

## JF-8 Junee Cave

Janine McKinnon

16-17 February 2013

SATURDAY

**Party:** Andrew Greenhill, Ric Tunney (sherpas), Andreas Klocker, Michael Packer (Pax), Adam Hooper, Janine McKinnon, Pat Fitzgerald (divers). All divers CDAA.

Originally, the entire week ending in this weekend was earmarked for an exploration and re-survey of the first sump. Due to lengthy dramas that I won't go into, this plan failed catastrophically, with me being the only diver left standing when the silt settled, so to speak.

Andreas suggested coming down, and inviting a couple of others, to do a simpler version of the project. Thus a plan to visit For Your Eyes Only (FYEO), and do some exploration off the main line through Sump 1, over two days, was made.

None of the other divers had been in the sump before, so we planned to dive straight through to FYEO, take an hour or so to look around and take photos, and then start some exploring on the way out. Each diver would swim the sump alone, with a time gap between divers.

The usual two hours was spent getting tanks and gear to the beach, and divers getting kitted up. The ferrying was made much easier for Pax and me as we had personal sherpas! Ric carried both of my tanks to the beach yet again. It's 100 m into the cave and immediately before the start of Sump 1. His loyalty and support is wonderful (many may use other adjectives like long suffering, or amazing – with raised eyebrows).

I went through first. The flow was very low and the current not at all difficult to swim against. Visibility wasn't too bad at about 2-3 m.

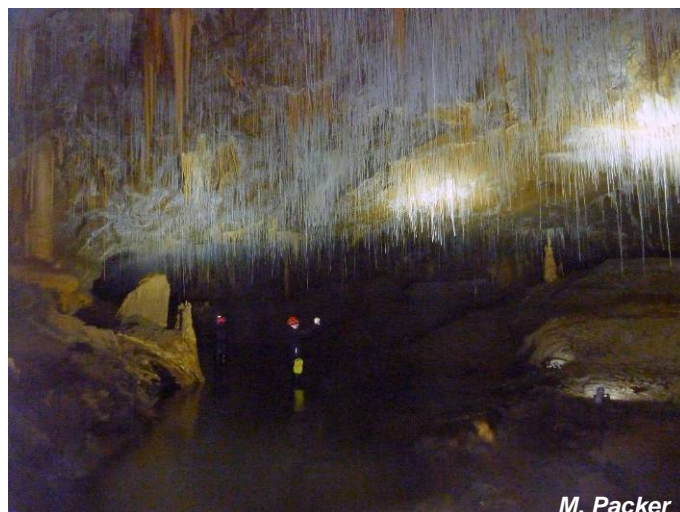
As part of our exploration plans for the return trip, I was going to put two markers on the main line on the way in. One at about a quarter of the way from the start, and the other about half way in. The only way I could determine these places was by looking at depth profiles for the sump. It was a bit of a guess, but would be good enough for our purposes.

I had a little difficulty getting the lines off my belt, where I had looped them through a ring, with my super thick dive gloves, and Andreas arrived before I was finished. Once I had sorted that, I went on, put the second marker in place, and surfaced in FYEO after about 20 minutes. Andreas arrived a couple of minutes later.

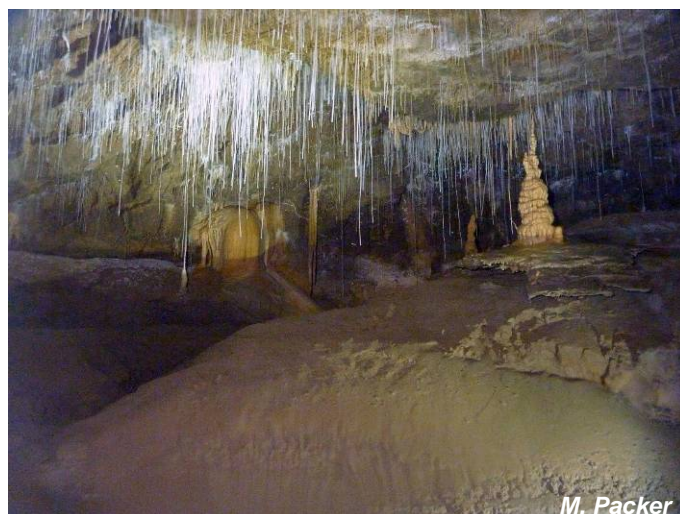
The others arrived at a few minute intervals.

