

Speleograffiti

Volume 27 Number 1

January–April 2021



The Newsletter of the National University Caving Club (NUCC)

Speleograffiti

The Newsletter of the National University Caving Club (NUCC)

Volume 27 Number 1, April 2021

ISSN 1031-1807

Published by the National University Caving Club, an ASF Member Club. Edited by Oxana Repina and Lachie Bailey. All articles, photographs, and items remain copyright their author, and where unattributed, copyright to NUCC.

Contact: caving@anusra.com.au

Website: <https://nucc.caves.org.au/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/65963976973/>

Front Cover: Lachie Bailey and Austin Zerk appreciating the stunning formation in Welcome Stranger Cave, Junee Florentine, Tasmania. Photo by Andriana Stoddart.

Back Cover: Claud Tomkins abseiling the first pitch of Bungonia Main Canyon, New South Wales.
Photo by Oxana Repina.



Do you want your own copy of *Speleograffiti*, spiral bound, printed, and stamped with the official NUCC stamp? Copies can be had of *Speleo-G* for \$4.50 each, so that your Librarian can pay for paper and replace his print-credit when it runs out. Email caving@anusra.com.au the editions you want, and transfer your payment to the NUCC account (details here: <https://nucc.caves.org.au/join/>).



More formation in Welcome Stranger, Junee Florentine, Tasmania. Photo by Andriana Stoddart.

Editorial

I'd optimistically planned to have a single issue of *Speleograffiti* for this year, but as the document headed past 100 pages and 150 MB in file size for reports covering first few months alone, I've had to split it into several issues. During a normal year (that is: no COVID-19 lockdowns!), it looks like we can easily publish *Speleograffiti* quarterly. For the second half of 2021, lockdowns definitely put a spanner in the works, but the first half of the year was very much like pre-COVID times and we ran many trips over summer and on most weekends during first semester.

This issue covers the summer expedition trip to Tasmania, several canyoning trips over the 2020–2021 wet canyoning season, and NUCC's first post-COVID caving trip in New South Wales (to Bungonia). The Tasmania trip alone takes up 45 pages, an impressive jump over the 25 pages that covered NUCC's 2019 expedition to New Zealand in *Speleograffiti* 25.1.

A big thank you goes to everyone who contributed trip reports and photos. Perhaps more frequent issues of *Speleograffiti* throughout the year will provide a greater incentive to contribute content! And an extra thank you to Lachie Bailey, for firstly entrusting me with editing this year, and secondly for providing a huge amount of help as sub-Editor.

—Oxana Repina, 2021 Editor

President's Prattle Pedestal

Marvelous mix of wholesome crunchy nibbles, garden peas, peanuts and juicy sultanas.

For these, and all of these mercies, praise thee.
Amen.

—Andy Waddell, 2021 President

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Trip reports | 4 |
| A canyoning not-week-long (Newnes and Bungonia) | 5 |
| Tassie Part I: Ida Bay | 8 |
| Tassie Part II: Junee Florentine | 23 |
| Devils Punchbowl | 54 |
| Macquarie Pass | 55 |
| Buchan | 59 |
| Dragons and Queen: A Caver's Fairy Tale (Bungonia Caving: Blowfly and Acoustic Pot) | 61 |
| Easter Canyoning at Newnes | 64 |
| Bungonia Main Canyon | 73 |
| Yarrangobilly | 76 |
| Canyon Topos | 79 |
| Tiger Snake Canyon | 80 |
| Hole-in-the-Wall Canyon | 81 |
| Bridge Canyon | 82 |
| Closet Canyon | 83 |
| Other reports | 84 |
| Some thoughts on the Tassie trip | 85 |
| Australian caving community online directory | 87 |

Following page: Darcii Jean and Josh Coates in Eagles Nest Cave, Yarrangobilly. Photo by Penny Sze.

Trip reports



A canyoning not-week-long

(Newnes and Bungonia)

10-13 January 2021

Lachie Bailey

Participants: Lachie Bailey, Michael Larkin (ISS)

Michael and I had been planning a six day trip up to the Blue Mountains for quite some time now. Being the height of summer, we planned to go to Mount Wilson originally as the canyons have a bit more water than the ones further west. Unfortunately, the Sydney COVID outbreak put paid to that, and we ended up at Newnes. The rough plan was Pipeline, Starlight, Firefly, and maybe something easier up on Newnes Plateau for the lazy days. We'd originally had heaps of takers, but natural selection whittled the trip down to just Michael and me – ah well, such is life when organising trips over the Christmas break. I got away to a slow start from Canberra too, as Sunday 10th was the annual ASF Council meeting, and I have the (dubious) pleasure of being NUCC's rep and getting to indulge in ALL the speleopolitics. So I only made it as far as Taralga by 1am. For future reference, there is a very convenient rest area by Woolshed Creek 2.5km north of Taralga, but nothing much of any use between Goulburn and Taralga. Handy for late night runs to Jenolan/Wombeyan/Tuglow/Kanangra/The Blueies where you want to get there for an early start but don't want to risk the sharp bends and wildlife of the Abercrombie Road at night.

Got to Newnes 8:30am, full of Sydneysiders. I thought they were meant to all be corralled into the Sydney Basin because COVID? Michael and I were away to Starlight Canyon by 9am. It's a viciously steep 300vm slog straight up the Pipeline Track to the turnoff to Starlight Canyon, and we'd managed to schedule our trip just after the nice, pleasant cool weather had burnt off. Not. Fun. We found the track out to near SH867

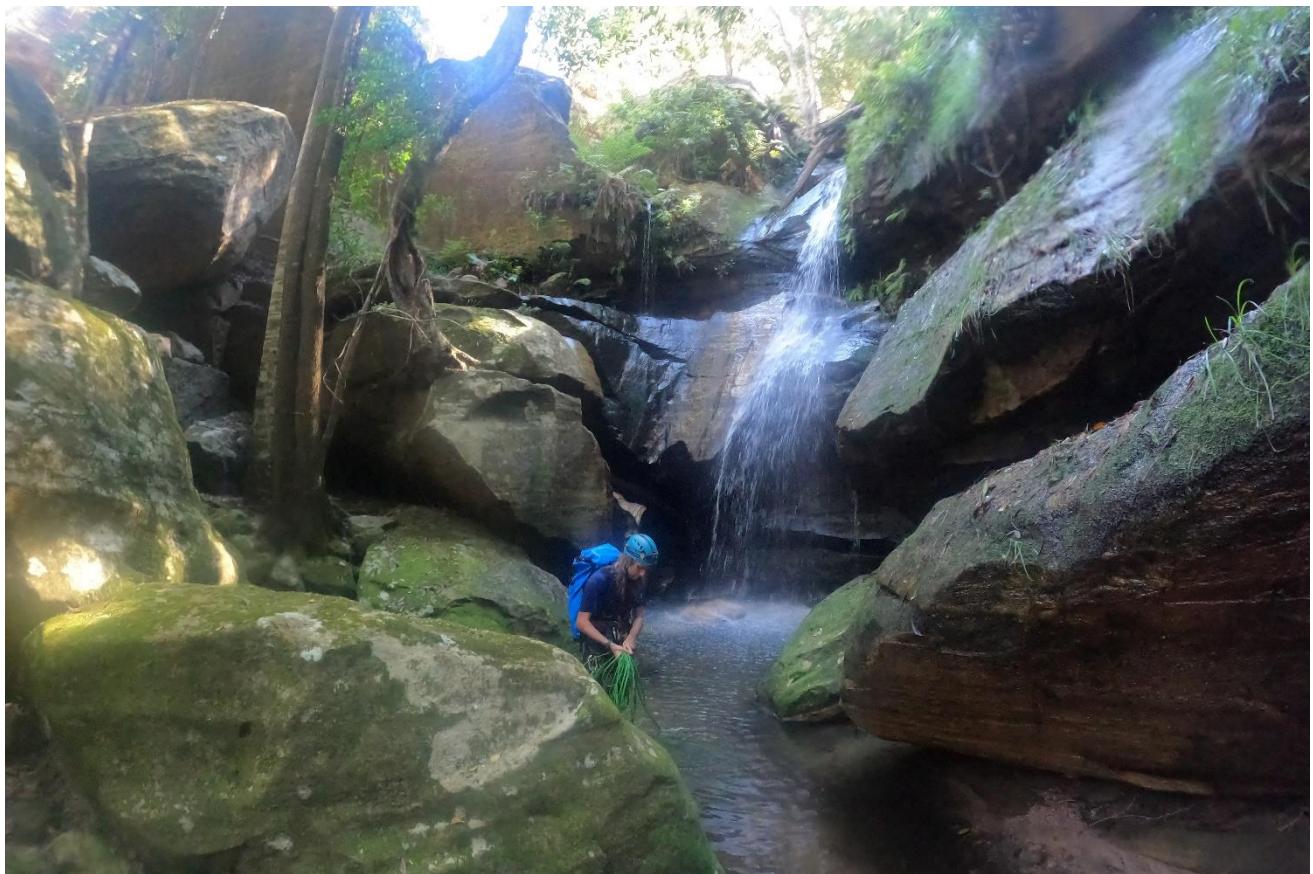
pretty easy to follow at first, but it got progressively vaguer, before vanishing. This meant that we blundered off down the wrong ridge, and ended up bluffed. Annoying. We eventually gained the main Starlight valley, and abseiled in at the end of the covered area. The sandstone was appallingly terrible – you could very nearly push your finger into it, and the ends of my top rack bars literally embedded themselves up to the frame of the rack in the sandstone!

This section was quite pretty – lots of glowworms, and the water was chest deep. I wandered up to where most parties abseil in, and the waterfall was pumping. Michael piked at the point where he thought he was going to get chest deep, and didn't go the whole way. As I came back, I wondered what geological process had caused such a constrained dark-zone to form... Maybe a massive landslide in the not-too-distant past? Surely the tunnel must be geologically a very short-lived feature, or we'd see more like it in other canyons.

After the tunnel there was a long slog of creekwalking through constricted but open canyon. One final pitch was downstream, and what has to be the world's most unpleasant boulder jumble (NOTHING WENT!), and we were on the Wolgan. Wandered upstream a bit to soothe our aching feet, and then just a long plod back along the Wolgan River Trail to the campsite. Neither Michael nor I particularly rated Starlight, it's a long and unpleasant walk for a pretty average canyon. The only real feature of note is the tunnel, and you can get much nicer by going in an actual cave.



Classic Blue Mountains scenery on the walk. Photo by Michael Larkin.



Lachie flaking the rope in Starlight Canyon. Photo by Micahel Larkin.

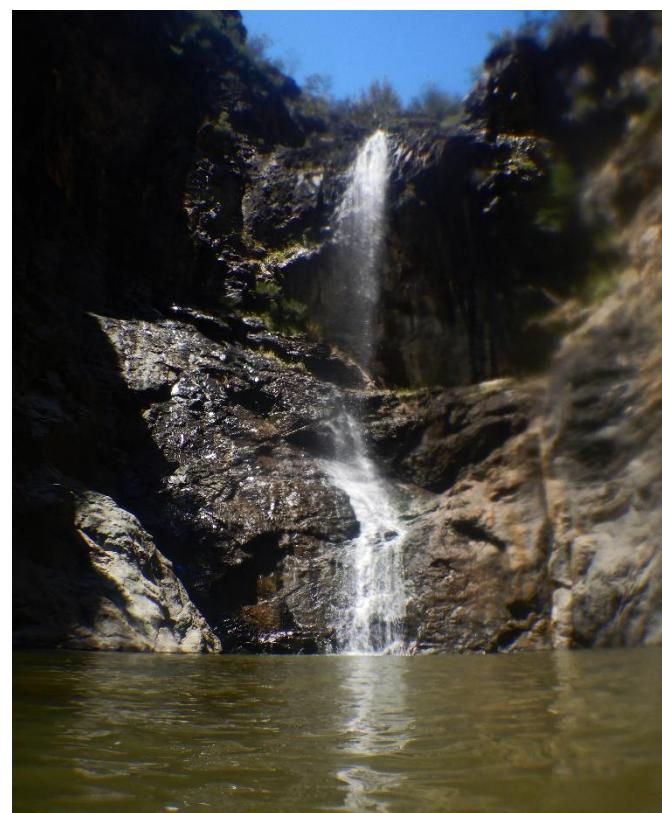
Michael and I were both pretty wrecked the next day from the heatstroke we got on the walk to and from Starlight, and the weather was forecast to be just as nasty for the rest of the week. So we both agreed to bail on Newnes, and retreat to somewhere more southerly with more water. Bungonia! Proving how small the outdoors world is, we ran into Oscar Parra at the Bungonia campground – he was in the area for a bushwalk with a friend.

Wednesday saw us barrelling down Bungonia Main Canyon. This is a lovely canyon which never fails to excite. We went slowly, as I was preoccupied with my GPS and notepad, taking notes for a canyon topo (see *Speleograffiti* 26.2). There's a lot of crap hardware in Bungonia Main, and many of the current abseils are sub-optimally positioned – someone needs to come through and bolt it properly. At the confluence with Jerrara Creek, we met a group of four that had come down Jerrara Canyon with two kids. Watching the kids abseil, I have to say I was impressed! Jerrara Falls has daunted many adults, and the kids were abseiling it like champions. In another example of the smallness of the outdoors world, one of the two adults with the kids was from Fenner School, and I actually owed her an email about where I was at with my PhD (cue: random slackness guilt). So I guess I was very much sprung for going canyoning on a weekday, rather than being in the office...

The slog up and out of the gorge along the Bretons Creek Track was as foul as ever. Having walked up that godforsaken track so many times now, about all I can say is that knowing exactly how far up each landmark is makes it even more miserable. Back at the cars, we decided to bail on the original plan to go to Macquarie Cascades,¹ and headed home to Canberra after rather less canyoning than we originally planned. Still, a fun few days out, just wish the weather had been less nasty!



Michael starting the P1 abseil. Photo by Lachie Bailey.



Looking back at P1. Photo by Lachie Bailey.



Looking over the edge of P3. Photo by Lachie Bailey.

¹ The generally accepted names for this canyon are 'Cascade Falls', or 'The Cascades', which are both completely and utterly useless names. 'Macquarie Cascades Canyon' isn't much better but at least it informs you which set of cascades is being talked about!

Tassie Part I: Ida Bay

30 January–5 February 2021

Participants: Andriana Stoddart, Andy Waddell, Austin Zerk, Chris Bradley, Corey Hanrahan, Elisa Scorsini, Hugh Mason (STC), Jak Burges (MUMC), Jess Spargo, Lachie Bailey, Oxana Repina (SUSS), Riley Baird

Saturday 30 January: Canberra to Melbourne

Jak

Woke up, made spaghetti bog round 1. Bought a book and some last-minute equipment. Made spag bog 2 electric boogaloo. Had to deal with some strangers in my house, but bed was nice.

Austin

This was my first big caving trip and I was really excited. I had my bag packed (minus a few things) and was ready to go. This started a great discovery of things I forgot to pack. First thing I noticed I was missing a mask, as one was required for the boat ride from Melbourne to Tasmania. The next thing I forgot to take was my gumboots. They were by the door ready to go, but were not with my other things and so by the door they remained.

The driving itself was quite nice – I was driving with Chris, and other than a few stops for lunch and toilet breaks, it was almost straight to Melbourne. There we crashed at the place of a wonderful person named Matt Dunwoodie who lived with Jak and Jak's brother. After grabbing some dinner at a local fish and chip shop we were ready to board the boat. Nothing eventful really happened on the boat, everyone mostly just slept.

Lachie

Yay! Caving! Tassie! After nearly being derailed by COVID, the Tassie Trip was finally here! Met Chris, Andy, Austin and Elisa in Gold Creek at Maccas, because there has to be a meeting in a Maccas carpark for any good roadtrip. After some chat, we were away, with the first stop being at the Dog on the Tuckerbox in Gundagai. Then it was on to Albury, for the feared border crossing, which I had been fretting about for a week. It turned out to be a non event – the police were actually dismantling the checkpoint, and we were all just waved on through. I think I was actually upset about the fact that they didn't even look at my border pass!

Had lunch at Wang, and raced on to Melbourne, using Jak's conveniently placed place in Melbourne Port as a staging point. After arriving, I discovered that Matt had bought some disgusting amount of removable anchors and 8mm rope. Much gear envy. Grabbed Jak, and raced off to visit Steve Fordyce out in east Melbourne and pick up

some dye-tracing kit and other random bits and bobs. Steve took the time to give us some excellent advice and a general overview of JF. We also met his kitten, who was adorable.



There's still a few spaces in Lachie's car, we can cram more stuff in! Photo by Lachie Bailey.

Got back to Jak's place to find the others were poring over Matt's map of Bulmer Cavern in NZ. More gear (and cave) envy. Jak offered me some of his freshly cooked spag bol, which was excellent (although, is it still spag bol if there isn't any spaghetti in it?). Got chivvied along, and we were soon boarding the ferry. I had a moment of utter despair as they pulled me aside and made

me unpack my car and took the 3 gas cylinders I had. I thought they were being confiscated, but no, they just wanted to store them elsewhere for transport. We all trooped up to the observation deck to watch the lights of Melbourne recede into the distance, and soon after that collapsed unconscious into the recliners.

Sunday 31 January: Getting to Ida Bay

Austin

The boat pulled into Devonport at about 8am and we were off at about 9:30am. We had a nice breakfast at a small café and were on the road again. After some nice mountains and fields of various animals and crops we arrived at Hobart. There we faffed around sorting who and what was in each car and headed to Woolworths in Huonville to do some shopping. After about an hour of shopping we had a tonne of food and spent about \$690. We then arrived at the campsite, set up some tents, had some reheated pasta and called it a day.

Jak

Woke up at 4am to an alarm set the previous day. Despite knowing that I was supposed to be heading out for a flight in an hour I was very reluctant to get out of bed. Despite this I was still able to comfortably leave home by 5am and was

making good time until it was realised that the flight was at 6am. Desperately ordering a taxi and running through the airport fortunately corrected the mistake and I even made the gate before final call.

Flight was uneventful, as was locating Riley. Happened to be on the same flight making the whole thing rather easy. Everyone in Hobart does not believe in Sunday and all useful facilities were closed. Rather annoying but oh bother. Walked through the botanical garden, over an overly-sized bridge, and up to Rosny Hill Lookout which I had decided to be the meeting point about half way to it.

Meeting was a little chaotic, but it was decided that Andriana and Hugh would buy the beer, and everyone else buy the food at Huonville. Lachie's driving made me sick, that or my weak stomach, but an otherwise uneventful day.

Monday 1 February: Big Tree Pot and Midnight Hole

Lachie

Got up, headed off to Big Tree Pot. Found the other group at Mystery Creek Carpark, only just getting ready to go. Apparently, they had gone off down South Lune Road, despite clear instructions beforehand to Jak that it was the wrong way. Went for an unnecessary bushwalk. Turned around and headed back to Big Tree Pot (thanks to Optus allowing an emergency call to Janine McKinnon). Found cave (thanks to the STC trackwork fairies), rigged down to P4. It was

now getting late thanks to the unnecessary bushwalk, so headed back to camp. Lovely rainforest. Jak seemed to have a bee in his bonnet about something when we got back to camp. He even volunteered to write the trip report. Is something up?

Jak

As is tradition we started the day taking a wrong turn driving out to the carpark an hour after what the intentions board had written.



Jak enjoying Matchbox Squeeze in Midnight Hole. Photo by Andriana Stoddart.



Riley belaying Andy down the first pitch of Midnight Hole, presumably so as to avoid the embarrassment of an accident on the first pitch of the first cave NUCC does in Tasmania. Photo by Andriana Stoddart.

With Lachie's expert guidance, we walked along the southern ranges trail until we had reached the appropriate altitude of the cave and began the bush-bash towards it. Unfortunately, the information we had been given by our intrepid leader was inaccurate, as after 200 metres towards the cave, no tape appeared on any tree. Never doubting Lachie's directions, we persisted onwards in the vague direction of IB11. After roughly 30 minutes of hiking, the first pink tape was found, not exactly 10 metres from the trail but a certain someone might have misremembered. After some more arduous trekking the very clear signage around an innocuous hole in the side of the mountain indicated we were on the right track.

First pitch was simple enough, and after remembering how to spell our last names we were ready for the rest of Midnight Hole. The freshly installed bolts (courtesy of STC) were



Riley and Jak in Midnight Hole. Photo by Andriana Stoddart.

clearly visible and had little to no rub (not that this would have been an issue on a pull through). Barring some unease with the final pitch, the vertical section had been passed and Matchbox Squeeze approached. Now I say squeeze, but it was a rather pleasant experience, with plenty of wind suggesting that the cave likely went. After a rather stunning step over the streamway, the first rock pile was the site of a quick lunch and some light reading of the map. Following the rock-pile/streamway was straight forward and well trodden. Stopping by the well flowing waterfall and topping up our bottles, we squeezed into the final passage which contained a beautiful collection of glow worms giving the cave an excellent artificial horizon. Dwelling there for an extended period we finally took the last 200 metres of the cave and enjoyed a simple walk back to the cars where it was discovered Lachie was running a little late, likely still lost on the walk in.²

² Editor's note: The maps of all the caves we visited at Ida Bay are appended at the end of the report (page 18).



Hugh filling up his waterbottle from the waterfall in Mystery Creek Cave. Photo by Andriana Stoddart.

Tuesday 2 February: Big Tree Pot and Revelation Cave

Hugh

Headed to Big Tree Pot (IB9) for the day. Lachie's group from Monday rigged the first three pitches and left rope for the next three pitches, plus extra gear. We did take some time trying to find the entrance, and ended up stumbling across IB49. Eventually we did find Big Tree Pot and we descended the rigged pitches, and made good time to the 90p. The 90p was super impressive with massive avens and a clean drop. The bottom was a small platform with a ledge that led to the last pitch (9m). According to Oxana and Andriana, the bottom of the cave is nothing to write home about. Ascending the 90m pitch was kind of miserable with the amount of the rope stretch we had, but didn't dent anyone's spirits once we all made it back to the surface.



Andy admiring the formation just above the 90p in Big Tree Pot. Photo by Andriana Stoddart.

Lachie

After the misfire in Big Tree Pot yesterday, I wanted a short and sweet cave that I knew I could get to the bottom of, contained something interesting, and could be back from by tea-time. Janine had told me about IB1 Revelation Cave, which sounded really interesting as it had lots of question marks on the map, and a draughting dig at the bottom. I convinced Corey, Riley and Austin to come with me, and after a quick packing session in the morning, we were on our way. This time we knew EXACTLY where we were going. So, shortly after leaving Mystery Creek Carpark, we found our turnoff from the Southern Ranges track, and then Revelation Cave itself, buried in the rainforest.

The rigging was easy, although I found myself cursing the thrubolts: dicking around with a

spanner while perched over a pitch with no real safety is not my idea of a fun time. Pitch 3 was slightly more interesting – the naturals worked, but were a bit marginal. I found myself wishing that the bolt fairies would come and make another visit, even if they did leave more thrubolts. Once down P3, we had a look at the inviting inlets that feed water into the cave. Considering how high the roof and avens are here, I reckon there is a good chance for some neat feeder caves! A few desultory scrambles later, and we barrelled down to the dig and low stream passageway where the cave ends. We did the obligatory spot of grovelling, made our contribution to the dig by removing a few handfuls of mud, and made our way back out. We derigged as we left, and left the cave to the zillions of cave crickets that call it home. Returned with plenty of time before tea time.

Wednesday 3 February: Cockle Creek and Midnight Hole



Caving tourists trying to score as many 'southern-most's as they can. Photo by Oxana Repina.

Oxana

I'd noticed Cockle Creek and the South Coast Track marked on the National Parks map en route to caves on previous days, and had been desperately keen to go there since bushfires during a previous trip two years ago had disallowed it. So today was set aside for bushwalking and sight-seeing. We left camp fairly late so only had time for one short-ish walk, so we picked the day trip to South Cape Bay.

The track started with a couple hours of slogging through bush, which I sulked through as I'd had plenty of that the last couple of days and had mentally prepared for a day of coastal scenery. But looking across corduroy lines of big blue breakers booming below grey gravel cliffs as the bush suddenly opened out onto the southern-most point of Australia's southern-most track, I was very glad I came. We ate lunch looking out across the ocean, then ran down to touch the almost-southern-most water before turning back.

We spent a little time at the Cockle Creek lagoon, wading through the water and watching mud crabs dig themselves into holes. Dinner that night was at the pub, featuring an almost-fist-fight relating to spoons.

Lachie

Midnight Hole today. Very easy walk in, I don't know what Jak was complaining about. He must have gotten lost, poor thing. Lovely pitches! Our setup of 2x30m ropes and 1x60m rope was less than ideal on the longer pitches, as a European Death Knot (Flat Overhand Bend for those who like boring knot names) in 9.5mm rope was easily insufficient as a knot block on the pitches. 2x60s, isolated with a Stone Knot, SRT, last person removing Stone Knot then abseiling double rope would be much easier. Had one fun pull-down (P5 I think), where the rope caught on a flake 10m up, but we managed to dislodge it eventually.

The Chasm of Fear failed to live up to its name, but I very much didn't like the climb down from the end of it into Confusing Chamber. Used a 15m rope we had for the Midnight Hole P6



Elisa, Austin and Chris working on creepy lighting in Midnight Hole. Photo by Lachie Bailey.



Jess ready to descend in Midnight Hole. Photo by Andriana Stoddart.



The dumb pose competition in Mystery Creek Cave. Photo by Corey Hanrahan.

approach line and a meat-anchor to handline it. Don't bother with naturals – they're crap, and a meat-anchor does the job, as you only need one person happily down to guide the rest of the party down. Loved the glowworms in the Walls of Sorrow area, and encountered some tourists in Glow Worm Chamber 1. They hadn't made it 50m from the entrance yet, and were not only lost already, but afraid of getting muddy ("do I need a caveman suit like yours to go any further?"). I pointed them the way on and the way back, and left them to it. Breezy walk back

to the carpark; I wish all caves could have such a lovely walk in as Mystery Creek Cave.

