
THE DREAMING WHITE HORSE

BY KEIR VAUGHAN-TAYLOR

Participants: Philip Maynard, Mel Stammell, Katrina Badiola, Deborah Johnston, Rod Obrien, Tom Short, Keir Vaughan-Taylor, Jack Wachsmann

Date: Saturday 8th October 2011

Divers: Keir Vaughan-Taylor and Phil Maynard and a support climbing team.

Support divers: Katrina Badiola, Rod Obrien.

Trip start: 11:00am



Start of Imperial Dive. Photo by Keir Vaughan-Taylor

We all then returned to the climb site.

With the scaling poles bolted together and erected into the lead in the roof Tom carefully ascended. The scaling poles were also supported from each side with rigging tapes to avoid slipping away from the desired position in the roof. We spent a long time getting this right so as to ensure the safety of our valued climber, Tom Short. The upper passage continued but presented a second scaling pole lead.

After making safe belay points in the upper chamber, scaling poles were hauled to the upper ledge and repositioned for the next section of climb reaching into a higher level. Exploration and further climbs connected to a short technical climb at the top. Above it looks to be a canyon passage? It is clearly delineated in the roof by a serpentine pressure tube and we are fairly sure, a large walk along stream canyon. Of course as with the Loch Ness Monster, just out of clear view. The usual element of doubt!

We curtailed the climbs because we were already late with our designated return time. A rope was fixed in at the furthest point of exploration and rigged for descent and as a means to prussic back in future. No need for scaling poles in future.

The aim was that a cave diving team act to support a climbing team to explore a pair of avens above the stream way just beyond Imperial river Sump 1. Diving with scaling pole equipment through sump one avoids the need to carry poles and equipment a longer way through the caves thereby reducing the time to transport gear and also protect the cave.

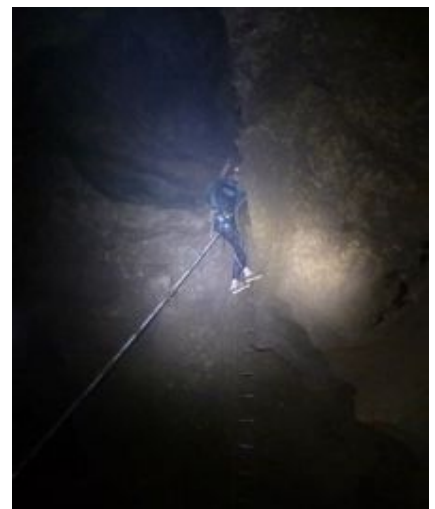
On a previous trip using the same dive plan, a lower aven was entered and followed some distance to termination of the passage. Passage above could be seen through a thin slot in the roof.

The first dive through the sump was uneventful delivering half the poles and a heavy bag of scaling pole bolts and brackets to the bottom of the lead.

The two passages in the roof are in an area of the caves where there is no other known caves. The closest tourist cave is Chifley but the map shows the position of the avens to be far west and north of known start of the climb.

The second set of poles were left on a ledge to be picked up on the second trip through the sump. They slipped off the ledge into the water and were for a short while lost. A search in a hole in the floor of the sump relocated the poles and were then also delivered to the climb site.

I waded upstream with diving gear to make sure the climbing team free dived Sump Two without any problems. After the usual trepidation about the cold and how far through and how far down and along the aqua group made it to the other side.



Tom Ascending Scaling Pole. Photo by Keir Vaughan-Taylor

After derigging we reversed the transport through the sump and the climb team returned upstream and out the cave.

At least we won't need the scaling poles again however... I have a copy of the original map of the Imperial Streamway by Ron Allum, Ian Lewis, Alan Grundy, Phil Prust and Robyn Allum 1979. Marked in the roof next to Sump 5 and Bell chamber is a note flowstone wall requires 5 meters of scaling poles.

Saturday, Sunday 14-15th April 2012

Present: Phil Maynard, Greg Ryan, Keir Vaughan-Taylor Bill Lamb, Tom Short, Lauren Harmsworth, Ashton East

Trip Report: Keir Vaughan-Taylor

Remembering our early years of cave diving at Jenolan, Far Country was explored by myself Patrick Larkin and Greg Wilkins. See Bull 29(3). Our transport techniques were awful but nevertheless Pat and Simon surveyed and mapped the passages on the other side. I suspected the surveys were not very good but a reasonable representation seemed fine for that time and I was most suspicious of the hook in the passage at the end that I didn't perceive in real life. Not surprising since we were focussed on other caving aspects.

The then Head Guide at Jenolan, Ernie Holland had always wanted a cave diving presence at Jenolan. All those blue pools and a group of people to who those secrets might be told.

One day Ernie gently suggested that times were changing and that SUSS cave divers needed in the fullness of time get formal qualifications. In those days qualifications were not so necessary but that was changing. Ernie was most diplomatic, and was, I imagine, having conversations with those in government; Sir Humphreys wanting a more formal set of procedures and training schedules. I was tempted to resist the beaurocrat growth of rules and restrictions but even I, in my cowboy past, could see the nature of our future. Cave diving is one of those life experiences that is awesome and it wasn't something to let pass. Beside we might learn something.

