very quickly! If you are keen to take a more formal role in the club, now is the time to consider taking on a position. See a list of positions on the left of the prior page. Nominations for Office Bearer positions can be made via email or at the meeting. Office Bearer reports will be circulated over email and published in the next issue of *Speleo Spiel.*

## *Anaspides* Progress

The Science Officer has just discovered that the reason for the long silence from Christoph Höpel, who has been studying the genetics and evolutionary differentiation of Tasmania's mountain and cave shrimps (*Anaspides* genus) for more than a few years now, is that he has spent most of the last year head down analysing data and writing papers at the University of Rostock (Germany) in order to get his PhD finished. The good news for Christoph and his supervisor, Stefan Richter, is that he is finally 'Dr Höpel'. The even better news is that Christoph is not finished with *Anaspides* and will be continuing his studies of our cave critters with a two-year job starting in early 2026 based at the Australian Museum in Sydney. Christoph already has plans for his next specimen collecting visit to Tasmania in March 2026, so don't be afraid to volunteer to help; it's interesting and you will learn things (like the best tricks for snatching those cunning shrimps…).

Over the past year Christoph has published several scientific papers exploring the intricacies of the evolutionary divergence of *Anaspides* species in relation to their ability to colonise underground or aboveground spaces in response to changing glacial and interglacial climates and other environmental conditions. Several of these papers are now available in the STC archive (courtesy of Ric Tunney) but be warned: you will need a good command of genetics to explore these papers beyond the introductory level!

*Submitted by Chris Sharples, STC Science Officer*

*Above, Christoph Höpel, showing lifelong commitment to his PhD subject matter. Image taken by Chris Sharples at the entrance to King George V Cave at Hastings, during 2024 fieldwork.*


*Submitted by Stephen Fordyce, originating on the internet somewhere.*

# Trip Reports

## GH-13 Daverns Cavern

**30 January 2025**

Greg Middleton

**Party:** Michael Dempsey (non-member), Greg Middleton

Daverns Cavern is a relatively small, but interesting, cave in Precambrian quartzite located in the Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park (and hence in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area) near Sharlands Peak which is itself not far from Frenchmans Cap (Photo 1).

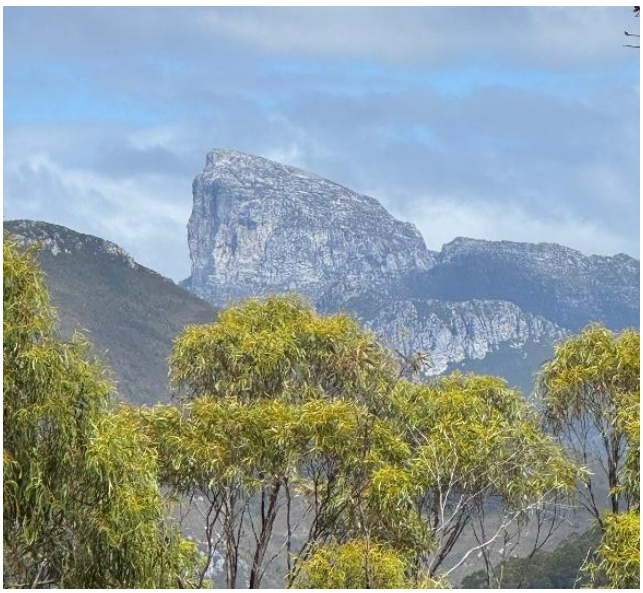

*Photo 1: First good view of Frenchmans Cap, from the track. Image: Greg Middleton*

### Discovery and Name

The cave was first recorded following its finding by bushwalkers Aubrey Davern and Douglas Anderson late in December 1932. In Aubrey Davern's own words:

> *After much scrambling and slipping on the steep slope leading to it, we gained the base of the rock, and found facing us a commodious cave. As the weather was now very stormy and bitterly cold, we were glad to seek its shelter. The Hollow Tooth, as we named the spot, from the resemblance of the rock to a decayed molar, became our home for the next four nights. It made an excellent camp. An adequate supply of wood lay round its mouth, and from its roof dripped a sufficient supply of water. There was ample dry room for sleeping and fire, while a low ledge on one side served as table, sideboard and wardrobe.*
>
> *Nothing could have been more welcome than the 'Hollow Tooth.' The wind rose in the night to a howling gale. Heavy snow alternated with hail storms. For 48 hours we sat snug in our mountain cave three thousand feet above sea level, watching the snow driving down the valley, and congratulating ourselves at having found such a home in the storm. It was possible to emerge for a few hours on Thursday afternoon and make a preliminary examination of the approaches to the Cap, in anticipation of making the attempt next day. (Davern 1933)*

The two walkers did go on to reach Frenchmans Cap, pioneering a route (without the diversion to the cavern) which has become one of Australia's great wilderness walks.

As Simon Kleinig, in his remarkable compendium on Frenchmans Cap (2022), put it:

> *It is late December 1932, and in the broken country north of Barron Pass, two figures scramble below the crags and spires of the Main Range* [see Fig. 1]. *The weather is terrible. It has been raining all day and both men are cold, wet and weary. In failing light, they battle for hand- and foot-holds amongst the prickly scrub hugging the exposed ridge up which they are working.*
>
> *The situation becomes serious. The full force of the storm is now upon them and they brace themselves against icy blasts of sleet and rain. After much scrambling and slipping, they work their way up the steep slope to find themselves standing at the foot of a huge impassable column of rock. One of them* [Anderson] *climbs a tree growing out against the rock face, gains a precarious foothold on a small ledge, and pulls himself up. He is amazed to find himself peering into the mouth of a large cave.*
>
> *The discovery of Daverns Cavern is one of Frenchmans Cap's more enduring stories. Davern and Anderson stumbled upon the cave in the early part of a journey undertaken to disprove the long-held belief that it was impossible to reach Frenchmans Cap from the east.*

Kleinig (n.d.) has also written: 'They called the cave 'Hollow Tooth', partly from the fang-like appearance of the great rock sticking up from the ridge, partly because the cave resembled a hole in a molar' and 'During the 1930s Daverns Cavern was used regularly by early bushwalkers. Today, it receives very few visitors. It is protected by its remote and difficult access …'

Kleinig (2022, p. 433) reported that the name 'Daverns Cavern' was actually given by the Hobart Walking Club in 1955 in honour of Aubrey Davern.

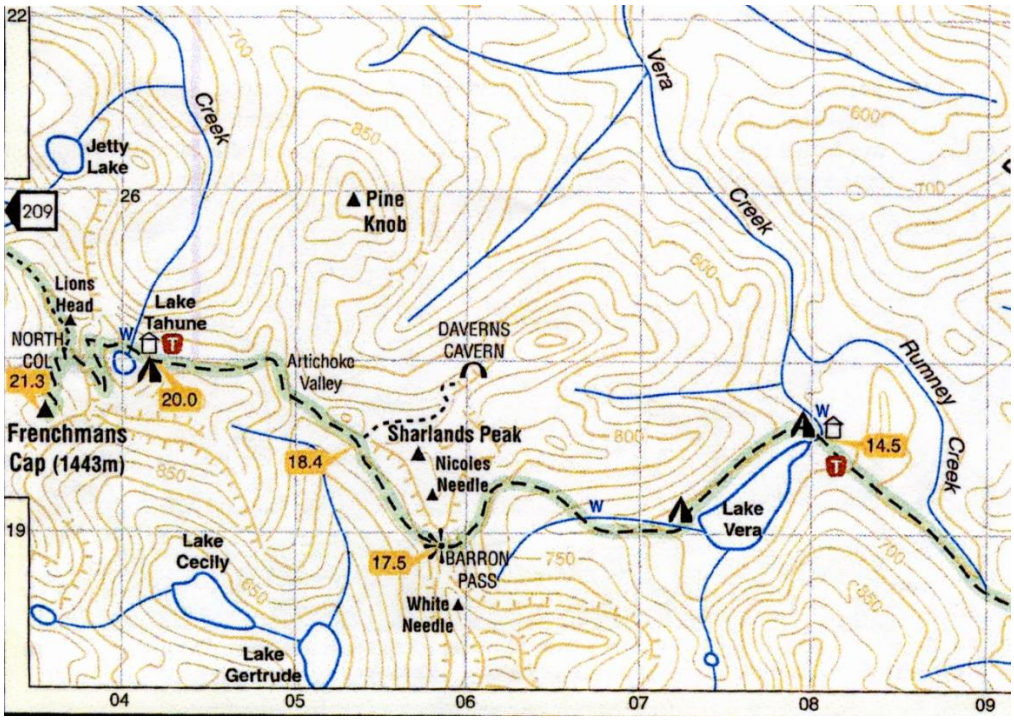


*Fig. 1 Map showing contemporary route to Daverns Cavern from Lake Vera – from Chapman 2017, p. 202.*

According to 'lyndoor' (on a Bushwalking Australia website,<https://bushwalk.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=4951>), the cave 'remained recorded but undiscovered [they probably mean 'forgotten' or lost] for many years. It was finally [re]located in the 1980s by members of the Scrub Club, a Hobart Bushwalking Club.'

