



Wessex Cave Club Journal

Volume 27

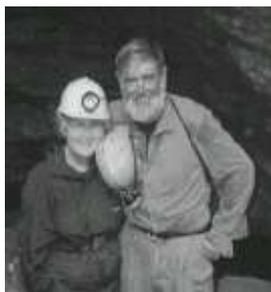
Number 282

December 2002

Officers of the Wessex Cave Club

President Donald Thomson.

Vice-Presidents Paul Dolphin and Sid Perou



Editor, Maurice Hewins.

It is perhaps only fair that I feature myself in this series, together with my loyal Acting Assistant Editor and Computer Trouble Shooter, Judy. We have decided to continue with this volume, 27 but it will be our last. Please keep your articles and pictures coming in.

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This Issue's Cover Picture

Neil Wooldridge, pausing for a brew up on the Berger trip in August.

Left, Congratulations to Steve and Tina Scott on the birth of their son Jordan, who is a second grandson for Sheila and Brian Pitman.

Congratulations also to John and Lou Biffin on the birth of twin (buy one, get one free) boys, George and Andrew, on 9th November. Photo please Biff?

Dear Editor,

I was amazed to read in Journal 281, page 192, "Isn't it time that some fat people went digging so we don't have to squeeze into things." The person writing comments like this should be grateful that someone, fat or thin, bothered to spend the time to open caves for them to look at. In this particular cave one of the diggers spent many weekends helping, only to find that he didn't fit through the Corkscrew Squeeze and never complained. There are less people willing to spend 2 or more years on a project so that others can see the wonders of the many undiscovered passages still to be discovered under the Mendip Hills. So I hope that they will go and find a site and tell us about their finds in future Wessex Journals.

Happy Digging, Pete Hann

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Water and Mud 2000 Episode 2 By Andy Kay (Or: the Wessex does the donkeywork)

Previously published in 'Speleo – Dordogne': translated by the author.

Note: The author makes no apologies for the fact that the majority of participants in this episode are not members of the WCC. For the sake of continuity it is felt best to publish the ongoing saga of the deepest cavity in the Dordogne within the pages of this Journal, for after all, 'Ubique Primus'.

18 August: Arrival of the team at La Chassenie in a Transit loaded down with the usual vast array of gas cylinders, propulsion devices, compressors, etc. After sorting all this out, the peace of the village is once more broken by the racket of compressors, the shriek of high – pressure air being purged, the familiar clank of dive bottles being moved. In short, the cave – divers are back in town! Clive hasn't touched his big tanks of Trimix since Easter. All they need is topping – up and everything will be ready for tomorrow...

....

19 August: Even if military – style preparations had been made yesterday evening for the 'attack' on the **Grand Souci**, we didn't arrive at the site until early afternoon. The water level has receded since Easter. Now, it's a good 5 metres below the surrounding field.

The plan is for Sean and Tim to dive first, to check on the condition of the shotline, and attach stage bottles to it if all is well. These will be for Clive, the lead diver. All seems well, so the latter kits – up and dives, intending to explore as far as possible.

It is worthwhile here to insert a technical note. Clive had only a limited time available for exploration. Carrying three tanks containing differing gas mixtures, everything had been calculated beforehand. His 'travel' mix would be breathed until the belay at –80m. At that point he would swap mouthpieces and continue down breathing a 'deep' mix. This was good for –110m with a 'narcosis factor' equivalent to air at –40m. However, each extra minute passed below –100 would require a further 15 minutes decompression on the way out. During his return, Clive would swap mouthpieces again at –60m, to a modified 'travel' mix. Once back to the shotline at the 'shallow' depth of –36m, he would be able to take his time, as the two tanks of 'travel' mix gave him considerable gas autonomy. The previously staged tanks were there just in case. In all, he'd only be able to explore for about ten minutes, even though the total dive time was to be three hours!

The rest of us waited.....the re-appearance of bubbles indicated that he was back at the shotline two minutes earlier than planned. Slowly, the size of the bubbles changed. We have become expert at interpreting the diver's depth from the form of the bubbles at this site. Once we could see that Clive was on his deco stop at –12m, Tim and Sean dived to check all was well, and recover the stage bottles. All this to – and – fro made things quite hectic for the surface support!

Finally Clive was back with us, a big grin on his face. He was carrying two dive computers, both of which indicated an attained depth of –104.2 metres. To which one must add the 5 metres between the surface and the water. This meant that the **Souci** indisputably now held the depth record for the Dordogne. Probably this was also the deepest exploration dive made outside Britain by a member of the CDG. Furthermore, the **Souci** now entered the 'top ten' underwater caves dived in France, in 7th position, I believe. Finally, it was still going deeper: Clive hadn't touched bottom! Yet again a line reel had been left, suspended from the deepest belay, 95 metres underwater.

Needless to say, some champagne was opened at La Chassenie that evening.

20 August: At Easter, our plans for **La Reille** had failed due to the weather. This time it was more the heat that bothered us while kitting-up. The army of 'sherpas' who had promised to help had, one by one, telephoned their excuses, so it was just the four of us that finally entered the cave, with kit for three divers. Clive, Sean, and Tim were each wearing their harnesses, carrying lead and two 6 litre tanks apiece. Your author was burdened with the rest: valves, line reels, bolting kit, more lead etc, etc, in a voluminous kitbag weighing about 25 kilos. This kitbag was to suffer unpublishable insults and become a mortal enemy, not least for its inexplicable tendency to fill up with water at the least sight of deep streamway, but refuse to drain itself afterwards!

These days, the terminal sump of La Reille is a major question mark in French caving. Dived by the late J – L. Sirieix in 1987, the only published description is a couple of lines in 'Speleo – Dordogne' and 'Spelunca'. Having only been diving for a short time, Jean – Luc's equipment was rather rudimentary, and also each visit was of a clandestine nature. He always said that his far point, 135 metres in, should be revisited, but he never did so. Now, the cave's ownership has changed, and an access agreement negotiated, so it is a choice target.

Let's not dwell on the journey to the sump: especially as it was the WCC carrying for the BEC!

Suffice it to say that on a lightly – laden, normal bash downstream without any detours, it takes about fifty minutes: today it took two hours. Having thrown the horrible kitbag to one side once at the sump, and leaving the divers to sort out their kit, I busied myself drilling a bolt into the ceiling as an anchor for the dive line. The protrusion that Jean-Luc had used was far too precarious; the two metres of his French-style ‘bootlace’ line were still attached, however. The rest had been broken by floods and washed downstream in the intervening years.

Tim sets off first, laying new line. He’s soon back, though, having surfaced in an airbell chamber 12 metres in. However, there is no obvious way on. Sean has a try. He circumnavigates the chamber, and like Tim, finds no evident continuation, unless it’s through a pile of blocks at 3 metres depth. Furthermore, there is no sign of Jean – Luc’s old line, and no good belay for the new one. A serious discussion ensues: could the passage have closed up over thirteen years? And how to belay the line?

At this point, Clive asked me how one drills a bolt. Unbelievable! Here’s a top-quality caver, who has the previous day just toppled a bunch of records, asking me how to use a bolt kit! However, in some way it’s a commentary on caving British-style: nearly all the ‘classics’ possess so many bolts that they are now being replaced by resin P-hangers, and so some of the older exploration techniques are being lost.

After a very brief bit of speleological pedagogy outlining the basic principles (during which I pointed out that the bolt I had just recently installed for the dive line was not an example to be followed if doing vertical work!), Clive set off with the kit, followed by Tim.

Sean and I waited at the sump entrance. Soon, through 12 metres of rock, we clearly heard the sound of a bolt-hammer at work. Then silence for a few more minutes, Tim came back shortly after. He had discovered the way on, which sure enough was between the blocks, and also the old line had been found. Clive rejoined us, having gone a little bit further than Tim in turn. Now all the viz had gone, and also the old line posed a serious hazard. It was decided to leave things ‘til the day after tomorrow.

Harnesses, leads, and tanks were left beside the sump, the tanks containing quite enough air for a further push. Their guardian would be the toad we had found in the vicinity, probably involuntarily domiciled there since a flood. However, the valves and a bunch of other stuff would be needed elsewhere tomorrow, so while the divers enjoyed the walk out, I struggled out once more with the detestable kitbag. The sun was still high in the sky, and we were nevertheless aware that we’d just put off the really heavy carry for 48 hours.....so off to the pub for fortification.

21 August: As the kit included two diver propulsion vehicles, and their use was not destined for the Souci, nor La Reille, we had decided to check out a hypothetical resurgence in the Dordogne river, at **La Roque Gageac**. (see ‘Water & Mud’ *passim*). There was a point where the river was reputed to ‘plunge to a depth of 30 metres’, according to local guides. Not only that, but these fearless cave-divers had also heard the stories of topless female canoeists.....

