



# **Wessex Cave Club Journal**

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## Officers of the Wessex Cave Club

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### **Geoff Ballard, Secretary**

When Mark Kellaway relinquished the post, at the A.G.M, we were left without a secretary. Although he is only a comparatively new member, Geoff bravely offered his services and the committee have unanimously accepted his offer. He is seen in the photo at the rearranged committee meeting at the Hunters. Geoff's address is :- 2 Monks Close Rooksbridge, Somerset BS26 2TJ

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## **This Issue's Cover Picture**

**Formations in St Lukes Swallet, taken by Bob Scammell. Aubrey Newport's article on this successful Wessex dig appears on page 68.**

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# Further Adventures in the Herault, Including “The Frenchman’s Car Key’s”. Michael Thomas, Malcolm Foyle and John Thomas

The 2000/2001 Christmas – New Year trip to the Herault was the fourth exploratory trip to this stunning area by a small group of Wessex members since New Year 2000.

We were, by now, starting to get a feel for the area, but with so much more we wanted to achieve, we set ourselves a long list of projects before we left for France. With limited manpower and equipment it soon became apparent that we had our work cut out. We did not achieve all we set out to do and we did things we had not planned to do, but at the end of a great two weeks’ caving we had found out a lot more about the area and had another long list of things to do on our next trip. What follows are five short stories that try to sum up why we were so tired when we all got back to work!

**The Frenchman’s car keys.** By **Malcolm Foyle.**

I want to tell you a story!

You quite often read about club members doing epic trips abroad, having fun in some of the major cave systems that they visit and doing some of the classic trips in the world. Well we’re doing one of those later in the year and I hope that we will have some good tales to tell when we come back in the summer. This is a bit of a story but an epic - I don’t think so.

It was January 2nd, Mike ‘shit I think I’m bent’ Thomas (but that’s another story) and I were driving back to our houses after a bit of stout flipping in a flooded system call the ‘Source du Durzon’ which was pretty damn impressive. On the way back we stopped off and with the aid of a bit of dodgy map reading, even worse understanding of the ‘Spell Liar’, but with the help of a grand bit of kit (GPS) we managed to locate the entrance of the Event de Rogues. This is a system in excess of 8 Km and the entrance is situated above, of all places, a rubbish tip. This was located for a trip when we are next in the area. It needs no tackle (just right for us old fat bastards).

We were quite happily driving along late in the afternoon discussing the events of the last two weeks caving in this superb area rarely visited by British cavers. Just as we rounded a slight corner, jumping up and down and waving their arms in front of us were Mr. and Mrs. Frenchman. We thought that there had been an accident and the road was blocked (if only it had have been that easy). We stopped and got out of the car, Mr Frenchman came up to us ranting on about something. Mike and I looked at each other and thought ‘ what the f--- is he on about’.

Eventually we got the idea! He was saying Blandas and pointing the way that we had just come. So we got the map out (like a couple of boy scouts) laid it out on the bonnet and showed him that Blandas was in fact the way we were going. By now Mrs Frenchman was looking pissed off and Mike and I realized they were in fact lost and it was nearly dark.

So in the best traditions of the Wessex and in our best French we offered them a lift. After we had sorted out all the crap that we had in the car, they got in looking relieved.

Mr and Mrs Frenchman had gone out for a walk and got lost in the woods, finally finding their way out on the opposite side from where they had entered. We quite happily drove to Blandas all chatting away (sort of) monsieur giving us directions to his car and nearly poking me in the ear with his car keys every time he wanted to turn right.

Eventually we got to their car and madam and monsieur got out very gratefully. She went to the car and he went to a big map of the walk that they tried to do to see where he had gone wrong. Mike and I drove off having a bit of a laugh about the whole thing thinking ‘great we’ll still get home in time’ because we were taking the bosses out for a meal later in the evening and we dare not be late.

Arriving back at Mike's gite we started unloading all Mike's crap. He's mucking about in the back of the Landrover when I hear him say 'What are these keys for?' holding up a set of car keys. Together we go **OH BOLLOCKS IT'S THE FRENCHIES BLOODY CAR KEYS!** What do we do? Its dark now and Mr and Mrs Frenchman are 3 miles from the nearest village with no keys. We had to go back didn't we? I had a quick look at the map to try and find a quicker way back. Mike rushed up and shouted to Sarah that he had to go out again but not telling her what for and we set off on a mad 20-mile drive with **the Frenchman's car keys**. There are no short cuts in the Herault; the roads go every which way but in a straight line.

After about 30 minutes loony driving all over the place we eventually arrived back at the little Citron in a car park looking lost and yep you guessed it nobody in sight. Now it's getting late and I'm thinking my missus is going to kill me. We drove back into Blandas because we remembered seeing a phone box on the edge of the village. We drove round and round the village and Mr and Mrs Frenchman were nowhere to be seen. What do we do with these bleeding keys?

We can't just leave them in the door lock because someone will nick the car. We can't hide them because how can we tell the old bloke where they are. We had a brain wave we'll lock 'em in the car and when he gets back with a spare set he'll wonder how they got there. Now with these fancy key fobs the idea is that you can't lock your keys in the car because the front doors won't lock manually, unfortunately they actually work. Anyway to cut a long story short, after lots of discussion and even more swearing, we finally figure out that we could lock the back door manually. So we write a note in the envelope of my Brittany ferries ticket in our best English just to let him know what the silly sod had done, chucked the keys on to the dash and left a bit quick.

I got back to our cottage about 2 hours late and for the first time in my life I could walk through the door and say to Rita 'Hi honey I'm home and you won't believe what happened to me today....' and actually mean it. Of course she didn't believe me until she spoke to Sarah at the restaurant later that evening. All she was worrying about was having to drive the Landrover all the way from the Herault if I had popped my clogs.

A couple of weeks after arriving home a french letter dropped through the letter box from Mr Frenchman thanking us very much for our help and returning his keys. I know this because I faxed it to Andy Kay and he translated it.

Imagine what an ear bending the French bloke got from his missus 'You take me out for a nice walk in the woods and get us lost. The first people to come along are bloody foreigners; they give us a lift back to our car. You lose the f---ing keys, we have to walk 5 kilometers in the dark to the nearest village etc. etc. and how did they get the keys back into the car'. You've got to laugh haven't you?

