

FAR WATERS (GG) via BAR / SMALL MAMMAL / STILE POT

There is a feeling in my waters, this might not be as easy as I first thought.

Date: 29th January 2011

People Present: Peter Dale, Daniel Jackson, Darren Jarvis, Duncan Jones, Chris Kelly, Alex Ritchie & Mike Skyrme

Weather: Clear but bollock freezing.

Grade: Northern Caves grades this as 4 – 5. I personally would only grade it as 4. There is nothing too difficult but looking at how most were quite exhausted I guess it scores a 5.

I could tell as soon as I got there, that it was not going to be as easy a trip as I had first thought. Before I had even left my car behind, I found I was missing my kneepad. Hmm I hoped there would not be much crawling in this trip.

We trudged up the hill and decided to rig the Small Mammal entrance rather than Bar, to save on Faff I guess. While Mike was rigging, I took Pete and Dan down Stile. I was soon down climbs and ended up far ahead due the small bladders of Pete & Dan. I was the first one to reach the Small Mammal House chamber. Mike dropped down and soon everyone else made an appearance as we all re-grouped. I led on from here into the Bar Pot route. After the rope climb people seemed to go all sorts of different ways to reach the Bar Pot big pitch. I had no idea how Mike got there, he said he went by the trade route but I thought the walking passage slopes I came down were the trade route?

We dropped down the big pitch without fuss and entered the New Henslers crawls. At this point Daz had removed his harness and was without a belay belt so this meant he would struggle pushing his overly heavy bag in front of him along the crawls. I decided not to be cruel with him as I was still wearing my harness. I clipped his bag to my harness along with mine and dragged both down the crawls. It was like being a snowplough as my bags pushed all the cobbles to the sides. I was moving along nicely until we came to the tighter wet duck at the end of the crawls. Daz's bag got wedged. At this point I had to back up, before doing some wiggling. I eventually unclipped the bag and got through.

We were soon in walking passage and I duly gave Daz his bag back. We continued along this for a bit passing a few promising inlets before the next little obstacle loomed into view. A very wobbly ladder leading up to a hole in the roof approx. 7 metres high. One at a time we cautiously climbed the ladder, hope it would not come crashing down as it bowed to our weight. At the top we took a right and shortly after this we reached the Blowhole. The Blowhole was a small hole in the wall, it looked tight but once you were in it, it was not as bad as it seemed. It did however lead to few comical moments where people seemed to pop out like corks and fly down the small calcite slope on the other side.

After a crawl we reached the P-anchored Echo Rift (15m). At the bottom of the pitch, we regrouped and headed under the left-hand wall (facing away from the pitch) to the first duck, which was not all that bad. With your helmet off you can avoid getting your head wet all together.

More crawling ensued, I soon realised that the crawling was not going to relent and my lack of protection on my knee was causing it to get quite painful. I stopped for a second and remembered had I packed my thick neoprene diving hood in my bag. In a rare flash of brilliance I grabbed it from the top of my bag and proceeded to put it on over my knee. It served me well as a makeshift kneepad and it made the crawling so much easier.

We carried on along relentless crawls, passing landmarks such as Nevada Passage & Clay Cavern. We entered an awkward crawl in a break down chamber (name eludes me). Shortly after this after taking his helmet off, Daz seemed to be having problems with his helmet not staying where it was suppose to. It was making progress for him annoying as it kept dropping down in front of his eyes. Never the less we pressed on, thinking there was little we could do with his helmet and he would have to live with it.

We passed the elven city of Rivendell. From here it is canals that lead to the final ducks in Far Waters. We lacked "Light of Earendil" but we pressed on regardless. Waist deep water at first, then chest deep now but it is okay, there is plenty of air space I thought. After a small chamber though this changed. Ahead of me was a frightened looking Pete staring at the smallest of air spaces, a bare inch and a half high. This looked to be a proper duck and I don't mean one that goes Quack!

