

## **THRUPE SWALLET**

**Sunday 5 December 1999** - Dave Morrison, Jim Young, Dave Speed, Simon Meade-King

Constructed a welded steel framework inside the 6' deep pit excavated during the summer. A further 4' drop can be negotiated between the main cliff face and the large floor boulders, with too tight holes below.

**Sunday 12 December 1999** - Richard Witcombe, James Witcombe, Paul Stillman, Tony Audsley

Attempted to sledge the large boulder at the bottom of the pit, but only managed to knock off a few chips. Brought out a small amount of rocks and spoil. The southern rock face has a number of undercuts and alcoves containing old stal. The east side of the dig is a sliding mass of small stones beneath a large capping boulder and contains debris from the 1960s dig.

**Wednesday 29 December 1999** - Richard Witcombe, James Witcombe, Tony Audsley, Anne Audsley, Clive North, Dave Speed, Paul Stillman, Tony Littler, Dave Tuffery, Jane McCorquodale

Carried two generators over to the dig on DS's front end loader. CN drilled 18" shotholes in the large boulder and one beneath it. DS welded a further steel cross member at the bottom of the east side of the frame, together with three rods projecting into the loose rocks. CN fired Super Cordtex charges in the two boulders, successfully reducing them to small "building blocks". A rough dry stone wall was built up on the east side steel work, and more rock was bucketed up to the surface. The session concluded with a further bang to chop off a boulder restricting access to the lowest part of the dig – a corner between the southern cliff face and a good solid west wall.

**Sunday 2 January 2000** - Richard Witcombe, James Witcombe, Simon Meade-King, Tony Audsley, Alice Audsley. Paul Stillman later.

Cleared broken rock and mud, exposing further boulders for banging.

**Wednesday 5 January 2000** - Clive North, Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe, Tony Audsley, Anne Audsley, Dave Morrison, Paul Stillman, Tony Littler, Rob Taviner

CN drilled four shotholes in various boulders and fired a successful Super Cordtex charge. There was a small run in of rocks and cobbles from the left but much of the fill was fortuitously held back by asbestos sheets dumped by the farmer some years ago. A large amount of rock was brought out, and at the end of the session a minor collapse at the bottom of the shaft revealed a loose hole against the cliff face some 6' to 8' deep.

**Saturday 8 January 2000** - Dave Speed, Dave Morrison

Installed a further section of the welded steel shaft frame, stepping in the back i.e. northern, side in line with the gradual undercutting of the cliff. Fumes appeared to be drawn into the shaft.

**Sunday 9 January 2000** - Simon Meade-King, Paul Stillman, Bob Cottle, Tony Audsley, Alice Audsley, Rob Taviner. Richard Witcombe later.

Cleared rock from the lower reaches of the shaft. There are several holes amongst the large boulders lying against the cliff face, and a small amount of falling water can be seen below.

**Wednesday 12 January 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Tony Audsley, Anne Audsley, Dave Speed, Rob Taviner

TA rigged a cross bar and pulley system to the steel headframe of the shaft. This was used to lift large slabs from the bottom of the dig which were then manoeuvred and stacked on the left hand steel frame in a crude dry stone wall. Smaller rocks were placed behind.

Below is a jumble of interdependent boulders which will require very careful selective banging if a major collapse is to be avoided. No sign yet of the timber shoring of the 1960s shaft.

**Sunday 16 January 2000** - Simon Meade-King, Paul Stillman, Bob Cottle

Cleared small rocks from the amongst the large boulders.

**Wednesday 9 February 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Clive North, Dave Speed, Paul Stillman, Rob Taviner, Tony Littler

CN drilled and fired a four shothole charge – three holes in a large boulder and one in a loose section of the right hand wall. The larger bang debris was built into the left hand dry stone wall and other spoil was sent to the surface.

A 5” piece of bone was found stalled into a flow on the right hand wall, and a small three foot deep “hole in the boulders” was uncovered against the back wall.

**Sunday 13 February 2000** - Simon Meade-King, Clive North, Dave Everett, Paul Stillman, Bob Cottle, Tony Audsley, Colin Rogers

A dry, sunny late winter’s day. Several large rocks were roped out, and smaller bang debris and spoil sent up in buckets. The left hand wall is now in urgent need of another section of steel frame.

**Sunday 20 February 2000** - AM: Dave Speed, Dave Morrison, Paul Stillman, Tony Littler PM: Dave Speed, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe, James Witcombe, Tony Audsley, Dave Everett, Colin Rogers, Clive North, Rob Taviner, Simon Meade-King. Vists from Brian and Brenda Prewer, Maurice and Judy Hewins, Dave Cooke and Paul Weston.

DS welded further sections of the steel frame. After a precision bang by CN to take the “nose” off a projecting boulder – four shotholes to create a line of weakness and two with Cordtex charges – DS added a lower section of steel. A few token buckets of spoil were taken out between welds, and a pipistrelle bat put in an appearance - perching on a boulder - towards the end of the session.

**Wednesday 23 February 2000** - Clive North, Dave Speed, Dave Morrison, Kate Lawrence, Paul Stillman, Tony Littler, Richard Witcombe, James Witcombe, Colin Rogers

A large amount of claggy mud was brought out from among the large rocks at the bottom of the dig, together with angular sandstone cobbles and limestone fragments. A rusty shovel head and the remains of a tin container were also found, but no evidence of the 1960s shored shaft which hopefully was further to the east.

Halfway through the evening the resident (?) pipistrelle bat attached itself to TL’s oversuit and received a careful lift to the surface, where it proceeded to clamber over the shoulders and helmets of several cavers. It was placed on a ledge on the outside cliff, and disappeared later.

The right hand cliff face is changing in character with a mud section sloping inwards towards the main cliff. At the end of the session, an alcove in the mud was noticed, containing jammed rounded cobbles and a small hand sized hole emitting a slight draught, possibly indicating a choked passage or a westwards continuation of the main cliff. A brief excavation revealed a small air space inside the alcove, but more downward clearing will be needed to assess the potential of this corner.

**Sunday 27 February 2000** - Richard Witcombe, James Witcombe, John Hill, Simon Meade-King, Rob Taviner, Tony Audsley, Clive North, Colin Rogers

A mix of yellow/brown mud and well rounded cobbles was brought out from the bottom of the shaft, leaving several large slabs which will require banging. A westward, cobble choked continuation of the cliff face has now been revealed, and there is a possible undercut wall or large rock on the northern side of the shaft. The air remains fresh at floor level.

The dig has an overall depth of 16'.

**Wednesday 1 March 2000** - Paul Stillman, Richard Witcombe, Clive North, Dave Speed, Tony Littler, Colin Rogers, Dave Morrison

The farmer, Bob Cowlin, has asked for a break in digging during the lambing period – a month or so.

Mud and cobbles were cleared from around the larger boulders at the bottom of the dig. The choked extension along the cliff face was probed for a foot or two, but the main effort will still be directed downwards.

**Wednesday 14 June 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman, Clive North, Tony Audsley, Colin Rogers and Dave Morrison

Digging resumes with the permission of the farmer.

CN drilled four shotholes – two in a floor boulder and two in a large rock projecting from the back i.e. north wall – while the Resurrection Hole winch (built by Nigel Hellyar) from Little Crapnell Farm was manoeuvred down into the depression. A Cordtex charge was fired in the boulder shotholes and there was a ten minute wait for the bang fumes to slowly clear. The larger fragments of bang debris were then built into the east wall steel framework. The projecting rock was banged at the end of the session.

**Wednesday 21 June 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Dave Everett, Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman

The last bang had successfully taken the nose off the projecting rock in the back wall, but the in situ remnant urgently needs a steel support as it is surrounded by crumbling mud.

