

Journal of the
Wessex Cave Club

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June 2005

The Wonders of Goatchurch in 1901

Buddleia Hole

A Grand Day Out / Off

Upper Pitts Log Book Extracts

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From the Editor

As I write this the summer seems to finally have arrived! I'm now feeling jealous of those who are about to depart for France on the Pink and Fluffy trip. Have a great time guys.

Another Wessex team returned from the Herault earlier this month with a full survey book and pictures to prove it. After several years of hard work, Mike Thomas and his team have finally broken into the big stuff in the Seoubio. A full report of their finds will appear in the next journal.

From our Caving Sec's report it appears the Scotland and Skye trip last month was a great success. Dave has also provided me with a long list of meets for the coming months so get out there and enjoy your caving,

Have a good time whatever you get up to this summer and when you get back be sure to jot down a few words about what you did and post them to me!

Jonathan

Next Journal

The next journal deadline will be Friday 2nd September.

All contributions no matter how small are very welcome. Electronic formats preferred although back of a fag-packet will suffice!

Thanks

Jonathan

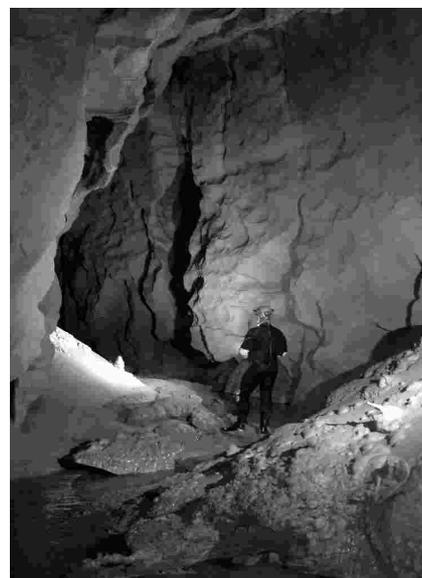
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Cover Picture

Jon Beal in the recently discovered Seoubio 4, Herault.

Full report from the WCC Team who made the find in the next Journal.

Photo: M.Thomas



News Items in Brief

Ridge Mine Closed

The boulders at the entrance have been physically moved by persons unknown to prevent entry.

Kitchen Hot Water

Pete Hann has fitted a new under-sink storage heater for the kitchen. Recycling the old shower unit from the Ladies was a great idea that unfortunately didn't live up to expectations. The new unit is performing much better. Thank you Pete.

CSCC Handbook

After a delay of 10 years the Council of Southern Caving Clubs Handbook and Access guide has just been reprinted. It contains all sorts of useful information, but primarily it has the up to date access information for caves and mines in Southern England. It costs £2 plus 50p p&p from Dave Cooke, contact details inside front cover or from Bat Products.

Members' Guests

It has been noted the some members are turning up with private groups for the weekend unannounced; in conjunction with booked groups this could put undue strain on the facilities. Members are asked to contact the Hut Bookings Officer in advance if they intend to bring more than 1 guest per member with them.

Some future Dates for your Diary

Working Weekends on 9/10th July & 3/4th September.

Main jobs are to fix the fascia boards and tiles to the rear of the Hut. Also to clear and prepare a for a concrete base to the new digging store.

Training Event: Morning of 6th August.

An above ground training session centred on the Club's SRT tower. The training will be tailored to those who attend but basic skills for newer members will be given priority.

Social Event: Afternoon/evening of 6th August.

The traditional Wessex vs BEC cricket match, playing for the Ashes of an old sofa. The match will be held in the 40 Acre Field to be followed by a BBQ (bring your own food) at the Wessex. Contact Les Williams if you want to be on the team.

Scotland/Skye trip

The trip to Scotland and Skye was a success. There were 9 members staying at the Grampian hut for the first week. Some classic caving trips were undertaken thanks must go to Tav and Vern for acting as guides. Other activities included walking, site seeing and drinking.

The second week saw 11 members and 4 non members staying at the Torrin outdoor centre on the Isle of Skye. Again some classic little caving trips were undertaken. On one sortie in the Alt Nan Leat valley we found an old quern stone in the stream bed, this was handed in to the local museum services. We have subsequently been told it is probably late/post medieval and is now part of the Skye museum collection.

Most memorable however was the location of the outdoor centre. Situated on the edge of a sea loch in the village of Torrin, you are in striking distance of the southern end of the Cuillin Ridge with superb views, spectacular sun sets and no midges in early May.

Dave Meredith

The wonders of Goatchurch in 1901

Dave Irwin

It is well known that throughout the last four decades of the 19th century the boys from Sidcot School explored the open caves at Burrington Combe and in the Cheddar Gorge. ¹ Caving eventually became a regular part of the Sidcot School Natural History Society. During the 1920s the boys explored and eventually excavated a number of sites in Burrington Combe in the hope of discovering more cave passage. By 1924 the caving section formally broke away and became the Sidcot School Caving Club. However, about 1946, the Stride brothers were instrumental in changing the societies' name again to that by which they are best remembered today, the SSSS, Sidcot School Speleological Society. Before and after this event the club played a major part in the discovery and exploration of some of the great Mendip cave systems including Longwood Swallet. One of the popular caves visited by the Sidcot boys was Goatchurch Cavern; an easy cycle ride from the village.

Goatchurch Cavern has been recorded in literature from the early years of the 18th century. It was visited by William Beard and William Boyd Dawkins in the search for geological and archaeological specimens and by the end of the 19th century the cave was well-known to members of the Wells Natural History and Archaeological Society, including Herbert Balch. In 1901 the landowner, James T. Gibson, who lived at Langford, opened the cave to the public. This venture did not survive long and after a couple of years it was closed.



The Entrance to Goatchurch Cavern c.1901

Photo. H. Bamforth
From the Pete Rose Collection

The two photographs known to exist from this period were taken by Harry Bamforth one of the important pioneer cave photographers.

In the 1901 summer edition of Boys Own Magazine one I. Allen Bartlett wrote of his experiences of caving on Mendip. On one occasion he visited Goatchurch Cavern. ² Written and published just before Troup, Richardson, Powell and the Hiley brothers made their historic exploration of the Wet Way and the Old Grotto in Swildon's Hole on the 16th and 17th August 1901 Bartlett was fairly free with his account of the descent. Though it outlines the passages quite clearly, the flowery language and exaggerations, that now seem quite comical, was a reasonably serious attempt at describing the exciting experience of exploring a cave - certainly it is not without its charm. Bartlett wrote that ³

... here in the bushes just above our heads is the small dark opening of the Goatchurch cavern. So small, so well hidden is it, that we might easily pass it by unseen, and, having found it, we must perforce crawl in on hands and knees.

We have provided ourselves with several hundred yards of twine, some rope, and plenty of candles - tallow dips, not composite - and, of course, we all have on our very oldest clothes. A bull's-eye lantern, or, failing this, a good bicycle lamp, is always useful to throw a beam of light into the thick darkness of unattainable crevices and crannies.

