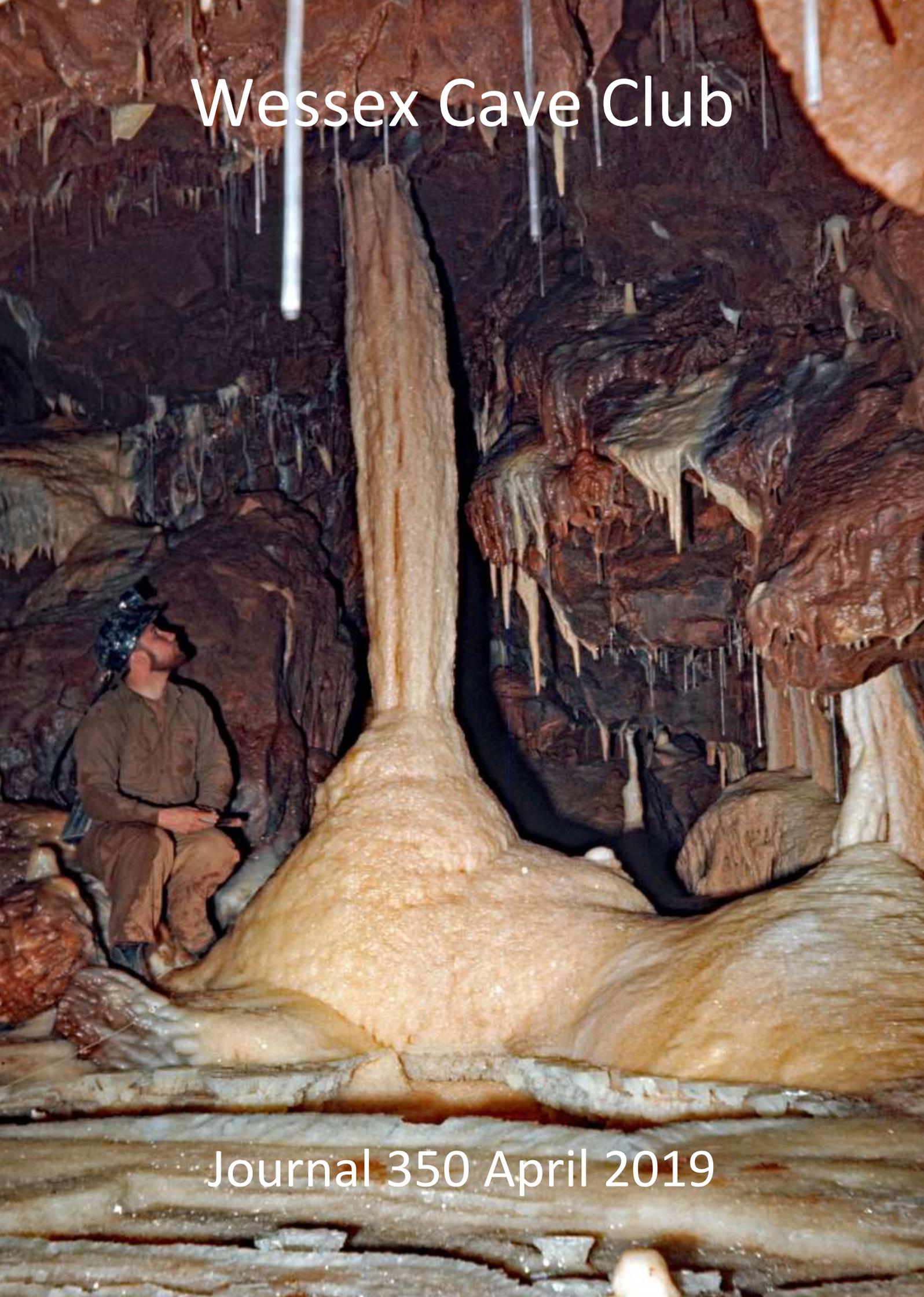


Wessex Cave Club



Journal 350 April 2019



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

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Diary

Friday 19-22 April Yorkshire Easter Meet
13th April 2nd Saturday Black Hole Swildon's
11th May 2nd Saturday Rescue Practice
8th June 2nd Saturday Portland
1st Saturday of Month Cantabria Training

Hut Bookings

Thanks to Ali Moody for all her work keeping the hut bookings well managed. For details please refer to Diary page on the Website.

Membership News

Welcome to:

Nikki Raine

Isabella Perkins

Shaleen Patel

Glenn Gilbert

Daniel Rees

Steve Brown

Paul Newman

Gary Cullen

=====

Front Cover photo Nick

Chipchase - Ray Saxton

In Pillar Chamber,

Shatter Cave

Louise Kent

Alba Castillo Belzunegui

Jacob Easterling

Joanna Shapter

Welcome back to:

Nigel Gower

Tibor Nagy

=====

Back Cover Photo Bill Nix

Hunters' Lodge Inn Sink

Missing in Action – Simon Richardson

Help...! Has anyone seen, used, or still has in their possession, either of the following Lifelines...Life Line M (not sure of length but it's a green/yellow colour. Life Line B (the new blue colour).

One of these is due to be retired and the club cannot have it in circulation with a Wessex identifier still attached. The other is now overdue its 6 monthly inspection. If these are not returned then the club cannot maintain its rope safety record. Please return to the blue quarantine bin which is in the tackle store beneath the log book.

Editorial

Welcome to the 350th Journal of the Wessex Cave Club. Many thanks to all the contributors for this edition. The training walks for Cantabria continue unabated although the snow managed to curtail the February's outing. Also the 2nd Saturday trips continue to be as popular as ever and there was a record turnout for February's 2nd Saturday trip to Eastwater Cavern with a total of 26 people divided into 4 teams, 2 rigging and 2 derigging, to visit 13 Pots via Twin Verticals and Dolphin pot. This is a magnificent achievement and congratulations are due to the organisers, riggers and de-riggers alike. However, these numbers would not be sustainable in a more vulnerable cave.

Committee News

Given the upsurge of interest in caving and the fact that it is the most popular time of year for caving parking has become a problem. The Committee are looking to ways to extend the number of parking spaces but we must bear in mind the limited space available to us. In the mean time I would ask that where possible members share transport.

Membership Secretary

The position of Membership Secretary remains vacant. Job description.

Maintaining membership records - Collecting annual subscriptions - Managing members' BCA subscriptions and cards - Providing data to use for day-to-day running of the club - The applicant should have a working knowledge of Microsoft Office products including Access and be aware of current data protection regulations. A full job description will be distributed as soon as possible.

Recent additions to the library.

As at 12th February 2019

Bristol Exploration Club. 'Belfry Bulletin' 62, 3 (566) Summer-18 (Vurley Swallet, Flat Holm, Portland)

Chelsea S.S. N/L 60, 10/11/12 (Oct-Dec. 2018) (Mallorca cave descriptions)

Descent 265 (Dec-18/Jan-19) (Thailand rescue, Hallowe'en Rift, Viaduct Sink)

Descent 266 (Feb/Mar 2019) (J-Rat Awards, Sludge Pit Hole, Portland)

Grampian Speleological Group 'Bulletin' 5th Series 2, 5 (Oct-18)

M.N.R.C Newsletter 151 (Nov-18)

N.S.S. (USA) 'News' 76, 12 (Dec 2018)

Red Rose Cave & Pothole Club N/L 56, 1 (Jan-19)

Shepton Mallet Caving Club. Journal. Series 13 No. 8 (Thailand, Iceland) Series 13 No. 9 (Tham Luang cave rescue, Thailand, Thermal imaging with Smartphone)

South Wales Caving Club N/L 134 (Oct-18) (Expedition to the PSM)

Lord, I. '*Rich Mountains of Lead – The metal mining industry of Cwm Rheidol and Ystumtuen*' 2018

The Chelsea Speleological Society folder, Vol. 50 → is missing from the Library, and has not been signed out!

We have a copy of Descent 2 (Feb-March 1969) and 33 (April 1976) for sale. Any offers?

