

LITTLE CRAPNELL SWALLET

Saturday 29 April 1995 - Dave Morrison, Clive North, Simon Meade-King, Richard Witcombe. Later Bob Cottle, Ken Appleby. Also Dave Speed (Little Crapnell Farm) and Malcolm Lambert (excavator driver).

At 9.45 am a JCB dig commenced in a grassy dry swallet, adjacent to the track leading to Little Crapnell Farm. The depression, measuring 100' by 50' and 10' deep at the southern end, is about 50 yards south of the conjectural shale/limestone boundary, and in winter is the sink point for a small stream which flows alongside and then under the lane to Dinder Combe, and is taken to the lower part of the swallet by an underground stone culvert (perhaps 19th century), seen in a small collapse by the lane hedge.

The site was dug inconclusively by NHASA and Dave Speed in the late 1970s, when a shaft sunk at the southern end intercepted the culvert but did not strike any bedrock.

There were no rock faces visible in the hollow but given the underground south westerly water flow to St Andrew's Wells, and the 25 degree dip in that direction, the digger was set to work to trench from east to west across the southern end of the depression.

An irregular southern cliff face was uncovered beneath 6' to 7' of soil and sub-soil, interspersed with sub-surface funnels filled with rocks probably picked from the fields and dumped in minor collapses over the years. A rock floor was encountered at a depth of 15' sloping westwards to a depth in excess of 20' - the bottom was not struck at that end. On the northern side of the trench, again under a 2' layer of presumably tipped top soil, a much larger agricultural infilling was uncovered, consisting of field stones and also mortared material from an old building. At the base of this, 5' down and resting on a natural thickness of clay, was the stone built culvert reaching nearly to the southern cliff face.

The 25' long limestone cliff face contained at least three waterworn rifts (the third only spotted on Sunday morning), about 6' apart and trending southwards. None was man-sized but they were progressively larger in the westerly direction. At the limit of the westerly excavation, a cliff at right angles to the southern cliff was uncovered, and at the junction of the two cliffs was a 18" wide rift at least 15' high, dipping away towards the south west. At the top of the cliff, the rift was solidly choked but from 5' down, the fill became progressively looser, comprising blackened sandstone cobbles and more angular slabs. The tipped building material rested on the top of the western cliff, suggesting that this rock face and perhaps the rift itself were visible in the recent past.

It was decided to choose this most westerly rift as the long term dig.

Sunday 30 April 1995 - Personnel as above, less Clive North and Ken Appleby.

Prior to the commencement of back filling, some preliminary excavation of the chosen rift took place. Much loose cobble material was pulled out and at a depth of 8' below the cliff top and 15' below the present land surface, an open passage was revealed. A small rift with a wider bedding plane below could be seen to descend at a shallow angle for at least 10', with only stream debris of mud and cobbles preventing caver entry.

It was decided to wall across the front of this rift using large slabs lowered by the JCB, and for the rest of the day until nearly 7 pm, this large scale dry stone walling and infilling behind it proceeded. The wall was built up on an inward overlapping principle so that a reasonable working chamber at the bottom was reduced to a smaller diameter shaft at the top. From the cliff top level, it will be necessary to instal two concrete rings to take the shaft through the backfill to the original field surface.

Wednesday 3 April 1995 - Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe, Graham Bromley, Clive North, Dave Speed, and almost the entire NHASA team on a break from Lodmore Swallet. Also Malcolm Lambert (excavator driver)

After a few more rocks had been added to the dry stone wall to bring it level with the cliff top, a 4' diameter concrete plate with a 2' square manhole cut out was lowered by the JCB

and placed over the rift. Two mis-matched (but cheap!) 2' deep concrete rings were then placed on top.

Meanwhile the NHASA team laid a rough and ready boulder ruckle of rocks leading from the truncated culvert to the rift area, to ensure that winter water would be able to get away easily below field level.

The JCB then commenced backfilling the excavation, while flat stones were built up around the pipes to stop them shifting under the pressure from soil and rock settlement. The pipes do not reach the former field surface level, and a small thickness of concreted rocks will be needed to complete the shaft.

By 9.30 pm darkness brought a halt to proceedings, with about one third of the excavation still to fill.

Thursday 4 April 1995 - Malcolm Lambert

Backfilled the excavation, leaving a small pit around the entrance shaft for spoil from below.

The ground surface of the dumped material is slightly raised above the surrounding field level but after natural settling and rolling by the farmer, and some stone picking from the earth surface, a satisfactory restoration will have been achieved.

Saturday 6 May 1995 - Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe

Commenced the stone picking and general tidy up, and raised the dry stone walling around the shaft to level with the top of the pipes, still a few feet below the old ground surface.

A start was made on the underground digging with ten buckets of cobbles and coarse gravelly mud being lifted out of the threshold area of the rift by hand held rope.

To further raise the height of the shaft, four very large slabs were manoeuvred into position around the lip of the pipe.

Sunday 7 May 1995 - Dave Speed, Dave Morrison

Thirty five buckets of spoil were brought out, lowering the threshold by a further two feet. The way on looks choked after about 10' or 12'.

Monday 8 May 1995 - Dave Speed, Nick Speed

Removed a further twenty buckets and uncovered a very large slab in the floor of the rift. This block, at least 4' long and 2' wide, is not lying at the angle of dip and has probably fallen from the bedding plane overhang on the left.

Ahead, a number of reddish, sculpted rock slabs (? Carboniferous mudstone) lie blocking a narrow blind rift, below which a small passage with a cobble and slab choked floor can be seen continuing for another 10'.

