



Journal of the Wessex Cave Club

Vol. 29. No. 308
December 2007



Raufarholshellir, Iceland Photo: Mike Thomas

On Saturday 8th December at the Hunters from 8pm there will be a Launch Party for
the Wessex Cave Club publication:-

“Swildon's Hole - 100 Years of Exploration”

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The Christmas issue, the first one after the AGM, has a special feel to it. We have three new committee members to welcome, for a start. Coming up to a New Year it's not a bad time to look back, as well, at the 2007 caving. Wessex members went underground all over the British Isles, in France, Spain, the USA, Greece, Madeira, Panama and Iceland. And our explorations were not confined to Limestone, Dolomite or natural caves. Mines on Mendip, in Devon and North Wales all figured, and lava tubes are the subject of a major article in this issue (and one from Maurice in issue 304).

The club's membership has risen from 220 to 240 this year, and even if some of our new members are scarcely teeny-boppers, the long-term membership outlook is good with juniors from the Prewer, Ballard, Delacour, Biffin, Williams, Timney, Thomas, Easterling and Freeman families having been exposed to the Caving Virus. And while thinking of caving families, it turns out that our new secretary is a member of the "3 Generation" club, having been caving with his Grandfather (who gained some notoriety for getting lost in OFD!).

It's worth remembering, too, that what seems routine to some of us represents a real challenge to others, whether relative newcomers or even experienced members. And the challenge of caving is what makes it so rewarding, as a couple of the Log Book accounts show. It's delightful to read Dave Murphy's account of his OFD through trip, and the two accounts of the Watergate trip on Wednesday November 7 and see what enthusiastic pleasure such trips can give. Some of us have taken a more "Professional" approach to our caving. A brief perusal of the membership list shows that Gavin Newman, Martyn Farr, Andy Sparrow and Tom Chapman are truly professionals while, Dave Morrison, Noel Cleave and Bob Pyke have spent seasons as Show Cave guides at Wookey and Cheddar. Any more names to add to this (*illustrious*) List?

Those of you who have been unwise enough (when plied with alcohol) to offer Journal articles, know to your cost that the offer slips the Nagmonster from his leash. My apologies for becoming a termagent are genuine..... but genuinely half-hearted. Amongst my victims this year has been Ian Timney, whose article on Via Ferrata follows the shorter account of a day's wire dangling in the Pyrenees in the previous Journal. Now to get Graham Candy and John Hurst to describe their Ocean Kayaking around the Isle of Skye.

Awarding the annual Frank Frost Prize for the best Journal article this year, Our president said: "There were several good articles this year, and choosing one above the others has not been easy. One article did impress me greatly, especially as it was locally inspired, and well written, and the prize therefore goes to Simon Richards, AKA NikNak for "A Grand Day Out". A masterpiece of understatement about the Grand Tour of Swildon's from the issue of December 2006. There were two other contributions which I considered worthy of mention, Michael Thomas' and Kevin Hilton's account of the expeditions to Greece, and Geoff Ballard's description of the Cambrian slate mine. One cannot help but note that the standard of photography in the Journal has improved enormously over the years and that this adds much to the impact of the written content". Your photos do, indeed, and this edition is an example, so please keep them coming in, and I'll keep printing them. And last, but not least, from myself and all your committee,

*A Very Happy Christmas*

## Swildons Book

The **Good News** is that the Swildon's book has been printed. A barrel and nibbles are being provided at the Hunters to celebrate the event and two of the authors will be present to answer any questions and also to sign copies if required.

The book is hard-back with over 270 lavishly illustrated pages in three chapters:

A History of Exploration; A Description of the Cave; The Formation of the Cave.

The book contains numerous surveys including a large fold-out survey of the whole cave.

Copies of the book will be available for collection at the launch evening.

The **Bad News**: there won't be enough for everyone; the book is receiving interest from non-club members as far afield as Switzerland and not in 1 or 2's but for 6, 10 and even 30 at a time! Be warned that this is a limited print run and they are selling fast.

It seems that many people have every intention of buying a copy or believe they have 'reserved' a copy as in passing have thrown a comment "oh, I'll have one of those" and I don't want to see folk disappointed. We have already pre-sold a sizeable chunk of the run! Please don't miss out on your copy(s). For those who haven't already reserved a copy it is possible to do so by contacting Brian Prewer at [brian@prew36.eclipse.co.uk](mailto:brian@prew36.eclipse.co.uk) Or send a cheque to Brian Prewer, made payable to **Wessex Cave Club No. 2 Account** for £25 excluding p&p (p&p is £5.00) to:-

The Swildons Book c/o

St. Johns Cottage,

Priddy,

Somerset, BA5 3BE

## Swildons Book Values

At the auction of Dave Irwin's books a copy of the 1975 "Pictorial History of Swildons Hole" fetched £300 (yes - three hundred pounds). It may be worth investing in a few extra copies of the new Swildons book!

## Colour Codes on Kit

Hatstand raises an interesting point in that we all put colour coding on our kit, notably our SRT kit, crabs, maillons etc. at a guess most of us use some form of sticky tape, so confusion is possible. In practice, however, how often have any of us found ourselves caving with someone whose colour coding is the same as our? Would anyone volunteer to compile a Club Colour Coding list for the Wessex notice board? (Like Hatstand, for example???)

## Caving Secretary

Les Williams has taken over the role of Caving Secretary. Having just returned from the joys of Co Clare and SUICRO, and then Tennerife (where the Cueva del Viento - Sobrado system on Teide is over 18 km long) it's obvious that he's taking his duty to discover new areas for club visits commendably seriously.

## MRO Training Officer

Mak (Kellway) has taken over from Gonzo (Lumley) as MRO Training Officer. Training meets and details can be seen on the Website: the website [www.mendip-rescue.org](http://www.mendip-rescue.org)

## Parking for Rhino / Longwood

Chris Grosart writes: Clive and I visited Rhino Rift - and parked appropriately by the waterworks - when the owner of Lower Farm (also called Longwood Grange Farm) came up and had a chat. She was happy that we had parked where we had, but asked us if we could politely inform people that she does not wish cavers and / or walkers to park on the 'triangle' of grass just at the top of her drive, on the right hand side of the lane. She informed us that her Father in law is buried there and she finds it distressing when people park on the grass. She also mentioned that she regularly picks up litter and sees people having a pee on the grass or in the hedge. Some

of the crosses to mark the grave had also been removed.

She was very pleasant to us and has no problem with cavers at all, save the few who park on the grass triangle, which is her land. She said that anyone caving there were more than welcome to park in the farmyard if they were concerned about security of vehicles and all they have to do is go into the farm (the dogs bark but are very friendly) and knock on the door of the cottage on the LEFT - NOT the house on the RIGHT. You will then be welcome to leave cars there.

Relations with this landowner seem good and although the caves are not on her land, it is handy to have a secure place to park off the beaten track - the alternative is to park on the lane, leaving cars open to vandalism / theft etc. **Chris Grosart**

### **Tyre concession deals**

Big Stu, the Waldren Monster, has kindly arranged a deal for Wessex members to get a useful percentage off the cost of new tyres. The details are on the notice board.

**Car Parking Area** As the result of the working weekend on 13<sup>th</sup> October the parking area is larger, smoother and junk-free. Quite a lot of the 'junk' was left by well-meaning people thinking that it would come in useful at some future time and dig. Please resist the temptation to do this, and do not dump, or leave, rubbish there. There is an excellent re-cycling site at Cheddar.

**Wigmore Swallet**. The divers have made some significant breakthroughs in Wigmore and are into open passage with avens offering the potential for dry caving access to the new extensions.

### **Tuesday Musical Soirées**

After the pub, Messrs Scammel and Weston (Senior) practice their musical instruments in the Lounge at Upper Pitts. There is no charge (*good grief*) but it might be worth discussing with them the possibility of a bribe to make their musical mischief in the Old Grotto. For gig bookings, weddings, Bar Mitzvahs etc. contact Paul Weston.

**Rods pot / Bath Swallet** Rods and Bath are now connected and round trips are possible, obviously Bath has to be rigged first if used for the exit. The full details are in Aubrey's article on page 107.

### **Caving Log Book**

There is now a Heading/Reminder in the Log Book to ask you please to include all the relevant details when you write up your caving trips.

**John Alder** John Alder writes: "On attending the dinner this year, I was somewhat taken aback, and upset, to find that a rumour was around that I had resigned from the Wessex, and furthermore had joined the B.E.C.! (**As If !!** Ed.) I can assure everyone that the rumour has no substance whatsoever. I have been a Member for over 40 years, and intend to stay".

**Diau Pull-through trip next June.** There is considerable enthusiasm for the idea of a mob-handed, pull-through, Trois Betas - Diou trip as a compact weekend event. June looks appropriate for weather and the end of the snow on the Parmelan. Possible dates are:

Friday June 20 2008 - Sunday June 22 2008

Friday June 27 2008 - Sunday June 29 2008

The basic plan would be to fly to Geneva on the Friday evening. Rent a minibus for the weekend. Cheap accommodation in an Auberge / small hotel / B&B near Thorens. Through trip on the Saturday (very early start). Serious French nosh-and-quaff on Saturday night. Fly back on Sunday. Flights would be Bristol - Geneva EasyJet. Noel would sort out accommodation and take everyone's heavy caving kit out by car. Having a car as well as a minibus would enable us to do the Diou / Angletaz ferrying. Depending on numbers it might be possible to swing a group deal from EasyJet, but currently the return fare for those dates would be around £120 per head, a weekend minibus hire would be around £40 per head. Names to Noel, please.

## Vercors in August

From Cookie: There was talk of doing a joint Berger trip with the NPC in 2008. The general feeling was that we've been to the Berger fairly recently (well 2002 seems recent ) and it would be better in 2009. However Vercors 2008 is happening 23-30 August. This is going to be BIG. As part of it, 20 odd caves are going to be [rigged including the Berger and Trou Qui Souffle. See the camps section on http://www.vercors2008.ffspeleo.fr/training.htm](http://www.vercors2008.ffspeleo.fr/training.htm) I think it would be an excellent idea for the club to go to the Vercors this year and time it so we can take advantage of all that is on offer at this event.

**Saturday October 13 2007** Ali had a birthday bash at the Horse and Jockey in Binegar with 18 or so friends, which was a most enjoyable evening.

## Working weekend, Saturday October 13 2007

Two items on the job list for this weekend were lagging the roof spaces and improvements to the car parking area. 17 tons of "gravelly stuff" (with a subtle hint of pink), were laid in one corner of the car-park this weekend.

