



CSS

Newsletter

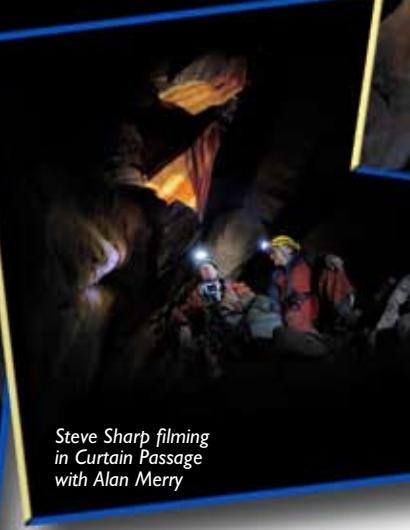
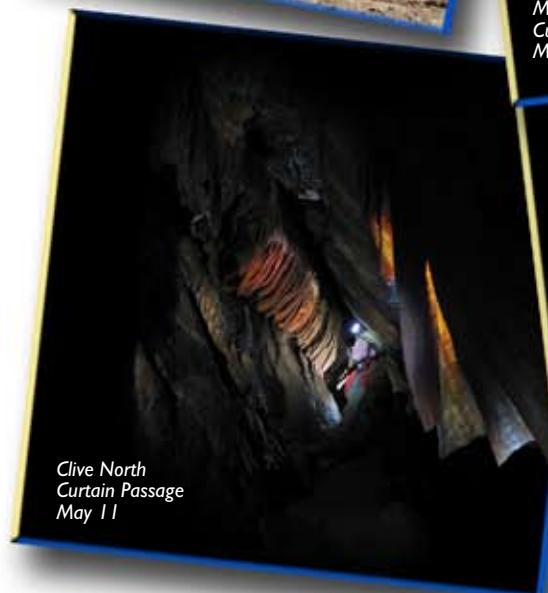
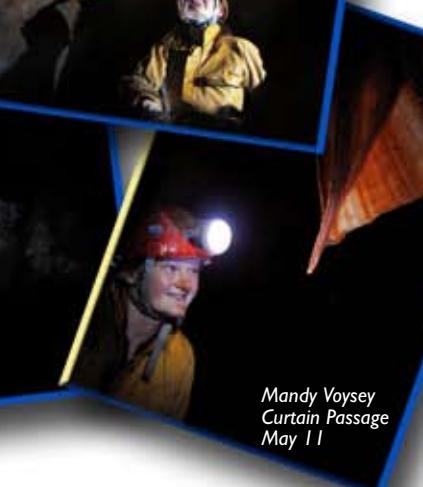
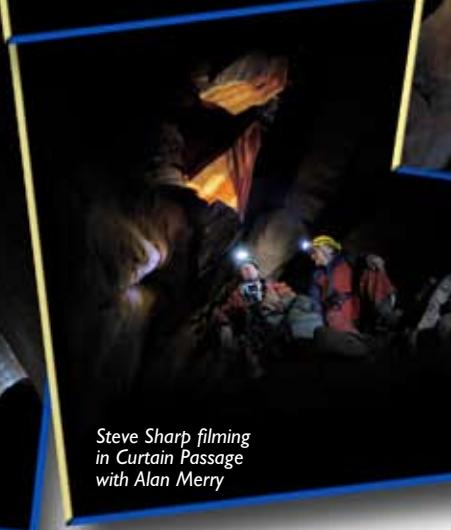
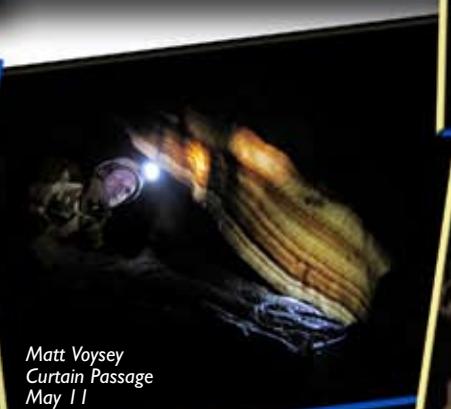
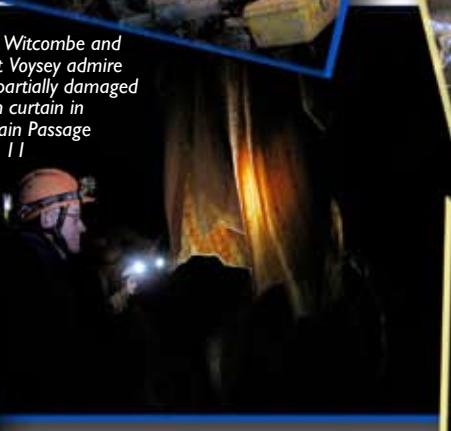
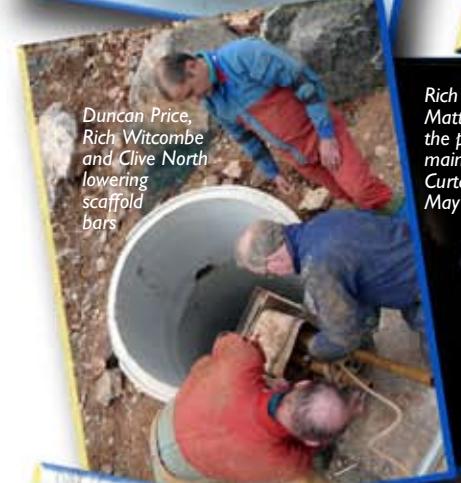
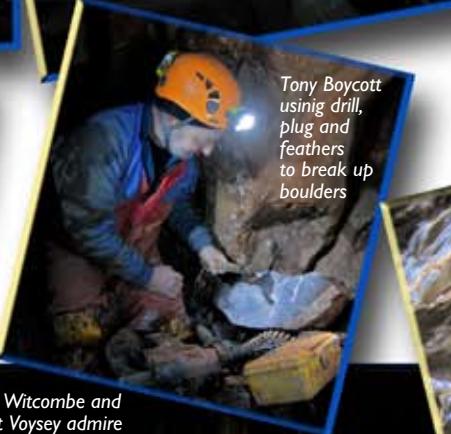
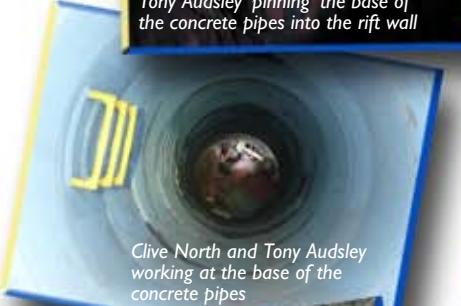
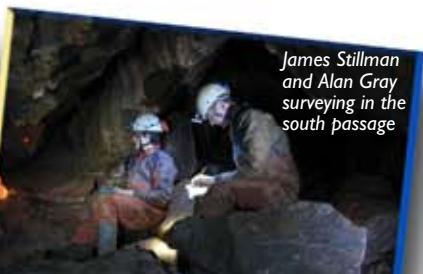
Volume 51 No. 8 Aug/Sept 2009



**Fernhill
Revisited**
**Selected
Caves of
France**
**Last Spit
Choke**

CHELSEA SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

A selection of photos of the dig
and subsequent breakthrough into
Fernhill, Fairy Cave Quarry
Photos: Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley



Chelsea Spelæological Society NEWSLETTER

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Sam Lumley in Hunters Lodge Inn Sink. Priddy

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Cover Photo:
Mandy Voysey in
Fernhill
Fairy Cave Quarry, Mendip
Photo: Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley

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

Editorial

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



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

The Creative Edge

7 Langleys Lane

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Fernhill Regained

by
Duncan Price



Fernhill Cave in Fairy Cave Quarry was discovered in May 1960, but was lost beneath a quarry tip a short time later. In CSS NL 50(5) I described the efforts by ATLAS to regain access to the cave by using a mechanical excavator to locate the near vertical entrance rift (technically a bedding plane) and leave a piped access to it so that digging could continue by more usual means. This took place at Easter 2008. At the same time, ATLAS were (and still are) active in the nearby Balch Cave, thus the two digs took place in parallel depending on manpower, age of the digger and enthusiasm.

