

“An Imaginary Trip Report” came out of my experiences exploring the Tasmanian bush and caves.

There were once many small scale mining operations around Tasmania where determined men and women extracted tin, osmiridium, gold and other minerals. Some of these places are partially preserved while most are being reclaimed by the bush. Searching out and rediscovering these sites today fires the imagination.

Searching for, or just walking to caves in some parts of Tasmania can be both challenging and rewarding. Trips may involve negotiating untouched ancient eucalypt forests with sections of beautiful rainforest, gushing creeks and impenetrable horizontal scrub. I sometimes feel I shouldn't be surprised to catch a glimpse of a Tasmanian Tiger slink off into the scrub as I pass.

Of course some of Tasmania's caves are well known for their spectacular chambers and speleothems. As cavers we dream of finding more such amazing caverns or the 'master cave'.

In “An Imaginary Trip Report” I've allowed myself to experience a little of all of this.

John Oxley. August 2021.

## **An Imaginary Trip Report**

'twas a Winter's day in twenty twenty  
with Covid lockdowns 'round a plenty,  
but we in Tassie mostly free  
to wander where we pleased to be

So instead of living in despair  
I thought I'd get myself some air  
and take a walk among the hills  
as an antidote to Winter's chills

Now, long ago I'd heard a tale  
about a place along a trail  
where miners in the past had found  
the treasures hidden in the ground

In their time and for their toil  
great wealth they dug out from the soil,  
but the little town that was their host  
is now no more than just a ghost

But whatever did they leave behind?  
Perhaps some relics I could find  
to hint at how they spent their day  
and worked so hard to earn their pay

I searched the map and gained a clue  
about a route to take me to  
this place out in the wild blue yonder  
but with daylight short no time to squander

So early morning off I set  
through the forest lush and wet,  
the little stream in dappled light,  
hurried on as fast it might

Along the track with twists and turns  
past regnans tall and tiny ferns  
with ancient myrtle branches bent  
and sassafras gave up its scent

With bryophytes across the ground  
and Blechnum minus all around,  
on rotting logs the fungi blue  
and all the other colours too

So on I went but then I saw  
the trail I followed was no more,  
I must have missed a vital turn  
or marker lost in last year's burn

I pushed along so not to worry  
there's plenty time, no need to hurry,  
I'd walked quite far, good time I'd made  
then chanced upon a grassy glade

The sun was warm, I thought it best  
to take some time to have a rest,  
to eat some food and drink a sip  
or just lie down and have a kip

So down upon the grass I lay  
but suddenly, to my dismay  
something made me look around;  
a man appeared without a sound!

He was old and gnarled with features rough,  
he'd clearly led a life quite tough,  
his skin was tanned, his beard was white,  
but his gait was strong, and his eyes were bright

Then on a nearby log he sat,  
I saw he wore a battered hat  
and hobnail boots I also saw;  
the kind old miners often wore

A moment passed and then he spoke,  
perceptive words from such a bloke;  
"I think those clouds will bring some snow.  
"I've seen before, I ought to know"

We talked a while 'bout nothing much,  
'bout life and times and other such,  
but then one comment caught my ear;  
he said he knew a cave quite near

"A cave", I thought. Now this was good.  
So I asked him kindly, if he would  
lead me there so I could see  
where this secret cavern be

So off we set to find this place  
each moving at a spritely pace.  
We walked through creeks and over rills,  
we skirted rocks and climbed up hills

We waded swamps with croaking frogs,  
we climbed 'round stumps and over logs.  
To cross a lake we built a boat  
and plugged with wax to make it float

Sometimes the scrub was awfully thick  
with no way on that we could pick.  
So we climbed a tree to get some height  
to see our way as best we might

We followed ridges through the bush  
and in horizontal scrub to push  
we came across a devil's lair  
and Tassie tigers everywhere

Then half way up a mountainside  
(where caves like ours prefer to hide)  
we came upon a rocky bluff  
with roots and vines and other stuff

But my disappointment was intense  
we'd come this way at great expense  
and now we'd reached our final goal  
to find a little wombat hole

I said to Tom, ('cause that's his name),  
to come this far is such a shame.  
But Tom was strong, he did implore  
me go inside and to explore

He said he'd been here once before  
but never in the cave he saw  
beyond the entrance rocks so tight  
because he didn't have a light

So in I squeezed 'tween narrow rocks,  
over pebbles, under blocks,  
then in a while the passage grew  
'till I was sure of getting through

I moved along a vadose bed  
where long ago a stream had led  
and all the walls were gleaming white  
with crystal sparkles from my light

But then I thought I'd seen the end  
No, wait! there's more around the bend  
and then the passage opened wide  
with decoration side to side

I came upon a great big room  
with crystal flowers full in bloom  
and 'tites and 'mites on roof and floor,  
with helictites and straws galore

Up high on walls there rippled down  
translucent shawls; white, tan and brown,  
then on the floor a little nest  
of oolites showing off their best

And all along protruding edges,  
glowworms hanging from their ledges,  
dangling down a sticky line  
for passing insects to entwine

Then on the ground with frozen features  
lay the bones of ancient creatures,  
all were species long since passed  
now preserved in calcite cast

And over on the other side  
a little stream its course had plied,  
spilling over gours and pools  
to make a million sparkling jewells

The stream had come from parts unseen  
with just a hint of fluorescein;  
a measured dose of dye injected  
to further downstream be detected

It then continued down a pit  
and when in time the bottom hit  
it made reverberation loud  
and billowed mist up in a cloud

But without a ladder or a rope  
of getting down I had no hope,  
so I left it for another time  
or someone else to risk the climb

And all this while I never saw  
a single footprint on the floor,  
nor broken straw or carbide scrawl  
no survey marker on the wall

Then while I pondered this huge space  
I felt some water on my face,  
it wasn't from a stal' up high  
but a raindrop from the sky

It seems that I had been asleep  
while dreaming of the cave so deep  
and when I lay down in the sun  
this story in my dream was spun

Now in the west the sun sank low,  
the gathered clouds were dripping snow  
and breezes blew with icy chill  
that funnelled down from off the hill

I gathered up my things around  
that I'd left scattered on the ground  
and shoved them quickly in my pack  
then headed home along the track

But as I started on my way  
I spied an imprint in the clay,  
the pattern one could not refute  
was clearly made by hobnail boot!

So if you're ever out that way  
and bump in to old Tom, please say,  
you'd like to have him show you 'round  
to find some mysteries underground

And whether they are real or not,  
it clearly matters not a lot.  
As real our caves may always seem,  
who's to say they're not a dream?