

The Journal of **York Caving Club** and **North York Moors Caving Club**



Number 3:
2013 - 2020

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Edited by Gary Douthwaite and Matt Ewles.

Cover photo: Ian Dawson in Pandemic Passage, Jenga Pot.

All photos in this journal courtesy of John Dale, Gary Douthwaite,
Chris Twigg and Rich Veitch. Cartoons by Pete Ryder.

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Excalibur / Jenga Pot survey

Bogg Hall Cave survey

MSG Hole survey

Plus others

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The Holy Grail Flowstone in the Excalibur Pot Main Streamway, taken in 2016 ahead of a talk at Hutton-le-Hole Village Hall. Despite all the amazing discoveries that this journal reports (mostly on the Jenga Pot side of the system), The Holy Grail and Main Streamway remain the most magnificent formation and passage in the North York Moors.

Forward

On a dark and frosty evening in the final days of December 2019, the annual NYMCC and YCC dinner was gathering pace at The Crown. Beer was flowing freely, the meal was excellent as usual, and Santa (in full regalia) was handing out brightly wrapped presents to a packed audience in front of a roaring log fire. As the drunken evening wore on, and as small groups of cavers gathered around to make new friends or remake old acquaintances, no one had ever heard of Wuhan, Covid-19 or lockdowns.

How time flies!

The subsequent dire events of early 2020 curtailed many underground activities, isolated friendships and resulted in the untimely departure of an original Moldywarp to the great dig in the sky. Despite the challenges of 2020-21 and those yet to come, the Moors remain in their splendour with curlews calling across the purple heather, summer streams dancing gaily across bright limestone bedrock and high sandstone edges bracing themselves against the winter blizzards.

The history of modern caving on the North York Moors began in a similar tumultuous time, with the early exploration of Dowson Pot by Raymond Hayes as war raged across Europe. When peacetime eventually arrived, Paul Fitton and Doreen Mitchell began systematically investigating the archaeology of the Windypits. The Yorkshire Ramblers made occasional forays into the area and, much later, the Moldywarps Speleo Group (MSG) began to migrate into the nearby valleys.

On 26th June 1971, Graham Stevens, MSG's "Thin Man", recorded the first Moldywarp observation of sinks in Hutton Beck:

Permission was asked at Water Swallows Cottage and the 20-foot escarpment was located on the west bank of the beck. At the upstream end of the cliff, under a tree is the entrance to Dowson Pot. Further downstream and at the base of the cliff is the impressive entrance to Lingmoor Cave. The normal water swallow is a few hundred yards upstream, but in wet weather the water overflows and sinks into the riverbed in several places.

Graham, who keenly followed the various exploits over the subsequent years, passed away due to Covid-19 in 2020 and is sadly missed.

Graham's friend, Ernie Shield, a talented rock climber who in 1963 had girdled the impressive Whitestone Cliff at Sutton Bank, also started to make progress in caves across the North York Moors. Ernie eventually recruiting the newly formed Scarborough Caving Club and other nomadic cavers to his underground explorations.

In 2007 as York Caving Club members combined forces with Ernie and the Scarborough Caving Club, a new "Golden Age" of North York Moors cave exploration exploded onto the British caving scene. Finds came thick, fast and, following grand Moldywarp tradition, were thoughtfully documented in two consecutive journals. The first issue (2010) introduced the discovery of Excalibur Pot and the second issue (2013) following this up with the early explorations of Jenga Pot, not to mention several finds elsewhere.

This new journal, the third in the series, documents the digs, discoveries and other club exploits between 2013 and 2020. Highlights include the 2015 connection of Excalibur Pot to Jenga Pot and the 2020 Covid Extensions which lie beyond the three short sumps at the southern end of Jenga Pot's Chertnoby region.

These new explorations add significantly to our knowledge of the Hutton Beck to River Dove hydrology. Unbelievably, the strong possibility of a navigable trans-valley cave system was tentatively glimpsed underground between the 2020 summer relaxation of the Covid-19 lockdown and the arrival of the winter monsoons which closed the sumps.

The new availability of public sourced satellite radar (Lidar) played a crucial role in the discovery of a new windypit in the Gowerdale valley - Thunder Windypit. And yet again, the industrial legacy of the North York Moors provided more new finds associated with Chris Twigg's "Jet Project", rediscovering and surveying inland jet workings which have shaken archaeological understandings in the area.

These three journals provide a lasting legacy to the hard won exploration and scientific understanding of the "Underworld" of the North York Moors. To bring this work to life is a different matter. To this end, club members have undertaken many illustrated talks in churches, village halls and pubs, to the delight of local landowners and communities. It is to these people that this new journal is dedicated. Special mention has to be made to James Holt and his family, and George Winn-Darley, who have provided unwavering support over many years, and to the staff of The Crown in Hutton-le-Hole who have put up with our late night antics for well over a decade.

The discoveries and varied exploits of the characters in this journal are a clear and lasting legacy to the comradeship of like-minded people, operating in a small group with a common focus. The bonds built in endeavours such as these are stronger than normal relationships, allowing sick and twisted practical jokes, winding-ups and put-downs to be administered to participants on regular occasions. In the "New Normal" these simple acts of "kindness" will, without doubt, become ever more important and valued.

In an example of this, during 2019 our clubs supported the esteemed author Robert MacFarlane in a project for his latest book "Underland" by hosting a visit to Antoft's Windypit. Robert, being Fellow of Emmanuel College Cambridge and Director of English for the University was extolling the romance of the Windypits when I recited a well-remembered poem that Graham Stevens had taught me as a child:

*Hence loathed melancholy
Of Cerberus and blackest midnight born
In Stygian cave forlorn
Amongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy
Find out some uncouth cell
Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings
And the night raven sings*

Robert turned round with wide eyes, a beaming smile and exclaimed; "MILTON!"

To which the answer came; "No – Pete Ryder, *Moldywarps Journal 7 -1976*".

John Dale, February 2021

Editors' notes

York Caving Club has continued to thrive over the last several years, with an active membership of 20-30 cavers and regular sporting trips. Our digging partnership with the North York Moors Caving Club (previously known as Scarborough Caving Club) has grown ever stronger, and the discoveries have just kept on coming.

This journal has arrived several months later than we had hoped. With Covid, we were all so keen to get back out of the house to see friends through 2021, and to progress our various digs, that journal editing took somewhat of a back seat. Much digging progress has been made in 2021, however, this journal focuses on work from 2013-2020, with only a few occasional mentions of some 2021 activities here and there.

Journal Four will not be far behind. The continued exploration of the Jenga Pot "Covid Extensions" and its four new sumps, all of which are spacious and await divers, should yield quick results. Furthermore, work at another dig downstream of Jenga Pot, and the 4km discovery of Draughting Hole near the Stang Forest in Gretadale (previewed in MSG 14 Journal, but a YCC-lead discovery), not to mention further jet and whinstone mine rediscoveries, mean that Journal Four is already well-populated.

Credit for the explorations detailed within this journal include the following 'regulars' who have come along on numerous occasions from 2013-2020:

From York Caving Club:

- Laura Bennett
- John Dale (JD)
- Ian Dawson (Snazzy)
- Gary Douthwaite
- Matt Ewles
- Rachel Findlay
- Alistair Rollinson (Lumens)
- Will Scott
- Ade Turner (Aids)
- Adele Ward
- David Willis (Pants)

From North York Moors Caving Club:

- Nial Adams
- Johnny Briggs
- Andy Brennan
- John Cameron (JC)
- Richard Edwards (Sparky)
- Paul Horner (Handshake)
- Lee Smith
- Carl Thomas (Chalky)
- Chris Twigg
- Rich Veitch (Bindy)
- Richard Wilsdon (Dickwad)

Plus, countless others who have turned up less regularly, but with no less enthusiasm, to lend a hand when manpower has been short or just to see what's going on. The attendee list in the next journal will be significantly longer, as 2021 has seen a fruitful influx of new diggers. This is thanks in-part to a live-streamed online talk given during lockdown in February 2021 which is available on the York Caving Club YouTube channel.

We would like to thank James Holt and family, and George Winn-Darley, who have supported our explorations on their land for 14 years now. Also, to The Crown at Hutton-le-Hole, our 'caver pub' who have nourished us and kept us watered for the same amount of time, and put up with our antics in their otherwise reputable establishment.

Gary Douthwaite and Matt Ewles, December 2021

Excalibur to Jenga Pot

Jenga Pot is the southernmost sink of Hutton Beck, 400m downstream of Excalibur Pot. The Jenga Pot swallet (on the opposite side of the riverbed to the present-day entrance) was, at the time we started digging, the second largest swallet in Hutton Beck.

Digging at Jenga Pot commenced in 2007, shortly after the Excalibur Pot discovery, but ended up taking five years of serious effort before finally (2013) yielding 500m of cave, with very tantalising leads to keep us busy. This was all reported in Journal Two.

One of these leads was the draughting boulder choke at the end of Sandpit Passage, the northernmost reach of the cave, only 40m from the end of Shit Creek in Excalibur Pot. Another lead was the end of Left-Hand Passage, just off Sandpit Passage. These two leads commence the story that soon achieved a connection with Excalibur Pot.

This chapter covered our efforts in the region between Excalibur Pot and Jenga Pot, with progress told chronologically, to show how our focus shifted over the years.

Lots has happened in the system outside of the region between the two entrances. This includes pushing Primal Scream in the Excalibur Main Streamway, and the recent megabreakthroughs at the Jenga Pot Chertnobyl Sumps. For simplicity, these are reported in separate chapters (although work at the sumps is mentioned briefly below).

2013

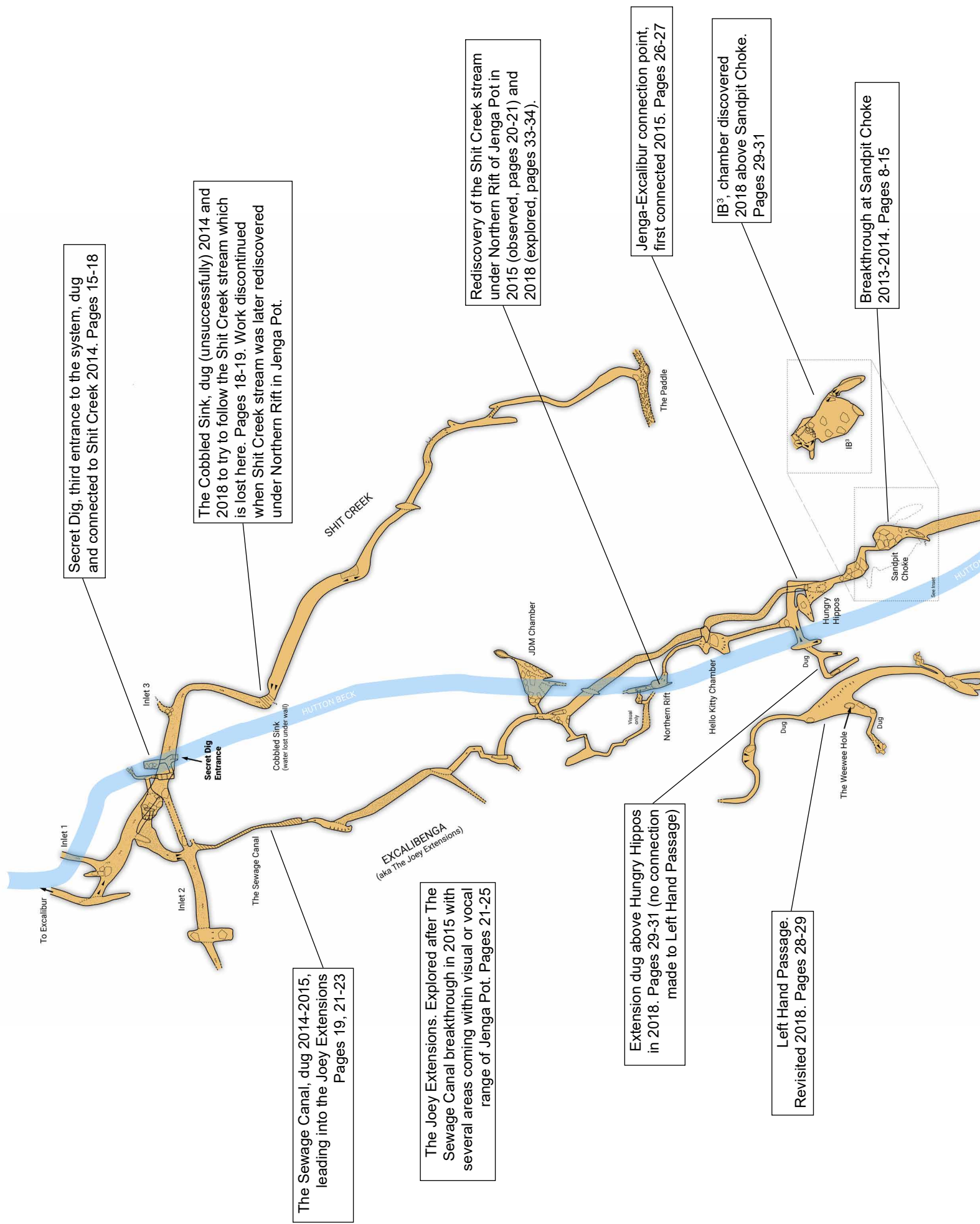
Sandpit Choke and Chertnobyl Sump

We pick up the story where Journal Two left off in summer 2013. The main ongoing project was the draughting boulder choke at the northern end of Sandpit Passage (Sandpit Choke). Tempting black voids beyond lured us back and attempts were made in 2013 to blast the boulders, but these efforts allowed barely a metre of penetration into the hanging death. This was going to be a lengthy effort, but the strong breeze, and proximity to Shit Creek in Excalibur Pot provided adequate incentive.

On 3rd September, Matt Ewles reported:

Work for the rest of the year is going to involve engineering a route up through Sandpit Choke. Over the last week, we've collected together all our scaffolding, robbing it from other digs. Dozens of poles and three bags of clamps awaited us at the entrance to Jenga for this week. Thanks to a good turnout, we were able to make a line of people through various sections of the cave to shuttle the bars, before the conga line of cavers could progress forward another 25m. Before we knew it, the bars and clamps were at Sandpit Choke ready for deployment and we were even at the pub early that night, so a double whammy success!

Over the weeks that followed, we used a long pole to encourage blocks out of the choke from a safe distance, and then scaffolded upwards into the resulting void.



Secret Dig, third entrance to the system, dug and connected to Shit Creek 2014. Pages 15-18

The Cobbled Sink, dug (unsuccessfully) 2014 and 2018 to try to follow the Shit Creek stream which is lost here. Pages 18-19. Work discontinued when Shit Creek stream was later rediscovered under Northern Rift in Jenga Pot.

Rediscovery of the Shit Creek stream under Northern Rift of Jenga Pot in 2015 (observed, pages 20-21) and 2018 (explored, pages 33-34).

Jenga-Excalibur connection point, first connected 2015. Pages 26-27

IB³, chamber discovered 2018 above Sandpit Choke. Pages 29-31

Breakthrough at Sandpit Choke 2013-2014. Pages 8-15

The Sewage Canal, dug 2014-2015, leading into the Joey Extensions Pages 19, 21-23

The Joey Extensions. Explored after The Sewage Canal breakthrough in 2015 with several areas coming within visual or vocal range of Jenga Pot. Pages 21-25

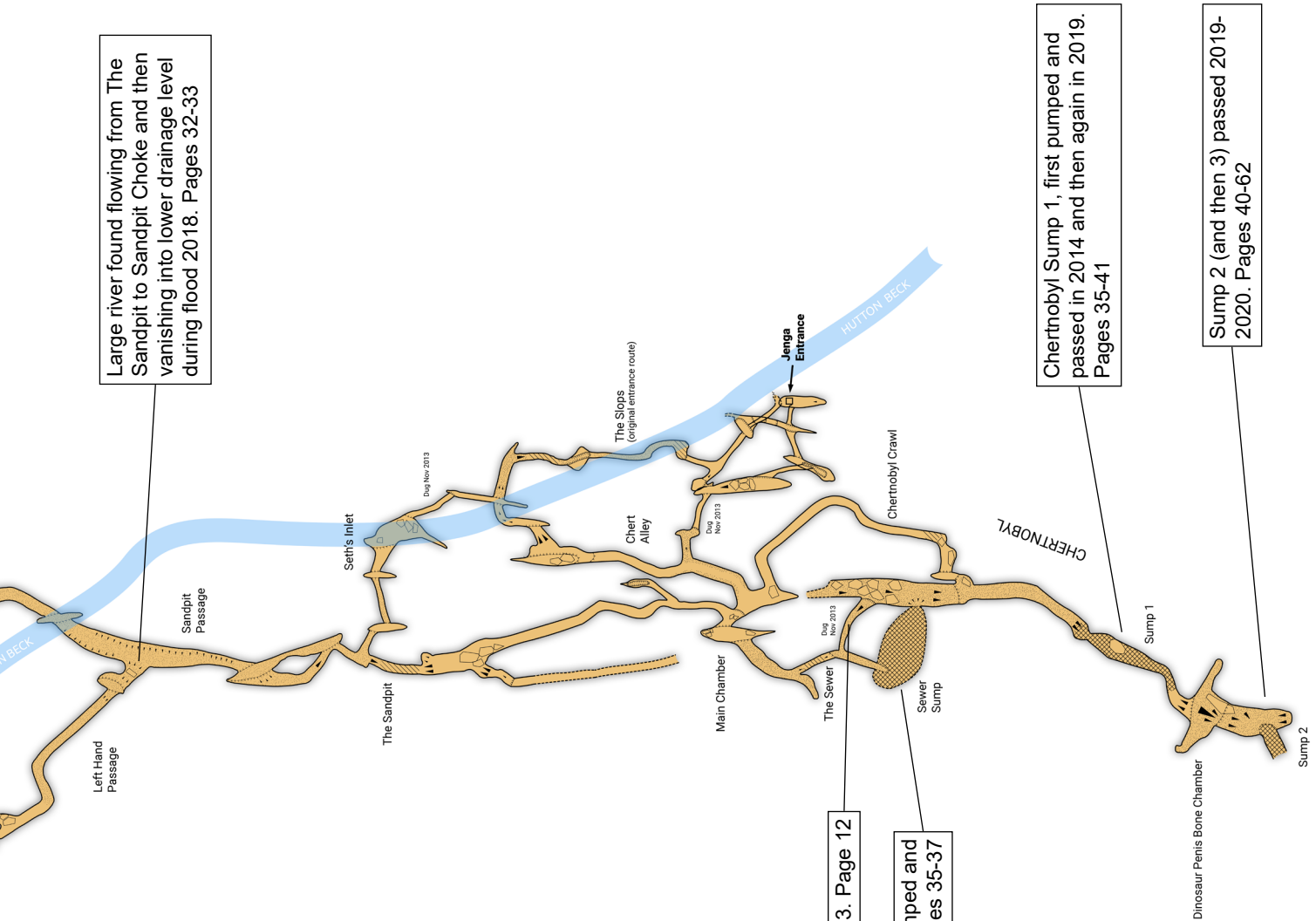
Extension dug above Hungry Hippos in 2018. Pages 29-31 (no connection made to Left Hand Passage)

Left Hand Passage. Revisited 2018. Pages 28-29

JENGA POT / EXCALIBUR POT

BCRA Grade 5d.

Jenga Pot including Shit Creek and the Joey Extensions in Excalibur Pot, highlighting the key breakthroughs and discoveries reported in this journal.



Large river found flowing from The Sandpit to Sandpit Choke and then vanishing into lower drainage level during flood 2018. Pages 32-33

Sewer to Chertnoby connection dug 2013. Page 12

Sewer Sump, pumped and pushed 2014. Pages 35-37

Chertnoby Sump 1, first pumped and passed in 2014 and then again in 2019. Pages 35-41

Sump 2 (and then 3) passed 2019-2020. Pages 40-62

By November 2013, a route up through Sandpit Choke had been engineered and partly stabilised. Before we could finish this, the first winter flood arrived, and as The Sandpit sumps and requires a week to drain sufficiently, progress at the choke stalled. However, thanks to the all-weather route into Chert Alley, avoiding The Slops (see previous journal), a few hardy diggers were able to get into Jenga even in full flood to undertake some other small winter projects that were to prove invaluable.

One of these projects included digging a route up through boulders beyond The Sewer into Chertnobl. This route is considerably less strenuous than Chertnobl Crawl and made it easier to transport a camera and waterproof lighting for insertion into the Chertnobl Sump (Sump One) attached to extendable drain rods. This revealed the sump to be extensive and spacious. Diving or pumping would be needed to make any progress here, and this is something we will cover in the next chapter (page 35).

2014

Sandpit Choke and the Hello Kitty Extensions

The floods finally subsided enough to allow work to resume at Sandpit Choke on 26th February, as reported by Matt:

Gary and I headed along to try to finish the scaffolding. We were pleased to find The Sandpit unchanged, despite speculation that it would need digging back out after being sumped repeatedly over the winter. Sandpit Choke was also unchanged, and a cold draught emerged to inspire us. We picked up where we left off last year, and after much swearing by Gary the last few scaffold bars were installed and a route up through the choke was 'safely' navigable. Gary went first but a small rock halfway up suddenly moved causing undersuit staining as he rapidly reversed. Then it was my turn.

I climbed the scaffolding to emerge into a spacious area above the choke. A few metres above me was a roof of hanging death and there was no apparent way on other than a 2m drop back down to a cobbled floor passage, leading (pleasingly) away from the choke for 4m to a sharp left bend.

Just around this bend, despite the passage enlarging, another wall of boulders greeted me, including a two-seater sofa sized block wedged diagonally across the passage. A small gap was open above it with space beyond, but some rocks would need prising out with a crowbar before it was possible to get through without certain death. I delicately returned and Gary went in for a look, noting a clean cobble-floored passage ahead and a good echo! He emerged fairly excited, but for now, the pub beckoned.

The weather was kind, and the following week (5th March), a sizable team headed down to Sandpit Choke. Matt reported on the progress:

Clearly a breakthrough was imminent as the entire team turned up!

I went through the choke first, armed with a crowbar. Within a few minutes the wedge over the two-seater-sofa block had been freed from obstructions. The 'sofa' was still causing me anxiety as it was resting on just one corner

on a non-solid floor. I continued, delicately, and was greeted by a faceful of terrifying blocks in the roof just above my head. I didn't hang around, and a few metres later I was back in standing-height passage.

Continuing ahead, walking-size keyhole shaped passage quickly enlarged into a chamber (Hungry Hippos), several metres high, two metres wide and with a floor of clean washed cobbles slopping down to a blank wall. The entire team followed through to celebrate this significant discovery.

Around to the left of the blank wall at the bottom of the slope was another small chamber; with a narrow window 2m above which seemed to lead up into a higher-level passage. Climbing up this was quite tricky, but once up we found ourselves in an even larger, tall chamber. To the right, the passage emerged at a traverse over the top of the earlier lower chamber above the blank wall. To the left, a steep slope led up to a spacious dead-end rift. Ahead, a crawling height passage continued into the distance.

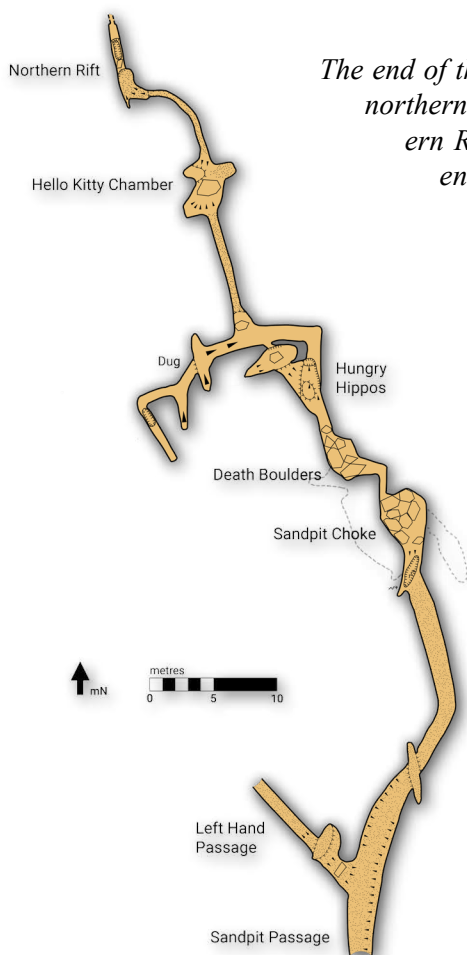
We crawled ahead for 6-7m, emerging into another chamber, 3x3m, with a large table-like block in the floor; which we called "Hello Kitty Chamber". This was standing height, with a choked aven. Ahead, another crawl carried on, this time involving a sideways thrutch. This crawl curved to the left, before enlarging again into a large rift-like chamber.

Left: Sparky emerging from Sandpit Choke.

Right: Hungry Hippos, just beyond Sandpit Choke. Unknown at the time to the two cavers (Laura Bennett and Andy Brennan), the soon-to-be connection to Excalibur Pot is just below their feet!







The end of this rift terminated in a mud choke, so this proved to be the northernmost and final chamber in the new extensions. This “Northern Rift” is several metres high, 6m long, 1-2m wide, and with enough space to accommodate everyone comfortably.

This seemed to be game-over for tonight so a quick meeting was convened. We concluded that the floor of this rift seemed to produce a slight draught and so offered good digging potential. Therefore, although this was the end of the discoveries for today, we suspect there could be significantly more to find here.

The survey showed the new extensions to come north as far as the southernmost point of Shit Creek in Excalibur Pot. However, much to our surprise, despite running parallel, the two branches were not on an intercept course, as the Jenga extensions were about 40m further west.

Even though it was now looking increasingly likely that Excalibur Pot and Jenga Pot were in fact one system, something was still missing. Digging in Northern Rift, Shit Creek, and several places in-between commenced to try to provide answers, and connection fever took firm hold of our digging teams for the coming year.

Survey extract of Sandpit Passage and the extensions beyond Sandpit Choke. Left-Hand Passage, and the yet-to-be discovered underlying passages of Excalibur Pot are omitted for clarity.

Secrets and Shit Creek

Our exertions in Jenga left many of our team missing the joys of a surface dig. The enticing, but very notable gap between the north of Jenga and Shit Creek in Excalibur was an obvious target and a surface dig in this vicinity might help answer lots of questions.

Therefore, while Matt and Gary were finishing off surveying in the Jenga Pot extensions beyond Sandpit Choke, several NYMCC folks started secretly prospecting Hutton Beck between Excalibur Pot and Jenga Pot for other possible sinks.

Chris reported on his earliest memory of the new “Secret Dig”:

My first inkling that something was afoot was 12th March 2014, when a video was shown after a Wednesday night digging session of water vanishing down a hole after some activity with the 'naughty crowbar', panning up at the end to show a familiar bridge by the Excalibur car park. Photos from the 15th March show this as little more than a small hole in the ground, but a couple more 'secret' weekends gave rapid progress.

Left top: Paul 'Handshake' Horner in the crawl coming from Hungry Hippos to Hello Kitty Chamber.

Left bottom: The team gathered at Hungry Hippos after breaking through at Sandpit Choke.

The 5th April saw the now-infamous 'squirrel incident' where a deceased rodent was repeatedly launched down the hole onto Chalky's head, at which point we estimated being 5m down. During all this time, small cracks and occasional draughts were being chased, so the 'secret' was kept for now



Early work on Secret Dig in Hutton Beck, 100m downstream of Excalibur Pot.

in case dig was abandoned. Finally, on the 15th April the 'secret' was revealed as the hole was becoming quite encouraging.

May saw slower progress as a troublesome layer was reached that needed much blamming and the concurrent disappearance of the draught. Somewhere towards the end of the month we veered off our vertical trajectory and followed a deep crack into the first proper open space upstream that became known at the "Death Chamber" where very brave work was done with the hook-a-duck boulder-pulling pole. An open area could be seen at the back of the chamber, but it was too unstable to continue.

Early June saw us move instead towards the "Tinkly-Tinkly Hole", a tiny fissure dropping some distance just offset from the entrance shaft, followed by some enlargement and extensive scaffolding sessions.

By June, Secret Dig was our primary focus, spurred on by the lack of mud (no need to spend hours washing gear each week), nice weather, and the prospect of beers on the surface. There really is nothing finer than a summer surface dig!

On Saturday 19th July, after a few months of work, the extensively enlarged and deeper 'Tinkly-Tinkly Hole' encountered a navigable rift-passage, as reported by Sparky:

I had a sneaky look down. The rift was fairly narrow with a few dodgy blocks in the roof, but nothing to worry about. I scrambled down to floor level where it became wider on the left with a passage heading 45° back with a visible chamber enticing us. I pulled a few blocks to one side and continued to crawl into the chamber. This was a decent size with a high aven in the roof. Chalky then followed, once he realised there were no cave dwelling monsters. I think his first words were "Ohh Fucking Hell". In the floor of this new chamber there were two possible ways through to a lower section with another high aven and a bum-shaped slot in the floor which dropped into a tight rift with a tighter way on, which will need enlarging.

So, Secret Dig had broken into a substantial chamber with good draught. At the far side of the chamber, on a lower shelf, was a descending rift (the Bum Shaped Slot). This was 3m deep with a too-tight crawl lead off, less than a foot high. However, during a subsequent digging trip in the far reaches of Shit Creek, Matt and Gary reported hearing a second team who were digging in Secret Dig. Therefore, a physical connection of Secret Dig into Shit Creek seemed inevitable, but where, exactly?

We were back the following weekend (Sunday 27th July), as reported by Gary:

A cracking full day of digging at Secret Dig. The Yorkie boys had recruited their secret weapon, tiny Toby Buxton, who was ready to be posted into any small hole we could find and didn't waste any time wriggling through the draughting crawl at the bottom of the Bum Shaped Slot. He described seeing a good-sized passage on the left and a slot down to a flowing stream-way on the right. We knew straight away that this had to be the second inlet of Shit Creek. Toby's usefulness was now exhausted so he was relegated to helping Chalky fill sandbags in a futile higher-level dig, which is the worst punishment of all! Meanwhile the rest of us spent two hours making the squeeze large enough for normal sized people.

Several happy diggers followed through the enlarged crawl and headed off down to the Cobbled Sink of Shit Creek to look again for digging potential there. Meanwhile Chalky was still busy digging sloppy mud out of a tube further up the shaft so I went back to gloat in our success.

Good work was achieved by all except John Dale who didn't even get his pristine boiler suit dirty and spent the afternoon laid on the bridge 'cloud watching' while the rest of us contemplated throwing beer cans and dead pheasants at him. Meanwhile, Peterphile turned up in a nice clean yellow TSA, went down the hole for five minutes and came out covered in shit. I'm not sure his trip was worth the hour of washing to clean it again.

Secret Dig now provided a back door into Inlet Two of Shit Creek, previously accessible only from Excalibur Pot via 30 minutes of wet, gruesome and suit-shredding crawling. The new back door made it much more palatable to pursue several promising digs in the Shit Creek area, and easier to reach them with drilling equipment.

Building the walling
around Secret Dig.



Finally, with Secret Dig being in the middle of the river, we needed to make it waterproof. In August, a circular 1m tall wall of blocks was cemented around the entrance with a tapered line of rocks on the upstream side to create a watershed. The entrance was finished with a metal hatch.

The Cobbled Sink in Shit Creek

The water in Shit Creek originates from three inlets:

Inlets One is the major dry-weather inlet, and we assume is fed by the Far Honey River Streamway, a presumed percolation collector, although this has not been tested.

Work since 2013 has proven that Inlet Two is fed from two percolation (autogenic) sources; The Bedding Extensions and the Honey River Streamway. The former however is also allogenic, bringing water sinking at the Excalibur Pot entrance when in flood. Both of these combine at a pool in Disappointment Chamber and form Inlet Two.

Inlet Three is a very minor, undeveloped inlet passage.

All the water in Shit Creek vanishes under a seemingly solid wall at the Cobbled Sink. An easier attack on this wall was now viable thanks to the Secret Dig entrance.

Gary reported on the first trip on 26th August:

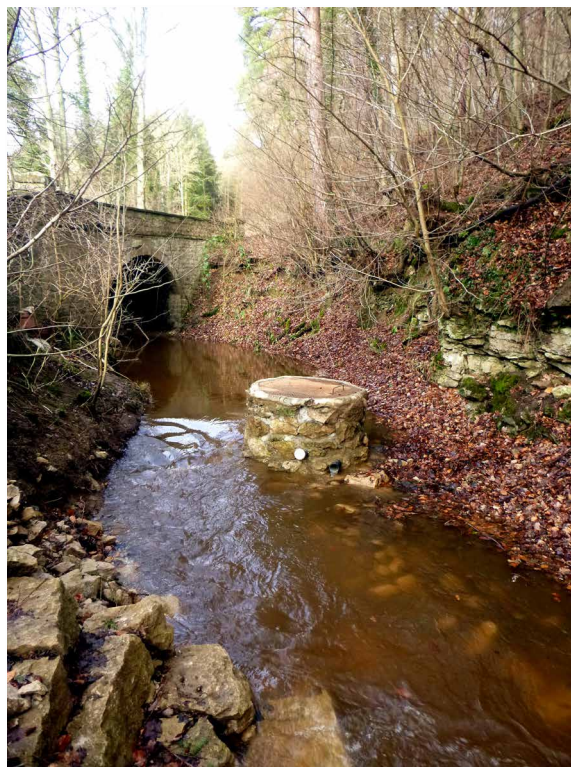
With drill in tow, Matt, David Pants and I squirmed our way down Secret Dig and through the bedding to the Cobbled Sink in Shit Creek. Matt and David sat in the larger dry passage beyond, while I drilled four holes in the wall above where the water vanishes and filled them with chemistry.

Matt and David headed back upstream laying the cable as they went while I wired up. After securing the wire around an eyehole, I headed off to find the end, which came sooner than I wanted. I waited for Matt to return with more wire which only added an extra six meters or so. This left me with little option but to fire while still lying flat-out in the Shit Creek streamway. The resulting bang felt like being trapped in a base speaker, so I headed off at speed back to the entrance before the roof fell in around me.

We returned the following week, as reported by Matt:

Clad in suitable layers of warm clothing, and armed with a few drag buckets, we dropped into Secret Dig, only to find Chalky and his team of victims already fruitlessly churning shit out of a high-level mud-choked passage. Keen to avoid getting roped into this, we slipped down into Shit Creek.

Once at the Cobbled Sink, David and I went up into the dry passage above and started to get the buckets tied onto a rope ready for use to remove the debris from last week's efforts, while Gary inspected the damage. We had



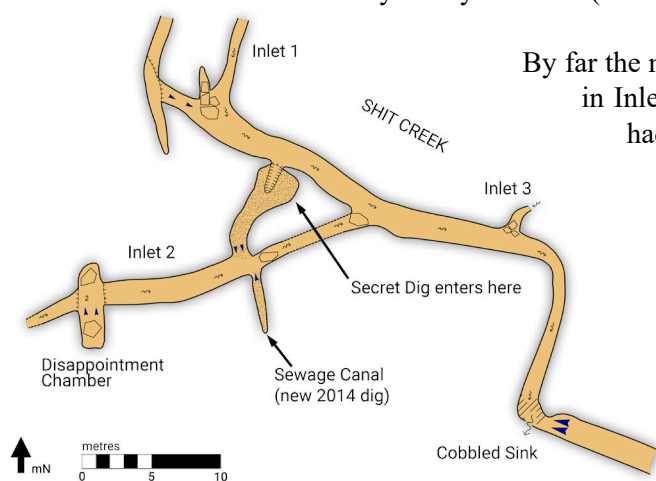
The completed entrance to Secret Dig in moderate flood (in severe flood the water over-tops the entrance).

peeled maybe a foot of rock from the wall. After some time clearing the debris however, no amount of churning with the bar into the gravel under the wall gained any hints of enlargement, and we exited feeling somewhat despondent about the prospects here.

Work at the Cobbled Sink was put on hold for now, but we were to return in 2018 with some more advanced chemical crowbars, discussed later.

Digging at Inlet Two of Shit Creek

Efforts then focused on other digs around the Shit Creek area. Inlet Three, a small calcited inlet, was pushed, locating a small passage heading back upstream with a visual connection opposite Inlet Two. Chalky pioneered several minor digs higher up in the Secret Dig but to no avail other than to fill two one-tonne bags with mud in the previously lovely chamber (subsequently removed as part of conservation works).



Survey extract of Shit Creek and its inlets prior to Secret Dig and The Sewage Canal dig.

By far the most promising dig was a small and inconspicuous rift in Inlet Two, just opposite where the stream is joined. This had been noted as a dead-end rift on the earlier survey (see left) but a closer inspection and the removal of a bit of mud identified that it was a continuing phreatic passage, draughting, but mostly full of mud.

With this looking good and being only 10m from the bottom of Secret Dig it was extremely accessible. This was tackled by a small team in early October 2014, but by 29th October with progress looking good, it was all hands-on deck and a full turnout, as reported by Andy:

A good effort last night: Sparky, Matt, Gary, Chris, David Pants and myself tackled the mud filled passage in Inlet Two. Sparky spent his evening digging at the face and storing large mounds of mud against the walls whilst the rest of us lowered the floor of the passage behind him. Eventually Sparky broke a dam of mud ahead of him and released a lovely river which washed the passage back to shingle. After a bit of digging, I went in feet first and my opinion is that the passage goes on. Gary was less optimistic! Everyone put in a good effort and was tired afterwards and many enjoyed a refreshing dip in Hutton Beck to clean our kit.

The new passage, soon to become known as the 'Sewage Canal', now continued for 10m beyond the Inlet Two streamway. It started as a dire muddy tube, but when dug down to solid floor, was comfortable crawling height. From the active face, it carried on, albeit with only 10-15cm of airspace above the mud. More mining was required!

A rather excellent video was made of the proceedings on 29th October, and this can be found on the York Caving Club YouTube channel (search for 'Shit Creek digging').

The digging continued through winter of 2014-2015. Each session cleared another metre or so of mud, enabling further progress in a gradually enlarging passage. However, breakthrough here had to wait until 2015 as reported later.



