



Caving in Tasmania

Caving in Tasmania is loosely separated in to the North and the South.

The North, closest to the conference venue, includes Mole Creek, Mount Cripps and Gunns Plains and boasts some spectacular caves, highly decorated chambers, meandering stream passages, and there is some big stuff. The caving is largely horizontal but there are some vertical opportunities also.

The South encompasses Ida Bay and Junee-Florentine. Down south, well, they like a challenge. Think deep, think technical, and think sporty.

Tasmania's caves are generally cool to cold (7-9°C) and are often very wet, for this reason the caving can provide some different challenges to caving on the mainland. Please ensure you read the advice and descriptions and come prepared for the various challenges.

Mole Creek (Northern Tasmania)

Mole Creek is considered a premier caving area in Australia. Most caves are reasonably easy, however many involve much longer days, colder (9°C) and often much wetter conditions than most mainland caving. Most of the caves visited on the field trips are very well decorated, but some are offered mainly for the 'sport'.

Considerations:

- It is strongly advised to wear thermal long johns and a polar fleece top (i.e. layers that will keep you warm when cold and wet), preferably with a cordura oversuit. Although cotton cover-alls were used by Tasmanian cavers for years, a more mud and water resistant outer layer is more comfortable.
- For any vertical trips, please ensure your SRT skills are very competent. Given the cold conditions and the often impeded/limited communications at pitch heads you must be capable and independent, and prolonged ascents/descents can impact not only on your safety but others.
- For some caves we recommend a full wetsuit.
- For Kubla Khan Cave you will also need a change of soft soled (non-marking footwear) and a thin wetsuit is recommended for the final 12 min wade, but many of us 'tough' Tasmanians wade this in winter snow melt just in thermals!

To help you prepare and prioritise the caves in Mole Creek you may be interested in our cave classification system. The table includes an estimated trip duration. Times are based on car to cave and return; the times vary according to group size and on additional time for some photography. For certain caves, if there is a demand we will operate specific photographic trips on the post-conference field trip. Consult the extensive legend at the bottom of the table to understand what a specific cave has to offer and what challenges are involved.

Read the Cave Classification table carefully before you commit to any particular trip.

Mole Creek Cave Classification Table:

CAVE	CAVE #	TIME (h)	CATEGORIES
Croesus	MC13	4 to 8	W++, T, D+
Lynds	MC14	4 to 7	W++, T, D+
Tailender	MC64	6 to 7	W, V, C, D+
Kohinoor	MC114	3 to 5	C, S
Diamond	MC6	2 to 4	C, S, D
Kubla Khan	MC1/29	9 to 12	V+, W++, C, D+, L
Genghis Khan	MC38	2 to 4	C, D+
Hailie Selassie	MC10	2 to 3	V, D
My Cave	MC141	3 to 4	D, W
Baldocks		2 to 3	D, S, C, M
Sassafras:	MC96	3 to 5	S, W, D
Marakoopa 1 & 2:	MC15/120	4 to 6	W, D
Devils Pot/Anastomosis	MC130/131	6 to 8	V+, C, A, L
Execution Pot	MC4	4 to 6	V, A
Horries Hole	MC26	4 to 5	V, C
Black Shawl/Spider Complex	MC46	5 to 6	S, D, A (or car shuffle) W
Hangover/Flyover	MC338/222	5	V, M, S
Mersey Hill Cave	MC75	6 to 8	C D L V W+
Gunns Plains : beyond show cave	GP1	3 to 5	W++, D+
Great Western (Gunns Plains)	GP27	2 to 4	D, S
Honeycomb	MC84	1 to 3	S (optional), C
PhilRod & associated (Mt Cripps) – long walk to caves	CP37	6 to 8	S, L, D, A, (V may be offered)

LEGEND

A:	Walk to cave entrance more than 2 km		due to large water/wind flows seem much colder
C:	Challenging free climbs involved: not too technical	V:	Vertical pitch (es): full SRT skills required (abseiling and prusiking)
C+:	Challenging technical climbs	V+:	Vertical pitches with re-belay/re-direction
D:	Reasonable speleothem decoration	V++:	Multi pitch with re-belay/re-direction, some long prusiking, challenging
D+:	Extensive speleothem decoration	W:	Water, may be knee deep
L:	Longer than 5 h for trip: allow adequate batteries and food	W+:	Water, up to thigh deep, may involve wading
M:	Considerable mud involved	W++:	Water, very deep, full immersion required: thin wetsuit recommended (only for wading)
S:	Some squeezes involved		
T:	Temperature noticeably cold: although Tasmanian caves average 8-9°C, some caves		

Mount Cripps (North West Tasmania)

This little visited area is quite unique: the only area of Polygonal Karst with temperate Rainforest covering in Australia. It is situated in the Reynolds Falls Nature Recreation Area managed by Savage River Caving Club (SRCC). It has little visitation apart from members of SRCC and invited guests as we consider it a study area rather than a recreational area.

