

ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN

CAVING CLUB



NOVEMBER 1971

NEWS LETTER No 37

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Congratulations to Mike Howell and his wife Lynn on their marriage on October 30th.

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Mrs D Court
26 Park Walk
Chase Park
Ross on Wye
Herefordshire

Hon Editor
Mr R E Bailey
Rose Cottage
Aston Crews
Lea
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FOREST NEWS

Women's lib has struck the male supremacy in the club, apart from the new committee a determined band of females, namely Daphne, Heather, Diana and Silvia (when she has permission) have started caving on their own on Wednesday evenings. This is against all the rules of " Birds " in caving and this speleological development is being watched. Taking their lives in their hands Colin Clements and John Elliott have infiltrated the group and are spying on their activities, no burnt bra's have been reported yet but there was a case of misplaced knickers.

Seriously though, there is a good reason for the women branching out on their own in that it gives them a chance to do some exploring on their own for a change and not be trailing at the rear as often happens with the female underground. Male company is by invitation only, and if no invite is forthcoming it is hoped that good manners will prevail.

BUCKSHAFT SCOWEL

Jim Hay and myself spent a Sunday positioning the surface holes but there is still surveying underground to be done.

LADDER BUILDING

Help is welcome but the right help is needed, please contact Jim Hay, John Court or myself before starting.

NIFE CELLS

These have at last arrived and will be for sale at £ 3.60 but new cables have to be fitted. A reel of cable has been ordered by Jim Hay, price is not yet known.

Main bulbs will be available soon at 20p each.

TRIPS

Sat 20th - Sun 21st November. Derbyshire weekend. Orpheus Caving Club cottage has been booked together with Giants Hole and possibly Nettle Pot.

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

Descent No 18 September 1971.

BEC caving report No 15 " Roman Mine "

CRG Newsletter No 127 October 1971

CRG transactions Volume 13 No 3.

WHO'S WHO

Who's got a fifty foot personal length .

Who broke down in Coleford.

Who wears her knickers under her helmet.

Who goes caving in ' Bover ' boots.

NEWYEARS EVE PARTY

This is an annual event when the respectable inhabitants of Chase Park Walk lock up their doors, wives and daughters. This year it is being held at No 10, the hosts are Jim, Daphne, John and Di. A barrel of beer will be on tap, all are invited.

THE DEVILS DITCH - LYDNEY PARK ESTATE

Several visits had been made to the Ditch by Forest cavers and some attempts to get down by climbing proved interesting but unsuccessful.

From the surface the Ditch is difficult to locate although it is over 1,000 ft long. In most places it is only 40 - 50 ft deep and looks no different from the many scowel workings of this area. However at one end it narrows and deepens considerably and stones dropped down seemed to indicate about 80 ft deep.

The Ditch itself is a fine example of a Strike Joint Vein which are fairly rare in the Forest.

One miserable evening Colin Graham decided he had some free time and told Elliott (who, unfortunately had 100 ft of ladder with him) that it was about time they went down this ere 'DITCH. The Land Rover was coaxed up to the site, and with moonlight trying to pierce the ever prevailing mist a start was made.

A suitable tree was picked and 100 ft of ladder was duly slung into the abyss. Elliott VOLENTEERED to go first and after giving up trying to clear loose debris descended 40 ft to a boulder pile and a tangled 60 ft of ladder. To the left a huge shaft continued, the bottom of which couldn't be seen.

Elliott re-ascended and the ladder moved over to hang in the shaft. It was then Colin's turn in the shaft and after muttering something about " rocks don't move - hope " descended from sight. His voice floated up " lovely shot - holes, big shaft, fine pitch etc, passed your ledge - hello it seems a little free from here" Some muffled sounds followed and then " I'm ten feet from the bottom - hanging in space - think I'd better come back up ".

This was fortunate as Elliott only had 5 ft of a 120 ft rope left, and if Colin had jumped off it might have been interesting. Colin climbed back up steadily and appeared back over the edge " puff - puff, not as fit as I used to be - tiring a bit there ".

We checked the situation - we had enough ladder spare if we moved it forward, and Colin pointed out it was Elliott's turn to go down.

" Rope too short " pointed out a happy Elliott. " Got my 180 ft rope in the van " was the smile swatting reply. " Er, its pub time, could do with a pint, might even hear Malcolm play his guitar if we hurry ".

A moments silence - " I'll get the rope then " sighed Elliott. Faced with a 110 ft pitch or Malcolm's singing what could he do.

