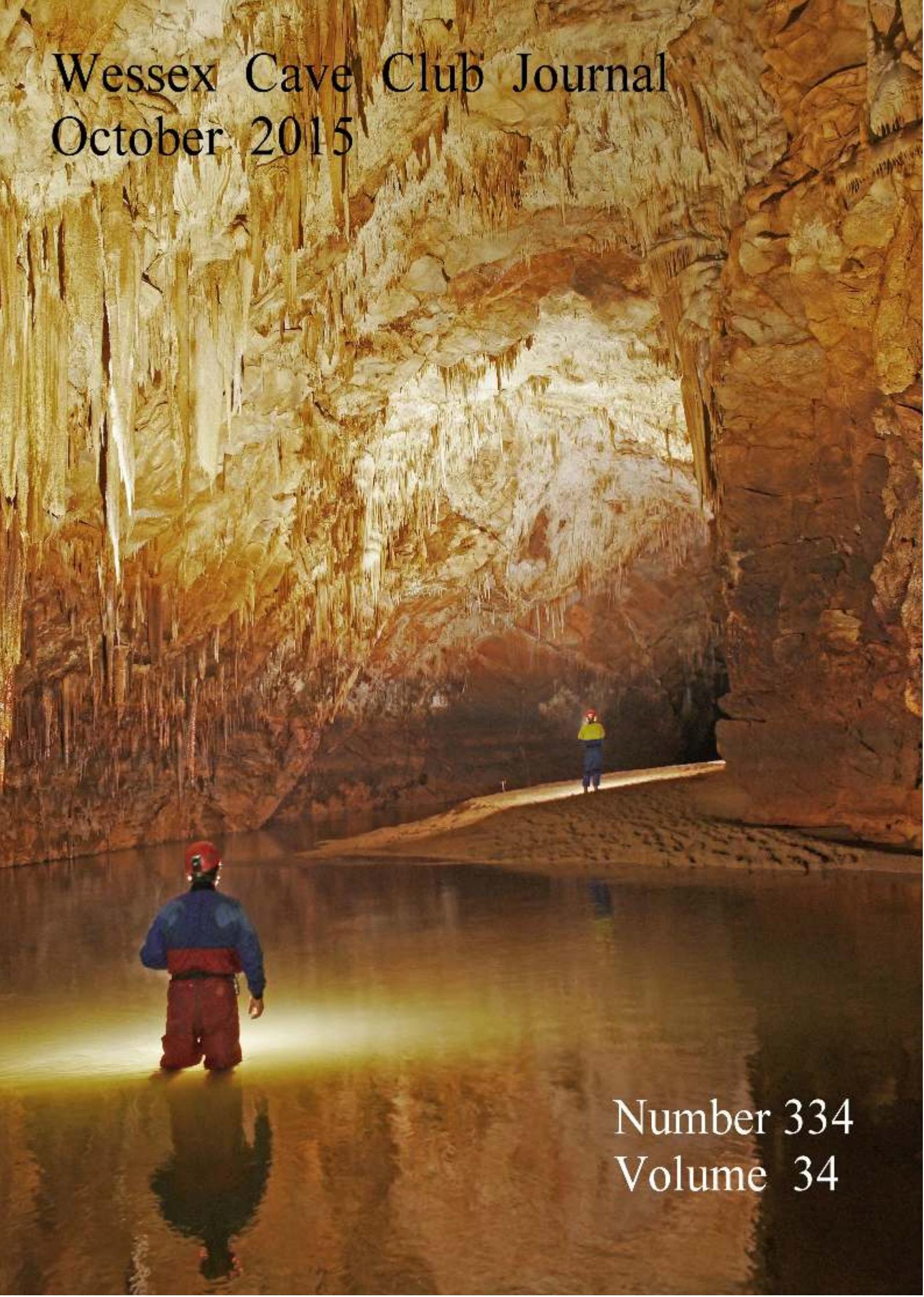


Wessex Cave Club Journal
October 2015



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President
Donald Thomson
Vice Presidents
James Hanwell
Sid Perou
Derek Ford

Chairman
Les Williams
53 Church Rd. East,
Wells,
Somerset,
BA5 3HU
01749 679 839

Secretary
Frank Tully
16, Bedminster Rd.,
Bristol,
BS3 5PD
07890 862 709

Membership Secretary
Colin Shapter

Treasurer
Aubrey Newport

Caving Secretary
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Hut-Warden
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Librarian
Phil Hendy

Gear Curator
Jonathan Williams

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Connor Roe

Sales Officer
John Gisborne

Webmaster
Les Williams

Hut Bookings
Ali Moody

Journal Editor
Noel Cleave
nhcleave@btinternet.com

Officers' Email addresses are available from our Web-Site

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**Headquarters**

Upper Pitts,  
Eastwater Lane,  
Priddy,  
Somerset,  
BA5 3AX,  
01749 672 310  
ISSN 0083-811X



# EDITORIAL



In theory, having, as the police would say “Some previous” as Editor of the Wessex Journal and several Wessex holiday journals, I should not feel intimidated at being back in harness as your Editor. In practice, I do. My last journal was number 318, in October 2009, and Pete’s Journals have set the quality bar far higher. A journal must follow the design adage “Form follows function”. Whatever the temptations of fancy fonts, glossy paper and colour printing, the content is what matters, and the content depends on the essential function of the Journal. Our Wessex Journal has evolved over 333 issues and developed into one that keeps all the Wessex members, active and inactive, near and far, informed of the activities and life of the club. And the “Life” of the club includes not just the caving and social life, but all the other shared activities we enjoy together. Typically, in 2015 Wessex members cycled, kayaked, climbed, canyoned, clambered on via ferrata and simply walked - and recorded these events in the Wessex Log-Book. Correctly, therefore, the Log-Book contents will underpin every journal. We are not a scientific society, but a Club with a capital “C”.

For some years I have been transcribing the log-book entries. I type them all up, the only exceptions being the (very rare) illegibles; but sometimes your writing puzzles me, particularly stranger’s names. It’s lots of typing and I often make mistakes, but the transcriptions still constitute the best record of the life and activities of our club. Your Editors have to chose an interesting representation of this record as extracts for the Journal. To avoid trivial repetitions, therefore, the extracts are biased towards “Out of area” accounts, whether from Yorkshire, the Continent, or further afield. These all go in. I used to include all digging trips, as a matter of principle, to bring it home to us all just how much hard work goes into finding extensions, let alone new caves. The sheer quantity of digging today makes this impractical. I include a selection, but write separately on digging elsewhere (on page 8).

Next, your photographs..... please keep sending them! I wonder if any other club is as enriched as the Wessex with a cluster of superlatively gifted cave photographers. Tragically, I cannot print all your images. Colour printing costs money and the Journal would become a photo-album with little bits of text! An ideal image file is between 500kb and 1 mb. Smaller and the image suffers, but larger takes ages to download and our Journal printing does not reflect your image quality.

Finally an apology: I wanted to get a Journal out as fast as possible, so I have used my old DTP (WordPerfect) and some of my old logos. Both, like me, are showing their age. For future Journals I have invested in Serif PagePlus which appears to present me with a steep learning curve!

*Noel*

**Volume 34**

**Number 334**

Cover photograph; Aggitis Cave, Greece. Photo: Clive Westlake

# Bits and pieces

**GB Parking** The parking area for GB and Charterhouse has been moved to a position as shown on this map, so please don't drive down to the farm itself. Please post the goodwill fee (£1.00) through the letterbox of the bungalow.



## **EuroSpeleo 2016**

The British Caving Association (BCA) and the European Speleological Federation (FSE) are proud to present EuroSpeleo 2016: the 5th European Speleological Congress. This week-long festival of British caving will run from 13-20th August 2016 and include:

A full lecture program, workshops and training sessions covering all aspects of caving  
Caving in the region's best, pre-rigged systems

The 4th EuroSpeleo Protection Symposium: "Caves & Karst - Protection and Conservation under EU Law"

Evening entertainment, including conference banquet and well-stocked bar

A range of caving competitions

A Trade Hall

Trips for cavers and non-cavers down Gaping Gill on the Craven Pothole Club winch; as usual the whole of Gaping Gill will be pre-rigged.

It's still early days so follow it on Facebook and Twitter to get the latest news as things progress. Tickets are on sale now, and it really is worth booking early, both for discounts and to guarantee camping or other accommodation space.

The Wessex has, of course, volunteered to play an active part in the event. Thanks to Connor Roe we've bagged Ireby Fell as our rigging task. The arrangement for EuroSpeleo is that rope is provided (which we can keep afterwards), but we must provide all other rigging equipment. The organisers say:

"We anticipate that rigging should be done up to one week before the event, and derigging up to one week after. Bespoke access agreements will be in place specifically for the Eurospeleo event. We ask that you use your own slings, karabiners/maillions and rope bags; however rope will be provided to you (enough for all pitches listed in literature rigging guides) closer to the time. Rope will be yours to keep after the event. Rigging should be done in line with the principals of SRT (e.g. use of deviations, and rebelayes to avoid rope rub and ensuring reliance on at least two anchors)."

**Dr Tricia Denning-Kendall** has written to the Wessex:

P A Denning-Kendall [mailto:P.A.Denning-Kendall@bristol.ac.uk]

Apart from being a caver I am also membership secretary for EGONS (Exploration Group of North Somerset) and it is our 50th anniversary next June.

It is possible that Wessex members may have been members of EGONS when it still had cavers in the group or may know of ex members who might like to attend a dinner at the Avon Gorge on June 11th. 2016. Tickets are available from myself (anpadk@bristol.ac.uk) at £26.95.

Dr Tricia Denning-Kendall  
Teaching Associate and MSc Course Director  
NHSBT

500 Northway, North Bristol Park,  
Filton  
BRISTOL. BS34 7QH  
0117 921 7344

## Journal Volumes

Given a change of editorship and a fresh Journal production, Phil Hendy suggested that we should finish Volume 33 with Pete Buckley's last Journal, 333. This would be 9 Journals, rather than the usual 10, but I agree that this be a sensible change in every way, hence the start of a new volume, and restarted pagination, with this Journal. As before, Phil can arrange binding for those of you who wish to have their collected Journals properly bound.

## The Annual Dinner Week End

### The A.G.M.

The fact that the A.G.M. was over by midday is positive evidence that the Club remains in good heart. This was despite a delay in starting on time, because of the late arrival of an officer (who shall be nameless) arriving somewhat late. Some 40 members attended, which is about average for recent years, although it was noticeable that the vast majority came from the geriatric wing of the club. This may mean that younger and newer members were just too keen to go caving. However the charge of apathy may in many cases seem appropriate.

After the President, Don Thomson, made a short address, he handed over to Les Williams to conduct the rest of the meeting. This was surprisingly uncontroversial, even for once the treasurers report. Funds are generally extremely healthy, although the hut only ran in the black because of a substantial sum paid by the archaeologists.

The only motion put to the meeting was that concerning the possibility of alternative caving insurance to that offered by the B.C.A. After Les read out a two page letter from Nick Williams, setting out the history and reasons behind the B.C.A. policy, (which Nick had negotiated) the motion was rejected with only 2 votes in favour.

The 2 vacant committee posts were filled by proposals from the floor. Noel Cleave takes on the role of Editor. In the past he has produced two volumes of regular editions. Noel intends to be more proactive in chasing up articles and club news. The remaining Ordinary Member position was taken by Tommo, who has passed the Gear Curator's job to Jonathan Williams.

At the end of the meeting Mhairi Rands raised the issue of hut fees and suggested that they were too low. After a short discussion, the chairman ruled that as it was not on the agenda, it was not possible for the A.G.M. to make a decision. However since it is, in any case, a subject on which the committee can act it, will be discussed at a future committee meeting. Any views can be put to a committee member.

At twelve o'clock we moved to the bar for lunch. **Maurice Hewins**

### The 81<sup>st</sup> Annual Dinner

This year's dinner was held at the Wells Golf Club and attended by 99 members and guests. The food, venue and staff were excellent and the drinks prices very reasonable. Chairman, Les Williams acted as M.C. and the proceedings seemed to flow more easily than on some occasions.

The dinners is a time when we entertain our landowner and farming friends and we were particularly pleased to welcome Dorothy Gibbons from East Water Farm. It is only through her good will that Eastwater Cavern is open to cavers. Newer

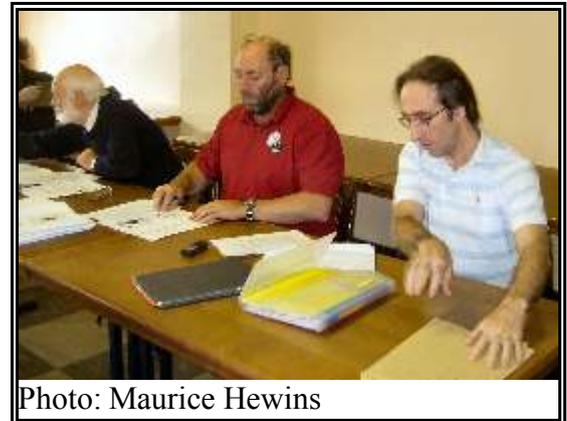


Photo: Maurice Hewins



Photo: Maurice Hewins

members may not know that without the willingness of Dorothy and her late husband, Ivor, to sell us part of their field Upper Pitts would not exist.. It is 50 years since the Wessex acquired the land and to commemorate the event she was presented with a plaque containing the original M.R.O. notice from the cave.

Our guest speaker was cave diver, Duncan Price, who entertained us with stories of his exploits under Mendip and about the recent tunnelling operations in Wookey. Later, a presentation was made to Wendy Williams in recognition of all the work she does arranging the dinner and indeed all the other things she does for the club and Hidden Earth. Thank You Wendy from all of us.

