

Yockenthwaite – I had a “hoot”.

Weather: Mild and cloudy with chance of sunshine – no rain forecast.

People: Just me

I advertised a trip to Wharfdale and as expected I got zero interest. To be fair though, it was a Sunday. No one it seems to want to go caving on that day, perhaps everyone I know is deeply religious? Anyway I did not let a thing like zero interest stop me! I decided to hit Yockenthwaite, mainly for the fact it was covered by NFTFH, so I had an excellent description to guide me.



Overgrown entrance, handy tree to my left (out of shot) to rig a traverse line.

After leaving a call out with Dan, I set off for the surprisingly long drive to the cave. I headed up the hill and found the cave easily. Being on my own gave me time for a couple of photos, before I began pondering about the rigging. There was suppose to be an obvious rock to rig off, however when I located it, I was not happy, it looked like the rope would just slip right off. So I went to the east side of the shake hole and rigged a traverse from a large tree so I could have a proper look lower down. I located a better rock underneath the one I was looking at earlier. I had brought an extra sling just in-case so it was no problem. After that it was just the matter of finding re-belay which took a good long time. (*Its in the North west of the shaft for future reference*). Part way down, beyond the re-belay I spotted what I believe was a barn owl so I took a photo of it without a flash so as to not disturb it.



I stopped in at hooters on the way down the pitch. (Look in the centre)

At the bottom a rather disgusting hole awaited me, full of mud and animal bones, It felt as if I was descending through a graveyard. Thankfully this descent was short and I was soon at the second pitch after a short bit of larger passage. I spent a little bit of time looking at the free climb and decided to give it a try on the way back out. The next pitch was almost immediate I could have got away with using a 20m rope for both. This pitch was a little snug at the top but easy enough. Round the corner was the 4th pitch where I could only find one bolt and it looked tight. I solved the one bolt problem by using the 3rd pitch rope as a backup. I then had to tackle the smallness. It's bark was far worse than it's bite, I slithered through easily after giving myself enough slack on my stop.



Second pitch



Third pitch



Looking up the rather snug 4th pitch from the ledge.

I landed easily on the ledge a few meters down. Looking up it would have been possible though foolhardy to free climb to this point. Safe on a wide ledge, I decided to get off the rope and look for the Dry pitch bypass. It was here things started to go wrong. First I got stuck in the bedding squeeze bypass as gear got caught. I freed my self but I had to do it twice for other gear I left behind. Would have loved having a partner for this bit.

Then as I started the free climb I thought, “hmm I don't like this”, so I backed off. At this point something dropped off me down the pitch/climb. With horror I realised what it was the battery lid had come off my helmet and my battery was hanging out dangerously, ready to join the lid at the bottom. I managed to stuff the battery back in and decided I had no choice but to go down. The climb was actually rather easy, it was just a long way down if you mess it up. Thankfully I located my lid and after a bit of faffing and thanks to my backup light, I managed to get it back on, though the wire was all wrong and my battery was jammed in place.

I was reluctant to continue now, but I did press on a little more, climbing a very awkward 2m high blank wall which was the start of Fossil rift. After going on for about 15 meters, passing through some squeezes I decided things were getting a bit too dicey for a solo outing and called it a day.



The point where I turned back, it looked like you could slither down through a tight hole or continue on an awkward traverse to where it looked like it opened out over nothingness.

The 4th pitch head was easy as you can just walk up the gully near the top. On the second pitch, I took the free climb which was a little challenging but easier than the 2m climb into Fossil. I had, forgot to tie the bag to the rope I so had to re-descend, doh.

The entrance pitch would have been difficult to get off of, but the traverse I rigged made things easy.

So going out was surprisingly easy despite it taking me 2 hours to get to where I turned around. I found I was on the surface after only a further 45 minutes.

Despite the light issue, I had fun on the way in and the way out, but I found I am no where near as brave when I am solo, there is no real reason I could not continue, other than it looking rather awkward. I just kept thinking what if, especially after the battery incident.

