

COW POT (Aardvark) to WRETCHED RABBIT

Duncan's Folly

Date: Sunday 30th October 2011

People present: Pete Dale, Rob Santus, Duncan "75%" Jones.

Weather: dry

A trip was called for and with loads of suggestions nothing really came about until late in the week, Cow pot 'Aardvark series' to the main drain then upstream and through the Mancunian Way and down the extension pitches to Dismal Junction and out County Pot. Things never go to plan!

Meeting Rob and Dunc at J33 we sped off to Ingletonia for a bite to eat getting close to nature on the way! We barged into Inglesport and headed upstairs for a brew and for Rob to ogle the kitchen staff! A while later we were parked at Bull Pot Farm and shortly after we were ready! The path was dry towards Cow Pot giving the impression it was fairly dry underneath which made our choice to go at stream level even better. Reaching Cow Pot Rob set about rigging the entrance with greased rope as a Petzl Stop had no effect even with a half lock and braking krab on the rope, thus requiring two hands on the rope to avoid plummeting to the bottom. Once at the bottom I followed Rob down the main passage, having strangely never been this way before, reaching a small chamber a hole in the floor with lots of scaffolding is encountered. Rob set off down and I followed leaving Dunc somewhere behind. The climb down is straight forward enough with the last section being the trickiest. From the bottom a traverse in a rift is followed for a few metres to a fun little bend to the right necessitating some unorthodox manoeuvres from myself and then a 2m climb down to the stream. Another short section of sideways walking in the rift to a left-hand bend which Rob informed me was the start of the tight section that last time scared off Alex and Chris.

We waited and waited at the corner for Dunc to catch up with the bag needed for rigging the next pitch, a while later he eventually arrived claiming he was not 100%, and didn't know what was wrong (*edit: still don't know, but probably a combination of things all bugging me up!*). The bag was passed to Rob who then headed in head first and shuffled along and around a left bend out of sight, my turn now. Looking into the rift it didn't look too bad so finding the widest part I entered head first and wriggled forwards and dropped into a wider part where I could make forward progress vertically but staying above the stream. Reaching the bend I shouted back to Dunc to follow and I squirmed round and slid down to the stream again. The next section looked a lot tighter than the last and Rob was having trouble deciding the best way to go about passing this bit. He set off into the widest section and wriggled forwards the passage was full of Rob and I was wondering if I would even fit! It didn't take long for Rob to retreat and he left the bag for me to pass to him once he was through. Removing his helmet he set off again and this time he went a bit further staying higher than last time and getting to the end of the tight section. I set off with the bag in front and led on my left side I wriggled forwards and reaching the end I could see that I had to somehow fit through a squeeze I wasn't made for. With the bag out of the way Rob suggested I tackle it feet first but this seemed more work than was required I simply slid into the squeeze head first lifting my legs up above me and with a good exhale I slipped through and out.

Another squeeze followed and Rob slid through so I passed the bag and while he was putting his SRT kit on, I signalled Dunc to join me. Once kitted up Rob got ready to get me through the tightest squeeze of all of them. To me it looked impassable with the gap being no more than the width of my out stretched finger and thumb apart. It was only a pinch point as it opened out almost immediately so I thought I would give it a go. Lowering myself in I slid down easily but came to a halt once my chest hit rock, I exhaled but it was no good I was not going to get through at this point, with help from Rob I heaved myself back out to survey the squeeze again. Facing the other way this time I once again lowered myself into the squeeze and as before I was jammed by my chest. It was not looking good I didn't want to go back out the way I came but I knew I would fit that way. Rob suggested trying getting through further back but this looked even tighter than where I was trying to get through. I thought to myself that it was worth a go so lowering my legs in I slipped down and somehow slipped through the squeeze into the small pool below, very strange squeeze!

Dunc follow in my foot steps and we were at the 2nd pitch, Rob set off down first and didn't get hung up this time and he was soon down and across the traverse to the bedding plane, I followed and traversed across to see Rob's feet kicking and flailing around. He said he couldn't get through so came back and slid over to a larger area to remove his SRT kit. Looking at the bedding plane it didn't look as bad as Rob was making it so

off into it I went both arms in front of me the only problem was propelling myself forwards, as there was not much purchase on the rock. A short thrutch saw me enter a small chamber with the way on being Keyhole passage aptly named! Keyhole is never tight and then it is never large either it's a bit like Petersons Roly Poly passage but a little smaller, it is soon over though, and with Rob tight on my heels, I was sent down the next pitch.

A short abseil and a brief crawl/walk to the next pitch come climb followed by another climb I was at the last pitch down to the main Ease Gill stream way. Crawling though the low arch I walked over to the far bank and sat down to wait for Dunc. We waited and waited and at one point we were a little concerned at the whereabouts of Dunc. Rob was just about to go back to look for him when we heard the faint groaning and grunting that we are all too familiar with. 'I'm not 100%' was the tale we got told as we set off upstream in a wetter than we liked main stream, sporting I think it's called!

(edit: On the date of this trip all three Aardvark pitches had in-situ rope on them)

Making our way upstream we soon reached Stake Pot and passing some other cavers we carried on towards Oxbow corner, by this point Dunc was making all the signs and excuses to avoid going down the Mancunian Way extension pitches, stating he would go out via Wretched Rabbit. Reaching a point in the stream where we climbed down on the great traverse Rob climbed up and said he would go that way while me and Dunc carried on at stream level. Reaching Oxbow choke it looked wet but was easily passable so in we went with me leading the way. We checked the rope up to the high level but couldn't see anything untoward looking up so carried on at stream level where Rob soon appeared behind us white as a sheet, apparently the mud bank we slid down was not reversible and suicidal. Climbing up the other side of the choke Dunc expressed that Dismal junction may be too wet to get past and was not worth the risk. So swift progress was made to the Stop Pot ladder which we descended to the ledge connecting to Four Ways chamber, where we had a brief rest.

Dunc and Rob set off along the crawl and I followed at a steady pace savouring the final part of the trip while the racing snakes sped off along the passage, I don't know what it is about Wretched Rabbit passage but I never like certain parts of it as it's bloody slippery whether this is due to the polished rocks under foot or the fact that it is covered in mud I don't know but I don't like it one bit. I could always hear those two in front as they never got out of earshot but I didn't see the point in rushing now. All the climbs were passed without issue and reaching the rope climbs up the big rift I made my way up the first one to find Dunc stood there totally knackered and unfit for purpose! He must have taken 3-4 attempts to get up the 6ft climb and in the end the sight of him hauling his corpse like mass up that climb nearly sent me tumbling down in fits of laughter. The next climb was just as bad and I won't embarrass him any more with what happened on the entrance climb! *(edit: I got up all of them under my own steam, admittedly a little slower than usual..)*

Reaching the surface we set off back with Dunc being sent back to the van while me and Rob went to De-rig Cow pot. Aardvark series is not to be taken lightly it is very committing but very rewarding if you have the nerve! I would have liked to do the extension pitches but there's always next time for that. As for Dunc, well I think more caving is required you can't do hard trips as one offs!

Pete Dale (with the italicised edits by Duncan Jones)