



Journal of the Wessex Cave Club

Vol. 29. No. 305
June 2007



The Traverse of the Jean Bernard system
Mak, Simon, (Our host... Jean Moatti) Bean, Mark, Tav.
Just Rewards for the Jean Bernard traverse. Photo: Mak

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With three issues under my belt, Journal production seems to be settling down to a dull roar, with a more-or-less standardised layout and headings. The last few days before publication are a rush. There has to be an absolute cut-off date for inclusions, particularly for late-breaking "Club News", and it is all too tempting to extend it - which dictates a total revamp of all the succeeding pages (Please would you have your accidents, or make your main discoveries, before the start of a publication month.....) I am hugely grateful that so many members are contributing major articles, and sending me their own log-book entries. I am equally grateful for the massive response to my requests for photographs, but these come with two problems. The first is that many lose excessive quality on conversion to monochrome (A colour journal would be too costly). The second is that the Journal can only contain a tiny fraction of your contributions. The Journal benefits from photographs. A picture may not be worth 1,000 words, but it certainly brings an article to life, and gives me valuable leeway in my layouts. In an ideal world all the published photos. would be directly associated with articles or log entries in the Journal. I wish. I wish.

Having cajoled and coerced the club's known photographers, I am loth not to publish their contributions. There are two solutions. One is for you to be ultra-selective about your offerings, and only send me the crème-de-la-crème. The other is for me to produce a DVD or CD as a part of the Christmas Journal issue, containing, in effect, the Club year in photos.

This issue sees a welcome letter from Pete Bentley in Hong Kong, his "Blast from the Past", and a similarly welcome article from our oldest member, Mac McMillan

Evening chat in the Club suggests that our older members have many entertaining tales to tell: embellished by time maybe, or even Apocryphal, but they could make good reading.

Following on my query about publishing all the log book entries, I am persuaded that I should only include selected extractions. In practice this has meant just excluding the regular and repeated "Bread-and-butter" trips. In no particular order of priority I'll aim to include all digging reports, major dramas, out-of-area reports, those featuring new members or introductory trips (particularly with family members), trips to rarely visited or unusual series, narratives enhanced by photographs..... which almost brings me back to where I started, but for future journals I'll try to include a potted summary of the omitted routine trips.

**Fire Safe.** Thanks to Simon Richardson, we now have a fire safe for storing valuable club documents.

**Eco Anchors.** Following the recent failure of an anchor in Rhino Rift, which resulted in the closure of that cave and others, it now appears that the testing procedure was too harsh. The caves have now been re-opened.

There is a full, if now outdated, account in issue 196 of "Descent"

**Fairy Cave Quarry** was used recently for a small 'rave'. Although the Police were called, there were no arrests, and remarkable little damage.

#### **Police investigation.**

This intriguing email arrived in my in-tray from the Avon and Somerset Constabulary:

Quote:

"On 1st May 2007 police conducted a search warrant at an address in Weston-super-Mare. Among the items seized was a quantity of material belong to your club. There were newsletters from 1993 but more interesting were the plans for Gotchurch Cavern, Swildons Hole, Eastwater Cavern, Stoke Lane Slocker, Hunters Hole etc. These were drawn on the other side of old blue prints that started life as engineering plans for Stothert's engineering of Bath. It all seemed a bit unusual for the type of person living at the address and we wondered if they were the legitimate owners of the property and that's why we seized it".

So I phoned the Officer concerned and was able to confirm to him that the individual in question was not nor had been a member of the Wessex. The Officer suspects these items were stolen. So does anyone recognise the items? Have you had a whole bunch of surveys stolen? If so, please let me know. **Phil Upper Pitts Kitchen**

One new oven/hob cooker, and one new 4 burner hob unit. has been installed.

#### **The Great P hanger nightmare is over.....**

Statement from the Equipment & Techniques Committee, concerning Rhino Rift:

**"Following a report of loss of resin from an anchor in Rhino Rift, an investigation was put in hand by the Equipment Committee.**

**Precautionary measures were taken where appropriate to restrict access to certain sites pending a full investigation of the problem.**

**As a result of this investigation the Equipment Committee have concluded that there is not a safety issue in the caves concerned.**

**The Equipment Committee have, however, identified some failings in the Eco Anchor program procedures and have agreed changes which are intended to prevent these problems re-occurring.**

**It was also agreed that the disadvantages of using a puller as part of routine testing outweigh the advantages and as a result the Equipment Committee no longer recommend that Eco Anchors be pulled as part of routine testing."**

Andy Pryke

Chairman Equipment & Techniques Committee

British Caving Association

19/05/07

#### **And most of our caves have been re-opened.**

The CCC controlling rhino and Ladder dig restriction responded immediately by opening Ladder dig and putting in place a bolt replacement program (hopefully completed in the next few weeks due to placer commitments)...which will result in Rhino being opened in the fairly near future....(I understand that it's more of a poor rock issue here)

The old CSCC CAndA officer restored normal access to Priddy green sink, and the new one restored access to Hunters Hole..

Hurray and thanks to all involved....

**An update on our professional casualty.** It transpired that Vern had a very rare fracture /dislocation of the right foot - so much so that orthopaedic surgeons were taking photos as they'd only ever read about it, never seen it for real! (I suppose if you're going to do something, you may as well do it properly). Vern's currently 'plastered'. Left foot/ankle all OK, just bruised so sounds like a lucky escape, especially considering his previous form.

#### **Journal Delay**

The next (August) Journal will be delayed. The PSM trip intervenes awkwardly in the dates, and it means that notices etc. for the AGM can be included with it.

#### **Drying Room**

The drying room is causing some problems.

The first is that it is eating excessive electricity, partly because people are turning the thermostat right up. The dehumidifier works well at a much lower temperature, so please resist the temptation to increase it beyond 22°C. It will be secured from unauthorised adjustment in the near future.

The second is that people are (a) too casual about leaving their clothes there for too long and (b) too casual about taking other people's dry kit out and simply dumping it on the changing room floor. The drying room is not a wardrobe. There are lockers for dry clothes. Please try and remove your kit when it's dry. If the drying room is too full of dry clothes when you need it, then treat the clothes you move as carefully as if they were your own. Hang then on one of the pegs, or put them neatly onto the shelving by the back door.

#### **SWCC**

To celebrate our formal incorporation as a "Kindred Club", it is planned to hold a party at Penwyllt - nosh, booze, cave - the first weekend in November. The BEC should be sharing the celebration as also a "Kindred Club". Sounds like a good one not to miss.

#### **Beaver Teeth**

"Eagle Eyes" Hendy has adjusted his focus downwards from Mammoth and can now spot Beaver teeth in the Templeton Spoil. Next journal Vole teeth..... ?

#### **Rope Test Rig**

Tommo's new toy is being installed by the kitchen back door. It looks seriously impressive, and sounds it, too, when the drop-weight hits the ground. Please do not use it for hanging baskets, laundry or drying smalls or Warmbacs.

The Club is steering a good direction, the squalls encountered of some months ago are changing to fairer weather, although there appears to be light showers in the East these should not change an otherwise calmer sea. There is a healthy stream of new young crew joining up and those that have been with us for these past years have not jumped overboard. All in all a very healthy picture and the barometer indicates there are many more highs to come. The bilges seem to be working ok, the lower and upper decks fore and aft are watertight and being upgraded and with the new map and book room plans progressing. These things will serve us well and long into the future. Club future events are posted in the log, all members are welcome. With various club sorties to the underworld planned, we wish everyone a successful, wonderful and adventurously safe summer.

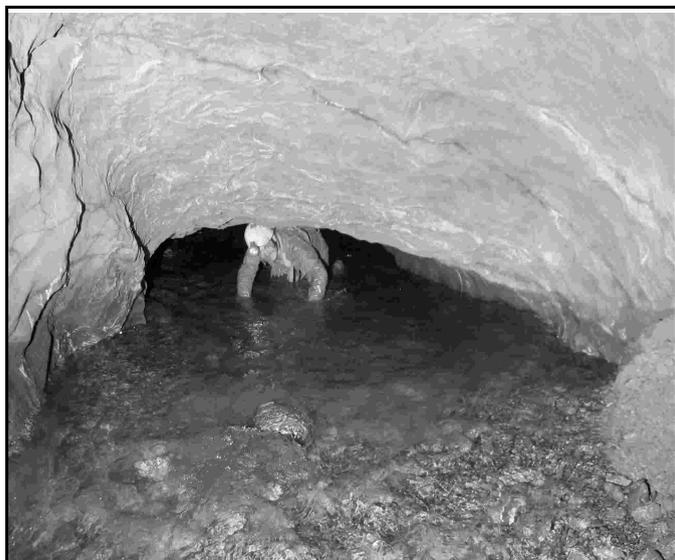
Best wishes to you all **Tuska**

## New Members

Recent new memberships are considerably up, but with some still to be ratified we have held over the official Journal "Welcome" until the August edition.

## **Le Gouffre Jean Bernard, Haute Savoie, France**

August 2006



Tav in the second pseudo-siphon

Photo: Mac

The Gouffre Jean Bernard (JB) is situated near Samoens in the Haute Savoie region of France, about an hour's drive from Geneva. The cave reaches a depth of -1602m from the highest entrance and has an overall length of approx 21km. Trips to the lower regions of the cave are only possible in winter months due to high summer water levels caused by seasonal glacial melting. However, a large part of the cave is still accessible during the summer and with several entrances into the system throughout its length and depth, numerous through trips are possible.

