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CLUB OFFICERS

Chairman	Phil Hendy, 10 Silver St., Wells, Somerset
Secretary	Bob Drake, Axeover House, Yarley, Nr. Wells, Somerset
Asst. Secretary	Julie Wooton – write c/o Upper Pitts
Caving Secretary	Jeff Price, 18 Hurston Road, Inns Court, Bristol, Avon
Asst. Caving Sec. (Northern caves only)	Keith Sanderson, 11 Pye Busk Close, High Bentham, via Lancaster
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Gear Curator	Dave Morrison, 1 Kenwood Park Flats, Hampstead Lane, LON W4
HQ Administration	Glyn Bolt, 4 The Retreat, Foxcote, Radstock, Avon
Editor	Al Keen, 33 Ashford Road, Swindon, Wilts.
Sales Officer	Ian Jepson, write c/o Upper Pitts
Survey Sales	Maurice Hewins
Librarians	Pete & Alison Moody
Hut Bookings	Mike Dewdney-York, 59 Kennington Ave., Bishopston, Bristol, Avon Tel: 0272 46835
Committee (other)	Pete Hann, Nigel Graham

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Wessex Cave Club, Upper Pitts, Eastwater Lane
Priddy, Nr. WELLS, Somerset BA5 3AX

EDITORIAL

Of this year's expeditions, it seems that it is getting more and more difficult, and necessary to travel further and further (unless, of course, you count Mendip) to find new cave that is anything worth shouting about. The trip to Northern Norway proved only that all the lovely blue areas on the maps can be crossed off (more in an article to follow). Pete and Alison, who went with the UBSS to Greece, had a great time but had no luck with new caves. Canada seems to be the new frontier, where Paul Hadfield is encouraging local and British cavers to look in some pretty wild places. Steve Gough is away this month as a member of the Nare River Expedition, and the Club wishes him the best of luck.

I am running out of material again for the Journal. You would not think so with all that is going on, but, apart from entries in the log, the Club's activities are not getting through. The Journal is the means by which members and other clubs see us hopefully more than by our luxurious headquarters or by our splendid festivities. Could I then make yet another appeal, in this special year, for some goods, before the dragon on the front cover gets replaced with a picture of St Jude (the patron saint of lost causes)?

CLUB NEWS

Jubilee Coffee Mugs As mentioned in a previous Journal, these are being made as a limited issue. A sample can be seen at Upper Pitts. They are in red earthenware, brown glazed inside, and have a fine copy of the Wessex Dragon in raised detail. These very presentable mementos are numbered, and if ordered by the AGM weekend, you can have your initials on the bottom. The cost is £4.75 and orders may be made at the AGM or sent to the sales officer, Upper Pitts.

New members The Club welcomes the following new members:
 Kevin J Gannon, 5 Crossman Walk, Clevedon, Avon BS2 6YD
 Martin L Buckley, 165 Bloomfield Rd., Bath, Avon
 Terrence C Waller, 41 Countess Close, Merley, Wimbourne, Dorset
 Hugh M Copper, RSPCA Domestic Animal Centre, West Hatch, Taunton, Som. TA3 5RT
 Geoffrey P Newton, 71 Middle Lane, Epsom, Surrey KT17 1DP
 Rosella Morgan, 41 The Normans, Wexham Court Estate, Slough
 Karl D Baverstock, 42 Cyril Rd., Bournemouth, Dorset BH8 8QD

MENDIP NEWS

Tynings Barrows Cave A new lock has recently been fitted. The Wessex has a key. Please do not forget to pay your goodwill fee at the farm - this seems to vary between 10p and 15p.

Twin Titties Dig After just over a year of subterranean engineering and spoil-hauling, NHASA were rewarded in September with the discovery of a small, highly decorated grotto. The main formations are straws. There are a few tiny helectites and some interesting solution pockets in the roof. The formations are extremely vulnerable, and it is requested that no-one should enter the gallery on the right. It is taped off, and there is no way on in that direction. The draught which has been followed all the way down the dig appears to come from a hole at the lower end of the chamber. This has been pushed to a too-tight bedding plane. A small stream sink, which may by-pass this, seems to be the best bet at present, but it is still unfortunately necessary to take all spoil right up to the surface.

Swildon's Hole The extreme drought of the summer months has led, for the first time, to Sump One opening up. It was possible to talk through a three-inch airspace, though 'ducking' was not feasible. Eat your heart out, Sheppard!

Thar's oil in them thar hills! An oil company has recently been undertaking geoseismic testing of the rocks in the Charterhouse / GB area. They have been drilling boreholes up to 150ft deep and setting off substantial charges. They were informed of the whereabouts of all the major cave systems in the area, so damage should be minimal. However, all the caves were given new locks, and notices were put up warning people to keep away, just in case.

Somerset Hills AONB The Club is in receipt of a copy of the consultation document issued by Somerset and Avon County Councils, concerning the future planning and development of the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The proposals are far-reaching, to say the least. Strict limits are to be imposed on housing and farming, and there are to be more, better signposted, recreation areas (e.g. the Minneries, Deer Leap, Burrington). The effects on caving seem to be minimal, although car parking at some sites, and litter, may be a problem. The Club will be commenting on the document.

Mines with a tarmac roof Residents of a housing estate at Coombe Down, Bath, have been alarmed by several collapses of the ground into a hitherto unknown stone mine. The workings appear to be less than four feet underground, and to extend for some forty acres. In several places, explorers can see grass roots or even the bottom layer of road tarmac in the roof. Even more worrying is that the collapses have left gas, water and sewerage pipes hanging in mid-air.

