

Suicide Cave, Winnats Pass, Castleton.

Grid Ref: SK 13756 82715 (GPS) also known as Horseshoe Cave

Alt: 277m

Length: 140m+/-.

Access: No known access restrictions.

Introduction

Suicide Cave has one of the most obvious cave entrances in Derbyshire, being next to the road in Winnats Pass just up from Speedwell Cavern. Although short, it boasts a large fossil vadose passage up to 3m wide and 12m high. At some point in geological history, this has been a significant cave. There are many theories to explain its formation and its association with other nearby caves, some of which, are more plausible than others. All can be debated!

The cave first appears to be more complex than it really is. In brief, it's one big vadose passage split into several sections and levels by false boulder floors and blockages, with only one tributary fossil inlet. Towards the end the only way on is at roof level, in the roof tube which ascends to a choke. At this point, the roof tube appears to leave the main passage. Various parts of the cave have been dug, but without result. The choke at the end was dug and connected to a hole on the hillside above (1).

Although it is not necessary to use vertical caving techniques to progress through the cave there are a number of 'pitches' which have been equipped with resin P-hangers for vertical technique and rescue training. Although the bolting of this cave was extremely controversial it has to be said that it has reduced the number of training trips in other caves like Giant's Hole and P8. Now that instructors are using Suicide Cave regularly the entrance chamber is clean. It used to be full of litter and stank of urine (an unfortunate side effect of being easily accessible to the less desirable of the valley's visitors). The place is now kept free of litter and is no longer used as an impromptu toilet.

The Cave

The entrance is obvious, to the right of the road just up from the bottom cattle grid in Winnats Pass. It's 3.5m high by 3m wide, to the left, a smaller entrance soon joins the main cave. The entrance passage soon lowers to stooping height but emerges in the Entrance Chamber after 9m. On the left is Horseshoe Passage, 1.5m high by 1m wide with a 2m deep trench in the floor. This is 17m long and emerges at the smaller entrance.

5m across the Entrance Chamber is the foot of a boulder ramp and the main way on. The ramp used to lead up to the head of a 5m pitch back down to floor level but this was demolished in 2006 due to instability. It now an easy scramble down into a small but high "chamber". Ahead the passage splits but soon rejoins.

Taking the left branch, 5m of passage reaches a hole in the floor. This is 3m deep dropping into a squalid 6m long crawl ending at a "rather optimistic" dig. From the top of the hole go right through a lower section, on the right the descending bouldery passage connects back to the small chamber. Ignoring this, another junction is met after 3m. The way on is to the right but to the left a narrow passage and climb ascends for 5m to a squeeze up into a small 2m high by 3m wide chamber. To the left a small passage ends at a clay and gravel choke after 5m. Back in the chamber, the passage to the right is a 10m long crawl ascending to a boulder blockage.

Back down in the main passage, the way on is to the right through a hole. 5m on the passage is blocked at floor level but there are two options, the way on is ahead up a 4m climb, but up and back, a 10m boulder ramp reaches roof level and 4m of bouldery passage to a balcony overlooking the entrance ramp pitch. The approach to the balcony can be protected using natural rock belays to access twin P-hangers in the right wall. This position gives the best impression of the size of Suicide's passage, it's surprisingly big!

Back at the bottom of the 10m ramp, the way on is forward up a 4m climb. 6m of passage leads to another choke but up and back, another climb ascends a 7m ramp to roof level. From the top of the ramp there are two options. Forward (continuing in the same direction as the ramp back towards the entrance) the passage can be followed to a balcony and 8m drop overlooking the previously mentioned 10m ramp. The way on is back over the 7m climb (away from the entrance), a short traverse follows a roof level passage for 5m to a low arch (at this point that the roof tube appears to leave the main passage). Beyond, the passage enlarges and ascends reaching a hanging boulder choke after 17m. This was once dug out to connect with the hole on the hillside above. In wet weather a small stream enters here.



Description Notes:

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Surveys:

SUSS Journal 1976



References:

- 1). SUSS Journal 1976 / JN Cordingley pers.comm. Mar. 2004.
- 2). Dave Webb, DCA Conservation Officer, pers. com.



Further reading:

- Crewe CPC Rigging Guide available directly from CCPC and local caving shops.
- Caves of the Peak District (p104), DW Gill & JS Beck 1991, now out of print ISBN 1-85568-034-3.
- Limestones and Caves of the Peak District (p322, 328), Trevor D Ford 1977, out of print ISBN 0 86094 004 1 (paper) & 005 X (cloth)
- SUSS Journal 1976



Entries in Descent Magazine:

#194 (p10) Feb./Mar. 2007 (loose boulder choke).



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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).

WARNING!

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

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CAVE RESCUE

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