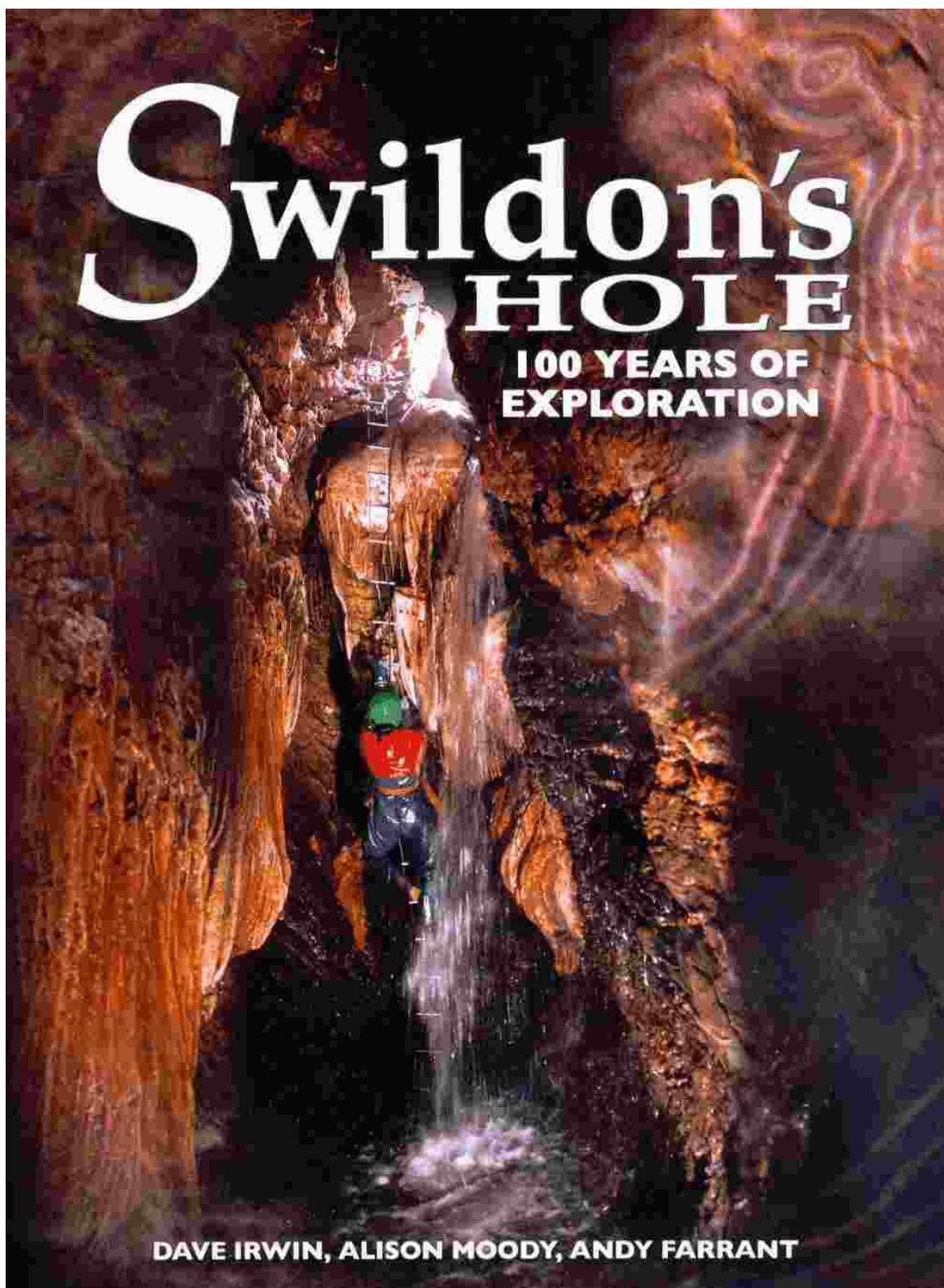




Journal of the
Wessex Cave Club

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The eagle-eyed amongst you may have noticed that we have a colour cover to this Journal. The quality of the photographs which you send for the Journal make this a constant temptation, but this was irresistible. All my Editorial work and musings pale into utter insignificance when one reads The Swildons Book. I suspect that it bound to be known to us as "The Swildons Book", rather than by its title, and that that is proper. And it is right that it should feature on this Journal, because it must represent as big a landmark in the Wessex Cave Club history as the move to Upper Pitts. I had hoped to be able to publish a professional review in this Journal. Everyone I approached claimed that they were either under-qualified, or over-involved, or both, as do I myself. So in lieu I've printed a (small) selection of the Emails and various Forum messages received by Ali. There's no mistaking the overall impression of delight and amazement that the book has engendered. And it must be remembered that the very considerable work of receiving book orders, packaging and despatching them is still falling on Ali and Brian Prewer.

Speaking personally, first thing I did was to look at the index to see if my name were there; being, like scores of fellow cavers, fascinated and vain. In our own defence, one of the glories of the book is that it is "Our" book about "Our" cave.

It represents so many man-hours (my apologies, Ali, for the male chauvinism!) and so many trips down Swildons to tidy up information here and there. There are still loose ends - thank Heavens - and more Swildons mysteries to find, and solve, and more passage to be revealed. "The book" covers just the **first** hundred years. Let's hope that the Wessex Great-Great-Great-Grandchildren will have cause to write the next volume! Reading her accounts in the log-book extracts it is obvious that Ali is intent upon rendering the book obsolete as fast as possible. In the meantime if any member of the Wessex has not yet bought a copy, or not even seen the book, then our cover only hints at its quality, and they should not delay. The first eight hundred copies went in days. Oddly there are some members who had ordered or pre-purchased copies who have not collected them, but for the rest the best advice is to purchase soon (details on page 133), before there are none left.

And Glory Be! I have such a glut of articles and accounts that I have had to hold some over for the next Journal. The stuff of Editorial dreams. So my apologies to those whose masterpieces have yet to appear but Journal 310 already boasts accounts from Greece, Ireland, Tennerife and France, and Cheramodytes has been given more time to prepare his next letter and discuss BDIs with Herbert, at Fred Felstead's request (page 143). With all this it seems churlish to ask for more, but I need larger file-size photographs for Journal printing. I can, and do, copy from the Wessex Web-Site, but the files are rarely big enough. Journal printing requires something approaching 500K. It's frustrating to see superb photos in your Web accounts and not to be able to print them. The solution? Email photos to me, Please, unless you have a large batch, in which case a CD would be even more welcome. My Email address remains [wessexeditor@streamcotts.eclipse.co.uk](mailto:wessexeditor@streamcotts.eclipse.co.uk). It is severely under-used!

Most statistical results play out the 80/20 rule, the Wessex ever true to the unexpected, plays to a slightly different tune of 70/30. 70% being the ratio of member/guest whom over the last 5 years and the next 5 you are likely to meet at the hut on any given week, you guessed it, for 80% of the year (actually it is 85%). On that average, for members therefore, were you to visit every weekend during the year the chances are that for every three people you come across at the hut you won't know one of the three unless you meet them twice and introduced yourself the first time. The exception of course is on the third weekend of October where you'll know everyone, however if you fell asleep then till the following weekend chances are you won't know anyone and probably won't have remembered the previous weekend anyway.

If you visit the hut in August, for most of that month you will know 9 out of 10 you meet, April you'll know half of them and intimately if you are there on the third weekend although that equates to a weekend in March this year. The last three weeks of February, first two of March and the first week of November are even split. Sardine weeks are the second weeks of October and November, the last week of September and October, whilst the first week of May seems to be a mellow mix. So there we have it for 15% of the year the hut bulges at the seams and for 85% of the year it doesn't. Information sourced, measured and collated, from the hut fees/bookings books for the last five years.

## Secretary Speak .....

Hi all, We have a great club but here's a few timely reminders to ensure that it stays that way!

**Tackle** – this must be booked in and out and please put it back in a clean and tidy state. Mark any damaged kit up for the attention of the tackle officer and if you need kit on long-term loan or for expeditions or digs please book it out with the tackle officer first.

**Keys** – again these must be booked in and out (we do keep a log of which caves are visited most) and keys including hut keys are for members use only.

**The Library** – one of the clubs best resources! Some items are not to be removed from Upper Pitts – please check before taking items home. If an item can be borrowed and you would like to take it out please log it out in the loans book. Alternatively if you are only interested in a couple of pages why not use the photocopier?

**The Hut** – please keep it clean and tidy – we all prefer it that way! Back from a big muddy trip? Shed your muddy boots and overalls outside, not in the changing room, and please give the changing room floor a good squeegee afterwards. A good breakfast in the morning – please leave the kitchen clean and tidy before you go underground. If you are the last to go home then please make sure that the gas is turned off, all the doors and windows are locked and that the fire in the lounge is in a safe condition.

**The Environment** – We are trying to be as green as we can. Turn lights off when they are not needed and when the heating is on don't leave doors and windows open. Recycle where you can.

Here's to a great years caving in 2008, **Kev**

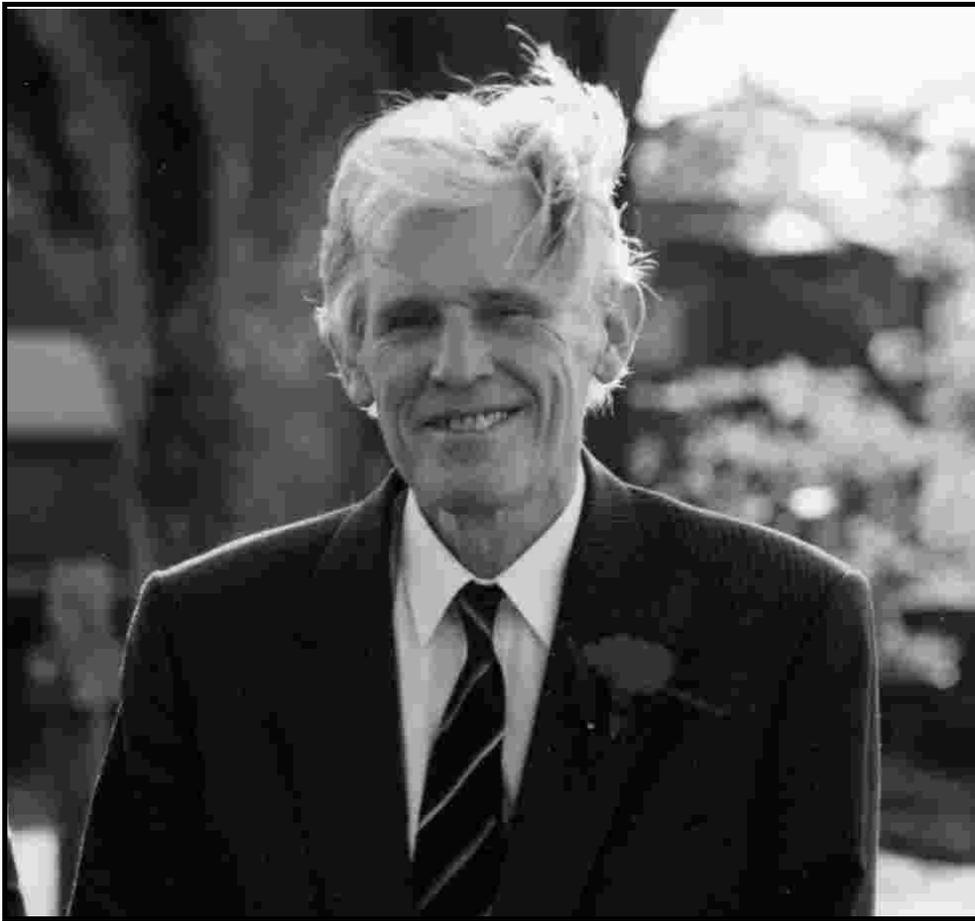
## Some memories of Michael Murray Thompson, 1933-2007

Mike Thompson's funeral took place at St. Laurence's Church, Priddy, on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2007. The church was packed, with barely enough standing room for all the mourners from the village and wider Mendip caving community to which Mike belonged and participated in for over fifty fruitful years.

