

Journal of the
Wessex Cave Club

Vol. 28 No.292

70th Anniversary Dinner

Return to the Seoubio

Showcaves of Perigord

The Verneau - A Different Perspective

officers

President

Donald Thomson

Vice Presidents

Paul Dolphin, Dave Irwin
Sid Perou, Derek Ford

Chairman

Dave Cooke
3 Starrs Close, Axbridge
BS26 2BZ. 01934 733260

Secretary

Les Williams
51 Churchill Road East, Wells
BA5 3HU. 01749 679389

Membership Sec

Simon Richards
65 Bifield Road, Stockwood,
Bristol, BS14 8TW
01275 834839

Treasurer

Mark Helmore

Caving Secretary

Dave Meredith

Hutwarden

Pauline Grosart

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Phil Hendy

Tackle Officer

John (Tommo) Thomas

Hut Administration

Ian Timney

Journal Contact

Jonathan Williams

MRO Co-ordinator

Jonathan Williams

Webmaster

Paul Wakeling

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Headquarters

Upper Pitts

Eastwater Lane

Priddy, Somerset. BA5 3AX

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From the Editor

It was with some trepidation that I rang Maurice 3 days before the AGM after reading his appeal in the AGM handbook. Maurice and I had talked of the possibility of an Editorial Team in the pub before, but I think we had both secretly hoped a knight in shining armour would step forward to take up the job and let us both off the hook. With no knight forthcoming and with everyone's time a premium these days it was decided that sharing the load would be the best way forward.

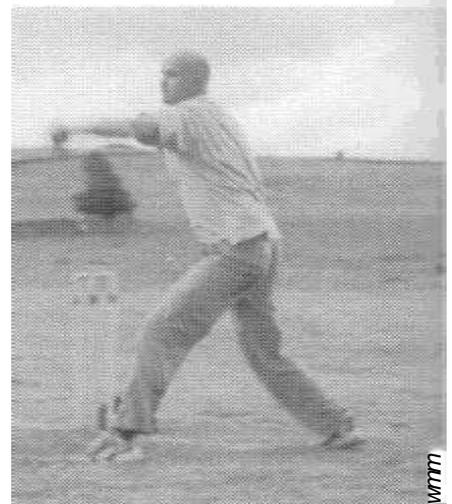
For the next year at least your new editorial team will work together to deliver your journal. I will be responsible for collecting articles and laying them up in an electronic format. Meanwhile Maurice & Judy will continue to liaise with the printer and ensure that you receive your journals in the post.

I think we all owe a great debt of gratitude to both Maurice and Judy for all their hard work over the past few years. I for one will be glad to have an "Old Hand" at the end of the phone when I'm lost for ideas.

I hope you enjoy your new look journal but remember it is nothing without your articles and pictures so keep them coming in.

Jonathan

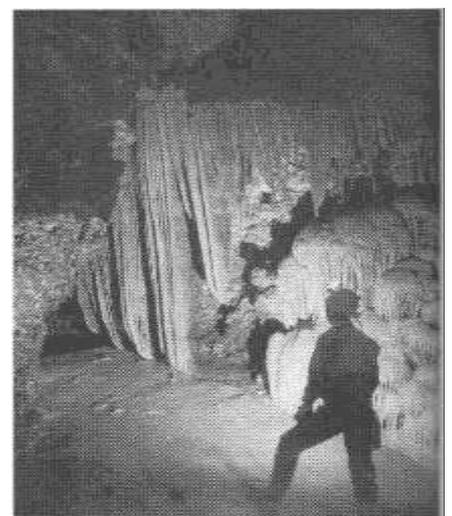
Committee Corner



Dave Meredith, or Butch, as he was once known, is no stranger to the committee. In past years he served as Hut admin officer doing a sterling job. After a few years break Dave is back taking on the role of Caving Secretary. What more important a job is there in a "Cave" club? Thanks Dave and best of luck!

Cover Picture

Aven Du Vitals (Chesse Cave) Herault. By Pete Hann



70th Anniversary Dinner

Over 110 people attended this years club dinner on 16th October at the White Hart Hotel, Wells.

This years dinner marked the club's 70th anniversary and it was great to see many long standing members able to attend. Diners were treated to a large and varied photo display depicting many of the clubs achievements during its history. After the usual bout of awards our President, Don Thomson cut a celebratory cake. Guest of Honour Derek Ford, himself a long standing Wessex member, entertained us all with stories from his many years travelling the world studying caves and karst landscapes.

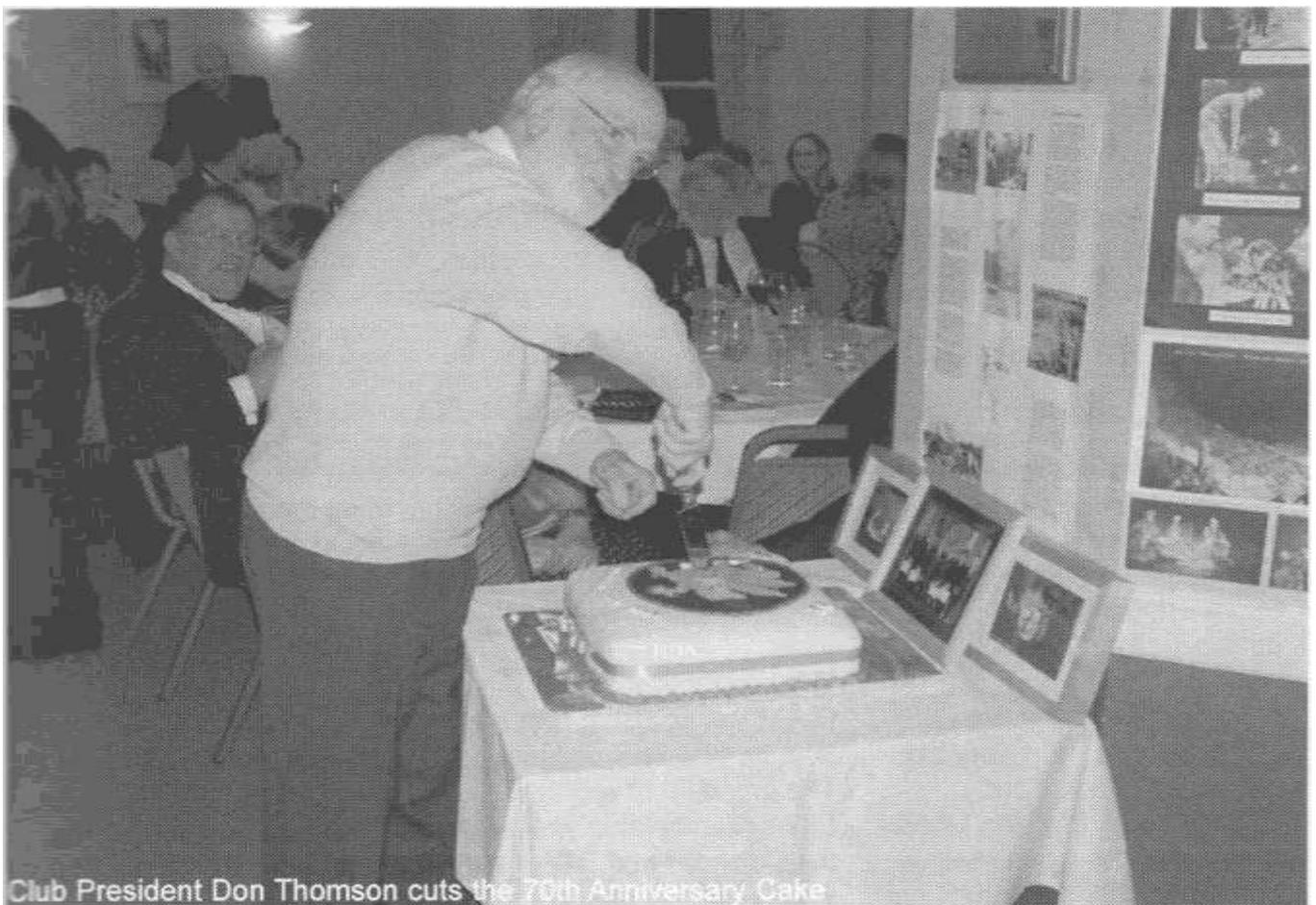
Special guests included Ivor & Dorothy Gibbons and Robin & Pam Maine. Kevin Hilton presented Dorothy with a bouquet of flowers from the Eastwater diggers as a token of appreciation for all her help over the past year.

