

Chelsea Spelæological Society Newsletter



Volume 51 No 1 January 2009
ISSN 0045-6381

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MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Congratulations to the following on their election to Full membership:

Jennie Lawrence
Dave Pinchin
Andy Rumming
Steve Sharp
Andy Snook

Welcome to new provisional member:

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LIBRARY ADDITIONS DECEMBER 2008

Nothing to report.

Events calendar 2009

January 31st /
February 1st

AGM & Dinner Weekend.

Saturday: Daren Cilau / Aggy through trip or variations thereof.

Now that the connection has been made why not have a club trip there! It will be an early start.... Well you never know what a year may bring. It's a nice ambition eh? For now we shall be happy with a Daren / Cnwc through trip, now that the sump/duck has been successfully passed.

Dinner in the evening shall be at the Ty Croeso Hotel.

Sunday: Annual General Meeting

CSS WEB FORUM

The web-based message board seems to be working well, with regular postings on a range of different topics, and the membership continues to increase, there are now 36 members. However there are a lot of people not yet using the message board who may be missing out on useful information and discussions, including trips that get organised at short notice.

Remember, the message board doesn't intrude on you by sending you emails - you just log on when you want to find out what's going on, or what everyone's talking about. If you've not yet got around to signing up, why not visit <http://cssmembers.proboards85.com> today?

SUBS REMINDER

THE CSS Financial Year ended on 30 September which means your subs became due again.

Full, Joint and Associate members who have not already done so should send the Treasurer a cheque as follows:

Full £30

Joint £43

Associate £20

Provisional £20 (for six months). Provisional members should renew when their previous subs expire or when promoted to Full membership.

CAVING INSURANCE: Whilst membership fees include non-caving public liability cover (unless already covered via another club in which case deduct £5 per person from the above) if you wish to increase this to ACTIVE CAVER level you need to send the treasurer a cheque for an additional £11.

CAVING B.C. PART 5 – THE DIG FACE BECKONS ... by Duncan Price

The final part of my odyssey from non-caver to CSS member spans the period from the middle of August 1996 to January 1997. During this time I did a fair amount of tourist caving with Birmingham University members but also became more attracted to the exploratory side of the activity.

Another camping trip to Hard Rock Café was carried out over the weekend 10th-12th October in the company of Rich Panes. We travelled down from Birmingham on his motorbike heavily laden with gear for the trip ahead. Arriving at Whitewalls, John Hunt almost talked us into going to the pub until Pete Bolt, Andy Cave and Angela Garwood turned up and shamed us into accompanying them down Daren Cilau. Rich and I both had fitful nights' sleep at camp – my inflatable mattress would not stay inflated and Rich was so cold that he would get up occasionally to get even colder so that when he went back to bed his sleeping bag seemed warm.

We got up just after 1 pm on Saturday to be joined for breakfast by Mark Lumley and two others. Rich changed into his wetsuit and we set off up Bonsai Streamway to look at a few promising dig sites by the Eastern Flyover while the others went off to dig in the Hard Rock extensions. I was still wearing my camp clothes (jumper and jeans) which presented a confusing sight to passing cavers (the place seemed to be teeming with them). Having explored Crystal Inlet and the area around the Meeting Room we returned to camp to be joined by Clive Gardener and his party. Our sleep was disturbed by the Rock Steady Crew getting stoned after discovering 200 feet of passage. We left early to get a head start on the others but were soon passed by Clive who was waiting for us at Whitewalls with a hot drink.

A month later on November 8th, Rich and I were back with Mike Wright and Phil Gazard for a 24 hour digging trip to a site at the end of Nameless Canyon that we had found on our previous trip. We'd just got ensconced at the dig face when Clive turned up with Simon Abbott and John Stevens. Simon and John went forward to the dig face while Clive and I dreamed up possibilities and extensions in comfort.

The dig soon yielded to siege tactics gaining a 20 ft extension terminating at a low crawl to a mud blockage. Clive & co. left for pastures new while we set off to follow them along Half Mile Passage and thence into Eastern Flyover and down into Bonsai Streamway. However, some of the party didn't like the look of the traverse over the end of Crystal Inlet so we retraced our steps along Nameless Canyon, looking at leads in the roof which were inaccessible without climbing gear.

