

## Below the Three Peaks - Winter Tour 2008

Attendees: 10 Members  
Dates: 20-28th December 2008

Activities: Caving in the Yorkshire karst, based at both the Northern Penine Club (Ingleborough) and Bullpot Farm (Three Counties System).



The longer time and less pressure on returning to London that we have during our normal weekend trips allowed us to tackle a far broader range of more tough and longer caving trips. The winter tour is a keystone in our year-round peer-to-peer training, and allowed us to take the first years and teach rigging and cave leadership skills in smaller groups on more challenging trips than we do during the Autumn term.

Caves successfully tackled included a large exchange trip in Gaping Gill; two sessions of novel exploration in Avalanche Aven (an old 1970s London-University-CC find) by drill bolt climbing; Aquamole; several large Easgill traverses including the Top Sink, Lancaster hole, Cow Pot and Pippikin entrances; Kingsdale classics such as Rowten, Bullpot and Yordas. Some members returned to their families for Christmas, others braved a rather cold Bullpot Farm, and Easegill traverse and a fine caving roast dinner on the 25th!

Weather: As expected, it was rather cold in Yorkshire - sub zero for the majority of the time, dropping to around -10 on the hills at night. The conditions in the caves were rather wet at the start of the tour, getting increasingly dry as the surface water froze and the rivers drained through to the resurgences (very little fresh precipitation).

The use of the caving hut system was absolutely necessary for the success of the tour - returning to a heated bedroom and the facility of a dehumidified/heated 'drying' room enabled us to carry out hard caving every day rather than shiver in a tent!

The Future: The winter trip to Yorkshire is probably the most reliable and successful tour that we operate, and is a cornerstone of our yearly plan in training the new members. Its location near fast train links within the UK allows flexibility for people's family commitments over the holidays, our deep and up-to-date knowledge of the caves in the area allows us to run very successful trips, the presence of the cave hut system in the area allows us to stay in accommodation ideally suited to multi-day trips including the drying, cleaning and fettling of gear.

However, the sometimes brutal nature of the weather on the fell should not be underestimated, and careful consideration must be given to getting back to the vehicle after dark when exiting the cave (sometimes in white out conditions), as well as maintaining the investment in our caving technical fleeces and PVC oversuits to ensure that exposure either underground in the melt-water, or on the fell getting home does not occur.

Aims And Objectives: Were fully realised. Choice of individual trips and caves were decided while up there, having been able to transport a large quantity of gear in the minibus that gave us the flexibility to do any of the hundreds of potholes in Yorkshire on a given day. Choice of cave was mandated mainly by the weather, both in terms of its known response to water, the distance over the fell that we have to travel to get to the entrance, and the effect of ice on being able to access a certain road etc.

Costs: Our only expenditure was for the minibus, for the accommodation (rates have recently gone up across Yorkshire to £5 pp pn), and food for day-to-day & cave-to-cave sustenance.

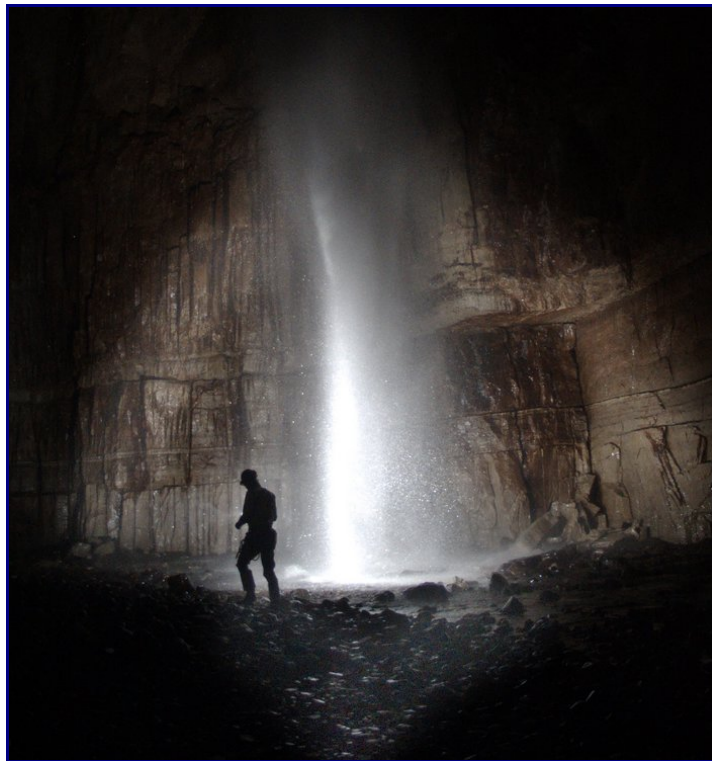
Here follows a few writeups from our websites, certainly not a complete description of our activities, but a sample none the less of the trips that we undertook.