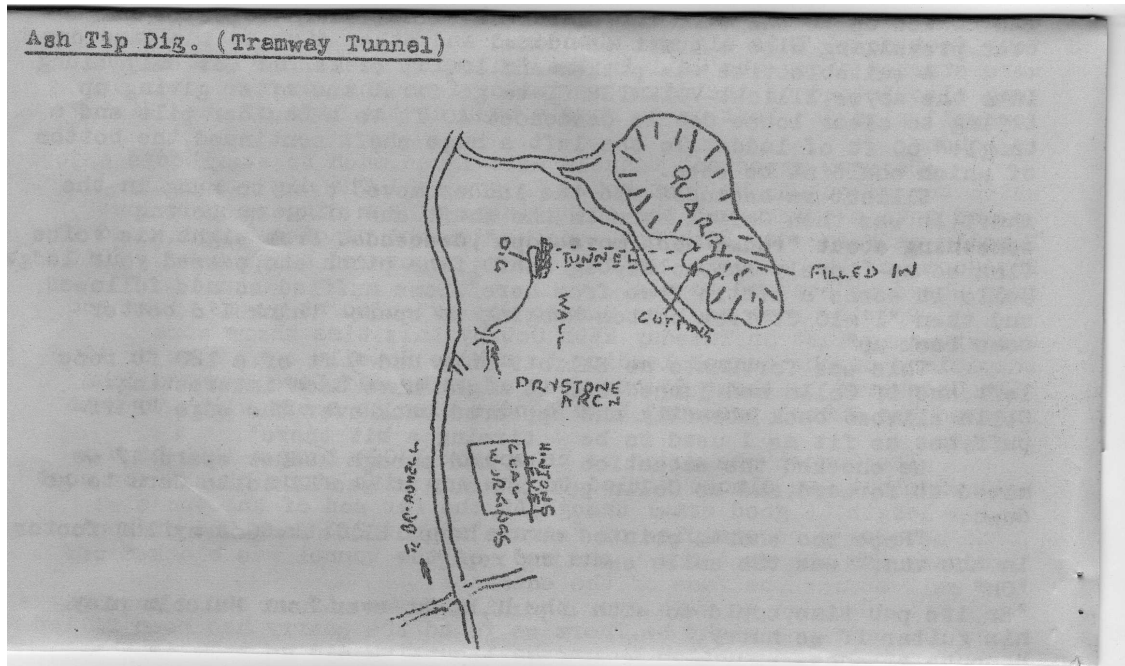
Later the pitch was re-rigged and Elliott tied on. A steep loose slope and off into space " Hell the ladder didn't touch anything, I've been done " The first 50 ft was quite nice about a foot from the face. Lovely shot - holes were duly noted, and then as the third ladder was reached the 15 ft diameter shaft belled out and the near walled zoomed off for 50 ft. " Oi what's going on " muttered an unhappier Elliott.

For another 50 ft this continued and then a landing was made on a big pile of trees. The ladder still didn't touch the bottom. Below a passage (sighted by Graham) led off so the tree's were descended.

The passage led up some cut steps and into a huge chamber. The passage continued high and wide with possibilities of down dip workings. It ended in a great steep slope of leaves obviously from the surface, after hesitating Elliott climbed up them and as the going was easier than it looked, kept going. A climb up over some overhanging fallen trees put him very much closer to the surface and Elliott's devious little mind was working overtime. A short climb, a brief traverse and he was shouting insults at a very livid Graham. Both grabbed cameras and went down to explore further, but the down - dip workings didn't go. However the workings are very interesting and worth a look. They run mainly parallel and under the main Ditch although digging looks doubtful, further workings may be found.

References - Special Reports on the Mineral Resources of Great Britain.

By Sir T F Sibly D Sc.



Location - Old rubbish tip right hand side of road between Cannop Cross Roads and Broadwell.

Diggers - S Harrold, A Phillips, I Hale, J Guth (newcomer) D Tuffely (just out of retirement) R Matthews (part time)

Information - Obtained from Mike Howells.

The dig was started on Wednesday 15th Sept as myself and Stuart Harrold had decided to opt out of a trip down to Wigpool formations with the usual crowd because we had been there the week before.

We had had a word with Mike Howells to see if we could find somewhere different to go. From him we discovered that the tunnel entrance had been uncovered approximately ten years ago, when the valley had been bulldozed out to provide a space for a rubbish dump.

