

Penyghent Pot 1964

Penyghent Pot was first entered by the Northern Pennine Club in 1949, when a group of club members digging at a small stream sink on Penyghent broke through into the cave. When the main part of the exploration and surveying was completed in 1950 the cave was established as the deepest known cave in Britain.

This is a reprint of an Article written by Mick Melvin in 1964 and included in the White Rose Pothole Club newsletter during that year; I have decided not to change the content in any way.

PENYGHENT POT IN 10 HOURS

For a long time John Motley and I had been planning a trip down Penyghent Pot and we decided to see if we had the support of the other lads in the club. A notice placed in the Club Room collected twenty signatures. The next thing to do was to decide on a date and obtain permission from the landowner to descend.

The date fixed was 12th January 1964, because we hoped the ground would be frozen and so there would be less water down the hole. Permission was obtained without any trouble and I arranged a meeting at the Sun Hotel on January 3rd for all those who hoped to go.

At this meeting everybody studied the surveys available and were given their allotted tasks. It was obvious from the start that everyone could not bottom the pot and so it was decided to split the team into two parties. One party was to ladder the pot, and the other party was to go down the pot three hours behind the Laddering party and de-ladder.

On the morning of the descent the laddering party (10 men) left Horton-in-Ribblesdale at 8-30am, and after a short rest entered the pot at 9-30am. A short hands and knees crawl led to a 6ft. climb down into a canal about knee-deep in very cold water. John Motley took the lead and we found that the roof descended immediately so that we were crawling on our hands and knees in about 18 inches of water. This proved arduous since everyone was carrying two items of equipment each. After half an hour or so of this we reached the top of the first pitch 20ft. This pitch had two waterfalls going down, one was from the canal the other was from the sink some half mile away. We stepped off the ladder into a knee-deep pool and the passage turned back underneath itself. This was quite an easy passage but contained some deep pools which were not too bad provided you kept to the edges. The next pitch we arrived at was a short one of about 15ft. with a rift leading off to the right via a crawl which leads to the big pitch (130ft). The top of the big pitch was very constricted and a suitable belay was hard to find. Eventually this was done and we descended to a small ledge where I found that the ladders had all collected in a big heap. From this ledge the climb entered a large chamber but I could not see the walls or floor until I was about 10ft. from the bottom, because of spray from a waterfall pouring down from somewhere above us. This pitch required exactly 130ft. of ladder.

I waited in the chamber for John Motley and Mick Omerod to join me, and after leaving instructions for the next two men to follow us, we set off down a rift passage on the far side of the chamber with one ladder and one belay each. The next three pitches were all very close together, all being about 30ft. At the bottom of the 3rd. rift pitch we ran out of tackle and settled down to wait. Here we had our first rest and something to eat. After about 20 minutes two lights, which appeared at the top of the pitch turned out to be those of one of the leaders of the de-laddering party Mick Bentham, and John Russum of the laddering party, both men carrying two ladders each. With the new ladders we descended two more pitches in the rift, but we had to climb down the next pitch because we had unwittingly laddered a climb which did not need laddering. At the bottom of the 9th pitch (30ft.) we landed in a pool thigh deep, which increased in depth as we approached a boulder chamber. The

way forward was to the right through a hole in the floor, where we joined the stream once more in a high passage which led us to the top of the 10th pitch (25ft.) Descending the 10th pitch we entered a large chamber with a low crawl leading off to the right. After this short crawl the water in the passage gradually became deeper until it was above our waists. This did not last long however, and we were soon wading knee-deep once more.

After what seemed a very long passage we arrived on top of a short climb 10ft. This climb was immediately on top of the last pitch (13ft). We belayed to an obvious belay and descended with the water. Once down the last pitch the way again was down a hole in the floor, but the amount of water made it very difficult to descend the climb, therefore we decided to try and find another way down to the lower stream level. John Motley traversed over a 30ft. hole on some very shattered rock to investigate an opening on the far side of the traverse. Whilst he was away Roger Harrison (de-laddering) arrived with a ladder and a belay after coming down the last six pitches on his own. We hung the ladder across the traverse just as John came to tell us it was possible to descend to the stream via the hole. We crossed the traverse and proceeded along a shattered ledge 30ft. above the stream and descended to the stream one at a time because of the dangerous state of the rock face. From here we proceeded down a long passage containing several deep pools. Suddenly we found ourselves looking at the sump which was about 25ft. long and running across the passage. The walls of the sump were very slimy and muddy. The six people at the sump were John Russum, Mick Bentham, Mick Omerod, Roger Harrison, John Motley and myself Mick Melvin.

The journey back to the 9th pitch went very smoothly, and it was here we met Bill Scholfield and Vincent Murray and two other B.S.C. members who were assisting the de-laddering. With the very able help of Bill and the lads we de-laddered all the rift pitches very quickly, but the 130ft. pitch delayed us for a while. On this pitch we had to change over at the ledge (60ft) as the lifeline would not go straight to the bottom. We progressed up the next two pitches and on through the canal to the surface crawl. We gained the surface at 7-15p.m., the last man coming out half an hour later, to face the blinding snow storm which was raging on the moors. My thanks to Jim Hanslip and Gordon Wilson who were at the surface to help with the tackle.

In conclusion I would like to include a list of equipment:-

Individual equipment- exposure suit and knee pads are essential.

Ladders

1st Pitch -30ft

2nd Pitch-20ft

3rd Pitch- 130ft + Lifeline 2 @ 110ft

4th Pitch-30ft

5th Pitch-20ft (Minimum)

6th Pitch-30ft

7th Pitch-30ft

8th Pitch-30ft

9th Pitch-climbed but needs 30ft

Belays

Crab and sling

40ft rope

20ft rope

Crab and sling

10th Pitch-20ft

20ft rope

11th Pitch-20ft

Traverse-20ft Line

PERSONEL

LADDERING PARTY: J.Motley, M.Melvin (Leaders) D.Shaw, J.Russum, B.Plant, M.Braithwaite,
M.Richmond, M.Omerod, D.Stewart, P.Cromack, B.Ferdinand.

DE-LADDERNG PARTY: M.Bentham, R,Harrison (Leaders), D.Newsholme., R.Ellis

P.Seddon, R.thompson, W.Scholfield., V.Murray, 2 B.S.G. members.

Mick Melvin (2010)

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