

Tassie caving April 2014

This trip evolved from two sources:

1/ Ever since Holly started caving she has had to put up with me lecturing her that just about every cave we went into would be better with an active stream way, and how good the caves are in Tasmania, and that she needs to master SRT before we can do anything good. We joined BMSC and she definitely proved she was keen and hopefully capable.

2/ Every time I get together with a few of my old caving mates I have spoken about going to Tassie or NZ for some high quality tourist trips of the best caves in the area. Lots of talk, no action.

A family holiday for December 2013 in Tassie (which might have included caving) got vetoed so when at the end of January I realised that Holly and I had time off Andrea had to work and Laura had left home it seemed like a great opportunity to go to Tassie. Nothing like short notice so I put the trip on the BMSC list and emailed a lot of my old caving mates trying to drum up some interest. In the end we had a crew of 3 dads (Jim, Greg & Mark) all 50 plus with 30 odd years of caving experience each and we each brought one of our kids Thomas, Tamsin & Holly. By pure luck we ended up with the correct sized group as the restricted access caves that require a permit have a maximum party size of six.



1: Thomas, Tamsin, Holly, Jim, Mark & Greg

Jim, Greg and I have all been on lots of caving expeditions to various parts of the world but I think I sent more emails, read more magazines and hassled more friends getting information and permits for this 12 day trip than a 2 month expedition. I gathered lots of good info and thought we were pretty organized, read on.

The boys dug all there old gear out of the cupboard and with the need to outfit our kids the gear stores did good business. My mate Al Warild was out of the country but we talked Julia into letting us raid his cupboard for MTDE one piece thermal undersuits, nylon oversuits, harnesses etc. all free because Julia didn't know the prices, regrettable Al gets home as I write this article so I will have to pay up shortly. We decided to purchase some new ropes and after more emails around the world for feedback from friends we decided to purchase 160metres of Tendon 9mm speleo static which we had shipped to a friend in Launceston to save luggage weight when flying. I had never used this rope before so was a little nervous but the price was very good. For all the short pitches on the trip I have a shed full of old short ropes so we took 10 of those, it seemed a shame to plan to cut new long ropes into short lengths.

Due to weight issues when flying we booked accommodation every night so we didn't have to carry sleeping bags, stoves tents etc. it's the first trip I have been on where every night we had wide screen TV's, heaters, hot showers, washing machines, dryers a kitchen and a comfy bed.

Worried about the unrest with Qantas earlier in the year we booked on Virgin with the added benefit of 3kg more luggage allowance, I was pleased when we checked in to see both holly and my bags weigh in at 22.8kg

We flew in to Launceston, shopped, picked up our rope and drove to Mole creek and settled into the Mole creek holiday village. Sorting our gear Greg and I were the proud owners of the thinnest looking 9mm rope we had ever seen, looked like 8mm, hope its tough were my thoughts.

Our first caving day was a Sunday, as we drove up to the National Parks Field office I was wondering if this might be a problem, amazingly we were met by Brendan who was in the office and expecting us, in all my dealings with the national parks office at Mole Creek they were extremely efficient & helpful . ½ an hour later we had keys to 4

fantastic caves. My mate Stephen Bunton had initially planned to join us on the first day and show us around but given the permit limit of 6 cavers he wasn't allowed to join us. I didn't have much luck sourcing maps for Mole Creek so we were reliant on Steve's detailed verbal instructions "Go in to the cave, jump the fence at the stream and head upstream". Marakoopa is a tourist cave so we went to the ticket office and impressed the staff there with our knowledge and experience by asking if they had a map of the cave, the guy behind the counter eventually found something that wasn't much use but we had a chat and he told us how he wasn't allowed beyond the tourist cave due to access restrictions, he almost had a coronary when he found out that this group of bumbles had permits for Kubla and Croesus as well.

After waiting for the 10am tour to head off we went into the cave and followed our precise instruction, we jumped the fence into the stream. Marakoopa 1 & 2 gave us three hours of very pleasant strolling up the stream way often through green shaded limestone with black and white banding. After about an hour we popped out on the surface then less than 50 meters away the stream emerged from another entrance allowed us to follow the stream further up the hill till we once again came out on the surface. A shortcut home over the surface was possible but we elected to reverse the cave. On the way out we discovered the right hand branch of the stream. Accessing this stream requires a 15 metre abseil from the tourist path which we didn't bring gear for. Something we will have to do next time.

