

JUNE 2018

This is an alarmingly long set of trip reports, and was definitely my most active month caving yet.

FRIDAY 1/6

We got the P&O ferry at 09:30 from Dublin to Liverpool, with most of us having stayed the previous night at the Quarry. I slept most of the sea journey only really being awake for the meals. The road journey, to the TSG1/ Chapel Works in Castelton only took about 90 minutes, which was a godsend because the weather was scorching and there was five of us piled into the car with gear. When we arrived a few of us headed up to one of the local pubs called "The George", it was a cosy looking place that had a great ale called Bombardier (sadly they only had it that first night... we drank them dry).

Due to several SUSS2/ members staying in the chapel too, all twelve Irish cavers slept in the one room. Strangely the fire door system (which would close the doors if the fire alarm sounded) seems to react to certain cavers snoring. No caves were arranged before bedtime.

SATURDAY 2/6

I was awake by 06:30 due to the foul air in the confined quarters. Then ended up locked out twice before 08:00, and went on two walks all before breakfast.

Botch from SUSS kindly offered to take three of us (Aaron, Orla, and Matthew), along with his group of old timers3/ into Peak Cavern. Erin, Matthieu, Adam and Aodhán went to Titan. Adrian and Patrick went with three SUSS girls to Nettle.

Myself, JP and Jill went to Oxlow with a local caver named Rostam, who luckily for me was a facial surgeon since I was still in a state from having my wisdom teeth out the previous week. Oxlow is a fresher SRT cave for SUSS with a little bit of everything while still relatively short. Oxlow (seemingly like a lot of other Peak District caves) is a mined cave, just to the West is the Maskill Mine which connects to Oxlow via the West Chamber (~300' in length). As a result of this the cave (at the time) seemed to me, to be loose in places. I have never had to call BELOW! so many times in my caving life. Though according to a SUSS member it is "quite stable by Derbyshire standards", this we would learn as the week progressed. I de-rigged the lowest pitch which was interesting since part

1/ [Technical Speleological Group](#)

2/ [Sheffield University Speleological Society](#)

3/ Term of endearment for ladder users. One of them actually explored Poll na gColm in Co. Clare back in the day.

of it had been hard rigged into the P-bolt after running out of maillons.

SUNDAY 3/6

Today I did Titan with Matthew, JP, and Patrick. Talk from the previous day's group was in my words fear-mongering, the cave or more properly the pitches were talked up and over blown, Erin did her best to quell this as we prepared to leave. The pitches were long there is no doubt about that, but they were to me nothing special. That said apparently Matthew playing Led Zeppelin's Stairway to Heaven on his bluetooth speaker on the way up had quite the ambiance. We all made our way back up the pitches quite quickly and warmed back up in the brilliant sun on the surface.

Despite completing the longest ascent in the UK at 464' (141 metres) we were still the first group back to the TSG and ended up in the pub at 15:30 with SUSS. One group went to Nettle (mainly the previous day's Titan group) and another group to Oxlow. "It (Nettle) was shit" - trusted authority.

Later in the evening Aaron, Erin and I went to the pub and ended up competing in a pub quiz with a Nottingham caver who had just finished his shift in the pub, we were later joined by Matthieu, JP, and Adam. Our answers were far from spectacular, but I was able to answer that Alan Bean was the fourth man to walk on the moon, and who the IRA killed while in their boat off the Sligo coast.

MONDAY 4/6

Today the balance of the group went to Peak Cavern with Alex who had the access rights that day at about 09:30, this was a quick trip we were out of the cave by about 13:00. But my god did we move quickly, I became rather faint towards the end as did my headlamp. We looked at Ink sump and Treasury sump. Where else did we go?

Two car loads of us headed to the caving shop in Buxton after lunch. The lads in the first car said that when they got to the door the gentleman was on the phone when he answered it, and when they all piled in he said down the phone "I might need a hand down here!". I think the shop looked properly cool, kinda like the hardware store your granddad would go into for a chat and a bottle of two stroke oil. The two shopkeepers were most helpful and looked after us all, this has always been by experience with caving shopkeepers. Hanging up in the shop they had a very interesting board with examples of gear failures on it. There was Figure-8 descender that failed at ~3300 kg, and a 7 mm maillon that failed somewhere around 1700 kg^{4/}.

