

## Diving Lawrence Rivulet Rising

Janine McKinnon

16 June 2012

**Party:** *Diver:* Janine McKinnon. *Support:* Ric Tunney

Winter is not traditionally the best time to dive sumps in Tasmania. In fact, usually it's not possible at all as the flow is too strong. We have very few cave dives that are ponds, nearly all are streams, subject to the usual effects on flowing water of rainfall and snow melt.

Consequently I was very surprised to find Lawrence Rivulet flowing strongly, but not at levels typical for Winter, when we decided to have a quick look as we drove past from Wyatinah to Maydena in mid-June. Even more attractively, it was relatively clean water, not the opaque, zero visibility, milky mess it had been each time I had checked it out in low flow conditions over the last two summers.

It was too good a chance to miss, even though the water temperate was going to be a further degree or two lower than summer temperatures, which aren't exactly tropical.

Thus, Ric and I found ourselves parking at Cashions Creek Road at 10:30 am, two days later. The air temperature was 7°C and it started raining lightly as I organised my gear. At least the dive wasn't going to be much colder than standing around on the surface.

As cave dives go in southern Tasmania, access to this site can be equated with Owl Pot or Tassie Pot. That is, it is as easy as it gets and an exception to the general rule. So a couple of trips got the gear to the kit-up site in 15 minutes.

Of course by the time I got it put together, and into the entrance pool, and me in too, and the gear on me, another half hour had passed.

There was no line visible so I made my primary tie-off to a convenient tree with my primary reel and placed it within easy reach to take with me into the entrance.

Finally, at 11:15 am I was ready for off. Well almost. I generally wear my drygloves for dives in these cold temperatures (which don't actually work as drygloves for me but they are warm) and I get everything on and sorted before I put them on. They are so thick I can't feel much with them so it is easier to put them on last. This time I couldn't get the second one on properly (they are difficult to get on) and I got fed up and left it off. One hand was just going to have to put up with getting very cold.

Now I was off ... a few metres under the log jam to try and find the entrance to the cave. This proved to be relatively easy to find by following the highest flow, and proved to be a smallish vertical slot with water barreling out with some force. I pulled myself through, with a little wiggling, jamming myself against the sides as I went, so as not to get spat out by the current. Just inside, where it opened up to a lowish flattener, I found the fixed line starting.

The regulator I was using was gurgling quite a bit now (water coming through as well as air). I must have got some muck, or probably a very small pebble, jammed in it as I came in the entrance. I stayed in place for a few minutes assessing how bad I thought the problem was. It was still quite useable and so I changed to the other

regulator and decided to keep this as my backup and only dive as far as was reasonable on the other tank.



Janine about to dive at Lawrence Rivulet Rising.

I tied off my reel to the fixed line and then started following the fixed line.

The current was significant but not too hard to swim against, particularly as I could pull myself along on the small rocks in the floor too. The line was in good condition, and still fixed at its tie-off points. I swam along the horizontal passage and then turned sharply to the left and down a steep bank. The slope leveled off at -18 m and the fixed line finished, tied off around a small boulder in the floor. There was no line ahead but there was a vertical restriction about 2 m ahead. I had penetrated about 50 m into the cave.

I hung there for several minutes deciding what I would do. I wanted to continue on but there were several factors in favour of turning the dive here. My hand was cold, I had only one reliable regulator (and thus air supply), and the squeeze could take a bit of time to get through. I was carrying a couple of jump reels but they only had 15 m of line each. That wouldn't get me very far. In hindsight, I should have used one of them at the entrance and kept my primary reel, with 120 m of line, for the cave. I had expected the fixed line to continue further. So, all things considered, I decided to retreat and return another day.

The swim back to the entrance didn't actually involve any swimming by me at all. I just let the current move me, pushing away from things that go bump, as I went.

I had a few moments of effort trying not to get pushed out the entrance squeeze whilst I untied my reel from the fixed line. I also had to be a bit careful how I went through the squeeze, and had to jam myself to have control over the exit. I managed this without damage to my drysuit, which was a bonus.

