

Wessex Cave Club

November 2017



Journal 344



EDITORIAL

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Vice Presidents

James Hanwell

Sid Perou

Derek Ford

Chairman

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51 Churchill Rd. East,

Wells,

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BA5 3HU

01749 679 839

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BS3 5PD

07890 862 709

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**ISSN 0083-811X****Headquarters**

Upper Pitts,

Eastwater Lane,

Priddy, Wells,

Somerset,

BA5 3AX,

01749 672 310

“Events, dear boy events”. This famous remark is traditionally attributed to Harold Macmillan, as to what he most feared as a Prime Minister. The editorial is the first item in the journal and occupies a finite space on the first page. Any late-breaking important news can mean an editorial re-write, and if the space changes so does space and position of every single element on every subsequent page. Yet “Events” are the stuff of editorial dreams.... provided that they come early enough to avoid a wholesale re-compilation! This particular journal is the one following the AGM and dinner and marks what is, in effect, the beginning of another journalistic year. In the past each “Volume” of Wessex Journal has contained 10 issues, but for what seem to be good two good reasons, I will extend this volume to include 12 issues. Firstly, the journals themselves are thinner, so 12 issues, properly bound, will still be a reasonably thin volume. Secondly, the new “Binders” hold up to 13 copies of the journal, and a set of 12 avoids waste (the spare spine string is vital.... it is diabolically easy to miss a spine cord when fitting the journals into the binders!). If anyone wants their journal professionally bound, then Phil Hendy can arrange this. For those of us who keep our journals, but hesitate at the cost of professional binding, Hatstand has a supply of the new binders for sale.

This is also the last issue before Christmas and the New Year, so for those of us going skiing this winter Snowcard provides the perfect winter sports insurance. And for Christmas itself Pages 283 and 286 have some useful present ideas.

If you’re a Facebook user and been watching carefully you’ll have noticed over the last couple of months that the BCA have set up a Facebook page, and have begun to announce news via it. Judging by the number of “Likes” the page has received though, not many of us have been watching too carefully! If you haven’t already you can like and follow the page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/BritishCavingAssociation/>

As a courtesy arrangement we exchange our journal with the Finnish Caving Society (<http://caving.fi>). Luola is their journal. It is a very glossy and well illustrated professional publication with most of the caving accounts are given in English as well as Finnish. Given the dearth of caves in Finland itself it’s unsurprising that most of the accounts are of caving elsewhere in Europe, and particularly in the UK. Perhaps it is more surprising that a flourishing caving society should exist at all in Finland! However with Miri on our doorstep, and Hungarian, Polish and French members we are undeniably a multi-national club and with surplus journals it is good to be able to advertise our existence more widely.

Nearer to home, however, a bit of publicity is needed about our lack of an “Ordinary Member” to serve on the Committee. Please would some altruistic person volunteer to come and help us eat Marion’s cakes at committee meetings. There are, of course, no strings attached to this kudos-enhancing post. Perish the thought! Enough already, enough, so from all your committee, we wish you a Happy Christmas and good “Elf Hunting”....? *Noel*

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**Volume 34**  
**Journal 344**  
**November 2017**

Cover Photo: **James Cobbett** in the sink entrance to **Owl Cave**  
 Photo credits in article on page 273



# CAVING OVERSEAS... PANAMA



**Ed:** James last reported his Panama caving in Journal 337, in October 2009 (on page 337).

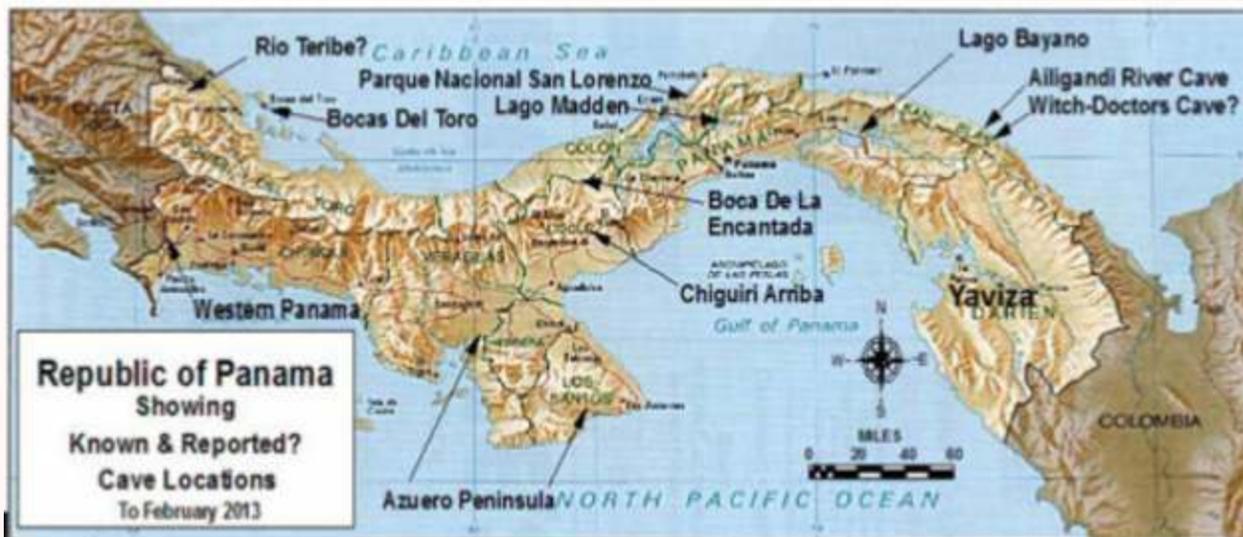
## Panama Caving Up-Date 2017 James Cobbett.

This is a lot of story for not a lot of underground hours. However, this is mostly real pioneering stuff, and this is how it goes at this point in the search for, and establishment of, new caving regions, in a country with next-to-no caving culture/history. The Ailigandi River Cave was only discovered four years back, with no other known caves within 60 miles. Caves are only rumoured to exist round Yaviza in Darien, and up the Rio Teribe.

Photos and survey by, and with permission of, Pat Cronin, Dig Hastilow, Roger Day and James Cobbett, members of the 2017 Anglo-Irish Caving Expedition to Panama.

I organized my first international caving expedition to Panama in 2005, with the sixth, and latest, in January 2017. Pat Cronin, Dig Hastilow and Roger Day arrived on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> January, with a relaxed, but exotic, month of activities in prospect. In the event, this delivered the customary components, including a “planning meeting” in the restaurant above the Panama City Fish Market, my car being destroyed by the poor Panamanian roads and going home on a trailer, a four day sailing trip each way to visit a cave in the Kuna Yala jungles of Darien, and yours truly nearly killing himself in a cave – this time via a nose dive into a rock when the floor collapsed under me in a newly explored cave. We did not explore a lot of new stuff, but we had a lot of adventures and a lot of fun!

My caving priorities have changed over the years. When I first came to live in Panama in 2001, I did not really believe that there were any significant caves here at all, so I spent the first few years trying to find anything that needed a light for its exploration (See “Caves and Caving in Panama, A Personal Account”, by James Cobbett, WCC Journal, 337 2009). Fifteen years on, and with one 2km cave discovered and surveyed, and many caves explored in a number of established “caving areas”, as shown below, I am focusing more on firming up some additional “caving areas”, and also on attracting some young blood to carry the torch, or should that be the “cap-lamp”, when I finally hang up my boots.



The plan for 2017 was first to spend four nights on the far side of Lago Bayano, to follow-up some leads referred to me by Austin Garrido, a neophyte caver working with the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institution (“STRI”). These leads included a deep surface pot-hole, and other caves unknown to me, including a

second pre-Columbian burial cave. We then planned to drive south-east to the end of the Pan-American Highway, where it runs out in the town of Yaviza in the Darien jungle. Again, Austin knew of a number of leads in the area and was to join us for this. Then we were to drive up to the other end of Panama to return to the Rio Teribe to find caves reported by the Teribe Indians on two previous recces – but this time we were to take caving kit and be prepared to spend several nights up there. On the way back to Panama City we were to check out whether we could find Pozo Azul, “Blue Pot”, located near to Chiguirri Arriba on the map above. Finally, we planned to sail through the San Blas islands of Kuna Yala, to revisit and survey the Ailigandi River Cave. However, “The best laid plans of mice an’ men gang aft agley”.

After the obligatory liquid lunch in the Fish Market restaurant in Panama City, the next day we drove down to Lago Bayano, a lake created as part of a hydro-electric scheme some forty years ago. There we met the crew that Austin had

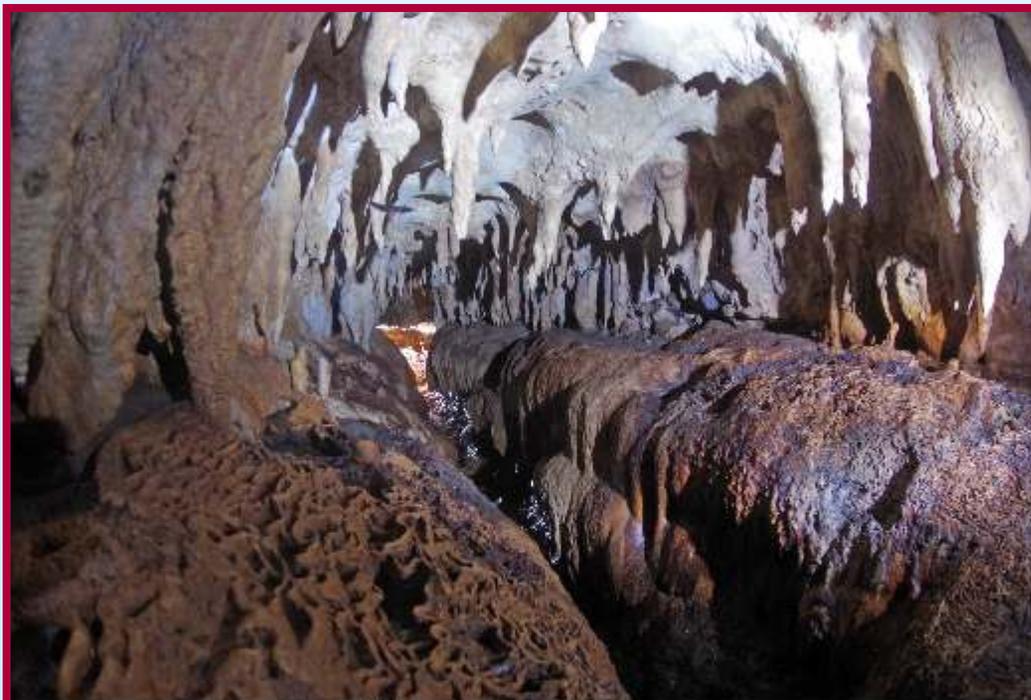
assembled, all loosely associated with STRI. This included a (Polish) cutting edge biologist working on butterflies, his (French) girl-friend, some experienced (Bulgarian and Costa Rican) cavers, three (US national) Peace Corps types, for a total head count of eighteen and seven nationalities, including us three Brits plus one Irish. Though this appears to meet the “introducing young blood to caving” criterion, none of these are long-term Panama residents, the only Panamanians being the local boatmen, cooks and guides (re-treaded farmers), so I will have to keep looking. A fifty minute boat ride took us over the lake to our camp-site at Pueblo Nuevo.



