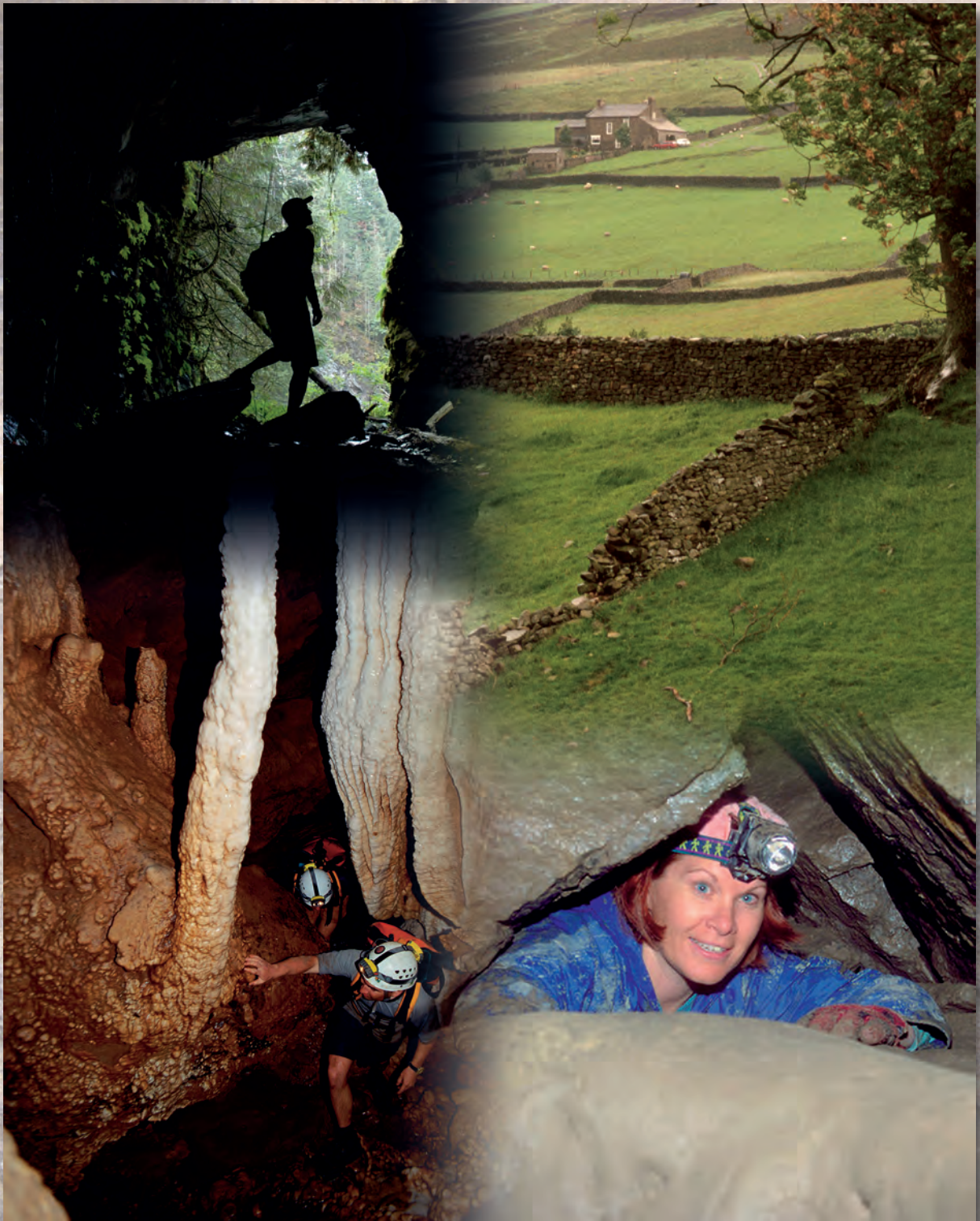


Caves and Caving in Daveley Dale Visitors' Guide



souvenir guide

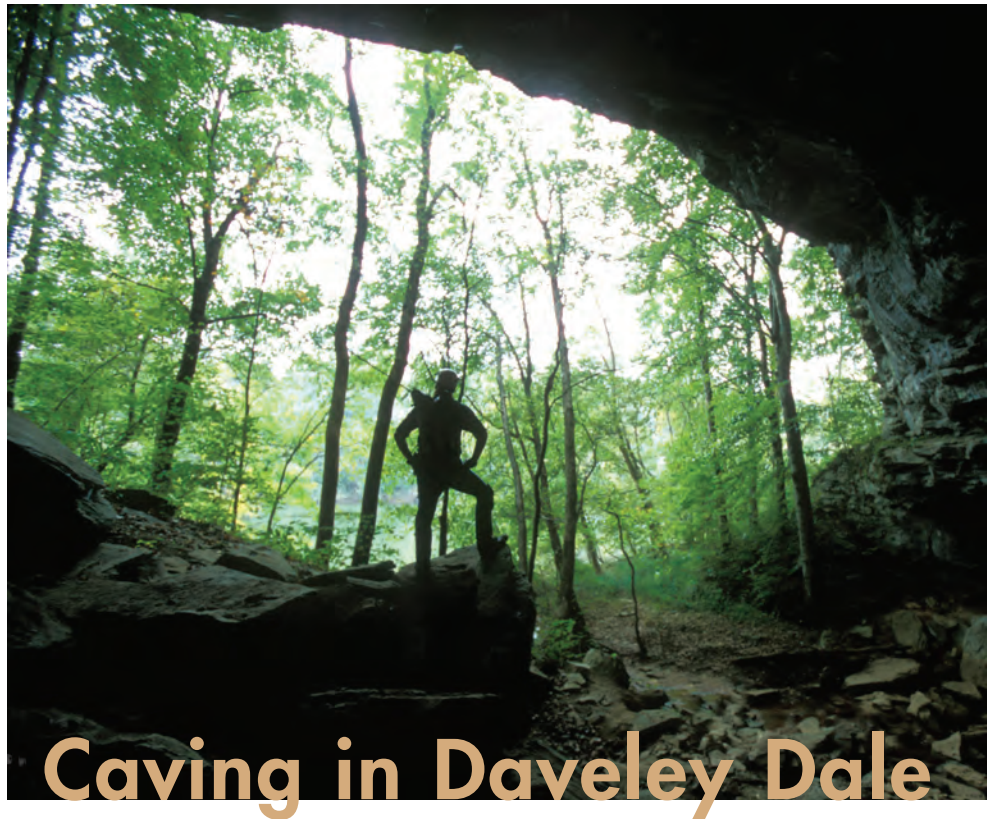
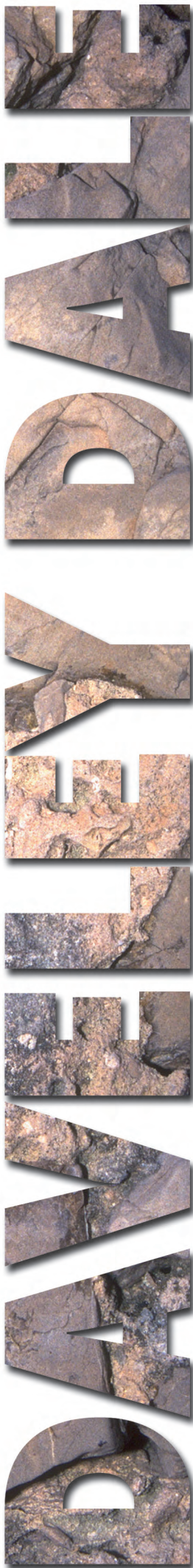
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Welcome to Daveley Dale!

Every year thousands of people come here to make a once-in-a-lifetime journey, underground.

