



Wessex Cave Club  
Journal  
March 2016

Number 336  
Volume 34



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ISSN 0083-811X

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# EDITORIAL



A new look journal, made possible by a professional DTP programme. In February Chris Howes and Judith Calford were kind enough to let me spend a day with the Descent team, seeing how Descent is edited and compiled. It was a chastening and eye-opening experience. There are number of commercial magazines for most activity sports: Canoeing, Climbing, Sub-Aqua, Kayaking and so on, but Descent remains uniquely, as far as we know, the only commercial magazine for cavers, in the world. If you look at any of the equivalent sporting magazines, you will immediately see that Descent is far more vividly and intricately compiled: packed with information, and a visual feast.

With an introduction from Chris and Judith, I also visited Cambrian Printers at Aberystwyth. This a major factory operating at the very top end of UK colour printing. There Dai Jones gave up a morning to show me every stage of all their processes. It was an awe-inspiring revelation of what multi-million pound machines can do, in terms of quality and speed. Descent is printed by "Photo-Lithography" which allows the variety of background shades that you can see in any copy, and the use of high quality paper. Our budget for the Wessex Journal dictates laser printing and the cheapest possible paper, but I am working on this aspect as well.

At last year's AGM John Cooper listed his many duties as our Hut Warden. It was an impressive reminder of what it takes to run Upper Pitts. Elsewhere, on page 60, Jonathan Williams writes on his work as our Tackle Officer. I've no intention of listing the minutiae of Journal production but think it's worth mentioning two points. The first, and most obvious, one is that excessive plain paper is a waste of your money. The second is that legibility and information density are interdependent. Typically, the average human eye cannot drop a line when the page-width to font size ratio exceeds a certain limit. In this Journal I cannot use 10pt across a full page of A4 without increasing the line spacing ("Leading") - which wastes paper. Small font sizes demand columns, and even the column break wastes some paper so there's an absolute limit on how many words can go on a page. It's a better investment in paper to use images to decrease the apparent column or page width. So I'll put in a brief plea for photographs, but more particularly for photos of digging activities. I appreciate that constricted digs, mud and steam are not conducive to brilliant compositions, but the point here is to illustrate how horrible many digs are, and the dedication of the diggers. We already have the JayRat award for successful digs, but perhaps we should acknowledge their more normal attribute with an "Index of Squalor". On a scale of 1 to 10, Grebe and Sludge Pit would rate about 15 - but we need photographic evidence for the Journal.

Sometime this year Bob Pyke and I will celebrate 60 years of Wessex membership. I've no idea in which month we joined, but presumably when Frank Frost believed that we were old enough to behave sensibly and responsibly as Wessex exemplars of couth youth. How wrong he was! But.... we are both still contributing to the Wessex and Bob has used his doctoring past to enlighten us about light (groan) on page 68. At the other end of the age scale page 70 features a delightful family caving contribution from guests, and it's noteworthy how well equipped they are - and not just in the lighting department. As it happens the family doesn't have Wessex membership, but visited under the aegis of Wessex members. This reflects rather well on the club, its skills and its hospitality.

Noel



# COMMITTEE & ADMIN MATTERS



1. The Wessex has formally “Adopted” Kent University Caving Club, which means that:  
They will pay hut fees at members rates (for their BCA card holders).

Kent University will hold an Upper Pitts guest key.

Small number of more experienced Kent University will be welcome on Wessex Club trips, provided that there is space.

2. Recently there have been a number of weekends when the club has been very crowded. Although members do not need to book when bringing guests, Ali asks that as a courtesy please would members intending to bring several guests, consult her first and check with the diary.

3. For the same reason the committee has revised the recommendation for the number of guests:

Maximum number of guests in a party booked into the hut should be restricted to 22 on any given weekend,  
This number shall not include members and direct guest of members, (A member is allowed to book in a guest),

However as a courtesy, it is helpful to include members and guests of members on the diary.

Larger groups can be booked at the discretion of the committee.

4. Sole use of downstairs dormitory. Ali has asked for guidance on booking of the ladies dormitory for sole use. A trial will take place using the following rules:

Use of the dormitory must be for caving related activity.

A group must demonstrate a need for exclusive use the downstairs dormitory.

Not when there are programmed events which would mean the hut is busy.

Where the downstairs dorm is exclusively booked do not book additional guest groups.

Booking of the downstairs dorm shall be put in the diary.

Where downstairs dormitory is exclusively booked, John Cooper will put a sign on the door indicating this to members.

5. At present the committee Email addresses are not on the Wessex web-site. They are:

The President: president@wessex-cave-club.org

Chairman: chairman@wessex-cave-club.org

Secretary: secretary@wessex-cave-club.org

Whole Committee: committee@wessex-cave-club.org

Treasurer: treasurer@wessex-cave-club.org

Caving Secretary: caving@wessex-cave-club.org

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Membership Sec: membership@wessex-cave-club.org

Editor: editor@wessex-cave-club.org

Ordinary Members: ordinary@wessex-cave-club.org

Sales Officer: sales@wessex-cave-club.org

Tackle Officer: tackle@wessex-cave-club.org

6. Non-committee responsibilities are:

Charterhouse Rep: cccltd@wessex-cave-club.org

Bookings Officer: bookings@wessex-cave-club.org

CSCC Rep: cscctd@wessex-cave-club.org

Librarian: library@wessex-cave-club.org

MRO Rep: mro@wessex-cave-club.org

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PWDCMG Rep: pwdcmg.rep@wessex-cave-club.org

Training Officer: training@wessex-cave-club.org

Webmaster: webmaster@wessex-cave-club.org



Jonathan Williams with his ladders.  
See article overleaf

# *Jonathan Williams writes*

**H**aving recently taken over from our long standing Tackle Officer and Ladder supremo John “Tommo” Thomas, it was tactfully suggested at the last committee meeting by the Hon. Editor that I might like to write something for the Journal about the process of ladder making. The Wessex have been extremely fortunate to have had Tommo in office for at least the past decade. During his time as Tackle Officer he perfected the art of ladder making and I find myself in the fortunate position of having many years worth of shiny new stock on hand to bring into service as required

I don't think I will offend Tommo in saying that he is a man of few words but limitless practical ability which he has kindly passed on to me over the past few months. To ensure that this knowledge is passed on to future generations of cavers should either of us disappear under the proverbial No. 9 bus next week I will set out here the current process of making electron ladders for club use.

I should first point out that endless debate can be had in the pub over the relative merits of ladder length, wire diameters, rung spacing etc. In this article I will merely detail what we currently produce without recourse to its advantages or disadvantages. If you feel you desperately need a custom 6.25m ladder with 15 inch rung spacing and 10mm stainless wire built for your newly discovered pitch, please feel free to make it yourself in your own garage.

## *The Past...*

Historically we made ladders using heavy weigh  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch, 12swt aluminium tube held in place using taper pins. This created a very robust, albeit heavy ladder. However, it did have the benefit of being easy to dismantle allowing the pins and rungs to be reused once the weakest part of the ladder, the wire, had become unserviceable. When Tommo began making ladders he found it difficult to source this size of tube and so moved to a lighter weight  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch 16swt aluminium tube secured with pins and epoxy resin. This produces a lighter finished product but makes the re-use of rungs at the end of a ladders life a little more difficult.



Cutting the rungs to length



The rung drilling jig



The rung jig with a rung partly inserted

## *Current Practice*

If you look closely in the store you will find two variants of ladder. Both use 1/2in 16swt aluminium tubes for their 153mm wide rungs spaced at  $9\frac{3}{4}$  inches apart. Our standard length 7.5m ladder uses 3mm Galvanized wire and is designed with C-links at both ends. This allows the use of a tether or spreader at the top and for multiple ladders to be joined for longer pitches. Also in the store are Swildon's Ladders designed specifically for the Twenty. These feature the same rungs but are made from 4mm wire looped at the top to create a built-in spreader. Given that the Twenty is probably the most descended pitch in the UK these ladders give a longer lifespan in

service with the small compromise of heavier weight.

Now you know the two sorts of ladders we hold in stock and what they are made of, but how does one actually make them? How long does it take and most importantly how much do they Cost?

The tubing for rungs arrives in 5m lengths and is first cut to size using an electric chop saw to ensure straight ends. Each rung is cut to 153mm long. A small jig fixed to the saw ensures rungs are

cut accurately to the correct length each time.

The rung spacing and ladder assembly jig with rungs positioned ready for pin and resin injection

Next holes are drilled in the rungs using a custom made jig. This ensures holes are drilled quickly, efficiently and accurately every time. Holes are drilled to 3.1mm when using 3mm wire and 4.1mm when using 4mm wire.



