

Trip Reports

JF8 Junee Resurgence

Old line removal and tie-off refurbishment dives

1 & 10 February 2014

Janine McKinnon

Divers: Janine McKinnon & Michael Packer (Pax).

Support: Ric Tunney.

[These reports somehow got lost somewhere between Janine writing them and my receiving them. A subsequent trip (Dive 3) has already been published in Speleo Spiel #401 (McKinnon 2014c – Ed.)]

Dive 1

The new line was in (McKinnon 2014a) and now we were starting the job of removing the old line and doing whatever was needed to the tie-offs to make them secure, and hopefully durable. The flow in the river was back to summer levels. We were happy to see this as the job would be much easier if we weren't fighting a strong current. The usual palaver of getting diving gear to the beach at the start of the sump was started at 9 am. Having my usual, reliable Sherpa, I was ready to put tanks on as poor Pax arrived with his last load around 10:30 am. This was OK as we had a plan. This plan involved me diving first and starting on the removal of the old line. Pax would follow behind, checking and re-doing the tie-offs. The best laid schemes O' Mice an' Men gang aft agley (credit Robbie Burns).

Pax arrived to report that he had torn a hole in the leg of his drysuit. Not to fear, he and Ric would return to the car and see if they could do a field repair. I would wait at the beach, and plan a plan review for if Pax was out of the game. To be honest, I doubted he would find anything that would seal the hole, and so I laid back and thought through my back-up plan. This basically involved me removing as much old line as I could fit in the two cave packs I was taking for the task, and then making my way out. Tie-off upgrading would wait for another trip. I apologise to the boys for doubting their determination and resourcefulness. Pax arrived, some indeterminate amount of time later having effected a repair with superglue ... Game on.

I headed in with two cave packs and a stage bottle (to potentially grant extra time), cut the old line just inside the entrance restriction and started stuffing the line in to the cave pack as I swam forward. I cut the line at tie-offs and when the sections were getting too awkward to handle I stuffed them into the pack.

Stuffing thick line into a pack underwater isn't that straightforward. It is sufficiently not straightforward enough that Pax caught up with me after about 15 minutes. I dropped the stage after a third of the gas was gone, dropped the pack when it was full then started stuffing and cutting line into pack #2. Pax periodically caught up with me. He was pretty fast with those tie-off fixes. When I had filled the second pack I signalled Pax (who had caught up yet again) to turn for home. I estimated we were around the half way point. Pax agreed.

The trip out was uneventful although moving two full rope packs of line was a bit awkward (it is mostly 9 mm rope, with about 30 m of it being 11 mm). I basically picked up each pack and put it down on the floor ahead of me as I moved. This stirred up silt so poor Pax had a pretty low visibility exit dive. Mind you, all our efforts on the way in had stirred up silt already. Every touch of rock and old line sent swirls of silt into the water. I can't say my visibility was much either.

I reached the surface 55 minutes after starting the dive

with Pax right behind me. We were quite cold (8 °C water temperature) but the task of getting our gear back to the car soon warmed us up. Lunch, coffee and a beer in the warm sun (30 °C) finished off the day. Also, we managed to talk to passing tourists. I am always surprised how many come by in summer.

I measured the rope when I got home and was disappointed to find only 70 m. I did a calculation of how much new line we had placed in the cave (using how much was left on the roll), and found around 230 m, which is the surveyed length of the sump, so that fits well. We obviously didn't get as far as we had thought ... Bummer.

Dive 2

The Dive 1 team was back to continue the job. Our start was delayed an hour, as we spent that time chain-sawing the tree that was blocking the road just inside the Norske Skog gate. We were equipped and prepared for this as this particular tree had given us some excitement on the drive out from the Dwarrowdelf trip the previous night (McKinnon 2014b). Pax did all the hard work with the chainsaw while we stood around, admired his skills and moved the odd cut limb.

We made it to the car park at 10.30 am. We packed the gear and took our loads to the viewing platform. We had coffee and a snack and discussed the plan, which didn't take long as it was the same as the last trip – Diving independently, I go in and start packing old line and Pax follows (with a 20 minute gap) and checks and secures tie-offs.

The usual shuttle to the beach went as normal. Ric left as soon as he had delivered the last load and Pax left for another load while I started kitting up. I was fully kitted and ready to go before Pax arrived back at the beach ... Déjà vu, Pax had had another leak in the (other) foot of his drysuit and had been out repairing it. I had just thought he was sitting in the sun for the 20 minutes that I was going in ahead of him.

I headed in, swam quickly to the end of the old line (10 minutes), as the flow was quite low compared to what it can be. Line cutting and stuffing went pretty much as expected. I spent half an hour or so at it and filled three bags. I was approaching thirds on my air (main twin tanks, as I had already dropped the stage) but more to the point, I was fed up with it for the day. Pax arrived behind me just as I finished filling the third bag. I had optimistically carried six in with me which was a pretty clear example of failing to know my limits. I signalled that I was heading out and Pax decided to continue on. I was a bit surprised then to see his lights appear out the entrance only five minutes behind me. It had transpired that his suit had started leaking quite badly only a minute or two after we parted and so he had terminated his dive too.

I picked up my stage and one of the filled bags as I came out and left one bag for Pax to retrieve. My dive time was 1 hour. I headed straight out to the car to alert Ric to our imminent return. I then started hauling out of the cave. Ric completed two trips with my gear from the beach to the entrance while I changed and stayed at the cars. There were lots of tourists around and we didn't want to leave the gear unattended at the car. I was amazed how many people were coming by to view the resurgence [It is an advertised tourist attraction – Ed.]. There were five or six groups in the hour we took to retrieve gear from the viewing platform, have a late lunch (at 2.30 pm) and pack up. As we were doing our final pack a couple walked by and stopped for a chat (as they all do). It turned out to be Keir Vaughan-Taylor and partner. He is a cave diver from Sydney. We knew him thirty years ago. Small world indeed.