

SLEETS GILL CAVE

Neoprenes delight

15th May 2008

People present - Rob Santus, Chris Scaife

Weather - Dry and settled

Rob had work in the morning and although making a miraculous recovery from the jaws of death I'm still far from full fitness, which was never particularly impressive anyway, so we chose to do a fairly short cave this Thursday afternoon, taking advantage of the dry conditions. Sleets Gill Cave is a trip that has interested me for a while, and one with a notorious risk of flooding. We met at Kilnsey at 1pm and after an ice cream were soon kitted up and heading up the short slope to the entrance. It was quite a hot day and my 5mm of neoprene weren't making it any colder so I was relieved to reach the shaded entrance. I would later be very relieved that I'd chosen to wear neoprene.

The cave starts out with an odd scree slope downwards. There is room to stand up at first, but it soon lowers and we slid down the loose rock feet first until the angle eases and we crawled down to the Main Gallery. This is a big tunnel with about ten minutes of easy walking. Just before the end of the Main Gallery, we stopped for a rest and to compose ourselves for Hyperthermia Passage. A short crawl leads to a low airspace canal. There's no mistaking this passage!

For the first 20-25 minutes we were flat-out in deep water. Rob had his helmet off and held out in front of him, which I tried, but kept bashing my head and didn't really fancy a cut and bruised scalp with my lack of hair, so put the helmet back on. The airspace was such that with my helmet scraping the ceiling, my face was still partly in the water. Every few minutes the strain would be hurting my neck so I'd turn my head around, meaning fully immersing my face in the water. It did at one point occur to me that if I got stuck like this it might be quite dangerous, but I suppose many aspects of caving are best not thought about. Although intimidating, this section was actually probably the easiest part of Hyperthermia Passage, as the water was deep enough that we were basically floating.

After this section, a lot more flat-out crawling with slightly shallower water and several squeezes leads to a narrow chamber. I caught up with Rob here and he was shivering quite violently. Rob's coldness combined with my tiredness could have made for an exciting return journey, but we knew there was possibly a way out from near the sump. From this chamber onwards, there are one or two places where it is almost possible to crawl or stoop before the sump is eventually reached after a further flat-out crawl. A short distance back from the sump is the suggestively named Bottom Connector, thankfully not blocked by flood debris. We crawled through this awkward, muddy passage and back into the Main Gallery.

By now I was far too tired to contemplate further exploration, so was quite happy to leave Rob alone to go the the '68 series sump and beyond. I crawled back up to the main entrance slope. There are few sights more emotive to the human soul than a shaft of light coming from above us in the darkness, and from the bottom of the slope, the outside world, where it was still sunny and dry, seemed very tempting. I returned to the sunshine and felt no jealousy whatsoever for Rob's longer trip. When Rob returned we went to a bar in a hotel in Kilnsey that was far too good for us and spoke about Hyperthermia Passage and nothing else. I feel this may be how I spend the next few weeks.

Chris Scaife

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