A group also headed in Restoration Cave again today, and had a good look around. They also concurred with the assessment of my group from the day before: it's a super interesting cave, and has lots of potential. Having said that, it would be super depressing if the dig down the bottom went all of 10m and then connected into Exit Cave. Sure, it might be a fun through-trip under the hill, but you'd need a permit then!

Thursday 4 February: Midnight Hole and Big Tree Pot

Andy

Today we went into Midnight Hole. By now, everyone in the group had gone through Midnight Hole. Hugh and Andriana were heading in for a second time. This made the walk in pretty leisurely, because they knew exactly where to turn off the well-trodden track to the pink tape trail. Jess took the opportunity to learn some pull-through rigging. The recently installed chains and bolts were the caver's ultimate dream – so shiny and in the perfect places. The cave was very enjoyable because each pitch was pleasant and the process was fast.

When we arrived at the Matchbox Squeeze, we were expecting a squeeze, which we did not find. Instead we found a jumbo-sized matchbox (for the sort of matches that are as big as a twig) that could have fit two people through at once in parallel. I am not even sure if I touched both walls at once. While disappointed there was no squeezing to do, I was relieved that it would be easy to get through the slot without trouble. Soon we will have to lodge a petition to remove the word 'squeeze' from 'Matchbox Squeeze', and rename it to 'Matchbox Passage' – watch this space. The remaining cave was pretty fun with a few small climbs, although I did not like the drop underneath my feet in the Chasm of Fear. When we reached the waterfall we filled our water bottles for those complaining back at camp about the campsite tank water, and also took some

photos. All together, the cave was fun and I was happy. That was until we reached the glowworms. The glowworms experience was incredibly immersive and emotional. I'm not sure how else to describe it other than that we were definitely in another world. Has to be the highlight of the trip so far for me!

Walk out was super easy. Midnight Hole? Would recommend.



Corey in Midnight Hole. Photo by Andriana Stoddart.

Riley

Today was our last full day at Ida Bay. With ropes left in place from the previous visits, it was necessary to organise a team to de-rig the cave and recover the 220m of rope we had rigged in Big Tree Pot. Through Lachie's persuasive efforts, he was also able to recruit Riley and Jak for the trip. The path to the caves was long and filled with various types of terrain. Starting at the entrance to the Southwest National Park, and guided by pink tags, we walked to the base of a quarry, then proceeded to follow a path climbing to the top. Immediately following that, we proceeded inward through a rainforest, complete with logs, moss, huge trees and rain. Reaching the cave entrance, we ate lunch and began our descent. There were several pitches, but thanks to the rigging setup, it was possible to combine some of these to descend multiple pitches in a single go. Following these pitches, there was a 4 metre climb, described as short and easy by our Tasmanian rigging notes, but still nasty in a SRT kit. After the climb, we reached the biggest pitch in the cave, 90 metres.

Lachie descended this to de-rig, as well as descending the much shorter final pitch, bottoming the vertical section of the cave. Riley and Jak stayed up top, examining the formations in the chamber and preparing to receive and pack the ropes that would be delivered. Following this, we continued back up the cave, gathering rope as we went. While de-rigging, Lachie noted that some of the spits in the cave seemed to be starting to degrade – despite the plastic plugs, a couple had a little grit in them, and were getting quite corroded. The spit on P4 was particularly difficult to deal with. Possibly, this fabulous sporting cave deserves some nice p-bolts as replacements for the old hardware!

All of a sudden, we heard a voice above us. Calling out, we discovered that it was Chris, another member of our caving contingent – after going for a long-distance power walk in the morning, he joined us to help with derigging! This was very much appreciated, as Jak had a shocking time de-rigging the last two pitches.



Looking back up the majestic 90p in Big Tree Pot. Photo by Andriana Stoddart.



Formation and impressive passageway in Big Tree Pot. Photo by Andriana Stoddart.

Apparently, he'd suffered a mix of jammed knots, stuck krabs, and a rope slick enough with mud that his ascenders were sliding on it. To make matters worse, he was wearing Andy's gumboots thanks to an accidental mishap in the morning, so was thoroughly miserable upon reaching the surface. Overall, we weren't entirely sold on the

placement of some of the spits and some of the naturals recommended by Jeff Butt in *SpeleoSpiel* 317, p9. Still, with Chris there to help us, we headed home muddy but accomplished. Walking back, pushing through the rainforest then enjoying the downhill walk down the quarry, we returned to our car, and our campsite for dinner.

Friday 5 February: Relocating to Junee Florentine

Lachie

After five fantastic days, we made a leisurely exit from Southport. We all gradually packed up in the morning, in no hurry as we only had to drive 3 hours to Junee Florentine today. Once packed, we all trooped down to the Rocket Pod, a lovely local pop up café on the Southport waterfront. There we had some most excellent chai, coffee, hot chocolate, cookies, and meteorites. It's only a short walk there and back from the Southport Tavern, but our trip was slowed by the abundance of blackberries growing by the sides of the road. Corey, Oxana, Andriana, Hugh and I nearly made ourselves sick from the number of them we ate!

Still, eventually we had to leave Southport, and drive back to Hobart, where we all mostly regrouped at Recycled Recreation in the city. Riley and Andy declined the offer to worship at this shrine of cheap outdoors gear, and went to visit some old railway relics instead. There was also a functioning map shop very close nearby, which was amazing to trawl through. Unfortunately though, JF is on the border of four 1:25k map sheets, at least several of which are out of print. So sad): Still, it wasn't all fun, as we eventually had some chores to do, like grocery shopping, buying some missing survey kit, and refilling gas cylinders.

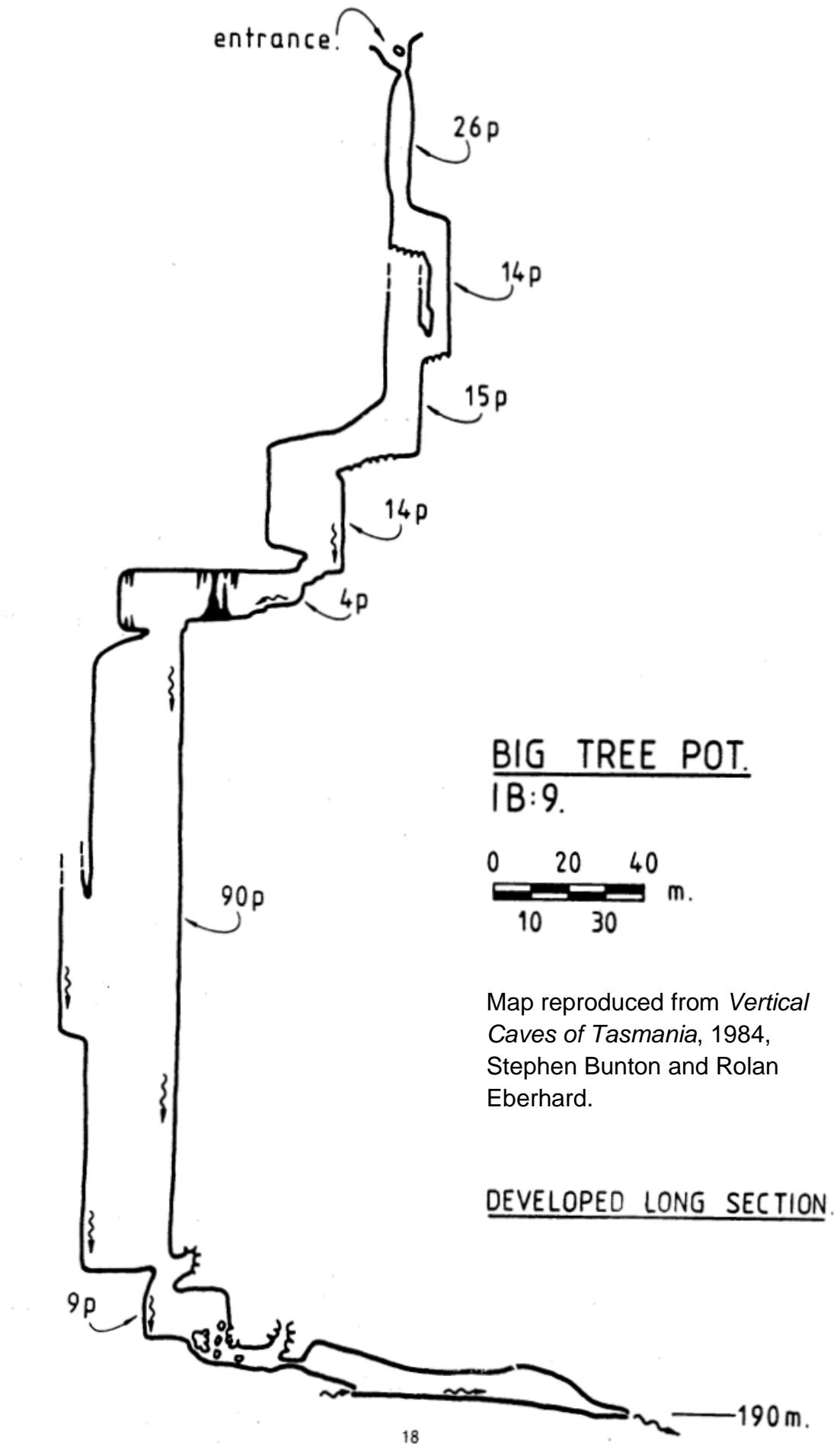
Once this was all done, most of the group trooped off to JF, where we would be camping at

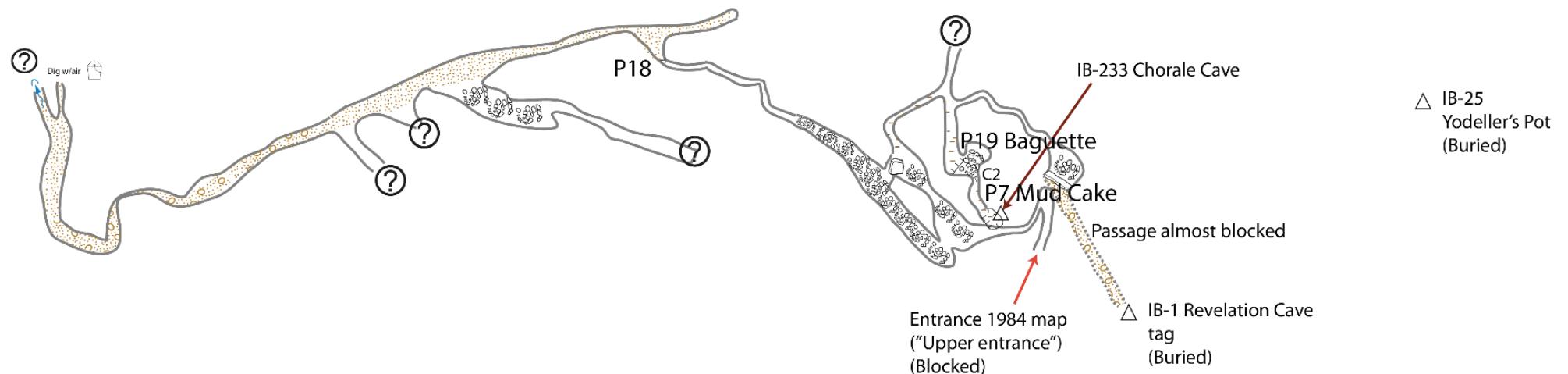
the Left of Field Camping Gardens. Jess, Jak and I had to visit Alan Jackson from STC to pick up the keys for JF, and hopefully pilfer some STC 9mm rope. Seeing as Alan wasn't going to be home until late, we went over to the eastern shore to visit Ric Tunney and Janine and thank them for all the help they'd been with the advice for Ida Bay. We had a lovely chat with them and admired the excellent view from their balcony!

After dropping in to say hi to Alan,³ we also dropped in on Gabriel Kinzler to pick up some capping kit. Unfortunately, we interrupted him in the middle of dinner (sorry!), and it had all been a misunderstanding anyway.⁴ We still took the capping kit though (it might come in handy), and scooted out to Left of Field. My timing was impeccable again, and we arrived just in time for dinner. It was less impeccable for the NUCC Committee meeting, as we arrived an hour and a half late for it, despite having suggested it for the 5th as 'nobody could possibly be likely to arrive after 8pm at JF'. Even worse, I didn't get to dodge the meeting, as everyone kindly waited until Jak, Jess and I got there to commence.

³ I was impressed just how low Alan's opinion of mainland cavers was: we got described as intelligent simply because I'd managed to bring hanger plates and M8 bolts to Big Tree Pot for the spits.

⁴ The short version is I misunderstood Jak, who misunderstood Steve, who gave us perfectly clear instructions, resulting in me pestering Gabriel when I really didn't have to!





Grid North



IB-1 Revelation Cave

Map 7IB1.STC389

Surveyed 30/9/84, 29/9/06, 6/11/06, 27/12/11, 21/1/12 by members of STC

Based on map 7IB1.TCC197 drawn by R Eberhard

Survey grade UIS 4-2-A

Drawn 10/14 by R Tunney

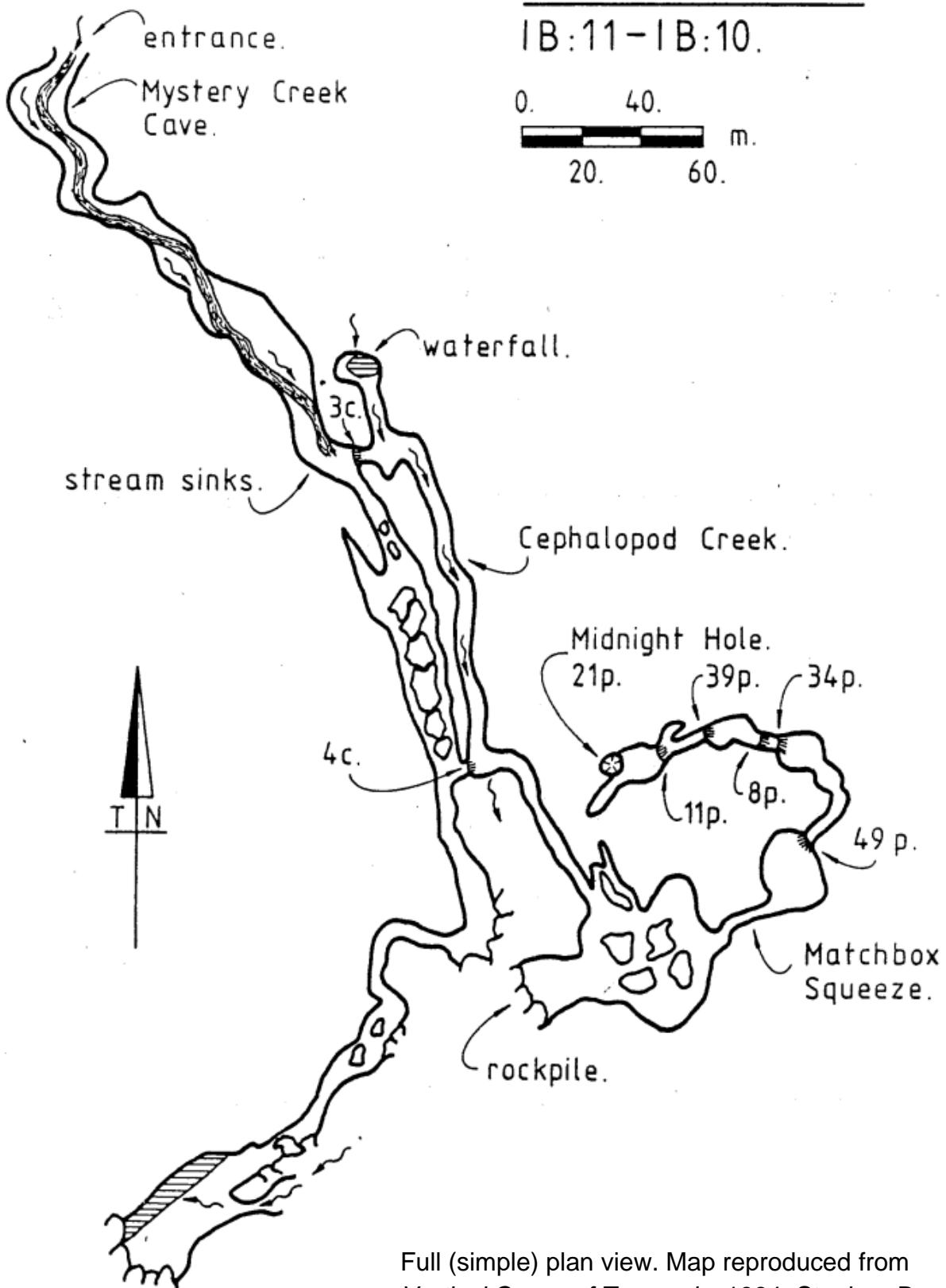


Map reproduced with kind permission from STC.

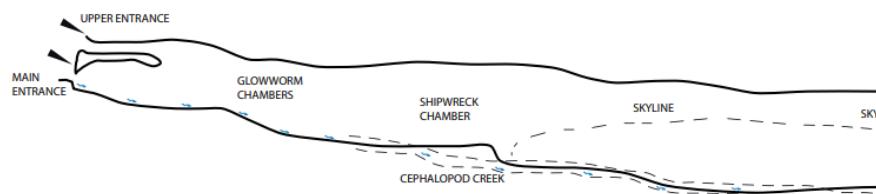
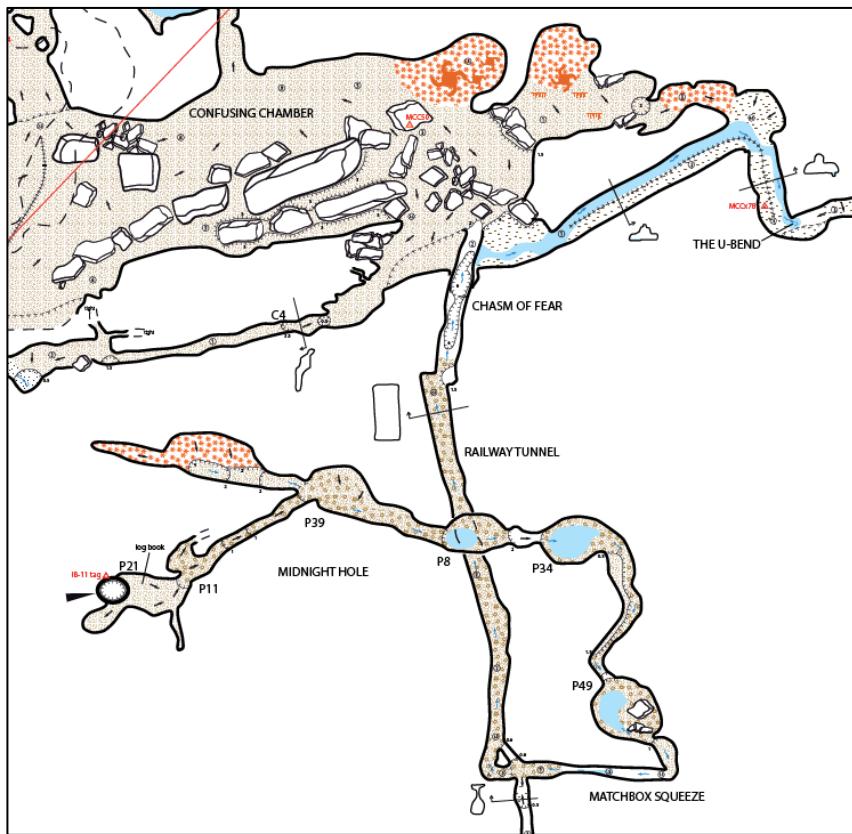
MIDNIGHT HOLE -
MYSTERY CREEK.

IB:11-IB:10.

0. 40.
20. 60.
m.

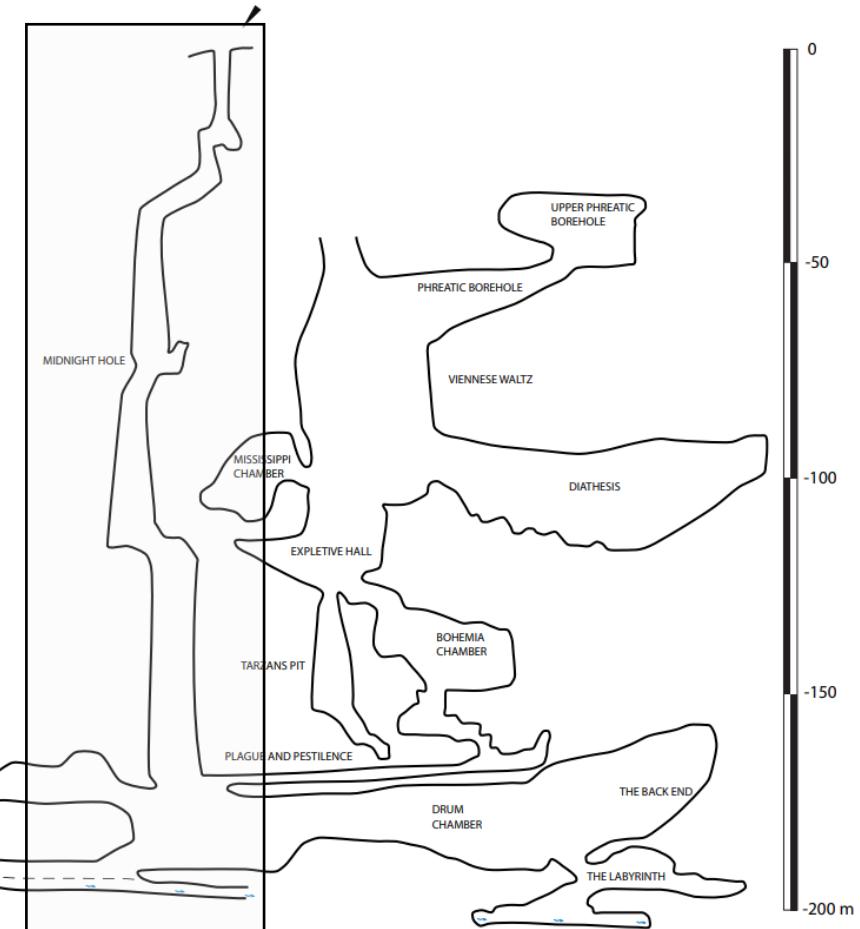


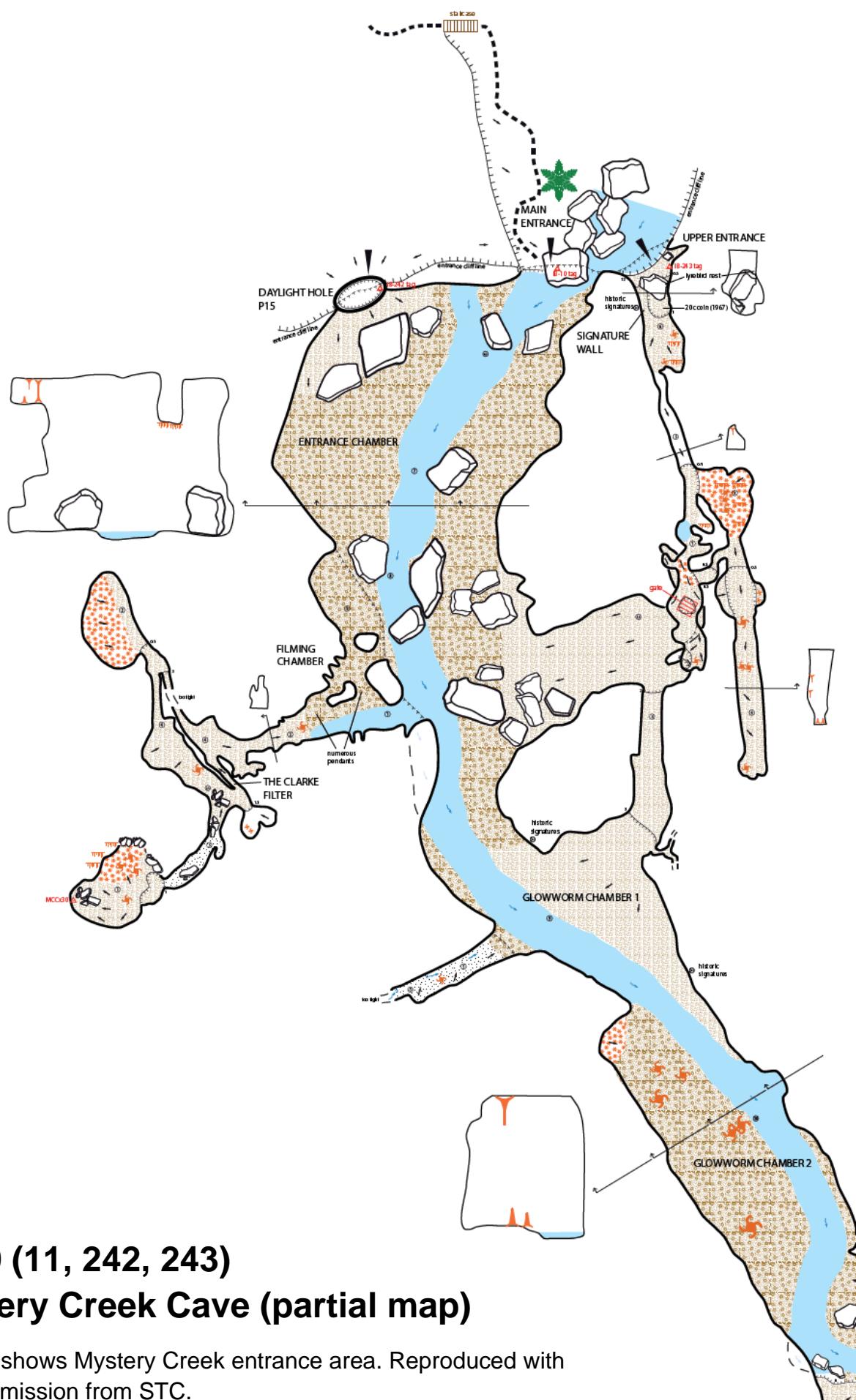
Full (simple) plan view. Map reproduced from
Vertical Caves of Tasmania, 1984, Stephen Bunton
and Rolan Eberhard.



