

Doing things you've never done before, whole new experiences, only happen once for each experience. On a recent holiday there were two such occurrences for me, one in the depths of the earth, the other high in the hills. Well they were new to me.

The Rescuers

**By
Dave Chambers**

It was only about three miles to the cave, but walking slowly, pausing to look at new scenery and inspect flowers and trees it was well over an hour before we turned off the road.

It had looked a bit steep for cars in places, but now on the footpath it was a gentle incline with occasional very steep bits and a climb over a style every hundred yards or so. Carrying the cool bag with the picnic and soft drinks was becoming really awkward, it was designed to be carried in a car, not over fields like this.

The last style before the cave had a warning notice by it declaring that due to recent wet weather Victoria Cave was unsafe, subject to heavy rock falls and that under no circumstances should anyone approach the entrance.

The two boys had gone on ahead, and knowing them to be exemplary responsible teenagers, we hurried the last few hundred yards up the path to catch up.

It was not as impressive as its name this Victoria Cave. An entrance about 30 feet high showing a rocky interior as far as I could see from my vantage point, standing on a large rock some way from the entrance and about 20 feet below. Evidence of previous rock falls was apparent in the scree of football sized chunks of rock from the entrance downwards almost to the path.

To their credit the boys had heeded one of the many warning notices along the path and were looking from another point a bit higher and closer, but not too close. I was trying hard not to show how out of breath I was, nonchalantly looking around from my vantage point. If this were on the coast the curvature of the hill, looking as if a giant ice cream scoop had been pulled downwards through it, would no doubt be a smugglers cove.

About 30 yards to the right and 20 or 30 feet above the cave entrance a sheep stood grazing on a narrow ledge. It looked down at us and called loudly.

"Baa." It said. I watched as it stretched its head in the characteristic manner of the bleating sheep. "Baa." Again and I only knew it was that particular sheep because I saw as well as heard it. With lots of sheep all around and the whispering gallery effect of the cove shaped hills, it was difficult to pick out exactly where the sound was coming from.

"David, want a sandwich?" Pat beckoned me down from my perch.

"Yes." I began to come down off the big rock.

"Something to eat you two?" She called and I was third in line again. While we munched our sandwiches I looked up at the sheep "That sheep's stuck up there."

"Where?" She asked and I pointed. "Don't be silly, they live here, they don't get stuck in places like that."

There were a few other people around playing and picnicking much the same as we were. It was a wonderful sunny day and we could see clearly as far as the surrounding hills allowed. The light breeze was welcome, making it feel cool in the shade of the dry stone wall beside the path. Just the place to let the heart and head catch up with the breath after our efforts to get here.

Sounds carried quite well and we listened to chants of "Richard, come down from there", "Johnny, stop that" and "Come here" mingling with the "Baa"s of the natives. We saw the people but unless we saw them speak, could not tell who was telling whom off. Suffice to say it appeared to have a curious inhibiting effect on most of the other adults, as if we were in a library or something. Not so the boys, they had a new audience who would be delighted, they were sure, with the loudness of their rendition of sandwiches and lemonade repeated.

Thus Pat's voice closely followed the burp around the hills. "Robert! Stop that!" Kevin had the good grace to follow his effort with "Pardon", but that didn't please his mother either. They gave up after about three attempts to catch the attention of the natives, who kept on saying only "Baa" in differing tones.

The chatter of a group coming up the hill reached us only shortly before they did. Loud, giggling and mischievous, and obviously fit, they laughed their way along the path egged on by Mable. She hobbled along leaning heavily on a walking stick keeping one leg absolutely stiff, she appeared slightly overweight and had a shock of silvery grey hair. Joanne, also slightly overweight, followed closely with a ready loud laugh for Mable's comments.

"Ooh!" She called. "There it is. Lovely day!" This last to us as they trudged past without a sign of fatigue. We could only manage a wide eyed "Yes, lovely day" while the boys stood in open admiration of the twenty or so white haired wrinklies, none of them as tall as our teenagers, and none who looked a day under sixty.

"Let's stop here for a breather." Mable relented.

"Aye, we can 'ave a look at t'cave."

"Not goin' up there Georgie!" Joanne said as she sat heavily beside Mable. The others were looking up at the cave.

"Can't go up there George. See the notice?" Said another.

"Can't?"

"Notice? What notice?"

"Tell US WE can't!" All this and the one called George hadn't said a word. They were all looking at him, a wiry little man not much more than about five foot three with a leathery wrinkled face, a shock of crew cut white hair and bright grey eyes shining above a broadening puckish grin. A quick look around at the others and, still without a word, he led the charge.

