

# Wessex Cave Club

Journal 363  
September 2024







# EDITORIAL



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**Journal Editor**  
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~~~~~  
eMails are generically:  
[postheld@wessex-cave-club.org](mailto:postheld@wessex-cave-club.org)

Wessex Committee: committee@  
Chairman: chairman@  
Secretary: secretary@  
Treasurer: treasurer@  
Caving Secretary: caving@  
Hut Warden: hutwarden@  
Hut Administrator hutadmin@  
Membership Secretary: membership@  
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It's always sad to have to start a new Journal with obituaries or news of recent losses. This issue starts with an obituary of Phil Hendy, and some informal contributions. Robin Maine died recently, as well, and Journal 364 will include an appreciation of his generous support for generations of Swildon's Hole visitors.

Following Phil's death I asked Aubrey Newport to compose Phil's obituary. What we lacked were photographs to accompany it, and put a general request for these. The result was impressive, but many people had photographs tucked away which they themselves had not taken, particularly from those long ago. Rather than try and track down all the original photographers, I've avoided individual attributions and hope that the nature of the unauthorised publication in this context will be acceptable and its own reward.

Image copyright and attribution are Editorial elephant traps. I wonder if Wessex Members who publish their photographs on the Wessex Facebook Page would be happy to see their work, properly attributed, published in the Wessex Journal, without individual approval? Would it be safe for the Editor to assume that this re-publication would be automatically acceptable?

The Wessex summer camp at the chalet la Paloumère intervened between Journal 362 in May, and this Journal, 363. The camp effectively took more than 3 weeks from my editorial days so our accounts from the summer camp have been deferred to Journal 364. This has allowed space in this edition for some slightly back-dated articles.

If I were to continue to restrict our caving accounts to 'catching-up' from the Upper Pitts Log Book, then current caving reports would lose their immediacy, so I've included a couple of recent reports.

The Wessex is fortunate to harbour some non-committee skills, if that is the right word. John Cooper adds to his work as Hut Warden the unofficial posts of Custodian of the Mud Sump Airspace, and Journal Proof Reader. Then Matt Ryan-East has acquired the prestigious position of Wessex Poet Laureate.

The next Journal, 364, will specially mark the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Wessex Cave Club. Without making it into a nostalgia wallow, it would be good to feature some aspects of the Club's life and activities from the past, particularly photographs and articles which had escaped previous publication. If you have anything interesting and appropriate, please send it to me. Publication is not guaranteed, but my gratitude most certainly will be.

The Wessex Cave Club 90th Annual Dinner will be held at The Mendip Golf Club, Gurney Slade, Somerset BA3 4UT on Saturday the 19th October 2024, 7pm for 7:30pm.

Please complete the form below, before Friday 4th October 2024, to register your booking.

<https://forms.gle/fj2mndN5TMzS6oGT7>

The cost of this year's dinner is £32.00 per person plus £5 if you require lunch on the following Sunday.

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**Volume 36**  
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**September 2024**

**Cover: Lost John's Cave**  
**Photo: Craig Holdstock**

## Philip Graham Hendy 2/7/1949 - 20/3/2024

In the afternoon of 20th March 2024 Philip (Phil) was working on the surface at the Templeton dig as he normally did every Monday and Wednesday. Phil suddenly said he didn't feel well and collapsed a few minutes later. John Hill, another Templeton digger, immediately called 999 and spent a long-time doing CPR but to no avail. The air ambulance with doctor arrived within 25 minutes but nothing could be done.

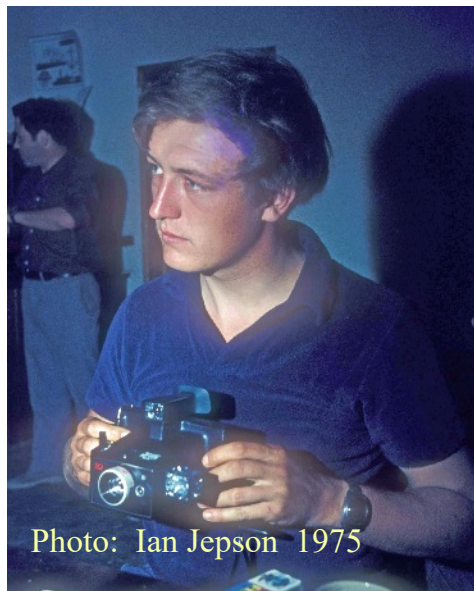


Photo: Ian Jepson 1975

Phil was elected to the Wessex in September 1972 and from then onwards most of Phil's life was closely associated with the club. He became Assistant Secretary (1974-1975), Secretary (1975-1978), Editor (1979-1980), Chairman (1980-1987) and was Librarian from 1999 onwards. He was appointed to be one of the four Club Trustees and his work was recognised in 2023 when he was given Honorary

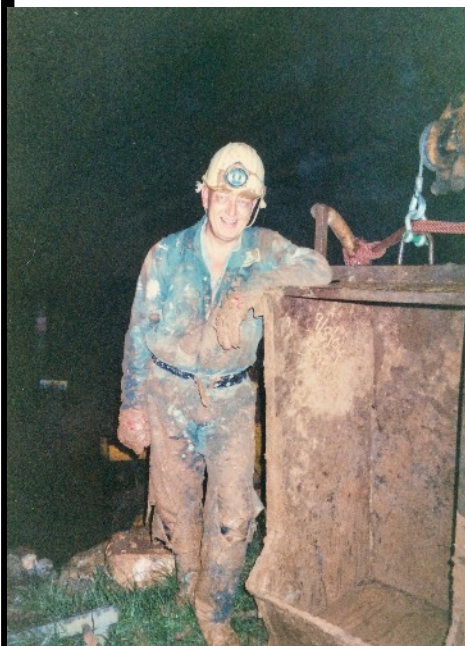
Membership of the club. As chairman he was master of ceremonies at the annual club dinners and he always dressed for the part in his suit and waistcoat. He was particular about keeping to tradition and having the correct toasts including the loyal toast.



Photo: Marion Wilkinson



Phil started caving whilst at Cotham Grammar School at the age of 15. He became a member of the Severn Valley Caving Club (SVCC) and was soon involved in his first dig at Rookery Farm Swallet near Green Ore. This was the beginning of his dedication to photographing, opening, and extending caves. He dug with NHASA (North Hill Association for Speleological Advancement) at sites including North Hill Swallet, Lodmore, Windsor Hill and Twin T's.



Phil studied at Sutton Bonnington Agricultural College, which is part of Nottingham University. He caved with the university caving club and travelled to all of the main caving areas of the country as a member of NUCC. After completing his degree Phil was employed by Glaxo, the drugs company based in Greenford. It was during this time working at Glaxo that Phil suddenly lost all his hair. Seeing the sudden change in Phil's appearance over a period of only two weeks was quite alarming. At the time he was also doing some voluntary drug testing for the company and Glaxo obviously denied all responsibility for Phil's hair loss. Despite help from Oliver Lloyd, the well-known caving pathologist, no one was able to prove the cause.

