

Rusling Farm Pot, Butcombe, Somerset

(Fig. 65)

(N.G.R. ST 516631. Ht. 540 ft. O.D. Tackle required: 65-ft. ladder,
10-ft. tether, lifeline)

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In June, 1964, members of the Society were requested to investigate a shaft in a hedgerow by Farmer Wear of Rusling Farm,* Butcombe. The shaft had been known for at least thirty years and had been used intermittently as an offal pit. Members first visited the site on June 15th, 1964, but were unable to reach the bottom of the shaft due to insufficient tackle. A party returned on June 18th and reached the bottom 65 ft. down. The cave is in limestone. The Dolomitic Conglomerate outcrops about 200 yd. south of the pot.

DESCRIPTION

The entrance of the shaft measures 3 ft. by 4 ft. and has no associated surface depression. It is normally kept covered by heavy timbers and sheet-iron. Small hawthorn trees on the northern edge provide a convenient belay point for a 65-ft. ladder. The top 15 ft. of the descent is down a 45° slope of earth while the remainder, after a slight overhang, is against an almost vertical rock face. The landing at the bottom of the shaft is on the northern slope of a detritus cone.

The whole of the cave is a rift aligned along a North-South plane of weakness. To the north of the detritus cone a 30° slope leads for 30 ft. to a tight descent through loose boulders, which descent becomes blocked after 10 ft. To the south of the cone the floor of the rift continues for 35 ft. to the base of a steep boulder pile. An easy climb up the pile leads for another 35 ft. to a point where the rift closes down. At this point a small hole leads back under the pile of boulders against the eastern wall. A squeeze enables one to re-enter the open rift on the slope of the boulder pile.

Most of the boulders have been well cemented with flowstone, which also covers part of the western wall. There are several pretty formations, including some helictites, mainly in the southern part of the rift. This, at floor level, is never more than 6 ft. wide and the roof, which follows the bedding, never more than 10 ft. wide. During the descent of the entrance

* This spelling is taken from the O.S. map. Locally the farm is called Rusland.

shaft a low wide passage is visible to the south, following the bedding at roof level. The southern end of this roof passage can be seen from the top of the boulder pile.

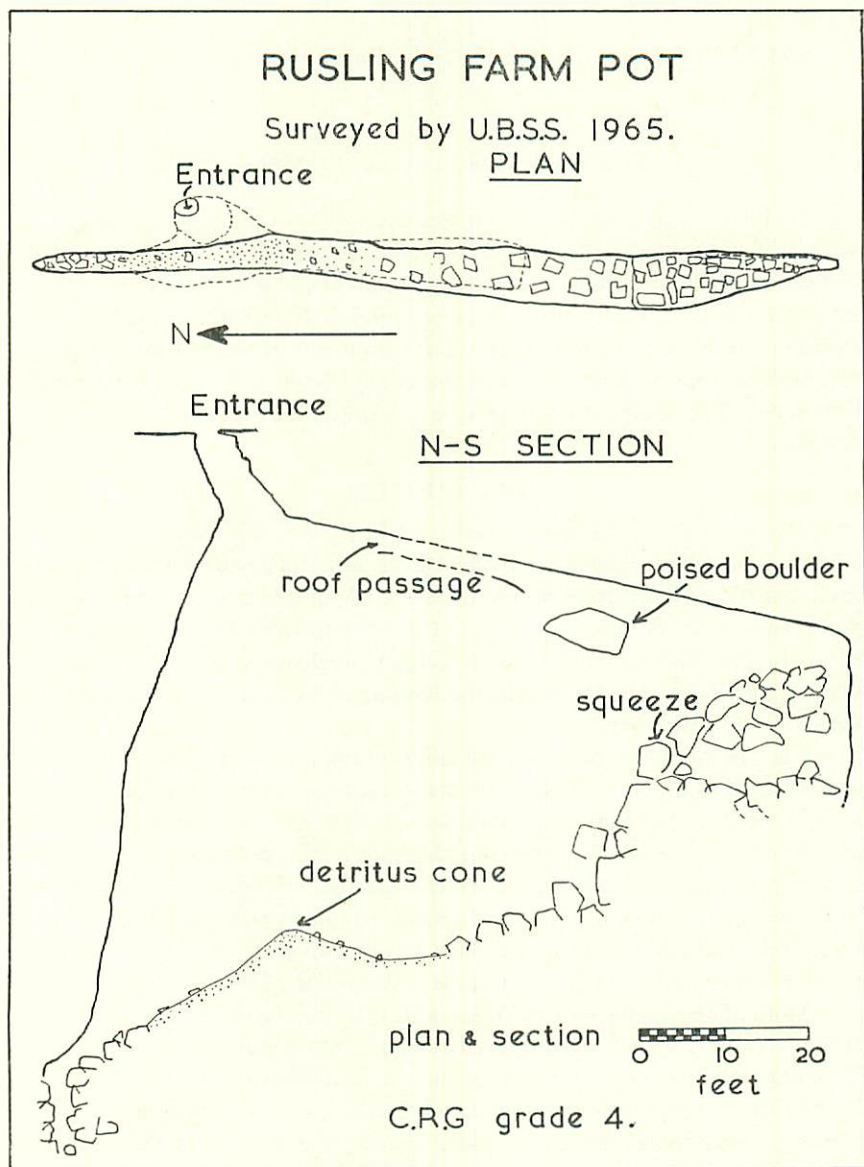


Fig. 65

COMMENTARY

Though there is plenty of evidence of mining in the neighbourhood this pothole is entirely natural. It appears to be a simple, isolated, ground-water, solutional cavity unconnected with any stream. It must have been formed when the watertable was much higher than now. Its height, *c.* 540 ft. O.D., suggests that it was formed after the 600-ft. erosion level described by Wooldridge (1961) and before, or perhaps contemporaneously with, that at 450–400 ft. described by Trueman. That is, it could have been formed in Early Pleistocene times about the time of the Early Glaciation of Zeuner (1959) (Alpine Günz). A comparable type of cave is Pen Park Hole (Palmer *et al.*, 1963) but that cave is very much older than Rusling Farm Pot (Bristowe, 1963, chap. V).

REFERENCES

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