

Daren Cilau – Hard Rock Café to Restaurant at the End of the Universe

To avoid repetition this trip is described from the Hard Rock Café camp onwards - see 'Hard Rock Café and St David's Sump' Printable Route Description for Daren entrance to HRC.

WARNING: *Ankle Grinder Bypass can become impassable in high water conditions and the duck before the REU camp can sump for days. If water levels are up to waist deep on the approach to Hard Rock Café or heavy rain is forecast, this part of the cave is best avoided.*

Trip times vary depending on group size and familiarity with the cave system, but it's advisable to allow at least the following for a there and back trip from Hard Rock Café:

Hard Rock – 12 O'Clock High (including Where The Sun Don't Shine) – Hard Rock: 3-4 hrs
Hard Rock – Restaurant at the End of the Universe – Hard Rock: 5 hours (add 1hr 30 min if visiting Pain Killer Passage)

Tackle: Cowstails and karabiners suitable for lifelining may be useful for Jacob's Ladder (6m fixed ladder), these will also be needed if continuing beyond HRC and descending the pitch to Big Chamber. There are a number of fixed aids along this route which are not officially maintained, so please inspect before using whenever possible.

NOTE: Take water bottles as the ONLY place you'll find fresh water is at Seventh Hour Sump just below REU.

Hard Rock Café to Western Union – The further reaches of the cave are reached by heading west along the obvious oxbow by the camp at Hard Rock, ignoring unpromising digs on the right, to reach The Ovaltinees, the start of The Hard Rock Extensions and the first of many 'sand swims' or low, choked, dry u-tubes dug out between 1986 and 1987. This is quickly followed by a series of low wriggles between rifts at H Block and then by the 15m Turtle Crawl to emerge into The Rock Steady Cruise, a fine, crystal-walled walking passage reminiscent of Midnight Passage and parts of the Gothic Extensions in Agen Allwedd.

A short walk and a move to the left bring you to a parallel rift, another sand swim at Agoraphobia Airbell (which needs regular clearing out as sand is carried into the u-tube by each passing caver) and then the Peace Pipe, shortly beyond which an awkward thrutch to the left brings you into High Flyer and an approach, through the Coal Cellar, to the boulder-choked bedding of Brazil. A low, dug-out crawl heading left at the top of a sandbank takes you through a bouldery bedding to a 'snug', moderate squeeze, Miami Vice, before spitting you out into a short, sandy crawl from which you quickly emerge into the more spacious chamber of Western Union.

Western Union to 12 O'Clock High (Optional Detour) – A scramble up through boulders to the left (west) side of Western Union brings you to a low arch beyond which an agreeable romp along the sand floored rift of Oregon Trail is reached. Part way along is Sand Chamber, with an abandoned dig in the floor. A tape nearby on the right-hand wall marks a short climb up into Terrapin North, a high-level sand swim that heads back eastwards to an aural connection above Western Union. Part way along TN, on the left, a dug squeeze enters Flight of the Bumble Bee a small passage heading north and ending in a compacted choke. Terrapin South, a crawl to the right (south) of TN, can be followed for a few metres.

Back in Oregon Trail the obvious westerly route continues as easy caving to a section where the rift narrows and drops down steeply. At the bottom of this a low arch on the right The Gusset marks the dug-out approach to Where the Sun Don't Shine, a flat-out crawl where great care is needed to avoid damaging the stunning formations. A way on can be seen at the end beyond a superb cluster of helictites, The Bush, but please don't be tempted to dig this as it is only a few metres away from known passage at New Boots and Panties and the loss of these fine formations and the vilification of one's peers is too big a price to pay for a few meagre metres of dull, flat-out crawling passage and would only result in the most boring and unwanted round trip in history.

Returning to the main passage continue on for a few metres and up a bouldery slope to enter the impressive chamber of 12 O' Clock High. At the far end a bouldery slope upwards leads to a compacted boulder-and-clay choke. At the base of the slope a wriggle down through boulders brings you into the smaller, westerly-headed passage of Chokes Away, which heads past an unpromising cross rift to a loose boulder choke which has been passed on the right hand side for a few metres to a point where the strong draught is sucked down through loose boulders which appear to be above, and close to the end of, the divers' extension San Agustin Streamway.

