

Report on Cromhall Quarry.

Directions

From the northbound M5, take come off at J14 and take the B4059 towards Wotton-Under-Edge. At the T-junction, turn right onto the B4058 and continue towards Cromhall for approximately ¼ mile. There are some buildings on the right hand side of the road along with a big yellow sign saying 'Cromhall Diving'. This is where it gets tricky! As you turn into the site, there is a large yard full of old buses. Go through that yard to the far corner and you will then enter a large truck yard. Through the truck yard the road forks; the left fork takes you uphill to nowhere and the right fork takes you down to the dive site. The only indication of it being a dive site is an old fashioned diving helmet sign on a post at the fork.

Facilities

There are toilets there but they are porta-loos. There are no showers or dive shop.

The quarry is effectively split up into 2 dive areas. The north site is the deeper part of the 2 and the entrance is next to the admin area. There is a kitting up/surface interval shelter there and it consists of one open iso-container. The 2nd dive site is at the south end of the quarry and again the kitting up/surface interval shelter consists of one open iso-container. The weather was very poor when we dived so the shelters got very busy.

The 'admin site' where you check-in and pay consists of 2 or 3 metal iso-containers near the quarry entrance. The fee is £10 per person and you will be asked to fill in a form asking for name, emergency contact and car registration. They also provide you with a map showing the main features of the site. Tea and coffee are provided from metal urns and the only food available is chocolate bars and crisps.

The Cromhall website mentions air re-fills but we didn't see any evidence of that. A couple of the iso-containers were closed when we arrived so the air re-fill station may have been in one of those.

Parking

Parking is ample at both ends of the quarry. There is no parking attendant so it is a case of find your own space. As with most quarries, the roads and car parks consist of rough stones, mud and pot-holes.

The quarry

The quarry itself is approximately 9 ½ acres of water and the maximum depth is about 20m (north end). The water is reasonably clear and the bottom consists mainly of sand, silt and green weed but there are a lot of large and small boulders from the quarry works. As always it is very easy to kick the silt up but it does settle again quite quickly.

There are vertical quarried walls underneath the water and the dive staff advised us to stay at least 3 metres away from them as rock falls are common.

The entrance/exit point at the north end of the quarry is by a pontoon floating in 15m. We didn't dive at this end but there is a Volvo car and a cabin cruiser in about 20m. We dived the south end which consists of a low gradient beach which gives you a very gradual descent. At this end there are 2 iso-containers sunk as training platforms; the first platform at a depth of 7m and the second in about 10-11m. Further out there is a Catamaran in 16m and an HS-125 aircraft cockpit in about 15m. The Catamaran is interesting initially but it has been largely stripped down. The aircraft cockpit is very small and again is stripped of absolutely everything. It even has a 'Do Not Enter' sign due to the tangled, sharp debris which resulted from everything being torn out.

The only aquatic life we saw was a couple of small Greater Crested Newts but the dive web site does mention the presence of Koi Carp.

Safety

The form you sign at the entrance contains a Health & Safety brief and there is a risk assessment available on demand. There is a safety boat available but it was broken on the day we were there. There is no staff cover at the south dive site as all the staff accommodation/shelter is at the north end. Around the quarry edges are a few life belt rings on posts but I didn't see any telephones or anything to attract attention from the south end if there was a problem.

Now the astonishing bit! The Cromhall website tells you that all divers have to be out of the water at 3pm in winter. Julie and I were out of the water by 1245 and were the only divers left at the south end. We packed up the dive kit and drove round to the admin site just after 1pm only to find that it was all closed and locked up. Furthermore, the iron gates to the quarry were also locked therefore we were stuck! We went back to the admin site to look for a telephone number or some sort of contact details but finding none, I had to climb the fence and go for help at the truck yard. They eventually managed to track down one of the dive staff who arrived half an hour later to let us out. Yes they had closed early for the day and to make matters worse, he was totally unconcerned about what had happened and even found it funny. It turns out that they don't check to see if the divers have left before they close up. They just assume! This has obvious safety implications. If one of us got into difficulties then there would have been no way to summon help except to the emergency services via our mobile phones. Worse still, had we both got into difficulties then we would probably only have been found next morning and only when someone realises that our car has been there overnight.

Conclusion

The dive site is reasonably new and has a lot of potential. It can be improved over time but there is a lot of work to be done. From a training point of view it is good as the water is clear and there are 2 solid training platforms in relatively shallow water. From a 'tourism' point of view it is good for one or two dives but needs more objects. The safety measures or lack thereof, was what worried us the most. We were put in a dangerous situation but I'm hoping that the staff has learned from it and has tightened their procedures. I have written to them for an explanation and am eagerly awaiting a reply!