

Danger Below!

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"ROCK!!!"

Our worst nightmare was now underway. A football-sized rock had become dislodged, on its own and was falling down a 232' pit of unknown dimensions, with a caver on bottom. Four harrowing seconds later the boom echoed up the shaft filling the cavern with waves of uncertainty. The next few seconds would be critical!

Only moments earlier?, Jon Cammon, Jonathan Upton, Patrick O'Diam and myself were sitting on a wet, clay/mud, slope in a small entrance room, having just slithered through the tiny entrance opening to O'Hara Fare Well.

We were all aware of the inherent danger associated with this pit as we sat motionless on the slick mud mound "saftied" into a handline so as to keep ourselves from sliding down the 15 degree slope into the pit. Our gear was 'binered' onto the line as well. The simple fact was, if it wasn't attached to a rope it was going down the pit. It was quite obvious that the top of this pit was still undergoing a metamorphosis. Large boulders, the size of stoves sat perched on loose gravel, held in place only by very conspicuous and unstable mud supports. We were hoping and praying that a thunderstorm didn't come rolling through while we were in the cave, for it looked as if the next "gulley washer" would completely transform the room we were sitting in.

As the scenario continued to unfold, Patrick was carefully and methodically rigging in for descent. The important issue of motionless behavior cannot be stressed enough. Every movement sent something tumbling into the black void. None of us had ever done the pit, so we had no idea whether the pit remained roughly the size of the small room we were in or became a voluminous, dark void like so many other TAG pits. We only knew that we had 300 feet of rope in the pit and one fist-sized rock or smaller, could slice it like a machete.

Patrick softly worked his way to the edge of the tight, canyon-type lip and slowly lowered himself to begin the rappel. The walls of this narrow opening were razor sharp. He lowered himself to a gravel covered ledge 20-30 feet below the lip. A rope pad is highly recommended at this ledge, however, keeping the rope on the pad is very difficult. From here the pit bellies and becomes another beautiful TAG specimen. A small stream that, during wet weather, shoots a healthy column of water into the cavern, enters the pit at about the ledge level and cascades to the flat, rock strewn floor some 200 feet later. Rigging in for ascent is also done very, very carefully so as to minimize the chance of knocking some of the loose rock from the ledge and also to try to keep the rope on the pad.

The last glimpse we had of Patrick was of him going over the lip. Two, still, quiet minutes passed when suddenly a ten pound rock released from somewhere to the right of Cammon and tumbled off into the pit. "ROCK", Jon screamed, it was all he could do. "This could be tragic", I thought. The next sound we heard was the echo from the rock striking bottom. We waited breathlessly, for what seemed like an eternity, for some type of communication from below.

"Hey!!!!!" came the much welcomed response. "I'm O.K."

At that moment, a silent prayer of thanks was offered I'm sure, by ah present.

Pat's climb was quick and careful and his words as he "lipped" the pit are worth repeating. "It's a beautiful pit but I don't want anything to do with it ever again. I'm getting out of here now! " I could tell he was greatly upset. His hands shook as he speedily removed his gear. The rock had slammed into the wall only 20 feet above his head and had shattered, spraying him with stone pieces in the process. Jon and Jonathan. both equally unnerved, opted for better judgment and exited the cave with Patrick

Being the idiot that I am, and displaying the sense God gave professional wrestlers, I bounced the pit.

