

Daren Cilau – Bonsai Streamway High Level Passages

This is a companion guide to the HRC and St David's Sump Printable Route Description for those wishing to explore the various high-level routes along Bonsai Streamway rather than heading straight to HRC or beyond. This includes optional detours to Western Flyover, Eastern Flyover, Frig and Frag Street and Forgotten Passage and a choice of alternative return routes.

Tackle: Cowstails and karabiners suitable for lifelining are recommended for use on these routes. All are accessed by either chain ladders or rope climbs - most of which are rigged with lifelines in situ but some are unprotected and exposed. The fixed aids on these routes are not officially maintained, so please use judgement and inspect before using when possible.

Optional Detours

These can all be done as part of a long day-trip either as a primary destination or included in a trip to Hard Rock Café or beyond.

The Flyovers - This is the first optional detour encountered along Bonsai Streamway on the way in, located at the top of an obvious boulder pile. The rope climb on the right accesses Western Flyover, while the fixed ladder on the left leads to Eastern Flyover. The most impressive is undoubtedly the Western Flyover, which is well worth a quick visit if you have the time. It's also possible to undertake a round trip between the two, which can be done from either direction, but Western to Eastern is probably preferable.

Western Flyover - The short rope climb up from Bonsai Streamway soon reaches a sandy floored passage of impressive dimensions with swathes of cryostal beyond the conservation tape. This area was once the site of an underground camp, though all remains have now been cleared. The connecting route to the Eastern Flyover is high-up on the right-hand side and currently rigged with a knotted handline and rope ladder. Beyond this, pleasant easy caving continues along a meandering path until a low belly-squeeze through sand is encountered at the end. Thankfully this is only short and well worth the effort to see the continuation of large passage beyond, which then ends quite abruptly at a massive boulder choke.

Back at the climb, ascending the ladder then reaches a brief awkward section at the top to reach a cramped stony crawl. This improves as you go then pops out into Half Mile Passage, which runs parallel with Bonsai Streamway at a higher level. Heading right here passes a dig on the left (Kilburn Highroad) before reaching the connection to the Eastern Flyover - a knobbly tube at the top of a short climb on the right.

Eastern Flyover - The chain ladder up from Bonsai Streamway leads to a large passage with selenite crystals coating the rocks and floor. This ends in a massive boulder choke, but before that another chain ladder is reached on the right. Above this is another short ladder which is the route to Half Mile Passage and the connection with the Western Flyover, while the passage to the right leads to an abandoned dig with interesting furniture. The passage beyond the ladder climb is knobbly and awkward in parts, but soon connects with Half Mile Passage. Here you should turn left to find the connection with the Western Flyover, which is the first passage encountered on the left-hand side. Heading right at the connection with Half Mile Passage instead leads to several digs of interest but (as yet) no other way on beyond the end of Half Mile.

Frig and Frag Street and Beyond - Continuing further along Bonsai Streamway the next optional deviations from the main route are located up a short chain ladder on the left, which gains a balcony overlooking the streamway. A second chain ladder from the balcony gives access to Frig and Frag Street, while continuing past the ladder leads to Forgotten Passage.

The chain ladder reaches a further balcony leading to a disappointingly long and low crawl. This fluctuates in size and awkwardness but expect roughly 20 mins of discomfort here. The important thing is to turn left at the junctions along the way, as unless you are a fan of extended crawling for no good reason you don't want to accidentally end up heading to Remote Chamber (Bugger Hall) instead. Along the way you go from Frig Street to Frag Street and eventually to Frog Street, the breakthrough point in 2009. The going gets briefly worse, but eases up when formations start to appear. The Prince is the most notable, and not far beyond this the well-decorated grotto Hopping Mad is seen straight ahead. This only extends a couple of metres beyond the vulnerable formations, so isn't worth risking damage to the formations by entering this area. Just before this in a passage on the right are the Helibeds, a stunning cluster of helictites that extend for some distance. Again, these are very vulnerable and damage has already been done here, so please move carefully and stay very low (belly crawl) when passing through. The wonders end as suddenly as they start as you emerge at the other side over a pit in the floor. There is not much of tourist caving interest beyond this point, so this is a good turnaround point. (Beyond, the passage continues for some distance before reaching Cheese Aven with a climb up to Fenchurch Street, a large passage containing a draughting boulder choke which is currently (2023) being dug. The pit in the floor reaches an abandoned dig, The Inconvenient Truth.)

