

The second trip was a bit shorter - only 15 hours. No problems routefinding, just a long slog to the end and the lump hammer and chisel ate Rich's tackle bag on the way in. The Duckham Sump was significantly worse than the previous trip, we were thankful of the bit of rope we'd put in, and it had obviously been sumped following the rain from a couple of days before. The other noticeable change was that the draught was going the other way all the way through and was blowing up Shrimpbone rather than down as it had done a few days earlier. At the end, Rich went up the pitch and it only took a couple of good swings with the hammer to knock the major obstacle to progress off, and after rerigging the pitch Snablet & I followed up.

The slot at the top of the pitch opened out almost immediately to an elongated, well decorated, oval chamber. At the opposite end, a 3m waterfall came down off the edge of a 2m deep false floor only a couple of inches thick at it's outer edge. Above and behind the slot at the top of the initial pitch the massive calcited boulder pile continues on up with several black spaces visible for 15m or so. Climbs up into this were too steep and slippery to consider with the gear we had.

Rich tried throwing a couple of rocks at the false floor as Snablet & I started surveying. The false floor held. We looked up at it, and umm'd and err'd and tried climbing up the wall next to it. Bugger - we thought. We weren't going to be beaten, so Snablet leant on Rich as he perched on a crumbly ledge on the wall and hammered hell out of the floor - this had the effect of diverting the stream down Rich's arms and giving Snablet an unwelcome afternoon shower. Still it didn't take long for the floor to be hammered back enough that Rich could be launched up - We were in.

I derigged the ladder and passed this on up to Rich who rigged it off a stal boss and off we went surveying in to a slightly smaller version of shrimpbone inlet. The passage was generally a joint controlled rift 1.5m - 2m high though in places the stream meanders turned this into a low tube / bedding. After 50m or so we started meeting cross rifts which generally went a few m's to small avens (10 - 15m high ?) Some nice long straws in places also. After ~150m (? - you'll need to add up the survey legs) a junction was met with a tall rift going right and left. Left, went to a climb up and a tall aven. Right, went through a calcited slot into a chamber at the base of several large dripping avens (20 - 30m maybe more, It was hard to see with failing carbides. The stream we had been following was not evident in this aven area, though whether it came from water percolating through the sand and rocks at the base of the avens or from elsewhere was not clear. This aven area was dubbed 'Mongooses don't jump' in honour of the small plastic novelty ice cream container that had been acquired in the Bakers the night before and followed us down, It's now bravely manning the survey station in the terminal chambery bit - awaiting explorers to drop in sometime !

This was as far as we could go, so we packed up and headed back. The ladder is still in place on the 2nd up pitch and pulled out or the water. There was only one set of SRT kit so Rich went down first and got a brew going, Next went Snablet, "Gear's on the end of the rope" he eventually shouted up. I went to haul the rope up, and discovered somewhat worryingly that the rope's sheath had been cut right through and slipped down a metre or two. Mmmmmmm.

I set about rerigging what rope was left and discovered that once rerigged the end the others had abseiled down was now too short to reach the bottom. Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm

I derigged the rope, being careful not to drop it down the pitch !! and managed to gain enough rope to re-rig the top of the original climb. I then had to perform some entertaining swinging / climbing acrobatics whilst derigging and rerigging the original climb up. I managed to recover most of the gear left on the climb and the pitch is now reasonably rigged up the wall out of the water (until the top that is - see diagram in the log book!!.)

NOTE It would be worth telling the next team in, that they should bring a sturdy new rope and possibly some climbing / rigging gear as I wouldn't trust that climbing rope to last another party going up & down it.

After a bit of food we packed up - and headed out - It was a relief to get back through Duckham Sump and apart from a twinging back, being knackered and having stage1 Shrimpbone Fever (a squitty bottom) the trip

out was almost a pleasure. We arrived back in Riaño to find Jim & Terry had done a sterling job in keeping the bar open AND brought over an excellent mountain stew. Even better, Andy Pringle had been keeping German's open, drinking Orange an Pink alternately (Cointreau and Pacheran)

Full marks to the support team.

Excellent Easter all round - I've nearly recovered now.
See you soon,

Sam.