Above ground, Daveley Dale is a place of wild and rugged beauty. Below the ground, hidden under the hills, is a maze of caverns, rivers, lakes and tunnels: stunning in colour and form. A network of over 20 kilometres of caves has been discovered and now five kilometres of passages have finally been opened to the public.

Caving has something for everyone. Take a gentle stroll and a boat ride through the magnificent Daveley Dale caves and take home a souvenir from the gift shop. Or, if you fancy something more exciting ... put on your climbing boots and a safety helmet, and come to Daveley Hole. Here you can experience the sheer terror and delight of a crawl through 800 metres of tiny tunnels.

For young people wanting to take up caving, this is the perfect place to start. Girls and boys can enjoy the wonder of our fabulous caves, led by qualified instructors in a safe environment.

Take this opportunity of an unforgettable visit underground.

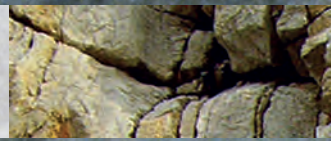
Need to know

First time caving? Here's some useful information about what you'll see.

Cave: Formed when rock is eroded (rubbed away) by water over millions of years. The softer the rock, the more quickly the cave will form.



Crevice: A crack in the rock.



Loop: A tunnel which brings you back to where you started.



Stalactite: A column of rock hanging from the ceiling of a cave. Formed when water drips from the ceiling. Minerals dissolved in the water leave a trace which builds up over millions of years.



Stalagmite: Formed in a similar way to a stalactite but on the floor of the cave when the water drips down.



Sump: A place in a cave where water collects.



Swallet: A cave formed by an underground stream which flows through holes worn in soluble rock.





An interview with Lisa Clark, an experienced caver

My first question has to be: why do you do it? Why do you go exploring caves?

Because they're there. That's what mountaineers sometimes say when asked that question and I think my answer's the same. I suppose the big difference is that a climber can stand and look up and see the challenge while for a caver, really you have to imagine it. To me, that makes it even more appealing. How does what I imagine a cave system will be like compare to what I find when I get in there?

How did you get started as a caver?

Well, as a child my interests were all to do with exploration, but on the surface! On family walking holidays in the Lake District my brother, Chris, and I used to go racing ahead of our parents, always trying to get to the top of some hill to see what was there. But actually it was only when I went to university that I got the chance to try caving. Chris is a keen climber now and I haven't been able to tempt him underground!





What was it like the first time you went underground?

It was here in Daveley Dale! My first thought was: this is crazy, I can't see a thing! Then of course your eyes get used to the dark and you begin to make out shapes in the light from the headlamps. But in those first few moments your other senses take over – you realise how reliant you're going to be on touch or hearing for example. You know the saying about hearing a friendly voice? Well that's exactly how it is when you're underground: hearing that familiar voice, especially if it's an experienced caver, is very reassuring.

What's the most dangerous thing you've done while caving?

I think it would have to be an exploration of the caves in New Dell. It's not a particularly dangerous system and we were well prepared, but while we were underground there was a flash flood. That's one of the biggest threats to cavers because the water level can rise so suddenly. Team work is critical in caving, you really do have to work together and in this case, the team on the surface realised we might be at risk and were ready to help us; luckily we made our own way out just in time.

And the best moment?

For me, it's that moment when you've been sliding on your stomach for ages, moving more like a worm than a two-legged creature and wondering just why you're doing this, when the tunnel opens out and you slither into a cavern in all its silent splendour. There's tremendous beauty of a sort that you just don't see anywhere else – everywhere you look you can see the work of nature rather than the hand of a human. And how many other places are like that in this country, completely without human influence? There's nothing to compare it to on the surface.



Caving ... what lies beneath?

Stephen Bleach is a travel writer. Here he tells the story of his first caving expedition.

Imagine this: I'm flat on my back, lying on a shelf of wet rock. Looking up, all I can see is another sheet of rock. It is ten centimetres from my face. The surface of the earth is 140 metres above me, the other side of thousands upon thousands of tons of (fairly) solid limestone. I am a tiny scrap of meat filling in a colossal rock sandwich. I am very, very scared.

