

Wessex Cave Club

Journal 328



Wessex Cave Club Journal

Volume 33: July 2013



President: Donald Thomson

Vice Presidents: Sid Perou
Derek Ford
James Hanwell

Chairman: Adrian Vanderplank
Holmwood Nurseries, Woodhill
Congresbury, Somerset. BS49 5AF
01934 833 320
chairman@wessex-cave-club.org

Secretary: Frank Tully
16 Bedminster Rd
Bedminster
Bristol
BS3 5PD
07890 862709
secretary@wessex-cave-club.org

Membership Secretary: Barry Wilkinson

Treasurer: Aubrey Newport

Caving Secretary: Les Williams

HQ Warden: John Cooper

Hut Administration: Ian Timney

Sales Officer: Pete Hann

Tackle Officer: John (Tommo) Thomas

Ordinary Members:

Darren Chapman

Noel Cleave

Hut bookings: Ali Moody

Librarian: Phil Hendy

Webmaster: David Cooke

Journal Editor:

Pete Buckley

editor@wessex-cave-club.org

ISSN 0083-811X

Headquarters

Upper Pitts, Eastwater Lane,
Priddy, Somerset,
BA5 3AX,
01749 672 310

Opinions expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the club or any of its officers.

Photographs by article authors unless otherwise stated.

© Wessex Cave Club 2013. All rights reserved.

Wessex Cave Club Journal 328

Editorial

Welcome to Journal 328. We had a drier, albeit colder, start to 2013. Our Club continues to be actively caving – as can be seen in numerous trip reports and write ups. There has also been a huge amount of hard graft put in to various projects – you know who you are!

In this issue there is part one of an appreciation of Chris Hawkes, whose death was sadly announced in the last Journal. As well as reports from foreign trips there are reports on Mendip caving. A report on the work at Spider Hole updates us all to progress there.

As mentioned in the last Journal I need members to provide ideas, photos, stories and trip write ups. This is our Journal – and it needs your input. I can not produce our Journal without your help. As you can see in this issue, a half page and a photo is fine. So, don't be shy put pen (or keyboard) to paper and share your caving.

A huge thank you to all contributors to this Journal. Without them, literally, there would be nothing to publish. On a personal level, once again, thank you for the comments I have received about Journal 327.

Happy Caving.

Pete

Cover

Sarah Payne and Aubrey Newport
Hazelnut Rift – Spider Hole
Photo by Pete Hann



Back Cover

John Williams in Grotte de Cabrespine
Photo by Pete Hann



Contents

- 4-6 Millau - 2013**
Noel Cleave recounts their week of caving in Millau.
- 7 Club News**
MCR Callout, Tackle store ladders, Pridhamsleigh Cavern 1937 and a welcome to new members. Derek Ford remembers caving with Oliver Wells.
- 8-9 Fred Davies – Honorary Member**
Fred Davies was recently made an Honorary Member. Here he gives us a potted history of his caving past.
- 10-11 Breakthrough!**
Pete Buckley tries to give us an idea of why we go caving, digging and exploring.
- 11 Warning – Bowline on the Bight**
The BCA warn us of the correct use of a bowline on the bight.
- 12-15 From Schoolboy Caver to Sage Curator**
Part one of Jim Hanwell's appreciation of Chris Hawkes.
- 16-17 Ouch!**
Just another Reservoir Hole trip? Naomi Sharp tells us of her recent experience in Dingley Dell.
- 18-19 Wookey Hole and Cheddar Caves**
A comparison of these two tourist attractions by Paul Stillman.
- 20-22 From the Logbook**
Transcripts from the Upper Pitts Logbook.
- 23-24 Spider Hole, Cheddar Gorge**
Adrian Vanderplank details the history of Spider Hole and outlines the recent work carried out in this cave.
- 25-26 A Geological Assessment of Spider Hole**
'Tav' gives his geological assessment of potential at Spider Hole. This article pre-dates the Frozen Deep discovery.
- 27 Spider Hole Survey**
- 27 Herault Account**
Clive Westlake's account of their recent trip in the Herault

Diary

- July 12th Priddy Folk Festival
July 13th Second Saturday Trip (Northwest Stream Passage)
July 13th Yorkshire permits for Deaths Head Hole and Lost Johns
July 14th Yorkshire permits for Shuttleworth Pot
July 14th Committee meeting
Aug 3rd Try Caving Weekend and BBQ
Aug 10th Second Saturday Trip (Banwell Bone Cave)
Sept 7th Yorkshire permits for Gingling Hole
Sept 8th Yorkshire permits for Hammer Pot
Sept 14th Second Saturday Trip (Long Hole and Great Oone's Hole)
Sept 15th Committee meeting

Hut Bookings

- July 5th UCET (10)
July 8th to 29th Archaeology Students (30)
July 21st MCRA Library booking

RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

As at 13th June 2013

- Bristol Exploration Club 'Belfry Bulletin'
58, 8 (545) (Jan 2013)
59, 1 (546) (Apr 2013)
- BCRA cave and Karst Science 40, 1 (Apr 2013)
Cave Diving Group N/L 187 (Apr 2013) (*Reservoir Hole*)
Chelsea S.S. N/L 55 3-4 (Mar/Apr 2013)
- Derbyshire Caving Association
'The Derbyshire Caver' 133 (Winter 2012 / 2013)
Information Circular 2013/1, 2 (Nov 2012 to Feb 2013, Mar to Apr 2013)
- Descent 231 (Apr/May 2013) (*DYO, GG (biggest chamber), Reservoir Hole*)
232 (June / July 2013)
- NSS 'News' 71, 3, 4, 5, 6 (March - June 2013)
NSS J. Cave and Karst Studies 75, 1 (Apr 2013)
SMCC 'Journal' Autumn 2011 (*Chris Wood, Thailand, Iceland, Isle of Wight greensand caves*)
White Rose Pothole Club N/L 32, 1 (Apr 2013)

Donated by J. Ankerman:
Dickinson L. *Wookey Hole – The Bottom of Britain* (Video & DVD)

Le congrès national de la Fédération Française de Spéléologie, Millau, 2013 *(Text - Noel Cleave. Photos – Chris Binding)*

Guilty parties: Chris Binding, Carmen Smith, John Hurst, Francois Tollemer and Noel Cleave

Sunday May 5 2013

John and Noel arrived after a long drive (we left chez Hurst at 0200...) at 1730 to check into our immobile home. While we were exploring the facilities and contemplating supper, Francois arrived. Next stop was the pizza nosherie over the road. Plenty of wine helped the fatigue factor before we crashed.

Monday May 6 2013

Got up lateish (0830). Went up to the Géant for a mega shop, then to the Parc de la Victoire, where there was no sign of the FFS. Back to the camp to collect our caving kit and set off to le Vigan and the Event de Rognes. The drive over via Alzon was staggeringly scenic. We were running late, so we stopped at a Logis hotel for an excellent lunch before driving to the Decheterie.... where we found major, but **major** roadworks at the Decheterie entrance. We got changed in the road and set off to find the entrance. And failed (ie. Noel failed) to find it. We melted, scrambling up screes and bush-bashing. So, eventually, suffering from heat-exhaustion, we accepted defeat and retreated to our camp, with an dehydration cure detour to the Cirque de Navascelles on the way. A serious BBQ eased the pain of not caving. It would appear that Magrets de Canard are highly acceptable.... but somehow had John lost his hearing aids at Rognes. Today then, Cévennes 2, us nil.

Tuesday May 7 2013

Revisited Parc Vic. Still no sign of Speleo life. Drove (2 Cars) gently to Demoiselles where we parted company. Noel had to high-tail it to the Montpellier airport. He got there just



Noel Cleave : Another Magret?

the 10 minutes before Chris and Carmen appeared. En route back to Millau we thought to boggle the Binding mind with the Cirque De Navascelles. On the way we enjoyed precautions against dehydration.... and slightly less enjoyed the realisation that the low fuel warning light was on. Retreating to Caylar cured the fuel problem but back at the camp site, no sign of John and

Francois. They appeared shortly afterwards. They had not visited Chamouse, but had gone back to the Vigan decheterie and, miraculously, found John's hearing aids. Reunited we enjoyed yet more Magrets and encountered the world-famous Binding Roquefort salad.

Wednesday May 8 2013

We started actually caving in the Cabanes St. Paul. There was some confusion over the uniqueness of this "Cheese Cave". Common sense confirms that more than one cool dark natural cave would have been used for cheese production. The access description was fine as far as it went, which was to the brink of a serious cirque cliff. Carmen's GPS, and lots of red-and-white FFS tapes brought us to the entrance. The entrance passages were littered with cheese production relics, and walled off into various rooms on two levels. Past the last of these the natural cave was a very fine, large, passage. This shrank quite suddenly into a long canal stoop.

It was worth getting a bit wet because from there on, upstream, it develops into a sporting river passage with deep lakes and multiple handline traverses. Sadly, we were halted by a 4 metre drop. It was roped, but we lacked SRT kit (the cave continues for another 1km or so). Exploring outwards we found the flood exit - a magnificent cleft at the foot of the cliffs. Thirst was setting in as we climbed back to the car, reflecting that our mobile home had both cold beers and a coolie-bag. Just for future reference.....

Returning via Roquefort village, which was ugly, we found a bar, so survived until a BBQ (featuring dead chickens, rather than ducks), enhanced by yet another of Mr. Binding's Roquefort hyper-Salads, and microwaved baked potatoes.

Thursday May 9 2013

The description notes on Bramabiau suggested that entry was tightly controlled and needed pre-booking. Francois got onto the telephone and discovered that neither restriction was correct. So we went there. Bramabiau is an unlikely looking place with a river punching directly through a hillside. The exit is a tourist attraction, more for drama than beauty (no formations at all). We went downstream to this, via a massive entrance.

Initially there were alternative and confusing routes, but it soon settled into a long series of waterfalls and floats down the river in a very high rift. Way above us the roof was decorated with logs jammed by earlier floods. No place to be in one of those! Not having seen the exit, and knowing that the final waterfall was "No-Go" we struggled to get out of the river canyon onto the show-cave path, high above us. Some interesting climbing and an **extremely** bold step put us up onto the tourist trail. Bramabiau, being a tourist

cave, boasted a pleasant café so thirst and hunger were easily avoided.

Homebound we diverted to the Grotte de Dargilan show-cave. This was fabulous; better than either Demoiselles or Chamouse. It's on the side-wall of a sensational gorge. It was also raining with considerable enthusiasm, so we went home and Mr. Binding fed us with outrageously garlicky prawns.

Friday May 10 2013

John departed early (by bus) to Montpellier to fly home. To cheer ourselves up we did the Traverse de la Grotte de Suèges. This is situated in the most extraordinary outcrop of limestone, surrounded by blue slate and shale lahars - a sort of miniature Mesa. We changed in a bitter gale but warmed up climbing to the entrance. The entrance pitch was awkwardly rigged and Francois added to his excitements when his main "Omni" karabiner opened.



Sueges Mud Lake

At the foot of the crystal-lined entrance shaft there was a Mendip-worthy squeeze: definitely a de-kit number. Various up and down pitches, plus a splendid traverse and tyrolean over a sea of mud led to the icing on the cake: an open-air exit pitch down the cliff face. Suèges was 2 hours of very good fun. As we were leaving we met a party of German cavers and discovered that they, too, were camping at Côté Sud. We guessed (correctly) that two of them were more than squeeze sized!

Beer at the car revitalised us before we went on to Aven Valat Negro. This boasted an enormous steel "I" beam for elephant SRT. It was about 8 feet long and must have taken a crane to position. Below it was a splendid shaft, opening into a huge chamber. Some clown had rigged the sloping last section with a knotted rope. The formations were magnificent but some of the more accessible ones had been vandalised with mud. With two caves under our belts we did another BBQ, Magrets and sausages event.

Later Thomas, one of the Germans, called round to socialise..... which didn't help an early start on

Saturday May 11 2013

When Francois decided that he could do the Brise traverse with us before driving home. Despite an unsociably early start we found 12 cars and dozens of French cavers already there. One informed us that Brise 1 bottom pitch was not rigged..... yet. So went to Brise 2. A grotty little entrance led to Faust shaft. Faust was not grotty. It was an awe-inspiring, echoing, straight 133 metres featuring four (badly rigged) flying re-belays and numerous deviations. The streamway was sporting, with lots of progress "In opposition", hand-line traverses and climbs. The rock was razor sharp, a dream for grip and holds. There was some slightly tricky route finding through boulder-ruckle squeezes, before we reached the downstream sump. There was no sight or sound of the French riggers; just a tantalising whiff of Gauloise on the draught. So we retreated up-stream to Faust, finding the upstream journey

far easier. 133 metres of continuous prussiking made it a 4 hour trip. Francois left late after Chris had fed him a major league omelette. Later we enjoyed a gorgeous indoor supper of Salmon fillets. We were becoming seriously disenchanted with the cold, cold weather.

Sunday May 12 2013

We arrived "Early" at the Aven de

Portalerie to find a cast of thousands preparing for a reverse rescue.... taking two disabled people down into the cave, wheelchairs and all! Got ourselves into the gloom ahead of the circus. Ropes everywhere. Not a wheelchair-friendly inch in sight, but a natty space-blanket tent being established for warming and, we guessed, comfort stops. Lots of interesting traverse rigging and handlines down to the Grande Salle which was grand indeed with wonderful formations, even though the mud vandalism was appalling and glorious curtains had been stoned. We looked, oohed and aahed, and did some photography.

