

Wessex Cave Club Journal

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# EDITORIAL



**T**he last journal, 334, and this one, feature several pages of extracts from the Upper Pitts, and travelling, log-books. This has occasioned some criticism, mainly on the grounds that (a) it amounts to caving trivia and repetitive trip accounts and (b) everyone can read the log book. Neither point is supported by logic although (a) could be without editorial selection. An important function of the Journal is to keep all our members informed about the doings of our club. I was an absentee member for some 30 years, but cherished the Journal: it was full of strangers' names - "Moody", "Vanderplank" - and strange activities such as "SRT" and "Bolting", not to mention LED lights; but reading it kept me feeling that I was still a part of the Wessex (and when I came back, indeed I was). So our absentee and armchair members deserve a Journal that reflects the Wessex caving scene. I also suspect that it is unlikely that members who only visit Upper Pitts very occasionally, spend their time reading intensively through the log-book (and believe me, the printed alternative in the Journal is appreciably easier to read!), which answers objection (b). Out of interest I analysed the names recorded in the log book from 01 January to 01 December. Of the 182 different names, 103 were members and 79 guests, so only slightly over a third of the Wessex members appear. Even if quite a few members made non-caving, social visits, it still suggests that the majority of our members rely on the Journal to keep them in touch.

It's always good to have a main feature article, whether on one major expedition, such as those to Aggitis Cave, or Croatia, featured in Journal 334, Or on major club meetings and gatherings overseas, as in this Journal. Such accounts are hugely enhanced by colour photographs, and make the best possible case for an all-colour, quality journal, but the cost means probably 5 journals a year, rather than 6. Some feedback on your reactions to Journal cost, quality and frequency would be most welcome. .

As well as the normal extracts from the Wessex Log Books, for this Journal, our "Out-of-Area" accounts in Penderyn, the Pyrenees and Lanzarote provide the major input, but I am still playing catch-up with the general log-book and endeavouring not to get too far behind the diary.

I try to keep up-to-date with the general and international caving scene, not least by perusing the various journals that we receive from other clubs, and if the "NSS Bulletin" and "Descent" set the quality bar far beyond our financial reach, most others suggest that the Wessex Journal is nothing to be ashamed of. Some offer more esoteric pleasures. Finnish cavers, for example, send a journal titled: "Luolaeksploraatiota". In which our old friend DyO becomes Dan yr Ogofissa, Walesissa. Not to be outdone, page 53 suggests that unpronounceability is not the preserve of the Finns.

*Noel*

**Volume 34**

**Number 335**

**Cover photo:** John Hurst in Gouffre Héretiques. Photo: **David Cooke**

# Club and Committee Matters



1. Our car parking frequently overflows....out onto Eastwater Lane. In wet weather the West side verge gets muddy and boggy, but please, whatever the inconvenience, park completely off the road. Forcing other cars to drive with wheels just off the tarmac creates a horrendous ditch and will collapse the newly laid tarmac edge itself.
2. We are not distributing a printed Membership List with this Journal. The Membership List is published on the Members section of the Wessex Web Site.
3. The committee have raised a formal objection to the development plans submitted for the erection of a large barn on the corner of the field adjacent to our grass area. Our objection is on the technical details of the proposed development where it conflicts with the relevant criteria for such buildings.
4. Don't forget the Wessex Cave Club Ceilidh on 12<sup>th</sup> March. The reduced price ticket offer ended on 31 December, but ticket request forms are available at Upper Pitts, and tickets can be bought at £10 each.
5. Tommo reports that our "20" ladders are vanishing. This is bizarre, people are taking them out but not returning them to the tackle store. You can hardly forget to put them back, often with a lifeline at the same time??? The "20" ladders are not much use for anything else away from the Mendips, but 5 have gone missing this year. Please have a look at your own tackle stores, garages, wherever, and see if one has crept away to hide in your kit!

# The Digging Scene



## DIGGING IN SLUDGE PIT HOLE: A FIRST YEAR

The dig started because I needed something to occupy me on Friday evenings. On Mendip a lot of digging takes place midweek. Midweek digging or caving is not really a sensible option for me, living where I do, with the journey taking the best part of two hours each way. However on Friday the locals have had enough of digging and take the day off. Typically I drive to Mendip on Friday, dig with Ali Moody and the Charterhouse digging team on Saturday and either do a short caving trip or dig on Sundays before driving back. So I decided to get a dig of my own that I could work when there was nothing else happening that I wanted to do. This was particularly for Friday afternoons but also potentially for some Sundays. The dig would need to be one which did not need a large team to work it given that few cavers are around Fridays, and for that reason would probably be an underground dig in an existing cave.

Why Sludge Pit? The fact that the cave had until recently been closed for nearly 30 years, meant that it might not have been looked at as closely as some others. As a bonus the entrance was within walking distance of Upper Pitts.

For the benefit of those not familiar with this relatively obscure cave in a depression up on the slopes of North Hill, a little background info is called for. The site of the cave was named Sludge Pit for obvious reasons by a number of Wessex cavers out prospecting on North Hill. However, on the expert advice of either Willie Stanton or Jim Hanwell they chose to dig North Hill Swallet instead and the Sludge Pit cave was dug into a few years later in 1968 by cavers from Bridgewater Technical College with technical assistance from Clive North of Axbridge CC and John Cornwell of WCC. They originally called the cave Contour Cavern because entrance

was thought, erroneously as it turned out, to lie on the 900ft contour. Later it was briefly called Boveways Cave after the field where the entrance lies. However the cave lacked a proper survey until 1970 when one was carried out by University of Leeds Speleological Association (ULSA). The surveyors paid little regard to the names used by the discoverers (that will teach the diggers not to do a decent survey). Amongst other changes, the cave reverted to Sludge Pit Hole, and Cornwell Chamber (named after the person who was brought in to effect entry with explosives) became Strike Chamber. These days Sludge Pit is not a particularly muddy cave unless of course you start digging there, when the usual Reverse Midas Touch comes into play.

Sludge Pit Hole can be summed up as a mainly pleasant phreatic maze of tubes and rifts with numerous tiny invasive streams. Much of the water drains into Main Rift, which ends at a gravelled up sump which has been dug on and off by most of the Mendip clubs ever since the cave was found. The water has been traced to Swildon's Hole where it enters the stream in Passchendaele, from a sump, The Somme. Much of the intervening connection between the two caves is likely to be sumped.

Of course others had the same idea as me. The BEC were already digging in two places at the time, namely the gravel blocked sump at the bottom of Main Rift and on the right hand side of the Main Rift near the junction with Aragonite Rift. Cheddar CC were also digging in a muddy tube off of Triple Arch Passage on the fringes of The Maze. Most of the old cave lies to the south west of the Main Rift. However study of the ULSA survey revealed no descending leads in that part of the cave other than those already being dug

by others midweek. Climbing and digging in the avens of the cave was not an attractive proposition given the proximity of the surface to the tops of these avens. By contrast nobody was working in the less extensive part of the cave which lies to the north east of the Main Rift.

My attention was drawn to Strike Chamber. Here a number of sporting descending passages lead off towards a blank space on the survey. The longest one, Back Passage had already been extended slightly by persons unknown at some time after the survey had been carried out, but the current end looked a very difficult prospect as there was a great shortage of stacking space and no airspace ahead. I settled on a steeply descending sporting tube leading off Strike Chamber that has no name on the survey. This tube was not open when the cave was first entered but was dug into in the late 1960's, probably by the Gordon brothers who rearranged boulders to allow access. About half way down this tube is a small chamber with a couple of choked small passages which we subsequently used for stacking spoil. However the tube carried on and ended at another small high chamber which had no less than six obvious ways on and no obvious signs of digging at the end. The layout here was unchanged from the 1970 survey, indicating that this location had not been dug seriously before.

In the above small high chamber the tube carried on, apparently too tight. About 2m above the continuing tube another tube carried on in the same direction but soon dived down steeply and appeared to become too tight. Two ways also headed steeply back up towards two too tight passages leading off of Strike Chamber. Two rift passages also headed downhill but rapidly become also too tight. However the floor of the small high chamber funnelled down through mud, ending at a gravel choked floor space less than a foot square. This is where I decided to dig. There was a slight seepage of water running over the gravel at the bottom, but there was no visible airspace. It was not very promising at first sight; however all the too tight or blocked descending passages in the vicinity appeared to be funnelling down in the same direction, so I thought maybe these might meet beyond the blockage and combine to form a decent size passage. Back in Strike Chamber the other descending ways appeared to be heading towards the dig too.

In addition to heading towards a blank space on the map, one can also dream of bypassing the sump in Main Rift or connecting with downstream Nine Barrows Swallet or even in one's wildest dreams, a connection with Swildons Hole via some as yet to be discovered high level passages. It's even headed towards a shakehole in the next field not to mention the Lime Kiln Dig and its possibly mythical cave system. Coming back down to earth, this site remains the best digging prospect in Sludge Pit Hole at the current time, or so I think.

Once permission to dig was granted in October 2014 I started work shifting mud and rocks from the floor of the small high chamber at the end of the nameless tube. I built a retaining wall with the rock I removed from the floor and put the mud behind this. After only two solo trips I exposed an air space over the water and a passage was soon evident below. Initially it looked like a bedding passage but as it was disinterred by removing the mud it became a tight rift with a tiny stream. After four trips I was able to enter the passage from the short shaft I had created by removing the mud fill. Here the upstream was seen to be a steeply rising rift with prominent shelving which blocked progress. Downstream saw the water go out of sight under a tiny arch. Sometimes a faint tinkle of falling water could be heard ahead. Unfortunately some of the mud from the shaft walls fell into the streamway before I could move it to the stacking areas and I pushed the less accessible mud against the arch with my wellies hoping it

would flow away. Some mud did flow on under the arch, but this action was a mistake as I lost the airspace under the arch and did not regain it for several weeks.

Moving all this mud in a confined space meant that I became plastered in the same. Typically it took the best part of an hour back at Upper Pitts to get the mud off the tackle, the tools, my caving gear and me. This was perhaps not the best recruiting advert for the dig. In the early days of the dig the mud was particularly adhesive. As time went by the mud has become less sticky but anyone pushing the sharp end still gets covered in it. I carried on removing mud and rocks from the streamway and gradually forward progress became possible. However stacking space was running out in the chamber and I had soon filled up some of the supposedly too tight descending passages with spoil as well. By mid-November, after 8 or 9 solo digging trips I had filled up all available stacking space and it was becoming a matter of urgency to get some help. With one or two more people a hauling system could be put into place and spoil taken back up the approach tube from Strike Chamber and it could then be stacked in the chamber halfway along this nameless tube.

Study of the elevations in the survey revealed that tiny stream in the dig was at a higher level than the tiny stream at the end of Back Passage. The two streams carried a similar volume of water. If the two streams were one and the same and the water flows from my dig into Back Passage, this would render my dig superfluous. There followed a pause in digging activities whilst I investigated this possibility. It does now seem that this scenario is most unlikely and I increased my efforts to get help. Another unwelcome possibility was that the water ends up back in Main Rift as there are a couple of minor inlets in the right hand wall of the lower part of that passage. However at that time the new streamway was still headed towards a blank space on the map. During this hiatus I also investigated the possibility of starting an alternative dig at the terminal choke in North Hill Swallet. I also took the opportunity to visit parts of underground Mendip that I had not previously been to.

In January 2015 I decided to persevere with Sludge and messed around putting in conveyor belt etc etc. Eventually at the end of January I recruited Mike Kousiounis who had recently joined Ali's team working in Longwood Valley Sink. Mike is young, fit, keen and relatively thin and small, so he was not put off by the mud and confined working conditions. A hauling system and more belting was put into place and the accumulated spoil removed to the chamber in the middle of the nameless tube.

We were then able to disinter more of the downstream passage exposing a fine set of rock shelves in the walls. These were sufficiently pronounced to cause some confusion in the destination of the water for a while but gradually the space under the arch increased. We regained the sound of falling water ahead and the passage was seen to continue as a tight rift beyond the arch.