The site is certainly well known now, and the access route is explicitly described by Chapman (2017) as a side trip from the track from Lake Vera to Lake Tahune and Frenchmans Cap.

Kleinig (2022) provides further historical details:

> *Daverns Cavern received few visitors after the 1930s, and especially after the first hut was built at Lake Tahune in 1946. Daverns Cavern has always defended itself well with a combination of precipitous cliff lines and dense scrub. The entrance is not visible from a distance, and the mouth of the cave only reveals itself when the visitor is just a few metres away. During the first decade of the 21st century former senior ranger Terry Reid began taking a few interested friends to the Cavern, and even installed a logbook in a weatherproof case to allow visitors to record their names, dates of visit and comments.*
>
> *The number of visitors to Daverns Cavern increased in line with visitor numbers to Frenchmans generally. This increased popularity began ... [with] a major upgrade of the Frenchmans track from 2008, and the construction of the third Lake Tahune Hut in 2018. Nevertheless, a visit to Daverns Cavern will always remain a challenging undertaking. This off-track journey requires a degree of perseverance and route-finding ability and is not for the average trackwalker unaccustomed to making their way across open and exposed terrain. As Terry Reid puts it: 'Any visit to Daverns Cavern has to be earned.' (Kleinig 2022, pp. 396-397)*

**Previous visits by cavers**

While a number of local cavers may have visited Daverns Cavern over the years they don't seem to have bothered to document the cave or their visits, with one exception. Searching the STC Archive, I found a folder for Daverns Cavern (in the 'new' Gordon-Huon background area); its only contents were eight digital images of the cave, created 1 March 2021. One of these images showed that Serena Benjamin had been on that trip (Photo 2), so I was able to find out a little more. The trip, on 1 March 2021, had been organised by Janice March of Northern Caverneers and included bushwalking and caving friends.

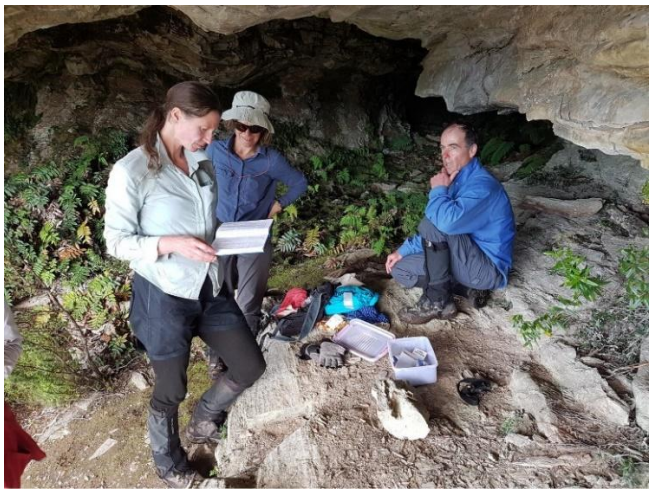

*Photo 2: Serena (left) and others check out the logbook in Daverns Cavern. [Photo: unknown – STC Archive]*

**Visit, 30 January 2025**

Having heard rumours about Daverns Cavern and desiring to better document this interesting cave, I discussed the possibility of visiting it with bushwalking friend, Michael Dempsey. Michael was immediately keen on the idea and was confident we could find it from Chapman's (2017) description of the route. We resolved to do the trip on 29-30-31 January 2025.

On 29 January we drove to Derwent Bridge and on to the Frenchmans Cap car park. At about 10:30 we set out for Lake Vera hut. After crossing the Franklin by the swing bridge, we got our first good view of Frenchmans (Photo 1) just after midday. We had lunch at the Lodden crossing and reached the Vera Hut just after 17:00.


*Photo 3: Start of Frenchmans Track, Lyell Highway author (left); Michael Dempsey (right).*

After a good night's sleep we were away again by 08:00 on 30 January and reached Barron Pass at 11:35. It's a bit of a grunt up the pass but I was reminded of my trip there 48 years before (Photo 4), when it had been much easier!

About 12:15 we left the main Frenchmans Track (following Chapman 2017) west of Sharlands Peak. As we expected, there did not appear to be a track; there were occasional cairns but we couldn't be sure they would lead us towards the cave. The weather, which had been overcast, was deteriorating and there were light showers and gusty winds. At about 13:00 we reached the open plateau from which the quartzite stacks known as The Ram, Hollow Tooth and Hill 1080 are clearly visible (Photo 5).

*Photo 4: Bob Hawkins, leading, and the author on Frenchmans Track, January 1977. Image: Steve Carey.*

As we descended the ridge to the right of the Ram and between the Ram and Hollow Tooth (Photo 6), the vegetation became thicker and the terrain more steep. It was just as well the vegetation became thick because at times the exposure was extreme (Photo 7) and only the vegetation enabled one to hang on.

*Photo 5: The quartzite ridge comprised of The Ram (left), Hollow Tooth (directly above author's head) and Hill 1080 (right). Image: Michael Dempsey.*

*Photo 6. At the base of The Ram (to left of Dempsey), heading towards Hollow Tooth. Image: Greg Middleton*

*Photo 7. In places the exposure was extreme. Image: Greg Middleton*

At about this stage I had to admit to having my doubts that we would actually find the cave because it seemed so unlikely that Anderson and Davern would have actually undertaken this descent in their search for a way to the Cap. But Michael's faith in Chapman's directions were unshakable and, at length, we found the entrance (Photo 8). It was 13:45.

*Photo 8. Michael Dempsey, elated at reaching the entrance to Daverns Cavern. Image: Greg Middleton*

We had a look around, surprised, despite reports we'd read, at the spaciousness of the cavern – especially for a cave in quartzite - and admired the great view looking out the entrance (Photo 9).

*Photo 9. View to Pine Knob, looking out from Daverns Cavern, across the deep valley formed by a tributary of Vera Creek. Image: Greg Middleton*

While Michael examined the cavern's ferns (Photos 10 and 11), mosses, cave crickets (Photo 12) and speleothems (Photo 13), the author carried out a survey of the passage (Photo 14).

