

Rock House B Team sat Jan 6th 2018

Duncan, Rich, Simon, Emma and Clive

More clearing of the mud and gravel fill, in the two rifts either side of the solid rock 'rib' in the floor, before two 60cm holes went in to further break up the solid.

These were set by Duncan and after firing revealed a goodly pile of loose rock. More remains to be cleared and, no doubt, prised out next week before another bang.

The stream continues to be heard clearly below....

A really good fire in the fire pit helped in the cold conditions

All best

Clive

Rock House 'B' -Sun 13th Jan 2018

Just Tav and Clive this time.....

Wednesdays' bang had produced a good pile of loose rock and the opportunity for some effective hammer and chisel work.

The protruding 'rib' in the floor has now gone and we have a flat bedding 'face' in the floor awaiting three holes to be drilled and fired early on Wednesday.

All best

Clive

Willetts Lane Hole Tuesday 16th January 2018 - Hi all in case you are interested: My 3 year solo digging project. Still going down the semi-scaffold supported shaft; pretty unpleasant sticky mud, lots of boulders slowly getting drilled, plug n feathered and hauled up, non have got me yet as I dig through the slimy mud n rocks clearing the way down to Crack Pot Rift - all good fun. It really is the most revolting hobby in this dig, dodgy, yukkie and probably not going anywhere... but there is always hope!

Andy Watson

Rock House - Sat 20th Jan 2018

The Gisbornes, Rich, Simon and Clive

Armed with the two new 'What' hammers we set to after a three hole bang in the large slab of bedding below us.

John uncovered a hole with a strong outward draught but this unfortunately disappeared during the session and could not be relocated!

By the end of the session a great deal of rock had been removed (just over a foot in thickness) and the next bedding down revealed – ready for another bang next time.

The sound of the stream is so much louder now

Its planned now to hang a caving ladder from a wooden stemple straight down the middle of the pot, it being a tricky climb out and getting deeper!

No session on Wednesday it was agreed – Clive and Rich are not about – normal service should be resumed on Saturday.

All best

Clive

Willet's Lane Hole - Sat 20th Jan 2018

After adding some additional scaffolding last week and drilling, plug n feathering some large boulders I managed to get into Crack Pot Rift seen through a dark hole recently so I have some 3.5 metres on new passage. Perhaps the first 1.5 m should have been called dropping rock rift but this will be dealt with next visit. The rest has a clean stable roof on a fault line. I worthwhile development after the time spent in this hole. Rift can be seen to run for another 3m or so and at some parts is 2-3m deep and going downwards full of smaller rocks. I think the rift i am into may be a feeder rift. Time will tell Regards Andy W

Sat 20th Jan 2018

Willet's Lane Hole after fitting some scaffold last week and drill, plug+feathering some large rocks I managed to wriggle into the all new Crack Pot Rift for around 3.5-4 metres and managed to safely drop the two very large boulders to a safer location on the floor and can see another 2-3m, all tp play for

Andy W

Digging session Sat 27th Jan

What name did we settle on? :-)

Rock Farm Barn Cave.

The current dig behind the barn at Rock Farm.

Rich, Clive, Emma, John, Simon & Dave.

Mud and debris that had slipped down was first cleared and hauled out, followed by 3 or 4 shot holes drilled and fired in the floor. A short tea break whilst the fumes gently wafted out of the entrance, meaning no perceptible draft.

The bang debris cleared and hauled out including a couple of large section of rock from the floor requiring the boulder net. By the end of play the stream could still be heard through the narrow rift above the floor against the east wall. This rift continues down into the floor with varying mud and silt infill. Before exiting the 5ft long wrecking bar could be pushed down almost full length into the very narrow rift at floor level into what appears to be clear space.

Dave.

Rock Farm Cave - Wed 31st Jan 2018
Rich, Gavin and Clive

After clearing a bit of run-in since the last session four holes were drilled in the bedding floor and duly fired.

Gavin, complete with new (pathetically weak!) lamp on his caving helmet had a short session clearing the obvious loose material at the end before we retired to the pub.

Gavin's feeling (having two fully working ears) was that the sound of the stream is coming from the right hand wall (looking up-rift) as John had suggested. The sound level was somewhat quieter than recent sessions which is surprising considering the high flow in the surface stream at present.

On Sat there will no doubt be some serious rock-wrangling to do.....

On a different tack - Gavin today has spoken to his friend with the 'Green Goddess' fire engine re providing a 'flood pulse' from the farmyard sink into the dig.

Hes very happy to help but rather than bring the fire engine he would bring an ex-fire service 'Featherweight pump' (its called that because it probably weighs a ton!) which will do the job admirably.

We've agreed on Sat after next on the understanding we provide a bottle of something nice for the guy in return.

Seems a bargain to me!

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Sat 17th Feb 2018

Dave, Simon, Rich, Emma & Clive (plus underground visit from Gavin)

Last Saturdays' big pile of bang debris was cleared before an early tea break which was followed by the H & S committee of Dave, Rich and Clive examining the roof area above the current dig point and agreeing on the previously mentioned need for three steel stemples to be fitted asap.

This should provide basic safety in the short term before Rich can pick up the roof with a concreted rock wall. It is hoped to fit the stemples next Saturday.

Clive enjoyed a very fruitful session levering up large sections of the bedding in the floor before a two hole bang in the right-hand (looking up-rift) bulge in the wall of the rift plus two large boulders in the floor.

All went well and on checking there was a great deal of broken rock present for next time.....
Clive

Willets Lane Hole solo digging final chapter (at least until the summer...) on Valentine's day 2018

With more drilling & P&F I made it into the final chamber about 8m or so below the historic lower chamber. It was very wet on Mendip in the Chewton Mendip area and the cave was very drippy & damp.

The final chamber exit route, now Valentine's Chamber almost sumps, and I considered it wise not to venture solo, but perhaps re-visit in the summer.

Crack Pot Rift is now some 6m long and descends about 3m or so along its length. The final chamber is now entered through a generous squeeze (opened up by P&F) and is 1.5m high, 1m wide and 2.5 m long and it takes a very small stream from the base of Crack Pot Rift. The water pools at floor level and the roof drops at one end to about 12" above the water, this may dry up in summer. The narrow rift does continue but it needs two people rather than solo and drier weather to push further.

All in all this digging episode in loose mud and large rocks has finally achieved a length of stable passage, albeit pretty short. Overall the cave has about 44m of passage now and a depth of 20m.

Andy Watson

Rock Farm - Wed 21st Feb 2018 Dave, Spike, Gavin & Clive

After a slightly earlier than usual start and equipped with stemples, angle-grinders, scaffold tubes, bench vice, drills and spanners etc the first hour was occupied by fettling the steel and the rock faces for the fitting of two stemples under the heavily banged northern face of the dig. The upper, main stemple, was firmly installed and the second prepared for final fitting on Saturday next.

A fair amount of mud had fallen in from the left hand rift and this was cleared by Spike along with the pile of broken rock from Saturdays' bang.

The resulting clear space was suitably prepped for drilling into the floor when the large slab which composed part of the left hand wall, along with a large pile of muddy sand, slumped to the floor in front of us!

More clearing ensued followed by two holes fired in the floor.

As a result of Spikes' clearing, the rift ahead could be accessed more easily and one or two stones thrown in resulted in a distinct 'plop' – presumably standing water – a small pool perhaps left after the higher water conditions during the 'pump' test?

The sound of the stream is very loud and clear now and the inward draught strong.

Just before leaving Clive noticed a concealed bedding undercut on the right which connects again with the open rift - it too taking the draught.

Clive

Rock Farm Sat 24th Feb 2018

Rich, Emma & John, Simon, Dave and Clive plus a brief visit by Dave Speed (carrying out gate work at WHFS Lower)

A bitterly cold afternoon helped by a good fire in the firepit.

The hefty rock pile from last Wednesdays bang was cleared, final tweaks made to the last of the two stemples and a good session at the face ensued.

The mud choked rift on the left (looking towards the entrance) suddenly dropped out to reveal around 10ft of vertical clean-washed rift about 6inches wide with the sound of the stream audible.

Further clearing work at the back of the dig on the right enabled a clear, if uncomfortable, view along the 4inch wide rift for about 8ft horizontally and about the same vertically.

Of far greater interest though was the low bedding plane extending off to the right at this point which I had noticed last time. It gives a clear view of a decent wall about 18inches away of which a section

about 2ft by 1ft high is visible. In front of that is either another rift in the floor or a rock on end bridging the space. The stream is *very* audible at this point and the cave draught disappears straight down.

Rocks thrown into the space seem to drop for maybe 6ft before splashing into water – presumably the stream itself.

All the team, including Gavin, had a look at the end and wholeheartedly pronounced it definitely “not without interest”!

Weather permitting the idea for Wednesday is to carry out a bang on three spots to ease access to the new target.....

Clive

Rock Farm - Wed 28th Feb 2018

Gavin and Clive

Despite the wind-chill and a surface temperature of around minus 6C a thoroughly enjoyable couple of hours was spent (mainly) underground.

The wind chill was also noticeable underground at the face as it whipped past us – very chilly!

Two holes drilled and fired which took out the approach to, and the roof of, the undercut on the right which last session was seen to apparently lead to yet another parallel rift. Another shothole in the floor of the threshold and one in a large block in the centre of the two main rifts completed the job.

Gavin enjoyed a good session at the face despite being rather long in the leg for the relatively confined space. Between us we cleared a large pile of bang debris and assorted mud and rocks to the base of the shaft. I think we could now happily make a set of steps there now, using some of this material, leading down towards the dig face.

By the time we had finished things were looking exceptionally interesting!

The undercut to the right did indeed lead into another parallel rift of the usual couple of inches wide variety. Just in front of it though is a substantial rib of waterworn bedrock hanging in mid-air – if that is removed there will be a reasonable space created.

All in all there are three parallel rifts set in a potential metre-wide passage all of which connect down to the stream below which is obviously just a few feet lower.

Stones dropped in one area make a deep ‘sploosh’ rather than the ‘plop’ we have heard previously. Presumably a deep section of the stream bed or maybe a constriction in the stream passage ahead is causing a deepening of the water.

We will no doubt have a few more feet of rock to remove before we get to stream level but there is far more in the way of open waterworn rifts now to help us.

I have to say that the site is currently looking the most promising yet!

We will obviously need to watch what the weather is doing before we decide on any work at the weekend

Clive

Rock Farm - Sat 3rd March 2018
Dave, Gavin & Clive

Having dug a lot of snow away from the entrance and lit the fire we found at the dig face the left hand wall, which consisted of sandy mud and a large vertical slab, had dropped about 6 inches and was in danger of entombing anyone sitting at the furthest point of the dig.

Needless to say that became a priority and we removed most of the crud to the surface before hitting the slab with a small charge connected to two others in the floor in the immediate approach to the face.

That done, the original aim of the trip was reestablished, namely to remove most of the smaller stuff from the pile at the base of the shaft and to build a nice set of steps using the larger blocks.

This continued apace until a surprise realisation that it was 5.45, getting dark and really cold again.

Work continues on Wed at the end.
Clive

Rock Farm - Wed 7th March 2018
Dave, Spike, Tav, Gavin and Clive

With the fire going an earlier start was made clearing more crud which had fallen in from the now, almost deleted, crud-filled joint on the left.

A serious rock-wrestling session ensued prising two large blocks from the floor and thus avoiding the planned bang. The rocks soon found a home on the flight of steps.

Taking out those blocks from the floor released pressure on a big section of the right hand wall/roof which promptly fell out leaving a nice gap behind which took in the continuation of our exciting new rift - the one with the stream at the bottom.

With a bit more clearing Clive was then able to manoeuvre himself, minus helmet, into a position where he could just look over the edge of the rift and down to see, for the first time, THE STREAM!!

The rift is about 4-6ft deep and around 6in or so wide but the stream itself could be seen to be in a section a good couple of feet wide with a possible undercut on both sides.

Much enlivened by this news a two-hole bang was set in the rock rib on the near side of the new section and the large flake hanging over the rift (which was found to be slightly loose) trussed up in a sling and firmly secured to the hauling rope – the idea being to stop it potentially dropping into the rift during the bang.

All was well though and the resulting debris cleared. The overhanging flake (approx. 3ft long and 1ft deep) was laboriously removed by Dave and Spike.

Now the good news....!

With the flake out of the way and the approach lowered a clear view of what lay below could be had. And quite a surprise it was too!

Down-rift it was as described above extending for around maybe 10ft down-dip, about 2ft wide lower down and clearly wider still at stream level.

Up rift it was man-sized, approximately 18in wide, extending into what appears to be a small chamber with a large inclined slab on the floor. Difficult to make out dimensions but it appears enterable.

The rift itself is clean-washed with fossils protruding from the walls and, luckily, a wider section which we can exploit to gain access. This will need just one bang to clear a way into it. We will need to keep an eye on a section of bedrock immediately up dip of the bang site which has a crack running around it and which could, conceivably, slide. If it does we will have to deal with it but it could well be completely secure.

So, it could be an interesting session on Saturday - be aware that reserved parking spaces are limited!

Clive

Rock House Saturday 10 March 2018

Clive, Emma & John, Simon, Tav, Duncan, Spike, Rich & later, Gavin.

The milder, more springlike weather and the enticing view down into the open, albeit narrow, streamway had brought out a larger than usual team.

After various sightseeing trips to the face, work began with a wooden chock hammered between the large, possibly detached, upstream block and the solid east wall. CN then drilled and laid a charge in the remaining shoulder of rock preventing access to the water. A small slump in the surface cliff face was meanwhile "fettled" with some dry stone walling.

As the fumes cleared, tea and cakes were taken, followed by a major rock clearing session with JG at the sharp end. Large slabs were built into the steps leading up the rift, and the rest was taken out to the surface. Eventually a large enough gap was created for RW to squeeze down to the streambed. The narrow rift is in clean-washed limestone with fossils protruding from the walls and well delineated bedding dipping at about 30 degrees. Downstream, the water disappears almost immediately into a choke of rocks and gravel, and the continuation above the water becomes too tight. A small bedding passage joins from the left but is impassable. Ahead, some small black spaces amongst the rocks draught well. Upstream, the passage rises gently for about 8' to 10' but is just too narrow for access. A showerbath enters at the far end.

The next step will be to enlarge the approach to the stream and commence both clearing the floor and chopping out one wall. Given the angle of dip, it is more than possible that the descending rift has become blocked by a large rock or two, causing the choke to build up and level off the streambed. At depth, it may well become passable again, and the absence of any signs of water back-up suggests that the blockage is not very solid. All in all, prospects remain good!

General sightseeing in the streamway brought the day's work to a close.

