

# OGOF DAREN CILAU

## 7 into 3 doesn't go..?

**Date** Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> of July

**People Present:** Alex Ritchie, Daniel Jackson, Chris Scaife. Part-trippers: Duncan Jones, Peter Dale, Rob Santus, Bruce Stone.

**Weather:** Heavy Showers/Downpours.

**Rated Trip Difficulty:** Hard. **Guide Difficulty** Grade 4 (Hard)

**Reason:** Many a man was turned back by the entrance and at the time of writing this I am suffering from Grade 5 bruises (bruises I normally get in grade 5 caves). (For larger caves I would rate this Very Hard)

The plan was to do Craig-a-Ffynnon however, we soon decided in a lay-by five minutes after setting off that due to the entrance crawl possibly sumping in the rain, doing Craig would be a bad idea. Ideas were tossed around like a Frisbee, until it was finally decided that Daren Cilau was the best choice owing to the fact that it is the only decent trip that does not flood even in very wet weather like we were having.

After a rather eventful drive (for me anyhow) up a very steep hill we arrived and parked up at the side of road five minutes away from the cave. I was quite excited to see what this famed nasty entrance series was all about; it can't be as bad as everyone was saying.

Rain halted play for a while, as no one was brave enough to get out of their car and get into their caving gear. I decided it would be easier to get undressed in the car, save getting my dry cloths well wet. Doing this obviously scared Dan as he was out like a shot. It was then just a matter of running around my car to quickly don my warm under suit and waterproof over suit.

Thankfully the rain eased and the other wimps...err my fellow cavers got out and got changed too, so we were quickly although not very enthusiastically at the entrance to this fine cave system. Not believing the hype on the entrance series I even took a small tackle sack with enough food for 3 people in it (thanks Bruce).

We slithered in, to start with the cave starts off as a low wet crawl, which was not too bad, but all to soon this changes and a sideways squeeze known as the vice looms into view. Everyone got through this, okay one may had needed some coaxing but we were all carrying on.

However the continuing passage was already wearing people down with its constant variation from crawling over boulders, side ways squeezes and crawling in 1ft deep water. Further ahead, Pete & Chris stopped and let me past. Pete went out, Chris I would see later, one down. Duncan was next to turn around having seen it all before, two down. Bruce followed who had thought if Dunc & Pete are leaving I am certainly leaving, three down. I persevered deeper and deeper and eventually catching up with Rob and Dan who were waiting just before the Calcite squeeze. After a quick breather we pressed on through this little obstruction and eventually we finally popped out into a nice stomping size passage. Rob announced he was short on time so he also left for a long solo trudge out. Leaving only Me, Dan & Chris who had by now caught us up. So that was it, there were only 3 out of 7 remaining.

Now before I carry on I should mention at this point that I had borrowed some wellies for the trip from this nice bloke at the SWCC hut (I left mine at home as usual). These wellies were certainly not made for caving and were several sizes too small for me. I found that walking in these were quite difficult, my toes were being crushed together like a vice and the grip was well none existent making me appear to everyone else like I just downed 4 pints as I slipped my way around.

From exiting the crawl almost this entire cave now consisted of now was walking passages in great huge canyons. These canyons were full of slippery rocks & mud complete with water hazards to boot. I felt like I was on it's a knock out! and was unable to keep up. I would give anything for a bit more crawling. My prayers were finally answered for a couple of meters as we passed the Wriggle were one

great canyon ended and after a squeeze over a boulder choke another one begins. I have got to say that this cave has some epic proportions I have never seen large passages this size go on for so long, complete contrast to the entrance.

With Dan leading we reached the major crossroads with the time machine to the right and White Company to the left. I like Rob did not want to spend too long underground today, long drive back, but mainly because my feet were hurting. I persuaded the others to pick a shorter route so we headed off along White Company. We had a break at Urchin Oxbow for some photos with our minds and some snacks from my solitary tackle sack. After that we headed to Antlers. Dan & Chris took the muddy climb; I went round (Again the wellies hindering me). We soon re-met again and I was pointed towards the Antlers. However being a blind as well a bat without sonar, I walked straight past the formations and only after going up and down two boulder slopes did I realise I had gone too far.

Oh well, I turned around and spotted on the way back, nice Trophy buck on the wall I thought! All what was left to do is trudge out.

On exiting, we stopped again in the smaller passage just before beginnings of the exit crawl and had a look at the surveys on display there. Imagine our displeasure of discovering, when we were at the Antlers we couldn't have been more than twenty minutes from the other exit. Oh well its more of a challenge to go back out the way we came in.

Again crawling, squeezing and getting wet & bruised followed until eventually the crawls ended and we popped out into a still quite rainy day.

Dan was regretting coming out first as we was freezing hits nuts off as he did not have the keys to Chris's car who would be giving him a lift back. After ten minutes or so Chris forced him self through the tight passage (me and Dan are quite skinny) and he emerged to meet Dan, who had started to trot back up the hill to the cave to see if the keys were left at the entrance.

Quick goodbyes were made and I set off on the two hundred and ten miles drive home.

Final note: Daren is a great Wet Weather alternative with so much to do once you get in, all you need is lots of time to explore it, or alternatively ask nicely for the combination on the other entrance padlock, though I think that takes away the fun.

Alex Ritchie