### Those in attendance

Ian Timney, Les Williams, Cookie Nigel Graham, Phil Hendy , Pauline, John and Cathy, Carmen, Simon R-son (fire boy??) Jude, Prew, Rich C.....**AND**...Most of the BEC, or Nigel Taylor and Mike Wilson providing the much needed mechanical support/assistance in the form of digger and dumper... with Phil and Lil Romford in support. Even our guest visitors lent a helping hand, which was a most welcome gesture.

Nigel G and Phil were mostly lagging Saturday whilst Les Ian Myself Prew Mike W and Nigel T cleared the area (of rusting iron, plastic buckets, rotting wood, kerb stones, buildings to be erected in the future) Checked the levels with an dodgy ancient levelling machine thing and my mighty levelling stick cobbled out of a bit of battening and a dymo sticker...oh dear....

A roller was delivered early, brought by a lorry large enough to house an Army tank.....the wall on the corner of the drive was nearly knocked down...

Then an even bigger lorry arrived with all the gravel.....again the wall was nearly knocked down, we escaped with only minor injuries to Tuska's wing mirror,

Then a third lorry arrived...even bigger than the other with a huge skip.....and the walls fell.....

By Saturday 5pm ish most the gravel was laid and just needed to be levelled.

## Sunday October 14 2007



**Photo: Carmen**

Phil and Nigel G started early to avoid the rush in the kitchen so by the time I'd arrived the 1 tonne of gravel accidentally left on the cess pit the day before had been cleared.

The students staying at the hut had also (thankfully) moved the extremely heavy kerb-stones to the perimeter of the driveway (from the stack in the middle of

the car park). The best thing of all all the rusting iron, rotten tarps, mouldy buckets, festering plastics, rocks and metal of all varieties were now winging their way to the skip in a Wessex land reclamation effort.... The skip driver arrived miles early.....all hands were suddenly to the deck.....and we filled the skip with the general detritus from the car park (whilst distracting the driver with a mug of tea).

The skip left, taking the rebuilt wall with it.....

The rest of the day was spent raking out and trying to roller and level the gravel. All the remaining half bricks collected over the decades (Obviously they had some significance to the people who had been collecting them at one stage but were now left abandoned ), bits of old tin, old chairs, old pallets were all sorted into Cookie's truck and taken to the tip....

What a fantastic tidy up and many thanks to those who were able to attend (it was between 2 very busy weekends) and especial thanks to Nigel T and Mike from the BEC for their huge contribution in time and equipment.. **Carmen**

### **Suggestions Box**

In an effort to improve and increase contact between the committee and the Wessex Cave Club members, and our guests, there is now a suggestions box. So when one of the committee isn't around, you can do some literary "Ear Bending". We will be discussing your suggestions in committee and reporting and reviewing them regularly in the Journal - so please use the box!

### **Upper Pitts Extension**

At the AGM it was apparent that the tentative plans for the "Library Extension" were a surprise to many of the members. This is a prime candidate for the members to make their suggestions, either by writing or Emailing, or by using the new suggestions box. We have already received some sensible, constructive and helpful suggestions, so please keep them coming in.

### **Dave (Wig) Irwin's Wake**

Dave Irwin, who died earlier this year was Mendip's leading cave historian and a prolific writer on caving subjects. His last major work was his chapter in the new Swildons book on the history of the cave. He was made a Wessex Vice-President for this and his work with the Mendip Cave Registry.

On 10<sup>th</sup> December forty eight of Dave's caving friends accompanied his ashes down St Cuthbert's The Wessex were represented by Pete Hann and Alison Moody and Dave's brother and his family were present on the surface A plaque to "The Wig's" memory was unveiled in Cerberus Hall, and a young violinist played some of the classical music that he loved. Later at an auction some of Dave's books and pictures were sold in the Village Hall. The proceeds went to the BEC. This was followed by a meal, during which the violinist (now recovered from her Cuthbert's trip!) and a cellist entertained. The evening concluded with a stomp with the Cheddar Blues Band

### **Templeton is becoming too popular!**

The deep shaft, spectacular steelwork and elaborate winding mechanisms are making the Templeton dig site, near Dursdon Drove, Priddy, something of a magnet for casual sightseers, but the visitor numbers are beginning to cause a headache for the dig organisers. David (Tuska) Morrison points out that the lane leading to the dig is a farm access track which runs right past the owner's home at Lower Pitts Farm, while the dig itself is 700m inside a field used for arable crops. Add to this the machinery on site and the long runs of fixed steel ladders in the shaft, and the potential for problems can be readily appreciated. David is keen to stress that cavers and diggers are welcome to visit Templeton, but they should do so by contacting himself (01761- 452437) or other team members and arranging to go over on a digging session or a "guided tour".



**Wessex Synchronised walling team.  
Photo: Geoff Ballard.**

Mike Thompson died on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> November. Mike was an Honorary Member and a familiar figure at Priddy. As an active caver he played a major role in the opening of Blue Pencil Passage. Later he was involved in a number of highly successful digs on Mendip. We offer our sympathies to Rachel and all his family. A full obituary and appreciation will be in the February Journal.

Another friend passes by and I reflect on memories of companionship, shared interests, conversation's of unknown caves yet to find, of past challenges and how these were overcome. I reflect on the inspiration I gained from you my friend, Mike Thompson.

Mike supported the Club and caving in many ways and for many years. I have always been grateful for, and respected very much, his and others opinions and guidance. Such opinion and guidance has over the years played and continues to play a significant part in my character and my role as Chairman of your Club.

### **Digging Bath Swallet & the Rods Pot connection**

Aubrey Newport.

Wednesday nights are traditionally 'digging night' on Mendip. There are perhaps a dozen teams who regularly dig on or under Mendip to discover new caves or passages. Many of the projects take years and it is not unusual for diggers to do several hundred trips into the same cave. One such cave which has recently been extended following a lot of work by a Wessex Wednesday night digging team is Bath Swallet.

Bath Swallet is the most easterly of the four known caves Bath, Rods Pot, Drunkards Hole, and Bos Swallet which are situated in the line of depressions just to the south of the track along the edge of Mendip Lodge Wood. Drunkards Hole was dug and extended by our Wednesday night team in the 1980's. [Wessex Journal Vol. 22 No. 239 pages 54-56] A stream flows off Blackdown and sinks in the Bath depression. Generally the stream sinks as it flows down the southerly side but in wet weather it also flows into the most westerly of the three cave "entrances" on the northern side of the depression. The most easterly was dug in the 1980's by Phil & Lynn Hendy without significant results. The middle entrance was opened up by Paul Lambert and Pete Hann in the late 1980's to give access to two small chambers after a 7m entrance drop and an awkward squeeze. This may be the same entrance as was opened by UBSS in 1946. [Proc. UBSS Vol. 6 No. 1



**Shower Pot. Photo: Phil Hendy**

A dig from the first chamber was started by Max Midlen and the author. The dig was vertically downwards through mostly mud with a few rocks and was stabilised by building stone and cement walls. It was often necessary to import rocks from the surface for walling blocks. As is often the case with cave digs the stacking



**Shower Pot. Photo: Phil Hendy**

and removal of spoil became a problem. Initially we filled the smaller of the two chambers, but then needed a more long term solution. We acquired a lot of buckets, filled them over several weeks, and stacked them in the first chamber. We then organised visits from the Lime Kiln digging team to make a bucket chain to empty the buckets on the surface. In the winter months digging became more difficult and at a depth of 5 to 6 metres we forced to ‘rest’ the dig as the wet conditions caused the walls to slump before we could stabilise them.

Over the next few years we dug elsewhere (mainly St. Lukes), and Max left for Australia. In 2001 the Foot and Mouth epidemic stopped all Wednesday night digging and as soon as restrictions started to be lifted Pete Hann and myself were eager to get underground. The first areas to be reopened included Burrington Coombe so we visited some of our old dig sites. The (then) bottom of Bath looked particularly interesting, having obviously taken a lot of water and so we decided to dig there, at least until all of the Foot and Mouth restrictions were lifted.

Two weeks later I was led on the floor of the dig, passing spoil back to Pete when a hole started to appear and rocks were dropping and bouncing off into the distance. Pete did not take my concern seriously and using a phrase similar to “get out of the way you wimp” took my place. Within a few minutes his words changed to “Oh S\*\*\*, give me that digging rope!”. We used the

digging rope as a lifeline and easily (but carefully) opened up a hole at the top of a pitch. Stacking spoil was no longer a problem as gravity did it for us in a spectacular fashion.

Our first decent was by rigging a single 24m ladder pitch, quite a classic for Burrington! The pitch was christened Shower Pot At the bottom is a large phreatic passage. Pete waited for me so we set off together to explore downstream (roughly easterly), only to be halted within 10 metres by a major boulder collapse and mud fill. There are several avens and a climb at the end leads to a small horizontal passage heading in the same direction as the main passage but the roof gradually lowers, enlarging this passage is our latest project. Upstream from the pitch was a large mud bank (now removed) with a squeeze over the top to a 2m hole in the floor and a pile of loose rocks leading to a major aven (Big Aven) with large jammed boulders. We have never seen any water coming down this aven although it must have taken a significant stream in the past.

The top of the main pitch required a lot of work to build walls and hold back the mud slope. We were joined for this by Colin Shapter and Keith Fielder, the other regulars of our Wednesday night team. The access to the top

of the ladder was through an awkward squeeze, over a rock protrusion. Keith took a dislike to this rock and adjusted its position by 25m vertically, taking with it our survey point! The rigging of the pitch was changed by adding some bolts near a large ledge. Two separate ladders (10m and 6m) now make a fairly easy descent. Some people free climb to the side of the lower pitch.

A dig was started down an obvious slot on the right of the main passage just downstream from the pitch. At the bottom of a 3m drop the stream was rejoined, having doubled back on itself. Digging along the streamway became a squalid mining exercise which we eventually abandoned.