The water was initially unpleasantly deep but in March I bought a long handled draw hoe from a garden centre and pushing this ahead resulted in a lowering of the water level and an impressive and satisfying sound of water whooshing down a rocky incline or cascade. Clearly the passage was not about to sump! As we progressed forward further applications of the hoe kept the water levels at a bearable level. However a sense of humour was an asset in this dig. We carried on enlarging the stream way by digging out the sediments and hammering away at rock shelves with a lump hammer. By April 2015 we reached a tantalising point where apparently passable passage lay ahead but access was rendered impossible by a too tight section over a metre long. Mike tried to force his

way through but to no avail. We made a little further progress by using a lump hammer. Mike also had an old drill which he sacrificed in the cause to use in conjunction with the lump hammer, but it was clear that we now needed to recruit someone with an explosives licence in order to make the breakthrough.

Meanwhile as a change, Mike decided to investigate the “too tight” tubes which I had used for stacking spoil in the days when I was solo digging, as a possible bypass to the tight section in the streamway. The higher of the tubes was initially tried and soon rejected as a “Neil Moss” type passage. The continuation tube straight ahead from the nameless tube from Strike Chamber was more promising. Clearing this out gave us another dig site right next to the start of the existing dig. This new dig was a particularly arduous one in a descending small tube with a mud floor. Removal of mud allowed forward progress, but the tube soon became too constricted for someone of my height and for me digging at this alternative site became almost a spectator sport, whilst Mike toiled away. We concentrated on this site for a while with just occasional hammering sessions in the streamway. The tube began to level out ahead and could be seen continuing into the distance, possibly with just passable dimensions. Mike thought he could probably get through but returning would have been well-nigh impossible. Reversing uphill with next to no purchase would have been impossible and he would have stuck in the sticky mud which liberally coated the walls of the tube.

Fortunately at this moment Ali Moody offered to apply chemical persuasion if we needed it and we were back in business at the end of May 2015. Ali leads a very busy life, so this was not as simple as it sounds, but she was the ideal person to work in a muddy constricted environment. Initially she could fit us in early on Friday evenings but there was not time to drill and bang in the same session, so the drilling had to be done beforehand. We carried on with both dig sites for the time being.

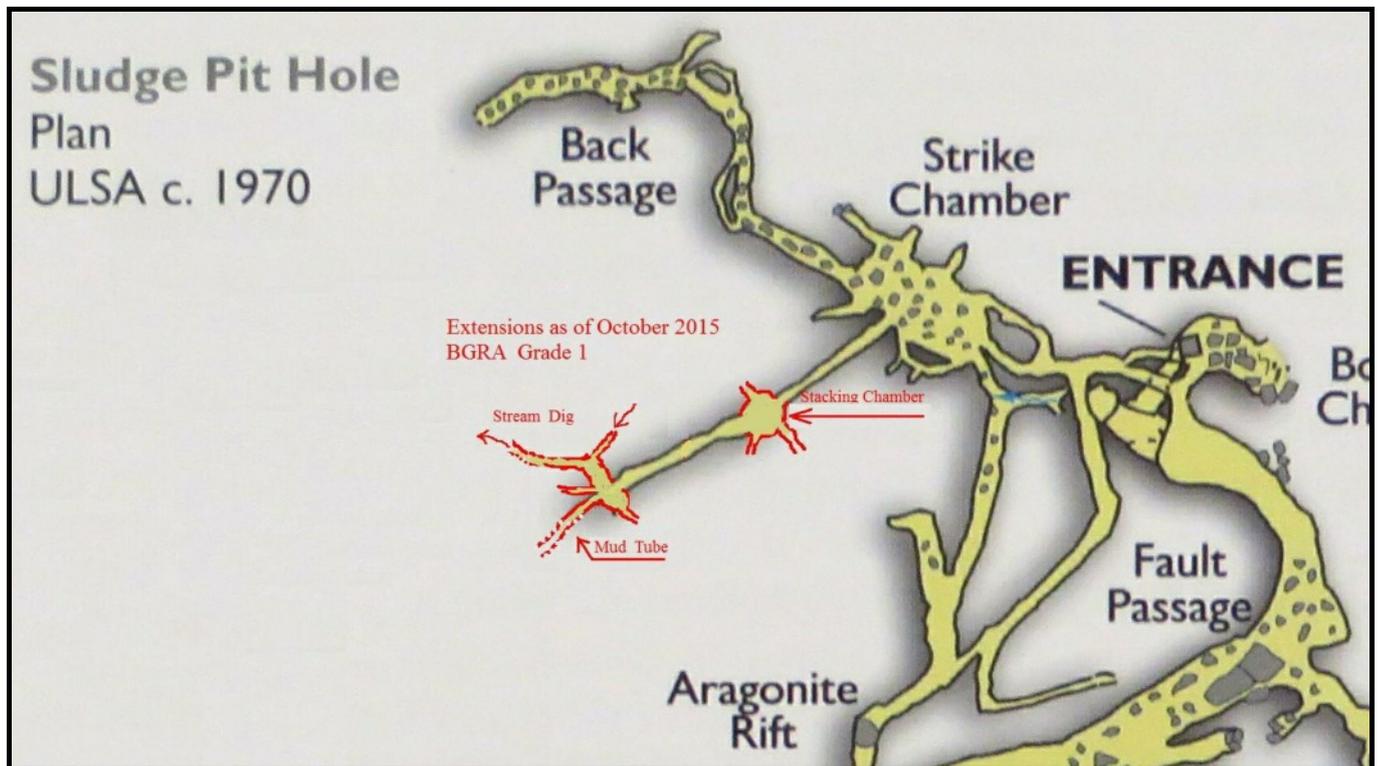
Mike’s old drill soon succumbed to the wet muddy environment of the new streamway, but John Cooper bravely offered to lend his number 2. drill to Mike and the end of the stream dig was banged for a second time by Ali in July, before the holiday period was reached. At the end of July Mike recruited an MCG friend of his Neil Maine, for a session clearing the debris back to the middle chamber in the tube. The way on was now more visible. The stream dig now appeared to be at a critical state as a breakthrough seemed to be on the cards with only two or possibly one further banging sessions needed. In fact this was over optimistic but we were not to know that.

During August and September we all went away on holiday at different times, mostly doing things other than caving, and the logistics of banging proved too difficult. It was frustrating, but it was opportunity for me to look around the rest of Sludge Pit Hole. The rest of Sludge proved to be quite a pleasant little cave, but I saw nothing to convince me that we were digging in the wrong place. Into October, I carried out some solo hammering of rock shelves in the stream dig to relieve my frustrations and to make the end marginally easier to work. Mike drilled some holes and on Saturday 10 October Ali banged the stream dig.

The fumes cleared rapidly and the next day I was able to clear back to the interim stacking spaces and get a better look ahead. Alas the next two metres or so of stream passage were seen in fact to be very much too tight and impassable. At the end of this tight section the stream appeared to run into an aven and / or cross passage, with water dripping down from above. It was still not possible to see which direction the water ran away to.

That has brought things up to date to the end of the first year. The dig remained promising but we had reached the point when it would go better with a slightly larger team.

**Geoff Newton**



Rough sketch of current digging situation. Alterations to original survey in red. Geoff Newton

## Bradshaw's Cave - Lost and found.

Veteran caver and digger Fred Davies once wrote that "Caves is where you find 'em", meaning that caves are sometimes discovered, usually by accident, in the most unlikely spots. Although all of the obvious places where a cave might be found have been examined, and in many cases dug, there is always the possibility that a hitherto unsuspected cavity can come to light. Holes have opened in fields under the weight of tractors, and quarrying, building or road construction has exposed many caves. I have written about these events in the past, and also described how a cave dig can be abandoned when the diggers lose enthusiasm, only for a fresh team to re-examine the site, and break through only a short distance beyond where the previous team gave up hope.

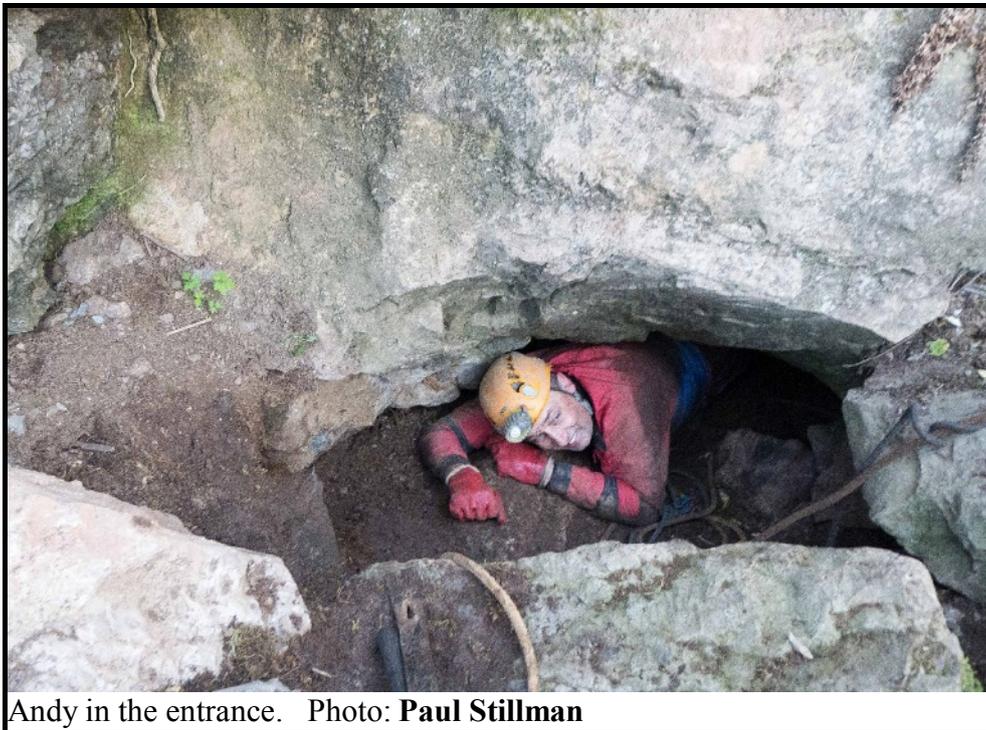
The story of the cave I describe for this Journal tells of the chance discovery of an open cave entrance, its loss, and rediscovery, many years later. Asham Wood Quarry, near Leighton, is now a nature reserve, but in 1982 it was still being worked. It was possible at weekends to walk down through the scrambles course, past Tom Tivey's Hole, a small rock shelter, and continue along a track alongside the stream, to explore the quarry. In March that year, I walked into the workings, looking for Seven Springs, a powerful resurgence blocked around 1948 by rubble tipped to construct a quarry track. The water normally emerges by the side of the track, at the level of the main stream, but on this occasion, I was surprised to see a large stream flowing along the floor of the quarry and over the track. On walking upstream, I found that the water was coming from a hole at the foot of the quarry face. The opening was over a metre wide, and about 30 centimetres high. It had been exposed by quarrying, and was definitely caver-size, but full of water.

Five months later, I had persuaded a cave diver, Alan Mills, to carry his equipment for over a mile in blazing August sunshine, to explore the hole. To our surprise, it was completely dry. Some stones had fallen into the entrance, but they were soon removed, and I wriggled down a metre drop, spurred on by a strong cold outward draught. I found myself in a waterworn tunnel, about three-quarters of a metre square. The floor was gravel, with a thin layer of dry cracked mud on top. There were no footprints, so I was the first to enter this cave – an exciting prospect! I was able to crawl along for nearly twelve metres, until I was stopped by a large block of stone on the floor, with several smaller ones on top. A short rift on the right probably connected back to the quarry face. It was impossible to pass the blockage, but I was able to look

beyond, to a gently descending passage which curved to the right, obscuring any further view. I made my way out, and Alan had a look, confirming my opinion that some serious work would be needed to passage the obstacle.

A little later, the stream was enclosed by walls of rubble; at its head, a mass of large rocks was piled up, with the wet-weather stream flowing from them. I assumed that the cave had been blocked, and thought no more of it.

Then earlier this year I was contacted by another caver, Andy Watson. He



Andy in the entrance. Photo: Paul Stillman

was digging a site in the quarry which seemed to fit my description – could it be the same? It was located at the foot of the quarry, about halfway along the rubble-bounded stream. The description of the entrance and the passage leading to a boulder choke seemed to tally with my cave. I had to go and look – apart from being in a different location to the one I thought I remembered, the entrance was the same as the one I had investigated 33 years ago!

