

Tassie Caving January 2015

After a great Tassie trip in April Holly and I were keen to get back down south as soon as possible, after months of juggling family schedules and quietly scheming we managed to find 10 days in January. This trip we had a team of six again, Greg Tunnock by himself this time, Jim Blyde and two of his boys Thomas and Peter, Holly & myself .

Jim, Thomas and Peter got things started on their own getting to Ida Bay on the 5th of January. They started with a pull through trip in Midnight Hole out via Mystery Creek Cave. We had done this trip in April but as Peter hadn't been with us for the trip Jim decided this six pitch abseil through trip would be a great introduction to Tassie vertical caves, once again it was a great day out.

The following day they visited Old Ditch Road which is a vertical entrance to the Exit Cave system. This can also be done as a through trip but SRT practice was one of the agendas for the day so the boys abseiled in, spent a few hours exploring parts of Exit then prussiced out, another good trip however the very muddy section near the entrance didn't get mentioned in the cave notes, be warned. That afternoon Greg, Holly and I arrived, helped the guys clean some muddy gear and pack rope for the next.



1: Peter in Midnight Hole



2: One of many washing trips

Next morning the 5 of us headed off to Cyclops Pot, a very vertical cave with 5 pitches, and almost no horizontal development, its 190m deep and you are on rope almost all the time. The plan was to brush the cobwebs of our SRT technique and it was a good cave for this. The cave was explored in the 80's and even though a few extra bolts have been added over the years there was still a pitch or two that were difficult to rig safely especially with skinny 9mm ropes.

A cave I had always wanted to do was Mini Martin, this is another vertical shaft series that joins Exit Cave. We had found this entrance during our search for Milk

Run in April. A huge tree forms a bombproof belay for the 110m entrance pitch, abseil down 10 metres to a rebelay then it's a 100m free hang in a huge shaft down to a slopping rubble floor. This pitch is followed by another two 30m pitches then a steep down climb to join the Exit stream way. As expected the abseil in was spectacular and the prussic out was long and bouncy.



4: Going down, at the rebelay



3: After the prussic

The next day we were able to leave the ropes and harnesses at home. Stephen Buton and Geoff Wise from Hobart came down to guide us on another fantastic trip into Exit Cave. We walked around to the western side of Marble Hill to the Valley Entrance. A narrow rift with climbs and a few fixed ladders soon brings you in to some of the furthest parts of the exits cave system, a solid 5 or 6 hours caving saw us traverse several kilometres of exits great passages, highlights being big stals, tiny needle like crystals, massive passages, walking down a few kilometres of streamway. Eventually we came out the main Exit Cave entrance on the southern side of marble hill then a brisk hours walk back through the rainforest to the carpark.



After 5 days caving Thomas had to fly back to Sydney so we took the opportunity to have a rest day and shop, relocate to Maydena for the following week. Again we rented a house in town so we had a great base, comfy beds and warm showers. The first trip was to Cauldron Pot, a large diameter 40m entrance pitch beside a waterfall is followed by the notorious bills Bypass a steeply descending narrow tube,