Having set up camp, we then walked thirty minutes through the jungle to visit Cueva Quebrada Seca, a through-trip river cave, favoured by tour companies offering “extreme adventure” outings to tourists. This can be a walk or submerged, depending on lake level – this time it was mainly wading for me and mainly swimming for Pat Cronin! It was also the first “caving” ever for some of the STRI team, who very much enjoyed this impressive cave. By the trail to the cave, we logged a number of shallow pits with passages going off at the bottom, none of which we found time to explore properly.

It should be emphasized that the terrain in karst areas of Panama is as bad as any of us have experienced, with boots falling apart in days, and some of us falling over within minutes of setting out – at least until one has macheted out a stout walking stick! This, combined with the heat and humidity, and the age of some of our group, limited what we were able to achieve; hence open leads being left till “next time”, and a need for “young blood”.

After we had eaten dinner prepared for us by the locals, and drunk some rum, we went to our hammocks with the



Heart Cave

intention of getting a “good night’s sleep”. However, I always like to have some fifteen feet between the suspension points of my hammock, and this could only be found between two of the scrubby trees growing outside the local “guest house”, so I had pitched my hammock there, with Pat Cronin next to me. Shortly after getting my head down, I was aroused by “splattering” noises as chicken excrement impacted my mosquito net, with the occasional squawking when a sleeping chicken fell out its perch on top of me. We had not realized that the chicken shit on the ground meant that the chickens actually lived and slept in the tops of these trees, about three feet above our heads. At about one in the

morning, the “cock-a-doodle-does” started, again about three feet above my head, to be answered by other cocks in the village half a mile away. Just before dawn, the howler monkeys started up, with three troops howling at each from different directions around our camp site. There was nowhere else to go, as all nearby hammock spots had already been taken, and I did not fancy taking my chances with the howler monkeys, and worse, in the jungle, so Pat and I just had to stick it out! The next day, we went by boat, mob-handed, to the main Pueblo Nuevo village. Then, while the Bulgarians dropped a previously unexplored pot, which proved to be some sixty feet deep, with rubbish and short passages leading off at the bottom, the Anglo-Irish contingent went to explore a cave previously found, but not explored, by Austin, a thirty minute walk away from the pot. This, a resurgence cave we named “Heart Cave” after a heart-shaped formation. Its main passage was surveyed at 122 metres long, and terminated in broken rock, likely near to the surface sink. As shown above, Heart Cave has fine decorations in the main passage.

Our local guides then lead us to a large entrance, with owls living in it – “Owl Cave”, about thirty minute’s walk from Heart Cave. We had a quick “run through”, only 120 metres of big stream passage uphill to the resurgence, which had not been recorded before. Then it was time to return to camp, where the locals had prepared fried fish supper. The next day we returned to survey and photograph Owl Cave, where I gashed my nose, when I fell, after the floor in the entrance collapsed under me. We also spent most of a day trying to find “Pile-Drivers’ cave”, another circa 120 metres long



Owl Cave Main streamway

sink – resurgence river passage, which I had originally found and explored in 2002, subsequently surveyed by others. However, the (2002) GPS co-ordinates took us to some desperate locations in the jungle, far from any tracks, and when we were eventually shown the downstream entrance by one of the locals, even then I did not recognize it, so we had to survey it again, and confirmed that the “old” and “new” surveys over-laid.

While the Anglo-Irish contingent were doing all this stuff, the STRI contingent were busy making “beginners’ trips” down Cueva De Pueblo

Nuevo and Quebrada Seca, having quick looks down holes found by Austin, capturing bats and butterflies, and dismembering the butterflies – in the name of “science”, of course!.

Though there remained a significant number of open caves that we had been told about, or which had been explored by the STRI contingent, or just seen the entrances, the combination of tropical jungle temperatures and humidity, appalling walking conditions under-foot, and even worse sleeping conditions, meant that after four nights everyone, young and not so young, had had all the fun they could stand, so we all went back across the lake. Having bid farewell to the STRI contingent, we returned to my home, two hours’ drive away in Panama City.

After a couple of days relaxing, I woke in bed one morning deaf; I guess due to the blow to my head that I received in Owl Cave. Medical visits, including a brain scan, delayed us a couple of days, by which time my hearing was beginning to recover – I am now fine.

The next trip was a recce down the Inter-American Highway to Yaviza, in Darien, where the road runs out. This road was surprisingly good, Yaviza being only five hours drive from Panama City. Not only that, but the far end of the 100 metre long footbridge across the Rio Chucunaque was resting on outcropping, karstified, lime-stone, as shown overleaf. One can take off into the Darien jungle either by boat from Yaviza, or by boat from Puerto Quimba, which we also visited. Finding the fabled caves of the Darien jungle between Panama and Colombia will be a priority for the next expedition, likely in 2018.

We then planned to check out reports of a cave at, or near, the village of Pozo Azul, near to Chiguiri Arriba, shown on the map above. We drove up on the after-noon before the planned visit, and, as we had some time to spare, drove up the route towards the cave at Boca De La Encantada (“Mouth of Enchantment”), to check out the rumour that a bridge had been built across the river Lura, and that the road had been tarmacked to the end. Though only a foot-bridge had been built across the river Lura, and there was no new tarmac, we forded the river and drove a couple of miles further until the track became too rough. On our return, just before the ford across the river Lura, a small rock, kicked up from the track, punched a hole in my cast aluminium, sump, resulting in loss of all the engine oil. A local towed us across the river, as I doubted that a recovery vehicle would want to cross the ford, and the next day was spent

“encouraging” the said recovery vehicle, and then taking my car back to Panama on a truck. Pozo Azul will have to wait for another time. We had also planned to return to Ailigandi, to survey the cave first explored by Roger and me in 2013. As Flying Scud, my 44 ft sail boat, was already waiting for us in San Blas (the Kuna indian reservation), it only took two hours to drive over the continental divide, from Panama City on the Pacific to San Blas on the Caribbean, and then four days to sail down to Ailigandi village (on an island), where we were welcomed as “long-lost brothers” by Christopher Lucas and Nelson Smith, who guided us in 2013. After the local Sailahs (i.e. “chiefs”), had given permission, we set off first thing the next morning



"Dugouts" transport.....not the Flying Scud !

in two hand-paddled dug-out canoes, up the River Ailigandi. No one had been to the Ailigandi River Cave since our first visit. The cave was as before, the only notable change being that, for no obvious reason, the bat population appeared to have reduced by at least 75% - I hope this was not due to Roger and me disturbing them in 2013.

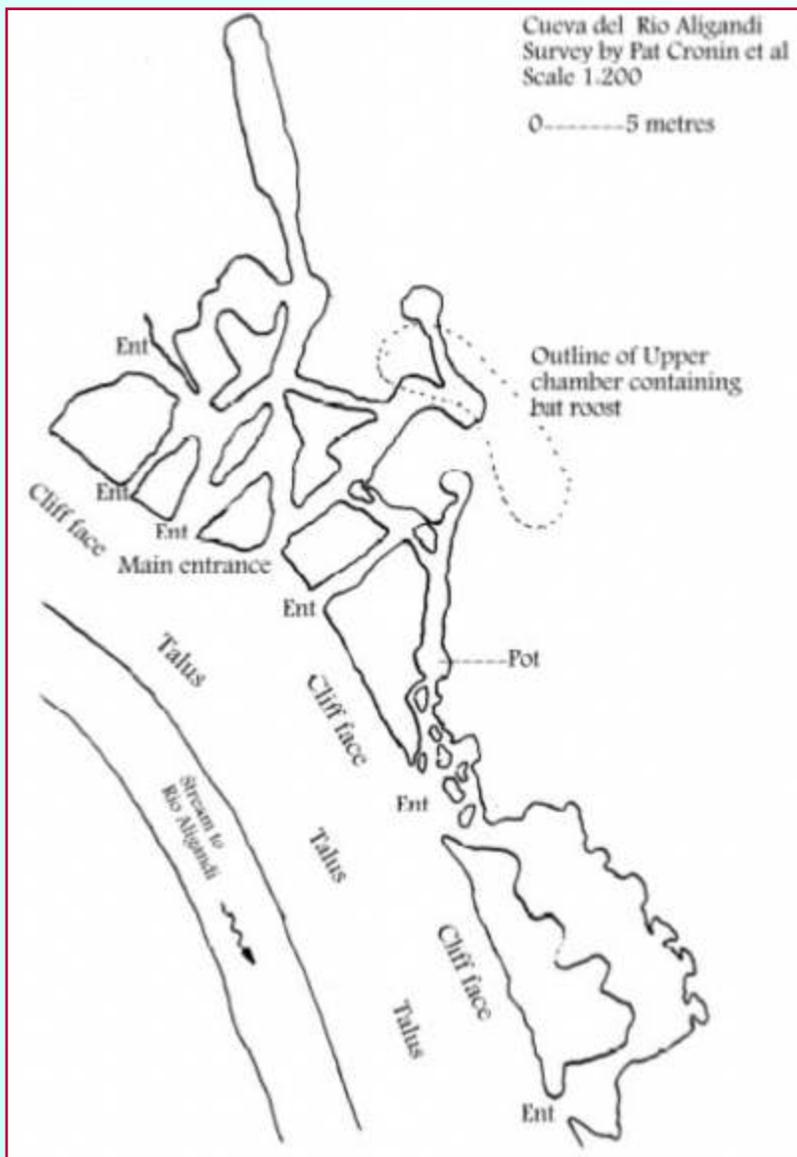
We found a few more passages and surveyed the cave at 128 metres, with help from Nelson Smith, see photo – not the largest cave in the Americas, but what a “collectors’ piece”! Though there was much talk of other caves in the area, none had been located in time for our visit; in part because it had proved impossible to contact Ailigandi by fone or email in advance, so they did not know if or when to expect us.

