

# FURTHER EXPLOITS IN SWISS CHEESE VALLEY

by  
Mark Rocklin

Once again the forces of righteousness do battle against the all pervasive dark force, Horse Lick Cemetary Cave. Forever thwarting our efforts to bring light and our sick interpretation of goodness into god forsaken crevices where no man (or woman) has ever gone before.

First, we went down in November to do some mapping and exploring and were greeted with the worst flooding I've seen in the area either inside or outside of a cave. Next we go down on January 18th and we have a slight drizzle and conditions reminiscent of a Saturday in April of 1983. Need I say more? Fortunately for the crew involved, namely John Wisher, Jacque Ramey, John Neek and yours truly we had secondary objectives.

On December 30th, Jacque & I had done some ridge walking in the aforementioned valley. We started in the area of the unknown resurgence across from John Coffee Cave and ridge walked (i.e. stumbled, tripped and generally mutilated ourselves) the valley for most of its breadth and width. We saw it and it seemed to be damned good. I think that we came up with 9-10 blowing holes on that day. "If it didn't blow, forget it" was the order of the day.

Thus armed with the knowledge that our butts could be history if we continued with our ill fated quest in search of the holy hole, we opted for plan "B". This consisted of exploration of one of the best looking leads in the valley. This was a lead about 1 kilo- meter up the valley, ~ 30-40 meters in elevation above HLCC. This consisted of an obvious collapsed canyon passage that had opened in a fault line.

The hearty crew entered this gapping hole with hearts pounding and bladders aching at 9:30 A.M. The cave passage follows an obvious fault in the rock to a large breakdown room. On the side of one breakdown block is a drop of ~10m. We rigged the sucker and I dropped down to another level. This consisted of another breakdown room with a small hole off to one side. I climbed down this passage to a small room in more break- down. Out of this lead a narrow canyon at floor level continues to a tight 90° turn. This led down into a drop into the bottom of a dome where a small drain could be discerned. John Wisher dug some rocks out to open the drain and I wiggled through. This in turn lead to a dry crawling passage intersected by a cross cutting stream. I figured where it was wet I should go (could this be because I had a wet suit top on?). John Neek was by this point dogging me so we decided to check things out before everyone came through. John chimneyed down a crack in the floor. This crack was one of those that has teeth. It's obvious now where we've been due to the pieces of jumpsuit left behind. With John leading we entered this knifed horror. I took the high road while he took the low road. My lead came to an end while John's lead to a room where he found the pack that he had previously dropped down a hole while entering the cave earlier (he must have learned this trick from P.K.). John says there is still a lead left here to be checked out.

John and I doubled back to the thread infested canyon and crawled into a dome pit with an active stream in the bottom. John tried to follow this down stream but found it to tight to follow.

We then headed upstream where the passage came through a series of crawls and rooms to a near ear dip. Being the timid folks that we

are we decided to head high rather than belly flop where no man has gone before. This lead into more breakdown which changed to mud choked breakdown canyon. In the distance we could hear the roar of either a stream (our wish) or a waterfall. We continued onward until we stood on the lip of a pit with a hefty flow of water tumbling into it from a stream across from our perch. This was not the same stream that we had encountered earlier. It looked like we had found base level at last. At this point John and I decided it was time to return for Jacque and John.

After having Jacque retrieve the other cable ladder we resumed our trek back to the pit to rig and drop it. John and I were hyped. After a quick snack of candy mixed with dirt, John & John rigged the pit from a bypass that we had found. John Neek was the first down (you would have had to render him unconscious for it to be otherwise) for the initial reconnaissance. I then followed him down as a backup. What he had found was a low drain where all the water was going. He found a tight bypass to the main drain, but after much digging was finally stopped by either high water or low ceiling. Same effect. Our hopes for a high & dry back entrance to HLCC were dashed. We then backtracked to the entrance.

At this point Jacque called out for me to follow him. He had found a high phreatic walking tube passage. He continued on down this until it became crawling and then mud choaked out. I followed a fault line to where a chimney lead into an open room. Damn, this thing looked familiar. I had come into an area of earlier exploration. On thinking later of this passage the lead down the canyon I had descended looks good for future exploration.

This cave still has some leads left to be looked at so all is still not hopeless, just not so great. This whole cave was virgin

even though it had a walk-in entrance. This goes to show what a little ridge walking can do. Time in this cave was 6 hrs. Jacque came up with an appropriate name for this beaut: Horse Lick Hell Cave. Believe me, it fits.

We next crossed the valley to another pit that we had found ridge walking. It was blowing an incredible amount of air the first time we had been there, so it was the obvious choice. We entered via a mud covered slope to a breakdown block. After slipping down this we found ourselves in a large breakdown room with leads in the breakdown in all directions. We followed a crawl off to the right that lead to another room. The group met up here to explore. We crossed this room and lo & behold what to our eyes should appear but two pits, both ear to ear. By the drop the rock and time the kerplunk method John & John estimated a depth of about 25 meters for each one of these. Virgin pits!

After a little more exploring it was decided to leave this cave and it's pits for another day when we had a little more time. Again Jacque came up with another name for this gem: Split Pit Cave.

After walking down the valley to the resurgence near John Coffee we found that the boils, which weren't flowing when we had passed them that morning, were now in flow. Good decision to abort the HLCC trip.

All in all a very rewarding trip, even though we all admit that Horse Lick Hell had had her way with us. Multiple bruises and contusions were the order for the day.

This now leaves 7-8 more blowing leads left in this valley, with about another klick to be walked, not to mention HLCC which after many aborted mapping trips has mucho virgin passage staring us in the face. After 3 mapping trips in HLCC we now have ~1.4 kilometers of survey with much more awaiting us. Care to join us?