



The Wessex Cave Club

JOURNAL

Volume 31 - Number 322 - January 2011



**Lost John's
Cueva del Aguanal
Wessex Man Part Two**

**Foreigners on the lawn
Lanzarote
Monkton Farleigh**

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**Cover Picture:**

Adrian and Claire at the entrance to Jameo de la Puerta Falsa

Taken from the Article starting on page 76, on exploring the lava tubes of Lanzarote by Paul Stillman & Adrian Hall

EDITORIAL

Firstly, a small apology for the time it has taken to get this latest journal out. As I have said before, it is only possible to edit what I receive and for a while, i simply didn't have enough to warrant a journal. One plan the committee have looked at to overcome this is to supplement the journal with simple newsletters. if you think this is a good idea then please let us know.

There have been comments about lack of content from the Upper Pitts log book in the journal. Simply put, I haven't got enough time to transcribe this myself, (the main journal takes the equivalent of 7 working days to complete as it is) so am actively looking for volunteers to help with this. Please let me know if you can help. It is also important that you actually fill in the log with details of your trips as Phil has highlighted in his letter below, otherwise we have no record of what the club's been up to.

So, please, keep on caving, writing about it and sending it in to the journal so we can all read about your adventures.

AndyC

Recent updates

1st Aid Kits - The club now has a supply of these for club trip. They are kept in the tackle store.

Priddy Green parking - Priddy parish council have requested that cavers refrain from parking on the gras in front of the changing barn.

JRat Digging Fund - £50 of this has been given to the team digging in Charterhouse cave.

Fairy Cave Quarry - The gates to the quarry and carpark are now using a combination lock. this combination is kept in the tackle store and the under stair cupboard. BMC members can also fin this on the BMC website

Letter to the Editor

Sir,

Looking at the caving log at Upper Pitts recently, one could get the impression that we do not do a lot of caving. There are very few entries for 2010; so few that the book can be used for 2011 and probably 2012 as well.

I know that a lot of caving is taking place, on Mendip, other parts of the UK as well as Europe and elsewhere. The caving log is our history, and trips need to be written up. This applies to short tourist trips to Sump I as well as epic or marathon trips in severe systems, and digs. If these trips are not recorded, they may as well not have happened, as far as the Club is concerned.

Please, take some time while having a brew after your trip to write it up in the log. It does not need to be fancy – date, cave, cavers and where you went. There is nothing wrong in typing it out at your leisure and pasting it in later, as long as it is recorded.

I am sure that the Editor will be pleased to receive more detailed reports of interesting trips for the Journal. I know we as a Club are doing some great stuff – but it does need recording.

Yours etc.

Phil Hendy

Journal Submissions

Can you please email your text submissions as Microsoft Word files. If you can ensure these are spell checked and correct in grammar and punctuation, then my life is easier and the article is more likely to be published (Proofs will be sent out for checking prior to publication). **Can you send any images separately** (i.e. not embedded in word files) in standard image file formats, ideally high quality Jpegs or Tiffs. All photos need to be supplied with both a caption and a credit to enable them to be used. If your article is of a historical or scientific nature, then can you ensure it is supplied with relevant references and information on abstracts. Information on how to present this can be provided if needed. As a guide, an article of 3300 words will fill 4 sides with images.

A Summer Return to Cueva del Aguanal

Covanera (Spain)

Having quit my job in order to relocate to the north just a week before, I was putting my unemployment worries behind me (for now at least) and was focussing on the task of enjoying myself, doing what I love most for the rest of the summer and having an action packed three weeks in Spain. Jason had just finished two weeks at the Doux de Coly where, with the help of CDG members including a handful from the Wessex, he, Rick Stanton and Jon Volanthen did not have the opportunity to push the end due to awful visibility.

Our first stop was a return trip to Covanera (see WCC journal no.320, Vol. 31), new posh digs (the old house no longer being available), and the chance to enjoy the Spanish summer sun rather than the harsh winter conditions. We headed straight for Cueva de Aguanal, which we had left at Christmas at a rather miserable looking muddy sump which had been preceded by 530m of the continuation of the impressive stream passage. Our first two trips comprised the surveying of the sumps and dry passages from sump one on to sump ten with Teca (Xesus Manteca Fraile) joining us for the first of these. Given the lower water levels the cave felt a little more friendly in the 'tighter' areas and we also decided to re-number the sumps, as some of the airspaces we decided, were simply air bells. I also learned that my



Emsy, kited up and ready to go.

dive knife attachment was far from ideal in these low scrotty places as the knife continually removed itself from its holster and repeatedly tried to stab me in the arm! On one of the trips I nearly lost the end from my spare regulator as it unscrewed itself in the middle of a particularly low sump and deposited itself on the floor for Jason to find as he was following on behind. So, despite the friendly summer conditions the trips weren't without incident.

On the second surveying trip, once the work was done, we took one set of diving kit between us, to our previous end point, the muddy uninspiring sump. On this occasion the earthy smell and the thick foam was not there and the stream flowed gently into a small but inviting sump pool. I kitted up further back from the pool in order to avoid destroying any visibility then crawled in. The sump was low with a gravel floor but ahead it became larger with a silt bank on the right and airspace above. The airspace turned out to be a tiny air bell and the way on continued in good size underwater. Sadly this was to be my turnaround point; this was just a recce dive to see if the sump could be easily passed, and we only had a short reel of line which I then removed. We were to try again the following day, our third day in Aguanal .

Armed with more line (and a set of diving kit each) I set off, passing the silt bank and the airbell, again with no fins and no buoyancy. The sump continued clear and shallow ahead, and after a couple of bends and a small constriction, rose back up to surface on the other side after a dive of about 30m. Wading through the stream in an attractive flowstone covered air bell the way on was soon located but sadly my line ran out after just a few metres. The second sump snaked away invitingly ahead and seemed to me to enlarge further on. I stopped here for a few moments enjoying the view of what was to come before returning to the air bell. Jason had just arrived there, having run a 60 metre tape measure through the first sump in order to survey it and using this, he pushed on further into the second, not finding an end or an airspace. Very pleased with the day's pickings and being aware that we must drive to the Picos de Europa for a separate expedition to Culiembro we exited, surveying my sump on the way home and kicking ourselves for not putting more dive- line on the reel.

Two weeks were to pass before we found ourselves back at Aguanal. A return match was not something we had originally planned to do on that holiday, but the view into the second sump and the excitement of a potential link with Barbancho proved to be too much of a draw. After Culiembro had been de-rigged we drove back to Aguanal and camped a short distance from the cave ready for an early start.

A very slick trip got us to the start of the new sumps in quick time. Jason dived first whilst I waited for 10 minutes before following. I had carried 2 x 3 litre cylinders and Jason had with him a 6 litre and a 3 litre; we had one fin each. The hope was that Jason, laying line, would pass the second of the two new sumps and together we'd then stomp off down

caverns measureless

After shivering to myself for a while I set off at my allotted time, quickly passing the first sump that I had lined just two weeks before, then setting off into the second. There was no sign of Jason. He had lined the second sump with thin white continental string (or death-string as it is often nicknamed by British sump divers used to using thick polypropylene cord) and this just continued on ahead of me in the hazy water. The sump continued low, passing several bends, one or two awkward moves through boulders and one committing section of low wide bedding plane about 6 metres long, forcing me to move slowly through with my head to one side, and still the string continued on ahead and in worsening visibility. With the sump being very shallow, air margins were far from reached when I eventually saw a pair of bright lights approaching me in the gloom; Jason had not passed the sump, and he was on his way home. After exchanging a couple of ok signals I let him pass me, giving him a couple of minute's head-start so we could both retrieve ourselves from the sump without any hold-ups. The route home required all my concentration as visibility had reduced to about a foot and in some of the constrictions, had reduced to zero. Memory of the passage route had a big part to play and I was glad to be following a well-laid

line. Movement was slow and deliberate as I was fearful of the line snapping and pinged off away from me if it were to snag on any of my equipment. In one or two sections that had proved slightly awkward on the inward journey, Jason had waited to make sure I got through and after several minutes we found ourselves on the home side of both sumps shivering, de-kitting and talking about the new find for the first time. Jason had laid 230 metres of line with the sump showing no signs of surfacing and seeming to be getting larger. I had met him at around 180 metres before we both turned around. We were soon warming up on the streamway stomp out as we considered logistics for a further penetration and how much unknown passage may lie between us and the hoped for connection with Barbancho. I left the cave, a very happy little lady, pleased with our adventures so far and excited by what was to come.

What was to come next however, was a 17 hour non-stop drive up through Spain, France and then the misery of a damp drizzly A1 and M62 to Huddersfield the Aguanal / Barbancho connection would have to wait.

Emmy
(Emma Heron)

Lost John's Cave

11/12/2010

Adrian and Jude Vanderplank, Andrea Russe, Clive Westlake, Gordon Kay, Kev and Charlotte Hilton, Pete Hellier and Richard Carey.

This trip had been on the cards since France but the weather looked like defying us with heavy snow and bitter cold. However, at the last moment, there was a thaw and the roads cleared. It was still icy but the roads were passable. We arrived at a warm NPC on Friday night and organised the ropes with Kev to rig Dome Route whilst Jude would take on Centipede. Following a hearty breakfast we loaded up the cars and took the short ride to Leck Fell. When we arrived we met the local diggers who are digging a connection to Notts II. They told us that they could hear the voices of the diggers in Notts II so they believe that they are less than 30 metres away. They informed us that Centipede was already rigged all the way and we were welcome to use their ropes. Splitting into two groups we entered the cave. The streamway was lively with snow melt but wasn't threatening. We left Kev, Charlotte, Clive and Pete at No 1 Hole and headed off along the traverse to Hammer Pot and down the Centipede route. We arrived without difficulty at Battleaxe Traverse. I had imagine it to be more exposed than it actually was and although the traverse line was only rigged to every other bolt did not present too much difficulty. Valhalla is a spectacular 34m pitch. Once past the deviation you soon become aware of the streamway thundering beside you. The 20, will never be the same. It is a bit wet and windy at the bottom so we headed off to the final pitch and then to Groundsheet junction where the master cave is encountered. Ade, Andrea and Jude decided to head back out whilst Gordon and myself decided to push downstream. We passed the inlet

from Rumbling Hole but turned around when the roof lowered and the stream level reached the "ooh line".

On our way back we passed Kev, Charlotte, Clive and Pete at Valhalla. Heading towards the surface we had elected to derig Dome route. No real problems here although the swing out onto Dome pitch was exhilarating and the pitch head did prove a little awkward. After ascending No 1 hole Gordon and I went „exploring% in Quicksand Passage but emerged just in time to stop Kev and Adrian coming to look for us. A truly inspirational trip.

Notts II 12/12/10

Following a good night's rest and refreshments in the New Inn at Clapham once again saw us on Leck Fell. Today we were minus Gordon but had gained Tony Seddon. A slightly longer walk than yesterday gained the entrance and we duly entered the cave. The entrance is a 120m excavated shaft dug into the cave over a period of ten years and is an easy free climb. We soon popped out into the stream way and headed down stream as far as Kleine Scheidegg Chamber. Kev and Pete opted for the crawl to the sump. We the head back up the spectacular streamway to Curry Inlet. Adrian, Pete and Kev opted to carry on upstream to find Inlet No5 which they reported to be even prettier than Curry Inlet. Clive had wanted to photograph a 3m column above the streamway and although we were able to climb up to it were unable to get both sides as a traverse line was required and the stance was very slippery. Thus defeated we headed out of the cave without incident and headed off to Bernie,s for tea. Mission completed

Rich Carey

Wessex Man: Part Two

1970-2010

Willie Stanton's later life on Mendip

A tribute by Jim Hanwell

My review of Willie's early life and background 1930-1970 (in *WCC Journal* Vol.31, No.321, August 2010) noted that his pioneering geological survey work overseas coincided with major political upheavals, first in Angola and then in Portugal. On returning home for good in 1970, Willie also brought several personal causes and concerns to bear on the Mendip caving front. Some amounted to lone campaigns, and I was even tempted to sub-title this account: "From High Priest to Prophet"!

All began well. Within the year, Willie and Angela had bought their dream family home at "Kites Croft" in Westbury-sub-Mendip. Whilst Angela took charge of their 2-acre garden, Willie claimed to be a "gardener's assistant" during the 30-years they subsequently spent together in such idyllic surrounds. Over time they gradually increased their holding by buying other land on the hillside, including the steep roadside verge on the Lippiatt just below Westbury Beacon from which much of Somerset and the distant skyline of neighbouring counties can be seen. He was anxious to protect this vantage point on hearing that it might be fenced off. Such actions typified Willie's wish to safeguard sites that he felt could so easily be spoilt. This outlook also included several favourite caves, of course, and he consistently argued with me that cavers, under the auspices of organisations such as the Council of Southern

Caving Clubs and Charterhouse Caving Committee, ought to buy the land and access rights to key systems on Mendip. He admired the way that the BEC managed Saint Cuthbert's Swallet.

Willie himself, on the other hand, stopped short of joining the necessary committees or attending the inevitable meetings that such undertakings entail. He rarely went to cavers' meetings, for instance, including Wessex AGMs, and was more at home with the "colonial way" of getting things done, to which he had become accustomed. Whilst always willing to be consulted, his preferred solutions were invariably undertaken on his own – to set the example. In time, he achieved most of his objectives by lobbying up-and-coming agencies such as the old Nature Conservancy Council (now Natural England) and the Somerset Wildlife Trust; especially as and when they respectively designated key areas of Mendip as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and created managed nature reserves.

His personal opinions on many environmental issues were forthright, for he suspected consensus decisions as being watered down and weaker viewpoints. As will become apparent later, however, Willie gained the respect and help of many key personalities closely involved with allied causes in the increasingly influential Mendip Society, formed in 1965. This go-ahead lobby was the main driving force that created the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1972, centred on Charterhouse-on-Mendip. Most cavers and caving clubs stayed on the fringes at the time, content with their own specialist world underground. Even the regrettable division of the AONB between slimmed down Somerset and the upstart county of Avon in 1974, seemed largely irrelevant to cavers. Only the Mendip Rescue Organization's call-out procedures via the Police needed up-dating.

Reservoir Hole in Cheddar Gorge, became his particular fiefdom latterly, over a decade after it had been dug into by Luke Devenish and Howard Kenney in the early 1950s. I myself feel that Willie's strong attachment to this key cave also reflected his high regard for both Luke and Howard for their encouragement during his early career as a Mendip caver. Indeed, he told me recently that he had regretted *not* having written-up an appreciation of Luke's formative role among all the other subject matter he had penned over the years. He valued him as a colourful yet unsung hero in many ways, as many of us still do.

