

SIMPSON POT

(Ian Patrick)

Proposal to install chains to link anchors in three locations

Background Information

Swinsto and Simpsons were not originally anchored for pull-through trips. Some anchor positions would indicate that there was also a favour towards ladder and lifelines.

I would like this opportunity to put on record my complete admiration for the early installers of resin anchors in our caves. This is not an easy job, even with today's modern tools and anchors, we really do "stand on the shoulders of giants".

The CNCC Committee agreed a number of months ago to allow both caves to have additional work to the anchors carried out. The aim was to bring them up to a standard which would meet modern demands and make descents safer, more user friendly and generally "fit for purpose".

Before this project was carried out, descent of both caves as a pull-through trip was only possible by either;

- Using a single anchor
- Using two anchors which were not suitably spaced, making rope retrieval more difficult and potentially causing excess wear on the anchors
- Leaving tat behind, or using tat left in place.

This was not an ideal situation for two of our best and most popular pull-through trips. These caves really are our "Jewels in the Crown" and working on them feels like it, I am always wearing my "metaphorical" white gloves!

The project aims to provide an anchor situation fit for purpose. Both caves are used for both pull-through trips and standard SRT trips, therefore the anchor arrangement has to accommodate both styles.

THE PROCESS

Traverse

Ensure a pitch head has a sensible traverse approach if required (a number didn't).

Pitch head

Each pitch head requires a solution for both pull-through and fixed rigging.

The pull-through solution of two offset closely spaced resin anchors is the default at ALL pitch heads (except currently at the three locations noted later).

The work process goes as follows, with the aim to have as few anchors at the pitch head as possible:

Assess pitch head and if existing anchors achieve what is required, DO NOTHING. (This was the case in a couple of instances where additional anchors had been added in the past)

Rationalise anchors and/or adding new ones as necessary to achieve a TWO ANCHOR pitch head where both anchors are suitable for either pull-through or fixed rigging. (This was achieved in a pleasing number of cases).

If a two anchor pitch head was not achievable then a THREE ANCHOR pitch head would usually achieve the desired outcome.

Only in a couple of instances have we had to resort to a FOUR ANCHOR pitch head. This is generally where the fixed rigging needs to be further out than would be suitable for a pull through.

All pitches in both caves now have the above anchor configurations, except for the three locations below, which relate to the request of adding chains to the anchors.

Slit Pot

This pitch head currently has FIVE anchors. Work could possibly be done here to achieve a pitch head configuration as per the other ones, however the presence of five anchors suggests that this is a problematic area and currently it is not optimised for a pull through. Linking two of the existing anchors here with a chain would provide a single attachment point and allow a clean up of the surplus anchors.

Options for fixed rigging could either use the anchors with which the chain is attached to (as you would if a pitch was already rigged) or simply attach to the centre point of the chain.

Over the top at Slit Pot

This area is currently not shown on the CNCC topos.

The pitch head here has potential to be extremely user friendly, lots of space and an open impressive shaft. Currently work here has included an extra anchor on the traverse to make it more “sensible” and two anchors suitable for a Y hang.

Linking these two anchors with a chain would provide a near perfect pull-through single attachment point, with NO rope rub.

As with Slit Pot, fixed rigging could use the same anchors or even easier use the central point. This would allow a TWO anchor pitch head suitable for both types of rigging.

Great Aven

This route provides a REALLY nice option for a pull-through:

- It is much drier than Slit Pot
- It avoids Slit Pot !
- It avoids the last wet pitch of Swinsto
- It visits a really nice chamber on route

The pitch head at the top of the sloping rift which had the most accumulated “tat” has been rationalised to a TWO anchor pitch head suitable for both styles of rigging.

If descending rift on fixed rigging, there is an existing anchor partway down for a re-belay.

At the pitch head of the main drop two anchors installed here provide the same situation as per “Over the Top of Slit Pot”. Suitable for a Y hang and if linked with chain, a rub-free single point which is easy to retrieve a rope from. A “two anchor” slightly offset solution here would not work due to significant rope-rub.

Summary of benefits to linking anchors with chain:

- Prevents wear to the resin anchors from rope being pulled down
- Provides an easier solution for pulling down and helps prevent rope twisting
- Places the attachment point in a more user friendly location
- Reduces the number of anchors required at a pitch head whilst still accommodating both styles of rigging
- Removes the need for any “tat” to be left
- Provides a rub-free descent. This is especially important on big pitches. If someone has to do a change-over and re-ascend the rope for any reason, rope-rub could have significant consequences
- Easy to replace the abseil ring in future due to rope wear, rather than having to extract and replace fixed resin anchors

Example of the proposed chain



UPDATE

A recent trip has identified a number of existing anchors that are showing wear from ropes been pulled down, some of these are “significant”