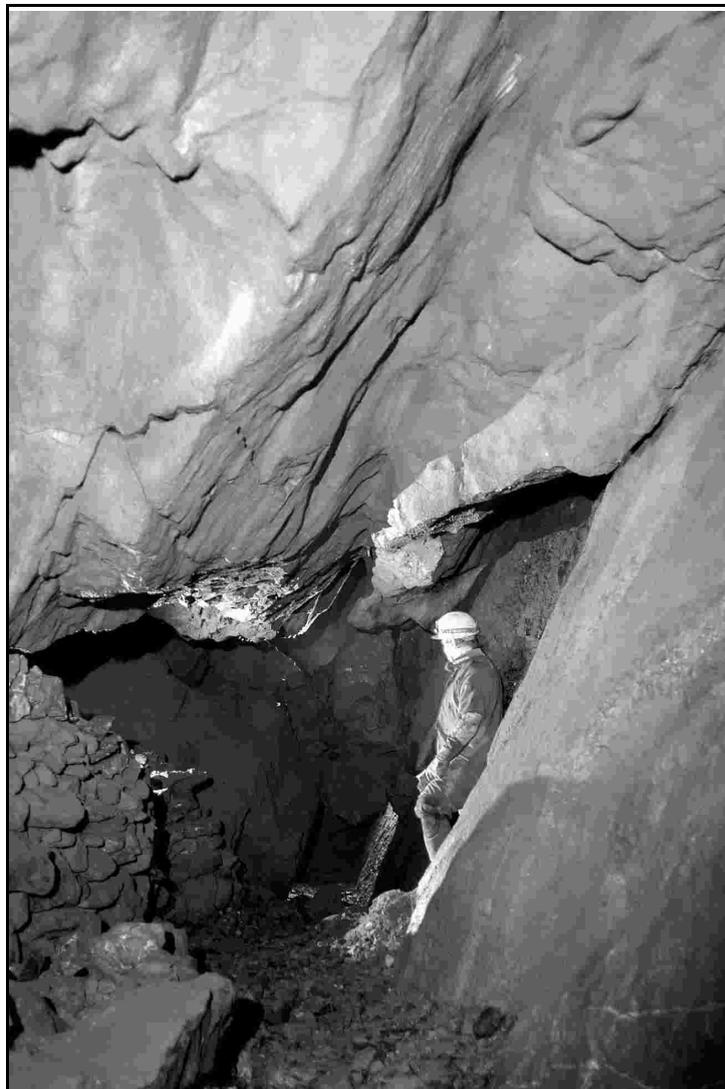
The second dig was from the bottom of the 2m hole near the bottom of Big Aven. The area was first stabilised and the mud bank graded to assist in spoil removal. The dig involved removal of mud and boulders from a cross rift while building a wall at the main passage end of the rift. The spoil was stacked in the main chamber. At this time (end 2003) I had an enforced break from the weekly digging trips on doctor's orders while recovering from a quadruple heart bypass. The normal advice is to avoid lifting any weight for 3 months after the operation while the chest bones repair, but on hearing about caving the consultant said no caving for at least 4 months! I therefore had a good excuse to avoid the bucket hauling on my return.

At a depth of about 10m a low horizontal passage with a stream was encountered. The stream was that sinking at the end of our previous dig. The passage was enlarged and followed in a westerly direction. A massive block was passed in 2004 by successively enlarging the gap between it and the solid wall until all of the team could pass. This was called Buddha squeeze, although it ceased to be a squeeze (for most) three bangs before Keith passed.

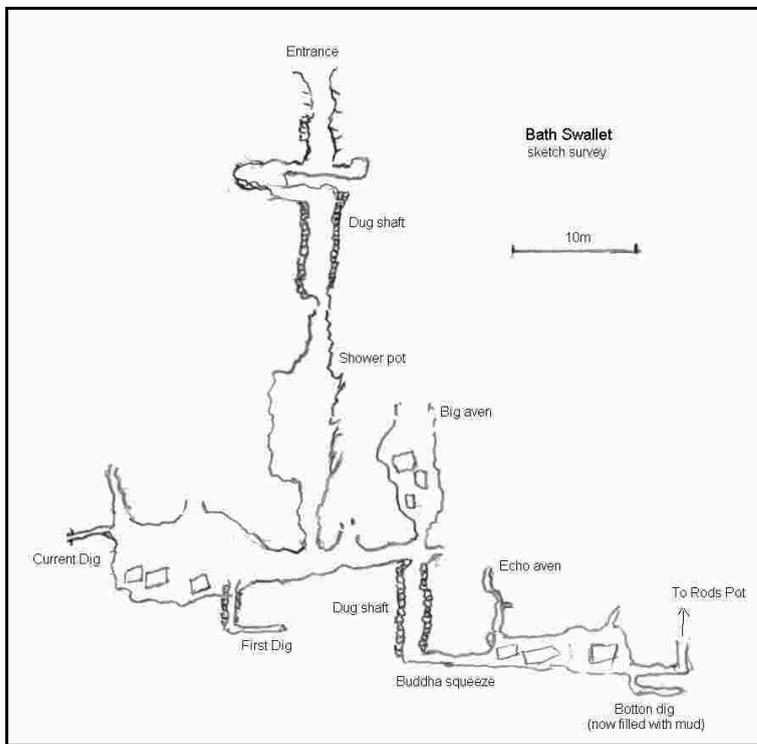
Beyond Buddha squeeze is a fairly large horizontal passage with a small lower level passage at the far end and several avens. We started digging along this lower passage but the roof was mainly mud and kept falling in, thus discouraging further progress.

Above the junction to this smaller passage is an aven which was enlarged in the vain hope it would provide a bypass to the dig.

In 2005 we had a visit from Jude Vanderplank and Ali Moody. Alison climbed further up the aven just past Buddha squeeze than anyone else had, and found there was a small passage going off over a stal. flow which gave a good echo. This passage promised to bypass the blockage at the upstream end of the Main passage at the bottom of the ladder pitches so we started to enlarge the approach to what became known as Echo Aven. Whilst digging the aven, our theory of the bypass was proven by the egress of bang fumes from the slot in the main passage. Echo Aven is a real collector's piece which is nearly impossible to climb, although very easy to descend! The way on at the top proved to be very small and would need a lot of work to push.



**Main Passage. Photo: Phil Hendy**



In April 2007 we had a joint trip with Andy Sparrow and the Cheddar Caving Club and established a sound connection between the bottom area of Bath and Rods Pot. In September 2007 they opened up the link making a through trip between the two caves. One unfortunate consequence of this is that the bottom dig passage has been completely filled with mud, blocking the drainage and making the cave about 2m less deep.

During the time we have dug Bath Swallet we have made some interesting observations. The most noticeable is the strong draught which goes in the Bath entrance in very cold weather and appears to coincide with the warm moist draught emitting from Rods Pot. This draught dries large areas of the walls of Bath down to the main passage in dry weather, but we have been unable to find where it leaves the known cave. On one occasion when the draught was particularly

strong we visited Rods and found a dry patch of wall just above the Bear Pit.

The main stream which sinks in the side of the Bath depression is not found anywhere in the cave. The part of the stream which sinks in the left entrance in wet conditions is found at the bottom of the entrance climb and sinks in several places in the upper chamber. Some of this water flows down Shower Pot and turns right before sinking in the floor of the main passage. This reappears in our first dig and then emerges at the bottom of the 9m climb before flowing through Buddha squeeze and under the floor of the lower passage to the bottom dig.

Prior to our 2001 breakthrough there were a few bats seen in the upper chamber in the winter months. After the breakthrough there were no signs of bats having been in the newly discovered passages, but over the past few years more and more bats have been observed. Their roosting positions are governed by the weather and they seem to move about to find their preferred temperature. The favourite locations are marked by droppings on the floor, thus proving the bats are feeding and do not hibernate through the whole winter. Our digging activities have never disturbed the bats even when they were quite close to where we were working. We have obviously been beneficial to the bats by opening up more habitats for them.

**Aubrey Newport**

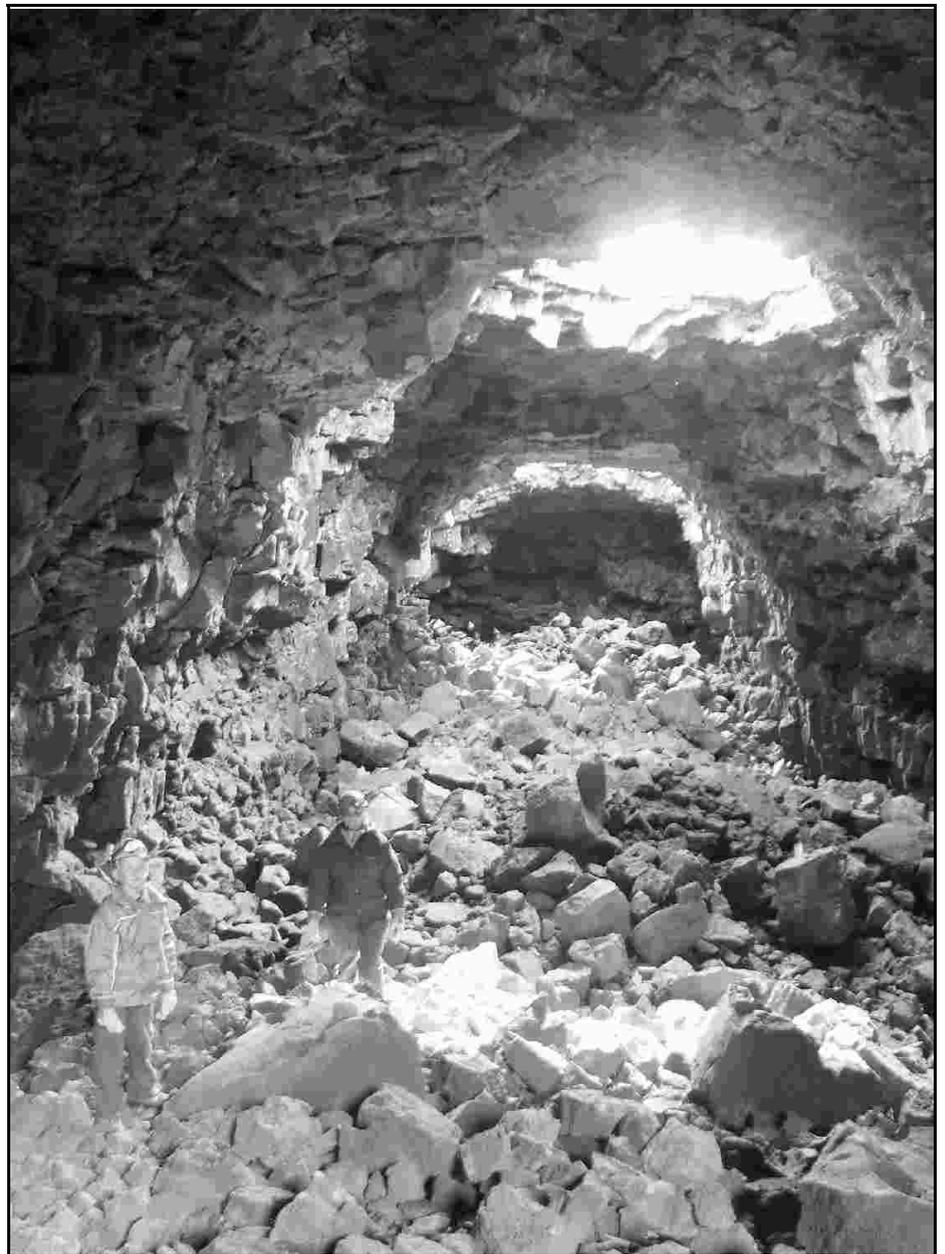
**Footnote:** On a very wet digging trip 20/11/07 (Jude, Adrian & Aubrey) some water was coming down Big Aven. The stream going through Buddha squeeze was sinking in a hole about 3 metres further on. If anyone wondered why we named the pitch Shower Pot, they should have been there!

