



I love Devil's Eye. Yet after diving it virtually every weekday for months on end and inspecting what seems like every inch of its gorgeous self, one day it struck me - this must be what being married is like. It's still good every time you do it... but you always know what you are going to get. Then the floods came and I was in for a wild ride; the marriage equivalent of coming home and finding your partner in a kinky outfit and ready to go, I suppose.

The floods quickly turned the vis to crap and hardly anyone was diving. While most saw doom and gloom, I saw an opportunity. I could turn my attention to the one tunnel I hadn't seen yet, the tunnel that led to the new section.

Now for the benefit of the Oz readers lets do a little 'Neighbours' style catch up. Back in 2007 Marius Frei did the impossible and found new passage in what is probably the most dived cave in the world. It was a damn wicked effort in anybody's language... the equivalent of finding new passage in Pines but on a much larger scale. Marius laid well in excess of a 300m (1000ft) of line and the cave was still going! Unfortunately early in 2008 a diver followed in his footsteps that led to a fatality, leaving a sour taste in the mouth of the cave diving community in FL. There was a very negative vibe towards the new section from the cave diving community and everyone assumed that simply going back there would not only totally blow the vis in the cave and ruin diving for everyone but it was also a somewhat suicidal mission. It's true to say that there has been a lot of misinformation, myth and mysticism surrounding the new section. I'm not here to set the record straight, instead I want to share my experiences back there and a few pics.

For my very first dive I scootered to 900m (3000ft), swam up to the end of the gold line, and made my way into the mysterious tunnel. The flow was virtually nonexistent because of the floods, which made diving in this area incredibly pleasant, kind of like diving Peacock. I got to the restriction and thought "really?" This is the infamous restriction? I unclipped one of my tanks and gingerly popped through to the other side. To my great surprise it was not at all hazardous, or particularly tight for that matter. The remainder of the passage was a most reasonable size and even had some decent sized dome rooms. I was super excited as one gorgeous dome

room after another appeared in front of me. I spent ages stopping, staring, looking, absorbing... admiring cave that less than a handful of people have ever laid eyes on. Unspoiled, untouched and beautiful cave revealed itself in front of me. I hit thirds around the 1333m (4400ft) mark and headed back with a renewed passion for all things Ginnie. It was like falling in love all over again.

I spent a few weeks diving there regularly, looking around, enjoying the cave and doing progressively longer dives... meanwhile the vis and the flow began to slowly return back to normal. One day as I was completing one of my regular ventures there, I couldn't help but notice a conga line of tanks leading all the way through to the new passage... and finally to a new cookie. I wondered who else was going back there... and what they were up to. Luckily I didn't have to chew on this for too long, as Andrew Ainslie gave himself away on the boards the very next day. We got in touch and figured out who the mysterious "Saber" who laid line all over the place back there was (James Toland). Thus began a flow of communication that solved many of the questions I had in regards to who did what and when. Andrew added more line, surveyed, and to his great surprise, found himself at 46m (151ft) depth. 46m (151ft) in Devil's Eye – it seemed surreal... the rest of the cave doesn't drop much past 30m (100ft).

Armed with this knowledge planning my next dive was that much easier, so I mixed it up and continued my own little exploration. Along the way I had the pleasure of seeing what is, without being too melodramatic, some of the prettiest cave I have ever seen. Then suddenly and unexpectedly I found myself at the end of the line... with a bunch of gas... and thought, now what do I do? The 125-foot spool (38m) was the longest bit of line I had. As one of my friends put it 'only you Ag, only you would do that dive without a reel.'

Yet, there I was and the Pits of Mordor were beckoning. The Pit to the right was the obvious way forward. I peeked in and it definitely went. I decided not to tease myself, with no line to actually go exploring, so I dropped into the other Pit. The Pit dropped to 50m (165ft), the flow disappeared, and the whole thing was low, flat and filled with silt up to the ears. I have affectionately dubbed it the "Mud Bath." While I won't bet my life that it doesn't go, I don't reckon it does. Although to find out for sure, I would need a much longer leash. At the end of my splash, I took out the spool; no point leaving scraps of line around and headed for home.

Finally while relaxing on deco I had an after-thought - I just got to see my first virgin cave ever! I'd be lying if I said I didn't get a kick out of this, not to mention the warm fluffy after-glow that goes along with the deflowering of virgins. Yet the after-glow was typically fleeting, and the cave had only revealed as much as a typical two dollar peep show. I am under no illusions; in the scheme of things my little sojourn 30m (100ft) into new passage means absolutely nothing. It is

not a cure for cancer. It's not even a footnote to the exploration that has been done and is being done around cave country FL, not to mention the world.

Yet the exploration of this cave does matter and it does mean something in the larger scheme of things. Cave exploration is not just about divers seeing pretty new cave or spooling out line into uncharted territory. At the very heart of exploration is the thirst for knowledge, knowledge that in the hands of the right people can be ammunition in the battle for environmental conservation. There are so many examples in Florida alone of physical connections made between springs by divers, which lead to conservation efforts and real changes in peoples and organizations attitudes to and actions towards the aquifer. Clearly the Devil's Eye Cave System does not stop at the end of the gold line. Tracing the source of the water could have a significant impact on how the land in this area is treated by everybody. Exploration should not be a dirty word; it should be applauded, facilitated and recognized appropriately. Clearly the mysteries of this cave are yet to be fully revealed.

Going past the restriction is not a dive for everyone, the same way a 3km (10000ft) push into Manatee or hitting the end of the gold line in Jackson Blue is not for everyone. But the cave is there, it has been pushed and it has been lined, and where's there's cave there will be eager and curious divers.

So if you are one of the curious divers and can't sleep knowing that beautiful, unspoiled cave is just a hop, skip and a jump away from the beaten path and you happen to be in Florida, do us all a favor and take it easy in there. Keep your own limitations in mind and don't over reach. Don't plan a quadruple stage dive to begin with; enjoy what this new section has to offer and better yet take the time to enjoy the 'old' cave first. Make sure your sidemounting is squared away, you are comfortable negotiating restrictions, dealing with potentially bad vis, tons of deco and that you plan your gas accordingly. If you are going back there, remember, it is largely pristine and unspoiled cave, so keep your wits about ya.

While my pics are from the white section past Narnia's Gate, I don't mean to be biased towards it, as the black section is equally incredible and mind blowing. My little camera and 24W light however, are no match for the black veneer walls of Devil's. One of my favorite memories is being sucked down the siphon tunnel into black nothingness. Imagine being in this huge black tunnel, I mean jet black, and being slowly sucked into what feels like a black void – it was the most surreal and memorable experience. I'd hate for others to miss out on this in the future, so if you are back there stay off the perfectly black walls, pretty please with a cherry on top. Otherwise – have fun and enjoy!

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