

RAT HOLE

Rattus coitus (part 1)

6th December 2008

People present - Rob Santus, Pete Dale, Daniel Jackson

Weather: cold and sunny with lots of snow on the ground

Having met at Bernie's at 9am, we decided to do a Rat Hole/Dihedral exchange trip. This was an occasion where it sounded a lot easier than it actually was: Dan would rig Dihedral and Pete and I would negotiate Rat Hole. One problem: on arrival at Clapham, Dan forgot his SRT kit. Oh dear me; an attempt to rent the said kit failed as no-one rents SRT kits, so it was decided for us all to walk up the hill to Rat and Dan to carry on up Ingleborough.



It transpired on the walk up the hill that Shelley had a bad feeling about the trip; the last time she had such a feeling was at Daren Cilau where Dunc and I had to rescue Pete's novice in a grade 5 cave! Such omens don't deter fools like Pete and myself, so onwards we went. Shagger Dan also kept us amused with his recent exploits.

On arrival at the entrance, the most noticeable thing was the water levels disappearing down Rat Hole Sink (although we were slightly unnerved by Clapham Beck also). We spent the next half an hour trying to un-dam the stream, so

that the water flowed down Gaping Gill instead. After much faffing about and discussions about doing an alternative trip down Dihedral, in we went.

The entrance is a tubular crawl, which lasts about 7-10 minutes, but isn't too bad. Soon a junction meets Rat Hole sink water on the left, which is confusing (it's on your right as you enter). A short passage meets the top of the first pitch followed quickly by the top of the huge shaft to the bottom. This apparently was the original route down Rat Hole, but the new way on is a pendulum to the left and into a very awkward traverse. There are no p-bolts in the traverse because the walls look unstable, so someone has put in a vertical rope instead. Bear in mind that below you is about a 100 metre drop – pretty scary stuff I can tell you.

With a particularly scared look on his face, Pete went first through the traverse, swinging on the in-situ rope like a petrified Tarzan to the other side. Here quickly follows the top of the big pitch.

Now we had a rough idea of the rigging but didn't have the description to hand as the woman in my local shop laminated Birks fell instead of Rat Hole – bugger! With this in mind, I forewarned Pete to be eagle-eyed with a view to deviating etc. About 10 minutes passed until eventually I heard a vague shout. This is unusual for Pete; I had to shout back three times to check that it was "rope free". It seemed that it was. I quickly descended to where he was and it was obvious why he was a little quiet – he was on the wrong side of the trouser flake. The trouble was, he was also bloody freezing because he standing in a wet and draughty bowl; it didn't take long for him to get back on the rope and go up like a scuttling rat. Once I got the rope free shout, I ascended. On the way up, I noticed the deviation on the far wall which would have brought us on the right side of the flake, so when I got to the top, I told Pete I was going down again to try and go the other side. I put one deviation in at -8 metres, followed by the one at -38 metres approx. and landed at the bottom "the amphitheatre". Allegedly there was a p-bolt on the wall, right in front of me here, but I didn't see it; this is probably because it was very wet and very cold. I did see the traverse to the last pitch but due to such high water volumes and Pete's reluctance to descend, I decided to leave post-haste. Once at

the top, I had the small matter of hoisting the tackle (145 metres of rope). After I'd pulled 20 or so metres it snagged. I tried to pull several times, but it stilled snagged. Bigger! Back on with the descender and down to the trouser flake (third time). The bag was well and truly caught; I sorted it out and headed out again up the 40 metre pitch. At the top, Pete was long gone so it was down to me alone to haul the tackle, de-rig, cross the tarzan swing traverse, further de-rig and exit via the rat hole entrance passage. Trouble was, I was knackered and the bag of 145 metres of rope plus 12 krabs and slings was seriously heavy. On exiting, such was my confusion, I missed the left turn for Rat Hole and went through to Rat Hole Sink. Pushing the bag through the high water level made me fear the worst because I thought I would struggle. Anyway, moments later, I saw daylight. I realized that it was Rat Hole Sink and thanked my lucky stars that we had sent so much water down GG. I struggled out through the flood debris, dragging the corpse-like bag behind me, gathered my thoughts, and scarpered of the fell towards Clapham. It was bollock freezing out there, with the sun going down, but after $\frac{3}{4}$ hour, I made it back, where Pete was waiting for me. Shelley was right to have a bad feeling about the trip because it was a hard time down there given the conditions. A return trip is a certainty (look out for rattus coitus part 2).

Rob Santus

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