To the right of this drop is an inlet passage, too small to enter, running back for about 10' in the direction of a shallow depression to the north west of the main swallet.

Later - Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe, Dave Speed

A few more rocks were removed for "evaluation" purposes, but no better view ahead could be obtained.

Sunday 14 May 1995 - Dave Speed, Simon Meade-King, Bob Cottle, Richard Witcombe. Later Dave Morrison and a steady stream of caving and other visitors.

DS brought over an agricultural front loader, and during a two hour picking session three bucket loads of stones

were taken away to be dumped "elsewhere".

Underground, digging was hampered by the large slab in the floor. The right hand "nose" of the rock was broken off, but it took several hours of lump hammering and crow barring to lift it out of the way. The large "mudstone" rocks lying ahead were also brought out, giving a slightly better view of the way ahead - a very low passage veering out of sight to the left after 10'.

After a dozen buckets of angular cobbles and gravelly fill had been removed from around and under the slab, it became clear that the rock would have to be banged. Nick Williams, with the necessary "kit", was known to be at Upper Pitts, and he was duly summoned to the dig by mobile phone. Two small bore shotholes were drilled and linked charges of SLB - Silent or Soundless Breaker - were fired. A brief post-bang inspection showed that the rock was cracked in several places.

Wednesday 17 May 1995 - Dave Speed, Kate Powell, Dave Morrison, Simon Meade-King, Richard Witcombe

The back-filled area had been rolled and re-seeded.

After a good deal of sledging, the banged slab was reduced to manoeuvrable sections. Some large chunks were placed at the foot of the shaft, but a large amount of broken rock was bucketed out of the cave. Beneath the slab is an area of compacted cobbles and fill.

Directly ahead, a smaller detached slab under the left hand wall was dragged out and broken up, revealing a further cobble choked undercut. Beneath the front of this slab were several shards of broken pottery, one of them a rim section. The pot material is a light orange clay with a greyish central band covered with a black or very dark green glaze. A dating will be sought from experts.

Altogether about forty buckets of rock and fill were removed, but the way on is still tantalisingly out of sight around a shallow left hand bend.

NB When cleaned up, the four pottery shards were seen to have a stream blackened, rough exterior but a modern looking light olive glaze on the inside.

Saturday 20 May 1995 - Bob Cottle, Richard Witcombe, Simon Meade-King, Ken Appleby and Dave Speed visited.

A total of fifty five buckets of cobbles, eroded rock and gravelly fill were removed during the afternoon. No more pottery was uncovered but a small unglazed shard was found on the spoil heap.

The cave development is becoming more complex. Down to the left in the area of the pottery finds, digging revealed an open bedding plane, 6" to 8" high, terminating 6' down in what may be a trench or rift, with possible ways on right and left. The main passage at this point is only about a foot wide, constrained by the bedding plane shelf and an encroaching mudstone wall on the right. Three feet further on a tiny choked rift, part of the right hand inlet series joins and seems to create a small widening of the passage and possibly a slightly higher section of loosely choked bedding plane. This was the limit of digging but the roof of the main passage rises five feet further on and stones thrown around the left hand bend seem to drop three or four feet, perhaps connecting with the bottom of the bedding plane.

Wednesday 24 May 1995 - Dave Speed and the NHASA contingent.

Fifty five buckets were raised, deepening the threshold area of the cave by several feet. The first right hand inlet was found to cross the main passage with a very narrow continuation in the floor and to the left. The excavation continued into the rift alongside the bedding plane but despite the removal of some of the red mudstone walls, the lower section of passage remains little more than eighteen inches wide at this point.

The deepened floor permits a better view of the bottom of the bedding plane and a small passage at the lower

right hand end can be seen continuing for perhaps 20', possibly picking up the main passage 10' on (the area of the 3' to 4' drop) before the way on is lost to sight around a shallow left hand bend. The far reaches of this passage may be close to man sized with the removal of some of the stream debris in the floor.

Thursday 25 May 1995 - Dave Speed, Dave Morrison. Richard Witcombe paid a visit.

Cleared more from the bedding plane area and the narrow rift beyond, raising thirty five bucket loads to the surface. The "main" rift can now be seen to drop down to join the bedding plane passage.

What appeared to be the hoof of a small horse was recovered from the fill.

Saturday 27 May 1995 - Clive North, Richard Witcombe

Recovered one of the redundant winches from Longwood Valley Sink and transported it by Land Rover to the farm for renovation by Dave Speed.

Paid a brief visit underground to assess the prospects. Cleared back a small amount of spoil from the left hand side of the main rift confirming that the bedding plane continues along the full length. Natural dimensions are going to be very restricted over the next few feet. A one inch section of clay pipe stem was recovered from this fill.

Sunday 28 May 1995 - Dave Speed, Dave Morrison

Raised fifteen buckets of mud to the surface and stockpiled rocks at the foot of the shaft.

To improve access to the bedding plane, a few slivers of shaly rock were chiselled off the roof and some more substantial chunks off the floor.

The "hoof" has gone missing.

Wednesday 31 May 1995 - Afternoon: Dave Speed, Clive North

Positioned the rebuilt winch which now incorporates a headframe.

CN drilled two shotholes into the bedding plane floor.

Evening: Dave Speed, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe

An assessment of the prospects was made. By lying full length, the end of the main passage is almost in reach, but the area is much too constricted to dig. Although there is a tiny arch ahead, a total choke just beyond looks a distinct possibility.

Some thought was given to installing timber shoring in the bedding plane - a wide unsupported span - and beneath a large undercut block in the roof, but a decision was postponed pending a possible bang in the bedding plane floor at the weekend.