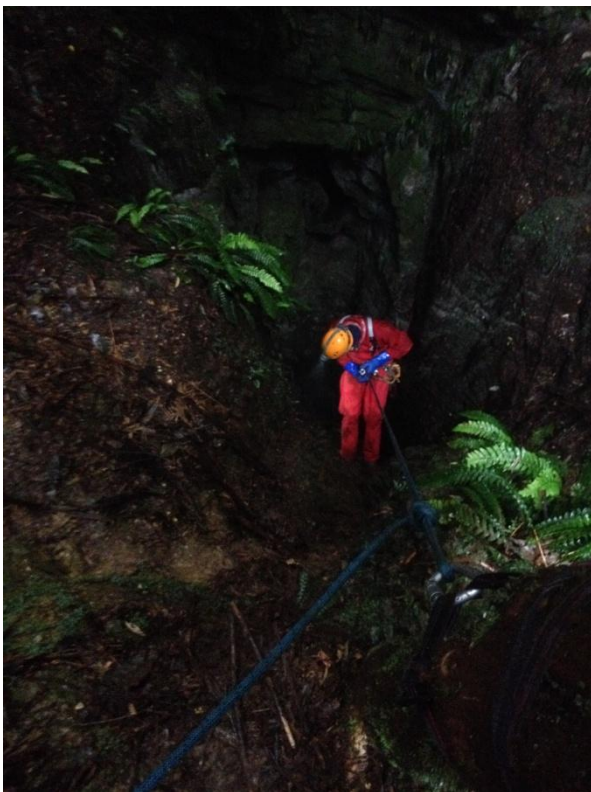
awkward to descend and a real workout on the way out. Once you exit the bypass you are back in the streamway and there are 5 great short pitches then a final 35m pitch takes you to a large chamber which used to be the end of the cave. A fixed rope allows you to prussic up a climb that leads to a large muddy passage then a long muddy flatterner then into a very impressive streamway. Water levels were low but it was still a fantastic bit of cave and with the low flow we managed to get down the fire hose pitch almost dry. Regrettably the cave ends shortly afterwards in a sump. It was a long trip out and the last of us got to the surface on sunset. An even bigger regret was realizing we had left the camera in the bottom of the cave



5: Cauldron entrance pitch



The next day was a rest day with a couple of hours spent down at the river cleaning ropes and gear then a drive to have a look at the big trees reserve and the Styx's River.



The following day we were off to Tassie Pot, another vertical shaft series. One huge appeal of Tassie Pot is the 2 min walk from the car which is fantastic compared with the usual 1hr to 1.5hr walk to and from the other caves in the area. 4 pitches of 42m, 24m 18m and a final big 71m deposit you in what used to be the final large chamber. In the 80's SUSS found a crawl connection to a small stream that can be followed upstream and downstream, we had a good time poking around in this, then we headed out early enough to clean gear and pack for the following day.