SUSS secured a training grant from the University of Sydney Sports Union to bring a cave diving trainer out from England. At first I tried the author of "the Darkness Beckons", Martyn Farr, but he was unable at that time to run the course. He suggested one of his associates, Rob Palmer.

Rob promptly flew out to Australia running a cave diving course at Jenolan Caves. Rob was to run this course twice. He sadly died later in a diving accident in the Red Sea bending rules that he had just spent a number of lectures emphasising these were rules that keep you fit and well.

Rob had seen the picture of Simon McCartney apparently quite comfortable sitting waist deep in Sump 6. I spoke to Rob of the prospects of this lead perhaps with a sparkle in my eye. The walls of the sump deeply scalloped and alluvial gravels both indicated occasional strong water flows. Clearly a major water inflow to the main Jenolan River. Rob was entranced by this photograph. There were the flood and flow indicators and Rob, clearly imbued with summit fever, wanted to go and find the great cave that lay undiscovered on the other side. Ha! Hooked!

So off we went. Sump 6 at this time was considerably filled with gravel and to progress along the passage meant underwater digging, systematically pushing the gravels to one side in order to move forward. There is some relief dropping into the more spacious chamber at the bottom and even more surfacing in the passage on the other side. No wonder they called it Far Country. (Actually we called it that!)

As I surface on the other side Rob said "Fuck that is a tight bastard". To my dismay he then said "Oh by the way I have forgotten my second dive reel can you go back and get it for me".

Rob, used to the grandeur of Bahama's caving was uninspired by the tight passage of Far Country, nor the technique of sidling a hundred and fifty meters of passage holding the big heavy tanks we had with us at the time. Rob was actually unhappy with me about having mislead him about the cave size but for those of us not diving Bahama it seemed the cave size seemed fine. Rob made no discovery in the end sump. Bored with sump number we now called the "Dream of White Horses" a famous four pitch climb in the UK and slight reference to Rob Palmer's visit.

Years later Far Country was once dived by Dave Apperly and although he and his buddy pushed the sandy passages, and some digging undertaken, no dramatic progress was made. No-one else had been there since. Alan Pryke's discoveries in Rho Hole subsequently made Far Country very interesting once more. Alan's maps of the new extension in Rho Hole show the newly discovered extension being close to the regions of Far Country with likely hydrological connections implying water transport from the areas around Rho Hole, Alladin and Glass into the Imperial River. There is clearly more to find in this region and the hydrological behaviour is something unknown.

The journey to Far Country is difficult involving dive gear portage along to Water Cavern, down through the barrel along a crawl passage, a ten meter pitch, down a hole and more passage with a possible sump.

The cave passage beyond sump 6 is a twisting vadose structure often with a trickle stream flowing in its floor. The whole length of passage becomes more beautiful, water cleansed and decorated along its path, ending in a small electric blue lake. There is a visible passage a meter down leading off underwater on the left. So far there is no water body found at the the far reaches of the Rho Hole extension. The lake has been dived several times but the

way on is blocked, they say, by river gravels.

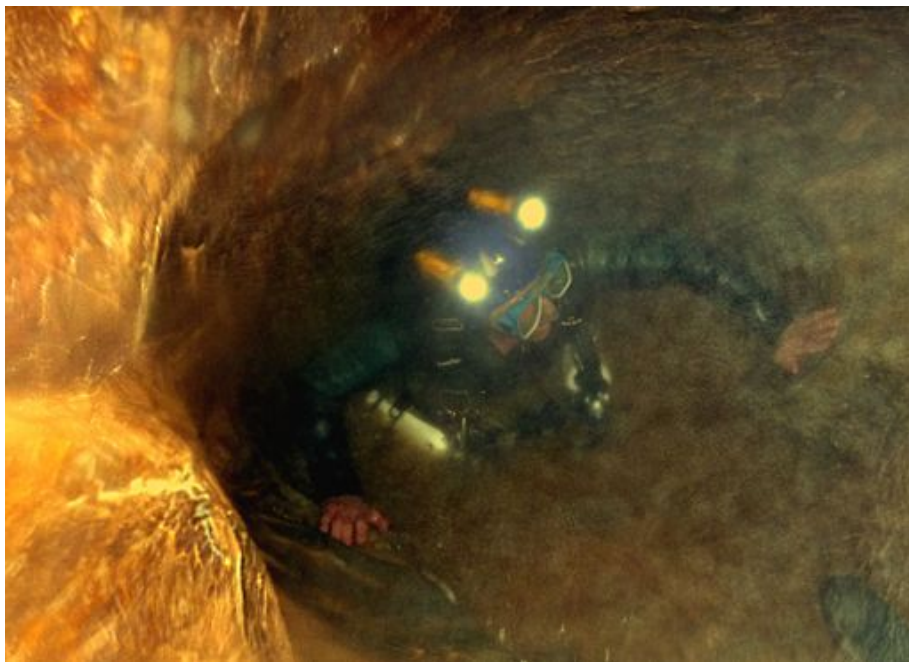
There were two previous surveys of Far Country one by Ron Allum and later Simon McCartney and Pat Larkin in 1987. We believe they used knotted guide lines for distance and cave diving compasses to take bearings in difficult circumstance. While our confidence in the Alan Pryke survey is very good, there may be problems with the Far Country survey done in extremely difficult conditions.

