

Wessex Cave Club

Journal 330



Wessex Cave Club Journal

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Opinions expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the club or any of its officers.

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Editorial

Welcome to Journal 330. The autumn brought the rain with it. For some this was welcome - water flow at last in Swildon's - but for others it means restricted access to certain parts of caves.

In this issue Dave Barrett recounts exploring caves in SW China. The caves he describes are just a little larger than on Mendip. There is also a report of a recent trip to the Drakelow shadow factory. As well as a write up of a trip in the ever popular Swildon's Upper series, there is a trip report from Skye. Further a field another write up of caving in Andalucia.

As mentioned previously I need members to provide ideas, photos, stories and trip write ups. This is our journal - and it needs your input. I can not produce our journal without your help. So, don't be shy put pen (or keyboard) to paper and share your caving.

Once again, a huge thank you to all contributors to this journal. Without them, literally, there would be nothing to publish. Again, on a personal level, thank you for the comments I have received about Journal 329.

All the best for 2014 - let's hope it's another bumper caving year.

Happy Caving.

Pete

Cover

Sima Cacao
Photo by Chris Binding

Back Cover

Chris Hawkes' Museum Garden Dig in 1992.
Photos courtesy of Jim Hanwell and Wells Museum. (Clockwise from top left).

1. Chris surveys the dig
2. Exposed cobble road. Now preserved at the rear of the museum
3. Broken 18th C crockery from China and Bristol Slipware found in rubbish pit
4. 18th C walled rubbish pit
5. 11th to 12th C sculpted stone head

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David Barrett explores caves in Cangyuan in the SW of China and details some exciting new discoveries.

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A recent Wessex trip gained rare access into the Drakelow shadow factory. Nigel Graham gives us a little history of the facility.

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Swildon's is one of Mendips most popular caves. Here John Gisborne tells gives a trip report to one of the lesser visited parts of the Upper Series.

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A (walking) holiday on Skye wouldn't have been complete without a caving trip. Kev Hilton tells us of his trip in the Valley Head Cave on Skye.

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Photos from the Wells Museum Garden Dig highlight the work, in 1992, that the late Chris Hawkes supervised and worked on. The central image is one of the finds from a rubbish pit. These images finalise Jim Hanwell's tribute to Chris in Journals 328 and 329.

Membership News

A warm welcome to Cheryl Lingard, Patricia Denning-Kendall and Alice Roberts

Diary

Dec 14th Second Saturday Trip (Rod's Pot – Bath Swallet)

Jan 11th Second Saturday Trip (Eastwater, Unlucky Strike)

Feb 2nd Committee meeting

Feb 8th Second Saturday (Manor Farm)

Mar 9th Committee meeting

Hut Bookings

Jan 12th MCRA (Library)

Jan 17th & 18th Try Caving follow up (20)

Jan 17th & 18th CPC (6)

Jan 24th KUCC (12)

April 11th Thunderers CC (21)

Thanks to Ali Moody for all her work keeping the hut bookings well managed.

Thanks also to John Cooper for keep the hut running smoothly during all these busy weekends.

RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

As of 28th Nov 2013

Axbridge C.G. Journal (Mar 2013)

Bristol Exploration Club 'Belfry Bulletin' 59, 2, 3 (Jul, Oct 2013)

Cave Diving Group N/L 189 (Oct 2013)

Chelsea S.S. N/L 55 7-8, 9-10 (Jul/Aug, Sept/Oct 2013) (*Caves of Lundy*)

Craven Pothole Club Journal 111, 112 (July, Oct 2013)

Derbyshire Caving Association. Minutes of Meeting 2/11/2013

Descent 234 (Oct/Nov 2013)

Gloucester S.G. N/L No. 4 (Oct 2013)

Grampian S.G. 'Bulletin' 4th Series 5, 5 (Oct 2013)

Mendip Caving Group 'News' 370, 371 (Apr, Jul 2013) (*Cutler's Green Sinkholes*)

SMCC Journal 13, 1 (Spr 2012) (*Lava caves and bibliography, FCQ unpubl. Survey*)

Westminster S.G N/L 2013 / 1, 2, 3 (Jan, Apr, Jul 2013)

NSS 'News' (USA) 71 9, 10, 11 (Sept, Oct, Nov 2013)

South Wales Caving Club N/L 129 (2012-2013)

White Rose Pothole Club N/L 32, 3 (Oct 2013)

Meghalaya: Vol. 1 (Pala Range and Kopili Valley) 2013

EXPLORING CANGYUAN – SW CHINA: (Dave Barrett)

Cangyuan, South West Yunnan, South West China

Part 1 September 2012: Peter Talling, Fleur Loveridge, Chris Densham, Dave Barrett, Liu Hong, Chai, Tiger

Part 2 April 2013: Peter Talling, Chris Densham, Dave Barrett, Rebecca Lawson, Phil Rowsel, Callum Braithwaite, Liu Hong

Exploration Area

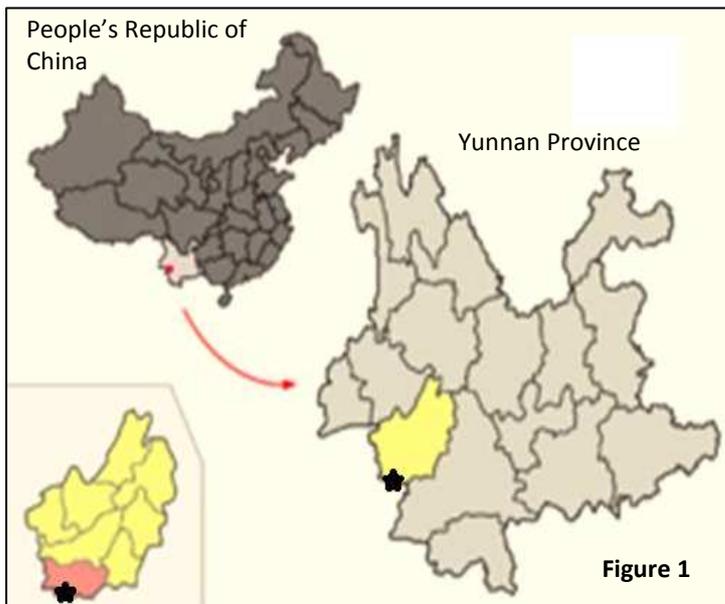
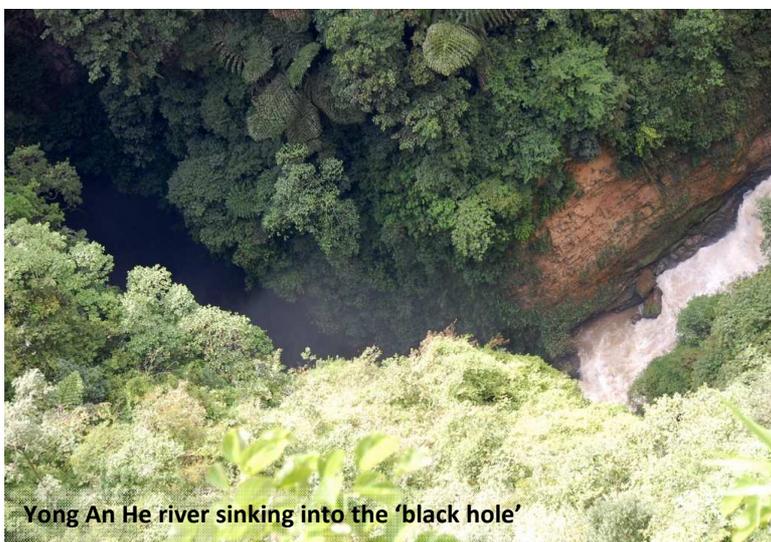


Figure 1

Figure 1: : Location of Cangyuan village (black star) within Cangyuan County and in relation to Lincang Prefecture (yellow), Yunnan Province (light grey) and the People's Republic of China (dark grey)

Part 1 - September 2012

I am leaning over a concrete road side barrier looking down into the narrow valley. Several hundred metres below, through the trees and undergrowth that hugged the steep valley sides, I could see the brown surging river sinking into a black hole in the mountainside.....



Yong An He river sinking into the 'black hole'

The photo shows the Yong An He river sinking into the 'black hole' as seen from the roadside concrete protection barrier. The photo was taken using a zoom lens.

We are in Cangyuan, Yunnan Province, south west China, a border town with Myanmar. It is the back end of rainy season (October) and we are familiarising ourselves with local topography and caving related places of interest.

For the past 20 minutes we have been driving along the side of a wide flat bottomed valley filled with lush green fields of sugar cane and grasses. On both sides the limestone towered, foliage clinging to the rock faces, adding to the overall green effect. It is truly beautiful scenery. The river was not visible to us, though we knew it ran along the edge of the other side of the valley. Soon, the road started to ascend. The valley looked like it was closing and we were heading for a pass. Our driver pulled over adjacent to a thick concrete protection barrier that was positioned to prevent cars going over the edge. This exposed point offered the only vantage point to see the river below sinking into a black hole.

A further five minutes up the road led to a turning onto a smaller, steeply descending road with a few cutbacks to arrive at the car park of one of the promoted highlights of Cangyuan; "Si Gang Li" showcave (pronounced 'sir garng lee'). The caretaker manager of the site (who lives here with his family) was there to greet us. I found him instantly agreeable. Smiling, polite, accommodating, why can't all cave custodians be like this! After the usual greetings we followed him on the well maintained path to the show cave entrance. Now, with the cliff face directly on our left we were certainly at the valley end point.

My expectation of show caves is usually quite low. However, this one impressed me from the start. It was a big entrance which appeared largely natural, except for the manmade concrete stairway built into the near side. An alcove behind a Buddha statue provided some fine examples of ancient rock painting in red dye. These pictographs are in a sheltered cave environment. There are several other locations in SW Yunnan where pictographs have been discovered, though many are on open cliff faces and badly weathered. (See image on the next page).

Descending the concrete stairway to level ground took some time. Looking back, the enormity of the cave struck home even more. The large arched shape of the entrance allowed daylight to illuminate the stairway which now resembled a thin ribbon in comparison to the overall cave passage size. Passing a side passage, where years of calcite growth had lowered the roof height to a mere few metres, we strode on to emerge in more cavernous cave passage. The ceiling became so high it was out of my light's view.

This section provided a treat of wide flat mud floor, abandoned gours and enormous columns (most standing, some fallen) flanked on one side by a rock wall of thin layered folded bedding. The tourist path ended ahead where a number of fine tall columns were lit up on a higher point.

Our primary objective on this trip was to explore the show cave's farther reaches. Two foreign cavers had visited a year earlier and conducted a pretty good survey leaving question marks for later exploration. The cave survey ended at a small inlet which fed a sump. The inlet source had not been pushed and there was a high level route that needed bolting. Most importantly, a draught was indicated!

We continued on (no more tourist lighting here), picking a way across a boulder field to arrive on massive, long abandoned, mudbanks. These sloped down to meet a noisy little river, which clearly did not have enough water in it to be the river we had seen sinking outside. Eagerly, we traversed up and down the mudbanks to follow the river route to the point where it met the expected sump.

We now endured those mixed feelings often acquired on exploration: excitement and disappointment rolled into one. The excitement stemmed from the significant draught that came out of the 'inlet' passage marked on the survey; indeed it was cold! The disappointment factor lay in the water level; it was much higher than when the survey had been made. Previously, the surveyors had walked along the inlet. Now, it only had air space of about one metre and a higher water line visible on the walls. One of the high level leads lay at the far (downstream) end of the sump which did not look inviting at all. It would have to be bolted whilst floating in the sump. However, fifty metres back in the dry passage a much more inviting second high level lead looked promising. Having scoped the options, we returned through the cave already charged with motivation for the next (true) caving trip.