Then after the formalities there was ample time to circulate and catch up with old friends, before the coach returned to Upper Pitts. **Maurice Hewins**

## Wessex Abroad.....

### A TOURIST TRIP TO NEW ZEALAND (WITH A BIT OF CAVING)

New Zealand is a land of contrasts, from the snowy mountains and glaciers of the South Island, to the volcanic areas of geysers and bubbling hot mud in the North. It was with the intention of seeing all of this fascinating geology that Sheila Pitman and I flew south there earlier this year. Of course, the world-famous glowworm caves of Waitomo were also on the itinerary.

Shortly after arrival, I decided to put the Kiwi medical services to the test by having a minor stroke. The hospital in Christchurch passed the test with flying colours, and discharged me after only 36 hours. Unfortunately, they insisted on me staying in Christchurch for a few days, so that put the kibosh on our planned trip to the Franz Joseph Glacier. It also meant that Sheila had to do (almost) all the driving, as I was banned from the wheel for a month. But visiting the earthquake-damaged cathedral, and seeing its cardboard temporary replacement, riding trams and hand-feeding huge eels can only entertain for so long. So we took the Transalpine train across the Southern Alps to Greymouth, then visited Hokitika, home of pounamu, or nephrite jade, which is exquisitely carved into all sorts of jewellery and ornaments. Only Maoris are allowed to harvest it, usually from river deposits. After a few more days on South Island, during which we tested Jungle Formula against the voracious midges of Lake Rotoroa (they won!) and tried unsuccessfully to locate Huia Cave (possibly up a rough gravel track which nevertheless is a school bus run) we sailed through Queen Charlotte Sound and packs (packets?) of penguins, across the Cook Strait to Wellington.

New Zealand's capital city is vast and initially overwhelming, but we stayed long enough to visit some Lord of the Rings locations, and tour Weta Cave, not a cave at all, but the post-production and prop-making studio for LOTR, King Kong, Avatar and other films. Fascinating!

Then we were off again, taking a trip on the only steam-driven paddle steamer in the southern hemisphere, up a river littered with flotsam consisting of tree trunks and lumps of pumice. Navigation required the look-out's full attention. Travelling north, Mount Egmont, an extinct volcano beckoned. The first snow of winter had just fallen on the summit, but the lower slopes were thick with impenetrable bush under a radiant sun. We climbed up to Wilkies Pools, cascades over a lava flow. Climbing is a rather grand word – in fact there is an easy path and wooden walkways all the way. Later we visited Dawson Falls, a straight drop of 18 metres over lava.

A day later we arrived at Waitomo, and hot-footed it to the booking office. There are three showcaves at Waitomo – Waitomo Glowworm Cave itself, Ruakuri Cave and Aranui Cave. We booked all three for the following day, then settled into our secondary project, testing Kiwi beers and wines. With very few

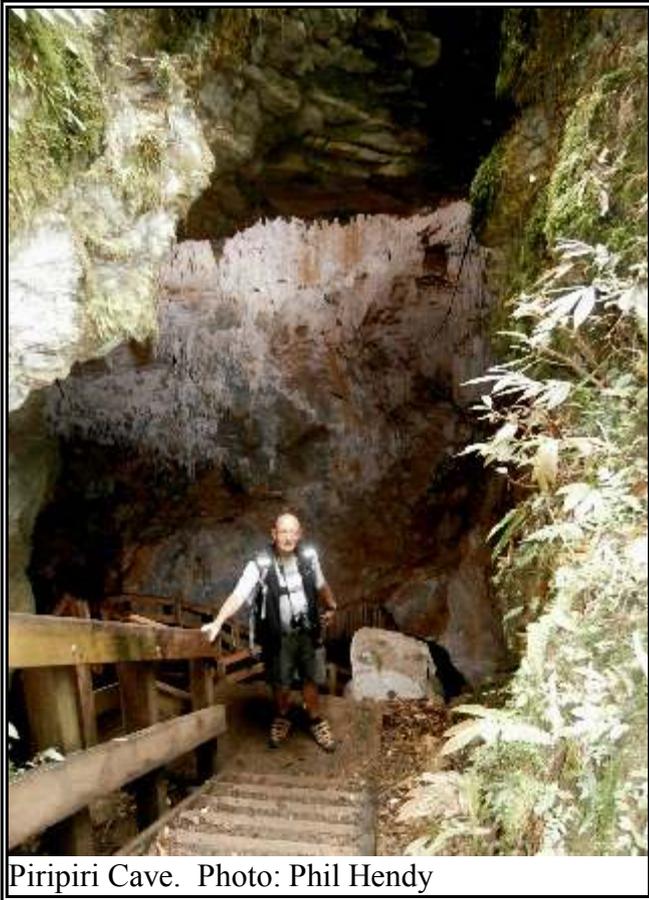


Glowworms in Ruakuri. Photo: Phil Hendy

exceptions, all are excellent. Draught or Farmhouse cider is unheard-of, and much of the bottled stuff is a bit like Diamond White, often adulterated with fruit. However, Isaac's draught cider is very much like

Thatcher's Gold, especially if the barmaid can be persuaded not to add ice. I digress.

We were up bright and early the next morning for our trip to the Glowworm Cave – we were assured that the first tour of the day is the best, the guide has more time to spare, and fewer people turn up. This was so. After waiting for a while under a huge awning housing a Maori totem pole guarding the cave, our Maori guide, a knowledgeable young woman, escorted us to the cave. Unfortunately, photography was not permitted, even in the areas without glowworms. We went through a gate and a low section, then into a large high dry rift cave, with some thinly-bedded limestone visible though gaps in pure white formations of all descriptions. The largest chamber, the Cathedral, was very spectacular. I had previously thought that the cave was just a flooded cavern with glowworms, but there is a lot more to it than that. At one point we were close to some glowworms, seeing the delicate threads they use to catch their prey. These are the larvae of a fly, which live near water, and in wet caves. They let down sticky threads, which have luminous blobs on them. These attract other insects, which are snared and then eaten. After two or three years, the larvae pupate, hatch into flies, mate, and die like mayflies. They are therefore true glowworms, not like ours, which are the female of a species of beetle



Piripiri Cave. Photo: Phil Hendy

which have luminous parts to attract males.

The upper dry parts of the cave are very well decorated, but we gradually descended to a boat, where the guide extinguished all lights, and asked us not to talk. She moved the boat slowly around the river by pulling on overhead cables. We went up and down a few times, not going very far, but the roof and walls were covered with the little blue-white lights produced by the glowworms, making it seem like a very starry night. It was very peaceful and relaxing, and after a while I could just see my hands by the light of the glowworms. Eventually the guide took us up a passage which led to daylight at the river exit, where we disembarked. The tour took about an hour.

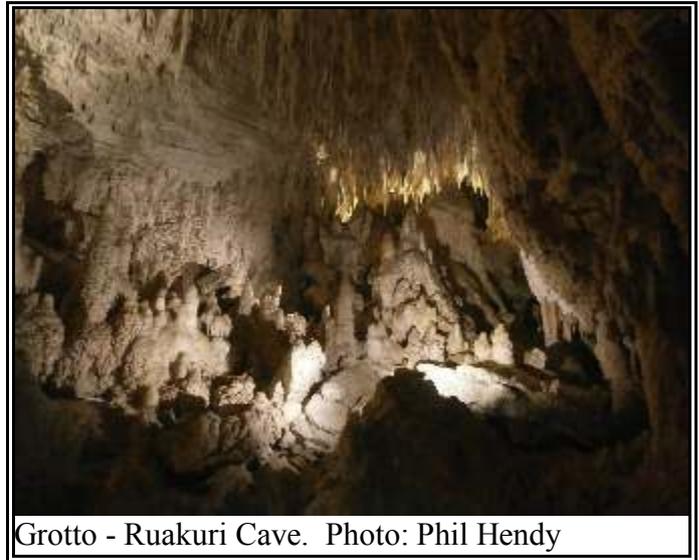
We drove a short way down the road, and waited for our guide to the next cave, Ruakuri. There was a short walk to an artificial concrete entrance, made to look like thin-layered 'pancake' rock. A sign in the vestibule warned us not to touch the formations – anyone damaging them was liable to a fine of €10,000. New Zealanders take cave conservation very seriously. The door led to the top of the drum entrance, a dark circular concrete shaft, which we descended via a sloping spiral walkway round the perimeter. The path was lit with dim orange lights, which made it quite mysterious. The way led through two airlocks connected by a short concrete tunnel. (The Kiwis are very environmentally conscious. CO<sub>2</sub> levels are monitored, in case visitor's breath causes the formation of carbonic acid, which could affect the formations. In the Glowworm Cave, too high a rise in temperature caused by visitors could affect the glowworms, in which case the cave is closed until things return to normal. All the caves are quite dimly lit, and the lights are only turned on when visitors are present.)

We were then into the cave proper. Most of the time we were on steel walkways, suspended by cables from the walls and ceiling to keep visitors off the floor. Most of the cave is a high decorated rift, with beautiful

white formations. At times the walkway was high above the river, where we saw Black Water Rafters floating down on rubber inner tubes. Black Water Rafting makes Adventure Caving in Gough's Cave seem very tame. The standard trip involves floating down the river cave on an inflated inner tube, but there are variations including jumping off the top of a high waterfall into the pool below, or a high-level traverse above the river. Above the river glowworms could be seen in the roof, though not as many as in the previous cave. Ruakuri is a very interesting cave, highly decorated, with the bonus of seeing glowworms at close quarters, and Black Water Rafters.

After this cave, we drove a short distance to meet our guide for the third cave, Aranui. This Maori name derives from the story that the cave was found when a hunter's dog chased a pig into the cave. Our guide was another Maori girl.

Again, there were high, superbly-decorated rift passages, but there was no river, so no glowworms. The walkways led past beautiful stalactites and stalagmites, and masses of flowstone, some of which was pink or brown. The brown was  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ , seeping in from volcanic rocks above the limestone. Patches of grey were caused by early explorers, who used flares. One path led above a small stream, to end at a beautiful grotto at the end of the cave. There were formations



Grotto - Ruakuri Cave. Photo: Phil Hendy

called the 'Nativity Scene', and 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs'. On the way out, near the entrance, we were shown cave weta, a form of long-legged cricket.

The following day we drove west, to visit the Mangapohue Natural Bridge, Piripiri Cave, and Marakopa Falls. The bridge was reached along a path running alongside a small river. The natural bridge is a huge double tunnel through the hillside. The lower one, taking the stream, was high and narrow, but above it was a much larger opening, which had massive but fairly short stalactites in the roof. It was very dramatic. We climbed steps to the right and passed through the upper bridge, then down more to a stile. Beyond this was a wide valley, with grassland and outcrops of thinly-bedded limestone and small cave-like openings. We entered the valley and looked around the rocks, finding the large shells of fossil oysters.

Four kilometres further on, we found Piripiri Cave. There was a walk along a path, then up wooden steps, around a bluff, and down more steps to the large cave entrance. There was a good wooden stairway leading down about 9 metres to the bottom of a large chamber, some 12 metres high, 33 metres long and 18 – 21 metres from front to back. There were lots of dry white stalactites in the roof, and a few stalagmites. At the bottom, there was a possible way on, a low crawl through a dried-up pool. There were also a few inaccessible high level passages. Near the entrance I found some cave weta,

Marakopa Falls are a short distance away. A downhill walk led to the magnificent 30m waterfall, with rocks projecting from the drop breaking the water up into dozens of individual falls. It was a wonderful sight.

Back near Aranui Cave there is a riverside walk, which passes a large resurgence, probably the entrance used by the Black Water Rafters. The path passes through a natural tunnel, and a short 'cave' tunnel beyond the place where the river takes a U-bend, part of an unroofed cave. At a large cave entrance, a short descent to a platform gives view down into a large chamber, about 12 metres above the river. The stream flows in at the far right, takes a wide curve around the chamber, then exits to the right. The roof was about 3 metres higher than the platform, and had lots of massive stal. Further on, the path dropped down to river level, from where the cave exit could be seen.

It would take too long to describe the hot springs and geysers of Rotorua, the tour of Hobbiton, and Hot Water Beach, where holes can be dug in the sand at low tide to provide natural hot spas. However, I did manage to explore another small cave. Northeast of Rotorua are the Otere Falls, at the foot of which lies Tutea's Cave. This was allegedly used as a refuge by local Maori tribeswomen when war broke out between the tribes. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century a path was cut down the side of the cliff, passing through arches, to two cave entrances. They were both fenced off, but presented no problem to a cave pirate like myself. I took the smaller tunnel first, a phreatic passage about 1.1 metres high and 3 metres wide. After around 12 metres it turned sharp left, and narrowed to a low crawl. This shortly dropped into a small pit, to join the main cave,

which was similar but larger. This passage continued into the hillside, getting lower and narrower, but passing to the left, over a short rift in the floor, brought me to the main entrance.