A rung already pinned, and ready for resin injection

Our next task is to cut an appropriate length of wire from its drum. A large pair of bolt croppers and a hammer come in useful at this point. The wire can then be threaded onto the rungs. This process can be problematic. The holes in each rung are necessarily only 0.1mm larger than the diameter of the wire and its multi-strand nature means threading isn't easy. My method for doing this is to take the end of the wire and secure in a vice leaving about 15cm loose. I secure the end in a pair of mole grips and slowly twist the wire while heating it with a blow torch. The wire will eventually go cheery red and continued twisting will melt the strands together and it can then be broken off. After cooling I take the twisted end to a grinding wheel and grind it down into a needle point allowing relatively

easy threading. The damaged end is then cut off at the end of the threading process.

Once you have your rungs threaded onto the wire your ladder can start to take shape. Using a custom made jig allows the correct spacing to be achieved currently  $9 \frac{3}{4}$  inches apart.

A metal pin can then be inserted into the wire inside each rung. This process is repeated on both sides of the ladder, until all rungs are secure in position.

The next stage is to mix your epoxy resin and secure the pins and wire in place. The resin is injected in in two stages to ensure that it doesn't all slump down the tube under its own weight.

The final process is to secure the ends using Talurit thimbles and eyes suitable for the diameter of wire you are using. A thimble is threaded onto the wire and the end bent around on the eye leaving a 5-6mm end exposed. Don't forget your c-link if you are using them. The thimble is placed on to the press and 25 tonnes of hydraulic compression ensures that this connection is not going to come loose any time soon.



The press with a talurit sleeve below the thimble

This completes the ladder making process. It has probably taking in excess of 4 hours for each ladder and cost at least £35 - £40 in materials to complete. When you look at that wall of ladders in your tackle store please spare a thought for the individual who made them. You can also do your bit to ensure they last that little bit longer. Please, Please DO NOT leave the ends of ladders clipped together in the store. It may be a convenient way to secure them for travel underground but once in the store please unclip them before you place your cleaned ladder back on the peg.

An eye-catching notice of the following advice has been put on the Upper Pitts notice-board and on the tackle room door, but given the information above on the cost in money and man-hours of providing our tackle, it seems worth repeating it here:

Use of the tackle store and the keys in it are provided freely for all full members of the club, however with this freedom comes a little bit of responsibility. Please take five minutes to read these guidelines and familiarize yourself with them. If you have any questions, please just ask the Tackle Officer.

The club tackle belongs to YOU and all the other members of the club so please be respectful to it and your fellow members.

There are clear guidelines on the wall of the store for the recording and booking out of tackle. Please follow these at all times.

SRT rope is provided for use by experienced riggers. If you don't have the proper experience to rig please don't book out SRT rope. Contact the Training Officer who will be pleased to help you obtain the correct training and experience.

If you are planning to book out tackle for more than two days or if it is to be removed from the country, please ask the Tackle Officer first. This is so spare tackle can be brought into service so tackle is still available for your fellow members.

Tackle should be brought back clean and properly coiled ready for use by the next member. Please make use of the rope washer and coiling rack in the washing down area at the back of the shed. It also helps if you allow tackle to drain outside as much as possible rather than hanging sodden ropes to drip dry inside the store.

Ropes should be coiled correctly. There is a rack for this in the washing down area at the rear of the shed.

Please remember the number one cause of accidents underground is falling from short pitches. Please use a dynamic rope for lifelining on all ladder pitches.

If you need help or instruction in any of the above please just ask the Tackle Officer or another committee member who will be more than happy to help you.

## WE WELCOME THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS

**Mr Richard Ferdinand von Dijk Waverbanchen** 10, Netherlands, 3645VS Proposed Christine Grosart, Seconded Duncan Simey

**Mr Mark Vaughan**, 8 Magnolia La, Basildon, SS15 4HL Proposed Kev Hilton, Seconded Pete Buckley

**Mr Timothy Clements** Rock Cottage, Nine Barrows Lane, Priddy BA5 3BH Proposed Jonathan Williams, Seconded Pete Hann

**Dr Anthony Carl Massey** 31 Wicks Dr, Chippenham, Wilts. SN15 3FS Proposed Jude Vanderplank, Seconded W Stearn

**Miss Laura Becl** 36 Queens Down, Creech St Michael, Taunton, Somerset, TA3 5QY Proposed R Marlow, Seconded J Cording

**Mr David Watts** 1 Cobble Row, Colchester, Essex, CO3 0GN Proposed Kev Hilton, Seconded Pete Buckley



## Brimbling around

Brimble Pit, a closed basin depression some 50 yards east of Priddy-Westbury road, has been investigated by various groups – first by the MNRC in the 1950's prior to an entrance collapse in 1960. • William Stanton, having acquired the land in which the cave and nearby Locke's Hole lies, resumed serious excavation in the 1990s. • The core 'RATS' (Read's Assault Team), Pete Buckley, John Cooper, John Gisborne and Ali Moody began work at the site in 2013 having previously completed work to link the Zed Alley section of Read's Cavern with the lower Browne-Stewart Series of the cave (Descent 232 pp32-33). Numerous other diggers have assisted the original team at Brimble Pit, notably Andrew Atkinson, Geoff Newton, Rob Adams, Jake Parrish, Mike Kousounis and Martin Grass.

The original entrance collapse for Brimble Pit which took the overflow from covered reservoir in the adjoining field has since been replaced by a stabilised entrance shaft with trademark Willie Stanton walling and cement work. • Crossing the passage at the base of the entrance shaft leads to a vertical squeeze into the lower cave which lies directly below the original sink.

Since 2013, the team has dug extensively in the lower portion of the cave at a depth of some 30 metres from the surface. A further squeeze has been enlarged and a small, decorated aven discovered at the current limit of excavation where the stream sinks. This has been previously flood tested to Rodney Stoke Rising by the MNRC. • Much of the team's work at Brimble Pit has been devoted to conservation, wall building and stabilisation work. • Owing to the cave's location in an area of complex geology dominated by the South West Overthrust, much of the rock comprises a friable and highly crystalline structure which is unstable in place and great care is needed. Work is ongoing at the site – for more information, please contact the diggers.

### **John Gisborne**

## Digging News from Fester Hole

The team at Fester Hole are happy to announce that after many years festering in Burrington the cave has finally gone! On 13<sup>th</sup> February, virtually a year to the day that we first discovered Valentines, the dig dropped into approximately 250 feet of large, well decorated passage. Maurice, Judy, Tommo and John Thomas were all present to enjoy the breakthrough on the day. A full write up will be ready in time for the next journal. In the meantime with the agreement and encouragement of the landowner the cave has been gated to preserve the formations while conservation work proceeds. Once negotiations with the landowner are complete it is hoped to open the cave under a leader system.

### **Jonathan Williams**

Jonathan in the new discovery.

Photo: **Pete Hann**



**An editorial note:**

Transcribing the Upper Pitts log book, it became obvious that an enormous amount of digging effort was going into the Longwood Valley Sink (“LVS”) dig. Convinced that this merited some publicity, I asked Ali for a journal account of “Events LVS”. This follows, but she has also provided enough photographs to illustrate both the historical background and the current importance of LVS, so these are added here. All photos by **Ali or Pete Moody**.



November 2012, Pete and Ali showing the damage where the Longwood stream flood undercut the Cheddar Gorge road.

## *Longwood Valley Sink – an update on the Cheddar Flood Relief work*

**Ali Moody**

During the very wet winter of 2012/2013, Main Sink in Longwood Valley, just downstream of the entrance to Longwood Swallet, was unable to cope with the vast quantity of water flowing off Blackdown. For nearly 3 months a large stream continued down Longwood Valley to Black Rock Gate and out onto to the Cheddar Gorge road where it caused considerable damage. The Highways Authority stated that “nothing could be done” until the floods subsided and their decision to close the road to vehicles resulted in great inconvenience to locals and visitors and also financial loss to Cheddar businesses. Cavers are pretty adept at finding holes to put water down and Rich Witcombe very impressively remembered the exact location of an old swallet, Longwood Valley Sink (LVS), located a short distance down valley from the junction with the Rhino valley. In the seventeen years since this was last dug, the original entrance (a vertical tar barrel) had been buried under over a metre of silt. The adjacent timbered sloping adit, engineered in the early 1980’s to make spoil removal easier, had also become completely choked following a collapse near the bottom. On 13 February 2013 a mixed group of volunteers, but mainly cavers, had within a couple of hours re-excavated the old swallet and succeeded in diverting all of the water into the cave. Soon after, the Cheddar Gorge road was resurfaced and reopened to traffic after a closure of 89 days. Over the next six months Linda Wilson, Conservation and Access Officer to CCC Ltd, achieved some sterling work at multi-agency meetings to negotiate funding from Sedgemoor District Council for a new LVS entrance pipe. A gate and a dry-stone walled flood channel were also installed to meet the requirements of Somerset Wildlife Trust who manage the reserve.