High Level Dry Lead

Next day we returned, in full caving kit, to explore the cave in a little more detail. Some previously missed side passages

were surveyed, though all were dead ends. Fleur had the un-envious task of bolting up the high level lead in what turned out to be mud wall near the top. Pete and I followed, with the pleasure of exploration and surveying. The route was relic passage, containing the crusty layers consistent with being dry a long time. Initially walking sized, it twisted and reduced in size relatively quickly, with some stooping until arrival at a large conical mud mound. Although the mound went down into blackness we didn't survey any further. My face started to flush hot and it felt more difficult to breathe, signs of poor air quality. There was no draught here.

Despite the promising (downstream) direction it felt like a dead end and we back tracked out.

Exploring a *Tian Keng*

For the next few days we spent time exploring the local area, locating a number of sinkholes and exploring the depths of a '*tian keng*' (*Ed: a sinkhole*). Reaching the *tian keng* involved some organisation, which Liu Hong arranged. First, we were driven up to a local village. Here a tractor unit and guides were found to take all of us and our kit high into the hills. It was a bumpy and slippery ride, the narrow track snaking a route around the numerous tea fields. Despite wheel chains for traction on the greasy surface, one wheel of the tractor slipped off the road, causing us all to 'abandon ship' rather quickly. No-one wanted to become an accident statistic!

Thankfully, the vehicle didn't career down the steep hillside. However, with its' rear axle now sitting on the ground we had to abandon it. The track ended a few minutes ahead. We then walked another hour through dense forest to reach the location of the *tian keng*.

The locals prepared tea; the cavers prepared to drop the pitch. Walking around the perimeter, it was actually smaller than I was expecting, though clearly deep. Chris began to cut through the undergrowth and rig down while most of the others took photos and video. The rigging took some time to complete with several cavers descending the shaft.

Unfortunately, the base was fully choked and no leads elsewhere. Meanwhile, back at the tractor unit, a couple of the locals had been busy digging a hole under the axle and were waiting for numbers to return to help them push it back onto the track. With about 15 people available it was easily accomplished. On the return journey, the guides showed us several sinks and holes, some in large tree surrounded locations among the tea fields. Time was insufficient to check them thoroughly. A local has witnessed 'mist' exiting from one shaft during winter time.



Pictographs in a sheltered cave environment

Si Gang Li Wet Leads

Our only option now lay in the water leads in Si Gang Li showcave. The first objective was to float out to the far end of the sump to find a place to climb out of the water to start bolting up into the possible high level lead. The second objective was to go upstream in the inlet.

With a plan put together, lots of tackle was ferried into the cave in preparation and we began our adventure. As the only person with a neo fleece I had volunteered to enter the water with added buoyancy of an inner tube and attached to a rope. Not keen on deep water pursuits, I am not ashamed to say I was rather uneasy with the situation but someone had to do it! Sliding down the mudbank I entered the cold and horrible black pool. A current from the inlet proved enough to push me toward the sump proper. As I approached the far right wall I could see around the corner and witness the real (large) size of the pool. Thankfully, the rope stopped me floating off into it. At the far side there was no evidence of a high level route, no draught that I could detect and nowhere to get out of the water – another dead end for us.

Next day Chris, Fleur and myself returned to explore the inlet lead. We had to be careful here as the air clearance was only a metre at some points and the rainy season had not 'officially' ended. Rainstorms were still occurring and we had no facts related to reaction time.

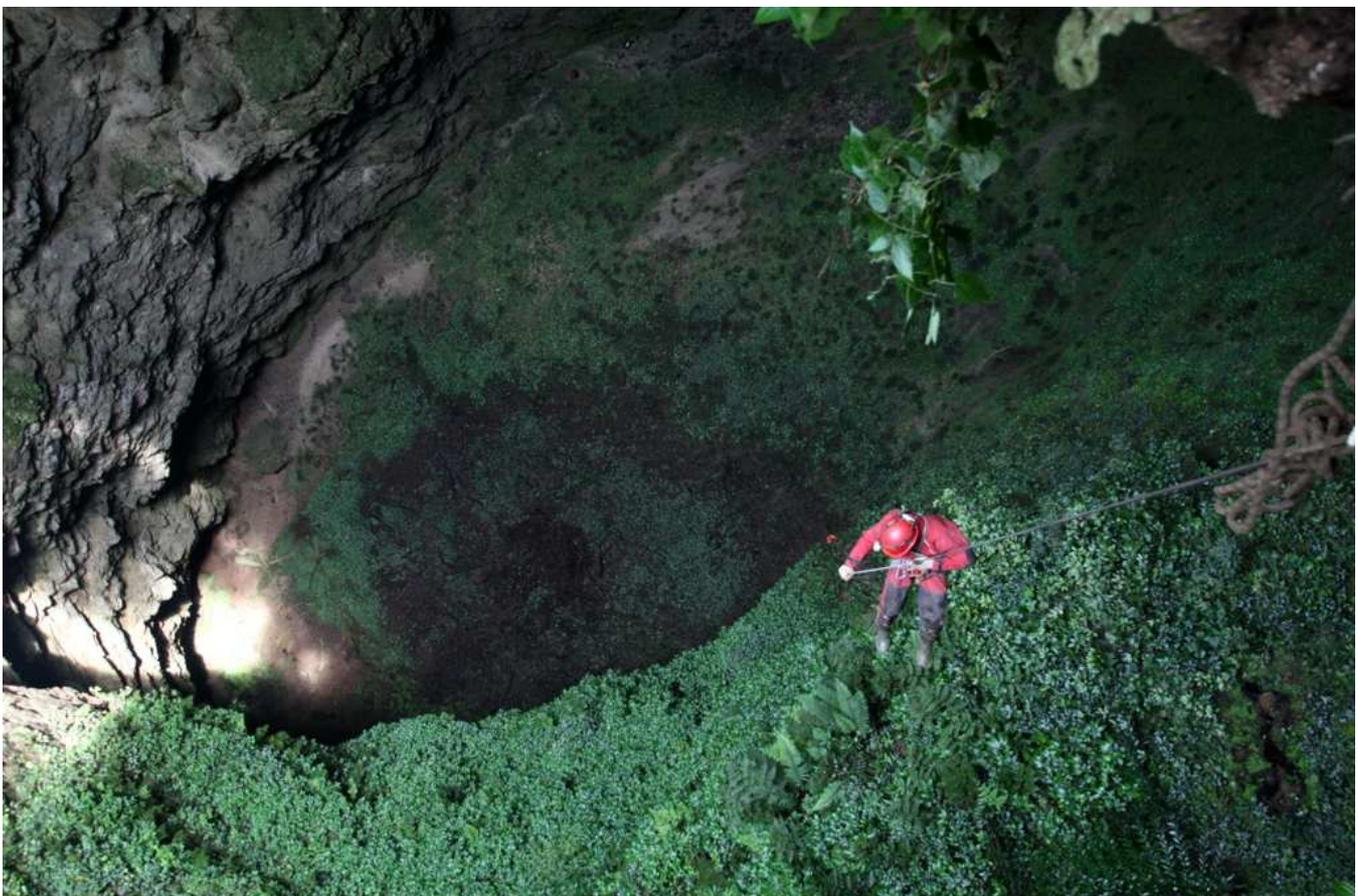
Armed with caution and my trusty inner tube, I entered the water and pulled myself along the wall against the current to rig a rope along the nearest wall. A rumbling noise in the distance became louder with progress; after approximately

80 metres I arrived at a small dry passage which I climbed into. After tying off the line and dropping off extra tackle, I waited for the others to join. Along the dry passage (clearly an overflow) we quickly arrived at a climb down to a deep narrow pool. Ahead could be seen a fearsome white chute of water crashing down and underneath us, creating the rumbling noise. A swim across the pool and climb up on ledges led into a short section of rift in front of the water chute, followed by a 3 metre wedge climb up to a large stone platform.

We had arrived in 'proper' river passage. River water raced toward us in a 3m wide rock channel, nosily diving below the water scoured platform on which we stood. Large mudbanks on the right half-filled the 10m high passage. It was draughting and we felt cold in it. In the distance an arch and pool were visible and beyond just blackness. The contemplation of what might be within that blackness excited us.

Trying to establish progress at river level proved impossible; the water force too great. Therefore, some time was spent trying to traverse along the right hand side in relative safety. Using a drill and bolts, Chris laid a safety line, though after placing several bolts it began to look a little too dangerous to continue. It didn't help losing the bag of bolts either!

The bummer was that two of us were leaving the next day, and with one another of our 4-man group unwell, there was no way it would be pushed further on this trip. Therefore, all the tackle was pulled out of the cave and the exploration came to an end.

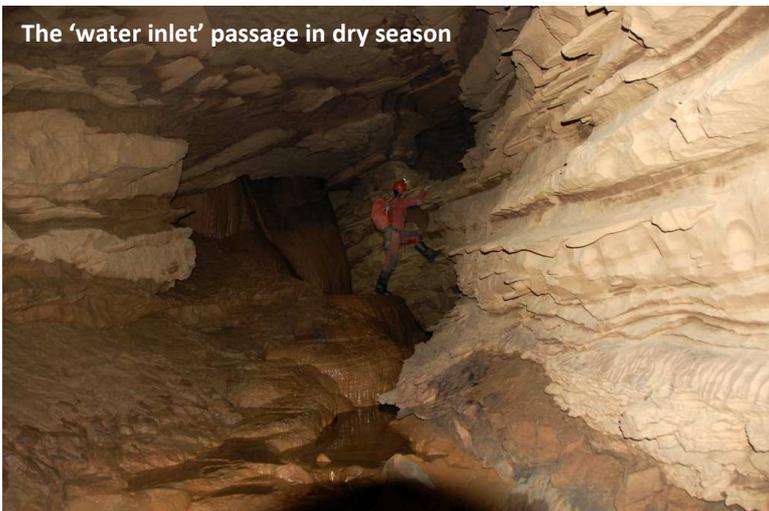


Part 2 - April 2013

An on-going river passage lead is great motivation to organize another trip, so just six months later, a slightly larger group assembled in Cangyuan on the promise of big river passage to explore. Deliberately, dry season was chosen for the return trip.... and dry it was. And hot. The wide flat bottomed valley that led to Si Gang Li filled with lush green fields on the last visit were now largely mostly stubby brown stalks.

We were quickly into the Si Gang Li cave. To me, it felt like my last trip had only been yesterday and I remembered every bump and boulder on the path. Past the end of the showcave route and on to the mud banks we could see the river bed below completely empty of water and the cave eerily silent in the absence of water.

On arriving at the sump, the inlet route, with the second river we had come back to explore, only had a small stream of water in it. Importantly there was still a draught. We negotiated a way down the slippery mud bank to stand in the floor of the passage which had presented such a challenge to us six months ago.



The 'water inlet' passage in dry season

Above, I could see the place where a line had been rigged to pull us through the water and, in the passage floor, see the gours described on the original survey. A sump remained in place a little further downstream. Much reduced in overall size, there was still no air space; no overhead leads were noted either. It had been hoped that a small air space may open up in drier months. Back in the inlet, we walked up the shallow gours to the end. A wide orange calcite 'boss' glistened in our lights as the trickle of water that fed the stream fell over it. Next to it was the climb.

Without water to float in, the climb up continuation proved a little exposed (undercut) therefore we placed a handline on it for safety. Beyond there was no water at all. The fearsome white water chute that had created such a noisy rumbling on the last visit was absent. Instead, the dry floor below glistened like it was full of tiny diamonds. Now, being the only route to get into the small rift ahead and climb up into the larger river passage, we had to drag our muddy caver overalls over the beautiful shiny surface.

We arrived on the stone cut platform. With no water to halt our progress we moved 'upstream'. Within five minutes I had found the bag of bolts lost on the last trip sitting in the riverbed; they were only a little rusty! The blackness we had looked into six months before was now illuminated with several powerful lights. Big passage, boulders in the floor, rock sculptures worn over time by fast water and still a draught. Survey equipment already out, we pushed on.

The route took a left turn, actually a junction, where a large mud filled passage continued ahead and up. The mud passage held the draught and we followed in, progressively more sandy going, until we hit a boulder chokeand bats. These bats were not small. More like the vampire kind as seen in horror movies. We had clearly disturbed them and they were flying all around our heads. As they escaped to quieter locations we managed to explore up into the boulder choke a little. Large boulders interspersed with loose debris and buzzing bats made progress difficult and no way on could be found. The draught remained elusive.