After inserting some of the larger banged fragments into the wall framework, a couple of dozen buckets of spoil were sent to the surface. A large boulder was uncovered which will need banging. At the end of the session, a hole was opened on the east side of the digging face giving a view down into an 8' deep man-sized space against an eroded and undercut cliff face. A black hole could be seen in the floor. Apart from one piece of timber lying on the rocky slope, the scene looked entirely natural. Could this be one of the small “boulder chambers” entered by the 1936 Mendip Exploration Society diggers?

**Sunday 25 June 2000** - Jim Young, Dave Morrison, Paul Stillman, Rob Taviner later

A further section of steel shoring was welded into place, including horizontal rods driven into the mud of the back face.

**Wednesday 28 June 2000** - Paul Stillman, Rob Taviner, Tony Littler, Roger Marsh, James Marsh, Anthony Marsh

Enlarged the access to the airspace, stacking large rocks into the steel framework. Below is a fairly stable small chamber with evidence of digging on the floor – a frame of timber and a 5' metal bar. The cliff face sweeps in a shallow crescent towards the digging shaft. There are several large boulders holding up the back wall and one currently restricts access to the chamber. The stream can be seen splattering from the roof on the far left.

**Saturday 1 July 2000** - Dave Speed, Jim Young, Dave Morrison, John Hill

Further steelwork welded into the frame.

**Sunday 2 July 2000** - Simon Meade-King, Paul Stillman, Bob Cottle, Clive North, Rob Taviner, Richard Witcombe, James Witcombe, Dave Morrison

CN drilled one shothole in the floor boulder and two in the slab restricting access to the small chamber. After the charge had been successfully fired and the fumes dispersed by dropping burning newspaper, the diggers ventured below. The chamber was entered first by RT who found it to be 10' across following the cliff face. On the left, the stream enters from the roof through metal bars which were placed across the Sixties dig when it was abandoned and the top section backfilled. The stream disappears in clean washed stones by a piece of shoring framework which abuts an indentation in the back cliff. The remainder of the Sixties dig presumably lies below, filled by stream debris. It seems that all the digs have now met up.

The diggers cleared more from the floor of the steel shaft, sending most spoil to the surface. Several big slabs were uncovered, two of which were drilled and banded - one shothole in each - at the end of the session.

**Wednesday 5 July 2000** - Simon Meade-King, Paul Stillman, Clive North, Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Mark Lumley, Roger Marsh. Richard Witcombe later

DS fitted various modifications to the Resurrection winch, including a new drum and handle. The broken rock from the last bang was built into the wall frames, and the winch was used to bring smaller debris up to the surface.

Heavy rain over the preceding 24 hours had had little effect on the size of the stream, which remains remarkably constant, summer and winter.

**Sunday 9 July 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Bob Cottle, Simon Meade-King

A large amount of spoil was brought up from the floor area - mud, cobbles, fault breccia and reddish (? Triassic) rocks. No new developments.

**Wednesday 12 July 2000** - Simon Meade-King, Rob Taviner, Clive North, Dave Speed, Colin Rogers, Richard Witcombe

General clearing of the floor area with many large cobbles uncovered. There is a spur of fluted rock on the right of the front wall which may need banging to keep the line of the shaft as near vertical as possible.

**Sunday 16 July 2000** - Simon Meade-King, Paul Stillman, Dave Bell, Dave Morrison, Kevin Hilton

Further clearing of the floor area. Against the cliff there is some evidence of false stal flooring with cobbles beneath. A succession of large jammed boulders is running in from the left and none can be safely removed until more supporting steelwork has been installed.

**Wednesday 19 July 2000** - Rob Taviner, Tony Audsley, Anne Audsley

A little judicious digging amongst the boulders. On the far right of the cliff face there is a narrow cleft descending at about 45 degrees which contains loosely packed, stream blackened cobbles.

**Saturday 22 July 2000** - Jim Young, Dave Speed, Paul Stillman. Simon Meade-King briefly visited.

Another section of the steel framework installed incorporating two supports angled across to the old chamber to pick up the large boulders on that side. A Kango was used to trim off one of the rocks. TA's makeshift headframe was dismantled and a braced steel beam welded on.

**Sunday 23 July 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Clive North, Simon Meade-King. Colin Rogers briefly visited.

A large floor slab was banged using Cordtex in two short shotholes. The larger pieces were built into the steel framework, and other bang debris, brown clay and cobbles were sent up to the surface. There are a number of sizeable air spaces in the floor.

**Wednesday 26 July 2000** - Simon Meade-King, Tony Audsley, Richard Witcombe, Dave Speed, Tony Littler, Rob Taviner. Alice Audsley visited.

A large amount of spoil brought up, and some larger rocks rolled down into the old dig "chamber". A rusty pipe and more bone fragments were uncovered in the rocks between the old and new digs. At the end of the session some clearing of the threshold to the cleft or undercut in the cliff face took place. This is trending southwestwards at a steep angle for about three feet and at the back has the form of a sinuous rift turning right with a small airspace. Could this be the start of a stream passage heading away from the faultline?

**Sunday 30 July 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Bob Cottle, Clive North, Tony Audsley, Simon Meade-King

Much material sent up from the threshold of the cleft in the south face, which now looks very much like the hoped for rift passage heading into the cliff. It has a sculpted sinuous form, dips steeply at about 45 degrees and is a foot or so wide with a possible undercut on the right. The fill is gravelly mud and a mass of blackened cobbles and occasional water worn red (? Triassic infill) rocks. Its general direction is south rather than the southwest postulated on the 26 July.

**Wednesday 2 August 2000** - Richard Witcombe, James Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Simon Meade-King

More clearing in and around the cliff face rift. There is now a view down a keyhole shaped passage for at least 6', and although it continues to be narrow – about 1' wide at its broadest – no floor has been reached and it is possible that it may widen at depth. The top of the rift is 25' below the shaft top.

**Sunday 6 August 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman, Clive North, Bob Cottle, Dave Speed. The Morrison family later.

Continued clearing around the threshold of the rift. Lowering the floor of the narrow passage is being hampered by a large block obstructing the left hand side, but as it appears to be a key support to the main pile of boulders on that side, more steel shoring will have to be installed before it can be banged. The floor of the main shaft is full of air spaces, but has a large tongue of rock across it.

**Wednesday 9 August 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Tony Audsley, Clive North

Drilled two short shotholes in a large boulder projecting into the line of the next section of steel framework. Further digging revealed that the tongue of rock across the bottom of the dig shelves into the rift passage and forms a V shaped floor, making the passage about 3' high. Behind the tongue, the floor continues downwards choked with mud, marly stones and cobbles. It appears to undercut and there may be a lower stage to the cliff rift passage. Fired a Cordtex charge before leaving.

The rift passage was measured as 7' long on a bearing of 200 degrees – almost due south – with an apparent turn to the right at the far end.

**Sunday 13 August 2000** - Simon Meade-King, Tony Audsley, Rob Taviner

Very heavy rain. Quick visit. Decided that no further digging was possible until after the next welding session.

**Wednesday 16 August 2000** - Clive North, Tony Audsley, Dave Speed

Very heavy rain. Steel had been delivered to Parfitt's farm. Moved it across to dig by Land Rover.

**Friday 18 August 2000** - Dave Morrison, Dave Speed, Jim Young

A further welding session, enlivened by JY furling among the boulders and setting the whole pile wobbling. One large rock was dragged into a better banging position. Hopefully the new steel work has stabilised everything.

**Sunday 20 August 2000** - Colin Rogers

A token probe.

**Wednesday 23 August 2000** - Paul Stillman, Clive North

Drilled and banged the boulder behind the threshold "bridge".

**Sunday 27 August 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman, Tony Littler, Tony Audsley, Colin Rogers

Cleared the debris from the demolished boulder and dug around the back of the threshold bridge.

