Speleo Spiel 466

September-October 2025

Newsletter of Southern Tasmanian Caverneers Inc. ISSN 2208-1348

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***Front Cover**:* Moving the stretcher through a tight pitch at the NSW Cave Rescue Exercise in Tuglow Cave. Image: Alex Motyka.

***Back Cover*:** Stephen Fordyce enjoying a birthday donut in JF-207 Voltera. Image: Adrian Hills.

Speleo Spiel 466 was prepared by Ciara Smart, with subeditorial assistance from Alan Jackson, Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney and Greg Middleton.

STC was formed in December 1996 by the amalgamation of three former southern Tasmanian clubs: the *Tasmanian Caverneering Club*, the *Southern Caving Society* and the *Tasmanian Cave and Karst Research Group*. ***STC*** is the modern variant of the oldest caving club in Australia.

Speleo Spiel

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Editorial

Not much room for editorial words thanks to another full issue (13,590 words to be exact).

It's only taken a few decades, but this issue contains a report of a trip *down* Hairygoat Hole! I hope the anticipation has been worth it. This issue also has an updated member list. With 74 members on the books, STC remains a very large club.

Stuff and Stuff

79th anniversary of the Tasmanian Caverneering Club; aka *The Birds* by Alfred Hitchcock.

Left to right: Stephen Bunton, Louise Wilson, Luca van Zino, Graham Bailey, Mike Cole, Adrian Herington, Russell Fulton, Delia Cole, David Green, Kath Bunton. Missing are Steve Harris, Anne Wessing, Jeff Davies and Phil Jackson (one of whom took the photo).

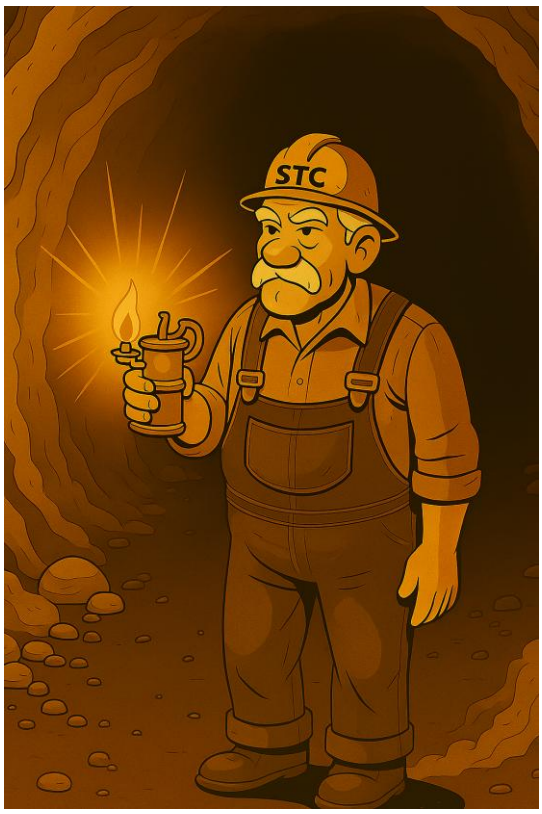
Thirteen past and present members attended the gathering at the Waterworks Reserve on 17 October. Numbers were low compared to previous events but there were many apologies and a large contingent at the NSW rescue exercise. Apart from the usual suspects it was great to see a few more from the past join us. This included Mike and Delia Cole who recently returned to Tasmania after a few decades on the other side of the ditch and Anne Wessing who introduced many youth groups to caving and other outdoor activities. There was much reminiscing about the good old days, plenty of gossip to catch up on and the weather was cooperative. The only disturbance was the constant sneak patrols by currawongs scouring the tables for unattended nibbles and the constant theft of food from the hands of the unsuspecting by stealth kookaburras. These evil bastards were fast, silent and had precision targeting that would be the envy of any military hardware engineers.- *Submitted by Phil Jackson*

Death of Gavin Linger

Those who spent time caving at Caveside in the 60s to 80s would remember Gavin Linger. Sadly, Gavin passed away in July. Gavin owned the farm on the route to Herberts Pot, Georgies Hall and Shish Kebab caves. Cavers would often be treated to morning tea or coffee on the way in the mornings or beers and whisky later in the day. Lucky ones would get a ride up the hill on the trailer behind the tractor. For his services to caving he was made an honorary life member of the Southern Caving Society. – *Submitted by Phil Jackson.*

Lost and Found

This month's item is a bit of a relic from the past, found amongst the cobbles in the main streamway in Mystery Creek Cave just a week or two after a minor flood event. At first glance it looked like just another boulder. The inside is very dirty suggesting it may have been embedded in the mud for some time before being dislodged in the recent high flows. The cradle is completely missing and there is no attachment point or holes for a lamp suggesting its wearer was using a handheld light. But why did they lose it, or was it not a caver that lost it? - *Text and images by John Oxley*



Trip Reports

JF-36 Growling Swallet: 3 Day Camping and Dive trip

4-6 July 2025: Dry Cavers' Report

Theme Song: 'Disco Duck'

Collaborative report

Party: Kynan Bonnice, Stephen Fordyce, Alice 'Ally' Kelly (NUCC), Lauren 'Laurie' Jolliffe (NUCC), Eleanor March (NC), Brendan Moore, Carl Walsh (NUCC)

Day 1 – Introduction

(Kynan) It was once again time to play the prestigious game of master cave or bust. After having won 'master cave' a few too many games recently with the Niggly crew, I didn't have high hopes for a win in Growling Swallet. However much to the surprise of our team a passage of rather pretty formations awaited us.

There's nothing like FIFO caving. Left to right, Brendan Moore, Alice Kelly, Lauren Jolliffe, Carl Walsh. Image: Stephen Fordyce.

Our team for the trip consisted of 'the mainlanders' Steve, Brendan, Laurie, Carl and Ally, combined with 'Northerners' Eleanor and me, to form Team Disco Duck (the trip theme song was selected by Steve, a silly song called Disco Duck). With this potentially being the last Growling dive trip for a while, the pressure was on to engrave the Disco Duck name in history (or at the very least find something cool to talk about).

Flying Formation

(Laurie) We were informed by a mutual friend to expect no tolerance for faff on this trip. This advice proved to be utter balderdash. But fortunately faff is an environment in which every NUCCer thrives. After sleeping our last night in warm beds, we re-packed our bags three times, talked gear, redivided our rations, made a cooked breakfast, and invented a whole new dish (Potato-giana- it's like a hash brown parmi) before breakfast. At some point the 'Northerners' showed up, and we began to make tracks. I must say the trip up the Eight Road in a Hilux was the most civilised drive I have ever taken that way.

I had similarly been warned that the hike up to Slaughterhouse Pot was far more miserable with a full pack and extra gear. Happily I can report that it was in fact less miserable than my previous experience, likely due to Steve and Brendan's propensity to stick to the track and not amble off into the shrubbery insisting 'I'm sure the track was just up here…' or 'I think I remember this tree' (not to point fingers and name names).

Our gear divided and cave packs filled to the brim, we bussed it down Slaughterhouse Pot and took a fun right towards Destiny (fun being the direction away from Windy Rift – if you know, you know). On the way down I said goodbye to the last bits of metal on my rack bars. Bag shuffling occurred, feet were wet (more than anticipated), and I wondered why the Lord saw fit to rob me of the opportunity to look upon a black river and ask, 'Why's it called Black River?' (seriously, why?).

Feeling The Rhythm

(Ally) We arrived at camp in good time. Those of us who'd befallen the trap of not knowing there was a dry route across the puddle near camp were quick to change into a set of dry clothes.

The camp was positively tropical, with a sandy base and the constant nearby rush of water. Steve wasted little time coordinating the setup of a cinema and implementing a rolling 'poo-duction'- an induction to pooing underground, which some might say went into far too much detail. Fortunately, our memory of this detail was soon quashed by a viewing of the magnum opus that is *Cool Runnings*. The movie set in motion the poor Jamaican accents and botched movie quotes which would follow us through the rest of the trip.

Movie time. Image: Alice Kelly

'Feel the rhythm, feel the rhyme, let's go Jamaica, it's bobsled time!'

The movie gave us time to contemplate that in many ways we ourselves were like a Jamaican bobsled team… Actually, I'll have to let you know when I think of the similarities… Cold?

Despite having heard all about the spacious campsite afforded to STC in Niggly, it was surprisingly easy to convince the majority of the group into a near people-pile of tarps at the top of the slope. While the arrangement proved to be surprisingly comfy, it did have the side-effect of maximising the sample group exposed to Brendan's snoring.

Day 2 – Disco Ducks Depart

(Ally) The next day brought a relatively relaxed though early start to the day (7 am), soundtracked by the dulcet tones of Disco Duck. The exceedingly peaceful and not at all grating quacking lasted only a few cycles before Carl bodily threw himself into finding the speaker which Steve had hidden next to the people-pile.

Getting into wetsuits first thing in the morning was hardly an appealing thought but we ran out of excuses when it became apparent that Kynan's breakfast jelly would not set in time to eat before we left. Only slightly cold, we moseyed down to 'dive base'. Steve and Brendan were already prepping gear and handed us a scrap of waterproof paper to vandalise. They vowed it would be left at the furthest point the divers got to. Laurie even drew a disco duck to ensure the trip's reluctant anthem would be immortalised.

Soggy Breadcrumbs

(Carl) We headed towards the roof sniff, which had been hyped up as the most intimidating part of the trip. From the dive base it's straight into a wet crawl heading to the sniff. We reluctantly embraced the wetness, dragging bags of gear behind us and hoping the dry bags were working. Steve pointed us through the bits with the biggest air gap but as the message got passed back some of it got lost and a few people took a suboptimal route and went almost fully under. The easiest bit was in between wet ear and wet mouth for me, although Steve claims you can keep your ears dry.

We trod down to Coelacanth Sump and shivered a bit while Steve and Brendan fiddled with knobs and bricks and hoses. There seemed to be a somewhat tense atmosphere building, which we decided to quash with a torrent of jokes, banter and general brain rot. As Brendan floated off face down in the sump, we decided we were cold enough and Steve could see himself off. We high tailed it back to the Living Fossils turnoff and got changed into our blessedly dry(ish) caving gear.

Living Fossils has a few ways to go at the start, but Kynan, having been lost here before (*SS*460, p. 4-12*)*, was certain of the way. Steve did give us a side mission to check out a possible lead towards Space Rat Alley around survey station LF14 which we identified and poked at briefly. After the initial junction it's basically a straight shot to the extension which branches off around the LF34 survey marker. In the chamber, we rigged a hand line and dropped the hole in the floor to the tricky stream. Initially we poked around and missed the first climb up around LFE103 but quickly reached the end of the section mapped in 2023 (nice fluffy helictites - possibly anthodites) and turned back to the climb. First one's not too bad, the second climb up a flowstone face is a wee bit engaging. Kynan had a go at this first and concluded that discretion being the better part of valour, he'd let me go first. Equipped with my trad climbing skills (bomber hand jam) and a broken risk assessment module, I went up, wedged myself in the constriction above the climb, and was used and abused as a meat anchor for the rest of the party who climbed the bag tethers hanging from me.

