



Speleo Spiel 470

May-June 2026

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Front Cover: Becca Lunnnon and Henry Garratt hanging about in IB-8 Mini Martin.
Image David Barlow

Back Cover: Fun in the rain outside IB-8 Minit Martin. Image: David Barlow

Speleo Spiel 470 was prepared by Ciara Smart, with assistance from Alan Jackson and Greg Middleton.

Speleo Spiel

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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.

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Editorial

It's been a quiet few months for the club with little on the exploration front (about time). Perhaps the most noteworthy event is that Ric and Janine have finally hooked a proper bite at their infamous Pitch Bagger's Guide. This is a list of all Tasmania's underground pitches over 40 m in length, with points assigned to each pitch based on length and difficulty of access. There's a bottle of French champagne in the running for the first person to hit 320 points (see *Speleo Spiel* 447, p.19-20). Newish club member Becca Lunnon is taking a stab at this list, after exhausting the Hobart Walking Club's definitive list of obscure peaks on the surface. Rumour has it that fellow peak-bagger Adrian Hills is hot on her heels, but Becca is overseas for a few months so he might catch up. Some pitches will be harder than others thanks to geological movement, and there's a few on there that haven't seen a visitor for decades. Good luck to them. There have been some updates since the list was last published, and I think there may be a need for a clarification of the rules, so expect to see an updated version in print soon.

Stuff and Stuff

Upcoming 80th Anniversary Event

A reminder that on 16 October, there will be a gathering in the upstairs bar at Boodle Beasley, 315 Elizabeth Street, North Hobart. All current and former members of the club or its antecedents are welcome, including family members. Meals and drinks will be pay as you go so no pre-payment is required. If you are planning to attend please RSVP to Jacko at pmjackson@dodo.com.au.

Lost and Found

Found: one miniature sailing pulley branded 'Ronstan Australia'. Slightly dirty but remarkably free of corrosion. Discovered on the route to the Heartbeat pitch series in Anne-a-Kananda in January 2026 (expedition report pending). The last known visit to the area was in 2002 on the expedition organised by Jeff Butt. I suspect this tiny pulley had a very specific purpose. Any ideas?

Trip Reports

Lake Sydney

29 December 2025 – 3 January 2026

Stefan Eberhard

Party: Bronwen and Stefan Eberhard

Lake Sydney is a mysterious and charismatic place. The outflow from the lake sinks underground in a large depression which, depending on antecedent rainfall, intermittently fills with water forming a large deep pond which then drains like a bathtub emptying. In addition to the lake outflow stream, two other smaller water courses also drain into the pond from opposite corners. The depression flanks which are subject to regular inundation are cloaked in immaculate marsupial lawn, creating a unique natural clearing and sanctuary in the otherwise endlessly dense forest and tangled scrub which must be navigated to reach this spot. Shortly before Lake Sydney camp there is a small sinking stream and overhang in a doline, set in ancient mature King Billy pine forest.

When we arrived at Lake Sydney, the depression was brim full of water following recent heavy rain. Over the next three days the water level in the pond gradually dropped to reveal a 15 m deep doline with the stream sinking under limestone blocks at the base. It was a quite fascinating process, and we felt fortunate to witness the entire cycle over three days, from pond full to pond empty, complete with mysterious intermittent gurgling noises.

The precise location of the resurgence is unknown, and it appears to bypass, via underground flow, Pine Lake which is located downstream in the same valley. It was initially postulated that the Lake Sydney water may discharge either into Farmhouse Creek or breach the divide into the Cracroft catchment. The latter seemed possible based on geological structure and dye tracing which had shown that water sinking in a depression ~4 km north of Lake Sydney on the eastern side of the Burgess-Bobs saddle resurged at Wargata Mina (Goede 1977). The question was tackled by Kiernan (1989) by innovative methods involving a fluorescein 'bomb' dropped from a helicopter into the Lake Sydney sinkhole pond. Later spectrophotometric analysis of the dye bags detected fluorescein in Farmhouse Creek while the Cracroft result was negative.

We were able to collect some *Anaspides* from the lake to add further material for the molecular phylogenetics and taxonomy project research led by Stefan Richter (Rostock University, Germany), and Christoph Hoepel who is now based at the Australian Museum as a postdoc.

References:

- Goede, A. (1977) Cracroft expeditions – survey results, scientific observations and speculations. *J. Syd. Speleol. Soc.* 21(3): 55-63.
- Kiernan, K. (1989) Drainage evolution in a Tasmanian glaciokarst. *Helictite* 27(1):3-12.



