

**75<sup>th</sup>. Anniversary Journal of the**  
**Wessex Cave Club**



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Anniversaries, being of past occasions, naturally to tend engender reminiscences, but it would be a mistake to concentrate this special edition of the Wessex Cave Club Journal exclusively on the past, even if it does present a reason for looking back. A glimpse of hemp rope and wooden ladders, and Beechbarrow, shows how far we've come, while Swildons trips by our younger family members such as Jacob Easterling, Chris Williams, Robert Thomas, Jack Ballard and Becky Chapman, bode well for the future. This is an appropriately special edition. I bombarded the great and the good (Yes, really, the Wessex has them!!), and our older members with requests and this mega-edition is the result of their labours. It is also my farewell edition after 3 years and 17 Journals. I wouldn't say "bloodied but unbowed" exactly; certainly feeling stale and that it was high time to pass the baton; but also to say a heartfelt "Thank you" to everyone who has sent contributions and photographs.

A look back at my first Editorial reminds me that I said then: "Our *Activities* extend beyond caving. The impulse that sends us caving also sends us climbing, doing via ferrata, mountaineering, hill-walking and canoeing, in Wessex groups. The club is enriched by these: so is the Journal..... *if* you send me your accounts." To that we can now add Cycling, and another "WCC" - Caving, Climbing, Canoeing, Cycling. What useful initials we have!

The size of this Journal made it imperative to start compilation and layout earlier than usual, so late news and Club matters have been relocated towards the final pages, and I have deliberately distributed sections of Old and New, Home and Abroad to add variety to your reading.

Seeking a photograph to link us to our caving history, I chose this one, most kindly provided by Trevor Shaw; with which, for me, "Hic finis fandi".



Trevor Shaw (right) with Norbert Casteret (left). Photo: Wyn Hooper (Ali Moody's Mother).

And some things never change.... Wet overalls drying on walls, whereas others do..... wooden rungs anyone?



Kit drying at Beechbarrows. 11/ 06/ 1949. Photo: Trevor Shaw.

## Blasts from the past

### AN EARLY PROBE INTO SWILDON'S SUMP 2

(Condensed from Willie Stanton's diary)

September 19th 1948

Luke Devenish had arranged this trip, possibly the first to Sump 2 after the War, as a training experience for some Royal Marines frogmen. At the entrance we met 4 frogmen, 3 of whom were coming down with Luke, Colin Vowles and me. Two had on frog suits, which later got full of water, and they had to cut holes at the knees to let it out. (They are just ordinary rubber with very stretchy elastic at wrists and neck.)

The 6 of us reached the 40, where ladders were laid, without incident, and then proceeded to the sump via Barnes' Loop at high speed (if one of the frogmen hadn't been slow we would have been a very efficient party). Consequently I was warm and somewhat reluctant to go in! After a short time Luke went through, followed by the frogman sergeant, a very efficient and pleasant chap. We sent some tackle through on a rope, and then it was my turn. It was remarkably easy, the only difficult part being making up my mind to put my head under water. The passage is about 3 feet high, and I took a deep breath, lay down on my front, put my head under, and pulled on the wire which is laid through. After 6 feet of going down I suddenly entered a smaller passage with a floor of gravel and came whizzing up, my cap and carbide lamp coming off in the process. It is very gratifying to break surface on the other side and be clapped on the back for doing the sump.

Colin came through next and picked up my lamp on the way, which was useful. The immediate sensation on emerging is one of warmth, as after a cold bath, and I felt quite merry for a bit Unfortunately there was now a good hour's delay while the frogmen were packing their apparatus, and we cooled down exceedingly. I'm sure the air

on the other side is bad, candles only burned with half their normal flame and they found it very difficult to burn solid fuel to heat tomato soup. Luke and I started surveying, roughly, with tape and prismatic compass. After the sump comes a short passage to the first duck, a shoulder deep pool with 9 inches air space. On my showing reluctance to enter this, Luke informed me that “the path of science is hard”, and I went in. I was writing down distances and bearings on a funny celluloid sheet, but I don’t know if they were legible. On the other side of the duck the roof rose to an impressive height and there was a medium sized chamber with a big mud flow on the right. This part of Swildon’s, in fact all Swildon’s 2, is quite different from Swildon’s 1 in the character of its passages, which are smooth, deeply pocketed and grooved, in contrast to the jagged upper cave. The cross section is much the same, however, a lofty rift most of the way.

The cave turns to the left, then to the right, and descends quite rapidly. Then, turning to the right again, the roof comes down to the first creep, a low wide crawl over pebbles. After 20 feet it rises again into a curious aven, a big hole in the solid rock suddenly stopping. After another stoop we re-entered the high rift section, descending gently, where we were overtaken by the others who went on to the other sump. When we had reached a 30 foot waist deep lake Col returned and told us that the others were ready. We hurried on through a short high section to the second creep, similar to the first but not quite so low, and after some 90 feet met the others at what seemed to be a sump. On a mud bank one of the frogmen deciphered the letters BALC. This was acclaimed as Balcombe’s signature. I suggested Balch, but the party rejected that. The sergeant put on his helmet (diving variety) and plunged 4 feet into a tiny bell chamber, and 4 feet more into a big passage. There was 4 inches of air space so we all followed easily. After 60 feet, however, the roof came down sharply to the second sump, by a pretty cascade. The stalactites in Swildon’s 2 are startling, by virtue of their scarcity and their purity, a complete contrast to the pervading gloom.

The sergeant put on his helmet and a lifeline and went in. The line was paid out slowly, till about 20 feet were out, and then it went slack and one of the frogmen took it in, finally putting on a bit of a pull. The sergeant came gliding in with his head under water and put up a big thumb when he bumped against the bank. His oxygen had given out, but he had reached the Little Bell. Apparently we had wasted most of the oxygen heating the soup. Reluctantly we retraced our steps and swims to Sump 1, and by pacing I found the length of passage Sump 1 to Sump 2 was about 810 feet.

There was another long cold wait while the frogmen packed up their kit and sent it through to Luke on the far side. Finally I went through easily enough and while the rest reorganised their tackle I went on and attacked the Priddy Green stream entrance with the hammer. In spite of my enthusiasm the rock was very hard, stones cemented by mud and stalagmite, and I only lowered the stream level by about half an inch by the time the others were ready. We made slow progress up with all the tackle, using Barnes’ Loop as easier than the rift. One of the frogmen was very slow indeed, I helped him round the Double Pots. We left the ladders [bulky hemp rope and wood] to a party to bring out next morning and came out as quickly as possible. I felt colder in the Short Dry Way than anywhere else. We got out after 8.5 hours under, my longest time. Changed in Luke’s garage, warmed ourselves with rum, and I cycled home to Street, arriving at 10 pm very tired. **Willie Stanton**

## **From Derek Ford in Canada: Remembering Denis Warburton**

Peter Cousins’ obituary for Denis Warburton in the December 2006 issue of the Wessex Cave Club Journal evoked many memories of the Eastwater Cave surveying days. When Denis began his big mapping task there friends and I were in the fifth and sixth form years at the City of Bath Boys School. Our small group became hooked on Eastwater, patronizing it much more frequently than the other caves we could reach conveniently by bicycle from Bath. Denis was ten years older and had a motor bike or (later) a car, so he could haul the ladders and ropes from the Hillgrove Hut, which we would set up underground for him. Thus it was that I stumbled into cave surveying; it is fair to write that I took my apprenticeship with him.

One very notable feature was his liquid-filled, prismatic compass. It was a whopper about 7½ inches in diameter and four inches deep, borrowed from a WWII bomber I believe. Once in position it gave beautifully reliable, stable readings – but it took some lugging in the cramped confines of that cave. The highlight of the survey campaign there, I suppose, was the descent of Primrose Pot. This sequence of 30, 60 and 90 feet shafts was the deepest combination then known in Mendip (is it still?) and had been descended only once before, by a party led by Howard Kenney, a squeeze specialist. The Pot is approached down the dip in a tight bedding plane that concludes with a very constricted squeeze onto the top ladder.

Denis got his descending and support parties in place betimes one weekend. We rattled down the pitches on cable ladders, he took the customary scrupulous sights, backsights and tape lengths, then started back up. I was lifelining the 60'. He was a very small man who could easily slip around me, climb the 30', and pass through the squeeze (flat-out, uphill) with only moderate effort. Phil Davies (slightly bigger) was next. His considerable struggles were thoroughly amplified to the three (all bigger again) who remained below. We looked meaningfully at one another, peeled off every under garment, put the sodden wet, gritty boiler suits back on again. Oliver Wells was first and got stuck, trapped by a metal button that turned into his chest. Fred Davies and I debated whether we would have to eat our way out through him. We were all out eventually, of course, and soon a technically very fine cave survey was published under the Wessex imprint.

Denis, Phil and I later worked together on parts of the Hillier's Cave survey. He passed the great compass on to me for Stoke Lane I and II, and I gave it back for Lamb Leer.

In 1959 my wife and I emigrated to Canada. Although I saw Denis a few times during the next five years or so, our paths inevitably separated. As noted, he was small in physical stature and was also somewhat embarrassed by a prominent nose. So, he was shy outside of his groups of male intimates. Phil Davies and his wife tried several times to fix him up with a lady friend, but without success in the years that I was around. It was very good to read that he had married and lived happily in a Midlands village for many years. **Derek Ford**

## News from our Expatriates

### **From Paul Hadfield in Canada**

The memories of my early days at the Wessex tend to concatenate and confuse, fortunately I kept a pretty good journal for trips I made from '73 through to '80, by which time I was established in Canada. On the social side I recall with great fondness the communal Christmas meals and so very many weekend evenings spend in the best of company at Upper Pitts. Here are a few things that spring to mind.

#### Early seventies, Upper Pitts.

In that era: Black Satanic Mills and I drop Rhino Rift one New Years eve. We do it in seasonal style and consume a bottle of whiskey whilst doing the trip. This made us rather late and I remember waving engagingly at the rescue team as our paths crossed when we were driving back to Upper Pitts.

Just a short time later, myself, Mr. Moody and Mr. Price were late returning from a trip to nine (light failure – we had all come out from sump 8 on one light – mine). When I enquired why the rescue had not been called the answer was, “Oh, it was you lot, we knew you'd be alright”.

Eastwater : the traverse : Black Wal lying wedged head down at the bottom of the traverse stuffing explosive into a promising crack. Calling out orders to the three little girls (his daughters) who were acting as powder monkeys for him, and who ferried explosive in that terrain more competently than anyone could imagine.

And you meet the Wessex in the damm'dest places: 28<sup>th</sup> June 1980, West Virginia. In the Rubber Chicken stream way checking out the Snedegars - Rubber Chicken connection and who do I run into but Alan Fincham! To celebrate, later that same day we paid a visit to Alan's then current project, Robin's Run dig.

#### We Drank it Dry (26<sup>th</sup> Aug 1974)

El Rebecco – Fuente De – Picos D'Europa. By 2am we had finished off the beer supply. The Landlord, obviously recognising the quality of his customers, immediately commandeered the local school bus, drove eleven miles back down the valley and roused the local pub owner for a resupply.

#### The Night of the Pigs. (23<sup>rd</sup> August 1977)

Late at night. Dark and raining. Harper and I descend wearily back to our camp in the Pescamou (the meadow at the start of the trail up to the karst of the Pic D'Anie in the Pyrenees). We had just completed the second heavy carry of the day to our high camp.

In our headlights we see the side of our tent bulging outward and glistening in the rain. “Ian's arrived” we declare (Ian Lewis, from Australia whose arrival we had been anticipating).

We open the tent door and look in. The warmth and comfort of our down sleeping bags is being enjoyed by three feral Pyrenean porkers. A short technical discussion ensues between Rob and I to decide on the best way to resolve the situation, which results in the professional vetinarian's solution of a large mountain boot propelled

with all the velocity that only someone from Edinburgh University's rugby team can muster, driven into the side of the pig that was causing the tent wall to bulge. In retrospect there may have been a better solution.

Three large pigs exploded from the confines of our small mountain tent, not necessarily using the doors designed for egress, showering Rob and I with delicate downy feathers from our sleeping bags, and leaving the tent in tatters. The persistent rain rapidly reduced the delicate down coating us, to a kind of sludge, and we were left staring at the remnants of our tent and sleeping bags. We spent the remainder of the night in a small derelict wooden hut with your author having to spend it in what was only a nominally dry spot whilst being dripped on continually through the remainder of the night.

Later that same trip Rob and I had the entertaining sight of watching Ian pick up handfuls of snow, throw it up into the air, then run underneath it with outspread arms to let it fall on him. An Aussie's reaction to his first encounter with snow.

At the end of that trip, I, as the French speaker, had to accompany Ian when he returned his rental car. The problem was to explain the damage to the rubber seal around the driver's window.

En route to join Rob and I, Ian had stopped in the narrow streets of a picturesque village to photograph the procession at a local festival. Complete with big bass drum, brass band, baton twirling young ladies and gaily clad locals, the procession had marched down the narrow streets until it came to the obstruction formed by Ian's rental car.

At this point the procession came to a halt, everyone marking time to the still continuing band and drum music. Young ladies still twirled batons and the eyes of spectators, bandsmen and by this time the whistle blowing policeman who had arrived, were all focussed on Ian as he desperately tried to get into his car. By this time of course he had located his keys, just where he had left them, in the ignition of the locked vehicle. Ian resolved the problem by using his pocket knife to cut out the rubber window seal and force the window open to gain entry. I confess my French was stretched as I outlined this story to the rental agency in Pau.

Strangely, echoes of my Pyrenean trips followed me to Canada. When the first American Caving trip to the PSM happened I was recruited to act as interpreter for them. In the course of this I met Reuben Gomez when the Americans visited him to talk about the cave.

Some years later in a friend's living room in NW British Columbia I watched as he opened a packet from France. From Reuben's "Rubber Factory". He was anticipating, he informed me, a pair of waterproof "Pantalons" with a built in inflatable chest band for flotation. These would be the ideal garment for wading along the miles of virgin stream way that we were guaranteed to find in the caves of the Dezaikos in the northern Rockies, that he and I had only recently discovered.

In the event, I never actually saw him wearing the rubber nurses uniform that the packet actually contained, but it did confirm my impressions about Mr. Gomez that I had formed at our meeting.

#### Boon :

I never kept secret my intent to emigrate to Canada and I noticed that in the period just before I left, numerous, usually older, members of the Wessex would quietly sidle up to me in the Hunters. The conversation usually went along the lines of :-

"You'll probably meet Boon out there, when you do, remind him I'd like my suit back" (or the five quid I lent him, or the NiFe cell he borrowed, you get the idea). This should have alerted me.

I did meet Boon. Due to the fiscal restraints faced both by myself and Boon we lived in the same, somewhat downtrodden area of SE Calgary.

On my first social visit to the basement apartment in the ramshackle building where he lived I took along a case of beer. Boon cooked beef heart. He cooked it for about three hours until the protein had converted to a product that would have made the result serve well as a hockey puck for the Calgary Flames. During this period we consumed the beer. Consequently the need to relieve myself arose. I asked Boon directions to the bathroom. "Follow me" he said, so I did.

He led me down a narrow corridor with a door at the end. He opened the door and ushered me in. It was a conventional north American bathroom with all the appropriate appointments. I finished my business, washed my hands and let myself out the way I had come in. Somewhat to my surprise Boon was waiting for me in the corridor. As I passed him, he went back into the bathroom and I glimpsed him wiping out the handbasin, adjusting the toilet roll, fiddling with the towel rail and generally fussing about.

We finished the remnants of the beer. I then plucked up the courage to ask Boon what he had been up to in the bathroom. It transpired that it wasn't actually Boon's bathroom. It belonged to the occupant of the other

apartment in the building and Boon's use of it was purely on a clandestine basis. As my host, he had merely been removing all evidence of my visit to avoid any unwanted repercussions.

I spent a couple of years around Boon, but I must confess that we really did not get on well socially at all, though I believe we both respected each others ability underground. We pushed the back end of Bragg Creek Cave, near Calgary, together, and I saw just how good he was underground when he lost his light at the back end of Canadian Hole, (W. Virginia), and had to follow me out. When I went in to Castleguard with another party and saw what he had achieved on his solo trip this was emphasised. The low point of our relationship was a fist fight in Virginia when I threw him out of a friend's house for his unconscionable behaviour in a home with children. By this time, I now know that his mental condition was deteriorating, but it was not really apparent at the time. It was simply like dealing with someone with no idea of appropriate behaviour, a circumstance I was not at all familiar with. Last I heard of him he was heading for Guatemala with a Canadian medical disability pension. (Presumably to annoy Mike Shawcross). **Paul Hadfield**

## **From Dave ("Flip Flop") Barrett in China**

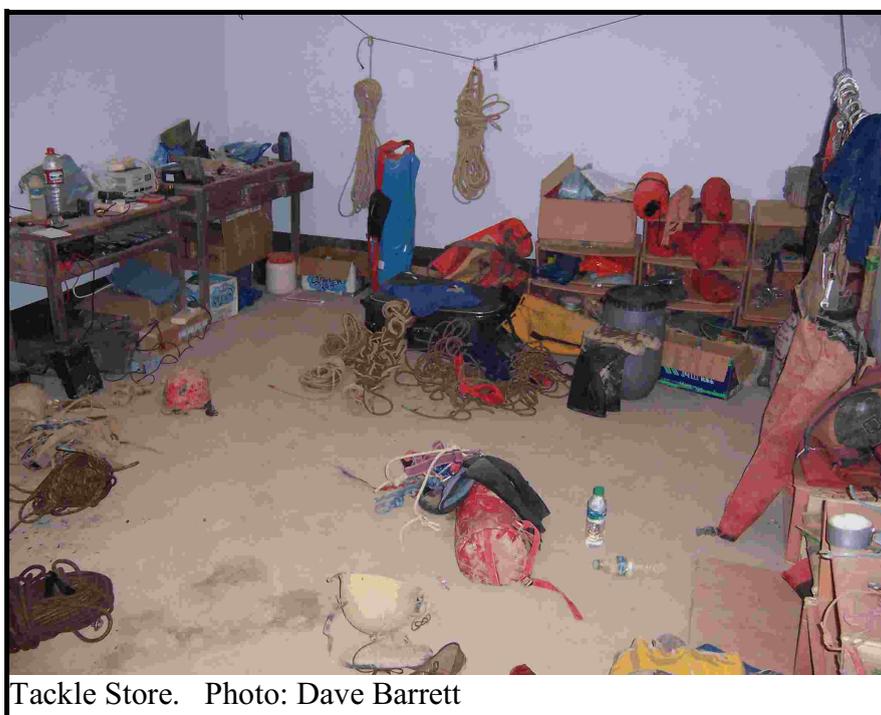
### **Exploring the Caves of Tian Xing**

"Chi-fan-a!"

There's a knock at the door and another cry, "chi- fan-a"! From within the warmth of my sleeping bag I look at my watch. It's almost 9.00am - breakfast time. "OK" I call back. Interrupted from my overnight hibernation I emerge from the warmth to a crisp cool morning in Tian Xing village. Apart from a few late cock-crows, the place is fairly quiet. All the hustle and bustle has already taken place with the departure of the daily 7.15am bus to Wulong Town. Sounding the horn for what seems an age, it acts as a wake up call for everyone that isn't already awake – which is normally just us visiting Westerners.

Dressed, I give Rob a reminder –"chi-fan-a"–and head off to breakfast. The kitchen is across the road from our sleeping accommodation, with some ridiculously massive concrete steps to climb to get to it. Locals are milling around the buildings. A couple of workmen are building an extension – even though they are using a guideline, the bricks look rather wonky. Several schoolchildren pass by; the braver ones call out "hello!" and the even more ambitious "good morning!" Waving back, I head to the kitchen.

Mrs Wey is hovering over the wok cooking on an open fire. The table has a number of dishes on it, as well as rice bowls and chopsticks. "Chi-fan-a"; she points at the table.



Tackle Store. Photo: Dave Barrett

Mrs Wey is our landlady, cook, organiser. In fact, she does everything! We are uncertain of her age but whatever it may be, she is very sprightly. More dishes land on the table. Other members of the expedition arrive and we tuck into cabbage, pig fat and 'nangua' (a squash of some description). Delicious! Mrs Wey disappears outside returning with another local whom she sits down with us to eat. A regular occurrence, we get to meet someone different every day! Mrs Wey sits also. She grabs a bottle of clear liquid from a shelf, filling her rice bowl and her guests' with the liquid. This is 'bi-jiu', a Chinese spirit which is drunk at all times of the day. She offers us some but we shake our hands over the bowl uttering the word "bu-yao"; no thanks. No-one says much - most of the group are not 'morning people'. Our meal is polished

off quickly and people start to filter off. It is now gloriously sunny outside, though cold in the shade but still a very welcome change from the overcast, drizzly week just experienced.

In the tackle store, Brian and I begin to kit up. We are off to check a new cave noted on a surface reconnaissance

a few days ago. In fact there are several shafts in that area, one has already blown out on us, ending in a glutinous mud sump after only 65m depth. Hopefully this next one won't be the same. Bags at the ready, we go to the front of the building to look for Mrs Wey's son, Long May. He is in the pharmacy serving a scruffy looking guy who I recognize as a 'regular'. Utilising my very limited Mandarin, I call out to Long May 'mo twor cher', followed by 'cha zi ba'. He knows what I mean - we need a motorbike taxi to the area where our cave is located. One of the large shutters is opened revealing a room full of bulk bags of rice, bottles of butane but most importantly a motorbike. I pay him the usual, 10RMB (70p) for each of us and we hop on the bike; three people, two tackle-sacks and a rucksack on one motorbike – no problem.

Our journey down the hill is hair-raising. Most of the time the bike is free wheeling, not a problem if the brakes are used. This isn't the case today; the guy is in a hurry! At every corner I stiffen

up half expecting to take a slide on the greasy surface of the road. We pass the 'man that maintains the road', another familiar face who always waves to us. His life seems to consist of repairing the holes in the road .....on his own! Around the next corner we have to stop. Several tree trunks are laid across the roadway, workers chopping them up for firewood. In true Chinese style, there is little reaction from either party. They chop, we wait. Ten minutes later the trees are small enough to move to create a gap for the bike to get through and we are off again. A few more corners, a few more heart stopping moments and we arrive at the drop off point. Our man waves goodbye whilst we set off along the track to the cave.

Almost immediately, a couple of local farm workers shout across to us 'dong' (cave) pointing to a distant location. They know what us 'laowai' (translates as "long noses", the name the Chinese use for foreigners) are up to. Normally we would stop to get details but already there seemed to be enough to keep us busy for days. We continue on the path toward a farmhouse. The inhabitants are busy building an extension (a common activity around here) but stop what they are doing to try to talk to us. Despite both groups not knowing the other's



Tian Xing village centre. Photo: Dave Barrett



The "Picture Postcard" Rice Paddy. Photo: Dave Barrett.

language we seem to be able to communicate what we are doing. These people were to become regular faces on our travels backwards and forwards, even allowing us to store gear here rather than walk it back every day. A footpath consisting of orange-coloured mud leads downhill to a vantage point from where we can see a bamboo thicket nearby. The scene is picture postcard. A perfectly flat rice paddy is in the foreground which borders the bamboo thicket in a crescent shaped line. The sun glints off the surface water within the rice paddy. Approaching the thicket we plunge under the canopy into shade. Dry bamboo leaves crack and rustle underfoot. A short distance along a slippery path among the undergrowth at the edge of the shaft leads to the pre-determined rigging point.

Brian is first to kit up fully whilst I prepare the ropes for him to rig. Brian does most of the rigging, as he seems to enjoy it! An initial 'safety' line from a thigh width tree trunk allows Brian to descend through the undergrowth toward a bigger tree from where he hopes to place the main hang. Cursing ensues as vines combine with small bushes to trap him. However, these are no challenge when a new cave beckons! Some thrashing does the trick and Brian reaches the appointed spot. 'Looks good' he calls up. "OK, I'll follow on with the bags" I reply. I feed out the rope he will need for the estimated 30m abseil then sort myself out for descent.

Twenty minutes later I get the 'rope free' shout. Excellent, my turn! I 'garden' the route on the way down the initial slope as well as at the top of the main hang then abseil down. The descent is in full daylight and I take it slowly to make observations on the way down. Immediately obvious is vertical bedding at the top of the shaft and slightly lower a large passage heading north. I continue past this to a sloping debris ledge which lasts for a few meters until the next vertical descent to the base of the shaft proper. Landing is awkward. The bottom of the shaft is a steep, slippery detritus slope. Tree trunks, a large poorly cemented mud bank and a dry stream bed in a trench are seen. I stay on the rope all the way down to a level area where Brian is standing. Still in good light, we are looking down another pitch. Seems promising! The drill is out and Brian starts to rig again in solid limestone walls.

A couple of short pitches sees us into good-sized horizontal passage, the next obstacle consisting of a 4 meter climb down in a narrow section which has a rather large, precarious looking boulder in it. Not taking any chances, I get into a safe position and give the boulder a couple of good kicks. Crash, it drops to the floor – on we go. Beyond the climb the route is still large though becoming noticeably steeper, dipping at about 30° in our direction of progress. Moving quickly down a series of small climbs, the passage opens out into a much larger space, a huge boulder seen resting in the floor ahead with blackness all around. Could this be another pitch?

A small trench, containing a very small stream, cut into the clean washed rock floor, headed directly to this point. Due to the steep dip we carefully made our way toward the boulder. About halfway it seemed wise to put a bolt in to facilitate a safety line to the boulder using up our last piece of rope, 30 meters. It proved a good call. More slippery near the lip, this was indeed a pitch! Decisions were now easy. This pitch clearly had a drop of at least 30m and we had no rope left. It was time to pull the instruments from the bag and survey back out. However, we did agree to leave the drill and



Brian Bolting in CXB Photo: Dave Barrett.

general bolting gear clipped to the bolt. A couple of hours saw us back at the top of the entrance shaft, still excited by our 'discovery'. We had plenty to talk about on the two hour walk back to our base! We would be back tomorrow .....

### **Day 2**

Breakfast done, tackle bags packed, motorbike at the ready – we were off again to Bamboo Cave on a gloriously sunny day. An incident free journey ended with both of us at the entrance in an hour. Our rope appeared untouched from yesterday but a good inspection of it is always considered a necessity. Especially after hearing horror stories of rats gnawing rope overnight! Lugging two tackle sacks full of as much gear as possible, we reached the boulder at the limit of the known cave quickly. Brian rigged down whilst I prepared to survey to him. Soon we were together at the bottom of the pitch looking at a small stream running off down steeply descending, clean washed passage. Stones and pebbles of varying sizes layered the base of the pitch but little mud. Interesting. A good draught followed us into the cave.

Surveying in, we clambered down small climbs following the water. The canyon became narrower and more sinuous, resulting in short survey legs and slower progress with our tackle sacks. A 4 meter climb down in the stream to a pool proved to be the most sporting obstacle - keeping dry almost impossibility – which we passed by using combined tactics. A few more turns in the passage led to another pitch, a short 11m rigged just out of the water.

To our surprise, the passage became even narrower beyond, a real thrutch with tackle sacks. SRT kit caught easily on the rock. However, a healthy draught encouraged us on. Not too much further on, we were rewarded with another pitch, this one 30 meters deep. It also proved to be the wettest yet, though it seemed insignificant on the way down. Our route became a little wider but still canyon-like and steeply descending. Not much farther on we came to the next pitch – we could not see the bottom so threw down a stone to try to work out if we had enough rope. Four seconds? This might be a problem. Still, Brian decided to give it a go, beginning the rigging. He disappeared into the darkness, his light growing smaller and smaller. Then I saw it waving around. 'He's looking for the next rig point' I thought so settled back down waiting for a shout to follow on. Ten minutes later I was surprised to hear him approaching me. Looking down I called out "What's the problem?"

"Got to the end of the rope. Still can't see the bottom!"

Wow, a pitch this deep was unexpected. Again, our choice was made for us – we surveyed out to the last recorded station.

### **Day 3**

Whilst we wanted to get back to the cave, we were both tired today. We had caved all day for each of the past three days. Brian was already on the ibuprofen to ease the pain in his knees! One thing both of us knew about expedition caving was to ensure adequate rest in between trips. After all, this wasn't familiar caving in the Dales – it takes a lot of effort to explore new passage in remote locations.

Though classed as a rest day, gear still had to be cleaned and prepared. Then the weather deteriorated. Mist closed in – it was damp, colder and it started to rain .....hard. Tian Xing is a small village but does boast a 'restaurant' which serves up delicious food – an extended lunch seemed appropriate today. In my flip flops, I gingerly made my way across the glutinous muddy surface to join the others at the eating place. The owner wasn't there yet but we helped ourselves to beer (about 15p for a 500ml bottle) from the crate beneath the table. A few minutes later the owner arrived on the scene. Chinese food does



R&R in Tian Xing. Photo: Dave Barrett

not take long to prepare and soon pork strips, cabbage, pig fat (similar to large bacon rind), tomato & egg and a spicy dish which I did not recognize appeared on the table. Chopsticks flew in, demolishing the food. After washing it all down with another beer it was time for a siesta.

