

LANCASTER HOLE

Through to County Pot

23rd February 2008

People present - Pete Dale, Alex Ritchie, Rob Santus

Weather: - Light intermitent rain and mist

Webmaster comments : [sic]

An alternative view on this trip can be found in Alex's write up further down..

Top sink to Lancaster hole was the plan but that soon changed due to wet weather so I had to come up with an alternative trip for Alex to prove himself worthy. Arriving in Ingleton we managed to park and made our way over to Bernie's for a brew while Rob left his usual round the bend. While Rob sorted himself out with a new over suit me and Alex looked through the photo's and came across a picture of Otter hole 'ahhh!' now Alex wanted to go on the Otter hole trip but me and Rob had decided that he needed to prove he was capable of the trip which is in a class of a trip to Far waters in GG. I knew we couldn't do the planned trip so for an alternative trip I thought we could go in Lancaster hole and out of County pot. Rob came over and sat down and I told him the plan (He was not impressed!) it was really the only option we had since we had no ropes or Krabs for anything else.

Arriving at BPF we made sure Rob parked the car at a suitable angle to keep us out of the wind while getting changed. We then packed the two ropes and set off to the entrance. A brisk walk against the wind and rain and also the flooded path, saw us soon at the entrance, I quickly rigged the rope and made my way down. The rigging has sure changed from when I first descended there are 'P' anchors everywhere now! Reaching the 'Y' hang for the big pitch I shouted rope free and waited nervously for Alex to come down. After a bit of faffing he arrived at the rebelay ledge and started off by getting tangled up in the ropes, so a quick sort out by me saw him holding onto the rock for dear life even though he was clipped in with his cowstails. After prising him from the rock and getting his stop on the next rope Rob had arrived and we both made sure he was fit to go and sent him on his way. With 'rope free' heard I set off down and once at the bottom we waited for Rob to catch up.

All of us together I led the way to bridge hall but, no sooner had we set off than I heard a kafuffle and Rob shouting at Alex (not for the first time!) he had fallen and within 10 ft from the pitch this was going to be an interesting trip! Checking Alex was ok Rob shot off in front and I stayed with Alex making sure he stayed upright where he was supposed to. Making our way down Kath way we entered Bill tailors passage and where on our way to Fall pot. Passing the shower bath on the left Rob commented on how wet it was. We were soon at a junction and rob headed off to the left towards Montague west I told him it was up the slope to the right, he had never been this way strangely? Carefully climbing around to the climb down Fall pot Rob quickly showed me the pitch that he used to get to the main stream. It looked nice will have to do it one day. The rope climb down was slippy as ever and we made sure Alex had clipped in to the ropes, (he still insisted on climbing without them) ducking under a large boulder we emerged in to the vast expanse of Fall pot and Rob quickly made his way down the boulder climb to asses the main stream route. Me and Alex climbed a little way down and sheltered out of the spray of water while we waited for Robs verdict. Too wet was the answer he said It was waste deep way to dangerous in his opinion so we set off back up the boulders and proceeded to take the high level route instead.

Now in my opinion the high level route seemed more dangerous to me than battling the stream but never the less we wanted a challenge and now we had one. Two routes up from Fall pot take you

