

## **Knock Fell Caverns**

Date: 27th December 2012

People present: Chris Scaife, Pete Brookdale, Alex Ritchie, Chris Sharman, Jonathan Finch, Joe Bones, Daz of 'Caving', Jerzy.

Weather: we couldn't get our cars up the hill, because the road was too icy (so icy in fact that Sharman's car started to roll down the hill after he parked it and we all had to grab it to prevent it destroying Jerzy's car), so we parked lower down, then walked through the blizzard to a shake hole deep in snow.

Prior to this trip, most of us were a bit unsure about how to find this cave, so I've decided to dedicate the first paragraph to navigation and location in the nation. See the CNCC website for access details. Turn off the A66 at Long Marton, then follow signs to Knock. At Knock turn left towards Silverband, then take the first road on the right, passing a large layby where much of our day was spent waiting for two bastards who turned up late; follow this road up the hill, further than we managed to get if you're lucky, right up to the Pennine Way. The cave is in one of many shake holes on the hillside to the right, grid reference NY 71839 30856.

The entrance has a metal grille and some solid scaffolding bars just below this, which we used to attach our electron ladder. Down the ladder we went one by one, as is the wont of those using electron ladders, into a massive pile of snow that had gathered at the foot of the 7m pitch. From here, we started by following the dotted lines drawn on the survey, indicating the 'typical' route. The cave is completely unlike any other cave I know of; some say it was formed hypogenically and I'm happy to go with that. After some fairly low crawls early on, we were in a typical labyrinthine section near the very nicely decorated Halfa Passage, when local hero Jerzy and not-local ballbag Daz decided to turn back. Fair enough - Daz may be the proud owner of a Scurion, but he'd turned up with a crappy light that kept flickering on and off. Jerzy was wearing boots and gaiters, and personally I'm impressed he got so far through some low crawls and over sharp and muddy sections. So we were down to six cavers.

Halfa Passage really was an interesting place, and we did a mini round trip in this section, before heading to the southern end of the complex, where the passage was mostly walking size, then off to Merlin Cave, which again featured some big passages, but also plenty of crawling over jammed boulders. We returned to the typical route and headed north, almost in a straight line, past the large Transpennine Passage, which could have provided an easy return almost to the start. At the end of this straight bit, we squirmed through a narrow climb up into a chamber, followed by a tube and crawl. A few sightseeing detours were then made on the way up to the Final Chokes, especially by Alex, who was determined to make the most of his 60th caving trip of the year. At the Final Chokes, we realised it was getting late and it was time to head out. A climb and slither up a step near F3 on the survey was quite sharp on the return. Some entertaining sections including a climb down a narrow rift, a wriggle up and around a boulder, a no-holds tube and a skydive ensured we all enjoyed the final section of the journey, and after 4 or 5 hours underground we emerged into near darkness to find a horrifying confession from Daz daubed into the snow, using what seemed to be blood.

A very entertaining underground maze, its total length of 4500m meant that although we explored well beyond the typical route marked on the survey, there were still many parts we didn't get to see. There may only be one short pitch and no streamway, but this is a cave with a huge amount of variety.

*Chris Scaife*