As we started out we encountered a lady struggling on the first ascent and traverse, which was, admittedly, badly rigged. She lacked any arm power at all, but her companion gradually got her across. We hesitated to interfere and in any case the stance above them was shortly packed with "Rescue" teams. We rocketed up, receiving much praise as Tarzans. Rocketing was a no-go after that as we

encountered a descending wheel-chair, so Noel was persuaded to pose in it. An extra-friendly local showed Noel and Chris a long wallowy canal which allowed them to by-pass the descending circus.



Back on the surface again, we inspected la Cavalerie for Knights Templars signs for a while. The fortress village looks a bit touristy where it has been over-restored, but is undeniably pretty. The Pizza place at the village entrance told us that we were too late for lunch (A fine Gallic Sod-Off, we can't be bothered) so we went to the café built into the fortress walls, took beer and had delicious Galettes. It was warm and cosy, Noel went into enthusiasm failure mode, but C² steeled themselves to tackle the rigours of Aven Bob. 1600 metres of windy walk in was followed by 100 vertical metres of vertiginous path down to the entrance where numerous Frenchmen were clustered. The real question is how on earth had Bob found his aven in the first place? It's small and obscure, part way down a featureless and overgrown, nearly vertical cliff face.

There was only a small delay before C² vanished downwards. Noel hiked back to the car for a snooze,

anticipating a 2 hour wait, but C² reappeared after an hour, having exhausted the exceptionally limited charms of Aven Bob.

Supper was indoors again, and we did a number on a sort of giant omelette, which suffered from being unturnably large and the lack of a grill, but tasted OK. Later we visited the frozen Germans at their dinner shelter. They were miserably cold and our mobile home seemed a better choice than ever!

Monday May 13 2013

Sunshine and a forecast of +18. Carmen announced early that she wanted a sunshine day. In short order and with little discussion, first Noel and then Max agreed! Cooked breakfast - not; baguettes and apricot jam did fine. The morning was sightseeing; first Compeyre, then the Millau viaduct with coffee-and-sticky-cake break. On to Navascelles for drinks and lunch at the belvedere café, before we drove down into the hameau, which was delightful and had a lovely looking restaurant for another visit. We came home via Caylar for fuel, so the entire week had only used less than a tankful. Did most of the packing. The evening was warm, so fired up the BBQ and had fillet steaks and more of Chris' wonderful salads, not to mention Asparagus and hyper-Garlic butter over everything.

Tuesday May 14 2013

Boohoo! Go home day. Cleared the mobile home, packed the car, did the inventory check with Madame who refused payment for one chipped mug. Set off in nice time for the drive and a lunch. Captain Chris chose a village close to Montpellier and we had an excellent pizza/beers/vino. Captain C wetting knickers about time, so left as planned and arrived, as planned, at exactly 1330. Bye bye C². 7 caves in 6 days; for all sorts of reasons, a perfectly excellent week.



CLUB NEWS

MCR Callout *(Claire Cohen)*

Mendip Cave Rescue warden, Stu Gardiner, has asked members to complete a call out survey. The survey is to provide a database on those who are willing and prepared to be called on in the event of a Cave Resuce and will also include people's experience and skills relevant to the rescue situation.

The survey document, which has already been emailed out, can be found on the notice board at Upper Pitts. You can complete the form and return it whilst at Upper Pitts.

TACKLE STORE LADDERS

Recently ladders have been returned to the tackle store poorly coiled, dirty and with 'C' links clipped together. Our tackle master, Tommo, reminds us all to clean gear before it goes back into store and that ladders should be tightly coiled up and to **not** clip the 'C' links together.

CAVES AND KARST OF THE YORKSHIRE DALES

Way back in 1974, Waltham and Sweeting edited the seminal volume *Limestones and Caves of North-West England*. A lot of water has flowed down the sinkholes since that time, and our knowledge and understanding of karst scenery both above and below ground has grown enormously. So have the processes of printing and publishing. Tony Waltham has now revisited his earlier work, and with David Lowe has, through the BCRA, produced a magnificent and completely up to date version: *Caves and Karst of the Yorkshire Dales*. So far, only Volume 1 has been produced, but Volume 2, which deals in detail with the various major cave systems, is available as an e-book, although 'when all component chapters and completed' it is intended to publish this as a book as well.

Volume 1, available both in hard back and soft bound, covers the wider aspects of Yorkshire geology and hydrology, as well as discussing the effects of glaciation. Chapters describe the chronology of the caves, and the formation processes which give rise to cave formations. Conservation is, of course, a major concern, not only dealing with the fragile underground environment, but specifically with regard to cave biology in general, and bats in particular. Palaeontology and archaeology are also covered.

Running to 255 pages, the book is profusely illustrated with high quality colour photographs, maps and diagrams. Each of the sixteen chapters, written by a total of twenty authors each of whom is an expert in their field, is extensively referenced. This is a book which many will

want to read from cover to cover, but more than that, it will be an invaluable reference book for anyone wishing to learn more about Yorkshire caving. On offer until 30th June, the book can be obtained from BCRA, Old Methodist Chapel, Great Hucklow, Buxton SK17 8RG, or via bcra.org/bookshop.

Review by Phil Hendy

Pridhamsleigh Cavern – July 1937

Ken Dawe pointed out an article in a recent Ashburton paper. The article was about the July 1937 exploration of Pridhamsleigh Cavern by members of the Wessex, "Cavers explore the legend of the lake".

In July 1937, T C Paynter was accompanied by Capt Bannister and E D Bannister. They had brought a 17ft canoe to cross the lake but this could not move beneath an overhang. Paynter swam into the lake and found it in two parts about 20 m long, separated by a narrow piece of water. At the southern end the lake was about 60ft deep.

Pridhamsleigh Cavern was described as a cavern of wonderful beauty, with walls decorated with pure white formations.

Thanks to Ken for passing this on. If any Wessex members have any photos, memories or log reports from this time please pass them on. Ed.

Membership News

A warm welcome to new members Mark Wildman and Andrew Brown.

Caving with Oliver Wells *(Derek Ford)*

I was very sorry to learn from James Wells that his father died in February this year. Oliver and I first met and caved together on Mendip when I was finishing my school years in Bath and then back on leave from national service in the RAF. Over 1955-58 we saw a lot of each other because he was doing his grad work at Cambridge and I was an undergrad at the other place. Of a Friday he would bully a couple of friends ('cavers when pushed' they called themselves) into his slab-sided Ford Standard and swing by Oxford to pick me up for the next trip to (usually) Swildon's. Four of us with kit and wearing the mandatory duffle coats were a tight fit in his car, which was just as well because one frosty November night we skidded on a patch of ice on the winding road between Oxford and Swindon and went quite a distance tipped over. "Nobody hurt?"

inquired Oliver. We lifted the car back on to its wheels – and made it to the Hillgrove hut before the Hunters’ had closed.

I participated in the Mayday Passage digging (not one of his better ideas) and bailed on the near side during the first push through the Mud Sump. Oliver, Keith Chambers and I drilled, placed and fired the first charge in Blue Pencil Passage. Actually, it misfired first time (pre-war bang?) but gave a satisfactory THUMP at the second try. Relieved, we headed out together, agreeing to get back to the job two weeks hence as Keith was booked for climbing in Cornwall during the intervening weekend. He drowned there in a tragic accident, and Oliver and I didn’t have the heart to get back to Blue Pencil until the Westminster speleos had opened it into Swildon’s’ Four. I was in support on his first dive through Sump Four, on the Wallington accident soon after, and mapped along behind when he, John Buxton and Phil Davies opened Swildon’s’ Five and Six for free-divers. Sadly, the last time that Oliver and I caved together in England was the Neil Moss tragedy in Peak Cavern at Easter 1959. For the first 24 hours neither of us appreciated how serious the situation was. Then Oliver jury-rigged an oxygen mask, hose and supply in the hopes that it could revive the trapped man. We rushed it to the site and gave it a good try but resuscitation was infeasible – poor Moss was probably dead already.

In the summer of 1959 Oliver and his wife emigrated to the USA, beginning with work in Pittsburgh, the heart of the US steel industry. At the same time my wife and I emigrated to Hamilton a couple of hundred miles further north and heart of the Canadian steel industry. Oliver joined the Pittsburgh Grotto (caving club), so we soon had a couple of trips together to Germany Valley, the club’s caving region in the rugged ridge-and-valley country of northern West Virginia. The caves were roomier, warmer and drier than in Mendip but offered good challenges, and there was fine

gritstone climbing alongside. These were the years before President Lyndon Johnson’s ‘Great Society’ initiatives transformed the Appalachian economy; Germany Valley really was hillbilly country. The Grotto rented an old farmhouse there and had a new outdoor one-holer dug to service it. For the first eighteen months or so this lacked some essential bacteria; the last time that Oliver and I fiddled together with bits of his diving gear it was to give our families safe breathing masks for quick dashes in and out of the facility!

Oliver moved to Bell Labs, New York, soon after and pretty much dropped out of the caving scene in the US. We exchanged Christmas letters but never met again in person. His son, James, is a caver, climber, passionate environmentalist and Facebook activist, living in Seattle: he is the spitting image of his father, who has much to be proud of.

FURTHER RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

Donated by B. Prewer:

- Bailey J. & J. *A Year in the Life – The Mendip Hills*
- Mullan B. *Fairy Cave Quarry. Climbers’ Club Guide*
- Patten R. & J. *Somerset Scrapbook*
- Powell J. & Davey J. *Mendip Country*
- Toulson S. *The Mendip Hills – A Threatened Landscape*
- Beck H. *Three Peaks and Malham (Family Walks)*
- Duerden F. *Great Walks – Yorkshire Dales*
- Spearman C. *Walking in the Yorkshire Dales*
- Wainwright A. *Walks in Limestone Country*

Fred Davies awarded Honorary Membership

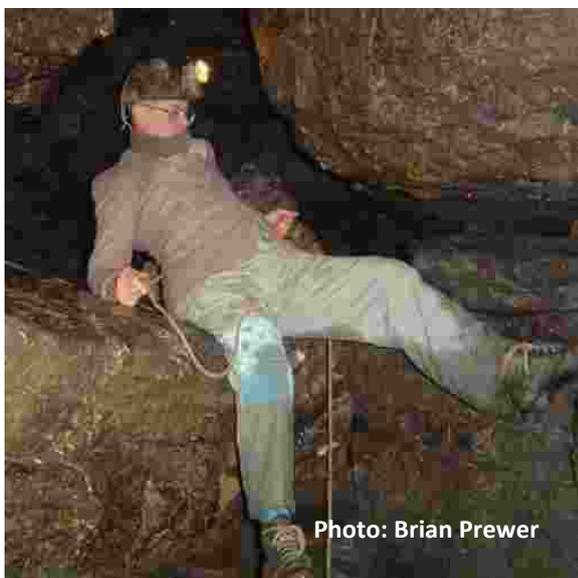


Photo: Brian Prewer

While I hugely appreciate being elevated to the Peerage - from Ordinary Member to Honorary Member - I must emphasise that as a caver I have always regarded my allegiance as being to Mendip caving in general, rather than any one particular club.

At times I have been a member of SMCC, RAMSCC, Dales Club, DSS and CDG and have continually caved, dived and dug with mixed members of other clubs. I’m not sure if Honorary Membership requires any qualification other than a clean criminal record and survival into antiquity, but I have also been Secretary, and Editor of the SMCC, Chairman of the CSCC and the NCA and Warden of the MRO. I have, of course, been a happy member of the Wessex Cave Club for many years, and in retirement from active caving my continued membership remains a constant pleasure. I could go on, so I will.....

As a teenager I enjoyed scouting and attended the first post-war World Jamboree at Moisson, in France, with the Somerset contingent - about 1947. In about 1947 I cycled from Street (my home town) to Priddy and attended an initiation and introduction to caving run by some founder members of the SMCC: an Upper Swildon's trip. We took along a change of clothing and a torch. I became fascinated, found literature on the subject and started encouraging neighbours and school friends on visits to Goatchurch, Rod's Pot, Upper Swildon's and so on, all by pushbike. Old clothes and hand-held torches were the order of the day!



Photo: Brian Prewer

While a student at Exeter University (1951 – 1955) I was also a member of the DSS, visiting Pridhamsleigh and Bakers Pit, plus weekend visits to Mendip with such luminaries as Ken Dawe and Wally Wilcocks, to do the Mendip classics. National Service from 1955 -1957 saw me stationed at Catterick with lots of fellow enthusiasts, for visits to Yorkshire potholes such as Bar and Alum. One

exciting day Diccan was mistaken for Long Churn!

A memorable week one January found us camped in Coire An Gabhail - our tent was blown away and my companion suffered frostbite (6 people died in Glen Coe last winter!).

