

CROESOR - RHOSYDD

Mine's a classic through trip..

Date: 19th October 2008

People present: Peter Dale, Rob Santus, Daniel Jackson, Chris Scaife, Alex Ritchie, Kate, Dan Jones, Mike Sweet

Weather: Usual Welsh weather i.e. Wet, Cloudy, Misty and very windy!

Croesor Mines, I had been both looking forward to and dreading this trip for a long time, so many dangers rickety old bridges over 180ft deep water, big pitches and the chance the roof could fall on you at any time.

The day had come; I awoke Sunday morning at 5am after a strangely peaceful sleep and headed off down the M6 to meet Rob and Pete. I arrived early and had a bit of a wait for the others to arrive, pacing up and down the street both to keep my self-awake and because of a small amount of nerves.

Soon enough though everyone arrived and we headed off with Rob driving to pick up our next passenger, Daniel Jackson who we found practically asleep in his car. We woke Dan up and headed on down into Wales. With Kate who was driving down her self now behind us somewhere we decided we would have time for a bite to eat and tell Kate to meet us there. We found this quaint railway café about 10 miles away from Croesor where we all sat down to our rather expensive breakfasts.

Kate had to be squeezed into our car, as she was worried about someone stealing a boat she had strapped to the roof of her car. The last leg of the journey was cramped if not cosy. We has arrived (Latish) and met up with the others at the start of the long trail that led up to the mines.

The walk it self was tiring, first it started off as a steep ascent over slate and rubble before flattening out and passing various ruins on the left and a large lake on our right, this would not be the only lake we would see today, I knew that for sure. The trail once again ascended steeply up the mountainside before breaking into the clouds.

The trail ended at a ruined and almost haunted ghost of a village with the wind howling through the ruins and mists swirling around us, as if telling us to turn back, no one should come here. These ruins marked the exit where we will be emerging from Rhosydd; a dark foreboding tunnel beckoning us to enter could be seen at the back of the abandoned settlement. A quick sludgy scramble over the mountainside soon ensued, where we reached a rather less forbidding entrance to Croesor.

With the wind still trying to bowl us off our feet, we headed inside and kitted in there. The first fifteen minutes of the trip was a simple affair, where we followed a long passage of the entrance adit. Care needed to be taken to not to trip up over any of the old railway sleepers. After this came the entrance chamber with what looked like a swimming pool in the centre but was in-fact was the main ramp down to the lower levels. So we were already at the water table level.

We had a peek down the passage that went off to the right before being forced almost immediately to stop by what looked like a bottomless pit. You could not see the water surface unless you looked really hard; the illusion of was made complete by the eerie remains of a bridge stanchion hanging just below the water line. There was no bottom we could see to this lake.



Turning back we headed through the entrance chamber to the main incline which involved a rather easy if not slippery roped climb, followed by some underground mountaineering where we puffed our way up this large and steep incline. The climb finished abruptly at a large shaft where I am told daylight was visible.

Immediately to the left of this shaft was the first pitch which led into the now infamous chamber 1. The pitch was passed with ease except great care had to be taken with the rope protector as only the bottom half of the pitch was free hanging, the rest rubbed tightly against a sharp

slate wall. Looking around at first the chamber didn't look as big as it was described in some reports that is until you realise it had just taken you about 10 minutes to cross the thing to reach the next pitch.

The Second Pitch was rather more awkward than the first as it was anchored to the ground close to the rock and for some reason I tried attaching my descender to this back to front! Thankfully I noticed there was something wrong before I tried descending on it (Thanks Pete btw for confirming this fact).

Once on the pitch it was an easy backward walk down to the rubble strewn floor of this chamber. A quick scramble down the rubble slope led to the first zip line, which spanned across a small lake. It was disappointingly shorter than I had expected, but was still fun none the less as you could pick up some speed thanks to the downwards angle.



After the zip line there was another small but deep lake to contend with, this lake used to have a modern suspension bridge to get across it with, however the roof saw to that was no longer the case and the bridge now lies silently at the bottom of the lake. With no bridge we were forced to cross this lake on leaky dinghy's (someone had left behind) which had to be re-blown up after almost after every crossing. Rob of course had to show off at this point and tried for the world water speed record only he failed as he reached the shore as the dingy capsized depositing Rob in the lake and consequently drenching him from head to toe. Sorry Rob no record this year!

