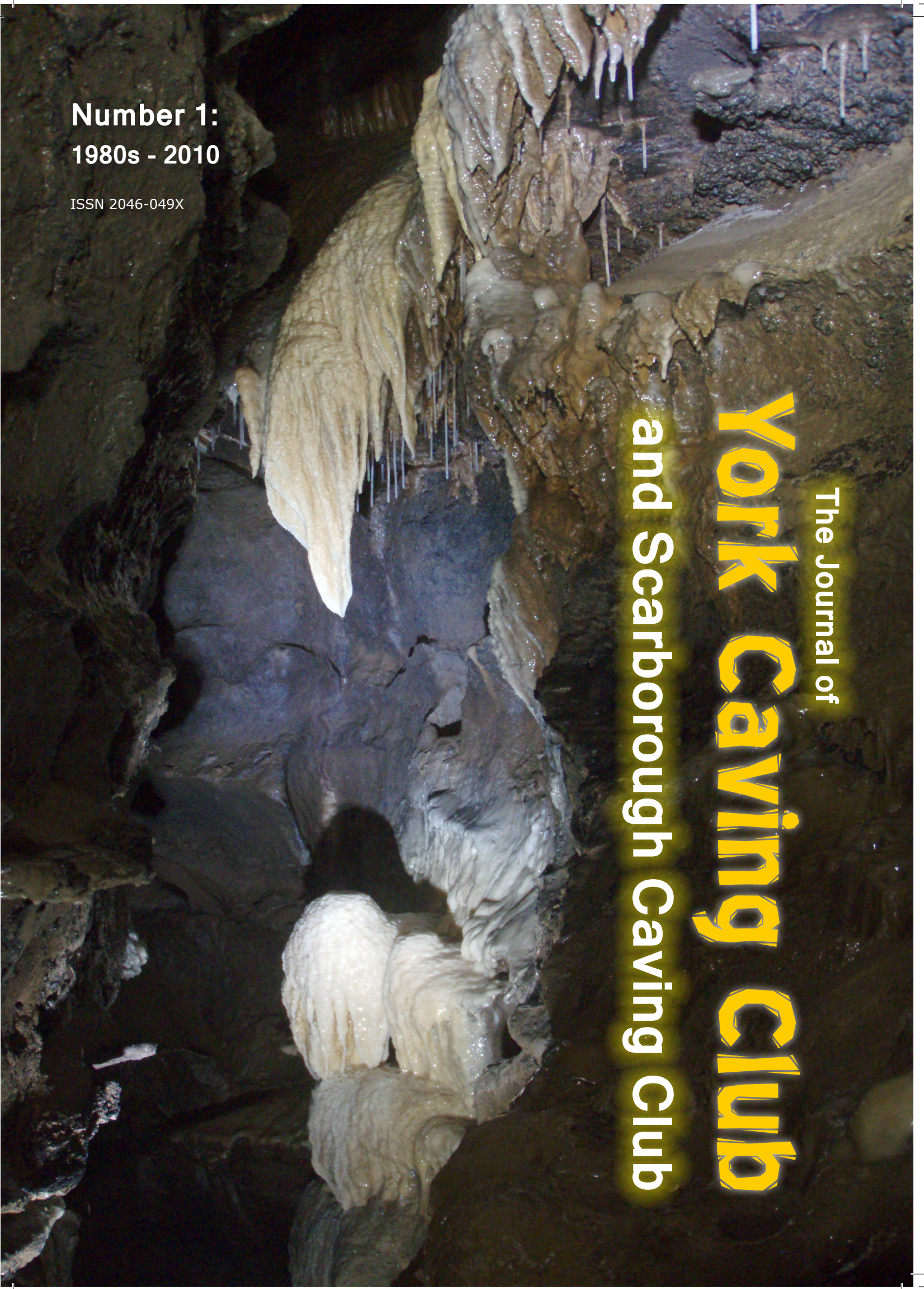


**Number 1:  
1980s - 2010**

ISSN 2046-049X

The Journal of  
**York Caving Club**  
and Scarborough Caving Club







The Journal of

# York Caving Club and Scarborough Caving Club

(Now North York Moors Caving Club)

## Journal 1: 1980s to 2010

Including the history of cave exploration in the North Yorkshire Moors, the clubs involved, and the recent discoveries at Excalibur Pot and the surrounding areas.

Edited by Matt Ewles and Gary Douthwaite.

Cover photo: formations in the Main Streamway, Excalibur Pot.  
Photo by Gary Douthwaite.

Published and printed by York Caving Club.

[www.yorkcavingclub.org.uk](http://www.yorkcavingclub.org.uk)

First published 2010.

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ISSN 2046-049X

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The North York Moors Caving Club (formerly Scarborough Caving Club) beer-mat survey of Guinevere's Slit, a newly discovered section of river passage underneath the River Dove.

All other surveys in this Journal (except Bogg Hall & The Well)  
© 2010 York Caving Club.

A classic example of the differences between our two clubs!



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# Forward

All cave discoveries are exciting - first of all to those directly involved, who get the pain and the glory, then to those who get to share the news, first to the select circle 'in the know' and eventually to the wider interested public. Many such finds are however simply 'filling in the gaps' - finding what we more or less knew was there anyway. Others - a few - are of much greater significance, because they are unexpected. They shake our knowledge of the geology, hydrology and geomorphology of a whole area.

The finding of Excalibur Pot is one such. What a way to put North-East Yorkshire on the speleological map! It was unexpected. The Corallian limestone on the northern flanks of the Vale of Pickering is in places barely a limestone; long ago I was practising geological mapping there, and the students' moan was that they did not know what to call the rock, was it a sandy limestone or a limy sandstone? In one place it was one, in another the other; 'facies change' I believe the term was! Caves? There were a few little ones; fighting through nettles in disused quarries to gain a ten-metre grovel through badger droppings, then wriggling out backwards because there was no room to turn round - you know the sort of place. For the connoisseur only (and, yes, there are some of us). More entertaining were the windypits, and they were actually tectonic slip rifts, nothing to do with the rock being limestone at all. Nevertheless, some of us dreamed....

The optimists had been around a while. A strange little pothole, Dowson Pot, near Hutton le Hole, had been poked at by local enthusiasts - notably Raymond Hayes - sixty or seventy years ago, but they never got more than a few metres down (read all about it in the 1942 'British Caver', vol.9, if you still have your copy on the shelf). Thirty years later I got to know the area, when working at the University of Hull in the late 1970s; Kev Solman and I visited every known cavelet in the area, and in turn came to root around in Dowson Pot. He was a keen entomologist and excited by the hibernating Peacock butterflies there, but I saw the circular water-worn shaft, and knew that Hutton Beck sank not far away, and wondered... could there be a proper cave beneath? A real limestone cave, with winding streamways, scalloped rock, roaring water, spacious gloom? Or did the streams and rivers that sank in the Corallian simply slither off into impenetrable bedding planes, or filter away through anastomosing mazes of tiny tubes? It is the 'ifs and maybes' that lure you on; it was all a night-time fantasy for a caver on the edge of sleep.

For us, it was not to be. We surveyed a few speleo-oddments, found a few new rifts in windypits, explored some intriguing old mines. The North York Moors are a great place for lots of reasons, subtly different in a thousand ways from cave country elsewhere. We stumbled into new caves in other parts of the country, but not here. 'Leave it for the next generation' we said.

Another thirty years rolled past, and the next generation came and they did us - the caving community (which I am assuming, dear reader, you are part of) - proud. What happened you can read about in the following pages. Dowson Pot had been - almost - the place. It was not a walk-in job; they had to hit the ground hard, but it yielded. Yes, there was a real cave, and a glorious one it turned out to be. Its exploration and survey have been handled in a remarkably competent and professional way, a model for any cavers



who have the high privilege of being involved in such things. But, as regards the River Caves of North East Yorkshire, this is only the beginning.

It could be frustrating, to read about what one almost but not-quite found, (we came even closer elsewhere, but that is another story), but in reality it is nothing but pleasure. Sitting by a roaring fire on a winter night, mug of hot chocolate in hand, cat on knee, perusing the survey and reading of the discomfort and privations of the bold explorers... this is bliss.

Enjoy.

Pete Ryder (Moldywarps Speleo Group) December 2010

# History

## History of York Caving Club

By Matt Ewles (York Caving Club Chairman 2008 - present).

York Caving Club came together during late 2008 and was officially founded in January 2009 by Matt Ewles, Gary Douthwaite, Laura Bennett, Ade Turner and Tash Durham, all long-serving members of York University Cave and Pothole Club (YUCPC). The club was founded owing to the perceived need for a second caving club in York to provide for the growing numbers of non-student (and former student) cavers.

Initially as just the five founding members, our first trip was to Growling Hole on East Kingsdale - this wasn't the most successful trip, as high water levels forced us to turn around before reaching the first pitch! Several more successful trips followed, including weekends away in North Wales and at Helwith Bridge. By the end of 2009 we had gained several more members, and we had a fantastic Christmas meal in our adopted digging playground; the North Yorkshire Moors national park. This year has so far seen trips to County Clare, South Wales and Durmitor in Montenegro, plus several very enjoyable day trips, all of which are detailed in our diary and trip reports at the back of this journal. The club has also grown significantly, so thank you for your support!

Although our focus is on sporting caving, we have a dedicated digging group, and it is through this side of our club that we have had the pleasure and privilege of making some great discoveries with our friends from Scarborough Caving Club (SCC). The Scarborough guys have been active cave explorers for many years. Both clubs have brought different skills and experience to projects we have been jointly involved in, and neither would have been able to make the discoveries reported here independently.

This journal differs from many caving club journals - because not only will you find the usual complement of reports, surveys and discoveries, but also a collection of digging records, compiled both from reports written at the time of the work, and also from retrospective memoirs from several members of both clubs. Although these extensive and sometimes personalised reports may seem quite lengthy and perhaps too detailed for those reading for scientific reference purposes, we feel that they allow us to inject our personalities into the written records - after all, digging is as much about the social and the fond memories as it is about the discovery. During our early days of digging we were inspired by the informative, witty and enjoyable publications of the Moldywarps Speleological Group (MSG), who have been exploring the minor caving areas (mainly the Northern Dales, but also the North Yorkshire Moors, where they made several great discoveries) for over four decades. Their tales of exploration has strengthened my personal interest in digging and has inspired us to ensure that our dig reports also make for interesting and inspirational reading for future prospective diggers.

## History of Scarborough Caving Club

Scarborough Caving Club (SCC) has been part of the caving scene for nearly two decades, although the 1990s saw the club at it's most active, when they were having regular sporting trips, holidays and digging projects across Yorkshire and even overseas.



Scarborough members have made a huge contribution to North Yorkshire Moors cave exploration. The club can credit itself with the discovery of Eastfield Quarry Caves, Not Oxendale Windypit, Lizard Rift and Vista Windypit amongst others, plus extensions to many of the known caves and windypits of the area. However, the biggest Scarborough find came in the 1990s with the discovery of the superb slip rift 'Old Fat and Past It Pot' near Pickering. At around the same time, Scarborough members were also the main diggers at Bogg Hall Rising (which had been previously discovered by current SCC member Richard Wilsdon) and later they had several digs at Hutton Beck, which although unfruitful, set the scene for the later discoveries reported in this journal.

After the turn of the millennium SCC became less involved in sporting caving, as their numbers dwindled (with houses, marriage, family and advancing age usually being to blame) and digging became their main focus. Unfortunately the club was almost dormant by the middle of the decade, but was soon re-established during 2006-2007 (partly spurred on by the revived interest in digging at Hutton Beck by York members Matt and Gary). Our two clubs are now friends and weekly digging partners, and some Scarborough members are even persuaded onto the occasional sporting trip!

Scarborough Caving Club therefore once again became an active club, though mainly focused on digging, and has recently (2010) changed its name to the North York Moors Caving Club to reflect the fact that few of the members live or cave in Scarborough any more. However, as most of the explorations detailed here predate the name change, the club is referred to as Scarborough Caving Club throughout this journal.

## **History of Exploration in the North Yorkshire Moors**

The North Yorkshire Moors are a beautiful national park, which provides a paradise to walkers and cyclists, with vast areas of heather moorland and rolling hills, glacial river valleys and dales, sprawling forests, picture-postcard villages, reservoirs and abandoned mines. However, the area has always been of less interest to cavers, despite the expanse of Jurassic limestone across the southern boundary of the national park (running from Thirsk to Scarborough), which dominates the geology and hydrology of the area.

Until recently there were only a few known phreatic caves (and prior to the discovery of Excalibur Pot, Bogg Hall Rising was the only active one), although relics of their once greater presence are easily found throughout the area. Kirkdale Cave at Kirkbymoorside is a 400 m long muddy fossil phreatic system, originally discovered by quarrying and famous for the exotic animal bones found there over a century ago. Other short fossil phreatic caves have also been found nearby, suggesting that phreatic cave development was once in abundance on the moors. These caves are now choked up with mud washed in during recent ice ages, and digging at them has yielded little progress towards identifying the larger systems that may have once populated the limestone in this area.

Visiting cavers instead get their jollies from the far more abundant slip rifts (windypits), where natural fissures formed by land slippage have become open to the surface. These extensive networks of fissures are often hundreds of metres long and up to 30 m deep and provide an entertaining day out, particularly as most of the day will involve finding them in the undergrowth! Unfortunately our ancient ancestors found them very interesting too, as places of both residence and burial, and therefore the archaeological finds have put many of them strictly out of bounds to the caving community. Nonetheless, in the last few decades, new finds such as Old Fat And Past It Pot (discovered by Scarbor-

ough Caving Club) have added to the complement of excellent (and non-archaeologically sensitive) slip rifts in the area. Cavers today trickle in now and again, armed with their ladders, lifelines, and clutching a copy of the local guidebook, *Moorland Caver* (Gibbs and Stewart 2003, a must-read for any local small cave enthusiast).

Sinks and risings are abundant across the area, and in 1981, Richard Wilsdon and Neil Hanan (then of Scunthorpe Caving Club) took the first steps to finding active cave by passing two sumps to enter Bogg Hall Rising in the River Dove less than a mile from Kirkbymoorside. Beyond these sumps they explored over 200 m of very wet cave, including a short but spacious stomping river passage, a first for the area! Unfortunately their game was over when after a few hundred metres, the cave abruptly terminated at a deep sump pool (The Font), bringing water up from the depths - at least 18 m - to which divers have not yet been able to reach any final conclusions. The search was therefore now on for the master cave supplying the water to Bogg Hall Rising.

The source of this water was suspected to be primarily the sinks upstream in the River Dove, but also partly the sinks in Hutton Beck, a mile to the north and in the next valley to the east. Tales were told locally of Bogg Hall bellowing cloudy water only a few hours after cement was accidentally dropped into Hutton Beck during bridge building works many years ago. This provoked speculation that an active cave system might span the two valleys and cover the mile or so between the Hutton Beck sinks and Bogg Hall Rising. However, the search would now take 25 years before yielding Excalibur Pot.

Hutton Beck sinks at several locations near the bridge to Lingmoor Farm. Scarborough Caving Club undertook a number of prolonged digs at the usually dry downstream sinks during the late 1990s. Unfortunately one of the main problems was the tendency of frequent flooding of Hutton Beck to destroy any unprotected digs in the streambed. Their later efforts instead focused on two nearby fossil caves, Lingmoor Cave and Dowson Pot, found in the cliff several metres above the bottom of the Hutton Beck valley. These were dug by the Scarborough cavers during the 1990s until around 2003, however, they didn't find any signs to suggest that there might be more cave passage nearby, and soon after this the club went into dormancy and digging stopped.

York Caving Club's involvement in the area actually came prior to the formation of the club, in 2006 when Matt Ewles and Gary Douthwaite (future founder members) were in search of an alternative summer expedition to the university caving clubs planned trip to Montenegro. During a trip to recce the North Yorkshire Moors for caving potential, we had a chance meeting with Richard Wilsdon, the original explorer of Bogg Hall Rising, and active Scarborough digger. He told us of their former digs and suggested that if we had the enthusiasm, we could always try our hand digging at Hutton Beck.

We arranged permission and dates to examine several potential dig sites across the area. We started with three tough weekends digging at Manor Vale Caves (reported later), but we soon gave up and moved onto Hutton Beck. Within weeks this dig soon looked like it might offer some potential, and so ongoing access was negotiated with the landowner. Within only six weekends of digging here (joined by Scarborough Caving Club diggers Andy Brennan, Chalky Thomas and Richard Wilsdon) we broke through into Excalibur Pot. Scarborough Caving Club were therefore once again active, and working with York Caving Club, have now become the most dominant group in moorland cave exploration. Several joint digging projects have since followed, including those reported here.



Excalibur now stands at one mile in length, with a superb main streamway passage, excellent formations and several promising digs. We have also now definitively confirmed that the water resurging at Bogg Hall Rising is, at least in part, that sinking from Hutton Beck. However, the big question that remains is whether the Excalibur and Bogg Hall system is unique to the area? Maybe not, as several other rivers are known to sink on the Jurassic limestone, including the nearby River Rye, River Dove (of which, more later) and Hodge Beck (next to Kirkdale Cave). Unlike the Dales however, the usual tell-tale signs of caves are much harder to spot, with no more obvious roaring swallets, natural surface entrances and definitely no shakeholes. Nonetheless, even without any further discoveries, we are pleased to say that the North Yorkshire Moors now provides an excellent weekend venue for any caving club, and a must-visit place for all those cave-collectors wanting to go somewhere different.



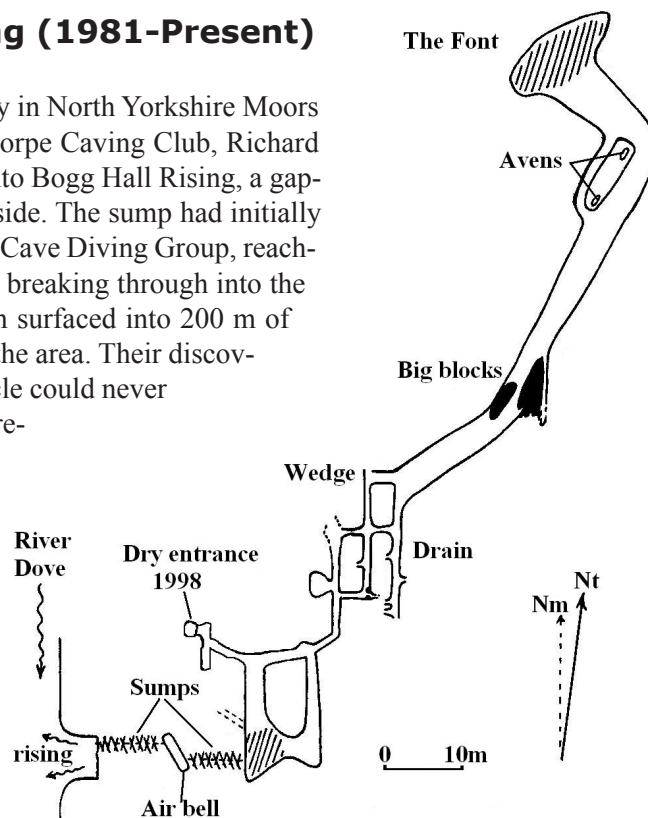
Approximate area map showing the caves referenced in this journal.

# Bogg Hall Rising

## The Exploration of Bogg Hall Rising (1981-Present)

Arguably the most significant and sporting discovery in North Yorkshire Moors caving came in 1981 when two members of Scunthorpe Caving Club, Richard Wilsdon and Neil Hanan performed the first dives into Bogg Hall Rising, a gaping resurgence in the River Dove near Kirkbymoorside. The sump had initially been investigated by Shackleton and Griffiths of the Cave Diving Group, reaching a small air bell after several metres, but without breaking through into the cave. Diving further, the Scunthorpe explorers soon surfaced into 200 m of very wet and active cave passage, a unique find for the area. Their discovery is documented in Descent 53, however, this article could never have predicted the significance of Bogg Hall with respect the discovery of Excalibur Pot 26 years later.

As the Bogg Hall discovery was such a turning point for cave exploration in the area, it seems appropriate that this should be the first chapter of exploration in our journal. The following reports detail all the work that has been done at Bogg Hall since the initial discovery, including the diving efforts at The Font sump, the excavation of a dry entrance, and recent digging efforts beyond The Font.



The 1981 Scunthorpe Caving Club survey of Bogg Hall Rising by N. Hanan and R. Wilsdon, showing the 1998 Scarborough Caving Club addition of the 'Oh My Ears And Whiskers' entrance.

The surveyors describe this as a rough survey with no BCRA grade being stated.

Resurveying of Bogg Hall Rising is currently ongoing by Matt Ewles, Gary Douthwaite and Nick Warburton and will be reported in the next journal.

## 'Oh My Ears and Whiskers' - The Bogg Hall Dry Entrance

Bogg Hall was originally only accessible to divers willing to pass the two short sumps at the resurgence. However, in 1998, Scarborough members dug an entrance to allow non-divers to explore the cave for the first time. The following report of this work is adapted from the Scarborough Caving Club 1998 newsletter by Andy Brennan.

