

Jenolan caves 2nd & 3rd of May 2015

Greg Tunnock, Cindy Mann, Holly & Mark Wilson, Jim & Rachel Blyde
Paul McKendry. Report by M Wilson

BMSC had a trip to Spider Cave in March 2014 where we reached Pike Lake Sump. Holly saw the dive line and heard that it was only a short duck under and wanted to do the duckunder. So a year later we did.

When I am caving I always love to go places I have never been before, that can be a bit of a problem when you are trip leader so the evenings of the 2 weeks leading up to this trip was spent reading old SUSS bulletins photocopying and sticky taping maps together. Unfortunately having a Spider trip meant that Paul couldn't come because he is too tall and Ric ended up pulling out at the last minute due to a trip to the dentist, so Saturday morning saw Greg pick up Holly, Cindy and I in the trusty Subaru and drive out to Jenolan, grab the keys of the rangers, dump our stuff at the cavers hut and head off by about 9-30. An early enough start we thought. We were planning on driving down the hill to the picnic ground but someone had clipped one of the two padlocks through both ends of the chain, we had a key to the 2nd padlock, it worked the padlock but we couldn't remove the chain.

Time for plan B, gear up at the car and walk down the hill. Being only 90% sure where the entrance was saw us go for a bit of an extra walk, almost to the Grand Arch before turning back to where I thought Spider Cave was in the first place. After all that we got into the cave at 10:45. With only four small framed cavers we got through Dingo Dig, Z Squeeze and Pirates Delight quickly. All of my reading of the previous weeks made me realise what an effort it must have been to dig out these three obstacles. We reached the Glop Holes had a quick look at the Mini Khan then headed up to the Whales Throat then turned left and headed for the Terror Traverse. This is an exposed narrow ledge with a 20 metre drop to the river, you crawl along the narrow ledge for 7 or 8 metres pass a large boulder that pushes you closer to the void and then you are in the Eyrie. We had a look around, admired some formation including a long shawl formed over a fault in the roof then we reversed the traverse back to the Whales Throat and down to the river for lunch. A quick bite then we wandered downstream till we met the Rubble Trouble rockpile, we turned around and wandered upstream to Pike Lake but went no further as we wished to stay dry till we went through the duck under on the way out.

Once again it was back to the Whales Throat where we spent a while crawling low in the rockpile and failing to look up to see the obvious way on up above. A squeeze past some formation a four metre climb down into Pretty Pit, needs a 10 metre tape, then another squeeze passage to get into the Colloseum. This was as far as we had got in 2014. Now we had to find our way back down to the river via another rock pile and an exposed climb down which brought us to the upstream side of the duck under at the Wishing Well.

For a bunch of cavers that were planning on swimming shortly no one wanted to get wet but after a short hesitation we made our way to the far side of the pool with the water only being crotch deep. As the plan was to explore more we headed up the passage following the stream way as far as X Window Sump, after a quick poke in the rockpile we decided to turn around and were soon back at the Wishing Well.

Before we left home Cindy told us she wasn't going to do the sump as she had the flu early in the week so that left Greg, Holly and I sitting at the Wishing Well procrastinating and feeling intimidated looking for excuses to not get wet. The original plan was to do the duck under race down the big stream way section back to the Glop Holes then out the entrance series, the plan being moving fast we would be fine with just a thermal top and bottom. With Cindy needing to stay dry the back up plan was to do the duck under take a moment then reverse the duck under and head out slowly via the climbs and squeezes, as a plan it worked so we couldn't use that a reason to chicken out. Freezing cold water would have been a great excuse but unfortunately the water felt almost warm. Another concern was that the water was quite silted so we would have to endure the dreaded zero vis, again not a valid excuse as the duckunder was short and had a fat dive line. In fact Greg being an actual experienced cave diver had brought goggles and had plenty of experience with poor visibility and in the end I think I had my eyes shut anyway?

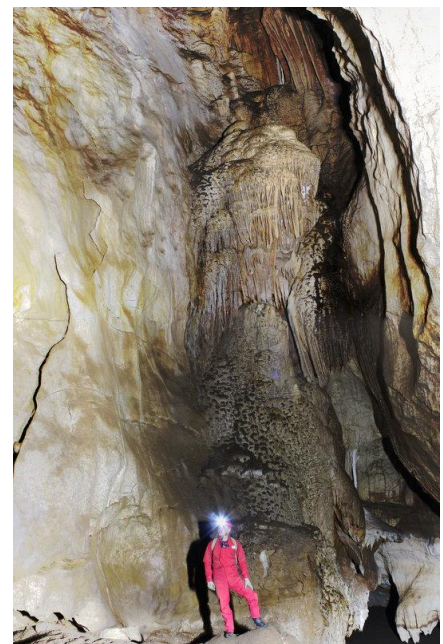
Lighting was the next concern, Holly and I had \$50 Chinese bike lights which actually make fantastic caving lights, very bright and we get about 14 hours out of the battery. When we brought them over the net they had a 1 metre waterproof rating but I am not sure how they achieve this with a 10mm hole in the housing. Another activity of the previous week had been siliconing up all the obvious holes in the light and sealing the battery in a bicycle tire tube. Submerging my helmet in the pool for 30 seconds was hopefully proof that my light would still be working when I reached the far side of the sump, I wasn't looking forward to floating in