It is a curious sensation, this passing out of the light and sunshine of a summer day into the tomb-like silence which dwells in the depths of the earth.

As we crawl along the light grows fainter, till we can just see the glimmer of the far-off entrance looking in upon us like the eye of day. ...

We fell a strange reluctance to lose sight of that distant gleam of sun light, and undefined terrors crown in upon us from the shadows. Does some surviving monster of the cave lurk in the darkness ahead ready to pounce upon our defenceless forms? Will cave bear, or cave lion, or the awful sabre-tooth await our advent hundreds of feet below the grass and heather waving in the sunlight upon the steep hill-side? Or does some yet more fearful creature unknown to man keep watch and ward over these silent solitudes? Now, as we proceed, the air grows perceptibly colder, the narrow tunnel slopes steeply westward, whilst boulders, fallen from the roof, impede our progress. Suddenly the passage contracts, and we struggle through a narrow portal into a beautiful stalactite chamber, whose floor slopes at a steep angle, whilst sides and high vaulted roof are covered with a delicate tracery of carbonate of lime, dyed in a hundred hues by the oxides of iron and other minerals which the water has carried down from the rock overhead. Little drops of water gleam like diamonds, rubies, and emeralds, and the solemn "drip, drip" of their falling sounds with a strange acuteness in our ears.

Numerous natural chasms and passages lead from this chamber to right and left, and two vertical holes show darkly at its lower end. The first winds towards the left, and thirty feet from the bottom leads into a long and difficult passage which formerly opened into the second hole. The second one, lying on the left side of the stalactite chamber, close to a huge white stalactite shaped like a barrel, is small and quite perpendicular. Through this we drop, one by one, into a horizontal tunnel which runs at right angles with the first chamber, and is just broad enough to walk in.

We follow this due west, noting vertical fissures opening from it on either side and awaiting exploration ; and after working our way for some distance, we find five

branches leading into chamber partly covered with stalactite and stalagmite, and ... with great masses of limestone. Here walking is very difficult, and barked shins and stunted toes are likely to result.

Two of these chambers lead into another, a much lower cavern, to reach which we lie upon our backs and descend a sort of smooth shoot with a little more celerity than dignity. Here, noise of falling water is distinctly audible, and by placing the ear against the stalagmite-covered wall we hear the rushing sound of the subterranean river as it sweeps along its bidden channel on the other side of the thin rock. One cannot but wonder what one's position would be were it suddenly to break through upon us !

Now we find ourselves in a much larger chamber, and observe that had we slid a little farther our legs would have shot over a narrow chasm, which, like all other deep ones in this neighbourhood, is, of course "bottomless."

One is reminded of that Indian king - Akbar, I think. he was - who, on being told that



Goatchurch Cavern with the Gibson family, c.1901.
The handrail and steps cut in the floor can be seen.

Photo : H. Bamforth
[from the authors' collection].

a certain holy well in his palace grounds was fathomless, was practical though sacrilegious enough to sound it, and found the rock at nine feet from the surface !

At the end of this chamber, which, like all the others, still slopes downwards, is another passage, and a second chamber, large and high, and covered with a perfect chaos of fallen rocks. Out of this, to the right, is a most lovely stalactite chamber, for the, time being all our own.

At its end are two small holes, just large enough for us to squeeze through, provided we are not Falstaffs ; and here again is the insistent sound of rushing water.

Down we slide, pell-mell, into third very large cavern, so lofty that its roof is lost in gloom, and with its floor covered. like the others, with immense blocks of solid rock.

At the lower end of this is a rushing. stream, of quite imposing dimensions after heavy rain, and with a deathly chill in its clear waters. I long ago christened it "The Styx" though no Charon waits in ghostly silence to ferry us across. This stream is, in part, the Twinbrook which we left far away, sinking into its rocky bed, and its tremendous loss of temperature is probably due to the fact that it receives a subterranean tributary somewhere in the depths of the hill, after it has vanished underground.

Various fissures and chambers open out from this great cavern, and down one of them the stream disappears again with a portentous roar. I have tried to follow it, but in vain; and after a lengthy course, through miles of caverns, it reappears in great force at Rickford, where it dances for awhile in the sunlight, and then hurries on its way to the distant sea, refreshing in its course the verdant plains, and bearing carbonate of lime, filched from the Mendip Hills, to clothe the naked corallines, and shellfish, and crustaceae who depend upon it for their impervious armour.

We are now 220 feet below the entrance, and perhaps 500 feet of wild rock are piled above our heads.

If we are quite alone, now is the time to feel the icy grip of that strange phenomenon "cave terror," an emotion against which the stoutest heart. are not always proof.

The excitement of the adventure begins to pass off, now that we have reached the limit of our powers, and suddenly a great longing to be back In the open air comes over us. We begin to hurry back, tumbling over boulders, losing our way, extinguishing our candles, whilst every moment we become more the prey of strange, indefinite fears, which goad us on to yet more desperate action.

The air seems to become too dense for breathing: we gasp; the perspiration streams down our brows.

We take the wrong. turning, and a solid wall of rock confronts us. Horror! Can the roof have fallen, and are we immured within a living tomb? We hear strange sounds behind us, and become convinced that a *thing* is following us. Again we struggle frantically; a distant gleam of light rewards our efforts, and soon we break forth, hatless, dishevelled, and covered with bruises, into the glory of the open air; and never does God's sunshine, and the blue sky, and the face of Nature seem more exquisite than now. This is no fancy statement, but a plain and most unpleasant fact with which every cave-hunter is only too familiar.

In the present case cave terror might be almost justifiable, for on attempting to return by the shoot down which we came so merrily we face an impossibility. It is so narrow, and so smooth, that no holdfast can be found even for the most agile toe, and even if one could use toe and finger there is no room bend elbow or knee.

To wriggle up like a snake is equally beyond us, and we should stand a fair chance of remaining in the cave for ever were it not for a means of escape afforded by the other passage, which, you will remember, we noticed on our journey down. Through

this, with much struggling and spilling of candle-grease, we force our way, and in another ten minutes we are standing breathless but free upon the little terrace which lies at the cave's mouth.

Did time permit I might convey you to another huge cavern at Harptree, where, after descending a shaft for 90 feet, you find yourself hanging suspended in a vast dome. 150 feet across and nearly 100 feet from its roof down to the sanded floor.

But the shades of evening are creeping up the coombe, and the blue mist rises from the level plains, where, free from assault of tiger or hyena, the farmer's flocks feed peacefully. A heron wings its heavy flight above our heads, as it makes its way with many a croak to its distant nest at Brockley; wild ducks are posing on whistling wings to their feeding-ground at the great reservoir of Blagdon; the hum of the mountain bees subsides to a faint murmur; and the great red sun sinks in a blaze of glory beneath the western sea.

Our editor calls "Time," and, obedient to his behest I make my bow, retiring to a certain quiet valley which I call home, and well satisfied if I have aroused in you some enthusiasm for my beloved Mendip Hills.