*Photo 10. The cave hosts a variety of different ferns; view to the back of the cave. Image: Michael Dempsey*

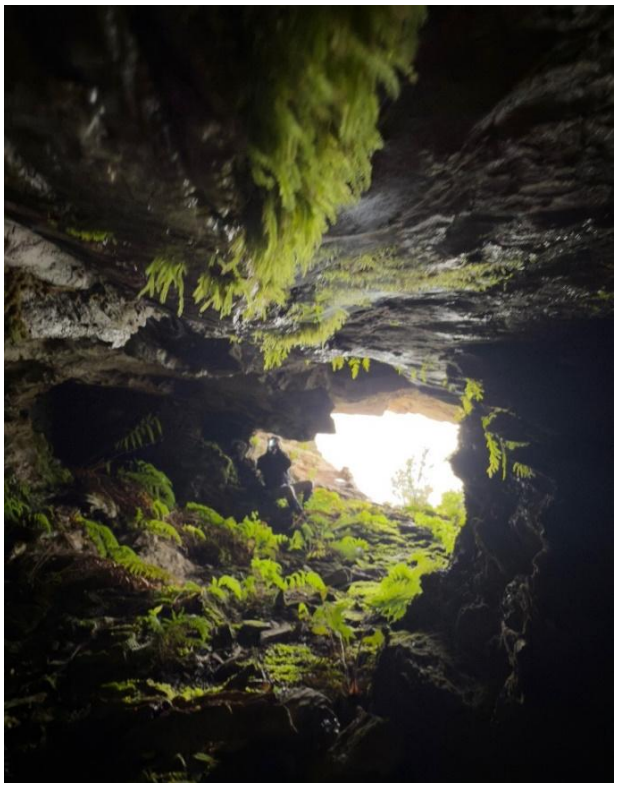

*Photo 11. Prolific growth of ferns, seen from the rear of the cave (and the author surveying). Image: Michael Dempsey*

*Photo 12. Cave crickets are plentiful towards the rear of the cave. Image: Michael Dempsey*

*Photo 13. Cave coral at the rear of Daverns Cavern – or perhaps these should be termed 'knobstone' – 'larger, more pronounced and more widely separated than cave coral' (Monroe 1970, p. K11). Image: Michael Dempsey.*

*Photo 14. The author surveying Daverns Cavern. Image: Michael Dempsey*

The cave crickets were not entirely unexpected as they are common in many Tasmanian caves – though this cave appears to be quite distant from other known caves, being in a large region of quartzite. The cave coral was unexpected as it is most commonly associated with caves in calcareous (or dolomitic) rocks. No analysis has been carried out, but it would seem unlikely these nodules are formed of calcium carbonate; silica would appear much more likely as it is the dominant mineral in the host rock, despite the fact that it is far less soluble than carbonates.

The cave was not displaying the roof drip providing '*a sufficient supply of water*' reported by Davern (1933), but it seems unlikely this was due to any current dry period as parts of the floor were quite boggy. Rather, it seems moisture now reaches the floor from a lower point or points without concentrating in a ceiling drip.

We completed the survey and reconnaissance of the cavern by about 15:00, signed the visitors' book and proceeded to make our weary, if contented, way back up to the main track (Photo 15) and back to the Lake Vera Hut, arriving still in daylight. On 31 January we walked back to the highway and returned to Hobart.

Subsequently, I prepared a plan and section from my survey notes (see STC Map No. 7GH13.575, on p.10) having assigned this cave entrance the number GH-13 in the Gordon-Huon background area. The plan shows the cavern to have an overall length of 20 m and roof heights ranging from less than a metre at the back to over 8 m at the dripline.

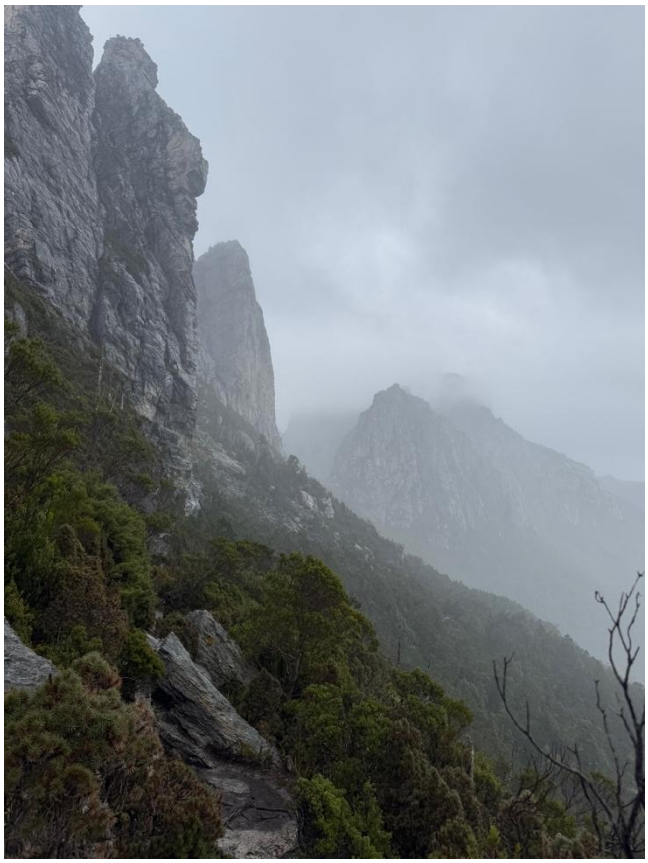

*Photo 15. On the route back to the Frenchmans Track – typical South-West weather. Image: Greg Middleton*

**Possible Aboriginal use**

We had wondered if this cave might have been used for shelter by Tasmanian Aboriginal people. While it is an ideal shelter cave, we saw no evidence of ancient occupation. Kleinig (2022) considered the possibility also, but concluded:

> *Whether First Tasmanians knew of Daverns Cavern we can only speculate. Given their millennia-long occupation of the region it is entirely possible, but because game was so scarce in the high country there were never any signs–such as bones and charcoal–that the rock shelter might have been used for long periods.*

**How might a cave develop in quartzite?**

While quartzite caves can't match those in carbonates for extent (in Tasmania, at least), they can probably be regarded as true karst caves as they owe their genesis (at least in part) to solution. As Wray and Sauro observed in a seminal paper (2017):

> *The importance of chemical weathering in quartz sandstone has started to attract a considerable interest since the discovery and early exploration of large-scale karst-like landforms and caves of the Venezuelan Guyana Shield during the mid-1960s to late 1970s. Continuous discoveries and studies in this area have changed the literature on this topic considerably, and have provided huge advances in understanding of rock chemical weathering, hydrology, speleology, silica mobility and silica-speleothem formation.*
>
> *In order to fully appreciate the development of the range and extent of landforms driven by solutional weathering on quartz sandstones and quartzite it is first necessary to understand the chemical reactions involved in the mobility of silicon which constitutes the main component of these lithologies.*

Wray and Sauro (2017) went on to discuss the importance of the process of arenisation (or arenization) which they regard as: *One of the major theoretical advances in [the understanding of] quartzite karst formation within the last 30 years.* The main difference between the bulk solution which occurs in carbonates and arenisation in quartzitic rocks is that in the latter case solution acts mainly along crystal boundaries, increasing the rock porosity and making it less coherent, mechanically weaker and more susceptible to physical erosion. The term derives from the Latin 'arena', meaning sand, so the process involves sandstone or quartzite being weathered back to loose sand. Speleogenesis, in such cases (which require the physical removal of the sand grains, usually by water or wind) should be expected to be rather slower than is the case in carbonates where the bulk of the rock is able to be removed in solution.