Pierre's Pot – Simon Perkins

The first ten minutes of caving were rather innocuous, only made slightly awkward due to transporting four bags of diving gear, but a pleasant bit of cave that I'd happily take my daughter down. Four lads from the BEC joined us in the cave so we let them pass when there was room. The first obstacle was a vertically shaped squeeze, requiring a feet first move down at about 25 degrees or so. In hindsight head first would've probably been easier. One of the BEC lads, none of whom were particularly large, had a bit of a struggle here but made it through. I passed the bags along, then thrust myself through without too much discomfort - not too tight considering I was in a two piece 5mm wet suit and caving overalls. Next up was a short clamber down a bouldery section. Nothing tight, just a case of being careful not to upset any of the timber supports. Down to the next squeeze. Claire remarked on how tight it felt, having seemed much roomier when she did it a good five or so years ago. Bigger BEC lad got down to it, hips through and then got stuck around his chest, climbed back up and we swapped so I went down. Couldn't even get my hips through.

When I started to cave last year I'd always said b****cks to this stripping off malarkey, if I can't get through in what I'm wearing then there's no point. This is supposed to be a 'hobby' after all. However, I was now there and couldn't abandon the trip just because of a stupid suit, so off came the top, still leaving the lower half on. Back down to the squeeze and could probably ease down another inch, but no more. I was seriously considering myself beaten at this stage but wouldn't turn until I'd tried everything. So down to my pants it was to be. A sodding miserable experience as I was trying to strip off in a space not much bigger than the seat of a chair, and wet suits are a sod to remove even when you can actually move your god-forsaken limbs. Suit off and overalls back on. Full of grit, mud and cold sweat. Nice. Into the squeeze, kind of hoping that I'd still not fit and that would be the end of it - as caving in pants only is just for the hardcore and/or insane - i.e. not me.

Sadly I got through the bastard. Bit of a fight but I made it. Even had a go at getting back up again, just for peace of mind, needed a bit of effort but all good and no drama. Big BEC then assisted

greatly by passing the remaining two bags and my suit down. Next up was another vertically shaped rifty squeeze thing. Small BECs helped here as I passed the luggage through and they manhandled it down, surprisingly gently. Good lads. Then on through the squeeze myself. Bit of a sideways superman manoeuvre needed, legs scrabbling behind, offering scant assistance. Through ok and an easy descent - but sodding painful with no underclothes to take the edge off the rock - presents the stream way. I'm obviously a bigger pansy than I thought. We said our goodbyes to the BEC boys, all of whom had eventually managed to get through the bastard squeeze, & headed on.

The sump is reached via a moderately c**p, backwards, cobbly crawl; however there is a small but suitably spacious chamber prior to this where you can kit up. Kitted up, Claire went in first - the plan was to just see how far she could get, as the sump hadn't been dived for a few years, digging and clearing as much of a way through as was feasible. After about 5mins she returned. First describing it as "s**t", she then quickly back tracked and said it was actually "as ok as could be expected". She had pushed on to a point where to make further progress felt like she was forcing herself too much. Thankfully, though, she managed to clear a lot of cobbles and silt from the route. I then headed down to the sump, crawling backwards over the rocks and cobbles, having to lie completely flat at one point. Reg in, I secured the line in my right hand and eased onwards, belly down, feet first.

I'm somewhat bigger than Claire, so still had to sweep some muck out of the way, kind of kicking backwards and sideways with my feet and using my left arm to help dig the silt, grit and stones from underneath me. Visibility was what I would have described as true zero earlier today - couldn't see my finger until it actually touched my mask, but I was making progress, all too aware of the nasty, gritty, silty mess that could easily screw up my delicate regs, so I tried to make sure that my 2nd reg was always where I needed it. This proved to be a little tricky at times as I'd need the free hand to dig my way through, occasionally thus temporarily trapping it uselessly down by my side. The reg would also often be to the wrong side of my neck as my head was twisted to the

other to get through a tight bit. I then learnt what true zero vis actually is. **Suddenly, lights out.** I was convinced that in jiggling my head around to try and get through I'd inadvertently switched off my primary torch and that my back up, which I had switched on at the start of the dive, had become dislodged at some point. Managing to get my hand up to my head, I switched the primary torch back 'on', but nothing, I checked the back up and it was still there. Then it dawned on me that, despite not getting even a dim glow from the torches, they were both fine, it was just that the vis was now a little less than what I had previously called zero - I must have been crawling through liquid mud. Progress continued, however it was slower and a lot siltier. I had no idea of my dive time or the contents of the cylinder that I was breathing from, but foolishly pushed on, head twisted to one side for clearance, legs kicking and arms digging, wiggling along the sump in pitch black darkness. Then it became light again, and suddenly spacious, I checked myself over and continued on. That must have been the tighter bit that I was told about, now to the end. A few minutes later I experienced the wonderful feeling where you still can't see but can hear properly again as your head enters an airspace. Slowly I made my way out of the sump and turned to face a fairly dismal looking crawl over cobbles. Thankfully I'd agreed that I'd see how far I could get and then return - if I made it out of the sump I'd just turn and head straight back through. So, fortunately, no crawling this time around. I checked my gauges - 70 bar (!) and 230. Not ideal but could be worse. This is why I don't like button gauges - they sit on the underside of my first stage reg. so cannot be read unless I detach the cylinder and twist the whole thing upside down. I'll need to see if I can get hold of or make one of those little gauge reading things so I can hold it up to my mask and focus when in the sump.

I also checked my watch - 20mins gone. So a rate of about 1m/min. I normally swim a little faster than that. Now, back into the sump. I was expecting the return leg to be dead easy, having already cleared the way, knowing that I could fit and going head first. Into the first bit, nice and easy. Then it got dark again, reg hose managed to snag on a pit of rock, impeding progress and almost pulling the reg from my mouth. Not good. Head twisted sideways I eased my way forwards, continually losing my back up reg underneath my chest as it rolled under me. The cylinder that I was

breathing from was dragging its knob through the mud, nothing I could do there and then, but it didn't make me very happy, with visions of it rolling off and the back up being stuck beneath me coming to mind.

The sump was now starting to feel a lot tighter than on the way in. I progressed a few more inches before finding forward progress impossible. I must have somehow crawled into the side of the passage and/or a lower undercut. Pushing myself backwards, almost dislodging my mask as my helmet twisted around, I kept closer to the line and felt the way on, still in absolute darkness. A free flow from the back up then followed, so I fought my way forward until there was enough space to sort it, checked it was still working and tried to carry on, but couldn't as something was pulling my head backwards as I tried to progress. I got my hand up there and found that the line had somehow wrapped itself around my back up torch. I managed to get the line free and carried on, out of the black mud and back into the orange stuff, thinking that I could relax a little now, the worst part was done. The passage tightened up again & I had a very very uncomfortable moment as my back up started to free flow again but this time I couldn't get my arm free to tend to it, nor would I have been able to get to the reg which was trapped under my chest, again. I must have also snagged the hose of the reg I was breathing from as it started to pull out of my mouth as I tried to move backwards.

Obviously I'd managed to wriggle into another tighter section, away from the line, which was still in my other hand. A rather unpleasant moment followed as I fought my way back a little so that I could sort my regs and try to regain the way on. It was a proper struggle as my hose had caught on something and the rest of my kit was trying its damndest to keep me in that bit of the passage I did have some nasty thoughts of not seeing my daughter again at that point, but I got a grip, managed to ease back enough to give me space to stop the free flow and felt my way out of the restriction and onwards. Moments later I was back in the streamway and crawling back out, away from the sump. I next had to strip my wetsuit off and get back into the wet, gritty, oversuit for the exit. Four squeezes and far too much time later we were then out of the cave, cursing the bloody bags all the way.

Saturday January 5 2019 Cantabria Training Walk - Noel Cleave

Cast of thousands, or more precisely: Claire Cohen, Wayne Starsmore, Vanderplank, Noel Cleave, Rich Carey, Nick Butler, Kushy, Pete Hellier, Aidan Harrison, Mark Helmore, Darren Chapman, Jo, Bean and Jacob, Sarah Payne (with two canine friends) and Maxine Bateman. Photo Adrian Vanderplank.