### **Lava Tubes and Tectonic Rifts with the Family** Mike, Sarah and Robert.

Iceland, a country that many cavers have visited and one that was on my list of things to do. When a family trip to Iceland was suggested in August 07 I started working out how to fit in a couple of caving trips and a day's diving in Silfra, the flooded part of the tectonic rift system at Pingvellir. The caving part was easy, take Sarah and Robert with me, not that I had much choice in that matter as Robert was well up for it! As for the diving no one wanted to join me in 3.c water-they went off to a hot swimming pool, sorted!

The day's caving was in danger of being shortened when Robert decided that he wanted to go whale watching and due to the weather the boat was going out the morning of our planned caving trip. But as it never seems to get dark in Iceland in the summer, starting the caving adventure in the middle of the day was not a problem. We hired a car to get down to the Reykjanes peninsular about 40km south of Reykjavik, this area is the closest area of lava and lava tubes to Reykjavik and is well documented by SMCC journals. My research into lava tubes was primarily done by talking to Dave Ryall (BPC) and reading the excellent SMCC journals. I had chosen two caves

to look at, both due to their ease of access from the road and suitability for a seven year old caver. I located both caves with ease using GPS coordinates from the SMCC journal. The first cave visited was Raufarholshellir, this cave has 1360m of passage and is located next to the road with easy parking. It seems to be very popular with local visitors and tourists alike that wonder around the first 200m or so. We also came across one commercial guide and two clients further in. The guide seemed a bit off that we were not employing his services, but warmed a little at my mention of the SMCC! Raufarholshellir has an impressive entrance and the tunnel is around 10m square with two skylight entrances in the first couple of hundred meters. The floor though is covered in huge blocks that made forward progress a slow job for Robert who continually had to climb up and down blocks the size of him, the rock was also very sharp and I was glad of Dave Ryall's advice before we went to take gardening gloves to protect our hands. Robert, Sarah and myself got about 400m in taking photos on the way, when Robert decided he wanted lunch and then wanted to go and find the other



**Raufarholshellir** lava tube cave, Iceland. **Photo: Mike Thomas**

cave. He was getting a bit pissed off at either wobbling around on top of the blocks or stuck between them at the bottom not being able to see anything, he said he didn't like being short! So during lunch I carried on alone for another 300m or so in the same size square cut passage. Although not reaching the end of this cave, it was a great first lava tube but not greatly suitable for seven year old cavers. Arnaker was our second cave of the day, it is located two or three hundred meters from the road, or rather gravel track, but is clearly signposted and the route across the lava field is marked with wooden posts. The entrance is a large vertical collapse with a seven meter steel ladder down to the bottom, from this point two passages lead off, what I think is down flow goes about 70m to a boulder choke and what I think is up flow goes about 440m to end in another boulder choke. Once everyone was assembled out of the wind at the bottom of the ladder we set off up flow to try to reach the end of the 440m passage. The passage size in Arnaker is much smaller than Raufarholshellir around four or five meters square, we even had to crawl just inside the entrance. Much more suitable for Robert was that most of the blocks on the floor were football size and the larger ones you could walk around rather than climb over. We were flying along! Arnaker is a much nicer cave the lava formations are very good, it even has some lava straws near the end. We reached the end in around one and a quarter hours with a cookie every hundred meters or so and came out a bit slower with Robert wanting to take photos so he could have a rest and steal another cookie. Just inside the entrance was a visitor book that we duly signed, there was only six or so recorded visits this year. On arriving back at the ladder I went to look at the 70m of down flow passage on my own and was treated to a superb lava



**Tectonic Rift. Iceland. Photo: Mike Thomas**

roof at the end, but no amount of cookie bribery could persuade Robert or Sarah to have a look. Within minutes of being back in the car one third of my caving team was asleep! The following day I was picked up in Reykjavik by my Icelandic dive guide and after a quick trip around town to collect a girl from New York and a couple from Paris we set off to do a days diving in Silfra. Silfra is a flooded tectonic rift about an hours drive inland from Reykjavik; the rift also has some cave development. When we arrived it became obvious that there was more than one tectonic rift, in fact there are several spread out over four kilometres in width and many kilometres in length. What is so special about the site is that you are between two continental plates North America on one side and Eurasian on the other. The water in the rift flows up from underground and is fed from the Langjokull glacier 50 kilometres to the North East, hence the balmy 3°C water temperature, it gets colder in winter. From the rift it flows into Iceland's largest freshwater lake, Pingvallavatn. After sorting out gear and getting in the water it became apparent that my new friend from New York was having a little difficulty with life and the Icelandic guide was earning his money! For me this was great, the couple from Paris were patiently freezing to death on the surface and

I just took the opportunity to investigate the source of the water. At a depth of 20 m a cave entrance leads back under the lava flow, I found out later that this cave goes back around 200m to a depth of 60m but as I was on a single cylinder and one light I had to be content with a brief look. Once reunited with my new underwater friends we spent two dives swimming the rifts, each rift was connected by a small cave. The water clarity was the best I have ever seen at around 60 meters plus, it was awesome. Several small caves were noted in the walls at the bottom of the rifts and some were looked at, but again not for any great distance, it was a little unnerving to find on one occasion Mr Frenchman had followed me in and managed to stuff the visibility in his efforts to turn around! I had a great couple of dives it's not what you would call cheap but well worth it.

The next day on a tour of some of the sites of Iceland Sarah, Robert and I returned to Pingvellir to have a walk around the area and investigate the dry tectonic rifts for caves. We followed one rift system for about a Kilometre it was just like caving but in daylight and I climbed down into several caves in the rift floor, Robert was a little unhappy that daddy would not let him join in but the rock was very unstable and not at all suitable for prolonging his caving career or my health if anything happened to Robert. I abandoned cave exploration for the day when in the last cave I climbed down into I stopped at about -20m over a 2m drop, it looked a bit hard to climb back up and there was a big black hole to the right! As I was contemplating life the ledge gave way and I fell to the floor covered in rock and mud, luckily missing the black hole where the ledge disappeared down never to be seen again. After a bit of a scary climb back out I found Sarah and Robert playing 'would you rather' and none the wiser of my little epic. On the walk back to the car Robert asked why I was all muddy and closely followed (before I could reply) with could we have lunch! **Mike**

References:

Shepton Mallet Journal series 11 No4 Autumn 2003. The Rough Guide to Iceland <http://www.dive.is/>

## From the Log Book & the Wessex Website

Saturday September 8 2007. **Wookey Hole.** John W. Fiona.

Did some line laying through the resurgence with John. Excellent viz until I pulled the sump back out with me! **Fiona.**

Sunday September 9 2007 **Wigmore Swallet.** Stu. Chriss J, Andy, Richard, Ian and Fiona.

Had an excellent trip helping Stu and Chriss J get their dive kit down to the sumps. This cave is one of Mendip's best: gives a really good day's caving. Stu and Chris had a very successful time diving the up- and down- stream sumps. **Fiona.**

Saturday September 8 2007 **Charterhouse Cave.** Pete Hann, Nigel Graham.

Short trip to carry sand down the cave, including sieving sand and gravel from the streamway, and to assess the next move on.....

Saturday September 15 2007 **Charterhouse Cave.** Pete Hann, Nigel Graham plus Ali and Pete Moody.

Yet more sand and cement in. Three bucket-fulls of mortar placed in what is now a pitch within the choke. **Pete**

Saturday September 15 2007 **Stoke Lane Slocker.** Claire C, Dave E, Richard C, Bruce, Danny, Paul F, Phil.

After a trip to Swildons sump one, Richard Cohen, a new caver, felt ready for a bit of pain and misery, by the name of Stoke Lane Slocker. Richard - and all eight of us - enjoyed ourselves immensely. Had a good look around the Princess' Chamber and Grotto, took some pictures and then back out in time for last orders. Noted at entrance: no stream whatsoever after two weeks without rain. **Claire**

Saturday September 15 2007 Derbyshire, **JH** Jim Lister. Fiona. Richard.

Had an excellent trip down JH for some SRT. First time down there, a very impressive passage: as you slide down it seems to just keep going. The walls of the passage were really interesting. I only did part of this trip as I only have limited SRT skills. Did a little caving at the bottom and then climbed the rope out. Jim and Richard continued on further and came out much later. **Fiona**

Saturday September 15 2007 Derbyshire. **Holme Bank Mine.** Fiona.

Very pleasant swim exploring most of the passages. Excellent vis. As always. **Fiona**

Sunday September 16 2007 Derbyshire, **Peak Cavern.** Jim Lister, Fiona.

Today's work was transporting scaffold clamps through Buxton Water Sump. I was hoping to continue on to Ink Sump, but not enough air in bottles to continue. Excellent trip. **Fiona.**

Tuesday September 18 2007 **Swildons.** The Crap Trap. NikNak, Geoff, Adrian.

A new discovery in Swildons, by the dive line just before sump 2. NikNak noticed a possible inlet on Saturday when visiting the sump to pick up a bottle. Adrian Vdp, Geoff and NikNak made quick work of moving a rather smelly organic silt to reveal a small submerged passage. Head-first, underwater digging in cold zero vis is amusing ???!!! Will investigate further. 7 feet of progress so far. **NikNak**

Saturday September 29 2007 **Swildons** Graham Bowden. Phil Hendy. Gary.

Graham Bowden's 70<sup>th</sup>. Birthday trip to Sump 1 with nephew Gary. A slow gentlemanly amble over 3 hours stopping for chocolate refreshment at the sump. All the other parties were going the other way. So they did not hold us up. **Phil**

Saturday September 29 2007 **Dan Yr Ogof** Fiona, Stuart France.

Had a really nice time in DyO. Went through the green canal and did some exploring the other parts of the cave. Completed the round trip. This is always a real fun place to cave in. **Fiona**

Sunday September 30 2007 **GB** "Big" Stuart Little, Hatstand.

Really nice trip to Bat Passage. Found a large group had just rigged the ladder and very kindly let us through first. Fun trip. Bat passage really really nice. Stuart now wants to go back with a camera. **Hatstand**

Saturday October 6 2007 **Swildons** Every one who is anyone.....