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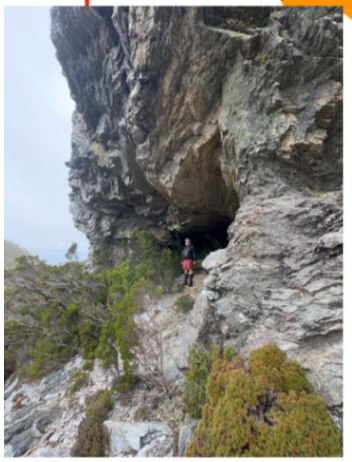
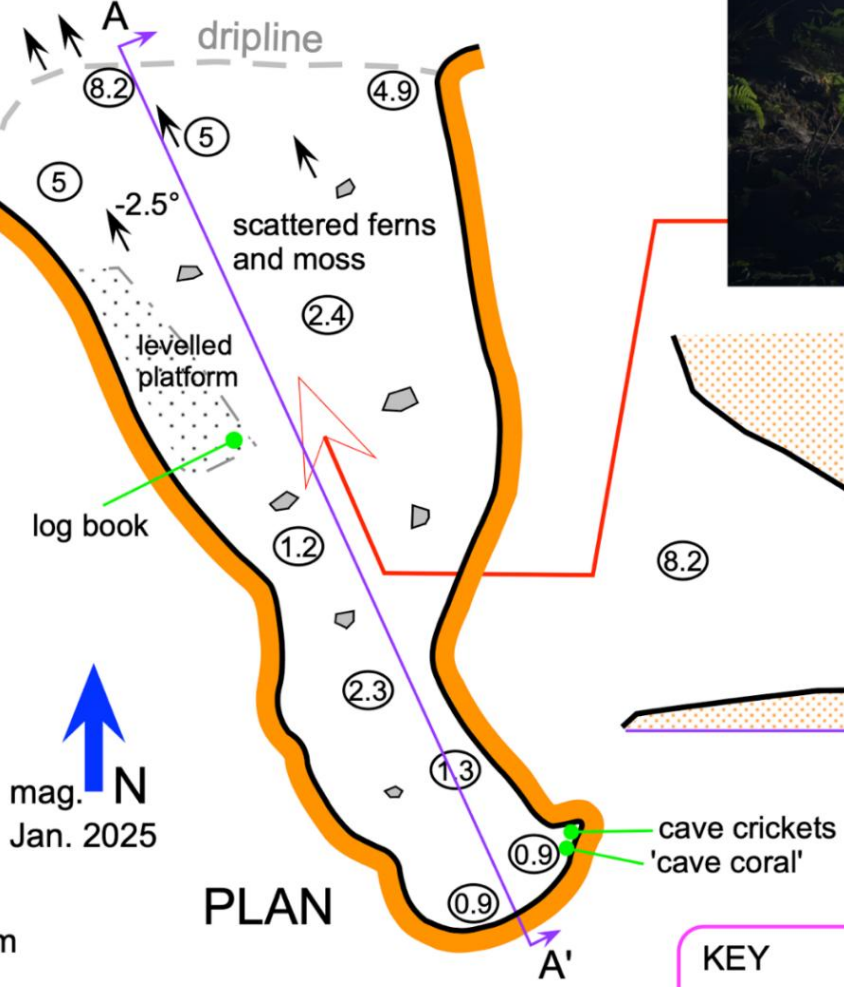
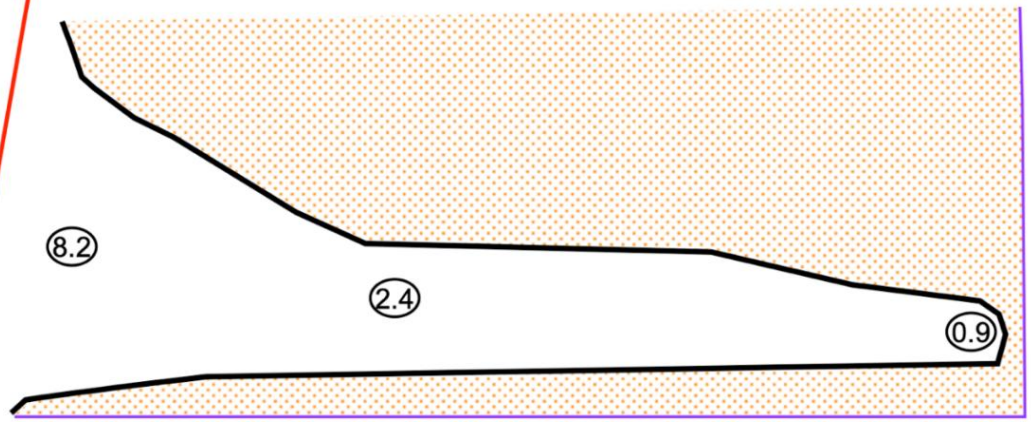
# DAVERNS CAVERN GH13

Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park
South-West Tasmania






SECTION A-A'

Cave length: 20 m

0 5 10
scale in metres

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

Surveyed by Greg Middleton
and Michael Dempsey 30 Jan. 2025
using Suunto compass and Disto X310
Drawn by Greg Middleton 4 Feb. 2025
using Microsoft Excel and EasyDraw 11.3
on an Apple Macintosh


STC Map No. 7GH13.STC575

## MC-44 Honeycomb Cave: Northern Rescue Exercise

**4 October 2025**

Jemma Herbert

**Party:** Jemma Herbert, John Oxley and many Northern Caverneers

Janice ran a rescue exercise in Honeycomb Cave at Mole Creek on 4 October. There were approximately 20 participants, with a good mix of experience. John and I were the only Southerners, outnumbered by a massive crew of six from NSW, and the remainder mostly from northern Tasmania. It was awesome to hang out with some of the very experienced NSW guys, who we don't get to train with so often.

The morning was dedicated to some out-of-cave skills practice in the trees. Janice tasked me with putting some practice ropes up in the morning before we started, but I don't have Bo's sick skills, and couldn't throw a rope even remotely high enough to get into any of the decent sized trees. We had to settle for the one tree which was a bit smaller on the side of a hill.

We initially demonstrated a counterweight haul and lower, then a cross-haul. We specifically practised with heavier casualties for something different and tried some techniques for using multiple counterweights efficiently. What we ended up doing was having one counterweight travelling down with the haul line, and two people jugging from the ground to add weight. Next time I would try having two people travelling down with the haul line, and one person jugging at the bottom as it was quite awkward having two people on the ground both trying to jug the same rope. With multiple counterweights we need to be particularly mindful of the loads on the anchors and gear.

After lunch, we shifted to a rescue scenario in the cave. Janice split us into three teams: comms, underground team and surface team. The comms team ran the Michie line in, distributed radios and Michie phones and kept surface logs of all the comms going on.

Team one was responsible for a section along the main streamway. The initial objective was intended to be a haul/lower, then carry up to the base of the abseil hole. But the water level was really high, and a carry was deemed too sketchy. I hate carrying casualties wrapped in a stretcher over anything more than ankle deep water. It would be so easy to drown them. Thankfully the underground team was all over that, and they rigged it as a Tyrolean instead. It went well, with a bit of in-the-moment problem solving to manage the transition from haul to Tyrolean.

Team two was my team. We were responsible for the haul out the Abseil Hole, and over the dirty lip finishing at the gigantic eye bolts. Some people got practice putting in concrete screws, and we rigged many anchors from trees. We did a counterweight haul for the majority of the pitch, then transferred onto a mechanical advantage haul over the lip, using human deviations and edge attendants. It went pretty alright, with some minor comms mishaps.

*Image: John Oxley*

Training all wrapped up at a very reasonable hour and we all went to the Mole Creek pub, now owned by our very own caver friends, Yara and family. We had a fantastic meal at the fine establishment, and then a proper debrief. Debrief at the pub is totally the way to go, so much more time for leisurely contemplation and deep discussion, without everyone wanting to rush away.

Some stuff that we talked about at the debrief:

- We talked about whistle signal in lieu of radios or easy verbal communication. There are too many groups with different meanings to their number of whistle blasts. If we're going to use whistles, it needs to be discussed and agreed on immediately beforehand.
- There's lots of ways to do everything. Often there are multiple fine solutions. If you're running a section, do it the way you know. If you're not, tolerate other people doing it differently (as long as it's safe). Sometimes that feels hard.
- Radios are awesome when they work. They only work when people actually have them.
- We need to be more deliberate and careful with the end of a counterweight so that neither the casualty nor the counterweight is unexpectedly made unsafe. Having a standard way of communicating this, like 'Casualty safe, counterweight off', 'counterweight safe, casualty off' might help. Twice on this exercise there was some confusion or uncertainty around this.
- SES can drive you home after an incident. I met a guy at work the other day who went to Dave's rescue as a driver. They totally could have helped cavers but didn't. Keep these resources in mind. Try to train with them to get to know the people and know what they can do.
- We try hard to train with the police and personally know whoever will likely be in command at an incident, but this isn't guaranteed. Having a liaison officer is essential to translate cave jargon coming out of comms into surface-dweller speak. Ultimately, it's the police who are in charge and responsible for the outcome, we need to make them comfortable to trust us to do what we do.
- Knowing people between rescue groups is great too. If we need to call in the troops from interstate it's essential to have a local knowledge about people.

## Mount Anne Portering Trip #1

**25-26 October 2025**

Henry Garratt, Jemma Herbert

**Party:** Henry Garratt, Jemma Herbert, Michael Glazer, Petr Smejkal

(Henry) Having left Hobart at 06:00 we faffed less than expected and left the cars at 08:15. We had a largely uneventful trip up the hill, slightly encumbered by our ludicrously heavy bags.