The dive had taken 25 minutes. I used 30 bar of air. I had twin, sidemount 10.5 litre tanks filled to 220 bar each. Water temperature was 6°C. Visibility about 2 m on inward leg. Minimum silting occurred for the return trip so visibility was about 1 m for return. A metre is as good as a mile, as they almost say.

Ric had seen my bubbles from the hill above and was waiting as I surfaced. This was a surprise as we had agreed on an hour, and he had gone off wandering in the interim. I

had expected to have to haul the gear out myself so I was pleased he was there to pass the tanks up to.

The rain had stopped so getting changed was much more pleasant than I was expecting.

We had planned a bit of work along McCallums track on the way home but by the time we had lunch the clouds

were gathering again, rain was moving down the valley, it was 3 pm, and so all together, enthusiasm evaporated.

We did check that the new key for the F8 East Road actually worked in the lock as we passed by on the drive home.

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## Settlement Area

**Alan Jackson**

**23 June 2012**

**Party:** Serena Benjamin, Stephen Bunton, Darren Holloway, Ken Hosking, Kerrin Huxley, Alan Jackson, Peter McIntosh (FPA), John Webb (Norske-Skög)

Norske-Skög (NS) own a bit of private freehold title in the Florentine Valley (the old Dawson Settlement) and grow trees on it for their paper mill. They've been planning and doing quite a bit of pine harvesting there in the last year or so. John Webb is a planner with Norske and has been getting out and about with Peter McIntosh (Forest Practices Authority) and Rolan to manage the karst that underlies the area. Ex STC member and former FPA employee, Adrian Slee, also did some work in the area with John and I believe Chris Sharples did some of the initial karst investigations as a consultant to NS.

Rolan tagged four of the caves in the area last year and published names and descriptions (Eberhard 2011) – GPS coordinates were also supplied and entered into the club GPS. Further work in the area this year revealed another cave that Rolan allegedly declared too narrow to enter (or at least too narrow to exit without gravity assist). With the prospect of a long-held dream of mine coming true – to name a cave something along the lines of 'Rolan is Soft Cave' – I organised to visit the area with John.

Eberhard (2011) mentions that the caves are off What-U-Callit Road but we accessed them by continuing to near the end of Frizons Road (the next road west). Road mapping and optimum cave access routes in logging coupes tend to vary following harvesting activities.

We started with a short amble beside a recently harvested pine coupe to a patch of residual native vegetation around a linear collapse/sink hole. John and Peter motioned towards the small entrance and sat back expectantly. It certainly was tight, but with a ladder in place it looked like I'd be able to get out again so I descended. The cave essentially consisted of two intersecting narrow rifts (one aligned ~100-280°, the other ~60-240°) both of which narrowed off at each end. In the 100° direction the rift descended steeply into a small chamber and then doubled back on itself and continued to descend steeply but via a narrow hole. Rocks rattled for a few seconds down the hole and there was a strong draft pouring in. The floor consisted of fill so it could be dug by someone super keen.

The 60° end of the other rift proved to connect with another small entrance located 8 m ESE of the main entrance – I could see Ken's light and converse with him. This entrance was not really humanly negotiable though.

Strangely, I had found a sheep skull on the surface at the entrance (and a scapula in the cave) and by the time I'd extricated myself from the entrance squeeze Bunty had mounted the skull on a totem by the entrance and

announced his intentions to call it Voodoo Cave. I suggested an amendment to make it Voodewe Cave and all those with a poor sense of humour whole-heartedly agreed what an outstanding name we'd come up with ...

It was tagged JF-592 on the western side of the entrance, GPSed, photo-tagged and sketched.



*The entrance to JF-592 was a little tight.*

We headed back to the car, where we discovered I had a flat tyre, then strolled to the end of the road and into the pine trash again. We located JF-458 Tonsil Cave, got a photo and confirmed Rolan's assertion (Eberhard 2011) that John and Adrian had surveyed the cave already. We then moved a short distance to a small entrance that John *et al.* had located previously and declared 'un-enterable'. Being decidedly untrusting, I poked my head in and declared it distinctly enterable.