The current survey information renders maps that show a close connection to the Rho Hole extension but also an unlikely hook in the Far Country Survey, trending in an unlikely direction. For these reasons we wanted to re-survey Far Country and more correctly locate the the relationship of the two caves.



Simon McCartney, Sump 6, 1988. Photo by Keir Vaughan-Taylor

Sump 6 is tight but short. Greg stuck his head and shoulders into the opening and sank into the water. He would be the only person that would see anything. I followed with my bulky surveying package. As with our previous experience the dive space is tight however opens into a larger chamber about six meters down the tube.



Phil Maynard, Archibald Entrant 2012, Sump 6. Photo by Keir Vaughan-Taylor

Over three hours we surveyed our way back to the sump, taking care with the accuracy of our survey recordings. The last few legs were more difficult as the lens of the Suunto Compass persistently fogged up. Eventually I descended

Phil, Greg and myself finally organised our kit on Saturday morning entering the cave at 11:00. Previous surveys show the passages we wanted to survey to be about 150m and we expected to be out by about 8:00pm that night. Bill and Lauren helped transport the gear through the tourist caves into the barrel and to the dive site and thence were no longer able to help us. Bill would return to the passage from the outside if we were not out by eight o'clock.

Since the sump is very short Phil and I used smaller 3 litre cylinder pairs but Greg chose to stay with his standard 7 litre configuration. I had a somewhat bulky PVC screw top container to hold the survey instruments and that would be fun to push down the gravel floor. A nice Disto X would have been great but the only person with one of those is Alan who has no faith in the PVC screw top.

There is a chance there is something to find on the left but would mean getting out the reel clipping on and feeling around although there is maybe 15cm of visibility. So far the small diversion hasn't been investigated.

The exit on the other side rises across a flowstone with a vadose passage above also characterised with loose river gravel floor. The sound of dripping water can be heard in nearby passages but there are no holes or possible connections to water.

We proceeded to the furthest point in the passage to survey back towards Imperial.

Along the full length of the passage are small cat sized grykes and holes in the roof but no explorable passages. The only way on is through the Dream of White Horses Sump.

to unpalatably licking of the lens and blowing on it to convince enough visibility to see those bearings.

Eventually with the last survey legs connected to the salient reference points at Sump 6 we finished sketching the cave passage outline and returned back through the sump to the Imperial Streamway passages.

It had been a long day. We returned through the sump at 6:00pm and were still faced with the transport of three sets of gear back up the pitch to the long crawl to the Barrel room. This was a problem in that Greg had to be back in Sydney. We were tired and cold. In compromise we removed only Greg's packs to the Grand Arch finishing up at 7:00pm with a plan to return the next day for the remaining gear.

A few more helpers conveniently turned up Saturday night. Tom and Ashton thought we were going to revisit the rope hanging in the Imperial and did not want to be left out. We were extremely appreciative for the help getting the equipment back to where it needed to be. Some of the best caving company a person could have but...

All that enthusiasm meant I had to steel my weary body to venture in the Streamway and venture with the team with another bold push up the rope hanging forlornly in the Imperial River.

After removing the packs we returned to Bell chamber. The sump into Imperial was full and it was a breath hold. Along the Streamway to the rope there is a five meter breath hold and it was going to be cold. Nevertheless I plunged into the water but after walking some distance along the swirling waters of the Imperial Streamway I realised I was pretty cold.

I piked! Being trip leader, I declared, I was not in a fit state to run the trip safely and we were going back. To my surprise no-one argued and we returned to the Cavers Hut with our somewhat muddied equipment and the Imperial Rope project awaiting our brave hearts on another day.

Phil has since processed the survey data. To my surprise the Larkin/McCartney survey is good but with two small mistakes. Considering how hard the dive was in those days it was a splendid effort on their part. Their survey accidentally reversed two of their compass bearings and there will be a significant change in the final connection point.

The accompanying map is the result of Julia James surveys in the tourist caves, Alan Prykes amazing map of the Rho Hole extension and our contributory efforts in Far Country. It reveals significant relationships of the caves on the West Gorge Dreamtime Bluff, the tourist caves and Imperial.

The puzzle gradually assembles and there is more yet to be explored. The difference in height between the Dream of White Horses and the Rho Hole is negligible but separated by about 30 meters. The sump floor is sandy and doesn't silt easily and so has good conditions for surveying. I don't know how far it goes but a survey of even modest extent would give good indication of where to look in Rho Hole. Maybe there is a connection and may reveal the enigmatic roles of the caves of the Dreamtime Area.

Sydney Smith although likely to be the same hydrological entity, is 35 metres higher and so we need to explore for ways down in the Sydney Smith area.

Far Country

Jenolan, NSW



Legend

Stream



Lake, sump

Gravel

Flowstone

Downslope

Connection to Jubilee cave
up 15p, through barrel

