

Victoria Aven - Part 2 of Peak Cavern.

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 showcave. Its 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 partly 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 SRT ropes presently rigged should not be relied upon, and it is worth researching their history prior to making an ascent.

Description

From the floor of the main cave a short scramble up muddy scree reaches the first pitch, a 30m prussik, passing three rebelay to a further rebelay at a ledge on the west wall. A rope continues upwards from this ledge, but an in-situ traverse to the right (north) along a fixed rope leads to a set of three up pitches (with rebelay) of 12m, 15m and 12m in the northwest corner. Do not step onto the adjacent bridge of cemented rocks as it is very unstable. These pitches have recently been re-bolted (2017), and the route mostly avoids fractured rock, being covered in flowstone for most of the climb. The pitches lead up through a hole onto a stable flowstone-coated bridge. at the start of the **Right-Hand** or Victoria Series.

Moving northwards and 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, helictites, 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 loose choke (care) 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 stalactites which soon becomes calcite choked.

The other rope from the 30m ledge is the route up to the **Left-Hand** Series. The pitch starts and finishes on the west wall of the aven but there is a rebelay on the east wall between these. 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 west wall rebelay, a rope heading even higher up the shaft is another, older route to the Right-Hand Series, with another airy pendulum leading to a further rebelay on the west wall, followed by a hanging traverse across the shaft to the bridge previously mentioned. This route passes close to much shattered and loose rock with stones perched on small ledges and is therefore not recommended for safety reasons.

From the rebelay on the west wall there are two further short pitches (take great care – fractured rock) 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, **The 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.

June 2001:

200ft of new passage was dug into trending south-west from The Victoria Line, named **Foot and Mouth**. It takes the form of a well decorated fossil phreatic hands and knees crawl with the occasional flat out section, passing several gours. A skeleton of a bat was also found. The passage ends at a calcite blockage that looks terminal but is roughly at the correct altitude to intersect the main bedding plane of the **White River Series**.

Description Notes:

John Cordingley's 1986 book 'Peak Cavern - a Caver's Guide'. Adapted and updated for this guide by Shaun Puckering.

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WARNING!

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CAVE RESCUE

In case of accident telephone 999 and ask for Cave Rescue

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