4/ NB: I don't believe these were shock loads.

TUESDAY 5/6

Today eight of us split into two groups and did a Oxlow - Maskill Mine crossover trip. The three girls went to other parts of Peak Cavern with two of the SUSS crowd, they were a bit late leaving. We had been warned of the extremely loose nature of the Maskill Mine, by both local cavers and the guide books.

Matthew's car left first probably about thirty-five minutes before Aodhán's car, yet by some happening they were still getting changed when we arrived. Myself and Matthieu decided to follow the other group up the hill and look at the entrance to the cave/mine (it's still rather strange to say mine) and be in Adam's live video purely to kill time. We felt the need to kill time because of the greater number of pitches and care needed in the mine. On our way up the field a black sheep decided to charge across the field at Matthieu who was tying his boot laces, Aodhán and Adrian assure us that this was hilarious. At the top of the field we lost Matthew, Adam floated the idea that he fell down a hole as a joke, that we all took seriously after a moment of silence! When Matthieu and I left the other group at the entrance shaft we all chilled in the car for another half hour before getting changed and heading to Oxlow to rig.

When we got to the bottom of Oxlow and headed through West Chamber we could just see the other group rigging and descending their final pitch. That just shows the difference in rigging in the two descents^{5/}. We had a little picnic down in the chamber while Adam set up his camera and proceeded to flash blind us for a while. Our ascent went fairly smoothly, I can say that since I was in the lead and not actually de-rigging anything. The bottom of the mine was quite loose and we were being quite careful. We had been warned about an area where the floor was made of boulders that were supported by thin air, with the pitch under this floor and a hand line above it. As one ascended the cave it became muddier but not in a John Thomas way, a much more solid mud than that. At one point a pile of boulders were being supported by one small scrap of angle iron and a mortar of mud, beyond that point it was quite quick to get to the surface, only perhaps twenty-five metres. When I got to surface I ran to Oxlow and saw Patrick at which point I hit the deck and crawled through the long grass and popped up on a mound above the four of them who were packing up their gear (yes all four of them got out in the time it took me to get out). I stood above them silhouetted by the sun for what I can only describe as an uncomfortably long time before I was noticed. After saying hello to them I headed back to the mine shaft and decided to take the rope bag down the mine to Matthieu who was going to de-rig the final rope. I met with him in the chamber with the mud mortar wall. We all made it out within about thirty minutes of that handover, and to celebrate we cleaned the rope bags by rolling them down the steep hill to the car.

5/ The relevant extract of the Giant's Hole - Oxlow - Maskill Mine Survey can be found at the end of the document.

Despite the fact that the hole is called Maskill Mine, it does not appear (to me) to be very mineish, rather that is it a very loose cave. Admittedly I do not know an awful lot about mines but this one looked a little too tight for transporting ore to the surface and for fixed ladders for the men. It realistically wasn't as bad as the guide book made it out to be. Thankfully.

WEDNESDAY 6/6

Today I went to P8 with Adam, Aodhán, and Erin. We thought we were getting a great deal only having to pay €1 for access. When we reached the sump we realised why we only had to pay a single pound. After taking a moment at the sump we started to head back, and decided to try to take a different route back by going up a muddy climb, which ended up leading to a wet pretty crawl. We decided to skip this and just return the way we came. I kept banging my shoulders off the passage walls and let more than a few curses out of me on the way out. P8 was probably the worse cave I have ever been to.

