

Ogof Craig a Ffynnon – The Promised Land

Location – NGR: SO 22011 12873 - **what3words:** ///hinted.commit.risking

Ogof Craig a Ffynnon is just a short drive from Whitewalls. The best way to get there is drive along the tramroad (Hafod Road) to the end, then at the roundabout opposite the new Gateway Bridge take the first exit along the Old Abergavenny Road. Continue along this road until you reach a layby overlooking the A465 where there should be space to park (**NGR:** SO 21745 12709 - **what3words:** ///mercy.fizzle.worlds).

From the layby walk a short distance further down the road to the 'Clydach' sign next to an old limekiln, where you'll see the track to the cave heading off to the left. Follow the rough path weaving through the scrub into the quarry for some distance, the cave entrance is easy to spot being an obvious large open alcove in the quarry walls on the left above a boulder slope. The gated entrance is located at the rear of the rock alcove, and great care should be taken not to loiter here longer than necessary as numerous rock falls have occurred in the area. The gate should be locked after entering and the key is also required to exit the cave.

The cave entrance to the left of Ogof Craig a Ffynnon with a rope to the entrance is Pope's Hole, an abandoned dig of 10m length which does not connect with the main cave.

Warning: *Craig a Ffynnon is liable to flood in heavy rain. The stream passage near the entrance can fill to the roof in wet weather and the first 90m of North-West Inlet is also flood prone.*

Access: See CSS website for information on how to arrange a key for this trip. CSS members can access the cave at any time using the club keys held at Whitewalls.

Tackle – Climb to Second Choke: The split pitch before Second Choke is permanently rigged with a knotted handline to assist the 7m fixed ladder and 8m climb on footplates. However a 25m lifeline and/or cowstails are recommended for additional safety.

Promised Land Pitch: Rigging this pitch requires an 8m ladder and 16m lifeline, or alternatively a descent can be made without tackle using unmaintained fixed pins to assist a rope climb.

Route Description:

Entrance to Hall of the Mountain King – Due to the risk of rockfall, it is best not to loiter at the entrance longer than necessary. Once inside the safety of the cave it is only a short distance to the first chamber where the logbook is situated, this should be filled in with the names of those on your team. Beyond this Straw Chamber is soon reached, which has a flowstone and gour pool floor and a large array of straws on the ceiling, however this is nowhere near as impressive as what is yet to come further into the cave. Continue following the streamway to First Choke which has two short metal ladders then a scaffolded climb to emerge in a much larger passage above. Ignore the taped route heading upslope on your right as this doesn't continue far before closing down, and instead continue to follow the streamway which lowers to a wet crawl at Gasoline Alley. This section of the cave sumps in very wet weather, so if air space is minimal and rain is forecast it would be wise to abort your trip!

Next you'll reach a junction, with a low and very wet tube heading off on the left. This is North West Inlet, an optional extra for anyone keen on an extended soaking in freezing cold water. This is best done in a wetsuit if possible, and if combined with a trip to Hall of the Mountain King or beyond should definitely be saved for on the way out.

Head right at this junction and continue to follow the streamway, passing a sump on the right, before a short low crawl upslope reaches the foot of the pitch/climb. This is split into two parts, the first 7m has a fixed metal ladder to a wide ledge, and the next 8m can then be scaled using fixed metal footplates and in-situ handlines. This is quite exposed, so cowstails may be useful for extra safety. The first person up can then rig a lifeline if required for those below.

Shortly after this climb Second Choke is reached. Here the only way on is up, following the well-worn route corkscrewing through smooth boulders. This is the most confined section of the trip, but is not especially tight or difficult so most cavers shouldn't have any problems. Descending this on the way out is much quicker and easier with gravity on your side and added lubrication from the next notable obstacle, the mud!

Second Choke emerges at the top of a calcite boulder slope in large open passage, where once again the taped route should be followed. Here you'll soon find your feet and lower legs properly ensconced in glorious glutinous mud. Thankfully this doesn't last too long before firmer ground is reached. The passage becomes low in places, but the route is easy going with no navigational difficulties. After a short calcite slide downwards, stay on the main taped route heading right and take note that this calcite slope is not obvious on the return (though you can't go very far beyond if you miss it). Ignore the taped route heading off on the right soon after, this leads to a 15m descent to a chamber with no way on. Continuing on the main route soon reaches more dramatic proportions to become Travertine Passage, a fantastic bit of cave with formations becoming more and more impressive as you go.

Beautiful orange coloured stalagmites and stalactites with crystal pools are just the start of this, with large gour pools spanning the full width of the passage before reaching The Hall of Mountain King, where the taped route should be carefully followed to avoid muddying the formations. The best vantage point to see the full effect of the stalactites and high-level formations is along the taped path heading left following the cave walls. This is also the route to the continuation of the cave, while the more obvious large passage heading off to the right (Small Side Passage Near the Entrance) doesn't extend very far before closing down.

Hall of the Mountain King to Promised Land – Following the taped path alongside the cave wall heading left leads directly to Third Choke and the start of 250m of mostly crawling through Hurricane Highway. The low belly crawl over smooth calcite floor, which is probably the tightest section, then fluctuates in size and awkwardness from then on. There is nowhere to go wrong here; if in doubt just look for the most worn route for the easiest way through. Eventually the passage increases in size to become Severn Tunnel, a fine canyon passage which continues for a further 250m before reaching a large junction. Here the main route is on the right (straight ahead and left leads to passages ending in boulder chokes), where the obvious route should be followed passing a hole in the floor to the Blaen Elin Streamway. A very large section of cave passage is soon met and at the next obvious junction we again take the right-hand route to ascend the boulder pile to Fourth Choke (the left-hand route leads to the Lower Series via an awkward climb and a 15m pitch).

At Fourth Choke things get briefly less pleasant. After the climb up the boulder pile, heading left reaches an awkward drop down into the choke, then once again it's just a case of following the obvious worn route to return to large open passage beyond. The path descends down to the next junction where the pitch to the Promised Land is located on the left. The best hang for a ladder descent is on the right-hand wall at the top of the 7m drop, while the rope on the left (not visible from the passage above) is the free-climbable route.

Helictite Passage and Fifth Choke (optional diversions) – If including a visit to Helictite Passage on your trip, continue past the descent to the Promised Land and take the right-hand route at the next junction. Formations begin to appear on the cave walls, and soon after the passage narrows and a cave conservation sign is reached. Please adhere to the 'two cavers at a time' rule beyond this point and progress with care when passing these extremely vulnerable helictite formations.

Back at the junction, the left-hand route passed on the way to Helictite Passage leads to Fifth Choke, which is the current end of this part of the cave. There is no particular reason to go there except that the cave passage along the way is very large and pleasant going.

The Promised Land – Back at the Promised Land pitch, please take care if using the fixed aids to descend and note that some of the pins inserted as footholds are not easily visible on the climb down. It's worth visiting the left-hand passage first; this doesn't go very far but soon leads to the Pagoda formation which is a definite highlight of the trip. Shortly beyond this feature the passage ends at a calcited choke. Heading back and following the right-hand direction leads to the end of the cave after 900m. The passage starts large and continues intermittently following a streamway, until an oxbow on the right is met, avoiding a too-tight section of the passage ahead. There are several large boulder obstacles before regaining the main passage and the stream – take note of this junction so you don't miss it on the way out. Easy walking later resumes and a sharp right-angled bend marks the closest point to Daren Cilau (Antler Passage). About 100m beyond this a boulder floored chamber with high avens is reached and a squeeze through boulders enters a rift passage with two avens and a boulder choke below.

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

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