

HONEYMEAD HOLE

Saturday 27 April 1996 - Dave Speed, Dave Morrison, Bob Cottle, Clive North, Ken Appleby, Pete Hann, Nigel Hellyar, Mark "Buddy" Williams, Richard Witcombe and various other visitors

A Hy Mac excavator, driven by "Slim", commenced digging at approximately 9 am in the shallow depression 200 yards south of Little Crapnell Swallet.

Deep trenching took place all around the depression encountering indeterminate rock faces at depths varying from 10' to 30'. The infill was a very consistent dry orange/brown loamy soil, with few loose rocks and only occasional patches of moisture.

Digging ceased at 7 pm with an irregular west facing north east/south west cliff uncovered but no cave passage found.

Sunday 28 April 1996 - Dave Speed, Bob Cottle, Clive North, Pete Hann, Nigel Hellyar, Mark "Buddy" Williams, Keith and Ros Fielder, Richard Witcombe and many other visitors

Digging recommenced at 9 am with further clearing of the cliff face. Some water erosion features were visible at the north end but no cavities were seen. A solid rock floor sloping at the angle of dip (approx 25 degrees) was encountered at a depth of 20' and followed down to 25' to a point where the main cliff appeared to meet a more broken area of rock at right angles.

DS and RW descended to investigate the possibility of rift development at this junction. Nothing was found in the rock angle, but the removal of a few rocks in the broken rock face by DS revealed a small draughting hole about five feet above the floor. More slabs were pulled off the face and an irregular rift passage some 2' wide by 3' high was uncovered. It appeared to be choked by broken slabs after 8', but the presence of cobbles and a film of mud were clear evidence of a former streamway.

PH ventured inside to report reasonable possibilities of digging into the choked floor, and a decision was reached to safeguard the hole and backfill the excavation.

The entrance was encircled by dry stone walling to a height of 6' before a halt was called at 6 pm.

W/c 29 April 1996

Clive North and Dave Speed investigated the area of water eroded rock at the north end of the rock face, but heavy rain caused slumping before any conclusions were reached.

Wednesday 1 May 1996 - "Slim" the Hy Mac driver, Dave Speed, Pete Hann, Nigel Hellyar, "Buddy" Williams, Richard Witcombe, plus a large contingent of NHASA members (Dave Turner and Don Thomson stayed to the bitter end). Dave Morrison and Graham Bromley arrived very late.

After clearing slumped mud from around the walled hole, an RSJ beam was placed across the unstable southern "cliff" face, resting on a slab on the right and jammed into a cleft on the left. The first 2' deep concrete ring was manoeuvred into position on the wall and beam by the Hy Mac, and then surrounded by dry stone walling.

More rings were added with periodic backfilling and walling. The rings used were offcuts with no joint lips, and to keep the butt ends in place, three 4" wide sections of RSJ were fitted over the top rim to link with the pipe above.

As darkness fell, a drizzle started, but work continued by the light of caving lamps and the headlights of Dave Speed's Teleshift farm loader. By 10.30 the eighth and last ring was put into place, and a halt was called to proceedings.

NB Jim Hanwell looked at the red rocks from Little Crapnell Swallet and pronounced them to be Triassic sandstone. The entrance rift is developed in a Neptunian dyke.

Saturday 4 May 1996 - AM: Clive North, Dave Speed

Dug out the eroded rock face but found no passage.

PM: "Slim", Dave Speed, Ken Appleby, Richard Witcombe. "Buddy" Williams and Nigel Hellyar continued digging at Resurrection Hole (Upper Crapnell Sink).

The crater was backfilled by Hy Mac and Teleshift, while KA and RW cleared the ground of stones. The ground surface was reinstated by 5 pm.

RW went below by electron ladder, and investigated the short section of passage. Both the back and floor are choked with blocks and debris but the air was fresh. The roof, in part leaning slabs, will have to be treated with care.

Wednesday 8 May 1996 - Dave Speed, Kate Powell, Dave Morrison, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe. Later joined by Martin Ellis (SMCC)

With the aid of the Teleshift, placed a series of very large limestone slabs around the lip of the shaft and set up the winch.

NB One of the large slabs had some Triassic sandstone adhering to it - another Neptunian dyke.

Later in the week DS chain harrowed the backfill to improve its contours, and picked several hundredweights of stones from the ground surface.

Sunday 12 May 1996 - Dave Speed, Clive North, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe

Commenced the underground dig. Initially mud which had dropped in during the backfilling exercise was sent up by a solo digger, but once the jammed boulder threshold to the cave had been cleaned off, a second digger went into the passage and started clearing out mud, fallen slabs and a few cobbles.

A total of fifty buckets were sent to the surface, and dumped directly into the bucket of DS's Teleshift.

A number of small holes were opened up in the floor of the 8' long passage, from which a slight draught seemed to emanate. The left hand wall appears to be undercut bedrock, while the right hand side consists of at least very large slabs or possibly slumped bedding.

W/c 13 May 1996 - Dave Speed

Fabricated and fitted a steel gate with spring loaded hinges.

Wednesday 15 May 1996 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Clive North, Richard Witcombe and a NHASA contingent - John Hill, Eric Dunford and John Ham contributed significantly. Dave Morrison arrived much later.

Cleared mud and a large amount of rock from the passage - a total of thirty loads.

By the end of the evening, the left hand wall was revealed as an undercut collection of large, probably loose, bedding slabs, while overhead a nearly horizontal slab 4' by 2' by 18" seemed to be suspended by a pile of stones at the far end and a pinched 9" cube of rock sitting on a 2" ledge at the near end. The floor consisted of large rocks with small holes emitting a slight draught, down which stones rattled on for 5' or so.

An tricky shoring operation will have to be carried out beneath the hanging slab, before a safe route downwards can be pursued.

Sunday 19 May 1996 - Dave Speed, Bob Cottle, Rob Taviner

Very heavy rain. Continued careful digging in the floor of the passage, raising five loads.

Wednesday 22 May 1996 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe, Martin Ellis, Nigel Hellyar, "Buddy" Williams

Following days of heavy rain, some settlement had occurred and water was ponded in the centre of the depression. DS found that his spring loaded hinges had sunk and had to remove them in order to get the lid on. At the foot of the shaft, beneath the rings, several large rocks had split under compression and some smaller stones had been squeezed out of the wall. A concrete and stone revetment will have to be built for greater security.

Eight loads were brought out during the evening, including one very large slab. GB bruised a finger quite badly guiding this rock out of the passage.

The scene in the digging chamber is now decidedly uninviting. The roof slab still hangs precariously and both "walls" appear to be little more than stacks of free slabs, some large some not. The floor comprises mud and large rocks which partly underpin the "walls". At one point a low passage of sorts can be seen beneath a slab, but it may be no more than a washed out hole amongst the rocks.

Some form of shoring will have to be devised or the cave will become undiggable on safety grounds.

Sunday 26 May 1996 - Graham Bromley, Bob Cottle, Dave Speed. Richard Witcombe visited later.

A section of RSJ and a piece of telegraph pole were inserted across the passage in the form of a St Andrews' Cross, the ends resting on the best of the poor ledges available. A longer section of pole was laid longways beneath the roof slab resting on the RSJ at the near end and a small stack of rocks at the choked end.

Three loads of rock and mud were brought out.

Wednesday 29 May 1996 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe, Clive North

A tractor driven cement mixer was brought over, and RW commenced concrete and rock walling underground.

The crossways pole was cemented into its ledges, and a short section of wall built onto the slabs at the back of it to reach the ceiling boulder. Various other cracks in the left hand wall were grouted.

Work then shifted to the chamber beneath the pipes where a gap in the left hand threshold was filled in and a substantial buttress constructed to support the pressure cracked rocks on the right. A good deal of stone had to be sent down from the surface!

Sunday 2 June 1996 - Dave Speed (bad knee), Ken Appleby (bad back), Richard Witcombe, Clive North, Dave Morrison (bad arm)

The able bodied minority went below to continue gingerly removing mud and rocks from the near end floor of the dig.

There were no solid walls to be seen, just large slabs and shifting smaller material. The area under the threshold and under the floor of the pipe chamber was found to be full of holes but very dangerous to dig. The stability of the threshold depends on a single jammed block.

