

DISMAL HILL CAVE - OLD ING CAVE COPPICE CAVE - EXHUMATION HOLE

An alternative day out at Birkwith!

Date : 10th April 2010

Present : Duncan Jones, Alex Ritchie

Weather : Warm and dry.

With a respectable looking forecast for once we started gathering thoughts on what to do on Saturday, visiting the caves of Birkwith area seemed to be the winner.. Plans were made and whilst Ron and Mike decided to take novices to Valley Entrance it was upto me, Alex and Pete to sample some alternative delights further east.

On the day Pete declared "he couldn't be arsed" so it was just the two of us. I arrived a bit later than Alex and found him already changed and having already found Coppy Gill Exit. It was decided that Alex should go and investigate this whilst I got changed, it wasn't long before he emerged and it didn't sound too appealing. After that initial disappointment we opted for Dismal-Old Ing as I had read about a through trip and I wanted to explore the streamway beyond the two free-dives in Old Ing (on my last visit I didn't spot the climb up to bypass the sumps so never got chance to sample it)



Dismal Hill roof bedding

A short walk brought us to the new entrance of Dismal Hill which I showed to Alex before we headed over to the proper, original entrance and the one that makes the through trip that bit better. A short crawl brings you to a climb, at the bottom of which is a dead sheep, luckily you shuffle along to a parallel climb thus avoiding the offending object, on the day of our trip there just was a faint aroma. You can avoid said sheep, unless of course you're Alex and drop your bag down the climb so it lands near to the sheep! The next flat-out section soon improves and emerges in the side of the fine main streamway.

We headed downstream first, a mixture of stream and traversing before reaching a canal, at this point we climbed up into the roof bedding and followed this as far as we could, passing an old dig en-route (later on we spotted a likely looking shakehole that may be where it was heading?)

After finally reaching an end we turned round and headed back upstream, after passing the 'original' Dismal entrance we soon encountered a fixed rope across a pool, quickly followed by the climb to where daylight can be seen from the new entrance. Shortly after the sump pool is reached, on the right wall is a fixed traverse line or loose rope half draped in the water. I opted for the wall, Alex went for a rope-assisted-swim. Reaching the far side a clamber into a blasted-crawl, round a bend reaches a step down into a canal passage with further fixed traverse ropes in-situ (in places this was looking a tad 'battered'). After a short but entertaining piece of passage the traverse ends and the rope heads up a short climb (couple of metres), some metal rungs assist the climb into the bedding plane.

The short flat-out crawl emerges in the fine Swift Falls Chamber, another fixed rope makes the climb up the waterfall easier and the passage beyond is a fine streamway. Eventually the Leeds-Liverpool canal is reached and we knew we had to start looking for the bypass to the two free-dives (only wearing fleeces, free-diving was completely out of the question!!!)

The bypass crawl was found a short distance back and soon lowers to flat-out before popping out above the 'usual' Old Ing streamway. Once down the climb I looked back up and realised why I hadn't spotted this on my last visit – obscure to say the least.

A quick visit to the downstream sump and then out into a pleasant day. Back to the cars for a quick drink and look at NC2, we then strolled over to Coppice Cave. En-route we stopped to have a quick nosey at an impressive dig before continuing to the large shakehole containing the entrance. We knew we were at the right spot owing to the faded words of the cave on the wood covering the entrance.

A short climb and bit of passage before a narrow downwards section is reached, Alex made it look unappealing and whilst he was wriggling I spotted a possible oxbow. Shuffling upright along the narrow section I entered the oxbow only to find it rather snug, so much so I back-tracked and followed Alex's route! Down through the narrow bit leads to a short wet crawl and a chamber. Further easy crawling eventually improves to where daylight enters.

At this point the continuation was a low wet crawl, which I looked at and decided I couldn't be bothered (plus not having any rope or SRT kit for the through trip) Alex decided to investigate whilst I climbed out and sunbathed! After a short while Alex emerged with tales of low crawls, narrow rifts; glad I didn't bother!

Walking back we took a short detour and found the entrance to North Fair Bottom Cave, it looked small and narrow and the survey shows it going nowhere so we just looked and didn't venture in.

Continuing the walk back we then climbed over at Calf Holes, walked upstream past a curious rising and followed the stream for some distance before finally arriving at a miserable looking entrance of Sikes Cave with a pool of water outside and a thin film of oil covering it. We entered and followed a small passage liberally adorned with flood debris of all kinds, eventually arrived at a t-junction where Alex had a brief snack (there was actually room to sit up here). The gloomy misery continued, until I found a spot where I could half sit-stand again, I waited, watched and listened to occasional sloshing sounds and constant scraping and shuffling sounds as Alex pressed on. A short while later he returned saying it got low and wet and he'd had enough! We exited into the warm sunshine disappointed at the crap cave, luckily the previous two caves were good and made up for this. I usually try to find something nice to say about any cave I visit however small, but alas not this time. It was underground, that's a positive I guess!!

Whilst I wouldn't recommend Sikes to anybody I would certainly recommend the other two fine through trips, as long as you're not too large in size they make for an alternative and short but entertaining few hours caving.

Duncan Jones

Photo – Alex Ritchie