

DEATHS HEAD – BIG MEANIE exchange

“Rob is a big Meanie”

Date: 14th November 2009

People present: Alex Ritchie, Peter Dale, Rob Santus & Daniel Jackson

Grade: 4, My grade: easier then I thought.

At the last minute I decided I would go on the Deaths Head to Big Meanie trip. It is time to improve my technique with free hanging re-belays.

We arrived on the as per usual cold and wet Leck Fell after a quick bite to eat at Inglesport. After a short while we were met by some other likely looking lads from down “sarf” and promptly ruined any plans they had of going down Deaths Head, so they went with their other plan of Lost Johns instead and we carried on with the original plan. Pete and Dan, being the biggest chaps set off down Big Meanie and me and Rob set off down Deaths Head Hole after giving the others head start seeing they had longer to go to reach the main chamber.

At this point being a day light pitch and being quite some distance with re-belays I was feeling quite nervous so much so Rob suggested maybe joining the others on there Lost Johns trip. I decided against this and faced my fears and joined Rob by the solitary tree overlooking the huge drop of Deaths Head Hole.

The first part of the pitch was more a slope then anything, but then you drop over the edge to the first re-belay where you can see all the way down to the rocky bottom still some 50 odd metres below. Passing this re-belay another was met 10 metres further down. This one was almost free hanging as not much ledges however I was feeling quite pleased with my self as I had finally managed to figure out a much easier way to pass these buggers without the usual fuss, it finally clicked so to speak!

Carrying on down this fantastic shaft I was enjoying my self now after the pre-trip jitters. I soon reached a Y-hang which takes you down the last 25 metres or so of the shaft before landing on a steeply sloping loose boulder floor, with one rock sticking out of the rubble ready to disembowel anything unlucky enough to fall down the shaft.

Whilst rigging the last pitch we could hear the others shouting over the waterfall in the chamber beyond. We descended the last short pitch and waited a short-while in the large chamber taking in the view of this impressive chamber. It was quite a sight almost on par with Alum Pot the whole chamber was visible as it was partly lit by daylight beaming in from the shaft we descended. Dan and Pete soon dropped in to join us and we exchanged pleasantries before both setting off on our separate ways out.

The up pitch was just to the right of the main shaft (facing into the chamber) and consisted of 3 large ledges stepping you up towards the roof before a muddy stooping passage issued you away from the chamber. Once de-rigged we progressed without incident into the passage and then through a muddy wallow. This ended with a little squeeze that was slightly awkward due to sharp angles but not tight.

We continued along the passage passing inlets and other passages not 100% sure we were heading the right way. After 100 metres of walking passage I spotted the tackle sack on the end of the rope that marked the route up and out. As I was de-rigging Rob went up first I let him get past the Y-Hang before following him up.

Reaching the first re-belay I could hear them talking at the pitch head. Amongst the talking I think I heard Pete say (not shout) “below” followed by clatter of bouncing of a stone coming on down towards me. Being in mid-air there was nothing I could do to avoid this bugger if its going to hit me its going to hit me and most likely hurt (I knew it was not a big one but from 30 metres above me its gonna hurt). Thankfully it whizzed past me and continued its downward journey clattering all the way down the pitch below me.

At this point I shouted up and told them in no-uncertain terms to clear the pitch head. Something was shouted back in an agitated voice by Rob, I could not make out a word he was saying due to my neo

hood. So I pulled my self up above the re-belay and stood on a handy ledge. I then asked what was going on, moving my hood from my ears this time. Rob told me that he was stuck saying something like he “came up the wrong way”. Eh? Rob stuck? But I heard panic in his voice. Bloody hell I thought not another rescue! What is wrong with us?

So I waited on the ledge and waited and waited. After about 10 minutes or so I thought well he may be stuck but this is Rob he is going to free himself eventually so I will start de-rigging as I would not be going out the way I came anyway, being de-rigged and all. I pulled the bag up and fuffed with it for a while fighting the rope into the bag with one hand and keeping my self steady with the other. Once this was done I shouted up again to find out what I should do. Rob was still saying he was stuck but to come up and try to push him through. So up I came abandoning the bag on the ledge to save time (of course still attached to the rope).

I got to the top and guess what...

He was not bloody stuck it was some prank him and the other “gits” pulled on me! GITS! Relieved and annoyed at the same time I had one slight comforting thought which was the fact they were bloody freezing as they sat at the cave entrance onto the cold Leck Fell.

Everyone then had an even longer wait because the bag got stuck as I abandoned it half way up it took me another 10 minutes to free it, in the process losing yet another glove!

Oh well it was a good trip in once sense as my confidence in SRT is growing ever more but an annoying trip because of the stupid prank they played on me and then blaming me for being cold!

Alex Ritchie

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