#### **Day 4**

The day broke clear. We set off for the cave with anticipation and a lot of rope, in fact the remainder from the tackle store. Our journey to the current limit of the cave was quick, the route and obstacles now familiar to us. Brian prepared the longer rope, setting off to rig. About an hour later I got the call, "rope free". Great; my turn for a look. Past the second re-belay, the pitch opened out significantly. In fact, a second shaft with a separate stream joined the one I was abseiling in. A final re-belay at an exposed lip left a final free hang to the bottom, landing on a clean-washed pebble floor just out of the small waterfall. I estimated the pitch at 70m and it was superb.

I joined Brian. Naturally we were both rather excited. The cave was bigger, had another stream and promised much. Following the water we quickly entered more canyon, rather disappointing, but after a few minutes it started to widen again. We passed several inlets - more leads - with the passage still growing in size. Just beyond an easily passed choke at a general change in direction we were at last in a main drain. Time for some whoops of joy, running passage! This continued for half an hour until we reached a choke. Climbing in the roof, we entered a large chamber. Left for another day, the way on was a short stoop in the stream and onward.

The character of the cave altered from this point with the walls made of a consolidated breccia (cemented rock pieces) and rather unusual. Continuing, we came across our first formations just before having to negotiate an interesting eye hole above head height where calcite partially blocked the route. A waterfall entered at exactly the same spot so no chance of keeping dry! Beyond, a beautiful white calcite deposit floored a long trench. Fortunately, a ledge beside this meant we did not have to touch it at all. Unfortunately, I hadn't brought along a camera!

Looking at the many interesting features slowed us down a little but it was worth it. For me some of the features were completely new and possibly unique. After another hour's progress we came across a second choke. However, this one was covered in calcite, and though there was still a good draught we could not find a way past it. Adrenalin waned; we sat down to make a brew before commencing to survey out. I pulled out the survey equipment to check all was in order. Compass seemed ok, tape ok, clinometer ..... strange, reads positive when pointing downhill! What a bummer. No choice but to leave the cave - we would have to return tomorrow to survey .....

#### **Day 5**

Expedition time was running short. Brian had to leave in two days so Rob joined us on this trip to help survey quickly. All went off as planned and we spent the evening entering the data into Surverx to get the centre line and see how the cave related to others in the area. Our four days of effort culminated in 2.5 km of new cave for the Tian Xing database, very respectable and duly celebrated with a beer!

#### **Day 6**

It had rained all night. I knew because the constant drumming of the drops and rumble of thunder had awoken me many times. Though the weather was not good, we decided to stick to the plan and go back to the cave. The expedition would wrap up in a few days so time was against us - we had a cave still rigged. We were uncertain as to how the local caves reacted to heavy rain. After all, the whole purpose of timing the expedition for September/October is to avoid the rains therefore knowledge of reaction times was poor.

Our motorbike journey to the drop-off point was slow; even the locals take it steady when the weather is bad. Walking across to the entrance shaft, we saw no-one working in the fields. The rice paddies were overflowing with water and the paths waterlogged. Approaching the bamboo thicket containing the entrance shaft, the noise of cascading water became ever louder - it did not seem promising. From our take off point near the lip, a waterfall into the cave could be seen where it was bone-dry a couple of days ago. Luckily, being a wide shaft and dry pitch, we were able to descend to assess the situation better from below. It was wet but passable. Our problem wasn't the now but the future. At least we knew where the larger 'safe' points were in the cave. As a precaution we took the drill in - one pitch was drippy in dry-ish conditions so no telling what it would be like when wetter. The first few pitches were fine, though wetter. Then we arrived at the 'suspect' pitch. It was a torrent of water so it had to be re-rigged out of the water using a short piece of rope we had left from yesterday. Using the drill in these conditions required care but Brian completed the task in short time. It didn't keep all the water off though! It wasn't necessary to descend all the way to the bottom of this pitch, only to the last bolt, though that was only

10 meters off the floor! Completing the task everything was bagged ready for our de-rig trip out. The amount of water made the trip through the canyon sections a little like Swildons wet route from the entrance and we enjoyed it despite the potential danger of ever rising water levels. Everything worked out fine. We arrived back at the base of the entrance shaft without a hitch. Our only problem now was to haul up several hundred meters of wet rope!

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### China's deepest shaft

It was close to dark as we followed the narrow winding path toward the cave entrance. In the dusk and laden with tackle sacks full of equipment we were trying to tread carefully to avoid taking a tumble down the hillside. Suddenly, a cry as one of the team slipped on a wet part of the track, his body starting to disappear into the undergrowth below. Quickly, we grabbed him, arresting his fall and hauled him to safety – a close call. After that we were all extra careful until arriving at the “safety” of the cave entrance - safe that is if we didn't go too near the edge.....this entrance was a shaft and not just any shaft. Da Kung is 500 meters deep, the drop broken by only one ledge at about 230 meters. A few years before a cow had fallen into this shaft, later recovered (in pieces

of course) by an expedition caver. This had been the first trip into the cave.

Our task was to explore the cave further and map it. To do this meant a long trip so we decided to camp inside - 50 meters into the main passage away from the bottom of the shaft – hence our large load of tackle sacks. Included within were sleeping bags, food, stove, water etc. The shaft had already been rigged by another team, great news for us. Now 10.30pm, Brian set off first. He soon disappeared in the undergrowth, attached to the safety line leading to the drop. Oliver and I followed on. It was impossible to gauge the size of this drop; our lights only penetrating a limited distance. There were many re-belays as the walls were off



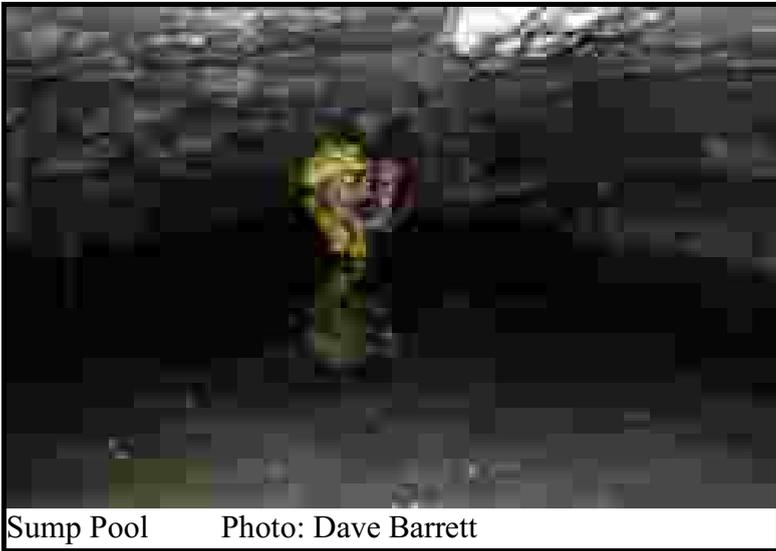
Oliver in Popcorn Crawl. Photo: Dave Barrett

vertical much of the time not allowing a free hang. I liked this because it would break up the return journey. I arrived at camp at 1am. Brian had already prepared the sleeping area and had a brew going. Perfect! Soon we nestled down in our sleeping bags for the night.

With no sunlight underground to wake one up it's easy to keep sleeping (provided it's not too cold!) so we didn't leave camp until 12.30pm. Even though we were in big passage the only way on was via a squeeze. Brian went in first to rig the pitch that lay immediately at the end of the squeeze. Meanwhile, Oliver and I managed the tackle bags through the constricted passage, the bags constantly snagging on the popcorn formations. We followed down the pitch then a second one before landing in walking passage again; only this one had a small stream. Our progress was easy going and soon we arrived at a junction. From here several other routes ran off, all gypsum covered passages which hadn't seen water activity for a long time. We stuck with the stream route. By 4.30pm we reached another junction. One a pitch, at the bottom of which was a large pool of water. Rigging from a large stalagmite, Oliver went down to check,



“Rigging from a large Stalagmite..” Photo: Dave Barrett



Sump Pool Photo: Dave Barrett

telling us it continued. I followed on. At the water's edge, small ledges in the rock allowed me to keep out of the water, though I stayed on the rope. Ahead, a stream ran from the pool into large cobbled floored passage for 200m to a sump. This happened to be the best of the trip, several nice formations adorning the walls. In the other direction, we traversed the pool to follow a canyon upstream to another sump. With no options left for us we took photos and surveyed back up to the pitch head.

From the junction we headed into the other passage. It ran in the same direction but higher

than the sumped passage below. Initially dry and wide with a sandy floor, it soon narrowed into hading rift with a stream. Traversing at various levels we bypassed much of the water, constantly going downhill. On one ledge sat a large rats nest, one occupant nestled in, eyes glistening in our lights. We arrived at a canal section, wading in the water until reaching a spot where swimming became necessary; time to get out the lifejackets. Brian headed out first, with me last carrying my camera gear and a tackle sack of equipment. Several meters into the swim I discovered that I didn't have any buoyancy and began to sink. I grabbed the slippery wall, grasping for a foothold but it was undercut. Being just able to keep my face above the water I



"Initially dry and wide..." Photo: Dave Barrett

called out for help. Oliver jumped in, made his way to me and took the equipment bag. This helped tremendously and I clung onto him to complete the swim. At the other side we checked my lifejacket to find it wasn't that at all, more like a fishing jacket. I had wondered why it was green!

I now had no option but to abandon my camera gear and use the empty daren drum as buoyancy. There would be no more photos but at least I wouldn't drown! Now wet and cold, we had to move on quickly to keep warm. None of us had wetsuits. A few more canals and one swimming section passed, the passage became blocky, requiring



Packing some of the rope after de-rigging. Photo: Dave Barrett

climbing up and down. Traversing over a hole, Oliver stretched out with his leg to reach the wall on the other side when the wall his hands were on suddenly came away. Being right behind him I grabbed the large chunk of peeling wall and held it in place to enable Oliver to finish his move safely – a small repayment for saving me in the canal. The walls began to get dirty now, covered in mud. We knew the resurgence of the water would most likely be the local dam and this seemed proof enough. Sometimes the water level in the dam is higher which would create back-up in the cave. I guess at one time in the past it may have been possible to do a thru trip to the river. We had surveyed up to a point on this route then stopped due to the cold conditions and lengthy spells in the water without wet suits. We estimated our final depth at minus 770 metres.

Near to what we believed to be the end of the cave and cold and wet, we started to head back, reaching camp at 5am, a trip time of 17 hours. Though tired and with our body clock telling us it was time to sleep, we had to prepare some hot food and drink to replenish energy levels before settling down. Getting up at 9.30am we packed up the camp to begin our long prussic upward. At the large calcite cobbled ledge at minus 260 meters I looked up and could see the daylight in the distance; impressive. It took another couple of hours to get there (in total 4 hours from the camp). Emerging into the sun after a long trip always gives me a great feeling and today especially good. **Dave Barrett**

## More Blasts from the Past

### A Brief Account of Perhaps the Stupidest Thing I have ever Done

From **Don Thomson**

I was browsing through Rich Witcombe's excellent book the other day, and came to the entry on Ludwell Cave. He remarked that this was only a small cave resurgence and had been investigated by the CDG and that there was not much more to say about it. I really wish this were true, but it took me back to 1951, when I was young and had no sense, was early in my caving career, and felt supremely, if misguidedly, confident. It was also in the days before wet suits. Ludwell Cave is a short length of passage carrying an intermittent stream, at Ludwell Farm in Hutton. The grid reference is SS 358592 and the cave is on the South side of the track leading to the farm. The annual flow is said to start on the day of Bridgwater Fair, about the time of Guy Fawkes Day. The entrance passage is adequate, without being commodious. At the end of this is a small chamber and an inviting looking sump. Above the resurgence is a rock shelter, the floor is or was composed of what seemed to be goat droppings. The dramatis personæ of this farce were two brothers, Lionel and Bully, a good friend of mine Peter Cooke, and me. We somehow became involved with Lionel and Bully, two local part time farmers who had convinced the farmer at Ludwell Farm that they were the best people to investigate the cave. They were also members of the Wessex, which we took as confirmation that they were the fount of all caving knowledge, although they were never in the higher echelons of the club hierarchy,

Poking about in the sump we thought we could feel the roof trending upwards, so decided to have a go at it. Lionel was big and strong and built like an ox, Bully was more like a hippo. It was clear that neither was adapted to negotiating constricted underwater passages. So Peter and I were elected to make the first attempt. Drain rods were acquired and fed into the sump, and I reluctantly pushed my way feet first down into the water, found what seemed to be the lowest point and beyond this attempted to surface. I felt a lot of rock above my head but no air space, and feeling very cold and conscious of my limited ability to do without air decided to make for the outside world. I had held on very firmly to the drain rods and did not anticipate much of a problem, but got under the lowest point and rose towards the surface, ramming my head into a cleft in the roof on the way. Clearly this was not the way I had come in, but I still had the drain rods, reversed and went a bit lower and was relieved, but much chastened, to reach the surface. Peter didn't feel like emulating my attempt.

We let it be known what had happened, and in due course Willie Stanton came over to look at the cave. He successfully free dived the sump and reported that on the other side was a larger chamber, but no clear way on. The roof sloped into the sump on the left along the length of the chamber. The only interesting thing about the place was that it had formed along the Triassic/Carboniferous boundary. It is probably the most low-lying cave in Britain, apart from sea caves.

This was not the end of the story. We decided to go back and try to make a survey of the cave. Knowing that the

sump did go, and that the air space was to the right as one went through the sump, Peter went first, towing a rope which we aimed to leave through the sump. He took ages to surface, and when he did he was astounded to find I was not in the small chamber he had just left, a few feet inside the cave. He then realized where he was and shouted to me to come through. I was surprised to hear him through several feet of water, but went anyway. It transpired he had gone through the sump, failed to find the air space, and floundered under water along the left side of the chamber, and I suppose, reached the end and turned round, expecting to arrive back where he had started. He then did something which, had luck not intervened, I would have had to explain to Her Majesty's coroner; he let go of the rope. He was fortunate to find the air space. We took some readings and were about to return when we noticed the hole in the roof, which led to daylight, so the return through the sump was no longer necessary. It appeared that Lionel's efforts in the Goats' Den had been successful, and though very thankful for this we did wish he had thought to tell us. Nick Barrington tells us that the dig was conducted by the Sidcot Speleos. I'm not sure this is accurate or complete. I know Lionel was digging the Goats' Den and that the floor was undisturbed when he started, and I also know it was not very much later when our adventure took place. I know that Lionel's digging technique looked potentially highly unstable, and it may well have been that his efforts collapsed and the dig was subsequently reopened and secured properly by the Sidcot folk, or indeed Lionel may never have got through at all.

Looking back on it, we seem to have made every idiotic mistake open to us, and failed to think logically about what we were doing. Communication between members of the team was lamentable. On my second trip through the sump we had found we could shout through it. This should have alerted me to the possibility of an alternative entrance, and the Goats' Den was the obvious one and I should have gone and looked. With our lack of experience it was a risky venture, and should have been left to more competent people. Lionel and Bully were the wrong shape. Peter was a competent musician and a fine hockey player, both activities being often rewarded for taking the risks, but how this could or should be applied to caving was less clear. We were uncoordinated, we knew that Lionel had been digging above, but he never told us he had broken through when we were not there, although maybe it was not he who had made the connection at all and we never thought to ask him. And Peter should never have let go of that rope. All in all we were lucky not to make the national press.

**Donald Thomson**

## **RUDOLF LEARNS ABOUT DIGGING** from **Willie Stanton.**

(WCC Journal Vol 10 pages 243-244.)

It is a Saturday morning in April 1968. Two Wessex men, Willie Stanton and Will Edwards, are changing in Cheddar Gorge, preparatory to entering Reservoir Hole. They are approached by a smart young Youth Hosteller wearing a large rucksack.

"You are potholers, no?"

"We are potholers, yes."

"I too am a potholer. I am Rudolf."

"Hullo Rudolf. You must be from Austria or somewhere."

"I am from Switzerland. In my country I explore many potholes. Now I am wanting to explore potholes in England. Where is your Society that I can get a torch and a suit, to explore with you your pothole."

"Alas, Rudolf, our club hut is far away and it will be empty on a Saturday morning. We have only one torch each, or we would gladly lend you one. But you would not like our pothole, which is small and muddy, and we go only to dig, not to explore."

"What is to dig? In Switzerland I never dig, only explore."

"At the end of our pothole the roof has fallen down, and we are digging through the boulders to find the great caverns beyond."

"Ah, that is very interesting. Perhaps I go now to Cheddar to buy the torch, and then maybe I join you to dig in your pothole."

"Well, that would be great, Rudolf. There's the entrance, up there. But you'll get your clean clothes terribly dirty."

"Maybe I see you. Goodbye."

Rudolf marches off down the Gorge, and the Wessex men do not expect to see him again. They enter the hole, lay and fire a large bang on an obstacle half way down, then, noting that the gentle draught is carrying the fumes

outwards, continue to the bottom of the terminal dig, a shaft 50 feet deep. Busily working, they suddenly hear coughing and a whistle up above.

“Hullo! Who’s that?”

“It is Rudolf!”

“Good gracious! Come on down, Rudolf, it’s quite safe.”

Rudolf arrives in a shower of stones.

“See, I have bought a fine torch. But there has been an explozeeon, no? I come to the entrance and she is full of gas.!”

“Yes, there was an explosion. Did you see if there was much damage?”

“I think there was no damage. But I think this is not a pothole, only a mineworks. When I can see through the gas, all I see is stone walls.”

“No no, it really is a cave. We’ve been digging here for 15 years, that is why there is so much debris.”

“You are digging here since 15 years and the cave is still so small! That is very interesting. All the time in Switzerland I never see so small a cave.”

“Oh. That is very interesting.”

Rudolf joins enthusiastically in the digging, and has to be restrained from prising out rocks that are supporting everything up above. He announces that when he needs bang in Switzerland, he makes it himself. The Wessex men marvel at his tales of the Holloch, but point out that the caves beyond the boulder choke are likely to be even bigger. At last it is time to go. In the Gorge, Wessex is astonished to observe Rudolf peel off his muddy trousers and throw them into a rubbish bin. His shoes follow the trousers.

“Rudolf, in Switzerland do you always throw away your caving clothes after only one trip?”

“Ah no. Here I do not wish to soil my good clothes, so after I buy my torch, I look in all these baskets and I find the trousers and the shoes. I wear them down the cave and now I put them back!”

“Very sensible. Well, we must be off, Rudolf. How did you like digging?”

“To me it is great happiness. Next year I think I come back to England with my friends, and we dig, and we find a big cave for you! Goodbye! **Willie Stanton**

## Cheramodytes

So it’s your 75<sup>th</sup>. You’ve beaten me by one, because I shuffled off at 74, way back in ‘85. Since then I’ve been marking time.... I’ve lots of past, but no future, although this might be intellectually debatable after a Pin of my favourite Long Ashton Cider. Ah well, an ideal time for a “Blast from the Past”, and a fairly literal one, as it involves Luke Devenish who tended to specialise in chemically induced noisiness. Steve Wynne-Roberts, Roger Horton and Mike Holland were also in on the act.

Back in about 1958 there was a giant Tilley Lamp Searchlight in GB main chamber. It illuminated the place dramatically.... when lit. Unfortunately nobody took Meths along to fire it up, the mantle was a on the delicate side, and pre-heating with a stinkie flame was apt to be too brutal. Approaching 5<sup>th</sup>. November, Mr. Devenish opined that a Roman Candle would light up the roof rather well. Indeed that several Roman Candles would be even better. George Pointing, whose work in the docks had mysterious links with defective lorry tailgates, provided some sensational Wessex fireworks displays and also ‘obtained’ a cluster of enormous Roman Candles for Luke. This, of course, was before “Health and Safety”, and they truly were enormous. On the open market each would have needed a mortgage on the caravan that George and Dave Berry shared at Hillgrove. But I digress (surely a ghostly privilege?). The instructions were to stand them in flower pot of soft earth..... So think about it. A gigantic terra-cotta pot, intact down GB? Soft earth in the Main Chamber? The obvious thing was to bind these behemoths into a cluster to provide a nice fat stable base. Assembled it looked awesome, with all the “Blue touch papers” sticking up on top. Since there were lots of them, some were well in from the outside, and because the fireworks weren’t identical, the touch papers were not as level as the base; much (debated) re-assembly led to an appropriately volcanic cone shape. About 18 inches across. It looked like a stretched version of the sort of land-mine that blows tank tracks off. Some of us, myself to name but a few, were wont to mention ignition difficulties, but Luke assured us that all would be well. Steve suggested that if ignition were indeed simultaneous, apart from illuminating the roof of the main chamber, the projectiles might either punch straight through and open a quick route from Charterhouse meadows, or bring the whole lot down onto us. This was dismissed as an extreme

view and we proceeded down into GB Main Chamber, where we discovered that a giant Terra-cotta pot would, indeed, have crumbled, because our carefully assembled device had done likewise. Luke reassembled it, but “Reassembled” has to be widely interpreted, as most of the sticky tape was by now non-sticky, and the outer candles were now propped rather than bound. As it happens there is no 12" flat rock in GB, so the result was a mini-Vesuvius, more or less vertical and more or less stabilised by a ring of stones. Keyword there: “Less”.

Luke, being rich, had a fancy Oldhams lamp. The rest of us had Stinkies, so Mr Devenish invited one of us to ignite his Son et Lumiere. To a man, we declined. This was the first, and only, sensible decision of the day. A better one would have been to leave, but Noel, who was inordinately proud of his polished and well maintained Stinkie, offered it to Luke. A quick shake, water to max, and a decent 6" flame allowed Luke to start the “Blue touch paper”.

Several things rapidly became apparent: the very first Roman Candle was on an extremely short fuse; even with an asbestos sleeve the further ones would have been out of reach; a 6" flame wasn't long enough and the entertaining bit of spouty flame before the stars, was quite amazingly smoky, and brief, and smelly. We were not in the back garden. We were in a cave. There was no gentle autumn breeze to waft the fumes away. The other Roman Candles lit themselves from what rapidly became a sea of fire. And then they cut loose with the “Stars” bit. Steve's worries about simultaneous ignition were groundless; the Royal Navy might carp, but “Ripple Fire” and “Salvoes” are *not* contradictory terms. Nobody knows if any stars reached the roof because visibility went instantly to about 6 feet - the length of a horizontal body, such as mine, and Steve's. I could not see the others, but they were occasionally audible above the explosions. I decline to quote them. In the fumes it seemed probable that Vesuvius had collapsed like its historical original. The shooting stars could only be seen as they shot and ricocheted *horizontally* past us in the thickening, sulphurously stinking murk. I had visions of looking at an exceptionally interesting pathological slide..... me, but none of us was hit. The only casualty was George's camera tripod, which had fallen over but whether from a direct hit or simply from outrage at this nonsense, I couldn't say. Luckily George hadn't had time to put his camera onto it. He had intended to have an open-shutter photograph; the mind boggles. People, myself, Noel and Steve amongst them, have come out of Swildons without lights. Lights, then, in GB, offered no visual assistance whatsoever. To the top of the Canyon we were feeling our way blind in a coughing caterpillar. I suppose that there were some bragging rights attached to this fiasco, but nobody claimed them. In fact, for some reason, we forbore to mention it to anyone else, and next day when we (gingerly) returned to GB to clear up the physical evidence we found it clear of fumes but liberally decorated with horrible, wet, soggy, stinking cardboard: actually not a bad description of our cotton boiler suits as well. And from their reeking evidence the truth gradually seeped out.

## More from our Expatriates

### **Caves & Caving in Panama, a Personal Account** from James S. Cobbett

In 2001, when I went to live in Panama, Marilyn's, my wife's, home country, I had already been visiting the country for nearly twenty-five years, and, in spite of my best efforts, it seemed likely that Panama was a cave-free



zone. I therefore left much of my caving gear in England, and bought a sailing boat instead. However, as will be apparent from the map below, which is current as of mid-2009, “cave-free” is not how Panama turned out to be! Before running through the various caving areas and caves, there are a few things to be kept in mind about caves and caving in Panama :

Panama runs West (Costa Rica) to East (Columbia), with the Atlantic, aka “Caribbean”, to the north and Pacific to the south.

Much, if not most, of Panama is not fully explored, or readily accessible – by “readily accessible” I mean within 2 hours, on foot or on horse-back, of a 4 x 4 drivable track, water-taxi/motorised canoe ride, or air strip. Darien remains largely “terra incognita”, with no way through to Columbia, though, many years ago, John Blashford-Snell did get a Range Rover through to Columbia, taking one hundred days, with support from Messrs Land Rover and the British Army.

Panamanians are reluctant to involve themselves in anything energetic, especially outdoors. They are not interested in caves, making it pretty much impossible to get together a posse for anything much more than a “beginners’ trip” within day-trip range of Panama City. This means that an “international expedition” is required for serious exploration.

By far the best way to locate caves is to “ask the locals” – assuming you speak Spanish, of course. Without exception, whenever I have been told “There’s a cave over there”, there always has been!

Logistics are key - the caving is usually easy, the hard, and fun, part is getting to the entrance! The 2006 and 2009 expeditions (Pat Cronin (Irish CoastGuard), Connor McGrath (ICG), Dig Hastilow (CDG) and myself, and in 2006 Ray Murphy (ICG) & Phil Collett (SMCC)), to get around used :

Helicopter,

4 x 4,

Horses,

Sailing yacht,

Inflatable with outboard motor,

Scheduled light aircraft flights,

Water taxi,

Motorised canoe, and..... Our feet.

The limestone in Panama is thin, maybe 120 feet maximum thickness. As a result the known caves are all shallow, generally have multiple entrances (e.g. sky-lights where the roof has fallen in), albeit with big passages, and are short - the longest, Nibida, being only about 2 kms in total.

Tropical rain forest (having often to machete a way through the jungle), combined with the climate (30° C, 100% humidity – when it’s not actually raining), the topography, and the surface clints and grikes common in karst areas, makes for hard going – especially for the “more mature” caver. The jungle is in many places so thick that one could walk within 10 metres of a surface shaft, and miss it.

The heavy rain, large passages and many entrances, mean that lots of things get washed into our caves, such as tree trunks, crocodiles & snakes. When a friend reported recently that he had found “a lot more branches in Cueva Las Tres Cascadas”, this did not imply more passages!

In our caves, we have more bats than they have in Lord’s Pavilion!

The best time for outdoor activities, such as caving, is the “Summer”, that is December through early May.

In Panama, we speak Spanish.

If the above is the “bad news”, there is “good news” too, notably that the booze, and most everything else, is very cheap, and that were you to fly in to-night, I could just about guarantee being in “new stuff” by to-morrow evening!

In 2002, I was introduced to Keith Christenson (NSS), an American caver, and tropical bat specialist, then resident in Panama. He had started on a systematic investigation of caves in Panama, and, though now back in the USA, is still the keeper of the “Panama Cave Registry”. Though he had involved a number of locals in the “Panama Cave Project”, and found, explored and recorded a large number of caves within day-trip range of Panama City, lack of qualified/experienced support left him with a number of open leads, and a number of unconfirmed “cave sightings”. With support of cavers from the USA, he had also explored some caves in Western Panama, near the border with Costa Rica, and also some caves in Bastimentos, an island in Bocas Del Toro, where Panama’s

longest caves are to be found.

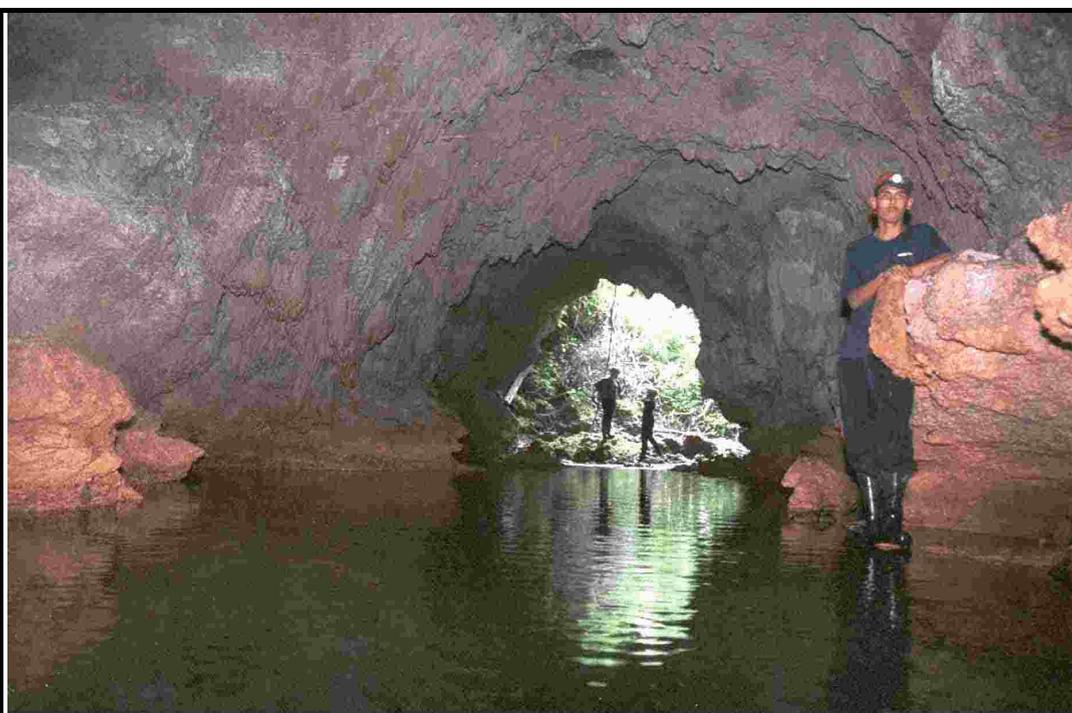
My explorations have largely built on foundations laid by Keith, and I am most grateful to him for pointing me in the right direction. Keith continues to interest himself in Panama, and I hope to see him back here ere long. Though the following may attempt a comprehensive and up-to-date account of caves in Panama, this is very much a personal saga, more from “From the Log Book”, than a UBSS occasional publication. Taking it area by area, and west to east :

### **Western Panama**

I have not been caving in Western Panama, though Keith Christensen et al explored and surveyed a number of caves here in the Oligocene Senosri-Uscari limestone, the longest of which, at 707 metres, is Cueva Porton.

