

## GOUGH'S OLD CAVE – ITS HISTORY

by

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### ABSTRACT

During the latter half of the 19th century Gough's Old Cave was variously known as The Great Stalactite Cavern, The New Great Stalactite Cavern and Gough's Stalactite and Stalagmite Cavern. The cave was probably shown to visitors from about the late 18th century. It was certainly open for public viewing by 1869 and was then run by John Weeks. The well-known legend of the Jack and Nancy Beauchamp – Gough partnership is now questioned due to the emergence of new documentary evidence. The extensions made in the cave by Gough between 1877 and 1889 are described, together with accounts of visits by travellers and scientific organizations. Rivalry existed between Gough and the Cox brothers, rising to its peak in the late 1880s. The important extensions made in Gough's New Cave between 1892 and 1898 eclipsed the 'Old' cave, which was finally closed to the public in the early 20th century. This paper has been based on contemporary accounts as far as possible, including newspapers, official documents and travel guides.

### INTRODUCTION

In a previous paper Irwin (1986) quoted the Phelps (1836) account of those caves in the lower reaches of Cheddar Gorge that were known at the beginning of the 19th century. These were situated in or under the 'Ivy Chair' at the entrance to the Gorge in an area known then as Rock-End. All the cave entrances are included in sketches made in 1816 and 1834 by the Rev'd John Skinner.

When Gough's Old Cave was first explored is not known and 19th century books mention the cave only briefly *en route* to the Long Hole (e.g. Rutter, 1829). Long Hole had been known to travellers for some time, being recorded in the late 17th century by John Beaumont (1681) of Lamb Leer fame.

One of the three known sketches made by Skinner (1816) of the 'Ivy Chair' includes the entrances of those caves that lie in the Slitter to the west of Gough's (New) Cave—Gough's Old Cave and Long Hole (PLATE 1). The approach to the latter was by steps cut in the soil of the steep upper slope (Warner, 1800). Of Skinner's other two sketches, one includes the entrance of what is now known as Gough's (New) Cave (Skinner, 1816, reproduced in Irwin, 1986); and the other has a picnic party seated at a long table outside Saye's Hole (Skinner, 1834). An earlier (anonymous) water colour of the Ivy Chair showing the entrance to Long Hole and Gough's (New) Cave forms part of a decorative lower border to a map of Cheddar village and the gorge (Cruse, 1805, f. 1).

The scree slope at the mouth of the Slitter was removed by the builders of the Caveman Restaurant in 1934. Until then access to the Slitter was by a gently sloping path that followed the side of the cliff, leading to the steeper upper section below the imposing entrance to Long Hole. It was at this point that the steps were cut; this zone too, has since been modified when the Gough brothers, William, Arthur and Llewellyn,

excavated the gravel deposit in order to surface a car-park in 1911. In doing so they accidentally discovered the Romano-British remains and coin hoard that today forms an important part of the collection at the Cheddar Caves Museum.

A detailed description of the four caves is given by Phelps (1836), and has been reprinted in full elsewhere (Shaw, 1966; Irwin, 1986). At the time Phelps wrote, none of the caves had any name, though Strachey (c. 1736) had earlier recorded a cave known as 'The Hall', frequently used by strolling beggars. By the mid-1860s references are found to 'Cheddar Hall' (Green, 1869); and this has now been positively identified as being Saye's Hole from an 1872 tithe map at Longleat House. The map of Rock-End in FIG. 1 has been redrawn from a photocopy of the very fragile original in the Longleat House Library (Longleat, 1872a). On the same map the open entrance to what is now known as Gough's (New) Cave is named Sand Hole, and the notes by Skinner (1816) and Sollas (1881) indicate that this was an apt description.

Of Richard Gough's operation at the old cave, the only detailed published account is given by his son William in a letter printed in Thorneycroft (1949). It is a remarkably accurate note considering the interval of over sixty years since some of the early events in the old cave.

Other authorities have confused the 'Old' Cave and the quite separate cave explored between 1892 and 1898 (originally known as Gough's New Cave and now called Gough's Cave), often considering them as one single cave that had been continually extended (e.g. Knight, 1915; A. G. H. Gough, 1922).

## CAVE GUIDES AND CAVE DWELLERS

The earliest mention of cave guides appears to be during the 1780s (Shaw, 1966) when they were mainly women who lived in cottages at the foot of the cliffs. Collinson (1791) mentions that there were 'five considerable caverns' including Long Hole which he describes in detail. Among this group he notes a small cave which could well be Gough's Old Cave:

... Another smaller cavern extends about twenty yards, but does not afford such that is curious: in this cavern a poor woman a few years ago had her solitary residence.

Whether or not it was inhabited it is probable that Gough's Old Cave was regularly visited by travellers accompanied by a guide, *en route* to Long Hole. Skinner (1816) implies that he visited an inhabited cave when 'we visited the dormitory of another mendicant, and the Cave, which contributed to the sustenance of others ...'

In an account of a visit to Long Hole in 1799 Warner (1800) describes the steep ascent after 'a guide offering herself in the person of an old woman, the inhabitant of the cottage at the mouth of the cliffs.' These women earned their living by charging a few coppers to accompany the more adventurous traveller. In addition to guiding they would be found selling spar, flowers or simply begging in order to obtain their crust of bread. They were considered nuisances (Rutter, 1829; Stevens, 1869)