Phil joined many Wessex caving trips including trips to the Picos de Europa and France. Glaxo supplied Phil with a company car, an Austin Maxi which was an excellent caving car and quickly became known as the "MaxiTaxi". He got permission for us to take the car abroad to the caving area of the Ardennes in Belgium. As soon as we arrived in Belgium, we were introduced to Trappiste du Rochefort 10% and 12% beer and on a visit to a bar in Rochefort Phil's curiosity made him enquire about the red coloured long drink the locals were





consuming. They showed us it was Trappist with a shot of grenadine and insisted on buying us several glasses. When he recovered late the next day Phil typically christened the drink “beer with a grenade in it”.

Phil's big talent was his writing ability and his way with words and illustrations. In 1978 he published "Muddy Oxbows", an illustrated humorous book depicting the sport and dangers of caving. His earlier efforts included the publication of "Splat", the toilet humour newsletters of the Elsan Caving Club. Elsan chemical toilets were the normal facilities in the early days of caving huts

and were usually located away from the main building. The Elsan Caving Club was closely associated with SVCC but became notorious because of the explosive Elsan destroying deeds of its members.

Phil's writing ability helped him become widely known to the general public for his articles in Mendip Times. Mendip Times is a glossy monthly free magazine available on Mendip and in the surrounding area. The articles were always on a subject associated with caving and of interest to the wider readership. Somehow Phil managed to generate a fresh article every month for over 15 years and in doing so his articles did much to enhance the image of caving in the area.

Phil was a frequent customer at the Hunters' Lodge Inn and like many regulars



he kept his own pewter pot behind the bar. Phil's well used pot was instantly recognisable

by the naked lady shaped handle although some of the lady's attributes had worn off. At the Hunters Phil met Lynne Williams, the daughter of the Mendip farmer from Whitestown Farm and in 1979 they married. In 1980 they bought the house at 10 Silver Street in Wells from Wessex members Rich and Annie West. They moved on to Dragon Cottage in Pilton and spent the next few years living in a caravan while rebuilding the cottage. Their son Daniel was born in 1987. After Dragon Cottage Phil moved to



Evercreech where he resided for the rest of his life. Unfortunately, his marriage to Lynne did not last, and she moved to Cornwall to be near her family.

From the time he moved from London back to Mendip Phil had a variety of employment. For a time, he was a postman, and often did odd jobs. He did a Teacher Training Course but decided that profession was not for him! Eventually Phil settled when he became an adventure cave leader and guide at Cheddar Caves.

Phil had always been good friends with Brian and Sheila Pitman and after Brian's death in 2010 Phil obviously remained friends with Sheila. Despite living a long way apart, they travelled widely together. An early trip to New Zealand was spoilt when Phil was hospitalised with a minor stroke. Their last trip was a month-long Caribbean Cruise which Phil said was especially enjoyable.

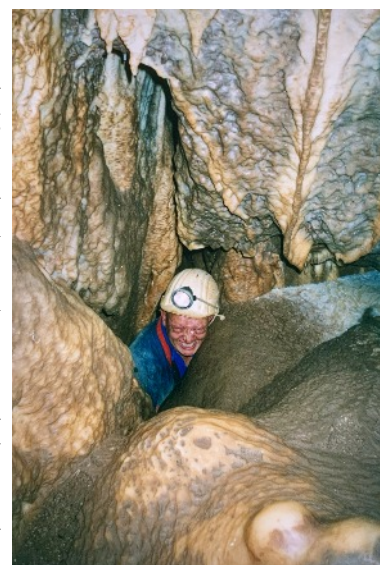
Phil will be sadly missed by his family and all his friends. **Aubrey Newport**



With an additional tribute from Christine Grosart:

I've been caving and cave diving for over 20 years and I can safely say that this inspiration and access to the incredible underground world, as well as the Mendip Hills, has been entirely down to my Uncle Phil. His passion for Mendip caves was unwavering and his quest to find new underground spaces never faded. He passed away at his favourite spot, always clinging to the hope that he one day may break into the "Wookey Master Cave". Very little of Phil's life was approached without humour; the time he was crawling out of a body-sized cave, having removed his helmet, and a bat had the same idea, crawling over his head to escape... Then there was a time when I organised a day out for the club at Clearwell Caves with three options of caving trip on offer, with three

different levels of difficulty. Unfortunately, the cave leaders got the trips mixed up and I don't think he ever forgave me for getting on the wrong one, having had a four-hour horrendous epic! Phil's love and fascination for wildlife was also notable, with a zoology degree and very little fear which did once land him in hot water, when an adder was just a bit too quick for him and gave him a nasty bite. There are so many stories and anecdotes around Phil that we wouldn't know where to start and these memories are sacred, as we miss him so terribly. Philip's sense of humour, intelligence and kindness is something that has supported and influenced me and I'm sure many others for a very long time. Mendip, the Hunters' Lodge Inn at Priddy and the Wessex Cave Club will be all the poorer without him.



May he rest in peace, knowing he was loved by so many, and may he find caverns measureless in the great karst of the sky, with his digging pals who have passed before.