Mike had entered the tunnel when it was open, but only for a short distance. So it had never been fully explored. Over the years the entrance had been covered over again due to the rising tide of rubbish.

Curiosity aroused Stu and myself set out to dig into the tunnel. After clearing the obstacle course that leads to the dig, brambles, nettles and a marsh formed by fruit pips from Carters (Ian learnt to swim here) we found the tunnel wall. Mike H arrived later on the scene to see if we had found it but we were still extricating ourselves from the pips.

The first dig consisted of a hole approx nine feet deep dug down the face of the wall (Mike said the tunnel entrance would only be four feet down) This dig was abandoned and other digs to the same depth were started along the wall in the following weeks. The rest of the gang also joined us including a visitor from the lower reaches of Cornwall, also Stu left us to have a bash at the life of the Rising Sun in London.

Several expectant tunnels were found, much to everybody's enjoyment, which turned out to be just holes in the wall. The dig gradually turned into a trench and the enthusiasm of the diggers grew lower.

Finally on Wed 20th Oct, to the delight of all concerned the keystone of the tunnel's entrance were uncovered below a tree 20 ft from where we started to dig.

cont

Spirits rose and the trench was extended at great speed and access was gained on Tuesday 27th Oct. By this time there were suspicions of a tunnel leading to a Mike Howells coal mine or lime kiln.

Undeterred by these doubts four of us, myself, Dave, Ian and John entered the tunnel preceded by a candle tied to a 6ft stick to test for gas.

The tunnel was found to be approx 130ft long by 12ft high by 12ft wide but was almost filled to the top with stone blocks for most of its length. (A crawl though) at the far end of tunnel we found good examples of

'straws ' approx 2ft long. The disappointing discovery was the fact that the end of the tunnel was blocked off by a wall across the face of the entrance.

We decided to walk over the hilltop to see if we could possibly see where the entrance might be. There we found the quarry had been filled in with rubble and rubbish, but a small cutting did go towards the direction of the tunnel. We presume that the tunnel was once a tramway for removing the stone from the quarry.

WARNING - anybody visiting or wishing to enter the tunnel should be careful of the entrance as it is slowly falling inwards and seems a bit precarious and be very careful not to damage the straws as they are very fragile and one has to crawl between them.

P. S. Is it possible that Mikes measurements of feet consist of size 4's and not 12 inches ?

Andrew Phillips.

CAVES AND SWALLETS OF BEARSE COMMON

Bearse common is an area of limestone and shales between St Briavels and Trow Green, the B 4228 road running through the middle.

Geologically it is very simple. The lower limestone shale outcrop over a wide area forming a fairly flat plateau at 630 - 650 ft. The lower limestone shale contains massive limestone about 100ft thick (coloured dark blue on the one inch geological map). In the middle of this area are impervious clay shale on top of the limestone which dips 5 - 6 degrees to the south.

The limestone rests on the old red sandstone which forms the eastern slope of the Wye Valley. The limestone's are well bedded and well jointed forming caves and potholes with the greatest of ease water collects on the shale outliers and drains towards the edges, sinking immediately it reaches the limestone. Some of it forms short but well defined streams sinking in swallets. In other places tiny trickles of water seem to be sufficient to form impressive potholes on joint intersections. The scenery of the potholes is good due to the active solution. Good examples of solution - fluting and shelving can be seen.

The conditions leading to caves are so active that one can find depression after depression with the occasional pothole just by walking the shale edge.

Although no water testing has been done it seems reasonable to expect water sinking at Little Hoggins, Orles Wood to rise as the feeders to Slade Brook. The risings are dealt with in the accompanying article by

P A Standing.

SITES - RUTTER'S HOLE (Sparkies Dig) 5740 0583.

Two solutional potholes to the east of the road. Rutter's Hole is in excess of 30ft deep and being dug spasmodically not because it will yield a cave but to find out what happens at the bottom.

QUARRY OPPOSITE BEARSE FARM

This shows a solutional pothole in section in the face.

LITTLE HOGGINS SWALLET AND POTHOLE.

The swallet takes the biggest stream in the area at 573049 and is still in need of proper examination. The farmer is not very interested. Cullingford entered a good cave here in a hedgerow close to Little Hoggins. This was reopened by him to disclose him a 30ft pothole with a further 30ft descent in a very narrow crack. At the bottom of this was a small chamber with trickles of water.

LINE OF SHALLOW DEPRESSION

These are mostly in filled and run from the west side of the road below Bearse Farm to where the shale edge crosses the road to Willscroft Wood.