Montague East and the high level route to Stake pot, Alex chose the Muddy climb and me and Rob used the rope to get to the high level. Once at the top an easy walk on dry mud floors was followed over a few climbs and the large holes which drop straight into the master cave over 100ft below. We soon reached Stake pot and the way on here was down a very exposed rope climb to the bridge and another rope climb up the other side to the continuation of the passage. Rob went first and I followed with a very Frightened Alex coming last. Those of you reading and have done the rope climb at Stake pot will know it is not that hard but Alex made it look like he was scaling a vertical wall of ice with oven gloves on! That obstacle passed we set off along the passage again soon reaching Bobs boss a large stalagmite on the right hand side, after this the passage narrows in somewhat and two traverses are met around the gaping holes of Scylla and Charybdis one slip here meant certain death especially when the only way past is a slippery muddy traverse! These obstacles passed and we were well on our way to the minarets and the connection to Cornes cavern. A couple of tricky climbs and rope traverses saw us past Oxbow corner and then a slippery mud climb up a narrow slot in the right wall took us to the junction with Diamond hall. Having never found Diamond hall it was quite a surprise when we went that way by accident but a quick look at the survey put us back on the right path. A short flat out crawl at roof level soon opened up in to the expanse of Oakes Cavern and then a small hole on the far side dropped us into the Minarets a series of connected passageways with beautiful formations. A climb up behind a huge block revealed the large expanse of Cornes cavern an impressive place the first time you see it but now a gloomy and lifeless trudge to were it narrows and a climb up a mud slope soon opens out into Snail cavern again a gloomy place but it does have a few nice stalactites. The end of Snail cavern turns sharp left and then opens out into Monster cavern you guessed it gloomy and dry. Monster cavern ends at Main line Terminus where a way off to the right heads to Carrot chamber and the connection with Manchester Bypass and Main line passage.

We set off towards the ladder down Stop pot I set off the way I thought was correct but Rob insisted that it was the other way, I was right and we made our way back to my way and soon reached the ladder down Stop pot. At the bottom of the ladder there was an awful stench was Alex that scared?? Nope some kind soul had left a deposit which still looked fresh as it dribbled its way down the rocks! Reaching the stream at the bottom of Stop pot we had a rest and a bite to eat and Rob scurried around like a lost rat looking for Depot passage. After a short while he reappeared stating that he couldn't find it, we looked at the survey and located the lost passage as being above our heads. With the passage located for my reference we made our way down stream towards Eureka junction and the connection to County pot.

The way through the Stop pot boulder choke is a small crawl on a ledge followed by a short drop into the stream and a duck under a boulder into the continuation of the passage. Thoroughly soaked we were soon standing at Eureka junction and making a note of the foam on the roof and walls! Heading off up Lower Pierces passage passing Wretched Rabbit inlet on the left we battled our way upstream past roaring cascades to eventually reach the junction with Trident passage. This was our exit as there is no way to climb the pitch at the end of Pieces passage. Following Trident passage we again battled the cascades until we reached the rope climb up out of the stream. Rob wanted to look at the water fall in white line chamber so he shot off to see while I waited for Alex to catch up. I told Alex to go and have a look at the waterfall while I climbed up the rope to help him up on his return. A minute later from the top of the climb I looked up stream to see Alex traversing along the passage high up above the stream. I wondered what he was doing as there was no way to get to where I was unless you new what you were doing and a fall from that height would not be good for any of us. I shouted at him to go back down and come up the rope like everyone else does he then disappeared back up stream again.

A few minutes later he was back at the bottom of the rope, Rob traversed over the way Alex was trying to! We then told him to climb the rope this he did in a fashion but for some reason he let go of the rope halfway up and slipped and fell back down! (Why won't he listen!?) Making sure he was ok Rob climbed back down and perched himself at the halfway point ready to assist Alex on his

2nd attempt. Making sure he held the rope this time we got him to the top but not without him giving his leg a good band in the process! A short climb and crawl/traverse followed into a parallel passage ending in a 30ft pitch. Rob being Rob climbed the pitch while me and Alex took the bypass, a sort rope climb and then a traverse on a ledge to reach a point 6ft from the top of the pitch were, an old chain ladder hangs down next to the rope. Now to climb this last section all you have to do is hold the rope in one hand, the chain ladder in the other and then using the ladder place one foot on a rung and step up to the top of the pitch. Sounds easy don't it? Well Alex made it look hard as hell at one point he was led at the top of the pitch screaming "Don't let go Rob!!) While his legs flailed around like a garden strimmer! All the time while this was going on he was clipped into the rope with both his cowstails so even if he did slip or fall he was going nowhere! Eventually he was up and after I manage to control my laughter from the spectacle I had just witnessed I stepped across and up the pitch. Climbing through into the ledge above White line chamber I found Alex led down Shaking and looking quite scared. We then informed him that it wasn't over yet. A step across the water fall, into the passage beyond, and a quick dart under the water fall in the next chamber for Alex, while me and Rob took the dry bypass. I then led the way through the complexity of battle of Britain to emerge just upstream of Spout hall.