Our trip had two main aims:

To attempt a through trip from one of the higher-level entrances, B22, to the lowest entrance V4. This trip would take in a large section of the upper and middle part of the cave, including the main streamway, two siphons (or bypasses depending on conditions) and several kilometres of classic French cave. To see how far down into the lower section of cave

from the V4 entrance we could get before being washed away!

The original plan to wild camp near the V4 entrance was (thankfully) ditched on finding that the Refuge du Folly, situated midway between the car park and the top entrance (1200mtrs vertically apart), and near to the V4 entrance, had vacancies and served cold beer ! So with our space reserved we were on our way.

## **Week One.**



Simon & Mark in the Rivere aux Excentriques.

Photo: Mak.

Bean and I arrived a week before the rest of the team and having lugged all the ropes, carbide and caving kit up to the refuge we spent the next few days reconnoitring the various entrances and carrying out some preparatory works, comprising of :

Locating the V4 and V11 entrances, not easy in near blizzard conditions!

Route find from the V4 entrance to the siphons and siphon bypasses (including the most important one not shown on the

survey or mentioned in any description of the cave, that a French caving contact had told me about ) checking that the necessary fixed hand lines were in place and usable They were!

Drinking all the Refuges supply of Beer

With the tasks completed we had a few days to play with so we did a V11 to V4 through trip, which would help us with some route finding on the main through trip (A brief note is needed here When the local cavers advise a hand line for the 30mtr ice toboggan in the entrance, with a 10mtr blind pit at the bottom, take one! I trusted Bean and once again was right in it on sheet ice at a 45deg angle relying on pebbles frozen in the ice, and Beans head, to stop my slide into doom!) Once in, this through trip is a great introduction to the mid part of the cave and definitely helped our understanding of the system.

The next day we went downstream from the V4 entrance to see just how far we could get. This was a superb section of cave with great pitches, phreatic ramps and a thundering streamway. All too soon, however, we reached an impasse where too much water halted progress.

On our day off, if you can call it that, we went for a walk up to the glacial lake, about 600mtrs higher up the mountain, and after a great day's stumping about in the fresh snow returned to the refuge red faced and snow-blind! (Well you don't expect snow in August!)

## Week Two

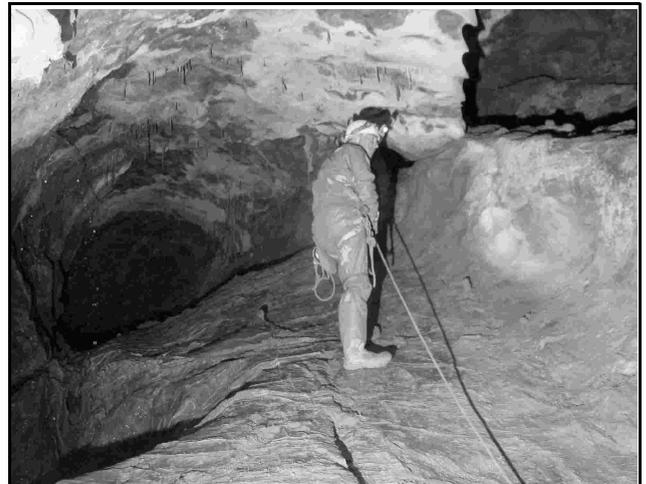


Simon & Bean in the Rivère de la Gadoue.  
Photo: Mak

The rest of the team, comprising Tav, Mak and Simon arrived and after a couple of introductory trips to the lower entrance, and a walk to locate the high level B22 entrance we were ready for the big through trip.

Having previously been given the confirmation, by a visiting Speleo Club Vulcain member that the through trip was rigged with the all-important fixed ropes on the up pitches we were off. Bean dropped the entrance pitch, followed by myself and the others. With the rope pulled down there was no going back now. Ahead I could hear Bean thrutching and cursing and then he uttered my most feared phrase You won't like that boy . I didn't !! We knew from the guidebook that there used to be a squeeze in the entrance series until it had been removed with explosives. All I can say is that they didn't do a very good job of it! I eventually passed the short squeeze with lots of encouragement from some ex-friends and some more hands-on assistance from Bean!.

There quickly followed a further longer squeeze, not quite as tight, but opening straight on to a 30mtr pitch!



Mark in the Gallerie de l'Erreur.  
Photo: Mak

Passing the squeeze involved clipping a cowstail into a loop of rope running through the squeeze and then pushing yourself backwards out into the abyss behind you, where you then had plenty of room to attach your descender. The fixed rope down this pitch had seen better days, a fact you only discovered two thirds down the pitch when passing a section worn through to the core ! Safely down this and the following pitches, we soon arrived at Les Champs Elysees, a fossil main trunk passage. There followed hours of stumping, dodgy rope climbs, rope rubbing pitches, superb helectite lined stream passage, classic French caving and some mud for good measure, before we eventually arrived at a point we recognised from our earlier forays. Route finding had been fine in the most part, particularly as at every major junction in typical French style there was a small metal route marker !

Avoiding the very wet first siphon via the rather muddy bypass, we soon arrived at the second siphon, which we were pleased to see, was low enough to pass. The route out from here to the V4 entrance is via a series of huge steeply ascending phreatic tunnels, fortunately rigged with fixed but very muddy handlines, intermixed with a few short pitches. We emerged to Sunshine and were soon back at the refuge having a well-deserved cold

beer or three.

In closing, I would comment that the JB is well worth a visit. A classic French cave in a wonderful setting. I cannot recommend the Refuge du Folly highly enough. The staff were fantastic and we were warmly received and cared for, the food was superb and to cap it all Jean Moatti, the Refuge manager, has his own micro brewery in the kitchen, where strange drinks were sampled on more than one occasion. Go there !! **Mark**

## TEMPLETON UPDATE

Pressure of work has kept me away from the dig until recently, but the situation there has been more of the same. The engine on the small generator gave up the will to live, but Jim Young has replaced it on an extended chassis. The dumper, not wishing to



be left out, has started to jam in reverse. It does not take long to strip it down and re-align the selector, but it can slow down the proceedings. At long last, the pumping problem has been solved, by the use of three submersible pumps which lift water to the surface in three stages. They run about 36 litres per minute, which currently allows digging to commence about an hour after starting them up. At Christmas, Nigel Taylor set off a camouflet charge at the end of a long scaffold pole driven into the mud near the south end. It was hoped that this would open up a drain hole to avoid the necessity to pump, but this was not to be. As a consequence, digging has been slow, but progress has been made, and the dig was recently measured to 172ft depth to water (which is, of course, a variable level). The situation at the bottom is that at the south end, the cave goes in about six feet, ending in a wall and possible rock (hopefully not part of the

### The team :

**Mark Helmore(Mark)**

**Mark Easterling(Bea)**

**Mark Kellaway(Mak)**

**Simon Richardson(Simon)**

**Robin Taviner(Tav)**

wall) which will have to be blasted. It is thought that the water tends to drain away slowly in this area. This short 'passage' has been dug to be the deepest part of the shaft, allowing us to place the lowest pump in a 'sump'. The main part of the bottom,

leading towards the north rift, can then be dug. The fill here is glutinous clay, with stones. Because the skip is now a good twelve feet above the bottom, a hand winch has been bolted to the wall, and spoil is lifted to the skip in buckets. On a good night, three skips can be raised.

The last night of digging (3 skips) was Monday 21st May. On Wednesday, we found that the top winch had been removed, and a JCB was

excavating the area where it stood. It was a lovely warm evening, and was a great spectator event. Two dumpers were kept running in shifts to clear the spoil. The excavation will allow the dumper to be parked under an extended skip run.

When completed, a new hydraulic winch, powered by taking the drive off the back axle of a car donated by Dave Turner, will take enough cable to allow us to reach the bottom without a changeover - and go even deeper. Work has already started on the steelwork, and a retaining wall around the pit will be built to prevent the sides from collapsing.

When this is completed, the plan is to blast the wall at the bottom of the shaft to allow the skip to run even further down the rails. A new steel platform will be installed, then digging can recommence. It is possible that a fourth pump will have to be

added to the system, as it is currently close to its limit when pumping the last few feet of water.