It was deep beneath the church down Swildon's Hole where we first met in the mid-1950s. We both took part on trips through the newly discovered Paradise Regained passages that eventually reached the far streamway in Swildon's Four and beyond. Mike played a major part in the digging and diving pushes that led to these epic discoveries, as recorded in *Swildon's Hole: 100 years*

*of Exploration*, published by the Wessex Cave Club on the weekend following his funeral. It is a fitting memorial that Mike's own contributions feature on 18 pages of this commemorative volume. A few days before he died in hospital, I was able to show him a special copy of the book, and the particular pages concerned. Although very poorly, he raised a smile, thanked all concerned and offered a few characteristically apt observations on the personalities he was involved with at the time! He passed away shortly after I last saw him in the West Mendip Hospital, Glastonbury, on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

Mike was born on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1933 in Surrey, an only child.



He was educated at Epsom College and then conscripted to undertake his National Service in 1951. Whilst drafted to the RAF's Radio Training School at Locking, near Weston-super-Mare, Mike went caving on Mendip and read Herbert Balch's books on the pioneer exploration of caves in the Priddy area, written barely fifty years before. A BAOR posting to RAF Nijmegen in the Netherlands servicing "wirelesses" (as he insisted they should be called) afforded time to read other caving books, such as *Underground Adventure* by Arthur Gemmell and Jack Myers (1952).

Once demobilised, Mike acquired Norbert Casteret's classic *Trente Ans sous Terre* (1954), and put his Higher School Certificate in French to good use. He recalled to me later that he had sometimes "wintered" in the Riviera with his parents before the War, where he acquired a lasting love of the sea, and a great dislike for French toilets! On returning home and taking his articles with a London law firm in Surrey, Mike sought the first opportunity to go caving on Mendip. He joined the Westminster Speleological Group and found a future.

At the time, WSG enthusiasts such as Dennis Kemp and Len Dawes were laying siege to Blue Pencil Passage in Swildon's most weekends from mid-May 1955 to mid-June 1957, and usually camped close by the cave entrance to save time. Although a keen member of this team Mike, however, was never enamoured with light-weight camping. He joined the Shepton Mallet Caving Club as their 71<sup>st</sup> member in 1959, not least because the old club hut next to The Beeches afforded more "luxuries" and an entrée to Mendip's social whirl at the time. As a local lad myself, who had luckily been with Dennis on the WSG's first Land Rover Expedition to Yugoslavia (Slovenia) in 1955 and with Len around Spain in 1958, we made lasting

friendships together.

After qualifying, Mike joined J.W. Ward the well established firm of solicitors in central Bristol, married Elizabeth Johnson and came to live in Priddy. Since Liz was a cousin of Fred Davies' wife Andy, Mike thus entered what was then known to the rest of us as Fred's "Shepton Family". This close-knit group came to the fore during the ensuing downstream pushes of the Swildon's and Stoke Lane streamways. It was apparent that the constricted sumps concerned required new techniques and tactics from those used by the first generation of post-War divers who relied on ex-Navy breathing apparatus, heavy suits and training methods. The days of bottom walking whilst carrying bulky lighting gear were clearly numbered.

Mike Thompson helped to bring about the changes that were needed. He joined the Cave Diving Group at the start of 1959 with Ken Dawe and, after only four training dives in Wookey Hole Cave, and the requisite five hours of safe water training in

the Priddy Mineries, both became fully qualified on 10<sup>th</sup> October later that year. Brian de Graaf, John Bevan and Charles George from South Wales were their supervisors whilst Phillip Davies, Jack Waddon and Luke Devenish dived in support. Dan Hasell was the onshore controller then required by the CDG, and I kept Mike's Log Book.

Over the next four years, Mike graduated from closed circuit oxygen "rebreathers", to mixture sets and then open-circuit aqualungs. He found that an Oldham cap lamp provided enough light, even when swimming with fins in Wookey Hole Cave, and was the first Mendip caver to try out a wet suit underground, as I recall. Meanwhile, Fred Davies, Steve Wynne Roberts and the irrepressible Mike Boon slimmed down cave diving gear to the bare essentials. These developments reaped rewards down Swildon's and Stoke Lane in the early 'sixties, but the tragic death of Jack Waddon whilst on an unscheduled training dive in the Priddy Mineries on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1962 was a big blow to morale. Moreover, the CDG nationally had lost key players to the trans-Atlantic "brain drain" at the time.

By common consent, Mike became Honorary Secretary of the Cave Diving Group. He decided that the group's fortunes depended upon the old Regional Sections working more together, even though there were few divers around at the time. After several visits and dives with key friends such as Alan Clegg in Yorkshire, Ken Pearce in Derbyshire and his early mentors from South Wales, Mike's diplomacy and advocacy gained widespread approval. His proposed new CDG constitution and training procedures were thus accepted at the Annual General Meeting in Wells on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1963. Mike's *Letter to Members* later in August tells the full story, and lists

those who rallied to the new look CDG. A joint meeting of divers from all Regional Sections was staged at Wookey Hole on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1964 to underwrite what was a personal high point in Mike's life. He was especially proud when today's divers recognised the part he had played earlier by appointing him an Honorary Life Member of the CDG in 2002.

In contrast, it was the cruellest blow when Alan Clegg drowned while diving in Lancaster Hole over Easter 1964, despite Mike Boon's efforts to resuscitate him. Mike T. and I happened to be in Yorkshire when the news broke, and I know that he decided to hand over the reins of the CDG from that moment. He only dived once more himself, with Bob Pyke to have a last look at the far reaches of Stoke Lane Slocker. The extreme ups and downs Mike experienced during his five years as a cave diver became a feature of his personal life thereafter. That he made the most of the former despite and sometimes because of the latter played a big part making him a positive and persuasive personality on Mendip.

Unlike the rest of us, Mike wore his dark pinstripe suit and old school tie on weekday visits to the Hunters' after work. He pointedly chided those who lacked such "sartorial elegance", as he was wont to say. On Saturday morning duties in Bristol he dressed in tweeds and twills during winter, donned sports jackets in summer and always wore a cravat. The latter invariably remained until the last moment when he put on caving kit. On occasions he forgot to include some essential item, and I recall a diving trip in Stoke Lane Slocker when he borrowed a milking coat and leggings from the farmer, Mr. Stock, to replace a mislaid boiler suit! He could change in and out of his gear faster than the rest, and was invariably first at the bar to order drinks all round. Even those with pockets that Mike regarded as "too deep" were included initially. Fags were also generously shared around for almost everyone smoked a lot in those days, even underground.

Mike relished getting to grips with new projects; would enthusiastically force the pace and lead by example. Fast cars, such as his E-type Jaguars, fitted this dash, and I shall always recall an early Saturday morning drive to the Gamecock Inn at Austwick, to meet others for a trip down a Yorkshire pothole. We left Bristol about 7 a.m. and arrived before they had finished breakfast. Small wonder that I cannot recall the name of the pot that we went down that day! Over the years, we had many memorable Yorkshire trips, reserved by Mike with Mrs Howarth at the Gamecock, who booked us in collectively as "Gentlemen from the South". He liked that touch, of course.

Mike's imposing height, his way with words and his self assurance helped a lot. He was occasionally referred to as "Squire Thompson" early on, and deferentially called "The Master" by Willie Stanton whilst we were digging North Hill Swallet. It was Mike, after all, who coined the name "North Hill Association for Spelaeological Advancement" (NHASA) for the regulars at this "all-comers" dig; arguing that we were "Terranauts", seeking space underground and thus on par with the astronauts undertaking NASA's high profile outer space missions at the time!

During our lengthy dig at North Hill Swallet, there were other even bigger spin-offs than the modest cave we eventually found. Foremost was that Mike and I negotiated the purchase of the nearby land on which the Wessex Cave Club's HQ, Upper Pitts, was subsequently built and secured the necessary Planning



Approval after several set-backs. Mike's legal advice was crucial, for which he was made an Honorary Member of the Wessex. Over the years, in fact, Mike willingly and effectively took over the mantle of being unpaid legal advisor to Mendip caving clubs that "Digger" Harris had worn since the mid-1930s when the Wessex and BEC formed. He much admired Digger, in fact, and both became firm friends. They had much in common as cave divers from different generations, of course, and Mike was readily converted to share Digger's faith in water divining. He was even introduced to the mysterious art of locating likely caves by suspending pendulums over maps!

Although not a keen walker, Mike accordingly took to traversing fields holding forked hazel twigs and bent rods in search of sites to dig. "Twigotec" (another Mikeism) thus ensued, and I (a disbeliever) was cajoled to traipse over much of Mendip, unable to keep pace with his long stride let alone relate the contortions of the twigs to matters geological beneath our feet. His firm proposals often felt like prosecutions to probe my defence using mere facts; yet we enjoyed ourselves, of course, and some cave digs even arose from these jaunts and taunts. The NHASA Log

Books initiated by Mike and his own detailed personal logs provide the best records of his continuing search for “caverns measureless” under Mendip. He keenly argued that such volumes should be entrusted to established local caving archives in due course, especially whilst a Trustee of Wells and Mendip Museum. Before he died, Mike handed over his own personal log books to the University of Bristol Speleological Society Library. He had been a member of the UBSS for some 15 years, after purchasing a full set of the Society’s *Proceedings* to complete his own collections at the time.



It must suffice here to list the main digging projects in which Mike Thompson was involved. Many more speculative “dabbles” are excluded in favour of the long-term stints that involved regular mid-week meets lasting about 3 hours. Such sessions have since become a feature of the Mendip caving scene. Apart from a few articles written early on in *SMCC Journals* (1960-62) and with me in *WCC Journal* Vol.6 No.82 (Dec 1961), Mike himself rarely wrote for club publications, nor stayed in club huts to contribute to their logbooks once he came to live in Priddy. He kept his own records at home where he also built up a large library of caving books (later sold when he downsized his collections). His prized shelves housed a complete set of Edouard Martel’s published works. I came to think that Mike himself would love to have lived like Martel, who was after all a well-to-do lawyer, even though he lacked fast cars and boats, and had to contend with French toilets! Down the Gouffre de Padirac, in fact, there is a bust of Martel, commemorating his discovery of its streamway. Its profile looks strikingly like Mike T.

After North Hill Swallet, Mike assisted in the bottoming of Rhino Rift and the final opening up of Manor Farm Swallet. NHASA’s focus then shifted to Windsor Hill for some seven years before returning to “home territory” at Sludge Pit Hole. Here Mike provided the compressor and drilling gear in a project he dubbed “Portotec”, and we developed a taste for hard rock tunnelling. Luke Devenish’s professional expertise in such work

gave us added strike power when we blasted the deep entrance shaft into our Twin Titties dig in 1969, as recorded in *Wessex Cave Club Journals* Vol. 26, Nos 278, 279, 280 (2002). Mike, who had been near neighbour and admirer of Luke Devenish, when both lived in Priddy and later on at Chilcote, had much in common despite their age gap. Luke latterly became the Club’s President, and was well known across Mendip for his willingness to demolish anything. Mike often took time off work to assist Luke at several of his more challenging jobs, especially when big things had to be blown up underwater! He recalled these dramatic exploits in his address at Luke’s funeral in Cheddar at the end of February 1994.

When Mike’s first marriage ended early in the 1970s, he took to playing golf, snooker, shove ha’penny, and steam engine renovation with characteristic enthusiasm and considerable success. He liked to do well, and played to win! Golf in particular saw him travelling more than he had ever done to play most of the famous courses in Scotland. Any caving was confined a few “away” fixtures to Yorkshire, and to northern Spain where *Wessex Cave Club* teams were pushing shafts high in the Central Massif of the Picos de Europa. Then, in 1975 Mike married Janet Harding, a cousin from Sheffield and true

Yorkshire lass. He thus acquired a new family of admirers who came to live with him and enjoy Mendip. Mike decided the time was ripe to undertake further house building projects, and also indulge his longstanding love of the sea at last. He and Janet bought a 45-foot motor cruiser *El Paraiso* in Southampton which Mike helped sail to the new marina in Falmouth. He then set about gaining Royal Yacht Association qualifications to take it to sea in his own right. In record time he achieved the necessary certificates and, with my wife Judy the four of us spent a fine week cruising around the Scilly Isles.