Instead, it was decided to dig down in the floor just before the bedding plane. Forty buckets of mud and stones were removed together with one very large slab, uncovering in the process the small rifts first seen on 24 May and another similar tiny choked hole in the floor. This seems to be minor development associated with the inlet coming in from the right.

Of more significance was an apparent widening at depth of the main rift which is not much more than a foot wide across at the level of the bedding plane. If the rift continues to bell out and is of a reasonable depth, it will provide a digging route to the end of the cave without the need to demolish the bedding plane.

A small fragment of animal limb bone was recovered from the fill - probably cow.

Sunday 4 June 1995 - Dave Speed, Dave Morrison

Twenty buckets removed, deepening the rift to three feet or so at which point it is up to 18" wide.

Wednesday 7 June 1995 - Dave Speed, Dave Morrison, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe

A first inspection of the digging face caused some alarm as the large blocks on the up dip, right hand side of the excavated rift appeared to have slipped downwards. This area of wall is almost certainly detached bedrock as the inlet passage bifurcates around the blocks to enter the main passage as two very tiny, choked rifts. Much of the wet fill from the nearest of these rifts had run out into the rift, changing the look of the area.

After a careful examination it was concluded the top block probably had moved an inch or two, but that the much larger (and more dangerous) lower block merely appeared to have shifted because of the slumping of the surrounding fill. Nevertheless, to be on the safe side, a short piece of telegraph pole was wedged between the large block and the left hand wall.

Twenty two buckets of spoil were taken out, deepening the rift to three or four feet below the bedding plane level (still no sign of a floor) and pushing about three feet inwards. The width is on average an awkward 18" and may get slightly narrower ahead.

Sunday 11 June 1995 - Dave Morrison, Simon Meade-King, Maurice Hewins plus assorted, mainly spectating, members of the SMCC.

The right hand blocks are definitely moving and "closing" the rift. After the removal of fifteen buckets of spoil, three more wooden shores were inserted as a temporary measure. Removal of the blocks may be the only permanent solution.

Beyond the blocks the passage appears to have a more solid right hand wall.

Rock was struck in the floor at a depth of about 4', but this looks more like a large sloping slab than the natural floor. Another small bone was recovered - perhaps a foot bone.

Late June 1995 - Jim Young, Dave Morrison, Dave Speed

Steel lid fabricated at Greendown by JY and DM and installed at Crapnell by DS.

Sunday 2 July 1995 - Dave Speed, Dave Morrison

Dug around the base and near side of the sliding blocks and lifted twenty one buckets to the surface.

Monday 3 July 1995 - Dave Speed, Nick Speed

A further fifteen bucket loads brought out, mainly fill from the side of the blocks but a small amount awkwardly removed from the rift ahead. Not surprisingly the wooden props are a serious obstacle to digging.

Saturday 8 July 1995 - Dave Speed, Clive North, Richard Witcombe, Ken Appleby

Examined the sliding blocks carefully. There are two slabs on top of the main shored block which is itself sitting on another detached block. Furthermore, a section of roof above this stack seems detached and only held in place by a few small friction points and some cobbles. Banging could shake this piece down and further destabilise the area.

On balance it is decided to risk demolishing the stack, using charges at the bottom to drop the pile in a "controlled" fashion.

CN duly inserted three 12" to 15" shotholes, two in the lowest block and one in the main block. Three of the four timber shores were sledged out to give the rocks somewhere to go, and three sticks of bang were inserted.

The charge was fired from close to the entrance, but after the loud crack there was not the expected sound of dropping or settling boulders. Some fumes emerged from the shaft but most hung about in the bottom of the dig, and the burning paper trick did not significantly disperse them. RW went below to assess damage but conditions remained "pea souper".

Later in the evening, DS went down and found that the bottom two blocks had been totally demolished and the two top slabs "re-arranged". The roof seemed intact.

Monday 10 July 1995 - Dave Speed, Kate Powell, Dave Morrison

Bang debris was cleared from the head of the passage, and the two fallen blocks were manoeuvred into a buttressing position at the base of the drop below the entrance shaft.

A total of eleven buckets of spoil were removed, leaving the way now clear for following the main rift.

A careful watch will be kept on the roof area, and shoring near the inlet area remains a possibility.

Sunday 16 July 1995 - Dave Speed, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe, Keith Fielder, Roz Fielder

Two large rocks were moved down from the base of the shaft to sit as steps on top of the large slabs positioned last Monday.

The diggers then worked down through the bang debris to a point nearly five feet below the bedding plane where a layer of large cobbles and a few washed out holes were encountered.

Unfortunately, straight ahead, the rift walls close in to little more than 9" apart. Unless we continue digging downwards, and face having to shift all the large blocks at the bottom of the entrance shaft, we shall have to force i.e. bang or possibly sledge hammer, a larger route ahead.

A total of twenty five buckets were brought out.

Wednesday 19 July 1995 - Dave Speed and the NHASA contingent

Dug down a further two feet in the wide part of the rift and hit a large rock. About thirty buckets were taken out.

Saturday 22 July 1995 - Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe

Decided to abandon the deep option for the time being and push on ahead. The left hand bedding plane floor was attacked by lump hammer and chisel and by crow bar but only a few slivers of shaly material were removed from the surface. Bang will be needed will be needed to make real progress.

By lying flat out a small amount of choke material was clawed back from the end as well as a large fragment of broken rock blown in from the last bang. All this material was dumped in the deep section of rift.

Lighting was provided by car battery powered fluorescent tube.

