Wessex Cave Club

Vol. 37 No. 369
March 2026

Ubique Primus

Chasing Draughts in Longwood Valley Sink

Filming with the Wessex in the 1960s

Cave Diving Expedition in the Peloponnese

Selinitsa - Craig Holdstock

Editorial

Before getting into this issue, I'd like to note and apologise for a misspelling of Tony Radmall's name in the previous issue. I'm grateful to him for bringing it to my attention. Accuracy matters, especially with names, and I appreciate the patience of contributors while these things are put right and, as always, I'm appreciative for any and all feedback received.

Of course my thanks would not be complete without mentioning John Cooper for his efforts helping me with the journal.

In this edition I have been intrigued to read about some of the historical activities at the Wessex, especially being a new caver myself. It really goes to show the extraordinary effort and teamwork the original explorers have put into making these sites accessible for the rest of us.

Also don't forget to join our WhatsApp group to find all of the latest happenings!

Sam Chung,
Journal Editor

Cover Photo:
Long Churn by Bill Nix

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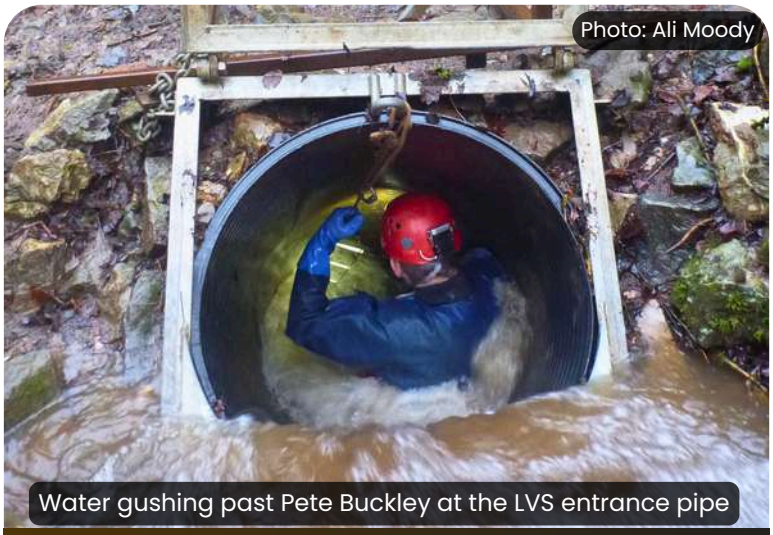
Photo: Ali Moody

Water gushing past Pete Buckley at the LVS entrance pipe

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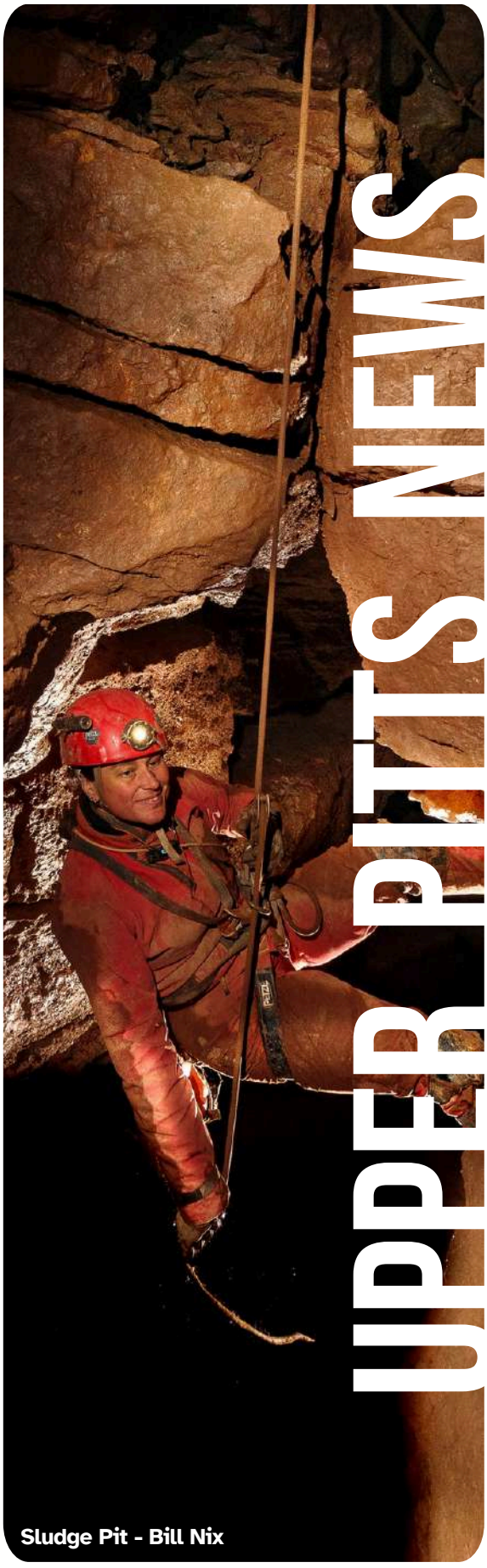
Scan the QR Code to join the Wessex Cave Club WhatsApp community.



Sludge Pit - Bill Nix

UNDERLAND FILM IN BRISTOL

Watershed in Bristol will be screening the film Underland - based on Robert Macfarlane's best-selling book from 2nd - 15th April. A cinematic documentary that voyagess into worlds below.
To see the trailer and to book visit:

https://www.watershed.co.uk/whatson/13887/underland

JOIN US FOR CANTABRIA - 1 SPACE!

Jenna is offering her space for the second half of the club trip to Cantabria, which is currently sold out.
8th -14th August 2026. £250
Please contact Jenna Overstolz directly on FaceBook for more information.

SWILDON'S HOLE CLOSURE

Please note that Swildon's Hole will be closed on Saturday 13th June 2026 for sole use by the BCRC Medical Conference.
More information about this event can be found on:

https://mendipcaverescue.org/index.php/bcrc-medical-conference-2026

UPPER PITTS FIVE YEAR FORWARD MAINTENANCE PLAN

A survey of Upper Pitts has been done and a report produced. You can find a copy loaded on the club web site here:

https://wessex-cave-club.org/members-pages/upper-pitts-development/

WHITE RABBIT, WHITE PIT, AND SAND PIT

Following the recent land ownership change access has now been agreed. The key to White Pit has been replaced in the Understairs Cupboard at Upper Pitts. Digging at White Rabbit's Hole has resumed. Contact the digging team for information.

PEN PARK HOLE WARDEN

More volunteer wardens are required for Pen Park Hole, could this be you?
This cave was formed by rising geothermal water and is one of the best examples of a hydrothermal cave in the UK.
Please contact Wayne Starsmore if you are interested in this role.

INTERNET IS BACK

After a long hiatus, we are happy to confirm that the internet and WiFi is now back up and running at Upper Pitts, thanks to the efforts of Les Williams, Tony Radmall, Andy Thompson, John Cooper, Sam Chung and others. This required the digging of a trench to install new fibre cabling.

NEW MEMBERS

Please extend a warm welcome to our newest club members:

Michael Smith	P: Nicholas Ashford S: Simon Clow
Alistair Hawthorn	P: Nicholas Ashford S: Alice Pearce
Dom Hector	P: Mark Easterling S: Darren Chapman
Simon Courtney	P: Nicholas Ashford S: Alice Pearce
Yana Stashkevich	P: Wayne Starsmore S: Clarie Miles
Jemima Hamnett	P: R. Hamnett S: Ali Moody
Chris Franklin	P: Steve Lloyd S: Sam Chung
Dhanvir Soor	P: Sam Chung S: Courtenay James
Hollie London	P: David Morrison S: Courtenay James
Edward Hilton	P: Kevin Hilton S: O. Hilton
Robyn Crowter	P: Kim Lake S: Sam Chung
Jemma Anderson	P: Sam Chung S: Courtenay James
Tanya Ta	P: Sam Chung S: Courtenay James
Xiao Jin	P: Sam Chung S: Alessio Sancetta
Claire Sharp	P: Alistair Smith S: Paul Wilman
Matthew Jones	Rejoining
Mitchell Parry	Rejoining
Stuart Waldren	Rejoining

COME CAVING EVERY 2nd Saturday

New to the club? The Wessex Cave Club runs a trip every second Saturday of the month. Tailored to members of all abilities, whether you are new to caving or have been doing it for a while, come join in the fun and meet other members.

2nd Saturday Trip, 10th January 2026
By Clarie Miles

The weather was clear and bright, but just above freezing outside.
Despite Wayne's rather off-putting description, 13 of us gathered at the hut to visit the relatively recently discovered passages in Stock Hill Mine Cave. The entrance is next door to the nature reserve, in lead mining country. Downstream heads to the Hunters', but no connection with the cellar has been found yet.
The entrance is an exploratory mine shaft, with three fixed metal ladders. Onwards is up and then down the death slide, eventually reaching a large (for Mendip) rift chamber where the route to the upstream route separates from downstream.
We went down past the entrance to the downstream end of the upstream series and then through a crawl past the turning to the upstream entrance to the downstream series.
More crawling, thrutching, awkward rifts and mud (there's a theme to this cave). Notable was COVID hill (thankfully with fixed handline) and COVID crawl. These were incredibly muddy, to the point that you couldn't get purchase with your knees and progress became very slow. Then there was the slightly hair-raising muddy rift with fixed footplates, perfectly placed for those with longer legs.
More crawly stuff and we made it to Early Dors pitch and down into the final chamber which thankfully had room for us to stand and even walk around a few paces from side to side. There was a couple of feet of small squeeze to see the bitter end.
Outwards was the same, in reverse and mostly uphill. More crawls, slippery rifts and lots of mud. Particularly notable for me was the Covid Hill, which in downwards direction offers a great opportunity to slide off the end of the rope into a very narrowly avoided hole.
With the vast majority the group making it to the very end chamber, and everyone making it out, the trip was declared a success. Thanks to Wayne for organising this unexpectedly enjoyable and certainly challenging trip.

Upcoming Trips

- **11th April**
  Upper Flood Swallet
- **9th May**
  Swildon's, Pirate Chamber
- **13th June**
  Thrupe Lane Swallet / Hobnail

If you would like to attend any of these events please drop an e-mail to the Caving Secretary, Wayne Starsmore.

caving@wessex-cave-club.org

Bank Holiday Meets

We also run trips outside of the Mendips, coinciding with the bank holiday weekends. Spaces are limited, so please contact Wayne Starsmore if you are interested in coming along.
e-mail: *caving@wessex-cave-club.org*

Easter – 3rd to 6th April
South Wales
We have been invited to stay at the Stump at Penwyllt, the Wealden Cave and Mine Society cottage. Nearby caves include OFD I, II and III, Pant Mawr and Cwm Dwr.

May Day – 1st to 4th May
Yorkshire
We are booked into Ivy Cottage in Horton-in-Ribblesdale, the HQ of the Craven Pothole Club. We will arrange a number of permits for the likes of Lost John's, Shuttleworth Pot, etc. If there are any particular caves you would like to visit then please let Wayne know. As it is Yorkshire, most trips will involve SRT.

Spring Bank Holiday – 22nd to 25th May
Yorkshire
We have beds booked at The Dump in Brackenbotton, the HQ of the Bradford Pothole Club. This is a winch meet weekend at Gaping Gill so many of the entrances to the system will be rigged (Bar Pot, Stream Pot, etc) giving the opportunity of doing a variety of through trips. If there are any particular caves you would like to visit then please let Wayne know. As it is Yorkshire, most trips will involve SRT.

Summer Bank Holiday – 28th to 31st August
Derbyshire
We are booked into the Chapel at Castleton, the HQ of the TSG. Martyn and Jess have kindly volunteered to show us the delights the area has to offer. This may include Peak Cavern, Titan, Giants, etc. Again, if there are any particular caves you would like to visit then please let Wayne know. There will be a good mix of both SRT and non-SRT trip available.

Kat's Thai Night

Kat Rosier organised a very successful Thai Night to coincide with the January Second Saturday. Many thanks to her and Andy Thompson who assisted.


Photo: Sean Howe

CHASING DRAUGHTS IN LONGWOOD VALLEY SINK

BY ALISON MOODY

The Early Years

It is fortunate that by nature cave diggers tend to be optimistic, as few Mendip sites yield to a minimum effort, with most often involving years of work. Helping at Longwood Valley Sink (LVS) as a teenager, little did I realise that it would be another fifty years, involving several phases of work by different teams and the combined effort and large financial contributions of many people before this site would finally yield anything of significance.

At around 55sq km the area feeding the risings at Cheddar is Mendip's largest catchment, with feeders extending as far as Tyning's Barrows Swallet to the west and Tor Hill Swallet to the east. This area includes many well-known caves including Longwood Swallet, the Charterhouse/G.B. System, Manor Farm, Upper Flood and Wigmore.

LVS is located in the Longwood Valley Reserve, some 90m down valley of the Rhino Rift valley junction. Under normal conditions most of the Longwood stream sinks in an obvious swallet, Main Sink, a few metres down valley from the Longwood blockhouse. Several small intermittent sinks are known to exist in the valley floor both upstream and downstream of Main Sink. Under flood conditions Main Sink can become overwhelmed by the size of the stream, which then continues down valley, partly or totally disappearing before reaching LVS. During severe floods and if the LVS entrance is blocked, water can reach Black Rock Gate where it flows off down the Cheddar Gorge road.

The earliest recorded work at LVS appears to be in early June 1968 when a Mendip Caving Group (MCG) member, Vic Ingraham assisted by a few scouts removed a few boulders at the site revealing a small rift with a noticeable draught and blocked by a large boulder. The dig was considered worthwhile, but it was decided that further work should be left until permission could be gained. A month later on the 10th of July 1968, Mendip was hit by the Great Flood, which caused devastation to the villages of the Chew valley and Cheddar area and had a profound effect on the local caves, including the demise of the Forty Foot Pot in Swildon's Hole. The following weekend an MCG group inspecting the effect of the flood in the Longwood valley recorded that the "Longwood Valley Dig" had been filled with rocks and debris. At the end of July, three Axbridge Caving Group (ACG) members

removed some debris from the site mentioning that a possible passage led off. Returning late August, a small MCG team, who also referred to the dig as Lower Longwood Swallet, noted the ACG work and in a three hour session regained their earlier point, reporting vegetation in the hole and a strong draught. The MCG listed Longwood Valley Dig as a club dig in their January 1969 newsletter, but no further details of the dig appear to have been recorded, although it seems likely that they may have started a shaft a little higher up the valley side. Around this time this dig was sometimes referred to as The Blowhole.