### **Christine Grosart**

Caver, Cave Diver,  
Phil Hendy's niece

~~~~~  
And a further tribute to Phil Hendy from David Morrison, and Graham Price.

ON March 20th Phil peacefully passed away in the company of friends and fellow cave diggers whilst participating in his favourite activity, cave digging. Although he hadn't been able to go underground for some years due to a heart condition, he was a vital part of the team providing essential surface support. Phil was certainly a well-known personality amongst the various caving circles, not least for his articles in Mendip Times which he had written since 2008. He was great friends with many of his caving contemporaries within the Wessex and other caving clubs. He would be a beacon to those visiting the club's headquarters at Priddy, eagerly sharing his knowledge on cave related subjects. Phil was widely knowledgeable on cave history and exploration and most fortunately for the club he took the opportunity to manage and meticulously maintain the club library and records, even writing a book or two himself if a space appeared on the shelf. Previously he also served as honorary secretary 1975-78 and chairman 1980-88. Phil's caving journey followed the way of many cavers. Enthusiastically learn the "trade", build bonds and trust of fellow companions in sporting caving activities, join a club, go on expeditions, organise local and national caving adventures and activities,





then move on to finding, digging and pushing forward into new caves and all the while learning and translating the knowledge from the practical to the academic. The knowledge and ability to use these acquired skills was Phil's strength that benefits all who have an interest in the subterranean and karst landscape of Mendip today. Artistic interest and a sense of humour would bode well for the more perhaps unusual activities that seem to go hand in hand with many caving clubs. Cavers though, seem to go the extra mile to dream up and extend the excesses of unusual games and feats of endurance. Phil was a key and passionate member of the Wessex Cave Club and not unusually for Mendip cavers, also of the Hunters' Lodge Inn community, where many a tale of caving exploits are shared. Phil will be missed. Our thoughts are with his family, friends and fellow cavers.

#### **David Morrison and Graham Price.**

The chronology below was extracted purely from the back-issues of the Wessex Cave Club Journals. It is unlikely to be all-inclusive but simply the best information available. Even so it shows how greatly Phil contributed to the life and well-being of his club. **Editor**

**Journal. 43.** Elected September 3rd, 1972:-

Philip Hendy

**Journal. 156. Dec 74.**

Hon. Secretary: A.D. Newport

Asst. Secretary: P.G. Hendy

**Journal. 162. Dec 75.**

Hon. Secretary: P.G. Hendy

Asst. Secretary: I. Jepson

**Journal. 173. Jun / Jul 78.**

Hon. Secretary P.G. Hendy

**Journal. 174. Aug/ Sep 78.**

Relinquished Secretary post.

**Journal. 180. March 80.**

Hon. Editor P. G. Hendy

**Journal. 182. Jul 80.**

Hon. Chairman A.D. Newport

Hon. Editor P.G. Hendy

**Journal. 185. Nov 80.**

Chairman P. G. Hendy

Editor P. G. Hendy

**Journal. 190. Sep 81.**

Chairman P. G. Hendy

Editor became A Keen

**Journal. 210. Sept 86.**

Chairman Phil Hendy

**Journal. 214. Aug 87.**

Still Chairman. Handed over to Jim Moon

**Journal. 263. Feb 99.** Following the death of Mike D-Y, Phil took over as Librarian "Phill Hendy has been appointed Librarian by the WCC committee. He has also been asked to fill the vacant Ordinary Committee Member post which he has accepted, therefore bringing the committee back up to full strength".

**Journal. 265 Jun 99.** Formally Shown as Librarian. He held the Librarian post for the rest of his life.

**March 2023.** Honorary Membership: "I just wish to say that I am proud and honoured to have been given Honorary Membership of the best club in the country. Since I joined 51 years ago, I have served in various roles on the Committee, and joined various trips to other UK regions and abroad. It has all been great fun, and I thank you for this honour". **Phil Hendy.**



## 2<sup>ND</sup> SATURDAY TRIPS

The first 5 of the “Second Saturday” trips were not described in the Upper Pitts Log-Book, but for the record are listed below:

Second Saturday: 8 April, 2023: Swildon's – Vicarage Pot .

Second Saturday: 13 May, 2023: Swildon's – Northwest Stream Passage.

Second Saturday: 10 June, 2023: Craig-a-Ffynnon.

Second Saturday: 8 July, 2023: Longwood Swallet – Galleries and Streamway

Second Saturday: 12 August, 2023: Mystery Tour (Many away in Vercors, trip courtesy of John Cooper)

Second Saturday: 9 September, 2023: Hillier's to Fairy Through Trip

Photos from Craig and victim on the grass!



Second Saturday: 14 October 2023: Swildon's Approach Passage.

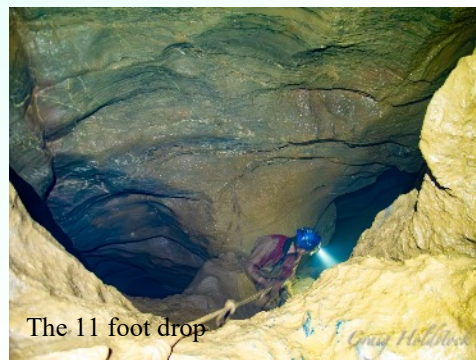
This was a trip in Swildon's Hole doing the Approach Passage round trip. This involved a trip down to Swildon's Sump 1. Through Sump 1 then across a bold step over the streamway and into a muddy phreatic tube that comes to an 11 foot drop (with line in place). Then descending down a 12m climb with fixed line. Before getting

back to Swildon's 2, then return through Swildon's Sump 1. A good trip with a good mixture of ladder climb, bold step, muddy phreatic passage and of course Swildon's Sump 1. Just a photograph with TG6. **Craig Holdstock**

Second Saturday: 11th November, 2023: Mangle Hole.

Wayne, Simon, Berit, Alessio, John (Hurst).(and guest appearance by Noel!)

We used ladders (democratically chosen over SRT) for first two pitches. Bats were flapping, spiders crawling and mud squelching.



We reached the eponymous “Mangle”. Some of us, newbies to the cave, had imagined a full-size working mangle, big enough for bed sheets, like Grandma used to use. So we were a little surprised by the diminutive size mangle. Well-mangled we pressed on (sorry, bad joke, groan) but soon realised that water, normally absent was very much present, swirling and rising. Wayne went first to investigate and wound up treading water above mud banks and getting fully immersed through a duck that had more air on the way in than on the way back. We back-tracked and made an early exit. At the entrance we were greeted by a friendly photographer, Noel, who had climbed the ridge to capture some glamour shots of John exiting Mangle Hole, much to John's mud-covered delight. With some time to spare we tramped into Sandford Levy, walked up





to the end, then tramped back. Noel decided to join us and had brought a spare helmet for just such an occasion. **Simon**