Even closer to home, Willie subsequently bought the fields around Brimble Pit Pool and near Cross Swallet after they were made SSSIs. He personally planted 5 acres of native deciduous trees hereabouts, and carefully "tended" the significant small scale karst features, surrounding the pool. Here, even when in his seventies and poorly, Willie



Willie at "Kites Croft", 1973

would spend many hours alone, carefully protecting and monitoring the weathered limestone outcrops exposed around the periglacial lake basin which he had carefully mapped and identified in his joint paper with Derek Ford published in the *Proceedings of the Geologists' Association* (1969). In due course, he pieced together significant evidence for the lengthy chronology of this particular site; in itself a fitting summary of Willie's deep knowledge of Mendip's geological past. Indeed, Brimble Pit Swallet was his last serious cave dig, and he also spent a lot of time opening up another swallet nearby called Locke's Hole. Both sites deserve to be taken on by caring geologists and diggers in memory to his life's work in the area as a whole.

Brimble Pit is an overflow swallet and was first dug by MNRC members such as Mike Baker (1957-58), after it had been deliberately flood-tested as a feeder to the Rodney Stoke Rising (1956). The entire groundwater catchment area of this key rising still remains a mystery, however,



Willie thoughtfully wades across his Brimble Pit Pool, whilst his devoted "Mr. Hunter" stays ashore. Photo by Elizabeth Hawkes (looking North West)

and a fitting challenge to solve by both divers and diggers. Since I myself can claim to be the *original* "Bloke from Rodney Stoke" I feel qualified to encourage this overdue quest. I also know that this was one of Willie's cherished aims. The ultra-fine Ball Clay infill he encountered at depth in his Brimble Pit dig intrigued him a lot (and samples given to Don Thomson, for example, produced some rather nice pots for the record). That such deposits probably formed early in Tertiary times provide telling evidence for *how* the exhumation of central Mendip's ancient core began and, so, *when* our oldest limestone caves formed.

Willie had a knack for spotting minute details that many overlook, then building the big picture they painted when put together. In this respect, he was a meticulous craftsman in the

grand tradition of field science, rather than a flamboyant artist fired by impulse and imagination. Some, however, thought that he provocatively "strayed" at times on issues dear to him! Speculating on such topics as the origin of small scale "snail holes" and the possible home for Britain's oldest people took his fancy, not least because his beloved sites above Westbury had them all to hand. He much enjoyed showing (off) such features on guided tours around his fields, enthusiastically persuading eminent scientists to go on their knees to *hear* snails at work within

his limestone pavements. It was a fortuitous coincidence that the now famous Westbury (Broadmead) Quarry Caves nearby, discovered by chance in the summer of 1969, yielded evidence of early hominids dating back to around 600 000 years ago. And a few weeks later our timely Twin T's breakthrough happened to reveal fine examples of likely "snail holes". Both these finds took place just before Willie's return to Mendip – like welcome home presents on his new doorstep at the foot of the hill. "Wessex Man" had arrived, and would stay for the next forty years!

So, as we say nowadays, Willie "hit the ground running". In addition to his significant chapter on "Mendip Quarries" in *Man and the Mendips* (1971), he and Nick Barrington linked up to publish two editions of their influential guidebook on *The Complete Caves of Mendip* (1970 & 1972). These timely publications were popular, and helped to boost the big increases in caving already underway in the 'seventies. Another revised edition to meet this demand was published later in the decade, to which Willie himself appended eight succinct essays called "A View of the Hills" (1977). Each one was on a favourite topic (hobby-horse) that he wanted to share with everyone and, typically, influence the caving community as a whole. They were Willie's way of bolstering a very fruitful period of cave research on Mendip. When the first edition of *Mendip Underground* written by Dave Irwin and Tony Knibbs was also published later in 1977, however, Willie stopped revising his own guide book records. Looking on the bright side at the time, he wryly remarked to me that at least Howard Kenney's initiative and foresight in setting-up the *Mendip Cave Registry* in 1956 now had good reason to be revived. The registry, he argued, ought to become the definitive index and main source of information on the area's caves and mines in future. There were plenty more things for Willie to do!

Willie, meanwhile, was regularly employed for four days a week as a consultant geologist by the old Bristol Avon River Authority, based at Green Park in Bath. Bob Whittaker, then a force in the Cerberus Speleological Society, as well as BARA itself, did much to champion this appointment and create Willie's main task: to unravel the hydrogeology of the company's main groundwater catchments from the Cotswolds to eastern Mendip, using boreholes and dye-tracing techniques. Bob, whom I mischievously though respectfully dubbed the "wicked Barabobath" (in *WCC Journal* Vol. 11, No.132, Dec 1970, p.171), had already played an influential role in supporting the Mendip Karst Hydrology Research Project undertaken by post-graduate geographers at Bristol University, notably Dave Drew and Tim Atkinson. Willie clearly had all the credentials to extend their work across the region – and the necessary drive. Soon, almost every swallet-to-rising link across Mendip had been dye-traced and timed; several more than once.

He also found time to join NHASA diggers at North Hill Swallet, and open up Lionel's Hole in Burrington Combe. Willie's welcome "guest appearances" at the former led to me calling him "Big Willie"; a deferential term from a simple serf to distinguish him from Mike Thompson "The Master"! Later on, however, Willie pulled rank by calling himself "The Black Knight" (Sir William de Ceddra), whilst

complimenting me with a signed copy of his *Complete Caves* dedicated to “Sir James Nanofathom”. I treasure this gift and fondly recall the fun and banter we had during this halcyon period, just over the wall from the Club’s then new HQ at Upper Pitts. His old bicycle frame, last used when he was at Sidcot School, was donated to “reinforce”



At the newly opened Greenbank Swimming Pool in Street, 1937. Willie (left), his younger sister Sally (centre) and Great Aunt “Janie” Walker holding baby brother Edward. Photo from Elizabeth Hawkes

the concrete base we cast to support the weighty column of pipes that (still) forms the entrance shaft to our North Hill dig. And Willie’s subsequent survey of the cave (WCC *Journal* Vol. 11, No.139, December 1971, p.340) was another masterpiece of whimsy – showing the constricted end of the cave as a “*temporary choke*”! Maybe a new generation of Wessex diggers will be willing to solve this 40-year old stalemate? I for one would welcome Willie’s original optimism being proved right, of course.

The bounds between Willie’s work for BARA and his Mendip playground became truly seamless with the establishment of the mightier Wessex Water Authority in 1974. This takeover created greater statutory powers for key consultants such as Willie. His brief thus expanded to embrace catchment areas throughout Somerset and Dorset, and much of the Wiltshire Downs – an essentially rural area administered from offices in Bath, Bristol and Poole. Here in his trusted Renault 4, Willie ranged the entire field checking and reporting on water abstraction schemes, pollution controls and other environmental issues. He thus literally became “Wessex Man”, with teeth! And, as ever, he revelled in all the fieldwork this job required. Later, he would justifiably moan about the inevitable

“drift” of such *real* observations into the *virtual* world of office-bound studies reliant upon secondary data. He could cite many examples whereby the latter missed spotting crucial factors only evident when the *entire* context of a site was examined firsthand by “seeing eyes”. I agree wholeheartedly!

With Angela and her daughters Jenny (now Jeni) and Susie, we invariably met up as families at the old open-air swimming pool in Wookey Hole on most Sunday mornings throughout the summers during the 1970s, regardless of the weather and bracing water temperatures. Here Willie would perform his distinctive back-dive; a remarkably elegant feat for someone so lanky! It is likely that he perfected this at Street’s Greenbank Pool when a youngster, for this attractive open-air lido was a generous gift to the town from Alice Clark in 1937. “Miss Alice”, remember (see Part One of my tribute), had brought Willie’s father Harry to Street in 1922. Willie himself became a strong swimmer who could easily do “a length and a bit” underwater. Free-diving sumps posed no problem, and he was the first to push the rising in Ludwell Cave in 1951, shortly after hearing about Don Thomson’s near nemesis there (see WCC *Journal* Vol.30, No.318, October 2009). As well as keeping his eyes open, Willie clearly kept a keen ear to the ground and welcomed every opportunity to further his growing list of caving conquests.

From the pleasant sun terraces at Wookey Hole that overlooked Mendip, we regularly discussed at length the significant discoveries being made by cave divers in the Great Cave at the time, and speculated on the possibility of tunnelling to make the round trip that was eventually completed and opened to the public on 27 March 1975. Graham Jackson, who then managed the Caves and Mill for Madame Tussauds, thus employed Willie to produce plans for this undertaking with Mike Riley, an experienced and creative mining engineer, as the project manager. Mike had also caved a bit in Derbyshire, and both men made an ideal complementary and effective team. Meanwhile the management also encouraged and enabled CDG

operations to continue as soon as possible from the forward base in Chamber Nine-two when lulls in blasting allowed. This was long before Health and Safety restraints became issues, of course. Like his predecessors, the Hodgkinsons, Graham Jackson greatly valued the crucial help given by the CDG to the tourist trade at Wookey Hole. Living at the gateway to this village for almost 50 years has given me firsthand experience of the increases in traffic following each new discovery and media event in the caves!



Willie surveys the dry route from the surface to Nine-two in Wookey Hole Cave with Brian Prewer, 1973. Photo by Jim Hanwell

Once the tunnelling was completed and the mill buildings had been restored, Graham extended Willie's brief to create a new Museum display celebrating the unique history of cave exploration and diving enacted at Wookey Hole over the years. A great deal of thought was given to this venture, resulting in some detailed graphics and appropriate caving equipment to explain how Mendip caves formed and had been explored. The former were clear with typically "high-minded" information on local hydrogeology and well-presented rock specimens. The latter focused on the significance of archaeological digs undertaken since 1859 and the discoveries made by the first successful pioneer divers in 1935, and the post-War years. At the time, the Mendip Rescue Organization loaned some of its redundant rescue equipment for display. These items included: MRO's first *Reviva* warm air breathing apparatus; Oliver Lloyd's trusted St. John's carrying sheet; hauling ropes, and spare ladders. It would be interesting to know the whereabouts of such historic gear, now that Willie is gone and his museum no more. Keeping tabs on such objects is better done by bona fide museums rather than commercially run businesses, I feel.

Not to be out-done by Wookey Hole, the management of Gough's Cave at Cheddar employed Willie to survey and help open-up the 40-metre long tunnel that now connects the Pixie Forest more directly with Saint Paul's and King Solomon's Temple. The blasting and excavation works here were undertaken by Luke Devenish in 1975.

The resultant self-guided and one-way tour around these narrower passages met with Willie's approval, for he regarded this as the next best thing to real caving. If only they could switch the permanent illuminations off, and allow temporary darkness ahead to lure people on, as they do at the Yarrangobilly Caves in New South Wales, Australia. Here, admittedly fewer and smaller parties rely upon sensor operated lights as they "explore" passages themselves. Willie was intrigued by this, but rather worried that some visitors could not be trusted. It only required one "rogue", he often argued. His bizarre plans to enable visitors to find their own way around the larger caves in Fairy Cave Quarry never materialised.

Other commissions at Wookey Hole and Cheddar, later on, involved advising on how to deal with unstable rocks above the main entrances to both show caves. Together, we dealt with the former by some rather dramatic "gardening" one day, and Willie then designed the protective canopy below which people now queue under to await a cave guide. The vertical cliffs above Gough's Cave, on the other hand, required more serious security with carefully sited rock bolts – their installation creating a great opportunity for much "free advertising"! I also lent a hand when Willie surveyed all the caves in Ebbor Gorge, after Olive Hodgkinson had given all this lovely unspoilt land to the National Trust in May 1967, in a blaze of publicity.

Sometime over Easter in the early 1970s, whilst negotiations

were underway with the old Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) as to how to manage the new Ebbor Reserve, Willie and Angela went to a secluded slope in Hope Wood to pick flowers and "take" a few plants for their garden. A popular glade, called "Primrose Valley" by children in the know was visited, where it was a longstanding local tradition to collect posies to give parents, and to decorate village churches for Easter festivals. I, too, was one of many who enjoyed seeing the great profusion of Ebbor's early spring primroses at such times. Willie, however, was left with more troubled memories. On returning to his car with a few plants, he was stopped by a passing police patrol; given a severe ticking off, told to replace the plants and apologise to Olive who, by then, had been warned by the NCC to stop people picking *any* wild flowers.

Willie, who had "previous form", having been caught on an illicit trip to the upper passages of the Great Cave as a young student, and firmly reprimanded by the "Wing Co", was thus hauled up again before his rather more magnanimous wife. After telling him that: "Of all people, he should have known better", his misdemeanour was overlooked and Willie offered a conciliatory G&T. But Willie rarely indulged, of course. I wish I had been there, to be sure!

Toar Elliott, a former Wing Commander in the RAF like Olive's late husband Gerard, had been appointed as the Warden to manage and develop the Ebbor Reserve on behalf of the NCC. He also enjoyed a drink! I now



Willie examines a newly excavated trench in Lower Jurassic rocks on the southern edge of Mendip above Chilcote, near Wells, showing evidence of former wave-rounded boulders, 1974. Photo by Jim Hanwell

look back on many heart-searching (breaking) hours spent giving Toar free advice on where new pathways might go to facilitate greater access around what had largely been a wild playground for local people, especially youngsters, until then. Rural "gentrification" may be inevitable but not truly my scene; particularly intrusive signs to warn that "Cliffs are Dangerous". Willie sympathised and faced similar dilemmas, of course, since the rising tide of greater access to the countryside was overwhelming. Times were changing, yet "Primrose Valley" is not a patch on its former

glory these days.

It was also during the mid-1970s that Willie and his loyal diggers spent three years excavating the Mells River Sink; an intriguing cleft in Wadbury Valley at river level which water overflowed *into* during dry conditions, but substantially *from* in wet weather periods. Such intermittent and invariably seasonal sink-or-spring sites are termed “estavelles”, and Willie had good reason to study these tell-tale flows carefully. Wearing his “Wessex Water” hat, he saw this dig as an opportunity to monitor the changing water table levels both downstream and upstream. The water that leaked eastwards from the riverbed was traced to the Hapsford Spring, a major source of water near Frome, whilst the copious winterbourne flows that discharged into the River Mells hereabouts came via feeders to the west, from Leigh-on-Mendip to Whatley. Plans to expand quarries in the latter catchment were afoot, and techniques for environmentally sound sub-water table extraction clearly needed careful investigation.