*The dives at Bogg Hall started many moons ago (actually 1981 when I was one year old) when a few members of the Scunthorpe Caving Club decided to dive into the cave. Years later, one of these cavers (Richard Wilsdon) was taken by Scarborough cavers into their new extension of Kirkdale Cave. Richard (who didn't much like the mud in Kirkdale), told us stories of how Bogg Hall was a real cave! A small diving team was formed with Jerry Gibbs and Nial Adams. They dived into Bogg Hall three or four times to re-line the sumps and to continue with the exploration of The Font. Later, Neil Hanan, another of the original Scunthorpe cavers, joined the team. He was keen to dive The Font again, and so he did! At around the same time I decided to try my luck at cave diving. On my first attempt I dived quite confidently to the air bell, then after being told about the possibilities of getting stuck in the second sump I turned back. This opened few eyes but the question was asked, 'Why can only divers get in?'*



*The next time we dived, I made it through both sumps and received the guided tour. Jerry took his dive reel and explored a direct route through which bypassed the air bell. We played about in the cave until I turned blue and we were just about to dive out when Richard noticed a rift that seemed to rise quite high above the de-kitting area near the entrance sumps. We dived out and asked the cold and bored surface party the question, 'Why can only divers get in?'*

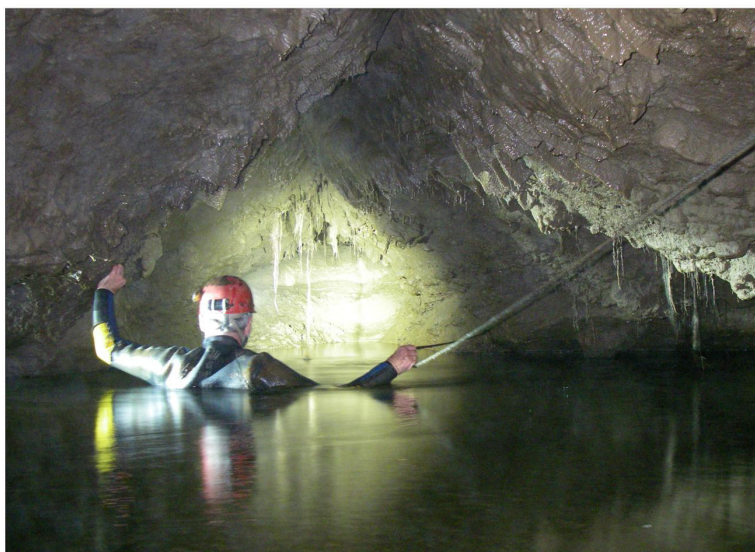
*Next time, Richard had got hold of a ferret tracker which was tied to some bamboo canes and poked up to the top of the rift. Outside, the surface party could not pick up the signal. The rift was obviously not close enough to the surface and a campaign was launched to climb it. Diving continued even when the river was in flood, and digging concentrated on the rift. Armed with a crowbar we worked our way upwards until eventually we came up into a sort of mud passage. Digging here, Jerry found a small chamber with a roof formed from a dome of clay and the odd root. We knew we must now be close to the surface!*

*The ferret tracker was borrowed again and further technology was deployed in the form of walkie talkies. The plan was to have two surface diggers, Richard and Peter (Fambely), while Nial, Neil and I dived in. We were to try to make radio contact, and if this worked we were to zero in to the right area by switching to a set of children's walkie-talkies. Finally we would attempt to use the ferret tracker to get a precise pin-point. On the way in I had quite an unpleasant experience. I was diving the second sump when my regulator started to flood and I couldn't clear it. After what seemed to be an eternity of breathing off the purge while my life flashed in front of me I found my other regulator. But things got worse before they got better, I had lost the hand line! Again while the rest of my life flashed in front of me (which was quite nice) I found the line with my foot and hauled myself out of the last three feet of the sump.*

*After de-kitting we all headed up the rift. I went first to take my mind off the near death experience I'd just had. I climbed into the small mud chamber and took out the walkie talkie. I turned it on and shouted into it, and*

*the voice of some old man replied 'HELLO CAVER' - it was Richard! By this time Nial and Neil were behind me in the mud passage. After a brief conversation with the surface I gave up my front line position to Nial while I crawled into a corner. Nial laid there and placed the ferret tracker while Neil and I listened to the messages for about an hour. Meanwhile on top Richard and Peter were digging and we could hear the banging of the bar in the rift. I decided I should go out as I was in shock and Neil said he would go with me.*

Richard Wilsdon at the far side of the Bogg Hall entrance sump. Photo by Richard Wilsdon.



*We left Nial digging in the rift while we dived out. It took some courage but I did it. I waited in the air bell for Neil but he didn't show up, but then all of a sudden a load of bubbles and lights appeared behind me from the first sump. At first I thought it was Neil, and as I said to the diver 'Who the hell are you?' He moved his lights from my eyes and it was Richard. Shortly afterwards Neil arrived having taken three or four attempts to get into the sump because the equipment he was carrying was so buoyant. Neil and I continued out while Richard proceeded into the cave. For the next three or four hours Nial and Richard lay digging in the rift, while Neil, Peter and myself were digging on the surface. We could hear the constant tippy-tappy sound of the cavers below playing with their crowbars below, so we knew we were close! We constantly hammered the six foot bar into the ground with the aid of a sledge hammer, hoping to impale a caver, but it always got stuck. Nial suggested we try to make a vocal connection, so they shouted but we heard nothing. Then we decided to try again, so like badger baiters who'd forgot their shovels we stood shouting down a hole in the ground. Surprisingly this sort of madness paid off and they could hear us! While they kitted up and dived out we spent another hour digging.*



Richard Wilsdon at The Font sump pool in Bogg Hall Rising. Photo by Richard Wilsdon.

*The next time we returned we decided there was no need for anyone to dive as we were armed with Chalky Thomas, who jumped straight into the hole and seemed to double the size in a matter of minutes. We all carried on digging and between Chalky, Jerry, Peter, Richard, Shaun (Aconley) and I we got another few feet down by the end of the evening. We were about to call it a night and go to the pub when I suggested we drop the bar into the hole (I was only joking around). But when we dropped the bar it disappeared and Richard only just caught it! Everyone stood in silence for a second, then Richard shouted 'WE'RE IN' and somehow managed to make a rabbit sized hole in seconds. The next thing we knew Richard had jumped in and Chalky closely followed. Richard went for a celebratory dip in the river passage while Chalky sat on a rock.*

*And the name of the new dry entrance? When Alice fell down the rabbit hole she landed at the bottom of a deep shaft on a pile of sticks and dry leaves. The White Rabbit was hurrying down a long passage and she was just in time to hear it say "Oh my ears and whiskers, how late it's getting!" Well, it was getting late and it was just as well for us that they understand this down at The Buck in Wrelton!*

## **Diving Efforts at The Font**

Bogg Hall terminates at a very large cross-rift with a deep sump pool (The Font), from which all the water that flows through the cave emerges from the depths. In an attempt to find out where this water is coming from (and with the lure of a possible network of sumped passage), several people have undertaken dives since the initial breakthrough at Bogg Hall. Their findings are summarised below.

### **Richard Wilsdon, 8th August 1982 (Scunthorpe Caving Club):**

A year after the discovery of Bogg Hall, Richard Wilsdon (one of the original discoverers and present day member of Scarborough Caving Club) dived and found The Font to be a deep vertical rift with several ledges. In particular, one major ledge at -6 m necessitated a 1 m step north to allow diving to continue downwards. The line was finally tied off at -12 m still with no bottom to the rift in sight (but with Richard being bombarded by debris washed up from below).

### **Jowett and Whybro, 18<sup>th</sup> July 1989 (Cave Diving Group):**

These divers passed Richard's previous limit and reached approximately -17 m at which point the rift was reported to start to close down, however, narrower passage seemed to continue down at more of an angle (although no further progress was made).

### **Hall and Murphy, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2000 (Cave Diving Group):**

These divers reported diving to -15.5 m where a floor was reached and the water emanates from a narrow slot continuing downwards at an angle (the same limit reached by the 1989 divers). The divers on this occasion entered the slot but were soon forced up by the upwelling water at a final depth of -18.5 m. From here they reported that the passage still continues downwards at an angle of approximately 45 degrees. Very few dives have taken place since 2000 and none have progressed past this limit of exploration.

Hall and Murphy reported that until approximately -12 m the rift walls were dominated by chert or shale-like ledges, however, below here these ledges were lost and the rock acquired a black coating (they suggested that it may be sandstone). This may be consistent with the middle calcareous grit layer known to exist between the upper limestone (which is presumed to be home to Bogg Hall, Lingmoor Cave and Dowson Pot) and the lower limestone (which contains Excalibur - see our later discussion on geology). The Font may be a collapse or natural fault that the water has exploited to transit from the lower limestone into the upper limestone.

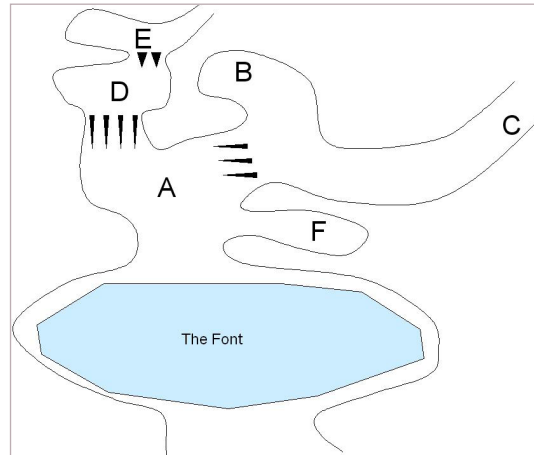
### **Conclusions:**

Despite all these efforts, The Font has not been dived to a final (*i.e.* impassable) conclusion, and there remains high potential that future dives could gain access to the sumped system that might exist beyond the bottom of the rift. Recent work in the River Dove (see reports later in this journal) has yielded other possible sumped entrances elsewhere that could also lead into the same subterranean system.



## Digging Beyond The Font

Beyond The Font is an area of large stacked boulders. Despite all the mud and rock that permeates almost every cavity between them, it is possible to slither up through the boulders for several metres, before all routes finally choke. This area raises the question of whether further dry passage could exist beyond The Font. To try to answer this, digging here has been on and off since 1998, with SCC members having had several sessions shortly after the construction of the dry entrance. We have recently re-examined this dig to see whether there could be any potential for further passage. The following is an adapted report written by Matt Ewles in June 2010:



A rough sketch of the dig area beyond The Font in Bogg Hall Rising (not shown on the 1981 survey). BCRA grade 1a.

*Area A is a wide sloppy chamber just up from the far side of The Font. From here, a short route goes off on the right towards 'F' but we didn't look too closely at that. We went up a steep slope on the right to enter a short flat out passage. To the left is a small bouldery area (B) with visual connection through to area D. Ignoring this however and continuing ahead, we then spent an hour excavating the mud floor of the passage (slowly progressing towards C). Eventually it was big enough to slither down until ending when the mud and solid rock roof met. We tried to dig further, but it was very hard work, and with no draft to act as encouragement, we didn't expect much. Back at chamber A, up another slope gains access to a small but standing height area (D) which is essentially a cavity amongst the jumbled boulders. Above, a small slot was opened up to allow an ascent up through the boulders into a very small, barely body sized area (E). The only way on from here was a small chute, blocked by a rock protrusion, but with a possible cavity beyond. However, without any signs of a draft, it seems unlikely that this leads anywhere other than into further small cavities amongst the blocks. Therefore digging beyond The Font has been suspended for now.*

# The Discovery of Excalibur Pot

From starting digging, to breaking through into Excalibur took only five weekends, for which we would travel up to the Moors on Friday night, camp around the back of The Crown Inn at Hutton-le-Hole, and not go home until late Sunday evening. This was all before the days of our online digging forum, and reports were instead written up by hand in a notebook, usually over the days that followed each session. Thanks to this we have the questionable artistry of some sketches to describe the proceedings.

## Digging at Excalibur: Weekend One (14<sup>th</sup> July 2007)

Attending: Matt Ewles, Gary Douthwaite, Richard Gover, Nikki Gover, Steve Gilbert and Richard Wilsdon

When we arrived at Hutton Beck for our first weekend, the stream was in full flood, and the target sinkhole (the one that was to become Excalibur) was a pool approximately 1 m deep, which appeared to have more water flowing in than was coming out of the other side. This confirmed that we had found the right place!

Disappointed not to be able to start digging immediately, we went to Dowson Pot and spent an hour investigating this for digging potential, however we saw nothing to excite us so we soon headed back out. Next we investigated Lingmoor Cave, finding 20 m of unpleasant low cave ending at an abandoned SCC dig, also with little potential.

With an hour and a half now having passed, we returned to the original sink, and to our surprise the flood was receding! Only a shallow pool remained in the sink, with most of the water entering not flowing out the other side. We removed loose rocks and boulders from the bottom of the pool under the riverbank, where water was now visibly slurping into the ground. With the sink now opened up, the remaining water in the pool quickly drained away down a fissure, leaving the sink empty with only a trickle of water now entering. The stream soon stopped flowing altogether and we excavated the fissure where water was sinking and also dug a deep pit outwards into the streambed.

The first pokes of the Excalibur sink on weekend one. Photo by Nicola Gover.



We dug down a metre below the surface, in particular, following the route taken by the sinking water. The main water-slurping fissure itself was opened out and found to be formed between two huge slabs parallel to the embankment. Unfortunately the opening between the slabs was extremely narrow, and the slabs themselves were far too large to remove. Therefore, with little more that could be done by digging downwards, the hole was instead extended out almost 2 m into the streambed to produce an impressively wide pit by the end of the session. Gaining further depth though was now going to require more industrial tools than shovels and trowels alone.





The following day we returned armed with an A-frame made from scaffold poles. We set up a simple system using a hand jammer for one-way haulage, with one person stood in the foot loop bouncing up and down to achieve lift. We surprised ourselves with the efficiency of this, and we were able to hoist several large boulders from the bottom of the pit in the streambed by this method, using long slings around the blocks, or by bolting them and attaching a hanger (although this often failed with scary results).

The first weekend of surface digging at the Excalibur sinkhole (the present day entrance is located on the far right hand side of the image, where digging didn't commence until weekend two). The water-slurping fissure that excited us during weekend one is at the back of the hole. Photo by Richard Wilsdon.

By the end of the weekend, we had extended our excavation outwards further, exposing the full length of the water-swallowing fissure. Knowing that the river might flood again before next weekend, we covered the dig with planks of wood, an old carpet and plastic tarpaulin to prevent debris from filling in the hole in the event of a flood. The excavated boulders were stacked into a wall around the hole to stop larger debris, mainly branches, from washing in, and the dig was now over for our first weekend.

## Digging at Excalibur: Weekend Two (21<sup>st</sup> July 2007)

Attending: Matt Ewles, Gary Douthwaite, Adrian Turner and Richard Wilsdon

We returned this weekend with a chain lift (a bargain buy from Netto) to find that Hutton Beck had flooded as we had feared. Once again we caught the water receding, and the beck terminating at our dig. Our hearts sank as we found a shallow pool of water occupying the dig site, with no sign of our original excavations (or the carpet and tarpaulin that we covered it with), which had been buried under a metre of washed in flood debris. Surprisingly, the water was now sinking through the cobbles a few metres further along the embankment (at the present Excalibur entrance), presumably because our carpet and tarpaulin was now limiting the sinking through the original fissure.





The tunnel dug into the embankment on weekend two, chasing after the sinking water. This is the site of the present entrance. Photo by Richard Wilsdon.

We started work using the chain lift and A-frame to drag blocks from this new sinking site, followed by giving it a good poking which encouraged even more water to be swallowed. We then started digging a tunnel horizontally into the embankment until we could no longer reach the back of it without crawling right in - and as we had undercut the loose soily embankment, with only thin mud forming the roof of the tunnel, this was not a pleasing option until some stabilisation could be done.

The water from the stream flowed straight into our tunnel and promptly sank through

the loose cobbled floor. Soon the waters receded completely and the sink dried up, allowing us the luxury of digging without kneeling in cold water. By the end of Saturday we had dug our tunnel to a final length of 1.5 m cutting directly into the embankment, at which point we reached a loose wall of drafting rocky debris - our first exciting signs of a draft! This now seemed like a much more sensible dig site, particularly as it could be more easily defended from flood than an open pit across the streambed.

The following day we returned, surprised to find the tunnel intact and the stream still completely dry. We stabilised the loose tunnel roof to prevent the bank from collapsing onto us, and then we begun digging downwards inside the tunnel through the cobbled floor where the water was sinking. We removed countless buckets of cobbles and rocks, until at 1 m down we reached a huge slab covering the entire bottom of the hole, barring all further downward progress. The rest of the day was spent unsuccessfully attempting to dig around the slab, and we finished this weekend with no idea how we were going to proceed next week and feeling rather demoralised.

### **Digging at Excalibur: Weekend Three (4<sup>th</sup> August 2007)**

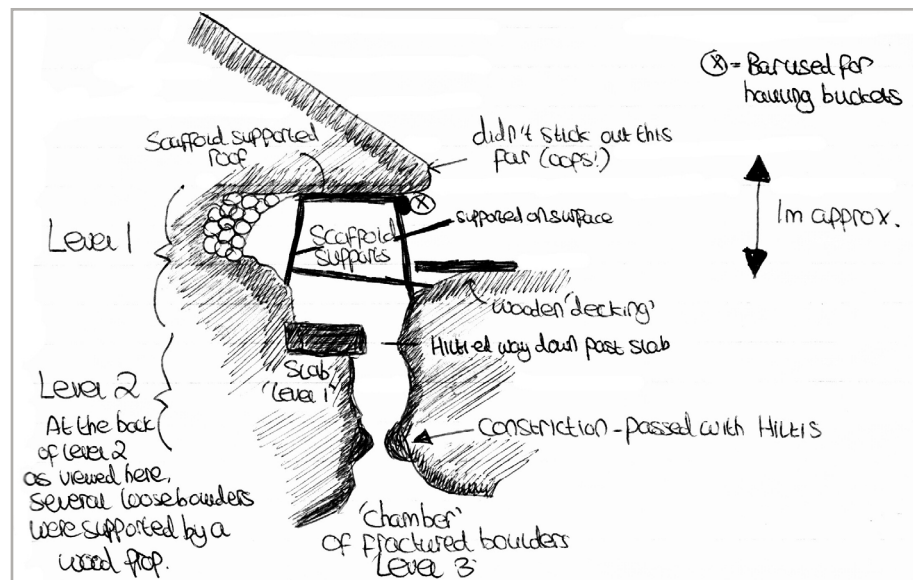
Attending: Matt Ewles, Gary Douthwaite, Andy Brennan, Richard Wilsdon, Chalky Thomas and Sharleen Hanlon.

Having heard about our low morale and troubles with oversized chunks of limestone, Richard - who had been unable to resist popping down to inspect the progress over the first few weeks - had called in the Scarborough Caving Club cavalry for our third weekend. This took the form of Andy Brennan and Chalky Thomas, who knew several quite interesting techniques for dealing with large obstructive slabs of rock!

We were pleased to find that Hutton Beck had remained dry since last time and the roof of the dig had held sound. We started work by opening up the entrance to the hole more. We then ensured that we had exposed as much of the slab as possible by digging around it. A full-on assault then took place on the offending lump of rock, with the Scarborough guys teaching Gary and Matt some valuable new skills.

After only a few hours we had removed a huge chunk from the slab, and we were able to trowel away the rubble from down the side of what remained of it. While doing this we chanced upon a small cavity in the corner of the hole below the slab. The cavity was

barely a metre deep, but was just about body width, so we began to feel more optimistic. A few more pops at the slab later and the entire top end of the cavity was opened out, allowing us to slip down into it for close examination. Some metal-bar action later, and we spotted yet another cavity peeping up from below a rock constriction, with a substantial draft coming up from it! The constriction was only 10 cm wide and refused to be enlarged by our crude brute force assaults. However, by lying on the slab with arms dangling we were able to get some holes drilled around the edge of constriction allowing for further acrobatic enlargement to be performed. Soon, the gap was just large enough for Andy to slip down into the drafting cavity below.



Sketch of the Excalibur entrance shaft during the first few weekends of digging. Taken from the original digging notebook.

We were surprised (and very pleased) to find that the cavity was actually a relatively spacious body sized chamber of jumbled giant blocks, stacked tentatively against each other. Many rocks were very loose and non-supporting, and so with the help of a relay-person stood on the slab (which became known as level 1), we were able to pass them up to the surface to form part of the ever growing flood barrier around the new entrance.

With the new chamber (named Level 3 – Level 2 being the first tiny cavity alongside the slab) starting to become spacious, we decided it would be necessary to stabilise the upper entrance more before someone was killed. Within only a couple of hours some first class stabilisation work was performed, involving a scaffold frame within the entrance (holding up the embankment above), and some lovely wooden decking outside to stop loose stuff around the edge of the hole crumbling down as people moved around on the surface (and also preventing the unwary digger from slipping down).

A bucket hauling system now became necessary to shift the debris out of Level 3. This required the constriction to be further enlarged to make it more bucket-sized! The instability of some large boulders at Level 2 now became a concern and these were stabilised temporarily with a wooden strut (*still visible as you descend the present entrance shaft*). Without further delay, the bucket was lowered on a rope from a scaffold bar over the head of the shaft, and a vast amount of debris was hauled out from the chamber, including blocks the size of printers! Level 3 soon became large enough to accommodate two working diggers, making for an altogether more social digging experience.

With the Level 3 chamber now cleared of all the loose debris, a couple of potential ways on were becoming obvious. One option was a narrow eyehole-like slot near floor level, sloping down into what looked like yet another cavity. The slot was barely inches wide (aren't they always?) and completely surrounded by solid rock, however it seemed to draft slightly. This was good enough for us, and so was chosen as the way on for the next session. We departed feeling pretty pleased with our progress for the weekend.

## Digging at Excalibur: Weekend Four (11<sup>th</sup> August 2007)

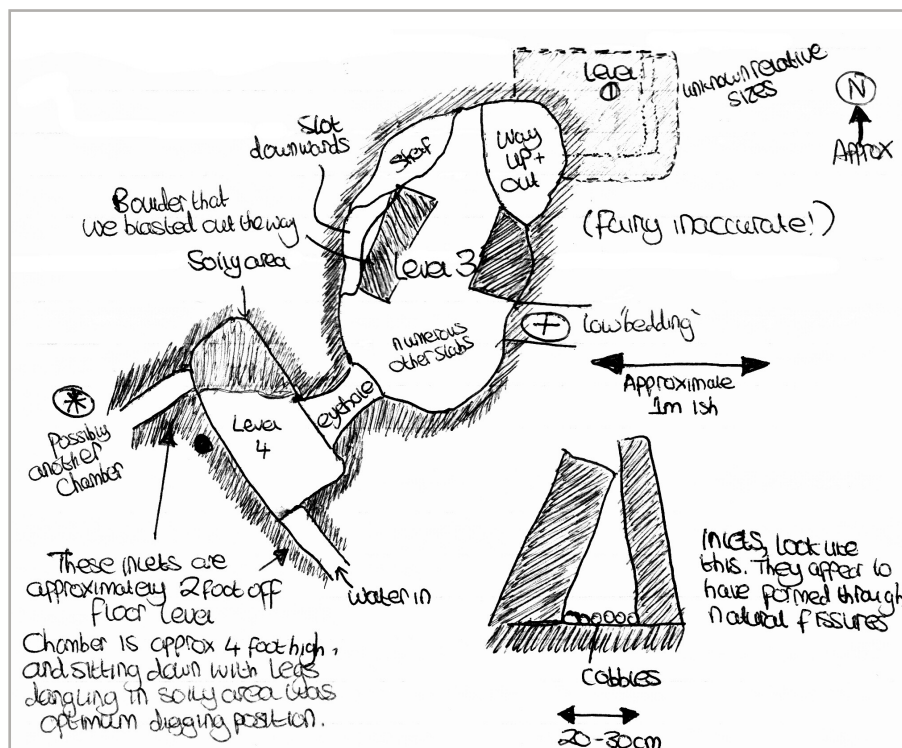
Attending: Matt Ewles, Gary Douthwaite, Andy Brennan, Richard Wilsdon, Chalky Thomas, Nikki Gover, Richard Gover, Simon Herrod, Dom Galliano, Jerry Gibbs and Sharleen Hanlon.

A further clearout of yet more debris from Level 3 was performed to prepare it for the work we had in store this weekend. We were honoured by the presence of Jerry Gibbs, author of the Moorland Caver guidebook, who popped down to offer his advice. He too reckoned the slot offered the best potential and so we set about chemically and physically attacking it - something we were getting quite good at now! After only a couple of hours, the slot was just about big enough to fit through.

Matt went through the slot head first – this took quite a bit of thrutching before his hips popped through and he was into a small rectangular chamber (this was named Level 4). This was spacious enough to sit up in and was more cleanly washed than Level 3. We were hoping for quick further progress, but unfortunately there was no obvious way on other than a tiny uninspiring chute through the far wall that looked like it might open out a metre along, but would require an unthinkable amount of work to enlarge.

