

# SOUTH WALES WEEKEND

## Whitewalls, Draenen and Craig

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**Date :** 12-14<sup>th</sup> March 2010

**Present :** Darren Jarvis (Daz\_of\_caving), Alex Ritchie, Duncan Jones, Daniel Jackson, Chris Scaife, Pete Dale, Simon Moorhouse

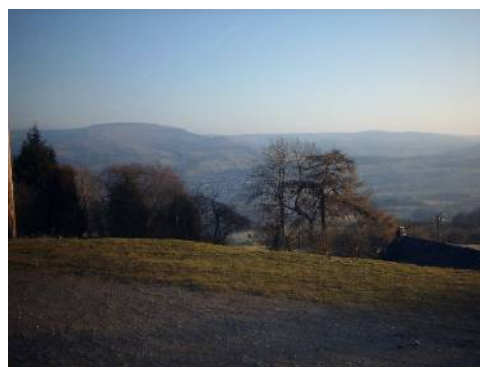
**Weather :** Cool and dry.

### **FRIDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> MARCH: EGLWYS FAEN/ TRAPDOOR POT:**

After some route finding issues around the M6 toll inlet, me (Daz\_of\_caving), Simon and Dan arrived at Whitewalls to find Alex and Dunc standing around waiting for Pete and Chris. After some beers and phone calls we found they were still over one hour away (with the key), so Alex and Me decided to go scout out the main chamber of Eglwys Faen and have a quick warm up.

The guidebook states the caves is 1Km away from Whitewalls so of we went into the night, after a lengthy walk and some scrambling we found one/two of the five entrances to the cave. Unfortunately these were not the main entrances and neither of us fancied a wet crawl out of our caving gear. We did actually enter the cave briefly through the waterfall entrance but quickly got turned around, after a good brisk jog along the valley path (not recommend after a few beers) we returned to find Pete and Chris had arrived and we were in.

Once settled we found the entrance to Trapdoor Pot and attempted to tough entrance climb through various methods, unfortunately this resulted in the pretty first aid box formation being damaged so a make shift ladder was built. Once everyone made it to the upstairs chamber it was quickly to bed ready for the big trip of the next day.



*Saturday morning view..*

### **SATURDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> MARCH: OGOF DRAENEN (WAR OF THE WORLDS TRIP) :**

An early morning saw us at ASDA café by about 8am and a nice full breakfast was eaten by all, after stocking up on supplies and sweets it was time to meet our guide at the local pub. Pretty soon all the gear was sorted and I was offered a questionable tackle-sack by Pete, once the straps were tightened it was off to the most controversial cave in the UK.

In we went into the frankly wet entrance series, through climbs, flat out wet crawls and some impressive scaffolding work we eventually arrived at Cairn Junction. It was at this point it was recommended that we strip down to our undersuits. After a quick break it was time to fully start the epic, the route on was through a long hands and knees crawl which we were told would save 10minutes trip time, we arrived at the Tea Junction with the sweat starting to flow already and we were in the first impressively sized chamber. The problem with big chambers and boulders is that your always watching your feet to prevent tripping up, once through into Lamb and Fox chamber up we went up the climb into the Indiana Highway.

This traverse is fairly easy at first but gets more fun the further on you get, especially without cows-tails... my rental tackle-sack was also causing problems by this point with questionable straps, slowly and surely we all made it across the great traverse route (a few pounds of sweat lighter), once over it was time for some retro gaming in the Megadrive passage.

The Megadrive carries on through some excellent big chambers, oddly placed conservation tape and lots (READ: LOTS...) of boulders, the way on was over these boulders and through several squeezes, chokes and crawls to areas beyond. It really is stunning if you get a second to look up. After some more sweating and big chambers we arrived at what is the only water on the entire route, refilling water bottles occurred, everyone met up and had a short break. Once the team was ready for more fun, Alex fixed the water bowl to collect more water effectively (this proved highly useful on the return). The way on was through Gone with the Wind chamber with more boulders and a stream following underfoot, round a left hand bend the route continues through several smaller sections and big chambers.

Eventually we arrived at the formation (the only one) >>>> of the entire trip, the football sized Snowball. That taken in by its beauty the team decided it would be a great place to stop for lunch, I ate the most questionable looking turkey sandwich in existence while Pete munched a flat looking steak bake, the bottom of the tackle-sack was now a mesh of steak, sweets, pastry, turkey, bread, water and nuts. Water was dished around and we were all rather jolly and merry at this stage in the trip. The way on was through to the Sleepcrawler series via a small hole to the bottom left of the passage, the rest of the trip carried on as a total slog through big chambers, tight crawls, gentle climbs and a lot of boulder hopping.