Yet another setback was inflicted on Mike when, during an operation which went wrong, Janet suffered lasting injuries that restricted her mobility and adversely affected her health in general. *El Paraiso* was thus exchanged for another one that Mike could crew alone if necessary. This boat was slightly shorter, but by way of compensation perhaps, much sleeker and faster; an “E-type” afloat with two 110 HP diesel engines that could sustain speeds around 17 knots. He subsequently moored it at Swansea, within easier reach of Mendip. We had another trip to the Scillies, whilst Mike himself ventured further to the Channel Islands and south-west Ireland. He and Janet also spent idyllic holidays slowly cruising down the River Shannon in hired motor yachts. Here Mike felt much “at home”, and took to investigating his Irish ancestry thereafter.

Throughout Mike’s sojourn with the sea and boats during the 1980s, he had little time to go caving. Another project and longstanding career ambition was accomplished however, for he had risen through the ranks professionally to become the senior partner of J.W. Ward. He masterminded the firm’s expansion

within the Bristol region, and it later became known as “Wards Solicitors”. For a while, was also appointed as a Coroner in the City. Mike seemed to be living several lives at once, and always espoused “doing a little bit more every day”. He read a lot, was knowledgeable and a good practical problem solver. This included keeping up-to date by reading *The Times* and *Irish Times*. Linda Wilson, for example, recalls that Mike was reading a copy of the latter with his feet casually on the desk when she was newly appointed to Wards in September 1983. He was also a regular listener to the wireless, and often re-read key childhood classics such as *Swallows and Amazons* to “exercise” his memory. Nostalgia for these Lakeland adventure stories led him to become a founder member of the Arthur Ransom Society. Mike also found time to set up an enterprising consultancy with John Cornwell called the Bristol Coal Mining Archives, providing developers and planners with information on disused mine workings throughout the region.

In 1991 when new finds down Twin T’s looked particularly promising, Mike and I were dealt the worst of blows for our respective wives died within a few weeks of each other during the summer. Both of us had to dig much deeper in different ways thereafter. This big jolt led Mike to yet another life, and he set about refurbishing his fourth and final home in Priddy. His social life increasingly depended upon daily visits to the Hunters’ and New Inn latterly. Even Wells, and certainly its supermarkets, gradually lost any appeal. Whereas he had previously enjoyed a good evening meal out and Christmas lunch parties with the “Priddy self-employed”, he took more to entertaining friends at home, becoming an enthusiastic chef and generous host. Guests were assured of traditional English fare with copious claret and malt chasers. Assistance down the steep stone staircase outside at the end of the evening was *de rigueur* (a phrase often used by Mike to stress his desire to do things properly). Mike thus married Rachel King from Chewton Mendip in 1996, and became more his old self.

Whilst supporting Rachel’s passion for horse riding, short of taking to the saddle himself, Mike busied himself by researching his paternal family tree. Given his surname, this was not an easy task. It was, therefore, a great surprise and delight when he chanced upon a likely link with forebears who farmed in County Fermanagh in the late 1700s; not least because they had fled the Scottish Borders to escape the arm of the Law! Furthermore, he

claimed to have found evidence that early Thompsons had lived on the Florence Court estate by Marble Arch Caves, near Enniskillen. And Martel, yet again, had first explored the many underground streams in the Knockmore-Belmore region.

When I first met Mike, I had extolled the caving potential of this little known karst area along the border country between Fermanagh and County Sligo, having just returned from splendid trips down caves there with David Willis and other Wessex members in 1956. Smitten by my stories, Mike had then persuaded the Shepton Mallet Caving Club to run its first overseas visit to the area in 1959 (see SMCC *Occasional Publication* No.1). He later returned to the locality several times, feeling that he had discovered his roots there. And the lure of finding new caves remained.

Mike’s last digs were undertaken with Tony Audsley and John Cornwell in the Charterhouse area. They dug at Roman Rift before handing the site over to the Mendip Caving Group and moving to their Old Farts’ Dig (or OFD) nearer Kingdown. The latter has since been shown to be along the general direction taken by the furthest reaches of the significant Upper Flood Swallet found by the MCG. Cairns Hill was another site looked at by Mike’s OFD team. It had long intrigued him, being just a stone’s throw from his first home in Priddy and so close to Swildon’s Hole of course. This dig is now in the capable hands of Tony Jarratt’s team and “looks good”. Indeed, Mike’s epitaph in this respect, and many other aspects of his life, might simply be: “If only”. It was so sad to see him lose his appetite and zest latterly.

I am very grateful to Fred Davies and Linda Wilson for their respective comments on this review of Mike’s caving days and professional life. By now readers of my tribute will have gathered why I was always flattered when Mike Thompson introduced me to colleagues and acquaintances as his “oldest friend”. His loss has left a hole on Mendip much more profound than any we ever found whilst caving and digging together.

**Jim Hanwell**  
Wookey Hole  
Christmas 2007

## **Congratulations**

I know all members of the club will join me in expressing enormous admiration, appreciation and thanks to those whose selfless dedication was involved in bringing the book “ Swildon’s Hole 100 Years of Exploration ” to fruition.

A unique book of a unique cave, caving history, exploration and personal achievements, outstandingly researched with unparalleled attention to detail and a lasting testimony to their hard work. The journey from concept to production has been an epic journey itself and culminated in a magnificent book. It marks a significant milestone in the club’s history.

Thank you to all those involved past and present who have made such a book possible, those who carved history and those who still make it and special thanks to those directly involved in the book, text and production, Jim Hanwell, Richard Witcombe, Alison Moody, Andy Farrant, Mark Lumley, Adrian Vanderplank, Phil Hendy, Brian Prewer, Ric and Pat Halliwell, Nick Fox, Geoff Ballard and Dave Irwin who is in our thoughts.

Thank you

**David Morrison**

# The Swildons Book - Some Cavers' Reactions

## Emails

This is just to let you know that the Swildon's book has arrived safe and sound. Many thanks. I've had time to skim through all of it. Please give my congratulations to all concerned. It is a fine piece of work and very attractively presented. I'm most impressed. **(Derek Ford)**

I have just finished reading **THE BOOK**. It's magnificent. So well presented and so well written! So well done - it is a tremendous achievement. **(Trevor Faulkner)**

I hope you and Pete are keeping well. Glad you mentioned THE book in your Christmas card as I obtained a copy straight away and kept browsing through it over the holidays. The CPC has now asked me to do a review for our mag so I just wondered if this would be OK from your point of view, please? (see below). It's impossible to really do justice to your combined achievement but I hope this review will stimulate interest and purchases. **(Arthur Champion)**

Many congratulations Richard on assisting in the editing of such a beautifully produced and informative volume. I think the WCC should be justly proud to have edited, designed and produced such a magnificent work - very well done to all concerned. I am especially pleased that a traditional binding technique has been used so that the book actually stays open at any page without effort. This is a book that you can dip into or read continuously and there are gems of information on every page - a veritable treasure trove! The plethora of illustrations is unbelievably good and the way they have been presented really adds depth to the text. I am particularly impressed by the full survey included and the illustration of the extent of the cave in relation to the ground surface around Priddy - remarkable!

That the Wessex can produce such a wonderful book to such a high standard is a real feather in their cap I think and shows that the Club continues to go from strength to strength. It will undoubtedly further cement and spread their already enviable reputation in the speleological world. **(Keith Barber)**

Dooley & I just received a copy of the Swildons Book. After a quick initial look I have to say it looks magnificent. It will certainly be something Walsh & I will be fighting over for the next few weeks ! Well done & all that ! A really great achievement ! I can only imagine all the effort that went into it. **(Paul Hadfield)**

My Swindon's book arrived safe today, many thanks. First impression, I'm very impressed, well done to all involved. I must visit the Mendips more often. **Mark (Lofty) Loftus**

The book arrived today. It is well produced and a credit to the authors and the Wessex Cave Club, but will take me a long time to read. **(Steve Craven)**

Many thanks for the prompt delivery of the book - it is truly excellent! I'll put a couple of pints in for the authors next time I'm passing through the Hunters! **(Steve Bunston)**

I read most of my copy over Christmas and can confirm it's a very interesting and well put together book. **(Simon Ashby)**

I meant to write before to thank you for sending the Swildons book. It is very nicely produced with good quality photographs. **(Gordon Peckham)**

It's Wig and the Moody's who really need to be commended for the book - they've put a lot into it, including many of the ideas of how the cave developed. Without their enthusiasm and pushing the boundaries, we'd know very little about the place. **(Andy Farrant)**

Thanks. Book received this morning. Excellent **(Gary Warwick)**

Great book. Well done. **(Tav)**

## Posts on the UK and Wessex Caving Forums

Very groovy - and 300(ish) of a run of 1500 gone on the first night. The more I read mine the better it gets! **(Hatstand)**

Fantastic book! Very informative and a really top quality finish. I can't put it down. Well except whilst typing this of course. **(Anfieldman - aka Mark Whyte)**

Received mine in this morning's post, very professionally wrapped. First impression is that it looks FANTASTIC. Congratulations to all involved. **Nick (Williams)**

Received mine too today. Extremely impressive, very many hours of work seem to have gone into it. The only annoying thing is I'm too busy tonight to read it! **(Damian)**

It is extremely impressive; clearly it is a labour of love and is far beyond the scope of a book had it been created as a commercial enterprise - for the money I think each purchaser is getting much more than they are forking out. The quality of the paper and the printing is of the best too; I also believe there will be greater interest (!) in Swildon's Hole than there has been in recent years with an upsurge in trips to the lesser-visited parts. **(Cap'n Chris - aka Chris Binding)**

Got my copy yesterday morning, read it from cover to cover. A truly excellent book. Many, many thanks to the Wessex and all who were responsible for this wonderful work. **(Tony from Suffolk)**

Got mine the other day, only had a chance to skim through it, but looks fantastic very informative. Well done to all involved. **(Finster)**

Love this book... Money well spent... Good on the Wessex... And well done all editors, contributors and producers - A Cracking Book! **(VivB)**

Congratulations to the authors of the new Swildons Book! received my copy today and am most impressed thumb-sup Excellent work! I wonder what the "Swildons book - the next

100yrs" will contain? (MDS)

Amazing book. My son turned up from Liverpool while I was engrossed in it, and I showed him the cover. "That's the 20," I told him. It's called the 20 because it's a 16ft pitch. That's where you get your fingers trapped behind the ladder." Then I showed him the pic on page 36."That's the end of Blue Pencil. You come out head first, grab the chain, and try to hang onto it while you get your feet out." "Huh. What time's dinner?" he said. One day, just one day, I hope to see some of those sights again. Meanwhile, I've got a brilliant book to keep me company. (Peaksoft)

Personally I think the Swildons book is fantastic and the more I read the more impressed I become at the detail, content and research that has gone into producing it. (Stu Gardiner)

This trip is AWESOME! If not a little bit nacking! So, having read a little of the new Swildons book (and at this point I must say... Thank you Ali Moody for the brilliant descriptions) I decided it was about time we attempted Priddy Green Sink, on what turned out to be possibly one of the coldest mornings of the year! Brilliant descriptions/survey in the book - really helped! (Ben Morley after trip down Priddy Green Sink)

Superb book, I hope every Mendip caver buys at least one! Also thanks to all involved at the book launch for a very enjoyable evening. (Barry Wilkinson)

Personally I think its a spectacular book and although I haven't read MANY caving books its lightyears ahead of any others I have. (Hatstand)

### Misc Cards/Letters

Congrats on the Swildon's book it is really an excellent production (Mark Faulkner)

Congratulation to you all on a splendid Swildon's book (Maurice and Judy Hewins)

Swildon's book is excellent, it really is (Bob and Golly Scammell)

The book is excellent (Kev Hilton)

I've just got the book and it makes a good read. You've done a great job. I think it has turned out well, and I hope you have all thought it well worth the effort – especially Alison. It brings back many happy memories of carefree days underground and I can still picture many of the hand-holds that I relied on in the past. (Brian Woodward)

## Club News

### The Swildons Book Launch

The "Swildons Book" project was brought to triumphant fruition on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup>. December with the launch party, most generously hosted by Roger Dors in the Hunters. Several hundred people turned up to collect their copies, while Ali and Andy went for RSI in Signatures. Jim Hanwell gave presentation copies to Roger and Jackie Dors (the book is dedicated to three generations of the Dors family - Joe, Ben and Roger), Robin and Pam Maine, and to Judith Tranter on behalf of the Mendip Society. It is noteworthy, and typical of the spirit behind the book, that none of those directly involved in its production would accept free copies, and that Andy Farrant should disclaim the value of his own contribution: you can read his Email, and many other Emails, with Postings on the Forum and some congratulatory messages on page 132

The Swildons Book Sales The initial sales rush has subsided to a dull roar, but only 700 or so copies are left. Members who have not yet purchased a copy are advised to do so before these run out. The cost is £25 if collected, or plus £5 for P&P. You can contact either Prew or Ali directly by 'phone or Email, and you can purchase directly from the Wessex Cave Club Web-site using PayPal.