Photo: Phil Hendy

Pete Moody and Ali Moody (nee Hooper) at the LVS dig in 1974

The next recorded phase of work was by a Wessex team, led by Wally Willcocks in March 1974 who reported that a low tunnel in the valley side appeared to connect with a dug shaft. On 7th of April, WW and Phil Hendy rigged a pulley system and pulled several large boulders from the shaft. A couple of weeks later, a team which included WW, Pete Moody, Chris Murray and the author spent a weekend at the dig, during which a very unstable 6m deep hole was opened up. The following Saturday most of the same team plus Aubrey Newport and PH, fitted some superficial shoring, and PM was given the dubious honour of the first descent of a tight sharp loose cherty rift, (now known as Main Rift), passing a constriction of jammed boulders partway down to reach a mud floor at a depth of around 12m. Excitement was short lived as ahead the rift pinched out and the draught appeared to come from an impenetrable boulder slope. With a major logistical problem of shoring and digging this site and no obvious way on enthusiasm waned, although an oil drum entrance was installed at some stage in the late 1970s.

In 1981 a mixed Wessex/ATLAS team took up the challenge. To aid spoil removal it was decided to construct an inclined adit from the surface to the top of the rift, some 5m below.

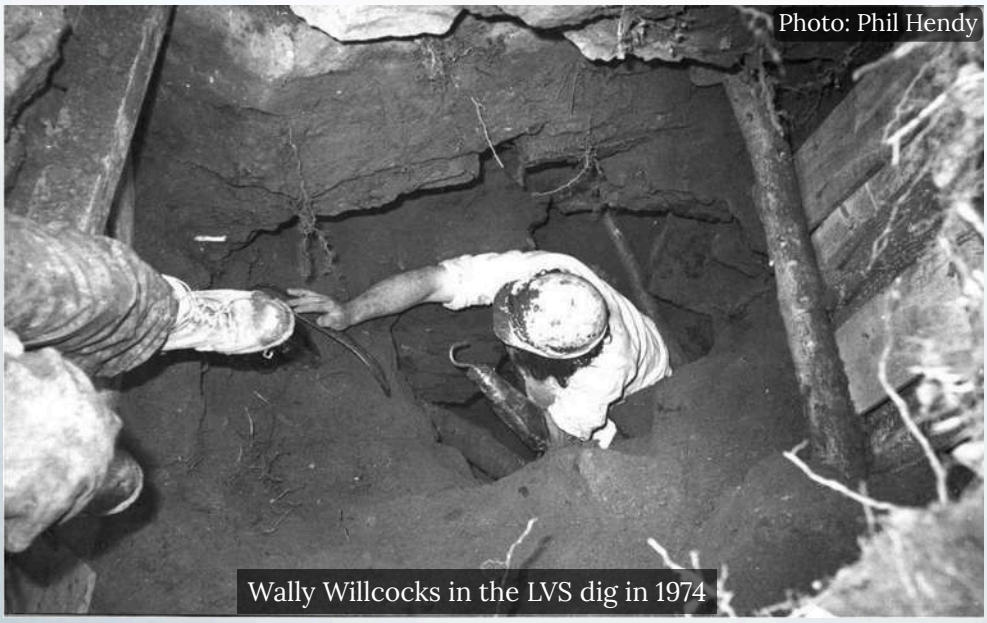
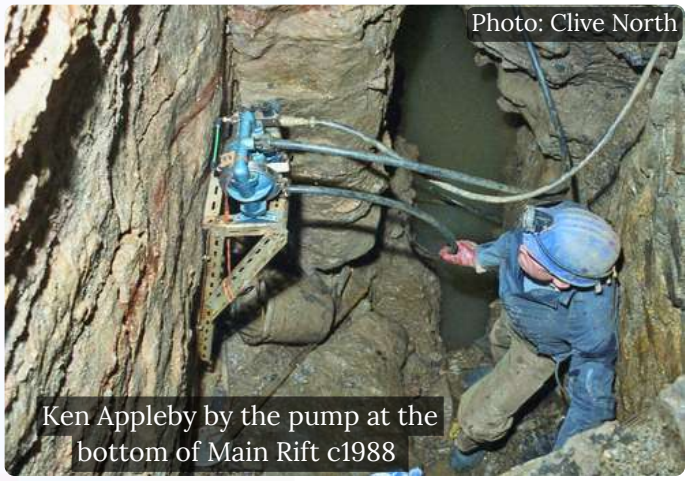


Photo: Phil Hendy

Wally Willcocks in the LVS dig in 1974

The first part was constructed using timber and corrugated iron by Les Oxborough, a member of the East Somerset Caving Club and ex-Royal Engineer, with the assistance of Tony Audsley, while the final section involved team members blasting through 2m of solid rock. With the adit completed and a winch installed, a concerted digging effort led by ATLAS resumed in 1984, and vast amounts of debris were

hauled to the surface. The unstable north end of the rift was supported with timber shoring to allow work to continue vertically downwards and in 1986 at a depth of 15m from the surface the diggers encountered a 45 degree sloping mud floor that led down to a narrow mud filled slot and effectively the bottom of the rift. Attention moved to the far end of the rift where after a breakthrough into just over 2m of low open passage, a completely mud-filled bouldery zone was entered. Digging conditions turned even worse as several wet winters resulted in ponding water and a quagmire of mud. A trial with a sludge pump from Oakhill Brewery proved unsuccessful and in 1988 the problem was eventually solved with the purchase of an expensive compressed air pump and compressor, although up to two hours pumping was required every session to drain the dig before work could start.



Ken Appleby by the pump at the bottom of Main Rift c1988

To save hauling debris to the surface a retaining wall was built across the rift, but frustratingly walling rock had to be brought back in from the surface, with some even collected from Black Rock Quarry at the bottom of the Longwood valley. The wall eventually reached a height of over 4m, but despite a massive effort the dig stubbornly refused to yield. A solid rockface ahead had forced work downwards, increasing the problems of flooding. In 1990, with the mud pit nearly 3m deep, the team were forced to concede defeat. The main diggers for this phase were Clive North, Rich Witcombe, Ken Appleby, Pauline Mason, Simon Meade-King and Janet North, with assistance from Dave Morrison, Duncan Frew, Nigel Graham, Jim Rands, Colin Rogers et al.

Although ATLAS moved back to Thrupe Lane Swallet, LVS remained of interest and refusing to be beaten, a plan was made to investigate a couple of small, adjacent descending tubes that led off from the top of Main Rift, which the geologist Willie Stanton had suggested could be a Triassic proto-cave. In January 1993, work principally by CN and RW started on enlarging and merging the tubes with explosives, with the resultant passage being given the name Triassic Tunnel. A tramway for spoil removal was installed and because of the small numbers working, the debris was thrown down Main Rift, backfilling the abandoned lower passage. After achieving some 11m of slow and expensive progress, by December 1994, the diggers concluded that their time and money would be more fruitfully spent elsewhere.

At this stage work at LVS basically stopped and over the next twenty years the oil drum entrance became buried under silt. Floods damaged the adit eventually leading to its collapse and blockage resulting in LVS no longer acting as an effective overflow sink.

Flood Relief work and the next phase of digging

The extremely wet winter of 2012/2013 brought the issue of drainage in the Longwood valley to a head. Main Sink had become obstructed with silt and debris. Flood water frequently reached Black Rock Gate to flow off down the B3135 Cheddar Gorge road causing considerable damage and resulting in it being closed to all traffic. After a couple of months of major inconvenience to local residents, a significant loss to the Cheddar tourist trade and with no obvious solution, the local cavers were consulted.

On the 13th of February 2013 a combined team of people including cavers (Stuart McManus, CN, RW and the author) plus Chris Billinghurst as a representative from the landowners Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT) and Bob Corns from Natural England convened at LVS. RW was able to recognise the exact location of the original entrance and within a couple of hours

the grid over the oil drum was uncovered and several diversionary dams constructed to send all of the stream into LVS. Over the next few days further work was carried out by Charterhouse Caving Company (CCC), SWT and cavers to re-enforce the dams and keep the entrance grill unblocked. By the following Friday, the Cheddar Gorge road was being repaired to finally reopen on the 21st of February after a closure of 88 days.

Clearly further measures were required to prevent this situation reoccurring during future flood events and a multi-agency meeting was convened to discuss options. Linda Wilson, as CCC Conservation and Access Officer, acted as Project Coordinator and over the next few months a considerable amount of work was completed by cavers working with CCC and SWT volunteers. As the valley is an SSSI all work had to be carried out with the agreement of Natural England. Over several hard sessions Main Sink was opened up to take more water, including the removal of a complete tree trunk. Attention then turned to LVS where Sedgemoor District Council agreed to fund the cost of a digger to excavate the LVS oil drum entrance.

Digging out the old LVS oil drum entrance in 2013

A new 3m length of heavy duty plastic pipe was provided by Highways England and Cheddar Caves paid for a new gate. The diversionary dam was re-enforced, faced with stone and steps constructed down to the entrance. The area was tidied up and items such as the old winch on the adit removed. Agreement was reached between SWT and CCC for digging to resume in LVS as a means of improving flood drainage. Several teams were keen to take on the challenge and the Read's Assault Team having just completed the work in Read's Cavern to open up a safer route via Zed Alley to the Read's sump at the bottom of Browne-Stewart Series, bypassing a very dangerous and mobile boulder ruckle, were looking for a new project. We were fortunate in gaining permission to work the site on behalf of CCC and work started in October 2013, with both of the sites investigated by the ATLAS thought to be of interest. One of the team, John Gisborne, an excellent engineer constructed a winch that fitted perfectly over the top of the new pipe. Unfortunately, the wet winter of 2013/2014 caused damage to the pipe area walling and also deposited further flood debris at the bottom of the entrance rift. This was a common theme in LVS of one step forward and two steps back that would be played out over the following years. From March 2014, effort concentrated on the lower ATLAS dig with a plan of avoiding ponding problems by blasting along the narrow rift at a slightly higher level. The washed in tennis balls jammed in the rift provided an obvious name. Slow forward progress was achieved along Tennis Ball Rift using a combination of drilling, banging and clearing, but after a few metres the ever narrowing passage forced work at a lower level where we encountered the same problems as ATLAS with ponding water. In June the rift effectively ended at a vertical wall with only a 2cm wide onward crack. An attempt was made to follow the wall downwards and an undercut to the right was also investigated but ponding water and a lack of anything obvious made both of these options impractical. The main team for this phase of digging were Pete Buckley, John Cooper, JG, Geoff Newton and the author,

with occasional assistance from numerous other people notably Andrew Atkinson, Emma Gisborne and PM. RW also joined us when possible and continued his excellent walling work on the surface. In August 2014 attention turned to Triassic Tunnel which RW and CN had abandoned partly as the result of the workface flooding. Encouragingly there was a slight draught coming from a couple of tiny tubes leading down dip on the far side of a delightfully stagnant puddle. The puddle was drained, accumulated flood debris was cleared, and lengths of conveyer belt laid along the approach passage to make spoil removal easier. Little did we realise that this was the start of a four year project, which extended Triassic Tube to a total length of 30m with frugal rewards for our efforts except for a blind flowstone covered chimney and the 10m deep chemically enlarged PSS Rift, so named after one of the diggers was hospitalised with Paget Schroetter Syndrome caused by overdeveloped shoulder muscles from hauling buckets. The logistics of working this passage meant that if a team of seven was not available spoil removal to the surface was time consuming and had to be completed in stages. A small intermittent draught is evident in Triassic Tunnel as the conveyor belt is often dry, but its origin is not obvious and beyond the chimney enthusiasm for the dig waned along with the diminishing passage size. In 2017, PSS was briefly reassessed as a dig site but after a few sessions abandoned again when the bottom of the rift pinched out to a few centimetres width and water was found to pond up. Every winter, digging sessions were often thwarted by wet weather and flooding and it became a constant battle to clear the base of Main Rift and Tennis Ball Rift to keep drainage open. It was also observed that the final section of Triassic Tunnel sumped in extreme weather. During 2017 the core team moved their main efforts to Brimble Pit, although the dig at the end of Triassic Tunnel was kept ticking over by JC who would chisel and drill mid-week ready for an occasional banging or clearance trip by the team. JG expressed interest in investigating the draughting boulder ruckle halfway down Main Rift and so started work. By the end of 2018, JG (aided principally by JC & GN) put in a dozen trips stabilising the entry to Tickle Choke, as the boulder blockage became known, and also observed from vegetation jammed between the boulders that the choke acted as an outflow for water in flood conditions. Meanwhile, the ongoing passage at the end of Triassic had shrunk to a fist-sized hole. Although water could be heard falling down a drop ahead, after one hundred and eighty trips in LVS since 2013 and £1500.00 spent on explosives, for 40m of passage, we concluded that the ATLAS were correct and there must be better places on Mendip to dig. The main additional diggers for this second phase in order of number of trips were Mike Kousiounis, Lee Venning, Jake Parrish, Chris Milne, and Tim Ball.

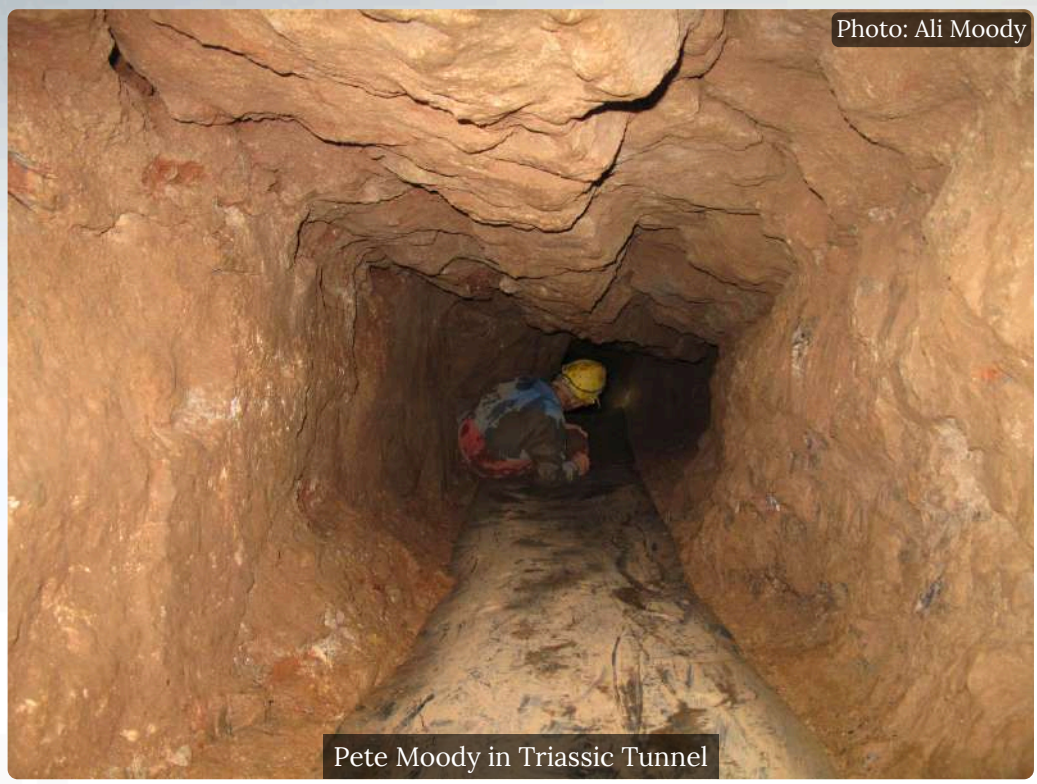


Photo: Ali Moody

Pete Moody in Triassic Tunnel

There was a break in activity until the end of 2021. During this three-year hiatus there was a

continuing dig at Bagpit (the ancient ice cave discovered in 2018) and then the Covid pandemic. In 2020/2021, the team began the Cheddar Hill Dig (a liquid mud, high CO^2, "make a cave" nightmare) where after seventy-four trips, we had increased the length of Mendip's caves by a mere 25m and gained two new core recruits, John Biffin and Lee Hawkswell, and thoughts turned once again to LVS. In December the team returned to the beast to assess the digs, concluding that the original sites were all pretty hopeless except for JG's dig in Tickle Choke. During this session boulders pulled out of Tickle Choke by JG and JB revealed a view into an open vertical rift, although a lot of work would be required to make it safe to enter.

