



Hassels Cave

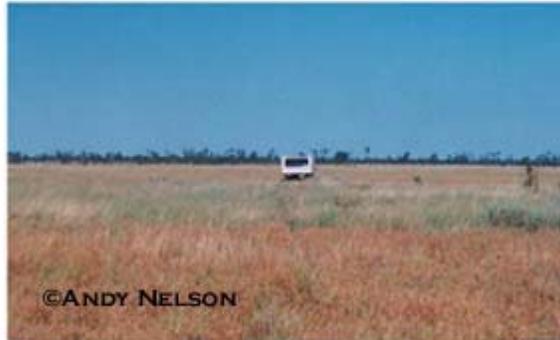
(au -> qld -> camooweal)

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By all appearances cave appears to provide excellent potential deep diving as the lay of the underwater section mirrors that above water in the form of a narrow rift passage varying between 1m and 4m wide. Visibility in early Apr 01 was 1-2m in the East end and 4-5m in the West end, but easily disturbed by soft white silt on walls. Fixed line descends almost vertically down southern wall. The length of the surface lake, almost 25m from East to West, will require extensive diving to investigate presence of



other leads. Vertical crevice type cave. Expect it to be similar to Marcus Mice Cave

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Hassels Cave

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Site Access:	<p>Permission to camp on-site and permits to enter the cave are required from the landowner. Contact Rocklands Stations at Camooweal. Access includes a 3km cross country drive across low shrublands and hidden diff-height rocks, allow at least one hour to negotiate.</p> <p>The Camooweal Police and local caver Hank Coppus (hlcopp@bigpond.com) should be contacted prior to and after your visit as a matter of safety and courtesy. They can also be of invaluable local area assistance.</p>
Cave Maps:	<p>Underwater map not available from Hank Coppus. This cave has yet to be dived. This cave has been dived at least twice, once by person(s) unknown who laid a permanent line from the waterline to -13m and continuing straight down, also by Andy Nelson in early 2001.</p> <p>Dry cave map available on request from www.trimixdivers.com Paul Boler will be happy to help with up to date site information for this cave.</p>
Time to Visit:	Around August (dry season) to avoid heat and tropical rain, and improved visibility
Suggested Rigging:	<p>Park car on high side of cave entrance, chock wheels. 2 x 50m ropes will allow access to the bottom of the multi pitch entrance, applying rope protection as necessary. One rope for abseil/gear lowering the other as safety backup. Route both ropes across the front of each pitch, not under the large boulder chockstones. WARNING: Extremely high rockfall area, all personnel working below need to remain clear of direct line of fall whilst abseiling/gear lowering in progress.</p> <p>Second section needs a halved 50m rope. THIS FINAL SECTION IS AN EVEN HIGHER ROCKFALL RISK. 5m of sideways swing is required to gain access to the final staging platform chockstone, and a 20 foot ladder is to be rigged to allow diver access into the water. A 25m long tail is required on the gear lowering rope to maintain control of gear by personnel on the lower platform. Allow hang points above the water to enable in water gearing up of divers. Full abseiling and ascending gear Associated rigging for gear hauling</p>
Cave Conservation:	Please adhere to the ASF Minimal Impact Caving Code (1995) to protect this cave and it's inhabitants
Foul Air:	None at time of visit. Very high air humidity and 32 degree temperature in Apr. Carry lots of water.
Turn Around Time:	The Apr 01 expedition required seven hours for entry, quick dive and exit, although this is considered slow due to unfamiliarity with the cave (causing equipment lowering/raising problems) and personnel difficulties exiting. Suggest five hours for well equipped personnel familiar with cave layout and efficient gear hauling systems ready to deploy.
Water Temperature:	27 degrees C in Apr.
Fixed Line:	Single line commencing on southwall 5m East of staging chockstone, approx 60cm above waterline
Gear Configuration:	Sidemount 55s preferred, although backmount may be OK subject to further explorations. Larger sidemount cylinders may be possible.
Dive Profile:	<p>Unknown</p> <p>By all appearances cave appears to provide excellent potential deep diving as the lay of the underwater section mirrors that above water in the form of a narrow rift passage varying between 1m and 4m wide. Visibility in early Apr 01 was 1-2m in the East end and 4-5m in the West end, but easily disturbed by soft white silt on walls. Fixed line descends almost vertically down southern wall. The length of the surface lake, almost 25m from East to West, will require extensive diving to investigate presence of other leads.</p>
Other Comments:	Vertical crevice type cave. Expect it to be similar to Marcus Mice Cave.