P.B. Lauder writing in the WCC Journal in 1959 recalled a visit he and his brothers made when it was still officially closed by the gate. ⁴

... Now, we knew better than to venture into what I now know as Aveline's Hole as we had been told that it was a bottomless pit, but the sight of the hole in Goatchurch was too much for us. We felt sure that there must be something worth finding down below ... To get into the cave we climbed over the spiked railings alongside the locked gate, which was quite a squeeze. The rope was secured to the handrail and we set off down. Blindly following our noses led us to a large chamber and we looked around for the fossil bones, robber's loot, etc., that we had hoped for. ... After a bit we saw a notice "This way to Hell" chalked on the wall. This had to be looked into, as I started along a passage, and, after passing a hairpin bend, found myself at full length pushing the smelly lamp in front of me and closely followed by the other two. The passage appeared to go slightly down hill, to be getting small, and to be running into earth rather than rock ... to my relief we soon emerged into a chamber with our passage continuing on a small scale on the far side.

... I carried the clear recollection of the terminal chamber in my mind until I next went down a cave, which was forty odd years later when I set out to guide my two sons down Goatchurch. In contrast to the blundering success of the first trip it several visits before I found the drainpipe, the chalked message having gone; and to my surprise the chamber at the end was quite different from my recollection of it. ...

The Lauder account is not isolated for A. Sercombe Griffin wrote of his adventures in the cave when he was a senior student at Sidcot School in the 1920s. On one of his school caving holidays 'Speleo-Leave' he was adventuring in Goatchurch Cavern in which he was ⁵

... sliding down the Giant's Stairway with the aid of a rope, squirming through the Squeeze, cannoning down the Coal Shoot, crawling along the Canyon, wriggling my way within the Rabbit Burrow, admiring the beauties of the Stalactite Grotto, inscribing the initials of the party on the Visiting Card (a rock 20 feet high and 8 across),

lunching in the Water Chamber, and drinking from the stream that flows through the cavern

Photographs of Goatchurch from the 1920s and 1930s frequently show caving parties posing in front of the defaced limestone blocks in Boulder Chamber. The area had then been vandalised with a vast number of chalk or smoke marked initials both on the 'Visiting Card' and adjacent rocks. A few initials still survive from the inter-war years, 1919-1939. On one occasion during 1944 two young students from Sidcot School deliberately put out their carbide lamps and set about getting out of the cave in the dark. With a few false starts and a couple of unexpected slides they made it to the Back Door, or in their parlance the Trademan's Entrance.⁶

¹ Knight, Francis A., 1908, A History of Sidcot School. A hundred years of West Country Quaker Education. 1808-1908. London : J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, viii + 346pp, maps, illus, frontis

² Known to the local villagers as the Goacher.

³ Bartlett, I Allen, 1901, Caving-hunting in the holidays. Boys Own Paper, Summer edition for 1901, pp.26-29, illus

⁴ Lawder, P.B., 1959, Early days in Goatchurch. WCC Jnl 5(74)239-241(May)

⁵ Griffin, A. Sercombe, c.1926, A Unique School Club. Sidcot's Speleological Society. Boy's Own Paper. 53-54(Summer) illus

⁶ Stanton, William I., 1950, Extracts from a diary of a schoolboy in Mendip. Part 1. Brit Cav 21, 65-72(Winter)

Buddleia Hole

How to dig while sitting in a tree

Phil

With the exception of the eponymous cave, all of the holes in Fairy Cave Quarry have been revealed as a result of quarrying, and quite a few of them there are (or were). Cavers have spent a long time examining the quarry faces for signs of new caves, and it is now extremely unlikely that any more will be found except by chance or long-term digging.

So when on a walk round the quarry with Brian Prewer in 2004 I thought saw an opening high on the north face, I was tempted to dismiss it as either a shadow or as a mere alcove. It was certain to have been looked at in the past - or was it?

The spot in question lies in a part of the quarry lying back from the main line of the face, hidden behind a buddleia bush clinging to a sloping slab below the sheer face leading up to the top of the quarry. Below the bush is another loose ledge sloping up from the left, with an alcove at the end. Under that is a sheer fractured rock face at the foot of which is a steep slope of loose debris leading down to the quarry floor. The steepness and nature of the rock meant that someone with my rock-climbing skills (i.e. none) could only stand at the bottom and speculate.

Then in February 2005 I persuaded Adrian Vanderplank to accompany me to the quarry with ropes and SRT gear. He belayed a rope to a convenient tree at the top of the quarry, and under my guidance abseiled down to and through the bush,



Brian Prewer climbing the ladder to Buddleia Hole

Photo:P.Hendy

sending down a cascade of loose rocks which bounced all over the place and caused me to retreat well out from the face. When he had extricated himself from the bush, Adrian had a look at what lay behind it. He thought I should have a look, so he pulled a ladder up on the rope, tethering it to the bush. As I climbed up I noted that the alcove at the end of the ledge was no more than that, but the slab leading to the hole above was coated with flowstone.

Adrian was sitting in a small opening, about 1m wide and 0.8m high, with a sloping floor of loose stone and gravel. To the right (looking in) was a low crawl, blocked with broken rock which had clearly cracked off from the roof as a result of quarry blasting. Nobody had previously entered the hole, because the fill appeared to be an easy dig. And so it proved. I retreated back to the quarry floor, and after pulling the ladder up out of harms way, Adrian began to pull out the rubble. This slid and bounced all over the place, frequently breaking as it landed and sending fragments in all directions, so I had an interesting twenty minutes dodging debris. I returned, and did a bit of digging myself. It is the only time that I have ever dug a cave while sitting in a tree! By the end of the session, we could look into a low crawl about 3m long, with some flowstone and the stumps of straws visible at the end. Beyond the blockage, the hole appeared to trend downwards, and we thought we could detect a slight outward draught. We could not be sure if the rocks on the floor were supporting the roof. Much of the fill (collapsed roof) was a conglomerate composed of angular pieces of limestone embedded in layered calcite. Further digging would require tools, so we left for the Hunters' and a celebratory pint.

A fortnight later we returned, armed with some tools. Once more Adrian abseiled off the quarry face, and I climbed up on a ladder. We soon succeeded in levering out the remaining rocks, and found that the roof was quite stable. Spoil disposal was easy - we just dragged it to the entrance, and let go! The dig was seen to be in a low bedding plane sloping down from the left, and enlarged to crawl-size by the removal of the roof. The sloping flowstone floor (which continued as the slab below the entrance) was covered in a layer of mud and rotten calcite. We dug it down to solid rock, but although roomy, we were unable to work on hands and knees.

It looked as though the end of the crawl might descent rapidly (the strata here dip steeply to the NNE). The floor here, under the layer of mud and calcite, proved to be a brown moist and crumbly cave earth with occasional stones. By using a short-handled hoe we were able to dig out enough of the floor to encourage us to return. There was indeed a draught, emanating from a narrow ascending rift on the left at the end, leading to a possible cross-passage. The rift was only a few inches wide and not diggable. It did however contain a small white stalagmite.

