





# THE WESSEX CAVE CLUB JOURNAL

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AUGUST 1997

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Opinions expressed in the Journal are not necessarily those of  
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# Club News

## Club Events

Don't forget the **Annual Dinner** this year being held at Coxley Vineyard on Saturday 18th October for WCC members - for more details with menus, prices, etc, see the flyer included with this Journal. The AGM will be held in the morning with a tour for the Sunday.

We are hoping to have a stand at the **BCRA Conference** this year, if any one would like to help set this up or even just mind the stand for a few hours please contact Dave Morrison.

We are hoping to **re-decorate the main dorm** as soon as possible. However the main painting can not start until some of the bunks have been refurbished, the ceiling and walls sealed, cleaning undertaken and general maintenance done on the windows, lights, internal doors, etc. If you could help with this task please contact Andy Ladell, as the more people that help the quicker this should be completed and the least disruption to the people using the dorm.

R Lewis first dug Trefil site in about 1966 and he has revisited it recently with a draught felt. The location is predictably good and the dig is unusually safe (for Trefil). The site is a stream-sink only in wet weather but the stream is continuous from Oct to May. If any WCC member wishes to be involved with this (midweek visits preferred), please contact Bob Lewis at:

17 Oak Rd, Horfield, Bristol, BS7 8RX  
He is not on the phone.

*(taken from logbook)*

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## WCC Meets

Did you attend the recent August BH meet in Yorkshire. Whatever the answer, why not attend a rather unusual venue for a change? A Wessex meet has been arranged for the 27th-28th September on the **Gower Peninsula**. We'll be staying at a campsite at Nicholaston (NGR 522/883) with the sand, sea and surf within 100m away. Be warned however that the caves are a little further away. Keys will be available for the caves. If you're interested in going, either just turn up or contact the Caving Secretary or Hut Admin Officer if you require any more information.

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British  
Cave  
Research  
Association  
Conference  
Bristol

## 12-14 September University of Bristol Union

**Friday 12th**                      **Afternoon/ evening**  
Field trips to Bath Stone Mines,  
Redcliffe Caves. Conference registration from  
8.30pm in the bar. Late bar in Union.

**Saturday 13th**                      **Day**  
Doors open 9.00am. First presentation  
9.30am, including: Mendip Dowsing and  
Regional Round-Ups, Albania, Ethiopia,  
Malaysia, Nullarbor, Training - Why bother?,  
SRT and other competitions

**Saturday 13th**                      **Evening**  
Stomp with local band RTZ and  
support. Quiet bar with Videos.

**Sunday 14th**                      **Day**  
Presentations and lectures continue,  
including: Cuba 97, French Alpine Caving,  
Oman, Vietnam, GPS for Cave Location on  
Expeditions, Lancaster / Easegill resurveying,  
Survival in Caves. Rope testing by Owen Clarke  
of NCA.                      **Finale and Award  
Presentations.**

This is only a small selection of what is organised.  
Up-to-date details can be found on the  
Conference Web site:  
[athttp://web.ukonline.co.uk/nca/bcra/conf97.htm](http://web.ukonline.co.uk/nca/bcra/conf97.htm)

Excellent display facilities will offer maximum  
impact for entries in the Photographic  
Competition and the Cave Art Competition, and  
the spacious areas directly off the central  
stairwell will provide a fine platform for Trade  
Stands, Artists, Bookstalls and Club Displays.

There is a **No Smoking** policy in the lecture  
and exhibition areas.

**A Creche is also to be provided**

# Caving News

## Mendip

For the latest update on **Honeymead Hole** see full report by Rich Witcombe on page 94.

Could all divers note that the management of **Wookey Hole** have asked that no dives be made from 9.2 as they are setting up a stand here. However it is still permissible to dive from 3 or 9.1.

The hand line in **North Hill Swallet** to descend Rumble-Plonk Pitch is no longer there.

Andy Sparrow has set up a **Web page** (see page 4), which contains up-to-date Mendip caving news. The address is:

[www.ascaveservices.demon.co.uk/](http://www.ascaveservices.demon.co.uk/)

Andy, a member of the WCC, has also brought out a book titled "*The Complete Caving Manual*". This is available from him or from all caving suppliers. The WCC is also hoping to sell them from our sales stock.

## Derbyshire

A new cave has been found at **Ribden Swallets**. It is No.3 Swallet, now christened **Holly Tree Hole**. Permission is from *Al Steans* of the Pegasus Caving Club (Tel: 0115 953 2708) and not from the farmer at Ribden Farm.

If any one spots a suspect **DMM** bolt could they please report it to:

*Mark Lowe* 0161 330 5111  
0468 531113 (mobile)  
*Ralph Johnson* 01782 515753

DMM's will soon be installed on the climb up to the **Far Flats** in **Nettle** to allow for a pull through.

The **Giant's Windpipe** which has been partly sumped for some time, due to a blocked outlet, has now been cleared, making the round trip a lot easier.

There has been movement in Upper Chamber **Rowter Hole**. Loose rock, made unstable by water up past the Chimney, was falling. Rock could also fall into Shaft 2.

## Yorkshire

The installation of Eco-hangers in **Marble Steps Pot** is now complete. All routes and areas have been changed over and rigging guides are available.

The choke in **Gingling Hole** has started to move. Although this is still passable with care, extra caution should be used in this area.

## Wales

Cavers are reminded that the use of carbide in **Ogof Draenen** is not allowed. Smoking has also been banned in this cave.

Access is now restored to **Ogof Lyn Park**, North Wales but is restricted to North Wales CC members only. The 100m entrance shaft leads to the longest cave in North Wales.

## Devon and Cornwall

Keys for **Dog Hole** extension are available from:  
*Andy Pryke* 2 St. Maurice, Plymouth, PL7 1JS  
Tel: 01752 384042  
*C Jones* 27 Hele Gardens, Plymton  
St. Maurice, Plymouth, Devon  
PL7 3JU

Please send 2 SAE's when requesting a key (one to send the key and one to return the deposit) plus 2 cheques payable to DCUC. £2 to cover admin charges and £10 returnable deposit.

Please note that the courtesy charge of 50p per head to the farmer is payable for entry into **Dog Hole**, **Little Pridhamsleigh** and the main **Pridhamsleigh caves**.

The landing stage in **Lake Chamber**, **Pridhamsleigh** had begun to rot and disintegrate. It has now been dismantled and removed, to be replaced soon by a steel frame work platform.

# Letter to the Editor

# Editorial

I would like to use the Journal to ask if there are other members like me with caving children. I have two sons, aged 8 and 11, who have a taste, and little ability, for caving - unlike their mother!

I would like to hear from any other members to see if we could organise the odd weekend of caving together, since I am somewhat wary of caving alone with two small children from a safety aspect. If two or more families could get together we may be able to start a 'Junior Wessex'!

Paul Cooper

If this idea appeals, why not contact Paul at the following address:

Applecross, Friars Hill, Guestling, East Sussex,  
TN35 4EP

As this is my last Journal, I would just like to say a huge thanks to everyone who's written articles or provided me with information to put into it. I am currently in the process of tidying up so if you have sent in any discs or photos, rest assured that they will be returned in due course. Thanks are also due to SpeleoScene for allowing the use of information for caving news. Below I have reproduced part of Andy Sparrow's Web page so you can see the content - why not try it for yourself? The Index enclosed with this Journal for Volume 23 of the WCC Journal has been compiled by Pete Cousins, as no-one else volunteered to do it - thanks Pete and we will try and find someone else to do it next year. Best of luck to the next Editor.

**Rosie**

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## The Mendip News Page (Web Page By Andy Sparrow)

A regularly updated information page for Mendip Cavers  
Last Update 3-8-97

Five Buddles Sink has broken into open passage after a year of hazardous and technical digging. 15 metres of partly mined passage has been followed to a choke where work continues in muddy conditions.

Whitepit UPDATE - Further work has entered 100 feet of large passage below Prophecy Pot. This terminates in a sump which will make future digging a problem. The air quality has improved but the area should not be entered without consulting BEC diggers.