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Trip Report by Andrew Nelson

OK, here's the full story! Fri 0500 Claire Elliot and I (cave divers) and Sherrie (dry caver) departed Darwin for the 1400 km drive to Camoweal, just across the border in sunny Queensland, meeting Hank Coppus (dry caver) that night.

Sat morning short drive to Niggle Cave just off the highway commenced with a multi stage 25m abseil and lowering of our gear, including two side mount 55 cu ft tanks, a pony and a common set of dive gear, plus water, food, etc for the expected 12-14 hour trip. The body squeeze on abseil served as a sobering reminder of how hard it would be to exit the cave in good health, let alone with any injuries. Walking, dragging and crawling for two and a half hours saw us at the final sump, after having negotiated a further 6m pitch hand over hand with a body belay for safety. Claire and I then prep'd the dive gear, discovering to some dismay one of the 55s having emptied all it's contents at some stage, the mystery remains as to where and when. This enforced the use of our backup pony tank as one of the two sidemounts, ensuring fairly conservative diving.

I conducted the first short dive down the fixed line to 6m left I assume by Paul Boler. After tying in a our line, I turned right and headed down to a depth of 18m, following the left hand wall which slopes down at about 30 degrees along a fairly silty bottom. Visibility was a milky 2m. Tie offs were rare and incredibly chalky, with one breaking off and needing re-tying on a subsequent dive. The passage was wider than the limited visibility would allow us to determine. Water temperature was a lovely 28 degrees.

Claire then took the reins and checked bearings, revealing the line from 6m to 18m runs along a bearing of 180 degrees. She obtained a depth of 22.5m and found a lack of any potential to the East and South. I conducted a final dive and confirmed line distance at a mere 25m, but also conducted a sweep into the West side of the cave and found it to be at least 8m wide in most parts, and appears to continue in a south-west direction. We then repacked our gear and commenced the exit, photographing some crabs in the process, and noted a vast number of green and brown frogs throughout the cave system. Total caving duration 10 hours.

[Ed: The frogs and crabs seen by Andy and their group are troglaphiles which means they prefer to live in caves but are not completely confined to that environment (a bit like us !). They are probaby washed into the caves during floods and survive down there while food & water lasts. In the Sept 2002 visit, most of the frogs were dead or dying, there having been no major rains in the area for the past two years.]

Sunday (Hassel Cave) We headed to Rocklands Station and met the manager, signed the waivers then headed West until turning off the dirt road and following our GPS to the mark 3.5km cross country, trying to avoid the proliferation of rocks that little this area. This took over an hour to negotiate and find the cave. The cave is described as a rift heading East-West, consistently narrow between 1m and 2m, very high rockfall danger

necessitating disciplined movement within the cave at all times. It is also quite hot and stifling, even near the bottom at 32 degrees. First multi pitch abseil was 25m using a long tie-in to the 4WD on the surface. A steep walkdown the rift led to the final pitch of about 18m, rigging proving difficult through the large boulder chokes and loose footing. Claire and I only abseiled down to about 5m above the water, then swung right 5m to a small boulder choke platform 1.5 x 3m. This offset below the abseil/lowering point caused considerable challenges when lowering gear through a narrow crevice, and required the diver to enter the water on abseil, gear up with the support of the other diver on the platform, then don prussicking gear to return to the platform post dive. Next time a different approach with a ladder and gear hanging slings will improve business. The offset did however prove effective protection from the constant rain of rocks from above which would otherwise have proven fatal. Owing to the lateness of the start, it was decided to only do a quick drop on a pony bottle and avoid the challenges of the gear lowering for the 55s (two new tanks, both full!).