#### **Rio Teribe**

River Teribe flows north into the Caribbean (i.e. Atlantic) from the highlands of La Amistad (“Friendship”) National Park, which spans the border with Costa Rica. Though there are no recorded caves here, there are known caves in Bocas Del Toro to the east, and Western Panama to the south, making it possible that there might be caves here too. In 2004, in spite of Lonely Planet’s warnings of “snakes like fire-hoses”, Marilyn and I ventured a couple of hours up this huge river, initially in a motorised canoe, and then on foot. The locals did, indeed, tell us of caves further up river, the entrance to one of which had been filled-in, to keep an evil spirit bottled-up. This would certainly make for an interesting expedition, for which one would need to allow several days. However, with the development of hydro-electric generation capacity on the Rio Teribe, access should improve.



**One of the Rio Mimitimbi River Caves**

### **Bocas Del Toro**

Bocas is an archipelago of Caribbean islands, discovered by Christopher Columbus on his fourth and final voyage to the Americas in 1502. Panama’s only show cave, La Gruta (“The Grotto”), is located on Isla Colon (“Colon” is Spanish for “Columbus”), and in 2001 Keith Christensen surveyed Ol’ Bank Underworld, on Isla Bastimentos, then Panama’s longest cave, at 1,146 metres.

In 2005, Rob and Helen Harper (“BEC”), Mac McManus and myself

returned to Bocas Del Toro, and passed a waterfall and duck, to extend both main inlet passages to extend Nibida, an active resurgence cave on Isla Bastimentos, to be Panama’s longest known, and surveyed, cave. This expedition also opened-up Isla Colon for caving, where a number of previously unrecorded caves were explored, including Cayman Cave, named for the cayman (a brand of small crocodile) that calls this cave home. Cayman Cave resurges into the Rio (river) Mimitimbi, which itself flows through a number of short river caves, one of which is shown above, big enough to drive an amphibious bus through. This expedition has been previously described by me in “Panama 2005” (Journal of the Wessex Cave Club in 2005), so will not be further detailed here.

In 2006 I returned to Bocas with a new crew (Pat Cronin, Connor McGrath, Ray Murphy, Dig Hastilow and Phil Collett), again using my sailing boat, Flying Scud, as a caving hut. Having been shown, by the National Park warden, Domingo Villagra (pronounced “Viagra”, and butt of a number of inexcusable jokes), a new cave entrance in the jungle in Isla Bastimentos, this was forced through to connect with the Nibida main stream

passage, to extend Nibida to circa 2 kms. A 12 metre tight and nasty surface shaft, named Perseverance Pot, first noted during the 2005 expedition, was dropped, to by-pass the “too tight” sump dived by Pat Cronin at the end of Domingo’s Cave, another resurgence near to Nibida. This gave access to the, large and well decorated, Domingo’s 2 streamway, with sumps at both ends. Domingo’s, named for the local hard man, takes the water from Ol’ Bank Underworld - the Ol’ Bank Underworld/Domingo’s system would likely be the longest in Panama, were these to be joined; a project for another day! Some cenotes, flooded pots, were visited to the south of Bastimentos, which could doubtless be readily connected by diving. A number of other leads were explored and surveyed, with much potential still remaining, including one cave which the locals did not care to show us, due to the resident dragon!

On Isla Colon, Dig Hastilow dived another cenote (“Cenote Courtney”) to the north-east of the island. This gave access to two flooded passages leading off, to a maximum depth of circa 5.5 metres, still continuing wide open. As we had only one set of diving kit, and this was but a recce, the sump was not pushed, leaving an interesting target for later investigation.

To get ourselves more time for cave hunting around the headwaters of the Rio Mimitimbi in Isla Colon, we took jungle hammocks to sleep one night in Cayman Cave. Having discovered, and explored, Rio Mimitimbi River Cave (52 metres) and Rio Mimitimbi Resurgence Cave (12 metres), we scampered past the resident croc in Cayman Cave, and set up hammocks in a large dry oxbow, above the main stream. After dining on self-heating MREs (US Army issue “Meals Ready to Eat” - not bad at all), we all dropped off to sleep - all except for Phil Collett that is, who had the hammock nearest the stream and the croc, and was worried about it! However, the croc it was who came off worst. After a few hours, the MREs had worked their way through, and one of our crew (no names, no pack drill!) found he had to relieve himself in the stream. When he had finished his business, he heard a noise, and looked down to find that the cayman, likely on a nocturnal crayfish hunt, had copped the lot!

The cave had its revenge on me, however, as it was most likely here that I picked up Weil’s Disease, which put me in hospital in Panama City for eight nights, with total kidney failure. I recovered completely, but we all took Doxycycline as an anti-*Leptospir* prophylactic on the 2009 expedition.



**The Croc that Cronin Crapped On**

Though a number of open leads, and rumours

of caves, remain on Islas Colon and Bastimentos, no “real” cavers have been back since 2006. Bocas Del Toro is an attractive and popular tourist destination, with many hotels, hostels, restaurants and bars, making this an obvious and easy target for another time.

### **The Azuero Peninsula**

Though no caves were known in the Azuero Peninsula until recently, a number of caves have been explored there in the last five years. Some ten miles headed north-west out of Tonosi, the road passes a cement works and limestone quarry. A number of caves have been explored in this area, the longest of which, Cueva Quebrada la Mocha, was surveyed at 206 metres, by Keith Christensen et al, in 2005. (This was a university-funded expedition, to obtain some speleothems for global warming research purposes, but which found nothing worth taking home. Why didn’t I think of something like that?).

The road branching south from the Pan-American Highway, just before Santiago, via Atalaya and Ponuga, to reach the Pacific at Mariato on the western side of the Azuero Peninsula, provides access to more caves. I was shown

El Tunel (“The Tunnel”), a fine but short (53 metres) stream cave, near the road bridge over the Rio Poci, in 2004, and Keith explored a few caves in 2005, from the coast road, heading south from Mariato.



**James & bats in the Cave of the Lost Children**

In 2006, I was asked to take a look at a gold prospect off the road to Mariato. While I was there, I was told about a nearby cave that had been entered by two children long ago, only one of whom had returned - the standard Panamanian tale, the local equivalent of the dog that disappeared down Swildons, and came out at Picaddily Underground one week later, with his hair all singed! In 2009, we decided to leave Bocas Del Toro alone for once, and concentrate on other leads instead, including the “Cave of the Lost Children”.

A passing local was happy to show us the entrance to this, and three other nearby caves, close to a (4 x 4) drivable track. The Cave of the Lost Children proved to be a sink at the bottom of a small valley, dry at the time of our visit. The sink-hole led directly into the large passage shown below. The cave branched, with both ends leading to sumps, static at the time, but which take a lot of water in the rainy season. The total surveyed length was almost 400 metres. As with almost all Panamanian caves, Cave of the Lost Children is home to many bats.

Two other sinks, within a couple of hundred yards of Cave of the Lost Children, were also explored, but only went about twenty-five metres each. Though we had been shown what is likely the entrance to the resurgence cave for at least two of these sinks, time (and idleness) did not allow us to look at this. If there are four entrances within a

two hundred yard radius, there must be more caves in this area, and also down on the coast, where reports of entrances were not followed up. Again, this area has to be worth another visit.

### **Chiguiri Arriba**

Though at this writing uncertain as to whether it is really limestone or not, Chiguiri Arriba is in an area of what appears to be cone karst. A small “eco hotel” looks over the jungle, with mountains extending as far as the eye can see. During an earlier visit, in 2006, the hotel guide had told me of caves in the area, and an offer to lead us to them was repeated during the 2009 expedition. However, these caves are said to be some hours, on foot or on horse-back, away, and as it was pissing down with rain, and we had already had more than enough fun getting out of Boca De La Encantada, see below, we declined. However, most likely there are caves in this area, just waiting to be discovered!

### **Boca De La Encantada**

Some years back, Keith Christensen told me that, decades ago, some American geologists/archeologists from the Panama Canal Commission/Smithsonian Institution had visited a village named “Boca De La Encantada” (“Mouth of the Enchanted” – a promising name!), when scouting out a route for a new canal. They had been shown a large cave, which two children had entered long ago, etc... The Americans had penetrated some fifty metres, with the cave continuing. Though Boca De La Encantada is shown on the maps of Panama, there is no road anywhere near – so how to check this out?

In January 2006, I made a recce using a Jeep Cherokee with lifted suspension. I reached a point from where I

reckoned that two hours walk should take me to the river, where I could hire a local canoe for a two hour ride, which would only leave a further couple of hours walking to reach the fabled land! This was the expedition that we had planned for 2009. However, a month before the team arrived, my wife's cousin introduced me to Angel Brennan. Angel works on rural development projects for the government, had been to Boca De La Encantada once already in 2009, and was hoping to find someone crazy enough to accompany him for the return trip.

The first day in Panama, the rest of the team made a helicopter recce of the Boca De La Encantada area, confirming that there is a lot of jungle, many rivers, and few good tracks. No karst features, not even some shake-holes interpreted from aerial photos, could be identified.

Following a two hour drive to Penonome, a former capital of Panama, and a night in a hotel, we met Angel at nine in the morning, and headed North in two 4 x 4s. After two hours driving in gradually deteriorating driving conditions, including one river crossing, we had to stop for one hour to improve a soft spot in the road. In spite

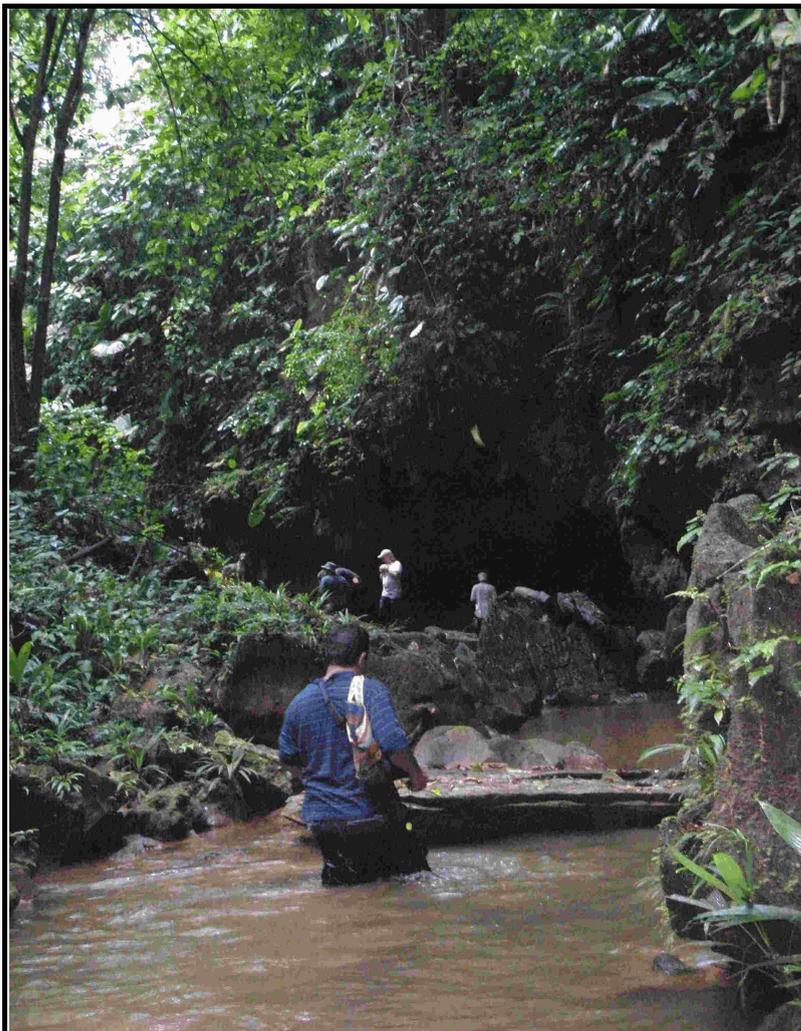
of our best efforts, we then had to spend a further hour pulling Angel's car out of the mud. Fortunately, Angel had arranged for eight horses and six "minders" from Boca De La Encantada (which is within cell fone range) to meet us, enabling us to press on, though this was the first experience of this mode of transport for most of us. Two river crossings, and four hours later, on the worst tracks imaginable, we arrived in Boca De La Encantada, just as it was getting dark, passing no obvious limestone or karst on the way.

After feeding us, we were shown to the village "Guest House" – wooden beds, no mattresses, so I used a jungle hammock. The next morning, after breakfast, we were loaded onto horses again, for a ride of little under one hour, after which we were led on foot down into a much-karstified limestone gorge, with the Rio Boca De La Encantada flowing down it. After a third of a mile, the river resurged from a cave mouth, as shown on the left.

The large passage was generally chest high in water – though Cronin had to swim! After circa 80 metres, a large inlet passage/shaft to surface was passed on the right. A climb over a tree trunk choke led, after a total of less than 200 metres, to the upper, sink, entrance, again largely choked with tree trunks. I walked upstream of the sink with Dig Hastilow, to see if there were any other caves leading off the valley, but the limestone/karst ran out

within a few metres. On returning to the sink, we were collared by one of our minders from the village, who insisted that we not return via the cave, because the rest of our team were now on top waiting for us. They has similarly been persuaded to come and meet me - I think the real reason was that it was lunch time! After lunch, I festered, with a detached boot sole, whilst the others took fotos (successful) and looked for my spectacles (unsuccessful). In the evening, back at the village, we reported our success, and also that we had seen no signs of lost children, treasure, dragons etc. We left a number of open leads in the cave, so a return trip may be warranted - alternatively, just wait for a day when the ambient temperature is 30° C, and go down Port-Yr-Ogof instead!

Though it had been raining whilst we had been in Boca De La Encantada, the next morning dawned bright and clear. However, the tracks that had seemed desperate to us on the way in, were now so bad that we avoided the



**Cueva Boca De La Encantada**

worst of the track via fields, and had an easier return to the cars, only stopping en route in Boca De Tulu for coffee - grown very locally, and ground in a 3 foot high wooden pestle and mortar while we waited!

However, once we were back at the cars, it was very obvious that the track was much muddier, and much slicker, than it had been two days earlier. Then, Angel's 4 x 4 Mitsubishi pick-up would not start – first it looked like a flat battery, then it became clear that the starter motor was U/S! Using a very long caving rope, and going as near as I dared without getting stuck, I managed to pull start Angel's car, with mine. A few miles down the track, in appalling conditions, Angel's car stopped again – and there it remains!

A couple of miles further on, sliding sideways at 30 MPH, my 4 x 4 sank into the mud, so deep that I could not even get the door open. Two hours digging, including cutting off the back bumper with a machete, resulted in the following exchange with a local spectator :

**Campesino**, to James : “Look what you've done to your Mitsubishi Montero!

**James**, to Campesino : “It's worse than that, it's not my Montero, it's my wife's!”

Eventually the locals managed to pull us out. Next time, on a bend, was worse, it taking eighteen men, plus two horses, to pull us free. We stopped at the last river crossing, just as it was getting dark, to wash off, then had a meal that Angel had arranged for us, then back to the hotel in Penonome, in time for a few beers.

Though we were told that there are no more caves near Boca De La Encantada, we were told of some accessible from the track between Penonome and the first river crossing - i.e., where the track is in reasonable shape, and not too far from Penonome. A return trip should be made to check this out, and also to make a more thorough exploration and survey of Cueva Boca De La Encantada. This deserves another visit, if only for the fantastic journey in and out!

### **San Lorenzo National Park**

Though the Spanish had built a fort, San Lorenzo, at the mouth of the Chagres River many years before, this did not prevent Captain Morgan from trashing the fort, and then moving on to sack and loot Panama City in January 1671. The area around the mouth of the Chagres is now a national park, and boasts a couple of interesting known caves – though there must be more.

Cueva Las Tres Cascadas, “Three Waterfall Cave”, may be approached via a “hard v. diff” jungle bash, terminating in a 200 foot abseil down a waterfall, in a real “Lost World” setting. How do I know that this is 200 ft – well being the first to attempt this drop, on a 175 ft rope .....! The waterfall leads within 100 metres to a wide, climbable, surface pot, with three waterfalls into the cave. Keith Christenson was shown this entrance by Bill Bailey, a “Zonian” (i.e. A US national, borne and brought up in the former Panama Canal Zone), and penetrated via a little over a hundred metres of big passage to the top of a 40 ft wet pitch, where he was stopped due to lack of support. I subsequently bottomed the pitch on rope into a deep pool, and then followed via a winding awkward rift, to a lower entrance, circa 100 feet below the top entrance. This makes Cueva Las Tres Cascadas the deepest surveyed cave in Panama.

After Bill Bailey's first exploration of Cueva De Los Gusanos Del Muerte, “Cave of the Worms of Death”, on the road to Fuerte San Lorenzo, he was indisposed for a period of time - and this is why Bill does not go caving any more. (If you want more details, see under “Creeping Eruption” in Lonely Planet's “Healthy Travel, Central & South America”.)

Though Bill, Jamesito (No. 1 Son) and I spent a day jungle bashing near Tres Cascadas, and found many karst features, we found no caves above “rock shelter” grade. The most memorable part of this day out was the big cat that was following us around (jaguar, puma?), not that we ever saw him, but we could certainly smelt him! However, as in other karst areas of Panama, there must be more caves to find, but first one has to look.

### **Lago Madden**

Lake Madden was created in the 1920's, by building the Madden Dam to control the flow of the upper Chagres

river into the Panama Canal, both to limit the impact of annual flooding, and provide a more secure, year-round, water supply for the Canal. In this general area there are two limestone quarries attached to cement works, and a number of caves, including the well-known, at least in Panama, Chilibre Bat Cave. Though, as ever, there must be more to discover, the two most interesting known caves are The Natural Bridge, and Bill Bailey's Bone Cave.

The Natural Bridge passes over a small river, leading into the east side of Lake Madden. Though little more than fifteen metres long, the Natural Bridge is big enough to explore from a large motorised canoe. This cave was first mentioned in the 1600's, as carrying the Camino Real over the river. The Camino Real was the track through the jungle, from Panama City on the Pacific, to Portobello on the Caribbean, across which the Spaniards, in colonial times, transported the silver and gold from Peru and South America, en route for Spain. Much of the Camino Real now lies under Lake Madden.

When Bill Bailey first explored a, short (120 metres-ish, survey in preparation) but big passages, cave near Nuevo Vigia, on the western bank of Lake Madden, it was full of, circa 3 ft in diameter, clay pots, each containing bones, some of which had almost been reduced to powder. As this was clearly a significant pre-Columbian burial sight, Bill was careful not to broadcast it's location, though he did show it to a close, female, Panamanian, friend. When Bill returned a few years later, all the archeologicals had been looted, with only a few shards of pottery remaining. This cave has two entrances, and when I first visited it, in the rainy season, also a lake more than one Cobbett deep. We returned in the dry season this year, prepared to dive the lake, to see if there was anything interesting at the bottom - perhaps more archeologicals, or a way though to more cave. However, Lake Madden is one hundred metres away, and the water level was, perhaps, fifteen metres lower in Lake Madden on this later visit, than when I found the lake in the cave.

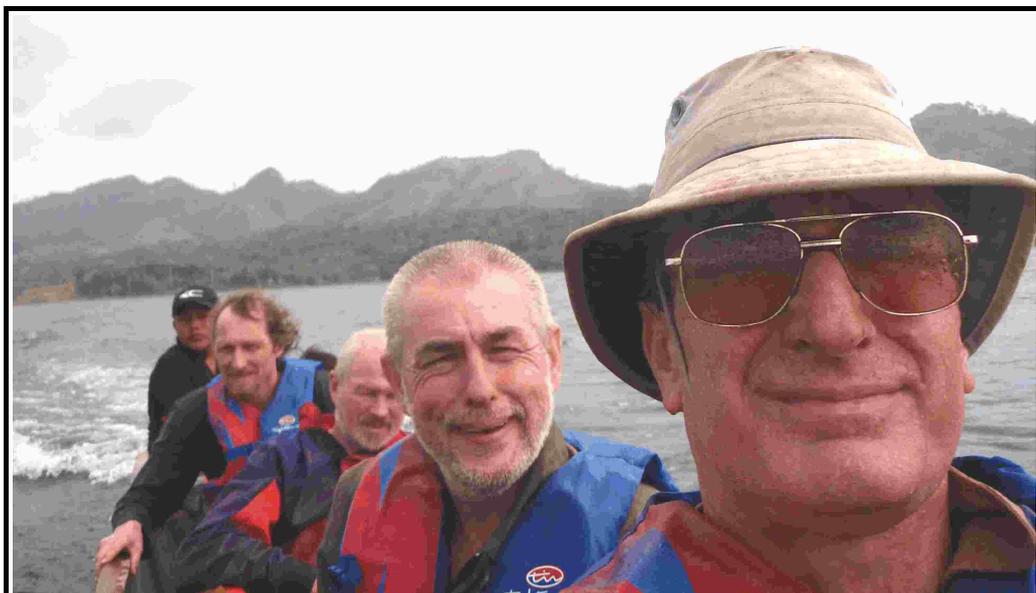
Bringing cave diving kit with us worked a charm - the "lake" had regressed to a muddy pit, with no way on, and no gold funerary ornaments. I have returned to Bill Bailey's Bone Cave once more recently, but to be so badly stung by ants, that I could not wear a watch for a week!

### **Lago Bayano**

Lake Bayano was created some decades ago, by damming the Rio Bayano,



**Cave Rescue - Panama Style**

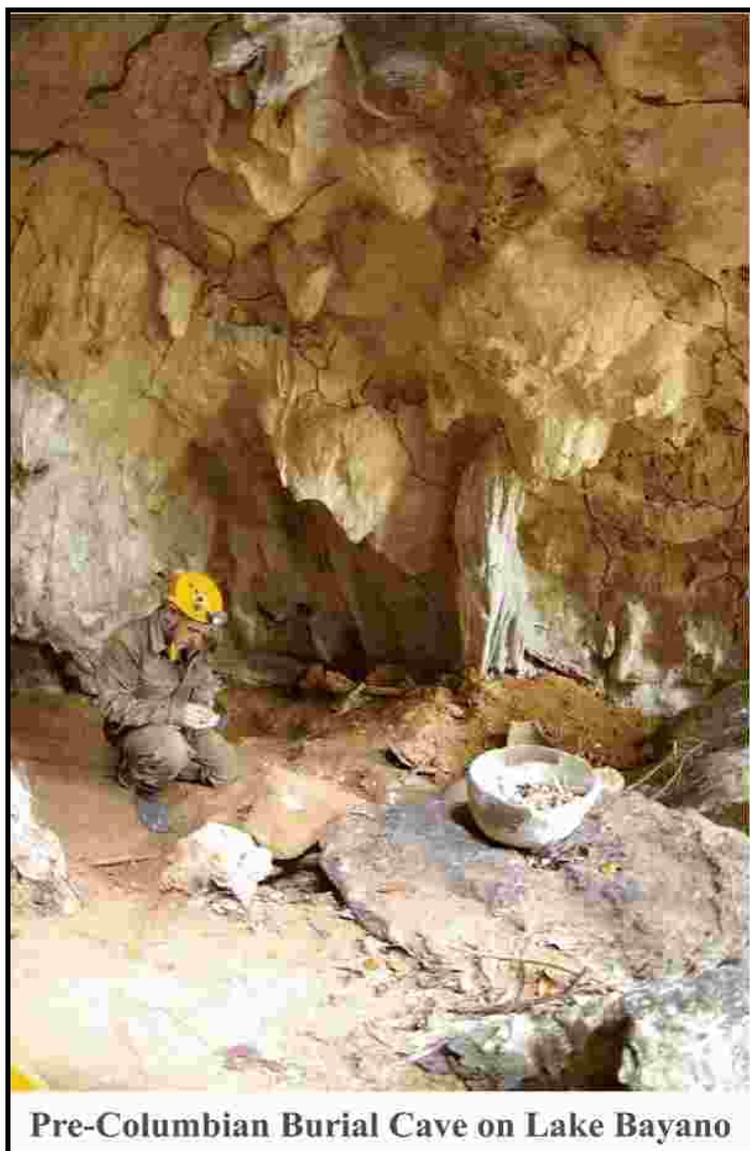


**The 2009 Team Crossing Lago Bayano**

as part of a hydro-electric project. The road to Darien passes a bridge across part of the lake, by a Kuna Indian village, lying within the Comarca de Kuna Yala, an Indian “Reservation”. Before the dam was built, American geologists had surveyed this area, and noted caves on what is now the north side of the lake.

Keith Christensen had used motorised canoes, and boatmen, from the Kuna village, for the circa one hour trip across Lake Bayano, to a very small village (two houses) on the northern side of the lake. Pueblo Nuevo (“New Village”) takes its water from a cave a couple of hundred yards up a limestone gorge leading from the village. Cueva De Pueblo Nuevo is an active resurgence, which leads after a few hundred metres to a dry, fossil, upper passage over the now-too-small streamway, back to the stream again. After a few metres, there is a possible climb to surface, a second entrance. Keith Christensen got a bit further than this, when it became too tight. I, on later trip, failed to find the “too tight” bit, likely due to a Mendip-bred urge to grovel in the stream, up to my neck in water, and added a couple of hundred metres to emerge at a third entrance. This cave, around 1 km long, was host to Panama’s only cave rescue to date, necessitating a new entry in “1,001 Things to do with Duct Tape”!

In 2005 we followed a track that leads up beyond Cueva De Pueblo Nuevo, into the hills, and noted a number of rock shelters, plus an active stream sink, which I did not push due to lack of support. We returned to this in 2009, but could not pass a near-surface tree trunk choke. This has been named “Sleepy Snake Sink”, for the hognosed pit viper, on a rock near the entrance, that Cronin almost sat on! On the way back down to Pueblo Nuevo, by a highly-karstified cliff, we examined a number of entrances into this lump of limestone, which already hosts a few small caves. The only one that we were able to enter, led, within 40 metres, to a chamber, with a window in the cliff face. The chamber had a number of clay pots, and bones, and is likely a Pre-Columbian burial site, though I have still to contact the archeologist at the Smithsonian Institution, here in Panama, to confirm this.



Pre-Columbian Burial Cave on Lake Bayano

Other known caves in the vicinity of Pueblo Nuevo include Cueva Piladores, a roomy active stream cave, alas only 132 metres from sink to resurgence, and Cueva De La Quebrada Seca, a roomy, spectacular and well decorated stream cave, leading almost directly off Lake Bayano, but only 383 metres long. There must be more caves in this area, and a team willing to spend a few nights camping at, or near, Pueblo Nuevo, would be almost certain to come up with some new stuff.

### **The Rest of Panama**

As mentioned in the above introduction, most of Panama is only partially explored, and most is covered with thick vegetation making it hard to know what could be only a few metres away. As in other places, the caves are exclusively located underground. This combination suggests that there could be whole new caving areas out there, if only someone was to go and look!

Volunteers for fame and glory may contact the author on [James@JamesCobbett.com](mailto:James@JamesCobbett.com). Vasco Nunez De Balboa, who discovered the Pacific, had his head cut off in Panama, in 1517, by way of a reward, and my father’s boat caught fire and sank in the entrance to the Panama Canal in 1914 (Yes, really) – but you may be more lucky!