Depression pond full, Lake Sydney background right, distorted panorama. Image: Stefan Eberhard



Depression pond partly drained, distorted panorama. Person (right) and tent (left background) for scale. Image: Stefan Eberhard



Depression pond partly drained, Lake Sydney outflow stream entering depression on left. Image: Stefan Eberhard.



Depression pond just drained, Lake Sydney outflow sinking underground. Image: Bronwen Eberhard.

JF-43/JF-44 and nearby surface walking

16 January 2026

Stephen Fordyce

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Ciara Smart

I was interested in doing some surface walking around JF-1 and relocating JF-43 and JF-44 (dual entrances to a small cave unvisited since being tagged in the Hairygoat Hole era (early 1970s)) in case they were interesting. Ciara came along and we had a mostly pleasant day wandering about. We parked just south of the 341 carpark and walked to JF-1 for orientation purposes. We were duly informed by contemporary reports that JF-43/44 was ‘on the ridge uphill from JF-1’, which surprisingly turned out to be good enough. Ciara sniffed out a small limestone bluff with the caves and tags very obvious.

We took photos and GPS, then commenced a survey/sketch (published on page 6) and Ciara put her oversuit on while I caved in shorts and T-shirt. There was some envy of attire in both directions. Ciara was enamoured with a purple stain on the wall. A short sloping passage led to a large chamber, with a 3 m chimney climb down sharp rock (my kingdom for a caving suit) to a small terminal chamber with some bones. There was sort of a tight lead if you were really optimistic and your head was 10 cm wide. There was no draught; I wouldn’t bother with it.

From there, we decided to go up the major ridge to a target almost at the beehives on the road above KD. We stayed well on the east side of the ridge and there was lots of exposed limestone and reasonably easy going - sadly nothing in the way of caves though. The target (which is very obvious on LiDAR) was a nice doline with heaps of exposed limestone outcrop but no cave or hint of cold. It was borderline, but in our disappointment we didn’t bother tagging it (it’s in QGIS though).

Morale was high enough that we barely even thought about walking 50 m to the road, and the easy way back to the car (also the bees would be scary). We dropped down the west side of the ridge and although there was also plenty of exposed limestone, it had thick sapling regrowth that was very painful. Fortunately, we gained the gully which was wide, open and easy going. A couple of decent targets were identified as dud karst features (annoyingly, there was still limestone everywhere, but still no actual caves) and we eventually beelined back to the car via a convenient snig track.