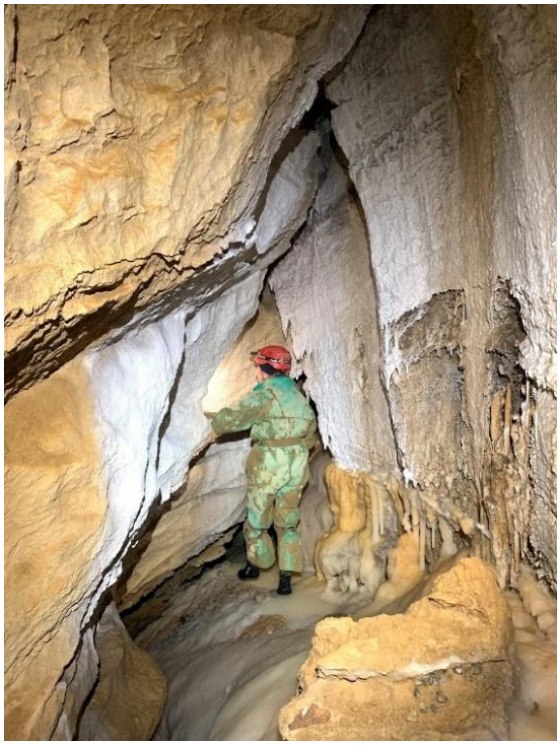
Fluffy pretties. Image Alice Kelly

Ducktrog and Surfers' Paradise

(Eleanor) Heading up through Pommie Dreams I was absolutely shocked to find pretty stuff! In the Junee-Florentine! Truly amazing. After starting surveying and doing our best to avoid getting the lovely white flowstone muddy for a bit, we had to skirt around a bit of a hole that certainly didn't look fun to fall down. In the bottom of the hole is what looks like a calcite stream. It was not flowing and was completely solid but had a definite streamy look to it. A bit further on, two leads became apparent. The higher lead was a bit dirtier, but the lower lead had a floor of white flowstone. Kynan followed the higher lead while I decided to go for the lower but take off my boots and gloves as I didn't want to get it all dirty if it didn't even go anywhere. There were a few holes in the roof which I could see Kynan's light and later Kynan himself through, but no leads heading off below me. The floor that I ended up walking on was the previously

mentioned calcite creek. Very cool, definitely worth taking boots off for.

Kynan had found a window through to a fairly large aven and wanted to see if I could get into the bottom of it. I could, but only through a smallish hole surrounded by more white flowstone, so I took off the rest of my dirty gear to continue on. I popped out in the bottom of the aven and found it to be pretty big. It was maybe 10 m across and quite tall (17 m when measured it). It also had a pool of calcite in it. The pool is surrounded by some sand (sort of like a beach). By this point in the trip, all members of the dry party had devolved into calling everything that we came across 'gnarly', so we named the aven 'Surfers' Paradise'.



Eleanor sans boots and gloves. Image: Alice Kelly.

After some marveling at how 'sick' the aven was, I found a point where I could climb up to join the others. My muddy gear had been left behind however so I had to be careful to stay clean so I could head back the way I came and retrieve my suit. We continued surveying a bit further until we came to the end of the clean pretty stuff. Everyone went ahead for a bit while I remained stranded in the clean bit. On the way back to my boots, I took some shots with the Disto to join the 'Ducktrog' area to the higher lead, the 'Ducktrog Bypass' at both ends.

If anyone is checking out the 'Ducktrog' in the future I would definitely recommend also detrogging. There weren't any more leads that I could see down there so there's no reason to muddy it up. It is really pretty though, so worth having a look, even just from above.

2nd Migration

(Kynan) After the excitement of our newfound passage had worn off, we began to head back to base. Climbing up the handline and filling up our bags we made good pace getting out of Living Fossils. Around survey station LF14 Carl and I took another look at the lead before placing a large rock to reinforce the current cairn, making it easier to locate in the future. After leaving the crawl I created a small symbolic wall of rocks across the wrong path to hopefully aid future navigation, as this is where previous groups had come unstuck (*SS*460*,* p.4-12*)*. Arriving at the stream we read that Brendan had returned from the dive early and went back to camp. Not wanting to leave him in the dark both physically and metaphorically, we quickly got changed into our soggy suits for the last time.

Ya Dead Man?

(Laurie) Having dispensed with the telephone beta the first time under the roof sniff (by the time the message got to me, 'stay left' had turned into 'don't go left' ... suffice to say I had a wet trip), the trip back was perfectly civilised. After encountering Brendan's message at our note drop we pushed through the roof sniff and scurried one by one back to camp yelling 'Brendan, are ya dead man?' (in woefully bad Jamaican accents). He assured us each time he was. Reassured, we set about a lovely dinner and tucked ourselves into bed… only to be awoken some hours later as Steve stepped on the people pile tarp and was showing them his lucky egg (a rock from Coelacanth Sump).

Day 3 – Up and Out

(Eleanor) The morning of our exit, the magnanimous Steve gave us a whole thirty-minute sleep in before the psychological torture (waking up to the lilting tones of 'Disco Duck') began. Once everyone had dragged themselves out of bed, packed up, and faced their wet socks, we packed up camp, found a place for everything in the packs, and got going. Leaving the stream, we replaced the old handline and did a lot of pack passing to get to the bottom of the pitches. Carl and I scooted ahead with three packs between us from this point to try and stop pile ups from happening at every pitch. We pretty much didn't see anyone else until we were almost out of the rockpile. We passed the packs through the rockpile; this was much harder with two people on the way up than I had found it with three people on the way down. To make sure neither of us ended up too tired, we alternated who had two packs on each pitch. I reckon this worked pretty well as I exited the cave just about the right amount of absolutely pooped. The 'Wet Concrete Crawl' was definitely the worst part of the whole day (honestly rude of the cave to form like that). My torch decided to run out of juice just before the exit which was sub-ideal, but there was still daylight outside which was nice.

'Yay, we're out!' Image: Eleanor March (selfie)

Over the next hour or so, everyone else emerged too. Everyone made it out in the daylight! Truly amazing. After loading up our packs and walking back to the cars, there was only one thing on everyone's mind: the pub (and also NUCC merch). On the way back down to the main road, we noticed that the Growling road had been graded. Not very well, but it was nice if not a bit odd. We went to the Bush Inn in New Norfolk for a hearty dinner before Kynan and I said our goodbyes and headed back to Launceston.

The 'after' photo. Image: Eleanor March

JF-36 Growling Swallet: 3 Day Camping and Dive trip

7 July 2025: Dive Report

Stephen Fordyce

Dive Party: Stephen Fordyce, Brendan Moore

This report covers the diving aspect of the second and final three-day camping/diving trip *[- Ed.* see above trip report for the dry component]. This was my sixth dive here, the fourth in this series and the last for the foreseeable future. See *SS*464, p.4 for the previous most recent report and background. Both sets of diving and camping gear were still there, so Brendan Moore came along to be the second diver. We planned to bring BOTH aid climbing and modern digging equipment beyond the sump as I had been too shagged last time to properly decided which one to focus on.

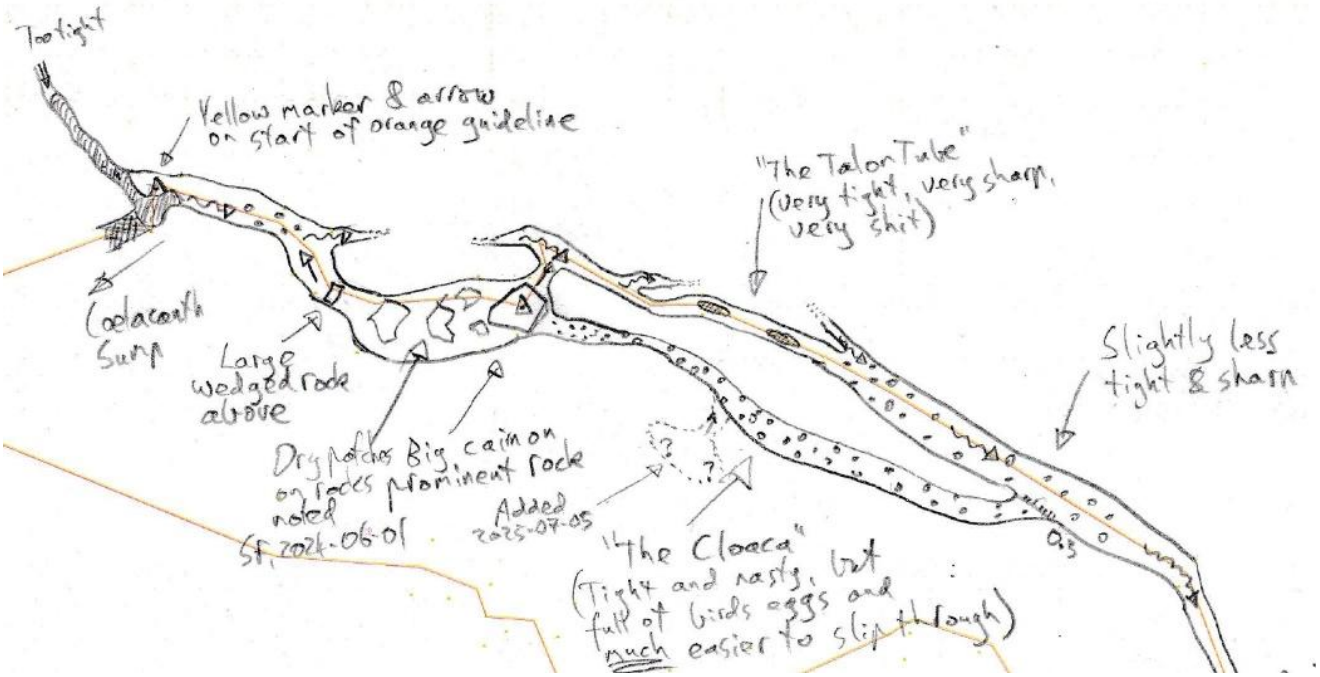
We got a reasonable sleep but there was much faffing (and three nervous poos from yours truly) in the morning, so the sump wasn't reached until late morning. The plan was for Brendan (armed with a thorough briefing) to go through first so he could see and clear the bottom restriction as much as desired, and I would follow through fifteen minutes later to avoid getting in the way. We each dived with a large bag of crud including our SRT kits (while diving, wearing dangly bits that can get caught on the guideline or other things isn't good).

Well to cut a long story short we both had equipment issues that took some faffing to fix, and after two attempts Brendan made the call that he wasn't comfortable with the restriction. This was unfortunate, but much preferable to forcing it. We had planned for this possibility, and I was prepared to do the mission solo – and after waiting for quite some time I was happy to be moving. Brendan (who slowly made his way back to camp and had a relaxed afternoon) had left his caving bag at the deep point of the sump, so I added it to mine on the way past (both butt-clipped) and burrowed through the restriction without too much trouble.

Divers being gnarly. Image: Alice Kelly

Beyond the sump I triaged the gear – there was a lot. Survey kit was transferred from diving canisters to peli case, assorted things of Brendan's were left in a pile and lists were cross-checked. If I wore my SRT kit, I could just fit the aid climbing and digging gear along with all my spares and other things – as usual the bag was choccas but not quite overflowing. It was heinously heavy (the two hammers plus crowbar plus long metal rods didn't help) but seemed manageable as long as I didn't have to lift it one-armed.

On the way through the Cloaca, I noticed a lead up to the right and squirmed up into a small standing chamber with possible leads in rockpile. This is sketched onto an updated map of The Condor – I didn't get a chance to look properly.