Time for some multiple 'fess ups. I'd intended to photograph the "2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday" cohort going underground, and perhaps the odd group photo for the Journal. Never having been to Mangle, I read up the directions in "Mendip Underground" and printed these out and a section of OS map. Armed with these invaluable aids and my world-class fallibility quotient, I got lost. Eventually I found a fenced-off shaft, and then Sandford Levy... and adjacent rustic bench seat. Convinced that I was ahead of the game, and Wayne's mob, I was wont to take my ease and picnic there. Eventually (useful word, that), I decided that they had deleted Mangle and gone elsewhere.



So I departed, only to encounter Simon, his family and friends within moments and yards of Sandford Levy. Simon informed me that Wayne etc. etc. had planned to enter Mangle at 1100; also that Sandford Levy was not Mangle, which was further on, and that I personally should accompany him and his into the Levy. Thinking to recover something useful from this undoubted debacle - even by my standards a 5\* FU (see above re "Fallibility"), I demured modestly, and headed further into the unknown and soon found 1 Mangle Hole, 1 Simon lifelining 2 bodies resting, and 1 body on the ladder. 'Twas John was on the lifeline and he duly surfaced soaked and hyper-muddy; this was visibly par for the course, although Wayne was markedly wetter than the others, when he surfaced to de-rig. On the walk-out Wayne & Co decided to visit Simon & Co..... in Sandford Levy. Thinking to microscopically lessen my complete prat status for the day, I joined them. If anything, this enhanced my complete prat status, because the entrance to SL is crawling, wet and supermuddy - and I was wearing smart cords. A certain unseemly ribaldry back at Upper Pitts indicated that I wouldn't get away with an 'accidental tumble' explanation at home. My wife's only comment about this foray underground was: "I knew you would". **Noel**

**PS** I did photograph the surface activities ... all the attached photos. **Noel**

### Second Saturday: 9 December, 2023: Hunter's Lodge Inn Sink **All photographs by Mak.**

On a wet and windy December the annual Christmas second Saturday trip was Hunter's Lodge Inn Sink. Wayne had done his back in putting up Christmas decorations so a deputy was found to lead this festive bunch!

Now it was very wet and looking down the entrance pitch looked very wet indeed but the clouds were parting and blue sky could be seen, so I thought I would lead from the rear and let the others have the delight of a soaking. My plan worked and







the time I descended the water had ceased (older and wiser wins).

We all met up in Happy Hour Highway but were missing Alessio and Clive who thought the way on was a detour down Rocking Rudolph Rift (they were obviously in the Christmas mood). We rigged Pewter pot and Tom Gibbison volunteered to go first followed by Clive who later described it as not as wet as Aldo's pitch in The Berger in 1964 on ladder (I may be a few years out). The bottom of Pewter Pot was completely sumped so it was a down and up trip but they all came up cleaner! The majority opted just to go and have a look at the dryer bits of the cave instead!



A good Christmas trip with tea and Mince pies back at the WCC.  
**Bean**

Second Saturday: January 13, 2024: Singing River Mine (See also the back page, taken on another trip)



Photo: Craig Holdstock

Entrance is via a 10m ladder pitch into maze of passages, chambers and rifts. Explored East and West passages. Picture of Alessio on a plank above one of the rifts with water at the bottom. **Craig Holdstock**

Andy Sparrow:  
"I didn't entirely trust that plank 40 years ago".

Second Saturday: February 10, 2023: Eastwater round trip exchange.

**Photos: Noel**

Pete Hellier leading Damon, Colin, Mathew, Alessio, Darren down Dolphin. Mak leading Matt Randall, Berit, Emma Ballard, Jenna, Andy M.

"Wet entrance soaked us all. Woggle Press and downwards pre-rigged. Dolphin Pot, 13 Pots to where we lost Darren (returned back via Dolphin). Up Twin Verticals, de-rigged and out same way for second soaking!" **Pete**

"Got wet in entrance and in the boulder choke, also in and out via the Woggle Press. Down Twin Verticals where Mr. Morse helped by lifelining; I came down last with my rope on. Met Darren at the Bold Step and he was so keen that he went round the 13 Pots a second time! Bumped into BEC crew at head of 13 Pots and de-rigged and re-rigged the Dolphin Pot and Chimney. Out to find our hopes of diminishing wetness were in vain! **Jenna**





I had not been down Eastwater before so joined the trip led by Mak. I decided to join the group that was going down the verticals as that means less ladder climbs on the way out and you come up to the Bold Step from below, which is easier for people with little legs. We had 6 in our group when we started but were joined by Darren when we crossed paths with the other group. I really



enjoyed the trip, especially the 13 Pots bit. It was quite wet at the entrance, a good, sporting trip. **Emma**

#### Second Saturday: March 9, 2024: GB Cavern

James Sheffield, Danielle, Colin Brenton, Frank Tully, Simon Perkins, Andy Morse, Damon Fentham, Kazushi, Tom Gibbison, Monica, Alessio Sancetta, Bev Ford, Christopher Ford, Matthew Ryan-East, Berit, Glen Gilbert, Darren Chapman, Matt Randall, Wayne.

We split into 4 groups with me leading the 1<sup>st</sup>, Monica leading the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. Simon leading the 4<sup>th</sup>. My group made good progress Mud Passage, (having done the Devil's Elbow route), Gorge, White Passage, Rift, the Loop oxbows. We rigged up Ladder Dig, and pushed through the near-sumped passage beyond. There was dried foam most of the way up the Ladder Dig chain! Monica's group caught up with us in the boulders on the way to Bat Passage. There was no sign of Simon's group so we pushed on. We had a good look at Bat Passage and then started up through more boulders to Disappointment Chamber - the entrance to which is extremely dodgy with many loose boulders. Back into the boulders and up into Great Chamber. On the way, Alessio said: "I think I've messed up". Monica had asked him to pull the entrance door closed behind him. He did this, but also slid the bolt closed for good measure.... thus locking out Simon's group! It was a good job that we didn't wait for Simon to catch up with us. (Simon, Darren, Glen, Kaz and Colin went back to the Wessex, whence Darren led them on an Eastwater 13 Pots trip). Back in GB we found our way to Great Chamber and had a good look around. Headed back down to the Broken Columns and everyone down the LH Hole. Matt Randall didn't fit, so he, Frank and I took the RH Hole. All safely out and back to Upper Pitts for Tea and apologies. **Wayne**

PS. Many thanks to Monica and Darren for helping to lead groups.

Second Saturday: March 9, 2024: Fun start of the day, being locked out from GB so change the course to Eastwater Cave An excellent trip going through tight passages in downwards-dog-pose, down the long slippery rock slides, climbing down a ladder, dodging serrated and pointy rocks, and finally managed to get to the bottom of the sandy bottom!! (after 18 pots?). The highlight of the trip was rescuing a baby rabbit on