It was decided that to make any further progress, one of the boulders would have to be banged, but unfortunately most looked to be mutually supportive. Whilst cleaning off a large, relatively free standing block on the right, a tiny passage was opened up heading horizontally beneath a bedding roof for 8' or 10' in a south westwards direction. A second slot descended towards the threshold area.

The block itself was eventually declared non-load bearing, and the decision was made to risk a very small bang. CN duly laid and fired a half slab of plaster. Thankfully the crack of the explosion was not followed by any other rumblings.

In total, ten loads were raised to the surface including two trussed rocks.

Wednesday 5 June 1996 - "Buddy" Williams, Nigel Hellyar, Martin Ellis, Richard Witcombe

CN's bang had neatly split the boulder with no apparent collateral damage. The blocks were stacked out of the way, and four buckets of mud and small rocks were sent to the surface. This clearing work showed the south west "passage" to be little more than a gap in the boulders. The best prospects still seem to be in the floor.

Sunday 9 June 1996 - Bob Cottle, Clive North, Richard Witcombe plus a number of visitors

A good many rocks were carefully removed from the floor area, and stacked at the back of the chamber beneath the shoring beams. Some of the larger blocks had to be sledged.

Five buckets of mud were then sent to the surface. A few more slabs were shifted to reveal a 5' drop between a reasonably stable left hand wall and a less secure right hand wall. The floor area was loosely choked.

One of the floor blocks was selected for part demolition and CN laid and fired a one slab charge.

Wednesday 12 June 1996 - Graham Bromley, Dave Speed, Clive North, Richard Witcombe. "Buddy" Williams assisted later.

Combined digging and walling evening. DS provided concrete and haulage from the surface while RW continued revetment walling at the foot of the concrete rings and simultaneously, GB assisted by CN continued excavating the shaft below the threshold.

CN's bang had done little damage, but by shifting mud and some large blocks GB was able to make careful downwards progress for 3' or 4'. The left hand wall is reasonable continuous and solid, but the right hand side remains a nightmarish jumble of jammed blocks. Various tiny cross rifts and small holes appeared but there is an urgent need for shoring of some sort.

Eight loads were taken to the surface including two large, trussed rocks. Other rocks were incorporated into the concrete walling.

Wednesday 19 June 1996 - Dave Morrison, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe, assisted later by "Buddy" Williams and Nigel Hellyar. Dave Speed and Kate Powell visited.

Further judicious excavation of the rift, followed by an attempt to remotely "re-arrange" some of the bottom boulders using the winch cable. Small collapses resulted leaving some of the rocks barely supported.

The draught emanating from the floor was as strong as usual and stones dropped into small holes rattled away for 8' to 10'.

Eight loads were sent to the surface.

Sunday 23 June 1996 - Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe, Paul Stillman, Len Coltham, plus several visitors

A 4' length of steel angle was concreted across the rift beneath the main threshold boulder and various cracked walls were infilled. More concrete and rock walling was built into the bottom of the entrance shaft.

PS took a few photos.

Wednesday 26 June 1996 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe

Combined grouting and digging evening.

RW sealed up various gaps in boulders with concrete, while GB examined the digging face. A section of steel U channel was inserted across the rift beneath one of key upper chamber boulders, after which GB proceeded to dig back under the upper chamber in a generally south westerly direction, following a reasonably solid left hand wall. By the end of the session, a narrow - perhaps one foot wide - open rift could be seen ahead. Stones dropped down it seemed to fall for 15' or so. More clearing work will be needed to reach it safely.

The section of the dig below the pipes has been christened Concrete Showers by GB who is usually on the receiving end of surplus grout.

Seven loads were sent to the surface, including several large rocks, but all small rocks were incorporated into the grouting.

Sunday 30 June 1996 - Graham Bromley, Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe. Dave Morrison and various Wessex visitors arrived later.

Cleared rocks and a small amount of mud from the threshold of the open rift. A small void below the floor was uncovered which almost certainly connects with the rift but a large flake of rock prevented access. Some sections of the flake were removed by hand but the remainder will require heavy chiselling or bang.

The cold draught is very encouraging although the right hand side of the threshold is not very stable and the rift may not be quite mansized. Stones thrown down seem to drop about ten feet.

Six loads were sent to the surface including three large rocks. Much other material was stockpiled for walling underground.

Wednesday 3 July 1996 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe, assisted by half a dozen NHASA members

Attempted unsuccessfully to break up the large flake with chisel and sledgehammer - it will require bang. Some surrounding rocks were broken up and seven loads of mud and rock were sent to the surface.

The rift ahead can now be seen to drop away at a steep angle for about ten feet but it only six inches or so wide. More intriguing is a hole off to the right. Stones can be thrown through this and sound as though they are dropping five or six feet into a void.

Friday 5 July 1996 - Aubrey Newport, Dave Speed, Graham Bromley

Drilled two small shotholes in the large flake of rock and fired a Cordtex only charge. The fumes came quickly out of the shaft and cleared in five minutes.

Inspection revealed a nicely shattered rock and no collateral damage.

Sunday 7 July 1996 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe, Clive North, plus various visitors

Combined digging and grouting session.

The shattered rock was cleared, and the digging face area generally cleaned up. There is a possibly man-sized rift five feet off to the right but access is prevented by various inter-dependant slabs. Careful demolition and walling will be necessary.

Eight loads including one large piece of rock were sent to the surface.

Wednesday 10 July 1996 - Afternoon: Clive North, Dave Speed

Drilled three shotholes and fired a split, one stick charge in two of them - right hand wall and a block in the floor. The fumes were slower to emerge than on the last occasion.

Evening: Dave Speed, Clive North, Dave Morrison, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe

Cleared the bang debris and used much of it in grouted walling in the lower section of the dig. The slabs preventing access to the right hand rift still cannot be moved or banded safely. The whole mass may have to be cemented together before a route is "cut" through. For the time being excavation will continue in the floor of the boulder strewn main rift.

Five loads were sent to the surface including a large rock.

Wednesday 17 July 1996 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Dave Morrison, Bob Cottle, Paul Stillman, Richard Witcombe

Continued clearing bang debris in the main rift and lowering the floor. Stream gravels and small cobbles were encountered and a possible lower route into the right hand rift was uncovered. A large slab will have to be banded to gain access but it looks a safer option than the higher level route.

Twelve loads were sent to the surface including two rocks.

Sunday 22 July 1996 - Noon - Clive North, Graham Bromley

Drilled two shotholes in the large slab and fired a one stick charge.

Afternoon - Graham Bromley, Bob Cottle, Paul Stillman, Len Coltham, Richard Witcombe, Clive North

The bang had virtually demolished the boulder and GB started clearing a way through to the rift.

Much of the shattered rock was incorporated by RW into grouted walling in the rift above the digging face. Judging by a crack

in some earlier concrete, one large wall block had slumped slightly probably as a result of the bang. It was "picked up" by more concrete walling.

In due course, GB crawled through a 5' connection under the right hand wall into a short section of open, man-sized rift. While he evaluated the passage - Doubting Thomas Rift - RW grouted around and beneath a large suspended block at the threshold to the crawl.

GB reported a steeply descending rift passage parallel to Concrete Showers. Stream debris - eroded rocks and cobbles - partially blocked the way ahead but stones could be rolled for about 10' into what may be a small chamber. To the left was a too tight entrance to another rift which seemed to be deeper. Upstream and overhead were chokes of loose slabs.

After visits by RW, RC and CN, GB crawled a little further down the main rift and noted a cross rift ahead.

A major clearing session will take place next Wednesday.

Six loads were sent to the surface.

Wednesday 24 July 1996 - Dave Speed, Nick Speed, Kate Powell, Paul Stillman, Clive North, Bob Cottle, Dave Morrison, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe

After photographic sessions in Doubting Thomas, GB cleared a small amount of stream debris and crawled on down the rift to emerge after 15' in a small bedding plane chamber, 20' long by 10' wide and 3' to 6' high. Halfway down the chamber was a hole in the floor, partly filled with loose rocks and without an obvious way on. The chamber terminated below an area of roof collapse in a mud choke with a fine stal flow above it. To the right was a man sized inlet passage fringed with further stal.

The rest of the party came through to the chamber, and after more photographs, GB shed his boiler suit and crawled carefully into the inlet passage. It rose parallel to the main passage, terminating after 30' in a choke.

The draught was detected emerging from a small hole in the terminal choke and an hour's digging through collapse material of mud, rock and broken stal revealed a reasonably solid left hand wall and some evidence of a passage continuing under the stal flow. Spoil was dumped further up the chamber.