The limestone of New Zealand is much younger than ours, at about 100,000 years old. It is quite soft, and thinly bedded. Although the famous caves are at Waitomo, there are plenty of other caves dotted around the islands. The showcaves are magnificent, and the cave water is much warmer than ours. Oh, and medical assistance is free, all you have to do is pay for the ambulance. **Phil Hendy**

# The Digging Scene

## Digging on (in?) Mendip.

*To quote Mark Twain "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies and statistics".*

*Transcribing the log-book it became evident that a huge amount of digging was in progress. I also realised that I could dig out (ouch, sorry!) considerable data from the log-book transcriptions. So I did so, analysed the stats, and wrote to the prime muck-mover for each dig, asking if he or she could pen a short contribution to a proper Wessex Journal article on the current digging scene. I thought it would be interesting to learn something of the background, history, potential and state of play of the currently active digs. I was rapidly enlightened that: (a) the log-book is a terrible source of statistics and (b) "Digs" and "Publicity" are unwelcome bed-fellows, so I binned the original idea. "When in a hole, stop digging" is sound advice (ouch again, and sorry again!), but I think it's acceptable to mention the digs which are currently active and well-known, if only to show how hard our members are prepared to work to find new cave passage. It's an impressive list, simply in alphabetical order:*

Brimble Pit & Slocker  
Fester Hole  
Grebe Swallet  
Lime Kiln  
Longwood Valley Sink

Mitchell's Dig  
Reservoir Hole  
Rolling Thunder  
Sludge Pit  
Spider Hole

*The list is almost certainly incomplete, both because there have always been "Secret" digs and because some digs simply don't get written up in the log book. It's also worth saying that the aversion to publicity has a variety of entirely justifiable causes, some personal, some political and this is emphatically neither the time nor the place to discuss or query them. The moving spirits behind Grebe Swallet, Fester Hole, and Mitchell's Dig (in order of squalour) however, have happily contributed the following notes. Ed*

## Grebe Swallet

Chris Binding replied:

"Grebe is a private dig rather than a club one but anyone stooopid enough to want to help out is welcome to provide their calories! (We dig Monday afternoons and have a lush curry afterwards in Cheddar, as is a long standing tradition). Potential with Grebe is unlimited." *Chris has promised a more informative article for the next Journal. There is also a fairly comprehensive visit description on Thursday June 25 2015, on Page 26. Ed*

## Tween Twins Hole (also known to the Wessex as Fester Hole)

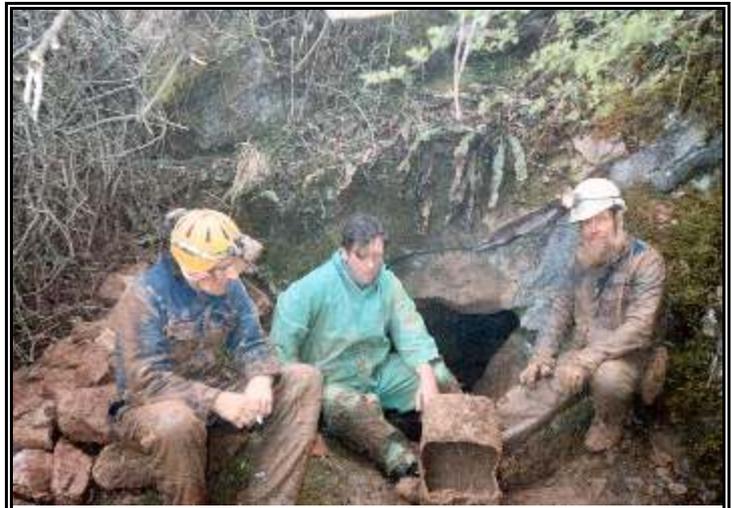
Fester Hole was recorded by the B.E.C. in their Burrington Cave Atlas, (1973). It was dug by C.S.S in 1967, before coming to the attention of Aiden Williams and Jim Rands of the Wessex in the late 1980's. I first visited on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1990 with Jim and John Thomas. By this time most of the resident hut group of the time had been recruited at least once, although little was written in the club log.

The entrance in use at that time was some 3 metres to the right of the current one. A shaft 2 to 3 metres deep, with a short steel ladder led to a tunnel less than a metre high, which gave entry to the chamber, which Jim and Aiden were excavating. There were two low grottos, containing some small curtains, which were coloured an attractive shade of orange/red. We spent a couple of hours dragging containers of sticky red clay

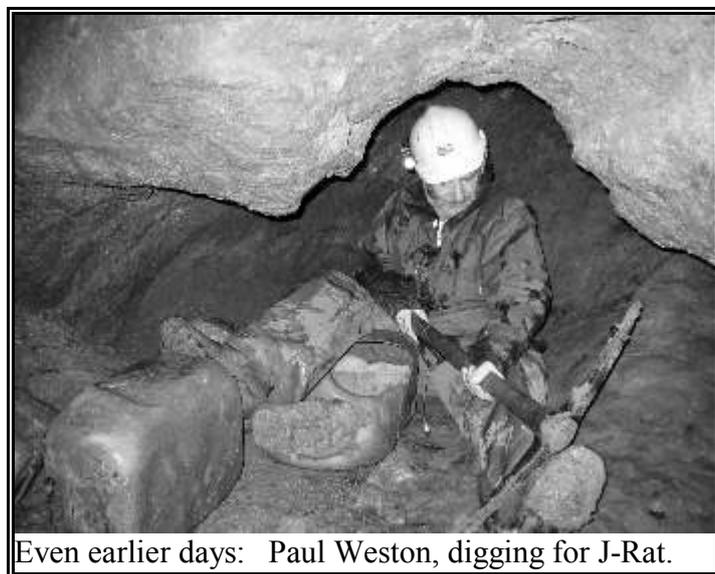
out and up the shaft. Then for the next 19 years I forgot about Fester Hole.

Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> November will be remembered as Rat-Fest, a day on which Mendip covers celebrated the life of Tony Jarratt, alias J-Rat. In his last days he had urged cavers to “carry on digging.” Despite knowing that our serious caving was behind us Judy and I decided to have another look at Fester Hole. We persuaded Paul Weston to join us. But really it started as a bit of a joke.

We found the dig just as I remembered it, except that an easier entrance had been made, by-passing the old crawl. A few plastic digging boats, a rotten rope and an old scaffold plank were still inside. It felt a safe place to play, as the roof is solid and the deposits easy to dig. We dug a token 5 boat loads and retired to an evening of beer and singing at the village hall. Honour was satisfied, but a seed had been sown.



Early Days. Jim Rands, John Thomas, Maurice Hewins. Photo: Maurice Hewins



Even earlier days: Paul Weston, digging for J-Rat.

the next 3 years was very spasmodic, with a variety of diggers, but by April 2014 we were about 8 metres in and digging upwards through a mixture of compacted gravel with small boulders and fragments of broken calcite floor.

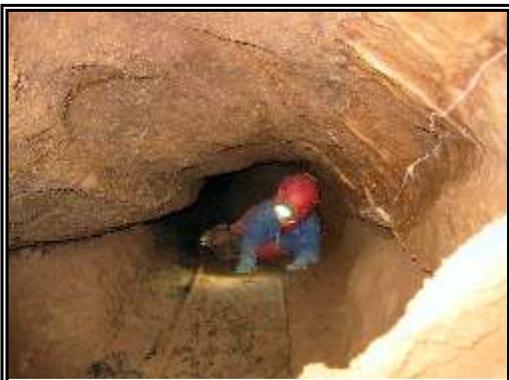
On 13<sup>th</sup> September Tommo and I were trying to follow the solid roof, when a spike suddenly went half a metre into something soft. On 22<sup>nd</sup> November we were joined by Jonathan and 7 year old Emily. Tommo had gone ahead of us and when we joined him he was excitedly told us that he had broken into open space. The only trouble was that it was 180 degrees in the wrong direction. What he had done was join up the dig with the end of the upper grottos. However, we now had a roof and a soft calcite layer to follow. At last it did look really promising. Not just more promising than Lime Kiln!

The following February Jim Rands was back on Mendip to celebrate his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday and we mentioned that we had been back to Fester Hole. He was delighted and pressed us into reopening the dig. So, on our next visit to Mendip we returned with John Thomas and began to dig downwards at the end. Interest in Fester increased when Tommo and Jonathan joined the team.

At this point we decided that the site was promising enough to contact the UBSS and formalise operations. We now realised that spoil could not be brought to the surface. Fortunately we had a redundant shaft and passage to back fill, as well as several large alcoves below. Work over



Judy digging in Valentines. Photo: Maurice



Emilly, between Rands Revenge and Valentine. Photo: Maurice

After that weekend Judy and I went into hibernation over the winter, but on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2015 Jonathan phoned us with the news that “Fester had gone” The following Saturday we came down to Mendip to see for ourselves. Just where we had shoved the spike in Jonathan, Tommo and Barry Wilkinson had broken into a pretty chamber, with some attractive orange, red and white flowstone.

They named it Valentine, after the day of the discovery. Better still, a strong draught



Jonathan & Barry Surveying. Photo: Maurice

was issuing from a low passage, which ran at right angles to the entrance chamber. Jonathan had managed to squeeze along for several metres, but the floor would need lowering to aid further progress.

The rest of the story belongs to the team of local Wessex Members who moved the dig on. Aided by a length of quarry belt to reduce friction, boats of soft clay and stones were dragged out. A team of geriatrics filled sandbags to build retaining walls to back fill the redundant alcoves and soon, at 20 metres from Valentine, a way could be seen into a black opening.



“Sapper” Tommo sandbagging. Photo: Maurice

It was probably no coincidence that this second breakthrough was made on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> June, a day when Judy and I could be present. The rest of the team that day were Jonathan, Dave Upperton, and Tim Clements. “Tiger” Tim was the first into the new chamber, which we named Rands’ Revenge. It took Dave 20 minutes to make the opening Uppy size.

It was the first time I had been into virgin cave and Rands’ Revenge has some very pretty formations. On that night the crystal floor sparkled in our cap lamps. The colour was typical Fester Red. The crawl from Valentine’s to Rands’ is 22 metres.

The draught was emerging from a partially blocked hole in the floor and the only way on is downwards. At present work is continuing by the local team. Apart from those already mentioned the following have contributed some time at Fester Hole. Phil Hendy, Brian Prewer, Jude and Adrian Vanderplank, Pete Hann, Josh Yates, Aubrey Newport, John Cooper, Murray Knapp, Kevin and Charlotte Hilton, Kathy Williams, Wayne Starsmore and Malc Foyle. **Maurice Hewins October 2015**

### Mitchell’s Dig

The first mention of Mitchell’s Dig in the 2015 log-book read:

Saturday June 6 2015 Mitchell’s Dig Pete Hann, Colin Shapter, James Collings, Jude and Ade VdP.

Mitchell’s dig is at Charterhouse Warren Farm. Pete had previously dug here in the 80s and persuaded us that it was worth another look. The dig had been abandoned in the 90s leaving it at present consisting of a 12.85 metre shaft through concrete pipes, followed by a 4 metre climb down steel shoring with breccia wall and

floor.

Today's work consisted of erecting a tripod, adding a section of ladder to the bottom. Two buckets of cement were mixed and some of the loose walls stabilised. A lot more needs to be done before we can start going downwards. The draught seemed to be blowing into the cave and possibly sinking in the SE corner of the floor. **Ade**

*Since the idea of abandoning a dig with a professional 16 metre entrance shaft looks bizarre, I wrote to Pete asking for some background on this. He was able to give me the whole history of the place, courtesy of the original Atlas dig report from the MCRA web-site. Given the prodigious effort involved, it seems well worth reproducing this here, although I have deleted some of the non-technical entries relating to simple muck-moving. If the dig "Goes", then this background merits acknowledgment. Ed*

### **Mitchell's Dig**

Pete Hann replied: "Please find attached the Atlas dig report on the early days of the dig, this was taken from the MCRA web site. I have a full account of our latest digging I will try and get to you a bit later."

### **DAVE MITCHELL'S DIG**

The Original Dig

This large, shallow depression at NGR 49285434 on Charterhouse Warren Farm was first dug by Dave Mitchell and Allan Cowley in 1962.

Dave Mitchell's log book records the events:

#### **Feb 4th 1962**

A trip to the cottage (MCG) ..... in looking at a shakehole which fell in on Warren Farm. Digging carried out for a short spell by Allan (Cowley) and myself and it looked very promising.

#### **March 4th 1962**

Spent a day at the Cottage where much work was done at dig on Warren Farm. Dug down approx. 15 feet and encountered choke of small loose stones. Very promising.

#### **April 15th 1962**

A visit to Warren Farm where no trace of previous shaft could be seen owing to new collapse. A new shaft dug and after a day's digging bypassed previous shaft by about 2 feet. Nothing found. Shoring placed in position for future dig.

#### **July 8th 1962**

Warren Farm dig was found to have fallen in.

#### **The 1980s Dig**

The dig was probed again in the late 1980s by Pete and Alison Moody and Rob Taviner. They sank a lightly shored shaft for 15', but were defeated by a buried mass of baler twine which resisted all attempts at removal, including bang and fire.

**Saturday 19 April 1997** - Dave Morrison, Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley, Angie Cave, Paul Stillman, Bob Cottle, Clive North, Richard Witcombe, Pete Hann, Keith Fielder, Tony Audsley plus a stream of visitors. Commenced an excavation of Dave Mitchell's Dig at 8 am using a Case Poclair tracked digger driven by Martin Ford. After a trial trench on the western edge produced no solid rock at a depth of 10', excavation moved to the north and eastern edges. Huge quantities of brown soil were removed down to a depth of 15' before a possible rock floor was encountered. Attempts to relocate this further south west involved removing the rusting steel and galvanised iron shoring of the earlier digs together with the infamous baler twine, but no further rock was seen down to a depth of 20'. The earth and mud was featureless apart from occasional bands of grey clay and patches of small stones, some possibly frost shattered. All afternoon, the digger moved around the depression, benching itself downwards to reach a depth of over 28'. A few larger rocks were located, giving hope of buried cliff faces, but all proved to be displaced and surrounded by mud. One rock did ring solid when struck

by the bucket but it was at that stage too deep to be pursued. Work ceased at 6 pm with a general view that the search was going to prove fruitless. Over a 40' to 50' radius and a depth of 28', there seemed to be no solid edge to the depression. Only DM retained his optimism that a cave would be found on the Sunday.

**Sunday 20 April 1997** - Dave Morrison, Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley, Bob Cottle, Paul Stillman, Pete Hann, Keith Fielder, Tony Audsley, Richard Witcombe plus other visitors Work on the dig resumed at 9.30 am and the digger trenched eastwards at a depth of 25' to 30'. At 11.30 am, a small area of solid rock floor was uncovered roughly in the centre of the depression and close to the location of the earlier digs. The bucket then revealed a small hole approximately 1' in diameter, which readily swallowed the loose earth around it. PH and RT went down in the bucket to examine it and pronounced that it was in more or less solid rock and was fretted by water erosion. It appeared to bell out below the lip, but was largely filled by a cone of earth and mud. A decision to safeguard and pipe it was quickly reached and DS and helpers were sent off to Little Crapnell Farm to bring back the stock of concrete pipes. Starting at 4.30 pm, eight 1' 9" high pipes were installed and the surrounding pit backfilled. Work ceased at 7 pm. A slight draught was detected emerging from the new shaft.