This was another of Mr. Helmore's little teaser strolls. His advertising blurb read: "The walk (on paper) is just under 15 miles with 2,300ft of ascent and should take 6 Hours or so. We won't be stopping anywhere for lunch or coffee (until the end)" Like most advertising blurb this required the skill to read between the lines and recognise where the truth was being economically employed. A glance at the map suggests that in a (rare) moment of mercy the route finished downhill. Starting at Cheddar rather than Upper Pitts more or less guaranteed this, but the keyword "Less" is important. Observe that the Chequered Flag masks the important finishing straight down in Cheddar, but hints that 'straight' might not be the mot juste. So when the tattered remnants of the walk descended to Cheddar car park level - about 7mtrs above sea level - we were turned brutally back uphill (at that point about 1

in 4) to well above Gough's Cave entrance. Now this happens to be the highest building in the Gorge if you exclude the reservoir. So we gazed down on it before a final brutally precipitous descent into the fleshpots and cafés of the metropolis itself. Miraculously the tattered remnants included all the starters, so delete "Remnants" but insert "Survivors". And the walk itself? 15 miles was correct; it took us 5 ½ hrs. The weather was overcast, cold, but windless - pretty much ideal. Down on the flatlands we found that our boots were becoming ice glazed, but it never felt that cold. The views from Crook Peak were fine, but hazy and overall the route was thoroughly interesting, varied and enjoyable. The stars of the walk were Sarah's dogs, which did the whole thing on legs about 4 inches long! Thank you, Mark.



Cantabria Training Walk Saturday February 2 2019

Cancelled due to Snow – Photo Mark Helmore



Cantabria Training Walk Saturday March 2 2019



Cosa Nostra (Cantabria branch) training walk. The usual suspects included the Caporegime Mark Helmore, his Consiglieres Wayne and Darren, and soldato Bean, Mak, Jo, Aiden, Jude, Rich, Andy, Pete, and Noel.

The advertised 15 mile route had been updated. The news of this update only broke when we set off for something approaching 18 miles. With our Capo taking no prisoners there was astonishingly little faffing and we left Upper Pitts at 0910. Initially we were in "Mendip Sunshine", but this soon stopped and we could shed waterproofs. We needed to. The weather was mild, if not very sunny. March made it officially Spring and overheating led to a progressive peeling of layers as the miles passed. Although we took our usual route past Pen Hill Mast initially, from there we dropped into terra incognita from previous walks, a thoroughly interesting and varied hike. Through

The Horringtons, Dinder and North Wootton with only minimal stretches on tarmac. While it remains unhealthy to criticize the Caporegime, it has to be.... noted..... that once again there was far more **Up** than **Down** in his perambulation. But in a dramatic twist on the usual result of these walks, rather than leaving bones bleaching by the wayside behind us, we actually gained a body at Wells, where Kat joined us to help Aiden on the brutal ascent to the fleshpots of Upper Pitts. Six and a bit hours on the hoof led to some serious tea-drinking, enlivened by the welcome presence of the Hungarian Mafia. **Noel**

Return to the UK - Welsh's Green Swallet - Josh White

I'm gonna start this report with a summary statement. What an absolute shitehole. But good God did I need it after 9 months of easy tourist caving in Vietnam.

I arrived to the Wessex at midnight on Friday evening with a crate of lager ready to catch up with Chris Williams and Dan Kent who had been drinking for a few hours already. After setting the world to rights, we fell asleep in the common room at about 6am. During our drunken conversation Chris had raised the decision that we would investigate Welsh's Green Swallet, a beautiful phreatic passage cave, which would keep our oversuits nice and clean as we were due to be going to Wild Wookey the following afternoon.

After reading the guide book it became apparent it was not a beautiful clean passage but was classic Mendip squalor - perfect, I couldn't be more excited. We woke up from our two hour nap and packed a chunk of rope and some slings and headed off towards the cave. Whilst wandering through the woods looking for a hole in the ground we decided we should have read the guide book better and we democratically decided that Dan should head back to the car to get my phone which had a picture of the MU page. He returned and we very easily found what could possibly be the cave. We rigged around the tree and chucked the loose end down the first pitch. Dan decided to change the rigging around the tree and let go, losing the first of our ropes - doh! We re-rigged with the other rope and I abbed down, leaving my "up" kit at the top of the passage, to be lowered down to me if I needed to come up or carried down in the bag if we were in the right hole. I

dropped through the hole in the floor and continued into a shitey crawl, shouting behind me that it was a goer.

I arrived at the second pitch hoping someone had bought both the first rope and my "up" kit. Chris arrived, no up kit, no rope. Dan arrived, up kit, no rope - doh! So we decided to turn back and maybe come back later to investigate. It has the potential to be a nice trip for scouts that are bored of Goatchurch/Swildon's. On the way out we hauled a load of rusted metal girders and corrugated iron that were clogging up the entrance.

Dan and I returned the following day, found the cave easily, didn't drop any ropes and continued down below the second pitch. What. A. Horrible. Place. I was in heaven; thick gloopy liquid shite, no chance of standing or even stooping, and near enough nothing to look at. We got to a fork in the path near the end and I went left whilst Dan went right. I got to a nice aven and was glad to be standing. Dan got to scaffolding and shit himself so followed me. We headed back to the junction and I started to go down near the scaff - before shitting myself, deciding it didn't go and starting to head out. We took a look at another aven before heading back out the pitches. We were absolutely filthy, and so was the kit - perfect return to the UK.

Once we returned to the Wessex, Les advised that if we'd kept going through the scaffolded dig looking section we would have seen the selenite crystals. We will need to return to a) find the crystals b) test out rigging on the second pitch for

taking scouts c) do some further conservation cleaning, as it has a lot of old shite in there. If anyone is still actively digging in that squalorific shitehole and has anything they'd want left in

place, please let me know, otherwise I will look at clearing out digging buckets as well as rusted old shite scaff (loose in the entrance).

Fairy Cave Quarry The Movie - Nick Chipchase



Shatter Cave was discovered 8th April 1969. So this April is the 50th Anniversary. A draught issuing from small holes in the quarry face leads CSS members Conway and Saxton to begin digging. In late evening they were able to explore several hundred metres of large passage. Further exploration up to Erratic Rift took place the next evening. On April 15th a party from the quarry company and the River Authority accompanied by Willie Stanton visited the cave and Stanton passed the choke to enter Tor Chamber. The following day cavers from various Mendip clubs explored the cave and the infamous footprints were made across the crystal floor in Pillar Chamber. I made the first photo trip in Shatter Cave at this time accompanied by Ray Saxton with his lucky hammer. Time has passed and so have a number of those folk from back in April 1969. Willie Stanton has gone but what ever happened to Conway and Saxton I do not know. Likewise, Bob Whitaker of the River Authority who later gave his name to the pool in Withyhill. "Barabobath's

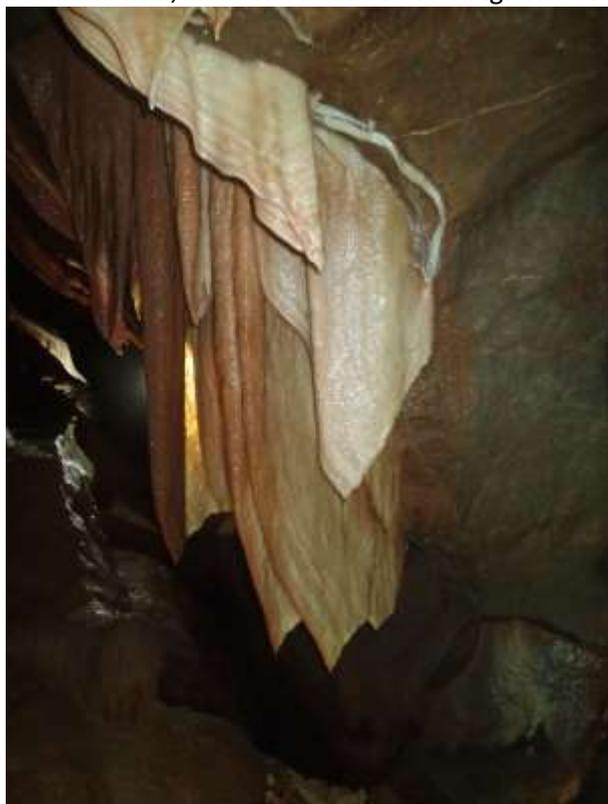
Bath". Bristol and Avon River Authority Bob from Bath. I do know that the footprint culprit has long passed so no names. The name "Shatter Cave" was adopted as provisional but never changed. I did not like it then and I do not like it now. At least I got to give Withyhill a sensible name. It runs from Withybrook Slocker to Hillwithy Cave which in turn runs to Hillier's Cave from Withyhill Cave. Anyway originally they were all one cave so I am sure you see what I mean.