NORTHERN NEWS

Rift Pot, Masongill This spectacular new NCC find, which is central to the Three Counties System, is entered via the very large shake hole to the south of Marble Steps Pot. A 60ft climbable entrance shaft leads to 400ft of crawling and a 140ft pitch into a very large chamber. From here, extensive passages radiate, one of which connects with Necropolis in Large Pot, thus answering one of the questions I posed in the last Northern News.

Stream Passage Pot This is open again after heroic work by the Bradford Pothole Club, who climbed up from the bottom and dug at both sides of the collapse. I believe that the pitch heads have been thoroughly silted up, so if you want a trip on the latest 3mm Polish insto-snap, this is the Pot for you. The entrance is now a 15ft pitch requiring tackle.

Gaping Gill. Far Country The iron ladder up to Echo Rift has been re-installed. Oddly enough, someone did this while I was beyond, which caused me some surprise on my return.

Digs Two digs in which Wessex members are involved are making slow progress.

At Sell Gill Hole, Ric Halliwell tells me, it is now impossible to follow the water as planned, as it has dried up.

At the 'Lake in the Sky' dig in Notts Pot a change of farmer on Leck Fell has not helped with access, while at the site bizarre noises and crashing boulders abound. It is still hoped that the "second going" of this dig will precede the second Coming by at least long enough for a grade five survey to be made.

Cliff Force Cave Plans are afoot for Chris Milne to dive Sump Two. In fact, the only reason he has not already done so is that your correspondent has failed to make the necessary arrangements, I apologise to the Wessex for this as I am sure that Milnie will get into miles of master cave, which must lie beyond because Pete Ryder says so.

Three Counties Latest news is that the Cave Projects Group have a draughting lead in a well known system which only needs a little work with a hammer and chisel. Unfortunately, the CPG are having difficulty getting this together, owing to the liberal interpretation of licensing laws at the Hill Inn, and their imminent departure for Canada. The site is a secret, but I know where it is. I wonder what the Ethics Fairy will have to say about that one.

THE LONG WINDING ROAD

THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST ROUTE TO WELLS

By Simon Meade-King

Following the discovery and exploration of Thrupe Lane Swallet in 1974, the Atlas Digging Team being temporarily without a new site, focused their attention on a small draughting phreatic tube leading off to the right below the twenty foot entrance shaft. The initial low passage, which now carries a wooden railed tramway, led into a southerly trending rift running parallel to the Ferret Run down which a second tramway was laid as we blasted our way forwards. However, with no sign that the rift was getting any larger, it seemed a waste of good diggers and plaster to continue the dig, and we decided to close down operations in the early Spring of 1976.

The next two years were occupied in the sinking of the Viaduct Sink shaft in the nearby Ham Woods Valley, and the clearing of the choked passages leading off below. But despite the discovery of a short length of open stream way, the hoped-for breakthrough failed to materialise - all ways on petering out as they entered a thick band of shale.

In the Autumn of 1978 I decided to revisit the abortive dig at Thrupe Lane to see whether we had overlooked any possibilities. The far end of the rift passage, Rock Street, was clearly a long-term and uninspiring project, but between the two tramways lay an insignificant cleft in the right wall - the entrance filled with material from the earlier workings.

It was only a few inches wide, developed across the strike, and did not look particularly promising. But it was a comfortable, easily worked dig with plenty of dumping space close at hand, and which I could operate on my own undisturbed, to be abandoned without loss of face if nothing developed.

During the subsequent weeks the cleft was persuaded to draw back its walls until ten feet in, black spaces among the shattered rock ahead indicated an enlargement. A small cross rift choked up and down dip, ran across, and beyond the passage size increased considerably. By this time it looked interesting enough to be taken seriously and the rest of the team (Richard Witcombe, Bob Cottle and Clive North) became involved.

The unexpected happened one quiet Sunday afternoon, when Richard and I were attacking the floor with an entrenching tool at the point where the cross rift intersected. Part of the floor collapsed, and a black hole appeared. Careful gardening revealed a man-sized rift approximately eight feet deep with a boulder ruckle visible at the up dip end. But neither of us believed that the dig could go this easily and we were right. Up dip lay a solid choke, and a roomy if rather sinuous down dip passage terminated in a silt blockage after ten feet. So no quick breakthrough but we had almost certainly stumbled upon an ancient route into the cave from a swallet entrance in a buried cliff face.

For some weeks we ignored the find in the hope that dig held more surprises at a higher level. A yard beyond the drop we came to a dividing of the ways. To the left we excavated an awkward passage that closed down to miserable proportions after only six feet, while straight ahead we probed a slightly higher level bedding plane. This was of ferret size only as far as the eye could see. We discussed the prospects and decided to return to the low level rift.

After demolishing a block at the top of the drop, we were able to manhandle buckets up from below quite comfortably and the attack on the silt choke began in earnest. We were following a winding rift, two to three feet wide and of stooping height with an occasional small airspace meandering about at roof level. The passage dimension was encouraging, but the same could not be said of it's direction. Like Rock Street before it, it seemed to be heading Southwards into the no mans land beyond Avalanche Pot.

