

## COUNTY POT – WRETCHED RABBIT

A Try Caving event

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Date : 12<sup>th</sup> May 2007

People present : Paul Turner, Mike Skyrme, Duncan Jones, Mike White, Claire Duxbury

The following article appeared in the North West Evening Mail, Wednesday 23rd May 2007. The article was written after members of the club took a reporter from this paper on a trip in Easegill, it also helped promote the national Try Caving event on the 26/27th May..

*I will now let Paul take it away:*

Like most people, I tend to see the world from up here on the surface. Occasionally I may step onto a jet plane and then see for miles and miles all around from up on high. But it seems I may have been missing out on quite a lot of what our planet has to offer.

Every week cavers from across the world decide to look beneath the surface and discover a world only a few feet away in distance but a million miles in perception. One such group is the Black Rose Caving Club, a small band of hardy explorers from across the north of England, who dip into the caverns and passageways carved out beneath the surface of the Yorkshire Dales throughout the year. Three of their number - they are eight in total at present - come from Barrow. Mike Skyrme, who spends his weekdays working in the shipyard and looking after his two daughters, is one of the more experienced members of the group, having been caving for more than three years now.

The second Barrovian is also - rather confusingly - called Mike White, but thoughtfully accepts the moniker Mike Two. He has only been caving for little over a year but he has already caught the bug and can't believe he didn't take up the chance to start sooner.

With the third Barrovian Neil busy elsewhere, it is just us three heading to Ingleton, in Yorkshire and a network of caves called Easegill.

Mike Two is full of enthusiasm for the trip. He's not been going underground for so long that he has seen it all yet and he bristles with contagious excitement about the trip ahead.

But the old heads too seem to relish every chance they get to go beneath the surface, Mike One and Duncan Jones - a caver from Oldham also a member of the group - have been there and done that so many times you could be forgiven for thinking it must all be passe to them by now. But instead they look forward to each trip with as much anticipation as the beginners, knowing every journey brings with it new sights to see and unexplored routes to check out.

And that's the thing about caving - there's so much to see underground as there is above it, as I was soon to discover.

Many people probably have an image of cavers spending their entire lives squeezing through tight holes, swimming through underground caverns and risking life and limb without a second thought to their own safety. I soon realise this is far from the truth. I'm fully kitted out in my two caving suits to keep me warm, a pair of wellies to keep my feet dry and a hard helmet with a mounted torch so I don't go round smashing my head every five minutes - and anyone who has ever been into even tourist caves knows how easy that can be. More importantly, I have a group of other cavers with me, who know how to get around and how to make sure accidents don't happen.

It may seem like the easiest thing in the world to go clambering down a hole for a few hours - but try it by yourself and I don't fancy your chances of coming back out. That's probably why I was a little nervous heading from Bull Pot Farm and towards County Pot and into the cave network.

Located halfway in between Ingleton and Kirkby Lonsdale, the Easegill Caverns are popular among many caving groups, but there's more than enough passageways and grottos to go round without bumping into other caving groups round every other bend.

In fact, during our four hours or so beneath the surface we only catch a passing glimpse of another group in the distance, dashing off on a different path to us. And the solitude is one of the first things you notice.

After climbing down the County Pot entrance, you come out into a small cavern with a passage carved out before you by millions of years of erosion by water flowing through holes in the limestone.

You stand up, but there is very little room to move on either side, as the walls stand about a foot apart, almost as if they were made for people to walk through as they set off on an underground adventure.

Being created by water finding the path of least resistance, the gaps between the rock are far from straight and lead you on a meandering course through the rock. It's not all walking though.

As I say, water takes the easiest course open to it and sometimes that is to drop straight down, creating waterfalls and spiral staircase like structures which are not quite so easy to negotiate.

The major one of these when coming in from County Pot is not far into the journey and I'm left to stand chatting with Mike and Claire Duxbury - the final member of the party from Harrogate - as Mike Two and Dunc set up a ladder and rope system so we can each be lowered five metres in turn down a level in the caverns.

Mike tells me to climb using one foot forwards and one backwards and to hold my

arms on the back of the ladder. Having tried it I can only assume Mike has some kind of double-jointed mechanism that allows him to do this, especially as most of the others seem to climb down in a far more conventional way.

The route down may not be easy, but the rewards are easy to see. Underground streams flow by beneath, and sometimes over, your feet and everywhere you look cave formations like stalagmites and stalactites are a wonder to behold.

There is the Whiteline Chamber, so called because of streaks on the walls near the waterfalls and Gypsum Cavern, a sizeable hole in the rock where all sorts of rock formations have been made from the limestone. Unlike so many of the tourist cave sites, you are able to get up close and personal with the rock formations here, though you need to be careful where you put your head for fear of knocking off hanging stalactites built up over thousands of years.

At one point Mike tells us all to switch off our lights so he can take a photograph with his special camera. Feet in the flowing stream, sitting barely six inches away from Mike Two I suddenly realise just how dark it really is. Mike may as well not even be there. Without the lights you can't even see your own nose - it feels like you are at the centre of the earth - though without the being burned and crushed alive bits. There are some moments during the excursion where being crushed seems like a distinct possibility. Duncan is confident he's leading us in the right direction when we end up half crawling, half sniping through gaps in the rock less than a foot high - suffice to say I've no option but to trust him.

When he leads us along a gap in the rocks with a 20-foot drop and only my own arms and legs to keep me from falling I start to wonder if I'm going to make it out without a quick call to the Cave Rescue Organisation. Fortunately, the more experienced climbers know where I'm going wrong and are able to tell me when to go back and start again. At one point it does require Claire to push me up by my backside, but I'm not complaining about a 25-year-old lass grabbing me by the behind - though sadly this is a one-off occurrence.

It's amazing how quickly time passes when you're below ground. Moving through the passageways and caverns, admiring the sights, stopping just to have a talk about anything and nothing, it's a social experience and one that passes by at a pace.

As we come out of Wretched Rabbit - a winding exit that seems to be going nowhere fast until right near the end - there is the odd bit of rope climbing to be done before the joyous sight of daylight. A quick scramble to the finish and we are done, wellies full of water, mud smears all over my face (thanks for telling me about those while we were sitting in the posh pub guys) and a thoroughly enjoyable experience behind me.

It may not be for claustrophobes, those afraid of the dark or heights, but for everyone else it's fully recommended.

There's so much of the world you're missing out on if you don't go. Next time they tell me there will be abseiling - I can't wait.

*Paul Turner*



*Photos - Duncan Jones and Mike Skyrme*

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