

SOUTH WALES WEEKEND

17th - 20th July 2009

A weekend of mountain biking and caving, I turned up on Saturday morning to do a Ffynnon Ddu caving trip and stayed Saturday night, with the intention of caving in Craig a Ffynnon on Sunday.

Saturday 18th July - Ogof Ffynnon Ddu 1

Weather: Cloudy, showers.

Present: Duncan Jones, Dominick Mennie, Dan Jackson, Alex Ritchie. Our leader: Martin Hoff

The day started with much discussion, who was doing what cave, you would have thought it was a simple process, but alas, no. I was keen to do a trip to Smith's Armoury, some were keen to do a through trip, others wanted anything and we had an offer of a round trip (for 4 people only) in OFD1.. Choices, choices..

Eventually we settled on who was going where (splitting into two groups of four) and set about getting ourselves ready. As ever, our faithful forgetful had forgotten his wellies, again!! Once Alex had procured a pair we headed off in the direction of our chosen caves at more or less the same time, our group had a pleasant downhill stroll from Penwyllt to the entrance, thoughts of the uphill struggle on the way back were pushed to the back of our minds.

Passing through someone's garden you soon arrive at the ladders down to the gate, with a further ladder beyond. Martin set about opening the gate and a delightful and strong draught was felt as it was opened. All in and we were off in typical Ffynnon Ddu style – decent sized walking passage!

After some easy going we arrived at a split, a ladder up the Toast Rack or Pluto's Bath with a rather audible stream beckoning us forward. Through the bath and the passage dips down to the stream which was racing towards the sump, it was here that the foamy evidence of recent flooding was found. Luckily for us the stream was do-able and we headed upstream in a fine, twisting stream passage soon arriving at the first notable point “The Step”, this was perhaps an inch underwater, but this was acceptable and we continued upstream.

The streamway, like the section between Top and Cwm Dwr is a fine one indeed, albeit a shorter version, it does however throw in some alternative entertainment in the form of 'pots'. They come in pairs, complete with scaffold pole across each and there is an escape route between the two pairs if it was needed, it wasn't and we continued onwards to a sump. Bearing left a much less active streamway is followed until we emerged at Boulder Chamber. A boulder choke at the far end is the key to greater glory.



Entering the choke you soon pass a bent scaffold pole (it was straight originally!) and you pass a quiet sump, continuing through the choke a distant booming/rumbling noise could be heard. At the far side a steeply sloping passage leads downwards to another sump and the source of the delightful booming noise.

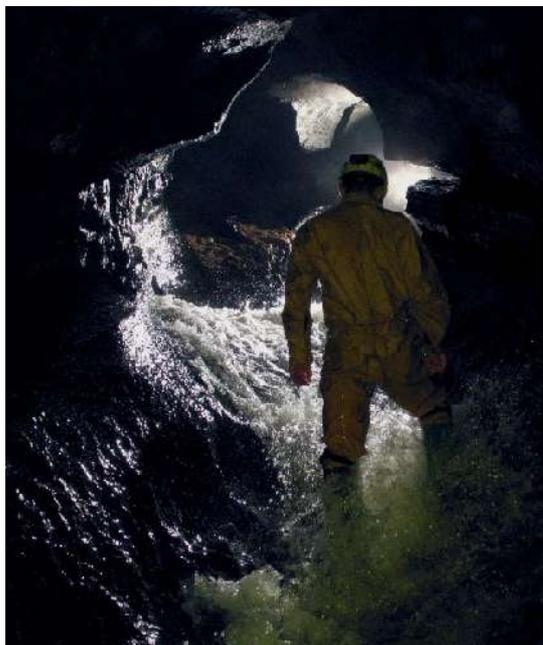
Leaving the booming behind we had a quick look down the crawl that leads to the connection through to the rest of the Ffynnon Ddu system. One for another day, either as a 1-2 trip and then when we know more about the '2' section and are feeling fit, there's the 1-3-1. A fine trip by the sounds of it and something definitely worth aiming for.

Back through the choke we retraced our steps to a handline climb, Martin however wasn't using the handline and climbed up the opposite side. Then with a quick leap he was back on the right side. Dan followed and not wishing to miss out on the fun I also took this leap of faith! Dom and Alex either have more sense than the rest of us or more likely just decided the rope was the better option.