**Wednesday 30 August 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Clive North, Rob Taviner, Dave Speed

Digging out the marly mud and rocks behind and beneath the bridge revealed the hoped for undercut as well as opening a hole among the boulders on the left hand (eastern) side. Rocks started rumbling below and stones thrown down appeared to tumble five or ten feet towards the western side of the cliff. Could they be falling into the lower shaft of the Sixties dig? Hopefully we are too far to the west.

By the end of the session, the undercut was taking the form of a steeply descending (50 or 60 degrees) bedding plane roof up to five feet wide with small holes at the back through which trickling water could be faintly heard.

At dusk, a bat descended the dig, spending a short time in the boulder chamber before emerging into the night.

**Sunday 3 September 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Clive North, Tony Audsley

Further digging was quickly followed by a run in of small rocks and cobbles from under the large boulders on the left hand side. No sooner was this cleared than a large slab of red and green marl from the back (north) wall peeled off leaving an unstable face behind. This was sent up only to have a further run in from the left. Another section of shoring is clearly overdue!

**Wednesday 6 September 2000** - Dave Everett, Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe. (The Audsley family carried out surface dowsing.)

Stabilised the left hand run in by building a dry stone wall and then cleared the floor ready for the next section of steel. Spoil was dumped into the old dig chamber.

The passage developed under the rock bridge appears to extend into the right hand wall, and the fill in that area includes water eroded rocks.

Two bats visited the upper shaft briefly.

**Sunday 10 September 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Tony Littler, Mark Craske, Nick Powell

Cleared hard packed marly mud and a few stones from under the bridge. Larger rocks were added to the dry stone wall on the left, while the rest was sent to the surface.

**Wednesday 13 September 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Dave Speed. Dave Morrison paid a brief visit.

Welded 20' of fixed steel ladder to the eastern side of the lower shaft and installed the next section of the shoring framework, which included rods driven into the marl face and the dry stone wall.

NB The western tributary swallet was completely dry.

**Wednesday 20 September 2000** - Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe, Tony Audsley

Following heavy rain the western swallet stream was flowing again.

Below ground, the diggers found a small stream pouring out of the marl wall over a slurry slope of slumped material – is this the hitherto unseen western swallet water or has the main stream found a quicker way to Wells?

The marl collapse had left a large void behind the northern steelwork, and this had to be quickly filled with rocks amid further minor collapses. Some of the rocks were brought from the old chamber where DS uncovered a hole against the cliff face – probably the Sixties lower shaft although no shoring material was visible.

Attempts were made to divert the stream into the holes under the dry stone wall but constant leaks and the cramped conditions made for slow and squalid digging. A small amount of marl and mud was dumped in the old chamber before ponding of water under the rock bridge caused a rethink of strategy. The back of the bridge seemed to be dipping much more vertically than the tube above, and the reluctance of the water to clear the floor area suggested a fairly vertical dig in wet and dangerous conditions for as long as the stream persists – probably throughout the autumn and winter.

Attention turned to the small cliff passage above where probes with a long iron bar caused small stones to drop over a large cobble at the far end and fall down to the right for perhaps five feet. The stones sounded as if they were landing on a piece of wood – possibly the Sixties dig again! In any event this dry passage offers a chance to get away from the water and to make progress into the cliff face. Further furling indicated quite an undercut on the right hand side and it may not require too much banging to make the tube man-sized.

**Wednesday 27 September 2000** - Clive North, Dave Speed, Dave Everett, Tony Audsley, Richard Witcombe

Strong winds and driving rain.

A sizeable stream was emerging from the back wall and there had been some “fall out” of rubble from behind the steel shoring half way up the lower shaft. CN and DS started early, drilling two shotholes in the right hand wall of the cliff passage (far enough in not to disturb the shoring brace) using a battery powered drill borrowed from Nigel Taylor. DS also cleared a hole beneath the bridge on the left hand side to take the water.

After the Super Cordtex charges were fired, the banged rock was cleared back and dumped underground. The floor fill, which included some sizeable cobbles, was dug out with the help of a narrow rake fabricated by TA. The passage appears to be widening and deepening further in, but the right turn at the far end looks very “restricted”.

Two further shotholes were drilled on the right hand side before the battery charge ran out. The charges were successfully fired before leaving.

A bat put in a brief appearance.

**Sunday 1 October 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Bob Cottle, Tony Audsley, Clive North

Cleared the bang debris from the cliff passage. The rock is proving very hard – presumably the effect of heating caused by the fault – and the shatter effect does not extend beyond the end of the shothole. Using the generator, CN drilled three further shotholes on the right hand side, and after an initial battery failure, successfully fired a Super Cordtex charge.

A small amount of broken rock was removed, and a little more fill, including cobbles, was raked back from the corner area. Three more shotholes were drilled, again on the right hand side, and with two shotholes which had partly survived the first charge brought back into use, a five charge pattern was fired.

**Tuesday 3 October 2000** - Dave Speed, Clive North

After clearing the bang debris, which included the use of the Kango chisel attachment, DS was able to crawl down to the corner and gain a restricted view of a narrow descending rift which may just be man-sized. There was no sound of a stream at this point.

While CN drilled a pattern of eleven shotholes to open up the right hand side right down to the corner, DS enlarged the hole beneath the rock bridge. Five or six feet down, a piece of wooden shoring can be seen, indicating a link with the Sixties lower shaft.

The linked charge was successfully fired.

**Wednesday 4 October 2000** - Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe, Dave Everett, Paul Stillman, Tony Audsley, Rob Taviner

Cleared the bang debris in “Salami Passage” and obtained a good look at the descending rift. It is one foot across, widening to two feet above a stal draped drop. Eight feet ahead it closes down to a tiny inlet. Stones rolled down appeared to fall onto a stal floor rather than the wood conjectured on 20 September.



RT made a first entry and found himself in a four feet deep “chamber” with a floor of stalled rocks, sandstone cobbles and gravel. There were no holes downwards, although the south wall is slightly undercut. The area is totally dry and with the approach passage enlarged, it should be feasible to clear out the floor covering in the hope of finding a fossil route into the main streamway.

Four of the six diggers managed to “visit” the find.

**Sunday 8 October 2000** - Bob Cottle, Paul Stillman, Richard Witcombe, Clive North, Rob Taviner, Tony Audsley. John Hill visited.

While CN used the power chisel in the cliff passage, RW renovated the rock shoring behind the north wall steelwork using stones sent down from the surface. After the chiselled debris had been cleared, a series of ten shotholes were drilled along the right wall as far as the corner and a linked charge was successfully detonated.

**Wednesday 11 October 2000** - Paul Stillman, Richard Witcombe, Dave Speed, Clive North, Rob Taviner, Tony Littler

Cleared the debris from the last bang, and attacked the corner with lump hammer and chisel. With reasonable access to the new rift, digging in the floor commenced. A mix of stal flooring, rocks, cobbles and muddy gravel was removed and by the end of the evening, RT had opened up a tiny descending rift at the far end, emitting a slight draught and possibly the rumble of a distant stream.

More rocks were jammed into the steel frames of the back wall.

**Saturday 14 October 2000** - Clive North, Dave Speed

While DS checked out possible leads in the terminal rift, concluding that the way on is down in the floor, CN drilled four shotholes in the right hand wall and the roof at the corner. Black polythene sheeting was packed around the stal flows on the left hand wall as protection. Charge successfully fired.

**Sunday 15 October 2000** - Bob Cottle, James Witcombe, Richard Witcombe, Clive North, Tony Audsley

The bang debris was cleared and then digging resumed in the terminal rift. Stal flooring was broken up and a mud and cobble fill was excavated. The north wall appears to be sloping inwards matching the undercut to the south, suggesting that the way on could be a bedding plane sloping downwards at the angle of dip – about 45 degrees.

Opinions were divided about whether the sound of the stream was emanating from ahead or behind!

After the digging session CN banged the right hand side of the bend using a four shothole pattern. The stal flows on the left were again covered with polythene sheet packing.

