

## WILD CAVING: ZWEIHOHLEN CAVE

Sasa Kennedy

Participants: Travis Cross (leader), Cath Sellars, Phil McGuinn, Patrick Nykiel, Dirk Stoffels, Lily Petrovic and Sasa Kennedy.

The day started with a pleasant sortie through the Ruakuri Reserve, looking for the entrance amidst a maze of tracks.

Zweihohlen refers to “two holes” or entrances. The upper sections of the cave are used by schools, scouts and other similar groups for adventure caving; access here is easy, requiring no vertical techniques. As such, it was interesting to see the range of management techniques used to minimise mud tramping, control erosion and generally protect the cave.

At the entrance to the cave is a metal stairway, which prevents erosion and also catches a lot of mud, before it enters into the dark sections of the cave on boots. This is soon followed by two boot wash stations. These have been used in studies to measure how much silt and organic material would be brought into the cave without them.

Shortly after, sandbagging has been used to prevent further deterioration where a deep trough has been worn by passing cavers. Though rather unsightly, it does seem to be doing its job.

Unusually for an undeveloped cave, galvanised handrails are used in a few places, more to protect some rather attractive stalagmites than for the safety of visitors. Though visually intrusive they do serve a useful purpose. Lack of a minimal impact ethic in some previous users can be seen where mud has been thrown at some features in this top part of the cave.

Travis reported having had to “mend” a few features, including a delicate shawl/straw and a large formation

high up on the wall, which had been smashed into fourteen pieces. Excellent repair work!

This upper section of the cave is looking a little the worse for wear (it reminded me a little of B4-5 at Bungonia, which has similarly unrestricted access), with compacted soils and erosion gullies, so it was good to see some active management of these issues. It was also pleasing to see that some delicate formations and dramatically large ones, such as the Birthday Candle, seem to have survived the wear and tear. There are some very pretty pool crystals along the track and groupings of shawls and flowstone to please visitors. As this part of the cave is mainly walk through, with a few easy crawls, it is easy to understand its popularity as a beginners’ trip. We had fun with a taped downclimb, but this could be avoided by less experienced groups.

While waiting to descend a 7-8m pitch into the lower sections of the cave we detoured to look at a crystal roof etched with mud cracks. A fun abseil, tight at the top and opening out into a stream passage below, required a bit of thought to avoid landing in the water. Requiring rope skills, this part of the cave is less trogged and quite lovely. From here we followed the stream, mainly ankle-deep but up to the thighs in places. Mostly the passage was wide and high but as we got closer to the resurgence it narrowed and got lower. The limestone in this passage was absolutely beautiful, with pancake layering washed and showing a lovely golden hue. We saw some wetas and a cave spider in this section of cave.

Eventually the cave emerged into the forest. Travis kindly collected the bus so we could walk the Ruakuri Track through the reserve. A relaxing but very interesting trip.



*Boot wash station*



*Travis Cross admiring Zweihohlen decoration.*

*Photos: Sasa Kennedy*