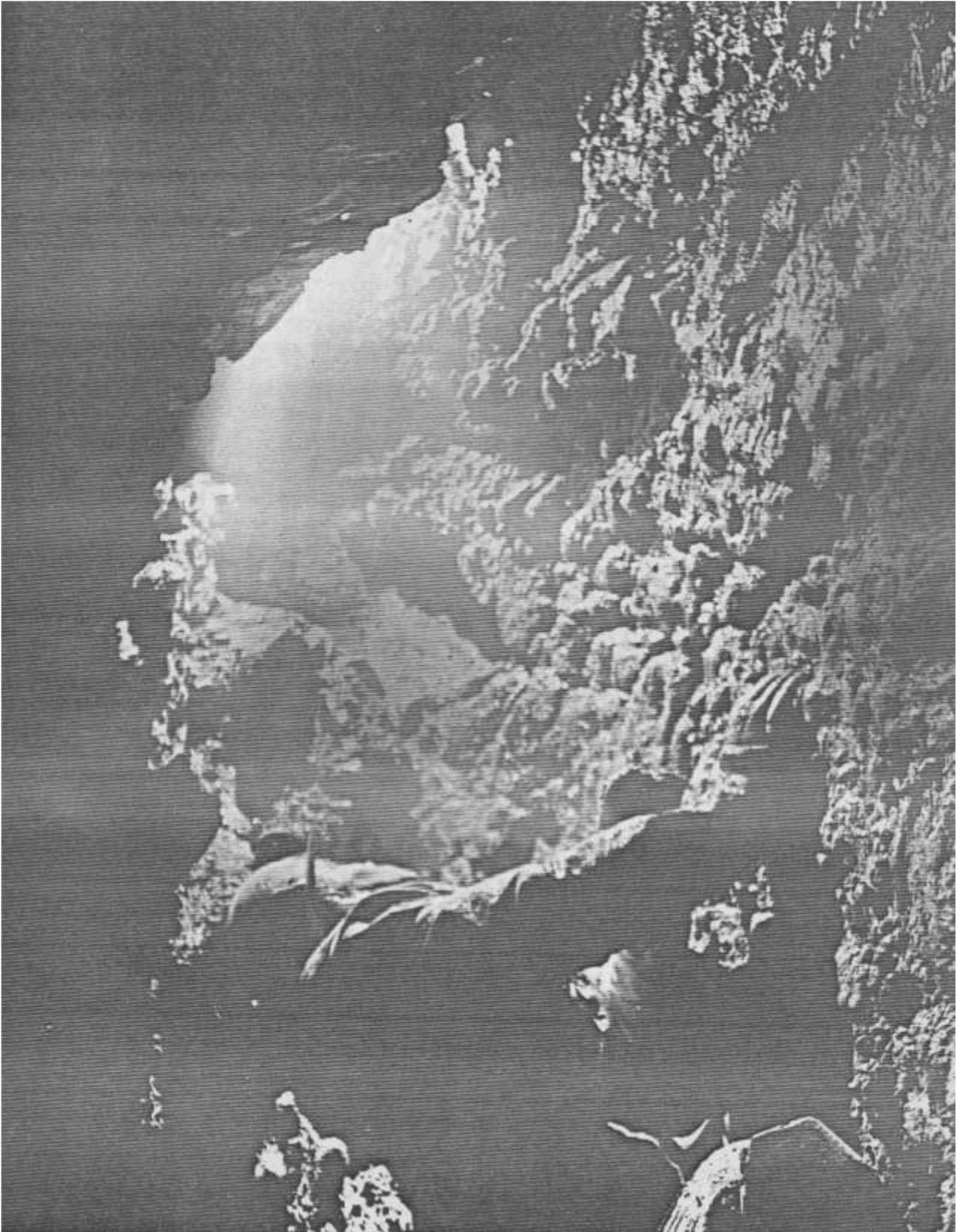
We were nearly twenty feet from the drop when the passage opted for a change. While Bob Cottle and I were digging one weekend a blank wall was uncovered dead ahead. Morale momentarily slumped, but probing to one side showed that the stream had turned a right angle and was now heading Westwards across the strike. The volume shrank at once to a two foot square, enhanced by a narrow slot in the floor, but to make up for this it was descending at a much steeper gradient. Moreover, it's new direction was pointing straight at Atlas Pot which in plain terms could not be more than eighty feet away. Was this the original route to the top of Atlas?

Banging was necessary over the next few feet to meet minimum digging standards, but after ten feet a tiny cross rift provided us with a small enlargement. Ahead, a three to four inch airspace indicated a levelling out of the passage. We hacked our way through very hard packed cherty fill in a solution rift little wider than a plastic bucket. By now spoil removal involved two and sometimes three stockpiles and Rock Street, into which all the spoil was being tipped, was filled almost to the top of the railway.