Brian Prewer: 01749 870 678 brian@prew36.eclipse.co.uk  
Alison Moody 01749 870 006 aadmoody@talk21.com

Congratulations To Mark Tuck and Kelly on their wedding on 10<sup>th</sup>. November.

Congratulations To Jonathan and Kathy on the birth of their daughter, Emily, on 21<sup>st</sup>. January.

Congratulations To Phil Hendy on his appointment as the new Caving Correspondent for the "Mendip Times" (.....and also on his fast footwork in avoiding the advertised post of roving freelance reporter for this Journal,)

Abandoned Kit A quantity of apparently-abandoned kit has been removed from the changing room, and will be sold or disposed of 4 weeks after this Journal is published. If you think some of your kit may be included, it is currently stored (in a dumpy bag!) in the shed. Phil

Maurice Hewins "Aniversaries" Maurice will be celebrating 70 years of existence and 50 years of caving in April. To give his "Birthday Bash" room, the committee have agreed to reserve Upper Pitts for members only on the weekend of 12 / 13 April, but Maurice is keeping the shape of the shindig secret at the moment..... it all bodes well for a good weekend! He describes the start of his caving life on page 145.

Insurance Disclaimers Insurance, like Health and Safety, is the bane of our lives but we have to live with it, and notices with the following wording will soon appear in the Car Park and on the notice board:

"Wessex Cave Club

Please be aware that all cars, equipment and other valuables are the responsibility of the owner/s of the same. The Wessex Cave Club accepts no responsibility for loss or damage.

Please park considerately.

The Committee"

**Jim Hanwell is now a Vice President** It's difficult to imagine a more popular or deserving recipient of this position. Jim's acceptance is below.

Dear Kevin,

Thank you so much for your kind letter welcoming me as a new Vice President of the Wessex Cave Club. It is a great honour to have such recognition of my contribution to caving from the one club above all that I have always regarded as leading the way for others on Mendip and throughout the country. Caves and karst have played a big part in my life, and I have made long lasting friends as a result of my membership and involvement with the Wessex over the years.

For me, it all began when I was personally encouraged by Herbert Balch to go caving on Mendip. As the Clubs first President at the time, he recommended me to contact Frank Frost, and I owe much to my old friend David Willis for proposing me for membership. We had fine trips together thereafter throughout the main limestone districts in this country, and overseas to Ireland, Slovenia, France and Spain. I am still in touch with Dave and his wife Brenda, both of whom are still members and "going well" it was also good to make friends with "Digger" Harris, Jack Duck and Hywell Murrell who had founded the Club in 1934. They were my mentors.

Be assured that I will continue to support the club and its encouragement of young people to carry on the traditions of cave exploration on Mendip and elsewhere. Please convey my best wishes and gratitude to the Committee and all concerned with my appointment. And good luck with your own key post as the Club's Hon Secretary. Your address in the heart of Hardy's Wessex is particularly apt.

I am also much amused to be able to inform our President Don Thomson that I can now claim to be his "Vice"!

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**Britain Underground** This publication contains what is believed to be the earliest description of Swildon's Hole printed in a "proper" caving guidebook. Britain Underground was published by Dalesman Publishing Company in conjunction with Blandford Press Limited in 1953.

The description of Swildon's Hole (page 200) written by A. H. Stride and R. D. Stride is 141 words in length. It is reprinted below by kind permission of Dalesman Publishing Company, December 2007.

**"SWILDON'S HOLE"** Priddy S.P. Alt 780 feet

In valley bottom E. of church, among trees. Key at Manor Farm.

Two dry routes and stream passage lead to first pitch. Pass belay rope through small hole in dripstone on right of pitch to keep ladder out of waterfall. Second pitch belay is boss on right. First sump, 10 feet long, is made easier by fixed handline. On far side is a slope and passage and climb to third pitch. Belay is a piton, descend part way and traverse over. Far end of passage is near the surface. Stream can be followed for over 1,000 feet to a sump.

Tackle required -

|              | Ladder | Belay | Lifeline |
|--------------|--------|-------|----------|
|              | feet   | feet  | feet     |
| First pitch  | 40     | 20    | 60       |
| Second pitch | 15     | 30    | 30       |
| Third pitch  | 35     | 30    | 30       |

In comparison the new description by Ali Moody in **Swildon's Hole – 100 Years of Exploration** published by the Wessex Cave Club stands at **46,000** words!

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**Wessex Tea Party** The 10<sup>th</sup> July will mark the 40<sup>th</sup>. Anniversary of the flushing away of Swildon's 40' Pot. To mark, and celebrate the occasion the Wessex will be holding a traditional Tea Party in Swildon's. On Saturday, 5<sup>th</sup>. July. More details nearer the time, but expect tables with white cloths, fine china, quality tea to drink and, of course, dainty sandwiches featuring such esteemed

delicacies as cucumber and bloaters paste. The highest sartorial standards will be expected. Upper Pitts will be "Members only" that weekend.

**The Christmas Party** Ali organised a Christmas party in Goatchurch. It was, inevitably, enormous fun and a huge success, marred only by the presence of 2 complete imposter Santa Claus. Luckily the genuine one fielded Andrew' and George's requests for "Iggie Piggie", and the contents of Mr. Newport's hip flask ameliorated any anger at his scene stealing. Hot and cold nibbles were circulated, while the no-drinking-while-caving rule was violated with some enthusiasm.



For light relief we have our old friend the Gournier and some spectacular Canyoning. Early registration is cheaper than later. Cookie is acting as liason man and organiser. The basic cost of attending the Congress will be around £35. Campsite spaces are liable to be at a premium and Noel will do a recce and booking in March if need be, when we have some idea of numbers.

**Dead Batteries** We are slightly pre-empting the forecast recycling requirement, and there is now a box for all your dead batteries. Please use it, rather than any of the other waste bins.

**Working Weekend** 01 & 02 March will be a working weekend. As always many hands make light work so please come along. Ian Timney will be organising the tasks list in due course.

**Suggestions** This entry from Journal 308 seems to have escaped people's notice and the suggestions box remains, as it were, virgin. So here it is again: In an effort to improve and increase contact between the committee and the Wessex Cave Club members, and our guests, there is now a suggestions box. So when one of the committee isn't around, you can do some literary "Ear Bending". We will be discussing your suggestions in committee and reporting and reviewing them regularly in the Journal - so please use the box. See page 145 !!

**August Camp in the Vercors** The IVth. EUROPEAN SPELEOLOGICAL CONGRESS will be held in the Vercors from 23 - 30 August. In view of the falling support for a camp in the Lot, it seems sensible to run a "Wessex" camp in the Vercors from 16 - 23 August and then join the main congress events from 23 - 30 August. A large number of major caves (including the Berger, and the Trou qui Souffle) will be rigged for that week.

## From the Log Book & the Wessex Website

Dave Murphy writes: "In November I found myself arriving one late Friday night at Penwyllt with Les, Cookie, a home-made artillery cannon and a box full of explosives..... as one does....."

**Saturday November 3 2007 Dan Yr Ogof** Cookie, Les, Clive, Wayne, Dave Murphy

Ever since looking through the photos around the SWCC hut I have wanted to see DYO and when the prospect of a trip arose I was very excited, I have been quite spoilt with caves in my short time at the Wessex (...although there have been scurrilous claims that I get dragged along to save others doing a write up!) and I wondered how any caving was going to be able to match

what I had experienced in Ireland only a few days previously. I shouldn't have wondered, this was an absolutely fantastic trip and right from the moment we got past the show caves and into the lakes I was buzzing. My only reservation (which deep down I was looking forward to) was the dreaded 'hour long crawl' that I had heard so much about and was now causing me a little concern.

I shouldn't have worried really, most of the crawl involved hands

and knees, towards the end there were some sections that were quite tight and having broad shoulders I found myself having to form up into a kind of extreme shrug and then thrutch myself through inch by inch using only my toes. These bits only went on for ten to fifteen feet at a time and although a few weeks ago they would have struck me with terror... 'a few weeks' is a long time and a lot of caving in the company of these guys... I wasn't fazed at all.

After descending a long ladder we were into the cave proper and it was time to relax and start enjoying the sheer variety of formations and scenery that the cave had to offer, we carefully walked around the crystal lake, complete with it's flotillas of calcite rafts and crystalline beaches and were soon stomping down a huge passageway that was bigger than many caverns I have seen elsewhere. The rock was a wonderful jet black which sparkled in the light as if strewn with small galaxies of stars, every now and then we came across amazing clusters of helictites and straws and just as I thought that this was as good as it was going to get, we came to Cloud chamber.

The Green Canal came next and was one of the main things I had been looking forward to, I wasn't disappointed as it was bitterly cold, to the point that you almost don't want to swim because it lets even more cold water into the joints of the neoprene, swimming in boots and caving gear isn't all that easy either, especially when the water is cold and the walls aren't wide enough to get a decent rhythm going, the only incentive is the fact that the canal is deep and sinking is not an option. Once we got to the other end (which was quite a swim) we met up with a rather dry Les, who despite being told that the canal wasn't traversable had managed to do so, admittedly it was incredibly exposed and a little dodgy, but clearly that is nothing in the grand scheme of staying dry.

We did a quick hour detour to the start of the Far North series and then headed back to eventually find ourselves at the edge of The Abyss, which was a cavernous great chamber with a plateau about fifty or sixty feet up, which we would have to climb down. Climbing down involved using a handline and a ladder and was a lot of fun, this chamber provided most of the sport for the trip, including traversing thirty foot up a giant hump with a rift running all the way along the middle - this particular part is called 'The Camel's Back', for obvious reasons.

The lower series was grand and Bakerloo Straight was a visual treat, a great bit of passageway that looked (as the name might suggest) like a black subway tube, sculpted by eons of water into almost complete symmetry.

After a bit of critical three water depth that Clive had neglected to mention, we were back by the ladder that heralded the start of the long crawl, to delay the inevitable we traversed across the side of the crystal lake on a rope that looked to be about one traverse away from rubbing right through, and had a hushed viewing of Flabbergasm Oxbow, very nice and by now I had well and truly overdosed on aesthetics.

Time to leave, and so after a very reasonable few hours of round trip I found myself shrugging my way back through the hour long crawl, it took a relaxed ten minutes and we were out and blinking in the sunlight a short time later (I swam my way back through the lakes to add a bit more value).

DYO is such a pristine cave and as such it stands testimony to the merits of good access controls and a leadership scheme with excellent leaders, many thanks to Clive who gave up his time to provide us with an unforgettable tour.

Later that night Les packed out our infantry cannon with explosives, launching all manner of beer cans and vegetables into the Welsh hillside, at times setting off car alarms with the

shockwaves, at other times jumping in sheer fright when us "bastards" lobbed a lit crow-scarer behind him as he tried to light the one in the breach.

Sunday November 4 2007 **OFD** and my day of reckoning, with Cookie, Les, Clive, Wayne

There was only one fear left for me that I had to conquer, I had managed to get myself over and beyond every obstacle I had so far come across in my short time caving but up until now had always fooled myself that if anything had gone wrong, I wouldn't have died from it but would have instead just ended up badly hurt.

The route we intended to take involved traversing, 120 foot up with no rope or handline and absolutely nothing to stop me falling to my death if I had a 'moment'... I had spent weeks building these traverses up to an almost stupid status, to the point almost that in my mind it wasn't the fall that might kill me, but actually the prospect of even attempting it would.

I did a lot of thinking on this the night beforehand, I've been a bit concerned on a few occasions in the past but I have never allowed myself to turn around and back out of something, so I was resigned to my fate and spent the first part of the trip torturing myself over it.