The Great Wessex Boat Race took place on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup>. October. This must have involved a huge amount of preparation by Ali, not least the installation of a 60 metre long 4" water pipe to deliver water from the water chamber to the top of the old 40. There it emerged from a magnificent dragon's head gargoyle. Ali's aim was perfect. The pitch was wet all the way down with a bonus, very authentic, "Bounce Splash" from the far wall, two thirds of the way down. Tommo's truly authentic wood and rope ladder pinched nicely at the top and slid beautifully into the crevice. Ah, nostalgia.... and dozens of us enjoyed this unique experience. But this is to jump ahead of events, which started on 29 September with the initial rigging and hydraulic engineering.

Saturday September 29 2007 )

Saturday October 6 2007 ) **Swildons**. Ali and lots of helpers.

Installing the pipe along the old water rift from the water chamber to put water over the old 40' pot. Impressive, even though flow through the pipe less than that using the post 1968 flood



course. Friday October 5 (Friday evening) Installed the wooden rung/rope ladder and the Dragon's Head Gargoyle. Rope ladder by Tommo, Gargoyle sculpted by Phil Henty. Saturday October 6 (morning) Ali and Kevin fine-tuned the plumbing. Saturday October 6 (afternoon) About 60 Boat Race participants, WCC and guests, assembled on Priddy Green in assorted caving / nautical / piratical fancy dress, bearing a remarkable variety of boats, for a photo-call prior to launching themselves down the dry ways and their boats into the entrance pool. Visibility underground rapidly went to zero in mist and sundry stunned parties of unbelievers and infidels found themselves struggling upstream against a human, rather than liquid, flood. Gathered in the water chamber the throng eased their thirsts on the infamous Moody ginger grog while waiting for the winning boat to appear. In due course Mr Newport's diminutive ultra-lightweight crossed the line in first place, hotly pursued by Biff's cave diver, whose helmet lights were still working. Unsatisfied with these minor excitements the multitude formed a crocodile to the top of the old 40', where Phil's Gargoyle vomited an impressive waterfall from Ali's amazing flexible water main with considerable accuracy



(and force) all over everything and everyone - notably the entire length of Tommo's vintage ladder. Various all and sundry descended, exercising their best vintage vocabulary. For future reference: it is impossible to dance a Hornpipe under the 40 in knee deep water when you can't hear yourself think, let alone sing.... Approximately the same number enjoyed a superlative hot meal later, at Upper Pitts, produced by the endlessly hard working Brenda Prewer and Jon Williams. Plainly this was **THE** social event of the season, and later still it extended to a two-handed each skittles at the New Inn where the highest scores were Ali and Nigel (15 each - which confirms the rumours that all that mortar has been used to build a practice lane in Charterhouse Cave....) And Pete (?MNRC) with a questionable total of 19. The guest, alas, won the play-off: the only blot on an otherwise amazingly successful and enjoyable day - another absolute triumph for Ali.

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Monday October 1 2007 OFD Names listed below:

Due to some international caving trips coming up I have been trying to keep the smaller excursions down a bit and yet I never seem to be able to, maybe because... as with any addiction it feels so much better when you shouldn't be doing it. So I broke my self-imposed (and lamely enforced) ban and jumped at the offer of a crafty trip to OFD with the Wessex and after using guilt trips, bribery and the threat of kidnapping... I convinced Hatstand to join us also.

As this was going to be The Grand Traverse through trip it was going to be the longest I had done so far and I really wanted to see how far I could push myself and also gauge just how far I had progressed in the last 4 months. I won't be able to remember the correct order or indeed all the names of the things we did, mainly because I don't cave in distance but rather in piss-takes and obstacles, so while I can pinpoint on a survey certain places where stupidity or high level moaning occurred I might not be so great with the more normal bits (of which there were few).

Saturday OFD;

Attending (split into 3 groups of five with one leader per group)

Group One; Team Cooke, Myself, Hatstand, John, Pete and Cookie

Group Two; Team Morse, Ian Timney, Michelle, Andy Morse, Katy and Lou

Group Three; Team Les, Les and Peter Jenkins

There were two steps in this cave that were the most significant for me, the first was the scariest and the second was the stupidest; at the very start of the cave we had already split up into our groups then staggered our entry and so team Cookie quickly came to a hole overlooking a streamway about 15 foot below. The trick was to jump to the other side and hopefully land on a steep bit of slope before jumping straight back and into another bit of passage....fine, but I was a bit too tall to stand up without losing balance and for some reason I almost found myself trying to back off. Perhaps I imagined that this was the shape of things to come, except the next jump would end up being 100 foot up, either way I did it with ease but it was more scary than I had bargained for and right by the entrance too! this didn't bode well but in fact turned out to be the only thing that really phased me in the whole trip!

After some stomping we came to a small boulder choke that was fun to wriggle through and then onwards, at some point we passed some very nice passageway which I believe is called 'Connection' with countless scores of straw like formations that were almost crystalline in texture, very pretty! The rest of the trip is possibly going to be quite disjointed but the next significant part was 5 metres or so of climb and then into a crawl that brought us up a few more metres on to level ground.

OFD is such a rewarding cave, with such a great amount of diversity and it really does have everything to offer, it is so big in places that you hardly ever feel that niggling oppressive vibe that some of the smaller caves can give off and I ended up conversing my way through a lot of the cave in a relaxed manner, stopping now and then to gaze in wonder (or have my head physically aimed at roof formations) or to get past an obstacle or two.

We bottlenecked and met one of the other groups at an interesting and rather unstable looking boulder choke and whilst we all gazed at it suspiciously and began gingerly going through it one at a time (to minimize fatalities) Les suddenly decided to burst into a poignant and moving ballad about being crushed to death by boulders, it was so moving in fact that some of us went so far as to take a running dive through the boulders just to get the hell out of there.... As far as boulder choke theme tunes go it

lacked the pleasantries of 'Old McDonald' but was certainly a lot more motivational.

The next obstacle came in the form of the letterbox, it made me wonder what the first people who went through it must have thought, in finding the way on not to be a squeeze or a climb, but in fact a squeeze positioned 20 foot up a climb. It is a little daunting after having climbed up the wall only to have to lean across on a very small foothold and try and lean back far enough to get your head inside the slot, whilst hoping you don't lean back that little bit too far and end up in a freefall. Les used a sling to strap himself in to one part of the slot and then proceeded to help various folk through.... thinking my luck was in and I was going to get an easy ticket through I climbed up only to see a smug Les vanishing through the slot. Instant karma was achieved in the form of his drink carton jamming him in, which resulted in an emptying of pockets and no small amount of swearing.

On the other side was the start of the one obstacle I had previously been dreading.... Diver's Pitch bypass, maybe it was the lack of enthusiasm I was detecting from certain group members or the willingness by others to belay off of a rusty bolt in preference to the bypass, either way I was nervous.... all I knew was that at least one person was not going to be enjoying this, however if this was the case then it certainly wasn't me... I loved it!

I was originally going to do the pitch on a stop and use a sling as a harness but after realising the sling wasn't going to fit without some serious work (I had 4 layers of clothing on) I decided to try the dreaded bypass, which was going to be much more exciting as I have done quite a bit of SRT now anyway and would rather try the more 'interesting' option. 'Interesting' came in the form of an initial bit of squeeze followed by a long and upwardly steep bit of tube that was like the drainpipe but with much less room and about 6 times as long. After thrutching for ages and enduring a severe amount of farting from someone up ahead, I was rewarded with looking down a 40 foot free-climb that had quite a lot of exposure. I always hate the waiting part, it is like having two personas... the waiting one that sits in silence, listening to everyone else and notes down every bit of struggle or negative factor and then converts it into sheer terror, and then the minute I am ready to go and take that first step down. I seem to switch into some kind of adrenaline fuelled monster and it is an empowered feeling that almost anything is possible, it is that transition that always occurs in the first step which I guess is less a physical one and more about getting over myself.

The climb was very easy, and a lot of fun and soon we were getting into the streamway proper which was easily one of the best bits for me, whilst most of the group did their best to bridge their way over the mantraps I did my best to plumb their depths with my entire body and I am happy to report that some of them were pretty deep. Cookie callously tried to use my head as a stepping stone for one part, but I ended up having the last laugh as he had overlooked bringing his neo-fleece and so all the way along the Marble streamway he made various shrill noises as the water reached a variety of critical points. I love water and so I spent much of my time in holes, crouched down and pretending they were much deeper (or in some amusing cases shallower) than they were.

We climbed out at the Oxbow and were soon free of roaring streamway and into hushed and muffled passageway, a wonderful contrast after all the noise and action just a few minutes before: We reached the drop at the end and I freeclimbed down it whilst Les rigged a handline and ladder for some of the others, and then it was back into the stream for more glorious dive bombing accompanied by a distant symphony of shrieks and moans along

with the odd chant of "Kenya" for good measure. Soon it was nearly all over and Maypole inlet was always going to be interesting, after several folk used my shoulders as a handy foothold I climbed on up and listened intently for the barrage of swearing that was sure to come from Les (we had bottlenecked and met the other groups again) as he began one of his least favourite parts of OFD. I always take a bit of smug satisfaction at the performing that goes on in this part of the cave as there is no bypassing it via 120 foot traverses, nor can you perform superhuman squeezes to get past it, and so seeing even Les reduced to misery along with the rest of us is always refreshing! and I know of quite a few people who might agree with this! We all got up and as this wasn't my first time on this part I was quite happy with the fairly steep freeclimb, but upon seeing a rope which some of the newer folk had used to aid them across, I was more than tempted to use it myself... the moment I mentioned this it was instantly removed

from my sight and I was severely berated! I actually found this hysterical and there are times on these trips where I do feel like a bit of an apprentice, great fun and if I'd really wanted to use it I am sure I could have (I was just being lazy).

We made our way out in a leisurely manner and I was really proud of how much energy I had left, I was literally buzzing and nothing ached... I almost felt like I could do the whole trip again as my stamina has certainly improved a great deal since the last time I was here and my confidence was also way up.

After that first fearful step over the very small drop near the entrance everything else had been fine and so it was whilst confidently walking the last 50 metres towards the entrance and laughing when Les told me how he had fallen over here, that I took my second comedy step.... which resulted in me nose diving into the dirt, sliding down a mudbank and looking for all the world like a twat. It was instant karma and I think even if I had broken my wrist there and then, I would have pretended I didn't just to avoid a lifetime of pisstakes!

What a brilliant trip and it took 6 hours in all which was a very relaxed and fun trip, it was easily the longest trip I have done and the fact that we only very rarely crossed paths with the other two groups was testimony to the sheer size and numerous route options within the place.

It should be mentioned that the three ladies who joined us (and for whom the trip was for) were doing their second ever trip underground, which just by chance was also one of the longest through trips in Britain, they did unbelievably well.

Big thanks go to everyone involved for an absolutely fantastic trip! **Kknowme**.