Returning to the dry river bed, we continued in the dry upstream channel. Not far ahead it reduced to a much smaller passage of around 4 metres high and 8 metres wide. I looked up at the roof and saw it 'move'; bats, thousands of them suddenly dropped from their roosts, flying around and passed us. We ducked down and remained motionless for a while to allow them enough space to escape. The air was thick with the smell of pungent bat guano and the floor covered in their black goo. It wasn't very thick though; the seasonal stream probably flushed everything out in the wet season. Almost immediately, we hit a second boulder choke (or maybe it is all part of the same one?). Again, a small draught, though this choke was a lot more compact with no space for a body to move through. Despite the initially large passage this lead was now dead so we completed the survey and headed out.

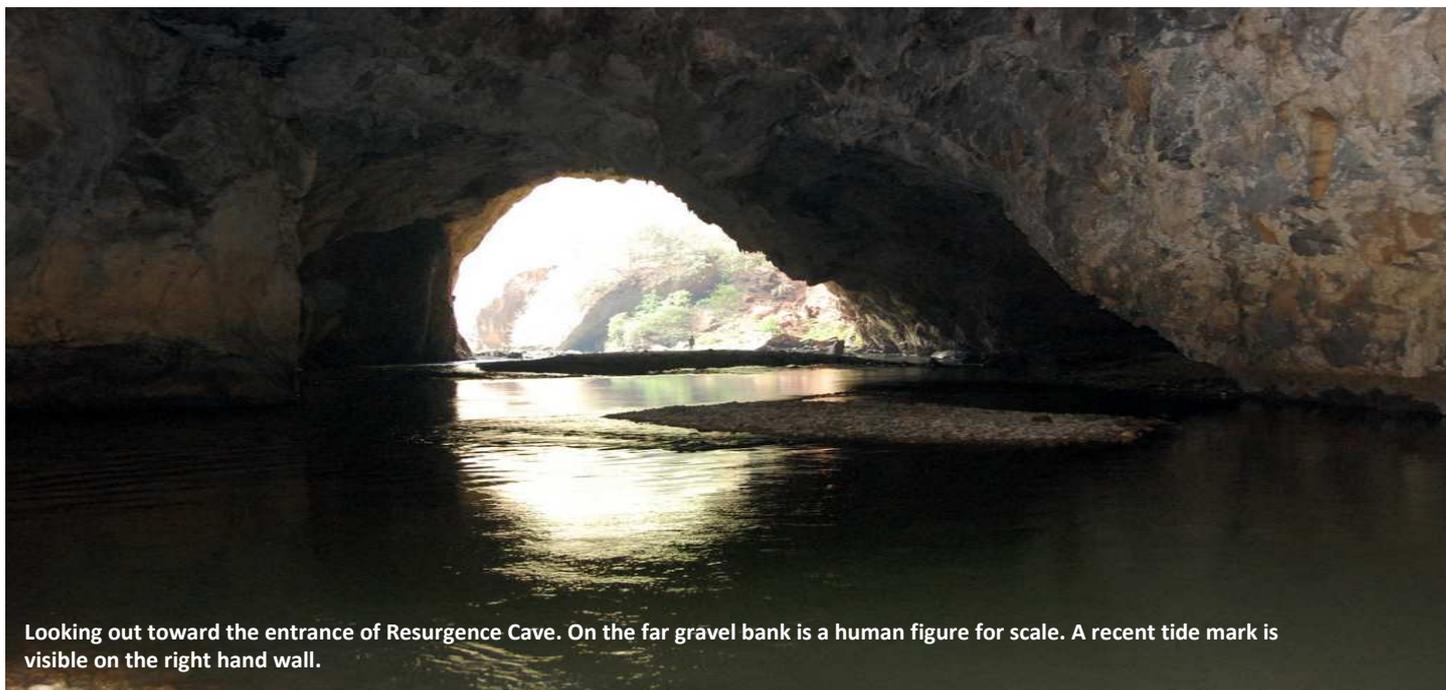
Back at the accommodation, the survey data showed the new passage heading back into the huge boulder choke in the main showcave. Later, a couple of the team were able to make a voice connection from upper to lower level. Trying to explain the draught still proved problematic though; maybe the temperature difference between the cave air and warmer air outside was creating its own air circulation?

Si Gang Li Resurgence Cave

A small team had managed to negotiate down to the black hole river sink, but found no way to enter the pit due to the amount of water going in. Our upstream leads were now all closed. However, several kilometres north of the showcave is a large resurgence. This is assumed to be the resurgence of the main river which sinks into the black hole (though there is no evidence to support this!). This now became the focus of our attention. A significant flow emerges from the resurgence cave developing into a wide though shallow

channel. There is a hydro power station nearby with a large diameter black pipe feeding it. However, the station appeared to be out of operation. An old narrow concrete aqueduct provided a path to reach the cave entrance.

Following the water and cobbles down the chamber led to a flatter area, consisting more of mud, and a large sump. Checking the water in the sump proved the flow was toward us - there must be more cave to the south. Whether this sump also fed the river was unclear, though it



Looking out toward the entrance of Resurgence Cave. On the far gravel bank is a human figure for scale. A recent tide mark is visible on the right hand wall.

Another spectacular cave entrance, 30 metres wide, 20 metres high and wider insidea large central gravel bank separated the river inside into two water channels before they combined again to cascade over boulders down to the surface river lower down. Despite only a water level at knee height, the water force proved quite strong. Ahead large passage beckoned and a draught blew from that direction.

Some large stalactites on one side of the passage all had a consistent slant toward the entrance indicating a considerable out draughting over time. We followed the water, up the boulder ruckle, toward a noise, to arrive in a massive highly impressive chamber where a large waterfall entered from daylight far on the right side. A pile of boulders, like a small hill (mound on the survey), sat on the floor of the chamber, providing a great panorama. The chamber looked approximately 100 metres wide x 100 metres long. Spray from the distant waterfall could be felt on our faces. The water split into several channels that ended up as two basic routes. One route to the river we had just followed in, the other down a gradual slope of boulders toward blackness in the floor.

Trying to get close to the waterfall provided a good soaking! Impressive as it was, the waterfall location did not look natural, too many blocky pieces of debris and an entrance hole consisting almost entirely of alluvium. Its' possible source created a mystery, as there was no river passed on the few kilometres drive from the show cave to this cave so where did the water come from?

did feed a second smaller sump under the east wall.

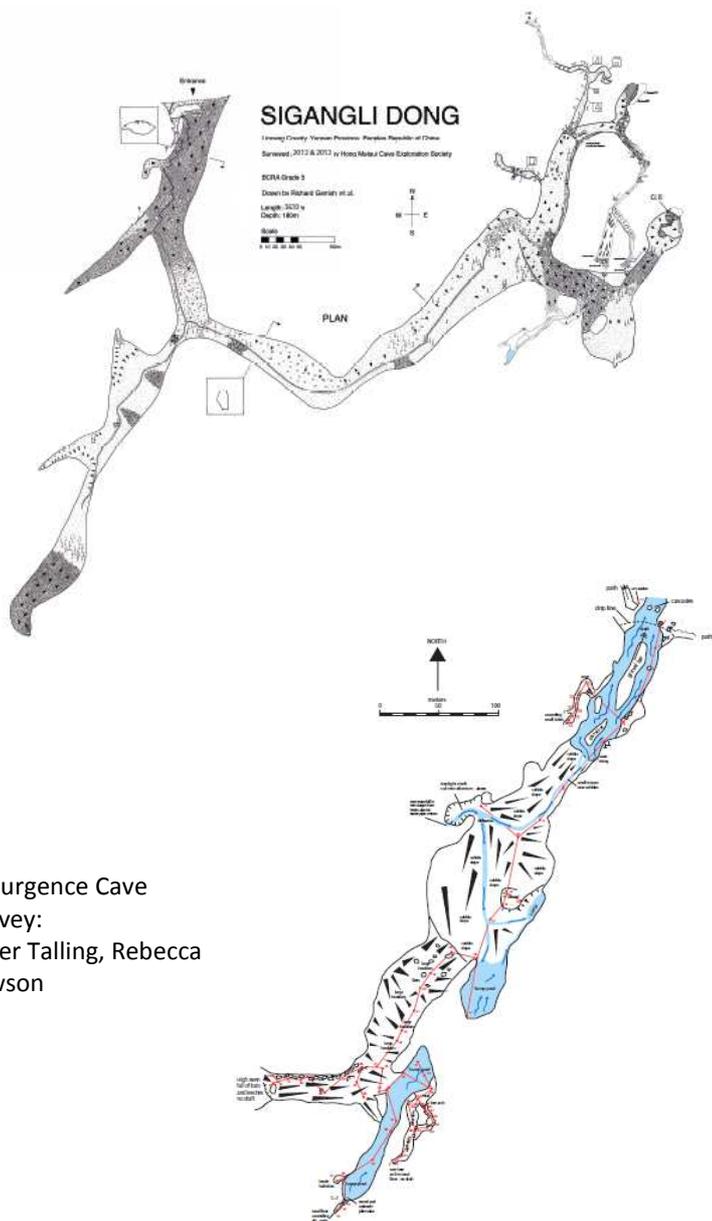
The way on was a wide, ascending mud and boulder slope trending in the same direction as the main cave passage. It soon levelled off, for a short distance, before arriving at a steep slope down to a pool and more ascending dry passage on the right. This dry passage proved quite steep. Much of the floor and large boulders were covered in bat guano. Cautiously, we made progress up one side wall until we reached a huge square fallen block at which point we marked a final survey station and headed back down; going on felt too risky without fixed aids.

We continued down beyond our previous entry point all the way to the pool. The wide pool looked deep and Rebecca swam across first, to a sandy 'beach' on the other side. Actually, after about five metres the pool was only waist deep, allowing us to wade along some of its' length. All ends were sumped with several smaller (now) dry passages off the sides. Flow was to the NNE, in line with the other two sumps, the entrance river and the streams witnessed in the show cave. This was the end of the navigable cave without diving.

Returning back outside we decided to try to answer the question of where the waterfall water originated. Following a track off the side of the road we found the top of the black hydro pipe and an aqueduct tunnelled through the mountain that was designed to feed it. Instead of entering the pipe the water was diverted into the hole to enter the cave. The showcave manager later

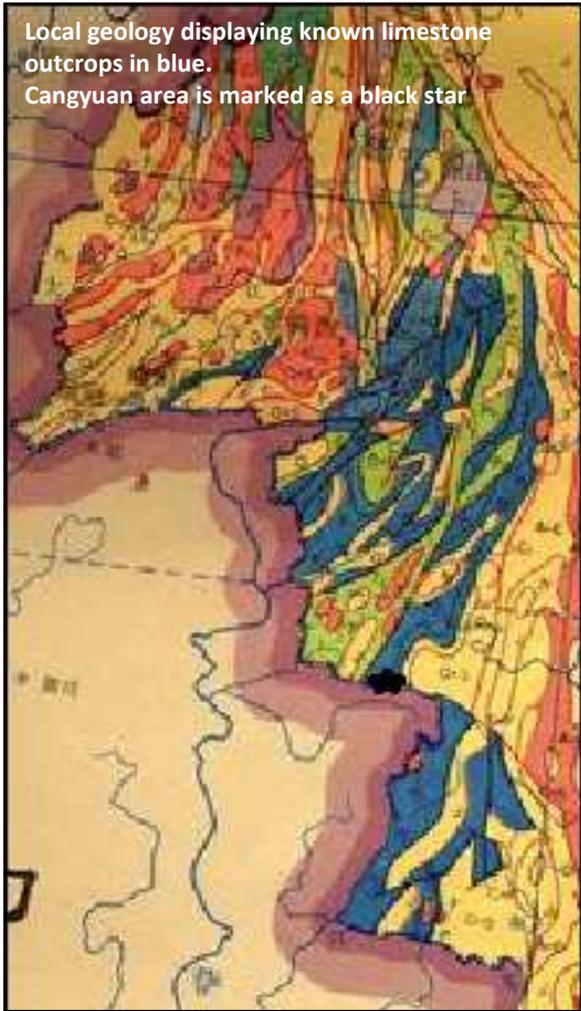
informed us the aqueduct runs from a far distant source where some of the main surface river water is diverted. It is quite a feat of engineering, even incorporating a completely enclosed aqueduct bridge across the road (we had wondered about that bridge!). I suspect that if the aqueduct didn't exist the large chamber in the resurgence cave would be a lake for most of the year.