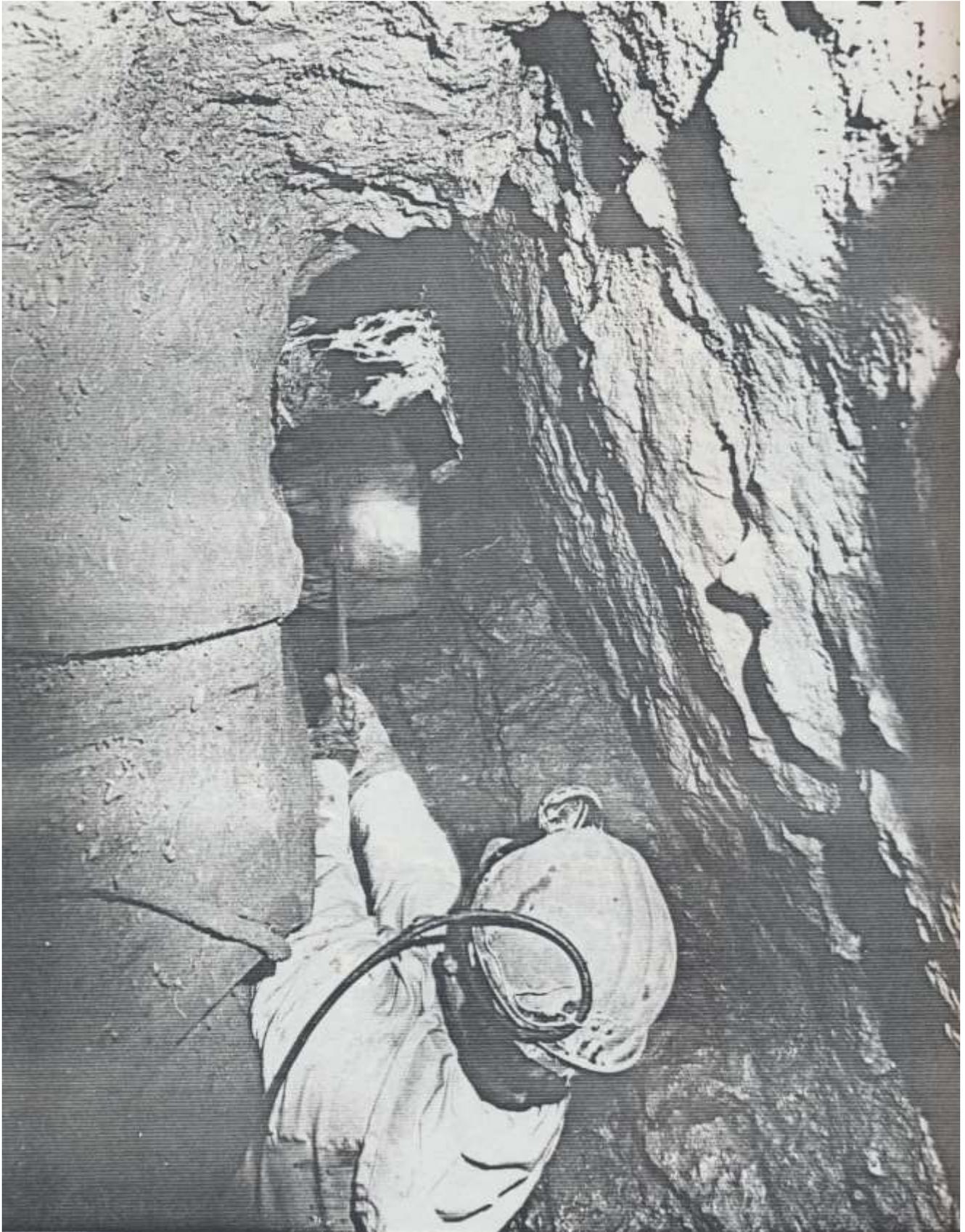
Twenty-five feet from the right-angled bend, another small cross rift was encountered and the passage increased in size, giving us a welcome turning space. The airspace at roof level began to close down as the angle of descent increased again - as indeed it had to if even the highest storey of Atlas, only fifty feet ahead, but sixty feet below, was to be intercepted. The gradient became steeper and steeper, and the choke total from roof to floor. By December 1979, clearing entailed lying head-first down the passage passing back buckets over one's head. It seemed only a matter of time before we broke through, and a new round trip forged into Atlas.

Two factors combined to slow down our forward progress at this time. By now the underground tipping space was full and the spoil had to be taken up the top railway and winched to the surface. In addition the roof of the passage had given way to what appeared to be material coming down from an aven. This periodically collapsed bringing down tons more spoil for removal. And then, at the beginning of April we hit another solid wall, with all development on the strike ceasing abruptly. Roof falls continued, each resulting in weeks of clearance work. However, after one fall a small black hole appeared in the roof, and through it what looked like solid rock.

With the help of a long bamboo pole the remaining fill was brought down from a safe distance to reveal a complex of tight cherty rifts forming in turn the roof of a much larger rift crossing our path from right to left. On the up dip side it was choked to within two feet of the roof. A short session with an entrenching tool on the down dip side exposed the continuation of this rift, man-sized when dug out. After clearing the first ten feet it enlarged slightly to a height of five feet and a width of eighteen inches. These dimensions continued as we pushed on, the rift dropping steadily, still completely choked. Only a small percentage of the time was spent digging, the rest being employed laboriously moving back the spoil to the surface. Thus by the end of the following year (1981), only some forty feet of the choke had been cleared. On several occasions during this period eerie dragging sounds were heard coming from back up the passage - slightly un-nerving when working alone. The eventual cause turned out to be our local farmer scraping out his yard fifty feet above. A sizeable inlet was exposed in one wall, but ignored in favour of carrying straight on.