**Wednesday 23 April 1997** - Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman, Pete Hann, Richard Witcombe, Keith Fielder

DS had brought over eight further pipes and seven of these were installed during the evening, making the shaft some 27' deep. The excavator then completed the backfilling of the depression. The winch was unloaded but not set up.

**Sunday 27 April 1997** - Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe, Kate Lawrence, Tony Audsley, Pete Hann, Nigel Graham, Keith Fielder plus visitors

DS set up the winch and linked bipod while the others picked stone from the filled area.

RW commenced the underground digging by breaking up one side of the hole. The rock yielded quite easily to blows from the small pick and it soon became apparent that the solid rock was not that solid. In due course PH took over at the face and started clearing in the undercut area below the hole. Instead of water eroded rock, he found that the walls comprised cemented scree material or breccia, which broke off very readily when hit or even brushed against.

By the end of the afternoon, RW was digging out mud and

breccia from a conical pot which seemed far too insubstantial to support the concrete rings. About twenty bucket loads were taken to the surface, before prudence dictated a halt. If we are not to lose the bottom section of pipe, it will need to be either pinned into the surrounding fill or bolted to the pipe above, or both. It may be that we are not actually digging in a cave but rather in a water excavated hole in a scree pile.

**Wednesday 30 April 1997** - Dave Speed, Paul Stillman, Kate Lawrence, Richard Witcombe

After DS had checked that the bottom ring was still in place, we considered the options for safeguarding the shaft:

1. Drill through the bottom pipe and drive out steel rods or angles into the surrounding fill. Dismissed - As the concrete is reinforced with steel, it would be difficult to drill large diameter holes, and with no certainty of hitting any solid rock, the rods would not offer much additional friction.

2. Connect the rings by bolting plates across the joins.

Dismissed - Drilling near the rims would weaken the pipes, and it would in any event be a long winded job.

3. Connect all fifteen rings by three tensioned cables bolted or clipped to the top and bottom rings. Possible - But the steel cable and tensioners would be expensive.

4. Connect all fifteen rings by welding three strips of steel to the connecting H sections. Where the H section is offset, a linking tab could be welded to the strip. The top and bottom of the strip could be either clipped over the rim of the pipes or bolted to the centre of the pipes. Possible - And relatively cheap and speedy.

Option 4 was chosen. With all fifteen pipes linked together, the combined friction factor should keep the tube in place within the compacted fill.

**Wednesday 7 May 1997** - Rob Taviner, Kate Lawrence, Tony Audsley, Pete Hann, Keith Fielder, Graham Bromley, Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe

Despite some heavy rain, the pipes were still in place. Both RT and GB inspected the prospects below and between then sent up six buckets of spoil. Small, water washed holes around the edge of the scree chamber provided some encouragement. DS had brought over three 15' length of flat steel bar with 6" at one end bent at right angles. PH hammered the angled sections under the bottom ring and then secured them in place by inserting rawbolts through the upright sections into the bottom ring. An attempt was then made to weld the flat sections to the H links between the pipes. KH descended halfway down the shaft, and the heavy, two stroke welder was suspended above him on the winch cable. PH "fired up" the rods, only to be immediately overwhelmed by petrol fumes. He had no option but to abandon the welding idea. The swirling fumes descended the shaft and were quickly drawn into the dig - clear evidence of an inward draught. A decision was made to return on Sunday to bolt the steel straps to the pipes.

**Wednesday 14 May 1997** - Graham Bromley, Dave Speed, Kate Lawrence, Paul Stillman, Keith Fielder, Pete Hann, Richard Witcombe, plus visitors

Sunday had been too wet to use power tools.

DS fitted a pre-fabricated, spring assisted steel lid, after which PH successfully bolted the straps to the rings. There was just time for KL to send up three token buckets of spoil. Part of the shelf on which the rings rest had crumbled away. Grouting will be needed before serious digging begins.

**Sunday 18 May 1997** - Bob Cottle, Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Paul Stillman, Tony Audsley, Richard Witcombe, Keith Fielder, Kate Lawrence

DS followed by BC and TA sent up 28 buckets of mud and scree from the bell chamber at the foot of the shaft. TA

concentrated on enlarging the small airspace descending at 45 degrees to the northwest, and by the end of the session he was able to peer into a tiny straw and column filled grotto, still entirely in scree, about 6' ahead. There appeared to be a slight outward draught. RW attempted to stabilise the walls and roof of the digging space with a bucket of grout, but the scree was so loose in places that it fell off when the concrete coating was thrown against it. To make any further progress in even relative safety, some form of steel shuttering structure or cage will need to follow the digger downwards.

**Wednesday 21 May 1997** - Mark Lumley, Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman, Kate Lawrence, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe

DS had sprained his ankle while sorting out steel, and GB and RW were delayed by a puncture on the Land Rover.

KL had brought over some corrugated steel sheets and RW some Dexion, but in the absence of DS's heavy steel lengths, it was decided to continue probing carefully downwards in the floor, avoiding the unsupported and dangerous roof leading down to the "grotto". ML, RT and GB between them sent up twenty two buckets of spoil. The fill no longer contains pieces of grass from the initial run in, and is likely to be undisturbed material from here on.

**Tuesday 27 May 1997** - Jim Young, Dave Morrison

JY welded two 6' lengths of steel angle at 45 degrees to the straps at the bottom of the shaft. These run down towards the "grotto" close to the dangerous section of roof.

**Wednesday 28 May 1997** - Paul Stillman, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Mark Lumley, Kate Lawrence, Keith & Ros Fielder, Pete Hann

GB managed to insert two pieces of corrugated steel sheet above the steel angle. The sheets were then braced against the roof by means of two jammed angle cross members. The shoring had unfortunately reduced the access to the dig chamber and RW had to hammer off a section of scree wall to allow the bucket to pass through. Four token buckets of spoil were sent up. The slab in the floor appears to be a random rock rather than bedrock. Still evidence of a draught.

**Thursday 29 May 1997** - Jim Young, Dave Morrison

JY extracted the corrugated sheets in order to weld two canted cross members to the two descending pieces of angle.

Two buckets of spoil were removed.

**Monday 2 June 1997** - Jim Young, Dave Morrison

Welded a support bracket to the base of the shaft and two more canted cross members.

**Wednesday 11 June 1997** - Mark Lumley, Rob Taviner, Dave Morrison, Dave Speed, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe, Clive North, Paul Stillman

ML, DM, GB and CN, working in pairs, sent up thirty four buckets of mud and scree. The grotto floor is now some ten feet below the concrete shaft, and more steel shoring is needed to prevent further collapse. There are many small holes in the fill and hints of some development under a large slab. The draught was fairly strong. Spoil was dumped in the trailer.

**Wednesday 18 June 1997** - Paul Stillman, Richard Witcombe, Graham Bromley, Rob Taviner, Mark Lumley

Thirty bucket loads were sent up. The left hand blocks are beginning to peter out, and the digging chamber is now very precarious. More steel shoring is essential. Only a faint, intermittent draught.

**Thursday 19 June 1997** - Jim Young, Dave Morrison

Welded two 7' vertical steel angle sections down from the pipe shaft and linked them to the descending angles with horizontal pieces, creating two steel triangles. During the course of cutting back the "rear" wall of the dig to accommodate one of the verticals, a small, loose alcove was encountered issuing a draught. More trimming of the wall will be needed to push one

of the verticals into a parallel position ready for a horizontal cross member to be welded in. Concrete and stone walling will be built up from these horizontal sections.

**Sunday 22 June 1997** - Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley, Kate Lawrence

RW sent up three buckets of slumped material from just below the concrete rings before making a start on the concrete walling. The spaces between the loosely cemented rubble roof and the four canted roof beams were filled in with rock and concrete, and a few courses were laid in the right hand steel triangle. The recent heavy rain had produced drip in the shaft which caused continuous minor wall collapses throughout the afternoon.

**Wednesday 25 June 1997** - Richard Witcombe, Paul Stillman, Graham Bromley, Kate Lawrence, Rob Taviner, Mark Lumley, Tony Audsley, Clive North

An inspection of Sunday's work showed that one eighth of an inch cracks had opened up between the concrete and the canted roof beams, suggesting that the latter had been forced downwards a fraction by the weight of the pipes.

RW walled up two thirds of the right hand triangle, working under heavy drip, pungently contaminated with sheep droppings, and occasional scree collapses.

**Sunday 29 June 1997** - Richard Witcombe, Clive North, Rob Taviner, Tony Audsley

The gap between the concrete and the roof beams had opened up to nearly half an inch, indicating further downward movement by the pipes. RW finished walling up the right hand triangle, but in the absence of further welding, could do nothing to seal up the back wall which continues to collapse. Instead, a 3' length of steel angle was inserted on top of the sloping steel roof sections just below the rings, and walling was constructed upwards from this to pick

up the ring above. Some of the stone was imported from the nearby pits. The drip had reduced slightly from last Wednesday.

**Sunday 20 July 1997** - Richard Witcombe, Bob Cottle, Graham Bromley, Kate Lawrence, Rob Taviner

With the left hand steel triangle in an acceptably upright position, RW commenced walling it up, completing about one third during the afternoon.

**Wednesday 23 July 1997** - Richard Witcombe, Paul Stillman, Rob Taviner, Graham Bromley, Kate Lawrence

KL had earlier delivered a trailer-load of walling stone. RW continued walling inside the left hand triangle, completing about two thirds of it.

**Sunday 27 July 1997** - Richard Witcombe, Ken Appleby, Rob Taviner

The surface run off from recent heavy rain had created small gullies and deltas in the depression, and underground there was still heavy drip. The water had disappeared into the scree choke with no sign of back up. RW completed the stone and concrete infilling of the left hand steelwork.

**Sunday 10 August 1997** - Graham Bromley, Kate Lawrence, Dave Speed, Richard Witcombe, Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman  
DS welded a section of angle linking the bottom of the two steel triangles to provide a base for the back wall. The welding proved very time consuming as the steel was galvanised and the surface generator was probably providing too little power. RW made a start on the concrete and stone back wall, with RT providing some infilling material from the bottom of the dig. The trailer, full of spoil and stuck in the mud for many weeks, was jacked up, dug out and hauled away to the stone pit.

**Wednesday 13 August 1997** - Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman, Graham Bromley, Richard Witcombe

RW continued constructing the back wall, switching to a semi-circular shape after 18" to match the rings above and allow the

easy passage of buckets. Some backfill material had to be sent down from the surface! The wall is now half completed.

**Wednesday 20 August 1997** - Paul Stillman, Richard Witcombe, Dave Speed

Further work on the back wall. A "1997" date stone was built in.

**Wednesday 27 August 1997** - Dave Speed, Rob Taviner, Richard Witcombe, Paul Stillman, Len Coltham

RW continued work on the back wall, almost reaching the concrete rings. DS cut a length of steel angle which will be welded to form the front edge of a concrete floor at the foot of the walls.

**Saturday 30 August 1997** - Dave Morrison, Jim Young, Dave Speed

Welded the floor level cross member.

**Sunday 7 September 1997** - Richard Witcombe, James Witcombe, Paul Stillman, Len Coltham, Rob Taviner, Kate Lawrence

PS, KL and RT sent up thirty buckets of muddy scree. A few small holes were uncovered towards the end of the afternoon, and one large rock which might just be bedrock. A digger's assistant is now required underground to guide the bucket past the shoring. The 3' steel ladder was exchanged for a 10' length.

**Wednesday 10 September 1997** - Richard Witcombe, Clive North, Rob Taviner, Kate Lawrence

CN assisted by RW sent up sixteen buckets. The small holes petered out and the large rock appears to be just that. On the credit side, larger slabs are now appearing in the fill and some of these were left underground for future shoring use. More steelwork will need to be installed before any further depth is gained.

**Friday 31 October 1997** - Dave Morrison, Jim Young, Rob Taviner

JY extended the welded steel framework into the main digging chamber. Wall frames, uprights and two canted roof sections were inserted in a day long session.

**Wednesday 20 May 1998** - Richard Witcombe, Kate Lawrence, Paul Stillman, Tony Littler, Rob Taviner, Mark Lumley, Dave Morrison

Opening of the 1998 campaign. The digging area was dry with little evidence of slumping. Ten buckets of scree were brought out and one small frog. Slight draught. DM brought over some galvanised steel mesh.

**Sunday 31 May 1998** - Rob Taviner, Paul Stillman, Richard Witcombe, Ken Appleby

RT fitted cut sections of steel mesh over the roof joists, adding a further 5' length of steel angle to the "cage".

**Monday 21 September 1998** - Dave Morrison, Jim Young, Paul Stillman, Kate Lawrence

Under very trying conditions of wall collapse and run-ins, JY welded further sections onto the steel cage creating an irregular cube within the digging chamber.

**Sunday 4 October 1998** - Paul Stillman, Rob Taviner, Richard Witcombe

Commenced walling up the very undercut right hand side of the chamber where any further collapse would threaten the stability of the concrete pipe foundations. The stone and concrete was laid on the steel framework and supporting Dexion sections driven horizontally into the run-in material.

**Sunday 11 October 1998** - Richard Witcombe, Clive North  
Continued walling, mostly along the far side. Incorporated a drainpipe of perforated plastic in the right hand wall. Some alarming scree falls punctuated the afternoon, and the roof above this point is looking very unsafe.

**Sunday 18 October 1998** - Richard Witcombe, Bob Cottle, Paul Stillman, Rob Taviner, Max Midlen, Dave Morrison and some Wessex casual labour

More work on the right hand and far wall. The backfill was "stiffened" with odd pieces of steel and wire mesh. Small rock falls continue and the undermining is now close to the side of the entrance shaft.