Despite locating and relating the aqueduct, a sink, a rising and the massive showcave, the main river underground has still not been accessed. Motivation for another trip I wonder?



Resurgence Cave
 Survey:
 Peter Talling, Rebecca
 Lawson

Surveys of Si Gang Li and Resurgence Cave.
 There is a straight line distance of approximately 3 kilometers between the end of Si Gang Li and the most south west sump in Resurgence Cave and 4 kilometers from the black hole sink to the resurgence



Additional Information

Cangyuan Country has two main surface drainages; one to the west which is captured by the Thanlwin River (Myanmar) and one to the east captured by Lancang Jiang (Mekong River). The watershed is a north-south line starting approximately 10 km west of Cangyuan.

The river cascading into the black hole sink a few kilometers south of Si Gang Li showcave is Yong An He. It originates in the small mountains on the southern border of Cangyuan and Myanmar, forming part of this southern border line. The river is dammed south of Cangyuan town, creating a lovely lake with flow regulated via a number of gates across the plains beyond.

Yong An He flows north to meet Xiao He Jiang, which is the river that can be seen next to the road on the bus journey from Kunming to Cangyuan (S314). This east flowing river also marks a large part of the northern boundary of Cangyuan County. Finally, the waters join Lancang Jiang (Mekong River), forming the eastern boundary of Cangyuan County to flow south into SE Asia.

THE 6th ANNUAL J-RAT DIGGING AWARD *(Phil Hendy)*

The Hunters' Lodge Inn, at Priddy, was filled to overflowing with cave diggers and others on November 16th, for the 6th annual J-Rat Digging Award evening. Tony Jarratt was an obsessive cave digger, under Mendip and Scotland in particular, and after his death in 2008 it was decided to give an annual award for the digging team which had found the most passage in the previous year. It had to be properly surveyed and documented.

Last year, the Reservoir Hole team won, by a large margin, following their discovery of The Frozen Deep. This is now known to be Britain's largest cave chamber in terms of ground area. It is also extremely well decorated. Over the last twelve months they have found extensive extensions to the Frozen Deep by climbing high into the roof. It, therefore, came as no surprise when the team won the award again.

The high level extensions have been given names such as Ceiling Around, High Country, Magic Smoke and Skyfall. One scalloped passage is heading back towards Cheddar Gorge. There are some stunning formations there. Dingley Dell, the static sump, was dived in the summer. A cross-current of water was encountered, but the passage in each direction is too tight to enter. It is very close to the upstream end of Gough's River Cave. Following a rockfall at the end of the last diving session, which injured two cavers, no more diving has taken place, although the sump can be approached, with care, past the loose boulders.



Photo: "The Tuesday Diggers" by Paul Stillman

The cave is now accessible to visiting cavers under leader supervision. So far more than 250 cavers have looked around, and photographed, the new system.

On Western Mendip, the Axbridge Caving Group is looking for the lost Hutton Cavern, which was found by ochre miners and described by the Reverend Catcott in 1756. It contained a large quantity of Pleistocene bones. This, and other nearby bones caves, were used by Catcott to 'prove' the occurrence of Noah's Flood, and that the Earth was only 6,000 years old. The bones of African animals such as hyena and hippotamus clearly had to have been washed



north and into the caves by the Flood. The cave was lost by 1828.

Recent digging has opened several small holes such as Primrose Cave and Maytree Cave. A horse tooth, dated at 200,000 years, agrees with the age of bones found in Hutton Cavern. It seems that these small caves are art of the same system. A Hymac has been used to dig between them, uncovering a steeply-inclined bedding plane, possibly the top of Hutton Cavern. Reportedly 100 feet deep, there is a long way to go.

Moving east, Andy Sparrow and members of Cheddar Caving Club have been digging below the blind pots in Rod's Pot at Burrington. They have found some larger passage than is usual in Rod's, and have dug through an ascending unstable mud hole, with around 130 feet of passage leading almost under the entrance. It is hoped to connect the cave to nearby Drunkard's Hole – it has already been linked to Bath Swallet – and there is only 135 feet to go, along a tight draughting rift.

At Charterhouse, Chris Binding and others have been digging for three years in Semicostratum Ruckle in Grebe Swallet. Explosives have been used to open a Neptunian Dyke and they are now in an area of boulders and voids with a strong inwards draught.

Many members will know that the river which flowed down Cheddar Gorge last winter, causing it to close, was the result of stream sinks in Longwood Valley becoming blocked. The problem was resolved by work, carried out by volunteer labour from the caving community, organised by Linda Wilson, the conservation officer of CCC Ltd and from Somerset Wildlife Trust. As the weather improved, the diggers were able to excavate the main sink at Longwood Swallet, so it takes all the normal stream flow. Dams and an improved entrance have been installed at Longwood Valley Sink, so this should be able to cope with excess water in the valley. It is likely that this old dig will be restarted.

On the hill above Longwood Valley Sink, Toothache Pot is a mine shaft. First dug over 30 years ago by Tuska, it is now being tackled by Robin Gray and members of the Cheddar club. Once an active swallet, at 50ft they entered natural rift cave. Explosives have been used to take the depth to 79ft, but the shaft is narrowing and water ponds above a soft clay floor.



Photo: Longwood Valley Sink. Western Daily Press

Just off Cheddar Gorge is Bone Hole, where many bones, including those of humans, have been found. The Mendip Caving Group started a high level dig near the entrance in 2008. Called Perforation Choke after the numerous small injuries sustained by the diggers, around 330 feet of draughting passage has been opened. It is well-placed between the ends of Charterhouse Cave and Reservoir Hole, and on the same fault line as Spider Hole. The dig is now below road level. Near this spot, during the 1968 floods, a 5 foot fountain of water erupted from below the road, so the lower levels of the dig could flood after heavy rain.

At Spider Hole, over the last three years, members of the Wessex have entered a 66 foot deep rift, which at the bottom has been dug and stabilised for another 72 feet. The team is now digging horizontally along the fault and following a draught – hopefully to Reservoir Hole.

Further down the Gorge, attempts are being made to enter the lower end of the Gough's River Cave. Duncan Price and others have reassessed the sump in Saye's Hole, and the diver's exhaled air bubbles can be seen emerging at the

First Feeder, just below Gough's Cave. Here, loose boulders have been removed until the summer water level was reached, but the way on is too tight to enter, and now the river is active again, further digging will have to wait until next summer. It seems strange to me that the hole to the right of the resurgence, which has the strongest flow and is nearest to Saye's, has not been investigated.

Near the top of Ebbor Gorge, the Templeton diggers have reached a depth of 200 feet, and a tight rift opened in the floor has put an end to flooding problems. The passage leading to the parallel shaft found in 2012 has been widened, in readiness for installing steel infrastructure to allow the digging of rocks from the floor. It is hoped that Templeton will be the link between Wookey Hole and the Priddy swallets that drain there.

Down the hill at Lower Milton, for many years members of the Bristol Exploration Club have been digging Hallowe'en Rift, which is probably part of the Wookey Hole system. Started in 1982, it has been abandoned and restarted several times. The diggers are generally following a draught, and some low level tubes have been excavated to gain entrance to small decorated chambers with names such as Merlin's Magic Milk Parlour and Toil and Trouble. One bison bone has been found dated to 52-54,000 years old. The end dig is now in a descending bedding plane.

On Eastern Mendip, Rusticle Hole has been opened by Graham Price, members of the Cerberus Speleological Society and others as a new entrance to Witherbrook Slocker. Several leads are being dug, and around 115 feet of passage has been found this year. The same club is digging an active sink at Blake's Farm Swallet. This depression has at least four places where water sinks underground. It is known to resurge in Ashwick Grove. When the entrances have been stabilised some serious digging will commence.

Despite the gross overcrowding and some technical difficulties, the evening was a great success, although in view of its popularity, it may be time to consider relocating to a larger venue such as the Village Hall. Many at the back could not see or hear, and the bar was filled with those who could not get into the Long Room. Even after the presentations from various digging teams, it was almost impossible to see the displays at the back of the room – these in themselves contributed to the overcrowding. It is a pity that some of the sound accompaniments to the various Powerpoint presentations would not work on the system provided, though all enjoyed the video of a digging team setting off to the 'Hi-Ho' song, and the intimacy of digging in (I believe) Grebe Swallet.

No major new discoveries are expected in Reservoir Hole next year, so the winner of next year's J-Rat Award is anybody's guess. Digging continues all over and under Mendip, with every team certain that it is only a matter of time before their name is engraved on the trophy. Digging is by its very nature a pastime for optimists.

DRAKELOW SHADOW FACTORY (*Nigel Graham*)

From time to time WCC members, like most cavers, visit somewhere off the beaten track of natural caves and former underground quarries. The Shadow Factory / RSG at Drakelow, in Worcestershire, is particularly unusual.

Drakelow was a small, mid-19C village built all-new on Wm. Hancock's Blakeshall Estate, but by 1940 it was largely abandoned and derelict.

As World War Two threatened, then broke out, engineering production was dispersed from obvious Luftwaffe targets in major industrial areas, and four underground factories were built. One was in an unfinished London Underground Railway tunnel, another in Dudley's underground limestone quarries (but uncompleted before air raids ceased, so never used); the 2-million+ square feet Spring Quarry complex at Corsham (Wilts) – and in the sandstone hill at Drakelow for the Ministry of Aircraft Production.

some places are slightly higher-level cavities for ventilation plant which, together with entrance air-locks, ensured efficient ventilation.

The tunnels also accommodated such services as stores, offices, canteen, toilets and medical rooms, ancillary plant and a billiards room. A 1940s photograph* of one of the machine-shops, well-lit under a white ceiling, could have been taken in any ordinary factory, with rows of milling-machines and a large radial drill, as the lack of windows is not obvious.



Photo: Tommo

In July 1941, eleven months after trial boreholes, the car company Rover was able to move machinery into the Drakelow tunnels and start making military aero-engine parts. The underground and ancillary surface buildings were completed and Rover in full production by late 1943.

The main tunnels are 19ft wide by about 18ft high; running parallel for about one-sixth mile to dead-ends, are all on the external road level, and connected by several cross-tunnels. Most of the tunnel surfaces are un-lined; the rock was sealed with silicon, then painted white. In Wessex Cave Club Journal 330

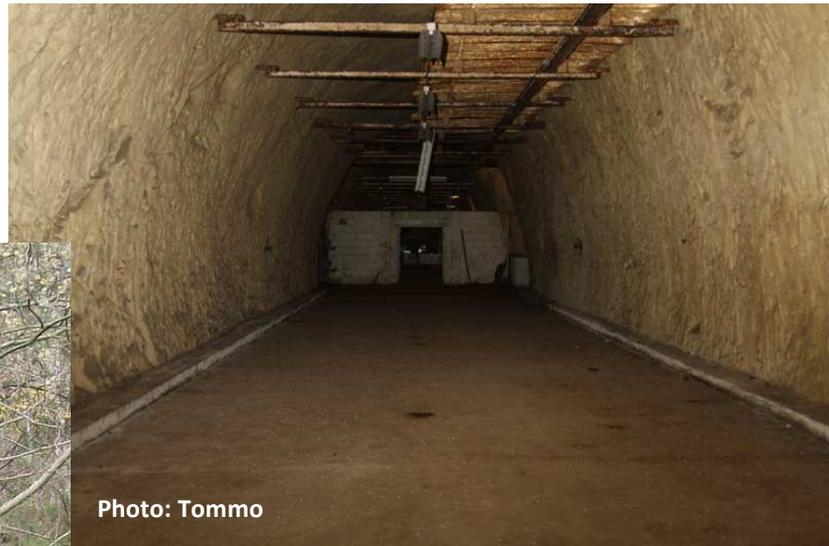


Photo: Tommo

In 1944, the Government gave the major surface buildings including a staff hostel to the United States of America Air Force. Parts of the tunnels became RAF Stores, isolated from Rover's area, with separate entrances.