OLD WELLS ROAD



PLASTER PASSAGE RAILWAY

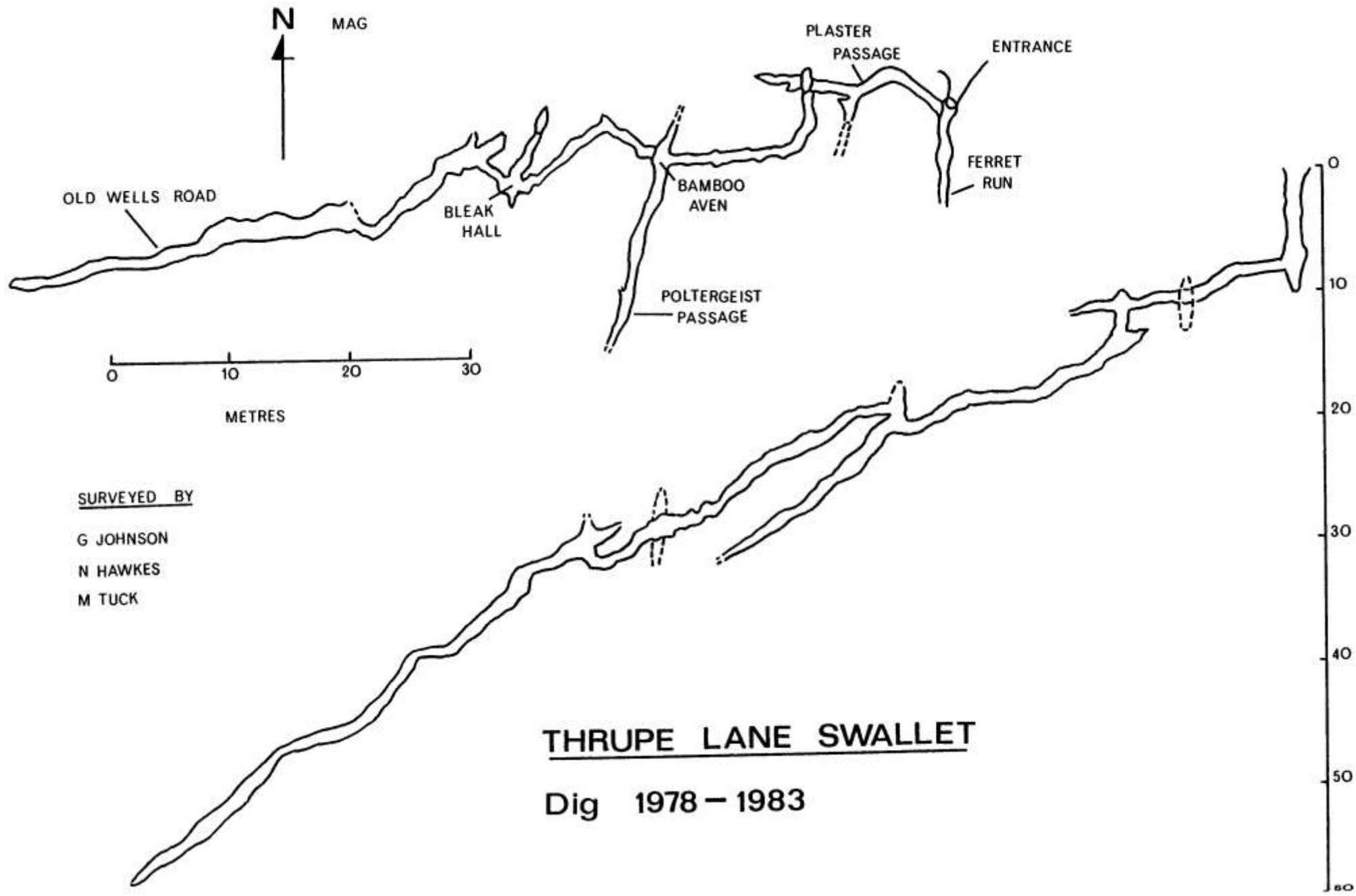
By the Autumn of 1982, the passage, still choked, had narrowed considerably with progress only possible by banging, and this inexplicable reduction in size finally caused work to cease in the Spring of 1983. It was a disappointing conclusion to what had at first looked like an excellent prospect, but with the logistics of bringing buckets up sixty feet of steeply graded rift, and with no sign of it getting any larger, it seemed wise to cut our losses and consider the options left.

A hundred yards down valley, south-west of the present entrance to Thrupe, there are surface indications, confirmed by local knowledge, of an old swallet complex. It had always been our hope that if we could reach this area from below, we would enter abandoned fossil drainage taking us beyond the known very vertical system. To achieve this we had to find a way on across strike and this Richard discovered by chance whilst pottering about at the top of what we had named 'Bamboo' Aven. He uncovered a small hole under the roof which was widened to gain access to a cobble-strewn, eighteen inch wide rift falling away from us along the strike. This we got into after demolishing a rock bridge, to a point where a large flake barred progress six feet down. The way on continued narrower curving slightly left, and we advanced slowly down thus, laying plaster charges every few feet.

There was always the chance that we might run into an aven in the roof of Atlas, and so we strained our ears for the sound of the distant Atlas stream, but this never happened. In fact the first sounds we heard were in July, when fifteen feet in the noise of dripping water became audible, and by lying flat out an enlargement of some sort could be seen a few feet further on. Soon after we entered this through an awkward squeeze, and found it to be small but forming the upper level of a four foot high rift. A continuation seen by the light of a fading Nife cell fell to us the next weekend. Heavy percolation through the roof explained the sounds heard earlier. A thin exit against the right wall beckoned us on.

On the next trip I made this exit mansized and pushed through into a cross rift five feet wide of sitting height and blocked with boulders down dip. Up dip it split into two narrow rifts, one of which led via a tortuous squeeze to a shaft becoming too tight ten feet down. A survey showed this to be only forty feet from the roof of Atlas. Now there would be a nice pitch!

Two routes led off the lower end of the cross rift. Down the larger of these Bob Cottle inserted himself, his muffled voice announcing that he had hit yet another choke. The other possibility although smaller and half buried by boulders was potentially more interesting. It headed on across strike - the obvious continuation from our entry point into the cross rift - and carried the hint of a draught. Several charges later and six feet on a small inlet came in from the right and we came to a bend. Looking ahead from here the view was not very encouraging - continuing nine inches wide, but in the roof something was developing. Shining a light up through a crack showed a higher level tube with a steeply sloping flat roof, apparently at least twice the width of the lower passage. It offered the chance of a bypass to the constriction below.



With the crack enlarged Bob Cottle and John Lane forced an upward squeeze on September 10th to emerge in an eight foot wide bedding plane, about three feet wide, inclined at 45 degrees. Up to the right it became too low. Down to the left they passed to one side of a jammed rock to the head of a six foot high rift passage. Light problems caused them to beat a retreat, but the next day, Clive, Richard and I returned to see what lay ahead. Twenty feet further and the rift reverted to an Eastwater like bedding plane and we squeezed over collapse debris into a more steeply angled section of bedding with the height increasing to four feet in the centre. Below, the bedding levelled out into a low chamber at the end of which another crawl gave way to a walking height rift again. But, just when we seemed to be heading for Wells, our progress was abruptly halted by a solid looking sand choke. Here current activity is centred.