We entered Giant's Hole about an hour ago. It's a swallet – a cave formed where a

stream goes underground. Tucked away in a hollow in the dale, the entrance is comfortably big, wide and tall enough for three to walk upright. But it's deceptive. Within yards, the light from the blustery day outside has evaporated and the cave becomes narrow, maze-like, mysterious. The twists and turns, ups and downs, the myriad passages that lead this way and that, are totally disorientating. Very soon, I have no idea where I am, or which way is out.



There are ten of us in the party, four (myself included) total beginners. In our gear of rubber overalls, wellies, helmets and headlamps, we splash through the stream, ducking and scrambling through narrower and narrower passages, getting farther and farther from the light and air above.

Our instructor, Andy, leads us four novices up into a hole at the side of the passage roof. We're roped together for the tricky, slippery climb (every surface is dripping wet), then crouch around him in the small chamber at the top.

"Right," he says, pointing to a small passageway to one side. "You can lead. Just turn left, then right, then left. You can't go wrong." And he starts chatting with another instructor who's come along for the ride.

Duncan goes right ahead. I follow him, and Andrea and Alan follow me. We are all excited, and nervous, and painfully aware that we are in a strange, hostile environment: we follow the orders of our instructor without question. And this is where it has brought me: to the verge of panic. Ahead, Duncan is also flat on his back in the half-metre high crevice we are wriggling through. He hasn't moved for a minute, and I suspect he is stuck. Neither of us knows how long this hideous passageway will go on for. We are not sure we can get back. We don't know if we're in the right passage at all. Maybe we took a wrong turn. We are both thinking one thing: we could die here. Some stream water slips down the neck of my suit, mingling with the sweat that has broken out all over my body. I start to feel like I'm suffocating. I want to bash my fists, uselessly, on the all-too-solid rock above. I want to scream. Then two things happen.



First, a crunch of pebbles and a grunt of effort, then I hear Duncan move suddenly forward.

"Are you out?" I try to keep my voice deep and calm, but it resounds in the tiny space and comes back to me as it really is, high and cracked.

"I'm out. It's just a few more feet."

"What's it like there? Can you stand up?"

"Nearly. And it's not too narrow. It's fine."

The panic ebbs away. Though an hour ago the space I'm heading for would itself have filled me with dread, now it seems vast compared to the crack I'm in. And I know I can get there.



The passageway, of course, brought us straight back to Andy. He'd sent us on a loop and, though we didn't know it, was always in earshot and ready to leap to our assistance if needed. For the next two hours, while some opted to stay in the wider passages, I was wriggling and squirming through cracks. I sometimes felt a surge of fear rise in my throat, and I moaned a lot, but I had a great time.

And I was struck by the beauty you can only see underground. Etched on a wall, as big as my hand, are the delicate fronds of a soft coral. Further on, a long expanse of wall seems to have been covered in melted candle wax: in fact it's rock, and the surreal effect is produced by the same process that

makes stalactites. Here, mineral crystals sparkle in the light of our lamps; there, along a rock face worn glassy smooth, the swirls and backflows of millions of years of flowing water have left their intricate patterns on the solid rock.

Emerging, at last, into the fading daylight, all four of us beginners were babbling, laughing, exhilarated. We'd been challenged, and we'd come through. Sure, we'd skipped Challenge Cavern and Sardine Chamber, and the sump, where icy water flows through an airless tube and cavers hold their breath and swim against the current, in total blackness, to reach air on the other side, six metres away. Those treats could wait. We'd done plenty for one day, thanks.

Visit Daveley Dale Caves

open all year!

*"Wow! This place is amazing."
Kate Lewis, aged 10*

*"A thrill-packed
day out"
from '1001 Great
Days Out'*

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🌐 www.daveleydalecaves.co.uk



‘Caving ... what lies beneath?’ by Stephen Bleach,
taken from *The Sunday Times* – Travel Section, 16 February 2003.

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