

WILD CAVING: RUMBLING GUT CAVE

John Brush

As we came to appreciate, Kiwi cavers don't tell you everything up front. The 'secret' email sent by Dave Smith to his kiwi caving mates, two of whom were to be our trip leaders for the day, said of the proposed Rumbling Gut trip "promote as a short trip". At the morning briefing in the HTG Cavers Hut, the advice was "mostly walk-through, good decoration, nice stream and basically a dry cave". That sounded good. No mention of the traverse across a deep plunge pool on a wobbly chain, or of the tricky climbs for those with short legs or of the Last Minute Squeeze where, in 1994, a woman was trapped for 16 hours and where on our trip, one of the locals decided to turn back.



*Marj Coggan in Peters Palace.
Photo: John Brush*

Rumbling Gut is part of the Waipapa Road System, a series of stream sinks, dolines and stream caves along Waipapa Road about 20km southwest of Waitomo. From the road, it was just a short walk to Phosphate Pot, where we entered the system. Initially we meandered along narrow stream fissures, not unlike some of the plateau stream caves at Yarrangobilly. Soon, we were at the infamous Last Minute Squeeze and only then did Rich Kersel, our party leader, tell us about the rescue efforts back in 1994. At this point Stan, the other local, became concerned about his recently-injured fingers decided to turn back, as did Lilly Petrovic who was nursing a sore thumb. Dirk Stoffels tried the squeeze and failed, so he too headed out. They later walked around and entered Rumbling Gut from the stream sink entrance from which the rest of us hoped to emerge.

Led by Rich, the rest of us (Sasa Kennedy, Phil McGuinn, Marj Coggan, Cath Sellars, and John Brush) continued on. There were handline-assisted fissure

climbs, climbs over waterfalls, chimneying, high climbs and traverses to avoid streamway constrictions, scrambles over slippery flowstone and the odd awkward squeeze to an area of rockfall. Near here we stopped to admire and photograph the spectacular decoration in Peter's Palace. Later, we continued over more rockpile and back to the stream which in that area was reminiscent of Coppermine Cave at Yarrangobilly, at least until we came across that dodgy chain. No mishaps, fortunately, so we continued up the streamway, over or around the odd waterfall or two and then out into a deep, muddy doline in a patch of pine trees.

A most enjoyable day, thanks Rich.



*Sasa Kennedy assisting Marj Coggan with a tricky climb
while Rich Kersel looks on.
Photo: John Brush*