The Frank Frost prize for best journal article was awarded this year to Kevin Hilton for his piece on a Titan through trip. Well done Kevin. An incentive for you all to keep those articles coming in.

Thanks go to all those who helped organize the event and especially to Pauline who worked hard to ensure everyone had a good time on the night.



Geoff Ballard presents an Award to
Adrian Vanderplank



Club President Don Thomson cuts the 70th Anniversary Cake

70th Anniversary pre-dinner photo/video evening

As a prelude to the AGM and Dinner, the Function Room at the Hunters had been booked for an informal gathering. A barrel of Butcombe was conveniently set up and a video player borrowed from MRO. With Roger away at Anthony Butcher's wedding, Nigel acted as a very helpful landlord.

During the evening a number of club videos were shown, some dating back to the early 1960's. It was good to see a goodly number of old Hillgrovers present. These included Ann Lawder, Tony Dingle John and Daveline Alder and Derek Ford, the latter being our Guest of Honour at the 70th Annual Dinner. The video of last year's St Trinians trip down Goatchurch went down particularly well. There was a good response to the request for members to bring along their photo albums and these were available for inspection during the evening. Maurice Hewins

The AGM

The Editor tells me he's running out of space so this will have to be short, which is probably best all round. 'Responsibility' was the reoccurring theme from comments on the Officer Reports. Books disappear from the Library without being booked out, the same for tackle and occasionally even keys. It is very simple; always book it out. Loosing items from the Library is probably the worst. Many of the books and Journals are

difficult if not impossible to replace. Most items fail to return through oversight. If it's in the book the Librarian has a sporting chance of tracking it down. It is accepted some tackle will be lost in action, but it will save the Tackle Officer the time and effort to look for it if he knows it's been dropped irretrievably down Juniper Gulf. Another 'Responsibility' is to lock the Hut if you are the last to leave. On quiet weekends this can be during the day, generally just after the Hunters has opened. Please ask if you don't know the procedures. Professor Derek Ford becomes one of our Vice Presidents. Les Williams replaces Ros as Secretary, Jonathan Williams replaces Maurice as Editor, Brian Prewer replaces Stuart as Ordinary Member and will help the Treasurer by doing the bookkeeping. Pam Lloyd replaces Pete Haigh as Auditor. We are still short of a Sales Officer. It's not a particularly onerous job, are there any willing volunteers out there?

The motion to require the proposer and seconder of a new member to be members themselves for at least one year failed. The meeting felt that the Committee should use its judgement and not rely on rules. The motion to increase the O.A.P. membership rate from 30% to 40% was passed. The proposal to align the Clubs membership year with the Calendar and BCA insurance year was passed. It was

felt there was no need to charge members for the extra 2 1/4 months membership that they will enjoy.

The proposal for the club to become a CASC was deferred for a year to allow further research and debate. There will be an article in the Journal later in the year. If anyone has particular questions that concern them can you please let the Chairman know so they can be included in the article. The proposal to remove the rules concerning Affiliates was passed and that was it for another year. Meeting closed. Dave "Cookie" Cooke

Swildon's Book - 100 Years of Exploration

Just a note to say thank you to all the members who have donated, loaned or pledged money for the Swildon's book. We have now received enough money to be able to go ahead with the publication; however further donations would be welcome. Should anyone who has donated or loaned money wish for a receipt please let me know & I will pop one in the post. I'm sure most of you who have paid by cheque will know that your cheques have been received. Obviously we would prefer not use up our monies on loads of postage. Brian Prewer

MRO Donation

A donation of £10 was recently made to MRO, this being the amount collected in the box in the Lounge. Phil Hendy

The rain continued to fall on our tent through the night, I lay in my sleeping bag reading my book praying it would continue, so we would not have to get up and go caving! My bed was comfortable and my book good. A little later... "Andy has it stopped yet?"... "Has what stopped?"... "The rain!"... "Yes" came the muffled reply "It's just tree rain now!" "We should go then."

Our last trip to the Seoubio was Easter 2003. (WCC Volume 27 Number 285) It was now 6-8-2004 one week into our Herault Summer trip, it was time to dive again. We parked the Landrover in the usual spot and carried the ropes, cylinders and other bits of diving equipment to the entrance. We just planned today to be a set up day and check the diving conditions. Andy rigged the now familiar 30 metre shaft and then checked the sump before I started lowering gear down the pitch. The sump looked good with the line intact as far as Andy could see, I started lowering equipment down the hole, six cylinders went down and four bags. I hoped we could get some help to get this lot out again! The one benefit to a cloudy and wet week was the CO2 levels were a little lower in the entrance chamber than previously, (it was only really noticeable while struggling to get our wetsuits on and while prussiking back up the pitch) but it was still a relief to either get back to the surface or start diving!

07-8-04
We returned to the cave today with the aim of re-digging open the cobble choke in the downstream sump one to allow us access back into the extensions. Three hours of digging later by Andy and I got me back into Seoubio 2.



Andy rigs the entrance pitch. Photo. Russ Brooks

On this digging dive two huge Andy sized boulders were removed with much struggling, this made passage through Cleavage Squeeze a little easier than on previous trips. We found the line through the choke to have broken. I won the job of repairing this, in the by now low visibility, before returning through the 20 metre long 2 metre deep sump one. At the end of the day all the empty cylinders that were used for digging were then hauled back up the pitch for filling. The remaining equipment stayed in the main chamber.

