

## LMC Potholing Meet 2005

Early November saw us once again deserting the daylight for the underground world of Yorkshire, God's Own County.

This year, it was to be Lancaster Pot, which we had visited before but which is worth a second visit. In any case, once you switch your lights off, all the pots are the same!!

We were in force: Will (one-leg) Weale from Wheelton; David (rock-jock) Toon; Jim (picture-me) Cunningham; Julie (school-me) Harold; Vicky (typical student!) Harold; David (gamma-ray) Sudell; Josie (danish-pastry) Smith; Claire (bossy-Newly Qualified Teacher) Smith; Richard (my brother-in-law/very ex-caver) Ramsden; Andrew (his off-the-roof brother) Ramsden; John (I'll-count-yer-money) Toon; Jason (meet-me-meets) Whiteley; Frank (super- bike) Woods; and me (yes, just plain me).

And most importantly, Stuart and his two mates, Ken and Alf!

Bernard (on-yer-bike) Smith and Graham (I've-got-the-money) Welsh stayed on the surface and went for a bike ride (2hours) and waited for us in the pub (8 hours).

As ever, we met in Ingleton at Bernie's cafe at 9:30 for big breakfasts and to pick up batteries, lights and helmets. Then off on a car chase up to Bull Pot Farm. People turned up in funny, old clothes because the pots we are taken down are always dry but we always get wet!!!!

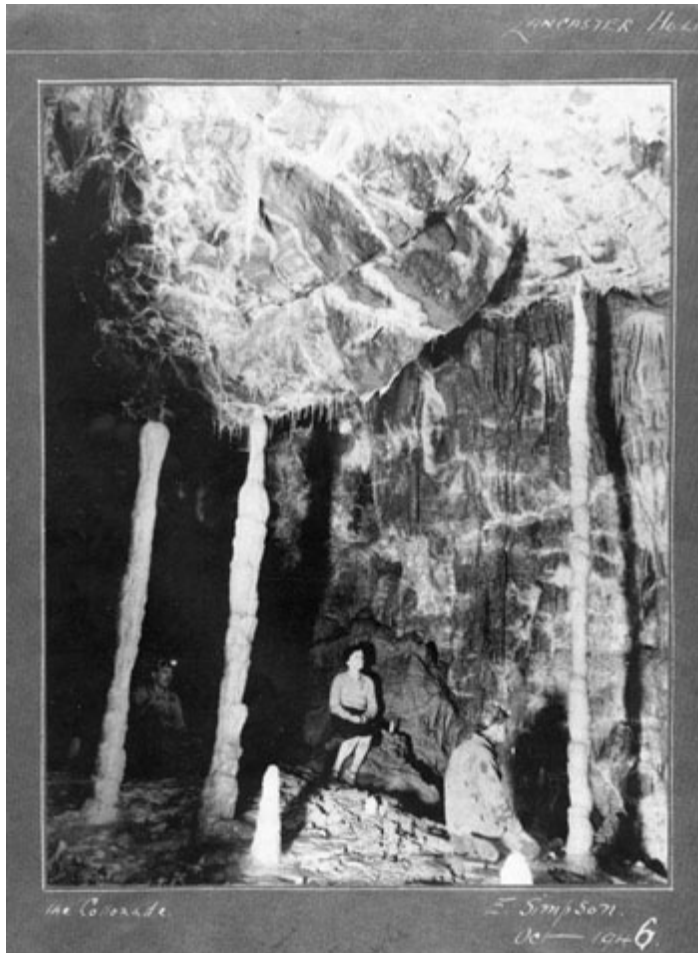
Then across the moors to the entrance to Lancaster Pot, discovered in 1946.

The history bit!

A year later, iron ladders were fitted to the main shaft in Lancaster Hole to help with access. The British Speleological Association took out a lease on the land to control access to Lancaster Hole (great forethought – nearly 50 years later, the CROW Act gives everyone right-of-access). The same year, Cornes Cavern in the Lancaster/Easegill system was first entered, which was the largest cave passage discovered in England at that time.

The picture bit now!

This next photo, courtesy of the web, is the first to be taken down Lancaster, shortly after it was discovered (was this Bernard's first venture with a Box Brownie?)