Andy and his friends had found a partly-choked opening, which looked inviting. They removed a few rocks, and found that quarrying had reduced the length of passage to the boulder choke by four metres. The diggers then forced themselves through the boulders, naming the constriction Sid's Squeeze. Beyond, twelve metres of passage, decorated with coral formations, led to a sharp right-hand bend, Chest of Drawers Corner. This is followed by 30 metres of straight passage along a fault line. The Long Straight is passed by crawling, though in places it is possible to stand. There are some small flowstone formations, and evidence that the passage floods. At the end there is a mass of breakdown rocks, but clearing some of these to the left allowed access to a low descending passage, curving round to a three metre high aven. Five metres past this, a choke, the current end, may be near the surface, as it contains roots.

The diggers have named the cave Bradshaw's Cave, after Dr. Reg. Bradshaw, former head of Geology at Bristol University. He examined the quarry around 45 years ago, and told Willie Stanton of several 'open tunnels' in the lowest part of the quarry, near Seven Springs. Willie was a consultant geologist, as well as being a very active caver and digger. It is not, however, described in his guide to Mendip caves 'Mendip – The Complete Caves and A View of the Hills', which he published with Nick Barrington in 1977. Seven Springs has been linked to swallet caves to the north, including Dairyhouse Slocker, Downhead Swallet and Heale Slocker. Bradshaw's Cave is currently 66 metres long, so there is potential for further discovery, beyond the terminal area of collapsed boulders.

### **Phil Hendy**

**Ed:** *Phil, apart from being our Librarian, is also a regular journalist for the "Mendip Times", and I am indebted to the Editor, Steve Egginton for permission to reproduce this article.*



### **Penderyn weekend at the WSG**

**Participants:** Jude, Noel, Clive, Wayne, Les, Wendy, Dog, Nick, Malc, Dylan, Pete, Jan, Dave.

Friday July 17 2015 **Porth yr Ogof** Clive

I dived from Tradesman's Entrance with a pair of 7L cylinders and four lights. The water was warm (13C) but the visibility only moderate ( 2 - 3 m) and the current still quite strong. **Clive**

Friday July 17 2015 Sodding awful stop-start journey from the bridge to Cardiff. Good to arrive and find Les and Co in residence, with Clive and Wayne already here. A large red wine helps to revive! **Noel**

Saturday July 18 2015 **OFD** Wayne, Noel, Nick Butler.

Wayne thought that he hadn't done the bottom-to-top trip before and Nick certainly hadn't, so we went over to Penwyllt. The place was almost deserted, but we got a key and left our "Out" chit as normal. Apparently the SWCC are blasting inside the entrance and we were warned that there might be some bang fumes. Also to leave our clothes in the car, not the changing room. Getting the entrance key to work was a struggle, but no bang fumes anywhere and no obvious signs of blasting. The streamway as glorious as ever, with just the right amount of water. One forgets (hmmm *I* forget) what a thrutch lies between OFD 1 and 2. Wayne found that he was remembering bits such as the Letter Box, so there must have been a through-trip somewhere in his mis-spent youth! We paused in Piccadilly for a snack break, but didn't bother at the usual pause point at the Lower Oxbow. Outbound, at the top of Gnome Passage I had an inexplicable memory lapse and missed the entrance to the Brickyard.... so we did a neat circle back to the Gnomes..... before correctly slithering over the bricks and so to daylight! 4 hrs (it always is!). There was a SWCC member to take out key back, but the place was locked and we couldn't shower. Back at the WSG we noticed that we were all more or less broken! **Noel**

Saturday July 18 2015 **OFD** As above, Nick Butler's experience: his first OFD.

From the SWCC car park Noel led us downhill to the entrance in woodland. After a short walk we soon reached a clean watercourse, flowing with clear water. Following the stream up slope we eventually reached a long, flat-out crawl, then a wet down-climb pitch with a fixed rope. After negotiating the Letter Box, Noel found the connection with the stream, which we followed for a fair distance, crossing deep holes in the stream bed with the aid of some fixed lengths of scaffold tube. A thrutch upwards from the Salubrious Streamway took us quickly upwards and after locating the Brickyard we soon found ourselves out into the relative warmth of a Welsh summer day. A short walk downhill took us back to the SWCC. A great trip. 4 hours.

**Nick**

Saturday July 18 2015 **Pant Mawr** Malc, Jude, Dylan (Norton). Dave Walker.

A great day for finding the pot to start with, sunny and fresh; the new fence round it could be seen from a mile away. Malc rigged - just enough rope! Off to see a very pretty chamber, then on down the streamway and muddy boulders to very near the sump. Plenty of foam; there must have been a good bit of rain recently. A quick look upstream from the pitch and back up the rope and out. Ice-Cream near Penderyn from a Mr. Wippy on the way back. Really good caving trip. **Jude**

Saturday July 18 2015 **Dan yr Ogof** Clive Westlake, Pete Hellier, Les Williams.

I don't think I had realised how good the show-cave is for non-cavers. We went the long way round so as not to meet anybody head-on. The lake was deeper for longer than I had remembered or expected. Super passage initially. Les was not in the mood for the tight start to the Long Crawl but Clive and Pete continued, to enjoy Cloud Chamber and Flabbergasm Oxbow having a good look around. Les experienced a surprise mini-flood-pulse while waiting for us. **Pete**

Sunday July 19 2015 Woke up to discover that some sadist had welded my lower spine to my hips leaving only the nerve endings to graunch together. Also that I could not bend enough to put on my shoes..... decided not to go caving today. Broken. **Noel**.

Sunday July 19 2015 **OFD** Clive Westlake, Pete Hellier, Wayne Starsmore, Chris Milne.

The excuse for this trip was to take some photos of the stal above Skyhook Pitch. All very pleasant and straightforward to the top of the drop into Maypole Inlet. We carried straight on and after exploring a few side passages not to be found on our copy of the survey we easily found the obvious cross-rift. At the end we dropped down into a meandering passage and soon saw the pull-through line for the pitch. A bit fiddly to feed the rope through two rings, and then another exposed 10' or so **\*\*\***, a hop up to the right to a nice fossil tube, then after the mud, superb amber helectites. We had a look at the half-dozen or so junctions beyond, while Clive failed to get his camera to function properly. The Out trip was much quicker. **Pete**

**\*\*\*** Our 23 m rope was short by 4 m and we made do with slings which we tied on using one of Clive's spare boot-laces. It might be better for the first man up to re-rig from the top: we slung some slings around a well-used stal for protection. **Pete**

18 - 19 July 2015 It was a good weekend for non-cavers too. Jan had a super walk back from Penwyllt to Caerllwyn following the main track over from the back of the SWCC down to Blaen-Nedd-Isaf and on to Ystradfellte. A pretty river stroll behind the waterfall at Sgwd yr Eira and over to Penderyn. Next day glorious views from the Moel Penderyn trig-point, then gently down the ridge to Craig y Dinas - back via the woods and Sgwd yr Eira again. An unexpected bonus was a concert at Penderyn Church: Cwmbach male-voice-choir, who also entertained us in memorable fashion in the pub afterwards. **Jan**

### **The Winter Yorkshire weekend**

Sunday November 22 2015 **Simpsons Pot / West Kingsdale Master Cave.** Kevin Hilton, Dave Watts, Clive Westlake.

To Kingsdale where water-levels had dropped after a very wet week or three. First we went in to rig the Valley Entrance pitch down to the Master Cave. Then up the hill and down Simpson's Pot. The first pitch, Five Steps Pot, was rigged..... and the next.... and the next! We didn't have to use our own ropes until Slit Pot. The extra water from Swinsto Hole made the last pitch a bit splashy. We hastened through East End passage, where the water always feels several degrees colder than in any other British cave. Through the master cave in lively water conditions, up the pitch to the Roof Tunnel and then out to Winter sunshine in Kingsdale.  
 ½ hr plus 2 ½ hrs. **Kevin**



**Wessex Cave Club Summer Camp. 13 - 28 August. Réseau Félix Trombe. Pyrenees.**

Noel has asked me to write a short prologue to this report of the summer 2015 club trip the The Felix Trombe, so here goes:

**W**hen a small group of us first visited the Félix Trombe a couple of years ago we had an absolutely cracking time and we thought 'what a great place for a club trip'. I'd like to think, after the club trip this year, that we were right. The accommodation at Chalet de Paloumère was exactly what a big group of cavers needed, the in-house catering was designed around us and the weather gods were smiling down on us (well for the most part anyway) So everything was set for two weeks of glorious caving, walking, cycling, kayaking etc.

Everything seemed to run smoothly and effortlessly, this was due, in the main, to a great deal of planning, forethought and hard work by a small number of people. Noel and Bean deserve a special mention here for the hard work they put in, along with a number of others, both before and during the trip. Our hosts at the Chalet also deserve a mention for putting up with us bunch and catering for our odd British tastes.

I won't go into too much detail here and will leave the caving tales to others. Suffice to say all went well, nobody died, despite the valiant efforts of some. A lot of caving was done in a number of entrances including some long through trips (some much longer than others !) The trip to see the world class Blanc de Blanc formation was a highlight of my caving. The group trip to the Gouffre de Burtetch / Grotte de Riusec was entertaining in a number of ways ! We even managed to get Tommo underground, no mean feat in itself.

Everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves whenever I asked, much beer was drunk at bargain prices and we all left for home having had a thoroughly enjoyable time. Well I did anyway, which is all that really matters. Cheers. **Mark**

**Ed:** And I wonder if any club has, before this, engaged a professional chef for their summer camp? I stuck my neck a long, long way out on this one, but I was not decapitated and we all fed very well indeed. These were the participants:

|           |          |       |        |        |
|-----------|----------|-------|--------|--------|
| Adrian    | Clive    | James | Mark   | Simon  |
| Aidan     | Colin    | Jan   | Max    | Tom    |
| Andrea    | Cookie   | Jane  | Maxine | Tomasz |
| Andy S    | Darren   | Jo    | Noel   | Tommo  |
| Andy M    | Dave     | John  | Pete   | Tony   |
| Barry     | Di       | Jude  | Rachel | Wayne  |
| Bean      | Faye     | Kevin | Rich   | Wendy  |
| Charlotte | Floss    | Mak   | Rita   | Will   |
| Cheryl    | Francois | Malc  | Sarah  |        |
| Claire    |          |       |        |        |

**Ed:** The Félix Trombe entrances are mostly located in very thick woodland. Before we started caving seriously, Mark, Simon and Bean tape-flagged the route to each entrance, and name-tagged each one. This was vital, and it worked brilliantly.



Simon "Entrance marking". Trou du Vent



Typical FT terrain..... why the caves needed to be signposted and marked.

Friday August 14 2015 Trou Mile Bean, Noel

I arrived at la Paloumère to meet with Jean Luc and Yolande ("JL" & "Y") at 0900 to be greeted by the braying wonder donkey. Saw JL and sorted out finance and minor details and did some unpacking and organising. I had a picnic lunch at 1300 and Bean arrive in time to join in with me. And then we went caving. We went in some style by driving right up to the TM meadow. The km or so of track above the l'Ours parking is OK with care. There was a real stream in the meadow and over the bottom cascade, but only a splashy trickle in the TM. Somewhere along

the line the rigging guide failed us and we were short of a rope for the bottom pitch. I was a spectator while Bean discovered and discarded numerous knackered old spits. We made as much use of naturals as possible. So at the moment the TM does not offer a traverse exit from TDV trips. On the way back we met a couple of speleos hiking up from l'Ours. Stopped to chat, but were met with blank incomprehension.... my French gone tits-up or what? Then the light dawned... They were Spanish and spoke no French at all !!! Discovered that they were on a recce visit, 6 days, to discover as much as they could about the FT, so invited them down the la Paloumère to meet with us and compare rigging etc. etc. We think that they are camping up by l'Ours. Poor bastards, the weather does not look good. Later Bean joined me for dinner at my hotel in Salies. **Noel**



Trou Mile. Thanks Simon, job done.