Some days earlier, I had obtained permission from the landowner to cross with vehicles to the beach-like bank opposite the particular spot in question. We were thus able to entertain ourselves with full cave – diving apparatus, with sunseekers, topless canoeists, and tourist boaters as spectators. Unfortunately, the curiosity of others must have been attracted. Later on, we found that one of the vehicles had been disrobed of Clive’s bag, containing his mobile phone and wallet, and also my Leica binoculars.

Worse than that, the ‘deep point’ in the river was only 8 metres, with no obvious cave entrance. Apart from a booty of any number of assorted but worthless objects, and having seen some remarkably large fish, the ‘unknown resurgence’ was only a dream. Shame. (Note. However further research using infrared aerial photography indicates that there are two resurgences in the vicinity where this operation took place. A further trip will be planned.)

22 August: Back to **La Reille**. Sean doesn’t feel like diving today, and in a moment of weakness proposes an audacious plan. We’ll all go to the sump, Sean will gather the kit he left there, and while I stay as ‘support’ for the other two he’ll exit, and come back to help with the carry out. Naturally this idea is accepted with alacrity by all concerned.

Down at the sump, after a lot faster travel this time, we see that the water is clear once more. Sean grabs his tanks and sets off back out. He takes the time about 100 metres up the stream way to empty his cylinders. It might seem unbelievable (try it the next time you sherpa for divers) but a dive tank is a lot lighter empty than with a full load of air compressed to 220 atmospheres. (Also, it’s a lot safer to carry). It’s a loud operation in a cave passage, though. Clive goes first. Beyond the

breakdown pile, he runs out 35 metres of line in a tubular passage, initially at 3 metres depth, but becoming shallower. However, the bad viz and the ever-present old 'bootlace' line are worrying, so he comes back without having found an airspace. In turn, Tim sets off, but is back with us shortly after: "This is becoming dangerous" he says, and obviously the old line presents a serious hazard for entanglement. To follow the 'fin prints' of the original explorer, it is evident that the old line must be methodically removed. (Note. It is however possible that the removal process has already started and with the heavy floods during spring 2001 that the danger might now have reduced and the line washed away.)

While Clive is de-kitting, Sean returns. All alone, he has made a two-way trip in record time! Less than 40 minutes for the return from the surface, while taking the time to admire the fantastic cavescape of La Reille. We empty the remaining air from the cylinders, making a deafening noise unheard by anybody but ourselves and the toad (yes he was still there), and make our way out. Yet again, we exit under a sunlit sky, and this time the exertions of the trip are quickly forgotten, aided by the contents of an icebox specifically planned for that reason.

We are well impressed by the initial work performed by Jean-Luc Sirieix. The end of his exploration has not yet been reached. (Also, after having done some more research later, I discovered that the number of 'clandestine' and unpublished trips he made to the site was considerable). A return is planned for two days' time. Tomorrow the divers will drive down to the Lot for some clear-viz touring in classics like the Ressel. Unfortunately the same evening I receive a call back to my work overseas. It will be a shame not to see what happens at La Reille, but nevertheless it was good to say 'Adieu' to that kitbag!

Participants:

Tim CHAPMAN	BEC/CDG	Caving, diving, common sense
Christane DEVAUX-KAY	SCP	Putting up with it all
Andrew KAY	WCC/SCP	Caving, donkey work, having a great time
Sean PARKER	BEC/CDG	Caving, diving, more common sense
Clive STELL	BEC/CDG	Caving, recordbreaking, therefore no sense at all

Postscript: 25 August: The divers returned to **La Reille**. Only one diver (Tim) entered the sump, where he cleared away more of the old line. In total, about 50 metres progress has been made in the second sump, but the original limit of exploration is far from having been reached. This is a future objective.

On this trip, the toad was brought out of the cave to the entrance doline, which he might find a more amenable habitat. He was named an honorary member of the BEC.

Fell Beck In Flood



Those members who went to the Craven Winch meet in August experienced some near Berger weather. Phil Hendy and Brian Prewer were on a two-hour shift below and were amazed to see how the water had risen. Shortly after, when they came out, it went over the dam. For the first time in many years a party of tourists had to be bought up Bar Pot. They enjoyed their experience so much they wanted to join the Craven.

Photo's Brian Prewer.

CALAMINE MINING AT STAR by Phil Hendy

Star is a small hamlet on the A38 one mile northwest of Shipham. It derives its name from the Star Inn, which dates back to the 16th century. Although much land has been reclaimed, there is still a lot of gruffy ground, which testifies to the areas' long mining history. The mines at Star are usually

reckoned to be part of the Shipham ore field and most were dug in the search for calamine (zinc oxide or carbonate) although there were some lead mines. Lead is often found associated with calamine, although the reverse is not true. Calamine mining was believed to have begun by the 16th century. Much was used even then as a cooling lotion or eye bath, and the ore was mixed with copper ore to produce brass. Only later was the ore smelted on its own to produce metallic zinc (spelter).

References in the caving literature are sparse. There was some exploration in the 1970s, mainly by Chris Richards and Marie Clarke of the ACG, and at about the same time the BEC descended two of the mines. The known open mines of the area were summarised in an article in the ACG Newsletter by Richards in 1972. The Wessex interest in the area began in the spring of 2002 with the reported discovery of a deep Cornish shaft on the hillside south of the Star Inn; others will report on this discovery later. (See W.C.C. Journal No 181 p.199).

Calamine was being extracted from the Shipham and Star areas from 1665. The ore courses usually (but not always) lay aligned E-W, so trenches were dug from north to south to intercept them. A useful clue to the presence of ore was the earth colour, usually yellow grit. The local rock is Dolomitic conglomerate. When found, the veins were wider than lead veins, and the ore was found in nut-sized lumps. Occasionally a mass of 8 or 10 tons would be found (Knight 1967). The mines would be started as long surface trenches, and then shafts were dug to extract the deeper ore. These seldom exceeded 50ft (15m) in depth, and are normally rift-like, except for the upper section, which was ginged. Airshafts were also dug; these were much smaller. Although shot holes have been seen in the mines, the early miners probably just used picks and shovels, with hand windlasses to raise the ore. Does the need for ventilation suggest that fire followed by water was used to break up the ore, or would the forms of light the men used be so smoky that they had to make airshafts? Sir Arthur Pendarves-Vivian in his diary of 1870 (quoted in Schmitz) notes the general absence of pumping facilities at that time; there was but one pumping house at Shipham. Even at that time, most mines could only be worked as far as the water table. This was reckoned to be at about 15 fathoms (90ft or 27m) at Shipham and 50 fathoms (300ft or 91m) 'near the Quaker's School' (Sidcot), which latter probably refers to Star.

Once extracted, the ore was wound up to the surface in buckets, washed, sieved and separated from the residue. There is no running water at Star, but often ore was washed in large tubs. Any galena would then be separated from the calamine. The zinc ore would then be calcined or roasted. The 1931 6-inch Ordnance Survey map shows an old limekiln in Daffodil Valley. This may have been a converted calcining oven or built on the site of one. The roasted ore was then transported to a brass works, one of the earliest in the area being at Keynsham, at the confluence of the rivers Avon and Chew. The Warmley brassworks were built much later. The main use for the calamine was for brass making, and at Keynsham, it is recorded as being very rich: about 65-70% 'pure oxide of zinck'. The demand for metallic zinc was low, and the brass mills at Keynsham in the mid-1800s (Harford & Co.) produced very small quantities.

During much of the 18th century mining was the main occupation of Shipham, though it created very little wealth for the villagers. Inevitably, the shallow reserves of ore ran out, and by 1830, the industry was in decline. Gough states that by 1853, 'all operations had ceased'. However, in the 1850s and 1860s Cornish miners came to the area looking for calamine, and sank shafts in the old rakes at Shipham. Richards (pers. com.) records a deep Cornish shaft recently discovered at Winterhead (half a mile south of Star) and it is likely that the shaft at Star is of the same age. Knight in his History of Sidcot School notes that in 1870 a Swansea company Hussey and Vivian attempted to restart the industry by sinking shafts at Shipham and Winterhead. There were plans to mine on the School land, but they came to nothing. One of the engineers however taught Chemistry at the School for a while, and taught the boys how to use dynamite, which they used to remove the stumps of some recently-felled Scotch fir trees. If only practical Chemistry lessons were so much fun today!