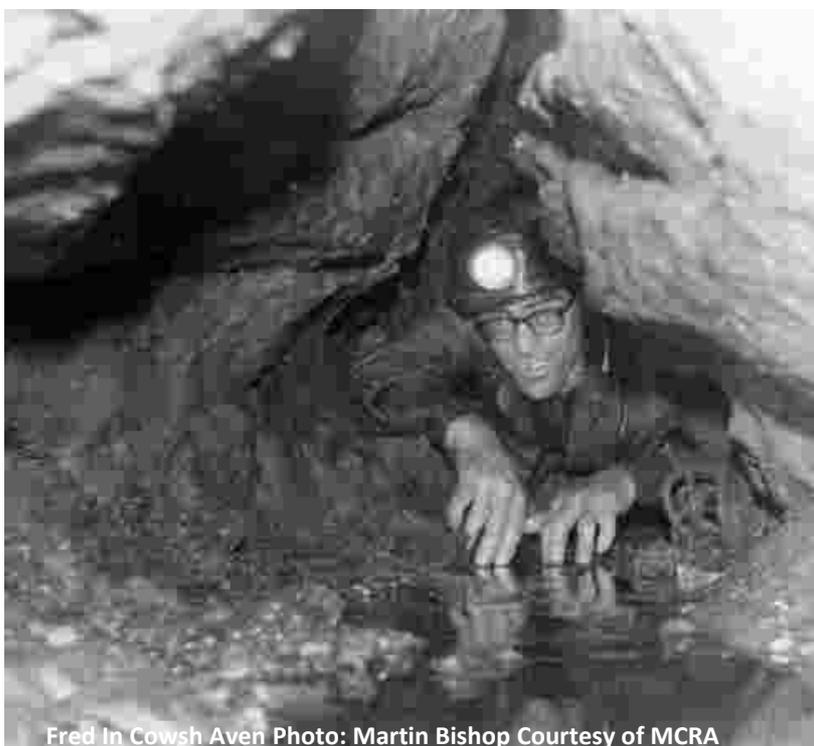
Demob in 1957; I was teaching in North Wales. No great caves but I spent a lot of time investigating small stuff (see "Caving in North Wales", Occasional Paper No.2 SMCC) and many visits to Mendip, sherpa work on diving ops in Swildon's. In 1960 I returned to God's own County, to teach at Millfield - now with Wife and Child. More sherpa work on diving ops, then I myself started to dive, forming partnerships with Steve Wynne-Roberts, Mike Thompson, Mike Boon et al. and exploring and surveying Swildon's 5, 6, 7, also Stoke Lane 3,4,5, and Threaplands in Yorkshire. I also wrestled maypoles into Cowsh Aven, and St. Cuthbert's.

Visits to Spain led to exploration of Vega de Liordes in the Picos de Europa and our techniques gradually changed from ladders to SRT. Our first attempts, in Lamb Leer involved hawser-laid rope and prusik knots - and learning the hard way to put the foot prusik above the chest one - character forming stuff!

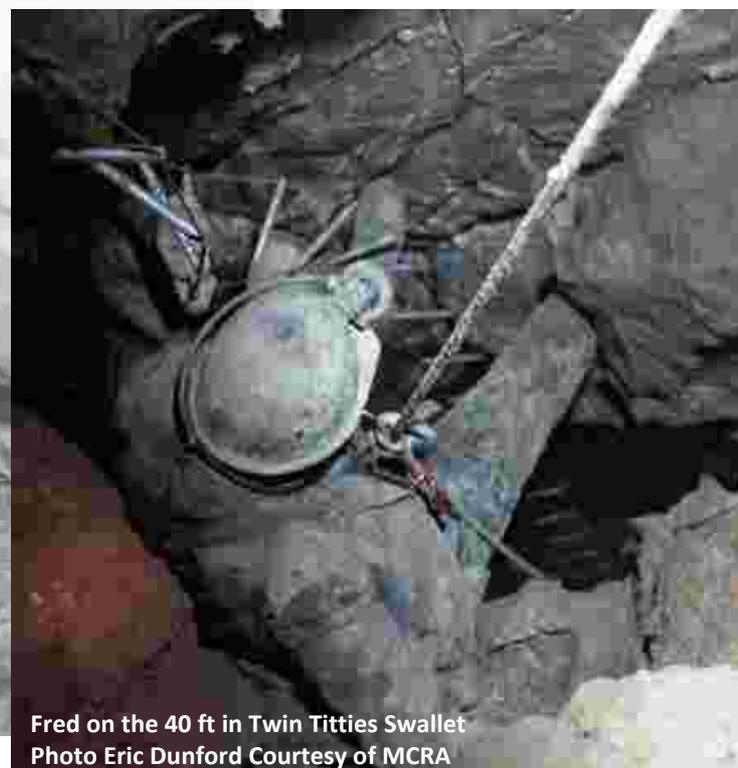
Having retired from diving I helped on many digs, notably in Priddy Green, which later led to serious attempts to come up from Swildon's 4 when Priddy Green itself seemed no-go. These uphill epics were recorded in the Wessex Journal - "Not now and again, but again and again and again....."! We reached great heights, approximately 20 feet from the surface, but it remained for JRat to make the breakthrough, many years later.

Almost by accident, when John Cornwell invited us, Mike Thompson and I made the first descent of Rhino Rift first pitch. While for relaxation during this time, there were summer visits to the Gouffre Berger and Pierre St. Martin.

Fred Davies



Fred In Cowsh Aven Photo: Martin Bishop Courtesy of MCRA



Fred on the 40 ft in Twin Titties Swallet Photo Eric Dunford Courtesy of MCRA

Breakthrough! (Pete Buckley)

A couple of years ago, just before I became a Wessex member, I asked for a tourist trip down Charterhouse. Needless to say I was given a bag and dragged it down the cave to Sand Dig. Surprisingly, not only did I survive the experience but I enjoyed it and volunteered to help out again.

At the end of April 2011 I was in the group making the first trip of the year into Charterhouse beyond Portal Pool. At the time I wrote a trip report (“No Footprints”) to try and express my excitement of being given the opportunity of leading and caving in pristine passages. *“It was from here onwards that we were walking in ‘fresh’ passage - there was no sign of any footprints. A real buzz for me, which I might have mentioned once (or twice) on the trip. Charterhouse must be a very active cave during the winter to scour out and wash away the summer’s footprints.”*



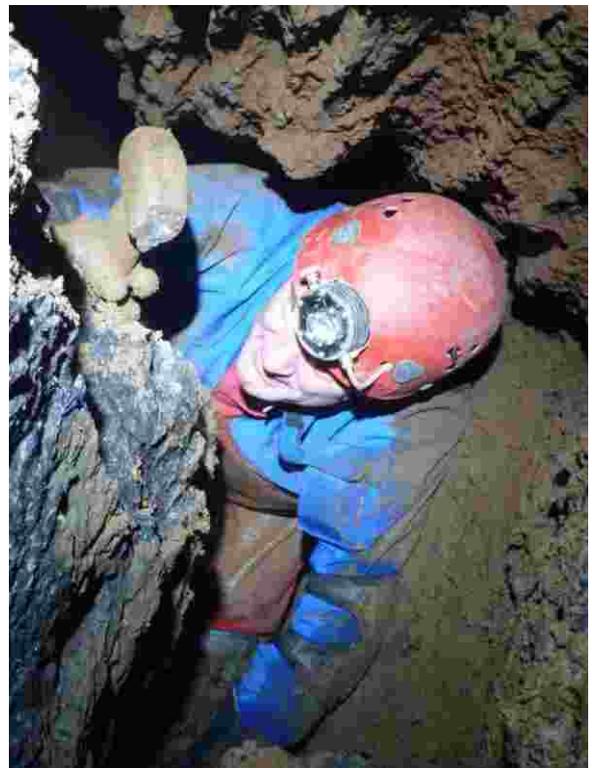
Moving on to the end of July and a further nine trips and the Sand Dig connection had been completed. We’d made the breakthrough. I remember feeling that the hard work had finished but not that excited – after all, we’d come out into known passage.

Shifting focus to Swildon’s, South East Inlets and another 9 months later I was again present on the breakthrough day; when we connected Maypole Aven to Lower Terminus Chamber. This time it was more exciting – I’d never been in Lower Terminus Chamber. Indeed, it’s still pleasing to know that I am the first person to have been in this chamber without going up the notorious 42ft Rift. The breakthrough team (Ali Moody, John Cooper and the author) were the first team to complete a Maypole Aven / Swynne Puke round trip.



Moving forward another year, to the start of 2013, I was present at breakthroughs over 2 consecutive weekends.

Firstly, was the culmination of 3 months of work in Read’s Cavern making the breakthrough into the main streamway. This breakthrough on 26th January was hugely satisfying and the result of a lot of hard work. Ali Moody had managed to gain the main streamway and was working on the other side. On the breakthrough weekend I was **very** determined to get through. Although the route was only Ali sized, I used brute force and a lot of Anglo-Saxon incantations to force my way through. It hurt, a lot. But I managed to get through and was jubilant! (Getting back required us to enlarge it a bit more). This connection point is now a very reasonable size and easily achievable by any average sized caver.



The following weekend was in Upper Flood and the breakthrough into Neverlands via a new bypass. This was again the culmination of a lot of hard work. The Neverlands Bypass is a 2 hour slog from the surface. Making the breakthrough was an unexpected bonus. Ali and Andrew Atkinson had been subcontracted by the MCG for the explosive work need to create the bypass and John and I were the invaluable Sherpas, essential for lugging the drill batteries down the cave! Again, I’m very pleased to have been one of the first into Neverlands without going through the really delicate stuff and it is a stunning section of passage, where we only explored for a short distance because we were so muddy. Sadly, the mud on the camera lens meant that the team photos taken on the breakthrough were not very good.

The last we heard about Read's was from Ali Moody in the last Journal *"This impressive section of passage is very unlike the rest of Read's and well worth the effort. The dig, a narrow very draughty rift looks very promising"*

By the end of March work back in Read's had reached a critical point. We had been working to enlarge this narrow, very draughty, rift. At the dig face Ali had managed to loosen some large slabs of rock. She'd fit through but it would be easier if we could break them up and shift them from blocking the way around a slight kink in the rift. I spent an enjoyable time using a lump hammer to gradually reduce them to manageable sized pieces. (I must have been thinking the slabs were

Eventually, the rock was shifted and the way on clear. I was honoured to be given the first lead. Ducking under a rock and into a large sloping rift passage. Whoopee! I was so excited – completely new, unknown, uncaved passage. Waiting for the rest of the team (Ali Moody, John Cooper and Andrew Atkinson) I could see the large rift passage dip down sharply for about 20 m – easy caving (and, for Read's, big passage!). This is what it's all about – the fantastic feeling of new cave.

At the bottom of my first 20 m lead, the rift passage turned right and pinched down into a narrow rift where the way on was a very uninviting pool with a minimal airspace. It was time for me to let Ali have the next lead

Since then the draughty rift, Early Grave, and the pool have been further explored and surveyed. The water level of Alzheimer's Pool drops in dry conditions and when low I've been lucky enough to push a further 5m. A lovely muddy

passage with a snug pinch point allows access to Alzheimer's Sump. The water here is deep and it feels as if the cave still 'goes'.

I, and the rest of the team, are hoping for a major drought this summer. Having been present at a number of breakthroughs and, finally, caving into brand new passage I've developed a taste for this and I want more!



All photos by Ali Moody

Bowline on the Bight - Warning

On January 13th 2013 the British Caving Association issued this warning regarding a common use knot in British caving.

Warning - correct use of Bowline on the Bight Knots

*BCA's Training and Equipment & Techniques Committees would like to highlight the importance of **ALWAYS clipping a cowstail through BOTH loops of a Bowline on the Bight knot**. Although this has been taught for years by BCA instructors, it appears that many cavers are not aware of the importance.*

*The problem is that in a fall the knot can slip in such a way that the rope going down the pitch can actually run all the way back through the knot. This means that a caver falling at a pitch head with their cowstail clipped into only **ONE** of the two loops could potentially plummet all the way to the bottom of the pitch. This cannot happen if they are clipped into **BOTH** loops.*

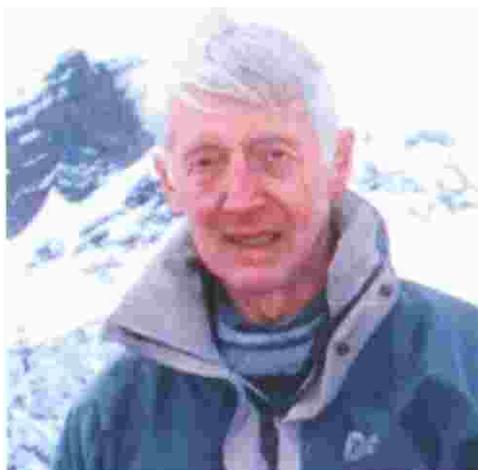
A useful tip is for the rigger to leave an HMS karabiner clipped between the two loops to make it easier for the rest of the party to clip in and it is always worth remembering that two cowstails are preferable to one.

The problem is only related to one of the four strands that make up the loops, but if you clip into the wrong one and nowhere else then fall heavily, the rope that goes down to the bottom of the pitch can be pulled back through the knot causing you to be lowered (rather quickly!) all the way to the bottom.

This would not appear to be a well known fault in the British caving world, the initial investigation was carried out in France back in 2010, but the long established best practice for using the knot would mean the risk is avoided and remained unnoticed.

FROM SCHOOLBOY CAVER TO SAGE CURATOR: The First Forty Years

CHRISTOPHER JOHN HAWKES 1930-2013 (Jim Hanwell)



This tribute, in two parts, tells the story of schoolboy Mendip caver who became a self-made archaeologist and museum curator in Wells and Bristol. It spans the full history of the

Wessex Cave Club, and more, as the club fast approaches its Eightieth Anniversary in 2014. I had the good fortune of working closely with Chris and his family over most of the post-War years; from the “real” austerity of scarcity and rationing to today’s “sham austerity” of too much choice and vast waste – for precious little lasts long. Chris capitalised during the intervening boom years and created his very own niches within the Mendip caving community and museums’ world. He, too, was a realist and cheerful sceptic.

Christopher John was born in Stratford-upon-Avon on 19th July 1930, just a couple of years before the now famous Shakespeare Memorial Theatre was first opened. He was weaned on the great productions staged there before the Second World War and retained a love of Arts and Crafts thereafter. His grandfather, Harry Peach, had founded the thriving Dryad metalwork enterprises based in Leicester. So, Chris grew up closely connected with their many famous craft products; notably quality engineered household ironmongery. Well-designed door knobs and knockers



Wessex Cave Club Journal 328

were a speciality. He was shown how to weave cane furniture, as a hobby. Type-print, book-binding and pottery also became personal interests.