Rich

NB The origin of the water in the cave may have been solved. A small clear stream that sinks into a culvert by a gateway into Windsor Hill Farm was assumed to flow underground along the farmyard wall to eventually join the main surface stream opposite Sean Wolff's manor house. However, there is no sign of it emerging there, and it now seems probable that it crosses the road, and is briefly seen under a concrete slab behind Gavin's caravan. From there it runs under the Rock Farm yard (hence the proved connection with the collapse in the middle) and thence into the cave. Some form of flow test is on the cards.

Rock Farm - Wed 13th March 2018
Spike, Tav, Mike Moxon, Gavin and Clive

Surprisingly, on this occasion, a very noticeable draught was blowing *out* of the cave rather than inwards.....

An early drill and bang was planned before the troops arrived. Looking at the section of the rift wall that needed removing to allow easier access to the stream rift it became obvious that there was a risk of the bang undermining the adjacent rock rift which was perched partly on top of it.

On balance it seemed worth the risk but it turned out that it wasn't! The upper section became dislodged and needed careful in situ drilling during which it slipped again trapping the Hilti and drill bit against the adjacent wall. The Hilti was removed leaving the drill bit embedded in the rock and the bang accomplished using just the one previously drilled hole.

After that bang we were left with an unstable pile of boulders in, admittedly, a very spacious working area!

A lot of rock was removed to the surface before end of play. Some discussion ensued about the possible need of a stemple or two in the area just up-dip. We will need to look at this carefully next time.

The plan now is to bar down into a safe pile all the loose boulders and pop them on the 'floor'. nb digging at the weekend this week will be on Sunday no Saturday.

I'm afraid its also time to pass the hat round for contributions to the bang fund - thank you to those who have already offered. I have to acknowledge that Gavin insisted in contributing as well which was very kind of him.

Clive

Rock Farm Barn Cave - 21/03 Clive, Tav, Spike

Arrived a bit later than planned, and was greeted by a great whumping in the farm yard.

5(?) shot holes had been fired, and the fumes cleared quickly inwards(?).

Levitated down to the face to find a wide array of debris, from muddy gravel through to boulder-net scale lumps. By stacking the larger lumps out of the way, a good many skips were cleared out despite the reduced team.

By close of play, the stream had been regained, along with Clive's previously abandoned drill bit. Access is still however a tad restricted and will need further loud attention. A mud-choked rift on the RHS (when looking downstream) was also opened, in which flowing water could be heard and eventually seen. The mud removed from this rift contained a goodly number of the small black cobbles, some of which were almost perfectly spherical.

Jobs for Saturday:

There are still a large number of net-sized boulders that are semi-precariously balanced below the former steps. These will all need shifting first as they are blocking the way on.

There is then still a central rib in the floor. approx 2-3ft thick down to almost stream level that will need Clive's attention.

I'm a little concerned about how important said rib is to the large vertical rib occupying the centre of the upstream wall of the shaft, and think this could certainly benefit from some stemming.

Whoever heads down first to load the net will need to be aware that the boulders are not formed into a Witcombe-standard wall, and should be treated with considerable suspicion. It might be sensible to rig the ladder to get as far down as possible as the base of the shaft gets quite wide...

Spike

P.s. If Clive can't make next Wednesday, then leaving a mess to deal with would be appreciated...

Rock Farm - Sat 24th March 2018 Emma, Rich, Gavin and Clive

After duly admiring Spikes meticulous cleaning up of the base of the shaft last Wednesday we had a good look at the prospects.

We decided that the up-dip section of rock that might have needed some stemple support probably didn't but we would obviously keep an eye on it.

Rich pulled some of the larger rocks from the stream bed and found homes for them in the new 'lower' set of steps and against the far wall.

Down at stream level we decided on a 'surgical strike' of a bang to take off just the overhanging section of the central rib abutting the stream, and the lower corner of the triangular block up-dip of it, to allow easier access.

This was achieved as planned and attention turned to clearing more rocks etc from the stream bed. After a while a view could then be had on down the narrow (6in?) rift for around 10ft where it appeared to *maybe* widen a little.

Richard's prediction of a blockage in the stream causing the water to back up proved spot on as around 6ft ahead a long narrow rock on end with stream debris piled around it could be seen. The stream didn't appear to be heading off to the right after all (although this might have changed due to our disturbing the streambed). There is some bedding development to the left and right.

Following the request to make sure I left a mess for the Wednesday team to clear up(!) I put a long hole into the right hand (undercut) wall a couple of feet along the stream rift. This hole popped through into space - presumably the next adjacent rift - which means that it can only be around a foot thick at most and that we can use that space to widen the passage (depending on what the roof does).

I resisted the temptation to bang the solid wall on the left as there are bedding cracks and joints which might mean that wall could become unstable if banged.

Two further deep holes went into the big block which sits in the streambed immediately below the access point. This should ease the workspace considerably.

Interestingly the inward draught was strong, as usual, everywhere except in the stream rift. If anything there seemed to be a little air movement up the rift at that point towards the barn.

So they should be plenty of mess to clear on Wednesday. I'm not out but Gavin has promised to help again.

Its going to get wet for the next few feet until we can remove the blockage and hopefully get the water to drain away or at least lower the water level.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Barn Cave Wed 28th March Tav, Matt, Mandy, Spike, Amy Neal (surface support) & Dave.

The up dip section of rock that might have required a stemple was checked and still looked secure after Saturday's bang. The "surgical strike" must have done its job, since there was no sign of the overhanging section of the central rib. The shot hole in the right hand overhang had also done a good job of opening up the working space. This gave plenty of bang debris hauled to the surface which was duly done. The small amount of medium size blocks below the up stream section of rock was left in situ in case it offers some support to the aforementioned up dip section of rock, and it wouldn't have significantly increased the working space if removed.

By the end of play the stream bed was lowered to at least its original silt level if not lower. A better view of the right hand rift is now available, although no more to report other than the floor of the rift is choked with silts and shingle etc. some of which were dragged out with the long crowbar, hence lowering the stream level a little. As one long flat rock was removed, the stream suddenly sank at the start of the rift but soon blocked up as stream bed silts washed in. Approx 6ft into the rift the stream drops by perhaps a foot or so. There is still potential to dig the stream bed deeper if necessary.

The central rib separating the two rifts doesn't appear to be supporting anything above and may only be approx 6ft long, it may be that with the long wrecking bar inserted down the left hand side possible to rock it slightly and establish whether or not it is connected to bedrock lower down.

An early finish and off to the George where ~~Matt~~ Chatt found a new friend who tried to take his head off.

Dave.

Sat 31st March 2018 Rich, Dave + 2 (Simon & ?), Simon M and Clive. Gavin on surface duty building a wooden extension to the skipway ladder. (very useful!) + 2 were Simon Ashby (CPC member) & Alex Randall (MNRC member)

After Wednesday's very efficient session clearing the streambed, pictures were taken of the way ahead (attached along with some snaps of the shaft etc) and a couple of holes drilled in the obvious rib in the centre of the passage. This was impossible to move at all using the long bar, unlike the long slab sitting above it which was completely loose.

After firing Dave and Simon cleared the debris with Rich finding homes for some of it in the wall adjacent.

At the end of play the accessible rift had grown by about a 3ft in length and is about 2ft 6in wide and 2ft 6in high. The stream flows freely off to the right at the end. The area to the right of this consists of a lot of very blackened and broken bedrock.

The roof of the passage currently has a long slab in the centre which doesn't appear to have any obvious support. It is probably ok but as we have to work and blast directly under it we need to secure it either with a couple of expanding stemples or engineer a couple of sections of substantial angle in place under it. This will need to be done on Wednesday as a priority.

We all agreed (including those of us with impaired hearing!) that there is the sound of maybe falling water ahead which can be heard alongside the sound of the rushing stream.

Wet suit trousers are probably advisable in the short term at least - the water was extremely cold in there on Saturday as was the inward draught! The heavy rain had added to the flow in the stream by sinking in the centre of the farmyard again.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Wed 4th April 2018 Mud(!), Dave, Emma, Gavin and Clive

A 5.30 kick-off by Dave and Clive enlivened by an excited Erica arriving clutching a bottle of champagne and accompanying glasses. The reason turned out to be the fact that she and Gavin had just heard they had finally got planning permission through for their conversion of the barns after 14months of trying!

Dig-wise Dave and I set-to at the end (Dave doing all the work squashed up in the little chamber-ette). After measuring up, a scaffold pole stemple was cut to length and successfully fitted tight under the near end of the block in the roof. A temporary timber support was set up at the far end of the rock as well.

This then enabled Mud to break up the big slab that had been resting on the floor and a large amount of stream fill was then brought to the surface.

A couple of bits of white porcelain turned up in the floor as well which was an interesting development.

An exceptionally cold night session for all concerned both above and below ground. The pub was particularly welcome this week!

Dave and I will be back on Saturday morning to fit the other steel stemple at the far end prior to our afternoon session.

Clive

Rock Farm Sat 7th April 2018

Saturday morning - Dave and Clive to fit the 2nd stemple at the end. All fixed no problem followed by Dave doing some rock removal of the central rib in the floor.

Saturday afternoon - Rich & Clive

Having removed the accumulated pile of rocks, deposited in the streamway during the morning, to the 'landing' at the top of the shaft we removed yet more rock from the central rib and from the flat section of bedding at the back.

A drilling session in the central rib and ensuing bang produced an excellent result and a large pile of rock ready for removal from the base of the shaft next time.

Right at the back on the right hand side the stream can be seen to continue to flow on, in addition to water flowing off to the right a feet before.

There is no real air movement at the end compared to within the shaft but there is a distinct sound of falling(?) water ahead somewhere.

On Wednesday we need a full team as there is a lot of material to come to the surface. At the end we also need to dig out plenty of stream debris before the next bang. Its all getting a bit aquatic!

Clive

Hobnail Hole Fri 6th & Sun 8th April

Over this last weekend I took a couple of MNRC trips down Hobnail Hole. It started with a few hours work clearing and shoveling mud & silts etc.

Fri morning 6th April

MNRC members Ian Barker, Nick (Mushroom) Powell, Mark Craske & Dave.

First job was to clear the debris blocking the Hobnail Channel. This took a lot of effort to first shovel a lot of silts etc from the channel itself before the stream was dammed to allow the flow to reach the cliff face and on into Hobnail. With the grill cleared of leaf and twig debris the sink could then be rodded with a length of angle iron that eventually shifted the blockage and allowed the stream to sink in its entirety.

Then the entrance to Thrupe Lane Swallet saw some attention. The approach to the gate was dropped by about a foot between the gate and old shaft, which only brought the stream bed down to the same level as the bottom of the gate. The gate itself was cleared of debris that had built up during the winter. An estimated tonne of washed down material was cleared and deposited above the steps.

The dam was then repositioned to divert the stream back towards TLS. Before the stream reached the gate, some of it sank on the corner where it first meets the cliff face (I believe any water that sinks here is the flow that enters Colditz and also finds its way further down into Hobnail). More of the stream then sinks just beyond the rock/branch dam that has held back a lot of floating stream debris, this portion of the stream can be heard entering lower down the TLS entrance. Once the stream had overwhelmed these two sink points, it still sank first

down the area of the old shaft and then under the cliff face by the bottom of the steps to the right of the entrance. Eventually a small fraction of the original stream made it to the gate and down the shaft.

It was then time to get changed into full caving kit for a descent into Hobnail, after giving it a short while to dry out. Nick & Mark declined a trip down and offered to monitor the stream and dam on the surface, so it was just Ian & Dave to check whether the winter floods had caused any issues in Hobnail.

Above the 4"x4" timber shelf although itself still intact there has been an amount of material washed out from above and the right hand side, leaving a gap for further debris to fall down. On down into Colditz, which was still taking a small stream. The slope down before the pit prop was sumped with flood foam adhering to the roof and walls. Out from Colditz and on down the Coal Cellar, there was no significant changes but it was very drippy in places, in particular below the metal ladder and down Black Pot. The Dairy was drippy as was King Cobble hall, much as it was on digging sessions.

The rock slope/staircase down to Carrera Crawl seemed to show signs of having had some small rocks washed out, but nothing significant that would cause it to be any less stable than it was. However at the bottom of the slope the water was about 1ft deep where the stream had scoured out the gravel debris and pushed it towards the corner. As a result the approach to the corner was a little snuggier than it was during digging trips.

Ian decided to wait appropriately in the Waiting Room whilst Dave continued down into Upper Butts' etc and a quick inspection of Cowsh Crawl before rejoining Ian in the Waiting Room. Reassuringly Cowsh Crawl remains much as it was last year and is unlikely now to sump or fill with stream debris as it might have done before the boulders were repositioned a year or three ago.

On the way out, the ladder and life line were removed but the spreader and sling were left behind due to not having a spanner to undo the maillon.

Sunday 8th April. MNRC trip

Richard Abbot, Cliff Abbott, Jennifer Abbott, James Abbott, Michael Kearney, Dave K.

Another opportunity to enter Hobnail Hole with a few objectives in mind.

Remove the spreader and maillon, see how much drier the cave had become after the stream had been diverted down TLS for a few days and finally to divert the stream back down Hobnail to allow TLS entrance to dry out for a trip planned for the following Friday.

A ladder and lifeline were now required to be carried in since the ATLAS kit had been removed on the previous trip. An uneventful trip down to The Dairy, with the only thing to report was finding that the cave was no drier than it was on Friday. Confirming that some of the stream, most likely where the stream first meets the cliff face, does head North towards and into Hobnail Hole.

Ladder etc rigged and all descended into King Cobble Hall and on down to The Waiting Room via Carrera Crawl. Cliff decided the Waiting Room was a suitable place to wait whilst the rest of the team continued on down into Upper and Lower Butts' Chamber. A quick look by all at Cowsh Crawl before heading back to rejoin Cliff in the waiting Room. No time to

hang around since some getting a little chilly, so back to the surface removing the spreader and maillon on the way (the black sling was left in situ, which would act as a marker for the natural belay point).

All thoroughly enjoyed the trip despite getting quite wet and a little chilly. On the surface the stream was diverted back down the Hobnail channel.

Dave.

Rock Barn Wed 11th April.

Clive, Mud, Spike, Gavin, Dave & Duncan pub support.

Rocks from Sat cleared from landing followed by clearing Sat's bang debris from the stream.

A good size working space now available under the stemmed roof slab. The roof continues to slope down and pinches out near the stream level, the stream flowing down the left hand side of the central rib. The roof beyond the stemmed section appears to be a similar width, but it's difficult to ascertain whether it is another slab or connected bedrock.

Three holes drilled and fired, two in the central floor rib/tooth, the other a more surgical strike below the point where the roof pinches out.