**Wednesday 18 October 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Dave Speed, Tony Littler, Tony Audsley

The last bang had successfully widened the approach to the terminal “chamber” although some damage had been done to the stal flows.

A large amount of spoil was dug out from the east end of the chamber, but the conjectured sloping bedding plane did not materialise. Instead at a depth of about 18” a fairly level floor was encountered which was followed across to the south wall undercut. This proved to be very shallow but the south wall continued westwards to form a tiny tunnel with a small airspace just to the south of the higher approach passage. This dogleg passage emitted a noticeable draught. Attempts were made to excavate the floor, but it proved

difficult to enlarge the passage. Is the level "floor" another false floor hiding a wider approach to the new tunnel?

All the spoil was dumped in the old dig chamber which is now filling up rapidly.

A bat visited the dig.

**Sunday 22 October 2000** - Simon Meade-King, Bob Cottle, Rob Taviner, Tony Audsley, Clive North. Richard Witcombe and Dave Speed visited later.

Cleared out the remainder of the terminal chamber. The more or less level floor continued across the chamber rising slightly towards the west end with only four tiny choked north/south rifts breaking its very solid surface. It appears that the very small western passage is the only significant exit. A few feet of awkward progress along this tube was made, following a definite draught and the sound of falling water.

**Wednesday 25 October 2000** - Dave Everett, Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe, Clive North, Tony Audsley, Tony Littler

Water had ponded in the terminal chamber exit passage but it was drained by poking the far end. DS lying flat out at a downwards angle in very squalid conditions cleared the low and narrow bedding plane for four feet to a point where a tiny rift went off at right angles to the right. RW managed to peer around this corner and beyond the constriction could see a slightly wider rift (but probably not quite man sized) veering round to the left out of sight. The right bank of this passage is covered in stal flows with a few straws and tiny curtains. The floor may descend but the constriction prevented any pebbles being pushed along to find out. Perhaps ten to fifteen feet ahead and slightly below is the sound of what RW considered to be running water rather than falling water.

To make any further progress the approach passage will have to be chemically enlarged. The floor is too hard to chisel out manually.

At the end of the session the rift/shaft below the rock bridge was examined again, and rocks were trundled down for fifteen feet or so. It sounds as though the shaft is following the steeply descending cliff face, in which case the stream it carries can hardly be the same as the one heard at the back of the new passage. Is it perhaps the western swallet stream?

A sketch survey of the cave was carried out.

**Sunday 29 October 2000** - Clive North

Using the battery powered drill, sank four and a half shotholes in the ceiling of the dogleg passage.

**Tuesday 31 October 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Clive North

The main stream was running strongly after several days of torrential rain. Underground there had been further mud and cobble collapses from the right hand wall at the threshold to the blasted passage, and one large "triassic" rock was lifted from the wall to prevent a certain collapse later.

A further three and a half shotholes were drilled in the dogleg passage, and an eight shothole charge was successfully fired.

**Wednesday 1 November 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Clive North, Rob Taviner, Tony Audsley, Mark Lumley

Still very wet underground but no further collapses. After clearing the debris from the successful bang, the diggers took turns to peer around the corner at the end of the dogleg passage. There was a significant draught and the sound of a sizeable stream flowing.

CN drilled three and a half shotholes.

**Sunday 5 November 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Bob Cottle, Clive North, Tony Audsley

Heavy rain throughout the afternoon. While CN drilled more shotholes in the dogleg passage, rocks and spoil from the threshold to the old dig were sent up to the surface. The material was dumped in a 4' collapse which had occurred along the cliff line at the site of the old shaft – presumably the effect of the recent rains washing out mud and gravels amongst the boulders.

At the end of the session, CN fired an eleven shothole charge. The shock wave lifted the timber placed over the shaft.

NB The combined age of the four diggers amounted to 220!

**Wednesday 8 November 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Paul Stillman, Dave Everett, Clive North, Tony Audsley

The last bang had unfortunately smashed one of the stal flows in the approach passage. Debris was cleared back to the surface and a slightly better view of the continuation passage was gained. It runs south eastwards as a sinuous rift about 2' high and 9" wide with the floor descending at a shallow angle. The view only extends to 5' or so but some distance ahead (perhaps 20') the stream sounds as though it is flowing in a larger passage or chamber. The draught is still noticeable.

A four shothole charge was fired.

**Sunday 12 November 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Colin Rogers, Tommi Juntilla (Finnish), Paul Stillman, Dave Bell, Clive North

Cleared the bang debris back to the surface, dumping it in the cliff collapse. RW carried out some cosmetic work to the broken stal curtain using a metal file. After a lengthy drilling session all around the working face, CN fired an eleven shothole charge.

NB A large frog was rescued from the threshold to the old dig chamber.

**Wednesday 15 November 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Paul Stillman, Tony Audsley, Rob Taviner

Cleared the bang debris back to the surface in two stages. It is still not possible to see far along the narrow rift because of the kink at the start, but there is a suggestion of a bedding plane development on the right about 4' ahead and the overall height of the rift increases beyond the kink. The stream sound now has a reverberation or "rumble" element to it.

**Sunday 19 November 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Clive North. Rob Taviner and Tony Audsley visited briefly.

CN drilled ten shotholes all around the digging face, while RW carried out running repairs to the shaft wall. When the charge was fired, the fumes emerged from the shaft within seconds.

**Wednesday 22 November 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Dave Everett, Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman, Tony Audsley, Tony Littler

The bang had partly straightened the “kink” and after the clearance of the debris it was possible to see ahead for about 6’. The passage widens slightly and a bedding plane slopes steeply down to the right in front of what may be a back wall. This could represent a drop into a streamway (or perhaps the bottom of the old dig).

All spoil was sent up to the surface. A bat flitted about the dig during the evening.

**Sunday 26 November 2000** - Rob Taviner, Richard Witcombe, Paul Stillman, Clive North, Tony Audsley, Colin Rogers, Derek Harris

Three buckets of spoil were sent up from the stockpile, while Clive started work on the shotholes. PS took photographs in the cliff passage and the shaft. In due course an eight shothole pattern was fired, the fumes from which emerged more slowly than usual.

After waiting for fifteen minutes, RW, TA, CN and PS returned below amid light fumes to inspect the damage. After clearing back most of the broken rock, it was possible to see ahead for 5’ to a wider muddy grotto, beyond which the floor of a sinuous rift dropped steeply away. The bedding plane development on the right is not really significant, but stones rolled over the grotto lip appear to tumble down six to eight feet in a passage which sounds roomier.

The larger rocks were moved back to the old dig threshold.

**Wednesday 29 November 2000** - Richard Witcombe, Tony Littler, Rob Taviner

Cleared back the rest of the bang debris from the digging face. RT forced his head and shoulders into the enlargement ahead (basically an alcove in the left hand wall) but a rock in the floor prevented a good view over the lip into the rift. He could see down at 45 degrees for about 10’ and thought the passage might just be man-sized – thin man! The lip is 12’ from the dog leg corner in the small chamber.

The spoil was moved up to the surface in two stages. The bat was present again.

**Thursday 30 November 2000** - Clive North, Tony Audsley

CN drilled a pattern of six shotholes in the left hand wall and roof, but when preparing the charge found that he had left his Cordtex cutting knife on the kitchen table! The holes were left unfilled.

**Friday 1 December 2000** - Rob Taviner

On a solo visit RT chiselled enough small pieces off the walls and floor to enable him to peer awkwardly over the lip of the drop ahead. He was looking into a pot about 12’ deep and widening to nearly 4’ which shelved out of sight to the right. At the bottom was a scattering of large blackened cobbles and the sound of the streamway beyond. Not without interest!

