

FOUL POT

More fun than 'foul'..

Date : 21st September 2013

Members Present : Don, Alex Dan, Sharman (Chris)

I figured I would write up the trip report this time instead of Alex, otherwise people might think that Alex soloed the pot while Dan, Sharman and myself sat outside waiting for him.

A five and a half hour journey to the end of a 700 feet pot and back again.

Per usual, the group met up at Inglesport at 9am. After a hearty breakfast for some, we headed out and drove to Dale Head next to Fountains Fell where we got changed and kitted up. A 20 minute walk along the farm track brought us to a very noticeable double bend in the road, at which point the road crosses an obvious small valley. Changing course we headed down the valley, meeting a rock wall after 50 metres or so. Climbing over the wall and continuing along the valley (more of a depression really), we immediately ran into Echo Pot. FOUL Pot was very easy to find from this point. You just continue in a straight line from the wall to Echo Pot for roughly 100 metres. FOUL is in a small shakehole and simple to identify due to the corrugated iron and rotten wooden planks covering its entrance.

At the bottom of the 4m entrance shaft, which is easily free-climbable (but care must be taken because of loose rocks), we headed through a short sideways crawl with Alex leading the way. This brought us to a small chamber and the beginning of a flat-out crawl (roughly 10m long or so) through small pools of mucky water. At the end of this is a short climb up leading into another small chamber. A short drop on the other side of the chamber led into a narrowish rift crawl for a few metres before dropping down into another small chamber. From this point we climbed down an in situ wooden ladder several metres into a larger chamber. A climb on the opposite side of the chamber under a large rock and then over another led us to the second pitch (the first being the one with the ladder). This pitch held us up for a bit as we had trouble rigging the rope to avoid rope rub (a problem on all of the pitches). The deviation from a stal boss on the far side of the shaft, which would have solved the problem, was nowhere to be seen, nor was there anything else suitable to use. After a bit of faffing and discussion between us about how to proceed, Sharman managed to find a decent flake that we could attach a sling to about 4m down. This avoided rope rub on the lower part of the pitch, but it was still somewhat of an issue at the top as the rope was mere millimetres from the sharp edge. Thank goodness we were using my rope though, so no one else had to worry about their gear getting damaged or destroyed.

The second pitch is large and very roomy. The descent reminds me a lot of the fourth pitch in Bull Pot, and is about the same height as well. At the bottom is where the real fun began, the dreaded narrow rift of doom. At least that's the impression one got from reading the TSG trip report. In actuality the rift wasn't difficult at all. It's basically a sideways crawl/shuffle. The difficult part was getting six (yes six!) tackle bags through it. Someone (Dan?) came up with the ingenious idea of tying each of the bags to the 50m rope that Alex brought and dragging them through. This worked out quite well except for the fact that once on the other side of the crawl (which is roughly 7 or 8 metres long), the rift continues. There's really only enough space for 3 people to stand comfortably (though there is space to turn around) before you have to continue through the final section of the rift, which is a sideways crawl at a slight uphill angle for several metres. Again, neither of the rift crawls was particularly difficult; it just took time to get all the bags through.

At the end of the rift we found an in situ knotted rope which led several metres down to the floor of another chamber. The exit from this chamber was through a crawl that lasted roughly 5 minutes at most, a combination of hands and knees, sideways, and mostly flat-out crawling. This led to a twisting canyon streamway passage (with very little water). After several minutes of walking and traversing (towards the end) we reached the fourth/big pitch, which Sharman rigged. The only complication here was the deviation at the top, before you even get on the rope, which required a very long sling and was required careful positioning to avoid further rope rub further down the pitch. The pitch never opens out and has the same shape all the way down, roughly the size of a living room or bedroom. At the bottom Sharman led the way on to the fifth pitch, which immediately followed the fourth and could be rigged using the same rope. This pitch was only a few metres deep and continued to follow the stream passage.

After another couple of minutes we reached the final sixth pitch. Sharman really f*cked up the rigging here because he's a madman. I'm convinced that he would abseil down the main shaft of Gaping Gill on shoe string if that's all there was to rig with. This pitch requires a wide y-hang. Sharman and Alex, however, decided to rig the rope from an obvious anchor on the left hand wall at shoulder level and an anchor at floor level. This pitch was also technical in that you have to position the rope very carefully over a very narrow rift, which is the way down. Sharman went first, followed by Alex, who put in a deviation about 10m down (the shaft is only about 13m high or so. As Dan and I watched Sharman and Alex descend we decided to look for the other anchor as we assumed the one at floor level was not the correct one. After about one and a half seconds of looking Dan managed to find the surreptitious anchor - it was located at exactly the same height as the anchor on the left hand wall, only it was on the right hand wall instead. Who would have imagined? Dan reconfigured the rigging, then descended, then I reconfigured it as well before descending. At the bottom of this pitch is what is probably the biggest room in the cave - about 40 feet high and slightly less in length and width. A few short climbs down from here take you to the sump.

The trip out was uneventful and much quicker than that on the way in. The only really memorable moment - at least for me - was when Dan decided to kick down a few rocks and some mud clumps just before I started ascending the big pitch. Some of the mud managed to hit my helmet. Better luck next time, Dan! Otherwise, the trip out was uneventful.

Once out we headed to Helwith Bridge, had a drink, and headed home.

We all agreed to give this cave a Grade 4, unless you add in 6 tackle bags, in which case it becomes a Grade 5.

Don Miller

[A Black Rose Caving Club trip report.](#)