Dave Mitchells dig at Charterhouse is progressing well. This depression was opened with a Himac and work continues between stal cemented boulders.

Hunters Hole - there is a massive digging operation in the bottom, and much equipment left in situ.

Swildon's Entrance is now apparently stable after the series of collapses that began a few years ago. Following the stream now provides a safe route between a solid roof and floor which bypasses the 8 foot climb. The Z bend route to the Dry Ways remains closed. The Mud Sump drain hole is still blocked and the recent wet weather has reduced the airspace. Bailing is now very difficult from either side and parties completing a reverse Round Trip or Priddy Green Sink through trip may find exit this way impossible. UPDATE - Mudsump is passable but bailing and water storage is still a problem because the dams are full. The situation is now very weather dependent. Also in Swildon's Sump 12 has been revisited and the underwater passage has been enlarged. It is hoped that a route can be forced up towards airspace very soon. A caver training facility for Mendip Wells community education have been successful in their lottery bid to finance a new sports hall which includes a climbing wall and specially designed caver training facility. This will consist of a balcony with rigging points where SRT, ladder and lifeline or rescue techniques can be practiced by local cavers. Completion is due in early 1999.

Bolt Update Resin anchors have been installed on the Entrance, New Atlas and High Atlas pitch heads in Thrupe. The climb to Ladder Dig in GB will be resin anchored very soon, and work will begin on Rhino Rift in the autumn. There are two stripped spits in Hunter's Hole; one over the main pitch and one above Far Right Pitch. Coral Cave has recently been SRT bolted, [click here for topo Update](#) - GB ladder dig is now P anchored

Hazel Nut Swallet is a BEC dig in the Biddlecombe valley just outside Wells. There has been a recent small breakthrough into short length of decorated passage. A way on is visible and work continues.

**Please email your comments and updates and make this site work for Mendip cavers.  
Caving queries gladly answered.**

# One Thousand Litres Downed

Rob Taviner

*'If all be true that I do think,  
There are five reasons we should drink,  
Good wine, a friend or being dry,  
Or lest we should be by and by  
Or any other reason why'*

(Five Reasons For Drinking, HENRY ALDRICH 1647-1710)

Peering grimly through the sleeting rain, Jake eased the growling diesel down into the Corrieshallach - the narrowest gash of a road, snaking north through an endless jostling battlefield of pines. Suddenly, a lumbering mass of horn and spittle catapulted from the fray, its glaring primordial eyes transfixed for a moment in the hard halogen wash, before strutting contemptuously away. Jake eased the ramrod straight brake back and exhaled, grimacing at the heady acrid mix of stale baccy and burnt rubber. Better a few dozen miles off your tyres than three hundred pounds of prime red stag tickling your tonsils. Behind, a pair of fast moving headlights swept over the low brow of a hill, magnified briefly

- twin searchlights seeking out some hapless prey  
- then polarised into malevolent stabbing beams of light as the car accelerated menacingly into the gorge behind. The faint phospherent glow of the digital clock clicked on ... 3.30 a.m. Radio Iraq exhorted its endless incomprehensible message to the stars. Suddenly, blue light exploded in the rear view mirror.

*Christ, it's the polis'*, whistled Jake, rolling gently to a halt. *'Evening Officer, what's up?'*

*You've a problem there, your back lights out'.*

*Oh, right'*, he replied, grabbing a screwdriver and a fistful of spare bulbs. HMs' finest ambled nonchalantly around the van, experienced eyes perusing the wagon circle of shadowy figures and five gallon barrel of Thatchers teetering gently on a mound of bars, hammers and other 'unspecified' equipment. Just what does your average Highland burglar carry for a nights work? After an uncomfortable couple of minutes the apparently unedifying prospect of there being enough material here to keep the entire North-West constabulary paperwork department busy for weeks to come, yielded a momentous decision. *'You'll be cavers then'.*

So began Assynt '96, the epic annual invasion of the southern Grampian. This was to be the year of Damoclean. The year of the big one. We had the tools, we had the manpower. What could possibly get in our way?

The first thing to get in our way was The Alt. Having woken to the familiar dulcet tones of the lumpy toilet choir, we headed for Damoclean. At Ledmore Junction, Jake turned right. *'Damoclean's left'*, I proffered. *'Just nipping into Erics'*, replied Jake. *'Won't be a tic'*, nose growing longer by the minute. To the accompaniment of Dangerous Dave - a travelling accordionist - Jake and Rich achieved such truly remarkable 'tired and emotional' states, that even the landlord was forced to take photographs - no mean achievement in a Highland bar. With Blakey crowning his one man jelly act by winning the disco dancing championship, even though he was just going up to the bar to get a drink, Jake entered desolation mode, drooling out some deeply repressed fetishes, much to the astonishment of a party of Dutch tourists. Offers of a lift down to the nearest Darby and Joan were abandoned on the strength of an impromptu spot of internal van redecoration, the sad result of a failure to coordinate opening the window with deep sustained retching. Back at the hut, I razzled up something with the bagloads of fresh trout, courtesy of the Bannockburn fishermen - *'Remember us to Tony(Jarratt), Brian(Johnson) and the one with the beard who can't stop talking (Pete Glanvill)!'* - Blakey 'helping', opening a can of ham using the often overlooked 'stab it with a 6" kitchen knife' technique.

Sunday saw activities begin in earnest. Previous years expeditions had mainly concentrated on pursuit of the underground Traligill system resulting in a number of important extensions, culminating in 1994 in the establishment of Cnoc Nan Uamh as Scotlands longest cave. However this was to prove short-lived, for following a reconnaissance dive toward the end of the 1995 expedition, Grampian divers succeeded in passing Sump 6 in Uamh An Claonaite - the previous record holder in the neighbouring Allt Nan Uamh valley - to explore nearly 1 km of large passage, easily re-establishing it as Scotlands premier cave and a just reward for many long years of barren toil. In light of this we decided to shift our attentions to this area, to two sites in particular - Rana Hole, a conical shakehole

lying very close to a large aven in the new extension and Damoclean Dig, a superb Eastwater sized swallet perched high on the peat hags terracing the shattered slopes of Creag Liath, situated close to a conjectured series of fossil passages separating ANUS Cave from the East Block in Uamh An Claonaite. First discovered by Julian Walford in 1976, this lead had been pursued with increasing intensity over the years but despite the resulting vast spoil heap had until recently failed to reveal even the slightest hint of what lay below. The installation in 1995 of an entrance scaffold cage provided the framework for the first real progress, enabling a 5 metre shaft to be excavated into a draughting area of collapsed beddings. For the first time this site had been elevated from secondary target status to primary target status, and we had two weeks in which to lay siege.

Several hours digging saw us entering more promising territory - a low but pleasant peat-filled crawl carrying a strong inward draught. With hopes high we decamped to blast Rana, a sizeable vertical rift excavated by Grampian regulars to an encouraging draughting crack. Slightly less encouraging was a continual heavy drip, which combined with the hanging walls of peat had rendered the hole a really hideous pooh mine. Two on-going situations was more than enough reason to celebrate and freed from the constraints of driving I decided to give the Rubber Men a taste of their own medicine, unfortunately culminating in an extremely messy failure to escape the confines of a sleeping bag in time.

Escaping the wrath of all those who had trod my personal Yellow Brick Road, we headed back to Damoclean, passing the Rana pooh-miners en route manfully transporting a generator up the side of the mountain in a wheelbarrow, much to the mirth and incredulity of the nearby fish farmers. Fifty skiploads saw the peaty crawl removed and clearance started on a jumbled mass of boulders emitting a powerful draught. For evening entertainment, Jake relocated the Hunters to the Highlands - mountain bike, shoveapenny board and all.

