
TUGLOW CAVE DIVING TRIP REPORT

BY KEIR VAUGHAN-TAYLOR

Participants: Julie Burton, David Miles, Rod Obrien, Anna Ossig-Bonanno, Felix Ossig-Bonanno , Keir Vaughan-Taylor (TL, Support diver)

Arriving early Saturday morning the group rendezvoused at the Tuglow Fire Trail turn off. With the group together we moved on to Boss Peak to transfer gear to river-crossing capable vehicles.

A warm spring day saw our group back-packing dive gear under a blue sky to the Tuglow entrance, highlighted by sound of exited bird life. A family of peregrine falcons at Tuglow Bluff cried warning screeches alerting the world to our presence.

First pitch done we made our way through the rock pile rigging ladders and tapes down Ward's Chimney lowering dive gear to the streamway landing at the bottom of the chimney.

Rigging pitches and transporting the dive gear went quickly. We were hampered trying to find a recognisable survey location with which to connect surveys from the deep pool under the final waterfalls somewhere close to the end sump.

The survey descriptions, done quite some time ago, were described as Rock on top of pitch. Even with compass and clinometer bearings from the old survey for clues we couldn't be sure of finding the old survey points. We would have to guess where a survey station was based on the bearings from a pointy rock in the sump, to get a rough connection into the existing survey. All dodgy with the information at hand. Ian Cooper, currently working in Nimagee, was the lead surveyor at the time, and has the original paper sketch and survey notes from which we can most likely extract more information.

A team could return later and survey from the sump back to some definitely recognisable station, thus connecting into the existing map and survey with some accuracy.

Just prior to the obvious waterfall drops on the right side, a deep well like shaft nestles against the right wall dropping eight meters to water near the dive starting place, close to an underwater bridge from where previously laid dive line is tied.



Rod Rigging Wards Chimney.



Transporting dive gear down chutes.

Atop this shaft we found a stud placed by Andrew Pavey for his unpublished survey from the 1970s and this became our relocatable reference point.

Tuglow is in part famous for a superb clean washed, wandering streamway adorned with rimstone pools. Tuglow's stream bows out in a dramatic fashion cascading down to a terminal lake dropping through blue marble chutes pouring through and atop rimstone calcites textured in places with gours.

Gear contained in protective cave bags was passed down the chutes drenching helpers with the cold Tuglow waters. Water seems to find the opening in cave-suits at the back of your neck.

At the sumps edge Rod suited up and eased into the water. After making some sketches for the survey Rod commenced his dive planning to visit the end of the line.

He would hopefully record video on a Go-Pro then return to the natural bridge where the line is initially anchored and start a survey down the sump's vertical shaft.

As reported from dives many years ago, just underwater a small natural bridge arches across the top of a vertical rift shaft which silts immediately. This silting may improve if dived more frequently.

Rod followed the guide line to its end, noting a number of possible onward passages along the way. A Go-Pro camera was running during the dive hopefully recording passage features, leads, line status and interesting geology.

The rift widens on descent, somehow morphing into a more horizontal, flat geometry. The line, laid many years ago by Ron Alum, is in good condition without sign of abrasion.

In the floor a round solution tube sits like an ant hole dropping a further 4 meters, finishing the descent at 30m depth. An easily traversed horizontal stream passage harbours considerable alluvial gravel in the floor .

Rod found the end of the line tied back from the end of the passage, although the horizontal passage continues and can be seen constricted in the distance by gravel mounds.

Passing the constriction should be straightforward with a little time, but require another dive in the future. Rod's dive plan was to have a quick look and get a few legs of survey before starting back to the surface.

Rod returned when, after checking depths and times on his dive computer, he began the measurements to connect a survey leg from surface survey point to the line on the underwater bridge. A simple task that was confounded with the overheads of managing notebooks, pencils and survey instruments while floating in a pool under a waterfall in dive kit.

The dive to thirty meters and return to surface took only eight minutes. Surveying underwater was in contrast to be nearly an hour in muddied water, finally recording eight meters of underwater survey.

The first legs are the most difficult but longer legs will be possible on future dives.

The surveying only stopped because of the cold. Rod was not wearing gloves and, as with mostly motionless survey procedures, his hands reach a state of clumsiness, making the recording of data too difficult.



Rod finishes the dive, very cold.

Surfacing to get out, although very cold, he couldn't help giving a description of what he'd seen and done finishing with the statement; "It's an awesome dive".

On Sunday we returned to look for survey markers. Felix squeezed into the furthest possible realms of Trickett's passage reporting a promising breeze. Dave Myles had not been to Tuglow before, so Felix escorted Dave to the top of the upstream waterfalls, and then back down, for a swim upstream to see the underneath of the main water plunge.

Rod and I returned to the vehicles, changed out of our wet cave suits, sat in our chairs in the Spring sunshine sampling some boutique cheeses, crackers and a beer, leaving Felix the pleasure of derigging.

(all photos in this article by Keir Vaughan-Taylor)