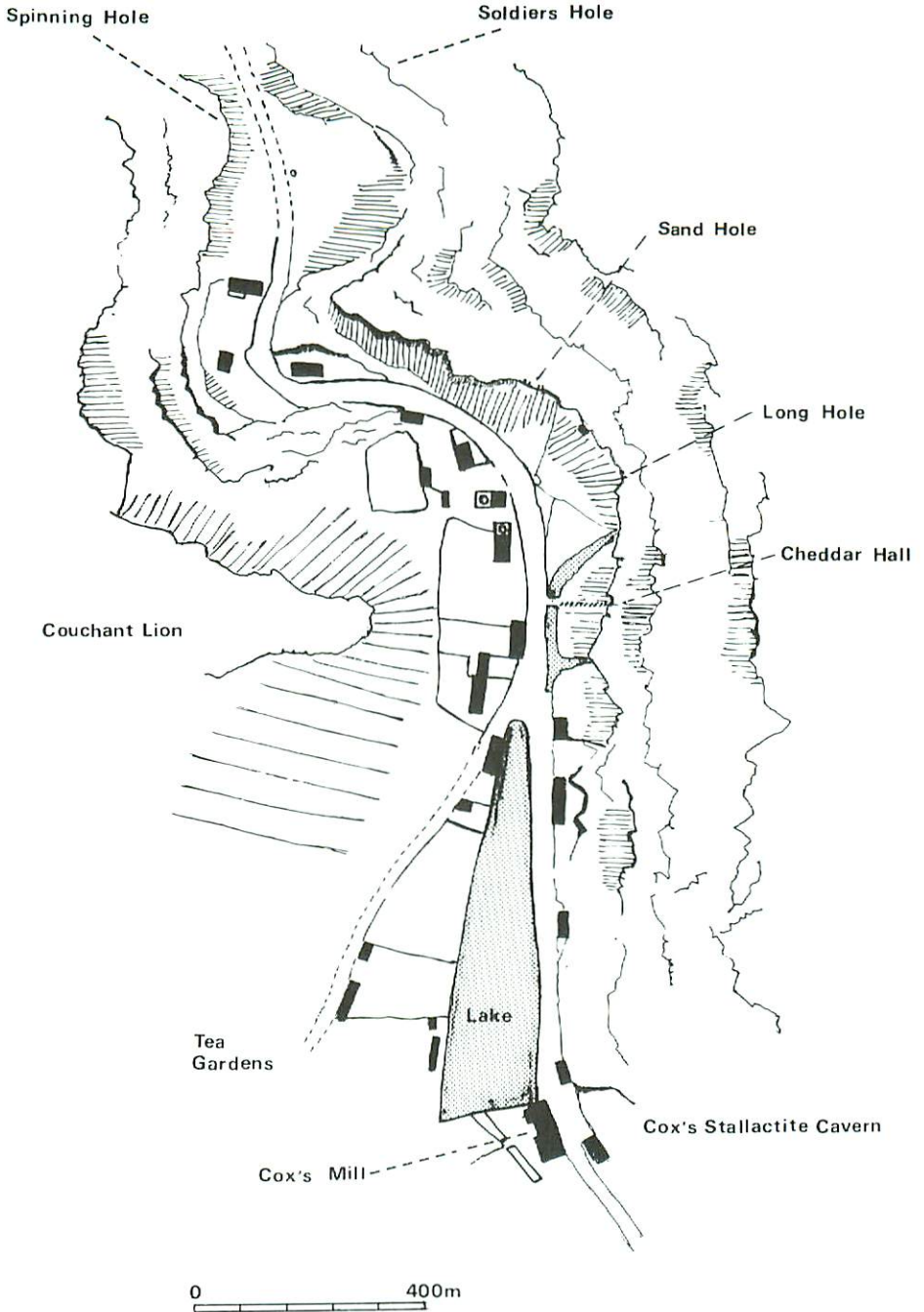


FIG. 1 — MAP OF 'ROCK-END', CHEDDAR, 1872: REDRAWN, WITH THE ORIGINAL SPELLING, FROM A TITHE MAP IN THE LONGLEAT HOUSE LIBRARY; THE SCALE HAS BEEN ADDED  
 Reproduced by courtesy of the Marquess of Bath

and their activity is amply described in Skinner's diary on one of his many visits to Cheddar (Skinner, 1823):

We were assailed by numbers of the Cheddar females bearing baskets of pinks and spars found among the Cliffs and such a competition was excited among these craving peasants that their intrusion became at length quite offensive and I was under the necessity of telling them to retain their baskets and their contents till they were required, instead of poking them into the faces of the strangers who came to visit them.

A later account though outlines clearly the wretched state of these people (Green, 1869):

The near neighbourhood of the cliffs has caused a number of miserable cottages, certainly not fit for human habitation, to rise up at the very foot of them; they consist of four walls – in many instances the side of the rock forms the support against which these sheds are built – a low doorway, a single small window, and what they call a 'chimly', though the wind is rarely in the right quarter to allow smoke to escape by it; no division in the one room – no upper chamber – in it whole families live huddled together; and in one of these comfortless dwellings (a woman told the writer) the occupant pays a half a crown a year to the lord of the manor.

Early references to cave dwellers have already been discussed elsewhere (Shaw, 1966). The site of their habitation is uncertain but the Collinson account above strongly suggests that Gough's Old Cave was inhabited during the late 18th century. About the same time Middiman (1792) also mentions that one of the caves was inhabited by 'a poor Family who ... guides the Curious through the Clifs and Cavities ...' The 19th century accounts relate generally to Gough's Old Cave, the Pride Evans occupancy being the exception (Balch, 1935). Evans and his family lived for several years early last century in Spinning Hole, now known as Pride Evans Hole.

The earliest of the 19th century accounts of people inhabiting Gough's Old Cave is by Skinner (1816). After visiting Gough's (New) Cave he writes 'Near this excavation, there is another opening to the light, into which a poor family have resided as we were told, for seven years: the entrance being closed by a door, but the interior exhibits wretchedness in the extreme'. Later, Rutter (1829), describing the ascent to Long Hole, remarks upon a cave entrance 'which has formed the comfortless habitation of a poor woman for upwards of twenty years ...' That cave is certainly Gough's Old Cave as the entrance would have been passed when climbing into the Slitter to gain the entrance to Long Hole. About ten years later another visitor writes of visiting the last surviving inhabitant of 'a cave in the Cheddar Cliffs who had lived there for upwards of thirty years.' (Thompson, 1838). From these descriptions it is probable that the references are to the same family as the length of occupation increases with the date of each publication.

A lithograph of 1834, titled 'A Cave at Cheddar' (PLATE 2), shows a woman and child living in a cave entrance and it has been suggested (Shaw, 1966) that this is Gough's Old Cave.