We therefore started with the easier option of digging down in the floor, through cobbles and sandy mud. The slot was enlarged further to bucket-proportions and huge amounts of soil was pulled up into Level 3 and then up the shaft to the surface. We had a fantastic time doing this - the best kind of digging is when everyone has a job and nobody is left doing nothing, and often getting cold. In this situation, one person shovelled at the floor of Level 4, one person hauled the bucket up through the slot into Level 3 and roped it up, three people on the surface hauled it up the shaft, with one on the slab (Level 1) to guide the bucket through the constriction, and one person was on bucket emptying duty. Nikki was on tea-making duty and, of course, Richard supervised proceedings, with the occasional sceptical comment to keep us focused.

Rough sketch of the Level 3 and Level 4 chambers during weekend four of digging. Taken from the original digging notebook.



After only a couple of hours digging, and approximately one metre down through the muddy floor of Level 4 it became increasingly difficult to contort our bodies into a suitable position to continue the digging. The mud offered no cavities or enticing drafts, and a metal bar poked down into it failed to encounter any rocks or voids to suggest we might be on the right track. So with the pub now calling, we packed away, disappointed not to have any positive leads to come back to, especially after such a productive and eventful few days.



## Digging at Excalibur: Weekend Five (18th August 2007)

Attending: Matt Ewles, Gary Douthwaite, Andy Brennan, Richard Wilsdon and Chalky Thomas.

We started this weekend by examining the Level 4 area closer with our refreshed eyes. Perhaps we had missed something last weekend? We concluded that digging downwards wasn't going to be practical, and instead we examined the narrow fissure through the far wall more closely. By throwing rocks through we confirmed that this did indeed open into another chamber a metre along. The fissure would have been a massive enlargement project, so Gary started crowbar-tickling the apparently solid wall around the fissure instead. Within half an hour, and with relatively little effort (and much to his surprise), Gary dropped a huge slab out from the wall, revealing a much larger slot through into the next chamber.

Like all good cave slots, this was slightly too small and some enlargement was required so the drill was called for. By Saturday afternoon we were able to squeeze through this slot and into another, slightly larger chamber which you could awkwardly stand up in (this soon became known as Level 5). From here the floor sloped down towards a promising and pleasingly spacious dig through a loose muddy floor at the southern end of the chamber, which we quickly turned our trowels and crowbars towards.

After less than an hour digging, we heard something extremely interesting! A small chunk of debris crumbled and fell beneath the wall of the chamber, and was heard to fall for some distance! Speedy excavation ensued, until a small dark fissure between the wall and the floor was revealed. A pebble was dropped and it clattered down for a good few seconds, indicating a reasonable drop! With some frantic digging, we soon opened up the top of a very large rift, and we were able to peer down, revealing the floor to be several metres below!

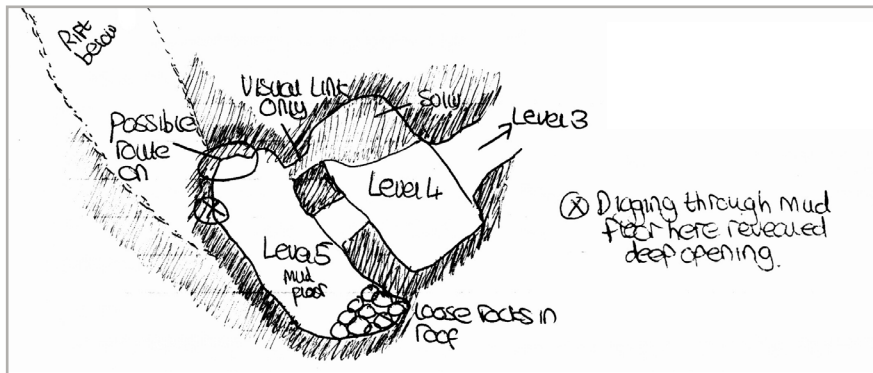
We excavated the narrow fissure back to solid rock, revealing it to be roughly body sized. A scaffold bar was propped over the head of the new pitch and one of Richards fluffy old tow-ropes was rigged and thrown down. Matt was elected to make the first descent, however, as he had not been ambitious enough to bring his own SRT kit, an SCC one was borrowed (a life-threatening decision)! Unfortunately it soon became obvious that there was no chance of him fitting through the narrow opening, and worse, the steeply



The dig at the end of weekend three, showing the tunnel dug into the embankment, the scaffolding works and the fine wooden decking. Photo by Gary Douthwaite.



The dig during weekend five (at the time of the breakthrough). The defensive wall proved totally unnecessary as the beck didn't flood again for two months! Photo by Gary Douthwaite.



Rough sketch of the Level 4 and Level 5 chambers during weekend five of digging. Taken from the original digging notebook.

sloping floor at the pitch head was providing a pebble shower as he thrashed about within the constriction! Further gardening would therefore be required before attempting descent again, and with pub time now closing in, we packed away. Gary and Matt drove back to York to collect their SRT kits, returning to The Crown for last orders and a good night sleep in our tents.

Sunday started with removal of lots more loose mud from the floor of Level 5, around the new pitch-head, and then some further enlargement of the narrow fissure. By late morning it was time to attempt the first descent again. Matt once again started to wiggle down (this time with his own SRT kit), taking his time to kick down loose stuff below as he passed (hence the reason rope was chosen over a ladder). Once through the narrowest point, the rift widened, and descending further, the very spacious magnitude of the rift became apparent. Both walls were comprised of huge stacked blocks, and through gaps in one wall, another large chamber could be seen on the other side.

A muddy floor was reached at the bottom where Matt departed the rope and could walk around. From here a narrow chute continued downwards in the same rift directly below the pitch, however, an archway through one of the walls lead through onto a ledge in a very tall parallel aven, with another pitch immediately dropping down 4-5 m into a spacious rocky chamber (the Main Chamber). Both routes were equally tempting!

Matt waited on the ledge in the aven while Gary descended. While contemplating the best way down to the chamber below, everyone else promptly followed down the rope. Matt then continued down a funnel-like chute beneath the pitch, which was tight and awkward thanks to the mud we had thrown down. At the bottom, a squirm through a narrow sharp slot delivered him into the Main Chamber stood below Gary, who was still on the ledge above. By now however, Gary and Andy had flung the surplus rope from the first pitch straight down, with some blue tarpaulin as a rope protector against the sharp ledge to allow a much easier abseil down for everyone else. Matt was soon joined in the Main Chamber by Gary, Richard, Chalky, Andy and also Harry Wilsdon, and from here the exploration of Excalibur Pot commenced.

## Memoirs of the Discovery of Excalibur Pot

### A personal recollection of events by Matt Ewles

We were very lucky indeed - firstly to have broken into such a substantial cave after only five weekends of work, but also lucky for Gary and I that the SCC guys didn't make the discovery almost a decade earlier - the discovery of some of their digging debris near the breakthrough point demonstrated how close they got!

The dig was part of a project organised by Gary to entertain us over the summer of 2007 while our friends from the York University Cave and Pothole Club (YUCPC) were on an expedition to Montenegro (not being students, we couldn't take the time off work and



had jokingly vowed to discover more cave than them in the North Yorkshire Moors instead). We familiarised ourselves with many of the small caves in the area, and on a recce trip to visit Bogg Hall and T'une Mouth in late 2006 we ended up in a chance meeting with Richard Wilsdon, who seemed excited to see cavers taking an interest in the area (particularly Bogg Hall, which he had discovered 25 years earlier). Richard showed us around the local sinks and former Scarborough Caving Club digs, and suggested that starting up a digging project again at Hutton Beck might be rewarding.

The Moors project (as it became known) commenced in May 2007 with three weekends of rather desperate and muddy digging at Manor Vale Caves near Kirkby-moorside. We were, however, looking forward most to July when we had negotiated permission to dig at Hutton Beck. Digging in the nice clean washed sinkholes was to provide the highlight of the summer project!

The day we turned up to start digging at Hutton Beck was a very ambitious and enthusiastic one. We arrived at an extremely fortunate time indeed, as Hutton Beck was receding from a major flood, and we were able to watch the receding water sinking at our targeted dig site (the sink which later became Excalibur Pot). After a few hours of poking around in Dowson Pot and Lingmoor Cave the beck had completely receded and was terminating at this sinkhole, so we knew that we must be looking in the right place.

That weekend of digging was mostly experimental and I fondly remember kneeling in the beck with water lapping around my legs, watching it gurgle down more and more with every poke of our metal bar - 'Excalibur'. We had originally designed and commissioned this bar for rigging mine shafts from, but boulder-leaving seemed to be a much better use for it! Pulling blocks out of the sink and watching the water gurgle away seemed a fantastic and mesmerising way to spend a sunny afternoon.

Unfortunately, as was the fate that became the 1990s Scarborough digs, we lost our first attempt to a flood during the following week, however, the weekend soon came round again and we took the chance to refocus and restart, this time digging initially into, and then down below the embankment. Our enthusiasm was sustained by the enticing drafting black voids that kept appearing, until we reached a huge slab completely blocking any further downward progress by our conventional digging methods.

The following weekend we were joined by the Scarborough guys (Andy Brennan and Chalky Thomas), having been summoned by Richard to assist with the slab. This was the start of a productive digging collaboration and long friendship. Three exciting weekends of digging followed, camping behind the pub at Hutton-le-Hole, with great weather and lots of beer. Thanks to SCC's chemistry experience, we were able to deal quickly (and harshly) with the offending slab to reveal more drafting voids below.



Matt about to make the first ever descent of Excalibur Pot. Photo by Gary Douthwaite.



Andy descending onto Beyond Belief ledge for the first time. Photo by Gary Douthwaite.

We soon made further progress from here down into a small chamber 5 m below the surface. For an entire weekend, blocks were hauled out from this chamber to allow easier digging. A small saucer-sized constriction was enlarged and this led into another small chamber. The morning of the fifth weekend Gary pulled a block out of the wall to reveal a narrow squeeze into another small chamber, with a mud floor waiting to be dug!

We were digging at the floor for only ten minutes, and then I remember our excitement as we heard stuff falling! Telling the others behind me to be quiet, I poked the floor some more, and stuff continued to drop away below! With my heart racing we continued digging, uncovering a small opening into a large rift disappearing downwards. The opening was only just large enough to peer down, however, with the dark mud that coated the walls (this has since washed off) and my weak old lamp (before the days of super-bright LED lamps), the rift looked at least 15 m deep and it became apparent that we should have brought some SRT equipment! An attempt to descend using some Scarborough gear (of dubious vintage) confirmed the opening to be too small anyway, and some enlargement would be needed.

We took a late night drive back to York that Saturday, collecting rigging equipment, and returning to our tent in Hutton-le-Hole, followed by some celebratory drinks at the pub in nervous anticipation of what we would find at the bottom of the pitch the next day. We celebrated with a bottle of the house red wine, aptly named 'Cave de Masse' (or 'Cave de Massive' as we called it). We could hardly wait to see what awaited us on Sunday!

Sunday morning came and we headed down to the pitch head. A scaffold bar was installed to hang a rope from and some gardening and further enlarging of the pitch head was performed. I had the honour of making the first descent while Gary filmed using his digital camera. My heart was going sixty to the dozen and the scary feeling of going somewhere that nobody had ever gone before was so exciting, something I'm sure anyone who has had such privilege will agree with. The narrow and constricted pitch head and the dangers from falling debris only made it seem more exciting! Once on the rope (which creaked uncomfortable against the scaffold bar), it took me several minutes to descend the first few constricted metres, gardening away huge amounts of debris in passing. Further down, the pitch thankfully belled out and became more stable and I was able to descend more confidently to the floor. Wondering why the others had gone quiet at this point I later found out that they were discretely attempting to alleviate the horrendous rope rub at the top that was threatening to hasten my descent!

Safely down at the ledge, I stood ecstatic and flabbergasted as Beyond Belief aven towered above me and the Main Chamber waited tantalisingly below (again, this all seemed much bigger when we had sub-300 lumen lamps)! I slipped down the funnel-like shaft which continued down below the pitch - this was very tight and sharp, but eventually I popped out into the Main Chamber. Andy, Richard, Gary and Chalky were by now down the first pitch, and on my advice not to attempt the slot route, they flung the rope down to the Main Chamber with only plastic tarpaulin as a rope protector against the sharp floor.



The hours that followed were magical as we explored crawls, cross rifts, stooping passages and avens, including the downstream Honey River and several crawls around the Main Chamber. With time pushing on we decided to leave several passages unexplored, including Breakaway Chamber, the first section of Shit Creek and the upstream Honey River. Looking back now I don't remember why we didn't explore well into the night (other than having work the next day), and I can't imagine we'd be so inclined to leave unexplored passage today if we make more breakthroughs. Maybe at the time we were so overwhelmed that we'd had our fill of adrenaline? I remember a feeling of being a very long way from home, beneath a pitch head that was hideously unstable. I also seem to remember being concerned that all the unexplored passages would soon close down and we'd end up leaving the cave knowing that we'd explored everything there was to find. Something inside us wanted to leave sometime to keep us dreaming.

It took us three weeks to gain further access permission, by which time we had amassed a large team to help with the exploration. It's amazing what the incentive of open virgin cave passage does when recruiting diggers! We installed spits on the second pitch to enable a sound rope hang (although now we go down the funnel-like slot below the first pitch which has since been smoothed off by three years of passing cavers). Once everyone was down, one group went off and explored the upstream Honey River Series, and another group explored the bedding crawls around the Main Chamber, including Shit Creek, and in the opposite direction, Breakaway Chamber (although without finding the connection to the Main Streamway on this occasion).

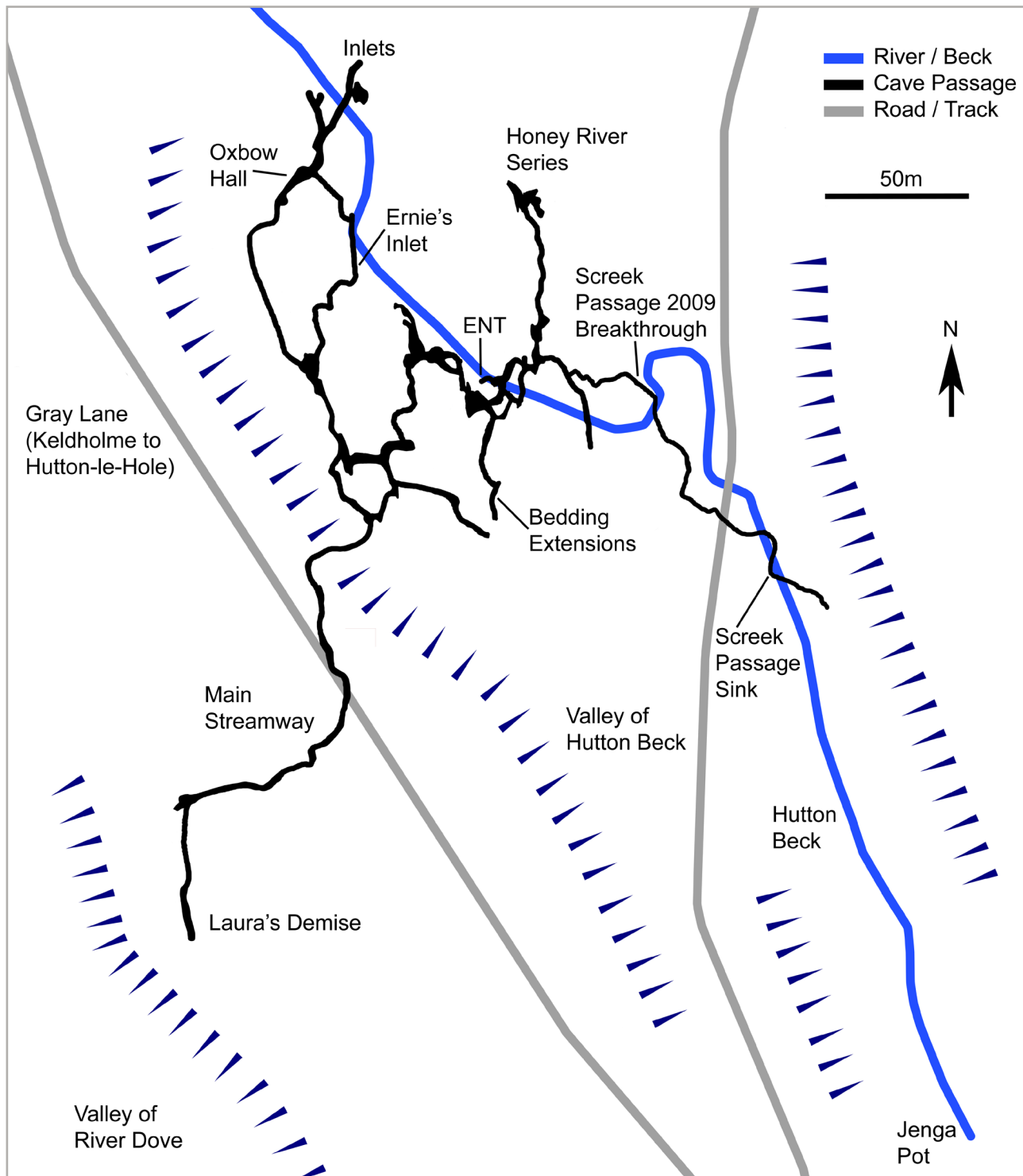
Two weekends of exploring followed but with no sign of finding the Hutton Beck river passage we had been dreaming about. Where was the sunken water? On the third weekend however, with our leads now quickly running out, we started to focus on some of the more unobvious possibilities. So while Gary, Tash (Durham) and I scaled the avens around the Main Chamber, Andy and his team were the lucky ones to explore a small slot leading away from Breakaway Chamber, which resulted in them finding the Main Streamway. We heard them scampering back to tell us of their find and that we needed to fetch a ladder in order to descend into the stream passage.

We all returned to the surface to collect our bolting kits (and to fill up on Supernoodles) before promptly scuttling back down to the streamway to install a ladder at Holy Grail Balcony (this spit has since been removed and the main descent point has been moved to another ledge further downstream). We then took our first magical walk down the stunning Excalibur Main Streamway, something that many diggers spend years dreaming of and that I feel privileged to have experienced. The well decorated downstream passage meandered for what seemed like forever, until eventually dealing us the classic boulder collapse card to call time on our adventure. Upstream was equally exciting, with roaring cascades and dodgy stacked boulders! In fact, we didn't fully explore the upstream passage or Ernie's Inlet until later sessions, as once again, we'd had our adrenaline fix and we wanted to leave something to keep us dreaming for next time.

With all the major areas of the cave discovered and explored by Christmas 2007, the initial excitement calmed, marking the beginning of years of digging and surveying. The discovery of the system proved that significant cave can form in the local Jurassic limestone, and gave added incentive to start digging at the downstream sink (now known as Jenga Pot). Undoubtedly there remains a massive amount of passage to be found in the area and maybe even another main streamway in the Jenga vicinity, and so the Excalibur 'system' is likely to keep us busy for several years to come.

# The Excalibur Pot Survey

The surveying of Excalibur Pot (by Matt Ewles and Gary Douthwaite) commenced in March 2008 and was completed by July 2009, with approximately one mile having been measured to BCRA grade 5d. The surveying used the Shetland Attack Pony and Silva sighting instruments, and a Leica Disto and surveyors tape. The following pages present the survey and discussion for each area of the cave. Up on all surveys is north.



## The Entrance and Main Chamber

The walled entrance of Excalibur (built in September 2007 from blocks hauled out of the entrance) is situated in the streambed of Hutton Beck a short distance upstream of the road bridge leading to Lingmoor Farm. The cemented walling rises 1.5 m above the streambed and has a metal trapdoor. Below the trapdoor a scaffold shaft drops 5 m into a small scaffold-supported cavity in the boulders. An enlarged slot reaches a further cavity, and then an awkward slot reaches the top of the main entrance pitch (A).

The pitch is a spacious rift, although is quite narrow and awkward at the top particularly for larger cavers. A 10 m ladder belayed from a scaffold bar allows for the best descent. After 7 m a shelf is reached with access to a balcony in Beyond Belief Aven (B), overlooking the Main Chamber below. This is the tallest aven in Excalibur (14 m from top to bottom) and is situated directly underneath Hutton Beck.

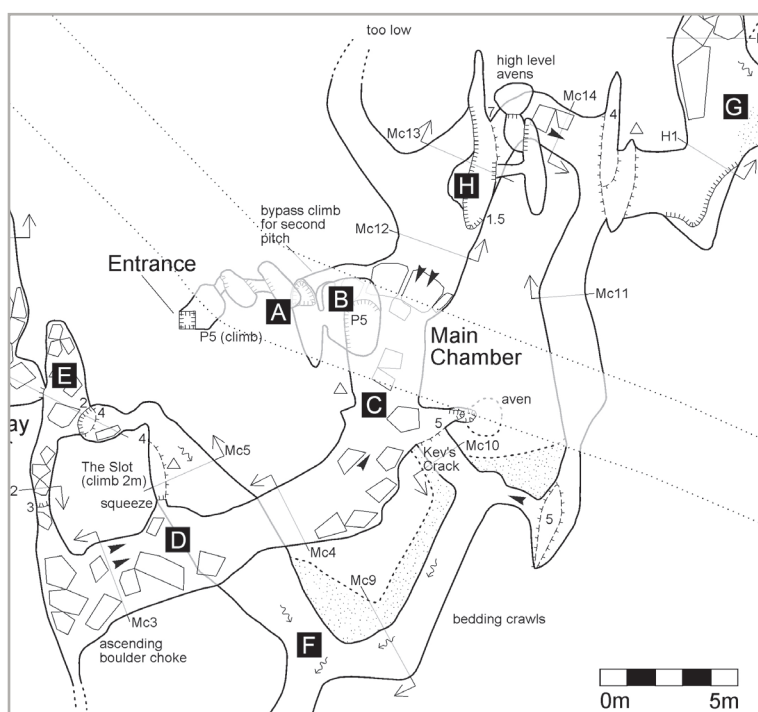
From Beyond Belief balcony, a 5 m pitch to the Main Chamber may be tackled using two untrustworthy exploration hangers and a 6 m ladder. However, to avoid the additional ladder, it is easier to continue down the slot beneath the first pitch to emerge awkwardly into the Main Chamber through a sharp slot at floor level.

The Main Chamber is a boulder-strewn, tall and spacious chamber (C). From here a crawling height passage leads west for 9 m until large slabs start to make further progress more awkward and a narrow rift on the right (The Slot) offers an awkward route down (D). Dropping down The Slot enters the bedding crawls, which head off in two directions. Following the crawls to the north (keeping to the left) soon reaches a step up into Breakaway Chamber (E). Following the crawls to the south starts as a flat-out struggle before passing the excavated entrance to the Bedding Extensions on the right (F). Keeping left continues as a crawl around the south eastern edge of the Main Chamber (including on the left a flat out connecting squeeze, Kev's Crack, which is only for very thin cavers) before passing through a tall cross-rift and finally reaching Honey River Junction (G).