*The route requires crawling with heavy bags at times. Image: Jemma Herbert*

(Jemma) A little scrubby off-track adventure got us to the lip of the doline, thanks to Petr's memory and Michael's GPS. We had done our due diligence in searching for previous rigging notes for this pitch but could not find anything useful in the archive or *Speleo Spiel* so came equipped to create our own anchors if required. It turns out there were existing anchor options installed by previous parties, but unfortunately they were incompatible with our gear, so we had to double up. Rigging notes for this pitch are now in the archive. The descent of the doline was rigged; we were grateful to have harnesses as downclimbing it would have proved exciting. It was very wet, and there was a little residual snow in the doline.

(Henry) We got to camp around 15:00, set up sleeping gear and promptly fell asleep around 17:00. I was awoken to the roar of the MSR Dragonfly. I blearily stumbled into the camp kitchen and asked Jemma if it was morning time; turned out it was 20:00, and Jemma was cooking dinner, not breakfast. We enjoyed dinner then promptly went back to bed.

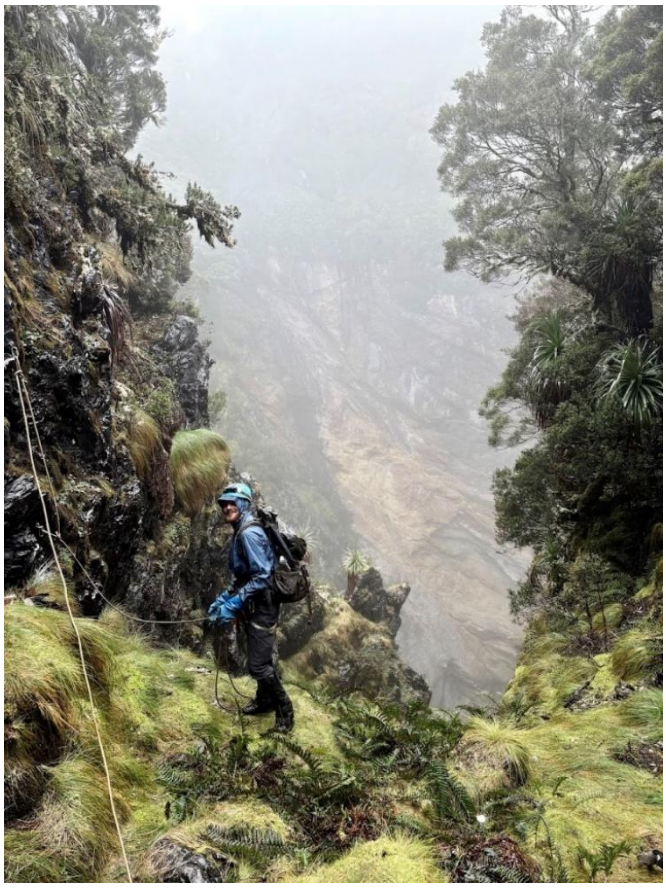
The following morning, we all slept in for what felt like forever, and eventually left at 09:00 after establishing our stash of food and gear in the rockpile.

The way down the hill was delightful, apart from some slight navigational issues. I was in front, following the track near the bottom of the hill. I was ambling along in the rainforest, when Petr announced, 'Hang on, we've seen this creek before, we are going the wrong direction.' Quite bewildered by this Michael looked at his GPS track to find we had been walking back up the exact track we had just walked down for the last 740 m….

Unbeknownst to me I had managed to get the group to execute a perfect 180 degree turn and lead the group back up the track we'd come. For 740 m… without anyone noticing.

After much amusement we started following our noses back DOWN in the correct direction, with Petr at the helm. However, soon we found ourselves back at a very familiar looking muddy section…. We backtracked, found the confusing section and theorised that we'd walked one side of a large fallen log, round the back and then round back the way we'd come, following some confusing blazes from the 80s.

Consulting the GPS oracle revealed we'd performed the same trick, but on a different section of track! We had not gone the full 740 m back to the first time-warp before we got turned around again! The original confusing section was also a large fallen log and some confusing blazes. Slightly dazed and confused we made it back to the cars and drove home (without getting lost).



*Henry descending into the doline. Image: Jemma Herbert*

## JF-90 Vandal Cave

**1 November 2025**

Henry Garratt

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

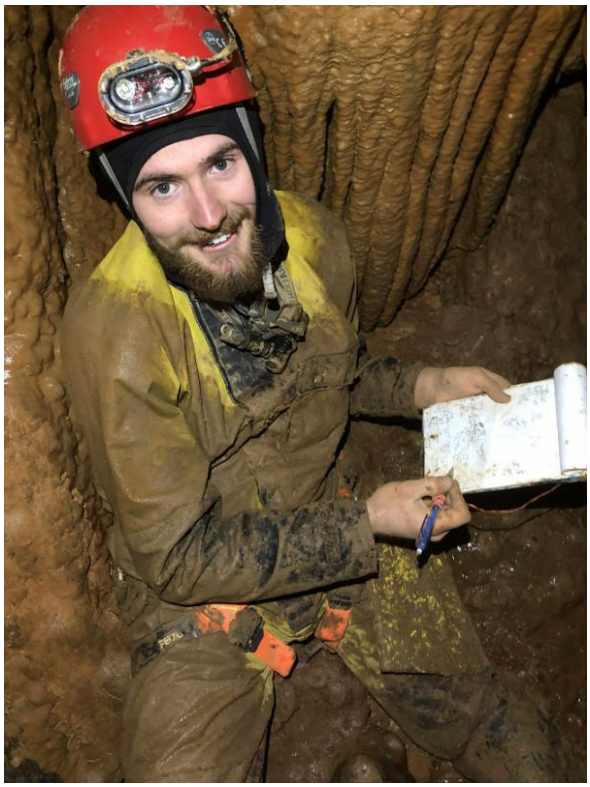
It was about time I learnt how to sketch properly. Having done book a few times and ended up with somewhat unintelligible chicken scratchings I thought I'd put some effort into learning how to do book properly. Ciara suggested we go and survey a small cave, so I could survey the whole thing in a day and then draw up the entire map, learning the process from start to finish.

Having consulted the oracles for a small cave in the Junee-Florentine needing a map we settled on JF-90 Vandal Cave. Jemma Herbert had some surface things she wanted to play with in Junee-Florentine limestone, so she came along too.

The entrance was found without too much trouble, within cooee of Junee Rd. The cave has a 2 m entrance and a 7 m entrance, both vertical.

We set about rigging the entrance with the tag for SRT... Only to find that it was indeed the 2 m entrance and was quite easily down-climbable. (The 7 m is a proper pitch though! Don't try and downclimb it!)

*Henry at the top of the 2 m 'pitch'. Image: Ciara Smart*



*Henry had sore elbows but kept the book clean. Image: Ciara Smart*

We faffed with calibrating our FCL and DistoX. I have decided that Michael's FCL calibration interface is FAR superior to the DistoX!

Sick of the sunshine and surface activities, Jemma came to join us. However, she had to cave in on braille to find us as she'd left her light batteries in the car. I plied her with spare 18650s once she got to us and we finished the survey while Jemma bottomed the cave.

The survey went uneventfully, and by the end I was the proud owner of some highly intelligible chicken scratchings.

(Ciara) Vandal Cave exceeded my expectations. It's quite a fun cave, with some easy downclimbing and squeezing and quite a few chambers to explore. Despite damage being obvious from last century, including the obvious theft of speleothems, the cave still has a reasonable number of pretties, some of which are slowly regrowing. It would make a decent half-day beginner trip. It's also a blissfully short walk from the car.

