

The Cave of the Wild Horses

by Colin Bunce



Bunce, C., 2010, Cave of the Wild Horses, *Irish Speleology*, **19**, 3-5.

The Cave of the Wild Horses is an extensive and complex cave system in Kilcorney, Co. Clare. The cave is 70m in depth and is known to flood completely to the level of the turlough in which the cave is situated. This article presents a new survey and description which includes recent extensions made by the Clare Caving Club.

Introduction

Kilcorney Cave has the longest history of exploration of any cave in Co. Clare however it still manages to reveal new passage. The Clare Caving Club have been exploring the lower reaches and have been rewarded with a number of small extensions: one in Lower Gour Passage; a new connection from lower main series to Frog Passage, Frog Passage itself has been pushed to a definite sump, and the lower eastern series may or may not have been extended! A complete new survey is presented including the Pull through Series, which may have been discovered in the 1990s but not surveyed until now. The new survey puts the length of the cave at 1,285m, with a total depth of 70m. The sump at the end of Frog Passage is at 33m a.s.l., which is a similar level to the sump at the end of recently discovered Poll Gonzo.

WARNING

The entire cave can fill with water so that water pumps out of the entrance and floods the turlough. The conditions under which this happens are uncertain so great caution should be exercised in anything other than prolonged dry weather.

Description

The cave entrance is a low arch at the base of the cliff on the southern side of the Kilcorney depression. The straight entrance passage is soon of a comfortable walking height. After 30m Main Junction is reached; to the left is the Eastern Series and to the right Upper Main Series.

Eastern Series

Eastern series begins as a low crawl which within a few metres meets a T-junction. To the left a crawl runs for 30m, eventually becoming too small, close to the entrance passage. The right hand passage is also a crawl for a few metres to the roomy Second Aven. The passage continues beyond this aven to a low chamber from which a squeeze through an even lower bedding reaches the head of a 20m pitch. The pitch is in a narrow calcited rift with bolts on the right hand side and is awkward especially on the return. At the foot of the pitch the narrow rift continues to the head of a 7m pitch reached by a bolt traverse. Beyond the second pitch the passage can be followed for a further 40m to a duck held back by a large gour dam, this has been

passed to a further short drop to a sump.

Upper Main Series

At the Main Junction straight ahead leads, via a scramble up, into the boulder floored Main Aven. This is 7m high and has a voice connection with the Second Aven. A scramble down on the far side gives access to a meandering tube, 1m in diameter, which soon develops a small trench in the floor. After some 25m a junction is reached. To the left an ascending squeeze leads to a small round chamber, with a choked continuation. To the right the tube continues, without the trench, for a further 20m to Pitch Chamber. The Upper Main Series passage continues to the right beyond the pitch for 60m to a termination near the cliff face. The passage varies in height from 1m to 10m. The pitch is 13m deep and is bolted, its first half descends at an angle to a lip after which it is vertical. Traversing over the head of the pitch leads to an alternative pitch which divides into two parallel shafts at 4m depth. One shaft rejoins the main pitch, the second leads independently into the Lower Main Series after 12m.

