

## Peak District Caving **Micro Guide**

### Pickering's Passage to Moss Chamber & Cohesion Part 4 of Peak Cavern (Castleton).

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

#### Introduction

Pickering's Passage enters the north wall of the Upper Gallery about 150m upstream from Mucky Ducks. The muddy 1m diameter tube does nothing to advertise the existence of the fine cave beyond. This includes the finely decorated Moss Chamber, Anniversary Hall, Cohesion Sump and Toadstool Aven.

#### The Series

A 3m climb up on good but slippery footholds leads into a 1m diameter phreatic tube in the north wall of **Upper Gallery**. For almost 90m this hands and knees crawl continues in similar fashion, rising slightly and following a tiny stream. Where it lowers noticeably, a squeeze over a block to the right bypasses a flat-out section. Immediately beyond this squeeze the passage rises on the right to a tiny muddy aven. To the left rejoins the main route which continues as before but made smaller with a floor of mud and rocks. A few metres beyond the squeeze, a slot up on the right (easily missed but follow the echo!) enters a much bigger passage, the main crawl continuing into Pickering's Passage Extension (see below).

The big passage above the slot is 3m high and 5m wide, climbing steeply. To the right is a small hole connecting with the top of the tiny aven mentioned above, and is impassable. The main passage has a very slippery mud floor and care must be taken to avoid an uncontrolled descent, which has happened in the past, fortunately without any major injuries being sustained. At the top, an easy walk along a canyon passage is interrupted by two rather sporting climbs up greasy flowstone (care!) rising to a junction with another large passage. This is mud-choked to the right but continues to the left into another canyon section. Where a stalagmite flow fills most of the passage it is necessary to climb up and squeeze through **The Eyehole**, a narrow slot at roof level. A careful move forward avoids a nose-dive to the floor of the continuing passage, developing into a crawl over interesting floor deposits of calcite. Beyond, a slippery climb down flowstone into a chamber is followed by a 9m climb back up to roof level (fixed handline sometimes in place) leading to a crawl over a floor of tiny crystalline gours. Shortly after, the passage enlarges

and the caver plunges into a chest-deep gour pool to enter **Moss Chamber**.

This is one of the best decorated parts of Peak Cavern's lower level. A clean white flowstone floor rises steeply to the top of this 30m long chamber. Halfway up in the right wall, and marked by an inscription is the entrance to the tight shaft where Neil Moss lost his life (1,2) in 1959. It is blocked by rocks a few metres down just beyond the first bend. The roof of Moss Chamber is liberally adorned with white stalactites and at one point a superb white flowstone cascade enters from a choked roof passage. At the top of the chamber a small drop leads into an awkward crawl, followed by easier going into **Anniversary Hall**. Here, a steep loose boulder pile must be climbed to where a huge block is jammed across the passage. Crawling over this and through a body-sized hole enters **Anniversary Aven**. A further boulder slope up follows, and is extremely unstable leading to a vertical wall of mud and rocks insecurely held together with calcite. This has been climbed (3) (initially on the right by crossing a loose ledge to the left after 7m) to reach a passage 18m above. This rises to a loose unpromising boulder choke but another difficult 15m climb up has entered various choked passages, one entered via a delicate traverse on a mudslope. The main way on is a fine aven soaring out of lamp range which will not be an easy proposition to ascend. Due to the risk of massive collapse the whole area of Anniversary Hall and beyond is best avoided.

**Pickering's Passage Extension** is entered by crawling along the obvious continuation of the initial Pickering's Passage (past the route to Moss Chamber) which reaches a short muddy twisting section. This is the site of the 1971 T.P.U. breakthrough (4) into the easier going of **Cohesion Crawl**. Most of this muddy passage is hands and knees sized, with one or two lower sections, gradually ascending to a junction with a much bigger passage after about 90m. To the left this large phreatic tube descends immediately in **Cohesion Sump**, the water overspilling down Cohesion Crawl. Underwater the tube is up to 6m diameter and descends steeply to a silt choke at a depth of -26m, some 53m from base (5). In drought the level of this sump has been known to drop considerably and it has been observed to fall by as much as 11m below its normal level (6). To the left of the sump pool, it is possible to enter a crawl at water level ending in a dig. This has seen activity over the years.