Surrounded by long-established Quaker Friends, Chris was also blessed by Harry Peach’s wider involvement with social and environmental issues during the Inter-War years. Many of his campaigns to conserve historic urban and rural areas in the Midlands were way ahead of their time and became models for the national Town and Country Planning Acts post-War. Other innovations included the educational value of museums and their collections. Harry was a founding father of Leicester’s University College and the City Museum, both of which remain closely connected to this day. Such influences clearly bolstered Chris’s early years. Visit the city’s many museums to find more about Dryad’s history and Chris’s background.

When his older sisters, Mary and Joan, went to Sidcot School at Winscombe in 1937 they and young Chris were taken to Gough’s Cave and Cheddar Gorge by their parents. He often told me that this visit led to his love of caves and archaeology. Later, throughout the war years, he too was a pupil at this well-known Quaker boarding school and revelled in its enlightening policies that allowed boarders to explore the Mendip countryside on their own initiative at weekends. Here he met such like-minded characters as Willie Stanton, Nicholas Barrington and the Stride brothers, Arthur and Ralph. Arthur read geology at Bristol University and became an oceanographer whilst Ralph studied medicine there and was an active member of the University of Bristol Spelaeological Society (UBSS). Both brothers contributed the brief listings of caves in “Southern England, Wales and Devon” for the booklet on *Britain Underground* (Dalesman & Blandford, 1953). This pioneering publication led to Nick’s more detailed accounts in *The Caves of Mendip* (Dalesman, 1957) and his subsequent enlarged revisions in collaboration with Willie.

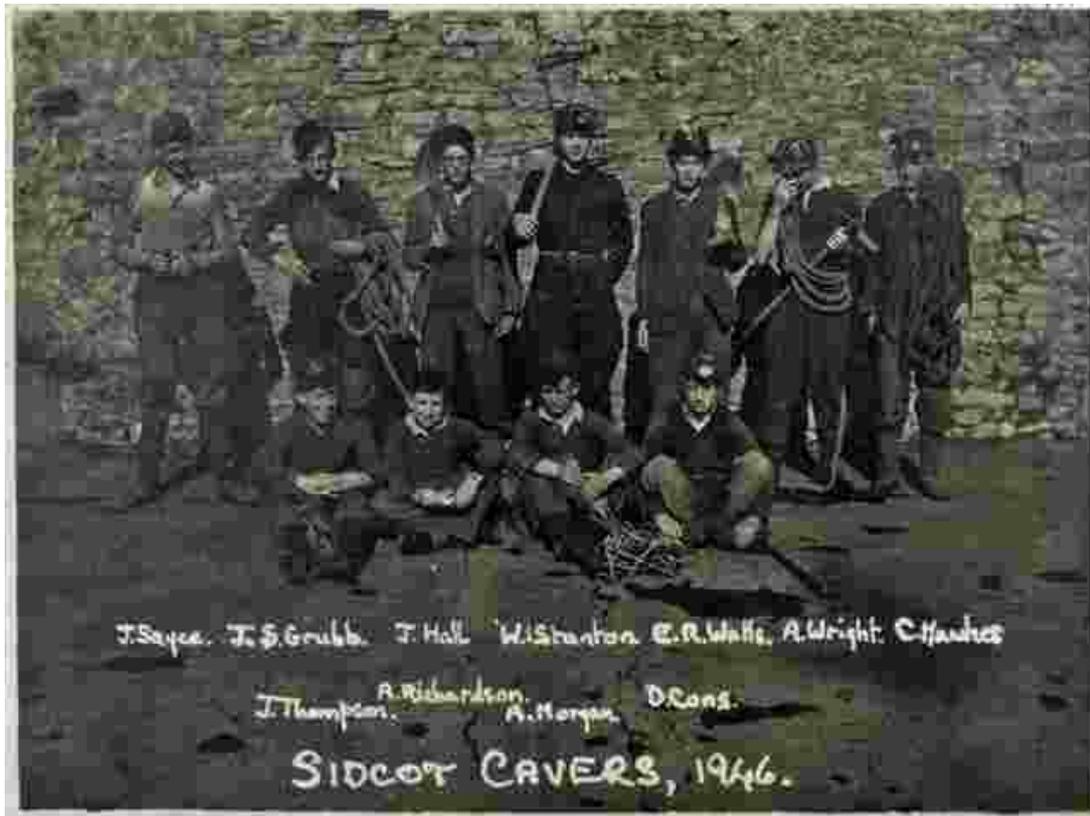
Such success stories show that Sidcot “spelaeos” made the most of their wartime schooldays. A long tradition of “outdoor education” had been well established by former pupils. For the record, Sidcot’s Natural History Society had been established in the 1860s, from which a “Caving Club” evolved when Hywel Murrell went there in the 1920s. In 1934, Hywel became a Founder Member of the Wessex Cave Club. As the club’s first Honorary Secretary, until the Second World War began, he also inspired its imaginative “Affiliated Members” scheme whereby school and other groups could have formal links with the Wessex. Sidcot’s “Caving Club” became the second such group to join the Wessex in 1937. By the end of War, however, it had been renamed the “Spelaeological Society”; a reflection of the more serious cave research and successful discoveries that pupils of Chris and Willie’s vintage felt they had undertaken.

Chris especially regarded their archaeological excavations at Scragg's Hole, below Crook Peak, as his own entrée into Mendip's rich archaeology. A less serious distraction was when Jean Simmons, who later became a famous film star, was evacuated to Winscombe and the local school. Her father taught sports there for a while, having been in the GB athletics team at the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm. Jean meanwhile is on record as having made her stage debut in the village when 14 years old, probably at Ken Bird's popular Assembly Rooms next to his bakery. I'm fairly sure that Chris was not overly keen on sports or games, and Bird's Assembly Rooms were a far cry from Stratford's Memorial Theatre, of course. Whilst much taken by such an attractive local girl, Chris remained committed to caving. And, as far as I know, Jean doesn't get a mention in Willie's very thorough school diaries. You can read these to prove me wrong via the Mendip Cave Registry and Archive's (MCRA) website.

In an era when going to university was mainly confined to a few academic high-fliers, Chris was content to pursue a path that satisfied his more practical interests. After school, he worked for a while in Pontefract, a bookshop in London and a laboratory in Manchester that prepared skeletons as teaching aids. "Learning by doing" was his forte. Rather than a career involving "sudden death" examination hurdles, he chose a more assured future with his uncle at Dryad Metalworks; one which gave him a job for life and one in which he could largely be his own boss! At least this is how most of us on Mendip saw his professional life taking shape.

After two years of National Service, with the Army in war-torn Germany, at Wuppertal, Chris returned to his family's works at Leicester in 1950. Despite the post-War "Austerity Years", Dryad's businesses were about to boom with the rebuilding of Britain's blitzed cities and new housing in general. Chris was responsible for arranging contracts with architects and developers for quality door furniture and other metal ware fittings. I still have the well-used ones he kindly gave me as a wedding present for my new home in Wookey Hole, built over the frigid winter of months of 1962-63.

At home, in Leicester during the 1950s, Chris found scope for his archaeological interests. Nearby, the city's Museum staff then included Max Hebditch, who hailed from Yeovil in Somerset. On hearing of Christopher's caving background, Max invited him to help dig out a local well



that had promising archaeological potential. They also kept in touch when Max moved to Bristol before becoming Director of the London Museum. Leicester University's flourishing Department of Archaeology was also close to hand. Opportunities to meet and work with noted archaeologists thus abounded.

On Mendip, such contacts included the eccentric Philip



Rahtz who dug key Roman sites in the Chew Valley in the 1950s, before they were flooded by the new reservoir; then directed the excavation of King Alfred's Saxon Palace at Cheddar in the 1960s and a dozen other sites around Somerset. Chris helped at his dig on Glastonbury Tor. Philip was a Wessex member during this time, was born in Bristol

in 1921, went to Bristol Grammar School in the 1930s and was greatly influenced by such Mendip authorities as Edgar Tratman and Leslie Grinsell. Chris visited Philip often after he became a lecturer at Birmingham University, in 1963, and more so when he was made Professor of Archaeology at York University in 1978. His reputation as a talented field archaeologist, ardent naturalist and liberal lothario appealed to Chris. However, I do not recall him emulating the professor, or going starker himself! It was the practical approach to digging that mattered most.

Many of us on Mendip marvelled at Chris' knowledge of who's who and what's what in the world of archaeology and how he'd found time to do so much! His countrywide travels on behalf of Dryad provide us with some clues. Fred and Andy Davies, for example, often had visits by Chris when they were living in North Wales and he made good use of the Wessex Members Address List. He was also happy to have members call in and stay at his own home in Leicester; a convenient stop-over for those en route up the Fosseway to cave in Yorkshire *before* motorways. Mike Thompson and his wife Elizabeth, for instance, spent the first night of their honeymoon there. As Mike's Best Man, the three of us had shared this well-kept secret! Chris' cavers' social world thus became countrywide.

Mendip figured most on his itinerary and Chris became a keen member of the Wessex Cave Club in 1955; a momentous year for new cave discoveries down Swildon's Hole, among other things. At the time, Howard Kenney in Wells was much involved with such matters and already a great friend of Willie Stanton, whose Quaker family roots from Street also spread far (see my "Wessex Man" tributes in WCC *Journals* No. 321, Aug 2010 and No. 322, Jan 2011). Howard proved to be match-maker and, later, a king-maker on Chris' behalf.

Willie's first cousins from York, Martin and Elizabeth Ridges, spent many school holidays with him in Somerset. After the War, 'Liz chose to train as a nurse at Bath's Royal United Hospital. Here she met Edith Barker and introduced her to Howard in Wells. With two eligible young ladies to escort, both were taken on introductory trips down Swildon's, where Edith remembers being impressed by 'Liz's caving skills. After qualifying in 1953, both nurses met up again when applying for posts as mid-wives at the Salvation Army Mothers' Hospital in Hackney, London. Much toing and froing ensued between Mendip and London cavers over the next couple of years, until Howard married Edith in 1955, with 'Liz as her bridesmaid.

I was just an observer, at university in Hull, but well recall the journey from Wells to London in Dennis Kemp's packed-full Land Rover, after the WSG's second trip through the Mud Sump to explore Paradise Regained on 26th March 1955; 'Liz kindly agreed to sit on my knee for

the entire journey! In September 1957 Chris and 'Liz were married at York in the famed Rowntree Village. Nick Barrington's brother Pat was Chris's Best Man. As 'Liz's mother and Willie Stanton's mother were sisters, formerly called Walker when living in Street, Chris roguishly claimed to have married into the "Street Walkers' family"! He was also proud to become a first cousin to his schoolboy friend Willie.

I had recently graduated from the university "down the road", and been on a celebratory car and camping tour of Ireland. New lives lay ahead for us all and portents of the "Swinging 'Sixties" rife. Rebellious, teenage "baby-boomers" were due to arrive in force. Though no Teddy Boys ventured into the Hunters', as far as I know, or went down caves! My own sights were set on digging the Priddy Green Sink on the roadside opposite Fountain Cottage, once I could get the necessary approval of all concerned in the village, the Local Authority and many others. This took some time, of course, as a few people were concerned about such a project. With fingers crossed, I reassured them that the dig wouldn't take long!



Priddy Green Sink

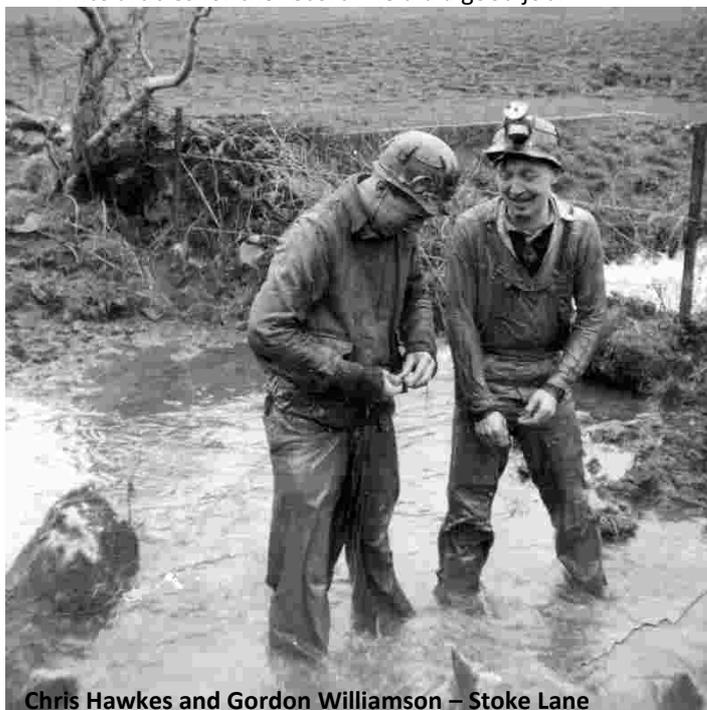
Meanwhile, Chris and 'Liz first went to live in Leicester where their daughter Sarah was born, in 1958, and their son Jeremy, in 1960. Despite such growing family commitments, Chris came to Mendip to take part in the marathon cave diving pushes into Swildon's Four, as outlined in my recent tribute to Oliver Wells (in WCC *Journal* 327, Jan 2013). I was deeply impressed by his care and compassion for poor John Wallington, whom Chris accompanied up the raging Forty Foot Pot waterfall, and through the flooded Water Rift, before he died in the Water Chamber – the 17th January 1959 was a truly unforgettable night!