Approximation of new chamber off the Cloaca. Sketch: Stephen Fordyce

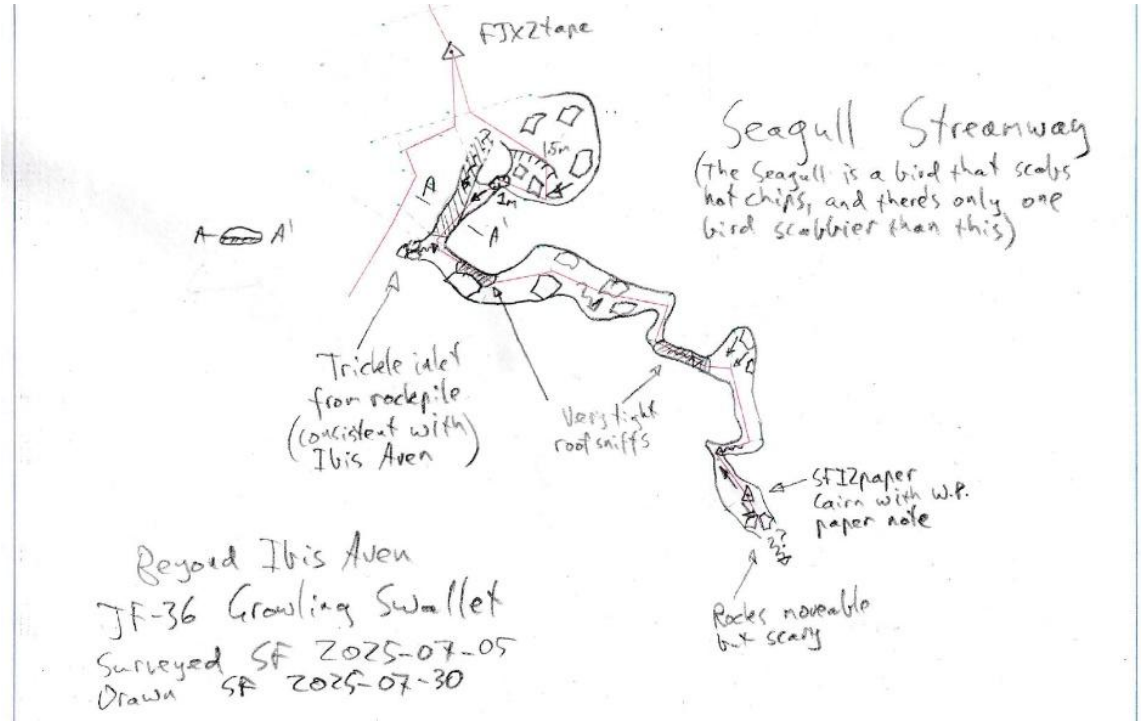
I considered taking the Sump 2 bypass and trying to get up into the Soaring Passage but didn't want to waste a bunch of time and energy on climbing up (this was a good call). So instead, I stayed in the water to roof-sniff Sump 2 and grovel through the stream to the Eaglebird Rockpile. It was hard work with the hero bag, and wearing my SRT kit didn't help the cause. I made it in the end and polished off a couple of cheese kranskys as a reward.

While still some kind of fresh (and with reasonable mojo), I did a careful assessment of where to focus. The Ibis Aven definitely was a terrible aid climbing prospect and I cursed inwardly (and outwardly) at my overenthusiasm and the wasted effort of dragging the kit in. It matched my sketch well, with the two solid walls and two walls made of fill. The downstream wall of fill went up out of sight with a few holes behind boulders which were uninspiring, even before you had to approach them from vertical while on rope.

Back down the handline to FJX2 (left in place), I followed the feel of the chamber, which ended in indeterminate rockfall but did corkscrew down right at the end to the sound and almost sight of the stream. As Chris had reported, it was indeed a very tight and committing squeeze, and even after I'd done some poking with the crowbar it was pretty dubious. Having dragged it all this way, the drill and other technology were put to use, and with a single application, the key obstruction was nicely removed, and grovelly but going stream passage was easily accessible. Great success!

After putting everything away and having a bag of Shapes (they were vacuum-sealed and survived the sump), I finally abandoned everything except the basics and headed for glory. Soon on my right, a small stream trickled down out of rockpile – consistent with the waterfall from Ibis Aven, so at least I might be beyond that part of the rockpile. Over the next hour or so I negotiated what felt like a lot more but was actually only about 25 m of tortuous stream-through-rockpile. There were two very tight and nasty roof sniffs, some digs, and not everything was well cemented with mud (obviously it gets a bit of water through on occasion). I made an effort to check above and to the sides, it felt like there wasn't much in the way of original wall and it was mostly rockpile, with hints of voids around. It was confusing and there was minimal if any draught.

With diminishing returns, energy and courage, I decided that was it when I reached a scary loose dig with an awful looking wet squeeze beyond it. I made a cairn and placed the waterproof paper note the support team had written on, such that it hopefully won't get washed away. From there, I surveyed back, keeping the DistoX shots in memory, and bulk-dumping them to the phone back in the big cave. I'm confident they were pretty accurate. For anyone wondering, this new section (named the Seagull Streamway because it was so scabby) is definitely not the unsurveyed streamway under the Eaglebird Rockpile (which I'd previously pushed and is shown on the sketch map).



The new section – Seagull Streamway. Scale: 2.5m/c. Sketch: Stephen Fordyce

I refuelled and slowly headed for home, glad to be able to take the Soaring Passage this time, although I hadn't realised just how much bag handling would be required or how heavy the thing now seemed. Once I nearly lost it down a hole and struggled to lift it out. At the Hawk Rockpile, this looked to be an 8 m pitch with no chance of climbing even with a handline! But from below, maybe if you were keen it might be doable. I rigged the static rope (9.5 mm Bluewater) around a single giant boulder with some mild rubs and gingerly abseiled down. I was too shagged to care about using the drill to put in bolts and make it nice. The rope was left in place… for future explorers. The rubs aren't that bad but better bring something to pad it.

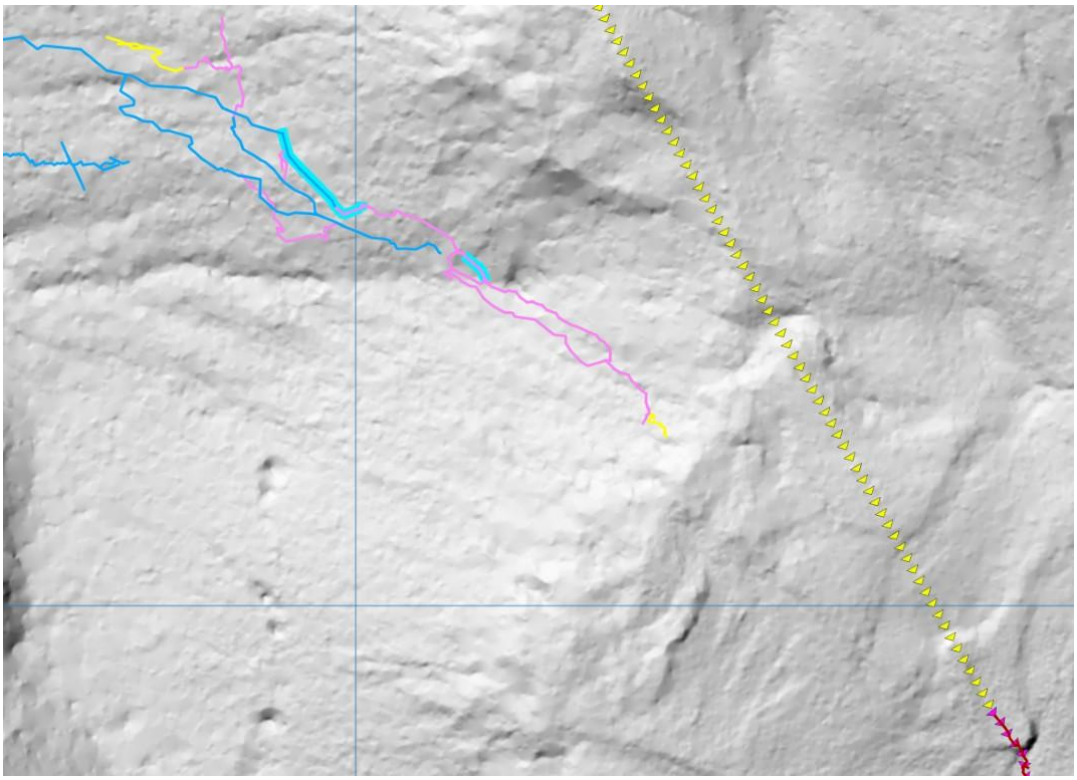
Glacial but steady progress was made and faffing completed for the dive. The restriction was mostly uneventful, but the two bags made for slow and heavy progress up the home slope to the surface and I had to stop and catch my breath at least once. The effort of powering everything over the short crawl to the home lake was a bit much after all that and I took a well-deserved rest by the sump pool after dumping everything. I managed to bring the two bags and all dive gear except three tanks and some weights back to camp, arriving just before midnight, totally cooked as the kiddies say.

As usual, massive thanks to the rest of the crew for hauling ten mega-bags between the seven of us – me, Brendan Moore, Kynan Bonnice, Eleanor March, Carl Walsh, Lauren Joliffe and Alice Kelly. In the end, the trip was entirely powered by enthusiastic out-of-towners. The exit was particularly impressive as everyone pitched in on the multi-bag effort and spirits were still high even as we gained the entrance in the twilight. A note here that we replaced the two (1980s vintage) handlines in the rockpile between base of Destiny Pitch and Black River.

Enthusiasm was hardly dampened by much faffing. Image: Alice Kelly

That's it for the diving efforts in this area – I've given as much as I'm prepared to. Despite leaving with a pessimistic outlook every time, the cave was extended downstream and in other directions on each subsequent dive trip, so there is always hope for more. We left pretty much the same stuff in there as last time (two sets of camping kit, oodles of assorted dive gear) and my August trip will start cleaning out. Unfortunately, the tanks at the sump will need a final traverse of the roof sniff – perhaps some kind soul will pull them out (pretty please?!), otherwise I'll drag them out in summer.

I figure on doing a project wrap-up report once the last of the cleanup trips and de-rig of Destiny Pitch are completed.



State of play – Growling Swallet in blue with recent stuff in pink, new-this-trip in yellow, Niggly (Bin Chicken Haven) in maroon, theorised mastercave from Porcupine in yellow arrows. Growling/Niggly distance about 250 m. Image: Stephen Fordyce.

Stocktake of stashed gear:

- It's recorded on videos if needed
- But is all coming out anyway

Dive gear used:

- Same as previous dive
- The phone and DistoX went in underwater housings for the dive – their caving peli case (transported sealed but empty) survived one transit but flooded on the way back.
- 12V dive suit heating canister with 14Ah battery
- Red 12V drill with guts removed and replaced with heavy duty switch – sealed in 2 new drybags (drill stayed dry)
- Balaclava and proper caving gloves (with undergloves) travelled with the drill and stayed dry – they were very nice in the drier section and for fiddling with modern digging technology.
- Ropes (a static and a dynamic) were transported in a drybag – to help them stay dryer/lighter, and provide some positive buoyancy in the dive (only leaked a bit)

Timing notes:

- 7:00 – alarm goes off
- 11:00(?) – leave camp, go to sump, faff
- 13:05 – Steve starts outward dive
- 15:00 – reach Eaglebird Rockpile
- 15:45 – lunch break
- 17:00 – obstruction removed
- 18:30 – turn back from far point
- (survey back, faff repacking for the return, faff with rigging, faff reconfiguring for the return dive)
- 22:05 – start homeward dive
- 23:45 – return to camp

Gas analysis:

#4 dive (this one):

Steve:

- Start: 150/150bar (9L cf)
- Out: used 50/0bar (450L) – fixing line
- (@ Condor: 100/150bar)
- Back: used 50/0bar (450L)
- Remaining:50/150bar

Brendan:

- Start: 210/180bar (9L cf)
- End: 210/50bar
- (2 dives to restriction)

Dive Profiles and Transit Times:

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

- 2025-07 out: 8 minutes
- 2025-07 out: 10 minutes (pair of heavy bags)

Tachycardia Track Surface Walking

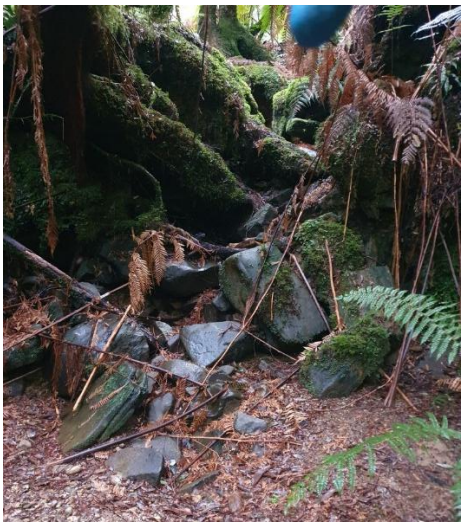
14 August 2025

Stephen Fordyce

Party: Stephen Fordyce

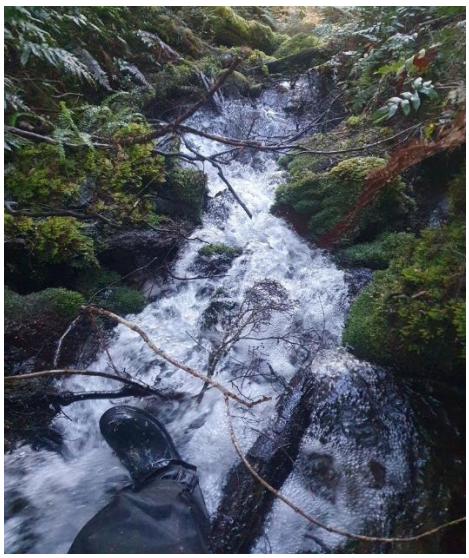
I had a day to kill before the other mainlanders arrived and decided to spend it on the mystery of JF-568 having no water. It has a big catchment (so a stream audit had been on my wishlist) and the creek where it crosses the Tachycardia track has been dry on each of the four previous occasions people have looked (including on a wet weekend in May after Petr and I got rained out of Niggly). Conditions were pretty dry for winter, but there was still plenty of water about, with nice steady state conditions.