Gavin, Clive & Dave joined Duncan in the George.

Dave.

Rock Farm - Wed 18th April 2018 Clive!

Having had a good long stare at the possibilities at the end I decided the best, and probably safest, thing to do would be to veer off to the left a bit to avoid knocking about (and undermining) the big roof slab that Dave mentioned in his last report.

Not having the best combination of bang cords with me I contented myself with drilling 4 holes in the left hand wall, one in the left hand side of the remaining lump of bedrock in the stream bed and one in the lower section of the vertical slab jammed in the blackened rift ahead.

These can all be fired on Sunday – I'll try to do this before the troops arrive (hopefully they will!) in order for the fumes to have a chance to disperse.

There is next to no apparent air movement in the lower cave and precious little even in 'The Narrows' in the entrance rift.

Having said that there was a noticeable (but slight) cold draught emanating from the rift running off to the right (looking down rift) at the junction with The Narrows.

All best

Clive

Well done, Clive, for your solo effort.

I too have detected a draught from the rift you describe when the air is still elsewhere. I would say that this rift is not without interest.

It could be that the rifty nature of the cliff face has encouraged the historic stream to down-cut very rapidly (in geological terms) to its present level. As is common in East Mendip caves, such recent streamways can be very narrow and immature.

The narrow draughting rift off to the right (we must give it a name!) seems to have a "drop off" a few metres in. Could this be a slightly more mature (and therefore bigger) fossil route? It would take a fair bit of bang to enlarge the approach to man-sized (sorry - person-sized!) dimensions, but it might be an early candidate for a camera on a stick.

What think the rest of the team?

Rich

PS Unfortunately I can't make this Sunday owing to Geraldine-type prior commitments

Rock Farm Culvert - Sunday 22nd April 2018

Donning his new diving wetsuit and borrowing a 6' length of wooden batten from behind the barn Duncan prodded the backed up culvert downstream of the road whilst standing in waist deep water. Success was achieved just as Dave, Darrel and Clive came over to see what was going on. The next window into the culvert backed up a bit before settling down and muddy water was seen coming out of the point where the pipe emerges by the flood sink digs. Once the water level had dropped the grille upstream of the culvert was cleared of debris. Providing this is maintained then the water should flow away nicely.

Duncan

Rock Farm Sunday 22nd April 2018

After Duncan's heroic unblocking of the culvert for the benefit of the locals Dave, Darryl and Clive carried on in the dig.

The holes prepped last Wednesday were fired and all of the larger blocks and some of the smaller ones removed to The Landing before we dragged them to the surface.

This left a very useful space on the left of the rift to work on with a view to lowering the floor somewhat and working ahead a few feet to see where the water goes (it can be heard ahead somewhere). A large piece of the floor also came up after a hole was fired there further increasing the working space.

Before finishing a further couple of holes were fired on the left. Given a reasonable sized team on Wednesday there will be a lot to come up from the end straight to the surface.

Draught-wise there was no apparent air movement at the bottom of the cave and little in the entrance rift. The narrow rift going off to the right just below The Narrows though was producing a very noticeable cold draught. This will be our Plan B if we need it.

It has to be said that, at the moment, the end of the streamway is not looking promising - it appears to be degenerating into very narrow rifts again. We will give it a few more feet of probing though before giving it up.

Our two bangs were 'observed' from the manhole in the barn where each produced a clear sound and blast of air further confirming it has to be the same rift as the one in the dig.

Clive

Rock Farm Wednesday 25th April 2018 Spike and Clive plus Dave on surface and pub support.

I took the opportunity to put together the little 'endoscope' camera and light on a pole to have a look at the end of the 'Plan B' rift.

I have yet to look at the results on a large screen but as far as I can make out there is no major enlargement in the presumed rift at the end, below the small stal curtain we can see.

There is one area of potential interest (perhaps) but I need to look at it properly on a larger screen than my phone!

Down in the streamway the last bang had done its job and there was plenty of rock to move. Spike spent the evening wrangling a lot of rock from the left side of the rift (which we have pushed back about 2.5ft). By the end of play the bed of the stream had been piled high with debris ready to go to the surface - I reckon it will take at least one major clearing session to remove it.

When that is done there is a lot of small material in the floor at the very end to dig out (which will be a wet job) to reveal where we need to bang next and which might also allow better draining away of the water.

I am not around at all this weekend and away from Wed until Sunday next week so will miss three potential sessions. Dave I believe will be on 'very' light surface duties.

Clive

ROCK FARM CAVE SATURDAY 28 APRIL 2018

Dave K (surface duties), Ray D, Emma G, Rich W and for the second half, John G.

With sub-optimal numbers initially, DK had to shoulder the lion's share of the hauling and spoil disposal. Nonetheless, steady work with lighter than average skip loads enabled all the banged rocks to be cleared from the streamway to the surface. When JG arrived, large quantities of stream debris were also removed.

The way ahead was then examined closely. The stream seems to flow down a gradient in the narrow slot to the right, which might in due course take the water below the digging level. To the left of the central blocks, the too-tight rift continues for 2m +, and is nicely stream-blackened with areas of possible enlargement. By taking a crowbar to the centre rocks, it was possible to "dismantle" many of them and a few were cleared back to the base of the climb above the streamway ready for removal.

Should there be a team for Weds evening, more of this dismantling can be done without the use of bang, and a better view of the way forward should result. Two points - a couple of rocks have been jammed under the big roof block on the right as a support - leave these as we are not going to touch this area. Also, there is a

smallish, loose slab in the roof ahead - this can come out but the removal needs to be done carefully - the rock above it appears secure but will need testing.

There was a very fresh feel throughout the cave, and with the stream rushing ahead without the least sign of back up, all who saw the end were quite encouraged (possibly even enthusiastic!).

Rich

PS Ray D declared that the cave will go without too much trouble!

Rock Farm - Wed 9th May 2018 Tav, Spike and Clive (+ Gavin for some late surface hauling)

Tav spent a semi-aqueous evening clearing the finer stream debris – sand, pebbles etc and a few rocks – from the end and ultimately produced a fair impression of a sump!

Four holes were then drilled and fired – one in the left hand solid wall and the others in the jammed blocks in the rift ahead.

Spike inspected the results and reported a number of largish rocks to be removed along with a lot of smaller ones and the option of plenty of rock-wriggling and wrangling to be had. The stream was sinking easily into the 4in wide right hand rift and was no longer ponding up.

Some of the potentially loose rocks in the roof of the rift apparently fell or are on the pint of falling!

Plenty to do on Saturday! Lemon drizzle cake, provided by Catherine and Christopher at the retreat as a thank you to Duncan for clearing the stream blockage, will be forthcoming from Gavin's freezer in time for afternoon tea!

Clive

Rock Farm Wednesday 16th May 2018 The 'dynamic duo' of Gavin and Clive!

The pile of rocks and smaller stream debris piled at the bottom of the shaft was soon relocated to The Landing for later removal to the surface.

Gavin, having had a look at the end, commenced a monumental session clearing back the stream debris and hauling back some of the most obvious loose rocks. These were soon reduced to 'bite-sized chunks' and stacked at the bottom of the shaft.

Much work between us with bars, hammer and chisel etc also removed a fair amount of 'solid' rock from the floor in the centre of the passage and to the left, much helped by a reduced stream level. It has to be said that despite Gavin's size he 'does fold-up well' and has been further into the 'new' cave than any of us having reversed into the far end of the left hand rift whilst attaching the floor.

One large slab about a metre long was encouraged to fall away from the centre pile of rocks ahead and fell into the left hand rift – this awaits a bang.

By the end of play the base of the shaft was filled with rocks and a long pile of stream debris also awaits down-dip.

So, plenty to clear by those stalwarts on Saturday not tempted by the alternative 'attractions' of the Royal Wedding or the football match!

Clive

Rock Farm Saturday 12th May 2018 Rich, Simon, Duncan and Clive

Some time was spent removing the debris from the last bang, firstly up to the landing and thence on to the surface.

Tea-break was enjoyed with the help of a magnificent Victoria sponge cake baked by Catherine at the 'retreat' for Duncan in appreciation of his unblocking the stream culvert. Unfortunately Gavin had forgotten to take it out of the freezers so it took a bit of sawing up!

Rich's work at the face produced a far better view into the rifts beyond – viz one on the left, one on the right. The left had one goes for around 8-10ft and is around a foot wide with heavily blackened walls and loose rocks. The right hand one has the stream running into it which appears to sink in the floor a few feet in. It is around 4inches wide at the start but around a yard in appears to be at least a foot wide with clean washed rocks in the floor.

Obviously if we remove the fairly broken rock in between the two rifts we will have a roomy section of rift and the more open areas of the two rifts ahead do appear very interesting. No draught there though although there was a gentle inward draught in the entrance passage.

So, after the end of the dig appeared to be closing in just a couple of weeks ago we now have a vastly improved situation!

Dave – we will need another stemple to go under another roof slab which, although apparently solid, could do with some support.

There is a nice bedding on one side for one end to go into while the other side will need the usual hole drilled. The width of the gap is equal to two of our long chisel lengths! ie around 24inches.....
Clive

Rock FARM - Sat 19th May 2108 Richard, Simon, John and Clive

All the stacked material on The Landing was removed to the surface followed by that at the base of the shaft and the pile of stream debris in the streamway approach.

The final chore was to bang the medium sized but very awkwardly positioned boulder loosened by Gavin on Wed.

The plan for Wed is to fit a stemple under the next 'roof boulder, section and to start to remove the blocks in between the two rifts (left and right).

Bang will probably be needed.
Clive

Rock Farm - Wed 23rd May 2018 Dave, Spike and Clive

Dave's latest 'freebie' ladder was tried in the entrance passage and, being a little narrower than its predecessor, it fitted the passage a bit better. It is also longer which is also useful. Dave will add some plywood to it and we can try it in anger soon.

At the dig face we measured up and cut to length the latest stemple before fitting – it now (almost) picks up the big roof slab. There is a gap of a few mm which we should fill with a hardwood wedge to encourage the rock to stay where it is!

We do need to keep a watching brief on it – there is always the possibility that we may need to bring it down if we feel the risk of working under it (which is imminent) is too great a risk.

Spike removed a great deal of loose rock from above and behind the central slabs in the passage. These eventually found their way up on to The Landing for removal to the surface on Saturday.

As a result we can now see the area around the right hand rift where the (now much reduced) stream is sinking. Whilst there is no gaping black hole to gaze at the area does look very interesting.

Before leaving for the pub the three large blocks in the centre of the passage were drilled and ‘medium-sized’ charges fired.

Clive

Rock Farm - Sat 26th May 2018 Rich, Simon & Clive

After a preliminary look at the results of Wednesday nights bang (very successful) the resulting pile of rock was stacked up at the base of the shaft and attention turned to the pile of accumulated rock on The Landing.

This was removed to the surface before tea-break after which Rich and Simon carried on hauling up some of the fresh spoil while Clive tried attacking a very obstinate boulder at the end with the Plug ‘n Feathers. This was partially successful and after a lot of fruitless wrangling a shothole was finally drilled and the rock eventually sent on its way to the great boulder ruckle in the sky....

At the end there is a (soon to be cleared) narrow rift on the left but the main interest is to the right. Here the stream sinks at a corner where the rift appears to go off to the right (maybe to connect with what was the line of the original ‘right-hand rift’). The water drops vertically for a couple of feet maybe and, beyond the sound of that, can be heard the sound of flowing water somewhere ahead.

Its an interesting area with development apparently away from the usual North-South (approx.) alignment of the rifts.

The Box Office is now open for bookings for the performances on Wed and Saturday this week – book early to avoid disappointment!

Clive

Rock Farm - Wed 30th May 2018 Spike and Clive

All the tipped rock from The Landing plus that from the base of the shaft was dragged to the surface before a look at the end.

Saturday’s bang had broken the mega boulder into manageable lumps and when removed provided decent access to look into the rift on the right.

This was taking the, now tiny, stream and is a very interesting waterworn vertical rift 4-6inches wide and apparently about 6ft deep. About 3-4ft down there is an obvious undercut to both the right and the left and what appears to be a waterworn floor (probably another rib) is visible below.

There is a lot of stream cobbles and mud piled up at the threshold and it appears that that could be the end of the fill.

Obviously we need now to go down rather than along and to do that the obvious place is right under the big roof boulder. This will need extra support in addition to the original stemple. Looking at the walls on either side there is scope for fixing steelwork although a traditional stemple would not be sufficient. It may be that a custom inverted U-shape truss needs to be made to both take the potential load and also allow as much headroom as possible. Headroom won't be an issue in the longer term of course as we go down.

I removed a superb 'lindle-shaped' slab from the right hand wall - blackened and worn smooth its around 2.5ft long and tapers to one end and should be brought out in one piece. I'm sure Gavin would use it in a place of prominence in his building work!

Before leaving Spike also managed to lever up a huge flat slab from centre of the floor (which will help the headroom a bit in the short term!) He suggests we use it at the base of the shaft.

We now have a lot of smaller debris to clear from the base of the shaft again plus we need to have a good session digging out the loose material in the floor at the end, especially around the rib in the centre of the floor. Plenty to do and all to play for!

Clive

Rock Farm Saturday 2nd May 2018 Rich, Simon, Emma and Clive.

After clearing the remaining rock and debris pile at the base of the shaft Richard set about assembling a sturdy wall at the far end to help support the dodgy roof block.

This turns out to be a very suitable alternative to the original steel prop idea and picks up the block on its left side.

This does of course narrow the passage somewhat but that is offset by the possibility of removing a couple of obvious blocks from the right hand wall.

Some cement and "quarter to dust" were "borrowed" from Gavin which allowed Rich to grout most of the new wall. This will be finished next time.

Next time will of course be Thursday rather than the usual Wednesday when we will be hosting the 'Digger-Heckling' competition led by Mark Lumley!

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Thursday 7 June 2018

Underground contingent - Clive, Alan, Dave, Alec (?Alex) from MNRC and Rich.
Surface support - Mr & Mrs M Lumley with canine companion visiting from Pembrokeshire in the Principality, "Spike" and Amy (the latter selecting rocks for a Hidden Earth art installation) from Weston-super-Mare, and Matt and Mandy from Wiltshire, although lately returned from a visit to Cornwall.

After an inspection of the "way on", a decision was made to place charges in the floor rib and a convenient cleft in the right-hand wall. Following successful detonation, the team went underground amid moderate fumes to commence clearing to the surface. The rib was nicely broken up but the right-hand wall was only partly

shattered. By the end of the evening, the view down the narrow, stream blackened rift ahead had been opened up and was adjudged not without interest. The stream was very low, but there was a slight outward draught, evidenced by the drift of the drill dust.