See it isn't all about the caving and diving!

### **Divers Tales.** By Michael Thomas.

Caves in flood! This is at the top of most divers list of 'Things that will annoy me today'. On the day we arrived, the Herault was in flood. On Christmas Eve we took a drive down the Vis valley looking at various caves with outrageous amounts of water pouring out of them. Our passengers thought they looked very impressive. The divers went into a deep depression and waited for it to stop raining.

One good thing did come out of the flood, a substantial stream was spotted emerging from the base of a cliff some 60 metres above the road in the upper Vis valley. On further investigation Michael found a small spring that looked big enough to dive. After consulting the area guide- books and sump index and finding no reference to it, we decided it probably had not been dived. We also gave it a truly original name, Christmas Pot.



Returning on the 27<sup>th</sup> Michael, Malc and the old fellow climbed back up to the spring carrying one 6l cylinder and a bag of bits. Michael kitted up and inserted himself feet first into the crystal clear sump pool. Unfortunately the spring turned out to be a fairly tight vertical rift. With a bit of care the diver managed to get down to  $-3.5\text{m}$  and into a small chamber 2m by 1.5m. The flow came up through the cobbles of the chamber floor, no other way on was seen, so the diver surfaced and went for a beer!

Michael did two dives after the floods had gone in the Event De Rodel in the lower Vis valley. This resurgence cave has about 120 meters of dry caving, down an easy going passage before you reach the 320 metre long sump. Judging by the amount of water that comes out of this site when in flood there's a good chance of something big beyond the sump. Unfortunately the way on has been lost in this low and complex site. The first dive was to check the condition of the line and inspect a squeeze 145 meters in. The line was in good condition, but the squeeze needed a bit of attention before it could be passed with care! The floods had pushed a lot of cobbles up the passage and into the squeeze, these were duly pushed back down the passage before the diver returned home. On the second dive a few days later the visibility had improved dramatically and the diver searched the sump thoroughly up to about 200 meters using a large diving light, but unfortunately nothing significant was found. The diver again turned for home and decided that this site would need several more dives to work out where all the water comes from.

The third diving site that the divers visited was the Source De Durzon. We only planned a tourist dive in this picturesque site, as it is over 800 meters long and 80 meters deep. Michael using 7l cylinders swam to 230m in fairly high flow and Malcolm using half full ultra lightweight 9l cylinders got to 200m where he abandoned his dive due to buoyancy problems - with his cylinders! Malc decided that breathing any more gas from these cylinders would have only one out-come, the diver would exit along the roof! The entrance boulders were easily passed with side mounts and the dive line was extremely well laid along a grand passage. A classic dive site. At the end of this dive Malcolm stated that his New Year's resolution was to do more diving this year. Malc we await you!

**It's too far to fall.** By Michael Thomas.

With the PSM trip looming on the horizon Malc and Michael decided that a couple of SRT trips might be a good idea, as neither of us had done much rope work in the last few years. The first cave chosen for our SRT refresher course was the Aven du Bois du Bac, this cave was attempted by Pete Hann and Malc in the summer, but they were stopped on the

third pitch due to the rope being too short. Malc wanted to try again, this time with a longer rope for the offending pitch.

The entrance is located in fairly large depression with a steep gully leading down to the first pitch of 45 meters. While Malc started rigging the gully and entrance pitch Michael tried to remember how to put his SRT kit on and tie a few useful knots! John looked on in silence, but with that look of 'Do you really know what you're doing?'

After the first re-belay Malc called rope free and Michael started descending the gully, care should be taken here not to kick any stones down the first pitch as the second re-belay is right in the line of fire. The second re-belay is hard to rig; Malc was very quiet at this point! And it's nearly as hard to pass, Michael ended up at the bottom of the pitch bleeding nicely after trapping his hand under the knot while trying to unload a karabiner.

The second pitch of 8 metres is reached after climbing 6 metres up the wall from the very bottom of the first pitch! You descend between two impressive columns to reach the floor of a large chamber. The third pitch of 15 metres is on the other side of the chamber, but also worth a visit is a parallel chamber reached by climbing up through a small hole in the left-hand wall. This chamber is well decorated, but beware the climb back down from it!

The rigging for the third pitch is bad; it starts off with an ascending traverse line and gets progressively worse until you reach the bottom. This pitch really needs rebolting and needless to say we had much fun here, but on reaching the bottom we decided that it was definitely worth it. The chamber is full of stunning formations - words cannot do it justice. We left this cave looking for bigger holes, but doubting we would find formations like those we were leaving.



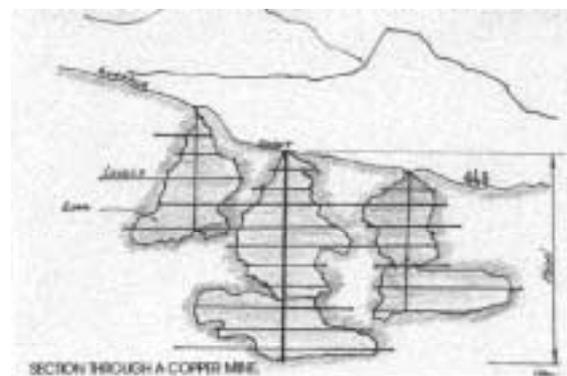
**Above, Mike diving in Christmas Pot and right, beginning the 21m entrance pitch into the Mas Raynal**