Saturday 29 July 1995 - Clive North

Drilled a third shothole in the bedding plane and fired a two stick charge.

Wednesday 2 August 1995 - Dave Speed, Nick Speed

A large 6" thick slab had been lifted by the bang and the rock below cracked. The block in the roof had survived the shockwave but looks very threatening.

Twenty buckets of broken rock were brought to the surface.

Friday 4 August 1995 - Clive North

Drilled a deep shothole under the far end bedding plane and fired a one and a half stick charge.

Saturday 5 August 1995 - Dave Speed, Clive North, Richard Witcombe

Sent twenty buckets of broken rock up to the surface and stacked some larger slabs into steps at the head of the rift.

The digging face looks to be changing in character. The 4" high bedding plane continues on the left, choked with brownish clay apart from a small washed out hollow 2' to 3' over. Ahead the roof and right hand wall appear to be composed of boulders rather than solid rock, but a tiny cobble strewn hole continues and the air here remains very fresh. In the floor the very narrow rift is well choked with mud.

CN fired a further one stick charge in a shothole drilled into the bedding plane face.

The rocks taken out were placed into the bucket of an agricultural loader and taken away by DS for dumping.

Saturday 12 August 1995 - Clive North

Cleared back and stockpiled the rubble from the last bang, and drilled a further shothole in what may be the last vestiges of the bedding plane shelf.

Sunday 13 August 1995 - Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe

Before the stockpile was tackled, an exploratory probe was carried out at the digging face. On the left, the mud choked bedding plane comes to an end and a mudstone rockface comes across to form a left hand wall. The right hand wall is less well defined and may be undercut. The removal of a small rock from below the roof pendant at the end of the passage gave a view along 3' or 4' of airspace - a 6" wide rift with the roof rising briefly to about 18" before dropping behind stream washed floor debris. The floor comprises gravelly mud which seems deep enough for digging rather than banging progress to be made.

Sixteen buckets of spoil were removed, and some of the larger rocks were placed as steps up the rift.

Wednesday 16 August 1995 - Dave Speed, Nick Speed

Brought out twenty buckets of spoil.

The digging face comprises a 2' 6" layer of gravel and mud overlying sandstone cobbles. At the far end of open space uncovered on 13 August, the passage appears to veer to the left. The walls of this section are red mudstone.

Friday 18 August 1995 - Clive North

Fired a one stick charge in the shothole drilled on 12 August.

Saturday 19 August 1995 - Dave Speed, Clive North, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe

After clearing the bang debris and adding to the stone steps in the rift, the team arranged themselves for digging at the face - one filling the bucket, two guiding it back to the bottom of the shaft and one on the surface.

A small amount of mud and gravel was shifted, but the rift ahead was found to contain some close fitting blocks of red mudstone, resembling a Triassic sandstone passage infilling. The floor also contained large rocks packed around with cobbles and other rock and gravel debris. In the course of the afternoon most of these rocks were

levered out with crowbars but this left little "natural" passage. The air space ahead veers slightly to the left and appears totally choked after a couple of feet.

Forty buckets of spoil were brought to the surface. Part of an animal (? cow) limb bone was found in the terminal fill.

Wednesday 23 August 1995 - Dave Speed, Nick Speed

Cleared mud and rock from the passage ahead. It remains very narrow, but a tiny airspace continues for at least 3' or 4', dipping down at a much steeper angle than the bedding - 45 degrees or so.

Twenty two buckets were brought to the surface.

Wednesday 30 August 1995 - Dave Speed, Clive North. Later, Mark "Buddy" Williams and Nigel Hellyar of the Shepton Mallet CC

Further digging in the floor revealed a small air space amongst cobbles emitting a slight draught. Unfortunately the passage width at this point is little more than 8" wide.

About thirty buckets were brought out.

Sunday 3 September 1995 - Dave Speed

A few buckets were filled and left underground. Another small hole was uncovered but with no perceptible draught.

Later Clive North

Drilled three shotholes in the left hand wall and fired a three stick charge.

Wednesday 6 September 1995 - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe

After the full buckets had been lifted to the surface, the broken rock from last Sunday's bang was taken out. The clean washed cobble area was uncovered again, and "freshness of the air" if not exactly a draught was noted by DS and RW.

Twenty six buckets were brought out.

Thursday 7 September 1995 - Dave Speed

Continued lowering the floor in the bang widened section. Plenty of clean washed cobbles and small holes but the rift ahead is still only about 8" wide.

The spoil - about ten light buckets - was stockpiled just below the entrance shaft.

Sunday 10 September 1995 - Dave Speed, Bob Cottle, Richard Witcombe

Very heavy rain sent all the diggers underground.

Further excavation of the banged area revealed yet more narrow slots in the floor, some of which could be probed by crowbar for three feet or so. The overall height of the rift at this point is now about 8'.

In the absence of bang, digging switched to the narrow rift ahead. A small, cobble strewn horizontal hole was opened up which seemed to connect with the open, descending roof tube after about 6', but it was very narrow - 6" to 8" - for its full length. Two or three feet further down at the level of the slots in the floor, the passage

ahead starts to widen, and digging halted in a cobble filled section about a foot wide.

Spoil - about twenty half buckets - was stockpiled further up the passage.

Tuesday 12 September 1999 - Clive North

Drilled two shotholes in the left hand buttress and fired a two stick charge - half a stick in one hole and one and a half in the other.

Sunday 17 September 1995 - Dave Speed, Bob Cottle, Clive North, Mark Williams, Nigel Hellyar, Richard Witcombe

Cleared from both the stockpile and the end. Thirty nine buckets and one large trussed rock were taken to the surface.