**James S. Cobbett – Panama City, Panama, August 2009**

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# Digs and Mysteries nearer Home

## THE GULF ON SANDFORD HILL - ANOTHER POSSIBLE EXPLANATION

### From Willie Stanton

When Herbert Balch and Ernest Baker were investigating the caves of West Mendip at the turn of the 19th century they knew all about the legend of the Gulf, which figures in *Netherworld of Mendip* (1908). They had, no doubt, read about it in John Rutters ground-breaking book *Delineations of North West Somersetshire*, published in 1829. He was quoting letters he had had from Dr David Williams, the explorer of bone caves on Hutton and Banwell hills. According to Williams, local miners knew or had heard of an immense cave on Sandford Hill, which has never been explored .... The mouth of it is said by the miners to be 80 fathoms below the plane of the hill and they have let a man down upwards of 300 feet from its verge without coming to the floor, nor could he see any sides or termination to it - they call it the Gulph.” Baker wrote in *Netherworld* “We are probably on the track of this monster cavity, an exploration of which will entail labour and fortitude”.

Baker’s account of the story in *Netherworld of Mendip* links the gulph to Sandford Levvy, which was being driven in 1830, the time of Dr Williams’ letter. During the drive the Levvy miners broke into a very large open cavity, the so-called Second Crossroads, which probably dropped into deep water when found although it is now almost full of debris from the extensive tunnel beyond it which would have been reached by a bridge. No doubt the Levvy miners enjoyed talking about their breakthrough, together with other tales of caves on Sandford Hill. By the time Dr Williams heard about it, probably at second or third hand and suitably exaggerated, it could well have been linked to an old tale of a “Gulph”. The mouth of the Levvy is reasonably close to 80 fathoms below the top of the hill, and the depths quoted could as well apply to the Second Crossroads as anywhere else.

Balch, writing 29 years later in *Mendip, its Swallet Caves and Rock Shelters* (1937), recalled that the local gamekeeper understood the entrance to be “on the summit near the western end of the hill”. This is 420 feet above sea level, so although the story was still current after 80 years it was of no diagnostic value.

There remains one clue, of an unfamiliar kind. When, some 30 years ago, I was researching into the history of Cornish mining at Charterhouse, I regularly visited the British Newspaper Library at Colindale, in North London, to study the *Mining Journal*, which was published weekly with reports of developments in mines all over the country. Anything of interest to miners and indeed engineering in general, such as atmospheric railways, appeared in its pages. To my regret I did not copy a short account of mines on Elborough Hill near Banwell, which included a throwaway remark that although they were of little interest, about a mile to the east a gulph of ore had been discovered, of great value. The word was sometimes used in the sense of bonanza. What the ore was it didn’t say. There is a clear link here to Triple Hole, where at the bottom is a large low chamber with a floor of clean deads of unknown depth. The chamber walls and roof exhibit closely spaced pick marks. There must have been a large quantity of ore. More than that cannot be deduced, but the distance from Elborough is right.

So there is another possibility, that the Sandford Gulf was a mixed story of a natural cavity in the Levvy and a rich mine not far away on top of the hill, the story confused by sporadic telling and re-telling. If anything, I favour this latest one. **William Stanton**

## TEMPLETON    **Phil Hendy**

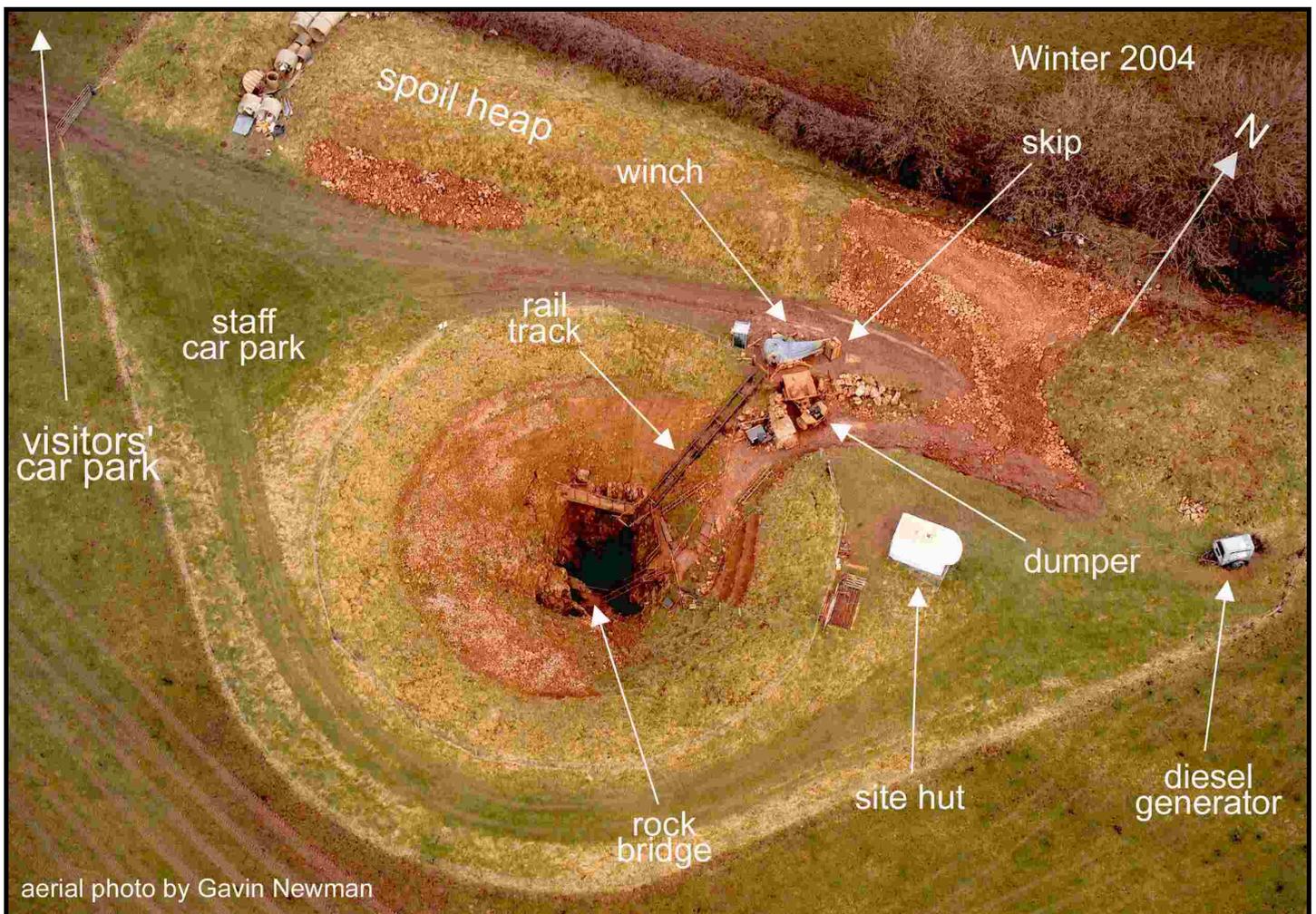
Templeton, at a depth of more than 50 metres, must be Mendip’s deepest surface dig, and is probably one of the most mechanised anywhere. The shaft has finally bottomed out, and a small tunnel is being excavated to the

south. Where it leads, if anywhere, is anybody's guess. The site was discovered in 2000 in a traditional manner when a tractor wheel sank into a small subsidence. With permission obtained from the farmer, Richard Masters of Lower Pitts Farm, a pit was dug down to rock with a Hymac, a concrete pipe shaft was installed, and the Axbridge Caving Club continued digging by hand. The sides of the dig kept running in, so a second shaft, using larger diameter pipes, was put in over where the run-ins were thought to be originating.

Although the diggers were following a vertical rock wall, the other sides of mud and stone kept slumping, and so in May 2002 Tuska brought in a Hymac again, this time determined to excavate the whole area down to solid rock. Over the next few months, the depression to approximately the level of a rock bridge at 25ft depth was cleared of infill. High on the south side a small inlet passage was found, running down to a rock arch and a pothole formed behind a calcite bridge.

The Hymac having done its job was taken away, and its place taken by a mini-digger, which took more spoil out to near the lower arch of the rock bridge. By this time Tuska and Jim Young, a local farmer, had started building the skip run, which since then has been used to bring all the spoil up to the surface. When the mini-digger had dug itself down to a point where it could no longer be used effectively, it was lifted out using a Sparrow's 35-tonne mobile crane, and serious hand digging commenced. The lower 140 feet of the shaft has all been dug by hand since January 2003. The Axbridge have been supplemented by diggers from NHASA, the Wessex, BEC, Shepton, and itinerant jobbing diggers from Craven.

As digging progressed, the rail line was extended in 3 metre sections. Steel working platforms were pinned into



the walls at approximately 20 foot intervals, connected by fixed steel ladders. As well as providing useful rest areas between ladders, they also protect those below from falling rocks. Skip loading when the excavation was too far below the current platform was facilitated by using one or two suspended wooden platforms, which could be lowered and adjusted as the dig deepened. A wide rift on the north side, filled with loose rubble and mud, was

walled with cemented stones down to the 64ft level. It widens and pinches out as it descends, but has generally been left alone, though some parts have been stabilised with cement. A pothole opened out behind a narrow rift on the south side, but eventually this joined the main shaft.

Skip haulage was originally effected with a Canadian mobile winch with jib. The skip, which holds about a third of a tonne, was hauled up, lifted on the jib, and swung over a dumper. A catch could be released to open the bottom hatch, thereby emptying the contents. However, when the dig had gone down to about 140ft, the cable-carrying capacity of the drum had been reached. With great ingenuity, Jim and Tuska extended the top of the skip run up and over a pit which was excavated on the surface. The dumper can be driven into this pit, so the skip is hauled over it. An ingenious tilting rail allows the skip to be lowered to a vertical position, and then emptied. It is very efficient, but time-consuming – a return journey from the bottom can take up to 20 minutes.

The new winch system is powered by a hydraulic pump connected to the front drive of an old Diahatsu. Electrical power is supplied by generators. The main one, a towable generator, is now only used when extra power is needed for welding. Originally, lighting was supplied by the old NHASA petrol generator, which was replaced by a diesel Briggs and Stratton. We now have a 7kVa twin cylinder diesel generator, very reliable, but a bitch to start in the winter. Communications between top and bottom are by radio, supplemented by two CCTV cameras.



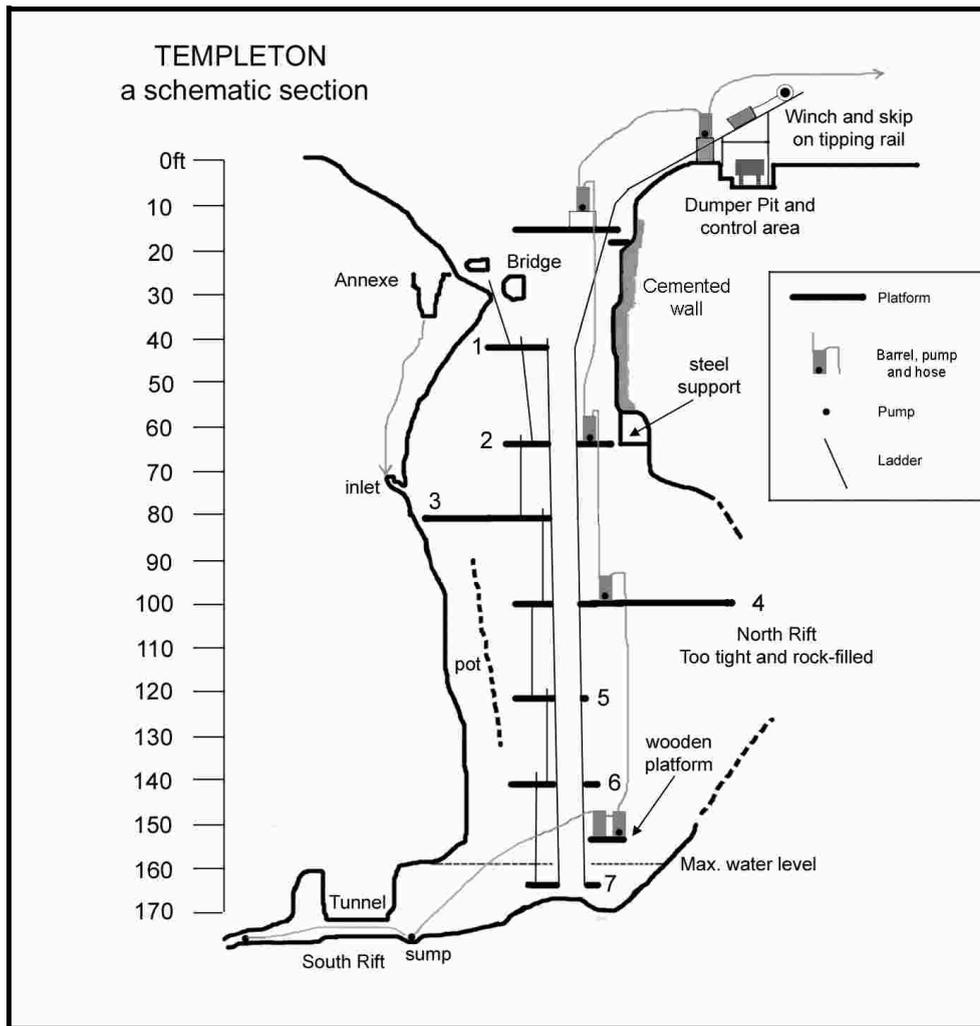
### **Description and Geology**

The dig is at ST 5375 4936, in a shallow valley running southwest to Higher Pitts Farm, and then deepening westwards into Ebbor Gorge. The rock is Oxwich Head or Clifton Down Limestone, though Dolomitic Conglomerate can be seen in the east side, near the surface.

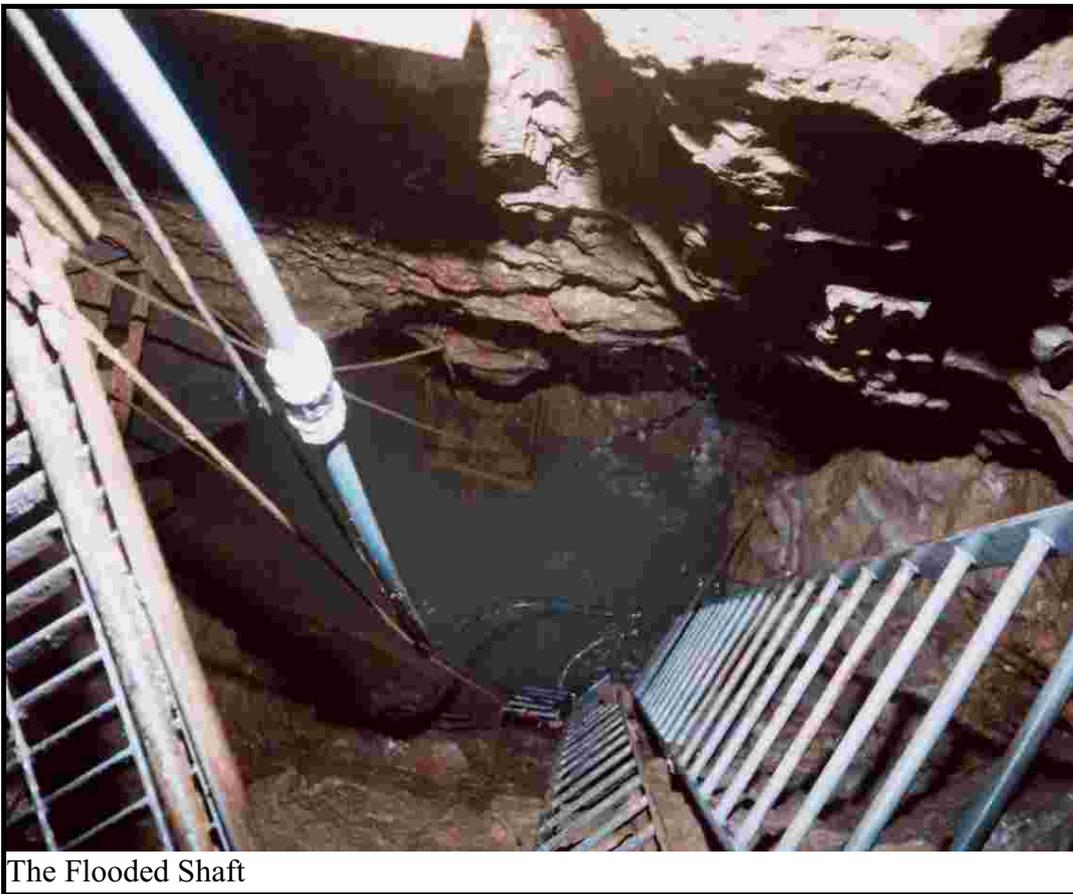
The dig, currently around 170ft or 52 metres deep, is generally a wide rift trending NNE to SSW. The bedding appears to be dipping gently to the north near the top, but becomes indistinct at depth. Near the top, on the west side, the wall is smooth. This is probably due to faulting. The north end of the rift was about a metre wide and filled with loose stones near the top, and a cemented stone wall was built down to the 64ft level to retain the fill. At this point, solid rock was encountered, so a steel support was fitted underneath the walling. Further down, the rift opens out again intermittently, to between six inches and 2ft. Attempts to penetrate were foiled by loose rocks falling from above, and in places building has taken place to prevent them from falling on the diggers below.

The middle of the rift is roomy, and near the top measures approximately 30ft by 10ft. It gradually narrows with depth, but at the bottom is still a comfortable 20ft by 6ft. The Hymac and mini-digger removed all the spoil to

just below the bridge, at around 30ft depth. Everything since then has been dug by hand. The fill was mainly mud with stones, some of which are a rotten dolomitised limestone. Occasionally gaps appeared between the boulders, leading to excitement followed by resignation, as they just proved to be isolated voids. Most of the larger rocks were broken with a sledgehammer, though occasionally snappers or detonation cord was used. Latterly, Hilti caps have been employed with moderate success, both to break rocks and to widen the bottom passage. It was difficult to see any stratification in the fill, though some areas of clay were almost devoid of stone, allowing it to be dug out in slices using a spade. Some of the mud was quite red, and in places black layers occurred. Some quartzite pebbles were found, and small shiny rounded black stones are common. They are frequently haematite (some fragments are magnetic) but some stones are



also covered in black manganese oxide. The first half of the shaft yielded lots of broken pieces of flowstone and some stalactites and stalagmites. Flowstone covers much of the walls, elsewhere the walls are covered in narrow vertical flutes (rillenkarren) and there is some scalloping denoting downwards flow of water. Although the digging was relatively easy owing to the roomy nature of the shaft, allowing several diggers to work at once and to swing a sledgehammer, removing the spoil, even from 30ft, would have been a nightmare. Spoil removal however became a dream, thanks to Jim and Tuska, who designed the skip run in a steel shaft welded from angle iron. This was extended in stages as the shaft deepened, and also steel platforms were pinned into the walls. To try to keep the skip run from blocking the shaft, it was necessary from around the 82ft level to blast rock from the west wall. 13mm holes were drilled using a 240v hammer drill, and Clive North kindly did the necessary, using bunches of detonation cord. Removing the consequent debris took several weeks, during which no downwards progress could be made. Originally the skip was loaded from the front, but later this opening faced the wall, so the skip was modified to allow loading from the rear. At around 90ft below the surface, the shaft appeared to be dividing into two, when a pothole was uncovered to the south, connected to the main shaft by a narrow section which in places was too narrow to pass. However, it had rejoined the main shaft at around 130ft. Here, some large rocks were uncovered on the east wall. They appeared tenuously attached to the wall, so were braced by a series of expanding stemples. A major setback occurred in May 2006, when the bottom of the shaft was found to be flooded. At that time the depth was around 145ft. The water soaked away slowly, so for a time digging took place alternately at the north and south end, a mud bund being constructed to that water from the active pit could be baled into the other. As the dig deepened, the water got deeper, and a solution had to be found. At one time, the water at the bottom of the shaft was more than 2 metres deep.



The Flooded Shaft

Much discussion ensued over many pints in the Hunters'. Eventually Jim and Tuska installed an old Lister twin-cylinder pump, modified to run from an electric motor, on the 142ft platform. When it worked, it pumped water efficiently up to the surface, where it was allowed to run away on the surface. Most of the time however it did not work, as it did not like dealing with the gravel which inevitably entered the pipework. Many hours were spent fettling the beast, until we gave in, and installed a series of submersible pumps.

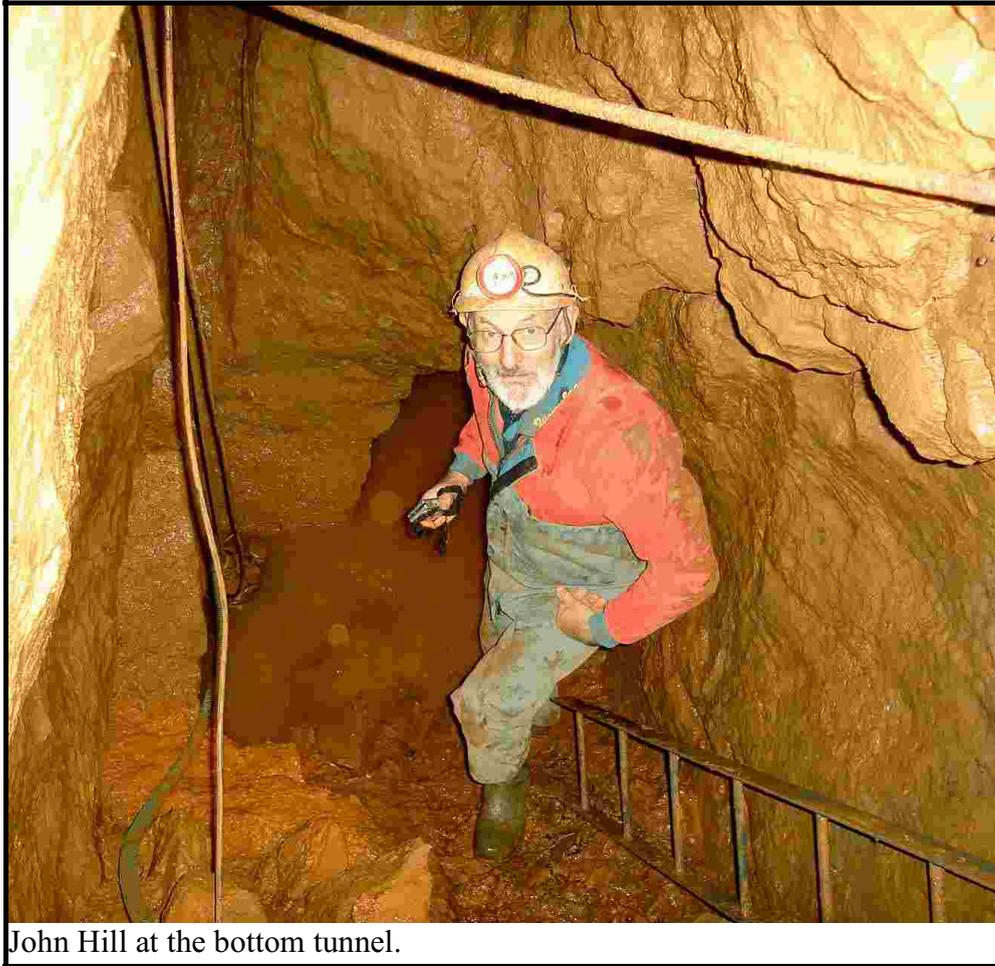
There is a trade-off between volume pumped and the height that the water must be raised, so after much experimentation, we have settled for six pumps, at intervals between an excavated sump at the bottom, and the top of the depression. Water from the end of the tunnel, which is slowly descending, is taken to the sump using another pump.

The sump pump is protected from gravel by a wire basket, and water from here is led into a barrel on a wooden platform suspended some 3 metres above the 7<sup>th</sup> platform. This acts as a settling tank, so the overflow water which runs into a barrel containing the second pump is grit-free. Each pump then sends water up into another barrel, from where it is raised to the next stage, and hence to the surface. Despite the vast volume of water pumped at times onto the ground behind the spoil heap, none of it seems to find its way back into the dig, which is intriguing.

During periods when pumping could not take place, attention was given to a choked shaft opposite the pothole which leads into the main shaft at the other end of the calcite bridge 25ft below field level. This was named the Annexe, and the walls needed stabilisation with cemented stonework before digging could begin in earnest. Rock and mud was excavated to a depth of around 3 metres, and although the trend was to the south, we were aware that the main shaft was very close to the north side. In the south side of the main shaft at around 70ft depth a small alcove had been exposed, which let in a strong trickle of water during wet weather. Just as an experiment, water was pumped into the Annexe, and the lower inlet soon flowed copiously with muddy water. The Annexe was abandoned!

Whenever the bottom could be pumped dry, digging continued, and just below 150ft depth the south rift became undercut. Digging revealed what appeared to be a trench in solid rock in the floor, leading to an almost vertical wall. Further excavation showed that a small tunnel, completely choked with mud (and very little stone) led off in line with the trench, which is cut into a band of relatively soft calcite. This tunnel is only about half a metre wide and a metre high, and digging was a squalid exercise which only a few (notably Elaine Johnson, now Tucker) enjoyed. Persistence paid, and with the aid of a 'trug' (a plastic tray which could be pulled to and fro along the tunnel to remove dug spoil) after some 4 metres the roof rose, and it was possible to stand in a small decorated aven. After heavy rain, the tunnel fills to the roof, and it is interesting to watch the pumps reduce the water level until it remains static for around 20 minutes, when loud glooping and gurgling sounds come from the tunnel. Eventually the noise ends, and the water level continues to fall. The explanation must be that air is slowly

displaced through small cracks in the rock above the aven as the water rises, but pumping removes the water so fast that the pressure cannot be equalised. So air has to enter through the tunnel, making the sounds, which were alarming the first time we experienced them.



John Hill at the bottom tunnel.

It is an interesting fact that however much rain falls, the water level never rises above a certain point, which was observed to be roughly at the same height as the top of the undercut in the south rift. A narrow joint was seen to lead off at a tight angle at the back of the south extension, and it was surmised that this might be a high-level drain. Aubrey Newport kindly came to bang some drilled holes, and the joint was widened, but inconclusively: if anything the joint rises, and water pumped into it merely returned to the main dig, and onto the observers below.

The end of the tunnel is choked with glutinous mud, with very little stone. The calcite floor appears to be dropping away, but due to the

restricted space digging is very difficult. Attempts are being made to knock protruding lumps from the wall with Hilti caps, but even so, the digger must lie in the mud, and can only usually effectively use one arm to dig. It is also difficult to transfer the mud from a bucket into the trug, and hence back up the tunnel. Originally the floor was uneven, causing many loads to tip out of the trug, but efforts have been made to smooth the passage of the trug. Digging continues...

Further digging at the base of the main shaft revealed a solid floor at around 168ft. The 'bedding' appears to be vertical, with eroded bedding planes. Just below the west wall, the floor is perfectly smooth and level, but generally the floor dips down to the south rift tunnel. However, at the base of the north rift, the floor remains to be found, and a deep mud and stone filled pit is being excavated. It does not appear to be a splash pot, which is intriguing.

### **A Theory**

The author is no geologist, but it is possible to observe certain facts and features, and come up with a hypothesis. The main fault in the area is the Great Western Overthrust, which probably lies some 150 metres to the north of Templeton. From the west, it runs gently south, past the dig, and then curves back towards the north. Twin Titties, White Pit, Sandpit Hole and Templeton lie exactly on a straight line running NW – SE, and roughly parallel to the Great Western Overthrust. It appears that the order of flow-times from Priddy swallets to Wookey Hole is Swildon's Hole, Eastwater Cavern and St. Cuthbert's Swallet, with Swildon's water taking the longest. It can be argued, therefore, that St. Cuthbert's has the most direct line to the resurgence. All of the swallet water has at some point to cross the main fault, and it is known that faults can alter or even prevent cave development. My argument is that Swildon's water flows south until it meets the fault, and is then diverted to the east. On the way it picks up the Eastwater flow, until it meets and is captured by the Cuthbert's stream, which then forms the master cave to Wookey.