As we thought that the dig would keep us busy for some time, we decided that easier access was required, so on the third visit, I took the cordless drill and fixed a line of spits. This took some time, as the rock in places was very fractured, but eventually, with Prew's help I succeeded. We could then use a ladder with a twist plate attached to each end, to climb up in the same way that we access Ladder Dig in G.B. Cave. On the next visit, I found I had to place another spit, as there was a large distance between the top bolt and the one below, and Adrian objected to having to stand on the top rung of the ladder to reach it. We also found that by fixing the top bolt well into the entrance, a 7.5m ladder was over a metre short. Tommo and I spent some time building a rock pile at the bottom to allow access to the foot of the ladder, all the while dodging the debris dropped from above by Adrian.

As digging continued, we found that the fill of mud covered a limestone floor which when exposed was seen to slope down ahead and to the right. Just before the pit we were digging, a small seepage came in from the bedding plane on the left. It did not flow into the pit (which kept it dry) but it did mean that we were lying in wet mud to dig. The floor continued under the right hand wall, which was a low mud-choked bedding plane. The rock here was quite cracked and unstable-looking. It was evident that the dig was heading back towards the quarry face, and examination from outside confirmed this. Reluctantly we concluded that we were wasting our time, and decided to abandon the dig.

Buddleia Hole, as we called it, is located at NGR ST 6559 4763, altitude 555m (data from GPS). It lies roughly midway between the entrances to Hillwithy Cave and Hillier's Cave, and we hoped that the dig would connect with one or the other, most likely Hillier's. We measured the dig as being 4m long running to the right of the entrance, with a vertical range of 1m. The spits are still in place, and a 10m ladder is required, plus two spreaders, two Maillons and two twist plates, plus spanner. It is easiest if the last man descends on a rope doubled through the buddleia bush, having first lowered the ladder. The buddleia itself was an integral part of the dig. Although it had effectively hidden the hole (we could not understand why had the hole not been spotted before the bush grew) its' roots grew up into the dig, and it was very firmly anchored. It made a useful belay for rope and ladder, and provided a stance for the digger's assistant when resting or clearing debris from the entrance.

The dig was an interesting exercise over several weeks, and although not leading to anything spectacular, it does add a feature to an otherwise barren part of the quarry.

Library Additions

as of 5th June 2005

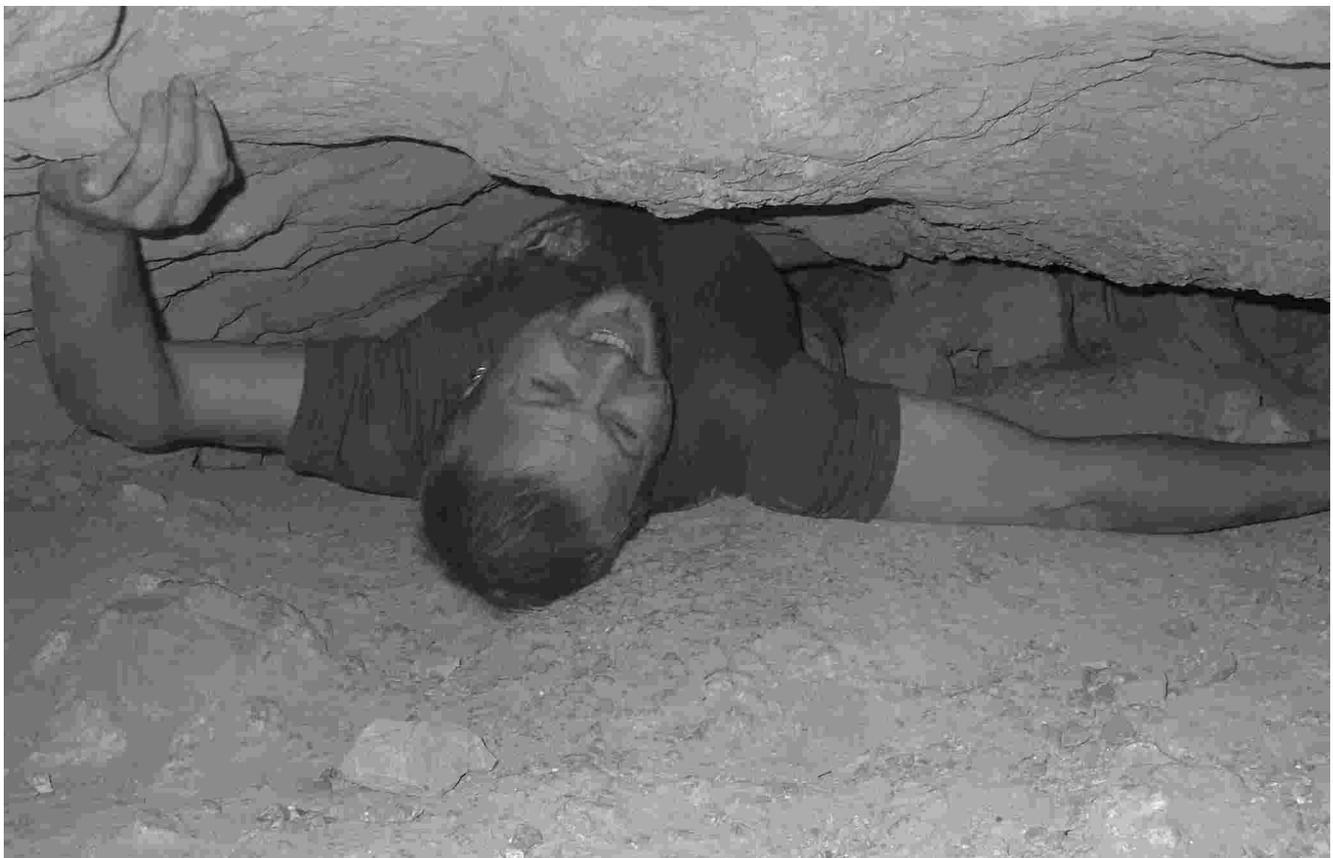
Phil Hendy

Bristol Exploration Club. Belfry Bulletin. 54, 1 (521) (Spr. 05)
(Loxton Sand Quarry caves)
Cave Diving Group N/L/ 155 (Apr 05)
Chelsea Speleological Society N/L. 47, 4,5 (Apr, May 05)
Craven Pothole Club. Record. No. 78 (Apr 05)
Descent 184 (Jun/Jul 05)
Grampian Speleological Group. Bulletin 4th series Vol 2 No. 3 (Mar 05)
Mendip Caving Group. N/L. 322, 323, 324, 325 (Sep 04 - Jan 05)
Mendip Nature Research Committee N/L 104 (Spr. 05)
NSS News 63, 3, 4 (Mar, Apr 05)
Journal of Cave & Karst Studies 67, 1 (Apr 05)
(Archaeology of Kent's Cavern)
New Electronics 37, 9 (11-5-04) (Article on Heyphone. 16-18, also cartoon p. 14)
Regards (Belgium) No. 59 (Mar-Apr 05)
SUI / Irish CRO 'Underground' 63 (Spr. 05)
Westminster S.G. N/L 2005/2 (Apr. 05)
White Rose Pothole Club. N/L 24, 1 (Mar 05)