Initial prospects looked good, but it soon became apparent (after heavy rain) that the area at the base of the piped entrance needed considerable underpinning beneath the bottom ring before the key stones facing the rift could be carefully removed. Peering to the north through the rocks, the stal coated wall of the entrance bedding-plane could be seen and a slight draught of air was present. In order to protect the seriously unwary and also prevent vandalism (only partially) a temporary iron bar "gate" was fitted over the top end of the pipes to deter the local oiks from returning the spoil that we'd removed.

In July 2008 (following the Glastonbury festival), ageing hippies Alan Gray and Rich Witcombe arrived in Alan's flower-power VW camper van to join Tony & Alice Audsley,

Mandy Voysey and Dave King where what seemed like hundredweights of kit (generator, drills and misc ironwork and tools) were ferried to the shaft, with the intention of sticking a few pins into the rock wall to cure the collapses which had plagued progress down the rift. Tony described it as a bit like acupuncture but on a larger scale.

Because the drilling was likely to be a bit tricky, Tony had prepared a cunning device to hold the drill position and much to everyone's surprise, it worked very well. Heatstroke finally brought an end to the proceedings but there was now a "roof" over the end of the pipes beneath which we could work.

Meanwhile in Balch Cave, torrential downpours at the end of May 2008 had flooded the dig causing a major slump which set us back six months (in fact, a year later, we have only now regained the lost ground). Digging continued at the bottom of the pipes in Fernhill where the occasional "bang" was required to shift a reluctant rock. With the pipes in place the site resembled some Arab supergun aimed conveniently at the feeder for Fairy Cave Quarry – Withybrook Slocker.

As the "summer" progressed and in the absence of any drying out on the Balch dig, the numbers at the Fernhill dig swelled resulting

in the construction of a number of dry stone walls to retain the digging spoil. This "dugout" was put to good use as a shelter from the rain (aided by a sail erected by Gonzo) at the end of August when yours truly decided to celebrate his birthday by holding a barbecue on site in a downpour. Guest of honour was Duncan's Dad (Derek) who had worked as a wages clerk at Fairy Cave Quarry in the late '50s and knew a number of the people who had caves (or cave features) in the area named after them.

As we worked down the entrance rift, the draught enticed us on and cooled the heated debates over which way to dig. Depending on the weather, the air blew out or in (bringing the smell of combusting tobacco when members the surface haulage team were slacking). Like the neighbouring Balch dig, ATLAS excavations seem to consume everyone available and soon the numbers needed began to swell. While one person dug, another swapped the buckets over, a third was stationed part way up the rift to guide the spoil over a ledge to be received by another worker at the base of the pipes who launched (literally – in fact this was the most dangerous rôle as the energetic haulers were prone to propel the skip skywards and then drop the empty one back down again with a carefully measured amount of slack so as to frighten the poor helper). Topside, one person was needed to catch the drag tray with two or more souls towing the haul rope along an increasingly better beaten path.



The most important member of the team was Dylan (Gonzo's dog) who competed for the rope handlers' attention by demanding to chase sticks. Dylan is quite an accomplished caver, having been to the top of the pitch down to the dig in Balch via Erratic Passage, Bullrush Way and the connection with JW

Passage. Mention must also be made of the support team behind the bar in the Waggon & Horses where the team decamped after their toils beneath Eastern Mendip – we even have a table reserved for us!

As the year wore on, skip load after skip load of debris was removed and redistributed into various spoil heaps or retaining walls for them. Due to the nature of the bedding rift (which was heavily calcited when found), a fair amount of spalled-off thick calcite deposit formed part of the fill and had to be dug out. Several big bits of flowstone now adorn Duncan's front garden. Purists may disapprove, but they would otherwise have been left in the surface tip.

Things began to look promising on the 3rd December 2008 when, midway through the session, Alan started whooping enthusiastically. Apparently a “way on” had been opened up. A quick changeover of personnel and a bit more digging, and soon Mandy and Matt Voysey were able to take turns squeezing their heads into the hole for a look. There was a glimpse of a lot of broken boulders and bedrock, a floor that appears untouched by human boot, but not great deal of room for swinging cats, or dancing. The following week was the ATLAS annual dinner so we all went for a meal rather than dig. ATLAS knows its priorities.

In view of the lost opportunity and the approaching Xmas holidays, activity increased with digging on weekends as well as Wednesdays. On Saturday 13th December we were optimistic of a quick breakthrough. With a small team of Alan, Dave King and myself our plan was to dig downwards to expose the route into Fernhill reckoned to be 4' down and stack the debris in the cave. However, it was evident that there was not enough space and the spoil would have to be brought to the surface. I was making good progress at the bottom, with Alan hauling from the base of the shaft and Dave at the top, when the back wall of stacked deads collapsed burying the digger up to his waist. Fortunately, no-one was hurt and the arch of rubble above the initial collapse remained in place. The rest of the day was spent clearing and grading the slope (one of the digging buckets was buried under the collapse but later retrieved).

After looking into Matt and Mandy's southerly lead, the gang finally enlarged the way in and broke into what we dubbed “South Passage” on Wednesday 13th December. The team was Alan Gray, Antoinette Bennett, Clive North, Dave King, Duncan Price, Mark (Gonzo) Lumley, Richard Witcombe & Rob Taviner (Tav). Clive went to the bottom to dig, with me bucket swapping and Antoinette working at the base of the pipes, while the others hauled from the surface. I then reversed into the hole and enlarged it with the pick so as to admit Clive and Antoinette, where we waited while the others joined us in the “new” passage. This went for 10-15 m in 1-2 m wide passage of similar height which headed south with a few prints from previous visitors and then turned right along a rift for about 10 m through a squeeze which only Alan could pass to a dead end.

Digging continued downwards over Xmas with sessions on the 24th and 30th December as well as at weekends. We thought that we'd be into Fernhill proper by the end of February. However, the instability of the dig was to thwart us! On the 11th January Tony Boycott, Chris Davies, Alan Gray and I were digging. Several large calcite slabs were broken up and evacuated to the rockery pile (for relocation to Glastonbury) in two stages (up to the bottom of the pipes and thence to surface). I got a splinter of calcite in my left eye (2 mm cube) but fortunately the good Dr. B attended. Concurrent with the sometime dangerous excavations was the necessary technical activity of shoring the roof and walls. Dave King fashioned expanding stemples from scaffold tube and heavy duty threaded studding which were used to support an inverted staircase of planks.

Quite by chance, a discussion with Jim Hanwell (who had been into the cave when it was first found in the 1960s) at Upper Pitts showed us that we were digging in the wrong place. The survey showed the entrance “rift” and the South Passage that we had already found which suggested that there was a short section of a northerly passage opposite our point of entry into the southerly route which would turn a corner into the main chamber. We had (as Jim pointed out) neglected

to take into account the dip of the bedding which meant that the base of the rift effectively described the south end of the chamber. We needed to dig toward Russia (east), not toward Australia (down).

Our target of February had passed, but progress along the “rift” was slowed by the need to shore up the roof. Spoil could, however be disposed of in suitable places in the South Passage and also in the floor of the dig which had by all reckoning been dug too deep. With less man/woman/dogpower being needed, the bulk (and I use the term advisedly) of ATLAS dispersed to Balch to dig and clear in alternate weeks. In Fernhill, by the end of April/beginning of May, the diggers were looking across a large, decorated chamber along the edge of the scree slope. Not wanting anyone to miss out on the breakthrough, we delayed the final push until everyone could be there. This proved complicated as the proposed date of entry coincided with absences due to business trips by Tav and myself. A last minute compromise was reached whereby we'd dig on a Monday night...

So, on the evening of 11 May 2008, a large contingent of the ATLAS team gathered at the Fernhill entrance – Antoinette Bennett, Tony Boycott, Alan Gray, Dave King, Kate Lawrence, Mark Lumley, Clive North, Duncan Price, Paul Stillman, Rob Taviner, Mandy and Matt Voysey and Rich Witcombe. After a session clearing back rubble to enlarge the approach route, the team wound its way down into the main chamber, with the more ancient and expendable diggers kindly allowed to go first!



The May 11th Breakthrough Team, left to right: Matt Voysey, Mandy Voysey, Paul Stillman, Clive North, Rich Witcombe (with uncharacteristically bright light!), Mark ‘Gonzo’ Lumley, Duncan Price, Alan Gray, Kate Lawrence, Dave King, Rob ‘Tav’ Taviner, Tony Boycott, Antoinette Bennett.