Underground digging was finally able to resume at the site in October 2013. During that first winter, the multi-club LVS team was prevented from working on several occasions by floods. When Main Sink



**The adit entrance, completely choked with silt and the floodwater by-passing it en-route to Cheddar Gorge. The winch has now been removed.**



overflows and LVS takes a stream the entrance pipe turns into the equivalent of a bath plughole, making digging impractical. This site can absorb an amazing amount of water and the resulting torrent of a full flood transforms the cave into a maelstrom. From experience we have discovered there is a very fine line between a sporting trip and the impossible. Below the entrance pipe the water descends Main Rift, but then backs up to disappear along tiny cracks. In severe floods evidence suggests that Main Rift sumps completely and water flows off down Triassic Tunnel. This small (cat-sized) high-level tube that leads off from the top of Main Rift was thought by Willie Stanton to be Triassic in origin. The best place to dig in LVS was not obvious and the original diggers excavating the bottom of Main Rift were thwarted by a perched water table in a wide boulder and mud-choked rift. Our initial plan was to bypass this area by banging immediately above it along a narrow, flood debris choked rift – named Tennis Ball Rift for reasons that can be guessed. Unfortunately after several metres we encountered a blank wall that forced us down into the area of the original flooded dig and we soon encountered the same major problems that had defeated the earlier digging. In the 1990's Rich Witcombe and Clive North had also started enlarging the high-level Triassic Tunnel, making about 11m of progress. A smelly deep pool, filled with rotting vegetation and acidic water had since formed at the final point reached. We immediately christened this truly disgusting feature the Stinking Pool and the two bags of cement used to help fill it in have not set after 2 years. Beyond Stinking Pool, Triassic Tunnel could be seen continuing as a tiny down-dip tube descending at an angle of about 10 degrees. Formed in extremely hard Black Rock limestone, progress is both slow and expensive. After 7m of blasting we gained a

**Main sink under normal flow conditions**



**Main sink in flood conditions with water flowing on down towards LVS**



minor 2m long breakthrough where a small inlet entered from the roof and flowed off down a narrow vertical rift. Several months were spent enlarging PSS Rift (Paget-Schroetter Syndrome) after Pete Buckley's injuries from digging at this site. At a depth of nearly 10m PSS Rift pinched out to a few centimetres wide and it was time for another re-think – Plan C! On the far side of PSS Rift, Triassic Tunnel continued as a tiny passage, but unfortunately we now had a rather large deep hole in the way of spoil removal. The "engineering" section of the team, John Gisborne and John Cooper, constructed a scaffold and wood bridge across the

void and the weekly routine of clear, drill and bang continued. Very surprisingly after 5m we suddenly broke out under a small well-decorated aven, Little Aven, where another inlet enters. Several months were spent proceeding very delicately to create and enlarge a route below the false floor of the aven in order to preserve the formations. We are now 5m beyond this point and Triassic Tunnel can be seen continuing



Emma Gisborne showing the Longwood stream in flood, and (above) at Longwood Swallet itself.



Regardless of where it sinks, the water has to resurge somewhere.....

Another photograph showing the Main Sink completely overwhelmed in flood conditions

along the same line and angle of dip, but appears to have changed to a keyhole-shaped passage. At the time of writing (February 2016) Triassic Tunnel is an impressive 30m in length and in LVS, we have clocked up 117 digging sessions and spent £1000 plus in explosives.

As the site is adjacent to the main path through the Nature Reserve, conservation and tidiness is paramount. Rich Witcombe has constructed some superb dry-stone walls around the entrance, very patiently rebuilding them after flood pulses caused considerable damage when the new entrance pipe was settling. All spoil (including new flood debris) has to be brought to the surface and landscaped. Additional work includes an annual clear out of Main Sink and during floods the LVS gate has to be regularly checked to keep it clear of debris. We dig at LVS most Saturdays and assistance is always extremely welcome. The regular team is Pete Buckley, John Cooper, John Gisborne, Mike Kousounis, Ali Moody and Geoff Newton. Rich Witcombe keeps an overview on the surface walling and landscaping. We are extremely grateful to the numerous people who have helped at the site, particularly Andrew Atkinson and Jake Parrish. This is a lovely place to dig in bluebell season and also for a picnic in the summer months. Passing walkers have been extremely supportive of the work and have often commented that we should be paid!

The winter of 2015/16 has proved to be wet and without the work at LVS, Cheddar Gorge would certainly have become a river bed again. The cave now warrants a sufficient length to be included in the next Mendip



# THE DIGGING SCENE

Underground. The cave is running down valley and we are convinced that there must be caveable passage down there somewhere. Hopefully we will not have to bang all the way to Cheddar.... Ali



Rich Witcombe by some of his magnificent walling which diverts Longwood stream floodwater down LVS and thus saves Cheddar Gorge road from a repeat of the 2012 damage.

The winch was designed, constructed and installed by John Gisborne



Ed: The photograph of Pete Buckley contemplating a Darwin award digging trip arrived as an Email from Ali on 03 Jan at 9:40 AM, with this message:

"Noel - this was the LVS entrance yesterday! Main Sink near Longwood Swallet has been overflowing for several days and it is rewarding to realize that LVS has saved Cheddar Gorge from severe flooding this winter. The brave soul in the photo is Mr Buckley and no we didn't manage to get into the cave for a working session yesterday !! Ali"



Ali and the core digging team by LVS in drier conditions!

Just visible on the left is more of Rich Witcombe's walling, retaining some of the spoil which has to be properly landscaped to blend in with the Longwood Valley.



## Further Reading

- Witcombe, Richard G.1993, Longwood Valley Sink. WCC Jnl 22(238)42-44 (Jun), survey, photos Witcombe, Richard G.1994, Around the Wessex Digs.  
CC Jnl 22(241)94(Mar)Witcombe, Richard G. 1996, Around the Wessex (& partly Wessex) Digs.  
WCC Jnl 23(251)140(Sep)Graham, Nigel. 2013, Longwood Valley – New Years day 2013. WCC Jnl (327)7(Jan), illus  
Moody, Ali. 2013, Cheddar Gorge Shut [stream diverted down Longwood Valley Sink]. WCC Jnl (327)8 (Jan?), illus  
Goddard, Joan. 2013, Cavers to the rescue for Cheddar Gorge [Sorting out the flooding problems]. MCG Ntr(370)8 (Apr), illus  
Wilson, Linda. 2014, Cheddar Gorge Flood Relief. UBSS Ntr 3 (16) (Summer), illus  
Buckley, Pete. 2015, PSS..... cave digging can damage your health! WCC Jnl 33(333)218-219, illus

The BCA Training Committee has an annual budget to promote the training of “recreational” cavers, and also holds a small stock of that can be loaned for training. The committee is particularly anxious to promote SRTtraining. To apply for a grant either contact the BCA Training Administrator and ask for a grant applicationform: [trainingadmin@british-caving.org.uk](mailto:trainingadmin@british-caving.org.uk). Or download the form from the website; <http://britishcaving.org.uk/>

## 50 years of caving lights

"Candles are by common consent the most dependent illuminant, as they cast no treacherous shadows" H.E. Balch. The Mendip Caves.

Grand Edwardian phrases, to which , in the Hunters in the 60's, we replied in song:

"Balch,s dependable illuminant  
A candle flame all bright  
It casts no treacherous shadows  
'cos it gives no bloody light"

Other verses of a less family-friendly kind folowed, often vetoed by Ben Dors because of the use of "Them Words".

Our generation of cavers got around in the small friendly yellow glow of the stinky carbide flame. A French caver likened the darkness to a sort of black cotton wool stuffing, which momentarily dissolved as we lit our way through it. The cave felt reddish and sort of cosy. Then came the blueish light of the electric CEAG's and Oldhams, the rock was blacker and it all seemed a bit less friendly. Finally the LED has turned caves as bright as operating theatres, banishing shadows, treacherous or otherwise completely.

The process of dark adaptation allows us to see with a lot less light than the full daylight we are used to...in fact about a hundred thousand times less.( Jim Ayres , rendered lightless while alone in a Yugoslav cave even tried to see with his luminous watch..good try, but no go). During the first half hour in a cave, the eye adapts by becoming more sensitive to the available photons, although continuous further adaptation occurs for several hours, and even slower in the veteran caver, to whom, like the wet suit, the LED is a useful life extender.

Most will know the intense blast of blue and green that hits the eye on surfacing from a long trip or underground camp, especially if you having been using the reddish acetylene flame. The pupil dilates, but most of the adaptation occurs in the rod cells of the retina. They are full of the chemical Rhodopsin, which hoovers up scarce photons in the dark adapted eye and fires impulses to the first of a series of relays transmitting to the optic nerve. On exit,a

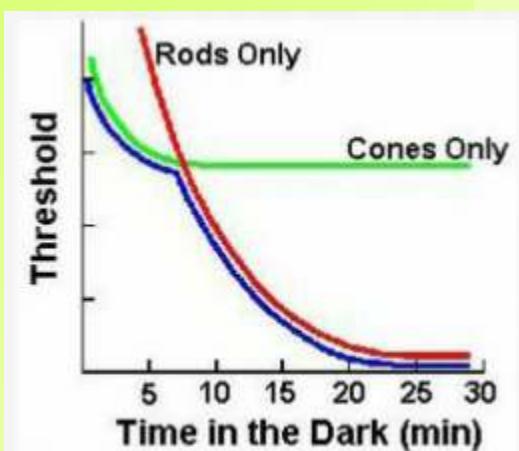


Figure 2 Classic slow phase dark adaptation curves.

blast of daylight "bleaches" it, separates it into Opsin and Retinal, and the eye becomes less sensitive to light after a short dazzle period.

