

CHELSEA SPELAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

CSS

Newsletter

Volume 51 No. 7 July 2009

**Selected
Caves of
France**

Lot 2008

Radon

**Pat
"Twink"
Fletcher**

**Recent
Extensions in
Charterhouse**

Chelsea Spelæological Society NEWSLETTER

Volume 51 No 7 July 2009

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Mandy Voysey looks up at an unpushed aven
(come on chapst!), Friday the 13th, Daren Cilau

CONTENTS

	Page
Kayak Trip and Dinner	85
Lot 2008	86
Equipment review - Petzl Pantin	88
GCRT Rescue Practice	89
Selected Caves of France	90
Cave Access (Club Leaders)	92
Radon Gas in Agen Allwedd and Eglwys Faen	93
Otter Hole	94
Pottering Around on Mendip	96
The Otter Hole Experience	98
Under the Ground	99
Pat "Twink" Fletcher	99
Officers of the Society	100
Meets List 2009	100
Photos of the Month	101

ADDRESS LIST

Members are sent an address list each year. If you are shown as **Lapsed** then you will not receive further newsletters until the Treasurer informs me you have paid your subs.

Current rates are:

Full £30
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Associate £20
Provisional £20 (for six months).

Provisional members should renew when their previous subs expire or when promoted to Full membership.

Cover Photo:
Alison Moody in the 2009 extensions
Charterhouse Cave
Central Mendip.
Photo: Pete Hann, Wessex CC

Photos in the Newsletter that are not credited have been taken by the Editor.

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.

Editorial

Thanks for all the contributions, please keep them coming . . .



Mark Lumley

Membership

Welcome back to 'new' provisional member

Charles Bailey

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Charles Bailey, aven-tumbler, boulder-magnet, one-hipped crawler and the osteopath's friend, with his own private wing at Abergavenny Hospital's Accident and Emergency Unit, enjoying 'running repairs' at Hard Rock . . .

Please send all material (ideally in blocks of less than 10 megabyte) to:

mark@creativeedge.me.uk

or put on CD (readable on all platforms as I'll be working on a Mac) and post to:

Mark Lumley

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Send text for your article as .doc or similar, or simply send it as an email.

Convert photos, surveys and other images to decent-sized .jpeg, .tif, .psd or .eps files.



KAYAK TRIP AND DINNER

12-13th September



Kayaking photos supplied by Stuart France

An extra informal meet is proposed. This will be based at Whitewalls. The plan is to kayak down the Wye to Kerne Bridge near Symonds Yat. This is similar to the trip that was cancelled due to floods a while ago.

On the Saturday evening, an Italian communal meal back at Whitewalls. Anyone interested in the river trip, the meal, or both, please contact **Stuart France**.

Lot 2008

by Gary Jones

John Volanthen in Gouffre du Briant Photo: Clive Westlake

I've been visiting various areas of France over the last 12 years or so to enjoy some of the magnificent and varied caving that the country has to offer. Areas such as Languedoc, Franche-Comte, the Vercors and the Pyrenees have all had to put up with this Essex boy and his dodgy school boy French. One area I have visited on a number of occasions however is the Lot, principally to enjoy the superb cave diving available and more often than not to lend a hand to other divers pushing ridiculous distances into various sumps. In 2007, due to rather wet weather, I'd been forced away from the usual easy access, fat boy resurgence flop sites and into some of the dry caves of the area and had been surprised at how much I'd enjoyed myself! It's quite a relief not to lug heavy diving tat around once in a while. Hence, I thought in 2008, I'd try to visit a few more of the proper caves of the département. In addition, two of the usual suspects for sherparing duties (Rick Stanton and John Volanthen) were looking for a hand getting piles of homemade breathing paraphernalia down to the bottom of an honest pothole. Hence 2008 saw myself and Lucy Northover driving out to the Lot to join a motley bunch of cavers/divers for some caving in the sun...

We arrived at the campsite tired after the long drive out with the

intention of the following day being a nice lazy one in which to recover from the drive, however it wasn't to be! Instead, the first of the sherparing trips into La Carrière took place. We all disappeared into the hole in the middle of the field with the exception of Clive Westlake who had left his SRT kit back at the campsite and had to rush back for it. The first few pitches are short scrappy affairs linked by grovelly short crawls. After a few of these though, one longer pitch drops into much more respectable passage with the exception of a short section of muddy horizontal passage with little to commend it if you don't count the mud formation/sculpture of an arse or according to Tim a pair of breasts! What was far less ambiguous was the CO₂ levels. High CO₂ was experienced all through the cave from this point onwards, especially in the muddy section. The increased level of panting and exertion needed to move through the cave was marked. From the muddy section, a small but at times pleasant stream is reached. This is mostly easy going with the odd obstacle, the worst of which was an awkward rift which was rigged with two traverse lines, one for the hands and one to stand on. Once you'd worked this out, it was a lot easier but still a pain. This stream eventually joined a much larger one, the main collecteur for the system. We proceeded downstream in fine passage of 10m+ high and

5m wide passage. There were a few more minor climbs and drops on the way, a few of which were rigged and required kit. There was a reasonable amount of traversing to do as well to involve some deeper sections of water. The last bit involved climbing high above the stream and was particularly airy. Tim had quite a scare when a handhold came away some 10m+ above the streamway! The kit was dropped a few hundred metres short of the sump as the last bit was only accessible by swimming. Time to bottom was around 3hrs and 50mins, which included a lot of route finding and a few wrong turns on the way! Back at the entrance after 7 ½ hours underground. It was particularly noticeable that when we reached the last few pitches, the air quality improved, we suddenly felt much more energetic and buoyant and all our lethargy disappeared. It was surprising just how much we picked up as we reached fresher air, it was only at this point that Lucy believed me that the exertions and hard work she'd experienced was not due to fitness but was in fact the bad air after all!

The next day I resorted to resurgence flopping and went for an easy swim in the Marche Pied. This is a site that has only recently been explored by two Somerset section divers after they dug open the entrance. Clive was raving about

the site, the water was gin clear and it was a short walk, I simply had to go! The sump starts low through an excavated rubble choke with various bits of metal work holding stuff in, including acroprops which appear to be supporting the entrance itself... Once past this joy, a rattly trench is met, the combination of these two making the site a definite side mount place (which is nice as it keeps away the hoards!). However, after the trench the passage becomes spacious and picturesque. Diving with Clive, I benefited from his lights as well as mine and this gave a great dive. Well worth a visit.

Recalling the next day's activities brings on mixed emotions. The trip was to the Pucelle, a well known, easy and fun wet cave often frequented by parties of school kids and outdoor groups. The reason for my mixed emotions is that myself and Lucy were accompanied by John Maneely on the trip. Although we caved with John later in the week and my last trip with him was through Ink Sump in Peak cavern, this trip sticks in my mind because it was just straight forward simple fun. It's sad to ponder on the fact that the next time John would venture back to France would prove to be his last... Duncan wrote a fitting article about John for the newsletter which I was pleased to see so I won't repeat what he wrote here other than to say that this trip brings back fond memories of John, smiling his way through the cave, lending a hand whenever possible and generally just being John. I'll miss him.