Searches of spoil from the heap (made easier after washing by the rain) have led to finds of more fragments of mammoth tooth, and some interesting curved teeth which show signs of continual growth. The theory is that they are beaver incisors, which raises some questions. They seem to be in association with the

## **Easter Club Meet at the NPC**

Went up to Yorkshire on the Wednesday evening as both Jo and I had Thursday off work. Luckily so did Mark and Bean so whilst Jo went off on a hard 45 mile cycle (roadbike) with lots of arrows up (and down) marked on her map, Mark Bean and I strolled up to Stream passage with helium bags on our backs - or at least I wish we had - heavy packs and a route march up, still stream is a fantastic trip - I think one of the better ways into GG - three cracking pitches and a shortish stoop and crawl to get to main chamber - don't listen to Bean if he says there is an easy way back making a short round trip! Shocked Out with plenty of time and daylight left so we decided to up the pace on the way back - just short of running. Help! **Mak**

Most people started appearing that evening after battling the traffic. Friday was set as an early start to allow for a restful afternoon before the big walk on Saturday, we all got up at 7:00 and apart from Ting-Tong, Bif and Rich who had arrived to late to be told about the early start we were all ready to go at 8:00, so I woke them five minutes before we all set off! **Mak**

Later Simon, John Hurst, Noel, Jo Williams and Tilly, Dr Strangelove (aka Tin-Tong) and Biff joined the early arrivals. We were joined by Richard Marlow (BEC) and Flip-Flop Dave and his wife, Anna. Flip-Flop has previous "Form" - a gift for turning up out of the blue, just in time to join us on some worthwhile outing. He's ex Shepton and recently returned from a couple of years working in China. Plainly he should soon be a member of the Wessex! Most of us travelled up on the Thursday in an attempt to beat the lemming rush. The attempt was a failure. The journeys were grim for us, and for the other million or so motorists between Mendip and Yorkshire. We seemed to have the NPC virtually to ourselves. **Noel**

Mark, Bean and I went in Diccan with Bean rigging, and Simon, Jo W, John and Noel going in dolly tubs with Simold rigging, although Noel got to the top of the first pitch in dolly tubs to realise he had left his descender back at the car. Embarrassed he went back with directions to the obvious rock. Diccan was relatively dry so we were at the bottom quite quickly and arrived at pretty much the same time as the others. We waited some time for Noel to catch up but decided to carry on with the exchange and start de-rigging both routes. Turns out it took him an hour to find the car keys by which time he gave up on the trip - he might have been able to at least go down Diccan as the others finally arrived but couldn't wake him

mammoth teeth.

So, the summer season at Templeton looks like being one of fresh air and construction work. Prospects still look good, but it will be a few months before we can get to the bottom and start digging again in earnest. **Phil Hendy**

from his snooze in the car! Shocked they gave up and went down Diccan without him but were too late to exchange so had to come back out of Diccan. All back to Ingleton for chip butties and tea and cake to carbo - load for the Saturday. **Mak**

**Friday April 6 2007** was beautiful and we made an early start to claim first rigging rights in Alum and Diccan. Simon rigged Long Churn and the Dolly Tubs for John, Jo and Noel. Bean, Mark and Mak rigged Diccan for the exchange. Jo took Tilly for a scamper around Alum, where they were joined after a few hours by Noel. Difficult to draw a discreet veil over this. Noel went to clip onto the first pitch and discovered that his descender was still in John's car. Common sense and rope kindness dictated a quick recovery trip. John described the location of his car keys as being under a stone in front of the car. Deafness and water noises converted 15 feet in to 150 feet in front..... So Noel spent an interesting 1 ½ hours inventing the new sport of "Stone Turning and Pebble Lifting" Having previously discovered that the first Dolly Tub is still neck deep (some 45 years after first doing so), he got chilled. With almost 2 hours in arrears, he decided that discretion ruled, so changed into warm dry and went to sleep in the car. Where, shortly



**The final peak, Ingleborough.**

afterwards, Biff, Dr. Strangelove and Richard observed him. He slept through all their attempts to wake him, but finally, warm and pissed off with himself, walked back to Diccan to join Jo and Tilly waiting for emerging cavers. In due course they all

emerged with tales of derring-do, but Biff and Co had left it just too late for the exchange, as Bean and Co had derigged the bottom Dolly Tubs pitch. **Noel**

**Saturday April 7 2007** dawned clear and beautiful with a cool wind. 12 of us set out on the Three Peaks Walk. We left a couple of cars at Ribbleshead and started our walk in Horton at 0750. The crocodile consisted of Simon, Mark, Bean, Mak and Jo, John, Noel, Jo W and Tilly, Flip-Flop and Anna, Tommo and Biff. Mark did a great job of organising the cars and getting us out so early. Difficult to imagine more perfect walking conditions. Ten days drought had dried the peat, so apart from some minor bog hoppings, it was ideal underfoot. After Penyghent and the long hike across to Ribbleshead we stopped for lunch at the snack-waggon there, where Tilly persuaded Jo to call it a day, and John and Tommo joined them. Tilly on legs about a centimetre long must have done 20 miles already as she galloped from end to end of the crocodile, chased wagtails and explored off-path. The remainder ticked off Whernside with Simon in overdrive top before a welcome pint stop at the Hill Inn, where John and Tommo appeared on schedule. Biff finally saw some sense, and, having had no exercise worthy of the word for 10 months, left before he crippled himself. Anna also called it a day. Hyper-fit Flip-Flop merely took the brakes off. Simon was going still faster and faster. My legs lost their spring. Seven of us eventually topped Ingleborough for our third peak and looked down towards Horton for the hike home. Back at the cars, Simon consulted his GPS, announced 23 and 3/4 miles, instead

of the promised 25, and suggested a brisk addendum to the end of Horton and back. Guess what? No takers. It was 1800 We'd stopped for almost exactly 2 hours on the way. We deserved a decent nosh, so we went up to the Railway Inn at Ribbleshead, where, unbelievably, they don't accept credit cards, and it didn't matter anyway because on Easter Saturday..... the kitchen was closed! We finally ate at the New Inn at Clapham.

**Sunday April 8 2007** saw us up and about, remarkably supple and moving well. Hmmm. Up to a point, the point being where we started to walk uphill from the Kingsdale road to the Swinsto entrance. Variously we discovered that our legs didn't do uphill properly. Some of us, myself to name but a few, had aged considerably overnight. As Mak put it: "The walk up to Swinsto is very, very scenic - we just had to stop every few paces just to admire it (nothing at all to do with tired aching legs)". But eventually a reasonable quorum assembled at Swinsto: Simon, Mark, Bean, Mak, John, Biff, Richard and Noel. In very dry conditions we had a most enjoyable "Pull-through" to the Valley entrance. The final climb into the roof tube passage has a fixed rope with some iffy foot-loops, and Bean can climb it anyway, so we hadn't needed to pre-rig this. All in all, the perfect day's caving as a follow-on from the long Saturday walk.

**Monday** saw a mass bail-out to avoid the lemmings homebound. This was successful and we all had easy drives home. One way and another it had been a cracking good club meet. **Noel**

## From the Log Book & the Wessex Website

Tuesday April 3 2007 Swildons Carmen, Rich Carey, Diana Koether

An American lass (Diana Koether) contacted the Wessex (as it had been recommended to her by a friend in California) with a view to doing a bit of caving in the UK during her visit. Rich Carey and I were duly able to oblige.

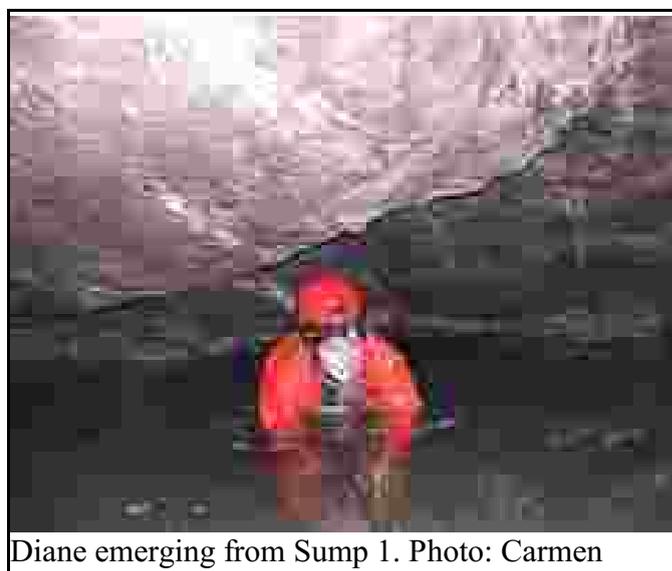
On the morning of the trip, in a mad panic I had to call on the services of Mr Sparrow to provide some kit, I had no idea as to the size of said lass, so a bit of planning may have been needed, (just in case a USA size Max was needed) To my relief it wasn't, but Andy was able to provide a helmet and light which I thought she might find a bit useful.....

1 st stop the Hunters for Lunch. She got to meet a sample of the regular locals...and loved the veg korma (without fries to go!!) Andy met us, provided the kit ( he handed me a belay belt with a withering look that said "I bet you've no intention of lifeling her on the 20...."

No words needed to be spoken, he was right, so with a heavy heart full of guilt I did the adult thing and took a lifeline...and used it!!)

She done a fair bit of caving in the states but not a sump before so off we went...to sump 1

We returned to the wessex where Roger and Barry dutifully handed our guest a steaming mug of British tea...just to add to



Diane emerging from Sump 1. Photo: Carmen

the mendip experience. We sat round the common room warming up for a bit..Then a quick sight seeing tour down Cheddar Gorge....a few coos and Ahhs and back to the Wessex for more Tea, biscuits, and a warm fire.

Several more members came and went exchanging entertaining stories of heroism down caves....after all, here was an attractive young female without apparently a boyfriend in tow...so what red blooded males wouldn't! 7pm Rich arrives, and they go for a trip

to GB to explore the largest chamber in the country, and the pretties in Bat passage....then back to Hunters for a late supper, and Music from the back bar.

A true Mendip experience for Diana. **Carmen**

Sunday March 18 2007 **Wookey Hole**. Mike Thomas, Kevin, Christine.

Surveying trip up Edmunds Rift to the dig at the top of the climb. The instruments appeared to be revolting, but most of the job done and the results look good so far. **Anon**

Wednesday March 28 2007 **Swildons** Clarie, Jonathan, Gareth, Ros French.