Photos online here:

[http://www.union.ic.ac.uk/rcc/caving/photo\\_archive/tours/2008%20-%20yorkshire%20winter/](http://www.union.ic.ac.uk/rcc/caving/photo_archive/tours/2008%20-%20yorkshire%20winter/)

Jarvist Frost

## Winter Tour 20-28th Dec 2008



### Large ( Andy + Alex + JKP)

*It's not so large.*

Alex and I had done the keen thing and arrived at the NPC a day before the rest of the crew. After the usual problem in choosing a cave (it was rather wet), we decided to go and visit Bernie's and go and have a go at Large.

Rigged down the entrance, zipped down and found myself staring at an improbably narrow slot. Narrow and bendy, I knew that this was best tackled feet first so I started to gingerly try a few different combos: turned one way, turned the other, face up, face down. Eventually I decided that there was no easy way through, rigged my legs around and heaved myself through to start rigging. Soon I was at the bottom of the next pitch thinking "Thank Jahve for that!" (or something to a similar effect). Alex behind me is younger and more supple but he still had a hell of a jamorama and required a tad of rescuing from Andy. This second pitch is particularly beautiful in my opinion, dark rock scooped in a smooth shape.

At the bottom of this second cave a free climbable drop leads to the pitch, rigged off some dubious ceiling protection.

From here on the cave follows a stream, until a chamber is reached where the passage splits: to the right it goes towards the red herring series, to the right towards Arcadia. Arcadia does not contain any grass and pretty virgins but is rather a nasty collection of crawling misery, none of it particularly hard, still though I distinctly remember my boots coming off at one point and I think Alex's SRT kit came on and off a few times at least!

The reward at the end of the cave is Colossus: a mighty fine pitch indeed! I rigged it as dry as possible with some creative use of mud and reached the bottom. Again this is a fine pot with plenty of stal, impressive mud formation and an sinister calm atmosphere.

The way out was pretty uneventful: Andy derigged, no one got too stuck, we got changed to Ace of Base. Ace start to the tour! Tic!

## **Gaping Ghyll And Drill Part1 (Drill Team: Tim O + JKP, Sherpas: Paul and Alex(?))**

The mission: reach Avalanche inlet, gain some experience of bolt climbing, explore the unclimbed aven, out for tea and medals. We entered the system down Bar Pot. A pair of "seasoned" cavers was making their way out as we arrived so we patiently waited for their exit. They rewarded our patience with a carabina: nice!

Though most of us had been there before we seemed to make a hash out of the route finding: in particular we decided to rig the second pitch from a great distance and ended up short of rope: poor Tim was left hanging whilst Jarv and Andy - who had come down Flood and were gonna get out of Stream - took the piss out of him. Anyways, soon the way down was reregged and we were at the bottom. On the way to the main chamber we bumped into Jarv and Andy and had a hilarious accident involving a spooked bat who kept fluttering up and down the passage.

The main chamber was very impressive: all three waterfalls clearly visible and flowing rather hard.

We did not dither and got to Mud Hall: Lord, I love that place. There's something majestic about those soft muddy floors and the scale of it is impressive, also the collection of ancient ropes, chains and other "safety" equipment is so charming. If I had to chose a place to live in underground, it is definitely Mud Hall. Anyways. We quickly reached the Avalanche series and split: team drill took the lead followed by the Sherpas. The idea here was that we did not want to be slowed down waiting for Alex. This proved to be a mistake as:

a) Alex is quick

b) Once me and Tim reached the top of the second pitch of the series, there was no way for team Sherpa to continue the exploration of Shark tooth aven.

The Avalanche inlet series is a very pretty place in its own right: the first pitch goes straight up from boulder chamber and

gains a narrow, keyshaped rift. After some thrutchy rift passage you reach a small waterfall with a fossilised copy of the Guardian date 197x (had news of war in Israel on it... sigh...). This can be climbed up and soon a most beauteous chamber is reached. The chamber sports a drip fed pool to one side with cave pearls and to the other a small wet inlet. A rope disappears to the top of the chamber 35 m up. At the top of the pitch the obvious way on is straight ahead toward shark tooth aven, but our mission was to traverse the top of the chamber to the right for ~5 m and gain the vertical rift which is visible from below.