**Sunday 3 December 2000** - Paul Stillman, Clive North, Dave Speed, Bob Cottle, Rob Taviner, Richard Witcombe, Tony Audsley

Starting early, PS took more photographs and CN drilled five more shotholes to add to the six drilled on Thursday. A piece of foam was wedged into the rift ahead to protect the stal and the eleven hole pattern was duly fired.

The fumes were slow to clear, some eventually emerging from the cliff face collapse. In still fumey conditions, the full team cleared the broken rock back to the surface (the foam had vanished down the rift),

and DS and RT then attacked the constricted entry into the pot with hammer and chisel. It proved impossible to make the approach man-sized and CN had to return to drill five more shotholes, three in the floor and two in the left hand wall.

The second charge was fired and after an impatient wait, the team (minus BC who had to leave early) went back underground with RT at the head to attempt the pot. He squeezed into the rift and went down about ten feet on a belayed handline. Disappointment lay around the corner to the right. The passage degenerated into a boulder filled space against the old cliff face – either the 1960s dig or more probably just below it, as no timber shoring was visible. Many of the rocks were loose and RT made about ten feet of further progress before discretion and stone falls caused him to beat a retreat. The stream was flowing among the boulders to the right but no obvious passage beckons.

**Wednesday 6 December 2000** - Dave Everett, Dave Speed, Clive North, Richard Witcombe, Tony Audsley, Tony Littler, Dave Morrison, Rob Taviner

DE and RW passed the slot into the new chamber, but DS found it too tight. The roof of the chamber, which is just above head height, is a continuation of the cliff face but now sloping at a shallower angle of about 45 degrees. The rubble floor drops at a similar angle for a length of 15', ending in a pronounced near vertical cleft, loosely choked with rocks and cobbles. The north and east "walls" comprise massive jammed blocks, at least one of which will require shoring.

Five feet left of the terminal cleft, a squeeze past a boulder gives a view into a dry parallel rift chamber inset into the cliff face, some 8' long by 3' wide with another possible way on in the floor. The western wall is solid and stal draped, but is undercut by a bedding plane carrying a small stream. At the top end there is a space over cobbles on the far side of the stream giving a restricted view into a void with falling water. A round wooden pole can be seen protruding from the roof. This must be the terminal section of the 1960s dig which our solid rock passage has passed over.

At the bottom of the chamber, the stream levels off and turns right, entering what looks like a half arch into the descending roof. Above are some tiny phreatic passages meandering into the solid rock.

Digging into the streamway is going to be made tricky by the presence of a very large block poised on the 45 degree slope in front. This will have to be moved away in a "controlled" slide using ropes and crowbars. The stal coated walls preclude the use of bang.

While this examination of the chamber was taking place, CN drilled more shotholes to enlarge the approach to the slot. DE tried to drag the foam sheet into position to protect the stal from blast but it jammed in the slot. RT, arriving late, visited the chamber for a brief appraisal. He squeezed into the small rift chamber noting holes in the loosely choked floor.

At the end of the session a seven shothole charge was fired. The fumes emerged from the shaft very quickly.

**Sunday 10 December 2000** - Bob Cottle, Rob Taviner, Richard Witcombe, Dave Speed, Tony Audsley, Clive North, Dave Morrison. Paul Stillman visited later.

The clearance of bang debris and some chiselling allowed all team members to inspect the new chamber.

RT and RW removed rocks from the floor of the eastern rift chamber and looked into a small eastward extension along the line of the cliff face. RT squeezed into the first section where he could see an irregular air space containing a number of good straws which choked after 6'. There seems little point in following the spaces against the cliff in this direction.

The large boulder guarding the small streamway was moved downwards slightly and jammed against the stal wall and the cliff, but access to the stream was prevented by a solid ridge of rock which may be part of a bedrock floor. It will need careful banging. Whilst clearing rocks in this area, a small bat was found clinging to the rock ridge. It was left to relocate itself.

The other large boulders were examined for stability and a decision was made to jam a large piece of steel angle across the chamber in front of the slabs and incorporate it in a dry stone wall or revetment.

**Monday 1 January 2001** - Clive North, Tony Audsley

Cleared a further foot or so of rocks and cobbles from the floor of the cleft. Below there are small voids against the cliff face and a level undercut running off to the right towards the stream area.

**Wednesday 3 January 2001** - Paul Stillman, Clive North, Dave Everett, Richard Witcombe, Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Tony Audsley, Anne Audsley. Dave Morrison visited.

Drilled and chiselled slots in the coffin lid boulder and the back wall and hammered a 3" by 3" timber brace in place.

After RT had unsuccessfully attempted to squeeze along the stream route, more rocks were cleared from the cleft, most being jammed into a void on the left and secured with wooden wedges. Below, the low undercut is floored with rocks, cobbles, gravel and mud. When dug, it should be possible to advance along it towards the holes in the floor visible to the right close to where the stream disappears.

A bat visited the terminal chamber briefly.

**Sunday 7 January 2001** - Bob Cottle, Clive North, Tony Audsley, Rob Taviner, Colin Rogers. Richard Witcombe visited.

Continued lowering the floor in the cleft, dumping most of the spoil in the side chamber. Large rocks are beginning to constrict the digging area, although there are still open holes off to the right emitting a strong draught. CN drilled a single shothole in a floor slab, detonating the charge from the surface.

The bat was present but had departed before the bang.

**Wednesday 10 January 2001** - Richard Witcombe, Paul Stillman, Clive North, Dave Speed, Dave Everett

Cleared the bang debris and stabilised the left hand rubble wall with several pieces of scaffold pole. A small amount of material was dug from the floor, revealing more of the air space which continues downwards to the left. The digging space is confined and potentially unstable, and a timber prop was inserted between the boulder below the coffin slab and the cliff face for added security.

Two shotholes were drilled in a large floor slab with the intention of taking a corner off and then digging beneath it to gain access to the westwards extension of the cliff face. The charge was fired successfully.

**Sunday 14 January 2001** - Bob Cottle, Clive North, Rob Taviner, Colin Rogers

Cleared the bang debris and deepened the floor. The north side boulder proved to be very undercut and was supported by a 5' length of scaffold pole driven into the rocks on the east side and keyed into a drilled slot in the remaining part of the banged boulder on the other side. The pole was further braced by a wedged timber prop.

The cleft shaft, which contains a trickle leaking from the main stream, is now about 15' deep, making the total depth of the cave over 75'. There is a view through boulders to the west into a more open area with a debris strewn floor sloping down southwestwards under a stal coated roof. To enlarge the working area, CN drilled a shothole in the cliff face wall, firing the charge from the surface.

**Wednesday 17 January 2001** - Richard Witcombe, Paul Stillman, Dave Everett, Clive North, Dave Speed, Dave Morrison, Tony Littler, Rob Taviner

Cleared the bang debris and excavated stream gravel and cobbles from the floor. At the end of the session, DE was able to squeeze over a boulder in the floor to the right and enter a small stal draped chamber against the cliff. It descended, 3' high by about 4' wide, at an angle of about 45 degrees for ten feet to a loose cobble choke, with the stream flowing down amongst the rocks.

Agreed to christen main chamber – Advent Chamber.

CN drilled a single shothole in the floor boulder, firing the charge on the surface.

**Sunday 21 January 2000** - Clive North, Rob Taviner

The bang had removed most of the obstructing boulder, allowing an easier, if rather wet, examination of the new chamber. It forms a cleft in the cliff with undercuts on either side giving restricted views into the usual voids amongst the rocks and cobbles. The off shoot from the main stream runs off to the left and there is a large stal coated boulder leaning against the far end wall which we need to be removed.

To improve access, a portion of the roof in the approach crawl was chemically removed – one shothole.

**Wednesday 24 January 2001** - Richard Witcombe, Paul Stillman, Dave Everett, Rob Taviner

Cleared the small amount of bang debris and some of the cobbles and stream debris from the top end of the new chamber. This opened up a view of a sizeable air space against the cliff face on the right, but it does not appear to be a significant way on and there is no sign of the main part of the stream.