Saturday August 15 2015 RV'd with Bean at the chalet at 0900. Pissing with rain and decided that the TM could stay unrigged for the day! Thought of two soaking Spaniards in a tent surrounded by wet caving kit and felt..... better. All heart, that's us. People arrived through the day in dribs and drabs, but some of my arrival planning was faulty as the Saturday was a religious public holiday so the Mane

Intermarché was closed and neither beer nor wine was available. **Noel**

Sunday August 16 2015 Trou du Vent. Rigging trip. Aidan, Clive, Pete, Noel.

In a word: “Failed” So I, personally, am acquiring a Jonah reputation with a 100% failure record so far. Aidan was the main man, rigging and dangling. Some of the pitch heads were awkward, but the route finding seemed to be straightforward, following tightish roof-tube meanders. Keyword there - “Seemed”. We eventually arrived at a 35 metre, genuine, 100 carat swine. Tight almost all the way, with walls like shark’s teeth, it dropped into a magnificent shaft one side from the pitch. There was a minor, but awful, deviation (2 linked crabs) at the tightest point, at the top. At the bottom there was a lethally tight meander going nowhere; and nothing else at all other than a huge pile of spend carbide. Clive and Pete pushed the meander until it became sub-Mendip size for both of them. We retreated up the aforementioned 100 carat special, and then up the next pitch until we found the far-from-obvious correct route downwards. It looked horribly tight. We looked at it and decided that someone else should have the honour of completing the TdV rigging..... and headed out to daylight. The TdV is one lousy way into the cave. 5 ½ hours of brutality. **Noel**



Charlotte & Faye rigging Pyrenois

Sunday August 16 2015 Pont de Gerbaut Rigging trip. The dream-team today consisted of none other than Bean, Tom and Claire.

While kitting up it was decided that Claire should be swapped for the leggy German bird who was flashing some flesh about 5 metres up the road. Then we decided that it was too much effort to hike back 50 metres to the cars to fetch some water. Oh well. Mark had informed us that it was an easy 30 minute hike. Yeah, yeah, 45 minutes into the steep and tiring walk in we realised that we still had 15 minutes to go. Then Claire decided that she ought to have done some SRT practice before dropping the 40 m entrance pitch.... Tom rigged and Claire and Bean picked holes in

his work (but not to his face). All went well and we managed to devour a whole Energy-Total bar between the three of us. In fact we did so well that we had a complete, spare 30 m rope. It was the one Bean should have had on Friday in the Trou Mile. So Bean carried it out. **Claire**

Sunday August 16 2015 Walking Team - cast of thousands. The intention was to locate some of the cave entrances: Henne Mort, Trou Mile, Hérétiques, Trou du Vent. I would like to say that we walked directly to the entrance of the Henne Mort, but I would be lying. Only one casualty - Simon’s head encountered a branch, and Barry’s extremely close inspection of the entrance which scared a few! **Mark**

Sunday August 16 2015 Bean, Mak, Jo. Quick cycle ride down to Arbas and back via Fugaron. 8 minutes down and 40 minutes back up the hill. Unfortunately the shop was shut, so no ice-creams and rather hot coming back up the hill, but at least we earned our cold beers. **Mak/Jo**

Sunday August 16 2015 Trou Mile - Hérétiques Wayne, Darren, Kev, Charlotte.

Great trip, Darren liked the trip - no swearing - must have been good! Completed the Trou Mile rigging. **Charlotte**

Sunday August 16 2015 Hérétiques - Trou Mile James, Maxine, Tomasz, Francois.

Great trip, an excellent “Exchange” with the Trou Mile mob. **Anon**

Monday August 17 2015 Hérétiques - Trou Mile Jude, Ade, Pete, Aidan.

Aidan and Pete needed a safe bet for today and this trip proved just the job. Straightforward descent through the Hérétiques and into the Grand Salle of the TdV. Highlight for Jude was a lonely salamander. No sight of a rope from the TdV entrance. A gale at the end of the Grand Salle, but for us the tortuous route down to the Trou Mile stream. Then just a case of following it up to the surface, with a few interesting rope traverses. Great trip. **Pete**

Monday August 17 2015 Trou de Vent - Hérétiques Tom, Bean, Andy, Claire, James, Francois.

The plan was for us to rig the final pitches of the TdV. "Simples" having been given detailed instructions of where **not** to go by Noel, who'd had a rather "Interesting" trip the day before. So we just decided independently to follow suit, 6 of us thrutching a hopelessly tight meander..... Death or Glory....and we were hell-bent on the glory, and also at the bottom of the horror pitch discovered yesterday. So back up the bottom two pitches we found the far-from-obvious, horrid, down sloping meander. Bean's colourful vocabulary kept us concentrated. We all agreed that going back up simply wasn't an option. These pitches are not easy, and are extremely tight. We finally made it down into the streamway after many acrobatics and antics. The streamway is huge, and looking up at the hole we'd popped out of, 18 m up in the ceiling was quite awe-inspiring. We romped down the Grand Salle and out up fun and picturesque pitches. So Glory was finally had and Kev and James have been elected mad enough to de-rig the TdV.

Monday August 17 2015 Pène Blaque Dave and Max.

We went to the rope traverse at the end of the entrance crawls. A grand bit of cave. Thanks Noel for taking us to the entrance. Then up to the Pène Blaque for a great view back to la Paloumère and the village. **Dave**



Wayne in Gouffre Hérétiques Photo: Tomasz



Monday August 17 2015 Cycling: Mak, Jo, Maxine.

Arbas, Salies, St.Lizier and back, with nice crepes in St. Lizier. **Mak**

Tuesday August 18 2015  
Quote of the day: "I can notice small things. That's why I wore a black overall when mine is blue".

Tuesday August 18 2015  
**Pène Blaque** Andy Morse, Kev, Wayne, Tomasz.

Down Pène Blaque to the wire traverse and back. A very pleasant walk in, but

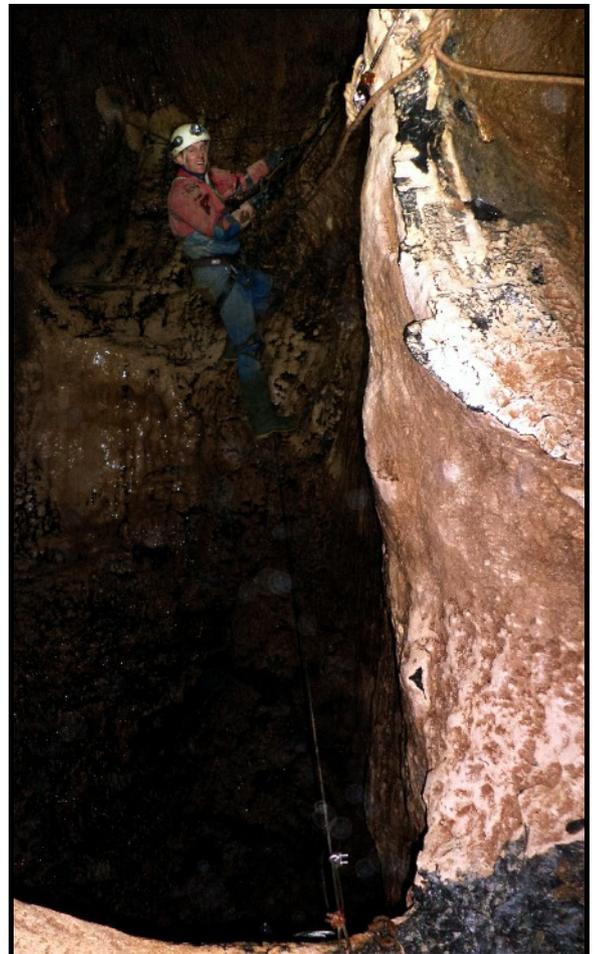
Before Trou Mile - the phantom flying Wellie

Photo: Kevin

quite brutal in reverse! Met three Israeli cavers and their French guide. Mr. Morse commented on caves in Israel. The wire traverse was quite something \*\*\*! Had to stop for pictures. Home in time for tea. \*\*\* Subsequently Andy wondered if they had not stopped at the first wire traverse (over a shaft) rather than at the PdG junction traverse.



Trou Mile - Pène Blaque Photo: Tomasz



Kevin on classic FT traverse, Trou Mile to Pène Blaque. Photo: Tomasz

Monday August 17 2015 Walked in to Pène Blaque to show Dave and Max where it was (also lent Max a helmet etc). It's a fair hike in and out, but lovely. I did some cairn enhancing at the top of the scree slope where one turns off across the hillside.

Tuesday August 18 2015 **Trou Mile** John, Dave, Noel, Colin.

Excellent starter and refresher trip for SRT and an introduction to the Félix Trombe system. Descended all the entrance pitches and continued down the streamway for 300 metres or so. Swildons with attitude, Irish Chert and on steroids. TM would be perfect if it were 6" wider, but lovely grippy rock and stal, with delightfully sporting climbs. **Colin/Noel**

Tuesday August 18 2015 **Geocaching** Maxine & James  
Over by Estradens.

Wednesday August 19 2015 **Cycling.** Jo and Mak

Gentle cycle from St. Girons up Port (Col) de la Core (1395m) to Seix. Tried to cycle up col de Saraillé (942m) but decided that 12 kms of big gravel downhill was not practical on road bikes (after getting to the col !!!). 52 miles and around 1500m of uphill - a good day out. Finding something to eat at lunchtime was a challenge. Sore bums all round: and underground 3 times on tunnel road Soueix to St. Girons - without lights !!! **Mak**

Wednesday August 19 2015 **Trou Mile - Pène Blaque** Bean, Darren, Aidan, Pete, James, Tom.

Very good. Only comment so far: James "I would have got less abuse if I'd turned up wearing FlipFops instead of wellies".

This was the first of the big “Through Trips”. They were through in 12 hours and walked into the evening meal at about 2030 to applause and congratulations.

Thursday August 20 2015 **Trou Mile - Pène Blanche**

Andy - Music Man & Pull-Down Man.

Wayne - Map Man

Claire - Stores and provisions Man? Woman!

Kev - Rigger Man

Tomasz - Bag Man No. 1

Francois - Bag Man No. 2

With everyone allocated a role we set off for our through trip. Good enjoyable progress, stopping for lunch, and then the pièce de résistance, having stopped just after the second wire traverse - Queen. As ever, Andy had a great selection of tracks that also kept us company on the walk back to the car. A great trip. 17 hours.  
**Kevin.**

Friday August 21 2015 **Henne Mort - Commingeois** Bean, Aiden, Sarah, James, Tom, Pete.

Superb trip down through ever-improving pitches - a real classic, and all straightforward. Good fossil passage with, it seemed to us, fairly uncomplicated route-finding, although Bean had been before. The draft got stronger as we neared the exit, until, as described, eyes had to be closed to avoid the blasting sand. The exit is a small window, high up the hill, the descent slowly improving. Thanks to Bean for leading/rigging and Mark for helping us find the entrance. **Pete**

Friday August 21 2015 **White Water Kayaking** Will, Floss, Kev, Charlotte, Cookie, Faye, Wayne, Noel, John, Colin, Dave, Max. (Sundry French families also came along...)



Wills spotted this tourist flier and pinned it up. It looked such fun that the Dozen listed above went for it. And it was even more fun than the brochure promised. The actual operation is fairly shoe-string, but professional and well organised. We went upstream by van and car, had 20 minutes of instruction (in English), and then set off downstream. It was about as much fun as you can have wearing someone else’s ill-fitting wet neoprene pantaloons, inflated false mammaries and a non-caving helmet. We were in a mixture of solo and pair kayaks and went down the rapids variously forwards, backwards, sideways and sometimes independently



Will and Flos making it look easy. Photo: Cookie

of our kayaks. At one stage we abandoned them completely, en-masse, to body-surf a particularly body-friendly rapid. After changing, Cookie bought a CD of photos of our trip - we will not mention copyright, but felt that one CD would suffice! One way and another it was riotously enjoyable.

Afterwards we went to St. Larry to a "Logis" favoured and recommended by Noel, only to be turned away as rudely as the French typically do when they simply can't be bothered provide any service to a

bunch of hungry, thirsty canoeists. Just up the valley, however, we pulled into a bar/cafe/restaurant which plainly catered mainly for locals rather than tourists and they provided us with splendid plates of chips, salads and croques monsieur..... and needless to say, plentiful wine and beers. **Noel**

Friday August 21 2015 **Cycling** Maxine, Jo, Mak, Darren.