Christopher Keeler, the County Council’s Minerals Officer, had compiled a major survey on *Quarrying in Somerset* (1971), to which Mendip cavers contributed key information on groundwater and rock structures in the area. It also gave Willie a platform for his strategic plan to meet the growing demands for limestone aggregate in the London area and South East by concentrating quarries into East Mendip, closer to existing railheads. Quarrying on Central and West Mendip might thus be gradually closed down in favour of schemes to enhance the scenic and natural beauty of both areas. His great mistake was to argue that such attributes east of the A37 were less important; particularly when he somewhat thoughtlessly wrote that it was a more suitable “sacrifice area”. Many local people were furious, of course!

Shaken but undeterred, Willie worked hard in and around the Mells River to show how proper pumping and water quality controls could be used effectively to protect the natural environment in such a sensitive area. It need *not* be a contest of rock versus water! He and Wessex Water were assisted by researchers from Bristol University’s Geography Department, such as Tim Atkinson and Pete Smart. Today’s hugely productive quarries, such as Whatley, co-exist alongside attractive riverside walks down Wadbury Valley into Vallis Vale, and are living proof that Willie’s original vision has eventually worked well. But for how long, and what happens to such vast holes when Mendip’s readily won reserves run out? According to Willie, it will be back to *mining stone*, if needs be. New caves may be found!

The subsequent closures of old limestone quarries at Sandford, in Cheddar and around Wells represent the other side of Willie’s “grand design” equation. Maybe they already provide us with glimpses into the future. As I look out my window on Milton Hill to the west of Wells whilst writing this tribute, I recall hours of abseiling off the blasted faces of Underwood and “Split Rock” quarries, side-by-side with Willie, to log and report upon their somewhat unstable structures. Somerset County Council had proposed removing the entire hill down to the water table! Suffice to say here, that our findings and misgivings were supported and quarrying ceased. My untarnished view today is of a wooded hillside with well-established climbing routes

on attractive cliffs by which the well-frequented West Mendip Way passes; all embraced within Mendip’s Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. A discretely hidden yet rather busy enterprise park has grown up nearby. As Willie would argue, these assets have more lasting value than the price of the stone that would otherwise have been removed and spent elsewhere. Such are the benefits of Willie’s legacy to the locality.

Some 27 years after he began his campaign to reform the destructive impact of so many quarries, a well-attended seminar to “Examine the Dilemma Facing Mendip” was held on 23 October 1993 at the Royal Bath & West of England Society show grounds near Shepton Mallet, jointly organised with the Royal Geographical Society. Willie’s reflective contribution to this meeting (in *Mendip Limestone Quarrying: a Conflict of Interests*, 1994) reviewed his work over the years, crediting both the Wessex Water Authority and Wessex Cave Club for their support. Never the best of speakers at such gatherings, he made his case by way of a wide-ranging and complex cost-benefit analysis he himself had devised, and “pre-tested” on me. Briefly, his case rested upon nominally quantifying and tabulating the “values” of different rock types for industrial uses *relative* to their “opportunity costs” for selected amenities if left in the ground. For once, I was unconvinced by his highly subjective comparisons, though such idiosyncrasies give us a good insight into Willie’s passions and unshamed bias. His great love of limestone landscapes led him to assert that: “hard limestone stands head and shoulders above its competitors”; much better and more deserving of preservation than Dartmoor’s granite country, for example.

On a few occasions we went to the Yorkshire Dales together; once on a NHASA outing to bottom Meregill and Tatham Wife holes in very wet weather, and a full field week based at Whernside Manor with a party of my students studying geography and geology. During the latter Willie, went on a through trip from Lancaster Hole to Easegill, and we also visited most of the classic karst sites in the National Park. He was a particularly helpful and valued companion on this memorable trip -- we learned a lot from each other. His family holidays, too, invariably included visits to noted show caves, from lava tubes in Iceland to prehistoric sites in southern Spain.

Willie was an avid “cave collector” with a long list of sites to his credit. He was especially interested in the different ways used to guide and explain the features found in caves. And, as mentioned above, he was for ever “torn” between letting people find out for themselves yet “micro-managing” their behaviour. He went to great lengths to provide “obvious routes” to follow. Such measures included carefully constructed and cemented stone steps, grouted boulder ruckles, taped-off formations and even peep-holes to view vulnerable treasures that had to be protected. Chains were installed on short climbs, but some “moves” made deliberately difficult; to heighten their “challenge” for others to share some of the personal satisfaction he himself had experienced on being the first to get through. One evening in the early-1970s, for example, he invited to me dig once again at Reservoir Hole and sent me on well ahead of the rest, remarking that I might as well push on “as far as possible”. So I did!

Having reached the draughting ruckle that had barred the way on a week or so earlier, I encountered loose boulders which were easy to move aside. The way on suddenly opened out and the heady silence of a big void ahead beckoned. So I crawled on and stood up to get the full benefit of lighting-up my discovery. Hearing voices from way behind, I thought that I ought to slow down the pace of my progress into the unknown. Then, after several very long strides, Willie caught up still urging me to keep going. Always happy to do what I'm told in such circumstances we continued, exchanging awestruck observations as we went. Then, I saw the spent candle!

It soon dawned that I was leading the *second* party to have reached this limit; but, a bit more virgin passage had been deliberately left ahead for us to explore together. Willie had wanted me to share some of his joy in winning this hard won discovery. He also pulled the same stunt on his loyal digging companion, Bob Elliot, and maybe others. I for one am grateful for the gesture and Willie's kindness that night. In due course, Willie also entrusted carefully groomed cave leaders to escort parties down favourite caves which he had gated. Reservoir Hole, of course, and Grebe Swallet Mine at Charterhouse were regarded as his "property", and he bought the land above the latter to be sure. It is good to know that his ally Chris Binding now owns the rights to Grebe, and I was happy to witness the legal contract they exchanged at the time.

Although very busy in the 1970s, Willie's "availability" and firsthand knowledge of Mendip's many caves made him an ideal candidate to join the list of Cave Rescue

of NHASA's eventual discovery of Manor Farm Swallet in September 1973, and made the definitive survey of the cave (published in *UBSS Proceedings* Vol.13, No. 3, September 1974).

Greater links with UBSS publications were forged thereafter and Willie's interests focused more on the Charterhouse-Cheddar area into the 1980s. He was also targeted and "wooded" for contributions by Oliver Lloyd as the new editor of *UBSS Proceedings*, after Prof. Edgar Tratman died in 1978. It was OCL, remember, who had dubbed Willie as Mendip's "High Priest": someone able to convey his knowledge in print with great skill; meet deadlines spot on, and use every opportunity to preach about good practise -- all manna for any keen editor. Willie's Quaker roots and enquiring mind in field sciences blended well and flourished as bountiful contributions to Mendip's caving literature.

The long history and rich geology of the Charterhouse area had fascinated Willie since his schooldays as a Sidcot Speleo'. He played a big part in the protracted and deep post-War dig at Nod's Pot on Piney Sleight, and knew every site in the surrounding area very well. Oliver innocently (cunningly?) baited Willie with a request for an article on his recent dye traces of underground streams on Mendip, to which he obliged, and offered additional notes on archaeological finds found with Roy Vbranch at Mells, for the *Proceedings* (1981). A spate of papers on other subjects followed: the Mells River Sink and an unusual clay conduit at Ubley (1982); miners' shot holes found in Grebe Swallet Mine at Charterhouse (1983); Cornish miners at Charterhouse (1984); Cheddar Gorge and Gough's Cave (1985); snail holes and natural sinkholes at Priddy (1986); Waterwheel Swallet (1987), and the origin of lead ores in Grebe Swallet Mine (1991).

Willie was justifiably proud of his detailed 1984 paper in conjunction with Alan Clarke, for the UBSS, not least because it had taken him on many visits to London, meticulously digging through a mountain of weekly *Mining Journal* issues of mid-1800s vintage, and other rare manuscript records. Coincidentally, this significant paper was published in November 1984 just six months before Oliver died (20 May 1985) -- a suitable swansong to OCL's own far-reaching contributions to caving. When Trevor Shaw succeeded Oliver as the editor of *UBSS Proceedings*, therefore, he clearly inherited a willing ally. Happily, Willie and Trevor had been on the Wessex Cave Club's trip to France in 1949 (already mentioned in Part One of my tributes), and both became noted bibliophiles in the caving world -- especially on Mendip.

I rather think that the 1988 gap in Willie's contributions to the UBSS may be partly my fault since I encouraged him to write-up his account on "The ancient springs, streams and watercourses of the City of Wells" for *Wells Natural History & Archaeological Society Reports* (1987 & 1988) to celebrate the society's centenary. This centenary issue has since been a best-seller at Wells & Mendip Museum, and was the result of much flat-out crawling along the culverts and conduits under the medieval heart of the city by Mike Thompson, Fred Davies, Richard West and me. But don't expect full details of where we went since the property owners who allowed us access forbade any such



Willie prior to being known as "High Priest" of the Wessex, on Mendips' highest point at Blackdown, with friends from Imperial College Mountaineering Club, 1950. Montage by photos by George Lester (Compiled by "Gonzo")

Wardens. For a while, he even agreed to head MRO's Call-out List used by the Police. He was also the obvious choice to survey and write-up reports on key new discoveries. His old friend Richard Kenney, who edited *WCC Journals* (Vol. 12, 1972-73), received and published articles with surveys from Willie on: Fairy Cave Quarry; Rhino Rift; Pounding Pot; the Wookey Hole Ravine; the geology of the Westbury Bone Fissure, and various Water Tracing "notes". He also took over from my original sketch-plan

publication!

Another pressing demand on Willie's time was his appointment as Water Resources Investigations Officer to the National Rivers Authority (Wessex Region) based at Bridgwater, 1989-95. As well as delineating and protecting public water supplies throughout an ever-expanding patch within ancient Wessex, he became involved in schemes to capture and cleanse polluted run-off from major roads, and measures to minimise flood risks. The busy A303 corridor, into Wiltshire especially, presented many challenges and Willie earmarked suitable sites and designs for "biofiltration ponds" en route. He also devised a scheme to monitor and record the behaviour of winterbourne springs feeding old water meadows along key valleys that dissect the chalk downs of Salisbury Plain. Willie continued his weekly "water run" to collect such data for over a decade, long after he retired from the NRA in 1995. Even when very poorly latterly, he and Angela, sometimes with Susie, would regularly revisit these carefully chosen localities, complete with note-pad and picnic. Willie continued to send his "returns" to the NRA for their records, though became increasingly sceptical that this research was still valued let alone being continued for posterity.

Throughout his life, Willie's campaigns and work commitments naturally allied him with kindred personalities concerned with conservation issues on Mendip. However, he did not always see eye-to-eye with the opinions of the growing number of worriers and watchdogs whose preferred views of what needed to be protected often clashed. Like me, he thought that too many rock outcrops and cliff faces were becoming overgrown and obscured, and Mendip's craggy features less valued by some wildlife enthusiasts. We shared a deep nostalgia for the "bleaker" and more open vistas of the pre-myxomatosis limestone landscape we enjoyed as youngsters. Much later, his own plantation of native trees (already mentioned) still stands and grows as a reminder that even Willie was willing to follow fashion in due course.

Key figures in the early years of the Mendip Society greatly supported Willie's causes after he returned to Mendip in 1970. This influential body had been inaugurated at Sid Hobbs' house in Priddy at the end of February 1965, with Alan Thomas and other locally resident cavers present such as Mike Thompson and me. The deal to go ahead with a proposed "Mendip Preservation Society" was sealed later that night in the Hunters', of course. Here Alan and Sid especially raised several toasts to what they dubbed as the "Mendip Republican Army"; another fine example of BEC initiative and excess! In truth, they wished to create a forum that brought together those wishing to be informed on matters that might adversely affect Mendip's "rural amenities", e.g. a proposed cable railway in Cheddar Gorge and plans to quarry at Crook Peak. On 15 May 1965 they convened a full general meeting at Wells Museum at which the society was launched. Annual subscriptions of 2/6d were approved – barely the cost of a pint of beer at the time!

By 1970 the society's membership exceeded 500, and a new executive elected who chose to slim the name to the "Mendip Society". Dropping "preservation" signalled a change of heart; more people coming to and enjoying

the area would naturally swell the numbers who shared the society's aims. Len Cram, a local lad from Cheddar became the new Chairman from 1974 until his too-early death in 1991. Len was educated at Wells Blue School and studied sciences at Bristol University in the 1930s. After the War, he returned to Wells to manage one of EMI's more successful research groups. It was Len who appointed Brian Prewer to his team in 1958, and several other local "EMI cavers". He knew Herbert Balch well and was a member of the Cerberus Speleological Society when Balch Cave was discovered in November 1961.

Len also came to know Willie and positively empathised with his work on Mendip.

Lucky Willie, for Len carried much clout, and was equally outspoken on conservation issues. Brian feels sure that the little dialect ditties by a hitherto mysterious "LC", as footnotes in Willie's first edition of *The Complete Caves of Mendip* (1970), originally came from Len Cram. Getting rid of as many sycamores as possible across Mendip was just one of Len's many missions, for he championed biodiversity outdoors and nurtured different viewpoints to mull over. Brian regarded him as "a great boss", well able to get things done. Len, in fact, was the prime mover in getting central Mendip designated as an AONB in 1972 on his watch (see earlier), and I often wondered how he felt when new county boundary between Somerset and Avon in 1974 saw its administration carved into two, for he revelled in fieldwork rather than unnecessary committee chores. Happily, Len's secluded woodland home at Shute Shelve was *just* on the Somerset side of the ancient boundary between the parishes of Axbridge and Winscombe, and the popular West Mendip Way footpath ran past his garden. He approved of such amenities.

Another leading light in the Mendip Society was Vic Dennison, who lived along the A38 from Len at Churchill. The infectious enthusiasm of both men led to a large number of Winscombe folk becoming active members of the society. Vic, an enthusiastic and avuncular fellow geographer, was well known nationwide, and a former President of the Bristol Naturalists' Society, 1983 & 1984. He naturally held similar views to Willie concerning the protection and promotion of Mendip's karst features in particular, and became a powerful acolyte, well connected to the great and good in the geographical world. Willie was pleased to have such disciples rooting on his behalf, of course.