Ros' first ever caving trip. Nice jaunt to Sump 2. Dropped off some diving weights, the bucket, too (ably carried by Gareth). Ros did well, very naturally using the rocks and the walls to manoeuvre. **Clarie**

Thursday March 22 2007 **Little Crapnell Swallet** . Derek Sanderson and Dave Watt.

What a way to celebrate my 60<sup>th</sup>. Birthday. I was expecting a bottle of beer, but Dave had forgottn to bring it! **Derek**

Saturday March 24 2007 **Goatchurch** Clarie Morton, Nat Kudlac, Becs Coleman, Hazel Gibbs.

Took three interested friends down Goatchurch, for a pleasant Saturday morning trip. They enjoyed it and want to return.

Saturday March 24 2007 **Hunters Hole**. NikNak, Adrian Jude and Sarah.

A quick trip to dust off the SRT kit. Ade rigged and it was a pleasant trip with a poke around in the chaos at the bottom.

**Jude**

Saturday March 24 2007 **Manor Farm Swallet** Andy Morse, Niall Sclater, Vlad Tanamesen (??)

Followed main streamway to end where we were eaten by midges. Then NASA Gallery and a look at some of the digs at the end.

Saturday March 24 2007 **Swildons Hole** Phil and Prew

Joined Zot (and about 25 others) to celebrate his 65<sup>th</sup>. Birthday. Only about 8 "Real" cavers so it was a slow trip down the short dry. Beer and champagne flowed, then we left early to avoid the rush. **Phil**

Friday March 30 2007 **Swildons Hole** Hatstand and Tim (Hat's mate from Uni).

Nice trip down to Sump 1. Tim's first caving trip for a while. He may have mentioned that he didn't do ladders....I cannot report his comment on my suggesting that he follow the rope through the sump! But I was relieved, really. Tim very impressed by club hut and showers, though! He did suggest that getting changed in the snow by a minibus was more normal, but quickly backed-down when I suggested that we drive around and find a Transit to get changed by. I enjoyed the trip because it's the first time I've been with nobody who knows the cave properly, and pleased to see how much I remembered. **Hatstand**

Saturday March 31 2007 **Templeton**. Phil, Tommo, John Riley, Prew

The dig is now about 4' deeper at the South end, with a couple of inches of water over firm mud and rocks. The South end is

going sideways and the rift here is about 8' long, ending in a vertical wall with an 8" rift, filled with clay, to the Left. Very Squalid. **Phil**

Saturday March 31 2007 **Charterhouse Cave** Nigel Graham & Pete Hahn.

Cementing boulders. What else is there to do on a Saturday morning? - PH "Sieve gravel for the concrete". **Nigel**

Saturday March 31 2007 **Eastwater. Morton's Pot** Mad Phil, Ems, Richard, Fiona.

Rolled up at the BEC at 1030. Everyone up and keen to get going. Collected our scaffold poles and all the other tools for the dig. Started down the 380' way, all helping pass the poles and bags between us. Down Mortons and all the way the ring of scaffolding could be heard as we all persuaded the poles through the passage. Ems and myself worked together with our poles as we entered the Technical Masterpiece. Quite interesting moving scaffolding and yourselves through this part of the cave. Finally emerged at the terminal sump with smiles on all our faces. Phil started to pump out the sump so the digging could commence. Just over an hour later it was drained enough to start digging. Much progress was made and the scaffold was all installed and spoil removed. Phil has made his wicked dam with a bung in it. It really is excellent but makes one laugh as it looks like something from the loo. Phil banged the end for the next digging.

Really enjoyed the digging trip. Many thanks to Phil, Ems and Richard for being fun to be with all day. **Fiona**

Saturday March 31 2007 **Swildons Hole** Geoff, Ade and Jude, Pete & Phillipa, Rich Carey.

Hopefully the final photographic trip for the soon-to-be-published Swildons Book. All down to sump 1 where Pete informed us that that was going to be Phillipa's first sump. Uneventful trip down to Sump 2 where Jude and Rich, having been willing, and much appreciated, Sherpas, stopped. The rest of us then continued down to Sump 9, with Pete and Phillipa electing to use the 6 by-pass, in time to hear Geoff's wet-suit squeaking through the squeeze.

From Sump 9 we started taking photographs out of the cave; firstly in the 9 sump pool, then 8, 7, the finally the entrance to the Damp Link. The siphon was started in Gloop (I think) Sump to try and add some water to the shot. Up until then, all the equipment, camera, flashguns, had behaved beautifully, but all good things must come to an end and the flashguns had decided that they had worked hard enough for the day - and stopped. Feeling relatively happy with the day we decided that it was a good time to pack up and head out. Geoff and myself exited slightly ahead of Pete and Phillipa whose count of sumps went from 0 to 5 in one day. All then back to the Wessex, where there was a moment of concern when Pete found that the rocket tube carrying the camera had leaked..... luckily the flashguns were unharmed and the camera having spent a post trip 3 days in silica gel, 99.5% of the electronics on the camera are functioning again. Wicked trip. 7 hours, 30 photographs. **Adrian**

Sunday April 1 2007 **Swildons Hole** Aubrey, Ade & Jude.

Evening trip to Rolling Thunder (where else?!). 1 ½ hours.

Sunday April 1 2007 **Cairn Hill Shaft**. Tony, Jane, Fiona.

Digging trip. 52 bags of spoil removed. Excellent progress. **Fiona**

Wednesday April 4 2007 Swildons Hole Jack Ballard (6 ½ ), Geoff, Jude, NikNak

We went into the cave and then got very wet. Went down the 20 and then there were very big drops and there were steep bits we had to climb on. **Jack**

(75 minutes to Barnes and out.... in time for cake). **Geoff**

Wednesday April 4 2007 GB Simon, Jonathan, Gareth and Clarie.

Invited Simon along last minute to come caving and to my surprise he said yes. Therefore chose a nice simple trip which wouldn't make him exhausted/ sick . GB. See the Bridge, in and out via mud passage. Of course, going anywhere with me is never that simple. I nearly crashed on the drive down there (but thanks to my awesome braking power we were fine.) Then once we'd got to the farm, sorted out parking, met the kittens, I had a brainwave of 'key!' Wandered across the field to check whether it was a gated cave (it is) and made a little detour back to the hut to pick up the missing article.

Next cunning plan was to investigate a little hole I'd found last time I was down. Stu had bet me that I couldn't - with a month of his wages riding on it. The boys went up to see the car, and I pondered whether I actually could fit through this hole (it's another entrance to the gorge from the end of the Devil's Elbow passage.) I thought maybe I could, (well, my helmet fit through ok) so gave it a go. Silly idea - not half as silly as not removing my belt (with krab) and perhaps oversuit first. Got well and truly wedged in - managed to get pelvis to the smallest point but then realised every time I bent my leg to push, I wedged my pelvis the wrong way. It wasn't going to happen, so eventually decided to back out.

At this point, my suit which I'd so carefully eased through the hole with me wasn't easing back, and neither was my belt. Nor could anyone get to my belt to undo it. And then the idea of going back in to a very very tight space also got to me...

Needless to say, after a while I did get back through the hole. Which was a bit of a relief.

Left the cave rather hurriedly. But it will not defeat me! Next time I'm trying in a swimming costume and shower cap.

Underground about 1.5 hrs. Simon enjoyed it. **Clarie**

Friday April 13 2007 Daren Cilau Andy, Clarie, Fiona

Entered the cave at 1230. Went through the entrance crawls. This is the best part of the cave. Then through JigSaw passage and onto the Big Chamber Nowhere Near the Entrance. Filled in the Record Book and on through Eagle's passage and headed towards the Coat Hanger Ladder. I love that ladder. All three of us ascended without any problems, marveling at its construction. Headed for the Traverse, over than and then down the rope climbs. Through White Passage and on to the Time Machine. What a nice place to get to, huge ceiling and boulders the size of houses. Sat there for a while just enjoying the view and slowly started to contemplate the return part of the trip. Headed out at a very good time. Had a great time in the entrance section. Andy and Clarie really enjoyed themselves. Myself? Well it's the best cave in Wales. Really looking forward to visiting the Hard Rock Café when my two friends have recovered enough to contemplate the journey. **Fiona**

Saturday April 21 2007 Charterhouse Cave Ali, Nigel & Pete. Opened up a "Plughole" into a void amongst the boulders, while Pete and Nigel Graham hauled gravel in. Report from the sharp

end, "Which way next?". Still it's only another 15' further.... **Nigel**

Saturday April 21 2007 Swildon's Hole Tony Webber, Simon Miles, Jonathan Killen, Clarie Morton

Another trip to Sump 1, different in style from Tuesday's. Took my old friends Simon and Tony underground -this was now Simon's fourth or so cave, and Tony's first. Fun trip - we took it easy and Tony enjoyed it. They both managed the ladder fine, though were a bit daunted at first (who wouldn't be?) 3 hrs. **Clarie**

Saturday April 21 2007 Darren Cilau Tim, Fay, Fiona.