The 12 m square chamber was once well decorated with fine stalagmites and floor deposits, but sadly heavy blasting has destroyed

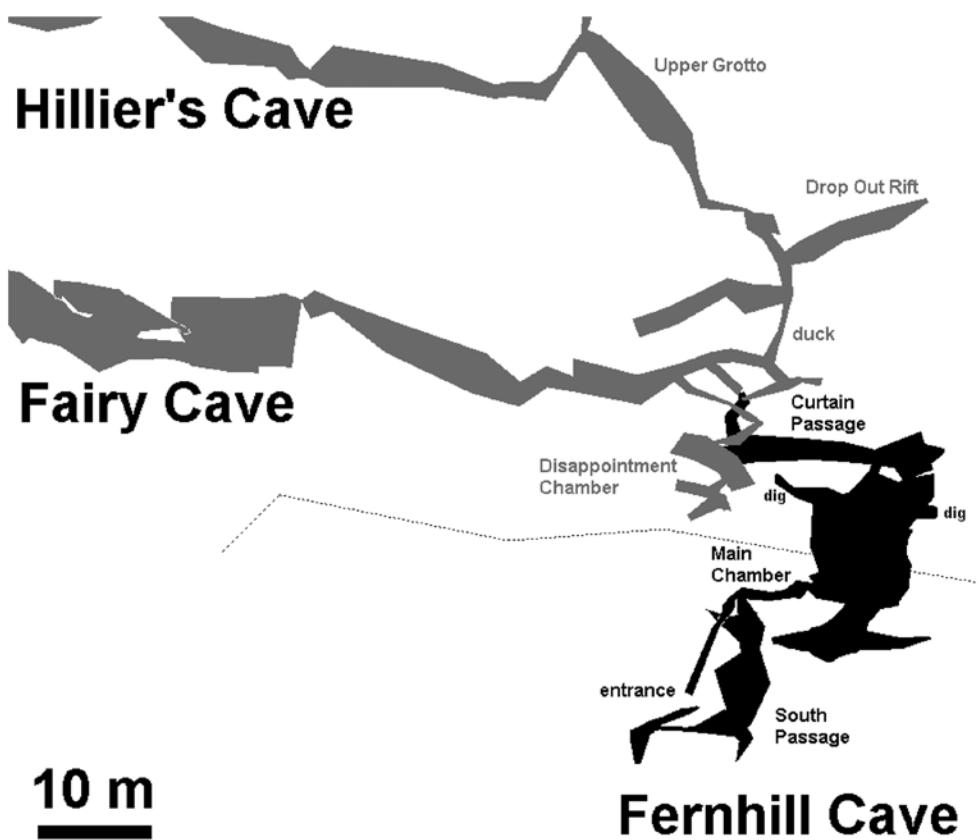
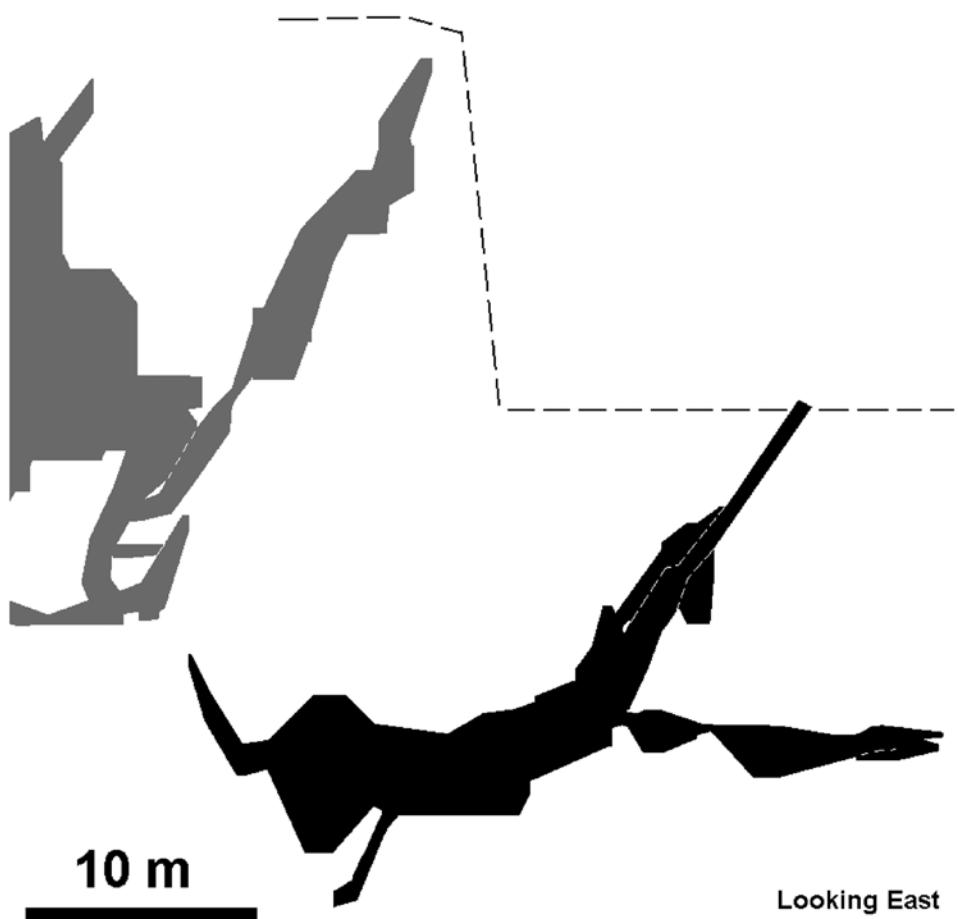
Fernhill Cave Survey and the Fairy Cave Quarry resurvey project

by Duncan Price

As Fernhill Cave was rediscovered, the diggers undertook to survey their finds. The entrance rift and South Passage was mapped soon after its discovery by Alan Gray aided by James and Paul Stillman. When the Main Chamber and Curtain Passage was re-entered, this too was surveyed by Alan, Dave King and myself. The latter was done in three parts – first the Main Chamber (in a loop) and then Curtain Passage and finally the “attic” area up the run-in along south wall of the Main Chamber which is basically a continuation of the entrance rift.

The end of Curtain Passage had always been known to be close to Fairy Cave – the voice connection having been repeated on the day we got back in. This prompted me to resurvey Fairy Cave from the entrance to the other side of the choke over two Wednesday nights – the first trip with Mary Voysey and then solo using Alan Gray's Disto and Shetland Attack Pony. This electronic tape measure and combined electronic compass/clino makes it possible to survey on your own. Another solo trip saw the ascending and unstable Disappointment Chamber area mapped. In order to get a better fix on the Fairy Cave side, I then continued into Hillier's Cave (with the help of Antoinette Bennett) and then surveyed from Hillier's Cave entrance downstream to join up the loop.

Other parts of the Fairy Cave Quarry cave system have been resurveyed by ATLAS and the intention is to produce a complete 3D computer model of them by combining new data with existing survey notes (where available). Just as an example, here's a plan and cross-section of Fernhill Cave adapted from screen grabs of the data.



most of the formations. Beyond, the beautifully sculpted Curtain Passage had fared much better. Thirty metres long, and up to 5 m high, this rift contains the famous Fernhill curtain, missing about a quarter of its length (and making a nice "bong" when struck – accidentally honest!), but it is still impressive and surrounded by many undamaged formations. At the far end of the passage is a window into the Fairy/Fernhill boulder choke, which is just as uninviting on the Fernhill side as it is on the Fairy side! A voice connection was made on the night but there are no plans to dig it. Rich Witcombe had commissioned his new Petzl light that day (after labouring under the illumination of a dim incandescent bulb for a long time) and was somewhat concerned by the state of his shoring which had previously resided beyond his view.

Subsequent sessions have taken place to re-survey the cave, photograph it and commence a modest dig which heads east toward the Withybrook fault and has the potential to reach some interesting cave development. The team are presently returning their attention to Balch Cave with a view to regaining lost ground. Back in Fernhill, one obvious lead is a descending rift (looked at by Alan and guest thin person, Alison Moody) which is markedly colder than the rest of the cave and possibly represents a link to Duck's Pot (also lost) and the streamway from Conning Tower Cave (also a remnant of Balch Cave).