Crawl into your hole. Send your mate back to fetch the rope bag still at the entrance. Switch off. Among the many unusual phenomena that cavers experience in their underground environment is a total lack of light...photon zilch. Opsin and Retinal recombine in the useless search for some passing photon. Rub your eye, and the retina is mechanically stimulated. An impulse from the retina can only be interpreted by the visual cortex at the back of the brain as an incoming photon, and we see a flash. Shining a big LED into the dark adapted eye at close range does not seem too good an idea.

The LED has transformed caving. Crouched in the water on the far side of Stoke Lane sump1, in total darkness trying to relight a stinky flame with a wet flint was character building. We left a candle burning on the other side for the return dive, which was a welcome sight, whatever it's other inadequacies.

Your editor remembers how in the course of a totally lightless exit from Swildons, he and his friends found that they derived considerable information about the passage from their voice echoes. Their "seeing by ear" was done by echo sounding. The difference in phase of a sound arriving at each ear allows the brain to locate the source of the echo from the rock. All terrestrial mammals can locate sound sources in this way because the speed of sound in air is sufficiently slow. At 20 Degrees C. the speed of sound is 343.2 metres/sec. It is impossible underwater where the speed of sound is 1482 metres/sec at 20 degrees C.

So do not scorn the humble BDI, but keep your matches dry. Waterproofing matches was a major obsession in earlier days, occupying the best brains of the day, and involving much polythene and many condoms.

Our Wessex dragon carries a candle, not a multi LED. Try joining him sometime, and experience the delight of minimally lit caving.

## **BOB PYKE (aka "El Puke")**

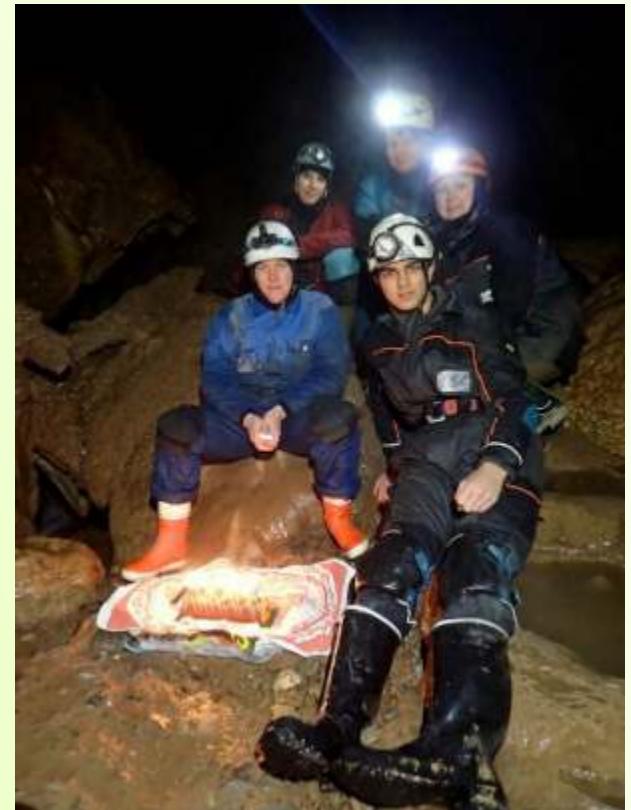
### **CONTRIBUTIONS FROM OVERSEAS VISITORS**

Sunday January 3 2016 Swildons Duncan Simey, Heli, Ilari, Velma, Miri and Katriina.

First Mendip trip for the Finns! (Finnish Caving Society: 3 novices, 2 SWCC members). Went to splash pot (bottom of old Forty) and back in rather wet conditions. Turned back there since the climb looked slightly too challenging for our skill level. Also had cake - with candles and all - in the cave to celebrate Heli's and Ilari's birthdays. Thanks to Duncan for carrying it in, perfectly intact! Went in through the ZigZags and Long Dry Way, out the Short Dry Way. A nice start to our stay in the area, looking forward to more. *Velma*

Birthday girl and birthday boy are at the front and years when put together made total of 54, hence 5 candles. They all enjoyed that trip to Swildon's very much, apparently it ended up being their absolutely favourite trip. So B girl is Heli, boy Ilari, and others from left Velma, Miri and Katriina.

Ed: I noted in journal 335 that our Finnish friends sent us an attractive journal with a totally unpronounceable title. Since then they have sent another, and included in it perfect English translations for every article. It is somewhat shaming that we cannot possibly reciprocate this courtesy, but good to know that they enjoyed Swildons and the Wessex so much.



## Two write-ups of the same trip

The first is from the Log Book written by John Cooper at the time. The second from a note from Trevor to his Uncle following the trip. The Whitney's were visitors over on a visit from Canada so are unlikely to become members!

### Thursday July 16 2015 Swildon's Hole

John Cooper, Emma Gisborne, John Gisborne, Barry Weaver, Bruce Whitney, Lauren Whitney (age 10) and Trevor Whitney (age 13). Trip to Sump I. In the long Dry Way and Inclined Rift. Out via Barnes' Loop and the Wet Way. A very enjoyable trip for all. 2 ½ hours. (Richard is an ex Chelsea SS caver now too old to undertake trips himself so asked me to sort something out for his relatives whilst they were in England last summer). **John Cooper**

### Dear Uncle Richard,

Over the course of our summer we went to many spectacular monuments, and took part in many spectacular things. But I think you will be happy to know that caving was by far, one of my highlights. The way caving demanded you physically was something I was not expecting. Nor was I expecting beautiful rock formations. But that all added to how amazing it was.



Left to Right (looking at the picture) are Trevor Whitney,  
John Cooper, Emma Gisborne, John Gisborne, Bruce Whitney,  
Lauren Whitney and Barry Weaver.  
Photo taken by **Richard Laurence**.

When we first got to the cavers club I will admit that it was a fair amount smaller than I presumed. This had already started to lower my expectations. I thought to myself, "were all the things said earlier an over statement?" But now that I have finished the caving experience I can assure you, if anything, they were definitely an understatement. Once we got inside and met with the others the mood switched for me. It became much more pleasant. They were all so kind and very welcoming. It was so relieving because I am guessing that if you are caving with people you are not terribly fond of it can be much less enjoyable. The next stage of the day consisted of changing into our caving gear. After we had gotten the furry and "oversuit" on

I felt tight together. I did not have full movement of my body which was a bit unnerving, although after a few minutes I was used to it. We then began the trek out to the cave itself. Once we arrived my heart began pumping at a much faster rate. "That was what we were going into!" Craziness. But never the less, we took a few pictures, said our goodbyes and we were off. I took a short pause before I went in, along with a deep breath and then began my descent into darkness relying completely on my light to guide the way. The first couple of minutes my main focus was on the boulders. "What if one came loose?" Dozens of "what if" scenarios ran through my head but they quickly went away due to the fact I had to give my foot placement full attention, especially as the terrain got much more treacherous. For a while everything went on fairly standard but there were a few very SCARY moments. The first was when we reached the waterfall. And I have to say, 20 feet never looked so high. When it was my turn to go I did not think it would be too difficult judging by how easy it was to do up at the club. But there were two things that made a major difference. The first was that the waterfall was roaring right beside you and sprayed down your shirt. Second was that the bottom was not weighted so you were constantly swinging around which led to my fingers getting seriously pinched up against the rock. The next moment was when we were climbing down a mini waterfall.

At that time the water was surrounding you and drenching the rocks which caused them to be wet and slippery. Though the thing most frightening was not being able to see where to place my foot. The final time was when we were walking on a slanted rock face with only a little place to put our feet. And some points we had to push on an

opposing wall just to make it by. And I thought I may slip and wedge myself between two rocks and I would not manage to get out. I was actually scared for my life. Not horror movie scared, but a real fear. Once we made it to the turnaround point we had our chocolate bars and then Barry demonstrated how to do a sump. It was very entertaining. We then packed up and went on our way back. The way back was much more wet, but it did not bother me too much because my whole body was nearly numb! The way back was much easier but it still took us a fair amount of time. When we reached the mouth of the cave I was the first one out, and waiting there to greet me was my mom and yourself. We then quickly began our walk back to the caving club and I have to say, it felt like one of the longest walks in my life. But once we got back we warmed up, had some snacks and drank tea. We then said our final goodbyes and headed for home.

Best wishes

Trevor

**Ed:** The selection of entries from the log-book is necessarily biased. Space alone dictates some discards, so lots of routine trivial trips - to Sump 1 for example - don't appear. As a general rule I include all trips with club guests and newcomers to caving (whose names often puzzle me). Layout dictates that these extracts are not in completely chronological order.