They swarmed up the scree, the big stones rattling and clacking together as they deftly negotiated their way upward while remarkably few stones made any move downward. Within seconds the white haired commando assault was a complete success and about fourteen or fifteen people were inside Victoria Cave.

Silent astonishment is the best way to describe what the onlookers felt, except of course the few wrinklies who had not gone up to the cave. They accompanied their friends with loud gales of laughter, adding considerably to the noise while even the sheep seemed be keeping quiet.

"Look at this 'ere Georgie?" The sound was distinctively different, coming as it did from inside the cave.

"What's that Georgie?" Mable's voice rang out.

"Some funny lookin' lines on the wall here." came the reply. It was followed by another loud clacking of the scree as the second wave took its courage in its hands and about a dozen people between the ages of eight and eighteen scrambled towards the cave. Once again within seconds they were in the prohibited zone, oblivious of the loud objections from down below, which were a marked contrast to the earlier climb.

The third wave was somewhat slower, puffing and panting against the slope, the rattling scree, and most of all, the inhibitions.

"Careful there Dearie!" Mable hadn't said that to any of the wrinklies, or the children, and I wondered if she'd meant me.

"Mine were just the same," Joanne whooped with laughter, "They don't change, do they?" This did nothing to encourage the motley group making their laborious way upward, muttering darkly about dire consequences and quietly cursing a stubbed toe or whoever invented second childhood or both.

Victoria Cave is a bit like a large hall, but with a very uneven floor. Each child was strategically close to at least one of the wrinklies as some sort of defence against the huffing puffing parental wrath while everyone seemed to have forgotten the danger notices. I do not know anything about its history but I don't suppose there has ever been this many people in the cave. Milling about looking at huge rocks which obviously used to be attached to the ceiling and dark holes which may

or may not be entrances to the famous Yorkshire potholes.

Without at least a torch you couldn't see beyond the cave itself and most of us had charged up the hill without a thought other than joining the mad rush to flout authority, follow the old pied pipers, or trail laboriously after the young pied pipers.

The wrinklies left when Mable was rested and declared they had a way to go. There were ominous rattles of the scree and shouts "Ave you 'urt yourself?" and "Watch it there." Still accompanied by the same chuckles and laughter and "Baa"s from the sheep so we concluded everything was all right.

The children, without the magnetism of the Grand Old Brigade and no real means of exploring further, got bored and began to leave too. The parents soon found they had to follow when they heard the scree rattling again. So the third wave began a cautious descent, with many more mutterings about the foolishness of others and the sensibility of selves.

Pat started to pack up the picnic and mentioned that we had seen another cave on the map not far from here.

"Where's the map?" I asked.

"It's that way." Robert pointed, unerringly as it happened, in the direction of the other cave. I began to unfold the map while the others walked away down the hill. I caught them up as they changed direction, starting up another hill towards the cave.

"It's up that way." I said and got the feeling of being superfluous again. Another long trudge upwards, but pleasant for all that, over grassy slopes in clear fresh air, just the stuff we came looking for.

Jubilee Cave was not even a miniature version of Victoria Cave but it did have several 'holes' which were accessible and seemed to go down into the bowels of the earth. This time we had the torch with us so the boys set to climbing downwards. If you ever got worried about the children when they first start to climb up, just wait till they start to climb down. A glimmer of light down a deep hole and the knowledge that a fall can only go deeper into the stygian darkness beyond the reach of the torch beam is not a pretty sight, believe me. And conversation is no help.

"Come out of there you two!"

"S'awright."

"Look down there. You can't see the bottom."

"Ouch! Mind me fingers."

"Will you two get up out of there."

"Hey, that stone hasn't reached the bottom yet."

"Come up here now."

"S'awright."

Thankfully, none of us are liable to become avid potholers. The inky depths just a step or two from bright sunshine do not hold the attractions for us that others obviously feel. There was a small hole which did not go far down but came up through another entrance a few yards from Jubilee Cave and although it took some doing, the boys persuaded Pat and I to crawl through.

My first underground experience off a London Transport map. We are now potholers I suppose. The boys guided us through with "Turn your shoulders to the left and reach up, then let your feet down," and other such directions as they were necessary. The record for the fastest exit went to Pat when they pointed out the spider's web two inches from her right hand.

After some more refreshments we decided to go back along the path past Victoria Cave and carry on in the direction taken by the wrinkly commando group.

It was still a beautiful day. Victoria Cave was still labelled as dangerous. There were still people in it. And the sheep was still on the same ledge saying the same "Baa."

"That sheep is trapped up there." I said.