Forgotten Passage - This rarely visited part of the cave is accessed by continuing along the balcony below the chain ladder to Frig Street and up a slope rigged with a handline of unknown vintage. After this an easy crawl through a wide bedding plane reaches an exposed step around a hole above Bonsai Streamway. Here take a sharp right into the somewhat smaller confines of Forgotten Passage as the larger passage soon ends in chokes. Forgotten Passage fluctuates in height and comfort, the highlight being the Enchanted Forest and the many interesting formations nearby, which is not too far to travel and quite a good destination to aim for. The passage beyond this is not particularly worth pursuing unless you like uncomfortable caving, however one interesting, though not necessarily enjoyable, feature is The Snake, a section of phreatic twisting squeezes that eventually becomes too tight for further progress. This is on the right at the only major junction, while the left-hand route comes to an end after roughly 300m.

Alternative Return Routes from HRC

Though simply following the streamway is by the far quickest and easiest route back from Hard Rock Café to the Time Machine, there are a couple of alternative routes via the passages high above Bonsai Streamway that offer a more sporting alternative if you have time and enthusiasm in hand. Doing these will take much longer than simply retracing your steps, as the route finding is more complex and involves extra climbs and traverses.

Flyovers Return Route - This is the first of the alternative routes encountered on the way out and can be done from either Western or Eastern Flyover. Both routes as far to the connection to Half Mile have been described already (see The Flyovers section above), and from either route you should emerge at Half Mile Passage and turn left. Please keep to the trod path along this fine cave passage to preserve the pristine floor sediments and crystals on the floor as conservation tape is not always present here. Pleasant easy travelling continues to reach some rock windows to be

climbed through. Then turn left (right here leads back to the passage behind via a low oxbow), and the next feature is a rope traverse skirting a steep drop to Crystal Oxbow below. Shortly after this another drop is reached, and here a brief unprotected traverse around the bend wedging between the passage walls reaches a ledge from which you can climb down to the passage below. This is where the Crystal Oxbow route joins Half Mile Passage, emerging beneath the climb you've just descended.

Crystal Oxbow Return Route - This route is shorter than the Flyover routes and avoids the ladder climbs and traverses that going from either Western or Eastern Flyover entails. However, it is still more time consuming and complex than following Bonsai Streamway and involves an unprotected rope climb to reach Half Mile Passage.

At the junction by the 'Daren Services' sign, head up Crystal Oxbow on the right. This is easy walking stream passage, which becomes well decorated beyond where the pipe carrying water from Crystal Inlet enters from the right. This has suffered somewhat from careless cavers, so please stay within the taped route to avoid further damage to the formations here. A rope hanging on the right-hand wall leads to a dig (Digger's Day Off); continue past this and up a boulder ramp to reach an aven at a bend in the passage with a large cone of sand. The high-level passage visible when looking up is Half Mile Passage, and the way to get there is up the rope climb against the wall straight ahead. (Crystal Oxbow continues beyond this point, ending at a connection to Bonsai Streamway that is blocked by formations and impassable to cavers).

The rope climb to Half Mile Passage is in two sections with one rope for both. The first section is quite awkward, but has good foot holds and hand holds to help. This reaches a ledge where a further short scruffy climb is ascended (taking care not to knock any loose rocks on those below) to reach Half Mile Passage just a short distance further. Here the route from the Flyovers joins from a climb on the right.

Continuation of both return routes (Half Mile Passage to The Time Machine) - From either of the above routes continue along Half Mile Passage (keeping to the trod path) to reach a T-junction. Turn right here, then at the start of a large sandy ramp look for a passage heading off on the left. This is Nameless Canyon, the route back to the Time Machine, but it's well worth a brief detour ascending the ramp up to Aggy Passage to look at the excellent coloured bands on the ceiling at the top. (Beyond, Aggy Passage continues as easy walking on the right before coming to an end at a huge boulder choke, while Kingston Sands on the left also ends after a similar distance.)

Back at the start of Nameless Canyon, follow this lofty passage climbing over various wedged rocks until a final climb up reaches a ledge to the left. Stay on this ledge to the end, and soon after you'll reach the Meeting Room where a number of passages join. Keep following the obvious route straight ahead here, passing the large passage to Beyond Time on the left, two short passages on the right, then Balcony Passage on the left before descending towards the Time Machine. Here a short but awkward climb down lands you back into familiar territory where it's just a case of heading right and following the reflective markers once more.

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 - April 2023)

