

Johalvin Cave, Commemoration Hall and Broken Pot Grotto

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Johalvin Cave

Discovery

John and Alvin Meyer discovered Johalvin Cave on the 29th November 1933. John Meyer was first to descend into the cave by rope ladder through a small hole in the roof. Meyer diarized the following:

'Then we went to Johalvin Cave. Alvin crept in through a narrow opening and I descended by rope ladder. We found a grotto about 60 ft. long, 3 to 6 ft. wide and about 12 feet high. The entrance was about 20 feet above the floor...'

On the 26th January 1935 John Irving and Meyer entered Johalvin cave by rope ladder and discovered a tortuous passage that allowed access to the surface without requiring a rope ladder. On the 5th September Meyer and Mr. Hurling hammered at an opening and entered a small chamber, which was, they called 'Josie's Trap'.

The cave name is a combination of the discoverer's names, Joh-alvin. Meyer painted the cave name and details of its discovery on a piece of loose rock, which he left in the cave.

Description

Johalvin cave is situated in the southwestern ridge of Kleintuinkop (little garden on the hill). It has two entrances set in the floor of a grike that incises the ridge at 90 degrees. Indigenous trees have grown to fill the grike. The cave consists of a single lofty chamber about 30m long. The lower entrance is at the southern end of the cave and is a narrow corkscrew through a jumble of boulders. The upper entrance is a small hole in the roof about 7m above the floor. It is possible to climb down by chimneying using the narrow ledges on the walls. Further in, the passage widens to 4m and ends in a small network of sandy passages that rise steeply at the back of the cave. A small stream rises from an accumulation of drips in the main chamber and flows along a narrow side passage on the left side of the cave. This passage is too narrow to explore. It appears likely from the survey that the water makes it's way into the nearby Commemoration Hall system and thereafter through to Broken Pot Grotto. The entrances of Commemoration Hall and Broken Pot Grotto are each only 30m away from Johalvin Cave.

Commemoration Hall and Broken Pot Grotto

Discovery

On the 17th October 1933 Meyer discovered two new caves. His diary entry reads,

'Went up the mountain. Visited Wolf Cave and Vier Grotte. Found and named Dome Cell. Found a grotto which I could not enter owing to water on the floor of the underground passage. (*Broken Pot Grotto)'*

Dome Cell is a small dome shaped entrance chamber with two passages leading from it. Meyer went back to this chamber with Mr Hurlingh in December 1937.

'Hurlingh and I went up the mountain this afternoon. We took with us hammer and cold chisel, and about a yard of iron piping, which I used as a walking-stick. When we reached Dome Cell, we filled the pipe with sand and flattened both ends, and used it as a crowbar. Then we tackled the opening in the side of Dome Cell. I crawled in first and started working on the other side. Hurling brought in a few stepping stones to stand on, and then also crawled in. Then we put a candle in position and went to Broken Pot Grotto, where I crawled in. But I could not see any light.'

'We decided to name the new cave "Commemoration 333" to commemorate the 300th Meyer climb, the 30th Hurlingh-Meyer trip, and the third time that we opened a chamber in a cave. (The other two chambers were Hurlingh Chamber in Boomslang Cave, and Josie's Trap in Johalvin Cave)'

On the 9th December 1937 he continues:

'Went up the mountain a few minutes before nine. I painted the following: Commemoration Hall where the Hiker and the Tramp held their first Commemoration Day - 4.12.37 - to celebrate 333 events. Commemoration 333 Chamber was opened with hammer and chisel 4.12.37.'

'After trying several times to get into Commemoration 333 I fetched the crowbar and hammer and chisel, and widened the opening, and crawled through. Inside, I placed stepping-stones and painted a white patch. ...'

Description

Commemoration Hall is a small cave amongst some rocks on the southern side of the ridge. The entrance area is a collapsed chamber or sunken gully sandwiched between lofty rocks. Two small entrances lead into a dome shaped chamber called 'Dome Cell'. A narrow impenetrable passage continues, but there is a small hole at eye level in the right wall. A squeeze through this leads into an un-spoilt eight meter long, two meter high passage, which gets one to the other side of the previously mentioned narrow passage. A narrow passage continues for a few meters until it is too tight to progress any further. Water collects in the entrance and flows down this passage that also carries a noticeable draft. A very narrow stream passage comes in from the left near the constriction between Comm. Hall and Broken Pot Grotto. This could be the water coming from Johalvin Cave.

Broken Pot Grotto

Broken Pot Grotto is a small cave situated at the base of a low cliff one level below the entrances to Comm. Hall and Johalvin cave. It was so named because John Meyer found a broken iron pot at its entrance. Remnants of the pot can still be found there. The entrance of the cave is between some lovely ferns and is low and horizontal. Water flows out of this cave in the winter carrying plenty of white silt along with it. The passage extends for about 15m before turning sharp right and becoming too narrow after a further 6m. The impassable section is very short.

Survey and Exploration

There are old grade-one ink sketches of Commemoration Hall and Johalvin Cave that were probably drawn by John Meyer. These drawings are diagrammatic representations of the two caves roughly showing their positions relative to each other. (XXX insert sketches)

Peter Swart, Jean Paul van Belle and I completed the survey of the three caves on the 1st May 1984. The survey shows Comm. Hall, Broken Pot Grotto and Johalvin Cave relatively close to each other.

Peter removed silt and sand from the floor of Broken Pot Grotto and managed to get to within a few meters of Commemoration Hall. He could talk to me where I was waiting at the end of Commemoration Hall. Johalvin Cave was also surveyed as it is nearby. A small stream flows down a narrow passage on the left side of Johalvin and disappears. The survey indicates that it is possible that the water flows through the Commemoration Hall system and out of Broken Pot grotto. The Comm. Hall – Broken Pot system is about 62m long. Johalvin Cave is a little more than 50m long.