The next morning, the Ailigandi Sailahs came to visit us on Flying Scud (a great honour!) to seek help developing an “Eco-Lodge”, to provide some tourist income and employment for the locals. There is considerable scope for eco-activities, in a little-visited area, including caving, jungle-bashing, hunting, birding, native medicine, snorkeling, skinny-dipping from one’s own deserted island etc. However, though I identified two potential candidates for this role, neither has “come good”; and now I am unable to contact the Sailahs to tell them this!

Back in Panama City, we also took the opportunity to make a day trip to the Puente Natural, the “Natural Bridge”, which provides a crossing point over the “Rio Puente” for the Camino Real, which was established in 1519 to link Panama City on the Pacific, with Portobello on the Atlantic. Mule trains, carrying untold wealth, used the Camino Real to transport silver and other riches brought in annual “flottas” from South America,



Nelson Smith surveying



mainly Peru, until the mid-1700's, providing much financial support for the Spanish crown. This is a big, but short, tunnel, which can be reached by hiring a boat, and boat-man, for the circa 40 minute trip across Lake Bayano, which was formed by damming the River Chagres in the 1920's, to control the flow of water into the Panama Canal. One can take the boat right through the cave, and then climb up to see the remains of the cobbled Camino Real above.

Next year, 2018, we hope to return to Yaviza, and explore the central Darien, to see whether the rumoured caves are really there or not. We also plan to spend a few nights up the Rio Teribe, again to establish whether there are caves to be explored or not. In addition to establishing brand-new caving areas, there is still Pozo Azul, and more known, but unexplored caves, near Pueblo Nuevo. Then there are two pre-Columbian burial caves near Pueblo Nuevo requiring archeological investigation. In Bocas del Toro, there are caves to link, new ones to explore, and a number of sumps/cenotes to dive – and a lot more. So much to do, and so little time, and so few people to do it!

**Ed:** James writes that although he is likely to have a “full-house” for the 2018 recces any Wessex members would, at least in principle, be welcome to participate next year, but basic reccé trips are not well-suited to going mob-handed. Naturally anyone interested in raising a posse for other caving in Panama is welcome to contact him.



## CAVING OVERSEAS..... GREECE

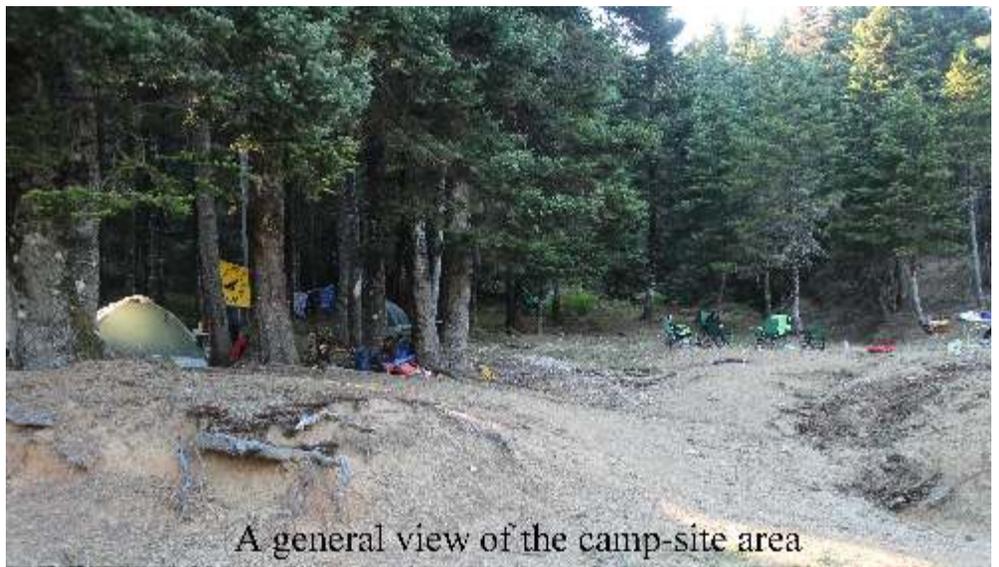


### POOING IN THE WOODS (EVIA, 2017)

Pooing in the woods. Now I know that you are expecting an article about caving in Greece. However, I think the success of anything submitted to the journal is in picking out those aspects of the trip that others may not necessarily have experienced. First and foremost, in this instance it is pooing in the woods. After all, how many other summer trips nowadays have on the list of essentials a digging trowel for the morning ablutions. Now that said it wouldn't be pleasant to wax lyrical for the next ten paragraphs on some of the obstacles and challenges that need to be overcome to bring that daily relief that we all enjoy. I will however briefly comment on etiquette should you happen to find yourself on one of these trips. Pooing below the water source is common sense and it is good manners to politely avert your gaze when catching the eye of someone leaving camp with a digging trowel and a roll of toilet paper. It is not the done thing and severely frowned upon (however funny it might seem) to land your morning load on top of a tortoise. Such incidents will be quickly taken to task by the expedition leader. Furthermore, the challenge should

never be escalated to canines (after all the Andrex puppy is just a fictional advert) or any other animal. When the mosquitos are out in force, don't be too hasty and check carefully before pulling up your pants. It is far better to have an angry mosquito on the outside of your undergarments than on the inside. Lastly, pick your spot with care. If, having secured your trousers around your ankles and settled comfortably onto your haunches, you find yourself being eyeballed by two ferocious sheep dogs, you are in a very precarious position. This can deteriorate rapidly if they launch an attack. Being chased out of the forest into the startled gaze of your expedition colleagues is embarrassing and uncomfortable for all concerned. Enough said I think.

If I had to pick out the next point of difference it would have to be what we affectionately referred to as simply "The Track". A bit of geography



A general view of the camp-site area



Drilling for entrance pot rigging

first. Evia is north east of Athens and at 1,714 square miles the second largest Greek Island (Crete is the biggest). The south of the island is considered barren whilst the north is fertile and



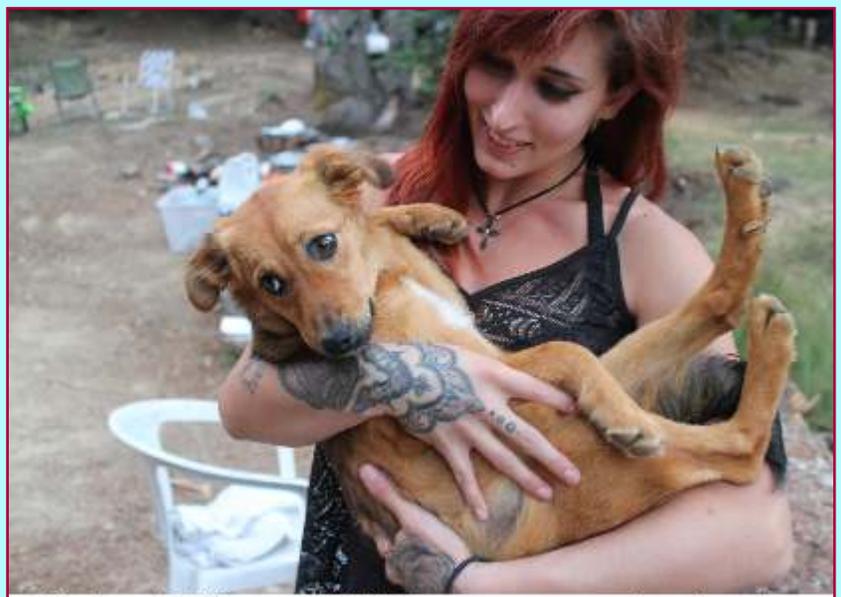
Robert Thomas. Photo: Bean

forested. The middle is mountainous rising to the highest peak of just over 1,700m. It's no surprise that our campsite is in this middle section, not too far from the east coast. Just to digress for a moment, I use campsite in the loosest of terms. You may have gathered from the above that other than a spring with fresh drinking water there are no showers, no pizza cafe, no pool, no bar – in fact absolutely no facilities whatsoever. Back to "The Track". The Track is an official bona fide road and can be found on all good sat-navs. It starts in reasonable condition. Tarmac gives way to



Wayne at the entrance to the rift cave that the Hungarians and I dug into, a few days later

concrete which then winds its way up through a series of switchbacks to the edge of the forest. Here the concrete finishes and dirt takes over for the next 7 or so kilometers. In places, it's not too bad. Other stretches where the heavy winter rains have carved deep ruts are barely passable. The car jolts and bangs; wheels spin; rocks fly and slowly you edge closer to camp. This goes on for nearly an hour. It's first gear only and if by the time you reach camp the gearbox is a bit clunky it's probably because half of it is now strewn behind you along "The Track". That said our brave little hire cars survived the ordeal. Thankfully they don't seem to check under the car when you hand the keys back in. "The Track" did mean that once you were in the forest there was no popping back down to the village for a quick beer or because you had forgotten to bring the milk up for the morning tea. Once you were in, you were in.



