
CAVE DIVING IN RIVER CAVE - AUG 3-4 2013

BY DEBORAH JOHNSTON

Participants: Rod Obrien, Rick Grundy, Keir Vaughan-Taylor, Michael Collins, Deborah Johnston, William Slee, Tony Le, Demi Klachos

This Saturday was an unlucky day for the SUSS cave diver regulars. Greg Ryan was away with a badly injured calf muscle, Keir was on strict order not to dive with an ear infection, and Rod Obrien was languishing through horrible dive withdrawals after a particularly persistent head cold.

Luckily, resident guide Michael Collins had a rare Saturday off, and had just had two of his tanks returned from test. Also Rick Grundy, an experience cave diver, had been convinced to return to Jenolan, to try jumping in the water to wash away two mildly traumatic dry caving trips he had endured there in the past. Phil Maynard was also coaxed into packing his dive gear for the trip, but it remained in the boot of his car as he was promptly stolen away by another group for some important Mammoth surveying business.

Rick was arriving Saturday morning so had been given a late arrival time to compensate for the inevitable pre-dive pfaing that occurs at the hut. When he arrived on time, he found a large group of eager cavers very happy to see him. . . well not him exactly. . . more like the big pile of SUSS ropes and ladders he had picked up on the way after a notorious member did his traditional last minute trip pull-out! The other cavers quickly snatched up the various bits of gear before flocking down to do Mammoth, Serpentine and Hennings.

Keir and Rod had a hole to check on the Southern Limestone, but promised to return at lunchtime to help the rest of us with the dive gear. As they trudged up the valley, the rest of us descended on the Southern tourist caves.

Michael is a resident guide at Jenolan and keen explorer, particularly interested in discovering more sections of the underground river. When we heard he had some hot leads to check in the tourist caves, Rick, Will and I quickly volunteered to lend a hand. We were well rewarded as we entered via Lucas cave, with Michael pointing out interesting features and historical notes along the way to the River Styx, where we left the tourist track through a small hole in the wall to search for new pathways to water and determine their potential for diving and future exploration. Guide Ted Matthews had described one such hole which we quickly found, but unfortunately it was not human size. The other section which had high promise was watery holes contained none. Nearby, I found an excellently decorated aven which had unfortunately sustained serious damage from careless visitors in the past. Much of this damage looks very old with new crystal growing over muddied sections.

After returning to the path Michael pointed out some rubbish in the pools (including his own name badge which had been dropped) and we exited via Baal in time to meet the others for a quick lunch and regroup with the addition of Keir and Rod, but loss of Will who decided walking the area was a smarter option than carrying tanks. Down to five we were considering carrying in two peoples gear instead of three (a difference of 6 bags versus 9) . . . but Rod told us to harden up and carry two bags each.



**Deborah and Rick gear up, Pool of Cerberus, Jenolan.
Photo by Rod Obrien**

By about 2pm we were down in the Mud Tunnels where a short climb and ladder takes you to a dry section of overflow of upstream and downstream Lethe. Rick is an experienced cave diver but this was his first trip to Jenolan so it was decided that we would do a familiarization trip before launching into the survey project. Rick went first and looked at home in the 13° water, taking off both tanks and slipping down the restriction. I had been through this section a few times now so felt comfortable trying it with one tank on, and to my surprise I got down rather easily. I followed and we soon passed a horribly gnarly section and popped out into larger passage with crystal clear water. We headed up the passage towards the first airchamber before turning back and finding Michael on the way who insisted he'd been down the restriction with both tanks on no problems despite our universal skepticism! Rick discovered that he had an excellent video of the first section of the dive, right up until his camera had flooded!

Rick and I then made our way over the short gravel bank and into the water on the other side to head in the other direction. We reached a section where most people take both tanks on and I attempted to show off to Rick by wiggling through feet-first with one tank on. He then slipped through easily with BOTH tanks still attached! We then quickly reached the section at 20m depth where a large, tight gravel slope starts. I had previously chickened out here and expected that we'd be turning around, but Rick plunged up the slope wiggling and willing his way through to the other side. I followed out in complete blackout putting all my energy into willing that the 20yr old line was in good condition as I couldn't make a visual check. We then pressed on through the aptly named "long, low, flat, horrible thing" with Rick leading the way through crystal clear waters, and me groping and grasping in the murk behind.



Rick emerges from Pool of Cerberus, Jenolan.
Photo by Rod Obrien

walking the right way. This was all done with our restrictive suits and heavy tanks still on, so by the time we finally found our way back I was feeling pretty stuffed with wildly protesting calf muscles. The others were relieved to see us as they had been expecting us back a little sooner based on our air supply going in. Happily, we were able to leave two bags of gear by the sump as we would be reusing it here again the next day. For an added boost on the way out we encountered another SUSS guide Tina Willmore who told her tour group how incredibly wonderful we all were as they took our photos.

On Sunday, Rick, Rod and I lost Michael to work and Keir to the Southern limestone, but we gained a new member Demi, a newish member Tony, and the triumphant return of William Slee. The group of 5 entered the cave via Orient which seems even more beautiful when you are going through in the downhill direction (as opposed to having just puffed up all the stairs with dive gear coming back out). We made our way down to the Pool of Cerberus which is currently closed to tours as they are replacing the lighting. We took advantage of this closure to hop in the pools and remove the rubbish that had accumulated, and retrieve Michael's guiding name badge. As we geared up the group admired the efforts of the petite Demi who carried a gear bag that I believe she could fit inside herself.

We also admired the extreme patience of Rick who geared up reasonably calmly despite an incessant barrage of niggly gear questions from Tony. We then strapped on a gopro video camera and began diving upstream where we first encountered a total bitch of a gravel constriction which we struggled through, leaving our group behind in a flurry of kicking and splashing. Just beyond this gravel bank we found some very old dive torches (believed to have been lost by legendary diver Paul Boler in the early 1990s), and a straw broom which Rick rode back out into the open pool to our unappreciative audience. We then swam back over to the twin bridges where we had exited the day before, and made our way upstream filming the long, low, horrible flat thing (which is a lot less horrible and long when you can see). We emerged at the mud tunnels just 12minutes later with our tanks still very full, but there was a mutiny to call it a day and get home at a reasonable time so we then packed up and exited.



Rick swims under the twin bridges removing rubbish.
Photo by Demi Klachos