After visiting Aggy Passage and some digging at Kingston Sands, we trooped down to Hard Rock Café to eat the remains of my food left there from our trip in October. Clive, Simon & John were met coming down from Eastern Flyover before we returned to a blind chamber off of the Meeting Room for an hour's sleep beneath bivi bags, finally exiting after 23 hours underground to the smouldering remains of the CSS bonfire party.

A follow-up trip on 29th November consisted of the same group plus Pat Hall. We surveyed our modest extension where a cursory dig picked up a promising draught. We then bolted up into an oxbow in the roof of Nameless Canyon – unfortunately we weren't the first to enter it.

Due to my increasing affiliation with the diggers at Hard Rock Café, I transferred my non-university caving allegiance to the Bristol Exploration Club. I was due to be going to Mendip over the weekend of 9-11th January 1997 when I got a better offer of a trip down Agen Allwedd with Jim Arundale, Steve Tooms and Rob Murgatroyd. We travelled down from Birmingham in Jim's car where we met John Hunt. Another caver known as "Spanners" tagged along with our group as we headed into the cave on January 10th to dig a site called "Gothic Passage"...

The rest, as they say, is history – or at least subsequent events are documented in the CSS newsletter. My take on the year that followed can be found published in the Belfry Bulletin Vol 42(1) No 444, Feb. 1988. I'd like to thank Clive Gardener for providing copies of stuff which I wrote a long time ago which were used in the preparation of these articles.

BREAKING THE CRAIG A'R FFYNNON CURSE by Gary Kiely

Since I started caving, I have been trying to get to Ogof Craig a Ffynnon. The forces of destiny have been frowning upon me. God knows, I'm not been over dramatic either.

April 2006: My partner at the time got run over by a car on the Friday morning before the trip. Trip aborted

March 2007: The Friday afternoon before the trip I became violently ill. I had not been ill for 5 years previously. Trip aborted.

March 2008: The Friday evening, on the way to Whitewalls, a Fox, a Ditch and the Tarmac conspired to kill my car, they missed me(!) but did a great job on the car. Trip aborted.

Needless to say those who know me forbid me to attempt to plan another trip. Some things are not to be, eh?

On Saturday 29th March we had a great trip on the Aggie grand circle. This was followed by all sorts of Shenanigans in the name of entertainment(?) until the small hours of Sunday morning. Most people were all caved out for the Sunday. Over breakfast I caught a whiff of an OCAF trip being arranged by a group of Hades members who were staying with us at Whitewalls. Nothing could go wrong! I wasn't organising the trip. If my memory serves me correctly, this trip comprised of Robin Weare, Jennie Lawrence, Alyson Rook, Mel and Anna. I can't remember all the surnames.

I truly believe that Chelsea have been beaten hands down by The Hades. I experienced the God of all faffs before we finally got into the cave. Of course, this was probably a one off!

The cave entrance had a rather fiddly locking mechanism. Apparently this is the improved and much easier MK VII version. I came in last and had the joyful experience of locking the gate.

The cave was quickly big enough to stoop. This led us through a passage with quite a lot of calcite. Thankfully it was well taped up. A fixed ladder took us up into a large chamber which was quite drippy. A climb down some flowstone brought us to a crawl of sorts, which led to gravel based duck. A few screeches ahead of me told me that there would be freshness to the water in the duck.

A few minutes later we at the base of the ladder leading to the chain and rope climb. Robin went

first and free climbed the pitch, if you can call it that. In reality it's a bit like the climb up into Biza passage on the Grand Circle. I climbed to the base of the pitch. I was asked to assist anybody that needed it in the link between the ladder and the pitch base. I felt a little out of place to find out that 3 out of the 4 girls were frequent climbers in the real world with sky, clouds and colour and everything. Robin life lined everybody. It took a bit of time and we were all glad to get going afterwards, to get the circulation going. The mood was right for a Sunday trip. A gentle trip, with lots of banter. Anna and Mel had a little caving experience, but their confident climbing made them look like old hands at it.