*The Tourists' Guide to Cheddar Cliffs* (Green, 1869) states that 'A cave opposite the limekiln is pointed out as having been the habitation of a woman for a period of 26 years.' Richard Gough himself afterwards published an advertising handbill for Gough's Old Cave (Gough, 1879) in which he states that

A Widow and her Son occupied the *outside* Chamber as a dwelling for 26 years from 1813 to 1839; their fireplace is still there. After the death of the Mother, the Son married and built a small room against the rock at the foot of the Cave, and lived there with his Wife 37 years. He died January, 1877.

From these accounts, together with the 1834 picture, it can be concluded that this woman was not the same as Collinson's 18th century inhabitant.

### THE PRE-GOUGH SHOW CAVE

By the 1860s the cave appears to have been a site of some curiosity, for it is from this period that the cave was organized as a show cave, though not having the same public acclaim as Cox's Cave further down the gorge. As has been seen it is almost certain that the cave was also open to the public before this date, the guides being the inhabitants living in the entrance chamber or from the cottages close by.

Local legend relates that by the middle of the 19th century the cave was operated by Jack and Nancy Beauchamp who lived in a cottage built against the rock at the foot of the cliff. The entrance to the cave was said to be in their garden. A photograph of the couple outside their cottage has been reproduced by Tratman (1975). According to the title of a postcard version issued about 1905, the original photograph was taken in 1860. The entrance to the Great Stalactite Cavern is clearly visible in the background and, what is more important, a large sign (illegible in the photograph) has been placed across the upper section of the entrance rift implying that the cave was open for public viewing. Assuming that the date given for the photograph is correct then Gough's Old Cave was open to the public by 1860, though no other contemporary account has been found to confirm this.

The earliest reference to Jack and Nancy to appear in print (Snell, 1907) differs from the later more detailed account by H. E. Balch. Snell relates that the cave, in

its pristine, comparatively uninteresting state, was for long the abode of a certain "Jack and Nancy," and their donkey. The aboriginals admitted visitors who were expected to furnish "tips" and find their own lights. The cave was then a purely local institution.

The cave to which Snell refers is almost certainly Gough's Old Cave for it is well known that the entrance to Gough's New Cave would not offer any comfort for permanent habitation due to the periodic winter flooding. Skinner also records this fact (1816, reprinted in Irwin, 1986). Furthermore it is known that the larger cave entrance was used as a cartshed (Weston-super-Mare Mercury, 1881, 18 March), as was Coopers Hole (Longleat, 1872a).

Balch's (1935) account is more informative:

Inspired by his relative, the late Edward Cox ... R. C. Gough entered into partnership with Jack and Nancy Beauchamp, who lived in a tiny cottage built against the cliff close to the old cave ... and, for a few pence showed it to all who came ...

Snell had not mentioned a surname and stated that they lived in a cave; but from the evidence of the photograph it is known that they lived in a cottage against the cliff wall. It is worth noting that this story does not appear in Balch's earlier book (Balch, 1926) on the Mendip caves and his source must surely have been local legend of the day. It is unfortunate that no contemporary evidence has yet been found establishing whether Jack and Nancy really existed.

The possible connection between the widow's son who had inhabited the cave and Jack Beauchamp is a matter for speculation, and it is possible that they were the one and same person.

Douglas Gough, grandson of Richard Gough, relates (Howell, 1984):

... they [Richard Gough and his family] lived in a cottage in the Gorge opposite an old couple called Jack and Nancy Beauchamp, who were apparently living in a chamber in the cliff face eking out a living by showing visitors the inside of their cave. To make his own living Grandfather worked up at the lead mines on the Mendips, walking up and down for two shillings a day ... when he'd been in Cheddar for some time, he started to go over and chat with Jack and Nancy, trying to persuade them to move out, so's he could see what he could find in there ... Anyway, after a bit the three of them formed some sort of partnership and the couple moved out. And Grandfather started his work.

However, an entry in the diary of a certain Robert Russell Green (Hensler, 1968) records a visit to the cliffs and caves in 1869 and introduces a new character to the story:

Besides the grandeur of the exterior of the Cheddar Cliffs, they are also particularly remarkable for their interiors which form very beautiful stalactite caverns. There are two chief ones, one kept by one Weekes certainly the larger of the two but not so beautiful as those of Mr. Cox ...

In the same year a guide book (Green, 1869) confirms that the cave was being shown to the public:

Another chamber, styled by the person who shows it to the *Great Stalactite Cavern*, has been made accessible to visitors ... less beautiful than the other cavern [Cox's Cave], the water sculpture is very curious; one object, a column, is beautiful and perfect. This is the largest cavern that has yet been discovered at Cheddar. The charge of admission to it is one shilling for a single visitor, and sixpence each for parties of two or more persons.

So, by 1869 the cave was known as the Great Stalactite Cavern and was open to the public. Stevens (1869) does not mention the existence of a second show cave and so, if he was collecting material for the book during 1868 then it would seem a strong possibility that the cave was opened in 1869.

It seems certain that the cave was managed then by Weekes (so spelled in the title record). If Weekes was operating the cave in 1869, about a year after Richard Gough and his family arrived in Cheddar, how could Gough have formed a partnership with Jack and Nancy? It is possible that story has become confused. The partnership could have been

between the Beauchamps and Weeks? Jack and Nancy may well have shown the caves *before* Weeks, i.e. from 1860 (the date of their photograph) or before, and up to the time (not later than 1868) that Weeks is known to have been in charge.

The answer was partly found in a tithe record book in the Longleat Estate Library (Longleat, 1872b). Plot 74, an area of ground in front of Gough's Old Cave up to the edge of the road was occupied by one John Weeks. The land contained a 'garden with hut and cavern'. From the Longleat House records and Green diary evidence John Weeks 'managed' the Great Stalactite Cavern between 1869 and 1872, and may well have continued until about 1877 when Gough took over the cave.