the way out, the little guy was shivering in the darkness.. Successful retrieve and return to the bush! Don't go caving alone again little one Thanks heaps for leading us Darren! **Kazushi Noiri**

Second Saturday: April 13, 2024: Bottom of the Black Hole.

Monica Bollani, David Cooke (Cookie), John Cooper, Damon Fentham, Kim Lake, Berit Lindholm, Emma Lindholm, Andy Morse, Simon Perkins, Danielle Rhoden, Matthew Ryan-East, Barry Weaver and Clive Westlake.

Water still at normal winter levels but definitely down from last Sunday. Started as a group of 7 and 6 but rapidly became a line of 13. At Sump I John left a torch shining in the Priddy Pool Passage sump in the hope that it would be seen at the sump at the bottom of the Black Hole. (NOT SEEN! Retrieved still shining on exit. Appears to be a lot of sand washed in over winter.) 10 people reached the bottom of the Black Hole



courtesy of Monica life lining them all. Left the Black Hole as parties of 3, 6 and 4 but the latter 2 groups merged on route to the Twenty.

All safely out after a 3 hour sporting trip. **Anon** (Prob. **Simon**)

The above photo. and the following two pages are excellent examples of Smartphone photography (It was a Pixel 4 made by Google). courtesy of **David Cooke**.

Second Saturday: 11 May, 2024: Bath / Rods exchange.

John Hurst, Damon Fentham, Tony Molski, Bev Ford, Darren Chapman, Berit Lindholm, Chris George, Craig Holdstock, Wayne Starsmore. Team "B" went down Bath and rigged it with ladders and abseil line. All abseiled down. Team "R" went down Rods and rigged Purple Pot with ladders and line. Team "R" out of Bath and being very keen went back down Rods to explore the Bear Pit, leaving JH to sunbathe. Team B spent a while creating photos in Rods main chamber with BF and BL as the models. BL defected to team "R" whilst team "B" made their way out. Ice-creams all round at Burrington car park then home. 3 hrs, **Wayne**





The Black Hole





The Black Hole



Second Saturday: 08 Jun, 2024: Rhino Rift.

1<sup>st</sup>. Group: Darren, Nicky, John H, Berit, Tom and Simon Perkins, SP descended RH Route to bottom of 3<sup>rd</sup> pitch, where he met Berit and Tom who'd descended the LH Route. After a brief wait they attacked the ascent. Other members of the group descended / ascended various combinations of the LH route, ably assisted by Darren. The whole cave was pre-rigged. **Simon**

In preparation: Thursday 6 June, 2024: Rhino Rift

Mark Easterling, Aidan Harrison, Tony Molski, Wayne Starsmore, Darren Chapman

An evening session was spent rigging both routes in Rhino Rift in preparation for the 2nd Saturday trip. Tony and Bean rigged the righthand route and Wayne and Aidan rigged the left. All went smoothly and Darren declared the rigging "Entirely Adequate".

Saturday 8 June, 2024: Rhino Rift

Early Team - John Hurst, Nicki Pearce, Tom Gibbison, Simon Perkins, Darren Chapman, Berit Lindholm

DeRig Team - Tony Molski, Colin Brenton, Aidan Harrison, Mak Kellaway

The early team set off first - as should always be the way. Simon, Berit and Tom all reaching the bottom via the lefthand route. Darren supervised Nicki and John down and up the first pitch. The rebelay causing them both some issues. The Derig team then turned up and successfully derigged the cave, although the message about leaving the deviation slings in place didn't get through. Look's like there will be another trip next week to put these back! **Wayne**

## We welcome the following new and returning members

These were omitted from earlier Journals by simple Editorial oversight !

### Meeting 21/01/2024

New - Ursula Collie

New - Kazushi Noiri

New - Ian Selby

Rejoin - Isabella Perkins

### Meeting 16/03/2024

New - Andrew Durrant

New - Alfie Durrant

New - Jasmine Durrant

New - Sam Easton

New - James Sheffield

Rejoin - Christopher David Ford Male

Rejoin - Nigel Jackson

### Meeting 20/05/2024

New - Danny Arnold

New - John Arnold

New - Georgina Gallagher

New - Mike Edgar

New - Jason Hares

New - Stephanie Lee

New - Steven Lloyd

New - Ian Matthews

New - Phillip Warwick

Rejoin - Matt Budgen

Rejoin - Adrian Morgan

### Meeting 06/07/2024

New - Lily Arnold

New - Jerome Nichols

## THE MAY BANK HOLIDAY SAW 10 WESSEX MEMBERS HEADING TO THE YSS AT HELWITH BRIDGE FOR A TRADITIONAL YORKSHIRE WEEKEND

### Friday 24th May

Darren and Wayne set off from the Wessex at 9am with a truck full of rope. They arrived at the YSS late afternoon, after enjoying a "Chippy Tea" in Settle and taking out a second mortgage after a spot of light shopping in Booths. Then they spent a productive hour or so packing rope bags for the next day's adventure. Other people turned up throughout the evening.

### Saturday 25th May

After a 9:00am briefing meeting, we all set off to Lost John's on Leck Fell. The following teams were formed:-



#### Bottoming Group

Tony Molski - Rigging Cathedral / Dome route  
Ian Selby - Rigging Support  
Alessio Sancetta - Chief Bag Carrier  
Simon Perkins  
Darren Chapman

#### Round Trip Group

Wayne Starsmore - Rigging Mud / Centipede  
Craig Holdstock - Team Photographer  
Agnieszka Kozłowska (Aga)

#### Through Trip Group

Keith Mason - Rigging Battle Axe / Valhalla  
Monica Bollani

The Bottoming Group got to the bottom and explored the Leck Fell Master cave. They derigged everything from the bottom and up Cathedral / Dome on their way out. The Through Trip Group successfully found their way through Lyle Caverns and the dig to emerge in Notts II. After a look at Curry Inlet, they made their exit via Committee Pot. The Round Trip Group went down Mud / Centipede and up Cathedral / Dome, taking pictures on the way. They then derigged Mud / Centipede and made their way out. All parties arrived back at the cars within 30 minutes of each other and we didn't lose anybody this time!

After a cuppa back at the YSS, we all went for a fantastic curry at the Ruchee in Settle. **Wayne**



Photo: Craig Holdstock

#### Sunday 26th May

The 8:30am briefing meeting decided it would be good to take advantage of the Bradford Winch Meet as many of the entrances to Gaping Gill would be pre-rigged. A plan was formed and everyone set off to Clapham for the long walk up. According to the Nature Trail ticket man (now £2.50 each) all the winch places had sold out by 8am so there was no option for an easy ascent. We split into two teams as follows:-

#### Stream Team

Keith Mason  
Ian Selby  
Alessio Sancetta  
Monica Bollani  
Tony Molski  
Darren Chapman

#### Bar Team

Wayne Starsmore  
Craig Holdstock  
John Hurst  
Agnieszka Kozłowska

The Stream Team went down Stream Passage Pot then to Main Chamber and back to the surface by the Flood Pot route. The Bar Team lost Aga at the first pitch in Bar Pot. For those that have not been there before, the first pitch has a very narrow and intimidating take off. The remainder of the team made their way through Bar Pot to the Main Chamber. This was impressive being flood lit with a lot of water pouring in and full of people. After a photography session, the team made their way back out via Bar Pot, picking up a YSS member (Alan?) on the way to replace Aga.