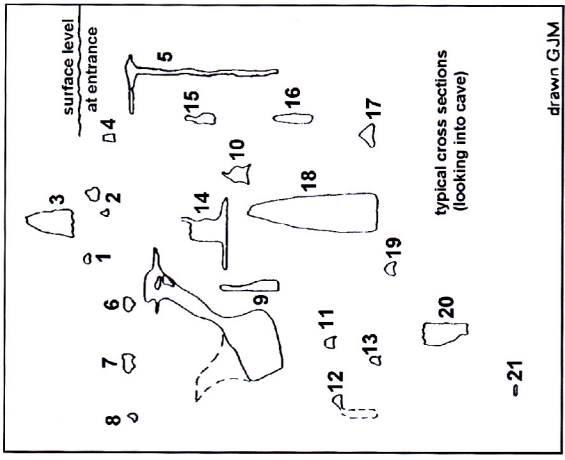
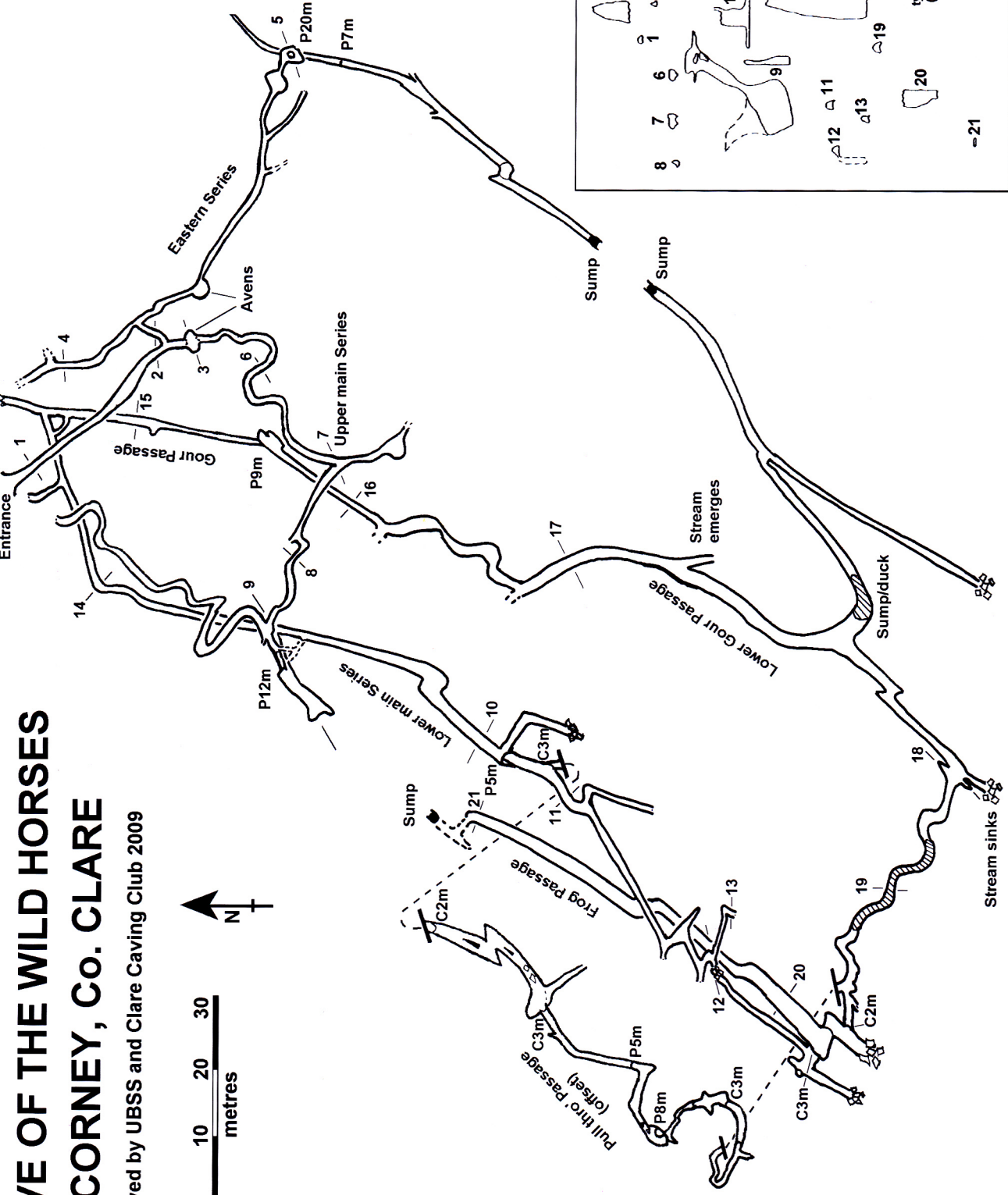
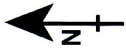
Lower Main Series

At the bottom of the pitch is the Lower Main Series. From the foot of the pitch a descending passage is blocked but a short uphill passage leads to a T-junction. To the right the passage, initially 5m high and between 1m and 6m wide, leads to a further 5m pitch (2 permanent hangers on right hand side). On the left side of the passage, opposite the hangers a tube can be climbed for a short distance to a choke. From the bottom of the 5m pitch a series of choked descending tubes can be followed, the lowest of which connects to Frog Passage via a tight squeeze.