Thursday November 26 2015 Fester Hole Tim Clements, John Cooper, Barry Wilkinson, Jonathan Williams, John Yates.

Spoil moved up from the end..... lots more still there!  
1 ½ hrs. **John**

Friday November 27 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Mike K.

A little spoil moved back to starting chamber, and drilling more holes. **Geoff**

Sunday November 22 2015 Swildons Bean, Tony Hetherington

Mr Seddon took me under his flipper for my first diving trip through sums 2 & 3. I can't say that we saw anything other than muddy water, but it was all good fun. **Bean**

Saturday November 28 2015 Swildons Bean, Jacob. Went in via the Wet Way. My understudy is getting quicker.... or I'm getting slower! **Bean**

Saturday November 28 2015 Sludge Pit Ali, Geoff, Mike K.

Banging, using the holes drilled yesterday. **Geoff**

Saturday November 28 2015 LVS John Cooper, Pete Buckley, Mike K, Ali.

Advance party of John and myself to clear the huge amount of debris from the dig face in Triassic Tunnel. So much debris that we've run out of space. Conditions are lovely, not a lot of mud, or water. More debris created when Mike and Ali turned up. **Pete**

Sunday November 22 2015 Simpsons Pot / West Kingsdale Master Cave. Kevin Hilton, Dave Watts, Clive Westlake.

To Kingsdale where water-levels had dropped after a very wet week or three. First we went in to rig the Valley Entrance pitch down to the Master Cave. Then up the hill and down Simpson's Pot. The first pitch, Five Steps Pot, was rigged..... and the next.... and the next! We didn't have to use our own ropes until Slit Pot. The extra water from Swinsto Hole made the last pitch a bit splashy. We hastened through East End passage, where the water always feels several degrees colder than in any other British cave. Through the master cave in lively water conditions, up the pitch to the Roof Tunnel and then out to Winter sunshine in Kingsdale. ½ hr plus 2 ½ hrs. **Kevin**

Sunday November 29 2015 Swildons John Cooper, Emma Gisborne, Barry Weaver.

Down to sump 1. Removed the ladder that had been stuck at the twenty for a week. The two crabs are in the Lost Property locker. 1 ½ hrs. **John**

Tuesday December 1 2015 White Pit Terry Waller, Derek Sanderson.

Good photographic session in Talus 4, and then to St. Helectites Chamber. 20 years since Terry last visited this cave and he didn't remember any of it except the hole into St. Helectites!. 1 ½ hrs. **Derek**.

### Friday December 4 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff,

Mike K.

Transferring last week's spoil to the stacking chamber to make room for the spoil we intend to create tomorrow. **Geoff.**

### Saturday December 5 2015 LVS John Cooper, Pete Buckley.

A five hour wallow in mud, clearing spoil and stacking, ready for a clearing session (next week). More work needed. Ahead we can see..... slight bend off right. Came out after my lamp was unable to penetrate the mud on the lens. **Pete**

### Sunday December 6 2015 Swildons John Cooper, John Gisborne, Antonio Emmanouilius (?), Manuel Perez. Trip to peer down Vicarage Pot. 2 hrs. **John Cooper.**

### Sunday December 6 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Ali, Mike K.

The bang of the previous day had done a good job, getting us into a continuation of the stream passage, which is open and passable for 8 m or so before it becomes partially blocked with mud. Not very inspiring. **Geoff**

### Thursday December 10 2015 Mendip Walking Mike K

0900, set off from near Morrisons (Wells), popped in to get supplies for the weekend, then through centre onto Wookey Hole road, right onto Lime Kiln Lane, over to Split Rock and right onto West Mendip Way track, down the private road past farm, through Walsh's Green (I think); up the steep hill on the left and through woodlands to arrive at a clearing above Wookey. Followed Mendip Way to junction with Monarchs Way, past Templeton (on Left) to Eastwater Lane, but over the two fields to Upper Pitts. 2 hrs. **Mike**

### Thursday December 10 2015 Sludge Pit Mike K

Solo trip to dig face. Broke up boulders in new passage and cleared back to inlet above the streamway (original). Cleared loose spoil and mud in canal passage to make flow of water easier. Now much more room, and tidier. Took pictures. Noticed another outlet of stream. See diagram opposite **Mike**

### Saturday December 12 2015 LVS John Cooper, John Gisborne, Ali Moody, Pete Buckley, Mike Moxon, Jake Parrish.

Removed 21 buckets from several previous sessions stacked in overfull banks plus 6 buckets of mud from the bottom of internal shaft. Banged in at attempt to widen the dig face beyond flow. Happy Times! **Jake**

### Sunday December 13 2015 Sludge Pit Mike K, Alex Nicholl

Down main rift to terminal sump, look at inlet that comes in on the right (down-cave), clear running. Back to entrance pitch and on to dig face off Strike. Alex hammering and chisel off awkward projections and lowered water level by chiselling floor to make drainage. Mike went to sharp end and brought out a few buckets of spoil. The water is lowering! Moved a few loose rocks back upstream and then back to inlet near terminal sump (water still running very clear). 3 ½ hrs. **Alex**

### Saturday December 12 2015 Goatchurch Tony Massey, Natalia Bel, Damien Heads, Cathryn Quick, Hugh Waite.

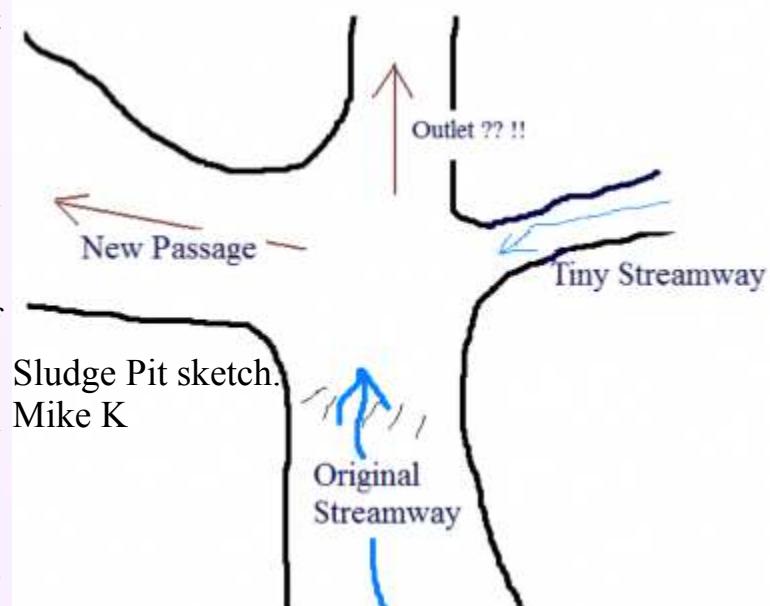
Trip down to the Drainpipe, first caving trip for Damien, Cathryn and Hugh. **Tony**

### Sunday December 13 2015 Rods Pot Tony Massey, Natalia Bel, Damien Heads, Cathryn Quick, Hugh Waite.

Trip to main chamber and down to the Bear Pit. **Tony**

### Sunday December 13 2015 Lime Kiln John Cooper, Murray Knapp, Jonathan Williams, Barry Wilkinson.

Took two submersible pumps and hoses etc to pump the water away from the bottom tunnel, but the drain had been working! Murray arranged a bed of rocks to lie on at the face, ready for more drilling. Came out to Blue Lights..... from the fire engines at the Eastwater call-out. **John Cooper.**



### Monday December 14 2015 Waterwheel Swallet

Mike K plus some irate MCG lot.

Plan to visit Waterwheel. Some not best spirited members (5 in all) decided to call quits and hit the Castle of Comfort for 2 Doombars and a pint of Butcombe. A tricky bend out of the member's Citroen.... small thing, but all in all a good trip. Didn't get as wet as I expected. **Mike**

### Wednesday December 16 2015 Lime Kiln Dig

John Cooper, Aubrey Newport.

Was supposed to be dry !!! Drilled 5 holes (100 gms) at bottom of pitch. 1 ½ hrs. **John**

### Thursday December 17 2015 Fester Hole

Tim Clements, Barry Wilkinson, John Cooper, Pete Hann, Jonathan Williams.

An hour's worth of spoil lifted from bottom of final pitch to top of final pitch. 1 ½ hrs. **John Cooper**

### Friday December 18 2015 Eastwater

Mike K, Duncan Simey, Robert Lavin.

Boulder chamber to Upper Traverse, over the top and around the bend into the Canyon. Crossroads to Dolphin Pot and 35 foot pitch. Down to Harris' passage and over the Bold Step, Muddy Oxbow and down to bottom of Mud Escalator. Back to Sand Chamber and up the 13 Pots. Back to Crossroad and had a quick look at the First Vertical. Out via the Crossroads and the Woggle Press. 4 hrs. **Robert**.

### Friday December 18 2015 Mitchell's Dig

Nigel Graham, Mike K, Pete Hann, John Cooper.

40 Buckets of spoil removed. Now ready for cementing. **Pete**

### Saturday December 19 2015 LVS

Ali, Pete Buckley, John Gisborne.