Wednesday October 3 2007 Swildons. Fiona, Rich, Andy and Jude.

Had a great trip. We went down Lower Fault Chamber and laddered it. We bailed Link Sump for 30 minutes in readiness for our trip on Sunday to Watergate. Really looking forward to Watergate as I haven't been before. **Fiona**

Monday October 1 2007 OFD, John & Peter Hurst. Kknowme, Michelle, Katie & Louise Frost, Pete Jenkins, Cookie, Les, Hatstand, Any Morse, Ian Timney.

We finally met at the SWCC. A late start as Ian had to be struggled out of bed. We split into three groups and had an excellent trip, OFD1 to Top Entrance. 6 hours. **Anon**

Friday October 5 2007 Cuckoo Cleaves Dave and Jon Mason I felt like Gandalf in the Lord of the Rings when he leads his merry band through the Mines of Moria and they get to the

junction and he says "I have no memory of this place"! I didnt!! I simply could not remember anything about the place other than it was pretty steep. I'm glad to say that unlike Gandalf and his followers we didnt wait around for hours only to follow our noses (which would have taken us to the Hunters anyway and cut out the caving altogether!). In true mendip style we just got on with it.

Having suggested to Jon that we go here so he could get another new cave under his belt I did feel a little responsible for leading us through the place. Its quite easy really though as Les put it in the pub after "you just keep going down!". We made good progress down through the Canyon and down a short section that reminded me of the 13 pots in Eastwater. We stopped and took some photo's along the way and just took our time looking at the steeply descending rift walls that are really quite spectacular.

We continued down through the 10ft crawl and then squeezed up into the key hole passage that again descends quite steeply to a short climb down and then the squeeze that terminates at Mark 1 (which I had to reverse all the way back out of!). Here we stopped for a breather as both were feeling pretty out of breath and wondered about the air quality in this section?

We then decided to make a slow ascent back to the entrance and again take some photo's along the way. It's on the way out that you realise just how steep this place really is! After a route finding blip near the top we emerged to yet another fantastic mendip night sky.

We quickly changed on the side of the road and then headed to the Hunters for the obligatory Chilli and Butcombe. Yet another great evening trip! **Dave Mason**

Sunday October 7 2007 Thrupe Lane Swallet Claire Cohen, Emmsy, Mak, John Meneeley, Clive Westlake.

We went down the normal way, Perseverance Pot, Marble Streamway, Slither Pot. All good practice for John, who was doing his first rigging trip. 3 3/4 hours. Excellent apples in the orchard at the entrance. **Anon**

Saturday October 13 2007 Longwood / August. Colin Charles. Pete Smith.

Second Saturday trip. Went down to Longwood Chamber and had a look at the waterfall climb, then carried on downstream until where it degenerates into crawling. Had a look at two side passages and also went up the upstream passage. Opted not to take the wet way out. A great sporting trip. Met two other parties on the way out. **Anon**

Saturday October 13 2007 Daren Cilau. Adrian Forcept. Fiona. Had an excellent time in the cave today - went to visit other parts of the cave. We headed to the Time Machine and then to the Meeting Room through Nameless Canyone and on into Aggy Passage. Next Half-Mile Passage and headed to Western Flyover to visit the old camp. Then back into Bonzai streamway and Crystal Oxbow. Continued up to the Water Pipe and on to the end. It was excellent to visit new parts of the cave. A really nice trip and even better having no large tackle bag to carry. **Fiona**

Saturday October 13 2007 Charterhouse Cave. Ali, Pete Hann, Nigel.

Stabilising only, more mortar! Ali's birthday, so cake with candles in Singing Stal Chamber. Built up appetite for Ali's birthday meal in the evening, complete with superbly iced cake brought along by Kevin Hilton. **Nigel**

Wednesday October 17 2007 Crocks Hole Dig Bob Scammel,

Steve. Pete.

I think that the pot has taken on a whole new meaning for Steve (Number One digger at the Pot bottom) as he came up looking more like a gargoye than any gargoye I've ever seen. Luckily Pete-the-winch and Bob-the-dumper got of lightly with slightly soiled hands.... But we smile and keep on going..... **Bob**

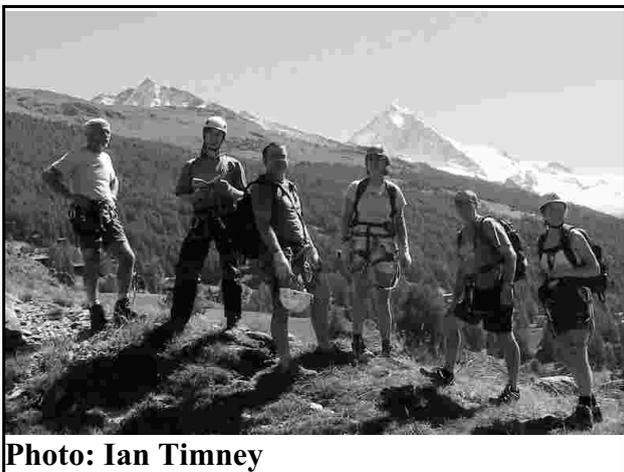
Wednesday November 7 2007 Swildons. Watergate. Kevin, Andy, Richard, Fiona.

I must say that this is the best trip in Swildons that I've done in a good long time. We pre-laddered Lower Fault and bailed it on Wednesday evening. Today the water level had stayed low. We started out by doing Blue Pencil and dropping into the streamway and having a look at 4. Then headed up Watergate. Wow! What an excellent entrance - up a narrow rift and into a slot. Continued, hit a sharp right turn, then stumbled into Christening Pool Duck. We bailed for about ten minutes, then took the plunge.... Nice duck. Then some more worming around to Sac Gang. This brought a few smiles to our muddy faces; then into Double Ducks. Those were great. Then on to Spectacle Duck - it sure was a spectacle! Then the long duck, taking all the mud with us and then some more bailing at the sump. This was interesting. My lips kissed the roof and my eyes saw water... some very slow movement... and I was through. Then all the others slid their way through, enjoying every minute of it. Covered in thick, glutinous mud from eyes to mouth and every other hole you can think of, you cannot escape the mud. Then we slid up into Lower Fault, where the ladder was inviting us to climb, mud and all. Up safely we headed for the streamway for a very well-earned wash before continuing on and back into daylight. Looking forward to doing it again. Soon. **Fiona**

Wednesday November 7 2007 Swildons, Watergate. Starring Fiona and Andy Snook, Guest starring Kev with Richard Carey We had pre-rigged the Lower Fault Chamber and baled the sump on the previous Wednesday night. Thanks to Jude Vanderpalk

## VIA FERRATA SWITZERLAND September 2006 by Ian Timney

Early in 2006 Simon Richardson invited me on his via ferrata trip to Switzerland. I knew he had organised previous trips to France



**Photo: Ian Timney**

before, but this one was to be different. I had myself only done one via ferrata route, after an epic 18 hour through trip in the Reseau du Verneau with Cookie, Les Williams, Peter Jenkins, &

for her assistance.

The trip was fairly uneventful apart from the massed hordes that you encounter on a Sunday in Swildons. We were only held up once on our way to the Mud Sump which was mercifully open although not dry. Blue Pencil was relatively uneventful and we went to visit sumps 3 and 4 as it was Andy's first visit.

The climb up into Watergate provided some entertainment for the larger members and I believe the air must have been not good as I was puffing away and struggled to get through. Andy remarked that as we had been here before why would we want to return! Even though Christening Duck was open we baled it to give a three inch air space and it provided no difficulty although emerging from the pool proved to be a little difficult as it had become very slippery. Next we came to the up-and-over passage which thanks to Kev I was able to negotiate. No-one else seemed to have a problem. then into the Sac Gang. Easy going for a while and the Double Duck was negotiated without any difficulty and straight on to Spectacle Duck. No-one remembered how long the duck was so Kev was elected to go through first. Feet first. He announced that it was ok and we all followed. We all became liberally coated in the glutinous mud that is abundant in these parts. No eyeball licking was necessary although it appeared that the mud had penetrated every orifice. However unperturbed we pressed on to Long duck. this seems to have silted up a little since my last visit 3 years ago as it was a bit tight in places. We baled the final sump to a minimum, the unavailability of air space previously must have done the trick and we triumphantly emerged into Lower Fault Chamber. We were held up at the 20 by the Sunday Hordes but soon returned to the hut for Tea and Trifle after a 40p shower. The first 20p was need to wash away the glory. **Rich**

nine Dutch cavers. This one climb although spectacular, did nothing to prepare me for what was in store.

### Day 1

At long last the day had arrived, 31 August, flying from Luton to Geneva, in great company with Steve Buck, Anna Harris, Toby Jones, John Hurst, Jo Williams and Simon. I had not met Anna, Toby or John before but in minutes we were like old friends. We had a good lunch at the airport then off to Genève, hired a couple of cars and set off for the hills. We drove about 150Km to Sion in the lovely Rhone Valley. Simon was driving the lead car, John in the front, me (the navigator) half asleep in the back. Never mind we got to Sion, found a lovely restaurant had a good meal in high spirits, then off to find a campsite in the dark. No trouble. Pitched our tents and had time for a good few beers in the campsite bar.

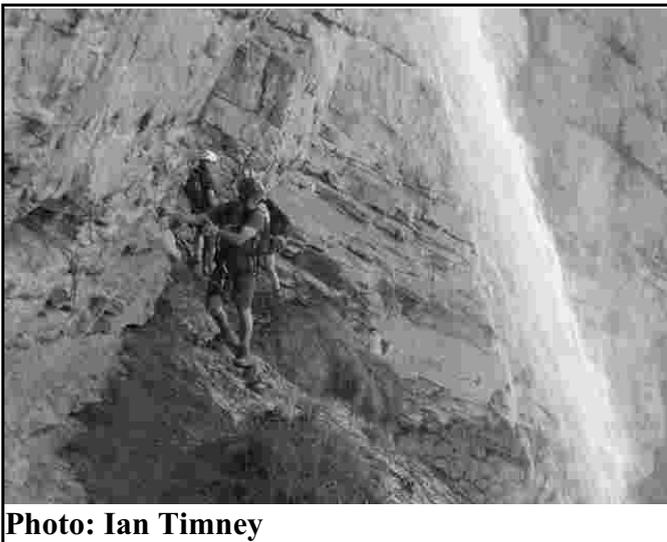
### Day 2

We woke and packed (not too early) the next morning, had a substantial breakfast in the campsite café then drove the 30km to Evolene to do (route 39) in the Via ferrata in Switzerland book by Iris Kurschner. It's a ROTHER WALKING GUIDE book, visit [www.rother.de](http://www.rother.de) if you're going get one.