08-8-04
Both divers passed downstream sump one with no problems. Andy with a cylinder and a bag

filled with diving bits and myself with two cylinders. I was then made to look like a diver again and set off to inspect the line through sump 2. The line was good to the end in Seoubio 3. I then tied on a fresh reel and dived into sump 3. After 55 metres of superb sump at -6metres deep, I surfaced in a large chamber 30 metres in length. After climbing a 3-metre high sand dune and burying the reel I jumped into the pool of sump 4 to have a look before returning to let Andy have some fun. On returning through sump 2 I spent some time re-investigating the bone yard. Some of the skulls had been buried in the sand again but other bones had now been exposed. After dressing Andy in mostly my kit, Andy set off to the end of the line and continued into sump 4.

This was Andy's first taste of virgin cave exploration, he was a happy lad! Sump 4 was again very impressive and continued in its large size. Andy tied the line off 45 metres into sump 4, on the right hand wall before returning to Seoubio 2. Sump 4 carried on the theme of having very few natural belays and a sandy floor, so the line tends to zig-zag across the passage in search of belays. After packing all the gear not needed into a tackle bag again, the divers dived back through sump 1 with just a little digging needed to get back. Empty cylinders were hauled up the pitch by Andy in the heat of the day for re-filling. He very quickly agreed to my suggestion that he go up first and get some fresh air and get out of the CO₂. It was only half way up he realised that he would now have to do all the pitch hauling of the empty cylinders and this was not necessarily the better option! A few choice words drifted across the French countryside.

09-8-04

Today we had some support, Mark Tuck and Russell Brooks who after assisting the divers were going to do a surface walk in search of other entrances in the downstream direction. Jon was going to do a slightly more professional survey of the bone yard in sump 2, being an educated man in these matters! All divers through sump 1 with no problems. Andy and I with two cylinders each and Jon with the cylinder and bag. I dived first leaving Andy being instructed in the art of digging holes in the mud! The diver swam to the end of the line in somewhat reduced visibility. A new reel was tied on in sump 4 in by now zero visibility and the diver set off in what he hoped was the right direction. After a few meters the passage rose up a little and the diver was back in good visibility in a superb rift passage 1-2 meters wide. Using imported string bags with pebbles in for belays the diver laid a further 50 metres of line to surface in Seoubio 5, making sump 4, 95 metres long and 7-8 metres deep. The diver de-kitted and walked down a large dry passage for 30-35 metres with a floor deep in sediment until the inevitable sump 5 appeared. The diver tied on the reel and then returned to Seoubio 2 to let Andy do his stuff again. Andy then dived to the end of the line with my kit and dived sump 5. This turned out to be very shallow and about 5 metres long leading to another 30 metre long dry section with sump 6 blocking the way. Andy also noticed a possible dry continuation to the left of sump 6 up a steep mud bank but resisted the temptation until he had a friend to catch him! The diver then returned to base in Seoubio 2. Jon was then dressed in my kit and set off in to the bone yard to do his stuff.

Jonathan Williams observations of the bone yard in downstream sump 2.
(Also see CDG Newsletter 153.)

Aim of this dive was to investigate more closely the bones previously found in downstream sump 2. The diver first swam the length of the sump to surface in Seoubio 3 then made slow progress back towards sump 2 making observations. At a depth of between 6 and 9m and 60m into the sump a sandy chamber (The Bone yard) contains a large array of bones scattered liberally on top of sand banks. They appear to be a mixture of animal and human remains and at least one human skull remains exposed. Careful excavation around the denser clusters revealed that the sand contains more buried bones and that those visible on the surface account for only a small percentage of the total present. There appears to be no pattern visible in the layout of the bones. Previous attempts to extract a date from a human skull removed from the site at Easter 2003 had failed and a tooth or long bone had been requested to provide further dating evidence. What the diver believed to be a human arm bone was removed during this dive to facilitate this. A brief list below details the major groups of bones visible during the dive.

Human Skull (Top half only remaining . Very thin and blackened.)

Large group of mixed bones, mainly what appear to be rib bones, probably animal.

Two separate groups of large indistinguishable pieces of bone.

A small group of animal bones including a number of teeth, (one of the teeth was removed during the dive and appears to be animal, possibly dog)

A proper scientific excavation of the sumped sections of the cave would be virtually impossible.

However in the large passage between D/S sumps 1 & 2 which appears to act as an over flow during



Mike exiting the Seoubio. Photo. Russ Brooks

time of heavy rain, bones have been found sticking out of the mud. It may be possible to mount some sort of excavation in this passage if the results of dating prove of interest. While Jon was diving I set off back to the main chamber to find our sherpas and to start the pitch hauling of gear. I noticed Cleavage Squeeze was somewhat tighter on my return but paid little attention to it,

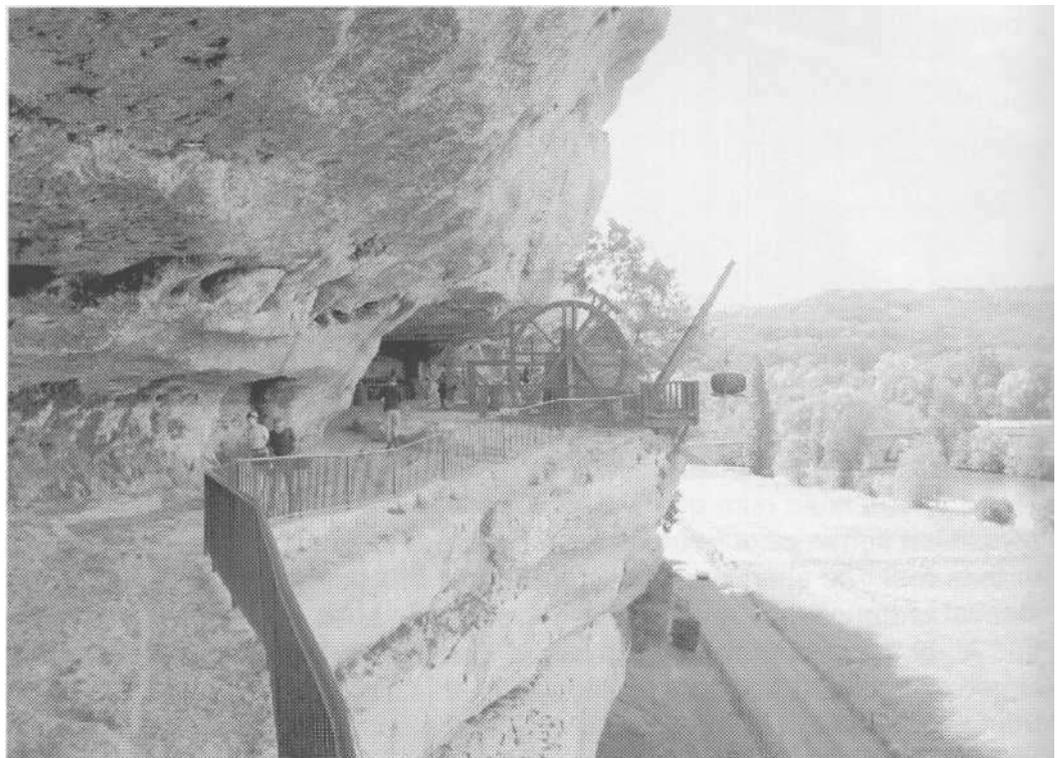
after all both Jon and Andy are smaller than me! The sherpas were duly at their stations, but had unfortunately found no other substantial entrances in their stumbling around the bush. After Jon's dive in the bone yard both he and Andy tried to return through sump 1. Jon dived first and two attempts later he declared the squeeze too tight! Andy not too happy with this statement dived to have a look and with some trouble got through to the right side. Now the cub is on the wrong side of the sump with no friends, not a happy Cub! Another attempt and with Andy guiding his legs and pulling he popped out somewhat relieved. Well if they would insist on diving through the wrong part of the choke what do you expect!

