

STREAM PASSAGE POT to CORKYS

Via the Whitsun Series..

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Present : Don Miller, Alex Ritchie, Chris Sharman

After a hearty breakfast at Inglesport (do trips ever start off any different than this?), Alex, Sharman and myself each drove in our own separate cars to the parking area on the grass just opposite the farm on the road halfway to Clapham. After getting changed and bringing along a small bag each for our SRT gear, we headed up past the farm and followed the road and then sheep up to Gaping Gill. It was really too nice a day to go caving, but at least the hour long hike up to Gaping Gill and back down allowed us to enjoy some of the sunshine.

Upon reaching Gaping Gill Sharman went to the BPC tent next to the main shaft and informed one of the 'volunteers' on where we were going and the latest time we planned to be out by (8pm). This done, we set out to for the entrance to Stream Passage Pot. Unfortunately, three BPC members set out about the same time and we kindly and politely allowed them to get changed and go down first. Their club was responsible for rigging all the pitches after all. After a short ladder climb down, we proceeded down the next four pitches fairly quickly. Alex had a bit of a fuff with the deviation on the first big pitch, but otherwise the descent was uneventful. Once at the bottom of the last pitch we said goodbye to the BPC members who decided to sit down and have a rest. Alex then led the way to the Main Chamber where we sat for a bit and watched all the various people in light green jackets and white helmets milling around in groups here and there. Many of them looked like lost school children. The sight of the Main Chamber completely lit up was amazing and something not soon to be forgotten.



We next proceeded to Mud Hall. On the way we ran into a few people in the guided crawl headed on their way back to the Main Chamber. Once at Mud Hall we quickly headed up towards Corky's, dropped off some of our SRT gear, and then down the other side of the boulder slope into the



Whitsun Series. The directions in NFTFH make the trip sound rather short, but if memory serves me correctly it took us roughly two and a half to three hours to complete the round trip from here to Farrer Hall (the terminal point) and back. Even though none of us had been here before, route finding was not an issue and the trip itself was pretty straightforward. There were only a few junctions where one had to remember whether to go left or right.

The first section of the Series was fairly mundane - a combination of walking, stooping and hands-

and-knees crawling. As we went along though, things got progressively muddier. The first real 'challenge' was a 6m long muddy, elbow-deep duck, known as Pool Passage - just as described in NTFH. In reality it wasn't very difficult at all though. There was plenty of airspace and only a very short section of about half a metre where one had to turn one's head with cheek touching the water to get through. At least this is what you had to do if you were the last one through like me, after the two people in front of you had made small waves in the water. Needless to say, by the time each of us had made it to the other side we were rather muddy and soaked.

After a short bit of passage we quickly reached The Font, a three and a half metre long, somewhat flat-out duck with a smallish triangular airspace. The duck itself was passed fairly easily by all. The worst part was that one had to lie on one's back to go through the duck, meaning that by the time one got to the other side one was completely soaked. Unless you're Alex, of course, who always likes to make things more difficult. He chose to go through the duck on his side and stomach. There was actually a good amount of airspace and the duck wasn't as scary as it sounds in NTFH. There were also two blue buckets on either side of the duck in case it sumped and someone wanted to clear out the water. No one in our group tried to use these buckets in vain to lower the water level though. That would have been utterly pathetic and not in the spirit of Black Rose.

Once past the duck there was some more hands-and-knees crawling, and even some walking and stooping, until we reached the start of Anagram Passage, a 10-15 minute crawl in a low, but rather wide passage (varying between roughly 10-20 feet wide). This crawl is a mixture of hands-and-knees crawling and flat-out crawling, though there are several small chambers along the way where there's enough room to sit up. The passage was also remarkably dry, and not muddy at all. There were a few short squeezes along the way, nothing at all difficult though, until we reached the Prudence Cairn squeezes. This consists of one short flat-out squeeze into a small chamber (roughly 6 x 6 feet), and then another flat-out squeeze (longer than the previous one) which leads to roughly another minute of combined flat-out/hands-and-knees crawling. The first squeeze was passed quickly and easily by all. The second was passed quickly by Alex, slightly less quickly by Sharman, and even longer by me. I tried passing the squeeze feet first on my stomach with no success, then made several attempts feet first on my back and eventually made it. It's not actually a difficult squeeze once you figure out the right way to fit through. The key, as with all squeezes, is to do the exact opposite of whatever Alex does. For some reason this always seems to work for me when it comes to squeezes and ducks.

The remainder of the trip to Farrer Hall was fairly unremarkable, just more stooping and crawling. The hall itself is rather large in comparison with the hundreds of metres of passageway preceding it, but very small in comparison with Mud Hall and the Main Chamber. After a quick look around we made our way back to Corky's. Route finding was only an issue on one occasion, otherwise the trip back was uneventful.

Once at Corky's Sharman headed up the rope first while Alex and I vainly tried to clean our caving gear with the meagre drops of water falling from above. After what seemed like an eternity Sharman yelled 'rope free' and I headed up next. About 30 feet or so from the top I realised that the rope was rubbing against the rock. A sobering thought considering I was 100 feet up the rope. Once at the top I carefully climbed up the boulder slope and waited with Sharman at the bottom of the next pitch until we heard Alex coming. After that Sharman headed up next, followed by me, followed by Alex, who had chosen to free climb the pitch rather than use the rope. My memory of the cave from point until the exit is rather hazy. There were three or four more pitches. One had a ladder rigged, though no lifeline, and was easy to ascend and fairly easy to get off of at the top. One of the pitches was very tight at the bottom and more easily free climbed than ascended using jammers. Another pitch was fairly airy, though it was somewhat of a pain getting off at the top. The part I remember most though were the miserable crawls between the pitches. These wouldn't have been too bad without SRT gear. As it was I had to take my SRT gear off on two different occasions, both times in the middle of a crawl. The second time I took it off about ten feet before I had to put it back on again to go up a

pitch. All I can say is that there's no way I would ever do those crawls if I had to drag a tackle bag full of rope with me. It's of course possible (as those who have done it know), but it would be a huge pain in the ass.

Once out, the sun was shining, though it was pretty windy and rather cold outside in comparison with when we had first gone in. We checked back in with the BPC tent and then headed down to the cars, got changed, and made our way to the New Inn pub in Clapham. Once there we had a drink and watched the beautiful eye candy working there. In fact, there were three pieces of candy. I'm assuming since they were working in a pub that they were at least 16 years old, though I can't confirm this. Either way, there's nothing wrong with looking, right? A fine end to a fine day.

Don Miller



Photos – Alex Ritchie

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