Drakelow's last wartime component was a "master connecting-rod" (for a radial-cylinder aero-engine, in pre-jet days), on 13 February 1946. Post war, the Midlands car manufacturers generally reverted from defence to motor-cars. Drakelow's run-down started in 1945, yet some aircraft-engine parts were made there until the mid-1950s. By 1958, "Drakelow Depot" was just a military store.

Then came the stand-off between NATO West and USSR East and the threat of nuclear war. The UK Government organised its Civil Defence force accordingly, dividing the nation into Regions supervised from Regional Seats of Government. Some had code-names like 'Turnstile' (Corsham – the intended National SG). Drakelow, still in Government hands, thus became RSG 9, running the Midlands as Defence Region 9.

As an aside, I recall a school friend in 1963 showing me a Civil Defence handbook – which he should not have done! I think his father was a CD member. I recall only a diagram of the range of a 50-megaton explosion, giving physical effects out to, I think, 50 miles. If so, an air-burst high

enough above Yeovilton Air Station for the blast to clear the intervening hills would have, at least, badly damaged Wells Cathedral, about 25 miles away...



Photo: Tommo

As RSG 9, the depot changed considerably in nature, and now housed representatives of key Ministries and the Services as well as a small BBC studio. Land-line communications relied on the General Post Office (a Civil Service department until the 1960s) and there is a certain aptness in the RSG's radio mast above the tunnels being on an Iron-Age hill-fort.

Cold War policy and strategy was necessarily fluid. Under the 1980s Conservative Government's 'Home Defence Review' (1980) Drakelow's occupied area was reduced but refurbished and enhanced as "Regional Government Headquarters 9.2". All the remaining surface buildings including the Drakelow village fragments were demolished, furthering the camouflage. Among the new works was a pair of diesel-generating sets for use in emergency (war!) – though rationing the 4-6 week fuel store would have left the canteen with just one water-boiler and hotplate to serve up to 140 people!



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A chilling human aspect is that for the staff from various Government departments and military liaison officers, all volunteers, no concessions would be made to those with families. They would not be sealed in throughout, only when a nuclear attack was imminent, occurring or had occurred, when they would stay underground until



Photo: Tommo

outside conditions were safe enough for them to emerge.

A 1990s review proposed closing Drakelow, but the unexpected end of the Cold War intervened so RGHQ 9.2 and its surrounding property, as with other such sites, were sold.

The complex is now maintained for its owner by a 'Friends' group and open to organised tours, like the April event for caving clubs. Sadly thieves and vandals have stripped a lot of fixed equipment not removed by the Government or decayed by damp and time. The generators are run to provide some lighting but otherwise we had to rely on caving lamps or torches.

Nevertheless, the site retains enough artefacts to be more than a mere shadow of a Shadow Factory / RSG and is well worth visiting if you can. The IT buffs will like the top-of-the-range Commodore PETs and the manual GPO Telephone Exchange with its lovely wooden console. A good deal of the cafeteria remains intact, but the medical rooms are just that – bare rooms – and the main factory tunnels are empty.

I'm surprised so few of us from the Club went: Les Williams, whom we thank for organising the WCC's inclusion, Dave King, Barry and Marion Wilkinson (our Chauffeurs), Tommo and I.

Acknowledgement.

The above history is from Paul Stokes' well-produced book, *Drakelow Unearthed – The Secret History of an Underground Complex*, revised edition, 2004. The photograph(*) is one of its many then-and-now illustrations and diagrams.

HAVING THE UPPER HAND (*John Gisborne*)

"Oxbow's? Rescue you later..." was the cheery but ever-so-slightly serious changing room comment from Bean, as I set out for my first trip into the more intricate, and sometimes tighter, passageways of Swildon's Upper Series some months ago.

I laughed nervously, but fortunately, a 44-inch chest has only proved to be a marginal and periodic handicap when exploring this popular, but under-visited series of Mendip's most popular cave. As most cavers rush for the Sump or Short Round Trip in a bid to prove their mettle, The Oxbows in the Upper Series are worthy of a closer look and, as some of the most recent discoveries in Swildon's history will testify, you never know what you might find...

Now, to write an article on the Upper Series in a journal that is read by some of those who discovered it is a challenge, not helped by the fact that I don't have any other major breakthroughs of my own to report this month! However, if you're like me and caving memories date back to the scouts when everything was bigger and seemed less complex, this little trip guide refresher might make for an amusing hour (or two).

My favourite route into The Oxbows begins just into the Wet Way on the left hand side, a short distance downstream of Showerbath Chamber. A one knee-down crawl quickly gives way to a fifteen foot, keyhole-shaped tube, where the trick is to stay as high as possible and keep one arm below. As an introduction to tubes, this section is fairly committing but actually looks much worse than it is.

After emerging into a reasonably sized chamber, you have two options. To continue downstream (a little water from the entrance in wetter weather flows here) into the Upper Oxbow, re-joining the route at the Oxbow Junction or, my preference, to squeeze under the far wall to the left on your back into the Butcombe Chamber.

Butcombe Chamber was only discovered by a Wessex team in the 1980's and can be climbed to some height (watch for the hanging delights above) before squeezing through into a parallel rift which forms the limit of exploration but trending towards New Renascence. If your only desire for Butcombe is when you get out, then head downhill under the right hand wall and make your way down to Oxbow Junction by sliding over the boulders. At Oxbow Junction you have several options. Turn left uphill and squeeze over some stal knobbles into a pleasant little chamber from which it helps to do a headstand on the way out.

Alternatively, bridge up the smooth flowstone wall ahead of you for an interesting and quite exposed climb that

ultimately terminates in a small, but decorated chamber at high level.

There is also an interesting upward trending phreatic tube running parallel to the wall, to explore on the way down. If this isn't enough, head downhill, under the stal wall ahead to begin the tighter route into the Lower Oxbow. I confess that this is too tight for me until I either get braver or learn to like dinner a little less. However, if this is your thing, you can bypass the next part of the trip and make your way direct to the lowest entrance of the Oxbow series, entered from the Water Chamber.

For the more normal, turn right and head back down to re-join the main streamway just above the Lavatory Pan. As you lower yourself back down to stream level, there is the option to climb higher on the left and squeeze into a chamber, from which a further squeeze through a small hole (one arm back) gives rise to a hanging rope which marks the climb up to Cistern Dig, high above the main stream.

The final part of the journey begins with a climb on the left (as you head downstream) in the Water Chamber. Head up the wall (take care) and join the lowest section of The Oxbows. It is here that you pass, on your left, the other entrance to the continuation of the Lower Oxbow – very tight. Ahead, through a dug section, and on your left down an excavated tube heads into the Lowbow. I can just about get around the corner at the lowest level in a puddle, but no further. A voice connection can be made from here to the passageway ahead which marks the other side of the squeeze.

From now onward you have several options to make your way back out from the Water Chamber. You can consider the Dry Ways, with the option of a detouring through the interesting squeeze up into the New Grottoes, and perhaps visiting the Zigzags en-route. Alternatively head back up the Wet Way and try the Upper Oxbow (and exciting T-shaped vadose trench) from the other side and back through the keyhole passage to where we started, just into the Wet Way.

At the end of all this, I can promise you several things:

- You will be tired
- You will feel better about Eastwater
- You will have gained yet more appreciation for the Upper Series

I am very grateful for endless patience of John Cooper in teaching me this series and whose comments of it being "Good exercise innit?" as my hat is stuck and a stalactite wedged in my armpit, have kept me from stages of near panic.

CAVING IN ANDALUCIA – August 2013 (Noel Cleave)

(Photos by Chris Binding)

Saturday 10th August

Chris Binding organised an SRT emergencies training revising day on the Wessex Cave Club tower at Upper Pitts. This was attended by Rich Carey, Mike Waterworth, Noel Cleave, Josh Bratchley, Mike Moxon (MCG) & Dave Barrow (MCG).

Mike arrived virtually on time, an almost unique occurrence occasioned by the fact that he was in someone else's four wheels and not on his own two. He was, however, his normal self and was bearing the most unbelievable Warmbac oversuit, which was 90% Grebe Swallet mud, heavily sprayed onto the fabric background. It was wet. The word "Festering" is lurking in there. Disregarding our suggestions that he pressure jet it in the washing bay, he prodded and shook it from time to time during the day: ineffectually. Meanwhile Chris rigged the Dangle, Strangle and Tangle spider's web and provided a length of ex-digging rope for cutting practice. So, we practised and cut it. This was hugely instructive and hugely valuable - we simply do not do enough of this basic emergency training.

Nobody fell, but Rich Carey managed to pull an elbow or arm tendon very painfully, so downgraded to spectator status. Andrea appeared later, suffering from a lurgy, and opted for indoors-on-the-sofa-with-pills status. The rest of us progressed from getting bodies off the rope to getting them out of the cave with different pulley configurations and techniques - again, and immensely valuable session.

Sunday 25th August. A full day!

I got off the ferry at Santander at 1800 on Saturday, then got out of Sima Villaluenga at 1800 on Sunday. In between I did 640 miles and had two hours sleep. The others arrived at Malaga airport in good time, collected their bags and then went looking for the car rental. We wandered around trying to spot the desk. We asked and were told that it was upstairs.... Eventually we gave up and telephoned the number given and, in my best Spanish, asked where they were. I was told that there was a lady with a board, in arrivals. We managed to get back in, and found her. She told us that we had to get a courtesy bus to their depot; finally the bus arrived and took us to collect our car. Put the SatNav in the car, and, two hours later, arrived at Villaluenga.

Everyone to Sima de Villaluenga, which is all of 300 yards from the hostel, a massive shaft draining the enclosed Villaluenga valley. Great technical pitches and pitch heads, with a classic 50 metre free-hang. There were a few problems with hangers and rebelay in bags. Nice Echo! Chris' camera (brand new) decided to leap to its death, the full distance.



Got into a lovely rhythm going up the shaft. For a big fat flabby, Mr Carey climbs rope rather quickly.... i.e. faster than me.

Came out knackered and back to base to meet Miggy (Ed. Miguel Tome - MCG) who was looking worried because Pete (Bennet) and Tim (Francis) (Ed. Both MCG) were late, very late, coming out of Sumidero de la Ollya. They occasioned a call-out and inconvenienced our beer drinking. On Holiday. We had to get our sweaty caving clothes out, put on heroic expressions, only to find two spectacularly muddy rescues by the roadside. Plus they now want us to de-rig their ropes tomorrow.



Sunday August 25 2013 (Pete Bennet)

Was not as pleasant a trip down Sumidero de la Ollya this year as it was last year. Covered in shit right down to the bottom. So much so that we had to dig out the tackle bags that we had taken down the previous year. Perhaps not a good idea as this stirred up some organic matter releasing bad air. We both had headaches for a bit, but luckily the air cleared. Hot and sweaty on the way out, and particularly slippery as we were covered in shit. Not too bad in the squeeze hole, but we'd had enough in the entrance series. Came out surprised that Miggy wasn't there, as it felt late..... then the cavalry arrived as we had underestimated the time we'd be underground.

Monday 26th August. Sumidero de la Ollya

"Fun" trip down Sumidero de la Ollya, lots of potholes, lots of mud. I can't think what Tim and Pete were on about. A classic series of beautiful pitches, all short, all deliciously off-vertical with fun take-offs, and challenging rigging. Coming up was much more fun with our Jumars, Crolls and Pantins jammed with something resembling old Mars Bars,

ropes like thin linear turds, and air finely filtered to induce panting and headaches.