Photo: Monica Bollani

The Bar Pot team took a while longer than expected (underground for about 6 hours due to being held up by a commercial group of about 15 mostly novices) so options for food were stark (Most Yorkshire pubs stop food at 5pm on Sunday and those that serve late were fully booked). We decided to wander the mean streets of Settle and ended up in the Fisherman Fish and Chip restaurant. Darren managed to trouble a number of old people to give up their tables so we could all get seated and a fine meal was had by all. Retired to the Helwith Bridge for a few beers before bedtime. **Wayne**



### Monday 27th May

It rained all night and the weather forecast for the rest of the day was wet - well it was a bank holiday Monday! With a distinct lack of inspiration and enthusiasm, we all decided not to go caving and settled on a second breakfast in the 3 Peaks Cycle Shop in Settle. Monica, learning Darren's technique from yesterday, managed to free up enough tables for everyone. After an "entirely adequate" breakfast we all made our way home. **Wayne**

Ed: A personal note from Craig on the YSS weekend.

Today was a trip to Gaping Gill. This has been on my to do list for quite a while. This was during the Bradford Winch Meet so everything was pre-rigged. We entered via Bar Pot and then went past the bottom of Flood before going to the main chamber. Bar Pot had an interesting first pitch which was a bit tight and awkward at the top, and then a second larger pitch. Main chamber was impressive seeing the size and helped by the people visiting using the winch. We then came back out via Bar Pot. A second rope had been rigged on the larger pitch so came out the right hand side with a rebelay 3/4 of the way up the pitch. The final pitch was also awkward on the way out\*\*\*. Cracking day and managed to take a couple of pics.\*\*\* **Craig**

\*\*\* Ed: See also Page 202. Craig's comment about the Bar Pot exit elicited a number of replies:

#### Rick Stewart

The tight bit at the top of the first pitch is a bit of a tw\*t on the way out.

#### David Morris

Awesome photos Craig as always. Glad you enjoyed GG via Bar Pot. The top of Bar is interesting, the secret is to extend the descender going down and struggle on the way up. Glad you had fun.

#### Mike Moxon

David Morris or go out of Small Mammal (or even Stile - no rope required there, just grovelling)

#### Michael Thomas

David Morris don't struggle just get the chest jammer off low down unless you are a micro caver.

#### David Morris

Hi Guys, Mike very true but I don't know Stile ? Thanks for that.

#### David Morris

Hi Michael thanks, yes always an alternative. I was just winding Craig up in jest. All the best Guys.



Photo: Craig Holdstock

### 21<sup>st</sup> April 2024. THE WESSEX WENT TO PORTLAND!

Steve's Endeavour to Persil through trip (also passing through Hopeless Hole and Sandy Hole) led by Tim Rose. With Matthew Ryan-East, James Sheffield, Nick Butler (taking the photos) and me. **Monica**





## PORTLAND FROM OUR POET LAUREATE

Mary had a little lamb,  
But this is not that rhyme!  
For five of us went caving  
That started with a climb.

With handline up the cliffside  
We scrambled in the sun  
And entered Steve's Endeavour  
To have some Portland fun!

Through Hopeless Hole we shunted,  
Traversing all the way  
From rift to rift to rift  
To the one called C and A.

Queen's Tunnel led us onward  
To reach the confluence mark,  
Then crawling on our bellies  
We pressed on in the dark.

Following Ariel tunnel,  
Named after Shakespeare's sprite,  
We dropped into Grand Canyon:  
A most impressive sight!

So finally into Persil  
The end was very near,  
And climbing up the ladder,  
We came into the clear.

Thank you Tim for leading,  
And joining us for a brew,  
And to Monica, Nick and James,  
And the Dorset coastline view!

**Matt**



## MORE OF THE DIGGING SCENE



## VIADUCT SINK

Viaduct Sink is situated in idyllic, sylvan surroundings, just upstream of a viaduct on the old Somerset and Dorset Railway, where the track crossed the upper part of the Ham Woods valley. In dry weather the valley stream sinks in the stream bed close to the entrance shaft put in by ATLAS. In wet weather the excess water flows on down valley for a considerable distance past the viaduct before sinking, a little of this water entering the cave in Red Aven, with a lot more water entering the cave as an impressive showerbath into Downside Aven.

Viaduct Sink was first entered by ATLAS in the 1970s, when they were all young and fit. They pushed all the leads thoroughly. The cave ended in a too tight stream passage. This was before the availability of cordless hammer drills, and the passage was unwilling to yield to the chemical persuasion techniques of the day (plaster charges). Eventually ATLAS (by then mostly Simon-Meade King working on his own) transferred their attention to a side passage, The Somme, a relict passage nearly filled with sediment and rubble. He got his revenge on the obstinate stream passage by back-filling it. The Somme in turn was abandoned when the logistics of digging became too much. Eventually the cave was closed about 15 years ago due to persistent vandalism of the gate.

Fast forward to the present day and the availability of cordless hammer drills, and Rich Witcombe realised that modern cave enlargement techniques made the streamway end a viable dig again. However, there was not a queue of ATLAS diggers keen to take up the challenge of this, so Rich head hunted me and Mike (Kushy) Kousiounis, as we had acquired a reputation for digging in difficult conditions in Sludge Pit Hole. Rich fixed me with his glittering eye, hinting at a Windsor Hill Master Cave and extolling the virtues of Viaduct Sink, the gentle gradient of the known cave and the potential for lots of open cave before it hit the water table on its way to St Andrew's Well. At the time ATLAS were also digging nearby Rock Farm Cave in an attempt to find the way into underground course of the Windsor Hill Stream. In due course I joined ATLAS for these and other reasons that I won't go into here.

In October 2018 ATLAS reopened the cave and installed a new gate engineered by Dave Speed. The cave had cleaned its act up a bit during the 15 years of closure and The Grimpen Mire had drained itself and The Somme had become less Somme-like. Although progress through the cave requires some grovelling, some sections are relatively spacious, hinting at significant possibilities of mature cave to be found if a breakthrough can be achieved.

The stream end was soon un-backfilled by me, Dave King, Mike Kushy, Courtenay James, and Monica Bollani in a handful of sessions, regaining a useful small chamber. The Toolshed, where one end of a backfilled