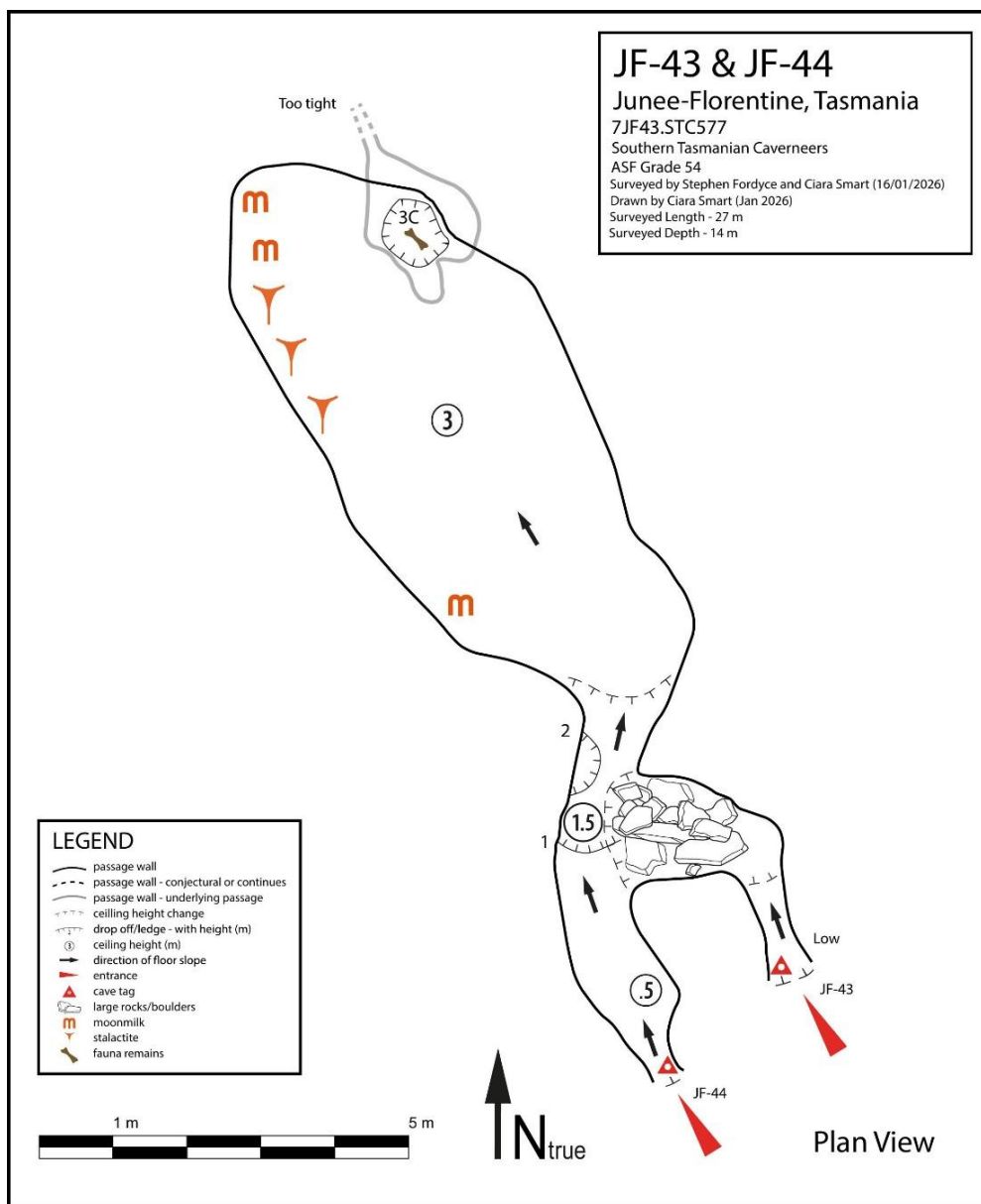
Before giving up for the day, we examined the doline just to the east of the 341 parking spot. It was big, but flat-bottomed (with big trees growing there) with no outcrop or cold. Definitely not a goer.



Tastes like snozzberries (I jest). Image: Stephen Fordyce



Closer look at the purple staining. Image: Stephen Fordyce



Plan View of JF-43 and JF-44. Credit: Ciara Smart

Paramedic Training Trips

16-20 February 2026

Jemma Herbert

Some champions behind the scenes (Bec Foxen!) have done a whole bunch of bureaucratic hoop-jumping to get us some cave paramedics from Ambulance Tasmania. Towards the end of last year six wilderness paramedics were appointed Cave Paramedics: Bec, Becca, Kris, Elvin, Keith and Pete. These guys are now allowed to come underground and train with us which has always been a sticking point in the past and will make a huge difference to their ability to get into and operate effectively in a cave in a real incident.

STC was enlisted to help with some of the hands-on skills as part of their formal training. We did three training days with them, then they joined the Khazad-Dum rescue exercise.

Vertical skills session at Fruehauf, Hobart

16 February

Jemma Herbert

Party: Jemma Herbert, Alan Jackson, Janine McKinnon, Ciara Smart and paramedics Bec, Becca, Kris, Elvin, Keith and Pete

Bec had a list of vertical mobility skills the paramedics were required to master and demonstrate. We had a rope and a helper for every paramedic. They were all awesome, and every one of them had done at least a little bit of caving before. Most of them had done all this vertical stuff too and were just familiarising themselves with their new provided cave kit (from Ambulance Tasmania). They could all go up and down and transition and do rebelay and redirects and pass knots safely.

JF-36 Growling Swallet

17 February

Jemma Herbert

Party: Allie Fenton, Henry Garratt, Jemma Herbert, Alan Jackson, Dave Taberner, Al Warild and paramedics Bec, Becca, Kris, Elvin, Keith and Pete

We headed out to the Junee-Florentine and got the paramedics underground. We rigged them an extravagant and unnecessary ropey obstacle course in the entrance and Yorkshire drain. We tested them with knot crossings, poor rigging (definitely deliberate), and slightly exciting traverses, all under close supervision. They were all good, happy and comfortable.

JF-223 Tassie Pot

20 February

Jemma Herbert

Party: Jemma Herbert, Henry Garratt, Allie Fenton, Al Warild and paramedics Bec, Becca and Keith

We had a little taster of a more realistic vertical cave for the paramedics. The group was split up, with half to Owl Pot and half to Tassie Pot. They all cruised through it and did everything safely and somewhat efficiently. I think most of them were suitably impressed by some nice caving.