The Sewage Canal dig just across from Inlet Two of Shit Creek; Chris Twigg makes some very muddy progress!

The Chertnobyl Sump

During 2014, the first efforts were made to pump the Chertnobyl Sump (Sump One), at the southern end of Jenga. Given the major extensions this later led to (in 2020), this is discussed in a separate chapter dedicated to these breakthroughs (page 35).

2015

Digging in the Jenga Hello Kitty Extensions

Digging of the floor in Northern Rift of the Jenga extensions continued through 2015. This was driven by the knowledge that the streamway in Shit Creek and at The Paddle (a separate unnavigable stream at the far end of Shit Creek) must flow somewhere underneath the area. This quickly paid off and a route under the western wall was found, dropping to a cramped chamber with tube and choked bedding leading off. The following week (11th February) we returned and Matt reported on progress:

We arrived in the freezing bloody cold as usual and had a saunter up to the top sink. It has been a mostly dry week but sunny, so all the snow had melted. Sure enough, the big sink was a full swirling pool ready to overflow and drown any unsuspecting cavers further downstream.

After being mesmerised by the water for a while, trying to convince ourselves it was dropping, I encouraged Chalky to help me poke the top sinks which were blocked by bin bags. With some sticks we churned up the stre-

ambed, puncturing the bags and entertaining ourselves for 10 minutes. We returned to the big sink to see the level already a foot down and falling.

A sizable team headed down Jenga, enjoying the clean-washed entrance series and Chert Alley, after the floods over the past week. The first problem came at The Sandpit, which had turned into bathtub. Gary stayed behind to bail it while Will, Ali and I enjoyed a total soaking before heading to the new chamber beneath Northern Rift. Ali wasted no time inserting himself into the tube as Will provided questionable moral support.

Ali pushed his way along the tube for several metres, which felt like it was going back underneath Northern Rift, to where he was blocked from going any further by walls of mud. However, beneath him was a narrow fissure, far too tight to climb down, but maybe 7-8ft below he could see water flowing on cobbles from right to left (we guess west to east). This ruled out The Paddle water from the far end of Shit Creek, which would have to be coming from the east, so I immediately thought this must be the main Shit Creek streamway beyond the Cobbled Sink. Unfortunately, any further progress here is going to require significant enlargement.

Back in the chamber, the too-low bedding heading off in the opposite direction was examined. This was only 20cm high, but with a draught emerging and it seeming to open out further along, it is worthy of future attention.

The tight rift with a streamway at the bottom was left alone until 2019 (pages 33-34). The too-low bedding crawl transpired to be a visual and vocal connection through to the Joey Extensions in Excalibur Pot, which brings us nicely onto that topic...

The Joey Extensions

After spending winter of 2014 digging The Sewage Canal in Shit Creek Inlet Two, making a few feet of progress each week along a mud-choked passage, we wasted no time returning there in 2015, when a quick breakthrough was achieved.

Matt reports on a rather exiting session on Wednesday 7th January:

I expected everyone, myself included, to be keen to get back to digging for the new year, what with the enticing lead in Shit Creek Inlet Two. Despite this, 4pm came and I was leaving work in Harrogate, in the rain, thinking I really couldn't be arsed. I got to the A1 roundabout where it was decision time. Straight on to home and my warm house, or left onto the A1 towards the North York Moors for a night of cold, wet misery. For some odd reason I went left. It continued raining for most of the journey, adding to the depression. Little did I know that it was about to be an evening to remember and one I would be glad not to miss.

I arrived to find Sparky and Chalky already there. It was a grim night, cold, dark and wet, and little about the sloppy mud of Shit Creek was enticing me. However, Chalky rallied the troops and before I knew it, we all somehow had oversuits on. Chalky, Sparky and I headed down Secret Dig where it was warmer and sheltered, while the others arrived and followed.

On arrival at the Sewage Canal I was greeted by a deep pool with the drag bucket forming a sluice. Removal of the bucket released hundreds of litres of water, which proceeded to spill out from the canal. Once the flow eased, I headed in to dredge the channel. Further along the passage, progress was flat-out in the water, and as I wasn't wetsuited, I made way for Andy and John C who were. They started thrashing about at the end of the passage, using their bodies to expel gallons of watery mud back down the passage to where I dredged it out and Aaron stacked the solids. Lovely!

Pulses of muddy water continued to emerge, as the diggers thrashed about, breaking mud dams while trying to make forward progress. It was all quite enjoyable, and there was some satisfaction in knowing that the water coming down the passage was making more room for us. Also worthy of note was the phenomenal draught blowing outwards by this point!

Soon, the bucket was summoned for. This slid nicely along the passage like a sledge on a toboggan-run in the winter Olympics! Better still, on removal of the bucket, it brought with it a tidal wave of sloppy mud down the passage towards me. No sooner had I dredged the mud from the channel and Aaron has dispatched it somewhere, the next bucketload was ready to pull out. All chances of getting cold tonight had vanished!

As pub-time approached, Andy reckoned that he might just be able to see open space beyond a squeeze in a pool of water. This spurred us to delay the pub to see what might happen. He and John were now snorkelling in liquid mud, uneasy by their confined and watery predicament. Had they broken any further dams of water they might sump themselves!

Suddenly they heard a funny noise coming from the mud just behind them... glug... glug... bubble... bubble... and John told everyone to be quiet. Then it happened again like a hideous belching noise as air bubbled up through the wet mud. "Fuck! Get out Andy... it's gonna flood!" shouted John. Andy spun into a panic, soiled himself and flapped for several seconds before the true nature of the noise became apparent. Aaron, at Inlet Two, was blowing on a siphon pipe we had laid along the dig before Christmas, bubbling air through the mud near the active face. Andy was not impressed!

Another ten minutes passed, and the positivity increased, with Andy shouting back that he was nearly through. Everyone waited with bated breath, until eventually Andy and John went for it and vanished.

I had no wetsuit, but I was damned if I wasn't going too, so I edged forward to where they had been digging. At that point, the passage is maybe 15m from Inlet Two, 1m wide and only 40-50cm high, half full of muddy slurry. Beyond this point, the passage lowered to a flat-out wallow soon reaching a ramp going up where I could see their lights ahead. Unfortunately, a rock outcrop, the squeeze Andy had referred to, forced a head-dunking in the liquid mud. With open passage ahead, I just went for it and a few unpleasant moments later I was up the ramp, out of the watery mud and able to stand up in a gloomy chamber with John and Andy.

Chalky was next and we beckoned him through, but the wet mud was not compatible with his false leg and he had issues tackling the squeeze on his back trying to keep his leg and head up and out of the mud. He partially emerged screaming 'Help Me Help Me' much to our amusement.

A low, wide, arched passage headed enticingly off into the distance. John took a brief look maybe only 5-10m along, concluding that it was continuing and still draughting. Despite this excitement, it was now well past pub time, plus we were missing Gary and a few others, so we decide to turn around and leave the virgin passage untouched for next Wednesday.

The digging session the following week (Wednesday 14th January) was unsurprisingly well attended, and was reported by Matt:

After the excitement of last week, and the knowledge that there was virgin passage awaiting exploration, turnout this week was going to be high. Several people had even been out on Saturday to do some further mud-bailing of the Sewage Canal to lower the water further.

A throng of cavers (Andy, Chalky, Sparky, Gary, Chris, John C, Aaron, Will and Ali) headed into Secret Dig. Problems soon became apparant. The out-flow bedding where the Inlet Two water is temporarily lost before joining Shit Creek was blocked with mud that had been dumped over the weekend, and a deep pool had formed, backing up along the dig.

It took an hour to lower this sufficiently, and even then, we decided it was sensible that not all of us went into the new extensions at once in case the water started backing up again. Chalky, Chris, Aaron and I stayed to work on the drainage, while everyone else went to explore the new passage. They were gone for some time. On their return they told us of extensive crawls, and a massive chamber! My team then headed in to see for ourselves.

Once through the breakthrough point and up into the new rift, we pushed on along a low but wide passage full of sloppy mud. The route then trended uphill, passing through two tiny chambers, before ending after about 50m at a small chamber. The only way on was a left turn, into a clean-washed, sharp crawl. This curved right and was uncomfortably tight for the first 3m before suddenly enlarging into a rift with standing space. This area was clean washed, draughty and with a couple of possible routes onwards.

Gary had warned me to look out here for a chest-height passage on the left. I found this easily and wriggled along for a few metres to reach the foot of some extremely large boulders where I could step up into an enormous chamber, probably 8-10m diameter. The floor of the chamber was just huge blocks, with deep voids visible down between them and a car-sized block hanging from the roof. I gently tiptoed across the boulder floor to the far wall, which turned out to be the eastern wall of a large rift, at least 10m tall. At the northern end of the rift a short passage led to a 4m deep pit. This looked like a dead end but as there was danger everywhere, and everyone else had turned around now, I didn't investigate further.

Back at the main passage, 3m further on was a too-tight fissure in the floor and a passage on the right (westward) which we left alone. Straight ahead, the main southbound passage continued as a crawl. This was mostly gritty and sharp crawling for about 30m until the roof started to lower and the passage closed down at a miserable muddy puddle and a mud choke.

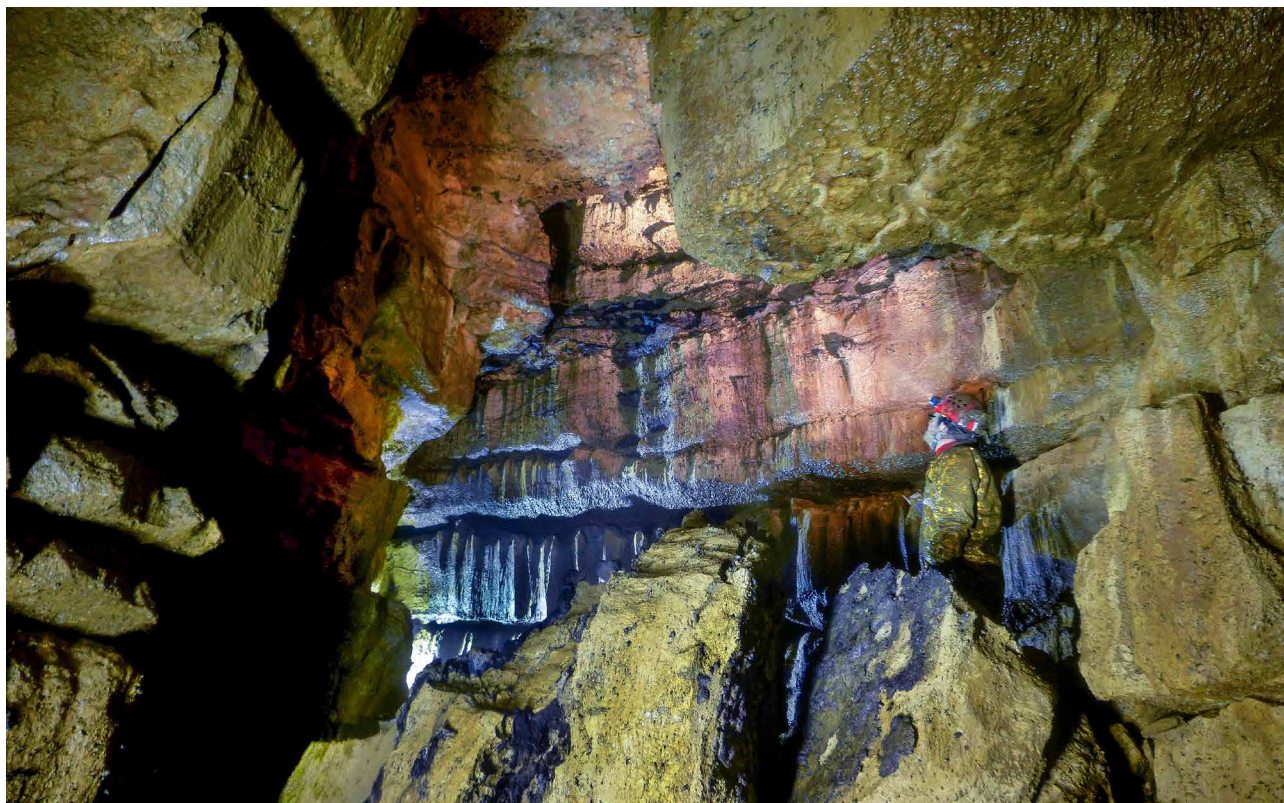
The journey out was a killer, heavily laden with water and thick mud, and dragging myself like a walrus along the passages. The entrance climb just about finished me off! We were out at 8:50pm and at the pub soon after for the obligatory beer mat survey, although it was all a bit of a haze!

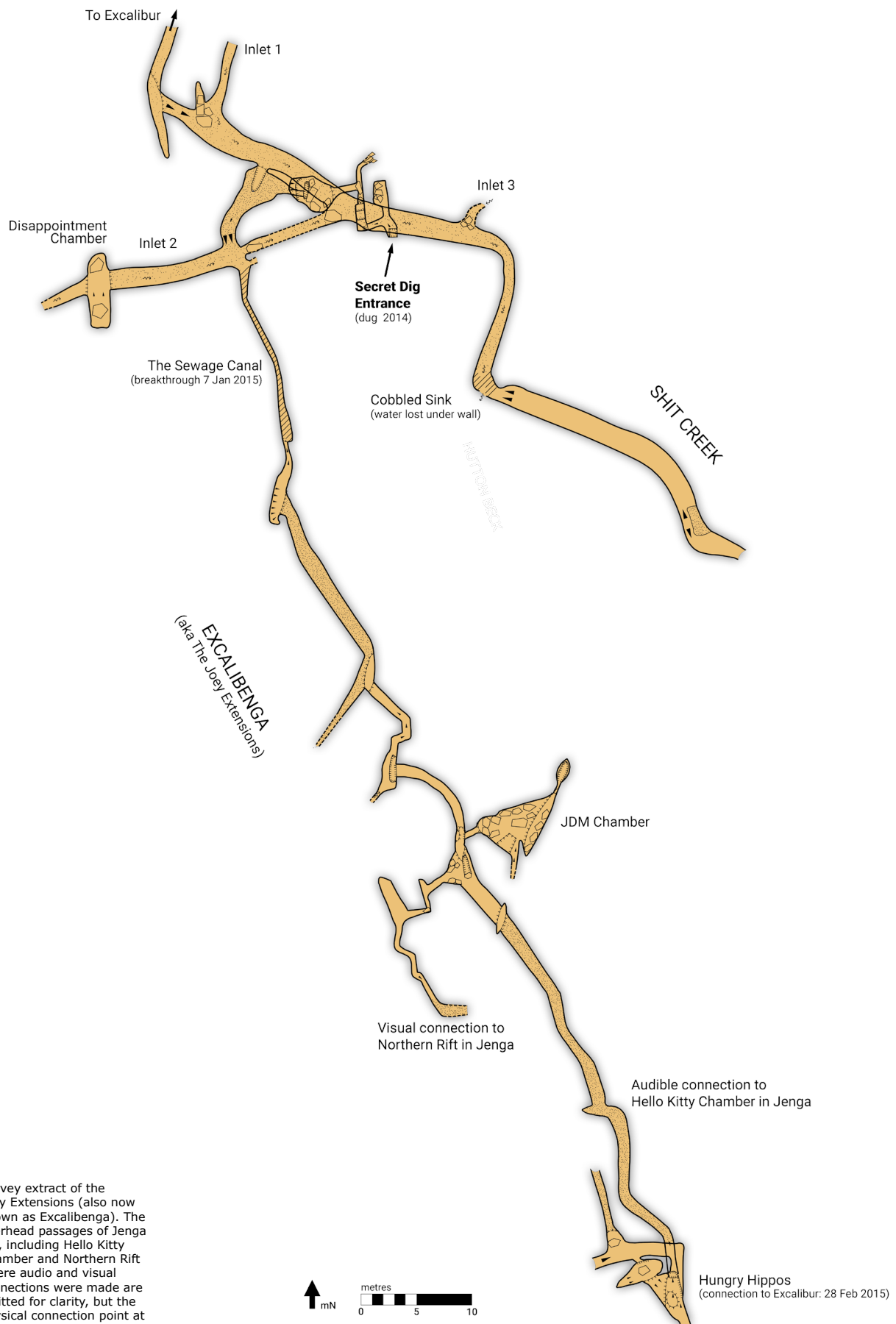
Over the next few weeks, the new passages (the 'Joey Extensions') were explored and surveyed. The large chamber, the Joey Deacon Memorial Chamber (JDMC), was a dead end. The survey found this to be underneath the side of Hutton Beck. During a later digging session, Matt and John C engineered a route down through the boulders in the floor at the northern end of the chamber. After much buttock-clenching squeezing through boulders, the true floor under the centre of the chamber was reached, but they quickly concluded there was no way on except some impenetrable phreatic tubes.

The southbound passage ending at a mud choke provided the greatest interest. Along here, clean-washed cracks in the floor and roof suggested lower and higher areas and recent hydrological activity. The survey revealed that this passage intersects the 2014 Jenga extensions, running underneath Hello Kitty Chamber and terminating close to Hungry Hippos near Sandpit Choke. The much sought-after Jenga-Excalibur connection now seemed inevitable. West at the JDMC junction, the passage continued around a tight bend before becoming too small, not far from Northern Rift in Jenga.

The total passage length of the Joey Extensions is around 150m.

Joey Deacon Memorial Chamber (JDM Chamber, or JDMC) in the Joey Extensions; one of the largest chambers in the entire system.





Survey extract of the Joey Extensions (also now known as Excalibenga). The overhead passages of Jenga Pot, including Hello Kitty Chamber and Northern Rift where audio and visual connections were made are omitted for clarity, but the physical connection point at Hungry Hippos is shown.

Connection of the Joey Extensions to Jenga

The weeks after the Joey Extensions discovery were spent pushing several of the potential connection points to Jenga from both sides. The first site to be targeted in February was the low bedding beneath Northern Rift of Jenga, as reported by Matt:

With the weather having been quite dry and the water levels low, we hoped The Sandpit might have drained; but it was not to be. It was lower, but still meant a full wetting of our lower portions. Onto the dig site, Gary made a start digging mud out from the tiny floor-level bedding under Northern Rift. Mud was packed into a bucket, dragged up into the cramped chamber above and out into the main rift for stacking.

After taking the easy pickings, Gary handed over to me. Half-way through my session I heard a sudden burst of an air-horn! I knew that John Dale was down Secret Dig trying to establish vocal connections with the Jenga digging teams, and so I started shouting wildly thinking it was him. I was soon to find out that Aaron had turned up late and had brought the air horn into Jenga instead and was honking it randomly. He had also brought a non-caver 'friend' called Jonathan (who I think he was also honking), who had been equipped in a tee shirt, jumper, and an enormous green chemical suit. The poor guy was miserable and frozen. He and Aaron started digging in the floor of Hello Kitty Chamber and established a vocal connection with the underlying passage of the Joey Extensions; another possibility.

Anyway, back to the active face, I was about to hand over to Will and Ali, when I heard shouting. I recognised the dulcet Teesside tones of John Dale, who had pushed along the westbound passage of the Joey Extensions opposite JDM Chamber. Another connection! John enquired about the noise, to which I carelessly replied "AARON HAS GOT THE HORN".

Some pleasantries later, Will took to the active face at our side, and John pushed along the passage from his side as far as he could. We could see his light shining in from the back-right of the bedding. With the call of 'pub', John, who thought breakthrough was imminent, went into a digging frenzy for the glory of being the first person to connect the two caves. Will pissed on John's fire by saying that it was futile tonight as the bedding was still too tight, but John rejected this negativity from such a whippersnapper.

Will and Ali, now suitably offended by the over-excited Moldywarp, commenced their journey out while I returned to the face for one last chat with John to confirm that there was no chance of a connection tonight. We said our farewells, arriving to the cars at the same time, totally knackered.

The following week (25th February) saw a continued assault on the bedding underneath the Jenga Northern Rift by the Yorkie team while the NYMCC contingent turned their attention to a hole in the floor at the junction with JMC Chamber. This was enlarged and dropped about 3m into a pool of standing water with no apparant way on. Despondent with this, the team continued south along the passage which runs underneath Hello Kitty Chamber in Jenga to check out other possible connections.

Progress here was reported by Chris:

We arrived underneath Hello Kitty Chamber, where we could hear the YCC team above on their way out of Jenga after their failed dig below Northern Rift, but we struggled to establish a visual connection with them. I think a lot of blasting would be required to make a connection here.

At the muddy puddle and choke at the far south end of the passage, further examination revealed a tiny upward slot. Shouting up, a vocal connection to the Jenga team was established here too, and this time, I could see their lights only 3m away. After later discussion in the pub, it emerges they were in Hungry Hippos near Sandpit Choke. Of all the possible Jenga to Excalibur connections, I think this might be the easiest to pursue.

With the best potential connection point between the two caves now established at Hungry Hippos, we were back on Saturday 28th February. Matt reported on progress:

We had plenty of people for our weekend mission; Myself, Gary, John Dale, Chalky, Sparky, Chris and Rich. Within an hour, a pit was dug at the lowest point of Hungry Hippos, and at a depth of five foot, black space could be seen horizontally beyond a choked muddy puddle where the wall started to undercut. Chris assured us that this was the end of the Joey Extensions in Excalibur, where he had been only last Wednesday.

The chills were now setting in, so we took it in turns, with quick shift rotation to widen the pit to allow horizontal digging into the passage heading off underneath the wall. This was easy, but energetic digging, involving using a spade to shovel silt out and a second team to chuck it away from the dig to stop it washing back in again on the next flood, as the entire floor in Hungry Hippos chamber slopes down towards this point.

John Dale then dug lying on his side, with his upper body in the undercut, mining at the mud bank ahead. This was exceptionally effective, and with a second person stood in the hole, the spoil could be removed.

However, Gary was to be glory boy today, breaking through the mud bank to allow him to slither ahead and into the passage of the Joey Extensions. He shouted back that he had found a handprint, confirming the connection and there was a muted round of applause from those present, muted mostly due to the onset of mild hypothermia. Jenga and Excalibur Pots are now a single 2.8km cave system, which is a significant milestone.

Despite being freezing cold, we all ended up going through and completing the through-trip to Secret Dig, exiting by 5pm, in daylight (a rare treat) and not freezing bloody cold outside for once!

With the connection made and all small digs completed, we focused on finishing the surveying of The Joey Extensions. The area is now often known simply as 'Excalibenga'. Only a few months later the first Jenga to Excalibur through-trip took place.

2016-2017

Jenga fatigue

There is only so long you can spend digging in one cave before the novelty and enthusiasm wears off, and by the end of 2015, this is exactly what had happened. With Jenga and Excalibur connected, all simple or obvious leads now exhausted, we gave the entire system a break for two years to pursue projects at The Glass Trap, Kirkdale Howl and Manor Vale Caves, all reported in this journal.

2018

Return to Jenga and Left-Hand Passage

In July 2018, with other projects having lost our interest, we returned to the Jenga/Excalibur system to revisit several sites, including the Cobbled Sink in Shit Creek and the Left-Hand Passage in Jenga Pot. The first report came from Matt in September:

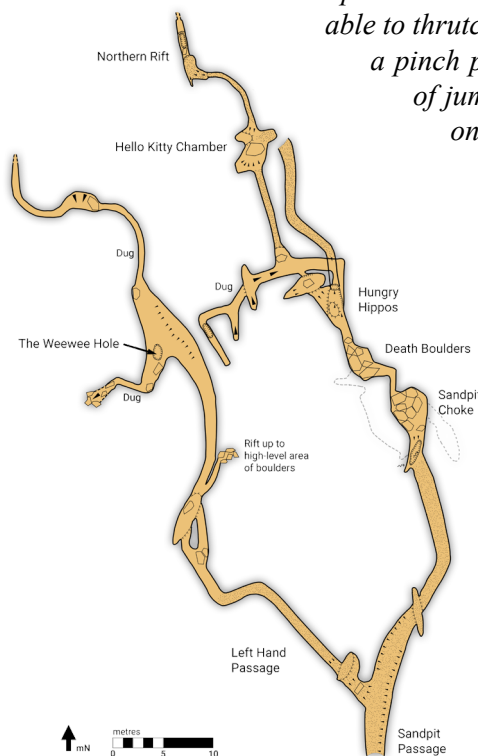
The last few months of digging has seen record attendance, but also record little progress. Work at the Cobbled Sink at Shit Creek has been slow and all efforts to find some kind of bypass have failed. Enthusiasm has dropped and we are starting to wonder what the way forward is for North York Moors exploration. We had no simple leads and all projects seemed to have fizzled out. This is always a low point for any digging group, and this is probably our lowest for a while. At the pub we made a list of all potential projects. Loads of ideas were thrown into the arena, but the Left Hand Passage, off Sandpit Passage in Jenga was discussed in the most detail.

This tantalising passage, reported briefly in our last journal, goes off into blank space on the survey, and runs underneath the wooded area west of Hutton Beck between Jenga and Excalibur, which may have been an earlier course of the river. After 60m, the main passage fragments into a few possible digs. The right (northbound) route was dug in 2013-2014, but has been revisited since, pushing a small crawl through a series of low chambers, but with no stacking space, this has been totally abandoned.

To the left (south) is the Weewee Hole, a 3m deep pot with a bedding crawl going off in all directions at the bottom, far too low to enter, and a choked, draughting aven in the roof above. Beyond the Weewee Hole, is a possible tight continuation that has never been pushed, the target for tonight.

A team of myself, Gary, Andy, Chris, John C and Sparky headed along Left-Hand Passage, noting the direction of the scalloping showing flow towards Sandpit Passage, suggesting this passage is (or was) an inlet.

At the end of the passage, I made a start with the possible way on to the left, beyond the Weewee Hole, backed up by John. Where the passage pinches in, on the right, and a few feet above the floor was a tiny tube going west for about 3m to a left bend with a substantial breeze emerging. There are a surprising number of draughts circulating in this area.



Survey extract showing Left Hand Passage and the dig above Hungry Hippos leading towards Left Hand Passage.

I pushed into the narrow tube. This was a very tight fit indeed, but I was able to thrutch forward to peer around the left bend. The passage then has a pinch point, but beyond it continued for a few metres into an area of jumbled blocks and it was impossible to tell if there was a way on. The whole area is draughty and well water-worn. Although the pinch point would have been passable in a simpler passage or any other scenario, coming so soon after a sharp, tight left bend, the potential feet-first reverse was not an enticing prospect, so I declined the glory for tonight.

A week later we returned, armed with Chris Curry, a skinny Swaledale digger. About 40m along Left Hand Passage, we spotted a previously unexplored tight rift ascending alongside the right wall (shown on the survey image here). This was mega-tight but Chris was able to squeeze up 4m into a spacious overhead chamber adorned with very precariously stacked blocks, sadly offering no obvious way on.

After some lengthy discussions at the pub, we concluded that Left Hand Passage is an abandoned stream inlet. There are probably some higher inlet chambers and avens to find, similar to Secret Dig, and heading up towards the surface, but further horizontal progress seems unlikely.

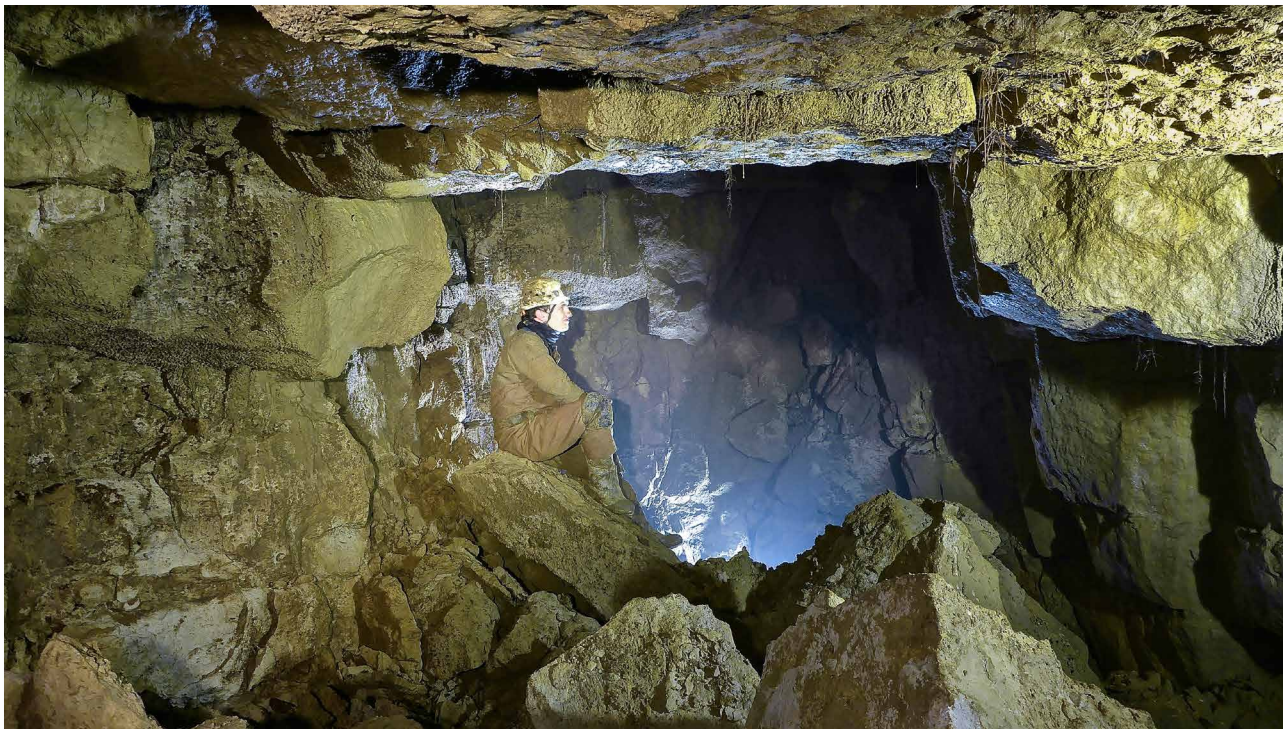
Hungry Hippos and Ian's Big Bouldery Bollocks (IB³)

We then turned our attention to a dig located above Hungry Hippos where a westbound passage leads up a steep boulder slope to a dead-end rift, several metres higher than the surrounding cave, and close to the end of Left-Hand Passage. On the western wall, a phreatic passage 1m x 1m in size continued but it was choked to the roof with mud. This passage, if excavated, could lead over the top of Left-Hand Passage and into the higher chambers that we now expect might exist around there.

We started work digging the mud from this totally choked passage (marked 'dug' on the survey above). A few weeks into this project, Matt reported following a session on 7th November, which ended up delivering somewhat more than what we had bargained for:

On the first very chilly night of autumn, enthusiasm remained surprisingly high, despite very little progress lately. The focus this week was to be the high-level mud-choked phreatic passage just up the slope beyond Hungry Hippos. We've had a few weeks working here now and thanks to the ample stacking space, 4-5m of progress has been quickly made. Last week Sparky and his team found a rift with a 15cm wide slot in the floor which rocks fell down for some distance. They were obviously keen tonight as John C and Sparky were already underground by the time I arrived.

Ian and I arrived to meet Andy, Chris and John D for the pre-digging beer, but only Ian and I showed any enthusiasm for going underground tonight. We located Sparky and John at the dig and by the time we arrived, they had started enlarging the slot to allow access into the 'caverns' below. Drilling



Ian Dawson, sat proudly in his newly discovered chamber, IB³, far above Sandpit Choke.

soon commenced and a loud pop later, and the entire area was engulfed in thick noxious smog. The top of the rift was now larger, and John C finished the job with a hammer. Meanwhile Ian, who wasn't enjoying the fumes very much, vanished off to explore elsewhere in the area.

I was nominated to try to squeeze down the newly enlarged rift, which I did successfully, dropping 4m through a chert band into a new and unexplored passage. Hopes were quickly dashed however when I realised this was no more than a 10ft long 2ft wide rift, heavily water-washed with lots of sharp protruding fossils and cherty projections but no way on. It's game over, and all that remained was a herniating upwards squeeze out of the rift and a quick survey, showing this to be very close to Left-Hand Passage.

Just as we were about to head out, Ian returned, having been solo-climbing various avens and chokes in the area. He announced that he had climbed a choke into a very large chamber and asked if anyone had explored this. This was intriguing, as we couldn't think where he was talking about.

We followed him to said choke, only to find that it was the gravity defying death blocks between Sandpit Choke and Hungry Hippos; the one with the barely wedged massive blocks that we've been tiptoeing under for the last three years and never dared to touch, let alone climb! It appears that Ian, unphased due to big bollocks or stupidity, had scaled this deathtrap.

We followed Ian up the choke. If approaching from Hungry Hippos towards Sandpit Choke, the boulders are easily, if anxiously, scaled until you are 3m above the passage below. The route up the choke then branches away from the underneath passage and ascends 2m via a sideways squeeze anti-clockwise around a large boulder into a sizable chamber. From here, there were glimpses of large black space above. Exciting!

As if we weren't already shitting ourselves by the hanging death all around, Ian vanished off 2-3m up a narrow chimney through yet more deathly boulders, adorned with recent looking scrape marks, emerging into the chamber above. We followed, buttocks firmly clenched. I did not like this.

We emerged into a very impressive chamber, maybe 8x5m. The floor was a mess of boulders with cavities between them leading down into the choke we had just climbed. The roof was mostly flat (with a few avens going up another 2m) and adorned with tree roots. We were close to the surface!

In the east corner of the chamber a 2-3m scramble down blocks next to a nice yellow calcite wall with some small stalactites, lead into a walking-sized passage, also adorned with yellow calcite. Unfortunately, this terminated after only 5m but was a fine little section of passage anyway.

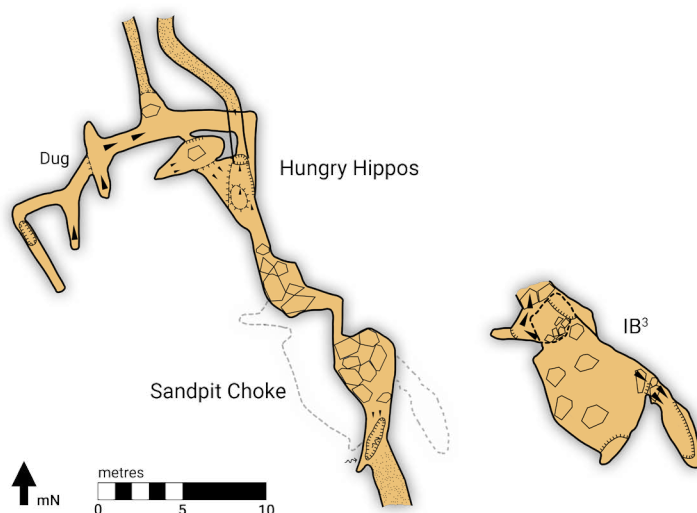
There were no obvious digs here, and you certainly wouldn't want to climb up and down this choke regularly anyway. So, with the area fully explored it was time to clench our buttocks again for the climb down, and commence a rapid exit to the pub, feeling rather pleased with the new finds.

What to call this new chamber? This was Ian's first discovery since joining our group and hats off to him for climbing up that dodgy choke, which the rest of us had left well alone for three years. The name IB³ (IB-Cubed) is suggested, for Ian's Big Boulderly Bollocks. This led to his new nickname of 'Snazzyballs' which soon became abbreviated to just 'Snazzy'. A cracking evening, one of the finest and most inspiring in Jenga for some time.

The events of that evening represented a turning point in our digging enthusiasm. A few weeks later, we returned to survey the chamber, and also carrying an extending pole, the receiver for the ferret tracker, some tape, and a walkie talkie. We taped the ferret tracker receiver to the pole and jammed it up the highest aven in the south corner of the chamber. Soon, a crackle came through and we exchanged a few very fragmented words with Chris on the surface, who allowing us to pinpoint IB³ to 4-5m beneath Hutton Beck.

Survey extract showing the location of IB³ (dashed outline) and the chamber detail set aside for clarity.

Right: Nial Adams admiring the short passage adorned with yellow calcite at the east end of IB³ chamber.



Some excitement in flood...

Soon after the IB³ discovery, winter floods were upon us. Digging attendance remained high so, on the 28th November, with the river in full flood, we took the opportunity to learn a bit more about the hydrology. Matt reported on an exciting evening:

It was a piss-wet and cold evening, and I was all up for sacking it off, not fancying the drive from Harrogate, but Ian persuaded me. We arrived 6pm to find the river in full flood. Beer and crisps later, and by 6:45pm Me, Ian, Andy, Sparky and Nial kitted up and headed down Secret Dig with the river about 50cm deep and fast flowing around the entrance. We had been down Excalibur and Jenga in flood but not Secret Dig beyond The Sewage Canal. The plan was to see how the Joey Extensions and the northern passages of Jenga react in flood, as this has not yet been investigated because The Sandpit sumps in flood, blocking access from the Jenga side.

The entrance shaft was very drippy with lots of spray but not as bad as you might imagine, considering it's underneath a river! The next shaft was little more than a few drips. A small inlet streamway is met at the bottom. In Secret Dig Aven, water was spouting in from a shelf on the right (which proved useful later for cleaning our oversuits on the way out). All the water vanished down to Shit Creek via the Bum Shaped Slot, making the 3m drop down here seriously sporty. Thankfully, the water vanished straight down through the floor rather than through the flat-out crawl to Shit Creek.

Shit Creek itself was flowing well, but surprising only about 10cm deep and navigable, upstream at least. Inlet Two, which brings in the Honey River and Excalibur entrance water was also about 10cm deep but fast flowing. Onward, The Sewage Canal breakthrough point was pretty much as normal which was reassuring that we wouldn't get trapped tonight.

Onward along the slimy passages towards JDM Chamber, all seemed pretty normal other than a few drips and pools here and there. Outside JDM Chamber we could hear a large amount of water falling, no surprise given the tall rift in there is underneath a minor sink. We ignored this and carried on to the connection point with Jenga. Along this section of passage, water entered from the ceiling at several places near Hello Kitty Chamber, and vanished through slots in the floor into the as-yet uncharted lower drainage level. Surprisingly, the connection point to Jenga was fine despite having water flowing into it and pooling slightly, so this too is obviously draining away to somewhere lower. After passing, we stood and watched for a few minutes to make sure our transit had not blocked this draining, which could have made the outward journal a little interesting.