Cycling Aspet - Col du Menté - return via Sauveterre-de-Comminges - Aspet. Maxine's first big mountain col. Nice tarts at the top. When Maxine said that she would be slow on the descent we did not believe her.

A puncture meant that we waited at the bottom; luckily some Frenchmen stopped to help her and gave her a lift when she had her bits out! Darren decided to cycle back from Aspet.... A decision that he regretted by the time he got to la Paloumère. **Mak**

Saturday August 22 2015

**Walking** Noel

I left the car by the chapel at Herran and hiked up the side of the mountain. Keyword there: "Up". This path was steep, but well marked where it branched off from the route forestière. It reaches the ridge by a large, modern, stone cross. From there the GR rises steadily in the woods, with only occasional



The Blanc de Blanc formations. Photo: Cookie

views Southwards. Paint markings on the trees show the route, which skirts round a massive blind sink-hole right on the ridge. It pops out of the trees just below the Tuc du Tucol. From the wind-sock you can look

directly down into la Paloumère courtyard. So I did, and waved, but nobody took the blindest bit of notice. It took me 1hr 40 to get there. From there on the ridge walk was glorious, wide and undulating with wonderful views Southwards to the high Pyrenees. Having debated whether to leave the ridge Southwards to Portet du Collet and get a taxi home, I decided to take the track down past the Cababne de Roque to the parking d'Ours and hike all the way home. I immediately met Claire and Mark, then Cookie, Faye and Rachel, and finally Malc and Rita, all hiking up having parked at Ours. The tarmac road down was a pain and la Paloumère a welcome sight... so were a couple of beers! It only remained to walk up to Herran and retrieve the car. All in all, it was a glorious walk, but a mistake not to drop off on the South side to Portet.

**Noel**

Sunday August 23 2015 **Blankety Blank** (aka **Blancs de Blancs**) Bean, Mark, Aidan, Mak, Andy M, Francois.

After a leisurely breakfast (having prised Mark from his sick-bed) we set off for Pène Blanque. Francois donned full hill-walking kit (with poles) for the walk to the entrance where we left bags and poles before heading in. Progress to Dromedaire was swift, with only minor cursing in the Letter Box, and much overheating (a theme for the trip). Route finding went well, but when you arrive a room with an arrow pointing up.... it's best to take it !! Leaving markers as we went, we arrived at the B de B. Just as described: Big. White. Nice. Stomped out with minor curses at the Letter Box - again. A bit warm by the time we reached the entrance. 8 hrs ish. Quote of the day: "Quite quick for a bunch of geriatrics). **Anon**

Monday August 24 2015 **Henne Mort - Commengeois** Wayne, Kevin, Jude, Aidan, John.

"It won't be wet", said Mark, "Just a few splashes". So a rather wet and cold trip but great fun. Amazing pitches and then just like being back on Mendip to get out, apart from the walk back down to the car. Talk about steep! With thanks to Mark for showing us where to park and walking up to the entrance with us, and Charlotte and Noel for car ferrying. 8 hrs, and rather late back at La P. **Kev**

Tuesday August 25 2015 **Pyrénois - Pène Blanque** Andrea, Rich, Flos, Wayne.

I lead the trip into Pyreinois. Going down the big pitch with nobody at the bottom waiting for me was rather scary. Everyone enjoyed the trip. Lots of variety of ups and downs and small pitches. A few traverses and a bold step, then the hands-and-knees crawl out through the PB. 1 Hour walk in, 2 hours caving and then 1 hour walk out. The walk out was hard work! Overall an enjoyable caving trip. **Andrea**

Wednesday August 26 2015 **Gouffre des Hérétiques - Pont de Gerbaut.** James, Maxine, Aidan, Francois, Jude, Rich.

The objective was to de-rig the Pont de Gerbaut, so we went in through Hérétiques. The extra pitches were successfully negotiated and while I managed to talk Maxine safely through the manoeuvre, I completely messed it myself! The Grande Salle of the Trou du Vent was as spectacular as ever, complete with rope dangling enticingly from above: too soon and too tight to bail out! At the bottom of the chamber a crawl through into the TdV. Some interesting passages led to some very fine pitches, all over 30m with "Interesting" traverses to get to the pitch heads (character building and exciting at the same time). Some nice stomping passages with occasional large and spectacular chambers. The Traverse of Death was safely passed by all at the connection to the Pè Blanque. Down to the streamway and then up to daylight and freedom. There was one tight crawl to a small pitch which you had to ascend and post yourself into the next passage. A few more climbs and short pitches came to the bottom of the 42m entrance pitch. This was big and airy and despite being broken by a re-belay half way up was a bit bouncy. Up and out revealed an enormous entrance. It made the Hérétiques entrance look like a rabbit-hole. Excellent navigation by James and a solid team made for an awesome experience. Definitely my best trip ever. **Rich**

Wednesday August 26 2015 **Cycling** Arbas - Aspet - Col de Portet d'Aspet, back to Arbas by-passing St. Girons. Steep col to climb after previous day's trip and a hot day. Luckily got omelette and chips off-menu in Portet d'Aspet. Nice descent, but the return went on a bit. Computer took us off-route and we met a

friendly local who also rides a Cannondale and filled Jo's bidon. Found ourselves cycling uphill at 3pm in sunshine on the hottest day of the holiday! **Anon**

Monday August 24 2015 **Gouffre de Burtech - Grotte de Riusec** Cast of thousands, just about everybody was involved.

We split into two parties for the pull-through, with a couple of carloads going to the Riusec exit while the



Mob at the Gouffre de Burtetch entrance. Photo: Tomasz

rest hiked over the hill to the Burtech entrance. The idea was that the pull-through ropes would be left with the Riusec mob to bring back in their cars. The drive to the Riusec parking area is a seriously tedious 45 minutes on rough routes forrestière. Simon had calculated the GPS co-ords for the Riusec with astonishing accuracy from the 1:20k topo, so Clive, Tommo, Barry and Colin and Noel set off from the car with Mr. Morse's GPS gizmo to go caving. Mr. Morse's gizmo persistently asked Clive if he were indoors because it was otherwise lost. So we clambered around the side of the mountain, discovering that stinging nettles grew abundantly there. After sundry false trails and climbs Noel eventually found a red

arrow, and then the target cave exits, blasting out cold air. While we were changing, Malc, Simon and Cheryl arrived. Simon's (working!) GPS suggested that his calculated point was less than 30m from the cave.

The Riusec exit porch frames a view only rivalled by that from the Grotte Chevalier, with distant views of the high Pyrenees still patched with snow. Inside it even resembles the Trou du Glaz, a large stomping passage which leads into the colossal Salle Luis Trombe. Its size is deceptive because it is all on a steep slope of enormous blocks and slabs. We became ants in a bowl of sugar lumps. With tiny lights appearing here and there we lost Clive completely for a while, but were joined by the "Through Trippers" in ones and twos as they emerged from the equally vast Salle A. The two chambers were impressive enough, but the caving was a matter of clambering around on enormous ex-roof boulders. Eventually we all rendezvoused at the exit to share beers and snacks before hitting the hillside homewards. And plan A failed; The



Mob at Grotte de Riusec exit

riggers carried the ropes back over the mountain instead of leaving them with the car parties. **Noel**

Thursday August 27 2015 **Pyrénois - Pène Blanche** Charlotte, Faye, Andrea, Colin, Noel.

The plan was to de-rig by pulling through. I'd thought that we could link the first pitch ropes to my short one to complete the pull-downs, but Faye, who knew that the actual rigging was almost one continuous 100m rope, realised that this was impossible, so decided that she and Charlotte would de-rig from the top, and Andrea would take Colin and I through to the Pène Blanche. Since I was slightly ahead at the Pyréniois entrance, I saw the "Y" hang and clipped in.... and promptly jammed completely. The entrance is an 'orrid, nasty, tight, underhung' ole. So there I was, needing rescuing with only half of me underground! Eventually Faye managed to reach past my waist and unclip my Stop. The drop underneath is about 3' !! From there on down, it's nice, three little pitches, all nice heads, and then the biggie. This is the top 35 m of a 140m shaft, and after a small deviation at the top it drops into the mother of all giant shafts. No water, no noise, spooky. At the bottom of this pitch, the rope is anchored, so one can pull across from the open shaft and clip onto a pre-rigged climb (up into the Pyréniois connecting passage). From the top I watched Andrea and Colin descending and doing the pendulum pull before they joined me. We'd had instructions to ensure that we untied the foot of the pitch rope so that Faye and Charlotte could pull it up.

Noel to Colin: "Did you untie the rope?"

Colin to Noel; "No"

So Colin went back down the climb to free the pitch rope and we watched our escape to the outside world vanishing upwards. That sorted, we set off to the Pène Blanche. It's a thoroughly enjoyable bit of passage with pre-rigged downs and ups (with some serious holes in the floor), also some good formations and flowstone. Eventually we reached the toboggan slope up into the Pène Blanche and did the stooping and crawling exit to the open air and a pleasant sunny, warm afternoon.

Meanwhile Faye and Charlotte were de-rigging upwards.... and there's an unsaid element here, which is that getting upwards out of the Pyréniois entrance has to be a nightmare. Somehow Faye did it, but the end result was that we arrived back at the car before Charlotte and Faye, and then all had to hang around while we changed a flat tyre before we could head back to la Paloumère. To compound my embarrassment at having to be rescued before even getting into the cave, Faye revealed that she is BEC and not yet in the Wessex! I hang my head. **Noel**

*My best trip of the holiday. Start by abseiling without a stop or rack. Great trip down. Superb pitch down to the ledge with a pull across. Up the hand-line, the Oh S\*\*t, I didn't untie the rope for Faye and Charlotte. Back down to untie. Charlotte calls from the top: "Hello, are you having fun?" Great timing as I had just*

*succeeded in freeing the rope for them before my mistake was discovered! Then up through the big stuff - lovely, then the final 15 minute crawl out in the Pène Blanche, but we small people can stand up for most of it! **Colin***

Thursday August 27 2015  
**Walking. Pic de Cagire Jo,**  
Mak, Malc.

Early start to 4 hour walk round, and up to the Pic de Cagire via its knife-edge ridge. Nice breeze kept us cool and found a cave entrance 20 m Below the summit - maybe the Grotte de



Walking to Goufre de Burtetch

Cagire. Nice return via circuit route to Col de Menté and cheese-and-bacon toasties with chips and salad followed by huge ice-creams. **Mak**

Ed: Because this was such a large and successful Wessex summer camp, it seems worth adding a few non-log-book words about it. We stayed in the Chalet de Paloumère, a “Gite d’Etape”. It’s a short distance, and a cyclist-unfriendly height, above Arbas; perfectly situated for all our caving in the FT. As accommodation it could scarcely have been better. Given our numbers, and the equipment of the kitchen, employing a proper chef was a necessity, and the catering worked very well. One of the chalet facilities was a conference room, which became our indoors social centre and also the planning and information room, where we could



The planning and conference room Photo: Noel

spread out OS maps, and put the big FT survey up on one wall. It was where Mac and Jo planned the cyclists’ routes and the overnight secure storage for many thousands of pound’s worth of bicycles! Some of the FT



Dining at Paloumère *Cookie*



Social life at Paloumère

entrances and exits involved long walks, but it was glorious walking terrain. Given the nature of the camp log-book, it has proved almost impossible to associate the photographs with the accounts. My intention has been to illustrate the many and varied trips and activities of the fortnight. I suspect that my photo attributions may also have errors; I had some filing problems! **Noel**

## Lanzarote 27 November - 04/09 December

For several years Chris and Carmen have been hosting very informal gatherings in Lanzarote, in the Spring and Winter: a week or so of caving, climbing, walking and socialising. Caving in Lanzarote is fraught with official prohibitions, and the National Park Rangers are numerous, observant and equipped with telepathic Fun-Detectors, so we invariably hide all our caving gear in ruc-sacs wherever we are caving on the island. This winter the participants were:

Chris Binding and Carmen, Colin and Joanna Shapter, Pauline, Andy and Rachel, Mac (Stuart MacManus - BEC), Aubrey and Carol, John Hurst, Noel and Rosemary Cleave, Paul and Ali Stillman, Nick Butler and Sam Storrar.

