

New Cave Diving System Discovered on Roe Plains

G'Day Everyone,

Well here's some very HOT news - we have made a very exciting discovery. An amazing new cave diving system on the Roe Plains, a massive thing with a two (side by side!) semi trailer sized passage barelling at least 800m straight away from the entrance with side passages everywhere.

Alan Polini and I got back from the Nullarbor on Saturday 8th October 2011 where we were diving with Brian Kakuk (on a guest visit to Australia - see <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/field/projects/blue-holes-team/> for more info) and several CEGSA/CDAA members - Ken Smith, Richard (Harry) Harris and Grant Pearce. The main objective was to show Brian some of our best Nullarbor cave diving sites to which both Ken and Harry agreed that Olwolgin and Burnabbie Caves on the Roe Plains would be excellent choices, together with Weebubbie, of course.

Apart from doing some wonderful dives in these caves, Alan & I also took the opportunity check out a couple of other sites in the area that needed resolving. We did in fact find two new karst features in our travels, but the day before we were due to leave (Thursday 6th October), we checked a small pool in a cave we had on our list of things to do when we made a promising discovery. I was the lucky one to dive and emptied my 90m reel through some quite small, low and silty passage before it started opening up into clear water when my line ended and I tied off, surveying out. Alan dived later that day with me on a full set of 7ltr cylinders each. Soon after Alan started reeling off, the passage opened into massive borehole sized tunnel. 150m later, Alan had emptied his reel and tied off, I connected Ken's reel with 340m of line on it. 130m further down the massive main tunnel, we reached our thirds, tied off and left the reel for the next dive. We jubilantly shook hands before turning and surveying back out. We noted huge side passages on both sides of the tunnel as we headed back.

We asked Brian and Ken to do the next dive and on Friday morning 7th October they emptied both their reels extending the main line by another 240m which they surveyed out. They were both elated on their return. Brian's comment was "Man, you've got a lot of work to do in there!" - a telling comment from a fellow who has done a lot of work himself, exploring and mapping tens of thousands of metres of cave passages in the world's most beautiful and extensive cave diving systems! The end was still open and going when we left on Friday with Harry and Grant planning a big dive on Saturday 8th October with stage cylinders before they had to head for home as well. We waited in high anticipation for their call on Sunday to find out what they had found. The news couldn't have been better!

On Saturday, Harry and Grant added another 200m of line to the main line with the passage "continuing into blackness at the end" was Grant's description. Brian and Ken also dived and made another significant discovery. Brian checked some side tunnels and found himself in a massive borehole passage "bigger than anything we had dived in the cave so far". He laid 200m of line and tied off with the tunnel continuing straight ahead in the same massive proportions. The tunnels Alan Polini & I swam through were generally 10-20m wide and 5-10m high, though a couple sections we dived through were 30-40m wide and only a couple metres high. We can't wait to see what Brian found and how far it goes!

In summary, the team explored approximately 1500m of underwater passage with the majority of it cursorily surveyed in just three days of diving. There are continuing leads in three main passages on the same general trendline to the South West. There is potential in the area for continuation and possible connection with the other cave diving sites in the area. Burnabbie Cave currently at 2800m surveyed and Olwolgin Cave over 2400m.

There is little doubt that this is one of the most significant Australian cave diving discoveries to be made for a long time and it was a privilege to be involved in and to be able to share the experiences with such an excellent bunch of people.

Of course we are planning return trips as soon as possible to continue exploration and documenting of the system. Details will be published as soon they are available.

Return exploration trip 28-30 October 2011, team comprising (Divers) Alan Polini, Craig Challen, Kim Halliday, Paul Hosie together with (Support Crew) Christie Allen, Jeff Gibson and Mark Brown. The team drove from Perth overnight Thurs 27th October. Friday set up camp and video'd the first 50m of passage whilst clear so everyone could see what only the first person in would ever see. We secured the entrance line through the Letterbox and the Filter, then set up a staging area with hang lines to clip gear off to prior to push dives.

Saturday, ferried dive gear to staging area. First push dive of the A Tunnel (discovered by Brian Kakuk) for an additional 200m. Surveyed out. Second push dive added approx 50m to end of C Tunnel but terminated in low flattener. Surveyed out as well as perimeter of the Wide Room.

On Sunday, the B Tunnel (originally explored by Richard Harris and Grant Pearce) restriction was visited, line trap repaired and passage extended by 130m into a spectacular section of passage where an 80m long, 30m wide and 3m high section was surveyed. On a separate dive, some large side passages were explored which connected A and B Tunnels, as well as A and C Tunnels. The last effort for the trip was to survey the D Tunnel originally explored by Al Polini - which confirmed 137m of passage but no continuation.

The conditions of the entrance passages are such that entry and exit is a quite challenging (maybe perfect for Craig 'Challen', but not for the rest of us!) affair in zero visibility through restrictive passage the whole way. This slowed us down and presented some difficulty ferrying gear in and out, particularly when teams of divers had an unplanned meeting head on in the middle of it!!!

Effort for the long weekend amounted to an additional 600m of passage explored and total surveyed length of approx 2100m. Maximum penetrations achieved were 940m in the B Tunnel and 800m in the A Tunnel. Both of these passages have good leads at the end and many unexplored side passages remain to be investigated on the next trip.

Fortunately, the two teams of divers were able to focus 100% of their concentration on the diving requirements because of the fantastic support of our camp crew of Christie, Jeff and Mark. We couldn't have done it without you guys - Thanks Very Much!

Kindest Regards,

Paul Hosie

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