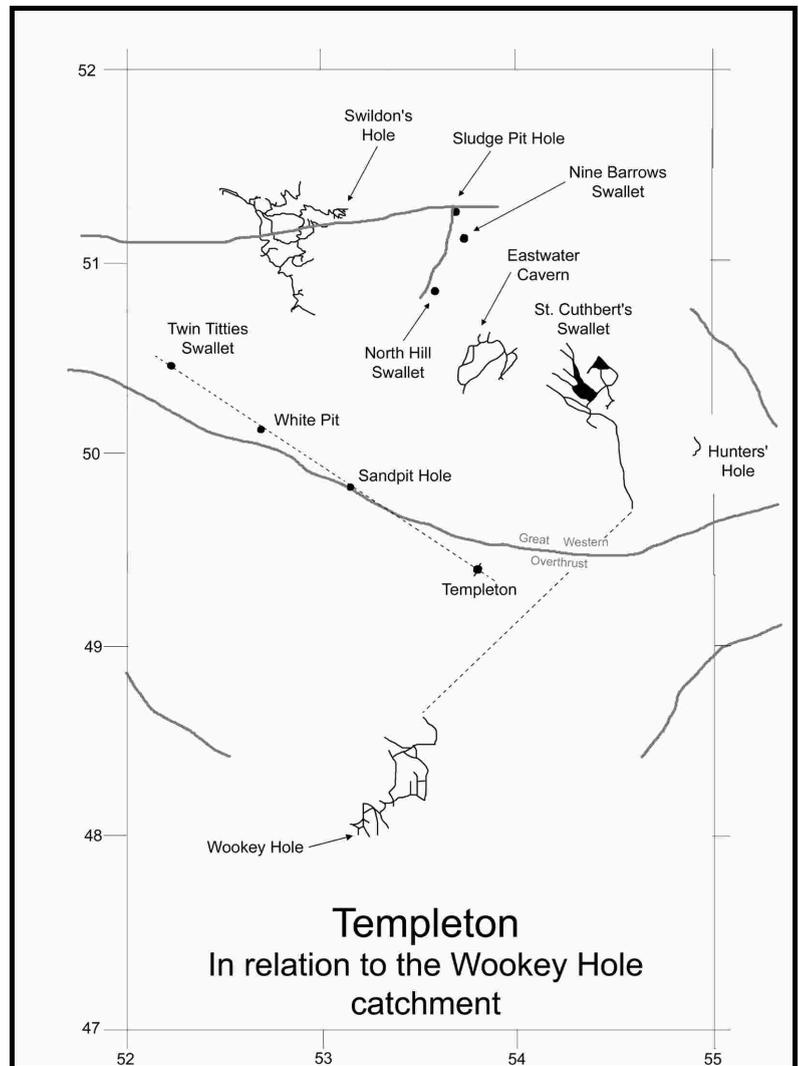
Templeton is the nearest cave feature to the direct line between St. Cuthbert's and Wookey Hole, and although it is obvious that cave passages meander, the dig is still best placed to pick up the master cave. However, because of the height difference between Templeton entrance and, say, Swildon's, the bottom of the dig is probably still no lower than the top of the Twenty Foot Pot. There remains a lot of limestone between the point reached to date and the lowest point of any of the swallet caves, which is good in terms of the potential to find cave – but bad if it is all similar to what we are digging out at present.

### The Templeton mammoth

Early on, cursory searches of the spoil heap revealed nothing but the odd flint, surface scatter in the topsoil. The nature of the debris filling the shaft seemed to preclude finding anything of human or animal origin, but in 2006 Graham Bowden, Emeritus Professor of Astrophysics (so obviously an expert in the field) found some pieces of large teeth exposed by rain wash on the spoil heap. Dr. Andy Currant, from the Department of Palaeontology at the Natural History Museum was contacted, and the teeth were identified as coming from a Steppe Mammoth (*Mammuthus trogontherii*).

These beasts walked Mendip during the interglacial before the last, around 200,000 years ago. It is one of the largest proboscids to have ever lived, standing 4.50 m (15 ft) tall and weighing between 4 and 10 tonnes. Its spiral-shaped tusks could be as long as 5.20 m (18 ft) in old males. Remains have previously been found at in the quarry at Westbury sub Mendip and on western Mendip. Subsequent searching of the spoil, and indeed washout at the shaft bottom revealed more fragments of teeth, including some which were later identified as horse, and more exciting, Straight-Tusked Elephant. Dr. Currant thought this may pre-date the mammoth, though the species has been dated from 781,000 years ago to as late as 115,000 years ago in Britain. Whereas the mammoth lived in tundra conditions, both the horse and elephant preferred a warmer, savannah-type climate. A few small flints were also found, one of which is thought by Dr. Roger Jacobi to show possible signs of working by man. Bone fragments are rare and unidentifiable.

Despite the flowstone on the walls and the occasional find of small stalactites and stalagmites in the spoil, I feel it is unlikely that Templeton was ever an open shaft for any length of time. It therefore never acted as a pitfall trap for animals, hence the finds being restricted to teeth and small pieces of bone. A small stream probably sank in a muddy depression, carrying with it teeth and other small fragments from animals which died on the surface farther upstream. As the shaft developed voids at depth, these would periodically collapse, allowing these fragments to find their way into the shaft. This would explain the absence of any large bones, and the fact that finds have been taken from various depths rather than being found together. The presence of small quartzite pebbles is harder to explain, as there are no sources nearby. They are very hard, but rounded, so must have been tumbled in running water for a long period of time. The haematite and manganese oxide (and even small amounts of ochre) are probably the remains of deposits from overlying strata which have been totally weathered away. NHASA usually gives itself at least seven years digging before giving in, but the enthusiasm remains. There are so many questions to be answered, and so much potential to enter significant cave. Perhaps we will have some answers (and horizontal cave) in another seven years!



**NOTE** Templeton is a deep open shaft, and daylight no longer penetrates to the bottom. Although there are fixed steel ladders and frequent platforms allowing climbers to rest, there are risks in descending the dig. Digging takes place on Mondays and Wednesdays from around 7pm, and it is recommended that visitors come then, when everything will be in operation and the dig can be explained. Be warned that visitors are often pressed into service! Apart from these evenings, the farmer has requested that visitors do not drive up the track, but should walk up from Lower Pitts Farm to the last gateway on the left before reaching Dursdon Drove. The spoil heap is an obvious landmark. There is no direct access from the Monarch's Way - please do not climb the field wall.  
**Phil Hendy** Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2009

## Recent Caving Abroad

### **Los Lagos Lava Tube** Lanzarote, Star Wars Day 2009 **Chris Binding & CarmenSmith**

A new trip for me, this, with easy parking at the Los Verdes' showcave car park and then a jaunt down the road for about 70 metres to an obvious (!) path across the malpais (badlands) for a few minutes in the blistering heat. The GPS coordinates aren't really necessary as the path leads directly to the hole in the ground and the first bit of fun – an exposed, oh yes, traverse directly over the entrance, where rock climbing ability is useful.

Soon onto terra firma and the scrabbly slope drops away to a dickplaces style gate, enthusiastically over-padlocked but long since bypassed by gas axers. Instantly the passage size increases to pretty large scale stuff, roof some 20-30 metres high and passage width around the 6-10 metre size, with very good laminar flows on the wall, lava benches at

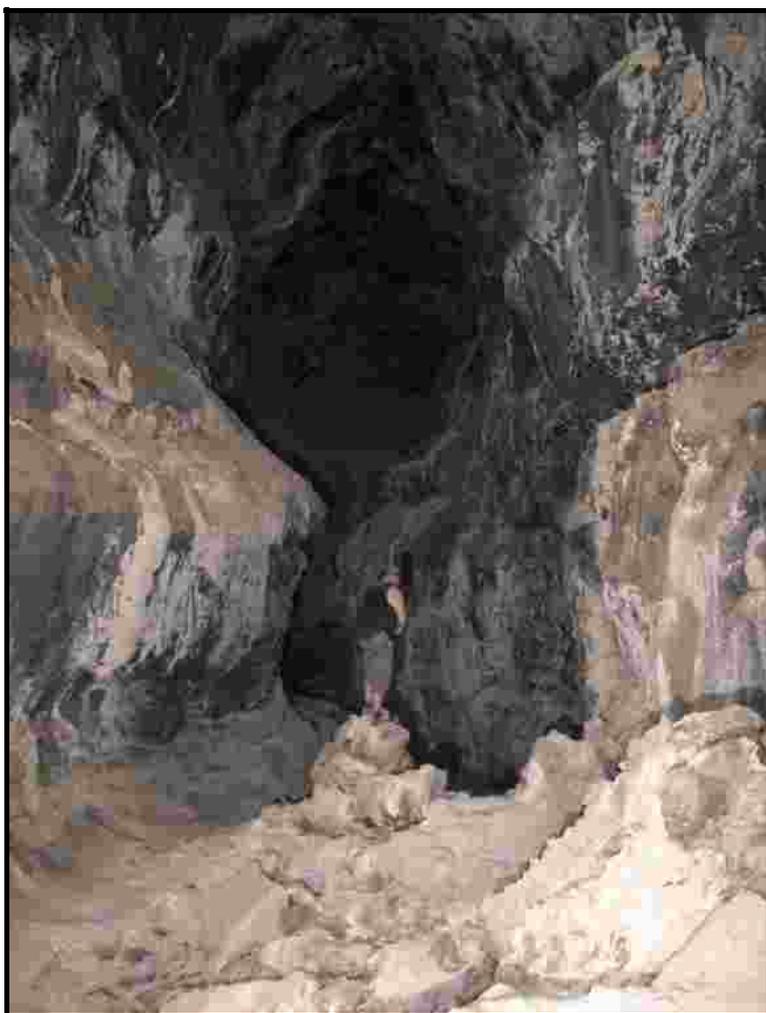


Intrepid monkeyboy atop the traverse of doom

various horizons and all the usual gypsum dunes, florets, lavamites et al abounding.

However, unlike previous lava tube adventures Los Lagos has some surprises up its sleeve(s). The first is encountered after about ten minutes of boulder hoppityings....

There's a bit of a ledge to traverse along, on the right hand wall, going downstream with the lava





flow. It probably wouldn't kill you if you fell off but it would certainly hurt, and wouldn't be cushioned much by the crystal clear, deep blue, waters in the gulf below.

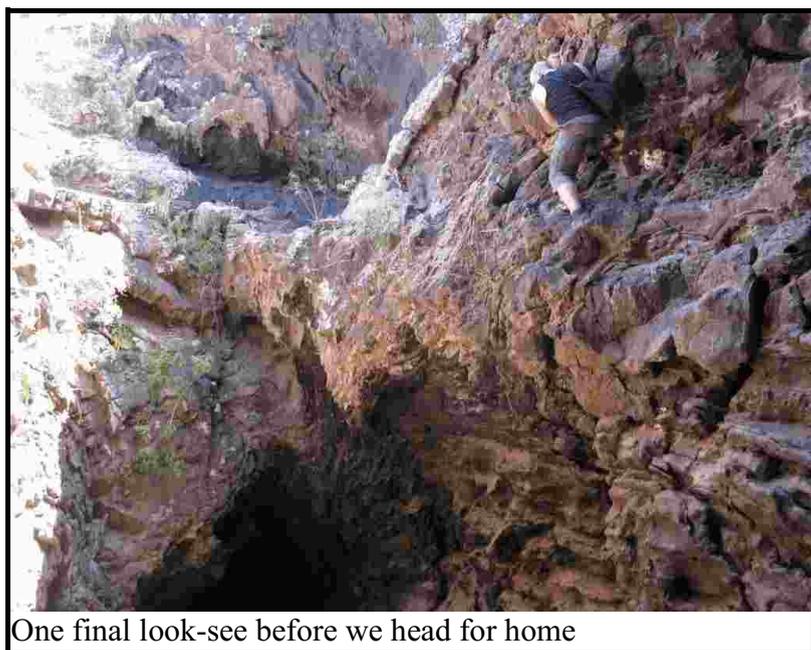
This leads immediately to a simple up-climb amid a boulder ruckle with some Mendip-style maze manoeuvres making easy work of the obstacle and emerging to smaller dimension, yet walking, passage.



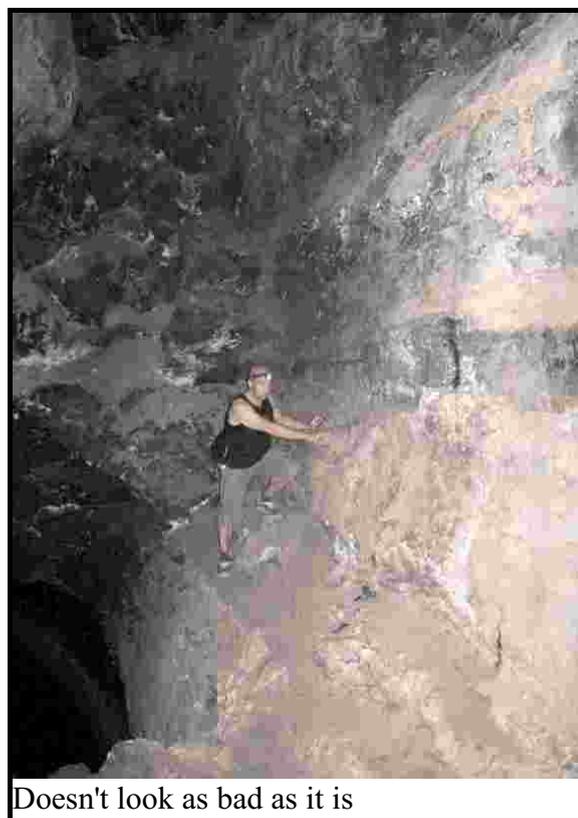
Famous Five's territory, this.....

.... which again quickly changes character and leads to yet another marginal path/traverse on the right hand wall (the picture is taking from the downstream view and hence I'm traversing back in the shot, i.e. left hand wall traverse = exiting). Again it's a bit precipitous but the drop is only onto fluffy boulders so doesn't present much peril. Some, but not much. Enough to make snapping noises.

Shortly thereafter is another quick boulder ruck and the final part of dry land as the passage drops into a sinuous, long lake (Lagos) where a couple of skinnydippers with headlamps were frolicking away from us when we arrived. Thinking this a wheeze, we decide to return on another occasion, equipped with skin and goosebumps.



One final look-see before we head for home



Doesn't look as bad as it is

Return the way we came. Heroically and very much in the style of Indiana Jones. I got to keep the golden statue. Woo-hoo. A fine trip

**Chris Binding**

All photographs by Carmen

## **Memorable second breakfast's with Clive Michael Thomas (With Apologies to HW Tilman)** Dive Reports: Claire Cohen, Enthusiasm: Phil Rowsell

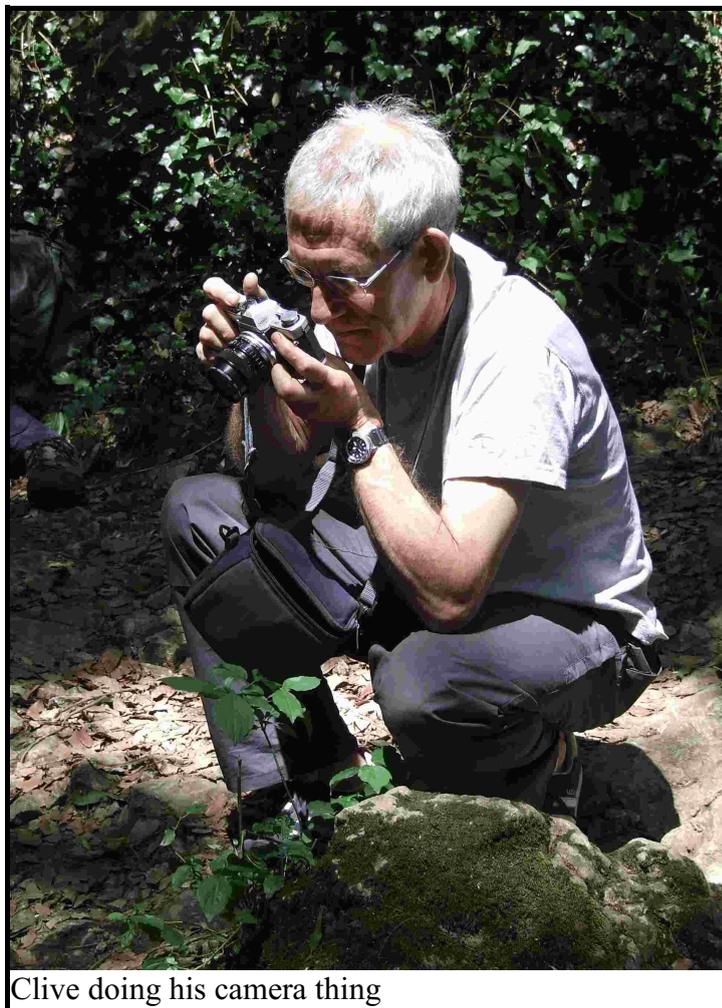
I first met Clive Westlake on the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> December 1996, I had been invited to dive Dip Sump in Ogof-Ffynnon-Ddu by one of Clive's then diving partner's Steve Thomas, to take some profiles from a new type of dive computer. Clive was also diving at the same time and was amused to find me offering Steve Thomas a cup of Oxtail Soup after the dive. Steve was vegetarian. Over the years since then I have enjoyed so many great caving and diving trips with Clive it is hard to remember when they started or finished or if they just all rolled into one. The start of this year was really bad for diving conditions across Europe, At Christmas I was snowed, then flooded, out of the Herualt; most years we are in shorts! After that a trip to Italy then another to France were both binned due to adverse weather conditions. With a trip to Greece in the summer looming I needed to get some diving training in and much preferred the option of swimming around a nice cave rather than swimming around an inland training site. So with less than ten days to go before the start of this latest trip, I got an email from Claire to say that Clive said the conditions in the Ardeche were superb and did I want to join her, Phil Rowsell (BEC and CDG) and Clive for an eight day diving trip. Not having visited the Ardeche, but aware of the diving sites of the region, plus being able to have the caving oracle Clive with us, was enough of an incentive to mess the boss around with leave again and make more requests to the family for play time.

After the usual balls-ache of a drive across France, Claire, Phil and I arrived in the designated campsite complete with Landrover and trailer. The camp site was a dust bowl but it had plenty of shade and soon three tents were up and Phil put a brew on. With that our glorious leader Clive arrived and consumed Phil's first cup of tea.

After setting up camp as a group of four and realizing that wind in our campsite was going to cause some inconvenience, Phil suddenly announced we should go and start the diving. It was 18.00 and we had travelled all day, oh well lets go diving then.

### **Goul Du Pont**

*A cheeky early evening dive on our arrival followed by 2 additional dives at this excellent resurgence. Phil and Clive had already dived this site which is situated in the middle of the town of Bourg St Andeol. Kitting up is done in the middle of a park so things really couldn't get any more civilised. Our first dive though short was absolutely superb. A gradually descending shaft, light yellow in colour, about three metres wide and of course gin clear visibility. At -19 metres depth and 75 metres from the entrance an enticing shaft drops away in stages to -110 metres where the passage travels horizontally then drops again to -178 metres. Exploration is still ongoing. Day two and we decided upon another dive here as the cave profile make's it an*



Clive doing his camera thing

*excellent depth & rebreather training site. We all decided to dive solo as each of us had differing objectives. Phil dived and placed bailout tanks, Mike planned to get some deep diving rebreather experience for a future project and for myself just to gain more experience on the rebreather. Clive did a deep open circuit dive just for the pleasure of it all. All dives went to plan and we all met up in the shallows to decompress.....some colder than others as Phil had an excellent wet dry suit.*

I need to explain a little of the camp life of this diving trip, Clive generally woke first and possibly had a sneaky pre breakfast snack although we could not confirm this! Next Phil got up and soon all his other friends were up as Phil was always keen to go and play. Next came first breakfast and diving lectures or discussions about the amount of dust that had covered our camp over night. With most cave diving trips we plan on one long dive a day which logistically and physiologically works well, it also means we don't have to leave camp early. After first breakfast came a manic hour or so of filling cylinders and sorting gear for the days dive. At around 10.30 Clive would summon us to 2<sup>nd</sup> breakfast with more diving lectures or caving tales and even on one occasion Latin and Greek History lessons! The days plan was discussed and Clive handed out the work sheets including surveys and descriptions. Soon after this we were off to the dive site to start diving at the crack of lunch feeling much educated.

### **Goul De La Tannerie**

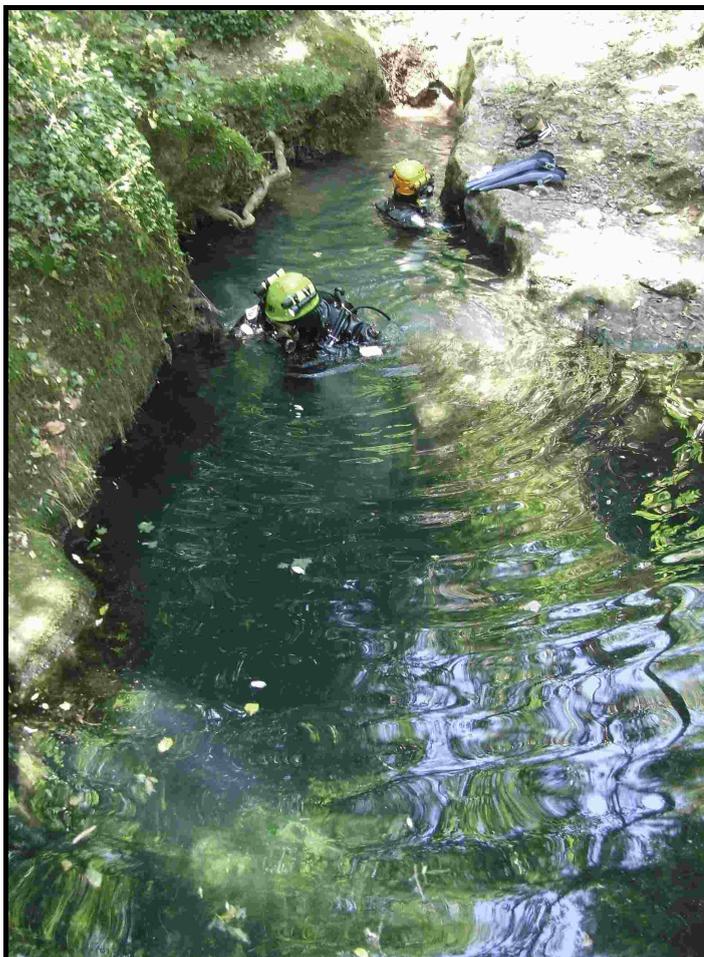
*We completed two cave dives at this site. Day one of our trip. Clive & Phil who had dived here before carried out a long dive 700m in distance, both very pleased with their progress. The great thing about this cave is that the average depth is only 8 metres until you meet a huge vertical shaft 700 metres from the entrance. What isn't so great is trying to swim with a rebreather on your back for the first 100 metres. Mike & I turned the dive after about 15 minutes of very slow progress due to the scraping of rebreathers on the roof of the cave (the roof being really quite low), & our open circuit bailout not being enough for the little progress we were making. Our second dive here was far more fruitful than the first plus we had Rupert Skorupka (Northern section CDG) & his wife for company by the sump pool. All four of us now on open circuit, Phil & Mike planned to dive to 700 metres*



Claire with “Admirers” in Goul de la Tannerie.

then drop down the shaft a little. Myself & Clive to swim to 700 metres, this being my longest planned swim. Although both the Goul Du Pont & the Tannerie resurge a mere 50 metres away from each other they are both really quite different in character. Goul Du Tannerie is wider in passage size and rock smoother in appearance. Again excellent visibility made it easy to spot crystal rimmed gours on the floor of this now flooded cave. After a 104 minute dive in a beautiful cave things couldn't get much

better .....until we were met by six French firemen clad in uniform drysuits in the sump pool offering us help with our diving gear.....ahhh life's hard!



Claire & Phil in the Source de Marnade

During the diving sessions Clive would continue to amaze us with the quality of the diving he was performing with such modest after dive talk! And then continue to impart his caving and diving knowledge of the area to us. After we consumed our post dive lunch or even a trip to the ice cream lady we followed this by dive kit sorting and plans for the evening.

### Source De Marnade

Day Three saw us at this beautifully picturesque site. Source Du Marnade is tucked away in a forest about 80 or so metres from a large river. Transporting equipment to the sump again proved easy going. Phil & I descended a vertical rift to 15 metre depth where the cave turned into a huge passage. The visibility however was not up to much casting a slightly sinister feel to the cave as the thin white diving line ran along a seemingly bottomless wall and a ceiling that could not be seen. A fairly short dive due to depth but we were both glad of the experience gained in following French death string. Both Clive & Mike completed their dive as we all agreed we would return, hopefully with better visibility next time round.

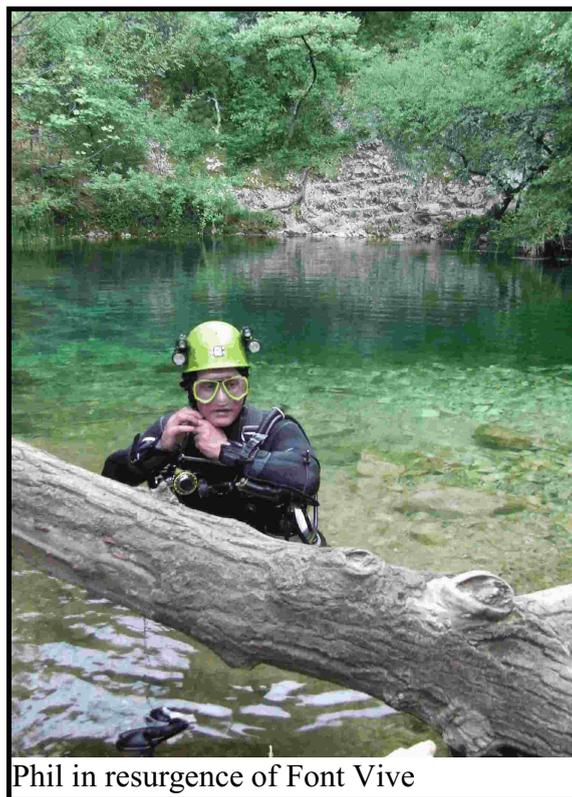
Evening meals were either at the campsite doing battle with the dust and drinking the red wine selected by...

yes, Mr Westlake, and one appallingly cheap rose that found its way home: it was great - honest! Or out in one of the local restaurant's, drinking more good red wine in moderation! The amount of diving we were doing stopped us from drinking too much, not one hangover all week, hopeless!

### **Font Vive**

*Phil, commendably had dug out the entrance squeeze the evening prior to our dive. Again, a beautifully picturesque diving site awaiting us. This time minus the French firemen but flesh eating insects instead to greet us. This dive site is fantastic, excellent visibility & well laid line saw us swimming along passages carved out like Swiss cheese. Post dive, as with all Ardeche dives saw us laying in the sun eating fresh baguettes filled with Camembert (or for some rough cat food like pate) soaking up the ambience and good company & all agreeing to return sometime in the not too distant future.*

All too soon the last dive was done and it was time to pack up and head north again Clive was moving campsites in the area to meet up with his next week's caving friends, it was a shame to end this diving trip and the memorable discussions we had. But I am sure the next trip is not far away. I accused Clive during one of our breakfast meetings of being the H W Tillman of the caving world, I stand by that. Cheers Clive. **Mike**  
(All photos: Mike Thomas).



Phil in resurgence of Font Vive

### **Montenegro or Bust** Christopher Binding & Carmen Smith June 2009

“A newbie's view of the uncertain world of expedition explorationings”

Carm decided that the time had arrived for me to earn my tiger stripes and join in with an opportunity to accompany a multi-club expedition to Montenegro which she had been headhunted into joining 'cos she's a bit handy with elasto-plast and they wanted someone along who could cope with the sight of blood. As something of an afterthought the word then went out that a rigging monkey was being sought and obviously Carm carved my name down for the role.

Thus it was that EasyJet bounced into a maelstrom at Dubrovnik airport after dusk one Sunday and Chris Backhouse, myself and Carm huddled in the corner of the on site café watching The Second Coming of Noah shortly before he dissolved outside. We have film footage of the vertical sump to prove I'm not exaggerating (much).

Time passed and wine was imbibed and our backup crew eventually moored up in the minibus and Plan B was hatched (stay in a hotel); thus it was that a new day dawned without the odour of armpits or hay in our hair (yet). The onward journey to Montenegro from Croatia was marred only by passing the border in a quaint, yet mildly unnerving and sweat-creating, exchange between hostile foreigners and the armed locals. Our sweet smiles of idiocy won the day and we were soon swerving along mountainous gravel paths amid the smell, bustle and prehistoricness of this previously unheard-of patch of New Europe.

We stopped at a seaside village called Risan to top up on ships biscuits, tarpaulins and lard at the local shop and meet up with some regional caving delegates who were to vet our bona fides and give us the once over; despite appearing to be barely above twelve years old, they seemed quite nice. I think they were shocked and alarmed by us bunch of creaking archaeosteopathic UKers, though. After sorting out some paperwork (aka “tax on breathing”) we created a convoy up into t'mountains to find our campsite, laughably disguised as wasteland amid derelict bombed out buildings and maquis scrub. A mix up with the GPS soon proved the locals were right in their route-finding and a particularly fine quagmire was located for the van to get stuck in; standing ankle deep in a peat bog in the middle of nowhere in a country no-one has heard of in a thunderstorm trying to push a heavily

laden minibus seemed to me not to auger well. Promises of eternal sunshine and olive-brown skin-a-plenty were now exposed as the outright lies they were clearly originally peddled as.

I had been had.

Tiredness from weeping soon resulted in unsettled kip and the morning thunder awoke me at 5:45am. Paul Taylor religiously awakes at 5:36am. He was going to be my benchmark!

After the campsite duties had been fulfilled we set off to locate our Primary Mission – a cave named PT4 which had thwarted the last team who visited here in 2004 as they ran out of rope on the 9<sup>th</sup> pitch, with ongoing cave ahead. Tales of skellingtons, gold and ammo had lured me onto this expedition and I was keen to descend. A small matter intervened. We had to find it first.