"The Return" A 12 hour bash..... Tim Fay and I had a good fry-up and got on the way to Wales. Arrived in good shape to do battle with the cave. Entered at 1100. Really enjoyed the pleasures of this section through JigSaw to the Big Chamber Nowhere Near the Entrance. Through Eagle's Passage and ascended the ladder with my two friends. Continued through the climbs and the traverse and on to the Time Machine. Then on to the Bonzai Stream, saw all the Bonzai trees. Got to the signs for the Hard Rock Café and the Restaurant. By now my survey had finished and the descriptions had long gone. We carried on caving, not sure how far we had left to go until we would find The Café with a Candy Store, we continued on, but as our Sunday had long finished, we decided to turn and head out for the long road back. Looking forward to a return trip with a survey that goes beyond and can guide us into this wonderful place. **Fiona**

Wednesday April 25 2007 Ireby Fell Cavern Keith & Derek Sanderson.

Down to the sump at the end of Duke Street. The sump had recently been dammed and pumped out to give access to Duke Street 2 for non-divers. The dam has now been removed and the passage is a sump again. Please note that the dam was temporary and would have been breached by water / washed away when flooded. It was not intended to remove the sump permanently. **Keith**

Wednesday April 25 2007 Swildons Clarie, Fiona, Andy.

Took a wander down to North West Stream Passage. Nice and crawly, but a bit of a pain carrying a rope and ladder all that way. Looked at the traverse before the pitch and decided that it could wait for another day! **Clarie**

Wednesday April 25 2007 Star Mine Jude, Adrian & Geoff.

As it seems to be about the only place on Mendip where you can still actually play on string, and seeing that Jude and myself had never visited the place, we thought we'd have a look. Impressive entrance shaft followed by a short piece of mined passage to a smaller and shorter shaft to water. Apparently the water was about 7 metres lower than the last time that Geoff was there. It could really do with another section of scaffold or a "P" hanger to give a nice straight hang to the water. Pleasant change to the usual Swildons round trip routine. **Adrian**

Thursday April 26 2007 Swildons. Noel, George Schlowsky.

An introduction to caving for my guest from the USA. We pottered down to Sump 1 via the short dry, very pleasantly. George led out tackling the Devil's alternative to Barnes, and the Wet Way highly professionally. 2 hours - so our pottering was rather faster than needed. Many thanks to Ali for the loan of a Nova for George. The Wessex guest headset light had main and

secondary bulbs out. I re-soldered the bulb connection before discovering that it really was a dud bulb. I've since replaced both bulbs. **Noel**

Friday April 27 2007 **Ogof Rhyd Sych** Ali & Clive

As usual the journey in was something of an effort, but the large, well decorated passages beyond were worth this effort. **Clive**

Friday May 4 2007 **Joint Hole** Clive, Christine, John Maneely  
To the Cockpit (475 m, - 23 M) in excellent conditions. 8 M visibility.

Saturday May 5 2007 **Magnetometer Pot** Clive, Christine, John + 5 NPC members.

To Caton Hall on the exact 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pot's discovery by the NPC, 3 hours. **Clive**

Saturday May 5 2007 **Hurtle Pot** Clive, Christine, John.

Brilliant conditions again - 10 M visibility - we went up the Hindenburg Wall, turned right at Jingle Junction, then up the Void to Frog Hall. Failing to find a line to Jingle Pot, we dived home. 3/4 hour. **Clive**

Saturday May 5 2007 **Swildons**. Jon Beal, Charlie Reid-Henry, Jack Reid-Henry (age 9)

Jack's first caving trip. In the Wet Way, down via Barne's Loop and onto Sump 1 for Fizz and Mars Bars. **Charlie**

Saturday 5th May 2007 **Charterhouse Cave** Ali Moody, Pete Hann and Nigel Graham

This was basically a trip to try to stabilise the area that we had got into on the previous trip. I concentrated on the large boulder that you have to squeeze past while Pete worked on the right-hand wall. Five buckets of concrete were used and the area now looks considerably more healthy! It is still not obvious where the draught is originating from so we are keeping our options open by both digging downwards and also opening up a route into a void immediately above us. **Ali**

Saturday May 5 2007 **OFD 1** Prew, Phil & Tommo.

Prew and Phil took Tommo on his first OFD trip. Low water levels. Photography: Prew took some good digital pics, but Phil suffered a triple whammy: the analogue SLR failed; a resistor in the flash went critical and the battery in the slave unit was flat. Apart from that, a good trip, as far as the rocking boulder.

Good evening BBQ at the WSG cottage for some of the party, especially as Biff and Lou's boys kept the camp-fire going all evening for us. **Phil**

Sunday May 6 2007 **Bridge Cave** Phil.

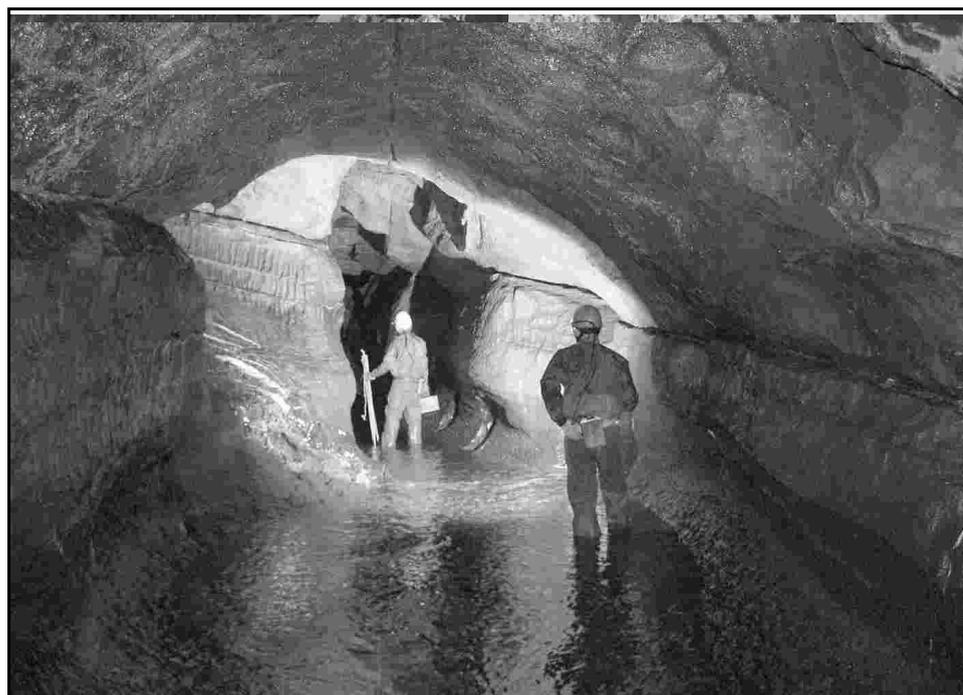
Solo trip to Bridge Cave to clear cobwebs (these turned into a horrendous cold/cough) anyway a pleasant trip. Had the cave to myself. **Phil**

Sunday May 6 2007 **OFD** Mark, Bean, Simon, John Hurst, Noel and George S.

George and I drove over to Penderyn for 0830, when folks were just stirring. I'd put in a plea for an uphill through trip and Mark came up trumps with an early group for us to join. The through trip was a magnificent experience for George - and I suspect that it never loses its drama and sport for any of us. George enjoyed it enormously (with some reservations about the charms of the Connection....). Simon played shepherd for him throughout, which was very much appreciated, and Mark was kind enough to set a suitably leisurely pace, so we were through in 4 hours. **Noel**

Sunday May 6 2007 **OFD 2** Ade & Jude, Rich, Andy Snook, Leg

Day trip to South Wales to go into the Top Entrance after a short detour en-route! Got down to Judge and Trident - from there route very straightforward to the Nave. We abseiled down (Andy's first SRT underground) pulled through and went down the two other short pitches into the Oxbow. Up to the Top Waterfall. Water very low so you could see all the holes in the streamway. Back downstream and came out at Maypole and made our way out uneventfully. As really enjoyable trip. **Jude**



Phil and Tommo in OFD 1. Photo: Brian Prewer

Sunday May 6 2007 **Swinsto - Valley Entrance** Clive, Christine, John + 5 NPC members.

Even in such low water conditions this splashy pull-through trip was good value. **Clive**

Sunday May 13 2007 **St. Cuthberts** Ali, Jon Mason, Rhys Wickham, James Hassall.

The cave was quite wet so a very pleasant sporting trip to Sump 1. Route into Gour Hall was via Boulder Chamber, Everest Passage, Stalagmite Pitch By-pass. Out via Rabbit Warren, Sentry Passage, Lower Traverse Chamber etc. etc. Fortunately the dams on the surface were still holding on our exit when we got out, so the entrance rift was still dry. However the party was suitably impressed by the torrent once I had let the dams out! **Ali**

Sunday May 13 2007 **Shute Shelve Cavern** Alan Gray (ACG), Wayne,

Mak & Jo, Paul Wakeling, Clarie, Phil, Jan Riley.  
Official club trip, led by Alan. Down to the bottom, some looked at the dig, others looked into Elm Street. Photographs were taken (I suffered flash-gun pox again) and bats were observed. **Phil**

Wednesday May 16 2007 **Tetley Cavern** (Eastern Mendip).  
Jude, Stu, Geoff and Ann.

An interesting trip to Tetley Cavern where we negotiated Hobnob Rift before arriving in the impressive Kettle Chamber. 4 hours. **Jude**

Saturday May 19 2007 **Charterhouse Cave**. Party 1: Pete, Nigel & Ali. Party 2: Pete Moody & Rich Carey.