It's at this point the noise of the streamway is left far below as you climb a long way up towards the roof of a huge passage. The quietness of these passages is in complete contrast to those of the Main Stream. Martin had brought his camera and was keen to use it so whilst Dom modelled we investigated the continuing passage. After a reasonable distance Alex realised that this was the way on and had to backtrack to retrieve his bag. Me and Dan had a nosey around Pi Chamber (not that we knew it's name, well not until Martin arrived and revealed all). It has to be said I am sometimes sceptical of these led trips but sometimes having someone that knows their stuff does make for an interesting trip, and this was one of those trips.

At the bottom of the chamber a climb down (the start of losing all the height previously gained) leads onwards to eventually reach a chimney. At the bottom a short steel wire traverse, with the Main Stream far below gains solid ground, before it breaks out above the stream again, this time for the longer bolt traverse (again with in-situ steel wire). Another short section of passage leads to another traverse (Airy Fairy), this one however we were not doing today and we turned away from the Main Stream up an inlet passage, this in turn leads to a climb up and it's this that forms the escape route. Useful to know if the weather took a turn for the worse when you were in there.

All that remained was more easy going passage to take us back to the Toast Rack. At the bottom Dan dragged everyone back to the Main Stream for some photos, once the posing/modelling/faffing had been completed we headed out.



The walk back up to Penwyllt didn't seem too bad and we got back to find the others had already completed their through trip.

To celebrate (or whatever other excuses appear suitable) we headed down to the ~~Asian~~ Ancient Britain for a few drinks. The rest of the evening and night was enjoyed at back at the cottages, with plenty of drinks and chocolates.

End of Part One; a short commercial break:

A finger of fudge is just enough to give Dan a treat...

Win great prizes with Alex's "find the ball" competition!

Part Two:



Sunday 19th July – Ogof Daren Cilau

Weather: very frequent and sometimes heavy showers.

We awoke to the sound of rain, not the best of starts and to be honest the day didn't really improve. The planned trip was Ogof Craig a Ffynnon, however stories of overnight rain nearly preventing exit and then others telling us it might not be a good choice our spirits dampened more than the weather.

Whilst we contemplated our options, Dan did a sterling job in providing me and Rob with a cooked breakfast, Alex looked downhearted as his exploding soup didn't match up to Dans delights. Everyone else fed and watered themselves and we were ready for action, well at least some of us were as the next hour or so was spent twiddling thumbs and pacing around waiting for everyone to sort themselves out.

'Craig' tempted us some more and we decided to head over that way, have a look in the cave and see how bad (or good) it looked. No more than 10miles driving and it was hammering it down, the first suitable layby was employed as a makeshift discussion room and we considered our options, again.

Continuing with our plan, Daren, Big Pit were all put forward and, for some unknown reason, Daren won. So after a lengthy drive, a laugh at people trying to negotiate the steep Llangatock road we arrived. Pulling in to the parking spot the sensible amongst us sat in the cars waiting for the heavy shower to pass whereas Rob and Dan did the hard cavers thing and got changed.

The short walk was improved by the fine views and the entrance soon beckoned. I was first in and realised things were going to be wetter than last time.

I gave up in the entrance passage just over half way, Pete had given up somewhere before then and Bruce had given up before that! Rob continued to the end, only to turn round and head back out (like me he had time constraints). With Dan leading, Alex and Chris continued onwards to sample the delights of the White Company, Antlers and Urchin Oxbow. In hindsight (always a good thing) I should have taken my camera and had a faff around in The Vice and other sections of the passage, but it was one of them days and something would probably have gone wrong!

After emerging a brief rest was had before I set off leaving Pete and Bruce to bathe in the sun and walked along the length of the cliff to locate other entrances. Eventually I found Ogof Pen Eyr, in to which I paid a very quick visit to the start of the corkscrew section. Returning to the other two I decided to leave them to their waiting as they scuttled off under an overhang whilst it rained yet again. And if you're wondering why they didn't return to the car, well, Chris had the car keys with him and he wasn't exiting any time soon.

After a short wait Rob returned from his adventures and the long and sometimes slow journey home began.. Pete and Bruce waited some more and also took in a visit to Ogof Pen Eyr (nice fun little cave apparently) to pass the time.

Well, I'll draw my waffling to a close, sit back and think ahead to my next trip down there, which may be sometime off, but it's worth the wait. At least next time we should be better organised and we now have plenty of information from various sources to undertake any number of trips in the OFD system.

Duncan Jones

Photos – Dan Jackson

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