

Applecross and Appin

Friday 18th – Sunday 20th May 2012

Cavers: Chris Scaife, Alex Ritchie, Darren Jarvis, Dave Burke, Nic Ward.

Weather: There had been rain the week before, but we had sunshine all weekend.

Alex and Daz hired a car and drove up to the campsite at Applecross, while Young Nic very kindly ignored our modern day facebook equivalent of drawing names out of a hat to decide whose car to take - which had resulted in defeat for me - and offered to drive the Newcastle contingent all the way. Naturally Young Nic stayed with his parents, while David and I bunked up in a lovely little lodge behind Nic's parents' friends' house; and Daz and Alex unwittingly set up their tents right in the middle of some midlife crisis party, whose participants had actually made a flag saying, 'MX-5 Owners Club'. Tragic.

We woke up to clear blue skies, unexpectedly, and all met up at the campsite, then headed off to the rather secret location of Uamh nan longantan Fior, or Cave of True Wonders, the recently discovered jewel in Scottish caving's crown. A slightly awkward manoeuvre at the entrance led into a wet crawl. Alex went in first, then me, then Dave. Nic was having second thoughts and then Daz shouted (or perhaps he just spoke at his normal volume, but it was loud enough) that he wanted to spend the day walking so that he could be alone with his thoughts. It sounds as if he had a fantastic day walking and, if his tales are to be believed, had a voyage on a par with that of Odysseus.

The wet crawl downstream only took a few minutes and soon the true wonders were encountered. We were mesmerised by the formations in this cave – absolutely pristine calcite, with perfect flowstone, enormous stalactites and unblemished straws throughout. Having stared open-mouthed at the decorations for a while, we headed back to the surface to find Young Nic still grinning away, and managed to coax him inside. We then did the whole trip again for double the fun.

After exiting we headed to Uamh nam Breagaire or Cave of the Liar, which has two entrances in the bank of a dry river bed. Before entering this there was a minor incident involving Alex snatching a sandwich from the grasps of Young Nic, but let's not go into that now. Alex and Nic went in the upper entrance, and I followed Dave into the lower entrance. This started as sideways crawling and involved a bit of hands and knees crawling down Jawbone Passage into the main chamber, where we met the other two. A small, obvious, triangular hole in the floor of this chamber (about ten times the size of the small, obvious triangular hole in the floor of Boireau Falls Chamber in Langcliffe Pot) provided an entertaining slide down into some crawling passage, which we followed without any route-finding problems, and finished up at a lovely little hole in the floor called Flowstone Pot. We did not descend this as we are very good people and had no intention of dirtying the formations. Reversing a little, we found a narrow passage and Alex and I penetrated, then slid our slender frames through a squeeze into Straw Chamber, which actually had longer straws than the Cave of True Wonders. On exiting the awkward squeeze, a sharp bit of rock dug into my back and gave me a very rough massage, reminding me of Thailand. We all headed out the upper entrance, which was a lot

wider than the lower one, with a brief mix of walking and crawling, culminating in an easy, though fairly loose, scramble back to the world.

Caving finished for the day, we went for a bit of a walk through the mixed woodland, listening to Daz's tales of the exotic beasts he'd seen. We witnessed a minor scuffle between two red deer and saw some wonderful views across the Inner Sound to Raasay and Skye. All the day's activities were basically just to build up our appetite for what must be the main event of any trip to Applecross: dinner at the Applecross Inn. We ate some tremendous haggis, squat lobsters, scallops and sticky toffee pudding; then stayed on to drink beer and whisky, somehow getting into conversation with a man who claimed to be Scotland's number one weightlifter and was very keen to get us to marry his daughters.

On the Sunday morning we went for a walk at Sandy Bay and Young Nic showed us some of the boulder problems he has put up on a small cave there. We ran gaily across the sand and then decided to get back on the road. About four hours driving brought us to a little lane between Ballachulish and Portnacroish, where we started driving up to Bealach House, then forked right and parked at a padlocked gate. As soon as we got out of the car we saw a golden eagle overhead. Nic decided to go for a run and Dave went for a walk, so I headed up to the cave with just Daz and Alex. We found the entrance to Uamh nan Claig-Ionn or Cave of the Skulls inside a fenced enclosure, with a slippery climb down into a short crawl, followed by a short pitch, which we rigged, but could probably have free-climbed. Below this, we followed a very impressive rift, Nutwood High Street, to the main shaft, rigged by an awkward reach around to a Y-hang, then a pleasant abseil through a minimalist waterfall. Below this pitch, a wriggle downstream brought us to a short, wet pitch called Dealer's Drop, which landed in a pool of water, from where we traversed along the rift a few metres to rig the narrow, final pitch, Chest Pot. The metamorphosed limestone in this cave was fascinating and the trip was completely different from either of those in Applecross. To round off the eclectic nature of the weekend, when we returned to the cars, Nic and Dave told us they had just seen a pine marten. A truly excellent weekend.

Chris Scaife

[A Black Rose Caving Club trip report.](#)