

Canal Cave Nidderdale

During the 1960s Mick Ormerod and Mick Melvin were members of a small limited membership caving club called the Happy Wanderers Cave and Pothole Club.

The Happy Wanderers have always been at the forefront of much of the new cave exploration work carried out in Yorkshire and Lancashire, and often their members would work together with other cavers, or caving clubs in a joint venture to push new ground.

The club produced its first journal in 1966 and Mick Melvin's article describing the discovery and exploration of a short cave in Nidderdale, reprinted below was included in the journal. The original content has not been changed.

Canal Cave, Nidderdale

Mick Melvin

NGR SD100736

On March 6th 1966 Mick Ormerod and I had to abandon a dive in the Nidd Head Risings at Lofthouse due to the volume of floodwater present. At a lost for something to do, we decided to explore the dry river bed to the north of Lofthouse. Approximately four hundred feet above the bridge a deeply cut fissure crosses the river bed, and a small amount of water flows from below the rock face on the left hand side facing up river, and into a pool on the river bed.

Mick and I began to excavate a small hole at the base of the rock from where the water flowed, and within minutes we had uncovered a low entrance about two foot high and eighteen inches wide. As I was the only one wearing caving gear I decided to explore alone. The first thirty foot of passage was a hands and knees crawl in water about a foot deep, after which the floor dropped away and the passage became approximately two feet wide and eight to ten feet high with waist deep water. The cave continued in this fashion for two hundred foot when the passage widened to around six feet and became about twelve foot high with chest deep water. Here I noticed an inlet passage in the roof on the right hand side. A right angled bend followed immediately and the passage width diminished to about fourteen inches. Approximately fifty feet beyond the inlet passage, the main passage became too tight at water level and I had to duck under for a couple of feet. At this point the distance rumble of a waterfall could be heard and as I pressed on the rumble grew louder, until approximately two hundred foot beyond the inlet passage I entered a small chamber where it was possible to stand clear of the water. A spout of water was falling about fifteen feet from an obvious passage into a pool on the floor of the chamber. I had a good look around to make sure that it was possible to scale the aven without the use of poles, and I noticed another passage in the roof on the right hand side of the chamber. I then decided to return to the surface.

A fortnight later I returned to the cave with Mick Ormerod, Mick Bentham and Clifford Lancaster whom I had recruited to take some photographs of the chert bands near the top of the fifteen foot aven before we had to break them down. I managed to scale the aven without any difficulty, but unfortunately I had to break away the loose chert for safety. At the top of the aven the passage took the form of hands and knees crawling over a layer of crumbling chert which was coated with a calcite deposit. This looked very beautiful but I could not avoid crunching it as I passed. The roof of the passage was covered in straws of all lengths and helictites of all shapes, and there were quite a large number of long stalagmites. The stream in the section of the cave was flowing in a very low bedding plane running parallel to the main passage. The hands and knees section carried on for approximately eighty feet, and then the overhanging shale bands forced me to crawl flat out on my stomach. We followed the passage in this manner for two hundred feet, sometimes having to dig our way through bands of shale or break down formations to progress. At a distance of three hundred foot from the top of the aven we emerged into a low flat roofed chamber six foot high and

eight foot wide with a pool of water covering the floor, and our passage entering about three foot up the wall.

Mick Bentham returned to the surface at this point and Mick Ormerod and I followed a passage similar to the previous one for approximately two hundred and fifty feet, squeezing passed two very awkward right angled bends, until eventually we reached a point where Mick could just manage to squeeze through to join me. I pressed on alone for another fifty foot to where the passage took the form of an inverted 'V' and became impassable due to some stalagmite curtains. I estimated that the constriction was about ten feet long but with no room to wield a hammer it is quite a formidable obstruction. We decided to return and explore the two roof passages which we had seen on the inward journey. The passage in the aven was followed for fifty feet to a complete roof collapse, and the other passage, near to the first right-angled bend was followed for approximately one hundred foot, heading in a line parallel to the main passage and towards the passage in the aven. This passage also ended in a roof collapse which I feel certain is common to both passages. This being an oxbow passage which has collapsed in the middle.

Conclusion.

I have not yet returned to the cave to carry out a survey, neither have I been able to dye test any possible sinks as the water is the drinking supply for Bradford. I suspect that the sink is located somewhere in the area of Howstean Gorge, as I did take a compass into the cave with me and the general direction was towards that area. There is a definite possibility to push the cave further , and an interesting point is, when the new pipeline for Bradford Water-Works is laid from Howstean the cave will certainly be broken into and eventually blocked.

Mick Melvin (2010)