Things started to look up over the next couple of years. Work at the Priddy Green dig began at 5.30 a.m. on 26th August 1959 and attracted much attention from the general public during the long hot summer that followed. It became an "all-comers" dig with many Mendip-based clubs involved. Chris was often there in the early days. In October

that year he was elected to the Committee of the Wessex Cave Club, where further changes were afoot. Foremost was the outstanding vacancy of a new President, ever since the death of our Founder President Herbert Balch, in 1958, and the way that the Club's longstanding Honorary Secretary, Frank Frost, had sought to run everything in the Wessex since the War. Both issues were related and only started to "resolve" after Chris agreed to become the new Editor of *Wessex Journals* in October 1960. At the AGM in 1961 Phillip Davies was elected as Honorary Secretary and Frank was confirmed as the new President.

As Editor of *Wessex Journals*, Chris oversaw their change to a meatier quarto format in February 1962. Regular issues appeared until the end of 1965, comprising Volumes 7 and 8. Even Frank Frost was impressed, though he persisted in calling Chris "Hawkes of Leicester", unaware that this parting barb actually pleased Chris himself; for a famous firm of shop fitters and clockmakers in the city traded under the very same name. I am not so sure that Mike Holland's roguish alternative "Knocker Hawkes" met with similar approval!

Whilst Chris was in charge of *Club Journals*, I became Hon. Secretary, and was reassured that my arrival was not the reason for Chris' departure from his post, for he had already lobbied and championed Tim Reynolds, another former Sidcot "Spelaeo", to take over from him. His business affairs and busy family life had to take precedence when his youngest son Nick was born in 1965. As well as reflecting his own love of print and books, Volumes 7 and 8 of the Club's *Journals* survive as good guides to Chris' enthusiasm and ability at cajoling the most reluctant to write articles for the record. He did a good job.



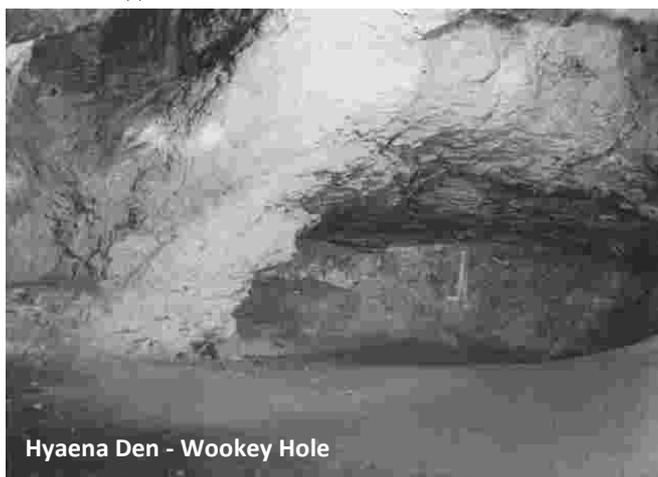
Chris Hawkes and Gordon Williamson – Stoke Lane

Whilst a frequent visitor to the main club huts on Mendip, Chris did not stay overnight at them, rather like myself who lived locally. Thus his presence does not figure in Hut Logbooks. With an eye to providing accommodation in the country for his growing family, in 1964 he bought Gilbert Weeks' old cottage called "Glen View" near the Belfry and began major renovations whenever on Mendip. He also found time to dig at Totty Pot, where he unearthed significant Mesolithic deposits including a human skull – using his young daughter Sarah's potty. Thus Chris' distinctive red Renault, with its unusual rear engine, became a familiar sight along the road from Priddy to the Club's HQ at Hillgrove in the mid 1960's. It was often parked outside the Hunters' at weekends, where Chris could be found having a beer from his equally distinctive and crude porcelain pot shaped like a toilet. A severe bout of jaundice put paid to the beers, however, and the pot assumed an off-putting appearance when filled with orange juice. Neither Chris nor Ben Dors seemed to mind.

Chris and Elizabeth, with their three young children, left Leicester to live in Priddy for a short stop-over before buying a house in Clifton, Bristol, in 1968. At the time Hywel Murrell's eldest daughter Jenny also lived in Bristol, and had access to much of her father's Wessex Cave Club archives and library. Tony Audsley recalls going over and cataloguing this material at Chris' home in Christchurch Road. Here, Chris also furthered his longstanding links with the UBSS, regularly attending evening lectures and key archaeological digs.

With Edgar Tratman, he helped to excavate the Hyaena Den at Wookey Hole (1966-70) and was intrigued with John Cornwell's dig at Charterhouse Warren Farm Swallet (1972), especially when bones were found there later by Pete and Alison Moody (1986). He returned to Wookey Hole with "Trat" to dig the Fourth Chamber sandbank (1974-76) and prove it had been used as a Romano-British cemetery. He became a UBSS member in 1974. After helping to rescue and restore the Society's museum specimens, following the Geography Department fire in 1982, Chris became Curator of the UBSS collections at their new home, opened in 1993. He had been appointed as a Vice President in 1984 in recognition of all this help. And, he had more fingers in even bigger pies nearer home!

Editor's note: Part Two, detailing Chris' Museum Years should appear in the next Journal.



Hyaena Den - Wookey Hole

Photos Courtesy of MCRA (unless otherwise stated)

Ouch! (Naomi Sharp)

Reservoir Hole, Sunday 10th May 2013

Duncan Price, Rob Harper, Claire Cohen, Connor Roe, Naomi Sharp and our illustrious leader Nick Chipchase.

The trip was planned originally for Rob to dive but as it turned out Rob had a cold and asked Duncan if he would like to take his place. So as Duncan's dresser and carrier of heavy things I thought I'd best go along.

We met in the Gorge and got going with a bag each. We made good progress to the Frozen Deep and briefly marvelled at the scale of it; the pretties and the rather nice large arch, before cracking on to our target, Dingley Dell and the sump. After finding the way off the not-so-beaten track that is TFD we crawled to the top of a dangerously loose looking, slightly inclined rift. I positioned myself awkwardly at the head of the pitch as there was not much room and lowered the gear down it on a rope. With some trouble I climbed down and once at the bottom it became clear there was not much holding up the large overhanging boulders at the top of the wall. Duncan remarked they were there by force of habit.

After making our way, chaining the gear under more large rocks I was not altogether happy about, we arrived in a more stable part of the cave where we had fun squeezing through holes and landing head first in glutinous mud. There is a particularly entertaining sideways lens shaped hole at head height which has a ladder to get onto on the other side, which Rob attempted first, much to mine and Claire's silent amusement!

So there we were in Dingley Dell, a mud filled rift which descends towards the sump. The low arch that had been dived through before was out of the water owing to recent lack of rain. Duncan got kitted up and went off into the murk. Eleven minutes later he returned and I slid down the mud, (holding onto the ladder to avoid joining Duncan in the sump) to take the line reel from him. I pulled my way back up the ladder one-handed and passed the line reel to Claire who helpfully tidied it up and I assisted Duncan with dekitting. The sump didn't go so we removed the line.

After more acrobatics getting back through the hole I passed gear up and derigged the ladder. Bringing up the rear through the boulders, I was pleased that I didn't have any gear to deal with as it was being chained further up. I could hear the difficulties that were clearly being had getting gear under the large boulder. When I caught up to the gear it was at the bottom of the rift with the hanging deaths and I noticed Nick (who had stayed behind) had rigged us a ladder and rope there, while he was waiting. I hooked the gear onto the rope, bag by bag, which Connor hauled up and I prevented from getting snagged as they went up. Nick and Duncan were behind me at this point and Connor warned me the rock at the top of the pitch had moved. I climbed up the ladder as carefully as I could but

when I was half way up there was a deafening rumble and a massive impact to the right side of my head and shoulder, which knocked me off the ladder.



Photo: Naomi Sharp

The next thing I knew I was sat on the floor with my back to a large rock and another pinning me by my chest and legs. I could feel warm wet stuff coming out of my nose and face, which I was less worried about than the rock on me. I tried to move and found that I couldn't. I could hear Nick shouting behind me and I looked to my left and saw that the boulder I had my back to was trapping Nick's hand to the wall. I could hear Duncan reassuring him and Rob from above asking who was hurt. I replied to say I was bleeding from the face and trapped and that Nick was trapped by the hand.

At this point I decided I needed to try a bit harder to get the rock off me. I'm not sure if I kicked it off or just stood up but off it came and I turned around to face Nick. It seemed to me that his left hand was being crushed against the wall by a sofa sized boulder. I tried to reassure him by promising that we would get the rock off him. Duncan asked where the nearest digging tools were. "Skyfall" he said. He may as well have said "on the moon".

When I realised that I was not going to be able to move the rock and that bleeding all over him probably wasn't going to help, I shouted for rope, crabs, slings and people and climbed out in a shower of stones, leaving Duncan to practice his recently gained first aid training.

Once into TFD I bossed everyone around a bit, (sorry!), pointed out a natural to suspend a pulley system from (which I'm glad they didn't use as it was about as stable as the rest of the cave in that area) and advised my shell-shocked looking buddies that I was leaving and they had ten minutes to get the rock off Nick.

Connor assisted me out of the cave. He did a rather good job; finding the right way, talking to me all the time, and even letting me stand on him at one point when I was getting a bit wobbly. I had used my buff to contain the face and nose bleed, which had pretty much stopped by the time we got out but I must have looked a state when we got to the cars. I sat on the bank while Connor and some helpful tourists tried to get some signal to make the call but we ended up driving into Cheddar, covering the inside of Duncan's car with mud and running over Connor's helmet in the process.

I was pleased to be ushered into the office at the show cave as I was aware that the sight of me was probably scaring the tourists. The staff at the cave were kind but I'm afraid I was not a very good patient as I refused to sit down

and was intent on calling everyone I thought may be able to help as I was extremely concerned about Nick who at that time (rock fall plus one hour) I believed to still be trapped. When I heard names of cavers I knew could coordinate the rescue being thrown about by cave staff and saw a member of staff I knew to be a caver I could relax a bit and get in the waiting ambulance. Imagine my relief when I was told that Claire had come out to report they had moved the rock and Nick was making his own way out with 'just' a squashed finger.

I had a few steri-strips and a sore face for a few weeks and, at the time of writing, one of Nick's fingers does not work. I try not to think about how much worse it could have been and consider myself extremely fortunate to still be here. It's lucky that regular digging has given us practice with moving large rocks and that they were just pinning us rather than crushing with their full weight.

Thank-you to everyone who was inconvenienced by the call out, hopefully you will be/ were around to help drink the cider we will get in at the Wessex rescue weekend.

This is the rock that trapped Nick Chipchase

This is the rock that hit the author

This is the wall that peeled away



Connor Roe on the ladder into Dingley Dell. Photo: Nick Chipchase

Wookey Hole and Cheddar Caves

May 2013 (Paul Stillman)

I first visited Wookey caves, as a tourist, with the children some 15 years ago. I have returned twice as a 'caver' on photographic trips. The return trip was with Ali Churchill, a professional guide from a stately home near Frome. She is new to caving, so her views on the visit would be from a different perspective.

I have spent a lot of time in Cheddar and have recently worked for Longleat. Cave tourism is in decline and the companies running these caves are always looking at diversifying and improving the customer experience. The hotel and pirate golf can be enjoyed at Wookey and the much publicised cable car for Cheddar is still in the planning stage.

The car park at Wookey is large and free; they get bonus points for that. The ticket buying process was fast and friendly, added to by the appearance of the "Witch of Wookey" who we were sure will be very popular with the dads.

We headed for the cave entrance and after a short wait our guide came to greet us. The group numbered around thirty people with a few small children. Ali C felt this is a little large for everyone to be able to get the best from the tour, particularly as it can be difficult to hear if you are at the back. The group set off into the cave and our guide reminded us of how to safely move around the cave. I will say our guide, who unfortunately did not introduce himself, was very knowledgeable and shared many historical and mythical stories about the cave and its many inhabitants. He spoke to a level all could hear, which, from experience, is most important for the groups' enjoyment.

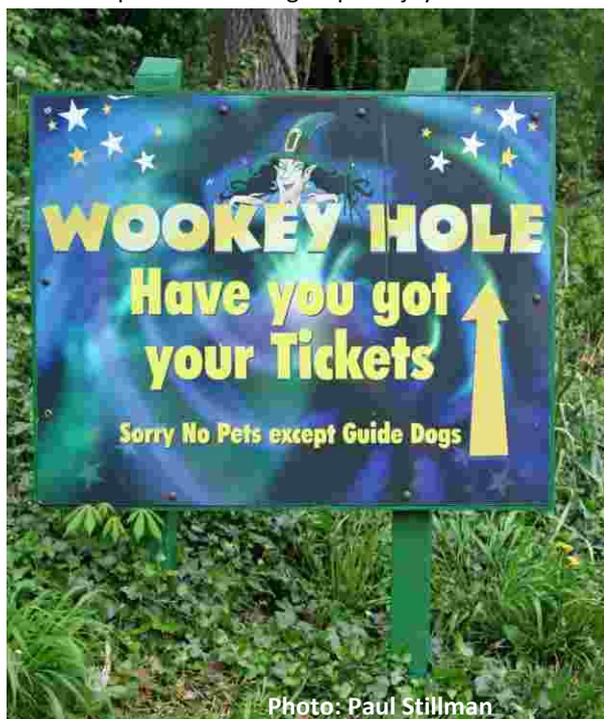


Photo: Paul Stillman

You cannot fail to be wowed by the beauty and scale of the various chambers and, of course, the water is mesmerising being cleverly lit to show how clear it is. The use of special effects and naff music seems obligatory these days but this had been kept to a minimum so did not spoil the overall experience.

