

A BOAT TRIP into KRIZNA JAMA

John Brush



*Port of Venice and the eighth lake, main stream passage
Photo: John Brush*

Križna Jama (Cross Cave) is a spectacular stream cave in Slovenia that is probably best known for its rimstone barriers that break the cave streams into a string of around 50 lakes. Outer parts of the cave can be visited on a low-key show cave trip and adventure-style trips can be arranged to more distant sections of the cave. In July 2013, Marjorie Coggan and I organised a 4 hour visit into the cave.

Much of Križna Jama is horizontal and spacious and with many spectacular features. The cave has long been one of the iconic features of the Slovenian karst world. However, as many of its special features are either fragile, a long way into the cave, or are beyond long stretches of water that fluctuate greatly in depth, it is easy to see why the cave has never been developed for mass tourism.

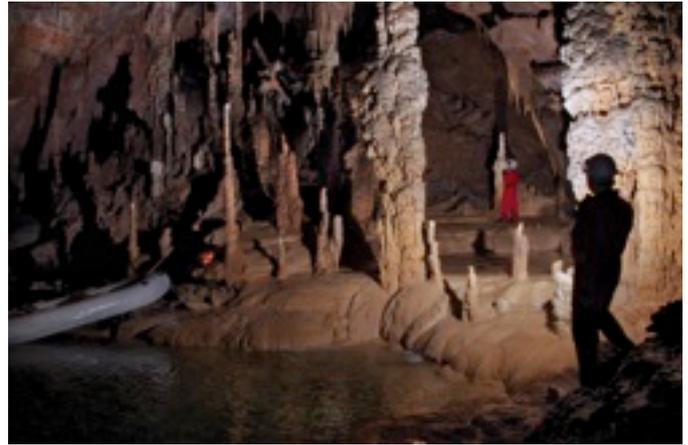
For some years, regular one hour trips into the cave have been offered. These cover the first 500 metres of passage and feature the large dry outer passage, a walk beside rimstone cascades and a short boat trip across

the first lake. The pathways are natural formation with the odd handrail and are usually delineated with either lines of rocks or flagging tape. Visitors are provided with lights and in addition, a couple of features, such as a display of cave bear bones, are lit with fixed, battery powered lights. These tours appear to be well organised and interesting but the real treasures occur further into the cave.

More than six kilometres of passage is known in Križna Jama. In plan view, the cave takes the shape of a reclining and wobbly "Y", with the entrance positioned near the base of the Y. Most of the Y is active streamway and, along the two arms, a number of tributary streams enter, draining an overlying karst plateau. At the intersection of the two arms, about 1500 metres from the entrance, there is a large chamber known as Kalvarija (or Calvary), which is the turn-around point for the four hour trips. Here Alojs Troha, our guide, said there was plenty of time to take photos or to simply soak up the magnificent scenery.



*Drifting along the twelfth lake in an inflatable dinghy
Photo: John Brush*



*The entrance to Calvary Chamber
Photo: John Brush*

Alojs has been taking people into the depths of Križna since 1978. Most people only get to see the 13 lakes to Calvary Chamber on the 4 hour trip. For a lucky few, Alojs can also organise an 8 hour trip to Kristalna Gora (Crystal Chamber) near the end of the northeast branch. Visits to the chamber are limited to 100 people a year and can only be done in winter and when water levels are suitable. Even the four hour trips are very much dependent on water levels. In summer, the levels are often too low for the inflatable boats but equally, storm events can raise the stream to dangerous levels.

We arranged our trip by email before we left Australia and two days prior to the trip, a quick phone call to Alojs confirmed water levels were suitable for a trip. We had thought it would be just the two of us with Alojs, but on the day of the trip, an English/Australian couple, who had not previously been caving but who thought it sounded exciting, appeared in the car park. They apparently had a booking for a different day, but due to a mix-up or misunderstanding somewhere, here they were. After discussions between guide and clients, it

was agreed they could join our trip. Fortunately Alojs had extra gear for them to use, but it was a little crowded in the inflatable dinghy and with the extra weight, our progress across a couple of very shallow sections of lake was slow.

In some of the shallow sections, it would have been easy to walk, but Alojs is very protective of his cave and did not want any unnecessary stepping on the dams. In fact, as we approached each landing, he would state precisely what order we would disembark and exactly where we were to place our feet. In a couple of places, he laid out pieces of (red) carpet to avoid stepping directly onto particularly delicate areas. This was the first time a red carpet had ever been rolled out for me!

For us, the trip was very relaxed, unhurried, easy and informative. It was Alojs who did all the hard work including most of the paddling and all the dinghy carrying between lakes. He also knew what bug to look for in which pool or on what wall (more than 44 species of invertebrates and around seven species of bat have been recorded in the cave) and was more than happy to run around holding a flash and to offer advice on photo



*The entrance to Calvary Chamber
Photo: John Brush*



*Walking beside rimstone cascades on the show cave trail
Photo: John Brush*



*Rimstone cascades in Calvary Chamber
Photo: John Brush*

scenes (“I have done this before, I know the best angles” and the like). At times he almost pleaded with us to spend more time taking photos, would you believe? Inevitably our four hour trip stretched out to around five hours, but we were more concerned about this than was Alojs.

Križna Jama is a magnificent cave and the four hour trip can be thoroughly recommended. In my view, it is well worth a detour for any ACKMA member who happens to be in the general area and who has a day to spare. Alojs

is very knowledgeable about ‘his’ cave and everything in it and is only too happy to share that knowledge with his visitors.

Further information on the cave, including on the various trip options, can be found at:

- www.krizna-jama.si.
- www.burger.si/Jame/KriznaJama/2013/02_KriznaJama there are some superb interactive 360° images where it is possible to navigate your way through the cave.



*Reboarding the inflatable after crossing a rimstone barrier
Photo: John Brush*



*Alojs rolls out the red carpet for VIPs (to minimise their impact on the cave)
Photo: John Brush*