The first technique we tried was to have Tim in a small alcove to the right of the pitch head belaying me. This proved to be most impractical: the top of the chamber is very narrow indeed and traversing over the top of the chamber is not only very exposed, but also loose, lacking sound rock for protection and generally unpleasant. Added on top of this our choice of belay was poor: I found myself crawling over Tim, tangled in rope, with hand holds coming off. It was therefore decided that I would rig a static traverse across. This was much easier, drill, fix bolt, clip in, continue. When I reached the calcite slope that leads to the start of the aven, I realised that drilling through this rock would not be possible. Luckily thanks to my long reach I could gain the opposite wall and managed to get a few bolts in. We decided that we would come back better equipped (we had run out of through bolts!) and that we would belay from the bottom of the aven, on the opposite wall.

We descended the pitch, left the static rope, dynamic rope in situ and made our way out. Way out unevenful: Alex distinguished himself by succesfully navigating out from the main chamber and before you can say "Gaping Ghyll" we were at the surface. Night was looming, it was extremely foggy, the walked back unremarkable.

## **Gaping Ghyll And Drill Part2**

Next day me and Tim went back with a crapload of slings and dozens of throughbolts. We reached our project, I traversed across, improved the belay on the far wall significantly (turns out you actually need to screw the plates on throughbolts!) and made myself as cumfie as possible while Tim joined me. As soon as he was under the aven we swapped gear: Tim carrying two etrieres, the rest of the throughbolts, some carabinas, a static rope to leave in place should the lead be promising, the dynamic climbing rope, a hammer and spanner: he was pretty laden! Boldy he gained the rift, which turned out to be a rather muddy piece of \*\*\*\*. My hanging belay was rather drippy and I kept shuffling to keep the circulation in my legs going, but my woes seemed nothing compared to Tim's. I suppose this is the tough school of bolting, learning as you go and with not too many spares he managed to ascend high enough on the rift to realise that it leads to... a bedding plane about 5 cm high. Disappointed he fixed the last through bolt, clipped in and let himself be lowered by me. I followed him out taking everything behind except the through bolts.

All in all, even though it was disappointing for our first foray into bolt climbing to be unsuccessful we learnt several useful things: etrieres should if possible be proper steps, quality quickdraws are an idea, you will need tons of tape, especially if you plan on traverses. Also it was very satisfying to get the job done: well done Tim!

The trip out was a real Golgotha: we were both a tad tired and were carrying a lot of stuff. Still we got everything out and made it back to town without significant disasters.

## **Aquamole (James, Tim, Alex)**

We gave Alex a rigging trip. He did fine. They made me carry an 11 mm rope WHICH WE DID NOT EVEN USE!!! It was an amazingly clear and beautiful day.

Aquamole is a nice cave. I'd like to go back. Tic!

## **Top Sink - Lancaster (Jana Jarvist and James)**

My hope of the great Easegill traverse failed to materialise as noone felt like thy could navigate Pippikin. I was all pumped on climb juice and was like: cummmmmmmoooooon! In reality it turned out to be a super trip: Jarvist navigated through the cavern with great skill and the whole trip was the perfect Christmas day trip, challenging yet not too tiring and utterly beautiful.

Top Sink is a beautiful piece of cave: a heavily meandered meander with tuns of water and plenty of excitement! At the bottom of the first pitch we met Tetley and his Oxford pal Gavin. Tetley was not smocking and I think his chest was heaving with the breathlessness of trying to outcave his chum: haaaa the follies of age! Anyways soon we reached Nagasaki chamber and the eary rock of ages: an enormous boulder suspended by some mystical force.

The first stop of the trip is to visit Easter grotto an amazingly decorated grotto with scores of straws. This is where we sh are some festive satsumas: Merry Xmas Jana and Jarv!

Soon we are back to Assembly hall and climb down. Jana has some difficulty with the tall person route and is graciously transported down on yours truly's back: gnarly! We quickly gain the river and make our way toward Stop Pot via Holbeck Junction. From Stop Pot we zoom out towards Lancaster down the wet way. The stream is absolutely wonderful, I fall in a few pools and spend all my time thinking: is it better than the OFD stream? The verdict: no, better decorated but not as so sporting nor matching the quality of that fantastic black welsh rock.

Once at Lancaster we bump into a couple who are taking a wee trip down Lancs on Crimbo. I "help" them derig and we soon are out in the surface, in ample time to return to the farm and help cooking a festive meal. Tic!

# A Drilling Trip In Gapin Ghyll

**James KP, Tim O, Paul H, Alex H**

It is blatantly obvious that the aim of caving is to visit places underground, but maybe many do not realise how much potential there is to visit places where no one has been before. Usually, the club does most of its exploration abroad, but this year we had a project in the Yorkshire Dales.

