

IREBY FELL CAVERN

Cripple Creek – Skylight round trip

Date: 28th March 2009

People present: Duncan Jones, Pete Dale, Alex Ritchie, Chris Scaife, Dan Jackson

Weather: Chilly, windy and mostly dry (just a brief touch of hail)

See below for Pete's version of events

Ireby Fell Cavern; a popular haunt of novice trips for many a year, a situation that has now changed with the opening of two different routes into Ireby II and thus creating a round trip. The first to be opened in 2008 was Cripple Creek, which is as the name suggests the harder of the two - the diggers should be congratulated on the amount of effort put into this route, I would imagine numerable long and hard trips took place opening this route up. Skylight Passage is by far the easier route and was dug by a large number of cavers from both ends (the Ireby II end was dug when the sump was temporarily drained)- this passage was connected in late 2008 and is a fine example of what working together can achieve.

After supplies (both food and equipment) were obtained from Ingleton we headed to an empty Masongill where a chilly change took place. I was glad that I'd purchased a new balaclava just earlier in the day as it came in very handy on the windy walk up. On the track we got hit with a brief, but still uncomfortable hail shower, we were glad it didn't last long especially with the strength of the wind. Once at the entrance I wasted no time in getting underground and into the warmth. Eventually everyone else made it inside and myself and Alex headed off down Ding-Dong-Bell whereas the others headed down Bubbles. Not long after Pussy Pitch we encountered the unlikely looking entrance to the Glory Holes; at first glance it would appear to be just a high level oxbow but in fact is the starting point of the passage.



Once in the Glory Holes after crawling above the streamway you reach a junction, to the right the passage starts as it means to go on, crawling and a lot of it being flat-out. Throughout the crawl Pete kept informing us of larger dimensions, we didn't believe him, although to be fair it was larger in some places (well, hands and knees rather than flat-out!!) After passing through The Lounge we entered the sandy Turtle Crawl, we said our hello's to the residents before continuing onwards to a junction. The larger passage ahead was obviously not our way on, the small crawl on the left was.. More crawling

arrived at a minor calcite squeeze and Numpty Rift, this is followed for a short distance before a drop down enters a small chamber, here a rope-ladder climb leads up to another crawl (anyone noticed a trend in the passage type yet?). This crawl emerges in the nicely decorated and (comparatively) sizeable Womack's Chamber, at the far side another crawl leads to a small hole down, a bit of faith is required as you lower yourself down and luckily find plenty of footholds. At the bottom a reasonable sized passage is found with a few nice formations again.

After a brief pause we set off again, the way on being up another rope-ladder, a slightly awkward pitch head leads to, go on, have a guess.. Yes, you're right, a crawl, only a very short one and I found myself staring down a hole. Head first didn't seem appealing so I had to retreat backwards, trying not to kick Pete in the face, to find space to turn around so I could drop down it feet first. Me and Pete relayed the information about the drop and headed down another rope-ladder climb, this time dropping into a small but pretty chamber. Another short crawl and past some boulders brought us to walking passage, although it didn't last too long. Follow the water was the information we had and this meant some more crawling and a few small (but not tight) drops and what we assume is the connection squeeze. At first glance it appears very small but I made it through with my SRT kit on so it can't have been that bad (for reference I kept my SRT kit on all the way, which is a mistake, particularly at the start as it gets sh.. up!)



We waited for the others to catch up before a bit more passage brought us to some climbs up and another short crawl to a fine traverse over a pit, once over we headed along a brief calcite crawl to emerge in the large and impressive Jupiter Cavern. A short rope-ladder drops you in the chamber proper. Keeping left was what we had been told, so Pete was sent off down a low level crawl, which was not the right way so back out and up the slope we found another muddy crawl. Passing through a small chamber I was soon at the top of a pitch (with some in-situ ropes, thanks to whoever placed them). Down this and a further two reasonable sized pitches in to Escalator Rift. I got a welcome sight at the bottom, some water to rinse off the muck. Once Pete was at the bottom we followed the easy going passage to emerge in Duke Street II, I had a quick nip upstream to the sump before we stomped downstream in the very large and impressive tunnel. After visiting the sump from Ireby I we followed the chilly water downstream which got to waist deep for me, before easing slightly as we approached the rope dangling down from Skylight Passage. A short climb and we were in the sandy crawl and soon back in familiar territory. All that remained was a quick and efficient stroll out via Well Pitch (with thanks to the MMMMC) and onwards and upwards to Ding-Dong-Bell and finally emerging into a cool late afternoon with a fine view over towards the sea.