So ended another session in the Seoubio, with three new sumps passed intersected with some great dry cave and another bone sample collected from sump 2 for radio carbon dating. Perhaps ,we should have mounted another pushing trip, but neither Andy or I could raise the level of enthusiasm needed to dig out and do battle with Cleavage Squeeze again. We were also keen to get on with a series of closed circuit rebreather dives in other sites. Soon the cave will seal itself shut again and will wait for our return.

During June 2004 Brenda & I, along with Brian & Sheila Sneddon (ex Shepton Mallet CC), drove down to the Dordogne and Vezere area on a Eurocamping holiday. The riverside campsite at St Leon sur Vezere was excellent and made a good base from which to explore the various caves and archaeological sites in the area. Being only a few miles from Les Eyzies St Leon is really right in the heart of the prehistory sites of Perigord. Unlike show caves in the UK some of the caves with painting have restricted access numbers and advanced booking may be necessary. Details of booking and numbers are given for some of the caves we visited.

We started off with a visit to the classic, Lascaux II, which is 200m from the original, Lascaux I. First mistake - it was a bank holiday and the French were out in force. On joining the queue we were unable to get in a group with an English-speaking guide and furthermore they could not provide us with any English leaflets. I have been told that there are English tours but nobody was able to tell us whether or not we might be able to get one for another day. On the actual high-speed guided tour itself the guide was obviously bored and prattled away in French so fast that even Shelia, who understands French quite well, couldn't make sense of what was being said. We found the light in the 'cave' rather dim which was surprising considering it's a replica. I know - it's meant to show realism - perhaps how the artist saw it but the original Lascaux wasn't that dim. Yes Brenda and I were lucky enough to see the original in 1962, a Year before it closed.

On the brighter side the concrete reconstruction is very good with the actual cave passage detail accurate to within a few millimetres. The drawings are excellent and faithfully copied although not all the side passages are present - just the main two galleries. There is no restriction on numbers however tickets must be



Roque St Christophe. Photo. Brian Prewer

Purchased beforehand from the ticket office in Montignac, a few miles away.

A rainy Monday saw us at the Grotte du Grand Roc near Les Eyzies. What a difference, an English-speaking guide, English leaflets and no rush. A superb little cave with the most amazing helactites I have ever seen. Every nook and cranny packed with them, some over 300mm long. According to Ric Halliwell some of the pictures in the French Best Formations Coffee Table book were taken here.

Next day we headed north for about 15 miles to Rouffignac village. Three miles from the village is the cave of Rouffignac, well worth a visit. There are an incredible number of paintings and carvings here,

Mammoths (157 paintings and carvings), bison, horses, rhinos & human, all about 14000 years old. You ride on a train which at first sight appears a bit 'touristy' however some of the paintings are over half a mile in and the slow moving train is designed to switch lights on and off in order to preserve the paintings. Many of these paintings have had to be restored. Alas, most of the tourists of earlier centuries were not content with merely satisfying their curiosity. Many of them, accompanied by a local guide, marked their visit by writing their names on the walls with the smoke from candles. Unfortunately, these four centuries of unrestricted access resulted in graffiti covering many of the Palaeolithic paintings. Today most of the

paintings have been cleaned up however it is still possible to see some of the graffiti on the roof of the cave. Another interesting feature of the cave are the bear pits. Bears used the cave to hibernate in long before man came into the cave to decorate it. In many places there are great scratches on the walls left behind by their claws The pits,



La Madelaine. Photo. Brian Prewer

over half a mile in, are the result of bears digging into the clay and turning around countless times to form lairs the size of their sleeping bodies. It was these nest-like dips that the animals huddled in throughout the winter. Bones of bears were found in some of these pits.

There is a number limit on this cave during the high season and also they appear to have a long lunchbreak so it is advisable to get there early in the morning.

Early in the holiday we went up to the Grotte de Font de Gaume, near Les Eyzies to try and book an English tour. There are severe restrictions on entry to this painted cave and we needed to book three days in advance. There is a limit of 200 people a day here. On the day of our booking we arrived early to be sure of our place - if you miss your time slot you've 'had it'. There is a short but fairly steep climb up to the cave from the car park. The cave, although short, is impressive with excellent coloured paintings of bison, reindeer and horses all about 14000 years old. The reason for the restrictions on numbers is because of the deposition of calcite and algae growth over some of the paintings. Large numbers of people mean high levels of CO2 therefore in summer the levels of CO2 are reduced by pumping with a turbine; in winter with fewer visitors the cave is allowed to return to it's natural balance. A lot of work has been done here and various methods tried in order to prevent the deterioration of the paintings. Again according to Ric Halliwell the tatty booking office is deliberate so as not to make the place look too commercialised, also the cave is shut on Saturdays again to discourage visitors.

Just down the road is Combrelles, a cave with excellent engravings of horses, bison, reindeer

and a few mammoths. These are all about 13000 years old and the guide uses a small hand lamp to show them in relief. The restrictions on this cave are even more severe than the Font de Gaume with only 4 visitors per trip and a maximum of 90 visitors a day. On this occasion as we were a group of 4 we had the guide to ourselves and he spoke good English. When he knew we were cavers he gave us a really interesting extended trip. Needless to say he got a good tip.

On the only other rainy day of our holiday we took off on a 90-mile trek to Peche Merle. Now this show cave is a must with its spectacular formations and stunning paintings. There is a restriction on access with a maximum of only 700 visitors a day however we didn't need to book in advance. There is a huge variety of formations all in excellent condition in spite of the cave being open to the public since 1926. In particular there is an amazing 'spinning top' cave pearl about 3" in diameter shaped like a child's top sitting in a conical socket of a similar diameter. The paintings here are particularly clear and vibrant with mammoth, horses, fish and humans, but probably the most interesting feature of this cave are the human footprints calcified in the mud. There are at least twelve footprints of an adolescent boy thought to be about 12000 years old. Yet another feature is a chamber called the Disc Room, here are many freestanding calcite discs thought to be formed where calcite-laden water is forced out between two slabs of rock. The calcite is deposited on the rim and builds up in concentric rings. The tour here can be arranged with English speaking guides.