CN attempted some Kango chiselling but a loose connection caused problems. Only one sizeable block was peeled off.

The prospects ahead are puzzling. Fresh air appears to be coming from the tiny hole ahead, but the widening of the passage at floor level has petered out with the walls and various ribs of rock closing in again.

A cigarette test on the draught was inconclusive.

Sunday 24 September 1995 - Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe

Further lowering of the floor in front of the "narrows".

The bang shock waves had travelled downwards and with some crowbar and sledgehammer work, DS removed about 18" of broken rock and natural fill. At this point it was possible to insert head and shoulders into a small, upstream, open space, 18" wide and a foot high over a cobble and gravel floor, but blocked updip after 2' or so. There was a 6" high extension over what looked to be a dropped roof block heading up to the left (looking downstream) to a blank wall after 8'.

This passage may represent the streamway level associated with the true bottom of the natural cliff face, which was not reached during the JCB excavation.

The air in the new hole was fresh and both DS and RW detected draught pulses. As it was a very breezy day up top, this phenomenon was probably related to gusts of wind blowing over the entrance shaft.

All the spoil was dumped below the entrance shaft.

Tuesday 26 September 1995 - Clive North, Dave Speed

Drilled two shotholes in the left hand buttress in front of the narrows, and fired a one stick charge.

Wednesday 27 September 1995 - Dave Speed, Dave Morrison, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe

Brought up fourteen buckets from the stockpile and a further fourteen from the digging face.

The floor of the main dig was deepened allowing a better view of the inlet passages. The left hand passage does not end after 8' but continues for at least 15' as a slightly offset narrow rift heading at a gentle angle updip across the strike. In its further reaches it may be close to mansized, and since it may intercept cross rifts associated with the entrance cliff face, it will need to be investigated further. This will require the demolition of the dropped slab.

The rift dig is still less than 6" wide directly ahead, but where the inlets meet the 18" section appears to continue downwards at that width. Beneath the cobble and stream gravel layer, there looks to be plenty of silt and mud.

Sunday 1 October 1995 - Dave Speed, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe

Continued to dig downwards in the widest part of the rift, lowering the floor by 18" or so and gaining a further foot of width. The spoil, comprising silt, gravel and a generous helping of small cobbles, was stockpiled below the entrance shaft.

The surface wind was again strong, and draught pulses were detected from the inlet area. Using a rake, small rocks were cleared from the far end of the dropped slab, and a better view of the left hand inlet was gained. About 12' along, the left hand wall seems to disappear, perhaps representing a small chamber. The other inlet, underneath the entrance passage, is narrow but partly open for at least 5' with a run in of rocks and cobbles.

After DM and RW had departed, DS continued to probe the floor of the dig, at one point almost losing a crowbar. The cobbles in the floor were larger at depth - up to a foot long - and 18" further down holes started to appear. By stockpiling all around the terminal rift, DS cleared away enough spoil to uncover a significant bedding plane dropping down for 6' or 8' beneath the left hand buttress. It looks as if it may be man-sized.

Wednesday 4 October 1995 - Dave Speed, Clive North, Dave Morrison, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe and a large contingent of NHASA

With DS at the digging face, four others underground and up to half a dozen on the surface, two hour and a half hours were spent clearing spoil from both the bottom of the rift and the upper stockpile. Fifty two buckets were taken to the surface before DS announced that way on was sufficiently open to call a halt to digging.

After most of the team had peered one by one into the open bedding plane, all adjourned to the surface to prepare for exploration.

DS was given the privilege of leading the party, and after much squirming and snagging of battery and belt buckle, he slid through the entrance squeeze and down an inclined slab into a bedding plane up to 6' wide and 3' high. RW and the rest followed close behind.

After 15' or so, the passage swung left and continued as a low crawl past a nest of roughly shaped cave "pearls" and a few short formations before enlarging into a short section of walking height passage. Choked inlets and side passages were visible at several points, and on the right there was a small boulder chamber at roof level.

The passage closed in to a 6' climb down into a narrow 18" wide rift with a fringe of formations below on the left, some flood damaged. Ahead a flat out crawl over silt and rocks led to a small slot through which stones fell for about 15' into what sounded like a sizeable passage. To the right before the crawl was a parallel rift about 15' high with a man sized hole in the ruckle floor. As this will need gardening and walling before it is pushed, a halt was called to the evening's exploration at this point.

Encouragingly, both DS and GB reported hearing the sound of a stream flowing at the far end of the cave, although there is no stream entering the field culvert.

The return to the surface was made easier by a handline on the now very muddy inclined slab at the breakthrough point. The swift slide down this block by DS and all who followed led to it being christened Speedway.

Pleased with the night's work, the entire team adjourned to the Hunter's for celebratory refreshment.

Sunday 8 October 1995 - AM: Dave Morrison, Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe. Joined later by Bob Cottle

A warm, sunny autumn day following two days of prolonged heavy rain. The culvert stream was flowing.

Carried out a Grade 1 survey to the end, taping the cave pearls on route. The overall length was approximately 125' and depth 50', trending mainly west.

A small stream was flowing in the new passage, emerging from under the right hand wall of the Speedway bedding plane and sinking under the stal grill below the 6' drop. This trickle is presumably all or part of the culvert water. A much larger stream could be heard below the terminal boulder choke.

DS and DM commenced shifting large boulders from the hole in the floor in the end rift chamber, eventually disclosing a view down a blackened rift 3' to 4' wide and at least 20' deep. One particularly large "coffin slab" threatened the descent and it was decided to adjourn to the surface for a break and a rope.