Some people went to back across the lake to do the zip-line again leaving the rest of us plenty of time to explore the next set of large interconnected chambers. As me and Pete explored the temperature seemed to drop dramatically in some places as if there was supernatural forces at work, it could also be the fact that there was heck of a lot of wind blowing about down there.

Finally the others finished playing about on the zip line so we pressed on through the cold chambers passing old workings and chains. We then arrived at the first bridge. This bridge although in poor condition as only the 2 main beams remained was easy to cross although a little slippery.

Immediately afterwards was the Second Bridge which was missing almost entirely except for the middle stanchion. We used another zip line here to get across taking care to lift our legs to avoid crashing into the middle stanchion.



The Third bridge shortly afterwards known as the “Bridge of Death”. This bridge consisted of a rather wobbly metal beam from a tram track that only reached to the centre stanchion. For the second section of the bridge there was nothing but air, except for a large rotten piece of timber that no one should put weight on. Balancing your self over the beam, over the 180 ft of water was surprisingly easy as you had steel pulley cable hold onto.

The second part of the bridge crossing consisted of another pulley line, with one problem the line was 8ft above the stanchion where you are standing meaning a sling had to be used so that you could climb up and attach yourself to the pulley. A couple of people decided not to use the pulley and instead used brute force to pull them selves across using steel crab crows tails. One of our party (wont name him) froze at this point not budging for 10 minutes or so even when the pulley was in-place, sometimes and I know this too well fear can get to you.

Me on the other-hand saw how difficult it looked and formulated a plan, you see there was a rope firmly attached to the pulley to pull the pulley back across again once the other person had crossed. I had brain wave (I don't have many by the way) why don't I just attach my self to that rope with my jammers instead of climbing up to attach to the pulley it self, this will save all the messing around. I scared Kate with this as she did not know my plan and wondered what the heck I was doing. I Attached my cows tails to the hand line the spanned the rest of the divide for extra security and finally convinced Kate it was going to work and boy was it easier not only had I crossed in a very short amount of time I also arrived at the other side at ground level rather then dangling above it as you would be doing if you attached your cows tails into the pulley directly.

The fourth bridge again was not there, the distance of this crossing was way too far for a zip-line and the other side was at the same level as us. This required a tricky manoeuvre of first assailing down to the water level into a dinghy while carefully sitting yourself down in the dingy trying not capsize it. You then needed to then pull your self along to cross the large lake, which was actually surprisingly relaxing.

The other end of the lake consisted of a short hand-line climb, from where the boat arrived, then a small upward pitch to the passageway above. At this point Rob who was kindly waiting for us all was freezing his nuts off, what with his earlier dip and all. Consequently he was getting rather annoyed with Pete who had not put his ascending gear on yet. The others at this point had left us behind; perhaps they were cold them selves? Once Pete was up the pitch we were probably a good 10 minutes behind the others and me Pete and Rob had to find our own way out through Rhosydd mines.

Scrambles, scrambles and more scrambles were what followed as we went up and down slippery slate slopes searching for a way to the adit that led out of the mine. Eventually we scabbled all the way to the top of the slops and exited the mine entirely only to find that we were in a steep sided old quarry that time had forgot. The quarry looked very difficult to get out of and we were also determined to exit the right way through the Adit. Up and down grassy and scree slopes we went, until Pete realised that we had actually come out of the mines where we were suppose to have gone back in again*. We back tracked back down where we came into the quarry and headed back the mine. We found the way on down another scree slope before eventually emerging from the slope onto a colossal incline that seemed to stretch forever downwards.

Once we finally reached the bottom of the incline, we simply walked the for what seemed mile or so towards a little pin-prick of daylight we could see in the distance to finally emerge in the

abandoned seemingly haunted village we passed earlier that day. A quick hike down the mountain was then made where we met up with the others who were a little anxious about where had got to and pleased to see us.

It was a good trip but I would not call it epic except we made it a little more so by going all the way out and back in again. The bridges part of the trip were not as bad as they were made out to be and I could liken the trip to more like a day out at Go Ape, Only underground, rather than a really serious and dangerous trip this was suppose to have been.

*according to one of the routes on the guide

Alex Ritchie



Photos - Dan Jackson

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