Conway and Saxton's intervention at exactly the right time saved much of Shatter Cave. The shot holes for the next firing had already been drilled and diesel oil poured down to assist the process. The first large chamber stank of it and was appropriately named Diesel Chamber. The quarry company agreed to spare the cave and move away from the Withybrook Fault. That direction continued until Withyhill and Hillwithy Caves were breached in April 1972, so we will have another 50 year anniversary in 2022. Early in 1973 Pete Rose and I were still banging the stal blockage at the end of WL Cave. All this was before an accurate Shatter Cave survey. WL and Shatter Cave were joined in embarrassing circumstances later that year. We then realised that the Shatter Cave entrance was a breach into a chamber and that WL was the real route through the system. In fact Balch Cave, WL and Shatter were all the same cave just as Withyhill, Hillwithy and Hillier's Cave were. We thought about blocking the artificial Shatter entrance and opening up the original WL to Shatter Link. That would have meant making Pink Pool Chamber a through route so the idea was abandoned. It would have made a good original trip though. The squeeze now connecting the two caves is horribly tight and not used today. WL Cave was buried under stal in Crystal Chamber in Balch for that reason it seems highly unlikely that it would ever have been discovered.

Andy and Antonia Freem had agreed with the management committee to film at FCQ in January this year. In December 2018 I did a Withyhill trip with Dave King and Martin Grass to look at some "secret" places I knew. Oh there are unspoiled

areas of Shatter and Withyhill now off limits. One of these is Pink Pillar Chamber I still keep to myself as there are exceptional floor deposits there. Yes and a pink pillar. We decided that these and other off limit areas should stay that way and would not be filmed.

Andy and Antonia came for four days on 13th January I helped for the four days and others came along including Mandy and Matt Voysey, Peter Glanvill, Pete Rose and Dave King. We did



an eight hour stint in Shatter Cave but Andy could not pass the squeeze in Pillar Chamber. Mandy, Antonia and I filmed up to and beyond Plug Hole Chamber. I learned a lot from the filming team. Their philosophy, filming technique and I found that Andy was very well versed in cryogenic stal fracturing. Shatter has so much cryogenic material some of which I had never noticed before. We had lengthy discussions on cave formation and climate. Ultimately the team did not just want a procession of "pretties ". They wanted a story and were keen to show conservation projects. Just the difference in cleaning stal properly gave remarkable results. A special restoration project was planned in WL Cave. Fernhill Cave was also visited. Filming hours were stacking up and Andy realised that maybe two films might emerge from the project. In February Antonia and Andy returned for two more days to make a thorough job of Withyhill. Peter Glanvill, me and Dave King, Mandy and Matt were on hand. Both WL and

Withyhill were much wetter than before with a lot of stal active and pools on the floor. Very pretty but the conservation project in WL was difficult as it was now a pool though dry in January. Green Lake Chamber was filmed. I got in there two years ago but not this time. Pete Rose and I discovered it in 1973 but made a poor job of widening the access. Oh if only I knew then what I know now. Remember that one, young cave diggers.

My amateur knowledge of the cave systems has been refined. Part of Withyhill certainly originated as Shatter Cave. That includes much of Glistening Pool Series. Only here do you see the cryogenic stal so prevalent in Shatter Cave. The tight rifts back to the main Withyhill route are captures from Shatter and beyond Column Chamber you can see the big phreatic half tube visible at Pisa Passage. The big terminal chamber we discovered in November 1972 by blasting was never named and is only a few metres from the surface. I did get to name another chamber I found that month, Jonathans' Chamber after my son who was one year old the same month. That's definitely part of the Shatter conduit. I do remember a smell of muck spreading in that terminal chamber so perhaps there is a connection to the valley or farm above. In any case there has been dumping along the valley in more recent times. Perhaps the memory is an illusion as I never entered it in my log. I certainly remember finding a mouse's skull in the Shatter terminal choke when we dug up there. Maybe the Black Rock Limestone part of the system has long ago eroded down to remove any passage formed there. Much of that is covered in periglacial head now.

If you have seen the Cuthbert's film you will be aware of how the Freem's work. They did say there will be months of editing before the final film or films will be revealed. Perhaps there will be a Mendip first performance. I really do not know. Perhaps they edited me out entirely. Well, I do remember the 8 hour plus Reservoir Hole filming for the three minutes it got on The One Show. Still Miranda K. was lovely. Ultimately the caves of Fairy Cave Quarry are a special place. Maybe unique in formation to anywhere else in the UK. It was probably formed in the Hoxnian Interglacial of 410,000 to 380,000 years before present. A warmer period than we have today, then modified by later glacial and interglacial periods. Our last glacial maximum was 210,000 years ago. Here we touch on another matter and

it is all far more complex than we might believe. We can rarely look at a landscape that we have today and hope to match a cave's formation to it. I have been lucky to have been involved at the

quarry since the 1960's. I guess at age 71 I am extra lucky to still be caving. So, I'm looking forward to the Freem's work. Will that be a sort of legacy?

Looking for caves in Kyrgyzstan - Jude Vanderplank



Vasili, Mike & Robert Thomas, Jude Vanderplank, Wayne Starsmore, Malc Foyle, Bryan Norton, the cook and Alexey.

Kyrgyzstan is a fairly small country that nestles in high mountains between China and the Central Asian steppes. It has recently received some attention in television programmes as it has been a key transit point of the Silk Road from ancient times. It has also been noted by cavers in the last few years, as there are large areas of *karst* limestone and very few cavers to investigate.

My knowledge of Kyrgyzstan was very limited when I received a phone call from Malc Foyle on a Tuesday morning, asking if Adrian or I would be interested in joining the group flying out to Bishkek on Friday morning, as one member of the team was unavoidably having to stay at home. Yes, I'd love to go **but**; my passport didn't have the 3 months left to run, did we need a visa, vaccinations? Was the flight that had been



booked transferrable? Answers, you can fill in an online application for a passport and book an appointment to collect it from Newport in 48 hours (providing there are no problems). No visa is required for nationals from EU countries for stays of less than 60 days. A trip to Nomad in Bristol on Wednesday ended up with a tetanus combined injection and an okay to go, but firm advice not to drink the water.

On Thursday I bought a Turkish airline ticket to fly next day! The six of us: Malc, Mike and Robert Thomas, Wayne Starsmore, Bryan Norton (generally known as Dylan) and I all met up at Heathrow. It was a straight forward journey out, though on the flight from Istanbul to Bishkek we were a little surprised to find so many ladies with lots of shopping bags. Obviously it's worth taking a 5 hour flight to Turkey to buy all the things that you can't get in Kyrgyzstan!

Lonely Planet describes Bishkek as "Delightfully green and full of post-Soviet anachronisms"; personally it didn't strike me as very green, (except the well-watered and tended garden of our hotel). Its previous Soviet history, however, is very evident with a well-defined grid layout and

plenty of high-rise temporary accommodation, that's in need of attention but still fully occupied. The traffic was chaotic, there didn't appear to be any laws regarding mobile phone usage or emissions from vehicles.