An animal vertebra (possibly cow) was found in the mud in the terminal choke.

PM: The above plus Simon Meade-King and John Hill (NHASA)

The party of six went back to the open rift with JH's tow rope, and DS, DM and JH succeeded in hauling back and tying off the great slab. After much gardening of loose material and the provision of a ladder as an aid, DM clambered down the rift - Sarcophagus Rift - and announced that he was in large passage descending steeply to his right. Four others descended, leaving JH above as a safeguard against a boulder collapse into the rift.

Later, after a roof inspection, JH was brought down to join the pushing party.

The team followed a small stream down a large clean washed chamber up to 20' wide and 10' high, descending across the strike westwards at about 35 degrees. Decorations were absent apart from the occasional stal flow, and there were comparatively few boulders on the floor. Like the rift above, there was much evidence of shale in the walls and the void may represent a large washed out shale band.

After 80' or so, the dimensions closed right in and the floor levelled, and just beyond an attractive stal flow, a partial rock choke was encountered in a passage about 2' high and 3' wide. DS cleared rocks back, and the choke was passed in five minutes. With BC in the lead, a potholed, descending tube was followed around several bends for a further 50', where progress was halted by a 12" to 18" high bedding partially filled with water. BC reported that the roof appeared to rise after about 8', but it was decided to leave pushing it to the following Wednesday.

The estimated length of the cave now stands at 350' and the depth 120'.

Wednesday 11 October 1995 - Dave Speed, Kate Powell, Clive North, Dave Morrison, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe and a large NHASA contingent

The early part of the evening saw a number of tourist trips passing through the cave, most people going no further than the large chamber, now christened Great Expectations.

Dave Pullen, one of the NHASA diggers, attempted the wet terminal crawl but did not pass the mud bank on the far side.

Later, RW and GB arrived on the scene and passed through the flat out wallow, squeezed over the mud bank and emerged ten feet further on in a narrow, heavily decorated cross rift.

To the right was a stal choke inlet, while on the left the floor dropped 8' and was just wide enough for a restricted crawl along the bottom of the streamway. On the right and at roof height was a fine collection of pure white flows, curtains and small pagoda formations. After 12' or so, another 5' to 6' pot presented itself below which the constricted rift continued. The roof and right hand wall at this point were covered with so much stal that the passage could not be negotiated without damage. The way on could be seen to continue for about 15', after which the passage appeared to turn right. The left hand wall of the rift is very crumbly black shale, and it may be possible to enlarge it with lump hammers to save the stal. RW and GB turned back to report the position

to the others. The name The Old Curiosity Shop was chosen for the passage in continuation of the Dickens theme.

Meanwhile CN had been investigating the original hole in the floor at the head of Sarcophagus Rift. It needs widening to permit entry but appears to lead to a passage parallel with, but unconnected to, Great Expectations.

Further up the cave, CN also examined the right hand side of Speedway passage, and reported a narrow slot on the right down which stones rattle for quite a distance.

The NHASA diggers repaid their tourist trips by clearing mud from the rift above the breakthrough point, lifting about twenty five buckets to the surface.

By the end of the evening the total passage length was estimated at over 400' and the depth 140'.

Sunday 15 October 1995 - Dave Speed, Bob Cottle, Graham Bromley, John Hill, Clive North, Richard Witcombe

With no significant rain for a week, the cave stream had vanished.

DS, CN and JH decided to examine the conjectural passage above Sarcophagus Rift, while the "small men", GB, RW and BC, opted to push and if possible enlarge the passage beyond the wallow.

The wallow itself, still half full of water, proved resistant to either enlargement or drainage. The floor of the far end squeeze which acts as a dam comprises a thin layer of mud over very hard rock and it will probably have to remain a "sporting" feature. Beyond, the narrow rift was enlarged slightly by lump hammering shale layers and thin rock shelves in order to reduce the muddying effect of passing cavers on the stal flows on the right hand wall.

GB commenced hammering away at the left hand wall of the terminal squeeze, but progress was slow as the rock proved hard and it was impossible to get a good swing of the hammer because of the proximity of stal curtains. Eventually the route was sufficiently enlarged for him to squeeze along the level floor and down through another constriction to emerge in a much larger passage.

RW and BC joined him with some difficulty and the three set off down a descending, potholed trench cut into the floor of a dip passage 8' wide and 6' to 10' high. Above the entry point, an upstream continuation was choked by a profusion of stal flows and straws and there were other formations at intervals down the passage.

After 60', the trench widened into a low, level floored chamber and the way on degenerated into a flat out, cobble strewn crawl along the strike. GB undertook a solo reconnaissance of this passage while the two geriatric members of the team recovered from the exertions of the squeeze.

Twenty feet further on, GB dropped 6' into a down dip rift, which he followed in meandering fashion, mainly by crawling, for about 100'. He called a halt at a letter box constriction which will require some chipping away, but he could see slightly larger passage continuing ahead. On his right, an inlet with gour pools led up for 10' or so to a stal choke.

The party made their way out, with BC and RW struggled mightily in the squeezes, and met up with DS in The Old Curiosity Shop. He had attempted the final squeeze but was too large to get through.

Back in Great Expectations, the two teams met up. The others had had no luck above Sarcophagus Rift, the expected passage being no more than an alcove under the wall.

The length of the cave now stands at 600' and the depth about 180'.

Wednesday 18 October 1995 - Graham Bromley, Dave Morrison, Richard Witcombe

Passage naming in the Hunter's:

The wet "wallow" - Uriah Creep.