Clearance of 12 full buckets from the dig face. The passage can be seen to continue ahead and turning to the left. More next time! 3 hrs. **John**

### Sunday December 20 2015 Rhino Rift

Aidan Harrison, Wayne Starsmore.

Good trip down to bottom of third pitch. Short of time, so didn't venture too much further. Everything very loose at the bottom. Took Bean's advice and rigged the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reelay on the third pitch as a deviation. Worked very well, but had to use the "Optimal Deviation" to prevent a rub. Aidan had fun penduluming over to it, but got it on his

"Last" attempt. With hindsight, the top deviation should have been off the farthest bolt, with a very short sling. This would make the "Optimal Deviation" easier. Trip took longer than expected - and half-an-hour overdue. Thanks to John Cooper for checking on us. **NB** the wall half-way down the third pitch still has some rugby-ball sized loose stuff. Aidan gardened some off this on his way up, and I tidied up what I could. **Wayne**

### Sunday December 20 2015 Lime Kiln

John Cooper, Murray Knapp, Jonathan Williams.

Spoil from Wednesday's efforts removed from drain (underwater). Murray drilled four holes which Jonathan sorted out. 1 ½ hrs. **John**

### Sunday December 20 2015 Welsh's Green Swallet

Mike K, Mike Waterworth, Anya

Went up an aven on the fork just before the long muddy crawl, for a poke about. I continued down the tunnel and past the bang wire under rock, smelt soil, and saw lots of boulder collapse (close to the surface?). Back to aven, dug original (old cave) through ochre passages for about 6 or 7 metres. 2 ½ hours. **Mike K**

### Monday December 21 2015 Goatchurch

Mike K, Neil Jackson (MCG), Alex Nicholl, Christian Robers (both non-members).

Beyond dexion from Tradesman's Entrance, Ladder Dig look, Hellish Tight (Only Mike K passed), long 30m flat-out crawl to interesting dig off Hellish Tight area. 1 Greater Horseshoe in the Loop, Top Entrance exit after playing in the Labrynth. **Mike K**

### Tuesday December 22 2015 Cuckoo Cleeves

Duncan Simey, Mike K, Rob L (guest).

We explored everything except the Lake Chamber ! Mike and Rob made a valiant attempt and got nearly as far as a discarded welly. Air was a little thin, but nothing to worry about and far better than reports from November. A surprisingly interesting cave - well worth a visit. **Duncan**

### Wednesday December 23 2015 Lime Kiln

John Cooper, Aubrey Newport, Barry Wilkinson.

A token 4 loads removed from bottom of canal to bottom of railway. 20 mins. **John**

### Thursday December 24 2015 Swildons

Duncan Simey, Mike K, Mad Fi

Weeee! We all had a lovely trip down Blue Pencil and the Round Trip. Wow, what a good trip is was.

Duncan did Blue Pencil for the first time, he made it really well and loves Blue Pencil.... lush, wicked and cool..... **Mad Fi**

Friday December 25 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Mike K

GN to end of Back Passage to start a trial dig, but took the wrong tools, so little progress made. Will know better next time. Looks encouraging with sound of stream quite loud ahead. Then to our usual dig to see what progress Mike had made while I had been away. The stacking chamber will soon not be a chamber any more! We will soon run out of stacking space. Went to sharp end but took ages getting back. This is a small, young man's, dig now, I feel; hence the interest in a new dig site. Mike came in as I was approaching the breakthrough point of 6/12/15 to remind me of our ETO. Will we run out of stacking space before the breakthrough we hope for.....?

**Geoff**

Saturday December 26 2015 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Mike K

Back Passage. The way on is blocked by several long slabs. Time was spent hammering and lowering to reduce them in size. Good long-term prospect. Then to our usual stream passage dig, rearranging spoil and trying out different digging tools. 4 hrs. **Geoff**

Sunday December 27 2015 Sludge Pit Terry Waller, Derek Sanderson.

Derek let me lead for once for an elementary round trip. One slight hesitation, no repetition, no deviation !! 62 mins. **Terry**

Sunday December 27 2015 Swildons Bean, Mike K, Jake Parrish, Mike Waterworth.

Swynne-Puke, round, up maypole, down abseil into Shatter. Looked at 1<sup>st</sup>. Duck (Jake went through), Also looked at Sidcott U Tube. (The Mud sump is filling up). 3 1/4 hrs. **Mike K**

Sunday December 27 2015 LVS Pete Buckley, Ali Moody.

Clearance session and then drill and bang. It is now possible to turn round in the continuation of Triassic Tube beyond the little aven. A clearance session to the surface will be needed next trip. **Ali**

Sunday December 27 2015 Fester Hole Jonathan Williams, Tommo, Barry Wilkinson, MK (check later??).

One more digging trip, but this one was to empty some spoil. Good effort by all. 1 1/2 hrs. **Tommo**

Monday December 28 2015 Swildons Kyle the Kiwi

Travelled to Sump 1. First ever time caving, on holiday from New Zealand. 2 3/4 hrs total. Absolutely loved it! **Kyle**

Monday December 28 2015 Fester Hole

Jonathan Williams, Barry Wilkinson, John Thomas, Tommo

One more spoil moving operation. When will it ever stop? Help!! **Tommo**

Wednesday December 30 2015 Swildons

Gary, Duncan

My fourth caving trip and very good trip. Totally different than I've seen Swildons before as we were hit by a flood surge on the way out. Very wet, came out via the Wet Way.

**Gary**

Thursday December 31 2015 Sludge Pit Mad Fi, Mike K, Tony Massey,

Down to main sump with tank of O<sub>2</sub> and weights, mainly for practice and training. Splashed around a bit and watched Fiona sink a foot into the ground! Dropped Fi and Tony at the ladder and went poking about (setting up a boat) for a while. 3 1/2 hrs. **Mike K.**

Friday January 1 2016 Swildons Kevin, Charlotte, Andy Murray

To Sump 1. In via Zig Zags, Long Dry, A good amount of water, and foam on Sump 1. Out Wet Way and into fresh Mendip air by 1200. **Kev**

Friday January 1 2016 Sludge Pit Geoff Newton, Mike K.

Continuing our new dig at the end of Back Passage. Much hammering of rock slabs and raking of mud in a low bedding. We gained about 6 - 8 metres of new passage. It was even possible to stand up in one place! On the left is a too-tight streamway (about 15 cms wide) going up, and down, stream. Ahead is an ascending tube which will need some work to be passed. The whole area is only suitable for slim cavers. **Geoff**

Friday January 1 2016 Burrington Bonanza

Rich Marlow, Mark Le Poidevin, Jude, Rich Carey.

Starting at the top of the Coombe a general rummage around was had in Elephant Hole; crossed the Coombe to send Mark down ??? Hole. Then further down to Foxes Hole for a complete exploration. Up East Twin Valley to visit the top sink and middle swallet via the streamway which made it a bit like an unroofed Swildons streamway. Next was East Twin for Rich M, Jude and Mark. It was taking a major stream, but they managed to stay dry and went to look at Spar Pot Series. Rich climbed up in the boulders towards the old, capped, entrance. Supra-Avelines was climbed up, too, and Rich descended declaring there were more formations. The climb was very slippery. Finally the upper series of Pierre's Pot was looked at. **Rich Carey**

**Saturday January 2 2016 (not quite....) LVS** Pete Buckley, Ali Moody, Geoff Newton, Mike K, John Gisborne. Main sink in Longwood Valley has been overflowing all week. On Thursday December 31 2015 Pete and Ali Moody managed a very wet trip into LVS, finding the main rift a waterfall. Triassic Tunnel had been washed clean of mud but flood debris had been deposited, and in places there was foam on the roof. Any digging equipment that was not weighted down had been washed down to the constriction at the dig face. Today water levels were up again and although Mr. Buckley made a brave attempt the entrance pipe was far to dangerous to descend. The Team spent an hour clearing debris from the stream bed upstream of the entrance. **Ali**  
Ed: See Ali's photograph on page 67!