IB-10 (11, 242, 243) Mystery Creek Cave (partial map)

Map shows vertical cross-section and a partial plan-view section of the highlighted box – the Midnight Hole entrance. Reproduced with kind permission from STC.





IB-10 (11, 242, 243) Mystery Creek Cave (partial map)

Section shows Mystery Creek entrance area. Reproduced with kind permission from STC.

Tassie Part II: Junee Florentine

6–15 February 2021

Participants: Andriana Stoddart, Andy Waddell, Austin Zerk, Chris Bradley, Corey Hanrahan, Hugh Mason (STC), Jak Burges (MUMC), Jess Spargo, Lachie Bailey, Oxana Repina (SUSS), Riley Baird



The Junee River at the resurgence. Photo by Oxana Repina.

Saturday 6 February: faffing, dye tracing, Owl Pot

Lachie

Woke up early and ready to go! We had arrived at JF at last! Unfortunately, five days of caving had finally caught up to me – my stuff was scattered to the winds and in such disarray that I had no chance of meeting the 9am departure time for Junee Cave. Even when that started to creep towards 10am, it was abundantly clear that I wasn't going to be ready to go anywhere soon, despite being desperate to go caving.

So I decided to pike and have a rest day, giving me time to organise our new camp, and sort my car out into some sort of sensibility. Plus, my cavesuit and SRT kit was still dripping with Big

Tree Pot, so I really needed to clean it a bit. (Getting out of Big Tree Pot had been particularly vile and muddy in the rain after nearly a dozen caver-trips had been made up and down P1.) Chris was also after a relaxed day, so as the others headed off, we settled in to tidy up our new home under the gazebo at Left of Field. I think we did a good job – the resulting confection was happily christened the Chateau de NUCC. We had a relaxed afternoon waiting for the threatening weather to break and soak us all... Chris cleaned all the leaves out of the Chateau to see if anyone would notice: they didn't. I think this upset me more than Chris; he was delighted that his subtle prank had worked.

Andriana

Oxana, Andy, Jak, and Andriana to Junee River and JF123. We woke up to lovely sunny skies after listening to the rain pummel our tents throughout the night. Thankfully we had the foresight to put up out tents around the puddles, however Andy still managed to get flooded (but inexplicably slept through it). After a few hours of washing ropes, we headed out to Junee River to check out the resurgence.

The huge amount of rain from the last few days had led to the river being a good half metre higher than usual. We spent a good few hours helping Steve check out some of his sensors, crossing the river and trying to find detectors under the water. This included bush bashing around the river to find JF31 and place a sensor at its mouth, as well as one further downstream. Steve had given us the mission of putting dye into JF123 and Owl Pot for his dye tracing experiments, and the sensor placements were part of it. In any case, it all went smoothly despite taking longer than expected, and made us aware of the leech problem we would face the rest of the day.

After the sensor placements, we headed out towards The Chairman (JF99), which involved a two hour trek up through the forest along beautiful mossy taped paths. The path was very well marked until we reached the section around JF123, so perhaps any future trips should consider bringing pink tape along. The leech situation was such that we dropped our packs to speed up the hike, which ended up being unfortunate. We had hoped to go down the first pitch of the Chairman, which was an amazing huge entrance covered in ferns. Next time! We did find JF123 and released the dye for Steve's experiments though, so the day was a success.

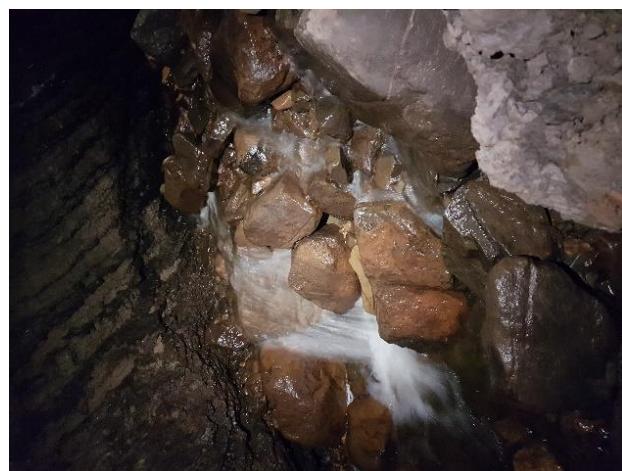
Corey

After an enormous amount of faffing this morning, almost the entire group headed to the Junee Resurgence for a look (minus Lachie, who

wasn't ready; and Chris, who wanted a rest day). It had rained for almost two days straight, and the Junee River was pumping! However, there was caving to be done, so Austin, Riley, Jess, Hugh and I bundled into a car headed towards Owl Pot (JF221).⁵



Jess on her way up and out of Owl Pot. Photo by Corey Hanrahan.



The Owl Pot streamway, the goal of today's caving trip. Photo by Corey Hanrahan.

⁵ Editor's note: Like with Ida Bay, the maps are appended at the end of the JF report, on page 44.



Dye release and detector missions in the Tasmanian rainforest. Top: Moss ball! Centre right: the rainforest was full of fungi. Bottom right: Oops, I think we might have promised Jak he'd have fun in Tassie? Bottom left: Andy on a mission to find the obscure cave entrance where the detector was meant to go. Photos by Andriana Stoddart.

The aim for our group today was to complete a dye release at the Owl Pot streamway, between the third and fourth pitches. The logging roads were a maze of poorly labelled, somewhat overgrown trails. As a result, we struggled to find the carpark. To make matters worse, Hugh's GPS didn't show many of these trails. Eventually we found our parking spot, having driven through swathes of fern leaves along 'Nine Road'.

Reaching the cave entrance, we were unsure if we were looking at Owl Pot as no tag was visible. However, the rigging instructions seemed to fit the description, the bottom of the first pitch featured flagging tape marking an owl roost.

In the cave itself, I had a chance to rig my first deviation and Y-hang. Apparently, they were alright – there were no casualties on rope for the day! Other highlights included an interesting vertical squeeze, some cool speleothems and countless shiny water droplets reflecting the head torch light.

By 4pm we had reached our turn-around time, the stream still not in sight. After some discussion, we decided to push on for another 10 minutes. Exactly 7 minutes later we were pouring dye into an amazing looking stream. Despite my desire to continue downstream to the fourth and final pitch, we had run out of time, and turned around to head back to the car.

Hugh

Everyone was up by 7:30am and keen to get going. Lachie and Chris decided to have sloth days⁶ to rest and reorganise themselves. Once we were all fed and caffeinated, we headed to Junee Resurgence (JF8) to be tourists (but also to do some work for Stephen Fordyce). We all headed to the cave entrance to be greeted with a torrent of water flowing out, it just so happened to have rained in the upper parts of Mount Field

the preceding days. The river looked to be about 10cm higher and with the extra flow you couldn't see the bottom. After some time taking photos and admiring the sheer power of the system, we headed back to the car park where one group was charged with fiddling with dye detectors that Steve had left, while myself, Corey, Austin, Riley, and Jess loaded into my car and headed to Owl Pot (JF 221) to rig it and do a dye release into the stream way.

Armed with a GPS point and a map out of *Vertical Caves of Tasmania* we drove out in search. We did get lost trying to find the correct road, stumbled across an echidna and then drove all the way to Westfield Road, before driving back to the start of Nine Road. We eventually found the 'right' turn off (fourth right, and has a sign pointing to Westfield Road), and drove upwards through a fern forest and muddy 4WD tracks. Although we did get lost one more time after accidentally driving past the parking area. Once we doubled back, we unpacked, and made the long and hard five minute walk to the cave entrance. I rigged the first pitch using a log (as backup/approach), slinged a solid looking rock and P-blots. It was definitely a pitch to be done quickly, very muddy. At first we couldn't find a tag, but all the rigging notes lined up.

Jess and Corey rigged the second and third pitch off P-bolts, so it was very straightforward. Here is where I discovered NUCC's love for teaching the Figure-9 knot, it made a continuous appearance in Owl Pot.⁷ Overall the cave was very pleasant, a couple of off vertical pitches, passageways on an angle and small squeeze above the third pitch. We descended and walked through some more slanted passageway, at this point it was 4pm, and originally in the car I said we should turn back first at 3pm and then 4pm. But as we were already deep into the cave I said we should keep going for 10 more minutes, and soon after we heard the rumble of the

⁶ This was about the point we discussed reinvigorating Ric Tunney's Speleo Sloth ranking system that Lachie had encountered whilst reading back-issues of *SpeleoSpiel*.

⁷ Lachie: The Figure 9 on the bight is the best knot. Fight me.

streamway. It was an impressive sight given all the rain we'd had, everyone was super keen for the dye release (and so was I). Pouring it, we watched the water turn green and flow off towards the Niggly Cave (JF237) and down the

Sunday 7 February: Owl Pot and Tassy Pot

Austin

After a gruelling three minute walk to the first pitch of Owl Pot, we started to descend. The first pitch was very muddy on the way down but is more of a climb than an abseil. The section between Pitches 1 and 2 has a very pretty wall where there are tonnes of small water droplets that light up when lit with a headtorch. The second pitch is a bit difficult to get on, but has a very nice descent which can be a little wet. Once at the bottom, there is a horizontal walk with some rock hopping and you get to two small climbs. The climbs are easy enough and have some water on them, but are nothing to write home about. There were a few climby bits where I like to implement my favourite climbing method. I call this method the beached whale method. It involves lying down to maximise surface area and then scrambling up any way one can.

There was a little squeeze through some rocks to get to the top of Pitch 3 but not too bad. Pitch 3 was an abseil at the top but turned into a climb section at the bottom. After a bit more horizontal caving and some crawling and getting lost we managed to find the streamway and walked along that to get to the top of Pitch 4.

Pitch 4 was a great abseil and had a wonderful view of the waterfall over the pitch. At the bottom there was a nice wind from the waterfall and we decided to see if we could find the sump. This involved some crawling and walking

valley. Job done, we headed out, and it was a bit slow going but we made it back before dark and back to camp to a cooked dinner (which I couldn't eat, culprit was sour cream).

through mud, and we found the sump but it was nothing resounding.

We made our way back to the bottom of the first pitch without any troubles and started our way up. I always find prusiking much harder than anything else in a cave. After reaching the top of the Pitch 4 I made my way to Pitch 3. I thought Oxana had gotten ahead of us but, as I went to take off my jumper she came in the passage behind us. She told us that she had gotten lost.⁸

For the squeeze at the top of Pitch 3, I found out yesterday that the squeeze was a bit tight to get through with my harness on, so I took it off, got through, and persisted on. We made our way to the second pitch. After getting up the climbs and getting a bit wetter we had made it to the bottom of Pitch 2. Another prusik, some walking, and another muddy climb out of Pitch 1, and we had finally made it back to the top of Owl Pot. While our bodies were unchanged our minds would forever be different.

We then went to Tassy Pot. I went a bit of the way down the first pitch, was told to leave, and stood around freezing my ass off. It was much worse for Hugh and Lachie, as they had to drag and cart the rope out of Tassy Pot.

Hugh

Did not expect to have a mini epic today. Headed into Owl Pot (JF221) again with Austin and Oxana to rig P4 and check out the waterfall and sump. Lachie, Andriana, and Jak headed to Tassy Pot (JF223) on the other side of the road.

room full of increasingly less trogged rubble hoping that it doesn't collapse on you while you are alone and no one is sure where you are.

⁸ Editor's note: Indeed. When you get to the fork in the passage above P4, where the streamway first appears, cross the streamway. Do not take the other branch or you'll be forlornly rummaging around in a

The plan was for us to do the rest of Owl Pot and then head into Tassy Pot, which was to be rigged by the others for an ‘easy’ day. We made good time to the streamway (~45 minutes) and Oxana rigged the last pitch. It was a nice abseil next to the waterfall into a large chamber. The section to the sump required us to climb though the rock pile and do some interesting climbs and squeezes. The rockfall was caked in a thick layer of dirt, which became super muddy once wet. The sump was very unimpressive, a small pool into a rock wall with a muddy bottom. Headed out and left it all rigged.

Found Tassy Pot after getting a little lost, but with a 1 minute walk from the road it’s very convenient. I shouted down expecting to hear or see someone, with no answer I descended to see where the others were. The rebelay at P1 was very short, so it required a little rope trickery to pass. The connection between P1 and P2 was also very awkward – a small pendulum was needed. I got to the bottom and inspected P3 and decided that we shouldn’t all descend the cave, as it required a slightly sketchy down-climb above a 4 m ‘climb’, which the others had rigged. I eventually met up with the other group as they

were coming up. Oxana got a bit stuck on the rebelay and small pendulum. Asking if she wanted to come further she declined and headed to the surface. I heard Lachie had a jammed carabiner on the second rebelay of P4, so I descended with a spanner in hand to unjam it.

The fourth pitch was really awesome but with my mission I didn’t have much time to properly check it out. After a couple of hits the carabiner moved freely, and I started the long climb back up. In retrospect I do wish I had gone to the bottom of the last pitch. However, it had already been a long day, and I had over 150 m of climbing to do, plus derigging the cave. The climb out was very exhausting, especially with an extra 10 kg of rope attached (120 m of 9.5 mm). Lachie struggled on the rebelay of P1 for a solid 5 minutes (the joys of fighting with a stuck carabiner), while I chilled at the top of P2. On my way up P1 I almost had a loose fern dropped on me but luckily it stayed put and I climbed out safely (I did kick it down afterwards to remove the hazard). I did feel pretty wrecked once I got back to the car, chucked the rope on the ground and collapsed next to the car, definitely slept well that night.



Lachie about to rig P4 of Tassy Pot. Photo by Andriana Stoddart.



Andy descending into a hole between Growling Swallet and Self Isolation – which, it appears, he neglected to write about...
Photo by Corey Hanrahan (who also neglected to write said report).

Monday 8 February: dye tracing activities, raspberry farm

Hugh

I had a rest day after the Owl-Tassy Pot epic. We cleaned rope, gear, and ate a lot of food.

Oxana

I fondly recalled the kilogram of Tasmanian raspberries that had been purchased on a SUSS Mole Creek trip a few years ago. Hence, after noticing the Westerway Raspberry Farm just down the road from Left of Field on the drive over from Ida Bay a few days ago, I fabricated a rest day for the purpose of giving the raspberry farm a visit. There was a vague excuse of needing to clean gear and rest before the Growling-Slaughterhouse trip tomorrow, but it was still an excuse.

Raspberries did have to be earned somehow though, so Lachie, Jak, Austin and I drove to the Junee Resurgence for detector retrieval and attempted connection fixing. Thus ensued prolonged button-pressing, staring in confusion at coloured lights, peering at cables through bushes to test for line-of-sight, stumbling around

in the river, general faffing, several phone calls to Steve, and the noble sacrifice of Austin's brand-new gumboots to the icy water. There was also the unfortunate instance of forgetting helmets and headtorches and thus resorting to using phone lights inside the Junee Resurgence like a tourist; a source of eternal shame (especially considering we were spotted by several tourists). Eventually, the short morning tasks were achieved by late afternoon, with some members of the team perilously near mutiny, and we made it to the raspberry farm (and/or to the hammock back at camp).

The remainder of the afternoon was spent on video call with Steve trying to make sense of the detector data (unfortunately a negative result for the time being) – assisted by copious volumes of raspberries and hot cross buns. By this stage of the trip, nobody bothered to comment on the moral conundrum of hot cross buns in February. Only on the moral conundrum of consuming three to six buns per person, per day.



The stream pouring into the entrance of Growling Swallet. Photo by Hugh Mason.

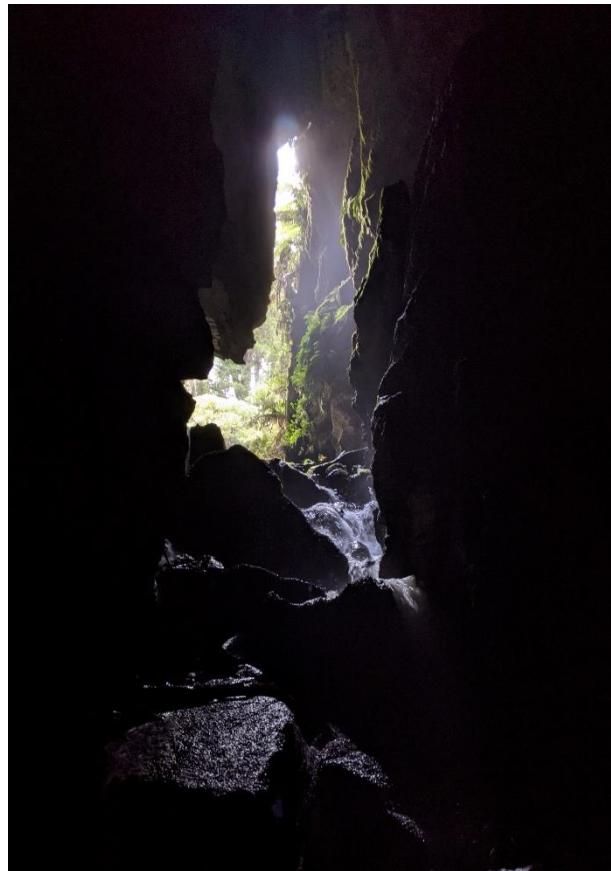
Tuesday 9 February: Growling-Slaughterhouse attempt, Welcome Stranger

Hugh

Lachie, Oxana, Andriana and myself planned to do the Growling-Slaughterhouse Pot through-trip. Did most of the planning the evening before, and got packed to head off early the next morning. After arriving at the Eight Rd car park, we all got changed into caving overalls and SRT kits, considering we'd be heading straight in.

Arriving at the entrance to Growling Swallet we checked the water level, which looked as it was when I was there in early January. However, from the start things didn't look right; some of the streams flowing in did look like they had higher flows than I remembered. As we made our way down the Dry Bypass, which was quite drippy, we entered the International Chamber to see a gushing waterfall on the left, and smaller waterfalls that added to my worry. Upon inspection of the next climb, we mulled the prospect that all this extra water could have either sumped some pools lower down or at the very least raised the water to where we'd all get wet. After doing the down climbing and having a look below, I relayed what I saw to the others, and we collectively decided to bail. At that moment all motivation just left us all, and slowly we made our way back out and to the car. However, we realised that the other group who were headed to Welcome Stranger (JF229), which required the 'Eight Road' key. So we were stuck until they arrived to do their dye release.

We did decide to have a peek in Gormenghast (JF35). Long story short it was a fairly miserable cave with lots of sharp rocks and very drippy – very much a smaller Growling Swallet. Soon after we arrived back at the car and drove towards the gate, we ran into the other group. We ended up giving Stephen Fordyce a call regarding our dye release and he gave us the go ahead. Afterwards we all headed back to camp for an early dinner and discussion of the day's exploits.



The stunning entrance of Growling Swallet. Photo by Andriana Stoddart.



Lachie in the Growling entrance. Photo by Andriana Stoddart.

Corey

Today was a day of discovery and excitement for our group of Andy, Jack, Austin and myself. We had planned a leisurely stroll through Welcome Stranger, followed by one of Steve's dye release experiments at the Growling Swallet entrance, then some exploring in the Growling cave. Chance (or fate) would lead to a different experience.

A slow start to the morning was compounded when we realised, 20 minutes into the drive, that the dye had been forgotten at camp! Eventually, with the dye in-tow, we arrived at the Welcome Stranger carpark. Because none of us had ever visited the cave before, we didn't realise that a flagging tape route existed. And so, we began to bush-bash our way towards our GPS coordinates.

About 10 minutes into our off-track adventure we came across a relatively non-descript hole choked with spider webs. We created a GPS waypoint, and I set to clearing the webs with a large stick. I then began shimmying down the soiley slope into the cave, followed by the rest of the team.



Corey next to the new entrance, 'Goodbye Old Friend'. Photo by Lachie Bailey.

Inside was impressive. The cave was filled with decoration: stalactites, straws, columns and an intriguing flowstone feature, with a human-sized hole heading further down. It was also populated with at least four very large Tasmanian Cave Spiders. None of the cave looked trodden, and we didn't feel comfortable continuing without detrodding. The cave holds substantial promise, and we decided on the name 'Goodbye Old Friend' as a group. We will return later this week to survey and push the cave.⁹

We followed up this discovery with an impressive Welcome Stranger visit. We thoroughly enjoyed the well-decorated cave. It is worth noting that the path out (which we eventually found the flagging tape trail) had many fallen trees. It seems like perhaps there was a recent landslide in the area.

Arriving back at the Eight Road, we ran into the other NUCC group, who had left for a Growling-Slaughterhouse through trip earlier that morning. Apparently, cave water levels were too high to complete their trip. The upside was we could all release the dye at the Growling entrance together. As usual, it looked very impressive, and we left for camp – satisfied with a successful day.

⁹ Editor's note: after consulting with STC, it's most likely that this is an alternate, but unsurveyed, entrance into Welcome Stranger. However, I don't think it has conclusively been checked since NUCC's visit to date (late 2021).



Beautiful backlit straws in Welcome Stranger, an anomalously horizontal and well-decorated cave for Junee Florentine. Photo by Lachie Bailey.



The maw of the cave (Welcome Stranger). Photo by Lachie Bailey.

Wednesday 10 February: Strathgordon and Tarn Shelf

Lachie

I think we all go a bit pikey today. Chris and Oxana went into Hobart to dispose of Jak (he was well past his expiry date anyway). Andriana, Corey, Andy, Austin, and Hugh went up to Mount Field for a bushwalk around Tarn Shelf. I went for a drive out to Strathgordon to have a gander at Gordon Dam, as the weather was spectacular. Beautiful country to go with it too! Gordon Dam and Serpentine Dam were both looked at, and I managed to dodge sloth points for the day by walking into a ‘cave’ on the opposite side of Serpentine Dam. It even had speleothems!

On the way back to Left of Field, I arbitrarily decided to drive off down Scotts Peak Road, to complete my dam trifecta and have a sticky at Mount Anne. That’s some lovely mountain up there, must come back sometime for a closer look at Kellars Cellar and Anne-A. Unfortunately, I decided to stop and take a second round of photos just before Celtic Hill. This had the rather distressing side effect of causing the dirt bank on the side of the road to crumble and pitch my X-Trail sideways down into the drainage ditch at a 40-degree angle. Oh shit, oh shit!

Jumping out, I quickly realised there was no chance of self-recovery. I’d chosen the worst possible section of ditch to get bogged in, and there was a real chance I’d roll my car if I tried snatching it. This left a tow-out as the bestworst option, and luckily two lovely ladies from Hobart soon stopped to check if I was ok. They were exceedingly kind to give me a lift out to Strathgordon, and gave me a hand as I sorted out a tow for tomorrow. Soon enough, Hugh rescued me from the lovely view in Strathgordon, and we were back at Left of Field just in time for dinner (pesto pasta again).



Lovely weather and views. Photo: Lachie Bailey



The dam wall – an impressive piece of engineering if nothing else. Photo by Lachie Bailey.

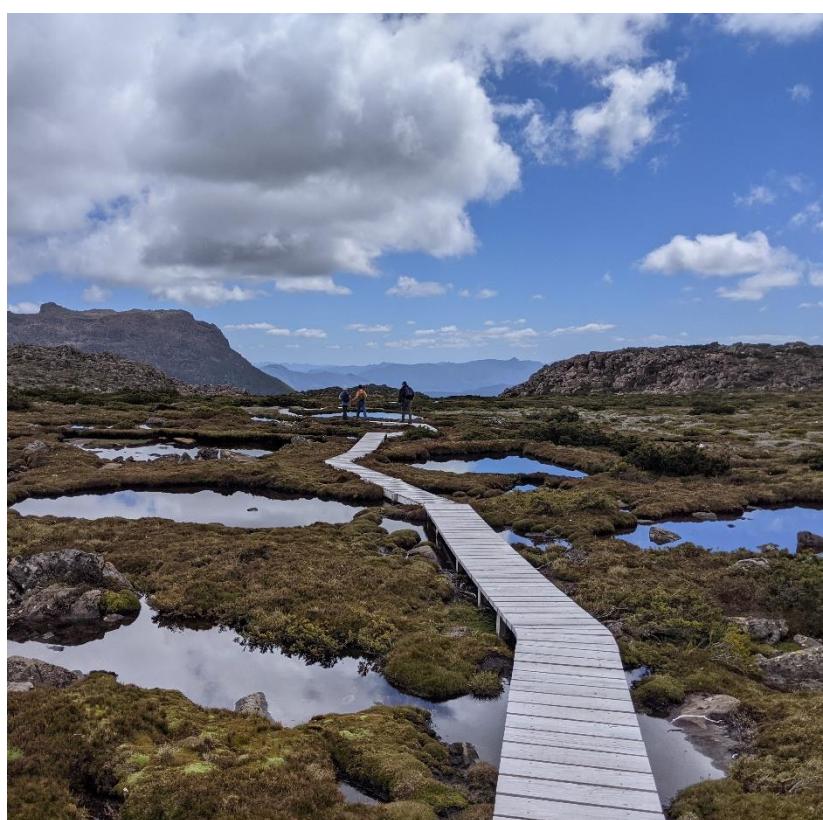
Hugh

Figured today would be a good non-caving day, considering it was (according to BOM) our last good weather day. So a bushwalk was agreed on and a few of us (Andriana, Corey, Andy, Austin) headed up to Mount Field to do the Tarn Shelf bushwalk. We really were treated to the perfect day, pleasant temperature, no rain in sight. The bushwalk was divided into a couple of sections with some rock hopping, duck boards, and avoiding boggy areas. One of the highlights was seeing an echidna (we were told afterwards that it was a rare white echidna), and it wasn't bothered at all by our presence.