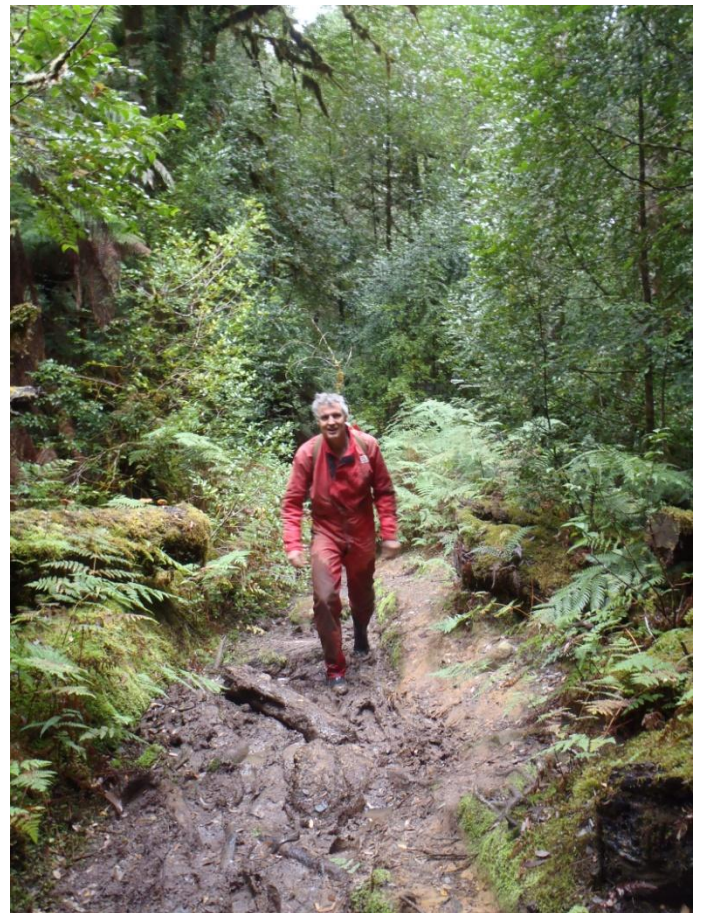


6: Peter on Tassie Pot entrance pitch

After more than a week of perfect weather the next few days brought heavy rain. Jim and Peter were a bit burned out after 7 caves in 9 days and were ready for a rest so they opted for a walk and an ice cream. For Greg Holly and I the plan was to visit Serendipity a cave I had a few attempts at before. The cave was discovered by the Eberhard brothers from Hobart, a few friends and I were invited on an early push trip to continue the exploration, the first day we rigged the cave and pushed onwards till we ran out of rope near the 4th pitch, going back the next day to continue the exploration we punched a hole in the cars petrol tank and had to abandon the attempt, later the local cavers returned to bottom the cave. Several years later on another trip I couldn't get in the entrance as an overnight downpour later trip the entrance series was taking so much water we couldn't get in to the cave, so after so many failed attempts I was keen to get to the bottom of this cave.

Greg, Holly and I had a slow 1 ½ hr walk in the rain, we lost the track in a tree fall and scrub bashed following the GPS to get us to the entrance. The cave was taking a bit of water, we managed to squeeze in above the stream but were almost stopped at the first climb, in the end we rigged a rope on the climb to avoid getting a face full of water.

The cave has lots of horizontal development, 5 pitches that require careful rigging using lots of naturals and a few bolts are over 30 years old. We abseiled down the last 40m pitch using a 50m rope, I ended up on a ledge with no more rope still 30m of the ground, I was cursing leaving the spare rope on the climb at the entrance. A quick consult of the notes showed we had abseiled down the wrong shaft so prussic back up pendulum across the shaft and back down the other side saw me on a ledge with ½ a metre of rope to spare. From here it was a confusing climb down through boulders to join the streamway and visit the downstream sump and the upstream ending. It was nice to get to the bottom of this cave after so many years. It was a long hall out then a long walk through the rainforest back to the cars, home about 1-30 in the morning feeling tired but happy.



No surprise the next day was a rest day, the usual washing trip to the river wasn't necessary as the tiny creek in our backyard was now knee deep.

For our last cave we had planned to do an Ice Tube through trip. This cave is very vertical and lower pitches catch a lot of spray from waterfalls. 10 metres above the floor of the final waterfall is a small squeeze connection that takes you in to the Growling Swallet system from here the way out is very complicated, in places muddy and flood prone. I had convinced Alan Jackson and Petr Smejkal from STC to act as guides to ensure we could find our way out as there was no retreat if we got lost as we planned to do a pull down trip, canyon style.

Despite all the rain Alan and Petr arrived full of enthusiasm. A quick gear check and we headed off. After a half hour drive over logging tracks we started the walk in, as we approached Growling Swallet, the well named cave that we were hoping to exit out of we could hear the stream way roaring and going a few metres into the cave we could see that the water level was so high that travelling in the stream way was too dangerous and there was a good chance that sections of the cave would be sumped. Disappointed it was time for plan B. On our Easter trip we had got into the Growling system via Slaughterhouse pot, this is a backdoor that gets you into Growling on the far side of one of the flood prone sections. So we decided to zip down the three pitches and have a look. Once down in the horizontal section we explored some nice high level passages so dry stream passage which had a nice stream in them that day and when we went further into the cave system towards Ice Tube it wasn't long and before water filled the passage.

It was very eerie looking at the flooded cave knowing that if we had gone ahead with the trip as planned we would have abseiled down all of those pitches, been wet, cold and sitting on the other side waiting for the water level to go down. We turned around and tried again in the other direction past our ropes towards the Growling entrance and sure enough it was flooded also. It was time to prussic out and a few hours later we were back at the house.

It had been another great trip, disappointing not to get to do Ice Tube but it gives us a good excuse for another Tassie trip.