Saturday November 28 2015 General chill-out day shopping to replenish the cellar and larder, then an outing across to El Golfo to show Pauline some Lanzarote views and sights. Lunch in an excellent El Golfo waterside restaurant..... garlic prawns chilli oil.... etc. Put Carmen in charge of social arrangements for an 1830 Rv between apartments 5 and 6 (Cleave and Shapter!!) since that offered enough milling space for 17! Raided the under-stairs cupboard for a couple more outside chairs.

1830 RV 17 bodies at Number 5 then at 2000 a mass raid on the amazing Chinese in town, Eu 6.5 for all you can eat, as many visits to the buffet as you wish.... and it was delicious and excellent. We fed well, but not to excess... unlike the tattooed behemoths surrounding us. Back to N5 for drinks and chat until 2300.

Sunday November 29 2015 Planning RV at 1030. Andy to do two chapters of homework, Rosemary and Rachel to Teguize for the Sunday market, all the rest in the other 4 cars to Gentes, we did a car shuffle to leave two at the nearest lay-by to Puerto Falsa and then headed underground... just the 13 of us, with Sam nursing a badly strained ankle, Pauline hobbling on two sticks (and not having caved for 23 months) Ali similarly out of practice. A quick trip..... not! But a delight, as always. Joanna, a virtual non-caver, was astonishingly sure-footed and agile, and Pauline amazing with her two sticks. The transit

suffered a lava bite de-luxe as well as a hurt ankle. Luckily the beachfront café at Arietta had sufficient beer and garlic to assuage all injuries... Later, after nibbles and drinks at N5, we ate en-masse (and very well) at the Italian restaurant at the end of our road. Since we were 16 this needed a bit of forewarning, courtesy of Chris. Later there was considerable discussion about the morrow, with a trip across to Graciosa being mooted. But on.....

Monday November 23 2015 We went out separate ways: Mac, John and Aubrey down towards Fermes for one of the described walks there. Nick and Sam for a total chill-out and do-nothing day, Chris and Andy and Rachel (with some rope) to drop a couple of interesting shafts on Pico Pardtio, Colin and Joanna to explore Teguize, Noel and Rosemary to tackle Caldera Blanca.

**Ed:** Chris and Andy didn't need to rope their shafts, but one was venting a howling draught through the boulder choke floor.

Their next discovery was a foul, sharp, crawling episode, requiring a bit of digging at the end to allow them access to 150



Social life at Numero 5. Photo: Colin



Aubrey & Noel. Gentes - Puerto Falsa. Photo: Chris

metres or so of tube and another exit to the open air. Quote Chris "It's the sort of place to take someone to when you want to end a friendship!"

**Cueva de los Gorriones** Andy, Rachel, Chris.

On the road past Montana Cuervo (with the crater to your left) you drive on past Mancha Blanca until you meet a small parking area

wasn't entirely without accident, as Sam tumbled, ripped her shorts and hurt her ankle again, and Ali took a pearler and

on the left (room for 3 or 4 cars) at the foot of Montana Tingata. We park here to cross the road and walk out and up to

Pico Partido along the snake shaped gully with a small cave you need a rope on the entrance. Anyway - you walk to the left of that known cave and over the brow of the hill and as you drop down and go round to the left a large open hole can be seen. The 4 of us dropped into the down-flow tube which closed down almost immediately, however, the up-flow side went on ....we came to a very low crawl (needles tore at our clothing and bare skin) but dig fever had set in. Andy S had to break off a couple of the longer needles to get through. This went on another 50m to find daylight - a through trip had been found! Chris and Carmen very kindly named it "Cueva de los Gorriones" which I think means Cave of the Sparrows?

After that we did some more furling - various holes were descended but I chose to sit and keep a look out and enjoy the sun. An amazing peaceful place - felt remote and wild. Will return next year. **Rachel**

**Caldera Blanca** Rosemary, Noel

With zero wind at Costa Teguse and little forecast, Caldera Blanca looked like a good bet. Lesson here? Don't gamble! Between the Caldaretta and CB the wind was funneled and gusty. Up on the MC rim, it was ferocious. We went half way up, where the gusts were becoming dangerous, and retreated. Coming back we completed the circuit to the lowest part of the caldera saddle, but there's no real path (despite what the map shows) and we wound up scrambling on the steep and exposed outside before regaining the rim. It was delightfully sunny, so our 3 3/4 hours walk generated a quality thirst, which we slaked at a beach-front restaurant in Caleta Famara while watching some magnificent surfing displays, so the trade-wind brought one benefit!

John, Mac and Aubrey had an interesting walk, buffeted by the wind. Aubrey and John went swimming..... Aubrey wearing nothing and John wearing his hearing aids! Subsequently Aubrey was broken, immobilised by a blister. John was unbroken but deaf.

Wednesday December 2 2015 Tinguaton Shafts. Chris, Noel.

We'd looked at the Tinguaton shafts a couple of years ago, and seen that one had several "P" hangars in position, which was a good indication that it was one of the deeper and better shafts (it and a neighbour are actually 97 metres deep). They are also comparatively young - less than 200 years old. In the 1824 eruptions the principal characteristic was "The enormous columns of smoke and boiling seawater that came out of the Tinguaton volcano" so technically these shafts are Fumaroles. Our aim today was to recce the rigging needed, and have a peer down into the stygian depths - and photograph the proceedings. Chris was rigging, obviously. Because the openings are very wide, rigging demanded deviations from the opposite wall from the descent rope, and it was all off lava naturals although we used the P hangers as deviations when we dropped the first shaft. This was user friendly, nicely human sized and in polished rock. We went down about 15 metres before coming back up. Thus far, no rubs, but lots of ledges to rest on. Our second shaft was wider and a much more serious piece of kit, although it, too, provided a handy ledge for reversing. Beneath that it widened out and a dropped stone took a long, long time to hit a floor.

Wednesday December 2 2015 Cueva los Lagos. Chris, Nick, Mak, Sam.

Everyone's favourite cave. Sam loved it despite hobbling with



Chris rigging a Tinguaton shaft

tendonitis.

The tide was going out, and Nick swam right to the end and looked down into the submerged pot-hole where the water was sinking. Nick reports:

Chris led us from the Cueva De Los Verdes show cave car park, across a lava field known as the Malpais de Monte Corona, under a blue sky with the temperature at 21°C.

After a few hundred metres we arrived at a steep sided depression about 8-10 metres across, and a similar depth, known as a jameo, formed by a roof collapse. Access to the bottom of the jameo was facilitated by a large, steel framed structure, which we clambered down to the entrance arch. Heading down flow (away from Volcan de Corona, towards the sea) the tube quickly opens up, into a gently curving canyon, 10-20 metres high. White gypsum deposits contrast with the black basalt. Where the lava tube narrows, we traversed around pool of clear sea water, then scrambled up, to a wriggle between boulders. Chris rigged a handline off natural belays to assist the rest of us across a second traverse, also over a tidal pool. After another squeeze, we reached the best part of the cave, a few hundred metres of lava tube, several metres high, with the cave floor completely submerged by sea water, at all states of tide. This could be explored further with a mask and snorkel or (with less dignity) on an inflatable swimming pool toy. At the time of our visit the tide was ebbing slowly, at a speed probably less than one knot. **Nick**

The Tinguaton mob and the Los Lagos mob joined up for the usual episode of ice cold beers and Garlic with Prawns and more Garlic at our beachside restaurant at Arietta, after which Carmen guided Noel, Rosemary, Sam, Nick, Andy and Rachel on some amazing roads to the summit of the Famara cliffs, to visit the **Cueva del Bosquecillo de Haria**. This was one totally sensory-overload experience. We dumped the cars and set out



Chris rigging a Tinguaton Shaft

along the very edge of the 900 metre high, vertical, Famara cliffs. The seaward view to Graciosa were fine. The view downwards was something else again, and then Carmen invited us to do the Lemming.... and jump over..... following her. Just under the lip was a ledge wide enough to interfere with our apparent suicides, and cut downwards into it, a short flight of steps leading to a "Mine", hollowed out by Picon extraction. The excavated alcove allowed us to lean over (just a teeny bit...) look straight down - to the sea. The mind boggles. Who, when and why would anyone find, and then excavate, picon there?

Breakage state today: Sam, semi-broken, tendonitis. Aubrey basically broken because he cannot put on boots. Ali, semi-