Since the dig had started back in 1978, our rambling, rather haphazard progress had taken us over three hundred feet across from the Ferret Run, and with the recent modest breakthrough down to a depth of approximately one hundred and ninety feet below ground. Not that much by Moody standards, it's true, but the final one hundred and fifty feet of passage is the start, at least, of what we've been looking for. Old high level development un-connected with the main cave beneath, and uninfluenced by North - South joints like the majority of the known cave. Hopefully the next chapter in the Thrupe saga will record the passing of the terminal choke into large extensions beyond.

ROLAND'S REVENGE

Steve Gough

"When the music's over,
Turn out the light"

The Doors

To the casual observer, what happens is this. Fell Beck, having formed on the south-west slopes of Ingleborough, flows along the limestone for a bit and then drops down a big hole called Gaping Gill. The truth is more complex, as usual. There are lots of sinks in Fell Beck and they get into the Main Shaft by different routes. One of the most important and least known of these is Rat Hole, first descended by the CPC in 1935, not ascended then, or as far as I know since, and blocked from the early 1960's onwards.

At the 1984 Winch Meet, a lot of hard digging by people other than myself got the Craven back in via a new entrance. A couple of hundred feet of low, wet crawling reached a ten foot pitch which has the inscription 'ES ACW CPC 1932'. In that year, Edgar Smith and Arnold Waterfall reached the head of the Big Pitch and unsuccessfully tried to establish it's depth by lowering a torch.

Oh yes,.... the Big Pitch. From the foot of the short ladder, a rift leads away until its floor disappears, and the considerable stream drops for fifteen feet before shooting off a tiny ledge into the sort of black void that makes you feel a bit sick. This one was worse because we knew nothing about it. For reasons that I do not fully understand, I was asked to do the rigging and go down first. I accepted like a dog accepts a bone - greedily, and pretty vacantly too.

So, when winching stopped on Thursday 23rd August we diverted as much of the Beck as possible back down the Main Shaft and John Cordingley, Graham Proudlove and myself set off with a big bag containing a lot of brand new Bluewater III.

At the pitch head was a jammed block which looked really solid when I tied the rope to it. I abseiled down to the spray-lashed edge of nothing, took a good look, and asked Graham to sit on the belay. A good natural spike enabled me to swing round onto the driest wall, and by placing a bolt further round again I got the beginnings of a good hang. I began the descent from here feeling quite cheerful. I may even have whistled, or something.

Eighty feet further, things didn't look so good. I was back in the water, and my attempts to place a rebelay bolt in the five foot wide dry(ish) rift to one side were continually thwarted by crumbling foot ledges and the tension in the rope. I thought that I could see a ledge about fifty feet below me, so I went for it. It turned out to be the top end of a flake system leading away from the water and into a nightmare of rock bridges, blind shafts-within-shafts, tottering slabs of rock and boulder bridges. Gently, I followed the main line of the flakes. The rock was too poor to take a bolt and the diagonal line of my abseil was a worry - it is much easier to control an oblique descent than an oblique ascent. Eventually, I got a deflection belay on a flake which seemed a bit better than the rest. A further abseil reached a small, wet ledge on good rock.

Looking down from here, I could see only blackness and boulder chaos, I decided that I should be able to pendule back into the widest part of the shaft. This should give a free, if very wet hang. I started to prussik. Thirty feet up, I noticed that twenty feet above me the rope, instead of swinging across as I had hoped was trapped behind a small flake. Still, it hadn't been there long and I freed it by a short movement along the wall.

There is a special feeling that better writers than I have described. It comes when it is your name written on the Ace of Spades, drawn to the short straw, or read out by the Executioner. Twenty feet above my head and 160ft from both the top and the bottom of the shaft, the sheath of my rope was completely severed, leaving a gap of about four inches in which the delicate blue of the core strands could be seen as they untwisted and separated. I had found the place where nature had invented the first Stanley Knife.

I tried to prussik past the damage. As I reached it, the sheath slipped and I fell five or six feet. I took my descender from my bag (don't drop it!) and fastened it to the harness. I threaded it with difficulty because of the thickness of the bunched rope, and standing in one footloop wrenched off the Croll. Just before I sat down, I realised that to do so would trap me on the safety cord, as I had been forced to leave two or three feet of slack to the descender. I undid the maillon and, abandoning everything, I was away to my little wet ledge.

A bit later, my light failed, but it did not seem to matter much. I got a bolt in, tied off the rope so that no one could follow, and waited a while, until John came down on the winch at 3.30 a.m. looking, I suspect, for something to put in a polythene bag. He confirmed that my rope reached the floor - it was better to be cold than to take a chance, with no light and no efficient method of prussiking - and I thankfully completed the first descent of Rat Hole for at least twenty years, and maybe nearly fifty. The pitch is 320ft deep and probably the most serious in the country.

HAVE DOG - WILL DIG

Phil Hendy

It gets boring walking dogs around the same old route every day, so Lynne and I have been exercising them on Mendip over the past winter months. Taking the opportunity to explore off the beaten track, we have found some interesting sites. None of them will develop into another Charterhouse Cave, but they are worth recording for all that.

A good search of Lamb Bottom failed to reveal Hywel's Hole to us, though we did find an open mineshaft high on the left bank, near a rickety scaffolding structure at NGR545550. Belaying the ladder, with difficulty, to a rock outcrop via a long rope, Lynne forced her way down about five feet to where she could look out into the valley through an overgrown window. Below her was a constriction, but stones dropped through this fell freely for about thirty feet. With some gardening, this might be entered.

