

OGOF DAREN CILAU

Antlers and Time Machine

23rd February 2002

Big trip bunch - Duncan Jones, Rose East, Jan Willder, Darren, Gary (CSS), Ashley (CSS)

Half a trip bunch - Pete Dale, Martin, Kevin

After an early(ish) start the slow job of getting changed started, after what seems like an eternity we were ready to go. The weather didn't deter us, chilly with snow and sleet. We had an offer of showing us the entrance from Duncan Price, we didn't refuse, all too soon we were looking at a rather low opening in the rock face.

Somehow I had been volunteered to go first, so in I went, straight through the pool, what a lovely start. The going was then fairly varied with crawling, sideways wriggling, stopping being the main means of progression along the 500-600m (depending which book you read) of entrance passage. The vice proved to be a reasonably easy obstacle as did the calcite squeezes near the end. I personally thought the worst section was the watery rifts, on your side in the water and thrutch and wriggle forwards. We made numerous stops along the way to make sure we didn't split up too much.

Finally emerging into a reasonable sized passage we waited for the others to catch up, one by one the popped out with looks of relief on their faces, following behind us were two members of the CSS, one of whom had never been in Daren before, Gary became a leader showing us the way on which saved us the time of route finding.

The going is easy over rocks, before clambering up into a bigger passage, then down through a choke (the breakthrough choke) into Jigsaw Passage, the taped route is followed for some distance before it closes down and a short sideways thrutch gets you through 'The Wriggle'. At the other side more walking passage leads past a junction and pops out into 'The Big Chamber, Nowhere near the entrance'. Here we stopped for a brief rest and decided on what we should do, after some discussion we opted to visit The White Company & Antlers first then see how we feel after.

More walking leads along a big tunnel, after a while something comes into view, something very white. Getting closer soon reveals the true beauty of The White Company, a fine collection of Stals and Helictites. Onwards the large passage continues with occasional formations, eventually the passage becomes smaller, although still walking sized and a climb down is encountered. Just beyond this The Antlers can be seen poking out of the wall, certainly the biggest helictites I've ever seen, well worth the effort of getting there!!

Retracing our steps back to Big Chamber we had another brief stop at which point three people decided to exit whilst the rest of us went onto visit the Time Machine. Clambering over boulders reaches Eglwys passage, the nerve of this cave, forcing us into crawling again! soon we popped out down a slope in Valentine Chamber, which leads to an interesting climb down a choke to emerge in the very high Preliminary Passage. From here you clamber down the boulders and an easy walk leads to the ladder pitch back up.

At the top a rather large mud village is encountered with some excellent pieces of 'art', just looking occupied us whilst everyone else made their way up the pitch, unfortunately I didn't add to it but next time I must add something. Mixed going leads onwards from here reaching a pit in the floor with a traverse line round the edge, grab the rope and go for it is the best way and don't fall. All safely round that we started to get brief glimpses of large passage below us, a short distance on we reached a hole with the rope in place. Down we climbed into the rather large White Passage, looking the same as Preliminary Passage it probably is the continuation of it.

Easy walking leads along the very large passage, now accompanied by a stream, I was beginning to think this was impressive but no, we had to climb up some boulders and emerge in the huge void

that is The Time Machine. If the passage before wasn't worth the effort then this was. The huge tunnel disappeared away in front us, we started to make our way along a bouldery route to the end of it, upon finding the hole that leads down into the Bonsai Streamway we had a brief rest then turned round and headed back out.

After getting back to the Big Chamber I made an error and turned the wrong way towards some chokes, eventually working out where I had gone wrong we met the others and had a food stop. The point had come, we had to make our way out, setting off towards Jigsaw Passage we assumed everyone was following, but on reaching the breakthrough choke, we noticed we were missing three people.

After waiting for a while Gary returned to the choke where I had stopped and asked if everything was ok, to which I replied 'others aren't here yet'. After a further five minutes curiosity got the better of me and I dumped by kit bag and charged off down the passage. I soon met Rose on her own, not knowing where Jan & Daz were, great I thought, just what we needed. So off again I soon found myself back at a rather quiet Big Chamber, after much shouting I gave up and retreated to relay the news back to Gary.

Back at the choke, again, Gary and Ashley went back to the Big Chamber, where they found the pair, they had apparently gone back in the direction of The Antlers..oops. All safely back, we set off out although I made a foolish error after emerging from the choke, as I clambered down the boulders I slipped and landed rather heavily on the side of my back (after getting my breath back, I set about cursing myself for being so stupid). After that the only thing left to do was the Entrance Passage.

I made sure I was in first as I didn't want to be held up by anyone, on the way out one thing was noticeable - more water, the passage had become wetter since we entered all those hours ago. The vice was a welcome sight, its awkward nature was of no concern, I knew I wasn't far from the entrance when I saw that. A short bit of passage later I could smell the air getting stronger, a brief ear wetting in the entrance puddle and I was out, twelve hours after entering. What a superb trip, would I do it again? Definitely yes, well worth doing.

Duncan Jones

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