JF-221 Owl Pot

20 February

Karina Anders

Party: Karina Anders, Chris Hampton, Alan Jackson and paramedics Kris, Pete and Elvin

Alan, Chris (Jemma's boss at Spidertech) and I took three paramedics (Kris, Elvin and Pete) into Owl Pot to give them some extra training on SRT. They all did a pretty good job getting down the pitches. I was at the back of the group following Pete, he talked his way through his redirects and rebelay and did a great job. When we got to the bottom of the pitches, Alan let the paramedics off the leash and let them lead the way to the streamway, we made it to the top of the waterfall pitch and threw a rock down it. Then we let the paramedics lead the way back up to the pitches; to Alan's great disappointment they did not lose their way. Alan supervised them at the top of the pitches while Chris and I alternated derigging. We met up with the other team at the entrance to Tassie Pot. All in all, a good day out.

Rescue Exercise in Khazad-Dum

21 February

Jemma Herbert

See next trip report. The paramedics participated in the exercise in realistic roles. Many of them got a good taster of sitting at the bottom getting cold. They were casualties and stretcher attendants, and they got to see the chaos that goes on underground.

Rescue Exercise in JF-4 Khazad-Dum

21 February 2026

Karina Anders, Jemma Herbert, Ciara Smart

Party: Individuals from STC, Northern Caverneers, interstate caving clubs, Tasmanian Police, Ambulance Tasmania, SES and VRA Rescue NSW

(Jemma) We did another SarEx in Khazad-Dum. Brian Evans had really spruiked this one, by having the national rescue workshop the preceding week, so all the mainlanders were there. We also had four police and our six new cave paramedics, and a couple SES people.

Like last time we ran two stretchers in parallel in order to keep everyone busy. We ran one stretcher the Wet Way and the other down the Serpentine Way. They ran

largely independently of each other, only sharing surface communications. This kinda worked enough, but next time it'd be better to just keep the event a bit smaller, as we were spread pretty thin on gear and expertise.

Dane Evans ran his mesh radio tech through the cave. This involves placing his small, homemade repeater units throughout the cave to create a continuous mesh network allowing text communications (using your phone) throughout the network. It's still in beta testing, but was run at the NSW exercise and this exercise, and was generally very impressive. It does really require Dane, or someone with an equivalent know-how, to be fully dedicated to monitoring the network and keeping it up and running. It was waaaaay more user friendly than Michie phones, and so actually got used a lot, at least in the Wet Way where it was working better.



Prior to the rescue exercise, outgoing ASF Rescue Commissioner Brian Evans organised a two-day rescue workshop. It was attended by around 20 individuals representing rescue experience from across the country, including police forces from multiple states.

Image credit: unknown

(Karina) I was tasked as safety officer for the dry route (Serpentine Route) through KD. Sometime after the hasty team had left, I decided to go scope out the dry route and familiarise myself with the sections and the rigging before Alan joined me. On my way down I met up with the hasty team who were almost where they were supposed to be—bottom of pitch 4. The hasty team consisted of Jess as trip leader, Tom the policeman and Pete the paramedic. Once we got to the ‘casualty’ Tom gave Pete the briefing of the situation and a plan was hatched about what additional medical and rigging support/equipment was required. It was fun to watch the two emergency services work together. Tom decided to be the runner to the surface to get the additional gear. I had a chat with Jess about her plan for the rigging at pitch 4. She decided for a counterweight haul up the pitch. Jess had to wait until Tom got back with the rigging gear before she could start rigging so I decided to head back up the cave and see if the other teams had got into place.



Karl and Jim (aka Chopper and Mario) were on underground safety officer duty. Image: Alan Jackson

I found Tom at a Michie phone where he had called in the situation and the surface crew started organising the gear he required. He considered going back to the casualty, but I suggested he keep going to the surface to confirm the surface team had correctly received the message and because they would likely need him to help carry gear back into the cave. He wouldn’t be able to do much anyway back with the casualty without that gear.

I continued up to the top of Pitch 3 and 2. Cam was the team leader at the top of this pitch. Another counterweight was decided upon at this pitch with a number of re-directs put in place. I ran into Alan at some point around here, he said it was a bit of a shit show up at Brian’s team (poor Brian had inherited two teams as someone else had pulled out) so I continued up to them. Alan on his way down suggested that pitch 3 and 2 should be lifted as one big counterweight.