Wednesday 21 October 1998 - Richard Witcombe, Tony Littler

Backfilled some of the collapse areas behind the stone and concrete walls, using scree and rocks dug out of the floor. A few minor stone falls. No detectable draught.

## More Wessex Abroad

### Croatia Caves – Part 2

By Christine Grosart

One of the perks of my job is the occasional lengthy run of 'rest days'. These are the days when ambulance staff are supposed to recuperate after grueling 15 hour shifts. I had a string of nine days off approaching in April and was just wondering how I should best use my time i.e. which caves I should visit, when Project Morpheus popped a post up on their social media page. A 'scouting' trip was planned for the exact dates I was available. This was too good to miss and I had unfinished business with a few caves out there and was keen to take a look at more in the region further north, near Otocac.

Rich was unfortunately already fully booked with work so, as the Dutch attendees already assumed I was going, I booked my flight to Zagreb.

£400 later I had 3 x 23 kilo bags booked with caving kit, backmount gear and sidemount harness. Wetsuit,

furry suit and drysuit all went in. It seemed appropriate to dress for all occasions!

Maurizio (the owner of Krnica dive and project manager for Morpheus) had purchased a stash of caving gear, including communal SRT kits, ropes and ladders, karabiners, maillons, pulleys, Daren drums and tackle bags, slings...all the stuff you need to get two cavers to a sump. I simply told him what we needed, ordered it and Rich and I flew it out between us over the winter.

I hopped on a KLM flight to Amsterdam Schiphol and met up with our good friend Anton Van Rosmalen. He had pretty much promoted himself to my buddy for the week and we were super



Photo: Christine

excited about the trip.

We landed at Zagreb and were met by Hungarians Zsolt and Kata. They drove us the four hours on to Knin and we arrived at Hotel Ivan in time for beer and meat.

Dutch divers Erik and Saskia – who were really getting into their caving – had already been out and about looking at some dry caves and I managed to get hold of the caving ropes and put them in the shower to wash and shrink them.

The plan for the first day was an easy one to make. We were keen to go back to Godsposka Pecina or 'Gentleman's cave' to dive the sump. With our new ropes and SRT gear and some ladders (Thanks Tommo!) we hoped to simply rig the 9 metre pitch and walk the last 100m to the large lake and sump pool which the

locals were pretty sure had not been dived.

It was only 5 minutes easy caving to the pitch head and I set about rigging it. I'd had the foresight to bring Petzl hangers as I figured nothing here would be p-bolted. I abseiled against the wall down to a ledge some 5 metres off the ground and came to a nasty rub point. Desperately looking around for a spit, I came across



Photo: Christine

instead, a screw sticking out from the wall.

Nuts.

Or a lack of them, it seemed.

After quite a bit of casting around there seemed no other way around this other than to be very careful and fend off the wall. Gently.

The pitch was longer and more awkward than we had expected and the plan of escorting the not very experienced people down the ladders was now off limits.

Anton (NL), Zsolt (HU), Saskia and Erik (NL) followed and we set up a tyrolean to send the cylinders and other dive kit down the pitch. It didn't take long to carry everything to the sump and Anton and I set about getting changed into wetsuits.

There was no evidence of diving in the sump and it was totally clean and crystal

clear. This supported the opinion of the locals that the cave had not been dived. It had certainly been considered but had not quite happened.

I set off with the line reel and checked out the lake for the way on. Sure enough, a lovely big tunnel with a deepening blue hue stretched out before us and I got the butterflies in my stomach that you just can't help getting when you 'know' the cave is 'going'.

Anton swam about just ahead of me while I made nice tie-offs and, perhaps owing to my British cave diving roots, looked up to spot the shimmering air surface a bit before he did.

After 30 metres we surfaced in a large lake, which was at the foot of a huge chamber. We looked up. The roof was some 30 metres above us and the boulders ascended upslope even further still. This all seemed somewhat too good to be true. I tied off the line reel and cut it free, whilst pondering what to do.

Anton muttered something about somebody having been there before and shortly, we found boot marks in the mud just up from the sump. We were pretty certain that this chamber had not been found by diving and once we climbed up into a huge, domed chamber, we found some spits.

We had absolutely no idea where we were. The local speleologists were not friendly with Project Morpheus, owing to the project gaining government permits for the resurgences and caves in the region, which had eluded the caving fraternity for decades. This made finding resources, as one would via the local caving club, almost impossible. We had clearly connected two very significant cave systems. But we didn't know what the second one was and we could not tell anybody!

Anton and I climbed some way up into the chamber, sharp handholds peeling off here and there. It didn't appear to be that well travelled and we finally stopped when an upward squeeze past some delicate curtains, deciding that, as we had promised the others to be no longer than an hour, we should go back.

We dived quickly home, getting a rudimentary compass bearing and I called it a day when my cold-ridden sinuses exploded. Anton stuck his head in another sump just behind the main lake and vanished for half an hour. After another 30 metres or so, he surfaced in another decent sized dry passage and this time we were pretty sure it was the one on the early survey that we had found.

The team got all the gear out of the cave and we headed back to Hotel Ivan at dusk to chew over the video and discuss the next day's plans.

"Hey! Beware of the snakes..." Maurizio warned us as we set off up the dry, boulder-strewn riverbed in the heat - and he settled into his van for a snooze. "Take a stick!"

We never did know what the stick was supposed to be for, so we carried on and several hundred metres later

came across a cenote-like pool. The drips echoed from the overhanging rock canopy and the sparkling blue sump pool glistened in the sunshine. Ripples from water drops reflected on the overhanging rock. The place was idyllic. The first 20 metres or so had been documented in great detail by Oliver Knab in 2008 and sump 1 was reported to be 200m/-50m followed by 200 metres of dry caving and another sump, 550m/-55m. How it ended is anyone's guess.

We threw Anton in first on his own, with a single bottle to suss out the cavern zone. The line was a bit rough and broken in places but he returned and reported that it was worth a dive in any case.

I threw on a twinset and Saskia Ton and Erik Hoogma had their first introduction to sidemount with some cobbled together set-ups.

Saskia and I investigated a side passage and a beckoning dark hole but it only looped eventually back to the main line. We decided to leave this cave for another day and some mixed gas.

The following day, Anton and I headed back to Rudelica Spilja, the dry cave Rich and I had visited the previous November. We found a downstream sump with no line in it and thought it unlikely that it had been dived. The rest of the gang headed off for some tourist diving at Glavas, Cetina and kept the police at bay when they were found to be waiting for them at the resurgence. Despite having armfuls of government permits and permission ten times over, those that could not gain the permits had yet again been causing problems and had called to police to Glavas to make life difficult for Project Morpheus. They went ahead and dived and the police were eventually satisfied.

Meanwhile, Anton and I began carrying our cylinders to the cave entrance and we had not got far along the goat trail before Anton was stopped in his tracks. "Oh man, a snake just went between my feet!" he exclaimed. I immediately took to higher ground, several inches higher than the track and declared "It's Ok, I'm standing on a rock!!"

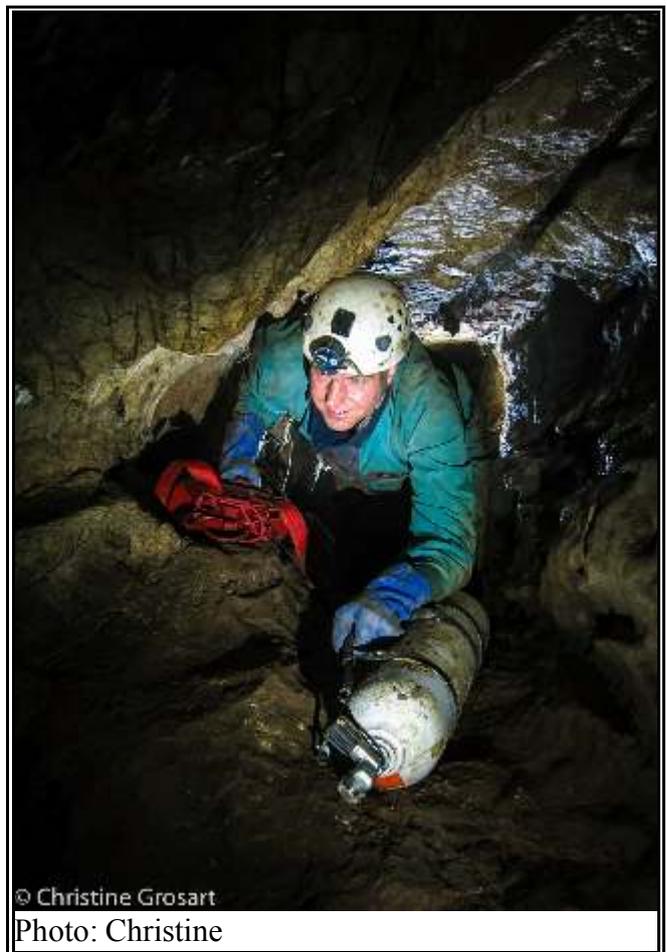
There was nothing left to do but fall around laughing – and wear wellies!

We carried one set of 7 litre bottles and a ladder down to an awkward climb and got my gear to the sump. It was hot and sweaty going and once my gear was at the water's edge, Anton decided he couldn't be bothered carrying in a second set of kit and I was nominated to dive the sump.

We rigged a ladder as the water was some way below the passage and Anton set up a camera on a tripod to film proceedings. I put on my equipment and could feel a dark hole looming behind me underwater. I was pretty sure this sump would 'go'. I headed off with a line reel and made some secure tie offs. The dark hole was indeed proper phreatic passage and I set off down a white, scalloped tube, making easy natural tie offs as I went. About 25 metres on, the passage opened into a large chamber and I spied shimmers on the roof, which meant air space. At that moment, I spotted a piece of old dive line hanging down from the roof.

Gutted and deflated, I tied off my reel, cut the line free and headed back to Anton to tell him the news. The cave surfaced in a large lake with no obvious way on. I wasn't much motivated to get out of the water and check as somebody had obviously been there before. I picked up my survey notes and compass and swam back through the sump, making a survey as I went.

On my return, Anton had been casting around looking for other passages. He climbed over to another lake adjacent to the one I had set off in and spotted what he thought was ongoing passage. The water was blue and



clear, so I tied in a junction and headed off up the passage. There was definitely no line here and I dived for about 30 metres, laying line until I ran out.

The passage was 2m x 2m and white and scalloped – it was a lovely dive. Chuffed, I began tying off the end of the line when I noticed something strange. Everything was getting brighter. Uncomfortable, I carried on making the line secure when the lights got brighter again. What was going on? I was the only person in the sump and it was really quite freaky.

I looked up from what I was doing and, utterly confused, saw Anton's Go-Pro and Rude Nora gazing back at me.

What on Earth...?

I then, suddenly realized what had happened. The sump had surfaced in one of the 'potholes', which we had passed on the way to the downstream sump pool. I shook my head in disbelief and Anton went back to de-rig the ladder, laughing.

It was a fun day out and we got some nice photos as mementos.

The upstream sump was 1km from the climb and we plan to head back and check it out to see if it is worth diving too.

The following day we moved north to the region of Otocac to investigate some caves in a lake called Jezero Sabljaci. Anton and Marco Selvini headed across the lake with one scooter between them to investigate a cave entrance and Erik, Saskia and I investigate one closer to shore.

First, my primary light packed up. This is not unusual and I have a history of destroying primary lights, often several in the same week. So Erik loaned me a spare as a 3<sup>rd</sup> light. It was hand held, but what the hell. It was only a recce...

We descended into a murky pit with tyres and dead cars littering the floor, whilst carefully dodging monofilament lines and spiders webs of old, cotton line. Then the resident gang of fish began attacking us, bashing into our masks and pecking at our drysuits. This was not a pleasant place to be.

Not far into the crack, which was dark rock, lined with mung, Saskia had an attempt at passing a bedding plane on the left where the line had broken or perhaps come to an end. She couldn't fit through with backmounts and as she was the smallest member of the team, we retreated to go and find something better. Anton and Marco returned from the far side of the lake– Marco on the trigger and Anton tucked in behind him out of the wash. The reported a nice cave of reasonable dimensions with a good line, which showed no signs of stopping.

The three of us swam over to the cave entrance and icy cold, blue water pumped out from within. This was more like it! I tied off the primary reel in daylight and ventured inside. Erik then indicated that his ear was stuck and we should carry on together. Saskia and I tied into the main line at about 9 metres depth and had a pleasant dive to about 200 metres distance. Not far from our turn pressures we retrieved some old line, which was coiled in birds nests on the floor.

I popped Erik's spare torch into my drysuit pocket on the swim back and on landing, found it to be missing...

Our last day was spent visiting a resurgence of a show cave – complete with wooden signs, but no dinosaurs – called Izvor Licanke. Still under the impression that many of these caves had not been dived, owing to the requirement to have government permits, Anton and I dived first, completely unaware of what to expect.

We dived backmount and set off from the pumping station, laying a primary line and soon came across the existing line. It was quite thick, in good condition and even had little orange directional and metre tags. Anton and I looked at each other. We had both seen line like this before. It was almost certainly Frank Vasseur's. He had been quite active in the area some 15 years ago and we weren't surprised that his decent line had survived.

This was a bit ominous. Pushing out Frank's line in any cave is no mean feat. We surfaced after a short, shallow sump in a large, swimming lake. An awkward flop over some boulders led to more lake and a climb out into dry cave and a huge phreatic passage, which was ongoing.

Anton returned and we decided that this was sidemount territory if there was another sump to be had.

On surfacing back at base, Maurizio and Velimir, our local friendly ex-police contact, had accosted a local guy who had produced a paper survey of the cave. The dry passage went on for about 250 metres and a second sump went down to -36 metres, back up to -25 metres and then had a question mark at the end.

