

Recon Trip for a Grease Rack Bolt Climb- July 5th, 2008

For the last couple of years I have been hearing talk of a potential 30 foot bolt climb at the Grease Rack in Butler Cave. The Grease Rack is upstream, past Penn State Lake and Pittsburgh on the way to Mbagintao. The climb was reported to have the potential to break through the lower Clifton Forge sandstone into next limestone layer.

On Saturday July 5th, Nate Hirneisen, Al Grimm, Scott Olson, and Tony Canike assembled at the homestead for our planned trip. After assessing the state of the team, the pile of aid climbing gear, our various time constraints, and the detritus from the party the night before, we decided on a fast and light trip to recon the Grease Rack before gearing up to climb it. We entered the cave before noon, with thoughts of sunny weather at the swimming hole in the back of my mind. But the mission was set, so inward we went. Past the Natural Bridge, turn left, crawl through the dry sumps, and up to the lake. Through the lake, up the climb, through the fissure, across the graveyard, past snake river. Left at three rivers stadium (it is Pittsburgh, after all), left at the 4-way, and just like that we were at the Grease Rack.

Well, the dream of 30 feet of bomber but easily drilled rock proved to be just that, a dream. The first 20-25 feet is limestone that is very decomposed. We were able to dig into it about 4 inches with our hands with no effort really – a goopy slimy mess. The limestone face is not dead vertical – it probably lays back at about a 70 degree angle. After that, there is about 5 feet of vertical sandstone capped with a muddy sloping ledge with a possible lead (ok, a shadow.) Then perhaps 10-25 more feet of sandstone to climb, but where to go is hard to tell until you get on the muddy ledge. There is a mud bank far to the left that Scott climbed to bypass the rotten limestone, but that would be about a 25 foot bolt aid traverse back right to gain the muddy ledge. We lit it up and stared for a while, knowing we had to come back with the proper gear.

Our decision to recon was a good one, as we would have not had the gear to deal with the rotten rock. The best idea I have heard so far is to drill deep 1/2" holes and pound in rebar.

Who wants to join me for a return trip to do the climb?

UNPUBLISHED NOTES:

Before getting to the grease rack proper, there is a potential chimney bolt protected climb that might get you to the same place as the muddy slope.

There's a poke hole to sneak around and up into to get a good view of the climb.