
NWHG Ref. 064 — Smoo Cave

Location, grid reference and photograph

Smoo Cave is located on the north coast, c.1.5 km. south-east from the village of Durness on the north side of the A 838 road, where the Allt Smoo flows into the sea. Grid Ref. [NC 418 672].

(Figure 52) The entrance to Smoo Cave. The cave is a large limestone dissolution cavern connected to the sea, via Geodha Smoo, at high tide. BGS Photo P530460 — T Bradwell.

Description and geological significance

Smoo Cave is one of the largest (former) sea caves in Europe, developed within the Sangomore Formation of the Durness Group of sediments (mostly well-bedded dolomites and limestones) of Cambro-Ordovician age. It is particularly significant as an example of the interaction of coastal erosional processes and dissolution processes with a large karst drainage system. Smoo Cave is also important as an archaeological site and contains an example of a prehistoric midden.

Accessibility

There is a large car park and toilet block adjacent to the A 838 road. Access is via a relatively steep and winding flight of steps taking visitors down to the cave on the west side and via a narrow winding path, locally steep, on the east side of the cave. Access from the west side continues via a narrow timber footbridge across the Allt Smoo. No access, therefore, for all abilities. Once in the cave, there is a guided tour by boat run by a local operator.

Conservation

Although the main outer cave feature and its approaches are on a large scale, there is certainly an important conservation requirement in relation to protection of both the innermost parts of the main cave and also the smaller inner cave feature, which is accessed via a wooden footbridge.

Visibility and “clarity”

Smoo Cave is a most attractive feature of significant proportions. The large outer cave entrance is very dramatic as it is approached from both west and east sides of the Allt Smoo. Once the cave is reached, internal features are easily distinguished but do require interpretation.

Interpretation and interpretation potential

The site is presently used by the Highland Council Ranger Service and by the Geopark GeoRanger. Existing interpretation panels located at the car park cover the geology, wildlife and archaeology but there are no interpretation panels located near the entrance to the cave or within the cave itself. The site is an important resource for students, researchers and the general public and there is considerable potential here for developing an interpretation facility to be located close to, or within, the cave entrance. The site should certainly be included within any future Geopark guide.



(Figure 52) The entrance to Smoo Cave. The cave is a large limestone dissolution cavern connected to the sea, via Geodha Smoo, at high tide. BGS Photo P530460 — T Bradwell.