Making our way upstream we were soon in the Broadway where another group was just prussicking up the climb to the bottom of the County pitch. I decided that I would climb up via the other route and traverse over to the top of the climb to help Alex up. Once the other group was up I made my way to the top of the climb only to find Alex had gone? I then heard a shout from him asking which way to go. He was at the start of the traverse of the way I had gone. I told him to go back down and climb up this way. Seeing his timid face looking up at me, I climbed back down to prove that it was climbable. He looked at it and then had a go but failed miserably. Rob appeared again from his rummaging and climbed up and then we both heaved and got Alex up. The last man of the other group was just on his way up the pitch and to save us the hassle of free climbing they said we could use their rope if we de-rigged it. We agreed and Rob shot off up the pitch Alex followed and I was last. I de-rigged the rope as planned and we all made our way out of County pot. The weather had cleared and it had stopped raining so a nice pleasant stroll over to Lancaster to de-rig our rope and a quick look at Cow pot for Rob and Alex. We then walked back to the car and got changed. A quick stop at the Ship inn on the way home and the day was over.

Well Alex did prove himself on the trip he proved he needed more practice on rope climbs; rock climbs in fact he just needs more practice! WE asked him if the trip had been hard, he agreed but he had enjoyed it all the same. I told him that he will never get better unless he keeps pushing himself to do more challenging trips, he agreed on that as well! A good trip though and it didn't take that long either. (Note to Alex, T-Rex may have had strong legs and weak arms but unless you build your upper body strength up you will become extinct as well!)

Pete Dale

Alternative report, by Alex

Lancaster to County - the hard way!

Weather: Poor, drizzle and foggy with more rain forecasted.

The rain was coming down hard today meaning that our original plan of going through top sink to Lancaster was off as the top sink entrance was described as suicidal by some in Berries in the current conditions. A new plan was hatched to instead do Lancaster to County using the stream ways.

So off we went, we didn't bother rigging county first because Rob said he could free climb it to rig it so off we went. We made the quick wet trudge to Lancaster through the drizzle having put on our SRT at the cars.

Lancaster hole was rigged without too much of a problem and I was the first one to go down the pitch. (After Pete had rigged it-Pete) First bit of the pitch oh dear that darn re-belay rope again! I was on the wrong side of it this time and if I were to go any further I would be stuck between the ropes. But luckily the entrance to Lancaster has plenty of ledges to stand on to sort my self (Pete sorted me out-Pete) out easily and headed down.

I lowered my self down and then across the traverse under the ever-watchful eyes of Rob and Pete. I fuffed a little with the almost free hanging (??) re-belay before heading down the pitch, I actually enjoyed the descent.

Rob and Pete headed down shortly afterwards. As we headed away from the pitch the Ease Gill reminded me of how dangerous it could be as I stepped onto a rock my feet slipped away from under me and I came clattering down a slot before I stopped my self on the rock wall behind me. Uninjured I picked my self up and carried on. The upper levels of the Ease Gill system are just covered with slimy slippy rocks making even simple climbs and even walking around far more dangerous and harder then normal.

We headed down the first rope climb that lead to the boulder climb that lead down to the stream level. Rob went first through the boulder climbs as water poured all around us and on us through the boulders. It was as if we where clambering through a giant water filter. Rob reached the stream level it was already waste high as we knew rain was still falling outside we decided that this route would be too dangerous. So we had no choice but to go through the tough high level route full of climbs and clambering. The route was notorious, as it is full of innocent looking holes that lead to 100ft drops to the raging current of the stream below. So one slip in the wrong place and off you go, having already slipped once today this made me nervous (and sweaty).

After going up a muddy climb and scrabbling for a while we reached our first major obstacle, a giant black ravine stretched out before us known as the Cybids Traverse.