The Rev. R. Kilvert, on one of his many travels, entered in his diary the only description we have of the 'manager' of the cave and indeed the only detailed account of the cave at that time. On the 9th September 1873 he noted (North, 1969) that Cox's Cave was:

very unlike one of the other caves we visited before luncheon higher up the cliffs, at the entrance to the gorge, for there a ghastly old man, with his jaws bandaged white like a corpse and an enormous nose, conducted us solemnly into a cave in the cliff as black as pitch. As he was almost entirely deaf, we had to bellow to him till the cliffs roared again. The corpse struck a brimstone match and lighted eight tallow candles on a wooden frame fastened on the top of a long pole. Then he gave each of us an end of tallow candle, lighted and fastened to the end of a short stick held horizontally, and we went to our doom. The corpse led us over the slippery, rough streaming rocks and up rude steep steps into an inner cave or gulf of blackness which might have been the bottomless pit itself, for all that we could see. All around in the darkness and solemn silence we could hear the dripping and splashing of water from the roof of the cave at a vast height above. Every now and then the corpse stopped suddenly at some specially awkward and inconvenient place when we were balancing on a slippery rock face or crawling painfully with cramped and bended backs down some devils staircase or under an accursed arch or bridge of sighs, and solemnly elevating his frame of flaring and guttering candles to some monstrosity water-sculptured in the face of the rock, he opened his ghastly white bandaged cadaverous jaws and in a loud harsh voice emitted such cries as these: 'Call that, a turtle.' 'Call that, a pulpit.' 'Call that, a parson.' 'Call that, an alligator.'

The corpse appeared to have a certain grim and ghastly humour of its own, and gave a horrible grin when any of these cries had excited peals of laughter which even it could hear.

Who was this white-haired old man? It was probably John Weeks and, if he was the son of the widow and was born and bred in the entrance chamber of Gough's Old Cave, he would by then have been approaching 60 years of age. On the other hand it might well have been Jack Beauchamp who could equally have been the son of the widow, either working on his own behalf or for Weeks and living in the hut on Weeks' property. From the photograph of Jack and Nancy of 1860 Jack appears to be between 40 and 50 years of age and so thirteen years later he could well have been white-haired. It certainly was not Richard Gough, for in 1873 he was only 46 years old.

### GOUGH ARRIVES IN CHEDDAR

When Gough settled in Cheddar about 1868 the village was rapidly becoming a popular tourist attraction, particularly so following the

opening of the Great Western Railway branch line through Cheddar in 1869. Visits to the caves, the church and the Pleasure Gardens were among the highlights for the increasing number of visitors. Daily excursions were run from Bristol to Cheddar for 1s 6d, attracting many tourists during the summer months.

When he arrived in Cheddar with his family, Gough lived with his mother at her home opposite the entrance to Gough's Caves until her death in 1871, having very little money of his own. When he became involved with the cave is unknown. What is certain is that six years later, by 1877, Gough became proprietor of the Great Stalactite Cavern. He was now comfortably well off and owned property. In June 1877 he entertained the cliff villagers to a 'sumptuous meal' at his house (Weston-super-Mare Mercury, 1877, 23rd June) and in the following month (Weston-super-Mare Mercury, 1877, 7th July) he entertained the Good Templars of Cheddar and Westbury to a picnic '... and then adjourned to the field adjoining, kindly lent by Mr. Gough, where they indulged in innocent amusements until the shades of evening, when they all availed themselves of the invitation by Mr. Gough to see the "Great Stalactite Cavern."'

## THE 1877 DISCOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CAVE

Poor public opinion of the Great Stalactite Cavern and the attraction of the Pleasure Garden on the Cox's property, spurred Gough into action and he began excavating at the end of the cave. One has to remember that Cox's Cave was famed throughout the country for its beauty and that Gough was starting with a moderately decorated fragment of a cave with little to show the public. During November 1877 he was rewarded by the discovery of a large chamber, eventually to be known as the 'Concert Chamber' (PLATE 3 and b in FIG. 2). The event was first reported in the Wells Journal (22nd November):

Last week Mr. Gough was making some excavations in his Caves, and in one place, after cutting through several feet of stalagmite he discovered a large and handsome Chamber, the Stalactite formations in which are exceedingly beautiful.

In the following month, on the 22nd December, the Weston-super-Mare Mercury published the following note:

GRAND DISCOVERY – Mr. R. C. Gough announces that he has just discovered a beautiful Cave at the extremity of the caverns of which he is the proprietor, to which he hopes to be able to provide public access in the course of a few months.

In 1879 Gough issued an advertising leaflet (FIG. 3) announcing a change of name of the cave to 'The New Great Stalactite Cavern'. In it (Gough, 1879) is printed a letter by him, dated 27th November 1877, giving more detail of the discovery:

I have much pleasure in informing you that on the 12th November, 1877, I discovered a very beautiful CAVE, at the extremity of the Great Stalactite Cavern; I was led to surmise that one existed in that direction from water occasionally flowing from that quarter. I found after cutting through 17 feet of Stalagmite, and excavating 40 or 50 tons of boulder stones, many 6 and 7 cwt. each, interlaced with Stalagmite, I came to a pond of water, and thence into the *New* Cave ...