Waking to a familiar obliteration of hail and sleet, we wiled away a few surreal hours watching Julian prepare some unusual culinary delicacies, to the accompaniment of goat-shagging music and Jake's ever popular 'Luftwaffe Band' tape. Cue twitch. After a quick stop in Lochinver, we battled back up to Damoclean, clearing twenty more finger crushing skips of Hilti debris before deterioration of a horizontal nature drove us back to the hut for some hard-earned Brevils, just in time to witness

Estelle do her bit for the 'Sea of Vomit' tour of Scotland.

Although Jake and Blakey were still keen to press on, after three consecutive Damoclean days, I was in serious danger of developing 'Allt Nan Uamh Twitch', so headed off with J-Rat and Estelle to examine the lonely limestone plateau separating the Allt Nan Uamh and Traligill valleys above Stronchrubie crags - specifically to seek out potential caves map-dowsed from Mendip by Dave Speed, the landowner of Little Crapnell Swallet. Navigating by GPS - essential kit on a featureless plateau swept by frequent blizzards - an endless number of grotty peat holes were 'bottomed', sadly without revealing any sign of the pre-named Uamh Speed or Cave of The Remote Diviner. Stumbling down towards Traligill, I negotiated a couple of irritating deer enclosures, following a not insubstantial mountain stream draining Torran Garbha, which sank in boulders just short of the junction with the main river. The dry continuation of this channel intimated that the position of the sink varied depending on the flow. Unexpectedly, it joined the main river between Tree Hole and Uamha A' Bhrisdeadh-Duile, two caves giving access to substantial sections of the subterranean Traligill, where from its proximity, one might reasonably have expected to encounter a comparably sized inlet. Mysteriously, despite the fact that only a few metres apparently separate these caves, no such inlet had been seen.

The following day saw a return to the familiar Damoclean routine of toil, spoil and oil which had been pursued by the Rubber Men the previous day into a mega boulder choke, where the draught had been lost. After removing yet another fifty skips, this was finally, frustratingly relocated at a low peat blockage back near the point from where we'd started! Any disappointment we might have felt however, was as nothing compared to that of Mick - a fanatical Geordie roofer from Durness - as title chasing Newcastle blew their final chance of the championship amidst scenes of gibbering doom, nor for that matter of the senior member of the Strathclyde fishing party who magnificently misjudged his expert cast-off head first into the freezing waters of Loch Borrallan - unfortunately for him in full view of his mates and a packed Alt bar. The rest of the party, having spent the day either on the blizzard swept summit of Ben More Assynt (zero vis - normal Pete Glanvil photographic trip) or playing in Traligill, ended up at Kylescu. Midway through their meal a groaning man staggered into the hotel with a gigantic splinter through his hand. With two good doctors to umm and ahh over the appropriate medica technique for removing said offending article, the hotel chef suddenly appeared

amongst them and performed the necessary with a fish-gutting knife, leaving in his wake the undying gratitude of one local crofter and two suitably chastened GPs to finish their meals in silence.

The third of May was scheduled as Smoke-Bomb day. The plan - for intrepid divers to activate pre-armed device below the aven in the Claonaite extension, whilst various mere mortals sniffed around on the surface for tell-tale fumes. Synchronising watches - the diggers of course adjusting theirs to take account of slow diver syndrome - an afternoons leisurely digging saw us assembled at various likely orifices to await the anticipated non-event. Now ferreting around in the sheltered bowels of Damoclean is one thing, but standing around in freezing rain for the sake of a sniff of cordite is quite another, so fully ten minutes beyond the allotted hour - at, as it later transpired, the exact moment the divers triggered the smoke bomb - saw a general abandonment of stations and communal bugging off to the Inch, where I settled down for a relaxing pint, safe in the knowledge that it just wasn't humanly possible for the Rubber Men to go on another bender. Of course the operative word here is 'human', as soon became abundantly clear. Up to now 'Jake And The In-Betweenies' had merely been indulging in light supping. Cue another night on the In-Bru. With adult conversation becoming increasingly scarce, Pete and Julian arrived back from the depths of Claonaite, armed with breathless tales of vast chambers, smoke-filled avens and the lurid discovery of fronds of 'Goonlite' - unedifying offspring of the great ones latest misadventure. Julian recounted the lovely story of Pete Glanvill grumbling 'Where's these bloody bear bones then', only to be pointed out that his size twelves were standing on them! We had been expecting visitors that night, but as I steered Mendips finest one by one through the carpark obstacle course, it became apparent that unless they'd turned up in one car each, somewhat more than the ten or so expected had arrived.

Forty odd people in the hut required a little re-pranging. Unfortunately during this process, one of the things to get relocated was Jake's pit - a fact he didn't discover until after he'd swallow-dived onto a bunk full of climbers, to the scene of flying fists, recriminations and apologies. Blakey's bunk however - why do the biggest piss-heads always choose the top bunks? - had survived the reshuffle, providing remarkable entertainment for the silent climbers for the twenty minutes or so it took him to get in it. Unfortunately for Blakey, no sooner was he in than he wanted a leak. Not a problem for a man of Blakey's resources. Why take all that time climbing out again when you can just peel off the

side onto those nice soft bodies below. More fists, more recriminations etc.

By this time, I just had to get away from the boys, and positively leapt at Pete Glanvill's suggestion of an easy day at Sandwood Bay, renowned as one of the finest beaches in the Northern Hemisphere. Easy is of course a relative term - involving in this part of the world a ten mile round trip - but worth every stride for the green seas, miles of unbroken white sand, fringe of snow-capped mountains and sentinel sea stacks - all basking under the best days weather we'd had all week. If you get a chance, go there. Unable to face another night in a heaving bunk room - Blakey, this time having been carried back to the hut comatose - I took advantage of the good weather to bivvy out on the patio. It was only when I woke to find myself gently floating off down the drive that I remembered the golden rule that conditions change rapidly in the Highlands.

The arrival the previous day of Simon Brooks and Mike O'Driscoll for an attack on the newly discovered terminal Claonaite Sump 7, seemed to provide the perfect opportunity to give my wetsuit its annual outing. Never the keenest of sherpas, the grotesque sight of Mike blubbering his way into a fish-net wetsuit soon had me bumbling away to dive base. A quick flight check. 'Bottles'...Bottles, 'Weights'... Weights, 'Face Mask'... Short silence. 'What Face Mask?'...'The one in your bag'. 'What bag?'. Fortunately, Roz Bateman, on her first sojourn north, had enjoyed the streamway so much that she volunteered to race out, retrieving the said item well in time for the off. After a quick tour round the East Block we headed for Damoclean to see how things were progressing. Things were progressing very nicely indeed. With a full team, the peat blockage had been cleared, revealing a comfortable undulating bedding plane heading off towards that siren sound of caving - falling water! On the down side, the excavation of a short U-tube had succeeded in turning our once clean dry dig into - yes you've guessed it - a pooh mine! That evening, after rounding-up (press-ganging) a few of the locals for a trip round Cnoc Nan Uamh the next day, we adjourned to the hut to await the divers - who finally grovelled in knackered but elated at 2 a.m, having cracked Sump 7 to in excess of fifty metres and a new Sump 8.

The following morning saw us outside Glenbain kitting up Eric the landlord and his mate Raymond for their long overdue introduction to caving. Convincing them that despite appearances they were in safe hands we overcame the usual 'novice puts on wetsuit back to front and inside out' obstacles and cajoled them up the hill to Knockers.

Once in the cave it became apparent that outside of the Waterslide we didn't actually know it very well and with Eric's confidence evaporating, it needed a little pointer from a passing Ivan to put us on the right track to Landslip Chamber. Declining the through trip due to relatively high water levels, after a short wander around upstream we retraced our steps, entering the Waterslide from the surface. Initial trepidation soon turned to awe, especially when they came across the little surprise we'd laid on for them - Eric's chance to blow the charge above the inlet sump, and by the time we reached surface Raymond was waxing positively lyrical, having progressed from '.....*better than the sheep castrating I did yesterday?!*' to '... *best thing I've ever done in the Highlands!*'. Meanwhile, with all this going on, Simon had turned up to have a dig in Waterfall Rising. 'Mind if I dive in your pool mate?' he asked a dumbfounded fisherman happily ensconced in the outflow pool, and promptly

disappeared from view. On surfacing the fisherman was gone, only to be heard later in the pub protesting the truth of his story to a sceptical audience.

