

DOG RESCUE ON THE CENTRAL COAST.

Chris Curtis.

On the Sunday night of 15th January, 2023, around 10:00pm, my phone started beeping its head off. Facebook Messenger was going nuts of people wanting help for a dog stuck underground. Cave Rescue was being called upon once again.

A dog called Jax (Photo 1) had somehow gotten into a cave at Wyong Creek, just west of Wyong (Photo 2). I notified my captain of the potential callout and I volunteered my time if needed.

By 11:00pm I was called to go and investigate. The Police and local VRA had already been to investigate and they both said it was out of their scope.

One of the downsides of being in rescue is potentially being the person to tell someone that we can't help. This was a very real concern for me leading up to this rescue knowing that the Police and VRA had both said they couldn't help. I was having serious doubts that I was going to be able to help too. There was a lot of discussion about having the dog put down inside the cave by gas.

At 4:00am Monday morning I got up and met the local VRA unit at the property at around 7:00am. The dogs owner Brian had mowed a vehicle track to enable closer access to the



Photo 1: Jax, the dog. **Photo:** Chris Curtis.

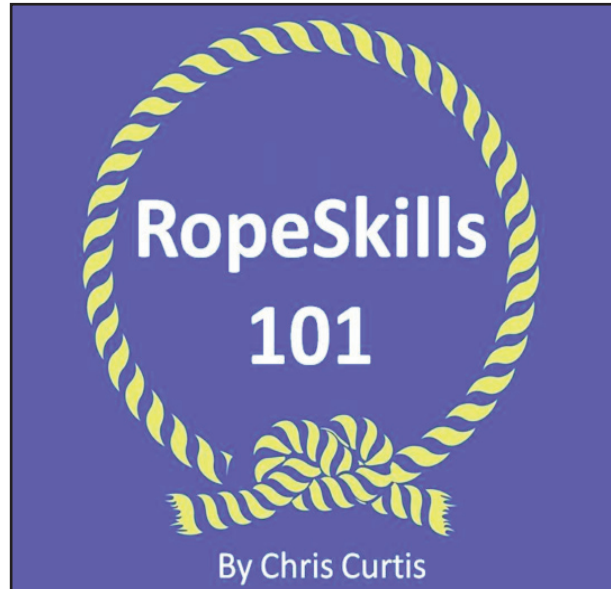


Photo 1: Location of cave, west of Wyong.

Photo: Chris Curtis.

cave. We only had about a three minute walk to the cave.

After having a thorough look at all our options, it was decided that heavy digging equipment was needed if we were to have any success, but I made no promises.

Brian quickly started making phone calls and before I knew it we had the RSPCA, Mine Rescue, an asbestos removal business and other businesses arrive. We had a generator, various jackhammers, a concrete cutting saw, and various other timber saws arrive.

A few guys dug out the entrance for me to investigate (Photos 3, 4). It took about three hours just to open the entrance for me. I went in and then started digging out the next restriction about 1.5 metres further in (Photo 5).

I also made phone calls to my captains asking to start ringing around to see who is available from Cave Rescue and have them on standby.

The length of passage to the dog was approximately eight metres (Photo 6) and all of that length had to be dug out and or cut out. It was still unknown if we would even be able to get the dog out in time.



Photo 3: The cave entrance before it was dug out. **Photo:** *Chris Curtis.*



Photo 4: The cave entrance after it was dug out. **Photo:** *Chris Curtis.*

← **Photo 5:** The second restriction in the cave. **Photo:** *Chris Curtis.*



About an hour later, after they had removed a substantial amount of rock at the other end of the passage above the dog, they were about to lower an animal catch pole hoping they could get the dog that way, as they had seen the dogs nose at one point.

During all their digging the dog was barking, which was good, but when they went to lower the catch pole down the dog was quiet, which seemed odd.

So, I quickly went back to the other end and went into the cave and started calling out for Jax. I shined my light as far as I could and waited thinking he may not be stuck and



Photo 6: Jaxs Cave. **Photo:** Chris Curtis.

started walking back out the other way. Jax started barking again briefly and he sounded closer, but still no visual again.

Eventually after waiting a while and realising just how much more digging was required I decided to back out of the cave. I was going to call one of my captains to bring in more cavers to help dig.

Just as I was almost out I was surprised to see Jax's face (Photo 7). He had made his way back out on his own. This probably saved us at least two more days of digging with still not knowing if we could get to Jax in time.



Photo 7: Jax. **Photo:** Chris Curtis.

Seeing Jax face was the biggest surprise of my life and the last thing I was expecting to see. I had to compose myself quickly and I slowly grabbed his collar just in case he got startled and was tempted to go back into the cave.

I gave Jax a moment to let his eyes adjust to the sunlight and the spectacle in front of him



Photo 8: Jax being lifted from the cave.
Photo: Chris Curtis.

and then I lifted him up the step and out of the cave entrance (Photo 8).

I thought he would be tired, but as I walked Jax on a lead back down the creek to the cars, he was pulling me along.

The dogs owners were very pleased to see him (Photos 9, 10) and they had made everyone lunch with drinks and we all (Photo 11) celebrated the day.

JSSS



Photo 8: Jax, happy to be out of the cave and to see his owner. **Photo:** Chris Curtis.



Photo 8: Jax, out of the cave with his rescuer. **Photo:** Chris Curtis.



Photo 11: Jax and the Rescue Team. **Photo:** RSPCA NSW.