Near Le Bugue is the cave Gouffre de Proumeyssac. This is the one to avoid; too commercialised, tacky music and large groups of up to 25. This is the cave that Casteret went down in the 1950s and gave it the title "Cathedrale de Cristal". I think he would turn in his grave if he saw it now. The cave consists of one large chamber, 120' high by 180' diameter, that has some fine formations around the circumference. A heavy drip from a ledge about 50' up is allowed to fall onto a variety of pottery objects placed on tables on the floor of the chamber. Over a period a considerable layer of calcite builds up on these objects which are later sold, at exorbitant prices, in the souvenir shop near the entrance. The original table that was placed here in 1953 now has about 12 to 15 inches of calcite built up on it. An English commentary is available through headphones as you tour the cave. The route is through an artificial tunnel that opens into the chamber about 50' up on a viewing platform and then descends via steps to the chamber floor where you can admire all the little calcite covered pottery trinkets - hundred of them. To make matters worse there are even video monitors beside the path showing how the cave was formed and explored. The route now takes you round the back of some of the formations, a lot of which have been damaged, and finally back to the tunnel. This was one of the most expensive show cave (£5.50) and for us the worst.

Apart from show caves we visited some interesting prehistory sites such as Les Eyzies. Unfortunately the new Prehistory Museum there has had to be temporarily closed in order to accommodate a lot of new exhibits, however Le Thot Espace Cro-Magnon nearby is worth a visit. As well as showing a video of how Lascaux II was constructed (English subtitles) it has a large park stocked with some of the animals depicted in the cave painted of the area including a full-sized mammoth! Yes, I know, it's not Jurassic Park but it does have a moving, bellowing model. All the other animals are real have been specially bred and include Pryzwalski horses, Ibex and European bison; these are the nearest relatives to the prehistoric ones in the Lascaux paintings.

La Madeleine and Le Moustier, both near Les Eyzies, are archaeological sites made famous as it was at these two sites that remains were found that gave rise to the pre-history periods now known by these names. The Magdalenians lived in the area about 17000 BP. Nearby is the famous cliff dwelling of La Roque St Christophe. This site, over 1km long, alongside the Vezere river, was occupied for over 55000 years and is well worth a visit.

All in all this area is great for Golden Oldie cavers with plenty to see and many fine restaurants with reasonably priced food.

Mendip Exploration

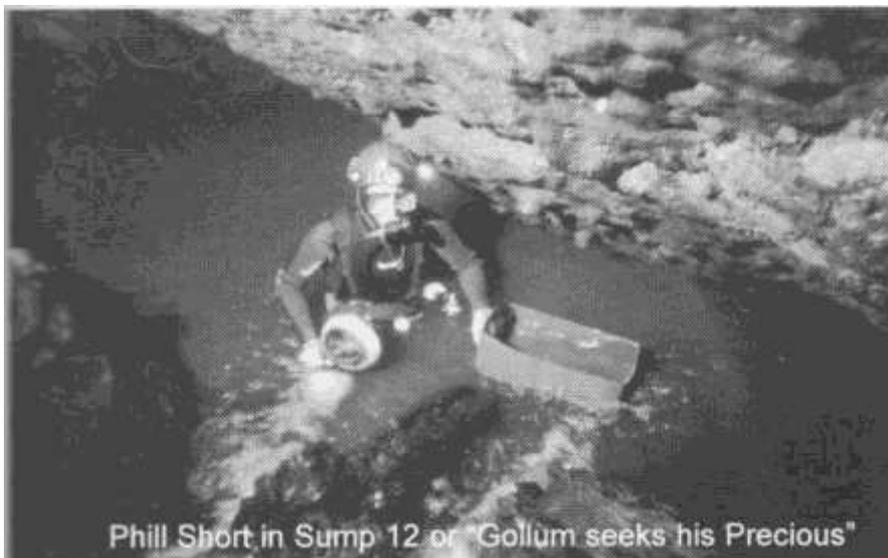
Exploration on Mendip is like waiting for a bus...you wait ages and then it all seems to come along at once. This summer and autumn has seen progress made in three of Mendip biggest cave systems. Reported widely in the local and national press Rick Stanton and John Volanthen's breakthrough in Wookey has been staggering. Wessex members have been part of the sherpa team throughout the project. Meanwhile in Swildon's Phil Short and his team have been continuing in their work at sump 12. In their last trip 25m of new line was laid in Sump 12a. Greg's report first posted on the CDG notice board is reprinted here. For those not of a diving persuasion "Mad" Phil Rowsell and his team have succeeded in their attempt to link Morton Pot to the West End Series in Eastwater. To all those involved in these projects, a big well done. Dedication will always pay off in the end.

Swildon's Sump 12 Update:

On 23rd October Greg Brock, Phil Short & Andy Chell went back to visit sump 12. Previously, after various digging trips, an underwater connection was made between sump 12 and sump 12a. At the weekend we went back with the intention of following the main flow of the water between sumps 12 and 12a. From sump 12a, 25m of line was laid to a depth of 13.1m. It was at this point we were met

with a gravel bank wall with the full flow of the water just filtering through gravel. No possible way on was noted unless the gravel was dug out. This now explains why sump 12 backs up so high in flood. Although this gravel bank (similar to that at the end of Wookey) could be dug, the spoil would have to be transported back to the surface in sump 12a and then back to sump 12 by either the underwater route or the dry route.

Greg Brock



Phill Short in Sump 12 or "Gollum seeks his Precious"

Rick Stanton and his home-made sidemounted rebreather used to dive Wookey Hole. Photo. Russ Brooks



"Divers plunge to new depths in Wookey Hole"

By Simon de Bruxelles

TWO cave divers have set a new British depth record after moving tea-chest-sized boulders blocking a passage at Wookey Hole in Somerset. John Volanthen and Rick Stanton ventured more than a mile into the caverns to a depth of 249ft (75.9m), 18ft deeper than the previous record, which was set in Speedwell Cavern in Derbyshire last year. The divers used a slimline rebreathing system of their own design to break the record.

They plan more expeditions in their attempt to discover the elusive "Chamber 26" beyond those that they have already explored. "

Report on Rick & John's dive reprinted from The Times, 30th September 2004 Copyright 2004 Times Newspapers Ltd

The Pink & Fluffy Caving Team consists of Alison & Pete Moody, Adrian & Jude Vanderplank, Geoff Ballard, Richard Carey and myself. As a combined team we have almost visited every part of Swildons for Alison's book description, with only Sump 9 and beyond now requiring our attention. On the way we have with the help of others reopened Sidcot U-tube and are currently in the process of extending the Swyne Puke roundtrip by digging through a connection between Maypole Aven and Terminus Chamber (watch this space). There are several sites that we believe may yield new passage and we have begun to actively dig at these. The main sites are as follows:

Beyond Hope (Swildon's Two)

We have identified a small blocked continuation of a passage at the base of the final aven that will require a single bang in order to test whether it is worth pursuing. The bang will be carried out shortly.

Right Hand Aven in Fault Chamber

At the top of the aven a phreatic tube continues upwards before dipping back down to a mud choke; the scalloping on the walls of the tube shows the water flow was up. Pete and Ali dug this site in the 80's. We have replaced the rope on the aven. The dig is currently flooded; we will shortly be taking up buckets to first remove the water and then continue digging.

Tumbledown Dig (Swildon's Five)

We are investigating previous claims that this is a draughting choke.