An easier alternative to The Slot for larger cavers can be found by continuing ahead in the main passage (from D). This route ascends over fallen blocks and becomes more awkward, until abruptly ending at a

Survey of the Main Chamber area (also showing the outline of Hutton Beck). BCRA grade 5d.

Photo: the Main Chamber, looking towards the crawl leading towards The Slot. Photo by Gary Douthwaite.

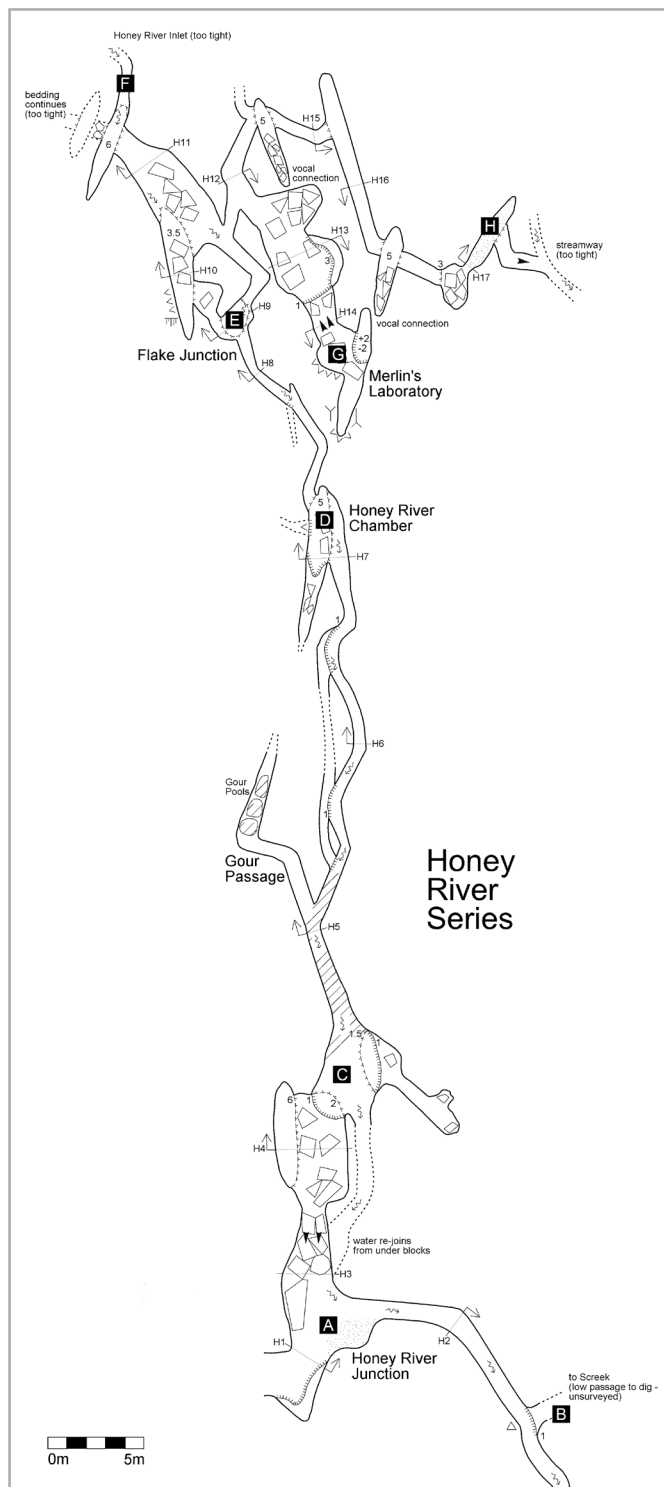




large rift dropping down on the right. This rift is an easy climb and drops into the south end of Breakaway Chamber. Note however that the passage over the fallen slabs beyond The Slot is dangerously unstable and therefore this route is not recommended for cavers who are able to negotiate their way down The Slot instead.

The second route off from the Main Chamber is to the northeast and involves slithering over a large fallen block to drop into a long tall cross rift (H). A flat out downward crawl under the right hand (eastern) wall soon reaches Honey River Junction (G) with the bedding route from Breakaway Chamber entering on the right just beforehand.

Survey of the Honey River Series area. BCRA grade 5d.



## The Honey River Series

The Honey River Series encompasses some of the first passages of Excalibur to be explored following the initial 2007 breakthrough.

The Honey River streamway is a trickling stream, which is non flood responsive, and has never been known to dry up, even during summer. The stream is intersected at Honey River Junction (A) near the Main Chamber. Extreme care should be taken of the enormous slab hanging from the roof here at shoulder height, which may fall at any time!

Downstream, muddy stooping passage continues south for 30 m, passing the entrance to Shit Creek on the left (B) before gradually lowering to a flat out crawl (beyond the survey extract shown here) soon reaching a choke where the passage ends and the water is lost into cobbles (this water may re-emerge in the far reaches of Shit Creek).

Upstream from the junction (A) is initially too low and so this section is bypassed by climb up blocks and through a wide chamber. Across the chamber the stream passage is then rejoined (C). Upstream (north) involves crawling in thick wet mud, and passes a side passage with some reasonable gour pool formations. The main passage then becomes a vadose canyon leading to Honey River Chamber (D), with a pretty honey coloured calcite flow entering on the left. This chamber is just one of many north-south cross rifts which are abundant throughout this area of the cave. Further upstream, the passage becomes standing height, but narrow, soon reaching Flake Junction (E). Following the trickling water upstream soon leads to a crawl and thrutch through a loose cross rift with calcite decoration and then into low and wide muddy bedding which soon terminates at impenetrable tube (F) from which the Honey River water enters.

Just upstream from Flake Junction, an awkward thrutch on the right at floor level departs the trickling streamway to enter the far upstream Honey River area at a junction. To the right a large breakdown chamber ascends to the delicate grotto of Merlin's Laboratory (G). This area is home to many extremely delicate honey coloured calcite flow, stal and crystal pools, some of which are positioned on the floor on the main route up towards the grotto, and therefore requires extreme care to avoid destroying these forever.



Merlin's Laboratory, showing the honey coloured stal. Photo by Gary Douthwaite.

Back at the junction, the left route passes two further cross rifts with visual connections back to the Merlin's Laboratory area. Shortly after the second cross rift, the final chamber is reached and flowing water can be heard (H). Dropping to the floor of this chamber gains a tight tubular streamway carrying a steady flow of water. This has been explored downstream for 4-5 m to an opening with only just enough space to turn around. Beyond here it becomes very narrow and has not been pushed to absolute closure. We suspect that this may become the first inlet of Shit Creek.

## Parallel Passages

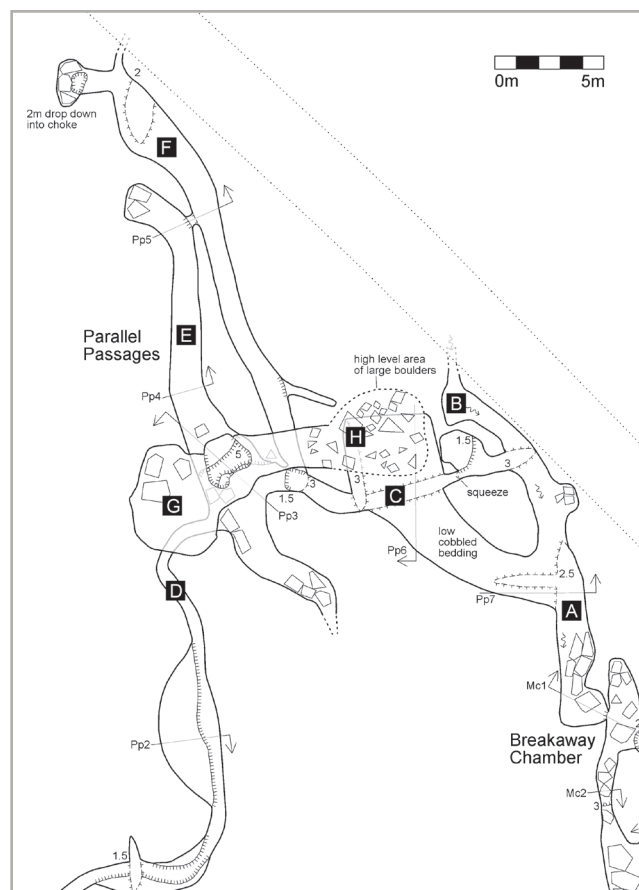
From Breakaway Chamber, a drop down a narrow slot gains a low crawl, soon reaching a standing height chamber (A). Returning to crawling again (continuing north) reaches a junction. Straight on closes down and a trickle of water enters (B). The way on however is left through an unpleasantly moist wriggle leading into an area of wide, low bedding (C) which intersects a cross rift 5 m along. To the south the low bedding connects back to the earlier chamber (A) (passable for very skinny cavers only), but continuing west in the bedding, a step up enters the spacious Parallel Passages Chamber.

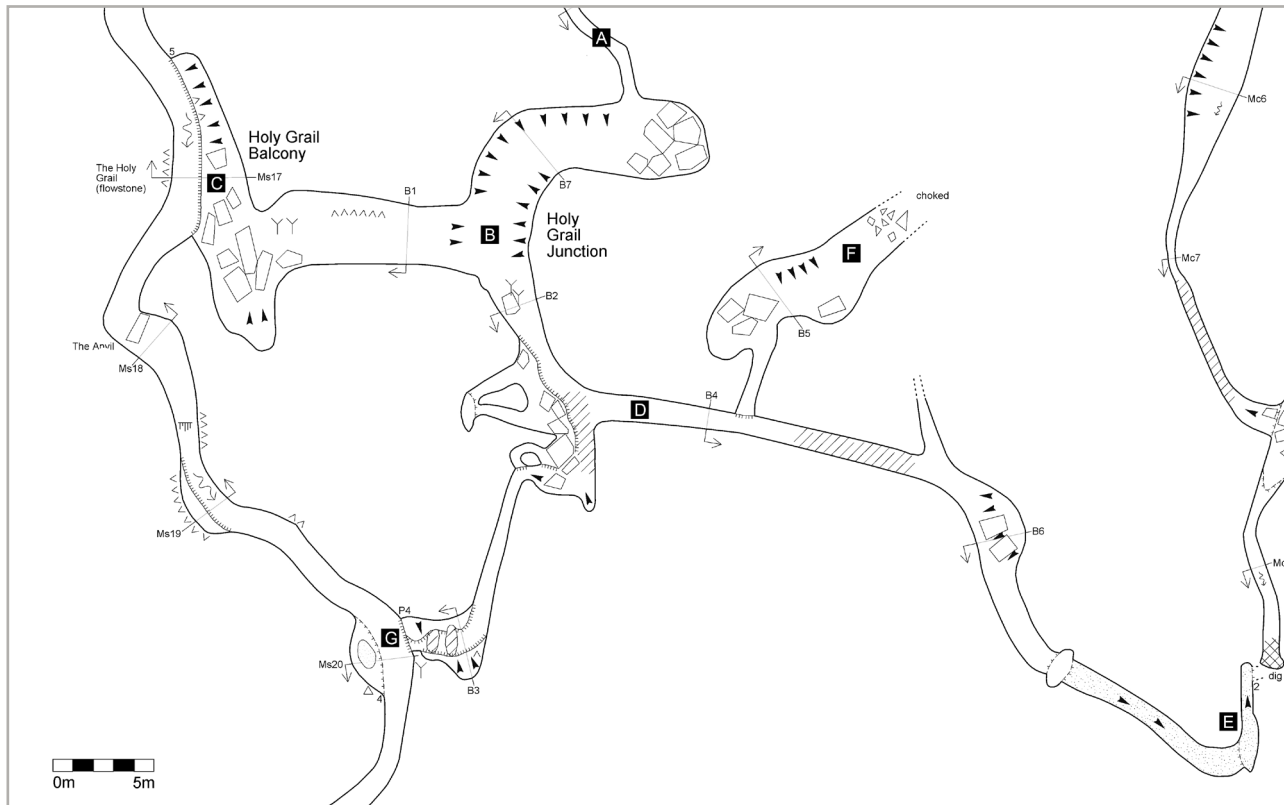
Survey of the Parallel Passages area with the outline of the overland Hutton Beck shown. BCRA grade 5d.

Parallel Passages Chamber provides several routes onwards. West enters a low canyon passage leading towards the Main Streamway (D). North West is the larger of the two parallel northern passages (E), and continues for 20 m before closing down. The North East passage reaches a wide and low area (F), where a slot drops 2 m into a short section of unsurveyed rift-passage, which soon chokes at a wall of muddy infill, with some delicate formations.

Climbing 4 m up the wall in Parallel Passage Chamber gains a very spacious upper area, where the rock is grittier and has many fine protruding fossils (this is typical of many higher level areas in the cave). To the west side of this area is a large standing height chamber (G), the south side of which is directly underneath the entrance of Lingmoor Cave.

On the eastern side of the higher level area a route continues over the top of the earlier bedding crawls, and soon enters an area of enormous stacked blocks (H). A path can be carefully navigated through this dodgy area for several metres until all possible ways onwards become too loose and dangerous.





Survey of the Holy Grail Junction area.  
BCRA grade 5d.

## Holy Grail Junction

From Parallel Passage Chamber a narrow stooping passage (A) twists and turns, emerging suddenly into a much larger passage, and the roar of water from the Main Streamway can be heard. To the east, blocks choke the passage but to the west the passage bears left, passing some formations on the roof, before reaching Holy Grail Junction (B).

From Holy Grail Junction, Holy Grail Passage heads to the west (although is taped off for conservation of the delicate and vulnerable formations). This passage involves 20 m of crawling to reach a cavernous balcony overlooking a 5 m drop to the Main Streamway and the impressive Holy Grail flowstone (C). No descent to the streamway can be made from here as it would inevitably result in damage to the formations.

Continuing south at Holy Grail Junction, another junction is soon reached from which Balcony Passage leads off to the east (D). This low and wet passage extends for 45 m before terminating at a narrow cross rift (E) only metres from the end of the Bedding Extensions (as shown by the survey, but they are not yet connected). A short way along Balcony Passage a squeeze on the left enters a small chamber (F) which soon chokes.

Ignoring Balcony Passage and continuing south reaches another short stooping passage leading to the pitch head at the Main Streamway (G). Some fine white calcite flow is situated near the pitch head, but despite marker tape, still receives regular hand-prints. A fixed hand line (which should not be fully trusted) allows a relatively easy 4 m climb down into the streamway, although a 5 m ladder is generally recommended.



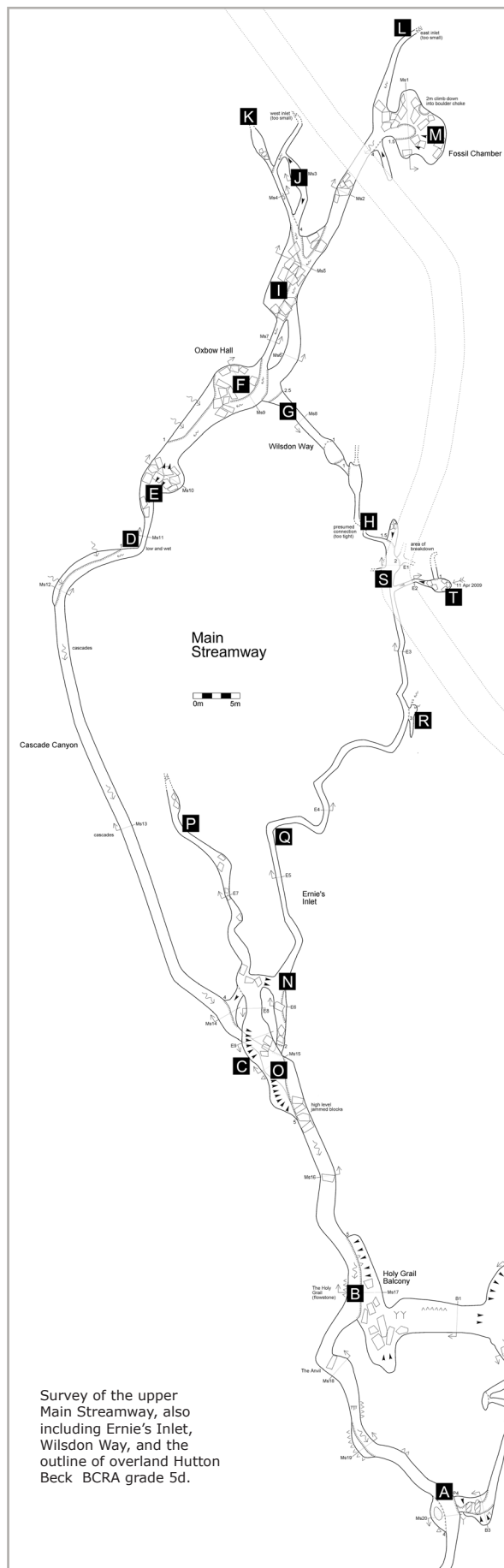


Above: formations in the Main Streamway. Left is The Holy Grail. Photos by Gary Douthwaite.



Above: Oxbow Hall in the upstream Main Streamway. Photo by Gary Douthwaite





## The Main Streamway

The Excalibur Main Streamway is a superb stream passage, even by Yorkshire Dales standards. From the bottom of the ladder (A), downstream meanders as spacious stomping past several excellent formations (not shown on the survey extract as it is a single uneventful passage). The water is typically only several inches deep, although much deeper in flood. As the passage continues south-west, the ceiling lowers from 5-6 m high to 2.5 m high, and after 200 m an extensive collapse is reached where the water is lost under boulders and a passage leads south to Laura's Demise (see description later of this area).

Upstream from the ladder, the streamway becomes more cascading, and passes several superb formations, including the Holy Grail Flowstone at Holy Grail Balcony (B). Upstream from here the stream passage becomes dominated by crumbly black ledges and water cascades. After only 40 m, the passage enlarges slightly at the climb up into Ernie's Inlet (C), named after Ernie Shields of the Molydwarps Speleological Group, the first person to explore it. Further upstream, Cascade Canyon is a very dramatic part of the passage, with roaring cascades, beyond which, shelves on the left bring in small flows of water. Upstream of here a narrowing in the passage is reached, where a high-level rock collapse forces a stoop in knee-deep water for a couple of metres (D).

Beyond here the streamway immediately enlarges into an impressive chamber with a large pile of muddy blocks that have fallen from the fractured roof (E). A short walk back in the stream, passing more inlet shelves, reaches Oxbow Hall (F), a very dramatic and impressively large chamber (by North Yorkshire Moors caving standards) with yet more big blocks. A passage high up on the right, Wilsdon Way, (G) connects to Ernie's Inlet (note that the connection - Butcher's Squeeze (H) - is passable for very small cavers only, but allows a satisfying round trip).

Upstream of Oxbow Hall a low stoop in the water is bypassed by a dry oxbow - hence the name of the chamber - to drop back to stream level. Just upstream of here a cobbled 'beach' is reached where the water enters from two routes (I). The left route can be followed through a dry, tall cross rift (J) which rejoins the water at a tiny inlet. This is too small to progress upstream and marks the end of this inlet, but downstream a small chamber (K) can be reached. This enters a tight rift-passage, which stands 10 m+ high and continues too tight into the distance.

The right hand route continues as spacious stream passage past some fallen blocks, before abruptly narrowing and becoming too tight, with lots of water entering (L) (this has been pushed by wetsuited cavers, but without success). Shortly before this, a stoop under a ghastly pile of blocks enters the sizable Fossil Chamber (M), with some excellent fossils (care). Beyond Fossil Chamber an area of massive stacked blocks offers some potential, but is extremely loose and dangerous - not for the faint hearted!

## Ernie's Inlet

See the Main Streamway survey extract.

Ernie's Inlet carries hardly any water, but is nonetheless a significant side passage. Two 1 m steps up out of the Main Streamway reach a junction (N). The left route slopes up into a chamber, and from here, access can be gained to an impressive balcony overlooking the Main Streamway from several metres above (O). Back at the chamber, opposite the balcony, a slither around a slab enters a strenuous passage (P) which soon chokes.

Straight on at the junction, Ernie's Inlet continues as narrow passage (Q). A cross rift after 50 m provides some relief to the tight twists and turns along here (R) (and is almost underneath Dowson Pot). Eventually the passage widens (S) before reaching Butcher's Squeeze (H), an extremely tight and technical connection to Wilsdon Way and the upstream Main Streamway. Just before here, a narrow rift slopes upwards into a small loose chamber (T), with a reported draft and smell of fresh air. A tiny tube leading off from here is too tight.

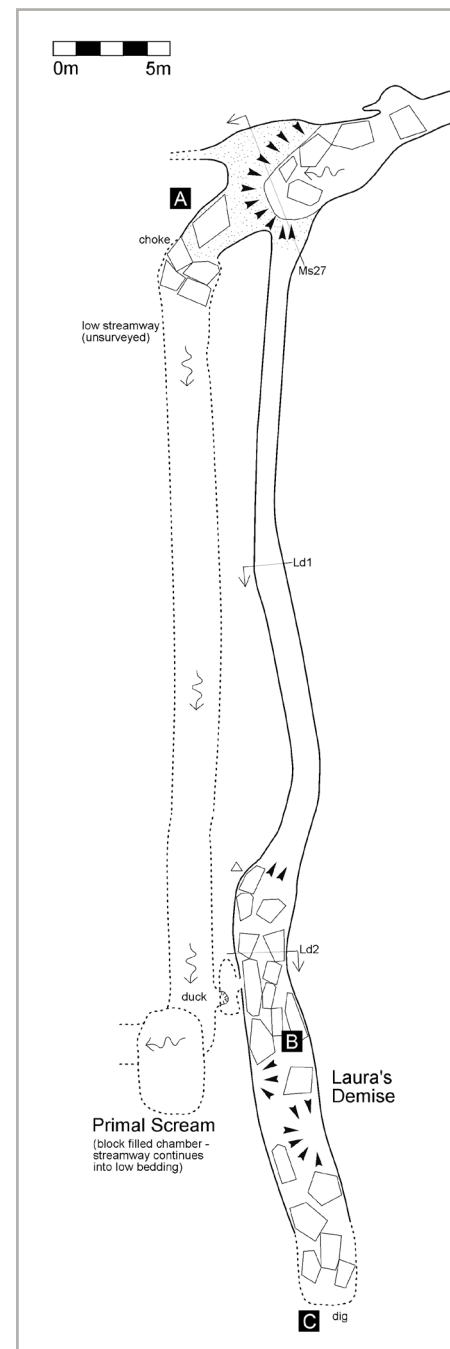
## Laura's Demise

At the furthest downstream end of the Main Streamway, the water is lost under a major and extensive collapse (A). This collapse is coated with several layers of mud (with clear banding representing various deposits). The water generally flows unimpeded under this, although fresh organic debris and foam are often found on the roof indicating that water does back up here under extreme circumstances.

To the south, a couple of metres above the stream level a small passage leads off, soon emerging into a 15 m long and 3 m wide breakdown chamber, known as Laura's Demise (B). This chamber is packed with big blocks, and chokes at the southern end amongst thick mud and yet more blocks (C). Within these blocks, a deep mud pool often shows signs of receiving regular fresh flow, indicating a possible connection back to the flowing water. This mud tried to eat Laura Bennett, gobbling her up to the waist, requiring the urgent fetching of a ladder and some rope to haul her out - hence the name of the chamber.

