

JF-8 Junee Cave – Diving Sump 2

Richard Harris (CEGSA)

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Party: James Arundale (VSA), Dean Chamberlain (CDAA), John Dalla-Zuanna (CDAA), Richard (Harry) Harris (CEGSA), Grant Pearce (CDAA), Liz Rogers (CDAA).

Background

After a wonderful family tour around the Apple Isle, including a great couple of days visiting the main show caves at Mole Creek (King Solomon and Marakooa); I (Harry) headed out to Maydena with John Dalla-Zuanna (JDZ). There we met up with the rest of the group who were already settling in at the idyllic cabins at the “Giants Table”.



The participants: L-R Richard Harris, Grant Pearce, Jim Arundale, Liz Rogers, Dean Chamberlain, John Dalla-Zuanna.

Our main objective was Junee Cave (JF-8), which lies in State forest just outside the Mt Field National Park; only a very short drive from our accommodation. The cave is famous for its stunning dry chamber (“For Your Eyes Only”), which lies between the two sumps. In cave diving circles, it is famous for a few other things also: firstly its temperamental conditions (being prone to high flow, flooding, razor-sharp suit-eating limestone and frigid water), and secondly, its potential for many kilometres of new passage. When dye tracing in 1973 connected Growling Swallet to Junee Cave, the concept of the Junee Master Cave ... a 9+km connection was born.

But to temper our enthusiasm was the knowledge that South Australian divers Tim Payne and David Doolette had on two occasions (2002 and 2004) visited the terminus of sump 2 and failed to find a way through a breakdown area there (*Speleo Spiel* Issue 349 July-August 2005).

Anyway we decided to try and see for ourselves and regardless of the outcome, we wanted to experience the glory of For Your Eyes Only (FYEO).

January 4th 2009: Dive Day 1

First impressions for those in the group that had been to the cave before was that the water level was quite high. From the carpark to the public platform overlooking the cave entrance is about a 10 minute walk through the picturesque rainforest. The first job is to carry all the dive gear up the 100 m streamway inside the cave to the beginning of the first sump. The 7 degree water necessitates the use of

drysuits for any such activity but one soon warms up whilst battling against the flow.

On arriving at the setup area by sump 1, we were somewhat surprised to see a diver’s gear neatly laid out on the “beach”. The lack of a car in the carpark saved us undue worry but for a fleeting moment we wondered what might have happened to the owner! We quickly surmised it belonged to Dave Apperley, a Sydney based cave diver who said he may be in the area. It seems he had started diving but retreated for a few days once the water levels started to rise. During the course of our stay Dave came and went and in fact saved us a great deal of effort by repairing a lot of line in the majority of the second sump before we dived there.

Although several of the group planned to use rebreathers in the cave, all except Dean performed the initial first sump dive on open circuit. The thick line laid in the first sump is still in a good state of repair except for a few belays, which had broken or come loose (these were repaired). In order to protect the line from the intermittent high flow, it has been laid to guard against rubbing on the sharp projections. This means it doesn’t always pass through the best route for a diver to follow. Several line traps exist as the line passes flatteners especially in the first 50 m of the sump. Visibility varied between zero and 4 m for all our dives (obviously worse on exiting the cave, or following someone else in). In low viz conditions these line traps can cause some delays during exit especially. Dives through sump 1 consistently took from 15 to 25 mins depending on whether video was being taken. Flow was moderate initially but improved as the water levels fell during the trip. Temp 6.8°C.

JDZ and Harry dived through the first sump together and then walked to the end of FYEO simply to admire the passage and get a feel for the work involved to bring more gear through. Based on the size of the passage they decided using backmount CCRs would present a challenge in some of the flatteners but they should be passable (as Dean had proven). The rest of the group also came through without incident and everyone enjoyed a relaxing chat in the beautiful chamber.



Dean Chamberlain and Jim Arundale talk tactics in For Your Eyes Only. Above Dean and to the left, one can see an emergency depot amongst the flowstone.