Access is still being sorted out – as is further stabilisation. The cave, although short, is well-decorated along Curtain Passage and these formations are best viewed from a safe distance. Rather than risk damaging these features, it had been decided to expand the leader system adopted for Shatter, W/L and Withyhill Cave (also in the same quarry) to include Fernhill. Therefore visitors are best advised to add a viewing to a trip down one of these caves as all the existing leaders are being introduced to Fernhill. A 10 m ladder belayed to the top of the (now securely gated) entrance pipes is required to get to their base and there is a further drop to the base of the dug-out rift which is currently rigged but free-climbable. The best way to see the cave is to come along on a digging

session (or alternatively get hold of Steve Sharp's film footage of the place).

For more details see the ATLAS website:

www.atlasdiggers.org.uk

from where much of this text was again plagiarised.

Librarian's Report

by Anna Northover

The Library at Whitewalls is beginning to come together. The Library material held by previous Librarian Clive Gardener in London has now come down to the Library in Whitewalls. A fun weekend was spent with Adrian Fawcett, Peter Ward, Tim Northover and myself cataloguing the intake from Clive.

The catalogue is currently available on the Computer at Whitewalls and a search and lending field has been added to the database we have set up. Currently I have a few loose ends to tie up so ask that books are not removed from the Library just yet. However, I hope it will be available for all to use soon and will keep you informed.

The remaining contents of the Library need to be fetched from Llandridnod Wells and I plan to do that this summer. That will mean undertaking another big batch of data entry as we don't have the database currently used. I would be grateful for any offers of help with this. Free supper to all who volunteer to help when date arranged!

Now the Library has started to move to Whitewalls I feel I can at last get on with my post of Librarian.

Finally, I would like to thank Clive for all the years he has worked hard as club Librarian for Chelsea.

Since originally writing the above in June the committee have met . Library still closed for loans. I plan to try to get on with more cataloguing and will put out some dates for this on CSS message board if anyone is able to help. Unfortunately, I broke a rib whilst canyoning in the Vercours so this has slowed proceedings a little. I did manage to do a little caving prior to breaking my rib though!

More thoughts on the Pantin

by Joe Duxbury

Gary Jones' comments on the Petzl Pantin (*CSS Newsletter*, Vol. 51, No. 7) were very helpful and instructive. As a recent convert to the Pantin myself, I would like to add some further thoughts.

Where the anchor point of the rope at the top of a pitch is too low to enable you to get a foot, or even a knee, up onto the lip, and where there are no footholds on the walls to push on, getting up over the edge is usually a struggle. The Pantin enables you to continue to use the rope to push on, and makes the task a lot easier.

It is definitely an asset on long pitches. I find it possible to change which foot I push harder with, so one leg doesn't get knackered. And there is now a left-foot version.

You are supposed to be able to disengage the Pantin by making 'a simple backward kicking movement', but I haven't been able to master this yet. On the other hand, it can disengage spontaneously when you least want it to. Sometimes the 'weak spring' aspect can be nullified by mud, and it won't run as easily as it should.

I would also like to raise a point of caution. It is possible for the tape sleeve that protects the tapes that go under the foot to slide about. If it slides up towards the body of the Pantin, it can prevent the cam from opening, making it difficult to either thread the rope in or to get the rope out.

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 Two: Franche- Comte

In part one, I presented a small selection of caves I've enjoyed/endured in the departments of Jura and Doubs. For the second part of my 'Tour de France' I'm still in the Doubs, visiting one system in particular, the Reseau du Verneau.

Around 30km in length, the Verneau has no less than seven entrances; six to the non-diver, four of which give access to various sections of the heart of the system, a superb long streamway, 'le Collecteur'. I've been lucky enough to have visited four of these entrances and to have completed the classic 'Verneau Traverse' (more of that later).

Gouffre de Jerusalem

The topmost entrance to the system. Three short pitches to a low crawl which looks like it will sump in wet weather lead to a short but attractive meandering streamway. Another pitch follows which although short, gives the visitor a thorough soaking; if there were any spits which allowed for a dry hang, I certainly couldn't spot them at the time of my visit. This pitch drops the visitor into the top end of the Collecteur. Obviously not as big as the streamway further into the system, but still pretty fine nonetheless. Downstream soon ends for the non-diver at Sump 1. Upstream leads after 100m or so to a large bouldery chamber terminating at a boulder slope, which must go pretty close to the surface.

Only a couple of hours trip, but a fun introduction to the system.

Gouffre de la Baume des Cretes

This entrance gives access to the next section of streamway for the non-diver.

An impressive 40m daylight shaft drops the visitor into a huge chamber with a steeply descending rubble floor. The chamber contains some fine old fossil stal pillars and flowstone. It's just a shame that our continental cousins seem to be in the habit of dumping spent carbide so freely. Continuing along, you soon enter a large flat-floored chamber, the way on being a short grovel at the far end of the chamber leading to an improbable looking hole down. This short pitch is probably free-climbable, though a 15m rope makes the return a lot easier. The route continues via several small chambers and pitches to reach a 12m free-hanging pitch which drops the visitor into the Collecteur. Cracking! The streamway has assumed larger proportions than the section seen in the Jerusalem. Heading downstream, the large passage gets muddier and muddier for the short distance to Sump 3, the end of the line for the non-diver. Upstream from the 12m pitch, the passage continues in fine style. Deep pools and cascades in a fine lofty passage. Some of the cascades present quite sporting climbs, enlivened by the water cascading over the climber. These climbs eventually lead to a more level section of streamway leading to the downstream end of Sump 2. We were very grateful for the in-situ maillons at the tops of the climbs allowing us to descend with the aid of the handline that we'd brought with us on our visit.

A splendid six hour trip into an impressive section of active streamway. On the subject of active streamways, the Collecteur is most definitely not the place to be in high water conditions. I understand that the system responds very quickly to rain, and can become a very nasty place to be.

Gouffre du Bief-Bousset

The Bief-Bousset gives access to the next section of the main drain for the non-diver and is in fact

the top entrance for the classic Verneau Traverse. A big sign at the entrance warns visitors of the flood risk. This is borne out by the tree trunks met below the 12m entance pitch! A pleasant meander in white limestone leads to three short pitches of 4, 4 and 10 metres.

Sadly the cave does not continue in such fine style; the next 600m or so comprises a section of narrow twisting rifts and squeezes, made all the more awkward by the fact that in several places it's necessary to chimney up and traverse along ledges in the wider parts of the passage. A second pleasant set of five short pitches is eventually reached. These lead to a small streamway and a short, deep duck. Another section of short climbs, a duck under a rock ledge and hey presto, Le Collecteur.

Upstream terminates immediately at the 60m long Sump 7 (the section of streamway between sums 3 & 7 only accessible to divers). Downstream is just superb. One and a half kilometres of uninterrupted streamway; dimensions vary, but suffice to say it's a splendid bit of cave. Fantastic. This fine section terminates at Sump 8.

A return to the surface heading back the same way makes for a fine 7-8 hour trip.

Grotte Baudin

This, the lowest dry entrance to the system is the least inspiring, yet provides the all-important exit for the Verneau Traverse. The small entrance hole is obvious by the fact that it emits the most incredible draught. The big flood warning sign also gives the game away that it's the right entrance!

It's hardly possible to get lost in the Baudin; if there isn't a howling draught, it's not the way on. Half an hour or so of crawling and muddy chambers leads to the top of the first pitch, already rigged at the time of my visit with a somewhat muddy rope.

Until a few years ago the only way into the main streamway was to descend this pitch to the bottom, followed by another short pitch and some horribly slimy contortions to reach an aqueous passage which may or may not be sumped. If the sump was open, you were fine, so long as the water didn't rise. However, the sump is more often than not closed. Fortunately an all-weather bypass was dug out, thus avoiding the sump. This bypass however is no easy alternative, as I found out when I visited the cave in 2003:

'A short abseil took us to a ledge ¾ of the way down the pitch. A small hole leading off horizontally was clearly the way on; once again the howling draught gave the game away. The

next 15-20 metres or so was distinctly awkward, a gradually descending, twisting tube, not for the claustrophobic. Keith stayed behind until I was able to confirm that this was definitely the way on; reversing this passage could prove to be difficult. I was pleased to see a rope at the end of this passage; this was indeed the sump bypass.