Brian’s team appeared to be in a state of organised chaos—not as bad as what Alan had made out... they had to rig a pitch and then traverse a narrow horizontal meandering passageway. The counterweight anchor on pitch 1 needed to be raised higher but otherwise it looked good. I moved on through to Janice’s team who were rigging a Tyrolean from underneath the false floor that went across the pool of water to the top of the meandering passageway. It was decided that everyone would commute underneath the false floor as lots of people standing/rigging/commuting across it seemed a little risky. Janice had everything calmly under control so I pushed on towards the entrance pitch. Henry was busy rigging an anchor on the entrance for the entrance pitch team; I couldn’t find the team leader so I decided to go for a toilet break and then head back in. On my

way back in I ran into Alan again, we had a bit of a debrief and he told me the pointers he gave to the entrance team. The main issue with this team was the limited space between the roof and the rock they were hauling the stretcher onto. To maximise the lift of the stretcher, the anchor was threaded straight through the hangers instead of using carabiners; this shortened the length of the anchor allowing for the stretcher to be hauled slightly higher.

Alan and I then raced through the entrance meander in the Serpentine Route (I won!) and headed back all the way to the bottom of pitch 4. By this time the stretcher and Tom had returned to the hasty team, and we were close to moving the stretcher through the cave. One paramedic was packed up into the stretcher and another was the stretcher attendant.

Before we got going at pitch 4 we noticed the counterweight didn't have his chest harness on properly and had threaded his chest ascender upside down, a good reminder to check these things on beginner cavers before beginning. It was interesting trying to use a human redirect here—we had one person with two pulleys on their harness redirecting the counterweight line and the stretcher attendant line. It seemed to be too much weight so we did a last-minute change and got a second person to act as another human redirect, so each line had its own person. This only seemed to help the situation partially. (I'm writing this report after having attended the SarEX in New Zealand where on a pitch I was rigging, about halfway down we used a human redirect with only a carabiner and it worked really smoothly and well. I wonder if our human redirects at the top of the pitch created a bigger angle and therefore more friction? I'm not sure why this worked so poorly compared to in NZ).



Serpentine Route. Image: Jess Bayles

Moving the stretcher up pitches 3 and 2 went smoothly; we then took the casualty out of the stretcher and walked through the annoying squeezy meander to pitch 1. Casualty back in and up the pitch we went. The Michie line rigging was right through the commuter/stretcher attendant anchor at the pitch head

which was annoying. A few attempts were made to move it but due to a lack of slack in the Michie line little could be done to improve the situation. The next section involved moving the stretcher vertically along a Tyrolean which would have worked better if it had been rigged higher. It is easy to forget the amount of sag the stretcher creates. The team did well manoeuvring the stretcher through tight passageway.

We then started stretcher carrying through tight passageway. It was slow progress. There was a suggestion that we skip ahead to the next vertical section however this request was denied. Stretcher carrying is an important component of a rescue exercise.



Serpentine Route. Image: Jess Bayles

The stretcher haul up the Tyrolean that Janice's team rigged went smoothly. We did however have some people on the false floor while most others and the stretcher were below them. Not ideal if the false floor had given out. It was then a slow process getting everyone past the stretcher. To avoid walking across the false floor we had rigged a small pitch (4 m) as commuter rigging. Mutterings of wanting to skip the stretcher-carrying section again were starting to become louder. Although the Serpentine team had started moving the stretcher an hour and a half earlier than the Wet Way team, they had by now reached the entrance, having beaten us. Although I will note, moving the stretcher through the tight passage is a lot more time consuming than just going up lots of pitches. With the other team finished, there was anarchy arising in the dry route.... so Alan and I compromised and agreed to skip the rest of the stretcher carrying if we could complete the final entrance pitch.

All in all, not a bad exercise. I was pretty nervous going into the Safety Officer role for the first time but really enjoyed it in the end. Alan was a surprisingly good mentor, I only asked about five times for him to step back and let me have a go at taking the lead which was less than what I was anticipating.

(Jemma) We had similar shenanigans in the Wet Way.... It was a very challenging environment, and people kinda worked it out enough.

