

Dachstien Expedition

What Have You Got Pot

By

Alex Ritchie



Depth 750m *Currently*

Date trip started: 12/08/2010

People present – Me (Alex Ritchie), Alex Teagle (*The A team.*)
Sam and Richard – Second Team
Joel (Expedition Leader) & H

Objective For the 'A' Team, the objective was to Retrieve a tackle sack full of rope from had been left on an earlier trip that Milky (Daniel Jackson) had been on. The bag was at a depth of approximately 300 metres, which although is not the bottom, it is still deeper than any Yorkshire Cave. Sam and Richards objective was to see how far they could get to see if they could help with re-rigging later on in the Expedition. Joel & Hs was to continue with the re-rigging of the cave.

Weather – Patchy cloud on entrance, damp fog on exit.

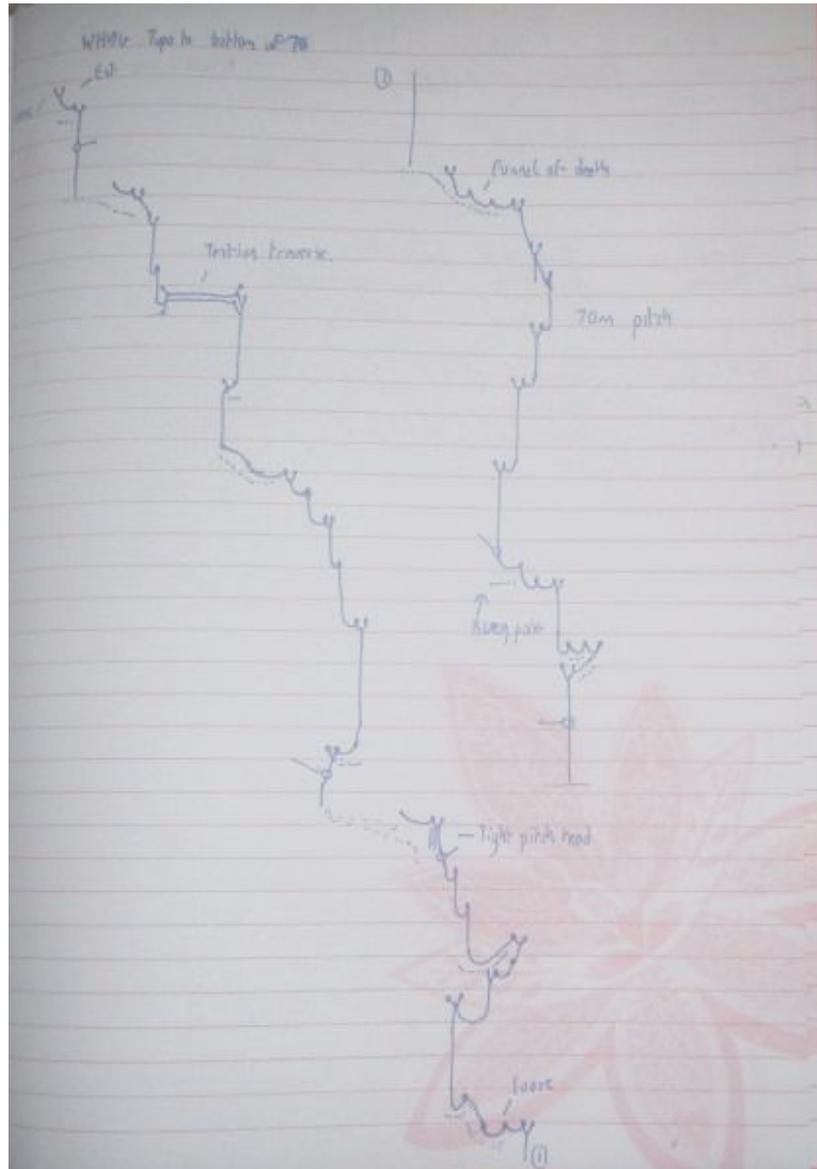
Grade – Not got one, would be a 5 in Yorkshire, for depth and reasons should become clear.

There is also a separate audio file : [Flood Pulse Audio](#) (1.5Mb WMA)

Report

After several earlier trips down into this cave saw an early abandonment due to weather as well as stories of a few hours spent shivering in a Kishu (A large tent like survival bag); we were reluctant to say the least to go down this cave. But this cave was the main objective for the expedition and I had to go down to at least once to see what it was all about.

I have had plenty of practice brushing up my SRT skills, I had done many a cave and completed an SRT aerial assault courses 100 metres down in a cave called Orkan. I had yet however not got to go deep and spend very long underground at a time. So when Milky suggested a retrieval mission to retrieve a bag full of de-rigged rope he left, I thought either do it now or never.



Rigging of the cave from memory, many re-belays and Y hang and this is only about half way down the pitches!