It was a fun trip, a nice wet cave with lots of duckings and easy pitches which we rigged old school with proper ladders and stuff! Not exactly sure how far we got but didn't quite get to the end as we ran out of ladders and had to stop at a rather fine looking wet pitch.

The next day saw Lucy, Tim and I off to the Padirac show cave as neither Tim nor Lucy had been there before and in my opinion, it's well worth a trip. Tim liked it so much he quite literally bought the T-shirt! The show cave begins with a rather impressive massive entrance shaft - either take the stairs or the lift if you're feeling a bit lazy! Then a trip in a boat along a very nice canal before a wander around huge chambers and stal. Finish it all off with an ice cream

afterwards (and before if you're like us!) and you have a very easy yet fun speleological day out!

The Padirac water eventually makes its way to the St. George resurgence, a popular resurgence flop near the village of Martel. The through trip which has been completed involves some 22 sumps and around 20km of passage... So it seemed only fitting that after a trip to the Padirac, we also went for a swim in the resurgence. So whilst Tim went for a long swim somewhere into sump 2, I gave Lucy a rather cursory diving lesson in the pretty but chilly sump pool which culminated in a dive to 9 metres and a look into the cave mouth.

Friday saw us return to La Carrière for what had now been inevitably dubbed la carry out! This time, Tim, Lucy and I went in together and with no gear and knowledge of the route made it to the gear dump in just under two hours including a quick look upstream in the collecteur - very impressive stream passage. Trip out straight forward, we just had to pause more than normal due to the CO₂ especially after climbs etc. We were back at the entrance after 6 hours but it would have been much quicker if we hadn't caught the rest of the party up at the pitches. Changing after the trip was memorable for witnessing what was possibly the world's most lecherous smile! This belonged to the local farmer as he'd driven past us whilst getting changed. Both Tim and I were pretty sure he wasn't looking at us...

I'd like to say we didn't tease Lucy about it but that would be a lie...

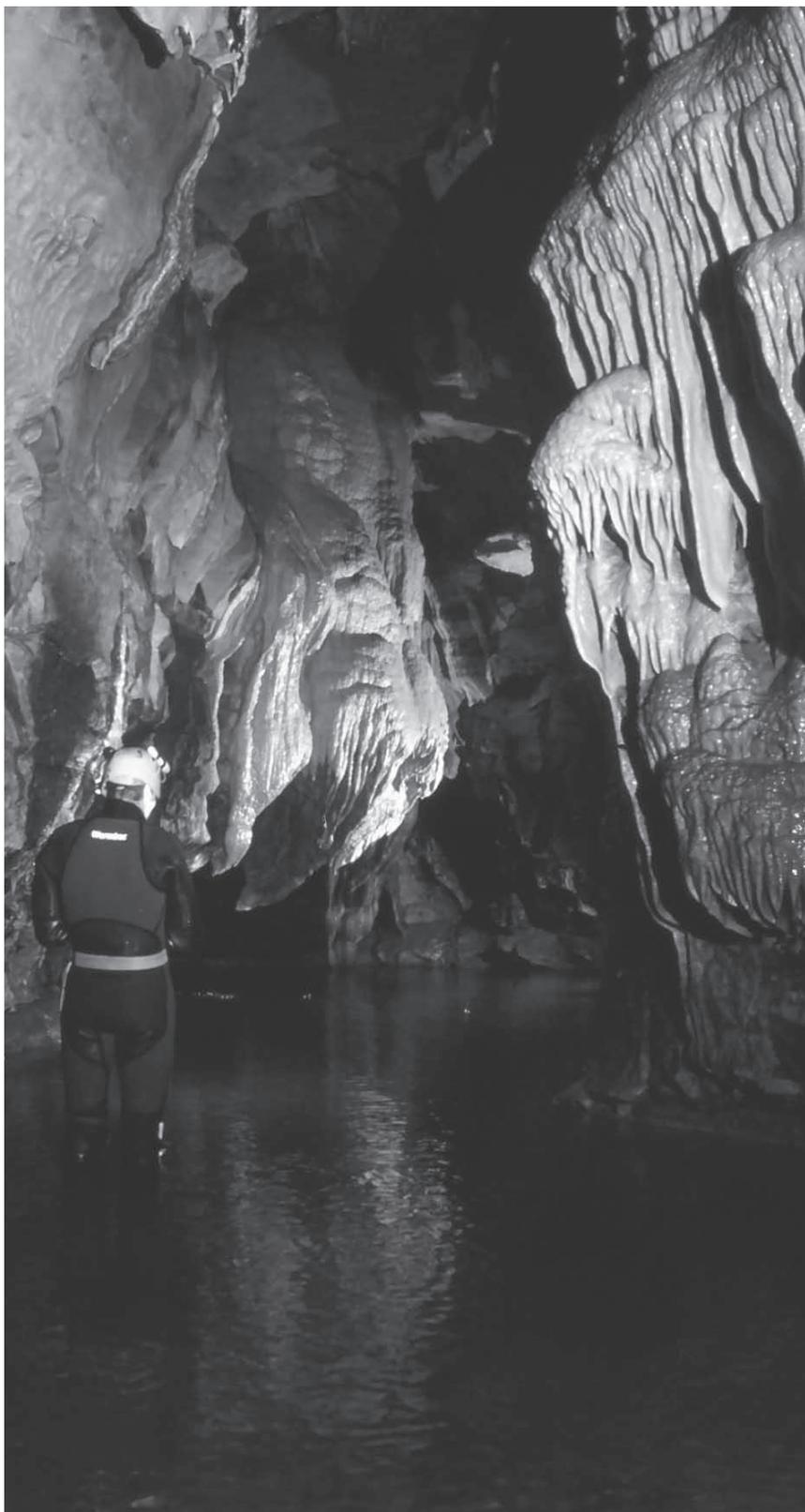
The next day saw Lucy and I hiring a bath tub of a canoe and taking to the waters of the Dordogne for a lazy day starting at the village of Gluges and paddling/floating downstream to Pinsac. Despite the overcast weather, floating down past the limestone cliffs is a very pleasant way to spend a down day although we didn't entirely avoid caving as the Emergence de Mayraguet is found in one of these cliffs and resurges directly into the river. Neither of us could resist and in we paddled... It continues for 50-100m round a few corners and then under a few low bits before reaching the sump. It was rather fun but also a tad scary as we

only had the one light between us...

A particularly fine cave that I'd ventured into last year was the Emergence Temporaire de la Dragonnière de Cabreret (to give it its rather excessive full name!). Clive Westlake had put me onto it and as I'd been so complimentary about it, a small circus of divers had another visit. After passing the first two sumps of 133m and 53m, a muddy passage is followed from an airbell. This quickly reaches a long climb up and then a magnificent series of phreatic tunnels richly adorned with all sorts of formation, this is the aptly named Jardin d'Eden. Clive took some photos (see www.plongeesout.com for some of Clive's photos - click on sites plongée, then test your French geography and find the Lot and finally click on Dragonnière)

The trip was not without incident however... I fell through a false floor and gashed my hand, Tim burst out of his new wetsuit due to a faulty zip (that's his excuse anyway...), various people went up the wrong lines in the poor viz on the way out and were rescued/found by others on the way back, Rick lost the line reel and Pete got stupidly cold as he was wearing a wetsuit which was so thin it quickly became known as his diving leotard! Nevertheless, it was fun!