Lonely Aven (Swildon's Seven)

We believe this aven has never been pushed to its conclusion and therefore intend to do so shortly.

Swildons Seven, Boulder Chambers

There are several leads from the chambers in Swildons Seven, on the left of the streamway, all of which head into a large boulder choke. We are currently attacking the choke from one location only and are about to break into a larger void between boulders, 4 meters up into the choke. It has so far been necessary to use bang on three occasions and given the size of the blocks up ahead we expect to have to continue with chemical persuasion. If nothing else we believe there is a further large chamber at the top of the boulder pile.

Thrutch Tube (Swildon's Nine)

This is another of Pete and Alison's digs of long ago and it is their intention to return next summer. The very restricted nature of the dig and its current condition makes this a summer proposition only.

Badlands (Swildon's Nine)

Most of the passages here are phreatic. This is perhaps the most promising of all the sites. The air here is extremely fresh and cold. A previously undiscovered continuation has been found by Pete and Alison and is virtually open, requiring digging of easily removed fill.

If visiting any of these areas, please be aware that bang fumes may be present. I will in future leave laminated warning signs after carrying out future bangs. We have recently discovered that the draught at the top of Maypole Aven does not perhaps disperse bang fumes as quickly as might first be expected.

I suppose that I've been here for a while. Quite a while. In-fact longer than I care to remember. The seasons march by and I do change over the years. I've grown and shrunk and moved about quite a bit. But I'm happy with the way I look at the moment.

I don't see much activity. The water comes and goes. Sometimes it is a boiling maelstrom that hurtles through cutting, moving and ripping things apart. I can change quite a bit when that happens. And sometimes it dries up almost completely. Then months can pass without anything happening.

Then some years ago I met something new. Cavers they called themselves. The first ones didn't know what to make of me. They saw me, stopped and then started milling around. They prodded and threw stones - some even came quite close and got themselves very wet in the process. They didn't stay very long. But they came back with bottles and masks and then went right through. They were very pleased with themselves.

I see a lot of them now. They are quite interesting. Some come and have a look and then disappear off up into the roof. I can hear them huffing and puffing up in the ceiling. And then they appear on the other side, come and have a look and disappear off again. Others just like to go straight through.

This summer was quite quiet. A lot of water about but then a dry spell and I had three parties through all pretty close together. It can only have been a couple of days between each one. The first group came roaring down the passage - they had been enjoying the stream way - rounded the corner and stopped. I thought that maybe they were going up into the ceiling but oh no. They came over, had a look, and then started unpacking masks and hoods.

A very determined man dressed from head to toe in black jumped straight in. He wasted no time at all and after that every one else followed. There was one girl in that first group. They didn't stay long. And then the next day a group of four.

Hmmmmm -I won't forget them for a while. They were very nervous -I don't think that any of them liked what they saw. A man in a grey and yellow oversuit got into the water first. He hovered about for ages plunging his face in and out of the water. He really didn't want to be there but he went through. The next one took his time but when he got to the other side he was whooping and dancing and carrying on like I don't know what. I've never seen anything like it. I don't know what was so special.

The third person through put his head underwater and tried to breath. Most interesting. I've never seen anybody thrash quite as much as that. Well I had to take a small souvenir. I couldn't help myself. So I eased off one of his wellies and dropped it over by the wall. It's quite deep down there. You should have heard the language when he came out.

And the last one through. He took the longest of all of them. They were going to send him back a mask on a line. But I thought that the mask would look good with the welly. So I took that. It's over by the wall as well.

Anyway. This last guy. He was in the water. Then he was out of the water and walking away. Then he was on the ground, crawling along, holding his breath. I don't know what he was doing. Then he was back. And at last he went through.

The Verneau - A Different Perspective Cont....

They sat around and had some food. They even talked about coming back through. Very briefly. And then they left. One was walking quite strangely.

Well I was very pleased with my little haul. You have no idea how monotonous it can be here at times. So I thought that I would go on collecting. Three days later a party of seven came through. Good pickings here - or so I thought. A lovely bag of shiny bits. Well I took that off the line straight away. I put it down below the arch, just to the left of the welly. I thought that it looked good there. But they weren't having that. Oh no. It was a woman and she was very persistent. She kept diving back in. I kept covering it up with silt but on her third dive she saw the bag and took it. Somebody even came looking for the welly. But I had that well hidden. That's mine. Well mine until the winter floods come through anyway. The party of seven stayed for a short while and then disappeared. They were in high spirits.

I haven't seen many people since. There's more water now and we're heading into winter. I might change a bit. But I'm looking forward to next year and the start of a new season. I'm sure that there'll be plenty more pickings to be had.....

Library Additions

as of 2nd November 2004

Phil Hendy

B.E.C. Belfry Bulletin 53, 5 (519) (Spr. 04) (Cuthbert's sump II, Eastwater (survey), H.L.I.S., Lodmore Hole) 6 (520) (Summer 04) (Lost Cave of Loxton)
B.C.R.A. Cave and Karst Research 31, 1 (2004)
Cave Diving Group N/L 1147-152 (Apr 03 - Jul 04)
Chelsea S.S. N/L 46 8/9, 10 (Aug/Sep, Oct 04)
Craven Pothole Club 'Record' 76 (Oct 04)
Descent 179 (Aug/Sep 04), 180 (Oct/Nov 04)
Grosvenor Caving Club N/L 129 (Aug 04)
Mendip Caving Group N/L 320, 321, 322 (Mar, May, Jun 04)
Mendip Nature Research Committee N/L 102 (Autumn 04)
N.S.S. News 62, 6, 7, 8 (Jun, Jul, Aug 2004)
N.S.S. J. of Cave & Karst Studies 66, 2 (Aug 04)
Soc. Spel. De Wollonie (Belgium). Regards 56 (Sep/Oct 04)
S.U.I. / I.C.R.O. (Ireland) Underground 60 (Summer 04), 61 (Autumn 04)
Westminster Speleological Group N/L 2004/3 (Jul 04)
White Rose PC. N/L 23 2, 3 (May, Aug 04)
Wittenburg Univ. S.S. (Ohio) 'Pholeos' 22, 1, 2 (Jun 04)
Craven Pothole Club. Jubilee 1929-2004 (History of the CPC)
Yorkshire Post Magazine 'Light fantastic: the beauty of Gaping Gill' 28/8/04
Vertical Caving (Meredith M. & Martinez D.) Donated M. Barnes

SAGA Caving

According to a Saga holidays poll, reported in the Daily Telegraph (9th August), 45% of 1000 adults questioned by NOP would consider taking up scuba diving, while nearly 20% would be interested in potholing. Perhaps we should forget recruiting new members from schools and universities, and set up a recruitment roadshow around the OAP clubs. Maybe an advert in the Saga magazine would pay dividends. Apart from providing hot Horlicks, reducing the 'no-noise' rule in the bunkrooms to 9pm and providing bunkside tables for toothglasses, changes at Upper Pitts would be minimal (some regard us as a load of old fuddy-duddies anyway!).