After 15 minutes in the cave we arrived at the point where the way forward was on a high gantry over water. The guide offered an alternate route for those who did not feel they could manage this, but no one in our group took this option. This is the **best** bit! Looking up into a large rift with the river running below you with, again, just enough lighting and music to make this an unmissable sight.

I am sure, for us and the rest of the group, the moment was made more special by the appearance of some cave divers preparing to enter where others cannot. Of course, they just happened to be WCC friends of ours.

After leaving the cave we thanked our guide. He told us he had been doing this job for 15 years, but when we asked if he was a caver he looked at us and said "No way! Would you?" Of course, we said you don't know what you are missing. Although aren't we all just a little crazy?

There is a small diving and geology exhibition to round off the visit before exiting through the gift shop. Even if you have been caving for many years and have visited some of the more extreme underground wonders of the world we would say Wookey still holds enough magic for an interesting visit.

A week later the two intrepid cavers were off again. This time we thought we would give the Cheddar show caves the once over; just to keep it fair.

On arrival at the gorge you have to pay to park. This was not such a good start! However, if you know where to go you can park for free. Again tickets were easy to buy at the entrance to Gough's Cave with no queue the day we visited.

Very different! Here you guide yourself through the cave, with the aid of a hand held audio commentary. We were not sure that we approved of this; as there is nothing like the real thing. Indeed, although the commentary gave the visitor plenty of cave facts mixed with its history, it was a bit long winded.

Gough's Cave has the usual naff lighting effects (why do they do that?) but no music hooray! Maybe not quite the wow factor of Wookey but as you progress deeper into the cave the formations and mirror pools are spectacular, particularly in the last two chambers. You also pass the spot where groups start their adventure caving trip. This is a taster into the world of caving for those who fancy putting on a boiler suit and hard hat and having a go at wriggling through tight passages and climbing down fixed ladder's to visit chambers away from the public route.

Needless to say this is what started Ali's adventures as a caver and she has been hooked ever since! After you immerse from your underground experience you are led through a very sad and under used exhibition area and then the gift shop. Again, this was not very inspiring.

Next was Cox's Cave. This has some fine formations but takes naughtiness to new levels with the "Crystal Quest". Cheddar itself is a pretty village with a variety of shops and

loads of places to have a cream tea. We would also recommend a trip on the Gorge open top bus tour. We are sure you all know the Gorge well, it is guided and you do see the magnificent limestone cliffs from a different angle. All in all we would say how lucky we are to have such beautiful places to visit right on our door step.

So, go on, be a tourist for the day and give them both a go.



Photo: Paul Stillman

UPPER PITTS – CAVING BOARD

If you are using Upper Pitts as the meeting point or starting point for your caving trip, you should put your group 'on the board'. Leave a note of who's leading the trip and the party size, together with the cave / trip location. Don't forget to put down a realistic estimated time out.

Estimated time out of the cave should allow a little freedom for unforeseen circumstances and include travel time. Sometimes, it might pay for other members of the trip to check the ETO

Weekends at Upper Pitts are often busy, so it's always worth letting others know where you're caving.

The picture on the right shows a very busy day at Upper Pitts. Some of these trips are detailed below.

DATE	PARTY NAME	CAVE	CAR MAKE AND REG	CALL OUT
13/04	CLAYCE KEV H	PIERRE'S DOWN STREET	KMZ 2FF	19-00
13/4	MARTIN + 2	BLUE PENCIL	-	18:00
13/4	ADRIAN + 4	SWILDONS BLUE PENCIL	-	17:00
13/4	NAOMI DUNCAN	THRUPE LANE	GREEN POLO	19:00
13/4	A1 + 3	Abad's Cavern	UBSS	18:00
13/4	Pete/Ade Nigel	SPIDER MC	VAN	18-00
13/4	MATT + 2	SWILDONS SHATTER SERIES	SILVER	19-00

Photo: Paul Stillman Courtesy of MCRA

FROM THE LOGBOOK

Editor's note: Please record your trip in the logbook at Upper Pitts. There has been a lot of work in Spider Hole and Read's Cavern – some of these log entries have been omitted due to more detailed articles. (Thanks to Noel Cleave for transcribing logbook entries).

Wednesday March 6 2013 Charterhouse. Mark Helmore, John Cooper, Emma Gisborne.

Down to Splatter Chamber, and looked at our stemple and shot-hole in the boulder on the floor. Continued on down to Cascades in the Citadel and then to the Grotto of the Singing Stal. On the way out we looked at the pearls in Citadel Chamber, then climbed up into Chiaroscuro Passage and admired more cave pearls. Took in the formations in Midsummer Chamber and looked into Forbidden Passage on the way out. **Emma**

Saturday March 9 2013 Lionel's Hole Ali Moody, Rich Marlow, Andrea Russe.

Description trip for MU5. Four hours were spent going round in circles in the Labyrinth and East Low Level and we are now more confused than ever! (Only joking). **Ali**

Saturday March 9 2013 Swildon's John Cooper, Rich Carey, Emma Gisborne.

Caught up earlier part of 12 at Greasy Chimney, then had a chat with all the people going down Blue Pencil Passage. Carried on through the Troubles without having to bail them out. **Emma**

Saturday March 9 2013 Swildon's Hole - Blue Pencil. Jude VdeP, Beth Berriman, Tony Molski, Wayne Starsmore, Darren Chapman.

Very well supported "2nd Saturday" trip. Went in first as Beth wanted to rig. She carried the bag in, but the 20 was already laddered. The following group was: Flos Crowther-Smith, Will Read, Aidan Harrison, Noel Cleave, Tim Rose, Sas Watson, Bev Ford. First group found the Mud Sump totally dry (many thanks to John Cooper and Emma Gisborne for bailing it over the previous couple of weeks). We got to Blue Pencil and were heading into the 4 Streamway. By the time we'd visited Sumps 3 and 4 the next group were on their way down into the streamway. The groups split, with most people finishing the Round Trip, while a few came out by the Mud Sump. Very enjoyable trip (around 4 ½ to 5 hours for most). **Jude.**

Saturday March 9 2013 Swildon's Hole - Blue Pencil.

Arrived at Upper Pitts at ~ 1030 to find mob departures to Blue Pencil and Swildon's 4. Set off a little later after them, alone, but only as far as the 20 where there was the predictable mob waiting queue. United with "My" group I renewed acquaintance with the non-Mud Sump (thanks, Emma and John). Some kind person had put a handline on the Greasy Chimney. At the top of BP there was some re-grouping. I hadn't been up or down BP for several years. It remains something of an acquired taste! I was on the 2nd Tourist trip through it, back in the mists of time, but I was thinner and more flexible then, when BP and the bottom corner were truly horrible. Now it is bigger on the corner and all polished smoother. We "Did" 4 and met Darren in the Streamway, who had reconsidered and made a second attempt at the corner squeeze. That man has seriously big balls. Out via the troubles (the first was almost dry). Not having been underground for 6 months or so, this was a rude re-introduction to the beastly qualities of Swildon's. The word "Squalid" sums up most of the passages East of the streamway! **Noel**

Sunday March 10 2013 Swildon's Upper Series Jude VdeP, Barry Weaver, Emma & John Gisborne.

Short Dry Way, Oxbows and a high ceiling climb. Cistern Dig - inspected the rope climb. Back out via the Long Dry Way and New Grotto. Great fun and good company. 1 ½ hours. **John**

Saturday March 16 2013 Read's Cavern. Ali Moody, John Cooper, Pete Buckley.

After 28 trips we are now at the "Start" of where we wanted to be, 6 months ago! Started work on enlarging the inwardly draughting rift near the end of Lad's Luck. *ps* John got lost in Lad's Luck on the way out and we are considering putting guidelines from the entrance of the cave to the end! 3 ¼ hours. **Ali**

Saturday March 16 2013 Eastwater Cavern. Flos C-S, Will Reed, Ellen Cooper, Jo M, Paul Brown, Hoppy Plym.

We headed down a very wet entrance choke and followed Paul past the Woggle Press (which we did not see) to the slanted bedding plane, and then on to Baker's Chimney. We weren't sure if it were the right way so we turned around and eventually found the Woggle Press. Didn't go down Dolphin Pot due to a very big group on their way up. We went down to the first Rift Chamber, through the "S" Bend and then turned around. A very confused, disorientated trip..... and also very wet! **Anon**

Saturday March 23 2013 Spider Hole. John Hill, John Riley, John Gisborne, Aubrey Newport, Pete Hann, Ade and Jude VdeP.

30 bags of sand carried down the cave and one bag of cement. John(s) H and R to the very bottom. 17 buckets of clatch hauled out. The bottom of the cave was quite damp. The draught was indistinguishable, but then it seemed to be blowing into the cave, not out. **Ade.**

ps: After returning to Upper Pitts had to wait in our kit for 30 minutes as the Read's digging team were past their ETO.

This was because JC had a mind blank and put 1600 as an ETO..... we are never back to the hut by 4pm!! **Ali**

Tuesday March 26 2013 Reservoir Hole Andrew Atkinson, Chris Binding, John Cooper, Ali Moody.

Completed the re-taping of Reservoir Hole, including the High Country. It has only taken over 80 working hours and used 1,000 metres (1 km!!) of tape. **Ali**

Friday March 29 2013 GB Simon Elliott & Mark Bradbury (CPC), Ric Halliwell.

"Two Mendip Virgins discover the Delights of GB"..... Having made the effort to get down here, Ric suggested that we actually do some caving. GB was suggested as a gentle introduction to caving in the Mendips. Reasonable progress was made to the Gorge. Pretty awe-inspiring stuff compared with much Yorkshire caving. Having turned round at the sump, Ric offered us the option to exit via the "Wet Way", (Ed: Devil's Elbow route) which we spectacularly failed to find. Eventually taking pity on us, Ric was kind enough to escort us back to the surface. **Simon.**

The CPC team also visited Shatter Cave, St Cuthbert's and Swildon's. Their long and detailed write ups are a huge compliment to Mendip caving. They may appear in full in future Journals. Ed.

Saturday March 30 2013 Burrington Pensioners Triathlon.....

Compost Hewins (75), Claggy Thomas (74), Foggy Thomas (73) Nora Batty-Hewins (70) Nigel (The boy) Graham (60).

Revisited scenes of former glory, viz: Fester Hole, Goatchurch (Show cave section) and Avelines Hole (until stopped by UBSS cage). Spotted rare fauna and damaged stal. Total age: 352. Batting average 22 years per moth. Foggy also claims the first 6 feet of Sidcot. We also pronounced "Pierre's Pot precludes Pensioners". **Maurice.**

Saturday March 30 2013 Read's Cavern. Pete Buckley, Ali Moody, Andrew Atkinson, John Cooper.

Managed to pass the constriction at the end of the narrow rift in Lad's Luck and found about 20 metres of steeply descending rift that dropped to a sump pool. 2 ¾ hours. **Ali.**

Monday April 1 2013 Swildon's, Vicarage Passage. John Cooper, Pete Buckley, John & Emma Gisborne.

Superb trip to Vicarage Passage and beyond. Inspected Vicarage Passage and dig. Lots of mud and a few laughs en-route. Out via the Wet Way. 3 ¾ hours. **John G.**

Tuesday April 2 2013 Cuckoo Cleaves. Steve Muncaster, Josh White, Heather Bell.

Late evening trip do to the pipe to the lake. Steve too fat to fit and air not great at the bottom, so gave up and headed back to the Hut. Arrived 40 minutes past call-out time thanks to Steve forgetting to change his watch for Daylight Saving Time! **Josh.**

Thursday April 4 2013 Swildon's Fault Chamber Darren Chapman, John Cooper, Emma Gisborne.

Went to Fault Chamber via Airless Oxbow, and climbed up 1st Aven into South East Inlets and then on to Fault Chamber. **Emma.**

Saturday April 6 2013 Swildon's. Pirate Chamber. Geoff & Jack Ballard. Emma Betteridge, Chris Halls, Tids Moy.

To start we went down to the Mud Sump, then on to Shatter Pitch. It was very high when we got to the first duck, we had to bail it out a little bit. You had to go on your back, head first. On the second duck we spent about 20 minutes bailing out water. And then when we went on to Pirate Chamber it was a bit disappointing because it was boring, and then we went on to Shatter Chamber. Dad went through first and bailed from the other side. Good trip but a little tiring and now hungry. **Jack Ballard.**

Saturday April 6 2013 Thrupe Lane Swallet. Claire Cohen, Naomi Sharp.

A quick look to see if Perseverance Pot was dry enough to go down, which it was not. After a desperately wet climb down and back up the Aqueous Rift, we doffed SRT kits and went to have a look at the Railway Series. Met with one of the original diggers on the surface and made plans to divert the stream, to see if this would help. **Naomi**

Wednesday April 10 2013 Goughs

A day off for my birthday. A gentle Saga trip around Goughs - the Adventure Trail with a family of 5 and the leader, Sam. It's funny how you forget certain hole and crawls, then you come out on the other side and "Yeah, I remember this bit" now! Fun trip, sunny and warm and then Mendip drizzle - Oh Well! **Pauline**

Saturday April 13 2013 Thrupe Lane Swallet Naomi & Duncan.