I've heard it being called a 'Yorkshire Classic' and I have to say I agree with that, a fine trip with a good mixture of just about everything.. It took me and Pete 5hrs 45mins to complete the trip and we did hang around a couple of times so it could be done in less time - we had a few pointers on what to expect and where to go so I guess that helps, the others spent a little longer as they were derigging DDB.. Alex came out looking muddier than ever and knackered to boot!

A fantastic days caving! Shame I couldn't go to the pub for a refreshing drink afterwards, but I made up for it when I got home..

Duncan Jones

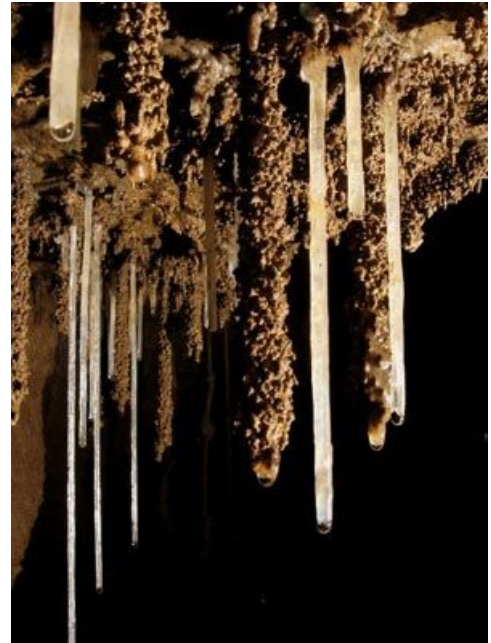
Cripple creek and Ireby II Round trip

Well Duncan had stressed that a big trip was in order so I thought we should have a go at the Cripple Creek round trip in Ireby fell Cavern since the Skylight dig had gone and was now cleared of sand bags thanks to a big effort by members of ULSA and BRCC (*Ed: well, just on one day and a small effort by two of us and more effort from Alex!*). The week before the trip the weather was not being nice but with a lot of faith it came good so the trip could go ahead.

We all met in Inglesport around 9:30am and filled our guts with various fatty foods then we set off up to Masongill to get ready for the big-un! When we were all changed and ready we packed the

bags for Ding, Dong and Bell pitches to make the exit easier and then set off on the long slog up hill to the entrance. Dan had never been to Ireby before and was most impressed by the entrance, we all kitted up and then set off into the depths. While we gathered at the start of Bubbles route Dunc decided to rig DDB route so with him taking the bag, me, Chris and Dan legged it down Bubbles to avoid getting slowed down leaving Dunc to spend some quality time with Alex. We were soon down at the bottom of Bubbles route and climbed up into the start of Glory Holes crawling along to the 'T' junction we waited for a bit and then decided to send Dan off ahead to wait for us at the start of Cripple Creek.

With Dan's moaning fading into the distance me and Chris sat waiting for Dunc and Alex to arrive and after what seemed like an hour they eventually turned up. So, with me in the lead, I set off along the half round crawl to the Lounge. The crawl is horrible to low to crawl properly and too high for flat out it's just dam right awkward, it just goes on and on and on. Eventually a small chamber is reached 'The Lounge' and I presume this is the start of Turtle crawl. The exit from the chamber is a flat out in the small stream gravel for a long way until the stream disappears under the left wall and the way on becomes a sandy crawl to another small chamber with a few inhabitants living there. A tightish, squeezey constriction, possibly the standard esoteric bit of a trip which, this trip has a few of I might add. After the squeeze another one is met and then proper flat out crawling where the sand in the passage is bulldozed out of the way by each person just like a turtle on the beach. Eventually the end was reached with Dan taking pictures of everyone's exit from the crawl. Then next bit is very spacious and you can even stand up. When Dan had finished taking the pictures and once the camera was packed away we headed off into Cripple Creek.