RT carried out a low grade survey – length 155' and depth 72'.

**Sunday 28 January 2001** - Bob Cottle, Paul Stillman, Rob Taviner, Clive North, Simon Meade-King. Colin Rogers later. Richard Witcombe visited.

Cleared cobbles, rocks and gravel from the terminal chamber. Drilled two shotholes – one to take the top off a boulder in the threshold and one to split the block at the bottom of the chamber. Charge fired successfully. Roof stalactite at the top of Advent Chamber accidentally broken.

**Wednesday 31 January 2001** - Richard Witcombe, Dave Everett, Adrian Bowen, Paul Stillman, Clive North, Tony Littler

Cleared a large amount of bang debris, cobbles and gravel from the terminal chamber, stacking it at the top of Advent Chamber and in the side chamber. By the end of the session, the floor had been lowered by a foot or two, and a view opened up into an air space on the left with some good straws.

The broken stal was smoothed over with a file.

**Sunday 4 February 2001** - Bob Cottle, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe, Clive North, Rob Taviner

After heavy rain, there was plenty of water in the terminal chamber, and the “roar” of a bigger stream off to the right. Large amounts of gravel and cobbles were cleared from the choke, exposing a couple of blocks that can probably be shifted without bang. Beyond there are open spaces for a further 8’ to 10’ under a roof sloping at an angle of about 50 degrees.

The stream is eroding much fill from around the larger boulders and a constant watch will have to be kept on their stability.

NB By the end of the afternoon, a stream several inches deep was flowing into the adit at Thrupe Lane Swallet.

**Wednesday 7 February 2001** - Dave Everett, Richard Witcombe, Paul Stillman, Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Tony Littler. Tony Audsley visited.

Still very wet underground. Cleared more spoil from the bottom of the chamber, and shifted the two large slabs, building them into a buttress beneath some undercut boulders. Other rocks were used to support a large boulder on the right of the threshold. Another large block has been uncovered in the floor which will probably require bang.

Given the steepness of the way on and the shifting nature of the fill, some very difficult and risky digging lies ahead.

**Sunday 11 February 2001** - Bob Cottle, Paul Stillman, Gary Sandys, Clive North. Richard Witcombe visited.

By chipping away at the rock and stalled-in stream debris in the roof above the large block, a passable route over the top was engineered. Hopefully the block can be left in situ to hold back the smaller material. A reasonable amount of spoil, including one or two large rocks, was brought out and temporarily stacked on the left hand side of the small chamber.

Ahead, the air space follows stalled up cracks in the roof with a few straws, and a faint outwards draught was detected.

CN drilled three shotholes in the roof at the far end and successfully fired the charge.

**Wednesday 14 February 2001** - Richard Witcombe, Paul Stillman, Rob Taviner, Tony Littler, Gary Sandys

Cleared the bang debris and Sunday’s stockpile. The larger rocks were built into stabilisation walls in and around the end chamber, and the grotto on the left was protected by a low wall.

A four inch piece of Cordtex had “survived” the bang.

The way on at the bottom of the chamber appears to be at a steeper angle.

**Sunday 18 February 2001** - Clive North, Rob Taviner. Richard Witcombe visited.

Moved a few rocks at the far end and drilled three shotholes along a rock shelf in the roof. The rogue piece of Cordtex was incorporated in the successful charge.

**Wednesday 21 February 2001** - Richard Witcombe, Paul Stillman, Clive North, Dave Morrison

Cleared out bang debris and other spoil, stacking some into various nooks and crannies, but sending the bulk up to the side chamber by a two stage operation.



The way on is fairly heavily choked although there is slot open for six to eight feet down to the left.

A three shothole charge in the cliff face was fired.

### **End of February 2001**

All digging and caving on Mendip ceased due to - **FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE**

FMD outbreaks in the West Country petered out towards the end of the summer.

An unexpected incident led to the resumption of digging -

### **Wednesday 25 July 2001**

Late that morning Nelson Butt reported to Bob Cowlin that he had heard one of the latter's Belgian Blue cows calling loudly for a missing calf near Thrupe Swallet and he wondered whether the calf might have wandered down into the "cave hole". Nelson also contacted Dave Speed who was working in Highbridge and he in turn alerted Clive North who went over to the swallet and descended the shaft. Although the covering timbers were displaced, Clive neither saw nor heard any sign of a calf at the bottom of the shaft.

Arriving at Bob Cowlin's farm, Dave reported that the calf was not underground, only to be told by Bob that his sons had distinctly heard the calf calling from the hole. Bob and sons said they would make a start on a rescue while Dave alerted other cavers.

Contacted by Dave, Richard Witcombe arrived at the cave at about 5 pm followed shortly by Dave himself. Bob and one of his sons were underground and had located the live calf in the small chamber below the blasted right angled passage and had already manhandled it almost to the bottom of the shaft by the light of an inspection lamp. The second son was manning the winch but although a strap from the cable had been attached to the calf, the noise of the lamp generator made effective hauling from the surface impossible. Richard went down the shaft and helped the two Cowlins guide the calf up the shaft while the surface team heaved on the winch.

Once on the surface, the calf was carefully placed on its feet, and to everyone's surprise, it succeeded in standing, albeit with a few wobbles. An inspection showed a cut on the shoulder and another on the inside of a hind leg, but otherwise the animal was unscathed. It staggered off to its mother (actually a foster mother) and began suckling. A second cow approached it and licked its wounds.

As the Cowlins were very pleased with the outcome and rightly proud of their own efforts (none of them had ever been underground before), RW asked if, following the installation of a secure shaft lid, low key digging could recommence. Bob Cowlin gave his consent.

### **Sunday 19 August 2001** - Dave Speed, Clive North

Trial fitting of a new steel gate fabricated by DS. The gate was taken away for a few modifications.

### **Sunday 26 August 2001** - Dave Speed, Clive North

New gate fitted – a heavy lift off plate with two handles.

A reconnaissance visit to the digging face revealed that all was as we had left it save for the sad remains of a lamb at the bottom of Advent Chamber.

Only a trickle of water was present in the lower parts of the dig although both visitors thought they detected the distant sound of falling water.

**Wednesday 5 September 2001** - Richard Witcombe, Tony Littler, Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Clive North

Bagged up the remains of the lamb for removal, but the diggers in Advent Chamber had to contend with a legacy of bluebottles for the evening.

Cleared debris from the bottom of the dig, dumping still in the small side chamber off Advent. Plenty of small open spaces below the choke, but one large slab now requires shoring.

**Wednesday 12 September 2001** - Paul Stillman, Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Dave Speed, Clive North

Inserted a timber brace between the large slab and the back wall, and extracted a few large rocks which were stacked in various corners of the bottom "chamber". Other spoil was sent up to the Advent side chamber.

A bat was present in the lower part of the dig.

**Wednesday 26 September 2001** - Richard Witcombe, Dave Grosvenor (Hewlett Packard Caving Group)

Removed a few rocks from the digging face and stacked them in odd corners of the bottom "chamber". There is a small, stal decorated open space off to right which was emitting a cool draught.

**Saturday 29 September 2001** - Richard Witcombe, Clive North

Cleared an approach to the open space on the right by gingerly removing loose fill from the up dip side. Five feet in, a washed out shale band has left a descending 10' deep passage against the 70 degree cliff face. Although just small man sized at the top, it degenerates to a slot at the bottom which either levels off or closes down. It carries a small trickle of water.

RW attempted to enlarge the passage by pulling off shale slabs but finding that all the up dip side was ready to peel off and plug the way on, he gave up. This potential route is probably too unstable to follow but it will provide much needed dumping space for the next phase of the dig.

Turning our attention back to the main face, CN drilled four shotholes, two in a left side buttress and two in the cliff ahead. The Cordtex charge was successfully fired from the surface.