It is odd that the location of a quarry that provided the stone for many historic buildings, some of which still exist, came to be lost. After all some of these buildings have very complete stories with large archives, much of which is in the public domain. I never intended to look, as from the early 1980's when I joined Bath & Portland Stone I had accepted the current view that "Hazelbury" was an archaic term referring to the Box Ground Stone (Bath stone) found within Box hill and the ancient manor of Hazelbury. I knew some of the buildings whose stone came from Hazelbury and clients were taken to Longleat (1573) and Lacock Abbey (1232) to illustrate the durability of Bath stone.

It was whilst researching a Mr Brewer of Rudloe, who had been involved in the construction of Box tunnel and owned Brewer's Yard mine that I came across a document dated 1614 referring to the transfer of mineral rights at Haifelbury Quores in Box Fields that I began to wonder, was Hazelbury just one quarry, the name being attached to others after it was worked out? This was not an unknown practice.

There was no map with the document and the description was vague, but this was common where the location was well known. A copy of G J Kidstone's "A History of the Manor of Hazelbury" (1936) found in the Wiltshire county archive provided some of the answers and some interesting facts. The owners of the manor of Hazelbury from the 11th to the 20th Century had been the Canute (knut) family and their descendent's who were related to William of Normandy (Norseman's land) a descendant of Rollo the Viking who had acquired Normandy from the king of France in 885.



I needed some verification and if possible an early map. This came very quickly in the form of other histories and firstly a map dated 1640, then Tythe maps, a survey dated 1840 and the documents transferring "The Entire Quarry" to Pictor & Sons in 1868. So, what about other quarries? The 1640 map shows only one other "Gree Cliffe" and no indication of mines or roads to them and I have been unable to find any documentation prior to 1800. Mining was carried out before 1840 through the "Backdoor" entrance from Hazelbury quarry which was worked out about 1850.

It is clear that Between the 11th Century and 1850 there existed a quarry called "Hazelbury" which provided the stone for Bradenstoke Abbey(1142), Monkton Fareigh Priory(1125) as well as Lacock, Longleat and many other fine buildings. Its location is clear, if you've been in or out of the "backdoor" then you've been in what is left of "Hazelbury".

26.6.04 Swildon's - Renascence Day

Inter-club team of:-
 Wessex, Ali M & Pete, Nik Nak,
 Geoff B, Adrian, Jude & Ann VdP
 Shepton Mallet CC, Tim Ball
 MNRC, Dave King & Dave Cushing
 MCG, Fiona Crozier
 NPC, Clive Westlake
 Chelsea SS, John Cooper

Thirteen of us to Sidcot 'U'-tube. This had about 6" of water over 2' 6" of 'Artex' type mud. We managed to break the sump in about 20 minutes & then spent about 3 hours digging out the mud. Excellent session leaving the 'U'-tube bone dry & large enough to free-dive when it sumps again. Celebratory trip to Black Chamber at the end of Old Renascence. Trip out commenced with a mud fight between the Wessex at the bottom of Maypole Aven - started by Mr Vanderplank. Thanks to all the people who helped. There is still plenty of mud left in the Sidcot 'U'-tube & Nik Nak has declared that the next Renascence Day will be the last Saturday in June 2005! A date for your diaries! There's still plenty of mud to dig.

26.6.04 Swildon's Four Andy Chell & Christine G

Dived Sumps 2 & 3 & wombled off to look at the worms in 4. Ran away!! And I only swore at my cylinder once!

27.6.04 Swildon's - New Renascence Day Geoff B, Nik Nak, Ali M, Adrian & Fiona

A foolhardy few returned intent on visiting 'the end'. On inspection of the entrance crawl Adrian swiftly volunteered to return to the 'U'-tube to dig. With hindsight this was probably a wise move! The remaining Pink & Fluffies plus guest continued on to North Doodle (nice). Then on to Rum doodle via the Far Series which took its toll on the team again as Nik Nak & Fiona decided to stay this side of the puddles. Far Series is sporting??! On passing the final squeeze into Rum Doodle you become very aware of how f***ed you'd be if you hurt yourself there.

28.6.04 Goon's Hole Pete & Ali Moody

The tube at the bottom of the entrance slope has now swung left & Pete had removed enough spoil to get round the bend. We had hoped that the passage would now be of a caveable size. Then remember that this is Burrington! Looks too tight for the next 2m or so to where the passage swings right.

29.6.04 Swildon's, 'The Forty' Ali M, Jude & Adrian VdP, Nik Nak, Geoff B

Trip for the Book & also to celebrate Adrian's Birthday by doing 'The Forty'. All present descended the pitch on ladder & also via the squeeze from the second ledge which then gives an easy free-climb down the Water Rift at the head of the Eight Foot Drop.

3.7.04 Swildon's, 'Odds & Sods Day' Ali M, Geoff & Adrian

Visit to the Ten Foot Overhang (the Bar Climb) in Shatter to determine exactly where the Priddy Fault runs across this point.

Old Renascence to complete the description & we couldn't resist a quick dig at the end of cont... tubes that descend towards Damascus - just before the Stoops.

Having determined that the bottom duck in the Muddy Oxbow (between the First & Second Mud Sumps) had an airspace we decided to see if we could achieve an exchange trip. Nik Nak bailed the top duck into the rift passage just before the duck & Ali & Ann completed the trip from the bottom end. We managed to achieve a reasonable amount of airspace in the top duck but it was still necessary to bulldoze your way

through the slurry. Can't imagine why Ann didn't want to do the duck twice. Not the cleanest of passages - it would make an excellent add-on to a Watergate trip!

4.7.04 Goon's Hole Pete & Ali, Geoff, Nik Nak, Keith Fielder & his wheelbarrow

A clearance session to haul up & empty the 50+ bags that had been filled up & stacked at the bottom of the entrance passage. Keith dutifully disappeared down Burrington Combe with his wheelbarrow at regular intervals getting some very strange looks from the tourists. The cave is still blowing extremely cold but I have at last worked out what to wear. This is 2 long sleeved thermal shirts plus 1 furry oversuit plus 1 fleece balaclava. The cave might seem a little smaller but this was the first time that I hadn't frozen while lying in the entrance passage. PS. Must remember fleece gloves next time.

4.7.04 Swildon's Phil H, Diana (Howard Kenney's daughter), Dan & friend

Down to the 20' via Long Dry Way, followed by the Wet Way, Kenney's Dig (where else?) & out via Binnie's Link. The boys were not too keen on leading & I had to con them into the Wet Way. The cave was dry with only two other parties.

5.7.04 Goon's Hole Ali & Pete

The fill at the end is bone-dry sand & gravel over a rock floor (honest - no mud). The tube is now really an enlarged bedding & we managed to dig up to the top of the bedding & round the next bend - a tight & sharp right-angle. There is now a large airspace over the fill & 2m further was gained to reach a rock arch coated with moonmilk. The passage can be seen continuing but will need digging out. Bastard to dig at present



as this involves grabbing a large armful of spoil, reversing back round the tight right-hand bend, down the slope to the next bend where there is enough room to fill a digging boat. It then has to be dragged back along the horizontal tube & bagged ready to be pulled out the entrance passage then finally to be taken away by Mr Fielder & his wheelbarrow.