Meanwhile, GB tackled the narrow rift to the left of Doubting Thomas. He struggled 6' down Barbecue Rift but was stopped by slabs which would probably require bang to shift.

The party adjourned to the Hunter's, well satisfied with the night's work. The decorated, slab strewn chamber was christened Slab House - Kate Powell works in the Slab House pub restaurant.

Sunday 28 July 1996 - Dave Speed, Clive North, Rob Taviner, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe

Continued digging the terminal choke, excavating a wide pit in search of the way on and dumping a large quantity of glutinous mud, rock, cobbles and broken stal in the top right hand corner of the chamber. By the end of the session, a possible way on was uncovered through stal cemented rocks, but with the pit now 6' deep, the stability of the rubble and mud walls is looking rather fragile.

Wednesday 31 July 1996 - Dave Speed, Kate Powell, Paul Stillman, Bob Cottle, Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe

Further digging in the terminal pit, dumping larger rocks in the top corner of the chamber and mud in the hole in the floor.

After half an hour, holes began to appear beneath the digger's feet and stones fell away into what sounded like a sizeable void. DS was working alongside what he took to be a safely stal cemented mass of rock when it collapsed with a roar into an open 15' to 20' deep rift. Other stones slid off the walls of the pit and a very serious collapse looked imminent. DM took over digging but soon retreated after another noisy collapse. All of the party withdrew to a higher part of the chamber to await developments.

Further minor rock falls occurred, but after a quarter of an hour, GB decided that the worst was over and gingerly clambered down the rift. He reached a rubble slope after 10' and proceeded steeply downwards under a very unstable roof until he reached a too tight left corner obstructed with stream debris.

On his return he crawled round a slab in the rift floor and entered an ascending rift with a pot on his right hand side. The rift had a good voice connection with the hole in the floor of the upper part of Slab House, and continued upwards to a choke.

GB free climbed the 15' deep pot to meet a further rubble choke in a descending bedding plane and a tiny trickle of water.

No one else felt inclined to follow GB's footsteps and a halt was called to the night's activities. A further 30' of depth had been gained, giving the cave an overall depth of perhaps 90' to 100', and another 60' of passage explored, making of total of 160' to 180'.

Some very careful shoring and stabilisation around the new rift will be necessary if exploration is to continue without serious risk to life and limb.

Sunday 4 August 1996 - Dave Speed, Paul Stillman, Bob Cottle, Graham Bromley, Dave Morrison, Rob Taviner, "Buddy" Williams, Richard Witcombe, Simon Meade-King

Further examination of the loose rift to consider shoring options. It looked a long and difficult task, and GB and RT therefore went below to check for possible upstream connections with the upper hole in the floor of Slab House and with Barbecue Rift. The hole certainly connects with the rift below but in between there is a dangerous chaos of large boulders perhaps 15' deep. Barbecue Rift seems too far to the left and no voices could be detected. GB examined a promising inlet rift opposite the pot but this appeared to be beneath the top right hand corner of Slab House where there is no obvious way on in the floor.

With other options ruled out, it was reluctantly concluded that the main rift would have to be shored and made safe. It was decided to bridge the upper end of the rift with a section of RSJ and build up a buttress of concrete and stone to hold back the sliding walls. The overhanging loose material at the lower end of the rift may require some form of scaffolding support as to collapse it would jeopardise the stal flows directly above.

The rest of the afternoon was spent grouting the lower parts of Concrete Showers. PS took a series of photographs in Slab House.

Wednesday 7 August 1996 - Dave Speed, Bob Cottle, Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe

Started the stabilisation of the Slab House rift.

Two 6' lengths of steel angle and concrete making ingredients were carried down to the chamber. The two angles were laid across the upper end of the rift as a channel piece and rock slabs were placed on top and concreted into the loose back wall. This "safety roof" will be built up further to create a solid concrete matrix across the rift and dry stone walling will be added to hold back loose material. A small amount of concrete was inserted into one of the unstable corners at the bottom end of the rift, but more shoring will be needed at a lower level.

A bolt was placed in the left hand wall of Slab House to allow a ladder to be used in the rift.

While this work was under way, GB and RT went below to enlarge the crawl access to the lower rift and 15' pot. The latter is becoming an awkward free climb as the footholds are crumbling and walls getting muddy. Some trial digging was carried out in the bedding plane choke below the pot. The stream fill is a mixture of mud, cobbles and rocks, but at least one of the slabs and a roof flake will need banging. Dumping space is limited and most spoil will have to be hauled up the pot and dumped in the upstream rift.

Sunday 11 August 1996 - Bob Cottle, Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner

The heavy rainfall of the morning was still falling when the diggers went underground.

More steel angle and concrete was taken down to Slab House but before resuming shoring work, the party visited the lower series. A small stream was falling from then inlet in the roof and running "upstream" to pour down the 15' pot. This was descended with the aid of a handline. The way on is low and squalid but emits a slight draught and shows no sign of water back up.

Two short sections of steel were wedged as a T piece in the lower part of the Slab House rift, and a concrete and stone roof was built up on top. This structure when complete will protect the caver from further minor roof falls.

More work was also done on the upper roofwork.

Wednesday 14 August 1996 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner, Mark "Gonzo" Lumley, "Buddy" Williams, Nigel Hellyar, Paul Stillman

No stream was running.

Commenced the clearance of the choked passage below the 15' Pot. Spoil was hauled up the pot and dumped in the "redundant" upstream rift. The passage was low, muddy and squalid, but by negotiating around various large slabs and ridges of rock, 6' to 8' of progress was made. Ahead, rocks could be pushed into what looks to be a reasonably open section of rift passage.

Sunday 18 August 1996 - Graham Bromley, Paul Stillman, Deborah Morgenstern, Nigel Helyar, Rob Taviner, Clive North, Richard Witcombe

PS took more photographs and RW taped the formations in Slab House and tidied up the spoil tips in the chamber.

GB, NH, RT and CN continued clearing the passage below the pot. At least one slab will need to be banged to improve working conditions but a sinuous, narrow open passage lies ahead, emitting a cool draught.

Wednesday 21 August 1996 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner, Mark Lumley, Paul Stillman, Richard Witcombe

Continued clearing the lower passage. A dozen or so half filled buckets of brown slurry and cobbles were hauled out and dumped in the upper rift. ML did some sketching.

Sunday 25 August 1996 - Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman, Richard Witcombe. Mark Lumley came underground later.

Despite two or three days of very heavy rain showers, there was no evidence of any significant stream having flowed in the upper cave. The showerbath below Slab House was running but at a lower level than on 11 August.

Water had washed out the digging face a little, and RT was able to remove one of the key rocks in the floor. After the clearance of some gravel and cobbles using a rope hauled skip taken down for the purpose, RT was able to crawl forward and peer around the first bend of the open rift passage. He could look about 10' along a slightly descending rift passage, some 2' 6" high but very narrow - not man-sized without banging or the removal of some ledges by hammer. At the far end there appeared to be a puddle of water.

The first corner of the open passage will require bang to allow a proper inspection of the way on, but one of the large slabs in the approach passage was repositioned more conveniently using a rope and muscle power.

ML had joined the party at this stage, and he went to inspect the possible dig down dip of the Slab House pitch while PS took some photos of the 15' Pot. ML cleared a way down to the left hand bend previously reported by GB but he was unable to see around it.

Later in the afternoon, Clive North arrived with bang and went below with Rob Taviner. CN placed linked charges around the constriction in the lower passage - left hand wall, right hand wall and an awkward ridge of rock in the floor, a total of two and a half slabs - and fired from the bottom of the entrance shaft.

Wednesday 28 August 1996 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner, Mark Lumley, Paul Stillman, Clive North, Richard Witcombe

GB, RT and ML went to the digging face and cleared the debris from a very effective bang. The passage ahead continues for 3' to 4' as a tall, very narrow rift to a left hand bend. A small "tiger" might be able to

force it with a lump hammer, but in the interests of larger and older cavers it was decided to blow off one of the walls using shotholes and Cordtex.

The rest of the team added to the concrete and rock bridge above Slab House rift. DS looked at the down dip end of the rift but pronounced the passage around the bend to be miserably tight.

