

Digging for the money



- 1 Police are hunting thieves who dug a 50ft long tunnel under a mini-supermarket before stealing tens of thousands of pounds from a cash machine. In scenes reminiscent of the movie *The Great Escape*, the gang are thought to have spent months surreptitiously disposing of the dirt from the tunnel as they carefully dug towards the machine built into a Tesco Express store in Eccles, Greater Manchester.
- 2 The thieves used pick axes and shovels to excavate the tunnel, while supporting the roof with parts of the building's foundations. After reaching the cash machine they managed to smash their way inside and made off with a number of the store boxes containing an estimated £40,000 in cash. Greater Manchester Police said the complexity of the tunnel structure would have required a great deal of planning and may have taken months to complete.
- 3 However, it has emerged that their efforts may have been 10 as ATMs usually have security devices which explode if the machine is breached, covering the cash in bright coloured dye.
- 4 It is the second time thieves in the area have used a tunnel to gain access to a cash machine in a retail unit. Two years ago a gang excavated a 100ft tunnel, complete with lighting and ventilation, to make off with money from a machine at a Blockbuster shop eight miles away in Levenshulme. After that raid police estimated the thieves had spent as much as six months digging the tunnel from a railway embankment under a car park and beneath the shop.

5 Police refused to say how much was taken in this latest raid, other than to say it was a “substantial” sum, but most cash machines contain in excess of £40,000 when full. The gang struck in the early hours of last Friday morning, when the machine would have likely been full of money ahead of the weekend.

6 Police said they were appealing for anyone with information to contact them. Detective Superintendent Mark Toker of GMP said: “These people had obviously spent a long time plotting this crime and I doubt they would have been able to keep their plans secret for all that time, without telling others about their elaborate scheme. The offenders must have spent long periods of time in the area over the last few months, which people may have noticed. You may have seen people acting suspiciously on Friday night, possibly covered in soil.”

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