Another dog walk below Deer Leap took Lynne to Ramspit, dug abortively years ago by the MNRC, and later re-opened in the fifties by the BEC. Springs rise indeterminately from the bog at the Coal Measures, and in flowing down the valley form two discreet stream channels. One enters the valley floor and gradually sinks in a wood - where exactly depends on the current volume of the water flowing. The other stays up the left hand side of the valley to enter a small swallet depression. It flows through vile mud, to sink under a low cliff. The resurgence was proved as Hollybrook Spring, 840m away and 117m lower down, by Willie Stanton in an impressive water trace using Rhodamine B. To date, I have not been able to locate a copy of the MNRC's report, but Barrington and Stanton put the length of the cave at 70-200 feet, depending on the edition referred to, and 50ft depth. The only other current reference, by the BEC, is a vague description of re-opening the site, through horrible mud to a choke with a rift one side.

Digging commenced in February, at the stream sink. There is a huge slab of rock on the left, but the floor was easily dug in stones and mud. At a couple of feet depth, we found larger stones, which suddenly and alarmingly subsided about a foot. These were carefully pulled out, but the stream appeared to sink under the slab on the left.

We then turned our attention to the back of this slab, where a small hole was apparently filled with bottles. We must have pulled out over thirty intact bottles - gin, wine, whisky and cordial, all unfortunately empty. There was also a lot of broken glass, so digging from then on, in gritty mud with embedded stones, became unpleasant. We also dug out a disjointed dog skeleton, shot, no doubt, for sheep worrying. Again, the floor subsided and a little more digging enabled us to look down a steeply sloping passage. It did not take long to pull out enough stones to make the entrance passable, though there was one large boulder perched loosely at the top of the stone slope. With heart in mouth, and a flow of brown adrenalin imminent, I crawled down, trying hard not to touch anything, including the floor. Glancing up at the boulder from below, it looked even more malevolent; if it decided to come down and join me, there was nowhere to escape to. The passage was about ten feet deep by two feet wide - almost high enough to stand in, with a steep and unstable boulder floor, terminating in a choked horizontal letterbox. I exited rapidly and we went to the hunters for a pint of nerve tonic.

Subsequently, the hanging death was pulled up the slope, beaten into submission with a lump hammer, and passed out of the dig in kit form. We started to take out the boulder pile, plus associated bed springs, until we reached the state where a retaining wall would be necessary near the bottom to enable us to dig out the floor. The rift mentioned by the BEC is in fact a narrow bedding plane on the left. It is quite deep, but at no point is it large enough to enter.

Prospects at the bottom seemed excellent, so we were very upset to learn from Anne Hale (to whom we had leased the dig for the summer) that it had been completely refilled, together with more broken bottles. We contacted the landowner, who was completely surprised - he had been keen to learn what was to be found down there. We 'phoned a neighbouring landowner, who turned out to be most irate that someone should be digging on his land without permission! Not for the first time (re Orchid Rift) we found that many farmers do not really know which land they actually own! The actual landowner in this case said that the 'theological college' had dug Ramspit in the thirties, without finding anything. Hence there was nothing down there. He had lost a cow down the hole some years back (it must have been very small and very determined!) and had ordered the dig to be filled, adding bottles to deter the curious. He was furious to find that we had started to dig without permission - which permission, he added, would never be given anyway. We managed to calm him by saying that the previous farmer we had contacted assured us that he owned the land, and was perfectly happy for us to dig there. So we have lost a good dig, plus all the tools which were at the bottom.

Finally, this episode draws to a conclusion on Rookham. We felt sure that Orchid Rift was not the only site in the area, and since Guy Boddington has now purchased the hillside and burnt off the scrub, we felt that it was worth another look. We were spurred by Guy's report of a conversation he had had recently with two picnickers, who turned out to be now-elderly relations of Balch. One of them had said that when he was a boy, Balch allowed him to accompany a party of cavers down a cave somewhere on the hillside. Being only a boy, He was not allowed down more than 25 feet, but the others went in much further. Apart from Orchid Rift, which could not have been the site in question, no other caves are currently recorded along this hillside, although there are some open mineshafts in the wood at the top of the Rookham Road.

A stroll along the hillside revealed no likely sites that we did not already know about - and these are only small and not worth bothering with. So, it being a fine day, we continued around the hillside to where a field slopes into scrub, overlooking Model Farm, of which it is a part. Here, Lynne quickly found two sites: an open, partially filled mineshaft and a choked cave entrance, both at the top edge of the scrub. (NGR's 54284823 and 54244825, both 750ft O.D.)

We returned the next day, armed with a pack frame load of gear, cans of beer, and permission to make a tentative exploration. The mineshaft was quickly disposed of. It was capped with limestone slabs covered with soil. One of the slabs is missing, and the hole was easily laddered - to a depth of eight feet. Three walls are cut in limestone, the fourth is dry-stone walled from top to bottom. The shaft is choked with stones, but appears to slope away to the east.

The cave site we called Creed's Cave. A rock outcrop lies at the western end of the depression. At the bottom, a gap could be seen between. By lunchtime we had cleared these and were making good progress in a roomy, almost vertical shaft with a rock roof. The infill was stones in loose soil.

After a compulsory lunch break at the Hunter's, we returned. By eight feet depth we had unearthed a solid rock floor and, disappointingly, a very rusty cold chisel. By ten feet, the rock had pinched in on all sides, leaving a hole at the bottom about a foot square, solidly filled with clay. Further prospects looked hopeless, so the cave was backfilled and protected with sheets of wriggly tin. More tin has also been placed over the mineshaft.