Sunday 1 September 1996 - AM: Clive North, Graham Bromley

Drilled a small diameter shothole in the right hand wall of the terminal passage but had to give up before maximum depth was reached owing to a flat battery. Cordtex was inserted in the shothole and a slab was placed on the opposite wall. The linked charge was fired from Slab House.

PM: Graham Bromley, Bob Cottle, Mark Lumley, Richard Witcombe

Strong bang fumes in evidence all the way through the cave.

Chiselled and cleared the shattered rock from the bang, dumping still in the upstream passage above the pot. The left hand bend was no more than a dog leg in a basically straight passage. GB was able to crawl a few feet along the very narrow 6' high rift and could see beyond a small drop for a further 10' or so. The former "corner" will need further banging to allow the narrow rift to be attacked with a lump hammer.

BC was lucky to avoid being hit when a large rock fell out of a bucket on its way up the 15' Pot, and RW had a similar close call when a medium sized rock dropped down the Slab House rift as he was negotiating the muddy crawl.

Wednesday 4 September 1996 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner, Mark Lumley, Clive North, Paul Stillman, Richard Witcombe

While RT went ahead to inspect the terminal passage, GB, DS, CN, PS and RW commenced a trial dig at the bottom of Slab House rift, dumping mud, small rocks and cobbles in a hole in the floor of Slab House. ML meanwhile, started clearing the slurry from the far side of the adjacent wallow.

After about 15 minutes, reports came back that RT was forcing the terminal squeeze. In due course, ML and GB joined him in exploring about 100' of significant passage.

The squeeze gave access to a cross rift with a sizeable rift chamber, some 20' high by 10' wide and 15' long, off to the right. At the back of the chamber was a squeeze and a tight pitch which was not descended. Several inlets entered the chamber, including a large passage in the roof.

To the left of the breakthrough point a climb down an 6' pot led to a 20' section of 3' by 3' T section canyon passage, ending in another pitch, this one roomy after a narrow top section and at least 20' deep. At the head of the pot was a fine grotto, and to the right a descending man-sized phreatic tube. Pot and passage were left for exploration by the full team at the weekend.

When the full news of the breakthrough reached the Slab House party, work halted on the rift dig. The clearing of the wallow was completed and CN went down to the breakthrough passage to lay a two thirds of a stick charge on one of the remnant corner buttresses. He fired from Slab House.

The party retired to the Hunter's to celebrate and agreed to name the rift chamber, Somerville Hall, in recognition of the Dinder Estates landowner, Commander Somerville.

Saturday 7 September 1996 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Clive North

GB examined a tiny continuation of the Slab House rift just below the lower steel shoring. After crawling in for 4' or so he negotiated a dog leg bend to the right and noted a diggable way on.

CN laid a one stick "slab" charge on a block on the corner of the lower passage, firing from Slab House as usual.

Sunday 8 September 1996 - Graham Bromley, Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Mark Lumley, Bob Cottle, Paul Stillman, Clive North, Richard Witcombe. Dave Morrison and John Hill arrived much later.

GB started early to further enlarge the squeezes in the lower passage and to put in a bolt above the new pitch.

RT and ML further enlarged the final squeeze enabling DS, RW, BC and PS to successfully negotiate it and assemble in Somerville Hall and the canyon passage beyond. CN could not manage the last section of the rift and retired to clear bang debris from the approaches.

The rift at the back of Somerville Hall was examined by RT who described it as a meandering, descending rift rather than a pitch. Beyond a constriction which might succumb to determined hammering, it appeared to get a little larger.

After DS had hammered off a constriction at the top of the 6' pot, all the party stacked up in the canyon passage to await GB's first descent of the pitch.

Finally the bolt was pronounced adequate and with an additional tether belay to a rock, 25' of ladder was lowered into the depths.

GB climbed down the slot in front of the grotto and after a few feet emerged in a roomy pot belling out below him. The ladder at first lay against crumbly shale ledges but later hung free of a good limestone wall. Half way down GB saw that the ladder did not reach the floor and he came back up to add a second ladder.

He bottomed the pot after the first few rungs of the second ladder and stepped onto a flat gravelly floor, some 8' in diameter. A narrow horizontal rift passage with good formations in the roof led off at right angles to the ladder.

After ML, RT and RW had joined him at the bottom, GB led the way along the rift while DS, BC and PS made their descents. After 15' the passage turned sharp right at a stal coated run in and ended in a partial choke. GB and RT cleared some rock to expose a tight, winding rift dropping away and a visible but not accessible up-dip passage. Despite some lump hammering (and a bloody finger for GB) no further progress could be made in the downstream direction.

The party returned to the top of the pot where ML, GB, RT, DS and PS investigated the phreatic passage to the right of the pitch head. After passing with care various holes in the jammed rock floor connecting with the pot below, ML crawled along a mud floor to a point some 20' in where a step down increased the passage size to walking height. Ten feet further on the ceiling rose and the floor dropped dramatically away to reveal an 8' wide, perhaps 40' deep pitch. From the balcony like vantage point, fine formations could be seen on the opposite wall. After sightseeing by the rest of the group, an attempt was made to place a bolt but after problems with the kit, the descent was left for another day.

Meanwhile, RW and BC had joined CN and DM taking bang debris up the 15' Pot. JH arrived to lend a helping hand.

As a parting shot, CN laid a charge on an awkward slab at the entrance to the passage below the 15' Pot. This nearly did not happen as CN placed the bang down on a safe spot in the passage and then could not find it. He had abandoned the search and was about to climb the pot when he noticed the slab sticking to the knee of his oversuit! The charge was eventually fired from Doubting Thomas rift.

The total passage length is now estimated at 350' and the depth 150'.

Wednesday 11 September 1996 - Dave Speed, Mark Lumley, Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley, Paul Stillman, Clive North, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe and John Hill, Eric Dunford, Brian Prewer, John Ham, Albert Francis, Jonathan and Rose Riley from NHASA

JH (Ham) and AF stayed on the surface to help dig a trench from the lowest point of the depression out to the entrance shaft. A soakaway and pipework will be installed in order to drain the stagnant water which has been hanging around on the compacted clay after heavy rain.

RW meanwhile, assisted by JH (Hill) and others from the NHASA team, installed and grouted in two 4' sections of steel angle, laid together as a channel, beneath a projecting and largely unsupported slab at the down dip end of the Slab House rift.

Various NHASA tourist trips were made to the Watershed and 15' Pot area where CN, DM and ED were clearing out bang debris from the lower passage.

The main party, ML, RT, GB, PS and DS, went through to the unclimbed shaft. After the bolting had been sorted out, DS descended first, getting off the ladder at a depth of about 20'. Several ways on were open.

From the foot of the ladder, a 5' climb led down to a remarkable stooping height passage, partly carved out of red sandstone filling a presumed Triassic Neptunian dyke. It trended to the right and after a sharp left hand bend, passed under a chamber with an horrendous choke of boulders overhead. Beyond was a choked rift and a short climb leading down to a too tight passage. Passage length of Blood Alley totalled about 40'.

At the same level as the approach phreatic tunnel was a continuation rift passage, reached by an easy traverse passing close to fine formations. Thirty feet further on, the rift opened into a small mud chamber with pure white formations on the right hand side and in a pit in the floor. The 15' long chamber ended in a mud choke just beyond a blind, 5' deep, mud walled pot. Overhead is an impossibly tight but high rift suggesting that this is a significant fossil route.

GB climbed above this passage to reach a third level. A tube went back over the approach passage and in the other direction an ascending passage led to an opening into a chamber which was not entered. Stones dropped into it fell through a hole in the floor into the middle passage. GB hung a ladder down from the top of the climb belaying it to a somewhat doubtful piece of stal.

Altogether about 150' of passage was explored with several leads still to be pushed.

Sunday 15 September 1996 - Dave Speed, Clive North, Rob Taviner, Bob Cottle, Richard Witcombe

CN and DS drilled two shotholes on the left hand side of the problem corner in the long crawl below the 15' Pot, and then retired to the surface.

RT, BC and RW went through to the new series below the 20' pitch - Balcony Pot. After looking briefly at Blood Alley, they examined the terminal choke in the middle level passage. Above much of this passage, a narrow, too tight rift soars up to a height of 15' to 25', and at the point of the choke it appears to be significantly wider at the top with a continuation beyond.