The others had a dive to film sump 1 and photograph the underwater pumps for the show cave, before we headed off for dinner and to inspect Plongeesout.com.

Frank had indeed dived Licanke and owing to further Croatian caving club politics, lost access and permits

until the present day, through no fault of his own.

Subsequent conversations with Frank confirmed that he left the cave ongoing and could not go back.

Roll on June 2015 and Richard Walker and I headed back to Licanke, armed with sidemounts full of trimix, deco bottles, suit bottles and Velimir for babysitting. We knew that caving and portering 6 bottles between us, was going to be a tall order, but we were up for it.

We surfaced in the lake and shed our gear to go and confirm where sump 2 was and what was involved in getting there. According to the survey, we should just come across it at the end of large, walking passage.

Oh, how wrong we were.

The large, sharp, bouldery, dry-suit shredding passage ended. It just ended. To our surprise, we came across a rope climb leading to higher-level passage. We took it with care and began casting around on sharp, high level boulders the size of caravans and just kept going higher and higher. This did not bode well for a sump.

Confused, annoyed and running out of time, I grabbed a single 7 litre of deco gas and stuck my head in something which looked like a sump – but not THE sump – and not surprisingly, it was just an undercut.

Dejected, we left the cave 2 hours later and went to the hotel down the road to get some signal and internet.

I got onto Frank Vasseur straight away to explain that we had lost his sump!

Once he had finished laughing, he explained that we had been in the right area but needed to go higher still.

Once at roof level, a descent led to the second sump. It was definitely not a trip for drysuits and a team was advisable.

Ho hum.

A return is planned very soon and a keen team is on standby to get our cylinders to sump 2.

We were beginning to learn a lot about the caves of Croatia. Despite government permits being required and a Croatian speaking chaperone being on standby at the sites at all times, it seems even the more awkward sites had still been dived.

Maybe local cavers were sneaking sites and we had witnessed this at Glavas, when the police turned up to check up on Morpheus – a local group of ‘speleos’ (sump divers) who were about to unload their kit, were seen turning tail and running away when they spotted the law.

The situation in Croatia is quite sad. There are two caving governing bodies (a bit like having two BCAs) and they are completely opposed to each other’s existence and do not speak.

The result of this is a closed, dark community and an extremely paranoid undertone in the caving and cave diving community. We would love to be able to engage with the local speleos, share data, share trips and work together to enjoy these fabulous caves. Unfortunately, the obsession over perceived ownership, permissions and deep-seated disdain for other cavers and divers is such that Morpheus cannot even begin to approach the organisations and the project is out on its own.

It is a stark warning to caving communities around the globe that, if you lose the sense of purpose for which you began caving in the first place – and allow political obsession to take over – these fabulous places will not be seen by anyone but a select few – and the sport will die. **Christine**

### Aggitis Cave Greece Kevin Hilton

“Will somebody please make up their mind which side of the river we’re walking on? We’ve got a 2½km sump to do yet!”

We’re back out in the Greek Maaras cave (also known as Aggitis Cave after the river Aggitis that was sucking and gurgling at our legs) and the vagaries of beating upstream against a large river are lost on some of the first-timers. Deep on the outside of the bends; shallow on the inside so we walk from apex to apex.

Our route wiggling all over the place. And yes we were here to dive but the sump in question today was a small duck 2½km into the cave not 2½km of submerged passage! Of course we didn’t let on until we had all slipped silently into the sump water with nothing on our faces but a great big smile...

Even I had to admit we had done well to get this far. A gaggle of cavers at Gatwick in the early hours (really early – I am talking about 5am) is never a pretty sight but we did all make it onto the plane. As we climbed for altitude out over the channel we relaxed to the first smells of coffee and bacon from the galley blissfully unaware that Clive’s luggage was still sitting forlornly at the end of the Gatwick runway.

After the autumnal chill back home, Thessaloniki was warm and stepping off the plane the air smelt really good. Even the sun was shining and after the obligatory bus ride we melted through passport control thinking

about the good caving ahead. All apart from one figure. Silhouetted against the glass there was a frantic patting of pockets and emptying of hand luggage going on.

“I know I had it when I got on. Where’s my passport?” Charlie had lost his passport. Tom Hanks starred



Photo: Clive Westlake. Quote Kevin: “I’ll let the superb photographs do the talking”

in the film Terminal about a man who became stranded in Charles de Gaulle International Airport, Paris for 18 years. Did we have something similar in the making here? Thankfully the passport was found on the plane and reunited with its owner. Biopic or sequel averted.

One empty carousel and the realisation dawned that Clive’s luggage was still thousands of miles away. Lots of forms and then off to secure the work-horses of the weekend – the hire cars that would be packed to the gunnels with kit and cavers. Except my hire car was waiting for me in Athens.

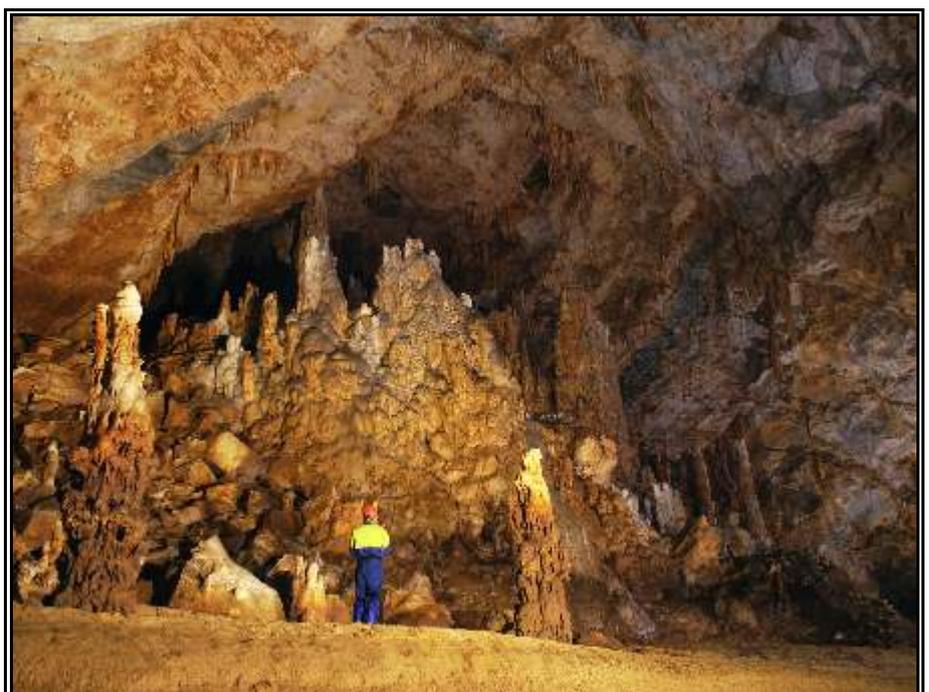


Photo: Clive Westlake

“No sir, you did book the car from Athens, not Thessaloniki. We don’t have any more estate cars here.” Opps – a bad case of fat thumbs when making the booking. In all fairness Sixt were fantastic – they simply changed the booking and gave us an upgrade too. Silver linings and all that...

We set up camp in the old school at Aggitis. The mattresses on the floor and one rather squalid shower our home for the next four days but we couldn’t really ask for more. The cave was a short walk away and the bar that catered for us every night an even shorter walk. The bells that chimed at 7am every morning in the church next door in the end just added character; even though they are perhaps the loudest bells I have ever heard!

Now Aggitis is a big river draining across three massifs collectively known as the Falakro Mountain. It flexes its muscles with the slightest drop of rain. We were hoping that we had snuck in under the radar of the weather gods but it was not to be. With storms promised for the following day a quick change of plans saw us abandon any attempt to put diving kit into the cave and instead en masse we targeted the very end of

the cave – nearly 8km from the entrance. So we find ourselves trudging upstream bouncing from corner to corner. The going is very easy underfoot. The sandy river bed has very few rocks although some bits of sand were softer than others - up to your knees before you know it. The easy going gives you plenty of time to look around. And it is worth it. Maaras is something special. I’m not going to try and describe it – I’ll just let the superb work of the photographers do the talking.

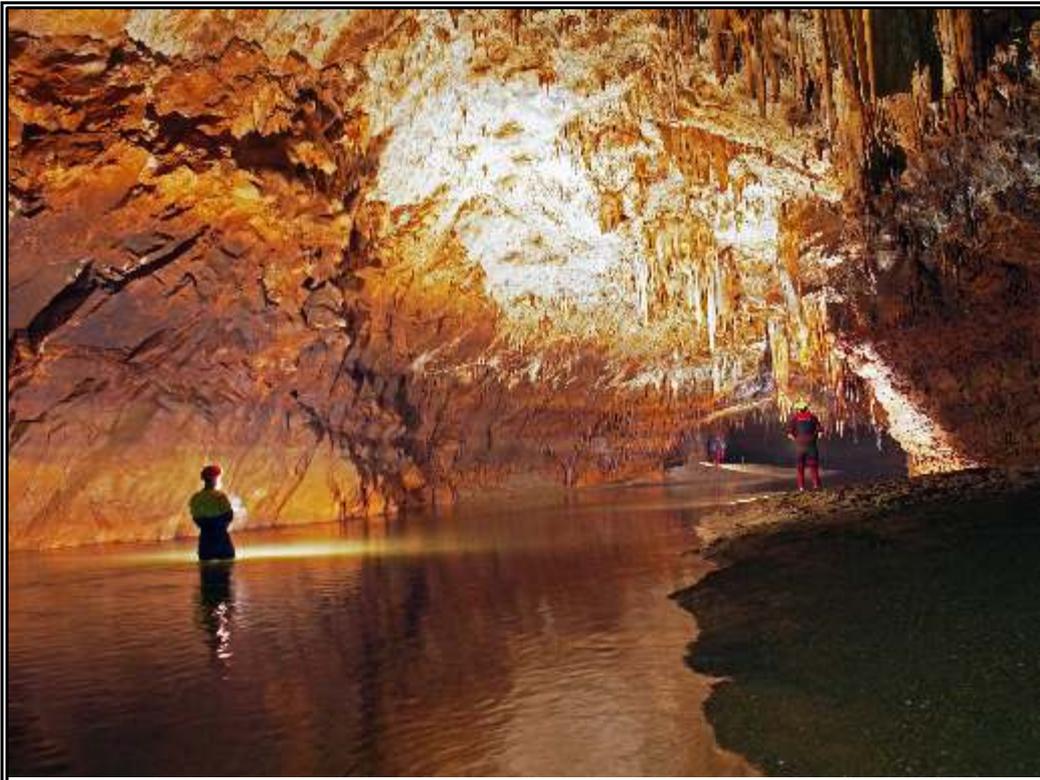


Photo: Clive Westlake

At 6½km in we pass the turnoff for the first sump. This is a relatively short sump and our aim had been to put cavers on the other side to explore a further kilometre of less travelled passage. The water from this sump is much colder - particularly when walking in it up to your arm-pits. It has certainly spent much longer underground than the main river.

And then we reach the end of the cave. The river rolls up into a large, round sump pool and then cascades angrily away. There is also a boulder choke where infill has slumped in. Being Maaras this is no ordinary boulder choke. It is huge and shows very little signs of having been pushed in any way. We wriggle around amongst the boulders for a while, commenting on tantalising black spaces and drafts but with the clock ticking turn for home far too soon.

Day two and it’s raining hard. Thunder rumbles around the hills and the sky is a moody grey. There is an 8 hour window before the river reacts so a group of intrepid photographers head underground to photograph beyond the 2 ½ km sump. However, once beyond the sump rising water curtails the trip and they beat a hasty retreat. In the afternoon sure enough the river changes to a solid murky brown and the levels come up. We sit and drink coffee waiting for a change.

Day three and with the river still a turbulent current of chocolate we head over to another show cave on the other side of the plain. The show cave at Alistrati is fully fossilised and beautifully decorated. The development is all horizontal and at the end of the show cave looking quite incongruous amongst all the stalactites and stalagmites is a stainless steel lift shaft designed to take guests to the surface. But of course it doesn't work and hasn't done since the day it was installed being completely unsuitable for the dam cave



Photo: Clive Westlake

environment. We tramp past this metallic folly and on to look at the boulder choke. Again it is huge with lots of potential but very little sign of being worked. We wriggle around for a while before being tempted back outside to sunshine and frapes.

Day four and the team divides. Some go off walking and touring; some go prospecting for shafts and a few of us head back underground to see what the water is like. What a difference. Even though the river is down the water in the narrow entrance just beyond the end of the show cave sweeps us off our feet. We climb along the wall like limpets until we can grab the rope and launch ourselves into the flow. Pulling furiously, we pass the arch and in bigger passage can touch the floor again. The river is up and moody but not perhaps quite as high as on our first visit here a year ago. We reach the sump at 2 ½ km. It is completely shut. The water boils and rushes between undercuts. It will be a while yet before the cave reopens. We've been lucky to see as much of the cave as we have.

Home time and with the cars washed and the worst of the scratches polished out (we might have done a bit of green lane-ing looking for other caves and sinks...) we head back to the airport. As ever a huge thank you to Malc and all his contacts for organising such a great trip. In particular Vassilis (our man on the ground out in Greece) and Nickos (our contact at the show cave) and lastly Maria who runs the bar and who fed us so magnificently every night. Until next time... **Kevin**

The cavers: Malc Foyle, Richard & Bev, Gerick Rhoden, Mike Thomas, Andy Judd, Charlie Reid-Henry, Clive Westlake, Pete Hann, Jude & Adrian Vanderplank, Simon Richardson, Cheryl Lingard and Kev Hilton.

## From the Log Book & the Wessex Website

**Editor's Note.** *Given the long gap since Journal 333, I've split the log-book extracts into two parts and will put them into two Journals, 334 and 335, to bring them up to date without overloading this one.*

Wednesday March 11 2015 Lime Kiln Dig John Cooper, Pete Hann, Aubrey Newport, Colin Shapter.