The Abine Du Mas Raynal is a 106 metre deep hole in the ground with a surface area larger than Alum Pot. At the bottom of this hole runs the river Sorgues. The cave has both an upstream and a downstream sump. Three cavers stood at the top looking into the abyss trying to find the way down. 'You sure you want to go down there?' says one. 'Yep' says another. The old fellow said 'Sod off I'm not going anywhere near that'. After a bit of searching we located the way down into the Mas Raynal. A parallel shaft leads into the main shaft about halfway down. Very little of this cave is in the dark! After tying off the old man to the pitch head (to stop him wandering around and falling down things) Malc and Michael set off down the first pitch of 21metres with two bags of rope hoping to reach the

top of the final 60 metre pitch. That should have given us a good view of the river below. The pitches follow in quick succession. The second pitch of 4 metres had a little surprise for us, at the bottom was a large fairly deep lake of rotting vegetation, luckily Malc found it first! The view from the third pitch of 15 metres was absolutely stunning; we were high up on a balcony overlooking the main shaft. The pit itself was very primeval, covered in greenery and steaming nicely, but by the look of all the fresh marks on the walls this pit has some heavy stone fall, something to bear in mind if you are considering the direct approach! Malc had some trouble rigging this pitch due to some really dubious anchors, but eventually we were both stood at the bottom in an area of large slippery unstable blocks looking for the way down. According to our survey, the fourth pitch, which is actually, a steeply descending ramp of about 20 metres should have been immediately after the third, so we brought one rope to do both pitches. This turned out not to be the case. The ramp was located some forty metres from the base of the third pitch which meant that our rope was now about 10 metres short. We were both keen to see down the final pitch and some discussion took place about what to do. It looked free climbable, but a slip would result in only one outcome, instant death. We quickly ruled that out. We could cut the rope at the bottom of the third pitch, but it was apparently Malc's favourite rope! So we didn't do that either. Mike suggested that he prusik out of the cave and fetch another rope. Malc rather indignantly suggested that he would rather like a drink and muttering something about 'keen people' started up and out of the cave. Mike stood looking longingly down the ramp and shouted to Malc 'We're just going to have to come back next time you know and we're going diving down there' the words SOD OFF echoed around and around this vast pit.

## Coniston Copper Mines Garth Weston

We have for some years, spent the February half term, in the Lake District. We have a particular liking for the village of Coniston and the Copper Mine Valley. My background in mining and tunnelling have given me a long standing interest in old mines and this valley has an abundance of these, some on a grand scale, with depths exceeding 1000ft. To look into Black Strings, by Levers Water, is to look on the works of miners, back to Tudor times and to wonder at the fortitude, of these old men. In recent years, thanks to the efforts of the Cumbrian Amenity Trust and the writings of Eric G Holland, ("Coniston Copper Mines"), much information, about the mines and their history has become available and this has made visits even more enjoyable.



Access is possible, to a number of old workings, though with the normal warnings, regarding mines and some special dangers, associated with the methods employed. In particular, the use of timber and rubble, to form false floors, spanning cavities, of great

depth and the effect long periods of time, in a harsh environment, has on these. even on solid rock floors, not always obvious, there are flooded pits and shafts, many hundreds of feet deep.

Notwithstanding all of this, these old mines are magical places, with great cavities, coated in oxidised minerals, of such colour, black, red, yellow, green, blue and white, like some great work of modern art. They are also in an area of very high rainfall, much of which drains into the mines.

Even on the surface, for those interested in industrial archaeology or geology, there is much to explore and all in an alpine setting. There is also The Black Bull, with its award winning “Bluebird” ale.

## **St. Lukes Dig – The Story so far.**

### **Aubrey Newport**

It was back in 1993 that Paula suggested the Wednesday night digging team took a night off from Cuckoo and investigated a newly collapsed hole on Whitestown Farm, where she lived. We dug there for a few hours, but soon decided it was old mine workings with little potential. We then looked at various other depressions scattered round the farm, including a large one with a hawthorn bush and a pile of loose rocks, which had been dug out by M.C.G! It looked interesting, and we were told it had not been visited for some time. I wrote to M.C.G. to check they had abandoned the dig and received a positive reply from Joan Goddard, the M.C.G. secretary.

The next thing was to begin collecting together the things necessary to make a stable shaft through the loose rocks. This did not start very well when Nick Williams broke his trailer while delivering the first concrete pipe. It was a large heavy one, but was quite spectacular rolling it down into the depression.

I was somewhat surprised (and pi—ed off) to learn that arrangements were being made to start the dig with a Hymac, particularly as the date was set for 19<sup>th</sup> October 1993- the Club A.G.M. I was Chairman at the time and could hardly miss the meeting to take part in the dig.

The top part of the Hymac shaft is four 1m pipe sections resting on a bedrock protrusion and capped by a concrete “biscuit” lid. This was extended to about 10m by (among others) Mark Helmore and Les Williams, in the first six months. They also did some engineering and constructed a scaffold pole/wriggly tin shelter and installed a petrol winch (which was clamped to the shelter scaffold pole for maximum noise effect!). The shaft below the pipes is down through mixed rocks and mud. This is shored up with scaffold poles and cement, but collapsed where the shoring was short of the bottom.



**Left, the entrance pitch.**  
**Right, Max Midlen and Bob Scammell, about to shorten the winch cable. Unfortunately, this proved to be a mistake! The site hut can be seen, in the background.**  
**Photo's 22/3/1997 by Maurice Hewins**



Max (Midlen) and myself had been digging in Bath Swallet (Burrington), but were faced with frequent problems of slumping in wet weather and decided a change of location was called for. We approached the last diggers and reclaimed the (now abandoned) St. Lukes at the end of 1996. We started using the petrol winch for hauling spoil and lowering cement. Keith Fielder made a steel bucket frame to (safely?) contain the ubiquitous Wessex Blue Buckets and Pete Hann was recruited to help with wall building. Bob Scammell came along a few months later to save the winch engine from the threatened "Easy Start". Mark Helmore and Paula Rich were frequent helpers. Les came over one night to help install the fixed ladder, at the top of the entrance shaft.

Our digging method is to dig out the floor of the shaft and then undercut the walls vertically in sections by half a metre before walling the gap with clean rocks and cement. The shaft is between 1 and 1.5 m in diameter and footholds are built into the walls. This works well as long as there are no voids behind the wall. If we dig out too much or fail to provide sufficient support the mud and rocks collapse from behind the existing wall. In a few places we have used metal sections to bridge between rocks, but inevitably the cement cracks in the vicinity of the metal.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1997 our first breakthrough was made into the finely decorated Hale Bop Chamber. (The comet was visible in the sky outside). Pete and Max squeezed down through a gap in the side of the shaft (at about – 12 m): I followed some time later after application of a lump hammer. Others (including Mr Rich) followed when we had extended the shaft down further so that it cut into the side of the chamber. Our concern was to preserve this fine chamber and so we were reluctant to dig at the obvious low point between clean calcite rocks under an aven. Off to the right of the shaft in a corner was another low point, but in mud and only 2 metres away- what choice was there?