The road from Star to Shipham is the Broadway, but 100m SW of the Inn there is a road, Cheddarcombe Lane, running southeast past a few old cottages. This continues as a footpath on the bottom of a steep wooded combe (Daffodil Valley). This emerges in Shipham in Broadway just before the tollhouse. To the north of Daffodil Valley the hillside forms a spur. The valley side is wooded, and there is open woodland running along the ridge of the spur, with open land (Star Common) between the two and on the top of the slope. The southwest side of the spur has a low discontinuous rock face, with many choked pits at its foot. There are similar rock faces on the right hand bank of the valley. Although the lower slopes of the hill to the north have been reclaimed,

higher up there is a profusion of grassy depressions ringed with spoil, and many of the large clumps of scrub and impenetrable bramble are growing in and around these pits. The pits are aligned along the rakes, which generally lay WNW-ESE (280° Mag.) There is one rectangular pit, which may be the foundations of a building, but (with one exception) there are no indications of any surface structures.

The main description of Star Shaft will appear elsewhere, (survey in last Journal, Ed.) but it is worth noting here that it is 27m (90ft deep). The opening is rectangular, 2.4 x 1.8m (8 x 6ft) aligned at 270° Magnetic. The top part is well built of mortared stone sitting directly onto the bedrock. A recess in this on the west side has been bridged with a brick arch. There are recesses for timbers in the top at the western end, and a rotten horizontal timber set into the west wall remains. The south wall has an alcove built into it, approximately 2.5m high and 0.6m wide. It is now only about half a metre deep, having been sealed with dry stone walling. This probably once connected with the surface, possibly as access for miners or for maintenance. The shaft was discovered when a tractor wheel broke through the capping of earth over timbers, which were set at about 0.5m down the shaft. There was no indication until the breakthrough that there was a shaft underneath a small flat area of grass, although there is a prominent spoil heap adjacent to this on the north. Below the mine, on the footpath leading down to Cheddarcombe Lane, there is an area of leveled spoil, with the foot of the spur, which forms its southern edge having been trimmed back as a vertical wall. This wall curves round towards the mine and into the copse heading towards a ruined building. Of this little but the outline of a wall around a muddy rectangular depression remains. The internal dimensions are 7.6 x 3.7m (25 x 12ft). It is aligned at 270° and is offset from the shaft. A trial dig in July showed that the wall was built of squared stone inside and out, and there was probably a flagstone floor on a hard sandy base. The site appears to have been used as a rubbish dump in the 1930s. There is no indication of a doorway, but this was probably in the east wall, close to the mine.



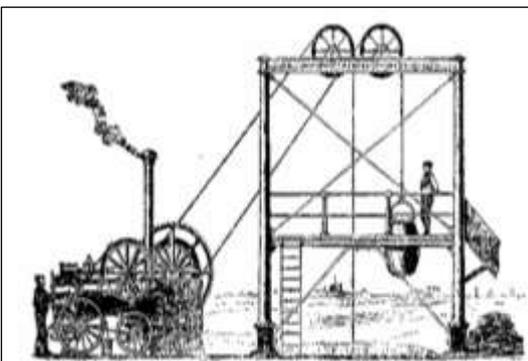
Star Mine
Left, Mike Thomas about to
dive the flooded level.

Right, the level leading to the
second pitch.

Photo's, Carmen Haskell.



Richards suggests that the leveled platform below the mine might have been used to site a steam engine, but it is more likely that any engine would have been placed nearer the mine, probably between the shaft and the building. The alignment of the building makes it unlikely to have been an engine house; these are in any case rare on Mendip. The dimensions of the shaft suggest that an engine would have been used for winding. There would have been two buckets, one up and one down. Engines were usually portable, being set on their own wheels but not self-propelled, being transported to where they were needed by teams of horses or oxen. This obviated the need for an expensive engine house (maybe a wooden shelter would provide some protection from the elements) but more importantly, with the vagaries of mining, it would be useful to have an engine which could be relocated with a minimum of trouble. Such engines were purpose built (see illustration), although sometimes-redundant locomotives were adapted for the purpose.



Portable engine and winding gear as built by Perran Foundry (Cornwall) in 1870

. A complete engine with all the winding gear cost from £375 for a 10hp with double cylinders. 7 ¼ inch (13i nch stroke). To £665 for a 20hp with double cylinders 11 inch (15inch stroke)

Ref Barton p232.

The purpose of the building is unclear. It is believed that the mine office was one of the cottages either in Cheddarcombe Lane or on the A38. However, it is probable that the mine required a forge workshop and store, and pieces of clinker and slag found on the surface near the ruins suggest that this may have been its purpose.

It is not known precisely when the mine was sunk, but the presence of old walled-up levels in the shaft makes it likely that it was dug on the site of an older mine in an attempt to find ore at greater depth than the earlier miners could achieve. The flooded lower level of the mine indicates that mining may have been stopped when the water table was reached. It is not known if the water was pumped, but the lower level is below the valley bottom, so adit drainage was not possible. The mine had certainly ceased operation by 1872, because the Bristol Times and Mirror for May 24th of that year advertises a forthcoming sale of mining equipment from Shipham and Star mines. On offer from the mine office at Star was a theodolite, chain tapes, spirit level etc.

Most of the shafts have now been blocked by time, or deliberately with rubbish, and at least two that were known in the 1970s cannot now be located with certainty. The chance discovery of Star Shaft has led to renewed interest in the Star Common area, and at least one deeper shaft remains to be discovered. In 1940, Coope notes that there was a shaft in a field to the left (of Cheddarcombe Lane) that was so deep that empty tins dropped into it could not be heard to reach the bottom. This is a common tale, but when a dog fell into the shaft, two ladders were needed, tied together and lowered with a rope, to retrieve it. The bottom of the shaft proved to be flooded, but there are no details either of the depth of the shaft or of the water.

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Ordnance Survey (1931) 6in to 1 mile map.

Extracts from the Upper Pitts Logbook. Edited by Brian Prewer

8.5.02 Swildon's, Mud Sump

Rosie & Vern

Went with great ideas of starting to bail this obstruction but water level in sump outrageous & well backed up. Suggest a party at Mud Sump (complete with picnic) with as many people as possible trying to clear it.

9.5.02 Blacknor Hole, Portland

Kev & Emsie (WCC Portland Division)

An evening trip to find & rig the abseil into Blacknor Hole. Looking forward to seeing an impressive void in the cliff face as shown in one of the photos in 'Caves of the Isle of Portland' (if you haven't got a copy it's available from Wessex Sales Ltd). Found a squalid little void in the cliff face filled with years of Shitehawk droppings – nice! Good fun for an evening & we will be back with full kit to investigate further. That good-looking cave must be around there somewhere.

April/May Assynt

Rosie & Vern

Invaded Assynt, courtesy of Tav. Joined usual collection of Mendip cavers (& others) for annual pilgrimage to Scotland. It rained, snowed, sleeted, galed etc but still managed to undertake at least 14 underground excursions including classics such as ANUS, Claonite, Knockers & Smoo, as well as lesser known shiteholes such Tree Hole (see Tav's article in previous WCC Journals). Managed to do some walking & touring & even found time to go to the pub! Fantastic.

PS Forgotten to mention Balnakiel Gloup – N coast of Scotland. Walk across golf course, climb over rocks, jump into sea, swim through kelp & into the geo via foam. Excellent trip.

16.5.02 St Cuthbert's

Rosie, Vern & Gonzo

Gonzo on commission to 'do some art', so down to Maypole Series for much posing on ladders. A classic trip to the top then back down again. Interesting to note that there was much more water on way back down. Overflow from dam on surface perhaps, but Entrance Rift dry?

19.5.02 Longwood/August

Rosie, Vern & Mark

Classic trip down August, downstream & back out via the waterfall for a bit of sport. Forgotten how great the streamway is, but just remember that you don't always want to go headfirst!! (Vern) Cave seemed tighter than previously & oversuit has shrunk, but still a fantastic trip.

21.5.02 Charterhouse Cave

Rosie & Vern

Another cave that seems to have shrunk! Entrance crawling just as hideous as usual. Normal route through. We even went to the singing stal & Midsummer Chamber. Main Chamber & 'blobs' still impressive

25.5.02 Swildon's Hole

Phil H.

Trip fuelled by 2½ pts. Not too much water – removed a stone from the drain. Long Dry (interesting upper

inlet) to top of the 20' also top of Old 40@, out via the Wet Way. A lot of huffing & puffing. 1 hour from entrance to Upper Pitts. Lovely to have the cave to myself.

24-25.5.02 Swildon's Hole

Phill Short & Andy Judd

See Journal 281 p 197

31.5.02 Swildon's Hole

Phill Short

See Journal 281 p 197

1.6.02 Dig next to St Luke's

Max Milden

Max arrived on Saturday. Had a good dig for an hour or two at the new dig at Whitetown Farm (next to St Luke's). Then a quick look at St Luke's, followed by Cheddar for cheese & rolls & a nosh at Burrington, followed by a quick trip down Bath Swallet. Backup in case of emergencies only supplied by Mrs & Mr Scammell & Paula.

1.6.02 GB Cavern

Ric & Pat Halliwell, Phil H, Tyrone & Julie Bevan & L. Elton

Down GB via White passage to sump & out up Waterfall climb. Out to bright sunbathing sunshine. (*Must be the only day this summer*).