A miserable long march in sodden silence for an hour across harsh terrain soon brought us to a GPS-induced merry-go-round whereby 8 people were hacking through impenetrable rain forest while lured into a false sense of adequacy by wildly differing satellite readings. It took an hour before, without any GPS or sense of direction please note, I blindly stumbled into a cave entrance with red painted letters “PT4” written next to it. My hushed exclamation that “I think I may have found it” didn’t work so I started a-hollerin’ and Gary Kiely bushwhacked his way to join me – we then marked a route back up towards the others who were shouting from afar and thus established a pathway t’cave.



Woo-hoo! It had only taken half of the third day here to find the cave. Within what seemed like an hour we had managed to transport ourselves and our kit bags to the freezing scree outside the entrance and kitted up to start the mission. As rigging monkey I got to go first and thus I made it look very hard indeed getting in – the small aperture was a portal to a white-rock 50 degree slope which opened out and dropped off into a 60m abyss somewhat akin to nightmares I routinely have. My disco knee neatly kept a good alternating rhythm with my wobbly spanner hand as the metalwork grated its way into rusty spit threads and the nylon goat-track began.

Despite a triple hang-up on the third rebelay whereupon my feet were above my head on a couple of occasions, I soon regained composure and ended up on the ground without velocity making it a messy affair. The installation of a static footloop for the others facilitated the rebelay changeover much to everyone’s relief, including my own.

Pitch One is a magnificent piece of subterranean architecture but Pitch Two isn’t. In fact P2 is more like a devil’s icy fart tube in that it’s a cold and hostile place with no aesthetic offset. Much time was spent shivering here. Immediately at the base of P2 the chossy slope drops into P3 which is more of the same but worse insofar as the “way on” (!) is an impossible sideways slot which requires complete removal of SRT kit just for the sake of a half metre squeeze, before having to re-don clanking regalia... only for Pitch Three to leave one gasping the by now cliched acronym “WTF” at the gnarly envelope slot in the floor. Chaffing one’s ankle on the nobbles while getting a bum wedge and running your Stop on cowstails (“for added slimness”) with an audience of incredulous looks was all the motivation I needed to effect a miracle and actually make it down this slit.



**View up Pitch 1: an awesome introduction**

To this day Carm still says she couldn't believe it, despite seeing it with her own eyes! (fnaar). It's an awkward little number with an unprotectable rub-point in the narrow section to add to the fun, opening marginally to a free-hanging narrow rebelay and more front-and-back rubbing to another rebelay which is mercifully larger and a final drop down to a trickling stream pot

Good traverses follow to a rather majestic clean-washed fluted inlet aven and a glorious bold step over an impressive black hole, made reassuringly not-black by my Prototype Viper headlight which scorches rock into softly rounded magma. Another meandering traversy nightmare leads quickly to Pitch 4 and similarly to Pitch 5, with the added excitement of the traverse being bottomless[tm] and with an awe-inspiring 13 second echo. Hmm. It's rather vertical, this, methinks. I didn't sleep well that night!

Pitch 5 was the event horizon in more than one way – firstly it starts as a very narrow pitch in a high traverse leading to a sodding awkward pinch with black space below – hardly the most reassuring bit of SRT, best tackled with your Stop on cowstails for anorexic advantage – this instantly bells out into a frickin-hee-you-juh shaft (pronounced “huge”) comprising a series of pitches and associated rigging malarkeydom – P5 30m, P6 & P7 71m, P8 & P9 78m ending in “Touch Down! – yeehah!.... new ground beckons!”.

This is not the sort of place where the panicked distant echoes of “Below!” would like to be heard ever again. I don't think I've run for cover that fast before, or since. Anyhoo, we soon had a party of four (myself, Carm, Joe and Chris Backhouse) and we tag-teamed turns descending the next parts of the cave,.... Moonmilk Pitch 13m, Mud Slide Pitch 20m, Mud Traverse Pitch 16m... all rigged off naturals and leading to a.... streamway!

Cool! – we now had a significant vertical system alter character and become a horizontal system; the excitement wasn't containable and a lot of exclamations occurred with each twist and turn - a couple of



**Andy Clark gets to grips with the confined third pitch**

good inlets showed clear signs of being worthy of exploration but that would have to wait since we had walking sized passage there for the taking – after a hundred metres (or possibly more) we came to a small watery pitch and this marked our turnaround point for the day.

Depending on individual technique, the return to surface took up to five hours from here. We drank beer and had a celebratory boiled egg each at the tent bar by the layby, after the hour long slog back in the dark.

The following day I had a rest, returning to the cave on Sunday, by which time the watery pitch had long since been despatched as an easy free climb (good holds meant it was indeed easy) followed by a chamber which was more akin to a huge boulder choke, with a circuitous route, upping and a-downing, wending its way through and back to the streamway on the far side, with another “interesting” climb down and more streamway a-beckoning; a neat but exacting traverse and a steep descent to a plunge pool (discovered as avoidable by Carm, after I’d been wading through it a couple of times!) led to a nice gour and MGB Pitch (named after the “Mendip Gay Bag” – one of those tiny little belt-mountable tackle bags - which was considered large enough to contain the short amount of rope guesstimated as necessary for this pitch (11m, all told). MGB Pitch soon terminated... at another pitch – but this one was bigger, far bigger... and more hostile as a result. When I arrived Gary Kiely was shivering and was not looking his bouncy smiley best, while Chris Backhouse was some way down the pitch, gerry-rigging from a fabulous natural horizontal spike,.. beyond communication in the maelstrom.

I relieved Gary of his duty to second Chris so he could make a break to daylight (and warmth) and was soon able to descend what has been christened as the broken/twin descent of White Line Waterfall Pitch (45m) to join Chris at an impressive spray-lashed view point over a black void to one side and a 30+m white water ramp dropping away at about 50 degrees to the other. We descended the water ramp, with good holds and fantastic grip, to lead to a sideways shimmy through quite a narrow rift (best done without SRT gear on!) and another continuation with a similar feature ahead – once passed the streamway cascades downwards, with nice climbs and detours here and there with the ceiling way, way beyond reach of our lights. We take it in turns to lead a bit here, a bit there, to another nice traverse and a steep slope with a mildly awkward drop to a boulder choke into which the stream disappears. Mud banks atop the boulders make slippery and dangerous features and there is a big drop over the end; we can’t do that so turn about, thinking we are thwarted. But, not so hasty!... perhaps there’s a way through. No. There isn’t. Or is there?... a Hillier’s style wiggle around a block and a 90 degree up-turn through a squeeze followed by another sharp wiggle and Hey Presto!... walking upright continues. More streamway and another traverse and we finally find some formations in this otherwise blank cave – not much, but nice nonetheless: a good array of curtains, stalactites and flowstone at a zig-zag at stream level. Just beyond this there is another constriction and our time is up: we decide to turn around, Chris putting date initials in the mudbank as a marker.

Back at camp the team lap up our description of the day’s findings but there is a drawback. We have yet to survey our discoveries and from the sounds of things we’re going to be hard pushed to survey what we’ve got, let alone push the cave any further!

The evenings back at camp were luxury largely because we had chairs to sit in and our secret weapon, Gary Kiely, who rustled up magnificent banquets to feast upon, including lovely puddings of chocolate cakes and caramel sauces etc.. Mmmm! Just what we needed after the days’ exertions.

Chris Backhouse had hurt his ribs on his exit and was out of action as a result, leaving just three SRT “tigers” to investigate the lower parts of the cave – myself, Carm and Gary Kiely; Gary had little or no surveying experience which meant it fell to Carm and I to organise a surveying trip ahead of the derigging which was hot on its heels as our time was rapidly running out. By Tuesday evening we had surveyed way over 300m of new passage and begun taking rope back towards the surface, too.

By Wednesday evening (after an unscheduled SRT rescue of one of the local Montenegrin “cavers” who had managed to get monumentally hung up on the first pitch rebelay - I’ve never abseiled down a tandem pitch to discover two people clipped on to an M8 bolt before, “WTF was going on down there?” - and subsequently required hauling to the surface). After a seven hour derig trip on the Wednesday, we had managed to get all kit to the surface and then we had to carry it back, as dusk turned to darkness; most of us were carrying a minimum of two heavy tackle sacks plus all personal kit and more than half of us were carrying three tackle sacks each



**Clockwise from lower left: Chris Backhouse, Rigging MonkeyBoy, Durot (Montenegro's Bear Grylls), Ivan (Montenegro's Jack Osborne, prepping for his rescue), Gary Kiely**

for over an hour! No wonder we lost weight.

Anyway, rather than include minutiae, the summary of the PT4 part of the expedition is this: it's gone from being a something-and-nothing hole-in-the-ground to being the 7<sup>th</sup> deepest cave in the country!; we turned around at an undescended pitch of probably no more than about 5 metres into a trench between 20 metre high mud banks, beyond which was a black void of stupendous proportions (even earlier before this the laser was unable to get readings).

And... All of this was in a streamway which was only ankle deep while on the surface the worst weather in 50 years raged for 12 days. So... "Where is all the water?". The cave is on a big scale, with impressive Dales-style waterfall pitches showing no sign of responding to surface conditions clearly indicating they are relict/fossil passage; we found and followed a deep vadose trench streamway down multiple cascades, ramps and waterfalls and still didn't find the master river/lake/sump which, sure as eggs is eggs, is down there somewhere. Oh yes. There is approximately a further 300m depth potential to the resurgence in Risan Bay.

So, 2010 beckons.



**Carm barely managing to contain her boundless joy in the arid conditions**

We need cameras that will tolerate the conditions so we can get pictures of the discoveries; we need to survey more of what we've found; we need to descend the short pitch and get around the corner into the stupendous chamber/void and we shall take more film footage to add to the stuff we've already got. I know I'm jinxing the next efforts, but I note that if an additional 110m depth is added to PT4 then it will jump to being the 4<sup>th</sup> deepest cave in the country. S'worth a try, I reckon.

We also shall avoid taking any non-SRTing Montenegrans with us (although we would do well to get Durot on board as he can carry five tackle bags in one hand while simultaneously snapping small trees with the other).

**Expeditioners:**

WCC members – Carmen Smith, Chris Binding

Others: Chris Backhouse, Andy Clark, Joe Duxbury, Gareth Jones and Paul Taylor

## More Blasts from the Past

### **RESCUE OF A CORNISHMAN NOT LOST IN AGEN ALLWEDD.**

**Part 1.** FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE RESCUEE. **Ken Dawe**

Twass in the year of our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Eight Nine, that I did not set sail from the Port of Port B-----s in Cornwall. I journeyed to a bunk house near Crickhowell to meet up with, not the King of the Goddam Islands and his odious family and repulsive subjects, but Bob Pyke, Stuart Genders and Grant Lindsay. On the Saturday morning we entered Aggi with the intention of investigating the Lower Main Stream Passage via Southern Stream Passage. I was the last of our group of four, and, for reasons I've forgotten, got held up and lost sight of the others. Entering a small chamber in the first boulder choke I still could not see my



“The Rescuer” Ken Dawe

colleagues. However I could hear voices ahead and shouted for instructions as to the route, after which I climbed up through a hole in the top of the chamber to meet a small party including Mark Gonzo Lumley. We surmised that Bob and co must be ahead, and Mark pointed me in the general direction of the Southern Stream, and left me to wander alone through the Main Passage. Reaching what I believed to be the Southern Stream Passage and hearing voices, I shouted and got confirmation that it was indeed SSP. I assumed that the voices came from my party, but in fact they came from Gonzo's group who on the way to somewhere else - and this was my last contact with them. Believing that I was following Bob and Co, I carried on down SSP, getting more and more irritated because the bastards hadn't waited for me. I knew that Bob was carrying a brew kit, including a small stove, and consoled myself that when I reached the Main Stream I would be presented with a hot drink.

Immediately prior to the trip there had been heavy rain. When eventually I reached the Main Stream I was dismayed to see a huge pool fed by a torrent, and no sign at all of my friends. I stepped across onto a submerged mud island and bellowed; no answer. I looked at the water and thought, with horror, that they must all have been swept away. I gingerly got back into SSP and retraced my steps

back towards Main Passage in a state of some agitation thinking all the time 'what on earth can I tell Lesley' (Bob's wife). Imagine my astonishment to get to Main Chamber to find the rest of my party and members of the South Wales Cave Rescue organisation. My party had taken a wrong turning in the First Boulder Choke and I had completely by-passed them. Eventually finding me missing and having spent some time searching, they had alerted the rescue team. I'm not who was the most surprised and relieved - Bob, Grant, Stuart or me. Over a couple of beers later that evening I had to point out that I was the only one of the party that had actually done the planned trip.

## **Part 2. HEROIC RESCUE OF MISSING CAVER      Bob Pyke**

I think I was leading. Mistake One. Unerringly reliable, I led into a pokey side passage on the right in the first boulder choke. By the time we had retraced and emerged into main chamber, of Ken there was neither sign nor sound. On the basis that he had been behind rather than in front, we waited. Vainly. Ok....he must have gone ahead after all, so we hurried into Southern Stream a little way, before convincing ourselves that he could not possibly be in front, and therefore that he must be lost somewhere in the region of the first choke, which seemed to have an awful lot of big holes in it.

So back we went, and spent an increasingly anxious half hour poking into nasty corners, with a good deal of hanging death. The actual moment when we looked at one another, and concluded we had to initiate a rescue, seemed surreal. Rescues were things that you go on to extract incompetent others, and not to confess you've lost your mate within a hundred metres of the entrance, and fear he may be strawberry jam. Oh God..what shall we say to Pat?

The walk back along the tram road was a tad sepulchral, and, it being before mobiles, I finished up standing in a phone box in Crickhowell, dialing 999 (has to be a first time), wet suit dripping mud, to the unbounded disgust of apparently the entire population of the town.

Things got blurry then. Hordes of gung ho SWCC and CSS cavers seemed to emerge as if by magic from the scenery, rig phone lines, ask embarrassingly pertinent questions re. our competence, manhood etc., and lead us all off on a Dawe Hunt.

We crawled into every available hole for ages, led by a gloomy local bloke, who announced “I fear the woorrst”, every minute, until, in our slightly overwrought state, we nearly murdered him. And then...in the far distance sounds were heard. Faint at first, they slowly resolved themselves into a clashing of hobnail boots, and a terrifying string of Cornish oaths, encompassing the whole population of the Goddam Islands and the ancestry of his mates, who had left him to cave alone for hours at a time. Ken doesn't take kindly to being kissed..so we didn't. But we sure were glad to see him.

## Epilogue

There was a last sting in the tail - camping close to the bunk house that we were using was a group of Sheffield University Spel Soc (SUSS) members who also intended a trip into Aggi. At the my time my son Angus was secretary of SUSS but was not present on the trip because of the imminence of finals. However I introduced myself as Angus Dad. The SUSS group were inevitably in the cave during the incident. I had not been home for more than 10 minutes when Angus rang- 'what have you been up you silly old b----r!

## Congratulations

from Herbie Plant

The Club is to be congratulated for remaining in existence for 75 years; it must be doing something right. It's strange to think that the club had already been in existence for 10 years when I was born. I was first introduced into the caving fraternity in 1971 by Bri Hansford with a trip down Swildon's Hole. Well, a trip down there will either 'hook' you or make you say 'never again'. For me it was the former, for the other friend that was with us it was the latter. He said he was glad that he had done it (I think he meant “got out alive!”) but it was not a sport for him. One of my early trips down the same cave was with Mike York, now there was an experience, I was fully suited up in a 6mm thick wet suit and there was Mike in his wet suit waistcoat and wet suit shorts and boots, truly a sight to behold (if only we'd had mobile 'phones with video capability back then!). There were about five of us in the party and on the way out when we got to the Well we met a party of about ten going down. Now there isn't an awful lot of room for that many people at the Well and Mike wasn't prepared to wait for the other party to sort themselves out and so he took charge and in his big booming bass voice was heard to direct the other group with “you, get in there”, “you, over here” etc. until they were all squeezed into small spaces, whereupon he calmly said “my party, follow me”. We meekly followed and left the other bewildered party to sort themselves out at their leisure.

Also remembered is the time I met a party of about 7 people at the Water Chamber, one adult and 6 children wearing light summer clothing and trainers, the light source was hand held torches, the adult addressed me thus, “which is the way out mate”. In the interest of the safety and well-being of the children I withheld the lecture that was about to emit from my mouth and guided them out. Amazing how stupid/irresponsible some people can be.

During my time caving I have introduced many scouts to the underground world and indeed some of them have now far surpassed my own caving experiences. Without the facilities offered by the Wessex Cave Club and indeed the sociability of the members most of those trips would not have been possible.

Living at Morecambe means that I don't often get to go caving in the Mendips, but I did take a couple of young people down there at the end of May 2009 and it was most pleasing to see that the club continues to improve upon the facilities it already has.

Long may the Wessex Cave Club continue in its endeavours to promote caving in all its' forms. **Herbie**

## Junior Wessex.....

Saturday August 15 2009 Swildons Upper Series.

Becky Chapman (age 10), Darren Chapman, Crips (Chris Williams age 14), Les Williams, Maggot (Chris Caton).

A Saturday afternoon trip so Darren could introduce Becky to the lovely wet playground that is Swildons Hole. I was staying locally, and Les, Crips and Wendy kindly picked me up on the way to the Wessex, where we met

with Darren and Becky. Darren accused me of being late, but I had nothing to do with that - and anyway, Gnome wasn't there at all. After some faffing and chatting to others in the hut, we eventually got changed, and set off across the fields. Becky won the prize for the fanciest wellies, while we discovered that, with a bit of shoving, Crips still fits down the iron pipe under the blockhouse.

At the entrance most went in the usual way, Les opted for the Alice in Wonderland option and dived between the tree roots. We all had a bit of a wander down to the water chamber, at one point I decided to go up and over instead of getting wet and ended up bridging over a bit of a chasm which challenged my climbing skills a bit, but managed to get back down without getting broken. Becky and her magic wellies did really well, and wanted to get wetter than Darren would let her!

We opted to come back the wet way, heading up through the lavatory pan section, where Crips got me back for the iron pipe moment, I was wet now. Les and I cut up through the middle oxbow and across the top of the rift while the rest tackled the well. Then Les and I admired the view while Crips Darren and Becky had a go through the top oxbow. Crips went through quickly, Becky just walked, and Darren had a bit of a thrutch. Then we went up through the showerbath, I climbed up first. Thinking Crips was next, I managed to dam the stream. When I saw a light coming up I let it go, Darren got a soaking. I dammed the stream again while Becky partly climbed partly was hauled up, then I saw another light, I asked Darren if it was Crips. He said yes, I let the water go again, and Les got the lot. Doh! Eventually I managed to soak Crips.

Then we came to the "awkward climb just before the way out". Crips went up first, Darren followed with slightly less dignity, Becky was sent up the easy way, and Les took the climb. I followed after Les, and what happened next is a bit of a blur. I'd made it up, was on my back at the top, and all of a sudden my left foot let go. Les's story went "Maggot was up, I looked round and then Maggot wasn't there!" Gravity had taken over, and I'd just slid over the edge, arriving back where I'd started. Fortunately years of falling off motorbikes had honed my survival instinct, and I landed on slightly bent legs and didn't fall over. Les said "What's Maggot doing?" and I replied "Coming up the easy way", which I did. Just before the exit climb I spotted a frog. Les tried to rescue it, but it wasn't having any of that, and hopped into the swirly pool. I went up and out, and, being soaked already dammed the stream water going into the drain hole so Les might have a chance of finding the frog. I was nearly submerged by the time he admitted defeat and so I let the water go. That frog's probably in sump one by now!

After a change at the hut, and some more faffing, we couldn't go to the Hunters as it wasn't open yet, so went to the Vic to play with the wasps instead.

Brilliant day out again. **Maggot**

Saturday July 4 2009 **Swildons** Robert Thomas, Mike Thomas, Claire Cohen,  
Robert's first trip to Sump 1. 2 ½ hours..... and well caved, My Boy! **Mike**

**Swildons** to Sump 1 Jack Ballard. Geoff & Nik Nak  
Hi my name's **Jack** and this is all about my caving trip.

Walking down the field, err yuk, I nearly stepped in a bit of pooh! We go to the entrance and I could see the water gushing. I wasn't that scared as I'd been in before. I felt quite excited but a bit nervous about food as Dad only brought three things; a flapjack and one peanut butter roll - cut in half!

It was a little scary at the top of the twenty getting on to the ladder. My legs are too short to step across from the stream straight on to the ladder so I have to walk across the top of the rocks and get on at the top of the ladder. Looking out into the hole was frightening even though I had a rope on. We went into Barns Loop and slid over the top. I didn't fall in the Double Pots but thought I

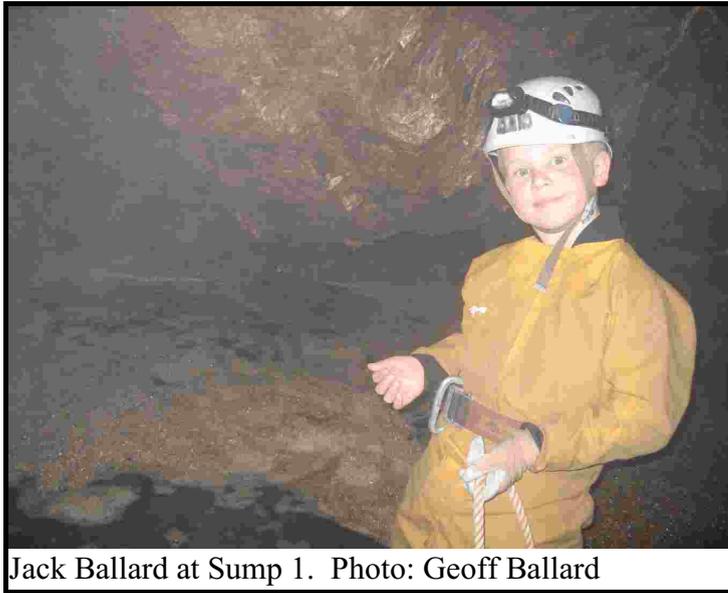


Jack & Jeff at Swildons.

might on the second one as I didn't know what to do. On the way back it was a big reach across the top one. It's really, really, cool down here – there's lots to look at!

All of the climbs were quiet freaky as I thought I might slip and there was lots of water.

There was lots of bubbles and 'Black Water' at Sump 1. We stopped here as I didn't fancy getting soaked. On the way back Dad asked me why I didn't pull the plug out - Wally!



Jack Ballard at Sump 1. Photo: Geoff Ballard

Dad rationed my food and only allowed ½ a roll on the way to the sump, but he let me have the other half and the flapjack before we set off out from the sump which was good.

I felt very tired on the way out – it's all up hill and there are lots of very wet climbs and my feet were freezing. I only had normal socks on and my Wellies are shorter than Nik Nak and Dad's so kept filling up.

I remember three places I needed some help on the way back. The top of the water rift was very wide so Dad and Nik Nak sat across the gap and I could walk up their legs like a bridge. Dad had to help me onto the climb at the bottom of the 'eight foot drop'

In the Water Rift we had to squish into the roof so others could pass under us (I nearly farted).

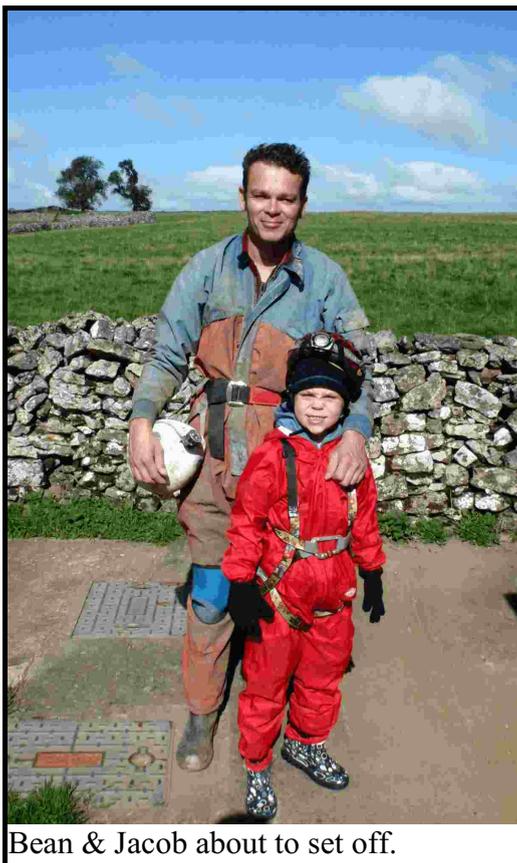
Best parts was going up the Twenty as Nik Nak and

Dad both said I was good at it and because I got the little secret of when the rocks in the way you just put your hand straight up to the top part where there's a gap.

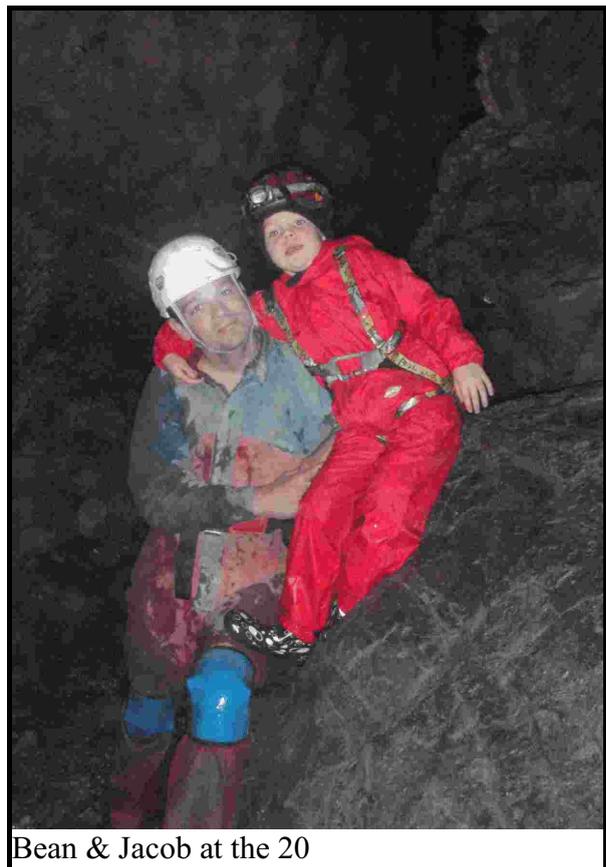
So that's the end of the story! **Jack** 8¾ yrs.

Saturday September 12 2009 **Swildons** Jacob and Mark Easterlng.

Noel and Keith encountered Jacob and Mark at the 20. Keith Glossop took these two photographs.



Bean & Jacob about to set off.



Bean & Jacob at the 20

# More Wessex Abroad.....

## Ardèche Holiday Report by Christine Grosart.



Christine in **Goul de la Tannerie**. Photo: Martyn Farr

Friday June 26 2009 **Goul de la Tannerie** Martyn Farr, Helen Rider, Christine Grosart, Rupert Skuropka, Steve McCabe.

CG posed for Martyn's photographs in the entrance series, then continued solo to minus 46.6m. With twin-set and two stages. 20 metres + visibility. Met Rupert on the way out. **CG**

Tuesday June 30 2009 **Grotte de la Cocalière.** Martyn Farr, Helen Rider, Christine Grosart, Rupert Skuropka, Steve McCabe. Trisha. Clive Westlake.

After a few detours finding

the entrance, the cast of many caved just over a kilometre down some fine, large and well-decorated passage. Paused for Martyn to take some photos of a whopping phreatic railway tunnel. What will be amazing is if the photos do it justice. **CG**

Thursday July 1 2010 **Goul du Pont** Christine. Clive.