Our final trip was to another classic of the area the Gouffre du Briant. This is a well decorated stream cave. The entrance is dry leading to a 10m pitch which we laddered. From there it's into a muddy chamber which leads to some nice but very muddy passages which then begin to get wet and wading is needed. This ends at a calcite dam from which a handline is needed (we used Clive's which was older than me!) to descend the flowstone wall on the other side. From here, there's a few grovelly bits but it quickly picks up into fine passage with the formations becoming whiter and whiter and more impressive. And lots of wet bits. Eventually the stream joins a much larger river. To the left and upstream sumps and includes the water from the nearby Jonquille cave (another good trip). We headed downstream, this is a fine phreatic river passage with lots of deep water some of which required swimming. Clive seemed to be forging ahead with gusto but the rest of us wimps



John Volanthen in Gouffre du Briant Photo: Clive Westlake

were really beginning to feel the cold. Every section of deep water was loudly announced with high pitched girly squeals and gasps, only a few of which were coming from the girl in the group... In the end, our bravado faltered and we had to admit defeat, reign in the caving machine that is Clive and turn around. Maybe the fact that I was only wearing half a wetsuit, Lucy was wearing my

caving wetsuit which was patently too big and Tim was wearing his Adonis suit was not such a good idea after all!

All in all, a pleasant week's caving which as usual, left France's stock of beer, wine, duck and ice cream severely depleted! Just need to plan the next trip now...

EQUIPMENT

Petzl Pantin

review by
Gary Jones

I'm not sure how many people are aware of this particular product, I wasn't until last year and hence felt it deserved a review here.

During a Yorkshire SRT trip last year, I was introduced to the Pantin by John Cordingley who couldn't speak highly enough of it. He was so keen to pass on its merits, he lent me his to try out for a day stating I'd probably go out and buy one straight away, and indeed he was quite correct, I bought one the very next day!

The Pantin consists of a jammer with a weak spring and is attached to the foot via webbing. Assuming your SRT set up is standard frog, i.e. a hand jammer and a chest croll, no adjustment is needed to this set up, the Pantin is simply worn on a foot and used in conjunction with the normal set up. It can be used to rope walk by alternating arm and leg movements resulting in rapid ascent though this is quite tiring and equates to more of a sprint than a sustainable effort. Alternatively and a lot easier is to simply prussik as usual in the frog style. The difference being that only the one foot is put in the leg loop as the other has its own jammer. As weight is put onto the Pantin, it pulls the rope taut through the croll resulting in a more upright position and hence a more efficient motion. In addition, due to the weak spring on the Pantin, it will easily run up an unloaded rope hence that annoying bit at the bottom of the pitch where you need to either grip the rope between your feet or tie a bag to it etc is avoided. Instead you simply lead with the Pantin foot which tensions the rope nicely through the chest croll. Likewise, passing a rebelay is also easier despite having an extra jammer to change. The change over is achieved in the usual way except that when you come to move off up again, the Pantin again holds the rope taut allowing the croll to run free without having to resort to pulling it

through by hand.

A further advantage is that it also makes tight pitches much easier. Rather than having to resort to one leg prusiking and general flailing around (well that's how I used to do it anyway...) the extra jammer gives more versatility and freedom of movement whilst helping to keep the rope nice and tight and really making the most of every effort. The much better body positioning gained by the extra jammer means that every little movement made down on the Pantin foot is instantly translated into upward movement on the croll, it's a joy to use and very satisfying!

I'd initially assumed that a Pantin would be an advanced bit of kit to add on to your SRT kit at a later stage but having used one I now think it's a basic bit of gear that should be in everyone's kit regardless of experience. To back this up, Lucy started using hers on only her second or third SRT trip and immediately found it easy to use and wouldn't be without it now. My only proviso would be that any newcomer to SRT at least does a pitch or two without one just so they can appreciate how the Pantin helps and just in case they were to lose it underground and had to exit without it.

Disadvantages: Well it's one extra bit of kit to carry and it can be a bit fiddly to get on and off the rope under some circumstances but overall I'd say these minor points are more than made up by the plus points.

A Pantin costs around £40 and although strictly speaking is a non essential item I certainly think it's a bit of kit well worth owning. If you're ever on an SRT trip with me, feel free to borrow mine (as long as you give it back!) and see what you think yourself.

If you know somebody who would like to join **CSS** then contact Pete Ward now: speleo@hotmail.co.uk

GWENT CAVE RESCUE TEAM PRACTICE

by Stuart France



About a dozen people met on Sunday 31 May at Whitewalls to try out a new type of "roll up" stretcher, a new casualty bag, and new telephones. All of these items performed well, including the people, and it was an enjoyable day.

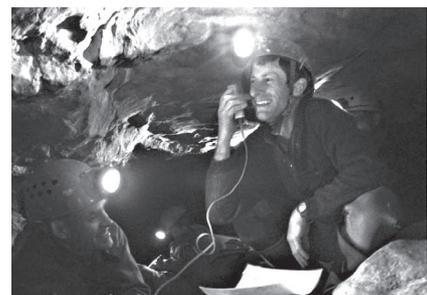
David Stevens hid in Eglwys Faen and waited to be found and retrieved. He was then taken on the new stretcher to the Oval Entrance. Afterwards Jason (1.5 times a David) tried the stretcher for size in the outdoors and the team humped him for a couple of feet. There are issues with this stretcher because it is flexible and curls up to grip the casualty once lifted. The rigid type may well be a better choice, if otherwise practical, for anyone with neck or spine or leg injuries.

The casualty bag is well made and seemed quite warm. The zip is single-ended which may be a nuisance with a lower body injury. There are some reports that it can absorb a lot of water, but we were

blessed with a hot sunny day to try it.

The new telephone is a replacement of the 1988 type, operated with a single push-button switch, and louder and clearer than its predecessor. Its software generates call tones etc which solves operational issues with the earlier model.

Finally, we got all the three Heyphones to work again. Two only needed new batteries and a general clean up of corroded connectors. One had a broken wire which we resoldered and its broken plastic case will need gluing back together.



Photos: Stuart France

Selected Caves of France

by Andy Heath

This series of articles presents a personal selection of caves that I've visited over the years across France and hopefully might provide the reader with inspiration for an enjoyable caving holiday.

I've not gone into detail of cave location, pitch lengths, etc.; all that information can be obtained elsewhere. A selective bibliography is included however, should more information be required.



Part One: Franche-Comte

This area covers the four departments of Doubs, Jura, Haute-Saone and Territoire de Belfort. My own experience of the area has been limited to Doubs and Jura.