All spoil removed from bottom of railway to surface and the bottom tunnel spoil removed to bottom of railway. 1 ½ hours. **John**

Thursday March 12 2015 Eastwater John Cooper, Tricia Denning, Emma Gisborne, Pete Hall, Nicki Dennis + 5 members of the Cheddar Caving Club.

Upper Traverse, Lower Traverse and out via the Woggle Press. **John**

Friday March 13 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Mike Kousiounis.

Usual pattern of events. More gloop from behind the retaining walls, back up the tube to the stacking space. Then more gloop from the stream bed to fill the stacking space made by the first action..... Conditions difficult. **Geoff**

Saturday March 14 2015 LVS John Cooper, Ali Moody, Chris Milne, John Gisborne, Geoff Newton, Pete Buckley, Mike Kousiounis, Andrew Atkinson.

Ali and Andrew (Observed by Chris) continued the survey of Triassic Tunnel and the rift. The rest of the team spring-cleaned Tennis Balls Rift and removed 31 buckets of flood debris plus an old tree trunk. With the survey complete, attention turned to clearing last week's band debris - 66 loads removed. More holes drilled and a charge set. 4 hours. **Ali**

Sunday March 15 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton

The cross passage referred to on 8<sup>th</sup> March was a breakdown in communication and has not been seen (yet??). Can see ahead for another metre in the streamway, which seems to be getting higher and, alas, narrower. Spent time moving mud and gloop from one place to another. **Geoff**

Sunday March 15 2015 Swildons Hole - Mud Sump Abbi C, John Cooper, Mike Riley, Barry Weaver.

After passing a kiddie ruckle in the entrance it was an uneventful trip. Bailed the Mud Sump dry. In Wet, out Dry. 2 ½ hours. **John**

Friday March 20 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton

Continuing to lower the water-level in the streamway, with some success but ran out of stacking space for gloop. Can see further ahead but don't like what I see. The cave is not giving up without a fight. The bat is still in residence in Strike Chamber. **Geoff**

Saturday March 21 2015 LVS Pete Buckley, John

Cooper, John Gisborne, Dave King, Ali Moody, Geoff Newton, Jake Parrish, Barry Weaver, Rich Witcombe.

Lots of people, so hauled out 105 buckets of spoil. More created. 4 ½ hours. **John Cooper**

Monday March 23 2015 Spider Hole John Cooper, Pete Hann, Ade and Jude.

With only four this evening we cleared spoil from the bottom shaft, moving it to the bottom of 4Ton Shaft. 2 Hours. **John**

Wednesday March 18 2015 Swildons Peter Hall, Emma Gisborne, Steph Clegg, Sean, Steve White, Peter Saunders.

Short round trip. On the way in I noticed a toad in the Washing Pool, so put him onto an alcove promising to take him out on the way back. We bailed the first Trouble and the others had natural air-space. Sump 1 was really low, well below the rope on the far side. Much to my surprise, the toad was where I'd left him, so popped him into my glove and took him out via the Short Dry way. **Emma**

Thursday March 26 2015 Eastwater. 13 Pots. Danny Burnett, John Cooper, Emma Gisborne, Peter Saunders. In via the Upper Traverse, Baker's Chimney by-pass, and Muddy Oxbow. Out via the Woggle Press. Emma tried to visit lots of other bits as well, but the rest of us objected! 2 1/4 hours. **John Cooper**

Friday March 27 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Mike Kousiounis.

Cleared some of the spoil back from behind the retaining walls to Stacking Chamber. Then started to fill up the space behind the retaining wall again. Steady progress lowering the water level, but still not very inviting ahead. The Strike Chamber bat has left. Geoff Newton

Saturday March 28 2015 LVS Alison Moody, John Cooper, Clive Westlake, Geoff Newton, Mike Kousiounis, Pete Buckley, John Gisborne.

80 Buckets of spoil removed from the deepening end rift, which is now in two stages. The way forward is still vertically downwards where a cobble floor is choked with spoil. More work needed to remove the drips. 5 Hours. **John Cooper**

Sunday March 29 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton.

Hammering away at the rock shelving in the streamway. Making steady progress forward, also lowering the water level by raking away at the sediment, dropped it by about 2 inches despite higher than usual flow. **Geoff**.

Sunday March 29 2015 Lime Kiln John Cooper, Aubrey

Newport, Barry Wilkinson.

Whilst Aubrey drilled, John and Barry cleared all the spoil from the bottom of the ladder to the bottom of the railway. 1 3/4 hours. **John**

Monday March 30 2015 Eastwater Connor Roe, Antonio Jardin, Abigail Luxton.

Went round the Upper round trip. My second cave ever and it was pretty tough! Upper Traverse was very challenging, but we all managed to get around fairly fluidly. Much warmer than yesterday, although now covered in bruises! Enjoyable and rewarding..... makes for good stories! **Abigail**

Thursday April 2 2015 Swildons John Cooper, John & Emma Gisborne

Emma "Forgot" her wetsuit, so wore JC's instead, He borrowed JG's neofleece and JG used his furry: good job that he'd brought it along! At Sump 1 we discovered that someone had removed the hawser-laid line and replaced it with a Wessex lifeline. This **must** be removed as soon as possible. The Wessex cannot assume responsibility for this fixed aid - especially as the rope used is totally unsuitable for this application. 1 1/4 hours. Toad rescued by Emma. **John Cooper**

Friday April 3 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Mike Kousiounis.

First removed a lot of spoil from behind the retaining wall to the stack in the chamber. Then a lot of hammering away as shelves to widen the stream passage, and raking in the floor to lower the water level. Steady forward progress, but the large bulge in the roof is going to be problematical. **Geoff**

Saturday April 4 2015 LVS Pete Buckley, Ali Moody, John Cooper, Nigel Graham, Geoff Newton, Mike Kousiounis.

Still following a narrow rift down. Currently 9.6 metres from hauling bolt to floor. 89 Buckets of spoil removed today. 5 hrs. **John**

Sunday April 5 2015 White Pit Derek Sanderson, Dave Watt.

Formations still well preserved. No CO2 problems. Noticeable draft in Tallis IV and the Waist of Thyme. Good trip. **Derek**

Sunday April 5 2015 Swildons John Cooper, Barry Weaver.

Went and peered down the Black Hole. Admired the new handline on the 10 foot overhang and the new handline through Sump 1. 1 1/4 hours. **John**

Sunday April 5 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Mike Kousiounis.

Hammering away at a too-tight streamway. Slow progress, but managed to lower the water level a bit more. **Geoff**

Sunday April 5 2015 Swildons Sas Watson, Tim Rose, Tony Cornes

First trip for Tony (Sas' Uncle). In via ZigZags and Long Dry. Visited Barnes Loop for pretties. Gentle persuasion given to Tony to go through Sump 1. Went as far as Sump 2. On the way out Tony managed to get round the Double Pots without falling in, but managed to fall off the bottom of the 40! Out via the Short Dry. Good trip and a first introduction to caving. Surprisingly few people in Swildons. Only met John and Barry. **Sas**

Sunday April 5 2015 Walking Ric & Pat Halliwell, Nigel Graham.

Parked in Cross Village and walked up onto the West Mendip Way above Kings Wood; along over Wavering down and on to Crooks Peak. Lots of people up there enjoying the patchy sunshine and wide but rather hazy views. Back down the spur above Compton Bishop, pausing to peer into the depths of Denny's Hole. Crossed the road to walk back to Cross along the banks of the Cheddar Yeo. Crooks Peak is off the OS Map that the Halliwells had brought so navigated using the geology map. **Nigel**

Monday April 6 2015 GB Pat & Ric Halliwell, Tony Credland.

Down via Oxbows to bottom of Ladder Dig, then back up the Gorge and Waterfall and out. Pleasant 2<sup>nd</sup> trip for Ric since his knee problem. 4<sup>th</sup> trip for Tony's introduction to Mendip. **Pat**

Craven Pothole Club visit to the Wessex

Friday April 3 2015 Nick & Gordon to Avelines, Lionels and Goons.

Sunday April 5 2015 Nick, Gordon, Sean Howe, Dave King & Tony. In/Out Rhino by left-hand route.

Monday April 6 2015 Nick, Gordon, Sean Howe, Dave King. Singing River Mine.

Thursday April 9 2015 Reservoir Hole Ali Moody, Pete Buckley, John Gisborne, Jake Parrish

Quick diversion to Golgotha en route to Frozen Deep, disbelief and amusement expressed at some sloppy attempts at expanding foam technique to hold cables together. Oohing and Aaaahing galore whilst in Frozen Deep. JP quick trip to impressive MSD. Bottom of Skyfall but unsure about safety of collapsed boulders. Brought decaying and mouldy log-book out and retrieved

decaying and rusty ladders, plus telephone for replacing. Great trip to avoid the blistering sun of an Easter holiday heatwave. **Jake**

Friday April 10 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Mike Kousiounis.

Cleared the backlog of spoil. Then continuing the work of attrition trying to widen a streamway which insists on getting narrower. The latest work used an old hammer drill to weaken the rock shelves before hammering. Need proper plug-and-feathers though. **Geoff**

Saturday April 11 2015 LVS Ali, Pete Buckley, John Cooper, John Gisborne, , Geoff Newton, Mike Kousiounis, Jake Parrish (and a scent of lavender).

77 Loads removed from the bottom and dropped the floor about 0.75 metre. Unfortunately the continuing vertical crack is only about 5 cms wide and full of mud and debris. No obvious draft at the bottom today and it was decided to have a break from this dig site and continue digging along the continuation of Triassic Tunnel. Holes drilled and a charge laid. Don't know who left a large deep hole in the floor..... it's a bloody nuisance!! **Ali**

Sunday April 12 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Mike Kousiounis

Steady progress by means of a hammer chisel and drill on rock shelves in the streamway. Also attempted to push a high-level passage, without success, so we will have to persist with the streamway. **Geoff**

Friday April 17 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Mike Kousiounis

Steady progress on two fronts. Hammering off rock shelves in the streamway - still not quite passable. Also removing backfill from a tube with a view to progress along that. Something to occupy the person not hammering! **Geoff**

Saturday April 18 2015 LVS Ali, Pete Buckley, Aidan Harrison, John Cooper, Geoff Newton.

Clearing, drilling, banging as usual, but change of scenery as now enlarging Triassic Tunnel again. Early finish as there were no hangers for a pulley to help recover the spoil which was blown down the PSS shaft. 54 buckets removed, but an estimated 12 - 15 left down at the bottom of the shaft. **Geoff**

Saturday April 18 2015 Fester Hole To commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the second battle of Ypres A and B company, Wessex Engineers (ie Tommo, Maurice, Barry, Judy, John Thomas, Jon Williams) resorted to Fester Hole for sand-bag demonstration. Very effective back-filling by Tommo consumed 20 buckets of "Fill" from the front. Air cleared by draft. No poison gas

attacks. After digging ceased Maurice and Judy stayed behind on Photo and Filming mission. Just realised that I have now been shooting underground movies for 55 years! Maurice

Thursday April 23 2015 Read's Cavern. Andrew Atkinson, Ali Moody

Final surveying trip to Death Wish to complete the Reads survey. Horrid section of cave located in mud-level Reads and where everything (Floor, Walls and Roof) moves! Read's now has a surveyed length of 1224.5m and a depth of 62.98 m: this depth does not include the sump. **Ali**

Friday May 1 2015 Rose Cottage. Mike Kousiounis, Dave Ball, Andrew Horeckyj.

Final pitch dig & Algarad 2. Mainly a photography-based trip for Andrew. Very pretty cave and very conscientious to stay within the tapes and watch for stal. The cascade in Algarad 2 & 3 is worth seeing, then we returned to the junction that leads to the final pitch: all that was needed was 20ft of ladder and 20 metres of lifeline. Unfortunately Andy could not pass the squeeze before the final pitch (Prancer's Pot). All the passageways are clear and relatively safe. **Mike**

Saturday May 2 2015 Fester Hole Maurice and Judy, Barry, Jonathan, & Jude VdeP.

Wessex Engineers War Diary Company - exercise and inspection. A & B companies working on communication trench, approved of sapper Tommo's sandbags in support trench and improvements to the fire step. Skip removal much faster - 45 skips filled 12 - 15 sandbags. Tunnelling company made 6 ft of progress towards point where way on looked blocked. **Maurice**

Saturday May 2 2015 LVS John Cooper, John Gisborne, Mike Kousiounis, Ali, Pete Buckley

First we carried loads of bridge bits, then we hauled 72 skips of spoil out, then PB and AM fetched Kev Speight's out of Longwood, got wet and headed for home. Meanwhile JC. JG and MK constructed the skeleton of the bridge before giving up for the day. 6 hrs. **John C.**

Sunday May 3 2015 Lime Kiln John Cooper, Kevin Hilton, Murray Knapp, Andrew Horeckyj, Aubrey, Barry Wilkinson.

Discussed - with tape and compass - the location of the end, relative the surface depression before Murray drilled the end. The rest cleared all the spoil from the bottom of the railway to the surface. More spoil created. 1 ½ hrs. **John**

Friday May 8 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Mike

Kousiounis

Digging in the tube has become very cramped and has turned it almost into a spectator sport for me. Mike being smaller and younger finds it easier. Progress is now slow but definite. **Geoff**

Saturday May 9 2015 LVS John Cooper, Ali, John Gisborne, Geoff Newton, Tim Ball, Mike Kousiounis.

After work to complete the bridge built across the 10 m shaft, begun last Saturday, the team cleared 15 buckets of mixed spoil from the Triassic Tube. After a quick break, a charge was set. A good session with positive progress and a great draught felt in the tunnel. 5 hrs. **John**

Saturday May 9 2015 Fairy Quarry. "2<sup>nd</sup>. Saturday" trip.

