

Tallow Cave Bolt Climb

by Alex Fischer, photos by Peter Whelan

The end of Tallow Cave is a large room (by Vermont standards) filled with beautiful flowstone and some helictites. Scrambling up to a ledge in the back of the room, one can see an alcove about 30 feet up the wall of the room. The back of the alcove is not visible, and it suggests passage. After a previous trip where I saw bats flying out of the wall and enough solid rock to climb up there (much of the cave walls are covered in slimy, deformable moonmilk), I resolved to return to bolt climb up to the passage.

On Saturday, September 5th, I returned along with several cavers from the UMass Outing Club and a bolting kit. Long story short, it doesn't go—the alcove quickly narrows into a ~5 inch wide tube shortly beyond what is visible from the ground, and there's clearly no digging potential as the tube stays at that width for a while and it's bedrock. There's a passage going backwards from the top of the alcove that also appears to pinch out, but I didn't go all the way to the pinch to verify that it didn't go, because it would require traversing a slippery mudstone chimney with 40ft fall exposure or bolting out a horizontal roof. There was no air up there.



Above: Shanon rappelling into the final room, with some nice helictites in view.

Left: Alex beginning the bolt climb as Shanon rappels into the room.



Above: Alex continuing the climb up to the alcove..

Below: Shanon rappelling into the room with Colin under the flowstone..

Since there isn't anything worth surveying or otherwise going back to, I removed the bolts (except for 2 at the top I rappelled off) so as to minimize visual impact on the cave.

The climb, while short, took many hours, mainly due to the highly variable rock quality. The wall I climbed is a mix of solid white or translucent marble, orange dolomitic marble which appears and feels quite weak, flowstone mud, and marble which seemed solid but turned out to be hollow or detached upon further inspection. I managed to only place bolts in the solid marble using some awkward traversing and big reaches, which made the climb very strenuous and time-consuming.

I would like to thank Amanda Butura, Shanon Fan, Colin Stern, and Peter Whelan for the long, cold belays; for shuttling gear through the tight, muddy crawlway on the way to the back of the cave; and in general for supporting me during this trip.

