

**Applecross – caves and country.**

**Weather:** Partly cloudy and quite warm the whole weekend!

**People Present:** Chris Scaif, Nick, Dave, Daz of walking and me.

**Day 1**

We set off on the journey up towards Scotland, it felt like we were going on expedition and it may as well have been considering it's an 8 hour drive!



**View across the tops off the A89?**

The final part of the drive was up a very twisty track, that led right over the mountains like a giant millipede twisting and writhing as it makes it way through the mountains. The highest point led to some fantastic views of the isle of sky.



We arrived in Applecross before nightfall (me and Daz, anyway) and got the tent set up just before it got too dark. I drank a pint at the pub before returning to sink slowly into a broken sleep.

## **Day 2**

The next morning we went for a quick walk down to the coast, taking in the views and frolicking with a local dog



**View from Applecross**

We met the others at around 10 and set off through the tranquil woods behind Applecross to the first cave.





**Cave entrance (between Chris and the tree)**

The cave we were visiting is known as the “Cave of Wonders”. We were told not to expect a trip as the cave had been flooded for the last 6 months due to winter rains, but we thought we would take a look anyway.

At the cave entrance there was a small constriction, which looked worse than it was. It was however enough to put Nick (His second ever cave) and Daz of flu, off.

After the entrance constriction the cave quickly developed into a canal with some waist deep sections before finally reaching dry passage again, looks like we were having a trip to the “wonders” after all and it was not long until we reached the formations.



**Start of the formations**



**Group shot at the start**



A very short bungee ladder climb led us into continuing delicate passage with yet more formations.



In a spot light, formations deeper in the cave



A frog we completely failed to rescue, as it vanished on the return journey so we had to call off the search (fatality)



Seeing how beautiful the cave was, we returned through the canals to the entrance and made/persuaded a reluctant Nick to come back with us, he was glad he did. Daz on the other-hand had vanished to go on a walk and have a “think” about something.



After exiting this cave for a second time for some of us, we ventured out of the forest and headed up a dry gully to our next cave “Cave of the liar”, where I stole one of Chris's sandwich's, I thought he could do with loosing a few pounds, hehe.

I entered first to scout out the cave and as punishment for eating the sandwich of envy. A long thrutchy crawl eventually led to larger stooping passage, before leading to a large breakdown chamber. With the survey in hand I decided I did not want to repeat that crawl so I did a small round trip along mainly walking passage to emerge from the supposedly blocked upper entrance to surprise the others and telling them that this was indeed the correct cave. I can see why this cave is called cave of the liar.

*“Disclaimer” Though in my view there was nothing wrong with the main entrance, like all boulder chokes care should be taken.*

Nick followed me through this entrance not fancying the crawl (don't blame him) and we all met up in the main chamber before venturing deeper into the cave.



**Typical passage below the breakdown chamber. (Why the arrow?)**

After an awkward triangular hole (awkward on the return) and some low flat out bits we made it to the end chamber known as calcite pot (which I forgot to take a photo of). It was meant to be 10m deep but I think Selected caves once again got something wrong as it was more likely around 10 feet deep.

It went no where and so we headed out. On the return me and Chris thought we would venture into “Straw chamber”. The entrance to straw chamber is through a narrow floor level rift which is



encountered on the left just before the gour-pool when heading out. Once the ten meters of small rift is negotiated a U-bend floor level squeeze is encountered, its main feature being sticky mud that literally glues you to the spot in middle of the squeeze, which is fun.

After a bit of easier passage we were rewarded with magnificent straw formations, thankfully there where no arrows in sight.



**Straw chamber.**

Heading out we pushed and pulled a few people through that triangular squeeze and all exited out the main entrance.





**Main entrance with Chris exiting**

Once changed and human we went hiking around Applecross spotting deer and other wildlife.





**Deer near Applecross**

We retired to the inn to gorge on the best sea food you are likely to encounter in the UK.

### **Day 3**

After another walk this time on the sands we headed off to Cave of the Skulls which is about 15 minutes or so south of Fort William and on our way home. The cave is accessed by a forest track the stones of which played havoc with our cars. Thankfully ours was a hire car. On arrival Dave and Nick did not gear up and decided to enjoy the midges instead.

We all however headed up to the cave and found that Daz of Hurry had already free climbed the entrance pitch/traverse (5m). Not wanting to be outdone we did too. It's an easy free climb but quite slippery.

A brief flat out crawl through blue marble rock led us to the second pitch which is also free-climbable (4 + 3m). I however rigged this one and we landed in the main stream. Daz of sightseeing took a look up stream while Chris rigged the third wetter pitch (11m). At this point Daz of not bottoming, did not descend and headed out. A short crawl led through to the next pitch where I took over the rigging again and dropped the 4<sup>th</sup> (5m) and 5<sup>th</sup> (9m?) to land in a large rift chamber at the end of the pot. A waterlogged crawl that apparently goes no where was the only way on so we headed out. I should note that the top of the 5<sup>th</sup> pitch is a bit tight on the return.

A fun little cave and well worth the short diversion, cave finished we said our goodbyes and headed home after a fantastic weekend.