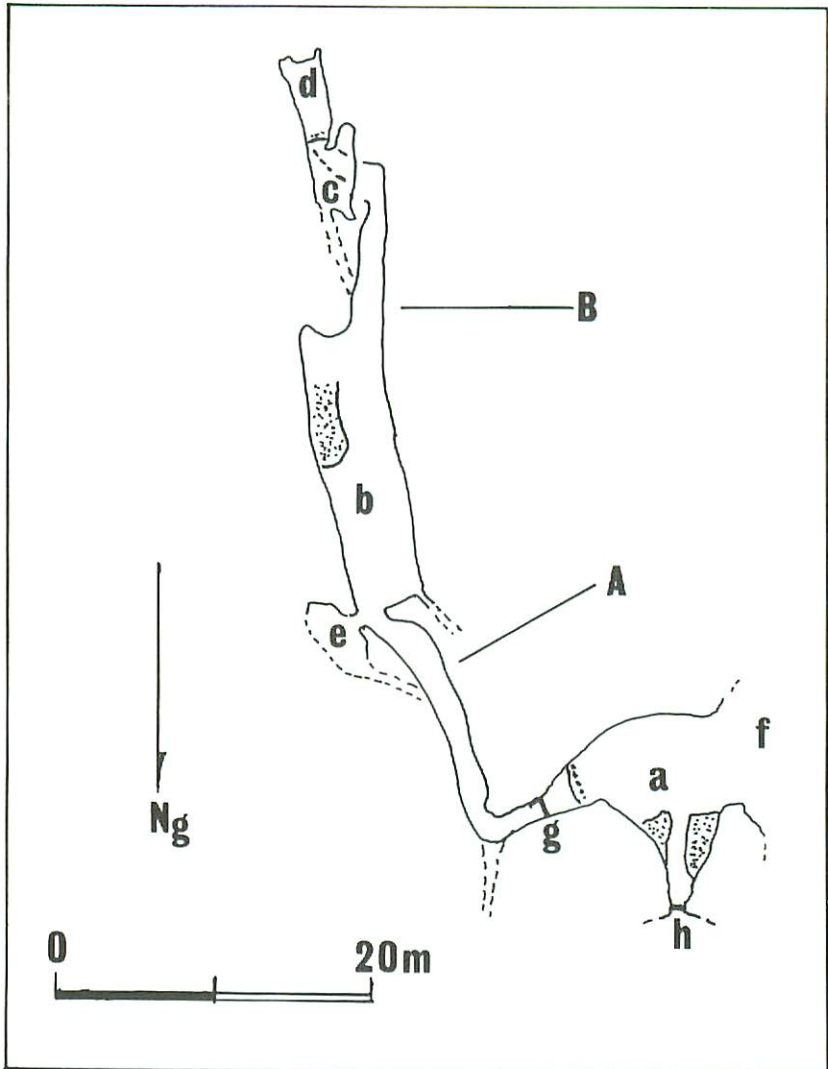


FIG. 2 — PLAN OF GOUGH'S OLD CAVE SHOWING THE SEQUENCE OF EXPLORATION 1877-1889

- A: LIMIT OF CAVE UNTIL 1877
  - B: LIMIT OF CAVE UNTIL 1887
  - a: ENTRANCE CHAMBER
  - b: CONCERT CHAMBER (DISCOVERED 1887)
  - c: QUEEN'S JEWEL CHAMBER (DISCOVERED 1887)
  - d: ST. VALENTINE'S CHAMBER (DISCOVERED 1887)
  - e: THE SLITTER
  - g: INNER GATE
  - h: OUTER GATE
- SHADED AREAS DENOTE STACKED ROCKS

Based on a survey by the writer

GOUGH'S OLD CAVE



PLATE 1 — THE SLITTER AT CHEDDAR, A SKETCH MADE IN 1816 BY SKINNER. HE MARKS THE ENTRANCE TO GOUGH'S OLD CAVE AS NO. 2 AND THE STEPS UP TO LONG HOLE AS NO. 1.

Reproduced by courtesy of the British Library from MS.ADD.33648,f.164a.

GOUGH'S OLD CAVE



PLATE 2 — 'THE CAVE AT CHEDDAR', PERHAPS GOUGH'S OLD CAVE: A LITHOGRAPH OF 1834  
DRAWN BY W. J. MÜLLER AND PUBLISHED BY GEORGE DAVEY OF BRISTOL  
From a private collection, accessible via U.B.S.S.