2.6.02 Swildons Hole

**Ric and Pat, Karen Lane, Debbie Evans T and J Bevan
Sean Howe, Gordon Kaye (Mostly CPC)**

Down Short Dry to Sump 1 and out wet way. Debbie's first trip underground.

2.6.02 Pierre's Pot

Phil Short, M Thomas & Jo Wiseley

All 3 to squeeze then Phill solo to stream, followed to up & downstream sumps. Look at Hanging Garden.

3.6.02 Pierre's Pot

Alison Moody & Carmen

To hanging Garden & sumps. Ali had a scamper around every nook & cranny whilst Carmen recovered (hoping it would wear her out a bit) – no such luck, out with the aid of Ali's head as a fixed aid, & straight down Lionel's to do the round trip. More scampering by Ali, & then out with a worn out Carmen. We will return – watch this space!

3.6.02 GB Cavern

Ric Halliwell & Don Mellor (CPC)

Took Don down GB. He's only been caving for 40 years & this was his second Mendip cave!! He was suitably impressed.

3.6.02 Box Stone Mine

Weston Bros & Dee Weston

Backdoor, Cathedral, Eastgate, B12, Roberts, BP (Fan Route), through barbed wire curtains, ahead to slot left & right into collapsed area then ahead again to shafts (Mrs Weston most impressed, particularly with the stone staircase & iron ladders to the surface – blocked!!) Out via WO Passage to junction with Clift Passage, Tank & AO route. 'Hanging death avoided with easy bypass. 3 hours plus usual repast at Quarryman's Arms.

8.6.02 Orchid Rift and Templeton Dig

Phil Hendy

Upper Pitts to Rookham (via the Hunter's –*of course*). To Orchid Rift. No change, but the drop at the end is half-full of water. Failed to find Creed's Cave (site of) – then up to Templeton Dig. An impressive spoil heap by the side of a large muddy hole with traces of a rift in the side. Back to Upper Pitts – cottage industry including gun carriage painting, ladder making, helmet fettling & map refurbishment.



Phil returned to Templeton with the editor on 15/9/02.

It is being dug by Dave Morrison and the Axebridge. Reinforcements are being called in from N.H.A.S.A.

We would welcome a report from Dave.



8.6.02 Lionel's/Spar

Alison M & Carmen

Return match on Lionel's after last weeks route finding problems. (I'm sure someone has moved the labyrinth around.) First a quick trip down Spar Pot checking draughts. On the way out we lit a small bonfire at the top end of Spar to see if we could repeat a smoke test carried out a long time ago, which proved a connection between Spar & Lionel's. We then continued down Lionel's via West Low Level to the sump & also to the dig at the end of Stick-in-the-Mud Passage (it hasn't improved!) Out via the round trip to Junction Chamber, which had a strong smell of smoke at high level. There was also smoke at the lower end of the Boulder Chamber. We intend to repeat the test with people in both Spar & Lionel's. It would make a lovely through trip!!

8.6.02 Ogot Draenen

Jonathan W, Kathy & Geoff

Life on Mars the Dry Way. Had a bash at a Few Haggises or is that Haggi. It was my way rather than the Highway for Mr Ballard on the way out. 8 hours.

9.6.02 Shatter Cave

Chris Grosart, Phil H & Phil Short

To Pillar Chamber then round loop & back. Pauline in a huff when she couldn't work out why her camera

wasn't winding on = no film!! Oh dear – will have to come back again. Phill S suitable impressed by CG's favourite little cave.

12.6.02 Hole in Next Field to St Luke's

Carmen, Paula, Steve the NWM & Bob S

A good ½ trailer load dug out. Lots of "Up bucket" & "Down bucket". Parts of a strange skull & a bone found. Another hole appeared & getting bigger. Rock walls on two sides, Cleared all of Max's spoil & a lot more. Carmen's got a blister which she's willing to show for a small fee or ½ an orange juice at the pub.

14.6.02 Spar Pot

Alison M & Carmen

Very thorough look around checking out all the leads. Found two possible dig sites. Draught checking with Carmen's disco smoke.

15.6.02 Spar Pot

Alison & Carmen

Sewer Rat Dig (name courtesy of Mr Prewer – thanks Brian). Trip to start digging one of the passages found yesterday. Nice & tight & muddy – watch this space.

15.6.02 Swildon's - Sump 12

Phill Short & Greg Brock

See Journal 281 p 197

16.6.02 Swildon's

Cave art trip to Old Grotto with Robin Gray, Ian Chandler, Mel, Andy Sparrow's missus, Maurice Hewins, Kathy Glenton & one other bloke?

16.6.02 Swildon's, Mud Sump

Keith & Roz Fielder, Gordon Kaye & Malc Foyle

Sunday morning trips not always a good idea. Farting Diamond White, belching cider & cursing Butcombe all the way down. Be warned – bad air in cave! Otherwise an enjoyable for Roz watching the blokes suffer!!

16.6.02 Spar Pot again

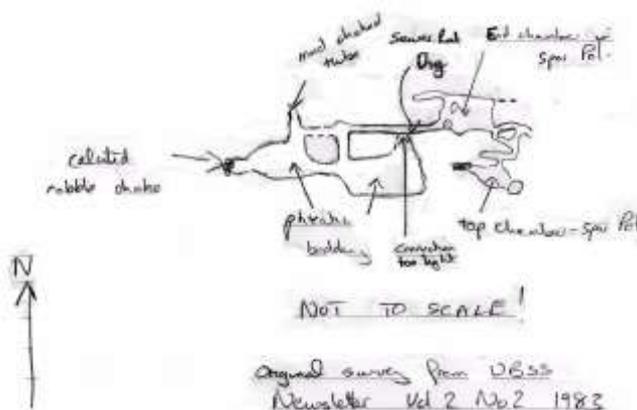
Ali & Pete M & Carmen

Very much a B-team down to Sewer Rat Dig 1. (Pete with 'flu, Carmen who had just worked a night shift & Alison with two sprained wrists.) Much mud removed & we managed to open up the U-tube & start on the mud slope on the far side. I had promised a breakthrough after an hours digging, (I lied) but after 3 hours difficult work (due to constricted nature of passage) we could get a clear view up the open passage (about 20') but just couldn't quite get into it. Carmen was on a night shift again so we called it a day. Discussion on the way back to the hut as to when, & who would be on the next trip. Carmen & Pete both very generously offered their places to each other even to the extent of paying each other to go underground – I can't understand why?

17.6.02 Spar Pot – No Not again! (4 days in a row)

Carmen, Pete & Alison

Sewer Rat Dig 1. Much faster progress thanks to a weeding hoe & after about 1 hour we had managed to dig away the mud slope & get into open passage. This proved to be a fairly narrow water worn rift for about 20' which then linked back into the continuation of the main phreatic bedding plane found at the end of the cave. This continued up dip to a phreatic arch choked with calcited cobbles. Very draughty. This will be the next digging site. Also, a mud-choked tube on the right might be worth a look. Total extension – approximately 20m.



PS Alison would like to thank Dave Warman c/o Warmbac Wetsuits for the £1 to buy a ball of string for Lionel's. (It's nice to know that your friends have confidence in you!)



23.6.02 Goons Hole

Alison M

Trip to look at our old dig. A considerable amount of debris has been washed in and it's no longer possible to get to the original digging point. The cave has definitely not increased in size since our last trip. Exited with a very large tree branch which should make things bigger. Cave draughting strongly downwards. Hope to start digging here again ASAP, but we first need to have a party down Goon's and one down Lionel's to check that they don't connect. Lionel's runs under and down the road (East to West) while Goon's heads North and we think may go over the top of Lionel's

21.6.02 Eastwater

Alison M & Mad Phil (BEC)

Down to look at Phil's dig in Soho. Looks worth a couple of banging trips to get to the next corner. Also to Phil's dig at Morton's Pot. This was flooded to a depth of 4m. Very impressive spoil removal system.

29.6.02 Brown's Folly Mine

Phil H, Kathy & Bob Scammell

Bob took us to uncharted regions & tried to get lost. We tried not to lose him. The water splash at the Well backfired on Bob. Thanks for showing us bits of the mine I have never seen & for the history lesson.

PS The Compton Martin Ochre Mine key fits Brown's Folly locks but AWT have other locks which can be fitted, their whim to keep cavers out! (During the winter?)

1.7.02 Lionel's

Carmen & Alison

Back to SR II – more digging, another 2' gained. Dig now digging itself, "Boulder 1, Alison 0". Dig is quite cold & draughty so trips are quite short. With any luck a few more collapses may expose the "Caverns Measureless to Man" behind it all without us having to do much more work. Hmmm – dream on!!