With our bit for public relations done and with time running short, we decided to concentrate our efforts on Damoclean in an all-out 'shit-or-bust' attack. Two days intense digging saw us past the peaty bedding into a hideously unstable cavity, beyond which a boulder filled rift dropped towards a 'so near and yet so far' streamway, deemed too unsafe to enter without more scaffolding. Trudging back across the moor for the 18th time in 11 days, we suddenly stumbled across a small open hole, which after a little gardening gained access to an 8ft deep scalloped pot and a small chamber with a parallel choked aven. Although hardly deserving of a name, after expending so much effort for so little reward, it got one anyway - Titian Pot - in honour of Goons lyrical introduction to Caves of Assynt. Rana Hole



had also been shut down, the blasted rift failing to yield, despite apparently breathing traces of cordite, an unusual side effect of which appeared to send J-Rat into serious rant mode, particularly pitiable when he was forced to lie down in-between tirades.

Whilst Jake took Gages' mountain bike to recover the wheelbarrow from Allt Nan Uamh, the rest of us headed for Traligill - Julian and I to the upstream sump in Uamha a' Bhrisdeadh-Duile, Tony Boycott, Blakey and a very contrite J-Rat to downstream Tree Hole to assist Simon in a long overdue attempt to connect the short distance separating these two caves. Reaching the sump, I took advantage of the low water conditions to force a 10ft long nose-scraping duck to a low wide pool - the sump proper. To the left, a probable sump bypass choked with cobbles after 10ft, whilst to the right, what appeared to be a small inlet - possibly the water from the mysterious Torran Garbha sink - entered from an impassably low bedding. Realising that no diver was forthcoming, I returned to the streamway, to find the water and much of the streambed now disappearing into a voluminous floor cavity, courtesy of a positively gleeful Julian. Which had been particularly perturbing for poor old Tony Boycott, who had seen merrily making his way upstream when the river had suddenly disappeared. Gathering J-Rat and Blakey - who had cracked the upstream choke in Tree Hole only to find it close down after 10ft - and Simon and Jake, who had pursued Waterfall Rising to an uphill turn after 5 metres, we headed to the Alt for a final farewell celebration fishermen, roofers and all, the beer flowing long into the night and long after the money ran out. Jake - still riled by an acidic note left on his windscreen by Bruce, former owner of the Alt and still owner of the hotel - turned to the owner of the "Gofers roof.

*'That Bruce is a tosser'.*

*'Oh .. I think he's all right'.*

*'A total and complete tosspot'.*

*'He's a bit of a mate actually'.*

*'An utter, utter pillock',* continued Jake, happily oblivious.

*'He was best man at my wedding actually'.*

*Short silence.*

*'He's still a tosser though'.*

*'Yeah, you're right'.*

Next day, Mick and Terry rose at 2.30 p.m, to the consternation of poor old Mick who had rung his wife the previous night to inform her he'd be back first thing in the morning, but to our relief for we'd become seriously concerned that we might have killed them. After a final final farewell session at the Alt, we headed south, hitting sub-zero Mendip at 5.30 a.m, to the astounding sight of Alan Thomas

and his last chicken in the shop impression. Although neither of our main objectives had gone, between us we'd added another 250ft or so of choice Sutherland cave to the map and the crack, as usual, had been magnificent. It didn't seem to matter that the 'big one' had failed to materialise. After all, there's always next year. The late autumn dinner season saw the usual flying assorted follow up trips - Damoclean again eating a host of scaffold bars, again yielding hardly a burp, though sadly, recent dye-tests now suggest that this site may not after all spawn the hoped for mega-system. Despite atrocious weather conditions, the Claonaite extensions were successfully radio-located, producing or confirming a number of surface possibilities, and a promising reassessment of Infinite Improbability inlet was made, yielding a small roof extension. Further north, discoveries of blowholes and an area of very large sinks and shakeholes in low-lying ground around Allt Acnaidh will doubtless provide plenty of opportunity for new ground come the spring. Tally Ho - only four more months to go!

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# Blast From The Past!

(taken from Wessex Journal No 205 Vol 18 1985 Pages 96-97)

## A SAGA of <sup>ye</sup> West Saxons

Att Pready hys on Mendippe in <sup>ye</sup> yere of ayety-five  
West Saxons fought a mysty fyte the Vykynz to debie  
att Belfry camp <sup>ye</sup> challynge tang, come drynk and eat  
our grubbe

proud boasts were mayd by Vykynz of <sup>ye</sup> Explorattion Clubb.  
The challynge out, <sup>ye</sup> Saxons bold mayd haste to go to warre  
the Cerberos, <sup>ye</sup> M.E.G, <sup>ye</sup> Sheepton in <sup>ye</sup> fore,  
with Em and En and Ar and Cee, cwyte proudlic in <sup>ye</sup> van  
and Wessex leading meny mor, full armed was evcy man.  
From Upper Pitts we sallied forth, thro Mendep fogg and cayne  
Blott led the way on horsback, tho menie might be slayne.  
Owre chariott blak with dragon golde we pull'd with  
slavs bedrench'd

and justt to chete the valiants on, full meny brou't a wench.  
Two score and mor of Wessex men approach'd <sup>ye</sup> Belfry campe  
Owre harts were brimd with war and thyrst, tho boddies  
mite be damp

A trumpet tang, oure match was oer, no moore of false alarms  
Oure fyrst atak was mayd upon "<sup>ye</sup> Pillagers Armes".  
Then Vykynz sygnified <sup>ye</sup> start of race of chariott and dolt  
By summonyng from Heavn a most myraculos thundrebolt.  
Thro mudd and fen the slavs dyd pull with all theyr mite  
and mayne

Ye chariotts thro wildreness, alonge <sup>ye</sup> wynding layne  
Cerberos fyrst to layk <sup>ye</sup> lead, B&C behynd in rayce  
When Wessex threw an cremy cayk, whych hit them full  
in fayce

On to <sup>ye</sup> sacted layk they rode, then plunged into <sup>ye</sup> main  
To rescu out a woden godde, and bryng itt back agayne.

Once more on wheels the combatants dyd taye back to 3<sup>rd</sup> foete  
MNRC dyd wyn perforce, 4<sup>th</sup> Wessex thyrd of course  
4<sup>th</sup> BEC cam foeth, methynks, all honour to theyr geytte  
All cam bak safe, tho covered oer with mudde and slyme  
and shytte.

Then drynkynz set in earnest, full freely flowd 3<sup>rd</sup> ayle  
Tho this is not 4<sup>th</sup> ending yett of thys my wondrous tayle  
For trestles hie were stakd with mete of hot dogge and  
roste capon

We ette oute fyll as onlie can who follow of 3<sup>rd</sup> Dragonne  
And meny mily hostes were mayd of battles real (and notte)  
And exploits undreneth 3<sup>rd</sup> grounde, in caverne and in grotte  
The axemen theyn display'd theyr skills upon a woden foe  
Untyl he was as kyndling wood upon 3<sup>rd</sup> grasse belowe  
And as 3<sup>rd</sup> day grewe dim and dark we hadde a big surprise  
Wyth meny bangs and plumes of smok as fireflies fill'd 3<sup>rd</sup> skyse  
4<sup>th</sup> magic of 3<sup>rd</sup> Vykyng fill'd all wyth awe and wondere  
We gaz'd aloft and fair forgot owre tankards and owre plunder  
Sych fyrework sparks hadd not bene seen for full a meny yere  
Then when twas oer we went bak to oure wenching and oure bere  
As nyte goes on, 4<sup>th</sup> legends grow, owre heroes never cese  
Wyth mity foemen frends all last, and talkynz eche of pece  
So once azayn a famous day of feastyng is gone past  
yts tales will grow wyth tellyng, so long as memry last  
Oure heroes teste, theyr boddys aych, with bere theyr  
heads be sore