All 15 of us! Paul Stillman, Sarah Payne, Trish and Andy P, Went to Balch's , Fernhill Great Aven., 2 trips, one each way Hilliers / Fairy. Wayne, Abbi, Nick, Sam, Ade Bennet, Dave Walker. (2) Jude, Duncan, Laura EC, Jake & Nicky D. Afterwards some of the group had a peer into the ever-muddy Hillwithy and Conning Tower. Many thanks to Paula and Wayne for helping out. Jude

Saturday May 16 2015 LVS Pete Buckley, John Cooper, Geoff Newton, Ali Moody, Mike Kousiounis, Tim Ball.

50 loads and debris removed and we are starting to make progress along the continuation of Triassic Tunnel. Another small inlet is entering from the roof on the right, about 1.2 metres head. At this point TT starts trending left.. The usual drill and charge. Exited to meet a face from the past: Dave Gordon of the Nine Barrows, "Gordon's Dig Extension" fame.. **Ali**

Thursday May 21 2015 Swildons John Cooper, John Gisborne.

A pleasant wander to the Sidcot U Tube to look for air-space. 3 inches of air-space showing and level dropping. We may return in a few weeks!! 1 hr 53. **John G**

Monday May 25 2015 Swildons Duncan Price, Rainer Straub, Hazel Barton, Phil Cunningham, Steve Smith, Iva Sasouski, DP and RS to Black Hole for photography, the rest of the international party came as far as Sump 1. **Duncan.**

First time back in Swildons in 20 years - forgot how much fun the cave is! **Hazel**

Thursday May 28 2015 Buddle's Wood. Shaft 9. Ali Moody, Andrew Atkinson.

Trip to try and enlarge the vertical squeeze out of Top Chamber in West Series, North so that we can complete

the BW9 survey. Andrew decided that the original squeeze was "Impossible" and that it would be easier to try and open up an alternative option to the side. Both options drop into a very nasty boulder ruckle and therefore only Plug and Feathers can be used. All was progressing reasonably well until Andrew dropped the drill battery down through the squeeze. This resulted in Ali having to pass the original "Impossible" squeeze to retrieve it ! On the plus side, the boulder ruckle is still open and the further passage in WSN is now accessible . Andrew still doesn't fit the squeeze, which is stupidly tight - and even worse to reverse! A further working trip is planned ! **Ali**

Friday May 29 2015 Sludge Pit Ali, Mike Kousiounis

Following on from last week's drilling session, with Ali's help we used some extra persuasion \*\* to remove some awkward obstacles in the streamway. All went to plan but I don't think Ali was amused by the working conditions..... But I did pre-warn her ! 1 3/4 hrs. **Mike**  
\*\* Good Boom

Sunday May 31 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Mike Kousiounis

Moving spoil from Friday's bang. Some progress, but more persuasion will be needed to break through into open passage. The cave is not giving up without a fight. Mike taking pictures with a GoPro on a "Selfie Stick" **Geoff**

Sunday May 31 2015 Sludge Pit John Cooper, Lee Venning, & Barry Weaver.

After descending pitch took a left into Shale Series, then a down-dip tube to the Maze and a left-and-left into Tributary passage. A look into the inlet then Skeleton Passage before returning to the Maze. Down to the Sump, don't seem to be making any progress, before exiting via Aragonite Rift. 1 ½ hrs. **John**

Thursday June 4 2015 Swildons John Cooper, Emma Gisborne

Down Blue Pencil to admire the Swildons 4 streamway and check out the Sump 4 rope, which was intact, all OK and at floor level. The first Trouble was very full and we took 20 minutes to bail it. Sump 1 had 2 inches of air-space and lots of gravel in it. Then out via the Wet Way. Very enjoyable trip. **John**

Saturday June 6 2015 Charterhouse Andrew Atkinson, Duncan Price.

Early start negated by Connor not turning up, but after a delay went in without him. Only two bags, but missing some gear. At quicksand chamber decided that Duncan would not come through first sump as we did not have enough regulators. Quicksand sump is about 6 metres

long, no real depth, turns left at the end through a squeeze bit. Skeleton sump, limited belays, starts to twist and turn. 3 m deep, couple of squeezes, rises back to near zero, way on is open, but more gear needed. Zero vis on the way back. Took two cylinders out with us.

**Andrew**

Saturday June 6 2015 Swildons Noel, Wayne.

Arrived mid-morning to find a cast of thousands milling around - mostly strangers. Decided to hide in Swildons and was joined by Wayne. Shock, Horror, Outrage, despite it being mid-day on a lovely Saturday the 20 was unrigged and we had to rig it ourselves. I haven't had my 20 ladder out of its pack in years! We parted company at Trats as Wayne was going to the Sidcot U Tube (Why? It's a once-in-a-lifetime collectors item). Sump1 was still there, but less and less of it with at least 6 inches of air-space. Admired the new hawser-laid rope but decided not to use it. I met some of the "Cast of Thousands" at the 20, otherwise the cave was remarkably empty.

Later another cast, of voodoo BEC, invaded the Wessex and made eerie chanting before the reek of garlic from the kitchen scared them away across the fields to Swildons. I photographed and filmed these episodes for police evidence but it was all in good fun with some excellently otherworldly disguises. I walked over to Swildons with them a videoed their entry. Took a USB stick over to the BEC later with all the images for them.

**Noel**

Saturday June 13 2015 Eastwater Geoff Newton, Darren Chapman, Beth Bergman, Wayne Starsmore. "2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday" trip.

Good trip. 3 hours to Mellow Chamber. Darren decided that he wouldn't fit down the dig between Unlucky Strike and Mellow Chamber so had a breather and looked at the formations, curtains, stal and helictites. Fortunately took 10m plus 7.5 m ladder with us which enabled us to drop down where the lake normally is. No lake, lots of mud; could see water about 2 m down a small tube. Lot of muddy straws. Uneventful trip out. **Anon**

Friday June 19 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Mike Kousiounis

Carrying on with mud tube dig. Mike moved a decent amount of mud. The problem will not be getting through, it will be getting back. The mud glues you to the passage floor and walls very effectively and retreating uphill in these circumstances is very difficult as there is little scope for leverage in the cramped passage. I tried an alternative approach and needed assistance to get back.

**Geoff**

Saturday June 20 2015 LVS John Gisborne, John Cooper, Pete Buckley, Geoff Newton.

The two Johns rebuilding the bridge over the shaft in Triassic Tunnel while Pete was hammering ahead and Geoff working on the bottom of the shaft. Two thick (and heavy) lengths of conveyor belting installed over the bridge, hopefully making it bomb-proof. All this took a little longer than expected. 5 hrs. **Geoff**

Monday June 22 2015 Monte Corona Lava Tubes Noel & Nicholas Cleave.

Nicholas did a week's caving on Mendip with me in about 1972, visiting all the major caves, but became a wind-surfer instead of a caver. In Lanzarote to wind-surf, however, he asked to visit some lava tubes, so I took out some helmets and knee-pads for a day's introduction to the joys of Monte Corona underground. Entering by Jameo de la Gente we did 30 minutes up-flow towards Prendes to look at some of the enormous passage there, before coming back to daylight.... and then back into darkness. The through-trip down-flow to Puerta Falsa is a delightful hour's trundling in which one could, and did, demonstrate the validity of the equation: Lava + Skin = Blood. As always, Garlic, Prawns, Garlic, Beer and Garlic Bread at Arietta remove all adverse effects and memories. **Noel**

Thursday June 25 2015 Grebe Swallet. John Cooper, Emma Gisborne, Peter Saunders; led by Ed Walters on a very pleasant trip. We went down the entrance pipe (rescued a baby toad), main rift on down Galena Ruckle and down a 12 metre climb, past deep pit into Sidcot Chamber, looking at original deads from mining. Really heavy, neatly displayed rocks of Galena/lead. Then we went into Young Clark's passage to look at signatures of John Clark and Henry Young who were 5 and 7 years old when working as miners (one lived to be 20 and the other into his 60s). We turned right to look at giant mud-ruckle left over from mining and a muddy foot-print which had been ruined by a conservation officer when Willie Stanton showed him round the cave! Leaving the miner's cave we went through the blasted rifts into the Breather Chamber and looked at the dig - where the diggers are working at present. Then into the Serious Ruckle and John and Peter climbed down into the "Garden of Earthly Delights" (Hieronymous Bosch) being the make of drill used to enlarge this section! Also into Abandon Hope.

**Emma**

PS. We visited the Lode Chamber on the way out. **John**

Saturday June 27 2015 Stoke Lane Slocker Pete Hall, Pete Saunders, Max Fisher

Very little water in entrance series but stream found further in. Went along streamway to sump 2. Then returned via high level chambers. Pete Hall ventured into the Bailey-Ward series and pushed in to near the end to find "Steven Bailey" written on wall. Must be very few visitors to this part of the cave. Pleasant return back to sunshine. 2 ½ hours. **Anon**

Sunday June 28 2015 Swildons (Swynne-Puke.... not!) Pete Hellier plus two chums from "Wednesdays with BEC", Jake Baynes & Tom Frost.

Long awaited trip via Maypole Inlet. Having rigged Shatter Pot, we went up the roped pitch and the two little puddles, but the exit from the second puddle proved too tight for the others despite a number of attempts. Have to have another look at 42 foot rift again, I suppose. Sidcot U-Tube open, but we were not tempted this time. **Pete**

Sunday June 28 2015 Swildons John Cooper, John Gisborne, Barry Weaver

Went to see how the air-space in the Sidcot U-Tube was coming along. About 15 cms now, so will go back with a wet-suit. Met Pete Hellier and party descending Maypole Aven. Cave very dry and very quiet, until we met hordes at the bottom of the 40. **John**

Wednesday July 1 2015 White Spot John Cooper, Aubrey Newport, Colin Shapter, Pete Hann.

All the digging buckets, conveyor belting and steel ladder removed from the cave. Also all the bolts at the head of the last drop. **Pete**

Saturday July 4 2015 LVS Pete Buckley, Rich Carey, Ali, John Cooper, Jake Parrish.

38 loads today, from 3/4 of last week's bang. This week another 6 holes drilled and another 700 gms total. 4 hrs. **John**

Saturday July 4 2015 Mitchell's Dig Pete Hann, Nigel Graham, Ade VdeP.

The loose walls have now been stabilised to Pete's satisfaction, so a hauling session then ensued. 100 buckets hauled out, the spoil consisting of mud and breccia. At present it looks as though we are only hauling out recent infill and run-in so we probably need to do another big session before we are into virgin spoil. **Ade**

Sunday July 5 2015 Swildons Emma Gisborne, John Cooper, Barry Weaver.

Went into South-East Inlet series through the Sidcot U-Tube, into Renascence Series. Had a look at the Stopper, then back out via the Wet Way. Can't wait to go back again soon..... **Emma**

Tuesday July 7 2015 GB Derek Sanderson

Solo trip to try out my ancient camera gear. Surprisingly it worked well - which is more than can be said for the photographer ! 1 ½ hrs. **Derek**

Saturday July 11 2015 LVS Pete Buckley, John

Gisborne, Geoff Newton, John Cooper, Ali, Andrew Atkinson, Rich Witcombe.

75 loads of debris removed. Making reasonable progress and the next 2 metres appears to be bigger ! *Than what?* Almost Pete Buckley sized ! **Ali**

Saturday July 11 2015 Swildons Noel

Usual solo trip to Sump 1. Met Mr. Binding and victims at the 20, who kindly let me down past his "Ups". Then various others below the 20 on their way out. Met 2 Wessex members, strangers to me, at Sump 1, but left while they debated the joys of 4 inches of airspace... At 20 encountered a moderate road block involving a bad ladder rig and general incompetence. Used their ladder and gave them time to de-rig and depart before rigging with my kit because there were two guys below and no kit left at the top of the 20. Bit odd, but there was one rope dangling, so they might have been on SRT, but equally it might have been left by Chris B for a Sunday trip. No matter, ambled out with a clear conscience. 55 minutes, so OK allowing for delays. **Noel**

Saturday July 11 2015 Upper Pitts Call-out to Upper Pitts where man was reported sleeping on sofa, heavily intoxicated. Two ropes signed out from store (59m, 11m) to aid the operation. After much deliberation JB began hanging chairs above said man to see how many we could hang before getting caught. MW assisted in chair collection. Victim highly confused on waking up. Hauling continued. End result 23 chairs, one large table (Makes a good hammock) and a coffee table for effect. Time out 0500. **Josh B**

Sunday July 12 2015 Swildons Noel

Back down to 20 to retrieve my ladders etc. Found that I have acquired a steel carabiner, unmarked. Plainly not Wessex. Very strange! Back out via the Wet Way. Quiet, misty morning and, needless to say, nobody else in the cave at 0730!

**PS.** Before this, found all our tables and chairs suspended from the ceiling in Upper Pitts in an artistic "Installation" of tangled rope. A fine student effort by the archeologists! Photographed it..... **Noel**

Monday July 13 2015 GB Dorset Underground Group.

Gaynam arrived with new suit and we set off for GB passing a large lorry in the ditch en-route. Driver OK. Richard struggled manfully up into ladder section, but could not pass the wet squeeze. Steve & Gaynam on into Bat Passage but got lost in boulders on return. We heard Richard's voice (He'd dug through the squeeze). Eventually faces joined voices and we returned gleefully through the hollowed-out squeeze. At the top of the Main Chamber we studied the mud plonks and old metal debris. **Gaynam Lock.**



Photo: Clive Westlake. **Aggitis Cave**

Our new members since April will be welcomed  
In Journal 335

| Date   | Event                                            |
|--------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 14 Nov | “2 <sup>nd</sup> . Sat”. Manor Farm              |
| 15 Nov | Committee meeting                                |
| 05 Dec | Yorks. Permit. Lost Johns, Boxhead. Shuttleworth |
| 01 Jan | Membership Fees due                              |
| 17 Jan | Committee meeting                                |

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