It was decided to have a rest day this Saturday, 9 June, and resume work on Wednesday, 13 June.

The young people later adjourned to a nearby public house.

RW

Rock Farm - Wed 13th June 2018 Rich, Alan, Spike, Tav and Clive

An early start by Clive to drill and bang the two remaining blocks on the right from the previous session.

This done, the air was completely clear by the time the whole team headed underground to haul out the debris.

Good progress was made until a large block (I think from adjacent to the left wall) dropped into the rift and proved impossible to drag out using the sling, rope and three diggers!

Before finishing the rock was attacked with bang along with a protruding piece of bedrock on the right.

The area below looks very interesting, it being at the junction of several joints and well water worn.

Saturday should see some fairly serious rock removal!

Emma, Rich and Clive are on the team so far – Simon, John??

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Saturday 16th June 2018 The Gisbornes, Rich, Simon and Clive

Happily the Wednesday night bang had done a great job of breaking up the remains of the central rib into lumps and removing the protruding section of right hand wall. This meant a big pile of rocks had to be cleared to the surface after Rich had applied more rocks and concrete to the supporting wall of the roof slab. A little more concrete is needed to finish the job.

The rock clearance revealed a clear view, down the vertical open rift, of the hammer which had slipped unnoticed into the void! This was around 8ft down in an encouragingly wider part of the rift with an undercut to the left (looking down-dip). A lower section of the same bit of rift can also be seen to have an undercut off to the right this time.

The minute stream falls down the rift at the upper of the two points and a cold, very gentle draught emerges.

An awkward drilling session ensued placing two holes across the top of the next lower section of the central 'rib' which blocks access followed by one its centre. A dumpy bag was forced into the rift to hold back the broken rock from falling into the interesting area below.

More fun on Wednesday....

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Wednesday 20th June 2018 Emma, Rich, Alan, Spike, Tav, Clive and Dave on surface and pub support.

Rich first of all finished off the concreting of the support pillars in the cave while Spike 'immersed' himself in clearing the banged debris etc from the drop at the end.

After a steady hauling session to the surface the dumpy bag had been removed from blocking the rift and the lost hammer was visible once more!

The base of the rift is looking very promising with a distinct widening to the right (looking down-dip) and the tops of several large boulders visible.

Before pushing further it is going to be necessary to stabilise the up-slope bedding which forms the up-rift 'wall' of the new rift. This will mean removing the loose sections and concreting up the remainder. This should give us a bit more space as well and will help when pulling up material from below. This will be our priority on Saturday (are you around Simon?).

All best

Clive

ROCK FARM CAVE Saturday 23 June 2018

Clive, Simon and Rich, with an underground visit by Gavin at close of play.

Made up a big mix of cement and ferried it underground in two work sessions. After clearing a small amount of bang debris, construction started on three low rock and concrete barriers in the stream bed to hold back stream fill and loose floor slabs. The tiny stream was allowed to run under the barriers through small channels to allow the aggregate to go off. The furthest downstream barrier is just above the 6' deep 'pot' and incorporates a heavy piece of steel angle jammed across the rift.

The view from the bottom of the drop is encouraging. There is a too-tight rift on the right, but ahead is a bedding plane 3-4' across and 6' long. This will certainly be man-sized and may continue at depth but at present a rubble floor prevents access and full examination. Upstream of the 'pot' are holes in the floor dropping several more feet. All in all, a lot more air and a lot less rock!

Some grouting was also done amongst the shattered rocks opposite the landing, and two token buckets of spoil were brought out of the cave.

Clive and I are not around on Wednesday (27 June), but whoever turns up can do useful work removing rubble from the bedding plane and clearing stream debris from upstream of the first barrier. NB Any large rocks from the bedding should be placed carefully onto the barriers to avoid breaking them up - crawling over them is obviously fine, Also be careful where you dig in the stream bed as the low barriers are well camouflaged. If a slot in the floor can be opened up, the tiny stream may well disappear before the pot - working on the third barrier was a very wet chore!

Rich

Rock Farm Wednesday 27th June 2018
Alan, Dave, Spike

<TL;DR for Tav at the end>

19:00

Alan and I arrived and, with no sign of Dave, headed to the bottom to see the state of play. Having marvelled at the inconspicuousness of the revetments installed at the weekend, Spike dropped to the bottom of the pot to investigate the way on. A promising sight was made less-promising by removing the rocks blocking the view, as although the bedding plane ahead is now passable for the 6+ ft described by RW in the last report, it degenerates into another gravel/silt blockage with no obvious signs of open progress. This will almost certainly reveal some more rift or bedding plane when removed, so not all lost.

The RHS of the floor of the bedding plane is loose gravel, and there appears to be open space into the continuing rift without too much digging, however access here is somewhat impeded by a 4' x 18" x 8" block which will need dealing with first. One other largish boulder requires removing from the base of the pot (approx 12" cube) but available manpower prevented its retrieval at this juncture.

At this point Alan dropped to assess the prospects and was mightily concerned about the roof of the bedding plane which seems to be only attached at one end and there by force of habit alone. The northern face of this slab (in the pot) also seems to be at risk of peeling off. Either way, some more stabilisation works are probably necessary before we go on digging beyond this point.

The large collection of rock removed from the bedding plane was relocated to the head of the stream, before we brought 3 buckets of smaller spoil out, to be met by Dave 'surface duties' King at the head of the first drop to the Landing. With his assistance, the three buckets were removed. Whilst preparing for hauling the rest, Gavin passed by on the road on his way to find some of his recently acquired (and slightly more recently lost) Welsh Black sheep. ~20-25 buckets of rock including a few big'uns were removed between the three of us before we decided to call it an early night.

21:00

Having changed and whilst in the process of debating a quick trip to The George, Gavin returned in the zebra Land Rover, with his brother(?) and daughter, but without any sheep. Whilst the merits of owning sheep were being discussed, a somewhat haughty chap turned up in a posh 4x4 asking if Gavin would kindly remove two sheep from his horse farm (or more accurately his "Cross Country Schooling Facility for the more experienced rider") as they were causing "mayhem" with his horses. He then gave Gavin some advice on how best to look after sheep.

Having re-fuelled the Landy, Dave and Spike agreed to help with the shepherding operation, and we set off to the stables, only to be told that the sheep had since disappeared. After a look in fields and footpath entrances down the lane from the stables we had given up the search and were returning to Rock Farm when we again met Mr Dumas coming in the opposite direction, but now on his quad-bike. Apparently the magically disappearing sheep had now reappeared in his top field and we were asked once again to go and retrieve them.

21:45

We were shown the route we could walk up among the cross-country jumps to find these two small woolly sources of outrage and, once in the top field, spotted them in the ever-increasing gloom sheltering against a hedge. Mr Dumas now helpfully appeared in the field upon his mighty four-wheeled steed to assist in guiding the sheep along the hedge, down the hill from where we hoped to be able to get them into the lane and up the road to Gavin's. This went well until we tried to herd them out of the lower field and through the gate onto the gravel driveway. They did not take kindly to this and broke through our lines (mostly Spike's fault) and set off up the field again, clearing at least one of the cross-country jump ditches on the way.

At this point, Mr Dumas' patience was wearing thinner than ever, which led to his technique changing from gently following them with the quad-bike to driving at them full tilt with the headlights on and the horn blaring. Unsurprisingly the sheep were now getting a little agitated and were becoming less and less herd-able. Spike and Gavin's brother were able to cut them off from returning to the top field and, with Grace's help, eventually corner them and allow them to calm down after the quad-bike (and thankfully its driver) removed themselves from the field.

22:10

A call for backup to Gavin and Dave who were guarding the exit from the stables down the lane in hopeful anticipation of the sudden appearance of some mad shepherding skills, and there were now 5 humans in an arc around the two cornered sheep. After some admonishment from Grace for closing in on them looking like scary predators, the arc had closed enough that the sheep tried to escape through the bramble hedge they were backed against and the humans pounced. The sheep were scooped up

and carried back to the waiting Landy for transport home, but not before one landed a good left cross on Spike's cheek. An obligatory photo opportunity was not wasted and the sheep were gently transferred to the pick-up.

Pinned down in the back of the Land Rover, and with their hearts going ten to the dozen, the journey back passed without major incident and the two scamps were re-united with the rest of their roving flock in their new (temporary) accommodation.

22:40

Job completed, backs were slapped and the team adjourned to The George for some (oddly below par) Gem, and to discuss with the landlord both the exertions of the evening and how owning sheep is a terrible idea.

TL;DR: Lots of rock out of the bedding plane. 6+ ft of navigable bedding plane now available to a gravel choke, roof looks sketchy as all hell. Then after some light shepherding, pub.

Spike

p.s. Sorry for the delay, I was hoping to get Gavin's brother(?)'s name to go in the report...

What an epic! Gav's brother is apparently Giles....

All best

Clive

Not necessarily referring to Saturday but as we have this amazing drought we should think ahead to the wet months to come and investigate getting the stream to sink ahead of the new drop.

It should be relatively easy to open up the rift in the floor (look up rift from under the new revetment and you can see it is open for a few feet at least). It might need a section of plastic pipe or two jammed into the rift and cementing in to finish the job.

While on the subject(!) we are obviously faced with new rock removal issues from the new section.

I propose a stemple across the top of the new drop with a pulley and rope. Also a suitable skip with haul back rope for dragging back to the base of the shaft.

A pulley and rope attached to the stemple adjacent to The Landing would be a great help too.

Do the more stream debris that can be removed from the approach to the end the better of course (although we need some to drag the skip on).

Plenty to do before dealing with the blocks (and roof) in the new bit.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Wednesday 4th July 2018 Alan, Alex, Mud, Spike and Clive plus Dave on pub support.

After taking some pictures of 'The Extension' (working title) we spent some time clearing the assorted gravels etc from the stream bed approach and hauled it all to the surface.

Mud meanwhile found a small cleft in the floor a few feet before Richard's 'embankment' and soon opened up a sizeable continuation of the left-hand rift – approx. 5ft or so deep and around 8 inches wide in solid. This should make a superb 'drain' for the stream assuming it does connect with the downdip rifts etc without backing up. There was no light connection between the two however.

There is of course stream debris on the lip of the rift and we will need to look, on Saturday, at how best to preserve the integrity of the hole under wet conditions in the future. I think a suitable wall concreted rocks should do the trick – we will need to decide also on how best to cover the hole – mesh, conveyor belting have been suggested so far.

Also discussed at length in the pub was how best to deal with the apparently very loose roof section in The Extension. Possibilities include initial 'remote' barring to see what happens and, in extremis, blowing it up!

Attached are the pictures from last night – there is a join up of the view down The Extension which needs to be looked at in conjunction with a second 'view to the left' to get the full picture. I couldn't seem to get this picture to attach to the rest of the join up. Three shots in all.

Nb I am sending the pictures over two emails.....

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Saturday 7th July 2018

Emma, Rich, Simon & Clive (Dave on fork-lift truck fettling duties)

After sizing up the new 'drainhole' some suitable rocks were jammed in position and then concreted in. Further concrete was applied to the 'streambed' for a few feet upstream to hopefully help maintain its stability in the future.

Finally, instead of attaching a grill over the hole the simple expedient of a cut to length section of scaffold plank was employed to make a bridge for hauling the skip over – plenty of room for the stream to flow down the remainder of the hole.

Attention then turned to the end where Simon had been removing a few skips of rocks. Strangely, although the stream was falling down the manhole, there was still a very annoying trickle coming in on the right hand side of the drop. It can only be coming somehow from the surface stream as there is little rock above the cave and the weather has been dry for a good while now.

The closest of the two large blocks lying on the floor of the down-dip bedding was drilled and gently banged in readiness for Wednesday night.

Whilst charging the hole, and leaning against the prominent up-dip slab half way down the hole, I had a freaky moment when it felt as though it moved an inch against my shoulders. On examination it seemed to be still firmly attached but this side needs some attention. I will do a 'surgical bang' on it soon to cut off the approx foot of it protruding into the shaft. This side of the hole may need some concreting yet to fully stabilise it.

Further evaluation of the roof and where we need to go down (basically in the floor at the shaft base and along the right hand side of the bedding where there is a debris filled rift) on Wednesday is needed. It is a confined space to work in (especially for the taller digger!) with little room for escape if anything collapsed.

On such a hot day the cave was deliciously cool with a slight outward draught, just perceivable at the farthest end.

All best

Clive

Wednesday 11/7/2018 - Rock Farm Barn Cave

Alan, Clive, Mud & Spike

Rich and Dave on surface duties

The rocky debris from the weekend's bang was cleared up into the streamway while Mud lowered a camera into the pot he opened up last week. The rocks were then removed to the surface before a second assault on the bottom of the end pitch.

The continuation of the rift was opened up at the base of the end pitch, but it remains quite narrow. More muck needs to be removed to get a better idea of the potential for continuing downwards. A goodly number of buckets of sloppy mud/gravel were removed, along with a number of larger rocks. These are sat at the base of the main shaft awaiting extraction.

Before retiring, I inserted a crowbar into one of the cracks in the boulder that forms the down-dip side of the final pot, and the roof of the continuation. Without very much effort at all, a 3.5' long, 9" square cross section lump dropped away, right where I'd spent the evening digging. This has made access to the bottom of the pitch roomier, but highlights the lack of stability in that area.

Discussion ensued as to how to support the roof, and indeed which level of the roof to choose to support. Rich suggests walling up to support the current roof, but I wonder if we need to look at a quicker method so as to mitigate the risk sooner. Perhaps some sleeper sections could be wedged in place while we assess where we want to continue downwards, and until sufficient rock to build a more permanent support becomes available.

Spike

On Saturday 14th July the Rock Farm Cave Safety Sub-Committee convened in emergency session under the auspices of the Price/Sharp amalgamation.

It was unanimously agreed that sections of sleeper be used as vertical 'pit-props' under the unstable roof at the end of the cave.

Gavin has agreed to supply the necessary sleeper(s) and will be on hand on Wednesday to cut it/them to length.

All best

Clive (advisor to the Safety Committee)

Rock Farm Wed 18th July.
Rich, Tav, Clive & Dave.

After further assessment of rail sleeper pit props for the roof block, the first of the two blocks on the floor was maneuvered into the undercut on the right hand side whilst the stockpile of spoil near the entrance was hauled out. With the first block clear, better access was gained to the second larger rock slab that was covering the slot in the floor and the position for the second pit prop. With a strop around this second slab and the 5ft bar wedged across in front of the roof block (acting as a deviation pulley), from above the climb it was possible to haul the slab up the slope to settle at the bottom of the climb. The slab was then reduced into manageable pieces and handed/hailed up the climb before being loaded into skips for hauling out to the surface. Lengths for pit props measured in preparation for cutting and installing on Saturday when the block stashed in the undercut will also be chemically reduced. The trickle of water that sprayed down the climb has been diverted slightly giving a much appreciated drier working area.