I could see the rope descending around 15m to a rebelay some distance off horizontally. This could be seen to continue as what was described in Descent as 'the mother of all traverses'. I was soon able to endorse that description. Keith soon joined me. I offered him the honour of being the first one out on the traverse; he politely declined! After a few contortions to get onto the pitch, I descended, pulled myself across to the rebelay and then began the extremely strenuous traverse. Basically, there must be around 20 bolts, all around a metre apart, but hardly a foothold to be seen. In fact, the wall where you put your feet is undercut. Try as I could to conserve my energy, my arms felt pretty pumped by the time the traverse eased. After these 20 or so bolts, there's a choice. Either descend a very tatty looking rope down to the streamway or continue along a further section of traverse. If one descends to the streamway, it is only possible to go downstream. A near vertical climb in the stream bars upstream progress at that level. Oh well, more traversing it was to be. Thankfully the next bit is quite a bit easier; so I was soon wetting my feet in the main Collecteur'.

So, having acquainted myself with all the dry entrances to the main streamway, I decided it was time to undertake the classic through trip from the Bief-Bousset to the Baudin. Several days prior to the trip, we'd rigged the pitches in the Bief-Bousset down to the streamway and familiarised ourselves with the intricacies of the Baudin sump bypass. We also established that the bottom sump was in fact open, so had that option available to us.

Incidentally, parties attempting a through trip are supposed to get permission from the authorities at the Mairie. I wrote off for permission but received no reply; I took this to be a 'yes'!

The Verneau Traverse

July 23rd 2003. A clear dawn. Weather forecast good. Advice from local cavers good. The trip was on. With amazing organisation a team comprising Alan Brady, Andy Rummeling, Simon Mullens and myself were at the entrance of the Bief Bousset by 9a.m. My biggest concern now was that I was the best part of 10 years older than the next oldest team member; could I keep up with these whippersnappers? Perhaps I could draw on the wisdom of experience instead! We'd given a call-out time of 24 hours hence; we were anticipating a trip of around 14-18 hours. Off we set at a cracking pace, could we keep this up? The Bief Bousset is a fairly uninspiring entrance to the system. Several nice pitches, but some fairly arduous and quite strenuous crawls and meanders. Thankfully though there were several pools to immerse our neoprene-clad steaming bodies into. I already knew this part of the cave, having done it twice in

one day on a previous Cerberus trip, so was looking forward to the big stuff with eager anticipation.

Nearly three hours from daylight and there we were, in the famous 'Collecteur' or Main Drain of the Reseau Verneau. This is what we had come to see. I can't really give dimensions; it varies in size and shape throughout its length. Suffice to say, it's big! Relatively easy going for over a kilometre or so over a mainly gravel floor 'til we reached the Salle des Patafouins and Sump 8 of the Verneau streamway. This was my limit back in 1999, so excitement was high. The sump is apparently free-divable. The book says 5m, a French caver we met later informed us it is in fact only 3m, about a metre high, and lots of people go through it. Had we known that then, we would probably have gone through it. Knowing what I know now, if I go back to the Verneau in the future, I'll definitely take the aquatic route, if only to avoid what has to be some of the most anxiety-provoking and strenuous SRT I've done. However, on this occasion, we took the overhead route.

Just to the right of the stream, facing back upstream, a slippery mud bank and muddy crawl lead into a high chamber with a rope hanging down. I had the misfortune of arriving there first, so donning SRT kit once more, I proceeded upwards. This aven is apparently 30m high. It looked and felt a lot more! It's disconcerting prusiking up a rope that hasn't been rigged by your party and not knowing the state of the bolts. In fact, several of the bolts were only half screwed in and on one rebelay the rope could be seen to be hooked over the top of the hanger. All alarming stuff. The ropes were apparently less than a year old, but horribly muddy. On more than one occasion my jammers slipped, a distinctly unpleasant feeling. The aven is split into four sections, so we were at least all able to climb at the same time. I flopped onto the mud at the top of the shaft with great relief; the nervous energy and sheer physical effort of prusiking in a thick wetsuit had really taken it out of me. Pausing briefly to recover, I then started the downward bit of the sump bypass; a series of five short pitches on very old looking hangers.

An hour after leaving the upstream side of the sump, I was now at the downstream side, having travelled 3m further down the streamway! The stream soon sinks amongst the gravel. The passage continued gloomily for a while. This area clearly floods totally. It struck me for the first time here that whichever way we went, we were a long way from the sunshine. The passage enlarges, a short in-situ rope is then followed down to the streamway again, bigger than before. Somewhere round here, the water from the Grotte de la Vieille Folle comes into the system, evident by all the cow bones in the gravel. To be at this point in the system in flood would not be a good thing. It is however a dramatic spot. Walking, wading and swimming along a canal, we were glad we had ensured that our tackle bags were buoyant. Somewhere round here, another major inlet enters, the Gouffre du Creux qui Sonne. We were now very glad to be wearing full wetsuits. In fact, to be at this point without a wetsuit would be downright miserable, if not unwise. This canal ends at the rotting remains of an electron ladder and a 20' rope of hopefully better quality, dropping down into

very deep water.

This point is a significant landmark in the system, the Jonction 1975. We were now in the Baudin, swimming along in deep water towing our tackle bags behind. The roof lowers with the impression that the place is about to sump. The steam rising from our bodies gave the whole scene an eerie atmosphere. As the roof gets lower, a passage on the right took us out of the water to bypass the next sump. We soon rejoined the streamway again, now of huge proportions.

At this point where the stream crashes over a pitch to yet another sump, a well rigged traverse on the right led up into more huge passage, well decorated with long straws and flowstone, the first decent formations we'd seen. The passage continues in grand style to a big boulder choke. Somewhere round here is the famous Tripod formation. We wanted to see it, but weren't sure exactly where it was, so we opted to press on. Had we appreciated what good progress we were making, we might have spent some time looking for it.

Passing the boulder choke we rejoined the main stream to a 20' ascending rope. The top of this pitch took us to a gently descending tunnel, about 10' in diameter in shaly white limestone, more like a mine than a cave, quite bizarre. Eventually we rejoined the stream once more, soon to arrive at another ascending pitch. Climbing this, we arrived at an obvious junction where we made our only real navigation error in the whole trip. Instead of turning left, we continued into a large, bouldery and increasingly muddy passage. A tricky climb down, we found ourselves in what is quite possibly the worst mud I've encountered underground. The main problem was its depth. Every footstep was extremely arduous; the mud was at least knee deep, more often than not thigh deep or more. Surely this can't be the way on? Anyway, we persevered, commando crawling, tackle bags in front, trying to spread our weight. This can't be the way on? A compass bearing confirmed we were wrong; should've done that 15 minutes ago! Retracing our route, we returned to the junction having wasted three quarters of an hour and more annoyingly, a huge amount of energy.

A kilometre or so of big, bouldery dry passage continues to a stal ramp into another short feeder to the Collecteur. The passage here has large milled potholes in the floor, care was required here, especially as I for one was starting to feel quite fatigued. The potential for going arse over tit and cracking your skull on a large flake is very high! The familiar traverse and pitch down to the entrance sump took me by surprise; I hadn't appreciated quite how quickly we'd been travelling.

By now, I was feeling pretty shattered and my tackle bag was feeling twice as heavy. All three exit options seemed daunting. I know I didn't fancy the full traverse, nor did I fancy a 20m pitch and the contortions of the sump bypass, so we opted for the open sump. Mistake! The sump seems to be rigged with all kinds of rubbish and very soon, I found myself on the wrong rope, the wrong side of the wrong bolt, with my bag in the wrong place, getting heavier by the minute. I found enough energy from somewhere to extract

myself from my predicament and continue upwards, away from the sump and up a strenuous vertical chimney to a low, squalid bedding crawl to eventually reach the downstream end of the sump bypass. I reckon with hindsight that the bypass would have been the easier route.

Finding myself now in familiar territory, I got second wind. We'd taken eleven and a half hours so far, to complete the traverse in less than 12 would be good, and even more importantly would be over two hours quicker than the Wessex had done the trip a couple of months previously! I was now on autopilot and in seemingly no time at all we were basking in the evening sunshine, 12 hours after having entered the Bief Bousset.

Next morning, I was pleased to discover maybe I wasn't quite as unfit as I thought I'd become, the reason my kit bag felt a lot heavier was because it was a lot heavier! The lid had somehow got twisted on my emergency supplies drum and the dry furry suit I'd carried was a next to useless sodden mass; good job I hadn't needed it in anger. Shame about the extra 5kg of water I'd been carrying!

