

SELSIDE POTTERING

Long Churn Cave, Wilsons Cave and November Hole (solo)

1st July 2006

People present: Mike Skyrme, Abigail Skyrme (daughter 9yrs), Andy & Sandy Morton (neighbours)

With mountain biking in Glentress being a far, far too strenuous activity for an old timer like me, I decided to take the opportunity to introduce one of my inquisitive neighbours to the delights of caving. Andy had been with me a couple of times before but for Sandy, this was to be her first trip.

I opted for Selside in particular and the Long Churns for easiness. This would also allow us to take in Wilsons Cave if Sandy was enjoying herself, and for me – a long awaited opportunity to have a crack at November Hole.

An early start saw us in Bernie's to hire kit and a bite to eat before heading off to Selside. By 10am we were all changed and stomping up the track to locate the entrance of November Hole. This proved straight forward and I quickly dropped down a handline as I intended to exit at this point.

From there we dropped into Upper Long Churn via Dr Bannisters and set off along the stream passage. We stopped at the "Anus" for Abigail and Andy to have a thrutch about whilst I took some photo's of them playing. However, this resulted in me having to go in from the other end to guide them out!!!

We carried on and dropped down the waterfall into Lower Long Churn and progressed quickly to "Double Shuffle" pool. I purposely decided not to use a rope in order to make things a little more interesting for the others until Abigail slipped and shot straight into the water with me having to jump in after her to drag her out. Andy got around dry and with Sandy managing it half in and half out, we proceeded to "Plank" pool where everyone opted to slide into the water and walk across.



I led the way through the "Cheese Press" (stinky place!!!!) and took photo's of the others as they made their way through and I must say how impressed I was with them all, considering!

We dropped down and followed the route through to the top of "Dolly Tubs" pitch before returning to the surface via the middle entrance where we set off to look for Wilsons Cave.

A quick drink and a bar of chocolate later saw us entering Wilsons. Nothing of note occurred during our speedy through trip. Once out we trudged back over to the entrance of November Hole. From here, Andy and I went back to Upper Long Churn with a handline. Once down, Andy retrieved the rope and went back to November to await my triumphant emergence!

From the first major bend in the Upper Long Churn stream passage, a step up into a bedding plane led to a flat out crawl and squeeze in water into a narrow chamber. I knew from the guide book description that there were three ducks in the system and assumed that I had just passed the last one (seeing as I was tackling the hole in the opposite direction!).

At the end of the chamber there was more lying full stretch in water and pulling myself along a small passage, at one point flipping onto my back in order to maintain breathing! “Hmmm, second duck over with – onwards (but not upwards)” I thought to myself. How wrong could I be!!!!

Once out of the water and a bit of side crawling along some tight passage, I emerged into a nice chamber. However, the only way on was a horribly narrow looking slot 3 metres above me – Bugger, can’t remember reading about this bit!

With no decent hand or foot holds, I resorted to chimneying up. After a fair struggle, I finally reached the top and threw myself into slot and lay there for a while to recover. “Had I taken on too much?” I wondered, “Fuck it, I ain’t turning back now!” was my response.

What happened from this point can only be described as abject misery, as I began a crawl on my side along a tight and notoriously twisting passage. There seemed to be a possible traverse at a higher level but it was just too tight to slide up into it.



So it went, for what seemed like an eternity (only managing to traverse in one place for about 2 metres before having to drop back down onto my side) until I got my foot stuck! “Fuck me!” I thought as my heart pounded from the exertion of getting to this point!

I had noticed the flowstone boss (not really that difficult when it appears in front of your face!) at floor level jutting into the tight passage as I crawled/slithered over it but never saw it as a problem until my foot dropped down between it and the wall. That was it - I couldn’t go forwards nor could I go back and I

couldn’t even lift my bloody leg up out of it either! It was at this point that cramp set into my calf and in between pitiful moans, I began to accept that maybe I had been a tad foolish in trying to do this by myself. However, in true British spirit and after some yelling, thrutching and heaving, I somehow managed to yank my leg out of the restriction and make frantic progress up the remainder of what can only be described as a vertical “Cheese Press” of a passage.

Beyond this passage (the guide book calls it a tortuous fissure!!!), the roof lowered and the walls widened giving this section of passage a more amenable shape allowing some fast crawling interspersed with flat out slithering under stals in places until at last I dragged myself around a corner and was rewarded with the vision of my handline at the other end of a short flat out section.

After lying at the bottom of the entrance shaft to recharge myself, I climbed out of the hole to be greeted by worried but relieved faces.

Time taken – dunno!! Definitely over an hour!

November Hole: Northern Caves grades this hole as a three. At 230m this cave is probably by far the hardest (in terms of strenuous activity) I have ever done and I’ll tell you something else as well – I won’t be going back in a hurry!!!



Mike Skyrme

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