What I can never grasp is the enormity of the caves in Yorkshire. Apparently, this Easegill system is over 30 miles long in total. I struggle with guide book descriptions to rock climbs a couple of hundred feet high – just the two dimensions to contend with; up or across. In the 3D underground world, the scope for getting lost is a-plenty. So its with real gratitude that I'm more than happy to trust to Stuart and his detailed knowledge.

This extract from the description will give you a flavour – and, as the guide book says, "it is intended as guidance for the wise, not the obedience of fools".

“It isn't a long trip - it can be covered in well under three hours easily, but it is a trip to savour and enjoy, and shouldn't be hurried.”

We took the advice and didn't hurry! So the three hours was more like eight for our team of 17.

“The Lancaster Hole entrance shaft has been comprehensively bolted.....it is a straight forward descent down a magnificent shaft. It is worth looking around, as you descend, to work out how on earth the original explorers managed to have fixed iron ladders meandering up the pitch.”

Wow, what a start, with a free abseil straight down. A good first abseil for Vicky!

“Once down, the way on is up onto a traverse ledge, and forward along the high rift to the impressive Bridge Cavern. At the end of this, an easy climb up the left, followed by a short traverse, enters Colonnades Passage with its impressive set of columns, which is well worth the ten minute detour.”

Did we do that? I've forgotten already. The route is up, down, around. Walking, crawling, slipping, sliding, wading and watching. It's a real experience.

“In front of you are some deep holes which descend directly to the sump some 30 metres below. To one side are some footsteps on a mud slope.”

Walking on friction-free mud, with no belays and big fall potential is nerve wracking.

“Follow the footsteps up the mud slope (a lot more secure than it looks), to a mud choke which is by-passed through a small phreatic window... Follow Wilf Taylor's Passage downstream. This is a super passage, with three particular points of interest. The first is a rope climb (rigged) down into a pool which culminates in a nasty little overhang; this is followed immediately by a superbly rigged rope-climb down an arête; and the third is a three metre climb. All three cause one to pause momentarily at the top!”

Yes sir!!! Sliding down greasy ropes by hand, into the abyss, takes care and some degree of faith.

I get no credits for the photos – again, the web shows some of the best bits. (Thanks to the RRCP and their excellent web site).

I especially liked the Painter's Palette in the first photograph – a superb splash of multiple colours. The others give just a little flavour of the cave.





And so on we went. Sweating with the effort. Waiting for our turn on the bad bits. Trying out the darkness with the lights turned off. Sharing the odd chocolate bar. Marvelling at the formations. Hoping we would find the exit. Wading in the stream. Squeezing around narrow tunnels. Slithering on the mud. Squirring when the ceiling nearly met the floor. Climbing the

twisting caving ladder. Smelling the fresh air. And finally, the easy climb into the darkness of the overground, frosty night.

We flogged back (and forth and back again) over the moor and found the cars and vans eventually. All trust in the Ford Focus, which wouldn't start, was eclipsed as Dave had to abandon his car and call out the trusty AA.

Then the race to the Marton Arms, arriving at one minute to nine.

"Have you got a menu, please?"

"Sorry, we stop serving meals at nine".

"Well, its not quite nine.....!"

"OK, but you'll have to be quick!!".

So those of us already there choose our own meals. We order a random job lot for the others, delayed by the car problem. Then relax to savour a beer from, perhaps, the best range of good beers of any pub anywhere, I guess! When the meals arrive, they are snatched as though we are starving refugees and dispatched in no time.

Just one more job left! Thanks to Frank for transporting the hired gear back into the village, where we left it in someone's back garden!! But it was fairly close to Bernies – honest, Bernie!

(Next day I get an e-mail - "I'm afraid your card transaction was not authorised." – must think the LMC are a tight-fisted scurrilous lot!).

So the end of another super day potholing. Everyone had a good day out. Lancaster pot is a classic excursion with as much variety as you could wish for.

Again, many, many thanks to Stuart, Ken and Alf who led us expertly through the system, rigged the abseil, fixed the ladder out and, most importantly, had the collective patience of Job when we dawdled on the awkward bits.

Richard Toon