(Ciara): I was assigned to paramedic minding duty. I accompanied three paramedics down to the very bottom of the Wet Way. They all did well on the rigging. At the exercise start point we rigged a simple 3 m counterweight and then sat and waited for everyone else to be ready. We huddled in the chamber for at least four hours, becoming properly frigid. The paramedics gained important first-hand experience of what it's like to sit in a damp, windy chamber for multiple hours (personally, I could have skipped this element). The paramedics cracked out their emergency

silver blankets from their first-aid kits, commenting that it was the first time they had ever worn these themselves rather than putting them on a patient. We did have one exciting moment when Jemma, in underground controller mode, decided the new radios and MESH texting system were making communication too easy and proceeded to hurl her radio down the pitch towards us. It did not survive.

Finally, the exercise began but I got caught derigging behind the stretcher, so I didn't see how it progressed, but I believe it went well. It was great to see the paramedics put their hand up to be in the stretcher, especially on the wet pitch—I guess that means they have some faith in us.

IB-131 Old Ditch Road

23 May 2026

Becca Lunnon

Party: Karina Anders, Adrian Hills, Becca Lunnon

As a new and inexperienced caver, one is somewhat dependent on the kindness of others to run beginner trips. When a spark from Janine's Pitch Bagger's Guide ignited a little interest, some fanning of the flames quickly had Karina, Henry and Jemma agreeing to run some easier trips for us newbies—the first to Old Ditch Road. As is the way with enthusiastic and adventurous souls, there was some attrition. Jemma was drawn to international exploration while Henry tried his best to amputate a finger on the morning of the trip. Karina was therefore left to bravely take on the job of keeping the two of us out of trouble.

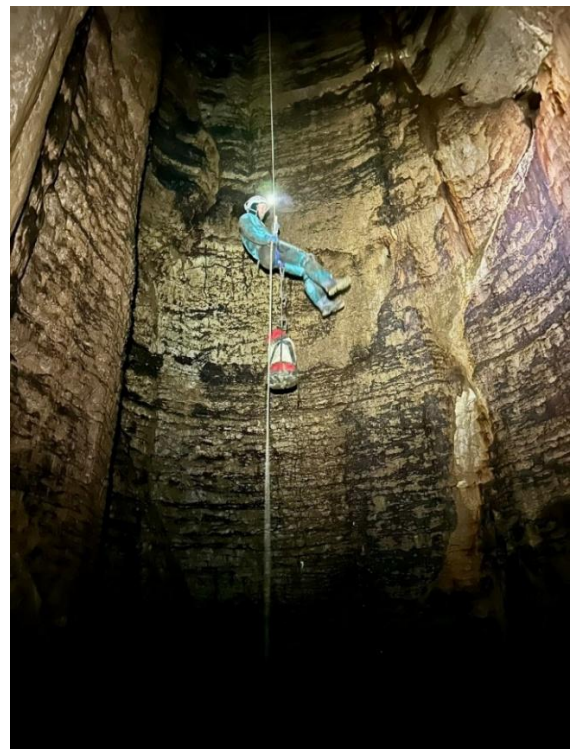


The bottom of Old Ditch Road. Image: Becca Lunnon

We managed to find the start of the cave without incident but despite having received helpful advice from Janine, we managed to do exactly as she said we'd want to do, but shouldn't. We followed the trickle of water further than we should have and found

ourselves peeking into the first pitch from an entrance part way down. A bit of scouting, the dawning of realisation, and we were back on track. Not to be deterred, Karina had Adrian and I take it in turns to rig the four pitches. It was a fun cognitive challenge to keep us engaged (and behaving?). The reward came at the bottom when we went for a little walk to The Ballroom and then the stream. Who says southern Tassie caves aren't pretty?

We earned our single pitch bagger's point on the ascent of either pitch 4 or 2, though I remain confused as to which it actually is given the different numbers written on the map, rigging notes and the Pitch Baggers Guide! Suitably exercised and hungry, we traipsed back to the car, the draw of bikkies, dip and cheese strong.



Adrian on rope. Image: Becca Lunnon

IB-9 Big Tree Pot

6 June 2026

Karina Anders

Party: Karina Anders, Henry Garratt, Adrian Hills, Becca Lunnon

We were off to find Big Tree Pot. The track was pretty easy to follow. We did think we had got to the cave a bit earlier than where it actually was but after looking around for a bit and not finding the entrance within 2 m of the track we decided to continue on. About 30 m later we found the entrance; it was very obvious. Becca and Henry rigged the first pitch and then it was essentially just pitch after pitch, down and down we went. It was a great opportunity for Becca and Adrian to do some rigging off naturals. The 90 m pitch was great, we all got to do a knot crossing and we tandem prusiked back up, me with Becca and Henry with Adrian. Adrian brought his speaker so while going down and up the big pitch and on the derig on the way out we had fun music to cave to. I can recommend it; it definitely makes for a different caving experience.