It is now proving too time consuming to sieve the amount of sand we want, from the Charterhouse streamway. Mr Hahn has now purchased a pallet of bags of sand for this purpose: hands off! Although it is hard work lugging BDH containers through the entrance crawls there is not really any alternative. Fortunately Pete and Rich offered to come down the cave and do a delivery for us. Other than this it was an ill-fated trip as Mr Hahn's drill went up in smoke nearly asphyxiating the digging team in the process. Unfortunately this meant we couldn't break up the boulders in the floor and therefore concentrated on cementing the RH wall. From Singing Stal it is now nearly 20M to the work face and lugging buckets this far through the ruck is becoming a real pain. Consequently we have decided to move the cement mixing area forwards to the Ice Box (Named after the freezing draught which blows through this section of the passage) ASAP. **Ali**

Saturday May 19 2007 **Swildons** Geoff and Patrick (Devon SS),  
Hatstand

My first ever 'short round' and second trip through the Mud Sump. First time the Mud Sump was so dry that it didn't even need bailing and I went through on my side with my helmet on - didn't even get very wet. Not so today, After muchos bailing by a party of 7 (four wanted to go through Watergate) a reasonable air gap... hmmm...Soggy. Not looking forward to 2<sup>nd</sup> trip to Sump 1, however, Patrick, bless him, has never been through before. Committing. On arrival at Double Trouble, started siphon and sat for a rest. After about 20 minutes water level had hardly dropped. So we started bailing to keep warm. We made excellent progress, rather too good in fact, another Wessex party to Cowsh.series complained that we nearly drowned them in Blue Pencil! We did get rather carried away. We only stopped when a bucket floated through from the far end ! "Not Birthday" squeeze was fun. Geoff pulled something going through. I got my big lazy overpaid driver's arse stuck and Patrick pushed me out. Patrick himself, however, got utterly stuck with his chest. Much pulling and swearing later he was through. In discussion with Ali later she claimed that NTBS was only 'snug' However after some discussion, and inspection of Patrick. Ali did suggest that she might upgrade (downgrade??) It to 'fairly snug'. We shall wait and see if Patrick got to change history! Anyhow, onward and outwards through Sump 1 which I made a big deal about, being a wuss, but then found not nearly as bad as last time and was then utterly shamed by Patrick who without any fuss completed his first Sump1 experience - from the wrong side. A cracking trip. Time for the pub! **Hatstand**

Sunday May 20 2007 **Charterhouse Cave** Pete Hahn and Ali.  
What else is there to do on a Sunday? We struggled down the cave accompanied by much cursing with a BDH of gravel, a large container of cement and a very large Peli case containing

a drill. The latter may have gone down the cave (a close fit in places) but I am going to be elsewhere when it comes out again - either that or we cement it into the boulder ruckle. A slightly more successful trip with Pete breaking up some of the boulders in the floor, which were unfortunately displacing some large slabs which were supporting the RH wall in the process. Never mind. Back to cementing, although it might just be easier to cement up the entrance to Charterhouse! The draught is definitely coming up through the boulder floor at the end and it is possible to look down about 3 M through the boulders. **Ali**

Sunday May 20 2007 **Peak Cavern** (Dooms Retreat) Jim, Jules, Simon, Fiona.

Had a nice working trip. Pleasant dive through Buxton Water and then Ink Sump to do some work the other side. Cracking weekend. **Fiona**

Tuesday May 22 2007 **Welsh's Green** Anne & Jude  
Vanderplank

A quick evening trip as I'd never been there before - may not be going again too soon! Entrance pitch followed by crawl to second pitch, very impressive, followed by much more crawling which gets progressively muddier: we saw lots of selenite crystals embedded in the mud! Well worth a visit, though kit cleaning takes a while: don't forget your knee pads. **Jude**

Saturday 24th March 2007 - **Swildons Hole - Watergate**. Clive Westlake, Richard Carey and Ali Moody

Many thanks to Clive Westlake who stepped in at the last minute to do a photographic trip to Watergate for the Swildon's Book. Thanks also to Adrian and Jude Vanderplank and Richard Carey who had bailed the Mud Sump last night to ensure that it would be open. Then Christening Pool had a "reasonable" airspace and Clive was soon shooting off numerous photos in the Sac Gang.

We then continued upstream to Spectacle Duck where I suggested that Richard would make a good model - but for some unknown reason he wouldn't take me up on the offer! All photos completed we exited via Blue Pencil and the Troubles. **Ali**

Thursday May 24 2007 **Crooks Hole Dig** Bob Scammel, Pete and Steve.

Good digging until a very large rock (Boulder to Steve, who was below it) decided to move downwards by approximately 1 foot and a tad forwards. This gave Steve a bit of an adrenalin rush and he moved very quickly, with a shaky voice, to a safer place! After stamping on it to ensure no further threat he regained his composure and digging position - more to the side, as 'under' was no longer an option. I'm glad Aubrey and Pete have recommended him for Wessex membership; I've been digging with him for 10 years and I wouldn't. He's not safe with himself!

Sunday May 27 2007 **Agen Allwedd** Ali, Clive, Christine, John Maneely.

The next in a series of quality trips in this sometimes maligned cave. We went 4/5 of the way down Southern Stream Passage, Climbed into Gothic Passage, Found Priory Road and so to Ile's Passage. The sand digs here have been dug to a caver friendlier size. We spent half-an-hour admiring the awesome formations at the end. On the way out Ali and Clive began to wonder if two successive knee-bashing trips like Rhyd Sych and Southern Stream were a good idea. **Clive**

Sunday May 27 2007 **Balch's Cave (Aven chamber)**. Phil Hendy, Jackie Ankerman

20M ladder is not enough to bottom the pitch, though the rest of the cave can be reached by a travers about 12M down. Pitch can be done on a handline, but an extra line would be useful for several holes in the floor. Aven chamber is impressively large. Many formations, some vandalised by breakage and hand-prints. A few helictites. Full exploration (of holes in floor) not possible due to lack of hand-line (safely stored at the top of the pitch!). A good Sunday morning collectors item. **Phil**

Monday 9th April 2007 **Rocket Drop** Pete and Ali Moody  
After reassuring myself on the trip on 13<sup>th</sup> February with the "Tuesday nighters" that the air in the cave was ok, Pete and I decided that we should revisit our old dig in the third chamber.

We had laid a charge at the end of the downstream passage on the 30<sup>th</sup> May 1984 but due to a very unpleasant experience with extremely high levels of CO<sub>2</sub> on the following trip in September 1984 we had never been back to the end to inspect the damage! This time the air was fine and the charge had done a good job of demolishing the too tight bend at the end where the passage swings hard left. The passage can be seen continuing for at least another 2m but very would require enlarging all the way. No noticable draught and all very muddy as though the whole area could sump at times. I decided that the dig didn't inspire me and that we have better sites elsewhere. **Ali**

## Blasts from the past

### From "Mac" Mackinnon:

Dear Noel

I realise that I cannot write anything about caving - I always remember that a full Swildons to me ended at the first sump; however, it is possible that the enclosed short piece about dowsing might help to fill an odd corner. I'm 95 and still going strong - well, fairly but am a bit hampered by vertigo. I wonder if there are any of my contemporaries about?

Best wishes

**Mac**

### Are You A Dowser?

I remember that a group of us on Mendip were very excited when we discovered that we could dowse using a Y-shaped hazel twig. This must have been about 1937 and I can remember well the strange feeling of the twig turning in my hands, apparently of its own volition. Professional dowsers can give a surprisingly accurate estimate of the quantity of water that might be found and its depth but geologists tend to dismiss their work as unscientific. I remember reading an article recently in which a German scientist proved that his team of dowsers could produce consistently more accurate results than the professionals. An American scientist showed that nearly everyone has the ability to dowse, he did this by passing a small current along a hidden wire, he found that all his subjects could detect a current of several milliamps and more sensitive subjects could detect a current of micro amps. If you wish to try your ability to dowse, the modern equivalent of the hazel twig is easy to make. Take two wire coat hangers, cut one end of the long horizontal side and at the other end near the twist leading the hook, you now have two pieces of one short side and the other longer. bend this so that the two sides are at right angles. You now need to get some small tubes into which the wires will fit and turn freely, take one of these in each hand and walk over the ground where you think there might be water and you will see the horizontal arms move.

I wish you the best of luck anyway.

**A.J.S.McMillan**, Hon. member

### From Pete Bentley:

I was stung into writing this letter by Richard Carey's excellent article about show caves in Guilin and Guiyang (China) - February 2007. My two sole claims to caving fame are that at one time I was secretary of the Bristol Grammar School Caving Club and that I thereby inducted Pete Moody into the noble sport as my protégé. Pete and Ali have, of course, gone onto far greater things than I ever achieved underground (besides living on Priddy Green) and I follow their exploits in the Journal with great interest.

The time I was active on Mendip was the late 60's when Hillgrove was the Club Hut, Dave Savage was diving to Swildons 7.8.9.....12? And Olive Lloyd was king of the UBSS. ("If you've legs like OCL, you can do it very well, but if you don't it's Bloody Hell - Down Below") So that dates me

I moved to Hong Kong in 1981, since when I've been working almost full-time in China - very happily so - and have seen some of the most amazing scenery in my life. This includes a full "Out-Door" cave, complete with multi-coloured

limestone rock-pools at an altitude of 11,000 feet, in far Western Sichuan province.