Digging in the mud choke soon revealed draughty spaces between stal coated rocks, and after an hour's work, a low way on could be seen. It stretched ahead for about 10' as a slightly inclined bedding plane over a stal and rocky floor until a levelling out and possible rise in the roof. Further clearance of the floor debris will be necessary to permit entry.

Spoil was dumped in the mud pot in the floor just before the dig.

Tragically but inevitably many of the stal wall flows in the narrow rift are becoming irretrievably muddied with the passage of bodies.

Wednesday 18 September 1996 - Dave Speed, Kate Powell, Rob Taviner, Mark Lumley, Graham Bromley, Paul Stillman, Vernon and Rosie Freeman, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe, Eric Dunford

Alongside general sightseeing visits, further exploration work took place in the rifts beyond Balcony Pot.

The middle passage dig was opened up sufficiently by RT and ML to allow a flat out crawl into the first 6' of a tiny 10' long passage. There was a small hole beyond a white grotto, but it did not look promising enough to justify destruction of the stal.

RT and ML examined a rift above Blood Alley which after "gardening" gave access to a void above the hanging boulders -Neptune's Hall. It is heading back up to the right, possibly in the direction of Somerville Hall. The "floor" looks too dangerous to cross but it may be possible to make a bolt traverse around one wall.

Meanwhile GB placed a bolt at the top of his rift climb and re-rigged the ladder. RW ascended to help with gardening around the entrance to the high level chamber. In due course GB, lifelined by RT, crossed the chamber around the left hand wall avoiding a hole in the floor connecting with the passages below, and reached a landing with a narrow but man-sized rift continuing downwards beneath good formations. In the roof off to the right is a large inlet passage.

Sunday 22 September 1996 - Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley, Dave Morrison, Keith and Ros Fielder, Aubrey Newport, Martin Ellis, Nigel Hellyar, Clive North

A mixture of sightseeing and working trips.

ME, assisted by NH, completed a quick line survey of the cave, which is now approximately 550' long.

Below Balcony Pot, stal cleaning was carried out at the far end of the middle passage - christened Kate's Calamity after some accidental muddying of a white flow last Wednesday.

The far end of the long squeeze was opened up a little more using hammer and chisel, and the way on at the back of Somerville Hall was examined again. It will require at least one bang.

CN, accompanied by DS on his second trip of the day, laid and fired a charge on the corner in the long squeeze.

GB's high level route has been named The Gods.

Wednesday 25 September 1996 - Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Mark Lumley, Graham Bromley, Dave Morrison, Paul Stillman, Richard Witcombe

DS, DM, PS and RW cleared back the bang debris and stacked it at the back of the Watershed. The corner is no more.

Meanwhile, ML, accompanied by RT and GB, tackled a 15' climb up into the roof passage of Somerville Hall, finding that it degenerated into two impassable inlets.

Moving on to The Gods, GB traversed along 20' of narrow rift passage beyond the chamber. It was well decorated in places but terminated in an almost complete stal blockage. Finally, GB entered Neptune's Hall by means of a bold step onto some very risky boulders. The Hall is a smooth walled chamber 15' high, 10' wide and 15' long with a disappointingly small, choked passage in the end wall.

Apart from the roof inlet in The Gods, all high level leads have now been eliminated. Attention will now turn to the two lowest points in the cave - the passage below Keen's Pot and the bottom of Blood Alley.

Sunday 29 September 1996 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner, Mark Lumley, Tony Boycott,

Richard Witcombe

Five 4' to 5' lengths of aluminium maypole were taken down the cave and erected in The Gods to gain access to the roof inlet. A ladder was hung from four sections of pole and GB and RT climbed 15' to explore a 50' long ascending bedding plane with a further steeply climbing extension through boulders visible around a corner.

Meanwhile, RW and DS completed a concrete retaining wall at the head of the Slab House rift, and ML and TB drilled two shotholes in the impassable terminal rift below Keen's Pot.

Joined by RW, GB and RT later examined the 10' pot at the end of Blood Alley. Some floor debris was dug out from the too tight continuation passage, but solid rock was soon encountered and any further progress will require banging.

On the way out, RT noticed a stal coated rift in the roof of the phreatic passage just beyond the head of Keen's Pot.

TB fired the Keen's Pot charge of Cordtex linked to a plaster slab from Somerville Hall.

Wednesday 2 October 1996 - Mark Lumley, Tony Boycott, Rob Taviner, Dave Speed, Paul Stillman, Tony Littler, Mark Helmore, Graham Bromley, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe

A mix of tourist and working trips.

The bang of 29 September below Keen's Pot was, as expected, of limited effect because of the hardness of the rock and TB and ML drilled a further shothole 18" long.

RT climbed the rift in the roof of the phreatic passage but it closed down after 6' or so.

GB and RW made for The Gods to conduct a voice connection test between the roof inlet and Barbecue Rift. RW's climb was uneventful but as GB reached the top of the ladder, the bolt pulled out, leaving the ladder held only on the traverse rope belayed to a small rock projection in the the adjacent chamber.

GB went up into the inlet, pushing 6' beyond his previous limit, and tried shouting and listening. He heard only vague distant hammering.

Attempts to rig up an alternative ladder belay point using one of the aluminium poles were unsuccessful, and RW and GB had no option but to trust the rope belay for the ladder descent. Both used the rift walls instead of the rungs whenever possible and came safely down the pitch.

On the way out GB noted a possible inlet above the 6' pot below Somerville Hall.

Meanwhile RT climbed 10' up into the rift above the 15' Pot, to find 35' of roomy bedding plane ending in chokes after a fork.

DS and DM spent most of the evening digging in the floor of Slab House Rift, stacking rocks at the lower end. The choked rift is 2' to 3' wide at this point and may give access to a third deep point.

TB fired his charge from Somerville Hall.

Sunday 6 October 1996 - Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman, Bob Cottle, Richard Witcombe, Dave Morrison

While DS and RW continued the concrete and stone walling at the foot of the entrance shaft, RC and RT went down to Balcony Pot to clean some of the stal muddied by climbing. The spray pump clogged before the task was completed.

PS and RT made further unsuccessful attempts to squeeze past the constriction in the rift at the back of Somerville Hall, eventually concluding that a bang would be necessary.

Later DM, RC and PS resumed the dig at the foot of Slab House Rift, stacking rocks and spoil in the chamber above. There appears to be a choked strike passage leading off to the left as well as a continuation of the rift itself.

RT has named the inlet passage above the 15' Pot, Rainy Day Inlet.

Monday 7 October 1996 - Dave Speed, Dave Morrison, Paul Stillman

Continued digging downwards in the floor of Slab House Rift, exposing the junction with the very narrow left hand passage and reaching the sloping floor of the main rift. Spoil was dumped in the chamber above.

Wednesday 9 October 1996 - Dave Speed, Chris Henderson, Mark Lumley, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe

ML drilled two and a half shotholes in the passage below Keen's Pot.

The other four continued the Slab House Rift dig, clearing out more from the floor of the main passage.

Sunday 13 October 1996 - Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe

Completed the concrete and stone wall beneath the entrance rings, and added more grouting around the steel beam in the entrance "chamber".

Wednesday 16 October 1996 - Mark Lumley, Dave Speed, Paul Stillman, Graham Bromley, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe

ML took the drill to the far end of the cave and attempted to deepen last week's shotholes. Little was achieved as the drill bit proved blunt and the rock very hard. Although the Watershed showerbath was not running, the passage below the 15' Pot had obviously carried water during the recent spells of heavy rain.

ML reported the presence of a black hole opposite the unexplored inlet passage below Keen's Pot.

The rest of the team carried on with the Slab House Rift dig. The main passage was cleared out for 6' to the point where it turns sharp left. On the bend, black holes in the floor were uncovered emitting a noticeable draught, and by the end of the evening, there was a view past a large boulder into a narrow but open 5' pot at right angles to the rift.

Friday 18 October 1996 - Dave Speed, Clive North

Placed and fired a one stick "slab" charge on the boulder below Slab House Rift.

Sunday 20 October 1996 - Dave Speed, Paul Stillman, Rob Taviner, Bob Cottle, Dave Morrison

Heavy rain over several days had created very wet conditions underground.

Water from the depression was emerging between the entrance pipes, and following the excavated route down to Slab House. The showerbath in the Watershed was flowing in both directions. The down dip flow, augmented by the entrance water, was sinking in the first left hand passage and was found re-emerging from a roof inlet in Somerville Hall. It left the chamber through the too tight rift at the back and was seen again falling from an inlet above Balcony Pot. The water eventually entered Blood Alley and sank in the floor of the 10' Pot.

