

# LONG CHURN CAVE – ALUM POT

Churn it up, Alan.

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9th February 2008

People present - Alex Ritchie, Mike Skyrme, Chris Kelly, Daniel Jackson (No not from stargate)

Weather: Clear sunny and surprisingly warm for this time of the year.

This trip for me was my the first trip since November using SRT so naturally I was quite apprehensive, prompting me the previous night to go through the usual routines in my head of how to pass re-belays etc. Despite the apprehension I was still quite looking forward to it. This was one of those trips I have always wanted to do, as I have never done daylight pitches before.

So I set off in the morning down to the Dales arriving first as usual, to be soon greeted by Dan and shortly afterwards everyone else including Rob and Pete who were doing their own trips. We were all marvelling at how nice the weather was for a change. Killing time and nerves I studied the handy survey of the wall in Inglesport's cafe of Alan pot from which I proceeded to bug Mike about the route so that I knew what to expect.

We didn't hang around for long, so that we could avoid or the tourists that frequent the Churns, but sadly within 5 minutes of us getting their 3 mini vans pulled up at once and an army descended on us. So we didn't bother putting our SRT kits on now and would wait until we reached the main pitch so we stuffed it in our tackle-bags. Straight away we quickly we charged off up the hill to avoid the crowds and get in before they did.

We made it in before them, just. We crawled our way through with heavy bags to a tough little climb where Mike rigged a hand line. Of course ignored the hand line Mike took time and effort to rig and knot and decided to use the rock, sorry Mike for the wasted effort. (Those who have caved me probably know now I do not like using hand lines and would go to extreme lengths often making the climb more difficult for my self to avoid them. Maybe it's some childhood experience or something but I would rather hold onto something solid thank-you.)

Anyway with that easily passed in my own way we reached the pitch head of the first pitch known as the Dollytubs pitch. I opened up the tackle sack to retrieve my SRT kit but then Oh Joy where is my Chest Jammer? I know I packed it in there before going in. Blast in our haste we didn't seal some of the bags properly and it must have fallen out! That's the second time that things escaped from me. So I left the others and proceeded to back track up the cave I got as far as the entrance no sign of it, so I turned back and scoured the ground some more. At last I spotted it, it was happily sitting in a side passage none of us had been down how it got in there I would never know. Well crisis over I headed off back to the pitch head and donned my SRT kit, which "almost" now fits thanks to some adjustments the previous weekend.

After a lecture in "the Basics of SRT, going down part 1." Chris was the first one to set off down the pitch to test the rope as it were. Of course what does Mike do halfway down he let's a torrent of water drop onto his head from the pool above. At least Mike did not discriminate because he did it to both Dan and me too.

Stepping off the pitch we walked down a streambed emerging into the sunshine, quite a few ohhhs and ahhs could be heard as only Mike had ever been down here before. Time was taken for pictures. Huge cliffs towered around us two waterfalls at either end tumbled down the rock-face, the far one disappearing out of sight below. We already seemed to be far underground yet we were only a 3rd of the way down.

The next pitch was rather easy just 5 meters to a large ledge below. It was however very slippery and slimy and I found my self slipping and swung into the wall when I lost my footing, Chris managed his second pitch with no problems and needed no help getting down showing me up too because he

managed to keep his footing.

The route on from there was a narrow ledge that sweeps round to the right of the abyss below us, to where a large rectangular rock laid wedged over the abyss making a natural bridge, the bridge however was at an 70 degree angle so therefore it was the 3rd pitch that we would have to negotiate.

The first part of this pitch was a horizontal affair basically walking backwards on our descended until we walked onto the steep part of the bridge. At this point Chris got his second lecture on SRT entitled "What's this knot for?", as there was a rebelay at the top of the slab. Chris passed it with only a little faffing. We then all followed him and made it past the rebelay and down to the bottom of the slab with the minimum of faff.