Vic was thus an ideal successor to Len, and became Chairman of the Mendip Society in 1991 until his sad death in 1996, aged 77. The *Proceedings of the Bristol Naturalists' Society* Volume 55 (for 1995) was subsequently dedicated to Vic's memory when published in 1997. This fact-packed *Special Issue* No.1 focused on Vic's beloved haunts and interests on Mendip, and is well worth reading. It contains Willie's contribution on "Ancient ponds and farm water supplies on Mendip", and concludes with key papers on Mendip's geology and geomorphology by younger peers such as Pete Smart and Andy Farrant in particular.

Willie's reputation for writing about so many subjects was also highly regarded by the wider Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT), for its Director, Roger Martin, became an influential fan and friend (see later). Roger, who lived in

Coxley near Wells, was a well-travelled career diplomat for 22 years before he resigned “in fury” as a Deputy High Commissioner in the late-1980s to become an ardent environmentalist. Fortunately, his brother Christopher was headmaster of Millfield School (1990-98) just down the road at Street. This distinctive school enjoyed longstanding links with the Clark family, and still does. Ralph Clark, for example, was appointed chairman of the school’s governors at the time. By now, those who have read my account of Willie’s early life and background rooted in Street may thus see the potential for such strong social branches to bear fruit later on; for Ralph Clark became President of the Mendip Society 1990-99, and was succeeded by Roger Martin from 2001 to the present. Willie’s place in this high-powered network was invaluable to those holding the reins. Who you know and respect still matters, of course.

At a less political, but more essential and basic level maybe, was Willie’s longstanding involvement with professional geologists who lived in Somerset and occasionally met to exchange views on matters of mutual interest that arose in the county. They called themselves the Geological Advisory Group (GAG), and were kept in touch with each other by Hugh Prudden who lived at Montacute, near Yeovil (he still does). The first meetings took place in Wells at Evelyn Franklin’s home in Ash Lane in the late-1970s when she was fiercely campaigning to protect Asham Wood from being quarried on East Mendip. She invited me along to these discussions, and further sessions were held at Wells Museum in the early 1980s when Prof. Desmond Donovan was the resident Curator. Hugh, one of my more eccentric friends, joined in and then ran GAG as an information service to local authorities, and planners in particular. He kept tabs on key geological sites across Somerset and eastern Mendip in particular. Hugh also regarded Willie as his main informant on Mendip matters, and even managed to attract him to GAG meetings – not least because they were such informal and sociable occasions. Several were hosted by Willie at “Kites Croft”. I, too, have a high regard for personalities at the grass roots, who know their localities and subject matter in depth. For me, they are unsung heroes.

Willie was awarded a MBE in 1993 for his considerable contributions to our understanding of groundwater resources, notably throughout the Wessex region. He also sought a wider audience for his views with scientific papers to reputable regional and national journals, such as the Bristol Naturalists’ Society *Proceedings* (1986 & 1998), the *New Scientist* (1989 & 1993), and key chapters within multi-authored books such as the *Hot Springs of Bath* (1991) and *Westbury Cave* (1999). A prolific file of letters to local newspapers, particularly weekly issues of the *Wells Journal*, will also be on record, covering a wide range of subjects. In Willie’s own words (written on 17 September 2004) these were on: “historical curiosities, little known environmental facts, criticising conventional wisdom, making unfashionable predictions, or just for entertainment”. He gave badgers, bullfinches and slugs a very bad press, but liked bull fighting when in Portugal and stock car racing back home at Tynning’s Farm, Charterhouse. Although he himself never rode a horse, he supported those

who did and the Mendip Farmers’ Hunt in particular.

Keen cavers who are sure of themselves, and do so much over several decades, are bound to make a few mistakes, of course. A couple of Willie’s gaffs can be cited; respectively arousing the ire of cavers and farmers in Priddy. The former occurred when he unilaterally installed fixed aids on the Twenty Foot Pot in Swildon’s Hole during August 1964; causing a furore that was soon resolved (see *Swildon’s Hole: 100 years of Exploration*, p.77). The latter, on the other hand, created a longer lasting rumpus in the 1980s when the former NCC (now Natural England) sent unsolicited letters to local landowners within the large groundwater catchment of Wookey Hole Cave, stating that in future the NCC required advance notice of so-called “potentially damaging” land use practises, in order to protect central Mendip’s aquifer, and the Priddy Caves SSSI in particular.

Outraged farmers blamed cavers, and Willie especially, for such draconian “instructions” out-of-the blue. Several threatened to close their caves! Sludge Pit and Nine Barrows Swallet were shut, for example, and sadly still are. Suffice here to note that Mike Thompson agreed to deal freely with any legal proceedings such controls might provoke, whilst I tried to tone down this high-handed action by the NCC hierarchy, based in Peterborough. After much correspondence and several meetings, their rather presumptive proposal was withdrawn. Peace and commonsense have reigned ever since, and bygones forgotten. All of us blot our copybook on occasion(s).

Looking back over Willie’s lifelong involvement with Mendip caving, I am struck by the consistency of his approach when attitudes at large were changing so fast. He maintained his do-it-yourself outlook to a fault, whilst doing more than most to give others the opportunities he himself had enjoyed in his youth. He put pen to paper in order to help the next generation; but would not join in the action of taking beginners underground, contending that this was far better done by caving clubs. Willie thus advocated the old Affiliated Club Scheme which had underpinned the success of the Wessex for so many years, including his own schooldays. He also admired how it was done by the Scouts, notably Fred Davies – another lad brought up in Street where the Clark’s dynasty reigned. Fred taught at Millfield for a while in his heyday, and inspired many young people to become competent cave explorers by taking small and safe steps into the unknown.

Willie approved of the little booklet that Fred and I wrote for the Council of Southern Caving Clubs entitled *Caving for Beginners* (1974), not least because we commended that it was better to encourage small groups of like-minded friends to go ahead slowly and surely, doing as much as possible on their *own*; just as Willie had done so successfully with his fellow Sidcot School Speleos. We did not favour large parties kitted-out with borrowed gear going on *over-ambitious* “ventures”. Being strung out in crocodile fashion, merely following “leaders” and the boots ahead on long trips, was not the sort of caving we enjoyed. Nor were such ventures seemingly effective in the long run. Yet trips like this soon became in vogue, of course, as evident in the rise of cave rescue call-outs from the mid-1970s into the 1980s. Both of us were even

sceptical of courses that purported to train “leaders”; but we were outnumbered and outdated at the time. Outdoor activities were on a roll.

The well-tried tradition of slowly *inducting* carefully selected groups of school children into caving on Mendip down the smaller caves in Burrington, as practised by Tom Elkin on residential courses at the Charterhouse Centre, was much more appropriate. And I do not recall any rescue call-outs arising from the countless trips he undertook. Nowadays, these lessons seem to have been learnt and our misgivings have mellowed. The big boom of novice caving in large parties seems to be over, and a more sensible steady-state flow of new blood has returned, where individuals matter. But where and how will the future generation of young “Willie’s” be enthused nowadays in our risk-averse, safety-first society, especially in schools? Established clubs such as the Wessex have a big roll here, as ever.

Willie’s well-proven way was to welcome and groom already seasoned cavers to his pet projects. In the last edition of *The Complete Caves* (1977) he acknowledges dedicated fellow diggers such as; Alan Clarke, Will Edwards, Bob Elliott and Roy Vbranch “for good company and pitiless criticism”. If another updated edition had been written a decade or so later, he would have undoubtedly added Pete Hann to his list of regulars; a new hand to his team whom he encouraged to join the Wessex. In one of our last chats at his bedside, Willie expressed his delight at the great new discoveries being made in Upper Flood Swallet and Charterhouse Cave; noting with obvious nostalgia that he had been among the first diggers at both systems in his day. He was glad that Pete was playing a key part in exploring the latter, of course – and felt that he was carrying his torch.

When Willie retired from work in 1995, he threw himself into totally new territory to write an ambitious book on humankind’s future worldwide. He had often expressed his concern that were too many people increasingly depleting Earth’s finite resources, and sleep-walking into a bleak future. He was “determined to publish his own findings” (his words) to wake everyone up. Willie, who had already enlisted as a founder member of the Optimum Population Trust in 1991, was very familiar with Darwin’s work on *Evolution* (1859), of course, though less so with the dire prophecies made by Thomas Malthus in his essays on the principles of population (1798 – 1826). Since geographers like me taught about such demographic studies, and I had covered key topics with Willie’s daughter Susie during her A-level course, I came in for some searching questions.

Many of our discussions went into the small hours! He listened and learned fast, but held firm views of his own which he would not debate. For example, Malthus had restricted his theory to “a limited territory”, and thought that the life on Earth had been created within “a week”. At the end of the eighteenth century, it was generally accepted that global changes happened as extreme events; such as wars, revolutions, famines and major catastrophes in the natural world. An awareness that tiny changes occurred over much longer periods of time only dawned in the mid-1800s following Charles Darwin’s proposals on *Evolution*. And nowadays, the processes of adaptation and *natural*

selection are accepted by most of us. So far so good, for we had both studied geology and knew the score. Unlike Willie, however, I had also been convinced by clear evidence that peoples’ *outlooks*, too, would change and adapt if they were made more aware of the very problems foreseen by Malthus, and his successors. As a teacher of geography, *education* clearly mattered to me, and it must surely have been one of Willie’s objectives in writing his book!

Whilst no expert in human affairs, I had long since accepted the wide body of research that colleagues had undertaken in such social and cultural fields. I even headed a large “Social Studies” faculty as my job (a label I was given yet disliked). Willie, on the other hand, stubbornly refuted the theory of “demographic transition” as being just another instance of today’s “political correctness”. His own preferred blend of *original* Malthusian principles with *social* Darwinism led him to conclude that the Apocalypse was inevitable, and nigh. There was no room for my optimism! Willie wanted to warn (and scare) with worst case scenarios. His controversial book entitled: *The rapid growth of human populations 1750-2000* (2003), clearly provoked and kindled this globally significant debate. My miniscule role in reading all his drafts and final proofs is kindly acknowledged by Willie in the introduction to his hard won *magnum opus*.

Our “high priest” of Mendip underground was thus promoted to “prophet” status by disciples of his book. Although a few have claimed it to be a rant, Willie’s account has won widespread approval from internationally respected environmentalists, and key activists in such fields. His main champion Roger Martin, for example, became Chairman of the Optimum Population Trust in 2009, and continues to spread Willie’s words and warnings, as evident on the Internet. In the end, Willie himself seemed content that he had achieved his purpose.

Finally, we must all come back to earth! After breaking his ribs (twice) when slipping on the steep greasy slopes around his Brimble Pit dig, Willie was diagnosed as having multiple myelomatosis (bone marrow tumours). The so-called “noughties” would prove to be his last years. His well-publicised views on mortality had long since led him to be a staunch supporter of voluntary euthanasia in such circumstances. So, true to form in personally setting examples, he and Angela tried to end their lives together in the final fall of 2009. But Willie alone survived the attempt, and much controversy and media attention ensued well into the New Year. The subject of assisted suicide even became topical at the time, and Willie willingly contributed to this debate, even whilst bed ridden. Fellow Mendip cavers helped him through these traumatic times, as good friends do. Nigel Taylor played a stalwart role at the worst time, and Martin Grass sensitively managed the relentless media coverage that followed to the bitter end.

Here, I dare to add a lighter and by no means trivial note that Willie himself would appreciate. Both Nigel and Martin are prominent members of the BEC, of course, and whilst Willie was not that familiar with the last lines of the “Wessex Song”, he was clearly sure of help from the “Other Club” when it mattered most. “Wessex Man rescued by BEC” comes to mind! He died in his own bed at “Kites

Croft” on 30 January 2010, overlooking wonderful views across the moors of the Axe and Brue to his childhood home at Street, and much of Somerset beyond. It was a gloriously sunny day.

Like everyone, I was delighted to hear that Willie’s remarkable career as a Mendip caver, going back to Balch, the Club’s first President, was suitably acknowledged when he was made a Vice-President of the Wessex in 2009. He had also been made an Honorary Member of the UBSS back in 1983 during Oliver Lloyd’s stint as editor (see above). Having helped in the early days of digging at Upper Flood Swallet (formerly called Blackmoor Flood Swallet) and Charterhouse Cave, he welcomed hearing about the eventual breakthroughs and exploration of both systems in due course. On several occasions, Willie often reminded me that he was a “very private man” who did not seek the limelight, nor indulge in the social scene enjoyed by Mendip’s caving community. In such respects, he remained true to his Quaker roots in Street; seemingly sure that he had much to offer his chosen profession as a geologist and as a doyen of Mendip caving, chiefly by way of writing up his work in both fields -- for a full 70 years.

Thanks to his two daughters Jeni and Susie, especially, most of Willie’s original diaries, cave surveys and related records have been donated to Wells & Mendip Museum, where his early years as a caver were nurtured by Herbert Balch. He also wanted the Mendip Cave Registry to help preserve these records for posterity, and this wish is now in the capable hands of Alan Gray.

Angela’s and Willie’s funerals respectively took place as tranquil woodland burials at Cholderton on Salisbury Plain, near the A303. Those who may have expected a site on Mendip more likely might reflect that this woodland lies almost midway between their childhood homes in London and Street. Latterly both had also spent many happy hours together in this locality on his chalk downland “water run”. In any case, Willie liked to surprise us! He thus lies on a hilltop in the heart of ancient Wessex, near so many others from British history. By coincidence, his burial on 10 February 2010 coincided with the moment that the book *Wookey Hole: 75 years of cave diving & exploration* went to the printers. This volume includes Willie’s chapter on “The Great Cave Surveyed”; his final contribution to Mendip’s valued literature on caves.

Often after digging at Reservoir Hole on a still night, Willie liked to hear his own voice echo from the cliffs by shouting loudly to his mentor Balch: “HERBERT.....”. A sonorous reply faithfully resonated back. Anyone going there who wishes to call Willie likewise can be sure of a reply, too!

Finally, there was one outstanding account that Willie grappled with but never finished. He called this file: *No Escape from Consciousness*, for he felt and hoped that our minds held acquired knowledge and wisdom which might even last beyond death. On rare occasions he raised such thoughts with me, and was initially inclined to believe in reincarnation, though *not* resurrection! In a final note on such deeply philosophical issues, he concludes: “I have spent hours – days – puzzling about how to express my thought in words, without success”. For my part here, I

can only add that memories of Willie will live long through his written works. His accounts have afforded us hours of enlightenment and pleasure already -- and still pose many challenges for Mendip cavers in future.