Both trips involve steep slopes and untracked ground, walking in the rainforest. A reasonable level of fitness and experience is required. You will need a reasonable-sized daypack, personal gear and first aid kit, water container, food and wet weather gear, lightweight caving clothing, gloves, helmet and light.

Southern Tasmania

Southern Tasmanian caves (Ida Bay (IB) and Junee-Florentine (JF) karst areas) are generally deep, vertical and often wet (>90% of Australia's caves deeper than 200 m are in these two areas). The majority of caving available requires fitness and technical skill levels well above caves on mainland Australia and this should be considered when determining field trip suitability.

Both sites are approximately 1.5 h drive (south and west respectively) from Hobart (which is 3 h drive from the conference venue in Devonport) and are not achievable as day trips from Devonport. All trips are achievable as day trips from Hobart but if consecutive days are planned then accommodation options in Ida Bay and Maydena should be used. Accommodation in Hobart, Ida Bay or Maydena will not be organised by trip leaders and is the responsibility of the participants. Transport from Hobart to IB and JF with trip leaders may be possible and will be discussed on a case by case basis. All IB trips are possible using a 2WD vehicle (some gravel roads required). Most JF trips are possible using a 2WD vehicle (gravel roads required) but a higher clearance or 4WD vehicle is preferable and required in some areas after rain). Sharing of travel/fuel costs is expected.

Due to the travel distances required from Devonport to these areas and the challenging nature of most of the caves a set programme of dates, number of trips etc. will NOT be provided. All trips are via pre-conference expression of interest only (EOI) – potential participants will be vetted and directed to appropriate trips and dates that suit the participants and the guides chosen. Consideration will be given to leading trips to alternative caves if specific requests are made.

Clothing, footwear and other personal equipment required is to be discussed with trip leaders during the EOI phase. All ropes will be supplied by STC (generally 9 and 9.5 mm diameter) and a rope use fee will be payable.

Ida Bay (Marble Hill, Southern Tasmania)

Ida Bay is located approximately 1 h 40 min drive south of Hobart on the edge of the south west wilderness area (i.e. weather is very changeable, even in summer, with high 30°C temperatures one day and snow the next a common occurrence). The karst area is characterized by a large horizontal 'master' system of caves at base level (Exit Cave and Mystery Creek Cave) with numerous vertical pot/shaft systems up to 220 m deep on the hill above. Several vertical caves connect to the horizontal system below allowing long through trips.

Access to most caves involves medium walks (40 min to 1.5 h) on poorly maintained tracks through thick vegetation on often steep and slippery terrain. A high level of base fitness and competence is required just to reach the entrance of most caves (Bradley Chesterman and Loons caves are notable exceptions, located very close to roads).

The horizontal stream systems (Exit Cave and Mystery Creek Cave) can involve wading (swimming after rain) and water and cave air temperature is cold, even in summer (water temperature between 5 and 12°C and air temperature ~8°C). The vertical systems are multi-pitch (technical SRT rigging) with individual pitch lengths up to 110 m and require very good SRT skills and high rope climbing fitness but are mostly dry or 'drippy' at worst (you will be expected to carry rope to and in the cave). Through trip options (Valley Entrance-Exit Cave and Midnight Hole-Mystery Creek Cave) only require abseiling and ladder down-climbing and are a less physically demanding option for traversing a vertical cave.

You may wish to book at the Dover Caravan Park or Ida Bay Railway campground if caving in this area for a few days.

To help you prepare and prioritise the caves in Ida Bay you may be interested in our cave classification system. The table includes an estimated trip duration. Times are based on car to cave and return; the times vary according to group size. Consult the extensive legend at the bottom of the table to understand what a specific cave has to offer and what challenges are involved. Caves listed in order of difficulty (easiest at top, hardest at bottom).

