

MARBLE STEPS POT

A step to success

1st March 2008

People present - Mike Skyrme, Mike White, Neil Heywood

Weather: Cold, windy and drizzly going in but rain had stopped by the time we got out

The only firm plan for this weekend was that Neil was adamant he would attend. With no interest generated via the forum (except for pogle..... er, sorry I mean Rick), I was left wondering where to go that would suit Neil with some easy rebelays to practice on. Thoughts of Rowten's 1st pitch or Bull Pot OTW surface shaft were running through my mind when Mike White contacted me mid-week to say he was available. Ideas then switched to Harddrawkin or Marble Steps.

I was unsure how Neil would react to the latter choice but was pleasantly surprised when he said he would like to return to the "scene of the crime" so to speak and exorcise a few demons. With that – Marble Steps it was.

Saturday dawned cold and windy but at least it was dry. With car packed and everyone picked up, we were on our way by 8.15am. Rather than drive to Ingleton, we stopped at Devils Bridge (Kirkby Lonsdale) for a brew and a bun, the highlight of which was feeding "Bent Beak" a little gull who was unable to (nor even interested in trying to) pick up food from the ground due to its badly deformed beak, yet was extremely adept at catching morsels in mid air.

Arriving at an empty Masongill Lane, we quickly changed in the bitterly cold wind and set off for the cave.

Rigging the gully route, I dropped down and tied the 1st rebelay before calling Neil down. As he approached, I continued the descent and put in the deviation before finally dropping to the lower shelf in order to watch the activities going on above.

Neil approached the rebelay but couldn't manage to get across and clip into it. Lots of scrabbling about and mutterings (all of which we have heard before LOL) of rebelays and the odd "I cant's" thrown in for good measure ended with me prusicking back up, removing the deviation (not needed anyway as it was very dry) and climbing into the gully to offer directions. After a while Neil managed to pass the rebelay in a somewhat unorthodox way and continued down to the ledge. I followed leaving Mike W to act as rearguard.

I continued to rig down to the next rebelay and once tied, shouted for Neil to follow so I could talk him through it. More nerves resulted in another unorthodox descent, the main issue being a lack of confidence in his cowstails.

Once we were all in Upper Main Chamber (UMC), the way on for us was up into the Northwest Rift and a drop between boulders followed by a short crawl and climb down to emerge in Lower Main Chamber (LMC). I left the others here and headed into the 240ft rift to take some pics.

On my return to LMC we headed back through the crawl to the chamber at the foot of the climb to UMC, where Mike W and I squeezed up the continuation (I assume) of the Northwest Rift, to an aven with a rope in situ. As time was against us we left the rift to rejoin Neil and head up into UMC, where we met a party from Manchester University.

After a brief chat and photo's, they continued down as we made our way back to the surface. Mike W led with Neil next as I followed derigging. Neil passed each rebelay in a methodical (albeit slow for me as I was getting cold) way making good use of his spare footloop to assist his change overs and more importantly, he eventually allowed his cowstails to bear his full weight – a major achievement in itself. Once he was up, I followed untangling our ropes from the spaghetti of the university rigging. All packed up, we emerged into the cold, biting wind where a hasty departure from the fell followed by an even quicker change saw us residing at the fireside in the Whoop Hall

for a welcome drink before heading home.

All in all, a good day for Neil. Some, but not all of his demons have been exorcised. We just need to work on passing these things on the descent – watch this space!!!!

Mike Skyrme

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

