

Victoria Aven

Part 2 of Peak Cavern (Castleton).

See *Part 1* for an overview of the entire system, access and location.

Introduction

This aven is a huge fault-controlled shaft that towers above the **Upper Gallery** just a few metres beyond the end of **Five Arches** and the original show cave. It's full size is not apparent from the floor due to an accumulation of semi-collapsed miners' deads and natural false floors some 20m up. **Victoria Aven** is 75m high and up to 15m long and 10m wide. Extensive bolting operations in 1984 and 1985 led to two series of passages leading off from the north and south ends of the top of the aven. This description is based upon the Victoria Aven entry in John Cordingley's 1986 book 'Peak Cavern - a Caver's Guide' now out of print. Since then the pitches have been re-rigged several times and there have been a couple of extensions made. The S.R.T. ropes presently rigged should not be relied upon and it is worth researching their history prior to making an ascent.

The Aven

From the floor of the main cave a short scramble up muddy scree reaches the first pitch, a 30m prussik, passing two rebelayes to a ledge on the west wall. Two ropes continue up from this ledge. To the north a fine free-hanging 35m pitch leads up through a hole into a chamber at the start of the **Right Hand** or **Victoria Series**. At the top (back towards the main aven) another hole leads down into blackness, which would probably give a free-hanging pitch of about 70m. Moving northwards in this chamber, traversing past the hole just ascended (care!) leads to a further 6m pitch up to a rising calcite-floored ramp, with a superb flowstone formation on the left. At the top, a 12m aven becomes too tight overhead, but a stoop under small stalactites to the left leads into **Victoria Chamber**. Here are to be seen straws, helicitites, two small nests of cave pearls and a curiously runnelled mud floor. Rising out of **Victoria Chamber** is a steep bouldery rift climbing to a choke 100m above the show cave, where toadstone blocks and fragments of mammal bones can be seen. Just before this on the left is a crawl through densely packed straw salagittes which soon becomes calcite choked.

The other rope from the 30m ledge in Victoria Aven is the route up into the **Left Hand Series**. The pitch starts and finishes on the West wall of the aven but there are two rebelayes on the east wall. The shaft is very large

here and a somewhat airy pendulum off the ledge is necessary. This must be one of the most spectacular SRT pitches in Derbyshire. At the top of the rope are two further short pitches up into **Elephant's Head Chamber**, extending in both directions. To the south (left) past a fine display of calcite formations is a 25m crawl leading to a large tube (**Victoria Line**) going both ways. To the left is a mud blockage almost immediately, but the main way, to the right enlarges passing various choked offshoots to a floor hole. Crossing this (with care!) ascends a ramp to a small hole leading down a boulder pile into a smaller tube, passing the **Tube Chute** squeeze and **Broken Arm Grotto**. This emerges back at the north end of **Elephant's Head Chamber**.

The floor hole is a 25m pitch (**George Cooper's Aven**) followed by a slope down to two more pitches of 10m and 5m. Here a narrow rift with a steeply descending mud floor emerges into the lofty **Echo Chamber**. Many unique mud formations are seen on the floor which slopes down to a diminutive mud pit. It is also possible to enter a rift chamber at the western end of **Victoria Line** containing various choked passages, one leading to a small aven (too tight at the top). On the right is a steep ascent up boulders to a 6m high aven with a floor hole (overlooking the 25m pitch in **George Cooper's Aven**). At the top of the 6m aven a traverse leads to jammed boulders which are climbed for a few metres then passed by a crawl on the left. A 2m climb up beyond to a boulder ledge (belay) is followed by a final 7m traverse to where a huge boulder choke hangs in the roof (2).

June 2001:

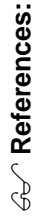
200ft of new passage was dug into trending south-west from **The Victoria Line**. It takes the form of a well decorated fossil phreatic hands and knees crawl with the occasional flat out section, passing a number of gours. A skeleton of a bat was also found. The passage end at a calcite blockage that looks terminal.



Description Notes:

John Cordingley's 1986 book 'Peak Cavern - a Caver's Guide'. Adapted and updated for this guide by Shaun Puckering. Last Updated: June 2001. This Edit: 31th December 2006.

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References:

1. Technical Speleological Group Journal No.11, pp33-37
2. Technical Speleological Group records Also personal communications from R. Grimes, G. Proudlove and I. Wright.



Surveys:

A complete survey of the Peak Speedwell System is available from Hitch n Hike 01433 651013 www.HIH-outdoors.com



Further reading:

- Crewe CPC Rigging Guide (topo) available directly from CCPC and local caving shops.
- Caves of the Peak District (p93), DW Gill & JS Beck 1991, now out of print ISBN 1-85568-034-3.
- Classic Caves of the Peak District (p144), Iain Barker 1997, now out of print ISBN 1-86126-058-X
- The Peak Cavern System - a Caver's Guide, John Cordingley 1986, now out of print ISBN 0-948152-01-X
- Rocks & Scenery of the Peak District (p76, 82), Trevor D. Ford 2002 ISBN 1-84306-026-4.
- Limestones and Caves of the Peak District (p7, 12, 13, 41, 203, 208-210, 275, 297, 300-5, 341-2), Trevor D Ford 1977, out of print ISBN 0 86094 004 1 (paper) & 005 X (cloth)



Entries in Descent Magazine:

- #111 (p16) Apr./May. 1993.
- #160 (p10) Jun./Jul. 2001.
- #161 (p10) Aug./Sep. 2001.



Amendments:

Amendments and additions can be sent to:- caveguides@peakdistrictcaving.info (any information regarding access or safety issues is automatically passed on the Derbyshire Caving Association).

WARNING!

Caving and exploring mines can be dangerous and fatal accidents can happen, especially if you are not sufficiently trained.

Anyone using this guide does so at their own risk while understanding and accepting that, although every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the writers and/or contributors can not be held responsible for any outcome however linked to this text. Do not rely on this description as it may contain errors. Your safety and the safety of those around you is your own responsibility. The existence of this guide does not imply a right of access to the cave. An access agreement may or may not be in place with the land owner. Liability Insurance linked to a Landowner Indemnity Clause may be required.

CAVE RESCUE

In case of accident telephone 999 and ask for Cave Rescue.