CG down the off-vertical phreatic shaft in infinite visibility to minus 60m and Clive turned just short of this. "Debates on Slates" ensued as to whether or not this shaft was better than the Doux de Coly, or Ressel. The result was "Not", but a fine place, anyway. **CG**

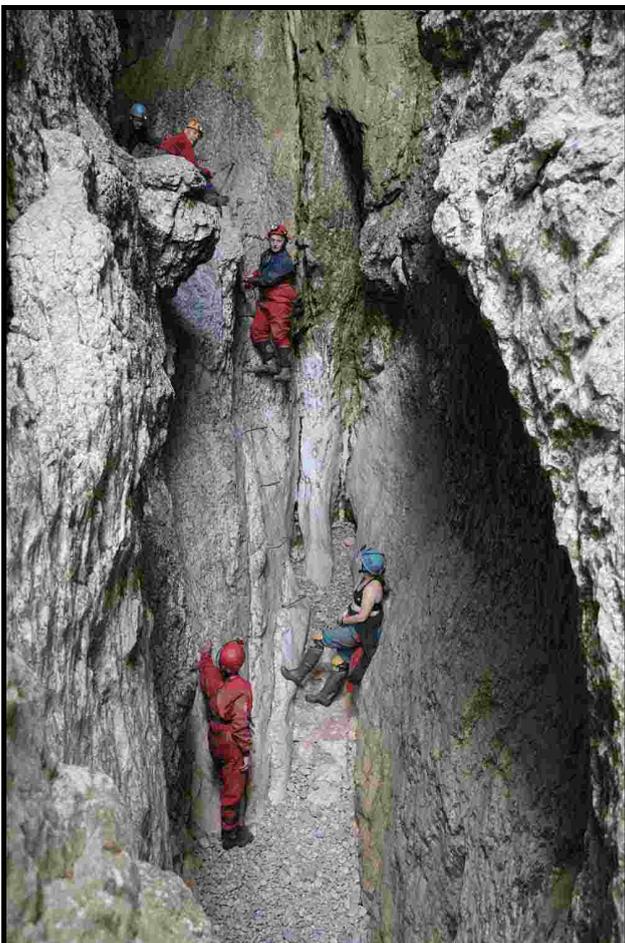
Thursday July 2 2009 **Fontaine de Monteils** Christine. Clive

Clive had done a sneak recce the week before and was itching to explore the Exurgence Est

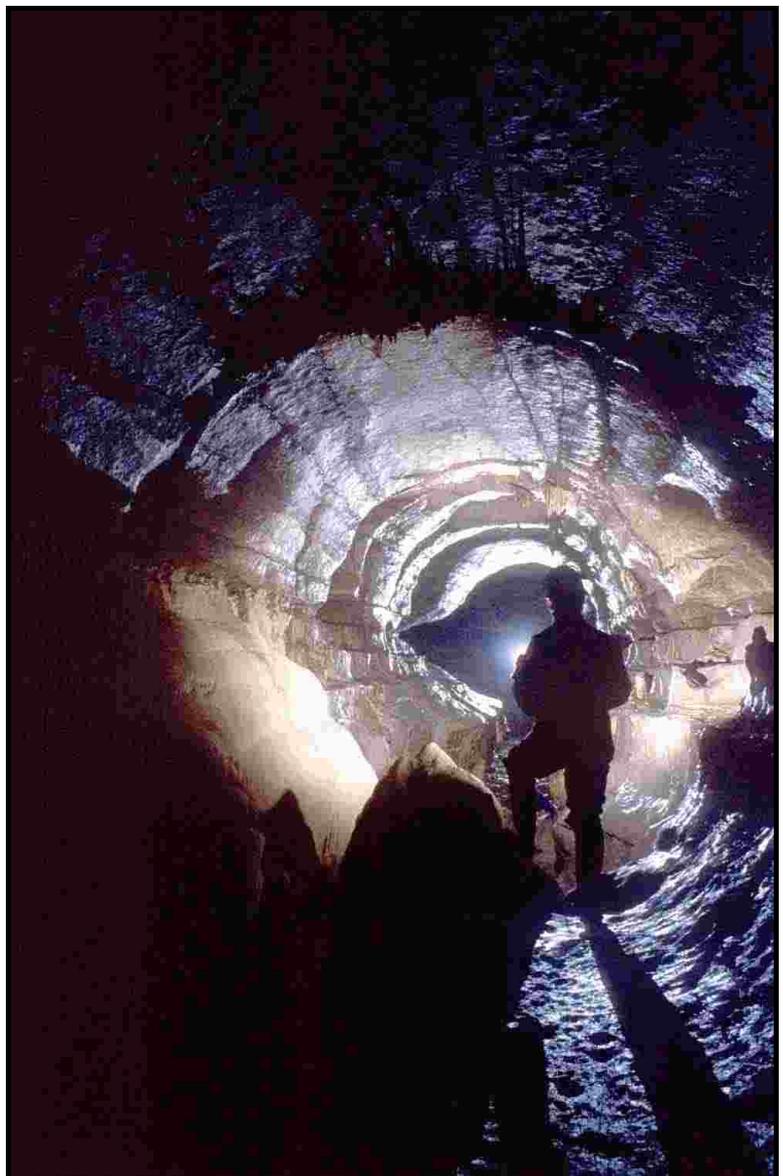


Christine in **Goul de la Tannerie**. Photo: Martyn Farr

(static) and the Exurgence Ouest, Aval (active). Clive looked at the former first and decided that two passages could be seen forking off, both were too tight and there was no line. Christine laid a line from base and opted for the cleaner washed left-hand passage. Thrutching along on her side she laid about 25m of line before scraps of French knicker-elastic could be seen on the floor, buried under rocks. Once she met some half-decent stuff she tied off her reel and continued shuffling sideways round some bends until reaching the head of a pot. The lines here took on the form of a cobweb and it was impossible to avoid being in close proximity to them and the diver concluded that this was unsafe. She collected her reel and departed. Both divers then took a look in Exurgence Ouest Aval which had a lovely flow of gin-clear water pouring from it..... and lots of pebbles on the floor, making the entrance too small for any diver. Clive got digging, but could make no progress. Christine dug until she thought that she could get in a bit. There is a sharp zig-zag bend, then a passage leading off, which is tiny, but which was not lined. Both divers left puzzled as to how anyone made any progress here with large cylinders to get to minus 60m beyond! A



Grotte de la Cocalière. Photo: Martyn Farr



Grotte de la Cocalière. Photo: Martyn Farr

Derbyshire Section digging trip is planned here!

Saturday July 4 2009 **Fontaine de Champclos** / Mont Blanc, Entrée Artificielle. Christine. Clive, Pauline Grosart, Paul Gamble.

Some fun and bush-bashing to find the entrance "Naturel". We had been told by Patrick Serret, (French cave diver), that the through-trip was no longer possible due to a blockage. So we caved some distance into this entrance until Paul met the blockage, a huge sandbank which had slumped. Evidence of recent digging attempts were strewn around. Nobody fancied going further so we all left and went on up the hill to find the Mont Blanc "Artificielle" entrance. We rigged and dropped the short entrance pitch to enter a huge, well decorated, passage and shortly the "Mont Blanc" chamber, which is massive, with a gigantic white stal beehive (hence the name). CSG had wanted to see this for some time. From there we all continued across some easy roped traverses until the other side of the blockage was met. CDW pointed out that we had

done the through-trip twice! Paul and Christine explored upstream via some more traverses until it became uninteresting and we went for beer and ice-cream..... in a thunderstorm!

Sunday July 5 2009 **Event de Peyrejal** Clive, Christine, Paul.

The original plan of going to the "Neuf Gorges" turned into a typical epic and the miles of forestry track did not agree with my car at all, so we abandoned that idea and Clive saved the day by suggesting the Peyrejal. On arrival a group of German cavers with rather dubious SRT and rigging skills invited us to use their ropes, thus saving us from having to rig. We dropped the pitches and headed off down some fine phreatic tubes - probably the best examples that I've ever seen. We returned to go out to dinner with Rupert and Julie Skuroпка.

Monday July 6 2009 **Goul du Pont** Christine, Clive, Rupert.

Christine was having HID problems again and so had a dull dive here previously. Rupert offered her the use of his torch so she could have a more enjoyable dive, and she did - to minus 58m. Clive hovered above and commented that her torch, lighting up the shaft, and Rupert returning and lighting up the lower arches, was the best underwater view he had ever seen.

Wednesday July 8 2009 **Font Vive** Clive, Christine. Surface support Pauline.

Christine dived with 3 cylinders as her larger ones were depleted and fills were getting harder to come by. So dived to the limit of her 7s and 5 litre, just over and beyond a big silt bank, to see enticing, gin-clear phreatic passage taking off into the distance. A return dive is planned here with bigger cylinders! Stunning cave.

Thursday July 9 2009 **Font Vive** Christine, Steve.

We dived the active, multiple sump route on John Volanthen's recommendation and were not disappointed. Excellent visibility, mildly awkward, but short, carries between sumps. Dived through sump 5, patching up the line along the way, and surfaced at the foot of a climb. Neither diver could be bothered with it as they were both close to 3rds. So turned back, recce done. In sump 2, on the way home, Christine had a first stage go down, making for a mind-concentrating dive home.

All the above accounts by **Christine** All photographs by courtesy of **Martyn Farr**

## From the Log Book & the Wessex Website

Ardèche. Act 1. June 2009. **Clive Westlake**

Saturday June 20 2009 **Goul de la Tannerie** Mike, Claire, Clive, Phil

Mike and Claire could not fit their rebreathers through the restriction 100m in. Phil and Clive dived to the shaft at 700m and went down it to -27m.

Sunday June 21 2009 **Goul du Pont** Mike Thomas, Claire Cohen, Clive Westlake, Phil Rowsell ("Mad Phil", BEC).

Conditions were excellent (20m + visibility). Mike went to -102m, Phil to -50m, Claire to -42m and Clive to -71m. Some "Personal Best" dives today.

Monday June 22 2009 **Source de la Marnade** Mike, Claire, Clive, Phil.

All dive to 125 m / -32m in only 2 -3 m visibility; back to the Gouls...

Tuesday June 23 2009 **Goul du Pont** Mike, Claire, Clive, Phil. Using rebreathers, Mike (-70m) and Claire (-67m) enjoyed the fine conditions and scenery, as did Phil (-61m) using Clive's cylinders for his first Trimix dive.

Wednesday June 24 2009 **Font Vive** Mike, Claire, Clive, Phil

The previous evening Phil was thrown in and told to dig out the gravel on the entrance slope - the sort of thing that happens to trainees. He made a good job of making the place passable with larger cylinders. This is a fine, scenic, dive; Clive and Phil went to 360m in Sump 1, Mike and Claire to 250m. Then we went for air and hospitality from Patrick Serret, a local cave diving activist.

Thursday June 25 2009 **Aven de la Buse** Mike, Claire, Clive, Phil

Some short pitches with fixed ropes, and one slightly longer one which we rigged, and a few grovels led to a large chamber. The best feature of this fairly interesting cave is the display of helictites; Clive took plenty of pictures. Back to.....

**Font Vive** in the evening - Mike dived all 380m of Sump1, Phil and Claire to 250m. Clive played the seniority card and sat by the sump pool.

Friday June 26 2009 **Goul de la Tannerie** Mike, Claire, Clive, Phil

Mike and Phil went to the shaft at 700m and down it to -46m,

while Claire and Clive went to the head of the shaft; excellent conditions again. We went back to Orgnac l'Aven to celebrate Mike's birthday.

### **Ardeche Act 2. Clive Westlake**

Sunday June 28 2009 Goul de la Tannerie. Clive, Martyn Farr, Helen Rider.

Helen dived to 250m. Clive and Martyn to, and down the shaft. The numbers: 780m in, -46m, time 116 minutes, combined ages 121.

### **Some Wessex in the Lot and Corrèze. Clive Westlake**

Saturday July 25 2009 Event de Jonquilles Ade & Jude Vanerplank, Andy Summerskill ("Leg"), Gordon Kaye, Clive Westlake.

Leg rigged the entrance pitches and the Clive led everyone the wrong way along the dry passages. The right way eventually brought us to the excellent upstream passage which we followed for a kilometre to Sump 1. On the way back Clive took some pictures and we surfaced after 6 hours underground.

Monday July 27 2009 Igue de Goudou Ade and Jude, Gordon, Clive, Charlotte Kemp, Kevin Hilton.

Jude had previously arranged permission, so we showed the farmer the permit then went down the 40m entrance shaft. A steep rubble slope leads down to a large tunnel. The way on is not here, but down a 4m pitch to one side. 200m of dry, undistinguished passage, with some fixed lines round traverses leads to another short pitch down into the stream passage. This is very handsome, leading for 650m to Sump 1. Everyone had been helping with Clive's diving gear and he now dived to check the line. The usual French string did not inspire confidence, so he laid 4mm to CDG standards. The sump is 70m long and 5m deep. We surfaced after 6 hours underground.

Wednesday July 29 2009 Gouffre du Saut de la Pucelle. Ade, Jude, Charlotte, Kevin, Clive, joined an hour later by: Paul Wakeling, Rosie Freeman, Gordon and Leg.

The first five went ahead rigging ladders and had just about run out when the second team arrived with more. When we reached a stretch of dry passage, which is rare in the wet cave, Clive announced with all the authority of two previous visits, that there were no more pitches. We therefore left the two remaining ladders..... and a couple of hundred metres arrived at the top of the last pitch. Paul deployed some slings for our descent while Kevin chased back for a ladder for our ascent. Soon all of us reached Sump 1, which is 2.8 kms and 160m below the entrance. The trip out was fun, especially climbing out of several neck-deep basins and smooth-walled pools. Paul added to the entertainment by free-climbing beside several of the ladders and performing acrobatic moves across the pitch heads. We spent 7 ¼ hours doing this well-known, high quality and rather wet cave.

Friday July 31 2009 Igue de Goudou Ade, Kevin, Clive.

We went down to Sump 1, which we passed without incident. Downstream is a kilometre of totally superb and rather remote stream passage. We turned round at Sump 3 and Clive took photographs on the way back upstream. One of Clive's valves failed at Sump 1, but Kevin went to

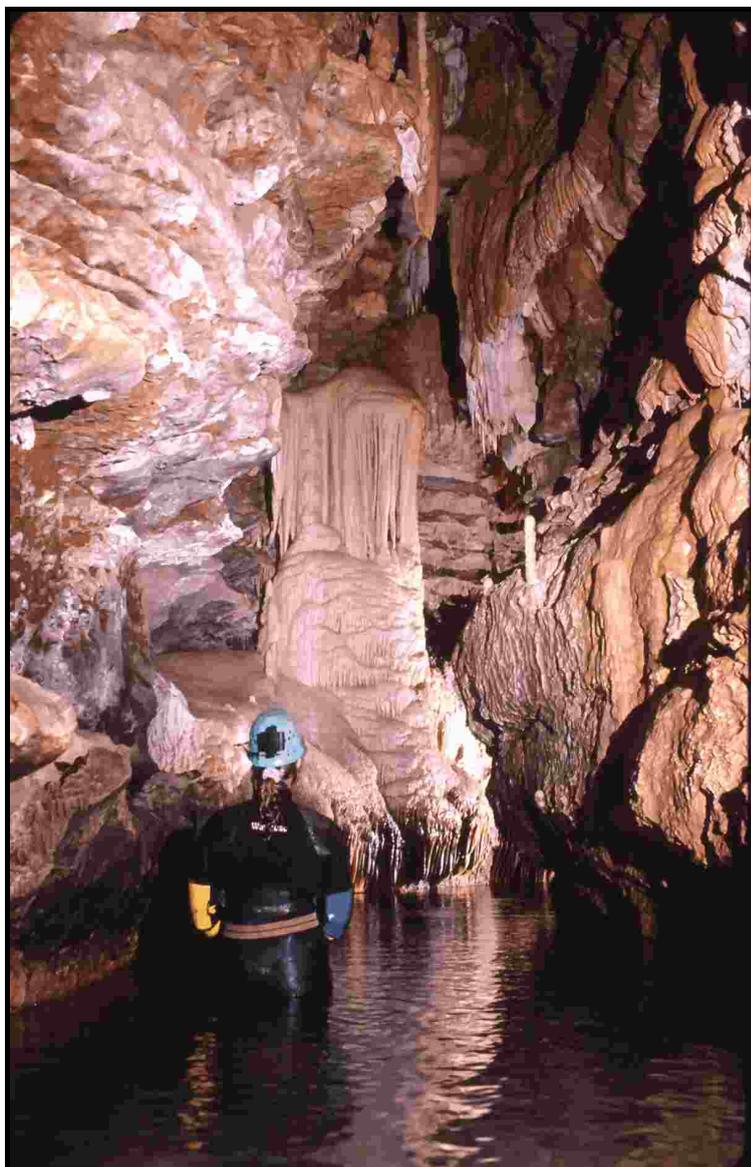
collect one of Ade's..... he had already dived back. Having sorted out this minor problem we left the cave after a brilliant trip of 8 ½ hours.

Thursday July 2 2009 Igue de Goudou Charlotte, Leg, Rosie, Ade, Jude, Paul, Gordon, Clive.

The divers were pleased that people wanted to come down again and help carry the gear. Clive was also pleased that they helped him take pictures in the very photogenic streamway. The trip took 4 ½ hours and we were then made welcome at the hut of "Terre et Eau" - the club which manages access to the local caves.

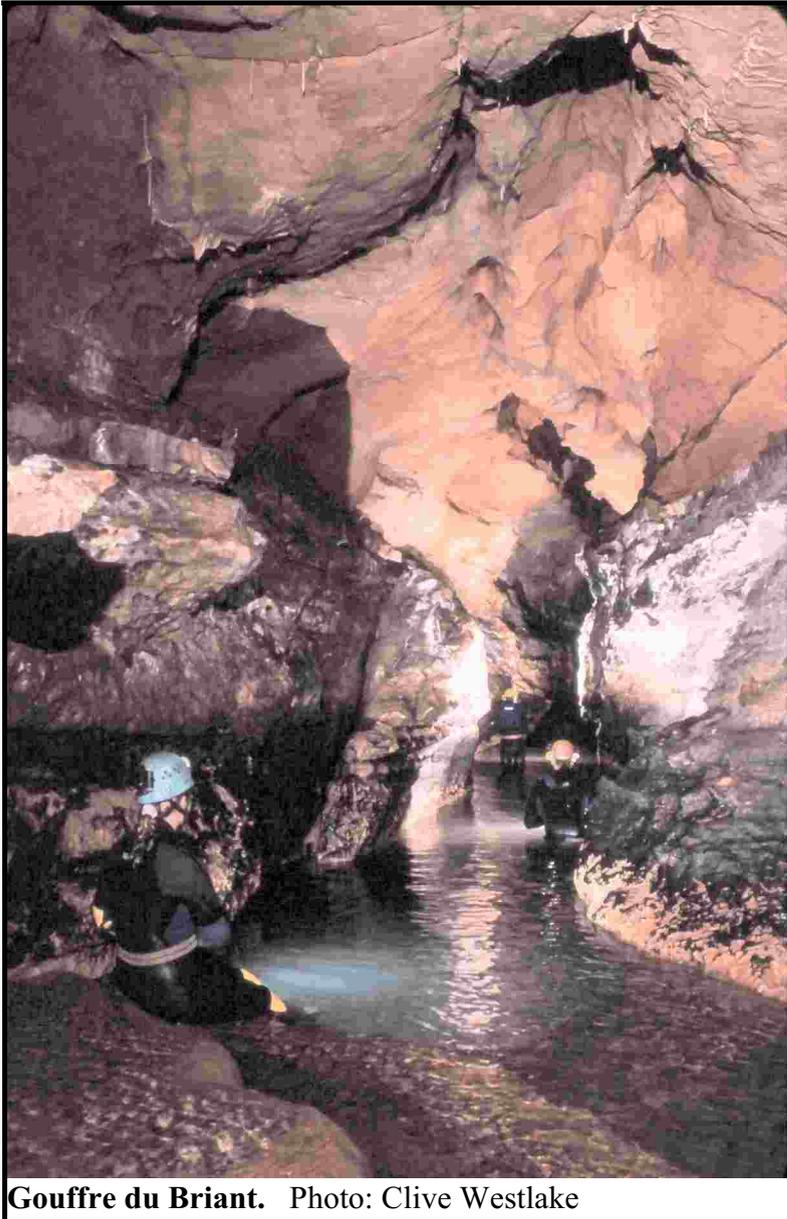
Monday July 6 2009 Grotte de Montclar Gordon, Ade, Jude, Clive.

The Shepton went here a couple of years ago and their report was very favourable. Having driven up a rough track at some peril to the VdeP car, we found the entrance with practised (!) ease. The two, off-vertical, pitches needed two ladders each and we soon reached the spacious final chamber. The cave must once have been very well decorated but all the floor formations are defiled with mud and only those out of reach are preserved. Nevertheless there are some very pretty helictites which Clive photographed with the help of everyone.



**Gouffre du Briant** Photo: Clive Westlake

Saturday July 4 2009 Gouffre du Briant Paul, Vernon Freeman, Charlotte, Ade. Kevin, Clive.



**Gouffre du Briant.** Photo: Clive Westlake

A fair number of cavers from this and lesser clubs have been persuaded down this superb cave and have not been disappointed. It begins with a 9m pitch then there's some muddy stumbling to a big, chest-deep, lake, which is dammed behind a 5m stal flow. This needs a hand-line of about 12m. Varied caving with a few wet grovels leads on to some fantastical cave-long, long canals with stunning formation draped down the walls. About a kilometre in, the cave seems to be closing in when suddenly there's this river junction with the combined Jonquilles and Couze waters surging past. Four of the team had seen enough quality cave for a day, so went out, but Clive had been here several times before and wanted to go downstream, as did Kevin. We went for 1.3 kms in wet and exciting stream passage until Sump 6, which is about 700m from the resurgence - most of the cave was discovered by divers and the dry entrance was found later. We took some pictures on the way out and surfaced after 6 hours of aquatic and dramatic caving. All accounts by **Clive**

Saturday July 18 2009 OFD, Top Entrance Clive Westlake, Christine Grosart, Paul Gamble.

Rain stopped play in Porth yr Ogof; Mellte high and going at a terrifying speed, so opted instead for a trip into Top Entrance, and down to Maypole Inlet to sort a climb that Christine had never liked - mainly because it was the wrong way! The normal route was much more satisfying! Went upstream to 2<sup>nd</sup> Oxbow, and out via Judge, Trident and Swamp Creek to the top of the Knave. We all had a rain-washed journey home. **Christine.**

Friday July 31 2009 Fester Hole Maurice, Judy, Tommo, Jon Williams, Graham Mullen.

Recording session. Took samples from wall of sediment on right by dig. Noticed a small fourth entrance on far right. You can see daylight at the end of the low flat chamber to the right of the 3<sup>rd</sup> (West) entrance. **Maurice**

Saturday August 1 2009 Fester Hole Maurice, Judy, Tommo, Jon Williams, John Thomas.

The recent heavy rain has turned the place very squalid. Did a survey of the dig chamber. Some very sticky mud was removed from the bottom of the dig and used to backfill part of the redundant surveyed tube. **Maurice**

Wednesday August 5 2009 Drunkards Hole Guy Briggs, Matt Faulkner, Colin Shapter, Aubrey Newport.

Long time since I had been in Drunkards. We had to remove a tree from the entrance which had apparently been there for weeks. The lower parts are really muddy from the Cheddar digging efforts. **Aubrey.**

Wednesday August 12 2009 Welshes Green Swallet.... revisited. Guy, Matt, Colin, Aubrey.

Had a bit of trouble finding the entrance - there are farm buildings which weren't there 50 years ago! Less mud than in the old days, but it is surprising how all of the sharp edges have worn off the passages. One of Mendip's classic collectors' caves. **Aubrey**

Tuesday September 1 2009 Carnglaze Caverns, Cornwall. Bob and Colly.

Yep, dead easy trip, though the steps can be a bit slippery when yer glasses are steamed up, but thankfully no accidents. 31 minutes.... and it rained!

Sunday September 6 2009 Wookey 22. Clive, Christine, MadPhil.

Chris and Clive dived through to 22 taking a 12 litre of trimix and a 7 litre of 50% through to the static sump. In the afternoon Phil and Clive dived another of Christine's 12s through to 22 while Christine dashed back home to get hold of another cylinder. Many thanks to Mum and John Volanthen for the carry last night !! **Christine**

Monday September 7 2009 Wookey 24. Chris and MadPhil.

Both to 22 to take the remaining 7 and 12 litre cylinders forward to 25 dive base. Alarming slick trip.... in and out in under 3 ½ hours! **Christine.**

Saturday September 12 2009 Upper Flood Swallet. Rich Carey, Kerrin Malone, Doug MacFarlane, Graham Candy.

Well, even Dad's Army, the honourable Wessex Geriatric Group can't win them all. After an hour's introduction to the joys of

Upper Flood's entrance charms, it was decided that enough was enough and the bugles called for a tactical retreat. Another day, when the WGG are younger and wiser.....

Saturday September 12 2009 Swildons Short Round Trip. Keith Glossop, Noel Cleave.

Keith was celebrating his first Round Trip for some 30 years and Noel his impending 70<sup>th</sup>. Birthday. One way and another it was a gentleman's trip. The Mud Sump was dry and all the remaining ducks passable with ample nose-in-the-air space. The trip was enlivened by various encounters. We met Bean and Jacob at the 20 where Jacob was imploring Daddy to take him down it. I know that Bean spurns the use of a ladder there but Old Granite Heart refused, even when we offered to provide one, and safety lines. Jacob was wearing a seriously smart full-body harness and very fancy 'helmet'. Then at the foot of Barnes' Loop we met three cavers completely littered with apparently band-new carabiners, figure 8s, descendeurs, jumars and even a string of Crolls and bolts, all jangling melodiously. We were wont to comment on this and informed that: "We're from Yorkshire. Our caves are all Potholes and we do everything SRT", and then asked if this were the way to Sump1. We reassured that indeed it was, and that one day we'd visit Yorkshire ourselves. Having

completed the "Round" part of our day, we were astounded to meet our trio of Yorkshire hard men at the foot of the 20. They declined the use of our ladder and proceeded to ascend with an awe-inspiring display of stumbling, bumbling incompetence. We emerged into glorious sunshine and sunbathed the afternoon away, socialising at Upper Pitts. **Noel**

Sunday September 13 2009 Noel's 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday GB. Kerrin Malone, Keith Glossop, Graham Candy, Doug Macfarlane, Paul Allen, Noel Cleave.

Despite much consumption of wine, but perhaps because of energy gained from the superb lamb roast with all the trimmings cooked by Noel at Upper Pitts the previous evening, the Wessex Geriatric Group were up and about and breakfasted early enough to set off for GB by 9.15 on Sunday morning (*This is not to be taken as a precedent. Noel*). After changing into wet gear(!) at Charterhouse Farm in brilliant sunshine we set off for GB. Once through the kissing gate Noel decided to wander off to the left to "look for the entrance" whilst the rest of the party waited (patiently at first) at the blockhouse. Some ten minutes later search parties were dispatched shouting "NOEL!!" in unison, who eventually arrived looking somewhat bemused at his geographical forgetfulness.

We descended via Mud Passage to the Gorge, then crossed The Bridge and ascended White Passage as far as the East & West Extensions, dropping back down to via Rift Chamber, the Loop, Hall and Oxbow to Main Chamber.

Various photographic stops were called by Keith (sporting a two-day old Olympus "Tough" digital camera with more menu options than an Indian restaurant) as we ascended Main Chamber and made our way back to the surface. Buzzards and the entrance to Charterhouse cave (when's it going to be open to guests?) were admired on the way back to the cars.

Congratulations to Paul – his first trip since his stay in intensive care at the RUH only four weeks ago (where he carelessly mislaid his gall-bladder) – and to Noel on his birthday. **Kerrin**

Wednesday September 16 2009 Wookey Hole 25/6 C. Westlake, M. Stewart, P. Rowsell, C. Grosart.

CDW and MS, in support, dived through to Chamber 24 with rocket tubes containing CSG's regulators, food, tool kit and sundries. PJR took his own set of diving gear, CSG's 3 litre cylinder of Oxygen, plus a line reel to 24 in order to patch up the line in the elbow of the penultimate, 90m long sump, which was reported to be buried in gravel. CSG in a drysuit, lazily carried PJR's camera bag and broke nearly everything in it!

The objective was for CSG to poke her nose down Rick's line and retrieve igneous rock samples from the 'newer' passage.

CSG and PJR kitted up at 25 dive base, PJR using a pair of 7s to fettle the line and stage the O2 bottle, at a depth of 5.5m on the downstream side of the Lake of Gloom, for CSG. She followed behind with two 12 litre cylinders of Trimix 17/50, a 7 litre of 50% Nitrox and an Ali 80 of 57% Nitrox. CSG staged the 50% at -21m in the 90m long sump and caught up with PJR, who had



**Clive & Christine following the '25 dive.**

Photo: Phil Rowsell

fixed the line and due to gas margins, was heading back to Chamber 24. CSG continued in good visibility (10m maximum), taking the left hand line around the 'wall' to the Lake of Gloom, which she thought was inappropriately named. Finding a comfy rock to sit on she composed herself whilst shining her HID down into the Well. She set off and made steady progress down the inclined rift – which goes on a bit, somewhat unnecessarily – until the passage became user friendly and she soon approached and recognised the old terminus, where the orange/brown gravel met the roof.

Having passed no line junction, she backed up about 2.5 metres and looked to her right where the way on was wide open. At a depth of 58m she tied off her line to the existing main line and met an obvious belay point which contained Rick's thin green line, broken on both sides. She continued in excellent visibility for a further few metres until a depth of 63.4m where gas margins dictated she should go home. Due to the smooth, scalloped, white walls and gravel floor in this section, no rock samples were obtainable.

The diver decompressed with deep stops every three metres in

the rift, in zero visibility and stopped on the 6m ledge for ten minutes on 50%, getting very cold.