GOUGH'S OLD CAVE

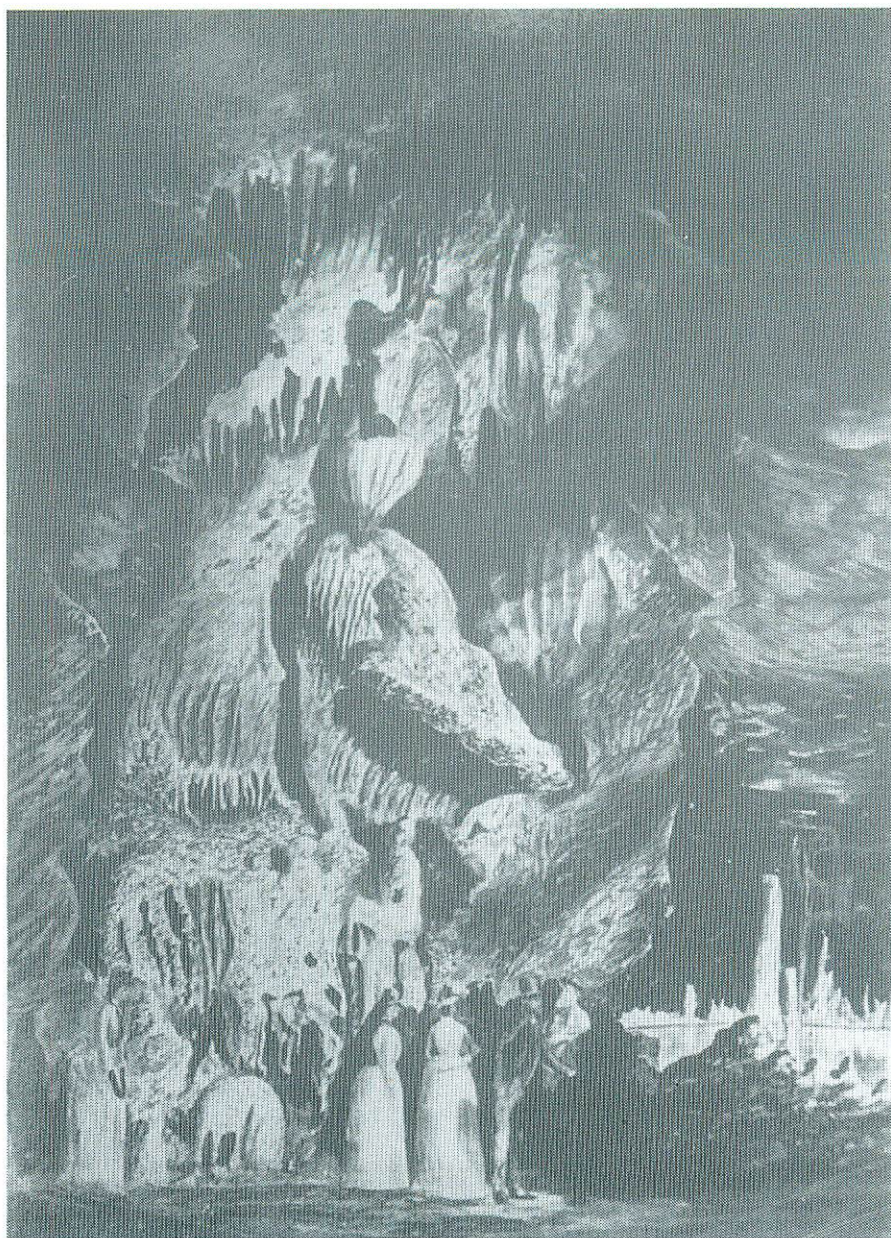


PLATE 3 — CONCERT CHAMBER, GOUGH'S CAVE, SHOWING ONE OF THE FOUNTAINS. A CHAPMAN PHOTOGRAPH, C.1890, OF A WATER-COLOUR.

Phot.: Worden collection

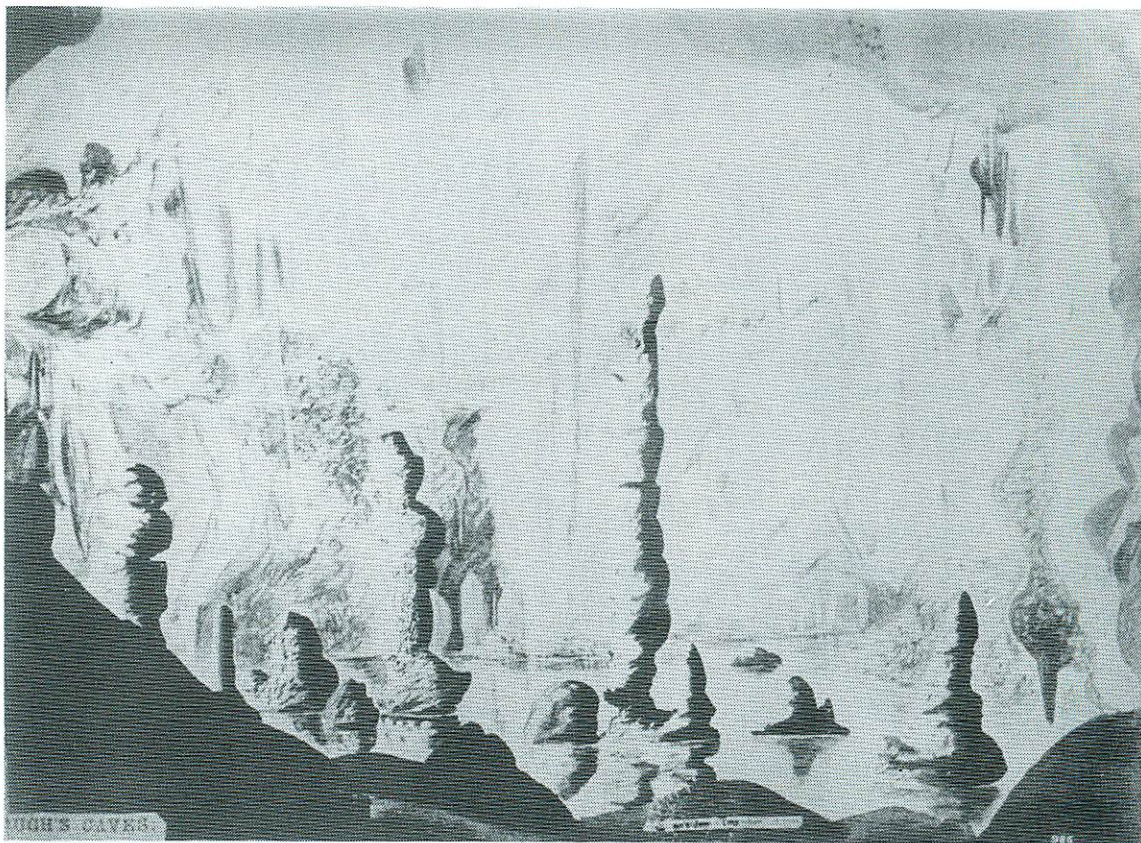


PLATE 4 — QUEEN'S JEWEL CHAMBER, GOUGH'S OLD CAVE. A PHOTOGRAPH BY CHAPMAN, C. 1890.

Phot.: Worden collection

The Weston-super-Mare Gazette on the 27th August 1881 reported that Gough was opening up another cave '... and in the course of removing the debris he made some interesting discoveries ...' No further announcement appeared in the press so it may be assumed that the excavation revealed little or nothing of consequence.

SEE

GOUGH'S

NEW


Great Stalactite

CAVERN,

Discovered NOVEMBER 12th, 1877,

Opposite the far-famed Lion Rock.



 Admittance for One, 1s. 6d., above that  
number, 1s. each.

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OLIVER & SON, PRINTERS, ANBRIDGE AND HIGHBRIDGE.

FIG. 3 — THE FRONT OF THE 1879 LEAFLET ON GOUGH'S OLD CAVE

The cave was often used as a place of entertainment. On the 29th of September (Weston-super-Mare Mercury, 1877) a report appeared of a handbell concert given in the cave:

NOVEL GATHERING IN THE STALACTITE CAVERN — On Friday last the "Welford Family" gave two concerts on the musical handbells in the inner chamber of Mr. Gough's Great Stalactite Cavern, which was extra brilliantly illuminated for

the occasion with three or four hundred coloured candles. The effective playing of the juvenile campanologists together with the cave so tastefully decorated with ferns and lights, did not fail to give great satisfaction to the hundred that attended.

Four years after this Mr E. R. Sleator, a local photographer, gave two lantern slide exhibitions of views of Cheddar, Wells and the neighbourhood 'in the spacious chamber of Gough's Cave which was lighted with Chinese Lanterns, the effect being very striking and pretty. The views being enlarged upon photographs and realistic and by the aid of the oxy-hydrogen light were seen to great advantage ...' (Weston-super-Mare Gazette, 1881, 27th August).

