

The Youngest Caver to set foot on the Bottom.
(By Kevin Mountford)

Phil, Mel, and I set off down to Camp 1 on the Wednesday aiming for the bottom. After a quick meal at Camp1, we put on our wetsuits and started for the bottom, making good speed to the Balcony, a splendid slope covered with flowstone. We continued on to Vestiaire thinking how easy it was, but after that it began to get wetter. We tried to traverse out of the water but kept slipping in, wasting a lot of time in the process. By the time we reached Eymas Hall we were all soaking wet and getting quite cold. Phil said that we would think about going to the bottom once we reached Camp2 as we were getting so cold and tired.

The passage that we were in suddenly got bigger; it was similar to the boulder slope above Camp1, but muddier with a 50 metre gorge on the left containing a river. We slipped and stumbled down this to Camp2. Here we met one of the Yorkshire men walking around on his own trying to keep warm. He told us that his mates had left him hanging on a bolt change on Gaché's with his lamp out! He managed to Prusik back up in the dark, get off, and mend his lamp. He had been at Camp2 for about three hours.

Melvyn then took some pictures of us at Camp 2. Phil was quite worried about the Yorkshire bloke so decided to return to Camp1. Melvyn did not want to go any further either so we started back up the Grand Canyon, where we met two MUSS people. I asked them where they were going to, and they told us they were aiming for the bottom. When I asked if I could go with them to my joy they said "Yes". I shouted up to the others that I was trying for the bottom and since they did not object, returned to Camp 2, made some hot chocolate and had something to eat. After ten minutes rest, we carried on.

At the Grand Cascade we met the Yorkshire party on their way out. They told us that we were only three pitches from the bottom. It did not sound very far, but it took quite a while to reach Little Monkey where Tony Gamble was setting up his camera to take a picture of Tony Reynolds ascending. He did not tell Tony Reynolds that there was an easy way to get off the pitch, he just let him take the hard way so he could get a good action shot! Tony Reynolds was not very pleased! As soon as the pitch was free, one of the MUSS lads went across. I talked to Tony Reynolds and asked him if he thought that I could make it to the bottom. He looked at me, and I thought he was going to say "No", but he said "Yes...But only if you are very careful and check everything." Even though he said that, I was still scared when it was my turn to traverse across Little Monkey and put both my 'cows-tails' plus my handjammer on to the rope. When I got to the pitch, my body started to shake, so I hung there on my 'cowstails' and 'rack' for a few seconds until I had calmed down, then took off my 'cowstails' one at a time and abseiled down to Hurricane. As I got there the MUSS lad was just disappearing over the lip. I unclipped and sat in a draughty corner and waited for a while but could hear no shout that the rope was free because of the falling water. Eventually I decided to go down, and abseiled off into the spray. At the bottom, the view was unbelievable a big lake with two waterfalls crashing into it, and you could not see the ceiling. We then walked down to the Pseudosiphon. My stomach was hurting and I was quite scared thinking about how I was going to get out. It was all right getting to the bottom but now I was getting tired without having had any rest for ten hours. We returned to Hurricane at a fast pace.

Once I had climbed Hurricane and Little Monkey, I stopped being scared as I knew I had been to the bottom and was on my way out. We arrived at Camp2 at a slow pace and stopped for hot chocolate and an orange. From then on, I was very tired, and nearly fell asleep every time we stopped for a rest. The other two plodded on and finally we reached Camp1. I could do nothing else but crawl into my sleeping bag and go to sleep. I was too tired to cook anything, but even though I was aching all over, I felt on top of the World with having reached the bottom. The climb out could wait until tomorrow!