It was a brisk pace and despite my reservations I was extremely pleased and privileged to be seeing a part of OFD that wasn't on the normal trade routes and so I was determined to give it a go and actually did quite a bit of technical traversing that I barely even noticed, not because it wasn't high up or exposed (it was) but because I was looking for this unholy monster traverse that was going to be my date with destiny (I really had built it up to this level) and so I ignored all the other obstacles and in fact breezed my way over them.

It is strange how important teamwork can be, it isn't just a physical thing in fact a lot of it is just about presence, simply knowing the people you are with can be trusted and have trust in you matters a great deal. I was pretty crap at sports at my school and you tend to pick up a 'fail mentality' which can resurface later in life at inopportune moments IE... at the start of a nasty free-climb or the top of a sodding great traverse (when failing really bloody matters), and while I just have to do something once to conquer it, it is that first step that is the hardest.

So while I had no faith in myself for this one, I took that first step on the word of Les and the rest of the team who knew I could do it, even if I wasn't so sure... it really was quite easy and I quashed nearly a month of pondering and a day of worrying in one bit of traverse.

It's funny, because I was actually disappointed that I couldn't do it again on the return journey, it was a psychological barrier that had been well and truly smashed.

Right after this traverse we free-climbed up a 60 foot aven which I really enjoyed and at some points actually walked my way up, then it was into the oxbow proper and after another hairy traverse (some of us did this with a 'rope', while others avoided it via a squeeze) it was time for Clive to take some photos.

Some amazing formations could be seen up here and various little crystal pools pitted the area. Once Clive was done we kitted up with slings and abseiled the 30 foot or so back down into Midnight passage, from there it was onwards and out, via Shatter pillar which Les tried to push over at exactly the same time I threw a rock at it, clearly he thought the pillar was collapsing and jumped back hooting in alarm for the second time that weekend....wildly amusing!

After all was done and we rested our aching limbs I reflected on

how great this whole caving lark is and really felt like a caver and not just a wannabe and while I like a good laugh (and that happens nearly all the time) there is a side to caving that is serious and personal and sometimes you might even have to stick two fingers up to your own stupid anxieties and learn something about yourself that only your comrades can see.

Different people have different fears, and different caves pull different strings but the people you cave with can be the determining factor between doing something or turning back, perhaps that is why most cavers are so easy to get on with, I think everyone has had to face a gremlin or two in their time and felt all the better for having some mates around to help.

**Kknowme**

Sunday November 4 2007 Wigmores Swallet Chris J. Fiona.

An excellent trip to help Chris take some diving kit down to the dive base. **Fiona**

Wednesday November 7 2007 St. Cuthberts Vern, Biff

I'm not usually one for writing in the Log, but I'm off down St. Cuthberts in a couple of minutes, with Vern, so I'm starting to get nervous.

A couple of hours later and we're out and still in one piece. To be fair it must be said that Vern is still fairly agile. **Biff**

Friday November 9 2007 Swildons 12 Claire Cohen (her idea!),

Kevin Hilton, John Maneely, Mike Thomas, Christine Grosart  
Mike took cylinders in to sump 2 the night before, assisted by Duncan Price. All straight through to 12 in good time. Steady return journey. Excellent curry afterwards, thanks to Claire. Good trip. **Anon**

Saturday November 10 2007 Slaughter Stream Cave. Derek Sanderson. Terry Waller.

Took advantage of the low water conditions and went straight down to Sump 3. Good sighting of a cave trout in a pool just before Dryslade Passage. **Anon**

Saturday November 10 / Sunday November 11 2007 Darkplaces & 28 Days "Try Caving" weekend. Organised by Chris Davies "Root" (Kent USS)

Speed route-march around much of Box Stone Mines, Corsham. In at 1130 PM Jack's Entrance, taking in the Alan Nut's loop, TT, QTR, B12 to Robots, taking in the grilled MOD grilled areas and knocking on doors. Headed for Webb's Store Stairs and X-Deads to see old pictures, up to the water-tank and back down to Cathedral. Out at 3.30 pm. 7 pm we arrive at the WCC Hut and head down Swildons for an introduction to wet caving. Back out at 1000pm and headed to the Hunters for food, and lots of beer.

Walking back at about midnight we were collected by Cookie and taken to the BEC Hut for an extended party. We drank more beer and left at about 3am. 3.30 sat in the Wessex common-room discussing sleep..... sleep actually at about 4am. Woken at about 10am by others arriving. Had breakfast and left for Goatchurch at 1130. Brilliant trip with crawls and drops. I showed everyone the Coal Chute which we did a few times for a giggle, then waited in the Water Chamber for about 15 people to pass through. Headed for the Drainpipe. Once everyone had crawled through I shouted for them all to come back. Good Trip.

Added comments: - Great trip. Thanks to Root. **Winchester**. / Cheers to Root for Re- the gang. **Hairy**. / Excellent trips, thanks

to Root and the Wessex Cave Club for their hospitality. **Sinnerman**. / Great Weekend, thanks to Root and the rest of the gang **POB**

Friday November 16 2007 Rhino Rift Clive W. Christine.

Christine wanted to rig a substantial pot without a queue of impatient SRT enthusiast giving contradictory advice. Despite bats roosting everywhere we sorted out the first three pitches (Left-hand route), having no problem with the infamous bolt. On the way down Clive sat around doing not a lot while Christine rigged efficiently, but on the way out had to do all sorts of crippling tasks like undoing maillons, stuffing ropes into bags and even carrying said bags up pitches. Pleasant, relaxed day, but it might lead to Diccan Pot, Growling Hole, Rat Hole.... and worse. **Clive**

Friday November 16 2007 Daren Cilau (Price's Entrance) Fiona. Adrian F.

We had a n excellent trip into Daren. Started off at Price's entrance. Bailed it for 40 minutes, passed easily then headed down Busman's Holiday. Down a few rope climbs and on to the Antlers. Then to Urchin Oxbow, through Epocalypse Way to the end chokes. We then headed to the Big Chamber Nowhere Near the Entrance, then did Man-in-the-Roof to the climb down. Then back to the Big Chamber etc. and out through the main (Daren Cilau) entrance. **Fiona**

Saturday November 17 2007 Swildons Hole Kevin Hilton, Stuart Gardiner, Clive Westlake, Dan Hiblett & Bob Toogood (Both Eldon PC).

First the Long Round Trip, then the Short Round Trip. 5 Hours and a few minutes - not for the faint-hearted. **Clive**

Friday November 23 2007 Browns Folly Mine Rich, Andy Jay, Fiona, the Weston Brothers, Robert Scammell Esq.  
No real reason.....!

Sunday November 25 2007 Ashwick Grove Middle Rising Graham & Chrissy Price. Fiona.

Re-looked at this site today. I was met by some large boulders and rubble in the entrance to the passageway underneath that continues. I dug, removing some of the boulders for about 30 minutes, until my little bottles would yield no more. Really pleased. I think after a few more visits and boulder pushing and shoving, I will be able to continue along the passage. Excellent stuff. **Fiona**

Sunday November 25 2007 Witherbrook Fiona, Graham & Chrissy Price

My first visit to Witherbrook today. Had an excellent digging trip. I was quite surprised. This cave is quite big with all the new passages that are in there. It's like one massive boulder choke. Very sharp and small..... just my type of cave. It certainly has a lot of potential. **Fiona**

Wednesday November 28 2007 Lionel's Hole. Richard. Fiona. Guy. Jay.

1 Hour 20 minutes. Really enjoyable caving tonight..... lots of mud and squeezes. Very interesting muddy puddle at the bottom. Came out very muddy. **Fiona**

Saturday December 1 2007 Swildons Hole Phil Hendy.

Solo trip. Long Dry to Water Chamber and out via Short Dry to take some photos. Pleasantly wet and I had the cave to myself,

lovely! **Phil**

Saturday December 1 2007 Craig a Ffynnon Adrian F, Fiona. Had an excellent trip into Craig a Ffynnon this Saturday. Went through the First Boulder Choke and then through the Second Boulder Choke. This Choke was excellent; very well formed; then through Travertine Passage, then long crawl through Fourth Boulder Choke and on to The Promised Land. Helped replace some bolts for the ladder pitch then headed into Helectite Passage. The stal is so white and very nice. An excellent trip with all sorts of caving involved - a very nice cave. **Fiona**

Saturday December 8 2007 Soggy Swildons Ade, Jude, Hatstand & Suntan and Bruce for a bit.

Swildons was a touch damp today; water entering through the overflow pipe on arrival. I had finally got my NeoFleece from JRat, so this seemed a fine moment to test it! In via the route formerly known as the Short Dry. Today re-Christened The-Slightly-Shorter-Decidedly-Soggy-Way. The waterfall as you exit downstream of the Water Chamber was very exciting, simply because you couldn't see where you were going. The 8' Drop was very easy to descend, however I have done so in a more controlled manner previously! Jude and I had a lifeline at the 20' and then Jude stopped at the Double Pots. Mark and Bean who had already been to Sump 1, suggested jumping in as the best method of descent. Jude decided that it was too much like jumping into a washing machine! Ade and I continued to Barnes Loop, then Ade went back to keep Jude company while I went down to Sump 1. It looked like a lovely pint of Guinness (Hmmm) and I couldn't find the rope. Getting back up the normally easy climbs was "interesting". Rejoined Ade and Jude at the Double Pots. I climbed most of the way up and then Ade said: "Have you got a good handhold?" before moving out of the way of the water !! The 8' was equally sporting! Then some silliness followed as while we attempted the route known as "The Wet Way". Jude and I both struggled up the Lavatory Pan but were eventually beaten by the water and were 'flushed' back to the Water Chamber, and out the way we came in only by now there was white water flowing down Jacob's Ladder!! On exit we met Andy Sparrow and used my arse as a plug for the pipe. - the water very quickly ran over, and down the manhole. The Neofleece works. A "Fablious" trip in exciting conditions. **Hatstand**

**PS.** Sorry if my nomenclature down Swildons is a bit rubbishy.... if only someone would write a book! **Hatstand**

Saturday December 8 2007 Swildons Upper Fred Felstead Good look around. I was very surprised to find that on the way out I went blind. However it turned out to be a screwed lamp, the battery of which I hadn't changed in nearly a year. All was well as I had a Chemi. Light Stick in my ammo box. They are shite, but it got me out and I shall make the Hunters after all! **Fred**

Saturday December 8 2007 Charterhouse Cave. Pete Hann, Ali, Nigel.

An extremely wet Mendip with streams flowing in all directions across the roads. Charterhouse cave was taking a Swildons sized stream - very impressive. The first section of the Aragonite Crawl (from the Citadel to the Singing Stal) had turned into a respectable duck with only about 20cms of airspace, which provided much muttering from Mr. Hann who complained that the water was flowing up the legs of his fleece and out of the neck! Only a short digging session on this trip but it was

interesting that water could be heard flowing beneath us through the ruckle. A new inlet passage was noted near Splatter Chamber on the way out. This was pushed for a couple of metres and a return visit will be made with a lump-hammer! **Ali**

Sunday December 9 2007 GB Hatstand, Ian Timney, Peter ? (Came with Ian)

A quick Sunday trip to see where the water was to. Foam on the wall suggested 3 high levels. The highest just at the top of the Ladder Dig but probably not enough to sump it. Water today at bottom of ladder. Waterfall very sporting so Ian and Peter went around via a convoluted route.... this was not intentional! **Hatstand**

Sunday December 9 2007 Agen Allwedd Fiona. Adrian F (CSS).

Had an excellent trip down today. Went down Southern Streamway, then Priory Road, then to the digs at the end. This is an excellent cave; a bit like Daren, but much larger and easier caving. I loved the Southern Stream Passage, similar to the entrance crawl in Daren but gentle in comparison. Looking forward to doing the other trips in there. **Fiona**

Saturday December 15 2007 Priddy Green Sink Fiona, Andy S, NikNak

Had an excellent trip down Priddy Green Sink. It was a most enjoyable trip. It was very clean: I really enjoyed Tin Can Alley and Clit Crawl. It's definitely the best way into Swildons. It's a nice sight as you abseil down into Swildons 4 streamway - it's very impressive. Blue Pencil passage is one of my favourite parts of Swildons in its formation! I would recommend this trip: it's crisp, clean and definitely one of Swildon's best. **Fiona**

Saturday December 15 2007 Swinsto Stu, Ellie, Katie Dent.