Extensive work was undertaken to find possible ways on from Laura's Demise, particularly one that might lead back to the Main Streamway water. This work soon paid off during winter 2008 with the discovery of Primal Scream (described later).

Survey of Laura's Demise and Primal Scream chambers. BCRA grade 5d.





# Later Explorations in Excalibur

## Exploring Excalibur in Flood

Following an earlier recce of the wet entrance and pitch by Richard, we took our first major venture down Excalibur in flood on Sunday 25th November 2007. The following is an adapted report written by Matt Ewles detailing our findings.

*This weekend we found the beck in flood and a 1 m deep pool around the entrance. We decided to take a trip down to see how the cave responds. The entrance shaft is surprisingly watertight, and leakage isn't encountered until below the level of the river outside. At the bottom of the shaft a significant amount of water was cascading in, washing straight down through the floor and was difficult to avoid! The next two chambers were drier, however, at the pitch head, the water was encountered again. The water has washed away all the mud throughout the entrance series. Only a few metres down the pitch, the water was cascading in from the small shelf. This formed a heavy waterfall at your side as you climb the ladder, and a drenching is unavoidable! Beyond Belief Aven was like standing in a major storm and water comes down from the roof, but it's nowhere near as wet as you might expect given this is directly underneath the river. The Main Chamber seemed relatively dry, however The Slot had lots of water cascading down, making it impassable. Instead, we took the dodgy bypass to reach Breakaway Chamber. Only a gentle flow (little more than usual) occupied the bedding crawls heading towards the Main Streamway. We found Parallel Passage Chamber and the passage to the Main Streamway to be drippy, but with no evidence of flooding. We were surprised to find the water in the Main Streamway only a couple of foot above the dry weather levels. We made quick progress downstream to the boulder choke, which the water continued to flow unimpeded underneath, although scum on the roof suggested the water may have been significantly - up to two metres - higher in recent days (note that this supports our more recent assumptions that the initial flood pulse is far worse than the prolonged flooding which then follows). Upstream, no progress could be made beyond Cascade Canyon as the narrowing of the streamway upstream of here had pushed the water up to hazardous levels. The prospect or proceeding was not too appealing given the loose nature of the boulders in this area. Surprisingly there was almost no water coming down Ernie's Inlet. Coming out was fun! We got clean while climbing up the ladders - the water gushing down the main pitch was more than enough to power wash the mud off. A dramatic exit and enough to keep your heart rate nice and high! It was eerie coming out of the cave in the dark surrounded by a deep pool of water. A fun and very sporting trip although as we don't yet know the full extent of the flooding we should not become complacent and continue to exercise caution in the future.*

Therefore, Excalibur can be entered during flood and can even be good fun! However, as we later found out while digging at the Bedding Extensions (see the next report), the severity of the flooding can be far worse, and consequently our advice is that Excalibur in flood probably isn't worth taking the risk.

## Bedding Extensions Breakthrough (2007)

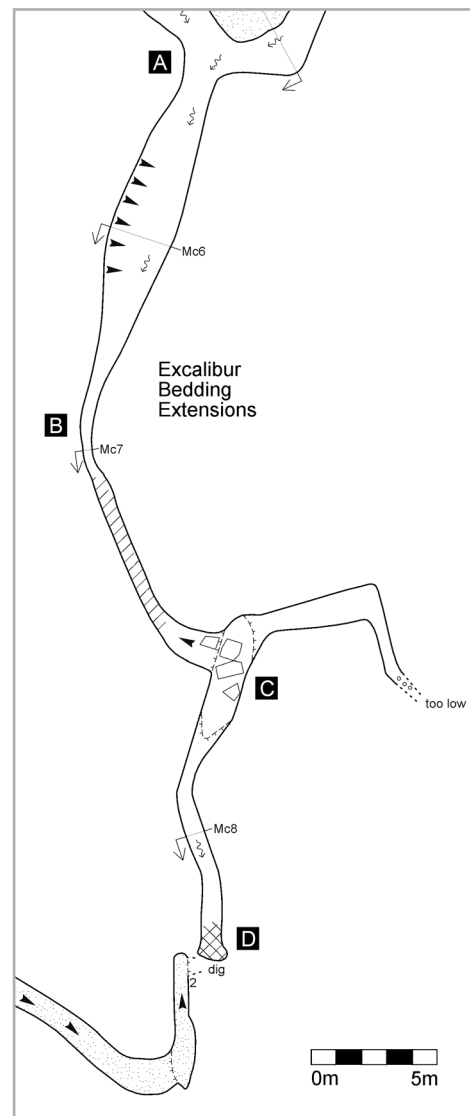
The Bedding Extensions are the main drainage for all the water sinking at the Excalibur entrance. This sinking water finds its way to the Bedding Extensions by two major routes. Firstly, lots of water comes down the main pitch and drains out of the Main Chamber via Kev's Crack. An equal amount enters down The Slot just to the west of the Main Chamber. Small amounts of water also flow from the tiny inlet just north of Breakaway Chamber (although this seems to flow all year round and is not flood-responsive).

The water from these inlets converges at, and is channelled through the Bedding Extensions, the entrance to which (A) was originally partially choked with cobbles. A small team of Matt, Andy, Chalky and Richard headed down armed with trowels and crowbars on a cold and snowy winter morning in December 2007 for a digging session that would stick in our minds forever.

We spent two hours removing cobbles and silt from the entrance to the bedding until eventually it was large enough to slither along. This hard flat-out progress soon opened out into much more pleasant bedding passage and then after 10 m a narrow sideways thrutch (B) reached a crawling height canal and then a low bedding junction (C). Chalky and Matt went left, where the bedding soon lowers to become completely impassible, and Andy and Richard went right, following the water, soon reaching a point where a standing pool of water almost sumped off the passage ahead of them (D).

By now, Andy was very cold so decided to head out, while Chalky, Richard and Matt stayed down to continue digging at the sumped section of passage. After only another half an hour we decided that we'd had enough and we started back out. However, on returning to the junction (C) we noticed that there seemed to be a lot more water flowing into the bedding than there was when we came down. We all agreed to make a speedy retreat!

As we started to get the tools together, we suddenly heard a scream - 'GET OUT' - it was Andy shouting from the end of the bedding! He had gone to the surface and found the entrance now in full flood from a sudden surge of meltwater. Water was gushing down at the entrance sink and straight down into the Bedding Extensions! We didn't hang around to collect the tools, and instead we scuttled back up the bedding, knowing that it risked being sumping off. We reached the low section that we had dug out - which was thankfully still passable, but rather more aqueous than on the way in. A flat out thrutch in the gushing icy water, spluttering as it flowed across our faces, was required, and this was made even more dramatic by the sound of the water crashing down The Slot only several metres away! Not being able to negotiate The Slot or Kev's Crack due to the water, we hurried along the bedding crawls to Honey River Junction and then back to the Main Chamber, where water was lashing in! We then took turns at a heart-pounding ascent up the ladder to the surface with half of Hutton Beck pouring down onto us (much worse than when we descended in flood the previous month). Another ten minutes down that bedding could have been very bad - a gentle reminder that the cave is the boss...



Survey of the Excalibur Bedding Extensions, also showing to the south the far reaches of Balcony Passage. No connection has yet been established. BCRA grade 5d.

On the 26th January 2008 (under much drier conditions) Andy and Richard returned to the Bedding Extensions in wetsuits with the intention of pushing their way through the almost sumped passage (D). Andy reported on the progress:

*The cave now has a duck. I can't say it was particularly pleasant but we got through. It's about 15 ft long and enters a small chamber (not big enough to turn round or even sit up but it felt like a chamber all the same). From here the water is 'cascading' down a drop of 9 inches and entering a bedding plane that is too low to enter, at present. This is a good dig and would probably be a bit better if water levels were lower. The way on will be to lower the floor so the duck drains and use a bucket to remove cobbles and follow the stream.*

We have yet to return to push this further. The survey shows that this area is only metres from the end of Balcony Passage and could potentially be connected through digging, allowing for a great round trip to be made via the Main Streamway. Where the Bedding Extensions water drains to is not known, although the Shit Creek drainage system is the most likely candidate. Future work will hopefully provide some answers.

## **Primal Scream Breakthrough (2009)**

See the survey extract of Laura's Demise for the approximate location of Primal Scream.

We initially couldn't find any way on from Laura's Demise at the downstream end of the Main Streamway. However, in November 2008 while exploring under some of the large blocks, we identified a small window in the west wall of the chamber. Digging this out gained a chamber dropping steeply towards a slot in the floor with flowing water below it. Could this be the water from the Main Streamway again? This slot was too narrow, and so in December we returned to enlarge it. However, on this visit we found the water much higher and lapping at the jaws of the slot, with whatever passage was below being sumped. The enlargement was performed, but a return trip would be necessary.

On the 16th February 2009 we finally had dry enough conditions to drop down through the slot. This was negotiated feet-first to drop into a wet wallow in a low stream passage. The water was several inches deep, flowing north to south, and is assumed to be the water which was previously lost from the Main Streamway. Upstream, the water emerges from even lower passage (this has now been pushed in very low water conditions to establish a vocal connection with the choked end of the Main Streamway). Downstream, the water disappears through low rocks and boulders again. Therefore, on initial inspection we were disheartened as there didn't appear to be any way on from here, and there were no signs of a return to stomping streamway as we had hoped.

With the cold spurring us on, we soon found a dig along a choked roof-level tube a few metres across the passage. After an hour we were able to climb out of the water and into an overhead chamber (Primal Scream, 4 x 3 m), of similar character to Laura's Demise. Dropping down through blocks on the west side of this chamber returns to the flowing water, which is unfortunately immediately lost into choked bedding. There appeared to be no way onwards from Primal Scream, and we were all soaking wet and shivering, so we headed out. Getting back to Laura's Demise involved taking a face-first plunge out of Primal Scream into the water, an icy-cold thrash back to the bottom of the slot, and a constricted squeeze back up through the boulders into Laura's Demise.



We have since returned to Primal Scream and Laura's Demise on a couple of occasions. Every cavity has been thoroughly investigated and found to be choked with no drafting. It is quite likely that more passage could exist in the vicinity; however a dig would be a very tough project indeed. Primal Scream in particular offers good digging potential by pushing along through the mud-choked cavities above the water in hope of the stream-way returning to more well-proportioned passage beyond the present cobble-choked termination. This too would be a serious project involving very slow and difficult clawing through mud and rock. With other more promising digs to distract our attention for now, digging at the south-western reaches of Excalibur is something that might have to wait, and the route of the water from here to Bogg Hall must remain a mystery.

Primal Scream is at approximately the same altitude as, and less than 100 m from popping out into the River Dove (approximately 100 m downstream of the fish farm at the bottom of Yoadwath Bank, in the next valley to the west of Hutton Beck)! The Excalibur water is therefore on an intercept course for the sinks in the River Dove (hence our recent interest in these) and a possible merger between the two subterranean rivers.

## **Shit Creek (Screek) Breakthrough (2009)**

Shit Creek (Screek Passage in pleasant company) is not shown on the current complete version of the Excalibur survey, however, the main Screek Passage has now been surveyed and is shown instead on the simplified black-line survey presented earlier.

The first 50-60 m of Screek Passage was actually one of the earliest areas we explored in Excalibur. From Downstream Honey River, 30 m of miserable flat out crawling through wet mud soon enters a (slightly) more sizable passage heading south. This also varies between flat out thrutching and low crawling, made more challenging by the sharp rocky protrusions that hinder progress and rip oversuits. Potential digs in bedding planes are passed on the left before reaching a collapse, which for the first two years of Excalibur, prevented further progress. Open passage could always be seen beyond the collapse, but we suspected that getting to it would require a serious dig in very unpleasant conditions. This was therefore off our agenda once our attention was distracted by the much more pleasing discovery of the Main Streamway only a couple of weeks later.

Screek Passage was therefore left alone for a year before we made another visit. This dig was unsuccessful and we actually brought down more blocks than what we shifted and the collapse ended up worse than when we found it! Giving up on this, we concentrated our efforts elsewhere until in June 2009 we turned our attention back to the Screek boulder collapse once again. This time it yielded to only an hour of crowbar action, eventually dropping more blocks down from the rift above, making it now possible to ascend up and into the rift and over the top of the entire blockage! The way on was therefore now open for the team (Matt Ewles, Andy Brennan and Martin Egan) to crawl onwards, exploring another few hundred metres of strenuous bedding passage, which, despite it's sheer disgustingness, has since become one of our most promising dig sites in the North Yorkshire Moors! Matt Ewles reported on the breakthrough:

*We were through!!! Martin lead the way, following by Andy and then me. The passage continued in much the same way as before (generally crawling and occasionally more flat out, typically awkward and muddy) for some distance until eventually reaching a junction, with a gently flowing water*

*inlet entering on the left. We ignored this and carried on along the main route (following the flow of water downstream). The passage immediately became clean-washed wide bedding, still flat out but more pleasant than before for a short distance further. We then reached another inlet this time on the right, which we also left unexplored in favour of following the water.*

*The water from the two inlets now combined to make a steady flow down the dipping bedding. A third tiny inlet was passed on the left with white calcified pebbles on the floor. While Martin pushed ahead I took a brief rest. And that was when I saw a plastic shotgun cartridge jammed in the roof! With further inspection, the roof was peppered with fresh organic debris. A cold draft was also noticed. Further on, two seedlings were passed, each germinated and desperately searching for light! This was exciting indeed and indicated that this passage flooded to the roof, but more importantly was on the route of water close to a surface sink big enough to swallow a sizable bit of plastic! We continued onwards now flat out in a reasonable flow of water for another minute until we reached a small (1x1 m) cobbled sink with all the water from Screek Passage disappearing down through the cobbles. Ignoring the sink, the passage continued beyond, sloping briefly upwards into a pleasant dry, wide cobbled passage. This passage became almost spacious (you could kneel up) however we were soon confronted by a large mud bank blocking the way ahead, although with passage visible beyond. Feeling cold and very far from home, we headed back out, while planning our impending return trip.*

Only a couple of days later we sacked off our usual Tuesday night digging down Jenga in favour of going back down Screek to explore the three inlets which we had previously ignored. Matt wrote the following report of our findings:

*We headed down around 6:30 pm and made quick progress down Shit Creek. We opted to all head straight down to the far end and work our way backwards. We arrived at the sink and then progressed onwards to the mud choke (added note - this is the end of the surveyed passage shown on the simplified survey). About ten minutes of digging through the mud allowed easy sliding over the top and back into crawling height passage beyond.*

*This passage continued, changing character beyond this point, becoming muddy squeezes and mud banks rather than clean bedding passage. This continued for about 30 m until the end was met where the passage closed down in mud-coated rocks. However, from here cobbled bedding could be seen below, with several small funnel-like openings leading down into it, but not big enough to enter. We turned around at this point, and while continuing back from the cobbled sink, we investigated all the different inlets. In order from furthest to nearest to the entrance:*

*(A) The calcified cobbled inlet was too narrow after only a few metres.*

*(B) The middle inlet (inlet two) is too narrow, however only a couple of metres away is a dry cross rift which you can stand up into. We hadn't noticed this at the weekend. From here a slither over a mud bank for several metres drops into a spacious crawling height cobbled stream passage carrying a*

*gentle flow of water. Downstream was too low (and almost certainly is the other end of inlet two). Following the flow upstream leads for around 20 m of easy crawling to a large chamber (5x2 m) and standing height! Beyond here the roof lowers and the water derives from a small cobbled sump.*

*(C) The first inlet (inlet one, nearest the entrance) was the biggest surprise. Crawling gradually enlarged to standing height crabwalking. I pushed it for some distance until feeling very alone indeed - nobody was following me! Waiting around, Richard soon came down and so I pushed onwards further. The passage becomes gradually more difficult, as it becomes hour-glass shaped and so thrutching at high or low level becomes a regular necessity. With the time pressing on we weren't able to get to the end of this passage, and instead after about 40 m we were forced to turn around with hard going passage disappearing onwards with no signs of closing down!*

Exploration at Screek then took a back seat in favour of surveying to determine whether the main passage was - as expected - heading towards Jenga. The results of this appear on the simplified Excalibur survey shown earlier (surveyed as far as the mud blockage just beyond the cobbled sink, but not yet including the three inlets). We were actually so confident that Screek headed towards Jenga that we had organised a sweepstake on how far the mud blockage would be from the Jenga entrance. This was won by Matt, who got closest to the correct answer of 180 m. The cobbled sink was found to be almost directly underneath Hutton Beck, 50 m downstream of the bridge. Shortly after surveying, the usual winter flooding took hold and we focused more on digging at Jenga instead.

After some time away, we eventually returned to Screek on 13th March 2010, where we found some interesting changes. Matt Ewles reported on the progress:

*We set off down Shit Creek with the intention of probing the cobbled sink where the water is lost at the lowest point. Gary started having a dig using the entrenching tool while Andy and I pushed on into the higher passage beyond leading to the mud bank. This passage must have a considerable flow of water at times due to the clean washed nature of the floor. Beyond the mud bank and into the far extensions, Andy started having a poke at a small clean washed area at the first cross rift while I pushed on several metres further. I was surprised to find this area a lot wetter than last time. There were several crystal clear pools with cave shrimp swimming around, indicating fresh water top-up in the area. About 10 m beyond where Andy was digging, a wallow in water was reached, which I'm sure was dry last time. The source of the water became obvious, as a tiny inlet brought in a small flow on the left hand side, which was pooling but also sinking through the floor. Beyond here a slightly larger area was reached just a few metres prior to the termination of the passage, where we commenced a dig.*

Richard Wilsdon in the further reaches of Screek Passage. Photo by Andy Brennan.





*Some time passed and we were joined by Gary who had given up with his effort at the cobbled sink (digging at this will require a drag-bucket to allow spoil to be hauled up and deposited in the more spacious higher level passage). Gary went on to the very end of Shit Creek, where the passage chokes with mud and some interesting holes in the floor offer enticing digging to a possible continuation of the bedding crawls below.*

*After a couple of minutes, Gary told us all to be quiet. He had heard something! We all scrambled along to the very end section, where Gary told us to put out head down one of the holes in the floor and listen. Sure enough, the quite loud sound of flowing water could be heard – in fact you didn't really need to stick your head down the hole to hear it. It sounded like a very strong flow indeed! The echo around this area is also notable, although we always need to remember that this can be misleading in caves.*

*Andy then put the seed of doubt in my mind that maybe what we were hearing was water backing up where Gary had dug and maybe blocked the sink. As unlikely as this was, once that seed of doubt is planted it can not be shaken off. I returned to the sink to check that everything was fine (it was), while Andy and Gary had a dig in the floor to try to gain access to the lower bedding and hopefully a continuation towards the sound of water. We agreed that there was a good potential for digging here, however it would require serious work, and we were also getting quite cold and tired, having been underground for three hours with no break and being wet through.*

*Shit Creek was certainly a very different place to when we were last down. There has clearly been recent serious flooding in the far reaches, meaning this area is far more hydrologically active than initially expected. The fact that we could hear the sound of running water was encouraging. We have probably departed from the main Screek Passage and entered into a higher level passage, into which water backs up during wetter conditions. The main Shit Creek stream passage remains nearby, undiscovered (taking the water lost down the sink), but maybe now we've at least heard it!*

The final sessions at Screek that we are reporting in this journal are the further explorations of the two main inlet passages. During a Tuesday night trip down to the cobbled upstream sump of inlet two, we had a failed attempt to gain further progress by draining the water. Having lowered the water by several inches, it became apparent that the sump was too narrow to pass through. The following month, on 15th June 2010, Matt, Richard (Farrier) and Toby Buxton (York university's thinnest caver) took a trip down to push inlet one beyond the previous limit. Matt reported on the proceedings:

*We headed down to Inlet one of Shit Creek, with the intention of pushing it. Toby, being thin and very agile had agreed to give it a shot. I was surprised how far Inlet one actually goes, probably around 40 m until you reach a small overhead chamber with a dropped block. Beyond here the progress gets very nasty due to the hourglass shape of the passage. Toby headed on, followed by Richard, while I waited at the slightly more pleasant bit. Toby reports that he was able to push the inlet approximately 30 m further from my point (including around a VERY awkward corner where Richard decided that enough was enough). Toby eventually reached a section where he reckons he could have pushed on, but it was exceptionally difficult indeed*

*and I could hear him thrashing against the walls, so a retreat was called. Had he become stuck, nobody else would have fitted to help him!*

*The survey shows that the start of inlet one is 150 m from the tiny upper Honey River streamway, which we consider the most likely feeder of water to this inlet. I'd estimate that at the furthest reach of inlet one is around 70 m along, leaving approximately 80 m remaining before a connection might be possible. The survey will reveal if it is heading in this general direction, and if a future connection might be worth pushing for.*

More recent digging efforts during September 2010 at the terminal choke of Screek Passage have been rather fruitful, with extensions now made into 20 m+ of further bedding crawls (although without intercepting any of the previously heard water flow, perhaps as conditions were much drier during these digging sessions). We believe these extensions continue in the direction of Jenga Pot, thus closing the distance between Screek and Jenga to an estimated 120-140 m. We also believe that the Jenga sink remains the most likely candidate inlet for the regular flooding that obviously happens in Screek Passage from time to time, so the chances of making the connection are looking good.

# Jenga Pot

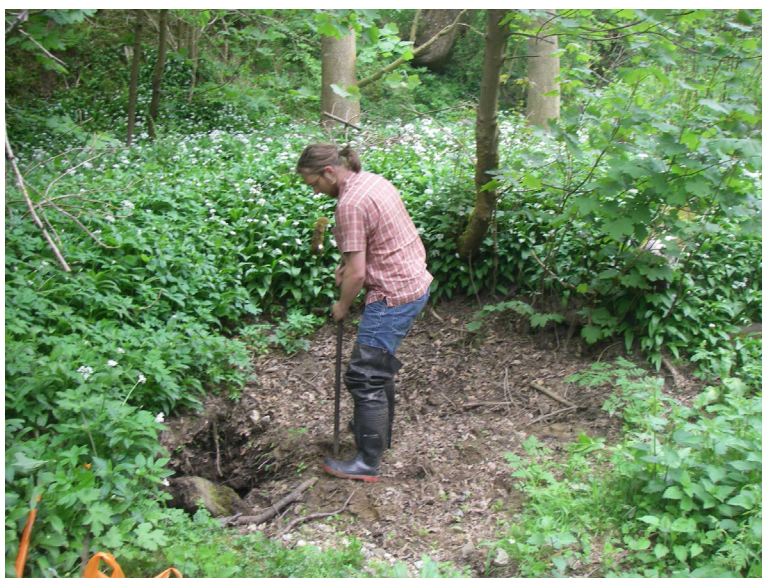
## Background to Digging at Jenga Pot

The southernmost sinkhole of Hutton Beck lies approximately 400 m downstream of the Excalibur entrance, near where the track towards Spaunton Quarry crosses over Hutton Beck. This is also the second largest sink, measuring 6 x 4 m and 1-2 m deep, although the depth varies throughout the year. Large volumes of water sink here during a flood, and this has been shown to resurge at Bogg Hall after approximately 5 hours (two hours longer than the transit time from the top sink via the Excalibur streamway, although the water levels varied greatly between the two experiments - the slower transit time from Jenga may be due to the greater volume of water in the entire system when Hutton Beck floods sufficiently to reach the Jenga sink). The route of water from Jenga to Bogg Hall remains a mystery, as no southerly inlets into the Excalibur Main Streamway have been found, indicating that the water may take a completely separate route towards Bogg Hall, maybe via another major underground streamway - hence our interest!