Dave.

Rock Farm - Saturday 21st July 2018 Emma, Rich, Dave and Clive

It was quite a relief to head into the cool cave from the surface heat on Saturday.....

Gavin had kindly cut three sections of sleeper according to our measurements along with some wedges. These were transported to the end of the cave where Dave and Rich fitted two of them tightly between the bedding floor on the left and the latest section of 'dodgy roof'.

The result was a nicely supported roof and an area where one now feels much safer working.

The large rock which had been parked on the right hand side was banged before he tea break and the debris removed immediately afterwards. Thanks to the gentle outward draught there were absolutely no fumes noticeable in the cave after the, admittedly, small bang.

A drag tray, purloined from the MNRC, was fitted with a rope and pull back cord for use at the end and Emma, followed by Clive, removed a fair amount of stream debris which was duly hauled back to the base of the shaft for removal on Wednesday.

A short stemple and small pulley would be very useful for hauling up out of the dig at the end – this would obviously help with the removal of boulders and would avoid damage to the steel and concrete

revetment near the top. A decent bucket with a safe handle arrangement would be a great help here too as tipping the contents of a skip into the drag tray, in the confines close to the top of the new drop, is quite tricky.

At the end the open rift in the floor, so far, appears to be just a few inches wide and curving downwards for around 5ft. On the plus side there is the cool cave draught coming up out of it....

Having cleared some of the stream debris from around the top of the upper end of the rift it appears there may be another much smaller rift or joint there which might lend itself to probable downward banging.

On the subject of which(!) bang supplies are currently still fairly healthy although I have just had to stock up with 25 dets and a small amount of cord (nearly £100) – so the hat needs to be passed around again I'm afraid. We should be OK for supplies for the foreseeable future though.

Any takers for Wednesday (its nice and cool in the cave!). Be aware the farm gate may be locked....

It would be useful to know of any likely helpers for Saturday as well.....

All best

Clive

Drama at Rock Farm! Saturday 28th July 2018 Emma, Rich, Simon and Clive

After clearing last session's debris from the 'Foot of the Stairs' to The Landing and thence to the surface work resumed at the far end with Simon making good progress clearing the cobble and mud-filled choked continuation to the right of the open rift. One very large rock was hauled out with the sling.

Clive then had a go and lowered the floor by a few inches and widened the area of attack, removing another large block in the process and discovering another larger one lurking in the floor. More digging will enlarge the down-rift area and will lead to a bang of the intervening narrow rift wall which separates the dig area from the deep, narrow open rift.

At this point there was a shout from Emma who was sitting half way along the streamway – "Whats that noise - its water!"

I could hear it from the end of the dig and we all instantly agreed that it would be prudent to exit the cave!

Climbing out of the end I could see water flowing over the top of the plank towards me and a torrent rushing down into the 'Mud'ole'. A large (by Rock Farm standards) stream was running down the streamway busily eating away at our stacked spoil.

There had obviously been a substantial cloudburst on the surface to produce this torrent (which smelled distinctly of farmyards!)

On the surface there was little to see except for a small stream entering the sink in the middle of the yard, although, judging by the spread of sand etc on the concrete it had obviously been covering a much wider area.

The main stream, which had previously been little more than a semi stagnant pond, was flowing again and was a light grey colour (sewage??). This was running clear again within 30 minutes.

A dramatic little flood pulse which poses the question of, when the stream returns to normal, how we transport spoil along the streamway without it washing away. Do we bag it up somehow or build a 'false-floor' of some sort so the stream can run underneath out of the way?

Much to discuss on Wednesday.....

All best

Clive

ROCK FARM CAVE WEDS 1 AUGUST 2018

Clive and Rich only. Duncan had earlier delivered a supply of bags to Clive.

An underground inspection indicated that last Saturday's flood pulse must have receded as quickly as it had arrived. There was only a small scattering of the spoil heap, and the working face was unchanged, although it still provides a number of trickles exactly where you don't want them.

Half a dozen buckets of rocks and stream debris were removed from the end. This was enough to show that there is some sort of intermediate flake in the floor rift, which if removed, should give a reasonable working width. A steady cool draught emanated from the narrow open slot.

The augmented spoil heap was then moved up to the landing area, with the small stuff in the new bags. Finally, the temporary rock dumps around the entrance area were cleared away.

A useful little session.

Rich

Sat 5th Aug Rock Farm Cave Sat 5th Aug, Rock Farm Cave

Clive, Rich, Emma, Simon & Dave.

Stemple measured, cut (twice) and fitted above the lower climb and Pulley added for spoil hauling. Whilst stemple fitted the previous sessions spoil was hauled out to the surface.

Tea break on the island with Birthday cake - Happy belated Birthday Emma.

The stemple and pulley worked well with spoil being shoveled directly into bags in a builders bucket making it easier to transfer the spoil from bucket to drag tray. All the spoil was then hauled to the surface.

The plan was then to bang the bedrock flake and a couple of large rocks. Unfortunately the tube containing the drill bits decided to cave on down the narrow rift before stopping approx 8ft below where it decided to stay. A possible rescue mission on Wed has been formulated before drill and bang to recommence.

Dave.

Just to add we welcomed Geoff Newton who had come to talk to us about possibly re-opening the Viaduct dig (and helping with the re-gating operation).

He had a look at the end of Rock Farm Cave as well and helped with clearing the spoil to the surface.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Wed 8th August 2018

Whilst the Halloween team enjoyed the fruits of their very well-earned labours by descending their newly opened rift, on Wednesday night Dave, Spike and Clive carried on the onslaught at Rock Farm....

An early start enabled Dave to (very easily as it turned out) rescue the lost drill tube from the 8ft deep rift at the end of the cave and Clive to drill and bang the big solid rib in the centre of the dig and a couple of associated blocks. (a pair of wooden boards have been fixed to the upper pit-prop to provide a space for tools etc to live in without them necessarily sliding down-dip into the rift)

After a teabreak on Gavin's 'Island' while the fumes cleared we returned, discovering en route a strong smell of bang fumes in the old dig on the left of the entrance.

Dave set to for a punishing session clearing the results of the bang which, after Spikes arrival we were able to move up to The Landing (the bagged portion at least, the selection of larger rocks remaining at the base of the shaft).

The floor area has now been dropped by a good foot or so at least and there is room to work in 'comfortably'. The view down and along the open rift didn't show anything wider than around 6inches but the tiny stream was happy enough flowing down it and a faint draught emanated from it.

Before exiting another bang was set in the continuation of the big rib and another parallel slab.

On Saturday we have the stockpile on The Landing to shift, and the rocks at the bottom, to the surface, before working on the banged rocks at the end.

Who might be about?

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Saturday 11th Aug 2018 Dave, Emma and Clive

An early meet up at Thrupe to do some rather overdue work on the rock wall in the streambed below the Ferret Shed. Almost completed now - could do with one last load of rock from Gavins....

Whilst there we met up with Ivan, the new owner of the farmhouse opposite. He has bought the property with his sister with a view to selling it after renovation. He himself has done some caving and was interested in what we do.

At Rock Farm we emptied The Landing of bags to the surface along with all the rock from the streamway. The stream was back up to something approaching its usual flow and was flowing merrily into the Mud'ole (maybe that should be Mudz'ole - a nod to the Gonz'ole that Mark opened up to drain the stream approaching the pitch in Thrupe Swallet?). It was good to see that the majority of the stream was finding a lower route (under the banged rock maybe in the rift base) at the end of the cave although there is still a fair amount of drip and splash coming from elsewhere.

At the end Dave had a very productive time removing the bang debris and more stream debris before persuading a lot more 'solid' rib to yield. As a result the streamway below The Stairs is now jammed packed with rocks and bags. It will probably take the whole of the next session to clear it all.

Due to commitments we have moved Wednesday's session this week to the Tuesday.....

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Wednesday 14th August 2018 Rich, Emma, Dave, Gavin and Clive

With Rich on the surface hauling and the rest of us underground we soon got most of the lighter loads up from the bottom to the surface. Gavin then joined us to help haul the heavier rocks and bags up the final leg.

Dave then persuaded a few more rocks to part company with the bedrock at the end before a final session drilling and firing a hole ready for next time.

The stream had reduced from its previous active state to all but a trickle. At the end there was still a lively splash from the right hand wall but its easy to avoid as its now quite roomy down there!

Work continues removing the central rib – currently about a foot thick. It will be necessary to clear the remains of the stream debris and rock 'overburden' at the back of the rift and the rib etc beneath to continue. Luckily the rock does have some extensive cracks which is a great help. A lot of material to come out though of course.

The jury is currently out on when best to dig next.....Spike might be able to do Sunday as can Emma and I (we can also do Saturday). Can you let us know asap Spike? Rich and Dave are unavailable this weekend. Simon/Tav - might either of you be around?

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Saturday 18th August 2018 Emma & John, Simon and Clive

John straight to the end to start removing last Wednesday's bang debris and assorted stream fill.

Three-quarters of the bags had been used plus plenty of assorted rocks had come up by the time we needed to clear the streamway and haul it all up to The Landing.

After tea this was all duly deposited on the surface by which time we had all had enough for the day!

There is still plenty of old stream fill to clear from the back end of the rift before the next bang (plus one large rock to bang as well).

Are there any preferences to which night to dig this week – Wed or Thursday? I ask as we are short-staffed and it seems a good idea if we need to change the digging night to match up with peoples availability....

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Wednesday 22nd August 2018 Dave, Tav, Spike and Clive

Dave brought along the new 'skipway' ladder for the entrance. Rather longer than the original this now fits the rift nicely right from the narrows up to just beyond the entrance. The old ladder has found a new career below The Landing to ease hauling of the bags etc up the drop without catching on protruding rocks.

Tav's turn at the front this time removing the last of the 'easily' accessible stream debris etc from the back of the rift. Very difficult to access due to the constricted nature of the rift not helped by the position of the lower pit-prop.

Managed to clear half a dozen or so bags which were taken to the surface.

Three holes drilled in the central rib and one in the large rock left over from last Saturday's session and fired before an early exit to the pub with Gavin.

The way on now looks a lot more interesting – I had thought that we were just into a long battle widening the 6inch wide rift for the foreseeable future, however at the back of the rift the passage widens to around 18inches or so and has loosely packed rocks with air gaps between. With the last bang this will now be easily accessible and as they say the game is back on!

Any takers for Saturday?

Apologies for the duplicate messages to Rich – the first was sent from my old phone and I had no indication it had gone, hence the second from my pc at home later.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Sat 25th August

Clive, Emma, Simon & Dave.

Clive first assessed the result of Wed night's bang - plenty of spoil to clear. Dave then began digging out the spoil whilst Clive hauled it up. Emma & Simon (Emma keeping an eye on Simon to ensure he didn't do further damage to his injured arm) hauled it back and stacked the numerous bags and loose rocks along the streamway.

Tea break was declared when we ran out of spoil bags, but not before Dave wrangle a few more rocks out and left them stacked near the dig face for the next session. After tea Emma &

Simon loaded the skips from the streamway, whilst Clive hauled to the landing and Dave hauled to the surface emptying the skips in the waiting dumper truck.

By the time all spoil hauled out there was no time left to remove the last of the wrangle rocks or a bang. But time enough for Gavin, accompanied by Dave to have a look at the sharp end. Gavin was quite impressed by the progress and "not without interest" seemed appropriate. On the way out using combined body heights the the depth from entrance to dig face was estimated to be approximately 50ft.

Wed (if that's the next session) there is plenty of spoil still to dig out and rocks to pry loose before next bang required.

It is proposed to visit Viaduct Sink before next session to assess what's required for gate installation before the weather turns and the ground gets too wet.

Dave.

Rock Farm - Monday 27th August 2018 Dave and Clive on a quickie visit to bang in preparation for Wednesday.

It turned out we were able to remove quite a bit more rock by hand and fill a few bags as well before firing three holes. As a result we should have a fruitful evening in Wednesday.

The stream had 'woken up' again and was flowing merrily down the 'Mud'ole'. No sign of it at the end but for the sound of it running under the fill in the base of the rift. A slight draught noticeable from the end this time.

On Wednesday afternoon, around 3pm, Dave and I will go over to Viaduct to suss out what is needed for the gate fitting operation planned for a weekend in Sept. All welcome of course. We will obviously be there for the dig in the evening.

All best

Clive

Viaduct Sink - 29th Aug 2018 Dave and Clive

Armed with spade, fork, saws and camera we set out to check out the state of the entrance to Viaduct with a view to the forthcoming replacement of the gate and the possible restarting of a dig there by Geoff Newton.

Access was easy via the public footpath through the fields behind Shaun Wolffe's house which led to the start of the viaduct itself. It turned out that following the field to its full extent led to within 30yards or so of the entrance with just a rickety barbed wire fence blocking the way.

The entrance, well concealed below bits of old Post Office van(!) and vegetation turned out to be in remarkably good shape. The gate itself was still secure although attempts had been made to cut off the padlock and smash the steel angled holding it. Pictures were taken to allow Dave to compare the size and shape of the gate with the modern replacement currently residing at the MNRC.

The ends of some of the sleeper 'spacers' forming the main part of the shaft were getting a bit rotten but on the whole it all looked pretty stable although I wouldn't trust the Dexion ladder.

Dave has worked out a possible plan for fixing the gate and the necessary concreting work. Gavin says he will order up cement and aggregate for us and will help with a cement mixer and transport over to the site. We have yet to speak to Shaun re access with Gavin's dump truck or fork-lift across his new driveway or to arrange a date for the work.

Pictures can be seen at

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/b32en2odhl1rfqc/AAByhtP_INBu1yoE72MUXfQMa?dl=0

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Wednesday 29th August 2018 Dave, Tav, Gavin (plus brother Giles) and Clive

Over the course of a laborious evening all Monday's bang debris was removed, along with the product of a fair amount of chiselling and levering, to the surface. This was accomplished 'in one go' thanks to the sterling efforts of Gavin on The Landing and his brother Giles on the surface.

At the end a lot of the compacted sand, mud and stream cobbles etc was removed from the wider section of the rift at roof level before careful removal of the jammed rocks above the open continuation of the rift below. Their removal however just revealed "more of the same" ie a view down and along another couple of yards of rift only around four inches wide. No apparent widening visible and no draught (although a slight outward draught was evident through a small hole before the rift was opened up).

Its obvious that the area to concentrate on is the wider section of the rift at roof level where it is in the order of maybe 18in wide but well filled with compacted stream fill. This will also need some of the right hand wall removing as we move forward.