**Hale  
Bop  
Chamber  
In 3D  
28/2/98  
M Hewins**

The first job was to stabilise the roof immediately above the digging area, and then to start downwards following the wall from the chamber. Spoil could be extracted directly to the surface by dragging the bucket up a slope at the top of the new shaft into the (now 13m deep) entrance shaft. Bob tried to develop the art of bouncing the empty bucket on the slope and onwards down to where we were digging! One time the bucket frame became detached from the wire and proved even an empty bucket hurts. To stop the bucket frame snagging on the way up the second shaft we installed a length of conveyor banding to smooth the way over the edge. The banding also provided a form of shelter from anything falling. We were removing vast amounts of spoil around the top of the second shaft while finding the best way down between very large boulders. We always kept to the one solid wall. Parts of the shaft are over 2m across and it narrows progressively at –2m and –5m

where we built ledges. In a couple of places, we found interesting openings in the side of the shaft, but abandoned each one because of the difficulty of digging horizontally under loose rocks.

Communications, with the surface (and therefore the winch driver) soon became an obvious problem, the cries of "Up Bucket" being inaudible above the noise of the engine and vibrating tin shed! Tony Audsley made an amplified telephone type system, which enabled the surface workers to hear the shouts from underground, even if they could not understand them. This was eventually replaced, with a commercial baby monitor, which picked up shouts from over 5m away, so that everyone in the lower part of the dig could be heard on the surface.

Bob Scammell continued to operate the winch engine and on hearing another Mendip digging team had underground floodlights, he built a generator, from an old lawnmower engine and car alternator. These were mounted on the seat of a metal-framed chair. The on/off switch was positioned under the seat, as was the shortened lawnmower blade. The inevitable happened and Bob (who is a Health and Safety Officer!) was absent for some time following the loss of the top of a finger while feeling for the switch!

The summer of 1998 was fairly slow because Pete and Keith had been lured back to digging Lime Kiln and Max was working alternate evening shifts. On several Wednesdays I was the only person to turn up. Solo digging trips were not very productive unless an area was ready for cementing, or a large rock needed banging so we tried to plan ahead when Max was there. Bean and Steve Watson started helping and progress improved.

We soon needed a second piece of conveyor banding, which was tied on to the end of the existing one. This proved to be a mistake because it led to the infamous "boulder" incident. The weight of the extended banding deformed the top section, causing a ridge in the banding at the lip of the shaft. The bucket, which was filled with a single rock, caught on this ridge and started to tip. Paula was helping to guide the bucket at that point and shouted for the winch to stop. After some discussion, Bean started to climb the shaft to sort things out. He was about half way (5m) up when the rock fell out of the bucket and down the shaft, (very) luckily missing him. Being at the dig face I had nowhere to go, except behind the conveyor banding that the rock hit.

Following that incident we spent the next six weeks refitting and extending the banding with some supplied by Cookie. The top section was rigged with two pieces forming a "V" and bolted into place; the lower pieces were hung from this and also supported a stemple. Unfortunately the new set-up also made the shaft quite difficult to free climb. This coupled with the lack of progress caused some adverse comment, but our primary concern was the safety of those at the bottom.

Pete Hann and Keith Fielder rejoined us, having decided that Lime Kiln could be "rested". Pete helping at the bottom, while Keith and Bob discussed mechanical things in the "Wendy House", depriving Bob of his frequent snoozes while we were cementing. Steve was always at the top of our second shaft, guiding the buckets and climbing up to collect the buckets when Bob's attempt at bouncing it down into the second shaft failed.

At the end of 1999 the second shaft had reached 13m deep and the draught coming in from the side was really strong. Downward progress was quite difficult. We were still following the same solid wall and had only needed to remove one significant protrusion to keep the shaft vertical on the way down. When some of the shaft side fell away we initially cursed because it would make walling more difficult but we eventually decided we would have to go that way because the shaft floor was actually bedrock. Things began to look quite interesting because as we dug sideways there was no floor. The problem was that there was no ceiling either! Everything we touched fell. Pete's building expertise came into it's own when building the walls and using a piece of steel as the initial roof support before

stabilising rocks for us to work under them. This took weeks because it had to be done in stages, with time for the cement to set between each. The “floor” was a narrow rift blocked in the middle, by a large boulder.

Pete, Keith and myself returned on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> Feb, armed with a drill, bang and high hopes. I had claimed first descent and attempted to squeeze past the boulder, which promptly moved when subject to sideways pressure. Pete and myself chased the boulder down the first part of the rift with a crow bar, jamming ourselves into the rift while levering against the walls. Pete tipped it onto his ankle and had to leave the dig in pain while I drilled and filled an oversize shot-hole. He had the pleasure of reciting exactly what he thought as he set off the charge and produced a volume of gravel. A second boulder made wondrous echoes when it was levered out of place and down to the bottom. I followed as soon as we had secured a ladder to find a chamber with some quite nice formations and lots of stagnant bang fumes. We had lost the draught! Pete followed me down and after a short look round we returned to help Keith make the shaft a bit safer before leaving to tell the rest of the digging team they would need caving kit on Wednesday.

The Wednesday trip was quite an epic. Neither Bob nor Steve had been to the bottom of the dig for quite some time and were quite impressed when they got to the top of the new ladder pitch. Bob took some encouraging to go down it and a lot of assistance to get back out! We took lots of photo’s in the chamber, which we named Antler Chamber because it contains some particularly bent stalactites.



**Paula, on the bottom ladder  
Photo, Bob Scammell**



**Steve, in Antler Chamber  
Photo Bob Scammell**

The next weeks were spent cementing some of the loose rocks in the rift, surveying the chamber (it is 49m long), taping off the formations, checking possible leads and selecting our next dig site. Again the site was chosen to protect the formations, rather than to be at the lowest point. The conveyor banding has been removed and the winch is now

redundant. We persuaded Mr Rich (the farmer) to come and see the new discovery- he did not have any trouble getting out!



**Pete and Aubrey in  
Antler Chamber**

**Photo by  
Bob Scammell**

In the summer when the mud was at it's driest we pushed a higher passage at the far end of Antler Chamber, but gave up after several weeks digging upwards through loose boulders. The passage was getting smaller and the rocks more threatening. This area is off limits for most of the year because of spreading the mud over the chamber.