So would I do it again?

Absolutely.

A superbly sporting, varied and dramatic trip. Won't be doing the Sump 8 bypass again though!

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Next instalment:

Stage 3 of my Tour de France takes us 150km south to the Haute Savoie for another classic through trip.

Membership

The committee proposes Charles Bailey, Matt Voysey, Mandy Voysey, Andy Heath and Claire Sharp as full members.

Anyone wishing to comment, contact the secretary.

COTTAGE BOOKINGS

4-5 Sept

Lost World CC

4-5 Sept

CSS Kayaking

14-15 Nov

Devon SS

Heale Farm Cave

Mendip

AN UPDATE ON ACCESS

by Andy Watson



Photo:
Andy Watson

Heale Farm Cave was discovered in 1974/75 by Beechen Cliff School Caving Club. The cave is in Eastern Mendip near Downhead and there are a series of small caves developed in swallet holes along the Downhead fault that runs almost under the road. It is the biggest of the collection of caves here. In the same swallet hole is Heale Farm Dig which was dug during the 1960s by various clubs to no avail, this has now been abandoned and a metal grid fixed just to allow protected bat access to the 20 feet deep hole.

Heale Farm Cave is on the left of the swallet hole and has a length of some 140 metres with a depth of about 60m. The best description is in the Belfry Bulletin from 1977, it is also in Mendip Underground. Access is strictly controlled now by Aggregate Industries and when the current gating is finished, expected to complete Sept 2009 (check with Andy Watson) then the key will be available at the security gatehouse at Torr Works and you will be required to sign an indemnity form.

The cave is on the Downhead road past Heale Farm (within the big horse arena) but before the Methodist Chapel on the right. The best parking spot is a gateway on the right after Heale Farm House; try not to block the road or the gateway. Please keep the noise down too, historically a complaint caused the shutting of this cave. Cross the road and go through the field gate at the end of the hedge almost

opposite. Follow the track down and round to the left. The swallet hole is some 200m in front of you and is obvious. The actual small stream sink is some 20 metres up the valley.

The cave entrance is made obvious by the dry stone walling stepping down to the entrance in the left corner of the swallet.

A 5 metre steeply sloping entrance passage gives way to a sloping bedding plane. Both areas have loose boulders and are steep, a handline may be useful. Please look out for bats.

At the bottom of the bedding plane a small chamber with a stream in the floor leads to the top of a 4 metre waterfall, this needs a ladder and lifeline secured to the very large boulder that overhangs the climb which is made of loose shale type rock. The base is in the main chamber with water and loose rocks underfoot.

At the bottom of Main Chamber a muddy squeeze behind large rocks leads to a muddy rift with a stream in the bottom (Alimentary Canal). This can be followed for a short distance before the stream sinks into a muddy choke. Back in the main chamber, at the bottom of the obvious chimney (rift), can be climbed to a short section of passage which ends over a choked pot above which is a difficult traverse and a 3 metre climb to the final 10 metres of passage which becomes too tight to follow.

The cave still has about 30m to drop before reaching its final resurgence at Seven Springs in Asham Wood.

The Main Chamber has been known to half fill during flooding and this is possibly seasonal, judging by the obvious glutinous mud deposits.

Montenegro 2009

by Joe Duxbury

Joe Duxbury and Gary Kiely were part of an eight-strong expedition to Montenegro in June and July. The main object of the expedition was to explore further PT4, a cave previously descended to about 200m in 2004. The cave was successfully extended to an estimated depth of more than 400m, and is still continuing.

Several other caves were found, and some descended.



You can **now**
receive your copy
of the
CSS Newsletter
as a **PDF**

The new glossy publication is going well. Print costs are similar to the previous format, but postage is more expensive because it needs an A4 envelope.

Postage costs are currently being offset by some members collecting copies from Whitewalls, and by local distribution to Mendip-based members.

One colour edition per year was agreed.

To further reduce distribution costs, and allow more of the budget to be spent on production, members can now opt to download a pdf copy from the Members area of the Website.

www.chelseaspelaeo.org.uk

Your hard copy will then be stored in the library at Whitewalls for collection on your next visit.

If you would be happy to receive your newsletter in this way then please advise John Cooper so that he can take you off the mailing list.

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 be arranged through Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley and Mandy Voysey

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 Carno

CSS keyholders include Adrian Fawcett and Charles Bailey

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.



Following on from Paul Tarrant's article 'Daren Cilau, that's a terrible place!', we move forward a decade to exploration antics beyond the Restaurant. I wrote this article for the Brynmawr Caving Club journal in 1996, as only a couple of people from BCC (Huw Durban and myself) had been that far into Daren. The intention was to generate interest within the club, and engender future cave diggers. It did neither, but serves as a decent representation of caving and digging at the middle of the 90's beyond the Restaurant.

For me, it was a special trip. This was my first breakthrough at the 'end' of Daren after many arduous trips ...

AT THE SHARP END

by Charles Bailey 21st January 1996

"I see what Ivan meant" I muttered, squeezing upwards into a chamber perhaps 4 metres across, with a cone of rubble at its centre. On the last camp at the 'Restaurant at the end of the Universe' in Daren Cilau, the dig at Spaderunner had finally yielded – after 6 years of digging! Andy Tyler and I had left camp on the day of the breakthrough in August '95 due to work commitments. The rest of the team had broken through into 30 metres of crawling /stooping passage beyond Spade runner ending in the chamber. We were keen to get back – although it took us until late December.

Camping and pushing cave at the end of Daren with only two people is bound to add that element of spice to the ultimate remote digging experience. The 'Restaurant' is about 5 hours hard caving from daylight, with the joys of the entrance series, Hard Rock extensions and Ankle Grinder to entertain you. However, trips can take much longer. On my first camp with Huw Durban, it took us over 8 hours. Some trips have been known to take 12 or more – including Mike Willett [BEC] and Co. who left late afternoon in August '95, and arrived for breakfast the following morning!

The sharp end is another 2-3 hours from camp. 72 hour camps are the norm – in one evening after work, two day's activity, then one day to exit.

So there sat Andy and I in the chamber – the most remote spot in U.K. caving – staring at a passage continuation opposite the entrance squeeze. There was only one problem; it was beneath a pile of rubble. We suspected that Jake [Graham Johnson, BEC] and Ivan [Sandford, BEC] had chemically persuaded the wall to become the floor before they had left in August. Why, we could only guess, although we had a strong suspicion that the way on was down there somewhere.

"Better start digging" I said with more enthusiasm than I felt. The route from camp was long and dry, and Andy welcomed a breather. Not for long though – I needed his dry stone wall building ability. Rubble was tossed aside. Andy took over at the sharp end, imagining draught. After 3 hot dry hours, approximately 1.5 tonnes of spoil had been shifted, and the 'way on' was a narrow vertical slot, turning through 90 degrees to the horizontal under the chamber



Andy Tyler at 'The Restaurant', Daren Cilau, 1996 Photo: Charles Bailey

wall. Frustratingly, I couldn't reach the spoil blocking the way on, as the bend in the route was too severe to negotiate. I poked my head down, but couldn't see much, so I elected to dig out the sand floor whilst virtually standing on my head! Andy had to drag me free.

"I might be able to make it". Wellies first, on my back, I slipped under the wall, pushing a bow wave of rubble forward as I went. It was ridiculously tight – my helmet refused to pass through the slot and had to follow. Andy disappeared from view as my nose scraped the roof. Gradually, 'Ground Hug Day' increased in dimensions. I called back for Andy to follow, and stood up in ongoing passage. We'd done it!

With Andy in front, we walked off for . . . 30 metres. The roof rose to a 2 foot square window at high level, blocked by a slab, also two foot square. The beast was impossible to move without being chased down the slope – not advisable this far underground !

Two small mineral veins formed a cross at the centre of the slab. With luck, this might form an 'X marks the spot' weakness we could exploit using bang, but due to the fumes produced, we wouldn't know the result for at least a few weeks, as we were due to leave the following day ! Andy retired to Spaderunner, to pack up our gear, and have a welcome drink of water. 6 hours activity in dry passage had created a massive thirst.