Monica with "Spam-A-Fix" the camp mascot who adopted us.

Heat. I've got to mention the heat. Even though the campsite is at 720m it is Greece in the middle of summer. It's hot. And if your follically challenged (like me) kitting up is done in the shade with as little time spent in the sun as possible.

Mosquitos. I've got to mention these too. It's a forest; it's hot and there are lots of them. Expose your skin and as if by magic they appear from all directions. Trousers are tucked into socks; arms are covered up and a ferocious barrage of repellents deployed but they still get through. Only when the wind gets up do we have some relief.

Lastly spam. I don't think I've mentioned yet that there is no mobile signal for at-least a 30-minute drive from the camp. Yet we all had spam. Keeping meat fresh when you can't get to town is a bit of a challenge so spam became somewhat of a staple. That said Kevin G appointed himself as camp cook and worked absolute wonders. Despite the limited supplies Kevin worked tirelessly to feed us all every evening. Thanks Kevin.



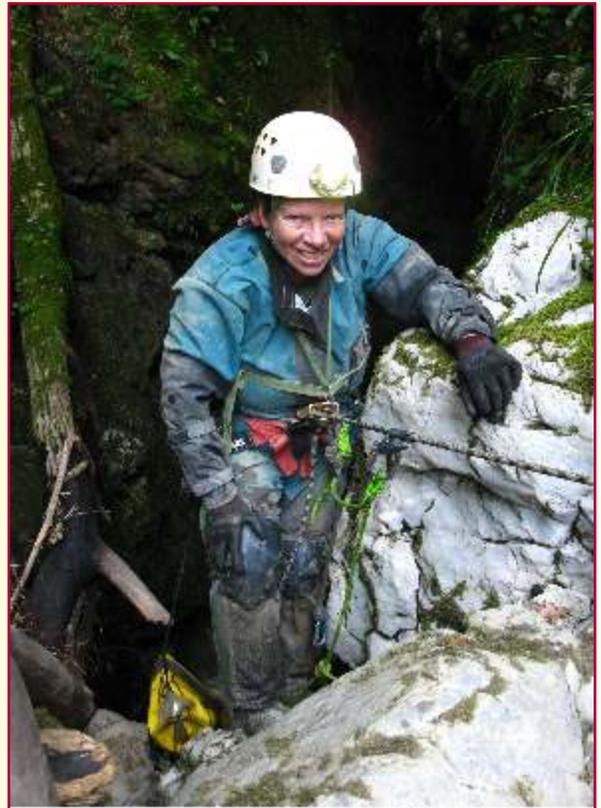
Kevin Gannon - Forest Masterchef!  
Photo: Bean

So, by now you are thinking why on earth take that precious two-week break in the working year and put yourself somewhere that has no connection with the outside world; where you are eaten alive; stripped of all but the most basic forms of hygiene and can only escape at a snail's pace? Firstly, it is beautiful. By day the forest stretches like a green blanket over the craggy landscape thinning here and there to let the



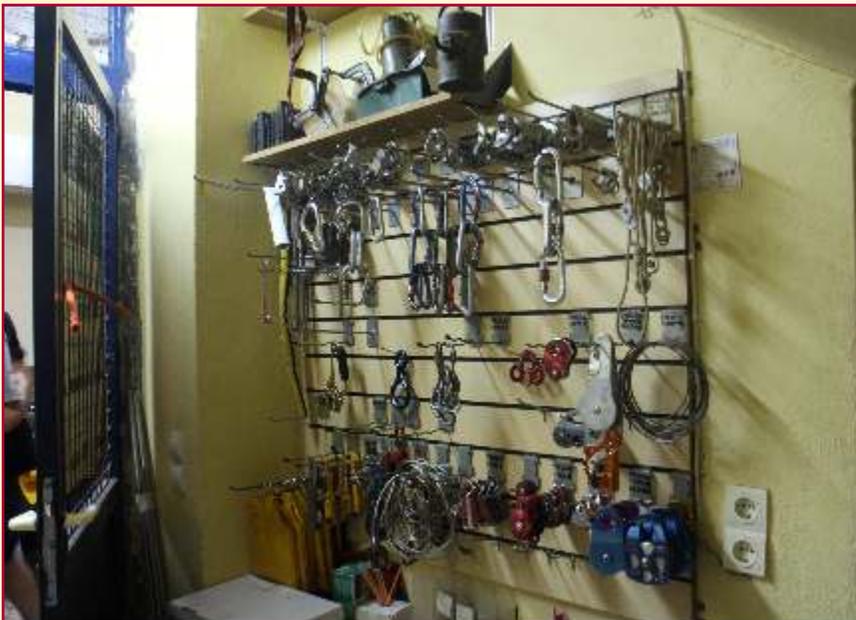
Kushy, Atti, Wayne, Szilvia and Tibor after a day rigging Papa Lakas

mountains rise up. At night, there is no light pollution. The stars pour through. They are all there – Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, Cassiopeia and behind them the humbling presence of the milky way scattered like dust above the trees. Secondly, it's all limestone. Not only is all limestone there has been very little exploration. We had four known sporting caves on the camp doorstep - Papaspilia, Papa-O-Lakkos, Milea, and Tsekoura's. We concentrated on the last three. All had leads in which were explored over the two weeks. Interestingly, it seems that the caves hit a shale bed at about 300m depth and sump or choke out. There is as yet no known cave that passes through to connect with the resurgences down on the coast some 700m below the entrances. Time was also spent pushing other surface leads that are scattered around in abundance. None went. On this trip. Time was also spent with the shepherds who roam these



it

Jude emerging from Milca  
Photo: Bean



Impressive scenes at the HQ of the Hellenic Speleological and exploration Club, in Athens

hills. This proved invaluable. They know where the cave entrances are; where the snow plugs stay all year round. Bulging GPSs came back from this day out.

On days off, once out of the forest the beach is only 15 minutes from the bottom of the track. And this is rural Greece so don't think of Kos with stag and hen parties plundering establishments and scattering everything before them; think of sleepy waterfronts where old men sit and play dominos; restaurant terraces that are built out over the waves and locals who take to the gentle swell of the sea at all hours to while away time.



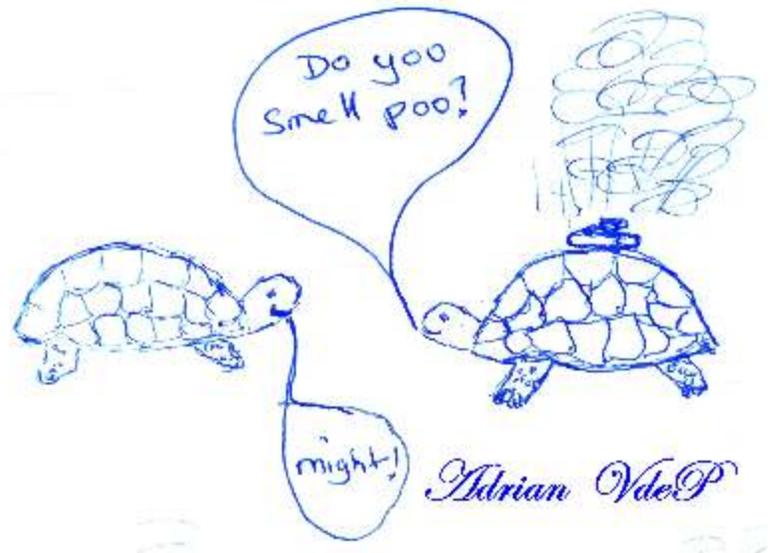
Impressive tackle in IISEC headquarters



None of this would have been possible without the support from Speleo (Hellenic Speleological & Exploration Club) and huge thanks must go to them. All caves in Greece whether known or not are archeological sites. You can't just

rock up and go caving. Speleo sort out access on our behalf. Many years have gone into building up the relationship with Speleo and we must thank Malc et al. for this. Malc must also be thanked for pulling the whole trip together. Great job - thanks Malc! It was good to see the Greeks caving too. At peak numbers there were over 30 people in camp from all over Europe.

I could go on about the wonders of solar showers; the friendliest stray dog ever that joined the camp and the sheep and goats wandering through camp at all hours with their deafening cow-bells but I'll stop there. Sitting now at 11,000m somewhere over northern France we're just beginning our descent into Heathrow. The humdrum awaits and grindstones need to be turned again. But what an experience and what a great couple of weeks. I don't think that a single one of us wouldn't jump at the chance to go back. Mind you, the tortoises are breathing a bit easier since we left! *Kevin*



**Ed:** All the above photos were taken by Kushy except the two credited to Bean. And here's an alternative offering from the Evia holiday from Szilvia Auth. All photos taken by Kris.

Here you go with my notes, sorry they are not really useful... Kevin made rigging maps about the caves, I think that bit is the most valuable from the whole camp.

Hungarians arrived to the camp on Monday, quite late (23.30).

Tuesday: Ati went to the Papalakos with the rigging team (according to my memory Malcolm, Bean was definitely there). Another team Jude, Kevin and some others went to check some new caves.

Tibi, Chris and Sylvia stayed in the camp and made some walks around.

Wednesday: Wayne, Mike, Ati, Tibi and Sylvia went to the Papalakos to finish the rigging till



the bottom. We run out of rope unfortunately, did not manage to rig the cave fully.

Thursday: Mike, Ati, Tibi, Chris and Sylvia went check the cave Mike was aware of (someone give the coordinates to him, it was found last year). Started to dig first at the back end (quite hopeless as it is full of very big rocks) and after it from the right-hand side, around the middle of the cave. We managed to find around 15-20 m of new bits, hammered through the wall into a small chamber. The cave is going down, worth continuing with a bigger team, maybe from both directions (from the back end and from the right-hand side). Some stalactites, dissolving. Mike decided to



call the cave Beer Rift, I have absolutely no idea where it is coming from.