Acknowledgments:

An appreciation of Willie’s exploratory work entitled “The Consummate Digger” will be found in *Descent* (April/May 2010) by Richard Witcombe, and I have reviewed his lifetime achievements in Wells Natural History & Archaeological Society’s *Report* (2009/2010). Many other obituaries have been widely published, of course; but I have felt that “Wessex Man” required a special effort for the Club he joined in 1949.

My two-part tribute to Willie deliberately spans the bigger picture of the caving scene on Mendip since the 1940s. He became Herbert Balch’s worthy successor during the second half of the twentieth century, and I feel privileged to have been around at the right time and in the perfect place to have known both of them. Whilst mentioning many Wessex members, and other caving friends over the years, I have also made a conscious effort to include Willie’s contacts and links with his wider world. All have played a part, and I apologise to any I have unwittingly overlooked. Elizabeth and Christopher Hawkes have helped me a lot with Willie’s intriguing family history and background. Brian Prewer has, as ever, been willing to scan suitable photographs for the record, the sources for which are given in the captions with my thanks. Our President, Donald Thomson, also helped to enhance some old prints and my syntax. Richard Witcombe kindly read and advised on improvements to my text (something that Willie was always willing to do), and my old friend Derek Ford has encouraged me from afar. Our Editor, Andy Chamberlain (whose late father I knew well as a schoolboy) has given me a free rein to write at length on one of the Club’s and Mendip’s most influential personalities. My subject, “Wessex Man”, clearly deserves to be well remembered, in print. I also cherish fond memories of my near neighbour and his family along the road at Westbury-sub-Mendip. And, as “Uncle Jim” to Jeni and Susie, I deeply appreciate their kindest gesture in letting me read Willie’s and Angela’s last words. Both “girls” did their parents proud, and a large number of friends met at the Quaker-style gathering, to celebrate the full lives that Willie and Angela had enjoyed together, on 10 July 2010 in Draycott’s Memorial Hall: barely a stone’s throw from where I was born and raised.

Jim Hanwell

Wookey Hole, November 2010

Lanzarote

A holiday report. By Paul Stillman and Adrian Hall.

On the 10th of October 2010 a group of eight friends left Bristol for Lanzarote comprising of four MNRC, three Wessex members and a civilian (my partner Kate) would they return as friends? Our plan was to have a good break but certainly not spend the time on the beach or in The Red Lion and from speaking to Chris Binding about his visit to the lava tubes this sounded very appealing and worth a look.

So armed with our maps, tube locations and caving gear we reluctantly left our four bed luxury villa in Costa Teguisse with its own pool to find some hot lava action. Our first stop was Jameo de la Gente which is not far from the road and has a well worn path to guide the first time visitor. The Jameo (collapsed lava tunnel) is a very impressive cactus and boulder strewn hollow measuring approx 200ft by 50ft wide and 40ft deep. With the volcano stack on the left and deep blue sea to the right the view is amazing. This was too good to be true and as always it was. The entrance to our first lava tube experience was barred by a rather anxious hungry looking

dog. We avoided eye contact and then saw the shot gun cartridge littered ground. This was going well! After a bit of 'you go first, no after you' we made our way into the impressive arched entrance. Down a rickety wooden ladder and we were soon out of daylight where we could feel the humidity increasing. Another characteristic of the lava tubes is the complete sound deadening qualities which was almost as unnerving as the dog.

The average size of the passage was 25ft wide and 60 high with one very short constriction. We soon ditched our helmets and started to enjoy this very un-Mendip world.

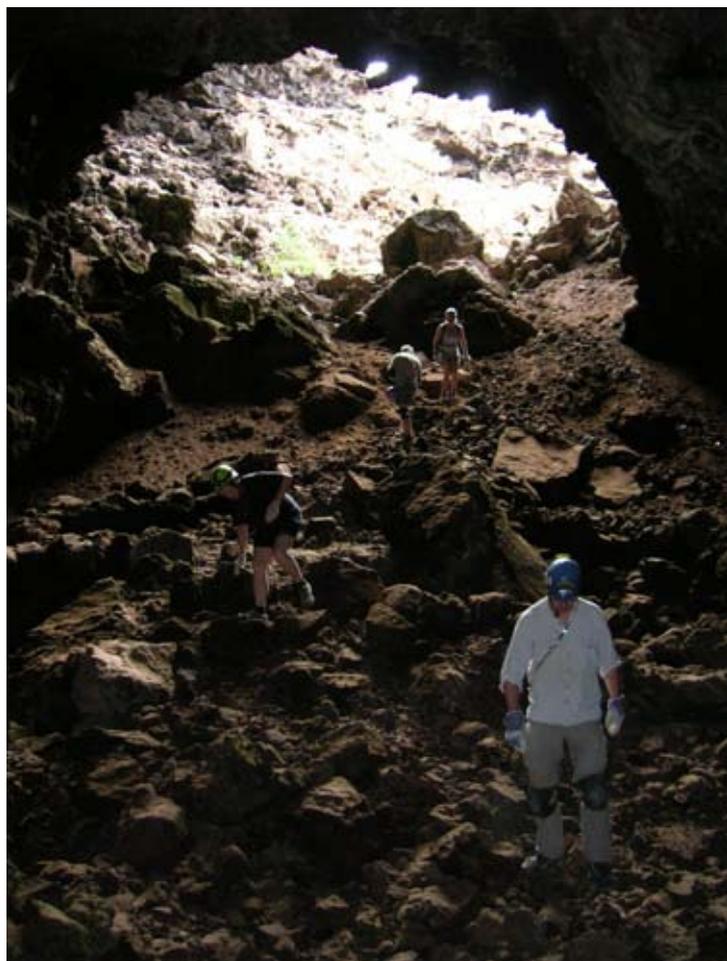
After 50 minutes with stops for a few photos we scrambled up a large run-in which had marvellous (stalactite looking) drips of lava on a narrow balcony and an uninviting, after the previous big dimensions, hands and knees crawl. This coupled with the high humidity made the decision to turn back easy. At the bottom of the choke a smaller passage was issuing a very welcome draught and while we cooled down here Adrian had a look further on. "It gets bigger" came the cry and we dually followed into a smaller inlet which soon became walking sized again and after a few minutes we were confronted with a pitch which links with the Monte Corona Tube system. With no rope we had reached our end and after a few more photos made our way out for lunch.

Our second trip of the day was from the same Jamea but going down flow this time to exit at Jameo de la Puerta Falsa and walk back along the road to the cars. The arched entrance is of similar grand proportions but has much more boulder hopping involved and you spend a lot of time looking at the floor instead of enjoying the high roof, long S shaped bends and the occasional balcony. Another feature here is the vast quantities of grey dust like ash which builds up like a sand dune on the floor and once disturbed turns ones hair even greyer! After an hour we exited into lovely sunshine and went to watch the climbers at the other end of the Jamea. We were able to find out from them that this other entrance also went on a good distance so a return trip was planned.

Our collection of lower leg scrapes and scratches was already growing nicely.

After a day of visiting the Timanfeya National Park with its Martian landscape and swimming at some off the track beachy coves to help our injuries heal we were ready for the next trip. The day started a little later than planned as we celebrated Tony and Vals anniversary the night before.

We had no info on the climbers entrance at Jameo de la Puerta Falsa but could just see the show cave entrance further down the hill so some ground could be covered. A far steeper descent than the previous two tubes once again led us into wide high passage,



*The group descend into Jameo de la Gente
Photo by Adrian Hall*



Sid checks out the water temperature while the swimmers strip off at

Cueva Los Lagos

Photo by Tony Littler

the biggest we had seen so far, with fine balconies and bridges. It was very hot here and without going into the details I was doing that thing sweaty things do! After stopping here for photos we continued on to be confronted by a wire mesh fence and concrete barrier. A sign informed us of environmental experiments and we should not proceed through the hole in the fence.

We made a slow exit due to the heat and in the bar later helped the Chilean miners celebrate their return to the surface.

Even though these three tubes are part of the same system and close to each other they all had different characteristics and something new to see.

Our last trip was to Los Lagos lava tube which we had been told had an exposed climb in and was not for the faint hearted. Having (genuinely) misplaced the directions we spent awhile searching the malpais (badlands) for the entrance and trying to avoid the show cave car park police who monitored our progress with binoculars. The entrance was found by Brian and we all had a look and agreed it really was exposed. Perhaps 30ft down and a further 10ft rolling onto rocks.

After looking at the climb for to long I made a exploratory visit along the ledge only to get jeered by my 'friends' chanting Spider Pig and suggesting my rapid progress was aided by my beer belly helping me cling to the rock face. Five of us got down with no problems and made our way through the hole in the padlocked gate. Mainly boulder hopping along large passage once more led us to a short drop through boulders to a blue crystal clear lake disappearing off out of sight.

The left hand ledge was a possibility to progress but the chances of falling into the water was very high and beyond the powers of even Spider Pig. While

the group pondered (including two Culiembro divers) I made a walk into the deep. Remembering first to remove my mobile but sadly to late for my wallet, which I realised as the water got up to my chest, stupid boy!

Adrian decided it was time to push on and stripped down to his shreddies and caving helmet and calmly set off into the canal. After 5 metres though the cold water proved too much and a quick blast of front crawl was attempted as it was thought that the canal would be short. About 50 m of out of depth water later he thankfully reached the end of the canal and climbed out onto dry land. A flat out crawl looked very uninviting. An underwater continuation looked extremely inviting but armed with just a wet pair of shreddies and a lamp it wasn't going to be an option. So a small hole was explored in the roof of the passage and a continuation was found which quickly led to a 2 m climb

down and a further deep water canal. Without footwear and no backup, Adrian returned to the first canal and shouted his findings back to the others. Paul and Claire didn't fancy it, but Tony and Brian quickly joined Adrian with Brian taking some photos. The 3 then went to the next canal and decided that footwear would be required. After posing for a somewhat suspect group photo all returned through the canal and made quick progress to the entrance climb and out. The surface was reached in about 1 hour 30 minutes. A very good trip and a return is required.

The entrance climb out had some moments but Brian still managed it with a lit cigarette, he also used to do this up the Swildons 20.

We had a late flight home so took a long drive into the north of the island and found some breathtaking viewpoints. A final quick photo trip into the down flow section of Jameo de la Gente and a few hours later be were back in Bristol.

This was an excellent holiday with good friends and we did some great trips into the lava tube world on Lanzarote.

The cavers were:

Tony Littler, Val Mintram, Brian Marchbank, MNRC.
Claire Cohen, Adrian Hall, Paul (Sid) Stillman, Wessex Cave Club.

Non cavers Gill Marchbank MNRC, Kate Beard, civilian.

Thanks to Chris Binding.

*Paul Stillman
& Adrian Hall.*

BRIAN PITMAN

Many in the Club felt a sad loss when they learned of the sudden and unexpected death of Brian Pitman in November last year, at the tender age of 60.

Welsh, and proud of it; Brian was born in Cardiff in 1950, the elder of two boys. He was introduced to caving in 1969 by his college lecturer Carl Pickstone, and was soon introduced to the Wessex. He joined the club in November 1970. Brian was a stalwart member for many years, principally as a sporting caver, but also as a keen if occasional digger at sites such as Clay Holes and Templeton. He was very loyal to the Club, but only served briefly on the Committee,

as he felt that he lived too far away to be really useful on the Club's executive. Working weekends were often made more productive by Brian's presence, though his role as Wessex tree surgeon was short-lived. Climbing the ash tree one summer to trim branches away from the electricity lines, all went well until it came to the last branch. Brian cut it with ease, but it twisted as it fell, bringing the power line to the ground.

A spectator standing underneath looked up to see branch and cable dropping towards him, and ran off just in time. There was a loud bang from the distribution box in the next field – and Eastwater was without power. The local residents, Mr. and Mrs. Gibbons and Mrs. Pattinson, were quite understanding, though a certain caravan-dwelling BEC member became quite upset, as he was unable to watch the evening episode of Neighbours. The emergency electricity repair people soon had the cable repaired, and informed Brian that had he asked, they would have come and trimmed the tree free of charge.

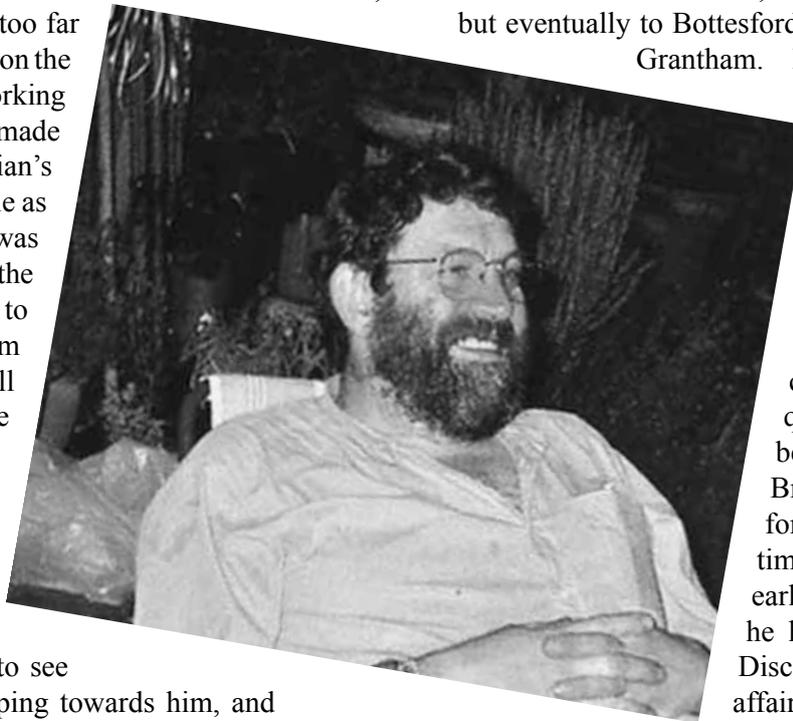
Brian was a big man in all senses of the word, and regarded Mendip, and Upper Pitts, as a second home. In 1973 he married Sheila Martin, who was originally from Birmingham but moved to Newport in South Wales as a child. They met through the Scout movement, and in later years Brian assisted with the local Scout group in Bottesford. Brian and Sheila set up home in Fairfield

Close, Aberdare, which will be fondly remembered by many members as a caving base in the 1970s. They made us very welcome, and from there, we set off to explore the caves and scenery of the Brecon Beacons, and also the local hostleries. It must be said that the Pitmans had very tolerant neighbours, because after the pub (usually Elmo's Golden Post, a real collector's piece), things could get very boisterous. Complaints were few, usually consisting of regret that we had not invited the neighbours over to our shenanigans.