The ropes were interesting going down crossing over a rubble bridge into a chasm with nothing but a small rope to hang onto. Going down into the chasm seemed a lot worse then it was however, it looks like there was nothing to stand on where there was plenty. I was clipping in my cow tails into every single bit of rope because of how bad it seemed which was causing me more problems then it solved as the rope tended to get wrapped around my legs. But as it was so slippy I weren't risking it, one slip and without cowstails and it was a long way down either side if you are not careful.

Progressing up and out of the canyon was a lot easier then going down. After a few more traverses and small boulder climbs we were well on our way. Our next obstacle was a tight squeeze climb, Pete seemed to make hard work of this one (Who had the Tackle bags??-Pete) but because my strength is more in my legs then my arms I simply used brute force to get my self up. At the top of this was another small boulder scramble which we promptly climbed we followed the passage above there only to find out it was a dead end dig, our first and only wrong turning of the day.

Backtracking a little we found our mistake was to go up the boulder climb we should have followed the main passage to the left. From there we headed across a few more traverse and climbs. I again was not taking any chances and was using my cow's tails wherever I could. We eventually emerged in more familiar territory we had traversed the Snail Cavern and reached Crones Cavern. I remembered this part of the cave system from my first little adventure there with Rob.

A bit more scrambling was made through Monster Cavern until we had reached the fixed ladder that lead down to the boulder slope that lead to the stream way. The climb down was grotesque, as someone had decided to defecate in the cave.

After a short rest we dropped into the cold water of the stream way which was waste deep still. We headed down stream before reaching a junction and then taking the first left going up a smaller tributary stream. Progressing up the stream when there is this much water is extremely hard work and I was seriously getting tired at this point, so what did the cave do to help me? It stuck a right

awkward rope climb in my way right when I needed it, not. (only awkward if you don't use the rope!!-Pete)

So I took one look at the rope and thought bugger that, and headed off further up stream and shimmied up the walls out of the steam way by about 8ft and out onto a ledge at the top of the common key hole shaped passage. Only to find that there was no way to get the entrance the rope climb reached? It was blocked off completely from that side by a formation, caves never let you cheat it seems. So in my tired state I had no choice to tackle yet another dreaded rope climb in the Ease Gill system.

The first time I tried it, I fell off no grip, so I took my gloves off tried again had to abort strength starting to fail. Finally with the some assistance with Pete at the top and Rob off to the side I forced my way up the very awkward climb whacking my shin in the process. But this was nothing compared to the next bit for what laid before me next was a free hang climb over a 25ft drop onto a broken metal chain ladder which hung there like a cast off from some by gone era. My face dropped this was the hardest part of the trip for me, it took a lot of effort from all parties to get me up that. It was so difficult partly due to the fear factor where I was thinking one slip and that rope will break, partly due to my own physical strength lacking as I had pushed my self hard already that day but mainly due to my fact I was still wearing my SRT kit which had decided to wedge itself into the rock right at the top the precipice stopping me inches from safety. Rob was the only thing at this point stopping me from sliding back over the edge "Alex I will not let you go." Rob said. With those words I made one last effort and with the sound of screeching metal of my SRT kit I made it to the top into white line chamber. (Just to point out that he made the climb harder by lying in the passage instead of just walking up-Pete)

We headed off up stream and through a waterfall drenching me, was in-fact quite refreshing at that point so I didn't bother taking the bypass I saw (you didn't see it!!-Pete). We then proceeded through Battle of Britain chamber and up the climb to the county pitch. Thankfully we timed it right and another group had already rigged an SRT rope that we asked kindly to use, saving Rob the awkward and dangerous free climb of 8 meters to the top some good luck at last.

After a quick ascent and a few squeezes through the upper county passages we emerged. With all of us now out all that was left to do was to make the mile and half drudge to Lancaster to de-rig. I was amazed at how far this was and how far we must have travelled underground. This trip was certainly a hard a trip and not for the faint hatred, so despite my problems I am still proud to say that I completed that trip from Lancaster to County via the high level route. Rob was also happy as this was his first time on this route too and considered it "A fun trip". Finally due to Pete's fantastic memory, we only made one wrong turn in the whole trip.

Alex Ritchie

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