My first SRT trip since my "Accident", so I was slightly nervous. Dropping into the cave the water was icy cold, with outside temperatures around -1°C. Katie rigged the pull-throughs and we descended the pitches with few incidents. Arriving at the streamway we decided to venture upstreams to have a look at the Rowten sumps, as another group were attempting to free-dive them. Although we didn't locate them we did find the dive line in "White River" Series. We exited the cave at around 1600 and quickly changed into warm clothes: upon picking the wetsuits up from the road, they had frozen and stuck to the tarmac! (Cold !!!). **Stu**

Saturday December 15 2007 Goatchurch (by candlelight).

An excellent turnout of approximately 40 people for a candle-lit party and festive trip down Goatchurch Cavern. It was great to see so many people enter the spirit of the occasion and the party included a Christmas fairy and at least Four Santas. Chris Binding, suitably adorned with flashing antlers, was heard to remark that this was the weirdest caving trip he had been on - he obviously hasn't done enough caving with the Wessex! Everyone arrived safely at the Boulder Chamber where Noel and Carmen had set up a Christmas tree complete with LED lights. After refreshments many of the party continued their exploration to the end of the drainpipe. A very impressive show by the Bifflets (Andrew and George Biffin, aged five) who managed to walk most of the way along the drainpipe!

PS at the end of the drainpipe Carmen demonstrated her hot wax skills but you'd better ask her about that! **Ali**.

Saturday 17 December 2007 - Charterhouse Cave.

Ali Moody, Pete Hahn and Pete Moody (Nigel had been given digging leave to go the Craven Dinner).

The end dig continues to deepen rapidly and we appear to be digging ourselves a pitch. The shaft is now 4 M deep, belling out at the bottom and as the floor has a disconcerting habit of dropping of its own accord, it was thought prudent to install a ladder, ready at the top - just in case. The left-hand wall of the shaft is solid, but all the other sides are "Cement" supported boulders. A useful session with two buckets of cement used and we are now at the same level as the "Inlet" that we could hear, several trips back. This can be seen about 3 metres away, to the Left of us (in an upstream direction). Although the ruckle is fairly open (and extremely dangerous) In this direction it is not possible to reach the inlet at present due to an extremely large and not very well-supported boulder. We are not joking when we tell anyone on cement mixing duties in the ice box (5 M Above, at this point) that it is not wise to wriggle around too much! Pete M, on one of his regular guest appearances, seemed suitably impressed with the way the dig was progressing and stated that the site was worth digging. **Ali**

Saturday December 22 2007 Charterhouse cave. Ali Moody, Peter Han Nigel Graham.

We now have sufficient room at the bottom of the shaft for two of us to continue with the cementing work Pete continued with digging on downwards while I finished stabilising the bottom half of the shaft. Nigel on cement mixing duties in the icebox. Excellent session with five buckets of cement used. **Ali**.

Sunday December 23 2007 Withybrook Slocker Graham & Christy Price, Nigel Graham.

It's their cave now! Plus a bit of surrounding field that the Prices intened as a wild flower meadow. The entrance is a civil engineering object lesson. Graham explained to me how the large silt trap in the swallet stream-bed, built by the county council decades ago to help the brook drain freely away from the road under which it passe, had silted up. Consequently the cave was full of sediment and rubbish. The prices and others are still cleaning it out. The trap and culvert are also subsiding with the stream sitting in a small side passage. The cave lies in steeply dipping bedding planes across the Black Rock / Vallis Vale limestone boundary. The main passage descends past entrance series including a complex, clean washed, boulder ruckle and becomes a strike tube heralded by an elegant cardiodal cross section. The Prices and Dave Cooke are currently digging beyond the heart-shaped passage and in the boulders.

Chrissie took me on a three-dimensional tour through lots of the awkward wriggly boulder squeezes with greengrocery themed names, then down the nice phreatic tube bits, and pointed out the many exposed good fossils, mainly solitary corals. Graham cleared digging spoil. It was the first time I'd visited Withybrook Slocker and I emerged feeling a bit more confident about negotiating unfamiliar awkward squeezey bits. We changed at the Cerberus Cottage, and my first view of the well-equipped new one, although I have stayed at the C S S Old Quarry Cottage. A poster in their club photo display was familiar to me! It advertised a public film show given in St. Pierre-en-Chartreuse in 1980 by in a local club of their explorations for and within that Chartreuse Caves. I had watched that same show with my first club the Dorset Caving Group on what became the Dorset Caving Group's Swan Song tour. Many thanks to Graham and Chrissie for the invitation, tea and toast! **Nigel Graham**.

Friday December 28 2007 Swildons Ali and Pete Moody, Richard Carey.

After the 40 had been "Unplumbed" Peter and I had temporarily stored the pipe in the Oxbows in preparation for an experiment to see what would happen if we filled LowBow with water. In theory this water could find a route into Renascence, but if we ended up permanently flooding Lowbow we didn't think that anyone would get too upset! After much pipe fighting - it is amazingly difficult and hard work to manhandle a 40 metre-long 10 centimetre corrugated pipe, we were able to run a pipe through the bottom of "Soffe" squeeze up to oxbow junction. We then fed it up the upper oxbow to where a dam was built and the pipe plumbed in. The lower oxbow looks impressive with a stream flowing down it, but unfortunately with the pipe in position and rather blocking the squeeze through the puddle this *passable* it is not really *passable* at present! A further 20 metre length pipe will be needed to get the water down LowBow and we hope to complete the work in the next few days **Ali**.

Saturday December 29 2007 Charterhouse Cave Peter Hann, Nigel Graham, Ali and Pete Moody.

Pete Hann bought up another 20 bags of sand to Upper Pitts and we estimate that this year in Charterhouse we must have used approximately 1/2 ton of sand (in addition to what we have sieved from the stream-way) and about six bags of cement. This was the 24<sup>th</sup> digging trip of 2007.

Pete Moody came down to ferry sand and then exited . Pete Hahn started working at the bottom while Ali tried to do some stabilisation just love this point. However a change of plan had to be rapidly adopted when the boulders at the bottom of the shaft, which both Ali and Pete were standing on, what decided to start moving. The cave was quite wet again and we could hear water dripping and flowing somewhere below us The shaft is now about seven metres deep, and we can see down at least another four metres - watch out Templeton - another 25 years of digging Chill Out Choke and you may have competition yet! **Ali**.

Sunday December 30 2007 Rods Pot - Bath Swallet. Pete Hann, Carmen ,Ali Moody, Pete Smith

Sunday afternoon Bimble to sample the through trip. All very straightforward and easy and the connection point - Purple Pot - was descended with a double hand-line. Many thanks to Aubrey Newport, Adrian Vanderplank and NikNak, digging in Bath who laddered Shower Pot for us. Very enjoyable trip **Ali**.

Monday 31 December 2007 Swildons & the Oxbows. Ali and Pete Moody, Pete Hahn, Richard Carey, Nigel Graham.

We took down two more lengths of pipe a 20 Metre length for extending the lower oxbow pipe into LowBow. The second pipe 14 metres, was used to take extra water from the entrance chamber and to feed it into the lower oxbow catchment. With the pipes in position we were able to achieve a good size stream flowing down LowBow. Some of this water disappear has down a small passage on one of the bends part way down lower LowBow while the majority continues down into the final cross rift. Ali then continued to the end of LowBow to inspect what was happening. Everyone else declined the invite to join me (Pussycats) I had hoped that the water would find its way through to the base for the pot at the downstream end of lower LowBow, but this was dry. More worrying was the fact that the water was rapidly ponding up just outside of the small tube that gives access to the final passage and having no wish to become sumped into LowBow I made a swift retreat. Note that this body

size tube was extremely sporting to exit with a stream flowing down it!

In the meantime Pete Hahn had continued down the mainstream way to check the inlets. He found that a considerable increased amount of water was flowing down the drippy stal that you duck under a short distance downstream of the 8 ft drop and just before the bend with the folded strata. This water was also noted to become muddy. Pete Moody had detoured off to Water Chamber Dig, and found that water was now have also flowing into this from a small passage two-thirds of the way down the dig. The new planning system was left turned on overnight to see what would happen **Ali**

**PS** Stu Waldren exiting from a trip to sump 2 trip a couple of hours later reported that there was now a large inlet stream flowing down the true right-hand wall of the mainstream-way 15 metres downstream of the strata bend **Ali**.

Wednesday January 2 2008 **Swildons - Shatter Passage** at.Wayne Starsmore.

Planned solo visit to shatter passage. Inspired by Swildons Book. However, thwarted by mud sump. Only about one inch of airspace, spent an hour baling and opened up enough of a space to be comfortable (about five inches). Unfortunately felt too knackered to continue rest of trip and "discretion being the better part of valour" I beat a retreat **Wayne**

Tuesday January 1 2008 **Swildons** Round-trip and Blue Pencil. Fiona & Jay.

Had an excellent trip this New year's Day. Got to mud sump and did one hours at bailing but still the water wouldn't go down. Luckily Pete, Ali, Rich, Nigel and Peter came across us and very kindly started helping, bailing for a further hour. Finally got it down to a tiny airspace. Very gently went through then Jay followed. It was so nice to get to the other side after all that bailing. Continued on the round trip, down the chain, visited sumps three and four. First trouble needed 20 minutes baling. Emerged fom Swildons after a really good trip. **Fiona**

Wednesday January 2 2008 **Swildons Hole** Pete Hann, Pete and Ali Moody, Aubrey Newport Colin Shapter.

Several 1.5 metre sections of maypole were carried in - giving a total height of six metres - with the aim of having a look at the inlet below the folded strata bend. The maypole was erected on top of the staled boulders about three metres upstream of the inlet. We had hoped that what appeared to be a high-level ledge above this point might give access to the inlet, but found that from the top of the maypole the only route involves a very exposed traverse on sloping mud covered startl with no hand-holds. From this point a bulge in the passage obstructs the view of the inlet and to gain a clear view or access to this passage it will be necessary to move the maypole several metres downstream and position it whether stream cascades down. A further four-metre section of pole will be needed to achieve this. The water level in Water Chamber dig was rechecked, and the end pool was found to be about 15 centimetres deeper and yesterday. The plumbing was removed from LowBow for the time being in order to avoid drawing attention to our new inlet. We hope to return with more Maypole to finish assessing the lead as soon as possible. **Ali**

Friday January 4 2008 **Giants Hole**-- Round trip + Rummage around to find Geology Pot Jon Mason (WCC), James Hassall(WCC), Sally White (UBSS)

The crab walk just oppressive and more relentless as I remember. James's first time down the crab walk and the usual banter ensued "does this ever stop", "Flippppping Hell" etc .My xmas excess meant considerably more grovelling in the water at tight points than last time I was there... With some relief we got to the eating house and had a very quick break.. I decided to have a rummage about to find Geology Pot . Left Sally just by the waterfall whilst James and I went off for a quick look.. I was as impressed and respectful of the trench that you have to bridge over then bold step over to get to the head of Geology Pot. At the pitch head I was very happy with my recent purchase of the 1w LED replacement for the halogen bulb on my DUO 14.. The best 15 quid I've spent for a long time I tell you!! Turns a defunct useless part of the DUO into a rather impressive tight focussed beam of light enabling you check out long pitches. So quick look down the pot and meet back up with Sally and continued the round trip... Spent a little time debating / arguing over the route as the Hitch and Hike guide contradicted the "Classic caves of the peaks" one.... In my opinion the Hitch and Hike one is much better. Example: From the Devils Windpipe ignore all side passages and go straight on... Hitch and Hike "6m beyond the water is a junction. Straight on is Handshake Crawl ending at an impassable restriction connecting back to the main route. Right is the way on"... this is the correct way on.... Anyway, the Devils Windpipe was much lower that last time as I was a little concerned about finding it sumped as really didn't fancy the crab walk in reverse.. and given the time of year was expecting it to be high, but in fact was very low. Exited via the crab walk and back to the car to get naked in 1 or 2 degrees surrounded by an American werewolf in London fog. All in all an good trip, a bit of everything !! **Jon Mason**

Saturday January 5 2008 **Charterhouse Cave** Ali Moody, Pete Hann, Nigel Graham

Good and well-needed cementing session with Pete Hann stabilising a large keystone above the next 2 metre drop and Ali finishing off the lower section of the shaft. Nigel as usual was on cemented mixing duties in the Ice Box - five buckets of cement used and in the end of we ran out of sand. Good draught blowing up the shaft today. A couple of bats were in residence in Singing Stal. First Charterhouse digging trip of 2008. **Ali**.