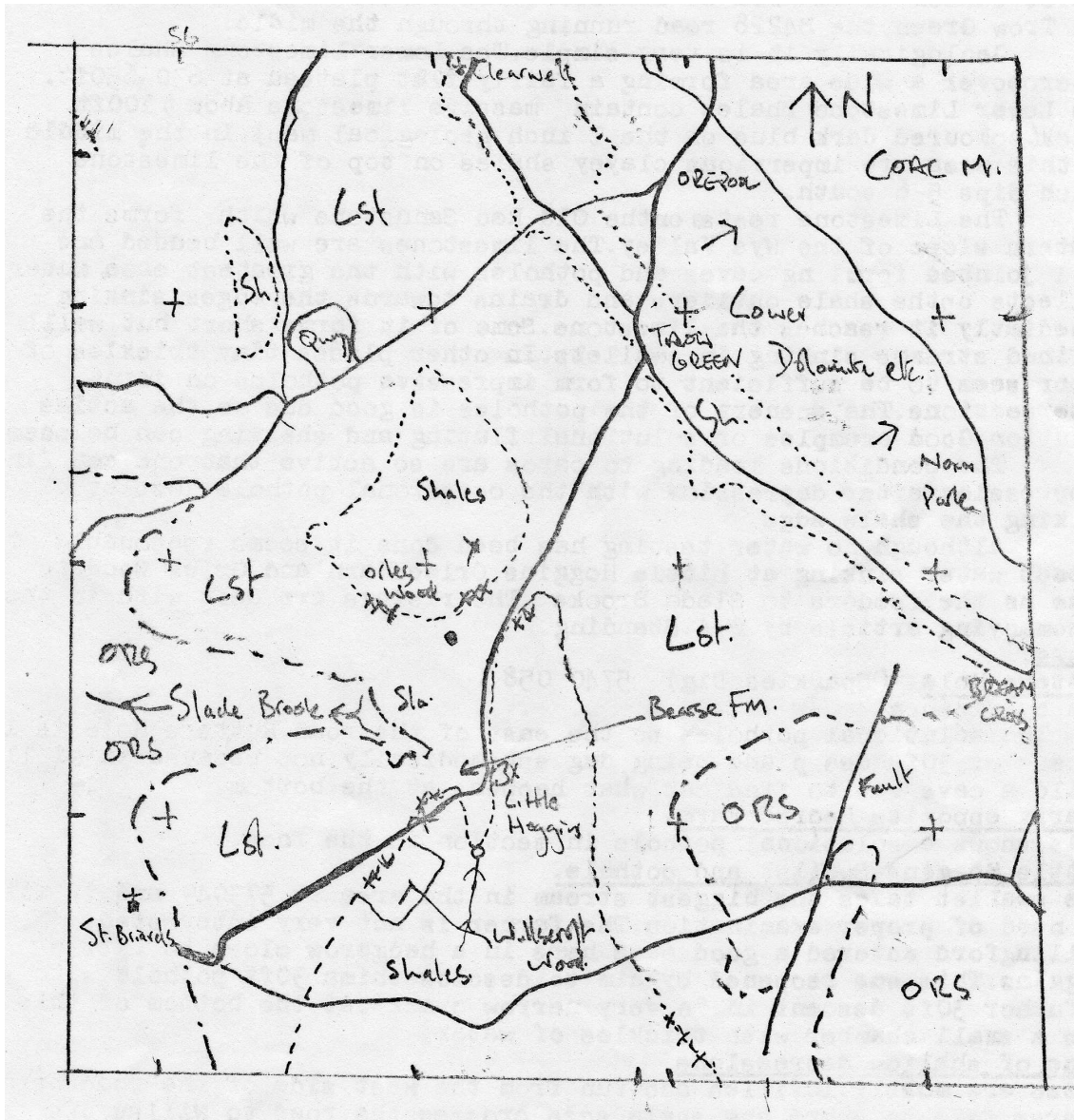
WILLSCROFT WOOD - 568 046

This contains a line of splendid active potholes up to 20ft deep. RFDCC did some digging her in 1966.

FROG PIT AND NEIGHBOURS - 058 572

These fringe the S E boundary of the wood. Two of them take small streams deepest is about 20ft.

Cont



BEARSE POT - 573 061

In the middle of the wood and difficult to find. About 10ft diameter and a 30ft clean pitch requiring ladder. Total depth including shake hole must be nearer 40ft. A beautifully fluted pothole with a dig at the bottom, dating from Cullingford in the early fifties and a group of Cheltenham schoolboys in the late fifties. The pothole is interesting in that it is inside the shale outlier and not on its edge.