Josh de-rigged the cave from minus 325m back to about minus 120m with the help of Mike M, Leonie and Chris. Passed Mike Moxon (MCG) and Leonie Woodward (MCG) somewhere on the way. We were out on our scheduled time (of course), although I managed to **abandon** my hand-jammer on one of the roomy entrance footholds (Chris rescued it later). Truly one of the more golden threads in life's rich tapestry..... not. Good fun, really, about 6 hours underground.

Chris lost his kit bag and camera bag in Ollya yesterday.

Tuesday 27th August. Sima Republicano

Mega Fabuloso. Drove right to entrance, across river bed. What's not to like: pre-rigged by the Spanish, huge passages, clean-washed, sculpted pale limestone, multiple pitches and traverses, fun pitch heads. We spread out somewhat on the way in, then re-coalesced as we came out, de-rigging the verticals.

Wasps on the surface and various people were stung. Later, went shopping in Ubrique. Road has stunning views and a Mirador. Aldi for wine, beer and nibbles.

Wednesday 28th August

The Great Invisible Didn't Happen through trip.

We'll call it the Sistema Hundidero-Gato, in code, to disguise it. Almost a non-event in fact. By virtue of some heavy handed arm twisting and persuasion (with some help from Miggy who minimised the financial risks involved), the event was emphatically not "Non". Chris was in serious worry mode on the matter of bureaucratic correctness and the landscape being littered with Park Rangers in go-anywhere vehicles, so we minimised our exposure to public gaze as we entered and left.

In between all this, we had a fantastic through trip. Several short pull-through pitches, numerous canals and lakes to swim through, a world-class mud wallow, giant chambers, formations to blow one's mind and several kilometres of hiking in humungous passages. Near enough 3 miles in 3 hrs 45. Once again the wine box colostomy bags proved their worth as flotation aids for people and packs. Chris and Jack floated on rubber rings, not always with complete stability. Swimming in wellies is surprisingly tiring, the frog kick useless; a stately breast stroke worked best. Towards the end, Mike W steamed off ahead. Noel plodded behind

to the exit. Perhaps this might be due to the 51 year age gap?

Thursday 29th August. Sima Cacao

A cast of thousands, most days.... Rich rigged the 70 metre entrance shaft in sections to the ledge, where Chris took over to the bottom of the cave. Chris; "Some oversight by me, completely forgetting the bottom pitch. Robbed some ropes to jerry-rig it I doubt if anyone will notice when the rest of the team visit tomorrow".

Slid down some boulders into the main shaft, and my first thought was... I'm pretty sure I can do a changeover and get straight back out!!! Followed by, what other sports



should I pick up to replace caving.....? Yes, it's fair to say I was feeling the gear; watching Josh bounce his way down the other rope alongside me, helped me to follow him down! At the bottom I was blown away by the beautiful chambers. Awesome! Until that point it was a very silent trip. Once there we took some photos of the fantastic stal.

On the way back up, Richard kept me cool by showering me with drops of sweat. Well done to Richard for his rigging skills, but next time it would be good for the re-belays to go a bit more sideways in order to stay dry! A very rewarding trip - 4 ½ hours.

Thursday August 29 2013

Chill-Out day for Mike M, Leonie, Mike W and Noel. Went to Ubrique to shop and get cash. Only so-so successful.... as machine refused to give Noel more than 400 Euros and the bank teller refused his Visa without a passport. Had coffees instead and shopped in Aldi before returning to base to

dump shopping (ie put beers in 'fridge). Then on to a remarkably unshowy "Show Cave" - Cueva de la Pileta. Illumination was by hand-held lanterns; they were hyper-inadequate. Pileta would be a brilliant 'olé with some serious lighting. UK Elf and Safety would have ten hissy fits about the steps and handrails. Here and there were cave paintings and strange graffiti from the ancient Andalucian Caving Club.

With a day's caving under our belts we went to Gato to put some food there, too. Rich's recommendation was spot on - definitely a good nosherie. Afterwards we ambled down to the pretty pool below the Gato exit waterfall, but the weather was cool and the water cooler, so only Mike W went in..... repeatedly..... from the high jump rock. Eventually the water God confiscated his mask. As the author snoozed, Mike M and Leonie went upstream into Gato (without any kind of permit), courtesy of Leonie's ½ candlepower headlamp, hunting for a missing neoprene sock. No sock, but eventually, on his final plunge, Mike W found his mask and emerged triumphant and absolutely freezing....

Thursday 29th August

Josh had a quick trip down Sima Villaluenga again to recover Chris's camera that he dropped a few days ago. Josh went first, rigging, with Chris behind, Rich following. The route was the main pitch alternative, left from the horse and down the 60 metre main shaft. Eventually Chris found the camera, on a boulder ledge 20 metres down, but on the way up. He swung over to it by using his bits bag as an anchor and pendulumed back. Camera is kaput, but the SD card is OK. Battery nowhere to be found.

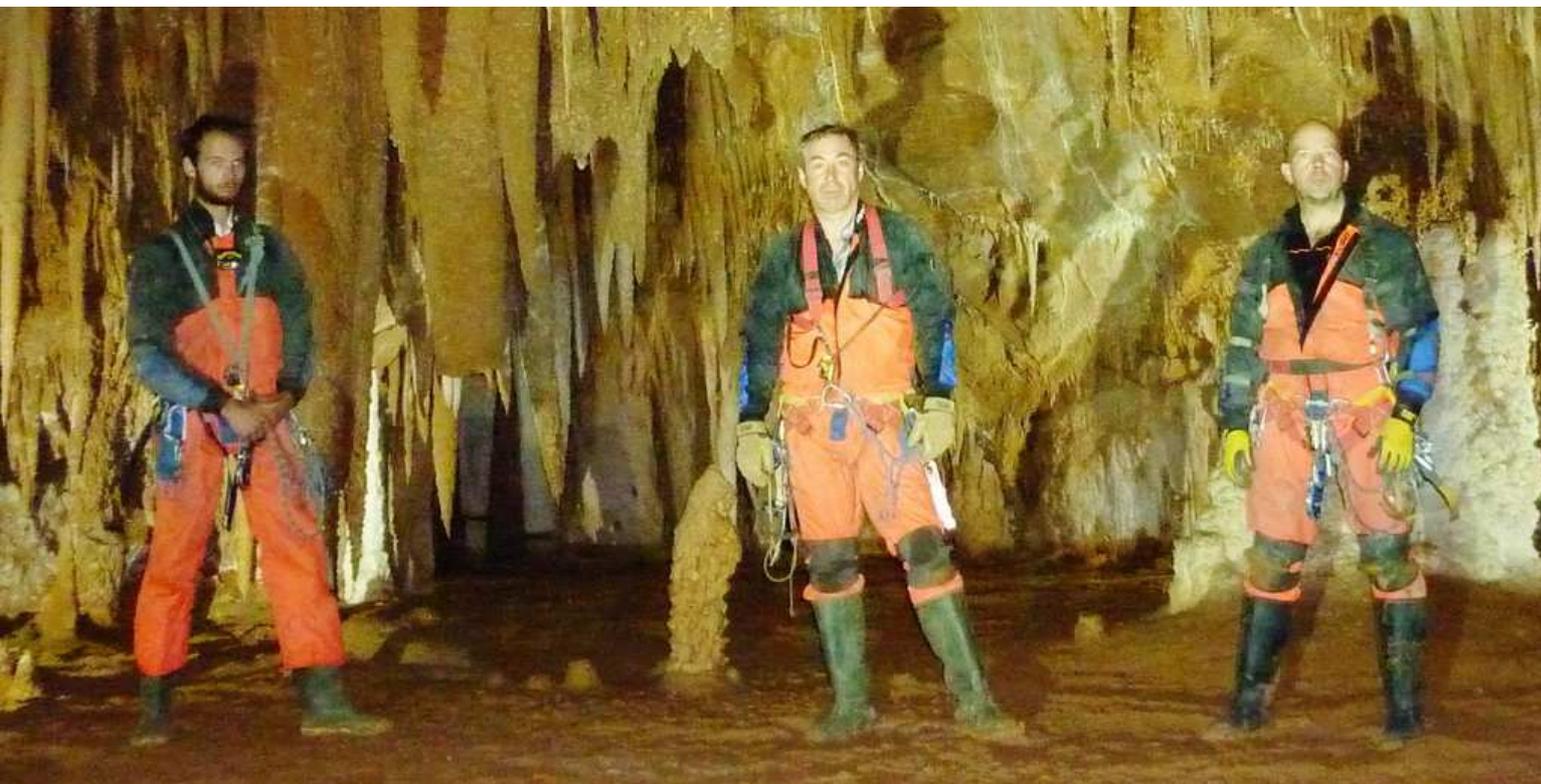
Hiked up to Sima Cacao somewhat alone. Looked up at the portal above the bull-ring and took the slope straight. This was quick, but meant that I missed the vital right turn back on the proper path. Scrambled on and up and discovered (?) an enticing cleft, shaft, by a wall. Miggy knew nothing of this so Sima Noel remains uninvestigated.

Reached Cacao with Ross Wheeler (MCG) and found that I had left my upping croll back at the ranch. Ross then told an absolute whopper, that he had a spare for just such an event, fitted it to me and sent me down the shaft. And Sima Cacao lived up to the hype: it is glorious! A super, day-lit shaft with lots of rebelays, then a series of stal slopes for walk-down rigging with scenery to die for. I put 10 metres of rope in at the bottom to slightly improve tape and waist loop bodge-up there. Then wandered around doing the oohing and aaahing until Jack Overhill (MCG) arrived (on something of a high after mastering the SRT down) and told me that Ross didn't actually have a spare kit.

So I rocketed back up, passing Leonie and Mike at the balcony ledge. At the top, no Ross, so I sat in the sun feeling thoroughly guilty and thoroughly grateful. I had brought up some beers, and slightly assuaged my conscience by distributing them to the beer drinkers. Leonie went one better, trickling Heineken from the can down the shaft for first Mike and then Rich to catch some. Finally everyone emerged and the cave was derigged.

Saturday 31st August. Sima Cacao

Trip up to Sima Cacao to give Ross the experience he nobly gave up yesterday. Chris, Ross, Rich, Josh into cave; Sherpas Noel, Dave, Andrea. A hot hike up but a lovely place to spend a few hours chilling out (in + 35°C) and reading while



Friday 30th August

Chris, Josh, Rich and Ross were underground. Andrea came

up for the walk, but went back down to help clear the dorms. Today, another camera was wrecked. Ross stumbled while changing and smashed the rear screen, then, underground, Josh discovered that his camera was woefully short of volts and amps. Are we discerning camera problem here? Did someone piss off the local camera God?



Later did a couple of runs over to Ronda to move ourselves into the Pangea accommodation - which is gorgeous, all brand new, marble floors, lots of space for our kit and a 'fridge and washing machine for us to use. Followed up with a proper, tummy-filling, evening meal. Things are looking up!

Sunday 1st September

Since we were the only guests in residence and no other planned arrivals, the receptionists took us canyoning. And How! We went straight down the river under the Moorish bridge across the Ronda gorge. The first pitch was 42 metres directly down under the waterfall. This occasioned various excitements, notably: Miggy panicked, Noel got battered to hell and Jack thought he was going to die.



Wading down the river the boulders were slippery and the pools fine for swimming across. Josh and Mike W seemed
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to spend a lot of time underwater: Mike emerged with a serviceable chair to sit on and watch people descending after him! The second pitch was only 25 metres or so, and much more civilised. All in all, a cracking good afternoon's excitements, and they didn't charge us at all (normally it is € 42 per head).

Monday 2nd September. Sima Lepiotas

Whilst the author took the day off caving (to rest an elbow injury) and chauffeured cavers instead, others entered Sima Lepiotas. Ross quickly and superbly rigged, allowing five to bottom plus Rich and Andrea to ledge pitch.

The chauffeur enjoyed a fabulous mountain-top ridge with howling gale. Walked over to watch the mob going down Lepiotas and ambled back to read and snooze until they emerged. Tried para-gliding with an Inglesport's plastic sac..... and darn near succeeded! Delicious lunch at Navacillo.