**Wednesday 3 October 2001** - Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Tony Littler

RT inspected the new shaft – Shale Pot – and agreed that it was too restricted and crumbly to be pursued at this stage. Instead it was used as a dump for the rocks and bang debris cleared from the main dig. A considerable amount of spoil was sent down including one very large rock excavated and manhandled by TL. By the end of the evening there was a better view down the hole on the left where there appeared to be an undercut to the main cliff face or a levelling off.

The whole digging area was cool and draughty. The bat visited briefly.

**Wednesday 10 October 2001** - Richard Witcombe, Clive North, Rob Taviner, Dave Speed, Dave Morrison

Cleared more rocks, gravel and cobbles from the main digging face, dumping the spoil down Shale Pot until the arrival of DM when enough manpower was available to bucket it up to the Advent side chamber. The evening concluded with a five shothole Cordtex pattern in the cliff face, detonated as usual from the surface.

Lots of bat droppings in the Advent area.

**Wednesday 17 October 2001** - Richard Witcombe, Dave Speed

Cleared bang debris and carefully dropped the floor, dumping all spoil in Shale Pot. This opened up a view into a significant undercut air space. After chiselling more rock from the main face, RW was able to slide 5' down a rubble slope into a low chamber some 15' long on an east/west axis, eight feet across and one to three feet in height. The gently sloping roof was solid rock with a few stal decorations, while the rubble floor with scattered large cobbles funnelled down to a small pit straight ahead with a black space below. Stones thrown down fell at least ten feet. The eastern end rose to a choke but there may be a further pit in front of the west end wall. Somewhere off to the west, was the faint sound of a stream or falling water.

Careful gardening will be required to establish the full potential of the chamber which was christened Maglite Grotto after the pocket torch used by RW to peer into it – his cell had expired by this time.

**Wednesday 24 October 2001** - Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Dave Grosvenor. Dave Morrison later.

While DS enlarged the access to Maglite Grotto with hammer and chisel, RT rearranged the rocks in the chamber to clear a way to the pit and the back wall. Most of the spoil was stacked on the eastern slope. Chancing to look up, RT found himself under a small stal fringed aven, and he was able to clamber 4' up into a phreatic tube trending up dip to the west. After a hands and knees crawl for 10', the passage turned in a more northerly direction and ended about 15' further on with a squeeze into a tiny mud choked chamber. Impassable bedding planes in the floor of the passage contained some good mud formations.

Hiding in this passage, RT invited DS to join him in Maglite Grotto. The latter was suitably puzzled over RT's disappearance, giving rise to the passage's name – the Priest's Hole.

The pit in the floor is unstable but appears to link to a loose choke in the floor down in the southwestern corner of the chamber. The best prospect may well be to sink a shaft against the two solid walls in this corner. There are black spaces down to ten feet or more, and the sound of a small stream somewhere near.

**Wednesday 31 October 2001** - Rob Taviner, Richard Witcombe, James Witcombe, Dave Speed, Tony Littler

RT carried out a line survey of the new passage. The rest cleared small rocks from the back of Maglite Grotto, dumping them in Shale Pot – which is now full. Stones dropped through holes in the floor near the corner cleft clattered a long way – perhaps twenty five feet down some sort of rubble slope. At the end of the session, DS and TL re-arranged one or two large rocks near the corner and were able to peer down a man sized air space against a 45 degree cliff. The rubble strewn route closed down somewhat after ten feet where the roof appeared to level off.

At least one bat, possible two, were present. One was seen crawling out of the bedding plane to the left of the lower grotto.

Survey details: Length 210' Depth 90'.

**Sunday 5 November 2001** - Clive North, Dave Speed

Carefully excavated around the lowest point in Maglite Grotto, producing a substantial pit with a very large block bridging the way on down. This slab (christened the Hammerhead when the lump hammer handle broke whilst attacking it and the head went down the hole) is crucial to the stability of the whole area and needs now to be left undisturbed. With this in mind, attention turned to the right hand wall where there were

plenty of cobbles and rocks piled up. After clearing much of this material, an awkward head downwards view was gained into the rock rumbling zone – a steeply sloping cobble strewn bedding against the cliff face with the way on just out of sight beneath an undercut.

In the interests of safety, the best way forward may be to bang open the stalled up cleft in the southwestern corner of Maglite Grotto. This could reveal a higher level continuation of the rift, or at least provide a mined tunnel access to the rubble slope.

**Wednesday 7 November 2001** - Clive North, Paul Stillman, Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Richard Witcombe, Tony Littler. Dave Morrison later.

After peering into all nooks and crannies of Maglite Grotto and evaluating prospects, it was agreed to bang open the south west cleft. The main hole in the floor was bridged over with slabs to prevent debris dropping down, and some spoil from the grotto was sent up the cave.

PS took some digital photos.

Before starting the assault on the back of the grotto, it was decided to enlarge the access arch in the hope of minimising disturbance to the rather unstable boulder slope. CN drilled a x hole pattern around the entrance, firing the charge successfully from the surface.

**Sunday 11 November 2001** - Clive North, Dave Morrison

Wednesday's bang had provided an extra 6" of "backroom" in the grotto entrance arch. After trimming the shattered rock, CN started work on the corner cleft, drilling four shotholes on the left, one in a stalled block and one beneath the block. Behind some of the stal coating is a layer of mud and gravel up to 8" thick.

A piece of angle iron will be installed beneath the entrance arch to stabilise some key rocks in the boulder slope.

**Wednesday 2 January 2002** - Clive North, Richard Witcombe, Dave Speed, Tony Littler, Gary Sandys, Rob Taviner

More fill was removed from the entry to the new passage and sent up to be packed into the nearly full Shale Pot passage. In due course RT crawled down the slope and uncovered a continuation under the left hand cliff face. This opened into a low bedding plane chamber, about fifteen feet long by five feet wide, with an undulating phreatic roof and a flowstone bank on the southern wall. Although the western end terminated in a mud choke draped with a few white stals, there was an irregular slot amongst some large boulders in the floor, impassably narrow but at least ten feet deep and emitting the sound of a stream.

While this exploration work was under way, RW built up a dry stone wall beneath the steel girder at the threshold to Maglite Grotto. To improve access to the new digging face, much fill will have to come up from below and be stacked in the grotto.

In recognition of the probable passing of the 100' depth level and of the change of character of the cave, the new chamber has been christened The Rubicon.

**Sunday 6 January 2002** - Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Clive North

After a short surveying session, cleared a large amount of gravel and small rocks from the approach to The Rubicon, stacking some of the material in Maglite Grotto and some at the eastern, upstream, end of The Rubicon. Rocks were also "rearranged" to give a better view into the floor slot. The southern side may be

solid or a stalled up boulder wall, but opposite the blocks are large but detached. Rocks roll away under the southern wall for fifteen feet or so.

Survey details: Length 262' Depth 101'

**Wednesday 9 January 2002** - Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Tony Littler, Dave King, Dave Grosvenor, Clive North

Major clearing work in The Rubicon area. Spoil was stacked all around Maglite Grotto and the Shale Pot passage. By the end of the evening there was a clearer view into the floor slot – stacked boulders with plenty of black spaces ten feet below.

**Sunday 13 January 2002** - Bob Cottle, Richard Witcombe, Clive North. Dave Speed on the surface later.

More clearing of The Rubicon. The slot was bridged over with slabs to prevent material from dropping down the “shaft”, and a large amount of small rocks and slurry were sent up by bucket to be stacked in an alcove on the right hand side of Maglite Grotto. Towards the end of the session, one of the large boulders in the floor settled slightly and a small hole appeared between this rock and the stal flow on the south wall. The stal is coating a rock and cobble matrix rather than a solid wall, and it is clear that further downward progress through what looks like a chaos of boulders is going to be somewhat problematic! Some falling stones seemed to roll down for at least twenty feet.

