
CAVE DIVING TRIP REPORT 26-27 OCTOBER

BY KEIR VAUGHAN-TAYLOR

Participants: Deborah Johnston, Andreas Klocker, Phil Maynard, Rod Obrien, Keir Vaughan-Taylor

Special thanks to support team Bill Lamb, Aiden Lloyd, Scott Moores and Ted for his in-house support.

Saturday: Imperial Streamway Climb Participants: Phil Maynard, Greg Ryan, Keir Vaughan-Taylor

Expecting this time to be climbing into the attic avens I wore my caving suit over a dilapidated surfing suit and underneath were generous layers of thermal clothing. Knee and elbow pads are an essential when going light. I would only be underwater for at most five minutes and hopefully way up in the roof where the expected lead would take us.

Climbing gear, and various equipment we did not want wet, was packed in a waterproof drum and suitable loaded with lead to get a neutral buoyancy passing through sump 1.

Phil's brand new regulator packed at the edge of the Imperial Bridge Sump. A minor problem required tightening the high pressure hose. Usually I have a tool kit but being in light weight mode we had no tools with us. Phil had to leave the cave and find a spanner back at the car.

While Phil was gone Greg and I floated all our paraphernalia through the sump unpacked it all and positioned it under the rope hanging from the climb.

In time Phil returned. He was first up the climb and was the only person that could safely go into the upper regions because of possible falling debris. Greg and I waited in the river watching Phil's light make its way higher and higher into the roof. Phil would occasionally shout some piece of information but in the echoes it was impossible to hear what he said.

After a few hours he returned with the disappointing news that the tunnel had just terminated. He was completely covered with mud and so I could tell that this was not the huge passage we had imagined. Oh well! It had been a brave effort.

Saturday: River Lethe

Participants: Deborah Johnston, Andreas Klocker, Rod Obrien

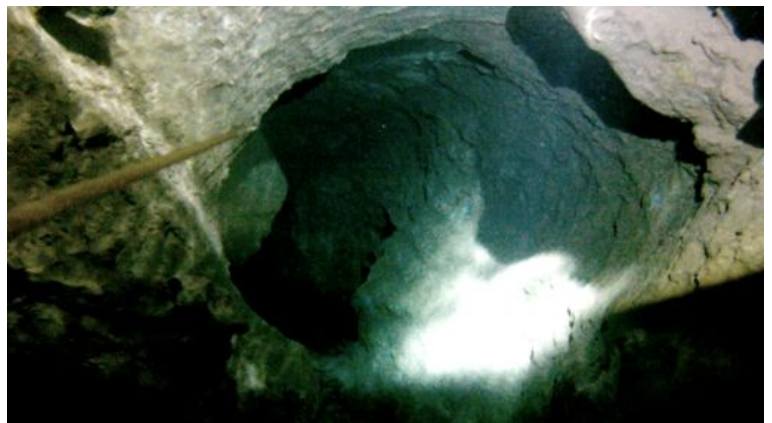
Previously, August 12th, Rod passed Lethe's vertical squeeze using a setup of lightweight gear. Michael Collins acted as support diver passing auxiliary tanks and other bits and pieces through the squeeze to him after he had crossed into a larger area beyond the squeeze.

Rod's examination was cautious, revealing passage developing into something more substantial and running off into the murky void. After establishing a route through the tunnel system coupled with various body positions within the squeeze, a dive plan was established. After spending a lot of time examining the passages, it was enough for him on that day. It was not until October they could get back and Michael couldn't make the later trip because of other commitments.

Apparent to everyone, our group was about to find the missing section of River Lethe between the Mud Tunnels and BlueTongue. This was something dive trips had focused on for years. The squeeze had



Phil Maynard, Imperial Climb. Photo by Greg Ryan



Lethe Squeeze. Photo by Deborah Johnston

been passed several times now and next trip was likely to be the breakthrough.

With the anticipation of new discovery Lethe was a favorite topic of discussion. There was considerable discussion about the Lethe squeeze around the kitchen table. In general it was felt that all the line, now somewhat old should be replaced with new orange 3mm, with past exploration blind routes taken out.

The squeeze didn't have a line in since it was originally thought to be a potential entanglement in the tight manoeuvrings that needed to be done. It was resolved to put a line in but take time to make sure it was secured properly and routed in a safe manner through the obstruction.



Lethe, Rod Obrien. Photo by Deborah Johnston

After establishing a safe route Rod began his exploration on the other side. Deborah and Andreas managed to film some of the manoeuvrings with a Go Pro video. The quality is poor, but one day in the future, may hold the quaint trapping of limited technology in the same way, we today, view Kodak's Brownie black and white pictures.

Rod laid line along a fairly wide passage. At times the tunnel surfaces and runs along a waste deep canyon similar in structure to the canyons found upstream from the far end of Barralong. In part there were rift passages rather than vadose canyons and broken with the occasional joints and kinks in the waterway.

The tasks on the journey require ensuring the tie off provides a return path in a complete visual blackout and so the first journey will take longer than return trips.

Downstream and upstream Imperial Streamway

Participants: Greg Ryan, Keir Vaughan-Taylor, Phil Maynard, Deborah Johnston

Greg has been doggedly surveying the Downstream Imperial. On a previous trip with Merv Mahr he did about eight survey legs but the results didn't match with a previous survey done by Ron Allum back in the 1970s. Ron's reputation is good enough that Greg sought to remeasure his survey legs again and just make absolutely sure his measurements are correct. In my opinion this is not easy in the murk and cold of Imperial.

We descended to the air bell from the WoolShed which is a chamber separating the main Imperial downstream sump and a 60m underwater passage back to the Imperial Bridge. Climbing down to the WoolShed Air Bell avoids disturbing silts passing through the first downstream sump from the Imperial Bridge. The chamber is not really an air bell because there are surface tunnels leading to the Devil's Coach House on one side and Imperial on the other but historically its get called an air bell.

Notwithstanding our silt reducing strategy, the water visibility was murky. In the confines of the small chamber, Greg summarized our procedure. He indicates a survey station and I hold the end of a survey tape on that station, hovering in the water while he reels out the tape to the next station. When he has recorded compass, depth, left right up down on a diving slate, two tugs on the tape signals that we proceed to the next survey station and repeat the process. Greg emphasized that the orange line should be the only guide to locate the next station rather than following the survey tape.

It might seem to be a dull way to spend a dive but on the contrary it can be relaxing giving time to take in the little things that you would normally miss. Just float and look at cave formation, evidence of flood action scalloping on the wall noticing current flows and formations evidencing a time when the passage was dry.

Without much swimming and movement it gets cold. After eight survey legs, I was starting to shiver so was pleased when Greg decided eight legs was enough for one day. We returned to the Imperial tourist bridge where Phil and Deborah were waiting to start on their upstream trip.

Deborah and Phil made their way to the fourth upstream sump and took a quick look round at Rubble Trouble. The group is still fossicking in this area hoping to find a more civilized route through the rock pile into Spider Cave rather than the current horribly small connection or the long route through Pirates. When Big Route is found it will revolutionize the diving exploration of Spider.

Returning to the Imperial tourist bridge we packed away all the gear keen to return on another day.