

# FAIRY HOLES CAVE

Two locks, one drainpipe, one very long cave..

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Date : 5<sup>th</sup> October 2013

Team Almost: Duncan Jones, Chris Kelly, Don Miller, Chris Sharman, Mike Skyrme

Tiger Team: Dan Jackson, Chris Scaife, Alex Ritchie

Weather: Thankfully dry.

We assembled in Eastgate in Weardale, outside the Cross Keys pub, before driving in convoy a short distance to a large gate, behind which was some lubrication. Perfect.

Walking up to the cave, we were greeted by a friendly man, who we assume was the landowner. He showed us the way through the quarry to the entrance: a 20m long concrete pipe, with one locked gate right at the start and one halfway along. The stiff outer padlock more than justified the aforementioned lubrication, if a justification is needed. Wet crawling through this pipe brought us to a climb down into the main streamway. The main stream was then followed for miles and miles. The cave has a very perpendicular nature, with almost every change of direction and side passage being right angled.



There were minor obstacles every now and then, such as short climbs over boulders and little crawls, but for the most part, this long section of cave was pleasant walking passage. When the stream disappeared, we climbed up into Vein Chamber, whence Don and two of our glorious Chrises decided to plough on ahead, leaving the most glorious Chris with Mike, Dunc, Dan and Xaaaahndah. Next we were in the high level Coral Gallery for a short while, admiring the fragile, but impressive fossilised coral. This long, narrow band of fossil coral ran through much of the cave, reminiscent of Knock Fell Caverns. A loose climb or slide down took us back to stream level, where we stayed for a while. There were some very unusual soft, black formations in this bit. Another long section of mostly walking passage was followed by The Choir, where a few photos were taken of the handsome models and some of the first calcite of the cave.



Beyond this chamber, there was a lot of crawling through dry passages, never particularly tight, but fairly tiring as it did go on a bit. We met Don and the other two Chrises on their way back, who said we were near the end. Not far from there was a pit in the floor and what looked a bit like a sump, enough to convince several of our party that this was it. Heroic explores Dan, Xaaaahndah and I found a passage above this, which was crawling for a bit to the Sarcophagus, a very impressive chamber with easily the best formations of the entire cave.

Following a way over blocks and back to stream level, we three explored another 520m of walking passage to a definite sump. This last section of passage was fantastic, with real character and it felt a bit wilder than the rest of the cave. From the sump, we headed out much faster than we had been on the way in, still separated into two groups. After the Choir, we stayed at stream level all the way to Vein Chamber. The way back to the stream from here is a fairly narrow climb down through a hole in the floor. I went first, followed by Dan, then Xaaaahndah decided instead to look elsewhere and ended up wasting 20 minutes of our valuable time down some grotty crawl that ripped his oversuit and caused him to lose his knife.

Anyway, back out at the surface, Don had been left alone and his happy smile on seeing us all emerge made the whole thing worthwhile. We had been underground almost six hours. Don's seemingly maximal happiness somehow increased when we returned to the Cross Keys and found our filthy friends, none more filthy than Mr Sharman.

*Chris Scaife*

*Photos: Duncan Jones*



*Looking back across part of the large quarry.  
Small red circle denotes Don waiting for the rest of the group.  
The cave entrance is left of Don..*

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