Up into Hungry Hippos, we split; Myself, Andy and Sparky headed beyond Hello Kitty and down to see the slot with the stream at the bottom beneath Northern Rift. The water was definitely a few feet deep and any passage down there sumped. Ian and Nial went up into IB³ where we had assumed the proximity to the surface would mean a lot of water would be pissing in, but this was not so! The chamber was only drippy. They did report hearing a rumble of water from somewhere, but nothing to be seen up there.

They soon identified that the rumbling was coming from Sandpit Choke which sits underneath IB³ chamber. We regrouped and scampered through to be greeted with a river coming north up the passage from The Sandpit, vanishing into the 3m deep hole in the floor at the south end of the choke as an impressive cascade. We've never seen this flow before!

We headed upstream towards The Sandpit. Crawling against the flow was tricky and at the low point after 15m, it was necessary to go through on our backs, mostly submerged in fast flowing water. I was rather lacking on the neoprene so left this one for Ian and Sparky to tackle. They report that no water was coming from Left Hand Passage (so this really is an abandoned inlet), but it was all welling up out of The Sandpit, which was sumped.

Exhilarated, we exited knowing that a fuck-ton of water goes somewhere on this side of the system. The water from The Sandpit dropping down that rift beneath the Sandpit Choke, plus all the water sinking in the connection passage, the water entering at JDM Chamber, Shit Creek and The Paddle, must all combine to produce a flow that would rival the Main Streamway. The question is where is the water going and is there a 'master cave'?

We returned to the water-swallowing rift below Sandpit Choke under dry conditions a few months later. A small amount of digging at the bottom of the rift and we revealed an immature and poorly developed bedding passage, only 6-8 inches high, with pools of water and totally inaccessible without a considerable quantity of explosives.

All evidence was now pointing to the active drain of Jenga Pot, The Joey Extensions, and perhaps Shit Creek (the entire eastern half of the cave system), being an immature bedding underlying many of the more well-developed and explored upper passages. The water drains into this at several locations. This may be the same bedding encountered at the bottom of The Weewee Hole in Left-Hand Passage. Despite being quite widespread and underlying a large expanse of the cave, this bedding is probably very narrow, poorly developed and seems very unlikely to be explorable, even with extensive digging.

It seems implausible that such a bedding could have always been the drain for so much cave passage. Where is the Jenga Pot "Master Cave"? Maybe perhaps we should revisit the Chertnobl Sump? This, however, is the focus of the following chapter.

A return to Shit Creek

After several years of absence, in 2018 we decided to reacquaint ourselves with our old friend, The Cobbled Sink in Shit Creek. After previous failed efforts, we gave things one more shot, helped by Ric Halliwell who has a much larger chemistry set than us. Despite our efforts registering on the Pickering seismograph several miles away (yes, really), the walls of the cobbled sink failed to disintegrate, and we gave up. However, this was not the last we were to see of the Shit Creek stream...

Rediscovering Shit Creek

The final of our 2018 Jenga mini-projects was the small slot underneath Northern Rift, dropping 2-3m to a stream. We discovered this in 2015, and found it to be sumped in the more recent visit during flood. This was too tantalising to leave alone.

Starting in November 2018, we had several enjoyable sessions enlarging the restrictive crawl leading to the too-tight rift above the small stream. This initial work was needed to allow a drag bucket to slide along in preparing for enlarging of the rift. As with many digging projects, preparation is everything.

This was a pleasant, warm and dry dig, and an excellent winter project. Attendance was high, meaning we soon completed preliminary work. Six people could now haul spoil from the end of the passage up to Northern Rift, where stacking space was plentiful.

Attention then focused on the narrow fissure leading down to the stream. Over several sessions, the chemical crowbar enlarged this just enough to drop into the stream below. Predictably, the stream passage was of minimal proportions, but was navigable.

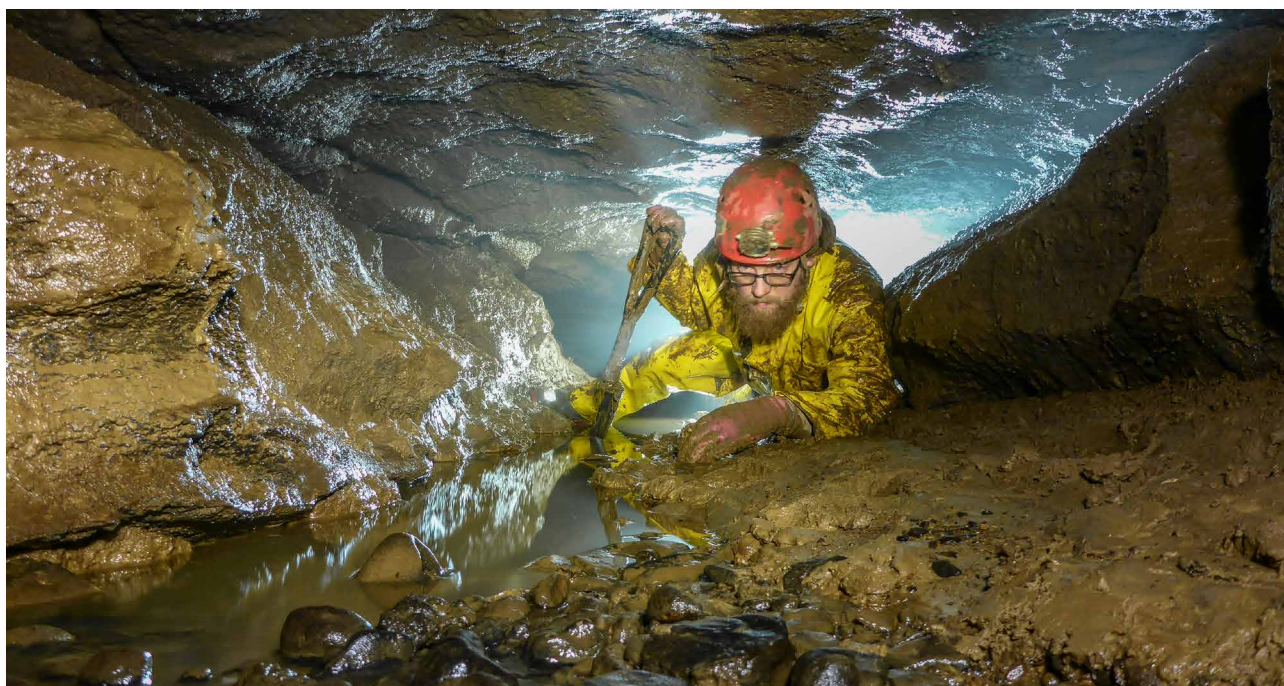
Downstream the low passage was 1-2m wide, with banked-up cobbles on both sides, and 50-60cm high. After only 5m the stream vanished into a low section choked with cobbles and only 10cm of headspace. With nowhere to stack spoil this would be a challenging dig, lying in the water to make matters worse. We declared this game-over.

Upstream the inlet passage was too tight, but Matt and Ian spent an hour scraping gravel to enlarge it just enough to squeeze through to a tiny chamber. The stream here emerged from a right bend (from the north), beyond which the passage became too awkward to navigate. This meant it was game over completely for this mini-adventure.

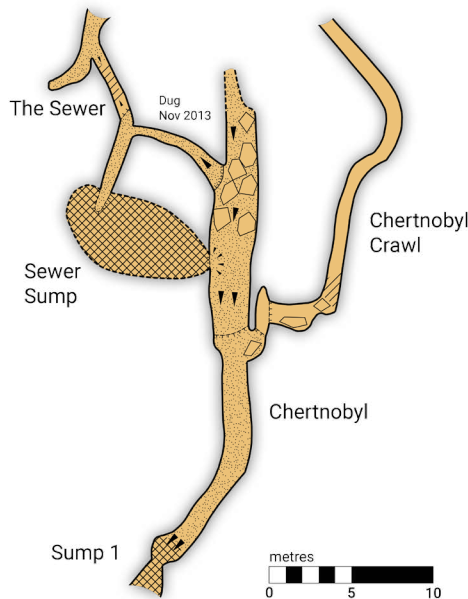
While all of this was going on, some tests using optical brightener, unbleached tampons, and a UV light (our standard water tracing approach), confirmed this stream to originate from The Cobbled Sink in Shit Creek, where the water is lost ~75m further north. These findings also rendered futile any further efforts to dig at The Cobbled Sink itself.

We found ourselves now in the situation of all loose ends having been tidied up in the Jenga system... all except one! All eyes now turned back to the Chertnoby Sump (Sump One), the story of which is told from the start in the following chapter.

Andy Brennan in
downstream Shit Creek



The Chertnobyl Sumps



Survey extract of the Chertnobyl area at the start of our efforts to drain the sumps.

The Chertnobyl Sump (Sump One) at the south end of Jenga Pot was discovered during our initial explorations in 2013, 20m south of Chertnobyl Chamber along a 2m wide, 60cm high passage adorned with curious ‘chert nobbles’ (see photo below). Our early efforts to penetrate this sump, by Richard Wilsdon, initially without diving gear, did not go well (it almost went very badly for him). Subsequent efforts using rudimentary diving kit and cameras on poles suggested the sump to be spacious and extensive.

Our digging group lacked experienced divers at the time, so rather than continue our doomed underwater efforts, we thought “let’s just get rid of the water instead”!

There is a second sump, which is often more of a low airspace duck, near The Sewer, with a visual connection over the water to Chertnobyl. At the time of their discovery, we didn’t know if these two sumps were linked.

2014: Wanking, dinosaur penis bones and Sump Two

On 21st April, 100m of lay-flat 2” diameter hose, a hand operated bilge pump, drill, 10m of rigid waste pipe and other paraphernalia were ferried down the cave by Sparky, Chris, John C and John D. The pump was bolted to a rock in Chertnobyl just above the newly dug connection to The Sewer and the lay-flat pipe run from there, through The Sewer to Chert Alley and back down towards The Slops, the lowest point in the cave, and bunged down a rift that had been observed to take floodwater. The incoming pipe for the pump was run into the Sewer Sump. Some rapid pumping later on waist-height positioned bilge-pump, in what can only be described to an unfortunately positioned onlooker as a furious wanking, and the water was lowered enough for Sparky to explore:

I went into the now lowered pool by The Sewer. The rift continued straight forwards like a canal with a big undercut to the left (the visual connection to Chertnobyl). I followed the canal for about 8m to a mud bank with a small draughting gap over the top, but no progress after that.

Today we have learned that Chalky is a one-legged cunt, John Dale hides down passages by himself, John Cameron is good at wanking, the sumps aren’t connected, both are probably static and can be lowered, and bilge pumps are hard work and slow.

The plan for next Saturday is to use an electric pump and generator with 150m of cable from the surface to pump the Chertnobyl Sump at the south end of the cave. The pump supposedly shifts 290 l/min so a couple of hours should make a significant impact and tell us whether pumping is going to give us any chances of success.

A team returned on Saturday 26th April to set up the kit. Chris reported on progress:

After our attempts pumping the pool near The Sewer last week, it became apparent something more substantial than manual pumping was needed to clear the larger Chertnobl Sump. In attendance were Me, Sparky, Chalky, Rich, John C and a 'Pornstar' (Pornstar) submersible electric pump.

The first underground task for the day was to get about 30m of extension cable from the generator on the surface to Handshake Rift and then 100m of new cable from there to the sump. I dragged the front end of the cable through Chertnobl Crawl while Sparky followed, helping with snags.

Rich took the extra flat pipe to the sump and rolled it back to Chertnobl Chamber for connection to the already laid length of pipe leading back to The Slops. The others wrestled the hefty Pornstar into the sump, where all the pipes were connected (at which point it was observed our jubilee clips were all a bit shit). Chalky headed back to the surface to start the generator and we held our collective breath as we connected the electricity...

Fortunately we were all still alive and a Darwin award was not claimed!

The pump hummed into life and the flat pipe instantly went rigid, showing a huge amount more was being shifted than by last week's wanking effort on the bilge pump. Now there was an hour or two of waiting while we gradually watched the level lowering in the sump. Rather than freezing to death, most of us went back to The Slops to watch the water coming out the other end of the pipe. It had soon sumped the area around The Fanny and all the water was flowing back and down the hole under the northern wall. This was taking the water easily with no signs of backing up further.

A few of us adjourned to the surface for a bottle of cider, while Sparky and John returned to the pump. They found it sucking air, having drained the initial part of the sump. The intrepid Farrier dropped down into the sludge and started digging away at a mud bank that was holding back a significant amount of water, allowing the Pornstar to continue sucking.

Sparky and John continued to wallow in grey silt (which was a bit smelly and organic with lots of sticks), guiding the water to the pump and increasing amounts of heavy sludge. Some buttock-clenching booming sounds were heard emerging from the gradually appearing sump passage which we hope was air getting sucked into newly exposed parts of passage (either that or we've released a sizeable demon from hell).



The 'Chert Nobbles' found throughout the entire Chertnobl area.

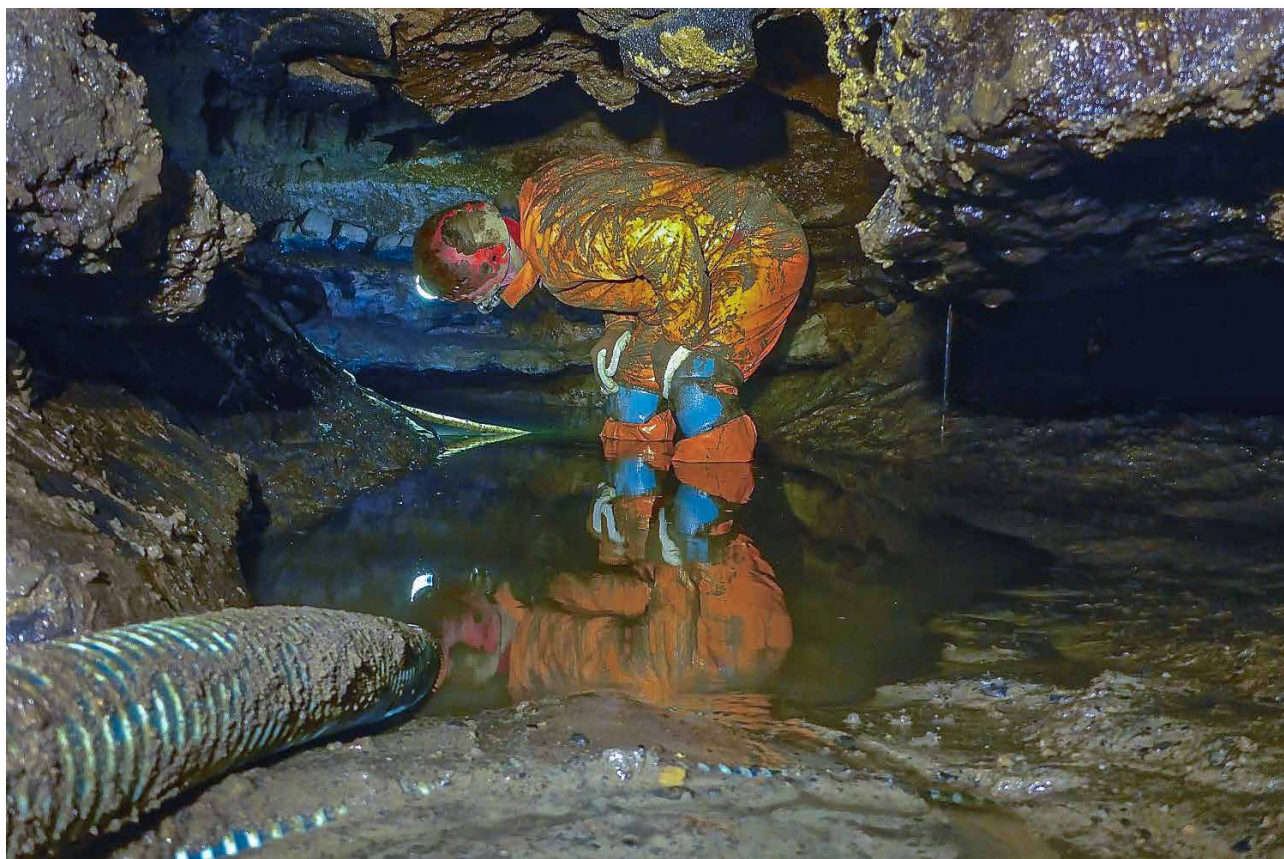
After a while it became apparent that the pump needed to go further into the now lower sump to continue dropping the water. The system was powered down and the 10m length of rigid pipe from last week was added to give some extra reach. After extensive tinkering, everything was connected and powered back up. Everyone was soaked and freezing so we decided to call it a day and just leave the genny running with whatever fuel was left. I went back to collect Sparky's Go-Pro and found water pissing out everywhere so powered everything off. Better jubilee clips are needed to secure the extra length of rigid pipe before the whole system collapses.

The sump was lowered by over two feet and Richard must have missed an air-bell by inches during his pioneering free-dive last year. The chamber and continuing passage remain encouragingly spacious.

Observations and theories for the day:

- 1. The Pornstar can suck for England.*
- 2. Sparky and Chalky enjoying weeing in their wetsuits.*
- 3. The sump/pool near The Sewer that we pumped last week had re-filled.*
- 4. A passage can been seen continuing into the sump, more work needed.*
- 5. We need better jubilee clips!*
- 6. We are a short distance from a huge chamber containing stalactites and a Dinosaur's penis bone.*
- 7. Sticks and debris are getting pushed up into this area by flooding from somewhere to the south that we don't yet know about.*

Sparky peering along
the partially lowered
Sump One passage.



Work continued on Tuesday 29th April, reported by Matt:

We returned to continue the pumping effort, finding the sump to have partially refilled from last Saturday but not completely. This suggests the sump is static and is refilling from water seeping from the surrounding silt.

It took Sparky and I about an hour to lower the level sufficiently, by which time others had arrived, and we were able to enter the sump. The passage sloped down about half a metre into the sump and under two rock outcrops forcing a miserable low grovel in wet mud. Once past this initial barrier, only 2m into the sump, the passage enlarged into a decent size chamber, a few metres wide, at least 1m tall and about 4m long. The going was sloppy indeed with thick, dark wet gloopy mud over a foot deep!

Onward, a wet canal along a spacious passage disappeared off for several metres, although it was still sumped further along. The pump was relocated further into the sump and pumping resumed. By the time the water at the end of the passage was low enough to push along, I was freezing so I took one quick look and then fucked off out. It appeared to turn right after several metres, but it was unclear if there was any way on as the airspace was only several centimetres at that point. Chalky and I shivered our way out of the cave, passing glory boy John Dale who was on his way in.

After our departure, Mr Dale along with others, pushed the wet and gloomy passage, presumably now lowered even more by the Pornstar. Indeed, it did turn slightly to the right and became even less airspace before suddenly rising into a large dry rift chamber. This was named Dinosaur Penis Bone (DBP) Chamber. They had a quick explore; the extent of the rift was limited to just a few metres in each direction above the usual water level. At the far side of the chamber, the mud bank sloped back down to another deep pool of water leading under the wall and into an extremely wet passage. There was some concern about entering this and inadvertently releasing the water back into the previous sump and getting flooded in, so everyone retired to the surface, delighted with our breakthrough.

Work continued on bank holiday Monday, 5th May, reported by Matt:

A 10am meet was arranged and Gary, Chalky and I arrived at 10:07am, to find an abusive message from Sparky for being late, and him having already fucked off down the cave. He returned 20 minutes later after finding the sump only partially refilled, and having repositioned the pump and connected the power cables. We started the generator, and then Chalky and Sparky headed back down. Their job was to keep the pumping going to get the maximum amount of water out as possible. Gary and I followed down half an hour later with surveying gear.

We arrived at the sump to find it mostly drained, with just wet gloopy mud remaining. Gary and I headed through to start the surveying. It was grim. I found myself swimming in at least 30cm deep custard-consistency mud!

Right top: Sparky and Matt surveying in Dinosaur Penis Bone Chamber.

Right bottom: Richard Wilsdon returning to Dinosaur Penis Bone Chamber, after his initial Sump Two explorations.



At DPB Chamber, Sparky plopped into the second pool without hesitation, quickly achieving full body submersion. He headed out of sight along the continuing passage but returned very soon physically shaking with cold. He said that the passage increased to almost walking height, neck-deep, and it was freezing! Richard then arrived fully wetsuited and had a go, confirming the ongoing passage to be several metres long, before all routes above water ended, but with possible ways on below water. Sump Two!

The daunting prospect of now dealing with a second sump, plus the discoveries at Secret Dig, and the subsequent connections between Jenga and Excalibur, meant that a return to the Jenga sumps would not be made for five years...

2019

A return to Dinosaur Penis Bone Chamber

During the week before Easter 2019, a small team comprising Sparky, Chris and John Dale returned to Sump One and reinstated the pumping gear. A few days later, over the Easter weekend, pumping recommenced. John Dale reported on this session:

Bank Holiday Monday found Sump One free of tourists, so the three musketeers had another go at lowering the water. The pumps worked and once the 'backwaters' had emptied, the drainage rate increased dramatically. Sparky then developed a dire need to pee and due to the constricted environment, Chris and I forced him to go directly into the pump inlet, an impressive achievement by Sparky under the difficult circumstances.

The pump was then moved into position beyond the chamber and left to do its thing while retreat was made to the surface to warm up. As it was 22°C outside this was achieved magnificently.

Sparky spent his time on the surface putting on a wetsuit and girding his loins, Chris picked the wild garlic that I had pissed on only an hour earlier, while I pretended to be asleep, hoping that Sparky would get bored and de-kit. This strategy didn't work so Sparky and I went back in, while Chris munched on his tasty wild garlic pickings claiming that his oversuit was ripped and he couldn't go back down the cave.

On arriving back at the Pornstar, we found it was sucking air. Sparky repositioned his tool and strong suction was regained.

The sump continued to make very worrying slurping and banging noises and once these had ceased, I manned the pump while Sparky, loins girded, headed into the sump. On surfacing at the slope up into DPB Chamber, Sparky's wittering got louder as it was clear Sump Two was draining into Sump One on the left side of the chamber. Sump Two was inspected and it was decided that a Brave Person could easily release lots of the water from it into Sump One while a Not So Brave Person manned the pump back on the 'safe' side of the sump, free from the threat of a prolonged stay.



The pump reinstated back at Sump One ready for action.

Sparky made his way (amusingly) down the slope from DPB Chamber back into Sump One, sending a wave of water that the Pornstar slurped with ease. Unfortunately, during repositioning of the pump, the top clip failed resulting in a splendid grey slime fountain in a very confined space. This was closely followed by loud screams of “turn the fucking pump off!” Unluckily for them, dragging my body through the grey slime and out of the sump to enact their wish took some time. As did the usual pondering as to whether I was going to get electrocuted by pressing the off-switch.

DPB Chamber is now open, it is as disgusting, if not worse, than last time and awaits a Brave Person to release the contents of Sump Two into Sump One, thus stranding themselves. Following this act of unselfish kindness he (or she) can then be ‘rescued’ by the elderly Pornstar in Sump One.

Points of note: The direction of the old scallops in Sump One suggest the ancient route of the stream in this area is from Chertnobyl towards Sump Two (i.e. into the cave). Secondly, the pool by The Sewer does not change height at all when Sump One is drained, so they are not connected. Finally, and most importantly, wild garlic butter made by Chris is best avoided!

Digging the following week was well described by Andy as “A homoerotic splurge in liquifying gloop culminating mostly in cramp”, setting the scene for the rest of the year. However, with the increasing numbers of diggers keen to benefit from the youth-giving

properties of Jenga mud, some issues soon became apparent. Firstly, the gradual liquifying of the mud at each side of the sump was causing previously solid mud floors to flow into the sump and block the pump. A retaining wall was needed to contain the perimeter of the sump. Secondly the air quality had seriously deteriorated due to the release of nasty gases from the newly churned putrefying organic matter.

Chris reported on a session from 28th April:

After last week it was clear that the air in the sump was not up to scratch, so today we took in a gas meter. We turned on the genny at about 10:30am and went underground soon after. We placed the meter at the entrance to the sump and it read 20% oxygen, so all good. We started filling sandbags to retain the slurry, but it was utterly pointless as the mud came straight through the hessian sacks we were using.

Just before John Dale arrived, probably about 11:30am, the alarm started going off, which meant the oxygen had dropped to 19.5%. At this point we took the meter further into the sump and it dropped to 18.5%. Now with just three of us in there it steadily dropped to 17% before the battery went flat. Around this time Sparky had got through to DPB Chamber. We decided to have a 10-minute breather out of the sump.

As Andy arrived, Sparky had a go at repositioning the pump to get it out of the mud, but the conditions were now really poor, and I was getting concerned that if Sparky expired while gasping for air trying to drag the pump and himself in heavy mud we would be in serious trouble. I can only guess that the oxygen in the sump was probably 16% or lower by this point. This is going to cause us some issues over coming weeks.

The following week, a 12V battery, fan and ducting was added to the ever-growing pile of engineering to try to push fresh air down from Chertnoby1 into the sump passage. By now however, the sump was not fully refilling between digging sessions, and the air quality issue seemed to magically sort itself out, presumably due to improved air flow from passages beyond, and all gases having now escaped from the mud anyway.

A few weeks were then spent filling plastic sandbags, which contained the silt much better than hessian sacks, and installing boards 5m into Sump One at the start of the canal leading to DPB chamber, where the pump was now permanently located. This allowed slop from the sump to be stacked. The pump was suspended out of the slop and a mesh fireguard placed around it to help prevent too much slurry getting through.

With Sump One now clear and all the groundwork done to keep it that way, focus turned to Sump Two. Unfortunately, nobody was going to be the 'Brave Person' that John Dale had proposed, so another strategy was needed.

Another Pornstar was sourced for Sump Two. With more bodging, more electric cable, and more pipework, the second pump was installed just beyond DBP Chamber. Unfortunately, our generator didn't have the vigour to run both of the pumps at once, requiring a complex operation of switching between them, which was slow and impractical.



The surface team looking after the generator at the entrance to Jenga Pot.

A bigger generator was needed, so we bought one. This ran a single pump with mega gusto, and two pumps well, although with occasional tripping of the genny as pumps were turned on because the startup current is higher than the running current. Once the pumps actually got going they were generally fine, but startup was an issue.

A surface support role of nipple-watcher became essential, to reset the genny power nipple each time it tripped and popped out, hoping, of course, there wasn't a caver getting electrocuted on the other end of the cable.

Digging turnout through the summer of 2019 was high despite the squalor. One person would man the switch in DPB chamber, switching off pump two just before we got sumped in, thus allowing poor old pump one (which ran much slower due to having to pump the water further) time to catch up and drain Sump One. The nipple-watcher would reset the genny if it tripped, and a few people in DPB Chamber manned pump two, scooping mud out as the water level dropped and repositioning the pump further and further into the ever-lowering sump.

Eventually we could start the genny, and both sumps would start pumping from their lowest point without us even needing to go down the cave! We spent one entire evening 'digging' while sat in the pub eating chips!

The next report comes from Matt on 14th August:

The pumping of Sump Two has been ongoing for several weeks with varying levels of faff, equipment failure and other impediments, but finally the water was almost gone. Sitting in the chamber that was previously Sump Two, five metres beyond

DPB Chamber, where once water filled it to neck height, the remaining water was just a pool at the lowest point with a clear underwater continuation heading westwards. We were joined this week by Josh Bratchley MBE, who apparently is not bad at cave diving. He allegedly has a fetish for muddy sumps and was keen to have a go at diving Sump Two.

As the last dregs of water slurped out of Sump Two, revealing a very low and squalid continuation, Josh came clunking down Chertnobyl Passage with Gary leading the way. He arrived at DPB Chamber only to be greeted with "You're too fucking late" and "There's no Thai boys through there". No amounts of heroism provides immunity from Sparky's foul mouth.

We dragged mud from the grim onward passage, and then in we went. This was an ear-in-mud wallow, passing a tiny cross-rift before reaching, after only 5m, a steep rise into a dry chamber. We had passed Sump Two!



Sump Two led up into a rather sizable chamber/aven (several metres tall), with a single continuing passage leading onwards, crawling height about 2m above the sump level. This had stunningly lovely, scalloped mud and it seemed a shame to ruin it, but it was unavoidable. We (Me, Sparky, Josh, John C) pushed along the passage for about 15m before it pinched in ahead to only 10-15cm wide but maintaining good height; it appeared to open out beyond the narrowing, and a good draught was blowing outwards.

Pumping of Sump Two, looking towards the low arched passage which is just coming into view, only 30 minutes before the breakthrough into the passage beyond. Prior to pumping, the water level was above head height of the two cavers (who were not in there at the time)!

A few metres back from this restriction was another pool of water. This appeared to extend underneath the restriction, but was sumped. Some sticking in of feet into this sump (Sump Three) showed it to be 2-3 feet deep and to head off under the excessively narrow overhead passage, separated from it initially by rock shelves. John, Josh and Sparky started some half-hearted poking while I returned to check the status of Sump Two. On my return to the sump, I was alarmed to find a deepening pool of water had reappeared with rather less airspace above than when we came through, water having seeped rapidly out of the surrounding mud, and the pump now blocked. I called an emergency evacuation, and we made a hasty and spluttery exit. Another ten minutes and things might have been problematic!

We emerged feeling triumphant, exhilarated, and excited, and celebrated in the pub in the usual fashion, with beer mat surveys and a beer.



The Ponstar (to use the correct name; typically known as Pornstar by us) pumps used at Jenga Pot, with the accompanying 2-inch diameter lay-flat pipe. We have three of these in-situ at the time of writing, one for each of the three sumps.

Over early autumn, several return trips were made to Sump Three and it became clear that we would either need to blast the restriction in the passage above the sump, or pump the sump in hope that it provided a bypass under the restriction.

Things were now starting to get fairly serious. Did we really have the ability, skills and enthusiasm to pump a third sump while keeping Sumps One and Two open? How far were we willing to push this project? Thankfully, the total absence of anything better to do in the North York Moors, and the draught that emerged from the restriction above Sump Three, meant we couldn't give up yet.

We decided on the pumping option, and a third Pornstar pump was purchased and shuttled down to Chertnobyl Passage. Unfortunately, before Pornstar III could be deployed, the first flood of Autumn 2019 came, refilling Sumps One and Two. They were repumped, mainly to retrieve the pumps and leave them somewhere safe so they didn't get buried in mud, but then the flooding became a more regular event. The southern reaches of Jenga Pot were left to the ravages of the winter floods, while we entertained ourselves with a surprise (and unmemorable) return to Mutton Butty.

2020: The Covid Extensions

The wet weather through January and February, followed by Coronavirus, put exploration on hold for significantly longer than we wanted. A return to Jenga wasn't made until lockdown measures were eased sufficiently at the start of June.

Built-up boredom, the draught from the 15cm wide ongoing passage above Sump Three, the reasonable size of the passage leading up to that point, and the ongoing joke that we might be only metres away from breaking into the Jenga Pot main drain (this really was just a joke back then), meant turnout was high for an attack at Sump Three.

Matt reported on the first session back on 3rd June:

With lockdown eased we had a substantial turnout for our first session back at Jenga. We split into two groups. Ian, Rachel, David Pants, Adele and Lee headed to Bogg Hall to start Ian's project of diving the entrance sumps and surveying them, while Nial, Sparky, John C, Gary and I headed to Jenga to get the generator going. The generator did not comply at first, requiring a winter-worth of moisture purging from the fuel tank.

Genny running, Nial and I headed underground. We knew the sumps would be full, but we needed to make sure all was working. It was bloody great being back in Jenga, and the grit, mud and wet crawls were heavenly. Sure enough, we found Sump One full to the brim but slowly lowering as good old pump one chugged away. We sat by the sump and had a philosophical conversation for nearly an hour about death, erections, and sexuality, the kind of conversation only Nial would instigate. We hoped that we might get into the first part of the sump to service the pump, but the water was lowering too slowly. We exited, and the generator was left to finish its tank of petrol. Sump Two should have been pumping into Sump One, so hopefully next week both will be drained, and we can get straight through.

Matt reported on the following week (10th June), when we returned, this time to deploy Pornstar III in Sump Three and commence pumping operations.

A similar turnout to last week, and while Ian, Adele and Lee went back to Bogg Hall to continue surveying the entrance sump, myself, Rachel, Nial, Sparky and John C fired the genny up and headed down Jenga. Sump One was pleasingly empty after efforts last week but Sump Two was nearly full! Clearly some water had been eliminated, but the water level was still over a metre above the Sump Two passage. Something was wrong and although we could hear the pump distantly humming away, no water emerged.

Confusion reigned as Sparky reckoned that the pump was on the far side of the sump, and gently tugging on the wire failed to retrieve it. Bollocks. Thankfully, Pornstar III had been brought through from Chertnobl. We managed to get this pump rigged up and into Sump Two and that fired up nicely and started pumping the water out. Rachel and I stood thigh-deep in Sump Two shovelling gloop from the floor as the water lowered.

At first it didn't look like we would get through tonight, but the sump narrows like a funnel, so the lowering of the water got faster and soon the arch of the passage appeared. As the sump passage slowly opened, something yellow emerged from the water. "What the fuck's that?" It was Pornstar II, clearly not on the far side of the sump as Sparky had insisted, but instead buried deep in mud beneath our feet! Still, at least Pornstar III worked.

With Sump Two now pumped out, Pornstar II was excavated and reinstated, and Pornstar III was dragged through to Sump Three. We found Sump Three full to the brim (much fuller than last year), but it was now late in the evening, so setting up the pump would have to wait for next week.

Work continued on 17th June also reported by Matt:

Another good turnout and while Ian continued his Bogg Hall diving project in what is soon to be the most well-surveyed 15m sump in the country, Sparky, Nial and I fired up the genny and headed down Jenga. Sumps One and Two were empty by the time we got down to them.

We dragged through a reel of pipe for Sump Three and it only just reached from Sump Three to Sump One, meaning we could bypass Sump Two in the pumping operation. Sparky fettled the electrics, installing a switch beyond Sump Two to allow switching between pumping Sump Two and Three, while pump one ran continuously. Pornstar III was then lowered into Sump Three and the all-clear was given to power up. It sprung into life.

Back at Dinosaur Penis Bone Chamber, the water from Sump Three gushed pleasingly out with tremendous force into Sump One. Nial stayed guard at Sump One because that was now filling faster than poor old pump one could empty it, and we really didn't fancy sumping ourselves into the cave. I stationed myself at the switchbox ready to switch if given a signal by Nial, and Sparky started digging out Sump Three and repositioning the pump further and further into the sump as the water level lowered.

Unfortunately, as the pump was being repositioned, the power tripped and the mildly inebriated nipple-watcher on the surface didn't notice, meaning an end to efforts for tonight. We ended this session with the water in Sump Three lowered a few feet, just enough to slip down into the sump and feel around with our legs, which confirmed the passage does continue.

We were back again the following week, with digging enthusiasm the highest it has ever been, and with good reason as we were soon to find out. Matt reported:

Ian and a few others went for their weekly orgy at Bogg Hall, while Sparky, Nial and I headed down to Jenga Sump Three to continue where we left off. We dragged down with us several decking boards, which would be used to start building a pier at Sump Three to hold the mud back and stop it slumping into the sump and blocking the pump.

Not much had changed at Sump Three and the water had only gone back up a little. Gary had very kindly volunteered to nipple-watch. We had some issues getting the pump going, as the power kept tripping, and it was looking for a while like tonight was going to be a total write-off. However, after getting the pump properly repositioned into the sump, it fired up again, and seemed to hold steady for the rest of the evening.

I sat and watched at Sump One. Initially nice clean water gushed out from the Sump Three pipe, but it was obvious the point at which Sparky and Nial climbed into the sump to start installing the deck boards, as the water coming out of the pipe suddenly turned very brown.

Matt Ewles with the pump in Sump Three. The ongoing passage is just starting to emerge from the water.



The pumping was quite stop-start as the pump needed frequent repositioning and kept getting blocked by mud. As there was no risk of Sump One filling, I went to join the party at Sump Three. The roof of the ongoing passage was now visible, and this looked encouraging. More boarding, digging and pumping later, and the ongoing passage was now enterable, and appeared to go on for 3-4m as a wide, low gloopy crawl ending at a mud bank. It was unclear whether there was any way on from there though.

Sparky went in, helmet off, swimming in liquid mud. I kept the pump clear of the worst of this, allowing the bow-waves of water from Sparky's thrashing to be sucked away, but the remaining liquid was becoming just too thick. Then suddenly, Sparky vanished! Over the noise of the slurping pump, we couldn't hear what was going on, so Nial and I followed, in fear that the glory-hunting Farrier had broken into measureless caverns. The last metre of the sump was head-in-the-mud, then it reached a sandy bank leading up into a chamber where Sparky was sat grinning like a Cheshire cat.

We scrambled up the embankment and into a large, clean washed passage, which started as stooping height but very quickly enlarged to walking, and vanished off into the distance. Giddy with excitement, we walked along it, passing a higher-level passage on the left with straws, a flowstone formation, and some small curtains. This was master-cave size passage, 1m wide and 3m high. After about 50m, the passage started to lower a little back to crawling, and turned a corner, but continued with no end in sight. We decided we had come far enough without the full team.

With adrenaline high, the exit was quick, to a celebratory beer and to tell everyone what we had found. Next week was going to be exploration night!

Sump Three had been conquered and our efforts rewarded. The excitement meant a high turnout the following week, and Matt reported on the historic evening (1st July):

Myself, John and Sparky headed down early to get pumping at Sump Three, and we dragged several decking boards down. The sump had partly refilled since last week due to water separating out of the nearby sloppy mud. The pump took a little encouragement, as the power kept tripping on startup, but Chris' nipple-watching skills proved second-to-none.

While the pump did its thing, we worked on the boarding to hold the slurry back for about an hour and to try to clear some of the slop out of the sump. By the time the rest of the party (Gary, Andy, Nial, Ian) arrived, the sump was empty, the boards in place and we were ready to head through.