We approached the Second Boulder Choke. This was really good fun, like a corkscrew. Somebody described it quite aptly as 4th dimension climbing. Up, down, forward and backwards all within a few meters. Again it took quite some time for us all to negotiate this. Care had to be taken descending the slope from the top of the boulder choke, it was quite loose in places and slippery in others. Either way nature was working at getting you down into the mud trail at the bottom very quickly indeed. The trail of mud caused a great many laughs. I wonder how many wellies are still in that mud. This passage was slightly stooping in places and snaked back and forth until it seemed to spread out into a lower chamber. The way on was a scrabble up between some smooth rocks. A simple manoeuvre indeed but made nearly impossible by the thick gloopy mud that had attached itself to your wellies. Arriving into a passage at a level of about 4 metres higher, at a guess, the aven of this passage was about 15 meters high. Much more gloopy mud at the beginning of this passage made the going quite hard work. The calcite and mud formations on the far right hand side were very impressive and roughly speaking they followed the passage along its length.

When we were out of the mud the passage got bigger and bigger in comparison to Aggy Main Passage, or White Passage in Darren. I had never heard much talk about OCAF in the past and had no idea what to expect. Journals and guides are fine, but they can't give you an image of a cave as well as a caver enthusiastically waving arms in the air describing it. Further on was something unusual, loads of deep steps, almost at the full width of the passage, about 6 meters. There was water gently cascading down these steps. On closer inspection, each step was like a wide gour

pool. Thankfully we did not have to walk across these pools. There was a muddy, worn path on the left hand side, for muddy, worn cavers. This led us into a huge chamber, Hall of the Mountain King. Covered in calcite it was as if a fleet of lorries just dumped a heap of calcite from above onto the floor of the chamber. We walked around this amazing sight very slowly. Pretties are not really my thing, but this was staggering. We were all silent now, absorbing this vast display of the work of nature.

When we had ogled enough we headed back to the surface stopping along the way for some mud wrestling etc. When in the Second Boulder Choke Mel reckoned that she knew how toothpaste felt having being washed down the drain. Another strange, but accurate description of 2nd boulder choke. Once down the climbs at the chain and the ladder Mel and I headed off to have a head start at getting the gate opened.

When we got there it turned out to be easy so we waited for ages for everybody else.

Going to Hall of the Mountain King is a great Sunday trip. Nothing too exerting and bundles of pretties, all of which, were out of harms way and all of this comparatively closes to the entrance. I would love to see the rest of the cave some time. But obviously, I wont be arranging the trip. Thanks to the group from the Hades who where happy for me to tag along and therefore broke the curse for me! I felt as much part of the group I caved with as I would with any of the Chelsea members that I cave with regularly.

I think it is really great, that there are so many caving clubs, which are very different to each other, full of very different characters, yet we still all stew in the same cauldron of caving. All having the common objective of having a great time, bouncing around in the veins of the earth.

CRAIG A'R FFYNNON 22/11/2008 by Tom Foord

Tom Foord & Martin Beale

It is a strange fact that in my 12 years of caving, many of them spent around Llangattock, I had still not managed to get myself down Craig-a-Ffynnon. But with the new access arrangements (ie. a nice shiny key hanging in the Whitewalls locker!) this situation could now be rectified.

A few of us had been chatting for a while about the prospects of starting a dig or two in OCAF, so I fancied a quick reccie trip to familiarise myself with the cave and also have a poke around the Blaen Elin Streamway, since we had been tipped off that there's a very promising lead up for grabs in that area. I managed to persuade Martin Beale to take an afternoon off from his new yacht to accompany me.

My first impression of the cave was that there was a more crawling than I had expected, and a lot more mud too. This mud was really gloopy stuff, and got everywhere. For some reason I had always envisaged OCAF to be a nice clean cave! The Hall of the Mountain King was impressive though, as were the gour pools in the large passage leading up to it. Severn Tunnel was another fantastic piece of passage, being easy walking along a tall, dead straight passage with a flat floor.

We soon reached Severn Tunnel Junction, which is a right-angled crossroads between four large passages. It is between here and the 4th Choke

that the routes lead off to Blaen Elin Streamway and also the Lower Series. Unfortunately there is some confusion over which is which! The descriptions in both 'Caves of South Wales' and the CSS 'Llangattock Exploration Journal' describe Blaen Elin as being down a rift in the floor just after Severn Tunnel Junction, while the Lower Series is accessed via a small passage just before the 4th Choke. However the labelling on the survey puts them the opposite way around. We decided to believe the descriptions, but there is no way of knowing whether our informant had things the same way around when describing where that 'promising lead' was!

After a quick poke around the large passages from Severn Tunnel Junction (which ended in boulder chokes heading south-west) we set off wriggling down the rift in the floor to reach the streamway below. There was a strong draught blowing out from here. Upstream (north-east) ended immediately in a boulder choke, presumably under the floor of the huge passage which leads to the 4th Choke.

