

SOUTHERN TASMANIAN CAVERNEERS Inc

ABN 73 381 060 862

PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS' HANDBOOK

Some background material for would-be cavers in Tasmania

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1. BRIEF HISTORY

The club is the modern variant of the oldest caving club in Australia, originally founded as Tasmanian Caverneering Club (TCC) in late 1946. The early trips were to King George V at Hastings and some caves near Maydena. Professor Sam Carey was a key person in the early days of the club.

In 1965 another Hobart based caving club was formed, Southern Caving Society (SCS).

In July 1961 a Northern Branch was set up, based in Launceston. This club, now known as Northern Caverneers, has been a club in its own right since 1973.

In 1975 another branch was set up, in Maydena, as the Australian Newsprint Mills and TCC had a good working relationship. The inaugural trip (12 April 1975) for that group explored a multi entrance cave now known as Beginners' Luck, with another entrance called Womguano.

In November 1985 another group, Tasmanian Cave and Karst Research Group (TCKRG) was formed. This group was less focussed on technically difficult caves and more interested in the scientific aspects of speleology.

Following a period of falling memberships and decreasing activity, on 4 December 1996 all three clubs in the south (TCC, SCS & TCKRG) amalgamated to form Southern Tasmanian Caverneers Inc.

Different members have different interests. Some are very keen to explore every cave, mapping as they go; others are interested in the animal life in caves (biospeleology); others are trying to consolidate the data collected over the last 60 years to develop an overall plan of a particular caving area.

The club was a founding member of the Australian Speleological Federation Inc (ASF) and is also a member of the Australasian Cave & Karst Management Association Inc (ACKMA).

2. CAVING AREAS

There are three major cave areas in Tasmania.

- 1 Ida Bay, west of Lune River and south of Hastings Caves State Reserve.
- 2 Junee-Florentine, between Maydena and Wayatinah and
- 3 Mole Creek, south of Devonport and west of Deloraine.

In addition there are over 70 other areas which are less visited by STC cavers. These include Cracroft, Eugenana, Gunns Plains, Hastings, Montagu, Mount Anne, Mount Cripps, Precipitous Bluff, Trowutta and Vanishing Falls.

As a club based in Hobart, the main emphasis of STC is on the two major southern karst areas, Ida Bay and Junee-Florentine.

IDA BAY (IB)

This area is within the Southwest National Park, part of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area; as such, access to some caves is controlled and/or restricted.

Access

The area is about 120 km south of Hobart; the driving time is about 90 minutes. Many trips are run as day trips. All roads are very good with about 5 km of unsealed, but well made road at the far end of the trip. There is about 20 to 50 minutes' walk, depending on which cave you are visiting. Mystery Creek Cave (IB 10), first entered in the 1890s and named The Queen's Cave at that time, is about 25 minutes' walk. Midnight Hole (IB 11), a vertical entrance to MCC, takes another 15 minutes.

Exit Cave (IB 14E), the longest cave in Tasmania, has a gate at each main entrance, takes perhaps another hour or so, depending which entrance you have chosen, or been allocated by Parks & Wildlife!

PUBLIC TOILETS

The nearest set is at Southport, just to the right of the T junction, near the wharf. There is another set in Dover, opposite and up the hill from the police station.

MEDICAL

There is a multi purpose medical centre at Dover, at the top of the hill, on the seaward side.

TELEPHONE

Mobile phone service (Telstra 'Next G') is good to Dover and extends patchily to the final carpark at the base of Marble Hill. Coverage is also available on the higher north facing slopes of Marble Hill. There is a public phone at Lune River, between the large bridge and the little bridge. The owners of the Ida Bay railway might allow a phone call.

POLICE STATION

Located in the main street of Dover, on the left hand side as you head south to Ida Bay.

JUNEE-FLORENTINE JF

Maydena is the only town near this area, it is about 90 km and 90 minutes from Hobart. Again many trips are run as day trips, with an early start and a late finish. Almost all the caves are within what used to be the Australian Newsprint Mills timber concession. ANM was sold to Fletcher Challenge of NZ, who in turn sold to Norske Skog, of Norway. As at the date of writing, Norske Skog is selling off the timber concession, to concentrate on making newsprint.

From the start of Florentine Road, just west of Maydena, all the roads are unsealed, generally in good condition (log trucks use them!) and you can cover a lot of km to get to the cave you want. Some of the branch roads in the State Forests have locked gates. In many cases there is also a walk from the car park, often enough uphill.

