

## CROMFORDE SOUGH TRIP date-29 Aug 2006

Attendees-John,Vicki & Mike Dave ,Martin ,John ?,An Other(sorry)  
Sid Harvey

We arrived in Cromford car park and whilst chatting before we set off I pointed out that I had been and had a look at the Bear pit sough entrance earlier in the year and that the stone entrance arch within the gated walled enclosure at that time had about 14 inches depth of water flowing out of it,considering the top of the arch is only about 24 inches high it raised a few eyebrows and Vicki seemed quite pleased she had decided to wear a wetsuit.John assured us that there would be a lot less water at this time of year.

The sough was started in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to drain the mines on Cromford moor the other side of Black Rocks some distance away and cost £30,000 at that time (how much would that be today!).The walled enclosure known locally as the Bear Pit was built by Arkwright to distribute the sough water to his local mills via underground channels.

Arriving at the Bear Pit we were quite relieved to see only about 6 inches of water discharging out of the sough (I was relieved anyway) and after doing a wobbly balancing act over the gate we all entered the sough.The first part was stone arched then as it got higher it opened out into natural rock,the sense of history was immediate to me.Walking along the passage we reached an area that had silted up due to some council cock up in the past,the roof was about 5 feet high and the floor had about 11 inches of soft silt covered with a few inches of water thus creating a strange feel underfoot,like walking through a giant chocolate mousse the silt hanging onto your wellies every time you tried to lift your foot.

We left the silt behind and came to a passage on the right,John told us this went across the road to the mill pond and a wet exit was possible on the return,nobody looked very enthusiastic.Continuing along the passage we came to another tunnel on the right issuing a fair bit of water,this was driven to dewater another mine,we explored along this until it became too low.Back in the main sough we continued forward passing amazing **things** hanging from the roof,I'm not sure if they qualified as formations as they were soft and squidgy but the colours were incredible,I could only liken them to something alien,the bright red ones looked like lumps of raw meat hanging down.It felt like an alien world there.

We continued until we came to a sign warning of the possibility of bad air and decided to return.On the return John pointed out to me miners initials FW scratched on a rock and it made me think about the people who had driven the sough,who were they,what were they like,had any died in here-lots of thoughts about this,it also triggered memories from my past when I worked in coal mining at a very small colliery where the supply gate tunnels were little bigger than what we were walking in,I could imagine what it was like,although Longe sough to give it it's proper name would have been driven using candle light,that is hard to imagine.

After emerging back to the real world the Derby crew and I went into the Greyhound for some real ale,the perfect end,everybody agreed it was a fascinating and enjoyable trip.Thanks to all who attended,I enjoyed your company and thanks to John who again led a superb evening trip.

Sid Harvey.

**This was a trip report to my caving club and names have been changed to protect the vulnerable**