The rift beyond the banged boulder was too narrow to enter, but a clear voice connection was established with the floor level inlet in Somerville Hall.

The main flow down the 15' Pot followed the obvious streamway route to Keen's Pot, eventually disappearing into the terminal passage. There was the sound of a lot of water beyond the banged section.

PS took more photographs on the way out.

Wednesday 23 October 1996 - Mark Lumley, Tony Boycott, Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley, Paul Stillman, Richard Witcombe

A trickle of water was still running in the main streamway beyond Somerville Hall.

ML and TB deepened the shotholes in Kryptonite Passage, while the rest checked out various nooks and crannies. Some bang debris from Slab House Rift was dumped in the chamber above, and surplus digging kit was taken to the surface.

At the end of the evening, TB fired a three shothole, linked charge.

Sunday 27 October 1996 - Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner, Richard Witcombe

Despite heavy rain showers, there was only a small amount of drip throughout the cave.

The bang on the left hand wall of Kryptonite Passage had been effective, but the hardness of the Black Rock limestone was such that remnants of the shotholes remained visible on the wall. After clearing away the broken rock and shifting one very large slab a few feet, GB was able to squeeze feet first along the sinuous passage at roof level. After 10' he reached the top of a pot, slightly offset to his right. The awkwardness of his position and the absence of any available stones meant that he could not determine the depth, but the shaft appeared to be mansized. Somewhere below was the sound of a small amount of falling water. GB could not make further progress and after a struggle he re-emerged.

Meanwhile RT and RW investigated the inlet passage on the corner before the blasted section. It was draughting strongly.

RT removed a few rocks from around the threshold, but could not risk shifting the key stone barring access as it appeared to be a chockstone for a large amount of loose material on the right. A very careful bang may be the safest option to open up the passage.

RT reported that there appeared to be a sizeable aven just inside the threshold.

Wednesday 30 October 1996 - Tony Boycott, Mark Lumley, Rob Taviner

Drilled a series of seventeen (!) small shotholes in the right hand wall of Kryptonite Passage, and laid and fired a combined charge of multiple lengths of Cordtex and one slab.

RT hammered away some obstructions which were causing the ladder to snag on Keen's Pot.

Sunday 3 November 1996 - Mark Lumley, Tony Boycott, Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner, Bob Cottle, Paul Stillman, Richard Witcombe, Dave Morrison, John Hill

The bang had been reasonably successful although several of the shotholes remained intact. After a good deal of hammering and chiselling a lower route to the head of the pitch was engineered. Using a crowbar belay some way back from the pot, two ladders were joined and lowered and GB made the first descent.

The shaft was a miniature 12' deep version of Keen's Pot, with one wall covered by a stal flow emerging from a too tight roof inlet. The way on was a level floored narrow rift which will need enlarging for about 6'

after which it appears to widen.

After RT, ML and TB had also visited the bottom of the pot, TB laid a small Cordtex charge in a shothole already drilled into the jammed rocks preventing access to the corner inlet passage.

Meanwhile BC and RW carried out stal cleaning in the Balcony Pot area, while PS took further photographs.

TB fired the Cordtex charge from Somerville Hall, reporting a small rumble after the bang.

Wednesday 6 November 1996 - Rob Taviner, Mark Lumley, Richard Witcombe

The Cordtex charge had removed just sufficient rock to allow RT to quickly dig open a route into the inlet. He crawled in to find himself in a narrow but man-sized phreatic rift. Above and behind the entrance squeeze was a small chamber filled with superb stal flows and formations, including one very large curtain.

RT was joined by RW and ML and the three explored 70' of gradually ascending rift passage up to 8' high in places but never wider than body sized. The walls were clean washed with many protruding fossils, but the floor was largely mud covered with a meandering stream cut trench. There were good examples of deep drip pits in the mud.

One inlet passage on the right was pushed by ML for about 10' before becoming tight, and RT reported two diggable ways on at the far end.

Returning to the streamway, the three re-rigged the 12' pot using a crow bar belay in the passage roof, and examined the way on. A few hammer and chisel blows made little impact on the walls, and it was concluded that a three or four charge banging campaign would be needed to reach the wider section beyond.

Sunday 10 November 1996 - Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley, Dave Morrison, Tony Boycott

RT and GB commenced a high grade survey, starting on the surface and reaching the Slab House area. Rather surprisingly the Slab House inlet passage proved to be 75' long.

Meanwhile TB drilled shotholes in the passage below the 12' Pot, christened Chalice Well, and later fired a charge.

Wednesday 13 November 1996 - Mark Lumley, Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner

ML cemented a short section of steel scaffold pole across the head of Chalice Well to serve as a belay point, and cleared back debris from Sunday's bang.

RT and GB surveyed to the head of the 15' Pot, including the awkward Rainy Day Passage.

Sunday 17 November 1996 - Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner, Bob Cottle, Paul Stillman, Keith Shea, John Hill, Richard Witcombe

A mixture of working and sightseeing trips.

GB and RT continued with the survey, reaching the head of Balcony Pot.

RW took a small bag of cement down to Slab House and stabilised the rocks at the head of the rift.

JH and BC transported a 5' length of steel angle to the bottom of Blood Alley. RT has plans to use it to make a safe step into Neptune's Hall.

PS took more photographs.

The new grotto and passage entered on 6 November have been christened Bay of Rainbows and Mud Meanders.

Wednesday 20 November 1996 - Mark Lumley, Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley

The entrance passages had been washed clean by heavy storms at the beginning of the week.

RT and GB added passage detail to the survey while ML did some sketching.

Sunday 24 November 1996 - Graham Bromley, Mark Lumley, Tony Boycott, John Hill, Keith Savory

A day of heavy rain. The streamlet from the entrance shaft, which is gradually washing out the mud and stream fill from amongst the Concrete Showers ruckle, was sinking just before Slab House.

TB drilled the terminal rift below Chalice Well, using an old cagoule to keep the spray off the drill. A charge was in due course fired.

A shothole was also started in the tight rift at the back of Somerville Hall.

KS conducted a preliminary geological survey of the cave.

Wednesday 27 November 1996 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner, Mark Lumley, Richard Witcombe

Earlier in the week, DS had dug down to the drainage pipe in the depression and had blocked it off. This should reduce erosion in the entrance series.

RW and DS carried out stal cleaning in Slab House and at the head of Keen's Pot, before a sightseeing trip to Mud Meanders and Bay of Rainbows.

ML, after completing two shotholes at the back of Somerville Hall, went down to the terminal passage and cleared back the bang debris. He could see along the passage for perhaps 20'. It appeared to be slightly bigger after 10' and at the end seemed to veer round to right, perhaps at a pitch head.

RT and GB continued with the survey, covering Kate's Calamity and most of Blood Alley. The grotto at the far end of Kate's Calamity was examined again, and it was found that stones lobbed into the small hole at the back seemed to rattle away for a short distance. It may be worth trying to reach this point by digging under the grotto floor, starting at the back-filled mud pot in the small chamber before the grotto.

Saturday 30 November 1996 - Paul Stillman, Rich Blake

Stal cleaning and sightseeing trip.

Sunday 1 December 1996 - Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner

Completed surveying Blood Alley and Keen's Pot through to Chalice Well.

Wednesday 4 December 1996 - Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner, Mark Lumley, Dave Speed, Pete Helliari

RT and GB surveyed the Mud Meanders, pushing the very narrow first inlet passage (on the upstream right) for nearly 30' to a point very close to the second inlet. A few feet of digging would make the connection.

Meanwhile, ML, DS and PH commenced digging at the end of Kate's Calamity, sinking a trench in the mud floor at the threshold to the grotto.

Sunday 8 December 1996 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner, Richard Witcombe, Mark Lumley

DS placed his purpose built fixed steel ladder in the entrance shaft.

RW took a 4' length of steel scaffold pole down to Balcony Pot where GB fitted it at the head of the roof climb as a replacement belay for the failed bolt. RT and GB then surveyed the Gods, including the Picnic at Hanging Rock inlet. RT had a close call when a large rock dislodged by GB landed very adjacently.

RW resumed work at the Kate's Calamity dig, to be joined later by ML. The latter burrowed downwards at 45 degrees while RW stacked the spoil behind stone retaining walls in the small chamber. At the end of the session, the dig was close to the stal floor of the grotto.