We thank you, BEC, untyl we doe it all once mor.

~~~~~  
Eggbald 4<sup>th</sup> Bard

wyth thanks to 3<sup>rd</sup> ynspirattion of Atty of Swinedun  
and yn hys Memory.

# Anyone For a Game of Cricket?

Rosie Freeman

What could be better than a pleasant sunny afternoon watching the traditional English game of cricket? - well, I can think of a few things, but not for the writings of this Journal! Anyway, coming from someone who knows nothing about cricket I have to say that the WCC vs BEC annual cricket match held on Saturday 19th July at Eastwater Farm was particularly enjoyable - a glorious day with clear blue sky, very warm and a barrel of Butcombe. I spent most of the afternoon relaxing on a blanket enjoying the sun with a pint of cider and trying to work out what was happening, but from what I could work out, here is a brief summary

The BEC chose to start batting and notable scores came from Trevor (7) and Vince (11) who even managed a 6, to make a 1st innings total of 48 runs, which included 12 extras.

Then it was the turn of the Wessex team. Despite the relative low score of the BEC, the Wessex could do no better scoring only 21 runs with 9 of them from extras and finished a disappointing 27 runs behind. No-one managed any 4's or 6's and the maximum score obtained 5 runs, by John T.

A short interval was then had before proceeding to the 2nd innings and a trip to Roger's to top up the beer and cider supplies ensured that the BEC were suitably hydrated - one of the better decisions by the Wessex!

By the start of the 2nd innings, much beer had been consumed, especially by the BEC, which seemed to help their performance from a Wessex point of view. Again Vince scored the highest score for the BEC with 16 runs, and the only other scorers were Guy and Jake who scored 4 runs each. Les and Max seemed to be the demon bowlers for the WCC and each got a couple of people out. The rest of the runs came from extras (14) which made a 2nd innings total of 38. The final score for the BEC was 86 runs.

The Wessex therefore started needing 66 runs to win the match, which, judging from the 1st innings performance, seemed an impossible task. Vince also proved particularly good at bowling getting 2 people out consecutively. However, the runs steadily piled on, with Brian Pitman scoring an impressive 17 runs not out and Simon scoring 11 runs. The score was helped by Mike Willett who ensured that the total required was soon reached mainly due to extras from wide balls bowled by him - thanks Mike! All this was even after the added distraction (particularly for Tav!) of a stalker. I'm not going to name names, but rest assured the stalker was female (and it wasn't me!!!).

Anyway the match was declared a win for the Wessex whose 2nd innings score totalled 66 for 4. The Ashes were duly handed over and now reside back in The Hunters. All in all, a pleasant afternoon which continued into the evening (and night) with a BBQ at the Wessex.

**BEC Team:-** Trevor, Dany, Vince, Andy T, Alex, Skippy, Paul B, Guy, Nick, Brian R Andy Sparrow, Chas, Mike Willett, Jake and Rich. (Yes ... I know there are more than 11 members here, but there was a lot of changing going on!)

**WCC Team:-** Max, Danny, Les, Simon, Tav, Mak, John T, Brian Pitman, Dave, Carl, Cookie and Ross.

| BEC           | Innings   |           |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|
|               | 1st       | 2nd       |
| <b>Runs</b>   | <b>36</b> | <b>24</b> |
| <b>Extras</b> | <b>12</b> | <b>14</b> |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>48</b> | <b>38</b> |

| WCC           | Innings   |                   |
|---------------|-----------|-------------------|
|               | 1st       | 2nd               |
| <b>Runs</b>   | <b>12</b> | <b>55</b>         |
| <b>Extras</b> | <b>9</b>  | <b>21</b>         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>21</b> | <b>66 not out</b> |

Thanks are due to Mr and Mrs Gibbons for allowing us the use of one of their fields and to Keith Fielder for providing such a lovely mown wicket on which to play.



One of the few times the sound of leather on willow



They called her the streak - the slowest thing on two feet

Spot the beer barrel competition

## Honeymead Hole

Photo's by Paul Stillman

Rob Taviner in Kate's Calamity



Len Coltham, Pot below Slab House

# Honeymead Hole - Further Developments

Richard Witcombe

## New Passage

Work in Honeymead Hole in the early months of 1997 produced only a small amount of new passage. On 15th March on a solo trip, Graham Bromley crow-barred his way into a 20' extension at the upper end of Picnic at Hanging Rock, the roof inlet above The Gods, and on the same trip, he dug through a choke on the corner of the main streamway below Mud Meanders to enter 30' of passage including a small grotto. This he christened *Going Dutch* as he was working in Holland the following week. Rob Taviner opened up the terminal squeeze here on 9 April, entering a tiny well decorated bedding plane with a mud choke beyond.

The Kate's Calamity dig was abandoned on 12th March after 25' of squalid progress had been made, courtesy of a lot of Clive North's bang. The low passage with an impossibly small rift in the floor had shown no sign of widening. The Chalice Well diggers, Mark Lumley and Tony Boycott, reached their "terminal" mud choke 20' from the bottom of the pot. Graham probed it inconclusively in March,

A bang at the bottom of the Blood Alley pot on 2nd April gave a disappointing view of 10' of less than man-sized rift, and with the spring JCB dig looming, it was decided to call a halt to Honeymead operations for the time being.

## Tooth Find

On 8th December 1996 during the course of a surveying trip, Graham Bromley found a 2" long, semi-fossilised tooth in streamfill in the Picnic at Hanging Rock inlet. This has now been identified by Dr Andrew Currant of the Natural History Museum as a canine from a very large Pleistocene wolf, approximately 60,000 years old. Further searches have failed to locate any other remains.

## Future Prospects

The two deepest points in the cave, both at approximately -170', are the passage below Chalice Well and the pot at the end of Blood Alley. The former carries a seasonal stream and is a constricted, partly mud choked rift. Although there are no signs of significant backing up in times of high flow, bad air was reported on a visit in June this year, and it remains a squalid and awkward site to dig.

The Blood Alley pot and the too tight passage leading off are dry and carry a draught. A lot of bang would be needed to enlarge the rift but with spoil dumping space nearby, it is a reasonable, long term proposition.

The Mud Meanders series seems to be part of an ancient phreatic conduit and its lowest point, Going Dutch, might repay a further probe. The problem here is the constricted approach for spoil removal and the abundance of good quality stal.

Elsewhere in the cave, a number of passages could be linked up by banging, but any sporting enhancement would in most cases be outweighed by littering the existing cave with piles of bang debris.

## Conservation

The cave has good decorations, especially at the head of Keen's Pot and Balcony Pot, and in Kate's Calamity and a grotto above the entrance to Mud Meanders. Because of the restricted nature of the passages, most of these formations are vulnerable to muddying and damage, and should be passed very carefully. The stalactites and flows at the head of Keen's Pot are particularly at risk. A water sprayer will be left near to Keen's Pot. Please use it if any stal is accidentally muddied.

## Access

Please call at Little Crapnell farmhouse for the key, and park cars where they do not damage or obstruct agricultural operations. Remember that a large milk tanker regularly uses the farm approach road.

## Equipment

The entrance shaft has a fixed steel ladder, but other pitches will require tackle:

|                 |                                          |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------|
| Slab House Rift | 20' ladder (with spreader) or handline   |
| Watershed Pot   | 20' ladder (with long belay) or handline |
| Keen's Pot      | 25' ladder (with spreader)               |
| Balcony pot     | 20' ladder (with spreader) or handline   |
| Chalice Well    | 15' ladder (with short belay)            |

## Vital Statistics

|            |                                                       |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| NGR        | 60084621                                              |
| Altitude   | 636' (194m)                                           |
| Length     | 1350' (412m)                                          |
| Depth      | 171' (52m)                                            |
| Resurgence | Presumed to be St Andrew's Well (flow time not known) |

# Vietnam - April Fool's Sump

Paul Cailister