Digging here had been on our minds ever since we started work in the area, however, as this land is owned by a different estate we were initially not able to obtain permission, and so our attention focused on the work at the upstream sinks instead. SCC dug here in the 1990s but floods kept filling their digs and the project was abandoned. We re-started digging during the spring of 2008, once the frenzy of exploration down Excalibur was slowing down and the more serious business of surveying was beginning.

By the end of the year significant progress had been made and the dig acquired the name of Jenga Pot owing to the loose stacked blocks down the entrance rift. Jenga is currently 18 m deep at the lowest point - the same depth as the Excalibur Main Chamber - and even at this point flood water continues to gush down through the floor. Unfortunately, we haven't gained any horizontal progress yet, and based on the north-south dip of the limestone (which can be estimated by looking at the Excalibur survey side projection), we expect that a depth closer to 30 m may have to be achieved at Jenga before the main horizontal cave-forming limestone layer is reached.

Andy Brennan having the first pokes of the Jenga Pot sink. Photo by Richard Wilsdon.



## Jenga Pot Digging Diary

The site chosen to start digging was actually on the opposite bank of Hutton Beck to the main downstream sink (only a few metres away). We started digging here on Saturday 17th May 2008. This site offered a much easier to protect dig than the deep swallet, plus a small amount of water was also known to sink here in flood.

Easy progress through washed-in organic debris turned more to soil several foot below the surface, and at around 3 m down we encountered a long horizontal cavity extending several metres into the distance





beneath a solid rock roof. For now though we continued to dig downwards in the new shaft until the floor became rockier. With a 4 m deep pit now excavated, we covered it with logs and built a wall around the front end to protect it from a flood.

The Jenga Pot dig soon gained a defensive wall and scaffolding. Photo by Gary Douthwaite.

Finding weekends when we were all able to make the dig was becoming difficult, and so we adopted Tuesday nights as our digging nights when we could all get together, have a dig and still get to the pub for last orders. The first session (24th June 2008) saw Andy and Sharlene prepare a rather tasty lentil dahl on a camping stove while the new shaft was stabilised and a scaffold bar was installed above the centre of the shaft to allow easier bucket haulage. With the shaft now safer we decided to start digging horizontally southwards following the cavity beneath the solid roof, scooping out the mud and silt fill from underneath it. The following dig report was written by Richard:

*We decided to head south rather than down. This meant we were digging out the fill from under the rock roof. There is a small gap over the top that appears to be the path of water that sinks here. Having dug out a couple of foot, this gap began to look more interesting. Currently you can see six foot or so ahead but it is still far too low a gap to enter. What was impressive is that the walls of the rift we are digging in continue under the roof and it looks very much like a passage that has been choked full of washed in silt, pebbles, cobbles and blocks. The original SCC dig here followed the same route but my memory was the water path took a dip down at the end and having reached that point we transferred to the stream bed dig outside Lingmoor (now Excalibur) as that offered better potential. Will we have the patience to dig the passage out to the current full height or will we push along over the top? Either way, we need to gear up for more hauling.*

Over the weeks that followed we continued to dig southwards, following the solid rock roof and the cavity beneath it. We pushed this for about 4-5 m until it started to narrow down and eventually choked with rock. However, it was now becoming obvious that we were actually digging along the top of a completely choked rift, and that the best way on would be to dig downwards to break through the choke in the hope that there may be an open rift waiting for us below (similar to what we found at the Excalibur dig).

On Sunday 3rd August, we started digging down, yielding a deep trench along the length of the passage by the end of the session. The following Tuesday, Hutton Beck flooded, and we descended the flooding new cave entrance to watch the water disappearing down through a small fissure in the floor at the bottom of the trench. It's always encouraging when your dig swallows water, so returning the following Saturday we continued to dig down here. Chalky reported on the session:

*Splendid dig, continued on down the rift as we did on Tuesday night. Beware don't fall down the hole now as it will smart a bit! Dig is around six foot below the bottom of the entrance shaft. After several hours of bloody tight awkward digging the bottom section starts to open out. We are getting out of the mud and into the rock that's easier to get out and there are signs that the water of the last flood went this way.*

Richard added the following report:

*Accompanied by little rain and some midges, we had a happy dig (Chalky, Ernie and I). I have quite forgotten why we are doing this but I have found there is some satisfaction in hauling buckets. The hole is deeper - alongside the fissure on the right that seemed to have taken water. The rift in the floor does not seem to narrow as much at that point and it would be interesting to see how far we can dig down here over coming weeks.*

A plastic pipe was embedded into the Jenga defensive wall to allow a controlled flow of water to enter the shaft during flood. This provided a great deal of entertainment during the weeks that followed!

Photo by Gary Douthwaite.



So we now had a promising downward dig, and although appearing to open out slightly, it remained a very narrow trench, and as we reached head-depth, digging at the bottom became painfully awkward and constricted. Chalky however seemed untroubled by this and continued to churn the buckets out at an astonishing rate!

The next several sessions were rained off. Eventually, on Sunday 31st August 2008 we were able to go down for a damp day of digging. We found that the trench - though somewhat moist - was unchanged despite the flooding that had happened. There was no draft at all and the metal bar was still going deep into the mud with no apparent voids below. With digging now becoming more awkward, our morale was now lowering and we were starting to lose interest. Towards the end of the session we spent the best part of an hour levering a sizable slab from the floor of the trench. The final task before the pub was to remove the slab from the trench completely and hope that



this was the keystone in the choked rift below us. Matt stood at the bottom of the trench, tied roped around the block, then guided it up with Chalky hauling from above. As the block neared the top, the knot suddenly slipped without warning, Chalky grabbed the edge, thankfully stopping it from falling on Matt's head, but crushing his thumb instead. A trip to York A&E diagnosed a broken thumb, but at least we'd got the block out!

The following week saw one of the biggest floods at Hutton Beck for a while. Richard bravely undertook a solo trip down to Jenga during flood on the 7th September 2008:

*The river is still flowing past the dig and a lot of water is still going down. The defences have almost entirely been washed away. There were a couple of logs wedged in the top of the shaft - I managed to pull one out but the other was too heavy. As I had suited up I thought I would have a go at getting down, so I squeezed through the debris. The shaft seemed fairly clear and I was rather amazed to reach the bottom to find there was no standing water. It wasn't easy to see anything because of all the water cascading but as soon as I ducked under the roof out of the spray, I was astonished to see the rift was clean washed. Loads of water was gushing in and going straight down the rift, which I would guess is now deeper than we had dug. I made a quick video but as I was alone and a bit concerned about the remaining log, I beat a hasty retreat. Rock on!*

On Tuesday 9th September 2008, with the flood waters receded, we turned up to assess the carnage. We cleared the debris and remaining log from the entrance and went down to investigate - little did we know what a treat we were now in for! The entire floor of the trench we were digging in had been washed away, and below was a clean washed rift disappeared downwards several metres. Matt attributes this entirely to the successful removal of the thumb-crushing rock! One last hanging jammed block deterred us from going down all the way that night so we spent the evening scaffolding the entrance shaft and rebuilding the outer defensive wall.

On Sunday 14th September we dispatched the jammed block and descended the newly exposed rift. It was quite spacious at the bottom, but was also hanging death, with large slithers of rock waiting to be peeled off the walls. We investigated a possible dig to the south end of the rift, which soon offered little promise of a way on. This was abandoned in favour of a drafting tube on the floor to the north, which soon became known as The Windpipe. Richard's dig report from 7th October 2008 summed up the progress:

*After using all of Chalky's destructive potential and at the last gasp of the drill, we had reduced the dodgy stack of rock to large chunks. The problem was that we had buried the rift! Ideally all of this needs to come out but we played Jenga and have stacked these blocks in every available place to clear a way to the stable opening into the rift. We were tempted to chuck rocks down to the lower rift but instead stacked them - hopefully Andy's Acro will hold them up. The potential through The*



Peering along The Windpipe we see Mark Sims digging in the new rift. Photo by Richard Wilsdon.





The narrow opening at the top of the pothole beyond The Windpipe. Gary Douthwaite.

*Windpipe looks good. You can see there is some space the other side, and there is a very good breeze.*

Most of the dodgy blocks and slabs were dropped using some controlled crowbar bashing. An Acro was installed across the south end of the rift and the blocks were stacked behind it (hence the name Jenga). Digging at the opening of The Windpipe was now far less of a trouser-soiling experience, and so we spent a week enlarging it. By the 26th October The Windpipe was just large enough to squeeze through, and we emerged 2 m above the floor in a spacious new cross-rift. The passage also continued beyond this rift, but was far too small and completely choked with mud.

To the north, the new rift narrowed significantly. A slot down in the floor could be seen but would require a lot of work to enlarge it sufficiently. Our attention was more drawn to a far more promising hole at the south end of the rift, where the floor opened slightly (unfortunately less than body width), into a pothole which could be seen to drop several metres. Richard and his fearless capping skills (often hitting them next to his face) soon enlarged the opening to allow us to descend, although the sharp and gritty rock ensured that gravity did little to help as we slithered down.

Below the constriction the pothole opened out and we descended 5 m to the bottom of a narrow circular shaft. On initial inspection it appeared to be a dead end, as we couldn't see any way on, however, looking closer a bedding crawl was spotted leading off at floor level. The bottom of the pot was too constricted to allow us to crouch down to get our heads into the bedding for a closer inspection, however Richard passed his camera down and photos were taken for later inspection at the pub. These showed the bedding to continue around a corner, but confirmed that it was far too narrow to enter. The bedding was named 'No Way On' and the next move would be to enlarge it enough to get our heads in for a more thorough inspection. Richard and Chalky returned on Sunday 2nd November to do just that, and Richard reported on their progress:

*We had another interesting episode yesterday evening. Chalky was at the bottom and kept asking whether I could hear anything. Were there aircraft flying over? Could I hear anything - no! He thought he could hear a river - exciting! We were changing places when he climbed above me and heard falling water through The Windpipe. Get out! Leave everything! Water was gushing in but it was not a total flood so I went back to recover the drill. There had been no sign of the river 20 minutes earlier. The big sink opposite the top of Jenga was slowly filling up. The interesting thing was that Chalky could hear the water below him so we must be on the right track. Before we were flushed out we managed to knock off a good lump off the wall at No Way On Bedding. Chalky managed to get his head down and look into the small passage that was shown in last Tuesday's pics. The floor level seems to drop a bit but it is still very small and we will need to enlarge it significantly to make any progress.*

A few more sessions of enlargement allowed a closer inspection of the bedding. Although it has a natural channel through it, this is so narrow that progress would be almost impossible. The bedding bends to the right only a metre along, and Richard experimented with BendyCam (a digital camera and light tied to a pole), but naturally this was completely ineffective.

That was the last digging session of 2008, and as the winter weather worsened, Hut-ton Beck fell victim to frequent flooding. We returned on the 13th January 2009 and to our surprise we found that the entrance shaft and wall remained sound and the dig was unchanged despite over a month of being completely submerged! We decided to give up working on 'No Way On' Bedding and instead started work to enlarge and dig out the choked continuation of The Windpipe beyond the second rift. A strong draft was flowing into the cave from behind which encouraged us onwards.



Gary Douthwaite working on the new entrance to Jenga Pot. Photo by Andy Brennan.

The following months involved enlargement and clearing of the tiny passage of the on-going windpipe. By the 21st April 2009 we had enlarged this sufficiently for thin people to venture down, one arm forward and one arm back (with no room to turn your head) and grab at the mud and cobbles, followed by frantic reversing with the spoils - this was clearly going to be slow progress! A number of larger blocks were too heavy to remove one-handed, so we needed to enlarge it enough to allow a both-arms forward approach. On Tuesday 5th May, the passage became just big enough for this, and after some time tickling a block a few metres along the passage, we were able to drag it out. A bit more digging later and a way through into a small cross-rift was now passable.

Andy went first along the tiny passage, thrutching wildly, before popping his head into the new cross-rift. He shouted back to report that it was tiny but there was another low passage sloping downwards to the left for 3 m over the top of a constricted pothole. This sounded good, but the low passage required enlargement. This kept us busy for most of May, until finally Laura was the first to be able to fit down the enlarged passage to reach a narrow opening at the top of the pothole. From here she could see that this dropped several metres into a more spacious and very promising looking area. Unfortunately, she was the only person who could fit, and so sensibly declined to descend when nobody else would be able to follow. On Tuesday 25th May the passage was enlarged further and with some interesting acrobatic manoeuvres, a descent of the pothole was possible. Matt went down just before the end of the evening, descending 5 m to reach a spacious blocky area at the bottom. He reported the findings:

*I was in a highly spacious and water worn rift-passage, large enough to comfortable house three working diggers! I didn't have time for a thorough investigation as the pub beckoned, but no horizontal progression could be made immediately. However, more promising was a slot in the floor which descended another 2 m approximately to what looked like a cobbled bedding floor. Unfortunately some outcrops of rock prevented dropping down into this (these will be easy to remove next week). I couldn't tell if there was*



*a bedding crawl disappearing off from the bottom but it certainly looked very interesting. Assuming that the previous bedding we encountered ('No Way On') was not actually the true bottom of Jenga, we may not have yet reached this. Next week will be an exciting dig - we need to do some work down there to open up this descending slot to see if an extensive bedding crawl awaits our exploration. Regardless though, we are now into more spacious and pleasant (and stable) digging which after the events of the last few weeks will make a refreshing change.*

Much of our attention through June was focused on further exploration down Excalibur at the new Shit Creek extensions, so it was not until 11th July that we returned to Jenga. Gary and Matt surveyed Dowson Pot and Lingmoor Cave while others dug down Jenga. Some progress was made continuing downward through the floor at the bottom of the new pothole, allowing entry down the slot to head height for agile individuals.

Further explorations down Excalibur then ensued and so it wasn't until much later in the year than Jenga called to us again, this time for a proper entrance to protect it from the impending winter floods. On Saturday 19th September 2009 we set about for a weekend of hard graft! This involved digging back around the hole to install shuttering, behind which rock and concrete was poured to cast a stable shaft. Above ground level, a cemented wall was built, as well as a second wall further out and flush to the line of the stream, with the area between the two being filled with rubble to provide a good solid base around the entrance. Our work was soon put to the test in early October by the first winter flood, and we were delighted to see it stand up to this very well indeed.

It wasn't until 28th October 2009 that a return to Jenga was possible. In the absence of any Yorkies, the Scarborough guys made some good progress down through the blocks at the bottom of the terminal pothole, gaining another few foot of depth. Things therefore looked quite promising, and unlike the first pot, this one seems to continue downwards rather than reaching solid floor. Further sessions gained further depth, but unfortunately Jenga soon fell victim again to the winter floods. The big freeze of early 2010 and the subsequent flooding prevented digging for some time.

Gary Douthwaite in the scaffolding frame at the bottom of the entrance rift of Jenga Pot. Photo by Nicola Gover.



Work recommenced in February 2010, reaching greater depths. Unfortunately such progress wasn't to last and only a metre further down, the bottom of the pot soon narrowed in, making digging more and more difficult. After several disappointing sessions, with no draft and no potential routes onwards, the decision was made to abandon this route and rethink our strategy.

Although this is where we leave the Jenga Pot story for now, much more work has been done over the summer of 2010. We have now decided to start digging towards the main overland sink (on the opposite side of Hutton Beck) from the bottom of the large entrance rift, in the opposite direction to The Windpipe. A recent flood has confirmed that this is back on the route of the sinking water, and we remain confident that significant passage awaits discovery somewhere down there.

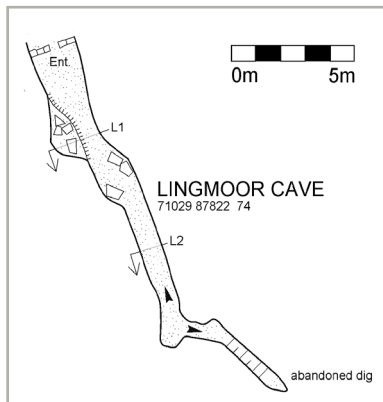


## A Quick Discussion on Geology

The area around Excalibur consists of two distinct Jurassic limestone layers. The limestone of the area is described as oolitic, meaning the limestone is formed around tiny particles of grit, sand or shell and is therefore very granular and sharp. The upper limestone (the Malton Oolite) forms the higher rocks of the Hutton Beck valley and is home to Lingmoor Cave and Dowson Pot (and possibly T'une Mouth and Bogg Hall). The lower limestone (the Hambleton Oolite) lies below the bottom of the valley and is home to the Excalibur system. Between the two is the Middle Calcareous Grit (MCG) layer, which is of varying thickness (typically around 10-20 m). Although the MCG has a very oolitic limestone-like appearance and composition, we have not found any evidence to suggest that it can support significant phreatic cave development.

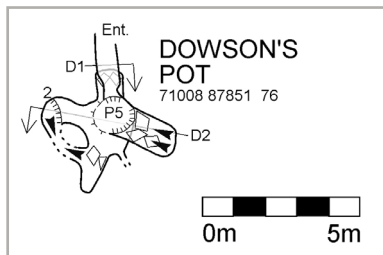
Although this is hotly debated within our clubs, it is speculated (based on what we have been told by a local hydrologist) that The Font at Bogg Hall may be a fault (or collapse) in the MCG layer which the water has exploited to rise up from the lower limestone into the upper limestone (where it has formed Bogg Hall Rising). The Hutton Beck sinks could also represent such faults or collapses which water has exploited to get down into the lower limestone, where it has subsequently formed the Excalibur system. However, it is also speculated that the lower limestone may not be quite so far beneath the bottom of the Hutton Beck valley, and that the sinks represent the northern point at which (due to the north-south dip) this limestone layer surfaces, and the water has been easily able to go underground. We await the assistance of a keen geologist to settle this!

## Other Digs in the Excalibur Area



### Lingmoor Cave

The entrance to Lingmoor Cave is located in the cliff face behind the Excalibur entrance (and is situated 15 m above Parallel Passage Chamber in Excalibur). Beyond the bricked-up entrance, a spacious crawl soon degenerates to muddy slithering leading to a small chamber only 14 m from daylight. From here a chute leads down into a wet, muddy tube ending after a few metres at an abandoned SCC dig (where Chalky reputedly disgraced himself - ask him for details). Despite their extensive efforts, the Scarborough diggers failed to achieve any significant extensions here. Lingmoor Cave may have once been part of a much larger system, but is now completely choked with mud washed in over recent ice ages.



### Dowson Pot

Dowson is a small pothole located high up in the cliff face 40 m upstream of Lingmoor Cave. A small opening reaches a narrow slot leading directly onto the head of the 5 m deep (free-climbable) main pot. The pot chokes with rock and mud at the bottom, although several former SCC digs provide a brief distraction for the small cave enthusiasts.

Surveys of Lingmoor Cave and Dowson pot. BCRA grade 5d.

Dowson Pot may represent an extinct sinking site dating from when the valley floor was higher, or it may have been a route for water into a cave system in the upper limestone. Dowson Pot is 14 m directly above a cross rift in Ernie's Inlet of Excalibur (hence speculation regarding its former life as a sink into the young Excalibur system), however, as with Lingmoor Cave, glacial mud now bungs up all hopes of a connection.

Lingmoor Cave and Dowson Pot were extensively dug during the 1990s by the Scarborough digging team in their efforts to break into the elusive Hutton Beck cave system (*i.e.* Excalibur). Future digging (particularly at Lingmoor Cave) might be rewarded with several more metres of mud-choked passage, and the possibility of discovering a system in the upper limestone similar to that at Kirkdale. What could be a better way to spend a sunny afternoon with some bottles of beer, a crowbar, and good friends?

### Hutton Beck

Hutton Beck has five known major sinks. The entrances to Excalibur and Jenga are two of these; however, the other three have also received digging attention over recent years.

#### (A) Top Sink

The top sink is found approximately 450 m upstream of Excalibur, at the northern end of the field. Unlike the Excalibur and Jenga sinks, the top sink is not an obvious swallet, nor a notable depression, but is instead a short stretch of streambed where Hutton Beck sinks rapidly through the fractured rocky ground, without significant pooling.

Under settled weather, all of the water from Hutton Beck immediately sinks at top sink and has been shown to enter the Excalibur streamway (taking approximately 20 minutes to get from the sink to the Holy Grail flowstone area, and three hours to resurge at Bogg Hall Rising). It is generally been assumed that sizable cave passage does not extend this far north, as the Excalibur Main Streamway fragments into narrow inlets 200 m south of this point. However, the roar produced by the water sinking at top sink has raised questions about whether it could be immediately tumbling down an open pitch.

During summer 2007 (before we made the breakthrough at Excalibur), we spent a day digging at the top sink. Progress downwards was easy and required only bare hands to pull out cobbles and small rocks. Within a day we had dug a 2 m deep trench alongside the sinking water, without any signs of cavities or solid cave walls. Without solid walls, the trench was very loose and further downward progress would have required either scaffolding, shuttering, or significant enlargement of the hole, which would have made it impossible to defend from the force of the winter floods. The dig was therefore abandoned in favour of the Excalibur dig, which soon yielded better results.

### **(B) The Big Sandy Sink**

Only 30 m downstream of the top sink, the big sandy sink is a huge swallet that dominates the field, nearly 30 m long and 10 m wide (as measured in 2009). After heavy rain, Hutton Beck often exceeds the capacity of the top sink and overflows into the big sandy sink, where huge volumes are swallowed. However, after very prolonged rain, even the big sandy sink's capacity can be overwhelmed, and over the course of several hours it fills up to a depth of 2.5 m - becoming an eerie swirling black pool - before overflowing, and continuing down the valley to Corner Sink, Excalibur and finally Jenga.

The big sandy sink has no exposed rock, and instead has almost vertical mud and sandy banked edges, where mesmerising slurp-holes open and close from one flood to another and water can be seen pouring down. These slurp-holes eat their way outwards and undermine the field, and consequently the outer edges are being continually eroded by the collapse of the overhanging bank. During our time working at Hutton Beck the sink has become one metre longer each year with no signs of stopping.

The water in the big sandy sink seems only to sink around the edge of the swallet, where the soil and sand is the most exposed. This indicates that the floor of the sink (which we have found to be a thick mat of organic debris) is almost completely impermeable to water. Instead, water sinks all around the exposed edges, presumably then being channelled across the underlying bedrock towards a route down into the cave below. A few half-hearted digs at the big sandy sink have yet to break through the organic debris and into rock, and any such project would be almost impossible to defend from flood.