If you have ever been to Clapham (North Yorkshire!) you might remember a river - the Fell Beck - running through the village. Followed upstream, the Fell Beck leads to the entrance of a show cave. For a few pounds one can visit this grotto: you might find it interesting. I prefer to continue uphill because I know that the show cave is nothing but the resurgence and that for the greatest part the waters of the Fell Beck come from Gaping Ghyll a massive underground system.

Our exploration project in the area is called Avalanche Inlet. Tim and I will have to cross three distinct areas before reaching Avalanche Inlet: Bar Pot, the Main Chamber and Finally Mud Hall. Cavers love naming cave areas, not only because by naming places we can easily talk about them, but also because memory is aided by creative names.



Bar Pot is the entrance section to the cave. It consists of two vertical drops which must be negotiated with rope, separated by steep, sloping sections. Tim fixes the rope to the wall making use of the permanent hangers, in a matter of seconds he is at the bottom of the rope and shouts the familiar cry: 'Rope free!'. We have both been to this part of the cave before so we make straight for the impressive second pitch, an airy abseil of 30m which drops into an attractive chamber.

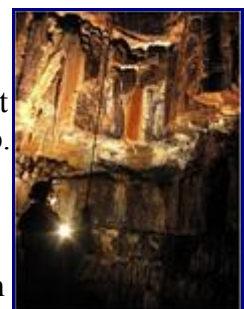
Our next destination is the Main Chamber, a 105 metre shaft open to the surface. Finding the way is easy as a howling gale blows as air is sucked towards the chamber by the incessant flow of water. Once we reach it, the Main Chamber is majestic: three distinct waterfalls can be seen and if we turn our lights off they are still dimly lit by the low winter sun.



To the east we clamber up a stony passage decorated with stalactites and stalagmites, unfortunately over the years scores of tourists lowered by winch from the Main Chamber have made their way out with souvenirs and now many formations are sadly mutilated. This passage leads to the Mud Hall: the Ying to the Main Chamber's Yang. Both these are enormous halls, but here their similarity ends. The Main Chamber is a vital place: the roar of water makes it noisy, the sun lights it and every surface is clean and glistening with spray. Mud Hall on the other side is a place of complete silence. Every surface is covered in hard, pressed down mud so that all noise is muffled. All surfaces are dull and matt and darkness is complete: even with our bright LED lights it is impossible to see both sides of the hall at once.



Eventually we reach our project. We are in a beautiful chamber, on one side a drip fed pool is covered in spherical coloured formations, on the other a small torrent runs in. Above, a rope disappears into the ceiling 35 m up. The sides of the chamber are covered in *âcalciteâ* a shiny deposit that forms into bizarre shapes and that seems almost translucent when lit by our electric lights. On one



side of the ceiling, the rope leads to a passage that continues into charted cave, on the other side of the chamber, the keen eyed caver can notice a hole approximately 1 m wide that disappears up. Could that hole lead to new parts of the cave? The first problem is reaching the damn thing. The top of the chamber we are in is not only very exposed, it is also slightly overhanging, and the rock seems cracked and loose. In fact, most of it seems to be

lying on a muddy slope and not much force would be needed to send it hurtling down: better not knock it off!



The first plan is for me to free climb along the top of the chamber, I will then climb up the chimney using as few bolts as possible to save on time and energy. This plan turns out to be impossible: space is limited and soon I am climbing over Tim, getting tangled in the rope, grasping for dubious bits of rock and generally getting very scared. We agree on a new plan. I will use the drill we brought and secure a safe fixed rope along the top of the chamber. I will then set some anchors on the opposite wall of the chamber. From this position I will be able to safely hang from my harness, whilst Tim climbs the up. This is the first time either of us tries drilling bolts underground. Soon I run out of bolts and we make our way out.

Drilling was not easy, but my experience is tame compared to what will befall Tim tomorrow.

The next day the drill seems more manageable and I finish setting up my anchor under a beautiful crystal white formation. Tim's task is to precariously climb up the slippery tube, securing himself with a combination of wedged body parts and the drill. He is very heavily laden down and soon the mud from the cave has thoroughly lubricated his hands, making every task a nightmare. At a crucial moment, he loses his grip, and drops an important piece of tackle, I try to reassure him as best as I can but his voice is strained. It is hard to gauge how long it takes, but eventually Tim reaches the top and announces that the lead ends unceremoniously in a horizontal slot a few inches high. At this point he realises that the shiny new bolt currently supporting his weight is bending out from the wall at a frightening angle. After a colourful exchange of words, we quickly decide that it is time to make a hasty exit and, disheartened, I start to lower him down.

Soon enough we are at the bottom of the climb. Carrying all the gear out is a herculean task, especially as we are burdened by disappointment. We have learnt many important lessons: next time we will be more efficient. More importantly, next time we will reach caverns immense and unknown to man.

James Kirkpatrick