Taxis had been arranged from the airport to the hotel, (note to self "never ride in the front of a foreign taxi!") We then took advantage of a few hours rest and had time to look round Bishkek and get some local money sorted out. We met up with Alexey, a geologist and organiser for our week. His office is based at the hotel; he showed us some photographs of karst areas he'd visited. Some of which looked very promising, in particular a waterfall which is near Naryn.

Next morning saw the arrival of Vladimir with the minibus. Packing everything into said minibus took a while, as there would now be 11 travelling with our personal kit, caving kit, tents, generator and cooking equipment. It looked rather full as we set off, next stop was the supermarket. Our cook for the trip bought food, everyone else was more interested in bottles of clear liquid, could vodka that only cost £3.00 per litre be drinkable – we

were assured " that is good but very expensive". He was right, it was very smooth!

Our first destination was to be the Karatal Japryk Nature Reserve; the group had visited with Alexey last year, when unfortunately, the snow had prevented exploration. We headed out on a good road, (with plenty of garages for fuel) that ran close to the Kazakhstan border, before turning off to smaller roads. As we went through mountainous areas the streams appeared to be running uphill, impossible, it had to be an optical illusion. On arrival in Naryn our already crammed minibus was required to expand and accommodate another large tent and assorted kit including a gas cylinder and metal petrol can. We promptly visited a garage but found that the petrol can had sprung a leak, initial attempts at solving the problem with sticky tape weren't successful and I was very relieved when Alexey told me that they had replaced the can. The gas was topped up from a tanker at the side of the road, and 2 legs of mutton, and vegetables bought from the local market. Now we really couldn't fit anything else in the minibus!

The tracks into the National Park were good and easily passible for the minibus. It's now that you get the full scale of wide-open plains with mountains in the distance. We reached a potential campsite, and it didn't take long to decide to camp there, the river was very close and an inviting (albeit not very accessible) cave entrance was on the cliffs very nearby.

There was rain that evening, so we woke to a layer of ice on the tents, but if you camp in frost pocket at 2500m that is what to expect. Unfortunately, it was going to be quite a few hours before the sun got to the campsite, so 4 of us headed off to a gorge that Alexey knew to have quite a few entrances, while Mike and Robert were going to try and access the cliff entrance just across the track.

Whilst waiting for the track to dry out enough to be passible we stopped on the plains by a farm. Malc, Wayne and I decided to walk up to an interesting looking gorge. It was pretty, and contained a few rock shelters, but nothing that would even take you out of daylight. On looking back, we saw the minibus driving off, Malc surmised correctly that the farmer had offered to show the others some entrances, (but again there

wasn't any length to them). Whilst we waited for them to return there was lots of activity on the plains.



The herds of horses, flocks of sheep and the cattle were being rounded up and taken to lower pastures for the winter. One of the herdsman spotted us and cantered over to be sociable, having shaken our hands he established that we couldn't speak any Kyrgyz or Russian, and he knew no English, so conversation was out, but he introduced us to another younger herdsman before they continued with their work. Once the minibus returned, we continued, on tracks that became increasingly steep and narrow, with hairpin bends, hats off to Vladimir for driving so skilfully. On arrival at another farm by a much larger river there was a suggestion that it might be possible to get the minibus across the river. Luckily this plan was abandoned as the bank was near vertical, but it meant that we had to cross on foot. Everyone else managed to keep at least one foot (if not two) dry, but river crossings aren't my forte! Alexey walked up the valley with us, as we avoided the many herds/flocks of animals being driven over the mountains, apparently the route to lower pasture near Naryn are quickest through the high passes.



When we reached a spectacular gorge, Alexey

said we should go down and check it out as there are many cave entrances, while he went to look at another area. He reminded us that we had to get back to the minibus quickly if it looked like rain, as the tracks back would be impassable if wet.

We set off with enthusiasm, Wayne with helmet and light looking into each entrance, but reporting back that there was nothing of any distance, though one contained some very nice crystals. It was easy going at first, where the gorge was wide and open, still with plenty of interesting looking holes but nothing that went more than a few feet. As the gorge narrowed there were less entrances and the going got much more interesting. This was not a trodden route; the trees and vegetation were tangled blocking what looked like a way through and there were increasingly large piles of rock to negotiate. Getting rather despondent I asked, "Are we nearly there yet?" We eventually got back to the river, and crossed, by this time it seemed best to just wade through the chilly water rather than try jumping onto large wobbly, slippery rocks. The entrance near the river junction that Alexey had mentioned was disappointing, so we headed up river towards the farm. Unfortunately, this side of the river became impassable, Wayne continued bravely before admitting defeat, but the rest of us crossed, knowing we'd have another crossing further down river.

We got back to camp safely, the only casualty being my trousers, the back of which had been ripped to shreds, and I hadn't even noticed. Luckily there was a pair of leggings underneath! Mike and Robert had spent the day climbing, but not managed to get to the entrance in the cliffs. It was decided to move camp next morning, and head to the Naryn Tau Mountains, as there are upwards of 60k of limestone in the range. This was also where the picture of the waterfall had been taken, though Alexey was unsure how feasible it would be to get to the best sites.

We camped near a new bunkhouse that was having the finishing touches, it already had a conference room that the owner proudly showed us, with a blue mirrored ceiling, very long table and maroon velveteen chairs, all very surprising when you are in a wild mountainous area. By our tents there was a river, and a couple of "toilets", not quite the sort that would win any blue-ribbon awards and some raised covered areas. Obviously,

a proper campsite in the summer, but not in September when the night temperature at 2750 meters is more than a little chilly!

Mike and Robert were straight off to higher ground to get a good look at the area, and just made it back before dark and supper, but full of optimism for potential cave sites.

We spent three nights at this campsite, so had two full days to explore the area. The first day everyone headed up the valley to a gorge that Alexey felt could be interesting. The first section was fairly easy going, but as we went up it became more challenging with plenty of scrambling, but unfortunately no caves of any significance. Malc and I returned to the valley floor and had a look along an adjacent valley, it was very pretty, and parts of the view reminded me of the Chartreuse in France, but sadly lacking cave entrances. The others returned, having made their way to the top of the gorge, but with nothing of interest to report.

Having had a busy day we were offered the chance to stay in the old bunkroom, the new one not being ready for occupation yet. The previous night had been very cold and I found the idea of a warm bed very appealing. Malc and Robert preferred to stick with their tents, but the rest of us stayed in the toastie warm bunkroom.

Feeling restored in the morning we all headed up the steep slopes to have a look at the areas Mike and Robert had seen on the first evening at this site. They made their way across the top to a distant cave entrance. It did at least go, but only for about 30metres. In honour of Malc's diplomacy skills they suggested calling it The Little Ambassador!



In the afternoon we all piled into the minibus to look at nearby hillsides, the views were stunning once again, though there were some visible cave entrances, nothing would be accessible in the time available. We headed back down to Naryn and as the sun was still shining indulged in ice cream, which made a change from the traditional food.



Next morning it was time to clear the campsite and pack up. We set off back aiming to stop for lunch in the same town as we had on the way out. The town was busier this time and as we walked down the street looking for somewhere to eat it became apparent that all the cleaner places were full, the furthest end of the street being rejected by our guides. They eventually found somewhere

acceptable, but I was dismayed to find there wasn't any toilet, and have drunk plenty of water on the journey this was of imminent importance. Alexey guided me through a few more streets and directed me to go down a back alley, I could see a sign at the end, and this is where he wanted me to go? It all looked very dubious. But through the door at the end was a backyard, full of chicken, and a tin hut that housed a long drop toilet. For the payment of 3com I could use the facilities, which included a sink in the yard, so you could wash your hands. This episode caused great amusement to the others, as when they finished eating, we were taken to a local craft seller's house where there were nice sit-down toilet facilities!

Our trip back to Bishkek was rounded off by a visit to the world heritage site, City of Balasagun (Burano Site). The restored tower is impressive, though not as tall as it was originally, and it was interesting to find out a bit more about the region's history.

