

CRYSTAL CAVE – DOG HOLE – BUCKET ON THE HEAD

Barbondale traverse... A quacking trip..

Date : 20th June 2010

Present : Duncan Jones, Alex Ritchie, Peter Dale

Weather : Warm and sunny

The weather of late has been kind to us, too kind even, with very little in the way of rain over the last month or so water levels are low, plans were made to take advantage of this.

A selection of caves deemed acceptable in dry weather was drafted, this was soon whittled down to just one; the Barbondale Traverse. This is a recently created trip, made possible by the discovery of 'Bucket' and the subsequent connection to Dog (and thus Crystal). The biggest problem with this trip is the connection between Crystal and Dog, of which there are two. The first is tight and suitable for the thin and generally malnourished cavers, the other requires passing through what is the upstream 'sump' – the low water levels meant that today this was just a duck. I had heard (read somewhere?) that some cobble shifting had improved the situation so maybe it's open more often...?

An early start saw me and Pete waiting patiently for Alex to arrive, after a brief wait we started slowly getting ready, at this point he arrived. A quick change and short walk we were soon underground and crawling to the first duck (although more a low crawl with dash of water). Mostly walking passage follows leading to the second, slightly wetter, duck. Beyond, the passage soon lowers to a sump, just back from here a side passage leads to the two waterfall climbs, the top of which reveals a low continuation.

Some sloshing about in water and a duck brought us to a climb, at the top a canal soon degenerated into a low, sandy, gritty gravel which eventually relented as we entered Monsoon Chamber. We were now in Dog Hole. Not long after we crossed the watershed and were heading downstream again, not that we knew where it was as there wasn't a stream to confirm this. Mixed going including a minor squeeze and low gravel brought us to walking passage, this in turn leads to a rift which becomes a traverse. Yes, traversing in a nice passage in Barbondale, the trip just gets better..

As the traverse comes to an end you enter the obvious Breakdown Chamber. The passage continues to a sump but the connection breaks off from this chamber. Alex was dispatched up a likely looking crawl, the news came back that there was a nice formation but no way on.. A bit of head scratching and Alex wandered off down another passage, I decided to check out the likely looking passage (it looked travelled) at least just to look at the nice formation. Once there a cheeky climb up the choke was spotted, at the top a shuffle forward brought me to a drop down and there were signs of recent digging in the small chamber.

Dropping down the hole we had entered Bucket On The Head, after a bit of low crawling the passage increased in height, passing some nice formations and reaching a short drop. The stream is regained but this soon lowers to the first of three ducks, at first it looked very low but it swings right through a low arch, the other two follow in similar fashion with a good wetting, although not really for the head. After some fun splashing around in these we left the stream briefly for some involved crawling before regaining the stream and quickly arriving at the fourth Bucket duck.

This duck was along a rift and presented no real issues, like all the ducks there's space to move about in them. From here the passage is well decorated and we took our time admiring some of the more intricate examples. Soon enough the final duck looms into view, like all others there is airspace but to use it requires being on ones back. Alex had dived through and as I was wearing a wetsuit hood too I figured it was the best thing to do so in I went, only short but invigorating. Pete examined his options and decided going through on his back was preferable. All that remained was a short length of stream passage to gain known ground again (at least for me and Alex)

The short entrance crawl and climb passed quickly and we were soon out into a warm morning (yes, still morning, that's a proper caving trip!) changing was most pleasant and a far cry from the usual cold windy mad dash..

A short but enjoyable trip, we spent just over two hours underground with the help of a survey, although there's not many places where you could go wrong. Somewhere I'd definitely go back to. Perhaps next time we'll do there and back or maybe take it further with a ladder and do downstream Bucket before retracing our steps all the way to Crystal, maybe..

Duncan Jones

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