Some of the caves here are within, or close to the boundary of Mt Field National Park; the Junee Resurgence (JF 8) is in a small separate State Reserve. Fifteen of the deepest caves in Australia are to be found in this area. Many of these are technically quite difficult.

PUBLIC TOILETS

There are two sets in Maydena, one in the swimming pool complex, the other at the side of the Public Hall. Both are in Mayne Street, which is parallel to Gordon River Road (the main street).

MEDICAL

The nearest medical facility is either the Ouse District Hospital, further up the Derwent Valley or in New Norfolk where there are both general practitioners and a District Hospital.

TELEPHONE

Mobile service (Telstra 'Next G') ceases at about Maydena. There are public phones in Maydena.

POLICE STATION

Located at 99 Junee Road in Maydena, may not always be attended. The nearest full police station is at New Norfolk.

MOLE CREEK MC

Mole Creek is a small town west of Deloraine, which is about 250 km from Hobart and about 2.5 hours drive. Most trips are for a weekend; camping is available at the caravan park, a very rough hut is sometimes available near Marakoopa Cave (MC 120) (currently managed by Northern Caverneers) and there are both cabins and a hotel.

This karst area is some 25 km long and about 3- 4 km wide, most roads are sealed, but some of the last kilometres are unsealed to very rough. Many caves are on (under) private land; or go under private land and, due to vagaries of land titles in this area, entering them without permission may constitute trespass!

Other caves in the area are within the Mole Creek Karst National Park or on other land controlled by the Parks and Wildlife Service. Permits are essential for some of these caves and many are gated/locked.

PUBLIC TOILETS

There is a set in the Main Street of Mole Creek. There are also toilets at both the tourist caves, Marakoopa (MC 120) and King Solomons (MC 119). Deloraine also has at least 2 sets.

TELEPHONE

There is a public phone in the main street of Mole Creek. Mobile coverage is patchy throughout the karst area and cannot be relied upon.

MEDICAL

There is a full hospital at Latrobe and a District Hospital at Deloraine. The nearest general practice is in Deloraine.

POLICE STATION

The nearest police station is at Deloraine, on the Launceston side of the river.

TRANSPORT

Private cars are the only practical way to reach most cave areas. If you are without transport it will usually be possible to arrange a lift. Generally the owner will accept a contribution towards fuel and other running costs. Check what is expected in advance, to avoid embarrassment.

A rule of thumb is that most modern cars return about 10 litres per 100km. A trip to Mole Creek is likely to total 7-800km, which is 70 to 80 litres of fuel, At today's prices (March 2009) of about \$1.30/litre that could be \$100 just for the fuel. Of course, running your own car costs more than that, what with tyres, registration, servicing, repairs, interest and depreciation!

On the same basis, fuel for either Ida Bay or Junee-Florentine, based on 250-300 km, will be 25 to 30 litres or \$30 to \$35.

3. CAVE IDENTIFICATION

There is an agreed procedure for identifying and recording caves in Australia. The system has been developed and is maintained by ASF (see below). Broadly, each cave or karst area is assigned a two letter identifier, IB, MC, JF etc. Each cave entrance is then assigned a number, generally in the order they are found. The number of the most used entrance will often be the way a cave is identified. Most significant caves are also given a name; some are really inspired; others remind us of an event. Midnight Hole (IB 11) is so named because the first party into it did not finish the trip until midnight. Khazad Dum (JF 4) is named for the great dwarf realm of Middle-Earth in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.

It is customary to affix an aluminium plate with the entrance number at or near each entrance, where it ought to be obvious. Cave numbers will appear on the surface map to be totally random; the pattern will give some of the chronology of the discoveries. The highest cave number in a list may not indicate the total number of known entrances in a cave area.

SURVEYING The club has a proud record of surveying caves, virtually as they are found. The club has some surveying gear which members can borrow. You could spend your entire caving career doing surveys ... The club's map collection is available to full members for inspection and copying.

4. GEAR

As a beginner caver, you don't need a lot of really expensive gear.

LIGHTS The club has lights and helmets available for hire to members. Initially you may be able to get away with a sturdy hand-held torch but soon you should obtain a helmet-mounted light. Discuss your options with other members as light choice is a matter of personal taste (and budget). The traditional carbide lamps are now generally banned in Australia; anyway modern electric lights are more reliable. A reliable light is critical for caving - and it is essential for each individual caver to carry two other separate sources of light (in the event of light failure).