Pete and I are now doing most of the digging, with occasional visits from Keith. As before, we are digging down through a mixture of mud and rocks and building walls as we go. The dig is below an inlet aven and we constructed a polythene roof to divert the water and allow us to continue cementing. The new shaft is between 4 and 5m deep at the time of writing. If it is to be as deep as the first two shafts it may be some time before our next breakthrough! Our other plans are to re-photograph some of the formations so that we get some measure of the damage we are causing, and to do some of the necessary safety work, higher up the dig.

## **Committee Notes**

**President.** Following the death of Richard Kenney, the committee unanimously agreed to ask **Dr Donald Thompson** to be the next President of the Wessex Cave Club. Don has agreed to stand and he will be formally proposed, at the A.G.M. He has been a club member, since the 1950's and was secretary from 1966 to 1970. In more recent years Don has been a trustee of Upper Pitts and he has often assisted on rescues, as a medical warden. Like Richard, Don has regularly turned out with N.H.A.S.A.

**Trustees.** It was noted at the committee meeting that two new trustees need to be found, in time for the A.G.M.

**Foot and Mouth crisis** At the well attended committee meeting, held on 1<sup>st</sup> April, it was agreed that, like other Mendip huts, Upper Pitts would be closed for at least four weeks, after which the situation would be reviewed. When we reopened, a hut working weekend was arranged, at short notice and more will be needed.

# Obituary, Steve Wynne-Roberts

## Fred Davies (with acknowledgements to Noel Cleave)

Tuesday 10 April saw the chapel at Haycombe Cemetery, Bath, packed with people saying "Goodbye" to Steve Wynne-Roberts. The congregation included representatives of the five linking themes in Steve's life; family, engineering, caving, diving and wind-surfing. At his request it was a secular funeral.

Steve started caving in 1957, with Noel Cleave. He joined the Wessex, and remained a member for many years, but later transferred his allegiance to the SMCC, where he was a tower of strength. Steve was involved in many of the great advances in Mendip caves at that time. Amongst other things he climbed Trafalgar Aven in St. Cuthberts, and with Bob Pyke he pioneered the Swyne-Puke climb in Swildons. Above all, it was the diving activities in Swildons that really caught his imagination. He joined the CDG and became an active diver. It was he who saw the advantages of the SEBA/ATEA closed circuit breathing kit, modified it, and used it in operations as far as sump 7. I still have memories of coming out from 6, after Mike Boon's desperate, but successful passage of 7. We both failed to pass that sump and both tore our dry suit seals in the process; then the long, wet, cold withdrawal from the cave.

Steve's reputation was such that, with Mike Boon, he was invited to join Ken Pearce's 1963 expedition, and dived in the terminal sump of the Gouffre Berger. At that time this made him the deepest man in the world of caving.

Although a skilled engineer with Westinghouse, seeking a higher salary, Steve built on his CDG expertise and in 1964 trained as a professional commercial diver. In the course of this he suffered a traumatic shipwreck off Anglesey when their diving tender went down. Luckily nobody was in diving dress at the time, but Steve had to make the choice "Neither of us reach the shore, or I do" after starting to tow a non-swimmer. That decision haunted him for a long time. He dived commercially for several years, on ship and harbour maintenance and installation. The oil diving industry took him to the coast of Africa and repaid him handsomely but when he decided that active diving was no longer his scene, he invested his money in setting up his own business assembling specialised compressors and hydraulic power packs for the diving industry and fire services. The name Wynne-Roberts soon became recognised world wide as synonymous with top quality equipment. Although no longer very active, Steve never lost his interest in caving and the CDG - in fact he was wearing a CDG T shirt on his last outing before he died. In later years, Steve's main active interest became Wind Surfing, which took him to the Mediterranean the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean. Nearer home, my house was on his route from Keynsham to the coast and I enjoyed many chats as he stopped for a cup of tea on the way home.

With semi-retirement Steve regularly joined with the "Old Farts" monthly walk where he maintained his caving friendship, with countryside strolls and pub lunches. It was Steve's humour to add "Silly" to the group name making the acronym SOFA.

Steve was diagnosed with cancer in the autumn, 2000, and died on 31 March 2001 after a miserably painful illness, only alleviated by the loving care of his sister and his family, who were with him when he died, and to whom we extend our special sympathy.

# Extracts from the Upper Pitts Logbook

## Edited by Brian Prewer

### Log Book 2001

#### 01.01.01 Swildon's Hole

*Various Old Farts (see list below)*

At the invitation of Alison Moody various OFs & others were invited to invade the cave to celebrate reaching a new Millennium viz :- Alison, Prew, Keith & Roz Fielder, Liz Green & Jules, Glyn Bolt, Adrian & Judith Vanderplank, Barry Wilkinson, Tav, Rich Warman, Pete Hann, Geoff Newton, Phil Hendy & Tuska.

After a group photo outside Main's Barn, we headed for the Old Grotto for another photo. Small parties then went as far as the Mud Sump & nearly to Sump 2. The cave was quite wet & those of us who have not been past the 20' for a while had a short, steep & wet learning curve on the ladder. Thanks for the lifeline, Keith!

We left the cave in dribs & drabs & when changed repaired to the Moody's for mulled wine & cider, & groaning table laden with snacks. There we were joined by Barry & Mandy Davies, Brenda Prewer, Beth Yates & Paul Weston. A good trip, the wetsuit survived (just) but the bruises will take ages to go down.

Comments:-

Hann "Not bad for an Old Fart".

Hendy "I may be an Old Fart today, but on Wednesdays at the NHASA dig I'm a young tiger!".

#### 7.1.01 Swildon's

*Nathan, Jon, Shag, Alan, & Cookie*

Quick trip to Mud Sump to fill a quiet Sunday. Mud Sump totally submerged & the pump is barely effective. Lots of spare pipes & buckets optimistically scattered around, but nowt going to happen until a concerted effort on the drain hole in dryer weather.

#### 14.1.01 East Twin Brook

*Mike O'Connor & Bob S?*

Bimbling around valley – total contrast to yesterday, all the caves were heaving & so were some of the cavers.

