

Double Trouble

by Alex Harrison

“You owe me” growled James. “No, I think we’re even” groaned Brandon in response.

The twins were lying on the ground outside the exit to one of the UK’s deepest potholes. Covered in mud and exhausted, they were lucky to be alive. Very lucky indeed.

Potholing is a dangerous sport – especially when things go wrong, and on this occasion they had – rather spectacularly.

Brendon, who was the more confident of the two, had wanted to tackle the well-known labyrinth called The Danger Zone, a maze of subterranean horizontal passages.

James was more cautious, since his brother had had to save him on a previous adventure. He was also extremely aware they had, for once, forgotten to let the rangers know where they were going.

They started well, making great progress. Wiggling and twisting, pulling themselves through like giant worms working their way along a massive worm hole. Once they reached the cave, known as The Cathedral, they would be over half way through. It was at this point it happened.

As they started to crawl away from The Cathedral they could hear the sound of water. They kept calm and pushed on squeezing their way along the narrow paths, but the sound of water was increasing. What did it mean? Could there be an underground river? They could not turn round and go back the way they had come. Then, suddenly, James saw Brendon just disappear as huge hole opened up beneath him. James inched forward and peered down to see Brendon 20ft down sitting up-to his chest in water. “Christ, are you OK?” shouted James”

“I think I may have twisted my ankle,” replied Brendon.

Somehow James was going to have to pull Brendon out on his own. Taking his rope from his back and attaching it to his harness he lowered the rope. Brendon attached it to his harness using a karabiner. “There is nothing to hold onto,” he yelled up, then added, “James, you know the water we could hear? I think I’ve found it.”

Brendon had indeed fallen through a weak spot where an underground river was carving a path below. It was only a matter of time before Brendon would be carried away. It was up to James to pull his 14 stone brother 20ft up a wet slippery wall. Lying on his back and bracing hard he started to leaver himself inch by inch away from the hole.

The effort was immense. The pain tore through his muscles like a burning flame, as he rammed his feet into the walls and pushed. Eventually, he saw Brendon’s head appear, followed by his shoulders. Brendon put his arms over the edge and started to pull himself up. Somehow James had done it. He had saved his brother’s life. All they had to do now was drag and crawl their way out of The Danger Zone.

Two hours later as they lay at the exit, exhausted but alive, Brendon said, “you know that debt you owe me, consider it gone!”