Gouffre du Gros-Gadeau

No special reason for choosing this cave first, other than the fact that it's a good fun, sporting little 3 hour trip. At the time of my visit, water levels were low. Even so, the pitches were still quite wet so thoughtful rigging is required for a dry hang.

I'm told the cave is ok under relatively high water conditions, though one guidebook to the area does warn of the dangers of flooding. Sounds like a fine line between sporting and desperate!

A daylight shaft (20m rope off a tree and a bolt) gives way to a quick succession of seven short pitches. No need for a detailed description; ropes of 15, 45, 8, 15 & 15m for the remaining pitches will get you to the lower part of the cave. You'll also need around 30 x 8mm bolts/hangers; the P bolt isn't widely used in the Jura yet (or certainly wasn't at the time of my last visit in 2003). A word of warning; many of the spits in the cave were in a dreadful condition; I must have wasted at least half an hour trying to fix hangers at full stretch only to find they were knackered.

The lower section of the cave leads to a pretty unpleasant looking sump and a horrible, tight muddy rift. Nevertheless Gros-Gadeau provides a fine few hours' sport.

Grotte de Chauveroché

A cracking cave, and one that took me three visits to get to the end. Moral of the story; wear enough neoprene and choose your team-mates wisely!

My first visit in May 1999 was cut short only about ¼ of the way into the cave. Despite me passing on

the advice that I had been told by a previous visitor, the majority of the team were very under-dressed for the occasion.

My second visit in May 2001 was even shorter; I'd somehow ended up in the cave with somebody who clearly wasn't up to it!

And so it was on July 22nd 2003 that a very determined and well-prepared Andy Heath returned to the cave with Jon Whiteley (DSS/BEC), equally well prepared for a long, cold trip. I was on a mission, Lac Rond (the end) or bust.

Prior to the trip we'd phoned the guy in charge of the local section of SSF (French cave rescue) for his advice. He'd assured us that things should be ok that day; the previous day he'd given us an emphatic "Non!". We got the impression that even if water levels were low, the place should be avoided if any rain was likely. I guess the place gets flood pulses. I'd already been given a first-hand report of a British group getting trapped in the cave and having a very cold time of it waiting for water levels to drop.

Strange how selective a memory can be; where did all the mud come from? I'd remembered the short duck just inside the entrance; more than welcome after the hot slog up the hill. What I hadn't remembered was about 300m of liquid mud that made progress tedious to say the least. After another short duck with minimal airspace, things improved; easy stomping along a large phreatic tunnel for around 1000m, over a boulder pile, a bit more stomping and then La Plage (The Beach) where it was time to dress for the occasion. Already clad in 5mm of neoprene, we donned an additional 3mm shortie each, ready to take all that the cave could throw at us. (A word of advice: wear a good, warm wetsuit, but be prepared to pick up a few battle-scars!).

The reason for all the neoprene? The main features of this cave are the gour dams and the associated canals. According to a description I'd read there are no fewer than 204 of these gours. Many are not that remarkable, but some of these canals are up to 50m long, often deep and certainly not over-warm! I'd also advise wearing close fitting wellies or boots; anybody who's tried swimming in loose wellies will know what I mean.

We'd also taken fins to assist on the initial long swims. However, the water seemed a couple of feet lower than on previous visits, so the fins turned out to be a bit of a lemon. Not sure they'd be that good even with extra water, some of the gours were more of an obstacle than I'd remembered. Oh well, seemed a good idea at the time. The extra neoprene turned out to be an excellent idea though, I never once got cold. Decent neoprene gloves are also

highly recommended, though not so decent after the trip!

Canal, gour dam, canal, gour dam, canal, gour dam...all good stuff. Occasional out of depth swimming, though not enough to become a chore. Hoisting our bodies up to an attractive inlet, this was the furthest I'd reached before. Back into the next pool, I had a horrible feeling I'd made a mistake in returning to the cave. It was awful; I had visions of it continuing in this vein to the end. Thick, sticky mud beneath a foot or so of water. Difficulty in seeing the gour dams under the water led to several bashed shins and much cursing. Thankfully this didn't go on for too long. More pools and dams followed, though shallower, so faster progress was made. The pools gradually got deeper and longer again to arrive at the four metre climb, an easy climb up a big stal slope into, no surprises, more pools and gours in big canyon passage. It's true, this cave could be criticized for getting a bit tedious at times, but it's an impressive way to be tedious and is pretty unique caving in my experience. The three metre cascade was passed with ease to be followed by "les Cascades" over smaller, more attractive gour pools.

4,155 metres from the entrance, we arrived at "le Confluent", one of the very few junctions in the whole cave. A brief note about quoted distances. There seems to be a bit of confusion over distances, different surveys showing different figures. I'm using those on the 1957 survey; they're longer so sound better! Leaving the big passage at the confluence, the way on to the end of the cave is by turning left into "les Marmites". The passage is now considerably more modest in size, only a couple of metres high, and a metre wide, but with an extremely eroded floor. Attractive at first, it becomes a pain in the backside very soon, so when the "Grande Cheminee" was reached about 800 metres later, it was not without relief. It was at this point that Jon decided he wasn't up to a trip to the very end and decided to stop here for a brew and not continue. Being a decent sort of chap though, he was happy to sit here while I went for the end, he knew how much this trip meant to me.

After a short cooling duck in a narrow canal, the passage soon regains impressive proportions. Now with the stream flowing over a gravel floor and with no bag to carry, I was able to advance rapidly at a gentle trot.

This was caving at its best. 5,436 metres in, the "Salle du Chaos" is reached, where big boulders have fallen out of the roof. I was getting excited; the end was within my grasp. Careful progress through these boulders, no twisted ankles here if you please, especially since I was now on my own. More

cautious progress, the floor was more fluted again. Over a gravel bank and there it was, "Lac Rond", complete with diver's line, my Holy Grail, 6,224m from the entrance, or 4,730m if you want to go by the alternative length. A brief self-congratulation, then about turn, no point hanging around. 20 minutes later I was enjoying a cup of something hot in Jon's company. It wasn't until I'd drunk it that I was told it was made with cave water, not the water we'd carried in. Oh well, Potage du Leech (did I mention the leeches?) isn't bad, and I'm still around to type this account.

Steady progress out, daylight was regained 6 ½ hours from entering the cave. A fine cave, though kilometres of wading certainly take it out of your legs! Highly recommended.

Gouffre de la Baume Sainte Anne

Only a short trip, but certainly an impressive one; you may have seen a photo of the main chamber on a Petzl poster a few years ago.

Basically, the cave consists of a big doline in the middle of a field and a superb daylight 60m shaft landing on a big rubble cone in a huge chamber (120 x 60m). A tyrolean at the bottom crosses a lake to an attractive waterfall and a short continuation, but at the time of our visit the rope across the lake looked decidedly dodgy so we left that bit to another time.

Well worth a visit.

Gouffre de Vaux

I've only really included this one to give bit of balance to this review; I don't want you thinking that all the caving in the area is good!

