

**SLAUGHTER STREAM (via WET SINK Entrance)
INFORMATION SHEET and LONG ROUND-TRIP ROUTE DESCRIPTION**

Slaughter Stream Cave is one of the finest systems in the UK. At over 14km in length, it is longest cave formed in dolomite, and the 10th longest cave in the country. It has a wide variety of passages, unique formations, fossils, and the infamous 'Norman' skeleton (presumed to be remains of a dog), deep within the system. At present, it has a single entrance known as Wet Sink.

ACCESS

The cave is gated and lies on land that is owned by FoDCCAG Ltd, who issue permits in accordance with the requirements of the Forestry England (who administer the Crown Minerals beneath the surface). Permits for bona fide clubs are available from permits@fodccag.org.uk and are issued in an electronic format. Arrangements need to be confirmed regarding obtaining and returning the key.

For conservation reasons, groups are limited to 6, in a maximum of 3 cars. There is a limit of one permit issued per day. BCA Insurance is required for each individual.

Parking is very limited. Park on the verge near the gate (but do not block) at:

W3W: ///milky.entrusted.clubbing; GPS: 51.821785,-2.610449; NGR SO 58025 13866

Alternative parking is available at the bottom of Joyford Hill, again do not block the gate:

W3W: ///slant.bricks.slip; GPS: 51.817985,-2.613024; NGR SO 57846 13499

From either car parking place, take the public footpath through the kissing gates and bear right to the cave entrance that is found over a fence at the bottom of a gully.

W3W: ///compiler.brush.late; GPS: 51.82058, -2.60852; NGR: SO 58154 13726

TACKLE REQUIRED

The initial entrance pitches are rigged with a series of fixed ladders. It is recommended that the party rig these with their own lifeline, in particular the Mouse Aven pitch as it is exposed with a narrow take-off. These ladders are NOT maintained and are used at the party's own risk. Tackle required:

- 35m (single) lifeline for fixed entrance ladders
- Balcony Pitch & Pen Pot Pitches:
 - 40m SRT rope plus 7 maillons and a deviation; or
 - 7m and 11m ladder and lifelines

Note. If using SRT fit gear before descending cave as there is restricted room at the head of Balcony Pitch.

SAFETY & WARNINGS

Check the Welsh Water CSO (pumping station sewer overflow pipe) isn't flowing at Dry Sink prior to descending. Please report to conservation@fodccag.org.uk if flowing. The trip will still be possible but the downstream is likely to carry an unpleasant odour. DO NOT under any circumstances drink water from this streamway and ensure any cuts are covered.

There are some awkward climbs and many exposed traverses along the route which DO NOT have any fixed aid. Rescue from the far reaches would be extremely difficult, challenging and long.

In the Remelt Series there are tight squeezes and loose boulders. If undertaking the Long Round Trip the tightest part is half-way through the trip - it is a long way back for a tired party, particularly as the climbs are much more difficult on return.

The streamway responds rapidly to heavy rain and the return progress upstream can become very tiring. If water is flowing into the entrance depression and passing through the gate, DO NOT enter the cave to descend.

CONSERVATION

There are several fragile areas of formations which cavers have to pass through. Please adhere to the signage and stay within the taped or corded areas. (Note: signage is provided only where the route is not obvious and straying off the route will result in damage).

LONG ROUND TRIP

Following extensive digging, two sections of the system have been connected to create one of the classic sporting trips in the UK. At just under 5km in length it forms an exciting challenge with a large variety of passage types and geological features. The trip is suitable only for experienced and fit cavers. ***It is not suitable for larger cavers due to tight sections along the centre section of the route.*** For safety and conservation reasons the trip should only be done in an **ANTI-CLOCKWISE** direction.

DESCRIPTION

A large metal grill covers the Wet Sink entrance. Inside the padlocked gate (*which must be closed whilst in the cave – it can be opened from within*), four fixed ladders descend a 14m shaft to a thrutch that leads directly onto the 8m fixed ladder of **Mouse Aven**. At the bottom the passage goes through a scaffold-shored route to the head of the 6m **Balcony Pitch**. Belay to a scaffold bar across the passage and extend a traverse line to P-Hangers on the left-hand wall. There is also a deviation point on the right hand-wall that should be used to prevent the knot rubbing at the top. There is a P-hanger in the rock at the base of the pitch and two further P-hangers at the far side of the chamber to give a free-hang down the next drop, **Pen Pot Pitch**. Leave SRT kit at the base of Pen Pot Pitch. Below is a climb down to a short flat-out crawl before the passage gradually rises to join a cross-rift. *The inlet on the left is some of the water from Dry Sink*. Follow to the right over a short traverse to join the main Slaughter Stream Cave at **Cross Stream Junction**. *Take note of this point on the return as you may end up going round again!*