On his way out, ML stopped off at Somerville Hall to deepen the shotholes. He made little impression because of drill slippage and sticking.

GB emerged from the cave with a large 2" long tooth found in floor debris at the end of Picnic at Hanging Rock. This appears to be a canine tooth from a large carnivore - possibly hyaena, wolf, lynx or lion.

Wednesday 11 December 1996 - Mark Lumley, Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner, Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe, Tony Boycott

ML went down early to drill a shothole below Chalice Well.

GB and RT proceeded to the far end of the Mud Meanders to dig the lower, left hand continuation, a draughting, mud floored bedding plane with a few inches of air space. After 12' of flat out progress, a halt was called with man-sized passage visible 2' to 3' ahead.

DS and RW continued digging at the end of Kate's Calamity, advancing carefully but very awkwardly under the stal floor. Heavy drip turned the mud floor into porridge, and dumping space is now almost exhausted. There was no draught to speak of.

TB came down and placed a charge in Somerville Hall, but the presence of the digging teams preventing firing in the time he had available and he had to remove the bang.

Later in the Hunter's, Don Thomson, a GP, had a look at the tooth found on Sunday and suggested it might be a pig's canine!

Sunday 15 December 1996 - Rob Taviner, Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe

Continued digging at the far end of the Mud Meanders. Only RT could reach the furthest point and he found it too constricted to make any meaningful progress. This is clearly a "Bromley only" dig!

RT contented himself with excavating a low point half way along the dig, while DS and RW cleared away a mud bank just before the entrance to the crawl. This may prevent the dig from sumping in wet weather.

On the way out, DS went down to Kate's Calamity to see if the dig there had drained. Some of the water had seeped away but it was still squalid and furling with a spade made little impression. More encouraging were the stones pushed into the far end hole which trundled down for two or three feet.

Monday 16 December 1996 - Mark Lumley

More shothole drilling in the Chalice Well rift.

Wednesday 18 December 1996 - Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley, Pete Hann, Mark Lumley, Tony Boycott

RT and GB, assisted for a while by PH, continued the very awkward Mud Meanders dig, reaching within a foot or so of breakthrough.

ML drilled again in the rift below Chalice Well, and TB later fired charges there and in Somerville Hall.

Saturday 21 December 1996 - Mark Lumley, Tony Boycott

Cleared the debris from last Wednesday's bang, and drilled and banged again.

Sunday 22 December 1996 - Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley

RT and GB passed the banged squeeze at the back of Somerville Hall and dropped 6' into a walking height canyon passage. After 25', the connection with the Balcony Pot inlet passage was reached but it was too tight to pass.

Moving on to the Mud Meanders, the expected breakthrough was made after 10 minutes digging. A roomy 10' high bedding chamber was entered with an inlet blocked by an old stal flow. The main way on continued via a dog leg and an eyehole squeeze to a three way fork. A pot in the floor dropped into a low passage with a large cobble preventing access, while the main right hand way ended in a collapse area. The left hand route led upwards to a stal coated aven with an awkward projection preventing a proper examination. Altogether about 75' of new passage was explored. The series continues to draught well.

Whilst in the Balcony Pot area, RT noted a alternative route up into The Gods, requiring only the removal of a few jammed boulders. This new climb will save the Balcony Pot formations from the effects of falling mud.

Friday 27 December 1996 - Mark Lumley

Further shothole drilling below Chalice Well.

Sunday 29 December 1996 - Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley, Graham Johnson, Dave Cook, Anthony Butcher, Eddie Walters, Natalie Clark

RT, GB and GJ proceeded to the new passages at the end of Mud Meanders, GJ carrying a drill. The aven succumbed without the need for any shothole drilling, but it led disappointingly into the collapse area associated with the right hand passage. The new passages, including the Somerville Hall extension, were surveyed.

The rest of the party toured the main routes.

Friday 3 January 1997 - Afternoon: Rob Taviner, Graham Johnson

A bitterly cold day, with a visible plume of warm air emerging from the shaft.

Worked at the Kate's Calamity dig, dumping spoil in the approach chamber. On the way out, pulled a few rocks out of rift route up into The Gods. A few large blocks remain.

Evening: Mark Lumley, Tony Boycott

Drilled and banged the rift below Chalice Well. A few more bangs will be needed to reach what appears to be a pot, with a continuation passage over the top.

Sunday 5 January 1997 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe. Later Rob Taviner

Continued work at Kate's Calamity, DS digging almost flat out in very cramped and squalid conditions. Buckets of slurry and rocks were passed along the rift and dumped in a hole in the floor. By the end of the session, small holes were appearing amongst the rocks in the floor.

Wednesday 8 January 1997 - Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley, Dave Morrison, Max Midlen

A number of tasks were carried out while MM went sightseeing.

RW carried out stal cleaning in the Balcony Pot area before joining DM, DS and GB at the Kate's Calamity dig. DM managed to haul out some large slabs, and DS then hammered and crowbarred his way under the stal floor.

Meanwhile RT brought down a large amount of rock from the new route up into The Gods, and in due course made the connection via an easy rift climb. GB and MM visited Picnic at Hanging Rock, where GB pushed the end for a further 6' beneath some "hanging deaths". The ladder up to The Gods was de-rigged.

Back at Kate's Calamity, DS was working in a very squalid porridge bowl of mud. He managed to insert himself far enough under the stal floor to see a low passage continuing ahead. RT examined the prospects but left it to GB to attempt to force the squeeze.

GB went in feet first for nearly a body's length, and then came out and went back in head first with tools. He managed to break up some of stalled floor beneath him and was able to peer ahead. A few jammed rocks prevented access to a drop in the floor beyond which the passage appeared to continue small but man-sized.

Sunday 12 January 1997 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner, Bob Cottle, Clive North. Later Dave Morrison

Apart from some stal cleaning and a short tourist trip for CN, all effort was concentrated on the Kate's Calamity dig. When DM joined the team, all seven were chaining buckets of sludgy spoil and rocks back along the rift to the disposal hole.

The progress made was disappointing. Just beyond the point reached by GB on 8 January, there is a tiny airspace continuing for perhaps 10', but the passage is largely filled with slabs and gravelly mud sealed beneath a stal floor. Drip in the passage soon converts the mud to slurry, and makes for some very squalid digging. There is no early breakthrough in prospect.

Sunday 19 January 1997 - Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Clive North, John Hill, Richard Witcombe

DS attacked the Kate's Calamity dig with a vengeance and succeeded in breaking up and pulling out a large amount of stal cemented rubble. By the end of the session, he had dug down into clean washed rocks and had uncovered a significant hole in the floor giving access to a narrow rift. Stones thrown through bounced down for 10' or 12'. RT also examined the end and could see the main tube continuing with bigger airspaces beyond a couple of large slabs.

Wednesday 22 January 1997 - Mark Lumley, Tony Boycott, Dave Speed, Paul Stillman, Chris Henderson, Rob Taviner, Dave Morrison

ML and TB cleared debris from the Chalice Well dig and drilled further shotholes. The "pot" in the passage ahead now looks to be just a step in the floor and the rift continues for a further 10' to 12', perhaps slightly larger at the far end.

The second team resumed work at Kate's Calamity. DS and RT worked at the face, wrestling with large rocks in very confined and muddy conditions. One large slab was eventually removed together with a lot of smaller rocks. The sludge was directed into the hole in the floor, a 3" to 4" wide slot up to 20' deep and sounding wider at the bottom. Ahead the passage is constricted by bridges of rock and awkward slabs, but 5' beyond, a more open section of passage can be glimpsed. There is stal on one wall and stones lobbed through roll away encouragingly. It looks as though bang will be needed to break through into this rift.

Sunday 26 January 1997 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Bob Cottle, Paul Stillman, Clive North

GB and DS attacked the rock obstructions in the Kate's Calamity dig with lump hammer and chisel and made several feet of progress. Alas, the view ahead was a severe disappointment. The "open section" was only a small stal blocked alcove in a very small passage.

The way on must be deep in the floor, and it will require a major banging campaign to reach it.

On the way out, the initial section of Blood Alley was examined closely to see if it represented a start to the lower route. There is a choked rift on the correct alignment which might repay a dig.

Wednesday 29 January 1997 - Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley, Clive North, Paul Stillman

Began the assault on the narrow rift. Two 18" shotholes and a shorter one were drilled in the approach passage and a Super Cordtex charge was duly fired.