#### 19.1.01 Swildon's One, Dry Ways

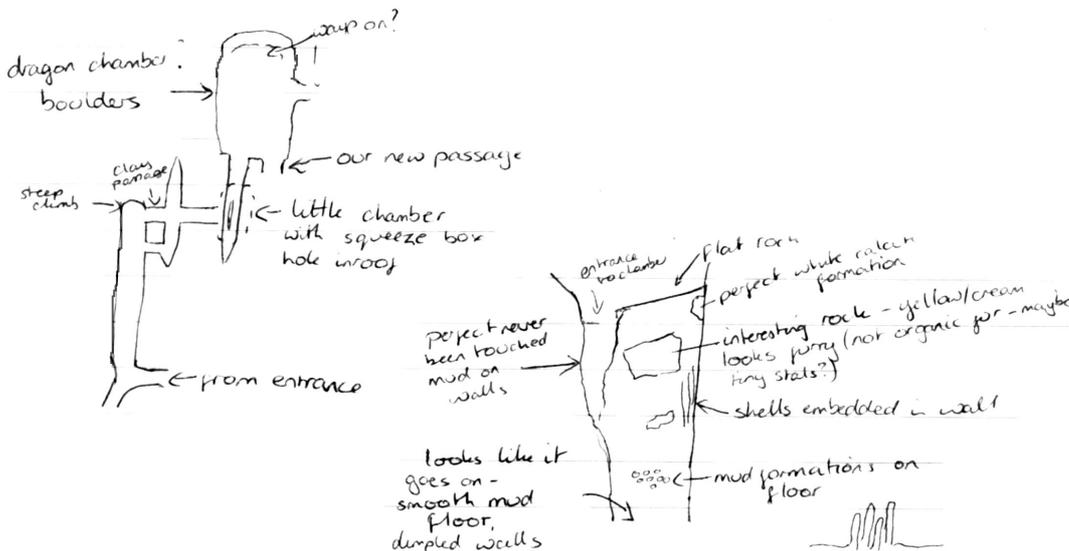
*Mike O'Connor, Ben S?*

Just a bimble around, but getting seriously lonely & agoraphobic until we met a party at the 20' we hadn't seen anybody! Was this really Swildon's? Didn't see anybody all the way out either – really weird.

#### 20.1.01 Tynning's Barrow

*Kent University  
Becky, Claire, Paul, Gary & Nikolai*

Trip for some ladder & rope work training. Fun 5 hours exploring, including a very nice squeeze & a few good climbs. Even saw a beautiful chamber with shells on the walls & stalactites. Very good satisfying trip



We're

swearing it's virgin passage (all credit to Becky). Didn't enter 'cos of formations – want to make sure no one else has found it & decided not to disturb it for conservations reasons. Jon's going to have a look at the survey for us. If it's new (we can only dream) it's ours! We'll be back with cameras. Before the Aardvark Trap take a right. As you enter into the chamber, turn to face the entrance. There's a flat wall on the left, 8' high. Up the wall, & onto the ledge on top.

#### 21.1.01 Swildon's

*UKT*

Wet trip to Sump 1 – Becky & Gary baptised Sons of Mendip & did their first sump.

#### 24.1.01 Goatchurch Reunion

*Weston Bros (SAGA)*

Descent to bottom – 21 minutes – return 2 hours 50minutes. Tempis fugit.

### 30.1.01 Swan Mine

**Weston Bros**

To Swan Mine with candles and a NiFe - 1½ hours underground – 2½ in the pub. Wonderful

### 31.1.01 Swildon's

**Geoff B, Jon & Amy**

Breaking the Swildon's Virginity. New experience, first wet cave – a cataclysm of water, down too Sump I & back. Next time, all the way through, onwards & upwards. A different cave on the way out. Friendly waterfalls becoming tendon-tearing torrents. The end result – a frozen solid toe, a cup of tea in this fantastic hut, & a burning desire to do it all again – faster.

### 3.2.01 Wookey Hole/Badger Hole

**A Cast of Several**

Henly and Pitman found Badger Hole easily. Large shelter entrance, tunnel to the second chamber with bats, tree roots, spar and odd little holes going off everywhere- one ending in a satanic shrine! Once into the cave, very little solid rock- all in mud and stones. Interesting.

Later in the evening, cast of several into Wookey Hole. S.S. Wessex could not be inflated and the cave's boat was on a rope too short to reach Chanon's hamber. Lots of photographs, lots of bats (LH and a few GH)

### 3.2.01 Priddy Green Sink

**Simon, Kev, Em, Butch and Cookie**



Ever fancied working in a London sewer? Priddy Green would be a very good practice. Picture if you will, confined crawly passages with green-grey slime hanging from all sides and not particularly pleasant smell of cowsh and diesel hanging in the air. But apart from that, Priddy Green is a cracking trip with an impressive drop into the spectacular Swildon's Four streamway. Not as many worms as Butch remembers either, although a worm was picked off Kevins back in three bits.

Swildon,s 4- reminiscent of OFD streamway- superb and then up to the Troubles. (What can be done at the Mud Sump so we can visit more often?) " I demand more bailing!"- Cookie on the amount of airspace. A lot of time was spent bailing the Troubles, as they are no longer visited as often. The only concolation was knowing we were going to get drenched at Sump ! anyway so we may as well get our ears wet! Much to Cookie's disgust.

A lot of water going through the homeward stretch but as everyone was on auto- pilot, our "out heads" kept us going right back to the hut for a hot shower and a steaming plate of spaghetti. Just the buisines

Done this trip 7 times and never have I seen so much shite and slime in one place (apart from committee meetings obviously!) Today I have been wallowing in effluent.

### 8.2.01 Waterfall Swallet

**Weston Brothers**

"To the end. Water bl\*\*dy freezing in the tunnel. Replaced all the bungs including the one in the dam at the bottom. Slow ascent due to the steepness of the route, arthritis, brain disease etc. The Hunters Factor did however assist in our heroic return! It didn't seem so steep going in.

### 10.2.01 Eastwater

**Shag, Stevie and Al**

Misty, rainy day, looking forward to taking our novice, Al, down Eastwater. Result- Stevie and I wet, Al "out before in". Shower, pub.

### 11.2.01 GB Cavern

**Geoff B, Amy and Ron**

Pleasant wander round- Oxbows, White Passage then out. Delighted in pushing Amy over into the mud outside the blockhouse- shower- beer.