Karina in the damp. Image: Becca Lunnon

IB-8 Mini Martin: Newbies Trip

13 June 2026

David Barlow

Party: David Barlow, Henry Garratt, James Grant, Becca Lunnon

James and I are new members and having passed our SRT training at Fruehauf, Henry took us to Mini Martin to practice our prusiking.

An unusually warm and overcast Saturday saw us humping packs up from the carpark. After a leisurely 90 mins, we had found the pit, via some muddy slips and a few U-turns. Right on cue – the wind and rain started as we kitted up – soaking us nicely and adding to the atmosphere.

Henry rigged and Becca hung on the rebelay 9 m down to make sure James and I passed safely. After a few whoops and hollers in the spectacular shaft we were all on the bottom of the 100 m pitch.

Henry had planned for us to just do the entrance shaft then head out, so a bite to eat, a few pics and Henry and Becca were tandem prusiking out.

I hadn't prusiked a shaft like this for well over 35 years – so it was fun to enjoy the ascent and the incredibly beautiful, fluted shaft. At the rebelay, I joined Becca and Henry, took a few pictures and then headed to the surface.



Three? on the rope. Image: selfie



The joys of tandem prusiking. Image: David Barlow

MW-1 Arrakis and MW-2 Crystal Cave

20 June 2026

Becca Lunnon

Party: Henry Garratt, Adrian Hills, Becca Lunnon

‘Have you heard of Arrakis?’ No, not the cave, but I already want to go. If there’s a cave named after the hostile desert planet in Frank Herbert’s *Dune* novel, it’s got to be interesting. In that fictional world, Arrakis is the only place where the spice melange is found, which is vital for space travel, extending life and granting enhanced awareness. Surely the cave lives up to this reputation!

The cave, on the slopes of Mount Weld, was named Arrakis for the lack of water at the entrance camp. Various features of the cave also have names from the novel. There is large, sloping Selamlik Chamber, named after Dune’s imperial audience chamber or throne room where the Padishah Emperor meets with dignitaries, nobles and petitioners. But my favourite has to be the 68 m pitch, Gom Jabbar. This shares its name with the poison-tipped needle used by the Bene Gesserit to test their subjects’ ability to rise above animal instinct. Subjects are required to put and keep their hand inside a box which causes severe pain. If they fail and remove their hand, the gom jabbar is driven into their necks, causing instant death. You can see why I really wanted to see this pitch! Would we have to rise above our base instincts?

Armed with imagery, GPS data, and previous trip reports we made the bold decision to visit on one of the shortest days of the year. An overnight camp had been suggested, but we’re all (relatively) young and silly and we opted for the comfort of our own beds and a little less extra faff, accepting the prospect of a slightly longer day. The road to the Mount Weld track carpark was better than expected (although mapping apps will

Henry had been busting to practice his hauling, so James got to have a slight elevator experience on his prusik out, with Henry and Becca heaving away at the rebelay.

We were all out and everything was derigged right on dark. A muddy walk up and down through the forest had us back at the car around 6.30 pm and our introductory caving trip was over. Thanks Henry and Becca.

try to send you through Tahune if you aren’t paying attention), taking somewhere between 1.5 and 2 hours from Hobart. We weren’t sure what to expect with the Mt Weld track; there was a chance it had deteriorated further than previous reports indicate, but there was also the small possibility that the fame and attraction of the Abels had caused extra traffic and therefore a more distinct/maintained track. It turned out to be better than we expected. The route through the kilometre or so of cutting grass was boggy and deep in spots, and we were grateful for gumboots (hiking boots wouldn’t stand a chance). The transition to forest was welcome, and our footing more secure as we contoured to the ascent ridge.



Crystal Cave. Image: Becca Lunnon

Trout Creek was pumping when we arrived 1.5 hours after setting out and we collected all the water we wanted for our caving, before turning to ascend the ridge. We’d already realised we’d walk right past Crystal Cave, which we’d been told was interesting, so we detoured to poke our heads in. It took us a long time to find the upper entrance (despite standing on top of it at one point!), but we finally did and crawled inside to see what all the fuss was about. It probably says more

about us than anything else that we spent more time exploring the far end of the cave, where there were no crystals, than the entrance, although we did take an obligatory photo or two of the crystal-covered ceiling.