If there are any WCC members who wish to contact me - either living in Hong Kong, or passing through - please feel free to get in contact by Email "[peterbentleyhk@hotmail.com](mailto:peterbentleyhk@hotmail.com)" I can't offer a free bed for the night, Hong Kong accommodation being rather tight on space, but maybe we could team up for a trip to some show caves (I am somewhat past my prime as far as active caving is concerned, but still into long-distance walking).

China is a fantastic country - developing ultra-fast and don't believe the negative stuff you read in the news; that's only 1% of bad news, compared with 99% of good news you never get to read.  
Hoping to make contact with some of you in the years to come,

**Pete Bentley.**

PS. I forgot my 3rd claim to fame! For a while when printing was still in the Stone Ages, I used to help collate the WCC Journal at Oliver Lloyd's weed-ridden house near Westbury-on-Trym. Now **there's** history for you! **Pete Bentley**

## The Great Wessex Boat Race, 2007



You are invited to participate in the first ever Swildon's Boat Race on Saturday 6th October 2007 to commemorate the new Wessex publication Swildon's Hole — One Hundred Years of Exploration. This event will be run on similar lines to the 2002 Duck Race. The start will be at the entrance blockhouse and the winning boat will be the first vessel to cross the finishing line at the end of the Water Chamber. Please provide your own "mini" boat, which must be capable of passing through the entrance pipe. Your boat can be entered on an individual, joint or family basis. There will be a special prize for the best homemade entry. Please make sure that the name of

your boat is written clearly on her bow. The Wet Way will be out of bounds and any cheating or acts of piracy will be severely punished by walking the plank or cat-o'-nine-tails. It is suggested that cavers make their way to the Water Chamber via the Short Dry Way, but I am looking for a couple of volunteer sweepers to follow the fleet to ensure that boats do not capsize or run aground on any boulders or reefs. Lashings of the Wessex Cave Club speciality grog (ginger beer) will be served while we await the flotilla's arrival. After the race there will be the opportunity for those who wish to celebrate 100 (actually 106) years of exploration in Swildon's Hole by descending the Forty on rope ladder — hopefully pre 1968 Great Flood. At 6.45pm rations will be served at the Captain's Table Upper Pitts, followed by a skittles match at the New Inn.

Dress Code (optional) — something nautical or historical

Start Time — 2.00pm on the Green.

Entry Fees to also include food

Adults £4.00 or four pieces of gold

Children £2.00

Children under 10 — free

Tickets must be purchased in advance from:

Ali Moody, Fountain Cottage, Priddy, **BA5 3BE**. 01749 870006

[aadmoody@talk21.com](mailto:aadmoody@talk21.com)

Please indicate if you are vegetarian

Closing Date - 22<sup>nd</sup> September

# The Molephone.....an ear to the Underground

Vern put on a magnificent show for his besotted fans in the MRO. Despite his penchant for publicity hogging, he declined to put pen to paper for this issue. He shouldn't have refused. He hadn't got a leg to stand on, and writing would have absolved him from nappy changing duties. Most of the usual suspects were in attendance either underground or on the surface. Vern now takes his own paramedic along when he goes caving (this time Carmen was on duty). Rosie put in her usual placid and patient guest-star-wife appearance, and has somewhat redeemed Vern's literary laziness with the following account:

"Following an unseasonably warm spell since Easter, it was one of those evenings where it was just 'too nice' to go caving; one of those evenings where non-cavers ask "Why does anyone want to go caving?" Despite being a caver (albeit on temporary hold) this is a question I've asked Vern too, on a number of occasions since .....

The normal Wednesday evening got underway when he left the house about 6.30pm cheerfully saying "I'm a bit tired, so think I'll just go for a walk on Mendip tonight. See you later". The next thing I know was a 'phone call from Jude about 9.30pm. A bit strange I thought & then my heart sank as I heard: "Hi, it's Jude. Nothing to worry about, but Vern's taken a 'bit of a tumble' down a cave". In a calm voice (?), I replied: "He wasn't even meant to be going caving tonight ... \*?@!!##\*\*".

I drove down to Mendip with that feeling of dread of what I was about to face (again). For those of you unaware, this scenario happened 4½ years ago (albeit at 9.30am when I was at work, although it was a Wednesday as well) & ended with a 9-hour rescue from St Cuthberts, a fractured spine & major surgery. Driving up Eastwater Lane I was greeted by Adrian at the entrance to the caravans who was on ambulance-directing duties. In the darkness & the glimmer of my fading torch, I stumbled across to the entrance to be greeted by the sight of Vern doing a forward somersault out of the pipes! After a few choice (unprintable) words directed at Vern, we had a minute to talk about what had happened ...

Apparently, he got chatting to Mak & Carmen they decided on a trip down North Hill Swallet as it was close to the Wessex & hence the perfect Wednesday evening trip. The trip was uneventful, they reached the bottom, turned round, then Vern happily watched them go up Rumble Plonk Pitch before starting up himself. Up the first bit, bridged across, went to grab the rope, then it all started ... that dreaded sense of déjà vu as gravity took over! Apparently he even managed to have time to think 'oh no, not again' but that was soon followed by a thud, a crack & various expletives as the pain hit – apparently on the way down he'd thought that it wasn't the easiest of climbs & that perhaps a line would be handy. By the time he'd finished venting & realising that he wouldn't be able to get out unaided, Carmen headed out while Mak stayed with him for company (& to check that blood wasn't oozing out of his wellies indicating an open fracture beneath the layers of caving kit) – good job he was in the capable hands of a Casualty Care Caver & so reassuring! He'd been caving with Jude a couple of weeks ago & stumbled quite a few times, commenting that "I really must buy a new pair

of Wellies" – how prophetic was that! The call-out was started, people from the Wessex who were doing some SRT practice on the tower were brought into action, cavers from the BEC came over & poor Jude got the job of phoning me. Underground Vern's legs were strapped up, he was put in a harness, hauled up Rumble Plonk Pitch with help of knee jams, hauled by Mark & Bean along the crawl (almost overtaking Mak in the process), then hauled up the entrance pitch making the unusual exiting technique described earlier!

After finding out the rough details of what had happened, it was just a carry across the field & over the stile in a Wessex-loaned chair to ensure Vern made it safely to the waiting ambulance (although the paramedics did question as to whether the chair 'was the best they could find?'). Personally think it did the job quite well – no wonder the NHS is in such a state if they always want the best of things!! (I can say that, I'm one of their employees).

He was taken to the RUH Bath, about midnight, x-rayed, lots of puzzled heads, CT scan, seen by Orthopaedics & stayed there a few days while they tried to work out what was going on – I left at 6.30am – it was a long night! Apparently nothing wrong with the left foot/ankle (that's why it's still bruised & swollen five weeks later!). However, dislocated 3 bones in the right foot, and fractured a number of others – not sure which ones as the scan showed lots of bits of bone scattered around & the surgeons aren't sure where they've come from either. A few more weeks in plaster, numerous hospital appointments & we're still in the dark as to what the future holds.

Upon reflection, we've come to the conclusion that it was just an unfortunate incident. However, accidents do happen & I'm just grateful that the caving bunch are basically a good group of mates who help each other in times of need. On that note, thank you to the MRO & all the cavers involved in getting Vern out & to those who've quite cheerfully provided support afterwards to Vern & myself by taking the P\*\*S - it's nothing less than we'd expect.

I still don't know why Vern went caving & why an evening stroll wasn't more appealing that evening. I also wonder if J-Rat is in cahoots with the ambulance service, who cheerfully cut off his wellies, wetsocks, oversuit & fleece, or whether Vern will go caving again? I'm afraid that I can't answer any of them apart from the last one, & for that, you'll have to wait & see ...

A few more details.....Gathered from various sources, web-sites, Butcombe Froth, scandal rags etc. etc.

One nice sunny evening a select, multi-club, mob opted to do a short little Mendip trip in order to enjoy the rest of the sunshine and heckle those who were swinging about on the Wessex SRT

tower. North Hill was handy and offered an excavated entrance shaft requiring a 40 ft ladder....90ft low crawling to Great Aven (only 20ft high but it's the first time you can stand up!!!) The

next 15 ft crawl takes you to a 6 ft drop.....50ft later beyond another flat out crawl you arrive at the top of Rumble Plonk Pitch where a fixed handline assists the first 20ft of descent followed by an easy climb down of 15 ft..... Coming back up this pitch Vern slipped and fell approx 15 feet landing on his feet (Sound familiar, anyone?). Luckily North Hill is a cave where legs are surplus to requirement anyway so with sufficient pain relief and hauling assistance Vern (Who remained very confident, calm, and professional through out the incident, due to his experience with previous rescues) was able to cave out

under his own steam, where he was met up top by his long-suffering wife (as usual) and an ambulance and promptly despatched to hospital, where yet another Warmbac was amputated.

The rescue was a good shared effort between Wessex and BEC. Overall 50/50, and even Vern is a joint member!

## **MRO Practice and Training Day. Saturday, 23<sup>rd</sup>. June.**

Jude is coordinating our efforts for this. All are welcome, but it would help her if you would either 'phone (01934 833 320) or Email ([jvvd@btinternet.com](mailto:jvvd@btinternet.com)) her if you intend to participate.

### **St Cuthbert's Swallet.**

Meet at the Shepton Hut 9.30 am

All active cavers welcome - bring appropriate personal caving gear.

All interested parties welcome for surface activities.

#### **Exercise will include:**

1. A small team doing a 'search' to Sump 2 with the Heyphone

(and testing the Heyphone locations in the process).