2.7.02 GB Cavern

Carmen & Emma

To squeeze at top of Ladder Dig, "My hips won't go through there!!" cried Emma, so out we went. Met Bill from UBSS, he's digging Bertie's Pot. Declined visit – places to go, people to see. Thanks to Ali & Pete for loan of kit.

3.7.02 Eastwater

Alison M & Mad Phil

Someone definitely had it in for us today. Lugged one drill & 3 batteries (bl**dy heavy!!) to Phil's dig. Spent about an hour removing the spoil from his last trip. I couldn't understand why I could feel water running up my wetsuit while lying headfirst down the dig. Soon found out why – my zip in my new wetsuit had completely broken – not nice. Phil then tried to drill some shot holes for the next charge, only to find that the drill was not working. After achieving a 1" deep hole in 45 minutes he gave up in disgust. He was not happy. Lugged drill & batteries out of cave again.

6.7.02 Spar Pot

Alison M, Mad Phil & Ray Deasy

Survey trip to run a line from Sewer Rat II back to the East Twin entrance

6.7.02 Star Mine, Shipham

Mike Thomas, Malc Foyle, Carmen, Laurie, Paul, Mel, Phil Mark, Pete & Jo

Mike Thomas diving with a lot of help from the above – thanks. About 50m of passage was re-found running in a north/south direction. Some old tools & a cart found that need filming. The unstable nature of parts of the underwater mine demand a little respect.

7.7.02 Goon's Hole

Alison & Carmen

Restarted old dig at the bottom – The Rat Run. Made some progress but spoil removal extremely difficult – we need some 'technology'. Cave blowing a gale.

6.7.02 Swildon's

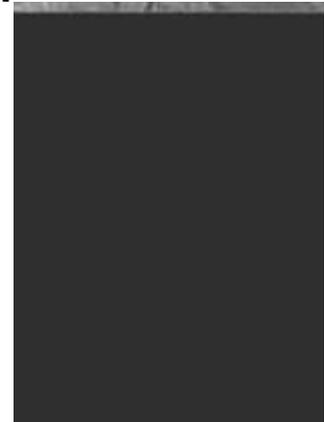
Greg Brock, Phill Short & Andy Stewart

See Journal 281 p 197

Alison Moody at the Mud Sump



Alison and Phil.



Photo's Carmen Haskell

Alison, assisted by Carmen Haskell, Phil Rowsel (BEC) and others finally opened the Swildons Mud Sump on 14/7/02. The work was carried out at times in exceedingly bad air. Hopefully the air-flow round that part of the cave will now improve.

5.7.02 Swildon's

Alison & Mad Phil

Transported 3 x 5 gallon containers to Second Mud Sump for a new dam to send the inlet stream on the left away from the Mud Sump & down the Airless Oxbows. Dam was put into place & sealed with expanding foam. High levels of CO₂ by the Mud Sump.

6.7.02 Swildon's

Alison, Mad Phil & Adrian Hole(BEC)

Trip to continue dam building.

10.7/02 Swildon's Mud Sump

Mad Phil, Alison M & Carmen H

Trip 1 Trip down to Mud Sump to try out diesel pump (which worked perfectly on the surface) only to find that it wasn't playing. Phil took it to pieces – not a good idea, components flying off into the sump in all directions. Also tried out Les Williams's idea of suspending a 5-gallon container in the roof above the sump &

bailing into the top of this. A siphon hose out of the bottom of the container then allows the water to flow naturally back up the passage to the next dam. Worked well, Carmen very nobly (or stupidly) volunteered to take one of the old defunct pumps out. (Which promptly worked on the surface & went back down again 1 hour later) Out of cave at 5.45pm.

Trip 2 - 6.45pm! (and wetsuit still wet). Mud Sump again with Mad Phil, Alison & 2 Moles. Down with another 5-gallon container to set up a 2nd siphon which will take the water over the highest dam & allow it to flow off down the Muddy Oxbows. Emptied all the dams except for the bottom one. System works extremely well & is a lot faster than pumping. Exited with thumping CO₂ heads to find the cave well & truly in flood. Total bailing time today – 6 hours.

14.7.02 Swildon's

Mad Phil, Adrian Hole, Shaun Howe (all BEC), Alison M, Butch, Paul W, Mak, Carmen H, Andy Morse & Caroline

Final attack on the Mud Sump to do the final bailing & finally clear the sump. Many hands make light work & thin air. Spent the first 2 hours fighting for breath. Once the sump broke a howling gale brought O₂ refreshment to a relieved team of bailers. Please note the signs directing cavers to walk over the dams using the constructed bridge to avoid damaging the dam upstream, also a concerted effort by all cavers passing through sump by doing a little bailing will keep the sump dry. There is a small inlet from the other side that will cause the sump to fill again if it is left unbailed for a long time. Eventually the sump was bailed dry(ish) & all the team were able to pass through with relative ease. Mission successful.

10.8.02 Swildon's Mud Sump

Alison Moody & Mad Phil Rowsell (BEC)

Working trip to see how much water had collected in the Mud Sump over the last month. We were relieved to find that there was still a reasonable air space (in wet weather the drip from the aven on the far side of the Mud Sump will still feed into it). Phil tried suspending the 1st container as high possible in the roof. We proved that it would be possible to bail the sump in one lift if a suitable pump could be found. This would need to lift water about 3m from the sump into the container.

14.8.02 Swildon's Mud

11.8.02 Swildon's Mud Sump

Alison Moody, Mad Phil & Adrian Hole (BEC)

We decided to put the pump/one lift idea on hold & to keep a simple workable system in place, with 2 suspended containers. The old lower dam just before the sump is not really serving any useful purpose now & also leaks like a sieve. This was demolished & a new dam built on the left-hand side of the passage, immediately below the first suspended container. Many thanks to Bob Pyke & Noel Cleeve who stopped to help.

11.8.02 Swildon's, Double Troubles

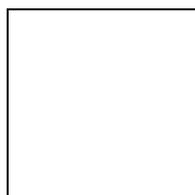
Pyke, Noel Cleeve

Intended round trip thwarted by failed memory syndrome at Birthday Squeeze. Returned in time to dig some mud for Alison & co, in Dam construction at Mud Sump.

Sump

Alison Moody & Mad Phil

Trip to finish off the new dam & to bail the Mud Sump dry again – just for fun! The bailing system can be fairly easily operated by 3/4 people. It is possible with 2 but involves a lot of running around. A request is made please not to leave water, long-term, in the new dam, as this could cause it to collapse. A good tidy up was made of the area & there is now a plastic sack full of rubbish which needs to be removed from the cave please. We could also do with some new buckets for bailing (both large & small). Any donations would be very welcome. find that there was still a reasonable air space (in wet weather the drip from the aven on the far side of the Mud Sump will still feed into it).



Look Back on 2002 Donald Thomson

October is the time when the Club rings out the old and rings in the new. At least, it makes a few changes, confirming some that have occurred during the year, and introducing new recruits to the Club administration.

The Club has had a successful year. There has been an increase of 3.8% in the Club membership. Set against a national preference for spectator sports this seems very creditable. Members have been abroad, to the Gouffre Berger and to the Herault region in France, and both expeditions have published dramatic accounts for the rest of us to read in the journal. The photo of the Aille River leak in Doolin on the Journal Cover revived old memories of these fine County Clare systems. I did not at first believe the photo of the froth in Ogof Draenan, said to be the Washing Machine; in Clare we were certain that these lumps came from Guinness bottles. Obviously research dictates otherwise, and, true, we could not explain their presence in Welsh caves.

On Mendip great discoveries are expected in Swildon's 12, and new passages have been found in Southbank, the distant and dicier part of Eastwater. It is very noticeable that the diving element of cave exploration is on the ascendancy, both here and abroad. Star Mine, as well as having a fine pitch, has extensive underwater passages. The extensions at Bath Swallet and the reopening of the Plug Hole near the Mud Sump added a touch of domesticity. Does the Plug Hole suggest further links at a lower level, perhaps connecting with the other little sump at the end of a tube off the Traverse Passage? Is it worth digging up the floor?

Social events have brought in the crowds too. The Wessex Challenge had tested enough military chariot transport and sufficient heavy ordnance to defend Upper Pitts from all comers, except of course those who had pre-booked, and the Wessex successfully snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

By the time this Journal is published important decisions will have been made at the A.G.M. The question of the Club's involvement in business enterprises should have been debated and settled. There are pros and cons, and the consequence of the decisions could be far reaching. Not unrelated is the perennial assessment of the most suitable subscription level. Apart from the unproblematic effect of inflation two other effects have to be considered. The withdrawal of the rate rebate and the increased rate of insurance premiums both compel subscription increases if the level of Club service provision is to be maintained, and members will once again have to consider what should be the appropriate Club policy.