Brian's job in electronics eventually took him from Aberdare to Blackwood, and briefly to Basingstoke, but eventually to Bottesford, between Nottingham and Grantham. By now Brian and Sheila

had two daughters, Tina and Rachel. Rachel has an aversion to spiders (and discomfort) so did not take to caving, though Tina did, often accompanying her father on his trips to the Mendip caves and Wiltshire stone quarries. These visits became less frequent, as Brian's job took him abroad for extended periods of time, until he eventually took early retirement. By now he had bought a Land Rover Discovery, after brief love affairs with some older models in various states of decrepitude.

Not being one to sit idle at home, Brian soon found another job, working for the local Land Rover dealer; this suited him well, especially the staff discount. But there was little challenge, and when Brian was offered a senior post at a small but growing electronics company in the village, he leapt at it. Here he soon made a first impression – the same first impression he made on everyone who met him for the first time – a big, gruff intolerant curmudgeon. He was once called xenophobic by a young foreign lady club member. This caused some consternation, especially when he tried to look the word up in the dictionary under 'Z'. But the lady had misunderstood Brian's peculiar sense of humour, for as everyone soon found out, under that gruff exterior, Brian was really a pussy cat. True, he didn't tolerate fools, but if he had a mind to, he could be helpfulness personified. He had a bark, but I never saw him bite,



and any group that Brian was part of, caving, walking or socializing, was the merrier for his presence.

In his youth, Brian was a diver, though mainly in open water. He dived caves in Wales, and also went to Wookey 9 when the only way was by diving. He was involved in the rescue of Oliver Lloyd and a UBSS party, trapped by floodwater in the newly-discovered stream entrance to Little Neath River Cave in 1967. In order to contact the trapped cavers, Brian dived through the sump in Bridge Cave, and made contact. Oliver promptly demanded the use of Brian's kit, so he could escape and organize the rescue from the surface. Not wanting a cold and indeterminate stay underground, Brian immediately replaced his mask and gag, and returned to report that Oliver and students were alive and well. All were eventually rescued safely.

Together with the Disco, Brian bought a large touring caravan, which was parked on his Mendip visits in the camping field at Eastwater Farm. Brian and Sheila also toured extensively; they liked Scotland, and also France and Switzerland. They joined two Wessex trips to France; to the Herault, in 2001, and to the Pyrenees 2002, where the Disco was useful in

transporting cavers up to the EDF tunnel, from where they explored the Verna and other parts of the Pierre St. Martin.

Whatever Brian did, he put his heart into. He bought a lathe, and became a skilled wood turner. Tina's husband, Steve, is a keen angler, so Brian, who had fished as a boy, bought the tackle and joined him. He also taught himself to fly fish, and enjoyed catching trout in small remote Scottish lochs.

Sadly, in 2009, Brian began to suffer from persistent abdominal pain, and was rushed to hospital for emergency surgery. He was in a very poor way when

it was decided to transfer him from Grantham to Lincoln, where further surgery resulted in the loss of most of his large intestine, which necessitated an ileostomy. Brian found this hard to live with, and the wound refused to heal properly, so after debating the matter with his consultant, Brian opted to have the operation reversed. After some



wasted trips to Lincoln, the operation finally took place in early November. All seemed to be well, but the sudden onset of complications was something that his body could not cope with, and he died on November 15th. He is very much missed by Sheila and his family, and indeed all who counted him as a friend. Tina's two sons, Jordan and Jevan, gave him much joy, and he was pleased that Rachel was in a stable relationship. His last foreign jaunt took place earlier in the year, when to celebrate their

60th birthdays the girls sent Brian and Sheila to Iceland, a trip which coincided with the volcanic eruption. He recalled with awe the sight of the ash plume, and the snow and ice covered in black ash, as they flew over the terrain in a helicopter.

Speaking personally, I have lost much more than a best friend, for Brian was more like a brother. I was pleased and proud to be asked to be a godfather to Tina, and later Brian became godfather to my son Daniel. To complicate matters, Dan is now godfather to Jevan. We have all spent many happy hours together, caving, fishing, swimming and diving in Cornwall, holidaying in the Dordogne, and concocting barbecues with the aid of copious amounts of red wine and pistachio nuts. A skilled cook, Brian's one culinary disaster was Rabbit Stew enriched with Bull's Blood and Cinnamon. I was looking forward to drinking the Bull's Blood from a glass, not as a gravy – and cinnamon as a spice does not do anything for a meat dish ! We have quaffed staggering quantities of ale (mainly Butcombe) and spent hours yarning and joking at Upper Pitts and under the French stars. I am sure that all our sympathy and best wishes goes to Sheila and the family. Brian Pitman, husband, father, caver and friend, – he will be sadly missed.

Phil Hendy

MONKTON FARLEIGH QUARRY

DISTRICTS 19 & 20, POWERHOUSE AND CANTEEN

The history of Monkton Farleigh Quarry, or Central Ammunition Depot no.3 sub-depot as it was formally called during World War 2, has long been known about.

Prior to the war it was a former stone quarry. During the conflict a need arose for secure munitions storage that would be untouchable by roving enemy bombers, and therefore it was hastily converted for this purpose. It has already been extensively mapped and written about, going through a brief period as a museum, and has been thoroughly explored during times of abandonment - there are indeed plenty of rescued artefacts around the WCC hut thanks to Bob Scammell. So why make a special fuss about yet another visit? The reason for this is that the present owners of the site, Wansdyke, are experiencing such a success of their secure document storage business that they recently purchased Districts 19 & 20 to complete their ownership of the entire complex, and intend to convert this extra substantial area so that it can also be used for storage. Prior to now it has been

possible for those in the know to access Districts 19 & 20 for an enjoyable “clandestine” explore, with it still being possible to get the feeling of having stepped back into another era, due to wartime signs and artefacts still being present (although largely vandalised). With the purchase of these districts now complete, Wansdyke have greatly improved the site security so that access is no longer possible, and within a short period will begin proper conversion of the space so that the impression of its former use will be lost for ever. Chris Davies organised a visit so that we could learn about the current use and condition of the site, plus take some last photos from 19 & 20 prior to the modernisation. This article records some of the present use and condition of the site for historical purposes.

From about 8.30am, various lucky users of the Darkplaces forum, including Chris Davies and Tim Ball from WCC, had begun to gather outside the gates of the locked Wansdyke compound just up the road from the Kings Arms public house. We were met by Steve Hunt, the Wansdyke mine manager, who had very kindly arranged for 12 people to visit the now out-of bounds Districts 19 & 20 (plus the powerhouse and canteen on the way).

Looking at the main surface building, there is a covered loading/unloading area in front of four pairs of green doors, plus a smaller brick building to the right. Whilst waiting for everyone to turn up I had a look around the place. The small brick building may possibly be a later built structure (early photos will confirm this or otherwise), since it is not connected in any way with the main structure. There are no doors on it, and these days it is used as a dumping ground for old equipment; I saw plenty of old space heaters in there. It is fairly unremarkable. Just to the left of this is another door that leads to a blind corridor. Again there is nothing much here. The main structure however is much more interesting. To the right of the main ramp on the external wall is a carved crest dating from the Second World War of the Army unit which was involved in the conversion of the former quarry to an ammunition storage facility. Sadly the right hand side of the crest has fallen victim to weathering and is no longer readable. Of the four pairs of green doors, only the left hand



Disused Generator

pair, to which a concrete ramp leads, are used since the others are covered inside by plasterboard. Wansdyke have applied for planning permission to extend the covered area outside so that the area is approximately doubled, such is the success of their business, since more room is needed to move everything around on a day-to-day basis. Although it has appeared unused every time I have seen the compound, Wansdyke in fact operate Monday to Friday on a 9am-10pm basis, and even have a late shift of 2-10pm. If anything is urgently required outside these hours, a duty storeman is on call who can retrieve

what is required. There are about 40 staff working at this site, some of which have more than 10 years service. Inside were crammed many pallets of boxes waiting to be processed; it was easy to see why the extra space is needed both outside and underground. All of the pallets have document boxes stacked on them outside of which there is a basic clingfilm type wrapping, plus a barcode attached which relates to the storage system (this provides an underground location and traceability of contents). In addition to the area used for pallet movement, there is a room used for equipment storage, a toilet, the managers office, and additional office, plus the rest and recreation room which was surprisingly large and contained a pool table (excellent!). There was one more small room that I did not ascertain the use of. In the additional office the walls are covered with health and safety certificates, plus training certificates for the use of forklift trucks, first aid, etc etc. It is pleasing to know that this is all taken very seriously. At the top of the incline there is the winch mechanism using for hauling the pallets up and down the Main West slope shaft. The forklifts used are electric due to the need not to have any fumes underground, which apart from not being good for the health in an enclosed space, can also damage stored items.

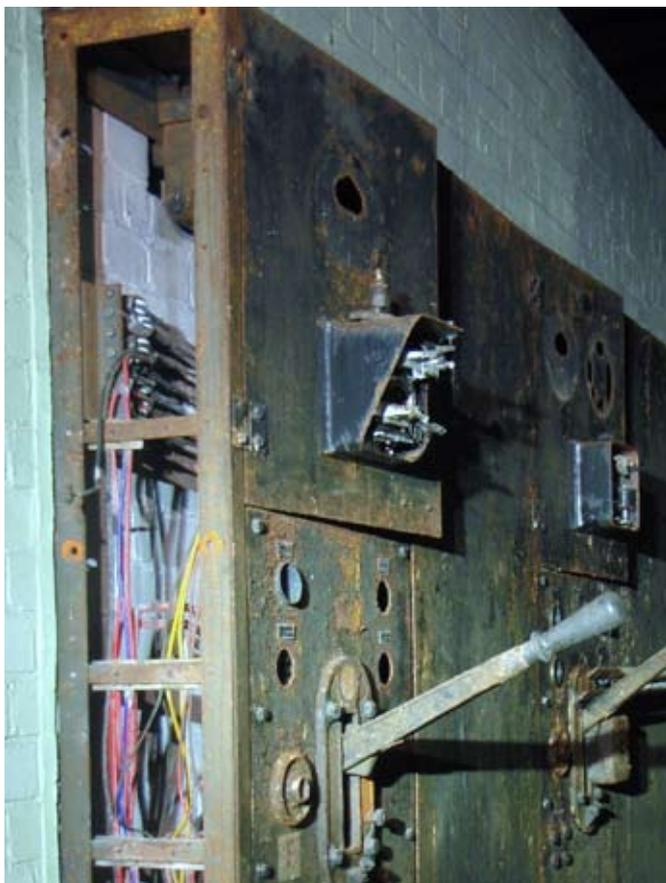
One of the conditions for the visit was that everyone had to sign the Official Secrets Act. Additionally all materials used by smokers had to be left on the surface. Everyone also had to carry a self-rescuer



District 19

with them, which is a device somewhat like a gas mask in that it has a filter which removes toxic gases before air is inhaled. A brief safety drill was given on its use. I believe that they are good for about 30 minutes, which is enough time to get out. We split into two groups of six, and each group was accompanied by two members of staff. Finally, before heading underground we all had to sign a sheet at the top of the slope shaft giving time of entry. This allows personnel movements to be tracked. It was different to see a list of everyone's full names rather than online "avatars" – I only recognised a few of them! Everything was kept official in this respect, which is as it should have been. One point of surprise was that whilst all of the Darkplaces people were wearing helmets with decent lights, our guides were not!

And so we headed downwards. The lighting underground is superb, and there is plenty of modern safety information on the walls about forklifts, manual handling, safety and everything else required in this kind of facility. The lighting is not automatic but must be turned on manually where needed. There are also plenty of smoke sensors mounted at regular intervals along the ceiling, plus an extensive intruder alarm system! Unsurprisingly we were not given any details about this, apart from it being let known that it is a system of "defence in depth" and has several different kinds of sensors. When you can get a guided tour like this, why would you need to break in? It is pleasing to know that the place is being looked after properly.



High Tension Switches

Almost immediately at the bottom of the slope shaft is a turning off to the left which leads to the Farleigh Down Tunnel. It is through this tunnel that ammunition used to be transferred to and from a railway platform during WW2. A condition of the visit from Wansdyke was that we were only allowed to visit the agreed areas, so we were not allowed to go here. However we did learn some useful information about what had happened after Wansdyke's inner wall at the top of the Tunnel was breached in the past couple of years. The top of the Tunnel had an unloading facility (a large area lined with reinforced concrete), plus an area to the east of this where there were blocked off regions of original stone working. About three years ago a dig was organised between several people to open up some of these regions with remarkable results – new passage was found that had probably not been seen in over 100 years, plus many artefacts from that period. Sadly all this is now inaccessible. In their work in expanding the useable storage area, Wansdyke cleared the last easily available region to them – “18 South” – of existing “rubbish”, and dumped it in front of the area where the original tunnel defence was breached. Previous visitors will know that there was quite a distance between the tunnel breakthrough point and Wansdyke's inner wall; one of the staff who filled the area reckoned that the rubble and rubbish is about

300 feet deep from the original tunnel defence point. There is therefore no chance of reaching this old working ever again. In Nick McCamley's book “Secret Underground Cities” there is a survey showing the layout of the underground storage districts in 1943. Of these only district 14 was properly converted into a row of arched storage bays, with everywhere else being open plan. When Wansdyke first arrived I imagine that this was the first district used due to its ready made suitability for storage, but such has been their growth that they have now taken up every available district (apart from 19 & 20) with the exception of “18 North” which is too wet. “18 South” is just being finished, with the electricians having recently been in, and the first racking having been installed.

Just after this left hand turning, also on the left when facing south, is sited the air conditioning plant. It is very noisy!

We then visited district 19 by going through the door leading to the escape passage from the Main West haulage route. On previous visits “on the other side” of the fence (so to speak) I, like many others, have been right up to the other side of this door and heard the ACU plant operating. Being there really was an inch away from Wansdyke!

A group then visited the old decontamination area for photos. It is not the purpose of this report to describe districts 19 & 20 in detail since a picture speaks a thousand words, and many good quality shots were taken. However during our visit we were shown the defences that have been put in place to prevent unwanted visitors from entering through the “short cut” hole in the wall (into district 19), and also at the far end of Graham's Grovel (into district 20). These are now blocked, and regularly monitored. It is the intention of Wansdyke to use the whole of these two districts for storage, converting and using as required.