We spent time walking upstream, taking photos, and looking at the stunning formations. All from the streamway, to protect the (still) pristine sediment banks.

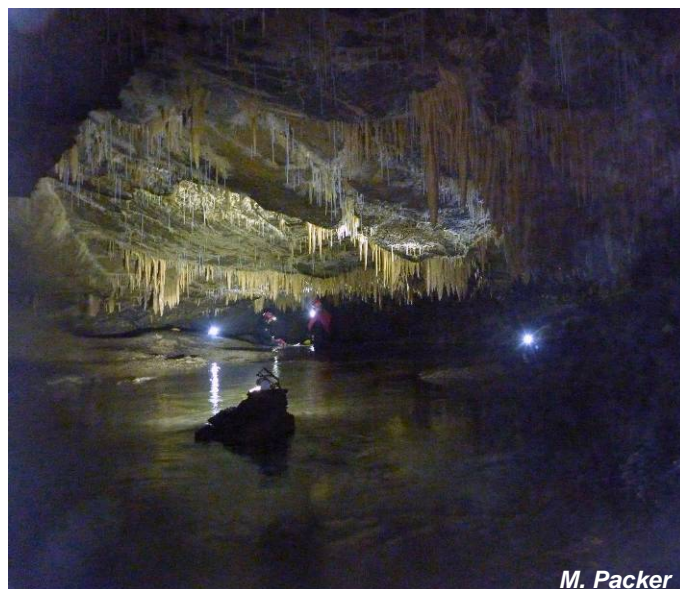
An hour later Pat started into the sump for the return dive. Our plan was for him to swim back to the first marker, closest to the cave entrance, and to start a systematic search, at 5 m intervals, to the left and right of the main line. Due to air supply considerations, and the 7°C water, I did not think any of the other divers would manage more than about 20 minutes of exploration. None of them had dived water this cold before and none of them had gloves or undergarments designed for these temperatures. With a 15 minute swim out anyway, I thought 40 minutes would be their maximum cold tolerance.



M. Packer



M. Packer



M. Packer

*The usual range of pretty photos in FYEO.*

Adam went next, planning on doing the same at the second marker, about half way through the sump.

Pax went third, about 30 minutes after Pat, with the intention of continuing on where Pat was working, but after Pat had moved out of the cave. Andreas was second last, at another half hour interval and intending to relieve Pax. I was last out, not far behind Andreas, and planning to start side jumps from a short distance into the sump, on the FYEO side.

As I started down the steep bank into the sump a bright colour caught my eye. I looked up at the roof, only 5m into the sump, and saw a bright orange Z knife. I lost this last year and assumed it gone forever, somewhere in the sump. It was caught in a small back eddy against the roof. It has sat there through floods for a year. Amazing.

My next surprise was only 20 m further on. There was a 2 m section of line that was the new green line we were using for distance measurements. It was tied to each end of the main line. The main line had broken and been repaired by one of the other party members.

At about the same time I noticed that the visibility was, technically speaking, crap. Less than 0.5 m, down to zero sometimes. There wasn't much point in exploring anything in these conditions, so I headed straight out.

Andreas was still at the beach, waiting for me, and Ric was just arriving, to help ferry my gear back to the car (see earlier comment).

Andreas reported limited visibility on the way out too, and hadn't bothered with any exploration.

Back at the cars, we found that the line had broken between Adam leaving and Pax leaving. Pax had arrived at the point to find no line! That's where those cave diving training skills come in. What do you do when you are following your life line out of a cave with 0.5 m visibility, or less, and 200 m from the end you find the line is broken? He was able to keep his cool, search for the ends safely, and attach a repair. This is not as easy to do as one may think, in the conditions.