N.B. Amy could have retaliated but didn't want to lower herself to the fun-loving gnome level and given her immense upper body strength blew it opening a can of beer! Even fun-loving gnomes come to a nasty end sometimes.

**Then came Foot and Mouth and the Mendip Caving Ban!**

# Sidcot Swallet to Slovenia

## Dr Russell G. Mines

It all started in 1963, my first caving trip to Burrington Combe, Avelines Hole and the first few feet of Sidcot Swallet with John Norris. John not only introduced me to caving but also to the music of Bob Dylan. John was a real Mendip character, he was a proud member of the Axbridge and could often be seen walking his white poodle, on Priddy Green. John taught me how to cave, how to keep a carbide lamp alight, in damp conditions and how to make my first wet suit, from a kit with standard yellow tape.

We did most of the smaller Mendip caves and often went down to Sump one and two, in Swildons, with many new cavers from Bristol. We progressed to Little Neath Cave, in South Wales. Now, that is what I call a wet cave. In 1967 (I think), I joined the Wessex, for the first time.

The floods of 1968 were awesome. The Swildons stream way, in particular, revealed the immense power of the floodwater, to shift huge rocks and to deposit bits of straw, high up in the passage. The old Forty had gone. In 1968, I did Aggie and O.F.D. 11 through trip, with the Wessex. In 1969, I went to Chamonix, in the French Alps, with Eric Davies. We hoped to climb Mont- Blanc, I am still trying to climb Mont Blanc.

Dave Yeandle and I took a trip down Darren Cilau, that summer. At that time, it was just a long, wet crawl with a chamber at the end. We did not reach the chamber but had a good laugh trying.

The highlight of 1971 was a visit to Dan-yr-Ogof, through the Endless Crawl to the BIG passages beyond, with Caerleon Caving Club. At this time, I teamed up with Mark Hutchinson, a climber who sometimes caved. We explored many Alpine glaciers and enjoyed the mountains, over several years.

In 1974, I became a Geography teacher, at Churchill Comprehensive School and introduced the Next Generation to the caves of Mendip and South Wales, often with Richard Clay, from Bristol.

The eighties meant marathon running. The Hereford, Snowdonia and Windermere, then the Snowdon Mountain Race. In 1996/97, I re-joined the Wessex. Les invited me to Slovenia, almost as soon as I met him. The trip was grand. In 2000 A.D., I completed the New Forest Marathon, in a heat wave in September.

2001-1<sup>st</sup>. January – 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party- I think it must be time to rejoin the Wessex cave Club, for the third time. It's good to be back. That's it so far. See you on Mendip.

P.S. I went to my first Bob Dylan concert, in 1997. John was right, all those years ago. Bob sings some great songs.

## Club News

**New boilers.** The committee agreed to proceed with the urgently needed replacement boiler and hot water system. **Ian Timney** has obtained favourable quotes and final details are being worked out by him and **Mark Helmore**. Ian was also thanked for the donation of a length of rope.

**Complaints** have been received, from the landowner, about cavers climbing the wall behind the hut. It is not necessary, and is not good for caver/farmer relations. Please come in over the stile provided

**A.G.M. Minutes** The draft minutes have now reached the committee and they will be checked at the meeting on June 9<sup>th</sup>. Copies will then be posted on the web page and at Upper Pitts. Any member wanting a copy, please ask the Editor and one will be sent.

**Ogof Drynen.** The combination has been changed and the log book is now in an ammo box, on the wall of the Lamb and Flag. Conditions of access are posted at Upper Pitts. Check with the Caving Secretary or the Treasurer (when caving is back to normal).

## New and rejoined members

We welcome **David Farey** 15 Cheyne Walk, Kettering, Northants 07773 106772  
 dave@hawloudly.screaming.net  
**Claire Morton** 59 Tunstall Road, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7BX 01227 760884  
 clairemorton@hotmail.com  
**Jacqueline Westcott** Avenue de L'Helice 28, 1150 Bruxelles, Belgium  
 00 322 295 3886 jacqueline.westcott@cec.eu.int  
**Bruce Albright** 1285, Albion 307, Den Co, U.S.A. Post Code 80220  
 Phone 303 355 3492 backbright1@aol.com

## Library Notes

**Missing Books.** Phil would like to point out that the following two items are missing and have not been signed for; - **Cavernes en Perigod (P Vidal)** Missing since August 2000 and **B.C.R.A. Cave Studies # 4 "an introduction to Cave Photography"** booklet. If you have either, please return them please. Or at least sign for them.

## Recent acquisitions to May 17<sup>th</sup> 2001

A photograph album, and the following maps, all from the **Richard Kenney Bequest.**

O.S. Maps 1" Reprint of 1<sup>st</sup> Edition. (Bristol Bath and Wells)  
 1: 25,000 Peak District (Dark Peak)  
 Outdoor Leisure : 15 (Purbeck and South Dorset), 20 (South Devon),  
 21 (South Pennines) and 24 (The White Peak).  
 Explorer 213 (Aberystwyth and Cwm Rheidol)

B.C.R.A Caves and Caving No. 29 (Winter 2000/01) Cave and Karst Science 27, 2 (August 2000) Cave Diving Group Newsletter No. 138 (Jan 2001)  
 Descent 158 (Feb/March. 2001)  
 Chelsea Speleological Society Newsletter 42,12 (Dec 2000) 43, 1 (Jan.20001) 43, 2 (Feb "2001) and 43, 3 (March 2001). Grosvenor Caving Club Newsletter 109 (Jan/Feb'01)  
 Journal of Cave and Karst Studies (N.S.S.) 62,2 (August 2000) and 62,3 (Dec. 2000)  
 M.N.R.C. Newsletter 81(Dec 2000 – Jan 2001) 82 (Feb / March2001)and 83(Apr/May 01)  
 N.S.S. News 58,12 (Dec 2000- Jan 2001) 59,1 (Jan 2001) and 59,2 (Feb 2001)  
 Pholeos (Journal Wittenburg University S.S.) 18,2 (Dec 2000)  
 Plymouth Caving Group Newsletter/ Journal 136,(Dec2000)  
 Speleolgia (Italy) 41 (Dec 1999) and 42,(Nov 2000)  
 Spelio-Spiel (Journal Tasmanian Cavers) 316-322  
 Stalactite (Soc Suisse de Speleologie) No. 2(1999)  
 U.B.S.S. Proceedings 22,1 (for 2000) and Newsletter (June  
 Westminster Speleological Group Bu  
 White Rose Pothole Club New



When the hut reopened at the end of April caving was still not possible. It seemed a good idea to get on with vital hut repairs, at short notice on May 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup>., as many people as possible were informed. At least, it was put on the website and phone calls were made but inevitably, a lot of people were missed and the committee apologise. We did the best we could. However, don't worry, there are still plenty of jobs to go round.