Boulders, dwarf-sized passages, tight squeezes and giant shafts

In January 2022 work at LVS re-started in earnest, initially with a main team of JG, AM, PB, JB and LH. Opening and securing a route into the new rift provided some adrenaline raising moments with boulders being lassoed and pulled out of the choke, often followed by an ominous rumbling as the choke shifted and re-settled. A considerable amount of cement was used to re-enforce the scaffold and to build walls and a flying buttress. The "open"


Photo: Ali Moody

Digging in Tickle Choke, early 2022

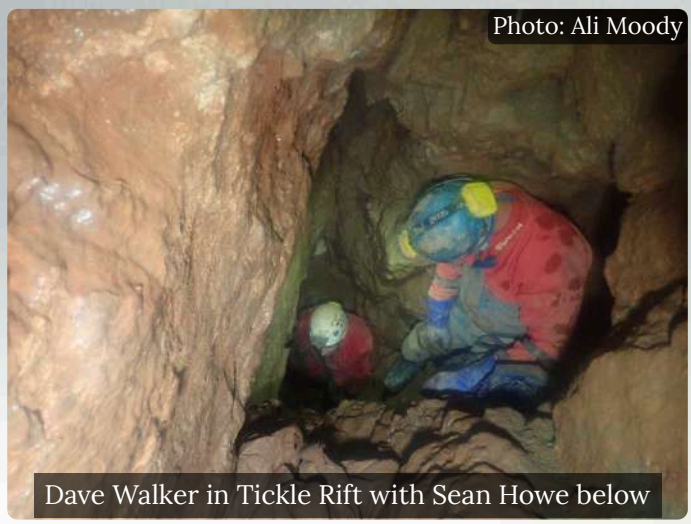


Photo: Ali Moody

Dave Walker in Tickle Rift with Sean Howe below

rift was eventually entered in mid-February and proved to be a void approximately a metre wide between solid side walls with a steep rubble slope that led down for about 3m to a perched boulder and clatch floor and ahead the passage pinched out as an inlet. A strong inward draught was detected in the boulder floor, and this was clearly the direction to dig, but further stabilization of Tickle Choke would be required before this area was safe to work. LH secured a useful source of scaffold and the angle grinder used for cutting scaffold was replaced by a reciprocating saw, which sliced through a pole as though cutting a slice of bread. A month later the team were able to start downward progress in Tickle Rift following the solid walls but continually having to stabilize the extremely loose west end of the rift which was basically a pile of unstable boulders. A mini-sized boulder took numerous sessions to secure and with an ever deepening dig a dumpy bag was placed on the platform at the start of Tickle Choke so that spoil removal to the surface could be staged. As with many digs the further into the cave you progress the more help that is required and Dave Walker, became a regular member of the team, plus Mike Wise, Chris Seal, Andy Thompson, Sean Howe, GN and Alex Hannam all helped when available and PM assisted with occasional mid-week banging trips. As the quantity of spoil increased and the dig became vertical the number of staging dumpy bags was increased and emptied to the surface when team numbers allowed. By September, we reached the base of Tickle Choke and the discovery of packaging dated 01/06/1999

from an empty bag of Fox's Glacier Mints, indicated that flood water reached this point. A narrow extremely draughty slot was uncovered at the north end of the rift. This sucked in a near vertical plume from a smoke match, but the rift could not be worked until the self-digging habit of the lower part of Tickle Choke was addressed.

From April 2022 severe ash dieback in the Longwood valley resulted in the permissive path being closed to the general public by SWT. Cavers were granted access to the valley providing helmets were worn and only when wind gust speeds were below 35mph.

In early January 2023 we were finally able to turn our attention to the draughting rift, but as usual wet winter weather made conditions unpleasant and turned the fill at the workface to a pool of slurry. Floods scoured Tickle Rift clean but also damaged some of the scaffold and cement, necessitating further repairs. As work down the rift progressed HE was required to widen the passage and reach a solid floor at a depth of about 4m. Ahead continued as a narrow rift again requiring explosives and in early February at floor level a small low inlet passage was reached which brought in a steady amount of water in wet weather, making digging conditions even more unpleasant.

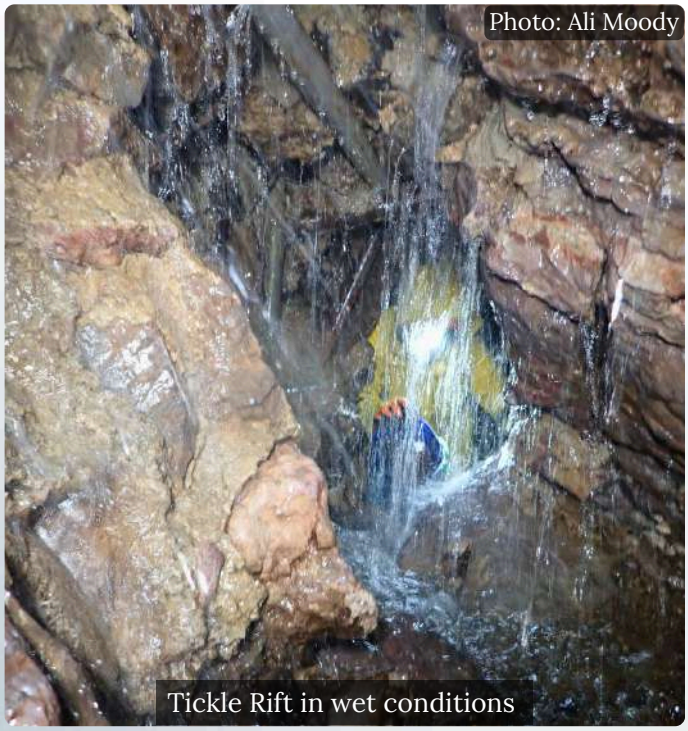


Photo: Ali Moody

Tickle Rift in wet conditions

Rather appropriately on April Fool's Day the team received a lesson in never underestimating LVS. Conditions on the surface were pretty wet, but as all of the stream was sinking before the Rhino valley it was decided to go ahead with a quick clearance session in the ongoing rift. Shortly after starting work an urgent message arrived from the surface team, warning that the stream had reached the entrance and within a few minutes water was pouring down through Tickle Choke to encouragingly roar off along the rift ahead. The exit up Tickle Rift was best described as sporting and on reaching Main Rift it was sobering to note that Tennis Ball Rift had already sumped. Returning the following weekend, the workface had been washed clean of spoil. The next couple of months were spent widening a narrow descending sinuous passage and a glass reinforced platform was installed on a scaffold frame at the base of Tickle Rift for staging yet another dumpy. Removing spoil to the surface required a big team and fortunately several of the more occasional members were able to give additional help. In June the rift swung hard right (west) and continued as a straight passage where progress was speeded up with the use of a 1m drill bit. Opening up Go West proved hard work as it often involved reversing back out with buckets of spoil, armfuls of rocks and drilling or HE kit. After about 10m the passage stepped down over a camel's back shaped lump of rock and before it was dispatched, lifting items up over this obstacle resulted in a couple of team injuries. Beyond, the passage levelled out to a flat-out wet muddy canal, where it was just about possible to turn around. Ahead the roof lowered and the water deepened to form an impassable duck with a few centimetres of airspace. Excavating the floor just created a deeper pool, so tactics changed to blasting off the roof. Conditions at this hypothermic workface were made even worse by the strong draught blowing through the airspace. It is always good to share the misery of a dig and each session a brave volunteer would be persuaded to drill the holes ready for my charges.

Towards the end of September, a midweek trip was made with my husband to retrieve the bang wire before a holiday. PM clad in a full wetsuit enthusiastically started clearing the debris from the last charge, soon opening an unexpected and very promising void up to the left. This point appeared to be the end of the duck and further investigation was postponed until the rest of the regular team could be present.


Photo: Ali Moody

Enlarging the duck in Go West

A team of seven returned on the 14th of October which was notably the 100th digging trip since work had re-started in 2022. The remaining boulders were cleared giving access to a high rift chamber where it was easy to dig a channel to drain the duck, allowing the rest of the team relatively comfortable access. Halfway across the chamber a steep loose boulder slope led downwards to a crawl that opened out at the head of a large deep pitch – definitely not what we had expected. Bolts were placed midweek ready for a laddering trip the following weekend. Estimations of the depth varied, but with several of the team having retired from vertical caving we were hoping for something not too big, but LVS had different plans. JB was offered the first descent and set off on the two ladders that had been joined together but soon shouted back up for a third and then a fourth ladder! Century proved to be a 25m deep free-hanging pitch, formed in a north/south fault rift and is quite a puff back up on a ladder. At the base of the pitch the rift pinched out at the south end but to the north an ongoing passage turned hard west into an east/west rift where the floor dropped out as a second pitch. This was left for another day.

Over the next few weeks, a large, detached boulder at the pitch head was dispatched to make the area safer and the cave was surveyed to the top of Century by JC and team members.

It was clear that SRT was the sensible way forward and at the end of November a team descent was made of Century and the second pitch (11m) on rope.

Two passages led off at the base of the Second Pitch, one heading east and the other west. East Passage starts above a 3m high wall of clatch from where an attractive hand-and-knees ascending crawl decorated with helictites broke out into the base of a fine fluted rift aven after 30m. The west passage appeared to be the down cave continuation of LVS and starting as a hands-and-knees crawl it opened into the side a drippy flowstone covered aven, 1.5m above the floor. Ahead the way on was a 2m deep slot, Slot 1, with a very constricted top. This dropped into a few metres of passage which narrowed to a draughty scalloped but impossibly tight descending rift, which was named Slot 2.

Weather conditions were not kind to the LVS diggers during the winter of 2023/2024, with trips regularly cancelled at the last minute because of either high wind speeds or flooding. On several occasions the entrance pipe was found to be under 2m or more of water and it was noted that the original duck area in Go West could sump in very wet weather.

Over that winter numerous housekeeping sessions were required to repair damage and to retrieve any digging equipment that had been redistributed or buried by the floods. An excellent hauling platform was built across the top of Century, also making access on and off the SRT rope easier for the shorter members of the team. When conditions allowed trips were made down the pitches to enlarge the top of Slot 1 and to start work on Slot 2. Repairs on Tickle Rift continued until the end

of May and from June good progress was made with opening up Slot 2. After observing the tendency of flood pulses to unhelpfully wash HE debris back down cave a superb retaining wall was built by PB across the base of the rift by the Second Pitch. By now the LVS dig had become a more serious undertaking with trips often five hours in length. The outward draught was often so strong that the that fumes would whistle by while the HE team were reascending Century.

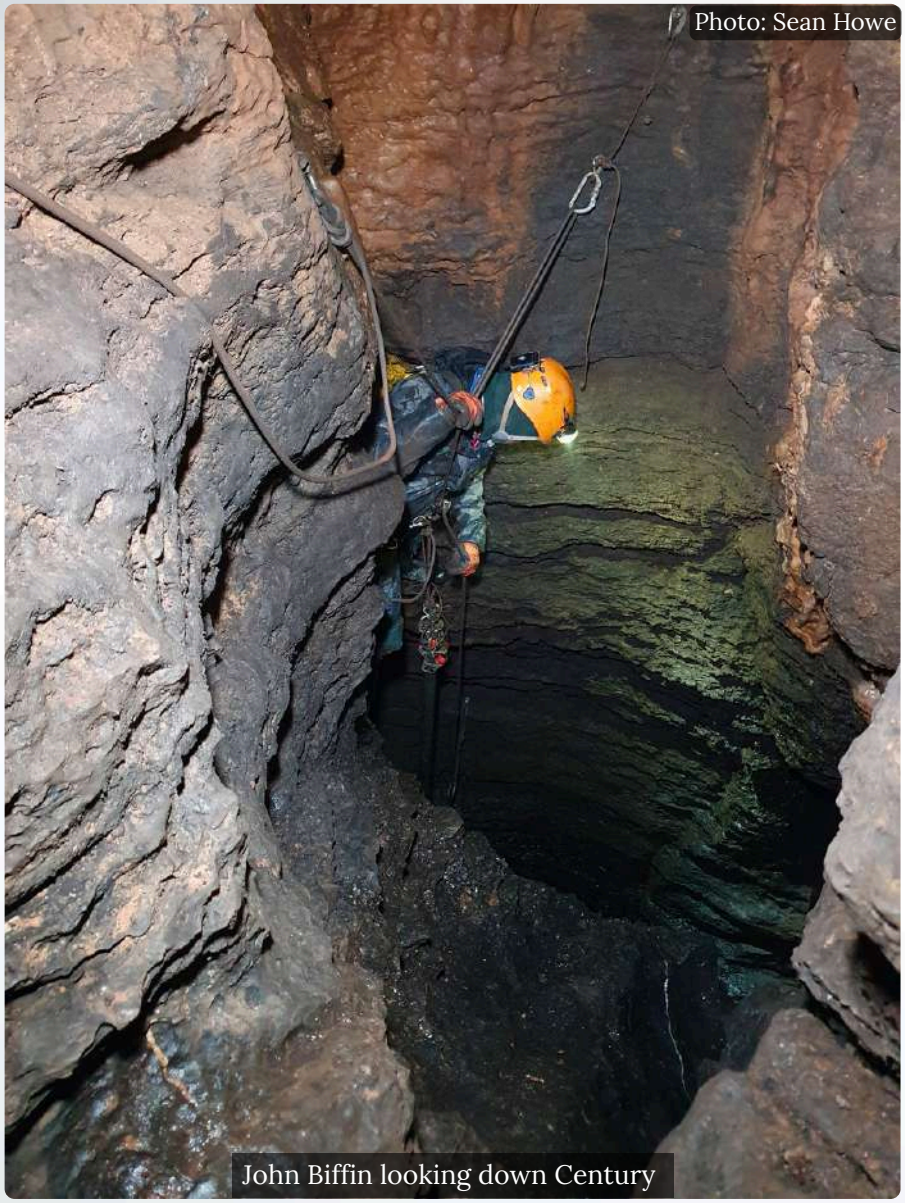


Photo: Sean Howe

John Biffin looking down Century

A large number of people were required to clear back from the work face. At times organising digging teams can be likened to herding cats and with some regulars suffering various injuries or having other life commitments we were extremely grateful for all the assistance received from occasional extra volunteers such as Callum Simmonds.