broken, hobbling on damaged ankle. Pauline broken because her caving has stiffened her limbs into immobility.

~~~~~  
 Thursday December 3 2015 **Sima Pedro Perico** John, Noel (Rosemary).

Pedro Perico is well inside the Timanfaya National Park, and therefore absolutely out of bounds for cavers. The local *criminal* speleos have, however, put in P Hangers.....The 25m entrance shaft is rebelayed at a ledge and drops into a large chamber with quite a lot of passage leading off. Chris gave us excellent directions on how to find the cave, and also his Garmin GPS. Following his directions we parked the car as advised and Rosemary set off walking to El Golfo, while John and I set off walking to PP. We did not need the Garmin because as we neared the end of the track and prepared to head up the cinder scree to the cave, John observed that there was a Park Ranger vehicle parked there. We did a discreet about-turn and absented ourselves before all our caving gear might be confiscated. We collected Rosemary en-route to El Golfo, parked there and set off towards Playa del Paso. This is a pretty, sometimes dramatic, walk on a rough lava path, which just happens to pass the entrances to the caves "Covon" and "Chifleterra". These are also both illegal, and it is illegal to depart the marked path. (Chris and Carmen were once apprehended at Chifleterra, but got away with their helmets intact). With no helmets at risk, we fired up the Garmin and found Chifleterra, which has a minute and obscure entrance. Covon entrance is actually right beside the path and no problem to find, so we had a brief look at it. Playa del Paso, a glorious, black lava-sand beach, boasts a huge notice saying that all and every sort of recreational pleasure (including swimming) is prohibito, in several languages. Just after John and I had finished a wonderfully refreshing swim and were changing, the duty Park Ranger vehicle arrived! I think we must have been bugged with Fun-Detectors. We walked back on the park road and treated ourselves to beers and garlic prawns in El Golfo.

Stop Press: That evening, John discovered that he was booked on, and should have flown home on, **today's** flight. Joined us for Chinese and alcohol later after in-depth discussion of options.... *etc*with wife. Later included fabulous samba drumming in town.

Extracts from the Log-Book

Ed: I am still playing catch-up with the Upper Pitts log-book extracts, and only have space for a few in this Journal. If you feel that your digging or caving activities have been rudely ignored, Mea Culpa; I have had to prune the earlier entries from July and August ruthlessly.

Tuesday July 14 2015 **Pierre's Pot** Gaynam & Steve.

Losing their ladder in an attempt to enter the tight slot in the floor - Jammed at the bottom! Visit to East Twin Swallet works and then on into Spar Pot. **Gaynam**
 If the ladder could be retrieved from Pierre's the pleas contact Gaynam on 02392550502, or 07736387021

Saturday July 18 2015 **LVS** Ali, John Cooper, Pete Buckley, Geoff Newton,
 Mike Kousiounis, John Gisborne.

Another 73 buckets removed amidst the mosquitoes and swamp-like conditions on the surface. Also five large boulders. The open chamber and small aven (The upper extension of the drip encountered in the lower rift) continues onwards and

downwards as a 6" wide crack. Much work still to do. 4 ½ hours. **John Gisborne**

Saturday July 25 2015 Mitchell's Dig Nigel Graham, Ade and Jude

Wall building, plus a few buckets of spoil. The building stone this time is from the Pig's Hole Dig - ie working one dig by lowering into it the stones from another! Land in the area was very dry on the surface, despite yesterday's prolonged and heavy rain. **Nigel**.

Saturday July 25 2015 LVS John Cooper, John Gisborne, Ali, Mike Kousiounis, Geoff Newton, Aiden Harrison.

Excellent session with 67 loads of debris removed. We have also determined that we will be able to preserve the false floor at the base of the small aven, by excavating the mud below it. **Ali**

Wednesday July 29 2015 Lime Kiln Dig John Cooper, Aubrey Newport.

Went to check on the water level in the bottom. Crawling along, the water is about 30 cms deep after the bend. Shallowest part is the bend (ie that's where the water is draining away?) where the floor is highest. 10 cms of water in the bottom of the entrance shaft. **John**

Saturday August 8 2015 LVS Ali, John Cooper, John Gisborne.

Cleared the debris from Tuesday - now stashed up the passage ready for removal to the surface. Placed another set of charges, which will, hopefully, enlarge the route below the false floor. Can now see along the continuation of Triassic Tunnel for another 5 m. It is keeping to the same angle of dip. **Ali**

Sunday August 16 2015 LVS Tim Ball, Pete Buckley, Ali, John Cooper.

62 loads removed. Even Ali says it's too small !!! More spoil created. 4 hrs. **John**. Back to normal digging for me, it's not quite Xanadu (more like Xa.....) **Pete**.

Sunday August 23 2015 Swildons John Cooper, Barry Weaver.

Nice wet trip to Sump 1. On the surface, water about 10 - 15 cms below entering the top pipe. At Sump 1 the upstream anchor was about 15 cms below the water. Decided that the current was a bit strong, so came out. **John**

August 19 - 27 2015 France, Correze - Lot area. Terry Waller, Keith & Derek Sanderson.

Caves visited: Grotte de Garnie, Saut de Pucelle, Event de Mirandol & Grotte de Coombe. Good time had by all.

Saturday September 5 2015 Swildons Duncan Simey, Chris Milne, Ella, Sarah Gould.

I hadn't been caving since I was a student, so when my cousin Duncan offered to show my 10 year-old daughter Swildons, I thought it was a good idea. I was very nervous after all these years, and was very pleased to find that I wasn't nervous at all when I got going. Went in the Long Pretty Way and came out the Short Dry. Thanks to Duncan and Chris. We liked using

the "5 points of contact" the bum being particularly useful! **Sarah**.

Friday September 11 2015 Fester Hole Jonathan Williams, Tim Ball, Barry Wilkinson, WS, John Thomas.

All the spoil from the dig face and in the tunnel, and the bottom of the plank slide taken out. Wow!!! nice clean and ready for Maurice Hewins and JH to inspect. **Tommo**

Saturday September 12 2015 "Try Caving" Weekend. **Swildons** Roxy, Paul, Paul, Eddy, Dylan, Alan and Tracy.

Went to Swildons Hole where we abseiled/laddered down the 20. Went through Sump 1 (which terrified me) but I did it and it was easier on the way back. Emptied our boots over peoples' heads when climbing over them (!). We also went to the Mud Sump and saw work being done there. **Paul** (?)

Saturday September 12 2015 Goatchurch/ Swildons. Mark, Max, Rick, Sam, Jude.

Started the day in Goatchurch. Great introduction to caving; a lot harder than I was expecting. The Drainpipe was very claustrophobic. Max made it down, but I didn't fancy it. Then after tea and cake, went to Swildons Hole to try a wet cave - a very different experience.

A fab day and very OK. Thanks Jude and the WCC. We will be back for more! **Anon**

Saturday September 19 2015 Brimble Pit Ali, John Gisborne, John Cooper, Geoff Newton, Jake Parrish.

Descended to find that a large boulder had dropped off into the centre of the bottom pit. Dropped two more out of the roof with a crowbar and managed to block the way on in the process. All three to be banged later. Cleared lots of clatch from around and under the boulders to be stacked behind the wall. While cementing the wall higher up a large boulder was detached and ended up at the bottom of the shaft. Luckily nobody was working there. Rescued newt on the way out. Also a lot of shrub clearance in the shakehole carried out to clear the steps down to the entrance. **John Cooper**

Thursday September 24 2015 Fester Hole Maurice, Judy, Barry, Jonathan.

An early (5 pm) trip to see progress. Jonathan descended the new rift after some gardening. It ain't caverns measureless to man, because he measured it ! That's 21' added to the subterranean scene. Jon reported no mud in the rift and more of the characteristic Fester stal flow. As I left with Judy, Pete Hann and Aubrey arrived to continue the work. **Maurice**

Friday September 25 2015 Swildons Emma Herron, Jason Mallinson, Stu Weston, Kieth Mason, Alex Hrabec.

Sociable to Sump 1 where Keith and Stu stopped, then on to Sump 2 for Alex to have a free-dive there and back. After than Jason and Emmsy continued on, free-diving to Swildons 9 and back via by-pass, meeting Connor et al on route. Sump 3 is still long and head-banging! **Emmsy**

Friday September 25 2015 Wookey Hole Maurice, Judy, Eleanor, Hugh (3).

Having obtained complimentary tickets we took the opportunity to see the newly opened Chamber 20 and observe some tourist reaction to it. My first impression of 20 was that the fluted formation was very impressive, but that this "New" chamber was opened at the expense of Chamber 9, which seems to have sustained some damage, and also that there was excessive scaffolding everywhere. Hopefully this is not the finished job. 3 year-old Hugh thought the whole thing was fantastic! **Maurice.**

Sunday September 27 2015 **Lime Kiln** Tom Chatterton, John Cooper, Murray Knapp, Maria Lynch, Aubrey Newport, Tommo, Barry Wilkinson.

First all the spoil from the drain to the bend was cleared while Aubrey and Murray were chiselling the floor out, at the bend. Then the majority of the spoil was removed from the bottom of the railway whilst Murray drilled holes in the floor. More spoil created. 1 ½ hours. **John**

Tuesday September 29 2015 **Eastwater** Tom Chatterton

I had a look down the Technical Masterpiece as a recce for Connor and myself to eventually complete the lower series round trip. Nothing individually too challenging, but just relentless in its downward trend and tight passage. Got to about ½ way down Technical before deciding that that was probably far enough for a solo recce trip. **Tom**

Wednesday September 30 2015 **Attborough Swallet** Tom Chatterton, Maria Lynch

An interesting little cave where you seem to get covered in mud for no apparent reason. Went down to the end of Nasty Nasty (well named) before an exit via Quick-Lime passage - not so well named. Trying to get up a 3m high very awkward and tight squeeze proved a good way to keep entertained for a while! **Tom**

Wednesday September 30 2015 **Cuckoo Cleeves** Tom Chatterton, Maria Lynch

Got about 4 m in from the entrance before deciding that the air was too bad to continue for a general look around. Trip Length: 3 minutes. **Tom**

Sunday October 4 2015 **Swildons** John Cooper, Barry Weaver.

Took a 20m lifeline with us to Fault Chamber - just right. Ascended fixed rope to ledge, then the right-hand aven to the top. The bottom fixed rope is fixed to a ring-bolt, backed up to two others, the top one of which is used to secure the traverse line across to the other two avens. The top fixed rope is attached to a hanger/8 mm Spit anchor, backed up to a ring-bolt. En-route up the top part are 3 ring-bolts and one piton - all unused. Need to go back and explore the muddy crawl at the top! **John**

Wednesday October 7 2015 **Hunters Hole** Tim Rose, Sas Watson.

First caving trip for Sas post the hand-job operation and to get over her Hunters woes. Her previous trip (some 7 years ago) was straight down the main pitch, on ladders, which was a most enjoyable experience. This time, however, we played string, and other than a few nerves while hanging over the

hold, reminding herself of fond memories, we had a good trip. **Tim**

Sunday October 11 2015 **Sludge Pit** Geoff Newton

Clearing the spoil from yesterday's bang, but only back to the start of the tube as Mike K did not turn up - maybe a misunderstanding. We have not got almost the end of what we thought was the tight bit. Alas.... now we can get a better look it seems that it is carrying on another two metres.... even tighter. So several more banging trips will be needed. However it then appears to run into a chamber with drips falling from the roof, and the stream runs away - so there is still incentive to carry on. The fumes had cleared well from yesterday. Came out just in time to see a magnificent sunset. **Geoff.**

Friday October 16 2015 **Swildons** Noel

Arrived at Upper Pitts as the Grave-Robbers left. They (a) left it immaculate and (b) left masses of food *and even beer and wine* for us. Guests to dream about!

Nobody else wanted to go caving so I fed the rat with a quick solo to Sump 1. Not much water going down and still 2" of airspace in the sump, which looks very silted up. Cave completely to myself and great to be underground again. **Noel**

Saturday October 17 2015 **Sidcot, Fester.** Wane Starsmore, Sam Storrar, Nick Butler.

Visited Sidcot, went down the Lobster Pot (a first for Sam and Nick), turned back at the Rubber Ducks and came back up the Lobster Pot without too much trouble. Contined to Fester, where we visited the present end of the dig. **Wayne**

Saturday October 17 2015 **Mitchell's Dig** Ade VdeP, Pete Hann, Nigel Graham.

Post AGM digging session. 33 buckets of spoil out, one bucket of cement in. Nice draughting holes revealed..... and then filled in by run-in. Well, that's the story of this dig! **Nigel**

Sunday October 18 2015 **Lime Kiln** John Cooper, Murray Knapp, Aubrey Newport.