HELMETS The Australian Speleological Federation Inc has clear guidelines on helmets. The chinstrap must have a positive closure, i.e. an elastic strap is not sufficient. A light bracket, at the front, and a cable clip at the back are essential. Again, when you buy your own, you'll make your own choice.

CLOTHING Caves in Tasmania are cold. Many beginning cavers find that (old) woollen trousers, a cotton shirt and a woollen pullover make a good start. Thermal clothing, whether as underwear or an outer layer, works really well. Whatever you choose, multiple layers, to maximise trapped air, are way ahead of a single thick jumper. You can add or remove layers as required. On long trips, where you may be standing around waiting your turn to ascend a rope, a balaclava (woollen hat) will also be welcome. This is all hidden under a pair of combination overalls, not bib and brace. The wool (or thermals) is/are good for keeping you warm; the overalls facilitate working your way through squeezes and keeping the undergarments in good condition. Whatever you use will certainly be old after just a few trips. Experienced cavers, especially those who do a lot of very wet caves, have quite expensive overalls. Once again, when you commit to caving as a sport, you will both have seen various types of gear and know what you like, can afford and is appropriate to your type of caving.

A complete change of clothes to wear on the return trip is quite comfortable and makes much less mess in the car. A (heavy duty) plastic bag to put the wet and muddy clothes in is also useful.

JEWELLERY Please leave it at home. Rings are a particular hazard; the problem is described as "ring attenuation injuries". Earrings and other body piercings can catch and cause injury.

HYPOTHERMIA The medical term for getting (really) cold. Tasmanian caves are colder than most on the mainland. The air temperature inside many caves is often about the same as your domestic refrigerator and there can be a breeze to give a really good wind chill effect. Good trip leaders will be keeping an eye out for symptoms. There is a very comprehensive article in *ASF Newsletter* No 78, Summer 1977. This article is available on the STC Website. [Click here ?](#)

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Every member of the party should be on the alert for any of the following, either in himself/herself or any other member of the party.

Pallor & shivering	Slurred speech
Abnormality of vision	Irrational or violent behaviour
Collapse	Listlessness, or lack of interest in party's decisions

If you are starting to be affected, tell the trip leader. It is easier to get you out of cave before a crisis rather than after.

ALCOHOL ASF's Cave Safety Guidelines prescribe that no person shall enter a cave who is under the influence of alcohol or any other performance-altering drug. This club rigorously enforces that rule. What you do round the campfire on overnight trips is your choice. Alcohol is *not* a treatment for hypothermia.

SMOKING Smoking is not permitted in caves. With smoking now almost a social crime, that should not present a problem for most people. You need all your fitness to keep up with the exercise in vertical caves. Many car owners will not allow even the residue of cigarette smoke (e.g. in your clothes) in their vehicles.

FIRST AID You are strongly recommended to complete First Aid training and maintain your CPR as required. If you have your own car, keeping a good first aid kit in it is also recommended. Carrying a small kit in your pack is also a good idea.

FOOTWEAR Rubber soled boots are fine for your first trips. Most members find that rubber gumboots are best, while other prefer lace up rubber boots; leather and elastic sided boots don't seem to cope in really wet or muddy conditions. Boots with hooks (rather than eyelets) should be avoided, in some circumstances the hooks can catch on other gear. Boots with leather soles and hobnails or other steel fittings (tricounis) on the soles are forbidden by the ASF rules.

Your final choice of footwear will depend on your budget, your style of caving and personal preferences.

CAMPING GEAR Most caving trips are day-trips from Hobart, but for those trips where we stay overnight, a good tent and sleeping bag are essential. You will seldom have to carry gear any distance, so lightweight stuff is not critical. Gas stoves and eskies are common. Of course, if you are in someone else's car, you may have to be very self-contained. A rucksack full is about as much as most would be happy to load. Trips to remote areas have their own special requirements; you should not consider going on these unless you are an experienced walker. The Mt Anne area, for example, requires camping at over 1000 m elevation after a very steep walk up to the caves. The trip leader should provide guidance.

SRT GEAR (Single Rope Technique) Many of the caves we visit have pitches (vertical drops). We abseil down these and prussik back up. This is called Single Rope Technique (SRT) and is an art form in its own right. The gear is expensive, but your life does depend on it. The Club has some sets of SRT gear for hire for you to learn SRT. It is not necessary to own your own set until you are committed, by then you

will have experimented at training days, in caves, talked to other members, taken out a bank loan etc. The market for second hand SRT gear is very limited.