Half-sized green dumpy bags were introduced for temporary storage and emptied when there were sufficient people. Slot 2 levelled out at an arch and ahead was a very narrow continuing rift with water flowing off along the tiny trench in the floor. The rift appeared to end at a cross-rift, but an encouraging echo suggested that maybe there was another pitch around the corner. At the cross-rift, right pinched out but to the left the passage stepped down into a bigger but still constricted rift. After a few metres it opened out into a black void, clearly another large shaft, entering some distance above the floor. September and October were spent opening out the approach rift, first with HE and then with plug and feathers. Gaining a view of the shaft was difficult, but the floor was estimated to be about 12m below and there appeared to be a boulder slope on the far side. A team descent was finally possible on the 16th of November, the shaft becoming more rifty in the lower section with a boulder floor at a depth of 14m. Here a couple of possible dig sites were noted, one at each end of the rift and a green dumpy was retrieved, washed in from much higher up the cave. Above our entry point, the west side of the shaft soared up into blackness like a big dark eye, hence the name the Shaft of the Cyclops, and it was thought that there might be a passage in the west wall.

Other work in 2024 included the climbing of the Flowstone Aven and finally reaching the top of the East Passage Aven. Survey trips in November led by AA completed a survey as far as the entry into Cyclops. From previous experience the team had developed a healthy respect for winter conditions in LVS, and the cave was put to bed until Spring 2025.

Photo: Mark Burkey

Pete Buckley Ascending the Second Pitch

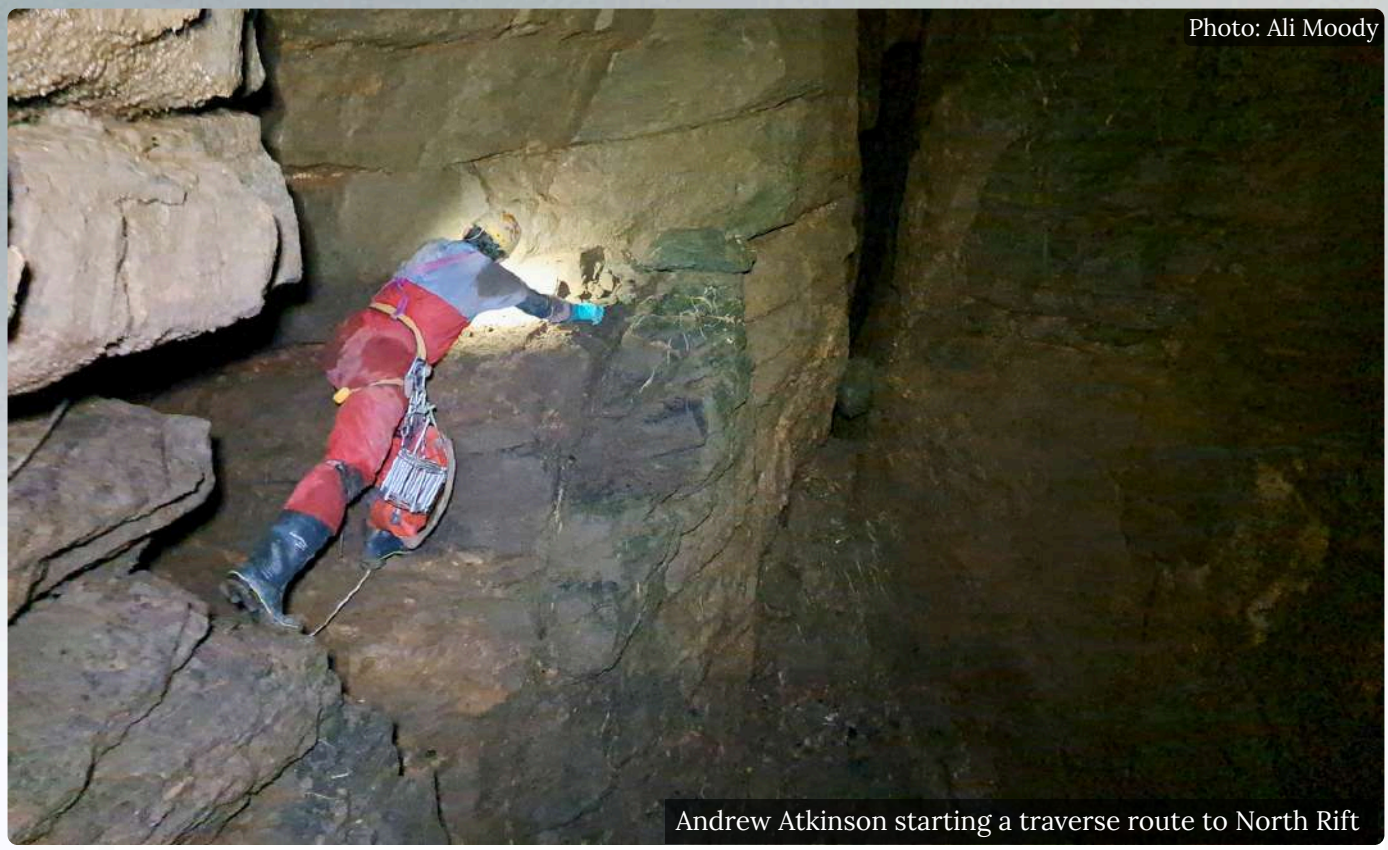


Photo: Ali Moody

Andrew Atkinson starting a traverse route to North Rift

Twenty-nine working trips occurred in 2024, with main participants on digging sessions in descending order: AM, MW, LH, PB, JB, SH, CS, MK, AH and AT. In addition to some of the core team, ATLAS also provided financial support.

In early 2025 the CCC revised their Cave Digging Procedures, also adopting the Council of Southern Caving Clubs' guidelines for the Type and Placement of Exploratory Anchors. The latter recommending the use of temporary anchors such as Petzl Pulse or equivalent if natural belays are not available.

On the first trip of 2025, in early March it was a relief to discover that the cave had not suffered from any serious flood damage over the winter. Later that month from the entry passage, AA, a qualified bolter, traversed horizontally along the south wall of Cyclops. After disappearing out of sight around a corner, about twenty minutes of spectacular flying boulders and loud crashes ensued as a very loose boulder slope was gardened before the rest of the team were invited to follow. Thankfully the traverse was not as bad as it looked and after wriggling carefully out over the drop, a step down and then around the corner gained a crumbly slope where the traverse rope continued up steeply to a calcited balcony. This provided a fine view of the size of the shaft and across to an obvious rift in the north wall. From the balcony a further short traverse around another corner reached a small passage that headed west. Starting as a horizonal hands-and-knees passage, Cyclops West soon lowered to an extremely snug, slightly descending bedding squeeze, which only two of the team were able to pass. This is best compared to a tighter version of Not Birthday Squeeze on the Short Round Trip in Swildon's Hole. Beyond the squeeze the passage enlarged to a crawl and after about 10m the floor dropped out into another massive rifty void. An inlet stream could be heard falling down the shaft. This was quite enough excitement for one day.

Over a couple of weekends in April, AA rigged a traverse out to the North Rift reporting that the floor dropped out as a deep clean-washed pitch. On the first of these trips PB and MW worked to enlarge the Cyclops West squeeze by chiselling away the calcite floor, uncovering a thick layer of thixotropic mud while the author took far too many photos of Cyclops. On the second session a survey was run across the traverses and adjoining passages, giving a depth of 25m for the North

Photo: Mark Burkey

Cyclops, Ali Moody on the balcony and Mike Wise Descending to The Gullet

Rift pitch and an impressive figure of 32m at a 70 degree angle down the void at the end of Cyclops West. From the balcony, Cyclops soars up for at least another 30m.

North Rift was descended by the team on the 3rd May dropping into a significant north/south rift passage. Turning south the passage widened at a 10m high rift aven chamber with a rifty hole in the roof. At floor level an unexpected pile of equipment included a tackle sack of rope, rigging gear, a green dumpy bag and a half buried bucket. The tackle sack had been stored on a ledge 2m up the Second Pitch and all these items washed down cave during floods, shot across the Cyclops shaft and then dropped through the hole in the roof.

From the aven chamber a 6m high draughty rift continued south and progress involved changing levels until exploration was halted at a major four-way junction, now known as Compass Junction. Ahead (south) the rift narrowed at the base but continued as a bigger passage at roof level. A narrow passage on the right, Compass West, gave access to a pitch, while a 3m climb up the left gave a view east along a superb phreatic passage, Compass East.

Concluding that the route used during the winter by the climbing and digging kit might provide an easier alternative to the North Rift traverse and pitch, the following weekend a small, constricted hole into the top of a narrow rift was located in the corner of a boulder slope on the west side of Cyclops. This is reached by an easy 4m free-climbable descent, from the end of the first traverse. The rift belled out into a chamber about 7m down, giving a 15m pitch. The entry point to The Gullet as it became known was enlarged on a subsequent trip and has been adopted as the usual trade route.


Photo: Ali Moody

Mike Wise at the start of Compass East

In June a return was made to Compass Junction to explore and survey Compass East. Here a walking-sized rift passage was followed around a series of dog-legs for 80m to where just beyond a flowstone chimney it lowered to a partly mud-choked arch with a small airspace – a future dig site. From the survey, a tight rift leading off at one of the dog-legs would connect with the dig at the east end of the base of Cyclops. However, this would not be a practical route option due to the instability of the south wall at the base of Cyclops.

Near the start of Compass East a significant rifty side passage, Go South, was explored to a pitch beyond a crystal floor and further investigation was left until conservation and protection measures could be put in place.

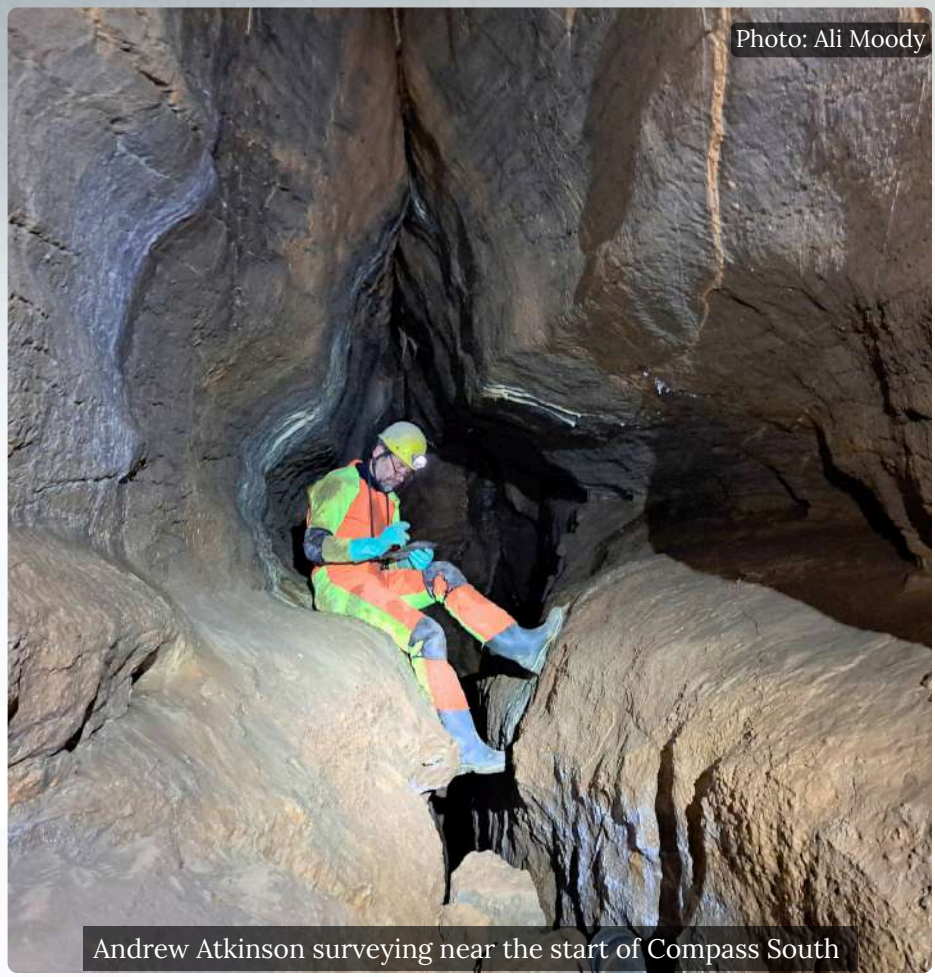


Photo: Ali Moody

Andrew Atkinson surveying near the start of Compass South

In July, as usual surveying as we explored, the south heading rift (Compass South) from Compass Junction was followed to an awkward climb up over a pile of suspended boulders into a rift chamber. From here a steep boulder slope led down to a boulder-filled floor, the only obvious continuation a slope up to a blind bedding chamber. It is thought that Compass East and South are features of the ancient 120m O.D. water table level flowing south towards Cheddar.

Compass Junction Pitch, at the end of the small passage to the right at Compass Junction, was next on the list, proving to be a 9m drop into another rift chamber with a loose boulder floor. Two side passages were blind but turning north the rift narrowed to a tight squeeze, beyond which a narrow but slippery traverse led to a corner where the rift widened to form yet another pitch. By this stage with the ever increasing number of pitches and traverses in LVS we were in danger of running out of rigging kit. When time permitted AA gradually replaced the Petzl Bolts with BCA anchors, and this work will continue in 2026.

The rather intimidating pitch, Colossus, at the end of Cyclops West was investigated on a trip at the start of August. Large loose boulders guarded the take-off and using a traverse line AA was able step over the hole onto a bouldery ledge. This led to a flowstone-covered pitch formed in the same rift with a 10m aven up to the left. For conservation reasons the second pitch was not considered an ideal option and AA returned to the first hole, descending after further clearance and reporting back up that he had been able to get off although the 40m rope was 6m too short. Just as the remainder of the team were about to follow, a large boulder with the survey station at the head of Colossus decided to start moving, forcing AA to make a speedy re-ascent so that the boulder could be dropped safely down the pitch.