Back at the slab, I was having problems with water too; I needed some to make good tamp (damp mud placed over the bang to concentrate the charge). I had some dry mud but no water. My usual source (no, not that one), the accumulation in my wellies, was as dry as my throat. There was only one source left ... hence the naming of Last Spit Choke. As I set the charge, and carefully reversed down the slope, I tried congratulating myself aloud to break the tension, but my dry voice sounded so bad, it only made matters worse.

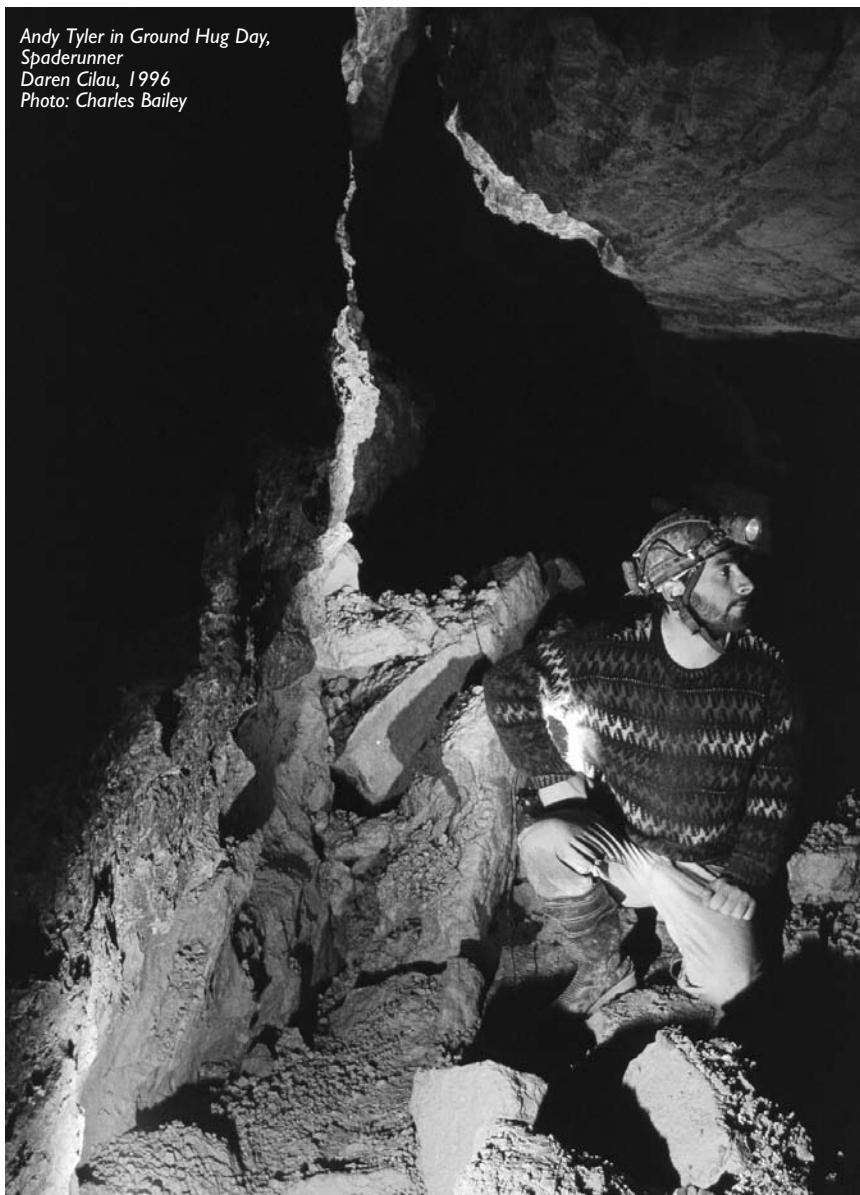
I carefully placed the insulating tape, which had been sealing the battery terminals, on the ammo box, lowered myself below a block, and applied the ends of the bang wire to the battery ... nothing! I licked the end of the wire and tried again. The result was, well ... electric! The shock wave blew the ammo box off the shelf, scattering its contents and the neatly placed tapes. Quickly, I packed the kit away, and ventured a brief look at the slab, but all I could see was bang fumes tumbling down the slope.

A hasty retreat was in order – no problem until I reached the breakthrough point from Spaderunner; this was a tight hole in a wall about 1 metre above floor level. An eternity was spent here, imagining bang fumes creeping towards me, until I finally managed to get into the crawl proper. Eventually, the dusty, dry, hot, knackered mess that was me landed on the floor next to Andy.

"I could murder a pint" I cracked "but I'll settle for the water".

"There's a bit left ... but, er ..." said Andy. My reply was not printable. To be fair to Andy, he hadn't drunk that much, we'd just underestimated the amount of

Andy Tyler in Ground Hug Day,
Spaderunner
Daren Cilau, 1996
Photo: Charles Bailey

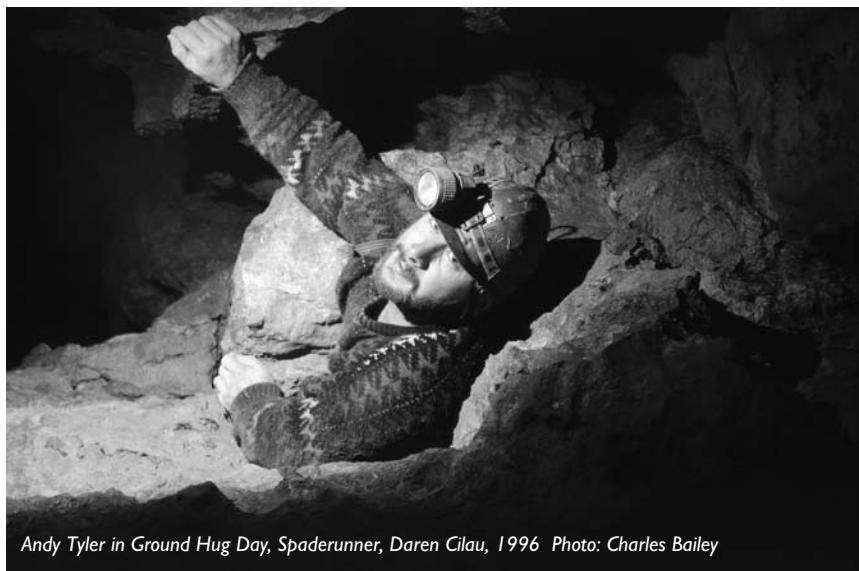


water we'd need.

We eventually arrived back at camp, just after midnight, with me enjoying a storming dehydration headache. Sanctuary! I drank a couple of pints of water, then felt up to a couple of swigs of Archers peach Schnapps, which rendered me instantly euphorically drunk. Great. 30 metres of new passage after all this time, and what lay beyond the block?

Time to get some food going. Another pint of water; instantly sober! Weird stuff, this dehydration!

Into bed by 03:00, but I couldn't sleep, due to the mind being active, with thoughts of caverns measureless to ... mice, probably. Tomorrow (subjectively) was another day – Christmas Eve! The five hour exit trip from camp, despite the graft and after a hard camp (or maybe because of it), was always a nice mellow experience. Bye bye camp, see you next time, whenever that may be! Whatever the cave does, time always seems measureless at the Restaurant at the End of the Universe.



Andy Tyler in Ground Hug Day, Spaderunner, Daren Cilau, 1996 Photo: Charles Bailey

success at 'Where The Sun Don't Shine' and 'Frog Street'.

I have no action photo's of 'extreme digging', but these rather relaxed shots of Andy in his Oxfam best jumper, looking all the world as though he'd lost his pipe and slippers! He certainly lost a lot more on the way out from the Christmas camp, and will forever remember two things:

1. That a huge portion of Christmas pudding has a high fibre content.
2. That your Daren Drum makes a very convenient toilet!

Charles Bailey digging Last Spit Choke, Ground Hug Day, Spaderunner, Daren Cilau around 20 years later
Photo: Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley



Epilogue

Despite 3 more camps in 1996, the secrets of Last Spit Choke were not revealed. The bang had done its work, but removal of the slab only unveiled more choke, with an intangible draught. By the end of that year a 3 cubic metre cavity had been created, but with choke all around, it wasn't a healthy place to be. It still marks the most remote dig in U.K. caving.