Initially, a fine cave. A 44m entrance shaft (55m rope) is descended to a short slope leading to a junction. Turning left, a large, well-decorated gallery is entered. Sadly, that's the limit of the nice stuff. A short climb up leads to a couple of short, muddy pitches (13 & 9m). The whole nature of the place deteriorates into a mudbath and to be honest, in my view, it's not worth a second look! We didn't persist to the end; sunshine and beer seemed a better option!

Some of our party had terrible problems with slipping jammers on the way back up the main pitch; I wouldn't recommend this cave; you have been warned!

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In the August/September newsletter we remain in the Doubs for 'the big one':

The Reseau de Verneau

CAVE ACCESS

Dan Yr Ogof

The club has two cave leaders:
Stuart France and Paul Tarrant

Fairy Cave Quarry Caves

Trips into these caves can arranged through Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley

Loxton Cavern

Mandy Voysey is a leader for this cave

OFD

CSS leaders for OFD I include
Adrian Fawcett, Duncan Price
and Paul Tarrant

Ogof Carnow

CSS leaders include Adrian Fawcett

Ogof Craig A Ffynnon

Access to this system is now managed by the Llangattwg Cave Management Committee

Otter Hole

CSS leaders include Adrian Fawcett

If YOU are a leader for any UK caves please let me know so that I can include the details in subsequent Newsletters.

RADON GAS IN AGEN ALLWEDD AND EGLWYS FAEN

By Stuart France

This article provides background and a summary of results from experiments run by Clarke Friend from 2007-09. A bound copy of the original papers have been left out at Whitewalls and will be moved to the club library room in due course.

Cavers, and other people spending time in confined rocky places such as granite houses, may be exposed to the radioactive gas ²²²Radon which forms solid radioactive particles when it decays. Gases can move around, breathed in and out of the body, but the solid particles remain in the body wherever the gas atom is when it decays. The solids go on to decay again creating more radiation in the body tissue where they lodged. The radiation from the gas and solid particle decays can damage DNA which may lead to health problems in later life including cancer. A smoking habit may multiply these risks.

Radiation, in varying extents, is around us all the time and unavoidable. The question for cavers, and some homeowners, is to what extent should one risk increased doses of radiation for the sake of a pastime, or living in a particular house. In the case of miners and professional caving instructors there is a legislative framework because the confined areas are places of work. The current recommendation for the general public is not to exceed a 1 milli-Sievert (mSv) annual dose. This can be calculated using the measured Radon concentrations and exposure time:

$$\text{Dose (in mSv)} = \frac{\text{Concentration (in Bq m}^{-3}\text{)} \times \text{exposure (in hours)}}{254000}$$

The Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) requested and funded the experiments reported here to measure Radon concentration in Agen Allwedd and Eglwys Faen since 2007. Twenty detector bags were placed in Agen Allwedd, plus another 5 in Eglwys Faen, on 19 September 2007. They were collected about a month later and analysed by the HPA. No bags were lost or damaged so the experiment was a great success. The late-summer Radon levels in Agen Allwedd were astonishingly high.

The Agen Allwedd sites were along the usual routes to North Wing and Main Stream Passage. The detectors went no further than Cascade Inlet and Hedgehog Passage in the Main Stream itself. Concentration readings varied from 6260 Bq m⁻³ just past the signing-in book to 16290 near Flood Passage. Barons Chamber was 9200 and everything beyond that was above 10000. The average for the system was 10960.

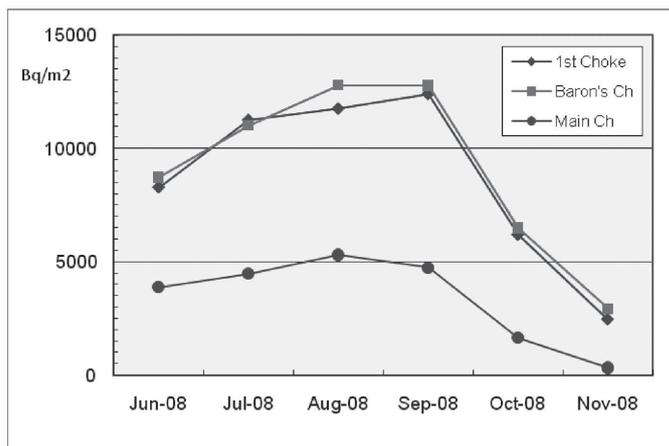
Using the highest reading (16290) the annual dose limit is reached in only 15.5 hours, but because cavers are moving it would be more realistic to use the system average figure – in which case the maximum is reached in 23 hours. Individuals will need to think carefully how

much time they spend in the system in the summer and autumn. It certainly came as a surprise to Clarke and myself that we had accumulated much of the maximum recommended annual dose simply to conduct the 2007 experiment.

Eglwys Faen produced lower numbers, from 1500 to 5550 with an average of 4048. Professional cave leaders had done earlier research here and obtained averages ranging from 3540 in August 1999 to 410, 473 and 2253 in the winters of 2000-2001. Unless the purpose of visiting the cave is a digging trip, the time spent in Eglwys Faen is likely to be short so the 63 hours to achieve a 1mSv annual dose at the system average Radon concentration represents many visits to the cave.

The above results suggest that summer concentrations are much higher than in winter, and it is generally accepted that Radon levels are seasonal. This is probably due to the caves draughting inwards with fresh air in summer whereas in winter they expel air that has come from far underground. So a second set of experiments was devised running over six months from June to November 2008 involving leaving detector bags at two sites in Agen Allwedd and one in Eglwys Faen on a monthly basis. The sites were chosen for typical 'system average' concentrations. All 18 bags were recovered without loss or damage and provided usable data.

The late-autumn/early-winter 2008 results accord with the 1999-2001 work and late-summer 2007 results, and it is clear from these that a more season-specific approach needs to be used in calculating Radon exposure, dividing the year into two or more parts. As can be seen from the chart below, the exposure level in Agen Allwedd falls to the equivalent of Eglwys Faen summer levels (or lower) from late October onwards.



Other well-ventilated caves, such as OFD, have Radon levels similar to those inside Eglwys Faen. CCW may deem it appropriate to carry out further investigations of Radon in caves in which they have an interest. The logistics of carrying out more longitudinal experiments in Agen Allwedd without exposing the experimenters themselves to the maximum annual dose before the fieldwork is over would be challenging. Cavers might also like to assist with experiments at sites which particularly interest them: for example, at the camps in Daren Cilau where some people spend many hours.

The weather as well as season may have a bearing. The summer of 2007 was quite cool and wet, and 2008 was also not good from an outdoor activities viewpoint. So the raw data obtained thus far should be used to enhance that obtained in other studies rather than regarded as definitive and generalisable from one year to any other.

The information presented here is intended for recreational cavers only. Anyone using the caves for professional purposes should fulfil their legal obligations under the relevant legislation and they would require a personal monitoring scheme and to consult with a Radiological Protection Advisor.



COTTAGE BOOKINGS

2-3 May	Exeter Uni SS
22-25 May	CSS Whit BH
27-28 June	CSS BBQ
4-5 Sept	Lost World CC
4-5 Sept	CSS Kayaking
14-15 Nov	Devon SS

Otter Hole

Sat 23 May

by Steve Sharp

Adrian Fawcett, Gary Jones, Stephen Newton, Lucy Northover, Steve Sharp, Christopher Tomlin.