Wednesday 4th September. Sumidero de la Nava

Drove to Nava via Navacillo. Noel had his coffee on the table, lap, shoes, floor.... by virtue of some fancy work with the glass. Sumidero de la Nava as described with a major league mixed (mainly tiny midges) insect population in residence about 20 feet inside. Some of us (Chris and Andrea to name but a few) had fancy midge masks. Others (ie Rich and Noel) went for the bank-robber option in ladies tights.

Even the midges thought this was an amazing sight and, more importantly, failed to get through, so we entered without lungs and eyes clogged with beasties. Less than 100 metres in - no midges at all, but a very different type of cave passage, not tight, but sinuous with some of the most gentlemanly dry sandy crawls ever. Hmmm. Interspersed with smelly wallowy pools covered with what appeared to be floating turds. "Turds" actually bark and twigs, but pooooohey for wallowing through! Noel discovered unnoticed intercostal muscle tears from canyoning episode, so retreated, groaning stylistically. Caught up with Andrea who was also retreating. Back through midge-alley and found Ross and Jack snoozing in car, having failed to find the cave entrance. This must have taken some skill....

Thursday 5th September. Sumidero de la Nava

Felt guilty, again, that Ross and Jack had given themselves a 2 hour window for the trip simply because I was marking time up aloft.

Took Ross and Jack over to Nava because they inadvertently missed yesterday's underground bit. The Bank Robber look suits Dave!! Had a walk past the cave and up the trail before returning to the car. Later discovered that Ross and I shared a common taste in vintage Pop music.

Another fantastic trip over. Thanks to all involved.

FROM THE LOGBOOK

Editor's note: Please record your trip in the logbook at Upper Pitts. There has been a lot of work in Spider Hole and Read's Cavern – some of these log entries have been omitted. (Thanks to Noel Cleave for transcribing entries).

Friday August 2 2013 Saut de Pucelle Lot, France. Three generation of Waller's visited this great streamway in the Lot. Kit (6), Hal (13) Grandsons, Nick (45) Son and Terry Waller (69). Grandfather !! An enjoyable womble in the entrance passages. **Terry.**

Friday August 2 2013 Sandford Levy Maurice Hewins, John Thomas. Try Caving (again).

Decided that Sandford Levy would still be within our declining abilities, and John had not been there before. Once we found the entrance, we had a pleasant 3/4 hour womble. Lots of nice white mini-formations, cave pearls and moon-milk glittering in the beam of our cap-lamps. Nostalgic feelings for the places of long ago! **Maurice.**

Wednesday August 7 2013 Charterhouse Cave Richard Carey, John Cooper and Emma Gisborne.

This was my third trip and the best so far. I actually went through the entrance rift without hesitating this time as it didn't seem quite so daunting - or I'm getting more familiar with it. Gate Squeeze, Calcite Squeezes 1 and 2, Wallow 1 and 2 - just like old friends now. Walked down boulder slope of Splatter Chamber and Citadel - through Aragonite Crawl into the Grotto of the Singing Stal (had a drink). Then into Chill Out Choke and passed my previous limit (the 2008 Gate) - followed the obvious route and string. Carried on down boulders and climbed down Gloop Pot. Then on to the Narrows which weren't as bad as I thought. Down the small canyon to the top of Dragon Pitch – here we used the ladder which we'd carried in and dropped through some boulders to the Confluence (where the GB water comes in).

We then walked and crawled down Highway 120 - passed the Blades to Frozen Cascade, where we had intended to stop. However, Rich encouraged us to carry on along 100 Fathom Passage to Sand Dig where we started the syphon going. After a quick look at the sump we went up Sand Dig into The Timeline and looked at the Gour pools (which were dry today). Then down through Portal Pool and into 2009 series - along and through (H)our Chamber and down to The Crossing - went upstream and looked down into the crystal clear sump pool and then downstream into Route 66 where we called it a day. Back to Frozen Cascade for food and drink - then uphill all the way back to the entrance. 3 Hours. **Emma.**

Saturday August 10 2013 Swildon's Short Round Trip. Tim and Matt. After Matt successfully made it through the sump three weeks ago, he had to be fully certified as a water-baby by completing the Round Trip. No bailing, queuing or rigging required - a rarity on a Saturday! Approximately 3 hours. Excuses about water no longer accepted! **Tim**

Saturday August 10 2013 Banwell Bone Cave + Stalactite Cave "2nd Saturday" trip. John & Emma Gisborne, Jude, Beth Berriman, George East, Carol Kenward.

We went into the bone cave first and then visited Stalactite Cave. Both short but well worth doing. **Emma.**

Monday August 12 2013 Spider Hole Jude Vanderplank and Emma Gisborne.

SRT training session. Jude went down both pitches to the bottom and Emma did the first one only. Can't wait to go back and do both and maybe offer my assistance digging on a Thursday or Saturday. **Emma.**

Thursday August 15 2013 Sludge Pit Rich Carey, Emma Gisborne and John Cooper.

We went down the ladder (all life-lined as per instructions). We followed main rift down to the two bottom puddles. Came out via Aragonite Rift - enjoying several small loops and ended up at Strike Chamber. **Emma**

Saturday August 17 2013 Spider Hole NikNak, Pete Hann, Ade & Jude Vdp, Rich Marlow, Andrea Russe.

A good digging session with 15 buckets of spoil cleared, 3 buckets of cement mixed. Pete wants to progress the dig "Down and South" but the dig seems to have a different idea to this, than us! The draught is coming from the South side still with holes in the floor. **Adrian**

Saturday August 17 2013 Read's Cavern Ali Moody, John Cooper and Pete Buckley.

Cleared out the new passage at high level over Lads Luck. Nice 'tube' for about 7m*; Ali says there's solid walls on left & right. Restriction due to calcite cobbles – passage appears to continue afterwards – so needs work. Also spent many happy hours throwing mud along the lovely phreatic tube that's being dug. Now it's sooooo long it's hard work getting spoil out. No stream at entrance rift. 4 hrs. * This is a good sized 'tube' all the team can access to the restriction. **Pete**

Sunday August 18 2013 GB Allan Kingshott, Kit Gibbons, William Lee, Rich Marlow, Jude Vanderplank

Down through Oxbows. Up into Ladder passage and into Main chamber. Nice grotto in far corner. **Allan.**

Sunday August 18 2013 Hunters Lodge Sink

Tim Rose, Matt Wadler, Stephen Dickinson, Julie Fudge.

Fairly uneventful; Matt got stuck at the top of the pitch and said some naughty words. Steve took swimming lessons in the puddle down at the bottom. Breast stroke yet to be perfected. Puddle quite deep for the summer. Much enjoyment was had carrying ladders out the entrance crawl, surfacing to sunshine 3 hours later. **Tim**

Monday August 19 2013 Read's Cavern

Ali Moody, Andrew Atkinson.

Completed the survey of The Offshoot to

Junction Chamber route so we now have a closed loop through the cave. Also surveyed Boulder Chamber and The Annex. It will probably take another 6 trips to complete the re-survey of the whole cave. (4 hours). **Ali**.

Saturday August 24 2013 Read's Cavern

Pete Buckley, John Cooper and Ali Moody.

More work digging both ends of the tube near Lads' Luck. A by-pass was also dug open to the bottom section of the Chattering Slope, which is collapsing. 4 ½ hours. **Ali**.

Saturday August 24 2013 Swildon's

Kev & Merik.

Kev had cleverly made his cylinders inaccessible so no Pierre's. What to do when the Maypole - Shatter pull-through was suggested. Sounded good so 40m rope, 3 ladders and off we went. The start of Maypole was easy to spot with a bright green rope. Less inviting was the squeeze with a deep puddle a bit further on! Working up through the three little chambers if it didn't look like the way on in a "what up there?" type of way then it was the way on. Good abseiling (although only one belt and one sling between us made the abseiling rather quick) and then out for tea. A great sporting round-trip - well done team for opening it up. Merik was heard to say that it was too wet and too muddy..... I don't know - divers! **Kevin**.

Sunday August 25 2013 Swildon's Hole

John Cooper, John & Emma Gisborne, Barry Weaver.

Down through Sump 1 & Creep 1 then up and the step across the "Bold Steep" into Approach Passage. Up this then down the 11ft drop where a minor route finding error took us into Abandon Hope. Fortunately, Barry retrieved the situation and we were soon back on the correct route & down the climb to the bottom of the 10 foot overhang. Out after a pleasant 2 ½ hour trip. **John Cooper**.

Sunday August 25 2013 Limekiln

John Cooper, John & Emma Gisborne, Roger Robinson, Tommo & Barry Wilkinson.

Spoil removed from end of first crawl to surface. 1 hour. **John Cooper**. (Ed: First mention of Limekiln. Is this a new dig?)

Monday August 26 2013 Swildon's Hole

Susie, Jack, Will & Marcus Smith from Bledlow Ridge, Bucks (friends of Lyn from Priddy).

John Cooper and Ali Moody very kindly took us down Long Dry Way as novice cavers. I was really rather apprehensive, especially as it seemed that the opening was very small! But once I got over my mild panic attack (the kids were fine!) I really enjoyed myself and felt I had accomplished quite a mean feat! Thank you so much for exposing me to a whole new world. **Susie**. Great fun and a good form of exercise for anyone; a full workout. Gets progressively more exciting through small gaps and jumping down waterfalls. A great day out!! Many Thanks. **Jack**

Saturday August 31 2013 Porth yr Ogor

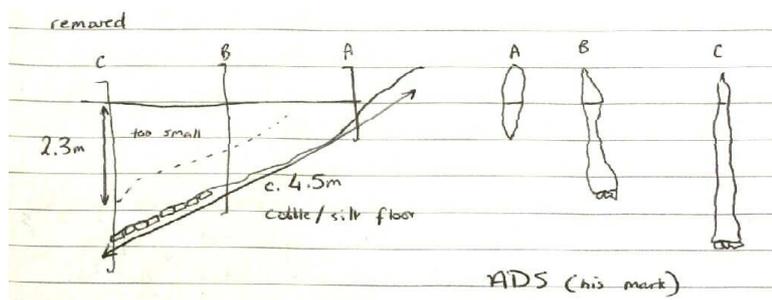
Mike and John Thomas.

First a dive in the upstream sumps for a nice look around - then a through trip with the old man in the dry main cave. Good to see my dad underground again. **Mike**.

Saturday August 31 2013 Read's Cavern

PB, JC, AAM, ADS

Diving Browne-Stewart sump. Diver whisked to dive site with ruthless tea-fuelled efficiency. Using 1 x 1.5l and 1 x 3l cylinders the sump was pushed along the base of a submerged rift. Sump left at a constriction where progress possible with streamlined kit and more floor excavation. No line required at this stage, so removed.



Sunday September 1 2013 Swildon's

Tony Seddon, Hatstand, Becky.

Top Trip. In via the Wet Way, very little water about, so technically I guess that's the "Not so Wet Way". The sump still has a great airspace, definitely a duck.... some musical / theatrical moments of me **singing** my way through, it certainly made the lads smile! Then down the II streamway to look at the massive airspace above II. I wonder how low the water level would have to be for it to be a nasal snorkelling manoeuvre. Top trip, Great company. **Becky**.

Thursday September 5 2013 Swildon's

John Cooper and Emma Gisborne.

Went to Shatter Pot - descended the ladder. We went through the Oxford Chamber. Then went through Junction Chamber up the 10 foot overhang (drill bit used to pull up on, making sure that it's pressed down on!). Entered Shatter Passage and had a look at the first duck that had 3" or 4" of airspace. Turned round and headed back to the ladder through the squeezes (more fun and games). Back up the ladder and out. (2 ¼ hours). **Emma**.

Friday September 6 2013 Swildon's Mike Thomas, Claire Cohen.

Bit of exercise after work but of note was the very low water level in the cave. Been a few years since I have seen the Short Dry Way actually dry! **Mike.**

Saturday September 14 2013 White Spot, Long Hole and Great Oone's 2nd Saturday Trip. 15 assorted cavers led by Jude.

