

# Ystervark Grot (Porcupine Cave)

*Author: Anthony Hitchcock (2003)*

## **Introduction**

Ystervark Grot (Porcupine Cave) is situated on the western end of Kleintuinkop (little Garden on the hill) on Kalk Bay Mountain. The entrance is a small vertical crack at the base of the cliffs overlooking Silvermine valley. John Meyer records in his diary that he painted the name on the 27th February 1934, but it is most probable that it was known earlier than that. The cave owes its name to the porcupines that used to shelter in the cave.

On the 24th May 1937 Meyer and Mr. Hurlingh explored the cave. Meyer records the following:

‘We explored Ystervarkgrot and found three passages and several chambers; also some bats and a few porcupine quills, but no porcupines.’

Meyer mentions re-opening the entrance some years later. The farmer apparently blocked the entrance because it housed a family of porcupines that were raiding his farm. His diary reads as follows:

‘06/04/40 - Phil Hitchcock and I went up at 10.50 a.m. We went to Ystervarkgrot, where we first had lunch. Then, after a short rest we worked for about half an hour removing the stones from the entrance. The heavier stones (about a score) we dragged away by means of a rope. Then we entered the grotto. There were several passages. We counted about a dozen chambers. It was not always easy to decide whether we had two chambers or two parts of one chamber. We did not see any porcupines; but Phil thought he saw fresh footprints of them.’

‘18/04/40 "Mr Hurlingh and I went up the mountain and lunched at Ystervarkgrot. After a rest we explored the grotto. I painted the letters A to N in the different chambers."

## **Description**

The cave has a narrow entrance in the form of a vertical crack, which leads into a low, small and dry chamber. The passage continues as a crawl until one finds a larger chamber in which it is possible to stand up. This is where John Meyer's visitor's book is painted on the wall. The passage is divided into a four-way junction at this point. A 20-meter dry sandy passage continues straight into the mountain. The left-hand passage dips a little and ends in a low and wide passage 15meters long. The right hand passage is the most interesting as it carries a small streamlet in winter. The water collects from drips in the main chamber and flows down the passage often undercutting the right hand wall. After

20m the passage turns sharply to the right and continues for another 10m, but is very low and difficult to get into.

### ***Survey and Exploration***

Dave Eckles and I surveyed the cave during June 1980. Our exploration revealed a low, narrow downward sloping passage beyond and to the left of the main chamber, but it was blocked with sand. This was excavated revealing a low wide passage 15meters long. The ceiling is flat and contains rounded pebbles cemented into the rock.

The right hand passage was surveyed as far as the constriction where it continued under the right wall. We noticed that a small stream carries silt beyond this constriction. The floor was excavated until we could squeeze through into a very low sandy stream passage. This continues for 10 meters after which it becomes too constricted to progress any further. An attempt was made to find where the stream rises, but without success. The cave system is about 120 meters long.

### ***Fauna***

Porcupines used to live in the cave before the farmer from the Silvermine farm blocked it up. No porcupines have been recorded in this cave since then. Meyer also records finding bats. Cave crickets and many spiders.