Later on after a spot of lunch back at the TSG we headed to Eldon hole, which was described to us by Aaron, Matthew, and JP, who were doing a crossover with us, as a small Alum Pot. We descended the North route to the bottom, where there was still snow from the winter, yes this is a June trip report. The bottom of the pot was peppered with frog carcasses, a single shotgun shell and the snow. If you ignored the shaft leading to the dig site then that would be the most interesting part of the pot. I went down the ladder leading to the dig, but I didn't actually go far enough. Around this point Erin started back up the pitch and Aodhán popped up the ladder exclaiming that I mustn't have gone far enough and that there was a massive chamber below. So the three of us headed in and Adam tried to get some photos of the chamber, maybe we'll see them on Instagram sometime. I estimate that the chamber was about thirty metres high (based on the Poll Tullyard pitch) with an arch about maybe twenty metres above the chamber floor. Off to the South side of the chamber there was a further dig which was probably on the near side of twenty metres deep. On the North side of the chamber there is a pull through system for rigging a higher chamber, Miller's Chamber. 6/

When I returned from the UK I looked up the Eldon Hole dig and found some interesting information on the Buttered Badger Potholing Club, Eldon Pothole Club, and UK caving websites. It is thought that at least two stone cottages have been disposed of down the hole in the last three hundred years, and the victim of a highwayman lay at the bottom also. The digging group have actually found the murder victims hat, and also partial remains for an adult and juvenile. The latter find halted digging while police and the county coroner determined the remains were not recent, that update was a little over a year ago in May 2017.

6/ The survey for Eldon Hole can be found at the end of the document, or online.

This dig will be an interesting one to watch in the future.

We were a little late getting back to Castelton, with the callout very close, silly us didn't keep track of the time well enough. Since we were so late dinner had already been served and even though portions had been saved for us, we were just too hungry, and so several of us went with Alex and Patrick (who had been digging in Titan) to the local Chinese takeaway, which was closed until further notice, so Indian it was.

THURSDAY 7/6

Today I went to Giant's Hole with Aaron, Erin, Matthieu, and Matthew. Giant's is very much a fresher cave, when we arrived there were two separate groups of school children on their way out (I didn't know they made oversuits that little). We reached the head of the first pitch really quickly, and Matthieu rigged the five metre pitch. This cave had quite a narrow stream way passage, not unlike what we would see in Clare, it reminded me of Cullaun II. Heading down the stream way further we took out time, it was squeezey in places but manageable. I lead the way out and banged the living daylight out of my shoulders and hips. I could have done with being a stone heavier to be honest, if only for the sake of my collarbones.

As with the previous day we returned to the TSG for lunch before heading to the next cave. Somebody had to go and de-rig Rowter Hole, so myself Erin and Matthew went. Rowter was mined, I didn't actually know that until I was looking down the neatly carved rectangular shaft. I quite liked the entrance shaft, it was quite fresh and new to me. I de-rigged the pitches and deeply regretted by choice, it was not the weight of the rope bag itself but rather the swinging of the bag from my D-ring, and the fact the D-ring rotated under the weight. I believe there is actually a way to resolve this.

FRIDAY 8/6

I was up fairly early on the Friday and it was some group's job to de-rig James Hall's Over Engine Shaft, which to me is a giveaway, the British cavers simply refer to it as "JH". I suppose that it makes it sound less like a disused lead mine. I went first and in a hands and knees crawl after the traverses, came across a ceiling of boulders supported by soggy timbers and rusted angle iron. At this I scurried back out of the crawl and decided to head to surface alone. The others went ahead and de-rigged. I returned to surface and closed the lid on the manhole, which I might add scared the life out of Erin who heard this distant

boom from above and thought there had been a collapse^{7/}.

I was able to get a lift back to Castelton with Aodhán and Adrian, albeit after a trip to the chipper in God knows what town. Having a cup of tea back in the Chapel, one of the SUSS cavers told us about how she has noticed that the timbers had been sagging or "getting lower and lower" over her previous visits. Unsettling to say the very least.

Most of the group decided to clear out to go to the cinema tonight, must to the surprise of the three SUSS cavers who came by to say good-bye and found myself, Aaron, and Erin doing the dishes before hitting the pub. The next morning we were up by 05:00 to leave for the boat, and the first car was off the ramp in Dublin at 18:00. As usual the food on the P&O ferry was fantastic.