Pictures of the end can be seen at

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/dpd7xhmp39uy7i5/AAAkUD_MYTC1YZVmdZ7GpVs9a?dl=0

nb in the picture looking up rift the spade on the left is very close to camera and therefore is nowhere near as big as it seems in relation to the rift beyond! The height of the rift at the access point is around 6ft up to the level of the pit-prop at top right.

Another go on Saturday then!

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Saturday 1st Sept 2018 Dave, Emma, Simon, Mark (MNRC), Clive + Rich on surface duty.

Dave and Emma spent the first session removing more of the sandy fill from the top and back of the rift only to reveal a dramatic narrowing of the passage.

This produced a number of bags augmented by a further clean-up of the floor area.

Clive, invited to have a look before the tea-break, concurred that further removal of the sand etc was possible but a better idea would be to work our way down through the floor a few feet back in the (admittedly desperate) hope that some positive change in the rift there might occur.

On the way out I noticed, at floor level on the right below the access point to the chamber a small opening in the bang debris which had accumulated in the narrow rift. A moment or two of clearing back revealed an interesting waterworn bedding going off to the right around 6in high. By lying on the floor it was possible to put my left arm in to almost full length and wave it about in the constricted space beyond but I couldn't feel the roof although Emma said later she could see it when she had a look and could also see a couple of slabs.

The bedding is likely to be where the stream flows and, what is more, is draughting nicely. (no stream flowing today)

Before finishing for the day two holes were drilled and fired in the bedrock central rib abutting the new hole which should allow a better view and so on.

Work will continue on Wednesday as usual.....

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Wednesday 5th September 2018 Spike, Dave and Clive (plus Gavin on pub support)

Spike was suitably impressed by the changes in the final 'chamber' since his last visit....

The results of Saturday's bang were soon bagged and some time was spent hauling it all up to the streamway along with a lot of stream debris, mud and rocks from around the floor level 'nook' which was opened up by further lowering of the threshold and the removal of a large piece of its detached 'roof'.

The rocks were stacked on The Landing and the bags at the foot of The Stairs by Dave and Spike. The 'nook' was revealed as a section of well water-worn bedding around 10inches high and a couple of feet across at most. The down-dip extant was similarly a couple of feet at most until banked up stream debris reached its roof. It was draughting slightly though as was the narrow rift at the bitter end.

After a suitable amount of head-scratching over which route to pursue it was decided to concentrate our efforts on the rift at the end. To dig either route would mean removing the large central rib in the floor and this was begun (it being well cracked in any case) followed by two holes drilled and fired.

It looks like there will be a good turn out on Saturday. There's plenty to do - clear The Landing and below and bring up the results of the bang at the end for starters. Early-bird bookings have been received from Dave, John and Emma and Geoff Newton so far.

Dave and I (and hopefully Dave Speed) will be going over to Viaduct around midday to do some prep work on the gate prior to restarting the dig.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm (and Viaduct Sink) - Saturday 8th Sept 2018

Dave King, Dave Speed, Simon, Geoff and Clive initially to Viaduct to open up the old gate and inspect and measure up for the new one (to be made by Speedy).

All accomplished in time to meet up with John and Emma for a late lunch on 'The Island' before a heavy duty session clearing The Landing and the foot of The Stairs of last Wednesday's rock pile and most of the results of Wednesday's bang.

This had been most effective and there remains much rock to be cleared this week along with more hammer and chisel work.

We are removing the right hand wall and floor while heading for the much narrowed rifts at the end.

By the way - Geoff Newton is now on this forum

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Wednesday 12th September 2018 Dave, Spike, Matt & Mandy and Clive

The evening was (very productively) spent clearing the remains of Saturday's bang right up to the surface plus drilling and firing more three holes in the floor/straight ahead in the rift.

A lengthy session in the pub ensued with Gavin for extra company.

On Thursday 13th Dave and I took another major load of stone from Rock Farm over to Thrupe and completed the 'seawall' defences on the stream bank under the Ferret Shed.

If there are takers for Saturday, so far Dave, Clive (and Geoff I believe) it's worth noting perhaps that there's a big sign at the top of Long Hill, at the crossroads, saying it will be shut on Sat and Sunday from 07.00 until 19.00. Hard to believe that's not a mistake in timing - normally closures like that are overnight. I can't find any reference to timings on the Somerset Highways website. Dave and I will have to approach from Ham Lane.....

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Saturday 15th September 2018 Geoff, Emma, Dave, Richard (surface duty) and Clive. Dave delayed by a MCR call-out to Wookey to help carry a visitor who had collapsed, up the steps in the cave.

Geoff at the sharp end first this time removing the results of Wednesday's bang which were all removed to the surface by 'tea-time'.

After discussing the survey of Viaduct Dave a return to the fray was made and Dave and Clive removed some large lumps of bedrock from the end before drilling and firing two more holes.

I will be away on Wednesday and Saturday this week. It being Hidden earth at the weekend it may be impractical to arrange a digging session then. Volunteers still needed for Wednesday of course (or maybe Thursday??)

All best

Clive

Rock Farm Cave Wed 19th Sept

Ray Deasy, Spike and Dave.

A useful session began with Ray and Dave filling a number of bags ready for hauling. A large rock was pulled out of the rift followed by failed attempts at reducing it into manageable sizes until Spike arrived. Whilst Spike reduced the rock, Ray loaded and Dave hauled and stashed a number of bags from the dig chamber. These were then shifted to the bottom of the staircase before repeating with the next batch.

A change of positions for phase 2 with Ray loading rocks, Spike hauling up and Dave hauling back to the staircase.

Phase 3 saw Spike hauling on the surface, Ray on the landing and Dave loading at the bottom of the staircase.

By Pub O'clock all the bags inc Sat's bags were hauled and stacked on the surface, but no time to haul up the rocks or empty the bags.

Gavin then joined the team for the usual re-hydration therapy.

Dave.

Rock Farm Cave Wed 26th Sept

Emma, Clive, Ray D, Tav & Dave.

Gavin had kindly emptied all the bags of spoil that were left at the entrance the previous Wed due to Pub'O clock.

Tav, Ray & Emma loaded and hauled out the rocks from the bottom of the staircase, whilst Clive and Dave kept them supplied with more rocks and bags of spoil dug out from the sharp end.

By the end of play only one bucket worth of spoil had been hauled to the surface. But in fairness to Tav, this was the JCB digger bucket that holds between 3/4 to 1 tonne, that Gavin had position by the entrance for the purpose of spoil dumping.

No chemical persuasion required and still plenty of rock wrangling to be done on Saturday. A large slab of approx 0.7m x 0.4m x 0.1m lies in the left hand rift, and on the right another rift exposed. The small amount of water entering the current final chamber, flows away freely.

Emma dashed off on dog duties, so Gavin was called upon to maintain the numbers for pub duty.

Dave.

Rock Farm Cave Sat 29th Sept

Geoff Newton, Mike Moxon, Clive, Emma, Simon, Richard & Dave + Spike fettling his truck (not digging)

After Wednesday's session, Gavin had kindly emptied the JCB bucket and left it positioned by the entrance for more spoil.

Geoff & Mike at the sharp end rock jiggling and filling bags for Dave to haul up. The large slab in the left hand rift was dug out, broken up and dispatched to the surface with such efficiency that it sailed passed the rest of the team unnoticed. With Clive loading at the bottom of Staircase, Emma on the landing above with Simon and Rich on the surface, most of Wednesday's and Saturday's spoil at the bottom of the staircase was cleared by tea break.

After tea and cake on the island, Rich, Clive and Dave headed down for an inspection. The tiny stream was puddling in the left hand rift and then trickling off under the right hand wall. Under the right hand wall the crow bar went in about 18" where it met another vertical surface/joint which is approx 2" in all vertical directions. Water sloshed down just disappeared with little sound.

Clive then drilled and set the bang whilst the rest of the team hauled most of the remaining spoil from the bottom of the staircase out to the surface. Monty, Gavin's son declined the offer of pushing the button on this occasion but is booked for next Saturday's pop.

Dave.

Rock Farm - Wednesday 3rd October 2018

Tav, Dave, Ray, Spike and Clive

Ray and Dave shared the work at the sharp end clearing the results of the very successful bang from Saturday.

This was all hauled to The Landing by Tav and thence to the surface by Spike.

By the end of the evening Dave reported that the water was not getting away too easily and was ponding up across most of the floor area. This due, no doubt, to the finer digging debris clogging up the small rifts.

It seems uncertain at the moment the best way to continue. I think a session with the mega bar on Saturday to try to open up a drain hole is a priority and then a re-evaluation of the situation before the next bang (ie which direction to head, apart from downwards).

After Wednesday's digging session rehydration at The George ensued with Gavin sporting an unusual, and very hairy, sweater which produced a lot of leg-pulling and sheep-orientated comments!

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Saturday 6th October 2018 Geoff, Rich and Clive

A definite touch of winter in the air at Rock Farm – soon be time for the fire-pit to return!

While the main stream on the surface seemed to be at an all-time low the cave stream was running well and at the end was flowing into the little rift on the right.

Thorough prodding of the floor and the 'main' rift on the left with the mega-bar didn't produce the hoped-for drainage solution so attention focussed on drilling and banging out the area above the drain hole on the right while Richard probed the up-rift continuation back towards the Mudzole. After two difficult-to-remove rocks had been persuaded to give in the narrow continuation could be seen as could a little of the stream.

A little time was spent probing a little rift off on the right, down-dip side, where there were stalled-up stream pebbles.

Some stream debris from the floor was bagged up and removed, along with the remains of Wednesday's session, to the surface.

Next Wednesday there should be clearing and chisel work as a result of the bang.

All best

Clive

Update on progress at Carrion Slocker, Downhead.

Regular digging sessions by Andy and Paul have taken this site from a debris filled depression to cave passage. As of last night we were both underground at the same time! The cave is in a small depression and a shaft has been excavated and stabilised at the base of a cliff face with metal caging, breeze blocks, across and scaffolding.

A scaffold A frame is in place for hauling the spoil which is mainly rock and is stacked within the fenced off depression. The large slabs blocking progress have been drilled and reduced to a (mostly) manageable size with plug and feathers. Andy's Bosch drill has been worked very hard!

Water running off the field has been directed away from the digging operations by installing a drainage pipe from the edge of the depression. A 'funnel' is being made from breeze blocks and roof tiles to prevent water further undermining the loose side which still contains farm debris.

Last night Andy pushed into a body sized inclining squeeze so two slabs could be removed from the small chamber and show the way on. More enlargement required here but early indications are we are finally out of the horribly hard conglomerate and into the limestone. Paul.

RockFarm - Wednesday 10th October 2018 Spike Ray and Clive

Spike at the sharp end, Clive loading the bucket and Ray hauling and stacking (very neatly!) in the approach passage.

The last bang had opened up a bit more of the rift on the right taking the stream and greatly eased the access to it. It doesn't appear any wider than the usual couple of inches in the bit than can be seen but 'sounds' hollow.

The narrow joint coming in from the left at the back of the 'main' left hand rift is however draughting quite well.

The plan now is to continue to remove the lower central 'rib' to expose more of both left and right hand rifts and hopefully more of the draughting inlet. Doing this means undercutting the potentially loose upper section of the central rib so another stemple is needed asap (sorry Dave) before we bang again. We measured the length using the short 24in bar (Spike assures me it is 24in!) and I make it 28.5in rock to rock.

Bang levels have fallen to critical low levels (have enough for a smallish bang) but I hope to see Nigel on Saturday to re-supply.

I have brought home the short length of sleeper that we intend to use to underpin the big roof slab. I will shorten it the necessary 1/2in so we can fit it on Saturday.

After digging all retired to The George with Gavin, his brother Giles and their rope access specialist friend Dave for a convivial session.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Saturday 13th October 2018 Emma, Geoff, Richard, Simon, Dave and Clive

All last Wednesday's bags and rocks were brought to the surface and by the end of the day another, smaller, batch had been deposited on The Landing for this weeks Wednesday night session.

Dave installed the short pit-prop below the big roof slab and had a go with the mega bar at trying to get the water to flow away down the left hand rift - unsuccessfully. Its obviously well choked for at least a couple of feet or so.

Some more rock was removed from around the right hand rift area.

The stream was up somewhat after the heavy rains of Friday but had dropped noticeably by the end of the session.

An early finish due to the evenings St Cuthberts film show at Priddy Village Hall.

On Wednesday we plan to install the latest stemple under the central rib before drilling and banging again. Talking of which, having run our supplies of cord down to the absolute

minimum I've now restocked with £135 worth. We still had plenty of dets so only needed to buy cord this time. So the begging bowl is out again! Three regulars have kindly already contributed - if anyone else wants to join in and its helpful to BACS it to my account, its HSBC (CW & JW North) account no REMOVED.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Wednesday 17th October 2018 Tav, Dave and Clive

The 'extra' bags from last Saturday's session, stacked on The Landing, were removed to the surface before all reassembled at the end to assess the needs of the new stemple.

Holes were drilled on opposing walls after a little extra rock had been removed for ease of fitting and the new stemple expertly fitted by Dave.

A few extra bags of stream debris etc were removed from the to the surface and two holes drilled and fired in the central rib below the new stemple.

The end chamber (must think a name for it!) was actively dripping and running with water in addition to the stream at floor level. The rift on the left at the end was still draughting and the little rift on the right taking the stream.

Rehydration with Gavin at the pub afterwards.

Any takers for Saturday?

All best

Clive

Carrion Slocker Oct 15th Andy Watson

I did some drilling in Carrion late on Mon Eve this last week, P&F'd some rocks ready for hauling.

Rock Farm - Saturday 20th October 2018 Geoff, Richard and Clive

Wednesdays bang had produced around 20 bags worth of spoil plus assorted rocks but strangely the central rib didn't look that much smaller than before! (although a fair amount had come off further into the 'main' rift.

After clearing this (which eventually found its way to the surface) attention turned to the largish block on the right which formed part of the 'rich-hand rift' which it was felt would come out easily. Wrong! After various bits had been prised out it became obvious that the work was destabilising the wall above it and in turn the newly installed stemple.

Work on this ceased immediately and it became obvious that the temple would have to be repositioned further in - this may well mean another slightly longer stemple.

To do this will mean removing a bit more rock from the central rib. This was going to be gently banged out but the drill, after just a couple of inches, promptly packed up! So it will need some serious hammer and chisel work next time before we replace the stemple.

The new gate for Viaduct has now been delivered by Speedy to Rock Farm (and very impressive, and heavy(!), it is too!)

As there is a forecast of a dry week ahead and we need the fields to be dry to take the fork lift across there is a plan to possibly fit the gate next weekend if everyone is available.