The Long awaited trip to Otter Hole! Apart from the mud, a tidal sump and the Hall of the Thirty, I had no idea what to expect.

It was a fine clear morning when I set off from Bristol, the roads were clear, the sun was shining and Chris Rea was playing in the background. Our meet time was 9.15am at the forestry car park at St. Arvans. I was first to arrive soon followed by Adrian and the others from CSS.

Otter Hole's location is not far from Chepstow race course; part of the cave is below the bottom end of the race track.

We all changed and headed down towards the cave The walk to the cave takes around twenty minutes downhill and around 3 hours back up!

Chris made us all laugh during the walk with his hilarious French impressions.

Fallen tress and overgrown

foliage littered the path I was glad we had someone who knew the way!

Adrian pointed out we were close to the cave entrance from the mud stains on the surrounding tree branches. We arrived at Otter Hole which is close to the river. I had packed a tackle bag with a Daren drum containing a camera and supplies hoping for a photo or two.

Adrian unlocked the gate and one by one we crawled into the cave to be greeted by the legendary mud. The entrance is low and squalid but the mud actually helps you along, I was having second thoughts about bringing such a large tackle bag by this point! A few muddy formations, crawls and squeezes led the way to the tidal sump. We were probably around 35 minutes into the trip at this point, if you have never been to Otter Hole this part of the trip is surreal, we

all sat together for around fifteen minutes as the sump pool began to drain. As the water receded we were entertained by all the peculiar noises that followed. Eventually our way on appeared, Adrian gave the signal and we all waded neck deep in the water towards the eyehole (the eyehole gives a key indication to the level of the water in the sump and when it's safe to pass through). A slight duck of the head and we were through, soaked and unpleasantly cold.

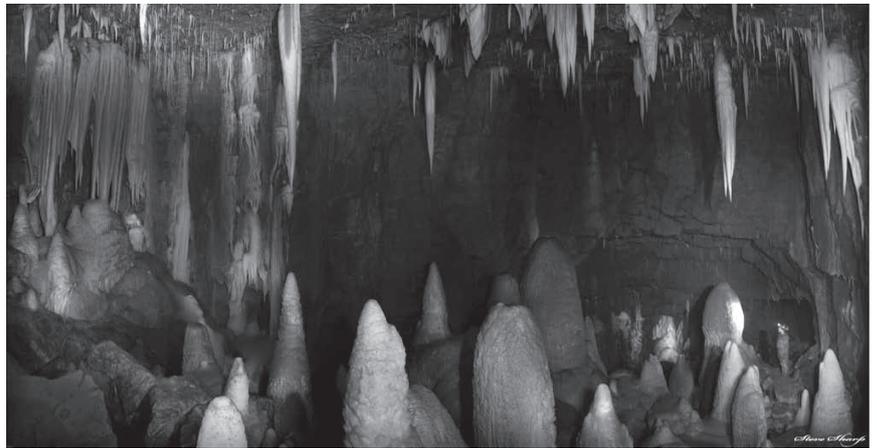
Our journey began into the main stream passage of Otter Hole. We climbed up towards the approaching boulder choke and ascended a small ladder that enabled us to climb over the top of the choke, giving a bird's eye view of the streamway. We climbed down into the streamway which is not dissimilar to Swildon's Hole but surprisingly larger.

We washed as we walked but the mud was stubborn. Our next obstacle was a fairly high traverse, a tricky feat when covered in slippery mud. The stream passage probably took us around 40mins to its conclusion at a sump. When Otter Hole was discovered the explorers thought this was the end of the cave so they called in divers to explore the sump. Further sumps and streamways have been found but to no known conclusion.

On further investigation the original explorers followed the draught up through a boulder choke which is just prior to the end of the lower cave. Here they discovered the impressive fossil passages above. The boulder choke had a few awkward, exposed climbs and squeezes but eventually brought us to paradise. Gleaming white curtain formations of all shapes and sizes decorated the way forward into the beautiful passages that followed.

Adrian explained that this was just the start of the formations; it was difficult to take in the sites as every step of the way was very slippery and you were constantly watching your feet.

We eventually turned a corner and the Crown Jewels of Otter Hole lay before us the "the Hall of the Thirty". The chamber dwarfed us, I had no idea it would be so enormous – stalagmites and stall bosses of all shapes and sizes decorated this vast chamber. Stal running down the walls like frozen waterfalls, large curtains covered the walls and ceiling, straws glistened above our heads, something you would expect to find in France not the Forest of Dean!



We had a quick break here and took a photo, Lucy stood next to a stall boss to give a sense of scale to the chamber, I thought this was our turnaround point until Adrian explained there was much more to see and he didn't disappoint. We left the Hall of the Thirty and made our way to an enormous aven. The sound of water dripping from the ceiling was amplified by plastic sheeting and a collection of plastic bottles was strategically placed to catch the water for thirsty cavers. We followed more highly decorated passageways for around thirty minutes passing the site of the old base camp which is directly below a pub.

We climbed huge stal slopes, stepping over delicate cave pearl

poles, walked through large aven passages covered in gleaming white curtains until we arrived at Long Straw Chamber with its enormous formations. Straws covered the roof of this large chamber. We had a short rest here and another photo. This was to be our turnaround point.

A few hours later we reached the tidal sump which was only knee deep. Exhausted, we made our way back to the entrance caked in mud, dripping with sweat but feeling good.

Our next stop was to take a traditional bath in the woods, Adrian explained this was compulsory and kindly demonstrated the technique as Chris scrubbed his back!

Hall of the Thirty

I would like to say a big thank you to Adrian from all of us. He was an excellent leader and made the trip thoroughly enjoyable.



Adrian Fawcett takes a much needed bath!

All photos: Steve Sharp

Pottering About on Mendip

by
John Cooper

Charterhouse Cave

Saturday 23rd May

Owing to the absence of two of the current explorers, Andrew Atkinson and Simon Flower, I was invited on a photographic trip with Pete Hann, Alison and Pete Moody into the start of the new stuff found two weeks earlier. A “guesstimate” of 0.5km+ had been found at the end of The Timeline after pumping out Portal Pool using a Mendip version of the “Earby Sump Pump”. Passages had been left ongoing owing to uncertainty that Portal

Pool could sump the explorers in!

A trip on Thursday 21st to enlarge the squeeze out of the pool had been undertaken so that Pete Hann didn't have to suffer quite so much bruising to his ribs being hauled through! Today about 15 minutes was spent hammering at the squeeze to get a few more flakes off before we progressed through and up the riser the other side into a nice phreatic passage about 1m high and 5m wide.