ROPES This club owns its own ropes. Ropes are precious and expensive and need a lot of care. All rope owned by the club is inspected regularly, strength tested occasionally, tagged and its use documented. Club trips which use ropes incur a fee of \$2.00 per person per trip.

LADDERS The club still owns some wire ladders; they are used on odd occasions. The subtleties of ladders are best learned at a training day, not in a cave. Some older members have done lots of work with ladders as many of the deep caves, e.g. Midnight Hole (IB 11), Khazad Dum (JF 4) and Mini Martin (IB 8), were initially explored using ladders.

FOOD Day trips generally just require lunch. Longer trips become a matter of personal choice. At Mole Creek it is very tempting to have a counter meal, especially after a long day of hard caving. Some will prefer to cook their own, others exist on army style rations. Whatever you choose, do select for energy. Sugary sweets can be just the boost you need on a long trip. Do not underestimate the amount of energy required even for a day trip and pack accordingly. The trip leader will be able to provide advice on the length and severity of the trip and appropriate rations.

CAMERAS The cave environment is very hard on cameras. There is high humidity, mud, (dust in some caves) the risk of damage from being dropped. And the flash gun is a separate story. Secure packing, but with easy access, is essential.

CAVE PACK On most trips underground you will need to take food with you. On all trips you need two backup light sources.. You may also be carrying SRT gear, spare ropes, camera and a first aid kit (small). All this is best carried in a pack. There are packs specially designed to fit through caves. The club has some of these for hire.

GLOVES Necessary to both keep your hands (relatively) clean and warm. Also useful when handling ropes, belaying, prussiking etc. Some members use washing up gloves, others use gardening gloves. Talk to other members, observe what they use, experiment for yourself.

5. TECHNIQUES AND TRAINING

ABSEILING For a modern caver in vertical caves this is absolutely essential. Fortunately most new members have been exposed to abseiling in school, so only a little practice will be needed. Field days are run for this purpose.

PRUSSIKING This is a technique for ascending a rope. It requires lots of practice and (usually) special gear, although it is possible to prussik only with ropes. If vertical caves are your thing, you will need to learn and practise.

The combination of abseiling and prussiking is known as Single Rope Technique (SRT).

KNOTS As a minimum, you will need to be able to tie any and all of the knots listed without hesitation, without light (if you are unlucky) and on some occasions with one hand.

REEF KNOT

BOWLINE

BOWLINE ON A BIGHT

DOUBLE FISHERMAN'S

FIGURE 8

FIGURE 8 on a BIGHT

CLOVE HITCH

BARREL KNOT

ALPINE BUTTERFLY

HALION HITCH

TENSIONLESS HITCH

TAPE KNOT

FIGURE 9

DOUBLE FIGURE 8 ON A BIGHT

(RABBIT EARS)

YOSEMITE MOUNTAINEERING

BOWLINE

PRUSSIK KNOT or FRENCH PRUSSIK

Diagrams and instructions on how to tie these knots are available in other publications. Ask a club member about suitable publications. But you can't learn knots from a book, only practice at field days develops the skill level. Practice sessions are held at Fruehauf Quarry, which is at Tara Street, South Hobart.

SPECIALISATIONS

Different cavers are interested in different aspects of speleology. Some are keen on exploring new caves, certainly in Tasmania there is still great scope for new discoveries. Others study cave fauna. (As an aside, there are no bats in Tasmanian caves – but many interesting troglobites – true cave-adapted species.) Others are very keen on surveying caves, partly to find out how long they are, mainly to get an overall picture of the entire cave area. Others are keen on photography. Some are content to run trips into the same cave again and again. This is important; as a new caver you can only learn about a cave when someone runs a trip to it!

6. CONSTITUTION

The full document is available on this website.

From the constitution and by laws you will see that to become a full member you need to attend two trips and then be supported by two existing members of the club who will vouch for your competence. Some evidence of those trips is useful, a trip record sheet is attached at the end; make as many copies as you need. You don't need to be an expert in all techniques; you do need to show that you are making significant progress in those techniques relevant to the type of caving you want to do.

To progress to trip leader is another goal.

7. LIBRARY

As the oldest caving club in Australia, STC has a very comprehensive collection of caving magazines from other clubs, both Australian and international, and books. Contact the librarian about suitable introductory books.