Started to look around and found a couple of depressions around the camp, would be worth continuing checking and trying to throw out the stones and debris. Finding a cave just opposite to the camp, under the wall. The geology suggests, the camp itself is in a big unroofed cave (walking around the area there are many signs – that is my opinion). This cave we went down has a chamber around 40 X 20 m, could be dug further at least at 3 points. Have stalagmites and stalactites in it, I will not say well-decorated but was worth going down.

Friday: Mike, Ati, Tibi, Chris and Sylvia, de-rigging Milea till the bottom of the 70 m pitch and taking out the ropes. Nice trip, quite wet at the end. The girls and some of the more experienced guys went also down to the cave, they were behind us and they did not come to the bottom, turned back (maybe halfway?).

Saturday: sea urchin day, I wish we stayed in the camp...!



Sunday: Malc, Michael, Rob, Pete, Iona, Laura, Monica Ati, Tibi, Chris and Sylvi rigging Manika. Going through the “tunnel”, arriving the big chamber and going down into the mud at the far end. On the way back to the cars we met (the small) Vassilis and his friend, they planned to camp near the cave and going down the next day.

Monday: Mike, John, Leon, Ati, Tibi, Chris and Sylvia went back to Manika. We met (the small) Vassilis and his friend at the entrance. Went down together and left Mike and John at the digging point. We went back to start mapping the “tube” as it was said there is a map about the entrance, Ati become peevish, tired and upset so we headed

out of the cave (too much beer? too many caves? too long nights?)...On the way back we met a couple of Greek parties. Jude, Adrian and Kevin were also in the cave, started to dig the point in the big chamber where the water goes under the rocks. Without any significant result. Leon and (the small) Vassilis made pictures.

There are a couple of side-passages where we could walk around but all of them going mainly upwards, so collecting water to the main system. The cave changed a lot, 25 years ago they used a different entrance and there was no lake at the entrance. Mike wanted to have a bath very close to the surface, jumped into the water and realized he is not taught how to swim in clothes (worth considering South-Wales caves with him J) and lost both his boots !!!

Tuesday: washing our furry suits as the smell was horrible, so no caving. We went down to Metohi, no urchins! A very nice day.

Wednesday: Ati, Tibi, Chris, Sylvia Tsekoura Cave de-rigging. Completely different cave from the previous ones, not as deep, was quite relaxing, took out 210 m rope.

Evening, trying to dig Tibi's cave. It is very close to the camp, having a very strong draft, so definitely worth continuing but the entrance pit is full of smaller and bigger stones. This cave is the same system we found a couple of days earlier (opposite the camp).

*Szilvia*



# Letters to the Editor



*Dear Editor,*

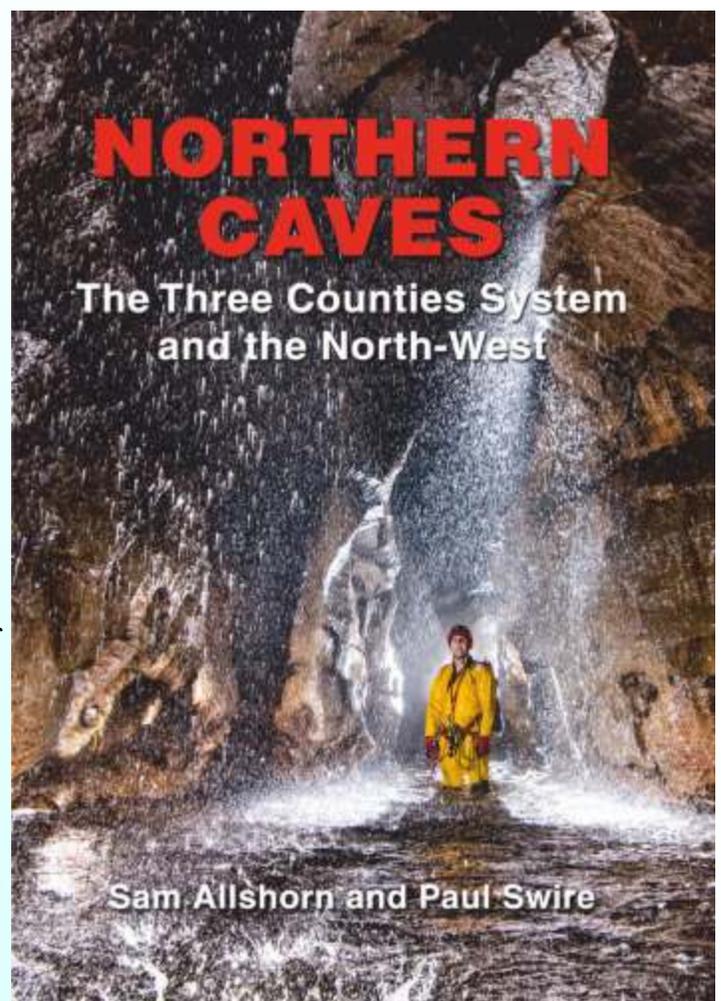
It is many years since the old Northern Caves has been updated. The area that was covered by the old volume 3, the Three Counties System and the North-West, covering: Scales Moor, East Kingsdale, Kingsdale Head, West Kingsdale, Marble Steps, Leck Fell, Ease Gill, Barbondale, Dentdale, this chapter had become much larger and so there is a new chapter, Great Knoutberry Hill and Garsdale, Wild Boar Fell, Mallerstang, Brough, Vale of Eden and Caldbeck, Bowland, Morecambe Bay and other areas. Have all been updated. The book is 472pg at A5 with colour maps surveys and photos through out. SRT information is also included. There are many hundreds of entries in the book.

There is also a large amount of information online at [northerncaves.co.uk](http://northerncaves.co.uk) this includes grid references, photos of the entrances and list of references. Details of where to buy are also on the website. It costs £33.50 inc P&P from Wild Places Publishing.

Could I ask you to share this information with your members even if you don't normally cave in northern England.

Regards

*Sam Allshorn*



(Dear Szilvia,

I must apologise that your name is spelled in all sorts of wrong ways in the log-book and accounts. I will correct as far as I can, and in future ensure that your Journal entries are properly credited to "Szilvia"..... but your Email comes across as "szilvike" which is yet another spelling... no wonder people get confused!!

Noel)

~~~~~  
Hello Noel,

I started to use the English version of my name here, as the "sz" just confuses everyone. In Hungarian the letter "sz" sounds the English equivalent "s" and our "s" letter is the English "sh" sound. Weird, I know... Although I do not really care if it is Sylvia, Silvia, Sylvie or Szilvia... Almost the same. :-)

And yes, "szilvike", just to add to the confusion... "ke" is a suffix (pronounced with a short "e" at the end, like in chef). With these suffixes you tend to say someone is nice, although literally it means "small" One of my former boyfriends created the account for me many years ago, I think he did not assume I would be over 20 at any point in the future (I think below 20 no one really considers it to happen) and might be ridiculous with the suffix "ke" later in life but so far the worst reaction was a condescending smile (I would be ok, no need for a psychologist).

So my real name is Szilvia indeed, but it does not really matter how it is written. So that is all for today about the silly suffixes, sorry, I am quite bored so was in the mood of writing about some nonsense stuff here. :-)

Take care,

Sylvia or Szilvia

~~~~~

**From Maurice Hewins**

### **The 2017 Annual General Meeting and Dinner**

As is customary, the A.G.M. was held at the Hunters Lodge at 10 30 a.m. It was attended by less than 15% of club members, very few of whom were aged under 50. While one could assume that the other 85% must be perfectly happy with the present state of the club, another possibility is that it was down to sheer apathy. The meeting was opened on time with the President, Don Thomson, in the chair. After a short introduction he handed over to Les Williams to conduct the rest of the meeting. From my memory it was the least contentious of A.G.M's for many years; even the accounts were approved with very little criticism.

The club's financial state is sound and the numbers of members is stable. However, with several vital maintenance projects under discussion and inflation increasing, it was decided with one vote against, to leave subscriptions at £35 for the coming year. The late payment penalty was reduced to zero. A proposal to transfer £2151 to the hut sinking fund was carried.

Several opinions were aired over the current status of the journal, but the general sentiment was that Editor was producing issues on time, and it really is up to the club in general to write most of the articles.



Don, Les & Frank presiding at the AGM.  
Photo: Maurice Hewins



Some concern was raised about the overcrowding of Upper Pitts and overloading of the sewage system at times, but this was left for the incoming committee to work on. They were also asked to prepare written instruction manuals for both the sewage system and the new hut electronic security systems, because most of the information is only in the heads of a few key members.

Phil Hendy was concerned that space in the library was running short. He therefore proposed that a number of old journals from various clubs could be scrapped. These had been listed in the A.G.M. handbook. However, as it was possible that these might include the last surviving copy of some issues, it was felt that the list should first be circulated to other caving libraries before final action was taken. An alternative could be to scan any items

thought important before disposal.

It was noted that for the first time since the introduction of the breathalyser, no coach had been arranged for the Dinner. This had been decided because of low demand and high cost. However over 90 tickets had been sold and members were asked to share lifts.

The dinner took place at Wells Golf Club and was generally felt to have been a successful event. Those of us who remember earlier dinners, where we fought over the last potato, were rewarded with an excess of vegetables that would feed a small army. (Remember meals at the Caveman Restaurant in the late 1960's).

The speeches and awards this year were kept to a minimum. I was honoured? to be awarded joint winner of the "tiger of the year award" for my short incarceration in Balch's hole, but I don't really think that equals Mike K's double life-threatening epic in Greece.

The undoubted highlight of the evening was the hilarious video presentation by our guests of honour, the Dudley boys, Chunky and Caver Keith. a.k.a. Mark Burkey and Keith Edwards. The rest of the time was spent circulating and catching up with old friends.