First, I checked the mud/dolerite cave under the north bank just downstream of the Tachy track creek crossing. It was impressive but didn't have any limestone (a good excuse not to tag it) and seemed to rejoin the stream a few metres down. The streambed still looked like it hadn't seen flow in a fair while, there was leaf litter and crud.



Leaf litter and crud in the streambed looking upstream towards the track crossing point (my finger is trying to point at it). Image: Stephen Fordyce

I went up the Tachycardia track, noting limestone outcrop for QGIS most of the way. At JF-269, I started contouring around to the east, confirming tags/locations for JF-537, and JF-536. I stayed high and did a first pass above where I thought the contact was, recording an exciting number of goodly streams including a monster. Hopefully at least one would go to an undiscovered swallet like Delta Variant did. Reaching the last gully visible on LiDAR, I headed back west at a lower level, recording each stream again. And then I messed about looking for junction points and things. No new swallets yet, the water all seemed to join up and stay on the surface. But the lot of it had to go somewhere, and that was still interesting.



The monster stream, with my foot for scale. Image: Stephen Fordyce

I got down into the base of the gully and found JF-552 in a whole heap of limestone outcrop on the SW side, which continued for a long way down. This area was last prospected in 2010 by Alan Jackson and co., and a bit higher up by me and co. in 2021 (when we found JF-703 Jimmy's Window). It felt ripe for more, especially along mid-level terraces along the bluff. The last side stream joined the main stream and I kept following it down, having a keen look for limestone outcrop on the less-prospected east side but finding only large dolerite boulders.

A juicy LiDAR target turned out to be the cliff-bounded corner referenced by Alan, and I would have liked a bit more time to look for things. The cave up in the cliff above looked somewhat promising. I kept zigzagging down the broad gully – it was mostly pretty easy going (easier than the Tachy track). JF-548 and JF-549 were relocated and the GPS co-ordinates were updated as they were quite off. JF-549 had a noticeable outward draught, and the limestone bluff above looked interesting.

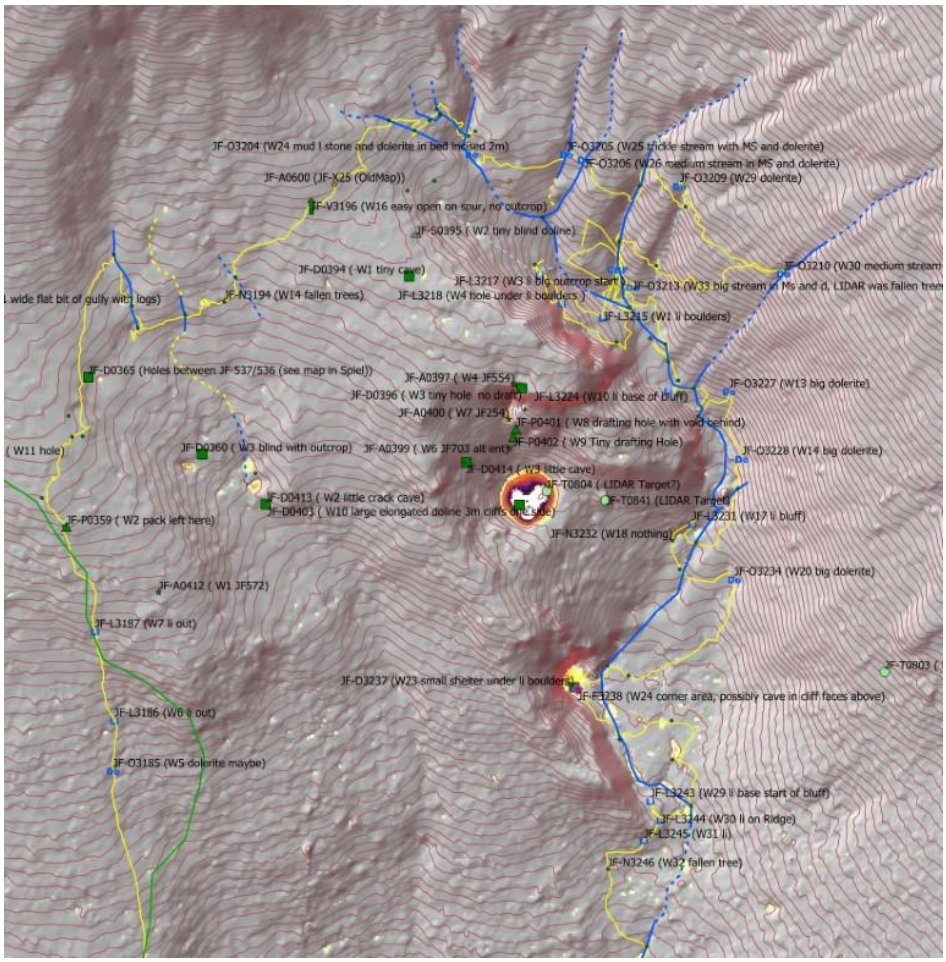
The main water sink point. Image: Stephen Fordcye

Not far down from there I finally found the main water sink point, although the stream seemed less, so it had probably been seeping away for a while. It was a pool in the streambed (gouged about 1 m deep from the original) with an unclear direction of flow. So a new and interesting sink point, but not a sweet new swallet (yet?). Limestone was not really apparent, so I didn't tag it, figuring on giving it a few more months to scour away. It was weird that it could eat so much water and yet still have a pool that wasn't overflowing.

A hasty photo I got of Mantrap (doesn't do it justice!). Image: Stephen Fordyce

On a hunch, I mostly stuck to the now dry gully and was rewarded by a spectacularly gouged 2 m deep hole where the water had obviously been sinking for a while before it moved uphill again to the current sink point. The hole had unstable looking mud walls which looked like they could collapse easily, so I reckon on calling it 'Mantrap' or something. I gingerly got down and found some limestone at the bottom, and an outward draught. It was diggable and worth a return – on the list for this summer. I was running late and figured the best place for a tag may be revealed by the dig.

So, I jumped out of the gully and followed my nose to the car – bypassing the annoying marshy cutting grass bit and popping out right at the side of it. Might be worth doing that again next time.



Results of my stream audit in solid blue (confirmed), dashed blue (extrapolated), dashed yellow (theorised). My tracks in squiggly yellow, 2 m contour lines in red. Caves are not shown. Image Stephen Fordyce.

JF-36 Growling Swallet Cleanup Trip

15 August 2025

Stephen Fordyce

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Marika Kahle (VSA), Grace Mason (VSA), Cole Neering (NUCC)

The Black River/Coelacanth dive project had been declared finished, so a cleanup trip made for a useful shakedown for the other mainlanders. We actually left the Maydena Airbnb on time, which was impressive – well done team! Special mention to Cole who I gave the benefit of the doubt when he said he only needed 30 minutes to get ready, the dude achieved almost a Petr level of anti-faff.

Left to right: Marika, Stephen, Grace, Cole. Image: Cole Neering (selfie)

We went in and out Slaughterhouse Pot and negotiated the fat/stiff ropes with only minor difficulty. It took rather a lot of faffing and a hot drink cos we could, but we managed to fit pretty much everything except the tanks in our bags (i.e. two sets of camping gear, all the communal camping/cooking/eating stuff, and my wing, regs, reel and tank rigging). Everyone had an appropriately sized bag, and I had two for luck. Marika grabbed the weight belt and wore it all the way out – nice one! We made reasonable progress, exiting the cave about 8 pm after a suitably 'moderate' day. Everyone was cleared for Voltera the next day.

Hopefully one more cleanup trip will do it. There are three tanks (and a bunch of weights) left at the sump that will require negotiating the roof sniff, and one tank plus the plastic camping groundsheets at the campsite. There's also the de-rig of Destiny Pitch.

JF-207 Voltera: Birthday Fun times

16 August 2025

Stephen Fordyce

Party: Adrian Hills, Henry Garratt, Will Grant, Stephen Fordyce, Marika Kahle (VSA), Grace Mason (VSA), Cole Neering (NUCC)

Voltera was on Saturday, it was a long and productive day which began with snow at the carpark and on the track (and on anyone who shook a tree). Our mainlander team being on day two of hard caving, we entered the cave at about 11 am having allowed the Hobart team to go first, but with the inevitable bottlenecking at pitches, we were within cooee pretty regularly.

While Henry, Will and Adrian got to work on opening and rigging the shortcut below the 30 m pitch, we went the long way around (the mainlanders got to experience the mud-coated meander and climbs). We talked with the other guys at their workstation above, headed towards Mud Bath, installed concrete screws for the handline where I'd forgotten a spanner last time, and finally surveyed The Horse, which Henry and I dug into from Mud Bath over a year ago (*SS*460, p.17). The last visit here was still nearly a year ago (*SS*461, p.9) when the stream was flowing into Mud Bath and we didn't go through to The Horse.

It hadn't changed much since then – much of the spoil pile had been cleansed but also tumbled back into the original Mud Bath dig. I dug and squirmed my way through to do the survey while the others worked on making it a bit more comfortable for my return. The water had at least washed the slippery angled slot clean and it was a lot easier to negotiate. The final bit was more or less unchanged, and there was definitely a minor outward draught.

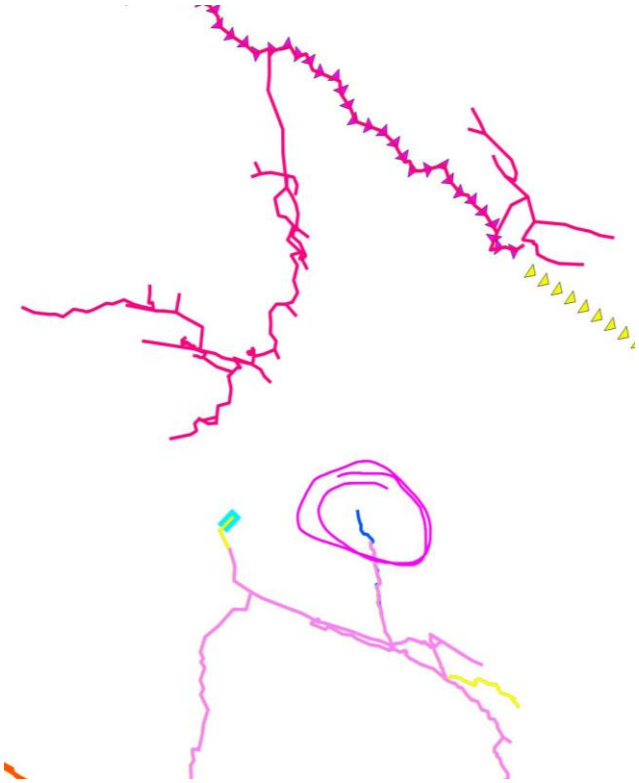
Mindful of a long slog (and remembering the horrors of my own first Voltera trip as a cocky mainlander), we started out, fortuitously meeting the other crew near the new handline. We almost said our farewells before remembering it was my birthday and there was celebrating to do. Everyone got a party hat and donut with a candle (infernal whistles were banned after the DV/Niggly connection), there were also fancy Whitakers chocolate, meat sticks and a comprehensive birthday song playlist (thanks Adrian). There was much rejoicing.