In mid-August a return was made to Compass West, and the rift squeeze enlarged by capping. From the corner reached in July a rising traverse above an 8m pitch (which dropped into a few metres of tight passage) gained a sizeable continuation of the rift with a floor that sloped up to a blockage formed by a 7m high wall of clatch. Although, free-climbable by some this is best treated as a pitch. At the top a bouldery slope led into an obvious hands-and-knees passage that looped up and then down to where it broke

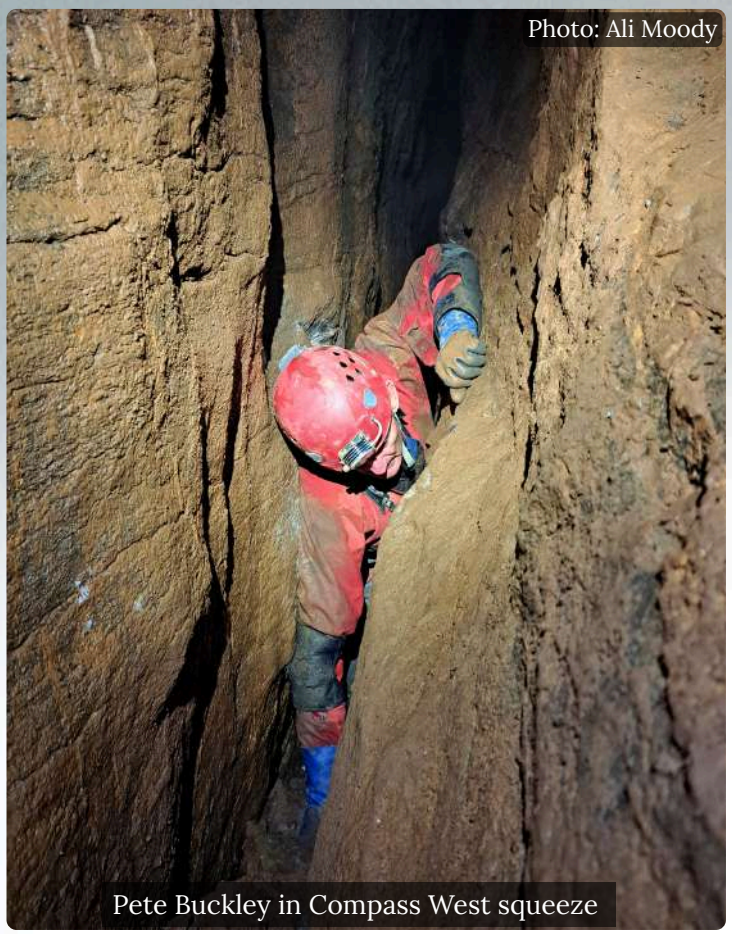


Photo: Ali Moody

Pete Buckley in Compass West squeeze

A return was made to Go South at the end of August 2025 and the crystal floor protected with plastic sheeting to safeguard the formations from mud or debris. A decorated alcove to the side of the pitch was surveyed and a squeeze in the far corner surprisingly gave access to a few metres of decorated but blind rift passage. Back in the main passage, the pitch (reached in June) proved to be a 16m deep narrow rift and although free-climbable was easier on rope. At the base a few metres of wider rift ended in a blank wall with a small rift continuing up to the left. Here an upward wriggle gave access to the top of a 5m deep pot with a fine curtain and a couple of large boulders at the top needing removal for safe access. As it was time to exit the cave and the pot was thought to probably be blind, AA free-climbed down to complete the survey. At the base a passage led into a small dry descending streamway that looked as if it could take a considerable amount of water at times.

out into the side of a large shaft recognised as Colossus, 15m above the floor. A continuation of this passage heading towards Rhino Rift and now less than 40m away, can be seen on the far side of the shaft. It seems likely that these passages and pitches were formed on the same east/west fault rift. Returning towards the 7m climb a hole between unstable boulders dropped down into a lower passage with a steeply sloping rubble floor. At the end of this a couple of small drops gave access to the rather unstable boulder floor of Colossus. At the base of the south wall a descending rift with an initially perched boulder floor was pushed to a 4m deep slot. This scalloped rift passage is the outflow for water falling down Colossus. As with any new cave LVS demands a considerable amount of respect and on one trip a particularly large boulder rolled forward pinning the leg of one of the team, but fortunately only resulting in some severe bruising. If stabilization is possible, Colossus will eventually offer a fine SRT exchange trip for visitors with one party entering via Cyclops West and the other via Compass West.


Photo: Ali Moody

Andrew Atkinson gardening the top of Colossus before the first descent.

Photo: Ali Moody

Andrew at the base of Colossus looking towards the rift passage in the south wall

From experience the team have learnt that LVS is best avoided in the winter months and in mid-October all tackle was removed from the cave. If Main Sinks overflows it has been observed that flood water can reach LVS in thirty minutes. Numerous small inlets enter the cave and several areas of the entrance series including the pipe are known to sump. It is thought that the shafts become extremely wet and the inlet stream in Colossus never seems to fail. Cyclops is probably a maelstrom in severe weather, and it would be interesting to leave a video camera over winter in this area. To date three hundred and forty-eight working trips have been made into LVS since the start of 2013 and around £3,000 spent on explosives and cement alone. The cave now has a depth of 126m and is 1,000m in length.

Thanks also to the following who have all helped in one way or another and have not been mentioned elsewhere and apologies to anyone that I have omitted.

Rob Adams, Szilvia Auth, Emma Ballard, Krisztian Balogh, the late Tony Boycott, Josh Bratchley, Jess Burkey, Mark Burkey, Nick Butler, Paul Callister, Andrea Carey, Richard Carey, Chris Casling, Claire Cohen Starsmore, the late Phil Collett, Henry Dawson, Amy Dough, Matty Dredge, Chris Eyles, Andy Farrant, Mark Faulkner, Tom Franklin, Alex Gough, Damion Grindley, John Harlow, Aidan Harrison, Tom Harrison, Maurice Hewins, Joan Goddard, Ildiko Groditzki, Darrel Instrell, Tomasz Kawka, Dave King, Nikki Kirby, Zsombor Koroknai, Mark Madden, Rich Marlow, Tony Massey, Rina May, Joe McComb, Simon Meade-King, Aiden Moyce, Mike Moxon, Graham Mullan, Tibor Nagy, Kas Noiri, Gemma Parrish, Chrissy Price, Graham Price, Ken Passant, Christian Roberts, Haydon Sanders, Alessio Sancetta, Kevin Sparkes, Wayne Starsmore, Sam Storrar, Francois Tollemar, Adrian Vanderplank, Mike Waterworth, Neil Watson, Barry Weaver, Clive Westlake, Tom Williams.

Initials

AA – Andrew Atkinson
JB – John Biffin
PB – Pete Buckley
JC – John Cooper
JG – John Gisborne
AH – Alex Hannam
LH – Lee Hawkswell
PH – Phil Hendy
SH – Sean Howe
MK – Mike Kousiounis
AM – Ali Moody
PM – Pete Moody
CN – Clive North
GN – Geoff Newton
CS – Chris Seal
AT – Andy Thompson
WW – Wally Willcocks
MW – Mike Wise
RW – Rich Witcombe

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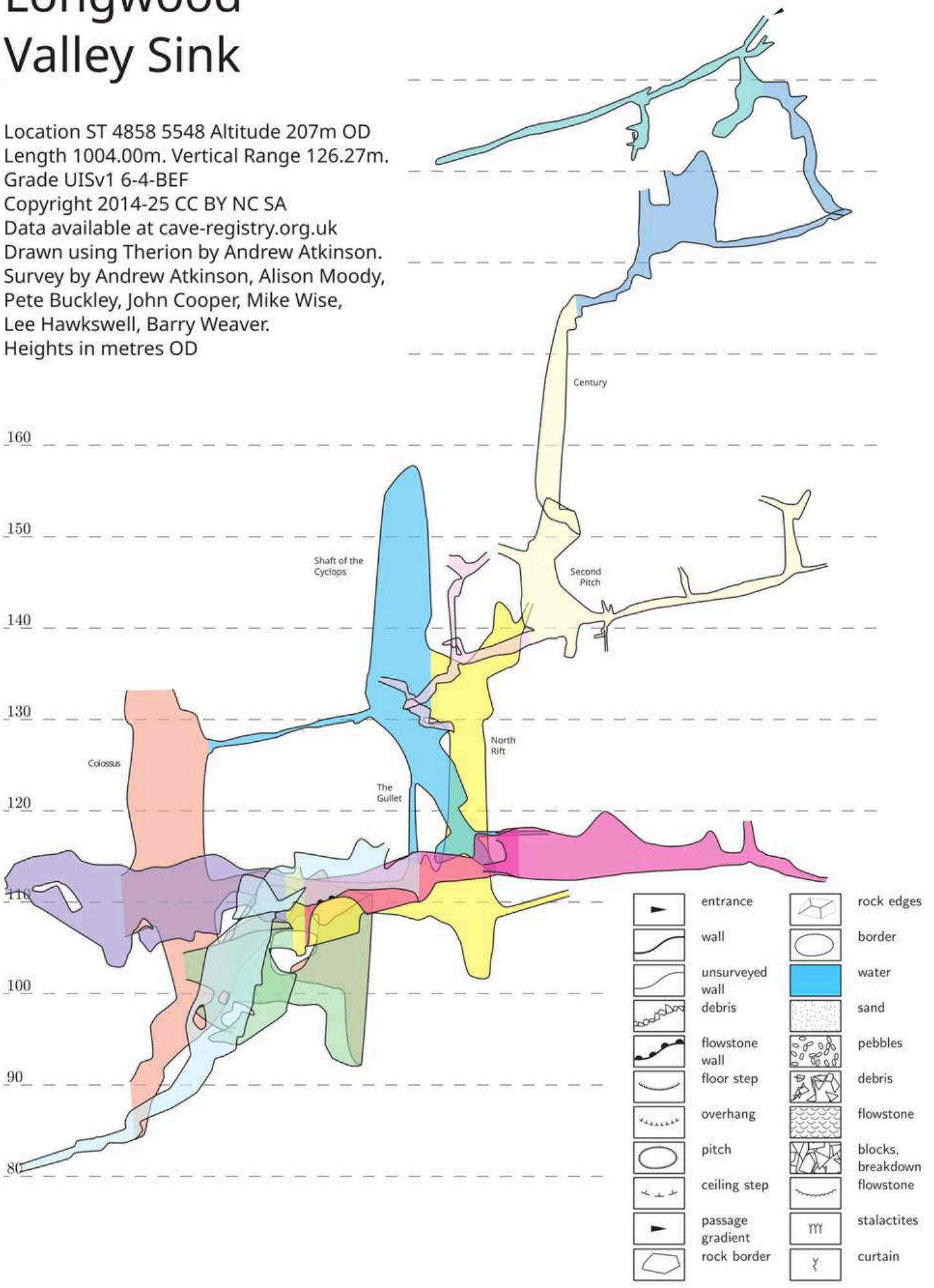
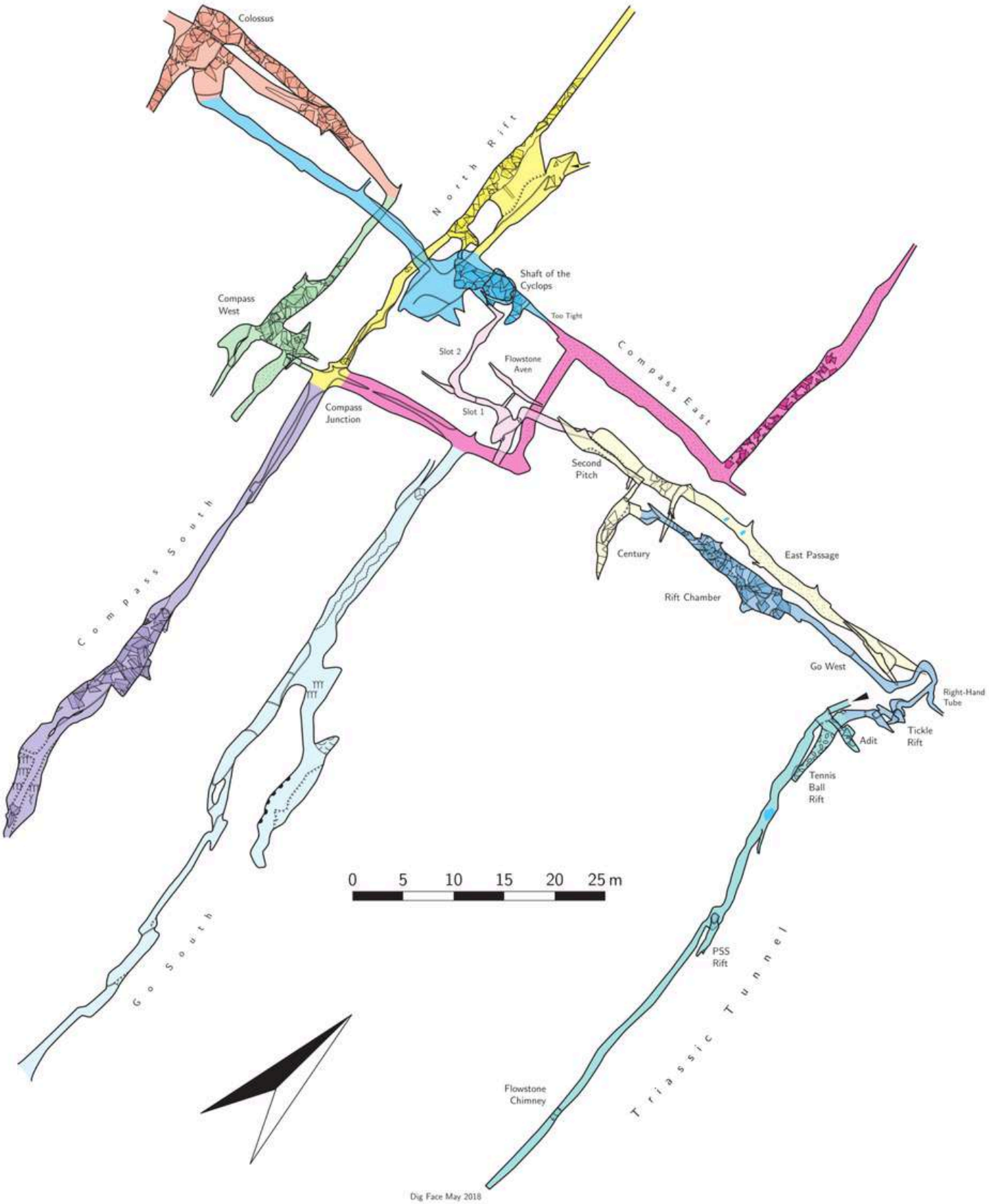
Longwood Valley Sink

Location ST 4858 5548 Altitude 207m OD
Length 1004.00m. Vertical Range 126.27m.
Grade UISv1 6-4-BEF

Data available at cave-registry.org.uk
Drawn using Therion by Andrew Atkinson.
Survey by Andrew Atkinson, Alison Moody, Pete Buckley, John Cooper, Mike Wise, Lee Hawkswell, Barry Weaver.
Heights in metres OD




Colossus
North Rift
Shaft of the Cyclops
Too Tight
Compass West
Slot 2
Flowstone Aven
Slot 1
Compass Junction
Compass East
Second Pitch
Century
East Passage
Rift Chamber
Compass South
Go West
Right-Hand Tube
Adit
Tickle Rift
Tennis Ball Rift
0 5 10 15 20 25 m
Go South
PSS Rift
Triassic Tunnel
Flowstone Chimney
Dig Face May 2018

Devon 2026

By Kat Rosier

Les organised the annual Wessex weekend in Devon. An area with lots of caving, mine exploration, and due to the local abundance of Tribute (*one of many fine local ales*) lots of drinking! Kat Rosier tells us all about it...

