

Hammer pot - Did I get hammered?

Weather: Clear and cold was around freezing on exit.

Date: 27th October 2012

People present: Alex & Andy Jurd



I met Andy in Inglesport and wondered how long it would be before Don arrived. I checked my phone and there was a message from Don. Apparently there was a blanket of snow of a least a centimetre thick had shut down the North-east of the country forcing Don to turn. So there was only going to be 2 of us.

I rigged the first pitch, despite it being climbable in anticipation of the return journey



Next was the infamous stemple rift. We put our SRT bits with the food and other stuff, while all the rope crabs went into the other. I volunteered to take the heavier rigging bag thinking the large bag size would stop it from slipping down stemple rift, I would find later that it did not.

We entered the rift making decent progress, as we passed the second stemple I made the observation of just how much gear was in the stream, wellies, slings, a pole & knee pads. I think though near all of it was mine from my first trip into this hellish place. From here it was the hardest section but progress was slow but steady.

Having made it through to the top of the second pitch we both realised it probably would have been easier if we took our chest jammer off and we each removed it in turn before descending the tight “second pitch”.

Once down I built a foot high mound of rocks to make the return journey easier while Andy continued to slowly force his way through the rift behind me.

We free climbed the third and I rigged the 4th, no faffing with spanners thankfully as like the first pitch it had in-situ Petzle plates of good standing. Nice passage led us down to the 5th. On the way I made the observation of a sandy crawl on the left wondering where it went.



At the bottom of the 5th we checked the time and realised the call out was tight. I did try extending the call out when we got changed but had no signal. In light of this we decided to forgo the last pitch and as such this allowed us to abandon the rope and our SRT gear. We then went through the misery of Sluge crawl unhindered but the last 10 meters of flat out wetness was still not pleasant. We first ventured down stream in the reasonably decorated passage to view the last pitch. Satisfied we returned up stream to look at the “slanting passage”.

Muddy going at first leads to a more pleasant stooping then walking height passage at a 35 degree angle, which ascended about 20 meters or so. On the left at the top I noticed a blocked sandy passage with a breeze coming from a small hole above. Likely with some digging this would connect to the other sandy passage at the top of the 5th, bypassing sludge crawl, but I ain't digging it! We continued on passing a 6 meter deep "Neil Moss" type hole and on into a reasonably high aven (15m~) A 3 meter climb brought us into the last aven chamber with a 3m deep blasted climbable hole in the bottom that we presume leads to the new 22m deep pitch.

We had no rope or time for it so we headed out. Soon the drudgery of sludge crawl was behind us. I went first again while Andy de-rigged.



Climbing up the second pitch was far easier than I remember, I think the mound helped but the top half I could not get up last time was a breeze this time.

However once in the rift we both found it far more tiring than the way in and we both struggled a bit. I toiled because I had a bag the size of a camel and Andy due to his 6ft stature. Going up the first bit, I just could not get the bag into the right position, it just kept swinging down back into the rift. Eventually I gave up and just forced it through at a lower level. Thank goodness I had it attached to me. Once at the stemples I was forced me to drag it out of the rift which caused lots of swearing to be directed at the bag. At the last stemple I climbed down and dragged the bag kicking and screaming inch by inch round hesitation corner, not wanting to back track to a spot wide enough the pull it out. Thankfully it moved otherwise it would have been gear out of the bag and several trips to pitch chamber carry it all.

It is strange how the bag did not cause me any real issues on the way in. If I ever come down here again it is certainly a better idea to go as a team of 3 or 4 to split the load more evenly.

When I got to the first pitch I realised most of my SRT gear was in Andys bag who was somewhere behind me. After a well deserved breather I put on my chest jammer which was in my bag and climbed the pitch using my jammer for some at least mental protection. After a very short wait I was greeted by Andy and we both made our way out into the pale freezing night.

Upon reaching the cars we were not expecting to see anyone but nevertheless we a had random encounter with a guy walking the length of Britain, so it just goes to show no matter how hard you think the trip you just did is, there is always someone doing something harder.

Don't think I will return again for a while but I can consider those demons banished. You can always tell its a rather squalid cave when you exit after more than 7 hours underground and your light still says its on 5 out of 5 power!