Call for stone pits to start up again

ATTEMPTS to encourage the reopening of small-scale quarries in the Dales for the production of traditional building materials has all but fallen on stony ground.

Traditional sandstone flags and roofing slates are often required for new development, but the scarcity of supplies has made them expensive materials. Artificial roofing slates have found a market and even theft of traditional materials from disused barns and other buildings has become an area of concern in the national park.

In an effort to ensure a better supply of building materials, a study was conducted a few years ago by the national park authority and Richmondshire District Council into the possibility of opening small quarries in the Dales on the sites of historical workings. Phil Brown, Principal Planning Officer for the national park, explains: "The difficulty has been in finding sites where there are reserves of good quality stone that can be worked, where access for transport is acceptable and where other planning requirements can be met. Generally, the working of small-scale quarries has limited impact on the landscape and local life and is a world away from the modern large-scale limestone and gritstone quarries we now have in the Dales. The wider conservation benefits would be considerable."

Six possible sites were identified where reworking of stone was investigated more thoroughly. Since then one site has restarted production near Keld in Swaledale, producing small quantities of walling and roofing stone.

"Although the working of stone to produce traditional materials at Keld is making a contribution towards meeting demand," says Phil Brown, "we need at least two or three local sources to make much of a difference."

The trustees of Dent Grammar School recently advertised the lease for an old quarry at Deepdale Head but have so far failed to find any takers.

At the moment there are working small sandstone quarries at Barnard Castle and Alston, but the nearest 'bulk' supplier of roofing slates is near Hexham in Northumberland.

● *Anyone with an interest in taking up the lease to restart working reserves at Deepdale Head can find out further details from Jonathan Ratter at Yorkshire Dales National Park, Yorebridge House, Bainbridge, Leyburn, North Yorks DL8 3BP.*

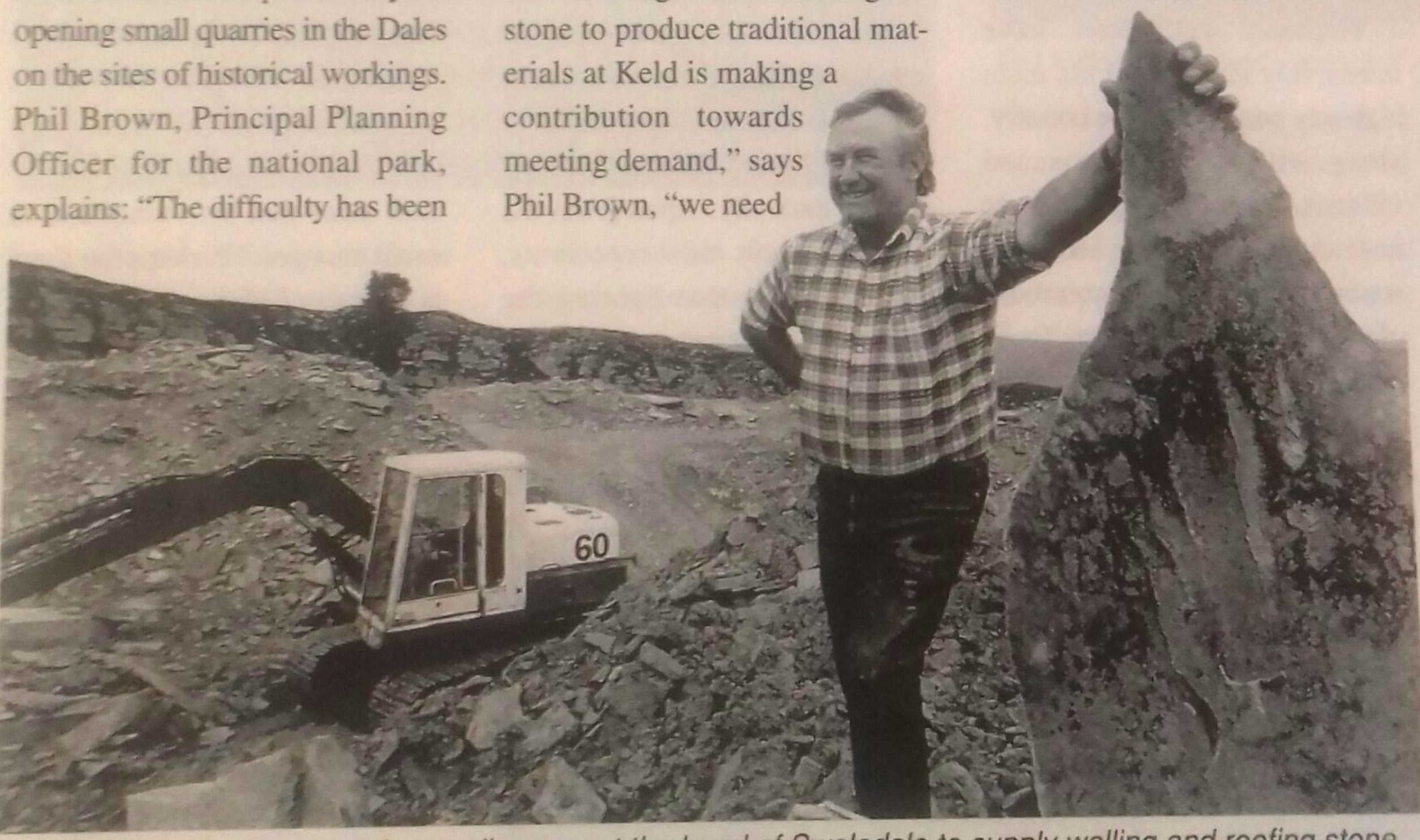


Photo: Asadour Guzelian

Keith Brogden has reopened a small quarry at the head of Swaledale to supply walling and roofing stone.