the lake in the dark whilst getting my emergency light out of a dry bag. On top of my light surviving the 30 second dunk test Greg pulled out a pair of 1980's vintage small diving lights, and although waterproof they gave of a very feeble light. Lighting wasn't to be a good excuse either.

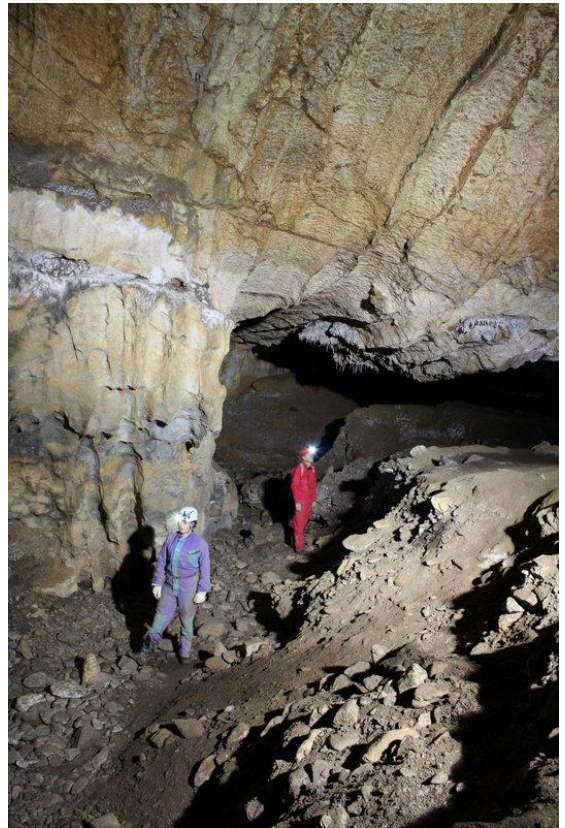
Running out of excuses it got down to the real reasons, I wanted to do the duck under because it would be fun but I was intimidated, I guess I have read to many gruesome cave diving stories. With no more excuses the only sensible solution was to volunteer Greg to go first. He quickly pulled on the dive line across the lake to the far wall, took several deep breaths and disappeared. A minute or so later he reappeared and reassured us that it was easy. I went through next, deep breathes, duck under, roll on to your back and pull on the dive line, seconds later I am through to Pike Lake and followed the line to shallow water. I waited on the far side for Holly who appeared a few minutes later after a quick chat we both popped back through. How good was that, little kids swim further underwater in the backyard pool every day but it was still a fun thing to do.

Wet and beginning to shiver we packed up quickly and climbed up the Wishing Well then headed out via numerous squeezes, and larger passages. We were back on the surface at 6-30. An uphill walk back to the hut and the luxury of a hot shower, reheated chilli for dinner, warm sleeping bag and a comfy bed, it was a fun day.

Next morning Paul, Jim & Rachel (Jim's 12 yr old daughter along for her first real caving trip and) arrived about 8-15am. Cindy was heading home so there were six of us for Mammoth. We got into the cave just after 9am and headed into the Horseshoe Chamber and then on to the Railway Tunnel. Other than Paul the rest of us either hadn't been in the cave or had never been past the Railway Tunnel.



The trip we did was a great loop. Starting in the large passages halfway up the Railway Tunnel we headed down towards Hell Hole but avoided the well named tight squeeze via a climb up a slope at a fixed tape then across the rift and into Naked Lady Chamber. Some pretty's in this area then down a small climb to Ice Pick Lake, then back to some flat ground in Naked Lady Chamber for lunch. After a false start we found the withering Snake Guts passage, a great winding passage with small bits that were easy for Holly & Rachel but more of a challenge for the larger adult. A climb lead up to a traverse across large jammed dice shaped boulders jammed across the rift "the Sugar Cubes" then up again crossing muddy slope to rejoin the Railway Tunnel.



Once back in the Railway Tunnel we totally failed to find the way in to Wilsons Rift despite having a great map and good instructions. Eventually we gave up and headed out. We got out around 3pm packed up and headed home. A great weekend. This was a fun day out, perfect for a new caver and a great chance for me to learn my way around a new part of the cave. The plan is to go back in November and explore parts of the cave further north.