This will need to be permanently repaired in the future.

That had taken all the time Pax had available for exploration. So, three duds so far.

Back at the cars, we found that Pat had had reasonably good visibility on his exit, and he had managed a couple of side jumps at his planned site, at the 17 m depth marker. He followed open lead for about 20 m to the right but this proved to close down soon after. He was in a small side passage off the main passage for a few metres. The rock was very friable and the ceiling was raining stuff on him from his bubbles. He had just discovered the joys of virgin cave diving exploration in Tasmania. He was fairly sure that this ended, and he could detect no flow, but a re-check may be worthwhile.

Adam did a couple of jumps but found nothing.

We all had a nice debrief with beer and headed home around 5 pm.

#### **SUNDAY**

**Party:** Ric Tunney (sherpa), Andreas Klocker, Adam Hooper, Janine McKinnon, Pat Fitzgerald

We returned at around 10:00 am to try for a more productive dive day. We only had one set of tanks each, so would only be able to do one dive each. We were not planning to go through to FYEO, but only explore our allocated sections of the sump, continuing on from yesterday.

Again, due to the low water temperatures, I thought the others would have had enough of the cold before an hour. Thus we planned our dives with that in mind.

We formed two groups of two. Adam and Pat were to be the first group in as Pat had to catch the ferry back to Melbourne that night.

Pat & Adam would go into the cave together, and dive separately, with the second starting his dive after the other had finished. They would start with the areas closest to the start of the sump, and move progressively further in on their jumps. They would jump off the main line, to the sides, when they couldn't see the walls and thought an explore worthwhile. This would not be at any pre-determined distances. They would leave a marker on the main line at their furthest point of exploration. Then, when Andreas and I followed them later, we would continue that process. This was to ensure each diver had the best visibility possible for their dive.

We assessed that Adam and Pat would be about two hours before they were finished. Andreas & I didn't want to sit on the beach, in drysuits, waiting all that time, so we planned to wait outside in the sun (and flies) for 1.5 hours before going in.

This worked very well. We arrived at the beach a few minutes after Adam had started his dive. Pat then left and went back to get changed and have lunch.

He reported his dive had been 30 minutes, he had managed several jumps but found nothing noteworthy. He did get to experience more crumbly rock though.

I started kitting up, assuming Adam would take a similar time. He duly arrived after 35 minutes and reported having an interesting time but finding nothing.

I swam to the marker and continued along the mainline for 20-30 m before seeing a void to the left that was worth a look. I jumped about 10 m before I reached the wall. The floor was boulder collapse with the usual large amounts of silt over everything and debris rained down from the ceiling after being dislodged by my exhaust bubbles. There was no flow.

I did another jump to the left a few metres further on with similar results.

I repeated this process again a bit further on. No luck. I had told Andreas that I would be no more than an hour. I still had plenty of air (running quarter rule) and was not cold but I had been in for more than 40 minutes. If I did another jump further in, I guessed that I would be over the hour on return. Andreas would be getting nervous about that, so I called the dive and started out, leaving the marker at my last jump point.

I surfaced after a 53 minute dive.

Andreas continued the process. He also looked up high near the entrance as the passage appears to be quite a high rift there.

He did a few jumps, but found nothing also.

His dive was 50 minutes and was turned by cold, not reaching air turn pressure.

I waited at the beach for Andreas to complete his dive. Ric arrived back at the beach after Andreas had completed his dive and we were packing our gear. Ric took the packs with my tanks in them back to the car whilst I just swanned out and got myself undressed. Poor Andreas (and Pat and Adam) had to get their own tanks and gear back to the cars.

Unfortunately we had forgotten the beer today, so had to do with tea and coffee as after-dive beverages. It wasn't quite the same, although Adam had some nice Tim Tams to go with it, and they wouldn't have gone with beer, would they?

We have not explored the full length of the sump. The marker has been left on the main line at the furthest point of exploration. There are other voids worth checking out on a future trip.