All in all a great week away, fair play to Adam for organising it, thanks to the Technical Speleological Group for accommodating us, and thanks to the Sheffield crowd who came out to act as guides for us.

SATURDAY 16/6

Saturday started extraordinarily early for me, leaving the house at 07:30 and being on the road to Fermanagh by 08:30, it was myself, Adam, and Erin heading North to complete a few caves that Erin hadn't gotten to do in her time here.

We stopped for breakfast rolls at the Applegreen station before Cavan town. We were climbing up to Prod's Pot by 12:30 for a quick and neat trip. We got to the canals before turning around, we didn't want to get soaked as we were going to Noone's Hole afterwards.

The pitches were easy enough today with the three of us moving quickly up and down. I exited first to take over the callout and carried out an involuntarily survey of motorists on the Marlbank loop. What I did was wave to an oncoming car to see if the occupants would wave back, the theory was that Irish Republic cars do wave but that Northerners do not. I however found a fifty-fifty split between the two groups. The biggest wave was from a farmer of about 80+ years of age driving an old Ford tractor down the hill, I should also say that the tractor had no registration plates.

After the other two were out we headed straight to Noone's. We headed down despite the simply unreal number of midgies surrounding the hole. I went down

^{7/} I should add that we are attributing the boom to me closing the manhole, but as I closed the manhole very gingerly, we are not actually sure that it was not a collapse.

last, since we were running late and hadn't got 8 hours to spare we only did the pitches. I found a number of peculiarities during the descent I could hear Erin calling my name all the way down the first pitch, I later found out that she could hear my voice too. Lower down I could smell burning for a split second. Nearing the bottom I found I had difficulty in breathing when standing up to unclip my cowstails^{8/}, I am putting it down to a sore knot in my back.

After leaving Noone's we headed to the chipper and then up to the Hoo where there was a few "more experienced" cavers who were staying the night. They all said "Oh hi Erin" to a bewildered Erin who didn't know what was happening. They suggested we go over to the barbecue, I went and finally persuaded Erin to follow suit, where she was greeted by Aaron, Adrian, Aodhán, Angela, and Matthieu who had prepared a surprise feast for Erin's going away party. Angela had the novel idea of her and Erin wearing dresses in the Hoo probably a sight that wont be repeated for many a year. Even though it was a party we were all in bed reasonably early with some of the surprise crew more sleepy than those who had been caving.

SUNDAY 17/6

I awoke quite early on Sunday, 05:40 actually, with a sense of urgency from a disturbing dream. After settling back in for another few hours sleep we all got up and headed for breakfast in Clancy's, where we ran into the DCG crowd who were up in Kiltyclogher, with the group on the surveying course. We all had a nice sedate breakfast before myself, Adam, and Erin headed to Shannon for trip to Swinger's Corner. We made quite fast progress down the Polltullyard pitch and through Rebirth to JCP Passage. I hadn't been through Rebirth since my very first caving trip in December 2015! I didn't recall Rebirth being as tight as I found it on today. The three of us made very speedy progress through the cave with only limited route finding after the Border Climb. All in all it was a great trip down to Swinger's Corner and back, and from surface to surface it only took four hours!

The drive back to Dublin was quiet and uneventful, with a pitstop in McDonalds and Adam catching up on Ru Paul's Drag Race in the back seat.

SATURDAY 23/6

On my trip to the US I was fortunate enough to get the opportunity to go surveying high up in the Rocky Mountains, at a cave called Groaning. This trip was a series

^{8/} Should it be cowstails or cowtails? Or umbilicals like the continentals.

of firsts and achievements for me, it was my - first time surveying - longest trip yet - highest trip yet - first time carrying my pee out in a bottle - most gluttonest trip yet. Firstly I should thank Paul for taking us up for the day's caving, and thank Kevin for lending me the caving gear.

Once we got past the gate and filled in the sign in book, the cave immediately became a crawl, Paul looks around to me and says "Welcome to Crawl-orado". It was at this moment that I realised that I shouldn't have laughed at the elbow pads Kevin gave me. We had entered the cave at 10:40 and reached our first survey station at something around 15:00. Paul had a few leads that earlier groups had put their head into and said "it goes".