Photo: Craig Holdstock

GG Main Chamber



oxbow came in. From there the stream passage descended steeply but soon became too tight. However, from then on only me and Dave King stayed committed to the project.

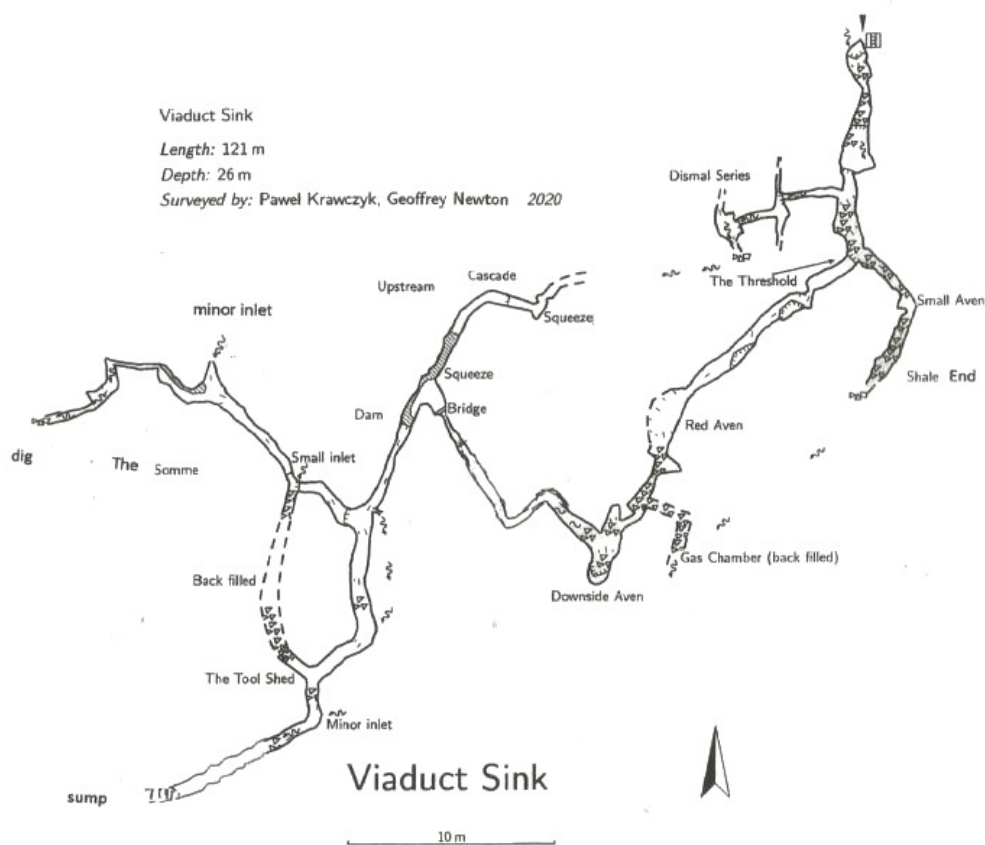
Unfortunately, neither Dave nor I had initially a piece of paper allowing us to acquire the chemicals necessary to enlarge cave passages. While this problem was being addressed, I made a couple of metres progress by simply using hammer and chisel. However, it became obvious by then that (a) we really would need to use chemicals and (b) it would be a good idea to divert the stream elsewhere to make life more comfortable. I thought that it should be possible to put in a dam and divert the stream into The Somme. The Somme is a side passage ending in a mud and rubble choke. It normally takes a tiny trickle from a couple of inlets. I was happy to leave the details of the dam and pipe to ATLAS resident engineer Dave King and in due course we constructed a concrete dam at the lip of a small waterfall and the stream water was duly piped into The Somme. This operated well for 4 years with minimal maintenance and served its purpose for the duration of the dig. We had hoped that the diverted water might clear out the choke at the end of the Somme. This did not happen but at least the water all drained away with very little backing up, even under high water conditions. Incidentally, the 1 inch diameter pipe took the entire flow of the water even under high water conditions. As water levels rose the speed of water through the pipe increased to compensate. This brought home to me that flow times can be misleading as an indication of open cave beyond a sump or other obstruction.

I resisted ATLAS advice to back-fill The Somme and we settled on taking spoil out to Downside Aven which meant taking spoil out through Passchendaele, a muddy crawl with an S-bend halfway along its length. Chemical supply was still a problem. A few people offered their services but when push came to shove, nobody had the time to spare. Eventually first me and then Dave acquired the paper and the equipment, and we were in business. Mike had also got kitted out by then, but he had been tempted away by other opportunities. Progress enlarging the stream passage was slow and steady. We mostly worked it on Saturday mornings before joining ATLAS on their Saturday afternoon digs. It was a gruelling job for what was mostly two people, taking the spoil all the way out to Downside Aven, where it was stacked behind a drystone wall which was built for us by Rich Witcombe. We made the project less unpleasant by draining Passchendaele and removing most of the boulder choke downstream of Bridge Junction. but the lengthy process of moving the spoil to its final resting place still meant that we were only banging once a month on average.

The enlarged stream passage descended quite steeply. We could not make it as big as we would have wished for our comfort, as the storage capacity of Downside Aven is finite. We had some help from Pawel Krawczyk and a few others from time to time.

It was obvious that the old survey of 1978 became less accurate the further into the cave it got. Pawel has a Disto-X and he kindly also resurveyed the cave. The survey printed here is a draft with corrections made by manual cut and paste, as opposed to electronically, as Pawel has been occupied with more serious matters in Ukraine. The most notable difference between the new and 1978 survey is that The Somme, far from converging with the stream passage, is now seen to be running parallel to it about 20 metres away and at a higher level.

To cut a long story short, our dig in the stream passage ran into a sump after 8-10 metres. The sump was still too tight and was mostly full of silt, gravel and bang debris. Dave does not like to be beaten. He had in his





digging Aladdin's Cave, a battery powered bilge pump. He rigged up a selection of filters to keep most of the grit out of the pump, and also a priming pump and he carried on pumping out the sump before each session. The water was sent back up passage and discharged into The Somme to join the other diverted water. However, the sump did not stay pumped out and it filled up again between sessions in dry weather and indeed filled up during sessions in wet weather due to small trickle inlets. As work progressed it became obvious that the sump was continuing to get deeper and probing with drain rods indicated that it was not going to end soon. As the sump was enlarged and cleared of mud and gravel, the volume of water to be pumped out soon increased until pumping out times became impractical. It was also obvious that if we persisted the quantity of spoil to be removed would overwhelm the capacity of Downside Aven. And there was no guarantee that even if the sump was passed, that the ongoing passage would be large enough to allow passage of cavers without the need for further chemical enlargement.

Dave and I then transferred our attentions to The Somme and the stream was sent back down into the stream passage where it belongs. The Somme is a relict passage which would be larger than the stream passage, if not for a fill of mud, rubble and flowstone which has turned it into a low crawl. The Somme was not an easy option; disposing of spoil was just as difficult as before. The plan was just to dig out a body length or two of fill at the terminal choke and then reassess the situation. The Somme soon deserved its name again as there are two tiny inlets in The Somme, providing enough water to liquify the mud fill as we dug. Dave soon found other things to do with Saturday mornings so much of the time I was digging solo. Progress became even slower after I revived a dig in His Lordship's Hole.

However, after less than 2 metres progress, The Somme copied the stream passage dig by descending into a jagged tight mud choked sump. It is slightly less hopeless than the stream end dig, for four reasons. 1. The passage is larger than the stream end sump, so less bang required. 2. The sump has the potential to be siphoned rather than pumped out. 3. The sump appears to be shallower than the stream passage sump and 4., when the jelly-like mud fill is taken to Downside Aven, the water falling down the aven washes the mud away into the immature streamway hidden under the floor of the aven and also into the end stream via Passchendaele, thus not taking up precious spoil stacking space.

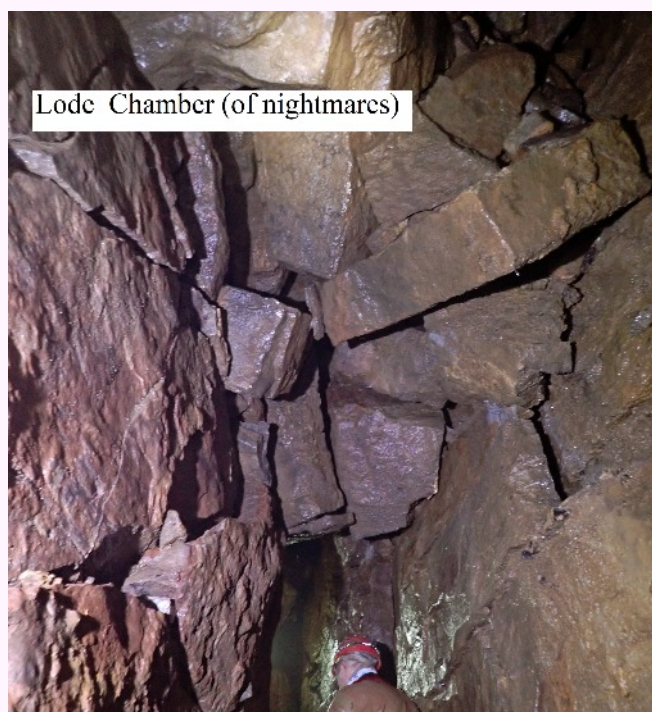
However, The Somme was not a sensible solo dig. As a final last throw of the dice, I looked behind the ATLAS back fill in a potential passage leading off of The Somme. A couple of short sessions digging out mud and rubble proved that it was a passage not an alcove and had not been dug before, but alas it was an unpromising inlet blocked with flowstone. Time to admit defeat and move on. At least here is now a reasonably accurate survey of the cave. **Geoff Newton**