After visiting districts 19 & 20, we went first to the Canteen. It is surprising just how close this is to the artificial wall put in place to prevent access to the main Wansdyke complex from the main entrance tunnel – a matter of metres. There is not a great deal to see in the Canteen. Regrettably there is heavy smoke damage to the white walls, all the way from the ceiling to within three to four feet of the ground, which gives the area a very oppressive feel. It is still possible to see several serving hatches between rooms, but there is very little in the way of original furniture or fittings, save for a few stencilled signs on walls and doors. When it is required to start using these two districts, the breeze block wall shall be removed to allow easy access with forklift trucks.

Our final post of call was to the Powerhouse, which for me was the highlight of the day. Whilst this is physically located directly opposite the main 19/20 access tunnel, to access it we had to turn right (south) and walk down Main West incline a short distance, entering from the “rear”. It is its own little complex in its own right. The first room seen contained two vast fuel tanks, and nothing else. In size terms, both had been measured to be just over seven feet in diameter, and were probably ten metres long each, painted black. My guess is that their capacity would be at least double that of an oil tanker seen driving on the roads, if not three or four times. Due to their vast size, the only way they could have been made is if the tubular sections were taken into the room and welded in situ. The tanks fill the room nearly completely, and there is no space for anything else. In the access corridor outside is another tank, large in its own right but in no way anywhere near the size of the oil reservoirs, that is made from sections riveted together. It appears to be a pressure vessel and my thoughts were that it was for compressed air, potentially to help begin the main generator (a Ruston Hornsby VLB5 alternator set) turning in the engine room when this was started. Due to the huge inertia of the generator it would be necessary to have some kind of pony motor or other system to get it turning at slow speed before applying the main current, otherwise burn-out of the windings or some other part of the electrical system would occur, due to the inability to overcome the inertia. It would be interesting to know indeed if this is what this smaller tank was used for. The main powerhouse itself is a huge room, probably at least eight metres high, the first half of which is unoccupied, with the rear half taken up with the generator. There is an overhead gantry present, and my guess is that the “unused space” in front of the generator was intended for maintenance purposes. For example, if it was necessary to replace some of the cylinders or linings, the gantry could be employed to lift off the top of the engine and place it onto the floor in this space. The floor itself is tiled – the only area in the whole of Monkton Farleigh where I have observed this. Perhaps this is for ease of repair in case anything heavy was dropped – broken tiles could simply be replaced. Alternatively, any small quantities of spilt oil would find their way to the cracks in between the tiles. A couple of small compressors lie in the corner just after the entrance; perhaps these were the pony motors used to start the generator. The main beast itself is absolutely huge. It consists of the engine at the rear, mated to the generator at the front. The flywheel on the engine

is the biggest I have ever seen. The engine has five cylinders and a walkway around the upper half of the body with ladder access so that the top can be reached. Unlike car engines, the main “block”, i.e. the lower part, is not solid. There are a pair of access doors per cylinder, one on each side of the body. Some of these are open, and they reveal the bottom of the huge pistons, the substantial piston liners, plus the conrods and crankshaft. Everything is on a huge scale. I estimate that each cylinder is several litres in capacity. Amazingly, all of the stainless steel items inside, such as cotter pins used on the conrods, are as shiny as the day they were installed. Everything else however, made from mild steel, is very corroded. When Monkton Farleigh was open as a museum the engine was allegedly operational, but it is certainly in a state of disrepair now. Towards the back of this main room is a fuel tank positioned high up near the ceiling (access via another ladder and walkway), which I think must have acted as a header tank to supply the engine. In a set of rooms parallel to this, accessible from both ends of the powerhouse, are several rooms containing all of the electrical equipment. This includes transformers, high tension switchgear and switches, plus low tension voltmeters and switches. Sadly these are mostly in a very poor state, and are certainly beyond restoration. However they do show that sixty years ago, the engineering was simple and “large” in nature, i.e. easy to operate, built to last, and simple to repair. The fact that this was all designed and installed during the middle of a war is quite incredible.

Our underground visit ended here. We made our way back up the incline, up the slope shaft and signed out on the roster at the top, returning our self-rescuers. It had been a fantastic morning, re-visiting parts of 19 & 20 seen on many times in the past, plus seeing the main Wansdyke area for the first time. A huge number of good quality pictures were taken. Sincere thanks must be given to Steve Hunt the Wansdyke mine manager for persuading his superiors that we could visit, and arranging the tour. Thanks also must be given to his three members of staff who gave up their Saturday morning to supervise us. And finally a big thankyou to Chris (Root) for contacting Wansdyke in the first place.

Tim Ball.

Club News

Diary

2nd Saturday trips - These happen (as the name would suggest) on the second Saturday of each month. Usual meeting time and place is 10am at Upper Pitts. These are a fantastic way for members old and new to cave with people they otherwise may never meet. for more details please contact Les Williams (your Caving Secretary)

Upcoming Wessex caving meets.

South Wales - 29th April to 2nd May - Staying at the Westminster cottage in Penderyn and visiting the classic systems of South Wales

North Wales - 27th to 30th May - Stopping at the Community Centre in Pentredwr (near Llangollen) and visiting the classic caves and mines of the area It is planned to do a Croesor to Rhosydd through trip during the weekend and perhaps winch into Llyn Parc if there is a demand.

New Members

Since Journal 321

There have been quite a few new members join the club over the winter. Let's hope this continues through the rest of the year. For clarity, i have presented this as the table below. Hope the change isn't to drastic. AC

Name	Town	Proposed	Seconded
Daniel Pearce	Bristol	Christine Grosart	Matt Jones
Naomi Sharp	Southampton	John Osbourne (Hatstand)	Vern Freeman
John Walsh	Glastonbury	Allison Moody	John Williams
Tom Cull	Southampton	Marion Van De Waterbeemd	D Richardson
Joe Hesketh	London	Christine Grosart	Rich Walker
Chris Williams	Wells	Andy Morse	M Hewins
Jessica Kirk	Bristol	Christine Grosart	Matt Jones
Pete Buckley	Tiverton	Dave Cooke	Frank Tully
Robbie Warke	Buckfastleigh	John Osbourne (Hatstand)	RJ Varns
Pamela Lloyd	Priddy	Brian Prewer	Jude Vanderplank
Kathryn Hall	Bracknell	Nigel Gower	Kathryn Williams
Christopher George	Priddy	Jude Vanderplank	Brian Prewer
Pete Hellier	Bristol	V Freeman	A Vanderplank
Andrea Russe	Bristol	RM Carey	A Vanderplank
Richard Hopkins	Guilford	Nigel Gower	John Osbourne (Hatstand)
Adam Papworth	Aldershot	Nigel Gower	John Osbourne (Hatstand)
Paula Grgich-Warke	Buckfastleigh	John Osbourne (Hatstand)	RJ Varns

Parking near Rods Pot / Bath Swallet

The recently installed gates at the top of the track near the UBSS hut are now locked. Members are requested not to park in front of these gates because access may be required for emergency vehicles

Cave Keys

It has been brought to the attention of the committee, that some a few people have been a bit on the slow side in returning borrowed cave keys. If you borrow keys, can you ensure that they are returned at the earliest possible convenience so to allow others that may want to visit the same cave to do so. We believe there have been a few cases of people keeping keys to ensure they have it for their next trip, which is a little unfair on other members. If something happens and you are unable to return them in person, then it is always possible to post them back to Upper Pitts. AC

RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

As at 5th January 2011

BCRA Cave and Karst Science 37, 2 (2010) - Speleology 16 (Dec 10) - Chelsea SS N/L 52, 12 (Dec 10) - Descent 217 (Dec 10 / Jan 11) - MCG News 363, 364 (Aug, Nov 10) - MNRC N/L 130 (Dec 10 / Jan 11) - NSS News 68, 12 (Dec 10)

FOREIGNERS ON THE LAWN

A Personal Account of the 2010 Expedition in Dr. Trevor Faulkner's studies of the caves of South Nordland (Mid-Norway).

Though from my trip log, I have avoided a day-by-day serial, or even strict chronology, to bring the flavour, the high-lights, the low-lights, the delights.

The 2010 Expedition were Trevor Faulkner, David St-Pierre, Alan Marshall and I, spending the first three weeks of August developing Trevor's and David's 2008 reconnaissance. We were joined variously by Erik Potts and his girl-friend Lina, and Ragnar Selvaag. We met our old friend and informant Odd Johanssen, and Mark Dougherty (CDG). On the way home, we were looked after by Torstein and Magni Finnesand, and Tomaz and Tatjana Gustafsson.

And So Unto The Explorations...

A Collie, A Cat And A Sporty Little Number

Stormo means "Large Meadow", this particular one mowed by a very friendly and interested gentleman whom Trevor and David first met in 2008, when they explored and surveyed Stormogrotta, our first cave of 2010. Erik and Lina joined our intended push through the 2008 limit, a wet crawl.

The family's dog and cat made a fuss of us as we changed in the farmyard, followed our short walk to the entrance and watched their new-found humans vanish underground.

Disappointingly, high water stopped us short, but it was still an enjoyable start to the Expedition. I spotted and scrambled up into an inlet roof-passage that TF and I soon found too tight, but the cave hadn't reckoned on our Secret Weapon, Lina, Sweden's own Mrs. A.A.D. Moody (horses and all). Tape in hand, she squirmed a further 12m to its penetrable limit.

Considering the resurgence to be in the deep valley beyond the farm, we slithered down a very steep slope to the river, then part-way back up to bypass deep, fast water. I became separated from the others among the trees, despite calling, so returned to the top. The collie heard their voices though, and on permanent 4-paw drive, joined them! They reported the water emerges among boulders.

The Britons returned late in the Expedition, in continuing dry weather. The stream was lower but still fairly strong, due to high snow-fields thawing. TF and I found the reduced water now cascaded through a circular hole a metre across, and apparently turned a corner. Just three ladder rungs down, a watery side-step entered an alcove above a deep, narrow sump, and that was that. Foam above our heads suggested a constriction or choke.

We waited, but eventually, worried by the non-appearance of DSP and AM, we de-rigged and set off back. Dave had been having knee and lamp problems, so Alan had accompanied him out, then returned only to meet Trevor and I emerging. Unfortunately, both therefore missed an impressive conclusion. In our concern no-one thought to go back down.

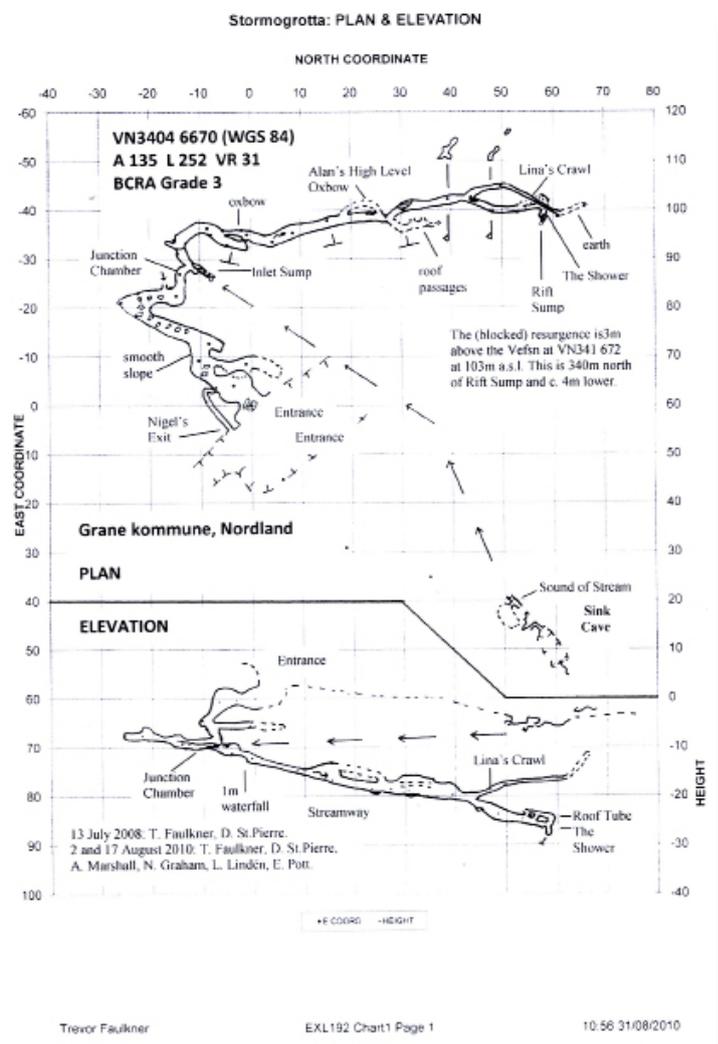
Stormogrotta is a fine 100metres' worth; an easy but sporty little number that can flood. Beyond a roomy entrance passage, short ramp and aqueous corner on a schist band, a rift hading at about 45° descends steadily, with small cascades, to the sump.

The rock is attractive, grey-white striped and swirled marble with some good schist boudains. These are cylindrical inclusions formed by the stretching to fracture of thin, brittle units within the plastically-flowing main rock during the tectonic processes that raised the mountains and metamorphosed the rocks; here from limestone and mudstone respectively.

The geology has a mischievous touch. The marble's foliation has created small ledges that make good footholds, but dips more steeply than the stream-way gradient. Consequently progress downstream is many short steps back up from the narrow stream to a more efficient level; conversely, on returning, you suddenly notice the floor is some ten feet below you!

Watch This Space

Svenningdal forms the heart of our area, carrying the main E6 road and railway North from Trondheim to Mo-I-Rana and beyond. From it, Elgfjell and Blafjell are two areas held in great affection for wonderful expeditions over the years. In a side valley, we had dug into the short but impressive Memorial Cave stream-way not long after Bob Drake's untimely death in a sea-diving accident. In 2010 we walked past Memorial Cave



to the upper valley, finding a line of active and dry shake-holes missed by Keith Bryant and me on a fleeting previous visit.

Alan and I dug open the lowest, in unfriendly boulders. The hole looked tight, wet and deep, and rocks seemed to fall a long way, but in turn we gingerly tried the constricted entrance, like hermit-crabs investigating new shells. After several attempts I could crouch on the rim of the “shaft”, but now saw a floor not far below a careful but easy scramble below a sloping solid roof. The opposite wall is just boulders, with no mortar in sight. The cave seemed choked but may yield to another look.