**Sunday January 3 2016** Swildons Bean and Mak Down to Sump 1, first trip of the New Year. Very sporting wet fun. **Bean**

**Sunday January 3 2016 Sludge Pit** Geoff N, Mike K  
Continued on the good work of the 1<sup>st</sup>. January. Dug up into continuing tube but soon reached another vertical blockage. Dug through this to find a 2m shaft/climb down towards the stream. The tube continues above the pit but will need more work to pass. Ditto the passage at the bottom, which is heading towards the stream. Anyway, we gained 25 - 30 metres of new passage on the day: good, productive session. **Geoff**

**Tuesday January 5 2016** Swildons Terry Waller, Derek Sanderson  
First trip of the year, to Sump 1. Almost an embarrassing start, due to a jammed crab coming back up the 20. Stone age technology to the rescue! Terry

**Friday January 8 2016 Sludge Pit** Geoff, Mike K, Ali  
Digging the ends found on 03/01 and getting very muddy. Maybe 3 metres progress. Ali took photographs of us in the squeeze etc. Takes a long while to get the mud off. **Geoff**

**Wednesday January 6 2016 Wookey Hole** Ali Moody, Andrew Atkinson  
A couple of hours spent digging in Andrew's dig in the roof of the Twentieth Chamber. Ali

**Thursday January 7 2016 Fester Hole** Tim Clements, John Cooper, Pete Hann, Aubrey Newport, Barry Wilkinson, Jonathan Williams and 3 other Williams (!) Spoil in Rand's Revenge moved to alcove near entrance. 1 ½ hrs. **John**

**Saturday January 9 2016 Spider Hole** Pete Hann, Ade VdP  
With Mendip being extremely damp, and a depleted team (I think Nigel was playing with his trains), we decided the only option was to go and shake the bottom of Spider. Good draught at the bottom as well as being quite drippy. Fired and returned. **Ade**

**Saturday January 9 2016 Lionel's Hole** Andrea, Wayne, Jake, Laura, Stu, Jude, Tony  
I remember thinking that my ribs had had enough after the last trip, but as we dropped down through the Tent and on through the first duck there was no cracking or crackling... only bruising! Bypass, Suicide Rift (with Laura's applause!) and on to Sump Chamber before coming back across High Level and through the Boulder Chamber. Then hail and rain poured as we emerged muddily with beaming smiles. **Tony**

**Saturday January 9 2016 LVS** Ali, John Cooper, Mike K, Geoff Newton, Tim Ball, Pete Buckley.  
Main stream was just overflowing, so access to LVS was no problem. Triassic Tunnel washed lovely and clean. Shifted out flood debris from the very end then shifted 34 loads of debris out of cave, plus a further 18 loads from the bottom of the main rift. Holes drilled and more debris created. Unfortunately the clean-washed state of the cave didn't last very long - soon back to normal conditions! **Pete**

Sunday January 10 2016 Cuckoo Cleeves Wayne, Mike K, Geoff, Tony.

Frome dig very wet, spring at entrance producing a lot of water. Dig draining, but filling quicker than spoil coming out (about 2 ft deep). 1 sandbag filled, but futile work, needs visiting during a frost. **Mike K**

Monday January 11 2016 Spider Hole James Collings, John Cooper, NikNak, Ade and Jude VdP.

Moving spoil from bottom to foot of Four Ton Shaft until the remaining bucket broke. 1 ½ hrs. **John**

Tuesday January 12 2016 GB Maria Lynch, Rachel Withycombe, Tony Massey

Round trip down past the Bridge, up the Oxbows and a bit of a touristy trip up Rhumba Alley and West Extension. A few water and chocolate stops and plenty of time to take photos of the formations. **Maria**

Wednesday January 13 2016 **Wookey Hole**

Andrew Atkinson, Ali Moody

Returned to the dig in the boulder ruckle between 19 and 20. Destroyed the 2 rocks that blocked the way while Ali continued with the upper passage. A few more rocks removed and Ali squeezed through the passage. 5 mins work and the upper passage was enlarged and I could get through. Ducking under, a parallel rift could be seen going off. Unfortunately, someone had been there before. Following it to the end, a pitch going down to a sump confirmed that we were in Beyond the Thunderdome at the top of Edmund's Chamber. **Andrew**

This is a photo of Andrew Atkinson re-surveying Beyond Thunderdome (which leads off from Edmund's chamber above Wookey 22. We dug a dry route in from the Twentieth Chamber in Wookey 20 and were the first non divers to visit this passage. **Ali**

Thursday January 14 2016 **Fester Hole** Tim Clements, John Cooper, Pete Hann, Aubrey Newport, Rich Warman, Jonathan Williams. Spoil lifted up end shaft. 1 ½ hrs. **John**

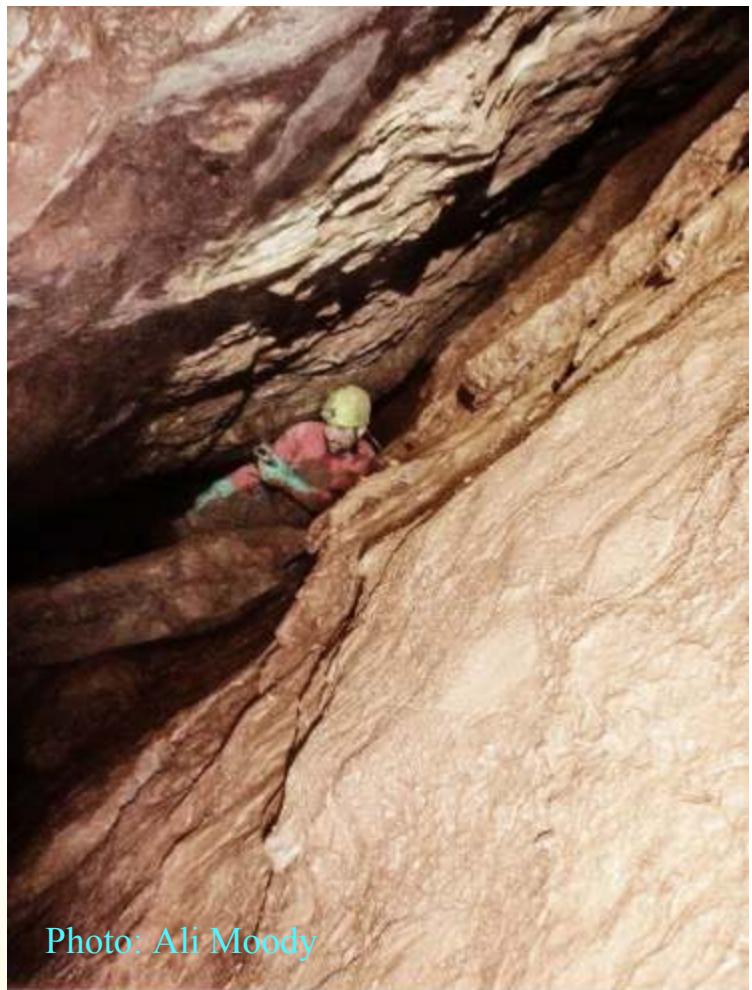


Photo: Ali Moody

Andrew surveying in the dry route between Wookey 20 and 22, which he and Ali Moody dug and opened.

Friday January 15 2016 **Sludge Pit** Geoff Newton Back to high-level found on 03/01/26, attacking the obstructions with hammer and crowbar. Steady progress. **Geoff**

Saturday January 16 2016 **LVS** Pete Buckley, Andrew Atkinson, Geoff Newton, John Gisborne, Ali Moody.

LVS had taken another flood pulse during the week and Triassic Tunnel had been washed clean again. Pity that this only lasts for about 5 minutes once we start digging. A good clearance session with spoil removed to the surface. Drill and bang. We are making good progress and are now only about 1 metre away from where the floor drops out as a narrow rift. Steady onwards draught. **Ali**

**Once in a while the Log-Book produces a gold nugget, a gem even. Sometimes it's an account of a classic trip, sometimes an account of a classic of another sort..... of which this is a glorious example! Ed**

## **EARLY RISE AT THE WESSEX**

**Saturday November 14 2015 Eastwater and Swildons.....** Josh White, Paul Wilman, James Collings, Tacklebury (Alistair Smith), Tom Marshall.

Me and a few others spent last weekend at the Wessex for a weekend full of caving.

Me, PaulW, Tackleberry and Tom, would be up, awake and down Swildons by 8am, ready to come back for 10am for breakfast with James, and then do a 13 pots Eastwater trip. I then would do a quick Rods to Bath trip (as I had my own transport for a change).

In reality, we were up until 3am drinking monkeyshoulder whiskey trying to traverse the small round coffee table, and so did not see the light of day until 10am anyway.

After a quick sausage sarnie we set off on our epic trek towards Eastwater. The rain was heavy and there was reasonable amount of water flowing in, but in my PVC suit I didn't care, and everyone seemed happy enough. We headed down through the cave without much of a hitch, really quite wet at times and the high collar on my oversuit was a godsend. Without too much struggle on the rifts (note to self: PVC is not as grippy as cordura) we got to the climb down before the main pitch. Tackleberry cracked on to set up the ladder, with James guiding Tom down the climb. Me and PaulW had a quick rest at the top of the climb down. After a short while it became apparent that Tom's energy levels at this point were not high enough, and he took the executive decision to bail out before he was in too deep. Tom and James reappeared at the top of the climb, and it was decided we would head out.

I climbed down to help Tackleberry with carrying the bag out and after briefly considering continuing on, we decided we'd rejoin the rest of the group. It became clearer as time went on that the weather had not improved and it was slightly damper than when we went in. The final climb out became a close your eyes and hope for the best whilst climbing. The water cascading in made it difficult to breath without swallowing or inhaling gallons of water.

I came out after James, Tom and PaulW, leaving Tackleberry to bring up the rear. It's at this point I realise in my PVC suit I can easily block up the flow of water for a couple of seconds before releasing it. After doing this a few times and a few choice words from Tack to myself, I climbed out and waited for him to be fully out. In the meantime all the running water had forced PaulW into having to answer the call of nature, which he duly did, into the stream, and therefore onto Tackleberry's head. More 4 letter words were thrown.