*Post-cave selfie. Left to right: Henry, Ciara and Jemma*

*Despite the cave showing damage from last century, there were still some intact pretties. Image: Ciara Smart*

## JF-223 Tassy Pot: Mini Rescue Exercise

**15 November 2025**

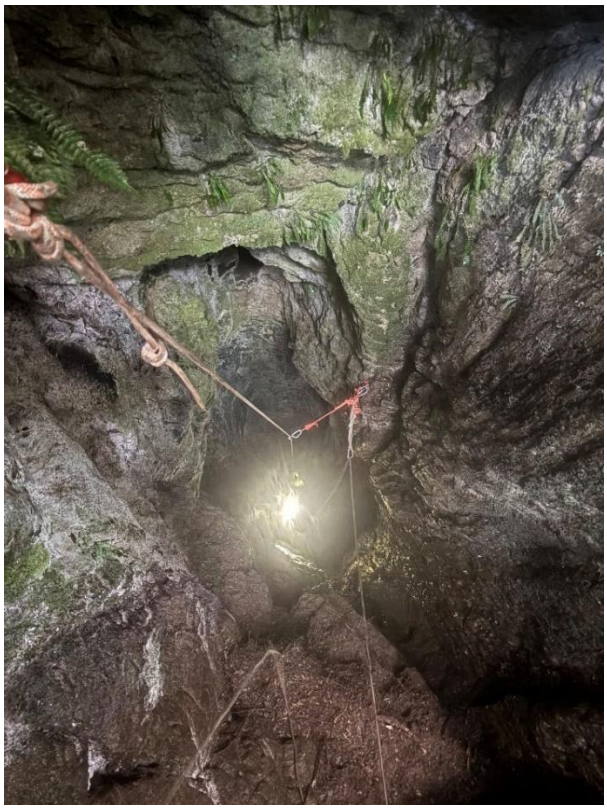
Jemma Herbert

**Party:** Karina Anders, Ashlee Bastiaansen, Henry Garratt, Jemma Herbert, Alan Jackson, Ben Jackson, John Oxley, Ciara Smart, Petr Smejkal

The last mini rescue exercise we did in Dwarrowdelf was a great success and there was demand for another. So this was pretty much the same but in Tassy Pot. I love these mini rescue exercises because the sum total of the organisation and planning that went into it was a single email (and this trip report).

There were a bunch of trees down on the Nine Road, but many hands and a few chainsaws made light work of them, and for now the road is passable again.

It was an arduous 30 second walk to the cave entrance, where we milled about for a while whilst the first few rigged in. Young Ben was going to be our casualty today, much to everybody's delight. I think he was lured in with the promise of being fed stretcher snacks and not having to climb himself out.



*First pitch. Image: Jemma Herbert*

Ciara, Karina and Petr were sent in first to do commuter rigging, get the stretcher down there and rig the 70 m pitch at the bottom. I gather it was all good. They ended up doing a counterweight haul up the 70, with 2 x 50 m ropes, passing the knot. They had a stretcher attendant on the access line and a releasable/retensionable redirect near the top. It all went smoothly. The counterweight, Petr, initially jugged in place on his own access line so that he was still at the anchor when we needed to get off the haul line for the knot crossing. Once the knot was passed he went down with the haul line, and got off somewhere on the access line much lower when the haul was complete. That was a bit slow and confusing, but safely done. Karina had a great ol' time playing with the radios, communicating maybe even more than strictly necessary.

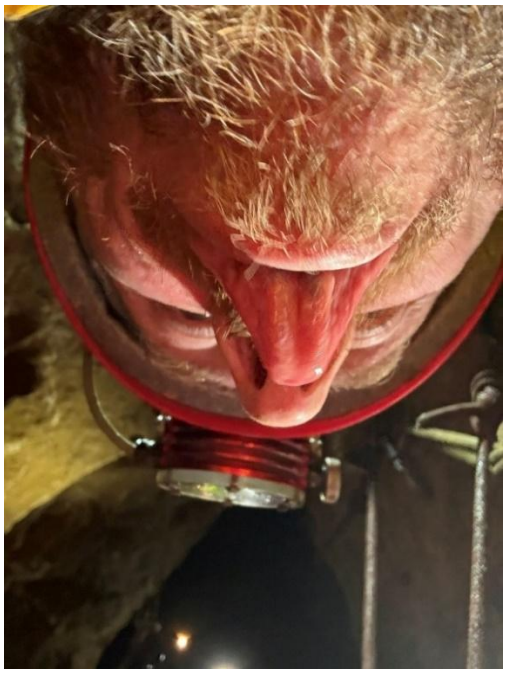
Henry and Ashlee were assigned the shit tight middle bit, which turned out to be quite wet. They both got utterly drenched and cold in cordura. They rigged the awkward tight pitch sequence admirably, making good use of an extra high counterweight anchor to make the transitions easy, and a swing out onto a little ledge with a belay and an access line. A whole lot of manual handling with a belay line got Ben through the long tight bit surprisingly easily. Miraculously our casualty got much better and could navigate himself through the very tightest bit at the top of this sequence, but his condition worsened again when he saw the remaining two pitches and had to get back into the stretcher.

*Everyone got wet, but Ashlee got particularly wet. Image: Jemma Herbert*

John and I rigged the 30 and 40-ish m entrance pitches, which were clean and open and easy. I got to place a few of my new FNA II expansion nail bolts. They require no spannering, just a few whacks with a hammer, and they were as delightful to place as I imagined. A layer of dubious rock in convenient locations caused a lot of deliberation before we started rigging, but I think the final outcome was good. There were two long clean counterweight hauls, one with a releasable redirect for the casualty and counterweight, and a short ugly drag up a dirty slope. The same system was used to move bundles of bags out at the end. We finished up by about 10:30 I think; home before midnight.

Things we learnt:

- Radios are good on big pitches. Make sure you give them to the right people to be useful.
- Hauling past a knot isn't that hard. We should do a little practice session so everyone can be confident with it.
- Releasable redirects are good.
- FNA II bolts are good.
- Good people are good.
- Cordura is bad.
- PVC is good.
- Dragging up dirty slopes is pretty OK.
- Mud is bad.
- Small teams are good.
- Counterweight = casualty + 30 kg is pretty ideal. The usual rule of thumb (casualty + 10-15 kg) is always insufficient.



*Alan's best angle, surely. Image: Jemma Herbert*

*Even Petr agrees this cowstail is due for retirement. Image: Jemma Herbert*

## Mount Anne Portering Trip #2

**22-23 November 2025**

Ciara Smart

**Party:** Karina Anders, Henry Garratt, Jemma Herbert, Samson Stensletten (non-caver), Ciara Smart

With a big expedition planned for this summer, it was time to lend a hand, or a back, carting stuff up the hill. Samson, a friend of Henry's, graciously offered to come along, despite professing a complete abhorrence of caves. He was duly loaded up with heavy things. Pack weights were between 20 and 30 kg. Unsurprisingly, the walk up the mountain was slow. Jemma and I walked through the button grass in gumboots, which was the appropriate footwear. Jemma advised me that I'd be 'alright' in shorts. About 40 minutes into the buttongrass plains, I was grateful I had packed pants. Jemma, however, had not.

The Bombardier Track along the buttongrass plains was monotonous and boggy. Henry entertained us with the story of how the track got its name. It turns out this track is called the 'Bombardier Track' because a literal bombardier drove along it in the 60s.

The walk up the ridge, aside from being steep, was pleasant as we wound our way through ancient King Billy and Myrtle forests before emerging onto the alpine plateau sometime around 6 pm. We could see considerable snow on Mount Anne.