A couple of mid-week preparatory trench digging trips as the water going down a hole upstream of the cave entrance in the hope of a drier trip. There was no sign of water in the entrance pitch or the rift leading to Perseverance Pot (despite the rainy weather). The stream was only seen again at the bottom of Perseverance. Naomi rigged the route at the end of the pretty Marble Streamway across the rock bridge to the airy "Y" hang, which was descended to almost the bottom of the cave. Decided that the last, free-climbable descent was a bit too wet to bother with this time. Fantastically pretty cave with nice scallopy, water grooved rocks and a lovely bit of streamway. Well worth the visit. Note: Caution still needed re water as if the surface stream debris were to block the hole it is currently going down, then Perseverance Pot would become impassable again. **Naomi**

Sunday April 14 2013 Reservoir Hole John Cooper, Ali Moody, Barry Weaver, John Gisborne.

Tourist trip to the Frozen Deep, courtesy of Ali and John. Breathtaking experience and Barry and I were amazed at how much work had been done around every corner. Good exercise climbing out, too! 2 ½ hours. Superb. **John G.**

Sunday April 14 2013 OFD Mark Easterling, Jo Newman, Simon Richardson, Emma Gisborne.

Went into Top Entrance and into Big Chamber NNE, into Bagpipe Chamber, climbed around the "Wall of Death" (Lives up to its name, but worth doing!). On to Bowhani Junction, top of Pendulum and the Crevasse. We went to visit the Straw Gallery, Poached Egg and Timmo's Table. Climbed down into Arrete Chamber past the Chasm and into the Salubrious Streamway. Trident and Judge and looked at the water pouring down Swamp Creek. Back out via the Brickyard. Learnt a lot on the trip about traversing! Good company and an excellent trip. **Emma.**

Wednesday April 17 2013 Thrupe Lane Swallet Naomi Sharp, Duncan Price, Tony Seddon.

"I can see clearly now the rain has gone..." Was the song of the evening as the water diversion is holding nicely. 100m of rope was wrestled through the Railway Series to the head of Chimney Pot, which has a convenient inn-situ handline down it. Wurthing Heights was rigged, albeit rather incompetently, by NS, fortunately followed by TS who tidied things up as required. The plan was to go down New Atlas direct to the bottom, but there was a waterfall in the way, so a pendulum was made into the Marble Streamway and the Traverse Ledge pitch was rigged instead. TS descended the Lateral Pitch to the bottom of the cave to retrieve a BDH dropped from the head of NAD - which was in many pieces - but did bring out the radio it contained, which survived! Exit via the Marble Streamway and up the pre-rigged Perseverance Pot. **Naomi**

Saturday April 20 2013 Read's Cavern Ali Moody, John Cooper, Pete Buckley, Tony Seddon

Lower water conditions and more work will be required to find the Browne-Stewart series sump. Also visited Lad's Luck but the water level in these sumps had risen by about 30 - 45 cm and the new duck found last week was no longer passable. **Ali**

Wednesday April 24 2013 Sludge Pit radiolocation.

Surface team: Brian & Brenda Prewer, Emma Gisborne, Marion Wilkinson.

Underground team: Pete Hann, John Cooper, John Gisborne, Barry Wilkinson.

The underground team switched on the transmitter at 8.15pm. Initially there was little voice communication so the "Pip" was started. At approximately 8.45 pm the underground team advised via a very good voice communication that the task was complete. All out of the cave by 9.20pm followed by refreshments at the Hunters.

The purpose of this exercise was to try and determine the accuracy of the paper survey (ULSA 19??) in relation to the sump. The results show the radio survey differing in the sump position relative to the surface dry-stone wall by approximately 9 metres to the South. There was considerable radio interference at the time of the exercise but it was considered that the results were accurate. Thanks to all who participated, especially Brian for the loan of the RL equipment. **Barry**

Wednesday April 24 2013 GB Keith and Derek Sanderson.

Visited nearly all the parts prior to the Ladder Dig, including Bertie's Pot. Keith reckons that it was over 25 years since he was last here. **Derek**

Saturday April 27 2013 Drake Low Bunkers (Near Kidderminster). Les Williams (organiser for WCC), Barry & Marion Wilkinson, Tommo, Dave King, Nigel Graham

Good start playing "Hunt the wallet" This site was first a WW1 and WW2 Shadow Factory underground, then by the end of the Cold War a Regional Seat of Government. Though scrap thieves have removed a lot, enough remains in the big tunnels and chambers cut into the Sandstone to give one a flavour of this intriguing and once secret site. An unusual and worthwhile excursion - surprised that more people didn't take the opportunity. Many thanks to Les. **Nigel**

Sunday April 28 2013 Eastwater Cavern John Walsh, Ollie Halls

A quick trip to get our bearings for future reference. Headed straight for the traverse, which was 'interesting' terrain. Across, then up past Baker's Chimney and bypass as far as the un-named pot down into Boulder Chamber. The now soggy map (photocopy) and thick red wine fog of John's memory were holding us up so we turned back and braved / shuffled our way back across the traverse, up into the Dining Room and popped into Boulder Chamber to have a look down the Canyon as far as the Crossroads. **John**

Sunday April 28 2013 Swildon's John Cooper, Barry Weaver, Emma Gisborne

Went and looked down the pitch in NorthWest Stream Passage. Emma says that she can't wait to go back and sample the delights of Wet Ears Squeeze again! 2 ½ hours. **John**

Tuesday April 30 2013 Swildon's Ollie Halls, John Walsh

Quick trip as far as Shatter Pot; peered down and vowed to return with a ladder. Headed back up via a quick look at the start of Renaissance Series, as far as Keith's Chamber. Hasty exit to get out in time for a pint. **John**

Spider Hole, Cheddar Gorge *(Adrian Vanderplank)*

History

The first recorded mention of Spider Hole is in a BEC bulletin in 1947, entitled "Dig at Stewarts Hole"..... No other mention of Spider Hole or Stewarts Hole is recorded again until Mendip Nature Research Council mentioned it in their newsletter. They describe the cave and the fact they had removed a largish boulder to allow them to explore a 15 foot tube to a boulder collapse. They considered there was open cave beyond but never went back to try and get through. Apart from being entered in the early cave guides there are few other articles about the cave until it is listed in Rich Witcomb's "Who was Aveline Anyway". This references its alternative name as Stewarts Hole, belonging to Peter Stewart of the MNRC who dug there in the 1950's.

May 2010, saw Tom, Sarah, Nik Nak, Jude and myself on a reconnaissance trip. Tom went to check out the North horizontal end and 30 minutes of boulder moving saw Tom entering a 6 metre extension with a flowstone wall and a dead end! Meanwhile the rest of us were investigating a dip in the floor just inside the entrance. A small amount of capping to a protruding ledge allowed Sarah to get close up and personal with a Goat skeleton but the exciting discovery was the cool draught coming up through boulders in the floor.

In the next few days Tom visited Cheddar Caves to apply for official permission to dig the cave. This, in time, we received.

The dig started to go down vertically through boulders with a solid wall on the Eastern side and large boulders on the other sides. We decided that our best way to stabilise the three boulders sides was to build natural stone walls cemented together. Over the next few months we made steady progress downwards, capping the larger boulders, using the smaller rocks for the walls and hauling the larger ones out.

With Tom's commitment to work increasing, we invited Pete Hann to join the team as his wall building skill is legendary and there were certainly a lot of walls to build. During this period there was an elusive draft, sometimes strong and then other times very faint, but always from the right hand side of the shaft.

As we approached 8 metres in depth more gaps appeared in between the rocks. It was at this time with the hauling becoming more of a problem, that Mark, Mak and Bif started complimentary digging on Thursday nights. This now gave us two evenings, Mondays, where Pete, Jude, and myself stabilised and cemented, and, on Thursdays, the A (Animal) team which did the majority of rock hauling.

10 metres down, and an undercut was becoming visible. Digging continued downwards until we were a metre below

the undercut and looking into a tube that had several large rocks blocking the tube, but had a tantalising black space beyond.

Excitement in the group grew and over the next few sessions the rocks were removed and the boulders on the right hand side stabilised. As it became apparent that the possible breakthrough would happen whilst Pete was away in France caving, both teams agreed to wait until he was back before pushing the dig.

Breakthrough

On the 9th May 2011 the digging team, consisting of John Biffin, Pete Hann, Mark Helmore, Mak Kellaway, Sarah Payne, Jude Vanderplank, and Adrian Vanderplank assembled, minus Tom Chapman, but including Robin Taviner, for what we expected to be the breakthrough trip.

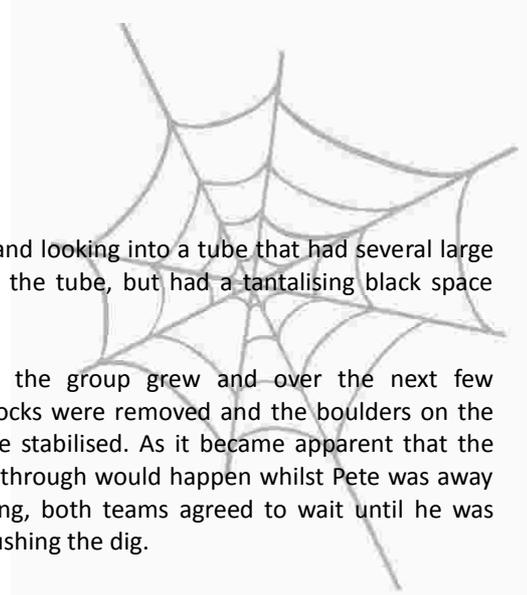
The last two or three rocks were pushed into the black space with resounding crashes booming into the distance, expletives from the rest of the team waiting in the shaft, Mark was trying to record the moment and produce a running commentary.

Finally we were through, black space beckoned, a 2 metre climb down led into a 3 metre wide rift, 4 metres high with a loose boulder floor. Another 20 metres downslope we encountered another pitch, luckily amongst our preparations for this trip we had brought with us some ladders and rope. With a much improvised belay (the ladder being attached to the rope which had been wrapped around a large boulder several times, and just for good measure Mak hanging onto the boulder.) A short 4 metre pitch lead to another 10 metres of passage before the rift narrowed the floor disappeared and more blackness beckoned. Time and a lack of the necessary equipment cut short the exploration, the Hunters called, and a very happy group of cavers exited the cave.

Plans were rapidly made to continue exploration the next day, Tom was kidnapped from work, ropes packed, drills charged, and speculation was high. Were we going to hit the Cheddar master system? Where was it going to end?

The next evening quickly arrived and Tom was set to work putting in the through bolts for the top Y hang. Tom descended this to a ledge, gardening loose rocks on the way, a second Y was inserted and Tom descended to a boulder floor. Every one descended the 21 metre pitch (split in to 9m and 12m pitches) keen to continue the exploration; we set off down slope heading under the pitch.

Ten metres downslope, the floor started to rise and the rift was filled with jammed boulders from floor to roof.



It was with a mixture of satisfaction and disappointment that we left the cave. We now had 90 metres of cave passage and 56 metres in depth. Not bad for six months digging.

The prospects for more cave were reasonable. Voids in the roof needed to be checked out. It was also probable that the draught we felt at the top of the cave was coming directly out the floor at the bottom.

Before opening the cave to the rest of the caving world, we have done several projects. The breakthrough point was stabilised and unstable rocks were either cleared or cemented together. The 4 metre pitch was bolted, and the rocks around that were cemented together. Finally a gate was built and fitted at the top of the first shaft, the key on this is the standard "Mendip Key" and this was done in accordance with our digging permission from Cheddar Caves.

August 2011 saw us starting to dig at the bottom, going vertically down. In December, although the digging was going well, we had lost the draught. A rethink was in order, we had dug past a horizontal gap under an overhang approximately 3 metres down. So with a bit of wall removal we had the draught back!

December 2011 to November 2012 saw steady progress downwards breaking the 10 metre mark.

At present, the team continues to dig at the bottom, and has been supported brilliantly by the Mendip caving community in helping ferry sand and cement to the bottom. Currently we have used three tonnes of sand and goodness knows how much cement.

Ps: as of the 28th May 2013 the bottom shaft measured 18 + metres deep!

The story continues.....



Artwork: Cheryl Lingard

*Pete Hann building walls at the bottom of the shaft, whilst Jude Vanderplank throws some light on the matter.
Photo: Adrian Vanderplank*



A Geological Assessment of Spider Hole

(Rob 'Tav' Taviner)

The Technicalities

Spider Hole is currently approximately 90m long with a vertical range of 55m. The entrance leads directly to the head of a large open North-South trending fracture, well in excess of 50m deep. The fracture is continuous but is best described in two distinct sections. The upper portion starts off as 2m wide x 10m high with a floor littered with large angular, shattered blocks. Some of these have jammed part way down the rift to form a short 4m pitch, below which the rift continues steeply down to the south, narrowing gradually down to 1m wide at the head of a second, much deeper pitch. This drops 20m into a lower section of the fracture, which is considerably larger at 4-5m wide and perhaps 25m high.

The floor here contains a small lenticular gravel deposit which features some rather unusual 'gravelmites'. There was some discussion that the gravel may derive from wash-in, either from the road or the old quarry above, and while possible, the fact that two sections of the deposit appear firmly cemented suggests otherwise. This point represents the furthest extent of the cave to the south and lies approximately 18m SSW and 50m below the entrance.

Below here, the trend reverses and the floor slopes steeply away to the north to reach a solid choke composed of further angular, shattered rocks, which have cascaded steeply down the slope from the fracture above. Slickensides, particularly in the lower section, show clear movement along the fracture to the south with the eastern wall being displaced very slightly (approx 0.5m) below the western wall. Evidence for this is clearly visible in the displacement of several well-exposed chert bands and bedding-planes. The fracture is tectonic in origin and there appears to be little solutional activity in evidence bar some fluting on the eastern wall from water trickling down.