## Saturday 5.4.97

### Bihn Minh Hotel, Hanoi, Vietnam

The bed I am lying in is comfortable, the first bed since I was last here over a month before. My feet are sore and a little numb and I have a variety of sores, scrapes and splinters recovering from going sceptic. My upper legs, which are suffering from some kind of heat rash, are covered in red blotches, some of which are breaking out into sores. A few hours ago, in a gorgeous hot shower, washed off the grit, dirt and grime accumulated over the last few days travelling and having only had a river to wash in for the last month. However, I am in good state compared to others. The sounds of bustling Hanoi mix with many languages I can hear being spoken in the tourist hotel that we are staying in. It is a world apart from that from which we have come from. I will attempt to recount the events of the last few days.

## Monday 31.3.97

Howard, Deb, Martin and Snablet had gone off to continue pushing the main streamway of the Hang Khe Ry (Grass Cave). The limit of exploration was now some 7 km from our camp at the entrance and with the various explored inlets the cave was seriously competing with Hang Vom as the longest cave in Vietnam. With the carbide supplies running low and little time left on the expedition it was decided that the rest of the group should go and check out the last sink of the four, that were shown on a US military map, to the east of the Ho Chi Minh Trail near the Laos border. Hang Khy Re was the second sink and the first and third sinks had been found, on previous trips, to yield no significant cave. However, sink 4 had potential and we also knew from the local guides that there was a cave at the sink known as 'Hang Tien' (Beautiful Cave).

Trevor, Simon and myself with our Vietnamese student, Hieu, were led by our guides, Mr On and Mr. Cuoi, on the 4 hour walk to Hang Tien. This proved to be an extremely optimistic estimate. Whilst climbing the first hill Simon decided that some existing blisters on his toes were going to cause him some problems and decided wisely to return to camp. We later realised what incredible foresight he had had!

Hang Tien was a disappointment. After the horrific jungle bash we'd endured, we were rewarded with a low arch at the base of the usual limestone cliff.

It was in contrast to the soaring entrance chambers of Khy Re and other caves that we had become accustomed to. Oh well! We'd come all this way. We decided to have a cursory 2 hour survey trip tonight then set off back the first thing next morning in order to get back before dark. It was now almost 6 o'clock and we were tired and hungry so decided to eat before entering the cave. It was an uninspiring meal of dehydrates, noodles and tinned tuna. However, it was preferential to the leather like meat of the monkey that the guides were tucking in to.

We kitted up and entered the cave. Though the entrance took a small stream, this soon sank to the left whilst we followed a dry sandy passage with a reasonable draught. Mr. On, our intrepid jungle-wise guide, embarrassed us further by following us quite some way into the cave dressed in shorts, T-shirt and carrying a cheap Chinese torch. We wore wetsuits, boots and helmets with carbide lamps. The guide followed us to a junction where the draught ducked under an arch containing an ankle deep puddle. The passage became walking size again before we dog-legged into an oxbow and a large boulder floored chamber. The way on dropped back into the dry streamway, through a low wade and into an ongoing passage about 6m wide with some flowstone and formations. The cave was beginning to become more promising when after 200m we climbed through boulders into a larger chamber at the base of which was the inevitable sump. Furthermore, we lost the draught. We'd surveyed 500m and there was nowhere obvious to go. We deemed that we had done what was expected of us and we were happy to say this sink had been looked at. We fettled our carbides and set off out of the cave. We arrived back at the low wade to find that water was flowing into the pool from the previously dry streambed.

*"I can't remember this"* I said.

*"This must be another sump"* said Trevor.

We doglegged into the oxbow chamber then back to the streamway. *"It's not this way"* I called back to Trevor as I waded into a dead end. We went back to the oxbow chamber, then slowly retraced our steps returning again to this dead end. Water was flowing over boulders and making some noise, none of which I remembered. With fearful realisation we realised what was happening. Trevor pulled out the survey notes to check back where we'd come and I waded back into the dead end. The water levels had inexplicably and rapidly risen and the low arch with the puddle where we had last seen Mr. On was now a sump. Holding on to the wall I pushed my

feet under the right wall of the dead end. Finding the arch and hoping for air space I took a breath and plunged under the arch. I smacked my cheek against the roof, found no airspace and lost any confidence I had. It was a reckless manoeuvre anyhow attempting a sump of unknown length or design.

In the meantime, Trevor had returned to where the water flowed over the boulders. He was pulling out rocks and boulders in an attempt to speed the flow of the water. I joined him and began maniacally throwing boulders out on to the sand banks. Trevor went off to check the other pool. He came back despondent.

*"You're wasting your time" he said, "The other side is already sumped."*

We pushed sticks into the sand at water level and watched as the water lapped past them. Gradually, the noise of the water flowing over the boulders decreased as the two pools became one with sumps at either end.

We went back to the large chamber and contemplated our position. The water had risen quickly. We were in a lofty oxbow chamber cut off both up and downstream by low sumped arches. We reckoned we had been in the cave less than 2 hours. We assume there had been a sudden and heavy downpour outside. However, it was weeks before the wet season and the water was unlikely to rise into the chamber. Our problem was just how long it would take for the sump to drop so we could pass through. It had risen maybe 2m.

We wore our wetsuits, had a finite supply of carbide for the carbide lamps and had an electric light each. We carried a tackle sack for our survey equipment, a basic first aid kit and for food - a mini Mars Bar, a Caramel wafer bar, a couple of small Thai candy bars and three boiled sweets. Trevor had his tobacco. Stupidly, neither of us had a survival bag. We had no idea how long we would be there and also had no watch. We consoled ourselves with half a Thai Cho Cho bar between us, barely a mouthful, and settled down for what we assumed must be night.

It was cold and uncomfortable. We lay upon damp sand with nothing to cover us. Trevor lay on the tackle sack and I used the tape measure and my gloves to keep my shoulders and hips insulated from the cold floor. We woke often, sometimes shivering, and would have to walk round the chamber to warm up a little.

### **Tuesday 1.4.97 - April Fool's Day!**

We knew it was Tuesday. We discovered that the chamber we were in was in fact the bottom of a

daylight shaft. At one end of the chamber we could look up 30 or 40m to a couple of daylight entrances in the jungle. As well as giving us some idea of time, the shaft also provided us with another possible escape route. The shaft was possibly climbable although it was something I was not prepared to attempt unless our predicament became really desperate. A review of the sump revealed that it had dropped no more than a depressing 2 or 3cm.

The day was spent sitting and watching and occasionally drifting into a fitful sleep from which we would wake cold and uncomfortable. Throughout the long day the sump dropped no more than a few centimetres. We spoke at length of what may happen to us and what would be happening outside. We guessed that Hieu and the guides would realise quickly what had happened in the cave if there had been a storm outside. They would probably think that we were dead. After all, they knew little of the cave beyond where Mr. On had escorted us to, and Hieu's experience of caving was minimal. If the water had risen so quickly would they have been able to rescue all our gear which had been dumped unervingly close to the entrance pool outside the cave? Trevor pessimistically pointed out that maybe they had been unable to rescue themselves!

We assumed that, as we had failed to return, someone would go back to Hang Khe Ry today to inform the others. They would be better able to assess the situation and Mr. On could show them where we had last been seen and this was metres away from where we were now entrapped. Maybe the daylight shaft would be discovered. There was unlikely to be enough rope at Khe Ry to rescue us from here but it was possible to supply us. We blew a whistle several times a day in a vague hope that it could be heard. Given the present reluctant drop of the water in the sump we had to accept the possibility that the sump would have to be dived. We had the advantage that there was an experienced cave diver on the expedition but equipment would have to be brought in from elsewhere in Vietnam or even from Britain. This could take days, maybe well over a week!