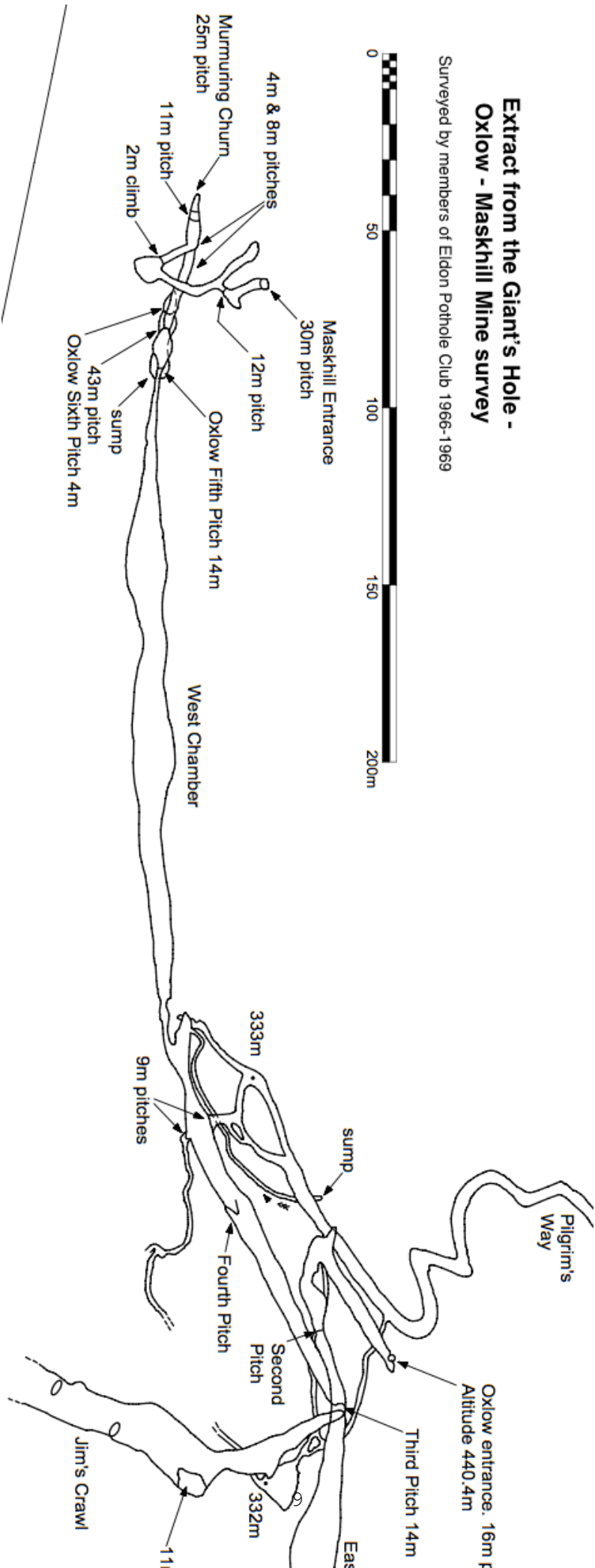
The first lead we entered was only about 18" tall in places with a floor of loose jagged rock. We surveyed up and around the corner alongside a small puddle with some calcification within. Erin who was on point then called back that she had found another survey marker. When we slowly made our way up to the marker Paul said "Oh I recognise this!". Someone had put their head down it and said it didn't go. Strangely our lead had popped us back out into passage that we had gone through on the way to our survey location.