Ida Bay Cave Classification Table:

CAVE	CAVE #	TIME (h)	CATEGORIES
Bradley Chesterman Cave – short, easy, horizontal cave (child friendly)	IB4-5-6	2	
Loons Cave – easy horizontal cave with vertical entrance option, VERY muddy	IB2	3-6	M, V, W+
Mystery Creek Cave – horizontal caving only with excellent glowworm display (front sections child friendly)	IB10	4+	A, W
Midnight Hole – Mystery Creek pull-through trip (160 m of abseiling over 6 pitches (up to 50 m) then horizontal caving out	IB11-IB10	4 to 8	A, C+, L, S, V, W
Exit Cave – lower sections only – large horizontal cave	IB14	4-8	A, D+, W+
Valley Entrance – Exit Cave through trip (long, mostly horizontal traverse of the bulk of the Exit Cave system	IB120-IB14	7-12	A, C, D+, L, S, V, W+
Milk Run - ~200 m deep pot hole	IB38	6 to 10	A, L, V++
Mini Martin – 200 m deep pot hole	IB8	6 to 10	A, L, V++

LEGEND

A:	Walk to cave entrance more than 2 km		due to large water/wind flows seem much colder
C:	Challenging free climbs involved: not too technical	V:	Vertical pitch(es): full SRT skills required (abseiling and prussiking)
C+:	Challenging technical climbs	V+:	Vertical pitches with re-belay/re-direction
D:	Reasonable speleothem decoration	V++:	Multi pitch with re-belay/re-direction, some long prussiking, challenging
D+:	Extensive speleothem decoration	W:	Water, may be knee deep
L:	Longer than 5 h for trip: allow adequate batteries and food	W+:	Water, up to thigh deep, may involve wading
M:	Considerable mud involved	W++:	Water, very deep, full immersion required: thin wet suit recommended (only for wading)
S:	Some squeezes involved		
T:	Temperature noticeably cold: although Tasmanian caves average 8-9°C, some caves		

Junee-Florentine (Southern Tasmania)

The JF is located approximately 1 h and 20 min drive west of Hobart on the southern flanks of the Mt Field National Park (on the edge of the south west wilderness area – i.e. weather is very changeable, even in summer, with high 30°C temperatures one day and snow the next a common occurrence). The karst ranges between 300 and 700 m elevation. The principal area of interest is the high relief eastern end with extensive wet vertical caves up to 380 m deep draining to large horizontal master stream systems. Some through trips are available but trips generally require significant rope climbing to exit.

Access to some caves involves medium walks (40 min to 1.5 h) on poorly maintained tracks through thick vegetation on often steep and slippery terrain. A high level of base fitness and competence is required just to reach the entrance of most caves (Welcome Stranger, Owl Pot and Tassie Pot are notable exceptions, located very close to roads).

Most caves are wet (minimum 'drippy', more often 'splashy' and sometimes 'torrential' – you WILL get soaked). Water and cave air temperature is cold, even in summer (water temperature between 4 and 8°C and air temperature ~7°C) but with strong air movement and constant dampness the caves

feel much colder. The vertical systems are multi-pitch (technical SRT rigging) with individual pitch lengths up to 70 m and require very good SRT skills (you will be expected to carry rope to and in the cave). Both through trip options offered still require significant elevation gain to exit (achieved via ladders and climbs) and should not be considered easy options.

Maydena is the closest town for accommodation options.

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Junee-Florentine Cave Classification Table:

CAVE	CAVE #	TIME (h)	CATEGORIES
Welcome Stranger – very easy, well decorated horizontal stream passage	JF229	2-4	D+, W
Growling Swallet – sporting active streamway (steep) with numerous unbelayed climbs and obstacles	JF36	4-8	C+, L, T, W
Slaughterhouse Pot – Growling Swallet through trip (~200 m of abseiling, rockfall and unbelayed rope ladder descent then free-climbing out GS)	JF337-JF36	6 to 10	A, C+, L, S, T, V+, W
Owl Pot – 230 m deep pot hole	JF221	4-8	C, L, S, V++
Tassy Pot – 240 m deep pot hole	JF223	4-8	L, V++
Khazad-Dum – 290 m deep pot hole with active stream	JF4-5	6-12	A, C+, L, T, V++, W
Ice Tube – Growling Swallet through trip (~350 m of abseiling then long horizontal cave out including fixed unbelayed rope ladders and climbs)	JF345-JF36	8-12	A, C+, L, M, S, T, V, W

LEGEND

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C+:	Challenging technical climbs	V+:	Vertical pitches with re-belay/re-direction
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S:	Some squeezes involved		
T:	Temperature noticeably cold: although Tasmanian caves average 7-8°C, some caves		