After showcasing the 50m of passage from last week (which I think everyone assumed we had exaggerated), and with everyone finally gathered at the turnaround point from last week, we pushed on. The passage did indeed get smaller, but remaining fairly easy spacious crawling for the most part. For the first 25m, I was expecting 'game over' to be around the next corner, but by the time we'd covered about 50m it became apparent that this passage wasn't ending any time soon. We then passed under a rift leading up to a higher-level passage going off in two directions (which we ignored for

Right: Ian Dawson
admiring formations in
the large passage, 30m
beyond Sump Three.





now). Then the passage got generally larger, with galleries, rift chambers, being mostly easy crawling, stooping or walking, until suddenly, what must have been nearly 150-200m from Sump Three, we encountered a stream!

This small stream entered from a low arch on the left, which was initially 2m wide but less than crawling height and mostly full of water, limiting the exploration to only a few metres upstream without wetsuits. Downstream however was a 3m wide stooping height streamway. We followed this, now whooping with joy as the passage very quickly developed into a beautiful streamway, disappearing into the distance. After about 80m, it enlarged to standing height at a prominent junction.

Here, a dry route went off on the right, but the water continued left along a walking height passage. We stomped downstream, now feeling quite a long way from home and unable to forget that we were beyond three sumps. Only 40m from the junction, the roof dropped and we were soon stooping and then crawling in the water. The mudbanks started to dominate the character of the passage, and a sump seemed imminent. Sure enough, we reached the sump in a small chamber maybe 60m after the junction. The water flowed into a waist-deep pool and under the wall of the chamber. A few underwater photos were quickly taken, revealing a decent size passage, before the 'brown' from all of our mud churning caught up.

Pandemic Passage where the stream is met, looking upstream towards Sump Four. From front to back, Matt Ewles, John Cameron, Richard 'Sparky' Edwards, and Ian 'Snazzy' Dawson. The passage back towards Sump Three comes in just behind John on the left.

The impressively proportioned Pandemic Passage streamway about 30m downstream of where it is joined.





The Pandemic Passage streamway about 60m downstream of where it is joined, just before the junction with the dry right branch.

We took some celebratory photos at the downstream sump, before remembering that it was raining, and we were beyond three sumps. Andy and Nial started on their way out and agreed to return to get us if there were any issues that required emergency exit (i.e. Sump Three filling back up). Once the seed of doubt about such things is planted, there is little that can be done to alleviate the concerns, but we tried to reassure ourselves it was all fine. Gary and Ian stopped on the way out for more quick photos.

Back at the junction, Sparky, John C and I explored the dry branch. This started as a passage with large mud banks on the right, reducing the otherwise wide, spacious passage to an awkward crawl. Beyond the mud banks the passage became 3ft high, 5ft wide, passing a large cross-rift. This passage seemed to go on for quite some way, maybe 80-100m. Eventually, we emerged up through boulders into a sizable chamber where we could stand up, and a large aven towered 8-10m above us. The passage did continue beyond here but was now a flat-out waterlogged canal.

A few sections of low canal passage were then followed, partially floating and with some reduced airspace in places, almost requiring helmet removal. This part of the cave felt rather less well developed, and not somewhere to be on a wet night! This had all the hallmarks of an inlet, but from where? I was at the back, and John at the front. After an oppressing and reduced airspace canal, John went around a corner and said the route ahead was getting lower, but it did continue. We decided this was a good point to turn around for tonight and leave something tempting for the next visit.

We never even looked at the higher-level passages that we'd passed earlier. These will have to wait until next week to explore.



The journey out felt like a surprisingly long way. We caught up with Ian and Gary, I helped with some more photos as John and Sparky headed out, and Ian, Gary and I were last out to a celebratory beer. We were met on the surface by Adele, Lee, Chris and John Dale who were forced to listen to us babbling incoherently about caverns measureless to man.

The not-so socially distanced breakthrough team at Sump Five, the downstream termination of the new streamway in Pandemic Passage.

These discoveries represent the largest North York Moors breakthrough since Excalibur Pot in 2007 (exceeding the 498m initial Jenga breakthrough in 2013). The aptly named Pandemic Passage is clearly the fabled master cave for Jenga Pot, although how hydrologically active it is today remains to be seen. We were back the following week (8th July) for more exploration and a rough-and-ready survey. Matt reported:

Despite the 'big explore' being over, turnout was nonetheless expected to be high tonight, with several open leads. However, importantly, Adele, Lee, John D and Chris had yet to see the new passages. Therefore, Sparky and I joined them mid-afternoon by skiving off work. Sparky manned the nipple and we headed down. Getting Pornstar III going took some serious effort due to silt having settled-out in the pipe, but Adele's pipe-milking technique worked well and left John needing a cold dunk in the sump.

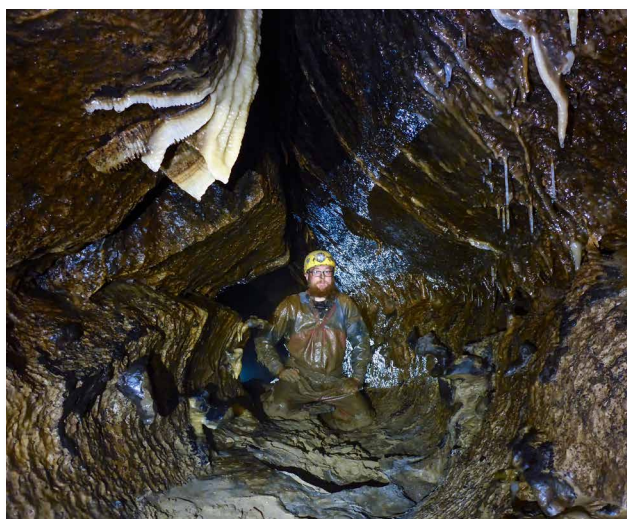
The first port of call was the rift about 80m beyond Sump Three, leading up into a perpendicular higher-level passage. This was a little strenuous to get up into, but myself, Lee and John managed our way up. I let Lee and John take the lead, with Lee taking the right branch and John the left. The right branch remained crawling height for maybe 15m, turning right, and running parallel with the lower passage, and passing some modest forma-

tions and small grottos. Lee stopped a few metres before the end, where clearly it dropped off a balcony which we had noted from the main passage below with some stal near the edge that we didn't want to damage.

Back at the rift, John took the other direction in a dry mud crawl. This had two very distinctive 'tide marks' on the mud-coated walls, and the mud was peppered with dried flood debris. Clearly the water in the lower passage backs up to some height! A standing-height chamber with some pristine mud was reached after maybe 15m, and beyond this the crawl continued, smaller, for 6-7m to a junction. Straight ahead was mostly blocked with mud but a good draught emerged over the top. This is a cracking potential dig! On the right, a short drop entered a smaller muddy crawl, which John headed along. Through his muffled voice, we ascertained that he crawled about 15m to an impassable visual connection down to where Chris and Adele were surveying in Pandemic Passage, meaning this is another high-level oxbow. Game over here, except for that draughting dig.

Top: The overhead passage just before it drops back down into Pandemic Passage.

Bottom: The opposite direction in the overhead passage, which is much more dry and sandy. The 'tide mark' from a recent flood is clearly visible on the wall, despite this being about 3m above the floor of Pandemic Passage below!



Back down in the main passage, myself, Lee and John headed to the downstream sump. Here, John located a possible bypass, hidden behind a mud bank on the right just before the sump chamber. Beyond a mud hump was a very narrow crawl in some static water that looked really tight. I couldn't believe we'd missed this last week! The crawl looked gnarly but after inserting my head and body in I could hear water flowing beyond!

Chris, Adele, Sparky, Gary and Andy soon arrived and volunteered to help me have a go at this bypass. With the removal of a few rocks, I was able to squeeze feet-first along a narrow, wet tube for 2m. I popped out into open space to see water emerging from under the nearby wall and lofty stream passage leading away.

The excitement was all too short, as sadly this continuation ended after only 15m at another sump. Andy joined me, and we concluded that this is chest-deep and spacious underwater, but is a diver project now. We exited the new extension, thankful of a helping hand from Sparky.

In total, another 50-60m of cave added tonight, including the upper oxbows and the new sump.

Chris and Adele's preliminary survey was surprising, revealing Pandemic Passage to trend more westward than expected. The new downstream sump is under the depressions in Dowson's Field (a couple of shake-hole-like depressions we had assumed to be old quarries) only 100m east of The Well in the River Dove valley. The right branch must head towards sinks in the River Dove itself at the north end of that field.

The following week was equally productive, as reported by Matt;

Another strong turnout, with Rachel and Mark Sims coming along. Myself, Mark, Sparky and Chris made an early start down with Andy on nipple-watch. Sump One was still emptying when we arrived (where is it refilling from?) and we had a short wait before it was passable. Once through, we tried to get Sump Three pumping, but the power tripped. Nothing unusual there, as it often does when the pump is just getting going, but the power did not immediately come back on. After ten minutes of waiting, no power. Being the youngest, Mark was sent to the surface to give Andy a bollocking for dereliction of duties, and the power soon returned.

By the time the sump was clear, Mark had returned and through we went. The first target today was to lower the water in the upstream passage of the new streamway by digging down the outflow streambed. There was plenty of vertical range in this, but it just needed the stream floor lowering. Scouring the downstream streambed occupied us for nearly an hour.

We reckoned we'd got it about as low as possible, so I neoprene-hooded up and went in. The upstream sump was a pleasant float in for the first 5-6m, and then there was a bend to the left. This was all OK, and then a slightly lower airspace section with head sideways in the water... still OK... reaching a slight enlargement. Ahead, the way on was now through a small arch with only 4cm of airspace, too little for my liking, so I floated out.

Meanwhile Ian, Nial, Rachel, Andy, and even Dickwad, had arrived and the junction suddenly became a rather busy place. Ian floated into the upstream passage for a look and to evade the plumes of Coronavirus that were clearly now dispersing around the chamber. He vanished, shouting back "didn't you guys see the nice stream passage", at which point Sparky almost crapped himself thinking that a Yorkie was buggering off into new cave without him, and he darted into the water to follow. They both returned after five minutes, saying that the passage had gained airspace and continued as a wet crawl for maybe 20m before sumping fully.

Some people went to the downstream sump, while Andy, Rachel and I headed up the dry right branch. Through the canals, we reached the turnaround point from a few weeks ago and continued beyond for another 10m in low, wet passage. At the end of a canal, a small ramp led down into a stooping height chamber waist-deep in water. There was a strong organic smell and an oppressive feel. An inlet on the right here needs a few spadefuls of silt removing but looks good. Straight on, flat-out crawling continued, so Andy suggested we leave this for next week, and he reversed out past me.

I don't have reverse gear, but up ahead there looked to be an enlargement, so I pushed on for another 5-6m to find somewhere to turn around. However, at the enlargement, I saw something encouraging ahead, the passage abruptly ending at a chamber with a prominent archway in the right wall. The floor sloped down under this archway into a clean, static pool, with limestone 'joists' spanning it at water level. This might be passable, but not tonight so I retreated, noting this area for future return.



Matt Ewles in the low canals at the end of the dry branch of Pandemic Passage, 10m from Deceit Junction. Note the trusty survey box which has been on every Excalibur/Jenga survey trip to to date.

The outward journey was about 40 minutes of arduous, wetsuited caving, and we emerged from Jenga totally knackered, after 4.5hr underground. A cracking session and probably another 60m of cave added tonight.

The following week, progress stalled due to problems with the generator. We arrived at Sump One to find it fully sumped. Some new parts for the genny were arranged and the week after (29th July) we were back in business, reported by Matt:

With new parts for the genny procured, I arrived to find Chris, Sparky and John C already hard at work doing man-things to the genny. I stood back and watched while drinking a beer and eating crisps, soon to be joined by Adele and Lee to do the same. With the genny up and running, and sounding a bit healthier than last week, it was time to head down. Enthusiasm for going underground was low because it was a nice warm night, so in the end just Sparky and I headed down.

We took underground with us a new switchbox made by Gary to allow easy switching between pumps two and three just by turning a knob, rather than disconnecting things and risking frying our bollocks.

We arrived pleased to see the sumps empty, and Sump Three only needing five minutes to clear what little water had settled out. Through Sump Three we made rapid progress down the newly named Pandemic Passage, along the right branch, through the canals and to the chamber with a pool where

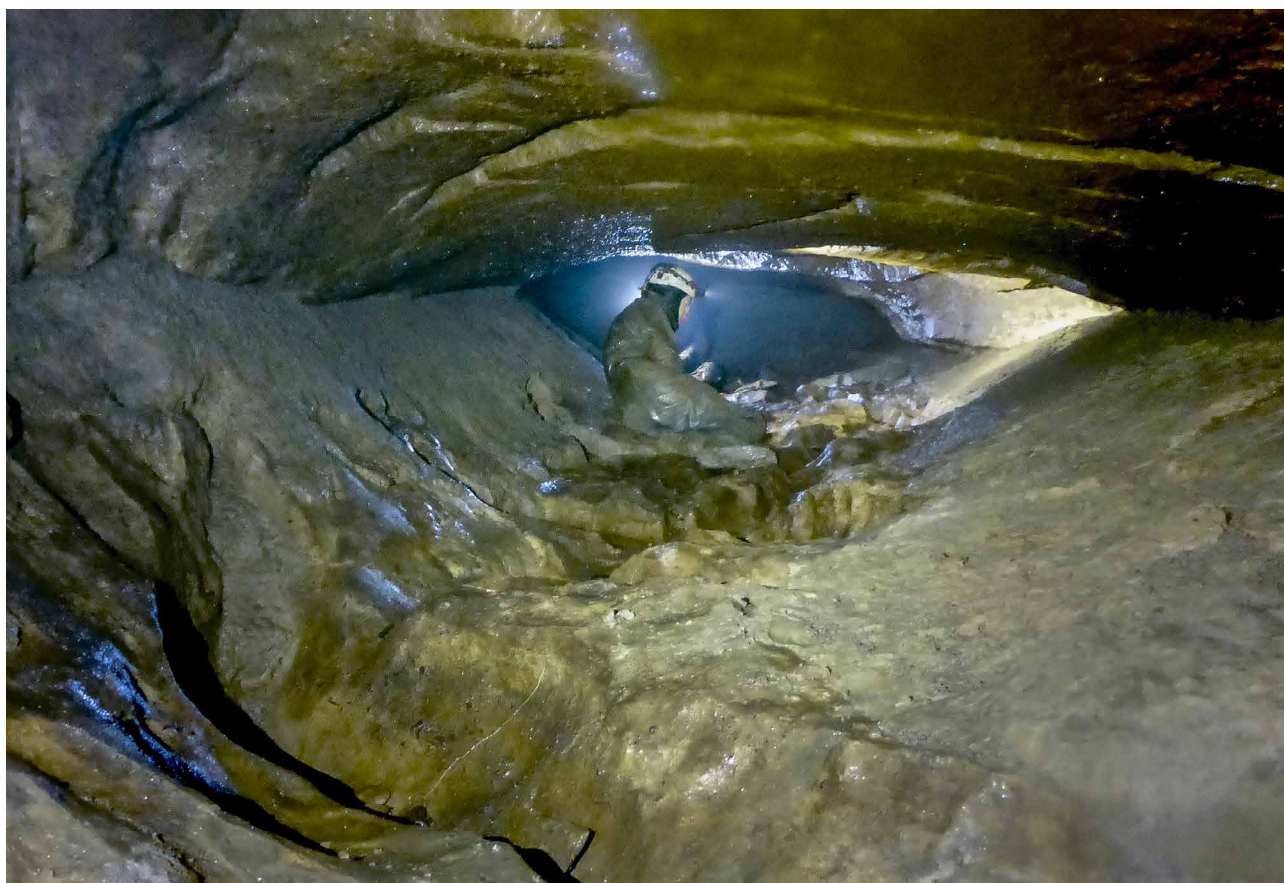
the promising looking inlet joined on the right. This didn't look as good as I'd remembered, and Sparky cursed me for giving him false hope. Nonetheless, he started work with a spade, and within five minutes had churned out enough sandy mud for us to slither forward along the passage. After only 5m, it opened out to better proportions, so the spade was abandoned.

The passage, now free from the misery of the deep pool, soon became a low crawl in the usual sandy mud, nothing too exciting, however as we crawled onwards, it gradually got larger, reaching 3m wide, 1m tall, elliptical, with clean washed limestone and heavily scalloped, indicating that we were going upstream. This passage is a flood inlet into the system.

After what must have been about 40m or so of easy crawling, the passage narrowed and sloped steeply down a 1m drop to a pool of water. I assumed this was a sump. However, on inspection, it was a static pool, and the passage carried on flat-out until the left wall with 4-5 inches of airspace. This looked a bit ominous, but we pushed along, taking a slalom course around cherty nodules coming down from the roof. This was a helmet-off job, and a few chert nodules had to be sacrificed (by Sparky's baldy head), but after 6-7m we were out of the water and back to spacious dry crawling.

Continuing onward in easy crawling, evidence of flood debris became more abundant, and probably another 40m later, the passage suddenly narrowed and appeared to close down. In fact, it had simply reduced to a rift-type passage, tall, narrow, and with an abundance of cherty projections sticking out of the wall making progress trickier.

The Second Wave, only 20m from Deceit Junction. At the point of publishing, this remains the only photo of this very fine passage, leading to the new streamway.



We wondered if we should turn around and return next week with the others, as the passage ahead enlarged to walking-height with no end in sight. Just as we were about to turn back, the floor took a 2m dive down a muddy slope into blackness. I thought that this must be a sump, but in fact, I was greeted by a streamway, 2m across, fast flowing from right to left!

This streamway carried far more water than the Pandemic Passage streamway, and more than any other individual stream we have encountered in the entire Jenga system in dry conditions. I suddenly realised that we may have encountered the Excalibur streamway part-way along its route from Primal Scream to Bogg Hall Rising. The quantity of water seemed right.

Although initially standing-height, upstream and downstream were smaller. Upstream was chest deep crawling for 10m, to an archway, with the way on having only four inches of airspace. I floated through for a couple of metres, helmet held out in front. After a brief enlargement, the next low section was soon reached, sumping all except a few millimetres of airspace. This was game over upstream without a drought or a diver.

Downstream, the passage started as an easy crawl but then became a low and gnarly thrash in the water. Progress was a mixture of crawling and flat-out wallowing, dodging cherty projections in the roof, and helmet-off in places. About 25m downstream, there was a cross-rift and the way on at stream level continued as a low crawl in the water for maybe 10-15m more, however a large chert lump emerging from the ceiling blocked the route. We will need to return with a crowbar to make further progress.

The outward journey was a killer, and I was glad when, back in the previously explored passages, we met Gary and Nial who had started to survey the right branch and provided an excuse for a short rest and chat.

We estimate about 140m of new cave tonight, including an encounter with a significant stream; probably the Excalibur streamway, although it is not out of the question that this could be the River Dove water somewhere upstream of Guinevere's Slit. Now, that would be exciting!

A week later (5th August) we were back to look further at the new extensions, and to finish off all loose ends along the right branch, as reported by Matt:

Another dry week and an early turnout from Me, Sparky, Andy and Chris, and a visitor, Mike Butcher. The target today was along the right branch to the 'Excalibur' streamway, and to continue pushing downstream.

We soon reached the gloomy pool from where the extensions commenced. We offered Andy the chance to go first, but the squalor meant he thought we were deceiving him and sending him down some shitty dig. Deceit Junction will be a good name here I think. About 15m before the slope down into the 'Excalibur' stream, we noted a high aven above the passage, clean washed and going up at least 8m. We totally missed this last week. Of note was a strong cold breeze coming down from above. We left this alone for now.

We were soon into the new streamway where Andy and Mike posted themselves feet-first into the upstream sump, which is preceded by an extremely low (<2 cm) airspace section. They concluded that it carries on, spaciou-ly, and it may even just be a free-dive back to improved airspace passage, but proper diving kit will be needed to find out.

Heading downstream for about 40m, we were at the turnaround point from our last visit. Our giddiness last week became evident, as with fresher eyes we saw that the chert blockage could be easily bypassed. No crowbar ac-tion necessary tonight. Into virgin cave, the river passage continued much as before, 3m wide, 2-3ft high, small rifts and mud banks along the side of the stream, and lots of chert outcrops emerging like grabby tentacles. This was starting to feel more and more like Bogg Hall in character!

About 15m of aquatic crawling downstream from last week's limit was the first obstacle, which involved acrobatic manoeuvres around chert. Beyond here, a few flat-out sections in the water required helmet removal and more head-slicing for poor bald Mr Sparkles. About 25m beyond last week's turnaround point, we were faced with a low-airspace duck. A few under-water chert shelves were collapsed, leaving about 50-60cm of space below the water and a 7-8cm triangular airspace above, plenty of space for nose and mouth as we each tackled the duck on our backs.

With the passage quickly opening out again, we started to wonder how far downstream we were actually going to be able to push tonight. Bogg Hall felt to be getting increasingly closer!

Beyond the duck however, it was game over in a matter of metres. The pas-sage was split by a low roof section down the middle. To the left was a dead end. To the right, following the water, another low-airspace paddle in the water enlarged into a 3m long section of passage becoming deeper, walk-ing height, with a sand floor. Only a few metres along here, with no way on, the sand floor suddenly gave way underneath me, leaving me floating in a sump! After freaking out and thrashing about in the water, I retreated to let everyone else have a look. Mike had a go at free-diving and confirmed the sump to be deep and spacious. This is yet another job for divers.

On the way out, we had a go at climbing the aven we had spotted earlier near where the 'Excalibur' streamway is joined. Mike managed to chimney 4-5m up, but it was getting a bit exposed due to the slippery rocks coated in oily mud. It continued up from Mike's limit, narrowing but inconclusive and with a cold and fresh draught coming from above. Does this go up to somewhere near the surface? An entrance here would be most useful.

Back at Deceit Junction, Andy and Sparky were now frozen, so they headed out. Mike and I however went right to have a look at the end of the pas-sage which I briefly visited a few weeks ago where a slope down under an archway leads to an ominous pool blocked by two limestone 'joists'. It didn't look like a route through here woud be possible, but Mike headed down into the pool and with sickening ease he squeezed over the first 'joist' and back into the pool beyond, chest deep in water and looking somewhat

claustrophobe within this confined environment. He then ducked under the second 'joist' making it look easy and reported that there was a steep mud slope up on the other side into a spacious continuing passage. There are times when this is not welcome news, and I reluctantly followed through this waterlogged obstacle course with significantly less ease.

The dry passage beyond was 2-3m tall and had tree roots poking out of the roof in multiple places. After several metres, a junction was reached with a tiny streambed (not flowing). Straight on ended in blocks, but above was a 3m tall aven with a mud roof and more tree roots. Right, was also blocked by boulders after a few metres, but an echoing drip-drip-drip was audible from beyond, in what sounded like a larger area, but getting there would need some boulder rearrangement. This was the end of the line for tonight and for any future trip without serious digging. This new area, Tree Root Chamber as it shall be known, will have to wait until another day!

The almost one-hour journey back to the surface then commenced. We exited at 9:45pm, after three and a half hours continuous strenuous wetsuited caving, and I was totally knackered. A trip to the far reaches of Jenga Pot is quite an ordeal! We suspect another 50m of passage gained tonight, with all accessible, open and non-sumped leads in the system now exhausted.

That trip marked the depletion of the simple, open leads in the Jenga Covid Extensions, so our attention turned to surveying. The sum of all passages beyond Sump Three should be close to 1km. Working as two teams over three weeks, we surveyed from Sump Two to Sump Five (the downstream sump of Pandemic Passage). This confirmed that Chris and Adele's preliminary survey was fairly accurate and reasserted the astonishing observation that we had traversed between the two valleys.

Fleur Loveridge near the end of a challenging surveying session in Pandemic Passage; A tricky place to keep the DistoX clean!



The first winter flood arrived earlier than usual, at the end of August. Technical difficulties with the pumping equipment prevented us quickly regaining access and so we entered the flooding season with an unfinished survey.

During a transient dry spell in April 2021, we gained access for one week, allowing us to survey to Tree Root Chamber. The entire pumping system then started to fail, meaning full recabling is now needed to regain and sustain access.

Tree Root Chamber is under the slope at the northeast edge of Dowson's Field, near the River Dove. See page 68 for a rough overlay of the survey on surface topography.

The Second Wave (leading to the 'Excalibur' streamway) remains unsurveyed. It is shown as our best guess, but may extend further west than we have depicted. The full finished survey of the Covid Extensions will have to wait until Journal Four. The draughting aven near the streamway must be near a sink in the River Dove that we have started digging (reported later) in hope of finding a 'back door' into the extensions, avoiding the sump pumping altogether.

Diving of Jenga Pot Sump Four

While surveying of Pandemic Passage was underway in August 2020, Ian Dawson, now extensively trained in North York Moors cave diving from his work at Bogg Hall (covered in the next chapter) turned his attention to the Jenga sumps.

On 12th August 2020, Matt, Gary, Fleur Loveridge and Pete Talling went on the first full surveying trip. Ian joined them, taking advantage of some assistance to carry his diving kit as far as Dinosaur Penis Bone Chamber. From there, Ian went it alone for a strenuous 200m carry down to Sump Four, the small and low incoming streamway.

This had already been pushed as far as possible without diving during the first exploration (as described earlier), and low airspace passage was pushed to a small streamway, reaching the proper sump after about 40m. Ian takes up the story from there:

The sump starts around the same point as a high level dry passage splits off, around 30-40m of passage can be passed on this route before a potential dig site reached if anyone is feeling so inclined.

Diving starts in an elliptical passage with excellent visibility due to the water flow being low enough to drop any carried particulates and not disturb the silt floor. After around 6m a blocky rift chamber was reached with a small airbell, although surfacing was not possible, before moving back into elliptical passage. This continued for ~7m before dropping to a larger chamber with boulder fall at ~2m depth before rising again into a long rift with chert projections with air space above, not dissimilar to the Bogg Hall Drain series. Small cave shrimp were noted at several points.

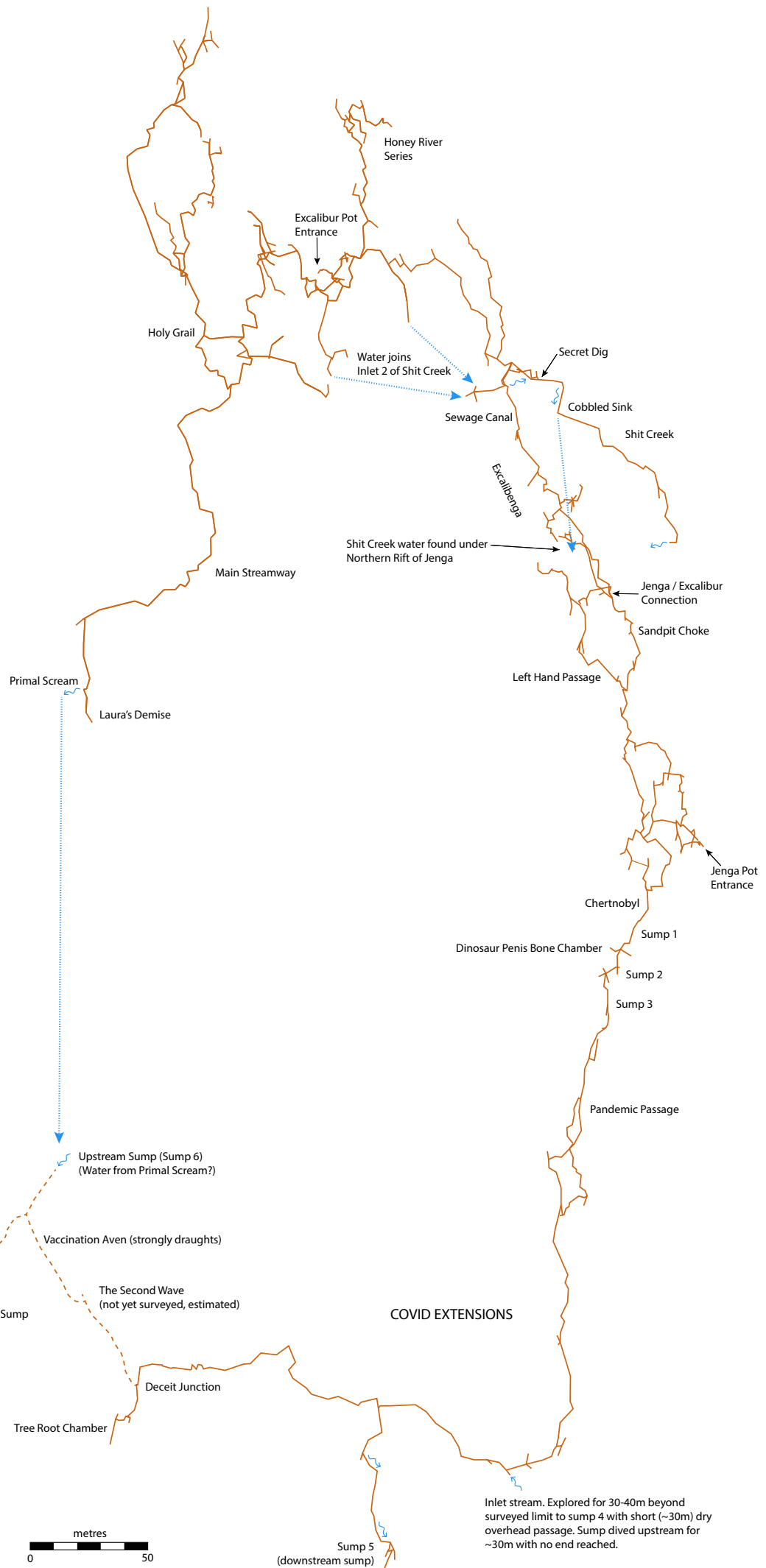
The chert projections made progress a little tight but with some maneuvering these were passed with a couple breaking away easily. Generally trending southwards (although a more detailed survey is required) this doesn't head towards any known passages. Given the cold temperature of the water, this may come from an undiscovered area fed by percolation water.

After travelling ~20 m and with no obvious change in the onward passage, plus a severe chill setting in, I decided to return. Visibility on turning was truly awful after catching the fine silty floor, and the outward journey was like diving in milk. After a couple of minutes this started to clear. In hindsight waiting in the air space to allow the water to clear would have aided the outward journey, but the passage could be retraced easily enough.

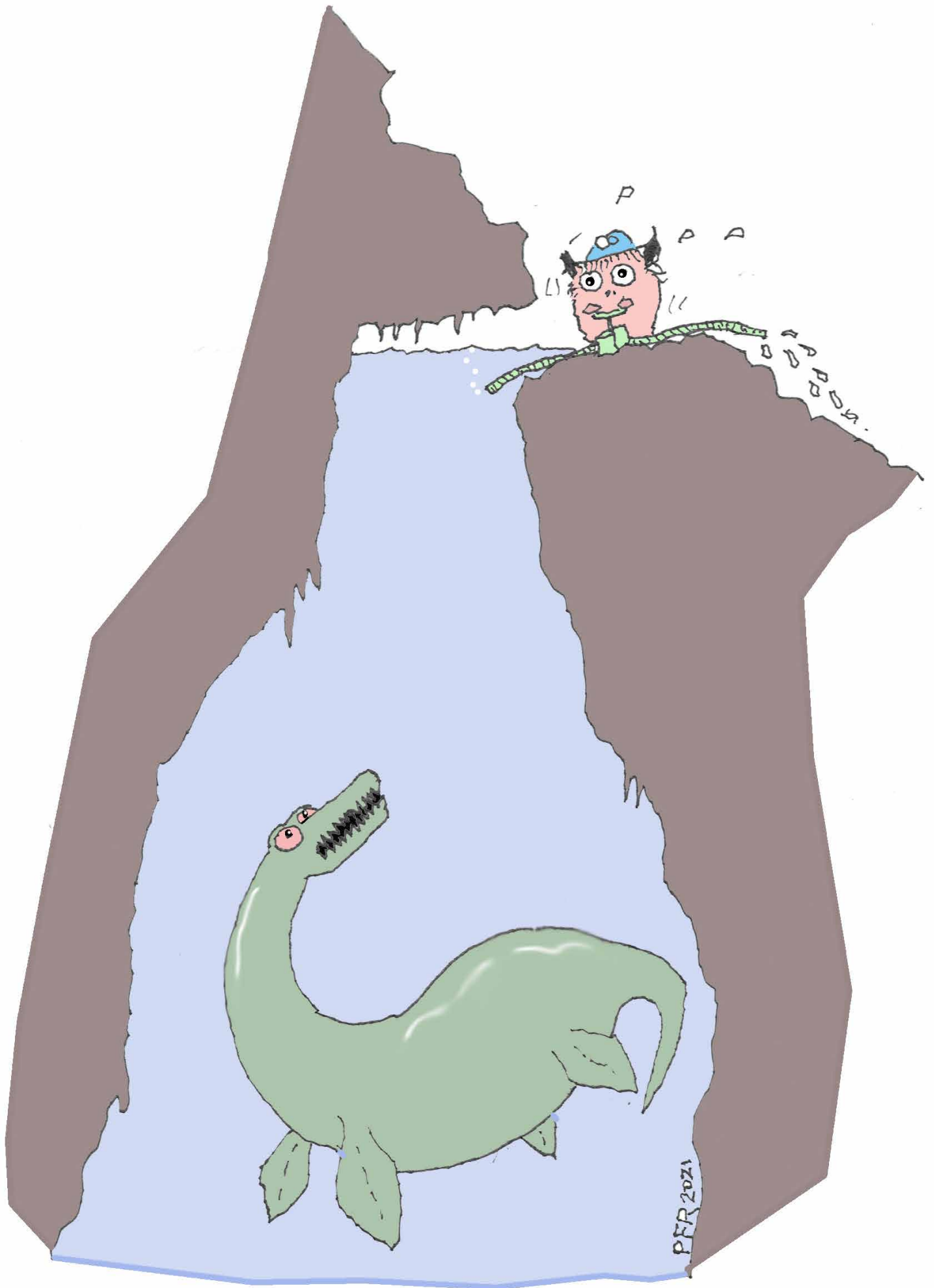
After the dry crawl back to the junction with Pandemic Passage I was cold and exhausted and contemplated leaving my kit to haul out at another time, but was thankfully saved from that task by the survey team coming down to help. I'd already warmed up by the time we reached the muggy summer evening air. Future dives will likely gain further easy distance and have the potential of intercepting a higher level dry route.

This was the only diving achieved that year, meaning Sump Four beyond Ian's limit of exploration, and Sumps Five, Six and Seven await diving over the coming years. There is undoubtably a substantial amount to be discovered.

Survey of the entire Excalibur-Jenga system, shown as centreline only, simplified for clarity. The 2020 Covid Extensions are shown down to Sump 5 and also Tree Root Chamber. The Second Wave and the new 'Excalibur' streamway is unsurveyed so is guessed (dotted line), hence there is likely to be considerable error in this. Known and suspected routes of water are shown. An overlay of this survey with surface topography can be seen on page 68, showing how the far reaches of The Covid Extensions extend into the River Dove valley.



Inlet stream. Explored for 30-40m beyond surveyed limit to sump 4 with short (~30m) dry overhead passage. Sump dived upstream for ~30m with no end reached.



Primal Scream, Excalibur Pot

In 2009 a route was engineered down through boulders in Laura's Demise to regain the previously lost Excalibur Main Streamway. Sadly, it is only 80cm high here. Across the stream is an awkward squeeze up into a final lonely mud chamber, Primal Scream, and below here the water is lost into a very low, wet, but not impenetrable, gravel bedding, and is next seen at Bogg Hall Rising. Journal Two covered our initial efforts to push this, however, the dry summer of 2018 provided the perfect opportunity to try again.

Initial pushing by JD, Sparky, Nial, JC and Andy commenced on 13th June. The previous limit of exploration was easily reached, at which point a dry muddy tube above the water needed excavating, whereas the water vanishes down a tight rift blocked by chert projections. The 20th June saw efforts at the dry passage discontinued, and attention on the 27th June focused only on following the water. Andy reported:

I pumped up my buoyancy testicles and took a hammer to the chert projections that had turned us around a few weeks ago. Ten minutes later I slid through. From the chamber beyond, which measured 2.5m x 1m x 1.5m, the water flowed invitingly down a passage to the right.

I just had to have a look onwards! All the water funnelled into the nice little ongoing vadose passage. The walls appeared solid (opposed to blocky), although the roof was a bit shit. After 2m there was a block fallen across the passage. Here I squeezed my head and shoulders over the top. I could see ahead the water briskly flowing down the now slightly enlarged scalloped passage. Further ahead this turned left and appeared to continue at almost stooping height! But being a good sport, I decided to wait and share this privilege with the rest of the team next week.

Andy Brennan passing the 2009 limit of exploration in the low and wet extensions beyond Primal Scream.





With hopes of the passage enlarging back to a glorious stomping streamway all the way to Bogg Hall, turnout the following week, 4th July, was excellent. Matt reported;

Clearly a breakthrough was expected as even Dickwad turned up with caving gear! Indeed, it was a full house apart from Ian who had made himself ill with all the excitement and had to go home to calm down.

After a warm wetsuited journey underground, Sparky, Andy, Nial and John C thrashed their way into the wet bedding, while Gary, John D, Richard and I waited at Primal Scream. They remained in earshot, before returning after 20 minutes to inform us that the new passage was only "about 70m to a sump". Well, I thought, 70m is better than a kick in the bollocks, and with rain forecast next week, it was now or never to have a look.

The first 4m of the bedding was reasonably spacious and the water was of no concern. After that, an arch forced a flat-out grovel in the water to emerge into a small crossrift where it was even possible to sit upright! On the left here is the mud ramp to the choked upper dry passage, but the way on was to continue straight on in the water from the foot of the ramp. The bedding was now extremely low, and wet and could only really be tackled on our backs, feet first and mostly submerged. Not a place to panic!

After a couple of metres another crossrift was reached where the way on was left (passing another ramp up into a tiny earthy chamber) then right, to reach Andy's limit of exploration. The going ahead looked good!

