

and all this after a solo epic to the big pitch. The incident, humorous though it be to some, gave rise to the CPC motto, 'Belay your ladders at both ends.'

After being defeated by the 'Letterbox' the previous week I returned on August the 1st. 1948, fortified by instructions from Dennis Brindle.

The 'Letterbox' is, roughly, a narrow triangular rabbit burrow (as it were) in the wall at ground level on the second pitch. A crack runs along the floor of this burrow and it is down this that you have to go. I entered feet first in a horizontal position, allowing my feet and legs to squeeze down into the crack and my body to follow until I was in a vertical posture. Then, pressing on the roof and walls with my hand, I forced my chest – or stomach? – down through the crack. Then came the narrow crawl, which I tackled on my side with my uppermost arm laying along my body and my lower one stretched out to push along my helmet in front. I found this exhausting, and during my frequent rests I could here my heart beating as it does in the 'Heart Beat' of Stump Cross.

I turned back at the head of the big pitch. On the return I failed at my first attempt to climb the 'Letterbox.' There appeared to be no footholds and hand holds were few. I made progress by squirming upwards, helped by the pressure of my jammed body against the walls. I got up at the second attempt, and then quickly up the second pitch to the surprise of the day – the tackle had been withdrawn from the first pitch and I was 45 feet down looking at a beam of daylight above me. I yelled once or twice but got no reply and I realised that I might be there for some time. As near as I could estimate, I entered about noon and the time was then about 5.00 pm.

The shape of the pitch above me – and I had plenty of time to study it – was roughly triangular, 45 feet high with a base (the floor of the pot) of about 20 feet. Daylight entered at the apex almost at right-angles to the shaft.

To pass the time until someone turned up, I decided to see how far I could climb up the shaft – but always with a mental reservation that as I was alone I should take no risks. Facing towards the daylight, I tackled the right hand side first and climbed easily for about 15 feet, but then found that the overhanging sweep of the rock was too much for me. I descended and tried the left side. Here, climbing was not so easy, but I made steady progress until checked by an overhanging jammed boulder about 20 feet up. I could reach the top of this with one arm, but had to leave the rock face and let my legs dangle while I pulled myself up – not a particularly graceful piece of rock work and an effort certainly not helped by my wet and muddy clothes.

Above this boulder was a ledge which runs almost all the way around the pot. It gave me plenty of starting points for further climbs, but I was forced back each time by tricky bits which I did not want to attempt. The left hand wall for the last 15 or 20 feet is a mass of jammed boulders and did not appear to be a particularly difficult climb. I decided to attempt this if no one turned up in a reasonable time.

In the meantime I set to building a seat, complete with canopy (the water dripping from the roof was certainly a nuisance) in one corner of the ledge. I was engaged on this when I heard Billy Farrow's welcome shout above me. A ladder was let down and I climbed out. The time was 9.20 pm. I did full justice to the meal awaiting me at G.G. camp.

'During most of the time at the first pitch I had the tantalising sight of daylight only a few yards away. I could hear the birds singing on the moor quite plainly and I sang with them to attract attention – but perhaps not so melodiously!'

Later the same year the CPC scaled Craven Aven at the terminal upstream end of Far East Passage, in Gaping Gill.

The stream descending behind the 'window' high in the east wall of the chamber had intrigued cavers for many a year. Where did the water come from?(2)

They achieved partial success by scaling to a height of 25 feet with the aid of a 16-foot rigid metal ladder, attaining the 'window' following a relatively easy rock climb. The crux seemed to be how to reach a ledge 10 feet higher up in the inner aven, a ledge only 4 inches wide, and then across the spray-filled rift to another ledge at the far side. The problem was not resolved until a year later.

During the summer of 1949 the Brindle brothers together with Bill Spencer returned to the aven armed with several sections of rigid wooden ladder, a 16-foot length of extending dural ladder and some flexible 'electron' ladders. Everything was just as before – the 'window' with the stream cascading behind it, and of course the same crux – how to reach the top of the inlet? The section of dural ladder was balanced somewhat precariously on the 'windowsill', enabling a climber to reach the psychological ledge above. A belay was found here for a flexible ladder. Then, lifting the extendable ladder up to this, it was deployed at an angle across the aven, only just reaching the ledge on the far wall. Creeping cautiously across the bending, spray-lashed ladder, the explorers managed to erect an 8-foot length of wooden ladder to