8. TRIP PROGRAM

Future trips are planned/advertised at meetings and often circulated on the Email List server. Trips may be advertised by general email, often at quite short notice. Trip leaders have the absolute right to determine who can attend a trip. Such decisions are based on the difficulty of the cave, the aims of the trip, transport, gear restrictions etc. A trip to the bottom of Khazad Dum (JF 4) is not appropriate to a beginner caver; don't be offended if you are excluded from a trip.

9. SEARCH & RESCUE

Caving in Australia has an excellent safety record; dangerous incidents in caves are very rare.

The club has an excellent relationship with the Tasmanian Police. Regular exercises are conducted with the Search & Rescue section of the Police. Some are underground, some on cliff faces near Hobart.

Each caving trip you attend will have an expected time of return. This should be advised to your parents, guardian, flatmate, partner, spouse or significant other person.

The initial call by a person concerned at your non-return on time should be to the Club's S&R contact. This person changes from time to time, check the list of office bearers elsewhere on this website.

Most overdue trips are caused by car problems, or just underestimating the difficulty of a trip. The first point of contact should be another member of the club. With mobile phones readily available, most overdue trips will be able to contact the relevant people in Hobart to explain what is happening.

In the event of a real search or rescue, all members of the club, the police and the State Emergency Service (SES) may become involved. If it becomes really serious, cavers from elsewhere in the State and even from interstate will be recruited.

The club regularly updates its database with details about skill levels, knowledge of particular caves, gear, transport, phone numbers etc. Make sure your details are on file.

10. AUSTRALIAN SPELEOLOGICAL FEDERATION Inc (ASF)

ASF is the umbrella body which represents the full range of caving in Australia. It was set up in 1956. STC is a member, and as such is bound by the rules and codes of ASF. ASF has a website: www.caves.org.au

ASF provides some level of insurance for its members. It runs a conference every second year; STC and its predecessor clubs have hosted several conferences, most recently in January 2005. ASF publishes a quarterly newsletter, *Caves Australia*.

In 1985 it published *Australian Karst Index 1985*, a full list of every cave known to ASF (some 6800 items!) at the time of printing. The modern form of this is maintained as a series of State-based databases, to which STC contributes cave information.

ASF has constituted itself as a registered Environmental Organisation. This means that it is able to accept tax deductible gifts for cave conservation purposes; i.e. money you donate can be claimed as a tax deduction in your personal tax return.

ASF has also published detailed guidelines on how to survey a cave and prepare cave maps. If surveying is your thing, you need a copy!

11. AUSTRALASIAN CAVE & KARST MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION Inc (ACKMA)

ACKMA represents those who are involved in cave management, often tourist cave managers, bureaucrats, adventure cave operators. STC is a member of ACKMA.

It runs a conference every second year (like ASF, the odd numbered years), usually in May to discuss issues in cave protection and management. The conference venue is usually a commercial caving area, with accommodation at varying levels, according to the budget and taste of delegates.

ACKMA publishes a quarterly newsletter, *ACKMA Journal*.

12. CLOSING REMARKS

Caving can be great fun and you will meet a large number of great people from all walks of life and all parts of the world. Caving can be as technically difficult or easy as you choose. It can consume every weekend, and put many km on your car, or it can be a really relaxing hobby.

Enjoy your time learning about caves and caving.

13. FURTHER READING

Caves: Processes, development, management. David Gillieson. Blackwell Publishers (1996)

Beneath the Surface: a natural history of Australian caves. Finlayson & Hamilton-Smith (Eds)
UNSW Press (2003)

Vertical. Al Warild (published by the author, on CD)

British Caving: and introduction to speleology. This is a classic, dating from 1953.

Alpine Caving Techniques: a complete guide to safe and efficient caving. George Marbach and
Bernard Tourte. Speleo Projects (2002)

Ten Years Under the Earth Norbert Casteret. The 'father' of modern speleology, Casteret was
French and wrote in a rather flowery style.

More Years under the Earth Further material from Casteret.

SOUTHERN TASMANIAN CAVERNEERS Inc

INTRODUCTORY MEMBER'S TRIP RECORD

Date Area Visited

Trip Leader

Other persons

.....

Caves visited (give both name and ID number) Time underground

1

2

3

4

5

Techniques used

Abseiling

Belaying

Crawling

Digging

Ladders

Prussiking

Scuba

Squeezes

Sump

Surveying

Vertical pitches

Wading

Other comments

.....

.....