

CRYSTAL CAVE and DOG HOLE

Every hole's a goal?

10th June 2006

People present - Duncan Jones, Mike Skyrme

Weather: Hot and sunny (cave: Cool and refreshing)

An alternative view on this trip can be found in Mike's write up, below.

Whilst a reasonable number of people were drinking and watching England play Paraguay in the World Cup (which was almost pointless as England only just scraped a win via an own goal!) and others were burning themselves in the sun (temperatures in mid-late 20c's - grim) we opted instead to take a look down some minor classic caves.

After a quick bite of food in Ingleton, we headed to Barbondale and pulled up at a likely looking spot. The sun pounded down on us as we got ready and we were grateful for the short walk with not much uphill.

Finding an inviting looking hole we quickly headed into the shade and a blissfully cool breeze greeted us and was most welcomed.

Once inside a short crawl soon reaches the first duck, which is just a flat out crawl in the stream with a potential for some ear-wetting. Suddenly the cave assumes respectable proportions when it enters The Hall, at this point the formations make an appearance of which there is an abundance of along the rest of the length of the cave.

Easy going reaches the first waterfall which is easily climbed and above the passage eventually drops and the second duck is reached, which is deeper than the first and involves a full wetting, apart from the mouth up, which is just above the water..

A sump is soon reached but a quick back-track we found the passage leading to the second and third waterfalls, at the top of which are some small passages, which either end or provide a very ropey connection with Dog Hole.

We headed back and I encouraged Mike to redo the second duck so I could take photos, which he seemed to enjoy, strange chap! At the first waterfall we climbed up into The Gallery with its fine array of formations, much better than the ones in the main streamway, after a look around and some photos we dropped back to the stream and made our way out and over the fell to find Dog Hole.

Clambering up by the dry waterfall we found the entrance with a healthy quantity of rocks covering it, after some time these were cleared and we proceeded down a steeply sloping crawl over a mixture of mud and vegetation into Bridge Chamber.

After some climbs we reached Boulder Chamber (hardly a chamber!), a small passage leads off and soon reaches the 4.5m pitch, which is really just an easy climb, I did hear some grumbling from above about it being lacking in space at the top but after a few grunts and wriggles Mike popped through.

From here a short crawl leads down a couple of climbs to where the end is reached more or less, unless you like small grovelly crawls that go nowhere in a short distance!

We then had a nosey around Boulder Chamber looking for likely routes into The Jungle but after a bit of ferreting around we had had enough and headed out and down to the Barbon Inn, only to find it closed and not open for about another hour so we carried onto to Casterton and The Pheasant.

On a hot day like it was the flood prone caves and short walk in a beautiful setting made for a most enjoyable day out, although it could quite easily be done as an evening trip.

Duncan Jones

Alternative report, by Mike

It had been decided in the pub after our trip to Gaping Gill, that me and Dunc would plan something to celebrate England's first world cup game (as we seemed to be the only ones who couldn't give two sh**s about football).

So over the next fortnight, thinking caps were donned and places such as Old Ing, Katnot and Ribblehead were banded about. However, in the end it was the weather forecast that finally dictated where we were to go! The prolonged dry spell afforded us with an excellent opportunity to visit the flood prone caves of Barbondale, Crystal Cave and Dog Hole in particular.

Saturday arrived fully living up to the forecast – sunny and very hot (at last they seemed to have got it right for once!!!!). After a brief delay at home (you know how it is with women and technical problems such as punctures and changing of wheels etc!) I was on my way to Ingleton. A quick dart into Daleswear for a new inner suit and it was off to meet Dunc for a brew and something to eat in Inglesport café.

Once fed and watered we set off for Barbondale, joining the slow moving convoy trundling up the A65 from Westhouses to Kirkby Lonsdale – BLOODY TRACTORS!!!!

Heading up into Barbondale I was very surprised by the stunning scenery and the steepness of the valley sides. As usual Duncan (the homing pigeon) Jones displayed his outstanding ability to locate the caves and a suitable parking spot as close as possible – Take a bow young man!!!!

After a leisurely change (far to hot to be rushing about) we set off on the short but relatively steep walk to Crystal Cave. Reaching the entrance we quickly pulled our oversuits and helmets on and ducked into the welcome coolness of the cave.

After a short crawl through bitterly cold water we reached the first of the 'ducks'. Not much of a duck this one, more of a flat out crawl in water. With his helmet off and much ooohhhing and aaarrggghhing (as the freezing cold water began to circulate his tender bits) Dunc was through. I soon followed using pretty much the same expletives! We were now in 'The Hall' which was festooned with lots on curtains and ancient looking stals.

Beyond The Hall, the passage continued through various crawls and climbs among jagged rock to reach 'Spout Chamber', which due to the dry period was more of a trickle on this occasion.

The survey indicated a higher level route from The Hall to Spout Chamber known as 'The Gallery'. Dunc located the climb up from the Spout chamber end and we both agreed to follow this route out during our exit.

