

KNACKER TRAPPER HOLE

Alternative round trip..

Date : 1st March 2014

Present : Chris Scaife, Chris Sharman, Mike Skyrme, Alex Ritchie, Don Miller

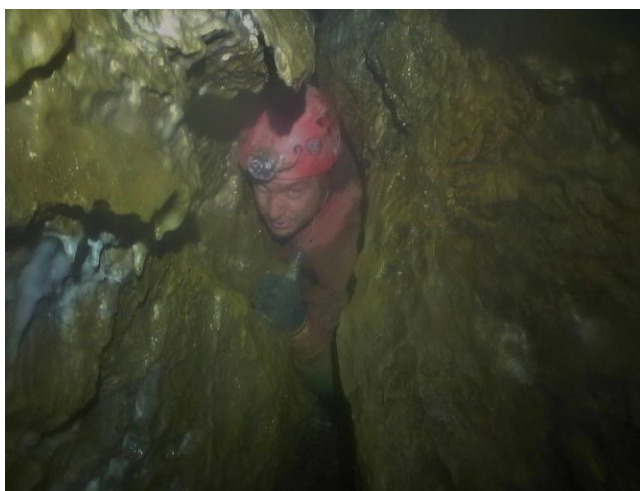
Weather : ..

Two versions of the days events:

A brave team of five, two of whom had had a disappointment in this cave recently, headed over to the world's greatest Grade 3 cave, Knacker Trapper Hole. Don lept straight into the oil drum entrance, raring to go, determined to get further than ever before. The cave is fairly narrow at the start, with flat out crawling and a few squeezes leading to the easily free-climbable first pitch, which is followed immediately by the second pitch - a bit awkward at the top, but nobody really struggled - for which we rigged a handline. Next up was the 14m long Bosch Rift. I went through first, facing the right wall. About halfway through, you stand up to get over a boulder, then squeeze back down to floor level, and at the end the rift goes upwards and round a corner to glory. Mike followed without much ado, then Sharman came through helmetless and he'd dropped his tackle sack into the rift, but basically OK. Mike then employed his special skills to free the seemingly lost tackle sack, before hollering to Dr Miller, who ain't no Hollaback girl.

Don started going through, then realised he was just too damn handsome, and having him in the lower reaches of the cave would be unfair on the rest of us, so after little over an hour of soul searching he very selflessly and courageously opted to head out alone. Xander kept calm and slithered through afterwards, a Slytherin to Don's Huffelpuff.

We put a frankly unnecessary handline on the third pitch, and once into the magnificent University Challenge, rigged the fourth pitch but did not descend and instead headed left for an esoteric round trip. This involved a quite scary climb up to the top of the rift followed by a crawl-traverse into a large chamber, loose rocks everywhere in this section. After a bit of sightseeing, we headed through the window into Loop Chamber, where loopy Mr Sharman stood on a great big boulder and everything seemed OK until it crashed beneath his feet. Fortunately it did not entirely block the way on, which was into a hading rift and then on to Veg Inlet. We stared at this part of the cave in disbelief as there were so many vulnerable formations. I can't imagine many people have done this trip.



For some reason, Xander ploughed on ahead and, rather than rejoining the main rift, decided to get himself stranded down a stupid hole, then asked the three survivors to get him out. We got back into University Challenge by a frighteningly loose traverse, then headed back to our fourth pitch rope, onto which we had rather auspiciously attached Xander's ascending gear (like me, he foolishly kept his harness on for the entire trip) and a rope.

While Mike found a free climb to avoid the fourth pitch, Sharman and I returned to rescue the intrepid/idiotic explorer from his impending doom. We all headed back out after that, enjoying being on solid ground again and Bosch Rift tried to claim a few more tackle sacks but we got everything through in the end. From last time I was in Knacker Trapper I remembered ascending the second pitch being the hardest part of the cave, but we all got through that without any issues and were soon out into the last rays of sunlight. Our hearts skipped a beat when we got back to the cars as we thought Don had waited for us; but alas, it was just another blue car-owning buffoon. Our hero had gone.

Chris Scaife
Photos – Alex Ritchie

The second version of events:

The round trip complete, all that was left was to cross the traverse and get back to the 4th pitch for the rope etc. We had not completely ruled out bottoming the place, though it was looking increasingly unlikely. Mike volunteered me to go on ahead.

I looked for this so called obvious traverse on the right, but finding just a big drop (The actual way on was up a slope, before you reach the traverse) I scouted about. I spotted a sling hand-line to the left and what looked like something that could be traversed below it, so I thought this must be it then, it probably swings to the right out of view. Why else would there be a sling hand line here?

Carefully I lowered my self down the sling to where the passage widened out, it was quite nerve-racking but nothing too much worse than that climb in to Toyland. But then I came to the realisation the sling did not reach the floor, far from it. "no issue" I thought, "It's a traverse I will just step on those ledges". I rested my feet onto the ledges and watched them crumble away and cascade down into the stream far below. Still holding onto the sling I shouted to Shaman who watched my descent "I am very scared at the moment" when he asked if I was okay. I wondered what to do next. With nothing to stand my legs dangling uselessly below me I decided instead of trying to climb back up, to swing to a more substantial ledge further away which would not break, still thinking at this point that this was the right way.

On the ledge, which was sloping at best, I realised this went nowhere, the traverse ended in open space. So not wanting to return the way I had come and the sling being quite far away from me now, I decided for the safe option, I shouted for a rope and my ascending gear. A fall the wrong side of Bosch rift would be a huge issue for rescuers.

I realised once my heart rate slowed that kitting up in this precarious position would be quite difficult, so eventually I persuaded myself to down climb onto a much larger ledge directly under the sling 15ft below.

After waiting some time, I believe they had issues locating the 4th pitch where my SRT kit lay, my hero's returned with my gear (well Mike's) and my trusty rope and I got my self out. The rest of the

trip was incident free except Sharman managed to get yet another bag stuck if the rift then his helmet, doing the last half of the rift blind I assume! So after he rescued me, I rescued the bag and his helmet, fair deal?

So this may have put me off solo caving a bit. On my own I would not have any mates to fetch my gear, but then again on my own I would not have gone down there in the first place!

We all have our demons Don's is going head first into things, mine is in-situ hand-lines. Hate the things, often get me into trouble.

Alex Ritchie

A final note: a couple of members have suggested the undertaking of the round trip should be discouraged and either best visited from either end or taped off. It's fragile, take extra care..

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