There has been a change in the list of Trustees. It has been unclear whether one individual could, or should be one of the Trustees and also President. The consensus, with which I agree, is that the positions should be separate and not be held by the same person, although the President should work with the Trustees. This decision has now been formalized with my resignation as a Trustee and the appointments of Richard Witcombe and John Thomas as Trustees.

Have a good, wet and muddy 2003.

The dig near St Lukes by Bob Scammell

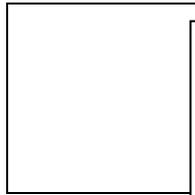
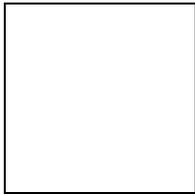
The foot & mouth scare subsided but the Bath Swallet diggers were still at their new find. Paula, Steve and I had a look at the various depressions but nothing was decided on, except for one which Paula had liked. We had begun a half-hearted dig at, but had given up as a job not suited to such a small group. St. Luke's remained shelved and in mothballs. It had gone deeper that it should have, and although Aubrey is lucky to have remained fairly fit and active into the autumn of his days, one or two others have suffered badly with the ravages of time. Needless to say very much on the subject, apart from the fact that I have had two serious attempts at dieting in the past twenty years, I am on a diet at present since finding our home weighing scales were in fact 3 stones incorrect on the wrong side. The nurse hasn't been lying to me after all. The previous serious attempt was forced on me one evening at a Wessex Dinner in Wells, when the main course consisted of a mark on a plate from an orange felt tip pen on which a naked fish finger had been placed.

Weight, size and shape is not my only problem. Even if I lose several stones (and I know I need to) and I become fitter, for it will not make a great deal of difference to whether I could help dig at the bottom of St. Luke's. The ravages of time have also included two broken arms plus badly fractured wrists (every bone in my left wrist) which under the circumstances was well repaired, Then there was the hernia (which was also repaired but could reoccur). A little more recently, after a further broken right arm along with a dislocated wrist joint and three broken ribs, the doctor has told me in no uncertain terms, that my right wrist will not take further damage, as part of one socket has already gone completely. If I can do that falling off a small shed roof I am past taking risks and climbing wire ladders is definitely out. Living with injuries can be very painful and unpleasant.

Sometime during the last winter months, Mark, the farmer who rents a field off Paula Rich's father, found a hole in the field as he was driving the tractor across to tend his cows. Paula had a look and was quite expressive of the possibilities. It was a huge hole with vertical sides, and her parents were willing to let us dig it, in order to find the reason for such a sudden loss of mowing grass.

The only sticking point was that we had to keep it tidy and not leave a pile of spoil or wreck the field. Steve (the none-Wessex member), Paula and I had a good look at it. It was about 2 metres by 2 metres square and almost 2 metres deep with loose dirt sides and right in the middle of an open field. There were no proper surface features, no deep depressions as there are in St. Luke's field next over, no bare rocky outcrops, not even a hawthorn bush, which has been found to raise hopes in the past, - just a hole in the middle of a grassed field. In fact the only features which deviate from a normal smooth slightly sloping field are two long wide shallow grooves running

across the field, one on either side of the place where the hole is, and which are best seen when the sun is low. Digging without creating a spoil heap was going to be a problem.



Left, Paula and her father talk tactics with Max.

Right, Max and Carmen pull up another bucket

Photo's Bob Scammell.

The new dig has now been going for a few months for it has been decided, time I think will bring it a n the hole was approx. 2 metres deep and at the side head just above ground level. Obviously a hole of collapsed so quickly that no run-in had occurred overhanging making it a lobster pot shape. Some of the overhang was removed to make it easier to get into the hole and digging commenced with Paula's father assisting with his new tractor. Each Wednesday he would bring a trailer over and wait while we filled the buckets with soft loose soil and tip it into the front loader bucket. When each bucket was full (approx ½ tonne) he would tip it into his trailer, and after each digging session the spoil would be carted away leaving just the hole. After a couple of weeks Paula's father put a tidy fence around the hole and as the trailer loads were whisked away only rocks and stones were left to be seen around the inside circumference of the fence like a small stone wall. Because of this the dig did not seem to alter very much, as there was no spoil heap growing with each foot of spoil removed.

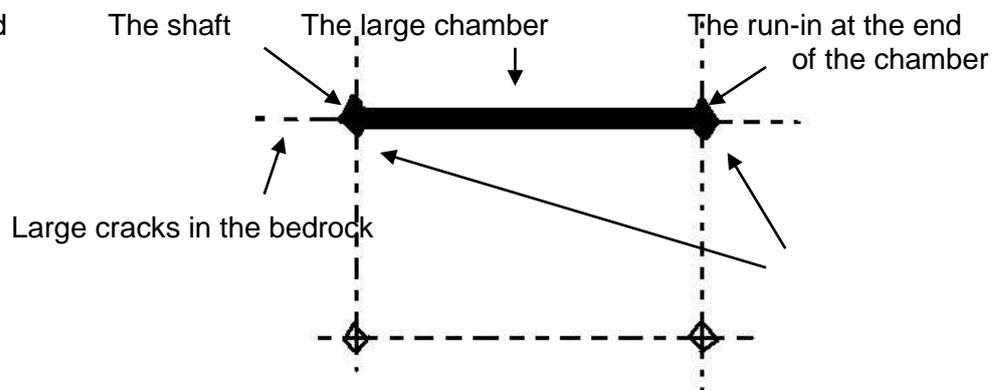
A rock wall was uncovered on one side, which seemed a little encouraging and every now and then holes appeared between stones in the loose soil of the floor. Amongst the collapsed subsoil, wood and bones were found. The latter appear to be from more than one type of animal. There were also lumps of lead crystal, red and yellow ochre, various types of crystals, smooth calcite and stones full of fossils. We were told that the field had been heavily filled with lorry loads of fill many years ago, and that the whole area was used by the military during the last war for the removal of a large number of trees by the Land Army women. The old Nissan hut near the junction was one of a pair where it is said the guards were stationed.

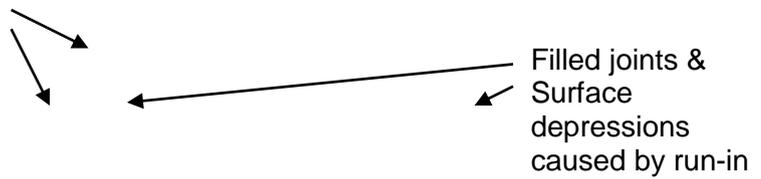
Paula and I took an afternoon visit to the English Heritage aerial photograph archives at Swindon, where we found a fairly sharp aerial photograph of the area taken in 1946. In this photograph the field looks to be rougher than the St. Luke's field, which is still full of some large depressions, several of such depth that I can drive my truck down into there and it cannot be seen.

In the 1970's Phil Hendy wrote everything he could on the area. This was in the days of the 'Rocket Drop' discovery and explorations, Phil's notes include his impressions on the terrain of the fields at that time. With Phil's descriptions and from studying the aerial photo's, it is fairly certain that the whole wide shallow valley that runs from the Lamb Leer area across Whitestown Farm land and on towards Burrington Combe and the Charterhouse Mineries was at one time totally rent with miners grooves.

Such grooving could be shallow or it could be deep, and in some cases very deep, because what the miners were working was the tops of open faults or 'gulls', as I believe the better educated call them. Not the type of faulting where one type of rock has slipped or moved in relation to another, caused by rocks being forced together, but purely vertical cracks where the base rock has been pulled apart in different directions. Basically, if the whole surface was cleared of soil down to bedrock and all in-fill was hoovered out, I believe that what would be left, if seen from an aircraft, would be a massive patchwork of criss-crossed cracks in the bedrock. St. Luke's shaft would be at the joint of two cracks where they cross, and the large chamber would be between two such joints. Places such as Lamb Leer and other similarly created caves in the area being formed where such cracks have been affected by water solution to expand into a more natural form of cave.

The faulting simplified





The first possibility was that our hole was something that had been buried under in-filling, which finally succumbed to old age and the weight on top, or some boulders had shifted in a rift or joint that may at one time have been opened by the old miners. There were tales told that even a bus had been buried in one of the grooves when the ground was levelled off, and to support such a story there are the remains of more than one old vehicle in a depression (the lime kiln) close to Rocket Drop. A vehicle such as a van could cause such a collapse. There was supposed to have been numerous small secret places created during the last war where specially trained saboteurs would have hidden to emerge once the enemy had passed to attack from behind. Such would hold one or two persons and possibly three at a push. The variety of bones below the bedrock level, the presence of well rotted timber at that depth and the base of a shot gun cartridge are all below 3 metres depth from the present surface. These along with the sudden drop in the ground of approx. 6 ft (2 metres) could point in this direction - a shelter 6ft x 6ft x 6ft under the ground hidden at the time in some very gruffy ground full of old mine grooves. The first possibility is not now the case, as evidence would have been found by now.