Gavin may not be about on Saturday to drive the forklift and the kit across so there is a possibility of doing this on Friday and Saturday. Gavin has said we can drive the fork-lift on the Saturday (this one is definitely is Dave's dept I think!) if we want.

We will decide on all this mid-week. Needless to say volunteers will be needed to help out and there will of course be no Rock Farm digging as a result.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Wednesday 24th October 2018 Dave and Clive

A 'catch-up' session to resite the stemple at the back of the rift which was achieved with the help of Gavin's power chisel and a lot of hammering.

After shortening and refitting the stemple against good solid rock on either side two shot holes were drilled (despite breaking yet another drill rod!) in the central rib and another in the troublesome rock by the right hand rift.

Thence to the pub with Gavin to discuss logistics for Friday and Saturday.

Clive

Viaduct Sink Gate - Fri 26th/Sat 27th Oct 2018

Dave, Rich, Mike Moxon, Geoff Newton, Emma, Simon (Fri) and Clive.

With the kind assistance of Gavin and cooperation of Shaun (access across the fields) the long awaited fitting of the new Viaduct Sink gate took place on a sunny but chilly Friday and perishingly cold (and slightly snowy!) Saturday.

The new gate and a large dumpy bag of aggregate were taken over dangling from Gavin's forklift followed by another load - a mega tank of water, One of Gavin's Landrovers, driven by Dave brought across a petrol cement mixer while Clive's Jeep transported large sheets of plywood, for shuttering and 'hard standing' plus tools etc.

The old gate was quickly removed and prior to a lunch break the old timbers at the top of the shaft were prepared to receive the new gate and the surrounding mud removed from around the shaft. Rocks were washed and placed in situ to receive the concrete for the pad around the gate frame.

Mike spent some time tidying up the timbers just below ground and clearing loose rock before concrete mixing and applying took place. Rich also removed some aged plastic rubbish from just below the entrance shaft.

On the Saturday afternoon more concrete was applied to finish the job and a locking device (a chain embedded in the concrete) added so that the gate could be locked in the open position whilst cavers were underground. This was felt to be necessary as the very heavy gate, when closed, would be hard to lift from underneath on exiting.

Landowner Shaun visited to see the works and seems suitably impressed by our efforts. Turns out he does indeed own the cave entrance and the land as far down as the viaduct. The stream bed is the westernmost boundary.

A tea break in the rain and wet snow was enlivened by the brief appearance of Spike, in full running regalia, on a run around the area.

The whole team, apart from Mike and Clive who gamely froze on the surface(!) then had a trip around the cave (see separate report?)

Late in the afternoon, in the rain a rapid pack up and retreat ensued.

All that remains now is for a digging team to be established!

All best

Clive

It was interesting to get back into the cave (Viaduct) 30+ years after my previous visit. I quite fancy digging Shale End. It looks to me like it was once the main way on, a mature passage blocked by rubble run in from the rather unstable entrance passage. At the time of this visit it was taking a small stream without backing up. If wet weather was to be a problem it might be possible to divert the excess into Dismal Series which already takes most of the water. Its near enough to the entrance to take spoil to the surface (subject to permission). This site is also more pleasant to work than those further into the cave.

Rich is / was keen for the old end of the cave (a significant looking streamway) to be dug. This would involve un backfilling it into the Somme, before carrying on widening it by drill and bang. Its not possible to take spoil out to the entrance and I have reservations about the amount of stacking space available in the Somme, but would be prepared to help un back fill the end before reassessing the situation. This is not a job for faint hearted. Rich and Emma did not revisit the end like me, Dave and Mike (Friday) thus enabling Rich to keep wearing his rose coloured spectacles.

Some stabilisation work near the entrance needs to be done. Some pit props in particular are now purely decorative.

Geoff

Rock Farm - Wednesday 31st October 2018 Dave and Clive

The evening was spent removing 20 bags worth from the site of the bang in the 'central rib' along with a pile of rocks. All bags stacked at the foot of The Stairs ready for removal on Saturday, the rocks are still waiting to come up.

A better view was obtained into the small sculpted tunnel that the stream is currently taking on the right (down dip). Too early to tell whether we need to go that way or not.

The current plan (assuming I can get the 40gm from Nigel to replace the 20gm he mistakenly gave me) is to lower the floor at the end to see if there is any thing of interest there involving the 'main' rift', the draughting rift coming in from the left (up-dip) or a better idea of what may be happening on the right hand side.

A lively inwards draught coming into the cave (all the rock surfaces bone dry as far as the streamway) and a slight inwards draught noticeable in the final chamber (where it was going I couldn't tell).

At the pub with Gavin we had a mutual debrief re the Viaduct work. Tav will furnish Dave with an invoice for the cement and aggregate used which will be passed to Les for payment.

It had been suggested (very reasonably so) that we could give Shaun something as a 'thank you'. Turns out he doesn't drink but was partial to a lemon drizzle cake that came to him, I think from the Forest School!

Any volunteers for Saturday?

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Saturday 3rd November 2018 Geoff, Emma, Simon, Dave and Clive

All Wednesday nights debris was dragged up from the bottom of The Stairs to the surface while Geoff beavered away at the end removing the bang debris and clearing a lot of material from the floor of the 'main' rift on the left. This left a nice space to bang into so after all the latest material had been bagged and hauled up to the streamway Clive drilled and fired four holes in the floor of the central rift.

This should start the process of dropping the floor between the draughting rift on the left and the little tube on the right which takes the stream. This should give us an idea which way (if any!) to go next.....

Plenty to come to the surface on Wednesday from below The Stairs plus all the latest bang debris to come up from the end.

Clive

Viaduct Sink Nov 2nd

The first digging trip since the cave was reopened took place on Friday 2nd Nov. Me, Mike Kushy and Courtenay James started un-backfilling the streamway at the bottom of the cave. Good progress was made. When we get to the old "end" a decision will be made as to whether to continue digging or not. This will depend on what we see at the end and the amount of space remaining for spoil stacking. You are all welcome to help.

I would like to get this done soon before the stream levels rise and wash any remaining clatch further into the cave. Other things being equal I intend doing this on Saturday mornings before Rock Farm sessions, meeting at 10am or perhaps overlapping Rock Farm if we get a later start. Initial indications are that it will only be 2 or 3 more sessions like the first, to finish this first phase of the job. Once stream levels rise we will probably get wet and then doing Viaduct before Rock Farm is probably not an option. However Friday afternoon / early evenings or even Sunday mornings are a possibility as well, depending on whether John Gisbornes dig in LVS or my dig in Snake Pit is happening. It all depends on who wants to do what and when.

Please let me know if you can come before midday on Friday as I cant be reached once I leave for Mendip.

Geoff

Rock Farm - Wednesday 7th November 2018 Dave, Spike and Clive

As expected water levels were up and a lively stream was splashing round our ankles at the end of the cave.

Debris from last bang had obviously held up the water somewhat as foam was sticking to the walls to a height of a couple of feet.

There was much spoil to shift as a result with plenty of large rocks, both loose and subsequently loosened, from the floor which eventually left a 6inch deep lake across the rift leaving the stream to rush into the little passage on the right with no build-up.

All the bagged spoil and loose rocks were despatched to the upper streamway and relocated at the base of The Stairs before being ultimately removed to the surface. Spike has to be mentioned in despatches in particular for this effort!

At the end of play three deep holes were drilled and fired in the above water level section of central rib that was above water – this makes up the threshold of the little tube on the right taking the stream. The bang will, at the very least, lower the water level of the pond at the end.

On Saturday there should be plenty to remove from the end again to the surface. Dave is not about, Rich is and I assume Geoff also. Anyone else?

Clive

A couple of amendments:-

The backing up of the stream was due to the blocking of the right hand rift on Sat with a large dumpy bag to prevent bang debris blocking the rift and tube on the right.

All the loose rocks cleared back to the bottom of The Stairs are still there at present, only the bagged up spoil made all the way to the surface.

Cheers,
Dave.

Rock Farm - Saturday 10th Novemeber 2018
The Gisbornes, Richard, Geoff, Simon and Clive

After the heavy rains a sporting stream was running into the cave which enlivened proceedings and produced some very wet and fairly cold diggers by the end of play!

While Clive and Emma attempted to get some meaningful pictures of the end (see attached) the rest of the team cleared the accumulated pile of bags and rock from the base of The Stairs up to the surface.

The results of Wednesday nights bang were then also lifted upto to replace the previous load and some meaningful hammering and chiselling took place which removed most of the lake.

The plan then was to drill further into the central rib and this was begun despite the rock being 'rinsed' by spray.

All went well until I started a third hole when I became aware of something to one side of me - a pool of pure white foam swirling round and the blocking the tube taking the stream. Within a minute I was standing in knee-deep suds with no sign of my drill holes!

By then the stream running down the rift had turned a brownish-cream (if you can visualise this!). Interestingly a stream of pure white water and suds was coming out of the low bedding on the left (looking down-rift) at the same time.

As John and I watched over the next five minutes or so the intensity of the inundation started to reduce and we vacated the cave as further 'play' was clearly impossible.

On surfacing Rich gamely owned up to be 'complicit' in suggesting to Gavin that some water-tracing of the surface culverts would be a good idea and as a result a cupful of detergent was tipped into one of them! The result was a rapid transformation of the scene at the end of the cave!

A positive take on this was confirmation of where one of the culverts led and that Gavin's washing machine was obviously the source of the two recent occasions when we have come upon mysterious traces of foam on the walls at the end of the cave. It is interesting that there was the inflow of pure white foam etc from the bedding on the left at the end of the cave in addition to the dirty main flow coming down the rift. I can only assume this indicates two routes into the cave from the culvert - one straight down a bedding whilst the majority of the flow goes (presumably) under the barn and down the rift.

On Wednesday (assuming its not washing day!) I'll resume drilling and banging plus there will be around 20 bags and a pile of rocks to bring up The Stairs to the surface.

All best

Clive

I had this from Gavin re the foam.....

<The reddish water was also down to me, I was clearing the area of collapse in the culvert in the yard it was sort of scalplings based which accounts for the colour.

On the upside, my informal tests will allow us (obviously with your advanced approval) to constrict the flow of water in the culvert and then pump a sizeable quantity away, making the dig less aquatic. If you need some help on the surface on Wednesday do please let me know.>

Needless to say I have accepted his offer!

All best

Clive

Viaduct Sink Friday - 9th November 2018 Geoff solo visit.

Rock Farm - Wednesday 14th November 2018

Tav, Mike, Spike, Dave and Clive

A short session at the end removing a few more bags of spoil from the little rift on the left and from the floor of the main rift followed by removal of the stacked bags at the top of The Stairs to the surface.

Two more holes were drilled on the right hand side at the end to join the three drilled on Saturday (before the great foam flood!) and fired before an early visit to the pub.

There should be plenty to do on Saturday.....

Clive

Rock Farm Saturday 17th November 2018 Geoff, Dave, Richard, Mike, Martin(?), Simon and Clive

With such a strong team spoil came straight from the end to the surface in one go and we soon had the end cleared. At a guess about 20 bags plus a few big rocks which went to help Gavin's construction project.

A three hole bang finished the session (still going down in the floor) which was set-off by new team member Monty before he ran off to tell his Mum!

A sliver of rock a few inches wide on the right hand side above where we are banging is looking unstable. It will need pinning soon. Not a major deal compared with some of the situations we have faced in the cave but in need of sorting.

Looks like a cold night ahead on Wednesday for the stalwarts!

Clive

Viaduct Sink 16 November 2018

Me and Dave King only, as Mike Kushy had to work late. The cave continues to get wetter. Water now sprinkling in from all avens, as well as the usual streams. Dave in fine form despite his exertions in Daren the previous weekend. We rotated the jobs and made good progress and are now beyond where Mike thought the back fill ended, but with no end to the spoil in sight. However there is airspace and a good draught. A sense of humour is now essential when working at the face. If you are not careful, water can enter your trouser legs and exit round your collar.

We emerged to mist and darkness, but despite this Dave recovered his spade from where it had been hiding in plain sight, near to where it had been used to bury the old gate.

Alas I am in London next weekend but normal service will be resumed the weekend after. If anyone is keen to continue un-backfilling in my absence please contact Dave or Mike Kushy.

Cheers

Geoff

Carrion Slocker Tuesday - Hard going, two hours drilling & P&F in dolomitic, conglomerate grotty n hard rock. Two wedges stuck! Dropped nice chisel down a crack. Some inward draft, raining. Generally miserable, as Paul said it would be!

Persistence is a virtue, caverns measureless soon...

Regards Andy W

Rock Farm Cave - Wed 21st Nov

Clive, Spike & Dave.

The stream was quite active at the beginning of the session, but had reduced by the end of play.

Clive and Dave bagged up most of Saturday's bang debris before chiseling out more rock from the floor and under the right hand wall where the water is freely flowing away. Two holes were then drilled into the right hand wall (looking down stream) and two pins hammered in to secure the slab on the right. When Spike arrived the bagged spoil and loose rocks were transported to the surface whilst Clive drilled 4 (or was it 5) holes in the floor, which were subsequently charged and banded.

Usual refreshments at the George without the company of Gavin who was below par.

Dave.

Rock Farm - Saturday 24th November 2018 Dave, Rich and Clive

One advantage of being relegated from 'Premier Parking' to 'Long Term Parking' turned out to be the discovery of Gavin's newly restored/built craft workshops – one of which we appropriated as a changing room. On return at the end of the session we found he had turned on the lights for us as well – almost homely, it just needs the addition of a couple of doors and some heating.....

Underground Rich had a session clearing the spoil from the last bang (water level was well down on last Wednesday) and Clive had a good go at chiselling the floor up including the blockage into the bedding which was creating the lake. Water now flows freely into the bedding and there is no pond to kneel in in Foam Chamber.

Before finishing five holes were drilled – three into the base of the bedding on the right, one into the floor of Foam Chamber and one into the floor below the central rib. This should give us plenty to do next time and might give a better idea of what is happening off to the right.
Clive

Carrion Slocker
Sat Nov 24th with Andy W & Paul S

A useful session in the Mendip mizzle with a large amount of rock hauled to the surface from Andy's last session(s). The ladder on entrance shaft is now too short so a platform of spoil and rock was added to make it safer and abit easier.

Andy continued with drilling and plug & feathers to reduce the jammed roof slab thats blocking the width of the passage. Also rescuing 2 P&F's from previous visit. The lost chisel is still there but atleast we can see it now!

More hauling very large and heavy rock top to the surface in the net. The roof slab is the next challenge as its under so much pressure being pinned each side making drilling almost impossible.

We are now looking into using a jack (hopefully with a long handle) to take advantage of a vertical crack in the slab.