Saturday January 5 2008 **Daren Cilau**. Adrian F, Fiona.

Had and excellent trip into Daren, taking in two Daren Drums full of kit for the camp on 18 & 19 January. This will be my first camp in the cave. It sure was cold coming out of the entrance last night! **Fiona**

Saturday January 5 2008 **P8 Roof route** Jon Mason (WCC), Sally White (UBSS)

What was supposed to be a quick Sunday morning trip turned into a rather wet good few hours. Heading back towards giants as a good reference point to find the cave, we noticed some cavers in the car park and guess this is the P8 Car park. After a slow painful change into cold wet gear, we set of across the fields. After some 20 to 30 minutes of investigating every single shake hole in site finally found the right (obvious) one. Luckily not the one filled with farmers refuse and a Rotting Dead goat I have to say. We had underestimated the aquatic nature of the cave although I had read the description I knew it would be wet at the entrance but the passages were at points knee deep, which I wasn't expecting. Following the stream way met up with the other cavers at the pitch head given away by the carbide exhaust of the Lead caver. They were doing a bit of SRT tuition for one

of them. Luckily I had planned to do the roof route anyway.. We retraced our steps and found an obvious arête and what looked to be a climb up... again this wasn't what I was expecting, but very cool climb up into the top of the stal and flow stone. A short bridging crawl brings us to the top of the pitch. Which is a body size slot over and down a nice head of stall. I rigged this with Sally overseeing it as she is much more experienced in SRT than I. After a very short abseil there is rebelay followed by another Y hang, so this was good practice for me . Once onto that 2nd Y hang... a rather cool descent into the pot from the middle of the roof aided by one short deviation brings you to floor. Sally started to descend and got stuck around the deviation.. I had made the amateur error of using a small malleon, which whilst my weight on the rope meant it could be removed from the rope, could not be removed whilst there is no weight on it Doh! I knew in the back of my mind I should have used a crab , but was trying to save gear as I was thinking we'd do the 2nd pitch too... so after some faffing about Sally made a graceful descent to the floor. Gracefull as in not all jerky and snappy, like mine. Got up and out of the water and had a look at the description.. We decided not to do the 2nd pitch as this is pretty wet and mostly defunct, also as we were wetter than expected decided to err on the side of caution. We made our way up into the gour passage, but the bold step got the better of Sally... we decided to make a hasty retreat to the warm of the car and imminent callout time to meet!! Ascended the pitch ok and successfully and safely de rigged. We could smell the other cavers getting nearer as the stinky was very obvious up in the roof, we soon heard then splashing about and soon crossed paths as we made our way down the climb. Made our way back to the car and made a very quick job of getting changed and getting in the car... A good trip and very enjoyable free hang through the roof... highly recommended although didn't get that far, it had a nice feel to it. And the SRT is fun. **Jon Mason**

Sunday January 6 2008 **Bath Swallet** Ade, Aubrey.

Down to the dig to see if "Blacks" were a more efficient way of dealing with the large boulders which are hampering progress, sadly they are not - the rock appears to be a quite hard, almost crystalline, Limestone, so in the end we resulted in using more traditional methods. Lots of noise and hopefully lots of broken rock. Both then retired to the Burrington Inn. **Ade**.

Wednesday January 9 2008 **Eastwater** Mud Escalator Guy, Andy, Jay, Fiona.

Had a good trip down the Eastwater. Not my most favourite of trips as there are some drops to navigate the and the bold step, but it was great as we found the Mud Escalator. Had been taken here once before, came out the alternative way to 13 pots. **Fiona**.

Friday January 11 2008 **Swildons Hole**. Ali and Pete Moody, Pete Hahn, Nigel Graham, Richard Carey.

The water piped into LowBow on the 31 December using the 40 plumbing had been left flowing overnight, and the aim of the strip was to:

- (1) Investigate the effects of this water on LowBow and to see if we had that lowly sump the final rift in lower LowBow.
- (2) Check water chamber dig to see how much that this had backed up.
- (3) Investigate the new inlet below the 40 on the right 15 metres downstream of the folded strata bend, which had been observed by Stu Waldren and Mark Helmore while exiting from the cave

yesterday evening.

- (4) Check out the stream way as far as Trats and also St. Paul's series of for a new inlets.

#### Observations

- (1) The water flowing down lower LowBow splits part way down with about a third of it disappearing down a small passage on the right hand in the dog-leg just after the first cross rift. this would appear to be the same quantity that is seen in the Watered Chamber dig. The majority of the water continues to the final cross rift and since yesterdaerday this has washed out the blockage at the downstream end and is flowing away at the bottom of the pot.

- (2) At the end of Water Chamber dig could there is now out a 2 metre long pool but the water level does not appear to be rising above this. The water flowing into Water Chamber dig appears to be disappearing into the right-hand wall near the start of the pool.

- (3) The inlet below the folded strata bend is entering at high-level on the right, then cascades down the flowstone wall of the mainstream passage. A maypole will be needed to check the site out. We believe that this quantity of water plus that entering from the drippy stal (just before the bend) account for all water that we have piped down LowBow.

- (4) The stream way to Trats and St. Paul's series was also checked but no new or increased volume inlets were noted. **Ali**

Friday January 18 2008 **Daren Cilau** (46 Hours, 2 night stay at Hard Rock) Adrian F. Fiona.

Had an excellent trip to camp in Daren. We rolled up on Friday night at Whitewalls and drank tea, then kitted up to leave the surface for underground, bags heavily loaded with Pitts, tins and other tasty delights. Did the walk up the hill with the wind nearly taking us down! Got to the lovely entrance. What a place it is, always waiting to greet you with its little trickle of water. An hour later bags and us arrived at the other side of the crawl, then off went us, through Time Machine, Bonzi Streamway and arrived at Hard Rock. The camp was well underway with Tilly Lamps burning and dinner ready. It's nice - a plate of hot food. Then, for the drinkers, the cocktail game began: there is a very well stocked bar. This continued until 4 AM. Excellent fun to watch. Found a spot to lay my head, to the tune of a lovely little stream. Slept like a log. Woke up and it's still dark; thought, "Where's the daylight?" Felt around, and light on, and it's 10AM to my surprise. Next a bacon breakfast before the day's caving got underway. Oh the fun of wet caving gear... on it slides, the shiver up your back, but not for long. Off we go towards the Restuarant, really nice cave passage. Through the Micron and the Ankle Grinder. Wow, that's some really nice cave. A 20 minute photo shoot and then some more exploring. 1200. High Noon, and then we helped do some digging. Back to camp and helped cook up the evening meal, and excellent chicken and rice. Then the cocktail games began. It was good there was Adrian, Steve, Henry, Andy Snook, Andy, Gonzo and Mad Fiona on this camp. We went to bed a little sooner than 4AM - a more respectable 0130 for a good night's kip..... under the stars! Had a good night's sleep and up at 0830. Time seems strange when there is no sunlight. Had breakfast and then camp broke up at 12 noon. Had an excellent trip out apart from my bag of camp rubbish turned into a dead weight. Gave me some very good entertainment through the entrance - then I saw daylight! Oh Man, that was some trip. Looking forward to the next trip.....Oh the love of the first hot shower after!! **Fiona**

Saturday January 19 2008 **Drunkards Hole** Pete Smith, Carmen.

Trip to survey the cave and take some piccies. Length surveyed is 198M. Depth is 36.5M. We also had a look at Andy Sparrow's dig at the bottom, heading East, away from the rest of

the cave. It looks like a good lead, but very squalid - it may take a lot of work. **Carmen**

## Blasts from the past

### My first caving trip, by Maurice Hewins From the Brightwell Brag, May 1958

"Young Farnham's second caving party left Brightwells shortly before 9 o'clock on the morning of Saturday April 19<sup>th</sup>. We first headed for Woking, where we picked up the Sheerwater contingent and several guides, including Jonah, who was already known to those who went on the September party. (John Thomas had been one of them. Jonah was BEC).

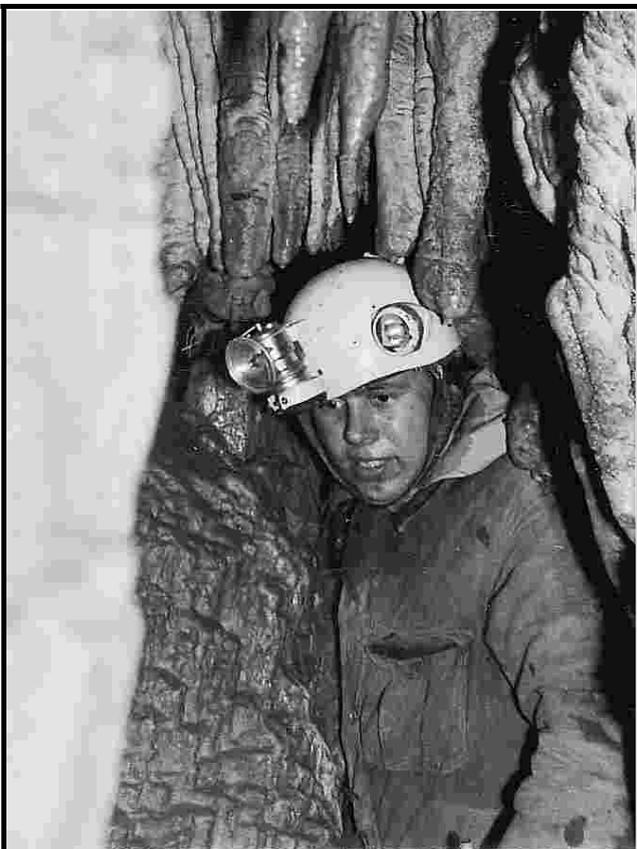
The lorry made good progress westward, and after brief stops at Salisbury and Warminster, where final provisions were bought, arrived at the camping site at Priddy. (The field behind Mains barn, where Albert Main welcomed us.)

No sooner had the gear been unloaded and the tents erected than the first caving group consisting of the nine members who had caving experience prepared to set out. (including John, who is on the left of the group picture.). When they had donned assorted protective clothing, boiler suits, helmets etc, they set out to explore the Eastwater caves with four guides from the Shepton Mallet Club. (One was Black Wally Wilcox and I think another was Ken Dawe)

Half an hour later a second group went out with Jonah



**Eastwater party. John Thomas extreme left.**



**Maurice in Swildons in 1959**

to explore the Swildons Cave. We had with us two other guides for what was our first attempt at pot-holing. Despite this, Jonah cheerfully told us to go down the 40ft waterfall by means of a rope (electron) ladder, assuring us that Noel, another guide would brake our fall with a safety line if we fell. (Yes dear reader I trusted my life to our esteemed Editor!) It was a peculiar feeling, descending inside that dark cylinder, with the rush of the waterfall almost on top of us, while the light from the headlamp of the guide below was periodically dimmed by the steam, which was continually rising from our clothes. From this "40 ft" we move along the cave, though chambers festooned with grotesque rock formations down to the 20ft Pot, another waterfall, and on to the Double Pots, two deep pools of water. Just past here we turned round and returned to the surface by the trickiest route Jonah could find. We had been down four hours.

It was a further half hour before the Eastwater party returned, telling tales of huge drops and narrow ledges on high rock faces. To enter the cave they had lowered themselves down several lengths of rope ladder, and crossed several huge crevasses, apart from losing themselves in a maze of boulders and tunnels.

As each party returned they were served a hot meal in the barn, which was used as a kitchen. The three girls certainly did a fine job here. Despite their rough treatment in Eastwater, the three members of the "Tinberwolves" had enough energy to play a few skiffle numbers before Mr Watts (Farnham Youth Leader) broke up the party, reminding us that the clocks went on half an hour that night and that we had another hard day ahead."

All that was 50 years ago and we live in a vastly different world today. It would be a brave youth leader who would risk running such a trip today. We travelled in the back of a canvass topped lorry, which would now be illegal and our kit was very basic by today's standards. However eight of that party soon joined the Wessex encouraged by Norman Tuck, who persuaded the committee that electing so many at once was a risk worth taking. John and I have fond memories of those who helped us in our

early days on Mendip. Caving friendships do indeed last a lifetime.