As usual the arrangements were made by the "Woman behind the Throne", Wendy Williams, who deserves the thanks of the whole club. Marian Wilkinson was also thanked for providing masses of cakes to cheer up arduous committee meetings. Both ladies were prominent in the kitchen at Upper Pitts for the traditional club lunch on Sunday.

*Maurice Hewins*

**From James Cobbett**

*Esteemed Sir,* (Ed. I love that.....)

I was interested to read the piece on Weil's Disease on page 231 of Journal 342, and would like to share my own near-death experience, which was mentioned on Page 60 of Journal 305 (June 2007) by "Cheramodytes".

Ten years ago, to complete a one-and-only (solo) through-trip from Arch Cave to Nibida, on Bastimentos Island, in Bocas Del Toro, and thus extend what was already Panama's longest cave to over 2 Kms, my shirt rucked up while squeezing through the link, and I scratched the skin on my belly. A few days later, we over-nighted in Cayman Cave, in nearby Colon Island, which, as the name suggests, is infested by a small crocodile, a zillion bats, and doubtless also a zillion rats. We then took a five day sailing cruise to Escudo de Veraguas, before the rest of the team flew back to the big city, with me staying on my sail boat with my son. Later that day, I felt very tired, and collapsed and slept 24 hours on a friend's boat, waking to feel very weak, with no appetite and all food tasting of card-board.

My wife, Marilyn, flew back to Bocas and then we both flew back to Panama City, straight to see a doctor. Blood tests indicated near-to-total kidney failure, which was eventually sorted out during eight nights in hospital, including three sessions of blood dialysis. At times, I was too weak almost to walk, and spent one hour under a cold shower, in the middle of the night, to reduce my temperature. Leptospirosis/Weil's Disease was not diagnosed until after I had left hospital, but was effectively treated by broad-spectrum antibiotics, to make a full recovery. Likely the scratches I sustained by squeezing through the Arch-Nibida link, enabled the Leptospira bacteria, derived from bats' urine in Cayman Cave, to enter my body. In Panama, Weil's Disease is a "notifiable disease", so the Health Ministry sent a team up to Cayman Cave to see what they could find, though I know not what success they had in this.

Since then, we each take 200 mg per week of doxycycline as a prophylactic against Leptospirosis/Weil's Disease (also effective against malaria), when caving expeditions visit Panama, as recommended by the US Army Medical Corps, following a 1982, 940 volunteer, double-bind trial, on soldiers undergoing jungle warfare training in Panama - see "An efficiency trial of doxycycline chemoprophylaxis against leptospirosis", by Takafuji et al, which can be found on the Internet. So far, we have had no more cases of leptospirosis/Weil's Disease. *James*



## Christmas Is Coming



This Cotswold Outdoor Christmas offer is seriously worthwhile, but remember that Andy and Rachel's "Caveclimb" emporium is right here our our doorstep for your special caving requirements.

.... And while thinking of Christmas presents, there is always the present that extends beyond December 25<sup>th</sup>. For the rest of the year.....

In 1952 Underground Adventure by Arthur Gemmell and Jack Myers brought stories of exploration in the caves of the Yorkshire Dales to the reading public. Now, inspired by those classic tales, two new authors - Dave Haigh and John Cordingley - continue the theme into modern times, bringing to life the dedication, ingenuity and sheer hard work needed to break new ground, often in desperately difficult circumstances, yet blend their narrative with the outrageous humour known only to cavers. They have captured the thrill of exploration when a project finally begins to reveal its secrets, such as penetrating further in Gaping Gill, diving beneath Malham Cove and discovering caves that were unknown in the 1950s. (Review courtesy of Matt Ewles)

All royalties from the sale of this book will be donated equally between the authors' chosen charities: cave rescue and Macmillan Cancer Support. Softback only at £24.95 inc P&P from **Wild Places Publishing**.



# THE DIGGING SCENE



*Geoff Newton* reports:

## **SLUDGE PIT HOLE: SURVEYING, FINDING AND WRITING OFF NEW DIGS**

It seems like we have been digging in Sludge Pit Hole for ages and ages, and in fact it's now nearly three years. The last update, in the Wessex Journal 338, had us digging in 5 separate locations in the general vicinity of Strike Chamber. The whole area has not been looked at as thoroughly as the rest of the cave. Which location Mike Kousiounis and myself dug on any given day depended on how many helpers were available.

In addition to digging, Duncan Simey and Mike K have been carrying out a complete re-survey of the cave using DistoX technology. This will be dealt in more detail with in a separate article in a future issue. However, it's worth noting that the surveyed length of the cave has increased from 660m to nearly one Km at the last count. About 70m of this is completely new passage we have dug into. Another 30m or so was what we believe is new passage gained by Mike K climbing part way up the aven at junction of Limlet Inlet and Skeleton Passage during the course of the survey. This new passage lies close to the entrance to Limlet Inlet. The suspicion is that the remaining difference is due to the original surveyors using the plan distance omitting all pitches instead of a passage centre line. Space will not permit a discussion of the merits and otherwise of each method of calculating passage length, suffice it to say that I now regard all cave length figures with a certain amount of scepticism.

On 24 July 2016 Mike, with the assistance of myself and Duncan S, climbed to the top of the aven at the junction of Limlet Inlet and Skeleton Passage. This is arguably the most impressive place in the entire cave. There was a hope that at the top of the aven we might eventually access passages trending back down again. This was only a slim hope, given that the top of the aven was believed to lie close to the surface. Mike found that the aven pinched out at the very top to "a 4inch diameter hole in solid rock". There was also an alcove at the top which provided a little respite, but this pinched out to a "3inch diameter hole". So the survey gear which Duncan had brought with him was not needed and we did not bother to join Mike at the top of the aven.

The whole top part of the climb and the area at the top was very muddy and loose, which slowed things down, as Mike had to be very careful with protection, putting in two bomb proof hangers. Fortunately, there was a good sized overhang which sheltered me and Duncan from falling rocks, whilst I belayed Mike and Duncan took photographs. During his climb Mike saw no evidence that anyone else had made the climb, which is a little hard to believe considering how long the cave has been open. There were certainly no bolts or pitons in situ and the climb is nastier than it looks from ground level. Until any evidence emerges to the contrary, we are assuming this was a first ascent.

During August 2016 it was difficult to recruit diggers due to holidays, EuroSpeleo and the like, and we soldiered away hammering off ledges and raking up spoil from the floor of the streamway at the end of Back Passage. The streamway was cascading (or dribbling, given this was summer) down a short section of steeply inclined rift passage. However, as we removed rubble from the floor of the streamway we hit a solid rock floor on 26 August 2016 and instead of carrying on down, the rift went horizontal and became impossibly narrow. Further progress will require explosives instead of hammering and this is likely to generate more spoil than there is usable stacking space. This is a shame as there is a decent draught and water can be heard falling down ahead. So this dig has gone to the back of the queue. At the time of writing it seems that Back Passage may have been formed as inlet passages draining South or South East, pre-dating much of the rest of the cave which drains in a more or less westerly direction, towards Swildons Hole. The assumption is that the water originally flowed from Back Passage into Strike Chamber and out to Main Rift via Aragonite Passage. By contrast the current stream will head direct to Swildons bypassing Main Rift but it seems making it passable is not a practical proposition.

A little time was spent in the Strike Chamber dig but this is still very loose, and after a boulder narrowly missed Mike we also decided to give this low priority, given that is likely to join up with known cave.

Mike and Duncan were on expeditions in much of September 2016.

I had also previously thought of digging at the bottom of the Four Pots Rift, but rejected the idea because the stream at the bottom of the rift on the old survey appeared to be heading straight for Main Rift. Climbing down the pots is quite intimidating and a handline is a good idea. However, when Mike and Duncan were resurveying the cave it was found that the stream at the bottom of the 2<sup>nd</sup> (as approached from Triple Arch) Pot actually turned away sharp left in its own separate rift, and so might possibly bypass the sump at the end of Main Rift after all. Progress along this lower rift was immediately blocked at the left hand bend by various rock projections but appeared to continue in a passable fashion

beyond these obstructions. On the weekend of 1<sup>st</sup> / 2<sup>nd</sup> October we attempted to remove these projections by hammering with some success but insufficient was removed to permit progress along the rift. Mike also climbed down the 1<sup>st</sup> Pot and dug out another rift which looked like it would intersect the rift at the bottom of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Pot but this eventually became too narrow. Subsequently Mike drilled holes in the vicinity of the sharp left hand bend in the streamway at the bottom of the 2<sup>nd</sup> pot and Ali banged this midweek. After we had cleared the rubble away on 14<sup>th</sup> October we were both able to get past the bend. Mike was able to see past the next bend and he saw the streamway continuing as a very (too) tight rift as far as he could see. This made it a serious undertaking to continue.

We decided to wait until water levels in the cave had increased sufficiently so that we could reliably carry out a “mud water trace” to see if the streamway joined Main Rift before the sump. No point in spending a lot of time, effort and money forcing the stream passage only for it to re-join Main Rift before the sump. On 9 December I cleared more sediments from the 4 Pots Stream Dig to muddy the stream and then went back up to Main Rift and thence down to the Sump looking at all the inlets on the way. They were all either running clear or were not running at all, which indicated that the stream might bypass the Sump at the end of Main Rift. Or it might mean that the sediment had all flowed through before I could get back to Main Rift, or perhaps that the mud had settled out before it could reach main rift. The test was repeated on 10 February in higher water conditions with Mike waiting by the obvious inlet in the left-hand wall in Main Rift and me doing the business in 4 Pots Rift. This time the water from the inlet became discoloured after 25-30 minutes. The first test presumably failed because the flow was not powerful enough to push the sediments through before they settled out.

Back in the Autumn Mike also carried out the climb of an Aven in Main Rift, and he returned a second time with Nick Butler to clear out some blockages. This has yet to be pushed to a conclusion as we are not really interested in going back towards the surface.

For a change, we went to check out His Lordship’s Hole a short cave in the same field as Attborough Swallet. What we did and are still doing there from time to time will be reported in due course.