### **(C) Corner Sink**

Corner Sink is a very small sink that was identified about 200 m north of the Excalibur entrance, on the corner where the stream turns to cut east-west across the field (only 25 m off the northern edge of the simplified survey shown earlier). Very small amounts of water have been seen to trickle down here, and a preliminary dig during summer 2007 (prior to the breakthrough at Excalibur) identified a draft only just below the surface.



Corner Sink was dug from April to July 2010 using all our skills learned from digging at Excalibur and Jenga. Our decision to dig here was based partly on the finding of a draft three years previously, but also on the results of the Excalibur survey, which shows that Fossil Chamber, at the north end of the Main Streamway, is almost directly underneath Hutton Beck only 40 m south of Corner Sink. Digging at Corner Sink might therefore create a top entrance into the Main Streamway and possibly gain access to any further passage that might exist in this area.

The digging of the surface shaft at Corner Sink was very reminiscent of the digging the Excalibur entrance, with loose mud and organic debris all requiring removal and large blocks requiring elimination. We soon reached two metres deep, with a strong outward draft to encourage us further downwards. A scaffold frame was erected to stabilise the loose edges of the new shaft (which unlike Excalibur was directly in the centre of the streambed). Within two months we had reached a final depth of four metres where we started to encounter some extremely large blocks separated by impenetrable fissures. Although the draft coming up from between the blocks remained strong, the only way forward would now require a huge commitment, stabilisation and enlargement, and by August 2010 we decided to discontinue the dig and return to digging at Jenga and down Excalibur instead. Most of the scaffolding from Corner Sink was subsequently removed and the dig was left to the mercy of the winter floods.

# Exploration of the River Dove

The River Dove flows down the valley to the west of Hutton Beck, and is a much larger river carrying significantly more water. At around the same latitude as the Hutton Beck sinks, the River Dove also disappears down a number of sinks and, like Hutton Beck, is also believed to also resurge primarily at Bogg Hall Rising. Many of these sinks are in the vicinity of the fish farm at the bottom of Yoadwath Bank (see Descent 160 for SCC's investigations of some of these), however, a number of others are found spanning south down the valley. We are confident that a network of cave passages exists in this area, although without any significant vertical range between the sinks and Bogg Hall Rising, passages are likely to be sumped (the vertical range from the Hutton Beck sinks to Bogg Hall is approximately 30 m). The recent discovery of Excalibur Pot and finding that this too resurges at Bogg Hall suggests a subterranean merger between the two underground streamways, adding additional interest to the area.

The subterranean River Dove received significant attention in 1999-2000 with diving of The Well. However, recent attention (since the discovery of Excalibur) has identified Guinevere's Slit, which drops into a short stretch of river passage with air space in dry weather. The following are reports of these explorations, in an area that will certainly be receiving more attention from us over the coming years.

## The Well (1999-2000 Explorations)

Only metres from the eastern bank of the River Dove, in the fields south of the Yoadwath fish farm (600 m upstream of Bogg Hall) is an old well, which drops 4 m down a narrow rift into sumped passage. We can be fairly confident that the water here is that of the sunken River Dove, and therefore The Well was (until the discovery of Guinevere's Slit) the only way into the subterranean course of this river. During the late 1990s Scarborough Caving Club spent some time scaffolding and concreting the old shaft to enable a much closer examination by divers of the flooded passage below.

On 12th October 1999, Jerry Gibbs of Scarborough Caving Club performed the first successful dives of The Well, locating a sumped main stream passage only metres from the entrance! Jerry reported on the progress in the 1999 SCC newsletter:

*The intention of this evening was to continue digging at the bottom of The Well to enable a diver to get through. The evening started normally. I decided to drive down the track and got the car stuck while trying to turn around at the bottom, but with Andy (Brennan) pushing and much wheel spinning we came free. On getting down to The Well itself I was keen to try my new modified equipment all thanks to Dave Ryall and Scoff Schofield who I met at the Hidden Earth conference. I now had a different bottle harness, a better method of attaching the bottles and best of all a very bright dive light, all home made of course!*

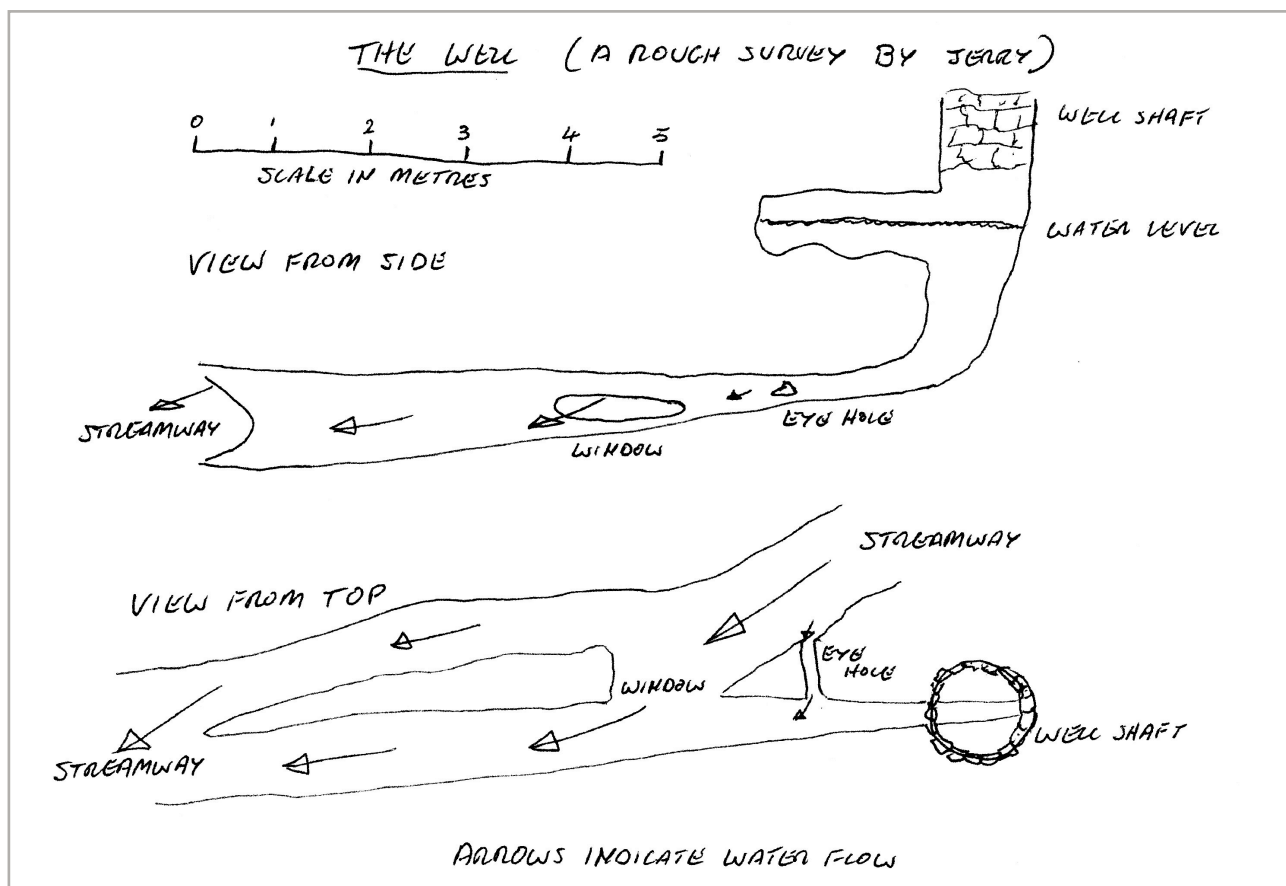
*I couldn't be bothered to get cold and wet so I let Andy go first instead. Andy geared up and set off. The dive light was brilliant; turning the water a bright orange and even when Andy was well out of sight I could still see the orange hue. After a few minutes Andy surfaced and muttered something*

about losing his nerve, but he had left the light on the bottom so I geared up in order to retrieve it.

The bottom of The Well was tighter than I remembered, and I struggled to get down, but once I had squeezed through the hole it immediately started to get bigger. Forcing myself backwards and dragging the light with me I slithered down a gradual slope and after 12 ft in and 3 m down I found the main streamway wide open for exploration!

Choosing to go downstream heading for Bogg Hall, I carried on slithering backwards dragging the lamp with me. The passage started to get bigger and I could turn around, but I stayed feet first because I wanted to see my return. After around 15 ft I started to emerge into a much bigger area, but with no fins and regretting not taking the line reel, I decided to call it a day. I had a frantic crawl/swim to get back against the pressure of the water, but I had done it! I had found the main streamway and the way forward! Whilst savouring a cool pint in The Buck I took great delight in gloating to Richard and Peter as we planned our return.

Jerry produced a rough survey of his findings in the same newsletter:



A later dive on 21st March 2000 by Jerry was reported in the SCC newsletter:

I set off again and passed the constriction with apparent ease. Drifting gently backwards with the current was very enjoyable, and I took the time to explore the surroundings. The line was belayed around a chert projec-



*tion and I continued backwards, zigzagging to find the biggest part of the passage. At ten metres in, and at minus three metres, my feet found a hole in the roof, but when I turned to look up into it, the regulator filled up with water. This did not inspire confidence and I vowed not to do that again! I tied the line off and continued on my way. The passage was rising, now at minus two metres and it appeared to be opening out. I turned around to see the way on and spotted another belay point. Whilst tying the rope again I glanced at the tag, it showed twenty metres, and the lack of line on the reel confirmed this to be true.*

*Suddenly I did not want to be twenty metres under the rock with only one three litre bottle and a leaking regulator. The line was quickly tied and cut, and I made my way out without problems, finishing the eight and a half minute dive with two thirds air left.*

A week later Jerry undertook another dive, aimed at adding another 30 m of line to the downstream sump, and then exploring the upstream passage. Unfortunately this was not quite so successful, and high water levels in the entrance rift scuppered his plan to kit up below the constriction to allow for more bottles to be taken along the downstream sump. All that could be done instead was a single bottle exploration of the upstream passage, which found it to be choked after only a few metres.

All findings at The Well over this year of exploration were reported in Descent 157. Unfortunately no further progress was ever made, as Scarborough Caving Club disbanded, leaving potentially open passage for any future hardcore cave divers to explore. This passage might continue for some distance towards Bogg Hall (perhaps merging with the Excalibur water inlet somewhere on-route). Are there any brave glory-hunters out there who fancy the challenge?

## **Guinevere's Slit (2009 Explorations)**

During summer 2009 we took a walk up the flooding River Dove to look more closely at the many known sinks in the area around and upstream of The Well. One in particular was noted on this occasion, a slit-like opening approximately 30 m upstream of the Well, and at the base of the opposite bank, but with too much water going down to be passable on this visit. Andy Brennan reports on a drier return trip on 30th June 2009:

*We went back to the little hole we found near the Well. There wasn't any water going down, and all we could see was a streamway a short distance below the surface. We couldn't wait to get into our caving suits so we just jumped in fully clothed! The river passage underneath is between 1.5 and 4 m wide. Downstream the passage dips with the strata and soon sumps (maybe only yards from the main passage under The Well). In extremely low water it may be possible to push this passage further. Upstream the water appeared to be flowing into the cave through some dodgy collapsed blocks which appear not to be penetrable. The water may also be flowing from a sizable submerged passage in the opposite wall that requires further investigation. Overall, the length of the new cave is about 10 m, well worthy of documentation by Scarborough Caving Club terms!*

Guinevere's Slit is the first discovery of non-sumped passage in the subterranean River Dove system, and is therefore quite a significant find. The entrance was covered with large slabs to protect it from the regular flooding pending a further visit. We eventually returned in July 2010, although as expected, we confirmed that further progress would require diving gear. Richard Wilsdon reported on this:

*The water levels were very low and I had a dabble in the sump pool. This is surprisingly deep. There is a big loose slab that you have to clamber over before this point and it would be sensible to drag this clear. Otherwise the way on seems open and an inviting dive for someone.*

Although there appears very little potential for further dry cave at Guinevere's Slit, there is huge potential for a network of spacious sumped passage, almost certainly connecting to The Well and perhaps heading downwards towards The Font at Bogg Hall - maybe passing the Hutton Beck/Excalibur inlet somewhere along the way. Guinevere's might therefore provide a much easier and more stable route - compared to The Well - into the unexplored River Dove system for future divers.

We are currently re-surveying Bogg Hall to obtain a more accurate position for The Font relative to the overland. Over the next few years we also plan to survey the River Dove, Guinevere's Slit, and map the location of all the sinks, to help us further understand how they might connect together underground.

# Other Digging and Exploration

## The Kirkdale Cave Extensions

Kirkdale Cave, near Kirkbymoorside, became famous in 1821 when a number of exotic animal bones were discovered during excavations by William Buckland, which confirmed the cave to be a prehistoric hyena den. Scarborough members made significant extensions to Kirkdale in 1995, pushing the length of passage to approximately 400 m, with the discovery of several very squalid extensions. The following is an edited (and highly abbreviated) report written by Chalky Thomas for the SCC newsletter:

*As this is the longest cave in the North York Moors area we thought we'd give it a bash and see if we could come up with any more length. Work began straight after Christmas 1995 with around five of us trying various different choked passages for the best looking way on, with one particularly dismal bedding being forced by Jamie and Nial. After about three Thursday nights of making no real progress, Shaun, who was bored, pulled a large rock out of a - well it was basically a pool of mud - and a couple of gallons of water disappeared! Shaun and I worked on this grotty looking bog until we'd dried it out and a reasonable phreatic tube was found. Of course it was full to the roof with silt. One evening Jamie arrived and decided it was his turn at the face, and after tapping the roof with the crowbar (to shouts of "that sounds bloody hollow") managed to pull out one - yes, one rock, and we saw open passage. The open passages seemed to go off in all directions and after about an hour or so we decided we should go to the pub and celebrate our 'breakthrough' (as is the traditional word on finding more than three feet of passage not filled with mud).*

*Of course, the next week another three members appeared, and we decided the way on seemed to be an outlet about four inches high at the far right of the chamber. After two weeks back-filling this chamber, an upwards slope stacked with small rocks was discovered. The rocks were removed after a couple of visits, and we squeezed up the slope into a rift about three feet wide and six feet long, but we could see twenty feet of passage ahead of us!*

*The next week Pete made the best breakthrough to date in this grotty hole. We broke into a rift around five feet wide and in places seven to eight feet high with beehive formations, stals, gour pools - the lot! We could see four tunnels leading off but the most appealing route was straight on.*

*After a couple of weeks of backfilling we dug out Asphyxia (as it was latter christened from the fact that with three of us in the passage we couldn't breath and received some good headaches to prove it) and that's where it ends up to now, other than to say the passage is still going! Until the next thrilling episode!*

Several routes were dug sporadically over the following few years, but with no further breakthroughs. A survey and guide to Kirkdale Cave (including the new extensions) was published in Descent 139 and also Moorland Caver (Gibbs and Stewart 2003).





Looking along the main rift towards the entrance in Old Fat And Past It Pot. Photo by Gary Douthwaite.

## Old Fat And Past It (OFAPI) Pot

One of Scarborough's finest early discoveries is the interestingly named Old Fat and Past It Pot (usually known as Ofapi, pronounced *o-fappi*), during 1997 in Dalby Forest near Pickering. The following report by Chalky Thomas is adapted from the 1997 SCC newsletter:

*One Sunday in mid summer one of our recces proved interesting. We were following the advice given by a wise man we met at a cave conference (names will not be mentioned just yet) and were prospecting for slip rifts in old quarries. We drove into this big old stone quarry in Dalby Forest. The day quickly proved profitable. On stepping out of the car, only two feet away from the door was a small drafting crack about four inches wide.*

*Now comes the technical part! A variety of stones of different dimensions were legged (as we say up north) indiscriminately down said crack. A sort of bangy, rumbly, tappy noise could be heard from below which obviously brought us great delight, considering it was a Sunday and the beer was still*

*rumbly tumbling about inside our large intestines somewhere. We then decided it was home time as Jerry was getting a bollocking from the missus.*

*Thus the pot was forgotten about for two years, until one Thursday night when another dig ended. Or was it our optimism that ended? Anyway, we were left wondering what the hell were we going to do the following week? Back to the hole in the quarry!*

*The car boot was opened. Drills, ammo boxes and wire were taken over to the crack. Andy thought that it was wide enough already and made a painful entry, descending the ladder to a ledge. Impressive though this was, it didn't make entering any easier for the rest of us. Three muffled shots later, Richard, decided that just one more would finish the job nicely. However the pub called from a distance and the smell of pork scratchings lingered in the cool night air (reasonably poetic don't ya think). Drinks were purchased at the bar, and we discussed the following weeks digging and proceeded to drive home.*

*On Thursday 9th October back we went and finished the job in hand. Within five minutes Richard had forced his way in and I followed. The bolting kit was out of the bag, and the first and only bolt was placed. Next down came the ladder, with a few rocks just to make us feel homely. The next pitch was descended and we found ourselves in a large slip rift. The rest of the party followed and the system was fully explored. The furthest end was reached by chimneying up to reach an extension that ended at a tight rift. Andy was called for and again we found ourselves on the wrong side of a*

*squeeze having to rely on his description of a climb down into the final 80 foot of rift before it closed down.*

*The rift is some twelve feet wide in places and fifty feet high but with its own unique characteristics; the main part of the rift bellies out with the smooth curve of the undercut walls covered in a white deposit. It also has classic slip rift features - dodgy boulders as big as a car, several climbs and gymnastic events - a brilliant find in such a short space of time. The slither down the entrance crack had seemed fairly easy, but the return was interesting, to say the least.*

*Yet again, the job of going to the pub had to be done, and over a cool glass of Black Sheep, the topic of surveying the rift was discussed, and we thought the best thing to do was to get the professionals in. I made a few phone calls to the right people for the job, and the following week this skilled group of experienced cavers arrived. The founder members of the M.S.G. have been a great inspiration to us over the last five years or so, and have helped us to realise what a great activity caving is. It really doesn't matter if your mid life has settled around your waist and you are just about to croak - you can still cave!*

*The three had travelled a long way and had gone to some trouble to help us out yet again, and they looked into the hole we had brought them to see. First one then another tried to get in and failed - the punishment showing in their faces proved too much. They failed where we had succeeded! We discussed naming the pot, and on the way back to the pub it came to us - 'OLD FAT AND PAST IT' seemed just to fit.*

*We talked in the pub, not daring to mention what the name was - at least until they had surveyed it for us. We agreed to enlarge it to eighteen inches and ring them when the job was done. The following week we completed the task and now have a brilliant survey. My thanks to Robin Sermon, Pete Ryder and Ernie Shields for the inspiration, the survey and the name.*

The survey and navigation guide for Old Fat and Past It Pot can be found in Moorland Caver (Gibbs and Stewart 2003) and the survey and a write-up of the breakthrough was also published in Descent 141. This is one of the most enjoyable slip-rifts in the area and provides a short but memorable afternoon trip - and is therefore highly recommended to any visiting cavers. The entrance is covered with a substantial locked cage, but the key may be easily obtained by contacting the Forestry Commission in Pickering.



The end of the main rift passage in Old Fat And Past It Pot. Photo by Gary Douthwaite.



## Manor Vale Caves, Kirkbymoorside

These are three small caves on opposite sides of the Kirkbymoorside Council Yard (on the road leading up to the golf course), and these are described in Moorland Caver (finding the eastern cave involves some foraging behind a council building).

The west caves have received little further attention since the publication of the guide. The much larger east cave however has been re-examined more recently (actually this was YCC's first ever digging project before we started work at the Excalibur site). The main passage terminates at a spacious but very muddy cross-rift, with a possible continuation visible beyond a choked squeeze at floor level. The small passage on the right only a couple of metres from the entrance (excavated by SCC during the 1990s) passes an awkward squeeze to reach a very narrow cross rift with a tiny calcited bedding crawl leading off at floor level. This appears to open up to body size a few metres along and YCC members Matt Ewles, Gary Douthwaite and Laura Bennett spent three weekends chiselling away the calcite floor, with minimal success. This requires additional work but could prove very rewarding (by North Yorkshire Moors caving standards), and a return is planned with our greater digging experience.



Above left:  
The large open entrance to one of the two caves  
on the west side of Manor Vale.

Above right:  
The bricked up entrance to the second of the two  
caves on the west side of Manor Vale.

Left:  
The entrance to the cave on the east side of Manor Vale  
behind the council buildings. This is the longest of the caves  
and holds the most potential with silt filled bedding heading  
into black space.

All photos by Gary Douthwaite.



## Other Discoveries and References

Scarborough Caving Club has discovered many small caves across the North Yorkshire Moors. Unfortunately, for most of these, no dig reports could be found to elaborate on the reports from Moorland Caver (Gibbs and Stewart 2003), and the Descent magazine articles published at the time (often in collaboration with other local caving groups):

Descent 53 and Caves and Caving 18: Bogg Hall Rising discovery

Descent 121: Troutdale Windypit and Newclose Rigg Pot

Descent 136: Cockerdale Windypit

Descent 139: Lizard Rift, Silpho Quarry Cave and the Kirkdale Cave extensions

Descent 141: Discovery of Old Fat And Past It Pot

Descent 155: Eastfield Quarry Caves

Descent 157: Extensions to Antoft's and Buckland's Windypits and The Well

Descent 158: Boltby Quarry Caves

Descent 160: Digging at the River Dove sinks

Descent 174: Hayes' Hole

Descent 179: Whitecliff Rigg and Sieve Dale Windypit

Descent 202: Discovery of Excalibur Pot

Descent 207: Excalibur and Jenga update

Descent 209: Excalibur Screek Passage breakthrough

Descent 213: The Excalibur survey and Jenga Pot update

Other references relevant to this journal:

British Caver 9 (1942) p 63, R. H. Hayes: Dowson Pot discovery

Cave Diving Group Newsletters 64, 66, 93 and 137: Diving at Bogg Hall

Moldywarps Speleological Group (MSG) Journals 1-12: Various moorland discoveries. If it wasn't discovered by our clubs, or our prehistoric ancestors, then Moldywarps probably discovered it! Their journals make for excellent and highly inspirational reading.

# York Caving Club Diary 2009-2010 and Selected Reports

## **Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2009: Growling Hole**

Our first club trip!

## **Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2009: Birks Fell Cave**

A superb trip as far as Shale Pitch.

## **Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2009: Croesor Rhosydd Mine**

This was part of our long weekend in North Wales, during which we also visited the spectacular ODB cave system - Many thanks to North Wales Caving Club for showing us around and helping us to organise a great weekend.

## **Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2009: Marilyn Pot**

## **Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2009: Boggarts Roaring Holes**

## **Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2009: Boxhead Pot/Lost Johns**

Our attempt at this exchange was rained off.

## **Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2009: Penyghent Pot**

## **Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2009: Notts Pot II**

## **Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> October 2009: Spectacle Pot/Vesper Pot**

Not quite an exchange – The Spectacle team bottomed it, however the dodgy spit at the top of the final pitch in Vespers prevented the exchange taking place.

## **Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2009: Jean Pot**

We bottomed it - an unusual, challenging and interesting cave.

