

MEREGILL HOLE

Hell yeah!

17th February 2008

People present - Pete Dale, Rob Santus

Weather: Bright and sunny with a chill in the air

Another weekend another trip and this time it was a return visit after 7 years for me and a virgin trip for Rob! Arriving at the lay-by just past the Hill inn at 10am we were surprised to find it more or less empty of cars and on such a nice day as well. Once parked up we set about sorting the ropes out for this epic trip. I remember way back when we had 3 or 4 tackle sacks of rope for a trip of this scale but now, with this new shoe lace stuff, we can fit all of the 126m's of rope into 2 bags (Amazing!). Meregill with just 2 people and 2 bags oh how times have changed!

Even though it's a good 1 ½ mile walk to the entrance it's relatively flat and with the weather being clear and sunny the views were well worth it. Looking out across to Whernside over the frosty fields and to Ribbleshead viaduct and beyond was worth the walk in itself. Arriving at the entrance in good time we hopped over the wall to see if it was possible to enter via the Mere as I had never been in that way, and after locating the 'P' anchor and tree for rigging a quick glance down the hole revealed a very dry bottom. We decided that I would rig the Mere and Rob would have a go at 'Little Meregill' entrance (Oh Dear!) Rigging for the Mere entrance was straight forward and easy to give a fantastic 17m free hang to the bottom landing right next to the usually sumped crawl into Meregill itself. Once I was at the bottom Rob set off to enter by Little Meregill, I made my way through the passage to find the bottom of Aven entrance and then on over a deep pool to deposit the bags at the top of the 2nd pitch. I then made my way back the 30ft or so to where little Meregill enters, I waited and waited and with the occasional shout out to Rob I got no reply so I wondered if Rob had been finally defeated by a cave? After a few more minutes I decided to go back to the bottom of the 1st pitch and see if he would turn up there since he had no srt kit with him.

Sure enough no sooner than I had got to the bottom of the 1st pitch Robs little head appeared at the top and requested some gear for him to get down. Once within talking distance he told me that he could not make his shoulders fit through the passage and had to call it a day on that entrance. (Finally He has been defeated!!) Once both of us were through the crawl I showed Rob the point at which he should have entered and he then proceeded to investigate how far he actually was from me since he said that he could hear me shouting. With his needs satisfied we set about getting to the bottom of this monster cave.

Again as usual there are CNCC 'P' anchors everywhere so rigging is easy with the only hard bit in deciding which of them you are going to use! Once I had made my mind up the pitch passed without problem and we were both soon in the stream way heading towards the canyon pitches. I thought it only fair that Rob should rig from now on so he can experience the sheer size of the canyon and was he impressed!! Having been a few times it is still an impressive place and always will be in my book. A couple of free hanging re-belays and a traverse saw us soon at the bottom and now faced with two deep pools to get past. Luckily the rift is narrow enough to be able to traverse them if somewhat undignified in appearance to onlookers. A couple of small climbs and the 5th pitch was soon reached Rob started rigging and we chatted away about various things but what was noted was the complete lack of water in the cave we had already missed out the deviation/re-belay on the 2nd pitch and now at the 5th pitch the last re-belay at the start of the rift was not required and upon getting to the bottom I noticed how warm it felt with no draft blowing in fact it was very pleasant to say the least. We then made our way to the last pitch, and reading the Elliot guide book on the way up here, Rob had noted that it said that in low water the last pitch which consisted of two 6m drops could be climbed by the hairy brigade club so in true BRCC spirit that is exactly what we did although we did rig a hand line for the first climb. The deep pools were past cautiously and

then all that lay ahead of us was the 700m+ of passage to the sump.

Now after all the impressiveness of the cave so far you expect the main drain to follow suit and to start with it does. A clean washed winding passage similar to County pots lower reaches (Note CLEAN washed!) was followed until an inlet on the left 'Torrent passage' was met. Now having read the guide book the night before this was the water entering from Black Shiva pot. Past the torrent the stream meandered on through a couple of pools and small cascades until it turned into stooping and then the inevitable crawling. Upon reaching an 11m rope labelled as TSG the passage became hands and knees crawling over cobbles with the water heading off to the left which Rob followed and gave up after it became a flat out struggle over cobbles. The other way soon reached a static sump and this we decided was the turning point of our trip.

Heading out I had taken the lead and was very impressed by all the flood debris festooned about the place and in some instances fresh green material as well! We were not worried though since it was clear blue skies and hadn't rained all week. Now I don't know what came over me but on the way out as we approached Torrent passage I had an urge to climb up and explore it? Rob climbed, chimneyed it first and he helped me up since my wellies were past their best (a bit like my undersuit!) We then explored the passage which again was a fine walking passage up until it lowered to a cobbled crawl. Back tracking we headed to the climb again and then back up the main drain to the pitches.

Successfully passing the two deep pools and climbing the 6m cascades (I'm sure I have climbed the lower one before.) we soon reached the bottom of the 5th pitch. Informing Rob that I would de-rig the cave he happily shot off up the rope to wait for me at the top. It didn't take long to de-rig it and we were both soon past the two deep pools and at the bottom of the canyon pitches. We both free climbed the bottom pitch and then having derigged the rope from the pitch we bypassed, Rob again shot off up to wait for me at the top. De-rigging the canyon passed without incident and with every re-belay I passed the bottom soon faded into the blackness below, not even my light reached the bottom! At the top we both hauled the bags up and with Rob taking the full bag he made his way to the end of the traverse while I packed the other bag.

Soon enough we were back at the 2nd pitch and with Rob at the re-belay ledge he pulled the bags up and then made his way to the top ready to pull the bags up again. With a bit of hassle getting the rope down to me past the ledges I was soon on my way up and reaching the top Rob made for the exit and I again packed the rope into the bag. Bag packed, I then made my exit through the dry sump and into daylight again. The top of the entrance pitch was basked in warm sun while down here it was gloomy. I left the bag at the bottom of the pitch and then made my way down following the stream to look at the Mere but alas it was not to be. The Mere was nowhere to be seen it had drained completely! All that was left was a few branches wedged high up in the walls and about 60 tons of soil banked up either side of the stream. I then made my way back to the pitch and Rob's little head bobbed out over the top and said he would pull the tackle bag up, I then made my way up the pitch admiring the view as I did so. Nearing the top I unfortunately prusacked head first into the tree above and jarred my neck!

All the rope packed Rob decided to have a look at the Aven entrance while I looked at Little Meragill. We then had a pleasant stroll back to the van not without mishap though since due to my knackered wellies I slipped and landed hard on the frozen ground! Bloody typical that isn't it we had both bottomed a 180m deep pot hole without any problems yet on the walk back to the car I knackered my already knackered back up even more!!

Both of us changed Rob supplied a hot cup of coffee and the fabled Huntsman's pie which has to be seen to be believed!! Stopping at the Horse and Farrier on the way home for a quiet drink in front of a real fire rounded the day off nicely! All in all an excellent trip and in dry conditions like today It does not warrant its grade 4 more like a grade 2.

Pete Dale

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