6 to 10.7.04 Llygad Llwchwr M Barnes

6.7.04 - The aim of the trip was to install my airlift, (which people seem to think won't work), into 'the slot' at the end of Sump 4 & remove all the gravel. Today's trip being my first, a while was spent exploring the many passages before arriving at the start of Sump 4. Three-quarter inch diameter air hose was laid to the slot. What a place, what a current!

7.7.04 - Several trips via dry passage, to carry the airlift & assorted equipment to the start of Sump 4.

8.7.04 - The airlift, made of 3m of 50mm dia. stell pipe was connected to its working end & dump end & then floated using an old lifejacket. It was then negotiated into its position at the end, and the air

hose was connected using 2 jubilee clips. Alas, the milk containers intended to float the upper end of the lift were not big enough for the job.

9.7.04 - A kindly farmer had given me a large 26l plastic container which, when filled with air, was wedged into the rift above the slot in a most secure way. The airlift top end was then duly hauled into position & tied off. Returning to chamber 4, a 15l tank was then connected, via an old demand valve, to the hose previously installed & turned on. A return was then made lift where the purge was opened & the gritty water expelled. The lift itself was then turned on & the diver joyfully watched as the gravel almost

miraculously disappeared up the pipe, to be dumped 15m down passage where the current should disperse it. Returning to base, another 151 tank was connected when the first ran out.

10.7.04 - All dive gear & 2x151 tanks removed via the river chambers. A return next week with a compressor & more hose will hopefully see the way on quite soon.

7.7.04 Swan Mine Carmen & Bob Scammell

Photo & graffiti removing trip. The fluorescent way-markings were only relevant to a moron who couldn't find his/her way out of a paper bag. Swan is fan shaped & needs no brains to find the way round. Anyway, it's now fairly pristine again & a pleasure to walk round & take photos. The markers, a dash & a dot, were made probably by the same tosser who has plastered them all around Box Mines & Brown's Folly.

However it cost them a lot more in spray cans than the two £1 wire brushes it took to clean the mess up. A mark every 20 paces - what sort of person needs that sort of route marking - Even kids don't need them. There, I feel better now.

PS Also cleaned up a stack of litter. Night-lights, candles, beer cans & general rubbish, which Carmen tidily dumped in the back of my truck.

10.7.04 Eastwater Mad Phil & Emsy

Trip to Morton's Pot & Unlucky Strike. Wet trip to help Phil. Managed to kick him in the face & make his nose bleed (ouch!). Then on to see Unlucky Strike - a very impressive chamber & huge curtain. Got out before the bang fumes consumed us.

10.7.04 Swildon's Vicarage Geoff B, Nik Nak, Adrian & Jude VdP & Ali M

Tourist trip for Jude & Nik Nak & description trip for Ali to check the Rabbit Hole & Impassable Crack. Nik Nak & Jude had an inspection of the Hairy Passage squeeze but there were no takers!

10.7.04 Gough's

Divers: -Malc F, Mike T, Jon W, Andy C, Clive W

Sherpas: - Chef, Pauline, Christine, Kathy, Jon Beal & G Bowden

Down Gough's to assist divers who were relaying lines. Chef was mistaken for a guide & had a queue of teenagers waiting with him to be shown around. Once beyond the tourist path we headed off towards the horrible slippery hill up to Makin Progress. We stopped at the top pitch above Lloyd Hall & passed all the kit on, unfortunately some of it went too far & we had to lug it all back again. Finally all kit ferried back to tourist path & out. Ice-cream shop visited before returning to Upper Pitts.

17.7.04 Swildon's - The Watergate trip that wasn't Pete & Ali M, Nik Nak, Geoff B, Andy Morse & Rich Carey (MCG)

We were very dubious as to whether the duck at the Lower Fault Chamber end of the connection would be open because of the extremely wet weather of the last few weeks. Unfortunately this proved to be sumped to a depth of 30cms. After about 20 mins bailing we managed to drop the pool by about 30cms but water still seemed to be flowing in from the far side, so we decided to leave Watergate for drier weather. Before exiting Lower Fault we spent a short time digging the tube leading off from the top of the pot above the right-hand climb, but gave this up due to bad air. Rich stated that he would like to do a 'collectors' passage & as Geoff had missed out on the fun of 3.7.04 we decided to exit via the Muddy Oxbow on the route out. Quote of the day from Rich, "I didn't think that there were any muddy places in Swildon's". He obviously needs to do more trips with the Pink & Fluffy Caving Team.

24.7.04 Swildon's Five, Six & Damp Link Pete & Ali M, Geoff B, Nik Nak, Adrian VdP, Tim Francis & Rich Carey (both MCG)

First trip through Sump 4 for Geoff, Tim & Rich. It was rather off-putting to find 5 leaches at the bottom of Cowsh Aven plus another one on the far side of sump 4. Jubilee Aven in Five & Tapeworm Tunnel in Six

checked for Book description & then everyone except Pete went out via Damp Link. Apologies to Phil Short for grabbing him by the helmet & hauling him out of Sump 4 - I thought that he was Geoff.

31.7.04 Swildon's

Adrian & Jude VdP, Phil Hendy, Christine G, Spanish Pat & Portuguese Lena

No water until Rolling Thunder. A queue on the 20'. Christine & Lena turned back at the bottom of Trats. The rest of us went on to Sump 2, finding Sump 1 warm but constricted. Excellent trip - my first (PH) below the 20' for 2½ years & first beyond Sump 1 for about 25!



Derek Ford and assorted long standing Wessex Members before a trip to Swildons on the 70th Anniversary Weekend.

Left to Right

Maurice Hewins, Derek Ford, Brian Prewer, Joe Candy, Ken Dawe, Noel Cleave and Ric Haliwell.

Photo: Noel Cleave

Outside GB
Left to Right
Derek Ford, Ken Dawe, Joe Candy.
Photo: Noel Cleave



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Club Diary

Dec 2004	
4th	Club Meet - Rhino Rift
5th	Club Meet - St Cuthberts
5th	Committee Meeting
Jan 2005	
29-30th	Devon Weekend
	Staying at DSS, Buckfastleigh
March 2005	
12 & 13th	Derbyshire Weekend
	Staying at TSG, Castleton
April 2005	
23rd-8th May	Scotland
	Grampian Hut and the Isle of Skye
	Please contact Dave Meredith for further Information on any of the club trips listed above

Sales Officer Wanted

The club is currently without a Sales Officer!

Could you spare a few hours a month to help your club raise valuable funds. Sales officer is an important committee post, you will be the only one who raises money rather than spending it! Full training will be provided and would especially suit a new member. If you feel you can help please contact any committee member.



Log Book Entries

It has been suggested that as many club members are regularly caving away from Mendip that many of the club's best caving is being omitted from the Upper Pitts log book.

Brian Prewer has volunteered to "cut & paste" any log entries which members might wish to enter in the log book but are unable to do so themselves due to distance.

Log entries should be e-mailed to Brian at bookings@wessex-cave-club.org