Work continued in the Boulder Chamber Dig for a while. The dig has become less unpleasant as water can be persuaded to drain along the right hand side of the “passage” so it is no longer necessary to lie in the water when you are working at the sharp end. During the summer the water entering the dig from the two avens had almost totally dried up, but with the onset of the rains in November a decent sized stream made its appearance but fortunately the dig takes water without backing up. The roof and floor and sides seem more or less solid, but it’s not clear if this rock is just made of very big boulders or if it is indeed really solid. Whichever is the case the roof has lowered ahead and the way on closing down to almost nothing, and with the water having been mud traced to Main Rift there is little incentive to continue with the dig.

The Gloopy Pool Dig became a Gloopy Passage dig and needed a large team to get the spoil out and this is difficult to arrange on Sunday morning and impossible to arrange on Friday evenings. The water here currently drains straight ahead down a small drain hole. The main passage turns left and appears to be heading towards a continuation of the Mud Tube. It appears to have the profile of an inverted keyhole. The lower, possibly passable hole is almost totally blocked with mud. However, above this is a tall very narrow rift which draughts well. Since the passage was apparently headed towards the Mud Tube, we decided to concentrate on the Mud Tube which is easier to work although requiring chemical persuasion.

So, five of our six digs in Sludge Pit were put on hold during 2016, leaving just the Mud Tube. Through 2017 we have been steadily enlarging and pushing forward with the Mud Tube dig with assistance from Ali Moody from time to time to apply chemical persuasion. Most of the other work has been carried out by myself and Mike, although JC has loaned us his number 2 drill to provide the holes for Ali to use. There has also been occasional assistance from Wayne Starsmore, JC, the London Hungarian CC and Lee Venning.

The vicinity of the Mud Tube started as a maze of too tight phreatic Tubes. However, we have now reached a multiple junction where the cave appears to be changing into a maze of too tight phreatic rifts. One of these rifts appears to be headed directly towards the blocked Gloopy Pool Passage. However straight ahead the Mud Tube has changed into a steeply descending too tight rift which emits a strong draught. The sound of water trickling along can be clearly heard ahead and is presumed to be coming from where the drainhole from the Gloopy Pool disgorges itself into the passage ahead. There are clearly good grounds for persisting with this dig.

Passages in this part of the cave do seem to be converging on the projected continuation of our dig but until they actually merge to form a passable passage we are resigned to have to bang our way along the rift passage ahead and hope that the merger happens before the dig becomes very difficult to work.

*Geoff Newton*



# LOG-BOOK EXTRACTS



Sunday April 2 2017 Shatter Cave, Withyhill. Kermit (leader), Emma Gisborne, Kris and Szylvia. Both caves very good! Seeing all the beauties, made some photos also. Great caves, great company. I hope to slow down a little bit next time, as we were in such a hurry I could not make any photos in the second cave. The camera's battery was flat, but that was not the reason of not making any pics! **Szylvia.**

Monday April 3 2017 Spider Hole John Cooper, Vern Freeman, NikNak, Ade & Jude VdeP. 50 loads of spoil hauled up the bottom shaft and deposited at the bottom of Four Tonne Shaft. Can see along/downwards to where it's a bit wider - but still not negotiable. 1 3/4 hrs. **John**

Tuesday April 4 2017 Brimble Pit Ali Moody, Pete Buckley.

Five holes drilled and banged. Interesting echo.... echo....echo..... Four newts rescued. **Pete**

Saturday April 8 2017 Brimble Pit Pete Buckley, John Cooper, Ali Moody, Mike K, Geoff Newton.

Excellent session clearing from last Tuesday's bang, and we have dropped one metre in depth, gaining small vertical passage below. Usual drill and bang ready for next Saturday. The missing crowbar dropped some time ago is now only just out of reach and we should be able to retrieve it next session. **Ali**

Sunday April 9 2017 Swildons John Cooper, Lee Hawkswell.

Bailed Mud Sump for 30 minutes. Same again should see it dry. 2 hrs. **John**

Sunday April 9 2017 Eastwater Neil Maine, Mike K, Duncan Simey.

In via Upper Traverse, down through Hallelujah Hole and a return via the corkscrew and the Upper Traverse by-pass. Duncan had a look up the chimney into Unlucky Strike as he hadn't seen it before. A steady trip. **Neil**

07 April - 09/04/2017 Waterwheel Swallet Terry Chew, Darren Scot-Hale + work car transporter guys.

Down with Terry and car transporter guys; first time caving. Did Waterwheel and abseiling, Saturday and then Swildons Sunday. Felt safe and surrounded by knowledgeable people who were friendly and approachable. Will definitely return as I felt the activity pushed me and my comfort zone and as my confidence grew only made me want to push further. Looking forward to next time already. **Darren**

07 April - 09/04/2017 Waterwheel and Swildons Same team

Amazing weekend with some pretty incredible people. Weekend organised by Terry. He did an amazing job and organised everything for us. Waterwheel was pretty good going, managed it fine. Loved Swildons and always feel that I've pushed myself to the limit when I come out. The people definitely made this trip; counting down the days to the next one. **Vicky and Vincent Hoddy**

Wednesday April 12 2017 Lime Kiln John Cooper, Aubrey Newport.

While Aubrey fettled the pipe, John drilled a couple of holes at the end. 1 1/2 hrs. **John**

Friday April 14 2017 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton

Clearing rocks and very sticky mud from the Mud Tube dig; with difficulty. **Geoff**

Saturday April 15 2017 Brimble Pit Pete Buckley, John Cooper, Ali Moody, Mike K, Lee Venning, Geoff Newton.

Cleared the intermediate pot, back to station 14. Then clear, drill, bang and get cold at the bottom. John continued building up the spoil retaining wall (2 mixes) by station 14. 3 hrs. **Ali**

Monday April 17 2017 Spider Hole John Cooper, Vern Freeman, NikNak, Ade & Jude VdeP.

Hauled one load up bottom shaft before Vern and NikNak arrived, then hauled 42 loads up 4 Tonne Shaft. 1 3/4 hrs. **John**

Wednesday April 19 2017 Eastwater Damon & Liam Fentham

Liam and I decided to visit the 13 pots via the Twin Verticals route. Rather than take ladders we elected to use our SRT kits for some well-needed practice. **Damon.**

Thursday April 20 2017 **Reeds Cavern** Damon & Liam Fentham

Our first trip to Reeds, we entered the cave via the wet way and explored the main chamber. We then made our way through Pipe Chamber, into Zed Alley, through the boulder maze and down to the link with Browne Stewart Series. **Damon**

Sunday April 16 2017 **North Hill Swallet** Geoff Newton, Sylvia and Chris.

Tourist trip to the end. Decided that I did not want to dig there! **Geoff**

Saturday April 22 2017 **Brimble Pit** Ali Moody, Geoff Newton, Pete Buckley, Lee Venning, John Cooper.

Caverns measureless to man will have to wait. Another few metres, all very steep and slippery. Cleared, drilled and banged: nice echo from the charge. Hard work today. Found the crowbar dropped on 18<sup>th</sup>. Feb. **Pete**

Monday April 24 2017 **Spider Hole** James Collings, John Cooper, Ade & Jude VdeP, NikNak.

Adrian built up the wall at the top of 4 Tonne Shaft while the rest of us hauled spoil up from the bottom shaft. 2 hrs. **John**

Wednesday April 26 2017 **Sludge Pit** Mike K.

Drilling.... drilled! Must take oil for padlock, barely got in this evening. **Mike**

Saturday April 29 2017 **Rods - Bath** Aaron, Jim, Kit, Will

Good trip. Climbed up Bath then went and checked out Reeds Cavern. Aaron made light work of the climb up out of Bath. **Anon**

Saturday April 29 2017 **Welsh's Green** Flos C-S, Will Reed

A first trip down Welsh's for both of us. Initial impression.... MUD. A good trip and one to revisit in the future as we did not see the pretties on this trip. **Flos**

Saturday April 29 2017 **Brimble Pit** Ali Moody, Geoff Newton, Lee Venning, John Cooper, Pete Buckley.

Cave is getting very steep. Still too tight, so the usual: - clear intermediate to wall stacking. Clear end to

intermediate, then drill while John builds retaining wall. 3 hrs. **Geoff**

Saturday April 29 2017 **Swildons** Pete Hall

New baby has prevented recent caving so a trip to Swildons 12 seemed a good plan for a day off! Lovely viz on the way in, not so lovely on the way out. 6 hrs. Knackered. **Pete**

Sunday April 30 2017 **Swildons** John & Emma Gisborne, Lee Venning.

Vicarage Passage and back with a look at the Old Approach series en-route. Loose rock above the inclined rift at a convenient hand-height. Too attached to garden. Needs care. 2 hrs. 20. **John**

Monday May 1 2017 **Spider Hole** John Cooper, Vern Freeman, NikNak, Lee Venning, Ade & Jude VdeP

Hauled 60 loads up Four Tonne shaft - another session still required to clear it. Then draught tested the very bottom. Smoke sank into the small rift where James nearly lost the big crowbar a couple of weeks ago. Decided best to keep going downwards, as that's following the draught. 2 ½ hrs. **John**

Saturday May 6 2017 **Brimble Pit** Pete Buckley, John Cooper, Ali Moody, Geoff Newton

Hard but fruitful session. Intermediate Pot cleared and then bottom cleared back to the Intermediate Pot. JC built up the retaining wall while the work-face was drilled and banged. A couple of large blocks removed from the bottom today. Good air, and very cold at the work-face. The cave continues steeply downwards at about 60 / 70 degrees. We're gaining about a metre of depth every session. 4 hrs. **Ali**

Saturday May 6 2017 **GB** Chris, Sylvia, Atti, Tiko, Citron, Sheela

Going to the Great Chamber and back. The cave is very dry - hardly any water. Good trip. **Sylvia**

Sunday May 7 2017 **Swildons** John Cooper, Steve Sharp, Roz Simmonds, Barry Weaver.