At Cross Stream Junction go upstream. At the first junction go straight on into a smaller passage, then right where the water upwells out of a sump. The passage soon enlarges at the foot of **Zurree Aven** - an impressive 12m high chamber with a stream normally cascading down. (*Note after prolonged dry weather the stream may not be flowing, but equally under extreme wet conditions this can become very challenging*). Climb up a series of steps to access to the upper series. (Take care of loose boulders near the top section). At the top of the climb take the right-hand passage over a boulder to a point where an occasional stream can be seen flowing down from the right. Cross straight over (*the left passage is taped-off and leads abruptly to an exposed pitch*) to a short crawl that leads to the **Graveyard**. A taped path leads past some bone deposits, to a junction (turn left) to go through a taped path amongst stalagmites - **Gnome Garden**. The route continues over a white-coated mud floor to reach a junction. Veer right to join a larger passage known as **The Chunnel**. Chunnel East goes off to the right, but the route on is to the left where the Chunnel increases in size until it reaches some 10m wide by 6m high. An obvious side passage soon opens to the right (**Kiln Passage**). Continue straight ahead over boulders. *Where there is a red and white tape, this is the entrance to a small passage at the base of the wall, which leads down into Coal Seam Passage. This can be descended to Dryslade Passage for the 'Short Round Trip'.*

Continue along The Chunnel to an obvious junction (**Deserts Junction**). Turn right at this point and then immediately left to the start of the **Three Deserts**. This part of the cave comprises of sandy crawls separated by areas of breakdown. (*Keep within tape to preserve the sand flow formations*). After the

second breakdown the passage size starts to increase to where it rises over boulders to another major junction - **Vittals Stop**.

Go down and straight on at Vittals Stop then after a further 25m turn left to follow the handsome Dog's Grave Passage. (*Right at Vittals Stop leads to Flow Choke and Hull Passages*). Other than a short crawl through an oxbow near the start the passage is easy going for its considerable length. Taped off sections of the remains of dog footprints are passed before arriving at 'Norman' the dog skeleton – DO NOT cross tapes or touch the footprints/skeleton. (*Just before the Dog is a narrow climb up to Hull Passage, best descended from above*).

The route continues as a large rift passage interspersed by a short tube section, a few boulder piles, and oxbows (best followed to the left). Eventually, the passage ends at the '**Camp**' just before **The Pig Trough**, where a streamway can be heard through a slot in the floor.

Onwards the passage now changes character and becomes significantly harder going. If tired or in doubt, this is a good point to turn back. The passage starts as a wide traverse. Past a rock pillar continue to traverse over occasional sections of floor to end at a remnant stream passage and an awkward 3m climb. At the bottom of the climb take care to avoid the crystal pool on the right – use the stepping-stones to avoid the mud - and bridge/climb up to the continuing rift. This is **Tinkle Passage** and **GREAT CARE should be taken to avoid the formations that cover the right-hand wall**. After this section of awkward traversing, the passage increases in size and the next traverses are very exposed. At the end, solid ground is once again met, before an exposed but easy 6m climb down. Ahead is blind, the way on is through a strongly draughting crawl to the left into the **Snow Garden** taking note of the signs. Snow Gardens has a false floor of calcite resting on water, with fine 'snowflake' crystals in abundance. **Do NOT pass beyond the cord** – the rift beyond is blind. Instead, **CAREFULLY** without dragging tackle bags behind, crawl to the right around a corner staying on the right-hand side. If necessary, support oneself using the opposite wall avoiding the flakes at floor level. Almost immediately there is a rope climb up a chimney. Given the lack of space, fragile floor and fine crystals that cover the area, no more than two people should be in this location at any one time.

Using the in-situ rope, climb up the awkward 6m chimney and follow a short passage that leads away from Snow Garden to the **Breakdown Chamber**. At the far end is a narrow climb down which is the breakthrough point into the **Remelt Plant Series**. This leads to a short crawl which ends at a much larger T-junction. Ignore both the passage immediately to the left and the hole in boulders behind ancient bat guano. The way on is up and to the right. A hole in the floor is encountered after only a few metres, and this is usually descended to follow the lower passage. (*It is possible to continue straight on but this involves a slightly more exposed climb down into the larger passage beyond*). The larger section is short lived, and it is necessary to climb/bridge up to follow the wider part of the continuing rift before Retort Junction is reached. Ahead and up an in-situ rope leads to Remelt Upper Series. The way on is to the left, where after a few metres there is an obvious hole in the floor. This is the way down to **Remelt Lower Series**.