One of our biggest problems was keeping warm. The caves are warmer than those in Britain but even so, being stationary for long periods of time and our low food intake made us susceptible to the cold, especially when we were trying to sleep. We moved a couple of metres up the chamber to a marginally flatter and drier patch of sand and then with considerable effort managed to split the sturdy caving tackle sack to make a small ground sheet less than a metre square. Using this the tape, my gloves and kneepads we made as comfortable a bed as possible. Then, throwing social conventions to the wind, we huddled up close for a little warmth.

It was not yet dark outside. We'd been in the cave almost 24 hours. We had a half a Caramel Wafer today!

### Wednesday 2.4.97

The night had been more comfortable though hardly luxurious. I had managed to sleep a little though I woke often. We'd moved the tackle sack to act as a blanket which covered either our shoulders or hips though never both. I had dreamt a lot. Once I had dreamt that we were trapped in this very cave but that we'd found a new series of passages which we were surveying to pass the time. Sometime during the night Trevor had sat bolt upright after hearing some noise from the sump. "What's that light?" he said suddenly. I sat up also, my heart beating with excitement. It was only a firefly, probably lost having found it's way down the shaft. Disappointment and frustration took over once again.

We 'got up' some time after sunrise and set ourselves a number of tasks to help pass the morning. We decided to move our sleeping place once again to a small alcove in one wall of the chamber. Trevor went to inspect and wash his feet. He was acquiring a foot problem possibly due to having had grit and water next to his skin for so long. He reckoned they were rotting. The first aid container was emptied and utilised as a water bottle - we hadn't actually drunk anything up till now! The sump appeared to be dropping slightly faster but still had over a meter to go before we had any chance of escape. We levelled our new sleeping area, removed rocks and ate the other half of the Cho Cho bar we'd started the day before yesterday. At a snails pace all this had taken no more than 2 hours. We sat in our alcove and waited. We spoke about many things during our incarceration. We spoke about caving and walking, about families, of Australia and the UK, about travelling past and future. I tried some jokes but our situation wasn't exactly conducive to humour. "Ever been trapped before?" Trevor asked casually as if he was asking if I'd seen a particular film. "No." I said, "Have you?" "Yeah, a couple of times" he replied nonchalantly "Shit!" I thought, "this guy's jinxed!"

Our spirits were raised later when we heard a bubbling noise in the lower sump. This time it was air being sucked in to the air pockets rather than expelled and was a sure sign that the water level was dropping. Some time late the same day we heard what sounded like knocking at the upstream sump. We were elevated into a frenzy of excitement in complete contrast to the enforced

lethargy that was normal. We rushed over to the sump and banged on the wall and on boulders in the pool. I blew the whistle and Trevor shouted. We heard the knocking again and we attempted to reply by tapping out half a tune. We were sure someone was responsible for the knocking but we could not be sure that they could hear or reply to us. The fact that there was someone at the other side was of immense physiological value to us. There was some more knocking then a brief bubbling from the direction of the sumped arch, then silence again. We returned to our alcove.

The sump was definitely dropping faster. I was getting excited and impatient, fearful that just another rain shower would ruin any progress that had been made. I felt that I wanted to check the sump every few minutes. Trevor was less optimistic, cautiously suggesting that we might be out by morning. We each took some strong pain killers to help us sleep. We'd been in the cave two full days.

### Thursday 3.4.97

Trevor woke during the early hours wanting a cigarette. He'd been snoring a little before then. I'd not been able to sleep. We normally kept a small carbide flame going constantly. However, neither of us had bothered to relight it when it had gone out during the night. Trevor needed it to light his roll-up so feeling a bit chilled I got up to walk round the chamber a little. I went to look at the upper sump. It had dropped dramatically. I had forced myself not to look at for quite a few hours and now I was pleasantly surprised. I looked round the corner of the pool and could see the top of the low arch out of the water. My heartbeat increased as I waded tentatively along the edge of the pool keeping as dry as possible in case the way was still blocked. Once opposite the arch I found I could see some way in to the arch through an air space of no more than 20 cm. I leaned forward to see if the airspace went through to the other side and as I did I heard dull noises and as I watched the glow of a light appeared at the other side of the arch.

"Wey Hey!!" I yelled. It was answered immediately by whoops and yells as Simon and Snablet appeared at the other side of what was now a low duck.

"We're out, we're out!" I shouted back to Trevor. The other two came through the duck and I showed them into the chamber which had been our home for the past 57 hours - 'The Ban Ban Hilton' we would call it. Trevor was still laid out on the tackle sack enjoying his cigarette and seemingly unaffected by our obvious elation.

*"Trevor, you can go now" we said, "You're free!"  
"But I just got comfortable!" he moaned.*

It was 4 o'clock Thursday morning. All the members of the expedition were now at Hang Tien. Apparently, some of the party at Hang Khy Re had come over to Hang Tien on the Tuesday afternoon as soon as they got the news from Hieu and guides who had left Hang Tien on that morning. They had finished their walk in darkness, with rifles at the ready due to a very real risk of tigers. Thankfully, they had come by an easier if slightly longer route than the one we had come by. Simon, Andy and Hieu had come over, with Mr. On, on the Wednesday morning with the last of the food, whilst Mr. Chiem, our Son Trach committee member, and Mr. Khang, the soldier, had returned to Ban Ban to buy food, delay our truck 24 hours and to hire porters to carry all our discarded equipment from Hang Khy Re to Hang Tien.

At Hang Tien, and unknown to us two trapped behind the sump, the others had worked for two days building dams in the cave, diverting the river outside the cave into another sink and baling pools out. When the other members of the expedition had first arrived the dry passages from the entrance all the way down to the sumped arch had been one long wading canal. In fact they had had great problems even locating the sump at first as it was submerged below the pool surface. They couldn't even believe that we had contemplated such a wet cave! Hieu later confirmed to me how sudden the initial flood had been. He described it as a wave of water which had swept down the dry riverbed. Much of our camping gear had been soaked and some pieces were picked up later from within the cave. However, it had not rained before or afterwards and we can only assume that there must have been a downpour in the mountains of Laos.

We got packed and Trevor and I thankfully changed out of the wetsuits that we had been wearing for two and a half days. By 6.30am we set off on the long walk back to Ban Ban which would normally have been done over two days. If the two of us trapped in the cave had not come out by today someone was going to have to go back to Son Trach. Arrangements would have had to have been made for acquiring diving equipment and extending insurances. The British Embassy would also have been informed, then the press and families. Thankfully we were spared this.

The route back followed dry riverbeds and, though longer, was far easier than hacking through the dense jungle the way we'd come. I felt a little weak and tired from lack of food. Trevor also felt a bit dizzy but was more concerned about his rotting

feet which were causing him some pain. At the Hang Khe Thy streambed (sink 3) we met Mr. Khang on his way to Hang Tien with another soldier and a medic. The porters arrived soon with horrifically overloaded packs from our previous camp, plus 20 kg of rice and a variety of picks and shovels. Mr. Chiem came bouncing over the rocks with a wide smile on his face. He shook our hands and nodded repeatedly the relief showing on his face.