Meanwhile, Eric, Lina and David spotted a proper cave entrance in another shake-hole, while TF explored higher up-hill still. Yours Truly was volunteered to ensure it choked just out of sight. Past a liberal shower over the entrance’s impending boulders, I dropped into a little chamber. Ahead, a tortuous stream-way made Blue Pencil Passage look large, but a roomy side-passage curved alluringly away. After a few steps my rather dim lamp lit a descending inverted-L canyon.

Elated, I exited. “It goes!”

AM had a look, still in just his fleece, while the Swedes and I suited up fully. Just beyond my foray’s limit, they found a pitch. “Why didn’t you get to here?” Erik asked.

“To be fair to everyone”, I replied.

Cautiously, mindful of loose cobbles, Erik and Lina free-climbed it while I waited, nervous of a deep, unprotected climb I could not see from above. The chamber looked very impressive, lit from below by their better lamps. They reported two parallel shafts estimated lithogravimetrically as 20 metres deep, one to water. Of two crawls they said one is sand-choked, the other slopes down over loose cobbles, but caution prevailed.

Excited, we all wanted to return next day, but Our Beloved Leader would hear nowt about it. It was not on the itinerary. Adding to the Swedes’ (and to some extent, my) chagrin, he pronounced further, “And SRT is banned in South Nordland!”

So it is Norway 2011’s aim. With the resurgence a respectable depth and distance back down-valley, we hope to find lots of luscious cave here. The resurgence is near the outlet of a fine gorge carrying the main river, cut mainly in marble, but also across a beautiful, creamy-coloured dyke we think is of aplite (very fine-grained granite).

“Digs Normally Go Quite Quickly.”

Quoth TF to our Swedish friends in front of a Mendip digger who had spent two years of Saturdays mixing mortar in Chill-out Choke.

A cliff path at Langjorda, near the town of Trofors, became too difficult and exposed for me where it had weathered to a crumbling ledge, but Erik and Lina returned early and collected me from the dappled shade in which I waited. In their car, we drove to the other “end” of the area reached by the ex-path. Along a track to two idyllic holiday homes, we found that disappointingly, the curious “doline” marked on the map was only an old quarry.

Next day we returned to the same fjell thanks to Lina having obtained access to a gated road. Erik remarked that permission is more forthcoming when “eye-candy” asks. On another occasion, for a group photograph, we heard him tell her, “Come here and look lovely”. Clearly Swedish gallantry thrives!

Our objective was the magnificent Bokkflau sink. A good track passes between a lake and a huge, open shaft nearly 30m deep, swallowing the outflow. A terrace on the opposite side had once held a water-powered sawmill, but only the ruined leat and track remain.

We rigged ladders, watched dubiously by essarteephiles Erik and Lina, but the pitch turned out to be a very steep, earthy gully on which ladders are more appropriate than rope, and needed fully only on a short rock step. You could almost use a ‘knobbly-dog’. Right, where’s the reported 300m long “Bokkflaugrotta” needing proper surveying and pushing? Buried, that’s where, below masses of washed-in logs and boulders. We dug for two or three hours by the foot of the waterfall before giving up finding what TF knew only from an old report, without even knowing the precise location. The site should hold a really lovely cave. Sadly, we’ll never know.

Erik and Lina departed that day, rather torn between staying or joining a larger, Scandinavian expedition. We said farewell in the base of the shaft, watched them self-line out then scratched around for a further futile half-hour.

“Bear prints”, said someone, of fresh marks in mud on the track back to the car.

The £140 Cave That Wasn’t, The £14 Tent and Five Men In A Boat

Ragnar was a bit put out, TF confided. Well, wouldn’t you be if a foreigner gives you well-meaning advice on surviving in your own countryside? Even so, he bought a new tent...

Ragnar joined us at Mosjoen’s coastal ferry terminal, hidden among factories. Ashore an hour later, after delicious coffee and waffles breakfast on board, we drove to the End Of The Road, several miles of gravel joining small hamlets to each other but not the rest of Norway.

In a little harbour beyond a closed-down shop, a man painted his fishing-boat. No, he couldn’t take us to Husvik, as he didn’t want to upset the local “water-taxi” chap. Such communities have to be quite close-knit and mutually supportive. RS rang the “water-taxi” number, and before he realised it, had booked it. It arrived half an hour later. Half an hour later still it departed, with TF and RF out of pocket. The fare would have broken our collective means, and the man charged 1000NoK just for his fuel and negotiating time!

Dismayed, we considered our options including a regular, cheaper passenger ferry which serves minor places on prior demand. These include a fjord-side power-station already picked as a way-point for a very long, one-day, walk from a planned hill-camp in remote Neversdal to a reported resurgence cave. We drove to Forsmoen, the farm and Neversdal road-head.

The farmer obligingly hired his boat to us for about 350NoK, self-drive! So with Ragnar at the helm, five men and several heavy rucksacks set out in a small dinghy with an outboard motor, onto disconcertingly breezy Sørfjord. After the 7km cruise, our local friend confessed to have felt “tense”. I think we all did. Let’s be honest: “fear”. It was not a very wise or enjoyable cruise, without life-jackets on choppy water in a heavily- and poorly- loaded old boat. One of my benefactors will be the RNLI, but irony has its limits!

Nearing the beach, we hit shallows and snapped the shear-pin, a safety device whose breaking protects the propeller on impact. Alan and I rowed inexpertly to shore, where Ragnar replaced the pin with the single spare luckily in the boat’s small tool-kit. Looking at the propeller shaft, it was obviously not the first pin to have been broken.

A shame the reported “resurgence cave” didn’t exist. Perhaps it does, but we had several streams along the coast to investigate in forest, no-one at nearby summer houses to ask, and no proper location details. We found merely a short, un-roofed stream-passage. That won’t upstage the ‘Meghalaya Mob’, we decided, as our humour took a Hidden Earth turn.

It rained that night. My rather old tent leaked a bit, but more worryingly the tide rose further onto the grassed foreshore than I'd bargained for, slowly covering my marker-pebbles and recalling memories of markers in Ogof Craig-ar-Ffynnon. We thought Alan and I would have to move, but the tide turned just in time.

Luckily the day dawned fine. TF, DSP and RS had a last fruitless look for the fabled cave. The cruise back was less alarming. The wind had dropped, and we loaded the boat more carefully, so it ran more efficiently. Nevertheless we had to avoid rocks, signalled by greener water. While Ragnar looked where he was steering, four pairs of eyes peered into the sea.

"That Way! Boulders!" I shouted, pointing vigorously to port, away from the submerged top of a huge block just off the starboard beam. It looked about 20 feet high in the clear water, from the sea-bed that sloped inexorably into darkness. I shuddered.

As for our miffed Norwegian friend... he had been ever so proud of his brand-new tent: "Only 150 kroner! Brand-new! On e-Bay!" It leaked like a sieve in the rain. One soggy Viking decided perhaps Anglo-Saxons understand Norwegian wild camping.

Where Butterflies Can Fly

Ragnar moored the dinghy and bade farewell. The Britons returned to Forsmoen, where the farmer advised us to reach Neverdalen "round that hill - there are paths up there"... By the time the valley had finished with us, we'd called it "Nevergaidalen".

Occasional boot-prints on occasional elk-tracks apart, the real path had long since turned away up another valley, but at least we found ripe cloud-berries, our traditional delicacy. After over four hours already of very hard walking, we had a long, cruelly interminable slog over roches moutonees, TF said they were – wave-like hummocks carved in the bedrock by the valley's formative glacier. I was tiring rapidly on the final stretch to the lake shore chosen as that night's base for the possible 4-night stay. I try not to swear, but was now 'effing and blinding' frequently, a sign in me of stress. At last, the lake, and a flat green on the far side.

We crowded three tents onto a vague hummock in a near-bog and fed the mosquitoes. At least being in August, they were not too numerous. I noticed a large step in the floor only when it forced me into a semi-foetal position in my sleeping-bag. The lake looked stagnant, but contained fish, jumping after insects. Norwegian anglers visit some very remote spots, but the only likely visitor here apart from state geology service surveyors using helicopters, was the farmer, once, out of interest.

David stayed in camp next day, worried about his knee, while TF, AM and I started up-valley. A pleasant walk with light packs ended at a tricky climb. I needed the 10m ladder we were carrying for that conference-wowing cave in the marble shown on the geology map.

I rolled the ladder, looked up – I was alone! I called, blew my whistle, swore even. Shocked and bit un-nerved, worried that with the gorge narrowing and steepening up-stream we'd find an obstacle too hard even with a ladder, I turned back. I had the ladder but not the tether, so the rigging was atrocious but "Safe I think". I glanced back at it hanging forlornly, waiting for recovery next day as I thought the planned tour was circular, and turned down-valley. I thought I heard a shout, but saw no-one.

Re-united in camp later, I learnt that AM and TF had reconnoitred, found a climb indeed too hard for me, so

returned but, finding only the ladder, realised what I had done. They reported a very tiring eight-hour slog, but found an "elk highway" avoiding the worst on the way back. They had found limestone and a very pretty gorge, but no caves. Breaking camp next morning, we made good progress back. After a lazy lunch in hot sun on the farmhouse lawn, TF left a letter of safe return and thanks to the family, and we returned to the ferry via sight-seeing at Vestvågen, with its vista of the



beautiful Seven Sisters ridge.

I had not returned straight to camp from the gorge. I dropped my pack on a little river beach and collapsed, devastated, onto a boulder. Something moved among the stones nearby: a butterfly in distress. Had it fallen in the water? It climbed aboard my hand. The port upper wing had flopped right over the starboard one. Very gently, using a tiny schist flake as a spatula, I eased it back. The insect climbed up to rest on my T-shirt sleeve.

That fragile little creature, a fritillary I think, absorbed my despair. I hoped it would recover and join the other butterflies fluttering around us, and the beautiful dragonfly that rested briefly on my arm. If an imago drying its wings, it was taking a long time. If it was dying, had it mated, most insects' adulthood's only purpose? Its wings could only flutter, bent in mid-upstroke, unable even to close upright. I recalled a trusted friend's advice, "Enjoy what you're good at", and thought I wouldn't mind being good at what I enjoy, too.

Still trying to fly, the fritillary fell off my hand. My clothes and I were damp and smelly. The shallow river was nearly warm. Wallowing nude while my clothes aired over bushes in the hot sun, made me feel cleaner and better. My fritillary staggered around the beach as I nibbled my lunch in dappled shade. Some would "put it out of its misery" though I doubt insects are that self-aware. Yet on dressing and resuming the walk to camp, I found myself tearfully calling back, "Fly, butterfly, fly!" For a few hours I had shared with that unknowing, dying little animal a world in which other people can negotiate the highest hills and longest caves, and butterflies can fly.....

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT TIME

Nigel Graham
7 January 2011

Cheddar Notes

As Charterhouse Cave is extended towards Cheddar Gorge, various groups are trying to enter the Charterhouse – Gough’s Cave system somewhere in the middle. Probably the most promising dig is in Reservoir Hole, which with Bone Hole is closest to the conjectured line that Charterhouse Cave is taking as it approaches the Gorge near Black Rock Gate. The Reservoir Hole dig has the advantage that it is deep, and appears to be heading under the road. Fears that the cave runs close to the reservoir above are unfounded – there is plenty of rock between the two. The Bone Hole dig is not as deep, but here the diggers are quietly optimistic. (In fact, all cave diggers are quietly optimistic, right up to the moment when they abandon the current can’t-fail-to-go dig).

The UBSS has devised a 3-D computer program, which Graham Mullan demonstrated at the J-Rat Digging Awards ceremony in December. The caves of the Cheddar catchment can be looked at superimposed on a

the system. A lot of passage has been found since the original survey by Willie Stanton, not least the River Cave. This is being re-surveyed by Duncan Price and other members of the CDG. One problem, particularly in the show cave, is that there is so much ironwork (railings etc.) and electrical wiring that surveying using a magnetic compass is impossible. Laser surveying equipment is not readily available, so a theodolite will be used where necessary. At least there are lots of loops, so the accuracy can be easily verified.

Visitors to Gough’s Cave may notice a mark high on the wall (just before the blasted tunnel near the mammoth alcove) which indicates the flood level during the Great Storms and Floods of 1968. In early January the opportunity arose to look at the cave while it was flooded. Heavy rain on 12th January caused water levels in the Skeleton Pit to rise during the evening by around a metre in three hours. The next morning the cave was flooded to the second step just inside the entrance –

the water was less than 30cm from flowing out of the cave and down the road. The ‘Dark Side’ was accessed through the Milk Cave, and it was found that the water had risen to beyond The Chimney, and was at the foot of Heartbreak Hill.

Three of us went into the show cave the next day, finding the water to be nearly up to our necks at the deepest point (by The Fonts). It had dropped almost a metre, and we could see the high water mark on the walls. It was below the 1968 level, but not by much. The following day (Saturday 13th) the water had fallen sufficiently for the cave to be re-opened, although visitors had to keep to a narrow path between pools in the area of the mammoth alcove. Water continued to flow from an inlet beyond and to the right of the alcove, which itself had a strong cascade pouring down the back wall.

On Sunday, a group clearing the remains of the deposited mud found a small live fish – a rudd – in a pool

opposite the Fonts. Divers have previously reported seeing eels and small trout in the lower end of the River Cave, and these have probably found their way in from the River Yeo via the resurgence. However, rudd are predominantly still-water fish, and to my knowledge have not been seen in the Yeo. Upstream, the nearest still water is Charterhouse pond in the Minery. Is it possible that this fish found its way underground where the pond overflow sinks in the Blackmoor Valley, and then all the way through the cave system to Cheddar? Does anyone have any sensible suggestion as to how this fish got into Gough’s show cave?



*Max Read and Rich Hobbs in the blasted tunnel beyond The Fonts.
Photographer: Phil Hendy*

map or aerial photograph, and they can be manipulated so that the caves can be examined from any angle, either alone or in conjunction with other caves. Clubs and surveyors have generously provided original survey data, as they believe that this information should be freely available and in the public domain. The program can be downloaded from the UBSS website – search for ‘Therion’, which leads to all the relevant programs and data.

Some of the caves were surveyed many years ago, and in some cases it is difficult to prepare a 3-D image from the original data. Gough’s Cave is one of these sites, and the UBSS has obtained permission from Hugh Cornwell, director of Cheddar Caves & Gorge, to resurvey

Phil Hendy