Over the slab and around a left bend the water deepened, but then the passage abruptly ended, only 4m from the slab. The 70m 'scam' was complete and we could just hear their distant laughter. We were now sat in a 3m long and 1m wide passage funneling the entire streamway. The water was about 40-50cm deep. Along the bottom of the passage, underwater, I could feel a bedding plane taking the water, barely 20cm high. This really was the end of the line for Primal Scream and there was no way on.

The new extensions represent the downstream limit of exploration in Excalibur Pot, and require drought to access. No further progress with the water can be made and the only remaining vague potential is with the mud-choked passages above the water. Only one week later, with completion of the Thai football team cave rescue, the extensions were named "Lucky Lucky Thai Boys" which is, if nothing else, memorable!

Right: Matt Ewles just beyond the first section of low bedding beyond Primal Scream

Left: The very end of the Primal Scream extensions (Lucky-Lucky Thai Boys) where the water vanishes into submerged bedding.

Bogg Hall Rising

During 2020, Ian 'Snazzy' Dawson, a relatively new recruit to the murky world of cave diving, decided to hone his skills in Bogg Hall Rising, the resurgence cave for water from Jenga and Excalibur Pots, as well as the sinks in the River Dove (covered extensively in Journals One and Two). Ian's work is recorded in detail in the CDG October 2020 newsletter, however, we summarise his proceedings below.

The first dive was 3rd June 2020, when, accompanied by David Pants and Rachel, Ian visited The Font. This is the upstream sump of Bogg Hall Cave, and is an impressive underwater pothole which brings all the water into the cave from the depths. This has been dived many times to around -18m. At this point, the passage turns more towards horizontal but is too tight to progress. Ian started by laying a new line to a depth of 7.5m, where there is a shelf, and from there the continuing rift becomes much narrower.

The next dive at The Font was 29th July, when Mike Butcher reached the shelf, tidied up some old loose lines and returned, allowing Ian to continue downwards from that point, describing progress in good detail (the following adapted from the CDG newsletter);

"After Mike surfaced, Ian descended to -8m, then using a euro-style line pushed initially under the shelf at 8m, although this turned out to be only body-width (presumably a layer of softer rock which has eroded slightly more than other layers), then descended fins-first down the rift. Reasonable flow meant visibility was decent and the diver quickly progressed, first to a wedged boulder which offered a good belay point then to a second set of wedged rocks at about -17m. Here the diver noted an old reel wedged tightly and still with a good amount of line on (presumably once attached to the line tidied up by Mike) and an opening below with a good flow firing out. A quick look down suggested a way on could be achieved but the decision was taken to retreat and plan this for another dive when a proper line had been laid to this depth."

Ian 'Snazzy' Dawson
preparing to dive the Bogg
Hall Rising entrance sumps.



Ian never returned, so this remains the latest effort to push The Font, after 2016 efforts by Adrian Hall (see a video report of this on the YCC Youtube channel). Sadly, this sump has now thwarted numerous divers and it looks very unlikely any way below about -18m will be reached without underwater modifications to widen the rift and create more room for the diver.

Ian's main focus that summer was Sumps One and Two (the entrance sumps) of Bogg Hall Rising. These were originally dived in 1981, and then several times during the early exploration, until the opening of the dry entrance ('Oh My Ears and Whiskers') in 1998. They have been very seldom dived since. The two short sumps, separated by an airbell were never surveyed, and there remained a small chance of a missed inlet passage coming from another branch of the system. Ian took on the task of systematically inspecting these sumps and surveying them.

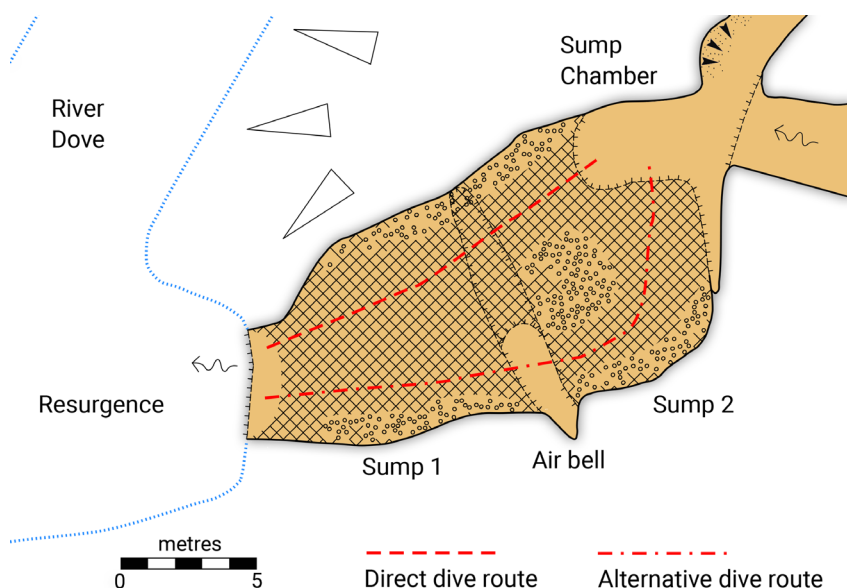
After several sessions of bugging about in the sumps, Ian completed his survey on 24th June 2020, as reported in the CDG newsletter, adapted below:

Work was done to try and identify the extents of the underwater bedding plane as well as looking into the possibility of a route bypassing the airbell suggested by Richard Wilsdon and Jerry Gibbs. Following the northern wall, a gap in the solid rock was noted after about 5m and was followed. With rock walls on both sides and after passing the 15m mark on my reel without hitting the air bell it became clear this was the second route that had been suggested, similar in style to the other sumps, but narrower. I rejoined the dry cave after approximately 20m, closer to Oh My Ears and Whiskers. It appears the entrance sumps are an underwater clone of the later drier cave, with water taking several routes. Surveying back out was done using the pre-marked main belay line with observations made at 5m marks and other data from the dive computer. Returning to the group who had been dry caving in Jenga Pot, feeling quite pleased with myself, the smile was quickly wiped off my face by their discovery of a potential master cave with luxury features such as 'standing height passage', 'some straws' and a 'dark corner with more passage beyond'. Needless to say, next week I will be down there rather than floating about in Bogg Hall's sumps.



Bogg Hall Rising, with Ian ready to commence his dive.

Therefore, Ian had successfully surveyed the original 'classic' route through the sumps, with the airbell separating Sumps One and Two along the south wall, but also a direct route by following the north wall. The sump is much wider than originally assumed with several routes for the water. The survey is shown below, with the two routes marked.



Survey of the Bogg Hall Rising entrance sumps, showing two routes, the north being a single dive, and the south being the classic airbell route via Sump One and Sump Two; Both routes are part of the same single wide sump, which is navigationally challenging due to gravel banks and areas with limited accessible space. Both emerge into Sump Chamber in Bogg Hall Cave near the bottom of the dry entrance.

The River Dove

2014: Diving of The Well

In memory of Bryan 'Scoff' Schofield, 1956-2017, a top bloke who is greatly missed.

The River Dove sinks at several locations along its riverbed. The uppermost sink lies a few hundred metres south of Yoadwath and this swallows most of the water in dry conditions. The river then takes an unusual oxbow east, and then back west again, flowing down the west side of Dowson's Field, passing The Well and Guinevere's Slit (see Journal One and Two respectively, and the map overleaf). Beyond The Well, no further sinks were known, and the river flows on to Bogg Hall Rising where it is reunited with the water resurging from Bogg Hall Cave. The rising water originates primarily from the River Dove sinks, with a small contribution from Hutton Beck (10-20%).

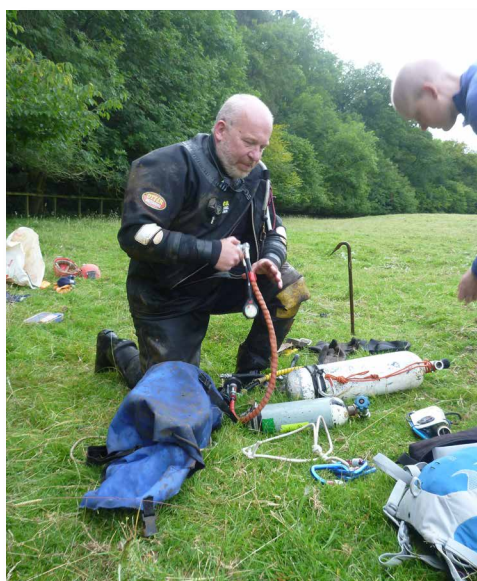
In Journal One, we reported on early (1999-2000) efforts by Jerry Gibbs to dive into The Well, which gained a large underwater passage, exploration being limited by the divers experience, equipment and the very heavy flow of the water in the passage.

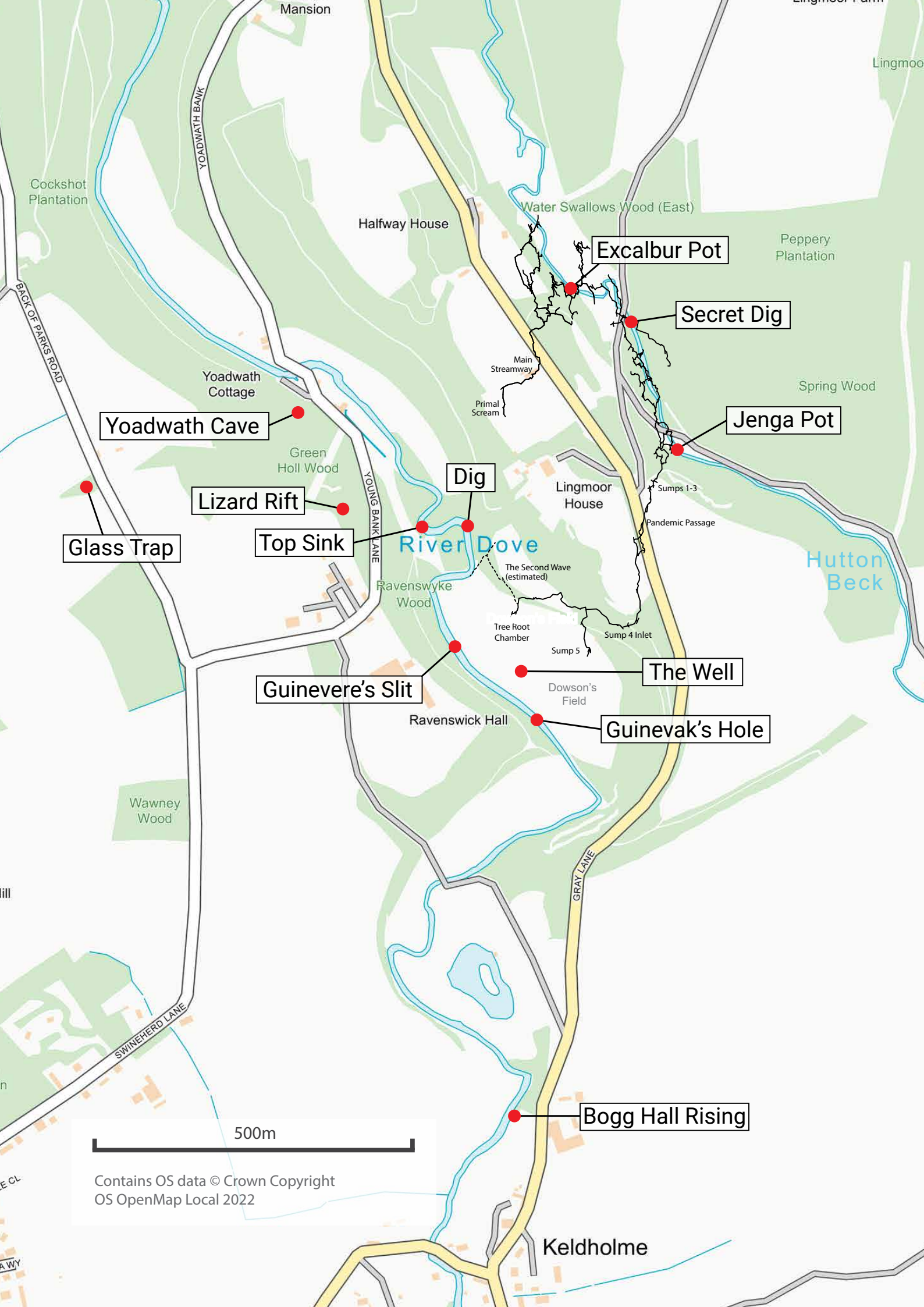
In Journal Two, we reported on efforts by Dave Ryall and Scoff to dive Guinevere's Slit, which lies in the River Dove about 60m upstream of The Well. The intrepid explorers pushed about 40m into the downstream sump ending at a breakdown chamber, heading directly towards The Well but stopping 30m short of making a connection.

Clearly the next job for the duo was to dive The Well, which hadn't been pushed since Jerry Gibbs' effort. A little preparation was needed. The rock lining of The Well needed remediation, and a little more scaffold was installed. Furthermore, the narrow restriction in the rift to get into the sump needed slight enlargement to make it 'Scoffable'.

Scoff dived The Well on 29th July 2014 and again the following weekend on 5th August in low water conditions. These successful dives are reported in CDG Newsletter 193.

Scoff kitting up ready to dive (left) and descending the scaffold shaft into the water of The Well (right).





Yoadwath Cave

Excalbur Pot

Secret Dig

Jenga Pot

Lizard Rift

Top Sink

Dig

Glass Trap

Guinevere's Slit

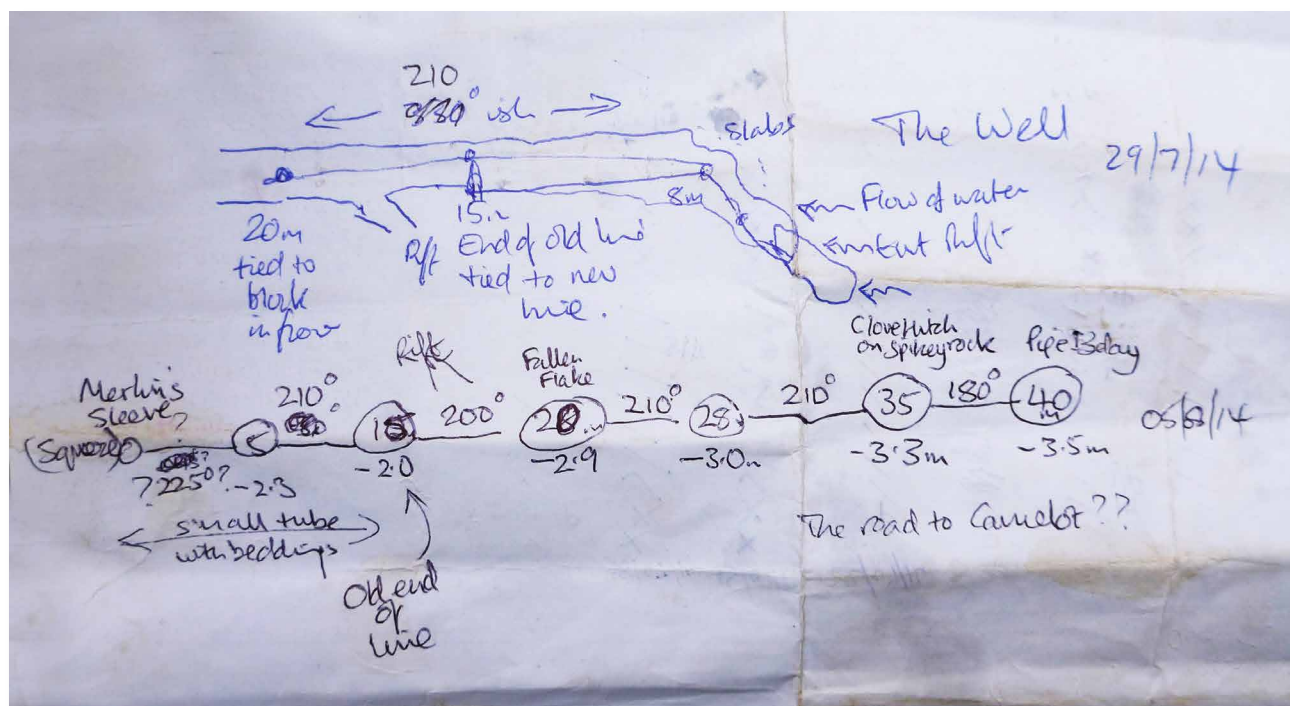
The Well

Guinevak's Hole

Bogg Hall Rising

500m

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Scoff's raw survey data from The Well, showing the downstream limit of exploration (The Road to Camelot) at 40m, after crossing under the River Dove (presumably under Guinevak's Hole) on a southwest bearing and then changing to a south bearing heading directly to Bogg Hall.

On the first dive, after some underwater struggles in the very narrow entrance rift (which Scoff named 'Merlin's Sleeve'), he reached the end of Jerry's old line 15m downstream from base. A few metres further, a rift was noted in the eastern wall (no flow) and the continuation became roomier to the turnaround point 22m from base, at 2.9m depth.

On the second dive it was confirmed that the passage beyond 17m was much roomier, achieving up to 3m wide and 1.5m high at the largest spot. Beyond the previous 22m limit, the passage got smaller and at 28m while searching for a belay, a large slab detached from the roof causing some concern. The passage then started to dip and at 40m and a depth of 3.5m, air levels forced a retreat, with open and encouragingly spacious passage still to be explored ahead downstream.

The general bearing is south-south-west, around 210° for the first 35m of the sump, with a turn to a more southbound bearing for the final surveyed 5m. This means the passage crosses underneath the riverbed of The Dove (no doubt where it was later intersected by Guinevak's Hole, see overleaf) and under the hill beyond, before turning south towards Bogg Hall Cave. The Font in Bogg Hall is approximately 550m south of this point, so there is still some distance to go, including an underground merger with water from Excalibur and Jenga Pots, which are assumed (but not proven) to join further south.

Very sadly, Scoff was never able to return to The Well and the open passage left behind, which he named The Road to Camelot (pronounced 'came-a-lot' of course).

The Well now awaits another brave diver to push it all the way to Bogg Hall and to then maybe dive upstream in the Hutton Beck inlet to emerge into the 2020 Covid Extensions of Jenga Pot. Although we suggest this slightly ambitiously, and tongue-in-cheek, this really is not as inconceivable as it sounds. Maybe Journal Four will cover that story!

Left: Area map showing the location of all relevant sites across the River Dove Valley and Hutton Beck. The Excalibur-Jenga Pot survey is superimposed to show how close the Covid Extensions come to Dowson's Field and the River Dove. Note that the overlay is approximate pending more data.

2019: Guinevak's Hole

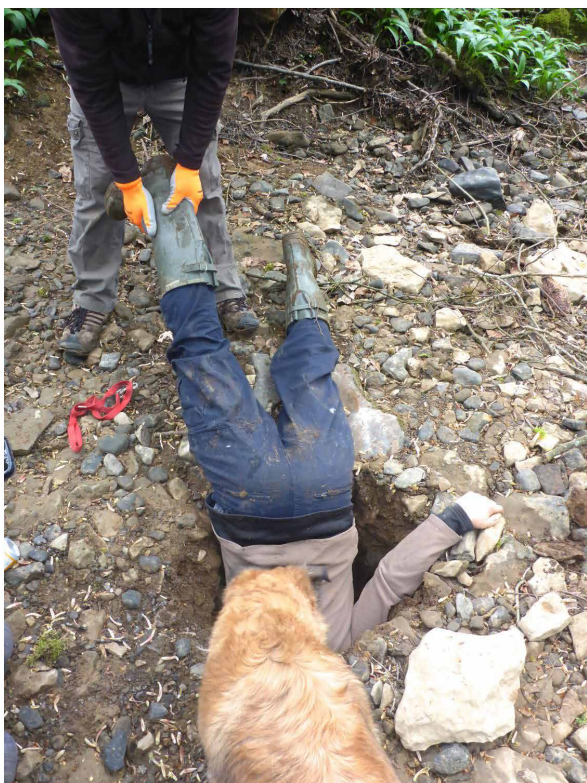
In 2018, work commenced to build the new Ravenswick Estate, following sale of the derelict Ravenswick Hall and surrounding land to Steve Gibson (the multi-millionaire owner of Middlesbrough Football Club). The new development, in effect, a new stately home with extensive grounds, was built through 2019-2020. This included a deer park and a small village for the staff just off Swineherd Lane north of Kirkbymoorside, above the western embankment of the River Dove. This was quite the development!

One of the fields included in the sale was Dowson's Field, where The Well and Guinevere's Slit are located (and where the 2020 Jenga Pot Covid Extensions may just encroach under). Naturally, concerns were abound that access here may be lost and The Well may get filled, or groundworks may affect the hydrology of the underlying cave passages. We have been unsuccessful in contacting Mr Gibson to discuss this and tell him about the caves on his land. However, pleasingly, at the time of writing (December 2021), The Well has been capped but not filled, so future access is not entirely off the cards.

During a discrete wander around the River Dove to see what had been going on, John Dale reported on the discovery of another sink downstream of Guinevere's Slit, on 24th April 2019. This had the potential to be a back door into the flooded passages:

In order to avoid the hordes of people in Sump One of Jenga I walked down to Dowson's Field to inspect Mr Gibson's new Ravenswick residence and see what the water level was like in The Well. Some heavy tree felling had been done on the banks above Guinevere's Slit, so that Mr Gibson's guests can view Sparky's porn stash from across the valley. And a heavy tracked vehicle had been taken down the dry riverbed between the tree work and the metal bridge a long way downstream.

Looking down Guinevak's Hole in the River Dove.



A one-foot wide hole was found in the riverbed about 25m below The Well. In the fading light it was just possible to make out a dry rift about 6 ft down and rocks thrown down this could be heard landing in water after rolling down a slope. The water in The Well itself was erm... well down.

The following Sunday, Sump One of Jenga proved problematic and a sunny afternoon walk was had by Sparky, Andy, Chris and myself. The Well had a much higher water level and was circulating. The new hole's rift had filled up with water from below and now looked very like the bottom of The Well. As it was Andy Brennan's birthday, instead of being given "The Bumps" he was hung by his feet head first down said hole, instructed to describe what he saw, and if it was interesting enough we would drop him down. After much persuasion by an upside-down Brennan, he was reluctantly dragged back out. The intrepid explorer then went in feet-first but had a mild panic as the slope above the sumped rift moved and he was again extracted.

I managed to get down to the constriction and got a photograph from below. On inspection of said photo there was a tight sumped vertical rift with clear water (circulating slightly) and the end of this vertical rift had a stack of flakes wedged in it both above and below water level. We were not sure whether there was open passage above, but I am certain that the sumped vertical rift did not have water in on the Wednesday before.

Guinevere's new sister hole is likely to be lost if the woodsmen fill it in before we can return. The hole is probably directly above Scoff's "Road to Camelot", his limit of exploration 40m into The Well, and must drop into this submerged passage close to the end of Scoff's line. On a quiet day, one can almost hear the sound of two waterfalls dropping into a chamber...

With the new mansion now occupied and overlooking the field, we never returned to Guinevak's Hole. Access to this high-potential underwater system hangs in the balance. It is reassuring to know however that a brief dig at Guinevak's Hole could regain access into the system if The Well gets filled, and join the sumps near to Scoff's limit of exploration, with several hundred metres still to explore downstream to Bogg Hall!

2020: New dig in the River Dove

Between the top sink of the River Dove, and Dowson's field, the river oxbows east and the back to the west, briefly stepping out of the straight line of most of its known sinks. Within this oxbow, a small sink was identified on the east embankment.

Our first visit here was in 2015 while we were working on nearby Yoadwath Cave and Lizard Rift and just getting restarted at The Glass Trap. We spent a few sessions removing blocks in the usual way. This never really came to anything and we were a little worried about a few large overhanging slabs in the cliff face above.

However, fast-forward to the 2020 revelation that the newly discovered Covid Extensions in Jenga come close to this area. We hypothesised that this sink, which lies well out of the line of all the other River Dove sinks, might feed water into The Second Wave area of the Jenga extensions, and might explain the abundance of flood debris there.

By September 2020 we were very keen on finding a ‘back door’ into the new extensions. Pumping the Jenga Pot sumps had become an impractical regular solution. This sink in the River Dove therefore became a focus of attention again.

Work started on 30th September, after all hopes of repumping the Jenga sumps had been abandoned. A small team headed down to the sink, which was dry (with water sinking at the main sink 100m upstream) and a pleasant evening was spent hauling blocks. The overhanging slabs we fearfully remembered from 2015 had dropped into the streambed and Sparky managed to reduce these to gravel using his chemical crowbar.

By the end of the night a defensive wall of hauled blocks had been built around the sink, and the hole opened back out to where we had left off years earlier. It was absolutely packed with organic debris and quite clearly had taken plenty of water since then.

The following week, the River Dove was in flood, but we took the opportunity to transport an 8ft section of pipe from The Glass Trap down to the sink, by rolling it down the road. This caused some anxiety for the new security guard at the gatehouse of the new Ravenswick development, who assumed we had pinched it from his boss’s building site. Thankfully Adele showcased her ample diplomatic skills and all was well again.

Unfortunately, work soon halted again as the River Dove floods beyond its top sink and past the new dig for most of Winter. Furthermore, a variety of Coronavirus restrictions and the second, and ultimately, third lockdown spoilt our fun. However, we will return in 2021-2022 so fingers crossed for news in the next journal. This dig could end up being the exit point for the future valley-to-valley through trip!

The dig in the east bank of the River Dove, 100m north of Dowson’s Field. This photo was taken in 2015, but we have since returned here and work in 2020-2021 has continued this project, though with little more progress.



Manor Vale East Cave

SE 6945 8682

The disused council yard at Manor Vale on the north side of Kirkbymoorside town centre, is home to two caves. These face each other from opposite sides of the valley.

Manor Vale West was extensively dug in 2011-2012 as reported in Journal Two. Over winter 2019-2020 we revisited this site but failed to make any significant further progress from the bottom of the extensively mined rift that takes some water in flood. Further phreatic openings in the cliff just 20-40m north of the entrance were enlarged but none enough to actually escape daylight and with no strong potential identified. The focus of work over the course of this journal has instead been Manor Vale East.

Manor Vale East is a sizable (1m high x 1.5m wide) entrance in the east cliff. Initial York Caving Club visits here were reported in Journal One. At the time of writing this site is behind a derelict Council building, which is likely to be pulled down in 2022 for new developments. Future access is therefore uncertain. The entrance leads down a slope of mud into a stooping height phreatic passage of respectable proportions.

On the right about 5m inside the cave is a continuation which was dug by Scarborough Caving Club in the 1990s, leading for 6m through dry earthy crawls to a cross-rift with a vocal connection up to the main passage on the left. In this cross rift, a way on at floor-level continued for several metres, but this was only 15cm high and choked by a calcite false-floor. Our efforts in 2007 here were unsuccessful.

Ignoring the right turn, the main upper passage continues for several metres, reducing in size to a damp flat-out crawl which, 20m into the cave, enlarges at a well-proportioned and standing-height rift with calcite flow down the far wall. Beyond here, the passage continued but was totally flat-out and blocked by slabs and calcite.

Therefore, Manor Vale East offered two possible digs; The upper main passage, and the lower right branch, both of which were going to need removal of a calcified false floor and underlying mud to gain further progress. As work at The Glass Trap was winding up in 2016, our attention turned to Manor Vale East to see what we might achieve with our enhanced mining experience gained through work at Jenga and Secret Dig.

Leathery badgers

One challenge presented itself at Manor Vale East; The cave had become a badger set!

Badgers are protected by the law, and unauthorised efforts to evict them would be very naughty indeed. Therefore, as we are good boys and girls, we decided that we would apply for permission to Natural England to close down the badger set. Over summer 2016, permission was gained (possibly helped by an ongoing planning request for residential development of the site after removal of the council buildings). The removal technique was to build a wall across the cave entrance with a one-way door to allow the badger to leave of its own free will (but not get back in), which it thankfully did.

Our first digging session of 2016 was 23rd November. We arrived armed with Sparky's latest toy, Cave Rover, an all-terrain vehicle with on-board camera and nothing for scale. This was designed to trundle into tight cave passages and give false hope by making the tiny miserable space beyond look absolutely massive. Andy reports on the session:

After three weeks of excluding the badger, Sparky and I quickly regained entry to the cave. We clambered over the old jumble of glass and buckets, only to be greeted by a minefield of badger shit.

We returned to look for the right side passage which wasn't spotted on the way in. Luckily after detonating a few mines and pulling out endless scoops of joy, the passage was found. Although I remember 19 years ago slithering off down this with ease, now it was choked almost to the roof with churned soil mixed with badger shit. We would need to clear this back out.

Back at the car we gathered the tools (including the prized yodelling ladle) and were met by Chris. We set to work clearing the cave. To lift our spirits, I uncovered a 'leathery badger' in the right-hand passage, which was now completely choked with the soft furnishings of the evicted tenants.

We were soon joined by Matt who began cleaning. He sorted the recycling and even performed a burial followed by a short service for the leathery badger. Joined also by Mr Douchebag, Aids and Nial, we began lowering the mud floor along the main passage. In line with Mr Sparkles' orders we dug enough space for a bobcat to work. A great night was had by all!

We posted a report of our work on the UKCaving forum. Unfortunately, a certain forum user, Chocolate Fireguard, was incensed that a badger had been de-homed to facilitate digging at Manor Vale, and refused to believe that we had obtained permission. After much shit-stirring with the relevant authorities, he wagered he would give us £100 if a licence was in place but that we should donate £100 to a badger charity if not.

The £100 was forthcoming and made a welcome addition to our digging fund.

Digging away the winter woes

The remainder of 2016 was spent clearing shit (literally and metaphorically) from the main passage, including a small skip-worth of glass bottles and rusty metal, which had been chucked in over the years, left by previous diggers and abandoned by archaeologists in the past. The right branch passage was also re-excavated to reach the cross-rift with the calcite-choked route leading onwards. By late January 2017, the cave had been restored to pre-badger times and work could start in parallel at the two dig sites.



The one-way door installed into Manor Vale East Cave to allow the badger to leave without re-entering the cave.



Looking along the main passage of Manor Vale East Cave from only 4m inside the entrance. The main passage continues straight ahead, but on the right, the caver is heading down the slope to the right branch.

Andy reported on progress at the end of the main passage on 18th January 2017:

The entrance into the first cross rift was substantially cleaned out so now it is only an awkward squeeze to enter. The calcite-choked continuation which was slightly offset to the entrance of the cross rift was also cleared out revealing a wonderfully decorated continuing passage which was observed to extend for at least 20ft and was 3-4ft broad. The calcite flowstone appeared to slope downwards from the northern wall to where a relatively large space was observed. The way on is to excavate the flowstone opposite the entrance to the cross rift to enable some forward progress.

The calcite proved to be the most substantial barrier in Manor Vale, at both dig sites. Our conventional techniques were ineffective as there was nothing solid to drill (the calcite had formed a thin but very hard crust over a mud floor) and there was insufficient room to lever with a crowbar or swing a hammer due to the low roof. An assault on the roof seemed the simplest approach, so work quickly got underway.

By early February, the choked continuation at the end of the main passage, previously only penetrable for 1-2ft, could now be accessed for about 6ft, with black space still visible ahead albeit low and with several obstructions still to deal with. Along the right branch, a false floor of calcite had been removed to enable a few feet of access into the gradually enlarging passage ahead. Things were looking encouraging on both fronts.



Photo taken into the bedding dig at the end of the right branch of Manor Vale East Cave. This looks amazing until the limited dimensions of the flash-gun box are revealed: It is only 18cm tall! We progressed for 3m along the right side where the floor was lower before it appeared to offer no hope of continuation.

Matt reported on progress the following week, 8th February:

Poor attendance this week, just Myself, Gary, Chris and Bindy, joined later by Nial and John Dale. The dig along the right passage was looking untempting as a pool of slurry had now formed, but after some scepticism and whinging, I dug a pit on the right side for the water to drain into. Gary then went in and made great progress forwards, with myself, Chris and Bindy dealing with the buckets which came out rapidly. Calcite was no obstacle to Gary as he tunnelled forward a good three foot in one night.

Towards the end of the evening, we hit a dilemma. Any further progress will require removal of two stal pillars. The passage continues into the distance for several metres, and draughts. But it's only 6-8 inches and just relentless calcite floor with no signs of anything larger. Directly ahead, a few metres beyond the stal pillars however is an anomaly, which could be a hole in the floor, or it could just be an illusion. Sadly, these stal pillars may have to be sacrificed in the interests of exploration.

Digging continued in fairly unremarkable fashion until April. The lower right branch was pushed by removal of one of the stal pillars, allowing a slither forward a few more metres along the right wall, at which point we confirmed that there was no obvious way on, and by summer this site was abandoned completely.

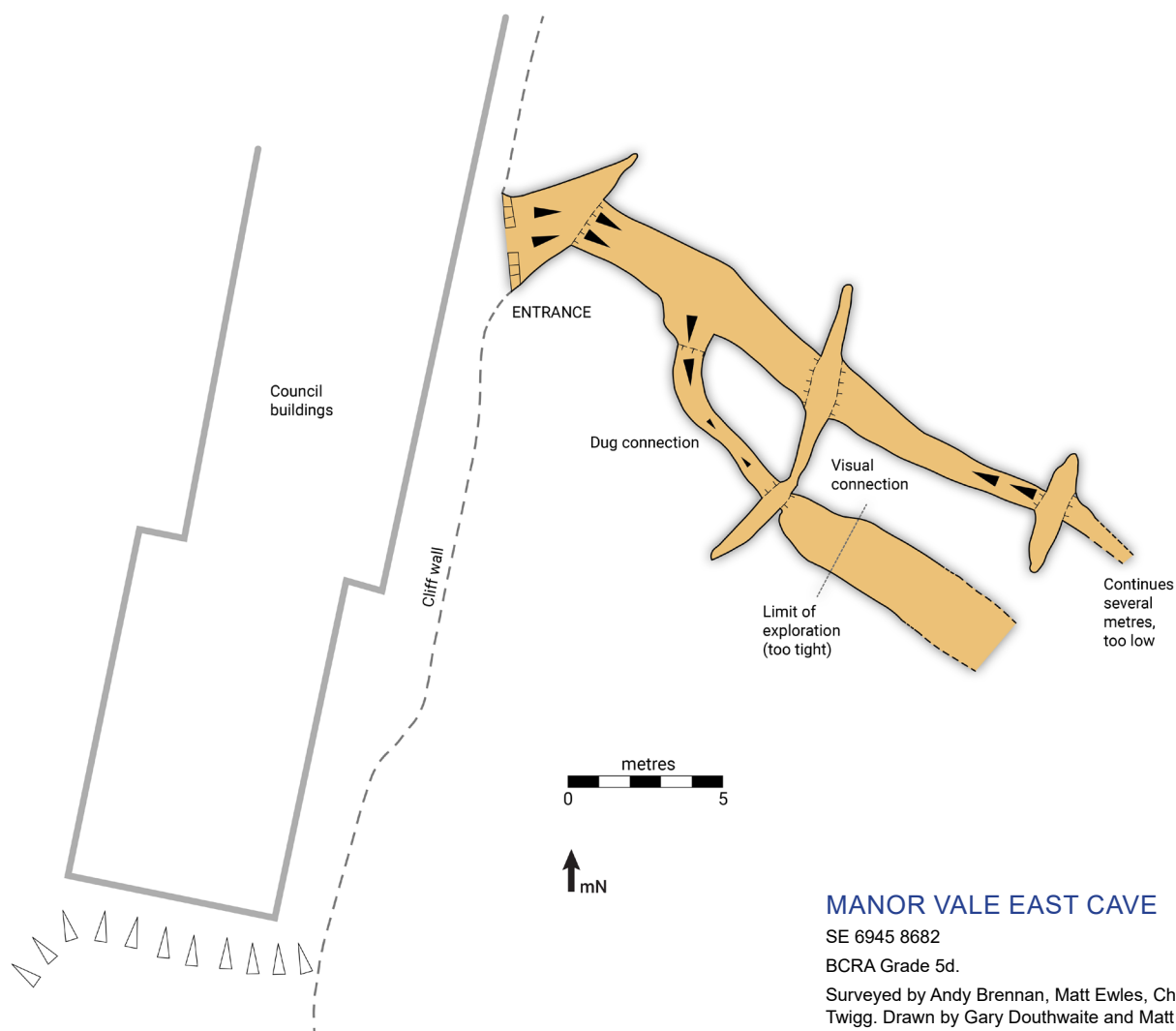
The upper (main) passage dig had reached about 3m progress by July. Chris reported:

For most of June we have been hacking away, making the once tiny slot wide enough for a body. Initially progress was slow, but the calcite now comes out in nice layers. Before last night, progress was over 3m from the large crossrift, and a further 3m away is a large stal pillar after which the passage seems to open out. The level of the passage has been maintained, but sadly the height of the roof has dropped slightly and it's now extremely difficult to handle the breaker or a crowbar in the confined space. Before leaving last night, we decided to take a sliver off the roof in the constriction, rather than trying to mine down the calcite floor. Hopefully, this will give more room to work and resume the quicker pace.

After several further mining sessions, the restriction was passed allowing progress into a wide chamber, generously adorned with stal including columns and stalactites, but very low. Despite a speculative draught, there was no obvious onwards passage. A more thorough investigation was going to need us to mine across the chamber, obliterating the formations, which currently provide a nice view at the end of the cave.

Manor Vale fatigue was setting in by now, and we decided to call it a day, leaving the best of the Manor Vale formations to be ‘admired’ by others (probably nobody). Manor Vale East remains a decent size phreatic passage, splitting into two routes, each degenerating into a wide but low chamber, continuing in parallel, but choked with mud and calcite. Any return to here is going to need some hellish determination or considerable boredom; but it certainly isn’t “game over” just yet. Therefore, don’t expect to have heard the last of Manor Vale for future issues of these journals.

Before finishing up, we addressed the absence of any known survey of the cave. This is shown below and can be downloaded from our website. Future readers may wish to note that the council buildings shown on the survey may soon not exist!