We left the others (who had a bunch more adventures) and headed out at about 5 pm. The shortcut as a pair of short pitches and some modest squeezes was a vast improvement on the long way around, especially with a person at the head of the higher pitch to haul bags through. I did some griping and fixing of some poor quality rigging – hopefully this is covered in the other report… It's still not great, 5-10 m of extra rope/tape/dyneema and a stainless clip next trip would be nice (a drill would be nicer, but for 1 concrete screw it's pretty unlikely).

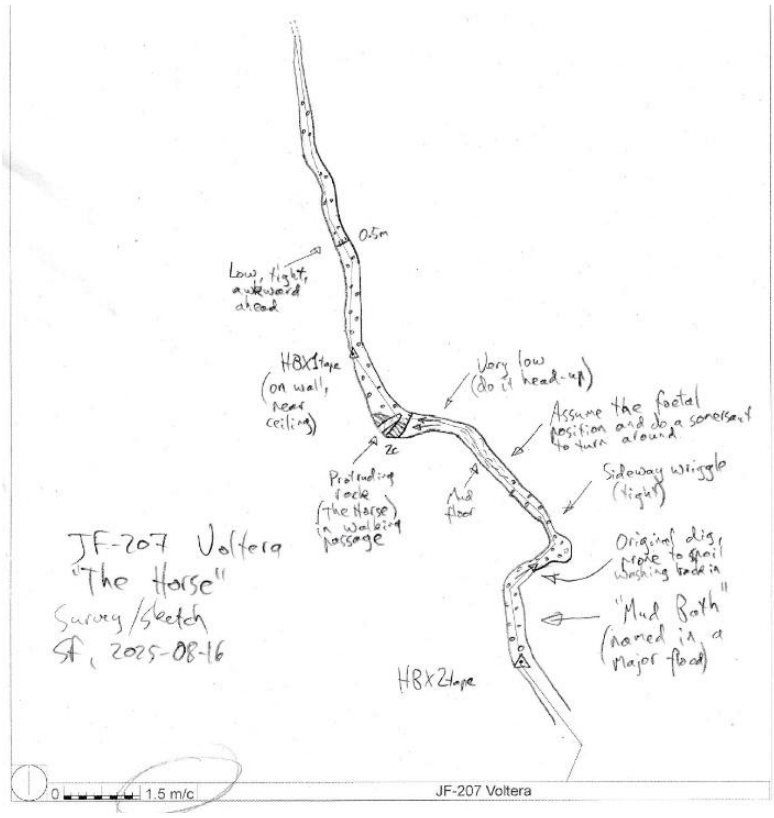
Our mainlander team made a slow but steady ascent, exiting at midnight in good spirits considering having more or less survived all the delights that a Voltera bottoming trip has to offer. Nobody got too tangled, although everyone was pretty wet and the Fistula extracted its due as usual. Well done everyone, Voltera is a hard cave! Actually, one of the hardest bits of the day was wrestling with the ice-encrusted ute tray cover.

Party time. Image: Will Grant

The state of play is below, the new survey in blue is circled. We are about 20 m closer to Niggly (plus a body length or two apparently), with the gap as plotted being 100 m. But if the sump is close to the most upstream point in Myopia as I suspect, that would shift Mud Bath a lot closer.



The current state of play. The Horse is blue and circled, showing the gap to Myopia in Niggly above. Image: Stephen Fordyce



The Horse, in all its surveyed glory. Sketch: Stephen Fordyce

JF-207 Voltera:

16 August 2025

William Grant

Party: Adrian Hills, Henry Garratt, Will Grant, Stephen Fordyce, Marika Kahle (VSA), Grace Mason (VSA), Cole Neering (NUCC)

[This report covers the same trip as the prior report – *Ed*.]

Due to the large number of cavers in a rather small cave, it was decided the party would be split into two semi-indented teams: Team South Island (the Tasmanians: Adrian, Henry and Will); and Team North Island (the mainlanders: Steve, Grace, Cole and Marika). This report is written from the perspective of Team South Island.

The locals arrived at the Maydena accommodation at approximately 8:30 am, and after the requisite faffing with gear that comes with any Fordyce epic, entered Voltera at 10:30 am, with the North Islanders hot on our heels. The Great Erotic Vagina was descended without incident. The vertical slot squeeze of the Fistula provided some challenge, but it too was negotiated without too much issue, in this direction at least…

The party continued down Cue Cards and onto the Stairway to Niggly. Despite starting OK, the group began to see why Henry despises this section of cave so much. The unceasing unpleasantness of tight passage and crawling in a creek takes its toll after a while. Notwithstanding, the party made it through and after a quick break at the top, descended Sent Down and moved onto Date of Release. The dry haven at the bottom provided much welcome relief against the insipient hypothermia afflicting us.

It was here the two parties' paths diverged. Team South Island's plan at this stage was to dig out the shortcut to Turn the Other Cheek, whilst Team North Island continued through Parole Passage to the Mud Bath. The shortcut is located in the southeast corner of the chamber below Date of Release. After 4 m of squeezing horizontally though a vertical slot, a small chamber is reached. A large in-situ rock then obstructs the passage. The passage immediately drops away after this into a moderately sized chamber via a 4 m pitch. Another 5 m pitch through the floor of this chamber drops straight into Turn the Other Cheek. Full rigging guide at end.

Digging out this passage went smoothly, rigging it did not. The top pitch was rigged using a single concrete screw backed up with the large passage obstructing rock. This is thoroughly unideal since the rock is lower than the screw, meaning if the screw were to fail, a 50 cm fall of up to Factor 1 is possible onto the rock anchor. The screw is placed in what was found to be the only good rock in the vicinity of the pitch head.

Much difficulty was had trying to place the concrete screws; it was found the screws would not bite well into the holes. Indeed the screws would rotate but were

not engaging nicely into the rock. In the case of two attempts, placing the screw only acted to ream the hole out such that the screw was in the hole, but in no way engaged. It was later found that this was likely due to screws being excessively worn out. Although the main holding threads were in fair condition, the cutting threads near the tip were worn out. Although it was subtle, the screws were unusable and should have been retired. Concrete screw manufacturers state screws should only be used once. Whilst this may be excessive and screws may potentially be reused safely, they should be thoroughly inspected after every use. It does not take much wear for them to be unusable. Another contributing factor may have been that due to where we were attempting to place the screws, it was difficult to apply much pressure to set the screw. For such awkward placements, it may be worth initially seating the screw using a hammer, and then driving the screw with an impact driver.

The result of this rigging issue is that the best rock near the pitch head was unfortunately turned to Swiss cheese. Although there may be space for one or two more holes with sufficient distance from the existing ones, real estate is at a premium. Anyone who may try to re-rig this pitch in the future should do so with great thought and consideration and attempt to re-use the existing holes, noting that some of them have been enlarged. In a later error of judgment, the unused holes were filled with cave mud, for unknown reasons. As such, said future worker should take a brush so they may be adequately able to adequately inspect the mess we unfortunately left, as well as clean out any holes they may wish to reuse. Although similar issues were had with the lower pitch, it is currently rigged well off a natural redirected by a well-placed screw.

Team South Island continued toward the Mud Bath, and reached the end of the pleasant passage just as Steve was returning from surveying the new progress in the dig. With both teams convened in a pleasant passage at the bottom of the cave, it was time for Steve's birthday celebrations. Steve had carried in a fine fare of doughnuts, candles, and coconut chocolate, whilst Adrian had the foresight to download a playlist of birthday songs to his phone (who knew there were so many birthday bangers). With such preparations, a fine party was had.

Team North Island had the sense to quit while they were ahead and turned for home at approximately 5 pm. Team South Island remained to throw some more energy at the dig. Despite Will spending most of the time digging out the first bend just to fit, good progress was made at the coal face, with Henry and Adrian adding 'three or four body lengths, that's 10 m right?'

Since the Mud Bath remains dry outside of flood periods, it has not been possible to match it up to any inlets in Niggly. In a new experiment, a pile of fern fronds and other leaves were left in the Mud Bath, in the hope that should there be another flood, these may be mobilised and redeposited in Niggly. If these are found, it would prove the Mud Bath passage is large enough for fern fronds to fit, so hopefully close to being human passable. The fern fronds may even give an indication of where the Mud Bath flows into downstream Niggly.

Team South Island turned for home at 7 pm. A reasonable pace was set going up through the lower pitches. It dropped off going up the stairway to Niggly, but still, steady progress was made. Despite claiming to have some issues, Adrian made light work of the Fistula; the Fistula made light work of Will. Despite the surprising ease at which Will descended the Fistula on the way in, there was nothing easy about getting through on the way out. Over the course of a very concerning two plus hours or so, Will made agonisingly slow progress though the squeeze.

One particularly concerning event which occurred during this period was when Will's foot got caught under a lip of rock whilst he simultaneously pushed his ascender hard up the rope. The foot loop then acted to tension the stuck foot and ascender together, meaning neither could move. After several attempts to either free the entire foot, remove the foot loop, or de-tension the ascender to move it down, all failed, and with the foot beginning grow numb, the decision was made to cut the foot loop with a knife. Without a knife, this situation may have become much, much more severe; a good reminder to always carry one.

Another concerning lesson from this situation is how easy it is to become over committed. Going through the squeeze on the way in had been remarkably easy. It is very easy to forget how beneficial gravity is when descending a vertical squeeze such as this. With hindsight, the fact that there was any issue whilst descending should have been a big red flag of how difficult reascending would be. With a vertical squeeze such as this, it is difficult test a squeeze without committing fully, but that should have happened. On a large trip with strong goals, it is hard to admit that something is too difficult, but with hindsight, the better thing would have been to acknowledge that it was too tight and not overcommit. Thankfully, no great harm came from this experience, but there were some strong lessons to be learnt.

Eventually, Will made it through the Fistula, with Henry coming through straight after as if it were nothing. Adrian had been patiently waiting at the top of the Great Erotic Vagina during this time, only guessing what was taking so long below. After waiting for two hours, putting on all his spare layers and still feeling cold, Adrian made the call to head out to the surface, calling down the Great Erotic Vagina one last time, just as Will was exiting the Fistula. No coherent conversation could be had over the sound of the

waterfall, but it could be vaguely understood what was happening. Will progressed so slowly up the Great Erotic Vagina that Henry found time to fall asleep waiting at a rebelay. But eventually it too was ascended and Henry and Will reached the surface at the hideously late hour of 4:30 am.

Rigging notes for the 'Shortcut' pitch:

The first pitch is currently rigged off a big natural hunk of rock which almost blocks the passage. Then there is a rebelay off a single screw in the roof just beyond. It's proably a 4 m pitch with 10 m of rope needed (it's a big natural). The second pitch is off a natural spike, redirected off a single screw. It's probably a 5 m pitch, with maybe 6 m of rope needed. You can get off rope between the pitches quite safety, but it's probably best to rig them with the same rope. Those rope lengths are pretty generous. I wouldn't be surprised if you don't need as much

JF-15 Hairygoat Hole bottoming

17 August 2025

Stephen Fordyce

Party: Stephen Fordyce, Marika Kahle (VSA), Grace Mason (VSA), John Oxley

After an epic in Voltera the day before, enthusiasm was almost universally low for caving again. After their two hours of sleep, Henry and Will went home, taking Cole for his flight which was earlier than the rest of us. Fortunately, John already had his caving gear packed and came anyway, despite my 2 am text message warning there was a high chance that activities would be café-based.

