

QUAKING POT (to the Crux)

I am “Quaking” in my Crampons (if I had any)

A YSS and BRCC trip (BRCC because I was there).

Date: 28th November 2010

People present: Ian Walker (YSS), Richard Rae (YSS) and of course me, Alex Ritchie (YSS & BRCC)

Weather: Clear cold and sunny on entrance, blizzard on exit.

Grade: 5, My Grade Same, 5.

Many caving books over time regard this trip to be one of the hardest trips in the Dales and it was about time we found out why. So Ian organised a trip with Richard and me to go down the hole.

The walk up was fantastic it was a clear and crisp morning as the land slowly awoke from its 5 below slumber. We stumbled our way up the icy path and almost immediately found the Quaking Shake hole(s), only we could not find the actual cave. First I explored a hole where under some loose boulders in the southern shake hole. This led to a deep pitch. *This possibly was an old tackle-lowering route into Quaking, it was quite spacious however, so I do not know why a full descent could not be made?* I explored the other shake hole finding lots of ice but nothing else.

Turns out that I was wrong to dismiss the second hole as Ian looked 5 minutes later and spotted the upper entrance, which I was practically sat in front of at one point. The reason I did not find the lower entrance that I was looking for because nature had built a wall of ice over the entrance leaving all but a small gap too tight to squeeze through and too solid to smash through.

We entered the upper entrance. A short easy crawl followed by a short climb into a chamber meets the first pitch. All quite tame up to now. Dropping down this pitch small section of squeezing through a rift is encountered that continues for a few metres to the second pitch with an awkward take off. With Ian busy rigging this pitch, I decided to go up stream just to see what lower entrance passage was like.

There was nothing too difficult, there was one slot squeeze but it was quite easy even with SRT kit on. I reached the ice blockage and jokingly pleading to be let out, alas no-one was listening and I don't think I could melt the ice by breathing on it. I turned around to go back down the entrance slope, and then my world went upside down, literally! As I had slipped on some ice on the entrance slope. I went arse over tit. I then spent the nice next 5 minutes saying ouch a lot due to a badly bruised buttock.

Anyway upon returning Ian had just finished rigging the pitch, so down I went. I struggled a little here, getting my arm in the right place to press the handle on my descender and opted to squash it against a rock to press it instead. At the re-belay the pitch opens out and a pleasant descent is made next to a dry waterfall to the chamber floor.

After this chamber the cave narrows to a rift where a combination of side ways crawling/side ways slithering at stream level brings you around a few corners to the next landmark. This landmark is the floor slot, with the obligatory welly wedged in it. For taller people this turned out to be awkward. It consists of a rather sharp left hand crawl over a small hole followed by another left hander on to a ledge. This then is followed immediately by right hander down a tight tube. Me and Ian did this part with our SRT kits on, not knowing if there would be room but there was plenty at the pitch head, the tube was a tight squeeze with kit on but would prove easy on return with no kit. I should also note that there is plenty of room at the 3rd pitch head to don SRT kit.

I was awe impressed by this part of the cave, I thought Quaking would be a tight & grotty little hole but this was a rather large chamber. The roof was some 50ft above and the floor could not be seen from the top.

I popped back into the rift to see if I could help Richard, who was struggling but unfortunately he could not get round the corner into over the slot, even with his SRT kit off. He then called it a day thinking of the return. I joined Ian down the pitch, I told Ian the news. This just left the brave two of us to face the darkness that is Quaking.

The route to the fourth pitch starts easy as bedding crawl above a rift on flat rock. Shortly however a calcite squeeze is met, the ledges all but disappear shortly after a hole is traversed over. The route now becomes a slippery fight to stay up. After much combat we reached and rigged the 4th pitch. This took me two attempts to descend. My first attempt I could not get my stop to well go and was forced to climb back up a few feet. I changed direction so that the pitch rope was on my left and tried again. Success I was down.

We now stripped off our SRT kits hung them up and went off to tackle the next section of the cave. This part was a lot like the previous section as it consisted a lot traversing with except there was tight bedding thrown in. This continued for about 5 minutes, until we reached the Quaking Famous three. That is “The SkyDive”, “Coitus Corner” and finally the “Crux”.

“The SkyDive”. To call it a sky dive is incorrect, as you do not need to sky dive this. Just drop your legs in and slither down. I found this very tight on my chest and had to breathe out to get down. Maybe because I was wearing 3 layers or maybe we came down at the wrong point but that was a lot tighter then I expected.

“Coitus Corner” This was extremely easy for Quaking not even really worth mentioning, suffice to say practically walked through most of it, well sort of leaned through.

“The Crux” Ian went first, made a lot of shuffling and verbal noises as he scrambled on through before reaching the stream at some point and turned around. We only planned to go to the Crux on this reconnaissance. I then gave it a go, I got into the Crux which is a no holds rift, I took the first left hander in this where I found round the corner, it was possible to drop my legs down and drop down to stream so I did. I popped back out and headed back the way I came. Speaking to Ian I found he went further along in the rift which is strange as, according to “Selected Caves of GB” the Crux ends where I dropped my legs down, all very confusing, where did Ian go?

If indeed the Crux ends where I stopped then it is not very difficult, except I can see it being hard if you are tired from going to the bottom. If the Crux did continue it looked and sounded

from Ian decidedly more difficult indeed. I also tried the alternative stream level route starting at Coitus but got completely wedged in the attempt, until I brute forced my way back out. This route I do not recommend unless you are the size of a small woman who weighs 6 stone.

Returning up the Sky Dive was, well to say difficult would be an understatement. It was not until I wriggled profusely, could I finally get vertical movement. Returning through the next section we mainly took the stream route. This was far easier than traversing and we were soon at the 4th pitch. We ascended the 4th pitch. This was not too bad getting off of, as it was a struggle going down. I dropped a glove while de-rigging, it seems it is not good trip unless I lose something, as I always seem to lose something in harder caves.

At the third pitch I again dropped something as this was deviation sling I decided I better go back down and get it. No deviation meant I got little soaking on the way back up. The way out was easy to the 3rd pitch, where I battled with a bolt that insisted it wanted to be loosened all the way with the spanner. I de-rigged the top one and emerged out-side to be greeted by a fully changed Ian and a blizzard!

A cold slippery slog was made down to the cars, in 5ft visibility. Once at the cars I attempted to drive away. This was successful but I found I had no control, on the steep downward sloping hill. After 50 metres and almost crashing I decided to park up and get a lift with Ian to the YSS hut, to spend the night there.

In the morning the snow had started to melt and so began a nine-mile walk, with no supplies (I had no supplies, as I did not plan for this walk). I first took the back roads, then decided cross the hills. Snow was a good source of water but it was my stomach that got the better of me and forced me down at Clapham for some much needed grub. I then walked the rest of the way along the A65. I was already aching thanks to Quaking, so thank-you snow for adding some to this walk but it was a very nice day at least.

Anyway in summary nothing with the exception of the Skydive for me was extremely difficult but the cave does take it out of you due to pure endurance of the rifts if nothing else! Underground time was about 6 hours, where an hour was spent messing around in the Crux and the Skydive. This trip also goes to show the adventure does not always finish when you are out of the cave.

Alex Ritchie

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