The Glass Trap

SE 70290 87510

The Glass Trap is found in a notable water-sinking depression located in a copse of trees just beyond Swineherd Lane, north of Kirkbymoorside, 500m west of the River Dove. This tiny swallet drains water from the surrounding fields, and in wet conditions a small stream enters and sinks from a field drain to the north. Interestingly, the location is at the head of a very shallow valley leading down to the River Dove, so this could possibly be an abandoned natural stream sink, repurposed now as a field drain.

The Glass Trap was reported briefly in Journal Two as a minor dig, after some preliminary attention during early 2013. We had dug a few metres down at the lowest point in the depression, mainly through glass bottles (the hole had been used as a bottle dump many decades ago), loose soil and sandstone rocks. However, by 3m down, with no encouraging voids appearing, no solid walls, no limestone, plus with the exciting new discovery of Jenga Pot taking precedent, The Glass Trap was put on hold.

By April 2015, digging fatigue was setting in at the Excalibur-Jenga Pot system. Jenga had been connected to Excalibur and all straightforward and obvious leads had been exhausted. A surface dig was exactly what we needed for summer, so we returned enthusiastically to The Glass Trap for another push.

On the 1st April, digging recommenced. A rudimentary scaffold frame was put over the hole with a few boards to stand on, and an A-frame erected above to facilitate haulage of spoil using the Jenga winch bike. The following Wednesday a barbeque and fire pit were installed and The Glass Trap quickly developed into a digging shanty town.

The initial 3m shaft broke through the bottle layer and hit a huge boulder. This was bypassed by a side-step (which conveniently provided protection to a digger from debris being launched from the surface). Downward progress continued through May and by June, we had reached a depth of 6m through clay and stones, still with no solid walls. The geology prediction was that we would not reach the limestone until about 9-10m depth and so hopes remained high that as soon as we hit that depth, a cavern the size of Gaping Gill would suddenly appear, dropping 100m into Lake Kirkby, where we would follow glorious master-cave all the way down to Manor Vale.

Stability was starting to become an issue, so scaffolding the upper parts of the shaft was necessary. The surrounds of the hole also benefitted from some decking. All necessary preparations were now in place, so the only thing left to do was dig downwards.

Matt reported on progress following a session on 24th June:

Progress hasn't exactly been lightning pace at The Glass Trap. So far, all we've achieved is a hole approaching 20ft deep passing through several layers of bottles and mud. Not our usual standard of progress, but there has been a lot of groundwork to do to make the site safe and practical. We're hopeful that we should only be 5-10ft from hitting the upper boundary of the limestone, if our geology is right. Things might then get interesting.

Right top: The Glass Trap dig in early 2015 when it was still only about 4-5m deep.

Right bottom: Our dig bike (version 2) used to haul spoil. The ratchet mechanism and brake meant that if the chain broke, the bucket would not plummet onto diggers below.



Last night saw only a small turnout, but a fantastic session! Summer at The Glass Trap is very pleasant indeed, under the shade of the trees with a gentle warm breeze. The midges are a pain but Gary had come armed with a canister of some nasty spray, which Chalky (sporting his new emo/thuggish haircut) obviously thought was eye ointment, as he proceeded to direct it in there, followed by whinging for the rest of the night.

I was first in and started making quick progress down, trying to work all around the circular pit at the bottom of the shaft. It was just wide enough to crouch down, and dig beneath, shoving the spoil to one side. The bucket was then lowered and promptly filled. After a few buckets, it was necessary to rotate around a bit to ensure the floor was dug down evenly. The mud is tightly packed, and clay-like with fist-size sandstone chunks embedded, and it is easy to break up with the crowbar. This is nice, dry, warm digging which makes a pleasant change from our usual shitholes.

I made about 2ft of downward progress in less than an hour before I started to notice a few voids in the floor. Some frantic digging revealed a draughting void, with black clean-washed cobbles below. Very exciting, but I was now knackered, so I retired after a total of a one-hour stint at the dig face and handed over to Gary.

Gary was unimpressed by my final 15 minutes of glory hunting and whinged for a bit about me having dug down a funnel, rather than keeping the floor equally low and the bottom of the shaft wide enough. He decided to put this right by carving away several inches all around the shaft, and lowering the floor all around, filling the draughting voids in with mud. Bugger! Mr Dale then took over to rectify this situation and continued down, soon uncovering more voids, and our first glimpse of proper limestone.

The evening ended with us having reached the proper limestone, and some solid walls, in what could be some kind of mud choked rift. The dig is now looking much more hopeful than it did at the start of the evening.

We had encountered a solid limestone wall down the west side of the shaft, however the infill was still clay and cobbles, with the occasional draught and cavity popping up here and there. Progress was slow but remained enjoyable through autumn.

The Glass Trap occupied us sporadically for the rest of the year, gaining another 3m of downward progress with the relevant stabilisations on-route. Unfortunately, once winter had arrived the small stream flowing off the fields meant the hole became a miserable place. A handful of enthusiasts continued over winter and fitted a plastic tarpaulin down the shaft to provide shelter from the torrenting water.

The next report came from Matt after a session on 24th February 2016:

We (Gary, Andy, Chalky, Chris, Rachel, Sparky and I) had a fine evening at the Glass Trap. We were slightly annoyed to find that despite the dry weather, there was still a stream flowing down into the dig. However, during my absence, a tarpaulin curtain had been erected down the eastern wall to provide some shelter from the water. It worked magnificently.

We had indeed hit proper limestone, at a depth of about 8m. The walls of the shaft above this had started to become a concern and had been lined over winter with thick wire mesh, which I spent the best part of this session backfilling with sizable rocks. Unfortunately, spray from the entering water prevented digging at the bottom.

We are starting to get somewhere quite interesting at the Glass Trap. The shaft walls seem satisfactory for now and once the water levels drop we will be able to get back to digging at the bottom of the shaft. We have sinking water, limestone with plenty of vertical range and precedent for big cave in the area, so I am cautiously optimistic.

The other highlight of the evening was a game of 'pass the burning box'. An entire, intact cardboard box was ignited and lobbed between each other until eventually it was so badly on fire that someone, the loser of the game, chickened out of catching it. Sadly, I missed this as I was down the shaft at the time, but I caught the final conclusion when I surfaced to find several diggers pissing themselves laughing as a 10ft high fire raged.

In April 2016, a large mud dam was built across the northern end of the site to create a reservoir for the incoming water from the field drain. A pipe and sluice system was then installed to channel the pooling water down to the bottom of the dig, rather than it spilling in over the edge. This allowed digging to continue even when a small stream flowed in from the surrounding fields. A video of these efforts can be found online and is rather entertaining (search on Youtube for 'Glass Trap Building the Dam').

Further progress at The Glass Trap included a dam and sluice to control water entering the hole, as well as other paraphernalia.



Work continued slowly over summer. A new, improved winch bike was commissioned. This one included a ratchet system that meant the life of the digger down the shaft was not entrusted solely to the integrity of an old rusty bike chain holding the buckets.

The next relevant report came from Matt in September:

It has been steady-away at the Glass Trap for the last few months, and all in all a very pleasant summer. We have continued to mine downwards in a trench alongside the wall of solid limestone, which has shown no signs of relenting. We are now 4m deeper in the trench and the wall of limestone is still totally solid and unbroken. The wall on the other side of the shaft as well as the floor beneath us is still mud and sandstone, a complete contrast. A few weeks ago, we had a tantalizing glimpse of some tiny phreatic tubes going off, albeit far too small to enter, but it is encouraging that something more substantial and phreatic might not be too far away.

We continued mining down, one wall of solid limestone and another of loose sandstone and mud. At a total depth of probably about 10-11m, a limestone shelf was reached, and the way on was down a mud-choked rift, now with a solid limestone wall on both sides. This was starting to feel more like a cave. Over the weeks that followed we mined a few more metres down, with tantalising voids and draughts coming and going.

In October 2016, we hit solid floor, with a small phreatic tube leading off, which must have been the route of water at some point. This was tiny and needed enlargement and more scaffold stabilisation of a dodgy wall where it undercut the rift above. Nonetheless this was draughting and looking like something exciting might be about to happen. By the end of October, we had progressed 2m along this tube to a 2m drop into a small but standing height circular chamber, water carved, with solid limestone walls, but unfortunately with no way on. This was a dead-end pit, yet clearly water has once flowed here. Numerous tiny phreatic tubules disappeared off like little mouseholes, but we were now without direction. Slight unreliable draughts would come and go.

The floor of this chamber was lowered to bedrock, putting us now in a solid, water-worn limestone chamber with phreatic character, but no clear way on. After several fruitless sessions and no direction to follow, enthusiasm for the Glass Trap waned. We knew we could be only metres from breaking into something big, but with no clue as to what direction to focus our efforts, a couple of metres might as well be a kilometre.

The upper shaft of The Glass Trap (left), and the water-carved pot at the lowest point (right).



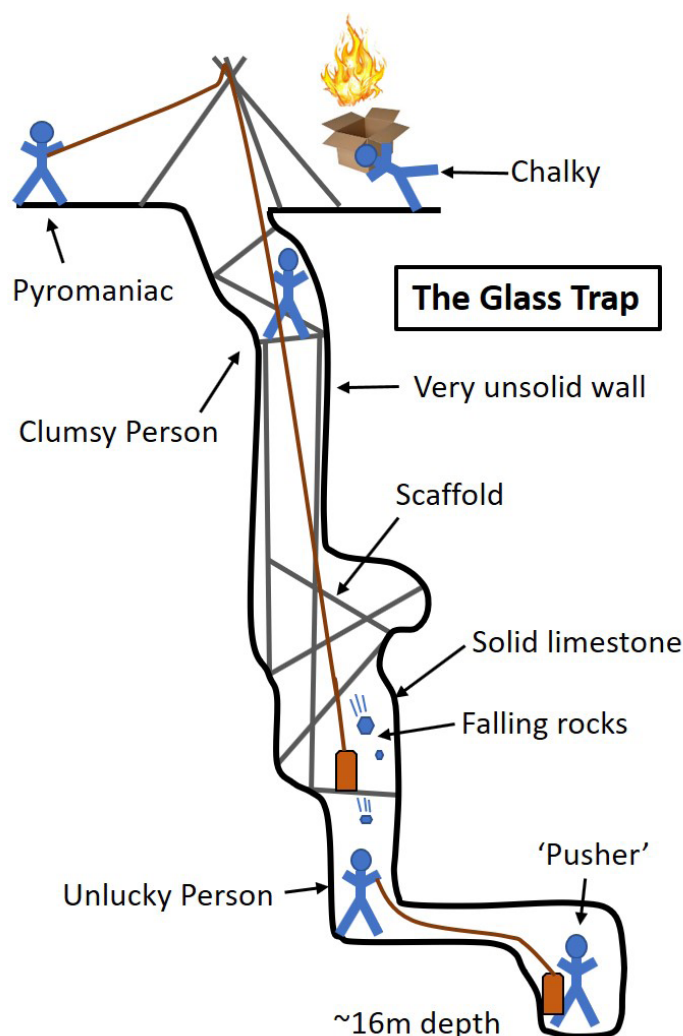
With winter approaching, we left the dig at an estimated depth of 16m. All eyes then turned to Manor Vale East for a dry winter project. The Glass Trap, following some vandalism, was capped for safety purposes. A brief return in early October 2020 revealed the site to have been reclaimed by nature, although the shaft could easily be reopened with only a day of work. No doubt we will return to The Glass Trap someday, and there remains every reason to believe there is something to find down there.

Half-hearted efforts to find the resurgence of The Glass Trap were reported by Chris:

Three heaped teaspoons of 'green' were inserted into The Glass Trap, followed by hours of driving around looking at springs and rivers. This green was never seen again, at least not where we looked. The options are:

1. *We didn't wait long enough.*
2. *We didn't put enough in.*
3. *It never comes back out.*
4. *The fish farm owner at Howkeld is very angry.*

Further work is needed to see where water from The Glass Trap goes, and how quickly. This might give us some idea about whether there is any potential for navigable cave passage. But like so many things, this is another project to revisit in the future.



A tongue-in-cheek depiction of The Glass Trap by the end of work covered by this journal.

Wandering in Windypit Country

By John Dale

The limestone uplands of the North York Moors are a splendid area for walking, with the added possibility that one might discover a previously unnoticed cavelet. I originally became aware of the area's major windypits in January 1975 when a hunting expedition was arranged with those avid windypit hunters Roger Cooper, Kevin Solman and Graham Stevens. Ric and Pat Halliwell are also mentioned in Graham's 1975 diary entry, but what he failed to mention was the "rabbit in the headlights" effect that Pat's attendance had on myself while I was merely a schoolboy, as the caving scene was primarily filled with bearded male dwarves at the time.

Gowerdale Windypits and Noddle End Windypit were all descended before the large party got frozen daft. The Gowerdale windypits provided ample dead sheep wrestling opportunities amongst squidgy, sinister blue coloured ICI fertiliser bags tied up with orange baling twine. Noddle End Windypit supplied a huge shock when I accidentally stepped on a very large and terminally dead goose that I thought was a boulder. This produced a loud "honk" from beyond the grave and the resulting brown-trouser moment is something that is still strongly etched in my memory 45 years later.

Through the hot summer of 2020, between spikes in the pandemic, small groups of NYMCC members ventured out into the great outdoors to hunt the elusive Windypit again. Armed with modern Lidar data, crowbars and numerous cans of refreshing beer, the sunny heights of Gowerdale, Caydale and Oxendale were explored over several weekends while Covid meant we could not go and sit in the pub.

The Gowerdale area provided several small fissures amongst the crags and hillsides on the opposite side of the valley to Motts hole. The largest being a bedding-crawl leading, after a body length, to a shaft estimated at 15 feet deep. The whole pitch head area was comprised of loosely bridged boulders and one could see down the shaft into a small chamber, that was formed within a massive boulder ruckle. Unfortunately, a feet first descent was required which would have meant going through the hanging death "blind". Fifteen minutes of head-first boulder wrangling actually exacerbated the situation, so the cave was named Chamber (of Horrors) Pot and the party spent a pleasant half hour sunning themselves outside on an incredible day, with an azure blue sky and not a soul in sight for miles.

The Caydale area provided similar amusement when Chris Twigg informed the hunting party of a strong

The classic appearance
of any new Windypit!



Lidar slip feature just below the salt bin. Here Nial found his first windypit, that will forever be known as Nial's Virgin Slit. This clearly made a significant impression on its discoverer, who waxed lyrical for ages about its delights and provided him with an impetus for new discoveries. This first windypit was joined by a second named "Salt Bin Windypit" discovered by Chris, also from the Lidar data. This was another body-deep slip-rift discovery that dropped into a small chamber where the rift below pinched out.

We then re-examined Caydale Hole and Shelob's Lair (Birk Bank Fissuers, both listed in Moorland Caver) further down the valley. Caydale Hole proved to be a large rift entered through a horizontal hole and requiring a ladder. It dropped down two levels to the deepest point where Raymond Hayes had carried out an archeological investigation in antiquity. The windypit's main rift sidewalls were liberally coated with moonmilk and in this were found scratched names from Ampleforth students from many years ago.

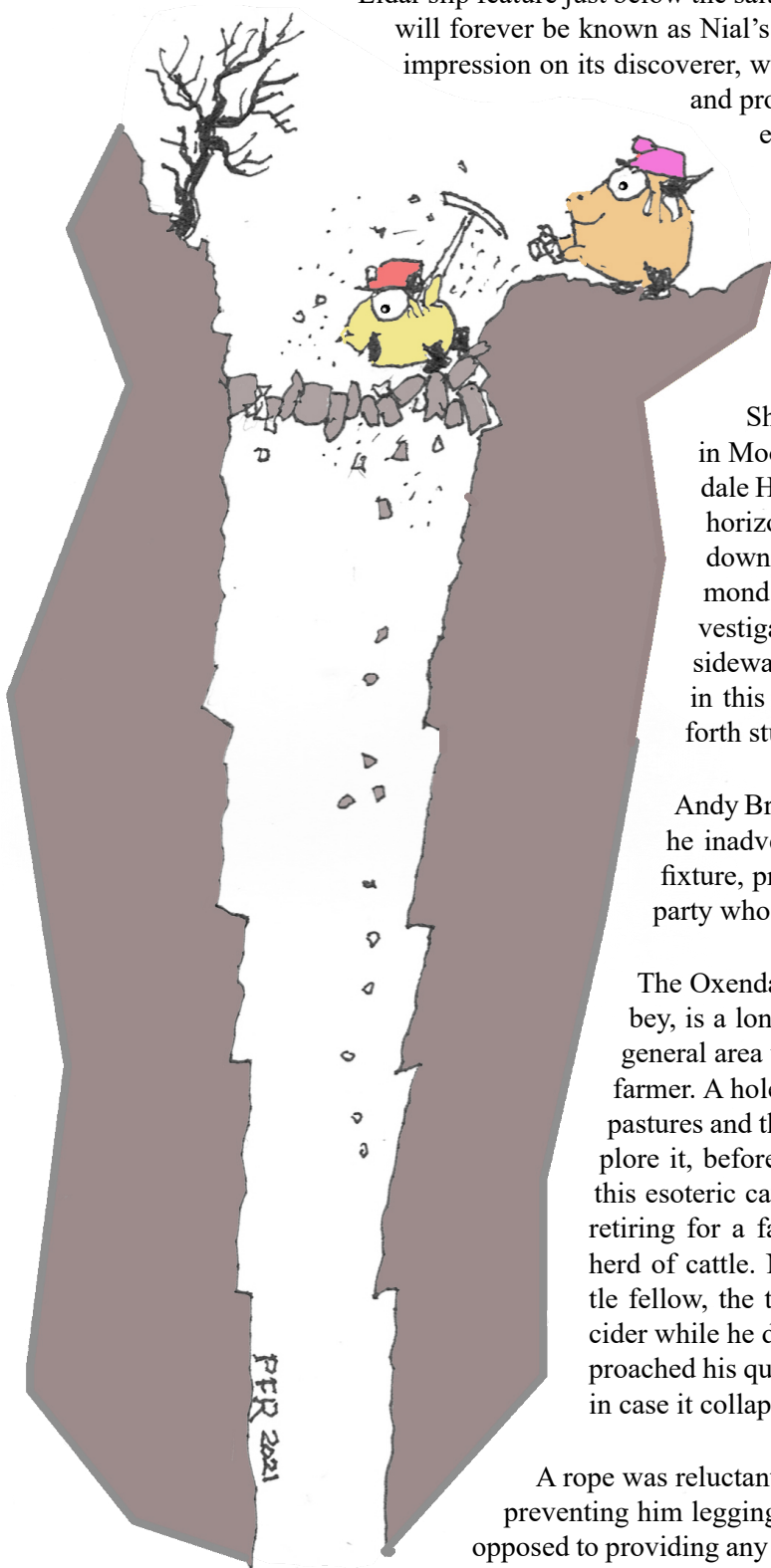
Andy Brennan then investigated Shelob's Lair where he inadvertently threatened to become a permanent fixture, providing much amusement to the rest of the party who were sunning themselves outside.

The Oxendale area, close to the beautiful Rievaulx Abbey, is a lonely dale in splendid isolation and from this general area the NYMCC received a call from a friendly farmer. A hole had "simply appeared" on one of the high pastures and the windypit hunting party was invited to explore it, before it got filled in. Sparky took ownership of this esoteric cavelet and attacked it with a crowbar before retiring for a fag while being watched with interest by a herd of cattle. Not wanting to take the glory from the little fellow, the team hung around eating pies and drinking cider while he donned an oversuit. Girding his loins, he approached his quarry before returning whimpering for a rope in case it collapsed while he was in it!

A rope was reluctantly tossed into the hole with the intention of preventing him legging it off into Caverns Measureless to Man as opposed to providing any sort of safety backup. Another advantage of using Sparky for this original exploration was that in the (highly likely) event of it not going anywhere, his short stature gave the best chance that he would get a body length inside and we could claim it as a new windypit.

Which we did – before we filled it in again.

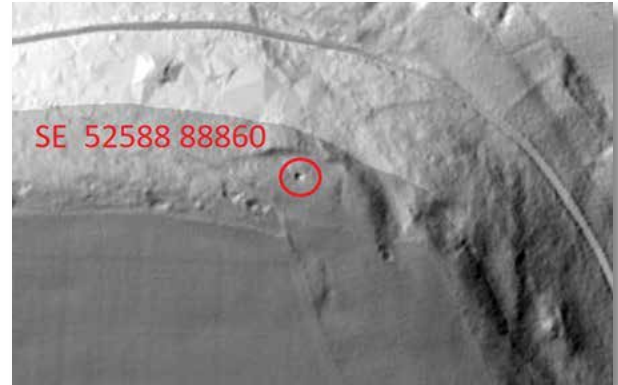
Thank you to Pete Ryder (Moldywarps Speleo Group) for this, and the earlier cartoon, which were drawn bespoke for this journal. Really appreciated!



Thunder Windypit

SE 52588 88860

The area around Noddle End is a headland overlooking the upper parts of Ryedale, dominated by meadows on its top and surrounded by dense coniferous plantation. It has seen several generations of groups prospecting and finding windypits. In 1936 the Yorkshire Ramblers Club (YRC) discovered Gowerdale 1 and 2. Raymond Hayes and others discovered Noddle End Windypit in 1944. The most recent discovery was Motts Hole which was explored in by YRC in 1947. Could there be more to find here, perhaps with modern techniques?



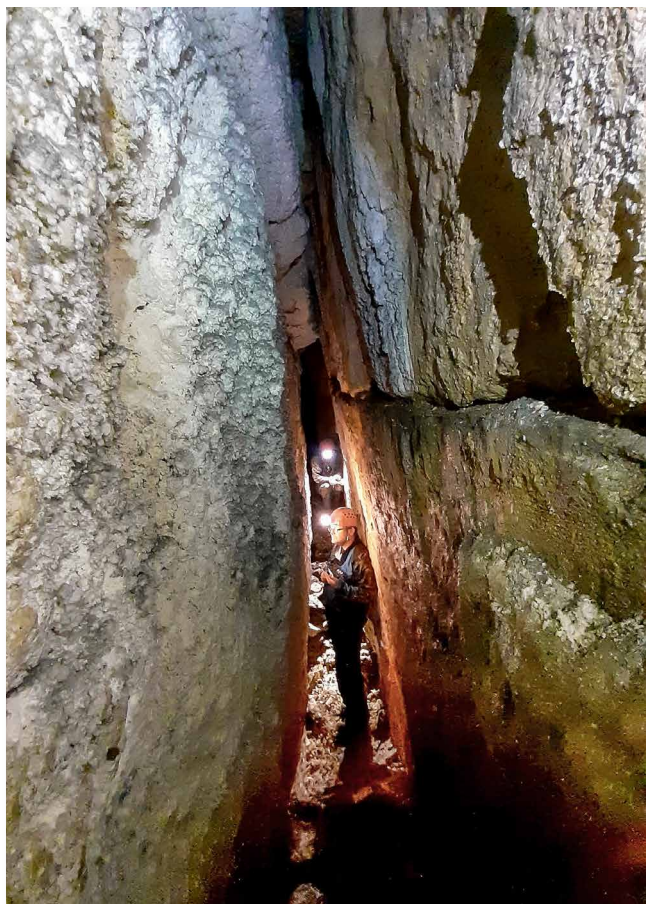
Lidar showing the feature of Thunder Windypit

For a couple of years, our teams had been experimenting with the use of Lidar to search for surface features in classic windypit areas. This allows a search to be conducted without the impediment of dense coniferous plantations or angry gamekeepers.

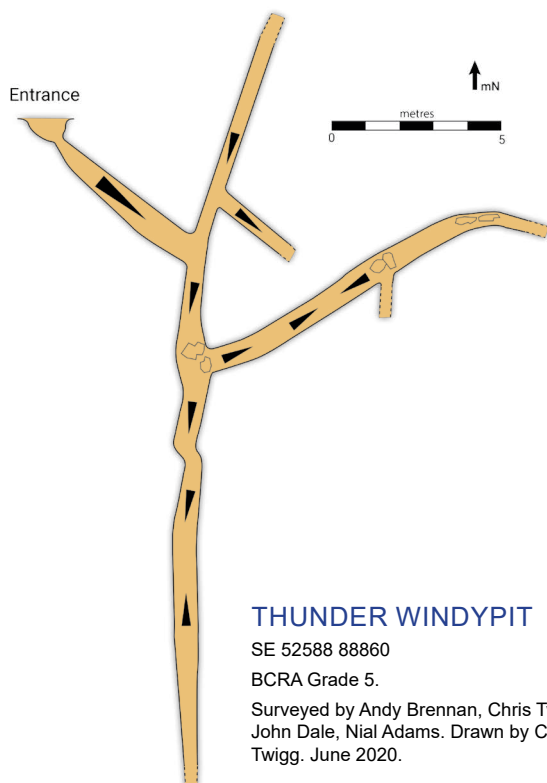
On 13th June 2020, Chris Twigg, Andy Brennan and John Dale went to search the area in person, just as Covid-lockdown began to ease. They went armed with the advantage of Lidar images showing a number of interesting depressions.

Andy Brennan emerges from the newly discovered Thunder Windypit, clutching an item that caused rather a lot of initial concern.





Thunder Windypit, nicely showing the passage shape, with abundant cauliflower moonmilk.



Chris Twigg reports on the visit:

After a quick visit to Motts Hole, we prospected the steep slopes to west and east, concentrating on any unusual Lidar features. Our final target for the day was an area due north of Noddle End with a strong Lidar response with a surface slip immediately below it at SE 52588 88860

This looked good and Andy soon got the 'red mist' in a large depression below a limestone exposure. He quickly broke into the top of a large draughty boulder slope after only five minutes of solo digging. He returned after his initial exploration with a large, potentially human-sized bone, that had us all a little worried. This has thankfully since been identified as horse. Thank goodness!

We had a good first explore of the cave, which appears to be three joints, nicely decorated with classic windypit features such as moonmilk, bones and matching wall profiles.

The team returned on 27th June with Nial, a windypit virgin, to survey the new find. Chris reports:

The new hole comprises a series of joints (not quite perpendicular, more of a trapezium). It's not massive but it is more than just a simple cross rift. The main rift is over 7m high and decorated with cauliflower moon milk.

Whilst we were surveying today, there was a crazy storm on the surface. The whole place rumbled despite us being at the furthest point from the surface, it was terrifying if I'm being honest! The new find was momentarily named "The Lidar Cauliflower Thunder Trapezium" but that sounded too much like a Ben Coult/Chris Scaife discovery, so we decided on the more classic name of 'Thunder Windypit'.

The survey shows 50m horizontal development and 10m vertical range. The area warrants more work.

Duckendale Windypit

SE 55523 80204

This small windypit is documented in Northern Caves and Moorland Caver (using remarkably similar wording). It was called Duckendale, although the valley in which it is found is called Ducken Dale, so any naming pedants will be extremely unhappy.

As part of a slow and gradual process to revisit several of the minor caves of the North York Moors (in preparation for future republishing of 'Moorland Caver'), we attempted to find Duckendale Windypit in 2015. The first session was totally unsuccessful owing to the complete inaccuracy of the identical grid reference in Moorland Caver (2003) and Northern Caves. Suspicions were raised as to whether the esteemed authors of Moorland Caver had actually ever been to Duckendale! A second trip a few weeks later was more successful, locating the cave 400m further down the valley from the grid reference, thanks only to having a machete to make progress through dense nettles.

The entrance, a small opening part way up the 4-5m high limestone crag on the east side of Ducken Dale, is not obvious, a clue being the more obvious entrance of Nanny Cooper's Hole, 50m further north at SE 5553 8025 (not south, as suggested in guidebooks).

A ladder, belayed creatively to a tree several metres away, allows a 4m drop into the entrance. There is a short, spacious upper passage to explore with a few bends. Below the first bend, halfway along the passage, is a slither down boulders which is best negotiated feet-first, into a lower passage which descends steeply to a 3m pothole. This is climbable but with no way on from the bottom. An impressive underground spot!

The closest approach to Duckendale Windypit is from the village of Wass. However, the finest and flattest approach is parking on the A170 at the forestry gate (at SE 5520 8185). Here, a southbound path enters the woodland. This is not a marked public footpath, but walkers are welcomed by the Forestry Commission.

Follow this path, ignoring a track on the left after 150m. After about 1km, the track gradually bends left, heading towards Stanbrook Abbey (a nunnery) and another, more vague track on the right descends into the head of Ducken Dale valley. This shallow valley can be followed south for several hundred metres to reach the cave.

The entrance is hidden half-way up the left (east) side of the shallow valley and requires a machete to get through the waist-height nettles and bracken from Spring to Autumn.

Good weather, old clothes, GPS, machete, a helmet and light, a 5m ladder, 10m rope and a few krabs and slings to tether to the nearby tree is all that is needed. In combination with the forest walk and a pint afterwards, a visit to Duckendale Windypit is a great day out.

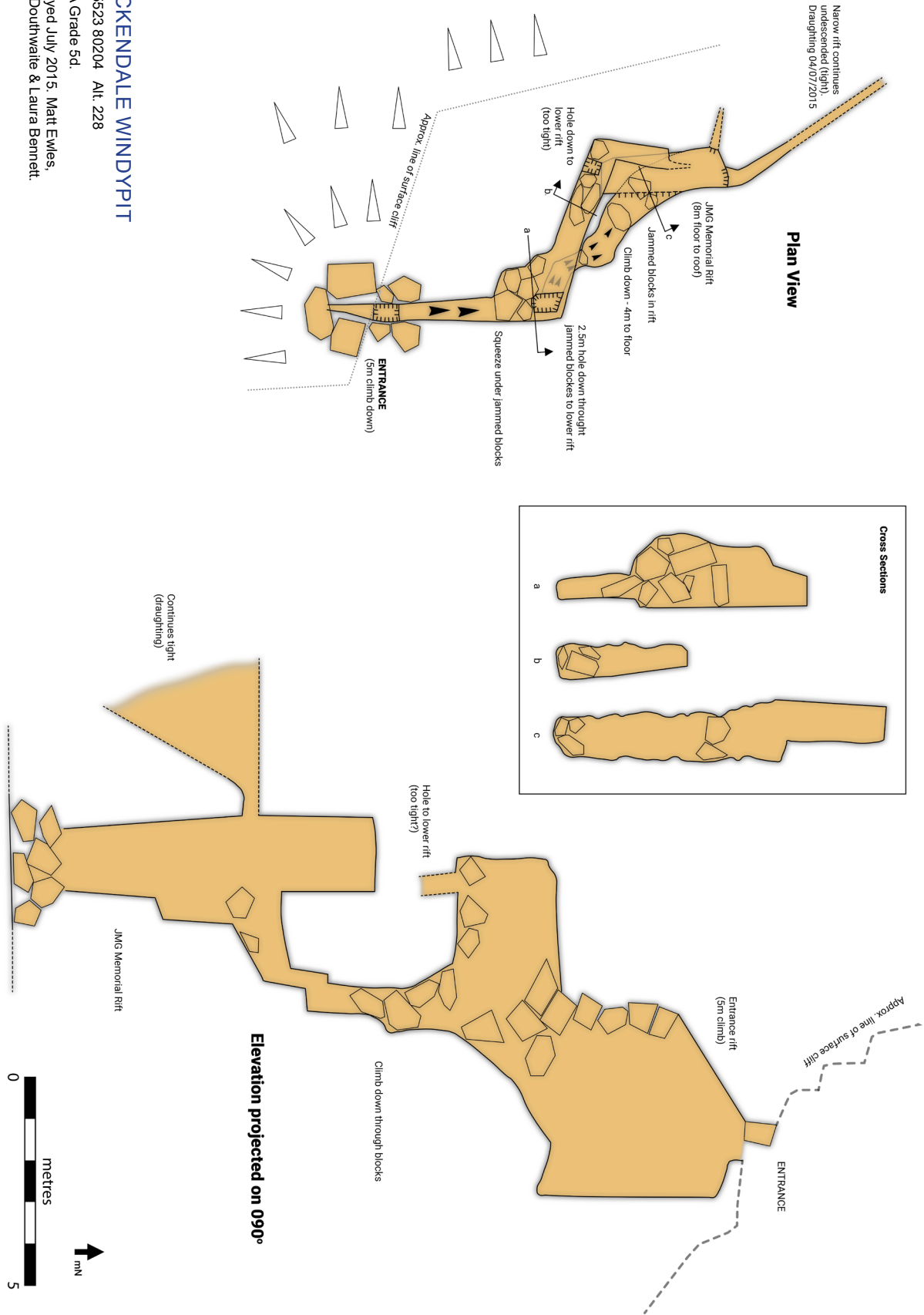
Finally, we returned on 4th July 2015 to survey. The result is shown overleaf and can be downloaded from the YCC website.

Duckendale Windypit on the surface (below), and underground (right) in the upper passage.





DUCKENDALE WINDYPIT
SE 55523 80204 Alt. 228
BCRA Grade 5d.
Surveyed July 2015, Matt Ewles,
Gary Douthwaite & Laura Bennett.



An Overview of Mining in the North York Moors

The North York Moors has a long history of being worked for minerals. Today, this is an ongoing tradition, with the deep mining efforts of ICL and Anglo American, who extract (or intend to extract) salt, potash and polyhalite from geological evaporite beds situated over a kilometre deep under the moors.

In antiquity, whinstone, ironstone, alum, jet, coal and ochre have also been extracted for use in road-stone, steel making, chemicals, jewellery, heating and the cosmetic industry, respectively. There are many excellent walks in the area that incorporate the historical industrial archaeological remains of these latter industries. For those with an underground fascination, these can play an interesting part of a holiday in the North York Moors when combined with visits to some of the caves and windypits.

The local experts are the Cleveland Mining Heritage Society, with who we have a few shared members and who we have crossed paths with several times.

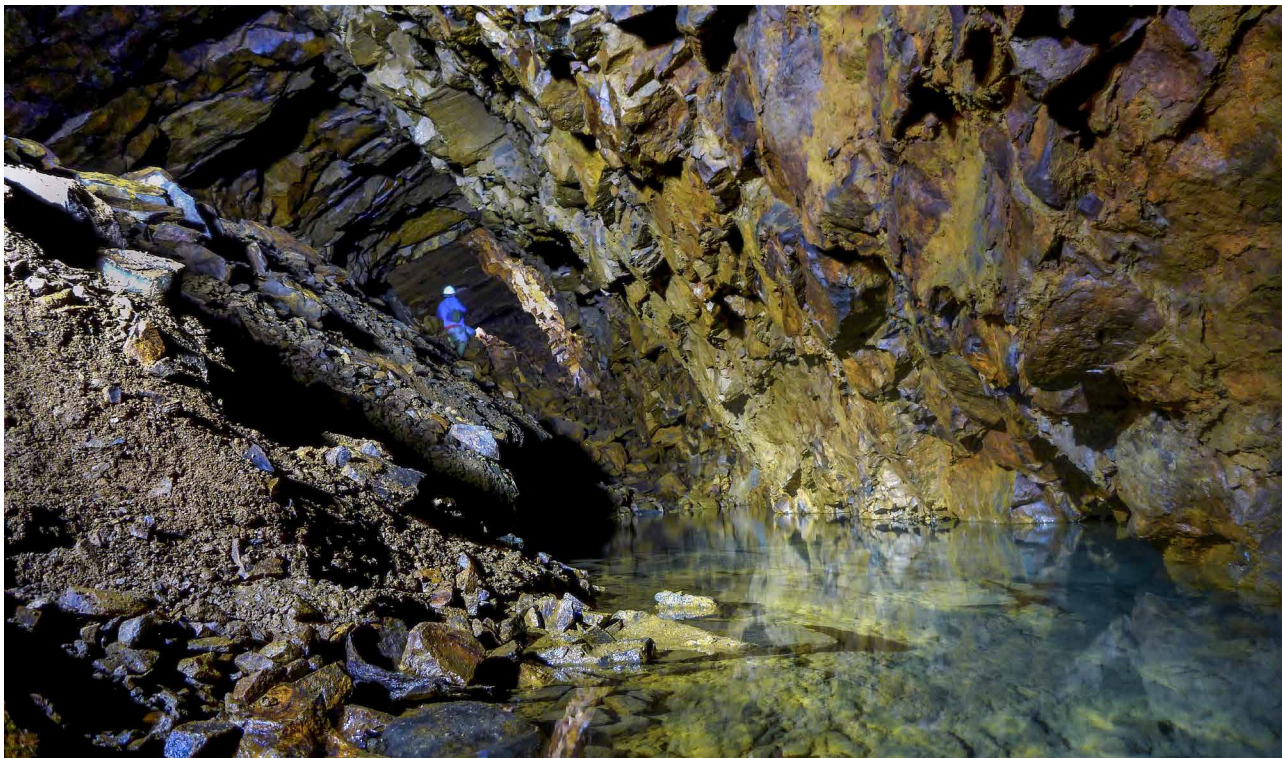
Whinstone is best appreciated by searching out Cliff Rigg Quarry at Great Ayton. This huge gash in the landscape can be incorporated into a circular route with the local “Matterhorn” of Roseberry Topping. Ironstone areas abound, visits to Rosedale, Grosmont and the Cleveland Ironstone Mining Museum at Skinningrove are recommended.

Alum, which formed the basis of the country’s first great chemical industry, was extracted from the immense sea cliffs along the coastline at Boulby and Ravenscar and both of these are well worth a visit. Jet (a form of fossilised wood) has a long and illustrious history primarily associated with Whitby. The Ebor Jet Works in the town and the Whitby Museum itself are excellent places to see modern jet being worked and to view some of the incredible items that the Victorian jet workers crafted. The Whitby Museum exhibits include a carved jet chessboard, inlaid with ammonites, that is truly exceptional. We have an entire chapter in the journal dedicate to our work in the jet mines.

Shallow coal pits in their hundreds pepper the moors at Rudland Rigg and Clitherbeck.

In terms of speleological history, both the YSS (Yorkshire Subterranean Society) and MSG (Moldywarps Speleological Group) were active across the North York Moors in the 1970s and 1980s and this tradition has continued with both YCC and NYMCC to the present day. Many of the early explorations into jet and whinstone workings are documented in the MSG Journals which are now freely available on the NYMCC website.