Pic St Loup, St Martin de Londres, Herault. A massive limestone wedge thrust up from the plateau where we were exploring the Calaven de la Seuobio. A 300m high cliff on one side, a gentler tree covered slope the other, and several hundred meters long, its a favourite spot with the French for a day out and with us having a day off from the adventuring, our plan was to meet Frank Vasseur (top French cave diver) and his family. We would follow a route along the edge of the ridge while Frank and family would take the more usual 'GR' path to meet us at the highest point, marked as usual by a large iron cross. Frank would then show us the entrance to a cave (called the Aven Des Deux Versants) for a small SRT trough trip in shorts and tee-shirts.

The walk along the ridge followed a marked route, easy even with the ropes, SRT kit and lunch we carried. It did give some great views over the plateau with the trail following the very edge of the cliff in many places. With photo opportunities everywhere, Mike took several stunning shots with us limestone hopping up to the top to meet the others. We had a relaxed lunch with Frank, his family and friends then went off to be shown the entrance to the cave....

The entrance was a nice eight foot diameter shaft, rigged with the usual French 'half-in' hangers and homemade pitons, holding a chain for 'pull-throughs'. The only problem was the seven-and-a-half foot diameter boulder wedged in the said opening, leaving a body sized hole in one corner! "Eeze eeze" says Frank "only one meter then open", so its the descender on a cowstail, a double check on its threading with no room to use the other cowstail, and a leap of faith into the rather snug hole, glad that my 'stop' is more of a 'go' on the dry rope as I can't reach the handle, my arms stretched above me while I scrape my way through.



Jon struggles through the squeeze.

Photo: M.Thomas

With a bit of wriggling, out I pop, quickly grabbing the down-rope to enjoy the rest of the 28m pitch. It was then that our intrepid leader, Mr Thomas, shouted "Are you in yet Jon? Only I don't think you're going to fit!!!" Too late now, and with the prospect of getting back through the gap above being rather a non-starter, I dropped to the bottom of the pitch to see Mike, minus SRT kit and helmet, just about getting through a 'way-too-snug-for-me' squeeze-Oh pooh!

A couple of attempts in different positions did nothing to improve the situation, and with Mike on the other side trying not to laugh and with Andy Judd and Laura giggling behind, Mike and myself set-to, bashing the soft rock floor with larger rocks. Bits slowly split off and we managed to open the squeeze up by-oh, at least 1/4inch! The 1/4 inch was enough though, head-first, downslope and on my back, with a huff and a grunt I was though, followed by the barely stooping Andy and Laura, trying their best (and failing miserably) to look concerned.

Thirty feet down the passage and we were perched on the lip of a large opening in the overhanging cliff, looking into nothingness. More rigging on French tatt and we had a pull-through, a 16m free-hanging drop onto a tree covered ledge below way-hay! With the most amazing view, we dropped down to the ledge then climbed back up a narrow ramp on the cliff back to the top of the ridge, reclaimed our kit from the entrance, de-rigged and strolled back down the footpath, accompanied by a multitude of French couples and kids who must of wondered just what the strange, dirt covered, bruised and grazed Englishmen must of been doing? Oh well, back to work finding new cave tomorrow.....

Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir,

We write to correct a number of misunderstandings in Phil Hendy's report on the gating of part of Aveline's Hole.

The cave was not gated by the UBSS and English Nature. The decision to gate the rear part of the cave was taken by English Heritage, on advice from the British Museum and other rock art experts. English Nature, the Mendip Hills AONB Officer, the CSCC C & A Officer and of course, the landowner, were all involved in the consultation process by English Heritage, and for reasons of convenience between the three agencies and the landowner, the gate was paid for by English Nature.

Evidence from other sites, both above and below ground amply demonstrates that rock art faces serious conservation issues and unprotected sites are unfortunately inevitably subject to defacement and other acts of vandalism. (By comparison, the miners' inscriptions in the Lost Cave of Loxton will be protected by a gate and a leadership system for exactly the same reasons.)The part that we played, as individuals, in the decision making process was to make the case for the gate to be placed at the furthest feasible part of the cave and not at the entrance. The UBSS was asked to take responsibility for access to the site, as part of their long relationship with the landowner. Any cavers who wish to visit the (very) small part of the cave that cannot be seen from outside the gate, or to see the engraving, should contact us. Phil states that the engravings in Aveline's Hole are similar to the markings in Goatchurch. This is incorrect. The engravings in Aveline's may well be over 10,000 years old, whereas the marks in Goatchurch, while interesting in their own right, are likely to be no more than a few hundred years old. Dated graffiti of this age can be found in a number of Mendip caves, whereas in the UK the only known engravings of a similar age to those in Aveline's are the Upper Palaeolithic images at Creswell Crags in Derbyshire.

Graham Mullan and Linda Wilson

I have a complaint. There's too much caving going on - too many entries in the Log! In view of this some of the entries relating to digs do not appear in the Log Extracts. However, a separate article will be included giving an update on progress on some of our digs. Log Ed

1.2.05 Bos Swallet Nik Nak, Rich Carey & Ali M

A little 'gem' of a cave - comes highly recommended

5.2.05 Swildon's Swynne-Puke Ali M, Nik Nak, Rich Carey,
A Atkinson & J Morse (UBSS)

Trip to install eco-hangers on 11m & 15m pitches in Swynne-Puke. It is now possible to do this 'round-trip' as a pull-through. Excellent trip - well worth doing.

19.2.05 Swildon's Simon?

Still 'humming' from the morning MRI scan, so thought a trip to Sump 1 was a good idea to see if

- a) I could still remember the way.
- b) I could get out again
- c) Whether I glowed in the dark or not.

20.2.05 Priddy Green Kev & Em

Post last surveying trip. Took in the passage beyond the Dawe-Thompson Traverse. It's worth a visit. Don't have to go back to PGS for a while.

21.2.05 Linley Cavern Fiona C, Clive W, Ben Holden & Jim Lister

An interesting place in the middle of an industrial estate with workmen & lorries running around & there you are kiting up in diving gear! You enter this dive through a muddy hole then a short way down you hit the water. First 2m was zero vis' then clear with huge passages. It seems to go on forever. It finally drops down to -40m. Passage still ongoing.

27.2.05 Hutton/Ludwell Cave Fiona C & Ben H

Tried to dive through the resurgence but found it very tight so dived through the cave entrance. Was unable to continue as it became tight again & would need digging. Not sure if some boulders have come down.