Gough installed gas lighting in the cave in April 1883 (Weston-super-Mare Gazette, 1883, 2nd May), the gas being produced by evaporating gasoline in a special apparatus in the entrance chamber of the cave! The Petroleum Act of 1871 required the user of petrol to hold a licence. Gough did not possess one and found himself before the court at Axbridge. In his defence Gough presented a letter that he had written to one Sir W. Vernon Harcourt on the 18th April 1883:

Sir. I have the honour of renting a cave under the Marquis of Bath, and have been showing the same by light of lamps until the past fortnight, since which I have, at great expense, introduced gas made from gasoline, which I purchased from merchants in Bristol on the 18th March last. At the time of the purchase I enquired if it was necessary to obtain a licence to store it, and I was informed that it was not if the quantity did not exceed forty gallons ...

During the court hearing although Gough had built a storage room for the gasoline well away from the cave, he was severely criticized for having the conversion apparatus installed inside the cave thus creating a potential fire hazard; for this he was fined 10 shillings and the 24 gallons of gasoline in his store were confiscated. The paper continued its report thus:

Supt. Gilbanks recommended a place for the storage of petroleum should be properly built. Major Law, to the defendant, "Unless you choose to take some proper precautions the magistrates will not grant you a licence." Defendant, "If I comply with the requirements of Supt. Gilbanks I may get my petroleum restored to me? I have committed no crime. It is like taking the bread out of a man's mouth to take the petroleum away." Col. Luttrell, "You would have been fined much more heavily if the petroleum were not forfeited and the Bench will therefore reckon that in the fine your petroleum is forfeited." The defendant said that he would like the Magistrates to visit the cave, and Col. Luttrell replied that he should be afraid to do so under the present circumstances.

### MORE DISCOVERIES – THE 1888 CHAMBERS

Gough's next breakthrough in this cave came in November 1887 (c and d in FIG. 2). It will be noticed that many of his discoveries were made during the winter months, the tourist off-season. The Bristol Mercury, on the 10th December reported:

Cheddar – Mr. R. C. Gough has, after ten years labour, succeeded in opening up two fresh chambers at the end of the large cave discovered by him in 1877 ...

On the same day the Weston-super-Mare Mercury gave a more detailed account:

THE NEWLY DISCOVERED CAVERNS – A correspondant who has by special permission inspected the first of a most interesting series of chambers that will shortly be connected with “Gough’s Caverns” says “This palace of Aladdin, which is at present approached by a ladder and some circuitous twists, was suspected to exist by the indefatigable Gough, in consequence of a mysterious down draught, which indicated something beyond. With the eye of an explorer, he espied an aperture just large enough to admit head and shoulders. Holding a light before him, he found himself passing a portal, guarded by crystal pillars of stalagmite. Once in this chamber ... he could stand, gaze, explore ... and break the silence of ages, by mournful and musical ring of stalactitic bells. On again our explorer crawls, passing under the imaginary wings of a fossil bird, until he is at last rewarded by the discovery of a monster cavern. What it is, what new wonders are to be found in it and where it ends are more or less matters of conjecture. Suffice to say, that this enthusiastic man is driving by the aid of drill and dynamite, a direct passage to it, apparently through solid rock ...

These chambers became known as the 1888 Chambers, the year in which they were made accessible to the public. Gough named them Cathedral Chamber and the Queen’s Jewel Chamber (PLATE 4), and to enhance them fountains were eventually installed. According to his advertisement (Gough, c. 1890), there were three in the Cathedral Chamber and one in the Queen’s Jewel Chamber (Gough, c. 1890); another one, in the Concert Chamber, can be seen in PLATE 3. The chambers must have been opened to the public between mid-April and the end of May for he was still enlarging the way through by blasting in the second week of April (Weston-super-Mare Mercury, 1888, 14th April).

The first newspaper account of a visit to the new chambers was published on 26th May, 1888 (Weston-super-Mare Mercury):

The first meeting of the season of the Cotteswold Naturalist Club, took place on Thursday ... for the express purpose of inspecting the more recent discovery of Mr. R. C. Gough, who after ten years arduous labour has succeeded in opening up two fresh chambers at the end of the cave discovered by him in 1877 ... Unfortunately Mr. Gough was not able to pilot the party having sustained a fracture of his right leg a few weeks since ... the party were met by Mr. Gough, jr., who took his father’s place and ably discharged his duties ... At the back of the cavern was the opening through which Mr. Gough had entered the cave beyond but which is now approached by a larger entrance that has been made.

Through this passage the members were now conducted and emerged in what might be termed two grottoes of stalactites ... these were well illuminated and the beauty of the effect is difficult to describe. In one place a small, natural, fountain played in the centre of stalactites and stalagmites. The stalactites at Cheddar are not large but are, for the most part clear.

Richard Gough employed his sons as guides at an early age. Thus William Gough (in Thorneycroft, 1949) recalls that ‘before I was twelve [i.e. in 1883] I was able to conduct parties through the caves as well as the next’. His brother Arthur was some three years older, so it could have been either of them who took the Cotteswold party round the cave.

It is said that, to augment the small number of stalactites in the cave, Gough had cartloads of them brought from Loxton Cave near Weston-super-Mare, which had been briefly open as a show cave in the 1860s (Richards, pers. comm.). In addition to the imported speleothems, various devices were used to enhance the cave, including the fountains,



and in the entrance chamber a hole in the side wall resulting from an early excavation was used to provide a reflection of trees and sky in artificial pools of water.

### SPECIAL VISITORS

The cave proprietors were always happy to receive visits by important persons, their letters and comments being used with great impact in publicity handbills and press releases. The visitors included the Bishop of Bath and Wells in the company of five other bishops and also the Earl of Kimberley. The Prince of Siam visited the cave on March 28th 1884 and, later, scientific organizations too toured the cave.

The visit by the Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club in May 1888 has already been mentioned and in September of the same year (Weston-super-Mare, 1888, 15th September) the final event of the Bath meeting of the British Association 'was devoted to an elaborate series of excursions including one to the Cheddar ... and Ebbor Gorges ... Luncheon was provided by host Bragg at the Cliff Hotel and Gough's Caves were inspected'.

