

Peak District Caving **Micro Guide**

Speedwell Cavern, Castleton.

Part 4: The Bung Hole Series.

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

The Bung Hole Series

Passing through the iron gate at the end of **Far Canal** a T-junction is met with a large stream flowing from the right. To the left it soon thunders off through a small hole over a dam wall (**The Bung Hole**) leading downstream to **The Bung Hole Series**.

Most of the **Main Stream Passage** water goes into this series directly via the **Bung Hole**. Some does sink down various swallets in **Far Canal**, though it rejoins the main flow in **Lower Bung Hole Series** (see later section). **The Bung Hole** itself is a stone-wall dam in the passage which keeps the water artificially high to maintain a constant level in the show cave canal. The stream pours over the dam through the small hole remaining and thunders onto the caver as they descend the fixed 6m iron ladder to the bottom. This becomes impassable in wet conditions. Below, inlets on the left become too tight and 25m downstream is a step up into a chamber on the right. From here a large calcite covered ramp ascends about 21m passing under a huge jammed rock to the base of **Block Hall**.

Block Hall is 100m high and is broken into three pitches leading up to **Watt Passage** and **The White River Series** (see Peak Cavern pt.8). Half way up the first pitch a small vadose passage can be seen in the south wall but to date this has not been investigated (1). At the base of the second pitch, an old fixed rope enters an alcove to a dig.

Downstream from here the passage (which is mainly walking sized) descends at a slight gradient with the stream gurgling noisily along for 80m to where a low dry crawl goes off on the left. This is the start of **The Long Bypass**.

Continuing downstream the next side passage is seen after 20m on the left, a low hands and knees crawl known as **The Short Bypass**. This is 90m long and is the normal route for cavers as it bypasses a very low section in the main stream passage that is impassable in all but the driest of conditions. If the main stream passage route is taken a climb up to the left enters a chamber. Straight ahead here climbs up stopes to a choke about 20m above stream level. To the left in the chamber a large natural passage also rises to a choke which has been dug in the past. By passing

through the wet crawl in the streamway, another blocked mined passage is seen to the left before the **Short Bypass** oxbow rejoins the main route.

From the lower end of the **Short Bypass** 40m of stooping emerges in **Rift Cavern**, a high chamber on **New Rake**, scattered with large slabs of limestone. Above on the left is **Egnaro Aven** (2,3), equipped with iron ladders, ascending 24m to **Colostomy Crawl** and **The Trenches** in **Peak Cavern** (see Peak Cavern pt.7). At the downstream end of **Rift Cavern** a short stooping passage rapidly encounters deep water at **Purtrell's Pool**, marking the start of **The Lower Bung Series**.

The Lower Bung Series

By wading chest deep in **Purtrell's Pool** and turning sharp left (straight ahead is blind) shallower water is reached in a stooping height tunnel. After 33m a sharp right hand corner is met with a large stream crashing in as a waterfall from a passage on the left - this is the downstream end of the **Long Bypass** from the **Bung Hole Series**. The combined streams rush off down a 3m high passage, with several deep pools and waterslides. Eventually a window on the left at shoulder height gives access to an inlet passage, which joins the main stream 10m further downstream. This **Window Inlet** is a stooping height canyon soon reaching a sump. A 16m dive in a low tunnel surfaces in about 40m of low streamway to **sump 2**, only 3m long but with a constricted exit. 40m of crawling reaches some loose slabs followed by an impassable oxbow on the right. The passage continues, passing a fissure on the left producing the stream, to end where a large rock fills the passage about 150m from the main streamway (4).

From **Window Inlet** downstream, the **Lower Bung Hole Series** takes the form of 200m of unbroken white-water caving. The floor is very uneven, having many deep pools, rockmills and rapids separated by sharp flakes which are often concealed beneath the foaming water. Progress has to be slow and deliberate in high water to avoid the risk of a broken ankle. It is possible from time to time to follow ledges above water level in the 3m diameter tunnel but most of this section is best passed by walking in the water. The jagged immature nature and froth-covered roof of this unique passage remind the caver that this is no place to be if rain is forecast. Eventually a ledge and short oxbow on the left are met, followed immediately by a static canal on the right known as **Sand Passage**. 25m of deepening water ends at low airspace at the start of **Treasury Sump**, connecting with **Peak Cavern's Treasury Chamber** (see Peak Cavern

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pt.7). The sump is not free-diveable despite the thick diving line, which is for properly equipped divers.