Later that afternoon we went to Genghis Khan. It is mostly a very large chamber so we weren't too concerned about finding our way in the cave. We were confident that we could find this cave because we had a good directions "it's halfway up the hill to Kubla Khan top entrance, just as you feel a bit puffed there is a rock I put my hand on for a rest and a small gum tree. The cave is 80 metres right of the track." How could we go wrong, plus I had done this cave 30 years ago! I had written the directions down but failed to learn there was a new car park with 2 tracks leading off from it. When we pulled into the car park we headed straight up the hill full of confidence, we found the Kubla exit then searched the hillside for Genghis but gave up after an hour, as Jim walked down the hill he found the other obvious track and with Jim's superior memory from only 20 years previous he quickly found the entrance. It only takes an hour or two to explore Genghis Khan, you use a hand line to make your way down the entrance slope to the bottom of the chamber and where there is a small gallery with lovely straws and helictites.



2: Holly Wilson in Ghengis Khan and another internet Ghengis photo



The next day we went to Croesus cave, this for me was the prettiest cave of the trip. A stream flows out of the entrance and after a small 10m section where you need to bend over there is a deep pool that the sly Dads found a way around after the enthusiastic youngsters went for a swim. After these minor obstacles there is a 1km stream way where in many places it was possible to walk 6 abreast and hanging from the high ceiling are the most amazing straws, after several hundred metre's of wading up the stream way you come to the golden stairs which is a 15m high flowstone staircase that you climb to bypass a deep pool, further on you climbing over a large rock pile which leads to more pleasant stream way and once again a swim for the unwary, from here the cave gradually diminishes in size, we turned around when it looked we had to stoop over by this time the swimmers in the team were cold and keen to head out. On the way out we managed to negotiate the pools with no more than a waist deep wade. This trip is one of the best 3 hours caving you could ever have.



3: These photos of Croesus are from the internet



4: Thomas Blyde in Lynds Cave

That afternoon the group split Jim and Thomas went down to Lynd's cave for a few hours, it has a sporting entrance stream way a squeeze through a rock fall at stream level, cold and wet and of course more fantastic formations. The rest of us met up with Deb Hunter from Mole Creek Caving Club. Deb had volunteered to guide us through Kubla Khan. We quickly rigged the exit pitch for the cave then adjourned to the pub for a great meal and chat about the following day's trip into Kubla Khan. One of the worst things about the trip is that permits for all caves are for 6 people and for Kubla Khan you must have an approved cave guide from one of the local clubs this meant that one of our party had to miss out on one of the best caves of the trip. Jim volunteered to go walking for the day.

The next day Deb lead us for a 9 hour trip through Kubla, we did the most popular through trip, abseiled the three entrance pitches then traversed through the cave and exited up the 40m bottom entrance pitch. This cave has it all, the Opium den has exquisite small and fine crystals. Khan hall has Kubla Khan an enormous stalagmite probably 20m tall and 7m diameter and his army of large stalagmites that appear small and insignificant, the pleasure dome is a 100m flow of golden flowstone with rim stone pools that you tip toe across after you change your clothes and footwear. To finish a quick 9 minute splash down the river and a final climb up to the entrance chamber then a 40m prussic. The cave has many boot washing stations and the national parks and local cavers are doing a great job of keeping this cave in beautiful condition.

Mole creek was an excellent caving destination and having now built a good relationship with Deb from MCCC I intend to return soon.



5 From the internet, Kubla Khan



6 More internet downloads and the pleasure dome below





7: Thomas Blyde, one of the 6 abseils in Midnight Hole

The next day we drove 5 hours south to Ida Bay, we stayed at the rustic cabins at the Ida Bay Railway. In the area there are 2 horizontal caves Mystery Creek where the water enters the hill and on the over side Exit cave where a substantial river flows out of the entrance, on the hill above these caves are many vertical shafts. Our 1<sup>st</sup> objective was Midnight Hole a vertical entrance that joins Mystery Creek cave, this allows you to do a fantastic through trip. An hour's walk past an abandoned quarry then up a well marked track up the hill got us to the entrance. 6 pitches are separated by ledges or short passages, the cave is equipped so it is possible to do pulling the rope down behind you the last 50m abseil ending in a chamber with a small squeeze which is the connection into Mystery Creek. From here it's a pleasant ramble through big passage and a nice stream way to the entrance, this cave has the most amazing glowworms close to the entrance.