The hole down is an awkward 3m climb (*fixed unmaintained rope*), that continues downslope to a junction. To the left is an oxbow with very loose boulders, best avoided. Follow straight on and to the left down a loose slope. (The passage to the right – Mid Way, is blind). It is recommended here that one person descends at a time. Near the bottom of the slope, thrutch up on the right through a narrow awkward slot and climb down. Ignore all passages to the left, which form Lower Series East and continue right into Lower Series West. After about 80m of easy crawling and stooping a small chamber is reached with a short side passage to the right. Continue ahead into a small calcite floored passage which consists of two separate squeezes along a 10m section - the **Molester** – easiest passed by facing

the left hand wall and staying low. **WARNING:** Larger cavers may have difficulty passing this section. This point is roughly half-way through the trip and there is no quick or easy way back!

After the Molester the going gets easier, largely sideways walking, which after a few sharp bends reaches a squeeze through a boulder slope up into a small chamber. The passage descends to an oxbow to a further rift and crawl. This originally ended in a mud choke with a small draughting hole. The route has been opened-up to a drop along a muddy hands and knees crawl through the **Rafah Crossing** to connect with the old dig leading off from a chamber near the end of **Kuwait** passage. At the time of writing the connection is *extremely muddy* and *cavers are REQUESTED TO USE THE HAND BRUSHES* in-situ over 3 pools at the base of the chamber to remove as much mud as possible before returning upstream. Take a breather here, you are almost at the deepest section of the cave and there is still 2.5km of passage to go - all of which is upstream!

Kuwait passage is a fine section of cave almost 900m long in a straight line, formed along a haematite mineralised fault zone. The lower part has gour flows and calcite pools, and much of the remainder is in black walled rifts with fine formations. **Much of the lower section requires traversing or using stepping-stones to avoid the fragile calcite floor.** Head left (upstream) taking care not to step on the edges of the calcite pools. There are two oxbows which should be followed on the LEFT. At the second oxbow, do NOT descend to the stream (which has a vulnerable calcite pool), but climb up and traverse forward. (Do NOT go along floor level as not all sections are passable). The traverse is awkward and there are a few sections where bridging is required due to lack of footholds. The route eventually ends at a 10m high rift – take CARE of the formations on the left-hand wall that you use to balance when passing on the right. Follow the obvious high-level passage to a climb-up through calcite formations and crawl past further formations until you reach the pretty **Lights-Out Chamber**. Stay to the right of the rope and take care not to touch the formations as you pass. Then descend a short climb.

At the base of the climb are two options – either a tight crawl at floor level or an awkward climb up into the rift. Both end up at **Razor Pot**, the former at the base, the latter part-way up. Here an exposed traverse to the right, up and over razor flakes reaches the top of the climb. The passage continues for ~150m to another climb up – **First Pot**. Beyond First Pot, the going becomes easier and rises to the **Zider Press** – a large stone circle to the left. (*Note: After an exceptional localized storm the passage below the Zider Press sumped.*) The way on is straightforward to a sand crawl where the cave dramatically changes direction at **Bottom Bend**. After ~200m of varied going a short crawl drops into the **Lower Streamway** just upstream of Sump 3.

The streamway is the main drain for at least five different feeder streams and can be tiring in high water conditions.

The way is upstream in a sporting vadose canyon with a phreatic half-tube roof and through deep pools. To avoid full submersion, one pool has to be passed by climbing up around it on the left, taking care not to damage the straws in the roof. Upstream the passage becomes higher, and many sections have ornate and sharply eroded floor and walls, hence the name the **Sculpture Trail**. The going can be treacherous due the sharp rock flakes hidden below the water.

After ~300m **Echo Passage** inlet stream enters from the right. Continue left in the main passage through an area of breakdown from an aven above, to the eventual end of this part of the streamway at a climb up to **Dryslade Passage** above Sump 2. Dryslade Passage is a majestic fossil passage that passes several side routes: **Dry Dig** and **Pirate Passage** to the right, followed by the downstream end of **Coal Seam Passage** to the left (*the route for the Short Round Trip*), just after the taped oxbow to

Fossil Sump. Beyond the passage decreases in size to alternate stooping and crawling with impressive roof pendants and vermiculation deposits until the streamway is reached once again.

Head upstream (*downstream leads to Sump 1*) and bear left where East Stream Passage enters from the right, and under the **Cascade** (*where the majority of Dry Sink water enters, best passed on the left*). *Just beyond a passage to the right gives an airy view part-way up the Cascade.* Continuing upstream, easy going ends at **Cross Stream Junction**. Don't miss this point! Turn right over the traverse back to the Wet Sink entrance series.