Friday 23rd January 2026

We arrived and there was a small group who went to Pridhamsleigh Cavern (ask Simon or Steph for details).

The weather was terrible, but we enjoyed fish and chips none the less, sheltering from the rain in Buckfastleigh.

Saturday 24th January 2026

We visited Great Rock mine. This was a micaceous hematite mine, which was used in rust proof paints for bridges, ships, railways etc. The mine was worked until the later 1960s before it became uneconomically viable due to synthetic rust proof paints such as Hammerite. Micaceous hematite is only found in a few locations round the world and definitely made for a unique experience underground. After a short walk through the woods we came across multiple adits. These were all locked, but Les had organised a key. These varied in length, complexity and decoration, the first of which was rather short and dry, with a few muddy looking climbs and an old tricycle which worked well for photos. The second of which smelt rather strongly of sulphur, but was more interesting. The third offered some more challenging balancing on planks across deep water filled holes, and only a couple of us got a bit wet. This adit had much more interesting formations and more passages off, so more to explore. The final adit had some amazing formations and significant passages in different directions. It had one very interesting part, which involved balancing on various dubious pipes over a very deep hole filled with water. One of us ended up in the water, but otherwise we ended up relatively dry, although we had to take it in turns looking after Sam the Dog as, even though he was very keen to keep swimming around in murky water, as it was filled with broken metal it wasn't the best idea. There was a lot of exploring to do on this fourth adit and a lot of interesting different formations. We all got rather damp walking to and from the mines, but it was a great day, although we were all a bit shiny as the mines have a very fine layer of metallic dust everywhere, which means you leave them looking like you're covered in glitter.

Sunday 25th January 2026

As there was a glimpse of blue sky, we decided to go for a walk instead of underground. This was a walk to Wistman's Wood on Dartmoor. It was very busy and parking was a bit of a nightmare, but we eventually all got sorted and headed off. It was a nice walk round, we planned to cross the river Dart and head back along an old tramway through the woods. There was some difficulty getting across the river, some jumping across the rocks more elegantly than others, and others walking using some old fence panels to climb over, especially as the river was very high and fast due to the recent rain. Only I ended up wading through to help Sam the Dog swim across as he was a bit nervous; although as soon as we'd crossed, the first thing he did was swim back to the other side! But it was a nice walk back to the cars, and then a beer before we all went our separate ways.

Lots of good beer and banter enjoyed by all, and we all had a lovely time, despite the weather being pretty rubbish the whole weekend. Sam the dog rather enjoyed himself and solidified his love of mines and acted as a good mascot for the weekend, although not the brightest labrador in the box. What a great start to the year. Thanks again to Les for organising.

Celebrating New Year's at the CSS

By Monica Bollani

We arrived at the CSS on New Year's Eve in our various vans and tent boxes and Jon produced a delicious kedgeree (quickly renamed Pedigree by Sam), before walking into Crickhowell to celebrate the New Year.

Editor: Monica promised it would be a quick 15-minute walk into town. It does not take only 15 minutes!

1st January 2026 – Corkscrews and hangovers

The original plan for New Year's Day had been to visit Aggy and see the Courtesan. Unfortunately, this plan failed to account for a late night in Crickhowell and an ambitious quantity of Baby Guinness shots. By morning, momentum was low and enthusiasm was... negotiable. A group consensus was reached: Aggy could wait.

Instead, the five of us headed for Ogof Pen Eryr, a small cave about 250 m up from Daren. It didn't take long before we encountered the infamous corkscrew: a heavily calcited, upward squeeze in two parts. We debated whether Alex would fit. He gave it a valiant attempt, but the second section proved incompatible with his rib cage. After some good-natured resignation, Alex retreated and went for a walk while the remaining four pressed on.

Beyond the corkscrew the cave was a series of easy rift passages, boulder chokes and more corkscrews, with bats positioned in awkward places. The final chamber was particularly interesting, reached by digging and explosives, remnants of which were still visible, and surprisingly pretty.

We returned to the hut to be greeted by Alex's flapjacks and Sam's Vietnamese pho— oddly sophisticated for a caving hut on New Year's Day.

2nd January 2026 – The Courtesan

It was Alex's first trip into the cave and none of us had been down Southern Streamway before. I was especially keen to see the Daren connection dig and underground camp, and therefore took on the vital role of nagging everyone into leaving by 10 am.

Jon, Alex, Sam, and I set off under clear skies, snow still crisp on the ground. Inside, we passed countless bats, and it was at this point that Alex realised he'd left his inhaler back at the hut. After a brief pause and some quiet bravery, he decided to continue, with us keeping a close eye on him.

We made our way down the main passage, negotiating slippery boulders, and found the route into the Southern Streamway without too much trouble. This section of the trip felt like an eternal cycle of stooping, crawling, and brief, glorious moments of standing up.

At the end, we climbed into dry passage and emerged onto Priory Road, a wide, flat, sandy passage. Soon we reached the underground camp, which was homely, despite the 'Aggy Glory Hole' which I can only assume was named by the regular diggers. Snacks were consumed and photos taken.

From the camp we took the left turn into Iles Inlet— twisty sandy tunnels, right-angled U-tubes, and just enough awkwardness to keep things interesting. Sam and I were in front and, finding a conveniently placed shovel and crowbar, took the opportunity to improve the floor for those behind us. Sadly, we soon reached a tight S-bend and accepted that Alex wouldn't fit. Alex and Jon headed back to the camp while Sam and I continued on, knowing the Courtesan wasn't far.

A few more turns, U-tubes, and a tight rift later, we popped out of the final restriction and were instantly confronted by the Courtesan. It was absolutely stunning—delicate helictites, long straws, and urchin formations, all pristine and luminous against the beige walls. Worth every moment.

Concerned that Jon and Alex might be getting cold at camp, we limited ourselves to a few quick photos before heading back. We woke Alex from a nap at the camp and began the long return journey, during which the Southern Streamway somehow felt even longer than before.

Back on the surface, we walked back in the dark over ice and snow, and the day was rounded off perfectly with chicken pesto pasta and Chess.

3rd January 2026 – Snags, Spiders and Swimming Alex

Jon and I had both visited Ogof Pont Gam before (on separate trips) and enjoyed it, so we were keen to return. We knew it was small, snaggy, and included three short pitches, conveniently pre-rigged. With this in mind, we packed minimally: abseiling kit and slings masquerading as harnesses.

The entrance is a small tunnel on the riverbank upstream from Pwll y Cwm resurgence, just below a small bridge (the Pont). My biggest challenge was the creatures that lay within the entrance tunnel—large, juicy spiders, complete with egg sacs—dangling at head height. The others dealt with these while I sat back, offering instructions and having a stern internal conversation with myself.

Once inside, the passage soon opened out to the first pitch, followed by a series of tight, snaggy rifts. We were all impressed watching Alex calmly and methodically work his way through the squeezes. The third pitch dropped into a beautiful aven adorned with flowstone and gour pools. Beyond this, the cave became surprisingly pretty in places, splitting into upstream and downstream passages. Dave was already planning future photo trips with his son Dylan.

After thoroughly exploring every inch of the cave, we exited by following the streamway through a small boulder collapse, held together reassuringly by scaffold. To get back to the cars, we waded down the river to Pwll y Cwm. Alex couldn't resist "cooling down" by plunging straight into the resurgence pool.

The trip ended as it began: with excellent food. Alex cooked a delicious roast, rounding off a New Year trip full of great caves, good company, impressive formations, and just enough poor decisions to make it memorable.

FILMING WITH THE WESSEX IN THE 1960S

Maurice Hewins

Part 1 - The Wessex in the 1960s

Back in 1960, before a majority of current members were even born, the Wessex headquarters was a second-hand wooden hut at Hillgrove, opposite the turning to Priddy on the Bristol Road. It had bunks for 15 cavers and water was collected from the roof into a large tank. Apart from a Calor Gas cylinder attached to a couple of gas rings, the only heating was an iron pot-bellied stove. (It is the one now in use at Upper Pitts).

Hillgrove in 1961, showing the washing facilities. Photo, John Thomas.

A large pit (Gash Swallet) had been dug to bury the rubbish after incineration, and the contents of the usually overflowing Elsan toilet were buried in the bluebell wood behind the club. Beyond that, the decaying remains of the former Hillgrove Sanitorium were still occupied by squatters. The Wessex also had a smaller hut at Eastwater, which was mainly used by couples and families The Journal was printed on a duplicator and collated at the hut. Eventually, the Wessex outgrew Hillgrove and we moved into the purpose-built Upper Pitts in 1968. It is a vastly different world to today.

Accustomed as we are now to having high quality smart-phones with instant information on tap, it is worth remembering that a cave rescue callout had to be made from a land line, and the nearest telephone box to Hillgrove was on Priddy Green. The social centre in the evenings was the Hunters' Lodge, which fortunately is still held by the Dors family and largely unchanged. It still retains the ambience of a 1960s pub.

Part 2 - Making the Early Films

By the 1950s the numbers of cavers taking photographs underground were increasing as cheap flash bulbs became more available, but some photographers still used burning magnesium ribbon or dangerous flash powder. Nothing was instant, and you did not see your results until the film was processed, which could take days if sent off to a laboratory. Underground moving pictures presented far greater problems as there were no digital cameras or helmet-mounted Go-pros in those days. Lighting for cine was at a premium, and early films consisted mainly of close-ups.

Unless you shot your movie scenes in the required order, it was necessary to cut and splice the film, and it was usual to get it processed as positives. To get second copies was expensive and involved returning the original to the processor.

With no smart-phones or monitors you had to project your moving images onto a screen in a darkened room, and unless an expensive magnetic sound strip was added to the side of the film it was silent. Sometimes captions were added, but usually the projectionist spoke a commentary above the noise of the projector. A film show was quite an event.

The British pioneer of underground cinephotography was Professor Edgar Tratman of Bristol

A single frame from Tratman's 1937 Lamb Lair film showing caving with candles and soft hats.

University, who began experiments in 1933, using a 16 mm camera in Goatchurch and Read's Cavern. For lighting he used a number of Tilly lamps, with fragile mantles, which ran on paraffin. With this basic kit he successfully obtained some evocative close ups of formations and cavers descending ropes and using candles.

Following this modest success, Tratman enlisted members of UBSS and the recently formed Wessex Cave Club to make a much more ambitious film In Lamb Lair in 1937. At the time this major cave was regularly visited by cavers, but it has been closed for some 40 years by the landowner.

Because of the slow film speeds at the time Tratman needed more light so he added a much larger Tilley lamp to his battery of lights. In some sequences, he slowed the camera down to give a longer exposure to each frame. The actors were asked to move more slowly, which gave a jerky movement on play back. Another problem was that the nitrate film stock was unstable and could explode if kept under the wrong conditions.

The first attempt at filming underground after the war was made by a team from the Axbridge, again assisted by Wessex cavers. Their team led by Ev Humphries, who had a photographic studio in Bridgewater and Jim Emmerson successfully shot a film in G B in 1951. The cave was lit as far as the Main Chamber by running a cable in from a generator outside the entrance, which powered a series of arc lights. They obtained some excellent sequences, although several of the team suffered temporary eye damage. The Axbridge followed this with a colour film made in Axebridge Ochre Cave in March 1952.

By 1960 John Hooper, (Ali Moody's father), had made 16mm black and white films in Devon caves, including pioneering studies of bats. Hooper used added captions, but when the BBC broadcast his film, they added a professional sound track.

In 1960 Oliver Lloyd and an MRO team, which included Phil Davies and Mike Holland of the Wessex, made a rescue training film at the 40ft pitch and Sump 1 in Swildon's. This was the first caving film with a full professional sound track, apart from a couple of Pathe newsreels, one of which was made in Wookey Hole in 1948.

It was in April 1960, that our group of Wessex Members from Farnham decided to try our luck at filming in Swildon's. As 16mm film was too expensive, we decided to use an 8mm cine camera with the fastest black and white film we could find, Gervertpan Ultra. This 8mm film came as a spool of 16mm film, which was run through the camera once, and then the spool was turned over and the film run back. After the film was developed it was cut down the middle, and the two halves, each of which had pictures on them, were spliced together. A 50ft roll of film would give 4

John Hooper filming in Virtuous Lady Mine, 1950's. Photo Ali Moody

minutes of running time at 16 frames a second.

For lighting we had three 24-volt operating theatre bulbs, fitted with reflectors, obtained like most caving kit at the time from government surplus. Each bulb was connected to a bank of 4 motorcycle 6-volt batteries. Suffice to say, that with beginner's luck the results exceeded our expectations.

A second attempt with a faster film was disappointing, but in 1962 Kodak introduced a fast colour film, Kodachrome IIA, with about the same film speed as Gervertpan Ultra. This allowed us to make very good colour films in Lamb Lair and Swildons. We even produce a sound track by using a tape recorder, synchronised to a Eumig P8 projector. At the same time another Wessex team of Denis Warburton and Alan Surrell were also making 8 mm films both above and below ground.

Part 3 - Saving the Films

In 1976 technology moved on with the invention of VHS video tape. and the first video cameras were soon being used below ground by Nick Barrington and others. Video cameras could also copy existing cine films to video. The VHS format dominated the 1980s and 1990s, although professionals like Sid Perou and Clive North continued to use film.

Around 1990 I had the idea of collecting these early Mendip Caving films together, but I found that already several had been lost, or were held by copyright owners who did not wish to co-operate.

It was at this stage, in 1993 that Jim Hanwell and Chris Hawkes at Wells Museum, (now Wells and Mendip Museum), Tony Boycott of UBSS. and myself set up the Wells Museum/UBSS Cave Cine Archive to collect and archive as much as possible. Most of the films mentioned here were eventually collected and converted to DVD, the next popular format to VHS, and NCA gave a grant to provide a DVD player to view the disks at Wells Museum.

The final stage to date has been to incorporate the films with back up documentation with the Mendip Cave Registry Archive, which has made them available as MP4 on YouTube. In addition, some of the original film stock, including, John Hooper's, that of MRO and my own has been deposited in the Somerset Record Office.

The definitive book on the history of cave photography is "To Photograph Darkness" by Chris Howes, 1989. ISBN 0 86299 649 X. It is recommended to all cave photographers.

Sunday Morning at Hillgrove, sketched by Carlton Attwood (Atty). Atty was a professional artist from Swindon. He also drew the picture of GB in the lounge and made the Wessex Dragon over the fireplace at Upper Pitts.