Chris and Mike had already been through and had come back through before anyone on our side had even attempted it, held up by Pete and his Hydrophobia. My memory is fuzzy for the next bit but I think I went ahead of Pete and pushed my way quickly through the ducks. *(Ed: I think, or at least my recollection was: Dunc went to the first airbell, followed by Pete and Daz, then you came through and carried on through the other ducks leaving a trail of debris, then Dan appeared, then can't recall which order we got to Hallucination Aven)*

My breathing increased as my head was immersed in the cold dark water; my face became scratched from the rock as I scrambled for the air space. Luckily this was only for a short period perhaps 2 metres or so. The rest of the duck was spacious in comparison. By the end of the duck I had a good case of brain freeze, as my neoprene hood was still on my knee.

In Hallucination Aven, Dan & Dunc informed me that some of my items were now happily floating in the water behind me. It seemed that as my items got immersed in the water they had become buoyant, at the same time the knots had loosened on my bag so items were just floating away. I checked my bag to see what was missing and shock horror, my camera was no longer there, I knew by now it would have sunk again. I then spent a good while in that freezing water, fruitlessly searching for my lost camera. Occasionally I would stoop down and grab something square shaped to be disappointed into finding out it was just a square shaped rock.

I was even more annoyed at the point we entered the beauty of Rivendell on the way back as I had nothing to photograph the formations with! I then started to shoot off, just wanting to leave the cave. I got a full ten minutes in front of everyone before I decided to get over my self and I let everyone catch up.

In a better mood I carried on with the party, I noticed Daz and a few others seemed to be getting quite tired by this point. Lots and lots of crawling ensued but we were soon back at the Echo pitch. I shared out some of my remaining reclaimed drink before we all went back up Echo Rift. The Blowhole was not problematic on the return for anyone provided they kept left.

While waiting for the others on the other side of the Blowhole, I decided to take a look at Daz's helmet. It seems that the screw that holds head strap onto the helmet had come off causing the helmet to tip forward. There was another screw I could attach it to but I needed a screwdriver. Luckily for Daz, I remembered I carry a multi-tool around in my pocket. Time to put it some use. Within five minutes or so the helmet was repaired for a grateful Daz.

There was no sign of the others so I shouted back to ask what was keeping them, to which I got the reply "Are you not gone, yet?" It would appear that they were deliberately waiting in an effort to stagger the group before the big pitch, if they informed us that, then that plan would have worked.

Pete and Dunc had shot off in front so I hung back and stayed with a tiring Daz. After taking a wrong turning somewhere and having to back track a little I met up with the back group.

We were soon back at the Henslers crawls where I took Daz's bag where it joined mine. I had just passed the tight muddy pool, when I happened to glance back behind me and saw a wedged Daz minus a helmet. Not sure why he took it off but he did not bring it with him into the crawl. This meant he free him self in the dark as my light was being blocked by the bags!

He freed himself and pushed on until reaching a larger part of the passage, where Dan could pass him his helmet. Fair play to him for getting through that in darkness, however a lesson here for him about not taking your helmet off me thinks. After more crawling we were finally at the big pitch, Dunc was still only half way up! I guess he was tired too.

A large queue formed at the big pitch as everyone without a Pantin was taking 10 minutes to get up the pitch. I went up after Pete and waited at the top, as I agreed to help with hauling the big pitch rope.

However once Daz had arrived I was given instructions to escort Daz out. I once again grabbed Daz's bag, which still seemed bloody heavy! He was wearing his SRT kit so what the heck was in it?

I let Daz exit first and I could clearly hear his screams of joy when he exited from the bottom of the pitch. He need not have bothered to shout rope free.

All that was left was a long walk back to the cars in the freezing temperatures in wet suits, oh fun! To me the hardest part of the trip!

I think trip time was between 6 and a half to 7 and a half depending on the person.

Oh it should be noted, it turned out I had not lost my camera, I had instead had the good fortune to forget to pack it! It was there sat on my coffee table, almost smug in its appearance.

Alex Ritchie.

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