In recent times, the latter two clubs have focused significant attention on the whinstone, ironstone and, most importantly, the jet workings, largely driven by Chris Twigg in his role as Lottery-Funded Industrial Heritage Officer for the local council, as well as being an active NYMCC and Cleveland Mining Heritage Society member.



The lower passage of Lease Rigg Whinstone Mine.

Whinstone mines

Cliff Rigg Whinstone Quarry near to Great Ayton was visited by MSG on 30th July 1974 and contained “The Elephant Hole” which was lost when the quarry walls were blasted into the entrance following a rescue in 1975. The local Gazette describes the accident:

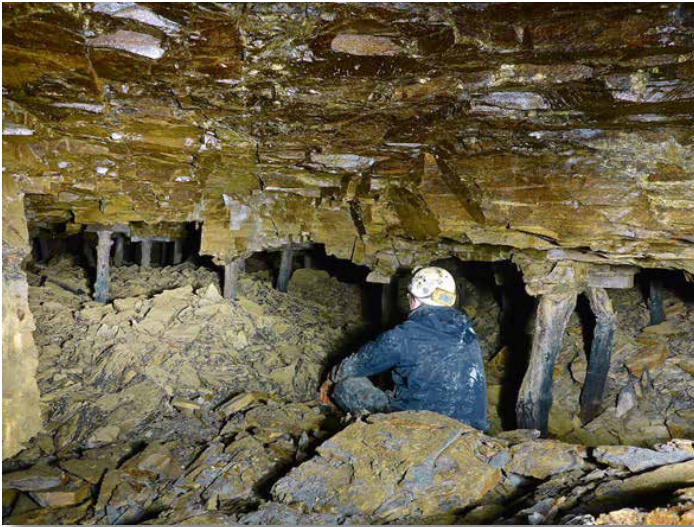
We sat on the edge of the hole to have a smoke, Terence dropped his cigarette and bent over to pick it up. He slipped and went over the edge, there was nothing we could do - it was terrible!

The Elephant Hole was an overhanging pitch of 25ft dropping onto rubble that sloped steeply down into sizable workings (big enough to fit an elephant in). These large passages were over 500ft long and gave MSG an early glimpse into the style of whinstone working used across North York Moors.

One of the few remaining, accessible whinstone workings is Lease Rigg Mine. This was found by MSG on the 9th March 1975 when Graham Stevens and John Dale located and dug into a small airshaft indicated on an old miners map. The entrance to Lease Rigg is found at NZ 812046, about 100m north of the road in the east bank of a steeply descending stream at the edge of the woods. Visitors are advised to be discrete and careful.

The entrance crawl leads down a very steep incline into much larger workings associated with the whinstone dyke itself. Impressive passageways at three levels spiral down to a low point, where a traverse across a dangerous boulder field leads first to a flooded area and then to a forehead. The strength of the whinstone allowed some very large passages to be mined, and the photo above shows an excellent example.

Sil Howe Whinstone Mine, one of the other more extensive workings, is deserving of its own dedicated chapter in this journal following our work to reopen access.



Ironstone mine showing original roof supports.

Ironstone mines

Spa Wood Ironstone Mine was also visited with the permission of the landowner.

This gigantic mine was originally explored by an MSG team on 2nd May 1975 accompanied by John Owen, the local ironstone mining history expert. During this exploration, Graham Stevens, John Dale and Ernie Shield entered the electric fan house and followed passages through knee-deep water covered in oil into the dry workings beyond.

Graham noted in his logbook;

We visited the location of an underground blacksmiths shop and examined the remains of broken drills that will never now be fixed. Bad air was one constraint on the amount of accessible passage, bad ground being another and the complexity of the passages being a third.

The mine entrance is on private property and Chris secured a visit in his official capacity. A gas detector was used to ensure the safety of the party, as the air quality had clearly not improved in the intervening 45 years. The fan house was entered, the underground blacksmiths shop was eventually located and the main engine plane was examined before exiting via the miners travelling drift. The abandonment plan of the mine reveals the true size and complexity of the workings. Many hundreds of miles of grid-like ‘bord and pillar’ workings extending out from the entrance, under the local villages and under the North York Moors themselves.

The extensive Rosedale Ironstone mines were covered in our last journal, and little further progress has been made here due to the bad air encountered only 100m into the only open entrance. Any further efforts to reopen these mines, once amongst the most extensive in Europe, will require reopening of other entrances and ventilation shafts, which is rather more of a serious undertaking, given much of the mine is underwater now.

Jet mines

Victorian jet has long associations with the North York Moors coastline, occasionally being washed up as sea-worn jet pebbles amongst the seaweed left at the high tide line. What is less known, is the extent of jet mining activity many miles inland and focused on a 30-foot layer of jet shale that overlay the area’s main ironstone seam. For this, we have an entire dedicated chapter in this journal covering several recent re-discoveries.

Coal mines

The mining of coal locally appears to have begun somewhere around the year 1640 and was set to continue in some form or another for the next 250 years. The Jurassic coals of the North York Moors area were primarily used for burning lime in kilns for agricultural purposes in order to neutralise the poor, acid rich, moorland soils.

Many surplus coal supplies were sold to locals for fuel and for a period, local coal fired the calcining kilns at Rosedale. Little underground exploration of these workings has been achieved (and would probably be ill-advised anyway) however, further detail of the mine sites can be found in 'Moorland Collieries of North Yorkshire' by Carl Thomas which is available on the NYMCC website.

Ochre mines

After significant progress exploring the Victorian jet mines, the NYMCC focus turned to the valuable ochre deposits associated with the geology below, as opposed to above, the North York Moors ironstone. Using Lidar and Google Earth images, locations below the moors dogger band were examined for streams carrying the tell-tale orange staining of ochre deposition.

Around Blakey Ridge near Rosedale, the mineral-rich waters were found to be welling up from old coal mines, where the colourful ochre was once extracted to serve local artists. In one remote moorland area associated with the whinstone dyke, the NYMCC assisted the National Park Authority to retain ochre in a reed bed system to reduce the environmental pressure of tourist's intent on visiting Goathland's spectacular orange waterfalls.

While in Rosedale, on-site research showed that extraction of mined ochre from an adit (which is still open) had been taking place for hundreds of years, with it initially being used as a midge repellent by Victorian ironstone miners, and even as a food colourant!

In fact, outside the Rosedale ochre mine, we found the pumps and pipework remain in working condition, allowing extracted ochre to be passed via pipeline to Bell End Farm in Rosedale, where it is bottled and transported to the beauty salons of Teesside. Here, it props up the faltering Middlesbrough economy as a modern, vegan approved, spray tan lotion, replacing lost income following the closure of the local treacle mines.

And if you believe that last paragraph, you'll believe anything!

A final note for budding mine explorers...

Mines are significantly more dangerous than caves, requiring a different set of observational skills combined with local knowledge. Gas meters are needed for most trips due to accumulations of dangerous levels of carbon dioxide even in areas that look like they should be well ventilated, and stability of the walls and roof is often very suspect. Mining artifacts must be left alone, and visitors are encouraged to avoid damage to original features. An added complication is that many are on private land and access is often difficult to organise. Entering some mines can have environmental consequences.



Ochre mining across the North York Moors

Right: Jet mine passage in the North York Moors.



Inland Jet Mining in North Yorkshire

By Chris Twigg

Jet has become so inextricably linked with the sea cliffs around Whitby, that most people are totally unaware that it was extensively mined throughout the North York Moors. Since 2014, members of NYMCC have undertaken a long-term project to explore and map these long-forgotten workings, for which very few contemporary records exist.

Previously regarded as a cottage industry with trivial underground working, we have since re-discovered a period of furious mining activity driven by changing fashions. Concurrently, we have mapped jet workings, some measuring many kilometres in length across the inland areas of the Moors.

The jewellers of Whitby would have you believe that jet mining only occurs on the coast around Whitby, starting when Queen Victoria went into mourning after the death of Prince Albert in 1861. The truth is much more interesting, with largely undatable evidence of jet working having taken place all across the Cleveland Hills back through the ages into the Viking, Roman, Bronze Age and even Neolithic times.

Chris Twigg eyeing up a large piece of jet left by miners on a ledge.



Jet is fossilized wood found in the Mulgrave Shale Member of the Whitby Mudstone Formation, dating from around 180 million years ago. The wood has been altered under extreme pressure and is valued as a gemstone due to its ability to take a deep and intense lustrous shine when polished, although essentially it is just a form of lignite coal.

Types of jet

The jet occurs in two main forms;



Cored jet

Cored jet consists of a thin crust of jet on a central stone core, and whilst this can often carry dramatic impressions of tree bark and ammonite fossils, it is virtually useless for jewellery due to its thin and uneven nature and is often found discarded in mines.



Plank jet

Plank jet is very flat, even, extremely light, warm to the touch, and when snapped, exposes a bright shine even with no additional polishing. This is the material highly desired by the jewellers of Whitby.

Mining methods

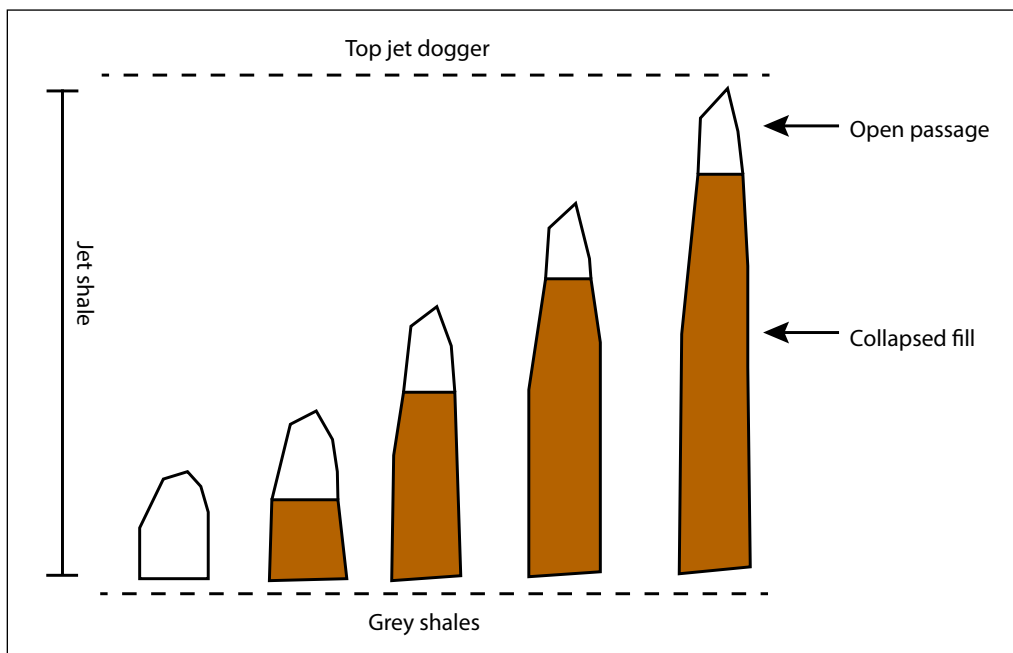
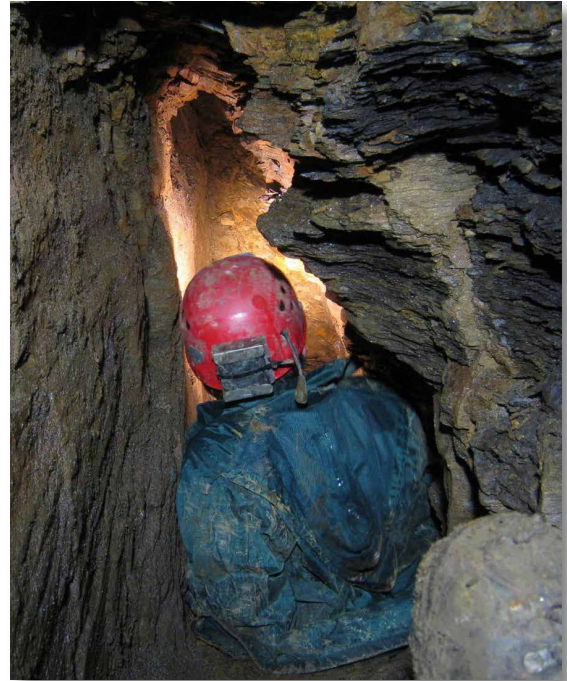
The Victorian method of jet mining is very different to that of the hard rock mining associated with both whinstone and ironstone. Jet is formed from tree branches and occurs completely randomly in soft shale amenable to hand tool use.

This jet shale layer is exposed horizontally on steep valley sides and early working took place by horizontally quarrying the exposed rock. The weather-beaten nature of the locations eventually led to hand-worked, man-size tunnels being driven into the hillsides at the base of the jet shale and developed in a grid pattern underground (like the Bord and Pillar working in coal and ironstone mines). Because jet is scattered randomly in this layer, use of a grid system gives the best chance of locating it.

As the jet miners progressed deeper into the hillside, the jet shale, being less weathered, became harder to dig and a point of diminishing returns was reached, typically less than 100m into the hillside. At that point, the miners proceeded by pulling down the roof on themselves into their newly excavated passage, working up from the bottom of the seam, through 20ft of jet shales, until they reached the 'Top Jet Dogger' which forms a good roof. It is in these roof falls that the majority of the jet is encountered at random; you are essentially looking for a needle in a haystack amongst the shale.

As the broken shale from the roof takes up lots of space, we are left today with the majority of the workings being tighter narrow passages left towards the top of the jet shales (see pictures for a contrasting view of the passages before and after upward mining).

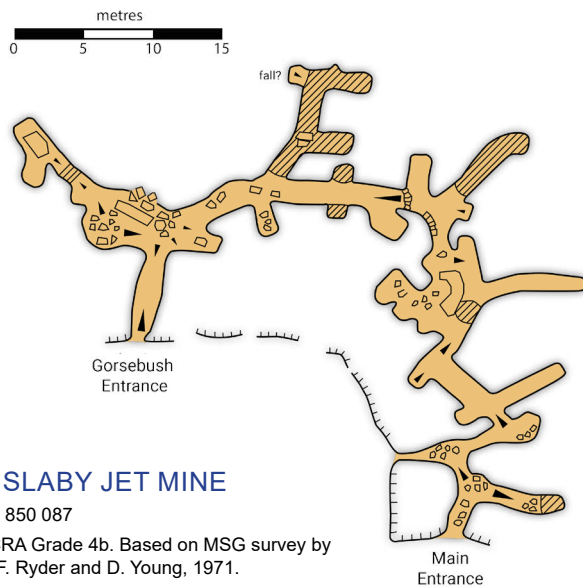
Jet mines have historically been thought of as modest affairs, the only contemporary account of the industry being “On Jet Mining” presented by Charles Parkin to the North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers in 1881, where it is stated that *“the workings seldom extend beyond a hundred yards at the most from the drift mouth.”*



Above left: Initial wider passages cut at base of jet shales.

Above right: Narrow passage left at top of jet shales after roof collapse.

Left: Passage profiles narrow as workings progress up through the 20ft of jet shales.



AISLABY JET MINE

NZ 850 087

BCRA Grade 4b. Based on MSG survey by
P. F. Ryder and D. Young, 1971.

Modern day caver interest

Caver interest in jet arrived in 1971 when a small mine at Aislaby was mapped by the Moldywarps Speleological Group (MSG) weighing in at 140m (see MSG Journal 8). In that same volume there is a survey of two small jet workings misidentified as Kettleness Alum Mines, measuring 88m and 52m, on the coast north of Whitby. These mines were later rediscovered by future members of York Caving Club in 2006 (see Descent 95).

By a cruel twist of fate, these discoveries would turn out to be completely unrepresentative of most jet workings in the area. Aislaby is considered a 'soft' jet mine in completely different geological strata, and Kettleness appears to have been somehow altered by the alum boiling and steeping the occurred on the ground immediately overhead.

Interest in jet then seems to have waned for about 20 years.

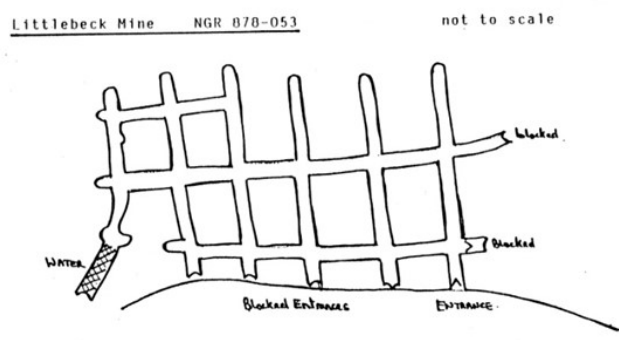
Scarborough Caving Club (SCC being the previous incarnation of NYMCC) were the next to stumble across some jet workings at Littlebeck in 1995, with a rough survey being shared in a monthly club newsletter (shown overleaf). This chequer-board pattern of workings is much more typical of the jet workings we have subsequently explored. SCC were unable to determine at the time whether it was an ironstone or jet mine, but said they intended to return to complete a proper survey (at the time of writing in 2021 that return visit is still outstanding).

Kettleness Jet Mine (with its atypical wide roof).



The next caving flirtation with jet occurred in 2002 at Chapel Wood near Osmotherley, when some heavy forestry equipment managed to ‘find’ some jet workings by driving over and falling into them (no doubt necessitating a change of underwear for the driver). MSG and SCC joined forces on the survey after being called in by the National Park head archaeologist Graham Lee, who after their discover of nearly 1km of passages had the following to say:

Our understanding of the scale of the mining operations associated with this industry has recently been considerably revised by a survey at Chapel Wood (NZ 455 987), north of Osmotherley, by Peter Ryder and Ernie Shield. Jet mines were generally thought to have been worked via relatively short drift mines into the seam, particularly where it outcrops from valley sides. At Chapel Wood, however, 972m of mined passageways have been surveyed, and these lie some 95m from the nearest known adit.



Littlebeck Jet Mine Survey
(taken from SCC May 1995 Newsletter)

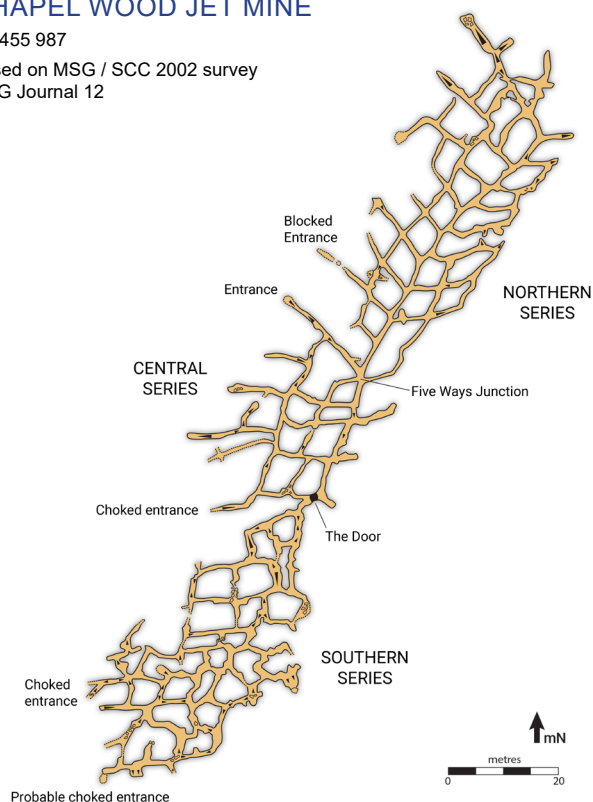
One key point to note about these workings is the three distinct patterns of passages that were found, named as the Northern, Central and Southern Series in caving parlance. They show this is most likely three different mines, perhaps worked by different people or at different times, each with their own unique working style. There are essentially only two points where these three sets of workings have been connected, at “The Door” and “Five Ways Junction”, perhaps to improve air-flow.

Chapel Wood Jet Mine
survey and typical
passage shape.

CHAPEL WOOD JET MINE

NZ 455 987

Based on MSG / SCC 2002 survey
MSG Journal 12



Until 2014 there were four surveys, but the number of individual jet mines across the area is huge, with extensive tips covering areas around Guisborough, Kildale, Bilsdale, Tripsdale, Scugdale and Rosedale in addition to the well-known sea-cliff workings.

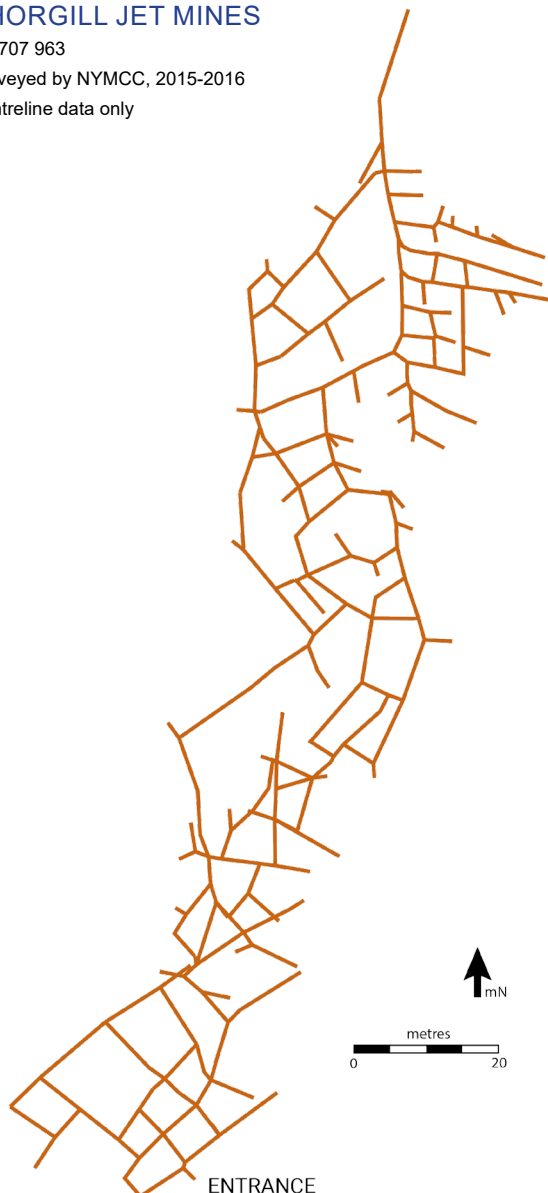
Since 2014 we have rediscovered and surveyed several more sites, covered below. All our surveys since 2014 have moved away from the traditional surveying techniques used by MSG and SCC and have been performed with a DistoX accompanied by PDA. Rapidly building up a plan of workings in real-time as we progress through them becomes an essential navigation aid after you pass dozens of identical four-way junction, although the traditional ‘piece-of-string’ still plays an important role in finding your way out. Some of the more extensive jet mines, particularly those to be discussed in our next journal, are not places to get lost as you will be in real trouble! Our surveys are also centre-lines only. Passage profiles are generally all very small and very similar, so it is not hugely beneficial to show the profiles and sections of the passages.

THORGILL JET MINES

SE 707 963

Surveyed by NYMCC, 2015-2016

Centreline data only



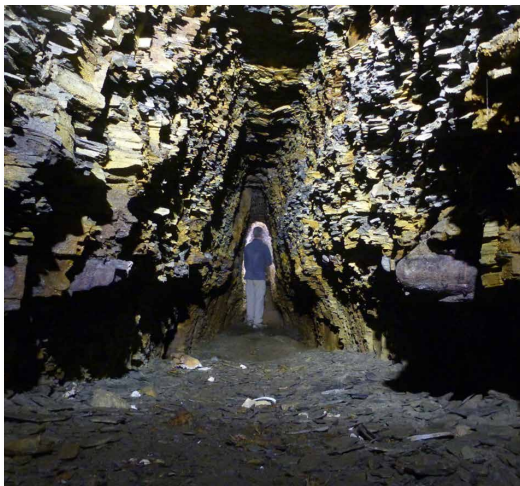
Overlaying these surveys onto Lidar data improves the visualisation as it reveals surface tips and collapses and their relationship to the underground workings. Combining Lidar data with surface imagery and 3D surveys allows us to visualise the workings fully in 3D, which was done for the first time at Thorgill.

Jet mines at Thorgill

“On Jet Mining” in 1881, made a passing reference to results from Gillbank Farm near Thorgill as being encouraging. Years later a story emerged of a boy named Champion entering the hillside at this same location and becoming lost; *“In desperation he ran in and out of the tunnels, frightened of the maze into which he had wandered”*. This seemed like the perfect venue for some of our initial explorations back in 2015.

The Thorgill workings were located and explored (SE 707963) and found to display widely varying character. Near the weathered surface outcrop, the passages are dry and in soft shales, which often form a natural arch of standing height. Further away from the outcrop the rock becomes harder and the passage square and often flooded. Records from 1881 show that this harder rock was the limit of working, due to the limitations of the hand-tools used (no explosives).

After two evening surveying sessions, the total passage length passed 1km and this became the largest jet working known. It later emerged that Dave Carlisle of the Earby Mine Research Group had first re-entered these workings in 1981, although his survey had never been completed or published.

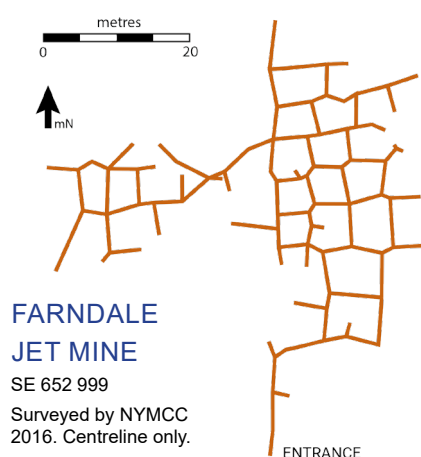


Left: Arched passage in soft near-surface shales at Thorgill Jet Mine

Right: Squared-off deep flooded passages in harder shales at Thorgill Jet Mine.

Jet mines in Farndale

The NYMCC has a very active “farmer-relations” department who are always on call when locals find their tractors or livestock disappearing into holes in the ground. This has yielded many an interesting discovery, both cave and mine, over the years.



Near Esk House in Farndale we offered our services to a farmer to install an oil drum with a closing lid into an offending entrance (SE 652999). We took this opportunity on normally private property to also survey the workings which measured about 600m, although numerous tips and surface collapses hint at much more being currently inaccessible. This rabbit warren of passages was quite literally a rabbit warren, now inhabited by a lot of lazy bunnies who had decided to re-use the tunnels as a home, rather than digging their own.

Jet mines around Hutton Lowcross

Another area that grabbed our attention in 2015 was the area around Bold Venture Gill, near Hutton Lowcross (around NZ 605135), following Facebook reports of local school children in the 1980s being encouraged by a teacher to go jet hunting in this area.

The mines in this area were relatively small, but it was noted that they didn't extend underneath the apparent surface collapses in the area, as might have been expected. These lines of surface pits were mis-identified by antiquarians in the early 1800s as hut circles from an ancient civilisation. In fact, so prevalent was this idea that the first edition OS maps for the area label them as a “supposed British settlement”. Despite the error, this is now excellent evidence that these surface jet pits had been worked and their purpose forgotten, long before the Victorians ever got interested in jet in the 1860s; Perhaps by the Vikings who named nearby Roseberry Topping as Othenesberg, Old Norse for the Hill of Odin; they clearly held it in very high regard for some reason!



Numerous workings at
Bold Venture Gill overlayed
onto 50cm DTM Lidar

Further explorations for Journal Four...

The real game-changer was the discovery of two mines nearby totalling 7km and 4km respectively. The exploration, surveying and historical research of those will be covered in the next journal, when the surveys should have been finalised.

Anecdotes of jet mine surveying

The complexity of the jet mines has produced several amusing incidents over the years.

In one instance, when a new jet mine was being explored, we became confused in a recently discovered area of passages and spent a worrying half hour going round in circles trying to find our way out. When this mine was subsequently surveyed it proved to be several kilometers in length and it became abundantly clear how lucky we had been!

On one surveying occasion the battery died on the PDA, leaving us without a survey with which to navigate out via the only entrance. This forced a panicked retracing of steps via multiple identical junctions. To avoid further embarrassment on later trips, a line of green garden twine was placed from the entrance and taken deep into the maze to the limit of the survey. This still proved problematical when Jerry Gibbs had to leave early for an important appointment, followed the line in the wrong direction and ended

half an hour later looking at a frayed end of green twine with passages disappearing off in all directions.

Other entrances to the systems were found in a rather novel manner; from the inside outwards! One exit consisting of a ten foot long, twelve inch diameter ceramic pipe which no one could possibly get through except Daisy, Andy Brennan's dog, who frequently joined the team on underground trips. Daisy was sent through the pipe to find a surface party searching the woodland above. The second additional entrance to the same mine was located over an hour in, where bracken roots were observed dangling from the roof. A climb and half an hour digging led out to the surface in the middle of a sunny pine forest. The discoverers quickly legged it to the original entrance a quarter of a mile away and waited for the surveying team to exit, with very puzzled faces!

Overall, the search for jet workings has been an immensely enjoyable one, with huge areas and years of exploration still ahead of us. The shallowness of the mines and the loose nature of the ground means that new holes are still regularly opening (see photo below) and giving fresh opportunities for underground exploration.

Left: Jet mine related holes appearing in Westerdale in 2020.

Right: Sparky making friends with the residents of Farndale Jet Mine.



Sil Howe Whinstone Mine

NZ 8405 0275

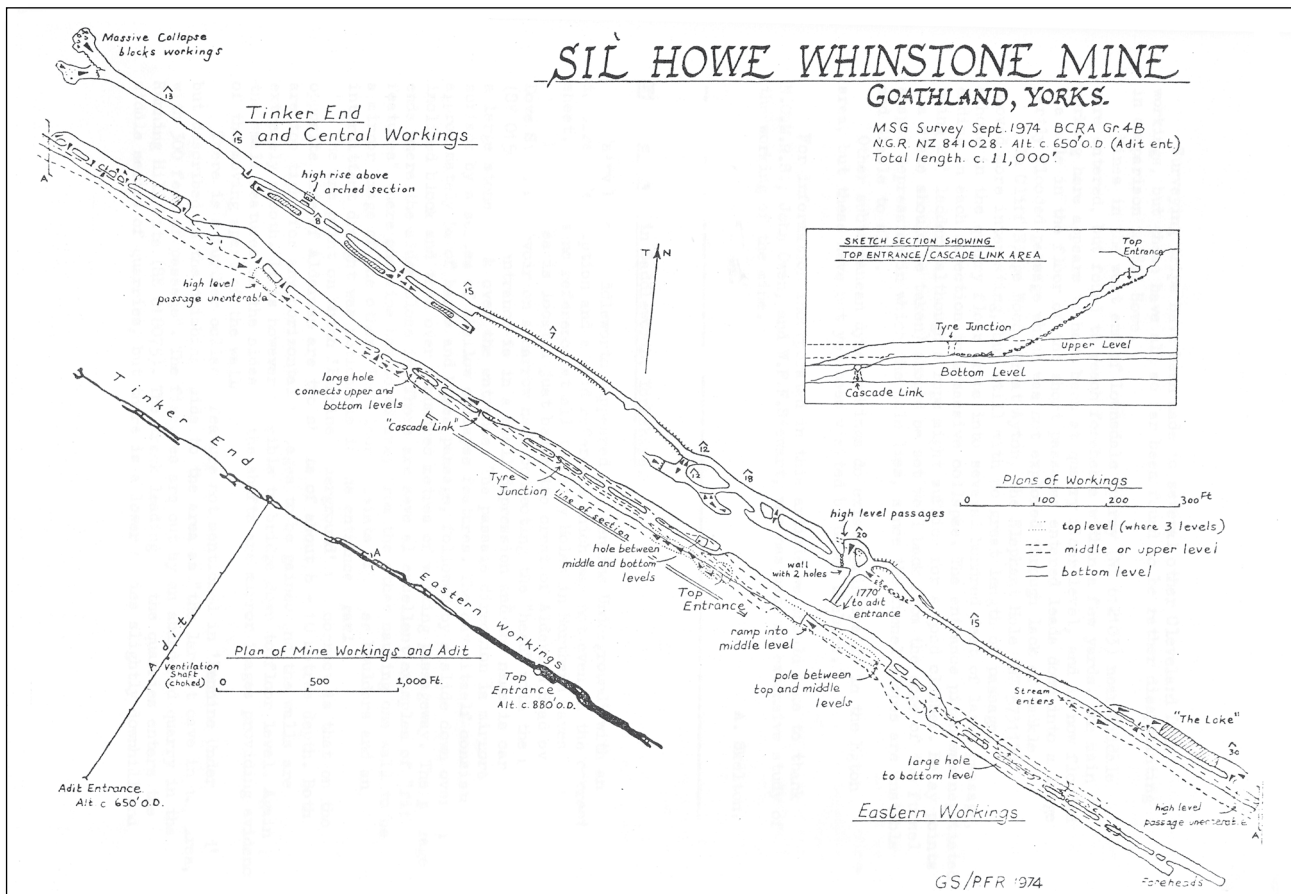
The Cleveland Dyke, extending from Scotland for 200 miles, crossing the North York Moors, is up to 25m deep and, owing to the hardness of the extracted whinstone rock, proved for many years to be a valuable source of street cobbles/setts and roadstone. As open-cast quarrying became gradually more challenging due to becoming waterlogged, at the end of the 19th Century, progress turned to adits for underground mining.

There are several whinstone mines across the North York Moors. Lease Rigg Mine (discussed on page 92) is an excellent example.

At the time of writing, YCC members have just rediscovered a similarly proportioned whinstone mine near Great Ayton. We believe we may be the first to enter this since its original closure. This will be covered in our next journal.

Sil Howe is an even more extensive whinstone mine extending for over 3km, comprising a 500m entrance adit to intersect the Cleveland Dyke and then eastern and western workings following the line of the Dyke itself. After many decades of abandonment, the Moldywarps Speleo Group (MSG) entered the adit in 1974 and their explorations are well documented in MSG Journal 7 (available to download on NYMCC's website, survey reproduced below). They explored enormous passages in a fascinating mine.

Sil Howe survey, reproduced from MSG Journal 7. The wider plan is shown in the bottom left.



Fast forward nearly 40 years to 2011, and the Sil Howe adit was found to have been deliberately collapsed only a few metres in, this having happened in the late 1980s. This was done by the landowners after discussions at the time, which included the possibility of creating a show-mine within the site.

With 25 years having passed since then, we decided to look into reopening the mine.

The collapse was extensive and clearly a much more sensible approach would be to tap into the roof of the adit 30-40m beyond the original entrance, where it ran only a few metres below the surface of the moor before the surface rose above it and the adit gained depth. Such works were going to need quite extensive permissions; from the North York Moors National Parks and the landowner (who is the same landowner as for Jenga Pot, so we already had good contacts for this).

With all permissions obtained, work started on 11th January 2014. A site approximately 40m from the adit entrance was chosen. Chris reports on the work and excitement that followed over the next two weeks.

After long access negotiations there was a strong turnout for the first day of digging at Sil Howe. Jerry's trolley proved effective at transporting the large array of hand tools to the site and after laying some tonne bags and tarpaulin for the spoil, the turf was quickly cut.

With everyone full of energy and enthusiasm the hole started large and fast progress was made. Numerous layers were broken through, with everything looking like phases of back-filling rather than natural geology. Numerous false dawns were encountered when the large wrecking bar seemed to hit a solid surface inches below our feet, but further digging then showed this not to be the arching of the level as the newly renamed "Bar of Disappointment" sunk yet further into the ground.

As the afternoon wore on and the hole became smaller and approaching 2m deep, the jitters were setting in, with talk of the adit arching being further to the left, right, being too low etc. Luckily however, the 'Bar of Disappointment' finally failed to live up to its name and a deep boom was heard as it struck the large sandstone blocks of the adit arching. As the sun set, we quickly covered the hole to prevent any livestock making the breakthrough and we retired to the Mallyan Spout Hotel for a well-deserved beer.

Day two started with us splitting into two teams. A small team headed off to Catton near Thirsk to collect the 3m of 900mm access pipe. New recruit, John Cameron's chainsaw made short work of the pipe and it was loaded onto Jerry's dinghy trailer for transportation to the site, where it was rolled across the moor with surprising ease. The rest of the group had been enlarging the hole and had drilled a spit into a keystone in the arch. This spit was used to winch it out with a block and tackle. The stone popped out and to everyone's great relief the level was not flooded below.

Careful progress was then made to enlarge the hole without collapsing the level. Some additional blocks were removed whilst other were cut with a Stihl saw to retain the integrity of the arching as far as possible. Someone

Top right: The Sil Howe adit entrance, with the dig site to intercept the adit 40m beyond.

Bottom right: The shaft breaking into the adit. Gary Douthwaite drills holes to insert metal rods to key together remaining adit blocks following removal of the top keystones.



then had a brainwave to drill into the remaining blocks and insert metal bars (cut from an old garden gate) to lock any blocks into position against the blocks behind.

While this was happening, rungs were attached inside the pipe and a slot cut in its side, to allow it to rest on the exposed inner wall of the level while the remainder protruded inside. With the pipe in place, it was secured by backfilling around it with the spoil heap. Despite the fact there should have been a few square meters of spare material, it all went back in the hole (mysterious). A short trip was made in with the gas meter which showed no air problems at all. Finally, a temporary gate was screwed onto the pipe to secure it and for a second time we retired to the Mallyan Spout. All in all, I think an amazing effort to get that much done in two days.

Eager to see the results of our labours we made the first trip since the early 1990s into Sil Howe the following Wednesday. Early arrivals had identified a point of interest from the quadcopter footage and located a steel covered shaft near the roadside. This is currently a point of confusion as the only shaft in the adit seems much closer to the entrance than the road.

We progressed quickly along the adit and became the first people to see the large colourful caverns with the benefit of modern lights. At the end of the adit, left went into the flooded Tinker's End, so we turned right. We tried wherever possible to walk in the channels already cut by water and not disturb any formations. However, when we reached the 'cascade link' some water from a small upper lake was released as there was no other way up to the area which was once the second entrance.