Spending as little time as possible in the Lake of Gloom, she dived home through the 90m long sump and had to make several mind concentrating attempts to pass a boulder choke in zero visibility, where the unbelayed line had found its own way on. She bumped into her 57% Ali and switched onto this before repeating her deco profile and finishing off on O2. The diver felt fine on surfacing and her support team were outstanding in relieving her of her gear and packing it away and carting it out of the cave without any complaint whatsoever ! A Thank you must go to Clive Westlake, Malcolm Stewart, Madphil Rowsell, John Volanthen, Richard Walker, Rick Stanton and John Cross for their advice, unlimited help and support in assisting the diver go somewhere she had wanted to visit for a very long time. **Chris**

## Wessex Cycling Club

### Mark “Mak” Kellaway

If you read the Wessex forum ([www.wessex-cave-club.org](http://www.wessex-cave-club.org)) you will know that there is a small core of local cyclists in the club. We mainly go mountain biking but many of us have road bikes as well.

If you fancy a bit of variety it can provide a great fun alternative to caving. Also cycling could be something for a non caving friend/partner/family member to do whilst you are underground.

Mendip has many attractions for the mountain biker – there is Stockhill Woods, just up the road (and conveniently near the Hunters) where there is a variety of trails for some Cross Country (XC for short) fun. For a bit of Freeride (FR) or Downhill (DH) fun there is Blackdown and Rowberrow forest where there are some FR/DH singletrack trails hidden in the woods with jumps and drop offs to get the adrenalin flowing.

Blackdown and Rowberrow provide us locals with a regular Wednesday night jaunt – we do this all year round in all weathers, this often results in us getting soaking wet and covered in mud, a bit like most Mendip caving trips, but we persevere. Last winters heavy snow was the only thing that stopped us as the going was too hard for the bikes; we were struggling to peddle down hill in the deep snow! As with caving at least there is a welcoming pub at the end, the Crown at Churchill, which like the Hunters serves real ale straight from the barrel and has a warm fire going in the cold weather.



**Figure 68**Jo and Kev in Rowberrow Forest

Mountain biking and caving are well suited companions as caving huts provide a good place to base yourself, changing areas and cleaning facilities for muddy caving kit is also good for muddy mountain bikes/bikers, and some huts even provide bike stowage, and most importantly all caving areas contain good mountain biking terrain as well. Also for the road cyclist caving huts are situated in areas of great natural beauty and provide access to quiet rural roads.



Jo on the Isle of Skye (WCC Scotland trip 2005)

We have taken our bikes with us to both the Craven and the NPC in Yorkshire, the Westminster in South Wales, the DCC hut in Devon, the Grampian in Scotland and the Orpheus in Derbyshire. They have even travelled with us on past club trips, I remember the Jura was very good MTB territory – and the bike came in handy on the morning trip into town to get the pain au chocolate as it was a 4km round trip!

We do a variety of riding ranging from pure XC to DH but mainly XC and trail riding, South Wales has some excellent forestry centres with great singletrack trails which are only an hour or two from Mendip, such as Cwm Carn, Afan Argoed and Glynccorrwg, these are even closer to for the annual Westminster meet.

Much like caving it is best when there is a group of you to share the adventure, and laugh when someone falls off, and also share tall tales of prowess in the pub afterwards.

So why not bring your mountain bike along with you down to Mendip or the next time we are away on a club trip? **Mak**



Figure 70 Paul and Mak fording a stream in the Lakes

## Reciprocal Club Privileges

### South Wales

Westminster Speleological Group - WSG.

South Wales Caving Club - SWCC.

### Derbyshire:

Orpheus Caving Club - OCC.

The Wessex now has a reciprocal arrangement with the Orpheus Caving Club in Derbyshire. There is a set of useful information which will find its way to Upper Pitts including instructions on filling in the hut book and paying for your stay.

We have our own key which is kept at Upper Pitts and available to members.

### Yorkshire Dales:

Craven Pothole Club - CPC.

Northern Pennine Club - NPC.

Yorkshire Subterranean Society - YSS.

### Devon

Devon Speleological Society - DSS.

## We welcome the following new members

### **Chris Caton**

12 Ivor Road, Bristol, BS5 9BW

Single member

Proposed: Les Williams

Seconded: Chris Davies

### **Nigel Gower**

Green Acres Farm, Hardwick Lane, Lyne, KT16 9AD

Single member

Proposed: John (Hatstand) Osborne

Seconded: Matt Jones

### **Frank Tully**

16 Bedminster Road, Bedminster, Bristol, BS3 5PD

Single member

proposed: Les Williams

seconded David Cooke

## Valete Mike Holland

We are indebted to **Alan Jeffreys** (“Goon”) for this appreciation of the late Mike Holland.

“See Mike Holland, how absurd  
Gallop along like a clockwork turd.  
Singing: boulder have a crunch,  
Have a crunch on me.  
Boulder have a crunch on me.”

Mike was a very active Mendip caver, a member of the Westminster Speleological Group and the Wessex Cave Club, principally in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He participated in many of the epic explorations of Swildons Hole, especially Shatter Series and the push down the streamway from sump 4 where he assisted in ferrying gear and providing hot drinks for cold divers, as well as pursuing upward leads in Cowsh Aven.

He also played an active part in the assault, launched in 1959, on Priddy Green Sink, an effort with high hopes of lining down to Cowsh Avens in Swildons 4. Alas, this venture took until 1996 – almost 40 years – before success was achieved. Such was the noisome effluent within this dig, caused by outwash from Maine’s farm cow byre, that digging became increasingly unpleasant and this, coupled with unstable boulders, led to an abandonment until 1995. The epic nature of this first dig led Mike to pen the Priddy Green Song which cleverly encompasses all the woes and aspirations of the original diggers.

In 1966 Mike moved up to Edinburgh because of work associated with the university. He soon sought out and joined the GSG, but wasn’t overly active in the field. He was best known for sitting at the back of meetings, his diminutive figure puffing on a pipe and uttering words of wisdom from time to time. I suspect he felt his mainstream caving days were behind him by then, his track record speaking for itself.

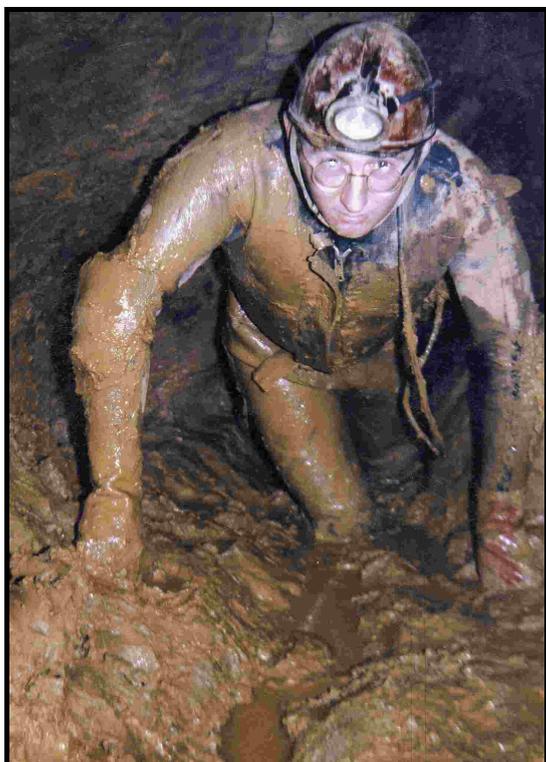
Mike died in the early summer from liver cancer. Yet another former member who will not be around for our jubilee. Spare a thought for Mike if you stand on Priddy Green during the dinner weekend.

“We’ve used a ton of gelignite  
And we’ve lost a man or two.  
I ‘spect we’ll lose another boys  
Before this dig is through.  
But we’ve added a hundred feet or more  
To the subterranean scene:  
Oh you’ll rue the day that you came this way to dig on Priddy Green.” **Alan Jeffreys**

To which I can add a personal note, because I caved with Mike quite a lot in the busy period immediately following the passing of Blue Pencil and exploration beyond it. Mike was always good company. He played the guitar well, and wrote several caving songs, notably the “Priddy Green” song quoted above. He was a famous

nosh scrounger and on one occasion at Hillgrove Bob Pyke and I ground up a packet of Winalot dog food , substituted it for the contents of a packet of Grape Nuts and induced Mike to eat it, which he did with relish. Our subterfuge revealed, we were roundly cursed, but Mike was not one to bear any ill-will. Noel

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



Paul Hadfield. The Stoops. Photo: Paul Hadfield.

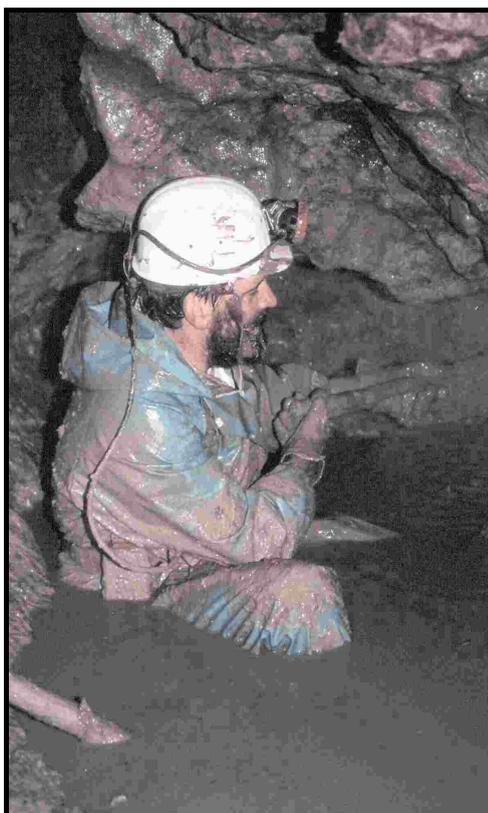
The Molephone has been adapted for time travel.... into the past, for this Journal, and even for some visual recall of classic Wessex digs, superlative quality mud, and highly motivated 'discoverers'.



The Late Ian Jepson: Abandon Hope. Photo: Paul Hadfield.



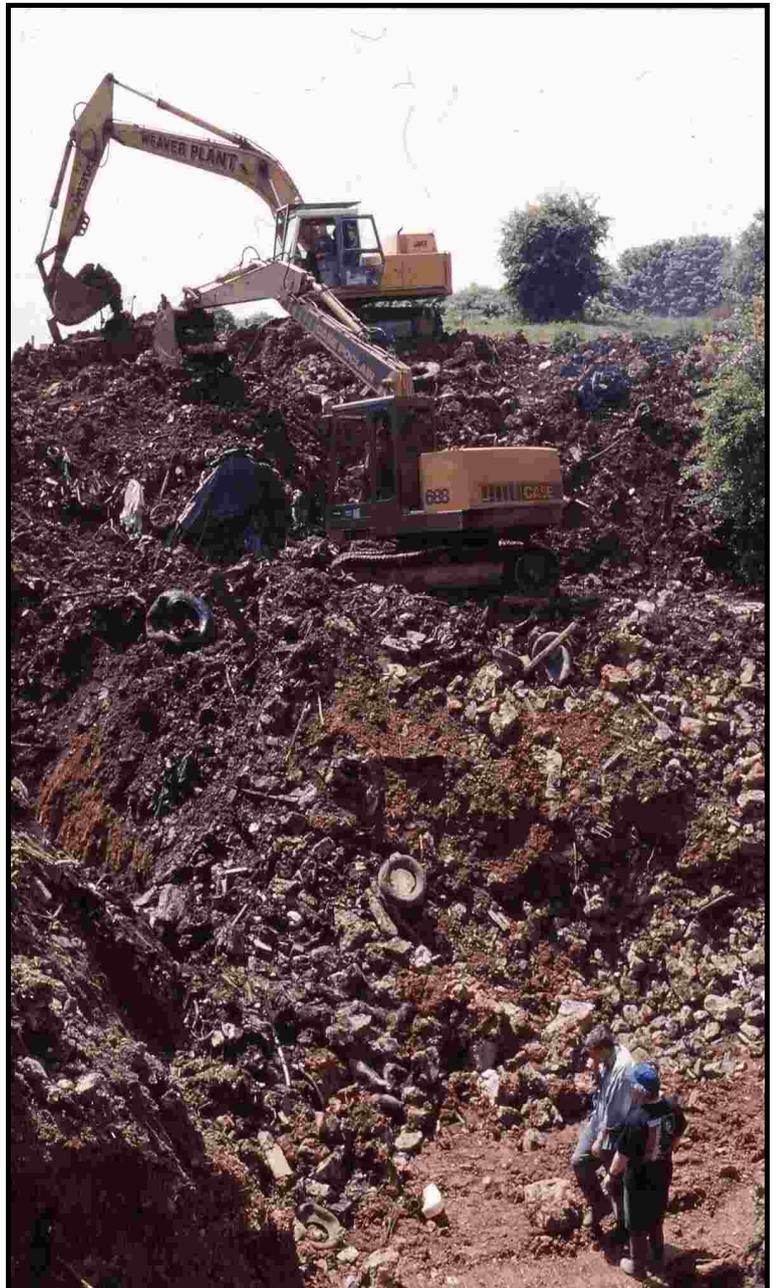
Maurice looking for his car keys. Clay Holes. Photo: Tuska



"You know it makes sense". Brian Pitman. Clay Holes. Photo: Tuska



Maurice. Compton Ochre Mine. Photo: Tuska



Tuska "Two Diggers" Morrison inspecting a failed dig.... a prize for the first correct name!

..... and from Ali's memory banks.....

Southbank was discovered on a long hard pushing trip to the West End Series Eastwater in 1988. On the way out I was extremely keen to keep the team moving by whatever means – and running off with Tav's cigarettes proved extremely effective! To quote the victim: "...and back in the Jubilee Line we felt we were out. Unfortunately we weren't. The section from here back to the old cave must rank amongst some of the hardest caving I've done. Blackwall Tunnel was arduous, Lolly Pot a desperate struggle and the rift above Gladman's a total bastard. Increasingly concerned about the time, Alison – fully aware of the power of sheer blind addiction – hared off up the passage with my fags and after 9 hours, just one quarter of an hour short of callout, we were out. The cow shit wafting over Gibbon's field never smelled so sweet. I had one wetsuit arm hanging from a thread, I was bleeding from every exposed part of my body and I was asking Pete for a ladder out of the entrance depression". (This quote is taken from WCC Vol 24 Jnl 260 )

Ali also admits that: "Over the years Pete M and myself have gained a reputation for not being over generous with our use of explosives when pushing passages". The following is a quote from a Wessex Log report by Duncan Frew following a Pierre's Pot trip in 1987. "... what Mrs M didn't mention was that this is another example of their use of minimum force for maximum progress, therefore maximum effort for minimum progress on the part of the caver".

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Noel reportedly tried to persuade Rich Carey to take on the Journal editorship, and failed miserably. If you're thinking of a career in sales, Noel, don't give up the day job: also skip the "Vacancies" for Arm-Twisters and Ladder Riggers.

## Club & Committee News

### 75<sup>th</sup>. Anniversary "At Home" day

The Wessex hosted a most successful "At Home" day on Saturday September 5<sup>th</sup>. When a number of the local farmers and landowners who allow us access to Mendip's underground, visited Upper Pitts. The weather could have been better, but it was fine enough for some of our visitors to experience SRT, and Les set up a superlative SRT Race Rig so that our professionals could show how it should be done. An emergency marquee, an all-day BBQ and a couple of barrels were much appreciated. So was the chance to visit Upper Pitts itself and see our accommodation and facilities.



Indoors Maurice and Clive entertained them with caving movies and slide shows.



**Honorary Membership** The Wessex Committee have offered Brian and Brenda Prewer Honorary Memberships of the Wessex. It would be difficult to overstate how much work both of them have put in, over the years, to help the Wessex run smoothly. In both social and practical terms, their contributions have been immense and hugely valuable. We are delighted that both have accepted.

**Charterhouse Cave** Ali reports that the lack of a settled dry spell meant that for most of the summer the sumps controlling access to the furthest and deepest discoveries was impassable. When exploration is again possible there is still surveying to be done and so there is no immediate prospect of the cave being open to general cavers.

Ali also points out that neither she nor Pete Hann are officially Charterhouse Leaders. Their personal permits are for digging and associated exploration and survey.

**Black Wal's Cupboard and the Sales Cupboard** These have to be operated on an honesty basis if they are to be generally useful. They share a common key with the Under-Stairs padlock so there should not normally be an access problem and both tend to be open fairly informally. It is up to members to ensure that they are meticulous in paying for their purchases.

**CO<sub>2</sub> Investigation** St. Pauls and Paradise Regained have always suffered from high levels of carbon dioxide, particularly when the Mud Sump is closed for an extended period. Aubrey Newport has some CO<sub>2</sub> test kits, so if you are going in that direction, please volunteer to take one for him. This does **not** preclude some bureaucratic closure, it is simply an ongoing study.

**Cuckoo Cleeves** This cave has long been notorious for dangerously high CO<sub>2</sub> levels and is currently closed for recreational caving. Cheramodytes made the case for this in Journal 315, but there's nothing light-hearted about the dangers in Cuckoo Cleeves at the moment. The new padlock is deliberately fitted to prevent unwise descents until the problem can be resolved.

**Post-Dinner Sunday Mystery Tour** There will be a mystery tour on the Sunday. Sensible outdoor shoes, waterproofs or umbrella (if it looks like rain) and a pen are recommended. There will be an opportunity for refreshments. The rest remains a mystery.....

**Dave ("Flip Flop") Barrett writes from China:**

"Next year (2010) I am taking a break from work (yes, again) and going to do some touring in Chongqing Province, for (about 9 months, specifically related to karst and caving. Chongqing is of course home to jaw dropping limestone scenery and (having toured there once already) I can honestly say it has some of the best limestone features I have ever seen, including the huge "skyholes". In my opinion, it is better than Mulu (which I visited in January) and a lot cheaper! Caves here can be large and varied and though this is not classed as a caving expedition, there will be caving, especially if you particularly want to do some.

Our accommodation will vary between tent (free), farmer's house (next to nothing), hostel or guesthouse (average 50 yuan, about 4GBP) per twin room. My wife is Chinese so no there will be no problem getting around, and I will be touring by 4WD. If anyone would like to take this opportunity to join us drop me a line with your dates of interest or any questions. Even though we are there for a period of time, anyone can join for short periods. We can collect people or arrange transport to meet us. Really, if anyone states an interest we will make arrangements around their proposal. We can even arrange domestic flights from an international airport if required (an In-Law works for a travel company). I don't think there will be any takers - it is a long way and really at least 3 weeks holiday would be needed to do it justice. This kind of trip suits people with time, spare cash and more than just an interest in sport caving."

E-mail: [cavercomms@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:cavercomms@yahoo.co.uk) You will find some of our previous adventures recorded at [www.dave-anna.com](http://www.dave-anna.com)

**Out-of-Area News**

**Llethrid Swallet** There has been a report of a collapse in the entrance series. It has not yet been possible to investigate but an update appear on the Cambrian website when more is known. Probably best to avoid the cave for the moment.

**Slaughter Stream Cave (Wet Sink)**

Slaughter Stream cave is now open to visiting cavers. The choke has been stabilized, and a good deal of work done to effect a permanent repair. There is still work to be done, and there is some loose material in the area between the choke and Balcony Pitch (which visiting cavers are invited to assist on its journey to the bottom of the main pitch), but the cave is safe for visitors.

**Pwll Ddu Cave Management Group**

At the AGM of the PDCMG on the 4th July 2009, a motion for the opening of the currently blocked second entrance to Ogof Draenen was discussed and a majority were not in favour. However, it became clear that a wider review of the group's entrance(s) policy was required. This policy currently states a preference for a single entrance system and was originally adopted on the grounds of conservation and protection of the concept of remote wilderness, including recognition that easing access to the further reaches could affect fragile calcite, gypsum and mud formations.

However, views were brought to the AGM that easier/multiple access is now desirable, while others in the Group retained their opinion that a single entrance preserves the unique feel for caving here. This is an important issue that may impact the nature of the cave forever. Consequently, the wider caving world is now being consulted for their opinions on a possible amendment to the entrance(s) policy in advance of an Extraordinary General Meeting of the PDCMG at the end of October. Cavers belonging to clubs which are members of the PDCMG should provide their feedback to their club representative. Alternatively comments can be sent to the secretary of the PDCMG for compilation ([pdcmg\\_sec@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:pdcmg_sec@hotmail.co.uk)). Further details of the EGM will be made available in due course.

The Wessex has a vote on this subject, but Wessex Committee feeling is that Ogof Draenen is not in our area and that we should go with the majority feeling of the locally involved clubs. It is relatively common knowledge that there are other, clandestine, entrances to OD, and so the matter raised above will inevitably be influenced by this, particularly as not all the entrances may be from land owned by the current entrance owner.

**Otter Hole Telephone Cable**

The old cable (which has been in Otter for 30 years!!) from the entrance to the rescue dump has been exhaustively tested and is still usable. The newer 2 core cable, which is cable tied to the old cable between the rescue dump and part way through the entrance series, has not been tested but has still been left in It may be removed once the old cable is fully re-tested and proven.

**Dan yr Ogof**

Following the flooding incident in March of last year a

considerable amount of work has taken place to ensure that there is adequate provision within the cave for any party that may become stranded beyond the lakes.

A communications system and entrapment provisions including clothing, sleeping bags, food and cooking facilities have now been installed in Wigmore Hall. This location has been chosen as it is dry and draught free; the previous location in Boulder Chamber proving to be too wet and noisy in flood conditions. A safe route from Boulder Chamber to Wigmore Hall has been formed and flagged with marker tape.

Please do not be tempted to open any of the drums out of curiosity, these are sealed airtight to protect the condition of the

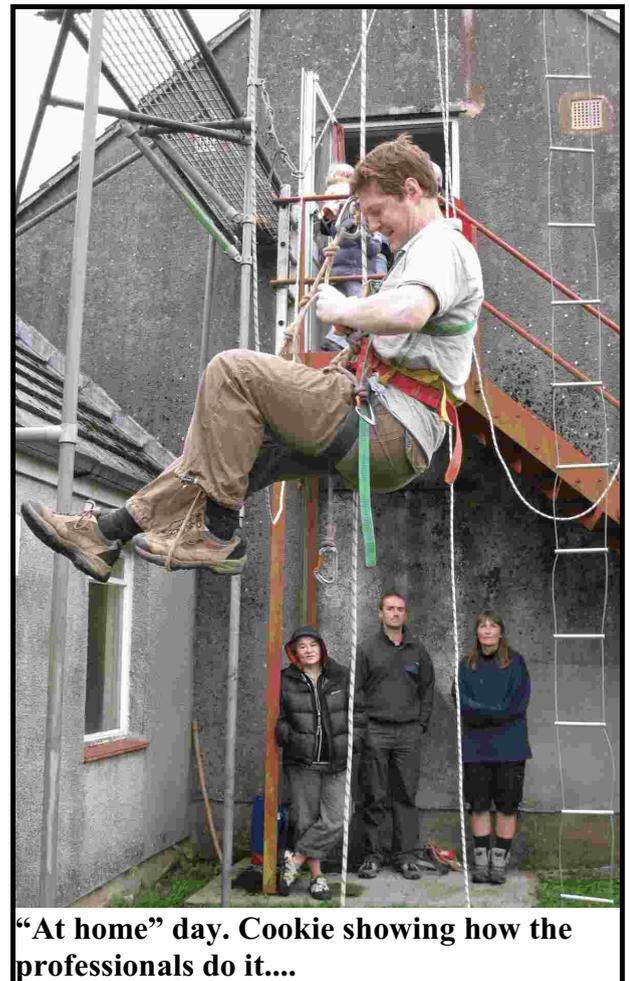
contents. The communications cabinet will signal an alarm in the showcave when the door is opened, so please do not open it unless in an emergency as this could trigger a false alarm.

**South Wales Caves Website** It is worth checking out <http://www.ogof.org.uk/> A Cambrian created archive of superlative photographs, videos and inter-active maps and photographs, which is well worth a visit.

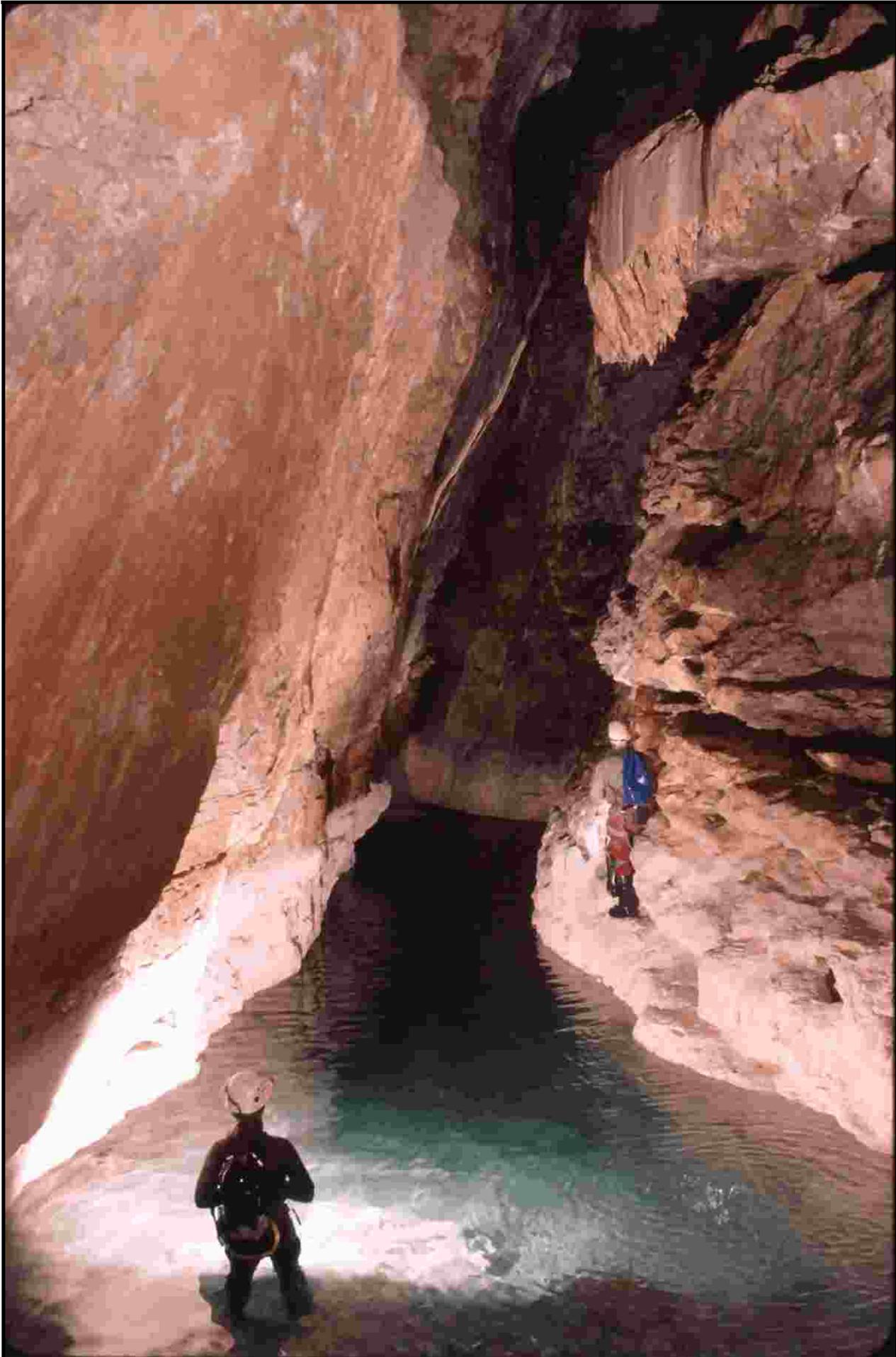
## Diary Dates

|                       |                                                                                |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Oct 9th - 11th</b> | Hut Booking Leeds Uni Caving Club (Sally Joseph) 20 people                     |
| <b>Oct 11</b>         | Library Booking 10:30 AM Mendip Cave Registry & Archive Meeting                |
| <b>Oct 17</b>         | WESSEX AGM 10:30 AM Hunters Lodge, Priddy                                      |
| <b>Oct 17</b>         | Committee Meeting 3:00 PM Upper Pitts                                          |
| <b>Oct 17</b>         | 75 <sup>th</sup> . Anniversary Dinner. 6.30pm. Royal Bath and West Showground. |
| <b>Oct 18</b>         | “Sunday After” lunch at Upper Pitts and Mystery outing.                        |
| <b>Oct 23 - 25</b>    | Hut Booking KUCC (Chloe Vincett) 15 people                                     |
| <b>Oct 23 - 25</b>    | Hut Booking York Uni (Imogen Shepherd) 4 people                                |
| <b>Oct 26 - 30</b>    | Hut Booking Wembley ATC (Anthony Walton) 15 people                             |
| <b>Nov 06 - 08</b>    | Hut Booking KUCC (Chloe Vincett) 15 people                                     |
| <b>Nov 27 -29</b>     | Hut Booking PNG 2010 (Tony Seddon) 10 people                                   |
| <b>Dec 04 - 06</b>    | Hut Booking DSS (Jason Pain) 10 people                                         |

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“At home” day. Cookie showing how the professionals do it....



Classic Clive, Classic Vercors: Grotte du Gournier.

Photo: Clive Westlake