It was time to go down, we all milled around at the entrance for clues of what the weather might do (No way to really get a good forecast in the mountains), when finally we decided to go for it. Joel and H shot off down first not to be seen again for a long while, followed by Sam and Richard and then me and Miss Teagle.



Down the entrance pitch and second pitch we reach the first landmark of this vertical adventure, a tension traverse. This consists of two ropes tied tightly to 4 anchors on either end. The way to cross this obstacle is to clip in both cows' tails and pull your self along on your arms, trying to forget the vast emptiness that lies below.

Once past this a steady decent down a short pitch series brings us down to the first major shaft. The rope then spirals us down past rebelay after rebelay until finally after what seems like forever we reached solid floor and can get off the rope although briefly.

Rigging, somewhere down the shaft

The next obstacle/landmark is known as the tight pitch-head. The pitch-head is not amazingly tight just a little awkward, though for a moment I thought I was back in Yorkshire. This feeling was soon dispelled as at the bottom of this pitch is where the cave really opens up to massive proportions. A large boulder floor chamber soon gives way to a great and sudden rift in the floor, where I can see the other's lights twinkle like stars in a night sky in the distance below me. The roof is now far above and out of sight as, is the left and right continuation of this massive feature.

Follow the rope along the rift and you are soon at the first of a Y-hangs and re-belays that take you to the bottom of this great rift. Once at the bottom a loose and wet traverse leads us on to the imaginatively named 75 metre pitch, which is another great rift. About two thirds of my way down this beast I find that Sam had, had enough (being relatively new at SRT) so therefor he, Richard and Teagle waited with him while I descended the rest of the pitch to retrieve the bag. My depth now was over 300 metres.

Unfortunately once at the bottom I failed to find the bag, instead I found 100s of metres of knotted rope. I had no bag to put it in as I expected one to be there so after a quick look around I ascended part way up the pitch to where the others had now set up a temporary shelter.



With the others not wanting to leave the comfort of the shelter I was sent up first and told they were not coming up until I got off the pitch head due to loose rock. I was about 150ft above the shelter when I noticed the ever present distant sound of water, got louder and louder and louder and within seconds it was now a roar. Immediately there where shouts from below as well as three whistle blasts indicating I need to come back down, as if they had to tell me.

Sam in a relaxed/bored pose

As I was about to descend more water began to crash down this time right beside me. It was a louder deafening roar, the freezing breeze brought with it a fear and panic. That fear seemed to penetrate my very soul, and I wondered will the next waterfall be directly on me and drown me?

I have been doing SRT for a while and have done a heck of a lot of SRT already in Dachstien. I have also already been down the pitch only a short time ago without effort or struggle, but I was in fear stricken state. I could not work out which was the up rope when switching to descending, gear. I focused enough to work out that puzzle, only to get tangled in the next Y hang, due to my haste and lack of concentration. Safety was now so near. It was as though all my training and experience was for nothing. I finally battled my way to relative safety of the shelter. I collected my thoughts, then both Teagle and Richard embraced me partly for comfort and partly for warmth.



With that drama over we then had to play the waiting game. Thankfully we all had food and dry spare cloths. Water was an issue because you could not get anywhere near thundering falls without getting soaked by spray/ Ironic really, water was everywhere but not a drop to drink. Getting wet and cold in an environment where the temperature is just one or two degrees above zero, would cause hypothermia to be sure, if you are unable to exit as we were.

Teagle left, Richard centre.

Four hours later after sheltering and telling stories the water seemed to go down enough for us to try and make an exit. We got ready to move both mentally and physically and just as I was about to get on the rope another roar of water came through, so we bedded down for the night sleeping on tackle sacks and the like. A further restless and a cold wait was had by me, as holes in my over-suit ensured that my legs remained freezing. We were eventually met by Joal and H who had been sheltering deeper in the system, the time now was around 6am. Water levels, were low enough to make an exit.

Prussiking up I could not get the flood pulse out of my mind, but as soon as I got above the 75 metre pitch my mood changed I was as happy as a kite and sang my way up much to the annoyance of everyone else.



Near the surface now just a pitch short of the traverse, water again began to begin flooding in but nothing as bad as before, we simply pushed through it knowing getting soaked when we are near the surface would not cause any problems. We exited at 9am to some warm soup from the assembled internal Dachstein rescue party as Me and Teagle, where well past our call out on Friday the 13th.

Trip time was 16 hours, when it was meant to only be 8. The moral of the story; well WHYG Pot should not be underestimated, although an accurate forecast is impossible, you should always be prepared for the worst. Luckily we were. We had shelter, we had food and we had warm clothing, so at the end of a day an adventure and not a catastrophe.

Our Expedition self Rescue party on the surface gearing up to go down



Back at camp, Camelot