Ian Timney and Mark Helmore had obtained an excellent price for the new boiler, which will run on oil. Ian brought it to Mendip and it was handed over to Pauline, to be polished!

The foundations for the new oil tank were dug out by, Kev, Emsie, Rosie and Vern, and the soil has been used to reclaim the extreme corner of the car park. Tommo helped me tidy up the wood- piles yet again and Cookie was talked into taking a couple of loads of rubbish to a couple of tips. (He was told not to come back to the one at Dulcote!) Apart from one rather conspicuous piece of old junk, with wheels, which has been lying about for some time, the site is as tidy as it has ever been.

All in all, those that turned up to work achieved a lot and well deserved the excellent barbecue, prepared by Dom et al. Thanks are also due to John Thomas and the Sheik of Lasham for the Holy carpet in the ladies dormitory and the library.



"Eliad Balm"  
 12 Knighton Close,  
 Woodford Green,  
 Essex.

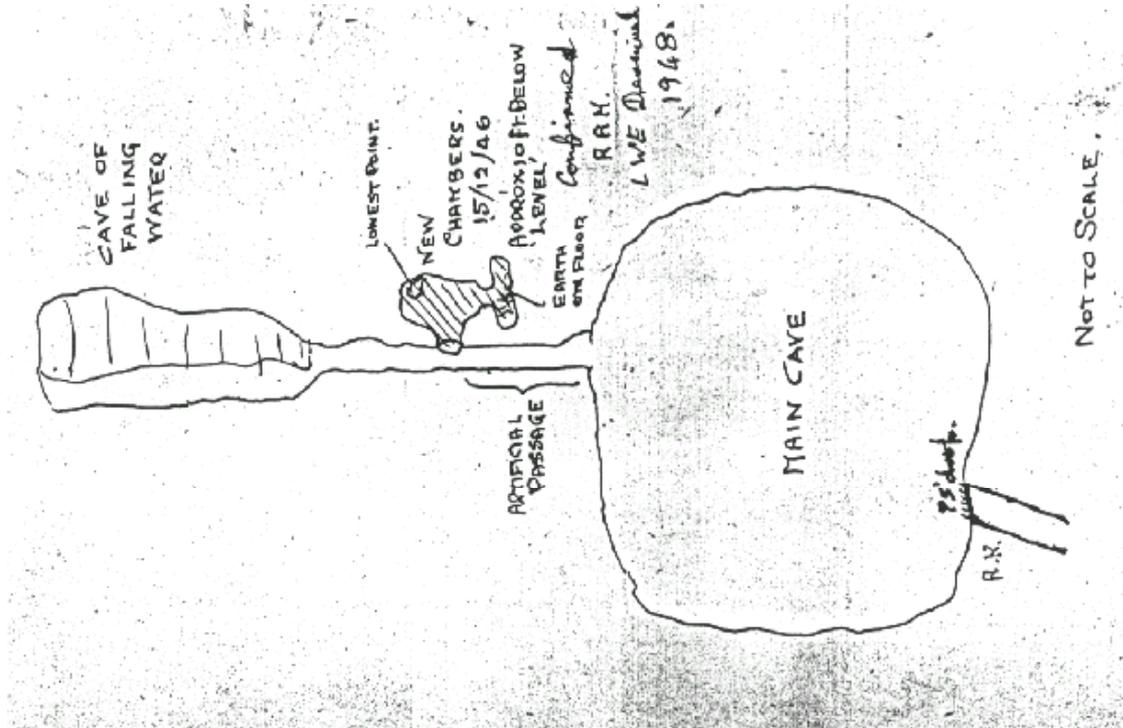
22<sup>nd</sup> February 1948.

Dear Mr. Balch.

Thank you so much for your reply to my letter - I am pleased you may be able to get some of your boys to continue my dig sometime.

Did I ever tell you of the small chamber I opened up in Lambler's last in Dec 1944 at the time of the W.C. Dinner? They lie at a lower level than the natural passage into which the drift from the main chamber mats on the way to the cave of falling water. To the right (see sketch) and I started clearing out boulders at this point during the BSA Conference at Bristol as I thought there was a way down. The munit seem to have known this unvisited mode from the drift down the hole. It may want re-clearing on a future visit as I was unable to move all the rocks & make it quite secure. Unfortunately I made no notes at the time & cannot trust my memory for an accurate description.

Eric Hensler.



### Flashback to 1948

This interesting letter and survey were sent to Herbert Balch, in 1948, by Eric Hensler concerning his diggings in Lamb Lair (or as he spelt it Lambler. ) Hopefully, this fine cave will eventually be reopened to cavers. Is it now time for us to agree a realistic charge for a new lease?

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## Forthcoming Events

**Committee Meetings,  
Hidden Earth 2001,  
Wessex A.G.M. and Dinner,**

July 15<sup>th</sup> and September 2<sup>nd</sup>  
At Buxton, October 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup>  
October 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Unfortunately, the Foot and Mouth Crisis led to the cancellation of a lot of caving events. As restrictions are relaxed, the club will try and arrange new events as soon as possible. The long gaps between journals may mean that information may not get printed in time. Please keep up to date by phoning a committee member and by using the website, <http://www.wessex-cave-club.org> Also, if you are arranging something yourself you can advertise it on the web, through, Jonathon Williams at [webmaster@wessex-cave-club.org](mailto:webmaster@wessex-cave-club.org)**



### **Vale : Steve Wynne-Roberts 1938-2001**

**Steve, seen on the left with Fred Davies, died on 31st March. The photo was taken on a S.O.F.A. walk and comes from Dave Irwin. Fred wrote the obituary on page 73.**