26.2.05 Sell Gill Nik Nak, Christine G, Geoff B, Simon Exley,
Rich Carey, Jude VdP & Helen Rider

Nik Nak, CG & HR down Goblin route - the rest down Fossil Route for an exchange. Helen decided to leave her SRT introduction to another day & turned back at the traverse to wait. Lots of snow on ground - CG & Nik Nak exited to a barrage of snowballs & a collapsing snow bridge. Lunch at Bernie's then to Alum Pot & the Dolly Tubs for an evening trip.

27.2.05 Lancaster to Wretched Rabbit Exchange Same crew as Sell Gil

CG & SE decide to do Wretched Rabbit to Lancaster to save time. We made excellent time, meeting others beyond Minarets, at Oxbow Corner & continued on the high-level route until it became quite unfamiliar & we spent a lot of time looking for the correct way on at Fall Pot. We had actually looked up the correct rift, but discounted it as it looked a dead end & too small. We continued searching & on realising the time, thought that someone would soon be searching for us; at least dropping the pitch for a look. We returned to a well trodden main stream route & made ourselves warm & comfy to wait. Exiting via W Rabbit would have been a very slow process & due to the late time of day we made the right decision.

The others had called the CRO & from the Lancaster pitch took all of 10 mins to find us. We made our way out unassisted, very embarrassed & feeling a little tired & stupid. But hey-ho.....

3.3.05 Swildon's 9 Clive Westlake, Christine G & Simon Exley

Having done diddly-squat for the last 3 days recuperating in hiding we set off on a previously planned trip to 9. Cracking trip - no problems & in good time.

8.3.05 King Mine, Sandford Nik Nak, Ali M, Rich Carey, Jude & Adrian VdP

An evening trip down this newly rediscovered mine in the same region as Sandford Levvy. This had been located by Dave Upperton & also surveyed. The mine starts with a 7.5m ladder pitch to a cross-rift where the left-hand side closes down fairly quickly, the right-hand side continues passing a bird & possibly a badger skeleton. The passage forks & then down to the right slopes into a roomy chamber (almost the same size as the Boulder Chamber in Goatchurch). To the right, upslope, a short passage is lined with calcite crystals while downslope ends in a dry mud choke. The mine is, at the moment, probably like the last miners left it with visible shotholes, pick-marks & candle scorch-marks on the wall. There is a 10 figure grid reference for GPS & the entrance is covered with branches to try & stop small things falling down it.

Dave U has named this King Mine in memory of a family friend Tony King, a helicopter pilot, who died in the second Iraq war. Tony lived in Congresbury.

11 to 13.3.05 Derbyshire Weekend Mr Dave, Mel, Bif, Lou, Simon, Kev, Em

Andy J, Mike, Wayne Sheldon (TSG), Anne (TSG) & Rob Heron

Saturday Peak Cavern - White River Series - Two trips in.

Sunday Kev & Wayne had early start & rigged JH as Wayne had some taping to do in the Tearooms. This led the way for a very lazy trip for Simon, Bif, Em & Rob who were bussed up to JH dropping down the pitches leaving some SRT kit for Kev.

12.3.05 OFD 3 Smiths Armoury M Thomas, John Beal, Andy Judd, N Campbell & S Pierce

Steady trip to OFD 3 with lots of scary bits for everyone - Traverses for Mr Judd, squeezes for me. Very clear in the streamway with resident albino trout & superb erosion in the streamway. My Latin is a bit rusty but I'm sure "traverse" means, "Get me off of here".

18.3.05 Rhino Ken Dawe, Noel Cleave & 'Joe' Candy

Put Joe on the scaffold tower & tried to confuse him utterly by way of intro' to SRT. We failed. In the afternoon, joined by John Hurst, we went to Rhino where Joe proceeded to cope faultlessly & calmly with the left-hand route (rigged by Ken). John rigged the right-hand route bolts for the first time, also very competently but he discovered that our rope was 2m short! Luckily Ken, at the bottom, told John this before John got too far down the pitch. Noel was responsible for this Cock-up, but he took a rope shown as 50m which should have been ample.

19.3.05 Manor Farm Joe Candy, John Hurst & Noel

Cave virtually bone dry - very pungent at the end! Admired the high manure shower from a safe distance. It was a roasting hot day, all quiet, sleepy & peaceful when Kevin "Pyromaniac" Hilton arrived & suggested that we open the BBQ season. Yes well it was a BBQ +++ & mega bonfire as well. All we lacked was an Ox to roast.

19.3.05 Swildon's Judith & Adrian VdP, Pauline G & Rich C

At the 20' had 20 min wait for 7 people coming up. Adrian & Rich went on ahead to Sump 2 to meet Nik Nak to help bring back diving cylinders. Pauline & Jude waited at Sump 1. On

the return we met up with Rich just before the 20'. He lifelined PG up the 20' who used a different technique this time - not seen before by anyone else! Joined the BBQ on return to Upper Pitts.

19.3.05 Priddy Green Sink Ali M, Nik Nak,
Andrew Atkinson & Juliet Morse (both UBSS)

Trip to inspect the Eco- anchors in PGS & the Bladder Pot route. Shit Sump was covered in purple 'blobs' which on closer inspection turned out to be writhing masses of tiny purple worms. Phil (Hendy) would like a sample if you would care to oblige Kev! (I promise that I won't ask you to go through it again). Leeches by Sump 4 seem very hungry today, didn't want to let go of Ali's finger - I think that this one should be called Dracula instead of Laurence.

Many thanks to Andrew Moon & the Tuesday Nighters for replacing the lower 5 gall container at the Mud Sump with a silt trap. This connects directly with the 4" pipe & should make bailing the Mud Sump much faster.