Straight after this was the 4th pitch which would take us down to the bottom of the abyss some 14 meters below. This pitch also had another re-belay which was at the very top just after the lip of the drop and was also very difficult to see until you get over the lip. Dan went first to rig the next pitch, followed by Chris who was guided by Mike got down there after a few minutes at the re-belay again picking it up bloody fast I thought.

Then it was my turn, slowly stepping out over the edge backwards was actually a lot harder than simply swing out over a pitch I found because it only takes a second this pitch was made worse for me by having to look down to see where the rebelay was. A few swear words were uttered at this moment. I wish however that I looked harder for once I have descended down to the rebelay I realised that I had managed to get the rebelay loop between my legs and there was no easy way to free my self.

Thankfully however Mike came up with a very nice idea of using my foot ascender's foot loop to hoist my right leg up so I could get it out of the rebelay loop it took some effort but I eventually freed my self. That's a handy trick if that should ever happen to you. Shortly after I was able to negotiate the rebelay and get my short cows tail off and headed down the rope to the bottom of the pitch.

A short distance further we reached what I thought was a climb however I saw Dan had rigged it, I asked was he sure this needed rigging but Dan said there was an anchor in the wall so it must be a pitch and it looked pretty hairy from up there. Just as I was about to attach my descender to go down my self Mike came along and called a stop to things and promptly unclipped the rope and chucked it down. It was just a climb and if we had rigged it we would not have any rope for the final pitch. The climb itself was actually easy it was more like stairs than anything so who knows why that anchor was there?

Looking straight up from the bottom at this point you could only see a thin slither of day light far above.

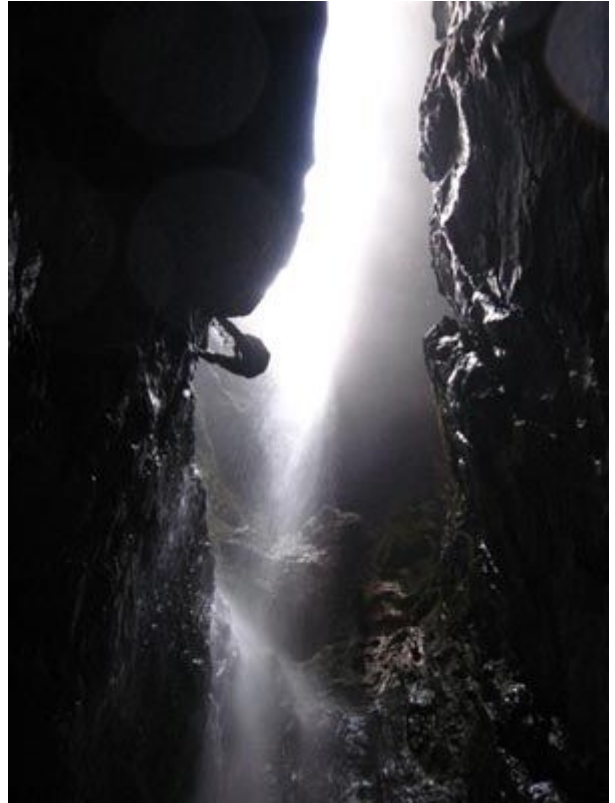
We reached and descended the Final pitch that brought us into the darkness once more. A challenging climb was next which was like a vertical water slide with as many handholds. I of course took the quickest route down. Shortly after we reached the bottom of the cave where the sump blocks any further progress so that's it job done we just need to get out now.

Going back up the climb it was Dan's turn to fall down it, making me the first one to get to the top of the climb. The pitches on the way out went by without a hitch except I still haven't mastered the technique of pulling the rope through with my feet making one or two pitch's slow for my self. I had to pull the rope through my ascender with my left hand as I stood up in the foot-loops. One day I will get this right I promise! Either that or I will just stick a big rock on the end of the rope hehe.

Chris did have a similar problem with this so a bottom belayer was used for most pitches. The rebelay's were far easier on the way up and caused us no real problems.

We were soon out and getting changed in the warmth for once at the cars.

*Alex Ritchie*





*Photos - Mike Skyrme & Daniel Jackson*

*A Black Rose Caving Club trip report.*