*Ciara abseiling into the doline. Image: Samson Stensletten*

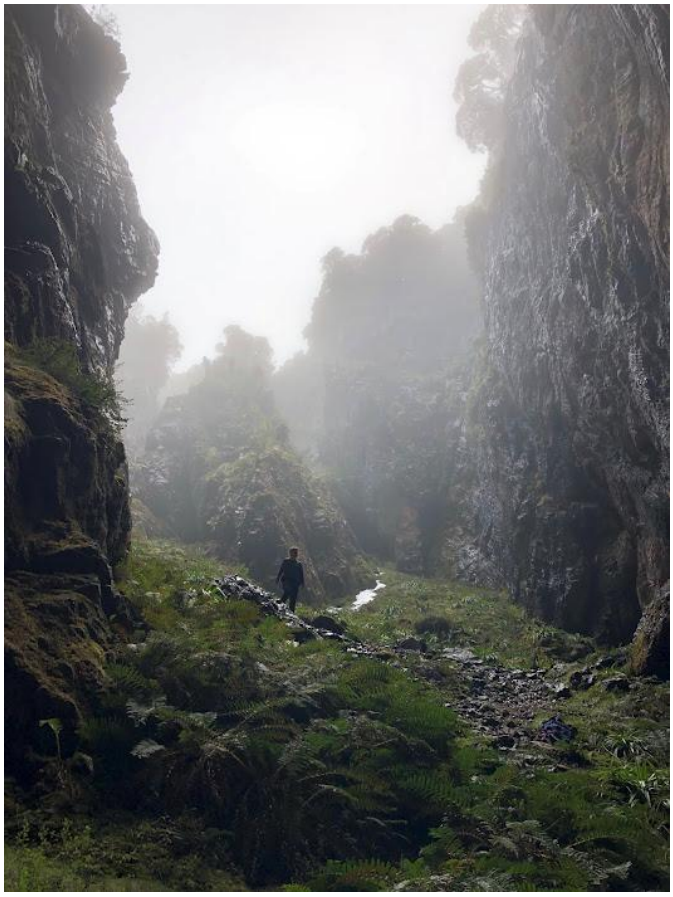
*Jemma descending into camp with a load. Image: Samson Stensletten.*

I was looking forward to finally seeing the famous Anne-A-Kananda doline. It is truly impressive, with a massive headwall rising above a gaping cave mouth. The doline drops around 80 m in height, about half of which is descended on rope.

It took us a little while to find the approach into the lowest bit of the doline, during which time Henry had an uncomfortable near-miss with gravity on an incorrect approach.

Getting down the doline was straightforward; the abseil was simple if muddy, and not as vertical as I expected. The pitch is about 30-40 m with a few standing rebelays. On the way down Karina spotted two bright blue objects attached to the steep far wall of the doline. It's not clear what they are, someone with binoculars should have a look.

Camping in the mouth of Anne-A-Kananda was delightful. It's a fantastic campsite and currently has about seven terraced sleeping platforms, with space for extra cavers if you sleep in the kitchen. The terracing was constructed by some enterprising (or cave-avoidant) cavers in the 80s on what must have been a back-breaking rest day. Camp does need some good fairy lights though.



*Looking up from camp, out of the doline. Image: Ciara Smart*

When we woke up, the temperature in the doline had decreased to 3.5°C. It's cold down there due to the temperature inversion where cold air coming out of the cave struggles to mix with the warm surface layer. Before leaving, Jemma set up our water collection system to catch drips falling into the doline. We collected about 80 L of water and stored it in plastic carriers in preparation for the summer expedition when water might be scarcer. We stashed all our food in heavy duty plastic drums in case of rodent activity. Sampson saw a mouse during the night. We strung up a large washing line before we left to hang our wet tarps and mats.

The walk back down took about five hours and exacted innumerable scratches on Jemma's bare legs.

*The camping area in the mouth of Anne-A-Kananda. Image Samson Stensletten*

*Almost back to the cars. Image: Samson Stensletten*

## JF-761 Delta Variant

**3 December 2025**

Alan Jackson

**Party:** Alan Jackson, Anna Jackson

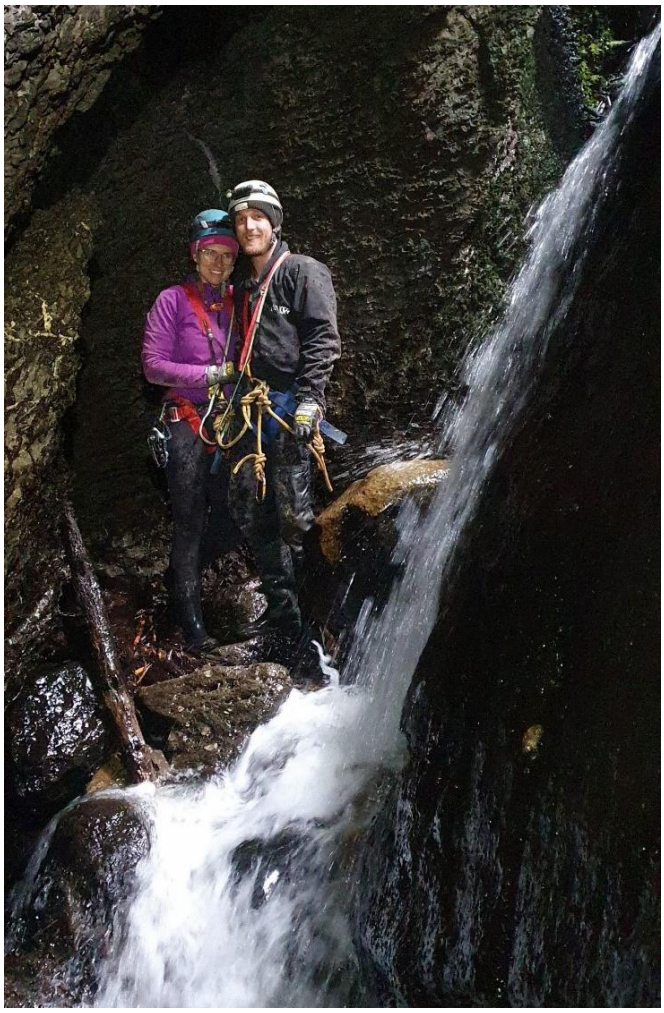
The world was caving in on me and I needed a distraction. Good excuse to finish the Delta Variant P-hanger programme. Anna and I worked our way down the cave, testing bolts and swapping the rigging from the old concrete screws to the new glue-ins. We were both a bit sick of it by the time it was finished. Thanks to all that have contributed dollars, time and/or power tools to make this happen over the last 12 months or so.

## JF-4 Khazad-Dum

**6 December 2025**

Rochelle Hotchkin

**Party:** Rochelle Hotchkin, Thomas Hotchkin (RMIT Outdoor Club), John Oxley.



*The cascade near the entrance. Image: John Oxley*

What a spectacular experience we had with John in Khazad-Dum, our first time in a big Tassie cave and Rochelle's first time in a vertical cave.

The walk to the cave through a moss-covered forest with massive fallen trees was an experience in itself. As our cave journey began, we avoided getting too wet, making our way around the beautiful waterfall that greets you at the cave's entrance. The Serpentine passage was enjoyable and felt like a welcoming journey into the cave, a smooth tunnel with twists and turns.

We made a side trip down a small pitch to see the creek and the beginning of the 'wet way' as a chance for Rochelle to test her SRT skills before going deeper into the cave. There we saw an impressive show of glow worms and spotted a mountain shrimp, which John later explained has been the subject of a fascinating study by German researchers in Tasmania.

After a successful test of our SRT skills, it was back up and on to the first short pitch, then some down and up climbing, and a fun and slightly challenging traverse. We came to a 5 m belly crawl, which was not too tight but a bit slow going.

Seeing the 28 m pitch was exciting for Tom and quite intimidating for Rochelle. John promised it was worth beating the nerves to tackle it. He certainly didn't lie when he said it was spectacular and worth it. It is an incredible free-hanging pitch in the middle of a large chamber. Mist from the waterfall filling the room created an incredible effect with the torch lighting. We took some time to stop and look around on the way down. It was the first time Rochelle had the feeling of a heavy rope underneath her on an abseil.

It was a little more wet at the bottom of the pitch from water spray, but offered a lovely view of the waterfall. We moved through another small section of the cave until we reached the next pitch, where we stopped for lunch in a dry spot nearby and decided to turn around.

After cooling down during lunch, we warmed up again making our way back up the pitch. John went up first with impressive speed and got some great photos as Rochelle and Tom made their way up.

We saw a brilliant white formation on a side trip down the Serpentine route and John took some more photos. It was interesting to see how John used the torch light to set the scene for his shots. We are grateful for John's photography interest and skills as we now have great photos to help us remember our time together in the cave.

*On the ropes. Image: John Oxley*

Arriving back to the first pitch felt a tiny feat compared to what we had achieved further down.