Spoil moved from bottom of tunnel to bottom of railway, and then more chiselling in the floor to enlarge / lower the drainage channel. 1 1/4hrs. **John**

Wednesday October 21 2015 **Goatchurch. Sidcot.** Paul Moore (Novice caving guest), Nick Butler.

Down Goatchurch to the end of the Drainpipe and out through the Tradesmen's Entrance, where there was a bunch of carabiners and a tackle-bag (although nobody seen or heard in the cave). Went over to Sidcot where we visited the Duck Pond and turned back. Returned to Upper Pitts to find a power cut! **Nick**

Friday October 23 2015 **Swildons** Max Fisher

Trip to visit Vicarage and the North-West Stream Passages. Strong smell of Urine on rounding the final corner before the Landing. Possibly coming from above ??! N-W Stream Passage very silted after the initial crawl. Made a descent of Vicarage Pot and had a good look around all normal 'person-sized' passages! **Max**

Saturday October 24 2015 Mitchell's Dig Geoff Newton ****
John Cooper**, Pete Hann, Adrian VdeP.

12 buckets of spoil out, 3 buckets of cement in. The intention today was to get quite a lot of spoil out; the day started well, with mud and clatch coming out at speed..

Unfortunately one of the boulders in the floor dropped, and this was supporting part of the wall, which also dropped.

Pete's abuse of the cave rapidly increased, and digging in the floor stopped. 2

crowbars were quickly used as temporary RSJs and a supporting wall was built off

one of them. The encouraging aspect of the day was more gaps, larger boulders and lots and lots of fresh air! **Ade**

**** Thanks to John and Geoff for their extra support, especially considering the weather conditions.

Tuesday October 20 2015 Waterwheel Cave Terry Waller, Derek Sanderson.

Water in canals deep, and cold..... need wet-suits next time. Getting old !!

Terry.

Friday October 23 2015 Eighteen Acre Swallet Jonathan Williams, Tim Clements.

The two keys in the tackle store proved redundant when after clearing a decade or so of mud from the entrance lid we found it bolted shut. A quick trip back to equip ourselves with bolt cutters and assorted tools enabled a protracted entry. A good look about to look for prospective dig sites didn't take long. We replaced the rusted bolts with new ones. Future visitors.... dispense with the keys and take two 13mm spanners.

Jonathan

Thursday October 29 2015 Fester Hole John Cooper, Jonathan Williams, Barry Wilkinson.

Spoil removed from bottom of pot to top of pot! 1 1/2 hrs. **John Cooper**

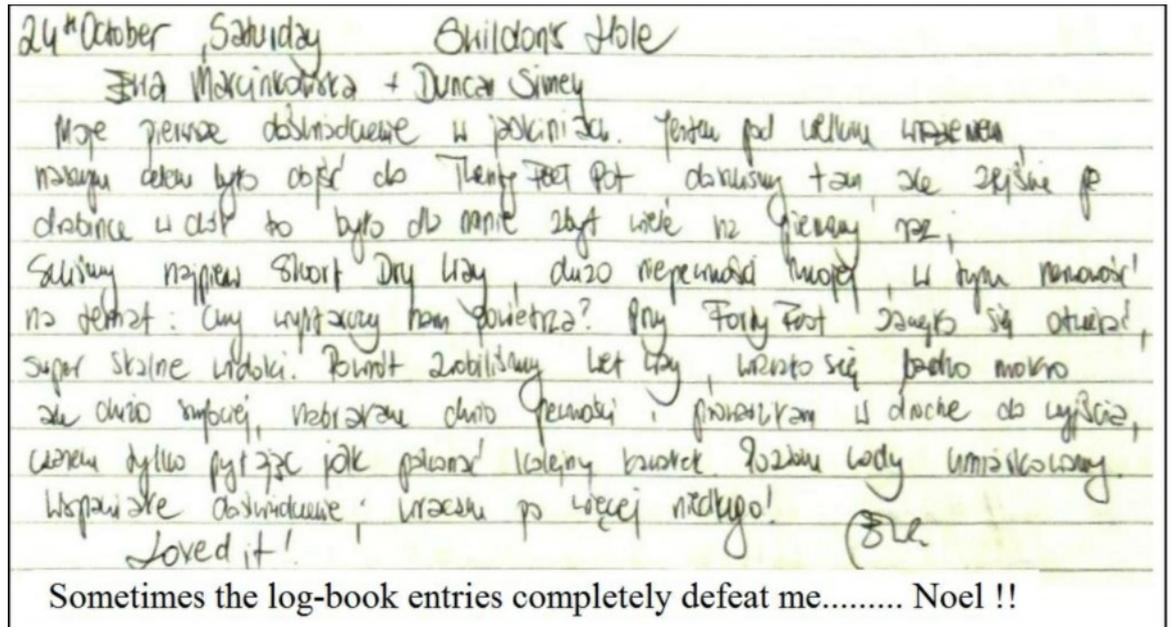
Friday October 30 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Mike Kousiounis, Ashley Duncan

Moving spoil back to stacking chamber and drilling holes. **Geoff**

Saturday October 31 2015 Brimble Pit Alison Moody, John

Sunday October 25 2015 GB John Cooper, Barry Weaver.

In Mud Passage route, over bridge and up to end of White



Passage. Back via Rift Passage and detour to Bedding Chamber and then Bertie's Pot before looking at the bottom and then out. 1 1/2 hrs. Saw several parties in, and others preparing to go in. **John**

Cooper, Geoff Newton, Mike Kousiounis, Jake Parrish, Ashley Duncan.

Human chain to shift spoil up to stack behind retaining walls, then JC and JP stay behind to build up the wall with rocks and concrete. **Geoff**

Saturday October 31 2015 Sludge Pit Alison Moody, John Cooper, Geoff Newton, Mike Kousiounis, Jake Parrish, Ashley Duncan

Clearing spoil back to intermediate stacking space. Then hammering... still a metre plus to go before we might have some passable passage. **Geoff**

Tuesday November 3 2015 Eastwater Terry Waller, Derek Sanderson.

Down to Morton's pot, through Boulder Chamber to the Woggle Press, down and through Hallelujah Hole, into parallel Rift Chambers and out via the Canyon. Hard work. **Terry**

Friday November 6 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton

Replaced the bucket in the haul system. Took out lots of rubbish. Poke around in a few odd corners. **Geoff**

Saturday November 7 2015 Brimble Pit Pete Buckley, Ali Moody, John Cooper, John Gisborne, Geoff Newton.

Completed clearing the debris from where the squeeze was! This area is now very roomy and will make the removal of the mud from the terminal area much easier. PB and AM played

with the mud at the end while JC and JG continued with the walling. **Ali**

Saturday November 7 2015 Mitchell's Dig Pete Hann, Nigel Graham, Ade VdeP,

Surprisingly, seeing how wet it was on Mendip, Mitchell's wasn't too wet. A good digging session with 40 buckets of spoil hauled out - a mixture of clean rock, small stones, mud and clatch. Quite a few holes exposed between rocks and a very, very strong draught. Next session will be a huge cementing session.... lowering back down a substantial amount of the rock which was hauled out today! **Ade**

Sunday November 8 2015 Swildons John Cooper, John Gisborne.

Went and bailed the Mud Sump dry. Nice stream, but lots of people. There was a good draught inwards along St. Pauls (presumably being dragged down by the stream). 1 ½ hrs. **John Cooper**

Saturday November 14 2015 Brimble Pit John Cooper, John Gisborne.

Cementing. 4 Mixes to the bottom, but too wet to start the wall proper, so built up the side instead. 2 mixes then to finish off the top wall. 2 hrs. **John Cooper**

Saturday November 14 2015 Swildons. Rich Carey, Jake Parrish, Gerrik Rhoden, Nick Butler, Sam Storrar, Wayne Starsmore.

"2nd. Saturday" trip, short round trip. A good trip, 2 hrs. 20 with 15 minutes bailing. Sam had lamp failure at the top of Jacob's Ladder and was escorted out. Otherwise uneventful. No swearing at the Birthday Squeeze, which was unusual. Streamway moderately sporting and air not great around the Mud Sump - either that, or we're getting unfit! Back to the hut for tea and cakes. **Wayne**

Saturday November 14 2015 LVS Ali Moody, Pete Buckley, Geoff Newton.

A quick trip to put three charges in the tube beyond the aven at the end of Triassic Tunnel. The inlet flowing down the aven has made a good job of cleaning up the dig - and it is now almost pleasant! **Ali**

Saturday November 14 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Ali Moody, Pete Buckley

Applying chemicals to the holes drilled on 08 November. Cave very wet. Pete not impressed. **Geoff**

Sunday November 15 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Mike Kousiounis.

Lots of spoil to clear from the previous day's bang. Still can't see what happens ahead. **Geoff.**

Thursday November 19 2015 Sludge Pit Mike Kousiounis

Borrowed Ali's Pelican case, too light hammer-drill and chisel extension and worked off about 10 kgs (estimated) of loose

rock from last bang. Took rock out of ceiling, too, and revealed a space big enough to get my head into. I can see a tube above, wider and taller, running parallel. 2 Greater Horseshoe bats, 1 at the muddy stacking chamber and the second (roughly a foot wingspan) circling me on climb-out ladder quite a performance! 1 ½ hrs. **Mike**

Saturday November 21 2015 Charterhouse Darren Chapman, Simon, Mark.

Down to Gate Squeeze. Nice rift. Simon stopped half-way down rift. **Darren**

Saturday November 21 2015 Brimble Pit John Gisborne, John Cooper.



Brimble Poseurs..... Photo: Noel

After posing for Noel did 6 mixes of cement, but the water was washing it out as quickly as we could put it in. 2 ½ hrs. **John**

Saturday November 21 2015 Fester Hole Maurice, Judy, Jonathan, Barry.

Maurice and Judy returned to the dig to inspect progress since our last visit, accompanied by the constructors. Pleased to find the place tidy and neatly back-filled. I took courage in both hands and descended the new rift. Johnathan named it Stanna Stairlift Rift in honour of we geriatrics. Actually there is, as yet, no such device fitted, but I was grateful on the ladder out for the comforting thought that Jonathan had me on a lifeline. Found that the rift is in nice solid rock, and that at the bottom there is another small cross-rift, with some pretty formations. The way on is obviously still downwards, where a recent pool of water has subsequently drained. Today, if anything, the draught was inwards. After the inspection and a few photos., we pulled about 10 light skips, mainly rock, as far as Rand's Revenge. We came out in time for a light lunch. **Maurice**

Saturday November 21 2015 LVS Mike K, Ali, Pete Buckley.

Main sink water very high, and had been over during the week; some flood debris at LVS. Down to dig face to marvel at clean-washed slot and open vistas! Ali then made it all muddy and horrible before letting Mike and I lie in a mud puddle to

clear more of her debris - at least Ali had to lie in it to lay her charges. More debris made for next week. **Pete**

Sunday November 22 2015 **Sludge Pit** Geoff Newton

No bats to be seen today, cleared some spoil and lowered the water level a little. Looked at an alternative digging site, but it was smaller than I remembered and not worth digging at the moment. **Geoff**

Tuesday November 24 2015 **Swildons** Terry Waller, Derek Sanderson

To the top of Shatter Pot. Cold and wet conditions. Mud Sump

bone dry. **Terry**

Thursday November 26 2015 **Fester Hole** Tim Clements, John Cooper, Barry Wilkinson, Jonathan Williams, John Yates.

Spoil moved up from the end..... lots more still there! 1 ½ hrs. **John**

Sunday November 22 2015 **Swildons** Bean, Tony Hetherington

Mr Seddon took me under his flipper for my first diving trip through sumps 2 & 3. I can't say that we saw anything other than muddy water, but it was all good fun. **Bean**

Last minute news and additions



SWCC & OFD access and keys.

There are formal and strict rules governing our visits to OFD. These are on the notice board at Upper Pitts and Jude Vanderplank can email the PDF if you need this. Her email is caving@wessex-cave-club.org. In practice actually getting OFD keys, and access to the changing rooms at Penwyllt is now easier and more flexible. Normally at weekends, the SWCC is manned from 1800 on Friday and there is a "Duty Officer" who will issue OFD keys, but it's worth checking up first. If nobody will be there when you intend to arrive you can gain access to the HQ by contacting one of the local Key Holders. You must always take your valid WCC membership card as you may well be asked to show this on any visit to OFD. The list of local Key Holders is included below. Phone ahead before picking up the keys. There is now an alternative; you can access cottage No. 3 (the changing rooms) and the cave key safes by retrieving a cottage key from an outside key safe. The location of the cottage key safe and the number to access that key safe can be given to you by any committee member of the club or one of the local Key Holders. Once into cottage number 3, the actual cave key safes are in the corridor of the changing rooms. The number to access the key safe will be given to you by the Key Holder or by any committee member. The Key Holders live quite close to the main road South of the HQ; here in order of proximity to Penwyllt:

Mick and Judy Day 01639 730125 GR. SN 844138 Bryn Aur, Brecon Road, Penycae, SA9 1FA

Annie and Simon Amatt 01639 730336 GR. SN 803122 135 Heol Tawe, Abercrave, SA9 1XS

Lesley Davies 01639 730771/07970177621 GR SN 822214 Bryn Cerdd, Morgan St, Cae-Hopkin, SA9 1TS

Recent Additions to the Library

As at 17th December 2015

BCA N/L 22 (Sep 2015)

BCRA News (Oct 2015)

Chelsea S.S. N/L 57, 5/6 7/8/9 (May/Jun, Jul – Sep 2015) (*Wookey 20*), 10, 11, 12 2015 (Oct – Dec 2015)

Craven Pothole Club. Index to Records 1 – 15 (1932 – 1998). 51 – 80 (1999 – 2005)

Derbyshire Caver 138 (Autumn 2015)

Descent 246 (Oct/Nov 2015) (*Wookey 20*, *Templeton*, *Charterhouse Cave*), 247 (*Hidden Earth*)

Gloucester Speleological Society N/L 'The Journal' 1 (Mar 2015), 1 (Sept 2015)

Grampian S.G. Bulletin 5th Series 1, 4 (Oct 2015)

Luola (Finland) 1, (2013), 2, (2014)

MCG N/L 378 (Sep 2015)

MNRC N/L 143 (Summer 1015)

NSS (USA) 'News' 73, 9, 10, 11, 12 (Sep., Oct., Nov., Dec. 2015),

Journal of Cave and Karst Studies 77, 2 (Aug 2015)

White Rose P.C. N/L 34, 3 (Oct 2015)

Mines and Minerals of the Mendip Hills (Burr P.S.) 2015 Vols. 1 & 2,

Gaping Gill (Dixon K.) Donated B. Prewer

Higher Eastwater Farm Planning Application The planning application to erect a large barn in the field adjacent to our drive was refused on Tue 29 Dec 2015. It is not known if a revised application will be submitted.

We welcome the following new members:

Andy Chamberlain (Rejoining), Martina Waberseck, Emily Williams, Toni Williams, Josh White, Terry Rands, Tom Chatterton.

Sadly we must report that John Heath who is now 94 and joined the Wessex in 1997 has decided that due to failing health and eyesight that he will end his membership. We are sorry to lose him but wish him well.

Diary Dates

“2nd Saturday” Trips:

February 13th. Eastwater
March 12th. Manor Farm
April 9th. White Pit *** to be confirmed
May 14th. Hilliers / Fairy

Important Club Dates

Saturday February 6 2016 Devon Weekend Staying at the DSS.
Saturday March 12 2016 Wessex Ceilidh
Sunday March 13 2016 Committee meeting
Thursday March 31 2016 Journal 336 Pub.
Sunday May 8 2016 Committee meeting
(All committee meetings 1000 in Library)

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Grotte de Marcel. Photo: Clive Westlake