Western Union to The Micron – Up the sandbank on the NE side of Western Union yet another low, dug-out archway leads to the abrasive delights of Acupuncture Passage, 150m of flat-out crawling through sharp, crystal-covered breakdown. The early stages of the crawl are along a sand-floored bedding interspersed with a few dug-out links through roof collapse. A wide, rocky bedding follows for 80m with a final 20m dug-out-breakdown thrutch to bring you to a large, sandy-floored passage which drops down to The Micron and the enticing roar of the stream below. Before dropping down this, carry straight on up the other side to view a fine helictite cluster, The Blockhead, in the wide, fossil bedding passage of New Boots and Panties, with its sandy, boulder-strewn floor which continues around several bends, dwindling gradually, to a choke that is not far from Where the Sun Don't Shine.

The Micron to The Restaurant at the End of the Universe – At The Micron a fixed rope of uncertain age drops 7 metres through perched boulders (care) into a clean-washed rift. Ignore the siren call of running water from Borrowed Boots Streamway downstream (this is the route to Psychatronic Strangeways) and head north (right), away from the noise, along the tortuous, welly-grabbing-pooled, tacklebag-snagging rift of Ankle Grinder Bypass. CAUTION: This is a flood overflow to the main stream which disappears further up. It has been known to flood extensively in wet weather. There are a couple of uninspiring, partially choked, high-level tubes along the way but nothing of great interest to the tourist caver. Eventually, after several hundred metres, you will arrive at a 5 metre long duck beyond which the passage enlarges. CAUTION: This duck becomes a sump in wet weather and can remain so for several days. Above the duck, a 4 metre climb enters the high-level, dry, Prawn Cracker Passage which heads south for 100m before finishing in a choke. Continuing from the duck the passage continues up a bouldery slope with a fossil side passage on the right, Icing on the Cake, sporting some photogenic columns and stalactites on a pristine mud floor beyond which it continues southwards, beyond conservation tape, with the airspace slowly diminishing. Continue up the main route, negotiating large boulders in big passage until you reach a short, airy traverse and climb down on the right hand side, where you can decide for yourself whether to avail yourself of the antiquated handline and fossilized bolts, then drop down to the streamway to approach the 6 metre fixed Jacob's Ladder (lifeline in situ) and a short handline up to The Restaurant at the End of the Universe. Before climbing up note that this stream, originating from Llangattock Swallet and emerging from Seventh Hour Sump, is your ONLY source of fresh

drinking water before the current end of the cave, a hot, dry, sweaty, energetic 2 miles away. The spot downstream where the stream disappears is also the camp toilet, a suitable spot to avoid polluting the cave ahead if continuing on to the further reaches. The Restaurant at the End of the Universe is in a large, dry, boulder-floored chamber perched above Seventh Hour Sump and was originally set up to facilitate digging in the more remote reaches of the cave. Please note that the sleeping bags, supplies and equipment stored there belong to the current diggers and, like those at Hard Rock, are not for general use. At the time of writing there is a First Aid supply and a drag sheet at the camp, for emergency use only. Please ensure that this is kept clean and airtight.

The Blue Greenies and Pain Killer Passage – An obvious climb up on the east wall of the main camp area (just above the drop towards Jacob's Ladder) traverses to the right and turns into a spacious rift over Jacob's Ladder. Above the rift is the roomy, and uncharacteristically damp, diggers' old sleeping area, unnoteworthy except for one pathetically small but richly deep blue stal hiding itself in a nondescript crack in the ceiling. Continuing along the rift below this chamber, easy clambering, with one uncomfortable crawl through boulders, brings you into passage of more spacious dimensions. Double back to the left in this passage, passing through fine formations and you arrive at the startlingly peppermint-hued Blue Greenies, a mesmerizing, and thankfully still pristine, array of flows, stalactites, helictites and crystals in Leonie-Jayne's Playpen.

Back in the main passage a rubble-strewn crawl becomes walking passage with oxbows continuing to a T Junction after 300m. Little Gem, 200m of southerly meandering passage, finishes in a choke which lines up enticingly with Flight of the Bumble Bee. A second, decorated passage chokes after 40m while the way ahead, beyond a 2m climb down, enters a small chamber beyond which is the large, sandy Pain Killer Passage. This impressive passage continues to the left for 100m before ascending to an enthusiastically-dug, but stubborn, calcited choke that bears all the signs of being a vestigial main thoroughfare and which trends towards an alluringly blank square kilometre between the Time Machine and the REU extensions. Just to the right of the Pain Killer Passage junction are a number of sandy interconnecting crawls which end in unpromising digs. To the right it continues, passing through a couple of constrictions before ending in a boulder choke where the tapping of a hammer can be heard from Beyond Time. It is also close to the northern end of Western Flyover, another connection perhaps best left un-concluded to help preserve the Blue Greenies.

Spotted an error in this route description or want to leave feedback?
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