The porters bulky loads were reduced dramatically by proper packing and redistribution. We tucked into biscuits and cigarettes were freely distributed to the guides and porters. Our spirits much lifted we hitched up for the last difficult stretch to Ban Ban. Deb was having problems with her feet and her and Trevor had set off ahead with small sacks. We were bedraggled party which made it's way towards Ban Ban.

The day was hot and we were all tired. Many of us set our own pace and the party became spread out as they trudged along over the jungle clad hills. The last slope down was very steep and caused some pain. At the bottom a woodcutter in his lean-to shelter put on a brew of 'green tea' for those who wanted it. I had been up front with the soldiers but now waited and watched as our straggled party went past. Trevor went past in a daze, carrying nothing but a water bottle and treading gingerly on agonizing feet. I took Trevor's bag off the soldier who had been carrying it and walked up to Ban Ban where our lorry was still waiting and I dropped my bag next to the others who'd arrived. I just took a swig of a can of Pepsi, when Howard came running up to us.

*"You've got to help!" he cried, "Deb's collapsing."*

A few of us got up and ran back down the hill. Deb was in a bad way, totally exhausted and feeling sick. Martin carried her piggy-back style up to Ban Ban where we all sat around in a bedraggled huddle. All the kids of the village were gathered around staring at us, as were a few adults. It seems we had become minor celebrities in the area but we must have looked a sorry sight of foreigners. We were exhausted at the end of the third trip out to the jungle at the end of the 1997 Vietnam Expedition. The expedition had discovered 20km of new cave and the 500m in Hang Tien had been necessary to reach that total. We sat and enjoyed the sunset over the jungle- clad, tower karst behind the bamboo village of Ban Ban. It would only be five hours uncomfortable ride on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a hurried packing of base camp, two hours on a ramshackle village bus, a tired day in Dong Hoi Town and an overnight trip in a crowded, rattling train before we would be comfortably installed in Hanoi!

# Logbook Extracts

## **3.5.87 - Porth and White Lady Cave**

*Maurice & John*

To photograph people doing funny things in rubber wear and with gags in their mouths.

## **17.5.97 - MRO Rescue Practice**

*Les, Ian Chandler, Graham, Cookie*

MRO practice rescue to locate MRO Mark I victim (teddy bear) in one of three possible stone mines. Our crew last there (1¼ hr late) first out (teddy located after 30mins) *UBIQUE PRIMUS*. (Les found the map with 'X' marked on it - that's why).

## **27.5.97 - Box Mines**

*Graham Bromley & Bob Scammell*

Good wander & Butcombe at Quarryman's Arms.

## **24.5.97 - New Shaft (?) Milwr Tunnel**

*Les, Mark, Mak, Andy, Bean, Cookie, Jo & Mad Mick*

.... abseil down 480ft entrance shaft. Mak had the dubious honour of descending first as no one else seemed to want to volunteer. The lack of noise coming from Les as he descended was noted ... Bean had the dubious honour of leading Jo, Mark and Mak out of the cave - having only been there once before ... the 400' ladder climb out was a doddle - it made a blissful change from plodding down the Tunnel.

## **3.6.97 - St Lukes**

*Aubrey, Max, Mark, Paula & Bob S*

More digging, more cementing. Aubrey and Max's tying up last week left most of the stal in place. These are strong stal!

## **7 6.97 - Epic tour of the caves & flues of Mendip**

*Debs, Dom, Vern, Mak, Jo*

This intrepid team set out well-equipped in shorts and t-shirts, for a tour of the caves of Mendip. A walk past Cuthberts led to some challenging through-trips of the lead smelting flues ... quick trip down Swildon's 20 foot pitch - one light each : (clutched between teeth) and back up (Vern's lighter, not to mention digital watch lights). Caving kit was appropriate for dry cave and hot temperatures ... at last a solution to wanting to go caving but not bothered to put on all that caving kit.

## **25 5.97 - Ogof Hesp Allyn (?) and Poachers**

*Les, Mark, Bean, Andy, Mak, Cookie, Jo*

..... even though we very kindly bailed the sandy crawl for about 20mins just so Cookie, Les and Bean could carry on and do the pitch, Les decided 2" of air space was not enough.

## **21.6.97**

Midsummer mega BBQ/Disco in a tent in a field in the pouring rain and everyone seemed to have enjoyed it - no snots or bad tempers - the BEC behaved impeccably!! ... the one toilet survived and a lot of booze was drunk - brilliant!!! Quite a number slept in Mark Helmore's bedroom. Where did Bean go???

## **22.6.97 - Swildon's**

*Tim NBD, Mark LBS, Pete The Worm, Nick (University of Kent)*

... sump had air space ... shame about the indigenous smokers in Barnes loop though - made the cave really stink.

## **24.6.97 - Box Mines**

*Graham Bromley & Bob S*

... GB found an 8ft frig-bob (saw). This was bloody tall stood next to me, but it was twice as tall stood next to Graham!

## **21.6.97**

*Butch & Paul Brock from BEC!*

Third attempt by Paul to find the entrance to the Gulf Crisis .. once into the main shaft on the traverse line there are NO FOOT HOLDS!! Good swing out to rig 'Y' hang. Dropped down to buttress where stream drops down and decided to rig slither pot. Paul dropped down but rope was too short by about 3m. Paul dropped the rope bag! Managed to re-rig and gain enough rope to retrieve bag ... de-rigging the traverse was interesting!!

***Just picture Les (Hairy and I'm tuff) Williams prancing around with a couple of hankies - I hear he goes out with Morris dancers on Wednesday digging nights!!***

## **12.7.97 - St Lukes**

*Mark H & Bob S*

No. the cable isn't too short. The reason we are changing the cable is solely because the shaft has become too deep! The cable which BS and Max shortened a while ago has been perfectly long enough. If anyone wants a good bit of cable for a shorter dig it is free to a good home.

## **16.7.97 - St Lukes**

*Aubrey, Max, Mark, Bob S, Martin & Tony A*

The St Lukes power-pack is almost complete, at least in prototype state. 12V generator made from an ex-ministry chair fitted with a fly-mo motor, a car alternator and a battery and it appears to work.

### 23.7.97 - St Lukes

*Aubrey, Max, Martin, Paula & Bob S*

More digging, more concreting, looking good - doubtful - looking good etc, etc.. The "Scamgen Mk I" instant lighting circuit is now in full working order - next week we have floodlighting everywhere, just look for the glow in the sky - it's us. Max and Martin are deserting us next week - they can't stand the pace and require a break - stress possibly youngsters can't keep it up.

### 2.8.97 - Thrupe Lane

*Colin, Fez & Pinkie*

Forgot how vertical the rift was and the length of Perseverance. Rigged pitch and abseiled, by which time had run out, turned around for exit trip. Pinkie and Fez got disorientated and tried to widen rift forgetting the exit was up. Fez and Pinkie's comment: "*Been there, done it (never again)*".

### 30.7.97 - St Lukes

*Aubrey Paula, Bob S, Tony Audsley & younger daughter*

Good evenings work - no Max!! Gone to sunnier climates. No Mark (bit of a flop really) .. slight adjustment required to the 12V generator which gives out a 4.5V light - back to the drawing board.

### 7.8.97 - St Lukes

*Aubrey Bob S, Tony A & daughter Anne*

It's been raining and St Lukes doesn't like rain, poor Aubrey's nerves are shot to hell, he's getting too old for it. It's a dig, it's bound to collapse here and there, he just shouldn't get in the way. The generator works well until the fuel runs out then it's a pig. The digphone works brilliant even the water running can be heard at the top of the depression - good when the roof or wall collapses (and the floor). First you hear just the water and Aubrey digging, then a rumbling crashing noise, then "**Oh Christ!!!**" and a lot of scrabbling. Anyway, Max will be back next week - he can take it.

### 9.8.97 - Swildons

*D Frew & P Hann*

A trip to prove it's still here

FOR: a good steaming stomp

AGAINST: these wetsuit things appear to have shrunk. Mud sump blocked, comprehensively. Needs a bang in the drain. Too sunny above ground! Sump 1 smelt like a piss pot, Sump 2 looked like a cess pit.

### 10.8.97 - Charterhouse

*Pete Hann & Nigel Graham*

More concrete in end boulders. Between us we've seen DYO, Lost Johns, Cuthberts and all ... caved in Crete, Belize, France and Norway ... but there's nowt to beat wrestling a bucket of wet concrete through Charterhouse Cave dig crawls.

# Club Diary

## 1997 September

7th WCC Committee Meeting  
12th-14th BCRA Conference, Bristol  
27/28th WCC Gower Meet

## October

18th/19th WCC AGM and Dinner Weekend

## November

10th-17th International Congress of Speleology  
22nd-25th WCC Yorkshire Meet

## December

6/7th French Cave Diving Symposium, Paris

## 1998 February

7/8th Ghar Parau Expedition Planning Seminar

## April

25/26th 3rd European Caving Expedition Symposium, Peak District

## July

4/5th Cavers' Fair, Mendip

## August

3-7th NSS Convention, Sewanee, Tennessee USA