Filming on the 40ft waterfall in Swildons 1964. John Thomas is on the ladder. Holding the lighting unit is Tim Reynolds. Photo Tony Dingle.

The Wessex Eastwater Hut, 1967.

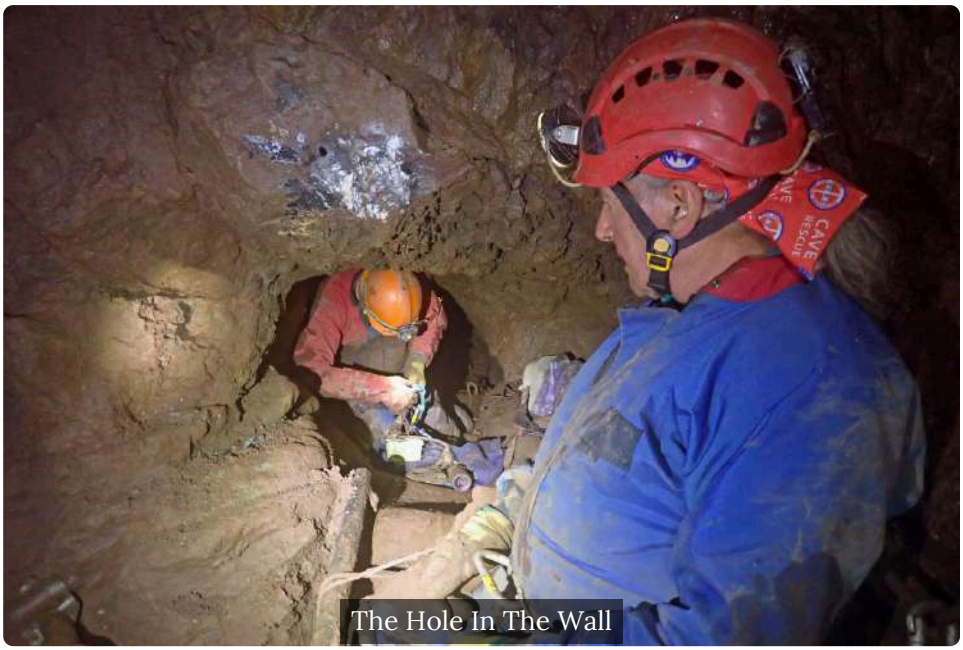
Cueva Coventosa - Clive Westlake

CHASING RAINBOWS AT THE HOLE IN THE WALL

Brian Johnson having lunch on THITW platform

Arriving at the intermediate platform, note the huge beam!

Bottom platform traverse to alcove dig



The Hole In The Wall

An immense amount of effort has gone into a project to find caverns in a mine that were discovered in 1795. So far everything has failed but being optimistic one might say that all alternatives but one have been written off. That leaves the current dig at The Hole In The Wall. Reality or myth? The miners were prone to exaggeration more to keep the backers happy in a failing attempt to extract wealth from the depths. Delusion or faith? Essentially that's what digging underground is all about. So rather than expand this account to include everything I shall start with two brief timelines. That from the miners and the one from the diggers. With over 1,000 photos of the project and endless amounts of text it pays to be brief. This account will not identify the location.

The Miner's Timeline

Pre-1780

Small mines are sunk near the top of the hills. They are restricted by flooding at depth.

1786

An adit is being driven from the base of the hill to dewater the mines.

1790

The adit makes good progress but needed propping as it passed through the Triassic rocks. Initially it held firm in the Keuper Marls (mudstone). The miners encounter a barite "*lode*" running along strike which contains minerals.

1792 - 1795

The northerly adit holes into the cavern in 1795.

When the NW is worked out the mine follows the lode to the SE to the greater part of the mine.

The mine struggled on until 1801 when it was closed but mothballed. All shafts are filled up or capped. The adit was placed in good repair.

1816

The previous mine captain writes up a description of the mine including the caverns for new

investors. This description tallies well with the more florid 1895 caverns description but the usage of different measurements are confusing. We tend to rely on the later description as it tallies better with the geology.

1817
The mine reopens to work below the previous adit depth of c.25m.

1821
In the end it fails again and the shafts are capped and machinery sold at auction.

The Digger's Timeline
1960s
The 1795 cavern description is published in the caving press for the first time.

1973
Nick and local cavers dig in the adit. Very little progress was made as the cut and cover lintels had collapsed.

1987
Another attempt was made at the adit. Four feet progress but further collapse cancelled that out.

2011
Another consortium of cavers attempted to dig the adit from within but conditions are horrible.

April 2021
The current consortium of cavers are formed. Work has continued almost weekly until Jan 2026.
The adit extended but complications at the blocked end means that work is suspended. The adit does drain some water from the mine but it's clearly held back up to seven metres above the adit exit in Winter. Both main shafts are opened with fixed ladders and platforms.
80m of high level mine passage is entered to the NW. Another capped shaft is bridged. A diver connects this shaft to the main shaft at flooded adit level at c.25m depth. All supposedly from the 1817 - 1821 era.
At the main shaft base a natural chamber exists. This was dug along the lode for 20m to the SE until the winter flood level was met.
Main shaft water levels are monitored for four years with a range of eight metres. The 2022 level came within 50cm of the flooded adit.
Finally the only alternative left was The Hole In The Wall.
The Caverns.
This is the 1816 description. Essentially there is confusion over the measurement types. For simplicity a fathom is two metres.

"In one place, about twelve fathoms under the surface, the workmen holed into a large cavern. This cavern, as far as we could follow it, was about fourteen fathoms long and from four to ten feet high. The width was from ten to twenty feet.; there were rocks in the cavern that could not be moved. There were many tons of ore abounding with heavy spar, i.e. the barite lode. We found the cavern dip to the east (down dip) and followed it to sixteen or seventeen fathoms. It ended in a round hole about a foot in diameter."

The 1795 description says that the caverns are 28 yards in length and from 4 to 12 yards high. The top of the caverns is 14 yards below the surface. So there are similarities. From those It would infer that the caverns run east down dip. Not far beyond the adit or water would be met. The shallowest point is 12.8m below the surface. The caverns run west to east for 25m to a hole in the floor. The 12 yards high seems a bit of an exaggeration. The 1816 description suggests that the caverns were holed into at 21m depth so almost certainly from the base adit at around 25m depth. To reach shallower depth from there they would rise to the west. The 25m deep adit was not being pumped until 1817. The 1795 account mentions draughting fissures off the main caverns. Certainly, the caverns lie across the spar/barite lode within the limestone rock.

The Hole In The Wall Dig
A small vugh was noted on the far side of the 3m wide shaft from the ladder. To access this an intermediate platform was built at the 15m depth level in October 2023. That platform being 10m above the alcove dig and 8m above the bottom platform adjacent to the NW dry level. There has never been much of a vugh to follow but onward it goes running adjacent to the barite lode. Usually mud filled and sometimes a metre wide but very low. Always tantalizingly interesting with a bit of onward probing. Digging started in late October 2023. Mostly that involved removing solid rock but at least we had the shaft to drop it down. By March 2024 we had made 5.25m progress heading SE. Roll on to July 2024 and we are 10m in. Lots more work takes us onward to 14.5m in Feb 2025 by which time we are using a tub running along a conveyor belt.

Around that area a larger space is engineered as we abandon an upward progression of the dig. We half fill that with rubble but later clear it all back out again.

Going slightly down now we often use bags if there are just two of us (*The Friday Nighters*). Short intensive sessions seem the answer as we are also digging at Quarter Way Up Hole the same week.

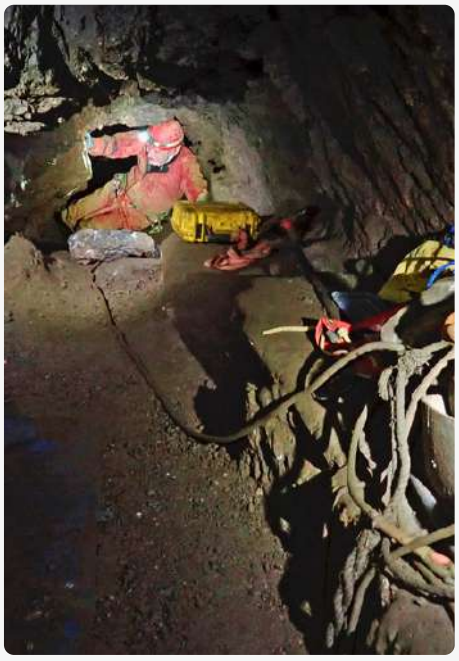
During January 2026 we approached the 17m mark. The vugh has enlarged a bit with some vertical development. Somewhere ahead and hopefully not too far should lie the caverns. We have done 83 sessions at THITW gaining 20cm per session on average. Progress is progress. Say about 5 sessions for every metre gained. Like I said normally the sessions particularly at night are fairly short. Sometimes no more than two to three hours.

Summary

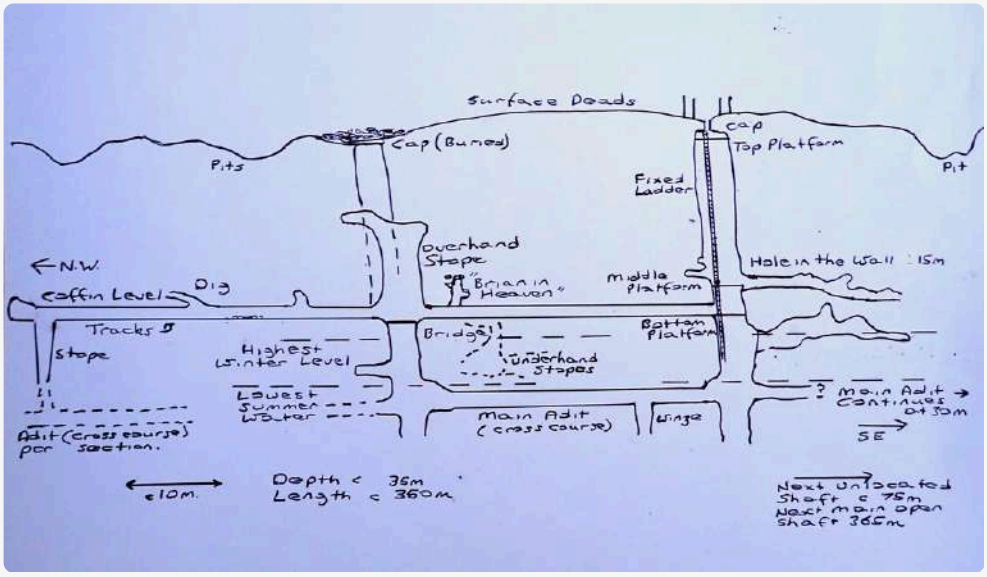
Certainly, the project deserves much more than this account. In fact, we could fill a whole book. Successive groups of diggers have included Wessex club diggers. One “largely known” member has been very helpful and another suffered in a wet cramped adit in the previous consortium. Rather him than me at the time frankly. Apart from the image captions it's best not to try to include everyone that ever helped as there were many including our locals.

We have been extra careful not to put into print any hint of where the site is. That so as not to prejudice ongoing work. Clearly, it's no big secret in the caving world but as authors we have to preserve anonymity. Hence no description of the geology and no references. Maybe all that will come at some point in the future.

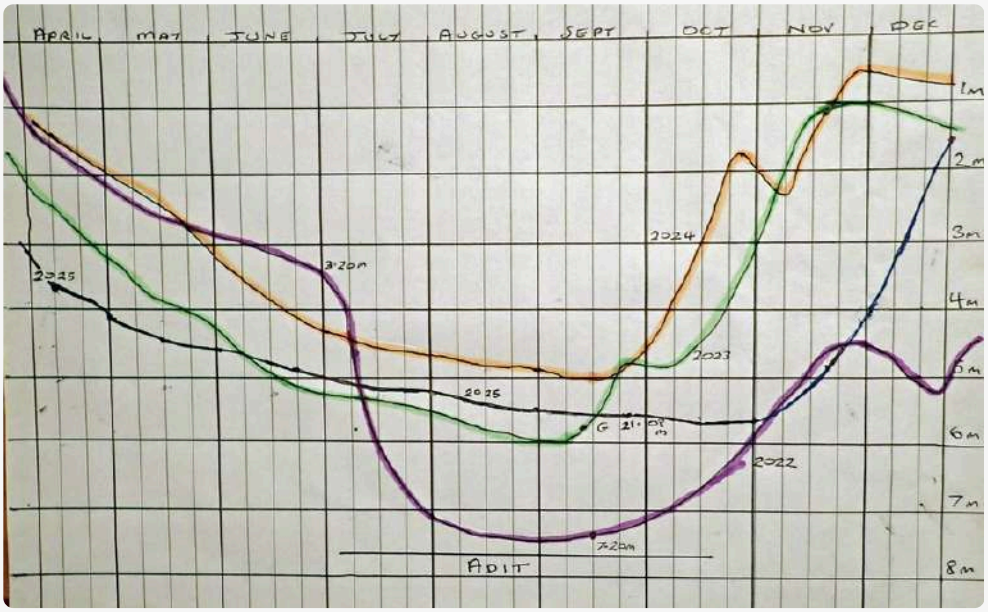
The current consortium was put together by Mike. Over four years folk became less active as work concentrated on THITW. It's one of those digs where two can manage but three is better. I think that we will carry on until one of us dies. I don't foresee any excitement over the coming months. If we blunder into caverns we shall let you know. One nagging worry remains. Did the miners fill up this space with deads? Now that would be rather sad wouldn't it?



Mike entering the enlarged area



Section of the mine’s NW area



Four years of shaft water levels

All photos by Nick Chipchase & Mike Wise

CAVE DIVING EXPEDITION IN GREECE

BY MALCOLM FOYLE
PHOTOS: CRAIG HOLDSTOCK

Editor: I'm really glad to include this account of Malc's September–October 2025 expedition to the Peloponnese in Greece. The team covered a lot of ground, both underground and underwater, revisiting known sites and pushing into new ones along the coast and inland.

We stayed at Agios Nikolaos on the Peloponnese, and were kindly hosted by GAIA, a charitable volunteer firefighting and rescue service.

We had several objectives for this trip, mostly on the diving front. The team assembled at the GAIA base over a few days from 19th to 22nd September 2025. The team members were:

Michael Thomas, John Volanthen, Charlie Reid-Henry, Aleksandra Ciesielka, Agnieszka Kozlowska, Craig Holdstock, Stephanie Lee, Malcolm Foyle, Rita Foyle, Jude Vanderplank, and Adrian Vanderplank.

Tuesday 23rd September 2025
After unpacking and sorting kit, we made our way to the local dive school to pick up equipment we had arranged to hire. Once fully equipped, several of the team had a dive in the sea locally to check out their equipment and start checking out the local area. One of our objectives was to see if we could penetrate any of the fresh water outflows, as during the summer months the inhabitants occasionally has issues obtaining fresh water.