Compared to the trip so far Cripple Creek was a pleasure to cave in although Dan might not agree with me on that! It starts with a few flat out bits but then gets bigger until a squeeze past some calcite at roof level drops you head first down to the stream, then you just keep traversing along the rift 'Numpty Rift' which is never really difficult or tiring and soon enough a short climb down into a large chamber with the way on being a dodgy looking rope ladder up the far side of it. I climbed the ladder first and made my way into the rather small crawl at the top but luckily it was over quickly and another large chamber was found 'Womack's' this had a beautiful white stalagmite in its centre there was also a rope going up to somewhere as well. The way on was yet another short crawl to a 5m drop. This climb required faith as you have to squeeze into a hole directly over the drop and lower yourself down onto ledges you cannot see and then grab the rope to climb the rest of the way to the floor. All rather exciting stuff I can tell you. With us all safely in the chamber at the bottom of the climb Dan took a few pictures while me and Dunc made our way up the next ladder and into another crawl leading to a narrow vertical drop. As I got to the top of the ladder and into the passage I crawled up to Dunc's wellies and then he started to come back towards me, there wasn't much room at this point but a handy opening on the right meant that I could shuffle into it to allow Dunc to reverse. Apparently he couldn't get down the drop and then I remembered that you had to negotiate it feet first so with a bit of contortionism Dunc turned to get his feet in the right direction while I was wedged ever more into the opening. Finally, with Dunc down the narrow section I turned around enjoying having to lie in a pool of water that so far I had avoided! Another drop of faith down the narrow bit and I was again stood up in a very small chamber with the way on behind me at my feet. I could hear Alex struggling and whining so I new he wasn't far behind so I made my way down the hole feet first locating the ladder with my feet. Once my arms where free to use I got a good grip on the rope and hand lined the rest of the way down to where Dunc was sat in

a much larger chamber than before. We could both hear Alex from our comfy resting place and after a while we were fed up with waiting so set about carrying on with the trip. A short flat out crawl led out of the chamber into a larger area where Dunc climbed up to find the way on, a good look revealed no way on so I climbed down and through into a stream passage (Cripple Creek?) I then followed the water round a few bends and sat down where the way ahead split into two ways on. With Dunc catching up we had a look at our description and noted the correct way on to avoid Blissful ignorance.



A short blasted crawl through a calcite blockage into a larger section of stream way with the water dropping down about 4ft in front of me. Dunc came through and then we waited for the others to catch up. Before long, the shuffles and groans could be heard, with Dan moaning about crawling, at the other side of the blasted section, I climbed down into another small section of stream passage followed by another climb down. Climbing down the way on is through the crux of the trip a short squeeze at stream level so with one arm in front and the other behind i shoved myself into it, a little tricky but not overly that tight. With that obstacle passed I waited for Dunc and the description.

Reading the description the way on now was up a few climbs so with no way to follow the water looking up and around I found the way on as a short climb of about 6-7ft into the base of an aven. Climbing the aven the way on was another short climb and thrutch through a crawl into a larger crawl and a bottle jack could be seen on the right. Now easy crawling and a short scramble led into the vastness of a large chamber with a rope traverse going off along the left wall. The traverse passed without any hiccups and then a brief

walk to a short crawl on ledges over some fine gour pools leads to the top of a 3m ladder into Jupiter cavern. Wow one big hole in the ground! With us all in Jupiter and Alex managing to get stuck on every ladder en route the trip was nearly over. The way on is a slippery climb up a mud slope on the left followed by a short crawl to a large aven, a way out to the right and another short crawl leads to the top of the pitches into Escalator rift. Luckily these are pre-rigged with 15mm rope and after abseiling down 4 pitches I was finally in the Duke Street II stream way. Dunc was in front and we made our way along the winding rift until it suddenly opened out into magnificent proportions, Ireby II had been reached!

Dunc and me made our way down stream taking in the sheer size of the passage with the roof being at least 20ft above us if not more in places and at least 30ft wide. We walked and walked until a junction was met with the Ireby 1 water so we had a look at the other end of the sump and then made our way to the Skylight crawl. From the junction with Ireby 1 we followed the water which got deeper and deeper until we reached the bottom of the rope up into Skylight passage. Dunc climbed up first and set off along the crawl I then climbed up and sorted my tackle bag out and just as I was about to set off the others had arrived at the bottom of the climb I set off along the crawl catching Duncan up near the far end. Skylight passage is a credit to those that dug it out as for nearly all of its entire length it is more or less easy hands and knees crawling! Once down the pitch at the far end we set off out knowing the others were not far behind. Good progress was made and we were back on the surface by 5pm. We decided to head back to the cars since it was none to warm outside. We got to the cars got changed and then the wait began. We waited and waited and waited and eventually the missing members appeared Chris was back first and just said 'Alex' and then Dan returned and said 'Alex' and then what was left of Alex returned, what a mess no resemblance to the Alex that set off on the trip earlier in the day!

Anyway everyone got out safely and all of us completed the trip, and what a trip it was it had everything in it a real classic and highly recommended to anyone who likes a varied and fulfilling days caving. Would I go back? Yes definitely maybe even exit via Cripple Creek!

Pete Dale



Photos - Dan Jackson

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