ORLES WOOD SWALLETS - 562 058

The south edge of Orles Wood has a continuous line of depressions and potholes, the best about 20ft deep occurring in three small valleys which drain Orles Wood. Oddly enough one surface stream makes it beyond the wood to sink in a muddy patch on the fields edge. The Bearse Farmer tells me that he has to prod with a bar to keep this one sinking and not flood his field.

ORLES BARN SWALLET - 571 058

This is alongside the track which runs down from the wood, past Orles Barn to Slade Bottom. This swallet is just before the Barn. At present it is about 12ft deep and usually has an active stream. John Elliott and I saw this swallet in action in the July 1968 flood. It swallowed a stream the size of a full Swildons without damming back.

CAVING AT BEARSE

Mostly on forestry land. The farmer at Bearse farm takes water from Slade rising for livestock, he has asked that cavers do not prod about at the rising with a tank on it, although lately the stream has found a lower outlet to Slade Brook. If you go Orles Barn way or to the risings it is probably as well to let him know that you are not going to interfere with his water.

STOWE QUARRY - 566 067

This is an active quarry working limestone. Several solutional cavities have been met. The largest had a diameter in excess of 20ft and depth in excess of 30ft. One was apparently ' Twice as deep as the face ' which is 40ft. So far as I can gather none of them opened up to the surface and seem to have been solutional drip pots presumably fed by water coming along the bedding. The quarry has approached the shale outlier at Margerypool Barn and the line of pots may have been related to an earlier shale edge.

I J Standing.

RISINGS AT SLADE BOTTOM - FOREST OF DEAN

Interest in the Slade Bottom area was aroused in 1964 by the discovery of Dark Hill Cave. This cave and the nearby Slade Brook flood rising have been described previously (Dryden 1964) but unfortunately erroneous map references were given. In this article the necessary corrections are made and a more general account of the area is given with notes on several other resurgences.

Slade Bottom lies to the north of St Briavels and may be conveniently approached by walking down the valley from Bearse Farm or by taking the Forestry track which leaves the B 4228 about 500yds north of the farm. The limestone / Old red sandstone boundary contours round the valley at an approximate altitude of 475ft and several streams are forced up by the sandstone. Risings occur mainly in two re-entrants of the limestone at the head of Slade Bottom, one coursing N E towards Orles Barn and the other S E in the direction of Bearse Farm.

Cont

NORTH EASTERN GROUP

There are five risings in all. Three of them, known collectively as Slade Brook Rising, are active under normal weather conditions whilst the other two, Slade Brook Flood Rising and Dark Hill Cave discharge only in wet weather.

SLADE BROOK RISING

If the Forestry track from Orles Barn is followed down the valley a catchments block and pump house will be seen on the left at SO 56760553.

Two small streams rise a few feet apart between the block and the track and although neither is penetrable tight cave passages are visible at both. The more southerly of the two is the larger both as regards water output and passage size. The third feeder to Slade Brook in this group rises some 50ft further up the valley at SO 56770554 just below a footpath which leaves the main track and contours round through Slade Wood towards Bearse Farm. The rising is impenetrable but does seem to widen somewhat inside. It is possible to wave a stick around and the passage size was estimated at 1ft high by 4 - 5 inches wide.

SLADE BROOK FLOOD RISING - SO 56750553

This is situated on the right of the track and has been described previously by Dryden. In extreme wet weather when Slade Brook Rising is discharging maximally a considerable volume of water issues from it. It would appear to be the most promising means of entry to the under ground course of Slade Brook. A small fissure just below the track but above the normal rising might also repay further investigation.

DARK HILL CAVE - SO 56760549

Is on the opposite side of the valley to Slade Brook Flood rising and further downstream. In wet weather it discharges a small stream. It should be noted that the cave is not in fact on Dark Hill and was named incorrectly. A change in the nomenclature now would however only add to the confusion.

SOUTH EASTERN GROUP

The risings of the N E group account for most of the water in Slade Brook but some contribution is made from the Bearse Farm Valley (S E Group) the two streams joining at SO 56700543. The risings are as follows:-

1. At SO 56760535 a small stream emerges from a minute fissure and flows down a steep bank to the Forestry track.

2. **Slade Wood Rising - SO 56860535** is on the N E side of the re-entrant about 15ft above the valley floor.