Divers: Mike Thomas, Aleks Ciesielka
On the North side of Stoupa bay a reef extends seaward. On the North side of the reef, a large fresh water boil on the surface can be seen from the shore. The divers departed Stoupa Bay on DPVs and headed around the reef on a compass bearing and found the large fresh water resurgence after around 17 minutes of searching. It's estimated to be about 150m offshore. The divers were surprised at the size of the depression; the sea bed was at 12m, with the deepest part reached at 26m. Huge volumes of fresh water appeared between boulders and buffeted the divers when they tried to approach. Divers felt like they had entered an industrial washing machine.

With some cunning DPV use and underwater rock climbing the divers managed to investigate the point where the water was emerging. Unfortunately, no human size cave could be found. It would make an interesting digging project!

Divers: Stephanie Lee, Agnieska Kozlowska
Evidence of potential submarine resurgences could clearly be seen from land as boils of water at the surface near Stoupa Harbour.
John and Craig assisted in getting the divers' kit to the northern edge of Stoupa Beach, then surface swam to the resurgences. Steph used the buoys that demarcate the swimming area of the beach to determine the approximate bearing and distance to the resurgences before diving in search of them with Aga.
One was inside the buoy line at a depth of about 3m, and was approximately 1m wide. The other significantly larger source was outside the buoy line at a depth of 7m. The telltale blur caused by the mixing of fresh and saltwater, a distinct cold temperature change, a lack of bottom-dwelling sea life in the immediate vicinity and noticeable discolouration of the sand all indicated outflows of fresh water, but there were no visible openings in these locations.
On the dive back, Steph noted several additional small geysers of fresh water emanating from tiny fissures in rock structures on the ocean floor. While significant effort would be required to further pursue these submarine resurgences, they suggest the presence of a master cave located somewhere in the vicinity.

Wednesday 24th September 2025
Most of the team headed off to a cave called Arna. Arna is a resurgence cave that the locals draw a large amount of fresh water from throughout the year. We first looked at the site back in 2012. The terminal syphon was dived to a depth of 48m and then taken directly to the surface.

Following a brief visit two days ago by Charlie, Rita, and Malc to:

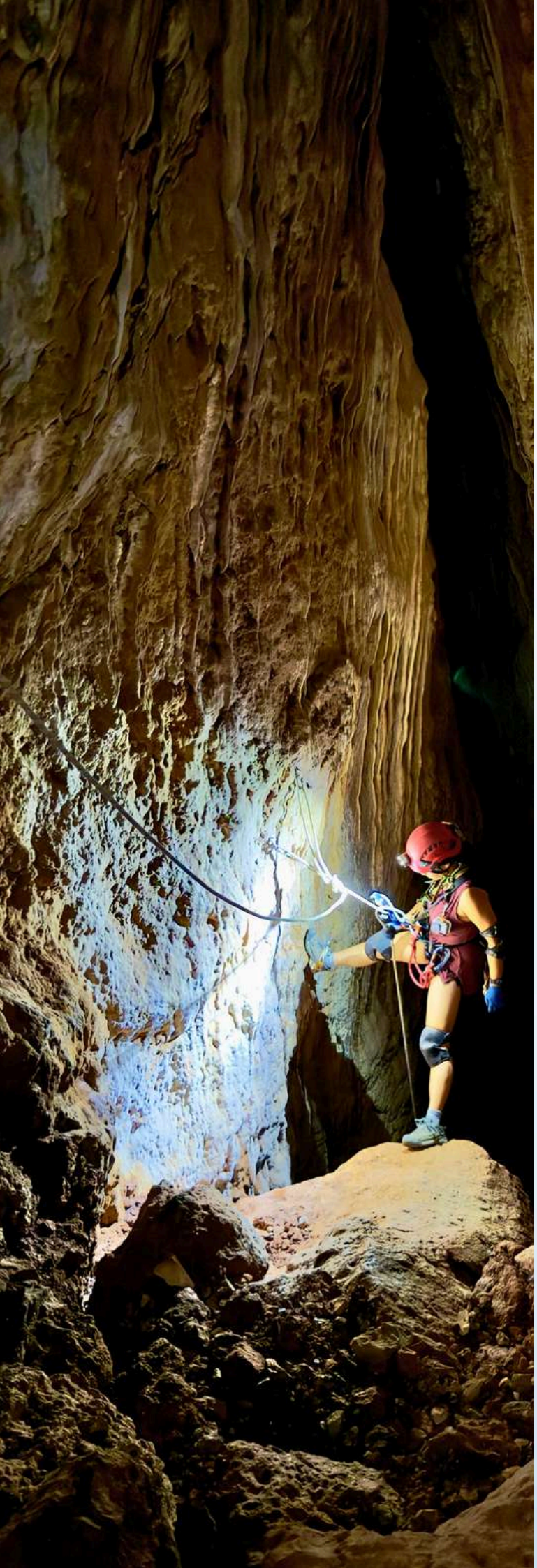
- make sure we could still find the cave after all those years and,
- refresh our memory as to the carry to the sump.

Charlie, who was the first to dive the cave in 2012, graciously handed the baton over to John. We had a '*I can't remember the carry being like that*' moment. Charlie decided that it would have been a right '*pain*' to get his back mounted rebreather to the sump.

We all mucked in to get all of John's gear to the sump pool where he duly kitted up and set off. While John was away, Craig set about our other task for the day photographing the cave. This is becoming an increasingly important item of any exploration nowadays.

Craig got some excellent images of the cave, recording both John kitting up and the general layout of the cave. Adrian and Jude had a good look around in the front half of the cave to see if there was any possibility of a continuation. Things do not look that positive on that front. John returned after about 1½ hours.

The main water flow appears to definitely come from the deep point at -48m. The surface discovered in 2012 was just an air bell. John could not find a way on despite spending a period having a good look around at the deep point. This was quite disappointing as we had quite high hopes for a continuation. We also had Steph's drone with us which we attempted to fly down the valley to check out the surrounding area, but the wind picked up not long after launch so we had to abort the flight.



Divers: Mike Thomas and Aleks Ciesielka
Mike last dived this site eleven years ago, and it was definitely worth another look. Aleks and Mike did one dive from a handy local beach using DPVs to reach and re-find three of the caves. Mike then did a second solo dive of 70 mins to locate the fourth and largest of the caves for a look around. Following an extremely old dive line to its end – the end was not the end, and passing a low arch, 30m of line was laid to find a halocline and wriggle to surface in a decorated chamber. Fresh water appeared between boulders, but unfortunately no way on was found above water. The diver feels it's unlikely this short section was new ground but very nice nonetheless. More invasive lionfish were also found unfortunately.

Thursday 25th September 2025
Some residents had contacted GAIA about a cave called Louka they had in their garden, so today we were going to have a look at it. The house was not far outside a small town called Kardamyli, some 15km from where we were staying with stunning views. The house is owned by a Dutch couple, Paul and Leive, whose hospitality was second to none. Thank you very much.

The cave was very much 'in the garden' - about 1m from the edge of the drive. It appeared to be a near vertical shaft with a howling gale coming out of it, which was just as well because it was pretty hot.

John descended the shaft where the first belay was conveniently the wheel of the van. The shaft was spacious, slightly off vertical, and reasonably well decorated. The only rope we had with us was 80 – 90m long which eventually ran out, so John returned. Craig and Steph then descended to photograph the extent of the day's exploration.

Divers: Mike Thomas, Aleks Ciesielka
Thomas Theodosiadis, from Speleo Club in Athens, told the divers a story of a possible cave that was reported by divers thirty years ago some place in the vicinity of Porto Gateas.
Thomas accompanied the divers and negotiated access from the very small port entry point. The proprietor of the local tavern confirmed the divers' story from a long time back.

The divers used DPVs and scootered north and located an entrance in a small bay around the corner. Mike laid line with Aleks following. The divers ascended up through the halocline into fresh water. 28m of well decorated cave was explored up to a tight restriction. Mike decided a smaller diver was required. On exiting the cave, both Mike and Aleks continued north on DPVs locating three more cave entrances.

Friday 26th September 2025

Today, Craig, Charlie, and Aga were heading to a major resurgence on the Peloponnese called Sitzi, which has been recently pushed to a depth, I believe, of 286m by a Polish team. Mike, myself, and a couple of other CDG members were invited to help sort out the water flow direction at this site with Greek divers in 2007, and had a good first dive at the site.

Mike, Aleks, and Steph were heading back to continue pushing and survey a site they looked at yesterday. John and I were heading to a cave called Nestani which was a couple of hours drive away. Nestani is a major sink which first came to our attention in 2007. It has a very large catchment area and a decent sized stream/river runs into the cave at the base of a small cliff just outside the village. The cave itself is about 200m of large walking passage to a sump. The sump is normally pretty disgusting because the stream collects all the rubbish from the adjacent motorway.

Some younger new members of Speleo, the caving club in Athens that we have very close ties to, shouldered the task of trying to pump out the sump after removing all the detritus from the surface. They think they pumped out 350 tons of water, leaving a small section of submerged passage. The sink-to-resurgence distance is just over 27 km and the flow through time is just 6 days, so the potential is huge.

John passed the short sump without any problems and explored about 150m of new passage ending in a 3 x 2m phreatic passage with flood debris on the floor indicating that he was following the water flow and still very much ongoing. He left the exploration for the lads who have put in all the hard work.

Because of the nature of the flooded section, the lads will have to pump it out for future exploration but we are sure that the whole sump can be pumped out to allow relatively easy access to the ongoing cave with as previously said, has huge potential. Watch this space!

Divers: Mike Thomas, Steph Lee
Support: Aleks Ciesielka

Mike and Steph entered the water and scootered north along the coast to reach the entrance of the cave that Mike and Aleks had discovered the previous day. Clipping off their scooters at the entrance, located at a depth of 11m, the divers proceeded into the cave and up a steep slope inhabited by several invasive lionfish. They encountered a halocline at approximately 4m and reached the end of Mike's line at a depth of 2.8m. Steph used an exploratory reel to begin searching for a way on and found three small squeezes all leading into what appeared to be a larger passage heading east. The diver attempted to pass through the largest and shortest of the squeezes by removing one of her 11L aluminium cylinders before deciding the squeeze would best be passed with a different configuration than what the diver had on. Steph notes that the squeeze could likely be passed by a small diver in a wetsuit carrying 3Ls and/or a hammer to break the curtain of stals on the right side. While Steph was trying the various points of the squeeze, Mike fully explored the short cave and found no other continuation. The divers then

proceeded to document the cave as they exited, with Mike taking photographs and Steph surveying the line.

Saturday 27th September 2025
We went back to Louka - the cave in Paul and Leive's garden with more rope. The cave did seem to go much farther, with one more short pitch and passages at its base pinching out. The draft coming out of the entrance is the strange thing. Because no noticeable draft was detected at the bottom of the cave, it makes us think that we may have missed something.

Whilst John and Craig were finishing off the shaft which, after a rough survey, we think is 75m deep, we flew Steph's drone again along a local cliff face. The results were very impressive the picture definition and the GPS capability was impressive to say the least. We believe that drones, provided the necessary permissions can be attained will have a major application in future trip like these.

Later that afternoon, Craig, Aga, Steph, Ad, and Jude went to a cave called Trachila to get some photographs. This is a cave on the coast that has seen a lot of activity in the past and has a large wall with a doorway built across the entrance. It is relatively short, well decorated and has a stunning view out across the sea from an upper entrance. Once again Craig showed off his ability with the camera getting an absolutely stunning shot out of the higher entrance.

Sunday 28th September 2025
Our objective today was to put 2 divers, Aga and Steph, into the sump in Selinitsa. This cave is 3.5km long and joins to a large resurgence under the sea a bit further to the South along the coast called Drakos. We have looked at this site a couple of times before, the last being in 2014 when we determined that all known underwater passages in fact trend '*downstream*' towards Drakos.

The objective of the trip was to try and locate the '*upstream*' continuation. If this could be done then we could follow the river into the hills above the known cave. The sump is about 1km from the entrance and it would take the whole team to carry all the equipment needed to allow the 2 girls to dive. There was a ladder needed to access the dive site, and getting kit in was not very easy. The ladder and a rope were installed to allow the divers and equipment to access the water. Steph dived first followed by Aga once she had safely returned. Both of the girls had a good look around the first 100 – 150m of the sump heading in an easterly direction, the direction where we assumed the upstream flow may be detected.

Some flow was thought to be detected and line was laid into a couple of passages but unfortunately no direct evidence of main flow was found. The conditions were very dry so very little flow would have been going through the cave. We may have to look again in conditions of more water flow. Craig and several others carried out some photography in other parts of the cave whilst the diving was being carried out. All the equipment was removed and a good day was had by all.

Steph's dive report:
To confirm her continued progress upstream, Steph looked for and followed ripples in the sediment in the passage floor. By holding extremely still and allowing the halocline to settle from her movement, then watching the ripples and eddies in its surface, she noted that fresh water was flowing down from multiple different holes and passages in the ceiling. She laid lines into three of these passages, each up to a depth of about 3-4 metres, before visibility, obstruction or the decreasing size of the passage caused her

to turn around. Before turning each time, she observed that the shallower sections of passage contained brown-coloured stals, in stark contrast to the main passage below, which consisted of white stone and was completely lacking in stal.

Monday 29th September 2025
Divers: Mike Thomas, Aleks Ciesielka
Support: Charlie Read-Henry, Stephanie Lee
Due to the Greek weather gods saying no to the divers' plan A, conditions far too dangerous to enter and exit the sea outside Selinitsa Cave, the divers returned to Vatsinidi Cave area for another look around. Conditions lumpy on the entry and exit, and no further cave found.

Many thanks to Charlie and Steph for quick transport of equipment back to the van after diving.

After the 29th, members of the team started to depart for home. A good trip was had by all and we achieved most of our preset objectives.

Thank you to Dive Code in Stoupa for all their assistance, it was very much appreciated. Thank you to Speleo in Athens for arranging all necessary permissions, information, and encouragement. A massive thank you to GAIA for their generous hospitality, help, and friendship.

Reservoir Hole - Dave Watts

HOW TO CALL OUT MENDIP CAVE RESCUE

1. DIAL **999**

2. ASK FOR **AVON AND SOMERSET POLICE**

3. ASK FOR **CAVE RESCUE**

4. PREPARE TO GIVE THE FOLLOWING DETAILS:
    - CAVE NAME;
    - LOCATION WITHIN CAVE;
    - NUMBERS & CONDITION OF THOSE INVOLVED;
    - DETAILS OF ANY INJURIES SUSTAINED.

5. STAY BY THE PHONE (IF USING A MOBILE STAY IN A GOOD RECEPTION AREA)

6. A MENDIP CAVE RESCUE MEMBER WILL CALL YOU BACK FOR MORE DETAILS - KEEP THE PHONE LINE FREE.