**Anna on first climb. Photo: Ian Timney**

This route was a perfect starter, about an hour in duration rising 200m mostly vertical, with some short overhanging sections and very pretty. Followed by a 30min walk to the village, lunch and a couple of beers in the glorious sunshine, the weather was set for the whole week. After lunch we did a supermarket shop then drove 80km to Saas Grund. Simon was driving the lead car, John front passenger, me the (navigator) in the back either gazing out the window or dozing at all the crucial points. I hadn't realised that at this very early stage of our holiday, that Simon was already planning the next year's trip. He had decided not to rely on navigators again he was going to buy a y TOM TOM. We arrived in Saas Grund at 5.30pm, pitched our tents on a campsite behind the restaurant, and much to our delight the gear shop was still open. Simon bought a super duper climbing helmet, and I bought a proper climbing harness. A caving harness is not a good idea. We had a slap-up dinner in the restaurant, loads of beer, a good night's sleep, and awoke to a beautiful morning and only 5 minutes walk to the cable car which was to be the start of our days activity.



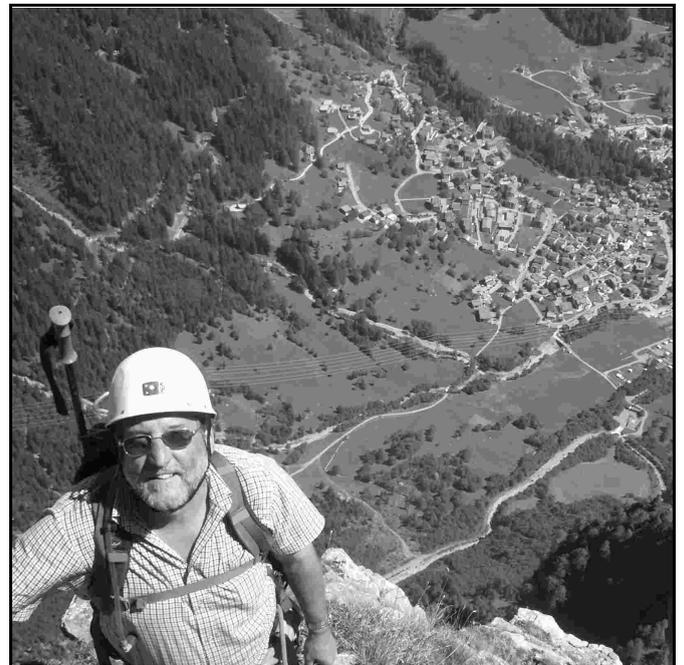
**Photo: Ian Timney**

### Day 3

Our climb for today was (route 50) the Jegihorn 3206 m high, we had to get started early as this was going to be an all day trip, so after a quick breakfast we packed our kit and provisions for the day. We were at the Hohnsaas gondola at 7.30 am at 1559m, then up to the Kreuzboden midway station, at 2397m. The cable car

ride was so spectacular it would be worth going all the way to Switzerland just for this. We then did a splendid 1 hour alpine walk, past the Wiessmies hut to the start of the climb at 2800m. We had crossed large expanses of rugged rocky terrain and moraines, then onto the climb. A very vertical start with a mixture of via ferrata and natural holds, 5 fixed ladders, and a monstrous steel rope bridge about 80m long with a humongous drop below. At the other end of the bridge there is vertical rope webbing to climb onto a huge, very exposed rock face, up the summit cone to the top. This has a timber cross as do all summits in Switzerland. (Before the bridge there is a by-pass giving an alternate route to the summit).

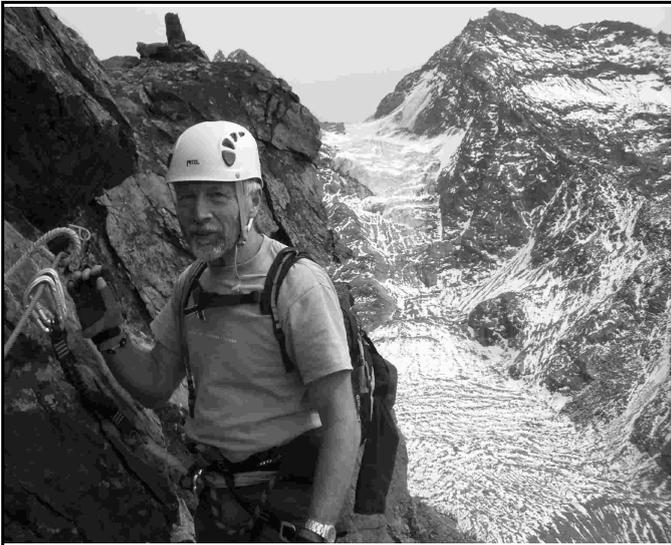
We reached the summit in brilliant sunshine, not a cloud in sight; within 20 minutes it was snowing! We watched 4 tiny black dots moving slowly up a huge snow field on a 4000m peak adjacent to us. They then disappeared in a complete white out. Our immediate response was to get the hell off this mountain. Fortunately as we descended we were quickly out of the snow and cloud and back to sunshine. The hardest part I reckon was the walk out, very steep narrow paths with precipitous scree slopes each side dropping into nowhere. 2 walking poles are a great advantage.



**Photo: Simon Richardson**

Throughout the climb you are surrounded at all times by the most beautiful alpine scenery. On the summit one felt an overwhelming sense of wellbeing, to be here in this place, surrounded by the true majesty of the mountains, and in such fine company. We thoroughly enjoyed the gondola ride back to reality. The gear shop was still open so in we went - can't resist a good gear shop.

Our campsite had really good showers, so we indulged ourselves, and then feeling clean and content, we all congregated in the bar to celebrate conquering the highest Via Ferrata in the Western Alps. Which we did, most royally, and felt like shit the next day. Despite the hangover Simon quoted, "Doesn't matter what happens now, every one is happy."



**Photo: Ian Timney**

**Day 4**

Got up late, packed, Pain aux Chocolate, then drove the 40k to Zermatt. You cannot take a vehicle into Zermatt so you park at the Tasch railway station, and take the train, a 20min ride to Zermatt. We had a delicious brunch in town, did some shopping then took the Matterhornbahn cable car to the Furi Mountain Station ( 1864m ), and the start of the Gorner Gorge, (route 46). Pretty much at the base of the Matterhorn.

The route starts with a steep decent through some woods, then into the head of the gorge. Straight away you are struck by the light, colour, texture and the atmosphere of this truly beautiful and tranquil place.

As you traverse through the gorge, with the Gornerbach thundering 30m below, you get a real sense of the millions of



**Photo: Ian Timney**

years you are immersing yourself in. A bluish world of fantastic shapes and moulins in the smooth polished gneiss, with alpine flowers and bird song all around. What finer way to spend a day! There are abseils, a Tyrolean, a squeeze through a hole in one of the moulins, (not for podgy people it says in the guide book: can't be right - I got through). There are 3 zip wires, a rope pendulum, aerial walkways, one of them only a long 4in diameter

log. Finally an audacious wooden pathway above the river, through the narrowest part of the gorge and installed in 1880. At the end of the route you continue through the now wooded gorge, on wooden walkways above the canyon floor for about 30minutes.

There are Elves hiding in the trees as you pass through the forbidden realm of Rivendell. We were unmolested, only I believe because our leader has the look of Legolas, of the woodland realm about him. At the end of the path you are accosted by a huge carven Phallus, a final gesture from the elves, for your trespass. To quote Simon, "This is one of the best fun routes I've ever done!"

We had our evening meal in Zermatt, got a late train back, then drove 70k to Leukerbad our next destination. The sun was setting as we arrived, the rocky peaks were bathed in sunlight, the mountains were beautiful, the campsite was crap, and you had to, in the woods as the bogs were locked!

**Day 5**

Crept out of the tent fairly early, the sun was up, WOW! Have you seen that monster of a mountain behind the campsite, a massive bastion of bare rock, that's bloody scary!

We decided to pack as we had no intention of staying another night, then into town for some breakfast. We then took the cable car up to the Gemmipass at 2322m. We were about to climb (route42) the Daubenhorn at 2942m the longest and hardest Via Feratta in Switzerland. It was only that bloody scary bastion of bare rock at the back of the campsite. The walk in to the climb scared the living daylight out of us. Along a very narrow scree path, with a massive vertical wall at our right shoulder, a drop of about 800m down the scree at about 75° and no protection. At a sharp angled turn in the path I caught up with Toby looking a bit white faced, he was clearly struggling with something he could not believe he had just seen. A human body had hurtled past him so fast he hardly saw it, but it was falling at an 80° angle and it was wearing a cape. What a nutter, this bugger had jumped of the top of the mountain doing an impersonation of Superman.



**Photo: Ian Timney**

Shortly after we reached the start, straight up it went, up and up and up! Exposure was incredible, at times you would be on a sheer cliff face that disappeared into the azure blue sky, and thousands of feet of nothing whatsoever beneath your feet, This

was big boys stuff. This was really committing right from the start, and did not let up. For the second time the protection ran out as we climbed onto a ridge, which proved a convenient spot to consume our packed lunches. After lunch we resumed our upward progress, it was a hot day and we needed a lot of water: we all drank at least 2 litres each.

From the town you could see half way up the climb a faint, white mark about the size of a pepper corn. On reaching it we found it

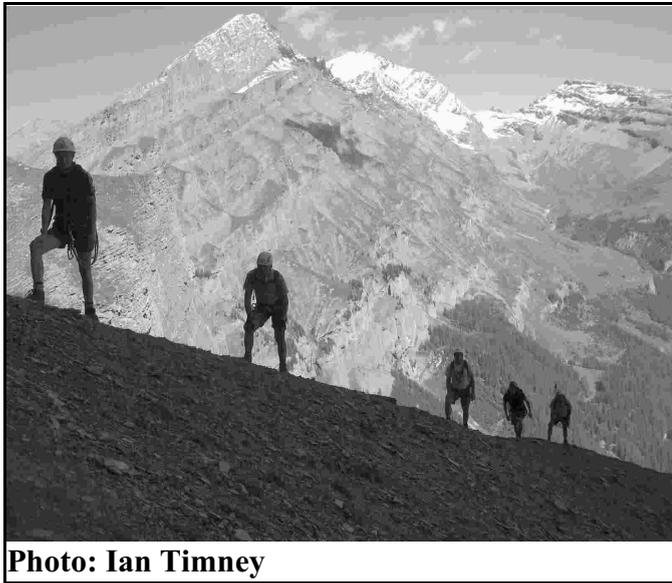


Photo: Ian Timney

to be a 10ft square metal sheet bolted to the cliff in the form of the Swiss emblem, with a fixed ladder up the side of it. This lead out onto an alpine meadow complete with Billy goat gruff and his harem, who demanded any food we had left, as payment for

enjoying his meadow.

