

# **ROWTEN POT to VALLEY ENTRANCE**

Free diving fun..

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Date : 21<sup>st</sup> April 2012

Cavers : Alex Ritchie, Chris Kelly, Chris Scaife, Chris Sharman, Mike Skyrme.

Weather : started wet, then some big hailstones started pounding us.

Almost certainly the historic first Black Rose trip to feature three Chrises, we met in Kingsdale on a wet Saturday morning armed with SRT gear, neoprene and diving masks (except Chris Sharman who is double 'ard and just faced the cold water with his bare eyes) and headed up to the magnificent shaft of Rowten Pot, which was first descended in 1897 – unbelievable!

Mike jumped straight into the 20m Eyehole pitch, swiftly rigged via a couple of early re-belays to the large platform overlooking the Main Shaft. At this point we turned our lights on for the spectacular 45m deep pitch, again utilising some hanging re-belays, to land in the plunge pool of a very impressive waterfall. Skirting round to the right, we entered a dry passage that led, via some easy free-climbs, to the 3<sup>rd</sup> pitch: wet, but only 7m. A short traverse around the left wall avoids the next 10m waterfall and we descended the dry final pitch.

I thought the only way on to the start of the sumps was through a duck, but no sooner had I plunged through this than Alex's cheeky grin emerged from a completely dry bypass. Anyway, shouldn't grumble, as we were now confronted with the first sump. Alex heroically offered to de-rig the pot and leave Mike and us three Chrises to swim our way out. Hoods and masks on, and deep breaths practised, Sharman dived straight into the 27 foot sump, followed by Mike, then Chris Kelly and then me. The visibility was only enough to see the diving line, which was quite close to the roof of the sump, so while I initially started the free dive on my front, I soon turned round and pulled myself along on my back. I wasn't aware of any shortness of breath and the sump was over sooner than expected, finishing in a large airbell, with plenty of room to stand up in the thigh-deep water. Chris Sharman had already left this airbell, but Mike and Chris K were waiting and, realistically, four of us would have fitted in quite easily.

The next sump was a mere 12 feet, so without apprehension I launched myself in, through the sump, past the airbell and banged my head on the far side a few times before realising that I needed to retreat a little for a breather. The woops of laughter from our Barrow friends helped guide me to the airbell, a little smaller than the first. The final sump is a doddle at 6 feet, and we were into the deep, wide canal in Rowten Passage. Following the flow of water this reaches the very familiar territory of Master Junction and a little further on, the short Roof Tunnel Pitch dragged us away from the very tempting looking sump just beyond. Out Valley Entrance and into a downpour, where Mike boldly offered to go and help out Alex. Our shared first name may have been a factor here, but as one we three that remained informed the de-rigging team that we would meet them in the pub. The Marton Arms to be precise, where discussions mainly centred around other free diving trips to be done in the future.



*The Three Chrises on the large platform, with Mike beginning to rig the Main Shaft*



*Mike preparing for the first of the free dives, 8m long*

*Chris Scaife*

Alex adds his version of events, being an in-out trip and not undertaking any free-diving:

I intended not to do the free dives, I did not bring any of the gear (mask, hood, neoprene etc) so...

I did not do the free dives, had you going for a moment there eh? All the others did, mad sods! They all told me how wonderful it was afterwards. May have a go next time if I practice from the other side first, maybe next time I pop down Swinsto or Simpson.

My trip out was interesting, I left my batteries at home so was on my back up ones which were rubbish and failing. No problem I thought, I will turn on my backup light on. It wasn't there. The cable tie had broke and the light had gone bye bye, quite where I do not know. Typical, the one time I actually need it... With fading light, I managed to get the lower pitches de-rigged before I could not see anything. The big pitch was very drippy and spray lashed, but was thankfully lit. Met Mike at the bridge and headed out.

I learned to not assume the backup batteries that have been in my camera box for a year will still be okay, blooming Duracell rubbish.

*Alex Ritchie*

*Photos – Alex Ritchie*

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