Exiting into the lush green forest was wonderful. It seemed like it had rained quite a bit while we were in the cave and the walk back was a bit more squelchy, but we were lucky to miss the rain.

We are very grateful to John for taking us on this trip and for sharing his time, knowledge and love of caving. John was kind, calm and reassuring when Rochelle felt nervous, and a brilliant trip leader. Our time in Khazad-Dum was certainly one of the highlights of our month-long honeymoon in Tasmania

*Such verdant forest. Image: John Oxley*

## H-23 and H-24: Hastings just keeps on giving

5 December 2025

Chis Sharples

**Party:** Gabriel Kinzler (non-member), Chris Sharples

Since circa 2003, when a few cavers started poking around in the Hot Springs Creek valley at Hastings upstream of the tourist cave, there has been a string of cave discoveries in the dolomite (Mg-rich limestone) bedrock of that area. These have notably included the extensive H-5 Chain of Ponds and H-11 Big Mama, along with numerous smaller caves just to keep the bedrock well aerated. That previously ignored area is now festooned (in my imagination and in QGIS!) with numerous GPS tracks delineating the areas explored. However, this doesn't stop new cave discoveries popping up, many of these being only metres from previous exploratory GPS tracks.

A few weeks before this trip, Gabriel had been sniffing around the Hot Springs Creek Valley (as you do) when he happened upon a 5 m deep shaft, which obviously required tagging and exploring. This was tagged as H-23, and a return trip with more rope and with me for company was organised. Of course, some of the best cave discoveries happen en route to exploring lesser holes previously found. This was certainly the case here. No sooner did we start getting close to H-23 than we suddenly stumbled into the spacious stand-up entrance of an entirely new cave, which we immediately tagged as H-24. This roomy entrance descended from the entrance at a steep, scrambling incline, which turned into a short vertical drop at the bottom. Good thing we rigged an abseil line!

*H-24 Entrance Chamber. Image: Gabriel Kinzler*

The broad chamber at the bottom of the sloping entrance appeared at first to go nowhere further, until Gabriel spotted a number of low, awkward squeezy holes with water trickles, which he soon determined were opening into further large chambers beyond which warrant exploration. However, at this point, further exploration was deferred for this trip, so after completing a fresh survey of the explored passage back to the entrance, we continued on our original route to H-23 with a warm inner glow of satisfaction at our new discovery. As for H-23, it was duly relocated, surveyed and found to not go far.

Now, once again, the Hot Springs Creek valley at Hastings is graced with a spacious entrance promising discovery and the chance to go boldly where H-24 leads the daring! (etc. etc.)

## Mount Anne Portering Trip #3

**6-7 December 2025**

Karina Anders

**Party:** Karina Anders, Kellie Glazer, Michael Glazer, Jemma Herbert, Petr Smejkal

Unlike Portering Trip #2, the weather forecast for this weekend looked a bit dire. With severe weather warnings, snow forecast above 700 m and 8-25 mm of rain expected, two of the original seven pulled out of the trip while five keen (or stupid?) people continued on with the quest of lugging gear up the mountain.

Last time I wore my approach shoes for the whole walk and while it was comfortable, my feet were freezing when I had to put them on again on Sunday morning. This time I decided to try out gumboots and committed to wearing them for the whole walk. Jemma decided to wear just approach shoes this time, but she did wear pants - lessons had been learnt.

We made good time on the walk up; we managed to miss most of the rain until we entered the forest. We decided to don our warmer layers before reaching the plateau, which proved to keep us warm until we were at camp.

I cooked up one of my dehydrated meals - Mexican mince and it was not bad even if I say so myself. Camp was as it had been when we had left it a fortnight ago. Jemma went about gear inventory that afternoon. Petr checked out the cave and was gone for about ten minutes. We collected lots of water and Michael showed us how to use his solar panel/battery system.

The next morning, we woke up to views of snow! Who knows, maybe we will get lucky and have a white Christmas in Anne-A-Kananda... [- *Ed:* Quite some foreshadowing there!]. Jemma went and checked out the cave to the first pitch, she was gone for a total of thirteen minutes. Looks like the first pitch is not very far away. We packed up and headed out.

There was lots of snow up on the plateau! We did have a minute there where we wondered if we would find the path down, it all looked so different with that much snow up there, but luckily we stumbled right onto the path (we also had maps/GPS we could have used if necessary). We broke up into two groups on the way down. The lunch spot creek was pumping when we got there on Sunday afternoon. Jemma, Petr and I made it back to the car by 1:30 pm, about 4.5 hours after leaving camp. Not bad. We also stopped by the Westerway raspberry farm for ice-cream; it was delicious.

*Karina in the snow. Image: Jemma Herbert*

## MC-13 Croesus Cave

**9 December 2025**

Janine McKinnon

**Party:** Janine McKinnon, Ben Niblett, Ric Tunney, Dion Tuttle (Parks Ranger), Gemma Umbers, Jeff Umbers, Meril Umbers

My family were down for holidays from the mainland and had joined the club to be able to do a bit of caving. More caving I should say as the Umbers clan have caved many times on visits in the past. Gemma's partner, Ben, was new to it all. Dion was along from Parks as he hadn't been to the cave before, and it is part of his patch.

The others wore wetsuits, and I trialled a drysuit for the first time. Spoiler alert – it was brilliant. It was the first time my feet have not frozen. We entered the cave at 12.30 pm and were out at 4.30 pm. We went in and out the main entrance and up to the top of the Golden Stairs. The water level was surprisingly low for all the rain they've had up north.

*The gour pools in Croesus are famous. Image: Janine McKinnon*

## MC-120 Marakoopa Cave 1 and 2

**10 December 2025**

Janine McKinnon

**Party:** Janine McKinnon, Ben Niblett, Ric Tunney, Gemma Umbers, Jeff Umbers, Meril Umbers

Second day of caving for the family. We went in at 9:30 am and came out Marakoopa 2 at 12:30 pm. The water levels were quite low, and we kept our feet dry - well, except the people in hiking boots at that last pool just before leaving the caves. The fossils were as good as ever and everyone enjoyed the canyon in Marakoopa 2. We had lunch at Devils Pot and were back at the cars by 2 pm.

*Life underground. Image: Janine McKinnon*

*Image: Janine McKinnon*

## JF-4 Khazad-Dum

**13 December 2025**

Janine McKinnon

**Party:** Janine McKinnon, Ben Niblett, Ric Tunney, Gemma Umbers

Ben and Gem have been keen to learn vertical rope skills for a while, so this was the time. Training happened at Fruehauf on Thursday and they both passed with flying colours. This was their practical day.

*Negotiating the water near the entrance. Image: Janine McKinnon*

The plan was to do the first two pitches in the Serpentine, so they could do a rebelay and also have some fun horizontal caving. We entered the cave at 11 am. There was a new log partially blocking the entrance chamber with a quite dead wallaby underneath the branches. We could smell it until past the first couple of bends in the Serpentine passage. Water levels were not high.

All went smoothly until the top of the first pitch where after rigging the approach line Ric was unhappy with straddling the drop to rig the Y-belay for the pitch. A fall would involve quite a pendulum on the safety rope as the bolt is several metres away.

I climbed up to do it and found that standing on the highest point of the ledges I was still too low to reach the bolts, by several inches. The joys of being short….and a bit old and less athletic than maybe past times. How embarrassing. On to Plan B.

Luckily, John Oxley had left the Traditional Route rigged from a prior trip as a future one was coming soon. Off to there we went.

Both Ben and Gem had no trouble with the traverse after P2. We rigged a rope down the second part of the Corkscrew to give them a bit more vertical practice. They dropped the 90 footer with me and we wandered down the rockpile to the top of the 8 m pitch and then turned for home.

*Image: Janine McKinnon*

I was impressed with how quickly they prusiked up, in club kit no less. They each took less than 15 minutes. The trip out went smoothly, and we were all out at 4 pm.

The track has quite a few new small falls along it and one large tree fall near the road. Someone has been doing some work at the car park and widened it, and also the road from there up towards where the bee hives are left.

*Left to right: Ric, Ben and Gemma. Image: Janine McKinnon*