

## SKOTINO CAVE (Crete)

Black Rose international expedition '07!

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12th August 2007

People present - Mike Skyrme, Abigail Skyrme (10yrs), Sean O'Brien, Conor O'Brien (6.5yrs)

Having been looking forward to a trip underground with the Hellenic Speleological Society (Dept of Crete) during my stay on the island, I was most disappointed when I visited their offices in the island's capital of Heraklion, only to be told that they would be unable to take me as they were not caving again until September. This left me in limbo, but with a stiff "British" upper lip I enquired about a cave called Skotino, which I had noticed on a map and appeared to be a short distance (something the Greek appear to have no concept of!!!) from the resort where I was staying. A straight forward horizontal system, which according to Kostas (HSS Chairman) should pose no problems if I decided to visit it.



A few days of umming and arring ensued, interspersed with wild stories of people being lost for 30hrs (which amazingly increased to 3 days in as many days) in the system by hotel staff, I decided "sod it" I'm going! With that I encouraged Abigail to come along together with an Irish lad called Sean (who was intrigued and fancied the experience) and his son Conor. With the happy band assembled we decided that Sunday was to be the day we stepped into the unknown. Sunday arrived and armed with torches and headlights procured from various sources, we took a taxi from the hotel up to the cave with arrangements for the driver to return to pick us up in 3hrs time. The taxi deposited us about 500m from the cave entrance. A well marked path led down through a small thicket of trees and through a gate. Further steps down led to the gaping maw of this hole, an impressive sight in itself, the entrance being a large arch, 27m wide and 10m high.



A 20m ish descent down a boulder slope from the entrance led to a massive chamber called Mega Nao. This chamber is approximately 130m long, 33m wide and 30m high. Along the centre of the chamber were two massive limestone plinths, the size and shape of which were amazing yet haunting. The far end of this chamber dropped away another 15 – 20m to a lower level. A traverse across the drop to the right led us to

beautiful decorated gallery with a solitary column and stals flowing down one wall. Pics were taken here before I climbed up to a higher level to look back towards the entrance. At this point, more than 130m into the cave, daylight could still be seen.

Leaving the gallery and retracing our steps across the drop to the opposite side of the chamber, a route led down some insitu wooden ladders followed quickly by a very greasy slope of 3m down to a step. As I turned to relay this info to the group, Abigail sailed past me doing a remarkable impersonation of the Luge, except for her horror stricken face as I grabbed and grappled her to a stop before she slid down another slope/climb down to the lower level of the main chamber. Bruised, scuffed and pride dented, this was the furthest point my companions decided to go – best choice considering the greasiness underfoot. Unperturbed I carefully negotiated this next climb and set off scouting around the lower level. Two ways led on, the first being a hole in the left wall dropping 4m before doubling back under the floor of the main chamber. Once down this, various crawls led off but being bereft of suitable clothing etc I decided to spare my knees and elbows, the ravages of Cretan limestone. Scrambling back up and following the next route led me along a narrow passage to the head of a roped (of the washing line variety) climb. Carefully picking my way down this spiralling climb, I emerged in a square chamber which was adorned with flowing tiered stals and a beautifully fluted wall at the far end. Lots of pics were taken here, much to the consternation of the resident bats, who didn't seem to appreciate me lighting up their abode.

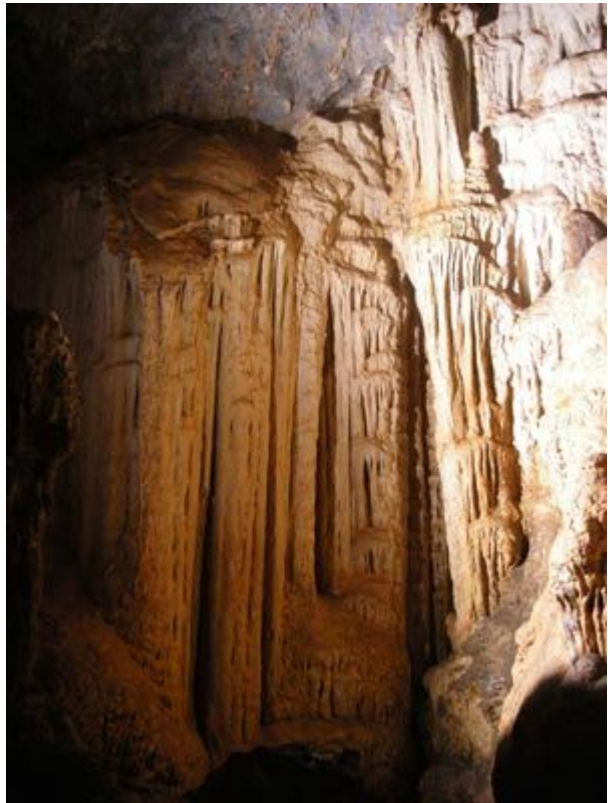
After a bit of ferreting around I returned to the others but as I reached our original traverse to the gallery, I noticed another place below that I thought was worth a look. I picked my way down an exposed 15m slope only to realise that all I had found was an alternative if somewhat "hairy" route to the lower level of the main chamber. Taking the sensible route back up (holiday insurance didn't cover extreme sports!!!) I rejoined the others and returned to the main chamber. Here the kids spotted the grizzly remains of a dead dog (long dead – no smell!) and gleefully busied themselves hurling rocks at the unfortunate beast as I took final pics of the main chamber. Once the hounds head had been buried under half a ton of limestone and every visible bone shattered to sounds of maniacal laughter, we ascended the entrance boulder slope to emerge in the heat of the day and await our return taxi.

The cave itself is steeped in ancient myth and recent history. Some say that sacrifices to the gods took place within the dark chambers; some say it is the lost labyrinth of Knossos where the Minator resided. More recently, the villagers of Skotino are said to have hidden in the cave from the invading German army during WWII. Skotino Cave is a beautiful place to visit and it is a real shame that people do not respect such beauty. The cave has been despoiled by rubbish and graffiti. Beer bottles (some broken) and litter abound, even in the far reaches of the cave along with what



seemed like the name of every person ever to have visited the system scratched into every wall – a true shame!

*Mike Skyrme*



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