Further in-fill was dug out, with some excellent though spasmodic assistance from Max who had returned from the dead to resume a spell on Mendip. Further solid rock faces began to appear, until there were good solid vertical rock on almost four sides, which left a 2 metre square hole with a loose clay, dirt and small rocks floor. At each end, running east/west, are two "rifts" which have loose rock in the floor but had loose earth and rock for roofs. As the digging progressed deeper the occasional fall of dirt and stones kept reminding us that before the winter came something had to be done about shoring the loose dirt above the line of the bedrock, as it continued to threaten to bury someone. At one time Paula and Steven got so engrossed in the rift that was appearing by the minute, that they forgot that the roof was no more than loose dirt holding some quite heavy rocks. Suddenly both jumped clear as three or four of these crashed down along with a large quantity of dirt and smaller rocks. This rift now has a concrete roof. Another collapse from a sidewall suddenly buried Steven's legs up to his knees where he was standing and before he could get out of the way.

Pete Hann visited with Aubrey and his surprise at seeing the solid rock walls appearing was encouraging, though Aubrey reserved any such comment other than the need for shoring. Aubrey's seal of approval was never expected, as we would need to have a little something more positive to show than a 6ft square hole full of dirt in a flat grassy field, looking as if the prospect is another 30-40 metres of straight down digging and shoring.

During the times when only the three of us were digging, both Steven and Paula have put in some hard work at the bottom hacking, digging and heaving rocks and filling buckets, while I have hauled a fair few buckets and emptied them.

Mrs Haskell joined us in between her commitments to Allison Moody's digging and rediscovering the old haunts of her youth in Swildons, Eastwater and elsewhere, and I must admit that Carmen's ability to haul up full buckets as if they were empty was a joy to see. I was unfortunately reduced in status from "Chief Haulier of Buckets" to "Dumper of Spoil into the Trailer" (Carmen's tuff, but she's not tall enough for this sort of thing, so there was a place for me).

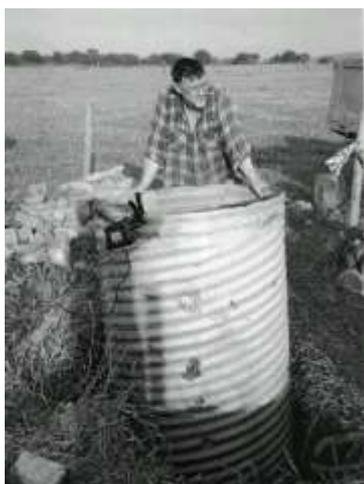
A plan was hatched, whereby a concrete roof could be constructed to cover the whole dig at the point the dirt sat on the bedrock and a pipe could be then installed as the entrance. The roof, if made strong enough, could then be filled in on top up to the surface. Max returned just in time to lend enthusiasm and practical skills, and within no time at all the old corrugated metal 1 metre diameter tube that had mouldered in the corner of the car park at the Wessex was transported on a



friend's large trailer to the dig. Metal girders were brought from our house to join other pieces of scrap from the farm and from the Wessex metal pile. The bottom of the dig was then dug furiously for a few weeks, in order to lower the floor enough so that when the roof was on there would be room enough to work below. Like magic Max returned on time and a metalwork grid was formed across the hole and between us we lowered the metal tube down to side neatly on crossed girders. Max then laid a crazy paving of stones and rocks all over the remaining grid of metal. An old cement mixer with a knackered electric motor had been pulled from a neighbour's hedge at home. I fitted another motor and pulley belt and got one of its two wheels to turn enough to manhandle it along, tilted up on its one good wheel. It has also only one paddle inside the drum, but it works - with a little help when full.

Mr Fielder kindly trusted us with a 200 kW petrol generator and my truck delivered a supply of sand gravel and cement. After the first good layer, further metalwork and stones were added with a few more mixes of cement and now the dig has a concrete roof on which even I can jump up and down (if I so wished). It could be regarded at present as more of a bombproof bunker than a dig or a cave; it might yet have its uses.

Photo above, Steven, Carmen and Max with the Tube. Next Page, Bob admires the new entrance.



Max has returned to carry on his sentence in Australia, while Carmen has deserted us on a globetrotting holiday for several months, so its back to the three of us to restart the dig after my one-week off, on Wednesday 18th September 2002. The plan now is for two more mixes of cement and then digging can resume, by which time we hope to draw the buckets up the tin shaft and tip them on top of the concrete roof. The stones are being used to build a tight grouted stone wall around the outside of the metal tube in order to reinforce its strength, and in case it rusts further than it has already.

The future? – We have a dig with a sound roof and entrance, it has solid walls, which are as near vertical as we are going to get and show no sign of closing together. The floor, which is to be dug, is easy and is becoming less and less dirt and clay and more of the correct sized rocks. What is below the floor or how thick it is - that we

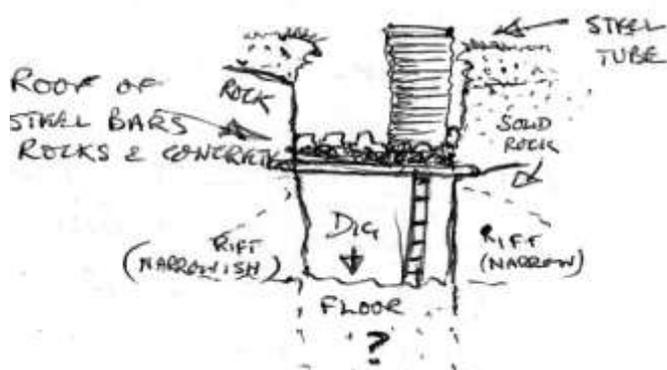
do not know, or how far down we will eventually dig, we don't know that either. Maybe it will take another 5 years to break through, or within the next 6 months we might be calling Aubrey, Pete and Keith for assistance if it goes, - whatever happens, hopefully we'll have a good time and a few more good laughs doing it, (plus a few more barbecues.) A tripod is ready when needed.

Over the past eighteen months we have drifted apart somewhat from the others, but I am sure that should our hole suddenly start going Aubrey and Pete will join us and I think we would expect them to. The basic aim is the same, to open up a cave if there is one to be had.

The "If's" to be considered when digging underground are: If, spoil is stacked where it can stay permanently o.k. But if instead it is put where it either falls or is washed back after a period of time, all the effort afforded becomes two, or even three times greater. If you know there is only 3 metres to go to open space and there is room to stack 4 metres of spoil, stack it, but if farther on you find less space than you hoped for, your in the shit. It is wise to stop the forward pushing and do something technical with the spoil.

So many times during almost 30 years as a Wessex member, I have heard of great breakthroughs and finds of extensive passages, but as only thin people can get along it restricts it to a few dedicated scrawny tigers. The enthusiasm fades along with the difficulties of dumping spoil and the limited number of people with skinny statures that can, or even want to, reach the digging area. As soon as a dig is allowed to reduce in size the difficulties rise dramatically. I have often looked back and had a wry smile at thought of

the various sudden bursts of enthusiasm that have fallen flat for just such reasons. After working with Aubrey, Max, Pete and Keith, Les and the others, I often wonder what sort of book could



produce if all digging heads were put together - Wessex, BEC, Shepton, NHASSA and the many other groups who have achieved some rather technical methods of digging over the years. The St. Lukes dig was constructed with long term use in mind and ease of digging was always a major consideration of those at the sharp end, by taking the time and effort to keep a minimum working space all the way. Smaller details like remembering to build foot and hand-holds into the walls, easy to use, yet out of the way of the main haulage route are important when concreting shoring walls, so as not to rely solely on ladders. Such foot and handholds can often be a benefit in emergency, or if working half way up a shaft *i.e.* when guiding up and down buckets or kit such as tools, drills, cameras, bang boxes etc. Space can appear to be a lot sometimes, but once it's filled up, it makes dumping any more a lot more difficult.

Hidden Earth at Monmouth, 27th /29th Sept.