The very tight squeeze at the end of the Old Curiosity Shop - Scrooge's Squeeze.

The decorated, descending trench beyond - Ebenezer's Escalator.

The terminal crawl pushed by GB - Chiropractor Crawl (GB is currently having chiropractor treatment for a back problem).

Friday 20 October 1995 - Graham Bromley, Max Midlen

GB chiselled his way through the bedding plane squeeze at the end of Chiropractor Crawl, but the slot was still too tight for MM to pass.

GB pressed on alone down a stooping and crawling potholed passage, decorated in parts, for approximately 150', stopping at another tight section. He passed several inlets, including a man-sized passage on the right leading up to two holes in the roof after 15'. A probable ox-bow passage was also noticed but not entered.

The cave length is now over 750' and the depth approximately 210'.

Sunday 22 October 1995 - Andy Legg (MNRC), Paul Stillman (MNRC), Bob Cottle, Richard Witcombe

Andy Legg has agreed to survey the cave, and Paul Stillman wished to take photographs, some for a "Descent" article.

The four made their way to the bottom of the Escalator, with RW making a short foray beyond the five foot pot in Chiropractor Passage.

Rob Taviner (Wessex CC) later passed the photographic party and paid a brief visit to the end of the cave, and he was followed by Graham Bromley, Tony Jarratt (BEC) and Estelle Sandford (BEC) on a bang reconnaissance visit to the squeeze which stopped Max Midlen.

Monday 23 October 1995 - Tony Jarratt, Rob Harper

RH was stopped by Scrooge's Squeeze but AJ went ahead to bang GB's squeeze. A small linked charge - one slab - was fired in two Bosch drilled shotholes.

Wednesday 25 October 1995 - Graham Bromley, followed later by Richard Witcombe and various NHASA and Wessex tourists

There was a tiny trickle of water emerging at the head of Great Expectations and flowing through the cave.

GB found that the bang had not significantly enlarged the squeeze and a further charge will be needed to permit the passage of "average" cavers.

He proceeded to the constriction reached on 20 October and squeezed through into another 50' of passage, meandering downwards at a slightly steeper angle. He passed under an aven bringing in a few drips before stopping at a further squeeze.

This section of passage he named Chocoholic after the colouring of the walls.

Backtracking, he examined the probable oxbow noted on 20 October, and explored it for 20' through a tiny silty chamber to a point where there was a visible link with the main passage on the right and a diggable route

straight ahead. RW checked the upper cave for possible side passages, noting only a well choked and loose roofed inlet on the right hand side just beyond the cave pearls.

Wednesday 1 November 1995 - Mark Midlen, Peter Haigh, Aubrey Newport, Pete Hann, Ros Fielder

While AN continued chiselling at Scrooge's Squeeze, the others went on to assault Graham's letterbox. Unfortunately the attempts at enlargement of this far squeeze resulted in a large flake of rock being levered into a position where it effectively blocks the way on. A plaster charge is now needed.

NB A dustbin was placed over the cave pearls to protect them from careless visitors.

Sunday 5 November 1995 - Two parties: Tony Jarratt, Richard Blake, Adrian Hole - all BEC. Clive North, Bob Cottle, Richard Witcombe. Later joined by Dave Speed

AJ and company proceeded to the far reaches of the cave to bang the rock flake in Graham's letterbox. RB was able to squeeze past the obstruction and proceeded beyond GB's exploration limit. A few feet further on, he was able to look down a tube like passage to see a pool of water with extensive silt banks - a probable sump.

A stick of gelignite was placed on the slab and detonated from the foot of Ebenezer's Escalator. The bang was heard clearly at the cave entrance.

Meanwhile, while RC scouted around the upper passages, CN assisted by RW conducted a video camera experiment in the strike passage close to the Speedway breakthrough point. A miniature camera attached to a number of drain rods was inserted along the bedding plane above the fallen block and guided first into the mouth of a small chamber and then adjusted to look down a rift just beyond the block. A live picture was transmitted down a cable to the video view finder held by RW. Had CN not forgotten a vital connecting cable, the picture would have been further relayed to a small monitor screen. Even so a very clear image was received. Scale could be guessed by reference to what the naked eye could see, and the view suggested man-sized spaces. Unfortunately the flexibility of the drain rods meant that the camera drooped just as it entered the threshold of the chamber, giving a view of a boulder in the floor rather than the way ahead.

The team were sufficiently encouraged by the camera work to consider how best to dig into the new area. Banging the fallen slab would not be an easy option as it appeared to be supporting a number of boulders under the entrance passage. A lower approach was sought, and RC, by now at the top of the Speedway boulder, was asked to peer up to his right. He could see black spaces amongst rocks, and RW set to work to clear out the fill to the left hand, entrance side of the squeeze.

A number of very large cobbles were easily removed, revealing a strong outward draught and giving a view into a blackened man-sized rift descending down to the right and out of sight. This looked as if it could be the continuation of the chamber seen above. CN took over the work, unearthing a bovine femur in the process, and confirming the promising prospects ahead. Although little more digging was needed to break in, the hour was late and it was decided to return fresh on Wednesday evening.

Wednesday 8 November 1995 - Clive North, Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe, Dave Morrison, Graham Bromley, Pete Hann, Ros Fielder, Colin X, Martin X, Carmen Smith

The party split into several teams - CN, DS and RW looking at the side passage revealed on 5 November, DM and CS checking the middle section of the cave, CX and MX on a tourist trip and GB, PH and RF pushing on to the end.