"No it's not, is it?"

"Yes." We stopped for a breather and I looked at the ledges which seemed to form a sort of staircase with very steep steps of about three to five feet each, all the way up to where the sheep was. Just there it seemed to have some of the larger steps which the sheep could not get up or down.

"I think I'll -"

"Go on then, you won't be happy until you do. Can you give him a hand Robert?" Kevin was inspecting some stones about fifty yards away.

"You won't catch me goin' up there." Robert was the younger and usually more adventurous of the two so this did not give me confidence, nevertheless, I wouldn't sleep if I walked away now so I started to climb.

Steps of three feet or more take some getting up and after negotiating about a dozen of them I stopped for a breather and found Kevin standing beside me.

"Want to back down?" He asked.

"No." I replied. "You all right?"

"Yes." He nodded and we carried on upwards. Climbing up, although physically challenging, was otherwise reasonably easy, just like stepping on to a lowish garden wall with a nice hand hold above it. Another new experience, climbing, not rock climbing, but steep enough to be new to me. A dozen or so steps more took us to just below a very worried sheep. It had obviously been there for quite some time, but at least it's not as bad as cow dung. The ledge was about twelve feet long, a little more than a foot wide at most, and tapered to nothing at each end.

"What are you going to do now?" Her voice drifted up on the whispering gallery effect and she sounded like she was only a few feet away.

"Big, isn't it," Kevin was speaking exactly my thoughts. We knew we couldn't lift it so we decided to herd it upwards like a sheep dog would do. Kevin went to the right and me to the left and it would be forced upwards. With one bound the sheep outflanked Kevin and stood at the extreme end of the ledge nervously munching at the grass and vigorously wagging its tail.

"See." Said Kevin. "It's not worried about us at all, it just decided to eat that bit of grass right now." He smiled.

We approached again and it was my turn to be outflanked. After several attempts we found that being a sheep dog is not as easy as it looks.

"Clever that sheep, in't it." Robert said.

"Which one?" Asked Pat.

Eventually we did manage to get a bit closer and as the sheep went to turn around again I put my hand firmly on its left shoulder and pushed upward as hard as I could. The sheep leapt upwards and after a brief scramble reached the ledge about five feet above us. From there a closer series of ledges saw the sheep onto a broad path where it sauntered along wagging a silly little tail and saying "Baa."

"Well done!" Her voice floated up to us.

"I thought you didn't have a head for heights Dad." Kevin said.

"I don't." I confirmed.

"That's OK. Just don't look down." I looked and immediately understood why the sheep had left so many calling cards.

"How we gonna get down?" It had the matter of fact ring that told me Kevin was all right, he was wondering how to help me. It was a long way down and Pat's voice sounded much closer.

"That's a point, how are going to get down?" I looked around but could see no alternative to the long struggle my feet being guided by Kevin, all the way down. Coming up was easy, but the idea of constantly looking down was really frightening.

"We could go up, follow the sheep." He said.

"Yes, why don't you follow the sheep." her advice drifted up.

"Yea, follow the sheep, it knows the way better'n you." Robert laughed. The sheep stopped at this point, turned its head, wagged its stupid little tail and said "Baa-a." I stood frozen to the spot for a moment then I said.

"I've got an idea. Let's follow the sheep." A small round of applause came from down below, accompanied by Robert's voice. "You're brilliant Dad, we'd never 'ave thought of that." Pat was smiling and her shoulders were beginning to shake while Kevin was trying very hard to keep a straight face. The easy bit had been getting up there so we started to climb up, me not being at all

appreciative of the sheep which stopped again and said "Baa."

I reached the broad path muttering my discontent under my breath and then followed Kevin up few more of these steps to where we had a lovely view of the surrounding countryside, and could see that about half a mile away there was a gentle slope down to meet the path that Pat and Robert were on.

"We'll see you along there." I pointed quite pleased with myself.

"All right, no need to shout." She said. They gathered up the picnic leftovers and started along the path. We went along the field to where it would let us down gently to meet the others.

"Well, that's your good deed this week." She said.

"Yes." I accepted the accolade.

"She was talking to Kevin." They all got the joke so I managed a wan smile.

We walked on for quite a way and the boys found numerous potholes which we didn't go in and they only went a little way in some of them. The path twisted and turned slightly downward and led us eventually back to the holiday flat where we were staying.

After a relaxing and welcome cup of tea with our feet up Pat said "What about tomorrow then, where shall we go?" I reached casually round to get the map when Robert grabbed it.

"You don't need this." He said with a grin on his face. "We'll get some sheep to show us the way."