Kyrgyzstan didn't give us any great caving experiences during our week; it was, however, a memorable place to visit. A reminder of the many facilities we take for granted, compared with their rugged life, particularly for the farmers. The mountains are very beautiful, the September weather was sunny and clear by day, but cold at night and it is very harsh during the winter months. The people are hospitable, being both welcoming and helpful. There are larger known cave systems and mines, but they are further west near Osh. Though there is plenty of limestone in the areas around Naryn, where we were based, we have yet to find anything of significance.

Camping underground - Daren Cilau- Courtenay James

The Severn Crossings are now free so Acca Jager Attila, Mitchell Parry, Monica Bollani and I decided to camp in Daren Cilau. Entering Price's Dig (Ogof Cnwc) it took 7 hours to get to Hard Rock. It was really hard because of the large bags we were carrying and thought I was going to die. However, after some food and Rhubarb and Ginger Gin all was well. A good night's sleep and the 6 hours back to the entrance. Exhausted but happy. Last man standing Atti!



Honorary Membership – Noel Cleave

Dear Les, Frank and all the committee,

My appreciation for the offer of Honorary Membership is hard to express, not least because I do not consider that I merit it - certainly not compared with the two signatories of your letter. When I look at the other Honorary Members I am struck by how little I have contributed to the **caving** side of my Wessex membership. Digging, in my distant past, was marked equally by my lack of enthusiasm and success. On the scoresheet, breakthroughs into virgin passage..... Zero. My only look into stygian unknown was upwards into a fine mist of farmyard when we maypoled up into Cowsh Aven and I climbed further: an ascent so foul that nobody bothered with it for some 14 years afterwards.

The reality is that the Wessex has given me far more than I have ever contributed to the Wessex and your kindness must be a reflection on my 6 years of Journal Editorship. I suspect that the

other qualifications and requirements are not (yet) to have been to prison, and to have lived for ages and ages.

It has been my honour and privilege to have been a member since 1956. In accepting your offer of Honorary Membership, I'll try not to shuffle off anytime soon: my only (very slight) claim to fame being that am one of a dwindling number who caved with, or knew, our founding members.

Finishing on a somewhat lighter note does not alter the fact that I was very moved to receive your letter. It had never occurred to me to even contemplate that I might qualify in any way for Honorary Membership. My wife would confirm that I was very quiet and thoughtful that evening. Humility rather than pride is my reaction. I accept, and thank you all.

Noel Cleave

Viaduct Sink - Geoff Newton

There has been no progress here as Mike Kushy has been involved elsewhere, digging in Portland with Tim Rose, Nick Butler, and Monica Bollani,

and in Reservoir Hole digging Jill's Slither and climbing Pulsation Aven with "Atti", not to mention tourist caving further afield.

Snake Pit Hole – Geoff Newton

As digging has progressed, the rift passage has decreased markedly in size and morphed into a keyhole shaped passage still choked with red mud and occasional small rocks. The upper tube-shaped part of the passage is probably passable without chemical enlargement, although it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between rock and mud simply by looking at it. So, the precise dimensions of the passage can only be determined by thoroughly scraping and poking away. The lower slot shaped part of the passage is very deep and only a few inches wide.

Digging can be cramped and awkward, in addition to being very muddy. Therefore, the dig has been in theory on the back burner. However, with progress on Viaduct Sink stalled for the time being, we / I have mostly continued, digging into the upper portion of the T-shaped passage. When digging is slow I have continued solo, to avoid

team members being bored and under employed. When digging conditions have eased sufficiently to allow production of large quantities of spoil or when there is an accumulation of boulders to be hauled to the surface, the dig works much better with more people, and I attempt to get a team together although I am usually in no danger of being overwhelmed in the rush to take part. I try to rotate the various jobs involved.

The part of the cave close to the surface is rather fractured and unstable but as the dig deepens the passage walls become more and more solid. The walls are nicely scalloped and sometimes a thin layer of calcite flowstone with tiny formations is exposed when the mud is removed. Where we have had to break boulders by capping or hammering, the exposed rock surfaces are highly crystalline, sometimes containing small geodes lined with calcite crystals. The fill is predominantly

a very fine red-brown clay, although there are small amounts of black and blue-green deposits here and there, either in layers or at rock-mud interfaces. Diggers at other places in the area such as Home Close Hole, Attborough Swallet etc. may have seen similar features.

The initial phreatic cave seems to have been drained for a period, allowing some deposition of calcite on the cave walls before some major event has filled it with mud and boulders. There is some evidence of mineralisation and metamorphism. Some of the boulders have become cemented to the floor during this process, although application of a hammer and crowbar can usually release them.

Other diggers involved have included Mike Kushy, Atti, Wayne, Monica, Colin Shapter, Tom Williams and friend, Courtenay, John Cooper and Lee Venning. Apologies to anyone I have forgotten.

There is still incentive to continue, as condensation and seepage water still drains away down the slot part of the passage. The general direction of the passage is headed towards the most active of the three swallets on the other side of the road, only 20-30 metres away. The dig face is an estimated 8 metres below the entrance. If the entrance to the swallet is visited, the passage can be seen to be headed directly towards Snake Pit before it becomes blocked by rubble after maybe 3 metres. However, permission to dig the swallet is unlikely to be forthcoming, as one would be working directly under the road and in a very public situation. Diggers at nearby Waldegrave Swallet in the 1970's had to give up due to interference by members of the public. During the early 1900's the swallet caused the road to collapse and the roof of the swallet was then supported with old tram rails which can still be seen today.

2nd Saturday Trips

January - Manor Farm Swallet - Wayne Starsmore

Wayne Starsmore, Daniel Rees, Clive Westlake, Mitch Parry, Claire Cohen, Steve Brown, Kim Lake, Mike Hood, Damon Fenton, Frances Porter, Monica Bollani, Courtenay James and James Collings.

James led the rigging team with Wayne coming an hour later as the de-rigging team. Both teams met up in NHASA Gallery. The tigers in each team went for a good root around in Silence of the Lambs. All back to the surface with only a few experiencing

difficulties with September Rift, although a knotted hand line helped a little. The air quality was ok with not too many leeches although a vast number of midges.

February - Eastwater Cavern - Richard Carey

The Thirteen Pots exchange trip is an absolute classic and attendance is always high. This year proved to be no exception with 26 cavers divided into 4 teams. One each to rig and de-rig the Twin Verticals and Dolphin Pot and Pitch respectively. I chose to rig Twin Verticals whilst Wayne opted for the Dolphin Route. With me were Kim Lake, Monica Bollani, Steve Brown, Nick Butler and Daniel Rees. The entrance was quite wet giving all of us a big wet welcome kiss on the way in. Route finding through the boulder choke was not impaired though and the Boulder Chamber was soon reached. A quick wriggle down the Canyon through the Crossroads into the 1st Rift Chamber to the head of the 1st Vertical. The ladder and life line were both rigged off naturals and the pitch

was soon descended. The 2nd vertical requires bolting and proved a slow process as the spits were a little rusty and required a little persuasion to get the bolts fully home. Just as I was about to descend Wayne was bringing his group back out. The timing was perfect and we proved to be no obstruction to each other. The oxbows were then descended and the 13 pots climbed without any particular difficulty. The Bold Step is quite easy from below and was soon passed. Just as everyone was through we ran into the Twin Verts derigging team so we probably delayed them a little. However, Dolphin Pitch and Pot were soon reached. The entrance was still wet so we all experienced a big wet goodbye kiss on the way out. The joys of having a hood permanently

attached to the over suit are not to be underestimated although I had forgotten about it

on the way in.

March – Lionel’s Hole Round trip - Andrea Carey

Wayne Starsmore, Damon Fenton, Monica Bollani, Simon & Izzy Perkins, Shaleen Patel, Frances Porter, Mitch Parry, Courtenay James, Steve Brown and Jessie.

Andrea led the annual trip to Lionel’s Hole with Wayne as tail end Charlie to make sure no-one got lost. The round trip was successfully completed. The girls were all together and were very chatty. Only Courtenay struggled with squeeze by The Tent although not with the Duck 2 Bypass and had

another go when he got back to the Boulder Chamber. He still found it difficult. The group still wanted more and went in search of the Well. Once out of the cave though, they were still eager to do more and went off to explore Pierre’s Pot and Sidcot Swallet.

