

Ashberry 1 and 2, plus Noddle End Windypit; North York Moors

Wednesday, 28th December 2011

People present – Alex Ritchie, Chris Scaife

Weather – Strong winds and light rain

I parked my car at the medieval Rievaulx Abbey and, being the first one there, decided to have a quick look at the visitor information. According to English Heritage, ‘If peace and tranquility is what you seek from a family day out in Yorkshire, then Rievaulx Abbey is the perfect choice.’ Well, just at that moment, my family for the day, in the form of Holy Moley Alex Ritchie, pulled up in his moonstone Peugeot 206, just screaming out, “Let the peace and tranquility commence!”

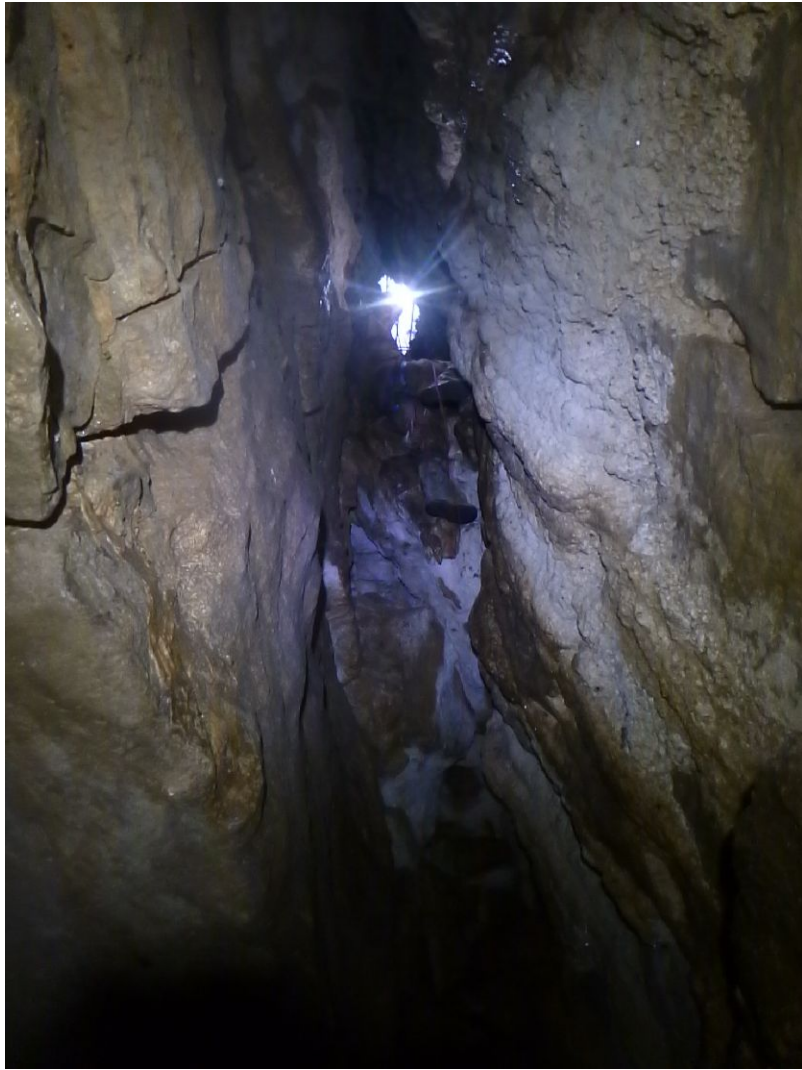
We drove on a bit and parked by the side of the road heading uphill to the west of Ashberry Hill. Ashberry Windypits 1 and 2 both have quite large holes for entrances and are only 9m apart, near the summit of Ashberry Hill. We found them straight away and decided to go into number 1 first. The entrance is an easy free-climb. A chamber on the right has produced all manner of archaeological specimens; we saw lots of animal bones and very kindly left them undisturbed. Back onto the route, we descended a rift and soon arrived at the 9m pitch. The alternative to the pitch is Dowson’s route, which was much more fun, so we did that instead and arrived in the main rift. We explored both ways in this rift and soon reached the deepest point in the cave, then headed out to its larger neighbour.

We tied a rope around a conveniently placed tree for the short entrance pitch into Ashberry 2. From here, all sorts of nooks and crannies were explored, including the Letterbox Route, the Intermediate Circuit, and the Main Route. There are a few quite nice decorations in this cave, for those that wander. We looped our rope around a boulder to descend the very short pitch near the bottom, and crawling through the boulder choke at the foot of this pitch led to the deepest point.



Chris on short 2nd pitch in Ashberry 2

Next we got back into Alex’s pussy wagon and drove a few miles to Noddle End, to descend the windypit described in pre-Excalibur Pot guidebook Moorland caver as, ‘by far the prettiest cave in the North Yorkshire Moors’. This cave was also very easy to find, in the corner of the second field on the northern side of the woodland. A large metal grille has been placed over the entrance and provides a useful anchor for the 20m entrance pitch. Sadly, it doesn’t seem to have prevented the suicide of a number of mammals, including sheep, rabbit and ox. As I waited for Mr Ritchie at the foot of the pitch, a loud thud thud thud crashed past me as Alex’s Darren drum had liberated itself from its lid and beaten him in the race to get down the pitch. By fate or good fortune, his camera remained wedged inside the drum and his car keys landed perfectly at my feet. That could have been a lot worse.



Alex descending Noddle End Windypit entrance pitch

Both down the pitch, we headed into the main rift. This continues a short way to the right, which we explored, but the way on is to the left. A fairly impressive rift was followed at floor level, passing moonmilk and stalactites, to exit on the slopes of Peak Scar. We then walked back to the entrance and descended down to the ledge, to explore the short parallel rift at this level and de-rig. Awesome.



Chris in main rift, Noddle End Windypit

Chris Scaife (Photos – Alex Ritchie)