Coming over Newdegate Pass we were surrounded by lots of little tarns and had spectacular views of both The Watcher and Mount Field West. Much of this section of the K Col track was on duckboards to protect the fragile bogs and mosses, which really isn't a bad thing, especially since it saved our knees for the time being. At the K Col track junction with the Mount Field West track we decided to high tail it back to the car so we'd be back in time for the pub. Unfortunately, the part over the Rodway

Range was slowed down due to the boulder hopping. Everyone was feeling it in their knees and I wasn't an exception. We were glad once we made it past the boulder field and back to the main track to the car. We arrived at the pub early and I went in to check if the others had booked (they hadn't).

Then we got news that Lachie had car problems out near Mount Anne. He had parked on a verge to get some photos and it had given way under the weight of his car, so he had two wheels in the ditch and two on the road, but the angle (as he described) was very steep and made self rescue too hazardous. He luckily hitched a ride with two women to Strathgordon. I decided to drive out to collect him, and definitely did so with great haste (won't have done if I had passengers). Finding an exhausted Lachie in the Wilderness Lodge, we said our goodbyes to his rescuers and sped back to Left of Field. By which time it was getting dark, fortunately the animals we did spy had the good sense to head straight back into the bush. I would love to spend some more time out that way, particular around Mount Anne, Mount Weld, the Arthurs, and Federation Peak.



Left: Stunning views across Tarn Shelf. Right: Everyone loves a cute echidna photo! Photos by Andriana Stoddart.



Chris on the Tarn Shelf track when we went up to catch the sunset. Photo by Oxana Repina.

Thursday 11 February: car rescue, Dissidence attempt, Sesame de-rig

Oxana

Standing over the pitch and leaning my body weight into the spanner, I noted that both outcomes from this situation were fairly glum – if the nut gave way, I’d probably lose my balance and fall down the pitch; if it didn’t, any hope of descending Dissidence was gone. The latter eventuated. (A tiny centimetre-thick jug handle was the best natural anchor we could find, and nobody was game enough to trust their life to it).

After slogging from the Eight Road gate (having forgotten the Eight Road Key) to the Growling Swallet carpark to Growling Swallet and then one extra hour into the bush at a tangent to get to the cave entrance, we made it a grand total of roughly 10 metres into the cave. On the head of the second pitch, the nuts had rusted onto the bolts and the two backup bolts back from the pitch were loose within the rock. We turned

back, cursing the Tasmanian bolts and infrequency of visiting caves.

Andy and Corey had also scoped their newly found hole, ‘Fern Cave’, prior to starting Dissidence, and found it didn’t go. Was anyone really surprised though? It was a small and sad looking hole in the soil, covered by spider webs.

So we trudged back and gandered briefly into Growling. The water level was much lower than a couple of days ago – the waterfall pouring in from above us in International Chamber was entirely absent today. We made it a little further past this, before turning back in anticipation of dinner and fear of impending rain. The highlight of the day was the glow-worms – I hadn’t seen them in Growling previously, we must have barrelled straight past when we had done the trip with Steve. The blue lights shone cheerfully in the darkness and rumbling.

Lachie

Up and at it very early – anxiety about my marooned Trucklet got me up well before my 9:30am pickup by the tow truck from Derwent Valley Towing. All the others were slothfully getting ready to go caving for the day.

Getting back out to Scotts Peak Road, I was very relieved to find my Trucklet still upright, the windows intact, and the bits and bobs I'd used to chock the wheels still there. The two great blokes from Derwent Valley Towing had no trouble pulling it up out of the ditch, and towed me back to Maydena. Luckily, there was no damage to my car – the undercarriage had barely touched the gravel. No harm done, except a little damage to my pride and wallet (and a day of caving lost, I had originally been planning a daytrip to the upper reaches of Niggly)!

Determined to get something out of the day, I trogged up, and planned to go crash the group that was probably busy having an epic in Dissidence. I figured that I could take a light pack, jump down their already rigged ropes, and escape before someone uttered the phrase ‘de-rigging’. However, first I gave Steve a call to let him know I was ok, and soon found myself knee-deep in the Junee Resurgence trying to do a Steve Job. No success,

and the habitat phone had a dummy spit. Returned to camp in defeat, and valiantly fought off a chicken that was attempting to raid our food supplies. Cooked dinner (lentil soup).

Hugh

Today was the dreaded Sesame Cave (JF210) derig day, luckily I got help from Austin and Andriana for this somewhat unpleasant task. The backstory is that in early January, I'd been part of the team that had helped Steve haul gear down to the sump so he could dive it. It was the hardest day of caving I'd ever done, lots of belly crawling, small streams with low roofs, and the mud – the mud! So to say the least I knew what to expect and did hype the unpleasantness up quite a bit throughout the trip.



Oxana going through the Renegade Squeeze in the entrance of Dissidence Cave. Photo by Corey Hanrahan.



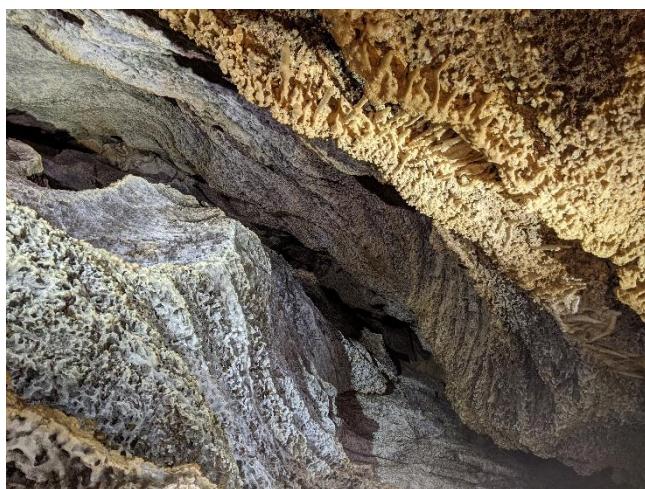
What a scenic spot to have to recover a car from! Photo by Lachie Bailey.

We headed in and descended the four pitches and had some lunch before deciding to go for a walk to Vera's Wet Hole. Vera's Wet Hole is a section of cave where basically you're crawling on your belly for 50 to 60m in 7-degree water, which touches your ear and cheek at one point, so definitely not a place to linger. However we got lost in the mud chamber before Vera, and after some sketchy climbs with unstable mud we all weren't keen to continue, and headed back to derig. Andriana and I leapfrogged the derigging process to allow people to stay warm. With two

bags (one very heavy with rope and metal) we slowly made our way back through the Nematode Crawl and to daylight. I did have to rescue one of Austin's gumboots after it slipped off his foot, but we made it back to the car in one piece, if a bit wrecked. Luckily we arrived back at camp to hot food and slept well that night.



Austin revelling in the mud of Sesame.



A pretty, mud-free and highly misleading photo of Sesame.

Andriana

I feel like Hugh hasn't emphasised the mud enough. It was truly incredibly sticky, and in some cases would act a bit like jelly. Truly exceptional mud, 10/10 would recommend. Would also recommend washing your gear afterwards, which I didn't manage to do before the next day's adventure.



Hugh, having finished the Sesame Task.



This is what Sesame Cave does to people. Photos by Andriana Stoddart.



Austin about to descend the first pitch of Owl Pot. Photo by Oxana Repina.

Friday 12th February: Owl Pot, Slaughterhouse Pot

Oxana

Today was Owl Pot de-rig and dye release II day. The descent to the streamway was uneventful, aside from noticing the rock on P1 holding half of the Y-belay wobbled somewhat in the mud as the first person descended the pitch. Having the rock fly out of the mud and down the pitch would be decidedly unpleasant, so we re-rigged it onto a different rock – more solid but also more prone to having the tape slip off. No matter, we were de-rigging the cave today anyway, so we left the rigging in semi-adequate condition and continued down.

Abseiling P4 was just as fun as last time, and so was the prusik up – the trick is to start close to the waterfall at the bottom, so that you don't swing back into it once your weight is off the ground. The dye release at the top was spectacular, and worth nursing my DSLR into the cave for (though I don't think the photos really

did it justice; my cave photography skills need work).

Once the release was done, two of the group headed out of the cave while Lachie and I stayed to de-rig, as their gear was still wet from caving the day before and they were getting cold. On the way out, they may have gotten lost beneath P3 just as we were about to de-rig it (and one of them may have been in the cave for their third time). Nonetheless, everyone made it out in one piece.

I was the first out and made another attempt to bush-bash to Three Falls Cave, unfortunately foiled again by a lack of time as we were late for the pub. I could hear the waterfalls from the entrance of Owl Pot and they would've been great to see after last night's rain.

The high-spirits sprint to the pub once everyone regrouped at the car was dampened as soon as

we jumped out – ‘Have you guys heard the news yet? Victoria is going into a five-day lockdown, starting midnight.’ Dinner was stressful and dejected, as everyone glumly tried to work out how the drive between Port Melbourne and Canberra was going to work. Chris was the exception to this, as he took the news as an opportunity to delay returning home and instead embark on a week-long hiking tour of Tasmania, which sounded pretty awesome.

Hugh

After the mini Sesame epic I was very pro on a rest day, but it was my last full day in JF. While most other people were either going into Owl Pot for a dye release and derig (in many ways I didn’t mind going back – third time lucky), or hike out near Strathgordon, I chose to have a look and maybe do the first pitch of Slaughterhouse Pot. After cleaning ropes and gear from the day before, I headed out to the Eight Rd carpark. Travelling light I had a good look around the cave and headed home for tea.

Saturday 13th February: Slaughterhouse Pot

Lachie

I was keen to go caving, as this was our last day available for any real JF caving due to the ridiculous pile of filthy gear to be cleaned tomorrow. Unfortunately, last night’s news about the Melbourne lockdown rather delayed my plans – I spent several hours on the phone talking to several different COVID hotlines. End result: Canberra will still let us all in, even me (a Queensland resident). The catch: so long as we don’t stop anywhere in Victoria. Still, there was caving to be done, and Corey and Oxana were rounded up for a visit to Slaughterhouse Pot.

Oxana was decidedly less than keen, as she saw this as a downgrade from our original plan to investigate Satans Lair. Thankfully Steve had intervened, and warned us it was a nasty cave, and a pain to get to. This did seem to be a theme of the trip – we’d call Steve, and tell him we wanted to go do a cave, and he’d warn us it was



Cool fungus on the Growling Swallet track. Photo by Hugh Mason.

small/cramped/nasty/muddy/not worth the effort. Was it all just a setup to get us to be more willing to tinker with his detectors at the Junee Resurgence?

Slaughterhouse was a cave that Oxana had sworn not to visit on this trip, unless it was on a Growling-Slaughterhouse through trip, but she was somehow convinced by Corey to come. I can only assume bribery or blackmail was involved? Arriving out at the Growling carpark, we were very surprised to meet Fran – a landholder from near Borenore in NSW who has a potential sink on her property. Trogged up, wandered out to Growling, then up to Slaughterhouse. Barreled down the pitches, putting some new waterproof paper in the logbook on our way down. At the bottom, we checked out Trapdoor Streamway – that aven is certainly impressive! I think even Oxana agreed that it was worth the trip down Slaughterhouse.

Meandered back up and out, arriving on the surface late afternoon. The forest in the area is stunning with some nice golden late arvo lighting!

Andriana

Yay for rest days! All the hot cross buns, finished knitting a sock, and washed all my gear thoroughly. So satisfying. Also I think it's worth mentioning how lucky some of us were (sorry Hugh) that we were leaving the day that we did... I managed to dodge the lockdown awkwardness by quickly rebooking flights to Sydney instead of Melbourne. Similarly, Elisa rebooked her flights, and Andy and Lachie were able to change ferries to a little later on, which meant they were able to make sure that drivers wouldn't be stuck in Victoria. The whole situation really reinforced how lucky we were that the trip was able to go ahead, despite us coming into Tas from all the eastern states. Truly amazing!



Cleaning in progress... Photo by Andriana Stoddart.



Various states of trogged-ness. Photo by Corey Hanrahan.

Sunday 14 February: Welcome Stranger

Lachie

Quiet day today. Went up to Welcome Stranger, took lots of photos. Pretty cave. Stumbled in the entrance, and was faced with two options: break me, or break my DSLR. Option 1 was chosen with little hesitation. Owwww, my back! Dunno how many Sloth Points I get for being broken by what is apparently JF's easiest cave, and in easy view of the gate and daylight?

On the way back, we stopped to pinpoint the Optus reception on the Florentine Road around Florentine Gap. It's only a small patch, and seemed vague at the saddle itself, but picked up

as you move down the hill, although it was gone by the time we got to the Niggly track. We also found that Telstra had nothing, although no-one had access to the full Telstra network – being uni students, cut price third-party access was the way to go! I had decidedly more trouble accessing the reception with my older iPhone 7, compared to Andriana's Pixel 3a which could even pick up a 4G network. There were also spots of reception on the Florentine Road where it paralleled the Tyenna River – so backtracking to the Junee Quarry-Sunshine Road area is almost certainly a better option than running up Tim Shea in the event of an emergency!

Monday 15th February: homeward bound

Lachie

Packing day. We had a deadline to be on the road by 10am, as people had flights to catch in Launceston. This of course meant that at about 9:30am, we discovered a certain necessary key-shaped item was missing. Cue: much car unpacking, and head scratching, and it was decided that said item was at the Welcome Stranger carpark. Damn. I was duly despatched to investigate, and returned 1.5h later with the retrieved item. This of course meant that we were late, and Cory, Oxana and my slothful progress north turned into a sprint. Still, we still managed to visit a cheese factory and honey stall

on our way north out of Hobart after dropping all the STC gear off at Alan's.

Dumped Oxana and Corey at Launnie airport, where Andriana had also been left by Andy a few hours earlier. Drove across to Devonport, and loaded onto the ferry. They let me keep my gas cylinders this time. Met Andy and Austin on the ferry, and enjoyed the view as we sailed out of Devonportport. Discovered that, actually, I think Cascade is a lot better than Boags, but that neither are that great on a swaying ship. Promptly went to sleep once we were out to sea and the view receded.

Tuesday 16th February: drive to Canberra

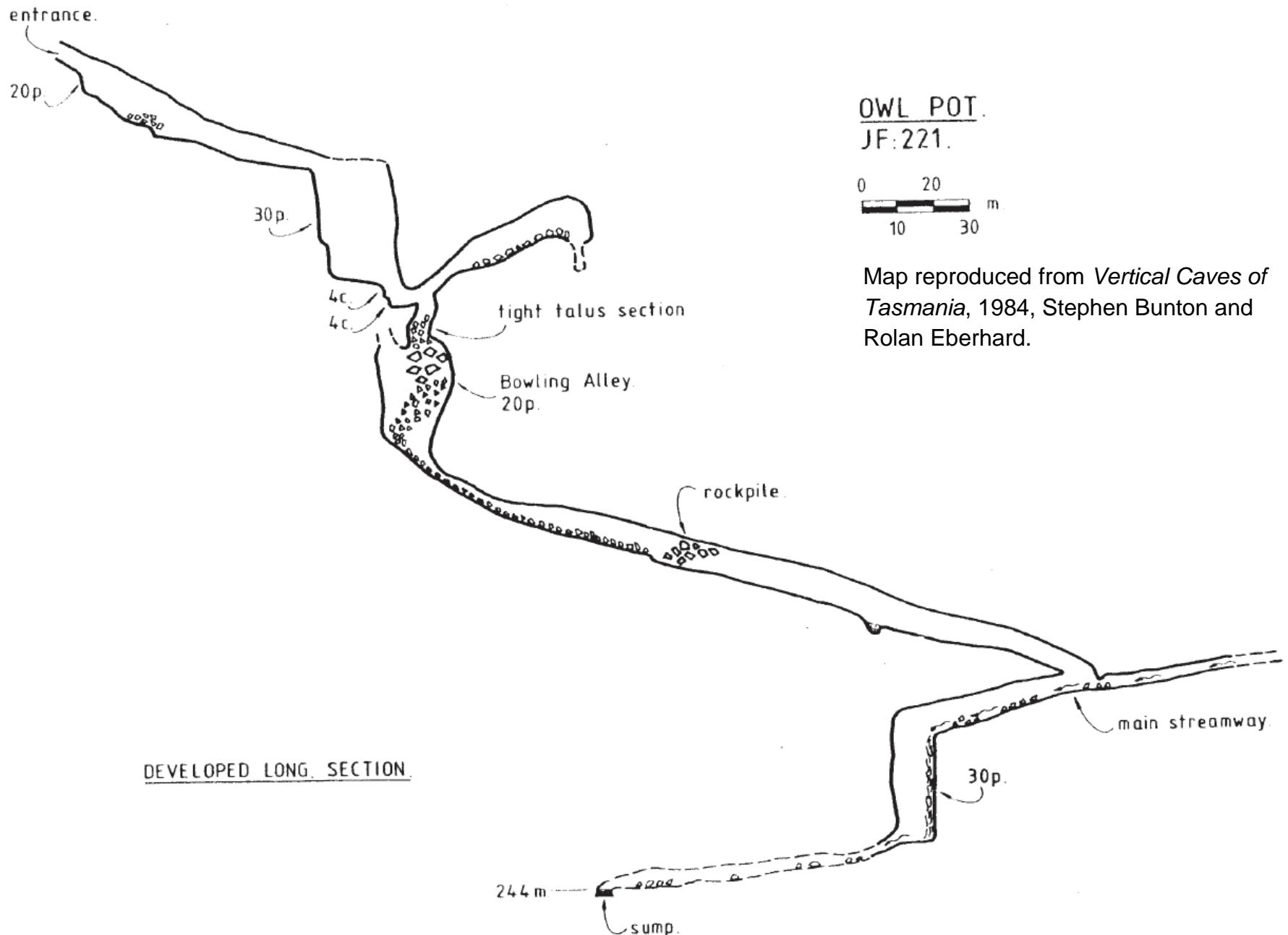
Lachie

Not much to report for today... Woke up, and rolled off the ferry. Had a rather long and tedious drive to Albury from the Spirit terminal with no stops (thanks COVID). Said bye to Austin and Andy at the Dog on the Tuckerbox at Gundagai. Arrived back in Canberra late afternoon with my sore back from Welcome Stranger nearly killing me... Was very pleased to get home to Canberra,

but also definitely missing Tassie already. That seems to be the way all long trips end: all the planning and frenetic activity fizzles out, leaving you sitting exhausted on a couch like you never left home. Still fizzled out on the couch has its uses: soon I found myself looking at cave maps and wondering if Tassie, Takaka Hill or the Nullarbor was beckoning more...



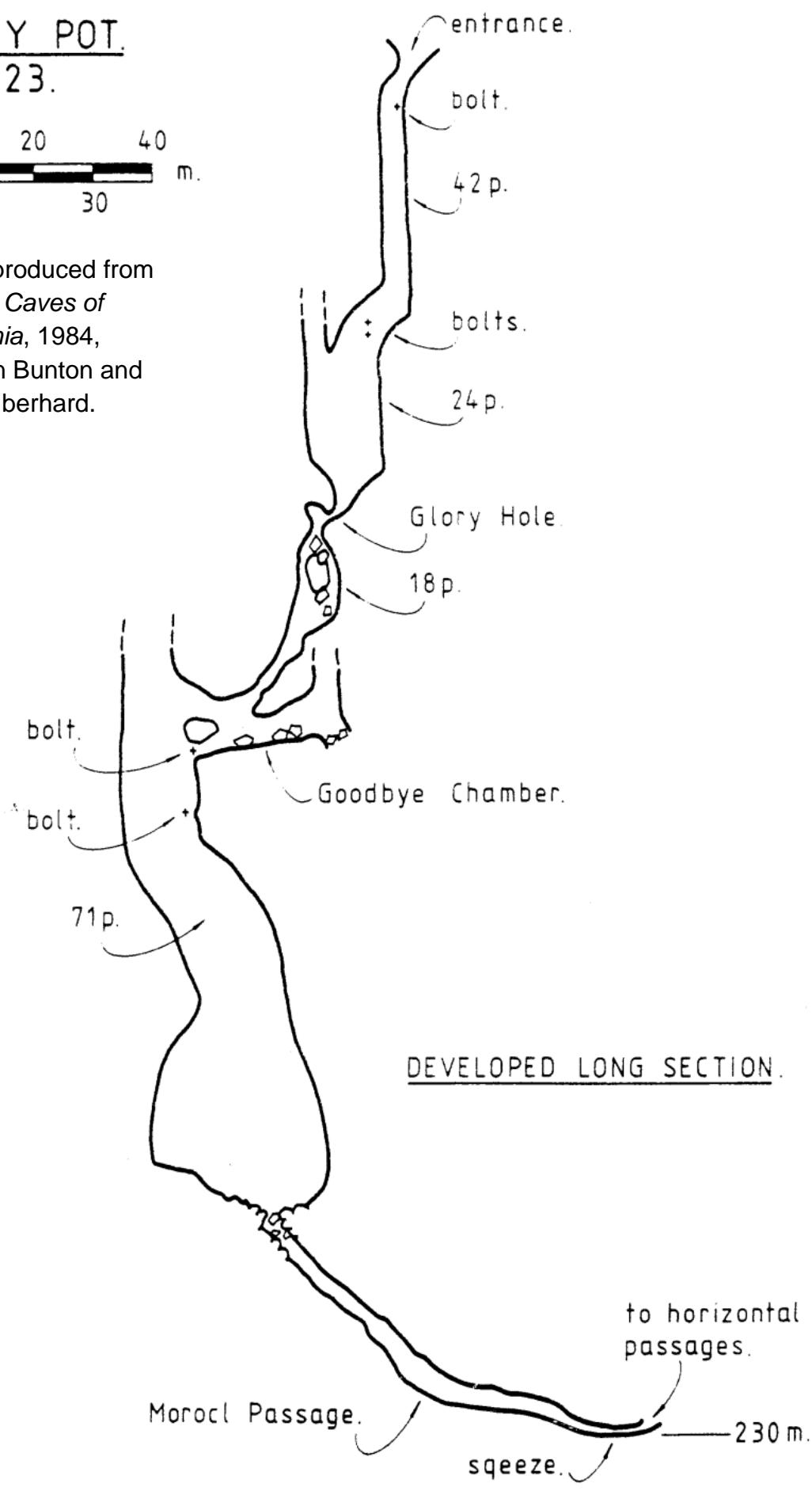
The beautiful Welcome Stranger cave. Clockwise from top: backlit straws, Lachie and Austin in decorated passageway, Andriana appreciating the formations, Austin next to flowstone. Photos by Lachie Bailey, apart from right-most photo, by Andriana Stoddart.

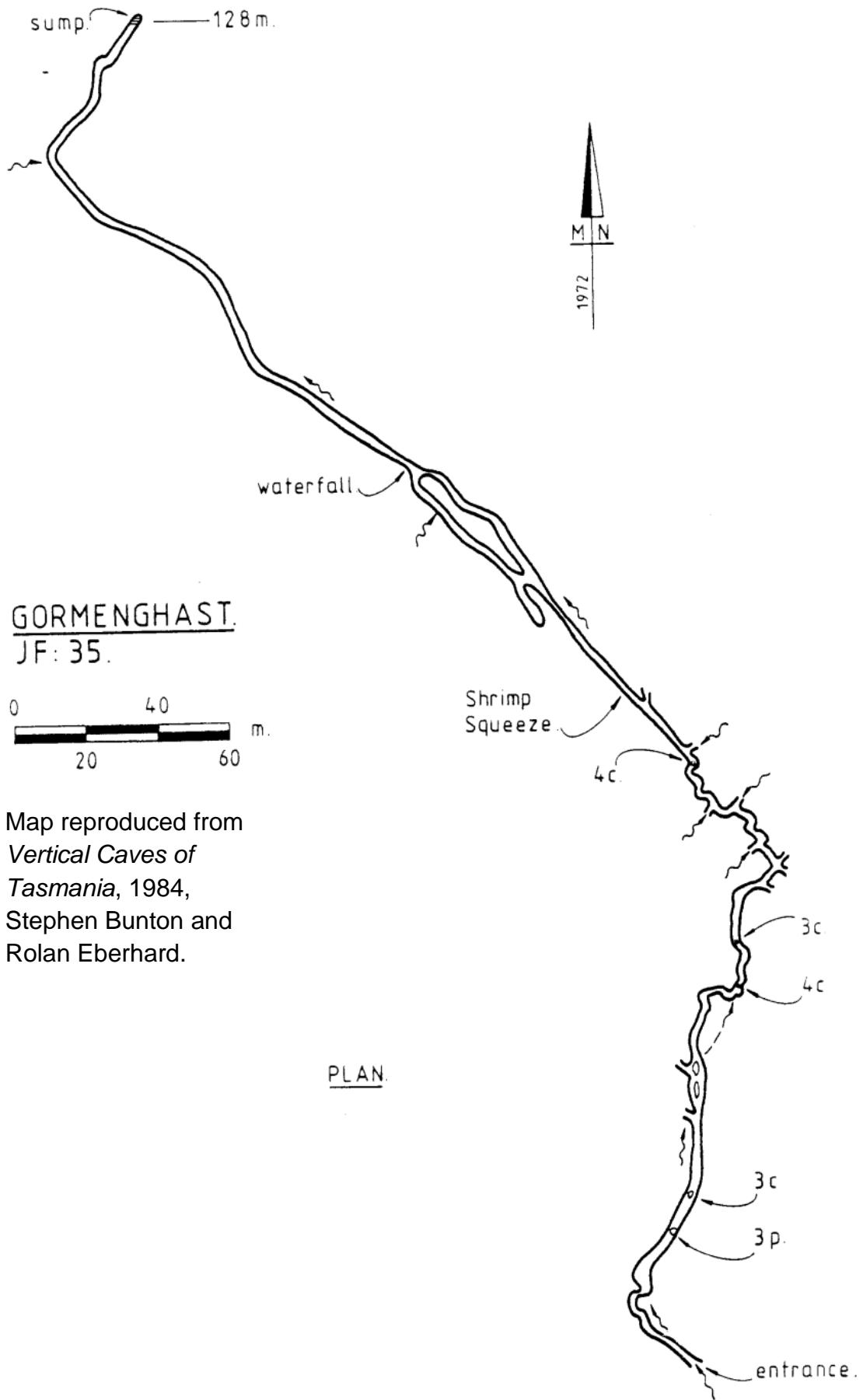


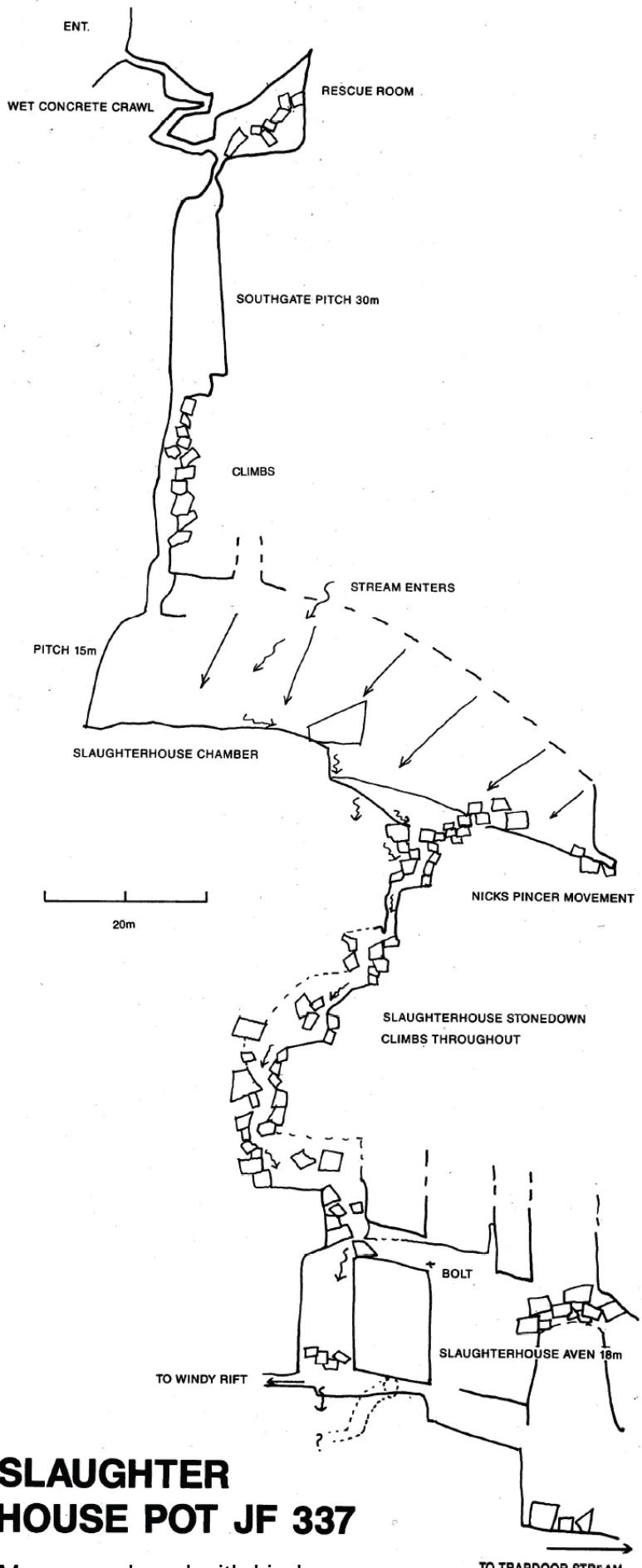
TASSY POT.
JF: 223.