On the walk back to the Wessex it was decided we would go and have a wander down Swildons, with two of the things I wanted to do over the weekend being rig the 20ft and try freeclimbing the 20ft. We grabbed a pre-prepared Swildons 20ft bag from PaulW's car and proceeded across the fields towards the entrance. It was at the entrance I decided that I really couldn't be bothered to carry a bag for rigging down to the 20ft and more importantly back up from the 20ft. So we wandered down bagless through the cave. I dived down the zig zags and joined the others at the top of Jacobs ladder, before we all gently wandered through to the top of the 8ft.

Whilst Tom negotiated the 8ft, I attempted to tackle the route up to the top of the 40. I got half way through the first keyhole and know that I can do it (one for the future), before climbing back down, down the 40 and to the top of the 20.

James climbed down and back up again, and asked if I was going to do it. I bottled it.

We started to head out with James free climbing the 40, and Tom heading up towards the 40 the conventional route. Myself, PaulW and Tack headed back to the water chamber to wait for Tom and James to reappear before Tack and Tom headed up wetways and James and I headed up towards the oxbows. After it getting a bit narrower than I thought I could handle, I let James lead, before following him through. Blame Badger and the Allen's crawl incident for the self doubt.

We got to the surface and waited for Paul W to appear. After about 10 minutes of waiting, we decided to check if the stashed tacklesack was still there. Turns out he'd taken the tacklesack and pissed off back to the Wessex for a shower without any loss in pressure. Git.

Back at the Wessex, I opened a can of beer and decided that I really couldn't be arsed to drive to Burrington, especially while chilli at the hunters was calling.

So a day where I planned on doing 3 caves ended up being 2 caves done half arsed, but all in all a good day out.  
**Josh**

***Most of us have a few of these buried in the memory box, how about bringing them out onto the pages of the Journal.... Ed.***



**Just one of those days !!**



For some people a letter in the “Times” letters page is a lifelong ambition. While the Wessex Journal may not have quite the same cachet, we could have a “Letters” page, and I would welcome it. The slight snag to this idea being that this is the only letter I have received in some 4 years of journal editorship!

Withy Lane,  
Neighbourne,  
Oakhill,  
BA3 5BQ

Hi Noel,

Your reprinting or Phil’s article from the Mendip News allowed me to check veracity of the quote. I had a lot of people saying “Hey, you got a quote in Mendip News”, mostly non-cavers, but I had missed that month’s copy.

Can I put the record straight.

I have no recollection of putting the comment into writing; it came as a summing up to a discussion in the Hunters.

Now, the actual wording “Caves is” is a grammatical error I would not make, “Caves are” is not my usual spoken idiom. As a true Somerset Son (despite being born in Devon) I am sure I would say “Caves be where you find em”.

After all, the declension of this local verb is so much simpler:

I	be
You	be
he, she or it	be
We	be
You	be
The	be.

So simple and easy to learn,  
Regards to you,  
Fred Davies

Sadly we have to report that Ray Mansfield who, although never a Wessex member, caved for many years with our members, died recently. There will be an appreciation of his caving years, and obituary, in the next journal. Fred Davies attended Ray’s funeral on 16 March, at the Mendip Crematorium, and reports that it was very well attended (standing-room only).

## THE “NEW LOOK” JOURNAL

**Editor’s note.** This journal was compiled using Serif “PagePlus” ® for desk-top publication (DTP). Hitherto the journal has developed incrementally. When Jonathan Williams took it on from Maurice Hewins, he had access to Quark Express for DTP, and introduced a new look journal with photographic enhancements. On take-over from Jonathan, I shamelessly purloined his banner headings, but reverted to a word-processor, and only incrementally changed the journal with the introduction of colour graphics. Andy, Hatstand and Pete in turn all made incremental improvements, and Pete, in particular, put the Wessex Journal into the top tier of cave club publications, but at the limits of what a word-processing application can produce. Encouraged and inspired by Chris Howes with his “Descent” magazine I finally plunged into DTP ..... and drowned. With only rudimentary documentation, learning has been by trial, and, mostly, error. So I have overcompensated with the bits that I have understood and gone screamingly OTT. With a couple of months to the next journal I hope to have mastered the basics and produce a professional (and less gaudy!) journal.

Phil Hendy has produced the index to Volume 33. It comes to some 10 pages, so is not reproduced in this journal, but will be put on-line on the Wessex web-site. We are indebted to Phil. The index represents hours and hours of tedious and detailed work.

### The Changing Room

The Club's success and popularity, while welcome, brings increasingly frequent problems with overcrowding, which are particularly acute in the changing/shower room. Common sense and consideration should avoid real problems, but members can help by reminding guests of some points which should really be obvious.

1. The hooks above the benches, and the benches themselves, are not for wet caving clothes, but for our dry ones.

2. Under no circumstances should caving overalls or boots be washed in the showers (and yes, this has been seen!).

3. There is washing area between the stile and the club, and that's the place to hose the mud off one's boots and overalls instead of trekking it all in, and onto the shower-room floor.

4. The locker-room is not a changing room (whether out of **or into** caving clothes).

5. It makes good sense to kick off one's caving boots outside, before coming in to change.

### Bob Scammell

Many members will remember Bob Scammell, a Wessex member for many years. He was the main M.R.O. warden for Box stone mines and also a regular cave digger. His most successful enterprise was probably at St Luke's. About 4 years ago Bob suffered a major stroke and he is now comfortably settled in the BUPA care home of Shockerwick House near Box. (Shockerwick House, Lower Shockerwick, Bath, North East Somerset, BA1 7LL). Visitors are welcome at any time. If you are passing that way, why not drop in and see him? A courtesy 'phone call first might be a good idea. 07749 650998(m) 01225 859232(h).

### Diary Dates

Friday April 8 Hut Booking Terry Chew (20)  
Saturday April 9 Hut Booking Terry Chew (20)  
Saturday April 9 "2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday Meet" White Pit Meet at Upper Pitts at 10am  
Friday April 15 Hut Booking Cambridge Climbing & Caving Club (8)  
Saturday April 16 Cambridge Climbing & Caving Club (8) Gordon Scott  
Friday April 22 Hut Booking Loudwater Outdoor Pursuits (10) Kim Rose  
Friday April 29 Hut Booking Terry Chew (20)  
Saturday April 30 Hut Booking Terry Chew (20)  
Sunday May 8 10:00 AM Committee Meeting Upper Pitts Library  
Saturday May 14 "2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday Meet" Hilliers/Fairy Meet at Upper Pitts at 10am  
Friday May 20 Hut & Library Booking CREG Field meeting (10) Rob Gill  
Saturday May 21 Hut & Library Booking CREG Field meeting (10) Rob Gill  
Saturday June 4 CDG (15) Sat night only Claire Cohen  
Saturday June 4 CDG 1830 Library Booking  
Friday July 8 Hut Booking Chesterfield caving Club (8) Frank Beasley  
Saturday July 9 Hut Booking Chesterfield caving Club (8) Frank Beasley

### *Descent Magazine*

Those of you who only cursorily view the much-thumbed, coffee-stained copy in the Upper Pitts common-room are missing out on a treasure trove of caving news and information; a magazine that is a feast for the eyes and which hugely rewards careful reading, and re-reading. A year's subscription for six issues (it is bi-monthly) is only £32.10. You can subscribe on-line at [www.wildplaces.co.uk](http://www.wildplaces.co.uk). It makes an ideal present from, or for, children, grandchildren, husband, wives and lovers when the birthday or Christmas question arises. And subscription is a virtuous circle; the more subscribers, the better the magazine!



Event de Peyrejal, France. Photo: **Clive Westlake**

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Printed by **SWIFTPRINT.biz**  
4 Silver St Cirencester Glos  
GL7 2BJ

Keith Sanderson has the following Yorkshire permits for the Wessex.

If anyone wants to use these, please contact either Jude Vandeplank,  
or Keith Sanderson Tel: 015242 51662 or  
[keithsanderson@btinternet.com](mailto:keithsanderson@btinternet.com)

Saturday April 23  
Sunday April 24  
Saturday May 7  
Saturday June 11  
Sunday June 12  
Saturday July 16  
Sunday July 17  
Saturday Sept. 10  
Sunday Sept. 25  
Saturday Oct 15  
Sunday Oct 16 2  
Saturday Nov 12  
Sunday Nov 13  
Saturday Dec 10  
Sunday Dec 11

Lancaster Hole / County Pot  
Cow Pot  
Stream Passage/Flood Entrance  
Dihedral / Bar Pot  
Disappointment Pot  
Lost Johns / Deaths Head  
Notts 2  
Penyghent Pot  
Little Hull Pot  
Juniper Gulf  
Long Kin East  
Top Sink / Lancaster Hole  
Pool Sink  
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Lost Johns / Boxhead