## **Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> December 2009: Kildale Mine**

The pre-Christmas meal mine trip with SCC, aimed at working up our appetites. The following report was written by Matt Ewles:

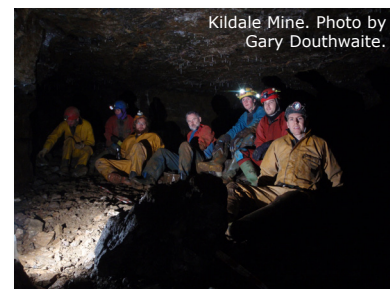
*On a very snowy day we met up with the Scarborough guys in Stokesley for breakfast, following large amounts of snow over the previous week. We headed up towards the village*



Growling Hole. Photo by Gary Douthwaite.



Marilyn Pot. Photo by Gary Douthwaite.



Kildale Mine. Photo by Gary Douthwaite.

*of Kildale, thankfully following a tractor which was gritting the narrow road. A trudge up the hill in the snow rewarded us with an excellent mine, with extensive passages and calcite decoration, and some fine original mine workings. We didn't have time to fully explore, however we were underground for a good three hours and we had only just scratched the surface.*

*We departed the mine at 4 pm and were soon on our way down the Bilsdale road to get to Hutton-le-Hole for our Christmas meal at The Crown Inn. As we reached Helmsley the snow started coming down hard and it was touching-go whether we would make it over the hill and into Hutton-le-Hole! We did, and we got to the pub around 5:30 pm with the snow coming down thick and fast. Within half an hour it was confirmed to us that it was to be a one-way trip for today! After shovelling a space for our tent around the back of the pub then we hurried in to spend six hours drinking and eating.*

*It continued snowing for five hours, setting down a foot of snow and making camping a chilly experience. The following day was bright and sunny but very cold, with thermometers reading minus 14°C. (Gary's digital camera turned itself off with the error message that the temperature was too low for the battery, and cans of pop had frozen solid in our tents). Thanks to a snowplough passing through the village during the night we were able to escape Hutton by 10 am, after spending half an hour scraping the ice off car doors to allow them to be opened! We took it in turns to take a run up at the hill, with Gary's heavy Laguna only just having enough momentum and grip to make it up to the highest point by the campsite, and it was downhill from there. An excellent and highly memorable Christmas meal.*

#### **Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> December 2009: Devis Hole Mine Cave**

#### **Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2010: Boxhead Pot – Lost John exchange**

One of our most memorable trips of the year. Report by Richard Gover:

*A classic Dales caving exchange and an excellent introduction to YCC.*

*Generally preferring to explore caves that others have already emptied of mud for me, it was rather late in the day before I decided to join YCC, despite having caved regularly with the founding members for years in the York University Cave and Pothole Club. However, after watching slightly enviously through the first year of the clubs existence as an impressive list of harder, and more unusual caves were ticked off, I decided I wanted in.*

*The plan was a trip down Boxhead Pot, and a recce through the Kendal Flyover and the Tate Galleries to the pave the way for a future exchange with Lost Johns. Having previously explored the Master Cave from Lost Johns as far as Lyle Cavern I was keen to do the exchange and planned to apply all my persuasive powers to push for this. Failing that, beg.*

*What better preparation for a long days caving than spending the previous day at the Ilkely Beer Festival? Despite this, come Sunday morning I felt surprisingly fresh and eager to go. Steve and Ellie (both YUCPC) were still*



up for it, though Max bailed at the last minute, so with a reduced team we set off from Ilkely to join Matt, Gary and Mark in Bernies. We arrived at Bernies at a reasonable time, only to find the others sat having long since finished breakfast and raring to go. After some discussion we decided to go for the exchange, despite Matt's reservations about the complexity of the route finding - worst case scenario the two teams would return by their original routes if we failed to find each other. Mark too was chomping at the bit at the prospect of doing two classic caves for the first time in one go, and was obviously pleased with the decision. The plan: Steve, Ellie and I would head down Lost Johns via the Centipede route and Matt, Gary and Mark would head down Boxhead Pot. We aimed to meet somewhere in the Master Cave, perhaps at the bottom of the pitch in Lyle Cavern after it had been rigged by the Boxhead team.

After a speedy breakfast we were on the road again and up to Leck Fell, where unusually for the time of year it was not snowing, or even raining. We kitted up and headed off across the fell, soon reaching Lost Johns while the others stomped on to Boxhead Pot (fortunately it was that way round as none of us heading into Lost Johns knew where Boxhead was).

Centipede Route passed without incident, ably lead by Steve as the previous days excesses slightly dampened my enthusiasm. We took our time reckoning that the others would be longer exploring the unknown ground in Boxhead Pot, but still found ourselves rattling down the cave at a good pace. Battleaxe Traverse was easier than usual as it had been left rigged by a previous group and we were soon dropping down Valhalla and on down to the Master Cave. After leaving a cairn at the junction to help the others, we headed upstream, and the navigation became somewhat more tricky due to having to read the Not For The Faint Hearted (NFTFH) description backwards. Fortunately the description was as comprehensive and detailed as usual and even backwards with no previous knowledge of the route (after the Master Cave) this presented no major difficulties.

A quick stomp up the streamway (probably one of the best in the Dales, if not the UK) and some clambering over boulders led to the climb up into Lyle Cavern. I'd been here once before, but had not remembered quite how breathtaking it is - truly one of the best chambers in the Dales. After an extremely efficient trip so far, with hardly a pause for breath the whole way, we were ahead of schedule and were not surprised that there was no sign of the others. However, dangling tantalisingly from the roof high above was not one, but two in situ ropes – but which to pick? With no way of telling where each went from the bottom I picked one at random and headed up, with Steve following up the second. After about 20 m I reached an entrance to a tunnel, while Steve's rope carried on up. I swung in and set about exploring. It seemed to fit my backwards reading of NFTFH (wet bit - climby bit - slightly bigger bit - another wet bit) so I shouted back to Steve. Steve's route had looked less promising and so he had stopped while I went to explore. After some swinging around it became apparent he'd have to head back down and then up the right rope, soon followed by Ellie and then we plunged on into the Lyle Cavern Extensions. I'm still not sure where the other rope goes, though it may be one of the alternative routes down from Avens Passage.

*One of the problems of reading route descriptions backwards is when it is obvious where to climb down from the top of a rift when heading in the correct direction, but not where to climb up from the bottom. However, after some blundering about we found a way up and into Helictite Rift. I found this is a rather sombre and brooding bit of cave while waiting for the others who had headed the wrong way at the top of the climb, and I was glad when the others caught me up after I'd got a few minutes ahead of them. After a couple more junctions we heard noises ahead and hurrying along we met the other group just emerging from the climb up into Avens Passage from Handshake Crawl - site of the original connection. NFTFH describes this climb as "fascinating" and judging from the weird grunts and panting coming up through the hole we began to wonder what we were in for.*

*One by one Matt, Gary and Mark popped out raving about the cave so far which whetted our appetite for the cave to come. Somehow we got lumbered with carrying out the rope they had brought for the pitch into Lyle Cavern, which they wouldn't need, and after some hurried extra route finding tips we said our goodbyes and headed on. The climb down was indeed rather acrobatic, but we were soon through, along the crawl and into the Tate Galleries. After the dramatic high level passages, soaring avens and amazing decorations of the Lyle Cavern Extensions, the next series of passages were something of a disappointment: they were more squalid than soaring. Still, we pressed on in the knowledge that it could only get better, and in any case we had no choice as our escape route via Lost Johns would soon be taken from us.*

*After a short dunking and a crawl up a low streamway we reached the obvious hand line up into the Cresta Run. It was here that the tiredness hit home after probably four hours of non-stop caving (plus the beer festival), and the hand line seemed hard work. I think we all struggled for purchase up the slippery rift and repeatedly slipped into the tight bit. After some combined tactics we emerged into the Cresta Run and the light relief of some easy passage. From here, we hurried along and before long popped out onto the ledge partway up of the Boxhead Pot Main Pitch, with the rope stretching up into the darkness and the sound of falling water all around - a truly awesome spot. Heading up, the pitch seemed to go on for ever, broken by a couple of re-belays before the last stretch straight up the main pitch. Swapping over onto the entrance pitch was made more "interesting" by looking up to see the feat of engineering that it took to open up this pot - hats off to all involved in this. With daylight beckoning us on we soon emerged into daylight, though while we were underground it had got cold and because we were soaked through we were soon shivering.*

*The way back over the moor was straightforward and we were soon back to the entrance to Lost Johns as the light was beginning to fade. There was no sign of the others. Despite not having any reason to think that they would be having any problems, we decided that it would be sensible for Steve and I to head down Lost Johns to locate the other group as if they had had trouble finding the way through then the sooner we reached them, the better. However, this was not a tempting prospect being now very cold and so we delayed with the excuse of washing the rope and so were delighted when*

*the others emerged after only a short delay. Despite being one of the best exchanges in the Dales, you can definitely have too much of a good thing.*

*After a rapid change we headed off for pizza at the Game Cock and then home, tired but satisfied after a great day. This was a memorable first trip with the club and a hopefully a sign of many great sporting trips to follow.*

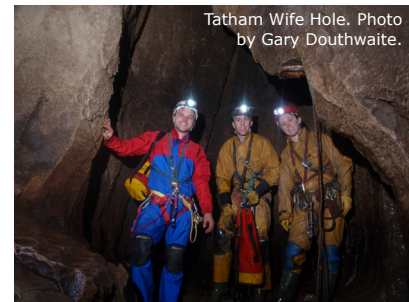
**Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2010: Tatham Wife Hole**

**Monday 5<sup>th</sup> April 2010: Hunter Scar Jet Mine**

**Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2010: Hurnell Moss Pot**

**Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2010: Penyghent Pot**

A classic and efficient trip to the main sump, and out in time to get to Middlesborough for Andy's housewarming party!



**Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2010: Sell Gill Holes**

**Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2010: Birks Fell Cave**

An exciting but tiring trip to Shale Pitch.

**Friday 28<sup>th</sup> May 2010: Doolin River Cave**

**Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> May 2010: Cullaun Two and Five**

**Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2010: Faurnarooska Cave**

**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2010: Coolagh River Cave**

These four trips were part of our long weekend in Doolin, County Clare, Ireland, where we stayed in a cottage overlooking the sea. We had a fantastic long weekend, travelling over on Thursday and back on Monday. We had fine weather, great caving, ample food and drinks and a generally relaxing time.



**Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2010: Lancaster Hole**

**Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> June 2010: Dale Head Pot**

Terminated on the big pitch due to dodgy spits!

**Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2010: OFD (Top Entrance-Selenite Tunnel-Streamway)**

**Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2010: OFD round trip**



## Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2010: Ogof Carno

An unusual and exciting trip. Report by Matt Ewles:

*One of my most memorable trips of the last few years has to be Ogof Carno in South Wales. As is YCC's constant search for new adventures, we decided that this extensive and understated cave was worthy of some exploration! The cave was discovered after a 2 km long water tunnel built over 100 years ago intersected natural cave fissures approximately 1700 m along.*

*The water tunnel makes for an impressive cave entrance. Entirely walking height throughout with only a couple of inches of water, it seems to go on forever (taking over 20 minutes stomping to reach the cave). The tunnel is perfectly straight and even from 1700 m along, light from the entrance can still be seen in the distance!*

*The 'duck' soon after the entrance ladder was only waist deep, and this was followed by nearly 20 minutes of monotonous muddy and dull progress before Sand Chamber. Until Sand Chamber I was feeling pretty uninspired and I had almost written the cave off as boring. Sand Chamber however was a welcome break and was impressive and sobering - mud banks metres above the roof of the surrounding passages had clearly been wiped clean of footprints, indicating the potentially catastrophic flooding that this cave may occasionally undergo.*

*Beyond Sand Chamber the cave started to become more exciting, with slippery muddy climbs, rifts, squeezes, ladders and more junctions, twists and turns than you could shake a stick at. Within minutes of leaving Sand Cavern I was feeling much warmer towards the cave, which now intrigued me and seemed to present a personality unlike any other. Mud adorned every single wall and absorbed light, while flat surfaces seemed like a rare commodity as the walls and roof rippled and undulated. Fixed ropes hung sporadically from the roof offering a glimpse into the complexity of the place. Getting bored now seemed impossible!*

*On the approach to Full Moon Crawl, some nice stomping passage provided yet another change in character to the cave, and the 'Cough and Drop' chamber before the crawl oozed charm. The crawl itself was conveniently broken half way with a spacious rest-stop, as if it had been designed for cavers! Beyond the crawl, a short round trip via Knob Alley and Whale Chamber seemed to provide a perfect reward to those turning around, yet offering enticing routes onward to lure us back.*

*Ogof Carno is indeed an interesting place, with a character like no other. The small twisty turning passages offer no clue as to the enormous expanse of the cave, and I have no doubt that a trip to the furthest reaches would be an epic adventure requiring a very long day! Ogof Carno may not be the biggest, prettiest or most spectacular cave in South Wales, however, it makes you want to go back to see more, to learn more and to know more about it. The log book suggests that not many groups other than the diggers ever seem to venture down, which seems like a great shame. Draenen,*

*Daren and OFD may be the kings of South Wales caving, but Carno is definitely the mysterious hidden treasure that definitely justifies a visit.*

**Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2010: Ogof Draenen**

Exploration of Gilwern Passage and Hearts of Olden Glory Streamway.

**Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2010: Dan-Yr-Ogof**

The above four trips were part of our long summer weekend staying at the Croydon Caving Club Cottage in Ystradfellte, South Wales.

**Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2010: Croesor Rhosydd Mine**

The main focus of a weekend in North Wales - Report by Matt Ewles:

*Mark, Gary, Chuck and I travelled down Friday night arriving in time for beers at the campsite. As Saturday morning arrived so too did the rain and a wet breakfast ensued! Thankfully by 10:30 am the rain moved away leaving a perfect walking day, so we wasted no time setting off up Tryfan, getting to the top in three hours and back down to the campsite by 5 pm. A quick shopping trip to Bethesda and a three course meal at the campsite later we were joined by the others coming down from York.*

*Sunday morning was not a pleasant one - heavy rain and winds pummelled our tents all night, and by morning, visibility was low and the weather was atrocious! This had not been forecasted and several people had not packed as much waterproof stuff as maybe they would have liked. Packing tents away was a very wet experience. The drive to Croesor was equally wet with roads flooded and we were uncertain whether the water levels in the mine would have risen. One road into Croesor was completely blocked by flood waters! This wasn't a good omen for the trip and the thought of sacking it off crossed my mind.*

*We parked in Crosoer car park in heavy rain and got changed. The walk up to Crosoer seemed much quicker than last time thankfully (about 45 minutes). Following the entrance adit for a couple of hundred metres (through an old gate) reaches the first area of interest - an old brick built room, in the corner of a wide chamber. Further on, on the right hand side a short passage reached an enormous flooded chamber with an eerie lake of bottomless depths! Ignoring this and continuing ahead passes a flooded slope down to a lower level, and then an interesting climb up a walled structure reached the bottom of a long slope with a huge water pipe down the left hand side. Following this slope all the way to the top reaches the first pitch on the left hand side.*

*The in-situ rope looked good, so we started down, using a system of light flashes to signify rope free (as a description we had advised against making sudden loud noises due to the unstable nature of this enormous chamber). I was last down the rope, expecting a trouble-free descent. However, half way down the rope, I felt a sudden jolt, as a section of knackered rope,*

worn completely to the core, passed through the bars of my rack. My heart rate shot up instantly, and still being 10 m from the ground I thought the rope was about to snap and that I was a goner! Thankfully it held and I was glad to reach the floor. The decision to complete the through-trip had been made, as we had no intentions of ascending back up this tat. Future visitors should ensure they take their own rope for a pull-through (50 m should be adequate), or a 30 m rope to rig properly, with a group returning after the through-trip to de-rig from the surface.

A short scramble across the slate-strewn enormous chamber reaches a slope descending through a huge archway on the right hand side, the head of the second pitch. We knew the in-situ rope had recently been replaced here so were more confident in using it. This pitch is amusing but scary, as the rope rubs and numerous points against sharp slate edges, and the countless rope protectors do little to prevent this at several points. Furthermore, the loose slate walls crumble to the touch. This really is one of the most simple but dangerous pitches I have ever done!

Glad to be at the floor, the zip wire is reached only 30 m further. Most people were already across by the time I arrived. The trip across the zip wire was tremendous fun as expected. The zip wire is done by using a steel double-pulley (metal wires shred alloy ones). This is attached to the wire, and some string or cord is tied on which can be paid-out quickly as the person zips across, to allow for the pulley to be pulled back (a reel of fishing wire would be better). It is important to weight the pulley with a few steel krabs or it flips up and gets stuck when trying to pull it back when unloaded. An in-site rope provides a backup and a good means to control your speed to avoid a harsh impact with the wall at the far side of the lake.

Beyond here a short boat trip across a flooded section (formerly the suspension bridge, long since collapsed) reaches a large flat chamber. An in-situ boat avoided the need for us to implement our own fine vessel, Stingray II, with its go-faster puncture (which makes you paddle faster).

Following the obvious stomping route on from here reaches after a couple of minutes (and passing through a couple of very large chambers) the first of three bridges. This first bridge is the easiest as it has a wooden strut all the way across it, which can be traversed while clipped into an in-situ safety line. The second bridge has nothing to walk across at all and is consequently passed by using a zip wire and pulley (the first person has to pull themselves across on the metal wire - gloves essential - and then they can attach a rope to the pulley to haul everyone else across).

The third bridge - the Bridge of Death - was terrifying! The first half can be crossed on a bendy bit of railway track, clipped into an overhead wire line as a backup. The second half had nothing to stand on, and so must be negotiated using the pulley on a wire approach. The wire however is too high up to easily reach, and so the first person across (the tallest) must install the pulley with a sling attached to hang down and for others to clip into. The changeover half way across onto the wire line makes crossing the Bridge of Death a heart pounding and thoroughly exciting experience!



*Immediately beyond the Bridge of Death, the main lake is reached, where one must abseil 5 m down a fixed rope into a waiting inflatable boat on a huge bottomless lake of pale blue water. The lake is approximately 30 m long, and the boats are pulled from one side to another by an ingenious system, by which some thick polyprop cord runs a loop from the top of the rope, down to the water level and across the lake and then back to the top of the rope, completing the full loop. Pulling up or down on the loop sails the boats back and forward across the lake. We arrived to find no boats waiting for us at the bottom of the rope, but on pulling on the cord, two in-situ boats appeared out of the darkness. We inflated Stingray II to create a third boat and attached it to the flotilla. This is probably one of the most fun and surreal things I have ever seen in any cave or mine. Groups of three took it in turns to abseil into a boat, before being slowly pulled across the lake (by someone back at the pitch-head) to a small slate beach at the other side. The last group are pulled across by those at the other side.*

*Once across the lake, a short Prussik up a fixed rope regains the main passage. A short distance along here reaches two steep loose slopes leading upwards on the right hand side. Taking the second one is the way on and soon reaches a broken wall where you cross over into Rhosydd mine. Following straight on through several big chambers reaches a slate collapse in the main onward passage, which must be carefully negotiated to pop out into a huge chamber with daylight streaming in from above. Five minutes of scrambling up the chamber towards the light reaches the huge gaping mouth of Rhosydd mine and the rain again. It was still dreadful weather, with no more than 10 m visibility and pouring rain. Water cascaded down everywhere!*

*Getting out of the deep depression at the Rhosydd entrance is surprisingly tricky, especially as you assume that the adventure is now over. The mine entrance is on a shelf, several metres below the surface, with few places where you can easily climb up especially when wet and slippery. Si attempt a grassy slope on the right approximately 30 m beyond the mouth of the mine, which he successfully negotiated, while I carried on round the ledge (with a steep drop on the left) for approximately 100 m until an exposed climb up a loose rock face allowed an escape. We threw a rope down to assist the others out.*

*Thank goodness we had taken a GPS fix at the Croesor entrance - with almost no visibility and torrential rain we wouldn't have had a hope in hells chance of finding our way back to the Croesor entrance (or the car) across the barren featureless moorland! The GPS prevailed and after 20 minutes of squelching across the moor, the slate tower at Crosoer mine entrance loomed out of the mist. This trip wouldn't have been half as memorable if it had not been for the generally atrocious conditions. We were soaking wet, cold (despite it being July) but thoroughly high spirited after such a truly superb and social adventure.*

**Sunday 1st August: Joint YCC/SCC week in Montenegro**

We stayed in a small ski chalet near Zabljac in the Durmitor region. On the first day we trekked up the mountain to meet up with the York University club expedition camp for a day of prospecting for new potholes. The rest of the week involved walking up rivers and mountains, swimming in the rivers and lakes, eating lots and drinking to excess, and enjoying plenty of lovely sunshine. Montenegro is a beautiful and very cheap place to visit, and a return trip to actually do some caving is now on our agenda.



Hiking up to the YUCPC camp in Montenegro. Photo by Gary Douthwaite.

**Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2010: Large Pot to Necropolis**

**Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> August 2010: Boulby Potash Mine**

Many thanks to the mine staff and our guide for an excellent and truly memorable experience. We were driven around the enormous salt tunnels almost a mile below the surface (and running several miles out under the sea) in a van, and then treated to seeing the core drilling process, and the mining machines at an active face.



Boulby Potash Mine. Photo by Gary Douthwaite.

**Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2010: Roaring Hole P-Hanger installation**

Successful installation of P-hangers by Gary Douthwaite and Mark Sims.

**Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2010: Robinson's Pot**

**Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2010: Great Expectations (Stump Cross)**

**Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2010: Buckden Gavel Lead Mine**

**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2010: Rowten Pot (Traditional route)**

**Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2010: Vesper Pot**

**Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2010: Spectacle Pot P-Hanger installation**

Successful installation of P-hangers by Gary Douthwaite and Mark Sims.

**Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2010: Rowten Pot (Gully route)**

**Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2010: Christmas meal at Hutton-le-Hole**

## Closing Remarks

So that's it for this journal!

It's been an exciting few years for both our clubs. For York, this has obviously seen our formation as a brand new caving club, and for Scarborough it has seen their reformation after a few years of dormancy, and subsequent renaming as the North York Moors Caving Club. Our clubs are distinctly different as probably shown by the reports detailed in this journal, but our differing skills seem to complement each other, and the discoveries seem to keep on coming. Our collaboration and friendship marks the start of a new era of exploration across the North Yorkshire Moors, and we can only hope for many more discoveries to report in the second journal in years to come.

York Caving Club is now becoming more well established on the caving scene, with the groundwork now laid for expansion and development of the club to meet the needs of it's many new members. Hopefully the club will continue to work with the York University club (YUCPC) to ensure that caving remains as popular as ever in York and the surrounding area, and that cavers are wholeheartedly discouraged from weekends at the garden centres, in front of the television - or much worse - going climbing "because it would be a shame to waste such a nice day by going underground!"

Left:  
York and Scarborough  
members on holiday in  
Montenegro, August 2010.

Right:  
Our cottage in Doolin,  
Ireland, May 2010.

Photos by Gary Douthwaite.







*“Quick Quick”*