We left the cave and started to contour the few hundred metres towards Arrakis, surprised to find we'd been going only three hours, despite our hour-long crystal distractions. Twenty minutes later Henry's navigation spat us out right where we wanted to be, although it took a bit of a scout around to realise it! He then walked us through what he was doing and why with the rigging, and one by one we joined him to help search for some solid naturals from which to rig an access line through Selamlik Chamber to the pitch below. Despite all of us being experienced and adventurous walkers/scramblers, none of us wanted to approach without a safety line knowing what lay beyond the steep slope if we slipped on its very fragile and loose surface. Henry had told us the story behind the cave being lost [*Ed:* or possibly not widely recorded] and then re-found, and standing there looking down made us shiver as we realised the potential ramifications of scrambling around, unaware of the pitch below.



Descending into the dark. Image: Becca Lunnon

After some gardening that left me feeling like a big kid with a marble run, and the tweaking of our natural anchor rigging due to concerns about rope length, Henry was off into the gloom. Adrian and I sat and waited, curious as to the cause of a glee-filled giggle that floated out of the blackness. It didn't take us long

to discover that the 30 metre rope Henry had used wasn't quite long enough to reach the bolt at the top of Gom Jabbar pitch, and he had extended it with a couple of the slings from some spare hexes, something Adrian had just asked him about. We congregated on the airy ledge on the right-hand side above the pitch, conscious that the reality of kicking rocks down during the approach to it was inevitable, and none of us wanted to be on the rope when that happened.

From there it didn't take long to whiz down. I arrived to find Henry's hand ascender on the end of the rope, just to make sure it didn't retract too far out of reach. He laughingly introduced me to the Jeff Butt special. I didn't have the pleasure of meeting Jeff, but one quickly senses he may have had an extreme frugality with rope when rigging pitches. As we sat and refuelled, we watched the end of the rope slowly retract skywards. Clearly it takes a bit of time to recoil after the stretch of a descent.



The Jeff Butt special. Image: Becca Lunnon

We'd been told the rest of the cave wasn't exceptional and so we'd made no plans to explore further and instead took it in turns to head back up Gom Jabbar. It didn't take long and we were back amongst the tree ferns with blue sky peeking through the natural skylight of Selamlik Chamber. Having spent a bit over 4.5 hours with the caving side of things, we were optimistic about getting back to the cars only just after dark. The walk out started fast but slowed down a touch when we hit the cutting grass and sufficient darkness to require the use of head torches. We got back in just over two hours.

Other Exciting Stuff

Correspondence

Following the rescue exercise in February, STC sent formal letters of thanks to Ambulance Tasmania and Tasmanian Police for their participation. STC also thanked VRA Rescue NSW for their generous donation of a large number of UHF Radios. The following letter was received from Ambulance Tasmania.

**Department of Health
Ambulance Tasmania**

GPO Box 125, HOBART TAS 7001, Australia
Ph: (03) 6166 1956 Fax: (03) 6173 0443
Web: www.ambulance.tas.gov.au



Contact: Emergency Management and Special Operations
Phone: 1300 937 977
E-mail: emso@ambulance.tas.gov.au

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers
C/o Karina Anders, President
president@southerntasmaniancaverneers.com

Dear Karina and Members of the Southern Tasmanian Caverneers,

I am writing to extend Ambulance Tasmania's sincere thanks to the Southern Tasmanian Caverneers and the individual members who generously supported and facilitated our recent cave rescue training.

Your collective expertise, professionalism, and willingness to provide access to technical cave environments have been invaluable in supporting the development of a cave rescue capability. The practical instruction and guidance offered by your members significantly enhanced the realism and quality of the training, enabling our paramedics to safely develop the mobility, situational awareness, and environment-specific confidence required to operate effectively underground.

The support provided - through technical mentoring and the sharing of deep knowledge of Tasmania's complex cave systems - has directly strengthened our operational preparedness. It has also enhanced interagency collaboration, communication, and created mutual understanding and respect, critical for complex and prolonged rescue operations.

Ambulance Tasmania recognises the dedication and volunteer commitment of the caving community, and we are genuinely grateful for the time, effort, and passion your members contributed to making this training possible. Your involvement not only enhances our capability but ultimately helps safeguard the wellbeing of those who explore Tasmania's remarkable subterranean environments.

We look forward to continued collaboration with the Southern Tasmanian Caverneers as we refine our specialist response model and participate in future training exercises. Thank you once again for your generous support and partnership.

Yours sincerely,

Nicole Ashworth
Chief Executive
Ambulance Tasmania

05 March 2026