The group split here, with John and Gary continuing along the lower workings while the rest looked in the higher levels along the return path. An inclined airshaft was spotted just near the adit entrance which just needed a safety line. This is un-explored and not marked on the existing plans.

As we left, it became very apparent the water coming out of the adit was now like tomato soup. Chalky took water samples to compare with some taken before we entered. We went to Beck Hole for some aptly named "Beckwater" and pork pies, feeling more than a little concerned, despite having had full permission from all relevant bodies for the work undertaken.

Obviously feeling equally worried, myself and Andy had independently decided to go up on Thursday morning and look at the river. Fortunately, it was nowhere near as bad as it had been 10 hours earlier. At Darnholme however, Middle Grain Beck was still noticeably orange, so fingers crossed neither of the two houses that has direct visibility to this has the Environment Agency on speed-dial. We need to do something about this.

Over the years that followed, numerous discussions were held with the National Parks on the best way to deal with the discharge from Sil Howe. We remained in agreement that no further trips down there were possible until a solution was in place to avoid the substantial ochre discharges that seemed unavoidable at the time.

Right: Two of John Dale's stunning photos showing off the size and vibrant colour of the passages in Sil Howe, typical of many larger whinstone mines.





Installing the pipe into the new shaft entrance dropping into the adit.

Permission was gained, and work undertaken to install a settling bed just outside the adit entrance with reeds to provide natural filtration. While this wouldn't mitigate the impact of a severe discharge caused by another venture to the far reaches of the mine, it might allow limited careful exploration, keeping to environmentally 'safe' areas.

In December 2018, with the settling bed partly established, we took the first trip back into Sil Howe as part of our Christmas event. Our team entered, carrying with us several hay bales to install into the main outflow. The adit water was reasonably OK; muddy and red but not gloopy ochre, however, a short distance after turning right down the main workings, the lower-level became deep, thick ochre. Thankfully, at this point there is a ramp up on the left into the dry higher-level workings, which are of splendid proportions and can be followed for a reasonable distance before ending.

Although the water was running red-brown after our visit, it was far from the pungent orange of the original visit in 2014. Therefore, the combination of the new measures and care to avoid the deepest and most ochre-rich sections seem to have worked.

Unsupervised access remains discouraged while the settling bed establishes. Sadly, this is a very long waiting-game, and a single incident due to a careless group could see the mine closed for good. Once access does become possible, extreme care will be required by any visiting groups. It will be important to travel single file and always remembering the impact a visit is having. It will likely remain a permanent requirement not to enter Tinker's End (the left turn at the end of the entrance adit), but instead keeping right, taking the first opportunity to scramble up to the higher level on the left, rather than continuing at low level into the deepening ochre-laden water. Ultimately, patience, common sense and care will help to minimise the damaging discharge after a visit and will keep this mine open for periodic, controlled visits by future generations.

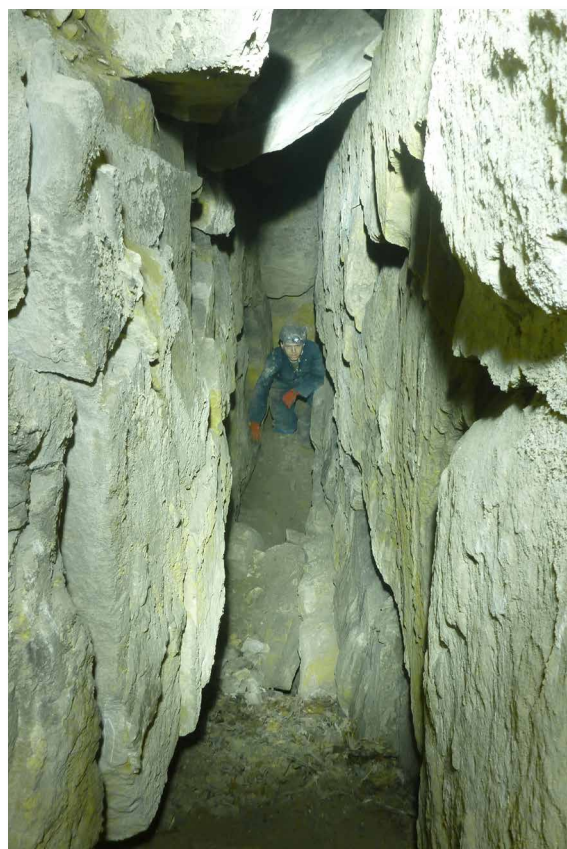
Minor Digs and Discoveries

Wass Bank Rift

SE 5615 7990

During a recce of the cliffs on the east side of Wass Bank on 1st August 2015, the ground-level entrance to a small slip rift was excavated Matt Ewles and Gary Douthwaite, to reveal an 8m long, 0.6m wide slip-rift passage with no continuation.

Wass Bank Rift



Snotterdale Holes

NZ 51319 012552 and NZ 51332 01212

On the northern edge of the Snotterdale Plantation, a series of holes were found. These are possibly due to movement of the hillside, but may be related to nearby jet workings. These were investigated in May 2015 but with no significant passage discovered. Further investigations may yield more interesting fissures in the area.

Two small holes at Snotterdale



Ayton Back Garden Cave

SE 9905 8525

A couple of years ago, Gary and Matt took a look at the sinks in Ayton. They were fairly remarkable, with a large quantity of water vanishing into the Yorkshire Water extraction facility as well as a few other nearby sinks. Digging these sinks would upset Yorkshire Water, but peering over a fence into the garden of the nearby house, they saw cave entrance in a limestone cliff. They called at the house, but nobody was home.

Fast forward a few years, and local NYMCC members called in and contacted the owner of what turned out to be a holiday home. He agreed to them having a preliminary look then (which was encouraging) and a return visit with a team for an initial dig.

On 28th December 2014, Andy, Chalky, Gary and Matt met in East Ayton and called in to see the chap and his brother who were keen to assist. The cave entrance is 5-6ft high and 4ft wide, and walking height for about 10ft in a passage parallel to the cliff face.

The two landowners were slightly alarmed by the appearance of a pickaxe, but thankfully a spade turned out to be quite adequate. We started digging down against the outer wall of the cave, looking for evidence of sinking water. A chilly hour passed, with one of the landowners (an archaeologist) examining all the finds: Mostly fragments of bone, brick, and a nice piece of asbestos. Then the lady of the house brought a tray of tea and cake, which was a fantastic treat to be nourished while defacing their back garden!

We soon got about 1m underground and it wasn't looking too hopeful. The true wall of the cliff appeared to undercut the cave and some rounded stream cobbles started to appear, then we hit rock. On clearing away the soil and debris, we found ourselves faced with what looked very much like a choked fissure running parallel with the cliff face.

This may be a fossil sink, with the cave above formed by sinking water. This sits about 4m above the current river level, and 20m from the active sinks. With no breakthrough imminent, we packed in for the day, and with the cottage soon going out to holiday lets, the dig had to be filled back in and we never returned.

We later found that we were not the first to examine this cavelet; In a report by Frank Rimington from several decades ago, he reports a donkey having been kept in the cave within 'living memory' and that the cave runs along a local fault. He ponders whether the subterranean eastward flow is a shadow of the course of the pre-glacial River Derwent before the glaciers forced it westwards to where it now meets the Ouse.

The mystery of the sinking water from the River Derwent, and whether there are any navigable cave passages, could be one for future generations.

The small cave in East Ayton being examined by YCC and NYMCC members.



Oooh Oooh Cave

SE 98706 86008

During a recce of various quarries up the Forge Valley, a small abandoned phreatic cave was located about 3m up the cliff face. A few sessions of clearing achieved a total length of about 4m in crawling height passage but ending in the usual way; totally choked up. A return session might achieve continuation if anyone was very bored in the future.

Oooh Oooh Cave (left),
and the rather small
passage inside (right).



Lizard Rift

SE 7065 8760 (approximately)

Note that the grid reference in Moorland Caver (2003) is 1km too far south!

In July 2015, we visited Lizard Rift. Coming down Young Bank Lane from Ravenswick towards the ford at the trout farm, a track heads off into the woods on the left, running above and parallel to the road below. After approximately 100-200m the obvious entrance to Lizard Rift is passed (an oil drum at the side of the track).

This is a decent-sized slip rift which provides several minutes of underground entertainment with a few fissures and 20m depth. We had a few evenings blasting the choked rift at the lowest point, but no progress was made, and the project was quickly abandoned in favour of a revisit to Yoadwath Cave, further along the track.

Yoadwath Cave

SE 7065 8770 (approximately)

A cave by this name is described in two totally different ways by two publications.

Pennine Underground reported Yoadwath Cave at SE 700885 in Green Houl (sic) Wood. After extensive searches, no cave anywhere near this location can be found, despite it supposedly containing “*three small chambers with very narrow pitches*” thus being of some substance. This is assumed not to exist, to be a very confused description of Lizard Rift, or maybe something else we have yet to find.

During July and August 2015, we revisited Yoadwath Cave (the one described in Moorland Caver). This is on the same track as Lizard Rift, about 100-200m further along towards Yoadwath. Here, there is a scramble down to a small cliff face (a handline is useful, belayed to a tree) and the cave entrance, which overlooks the buildings below.

Matt reported on progress one particularly well-attended Wednesday evening (5th August 2015):

A fine evening digging at Yoadwath Cave last night. This tiny cave, is little more than a rock shelter, overlooking the house at the bottom of Yoadwath Bank (only 10m up the cliff, 20m from their garden). Work started to examine this while people were poking about in Lizard Rift only 150m back along the track.

The cave runs into the embankment and has solid walls and roof for 5m to where a blank wall was the starting point for the work. Over the past few weeks, a pit has been excavated against this blank wall to reveal a good amount of water-worn limestone and tiny phreatic chutes radiating in all directions.

Work started quickly and in the usual fashion to rid the cave of its contents. This was pleasant, dry and warm digging, facilitated by a drag bucket to remove spoil and a handy cliff face to tip it off, creating an interesting new garden feature for the house (a bollocking is surely imminent).

Working in pairs, quick progress was made including the appearance of several voids in the water-worn limestone, although no draught. By the end of the night, progress down was hampered by an enormous rock. Therefore, the night ended with a reverberating echo around the valley.

With no draughts, there is no immediate excitement at Yoadwath Cave, but the quantity of water worn limestone is interesting. Is this an ancient sink or resurgence, or just a surface-exposed fissure. Time will tell!



The entrance to Yoadwath Cave with an exposed scramble down from the track above.

Unfortunately, a few more sessions at Yoadwath Cave failed to find anything of significance. The dig was soon abandoned in favour of better prospects.

Arden Moor and Blueberry Windypit

For reasons we cannot remember, but possibly linked to some interesting Lidar features, a few members of our team became interested in Arden Moor Estate near Hawnby, and the potential for new windypits and maybe even phreatic cave in the area.

During early 2016, several recce trips were held in the area. Of particular interest were an assortment of depressions on Dale Town Common, and a line of depressions across the fell flanking the public footpath around SE 506 894. This is 1km up-valley from Motts Hole and Gowerdale Windypit. One of these depressions contained a small stream



Stunning weather
on Arden Moor

which vanished along a too-narrow fissure. We recorded an exact grid reference for one hole of SE 50923 89576. Presumably the going didn't look that promising, as we didn't rush back. Nonetheless, the sub-surface geology of this area is limestone, so these holes are arguably proper shakeholes, a rarity in the North York Moors. Of similar note is an extensive outpouring of tufa at the head of Thorodale (around SE 499 915). Therefore, further prospecting may pay dividends in this area.

Further Lidar-guided prospecting identified a hole on North Moor, which during a recce trip was found to be covered with wire fencing and in need of a return trip with permission to explore. A few holes on Harker Yates Ridge were examined around SE 503 919 and SE 505 917 both of which were decent depressions but would need digging.

During Summer 2016, with permission from Arden Hall Estate, we spent a few days exploring. Several holes that had flagged up on lidar were investigated, although the only one yielding a discovery was the hole on North Moor (SE 51505 91549).

After a short amount of work, this hole was opened out and a scaffold pole was placed across as a belay and a ladder lobbed down for Matt to make the first descent. The opening was only a few feet wide but belled out into a loose rift 3.5m below the surface with a floor of loose crap. The rift continued underground to the east and west.

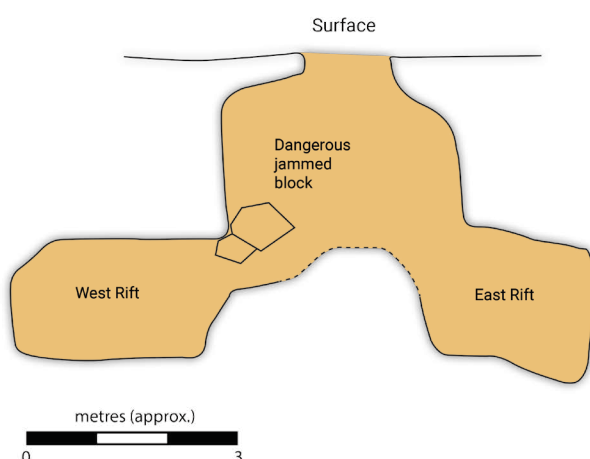
Blueberry Windypit
survey, BCRA Grade 2
(only a few compass and
distance measurements),
projected looking north.
SE 51505 91549

The western continuation involved a 2m drop under some precariously jammed blocks into a 60-80cm wide rift continuing for 3m. Some holes in the boulder floor showed little promise for greater depth to be gained. The eastern continuation was also a 2m drop

into a narrower (50cm) continuation for 2m. The total rift length of the entire windypit is around 8m, intersected in the middle by the surface collapse, and total depth is around 5m. Not a bad little find.

The new hole was named Blueberry Windypit, after the nearby Blueberry Woods. A video of Matt's first descent can be found on the YCC YouTube channel.

Other than this, nothing of any significance was found during our explorations of Arden Hall Estate, although we did 'rediscover' Eppy Head Holes, no doubt being the first visitors there in decades. We did enjoy some lovely views and a splendid walk.



Kirkdale Howl Cave, Commode-in-the-Hole and Wilmot's Palace

During winter 2015-2016, all attention turned to Kirkdale Howl, a valley upstream from Kirkdale Cave, with nice limestone cliffs and a great deal of potential for abandoned phreatic caves. A former BCRA publication dated 1976 details this area, in which MSG recorded several fissures in 'The Howl' and mentioned a small slip rift, which was too tight, and a 12ft section of cave on the opposite side of the ravine.

Clearly a closer search of this area was warranted.

The first visit was just before Christmas, when a team located Kirkdale Howl Cave in the eastern cliff. Being the largest opening on The Howl, this has surely been known for years and may be one of the caves noted by the MSG article. Chalky reports:

Kirkdale Howl Cave may provide some entertainment. The entrance enters a rift large enough to stand up in and appears to be located on a slip feature in the Malton Oolitic. There is a small tube leading off east which may provide some passage, and a small phreatic tube leads off under a ledge. Further exploration would require the assistance of chemical persuasion and the mammalian stink here was somewhat off-putting. Digging here may provide some badger or fox wrestling opportunities... Maybe best left alone!

On the same evening, our female Scottish member of the party, Rachel, took it upon herself to investigate a small feature located close to the cliff face some 20m north of Kirkdale Howl Cave. At this point Andrew and Mr Twigg decided to go and have a roam around the other cliff faces located in the valley. They returned after some time armed with a combo walking aid-toilet seat contraption. The device was immediately launched into the hole and one of them shouted 'Commode in the Hole', which became the name for this new cave. The angry jock was then forced to lie inside her discovery whilst the commode was rammed in front of her trapping her within.

Digging at Commode-in-the-Hole (SE 6748 8656) continued the following week, but no significant progress was achieved beyond a couple of metres.

The team continued their investigations after Christmas, as reported by Chalky:

After the 'festivities' of Christmas, feeding granny with turkey and sprouts, the tedium of being on 'holidays' was starting to take its toll. Hence, I had attempted to get anyone I knew to come out to play for a recce up to Kirkdale Howl to look for more of the BCRA-listed openings.



John Dale examining the enticing entrance of Kirkdale Howl Cave



Rachel Findlay enjoying Commode-in-the-Hole.



Wilmot's Palace



After scouring the cliff faces on the eastern side of the valley near to Com-mode in the Hole, we soon found a new opening, backfilled with rocks, no doubt to minimise the escape routes for local foxes. After spending half an hour enlarging the rift which contains flowstone walls we managed to peer round a left-handed corner and could see the continuation of the void, but much further work would be needed.

Whilst digging we could hear away in the distance the sound of crashing rocks and exclamations; "feck, drink, feck, arse". After being coerced from the dig by Andrew who remarked that John Dale, the old git, had obviously found something, we proceeded across to the western side of The Howl to where he was stood beaming in the gloom. Cripes, he had found something really interesting - A water worn rift, tight at the start but appearing to open out to around 3-4ft wide, by 4-5ft deep and continuing for over 20ft to where a slope and further void could be seen. The walls were fluted in sections and were covered in decent flowstone formations. After the removal of a few slabs, we thought the find would be best left for another night with more kit and the drill. The hole was covered and walled up.

The first find from this session on the eastern side was promptly overlooked in favour of the second, on the western side, which looked much more promising. A further visit in March 2016 gained entry as reported by Andy:

We removed blocks and then Sparky explored the first body-length of the cave. From here it was questionable whether this was a slip rift or a vadose passage. The dimensions were about 5ft high and 1-2ft wide. The walls were crusted in calcite and the rock was heavily fractured. After about 10ft the rift widened and heightened, and soon became hanging death. I pushed on, climbed over a wedged block and ducked beneath the hanging death to where it forced me to floor level. The ongoing passage (continuing in a straight line) appeared to have a mud ramp climbing several feet to further breakdown. It was here I retreated. JD however got to the mud ramp then disappeared up, returning to suggest that the mud was run in from above and the passage likely continued beyond the mud. For the next hour he began dismantling the loose rocks and established a way over the boulders. I then continued this work for a bit until the hanging death was almost gone. We then strategically disguised the hole and went to the pub.

A few further sessions at this new cave unfortunately failed to make progress through the mud at the far end, and we turned to better opportunities elsewhere. The walling at the entrance was eventually replaced with an antique chicken coop found on a nearby rubbish tip. The beautiful and enigmatic name of 'Wilmot's Palace' was coined from the branding on the ironmongery that now adorns the entrance.

Wilmot's Palace (SE 67395 86407) lies in the western cliff of Kirkdale Howl and is approached by following the path up The Howl until a rising path on the left leads back at an acute angle. This path is followed for a short while and Wilmot's Palace lies in the quarry face to the right.

In summary from our sessions at Kirkdale Howl, we have catalogued Kirkdale Howl Cave (the largest of all), and Commode in the Hole on the eastern side (as well as at least one other too-tight opening) and on the western side, we have found Wilmot's Palace. A systematic cataloguing of all openings along both cliff faces would be a useful exercise in the future. None of the caves are extensive, seldom more than 5-6m long, and none offer any immediate prospects, although patience and work might be rewarded.

Two Fruits Rift

a.k.a. Hill Fort Windypit II, SE 505 867

During a day out in January 2017 to look at Vista and Hill Fort Windypits, an opening was noticed in the cliff face directly underneath the Cleveland Way footpath, only 8m from Hill Fort Windypit. Tools to enlarge this sufficiently to gain access were lacking so this was postponed until a later date.

A return was made in October 2020, during a revisit to nearby Boltby Quarry Caves. We located the new hole opposite Hill Fort Windypit, and enlarged it enough for a descent. A 3m drop (ladder useful) under a wobbly jammed block dropped into a 50-60cm wide rift, 5m long. A narrow hole in the floor dropped a further 1.5m, but was a blind pit. There are no hopes for continuation here.

Unfortunately, this is just another of the ubiquitous undeveloped slip-rifts of the North York Moors. While Matt and Ian explored the new find (a process that took a matter of minutes), the rest of the team munched on some wild strawberries and the last of the season's blackberries, hence the name of this disappointing hole.

Chris Twigg (left) and
Ian Dawson (right)
supervising the first
descent of Two Fruits Rift
(Hill Fort Windypit II).



Shaken Bridge Windypit

SE 55564 87481

Reported by Chalky Thomas

Surprisingly enough, the NYMCC have yet again discovered a new Windypit!



Shaken Bridge Windypit

Original studies of the Old Byland area were conducted using Lidar data and several features were noted in the area. The data was passed on to the Farmer Relations Officer (Sparky), but as always, limited time meant we never looked at any of these.

Around June 2015, whilst nattering with one of his customers about windypits, a farmer disclosed to Sparky that there was a hole on his land in that area. I badgered Sparky for weeks and finally at the end of July, we thought it would be appropriate to go and check out some of the Lidar points of interest. Finding a filled-in windypit at one location, we thought we'd pop up and have a natter with the farmer at Shaken Bridge, Hawaby. After a discussion with the farmer, he happily agreed to show us his gaping hole.

The unnamed windypit lies in a hay meadow and is not visible until you are almost on it! Climbing out of the Landrover, the farmer explained that there may be some dead sheep in there that had 'fallen in'. He also explained that other nearby holes had been filled in over the last four decades, so the area is of definite interest.

We thanked him kindly and were left on top of the escarpment to do our worst.

After dropping into the six-foot hole and landing on a cone of dripping sheep and rubble I proceeded to clear a few loose rocks out of the way whilst Sparky closed the gate for the farmer. On his return I declared the hole safe and quickly climbed out retching and removing flies from my nostrils. Sparky proceeded to climb over the bloated carcasses and on down a slope into what appeared to be an open void. After a good look around, he declared that we would need to come back with proper kit.

A common sight in the North York Moors, much to the displeasure of many farmers.



The hole is a windypit feature, full of dead sheep, bones and a deer carcass. It drops to around 10ft depth via a slope into a rift around 3-4ft wide. Both walls seem very stable and are covered with calcite and flowstone. The farmer noted that snow melts around the area and smoke from my fags was blowing back out.

Over the following weeks an A-frame was established and lots of rubble removed (including the remnants of a landrover, registration PBB 895). Unfortunately, no further progress was made.

North York Moors Diggers

By John Dale

Many people seem confused about North York Moors Diggers, but it is very important to understand the correct procedure for keeping them. Nothing is more disturbing than seeing these fine creatures given as a Christmas present, only to be abandoned by New Years Day at the side of the Ingleton road.

You may have been to Hidden Earth and seen one that you liked (some do look quite cute and have interesting markings). But a mistake here could leave you with colossal holes in your lawn, not to mention the bar bills if you happen to choose the wrong one. In order to avoid problems here are answers to some frequently asked questions:

“We found a Moors Digger that we really liked, it’s great with the kids and always uses the litter tray, but it has recently become listless and bored?”

This is a common question often asked by new keepers, who nearly always fall into the trap of thinking a Digger’s diet is just nocturnal consumption of pub chips. It is essential to vary its diet with chicken nuggets or yorkshire puddings; this variety should ensure it looks forward to daytime meals. Boredom can also be alleviated by enriching their environment, by hiding toys such as dig buckets and rolls of duct tape for them to find. Failure to provide these general necessities often results in excessive bar bills.

“We managed to find a very rare ‘active-caving’ Moors Digger, but although it gets on well with our dog, it has taken to assembling scaffolding, emptying the fridge and marking its territory with beer bottles. Please help as we adore its pale colour and regional accent.”

Unfortunately these rare nocturnal Diggers need plenty of dark space in which to roam. The right habitat is also important. A blacked-out garden shed floored with turf and leaf litter is an excellent starting point; but do try to give it some basic equipment to keep it amused, for example an entrencher or a capping rod, something that it will mark as its own. You should also see an improvement by changing its diet to cider.

“My husband found an abandoned female Moors Digger at a rescue centre. She has lovely dyed blonde hair and hazel eyes but keeps eating the dog’s food and chasing postmen. I don’t want to have her put down as my Husband’s friends love her. She has now taken to coughing up Fairy Holes surveys and borrowing the DistoX at weekends. Where will it end?”

Females Diggers don’t have expensive habits but some suffer from sunburn and vertigo. Providing the correct club T-shirt is essential and a paid and up-to-date Starless River invoice will probably stop any excessive verbal discharge.

Next, we need to discuss how to look after your Moors Digger. Two excellent, but not well-known, books by Norbert Casteret are *“Care and Patronising of the Moors Digger”* and *“All that cold cave water and they still breed like rabbits”*, the latter being required reading for York University Cave and Pothole Club students.

The Inglesport “Excalibur Box” is now the accepted method for both transporting and exhibiting your prized Digger, due to having a wipe-clean chamber suitable for old age “follow through”. Always remember to have fun showing your acquisition, as there is a snobbishness creeping in at Hidden Earth. Some breeders are now arriving in purpose-built motorhomes with a hinged flap on the roof for exhibiting their specimen. This is going too far; a Dacia or Skoda being suitable, without appearing over-pretentious.

Remember not to leave your Moors Digger in the car in warm weather. They only smash the glass to get out and use your credit cards to buy beer and ice cream.

Since the rise in popularity of keeping Moors Diggers, many unscrupulous breeders have emerged and produced some quite horrifying tales of abuse and deformity through lack of good practice. Our undercover Starless River reporter, Ursula Undress, made enquiries to a southern breeder, purportedly offering pure bred “Brennans”. She found that an unsavoury character, a Mr Westlake, ran the organisation.

Ursula takes up the story....

Mr Westlake assured me on the phone that he had two good quality “Brennans” and that I should meet him on Sunday at the Northern Pennine Club hut. When I arrived, I was rather disconcerted as Mr Westlake was quite dishevelled, but in his defence I did notice a Chateaux Margaux stain on his lapel and he had clearly been snorting a good Stilton that morning.

Not one to judge on first appearances, I let him lead me to the NPC holding pens where my initial apprehension was justified. I just could not believe the state of the Diggers; my two “Brennans” were bedded on shredded Petzl catalogues with a listless glaze to their eyes and no leaf litter to keep their coats healthy. Two females were fighting over a single and out of date copy of Descent magazine, while another York cross-breed in faded university clothing was perched aimlessly in a corner. She had a spectacular regional Scottish accent and glossy ginger mustache hairs, but was in poor health, with empty Old Rosie bottles littering her bedding and shreds of oversuit strewn about. I simply could not leave her there.

By offering Honorary NYMCC Membership to Mr Westlake, I secured both her and a “Brennan”. I tried not to look back as I raced the mobile shop out of Ingleton, and vowed to expose this sham to all good breeders.

This is clearly a moving tale, and one must always be on ones guard when looking for a Moors Digger. An excellent indicator of a good pedigree is the ability to reliably discern between the Jet Shale and Iron Dogger geological layers.

Elsewhere, controversy still dogs the South Wales Caving Club hunt, where Moors Diggers are readied for the off. Recent years have seen few new caves discovered in the Welsh valleys; but hunt organisers remain optimistic; “*If the Moors Diggers can smell ‘em, they’ll find ‘em. Don’t matter ‘ow ‘ard they a’ve t’ dig*”, stated an official.

The hunt organisers later confirmed that they had lost control of the pack. “*But it’s the scent of the caves...drives ‘em to a frenzy, an they’re not used to havin’ underwear and clean cutlery likes what you or I would ‘ave*”. The final total of six new caves and three

dead cyclists pleased the organisers no end. *“Yup, people say ‘ow it aint humane, even cruel to hunt with Moors Diggers, but I says there aint no happier sight than a Digger, drivin back covered in cyclist blood with a fresh cave survey gently gripped in it’s fingers. You town people don’t understand country ways. The Scarbrough club was huntin’ with Diggers before youn were born... it’s just traditional.”*

More ghastly news reached the BCA this week, when Hidden Earth was cancelled shortly before opening, after a rehabilitated Digger was crushed under the wheels of a CRO Land Rover. *“I could not believe it,”* an eyewitness stated. *“He caught a glimpse of the Inglesport stall and was so excited that he ran straight into the path of the vehicle”.*

The CDG’s southern correspondent, Martyn Fur, writes that his male Digger seems to have developed Parkinsons. *“He just can’t keep his hand still, he’s always fiddling about and disappearing off for half an hour. It’s got so bad that I need a wallpaper scraper just to open my Descent magazines. Please help, as his eyesight is now affected and he keeps bumping into furniture, it’s just so distressing.”* This seems to be a side effect of Covid 19 lockdowns and many Moors Diggers are suffering from this. Plenty of cold and wet trips and a little sump diving reduces the problem to a manageable level.

Feral Diggers are also becoming a problem. You often catch a glimpse of these around Screwfix catalogues or at explosive stores. Bang fumes have proved effective in keeping the population down in the past. But they are now abusing it, even free-basing it with Hilti Cap discharge. One of the first symptoms of substance abuse is a strong desire to get involved with National Caving Bodies. Physical contact with Feral Diggers diagnosed with this affliction is to be avoided as their spoor is quite pungent during the voting season and it permanently stains the carpets.

As more and more Moors Diggers are being abandoned by their callous owners in the Mendips, Christine Grossfart is leading a campaign to highlight the problem. *“Really, it’s quite obscene. Mendip cavers acquire these beautiful creatures, then totally ignore their behavioural qualities. Why, I recovered a totally charming Moors Digger from a caver in Cheddar who refused to care for it because it bivied and shat in his garden whilst the neighbours were having a barbeque. He was only marking his territory!”*

Since settling in with Christine on her 100-acre estate near Wookey Hole, her Digger has thrived and shows little sign of his previous abuse. Though he sometimes disappears for days on end, usually after logging onto UKClimbing.

The amphibious Moors Diggers are now the pinnacle of ownership but require very high maintenance and a CDG membership card. An adequate environment can be achieved using a large water butt (with tightly fitting lid) three quarters filled with floodwater and topped up with farm slurry. They generally thrive in this environment but are prone to boredom. This can be alleviated by submerging a handful of scaffold clamps and hitting the outside randomly with a scaffold pole to simulate underwater explosions.

It is a sad fact that the availability of future Moors Diggers is likely to be restricted, as the Northern Dales have now seen the near extinction of free roaming herds due to the advent of Whatsapp and Zoom. This is compounded by a threat to breeding habitat as Kirkdale Cave becomes ever more popular with tourists, leaving them only Excalibur Pot in which to procreate; a miserable choice indeed!

On Leck Fell the Wind Blows

Is this a carbide lamp
Is this the YCC
Caught in a rockfall
No escape from the gravity
Open your eyes, look up the aven and see
That's just a Moldywarp, don't need no SRT
Ladder come, ladder go
Little climb, little crawl
On Leck Fell the Wind Blows, doesn't really matter – To me

Matthew; just killed a man
Put a rack into his hand
Threaded badly, now he's panned
Matthew; the trip had just begun
And now you've gone and thrown it all away
Matthew: oooooo-oooooh
I made Chalky cry
And Laura will be back later this evening
Carry on, carry on, even though your knees hurt

Too late, the pub has closed
Sends shivers down my spine
Body's aching all the time
Goodbye everybody, Richards going to go
Going to leave a turd behind and face the truth
Gary: ooooooo-oooooh
He's got Weil's disease
I sometimes wish I'd never been to Mendip at all
Carry on, carry on, even though your knees hurt

I'm just a Moldywarp - the NPC loves me
He's just a Moldywarp from a mole family
Spare him his life from the NYMCC

I see a little silhouetto of a man
Sparky-Sparky - will you do the bloody capping
Thunderbolt and lightning: very (very) frightening me
Mongo Gillo – Mongo Gillo – Mongo Gillo – Mongo Gillo
Mongo Gillo to Stump Cross – Magnifico!

Caves will come, squeezes go, will they let him go...
Hammer – no we will not let him go
Quaking – no we will not let him go
Gingling – no we will not let him go
Mama Mia, Mama Mia
Bull Pot of the Witches, has a devil put aside for me – For me (for me)

Top Sink you can stone me and drip in my eye
Marble Sink you can hold me and leave me to die
Oh Gary; don't do that to me Gary!
Just gotta get out
just gotta get right out of this cave

Caving really matters, YCC can see
Caving really matters - To me...

On Leck Fell the Wind Blows...

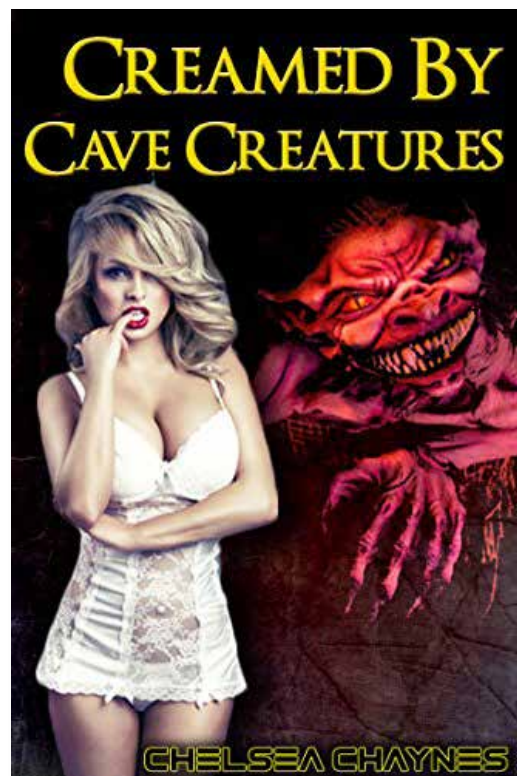
Book Review

“Creamed by the Cave Creatures” by Chelsea Chaynes

Reviewed by John Dale

“Creamed by the Cave Creatures” is a Kindle e-book that was “accidently” found whilst searching Amazon for interesting and wholesome caving literature.

It is stated that all names, places and incidents are the “product of the author’s imagination”. Unfortunately, Chelsea’s quote that *“any resemblance to actual persons is entirely coincidental”* would be strongly challenged by some YCC and NYMCC members. The front cover photograph is of high quality, but it is clear that Ursula at Starless River severely misunderstood Chelsea’s meaning of *“A Nice Little Outfit”*; It being fairly obvious that clothing unsuitable to the underground environment and likely to result in hypothermia, is being worn.



Chapter One: Into the Cave I go

Chapter one finds Chelsea in South America as part of her “doctorate in underground ecological systems”. It was heartening to see Cave Science in what is clearly a layman text. However, it was a concern that NYMCC’s Andy Brennan, our resident bat expert, may be involved with Chelsea due to her academic interests. These initial fears proved to be well founded when we are subsequently informed that she was solo caving due to her usual caving partner being *“ill as a result of a bad curry”* the evening before.

Her initial descent into the cave also highlights Chelsea’s poor training, in that a chiseled anchor loop (clearly not CNCC-approved) is used in conjunction with a climbing rope (where a semi-static rope would have clearly been the safer option). It is also of note, that despite clear academic leanings, her knowledge of hydrology is limited, as she states that the water in the cave sinks into granite.

Chelsea then becomes stuck for some considerable time, prompting suspicions that the author has indeed been involved with York University Cave and Pothole Club (YUCPC) in the past. Rescue ensues and the *“stench of breath”* suggests that the NYMCC members were also in attendance. This is confirmed when grunting and growling is heard as the rescuers circle poor Chelsea’s helplessly stuck body.

Chapter Two: Taken by the Cave Creatures

Chapter two forms the main technical interest in Chelsea’s trip report. Yet again, inappropriate clothing becomes apparent when we find Chelsea removing restrictive underwear, when clearly she should have worn the more robust fare of powerstretch undersuit and ladies AV oversuit. A very bad choice of illumination becomes obvious when her

light flakes out and a cardinal sin emerges that she is solo caving without carrying spare batteries! Frankly, I found myself having very little sympathy for her predicament.

This predicament rapidly escalates into a smorgasbord of confusing references across the caving scene and this chapter becomes very difficult to follow as a result. We seem to find our heroine starting at The Fanny in Jenga Pot, then moving onto Pussy Pitch in Ireby Fell Caverns, and finally Allt Nan Uamh Stream (ANUS) cave, thus transporting her miraculously from Ryedale to Assynt in a matter of minutes, thus covering YCC's many caving trips and prompting further suspicions about the author's real name.

Finally, it becomes rather obvious that the cave she is exploring is actually a hypogenic Mine Cave, as large veins are brought into the storyline as she gasps for air due to lack of oxygen and becomes dripping wet, the latter undoubtedly due to the deficiencies of Starless River's *"Nice Little Outfit"* as noted previously.

Chapter Three: Escape

In this penultimate chapter, we find her *"scraped pretty badly"*, a condition that is entirely understandable, given her inadequate clothing and lack of kneepads. Furthermore, Chelsea is clearly not Mine Aware, as she precipitates a rock-fall that propels her into the sump. Here she faces the agonising decision of whether to return to the clutches of the NYMCC or free-dive a sump of unknown length, whose description sounds uncannily like The Font in Bogg Hall. She makes the sensible choice and free-dives to safety, despite the visibility being severely reduced *"by a mixture of algae and semen"*.

Chapter Four: Fallout

In this final chapter, Chelsea finds herself back at (York?) University; working on her dissertation. Using test tubes and microscopes our protagonist scientifically analyses herself to find five different genomes of hybrid cave creature spawn. This discovery serves as an ample reminder of the dangers of aqueous caving!

Ultimately, we find Chelsea giving birth and her "Cave Creature" offspring disappearing into The Sewer. This represents a final link to North York Moors caving with respect to Jenga Pot's Sewer. The obvious conclusion is that the author must be an YCC club member writing under a pseudonym.

Further detailed research into other publications by Chelsea Chaynes reveals a second book *"Mastered by Vikings"* which adds weight of evidence to this theory.

Conclusion

In review, *"Creamed by the Cave Creatures"* is an entertaining mismatch of NYMCC, YCC and YUCPC exploits and characters that is somewhat fettered by serious technical inaccuracies. The target audience appears very inclusive of both ladies and gentlemen; but those new to the sport may develop unreasonable expectations as to the adventurous nature of caving. Furthermore, cavalier attitudes to personal safety coupled with the use of inadequate equipment, forms such a foundation to the discourse that its use as a training manual for the inexperienced is highly inadvisable.



YCC / NYMCC pre-christmas meal jet mine trip, 2017



YCC / NYMCC, plus CMHS pre-christmas meal trip to Sil Howe Whinstone Mine, 2018