I conducted a quick dive down the fixed line (yes, despite advice to the contrary, someone has dived this site before, bugger! Who? How far? How Deep? Map??) to 12m, observing a tie off at 13m then the line continuing further down the rift into an abyss. Visibility was better in the open rift section at about 5m, however quickly deteriorated due to the high amounts of silt lying on all sloped surfaces. The length of the surface of the pool is 25m, thus any number of accesses vertically downwards could be possible - this place could go!

After a difficult gear extraction, we finally exited the cave 7 hours after entry, then negotiated the cross country drive in rapidly failing light. A long and boring drive home was had on the Monday!

Thanks must go to Hank Coppus and Paul Boler who both contributed masses of information before the visit. Hank's efforts in the cave were exemplary and tireless, and his lack of water consumption was truly camel-like. Sherrie's contribution as a dry caver was also pretty impressive for someone not gaining the benefit of a refreshing dive at the end of a hard day's struggle, although Hank and Sherrie expressed no such regrets at not diving the sumps! Claire and I certainly appreciated the assistance. Anyone (dry or wet cavers) interested in joining us for future exploration trips to the area are encouraged to email us here at trimixdivers. Good caving and SRT skills are vital. There is huge potential in this area just waiting for the right masochists to bust it open !

Regards, Andy



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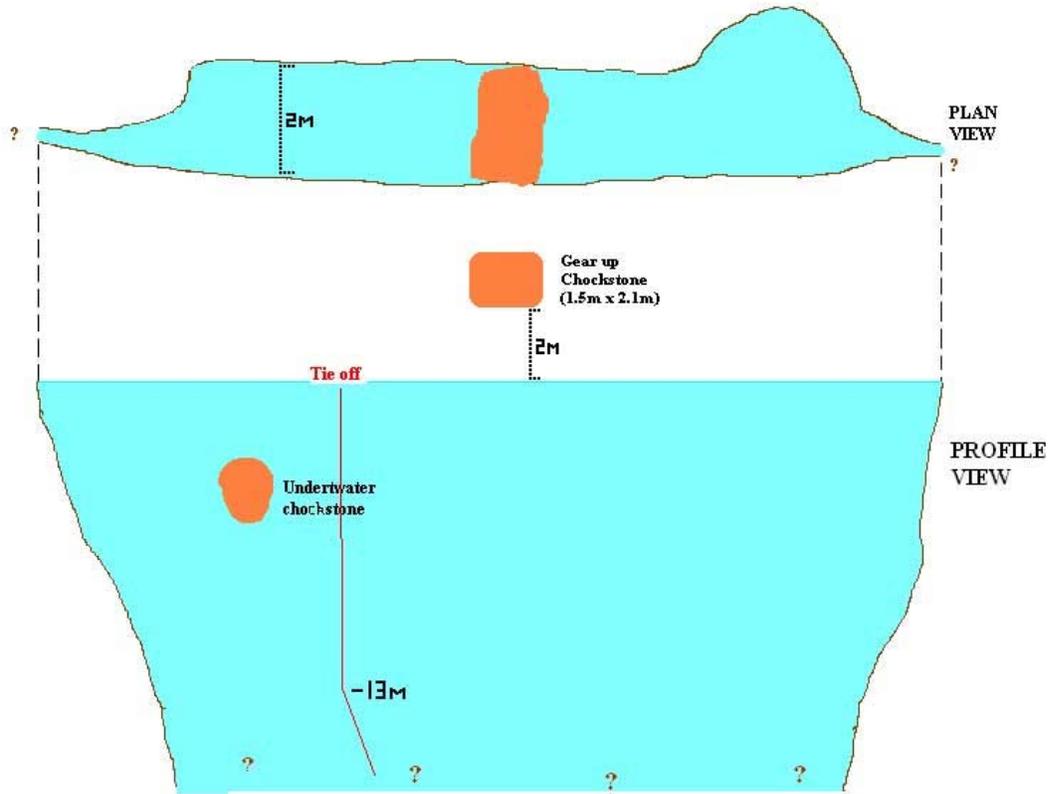


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