This year's event was very successful both for BCRA and the Wessex. Our members were prominent on the reception desk, with Wendy Williams in charge and on the technical team. Andy Morse won the prestigious Premier Trophy in the Photographic competition with his portfolio of 5 prints from the Berger trip as well as another prize for his picture of "The Hall of the Thirteen" The Wessex Club Stand won second prize ,a £50 tackle voucher and also sold some Atty GB prints



Les, Paul Mann and Wendy



Lou Biffin, Jo Diamond and Mak

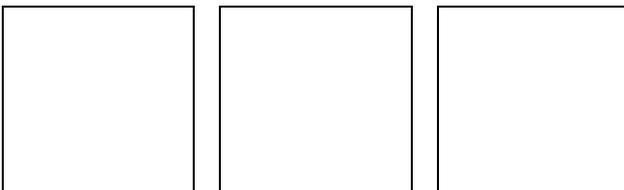


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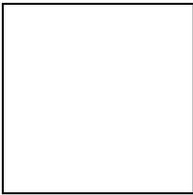
Library Acquisitions to 15 Sept 2002-10-08

Axbridge Caving Group Journal (June 2002).	(<i>Shute Shelve Cave, Carcass Cave and Templeton's Pot.</i>)
BEC Belfrey Bulletin 52,2# 514 (Summer 2002)	(<i>Hunters Lodge Inn Sink, Hunters Hole, Megalayha, Mudsump draining and Eastwater dig from a BEC perspective !</i>)
BCRA: Cave and Karst Science. Vol 28, 3 (Dec 2001)	Descent 167 (August/Sept 2002).
Chelsea Speleological Society Newsletter	Vol. 44, 7 (July 2002), and 8 (August /Sept 2002).
Grosvenor Caving Club Newsletter 121 (August/Sept 2002)	MNRC Newsletter No.91 (August/Sept 2002)
NSS Journal of Cave and Karst Studies	Vol 64, 2 (August 2002)
Regards (Belgium)	43 (July 2002) and 44 (Sept /Oct 2002)
Speleological Union of Ireland / Irish CRO	"Underground" 54(Summer 2002)
Stalactite (Organe de la Societe Suisse de Speleologie)	51 st Year #1,#2 (2001) and 52 nd Year #1.
Wesminster Speleological Group Newsletter	2002/3 (July 2002)
Beautiful Caves of France (Photographs).	Dargilan (Guidebook) Both donated by Phil Hendy
La Grotte de Dargilan (Aime Casal) (French language Reprint of 1950's Guidebook.)	Donated by Phil Hendy

Star Mine Update. Photo's Mark Helmore



On 9/9/02 Mark returned to Star with Scott Hall, Les Williams and Paul Wakeling. The water levels had dropped in the passage Mike Thomas had dived and his line lay on the floor. The party were able to walk to the large barrow and photograph it. Mark carefully squeezed past to reach a dead end after about 10 metres. At the other end of the level, after some digging, Paul was able to pass a very loose choke to find the apparent end after about 40 metres. No more tools were found.



Rescue from St. Cuthbert's 3rd. November.

The good news is that Vern Freeman is home from hospital; the bad news is that he can't sit down in a comfortable chair for three months! But yes, he has been seen back in the Hunters.

Most members will know that Vern had a nasty accident in St Cuthbert's, when he fell off the first pulley pitch in Maypole Series. He injured his back badly, crushing vertebrae and needed surgery to graft some bones. The rescue, carried out by M.R.O., took over 6 hours and involved cavers, fire brigade and police. We all wish Vern a full and speedy recovery.

Letter To The Editor By Andy Sparrow

Some thoughts, observations and proposals following Vern's rescue.

Call out:

Was Vern's rescue so successful despite the fact it was a Wednesday morning call-out or because of it? The usual procedure of recruiting rescuers from the pub and the clubs was not possible and we therefore had a much more selected team. Most (possibly all) people involved had experience of either practice rescues and/or the real thing which created an efficient team. Contrast this with a much easier rescue a few years ago when we carried an exhausted girl from the Water Chamber in Swildons. We seemed to be swamped with people, most of whom were unknown to us, who had little or no rescue experience. A smaller team of more selected people would have carried out that rescue quite effectively. Shortly after that, while visiting the Belfry, I saw a group of students waiting in their caving gear because they were 'on stand-by for a possible rescue'. Why put unknown and possibly inexperienced cavers on stand-by when a few phone calls could muster more useful people?

Stretchers:

There is a new generation of wrap-around 'cocoon' stretchers. These seem to have some advantages and some disadvantages.

Positive points of cocoon stretchers:

1. They give the patient more protection
2. They are streamlined and easier to move or drag
3. They can assume full dimensions when unladen allowing awkward sections of cave to be more easily assessed during practice
4. They allow horizontal lifting

Negative points of cocoon stretchers:

1. Do not bend around constrictions and are not suitable for all caves
2. Do not allow the patient to be 'arms out'

A cocoon stretcher would certainly have carried Vern to the top of Arete Pitch at which point he could have been transferred to a drag sheet. Would it have made the evacuation easier for Vern and for the team? I do not know the answer to this. I think we need to carry out comparative tests and see how the current stretcher and a cocoon stretcher compare from the point of view of both rescuer and patient. A cocoon stretcher will never be the solution for every cave but for specific sites like Swildons, Goatchurch and most of Cuthberts it might provide advantages.

Pitch Hauling:

On practice rescues trainees seem to be left to their own devices, are free to use any method they choose and are observed rather than trained. This reluctance by the MRO to adopt and train a standard system of pitch hauling has been justified by the view point that 'there are several ways to rig a pitch and they are all equally effective'. My own considerable experience tells me that this is not true. In my opinion the simplest, safest, and most efficient system in virtually every case is a double rope Grigri based z-rig system. I was pleased to find two brand new Grigris in the MRO accessory bag and used them on Pulpit Pitch. There was (fortunately) one, but only one, other rescuer familiar with the Grigri when the time to haul came. If the MRO obtained new comms or first aid equipment there would be a dedicated training session, why should this not apply to literally life-supporting equipment like the Grigri? I think it is time to adopt a standard system (be it my preferred method or some other) and train rescuers in its use. I am more than willing to provide this training.

These are my observations and proposals but as a rescue 'foot soldier' there is not much I can do to promote them. It is up to those appointed as wardens or team leaders to consider if these views are valid.

Get well soon, Vern.

Andy Sparrow.

Club News

We welcome the following New Members elected 19/10/02

Jonathan Hewitt, 88 Thorley Drive, Cheadle, Stoke on Trent Staffs, ST10 1AS. 01538 755582 07947 247672
Jonathon.hewitt@orange.net
Mike Partridge The Bungalow, Wellington A49, Hereford, HR4 8BB 07989 364716 thecockroachmotel@talk21.com
Ben Holden 19-21 Tucker St, Wells Somerset, BA5 2DZ. Ben.holden@btinternet.com

The A.G.M. was well attended and important issues were discussed. Perhaps the most important being the increasing cost of getting insurance for sports such as caving. This will almost certainly be an ongoing problem and will obviously have a major impact on subscriptions in coming years. It is hoped that the club can still claim a council tax rebate at least for a year or two. The committee will keep it under review. The possibility of sub-letting part of Upper Pitts was discussed and rejected.

The Dinner was judged by most as being one of the best for years. Certainly our Guest of Honour, Scoff Schofield made the best and funniest speech we have heard for some time. The club owes a great debt of gratitude to **Wendy Williams** for all the hard work she has put into arranging annual dinners for the last few years.

The Gnome Hunt Mystery Tour This year we travelled to Redcliffe Caves in Bristol in search of a rich vein of garden gnomes said to exist within the sandstone. Many of us, still suffering with hangovers, were let loose in the maze. It's a confusing place when sober and with various teams dashing about in all directions your editor at least got terribly lost. However we all got out in time for a drink at the Ostrich before returning for bread, cheese and soup prepared by **Pauline Grosart**.

The Working Weekend, 8th/9th November was a great success, with a new fire-exit crash bar being put in the Ladies Dorm. (Phil and Prew are now experts in fire-exit crash bars but don't ask them to fit another!) Also airbricks were installed into the end walls of the Men's Dorm, hopefully to reduce problems with mould and damp. The outer lobby was rendered ready for plastering. The day ended with a "spag-boll" for 14, brilliantly cooked by Jonathan and helpers.

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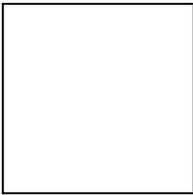
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Forthcoming Events

Committee Meetings;- 9th February, 30th March, 8th June, 27th July and 7th September.

Dent de Crolles trip 9th to 23rd August. Wessex A.G.M. and Dinner, Sat 18th October.

Watch the Website for events to be arranged before the next Journal is printed



Photographic competition

The first three places in the competition at the dinner went to **Carmen Haskell** with pictures from the Herault.

Left, Simon Richards and Jo Wisely decorate the formations.

Stop Press

In November Phil Short and his friends had an exciting day down Swildons when the cave flooded. The water in Sump 12 rose by two and a half feet in just over 30 minutes! Bypasses filled and Buxton's Horror really did become a horror. Using tatty bits of old rope they managed to dive their way out, including using bottles in Sump 1. Watch "Extracts from the Log" for the full details.

A fine spell of weather in October was accompanied by a worrying rise in CO2 levels in several popular caves. GB was shut for some time, after measurements revealed high levels. Several digs suffered similar problems, by early November things seem to have improved. Brian Prewer.

Ian Timney is looking for help with the next hut-working weekend on 15th and 16th March. If you have not lent a hand yet, now is your chance!