

JF-387 Porcupine Pot

6 January 2018

Stephen Fordyce

Party: Andreas Klocker, Stephen Fordyce, Petr-the-machine Smejkal, Fraser Johnston, Han-wei Lee, Anna Ekdahl

While the rest of Australia experienced a record-setting heatwave, some of the usual suspects and a few new ones made our cold and miserable way to the far upstream sump of Porcupine Pot for a dive attempt, and of course some filming for the *Tartarus* documentary (check out the trailer at <https://www.tartarusfilm.com/>).

We made good use of the advance order of TFM-spec caving bags from Aspiring Safety to transport an impressive amount of gear to and from the sump.



A happy-looking pre-caving party

Photo: Stephen Fordyce

Andreas's dive wasn't successful due to silty conditions - low water conditions meant that the water was clear, but the flow coming out of the sump (if any - might have been seeping through elsewhere) wasn't strong enough to wash away the suspended silt generated from a quick foray and return for more weight. Andreas reported the silt was rolling down the gentle slope ahead - he felt around trying to get through it but with no luck.

We were 13 hrs underground, with a slow trip out laden with all dive gear (except fins and weights) and a broken cameraman. Fraser Johnston also set a world record for the most whinging ever on his way out. His caving bag stood up well to some spectacular verbal abuse.



Somewhere along the way

Photo: Stephen Fordyce

IB-131 Old Ditch Road (ODR)

7 January 2018

Janine McKinnon

Party: Nicole Baillie, Tim Featonby, Janine McKinnon, Grant Rees, Ric Tunney

Tim was down from the mainland to do a cave diving project with me and I thought we'd give him a little taste of Tassie dry caving whilst he was here. Nicole was his partner, and a member of FUSSI like Tim. ODR seemed like a good choice for cavers who hadn't caved in Tassie before. This was to be the second time we had done this cave as a pull through trip. This time we decided to avoid the P-hanger on the first pitch (which is placed in a very poor position) and rig from the window directly above the second pitch. This makes for much easier access to the second pitch head. However, the only safe and suitable rigging point was around a fairly oblique corner. We decided to leave a permanent tape around this natural and run the double rope through a ring on the tape. The rope was rigged with double butterfly knots, so it was not in a state for a pull down (also not possible for the abseiler to go down the wrong side and kill themselves - never say I don't learn lessons). The tail on one end was also tied into one of the P-hangers on pitch 2, as a loop to aid with the passing of the now-rebelay at the second pitch-head (clear as mud?). Two ropes tied together were used for the 38 m second pitch (and the similarly-sized fourth pitch). This proved to be a better way to do this first pitch, and transition to the second pitch. The best solution (even for SRT return trips) would be a new bolt in a much better position on this first pitch.

All descended this with not too much trouble. However, when I came down last (using a rack), I took out all the knots on the first rope to make for as little friction as possible on the pull down. I descended to the top of pitch two and tried to pull pitch one rope down. Alas, this proved impossible. You can blame weak, old woman muscles; however, I think serious friction was in the mix there somewhere too. I finally abandoned the attempt and left the rope to be retrieved from the top on our way past the entrance at the end of the trip (which Ric and I did, plus removing the impermanent permanent tape).

All other pitches went smoothly, with pitches rigged as single rope descents using both P-hangers and me coming last and converting them to double rope (single P-hanger) pull down abseils.

We toured through the Ball Room, and through the main passage to the entrance at a leisurely pace. Water levels were very low. The gate was a little difficult to undo from the inside but not ridiculously so. We left a can of WD 40 on the inside, to partner the one on the outside of the gate.

Ric, Grant and I marvelled at the redecorating in the entrance area by the rock fall in recent months. It certainly means dry feet getting across the now non-existent pool and makes the steps up the wall redundant I would think.

We were back at the cars by 4:30 pm.