We headed downstream which quickly developed into a nice clean-washed streamway in a tall passage with a couple of little cascades and pools. This headed south-west, back beneath Severn Tunnel Junction until it hit a choke. This could well be the base of the same choke we encountered in the passages off Severn Tunnel Junction above.

The water could be followed downwards into loose boulders for a little way, but it was pretty horrible and I wouldn't have fancied digging at this. Someone clearly had done in the past though - a length of bang wire was evidence of this.

On the right of the choke a wriggle through boulders entered a good comfortable passage heading north-west for a few metres in solid rock. Unfortunately this soon rounded a corner to the left and immediately hit boulder choke. This choke didn't look as though it had received too much attention, and with the right equipment you might make some progress here. It would need something a little stronger than a just a crowbar though.

Our last option was to climb up into the roof at the main choke. The passage was keyhole shaped here, and was quite spacious at roof level with some nice formations. A dug passage led off to the left (south-east) following a solid left-hand wall. The right hand wall consisted entirely of choke. This dig could be followed for quite some way and draughted strongly. This was definitely the main source of the draught we had experienced at the entrance to Blaen Elin. At the end you could see a little way forward through gaps in the boulders, with the solid left hand wall continuing ahead. Again with the right tools you

could definitely make progress here, although spoil removal may be tricky since the dig is long and bouldery.

We had exhausted all options here, and time was ticking on, so we went for a quick wander up to the 4th Choke and located the entrance to Lower Series before heading out after 3 hours underground.

All of the chokes we had encountered seemed to be aligned on a line heading NW-SE, running parallel to main cave. Perhaps this is evidence of a fault? Although the dig heading SE is not going in a very inspiring direction (back towards the cave entrance), it did emit a good strong draught, so perhaps there is something to be found here?

Next time we will have to have a look at the Lower Series, which looks as though it comes very close to Blaen Elin on the survey. One thing that is fairly certain is that the stream mentioned in the Lower Series description cannot be the same one as our one in Blaen Elin, since ours was coming from the NE whereas the Lower Series is to the NW. These two streams must therefore converge somewhere within the area of boulder chokes we encountered.

WIGMORE SWALLETT 22/11/2008 by Gary Kiely

Sometimes one's mouth starts and finishes a sentence before the brain has any chance to have the slightest involvement. Depending on whom it is directed to, it can be completely un-retractable.

"I fancy having a go at Wigmore" was one such sentence, and directed to Mad Fi meant that it was written in stone. "Best cave in Mendip" according to Fi. It should have been the biggest warning sign!

Saturday morning, grass crunching under foot, east wind whipping my ears. Remind me, why do I do this again? The protective grill to the entrance pitch was quite meaty and I was thankful that there was a chain attaching it to the concrete edge. I could have so easily lost it down the pitch. That would be embarrassing. As we laddered the entrance pitch my hands were beyond useless cold already. I just wanted to get on with it. You just know, that no matter how uninviting it may look, it's nice and toasty down there. A gentle stream splashed its way down the pitch, keeping me company on the ladder. It's tricky to get out of

the water while belaying somebody here. Fi got down and we were off.

A few 3m climbs in close succession made me realise that my new oversuit was going to get a baptism of fire. The rock was very abrasive. Sliding or dragging is not an option, as every low crawl and squeeze requires the finesse of a belly dancer. Below the climbs a low wide chamberette leads into a series of low crawls. A 6m free climb down with a hand line leads into a rift, where hands and knees is the order of the day. Although not obvious at the start, a few meters on, a deep hole in the floor on an 80-degree bend appears. A conveniently placed scaffold bar across it certainly makes life easier. With the help of "Mendip Underground" I believed that this is called Piss Pot.