It was noted and dug by GSS in 1964 and more recently the RFDCC have extended it. A moderately sized stream emerges. At present the cave is about 30ft long with a stream entering from a low passage on the right about 10ft inside.

3. In wet weather a small stream issues at SO 56940528 between the track and the valley floor. Water may also resurge about 60 yds further up the valley though the author has never observed such an occurrence.

SLADE BROOK - After the confluence of the two streams from the groups of risings described above, Slade Brook flows westwards on Old Red Sandstone towards Mork. It is worth following the brook down stream for a few hundred yards, for there are large deposits of Tufa in it, in some places the Tufa has formed dams up to 18 inches in height.

References :- Dryden J K 1964 - Dark Hill Cave. GSS J Vol 13 No 2 - 13 - 14. Dryden J K 1964 - Slade Brook Flood Rising. GSS J Vol 3 No 2 - 27.

PA Standing UBSS - GSS - May 1967.

MENDIP WEEKEND - 16th / 17th October

Jim Hay

Not as many as we had thought eventually turned up to go on this weekend and in not going they missed some good caving. It finished up that only John, Diana and myself went for the complete weekend and we were having second thoughts as we set off in rain and mist. There was no point in arriving early as we didn't have a key and were relying on someone being there when we arrived. Using this as an excuse, we stopped off at a pub and stayed in the warmth until they threw us out.

Fortunately there were others there first when we eventually reached the new Belfry, the HQ of the Bristol Exploration Club. They have luxurious new headquarters that provide all the necessary requirements but unfortunately results in a high bed fee. After coffee we retired to get an early start in the morning.

No one bothered to get up too early as it was obvious that the weather was even worse and anyway, John Barry wasn't due to turn up until around 10.30 am - always assuming that he could find his way through the fog. When he did turn up, a discussion resulted that lasted through until after lunch as we argued over the caving merits of Goat - Church v Gough's. Around two the weather lightened and we had no excuse and went to have a look at Swildons knowing full well that it would be flooded and we could get back to the fire with an easy conscience.

Changing only into boots, we wandered over to the entrance to find much more water than normal and thus decided that it would be much too dangerous to go underground. Back at the cars, we found an enormous group in a coach preparing to go down and this confused us completely. If a group of obvious beginners could do it without wet suits. Then so could we (in wet suits) and anyway, someone should keep an eye on them.

Back at the entrance after changing, the water had risen another inch but the party of thirty had already gone on in and we had no excuse. The trip down the stream way was great fun and was marked at regular intervals by bedraggled beginners returning. At the Twenty the water was wet and getting off the ladder quite an exercise. Eventually the sump was reached and we thought about returning as the sump pool was lost under a thick foam. However, after paddling about in it for a while it looked very different from normal and it was decided to go through for a swim. Very little effort was needed to go through with the current and once on the other side the stream way to sump two proved much more interesting than in dry weather.

Duck two still had an air space but only just and the sump had almost as much foam as sump one.

Deciding on a high speed journey out we set off but were hindered near the entrance by a slow moving party that was all that remained of the beginners party of thirty. This party was looking very lost at the bottom of the small wet pitch near the entrance but moved over and let us through. They were having some trouble with carbide lamps in the very wet conditions but followed us out and we were able to give a hand with one girl that was very tired.

The evening was spent slightly differently to the normal caving weekend evening as we went into Bristol and played Ten Pin bowling until midnight. Somehow we were allotted 13 and suffered about 10 breakdowns before managing to get transferred to another one.

On the Sunday we had a fairly early start as Roger Solari and John Berry joined us for a trip down St Cuthberts lead by Oliver Lloyd. We were a bit wary as we had heard the Oliver had planned a special trip and we had not been in the cave since the artificial aids had been removed. As it turned out we needn't have had any worries as we had a fine trip around a greater part of the cave. To start with, we all headed straight for the new extensions towards sump two as no one had been in that section before. This consisted of a single long high rift passage headed towards Wookey and looked as if it might have some high level routes.

From sump one Oliver lead us round some of the lesser used parts of the cave with some fairly difficult climbs and as the conditions were wet it developed into a bit of a competition to see who could be drowned by the others. All too soon the time was up and we moved out by various routes and struggled up the entrance rift. Someone removed the plug in the dam that holds back the surface stream while Diana and Roger were still down the entrance rift and although Di managed to miss the worst of it Roger definitely won the competition. Oliver said he thought it was an unsporting thing to do - Roger said something much stronger.