The following day we were hoping to do a cave call Milk Run but after an hours walk through the rainforest and 3 hours combing the hill side we had found lots of great entrances but not the cave we were looking for. A great access description was a little vague at crucial point and an incorrect GPS point meant we went home disappointed. It was a nice day in the rainforest and we were close but apparently the entrance is small.

The following day Steve Bunton and Sarah Gilbert from STC came down from Hobart for the day and took us for a trip through Exit Cave. Once again the cave starts with an hour plus walk through rainforest to find a sizeable stream flowing quietly out of a large cave entrance. A traverse using a fixed



8: Mark Wilson in the Matchbox squeeze connection from Midnight Hole to Mystery Creek Cave

rope around the entrance pool, then a short crawl and a gate and we were in the main passage. Exit cave is probably at least 20km long and a large proportion of the cave is huge passage. The local cavers over the last 4 to 5 years have been spending a week each summer resurveying the cave and they still are not complete. Sarah who knows the cave well took us on a 5 hour express tour of the cave. We got too slightly beyond the grand fissure and it was a great day.

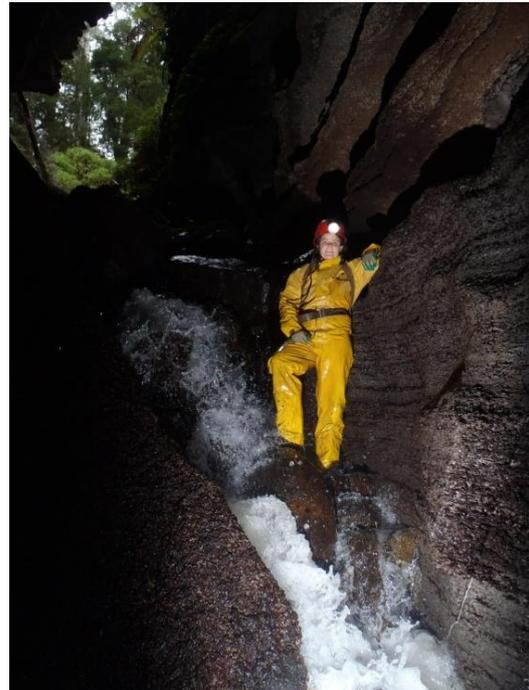


9: Thomas, either in Ghengis Khan or Exit??

That evening we drove to Hobart for a pub meal and then crashed at a mate's house. Jim and Thomas had to head home but Greg, Tamsin, Holly and I had five more days and were headed to Maydena next for some more vertical caves. After a resupply at the grocery shop, a pleasant lunch with Steve and Kathy Bunton at their home in Hobart, we drove up to Maydena about 1 ¼ hours NW of Hobart. Last time I was in this area it was actively being logged by APM and access was restricted. We had to sign in and out at the gatehouse. The area is still being logged but access is not restricted although you do need to get a few gate keys which we borrowed from STC.



The next morning we were joined by Petr Smejkal from STC and his mate Milos Dvorak. Our destination was the Slaughter House / Growling Swallet through trip. Growling is an extensive horizontal system that takes an impressive stream. Several vertical caves now link in to Growling, one of which is Slaughter House Pot. This cave is left permanently rigged as an escape route in case the Growling stream way floods whilst people are in the cave. A 20 minute walk from the end of the Eight road brought us to the entrance of Growling which is well named as the stream is noisy even in low flow. A further 20 minutes up the hill leads to the small entrance in a doline in a dry valley. The small entrance leads to a series of chambers and 4 abseils and a fixed ladder to the point where you reach the stream way. A delightful hour working your way back up the stream way brings you back to the surface at Growling's entrance.