Hopefully Dave K and Andy can tackle this while im away on the annual trip to Lanzarote.

Enjoy the meal.
Paul.

Carrion 28 Nov Andy
Yesterday rather windy. I took down my car jack, long handled grabbers, drill with P&F. I sucessfully retrieved to escaped chisel from lower down the rift first. Then used a 4x4 wood block to jack up one of the jammed boulders mm by mm and by drilling and 2 P&F i managed to crack the slightly smaller jammed slab and raise it slowly to shift it upwards. Eventually it moved enough to drop the tension. With more drilling etc i eventually separated them and broke the lower one up enough to move in bits.
Very drippy to day. Field wate just running now
So cave will get wet soon, hopefully our drainage engineering will work.
Quite a lot of water flowing towards Heale Farm in the parallel surface channel.

Hope your hols go ok
Andy W
Ps no need for your jacks now Dave K

Rock Farm - Wednesday 28th November 2018 Spike, Tav, Dave and Clive

After prolonged heavy rain it was feared that the cave might be 'a tad damp'. In this we were not disappointed as Spike found when he went down for a slightly earlier look.

The banded debris had obviously partly blocked the end and this, coupled with high flows scouring out the upper streamway, had resulted in water too deep to work in at the end.

Cue Gavin's suggestion of using his electric submersible pump in the open culvert in the yard to see if that would have any effect. In short it all but dried up the stream in the cave (pumped into the surface stream) and allowed a full digging session to proceed.

About a dozen bags were removed to the surface but there was a limit to what could be prised from the floor. The 'way on' remained a slowly swirling pool of water under the right-hand wall.

After due consideration it became obvious that the only practical way of continuing in that direction was to attack the natural rock roof of the bedding-plane and so five holes were drilled and subsequently fired. This should provide us with some working space to concentrate on pushing that corner and seeing where the water is going.

With Gavin's pump now to hand wet weather need not put a 'damper' on proceedings!

Volunteers for Saturday?

All best

Clive

Viaduct Sink 30 November 2018 Dave, Mike Kushy, Monica Bollani and Geoff

The surface stream now carries on past the entrance and goes a long way down valley, so a damp digging session was assured. Dave started off at the sharp end with the rest of us taking the spoil to the usual place. After Dave had had a good session Monica took over. After a relatively short session she thought she could see open passage beyond the backfill, and soon forced a way through, becoming wet in the process. Soon we were all through, with the un-backfilling process complete. The space was just big enough to take all four of us at once.

We did not go the last 3m or so to the previous end of the cave, as this is a descending flat out crawl in solid rock, not much fun in high water levels. This will need to be chemically enlarged before we can get to grips with the business of extending the streamway into the unknown.

As there was time to spare we had a look at The Somme, which is now not muddy enough to be worthy of the name. It takes a tiny stream which disappears into a small hole over a gravel fill. In other circumstances this would still be a promising dig, so we are reluctant to back fill this as with very little more effort we could take spoil out to Downside Aven. Fortunately there is still a reasonable amount of stacking space that we can use nearer to the end for the time being.

Banging will not start next week as Mike is already double booked for Friday. Provisionally I will be going down with Simon, meeting outside Rock Farm between 2.30 and 3pm. We will take down a few bits and pieces to look at the practicality of taking spoil out to Downside and to play around a little at The Somme and for Simon to get his first look at the cave for a few decades. If anyone else would like to come along please let me know. We hope to surface well before the end of the Yard Party.

Cheers

Geoff

Rock Farm - Saturday 1st December 2018 Geoff, Dave, Rich, Simon and Clive.

Geoff and Clive headed down before the arrival of the rest of the team to find a very lively stream coursing through the cave. At the end Geoff executed a heroic and very aquatic session clearing the bang debris from underwater – a lake the best part of a foot deep and initially covered with foam.

Gavin had previously turned on the pump in the yard and during the session I estimate the flow reduced by about a third – not enough to make any difference to the digging conditions though.

All the spoil was bagged and hauled to the surface by the rest of the team and an early tea-break taken while we confirmed there was no point in returning to the end. For the last half hour or so of activity a start was made, at Rich's suggestion, on clearing the threshold of Rock Farm 'C' (or whatever it is called!) just to the right of Rock Farm Cave to get a better view into the rift. By the end of play two large blocks had been uncovered which will need to be dragged out by Gavin's machinery.

It is another stal-lined rift about 8-10inches wide which is open for about 10ft. Knowing that there is a preponderance of parallel rifts in the area there is a chance of course that the end of our dig, having turned right (following the stream) might intersect Rock Farm 'C'. Failing that its another possible dig....

Clearly high water levels may well be an issue during the winter so we are looking at the options for additional pumping. I have an unused submersible pump which we can try in the short term to back up Gavin's.

We can try this on Wednesday no doubt.

All best

Clive

Anyone out this evening?

I went over today and with Gavin fixed up my extra submersible pump and 'fettled' the conduit with the result we managed to dry up the stream quite quickly.

Also blocked up where we think the stream bed is leaking into the end of the cave.

Tonight will be just drill and bang....

Clive

Rock Farm - Wednesday 5th December 2018 (A Reprieve) Gavin, Dave and Clive

Gavin and I spent some time further fettling the pumps and making up an elbow connector. This was to fit to one of the lay-flat hoses to avoid a kink which was restricting the flow. On completion it was very satisfying to see the two jets of water pouring into the main stream and the level in the culvert dropping accordingly. It was not possible though to dry the stream up completely due to some temporary leaks in the dam we had built.

In the cave the stream was down to its 'normal' level and, with Gavins help, I was going to have another go at banging the 'way on' to the right.

While looking at the high tide-mark of foam on the walls at the end of the main rift I spotted something new – a one inch wide black hole looking at me at floor level at the very end of the rift! The mega-bar was pushed through and met no resistance at which point Dave arrived after his long drive home and between us we opened up a continuation of the main passage – a blackened rift approx. 6-8in wide and maybe 8-10ft long with a stream cobble floor. There appears to be maybe a widening to the right hand side towards the end which may well coincide with the existing parallel joint we have been following.

No sign of a draught but the new rift now takes the whole stream very happily leaving our previous scene of operations to the right looking very sad and left out in the cold! I have dubbed the new bit Reprieve Passage!

A good number of bags and rocks were hauled up to the Foot of the Stairs and two long shot holes fired to open up the start of the 'extension' so there will be plenty to do on Saturday.

All this activity meant we didn't exit until 10.30 and as a result didn't feel we should leave the pub until 0.30am!

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - Saturday 8th December 2018 Geoff, Dave, Richard, Simon and Clive

Water levels were high and as a result, even with the two pumps working continuously, water levels in the cave did not fall very much during the afternoon.

The bang had worked well and we soon had all the bags filled and dragged to the surface along with the bags from Wednesday evening.

Four more holes were drilled and fired into the right hand side of the approach to the 'new' section of rift (Reprieve Passage or Reprieve Rift?) to give us some room to work. This should produce a busy evening on Wednesday. Dave and I also plan to drill and fit a pin into the loose section of wall on the right adjacent to the previous pinning site.

All best

Clive

Viaduct Sink 7th December 2018 Just me and Simon M-K. The first trip in the cave for Simon in decades. We took in and left a spoil hauling system, and confirmed that it will be possible to take spoil out to Downside Aven once the nearer stacking areas are used up. However it will require a third (preferably small) person to be stationed at the S-bend. This will still be easier than stacking in The Somme and has the benefit that the dig at the end of The Somme can still be worked. We think that the Somme is still quite promising but even though it has cleaned itself up while the cave has been closed, I think it will be easier and more pleasant to enlarge the main streamway as initially envisaged.

The cave continues to get wetter each week but is not wet enough to cause problems. Our start was delayed a bit because I managed to leave my cave key back at Upper Pitts, but we still emerged in time to catch the 2nd half of Gavin's excellent Yard Party.

Geoff

All best

Clive

Date: Sun, 9 Dec 2018 13:28:04 +0000

Subject: Viaduct Sink 7th December 2018

Just me and Simon M-K. The first trip in the cave for Simon in decades. We took in and left a spoil hauling system, and confirmed that it will be possible to take spoil out to Downside Aven once the nearer stacking areas are used up. However it will require a third (preferably small) person to be stationed at the S-bend. This will still be easier than stacking in The Somme and has the benefit that the dig at the end of The Somme can still be worked. We think that the Somme is still quite promising but even though it has cleaned itself up while the cave has been closed, I think it will be easier and more pleasant to enlarge the main streamway as initially envisaged.

The cave continues to get wetter each week but is not wet enough to cause problems. Our start was delayed a bit because I managed to leave my cave key back at Upper Pitts, but we still emerged in time to catch the 2nd half of Gavin's excellent Yard Party.

Geoff

Rock Farm - Wednesday 12th December 2018 Dave, Tav, Spike and Clive

Gavin had kindly turned the pumps on at 6pm but had not noticed the position of the float switches so, in fact, they weren't running when we arrived. Setting them going though produced an immediate drop in the culvert water level and junferground the stream soon 'dried up' completely. At one point in the evening a reduced stream did start up again (presumably a float switch had shifted) but it soon disappeared again!

Dave and I drilled and pinned the unstable wall on the right half way down in Foam Chamber and removed the unstable rocks (quite a few!)

With Tav and then Spike hauling the bags and rock up and back along the upper passage much clearing at the end took place including some heavy hammer and chisel work before a final salvo of five holes were fired.

A very productive evening with all the rock (apart from a few 'late' bags at the bottom) removed to the surface.

All best

Clive

Rock Farm - 15th December 2018
Clive, Dave, Rich, Simon and John

After some sledge wielding to break up a fairly large and gravitationally-challenged piece of roof bedding which had been residing near the front (note steel toe caps and eyes wide shut are mandatory on these kinds of projects) work began reducing and bagging up what must have been at least 30 loads of spoil plus loose rocks.

Whilst Clive loaded and Dave and Simon moved spoil up to the foot of the stairs, Rich and John worked in the floor and looked 30 degrees down dip to where, around six feet forwards, the stream seemed to drop around 18 inches and disappear. At this point, straight ahead, the roof appears scalloped and the bed choked, but since the two tandem surface pit pumps were on song, it wasn't really possible to see or hear what would happen in normal conditions. Note, looking to the left down cave the 90 degree joints in the limestone reveal what might be a parallel development from the first dig site.

Part one was concluded with increased flow, an impromptu frog rescue and hauling to the surface but not before some listening at the front revealed what John believed to be a fairly certain but distant medium sized stream rumble - exciting - backing-up and breaking, some way ahead. Clive also confirmed something but since the suds epic (note no water running today on the left looking up cave), the question is whether the pumps are taking all the flow and therefore what exactly might be the origin of the below?

After tea with Gavin, Clive and Simon prepared five holes whilst the remainder of the spoil was taken to the surface and scattered. Rock farm never fails to disappoint and judging by Gavin's midweek JCB efforts to expose site c? to the right of the main entrance, things might get bigger trending to the right of the existing entrance and heading South West.

No digging next Saturday I think but perhaps Wednesday. Will leave others to confirm and make plans.

John G

Many thanks John - just a tiny correction, the roof bedding you mention was in fact all that remained of an in-situ section of bedding floor which was a handy step for some when climbing down the rift. The rest had periodically slipped down dip as we blasted lower into the beds at the end.

All best

Clive

Dec 18th Carrion too wet for drilling yesterday as our diverted drain water was pouring in on my head!
Andy W

Rock Farm Cave - Wednesday 19th Dec

Clive, Spike & Dave.

Gavin had kindly set the two submersible pumps running before our arrival, although pumping well they couldn't match the flow in the culvert so a wet trip was anticipated. Saturdays bang had done a good job, leaving plenty of spoil to be shifted in the less than dry conditions. Spoil bagged and stacked followed by rock chiselling and wrangling that allowed the water to channel down the left rift which reduced the water level giving better access to the floor. Bags all hauled back to the bottom of the staircase before drilling began. Spike & Dave then transferred the spoil to the landing whilst Clive drilled and charged 4(?) holes. Gone 10pm by the time the holes were blown, so a late evening at the George. Pete (Landlord) joined us with offerings of Italian style bread dips and a plate of chips. When the clock strikes midnight there is still need for keys to be rattled when the landlord is sitting at your table (hope Monty woke Gavin up in time for the school run this morning).

Very few if any takers for digging on Saturday or next Wednesday, therefore the next session will probably be Sat 29th Dec.

Have a good Xmas and New Year
(I'm away until the New Year)
Dave.

Just a tiny correction – 2 holes, one in the stream bed just prior to the current restriction and one in the base of the right hand wall inclined downwards.

All best

Clive

Carrion 28 Dec 2018 Andy & Paul

A useful session - starting with some hauling then the pipe work was extended to reduce the heavy drip and roof tiles were laid down to help funnel the water better at the edge of the depression.

The chamber is a respectable size now making the working space much better. Looking through a small gap at the far end of the cliff face we are following you can see about 2m down dip.

A short detour to check on the entrance at Heale then to the Italian restaurant in Frome for more dig talk as we enter year 3 with more to do.

Cheers
Paul.

Rock Farm - Saturday 29th December 2018
Geoff, Richard, Emma & John and Clive

Whilst the main stream was well up the cave stream was running at its normal average and soon 'dried-up' with the help of the pumps.

The session revolved around the removal of the big pile of bags on The Landing to the surface followed by a fair number of bags and rocks from the end which are now at the bottom of The Stairs (plus some more on The Landing!) ready for the next session.

At the end the small bang last time provided some good hammer and chisel opportunities. Three large blocks were also levered out of the base of the left hand wall.

After a hot mulled wine 'tea-break' five deep holes were drilled and fired on the right hand side of the rift.

Dave is not around on Wed – if Spike and Tav are not available we will need to put off the next session until Saturday.

Having exhausted the bang supplies again I've now restocked from NXXX to the tune of over £XXX, including dets, (which should last us a fair while now). So the cap needs to go round yet again I'm afraid.

Clive

Your memory is playing tricks, CN! Apart from a few rocks paving the floor of the streamway, all of the spoil is out of the cave!

Rich

Indeed so - must be 'raptures of the deep'!

Clive

Carrion Slocker 31 Dec 2018 - Andy & Paul.

Another very useful session today with the mother of all boulders hauled to the surface. It took both of us to achieve this but it was a good test of the rigging and A frame etc!

More skip loads of rock followed and alot more drilling and P&Fing.

Some gardening took place both underground and above. Alot more glass has come to the surface after the recent rain. This was collected up to prevent falling on the diggers.

In the chamber opposite the cliff face there are odd looking rock formations which will require protecting. Photos to follow.

All the best for 2019
Paul.