### THE LAST DISCOVERY IN GOUGH'S GREAT STALACTITE CAVERN

On February 14th, 1889 (St. Valentine's Day) Gough made his last discovery in this cave and it was open for public viewing later that month. The Weston-super-Mare Gazette (1889, 23rd February) described the new chamber, St. Valentine's Chamber, as 'very charming'. The same report notes that Gough was working to locate another chamber, but whether this site was actually in the cave is not known. Certainly by 1890 his attention had switched to the nearby site, at road level, of what was to become the present Gough's Cave, which had interested him for some time past.

The admission to Gough's (Old) Cave appears to have been one shilling each for two or more people at first. A handbill (Gough, c. 1885) included an acrostic written by himself giving details of the admission charges for that year:

Great and glorious are the sights seen here.  
 Only one shilling to pay "My pretty dear."  
 Unless you come by yourself, Thence  
 Gough will charge you eighteen-pence.  
 Herein are seen great sights so rare,  
 So wonderful, 'twill make you stare.  
 Come one and all you'll enjoyment find -  
 And some of your cash leave behind;  
 Very great pleasure you'll obtain -  
 Enough I have said, so now refrain.

During the months of July and August in 1888 and the following two years at least, the admission charges (by then normally two shillings each) were reduced during the summer months to 'half the usual charge to parties of 3 or upwards.' Another large handbill (Gough, c. 1890)

states 'Excursionists will be admitted in numbers of Four and upwards at 1s. EACH (being half the usual charge), for this month and the next.'

Photographs of the Gorge by Archibald Coke were for sale at the cave entrance as early as 1879 (Gough, 1879). Pictures of the cave interior appear not to have been available until about 1890, for only then did regular announcements state that views of the caves as well as the Gorge were on sale at the entrances of both Gough's Great Stalactite Cavern and Cox's Cave. Those of the former were the work of Stanley Chapman, the Dawlish photographer who was a close friend of the Gough family (PLATES 3 (which is a photograph of a watercolour) and 4).

### RIVALRY

The involvement of Richard Gough at the Great Stalactite Cavern did not at first create a serious threat to the proprietors of Cox's Stalactite Cavern. However, by the mid 1880s the situation was changing. The discovery of the new chamber in 1877, installation of gas lighting, greatly improved walkways through the cave, and regular advertising in the local press no doubt caused concern to Edward Cox and his brothers. It is possible that this increased competition was, in part, the reason for the Cox family's attempt to sell Cox's Stalactite Cavern in 1884 (Irwin, in prep.). During the period around 1889 when Gough was making a number of discoveries in the Great Stalactite Cavern, claim and counter-claim between the two cave managers reached a peak. Two posters at the Woodspring Museum, Weston-super-Mare, typify the exchanges:

Cox's Stalactite Cavern.

Visited by H.R.H. THE PRINCE OF WALES

NOTICE.—There is no truth in the announcement of the discovery of a new great cave in 1877. It is one of the original Cheddar Caves shown to the public before Cox's Stalactite Cavern was accidentally discovered 1837-38. Both caverns were described in 1868 by Mr. Nicholls in "Pleasant Trips out of Bristol." (Cox, c. 1890)

The only edition (1873) of Nicholls's book that can be traced refers to Long Hole and does not mention either of the lower cave entrances.

The outburst from Gough is not unexpected (Gough, c. 1890):

VISITED BY ROYALTY—

Visitors: Read this before Seeing Caves.

GOUGH'S CAVES of 1877-1888-1889,  
are the most wonderful ...

Visited by H.R.H. the Prince of Siam and the Colonials.

... CAUTION! - Station Drivers and others who are interested in other Caves are not my Colleagues: I employ no "Touts." I received a letter from the EARL OF KIMBERLEY, dated June 9th, 1888, contradictory of a Statement posted at another Cave. H.R.H. the Prince of Wales has not visited Cheddar since a youth, with his Tutor.

Like Cox, Gough was not being wholly honest with the public, as touts were employed and it is still in living memory that many a fight between the carriage and coach drivers took place when collecting the innocent visitors from Cheddar railway station.

In the press, too, rivalry between the two cave proprietors appeared. On August 20th 1887 in the Weston-super-Mare Mercury:

DON'T GO TO CHEDDAR WITHOUT VISITING  
GOUGH'S

NEW GREAT STALACTITE CAVE

(The "Caution to visitors" given by jealous opponents  
is both slanderous, libelous and contemptible)

If you wish to see a  
NATURAL CAVE  
GO TO GOUGH'S

which has been visited and admired by 20,000 persons since its discovery, comprising six Bishops (at once), with Dukes, Marquisses, Lords and Ladies, the Colonials, HRH the Prince of Siam, "Classes & Masses" included.

See it! With letters of commendation, together with opinions of the Press.

NB - Closed on Sundays.

The intense commercial warfare continued well into the 20th century. Gough's real interest lay in the commercial exploitation of caves, the scientific emphasis that he laid before the public being simply for publicity purposes. There is no record of his having visited any other show caves in the country though he was certainly aware of them.

To combat the combined cave and Pleasure Garden complex organized by the Cox brothers, Gough with his wife Frances set up a Tea Garden next to their house (Lion Rock House) opposite the cave entrance. There were said to be 'Good Teas with Eggs, in Bowers or Tent, One Shilling Each. Closed on Sundays.' (Gough, c.1885). By 1890 Gough had built a small museum at the edge of the cave grounds, a photograph of which has been reproduced by Howell (1984). It contained a number of miscellaneous objects, mainly from his excavations at the Sugar Loaf Slitter and Gough's Old Cave. Admission to it was free.

With the opening up of Gough's New Cave (1892-1898) both caves were at first shown to the public and this persisted until the turn of the century. Advertisements for the old cave continue through the year 1900 but later versions simply combine the caves under the general name of Gough's Caves; the actual closure date is therefore obscure. Cheddar villagers have suggested that the cave was open as late as 1920 but this has not been confirmed.

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