Beyond **Sand Passage**, the main streamway is often only a 1m high bedding, descending at a steep enough angle so that the water roars off down it very noisily in wet conditions. The next two passages seen on the right are an oxbow, containing a tight inlet sump. 60m downstream from Treasury Sump is **Overspill Passage** (5) where a curious phenomenon can sometimes be seen, The pulses created at Whirlpool and Main Rising are often still evident this far downstream (1.2km) and the water can rise and start to flow-off down Overspill Passage. See later warning! The passage itself starts off hands-and-knees sized but soon becomes a flat-out crawl as it descends over its 90m to a sand choke. To the right just before the end is a sandy crawl passing a tight squeeze to a very low sump after another 30m.

Downstream from **Overspill Passage** the main streamway continues noisily as a descending clean-washed crawl passing a deep pool on a double bend to reach the **Downstream Sump** 80m further on. This has been dived in drought for 150m in a shallow bedding plane and continues unexplored. The water eventually reappears at **Russet Well**. For a detailed description of the sump see the "Derbyshire Sump Index" published by the Cave Diving Group.

WARNING! Although rare, extreme pulses have been witnessed in the Lower Bung during very dry conditions. These are likely to originate from Main Rising. In 1993 two members of the Cave Diving Group were digging at the Backwater Choke in the Long Bypass having entered the cave via Peak Cavern and Treasury Sump. On the way in it was noted that the streamway was incredibly low, nothing more than a trickle. While at the choke it became obvious that something was happening in the cave. The trickle of water that runs under the choke rose to a flow and the main streamway could be heard roaring in the distance. Upon investigation the main stream was found to have risen to a torrent. It would not have been possible to head upstream against the flow. The two options were to exit the Lower Bung via Egnaro Aven or via Treasury. Both involving a committing trip downstream with the flow. A decision was made to go for Treasury via the Long Bypass. Upon joining the main streamway it became obvious that this could only be a one way trip. Heading downstream to Treasury both cavers were swept off their feet on several occasions. At Treasury the diving cylinders were hastily grabbed and an exit was made to the safety of Peak Cavern. During the 25 minutes it took to get from The Backwater to Treasury there was no sign of the pulse abating. While still underground it was assumed that there must have been sudden, heavy and

prolonged rain. Exiting the cave, it was dry, and there had been no rain..... This pulse had occurred after a long period of dry weather. It seems more plausible that Main Rising was the source of the pulse rather than Whirlpool. The volume of water discharged was massive and prolonged. Anyone caught downstream of a way out would have been in serious trouble (6).

Description Notes:

Based upon the description in John Cordingley's 1986 book, "The Peak Cavern System - a Cavers Guide", compiled by Shaun Puckering with later information compiled from various sources.
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References:

1. Shaun Puckering, personal communication.
2. Cave Diving Group Newsletter No.56, p25
3. Technical Speleological Group journal No. 11. pp. 16-18
4. Cave Diving Group Newsletter No.60, p28 (+ survey)
5. Cave Diving Group Newsletter No.66, p21 (+ survey)
6. Shaun Puckering, personal communication.

Surveys:

Available from Hitch n Hike 01433 651013 www.HNHoutdoors.com
Basic A4 elevations in Crewe CPC Rigging Guide from Hitch n Hike.

Entries in Descent Magazine:

- #49 (p27) Jul./Aug. 1981 (Window Inlet).
- #93 (p12) Apr./May 1990 (Diving the Downstream Sump).
- #113 (p19) Aug./Sep. 1993 (Block Hall).

Entries in CDG Newsletter:

- #55 Apr. 1980 (p22-23) (Treasury, diving Window Inlet, climbing Block Hall and climbing Rift Cavern).
- #60 Jul. 1981 (27-28) (Window Inlet)
- #70 Jan. 1984 (p23) (Rift Cavern / New Rake Choke).
- #94 Jan. 1990 (p21-22) (New Rake Choke).
- #95 Apr. 1990 (p17) (Downstream Sump).
- #103 Apr. 1992 (p45) (Downstream Sump).
- #161 Oct. 2006 (p16) (Downstream Sump).

**Amendments:**

Amendments and additions can be sent to:-

caveguides@peakdistrictcaving.info (any information regarding access or safety issues is automatically passed on to the Derbyshire Caving Association).

**NOTES:****WARNING!**

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

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