

HANGMAN'S HOLE

On a ropey knife edge amongst the looseness!

Date : 22nd October 2011

Present : Alex Ritchie, Chris Scaife

Weather : Cold, clear, windy; had been raining during the week.

We fancied a fairly hard trip this weekend, and the best option, given that only 2 of us were caving, we had limited rope and the weather wasn't super dry seemed to be Hangman's Hole on Ingleborough Allotment. Meeting in an unusually busy Inglesport cafe, we managed to waste at least an hour eating and buying tackle (actually maybe that wasn't wasted time) before driving up to the layby near South House Farm, just past Selside. We asked for permission at the farm and received a very friendly confirmation that access was permitted, then headed off up the hill, weaving our way past Three Peaks walkers, passing the large shakehole of Sulber Pot, which has a rickety ladder leading down and some furniture in the pot. Alex thinks there may have been a wedding down there once.

Hangman's Hole entrance is in a large shakehole and begins as a short climb onto some loose rocks. We descended these loose rocks to find a horrible-looking squeeze, which we both looked at for a while, before the slender figure of Alex Ritchie slid gracefully down and into a small chamber with room to stand before the rightly-named Unprintable Passage. I then pushed the tackle sacks down to him, through the squeeze and wriggled through myself. I found this hole quite tight, but we both got through OK. I can't imagine a rescue from beyond this would be much fun though. Unprintable Passage is a flat-out crawl through water, which is very narrow at the start. I had my helmet in one hand, tackle sack in the other and my face spluttering away in the muddy water. The very narrow bit is only a few metres long though, and after 30m we were at the head of a pitch called Bridge Pot, which is not part of the normal route, but apparently leads to a very tight squeeze. We traversed around this pitch head, then another part of the shaft, then crawled through some deep mud to reach our first pitch, Pedestal Pot.

We rigged Pedestal Pot using 2 slings around knobs of rock, then used a deviation, which was pointless with hindsight. The next pitch (The Slot) is just down a short slope and we rigged this one by tying our rope around a big,



solid stalagmite at the pitch head. This pitch is quite narrow and leads down to a flake with the fantastic name, 'The Spanish Donkey'. Climbing over this, a squeeze leads to a climb down onto some frighteningly loose rock overlooking Gallows Chamber. After a good look round, most of which was spent shaking our heads in disbelief at the instability of this pitch head, we rigged a Y-hang using a sling around a large, protruding rock on the left and a stalagmite just beyond this, reached by flat-out crawling over the top of the protrusion. This makes the 8m pitch quite wet, but at least it was stable. This does, however, cause us to consider one of life's ultimate questions: is it better to drown or fall to your death? Gallows Chamber leads down to a very uninviting hole (The Collar), which is rather worryingly the start of the next pitch, The Executioner.

We put a sling around a stalagmite high above us as a backup to the hang from the chockstone. The pitch head is awkward and we both got bits stuck at various times. My cow's tail got completely wedged in a crack at the top and I had to cut it to free myself (*using Alex's knife*). Once these first few metres are passed, the rest of the descent is easy, except for the horrendously loose, gigantic boulders levitating at the side of the pitch, and the realisation that all of the difficulties so far passed have to be reversed. From the foot of the pitch, there isn't much more to the cave.



Northern Caves describes reversing The Executioner as the crux of the cave. Not many caves are given such an honour as a crux in these guides, so we were a little concerned, although both of us had already had to reverse the tight part several times in order to loosen gear that was stuck – Alex's hand jammer and my (now deceased) cow's tail (*not forgetting the hand jammer that got stuck to the 35m rope resulting in gear swapping up the remaining pitches!*). We both struggled, and both for the same reason – our Pantins. We made the return journey fairly quickly, all the way baffled at how to get our tackle through the tight squeeze near the entrance. In the end, we tied rope to it, I went out first carrying this rope (the squeeze is possibly easier on the way out), then I dragged and Alex shoved and we got both tackle sacks through. We actually made it out into the last few moments of daylight and headed off down the hill in the very cold wind. When almost back, Alex shouted, 'Oh fuck!' and started to run back up the hill. He'd left his car keys at the cave entrance.

This is an interesting cave that is basically just a big rift full of jammed and not-very-well-jammed-at-all boulders. It's got tight squeezes, one of which is at a pitch head, loose rock, an intimidating flat-out crawl and no bolts of any kind. I can say with some confidence that my face, on exiting, was the muddiest it has ever been.

I learnt several things on this trip:

- I'm not very good at judging how tight a squeeze is just by looking at it
- Carry a knife
- Pantins can cause lots of trouble at tight pitch heads

Chris Scaife (couple of edits by Alex, in italics)

Photos – Alex Ritchie

A Black Rose Caving Club trip report.