March – The After Party

Pierre’s Pot – Monica Bollani

Mitch Parry, Courtenay James, Simon & Izzy Perkins, Frances Porter, Steve Brown, Damon Fenton, Shaleen Patel and Jessie

Once we got to the squeeze to the Lower series the group split as some of us still had a little Christmas weight. Mitch and I went exploring looking for tight and muddy tubes to get ourselves stuck in and we definitely succeeded. We followed a rope up a narrow rift into an aven just off the main downstream passage. We followed a

small tube into a chamber where we found digging buckets and rope. We decided to explore both digs as far as we could get. Thinking we had found the Hanging Gardens we proudly reviewed the survey only to discover that we were nowhere near them and had actually visited The Flyover. This means we will be forced to go back again.

Goatchurch Cavern and Sidcot Swallet - Frances Porter

With Courtenay James, Steve Brown and Damon Fenton

A nice end to the Burrington Combe “Full Monty” since I hadn’t been to this area before. We passed a group at the Tradesman’s Entrance and went up to the Main Entrance and did a through trip in about 10 minutes. I was very impressed with how large Goatchurch is compared to the other caves. I will be coming back.

looked at the formations but as my light had started to go out we returned to the surface.

There are 42 caves in and around Burrington Combe of which the 6 largest/longest the most popular are Goatchurch Cavern, Sidcot Swallet, Rod’s Pot, Bath Swallet, Read’s Cavern and Lionel’s Hole. A “Full Monty?” not yet. (ED)

Actually we went to Sidcot Swallet before going to Goatchurch and got as far as the Lobster Pot. We

Eastwater Cavern 13 Pots – Jenna Overstolz & James Collings

An energetic 13 Pots trip in via the Upper Travers and out via the Woggle Press. I managed the

Upper Traverse on my own for the 1st Time with minimal fuss.

Ogof Daren Cilau to Ogof Cnwc - Maxine Bateman

A superb trip to dispel old myths

The warnings I had heard as a fresher about Darren were enough to put me off asking who he was. However I did later find out from a Cardiff fresher that it was less of a who and rather a what. It was actually Daren Cilau the cave they were all referring to. This didn't change the warnings I had heard, tortuous entrance crawl that went on for miles, took hours and was ridiculously tight. I mean no one ever sold it to me as a place I really had to visit and with plenty of other trips around I never made any noise to show interest in attempting the entrance series.

However late in 2018 I found a renewed interest in caving, my fitness had gone up, caving suddenly became a lot less effort and I was enjoying myself again. A few trips down Swildon's, Rhino and Aggy, with my final trip of 2018 in Swildon's on Christmas Day cemented my enthusiasm again which luckily made it into the New Year safely and I was back planning caving trips.

A group of friends were off to Whitewalls for a weekend in January and I headed to join in the fun. I participated in a little too much fun on the Friday, and upon waking up Saturday I felt pretty awful and definitely not in a fit state for caving. Slightly disappointed I borrowed a small fluffy dog, took it for a walk to see the entrance of Aggy and retreated back to spend the rest of the day inside in bed.

Sunday came with a renewed vigour, a determination to go caving despite the still lingering hangover. Tom Williams had joined the trip away and suggested the through trip in Daren. My gut feeling was to politely decline but with many of the others not caving, I was limited on choice. Remembering my enthusiasm, I slapped a smile on my face and used my favourite word, yes! A short walk from the hut, and my stomach was gurgling, I'm not afraid to admit I was hesitant about this trip. I was convinced I was going to get myself stuck or moan so much that he'd wish he'd never suggested the trip.

So I went in first, allowing Tom to get out still if I did get stuck or to pull me out by my boots. To be fair I knew he was vegan and the reputation that carries for wind was enough to be grateful to be in front. He casually mentioned a section called the Vice; describing how I should pass it but no other tight bits were specially named. Off we went, and I kept wondering where the cave got nasty, I was enjoying the low crawls, twisty bits and slightly bigger bits, the Vice came and I went in on my right side as instructed, did one armed press-ups and got most the way through before getting a little bit stuck. Stopping, I took breather, and then got myself through the last bit and continued on. I have no idea how long the entrance took but I strangely have to say I really enjoyed it, perhaps the 14 years I'd avoided the cave had led me to believe its reputation is worse than its bite. Onwards we travelled to the Big Chamber Nowhere Near the Entrance where in the centre of the chamber upon a boulder is a log book. Good place for a rest and entering our names I leant over the boulder to read back through the book while starting to feel the effects of the pounding this cave had given me. Stopping for a bit too long and getting cold, it was quite nippy, time to get moving again.

I had never heard about the pretties found in this cave and so wasn't expecting much. But when we climbed up to Urchin Oxbow I was stunned by how delicate the formations were, I could have spent hours looking at them. So white, thin, and magical really, a complete surprise and bonus on this trip. These formations somewhat stole the thunder from the Antlers which were somewhat less impressive viewed in this order. Before long we were out of Ogof Cnwc, the through trip completed.

A huge beaming smile on my face for the walk back to Whitewalls and a promise to myself to go back again to see more of the cave.

Foolhardy and Dangerous - Chris Howell

Early 80s in a science lab in Dorchester.

The constant background smell of gas hit you as you entered the science building. Our Physics teacher rarely turned up and so these sessions were largely used to plan our caving trips. I and a couple of friends had been caving for 9 months or so and we naturally regarded ourselves as experts.

Charles pulled out the battered and muddied cave guide book. Charles was probably the driving force of our small group, a self-appointed eccentric and prone to dramatic gestures. He had recently contrived to run out of water from his carbide lamp on a bone dry Portland trip purely to be able to urinate into the reservoir, admittedly an achievement whilst lying flat out.

“What about the Long Round Trip in Swildon’s – through Sump 4, down to Sump 9 and back up the Damp Link?” “Sounds good-what grade is it?” We were puerile grade tickers in those days, even before the term had been invented. “It hasn’t got one – just says foolhardy and dangerous ...” This was precisely the kind of challenge that would appeal to Charles; he had particularly enjoyed carefully enunciating the words “foolhardy” and “dangerous”. I did manage to get it put on the back burner for the time being.

A couple of months later in the Ancient Briton in Abercraf.

The constant background smell of beer and tobacco hit you as soon as you entered the bar. A group of bearded men in scruffy pile jackets huddled around a table, contrasting with the two fresh faced schoolboys in their new pile jackets. Our small group had now joined a Mendip based caving club, selected because it wasn’t choosy about who joined, had a cottage of sorts, access to keys and tackle and regular South Wales’ trips. Charles had (again) engineered the conversation round to the Damp Link. One of the other members explained how he had tried Sump 4 once with a rope tied to his ankle intended to ferry the only facemask back and forth. When the rope was pulled after his dive his legs appeared rather than the mask – he had somehow got stuck and blacked out. Even Charles looked slightly concerned by this, however later on in the evening a tired and emotional Charles asked what would qualify one as a “hard man”. Diving through

Sump 4 with a can of beer inside your wetsuit was the opinion of one of the regulars – a comment that would prove to backfire on him later. The look on Charles’s face told me that it would only be a matter of time.

A Sunday afternoon, two months later, Sump 4 Swildon’s Hole.

The constant smell of cowsh hit you as you approached and there were what appeared to be worms visible. Howard was kneeling in the mixture of water, mud, cowsh and wildlife trying to persuade himself to go. Howard was Charles’s brother-in-law and his wife had encouraged him to join with our caving trips so that he could rein in Charles’s more dangerous ideas. More importantly he owned a car. He was a nice chap but not a natural caver. He had recently managed to plummet down the whole length of Blacknor cliff on Portland inside a rift, lacking the awareness to control his speed by bracing his elbows out – one of the many incidents and injuries that had to be kept concealed from his wife. Howard had found the approach to the sump hard in itself – we had approached from Blue Pencil – so it came as no surprise that he eventually declined to come with us. His presence had meant that we were moving slowly and we were slightly concerned about our lights. As was the fashion in those days we had adapted Oldham battery cases by inserting ex MOD Ni-Cad cells inside which in theory gave up to 8 hours light on a good day, but we had never put that to the test.