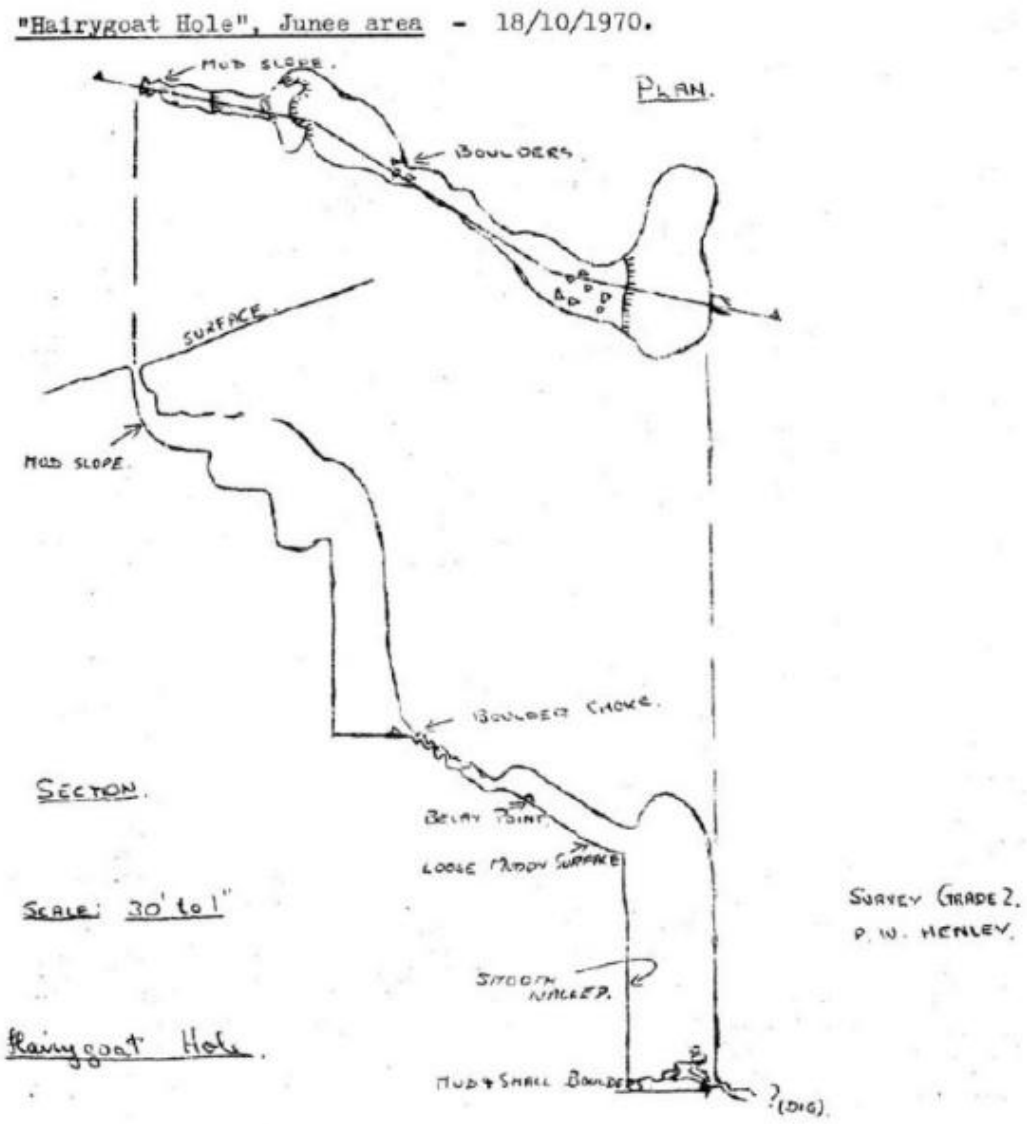
At least it was a pretty nice day on the surface, still colder than the cave though! Image: John Oxley

So, I found a last burst of energy to Hairygoat with John, while Marika and Grace joined us on the surface then wandered off to look at Khazad Dum. John and I rigged and re-surveyed HGH and checked out the prospect at the bottom which had everyone so excited for the last fifty-five years. We were underground less than two hours.

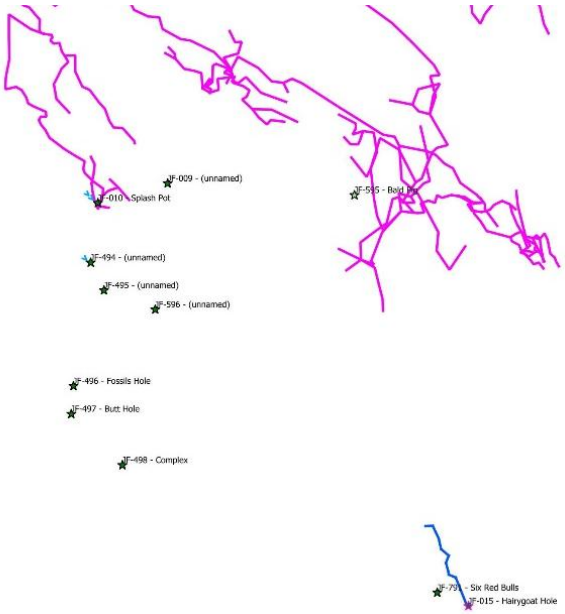
The rigging was a mix of naturals (dodgy and bomber) and concrete screws – to be improved next time. Ropes were removed. The cave was surprisingly spacious, especially considering the area and the entrance, and matched the original map by P.W Henley well. There were potential leads in parallel pitches and holes that might be worth checking. We noted occasional trog marks including marks from 3-strand twisted rope from the previous visitors in 1970. There was a dead echidna covered in black beetles at the bottom of the first pitch series.

John and Stephen looking at the survey. Image: Marika Kahle

Descending Hairygoat Hole, at last. Image: John Oxley



The original JF-15 map by P. W. Henley published in SS52.



Plot of the survey showing relationship to Splash Pot. Hairygoat Hole in bottom right. Image: Stephen Fordyce

The survey was done in the outwards direction, with a marked station left at the bottom for hopefully a continuation eventually. HGH is heading away from the theorised mastercave line and towards Splash Pot (92 m horizontal distance to closest point, which is in the vicinity of the final big pitch). It mostly follows the dip of the bedding plane, which is roughly 45 degrees (yes, heading away from the mastercave).

The dig at the bottom was viable and I plan to re-rig properly (including rigging notes) and tackle this when I'm back in summer. A bit of investment might be required, but it looks worth it – it's down a 45 degree slope of gravel and looks to get bigger after a few metres. The fabled draughts at entrance and dig were... underwhelming but present.

IB-1 Revelation Cave - IB-233 (Chorale Cave)

A Series of Unfortunate Events at Revelation Cave

20th September 2025

Michal Glazer

Party: Henry Garratt, Michael Glazer, Nik Magnus, Svein Jansen, Raelene Watson

We all rolled into the Mystery Creek carpark around 9 am, with the weather graciously holding off despite a week of solid rain. Little did we know, the rain had left us a few parting gifts.

The first hurdle of the day was Mystery Creek which was running with more enthusiasm than usual. I scouted upstream and found a decent spot to cross, with Svein and Rae following my lead. Henry and Nik, a little way behind, decided to follow suit. As I watched Henry start his crossing, I saw his hand reach for a tempting, but decidedly rotten-looking, log. Before we could yell a warning, Henry was executing a perfect, if unintentional, backflip into the torrent. For a moment, the sight of his legs flailing in the air had me, Rae, and Svein in stitches. The laughter caught in my throat when he kept getting washed downstream, but being the fit lad he is, he dragged himself out, his pride taking a bigger hit than his body. And the best part? Svein, with the reflexes of a seasoned documentary filmmaker, caught the whole glorious moment on video.

Just before Henry's swim. Image: Raelene Watson

We pressed on towards Revelation. Just as we hit the steep section, I noticed the usual chatter from Henry and Nik had gone ominously silent behind us. We waited, figuring they'd stopped for a nature break. Nothing. A few shouts into the bush yielded the same result. They'd vanished. I dumped my pack with Rae and Svein and trotted back down the track, assuming they'd taken a wrong turn towards Hobbit Hole. I can only imagine what was going through Svein's head on his first-ever caving trip: 'Is it always like this?'

Thankfully, we had a bar of signal. A quick call went unanswered, but a text to Henry got a reply five minutes later: they were 'slightly lost.' I'm blaming the hypothermia from his earlier swim for his navigational blunder. A GPS pin confirmed they were directly above the cave, and soon enough they were scrambling down the hill to meet us.

With the team reassembled, we started gearing up. It was then that the day threw its third curveball. 'Umm, guys,' Rae piped up, 'I think I forgot my suit.' I run hot anyway, so I handed over mine, praying this would be the last of the day's mishaps.

I went down first to prep some extra hangers, wanting to add something a bit more robust for the rigger on the second pitch. Soon enough, the pitch was all rigged up, and the rest of the crew had to put up with my plumber's crack due to the lack of a suit. Sorry guys. Everyone got down the second pitch smoothly, and Svein was handling his first trip like a natural.

The cave was roaring with water, more than I'd ever seen in Revelation. I bolted in a few extra handlines on some of the climbs, thinking Janine would appreciate them on future trips. They proved immediately useful, making the wet climbs a bit safer for all of us.

Henry rigged the third pitch, which had a proper waterfall crashing down it. At this point, Nik wisely decided he'd had enough excitement and would wait for us at the top. Thinking 'This will be fun in street clothes,' I started my descent. The icy water hit me with such force it literally took my breath away. Henry, Svein, and Rae followed quickly.

Henry and I made a dash for the end to check out a potential dig. True to form, Henry was buzzing with excitement at the prospect, grovelling into the tight space. I noticed the high-water flow had washed away a lot of the gravel, opening it up a bit more.

Conscious of Nik waiting, we headed back. Rae prepped to ascend the third pitch first. It was then I realised my Pantin was still sitting in my bag at the entrance. Henry's was broken, and while not essential, it would have been nice. I thought I heard Rae say through the roar of the water that she'd send her Pantin down once she reached the top. I watched her ascend to the rebelay, fiddle with her feet, and then continue on. 'Oh well,' I shrugged, 'She must have forgotten.'

As I clipped onto the rope, bracing for another ice bath, a great bellow echoed from above: 'SUIT!' Suddenly, my caving suit came hurtling down the waterfall like a soggy ghost. We all burst out laughing at the sheer absurdity of it. Already soaked to the bone, I just

stuffed the extra 5 kg of wet gear into my overloaded bag and started up, the cold water stealing my breath all over again.

All smiles despite the troubles. Image: Raelene Watson

At the top of the pitch, I waited for Svein, who navigated the rebelay like a pro – a credit to Henry's excellent training. I asked him to wait for Henry and help de-rig while I went to catch the others.

Arriving at the second pitch, I was greeted by the sight of Nik in a bit of a pickle, hanging horizontally like a confused bat, desperately trying to get his descender on a taut rope. Rae was already up past him. Henry, ever the enthusiast, was practically vibrating with excitement at the prospect of a pickoff. Seeing as there were good holds, I opted to talk Nik through it, getting him to descend 30 cm at a time while I manipulated his croll from below. Exhausted but determined, he did brilliantly, and we got him to the ground with a collective sigh of relief.

We then had a quick conference: haul or counterweight? I was secretly thrilled to discover I was heavier than Nik, and both Henry and I were keen for a counterweight, but we ultimately decided a haul was the safer bet with the manpower we had. Svein's first trip was quickly turning into a full-blown SRT workshop! We rigged up a system with two pulleys and a progress capture, calling Rae and Svein back down from the entrance to help pull. With Henry expertly managing the pitch head and keeping Nik calm, we hauled him up smoothly. I zipped down to meet him at the top and make sure he got off the rope safely.

To his credit, Nik managed the final entrance pitch under his own steam, a testament to his grit despite being utterly knackered.

The walk out was blissfully uneventful; I think the caving gods decided we'd had our quota of excitement for one day. We were back at the cars by 4 pm.

Descending Revelation. Image: Raelene Watson

On reflection, it was a day packed with learning. We put training into practice, dealt with multiple unexpected challenges, and reinforced the importance of carrying a few spare bits of gear. It was a hell of an introduction for Svein, and a testament to the team's ability to handle whatever a cave—or a creek—throws at you.

