

## JF31 Tom Smiths Cave: Another grotty dive ticked off the list

Janine McKinnon

3 January 2016

Party: Janine McKinnon, Ric Tunney.

Last April I checked out a small water-filled hole near JF8 (McKinnon 2015). Now I was back to dive it, and survey it for posterity. Why, I don't really know, as it looked like another go nowhere shit hole.

I started the dive at 10.50 am. The water was not flowing and the passage was narrow and not deep, so stirring up silt as I headed in was inevitable. I had visibility ahead of me for the first few metres, which was convenient as I soon reached a restriction. I could see it widened back to 0.5 m on the other side, so I would be able to turn around if need be. It took a couple of attempts, turning sideways, and some gear rearrangement, to get through, but this didn't take more than half a minute. The cave did almost a 90 degree turn soon after and several metres further on I surfaced into dry passage.

Dive time: 4 mins.



Janine commencing her dive.



The Tom Smiths Cave monster.

I took off the tanks and walked the ten metres to the end of the passage. There was another very small pool here, on the right, and a wall of mud at the end. About 5 m up the mud wall I could see a continuation of dry, mud-caked passage (as everything was

mud-caked here). It looked very narrow. I could not see a way to climb up alone. All the walls were smooth and covered in dry mud. There was no breeze detectable.

I looked in the pool and saw a very tight (too tight to fit) restriction just below the surface, heading in the straight line direction of the dry passage I was in. Below the restriction it widened a little but there wasn't a lot of room in there. I doubt it is passable, however I didn't actually try to dive it. Given the location of this cave, the nature of the passage so far, and the appearance of this very uninviting little puddle, I decided it wasn't worth my effort to go and get my tanks to try and fit into it. Maybe someone very small and highly optimistic can give it a go some time.

I started my survey from here. I had been going to use a silt stake to tie the dive line if there were no decent tie-offs (which there weren't), but the two I had brought with me had been knocked out of my wetsuit bootie and boot as I squeezed through the restriction. I only realised when I reached the air space. Finding them in zero visibility now was not going to be easy. I cut the line and tied it carefully to a solid looking clump of particularly thick mud (yes, I am joking about the solid bit). It would at least work for a survey line and guide line to get out, if I was very careful.

Survey was counting knots, compass and depth gauge for the wet bits. The passage was horizontal for the dry bit.

I had zero vis once I started the dive, so survey legs were done by counting knots and taking a bearing as I entered the water, counting knots to the bend, and then from the bend to locate this, and from the entrance looking back along the line for that compass bearing. There were no other direction changes in the underwater passage. Depth was taken from computer log. [See survey on page 24.]

Dive time out: two minutes. I managed the restriction more quickly this time, even in zero visibility.

So I had a total time underwater of 6 minutes. What an epic dive.

Water temperature: A balmy, summer 9°C. Not that I was in it long enough to notice.

Air consumption: Not enough to move the gauge needle noticeably.

I was back and finished not long before midday. So yes, all the rest of the time was spent getting gear off and on, trying to climb up to the higher stuff, surveying the dry bit and pondering the puddle.

I did feel for the lost silt stakes as I came out but with no success. Everything long and thin I felt turned out to be a branch. I will have to think of a much better way to carry silt stakes.

The line survived in situ whilst I felt my way out, but I made the mistake of trying to tighten some slack in it at the entrance, and gave it a tug to see if it was still in place. Not after that it wasn't. So we pulled it out.

Dive Kit:

7 mm semi-drysuit. 2X3 L tanks. 2X Apeks XTX 50 cold water regs (+SPG's), Boots (no fins), Razor harness with small UTD wing, 1X Petrel computer, helmet with dive Scurion, 2X emergency helmet mounted lights, Finn dive light, survey slate, three cutting devices.



Note:

I have trouble reconciling what I found here with the original trip report. It talks about John Parker walking in head high water for 30 m to a tight squeeze he couldn't fit through. I again, as per last visit, found the cave sumped at the entrance, which is at river level. The whole cave was only about 30 m long, but with totally dry passage for half of it (see map). Even if this cave was explored in very, very dry conditions, then the second part of the cave is dry.

I must say, I don't have the same belief that this is part of an underwater system measureless to man that the first report imagines (Annan 1977).

### Tagging

Neither Alan (Jackson 2015), nor ourselves last visit (McKinnon 2015), had been able to find either the tag for this cave or JF30

nearby. We had come prepared with new tags for both. Whilst I dived Ric had gone and installed a tag for JF 30. I now placed the new tag for JF 31 before I got out of the water.

We had tagged according to Alan's (Jackson 2015) assessment of the cave numbers.

### References:

- ANNAN, A. 1977. Exploration of the Junee River Caves JF 30 & 31. *Speleo Spiel*, 121: 3
- GOEDE, A. 1971. Club news, cave numbering. *Speleo Spiel*, 61: 2
- JACKSON, A. 2015. JF 30 The Letterbox, *Speleo Spiel*. 407: 3-4
- McKINNON, J. 2015. Checking out JF 30 & 31. *Speleo Spiel*. 407: 6

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## IB11 Midnight Hole

*Janine McKinnon*

15 January 2016

**Party:** Jasmine Landertshammer, Janine McKinnon, Andrew Thomas, Greg Tsaplin, Ric Tunney, Brett Wiltshire, Danny Wilkinson.

Some boys from Western Australian Speleological Group (WASG) that we had met at the ASF conference in Exmouth in June were over for a caving holiday. They had selected a few caves they wanted to do, with our help, and MH was the first off the rank. Co-incidentally we had a couple from Austria visiting. We had never met them but Jasmine was in the caving club we

had caved with, in the Ebensee area of Austria, so with a good reference from a caving friend over there she joined the trip.

There is nothing much to say about the trip really. All went smoothly, we ran multiple pitches at a time until the last two, to save all that boring standing around with a large group.

Two [*Three! – Ed.*] reasons to record the trip really:

1. The log book is totally full. So anyone going there should take a replacement. If you don't know how to make one (waterproof paper required) please contact me in advance to arrange to get one.
2. Danny took a couple of the best photos I've seen of the cave, so this is a chance to showcase them.
- [3. *Every trip should be properly recorded – Ed.*]



*D. Wilkinson*

Looking up into the vadose canyon between pitches five and six.