**Maurice Hewins.**

**P S.** Now perhaps you will understand why Noel and I keep nagging you to write up your trips either in the Upper Pitts Log or in your own. Because I did, I still know what my first trip was really like.

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

One of the Great Boat Race entrants finally proved the Swildons Connection..... to Wookey Hole.

The Editor's Via Voice system is still struggling to print the recited log-book entries.

Recent gobbledygook has included:

|                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| With few books locker      | Withybrook Slocker       |
| All dine apart             | Aubrey Newport           |
| Rickie Lee                 | Wiggly                   |
| Some prayer or shut Friars | St. Pierre En Chartreuse |
| Go H-reg                   | Goatchurch               |
| Coxed pairs                | Ox bows                  |
| A puppets                  | Upper Pitts              |
| Till some pole             | Swildons Hole            |

But the Editor is not alone in the Gobbledygook world. A recent browse in the Wessex Web-Site, mountain biking pages yielded this (fractionally edited) gem, from AndyC:

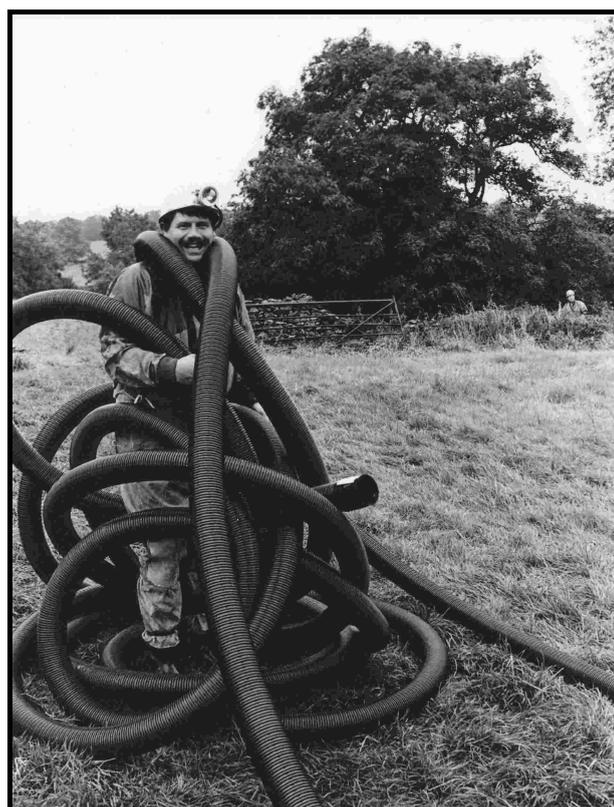
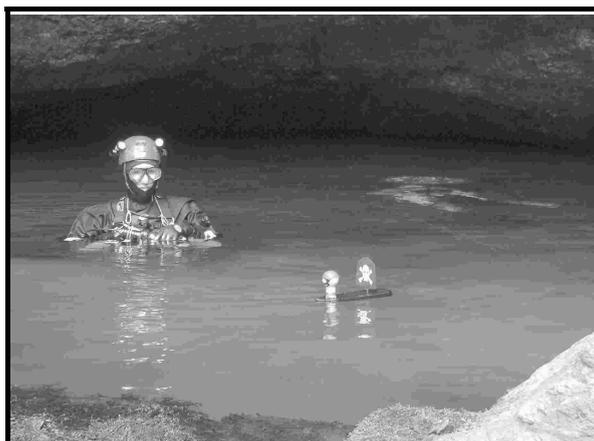
**"I got a bit carried away and put myself on a course so if any one fancies something nice and unique or has an old frame that needs love then drop me a line. I've built myself a nice 853 singlespeed with sliding dropouts. I can put singlespeed or sliding dropouts on an old frame and take off or put on any brazeons you want". That's awe-inspiring; there has to be a light-weight Maypole lurking in there somewhere!**

Reading between the lines is not easy when trying to imagine man- or woman- handling a 60 metre, 4" semi-flexible water pipe around Swildons. This photo of Malc doing a Laocoon wrestling act should give some idea. Fancy that teetering above the 40' , or feeding it around the LowBows?

While Fred Felstead did some technical investigation in Swildons, and writes:

**"As a direct comparison, a Cyalume chemi light gives worse illumination than a candle, but it cannot be blown out. If you're listening, Herbert, which is best?"**

**(Ed. I'll ask Cheramodytes if he can get in touch with Herbert, but I suspect the answer will favour the BDI ).**



# New Members

## We welcome the following new members: -

John Cooper, Somerset  
Graham Price, Radstock  
Jay Woods, Street  
Norman Wright, Glastonbury  
Mark and Megan Whyte, Cheddar.  
and a returning/re-applicant - Ray Borrett, Oxon

**Correction** to the 2007 Membership list addresses: **Jacky Ankerman**, The Garden Cottage, Wookey Hole, Somerset BA5 1BP 01749 679531 jacky.ankerman@tesco.net

**Noel Cleave**: Correct Email is wessexeditor@streamcotts.eclipse.co.uk

## Recent Library Additions

Philip Hendy

### As at 7 February 2008

Axbridge Caving Group Journal (Dec 07) (*Templeton, Combe Down Mines*)

Cave Diving Group N/L 165 (Oct 07)

Chelsea SS N/L 49, 10, 11, 12 (Oct, Nov, Dec 07), 50, 1 (Jan 08)

Craven Pothole Club 'Record' No. 88 (Oct 07)

Craven Pothole Club Record

Descent 198, 199 (Oct/Nov 07, Dec07 / Jan 08)

Grampian SG Bull. 4<sup>th</sup> Series Vol. 3 No. 3 (Oct 07)

Grosvenor CC N/L 141 (Oct 07)

Mendip Caving Group N/L 344, 345 (Aug, Oct 07)

Occ. Pub. 5 A Retrospective View 2007

Mendip Nature Research Committee N/L 115 (Dec 07)

Speleo Club du Perigieux 'Speleo Dordogne' 177-180 (2006)

SUI / Irish CRO 'Underground' No. 71 (Summer 07)

Soc. Speleologique de Wallonie (Belgium) Regards 67 (Oct-Nov 07)

Westminster Speleological Group N/L 2007/4 (Oct 07)

Phelps W. (1836) History and Antiquities of Somerset Vol. 1 Parts 1 & 2

Knight F.A. (1902) The Seaboard of Mendip

Mines of the Sixties (2002) (Donated S. Richardson)

**Workman G. (2007) 105 Days Below (A World Record Underground Camp at Stump Cross Caverns).**

**Donated R. & P. Halliwell**

### MISSING ITEMS

Following a recent stock take, the following books were not in the Library, and have not been signed out. Will whoever has them please return them, or at least let me know that you have them.

Caves Crypts and Catacombs of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire (McEwen)

Wilderness under the Earth (Frank)

Caves and Caverns of Peakland (Crichton)



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# Something to say? Get In Touch With The Wessex Cave Club Committee.....



**By email:**

Visit the website at [www.wessex-cave-club.org](http://www.wessex-cave-club.org). Select "Contact Us" from the menu to email the secretary or other members of the committee.

**By post:**

Club Secretary  
Wessex Cave Club,  
Upper Pitts, Eastwater Lane  
Priddy, Somerset  
BA5 3AX

**Suggestion  
Box:**

Write us a note and drop it into the red mail box in the porch marked for the attention of the committee.

Remember to include your name and contact details and we will come back to you!

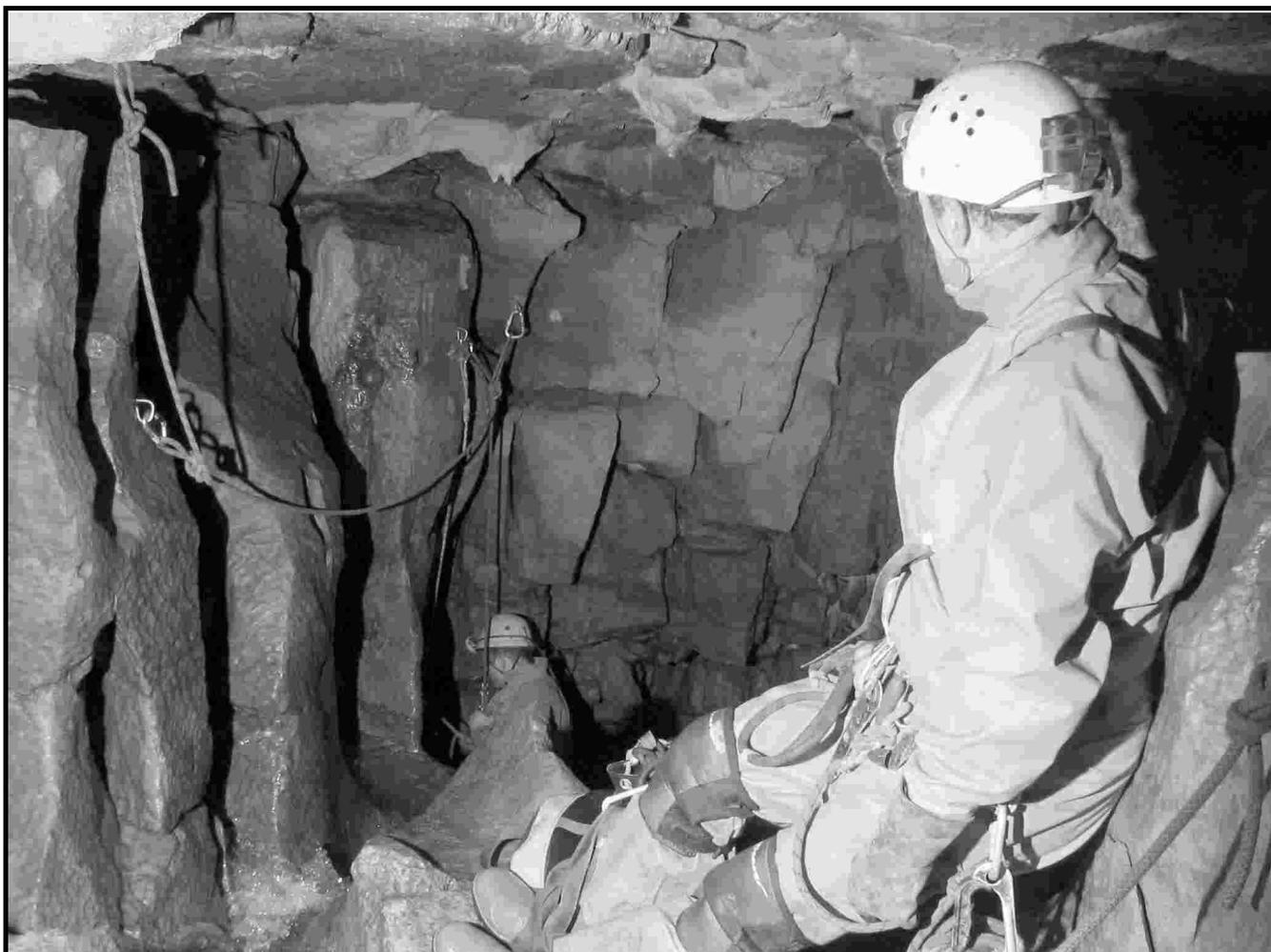
PS – If you would like to read the minutes from the last committee meeting they are on the wall in the library.

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### Diary Dates

|                                                               |                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Geriatrics South Wales</b>                                 | <b>15 Feb</b>      |
| <b>Derbyshire Meet (at Orpheus)</b>                           | <b>21 Feb</b>      |
| <b>Hut booking (Bean) 20 people</b>                           | <b>29 Feb</b>      |
| <b>Committee meeting</b>                                      | <b>06 Apr</b>      |
| <b>CPC ( Ric Halliwell) 20 People</b>                         | <b>20 Mar</b>      |
| <b>Members only WE (Maurice H)</b>                            | <b>12 Apr</b>      |
| <b>Mendip Cavers Fair</b>                                     | <b>06 Jun</b>      |
| <b>Trois Betas - Diau WE</b>                                  | <b>20 / 22 Jun</b> |
| <b>Members only WE - Wessex<br/>Tea Party (see page 135 )</b> | <b>05 Jul</b>      |
| <b>Euro Congress. Vercors (see<br/>page 135 )</b>             | <b>23 / 30 Aug</b> |



**Mark and Bean rigging Diccan Pot.**