Whilst relaxing on the meadow we realised that we had started too late and would not be able to complete the route. We didn't have enough water, and if we continued we would miss the last gondola, only to face a massive walk off the hill in the dark. We would also miss out on an evening meal and any chance of a beer. We still had a couple of hours walk out. We found a super restaurant and sat in the evening sun eating and drinking to our hearts content with a fantastic view of the climb. We were all of a single mind- just how good can it get? We then drove to a campsite at a place called Sievre, and had some more drinks.

Day 6 our last day.

We got up late packed everything for home, except our climbing gear, then drove 95km back towards Geneve, and the airport, We stopped on route for a leisurely lunch a delicious omelette, salad, fritte and a beer, which sat in my stomach like a brick all day. We had just enough time to do one last climb, Via Ferrata de la cascade on the Col du Pillon (route 27). A 2 hour sport climb traversing 450m along a cliff. Emerging high above the escarpment on to a 50 metre free fall zip wire from behind a waterfall and crashing into a padded crash mat at the far end. This was so much fun Simon went all the way round and climbed the escarpment to do it again. A perfect finish. We had to forgo the pleasure of a beer at the cable car café as we had to get a wiggle on because we had 130ks to the airport and not much time to spare.

I very much doubt if I will ever be able to fully repay Simon, for including me on this truly life enhancing experience. Thanks

mate *Ian Timney*

## Cheramodytes

I've hinted before that we doctors are not averse to seeing some of the exotica we have to know about... it's a somewhat morbid curiosity, and I hope that my jotting in this column will make it ever less likely that we will. But some of these exotic ailments are so readily available, as it were, and so easy to catch, that we all take precautions against them. If our precautions are inadequate or time-expired, then we are vulnerable. And Tetanus must come high on the list. The basic cause of the ailment is the Bacilli of Clostridium Tetani which is found in soil, and poo from horses, sheep, cattle, rats, dogs, cats, and chickens. Unsurprisingly the spores are found in almost all soil, because we manure our landscape. So it's lurking in wait, and can get into you through any cut or graze.... perfect for cavers. Actually perfect for almost any reasonably active child, too, so all children are routinely immunized, and thanks to immunisation, tetanus is now considered rare in the UK, with about 10 cases a year (which is why so few of us ever see it in our whole doctoring lives). This could make it difficult for us to recognise the symptoms, but it's quite different from other illnesses. Nothing else causes painful muscle spasms like tetanus. When they begin, there is little doubt that someone has tetanus.

Sometimes, the first and only sign of tetanus is a spasm of the muscles nearest to the infected wound. However, once the toxin

gets into your bloodstream, other symptoms start, usually in the face. The most common early sign is a spasm of the chewing muscles which makes it very hard to open your mouth (hence the common name of 'lockjaw'). The spasms may also spread to other muscles: to the neck making the head tilt; to the chest, making breathing difficult; to the stomach wall and to arms and legs. If the spasms spread to the back muscles, then you'll arch your back painfully. And it may be rare but untreated tetanus kills about 60% of cases. So you should worry about the state of your immunisation, because your childhood jabs do, eventually, run out, which is why a booster vaccine is recommended every ten years. Since the full course is 5 jabs, rather a lot of people don't have the full course, so most doctors or nurses presented with a dirty wound will automatically give you a jab of tetanus antiserum. This is not a vaccine. It simply gives additional protection against tetanus bacteria. So what might happen if you neglect your anti-tetanus precautions? Well the incubation period for tetanus is 3-21 days (with the average being about 8 days). Most of the time, the farther the wound is from the central nervous system, the longer the incubation period. If anyone remembers what I told you about Rabies in the Journal last February, this should sound familiar - it's because both diseases damage your control centre, as it were. If you actually get it, and experience the dreaded Lockjaw, and are miles from help, you

are in the odure, because if your heart gets its version of lockjaw, you will die. And if I could haunt you better and ask, after Christmas, how many of you reading this will go and get a booster dose.... the answer would be one fat zero. Being a ghost is frustrating: but I don't actually want to see a Wessex member

with Lockjaw - except, perhaps, the Editor, who is becoming an appalling nag, and refuses to let me haunt in peace.

## **Reciprocal Club Privileges**

Wessex members may stay at these clubs at their members rates. Other conditions and benefits specific to a particular club's accommodation are detailed below. It is common sense and courteous to check beforehand with all these clubs before simply turning up.

### **South Wales:**

#### **Westminster Speleological Group.**

Groups of up to 6 may turn up on spec, more than that must book in advance with the Westminster's Bookings Officer or online at <http://www.wsg.org.uk/>

There are a set of Westminster keys at Upper Pitts for our use, please ask a committee member. Book with Martin McGowan 01272 213 765.

#### **South Wales Caving Club**

[hutbookings@swcc.org.uk](mailto:hutbookings@swcc.org.uk) Book with Keith Goodhead. 01847 610 080

### **Derbyshire:**

#### **Orpheus Caving Club.**

Groups of up to 6 may turn up on spec, more than that must book in advance with the Orpheus Bookings Officer, Jenny Potts 01335-370629

There are a set of Orpheus keys at Upper Pitts for our use, please ask a committee member. You are advised to avoid their members weekends as the cottage can get very busy. You can check availability online at <http://www.orpheuscavingclub.co.uk>

### **Yorkshire Dales:**

#### **Craven Pothole Club.**

Groups of up to 6 may turn up on spec, more than that must book in advance with the Craven Bookings Officer, Pat Halliwell, 01482 876 544. Club details on [www.cravenpotholeclub.org](http://www.cravenpotholeclub.org)

#### **Northern Pennine Club.**

Groups of up to 6 may turn up on spec \*\*\*, more than that must book in advance with the NPC Bookings Officer. Keys are held locally, make arrangements with an NPC member or contact the bookings officer, Pete Drury 01132 868 412

### **Devon**

#### **Devon Speleological Society**

Whilst we have a reciprocal arrangement with the DSS their cottage is quite small and we are required to book in advance. You can check availability online at <http://www.southdartmoorbunkhouse.co.uk/> book through Jon Whiteley 01626 859 005

## **Cave Wardens**

Amongst its membership the Wessex has several Cave Conservation Wardens who can organise trips to the following restricted access caves. Please bear in mind that they all give up their time voluntarily. Their prime responsibility is to safeguard the cave and it's owner. Our continued access depends on this, so please neither abuse the entry conditions, not ask our Wardens to connive in bending the rules. The following list is provisional, with several queries, which should be sorted out in the next Journal.

### **Bunkers Hole**

Dave Meredith (To be confirmed)  
Les Williams (To be confirmed)

### **Charterhouse**

Rosie Freeman  
Rose Harrison-Wolf

### **Dan y Ogor**

Geoff Ballard  
Vern Freeman  
Emma Heron (To be confirmed)  
Mark Kellaway (To be confirmed)  
Clive Westlake

### **Fairy Cave Quarry Caves**

Jacky Ankerman  
Vern Freeman  
Phil Hendy  
Brian Prewer

### **Loxton Cavern**

Dave Cooke  
Adrian Vanderplank

### **OFD 1**

Dave Cooke  
Mark Helmore  
Andy Morse

Brian Prewer  
Jonathan Williams  
Les Williams  
Clive Westlake

NB. The SWCC have requested that we use our real names rather than nicknames on the permit.

### **Penn Park Hole**

Claire Morton ?? To be confirmed.

### **Reservoir Hole**

Vern Freeman  
Phil Hendy

### **St Cuthberts**

Ric Halliwell  
Alison Moody  
Vern Freeman  
Andy Sparrow

### **Upper Flood Swallet**

Jacky Ankerman

### **Fairy Cave Quarry Caves**

Vern Freema  
Phil Hendy

## **Our new committee members in their own write:**

**Kevin Hilton writes:** - Hi – I'm Kev. For those of you who don't know I am a third generation caver. Both my mum and my dad caved (they met through caving) and just occasionally you might see my granddad up at the hut. So a move to caving as my main hobby was almost inevitable although I still like to do a spot of biking and running.

The Wessex is a great club and I have taken a lot out of it over the years (and burnt quite a lot of it as well but that is another story) so I felt that it was time to offer my services. A chord of dissension running through the last AGM seemed to be the lack of communication between the committee and members. Something that I would like to see improved. The minutes from the last committee meeting are now up on the library wall and on-line. If you have anything that you would like raised with the committee then please let me know!

**Key**

**Pete Hann writes:** Many of you old farts will already know me but for the others a brief note to say who I am. I joined the club in 1979 and have been on the committee many times as ordinary member, sales officer and hut admin. I am well known for moaning at the AGM so if you have something you want to moan at the committee about then I am your man, please tell me and I will be happy to pass it on.

As well as moaning I am fairly active underground - mainly digging, Bath swallet being one of the projects I was involved with. I hope to serve the best interest of the Wessex and its membership. Thank you.

**The Dwarf**

**Charlotte Kemp writes:** I am almost up and running smoothly in my new capacity as Membership Secretary! My PC died on me and then I couldn't get the database to work, but thanks to my nerdy family, and Cookie, I'm sorted. Erm, do I have to submit a blurb? I really have nothing of any interest to say. I can give you the basics... Originally from Sussex, moved to Bristol for no particular reason, introduced to caving by Clarie Morton in November 2006 joined in January 2007 and that's it. **Charlotte**

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

In an effort to lessen the tedious typing of transcribing from the log, your editor invested in a computer voice recognition application : “Via Voice”. The system is made to work by reading pieces of pre-written text, to train the microphone gizmo, as it were. Behold the result of one test piece:

Chill bombs rolling thunder 8 Ian an Jude and a plank hardly new part Miss Teen gross-out Alison Moody Nigel Graham Pete Hann full stop full stop ducking sod tit full stop remove cruise ours of last thunderclap and drilled for next thanks to Pete for carrying the drill in four buckets of water placed in dig which now connects to Swildons 20 father tight Avon in Charterhouse cave free attic series with the vaguest trench reform so serious rift series heading ink too wars golfs how cave. All day report. The editor is offering a bottle of wine to the first correct decode of the gobbledgook, but how nice to know that we have a national “Beauty” ?? Queen in the club. Possibly she’s been too shy to tell us, but she may have been embarrassed that she fibbed about her age.

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|-------------------|-------------|
| Committee Meeting | 09 December |
| Committee Meeting | 03 February |
| Committee Meeting | 06 April    |
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|                   |             |
|                   |             |
|                   |             |
|                   |             |



**Boat Race Party. Swildons Water Chamber. Photo: Adrian VdP.**