0 20 40
10 30 m.

Map reproduced from
Vertical Caves of Tasmania, 1984,
Stephen Bunton and
Rolan Eberhard.







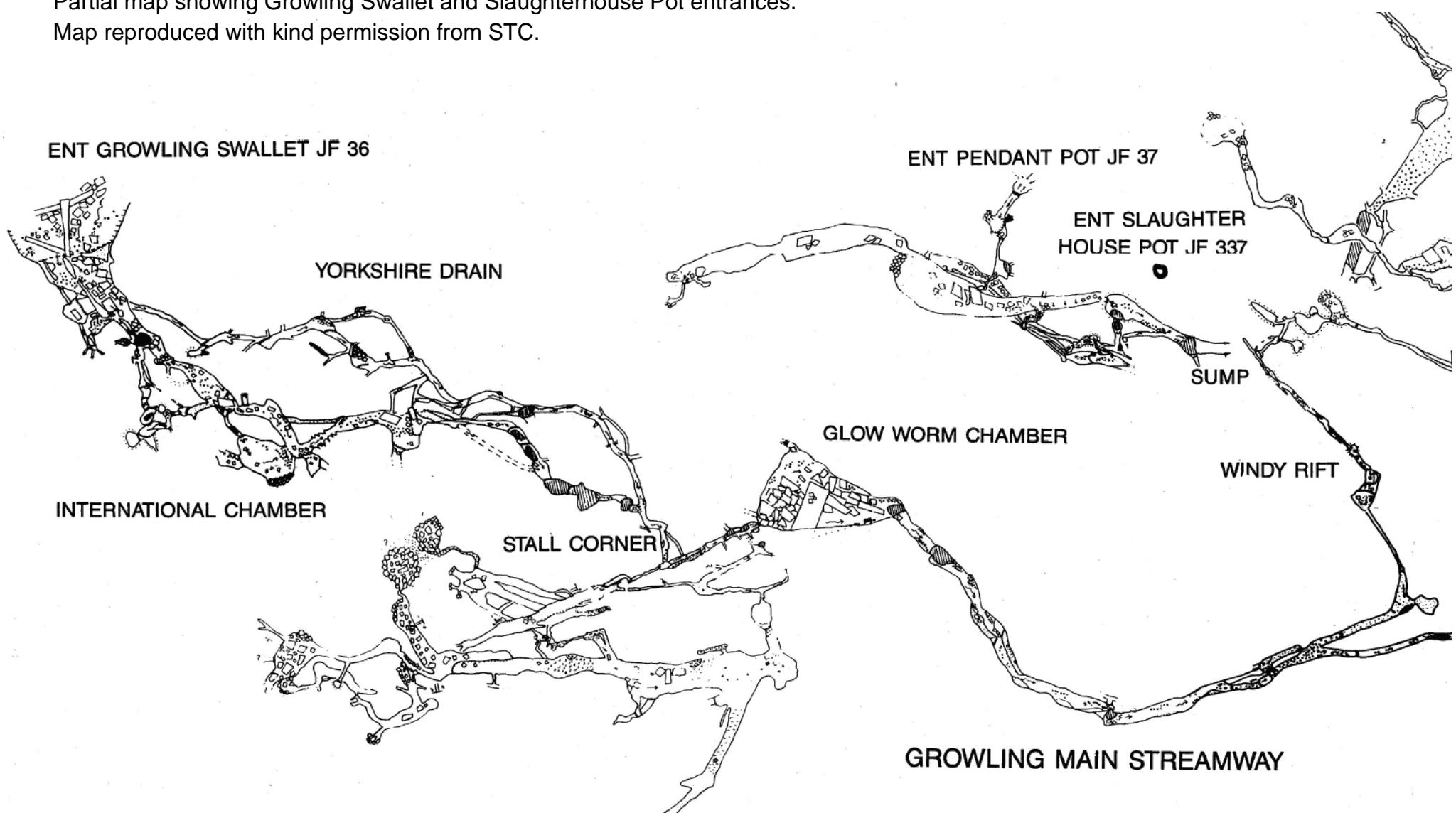
SLAUGHTER HOUSE POT JF 337

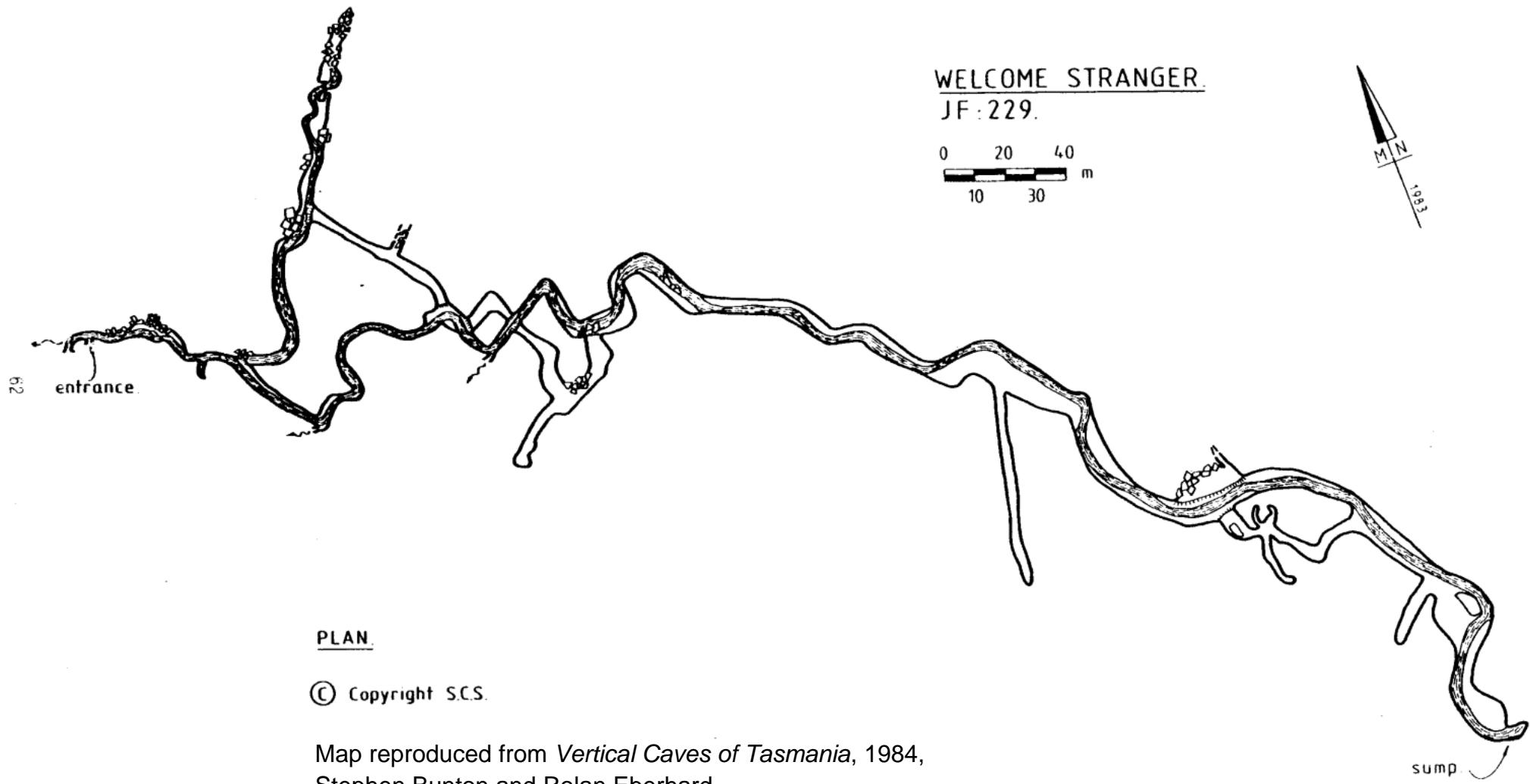
Map reproduced with kind
permission from STC.

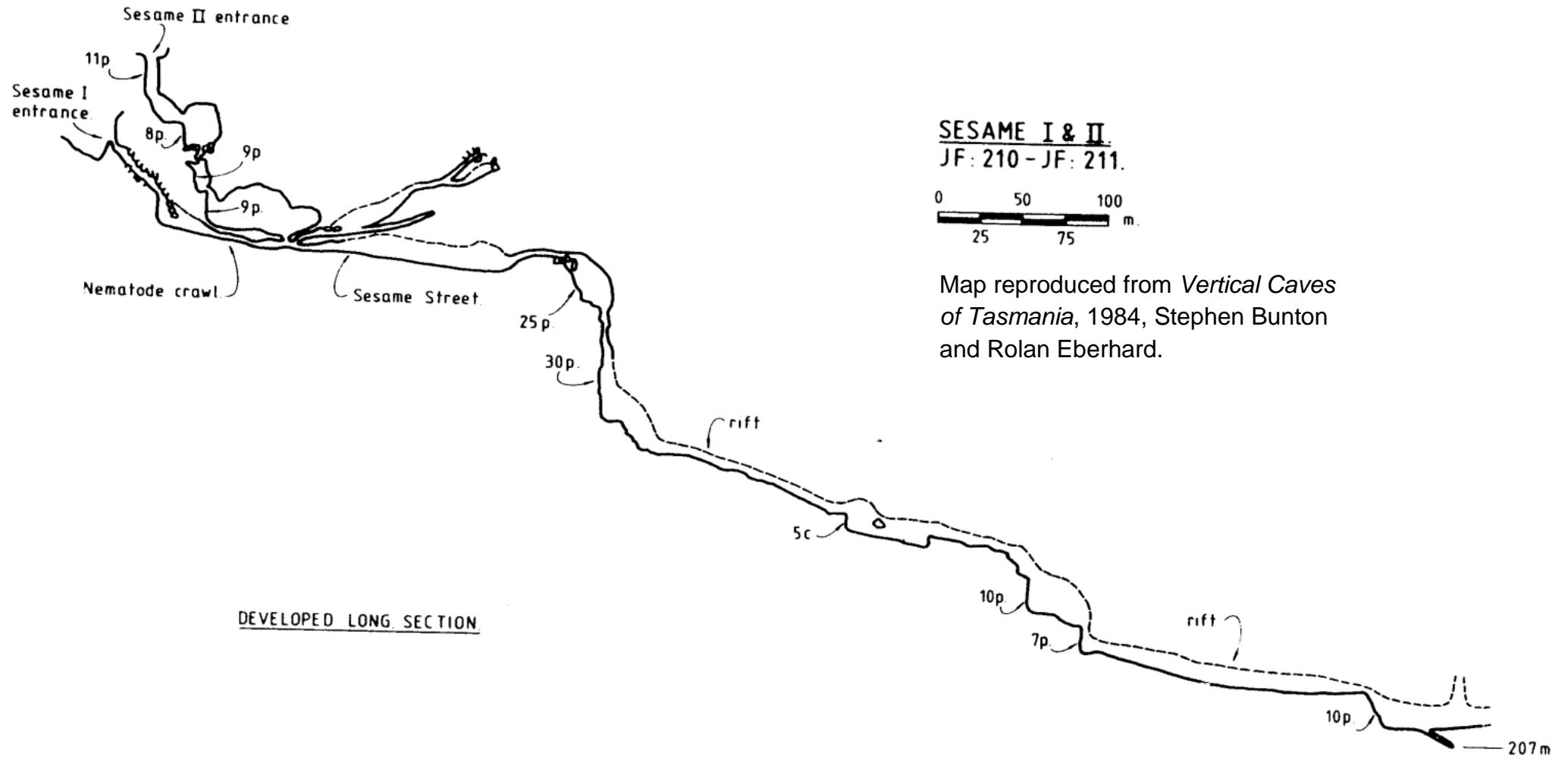
JF 36 Growling Swallet System (partial map)

Partial map showing Growling Swallet and Slaughterhouse Pot entrances.

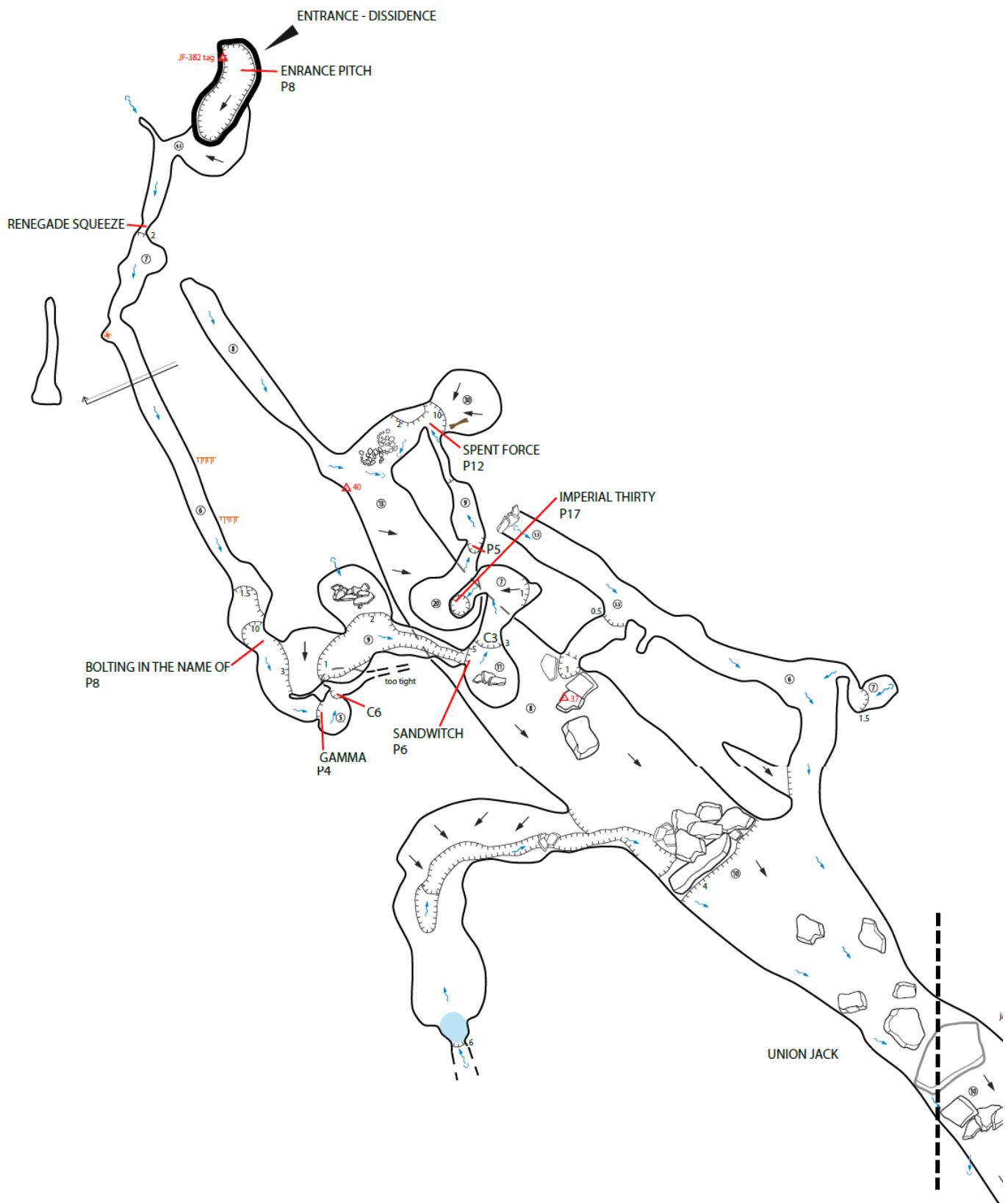
Map reproduced with kind permission from STC.





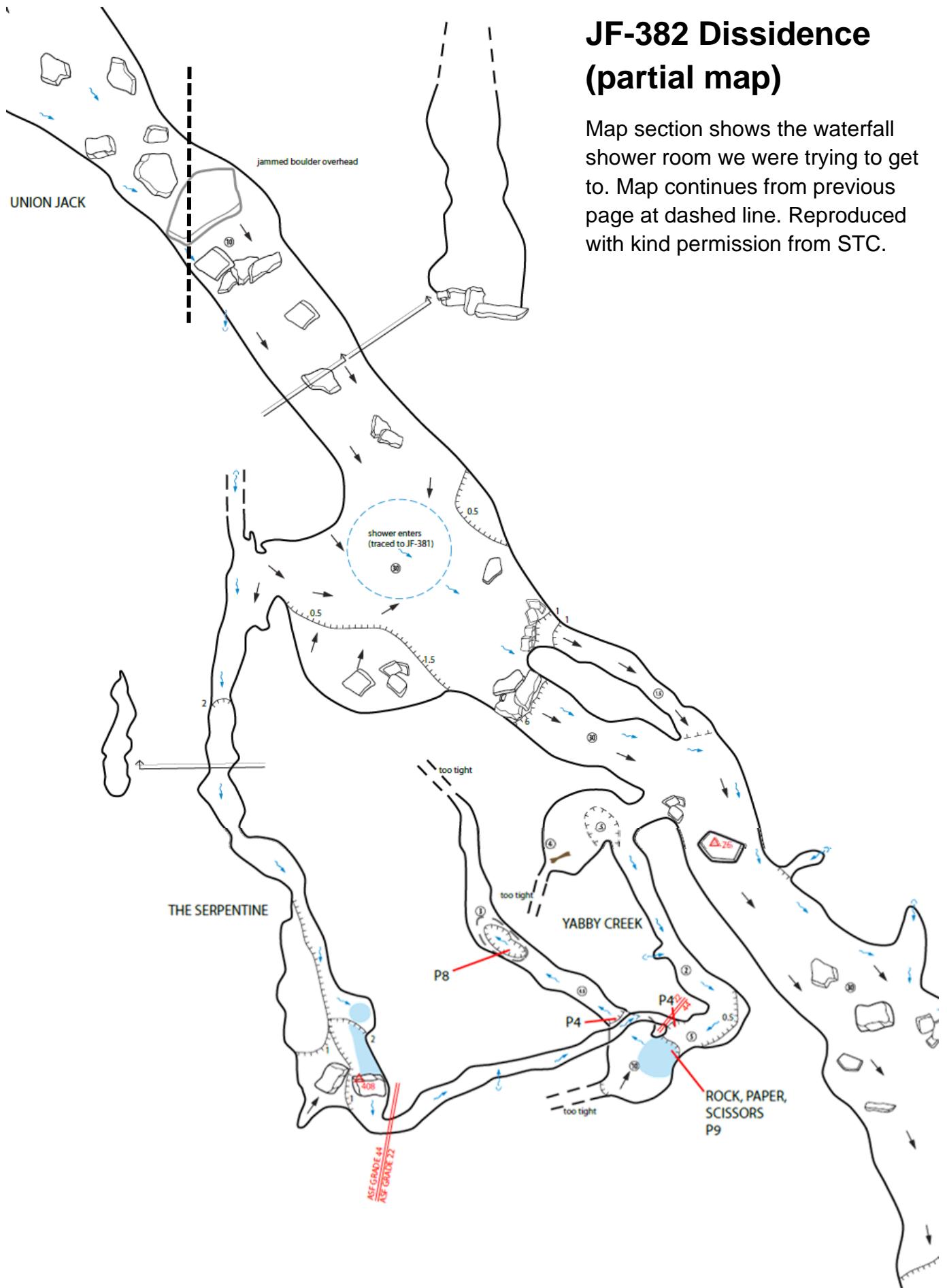


Map reproduced from *Vertical Caves of Tasmania*, 1984, Stephen Bunton and Rolan Eberhard.



JF-382 Dissidence (partial map)

Map section shows the entrance and the first pitch ('Bolting In The Name Of'), which is as far as we got. Map continues at dashed line onto next page. Reproduced with kind permission from STC.



JF-382 Dissidence (partial map)

Map section shows the waterfall shower room we were trying to get to. Map continues from previous page at dashed line. Reproduced with kind permission from STC.



In glorious memory of the Chateau de NUCC... Seriously, Left of Field is a great camping spot, and Adrian look after us extremely well. I can't plug it enough for any mainland cavers looking for a JF basecamp spot! Photo by Andriana Stoddart.

Devils Punchbowl

20 February 2021

Tali de Mestre

Participants: Ally van Gageldonk, Andy Waddell, Danny Feng, Lachie Bailey, Tali de Mestre

All participants (except for Mr. Waddell who was caught up for 20 minutes in the sausage aisle at Coles) arrived at ANU sport punctually at 8am. After waiting a few minutes for Andy to arrive, our fearless trip leader decided we should go on and rendezvous with him at the Billy Grace campground. After 90 minutes of driving within the confines of posted speed limits, both the main car and Andy arrived at the same time. A curious implementation of Andy's infamous 'speed theory'.

A short walk was made to Devils Punchbowl. Two ropes were rigged on the first pitch of the bowl. Tali went down first, eager to belay at the bottom. Subsequently, Lachie came down while instructing new member Danny, who had an incident with a glove being sucked into his rack shortly after descending over the ledge. Finally, Andy came down while instructing another new member Ally, completing a clean abseil. While at the bottom of the pitch, a brief foray was made into several 'caves' towards the bottom. A not-

at-all thorough or exhaustive search failed to reveal any connections to a larger cave system. While this was occurring, several ascents were made back up to the top of the pitch and the pitch was derigged.

Rather than rig a second pitch, a journey was made through thistles back towards the campground. Upon arrival, the NUCC sausage subcommittee was able to *rapidly* cook the 24 sausages and several onions we had brought for food. After clean-up, it was time for a swim. Deciding that Swinging Bridge Reserve was too busy, we opted for Micalong Creek. Again, deciding that walking was too much for a hot late-summer day, we opted for a section of creek along the side of the walking trail. Here ensued several unsuccessful attempts at overcoming the Navier-Stokes equations, and subsequently falling over into the rocky stream. This was followed by a largely uneventful trip back to ANU, marking the end of NUCC's first voyage into Wee Jasper for 2021.



The group at Micalong Creek. Photo by Lachie Bailey.

Macquarie Pass

27th February 2021

Participants: Antonella Wilby (SUSS), Claud Tomkins, Danny Feng, Darcii Jean, Dion Jones, Elisa Scorsini, Josh Coates, Lachie Bailey, Lauren Schenk, Lewis Russell, Max Etherington, Michael Larkin (ISS), Riley Baird

Rainbow Falls group (Josh Coates)

Saturday saw a group of NUCC members head out to Macquarie Pass for a day of canyoning. Attendees were varied in their experience, as the trip was largely targeted at new club members. Some had canyoned before a few times, some not at all, while the more experienced NUCC members were there to show us the ropes. All were enthusiastic and ready for a good time. The trip was well organised by Michael Larkin and co-led by Lachie Bailey.