Down to Sump 2. 1 ½ hrs. **John**

Sunday May 7 2017 **Sludge Pit** John Cooper + the Hungarian Mafia: Sylvia, Chris, Atti, Tiko, Citron, Sheela.

Clearing spoil created on 01 May. Good session.

**John**

Tuesday May 9 2017 **Honeymead Hole, Little Crapnell Swallet** Terry Waller, Derek Sanderson.

Good route around in both caves. Probably used up all the air for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday trip! Very enjoyable. **Terry**

Friday May 12 2017 **Sludge Pit** Geoff Newton

Clearing more spoil from the end. Also took some mud out of the tube, which goes off on the right of the "Stacking Chamber". Unfortunately it looks like it's heading up rather than down. **Geoff.**

Saturday May 13 2017 **Swildons** Jim Burridge, Aaron & Jamie Varley

To Sump 1. Jamie's first trip past the 20 to Sump 1. Little air-gap and I went forwards and backwards through the sump 6 times. **Aaron**

Friday May 12 2017 **Brimble Pit** Ali Moody, Pete Buckley, Lee Venning, Geoff Newton, Mike K, John Cooper.

Lots of big rock moved from the dig face - along with a whole load of sugar, muddy debris. We cleared to the Intermediate spot first. Another 1.2m of depth gained this week, but the way on is blocked by a large solutional flake, which is hiding a vertical/steep vertical 3 or 4 m drop into..... a larger passage. Air today was not good but we managed to survive long enough to set another charge - that flake will no longer be there. 4 hrs of brimbling fun. **Pete**

Saturday May 13 2017 **Honeymead & Little Crapnell** ("2<sup>nd</sup>. Saturday" trips). Iona, Floss, Will, Damon, Monica, James: in two groups.

Explored both caves. A good day was had by all. The air in both caves was not good - worse in Little Crapnell. **Anon**

Sunday May 14 2017 **Swildons** John Cooper, Gary Kiely, Steve Sharp, Callum Simmonds, Roz Simmonds, Barry Weaver.

All along as far as Shatter Pot, where we left Barry at the bottom. The rest of us continued on and went through the first duck, very carefully, on our backs, with our helmets off. On to the gour pool which we bailed until loads of air-space. On through a load of low grovels, losing Gary en-route. The rest as far as Shatter

Chamber where we stopped. All back out safely. 3 ½ hrs. **John**

Wednesday May 17 2017 **Swildons** John Cooper, Damon Fentham

Went to check the Sidcot U-Tube. A good 5 cms of air, would be helmet-off, nose and mouth against the roof. Went in via Airless Oxbow and the first aven. Mud Sump still dry. 1 3/4 hrs.

**John**

Saturday May 20 2017 **Brimble Pit** Ali Moody, Pete Buckley, Geoff Newton, John Cooper.

Intermediate pot cleared and then the bottom. We are about to descend the next 2m drop - after the next charge. Air bad today with high CO2 levels, especially at the work-face. Last session of the season. Work will resume in the Autumn. John used two mixes of cement to build up the retaining wall. **Ali**

Saturday May 20 2017 **Swildons** Aiday, Darell, Wayne, Rich C.

Short Round Trip. Bailed the 1<sup>st</sup>. Trouble only. "Not the Birthday" squeeze proved more eventful as I had to remove my oversuit and Neofleece. Slipped through like a greased pig! Small air-space at Sump 1. **Rich**

Saturday May 20 2017 **Mitchell's Dig** Pete Hann, Nigel Graham, Barry Wilkinson, Ade & Jude VdeP.

Task: from Pete. "Cap the triangular rock in the floor"  
Problem: Couldn't find a triangular rock on the floor.... but there was a sort of rock fitting the description, not quite on the floor, and quite large. One cap and a large rumble and the rock was reduced but with a significant amount of mud and small rock.

Problem: Grumpy small person saying that I'd broke the dig.

Solution: Give him three buckets of cement and put my ear-defenders on so that I couldn't hear him!

Anyway, the dig is now more secure, the boulders that Pete had failed to secure last time are now safer and another large boulder in the roof shouldn't move now.

Conclusion: A fairly happy small person, and the dig is back to where it was a fortnight ago..... happy days!

**Adrian.**

Saturday May 20 2017 **Goatchurch & Pierre's Pot** Paul Fretwell +++

A fun day out with a group of scouts from my village in Suffolk, plus my kids. With the help of the West Sussex

Scout Caving Team (several of whom are Wessex members as well), did the usual Goatchurch circuit, taking some photos in the Drainpipe. Then after lunch too those still keen to explore the upper series in Pierre's.... led entirely by my 7 year-old son who took us into every possible chamber and dead-end (some of them twice!). **Footleg**

Tuesday May 23 2017 **Western Mendip:** Loxton Cave, Loxton Quarry Cave, Denny's Hole, Sandy Hole, Supra Sandy Hole. Derek Sanderson, Barry Weaver.

1 hr. 35 minutes of very enjoyable caving. **Derek**

Saturday May 27 2017 **Mitchell's Dig** Pete Hann, Barry Wilkinson, John Cooper, Ade & Jude VdP, Rich Carey (reluctant digger).

With Pete at the bottom the main task was to clear the surplus of rock which was building up at the bottom, and at the bottom of the shaft. 42 buckets hauled up and 4 buckets of cement used. We managed to clear a lot of bang debris from the floor, exposing boulders with gaps. The draught was pulsing, in and out and the dig was relatively dry. **Ade.**

Sunday May 28 2017 **Swildons** John Cooper, Gary Keily, Barry Weaver.

Had intended to visit the Black Hole series, but light failure at the entrance reduced this to just Sump 1. 1 1/4 hrs. **John**

Monday May 29 2017 **Swildons** Derek Sanderson, Terry Waller.

Visited the Airless Oxbows. Definitely a collectors piece!! **Derek**

Sunday June 4 2017 **Swildons** John Cooper, Lee Hawkswell, Barry Weaver.

Went and dug out the Wet Ears Squeeze which leads to the pitch down into North West Stream Passage. Part of the preparation for next Saturday's trip. 2 1/2 hrs. **John**

Monday June 5 2017 **Spider Hole** John Cooper, Vern Freeman, NikNak

Hauled 42 loads up very drippy bottom shaft. Lots more spoil still to move. 1 1/2 hrs. **John**

Tuesday June 6 2017 **Hunters Hole** Terry Waller, Derek Sanderson.

SRT trip down Sago Pot. Still a lovely pitch. **Terry**

Saturday June 10 2017 **Brimble Pit** Ali Moody, Pete Buckley.

Trip with "Go Pro" hopefully some good footage this time. Two traditional charges On the trip at the top of the next drop. Air not brilliant, but OK for an hour's work. 2 newts and one small frog rescued from the bottom of the entrance shaft. **Ali**

Saturday June 10 2017 **Mitchell's Dig** Pete Buckley

Small team as others have skived off to go to Rich and Andrea's wedding.. 1 mix of cement used and lots of clatch removed. Large boulder in floor needs capping. **Pete**

Saturday June 10 2017 "2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday trip" **Swildons** Jim Burrige, John Cooper, James Collings, Damon & Liam Fentham, Jamie French, Duncan Simey, Wayne Starsmore, Aaron Varley, Barry Weaver.

We lost James at Sump 1, Jamie's first time through Sump 1, Jim's first time up into Vicarage Passage - he only just fits through! All then through Wet Ears Squeeze and down the pitch. Upstream through the duck and turned round at the Dip Tubes. Out after a 4 1/4 hr trip. **John**

Sunday June 11 2017 **Balch Cave** Maurice Hewins, Jonathan Williams.

Went to Fairy Quarry with Jonathan to visit the remnants of Balch Cave, and shoot some video.

Jon went into the right-hand entrance and I followed, however I seriously misjudged the first drop down and got stuck. With every wriggle I slipped further in. My thoughts were as follows: 1, Shit, I can't move; 2, Don't panic, relax; 3, I am probably too old for this! After 20 minutes and some quick thinking by Jonathan, he got me out, assisted by a foot-loop on a rope and a bit of help from a couple of passing climbers. As Ned Kelly remarked: "Such is life". **Maurice**

Tuesday June 13 2017 **Swildons** Terry Waller, Derek Sanderson.

To the top of Vicarage Pot, then inspected John's gardening efforts at the start of Northwest Stream Passage. **Terry**



We Welcome the following new Members



Helga Palmer  
Stuart Emmett  
Hallam Greene  
Robert Harper (and yes, there really is another Robert Harper).

And welcome back rejoining member

Chris Williams



### Wessex Elf Rescue Mission Saturday 9th December



#### One of Santa's Elves is lost in Swildon's Hole. Please help find him.

He was last seen being chased towards the Water Chamber by an evil Mendip Pixie who was trying to steal his big bag of presents. We need to find him and the presents else there are going to be some very disappointed children come Christmas.

We will be mounting a rescue expedition on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> December leaving Upper Pitts at 2pm. This is going to be a tricky mission. As we all know Santa's elves are very timid, being scared of bright lights and bald heads. To this end we can only use candle light and must cover our helmets with caps, wigs or anything that comes to hand.

To help lure him out of his hiding place a feast of mince pies and ginger beer will be laid out underground, to be consumed by all once he is found.

Upon our triumphant return to Upper Pitts a celebratory meal will be served, undoubtedly followed by the singing of carols and the imbibing of ales and Christmas spirits!

For conservation reasons please ensure that your candle is in a holder.

Cost: to cover refreshments and food. £6.00 (children under 12) £3.50. Vegetarian option available above and below ground, please let me know your preference. Please bring your own drinks.

For catering purposes it is essential that we know numbers and have payment as soon as possible please.

The final closing date will be Sunday 2nd December.

If you wish to join in please contact:

Wayne Starsmore: wayne@cuckooelives.uk Mob. 07392 696696

or

Ali Moody: aadmoody@yahoo.com Tel. 01749 870278 Mob. 07833 147997



Back Cover Manikia Cave, Evia.

Photo: Krisztian Balogh