NSW Cave Rescue Exercise: Tuglow Cave

'The Best Exercise Ever'

18-19 October 2025

Karina Anders, Henry Garratt, Ciara Smart

Party: Karina Anders, Henry Garratt, Jemma Herbert, Ciara Smart (and interstate STC members Alex Motyka, Shiva Nami, David Rueda Roeca, David Taberner), and about thirty others from NSW Cave Rescue and NSW Ambulance.

(Ciara): 'This was the best exercise ever,' declared Henry at the day's end. Yep, that's about all you need to know, but if you want the full version, read on.

Karina, Henry, Jemma and I travelled up to Sydney to attend a rescue exercise run by NSW Cave Rescue, a member of the Volunteer Rescue Association. Everyone except for us were members of NSW Cave

Rescue, with the exception of a small number of vertical access paramedics. The exercise was organised by Michael Fraser, with support from many including Al Warild. It took place in Tuglow Cave, a vertical cave in an isolated patch of limestone in Kanangra-Boyd National Park, about 3.5 hours from Sydney. Kanangra is an old haunt of mine, but I've never been in Tuglow Cave. Tuglow Cave is exceptional for a NSW cave, with about 70 m of mixed pitches before reaching a significant streamway of considerable length.

Left to right: Karina, Henry, Jemma and Ciara. Image credit unknown.

We kicked off at 9 am Saturday at a nearby campground. This exercise was staged more like a real rescue, with cavers being assigned to teams as they turned up, then being sent to 'find something to do' in the cave. The Hasty Team and the Comms Team were sent off first.

(Henry) Karina and I were assigned Team 2 with another NSW caver. We were led by Alex Motyka. We were sent in after a short time spent roasting in the ridiculous heat at the cave entrance, waiting for the Hasty Team and Team 1 to get further. We were eventually let loose and instructed to 'rig an alternative route to the streamway,' and given a vague direction to go. We were slightly confused by this: was it an alternative that was better for hauling the stretcher, or just another commuter line? We set about faffing with naturals. Karina and I quickly concluded that hauling a stretcher up this way would be very difficult, due to a lack of suitable anchors for a counterweight.

We were then informed that we were simply rigging an alternative route DOWN to the streamway to get people into the cave faster. We were told not to worry about rigging it for ascending. Being drip fed information like this was entertaining and perhaps more realistic to the chaos of a real rescue. Slightly confused but satisfied, we did some IRT [Indestructible Rope Technique - *Ed.]*, tied our 50 m rope to a boulder and slipped down what turned out to be a 40 m pitch through vertical rockpile. Karina and Alex rigged this while I complained about being too hot. Once getting to the streamway I was able to dunk myself in the water and perked up again, with the immediate threat of hyperthermia being dispersed.

At the streamway there was a flurry of activity with Team 1 and the Hasty Team rigging along the streamway towards our pitch. Here our team became slightly fragmented; I became distracted as a meat anchor for Brian Evans as he was slinging a spike precariously while Karina was asked to help move the stretcher to the casualty and got distracted with a full tour of the rest of the exercise and cave.

(Karina) I was really enjoying my personalised tour but I perhaps got too distracted and had left our team for too long because I heard a loud 'KARINA' calling me back to work. Alas, duty calls and we all regrouped at the base of the pitches.

(Henry) We were then assigned to set up a haul on the main pitch. Our benevolent team leader was keen to haul the stretcher up the alternative route we had rigged: the 40 m pitch with no bolts and a deficiency of natural anchors.

I offered to run up the normal route and compare it for a haul. I was confident it would be better given the bolted rebelays. As I was descending I saw there was another caver on the rope below me! He was underneath the first rebelay. We yelled that we'd cross each other at the rebelay. When I got to the rebelay it was clear he wasn't in a good way. The unfortunate NSW caver had fallen over and hurt his shoulder. He'd really struggled to ascend the 10 m up to the rebelay and couldn't quite manage to position himself up and onto it so I could pass him. I was concerned that he wouldn't be able to manage the next two rebelays or the other 40 m of jumaring so I politely suggested he go back to the ground and offered to haul him up the pitch.

I descended and joined him, feeling slightly miffed that this was the second time I'd nearly gotten to do a pick-off, but again I'd been able to talk the patient through transitioning without having to perform a pick-off. I found Dave Taberner (who was cosplaying as Alan Jackson in the role of underground controller) who explained the shoulder injury and the need to get old mate out of the cave. Trying to hide our delight at getting to do a real rescue, Karina and I jumped into rigging the pitch for a counterbalance. I prussicked up,

trailing a 50 m static rope that was tied into the casualty, clipping it into each rebelay with a releasable redirect (but with the rope running through carabiners - not pulleys, not good).

There was a rather Abbot and Costello 'who's on first' vibes conversation with Jemma and Ciara where I tried to explain that I had a real casualty and needed them to rig a counterweight quickly! I'd forgotten the safeword 'no duff' and was struggling to convey the urgency.

Jemma rigged an excellent anchor for the counterweight quite high above the existing anchors, on some naturals. The rope I had tied to the casualty came taut on my harness just on the lip, meaning we a knot crossing by about 4 m. We tied the bend with a long tail, and executed a half-remembered rendition of Andy Kirkpatrick's haul-line knot crossing method. It went pretty smoothly.

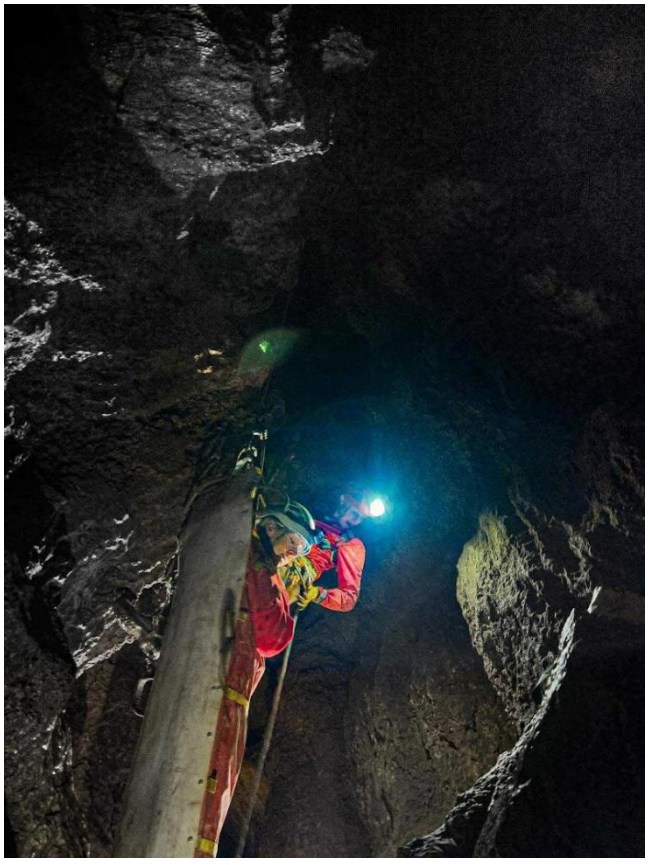
The haul went well, except that with a heavy casualty, and no pulleys there was a lot of friction. We had myself and another caver on counterweight. I was on my croll and hand ascender and the other person was just on a hand ascender. Both of us were squatting, plus Karina occasionally pulling me down too.

(Ciara) Jemma and I were assigned to Team 3, alongside four other cavers. We were the last into the cave, getting underground by about midday. It was a relief to get into the stygian cool as it was baking on the surface, but it was still 14˚C underground! Even in our AV suits, all the Tasmanians found the cave quite hot, but as Dave Taberner remarked, mainland cavers are used to thermal discomfort in Tasmanian caves, so it's about time we got a taste of our own medicine.

We descended the cave until we caught up to the paramedics who were slowly descending the main 45 m pitch. We returned to the surface and started rigging down to avoid the queue. We were not allowed to place bolts so we had to be creative in our anchors. This turned out to be less of a problem than we expected; you can find naturals in all sorts of places if you try hard enough. For the first anchor we used the gate. I'm not used to assessing the structural integrity of… a structure, but it seemed good enough. We rigged a short 4 m counterweight pitch off this that hung nicely down to the next pitch with the help of a human deviation. For the next 4 m counterweight, we used an existing bolt backed up by a natural.

We then turned our mind to rigging the main 45 m pitch. Here we met Karina, Henry and Alex who were discussing where to place this haul. We could rig it straight down the existing route, which was a bit tight and possibly a bit snaggy, or it could be rigged in a more ambitious route from the ceiling. Jemma and I didn't realise that Henry and Karina had already started on this pitch, so we also started to rig it. The existing anchors were already in use for the access line, and they were not going to be a good hang for a stretcher, so Jemma scrambled up quite a significant climb directly above the pitch to get a perfectly positioned bomber natural for the haul. We redirected this off a natural thread about 5 m back to get a nice line down the pitch. The three rebelays on the pitch would be managed with releasable redirects (a munter mule tied into the existing bolt on the wall).

It was about this time that things started to get quite confusing. A message was delivered that the plan had changed and the casualty was at the base of the pitch already. They were going to be hauled without a stretcher. We needed to haul the casualty NOW. This seemed a bit puzzling: why had we gone to all the trouble to transport the stretcher to the bottom of the cave if we weren't even going to use it!? No bother, the casualty would be less snaggy without a stretcher. And even better, the casualty could release the munter mules themselves! It was about this time that I began to think maybe we'd been doing our rescue exercises in Tasmania the hard way. Then they told us that the casualty was 120 kg. An unusual choice for a casualty, I thought, but good practice I suppose.



Ciara beside the stretcher. Image: Shiva Nami

Communication to the base of the pitch was impossible. Although we were only 50 m away, the sound of the streamway drowned out all voices. I was positioned on the next haul up so I could see the action as Henry started to haul on the counterweight, supported by another caver. Jemma was above them as controller and also pulling on the ropes. The haul looked strenuous. Karina had to step in as a fourth hand

on the counterweight, or sometimes to provide a fanning action when Henry overheated in the tropical heat of 14˚C.

Eventually the 'casualty' arrived at the top of the pitch, and I realised that they were in fact a real casualty. He had fallen over in the streamway and banged up his shoulder, leaving him unable to ascend one-handed. We hauled him up the next two pitches and got him back to the surface.

By the time this was all done, it was about 3 pm, and I wasn't sure we would have time to run the stretcher through. Thankfully, everyone was enthusiastic, and now we'd had a trial run of all the hauls. We realised that we hadn't put pulleys on the three redirects on the big haul, creating a lot of extra friction. I zipped down to place pulleys and reset the redirects and to get into position as stretcher attendant for the haul. We wasted a lot of time here with poor communication, with some people trying to come up the access line as I was coming down, and with some people being exceptionally slow at ascending.

Image: Alex Motyka.

Eventually the stretcher was attached to the base of the pitch. The stretcher attendant job here was quite involved, as the pitch was tight (for a stretcher), with lots of overhanging lips threatening to snag. I also had to make sure to release the three redirects before they became impossibly tight. When the stretcher reached a redirect, I shouted 'stop' as loudly as I could, but the haulers could not hear me. Here, we really needed radios. Thankfully I was able to release the redirects under tension.

The next two short counterweight hauls were simple. We had a final 2 m haul to get the casualty out of the cave, and here things got difficult. The angles were so tight we couldn't get the stretcher out onto the surface with the casualty in it. Eventually, we removed the stiff ribbing in the stretcher. This can be removed with the casualty still inside. This solved the problem and the patient got to the surface.

On Sunday we got the chance to see the rest of the cave. The streamway is high quality, sporting and interesting, and we only saw a small portion of it. We then helped with the derig and were back on the surface before lunchtime.