The carpark at Mac Pass was unusually busy, and so finding a park was our first mission, and in the end we all parked at the bottom of the hill while Michael ferried us to the top. With that sorted, we geared up in SRT kits, helmets, wetsuits etc., and then walked through the bush to the canyon. Our group then split up into two groups, one led by Michael and one led by Lachie. Michael's group were to continue up the canyon a little further, and abseil one or two bigger pitches than the other group. The abseils were great fun, and included a few short pitches down waterfalls and into deeper water. In between each pitch we rock hopped along the length of the canyon, which proved particularly challenging given how slippery the rocks were. In Lachie's group, of which I was a member, scarcely anyone made it through the day without slipping over on the rocks at least once. I don't think I've ever felt so unsure of my footfalls before, and it certainly added to the feeling of adventure. The weather was fairly mild, and so those of us with wetsuits were grateful for the extra insulation by the end of the day.



Setting up on the first pitch at Rainbow Falls. Photo by Andriana Stoddart.

Traversing the canyon was great fun, and it was great to be doing it under the tutelage of more experienced club members, while still enjoying the 'new' feeling with other fellow new members. It ended up being a very long day too, as we didn't leave Mac Pass until after 6pm, and didn't return back to Canberra until sometime after 9pm. All in all though, it was a great day that all enjoyed. If other NUCC trips are anything like this one, I look forward to attending many more to come!



A beautiful view of Macquarie Pass Canyon with the backdrop of Illawarra rainforest. The photo is taken looking back towards P2 and first pitch at Rainbow Falls. Photo by Andriana Stoddart.

Clover Falls group (Elisa Scorsini)

Although the weather was not as I expected, I spent a wonderful day exploring Macquarie Pass National Park and its waterfalls during this canyoning experience with NUCC. Thanks to the two group leaders, Michael and Lachie, a massive group of 13 fairly beginner participants managed very well to enjoy and navigate in the wilderness and among the wildlife of the park. We split into two groups. I was in the second one with Michael, Claud, Max, Antonella, Danny and Dion.

Since we were the “brave” group, Rainbow Falls was not enough for us. Instead, we headed straight to the biggest waterfall: Clover Falls, which is a stunning 30 metres descent alongside the nice and refreshing shower of the falls.

In order to reach this waterfall, we took the Clover Hill Trail which intersects with the Rainbow Falls Trail after 45 minutes walking from the car park. The trail to the massive waterfall is quite rocky and steep, but definitely worth the effort! After some bushbashing, we started our descent on a double-rope system. Many of us, myself included, got stuck on it – apparently the orange double rope causes more problems than the green one, not too sure why.

We spent 40 minutes at the bottom of the waterfall chatting, snacking and making fun of the others still in trouble on the rope (shame on us!) and then, we proceeded towards the wood forest and the pineapple rocks, trying not to fall

on the slippery moss or to kill any of the wildlife; cute, tiny frogs included.

During the second part of the trip, we went back on the main track to explore Rainbow Falls and enjoy the excitement of a “natural” slide. The path was initially full of tourists and other visitors, but luckily, being the last group wandering around the park and assisted by the awful weather, we were able to take our time and quietly enjoy the entire experience. I can’t forget

the excitement of Antonella, who literally spent the entire day in the water. The rest of the group, on the contrary, was trying to get out of the water as soon as they could!

Around 5pm, we decided that we had enough for the day, even if we missed two amazing jumps into the water just in front of us, and we started our walk back to the car park where the rest of the group was waiting and then drove back to Canberra.

Do I have any recommendations? Definitely I do. Many of us, myself included, had

no wetsuit: very BAD choice, especially if it is a misty-rainy day; I mean, you can still handle it, but if you have a wetsuit, carry it along with you. Oh! Another thing: Tupperware containers are NOT waterproof; so, unless you want to taste pretzel/M&M juice or soggy food, carry a dry bag with you to keep your food dry.

Lovely trip with lovely people: can you ask for a better start to the semester?!



Lachie setting up the final abseil (Editor: with what looks like a sadly tangled rope crying out for a rope bag...). Photo by Andriana Stoddart.



Due to popular demand, NUCC ran a second trip to Macquarie Pass on the Sunday – here some more photos from that day. Photos by Andriana Stoddart.

Buchan

5–8 March 2021

Britt Brockett

NUCCers: Britt Meers, Danny Feng, Jak Thomas, Lachie Bailey

ROCers: Alex Williams (“tall Alex”), Alex Detener (“other Alex”), Darcey Delanges, Steve Birkett

This trip had great weather, some great people, the use of humans as weights for fireside workouts, and even some cool caves! Though most of the trip has faded to pleasant memories as I write this ~5 months later, some highlights definitely stand out!

We departed ANU on the 5th of March, and made the ~6 hour trip down south to Buchan Caves Reserve, where we were to camp for the first night. The ROCers met us late that night, and joined us at our fire to sing songs about Stevens.¹⁰ We were up early (for cavers...) the next morning to pack up camp, as we needed to move ourselves off the Caves Reserve and around the road a little to private property that local cavers were nice enough to let us stay on.

The first day's caving saw us scrambling around in some classics, Honeycomb and Oolite. These caves are always a fun introduction to Buchan; with the water-formed passages giving Honeycomb its name. We did the Magical Mystery Tour and played “find the way out” in Honeycomb, and with only a few hints, the “S-bend” for the exit was found (look for the camel!). Unfortunately, this adventure turned into a tragedy when Danny realised he'd lost a glove, and despite desperate searching, the glove was lost forever...and Danny was forced to cave with sub-par gloves for the rest of the trip.

Returning to camp, we set up tents and had a fire going by dinnertime. It was a night of ridiculousness, with human weightlifting competitions and Darcey being put to bed by Alex D and Steve multiple times through the night...once they even carried him while sitting

on his camp chair and just left him in the cottage. Darcey always got himself back outside again, though...

The next day, Alex Williams took the NUCCers (minus Lachie, who was off making connections with/introducing to caving a group of Turkish locals from up W-Tree way) to a new region: Slocombe's Cave at The Basin. Containing some mud, lots of side-passages to explore, some crawling, and some climbing up a short but not-good attempt at a ladder, it was a great way to start the day.

After having lunch down at the river, Alex W, Danny and I embarked on a search for River Cave while Britt Meers went back to camp for a shower and a bit of a rest (beating a cave that attempts to trap you in a crawl by snagging your overalls is exhausting). The river adventure wasn't really caving, despite beating back blackberries, avoiding wombat burrows, and sticking our heads in a few holes, but it was definitely a nice walk/swim. Alex did let us know that he found the cave on his next trip, it was a few more bends along the river!

The final day: we'd decided to stop by a site that no one from NUCC had been to for ages, M4, but for which we *thought* we had clear directions... After talking to a landowner who lived near to the site (he reeeeally needs to be clued-in to any attempts to cave here, or you might find yourself in a bit of trouble) we suited up and walked down the hill to find the cave. Should be down near the river, on the bottom of the hill. Easy. Or not.

¹⁰ Song: I am Steve, by Hey Steve

We bush bashed for about an hour, but eventually called off the search as we all had to start the trip home. Hot, sweaty, and frustrated, it was nonetheless a fun day out with a bunch of great people. That cave shall be found, next time!

Overall, another great trip to Buchan – even if I can't remember it properly!



Top: Alex Williams, Britt Brockett and Danny Feng embrace the warm weather and use it to their advantage, searching for River Cave. Above-left: Some of the NUCCers/ROCers inspect Limestone Lodge, where we are to spend our second and third nights at Buchan (right-left: Danny Feng, Lachie Bailey, Jak Thomas, Alex Williams, Darcey Delanges). Right: Fireside antics on night two involved an impromptu weights class/competition. With no dumbbells or weight bars, typical caver ingenuity led to humans being substituted in for exercise equipment. Steve Birkett and Alex Williams spot Darcey Delanges as he lifts Alex Detener. Photos by Britt Brockett.

Dragons and Queen: A Caver's Fairy Tale

(Bungonia Caving: Blowfly and Acoustic Pot)

28 March 2021

Claud Tomkins

Participants: Brittany Meers, Claud Tomkins, Corey Hanrahan, Josh Coates, Lachie Bailey

After having put off writing this trip report for many months here I am, only a few hours before I've been told by the Editor I must have it in by, trying to rack my brain for the events that transpired on this day over five months ago... whoops!¹¹ But alas, here it is, the story of caving at Bungonia on the 28th of March as I remember it, five months later...

I'm going to start by going out on a limb here and assuming that it started the same as any of our other typical one-day caving trips. The 8am meet

at ANU sport. A classic. We probably grabbed some gear: ropes, tapes, crabs, headtorches... you get the point, your typical caving gear. Lachie, Britt, Josh, and I then went on our merry way up the highway to Bungonia where we met up with Corey who had travelled down from Wollongong. And so, the caving begun.

Up first was Blowfly. Being the productive, time-efficient group we are, Corey set off to rig the exit pitch whilst I was tasked with the entrance pitch. Under the watchful eye of Lachie, and much



Corey coming down the entrance pitch in Blowfly. Photo by Lachie Bailey.

¹¹ Sub-Editor's note: you know, I think I'm noticing a theme here with the trip reports...



Claud rigging the entrance pitch to Blowfly. Photo by Lachie Bailey.

feedback, helpful titbits and questioning looks, we were good to go with the entrance. With the reappearance of Corey and the all good from his end, we descended down into the dragon's lair. Ahead of us a treacherous journey. A journey that started with an uphill part-crawl, part-climb, to Middle Aven. Here we were met with a nice spacious chamber filled with many nice places to have a sit. But alas we couldn't get too comfortable because just ahead of us was it – the Dragons Teeth. Pointy, serrated rocks sticking up from the floor and digging into your flesh as you dragged your body uphill over the top of them. Despite everything I just wrote, not actually as bad as it sounds... Britt will however likely disagree. Once we had vanquished the dragon's teeth we were steamrolling ahead. Through the Spokeshave Squeeze, downclimb, through the Kidney Squeeze, more downclimbing, and suddenly we were already at the exit pitch. A short 25-meter prussik up Corey's expertly rigged rope and we had conquered Blowfly.



Getting ready for the first trip back post-COVID. Photo by Lachie Bailey.

Lunch on the surface, soaking in the sun, and eating... cake? (If I remember correctly Lachie fuelled us with his home-made orange cake, twas very tasty)... and then it was back to caving.

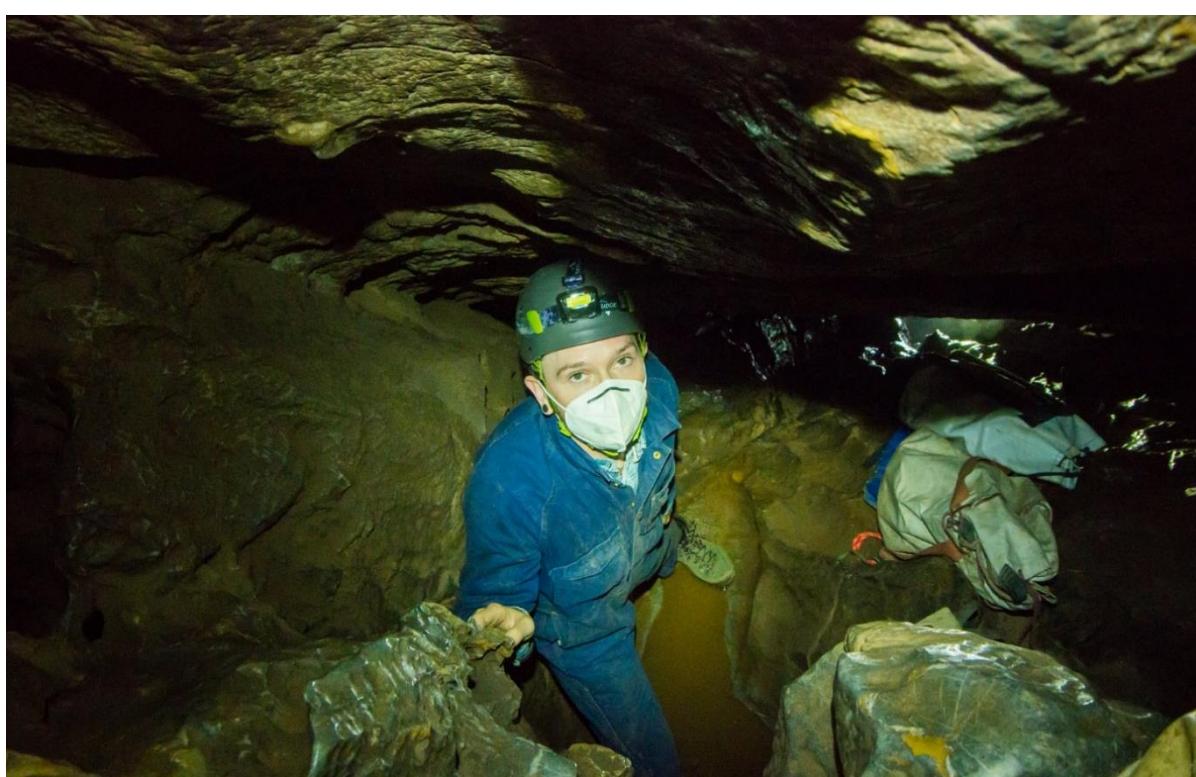
Acoustic Pot was next on the agenda so off we went down into the pot. Only a short time later we reached the main attraction, the 30-metre Acoustic Pot pitch. So, of course, like any sensible caver, Britt and I agreed that the situation demanded a sing-along to test out these acoustics its name so proudly advertised. And so started the tradition of singing Bohemian Rhapsody in every cave we went in together. With the acoustics sufficiently tested and approved of, we were all suddenly at the bottom of the pit and ready for a bit of an explore down Snake & Son. Corey and Josh quickly disappeared into the depths of the meandering passages, and whilst Lachie was quite content having a little sit, Britt and I journeyed off to follow them. However, the cruel and unforgiving passage had snaked Britt, trapping her. But not to fear, Lachie was here! With the removal of her

SRT kit she was freed from the grasps of Snake & Son. Once again, we were back to smooth sailing, back up the pitch and out to the surface.

All in all, even five months later, I remember it being a great day. However, just to make things even sweeter, it was our first cave back out at Bungonia since the caves had been closed with COVID¹² – thanks team for making it (clearly) a very memorable one.



Finishing the day scoping for possible canyons from the Bungonia Lookdown. Photo by Lachie Bailey.



Josh chilling in Blowfly. Photo by Lachie Bailey.

¹² Editor's note: this trip was indeed NUCC's first permit caving trip on the mainland post-covid – that is, in about a year – and Lachie applied for the permit for the very first weekend the caves opened. You'll notice from the photos that mask-wearing was one of the permit conditions.

Easter Canyoning at Newnes

2–5 April 2021



Andy doing Tiger Snake the fancy way. Photo by Claud Tomkins.

Tiger Snake Canyon (Josh Coates)

Participants: Andy Waddell, Antonella Wilby, Claud Tomkins, Corey Hanrahan, Darcii Jean, Josh Coates, Lauren Hayes, Lewis Russell, Oxana Repina, Tali de Mestre

Tiger Snake was the first canyon that we did on Easter long weekend, on Friday April 2. Our group leaders chose this one as they hoped that they recent heavy rainfall wouldn't have too badly impacted on the water levels in this canyon compared to others. Due to this uncertainty, two groups of five tackled the canyon, staggered by a half hour or so, so that we didn't clog up and slow down the trip. My group was led by Corey and Oxana, and included Darcii, Antonella and myself (Josh). The other group was led by Lauren, with Lewis, Andy, Claud and Tali in tow. Tiger Snake is a picturesque slot canyon that is sure to please any that traverse it. The canyon starts with a fairly awkward abseil down into the slot of 7m, and is then followed by a series of three more short abseils. A really great larger

23m abseil then took us out of the first section of the canyon, to walk along the stream for a while. The final abseil is either short (just 5m or so), or you can scramble along to a longer 22m abseil straight down into a dark slot. My group took the latter which was spectacular, while Lauren's group went with the shorter abseil. Shortly thereafter the canyon ends, and the walk out begins. Not after the canyon ends though, on the left there is a sizeable cave hidden away beneath some boulders, where we found the roof alight with glow worms. Overall, Tiger Snake is a great canyon, and well worth the 1.5–2 hour walk in and out. It was also a relatively dry canyon, with no swims required and only a few wades, such that I wasn't shivering by the end. Would recommend!



Antonella and Corey walking to Tiger Snake. The forest is starting to come back after the 2019–2020 bushfires. Photo by Josh Coates.



Josh and the awesome view on the walk out from Tiger Snake. Photo by Claud Tomkins.

Hole-in-the-Wall (Tali de Mestre)

Participants: Claud Tomkins, Corey Hanrahan, Josh Coates, Oxana Repina, Tali de Mestre

We left camp bright-eyed and bushy-tailed at 8 am in the morning. An hour later we arrived at the carpark with two cars and a pile of gear. With gear packed and distributed into several packs, we set off on foot to the canyon. The journey took about 90 minutes on foot, only briefly getting lost while attempting to find a nice view for morning tea.



Claud abseiling on P2 of Hole-in-the-Wall. Photo by Oxana Repina.

We suited up along the creek bank just before the edge of the canyon. A short drop of about a metre was made to enter the canyon, immediately placing us in a room not too dissimilar to a flooded corridor, with several families of fish lurking about. After wading through this section, the canyon began to widen and deepen, before constricting back in. After a

downclimb or two, the canyon widened significantly and suddenly we were simply walking along a creek bed. Recent flooding had produced many ‘false floors’ of sand along the edges of the creek, one of which an unnamed party member fell into. Eventually we encountered a nice patch of sun to stop for a lunch break.

After finishing lunch, we walked a few more metres and encountered a short abseil into shallow water. Shortly after this was another abseil with a log awkwardly positioned in the way. Another brief walk took us to the mouth of



Tali at the end of the Bungleboori swim section. Photo by Claud Tomkins.

the main even, the glow-worm tunnel! – a very impressive cave-like tunnel peppered with glow worms across the ceiling. These were admired for a moment before continuing, a squeezy climb up out of the water was blocked by a gathering of spiders. Josh went first to clear the path, followed by myself and then Claud. Oxana and Corey opted to backtrack and find a path around the terrifying spiders. The three of us decided to laze in the sun while we waited for them to regroup with us.

Ten minutes passed before we heard a blood-curdling scream; Oxana and Corey had not

found a way around and the spiders had gotten to them. There were several more abseils after this, including a 14m abseil through the eponymous ‘hole’ in the wall.

After the last abseil, we came out onto the Bungleboori, which looked beautiful as the sun

was just high enough to shine in. We swam for several hundred metres and then waded for several hundred more before finding a walking track to exit with. From here, we simply walked back the way we came all the way to the cars. On the drive home, Claud and I saw a family of brumbies—very cool.



Claud, Corey and Tali enjoying Hole-in-the-Wall. Photo by Josh Coates.

Bridge Canyon (Corey Hanrahan)

Participants: Corey Hanrahan, Oxana Repina

After gauging the water levels in Tiger Snake and Hole-In-The-Wall canyons for the past two days, Oxana and I set our eyes on Bridge canyon. Faced with a certain long walk and an uncertain reward, we were unable to convince anyone from our large group to join us. So, knowing that we were in for a big day, we packed the night before and started early.

The first part of the walk to the junction with Hole-In-The-Wall was well formed and easy

going. However, after the track split our route became increasingly narrow and poorly defined. It’s possible that the track had been destroyed by the 2019-20 fires. However, I suspect low traffic to this canyon (due to the long walk in) is primarily to blame.

The only real entry detail in the Jamieson guide was a GPS coordinate roughly indicating the start of the canyon. Not wanting to miss out on any interesting bits, I elected to approach the

canyon from a saddle to the north, rather than a more direct route from the 932m point to the west. Unfortunately, our route passed through a swamp of ‘cutty grass’. Because we didn’t have the foresight to put on gloves earlier, this meant we arrived at the canyon start with our hands and legs covered in blood.

Despite a rough start, we wet-suited up and entered our first slot. At the start it was quite overgrown with ferns, but it quickly transitioned to a couple of beautiful and enclosed climbs down 2m waterfalls. The slot ended as quickly as it started, and we continued through a prolonged section of creek walking and boulder scrambling.

At this point our morale started to wane. Had we bush-based all this way just to find a scrubby creek? Was this the real reason the canyon was done infrequently?

Thankfully, the creek narrowed again, and we started our first abseils. The canyon soon became a continuous series of down climbs and

abseils, punctuated occasionally with a short walk. Enjoyment peaked at an amazing, enclosed section with a 17m abseil, with many interesting rock structures. Among these was the “bridge” which gives the canyon its name.

After a few longer abseils, we arrived at the south branch of Bungleboori Creek. Daylight was fading, so we pressed on downstream and up the exit route between Bridge and Bjelke’s Mind canyons. As visibility diminished, we found ourselves confronted with a continuous line of cliffs, struggling to find the “break” described by previous groups. Eventually, we found it further west than we expected, leaving only a dark, long bush-bash through rocky pagodas and scrub.

We arrived back at the carpark past 11pm, thoroughly exhausted. Driving back to camp at Barcoo Swamp, we arrived just past our call-out time of 12am, meeting other members of our group as they were driving out of camp to check in on us. Overall, our day was definitely “an epic”.



Oxana in Hole-in-the-Wall. Photo by Josh Coates.



Lewis abseiling in Closet Canyon. Photo by Claud Tomkins.

Closet Canyon: An Easter Special (Claud Tomkins)

Participants: Claud Tomkins, Darcii Jean, Josh Coates, Lachie Bailey, Lewis Russell, Tali de Mestre

Day three on the scene started off pretty relaxed for the CCC (Closet Canyon Crew). Bit of a sleep in (in comparison to Corey and Oxana, who left before half of us were even out of bed), a nice long brekkie; really just enjoying our Easter morning. Once we were fuelled up for the day and had our gear in order, we piled into the cars and drove off to the track entrance.

So, as you can gather, a very chill start to the day. However, from here on out I will describe to you how my day went from ‘very chill’ to ‘a little bit less chill’.

At the track entrance I was hit with my first taste of ‘not so chill’. For Lachie had very kindly gifted me the pleasure of carrying a 70 metre rope. So, in the bag that went, along with everything else I had to carry: my kit, food, water, rain jacket, emergency thermals... you get the point. It was looking like it was going to be quite the load to carry. But not to fear, for after failing to stuff my wetsuit in my insanely full bag, and instead trying to tie it to the outside, Lachie kindly offered to

carry it for me. WOW! – what a weight that had been lifted.

Feeling as light as a feather, off we went. The walk started off pretty nice, a casual stroll down a dirt path. However, before long, we suddenly were veering off the path, trudging through the dense wilderness like a parade of ants blindly following Lachie’s GPS. I do although have to give Lachie and his GPS some credit as 1 hour, 42 minutes and 4.17 kilometres later (according to my Strava – because yes, I am a very diligent Strava user) we had arrived at the start of the canyon.

Pitch 1 – go time. Tali did a quick rig on a sling around a tree and then off I went. So far, so good. However, ultimately being the person that I am, I was quickly distracted by the view, had zero regard for where I was placing my feet, and for that I reaped the consequences. BANG! I hadn’t realised I was stepping off a small overhang and swung into the edge, smashing my knee. Besides looking like a bit of a numpty and bloodying up my sock, I was fine, but I can tell you that over



Josh at the bottom of a pitch. Photo by Claud Tomkins.

five months later I still have a pretty big scar from it. ‘Not so chill’ moment number two.

The next little bit was pretty smooth sailing. A short walk down the creek, down P2, downclimb, a bit of a swim, downclimb again, a wade through some water, and we were at P3.

Now Pitch 3 is what I like to refer to as a classic stitch up. Some slightly (really quite) inaccurate trip notes and poor visibility led us to believe it was quite the sizeable pitch. Nothing massive, but too big a beast for our 40 metre rope. So alas, we pulled out all the stops – it was time for the big boys. I’m talking not one, but TWO 70 metre ropes which were called into action for this epic pitch. Lachie tied them together, threw in a quick stone knot, advised us all to get changed into our wetsuits, and then off he went, disappearing down into deep, dark abyss, my wetsuit held hostage in his pack.

Yet there was no time to just sit there sullenly, for there lay a mammoth task ahead of me. You see, in the midst of our ‘very chill’ morning, we hadn’t bothered to address the issue of the 70 metre haphazardly stuffed rope that was the product of the day before. So, whilst Lachie had just taken off on the beautifully and neatly packed 70 metre rope, he had left us with this tangled pile of torture (so much for Lachie being well known for previously stating that untangling rope was his favourite part about canyoning). Off to work I went, tying the other end to the bag,

and slowly feeding the rope in. By the time Lewis, Josh and Darcii were also down the pitch, Tali and I had managed to untangle and feed almost 60 metres worth of it into the pack – big smiles all round, the end was in sight! Then tragedy struck. We were in trouble. Only metres from being finished we discovered a knot. Our faces fell, tears pricked our eyes. What were we going to do? One end was tied on the pitch and the other was under 60 metres of beautifully packed rope. I felt shattered... helpless. Then, just when I thought I was going to have to take all the rope out and pack it all back in again, Tali, and that gorgeously large brain of his, saved the day. We passed the whole bag through the loop in the knot, and just like that it was magically untangled – genius is what that man is.

Finally, it was my turn at this epic pitch!... of 18 metres. The pitch was 18 metres. We had used 140 metres of rope on an 18-metre pitch – talk about an overkill. Classic stitch up.¹³

Pitches 4 and 5 went smoothly, and, for the sake of the length of this trip report, nothing more to report on there.

Pitch 6 – the final pitch. The pitch where Lachie sacrificed Tali to the waterfall gods. If you don’t understand that then, I’m sorry, guess you should have been there. Once rigged, down the brave Tali went, carefully laying out the rope for



The crew navigating the upper section of Closet. Photo by Claud Tomkins.

