

Titan, Hurdlow, Castleton, Derbyshire.

Grid Ref: SK 13874 81846 (GPS)

Alt: 428m

Length: >17km including Speedwell Cavern, Peak Cavern and J.H.

Access: Booking is required.

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Introduction

Titan was discovered on the 1st of January 1999 and is the biggest natural shaft in the UK, standing at 141.5m (464ft). The choke through which it was found is a major feature of Peak Cavern's Far Sump Extension and has been known about since 1981 when Far Sump was first passed. Various divers investigated the site but it was obvious that digging through it would require a great deal of effort and equipment. In light of other "open" leads the choke was relegated to the long term "to-do" list. In hindsight, the dig would not have been a practical proposition for divers entering via Far Sump. The severity of the dive combined with the amount of equipment required and the inherent risks of dismantling boulder chokes from below would prevent a serious assault being made until a dry way into the extension had been found. There had to be one somewhere as there was evidence that lead miners had gained access.

From 1981 onwards, cavers tried to find a dry way in following many theories. J.H. and The Boulder Piles in Speedwell Cavern were to eventually provide the key (see separate entries). J.H. was pushed through seven chokes to a massive shaft that bottomed out on a choke directly above the Boulder Piles. A lengthy dig made the connection with Speedwell and one mystery was solved. From the bottom of J.H. another lengthy dig made the connection with Far Sump Extension. At last there was a dry way in.

The choke was tackled and passed. It was immediately obvious the shaft above was vast but no one imagined just how.... The "climbers" made the ascent over several days, bolting and pegging their route. With height came the reality of size. A large "black hole" in the roof (the Event Horizon) led to a ledge, above which the shaft belled out with the roof still out of sight. Various routes above reached the roof breaking the UK's height record by a staggering 43m (141ft). Exploration revealed a massive ascending gully to the East, a fine canyon streamway, and a major passage 130m up in the Western wall of the shaft.

The 130m Passage was the most promising of the leads. A 4m high 3m wide passage heading into "no man's land". Unfortunately, 12m in.... there was a massive choke. A short "exploratory dig" showed this to be another serious undertaking and because of it's position, and the length of time taken to get there digging was not practical. A week later two of the team were on the hillside above the surveyed position of the shaft. They discovered that one of the small shake-holes had slumped slightly. This was evidence of a natural connection between the choke in the 130m Passage and the surface. The choke had slumped all the way up to the surface 55m above. Permission was sort and granted and what was to become Britain's biggest digging project, connected with Titan three and a half years later.

Titan is still an active digging site and for reasons of safety, there is no general access. This description describes entry via the original route in from the bottom.

Location

The top entrance is in a very unlikely place, perched almost on top of Hurdlow, one of the highest hills above Castleton. Prior to work starting on the dig there was nothing more than a tiny shakehole to hint at the existence of a cave below.

Description

From the streamway just prior to **Far Sump** a slippery climb up through a muddy hole on the right (looking downstream) gains access to a lofty passage with a boulder strewn floor. This leads for a few meters to a 4m vertical climb up assisted by a hand line. At the top the passage continues, lowering as it nears the roof, to a junction. Ahead soon runs into a huge choke but a small bouldery crawl on the right leads for 25m to a 3m vertical squeeze into a large bouldery chamber (**Blarney's Breakdown**). This chamber has solid walls and a solid roof but the slope leads up into the **Titan Choke**. This is the same choke that the entry crawl skirts and the same choke that the bigger passage prior to the crawl runs in to. It is one massive choke! Up slope, from the point of entry, an obvious dig now supported by scaffolding ascends into a ruckle of massive boulders. A careful ascent up, along, up and along, enters a flat out crawl under a roof (a massive boulder) to emerge in the base of Titan. The floor area is big, but nothing compared with what is above. Even With a 100w lamp, the walls just go on up, disappearing beyond a black hole 65m above (**The Event Horizon**).