Saturday September 14 2013 Eastwater Cavern. 13 Pots James C, Maxine B, Paul Dold, Emily Spreadlove, Alistair Smith Emily's 2nd trip ever – the rift was well negotiated but hard work. Maxine discovered new positions that she didn't know existed. Met up with James and Ali at top of Dolphin Chimney as they had avoided the rift. Paul and Emily went out at this point. James, Maxine and Ali continued to 13 Pots. Quick trip back to find Paul & Emily waiting for us. Paul had a photo idea in the rift so back to the rift for some faffing and photography. Out in plenty of time for the party. Good trip. **James**

Monday September 16 2013 Read's Cavern. Rich Carey, John Cooper, ADS.

Back to the Browne-Stewart sump. One 1.5 litre, one 3 litre cylinder, former on left-hand side, latter hand-held. Passage continues down. Passage entered feet first, progress made by kicking gravel/silt/cobbles down slope. Depth 3.5m. Penetration c 7-8 m, perhaps a body length further than previous dive. No line used. Return is planned. **ADS.**

Thursday September 19 2013 Swildon's Black Hole. Rich Carey, John Cooper, Emma Gisborne.

Went through Sump 1 (2 cms airspace) and up to the Black Hole. Down to the bottom and explored around. Rich was returning after 20 years and his lights didn't fail on that trip!!! (first time there was on ladders, too). We examined the sump that leads to the Priddy Pool Passage and then looked at the other, parallel passage. Back out via the Wet Way. (2 ½ hours). **Emma.**

Saturday September 21 2013 Spider Hole. Pete Hann, Ade & Jude, John Riley, John Hill, Will Read, Flo Crowther-Smith, John Cooper, John Gisborne (and Landrover!)

Another major sand-hauling trip courtesy of the 4 Johns and especial thanks to John Gisborne and his Landrover for transporting the sand to the entrance. Thirty two bags of sand taken down and five largish rocks capped at the bottom, but left down there due to time constraints. The majority of the draught was coming out of the South end of the dig, which is encouraging, but we have some large rocks blocking progress forwards! (Spider Dwarf) **Pete Hann**

Saturday September 21 2013 Read's Cavern. Ali Moody, Peter Buckley.

Another session at the tube near the aven. About 2 m of progress made and the tube has broken into a bouldery area. There is open space over to the left that cannot be entered at present and the tube may continue in this area. At the start of the breakthrough point a visual connection was made with the top of the climb into one of the entry points into the Browne-Stewart Series. It will not be feasible to engineer a passable route between these points. On the way out, met a tourist party near Waterfall Chamber. We also spent ½ hour digging a large mud filled tube off the boulder maze. 5 hours. **Ali**

Friday October 4 2013 Swildon's. Phil & Dan Hendy.

After thunder and lightning the night before, our small trip was moist but pleasant. We rattled down the entrance, through the pretty dry route and down to the head of the 20. We debated going all the way down..... unfortunately the Hunters would be closed, so we made the executive decision to head back out, through the Wet Way in time to get back to the hut, showered and changed in time for a ham pasta and a well-earned pint of Roger's Best! **Phil.**

Saturday October 5 2013 Read's Cavern. Ali Moody, John Cooper, Pete Buckley.

Started the new dig at the annex off the end of Boulder Chamber. Enlarged the squeeze into a blind chimney. The way on appears to be a narrow rift, but the passage may widen at a lower level. Another trip needed to determine if this site is worth digging. **Ali**

Saturday October 5 2013 Swildon's. Jude Vanderplank, John Cooper, Anna Rudolph, James Waldegrave.

We had a wonderful experience exploring an underground world we never knew existed. Just the right amount of excitement! Thank you! **Anna.** Fantastic - wonderful. Many Thanks. **James**

Wednesday October 9 2013 Sludge Pit. John Cooper, Max Fisher, Emma Gisborne, Tricia Kendal, Andy & Rachel Sparrow.

Once down the entrance and into the boulder choke we headed down to the start of Fault Passage and took the route into Shale Series. Waited at the boulder choke at the end while Andy went round to the other side and we established light and voice communication. To dig through, best to dig out the mud rift at the bottom and try to leave the boulders above well alone. We all then joined Andy to look at the other side. Then a quick look at the aven at the start of Tributary Passage. I had a quick look along Skeleton Passage to the Upstream/Downstream junction. Then all down into Four Potato Rift, to another possible digging site. Out through Triple Arch into Fault Passage. Took Aragonite Rift route out. Met a load of BEC in the Triple Arch area

and another Wessex party "Lost" in the Aragonite Rift. Whilst I lifelined everyone up the entrance the rest of the party visited Back Passage. 2 ½ hours. **John Cooper.**

Friday October 11 2013 Sludge Pit. Terry Waller & Derek Sanderson.

Last week we did Four Pots Rift and the Shale Series. This week we went to the end of Skeleton Passage. Worth a visit. Surprised by bat droppings near the end. Also surprised by formations. The ULSA survey gives the end aven as nearly at the surface and not so far from Nine Barrows. **Terry**

Saturday October 12 2013 Hunters Lodge Inn Sink. Second Saturday Trip. Jude, Andrea Russe, Charlotte Hilton, Dave Walker, Christine Grosart, Magda Molska & Kris.

First party into the cave, Chris and Dave both with cameras. Charlotte and Andrea helped with the flashes while Jude, Kris and Magda went down the ladder. Kris went through the water first; Magda decided to traverse over, using ledges, so after a quick look at Broom Ale Boulevard we went back up the ladder and explored the remainder of the upper cave. We exited while the others took a few more photographs. **Jude.**

Saturday October 12 2013 Hunters Lodge Inn Sink. Second Saturday Trip. John Cooper, Gary Hall, Allan Kingshott, Gerik Rhoden, Neil Woodward, Imran Khan.

We were the second party, Jude leading the first. We dropped down the entrance ladder and followed Pub Crawl into Happy Hour Highway to where would walk and admire the formations. Through the dug-out section and up again into bigger passage. A crawl past the top of Pewter Pot and we were into Barmaid's Bedrooms - saw the bones that were still there before we squeezed along the last bit of passage off to the left..... too tight! Back down to Pewter Pot which we descended (2 X 7.5m ladders, just a bit short) before we went into Slops 2 and 3 Imran decided to test the depth instead of using the footholds just below the water surface. We ascended Broom Ale Boulevard until we reached the warning notice at the end (Loose Boulders!!). Back out, the only difficulty was getting the lifeline to reach the bottom each time. 3 Hours. **John Cooper.**

Saturday October 12 2013 Charterhouse Warren Farm Swallet. Ali Moody, Kevin Hilton, Pete Buckley.

Part of the swallet has been washed out to the rear of the old shaft, so care is needed to dig out the gate. Rescued a worm or two. Used a variety of ladders, tethers, ropes and ingenuity to rig all the pitches. Lots of bones, lots of stal. Absolutely fabulous lower sections. Stunning, despite having a yellow light! Spent some time looking at the crystals and pork pies in the Secret Garden. The expected "Fun" get out/up the pitches was not quite as "Fun" as I had feared; although the added wood to the corkscrew pitch needs replacing now. A thoroughly brilliant trip! My nice new "Sunday Best" caving suit is now, er, dirty! **Pete.**

Monday 14th and Tuesday 15th October 2013. Gough's Old Cave Ali Moody and Andrew Atkinson.

Surveyed Gough's Old Cave and Champion's Hole for the Cheddar Survey Project. Very impressed with the size of the passage in Gough's Old. **Ali**

Tuesday October 15 2013 Swildon's SE Inlets. Terry Waller, Derek Sanderson.

Had a paddle in the Sidcot U Tube to celebrate Terry's 70th. Birthday. 1 hr 55. **Derek.**

Saturday October 19 2013 Swildon's. Noel Cleave

Having lost the will to live during the AGM, I took myself down to Sump1. A pleasantly sociable bit of solo caving, meeting up with Andrea above the 20 where she was showing two novices around, and then various parties below. Sump 1 is still a duck, otherwise cave the same as ever and just as nice. I think that there were 4 sets of 20 foot rigging parked above it, so the cave is as popular as ever. In and out in 58 minutes, getting old and slow, but it was a great antidote to AGMitis! **Noel**

Tuesday 22nd October 2013 Swildon's Hole, Short Round Trip John Cooper and Emma Gisborne.

Really nice to see a good flow of water in the cave again! Mud Sump still dry. First Trouble wet. Started the siphon going then spent 25 minutes bailing as well. Got it down so just one ear wet. Didn't bother with the rest. Sump 1 a proper sump again and a good current flowing through it. 2 ¼ hrs. **John Cooper**

Saturday 26th October 2013 Longwood Valley Sink Andrew Atkinson, Pete Buckley, John Cooper, John Gisborne and Ali Moody.

Trip to investigate. The upper tunnel looks promising – although working at this point involves lying in a disgusting and very smelly deep puddle. Lower site - a very narrow rift might be worth looking at in future. **Ali**

Saturday 26th October 2013 Swildon's Sump 1 and Sludge Pit Mike Thomas, Andy Judd, Clive Westlake and Sarah Payne.

Swildon's – good to see Andy Judd underground and some water in the cave.

Sludge Pit –First trip fro myself and Andy thanks to Sarah for guiding. Rather impressed with this little cave. Andy's 2nd caving trip of the day and the year ☺ **Mike**

CLUB NEWS

The hut has been very busy of late, with many groups booked in. Thanks to Ali Moody and John Cooper for all the extra work this entails and for making sure this side of the club has run well over this busy time.

Sludge Pit is now open. It requires a CSCC key and you should sign the logbook, just inside the cave, and leave £1 goodwill fee.

A 'Highland Fling' (Valley Head Cave, Isle of Skye) *(Kev Hilton)*

Over the years, there are little golden rules that I try to stick to when going caving: always take a bit of food; some water; and have a really good laugh. More recently, and now also on the list, Charlotte and I have developed an aversion to locked caves with only one entrance. (It is just about a year since the key broke off inside Rhino and I'm sure that it didn't result in a rescue...).

Anyway, when the opportunity came to do a cave up on Skye and we knew that it had three entrances, none of which were locked, it was on the 'to do list'. These features were particularly pertinent given the distance between us and the MCR - not that we needed them before anyway...

We were up in Scotland for a week of walking and in the planning had put Skye and Ben Nevis on the list. Tav had recommended Valley Head Cave, so as well as the walking kit the caving kit went in too. Now the lower entrance is a resurgence and I knew that we shouldn't expect something the size of Wookey. However it took some finding, with the stream almost overgrown and us on the wrong side of the valley! We had nearly given it up as lost with Charlotte sat down verging (and she stresses 'verging') on a strop, when I heard a musical little tinkle. And there it was, a tiny little stream coming out from underneath a tree.

We dropped our walk-in kit and headed up hill. We passed a small shake-hole and then more excitingly another hole, from which we could clearly hear a stream-way (the second entrance). Four steps on and the main entrance. This had a bigger looking stream than we had seen at the resurgence disappearing in.

We had picked a dry day (which means that it rains between every 15-20 minutes instead of every minute) and so had got quite warm on the (long) walk up. Imagine our surprise when, within the first 3 metres, we were lying flat-out in the streamway looking at our fist duck. What followed was an absolutely cracking cave with a couple of little climbs, some great rock formations, spiders and lots and lots and lots of peaty Highland water. Despite the 15 minute rain showers we had air space at the sump – enough to talk to each other – and plenty of space in the ducks. However, the foam on the roof spoke of yesterday's heavy rain...

Our only failing was to not pack midge repellent. The cave washed all our carefully applied protection away and upon emerging we promptly provided dinner for the midges on the southern end of Skye!



This cave comes highly recommended and if you happen to find yourself on the Isle of Skye is well worth a look.

ps. if you are travelling up to Skye do talk to your sat-nav about the route you want to take. You may think that you are going over the bridge but the sat-nav may have other ideas. This can save hours of nail-biting anxiety in the standby lane for the ferry at Mallaig on a busy Saturday afternoon.