¹³ Editor’s note: if this trip report isn’t the perfect example of why rope bags make a world of difference when canyoning, I don’t know what is.

the rest of us to follow. Then I was up, and down I went. After me came Josh, followed by Darcii, then Lewis.

Finally, Lachie was also down and, the moment his feet touched down, he was off rope and scurrying away from the cold of the splash of the waterfall.

"Pull down the purple rope,"¹⁴ he instructed Tali and I as he frantically searched for warmth.

"Aye aye Caption!" we sang out in response.

And so, I got to work on the purple rope. Huffing and heaving, I bore down on the rope, giving it everything I had. Nothing. Seeing my pitiful attempt, Tali rushed over to join me. Together we huffed and heaved and pulled with all the might the fibres in our muscles could muster. However, once again, nothing. Hand ascenders on for extra grip. Nothing. Change up the angle. Nothing. Give the rope a violent wiggle to try free it. Nothing. Hanging my full weight from the rope. Nothing. Hanging my full weight from the rope but upside down. Still nothing. No matter what we tried it, it was always the same result. Nothing.

In despair, I stopped my futile efforts for a moment, stepped back, and thought. I thought back to rigging the rope, urging my mind to remember what it had looked like. Then suddenly I was springing back to life and dashing over to the orange and yellow rope that had just been innocently hanging there beside us.

Tali followed suit and grabbed onto the other rope with me. We looked at each other, our eyes filled with a nervous hope. I nodded once and then our heads sprang back around, eyes focused on the rope, feet firmly planted. HEAVE! We started pulling on the rope. And then, after all the immense effort we had gone to, we felt it. The rope was moving! We picked up pace. Pull, pull, pull, pull. The rope was free. We had done it.

And with that we had conquered Closet Canyon. However, the story does not stop there.

The walkout was... eventful, to say the least.

Once we'd walked far enough down stream that it was actually possible to escape the canyon, we prepared ourselves for the journey to come. Wetsuits came off and packs were exchanged – Lewis, being the great guy he is, traded his lighter pack for Lachie's much heavier one (in turn denying Lachie of the true, authentic Closet Canyon walkout experience).

The walkout started with what I can only describe as an uphill battle. I'm talking some serious high-grade slops. Up the cliff we scrambled – dancing between bipedalism and quadrupedalism – and we were smoking it. Laboured breathing aside we were feeling strong. Powerful. Unstoppable.

Yet stopped is exactly what we were. For in front of us stood a wall that towered over us at least three metres tall. The bear hunt was on. We couldn't go under it, we couldn't go around it, we couldn't go through it, we had to go over it. However, luckily for us, we had very smartly remembered to pack the canyoning essential, a rock climber. It was go time for Josh. Hand, hand, foot, foot, push, pull and just like that he was up. Piece of cake. With a newfound confidence the rest of us followed. Right hand grabbing the tree root. Left hand scrambling for anything to hold onto. Feet pawing at the dirt wall. A weird looking chin up and a struggle later I was up. Then we were all up. We were back on track...

Psych! At the top of that wall lay another wall, wall number 2. And wall #2 was not so friendly of a beast. With fewer hand holds and places to put your feet, wall #2 threatened our spirits. But alas it was no beast for the mighty Josh (and very likely neither for Lewis but my memory is hazy on the details). Within seconds he was up, however, unlike last time, the confidence that the rest of us would get up just so easily didn't follow. After a few frugal attempts, the thinking cap went

¹⁴ Author's note: all speech is clearly paraphrased and written for dramatic effect... I am writing this over 5 months later, I definitely don't remember the exact words spoken.

on – what could a group of canyoneers possibly be carrying with them that could assist them in climbing up a vertical face?... suddenly a rope came flying out a pack and was tied around a tree as a make-shift handline. And just like that we were all up. Once again big brain action had saved the day – and people say canyoning is merely physical exercise.

Luckily the worst of it was now over and, with a bit more effort, we had made it to the top of the hill. And boy was it worth it. What can I say, the views were absolutely spectacular. We rested for a moment, soaking in the landscape and the last of the afternoon sun, then, with night drawing closer, off we set once again. Before long the mountains had been engulfed in darkness. In the black of the night, with nothing but the moon and the few headtorches we had between us for light, we weaved our way through the dense vegetation.

After what felt like hours of trudging through the night, suddenly, in the distance, we spotted a faint light. No, make that two faint lights. Head torches in fact. And they were coming towards us. Could this be our other group who had spent the day in the neighbouring canyon?! Not long after, their faces came into sight – it was Lauren and Alen! Excitement spread through the group; spirits were lifted. However, as quickly as the excitement had arrived it vanished and an uneasy feeling settled in the pit of my stomach. Frantically I looked around Lauren and Alan, searching the vegetation behind them for the other three members of their group. They were alone. Panic coursed through me as I searched their faces for answers.

A moment later they had reached us, and Lauren spoke; her voice strong but tone almost uncertain: “There has been an accident...”

And with that, that is where my story ends, and another begins...¹⁵



Canyon buddies for life. Photo by Tali de Mestre.

¹⁵ Editor's note: unfortunately, an accident happened in the group that went through Closet Canyon. The full incident report from this trip will be published in the next issue of *Speleograffiti*.

Bungonia Main Canyon

10 April 2021

Oxana Repina

Participants: Christopher Bradley, Claud Tomkins, Corey Hanrahan,
Oxana Repina (SUSS), Tali de Mestre

After Lachie convinced Corey and myself that Bungonia was somehow on the way to Batemans Bay from Wollongong, where we had a commitment on Sunday, we agreed to squeezing in another wet canyon for the season. It turned out that the anomalously warm water from the floods on the Easter trip to Newnes last weekend made us complacent, and the water in Bungonia was noticeably cool – a fact even more noticeable under the robust wind that raked up the canyon. But with my reference point for Bungonia Main being NUCC's fateful trip in the depths of winter last year, where we abandoned the trip at the first pitch as half of our party were too cold to continue, the first immersion point

this time round was ‘quite refreshing’ rather than ‘heart-stoppingly freezing’. Meanwhile Chris, the only one in our party not to have a wetsuit, somehow managed to climb around the sides like a mountain goat and stayed basically dry. The stakes were too high to fall into the water, he noted.

At the first pitch, Corey and I decided to rig with a fiddlestick. It was a clean, snag-free drop and a good chance to practice using the fiddlestick on a relatively large pitch (35m), as we'd only used it on 15–20m drops previously. After demonstrating how the fiddlestick worked by pulling it out from Corey's perfect stone knot



Tali and Corey at the top of P1, rigged with the fiddlestick and pull-cord. Photo by Claud Tomkins.

(and he re-tied it with resignation), I went down first. The wind toyed with the thin red line of the Dyneema pull-cord, and I tried to keep the unruly string from tangling around the main rope as I searched for an abseil path that would swing me into a narrow rock crevice to wait for the others rather than under the waterfall and then into the pool.

The wind grew bored of the Dyneema and dropped it, and I jammed the pull-cord bag into a shelf of rock where the line was kept free of the rope. Then I jammed myself into another rock ledge and pulled out my camera with numb fingers, trying to stop shivering blurriness into the photos. The sun was out and the wind spread the bottom of the waterfall out into droplets that cast a rainbow, which everyone abseiled through. I kept one eye on the viewfinder and one eye on the pull-cord, but the pull-cord lay quiet and still on the rock. It technically didn't matter much if it was stepped or pulled on until

Corey abseiled as the last person, when the fiddlestick was no longer locked off at the top.

Corey started abseiling and I diverted a bit too much attention to photography. I looked up from the camera and saw the pull cord gently sailing through the air towards his feet. With a curse I lunged towards the pull-cord bag, as much as one can lunge over spray-soaked rocks without slipping and dropping oneself, one's expensive DSLR, and any hope of rescuing the cord, into a deep and cold pool.

The rest of the abseils were uneventful, though in between abseiling everyone draped themselves over the sun-warmed rocks in an effort to soak in the radiant heat and stay low enough to escape the wind. Bungonia Main is a stunning canyon, with three big pitches that each drop abruptly into a wide expansive landscape stretching out to the Shoalhaven. I had a great time as trip photographer and the scenery distracted from the cold. Unfortunately, the scenery (and the cold) also distracted me from



Claud abseiling through the rainbow at the base of P1.
Photo by Oxana Repina.



Chris at the top of the 65 metre P3. Photo by Oxana Repina.



Claud starting P4, the pitch shared with Jerrara Canyon.
Photo by Oxana Repina.



Chris descending P4. Photo by Oxana Repina.

my earlier promise to Lachie to verify the pitch lengths on his canyon topo. Alas, I have discovered that in canyoning, it appears to be a case of ‘Trip Leader, Photographer, Topo Mapper – pick two or fewer’.

While waiting for the rest of our team to descend the final pitch that’s shared with Jerrara Creek, Claud and I went to find the ‘real final pitch’ that was supposed to be an alternative to the downclimb that follows. Earlier that morning, someone in the group made repeated comments to the effect of, “Well of course we’ll abseil that final pitch!” and “Why go canyoning at all if you’re going to downclimb instead of abseil?”. That person was me and unfortunately, looking at the single sad, rusty bolt that dropped a line through a waterfall into a deep pool with long shadows stretched across it from the setting sun, I saw why people would indeed downclimb instead of abseil and that maybe we wouldn’t abseil that final pitch after all.

The walk out was distinctly longer and more painful with a wet 65 metre rope than I remembered it was without it, and I glumly rued my apparent lack of fitness as everyone else bar Corey (with the wet 70 metre rope) cheerfully skipped up Red Track. Chris, meanwhile, literally *ran* up the track, dropped his pack, and then came back for a second lap. Some sort of misplaced sense of independence and pride made me refuse his repeated offers to take my pack from me. We eventually made it to the cars and I feel I may have sounded more dispirited than I actually felt, because Red Track slog aside, it was an awesome trip with a great group to finally complete Bungonia Main nearly a year after my first attempt.

Yarrangobilly

24–26 April 2021

Oxana Repina

Participants: Andy Waddell, Britt Meers, Claud Tomkins, Corey Hanrahan, Josh Coates, Lauren Schenk, Lucy Elizabeth, Oxana Repina (SUSS), Penny Sze, Priya Singh, Rowan Phemister, Rowena Larkins (SUSS), Tali de Mestre



Britt playing guitar on the porch of Cotterills Cottage at Yarrangobilly Village campground. Photo by Penny Sze.

Following my last, and only, trip to Yarrangobilly nearly four years ago, I had raved about the area ever since, with statements like, “It’s totally underrated!” and “It’s the Tasmania of the Mainland!”. Coppermine Cave was recorded in my memory like a mini version of Lynds Cave – my favourite cave in Australia – and I’d been looking forward to going back to Yagby from the moment I moved to Canberra last year, from where the caves are almost within day-trip distance.

Cue fires, floods and a global pandemic and my eventual moving to Wollongong before the caves re-opened. And Yagby is definitely *not* within day-trip distance of Wollongong. Corey and I grimly slogged the five hours there on Friday night, a slog made all the more grim by the fact

that unlike ACT, NSW does not grant a public holiday for ANZAC Day on Monday when it falls on the weekend (a fact that we found out the day before).

After the bitterly freezing night finally broke into a beautiful morning and the sun thawed everyone from their tents, we all entered the characteristic faffing phase. Four factors contributed to spending a very long time negotiating who would go into which cave: (1) I was hell-bent on going to East Deep Creek, which I imagined as awesome walk-through streamway with lots of formation;¹⁶ (2) I did a poor job at selling it, and everyone else imagined it as dubious, cold, and miserable (because I technically couldn’t 100% confirm that it *wasn’t*); (3) Andy did an excellent job of selling Eagles

¹⁶ Let me correct this: *This is how I remembered Lachie telling me* East Deep Creek was. He definitely said the words: “You have to go there, you will love it!”.

Nest as the prettiest cave in Australia and one that's not cold *or* miserable; (4) we completely forgot that Lachie had put a lot of thought and effort into the permit and specially requested group sizes of eight, not six.

The eventual resolution involved Claud and Lauren going bushwalking to the Blue Waterholes and Corey, Britt, Rowan, and Lucy coming with me into East Deep Creek. After having spent five years following the lead of other people and several times thanklessly bush-bashing through heat and hills for hours as they 'navigated' us to cave or canyon entrances,¹⁷ I had now started tracking down waypoint coordinates and marking out the route on a GPS prior to leaving, and actively checking the GPS en route. No more thankless bush-bashing. We found the entrance without any trouble. (The fires had cleared out a lot of the thick, barely-penetrable scrub that Lachie had described in his notes, but together with the floods and lack of humans passing through for a year, the track was essentially non-existent. The route had been homogenised into track-less, but relatively open, bush.)

Of course, inside a cave, GPS no longer works (bummer). This was my first time leading a group of cavers, including several new cavers, as the most experienced person on the team. I tried to make it look like I knew what I was doing.

The rest of the group: "So... which way is it, Oxana?"

Me: "Umm... I dunno, I've never been here! Let's go down this bit. Looks kinda trogged..?"

Every so often we would pass a feature that seemed to correspond to my half-memory of Rowena's description of the cave she'd given earlier that morning. I was actually quite amazed that I was apparently able to find the route

¹⁷ A sample of quotes from said navigators: "Hmmm... guys, I think it was the *other* ridge." "Ok, we lost the track, but we can just cut across this gully, it might be a *bit* steep and scrubby." "Which ones are the eastings and which ones are the northings on the map?"

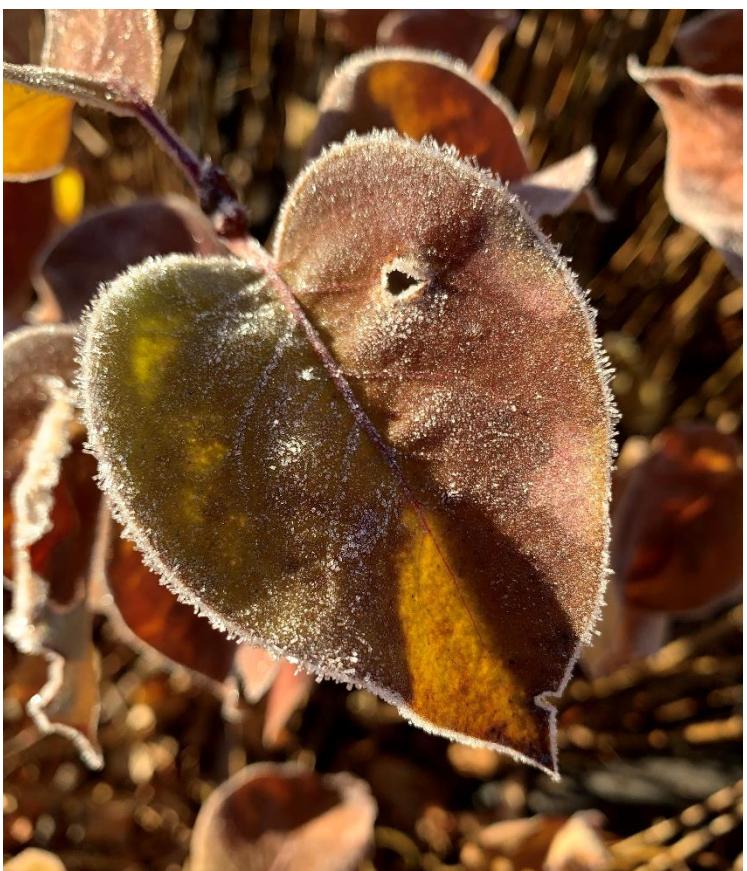
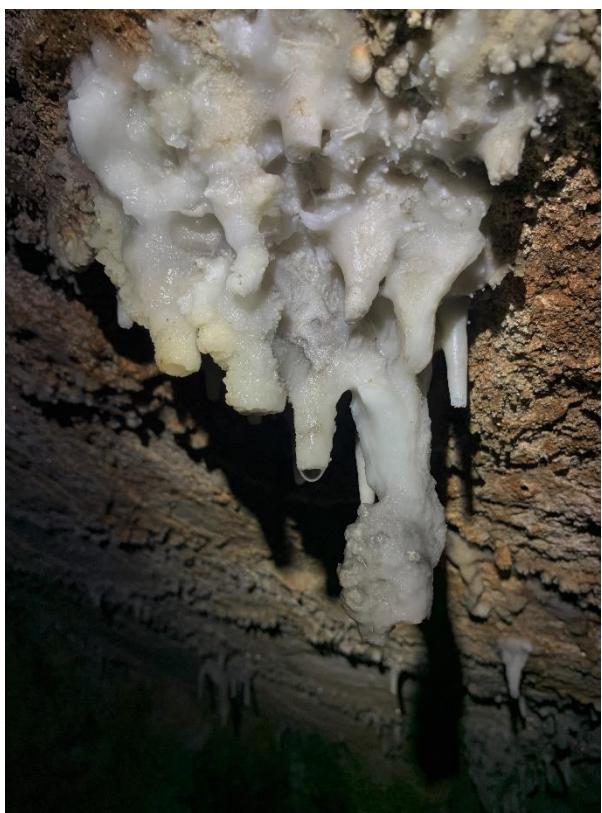
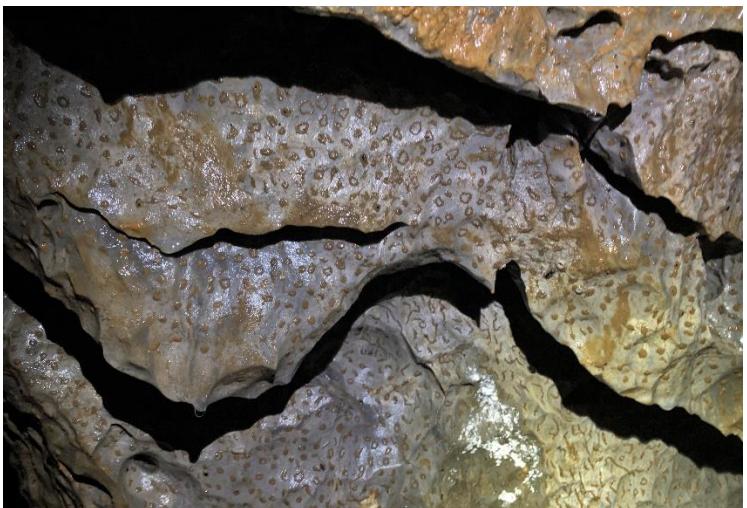
through this cave, having never been here before, and we hadn't required any back-tracking at all.

The recent floods must have washed through the cave too. There were trog marks at hand-hold level, but the entire floor looked like it had been scrubbed clean with a pressure hose. The limestone underfoot was brilliant white, even in sections where there were no signs of an active streamway – I'd never seen a cave like this. We tried our best to keep it that way but it was almost impossible, though we mostly managed to restrict where we stepped to a narrow route that followed the hand-hold trog marks.

If there was an active walk-through streamway, we never found it. What we did find was a trickle of water flowing through a long chute of flowstone (admittedly, a very beautiful section), which then trickled into more winding passageway that varied in height between crawling and belly-slithering levels, and was lined with large cobbles. That is, none other than a long wet cobble grovel. The new cavers were not super impressed by this. I was not super impressed by this. People began to get cold, and the club headtorches started to play up. We turned back. Later, I mentioned this to Lachie and he seemed surprised: "I thought you liked wet cobble grovels?"

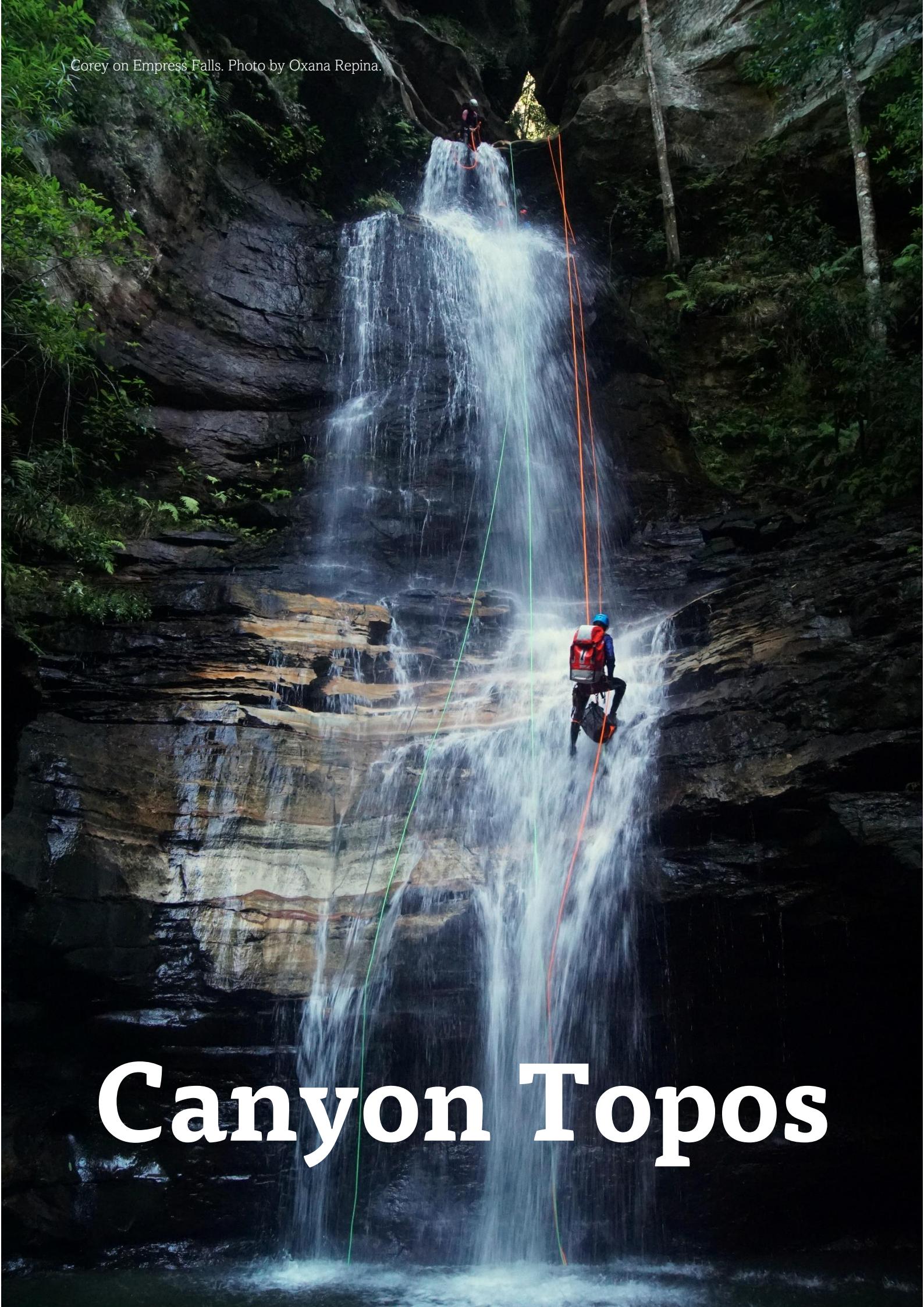
That evening, I made myself feel better by conducting an unsystematic and somewhat biased survey of everyone present for dinner at the time on whether they preferred canyoning or caving. Canyoning won. The next day half of us headed out to the Blue Waterholes and remarked how much better above-ground activities were.¹⁸ The other half went with Andy into Eagles Nest and remarked how much better that cave was than East Deep Creek.

¹⁸ In fact, less than three weeks later, I spent four days inside Niggy in Tasmania and loved it. How to explain this? I've realised that the same 'fun to effort ratio' that is very pertinent to canyoning also applies to caving. East Deep Creek was mild-to-moderate effort and pretty low fun – a poor ratio. Niggy was extremely high effort and even higher fun – a great ratio. Neither fun nor effort can be considered in isolation when evaluating a caving experience.



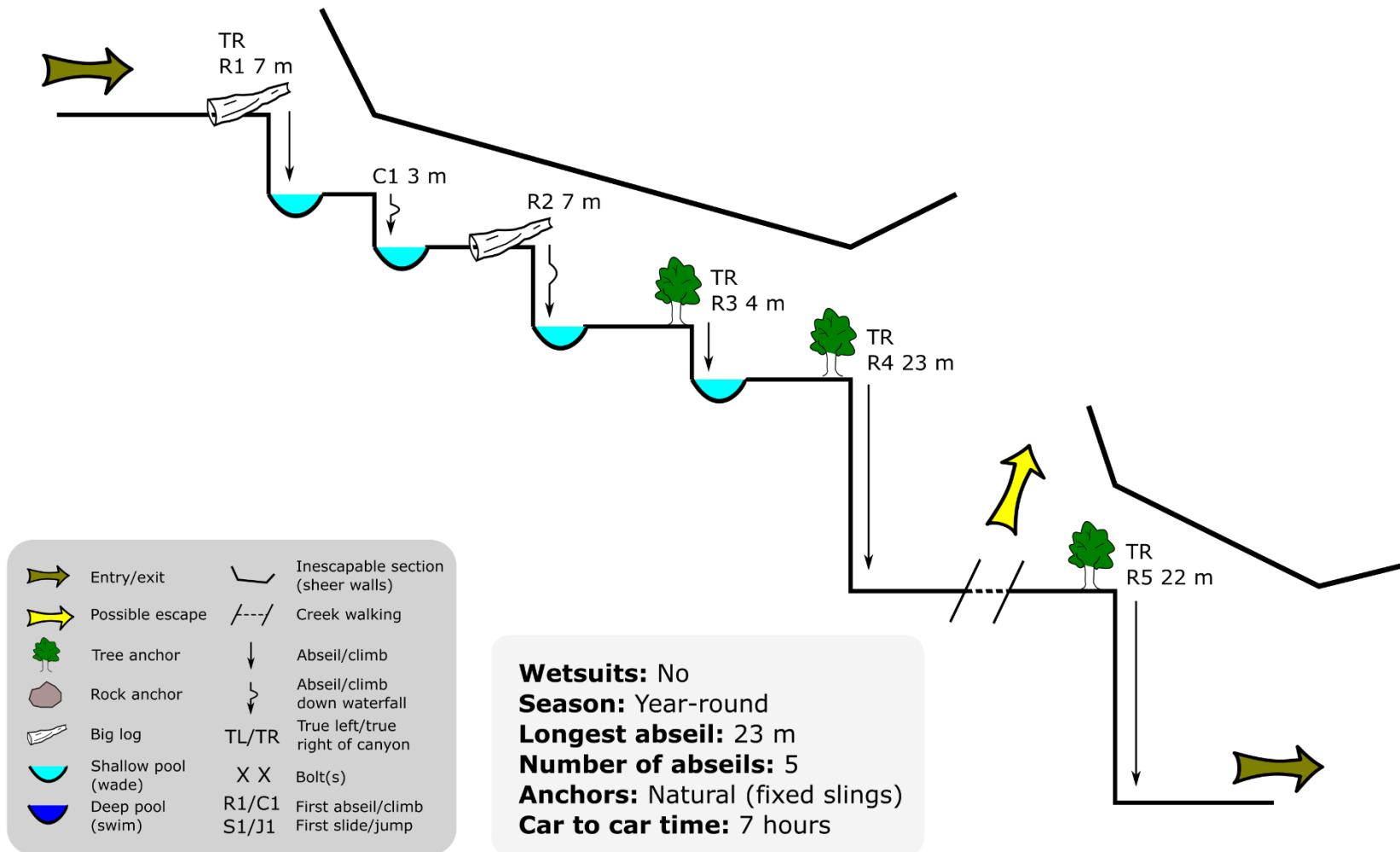
A selection of photos by Penny Sze from the Eagles Nest trip. Clockwise from bottom-left: reforming straws, small crystal formation inside the rock, mud patterns on otherwise-clean limestone, the group moving through a small room, and a frost-covered leaf from back at camp on the surface – it was cold!