The ascent to **The Event Horizon** is a single pitch of 55m. Above, a sloping ledge is gained and looking up the true enormity of Titan is revealed. The walls bell out, the roof can't be seen and to the East and the massive **Eastern Gully** (Horne's Gully) ascends away into the black at forty-five degrees. A traverse round the **Event Horizon** reaches a short drop into a small stream canyon. Just up stream a climb out to the left gains access to a massive ledge overlooking the shaft. Up behind, The **Eastern Gully** ascends, 100m of climbing up a loose slope via occasional short vertical sections. An incredible place but dangerous. Any rock dislodged collects more on the way down and these won't stop until the bottom. At the top, a cornice of poised boulders can be passed to a hanging ledge beneath a vast hanging choke. This point can only be a matter of metres from the side of Upper Cave Dale. Back in the stream canyon, cascades can be followed upstream passing through various small chambers for 120m to a choke, terminating this route.

From **The Event Horizon**, the ascent continues for another 65 metres to the 130m Passage. From here an aid climb accessed Titan's central aven, climbed to a ledge and small decorated chamber, 141.5m, 464ft above the floor. The 130m Passage, 3m wide by 4m high, can be followed to a choke. 6m Above the 130m passage an excavated bedding leads to the **Titan Surface Shaft**. From the point of entry the surface shaft is 45m to the surface.

Obviously from above, the story is quite different. A 45m pitch accesses a horizontal passage, an excavated bedding, leading to a hole in the west wall of Titan, 136m above the floor, 71m above the Event Horizon. A 71m pitch reaches the Event Horizon Traverse, giving access to the stream inlet, Horne's Gully and the drop below. The drop from the Event Horizon is 55m.

Currently, there is no general access to Titan via the surface shaft. However, once exploration is complete, a more open access system will be adopted.



Description Notes:

Written: October 2003, Shaun Puckering & Dave Nixon.

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Surveys:

- The up to date Peak Speedwell survey which includes the location of Titan is available from Hitch n Hike 01433 651013
- Descent magazine #148 (p12) Jun./Jul. 1999.



Further reading:

- www.PeakDistrictCaving.info (news pages)
- Descent #174 (p20-23) Oct./Nov. 2003 (No One Said It Would Be Easy).
- Descent #175 (p30-32) Dec./Jan. 2003/4 (No One Said It Would Get Harder).
- Descent #176 (p24-25) Feb./Mar. 2004 (Nobody Thought It Would Be This Hard!).



Amendments:

Amendments and additions can be sent to:-

caveguides@peakdistrictcaving.info (any information regarding access or safety issues is automatically passed on the the Derbyshire Caving Association)

 **Entries in Descent Magazine:**

- #146 (p13) Feb./Mar. 1999.
- #147 (p10) Apr./May. 1999.
- #148 (p12) Jun./Jul. 1999.
- #149 (p19) Aug./Sep. 1999.
- #150 (p10) Oct./Nov. 1999.
- #151 (p11) Dec./Jan. 1999/2000.
- #152 (p10) Feb./Mar. 2000.
- #153 (p11) Apr./May. 2000.
- #154 (p17) Jun./Jul. 2000.
- #155 (p9) Aug./Sep. 2000.
- #156 (p9) Oct./Nov. 2000.
- #157 (p14) Dec./Jan. 2000/01.
- #158 (p19) Feb./Mar. 2001.
- #159 (p13) Apr./May. 2001.
- #161 (p10) Aug./Sep. 2001.
- #162 (p14) Oct./Nov. 2001.
- #163 (p10) Dec./Jan. 2001/2.
- #164 (p15) Feb./Mar. 2002.
- #166 (p9) Jun./Jul. 2002.
- #167 (p14) Aug./Sep. 2002.
- #168 (p10) Oct./Nov. 2002.
- #169 (p14) Dec./Jan. 2002/3.
- #171 (p10) Apr./May. 2003.
- #173 (p17) Aug./Sep. 2003 (surface connection).
- #174 (p20-23) Oct./Nov. 2003 (No One Said It Would Be Easy).
- #175 (p30-32) Dec./Jan. 2003/4 (No One Said It Would Get Harder).
- #176 (p16) Feb./Mar. 2004.
- #176 (p24-25) Feb./Mar. 2004 (Nobody Thought It Would Be This Hard!).
- #179 (p16) Aug./Sep. 2004.
- #180 (p9) Oct./Nov. 2004.
- #182 (p10) Feb./Mar. 2005.
- #183 (p10) Apr./May. 2005.
- #187 (p15) Dec./Jan. 2005/6.
- #190 (p16) Jun./Jul. 2006.
- #193 (p13) Dec./Jan. 2006/7.

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.