By this point I had become accustomed to the ongoing snugness. Looking around this bend the snugness went to the next level, and because it is a straight line for as far as your light will allow it looks really mean. About 8 Meters along, the floor undulates, forcing me to snake down and up

within a body length. I think this is called "Butch's Arse". Beyond this I had to choosing a leading arm and wall to stare at for another 6 meters. A traverse line follows this tube about 2 inches above my head. Cowstails onto this was just bloody awkward. Inching along in the oversuit eating tube is a time and energy consuming procedure. At last my efforts were rewarded by the exit from this tube to Black Pudding Pot. It's a humbling experience appreciating the cowstail goodness, in fact checking it again and getting the 2nd tail on also, to be sure, to be sure. The ladder was about 1.5 meters away from the exit. Which was over the head of a 10m pitch. How I got out of this cannot be the right way! So if you find yourself at this point find another way. I could not quite reach the ladder so looking down the pitch, about a meter I saw a nib of rock about the size of a £1 coin and another about 12 inches below it. So head first down the pitch I crawled to get to finger holds. This allowed my legs to escape the tube and now I could reach the rungs of the ladder. Walking with my hands back up the rungs I finally got all hands and feet into their correct places and went down like any normal person would. Apparently there was another pot that I would have climbed to get to the sumps but I

can't remember it. Probably because I made Black Pudding Pot quite dramatic for myself.

I was really surprised when I reached the sumps. I had expected Wigmore to be a much longer trip. We carefully choose one of the cylinders by the sump to bring out. Tying up all the rest of the cylinders again was like a jigsaw. Fi and I made light work of getting the cylinder out, with very little difference in effort to going in. I think taking a cylinder in or out on your own would provide a whole lot of entertainment! The return was only made more colourful by the collapse of the spoil on the 2nd of the 3m climbs near the entrance; I spent about 15 minutes trying to rebuild this. Maybe there is a reason I'm an electrician instead of a bricklayer. It has to be said that my attempts were pretty dismal.

A quick shower on the way up the ladder helped to cool off. I was feeling pretty invigorated by the time I got to the top. A big grin crept across my face as I put the gate back in place. It wasn't as bad as I had anticipated. Best described as short bit of gnarly caving, creating an intensive work out for all muscle groups. If you want to go for a stroll in a pretty cave, . . . you need to go somewhere else!

POTTERING ABOUT ON MENDIP by John Cooper

Swildon's Hole, Sunday 7th December 2008

John Cooper and Barry Weaver on the usual trip. In the Dry Way, visited Sump 2 and out the Wet Way.

Swan Mine, Saturday 13th December 2008

John Cooper joined a horde of Wessex CC members on a trip to this mine near Bath.

Following lunch in the Swan Inn a large number of Santa Clauses took afternoon refreshments in the mine.

Bath Swallet/Rod's Pot, Friday 2nd January 2009

John Cooper and Gary Kiely did the through trip from Rod's Pot to Bath Swallet having first rigged Bath Swallet with a handline.

Read's Cavern, Friday 2nd January 2009

John Cooper and Gary Kiely entered by the upper dry passage and, following an extensive burrow around amongst large boulders below both ends of the Main Camber, exited by the lower stream entrance.

Don't forget to get your annual dinner booking to Gary Kiely as soon as possible.

Memories
of an agreeable
Rat



Belching 'Bollocks' with aplomb
Selflessly 'warming up' the stream while I was lying in it just ahead at the dig face
Snoring through MRO Wardens' meetings
Helping to drag me back to camp after a banana vodka and pickled fish challenge in Romania
Spewing his false teeth into the Hunters' bog, putting them back in and going back for more
Just one more Butcombe in a smoky haze
Vowing revenge for the pile of sheep shit I'd hidden in his tackle bag when he visited Daren
Noble assistance in the BEC 24 pints in 24 hours challenge at the BCRA conference
Catching his teeth in mid-air 200 ft up a shaft in Jagerhöhle
after throwing up on noticing that his delta maillon was wide open
Winding in the bang wire, not realising that the unfired det, cord and plaster
were being dragged up the passage over me
Drinking whiskey for 3 days solid in a rain-swept tent in Romania
Enthusiastic encouragement on countless projects
Shouting and hitting me to keep me conscious as I blacked out from bang fumes and
bad air in Bowery Corner
Cheerfully pointing out that the Polish rope we were both on had come second in a
drop test comparison with a pair of underpants
Garlic Schnapps for breakfast at the Wiesberghaus
Humanity

Gonzo

Officers of the Society are listed below

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CSS DETAILS

CSS WEB site: The club has its own domain name www.chelseaspelaeo.org.uk
The CSS committee is the Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, Cottage Warden, Meets Secretary Librarian and Tackle Officer plus elected member Mel Reid.

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COTTAGE BOOKINGS

23/24 January 2009	Cambridge University CC	12
30/31 January 2009	CSS	Annual Dinner & AGM