Corey on Empress Falls. Photo by Oxana Repina.

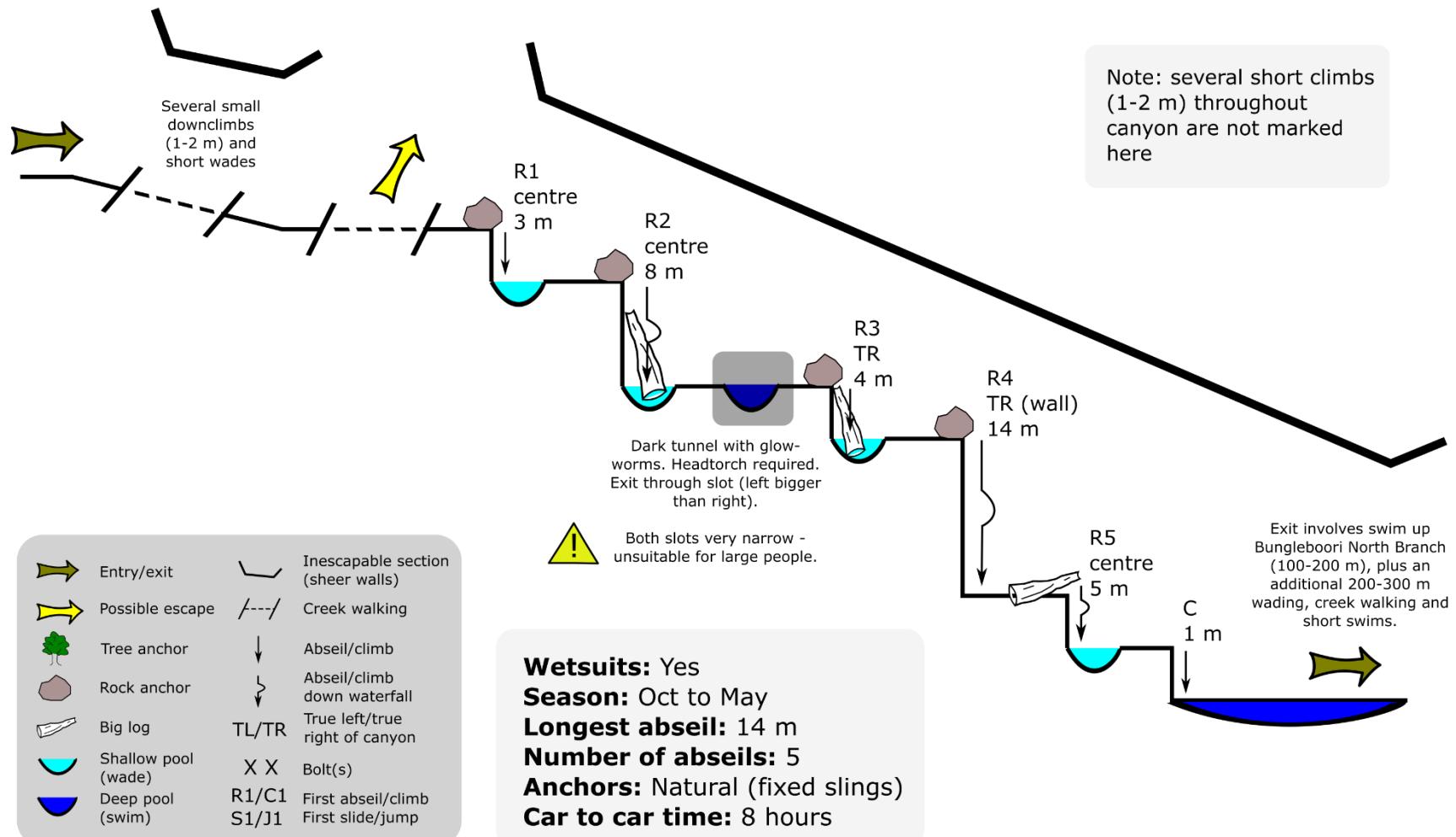


Canyon Topos

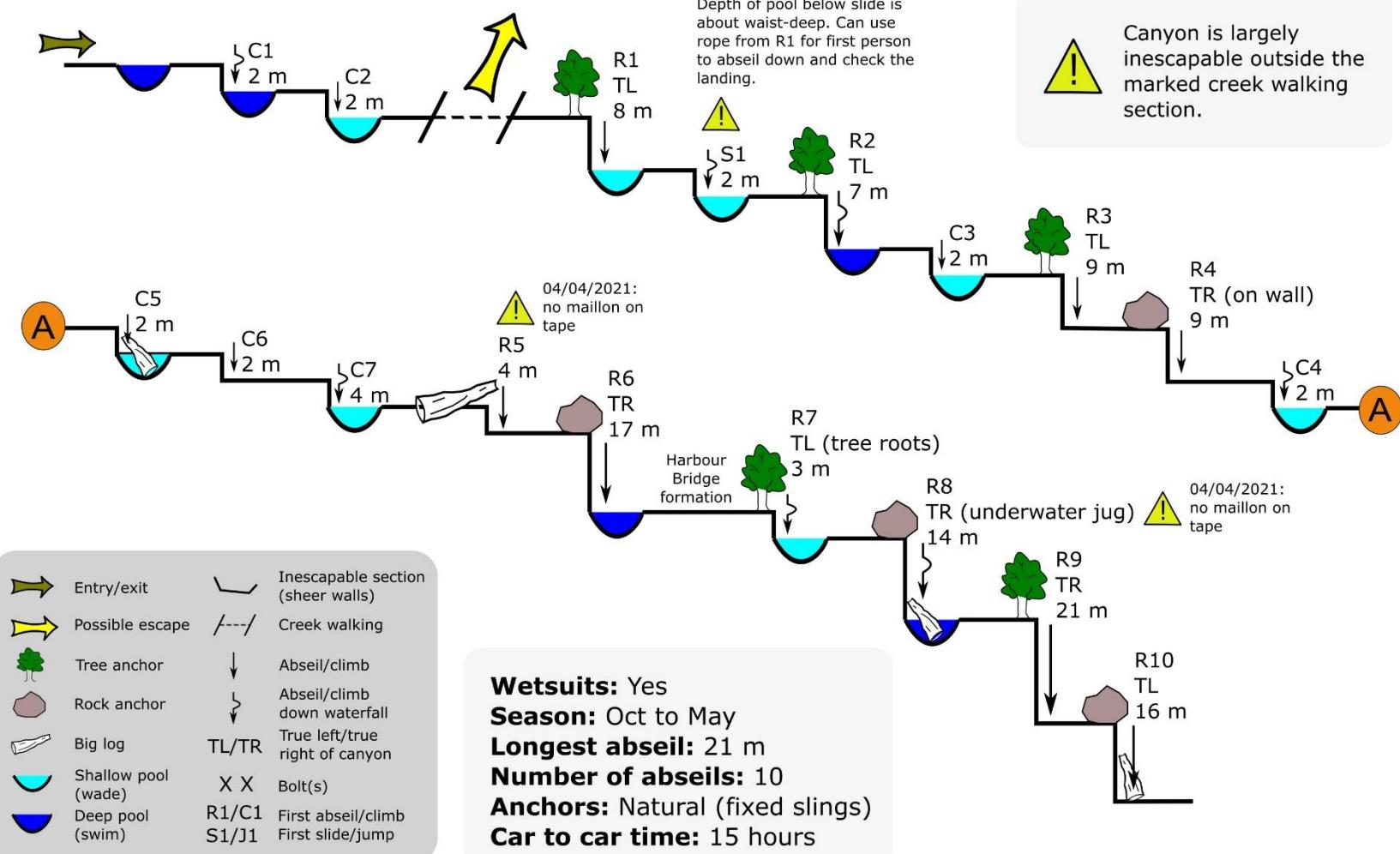
Tiger Snake Canyon (v3a1III**), Wollemi National Park



Hole-in-the-Wall Canyon (v3a3III**) Wollemi National Park



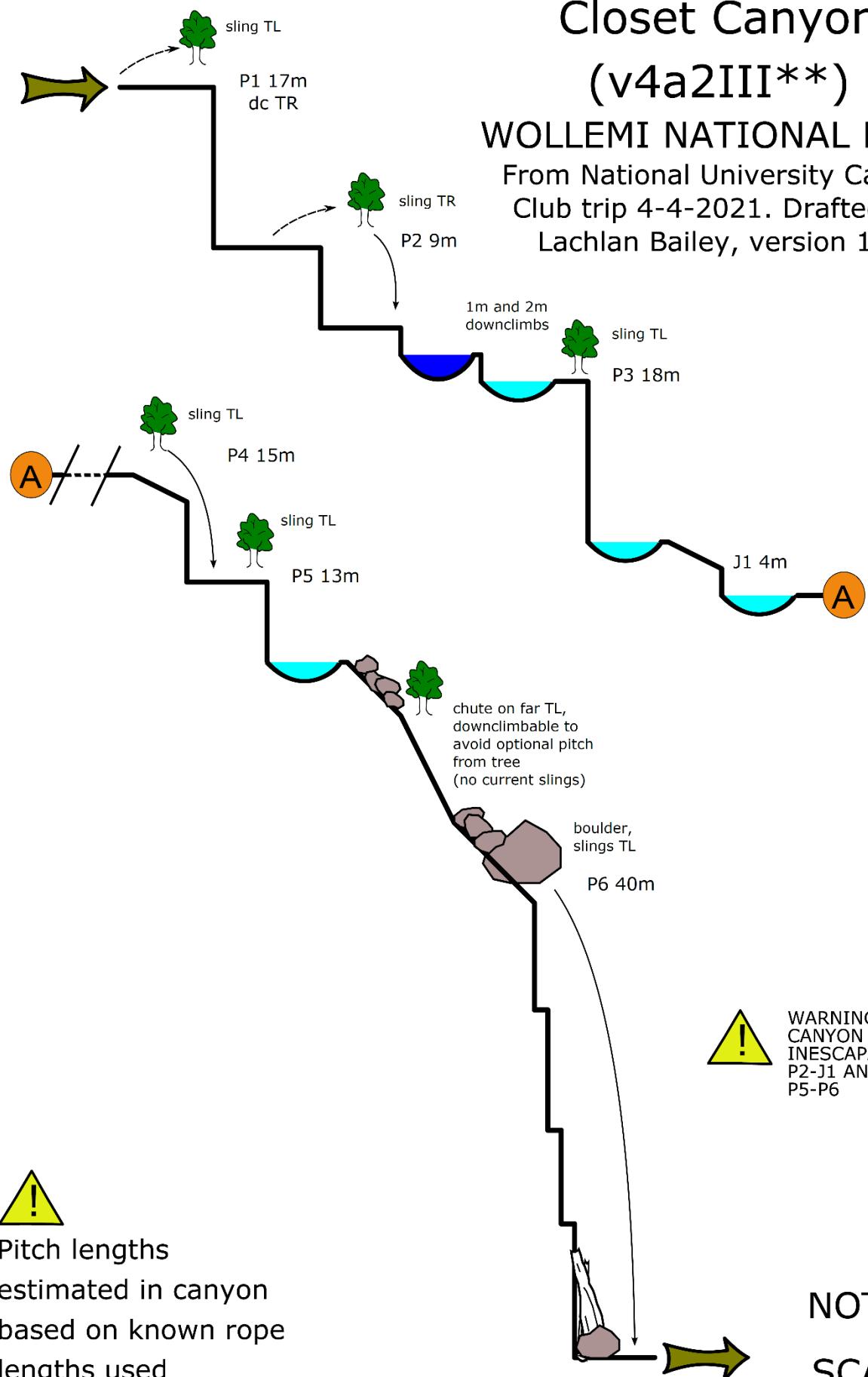
Bridge Canyon (v3a2IV*), Wollemi National Park



Closet Canyon (v4a2III**)

WOLLEMI NATIONAL PARK

From National University Caving Club trip 4-4-2021. Drafted by Lachlan Bailey, version 1.2



!
Pitch lengths
estimated in canyon
based on known rope
lengths used

Other reports



Darcii Jean and Josh Coates look into the entrance of Eagles Nest Cave at Yarrangobilly.
Photo by Penny Sze.

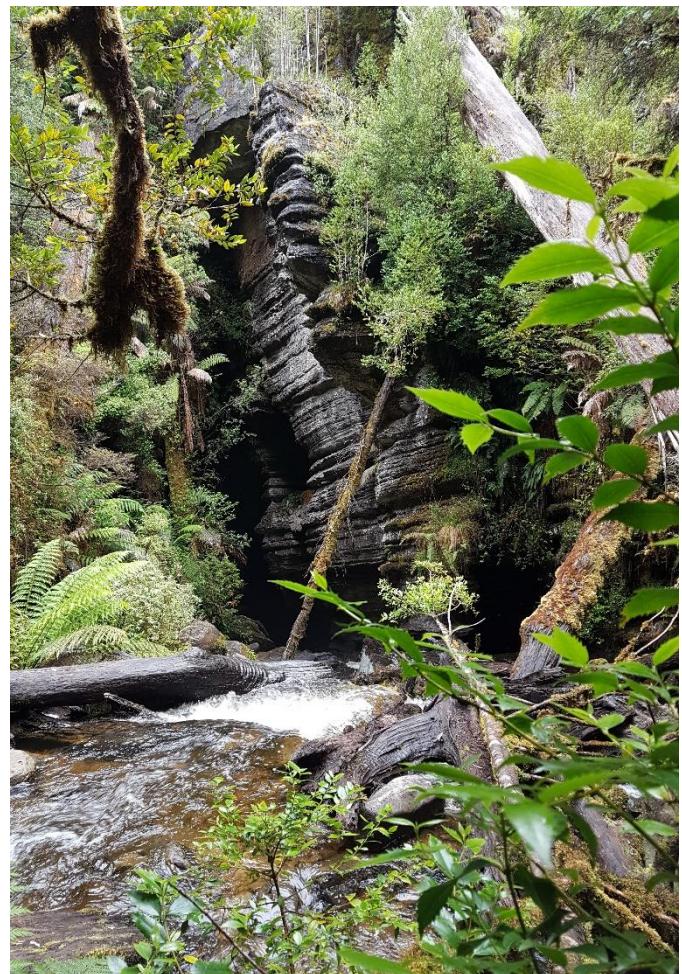
Some thoughts on the Tassie trip

Lachie Bailey

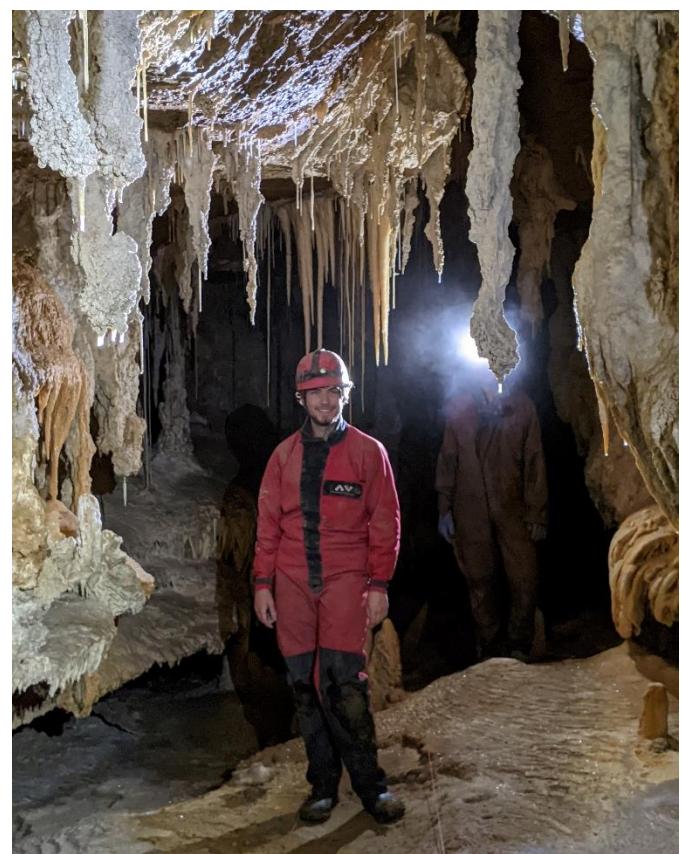
Here's a list of thoughts about the Tassie caving trip that'll hopefully make it a bit easier for any future NUCC groups planning a large group trip to southern Tassie.

- Start planning early, and contact the local cavers early. They won't hurt you (much), unless you try pestering them with a half-baked plan at the last minute.
- If you want locals to come caving with you, have a tangible plan and obvious objectives. I just said something along the lines of 'hey STC, we'll be down caving for a fortnight, we want to visit some of the caves on this list, get in touch if you're interested...'. It worked fine for us because we had a flexible group and GPS locations for the caves we were visiting. But I think not having a defined list of target caves put the locals off.
- Be careful of the mainland effect. I think I got misread as 'we want to visit ALL these caves', and got shoved in the overambitious mainlander who has it coming for him category. Which isn't great for talking people into caving with you...
- The big, deep and hard caves are tantalising. But try to ID options for slack days. If you're going for more than 3-4 days, you'll have them, and you'll want options at that point. Just because the Tasmanians called it lame doesn't mean it can't be fun.
- Unless your whole group is experienced off-track bushwalkers, take the raw, unadjusted Tasmanian caver walking time estimates and double it to find out how long it'll take your group. But be careful they haven't already adjusted it due to the mainland effect though.
- Bring a 13mm spanner AND an adjustable spanner. The 13mm spanner is for the 8mm bolts, and the adjustable spanner is for unsticking jammed krabs. Make sure you have it for the derig, AND it's secured (so that you don't drop it down a 90m pitch unscrewing the last nut or bolt).
- Bring spare stainless steel M8 nuts, in case you drop some down a pitch. Also, you'll need plenty of 8mm hanger plates and M8 bolts for any spits you encounter.
- Everyone will probably want two or more sets of thermals. You can manage the dry caves at Ida Bay in synthetics, and the drippy ones in a single layer of thermals, but once they get damp, you're looking at two layers. You will probably freeze in JF without two layers of thermals, and will probably want a fleece jumper in your cave pack too.
- Don't even think about cotton overalls unless you're a local with a nice warm house to retreat to after a single day's dry caving in summer.
- JF seems to have terribly poor quality limestone, which exudes vast quantities of mud. Expect anything you take into cave to get filthy very quickly. The mud seems to be particularly bad on entrance pitches (at both JF and IB), as it's fortified by organic colluvium seeping down from the rainforest.
- Leave aluminium racks at home, and even bobbin style descenders are miserable on the filthy ropes of JF and IB. Stainless steel racks seem to handle things pretty well, unless you're doing daily bounce trips on fixed ropes (but then, nothing would cope with that well, not even you).

- Like in New Zealand, we found that planning on a large caving day every second day, with rest days inbetween was the sweet spot. You can do more days in a row if you turn one large day into two smaller days (e.g. large day, small day, medium day, then a rest day). But, if you're planning on caving for more than 3–4 days, skipping rest days will catch up to you sooner rather than later.
- After some reflection, it's probably nicer to take the day sailing to Tassie than the night sailing, unless you have a few days to burn on the way. We found that driving down to Melbourne from Canberra, catching the ferry that night, and then driving to Ida Bay in the morning was quite a slog, and left the drivers pretty ruined due to the lack of good sleep on the ferry. Still, depending on shopping and people's schedules, the night sailing could still be a better option.
- For less experienced cavers wanting a taste of alpine caving, Takaka Hill is probably a more pleasant option than Tassie. There's less mud, generally less walking, and NSG has an excellent (and cheap) hut you can use to clean and dry gear overnight. However, researching info about southern Tassie caves is definitely easier thanks to STC's excellent documentary work for their local patch.
- Be careful with trip participants. Balancing experienced cavers wanting to explore the harder caves JF has to offer, and newer cavers wanting to test themselves is quite difficult.
- One more from Oxana: if you want to do any of the harder, non-beginner caves, and especially if you don't have someone coming with you who has done the cave before, make sure you decide that well in advance and leave enough time for it. It's not enough to decide at 9am on a given morning that a group will go to Ice Tube. The gear, route, etc needs to be sussed out beforehand and several days need to be blocked out for the entire rig/cave/de-rig process.



The grand entrance of Growling Swallet. Photo by Corey Hanrahan.



Austin in Welcome Stranger. Photo by Lachie Bailey.

Australian caving community online directory

Sil Iannello (FUSSI)

Reproduced, with additions, from *FUSSI Newsletter* Vol.32, No.1 2020

Australian Speleological Federation

<https://caves.org.au/>

Facebook @asfcavers

New South Wales Speleological Council

<https://nswsc.caves.org.au/>

Flinders University Speleological Society Inc.

<https://fussi.caves.org.au/>

Facebook
@FlindersUniversitySpeleologicalSocietyInc

Cave Exploration Group South Australia Inc.

<https://cegsa.org.au/>

Victorian Speleological Association Inc.

<http://caving.org.au/>

Facebook @ Victorian Speleological Association

Sydney University Speleological Society

<https://suss.caves.org.au>

Facebook @suss.caves

Rover Speleological Society

<https://rss.caves.org.au>

Facebook @RoverSpeleos

Orange Speleological Society

<https://oss.caves.org.au>

Newcastle and Hunter Valley Speleological Society

<http://nhvss.org.au/>

Facebook @nhvss

Metropolitan Speleological Society Inc.

<http://mssadventure.org.au/>

Facebook @MSSAdventure-group

Kempsey Speleological Society

Facebook @www.kss.org.au

Illawarra Speleological Society Inc.

<https://iss.caves.org.au/>

Hills Speleology Club Ltd.

<https://hillsspeleos.org/>

Highland Caving Group

<https://hcg.org.au/>

Cavers & Adventurers of the Snowy Mountains

Facebook @CASM - Cavers & Adventurers of the Snowy Mountains

Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

<https://southerntasmaniancaverneers.com/>

Facebook @SouthernTasmanianCaverneers

Under Victoria

<http://under-victoria.com/>

Rimstone Cooperative

<https://www.rimstone.org.au/>

Facebook @Rimstone Co-operative

Northern Caverneers Inc.

<http://northerncaverneers.com/>

Mole Creek Caving Club

<http://molecreekcavingclub.org/>

Blue Mountains Speleological Club

<https://bmsc.caves.org.au/>

Chillagoe Caving Club Inc.

<https://chillagoecavingclub.org.au/>

Facebook @chillagoecavingclub

Canberra Speleological Society Inc.

<https://canberraspeleos.org.au/>

Facebook @Canberra Speleological Society

National University Caving Club

<https://nucc.caves.org.au>

Facebook @National University Caving Club

Western Australian Speleological Group

<http://www.wasg.org.au/>

Facebook @ The Western Australian Speleological Group

Cavers Leeuwin Incorporated

<https://caversleeuwin.com/>

Facebook @caversleeuwin

Cave Animal of the Year Australia

<https://caveanimaloftheyear.org.au/>

Facebook @caveanimaloftheyearaus

Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association Inc.

<http://ackma.org/>

Facebook @ACKMA

NSW Cave Rescue Squad Inc.

<http://caverescue.org.au/>

Facebook @nswcaverescue

Cave Rescue Gippsland

Facebook @caverescuegippsland

ROC Cavers

<https://roc.org.au/>

Facebook @ROCCavers

Sydney Speleological Society

<https://www.sss.org.au/index.htm>

Facebook @SydneySpeleologicalSociety

International Union of Speleology

<https://www.uis-speleo.org/>

FFS - Fédération Française de Spéléologie

<http://www.ffspeleo.fr/>

National Speleological Society

<https://caves.org/>

Facebook @NationalSpeleologicalSociety

New Zealand Speleological Society

<http://caves.org.nz/>

British Caving Association

<https://british-caving.org.uk/>

Facebook @BritishCavingAssociation

Derek Bristol: Gear reviews

https://youtube.com/channel/UC66bwyl1N0BVQ_gu3Zg-fnw

Kieran McKay

<https://www.youtube.com/user/mckaycaver>

Meridianpost (Alan Green, SUSS/MSS)

<https://www.youtube.com/user/meridianpost>

Vertical Cavers

Facebook @Vertical Cavers

Cavers of Facebook

Facebook @caversoffacebook

Australian Cavers

Facebook @Australian Cavers

Women Cavers: Extraordinary Women Leaders in Speleology

Facebook @WomenCavers