1st April 05 Swan Mine Weston Bros plus

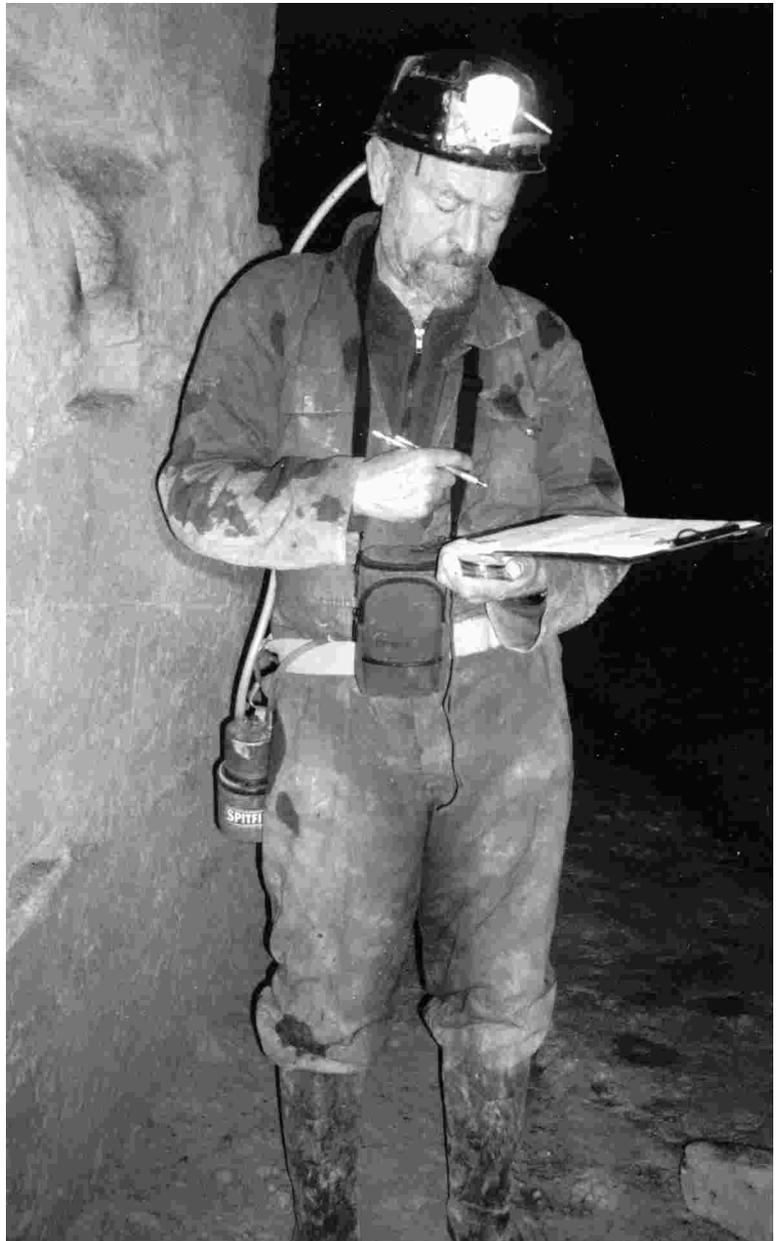
The entire population of Bathampton, Batheaston & nefarious unemployed, MPs, skinheads, teenagers, builders, labourers & students all fully equipped with spray-cans, gloss paint, drills, hammers, shovels etc to Swan Mine to re-arrange the entire workings, cave pearls, footprints, winches, cranes etc also one complete JCB. Nice one Bob.

2.4.05 Swildon's NW Stream
Rich Carey, Ali M, Adrian & Jude
VdP

Tourist trip for Rich & Jude, & for Ali to finish the description of Heaven & Hell Aven. Also for Adrian to leech hunt for Phil Hendy. Trip got off to a good start with 4 laurences found in the inlet stream that feeds Wet Ears Squeeze. During this trip Rich had fears confirmed that caving with the Pink & fluffy Team wrecks caving gear (i.e. the demise if his relatively new wet-suit). It was a good job (for the rest of us) that he was wearing caving shreddies & Heaven & Hell Aven has now been renamed 'Shredded Arse Aven'.

5.4.05 The 'Unlost' Cave of Loxton
Rich Carey, Nik Nak, Geoff Ballard,
Adrian & Jude VdP, Ali M &
Nick & Nick (BEC)

Excellent trip thanks to the two Nicks.



Garth Weston Surveying Swan Mine

Photo. P. Weston

Very interesting cave/mine & well worth a visit, particularly for the tally marks, the pieces of pipe & the graffiti.

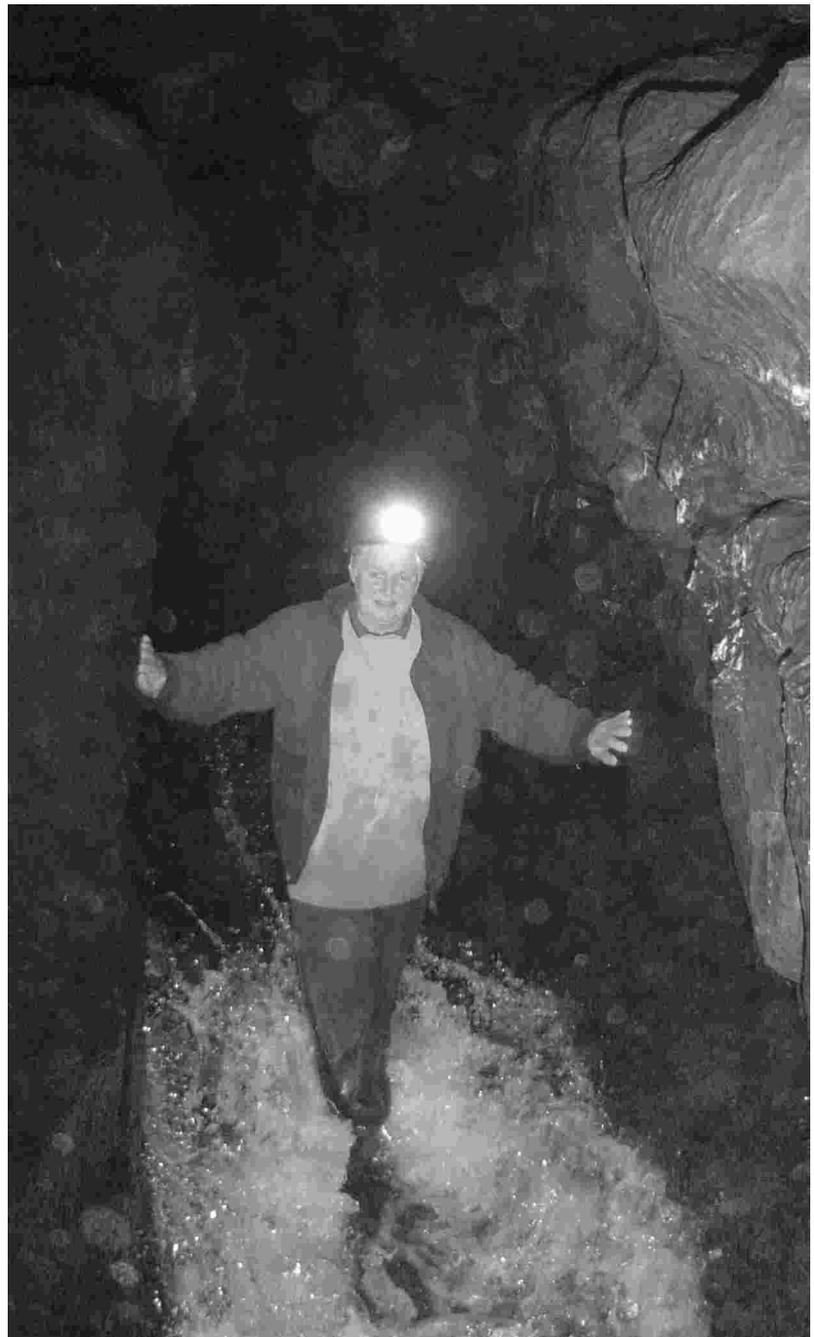
8.4.05 GB Cavern Mike Thomas, Jon Beal, Laura Trowbridge
Went to find the big stuff beyond Ladder Dig. 33.33% of us did not fit!