2. A carry from Mud Hall to the bottom of Arrete.

3. Pitch haul using weights not casualty on Arrete

4. A demonstration of pitch rigging for rescue on Pulpit.

5. A debrief later in the Hunters Lodge.

## **Cheramodytes**

I was going to write about Tetanus, but so far as I know, nobody in the club has ever had it. I am, of course, 50 years adrift of current events, but Leptospirosis is, again, immediately relevant.

Some 8 days after his latest Panama caving expedition, James Cobbett collapsed and was hospitalised with near total kidney failure. 8 nights in hospital in Panama City, including three sets of Dialysis fixed him up and he is now fine again. He had contracted the severe form of Leptospirosis known as "Weil's" disease; most likely picked up in Cayman Cave on Isla Colón where he had spent one night accompanied by zillions of bats and a small crocodile.

(From issue 196 of "Descent", with thanks to James Cobbett)

I commented in my first (since resurrection) Cheramodytes that if you go caving in exotic places you can contract some exotic diseases. You can contract Weil's disease in the UK (and I did), but possibly catching it from a small crocodile is undeniably and unmatchably exotic. Most people, like me, catch it from a combination of human sewage and rat transmission. This is not exotic at all. When I suffered, Howard Kenney wrote:

"Dear Editor,

A well-known caver has been unfortunate enough to fall ill with Weil's disease (an acute infective hepatitis) and for a time was very unwell. This disease is caused by a micro-organism carried by rats and can be caught by contact with rat's urine or droppings. It is well known as an occupational disease of sewer workers. The organism attacks the liver and often damages the kidneys. Fatal cases are not uncommon. It can enter the body through the eyes, nose, scratches or abrasions"

and as I said at the time: "The first thing to do was to get out of

hospital as early as possible. After that you eat and sleep as much as you can, and go in for "Graduated exercise" The turning point will be reached when you feel you can start caving again. This will be a lot earlier than you think. Tiring and rather slow at first, you will easily get out of breath. Last of all, back comes your wind and the spring in your step, and you can draw a line under what has gone before."

So, very briefly, a few notes on Weil's disease.

Weil's disease has a mortality rate of 5-10%. The most severe cases of Weil syndrome, with kidney failure and jaundice, have a mortality rate of 20-40%. Mortality rate is usually higher for older patients. These figures are frighteningly high. So how frightened should cavers be, how might we catch it, how might we recognise it? Basically it's not really a "Cavers Disease". I got it in Stoke Lane when there was human sewage contamination from the adjacent quarries. The carriers are rats, and at the time there was a major rat eradication there, but rats are universal creature and won't stay absent long, so any human sewage contamination poses a risk in any cave. Club outings to big city underground sewage systems pose a much greater risk and, indeed, the disease is endemic in sewage workers. If you've caved in, or visited questionable environment, and then develop flu-like symptoms within 4 to 9 days, particularly if you get a blinding headache which no proprietary analgesic can alleviate, and any of the symptoms of meningitis (such as eyeball pain from light), you should consider the possibility of Leptospirosis. As with many diseases, symptoms mimic other afflictions but the resemblance to Hangover Vulgaris will not, with Weil's, lessen and disappear in half a day.

## As at 30 May 2007

**Cave Diving Group** N/L 163 (Apr 07) (*Dives in Upper Flood Swallet*)

**Chelsea Speleological Society** N/L 49, 5 (May 07)

**Craven Pothole Club. Record.** 86 (Apr 07)

**Descent 195** (Apr/May 07) 196 (Jun/Jul 07)

**Grampian S.G. Bull.** 4th series No. 2 (Mar 07)

**Mendip Caver 2**, 6 (Apr 66) (*by kind permission of Paul Allen, via Mike Thompson.*)

**M.N.R.C.** N/L 112 (Spr 07)

**Severn Valley Caving Club** N/L/ (Cascade) 3, 3 (Feb 65), 4 (Mar 65), 6 (May 65)  
(*by kind permission of Paul Allen, via Mike Thompson.*)

**Shepton Mallet Caving Club.** Journal. Series 11 No. 10 (Aut. 06) (*Iceland, Lanzarote, Index vols. 10 & 11*)

**South Wales Caving Club** N/L 126 (Apr 07)

**Speleo Club de Wallonie** (Belgium) Regards. 66 (Apr/May 07)

**S.U.I** (Ireland) Underground 66 (Spr. 07)

**Westminster S.G.** N/L 2007/1 (Jan 07)

Bull. 9, 9 (Jan 07)

**Wittenburg Univ. Spel. Soc.** (Ohio, USA) Pholeos. 25, 1 (May 07)

## Videos donated by Jackie Ankerman:

Aliens, 999

Base Jumping in a Cave

Casualty, Inside Out: Hunter's Lodge Inn Sink

China Caves, Equinox: Fear of Falling

Cutting Edge (Ch. 4) Cave Rescue

Extreme Archaeology: Culzean Cave, Parys Copper Mine, Slaughter Stream Cave  
Frome Tunnels

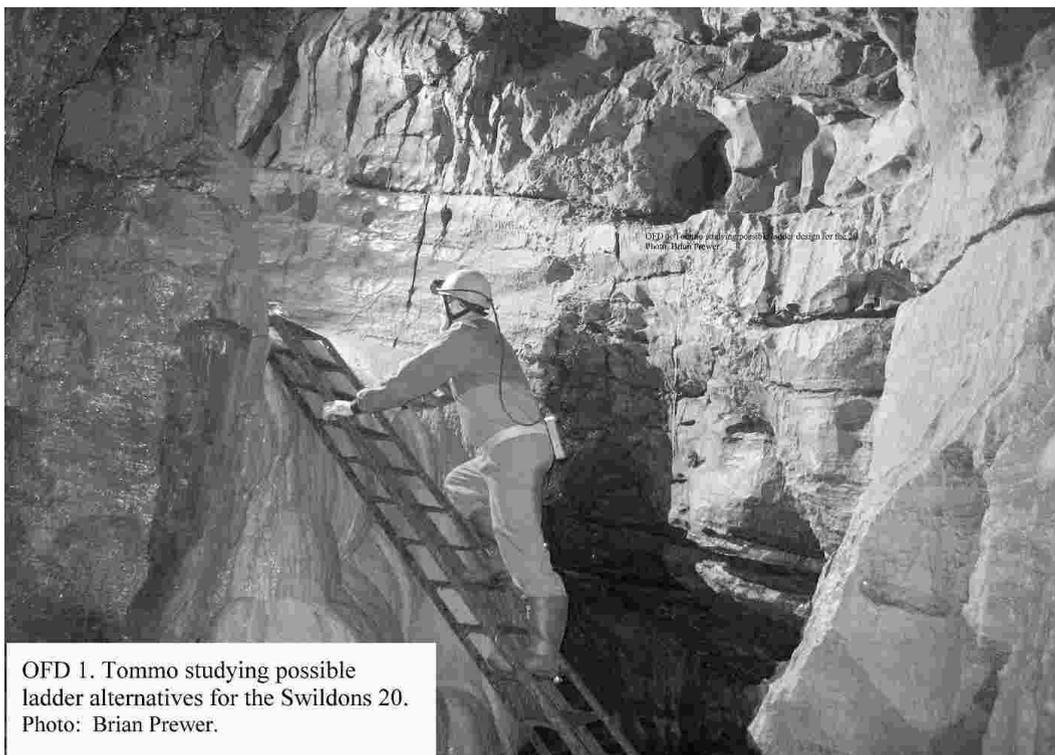
Horizon: The Secret Life of Caves

Mallorca: Rafel, Campana, Rafel, Cova Freda (1993)

The Great Indoors, Pippikin Pot, Hidden Depths 1, 2, 3, 4, Wakula

Touching the Void

Frank Frost photographs (contact prints, annotated)



OFD 1. Tommo studying possible ladder alternatives for the Swildons 20.  
Photo: Brian Prewer.

| Contents                 |         |
|--------------------------|---------|
| Club News                | Page 47 |
| Tuska's Reliquary        | Page 48 |
| Gouffre Jean Bernard     | Page 48 |
| Templeton Update         | Page 50 |
| Log Book Extracts        | Page 52 |
| Blasts from the Past     | Page 52 |
| The Molephone            | Page 59 |
| Cheramodytes             | Page 60 |
| Recent Library Additions | Page 61 |

| Diary Dates  |                         |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| 23 June      | MRO practice/Training.. |
| 23 June      | Goughs Cave evening. *  |
| 30 June      | Cricket V BEC & BBQ     |
| 14 July      | Mendip Meet. **         |
| 22 July      | Committee Meeting       |
| 04-18 August | PSM ***                 |
| 11 August    | Mendip Meet ****        |
| 16 September | Committee Meeting       |
| 06 October   | Ali's Boat Race         |

\* Evening after show cave closing. Times to be announced.

\*\* Little Crapnell & Honeymead Hole. Leader Cookie. Upper Pitts 1000 hrs.

\*\*\* The tackle has been purchased, so your deposits are overdue! Please make cheques payable to "Wessex Expeditions" and post them to Dave Cooke at 3 Starrs close, Axbridge, Somerset, BS262BZ

\*\*\*\* Upper Pitts. Meet 1000 hrs. Details to be announced.



**Tommo with yet another alternative hand-made ladder system for the 20 in Swildons..... which Ali may pinch for the 40 !**