Alison Moody in Portal Pool, Charterhouse Cave Photo: Pete Hann, Wessex CC



Alison Moody admires The Cascade, one of the 2008 discoveries, Charterhouse Cave Photo: Pete Hann, Wessex CC

Whilst PM went off with a dictaphone and a compass to start making notes the rest of us started photography. We worked inwards slowly, the passage soon narrowing and changing into more of a canyon. We stopped for AM to investigate one inlet passage, an awkward rift that was left ongoing after 30m+. Further in, at one right angle bend in the passage, AM sent PH up a low crawl to check out the boulders at the end. It soon became evident from the echo that PH was in bigger stuff!

Once PM returned we all went through and then spent at least an hour wandering round in about

200m of new passage, leaving several ongoing leads. The lowest parts were very glutinous and I would imagine get flooded in wet weather.

Returning to the main passage we continued inwards finally dropping down into the streamway, which flowed right to left. A quick look upstream revealed a lovely sump pool coming out of a rift in the floor. A short crawl over the top revealed another view down into it only 2m further on. Finally turned round having seen very little of the passage found two weeks earlier! Out after about 5½ hours.

Swildon's Hole Sunday 24th May 2009

A routine trip with BW through Mud Sump. The water level in the sump was still as low as ever. Took a 10m ladder with us which we used on the pitch down into Lower Fault Chamber. Whilst I went down and checked out Link Pool BW descended to the bottom of the ladder. As it's a 14m pitch he didn't bother with the bottom bit! Only just got out in time for The Hunters.

Charterhouse Cave Saturday 6th June 2009

Another photographic trip with same participants as two weeks ago. This time we were a bit wary as rain was forecast for the afternoon and on a trip seven days ago a low crawl from the original exploration was found to be a pool with only 15cm airspace.

We started photography at Portal Pool again then moved on to redo a couple in the rift passages before dropping down into the streamway. Upstream to photograph the sump pool then downstream a short way. Then took the dry passage on the right and continued photographing inwards as far as Diesel Duck. However it had dried out leaving a cracked

mud floor! Finished photographing at this point. Diesel Duck (Disappearing Duck?) is very gooey and smelly at the far end! Out after about 5½ hours again. Fortunately the rain had held off.

Met Gary Kiely at Upper Pitts (WCC Cottage) before the trip, saw Duncan and Antoinette on their way to Swildon's Hole as we drove back through Priddy, then met Lee Hawkswell, Chris Seal and (?) at Upper Pitts having just completed a Swildon's Hole trip. Should be lots of trip reports to read!!

Swildon's Hole Sunday 7th May 2009

A routine trip with BW to Sump 2. Following rain during the night there was quite a bit of foam about with several of the pools having nice circular rafts swirling about, maximum was 8 on a pool. Downstream of Sump 1 was a strong smell of Diesel, not sure where it was coming from but was strongest just downstream of Duck 1.

Swildon's Hole Saturday 13th May 2009

Joined a Wessex CC trip over The Black Hole, 8 people in total ably led by Dave Cooke. Met Joe Duxbury, Gary Kiely and Mike Read at Upper Pitts before the trip. They were down for a pre Montenegro meeting.

Charterhouse Cave Saturday 20th June 2009

Another photographic trip this time with Simon Fowler, Pete Hahn and Alison Moody. In parallel Andrew Atkinson and Pete Moody started the Grade 5 survey from Portal Pool, finishing off in the streamway where we met them on our way out.

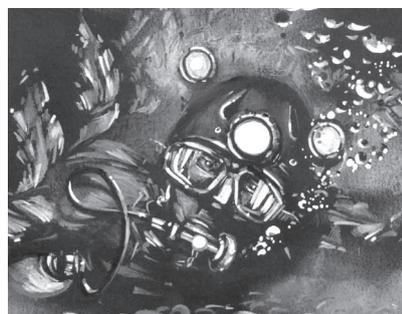
We started photography just after Diesel Duck, leaving that for the end of the trip as it's very messy! Continued on inwards finally stopping at Gravel Crawl. There were several interesting features along the way. Several high avens, an area where we pass through beds with chert nodules protruding and an area of massive block fall. Need a geologist to visit but rumour is Andy Farrant is difficult to reach at present! Next trip should reach the current end, all being well! 6½ hours.

Swildon's Hole Sunday 21st May 2009

A routine trip with BW to Fault Chamber. 2 hours and at the end my Scurion flashed at me to say it was very low. That's 8½ hours use after a full charge on the default normal setting and it's 18 months old.

THE OTTER HOLE EXPERIENCE

(short version)



by Gary Jones

Plod, plod, plod. Entrance. Squirm, squirm, squelch, mud, mud, mud. Sump, wait, gurgle, tinkle, boom, airspace, cold, **gasp!** More mud. Ladder, streamway, nice. Squeeze uphill, pant, struggle, curse. Big passage, pretty, pretty, **oo ah**, very pretty. Photos, faff, faff. More big passage, long straws, more pretty. About turn. Reverse. Pretties, squeezey bits, streamway, mud, lost welly in mud, ha ha. Sump, more mud, daylight. Muddy photo. Plod, plod, plod, plod. Clean gear for hours...

Good trip!

UNDER THE GROUND

by **Duncan Price**
(with apologies to **Walter de la Mare**)

First published in the CSS N/L in July 1989

Three drunken cavers,
Once bet a round;
Each out-cave the other one,
Under the ground.
Into the entrance
Each squeezed right soon,
And out of the heat
Of the afternoon.

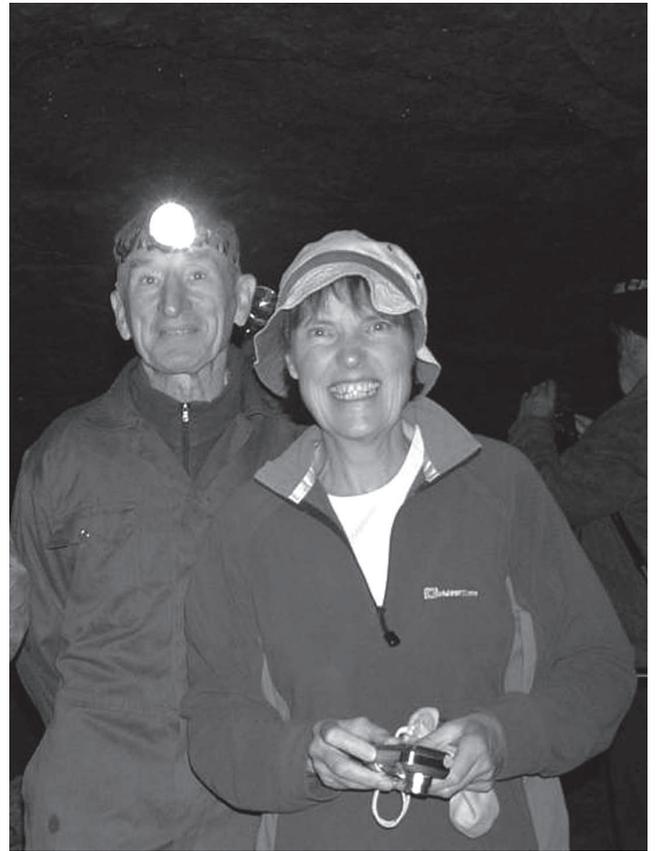
One-two-three,
Away they go! Not too fast,
And not too slow.
Passed white formations
Of straw and stal,
Chest deep in water,
In flowing canal.
Up over boulder,
Onward bound,
They crawled still forward,
Deep underground.
In Entrance Series,
They did their mile;
Grunting and groaning,
In single file.

