

## DOW CAVE (CASEKER GILL)

Solo, so far..

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**Date :** January 2011

**People present:** Alex and my camera

**Weather:** Although chilly, it was a pleasant day partly cloudy no breeze and little to no chance of rain.

**Grade:** I would grade the extensions 4, the rest of the cave before that a 2.

It seems that these Christmas holidays, everyone is otherwise engaged. I had not managed even just one trip over the holidays so far, so I thought well either I sit at home moping or I go out and do something, even if I have to do it solo.

I decided on the cave, arranged call out, printed out a few surveys and copied my NTFH description and off I went.

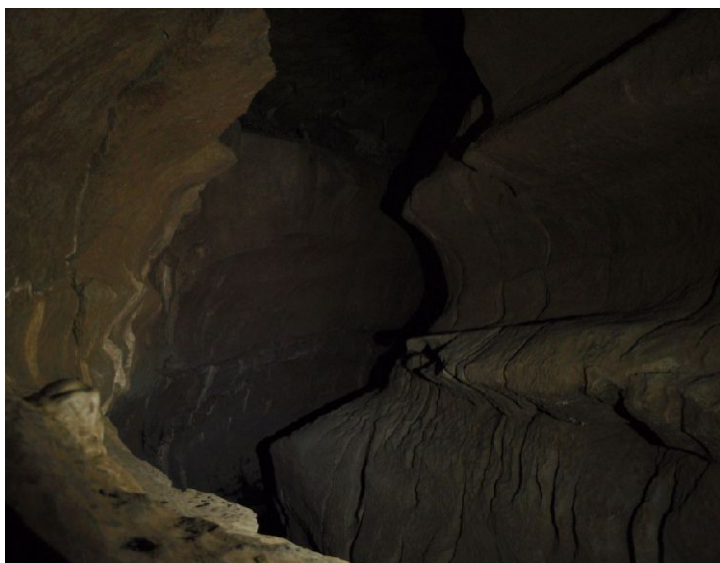
I found the entrance to Dow instantly as I had been there before as part of a through trip. I scrambled on down the slope, over the ice and into the pleasant walking passage below. What a cracking stream way!

I did not stay in the stream-way for long, because if I see a side passage I have just got to explore it, more so knowing that I will not hold anyone up.

My first excursion was though an unnamed inlet passage on the left. The passage starts as a nice walking passage. Shortly a bit of stooping brought me to a chamber with a bit of twine hanging down from 30ft above as if it was trying to entice me. Not on your nelly am I climbing up there I thought! I found an alternative continuation of the passage at floor level under the far wall. This led through many low muddy wallows until eventually emerging high up the wall in the first Miners Chamber.



*Dow entrance*



*Typical Dow stream-way a few minutes in.*



*The view of the "First Miners Chamber" where the crawl emerges.*



*Warning signs at the start of Hobson's choice.*

up near the waterfall. This led to more boulders but thankfully these seem calcified and not likely to move.

I quickly emerged in the next chamber "Depot Chamber". This chamber was beautifully decorated (*Photo below, does not do it justice*). There was also an interesting roped climb on the right half



A climb down from my high vantage point got me to the chamber floor. I then headed to the far end of this impressive flat roof chamber to find a boulder choke that led to the way on. I poked about in this thinking it was Hobson's choice after failing to find my way through, I checked the description and realised nope, its further up the stream, doh.

On my way up stream I passed a few health and safety signs. "Extreme Danger you are entering a dangerous area. No novices" and "Danger Danger unstable rocks keep away". I think these are a bit over the top; however as the cave up to now is only an easy grade 2, this marks the turning point in the cave's character.

I checked the description before entering and made slow & steady progress through the boulder choke. The route is through quite easy; you crawl in water until it is waist deep before a small waterspout. You then climb up through a slot above you. After that it is simply a case of following your nose until you come out from the boulders into a chamber with a nice waterfall in it.

The waterfall looked promising, but alas led nowhere so I carried on along the main route which involved a quick climb

rigged on a dodgy piece of wood, which I assumed was the way on. I thought hmmm don't like the look of that, so I found another way up by climbing back into the boulders and followed a short crawl through an easy squeeze. The squeeze deposited me precariously at the top of the climb. Precarious or not this was a good photo vantage point.

From my position a steep mud slope was the way on. Thankfully it was not too slippery. Following this passage ever upwards, I soon realised I was now in mine workings. Well that cannot be right so I checked the description and sure enough I had gone the wrong way.

I made a careful descent back down after doing a little exploration, and continued on the correct way. This was a crawl under the wall at the back of the chamber at floor level.

Surprisingly the cave resumes its large dimensions and I followed the large stream way for around 5 minutes or so before deciding to have a look at the "Rattle and Sploosh" mine workings. These works contain quite a few old timbers and relics.



*Man made wall just before Rattle pitch.*

After some climbs and a man made wall I came to a steep slope. I cautiously started descend it dislodging a small stone on my way down. I had forgot about the stone but I was suddenly aware of it again when it crashed to the floor after a long period of silence. Hmm this must be Rattle pitch then.

My heart raced at this point, the slope ended directly at the pitch. This was quite a precarious slope and if I slipped I knew I would not be able to stop my self from plummeting down Rattle pitch back to the stream way below. I cautiously and slowly made my way back up the slope. Consulting the survey confirmed that indeed was Rattle pitch, but this experience did not abate me from exploring further. I soon found sploosh pitch. This was 5 meter deep blind hole with the bottom half-underwater, hence the name.



*Sploosh Pitch.*

I returned the way I came, back to the stream way and continued to push up stream. I was soon stopped however by a large waterfall that seemed impassable. On careful examination I found a way up on the right in the rift just before the waterfall. This consisted of a 2-meter climb onto a very narrow ledge and then a traverse along to reach the top half of the waterfall. With the help of an in-situ rope I easily climbed it the top of the falls. Beyond lay some smaller waterfalls; all were bypassed by climbing up nearby. The last climb was an exposed 5 metres climb.

A quick stroll upstream brought me to what I thought was the final boulder choke. I partook of some refreshments and after a poke around, I made the return journey.

Heading out I was not exploring any more & not taking photos, so I made to the exit in around just 20 minutes, having took 3 and a half to get to the end.

On approach to my car I noticed that someone else was parked there. There was a man standing next to my car, looking let's say quite suspicious. On seeing me coming down the lane he soon got into his car and left before I reached him. Once reached my car I saw no evidence of foul play, until I happened to glance over the other side of the wall. There over the wall, was an orange bag about the size of a football. It was not there when I arrived so that man probably chucked it there.



I waited for the man's car to get out of sight before vaulting over the wall to investigate. I started to slit open the bag with my multi-tool caver's knife, hoping against hope not to find a human head! It slowly revealed its contents. It in-fact was not a head it instead contained an assortment of bottles and other rubbish. The lout was just dumping rubbish, scumbag. I removed the bag and took it with me to dispose of it properly, why that lazy lout could not do the same I know not why. Most of it was recyclable.

To sum up, solo cave exploring is certainly adventurous pursuit but also not for the faint hearted. I took a lot of supplies with me, a lot more than I normally would do. I had to be completely self-reliant. Solo caving however is also fantastic opportunity for exploration as you can go where you want to do and not have any fear of holding people up. Also it gives me plenty of time try and improve my photography skills, though they are still lacking.

*Alex Ritchie*

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