## RETURN TO GREBE SWALLET.

Thursday 21 Dec 2023

Well I was moaning on the UK Caving Forum about its content or rather lack of it when I had a message from Chris Binding. Did I realise my trip there was ten years ago and would I like another? Chris is rather peripheral to the Mendip club scene but I have always got on with him well. He is in the rather unique position on Mendip being a caver who owns his own cave. He inherited Grebe from Willie Stanton who bought the land after the 1968 floods opened the cave part mine. Willie did a lot to preserve features particularly the 18th century hand prints and signatures in the mud. We agreed to meet at the MCG hut which is a twenty minute walk from Grebe. I took along my carer and bag carrier Mike Wise. We were accompanied by MCG member Nick Thorne to avail ourselves of the facilities. As requested Mr Binding brought the cakes.

A short entrance ladder leads to the upper cave then there is a 12m climb where Mr Binding insisted on lifelining me. Well really but you do as you are told with the cave owner. Then on to Sidcot Chamber and Young Clark's Passage featuring the







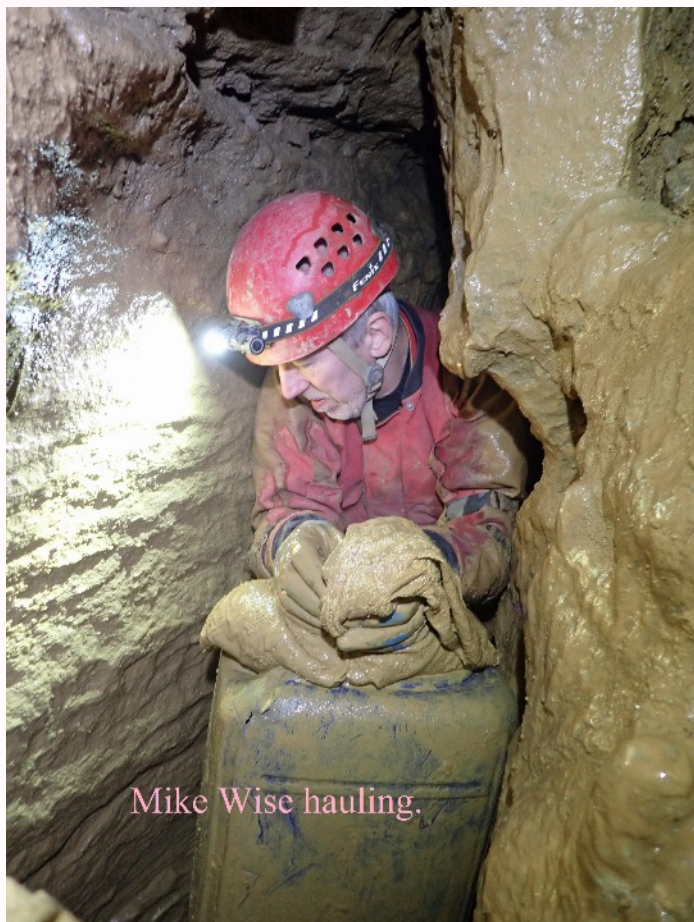
The proprietor in his cave.

inscriptions. Giant mud cracks are preserved behind a Willie wall here. The old digs continue here but for over ten years the diggers have been pushing "Perdition" straight along after Sidcot Chamber. They have achieved a lot since I was there ten years ago. The dig passage is fashioned "the Willie way" with the tight bits removed and most of the deeper water drained. We went to the end of "Perdition" and hauled out some bags and tubs of spoil.

On the way out we went to Lode Chamber. Chris had not been there for five years and if the intention was to scare me he duly succeeded. The roof is one of the worst chokes I have ever seen. After the brief scare it was time to wash up back at the MCG and eat the last of the cakes. I had better go back in another ten years.

**Nick Chipchase.**

All photos by Nick Chipchase



Mike Wise hauling.



Perdition



# Library

## Admin

Easy Access Chocolate Box in the Library.

PLEASE ensure that money for items taken from this box is placed in the red money box on the wall. This was £1.00 short (2 chocolate bars) when I last carried out the weekly stock check.

The club only just breaks even on the cost of these items, and it would be a great pity if this facility has to be stopped. If you require chocolate and don't have the correct money on you, please at least leave an IOU in the honesty tin.

Thanks to John Cooper for sourcing, we have some high quality colour Swildon's Hole surveys for sale at the hut. Price £15.00. Ali

## Publications

Recent additions to the club Library below

Cave and Karst Science, Volume 50 Number 3

Cave and Karst Science, Volume 51 Number 1

Cave Diving Group Newsletter No 230

Cave Diving Group Newsletter No 231

Grampian Speleological Group Vol 5 No1

Fairy Cave Quarry, Cerberus #1 1977

Lodmore Hole report, PH Henry June 2004

Below Belize, Queen Mary College 88 and 89

Descent magazine April May 2024 #297

Craven Pothole Club Record Jan 2024 #153

Craven Pothole Club Record April 2024 #154

The Cave Fauna of Thailand, Jantarit and Ellis

Now the Wessex library is a huge source of information for research and general caving knowledge, maybe even enjoyment. Myself as Librarian and Aleksandra Ciesielka ordinary committee member will endeavour to provide some sort of order to the chaos.

## A few house keeping rules

1 Put it back in the place you found it ! Please.

2 If you borrow it sign it out, please.

3 Ask me before you dump 30 years of old caving journals in the library because you don't want them at home anymore! We have enough spare journals in the upstairs stores to last a lifetime of sorting. If the HQ catches fire you will see it burn from France !

4 Personally the information in the library should be available to all, I'm going to go out on a limb and put some journals and books out that have historically gone missing. Prove me wrong and let me find them next month. I won't be shy to correct mistakes. It's going to take time to get it into order but we have some ideas, to improve access to all.

5 Any Valuable items left at HQ are best locked in the lockers provided and the code passed onto the collector. If it goes missing from the library, it can be difficult to track down.

**Michael Thomas, Aleksandra Ciesielka**



## NICK CHIPCHASE'S QUANTOCK RAMBLES.

Continuing with Shaft Number Two:

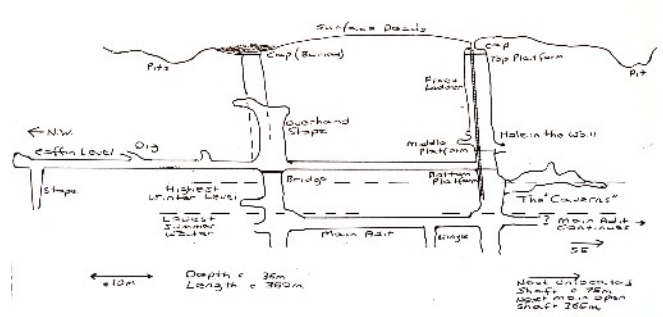
This shaft is 365 m away from Shaft One in a direct line and further into the central mine area. Work started in the same way as at Shaft One. 900mm twin wall pipes were installed to reach the 1821 cap. (Lee Hawkswell and Les

Williams sorted those for us). Tony Boycott helped breach the cap. Again we had a 4m wide shaft but ending in water. Connor Roe came along to dive there but found no way on. Later we were surprised to find no water in the shaft just a drain hole in the corner. Mike Wise, Brian Johnson and I built the 25m of fixed ladder with a very awkward (for Mike) construction at the top platform. The cap here is slightly domed and has some long straws. There was no sign of timbering anywhere but you could see ledges and niches where it originally went. We could not understand why there was no adit but one very wet day all became apparent. Sub surface drainage streams down the shaft walls forming a small stream at the bottom. Tons of silt and all the timbering now resides at the bottom.

During the drought we started a dig at the drainage point. We came up with all sorts of problems. Collapse, spoil disposal and buried timbers. Being further upstream in the mine we thought that there may have been a better chance to find the adit. Bearing in mind that we have a 7m water level range from Spring to Winter as the adit still operates in a confined way. (more anon). I designed a frame for the bottom where we installed vertical decking boards. A pulley system then transferred the spoil to half ton dumpy bags which could be stacked in the restricted area at the shaft base. Just as things got interesting in came the rain in July and the water has backed up to the top of the 7m range again. If we can get a

licence extension for next summer and less rain we hope to make more progress. **Nick Chipchase**

All photos by Nick Chipchase



**E**ditor: I'm trying to keep up with recent events. Articles, accounts and photographs which merit inclusion in this Journal have taken priority over transcriptions from earlier Log-Book entries. The back-log remains stubbornly close to a year's log-book entries (Journal 362 brought it up to 20 October, 2023). Perhaps the Autumn and Winter will see some slackening off from the current high rate of caving and digging activity and allow some catching-up, but this is not a plea for editorial leisure! **Noel**

**Back Cover**

Singing River Mine

Photo: **Bill Nix**