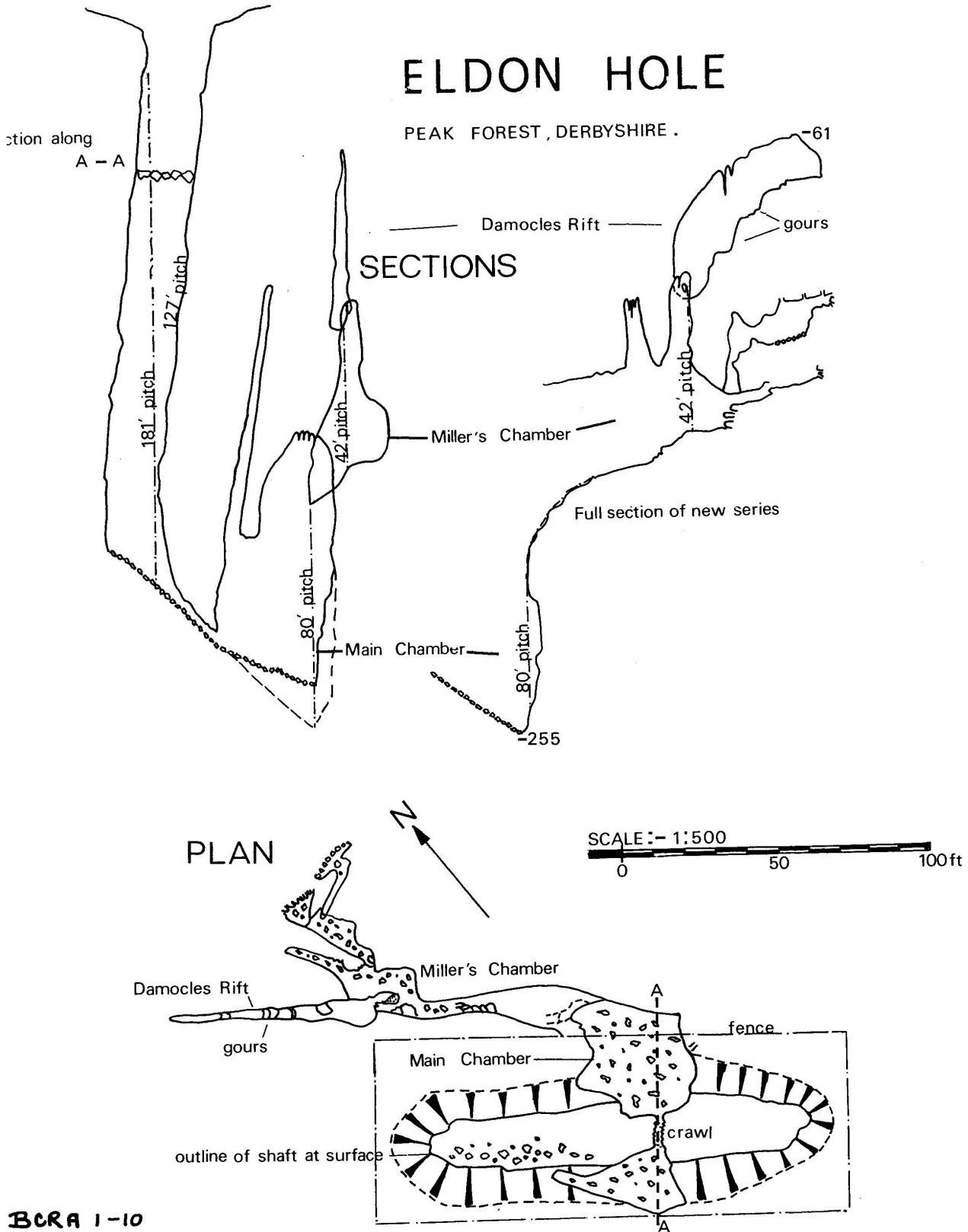
Our second lead was a couple of inches taller to begin with but opened down into a larger chamber which then went up into an even larger chamber. Understandably this perked our interest, and also confused us when it lead us to an existing survey station. When this was tidied up we started our trek toward the exit of the cave, with Paul periodically tricking us to see if we knew where we were going.

All in all it was a great trip and a great experience, and I have to thank Erin for organising it, and Paul for facilitating it.

Extract from the Giant's Hole - Oxlow - Maskhill Mine survey

Surveyed by members of Eldon Pothole Club 1966-1969





BCRA 1-10

Figure 2: Survey of Eldon's Hole