Upslope the large tube is obstructed by huge boulders, and a careful route must be followed round and between these. At one point the caver is faced with the choice between an exposed muddy climb up a slab, or a very tight

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squeeze between three boulders. The latter is the only safe alternative, but bigger cavers will find this very difficult. Beyond, and still climbing the route rises into the magnificent **Toadstool Aven**. This large chamber has many unusual stalagmite deposits on its floor, and translucent calcite on the walls resembling ice. A tiny hole in the roof (7) has been reached by scaling and is choked immediately. Most of the roof consists of very well calcited boulders and there is very definitely no way on. The whole of this large tube (after the junction with Cohesion Crawl) is probably associated with the easterly continuation of New Rake, which controls much of the nearby Speedwell Cavern.

A route to the left is a fine phreatic rift of walking size, which passes a couple of low sections over calcite floors, to end at a sharp right hand turn and a large flowstone blockage with a small hole which could be "enlarged". At the right turn a hole in the calcite floor has been dug to a possible mud filled passage the would carry straight on. (8)

#### **Description Notes:**

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Adapted for this guide by Shaun Puckering with additions from Tim Webber.

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#### **References:**

1. Descent No.62, pp20-27.
2. Descent No.63, pp32-36.
3. Technical Speleological Group Journal No.II, pp5-7, 19-20.
4. British Speleological Assn Bulletin (new series), No.3, p7.
5. Cave Diving Group Newsletter No.58, p27.
6. British Speleological Assn Bulletin (new series), No.4, p21.
7. T. Jackson, personal communication.
8. T. Webber, personal communication.

#### **Surveys:**

A complete survey of the Peak Speedwell System is available from Hitch n Hike 01433 651013 [www.HNHoutdoors.com](http://www.HNHoutdoors.com)  
CDG NL: #107 (p33) Apr. 1993 (Cohesion Sump).



#### **Further reading:**

- Crewe CPC Rigging Guide (topo) available from Hitch n Hike.
- Caves of the Peak District, DW Gill & JS Beck 1991, now out of print ISBN 1-85568-034-3.
- Classic Caves of the Peak District, 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, Trevor D. Ford 2002 ISBN 1-84306-026-4.
- Limestones and Caves of the Peak District, Trevor D Ford 1977, out of print ISBN 0 86094 004 1 (paper) & 005 X (cloth)



#### **Entries in Descent Magazine:**

- #48 (p15) Mar./Apr. 1981 (Cohesion Sump).
- #63 (p32-36) Mar./Apr. 1985 (Neil Moss).
- #110 (p15) Feb./Mar. 1993 (Cohesion Sump dig).
- #117 (p17) Apr./May. 1994 (Toadstool Aven).
- #160 (p10) Jun./Jul. 2001 (Balcony Aven).



#### **Entries in CDG Newsletter:**

- #55 (p22) Apr. 1980 (Cohesion Sump).
- #107 (p30-33) Apr. 1993 (Cohesion Sump).
- #120 (p26) Jul. 1996 (Pickering's Sump).
- #155 (p14) Apr. 2005 (Cohesion Sump).



#### **Amendments:**

Amendments and additions can be sent to:-

[caveguides@peakdistrictcaving.info](mailto: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.

### Related Media:

- A caving documentary "Fight for Life - the Neil Moss story" is available on DVD from [www.HNHoutdoors.com](http://www.HNHoutdoors.com) The story of the heroic attempt to rescue a trapped caver from the narrow confines of a shaft in the depths of Peak Cavern in March 1959.  
Running Time: 50mins  
Mail order: 01433 651013