A climb up the spout led us along more nicely decorated passage until we reached the second duck with a max of 8 inches of air space. However, once in the water the floor fell away quite steeply allowing an easy passage through. The water was still bitterly cold though!! Oh – and Dunc tried to float his helmet through but it promptly sank LOL! After much chattering of teeth and emptying of wellies we pressed forward for the short distance to the sump. Retracing our steps back, we located a side passage with led via a climb to two waterfalls which again were merely trickles. The waterfalls involved two 4.5m climbs which were extremely easy due to the abundance of hand and foot holds available in the jagged rock. At the top of the waterfalls, I crawled into another passage and followed this for a short distance before returning.

Back down the waterfalls and into the main passage it was decided that a photo call had to be made at the duck. Unfortunately for me, Dunc decided that a better shot would be had from the sump side, so for me, it was into the water and through the duck, only to turn around and come back again, pausing momentarily for our intrepid cameraman to take the shot. I think I had become used to the water at this point because it didn't seem too bad, still cold but not 'bone achingly' so like the first immersion.

Photo's over and Dunc safely through, it was off to find The Gallery, pausing for a few more shots

in Spout Chamber. The Gallery proved to be a beautiful place with curtains, stals, columns and flowstone complete with gour pools. We also noted one cave pearl. Lots of pics taken in this part of the cave, along with some acrobatical climbing to get the best shots of a beautifully decorated grotto complete with a deep pool.

We then returned to the main passage and made our exit into the bright sunshine and heat of the day.

For me, Crystal Cave has got to rank as one of the most beautifully decorated caves I have ever been in. The formations are not massive but the sheer number of them in such a small distance was unbelievable – well worth a visit if the weather is on your side!

A scramble out of the ravine and it was a short trip across the fell into North Barking Gill to locate the entrance to Dog Hole. Once found and the rocks removed from the entrance (more on this later), we dived into the flat out crawl to escape the attentions of the millions of midge's who were attempting to eat us alive – little bast**ds!

The floor of the crawl was weird. It appeared to be a mixture of mud, leaves, twigs and grass and seemed to be piled up almost blocking various routes which could be seen. It was soft and easily scraped away in big clumps, which made enlarging the crawl easy allowing a pretty rapid headfirst descent down onto a bedding shelf and rift, down which brought us into 'Bridge Chamber'.

From Bridge Chamber a short crawl and a drop down between blocks led us to 'Boulder Chamber'. From here, we climbed over a shelf and amongst more blocks to the head of a 5m free climbable pitch. This was tight at the top but once over the constriction, an easy descent could be made. Unfortunately, as always seems to be the case, it took a lot of manipulation before I managed to shoehorn myself over the constriction and descend to join Dunc who was waiting patiently at the bottom.

From the foot of the pitch, a low crawl led us down two small drops into 'Jet Chamber' and the 'guide book' end of our journey.

As we had every intention of paying south passage a visit whilst the opportunity allowed, (finding the bloody thing was a different matter!) we retraced our steps back into Boulder Chamber (the exit at the top of the pitch being a damn sight easier than coming down) where I began ferreting around looking for the 'devious and unpleasant' crawl which would lead us to south passage – I couldn't find it!!! What I did find in various places were small piles of animal (carnivore) bones, which seemed a little strange.

At 4.20pm I located a likely looking 'trodden' route and began to follow this until it split at another junction, at this point I gave up the search and returned to Boulder Chamber to where Dunc was trying to remember the exit route. As I had to be back home so the wife could go out, we decided to make our way back to the surface vowing to return again. The route was quickly found and the journey out uneventful.

Once outside, we were once again set upon by the ravenous hordes of midge's as I frantically replaced the rocks over the entrance before scrambling out of the gill and away from the little bloodsuckers!

A quick change back at the car and we were heading for 'The Pheasant Inn' in Casterton for a well earned pint!

All in all a good days caving and what better way to remove yourself from civilisation, as the masses began their assault on large quantities of larger and undercooked sausages before watching our national team rely on the misfortune of others in order to secure a win!

NOTE: Why was the entrance to Dog Hole blocked up with rocks?

Our first ideas were that it was to reduce the amount of debris being washed into the cave – but as the entrance is located relatively high up the bank of the gill; this is probably not the case.

The debris inside was soft and not compacted and on reflection would have appeared more like a bedding material – for what though??

The remains found in various places in Boulder Chamber were clearly from carnivorous animals judging by the teeth in the jawbones – sharp, hooked canines. A trawl on the internet indicated that the bones may have belonged to foxes.

Could it therefore be that the entrance was blocked to stop foxes using it as their ‘earth’ and thus prevent inquisitive little pups from falling down into the cave and dying from starvation? Who knows???

Answers on a postcard please!!!

Mike Skyrme



Photos - Duncan Jones

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