General Reflections

This exercise was structurally quite similar to ours in terms of being organised chaos. We saw a big range of abilities in the cavers. Although all the cavers were technically part of Cave Rescue NSW, it was clear that some had much stronger vertical abilities than others. It was also great to see a dedicated team of vertical access paramedics.

Communication was mostly managed through michie phones, with the usual pros and cons of this system. We were also trialling a new system designed by Dane Evans, called 'MESH.' Essentially, this involves a series of repeater stations that look like walkie-talkies placed throughout the cave. These communicate to MESH cards, which communicate with an app on your phone. This meant we could text people in the cave! We didn't have enough of these to use them effectively, and the repeater stations couldn't be placed in optimal positions because of the no-bolting requirement, but from what I saw, they are great! There are some hurdles to overcome, namely waterproofness and the use of multiple channels, but they are excellent for sending messages in caves where audio communication is difficult, or for sending messages across longer distances.

Sightseeing at Kanangra Walls. Image: Dave Taberner

JF-4/5 Khazad Dum

21 October 2025

Geoff Hurst

Party: Geoff Hurst, John Oxley

John has been tempting me with a KD trip since our first outing to Mystery Creek a few months ago. It seemed that it was hard to lock in a date, but eventually, the positive email came through that it was on. John had dutifully set it up to give everyone plenty of time to sign up and work it into their lives, even though it was a Tuesday. Everything was good until a few days before, when I asked a question about return timing without context, which was interpreted as my unavailability. This caused a cascading effect, with others making other plans before we figured out the calamity. Ultimately, this left John and me on our own, but with the best weather forecast for the week, we weren't going to let that deter us.

Descending Khazad Dum. Image: Geoff Hurst

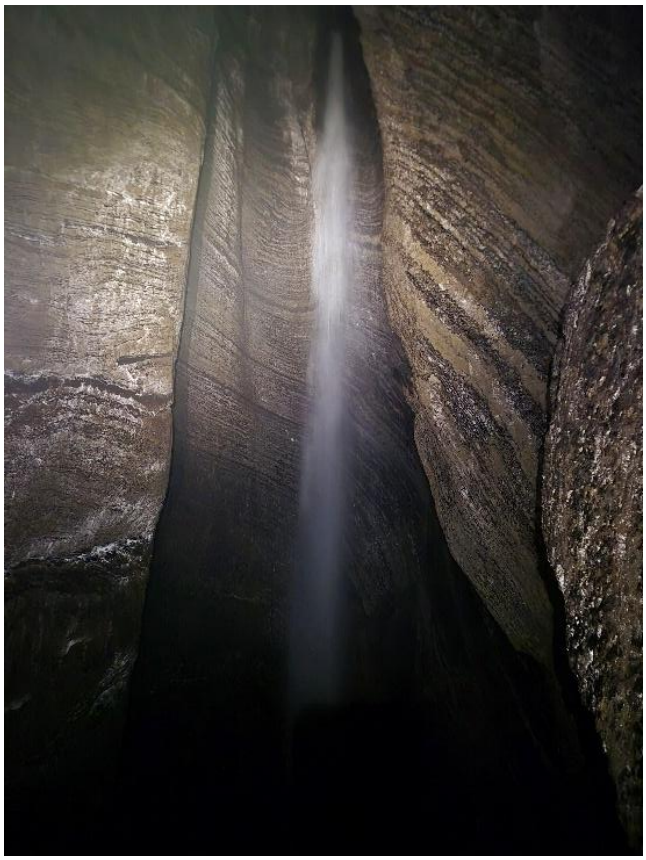
We got away from Hobart nice and early with a clear run to the Florentine Valley. John had made sure we hadn't forgotten the key, but it turned out the gate was unlocked anyway. We found a good park where we could easily turn around, considering my car didn't have a lot of clearance. We walked the last bit of the 4wd track and then up the trail to the cave entrance.

After a little morning tea break, we were into the cave. I was pleased that we weren't going down the wet route with the amount of cold water disappearing down the hole. John expertly directed us across the face of the waterfall and down the serpentine passage. We deviated from this shortly after to get onto the traditional route with a short sidetrip to set up an additional rope down to the wet route again.

We then meandered on through a couple of smaller drops and a crawl-through before emerging to some bigger drops and the magnificent waterfalls. These were well worth the visit, though the pictures don't do it justice. We spent some time in the streamway exploring the next drop before retreating for lunch.

Then came an opportunity to further practise my ascending. John makes it look easy, and I am sure he was much faster (I blame the gear); however, we were back at the surface in about two hours. It is much quicker when you plan to leave the rope in place.

Another thoroughly enjoyable trip under John's expert and gracious leadership, I look forward to the next one.



Stunning waterfalls. Image: Geoff Hurst

Other Exciting Stuff

New Nullarbor Book Published

Stefan Eberhard

Recently published, this spectacular new book features 96 pages of stunning Nullarbor images and informative text.

The purpose of this book is to draw attention to the World Heritage attributes of Australia's iconic Nullarbor Plain. This book describes how the Nullarbor and its extraordinary cave systems meet all four of UNESCO's natural heritage criteria for Outstanding Universal Value.

This book will be of interest to cavers, scientists and anyone who appreciates nature and wants to know more about this globally significant karst region.

Irrespective of whether this project gets given the go ahead, current and future access to Nullarbor caves by ASF cavers, cave divers and researchers is under dire threat because of the proposed development.

The intention of this book is to raise public awareness and stimulate debate on the path to having World Heritage values fully canvassed and a nomination put forward by the Australian government. Such a nomination is long overdue.

This book comes now because the Nullarbor Plain in Western Australia is urgently threatened by industrialization. Copies of the book have been widely circulated to politicians, government departments and relevant organisations in Australia and internationally.

The book is co-published by Save The Nullarbor Inc. and the Bob Brown Foundation, with a foreword by the President of the International Union of Speleology. Authored by Dr Stefan Eberhard and Geoff Law with additional contributions from Nullarbor expert scientists and photographers. The descriptive text is easy to read and informative, and supported by key references at the end of each chapter.

Soft cover, A4 landscape, 96 pages, 82 colour photos, 8 figures
ISBN: 978-1-7641404-1-6 (print)
Published 30 June 2025
RRP $75.00

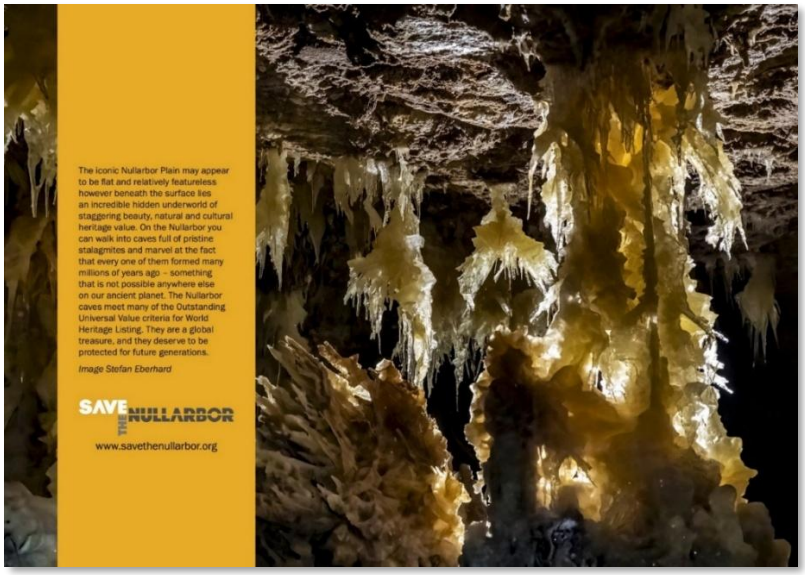
All book sale proceeds go towards offsetting the initial production, printing and distribution costs.

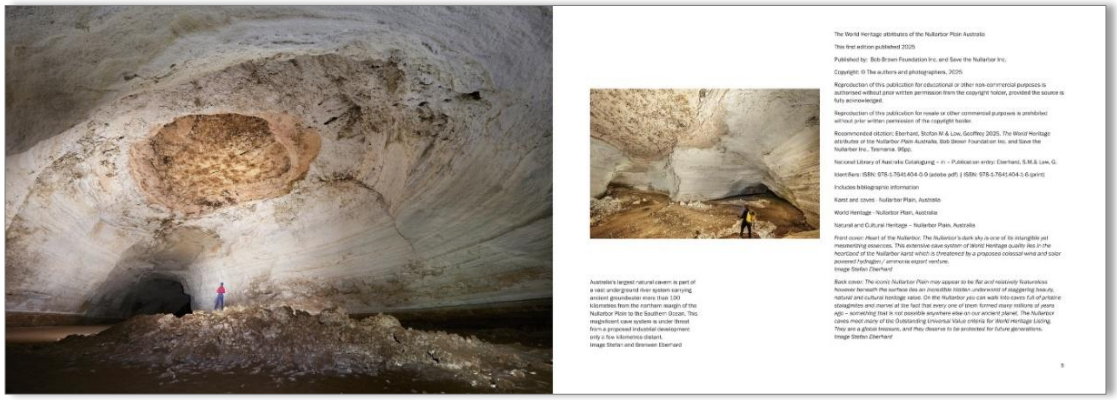
This limited first edition is available only while stocks last with a promotional discount of free standard postage within Australia. For express and international postage costs enquire.

To place an order, check this website or email:

www.savethenullarbor.org

admin@savethenullarbor.org.





The above images are a sample of the book. Credit: Stefan Eberhard

Current STC Member List

Karina	Anders	TAS
James	Barnes	TAS
Ashlee	Bastiaansen	TAS
Loretta	Bell	TAS
Serena	Benjamin	TAS
Stephanie	Blake	VIC
Amy	Brezinscak	TAS
William	Cameron	TAS
Dexter	Canning	TAS
Liz	Canning	TAS
Arthur	Clarke	TAS
Anthony	Culberg	TAS
Bianca	Curran	TAS
Stewart	Donn	VIC
Rolan	Eberhard	TAS
Stefan	Eberhard	TAS
Chris	Edwards	VIC
Hugh	Fitzgerald	TAS
Stephen	Fordyce	VIC
Russell	Fulton	TAS
Yvonne	Galaret	SA
Thomas	Galindo	TAS
Henry	Garratt	TAS
Sarah	Gilbert	SA
Emily	Gilev	TAS
Michael	Glazer	TAS
Albert	Goede	TAS
Jason	Goldstein	VIC
William	Grant	TAS
Josh	Greenhill	TAS
Jemma	Herbert	TAS
Adrian	Hills	TAS
Benjamin	Honan	TAS
Kenneth	Hosking	TAS
Deborah	Hunter	TAS
Geoff	Hurst	TAS
Alan	Jackson	TAS
Anna	Jackson	TAS
Benjamin	Jackson	TAS
Phil	Jackson	TAS
Svein	Jansen	TAS
GrRebecca	Lunnon	TAS
Nik	Magnus	TAS
Ron	Mann	TAS
Liam	McArthur	TAS
Trixi	McCarthy-Gilbert	TAS
Lyn	McGaurr	TAS
Janine	McKinnon	TAS
Greg	Middleton	Tas
Alex	Motyka	NSW
Shiva	Nami	NSW
Ben	Niblett	VIC
John	Oxley	TAS
Emily	Panietz	TAS
Tom	Porritt	QLD
Jane	Pulford	Netherlands
David	Rueda-Roca	NSW
Andrea	Russo	VIC
Michelle	Schrieber	NSW
Chris	Sharples	TAS
Rosalind	Skinner	TAS
Ciara	Smart	TAS
Petr	Smejkal	TAS
Craig	Stobbs	TAS
David	Taberner	NSW
Ric	Tunney	TAS
Gemma	Umbers	VIC
Jeff	Umbers	VIC
Meril	Umbers	VIC
Tony	Veness	Netherlands
Carolyn	Vlasveld	TAS
Raelene	Watson	TAS
Felix	Wikstroem	TAS
Geoffrey	Wise	TAS

You can probably guess what happened next. For full report, see p.18. Image captured from video by Svein Jansen.