We all caught up again in the chamber before the aim of the trip War of the Worlds, everyone was there except Simon who decided to hang back and have a sleep. According to Damian (our guide) we were not 20 minutes away from the second biggest passage in the country. On we went for about 40 minutes through some bedding planes and the excellent Reactor Chamber then we eventually found our aim. WAR OF THE WORLDS! Handshakes all round! Once some photos were taken in the biggest part we decided to not head to the very conclusion but to turn around and catch back up to Simon.



*Damian, Alex, Dunc, Chris and Daz; posing for a shot in War of the Worlds (South)*

The return route was not without its issues, Pete and Chris shot ahead only for us to catch up to the declaration that "Pete's stuck!" in one of the chokes. Once Pete was freed and Simon was awake on we went through boulders, boulders and more boulders until eventually we arrived back at the Snowball, by now the tackle-sack was being a total bitch through the squeezes and resulted in it being launched a couple of times. We were soon back at the traverse and I finally realised the 20M drop below and why cows-tails should have been used (Gulp!)

The final slog was broken down by a short 10 minute (Damian time) trip to the excellent St Davids chamber which involved a ladder climb, more boulders and some crawling. The chamber is arguably more impressive than WOTW with a great flat roof and some singing ensured after another short break it was time to head to the surface. The way home was just one big slog and by the end I was knackered and struggling to get more than a few meters before a break, never less we all got through the final crawl and back to Cairn Junction. The rest of the team were already up, I had an energy bar, Alex had a Mars bar and made a miraculous recovery in energy.

We arrived at the rope climb to find it at the top of the pitch (Stupid other cavers), once retrieved up we went with various methods being used from brute force to technical thinking. Me and Chris used some team work to get up the entrance series and soon we were at daylight after an absolute epic 9 hours underground, and what a sunset...

**Trip verdict:** An excellent trip for me, although void of pretties and the route is a test of endurance and stamina. There is so much more to see down there and I hope the authorities get their heads banged together to ensure future access for all cavers. Future trips: Northern series, Full round trip, The Wyvern Extensions and the Prisoners of war choke.

### **SUNDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> MARCH: OGOF CRAIG A FFYNNON**

Caving: Me, Alex, Dan and Chris

Weather: Sunny, Dry

After the previous days epic the four of us (after an ASDA smart price lunch) were ready for more. An afternoon trip to Ogof Craig A Ffynnon was on the cards. Arriving at the cave with no issues we were quickly changed and ready, we also got to admire some interesting outdoor formations which have grown in the archway by the parking area.

Once at the cave we struggled with the lock for some time before finally getting into the tight doorway, the trip begins with an easy walking size passage to some smaller chambers with some nice looking straws. Once over some bounders your quickly into a wet crawl which was not too bad in dry weather and your soon quickly walking again, some nice chambers later we arrived at the first ladder climb which leads into some scaffold (note: some strange fungus growing in the rotting wood). I was flying ahead by this time and carried on up the second ladder climb which is slightly scary at the top where the ladder changes into a rope. Above this ladder another climb leads into the first boulder choke, diving in I was quickly confused as to the way on and waited for Dan. Once everyone had caught up the route on was found (by standing up). The choke is not too bad and carries on upwards for a ways with some slightly tight climbs in for good measure. Once at the top the big and muddy stuff starts. I waited for the others to catch up, Dan found me first and informed me Alex was getting his bag up the climb so on we pushed through some epic mud, the mud crawl is excellent fun with groves cut into the mud for easy (Proper tourist trip this) Down several slides and pools later me and Dan arrived in the Hall Of The Mountain King, nice formations! and Alex/Chris caught up. Once no photos had been taken (the camera had done a vanishing act)

We began the trip out, no problems were met up to the climb down the second ladder where I almost fell knocking a barrage of rocks down (luckily no one was below).

We all met up again at the junction where Alex had gone for a swim down a side passage, a floating head marked his return and out we went into some beautiful sunshine. One hour and thirty minutes had passed underground.

**Trip Verdict :** An excellent and varied trip for such a short time underground, I defiantly want to see this one to its conclusion and a trip to the un-pushed 5th boulder choke should defiantly be on the cards.

*Darren (Daz-of) Jarvis*

*Photos: Daniel Jackson, Duncan Jones, Alex Ritchie*



*No photos from Craig-a-Ffynnon, but Alex went for a stroll afterwards and took in some fine views..*

*A Black Rose Caving Club trip report.*