

## **AFTON RED RIFT, BAKER'S PIT, DOG HOLE and PRIDHAMSLEIGH**

Devon 'cream' tea?

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Date : 26<sup>th</sup> March 2013

Present : Chris Sharman, Alex Ritchie, Chris Scaife, Joe90

Weather : Clear skies, cold, but not half as cold as Mendip.

As part of our five day trip to the Mendips, we decided to head down even further south to an area unfairly snubbed by most cavers: the wonderful land of Devon.

After posting on ukcaving, we were given plenty of suggestions for trips and managed to pick up a local caver (Joe90) and arrange for the keys to be collected from Dart Rock climbing wall in Buckfastleigh. Our first cave of the day was Afton Red Rift, a bit of a drive away from the wall. We parked at a farm and then headed up a wooded lane until we got to a quarry, where a knotted rope led up to a gated entrance. Through the gate, we were almost immediately traversing along a slippery red rift, with the drop below us varying from hardly anything to 10m of vertical death. At times this rift was quite frightening, with the prospect of sliding down, down into the abyss not seeming entirely impossible. At the end of this rift was a climb down into Flower Chamber, followed by more rift passage to the impressive Cascade Chamber. The formations in this part of the cave were tremendous, and the red colour of the rock unlike anything I had seen before. More rift then led to Mud Hall, which has a very difficult climb up its left-hand wall, and just after there we found a small hole in the right hand wall (Watkin's Squeeze), that was an upward-sloping squeeze, not tight but the narrow part was fairly long. This emerged at the bottom of the rift we had been traversing just inside the entrance, so a 10m climb up this slippery rock completed an excellent round trip.

Next we parked our cars beside a church and walked into the middle of a field, where stood a great big concrete chimney, whose locked gate could not prevent the great heat radiating from within. Inside this inferno, we climbed down 16m on fixed ladders into Baker's Pit, a remarkably warm cave. A mixture of walking, crawling, stooping, jumping (Holey Moley), climbing and other verbs used to describe movement through caves were employed as we explored another excellent cave. We saw a greater horseshoe bat just before the Lower Stream Series, which we did not enter, so as to avoid disturbing hibernating bats. At a waterfall, Sharman decided to rest his weary head while Joe90, Alex and I climbed up a squeezey rift into the Plymouth Extensions. This cave was very interesting, with some good formations and lots of variety.

We kept our undersuits on for the short drive to Pridhamsleigh and Dog Hole. Dog Hole again had a locked gate and beyond this a fairly moist dog leg squeeze and a slippery tube down into a small chamber. The dog leg is easy if approached on one's left hand side going in, right hand side going out. The tube is very easy to descend and, to ascend, best to be on one's left hand side with arms outstretched. As if that wasn't fun enough, we then got to see lots of sparkly crystals, gour pools and little helictites. This very short cave was certainly a worthwhile extension to the day. Our fourth and final cave of the day was the celebrated Devon classic Pridhamsleigh Cavern. As twilight was encroaching upon us, we opted for celerity over fastidiousness and, by fate or good fortune, we were in the presence of one with a comprehensive knowledge of the system, the sagacious Joe90. He led us on a round trip to circumnavigate the cavern via the lake. This is a very popular cave and the route through very well polished. On the blackboard outside, where all cavers sign in, there were two previous groups that day of 15 and 21 people.

After the caving, we headed to Joe90's local: the Star Inn. Outside was an insane velocipede for hundreds of drunkards to ride around the back roads of Devon, and inside we ate, drank and all agreed that Devon is a bloody good place to go caving.

*Chris Scaife*

*A Black Rose Caving Club trip report.*