One more overgrown mineshaft has been located on the hillside, but the scrub and bracken are growing up fast now and further exploration will have to wait until the winter. There are plenty of overgrown spoil heaps in the area, which I am sure holds surprises for us yet. However, until the undergrowth dies back, the dogs will have to get used to the trudge around Park Wood at Wells.

LEG. WESSEX. PANEM ET CIRCENCES

(or, SI NON DURUS...)

Agricola

Vpper Pitts was timewarped back two millenea to the Roman Occvpaton on Saturday Ivly VIIth. As Shaftvs Svperiorvm, it was to witness to the mingling of Celtic barbarism and Roman civilisation to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Wessex Legion.

The Wessex played host to many of the local tribes of troglodites, who worship the animal god Meles, the badger. A fine sight they were, clad in ceremonial fvrs with skin daubed by woad entwined in mystic symbols. The British Expeditionary Celts were led by Bovdicca in her chariot, flanked by armed warriors and a hvnting dog. The Mendip Nvtters and Ranters, The Cerbervs and the Sheeptonians swelled the throng, and there were representatives from the Imperial Navy and a band of visiting Goths. Allied to the Wessex, the Senators of NHASA were well represented, and from Egypt, we welcomed the Lady Cleopatra, who spent the evening refvsing requests of the natives who wanted to kiss her asp.

Legionares Drake and Fielder ensvred that there was no mayhem at the gate, whilst inside, Centvrion Bolt, clad in svn-dazzled armovr, with the Lady Ivlie beside him, sat leisvrelly chewing grapes and sipping wine while they checked immigration passes. To one side, Scott, the Centvrion's Ethiopian evnvch body-guard stood with scimitar ready to defend his master. Hanging from a cross nearby moaned Nigellvs, vndergoing pvnishment for portal-crashing.

Some two-hundred and fifty were gathered when the hvbbvb of the crowd was svddenly qvelled as a mighty fanfare rang ovt. Slowly, from behind the Forvm, came a procession, led by two legionaries. Petronivs Hannibal, the slave master, clad in leather kilt and arm bands, brandishing a many-thonged whip, kept in order the six slaves carrying aloft the Emperor Phillipvs. The procession made its way to a lofty dais, which the Emperor movnted, raising his arm in salutation and greeting. The hordes svrged forward, swords and spears brandished aloft, bvt they were qvelled with the news that the ale-tent was open, and the chariot race was to begin.

The chariot race was a grvelling contest of speed and stamina. Each team consisted of a charioteer, and two slaves to pvll. Wheel-knives were not allowed, bvt the vse of whips to fend off other charioteers and goad on the slaves was permitted. A massed start was made in the field adjacent to the grovnds, and the VIII chariots rapidly converged on the gate leading to North Hill Swallet. It was a narrow gate, and all chariots became involved in a mvlti-vehicle collision. Charioteers were flying in the air and slaves were rvn over. Miracvlovsvly, wovnds were only svperfcial, and all the teams continued, round the swallet shaft and back across the field to the drive. Centvrion Bolt covld see nothing for dvst as the race thvndered over the cattle grid, down the lane and across the field to the Eastwater stream valley to where it widened. On the spvr above, the slavemaster released fresh slaves from the pen for the second part of the race. The fresh havling teams pvllled the chariots vp the tribvtary and over the field to cross the main valley again. Here, the Wessex won, and raced across the field back to Shaftvs Svperiorvm,

The last obstacle was a ramp over the wall, with a small drop to the lawn and the winning post. First over the wall were the Cerbervs, followed by the Goths (young Wessex and BEC) then the Navy. Iim Rands spvrrd his slaves over the wall to come fovrth for the Wessex. He was hotly persved by the British Expeditionary Celts and the Septonians. Next came Senator Albertivs Francis for NHASA, driving the Hotpoint Automatic front-loading chariot. Finally, the MNRC chariot was heaved over the wall, having lost its draw-bar somewhere along the covrse; they arrived to be welcomed by a great cheer.

The Emperor awarded the prize, a laurel crown, to the victors, adding a flagon of fiery Caledonian spirit for the triumphant Cerberus team. He then announced the commencement of the feast. This was centered on two whole roast boars, cooked over a glowing charcoal hearth, and supplemented by bread, cheese, pickles and sundry delicacies and gateaux, provided by Mistress Moody and her kitchen slaves. Meanwhile, Rogius Dorsus and his brew-house slaves were hard pressed dispensing libations - more than LM pints of ale were consumed during the evening.

Four scabrous lepers (without whom no gathering would be complete!) then passed amongst the crowd, gathering alms for the MRO. A flight in a hot air balloon with Pontius (the Pilot) Workman was then raffled. The winner, from the MNRC, had to wait for suitable weather conditions, and the invention of the hot air balloon.

The evening continued with various feats of skill and endurance. Lavelin-throwing proved popular, although the competition was really only between Trevor Hvgius and Robertus Harper of the BEC. It was finally won, on distance, by the former. Piggy-back jousting was popular, especially the female tournament. Burning-coach rugby was well supported, though the outcome was not at all clear-cut. Lynne Hendius (any excuse to get stoned at a party) was arrested for suspected adultery, raised on a cross, and pelted.

There was no trouble from the normally antagonistic tribes and legions. Even the peace protest of Phillip of the Rom Ford and his fanatical druid 'Ban the Ballista' supporters came to nothing. True, the Wessex chariot disappeared under mysterious circumstances, but it was returned the following day by a local constable.

It was a most successful and enjoyable day, and one for which the Wessex Legion will be remembered through the ages.