10 Images of Growling Swallet entrance and streamway and one of 3 abseils in Slaughterhouse pot and a fixed ladder in Growling Swallet



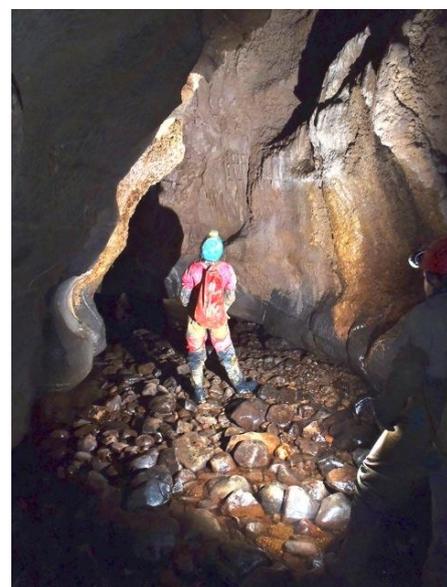
11: Steve Bunton in the KD steamway

The next day was to be potentially the best and toughest day of the trip a true test of Tamsin's & Holly's SRT technique. We were visiting Khazad Dum commonly known as KD and possibly the best vertical cave in Australia. The cave is 321m deep and has 13 pitches, 6 of which are in a lovely active stream way. Once again Stephen Bunton from STC joined us, this was extremely helpfully as it was over 30 years since I last visited this cave. A very accurate rigging list supplied by STC, so the afternoon was spent packing 2 full and 2 half full cave sacks.

The trip was all we had hoped for and took about 9 hours in the cave and an hour each way for the walk in and out. The first pitch is a 5 metre climb up, it has a fixed rope for the abseil on the way out but on the way in it is avoided by a bypass. Pitch 2 is short and simple. The 3<sup>rd</sup> pitch is supposed to be easily climbed and the most parties apparently don't use a rope on this so I didn't pack one, we sure wanted one and Steve's emergency 10 metre length of 7mm gave us a scary abseil /climb to a halfway ledge I then fixed a rope to let the girls abseil the rest of the pitch which I then dropped and completed the climb down.

So much for meticulous planning!! Looking at the map the next 3 pitches of 28m, 9m and 31m looked like they might be close enough together to use Greg's new 100m rope for the three pitches. It soon became obvious that the distances between the pitches was greater than I hoped so out came the knife and Greg is now the owner of three new but shorter ropes, quite a bargain I thought. From here we regained the stream way and things went more to plan, 6 pitches every one getting to the bottom with a few metres of rope remaining. Water levels were slightly up and on the 4th pitch and despite a redirection a quick abseil through the waterfall was unavoidable and cold. After the 6 small pitches the stream way crashes over the final 40m+ drop. Luckily you can escape into a dry oxbow "the brew room" and from here a dry 45m abseil down into the enormous final chamber. From here it is 10 minutes caving down a stream way and over mud banks to the sump 1. Cold and happy we turned around and began the prussic out. We were out of the cave around 7pm and an hour and a half later back at our accommodation the Maydena Chalet eating Lasagne in front of the heater.

The next day we had a sleep in and did a major gear wash, followed by a late afternoon walk up the Needles which had great views of the Thumbs and towards Lake Pedder.



12: Is this Mystery Creek??

Thursday was our final full day and we were keen to have a go at Owl Pot. Although 244m deep it was a much easier trip the KD as the entrance is only 5 minutes from the road and the cave only had 4 pitches with lots of “free depth” from steep walk downs. Once again we had great directions but initially missed the final road turnoff as it was very overgrown, a quick check of the GPS saw us back track and then test the capability of our non 4WD SUV, as we steeply climbed up a graveled logging road complete with lots of slippery moss and overhanging branches. The anti skid technology of the Renault got a work out but we eventually made it 2.5km up the hill and the motor and gearbox really didn't smell that bad after the workout.

After a series of tough caves Holly was having trouble with her arm and decided she couldn't prussic so decided to stay in the car, Tamsin decided to support her friend so she stayed as well. Greg and I did a quick 4 hour trip to the bottom. The cave has a very muddy entrance some steeply descending rift passage a short but lovely stream way and a very unappealing sump. Out of the cave before 1pm it was back to the Chalet for a final clean and pack. A 7am start the next day for the 3 hour drive back to Launceston airport, a quick repack at check to move some more weight in to the hand luggage and we

were flying home. It was a great trip, Tassie has lots of caving options to suit cavers of varying abilities and I am sure we will go back soon.



13: Mark & Greg in Owl Pot