RT examined Picnic at Hanging Rock but made no further progress.

Thursday 30 January 1997 - Mark Lumley, Tony Boycott

Banged the Chalice Well rift.

Sunday 2 February 1997 - AM: Mark Lumley, Tony Boycott

Cleared away debris and fired a further charge in the Chalice Well dig. The passage ahead after a short enlargement looks to be largely blocked by stal.

PM: Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley, Clive North, Richard Witcombe

Wednesday's bang had been effective, but fumes (from the Chalice Well bang?) were too thick for any clearing or drilling work.

After some stal cleaning by RW, the party visited The Gods and Picnic at Hanging Rock. Nothing further found.

Wednesday 5 February 1997 - Rob Taviner, Clive North

Cleared bang debris over a 5' length of passage, dropping gravel and small rocks down the rift and stockpiling larger rocks in the mud chamber. Drilled three 18" shotholes and fired another Cordtex charge.

Carried out a small amount of stal cleaning in the Kate's Calamity grotto.

Thursday 6 February 1997 - Mark Lumley, Tony Boycott

Passed the banged squeeze below Chalice Well to emerge in 10' or so of man-sized but very narrow passage with a few formations on the walls and a nearly total mud choke ahead. Not a very inspiring prospect.

Saturday 8 February 1997 - Paul Stillman and friends

A photographic excursion.

Sunday 9 February 1997 - Paul Stillman and friends

Continued the photographic work.

Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner, Bob Cottle, Richard Witcombe, Clive North

Cleared the results of Wednesday's bang and drilled three 18" shotholes and one short one. A Super Cordtex

charge was duly fired.

Further stal cleaning was carried out in the grotto.

Wednesday 12 February 1997 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Mark Lumley, Peter Hellier

The cave was wet after heavy rain, but the air was rather stale. This could be the result of muck spreading on the field above.

Cleared the debris from a very successful bang which had opened up another 5' of passage. One more bang should allow a better view down the slightly wider rift ahead.

GB and ML also visited the Chalice Well terminal choke and found the small stream sinking into the mud floor with no signs of backing up. The choke may be worth digging.

Sunday 16 February 1997 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Bob Cottle, Clive North

Further clearing work at the Kate's Calamity dig.

DS managed to "re-open" the narrow rift by pulling out a couple of rocks which had lodged part way down, and a quantity of bang gravel was swallowed up.

GB squeezed to the far end of the passage but a flake prevented him from peering down the wider section of rift. Rocks trundled down seemed to drop for 8' to 10' into a larger space.

Three shotholes were drilled and CN fired the usual Super Cordtex charge.

GB also visited the Chalice Well dig and after clearing some of the mud, uncovered a rock which appeared to be holding back the choke. He detected a draught and could hear water gurgling beyond the rock.

Wednesday 19 February 1997 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner, Peter Hellier, Richard Witcombe

Cleared more bang debris from the Kate's Calamity dig. Some of the rock was used to start building a causeway across the decorated "White Pot".

It was still not possible to see whether man-sized passage lies below the narrow rift.

Thursday 20 February 1997

Dr Andrew Currant of the Natural History Museum on a visit to the Somerset County Museum at Taunton identified the Picnic at Hanging Rock tooth as the canine of a very large wolf from the Middle to Late Pleistocene period, approximately 60,000 years ago.

Sunday 23 February 1997 - Graham Bromley, Clive North, Paul Stillman

GB and CN drilled three further shotholes in the Kate's Calamity dig, while RW and PS, after adding a few more rocks to the "White Pot" causeway, revisited The Gods and Picnic at Hanging Rock in search of further Pleistocene remains. Nothing more was found.

The spare piece of maypole was taken out from The Gods as far as Somerville Hall and the Super Cordtex charge was fired from near the head of Keen's Pot.

Wednesday 26 February 1997 - Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley, Mark Lumley, Clive North, Richard Witcombe

Cleared a large amount of bang debris from the Kate's Calamity dig. After completion of the "White Pot" causeway, rocks were dumped in the approach passage close to Balcony Pot.

The head of the rift is now a comfortable width, but it is still not possible to get a good look down. There appear to be undercuts or a widening of the rift a few feet down, but rock shadows confuse the view.

Sunday 2 March 1997 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Clive North

Cleared more bang debris back to temporary stockpiles, and drilled three and a bit shotholes. Fired the usual Super Cordtex charge.

Wednesday 5 March 1997 - Graham Bromley, Dave Speed, Paul Stillman, Peter Hellier, Mike Willett, Richard Witcombe, Mark Lumley

Cleared a large quantity of bang debris back to the rift close to Balcony Pot.

The terminal rift now looks narrow for quite a distance.

Wednesday 12 March 1997 - Graham Bromley, Mark Lumley, Rob Taviner, Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe, Paul Stillman

Chiselled out more rock with DS's homemade crowbar. Some of the debris had to be dumped at the bottom of Balcony Pot.

With no sign of passage widening ahead, the prospects do not look good. The decision was taken to abandon the dig in favour of an attack on the terminal pot in Blood Alley.

Saturday 15 March 1997 - Graham Bromley

A solo trip to eliminate a couple of chokes.

Taking the DS crowbar to the far end of Picnic at Hanging Rock, he prised a rock out of the way to gain a further 20' of passage ending in a more final blockage.

After inconclusively probing the choked rift below Balcony Pot, he descended Keen's Pot to examine the stal cemented boulders beneath the entrance to the Mud Meanders. The old phreatic route had been thought to turn right at this point, but there were also indications of a continuation downwards parallel with the Chalice Well streamway.

Using a short bar, he quickly broke through the boulders into a well decorated grotto with a narrow rift passage leading off. After a short distance the way on divided. To the right was a small boulder choked pot, and on the left a too low bedding plane with a view of a small grotto beyond.

As he was shortly leaving for Holland, GB christened the find Going Dutch.

Tuesday 18 March 1997 - Dave Speed, Paul Stillman

Photographic trip to Mud Meanders and Going Dutch.

Wednesday 19 March 1997 - Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman, Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe

Apart from a brief inspection of Going Dutch by RT and RW, and a probe in the Balcony Pot rift by DS, the party contented itself with moving kit from the Kate's Calamity dig to Blood Alley in readiness for an assault on the rift at the bottom of the 10' pot.

The Hale-Bopp comet was a spectacular sight in the north western sky.

Wednesday 26 March 1997 - Graham Bromley, Dave Speed, Pete Hellier, Rob Taviner, Richard Witcombe

Photography and stal cleaning, and a dig in the rift below Balcony Pot. A short section was cleared of stream fill but the dig was abandoned when the tipped material from the Kate's Calamity dig was encountered.

Wednesday 2 April 1997 - Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman, Dave Speed, Andy Sparrow, Chris Castle, Clive North, Richard Witcombe, Graham Bromley

While RT took AS and CC on a tourist trip, DS, PS, RW and CN made their way to the Blood Alley pot, carrying drill, batteries and bang.

CN drilled two shotholes in the left hand wall of the continuation rift and one on the right, later firing the usual Super Cordtex (Pentaflex) charge from above Balcony Pot.

GB returned to Going Dutch to make a start on lowering the floor of the terminal bedding plane.

Sunday 6 April 1997 - Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman, Clive North, Richard Witcombe

Cleared the bang debris from Blood Alley pot, stacking most of the rubble at the back of the pot. It was then possible to look along about ten feet of disappointingly small - less than man-sized - horizontally floored rift.

It draughted slightly, but as it would require a sustained banging effort to push, it will be left for the time being.

Some of the tools were brought out of the cave in readiness for the next Hymac dig at Charterhouse Warren Farm on April 19/20.

Wednesday 9 April 1997 - Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman, Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe

Proceeded to Going Dutch where RT lowered the stal coated floor at the far end. He eventually succeeded in inserting himself feet first and later head first into a small bedding plane grotto, about three feet wide and eighteen inches to two feet high. It was well decorated but choked with mud and stal after a body's length. In view of the constricted nature of the passage and the good quality stal, no further work is contemplated.

More tools were brought out of the cave.

A good view of Hale-Bopp comet and a crescent moon.

Wednesday 16 April 1997 - Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman, Richard Witcombe

Cleared a mass of tools and other kit from the cave.

Dave Speed painted the Little Crapnell gate.