Down to the Breakthrough
With quickening pace,
From stooping to walking,
They continued to race.
Jigsaw, Big Chamber,
The route to follow,
Marked with red stripes,
And muddy wallow.
The 65 foot pitch
Where ladders gleam,
All left behind
In the Time Machine.

Time Machine gone by,
They sped still keen,
Hopping and skipping
Down Bonzai Stream.
A mile and a mile
And a mile they went,
Leaving a trail,
Of carbide spent.
And lo and behold!
Passed Hard Rock Cafe,

Lay a deep sump pool
To bar their way.
Says caver Snablet,
"I puffs and I blows,
What's under the water?
Why no man knows!"
Says caver Gonzo,
"My wind comes weak;
A good man drowned,
Is far to seek!"
But caver 'Enri,
On twirling toes,
Up's with his wellies
And in he goes:
Down where the divers
Swim all day,
With bottle and plenty
Of line to lay...

Snablet and Gonzo
On mud bank sat,
Gazing at 'Enri's
Floating hat.
But never a ripple,
Nor bubble told,
Where he was sumping,
In water cold.
They called - called - called:
Came no reply:
Nought but the ripples'
Glooping sigh.
Then glum and silent,
They sat instead;
Vacantly brooding
With aching head,
'Til both together,
Stood up and said,
'Us knows not, cares not,
Where you be gone 'Enri,
Unless it be To Pwll y Cwm:
But axcusing silver,
And it comes most willing,
Here's us paying
Our forty shilling.
For it's sartin' sure, 'Enri,
Safe and sound,
You out-caved us square 'Enri,
Under the ground!"



George and Pat "Twink" Fletcher in Eglwys Faen. From a photo believed to be taken by John House, probably on the CSS 50th Anniversary

Pat "Twink" Fletcher

by **John Cooper**

As we go to press news is coming in of an accident resulting in the death of Twink. She died following a fall on the Ferrata delle Trincee while hiking in the Dolomite mountains in northern Italy. Her husband George and another member of the six strong hiking group scrambled down the mountainside to reach her but were unable to save her.

Twink (Pat Dymond) joined CSS in 1966. The June newsletter for that year records a March trip with George Fletcher and John House when Flood Passage in Aggy was surveyed, no mean feat as those who've done it will attest.

The origin of the alias "Twink" may have been coined by George as a play on Pat's maiden name of Dymond (Twinkle). From the late 1970s and through the 1980s George and Twink were keen supporters of the Families meet held at the Whitsun Bank Holiday week and more recently of the Golden Oldies reunions started following the 50th Anniversary Dinner.

More details may be available for the next newsletter.

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Meets List 09/10

This is an outline of the meets for this year.

February 21st – 22nd

South Wales.

Draenen Round Trip.

March 28th – 29th

South Wales.

Swansea Valley

(DYO subject to weather).

April 4th – 5th

South Wales.

Cottage building weekend.

A lot of small jobs to be completed.

April 25th – 26th

Derbyshire (Orpheus).

Nettle Pot/Oxlow/Bagshaw.

May 23rd – 25th

South Wales.

Otter Hole on Saturday 23rd.

June 27th – 28th

South Wales. Decide your own trips.

BBQ and Barrel on Saturday night.

July 25th – 26th

Mendip (Wessex).

Banwell Bone/Stalactite Caves as an option on Saturday. Eastwater as another option on Saturday.

Swildons on Sunday.

BBQ will be arranged for Saturday night.

August 15th – 17th

Yorkshire (YSS The Old School House).

Lost Johns/Birks Fell

(Days will be confirmed when permits booked).

Please contact me for any other requests.

September 26th – 27th

Hidden Earth (Location to be confirmed).

October 17th – 18th

Mendip (Wessex).

Box Stone Mines on Saturday.

November 7th – 8th

South Wales.

Agen Allwedd obscure passages.

Fireworks on Saturday night.

December 5th – 6th

South Wales.

Curry Extravaganza #5 on the 5th

Decide on your own trips.

January 2010 30th – 31st

South Wales. Dinner and AGM.

For all non Whitewall events except Hidden Earth, I need to know numbers to book beds etc, so please phone or email me to reserve a place. Also certain caves such as Otter Hole have number restrictions so it will be first come, first served.

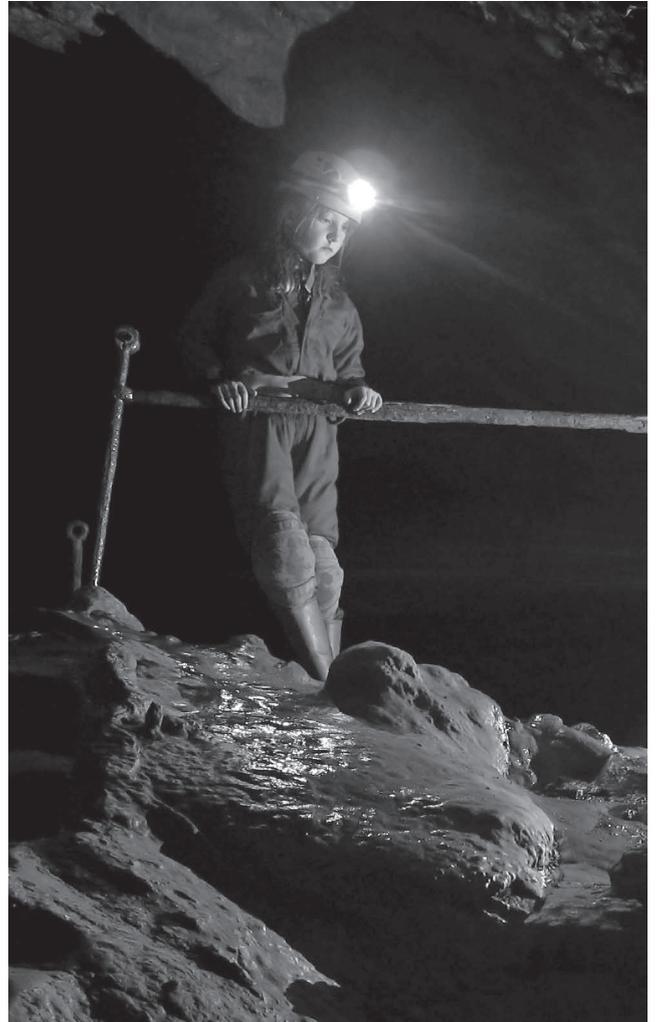
John Newton, Meets Secretary

Photos of the Month

Please send in your current, topical photos as it would be nice to have a wider selection to choose from.



Christine Grosart in Gouffre du Briant Photo: Clive Westlake



Toni Sharp, Goatchurch Cavern Photo: Steve Sharp



Straw Chamber, Otter Hole Photo: Steve Sharp



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