The new Spider Hole rift is a particularly fine underground example of one of the major North-South fractures which dominate the south bank of the gorge. There is an apparent (if somewhat tenuous) correlation of alignment with Bone Hole and the little known Vurley Swallet which suggests that it may be a significant local structural feature. This alignment also appears to influence two notable bends in the upper part of the gorge which suggests that the Spider Hole joint may be a major controlling feature, influencing not just the caves but the line of the gorge itself. It will be interesting to note if there is any sign of a continuation of this fracture within Charterhouse Cave.

Future Potential

To speculate on the potential for further discoveries in Spider Hole it is first important to understand and discuss the processes

which went into creating the existing known cave systems and the gorge itself.

Overall, the catchment area has probably changed little since its inception following the upheavals of the Permian period. Initially drainage of the plateau would have developed underground, exiting at a long-eroded point high above the current level of the rising. Undoubtedly there have been numerous levels of outlet in the past but for the purposes of this article only the three major ones are examined. These relate to three distinct levels of development clearly visible today in the caves at the foot of the gorge.

The formation of these levels and of the gorge itself is due entirely to three major ice advances, which happened 500,000 years ago, 250,000 years ago and as recently as 125,000-10,000 years ago. That the ice sheet itself did not reach as far south as the Mendips is irrelevant as the resultant tundra environment would have been more than enough to freeze the ground solid, effectively sealing access to any subterranean drainage channels. With the old conduits inaccessible, the waters of the plateau would have been forced to run along the surface, excavating deep river channels at an accelerated rate and exposing levels of limestone well below that of the previous outlet levels. As the climate warmed, normal underground drainage would then have resumed much as before, only this time to an outlet at the new lower level as water is inevitably attracted to the lowest available outlet point. This process would have de-watered much of the previously submerged cave passage, leaving it abandoned high and dry well above the base level of the new water table. Significant cave development would then have proceeded at this new base level, until the next ice advance came along to repeat the process. Eventually we were left with what we see today, namely a very deeply-incised river valley (the gorge) and three distinct levels of water table – the present one at 23m A.O.D and two old fossil ones at approximately 60m and 100m A.O.D. which are represented today by the fossil passages in Gough's Cave and Great Oone's Hole respectively.

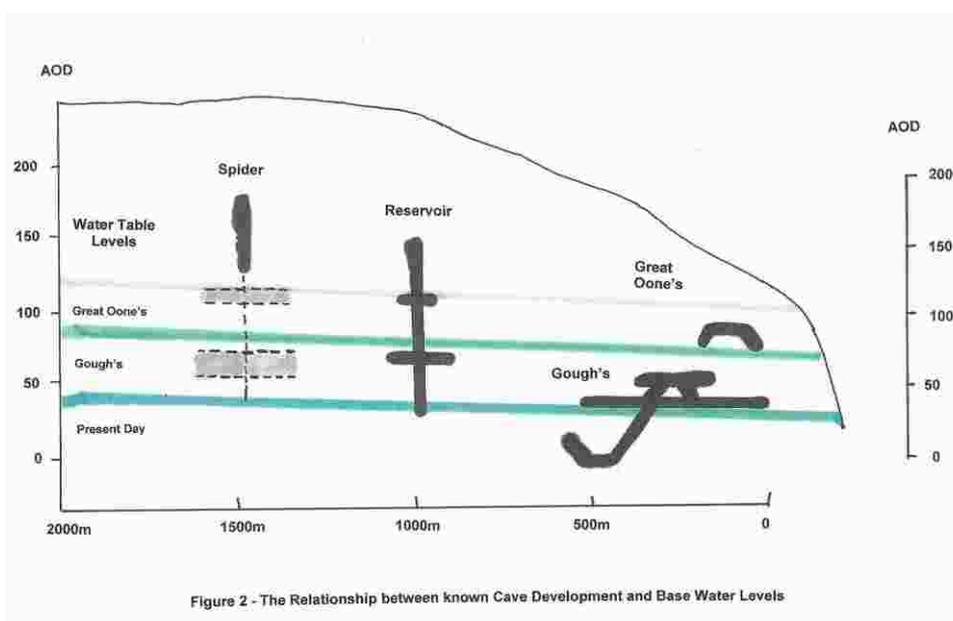


Figure 2 - The Relationship between known Cave Development and Base Water Levels

As all three of these water table levels operated for considerable periods of time, they will all have had well-developed cave passages associated with them and their influence would have spread right throughout the catchment area. It is at these levels that significant fossil development in Spider Hole (and any other cave for that matter) is likely to be found. Possible evidence to support this can be found in a number of nearby caves and we are fortunate to have access to two major caves, Gough's Cave and Reservoir Hole, where significant studies have already been undertaken. Using these as a comparison we can at least make an educated prediction as to the possible nature of any cave passages.

On this basis, the first fossil development, relating to the top of the phreatic loop in the Great Oone's level, is likely to be encountered around 110m A.O.D, which is approximately 75m below the entrance. The depth of this first predicted fossil development (20m below the current deepest point), may also explain the lack of solutional activity seen in Spider Hole so far.

So does this mean that the dig at the base of the pitch in Spider Hole is likely to be 20m deep? Well yes it might be. After all, there's an awful lot of material fallen down the rift that just has to have gone somewhere. Furthermore, if the intersection point happens to coincide with the low point of the phreatic loop rather than the high point, then it's possible that it could be quite a few metres deeper still.

However, this does not mean that the choke is by any means completely solid. The similar choke below Golgotha Rift in Reservoir contained several large voids within its matrix, presumably protected beneath the cover of overhanging walls and some very large boulders. As there are many great boulders already in evidence, there seems no reason to suppose that Spider Hole will be any different and hopefully similar voids will be encountered to act as 'shortcuts' down through the choke. In any case who's to say that the dig won't emerge in a further open continuation of the rift well before the 110m A.O.D point? After all it's already happened once. There's also the possibility that a passage may be found connecting through to other nearby fault-aligned rifts such as the one represented by Topless Aven in Reservoir Hole. Any of these scenarios could potentially bypass much of the choke in one fell swoop.

In summary then, it would seem that there is a reasonable chance that Spider Hole could encounter at least two distinct levels of fossil development, one located at 110m A.O.D and a more extensive one at 55-75m A.O.D.

Using that information, is it possible to predict the nature of any such passages? Evidence from Gough's Cave and its' satellite risings reveals few signs of prolonged vadose action. Most passages are phreatic in nature, formed mostly in bedding-planes along the strike and frequently crossed by important N-S joints, smaller versions of the larger ones encountered in Reservoir Hole and Spider Hole. There seems no reason to suppose that Spider Hole will be

any different, so there has to be a good chance that the dig will intersect at least some remnant of east-west fossil development, at either or both of the two levels described above. Such passages, (particularly those related to the old Gough's Cave water table level) are likely to be reasonably well-developed and given the amount of time they've been out of the water, probably quite well-decorated, although the devastating nature of the 1968 flood seems certain to have left some impact.

Below this final fossil level, I would anticipate a series of increasingly muddy passages descending steeply down towards the present day water table and while it is possible that these may reach an active open streamway, the correlation between the anticipated depth of this level and the known level of the water table as seen in Charterhouse Cave suggests that this level is likely to be accessible only to cave divers, albeit with considerable potential.

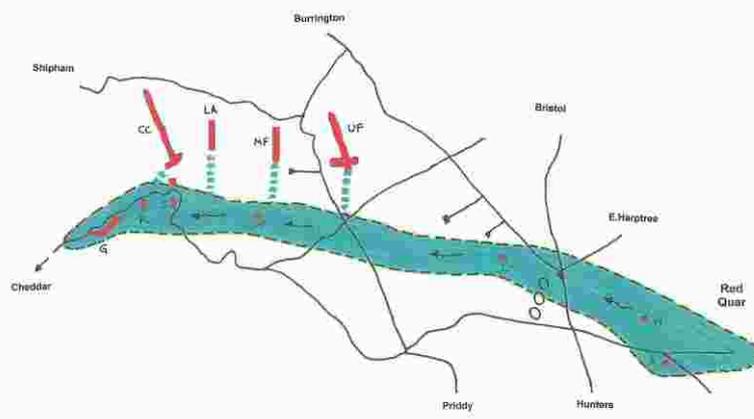
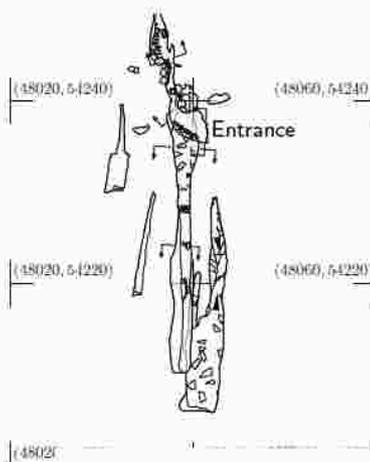
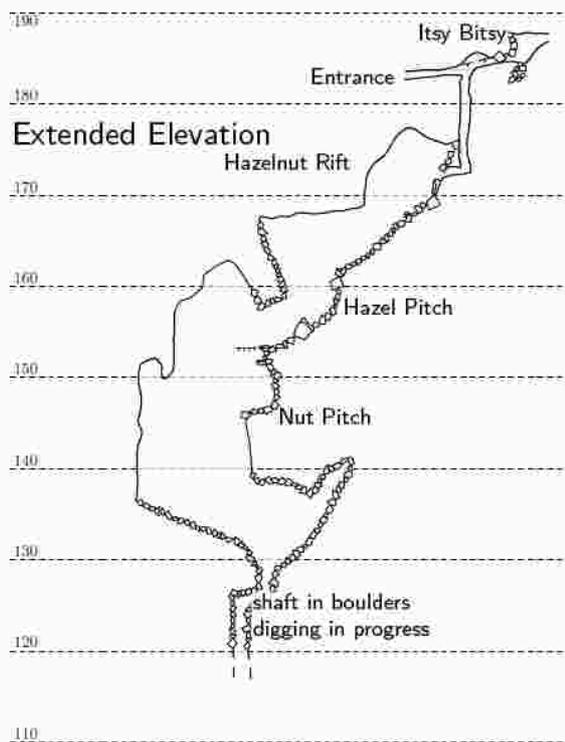


Figure 3 - Suggested lines of drainage for the Cheddar Catchment Area

Obviously the hypothesis of Spider Hole intersecting major fossil development at these levels depends entirely upon its proximity to any ancient main drainage channels feeding towards the abandoned outlets at Great Oone's and Gough's. In truth it is impossible to accurately plot the path of today's subterranean river with any certainty, let alone any long abandoned fossil passages. However cave development is not a random affair as passage alignment is largely dictated by local geological structures, with passages developing along the faults, joints and bedding planes. As previously stated, evidence from Gough's Cave shows the major fossil passages are formed mostly in bedding-planes along the strike (an approximate East-West alignment) that are frequently crossed by well-developed N-S joints.

Editor's note: Tav's 2012 longer article has been précisised here to summarise the salient points. No attempt has been made to review or update the article following the Frozen Deep discoveries.



Spider Hole



Cheddar Gorge, Somerset

Length 94.95 m (surveyed)

Depth 56.18 m (surveyed)

Drawn using Therion

by Andrew Atkinson and Graham Mullan.

Survey by Andrew Atkinson, Peter Hann and Adrian Vanderplank

Grade UISv1 6-4-EF

Copyright 2011-12 CC BY NC SA

Data available at <http://cave-registry.org.uk/>

Heights in metres OD

Herault Account (*Clive Westlake*)

Friday March 29 2013 Grotte des PN77. Herault, France. Malc Foyle, Pete Hann, Clive Westlake, Jonathan Williams, Jean-Phillipe (our accompagnateur).

Several kms drive along a route forrestière led us to la Salle, the remote and picturesque hut of the Béziers cavers. J-P took us along the short walk down to the entrance. Just inside the gate is a 12m fixed ladder. Various other fixed aids ease progress through this fine cave. There are excellent formations and a handsome streamway, which Pete and Clive photographed. Down to Olargues for a beer. 2 ½ hours. Clive

Sunday March 31 2013 Grotte de la Trayolle, Courniou Pete Hann, Clive Westlake, Jonathan Williams and Malc Foyle

A steep path up through the woods brought us to the entrance. The first few hundreds of metres of passage are well-tramped, even battered, but lead easily to a ramp/pitch of 30m. Malc rigged with some bemusement caused by the very large number of sound P Bolts - most unusual for France. At the bottom a large, deep, canal stretched into the distance, prompting a desperate search

for another route, but the chilly wade led to some large and scenic passage with plenty of gours and flowstone. Pete and Clive took pictures and we surfaced after 3 ½ hours. Clive.

Tuesday April 2 2013 Grotte de Cabrespine, Aude Malc Foyle, Pete Hann, Clive Westlake, Jonathan Williams, Jean-Claude and Alain (our accompagnateurs).

We went into the show cave and looked over a balcony - below is the most colossal chasm stretching far out of sight. This we descended by fixed ladders, staircases, hand-lines and boulder slopes until we reached the river some 145m below the balcony. We went downstream for about 2 kms in huge and superb passage with rushing water and mighty formations. We stopped for lunch - as is the French custom - near where there is a connection to an upper entrance - the Matte Arnaud. Jean-Claude declared that this way in is "Un peu physique". Not far on, we reached the Gallerie des Dômes which are similar in size and quality to the Gouffre Berger. On the way back Pete and Clive took a few pictures. This brilliant cave is worth many more visits. 5 ½ hours.

