

Molnar Janos Cave

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I can bet that very few inhabitants of Budapest are aware what lays beneath their feet when they walk the streets of the Hungarian Capital City every day.

The story starts in the XIX century with Janos Molnar or should I say Molnar Janos (Hungarian usually speak the surname in the first place). That Hungarian pharmacist was fascinated by the sources of thermal water that were supplying numerous thermal pools in Budapest. Their health benefits were discovered by ancient Romans who were strongly present here in the II century. But let's go back to Molnar Janos. He was trying to understand the benefits of thermal waters but also he was curious where that water was actually coming from. He was particularly intrigued by a small lake at the foot of Gellert Hill. He observed water coming from the rocks and suspected that there should be a water filled cave system somewhere under the hill. Finally he discovered a dry entrance to the system and reached an underground chamber partially filled with water.

The underwater exploration of

the cave started in the 1950s. Later in 70s and 80s divers from FTSK Delfin Dive Club explored the cave and marked 400m of the so cold old part. In 2002 came a real breakthrough (in the very sense of the word ;-). Explorers found a new passage and discovered a big spacious hall stretching for more than 80 meters and more than 15 meters tall. Since that time exploration continues and by the beginning of 2019 there is already more than 7km marked with guiding lines down to 90m depth. In the meantime a professional diving center was founded.

Molnar Janos Cave and Dive Centre are hidden between XIX century buildings of Frankel Leo Street. As I mentioned earlier it is at the foot of Gellert Hill on the left



Artur at the intersection, above the sandy bottom of the cave. . OLYMPUS E-M1 with OLYMPUS housing. 2x INON D-2000 strobes. ISO 640; 8mm; F/1.8; 1/40s. Background highlighted with Trojan Fatman Video Lights. Photo by CA

bank of Danube. Across the street you can find thermal pools built just before WWII supplied by the water from Molnar Cave. We pass through a metal gate to the small yard. On the right we see a lake covered by water lilies which are green all around the year. No wonder water temperature

is here 28 degrees Celsius even in January. Next to the lake there is an inconspicuous flap. That is the entrance to the old part of the cave. Through that entrance the first explorations were made.

In the yard we can see ruins of the old thermal spa which add some

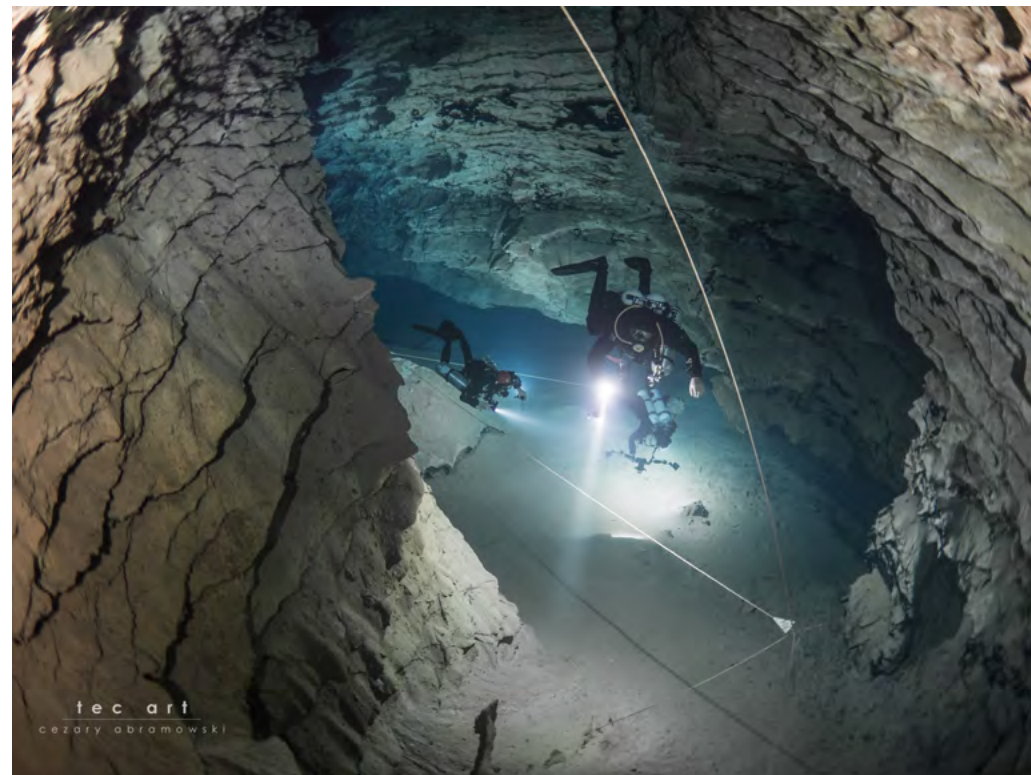


The lake just outside the diving center on a cold January morning.. This is the very same lake that attracted the attention of Janos Molnar in the XIX century. You can see the entrance to the old part of the cave. SONY A6000 with Nauticam housing. 2x INON Z240 strobes. ISO 200, 10mm; F9; 1/50s. Photo by AK

atmosphere to the place. Just behind those ruins there is an entrance to the diving center. As soon as we cross the doors we are struck by high temperature and humidity. It is almost like in the Turkish bath. A long corridor leads to the main part of the diving base. It is built with a lot of attention to detail. For every part of your equipment there is a dedicated space. You can find a big map on the wall and a place for briefings. For instructors there is a lecture room available. Staff pay a lot of attention to

safety. They have strict procedures and requirements that you are expected to follow. The cave is available for those divers certified as a cave diver. For technical divers without cave training there are also cavern dives organized.

As soon you are briefed and ready, you follow the metal stairs to the platform. It is located in the very same chamber that the first explorers reached through to the dry part of the cave. Again the platform is designed precisely for maximum convenience of the divers. There are metal rings



The intersection where one of the routes goes vertically up. OLYMPUS E-M1 with OLYMPUS housing. 2x INON D-2000 strobes. ISO 640; 8mm; F/1.8; 1/40s. Background highlighted with Trojan Fatman Video Lights. Photo by CA

where you can attach your stage tanks. Under the platform at 6m there is a big deco bar. Once in the water you assembly at a big buoy located in the middle of chamber. Pre dive check, ok sign and you dive into warm thermal water. Visibility in the main chamber is not perfect. Water here is warmer but also not moving too much which does not help to clear it after a number of divers swim through it. There are several directions that you can follow

from the descent line. Molnar is rather a system that can be compared to Mexican Cenotes than a cave that can usually be found in southern Europe. All the routes are marked with solid guide lines strongly anchored in the rock. All crossings are marked with big markers indicating the way out and how far you are from the surface.

If you take the route to the left you will gradually descend through wide tunnel. At around 10m depth