

## JF-341 Threefortyone

4 May 2019

Party: David Bardi, Stefan Eberhard, Jason Goldstein, Gabriel Kinzler, David Rueda Roca, Sandy Varin

After a long period of being unable to visit 341 due to summer fires and road closure, it was time to try to gain access to continue exploration from the last trip in November 2018. Once road access was granted, a two-pronged assault plan was formulated. The dry team consisting of David RR, Gabriel and Jason would continue with the digging assault that Alan had started on the September trip last year. The dive team consisting of Dave B, Stefan and Sandy would head to the furthest point of exploration and try to bypass a rock which was blocking the way on. All of the recent passage discovered last year would be surveyed as well.

### Dive team report - David Bardi

After reaching the gear-up area above sump one, the two teams bid each other farewell. The usual dive through sump one was executed, this time with two light packs of equipment needed for the exploration. After dekitting dive gear in the new section, it was wisely agreed that surveying should be conducted as the first task. With a dry Disto in hand, the three divers worked like a well-oiled machine surveying ... until the Disto stopped working after only six shots. A bit of fiddling proved futile and as our body heat seeped out of our wetsuit, the team decided to abort the surveying and move onto task two at the end of the cave.

As the dead Disto was stowed, a voice close by and the faint noise of tumbling rocks could be heard. Just around the corner, the dry team had broken through from above and the teams now engaged in conversation. Gabriel's boots could be seen dangling from the hole above. He had even visited the chamber we were in before struggling back up the muddy slope to the newly opened hole.

After a quick chat, the dive team pushed on to the end of exploration that had been achieved on the previous trip. The usual struggle through the sump two roof sniff, followed by the letter box squeeze and the birth canal vertical squeeze, was enjoyed.

Arriving at the obstacle rock in the stream way, at the limit of exploration, Stefan settled into a comfortable reclined position to observe Dave and Sandy set up to work on the problematic rock. Sandy shaved just enough of the obstacle so the team could slip over the rock and continue slithering down the stream. But, after negotiating another tight restriction just a few metres past our digging spot, a wall of impenetrable rock fall blocked the way on. No other option existed except to call 341 finished in terms of exploration beyond 341.

A weary dive team surfaced from the cave at 3 am for the 30-40 min trudge back to the car. Relieved that we now knew the outcome one way or another of the current project, yet disappointed that we hadn't broken through to master cave that probably lies beyond the impenetrable stream way rock pile.

Further trips now lie ahead to finish the survey, remove dive gear and derig. An estimated 300 m of new passage was discovered but will be confirmed in the future.

### Dry team report - Gabriel Kinzler

After leaving the divers, a short toddle took us back to the area suspected of connecting with the newly discovered passage past the first sump: a concealed, draughting, muddy slope with a drop on the other side, located between stations 226 and 227 on Jeff Butt's map (*see SS428, p. 10*). On a previous trip, Alan Jackson and Serena Benjamin had established voice contact with diver Dan Mitchell through that feature, and on a subsequent trip in October 2018, we made additional yet slow progress chipping away at rock.

Determined to fertilise the egg, I got to work with faithful companion David RR as my assistant of the day, while Jason went on touristising the big specky chamber further on. After removing a decent amount of rock at the choke point and creeping down the increasingly narrow slope inch by inch, I finally managed to break through, swiftly jumped on a munter-hitched David and slid through the narrow gap, aided by some mightily lubricating mud.

The other side was a 45° slope covered in said mud, with very few features to grab or stand on (a problem I'd discover on my way back up). At the very bottom of that slope I immediately found pieces of string line: as expected, it was the actual emergence point of the sump. I had a quick look around the stream, found a cairn left by the divers, then struggled back up my human belay. Shortly thereafter, Dave, Sandy and Stefan emerged from the sump, we conversed amusedly, and they carried on with their own mission. It felt like making a quick cameo in someone else's movie.

Before leaving, I got rid of another big blockage in the floor to make future crossings more comfortable and installed a set of two bolts and hangers on the right-hand side of the narrow slope in order to rig a Y-belay. A 20 to 30-metre knotted rope is enough, bringing an ascender is not imperative, but possibly a welcome aid.

I do realise it isn't an ideal bypass of the sump (especially with a pack), but it works upon reasonable effort, and it opens a real way for dry cavers to enjoy what could previously be witnessed only by a select few. Unfortunately, now that proceedings seem to have halted, it does feel like a lot of work for nothing. But for me personally, it was extremely valuable experience to garner. And who knows, maybe we'll see something the divers didn't, when we return one final time?



*Hot soup fixes everything.*

*Photo: David Rueda Roca*