

Agen Allwedd - Maytime

The route described is the most direct and travelling via Southern Stream both there and back is by far the quickest and easiest way to explore this part of the cave system. It is also possible to include Maytime in a Grand Circle trip to avoid repetition if preferred (adding considerably more time and effort to your trip) - if doing this refer to the Grand Circle description.

Warning – Maytime floods quickly to a considerable depth and some sections become impassable in even moderate flood conditions. This is definitely an area to avoid if heavy rain is forecast.

Entrance Series – The log book is situated just inside the entrance, please use this to indicate your intended destination and time out. The Entrance Series is a fun, sporting collection of wedged boulders to hop over, narrow rifts to squeeze through and short crawls and climbs, all of which is well trod so you can basically follow the caver-polished route. The key thing to remember when heading into Aggy is **always take the left-hand route when you reach a junction**. Following this golden rule you shouldn't go too far wrong but be aware that some of these are low down so can be easily missed. There are a few higher level passages heading off along the way, but these are bat roosting sites and should be avoided.

Beyond the initial rifty sections, at a point when the passage takes on a larger scale (just after you emerge from a slot behind a boulder), look for a climb up over the rocks on the left. This provides the easiest route of continuation, while taking the more obvious straight ahead route ends at an awkward climb and squeeze to regain the way on. Continue on this high level until you reach then end and a taped off section and sign is visible ahead, then descend the smooth sided hole through boulders in the floor. Below, there are more holes in the floor, but continue to the end and descend into a passage heading off to the right. Then take the side passage almost immediately on your left, which is low down and easy to miss. A small streamway is met and from here on the route is straightforward, with a knobbly crawl over polished rocks ending at climb up to gain the impressively sized Baron's Chamber, near a blue sign attached to a boulder. Take note of your location as you emerge from the climb as it's partially obscured and easily missed on the return.

Main Passage and Southern Stream Passage – The easiest way along the first part of Main Passage is to keep to the left hand wall. Shortly after you are forced to climb down into the middle of the passage the junction with Main Stream Passage is met. The continuation of Main Passage and the route to Southern Stream is upslope on the left. This part of the cave is remarkably pleasant and the passage is undoubtedly one of the finest in Wales – make the most of this while you can as the following section is quite the opposite!

There are a few passages heading off in this section but the junction with Southern Stream Passage is easy to spot – the floor drops away on the right hand side of the passage and a clamber down a boulder slope leads into a dry passage. Continue over boulders, pass through a constriction, then a short distance beyond a hole down between boulders leads into Southern Stream Passage. This is our route and the start of a section of caving of far less sizeable proportions. The continuing higher level route leads to Sandstone Passage and Upper Southern Stream.

The first section of Southern Stream is mostly stooping passage and relatively free of obstacles and there is normally very little water. First Inlet enters from the left, and after another 250m further the smaller Second Inlet, equipped with a drinking cup, enters from the right. This is roughly the halfway point from the start of Southern Stream to the waterfall. From here onwards there are more obstacles to impede progress. Often there is a dry alternative to crawling in water, although in a couple of places this is unavoidable. At one of these the roof lowers until it is impassable, but

on the left side a narrow ascending slot provides a bypass. Soon after this the going starts to get easier with some open walking passage, which suddenly arrives at the top of a small waterfall. A handline has been provided for the 2m climb.

The going is comparatively easy and much more pleasant after the waterfall, with occasional climbs up and over boulder obstacles. Look out for the short rope climb and rope traverse in a section where the upper part of the passage is significantly wider. Climb the rope to the wedged boulder and use the fixed line to traverse across to reach Gothic Passage and the Gothic extensions – if you were to continue along Southern Stream instead you would eventually reach Lower Main Streamway and the original Grand Circle route.

Gothic Passage to Maytime – Gothic Passage starts as an easy walking passage but quickly lowers to a crawl before arriving at a T-junction. Ignore the left-hand route which leads to Priory Road and Iles Inlet, and instead turn right along a sandy crawl which varies between hands-and-knees and flat out. This emerges into the side of a large sandy passage (Synchronicity) with three obvious taped routes heading in different directions. Our route is the most obvious one straight ahead to Resurrection Passage, while the left-hand route soon closes down and heading right leads to the High Traverse Grand Circle route (there's also a less obvious route on the extreme right here, which leads to the Snow Boat and further crawls and digs).

Resurrection Passage begins as a sandy crawl with sections of stooping, and has a number of sandy crawls during its length. The good news is there's not really anywhere you can go far wrong along here, so route finding is pretty straightforward. Passing a tight rift on the right, the passage becomes walking sized and fine crystal formations are encountered, so care should be taken to stay within the taped route. The passage then lowers to a crawl with a couple of sandy swims leading to Reverberation Aven. Next is a dug-out route through a boulder choke before walking passage is regained. Another choke is passed through (care required), then more formations are seen, before a final short dug section pops you into Maytime – this is where things get more impressive. Despite the vast dimensions of this streamway, the water levels can rise to a considerable height very quickly. If a sand bank is not visible from the climb down from the balcony then it is wise to exercise caution and not travel far. Upstream to the right the water gets deeper as you go before reaching Sump 3 after only a short distance. Heading downstream the water becomes waist deep to reach a cascade (impassable in even minor flood conditions). Beyond this the trench in the streamway can be traversed over to reach a second cascade. Here the water has been known to rise to a depth of 5m with the high-level ledges on the right being the only safe haven. This is followed by another trench before becoming pleasant easy walking passage with a couple of S bends before the roof lowers to meet the water at Sump 4. The water here has been dye traced to Elm Hole and Pwll y Cwm (the divers' route to Daren Cilau), and probably flows via San Agustin Way, Gloom Room Sump and St David's Sump, but no connection has yet been made.

Spotted an error in this route description or want to leave feedback?
Contact the Webmaster (see contacts page on CSS website <https://chelseaspelaeo.org>)

(Version 1 - May 2024)