January 5th 2009: Dive Day 2

Water levels fallen further today and weather perfect. Everyone dives through sump 1 and the 3 divers using backmounted CCR find the sump squeezezy but manageable. The group transported the 5 stage cylinders required by JDZ and the author to dive sump 2, up to the end of FYEO. Photos and video of FYEO were recorded and we all exited again via sump 1. A small drop in water levels was noted to make a large difference in flow in the streamway of FYEO. Dave Apperley dived sump 2 and spent considerable time repairing the line down through the deep section at 63 m. After working on the line he was short of time and unfortunately didn't get to the end. However this effort certainly paved the way for JDZ and I to dive the second sump the next day.

Dave reported the flow through the deeper restrictions was very high and quite difficult to pass.



R. Harry

Jim stands admiring the beauty of For Your Eyes Only.



R. Harry

Straws a plenty in FYEO. Truly a spectacular passage.

January 6th 2009: Dive Day 3

Weather holding up, river continues to drop. More video and stills in all areas today. JDZ and Harry hauled their rebreathers to the end of FYEO and the group kindly brought the rest of their kit. Sump 1 was becoming pretty familiar and comfortable. Regular sightings of depigmented brown trout were made, as well as white syncarids and shrimps.

JDZ and Harry set off for their second sump dive using the rebreathers. They used a trimix diluent to limit narcosis

and decrease the work of breathing at depth. Each carried 2 large bailout cylinders and a further cylinder of decompression gas was staged at 20 m.

The dive started with a 5-minute swim over silt dunes at only 5-10 m. The line disappeared into the silt intermittently. Multiple line patches were seen and really the entire line needs replacing at some point with thicker rope. The cave then descended steeply and the restriction known as the “Teeth” was clearly visible at 40 m. This presented only a minor obstacle and was easily passed. The entire tunnel was a single conduit with no side passages seen in the 4-5 m visibility. At 50 m the tunnel was flat centrally and on the right. On the left side it was scooped out and this was the obvious place to swim. However Harry found the flow to be very strong here whilst JDZ had a much easier time of it sticking to the middle. Through 62 m the maximum depth was passed and the cave then ascended to 56 m. Dave's line ended here and Harry tied on some 6 mm rope, which he ran to the breakdown area, which only lay another 20-30 m further on. They had arrived at their destination. It took 28 minutes battling the flow to get to this point, much longer than they had hoped but certainly sooner than if they had to repair all that line themselves. This gave only a few minutes to have a good look at the breakdown area, which was blocking further progress into the cave.

Harry: “My firm impression is that the cave continues beyond the breakdown. There was no sign of another route around the collapse. The breakdown is made of very large boulders with good size chinks between ... clear water is tantalisingly glimpsed beyond the rockpile. Some apertures perhaps 30 cm across are the largest gaps ... certainly too small for a diver in any configuration to pass. Whilst it might be possible to move some rocks and force a route, this would be very time consuming and not without risk so far from the air chamber, and nearly 1 km from the entrance. So for the time being, the Junee master cave will keep its secret! Total dive time in sump 2 was 104 very chilly minutes!”

January 7th 2009: Rest Day

Took a day to recover from the bumps and scrapes of carrying gear up those streamways! A quick tour of the district to have a look at some of the magnificent local scenery. Visited Growling Swallet (JF-36); one of the major feeder siphons for Junee. Next, over to Lawrence Rivulet (again following in the footsteps of Dave Apperley who had just dived here and was doing his line repair work for us again!) Lawrence looked very inviting (apart from the leeches and mossies which were abundant).

January 8th 2009: Dive Day 4

Snow on Mt Field and hail on us! The Junee River was rising and it was time to get our gear out while we could. Approx. 5 hrs total in the cave to bring all the cylinders and other gear out and back to the cars. Red wine and a good feed the order of the day for cold cave divers!

Thus ended our exploration of the Junee Resurgence. Tassie cave diving has made a big impression on all of us and there are already plans being made to return!