

Expedition to Explore the Berwick Canal Tunnel

In 1966 our chairman, David Adams, was amongst a party from the Shropshire *Caving & Mining Club* that ventured into *Berwick Tunnel*. This is his account of the trip written at the time.

This tunnel was constructed in 1797, Lord Berwick having refused the canal company permission to construct a cutting through his game preserves. It is $\frac{3}{4}$ mile long and in brick lined rock throughout measuring about 10 ft by 10 ft. There is no tow-path, the bargees lying on the cabin top and legging their craft through manually while the horses went around by road. Due to some surveying errors and perhaps also to the ground through which it was driven the tunnel is by no means straight having a conspicuous dogleg in the middle where the construction tunnels were said to have met. As the tunnel was not straight it was not possible for an approaching bargee to ascertain whether there was already a barge in the tunnel, as there was no room to pass. Legend has it that was many a fight between the bargemen as to who should retreat to allow the other to pass. Since 1948, however, the canal has been closed and has fallen into disuse, a road having been laid across the canal bed some 500 yards from the tunnels east entrance.

A boat, manned by K. Lock, P. Gaut and D. Adams, led the way into the tunnel, which had last been entered by the Shrewsbury and Newport Canal Assoc. a few months before. C. Lears was towed behind in a dinghy. The trip was reasonably uneventful except for the passing of the 7 air shafts. These averaged about 40 ft. in depth but debris decreased the depth of water below them to less than a foot compared with an average 4 ft. in the tunnel between them, also there a constant flow of water down the shafts falling into the canal which made the passage a wet one.

The tunnel itself was in an excellent condition despite its age and long disuse. In places there were massive calcite deposits on the walls. In other places there were massive galvanized iron sheets which had been placed in position to support possible weak sections. All were in good condition. At the west end, however, there is a severe fall, blocks having collapsed just inside the tunnel arch blocking the canal completely. It was possible to change crews via a plank for the return journey which was likewise uneventful. Members wish to thank Peter Heath for the loan of his boat for this expedition.