A bat was present in Advent Chamber.

Dave Speed carried out some fencing repairs following last Wednesday’s invasion of the Thrupe Lane depression by half a dozen steers.

**Wednesday 16 January 2002** - Simon Richards, Richard Witcombe, Dave Everett, Clive North, Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Tony Littler, Dave King, Elaine Johnson, Hugh Tucker

The evening was spent moving and clearing spoil from the Rubicon in the hope of finding a safe way downwards. With such a large workforce it was possible to haul spoil from digging face all the way up to the Advent side chamber. Some larger rocks were built into a retaining wall at the mouth of the Shale Pot passage which is now nearly full.

By the end of the evening the best option appeared to be the western end of the slot where a reasonably solid stal cemented southern wall faces a large and seemingly stable boulder. Access to a five feet drop is prevented by a stal or rock shelf which should succumb to a heavy hammer. The much shakier eastern end of the slot was backfilled with jammed rocks.

NB A bat was present in the roof of the Advent side chamber while dumping was taken place.

**Sunday 20 January 2002** - Richard Witcombe, Bob Cottle, Clive North

It took nearly half an hour’s hammering before the rock shelf was broken off, allowing BC to drop four feet into a hole amongst the boulders. To the south and west was an arc of stal covered rock with some good straws in various alcoves, but to the north and east there were only large blocks resting presumably on stream fill. CN replaced BC in the hole and began clearing some of the smaller rocks and cobbles, eventually uncovering a view of a small stream a few feet ahead dropping down under the south western wall. This could be the entrance stream.

The way on appears to drop for at least another six to eight feet, but several very large rocks in the floor will have to be removed before a proper assessment of prospects can be made.

**Wednesday 23 January 2002** - Dave Everett, Colin Rogers, Clive North, Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Dave King

After several days of heavy rain, the trickle of water running through the lower section of the dig was more of a streamlet.

The team cleared some of the clay and gravel overburden from the slope above the new drop, dumping the material in the Shale Pot passage. This passage was finally filled during the evening and walled off.

At the drop itself, a large slab was manoeuvred across the lip to prevent more stream debris from sliding over. It may form the base for a larger scale retaining wall.

The bat (species unknown) was still quietly asleep in the Advent side chamber.

**Sunday 27 January 2002** - Rob Taviner, John Hill, Bob Cottle, Richard Witcombe, Clive North

Heavy rain since Wednesday. The Thrupe Lane water was flowing into the adit and the streamlet in the lower reaches of Thrupe Swallet was almost of stream volume.

In very damp conditions, stream debris from above and below the Rubicon was moved into the upstream reaches of the bedding plane. Another large block was jammed around the lip of the drop, and some chockstones were inserted in the walls of the pot itself. The main stream below was very noisy, but it is still not possible to see where it goes.

Several large blocks now require banging, but first the stream flow will need to be diverted away from the drop.

**Wednesday 30 January 2002** - Clive North, Richard Witcombe, Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Pete Hellier, Dave King. Mark Lumley and Pat Cronin visited later.

Still very wet at the digging face. A plastic funnel, fabricated by DS from an old container, and a length of flexible hose were installed above the Rubicon "pot" to divert the stream around some straws and into the far end of the bedding plane where the water dropped away among the boulders.

In the much drier conditions, one large slab was brought up from below using a rope, and CN drilled two shotholes in another much bigger block, linking up the usual Cordtex charge to a single detonator.

The firing cable had been relaid to terminate in the small chamber in the dogleg passage below the entrance shaft from where CN unsuccessfully attempted to fire the charge using two battery packs. After a decent interval he went back down to the charge, checking the cable and joints for breaks or damage. Finding none, he replaced the last few feet of cable where it tends to get "chewed" and changed the detonator. He returned to the firing point but again, the charge refused to fire. CN had no option but to wait a further twenty minutes, and then return to the face to dismantle and bring out the charge. A new cable is clearly required.

**Sunday 3 February 2002** - Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Carmen Haslett, Dave Morrison, Clive North

Not unexpectedly, the recent spells of heavy rain have begun to cause problems underground.

On arrival at the threshold of Maglite Grotto, RT and RW were concerned to find that the stream had undermined the stone wall revetment causing the angle iron to drop down and threaten a major collapse.

Further on, a hole had appeared in front of the “Hammerhead” boulder at the head of the drop into The Rubicon, and the rock itself had settled by several inches, severing the stal connection on the right and destabilising the stacked boulders supporting it on the left. Down below, much stream debris had slid down to and over the “pot”.

The afternoon was spent trying to remedy the situation. The Hammerhead boulder seemed to be leaning securely against the cliff on the right and RW, with the assistance of RT, was able to gingerly build up the stone pile under the left side. The angle iron was then removed from the Maglite threshold, and a controlled collapse and a lengthy rearrangement were undertaken by RW. DM assisted in moving a large boulder into position into the new revetment.

CN meanwhile was rigging a new bang cable down through the cave. He visited the bitter end intending to lay a charge, but found that so much gravel had poured into the pot that the shotholes were totally obscured. As more debris was sliding down whenever anyone moved about above, it was decided to leave matters to settle down before any further digging or banging was attempted.

**Wednesday 6 February 2002** - Dave Everett, Richard Witcombe, Simon Richards, Rob Taviner, Dave Grosvenor, Dave King, Dave Speed

Despite moderate rain since Sunday, the repaired stonework was still intact and there had been no further movement of the Hammerhead boulder. More bracing walling was built in Maglite Grotto and some substantial rocks were installed in step fashion on the slope above the Rubicon drop. Inevitably most of the digging team had little or nothing to do.

**Sunday 10 February 2002** - Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Clive North, Bob Cottle, Tony Audsley

Still very wet underground, but no further rock movement. More steps were built into the Rubicon slope, and a large quantity of stream debris was brought up from the pot and distributed around the chamber.

**Wednesday 13 February 2002** - Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner. Dave Grosvenor later.

RW and RT carried four large rocks from the area below Advent Chamber down to Maglite Grotto in order to create more steps on the Rubicon slope. DG turned up as construction was about to begin. Step building was successfully completed but a gap remained between the top slab and the hanging rocks under the Hammerhead boulder.

On leaving the Rubicon, DG placed his foot on one of these rocks (!) and his 14 stone leverage brought the two to three hundredweight block crashing down onto the slope, followed by the dry stone wall on the left.

Luckily for those below, the rock landed on a flat side and did not roll on down the slope. DG pulled himself into Maglite Grotto unhurt. After a decent pause, RW and RT gingerly clambered up to inspect the Hammerhead. There appeared to be nothing holding the left hand side up. The two climbed very carefully up into Maglite Grotto, following which the floor of rocks on the north side of the Hammerhead dropped out.

It looked as though the Maglite threshold wall was also going to collapse but it held firm – for how long? One thing is now clear. The Hammerhead boulder is now in too dangerous a state to stay where it is. It will have to be levered down or possibly banded, and a new steep route engineered down into the Rubicon.

The diggers retreated thoughtfully from the scene.

**Wednesday 20 February 2002** - Dave Everett, Clive North, Richard Witcombe, Tony Audsley, Rob Taviner

Although there was still plenty of water flowing through the lower reaches of the cave, there had been no further collapse in Maglite Grotto. It was agreed by all that the Hammerhead boulder should be “dropped” by means of a small charge. This will probably precipitate yet another rockslide in the threshold.

CN drilled one short shothole on the right of the block and a longer one on the left, and linked the two Cordtex charges as usual. Meanwhile RW carried out running repairs to some of the stone walling, inserting a wooden prop across the crumbling face above the Maglite threshold and jamming more rocks into the 15' drop below Advent Chamber.

The charge was successfully fired from the chamber in the “dogleg” passage. There was a strong shockwave, but no sound of falling rocks.