Pull through passage starts on the left hand wall opposite the foot of the 5m pitch where a 2m climb up is followed by a steeply ascending passage leading to a small chamber. High up on the left is a small passage which divides into two but both passages end within 20m, an overhanging 3m climb up from the small chamber leads to a rift passage, this soon develops into a short easy traverse to reach the top of a 4m pitch (2 permanent hangers on left hand side). This is quickly followed by an 8m pitch (2 permanent hangers on left hand side). A narrow rift follows with an awkward squeeze to the head of a series of short drops that can be free climbed with care. Straight on from the last one leads to a climb down on the right that joins Lower Gour

CAVE OF THE WILD HORSES KILCORNEY, Co. CLARE

Surveyed by UBSSS and Clare Caving Club 2009



Passage just before the climb down into Frog Passage.

Gour and Lower Gour Passages

Left from the T-junction in Lower Main Series an easy passage can be followed uphill for 60m to a further junction with Gour Passage; to the left this rises steeply to a choke below the sink at the entrance. To the right, the passage becomes a narrow rift divided by high gours holding back deep pools which make arduous going for 30m to a 9m pitch down the far side of the final flowstone - 1 permanent hanger as a back up belay and 2 permanent hangers above the pitch. From here, Lower Gour Passage can be followed in a phreatic half tube over a number of muddy gour dams for 100m to a junction with a low bedding plane on the left which is usually sumped. In dry weather this becomes a duck, and a flat out crawl over cobbles leads in a north-easterly direction to a choke after 10m, this can be passed and leads to a T-junction with a large walking size passage. Left continues north-east for 30m through splendid cave to a clear sump. Right from the T-junction a 2m x 4m passage leads uphill to the south-west for 35m and ends at a large boulder choke.

Lower Gour passage continues for 35m beyond the junction to end where the small stream sinks into an impenetrable hole. The way on is to the right 10m before this where a hands and knees crawl leads to a short drop into a low tube half full of water which is followed for 10m before a short climb back up reaches a crawl. This passes the lower end of Pull through Passage before leading to a 2m drop into the large and very muddy Frog Passage. To the left this chokes immediately in mud and boulders, but to the right it continues for 80m through a number of low muddy squeezes and in very dry conditions has been pushed to an end at a sump of clean water.

Ten metres from the start of Frog Passage a 3m climb up on the left wall leads to a junction, to the left a mud slope leads up 10m to enter a fine aven; straight on is a choked descending hole, while on the right there are two passages of which only the first passage can be followed far. This is an ascending cobble floored tube

leading back up via a tight squeeze to the base of the 5m pitch in the lower main series.

Both Lower Gour Passage and Frog Passage contain large deposits of mud which move around during floods both revealing and hiding a number of side passages at different times.

Other comments

A visit in December 2007 was stopped at the main pitch when strange booming and popping noises were heard (the legendary wild horses?), water could just be seen down the pitch but it is uncertain whether it was rising or falling as we didn't wait to find out! But a visit into the Eastern Series on the same occasion revealed a couple of locations where air could be heard being forced up through tiny cracks in the rock.

In February 2008 water was found at the level of the top of the climb down to Frog Passage, this was seen to drop at a rate of about 1m every 15 minutes.

On at least two occasions in October 2008 the floor of the depression outside the cave was flooded, on the first water was observed flowing into the cave, while on the second water was seen flowing out of the cave. The extension in Lower Gour Passage leads to another choke at its southern limit. This means there are four passages heading south - all of which end at a choke. These blockages may be part of the reason that the cave floods, however the water level also drops rapidly indicating there may be open routes through the blockage.

References

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