Starting earlier than RW, CN and DS quickly dug into the new passage. CN squeezed beneath boulders for 10' to emerge in a convergence of small, blackened shaly rifts. Above was a 5' climb into the space seen by the video camera, leading to various inlet rifts which quickly became too tight to follow. CN climbed up into the roof for a further 12' to a point close to the bottom of the entrance shaft. The only way on was a small hole in the floor of the convergence chamber through which a small rift could be seen leading off.

With RW now present, work started on enlarging this hole. Small rocks were moved with no difficulty, and some flakes were chipped away from what was thought to be the bedrock roof above the rift. It became clear that a particular two foot square slab would have to be levered out to make entry possible, but DS felt that this rock might be playing a key role in supporting the rift roof and the wall of the convergence chamber. CN had a look, pronounced that the slab was resting against secure bedrock and advocated moving it. RW, who was lying on the entrance side of the operations, commented in jest he thought that he would note CN's words in case they needed to be quoted in a Coroner's Court. DS trustingly commenced levering the slab with a crowbar, whereupon the "bedrock" dropped a small but perceptible amount! RW felt the walls and ceiling around him vibrate.

Discretion rather than valour now became the order of the day. All thoughts of entering the rift, which in all probability leads down to the rifts alongside the Speedway boulder, were abandoned, and DS and CN crawled gingerly out to the entrance passage. The crowbar was left, "psychologically" supporting the roof. The series was christened Coroner's Inlet.

Meanwhile, GB had pushed on to the pool seen by RB on 5 November and entered the water to confirm that it was a sump. Pete Hann and Roz Fielder arrived later. The underwater passage seemed to be horizontal and reasonably roomy but there was much silt present and muddy evidence of water backing up for several feet.

Further up the cave, DM and CS made a token start on the excavation of a choked inlet at the head of Great Expectations, about 12' to the left of the current stream inlet. The latter is an impossibly tight rift but the choked passage seemed wider.

After their retreat from the slumping boulder, the Coroner's Inlet party moved on to examine the side passage on the right just beyond the cave pearls. It is at least 10' long and at right angles to the main passage but choked to within a few inches of the roof. A superficial excavation suggested that the passage may not be an inlet as it appears to drop down a few feet at the end. Further work must be undertaken with care as there is a floor of cemented cave pearls on the right and much loose material up to the left.

Saturday 11 November 1995 - Andy Legg, Paul Stillman, Richard Witcombe

There was a sizeable stream in the upper passage and the lower reaches were noisy but not impassable.

AL and PS carried on with the cave survey (their third trip) while RW excavated the side passage, dumping the spoil into a hole in the floor near the 6' drop. The cave pearls are forming on a skin of stalagmite on the mud floor beside a large fallen block. Any attempt to move this will probably destroy them and since the passage is probably no more than an oxbow leading down to the Sarcophagus Rift area, an abandonment of the dig seems the best option.

Sunday 12 November 1995 - Andy Legg, Paul Stillman and two others

Further heavy rain meant very wet conditions for the surveyors who were working in the lower reaches.

Graham Bromley, Dave Speed

DS inserted some wooden shoring beneath the slumping boulders of Coroner's Inlet which GB then explored. The narrow rifts were bringing in a lot of water and some of it was disappearing into a too tight slot off to the left below the Speedway boulder. This probably reappears as the tiny stream inlet at the back of Great Expectations, suggesting the possibility of another, albeit very immature, streamway somewhere to the left of the main system.

The two went on as far as Uriah Creep, but found the water level too high to go further.

Wednesday 15 November 1995 - Dave Speed, Kate Powell, Max Midlen, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe

DS peered into Coroner's Inlet to find that the shored area had collapsed leaving part of the right hand wall and roof now lying on the floor. After a careful check the route through was pronounced marginally safer than before, but the rotten state of the rock in this area and the weight of water hitting it means that this series should be regarded as a risky optional extra for anyone visiting the cave.

There was much less water in the cave than at the weekend, and GB and MM proceeded to the sump to find that it had backed up 6' or 7' above its former level.

In the meantime, DS, KP and RW carried on excavating the choked inlet at the head of Great Expectations, but after 5' of easy digging in gravel fill and cobbles, large jammed rocks were encountered. The prospects of significant "upstream" passage are not great and do not justify the use of bang in this potentially unstable area. It was decided therefore to abandon the dig.

Wednesday 22 November 1995 - Dave Speed, Dave Morrison, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe

Tidied up the underground digs, taped the cave pearls in the side passage, and cleared as much mud as possible from the breakthrough area. Seventeen bucket loads were sent to the surface.

Sunday 3 December 1995 - Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe

Checked two areas of silting - one at the top and one at the bottom of Great Expectations (left hand wall) - for side passages. Both proved to be no more than alcoves.

Visited Coroner's Inlet and found a moderate stream disappearing into various tiny holes in the floor. The upstream continuation, if enlarged, would give access to what appears to be 15' or so of small but man-sized passage, ending in a small waterfall, probably an aven reaching up to the cliff face rifts.

Sunday 17 December 1995 - Andy Legg, Adrian Hall, Malcolm Nicol, James Thackray (all MNRC)

A sump diving trip. Andy Legg inserted himself into the murk with hand held kit, and descended a low bedding plane at a shallow angle for about 25'. At this point, he felt silt all around him and returned to the surface.

Bob Cottle, Richard Witcombe

Attacked upstream Coroner's Inlet with a hammer, chisel and crowbar, and made 4' of progress. Beyond a short constriction, which may require banging, the passage looks man-sized for about 10' to a 3' or 4' waterfall. The sizeable stream flowing through Coroner's is not seen in the Speedway.