9.4.05 Wookey Hole Mike Thomas, Jon Beal & Andy Judd
Two dives today for MT & JB, one for AJ. Over the last few weeks a platform has been built in Edmund's Rift near 22. Today seven scaffold planks were dived in with a little difficulty. The platform is near completion & then the fun can start. Re-climbing Edmund's Rift to get back into the horizontal passage at the top. This has two potential dig sites for Geoff Ballard & Nik Nak. Although I'm not sure if we have told them!

12.4.05 Sandford Levvy
Pauline, Nik Nak, Ali M, Jude
VdP & Rich Carey
The latter 4 had not been here before. May be a bit too tame for the Pink & Fluffies but they ventured up the excavated upward extensions - and explored for an hour before returning to explore the two cross rifts.

16.4.05 Priddy Green Sink Kev & Emsy
Well OK, perhaps one more trip. This time to survey Main's & Great Aven. Have now surveyed it all (we hope!).

29.4.05 to 2.5.05 Penderyn
Weekend
Sat 30th April Cwm Dwr - Top
Entrance Nik Nak, Ann VdP
& Noel Cleave.
Nik Nak wanted to get the Cwm Dwr entrance fixed in his mind, which meant, in effect, map-reading his way to Piccadilly, although we did get some useful hints from SWCC members first. He also wanted to consolidate his knowledge of the exit routing from the Maypole series. Noel had never been into Cwm Dwr and wanted to, but knew the exit to the top entrance well, so the attractions of the through trip were complementary. Ann came along to add some civilisation, tone and class to the proceedings. Nik Nak's map reading was fault-



Brenda Prewer in the OFD1 Streamway

Photo. B. Prewer

less. The only error came from Noel leading into the boulder ruckle at the top on the left. Since the correct route starts at the bottom on the right this was a classic (but not rare) example of Cleave fallibility. 15 minutes of thrutching and cursing ensued. After Piccadilly, however, there was a genuine moment of confusion at the main stream. Everything looked completely unfamiliar. It finally dawned on us that the normally dry flood bypass had a foot of floodwater cascading down it and that this was going to be one seriously sporting trip upstream. In fact it was magnificent. All the inlets pummelled us as we went under them. Marble Showers was a maelstrom of spray which made looking up difficult, and even Noel's searchlight barely showed the inlets through their waterfalls. The noise was stunning. Because of the water depth, turbulence and colour, it was much, much harder to find ones footing or stay out of the deeper water, so it was also appreciably colder and more tiring. The whirlpool pot presented a major problem, but after several failures, Noel floundered out and could then use a few metres of safety lifeline to help Nik Nak and Ann to get across more elegantly. Although the Maypole Inlet was cascading down the ladder, from there on upwards it was more normal, more peaceful and less exciting. But not before a final mini-drama; Ann peeled off under the impact of the Maypole waterfall. The lifeline again proved its worth as Nik Nak held her professionally and the slight swing only resulted in a barked shin and a last adrenaline rush. All in all a superb trip. 6 ½ hours of fun and excitement

Sun 1st May OFD 1 Phil Hendy, Brian & Brenda Prewer, Ann VdP & Noel

This was intended to be a gentle Sunday outing after the Saturday's more serious trip, and so it proved. The SWCC looked like a Wessex AGM by mid-morning on Sunday. All the usual suspects were on parade and we even flushed Spanish Pat out of hiding (in the SWCC....!). Ann and Noel volunteered to carry cylinders into Dip Sump for the divers, but when the great cylinder distribution took place, their offer proved to be superfluous as there was ample Sherpa muscle amongst the divers involved. So flushed with self-righteous virtue, but otherwise unladen, Ann and Noel walked down to OFD1, where they were shortly afterwards joined by the aforementioned Wessex AGM. We draw a discreet veil over the subject of leaders (there were enough) and numbers at this point. Westlake Sahib and his cohort disappeared into the further reaches on a Through Trip, Jonathan and his divers followed, including Geoff Ballard, whose cylinders were the new (suspiciously) ultra-lightweight kind. Finally Phil, Brian, Brenda, Ann and Noel ventured underground. At this stage it should be emphasised that Brenda doesn't "Do" caving (other than the occasional Ali induced appearance in Goatchurch treasure hunts). Now, with Brian to advise her, there was no real excuse for her turnout, but a pair of baggy track-suit trousers was, frankly, not what we of the active Wessex expect to see on our members when caving, in public, overseas. And Brian hadn't even bothered to put on a tie. A perfectly acceptable Vyella shirt and Wessex badged sweatshirt, but tie-less. Well, no point in dwelling on the subject and, as it happens, I don't think that they were seen by any of the natives.

However, apart from the sartorial foxes pox, Brenda was fantastic. Something seems to have clicked, caving-wise, and having reached the main OFD streamway, she set out upstream with serious determination, only desisting when the combination of deep water, stature enchallengement and baggy trousers, allowed wisdom and common sense to exert some influence.

Phil, Ann and Noel wandered upstream in water levels so low that Saturday's flood was hard to imagine. The odd photo pause allowed us to arrive at Hush Sump just too late to help hand cylinders through the boulders, so we pressed on to Dip Sump. 10 minutes or so later we switched off our lights to enjoy the dramatic underwater arrival of Jonathan from downstream; with the news that Geoff Ballard hadn't carried in quite the weight of air that he needed....! The entertainment over, Phil, Ann and Noel departed downstream to complete a delightful Sunday bibble. Safely out, Ann and Noel refused to allow Phil to use his mobile to summon the taxi. Mistake. As we joined the road after the long track up, the endlessly and ever-kindly Prewer Taxi Service appeared on a rescue mission. Noel.

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Club Diary

June	
17-19th	Forest 2005 (Forest of Dean Symposium)
July	
1st-3rd	BCRC Cave Rescue Conference
9th-10th	Working Weekend
23rd	Committee Meeting
23-24th	Mendip Meet. SRT Training & Hunters Hole
30th	Club Rescue Practice
August	
6th	SRT Training- Morning. Cricket Match- Afternoon
27, 28, 29th	North Wales meet inc. Milwar Tunnel Tip
September	
3rd-4th	Working Weekend
10th-11th	Mendip Meet
23rd-25th	Hidden Earth 2005
October	
8th-9th	Yorkshire Meet. Notts Potts & Rumbling Hole
For further details on any club meets contact Dave Meredith: melndave26@hotmail.com	

Wessex Rescue Practice

This years rescue practice has been planned for the 30th July, however, to date I have received little or no indication that anyone plans to attend. Turnout to the last two practices has been in single figures and if this is to be repeated this year then my planned activity will be unworkable.

Would anyone planning on attending the practice on the 30th please let me know so I can make plans accordingly. We will need at least 12-15 active cavers to attend to make the day worthwhile otherwise I will have to consider cancelling the event.

Thanks

Jonathan.

editor@wessex-cave-club.org