I lay down in the mixture, took a deep breath and pulled cautiously. I could see my hand on the guideline and very little else. I immediately regretted the can of Newcastle brown ale and cigarette rolling machine stashed inside my wetsuit jacket as it got tighter ... a posthumous “hard man” designation was of little use ... however, it soon opened up and I joined Charles on the other side. Sump 5 was if anything even more unpleasant than Sump 4, a series of ducks through neck deep water and cowsh that bubbled when you moved. Up to start the siphons in Gloop Sump and off down the streamway. Neither of us was wearing a watch, but we were aware that time was getting on and so we stopped at Sump 7 for a tactics meeting and a can of ale and a fag. Charles’s light was starting to dim which probably

meant mine wasn't far behind and the way back was sketchy. Howard was in charge of the callout and would probably not hang around. Typing this now some 35 years later, it occurs to me that carrying some backup lighting rather than beer and fags (especially as the roll up machine was waterlogged and useless) might have been an idea but it made sense at the time to our amygdala driven teenage brains. Time to turn around.

I can't remember much about the actual Damp Link apart from it being quite squalid. Our lamps were covered in mud which reduced our dimming lights still further. I remember at one point licking the lenses clean, marginal gains, with our tongues being the only clean parts of our bodies. I also remember recalling the guidebook stating that "rescue from the Link would be impossible". We had now bailed one sump into the one below us, cutting off any retreat. We had totally lost track of time but it felt late, way beyond our callout time. Visions of Priddy Green floodlit by the emergency services flashed into our heads.

Eventually we reached known ground in Shatter series. We had stashed an ammo can of supplies the previous weekend which we eventually found ... needless to say it contained beer and chocolate but no lights. We were now reduced to switching

our lights off and then on in short bursts to illuminate the next bit of passage which was then done in darkness. Finally back into the stream way, we could see two lights bobbing in the distance. Sunday night – could only be a rescue team – but the fact there were only two must be a good sign. Two familiar faces eventually appeared. Our two club mates were relieved rather than annoyed. Now wasn't the time to remind them that the can of beer inside the wetsuit had been their ideas. The MRO had apparently been put on standby.

A final climb out into the fragrant summer evening. The air was still and peaceful with only distant farm lights to be seen. No flashbulbs or fire brigade. Apologies to our club mates. A relieved Howard. A debate as to whether this technically counted as being rescued. We knew what our non-attending school friends would think.

Monday morning in a science lab in Dorchester.

The constant background smell of gas hit you as soon as you entered the science building. The Physics teacher had failed to show up again. Charles pulled out the battered and muddied cave guide book.

A Nice Warm Hut - Colin Shapter

The wood for the Fire doesn't cut it self. With Tommo, Barry Wilkinson and John Cooper.



When things go wrong - Derek Sanderson

In the summer of 1983, I was fortunate to be invited to explore the Gouffre Berger with the Crewe Climbing and Potholing Club, organised by John Gillett. It was a successful and friendly expedition. My trip for the bottom was in the company of Trevor Faulkner and my brother Keith. I need to explain that on long trips like the Berger I had developed a habit of dividing the journey into a series of targets and would say something like "Let's get to the next pitch and see how we feel." Not that I intended to stop there - it just broke up the trip in my mind. Of course, I was usually ignored. In any case, when you caved with Trevor and Keith you have no choice - its bottom or nothing.

The trip from Camp 1 to Camp 2 was smooth and very enjoyable. The pitches were rigged well, apart from Claudine's where the rope was attached to a worn hanger and backed up by a loose one. For those of you who don't know, Camp 2 is at -860m and by 1983 it was no longer used as a camp. Beyond is a series of wet pitches dropping rapidly to about -940m. The first pitch in the series is Gache's and this is where things started to go embarrassingly wrong – at least for me. I have long believed that, whilst caving is often described as a team pursuit, you also need to be self-sufficient. On this occasion I definitely was not.

Gache's is not a particularly long pitch but on this occasion it was fairly wet with a re-belay at about -5m. Keith descended first followed by Trevor and then myself. Unfortunately, I abseiled past the bolt and was left dangling at the bottom of the loop. This would not normally be a problem but on this occasion I needed to prussik up a few feet as it was a large loop. However, I was not wearing my hand jammer – it was in the tackle bag dangling below me. It was easy to retrieve and clip on but before I could prussik the few feet to the bolt my carbide lamp went out and refused to re-light. Admittedly, I was in quite heavy spray, but normally my lamp was as good as gold in such conditions. If the carbide had run out then I had a problem – my spare carbide was in Keith's bag which was probably two pitches lower down by now. So much for being self-sufficient! I switched to electric and used my whistle to let the others know they needed to wait but there was no response – and no sign of lights either. It was clear that I needed to return to Camp 2 and review my

situation. Unfortunately, before I could reach the top of the pitch the electric light packed up. I managed to prussik up in darkness until I was out of most of the spray and tried to light the carbide again. No success. I was definitely out of carbide. So there I was, hanging on a rope, in spray, at about -880m and in complete darkness. The only hope was to try to repair the electric lamp where I was. Either that or try to get off the pitch without a light, which I didn't fancy very much.

Removing my helmet, I took off the lid of the battery case on the back and tested the battery with my tongue (a 4.5 volt flat). There was nothing wrong with the battery. It must be the bulb. There was a spare bulb of dubious age in the battery case along with a spare carbide jet, washer and pricker. These I tipped into my mouth and sorted out with my tongue – bulb in the right cheek, the rest in the left. I then dismantled the lamp at the front of the helmet, putting the glass and the bezel in the upturned helmet. I changed the bulb. Light! Not much but good enough. Having re-assembled the lamp, I was able to prussik to the top of the pitch and get solid ground under my feet again. All thoughts of carrying on were now banished. Moving away from the lip of the pitch, I selected a flat piece of rock away from the stream to sit it out. The spare bulb started to flicker alarmingly so I turned it off and sat in darkness. Strangely enough, I felt quite content just sitting there, probably because there were no more decisions to be made. Someone would turn up.

Three hours later I detected a small bunch of tiny lights high up above Camp 2 and snaking down the Grand Canyon. It took some time before they were near enough to talk to. Behind the lights were a group from the Crewe club. They gave me a fill of carbide and I headed back to Camp 1 accompanied by two of the Crewe lads who had gone as far as they wanted to. Goodness knows what they must have thought – a Mendip caver who didn't carry his own carbide, abandoned by his mates, and couldn't do SRT properly! The trip back to Camp 1 was good. After some hot chocolate I scrambled into an almost warm sleeping bag and dozed for a while. A few hours later Keith and Trevor arrived at Camp 1. Yes, they had reached the sump, but I can't help thinking that I had the more interesting trip.

Spider Hole - Dig Update March 2019 - Adrian Vanderplank

Journal 345 January 2018 contained an article detailing the position at the time. Here is the latest.

On the 14th May 2018 we started to notice that the wall of the shaft on the South side was “delaminating” *ie, gaps appearing between beds of limestone*. By the next month a definite under cut was appearing, the way on was blocked with boulders, but over the coming months these were cleared with a combination of crowbars and hammers, capping.

By October 2018 we could crawl along approximately 6 metres of passage to another large boulder. At this point it was decided to

go back and deepen the horizontal passage to make future digging easier. During all this time massive amounts of spoil were being hauled back to the main chamber, this involved hauling the spoil nearly 40 metres vertically and 10 metres horizontally. The draught in this time has improved from a feeling of “fresh air” at the bottom, to now a “gentle breeze”.

At present the “end” is terminated with a very large rock with a 150 to 200mm gap over the top with the wind from the Cheddar master cave blowing on our faces. As always Thanks go to all the regular diggers and the occasional ones, as Tesco says, every little helps - **Work continues.....**