Andy and I moved on to dig Painkiller Passage with much fun, a little success, but not the fabled breakthrough into 'open mountain' towards Eglwys Faen. Eventually, Andy moved to India and focus moved to the resurgence of camps at Hard Rock, with

CSS Chairman standing down by Adrian Fawcett

Although it's fairly widely known that I'm standing down as chairman due to the fact I'll be working abroad, I thought it appropriate to write a short piece for the newsletter to explain.

When I heard earlier this year that my job at Coleg Gwent was "at risk" as part of a reorganisation, and having had a poor experience teaching in the FE sector anyway, I decided to look elsewhere. I have accepted a job in Wuhan, central China, teaching A-level Physics. My contract runs from August until next June, with the possibility of extending it for a second year. The students I'll be teaching are Chinese youngsters who want to go to university abroad, particularly Britain, so I'll also be helping them improve their English skills. It's not exactly a leap into the unknown for me, as I taught English and Business studies in China in 2006-7. I leave the UK on 7th August.

Sadly, though, it means I will have to put caving on hold, and must stand down as CSS chairman. John Newton has agreed to take on the role of acting chairman, but only until next AGM. Thanks to everyone for making my stint as Chairman a relatively easy and enjoyable one. Hopefully I will be able to take an active role in the club again in the future.

Pat “Twink” Fletcher 1944-2009

by Roy Musgrove

with assistance from John Cooper's digital version of old CSS N/Ls and info about Gang 35 from Bart Sheekey.

A note has already appeared in the last newsletter informing members of Twink's accidental death.



Photographer presumed to be John House

Pat Dymond, as she then was, began caving in Devon while a student at Seale Hayne Agricultural College. Having finished her course, she joined Chelsea to continue the activity in about 1966. It was at this early stage that she acquired her nickname. George was much into giving people nicknames at this time and while “Twink” began as a pun on her name it so fitted her cheery, sparkling personality that unlike other nicknames it stayed hers for life.

Her CSS trips were few but striking. Just after being elected to full membership she participated

in a survey of Flood Passage without wet or dry suit. A couple of months later she played victim in a practice rescue from North West Junction to Main Chamber in Aggy and wrote up the patient's view for the Newsletter. How long her CSS activities would have continued had it not been for the outbreak of Foot & Mouth Disease in 1967 it is hard to know. Outdoor activity of any kind was almost closed down for many weeks. Restriction to less rural and more purely social activities resulted in Twink becoming Mrs Fletcher in 1968, and not long afterwards she and Geo took the decision to found CSS North West and move to Nantwich, where they remained.

However, some CSS members, particularly John Tooke, had already become very active rock climbers and Geo and Twink graduated from the Staffordshire Roaches to the classic areas of North Wales. For some time the group rented a disused platelayers hut on the old Caernarfon/ Llanberis railway and became known from its railway number as Gang 35.

Once Hilary and Heather joined the family extreme pursuits became more restricted, but George and Twink continued to join in a Golden Oldies weekend camping at Whitewalls at Whitsun, where they were particularly friendly with Tony and Carol Payne, Sally and Wendy. Following Tony's death in a hang-gliding accident these visits gradually lapsed. However, once Geo retired he and Twink took highly active holidays in places as widespread as Alaska and New Zealand. The Fiftieth Anniversary celebration reignited interest and we met again in Crickhowell in September 2008. Many of us will go there as planned next September, as I am sure Twink would have expected..

At home Twink had so many interests that most people cannot imagine how she fitted them all in. She was a WI member for the whole of her time in Nantwich, serving a term as president. She was a guide leader for fifteen years, a member of two art classes, helped in the parish church shop, belonged to a group visiting the sick and elderly and still found time to cook, dress make and knit for her family, and later her granddaughters.

It was while on a commercially run mountain walking holiday in the Dolomites in a small party that the accident occurred. They were crossing a steep snow slope, which walkers had already crossed that day when for reasons which will never be known Twink lost her footing and fell some 200 metres, incurring fatal injuries.

A family cremation took place on Thursday morning 25th June, followed by a service of celebration in Nantwich Church in the afternoon. A substantial number of Twink's CSS contemporaries attended the latter: Mac Ayton, Jane Bonner, Malc Bonner, Jan Butterley, Clive and Beryl Calder, Pat and Paul Cornelius, Colin Holdsworth, John House, Roy Musgrove, Carol, Wendy and Sally Payne, Bart and Margaret Sheekey, Brenda Thompson, Pete Thompson and two of his daughters. The total attendance at the service was of the order of 250 – 300 people. Quite a few of us visited the house afterwards to see George, Hilary and Heather.

Twink was one of a kind – accomplished at whatever she set her hand to, and delighting in anything and everything that life had to offer. We shall miss her smile and her distinctive voice.

Officers of the Society:

Chairman

Adrian Fawcett
5 Ambrym Road, New Inn, Pontypool
Torfaen, NP4 0NJ
(01495) 763130 (Home)
07973 815050 (Mobile)
adrianfawcett@talktalk.net

Secretary

Stuart France
The Smithy, Crickhowell, Powys, NP8 1RD
(01874) 730016 (Home)
css@linetop.com

Treasurer

Peter Ward
33 Gertrude Street, Abercynon
Mountain Ash, CF45 4RL
07749 235985
speleo@hotmail.co.uk

Cottage Warden

John Stevens
14 Kiln Close, Hermitage, Thatcham
Newbury, Berks, RG18 9TQ
(01635) 200879 (Home)
john@k-stevens.fsnet.co.uk

Tacklemaster

Gary Kiely
22b St Johns Road, Isleworth,
Middlesex, TW7 6NW
07958 039721 (Mobile)
gkiely72@mac.com

Newsletter Editor

Mark Lumley
7 Langleys Lane, Clapton, Radstock
Somerset, BA3 4DX
(01761) 419246 (Home and Work)
mark@creativeedge.me.uk

Librarian

Anna Northover
42 BrynGwyn Road, Newport, NP20 4JT
(01633) 678833 (Home)
anna@pnorthover.freeserve.co.uk

Meets Secretary

John Newton, 39 North Park Grove
Roundhay, Leeds, LS8 1EL
(0113) 293 3807 (Home)
jnewton5@csc.com

Records Officer

John Cooper
31 Elm Close, Wells, Somerset, BA5 1LZ
(01749) 670568 (Home)
csspub@googlemail.com

Web Master

Stephen Newton
68 Myrtle Avenue, Long Eaton, Notts, NG10 2LY
(0115) 972 9029 (Home)
snewton@ukonline.co.uk

Committee Member

Mel Reid
3 Bryntirion Terrace, Llangollen, LG20 8LP
07711 943492 (Mobile)
melrei@hotmail.com

Committee Member

Jason McCorriston
72 Christchurch Road, Penmaen Estate
Oakdale, Blackwood, Gwent, NP12 0UX
(01495) 221479 (Home)
jason_mccorriston@talktalk.net

Whitewalls

The Hillside, Llangattock, Powys, NP8 1LG, UK

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 Churchill School.

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.

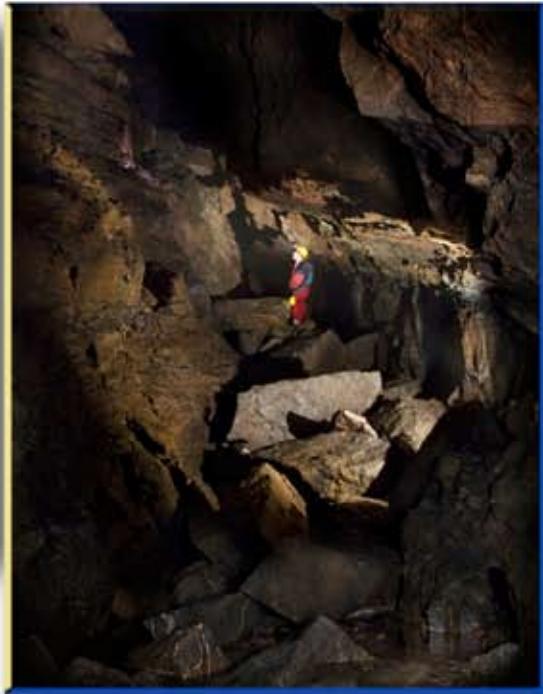
For all non Whitewall events except Hidden Earth, I need to know numbers to book beds etc, so please phone or email me to reserve a place. Also certain caves such as Otter Hole have number restrictions so it will be first come, first served.

John Newton, Meets Secretary

Photos of the Month



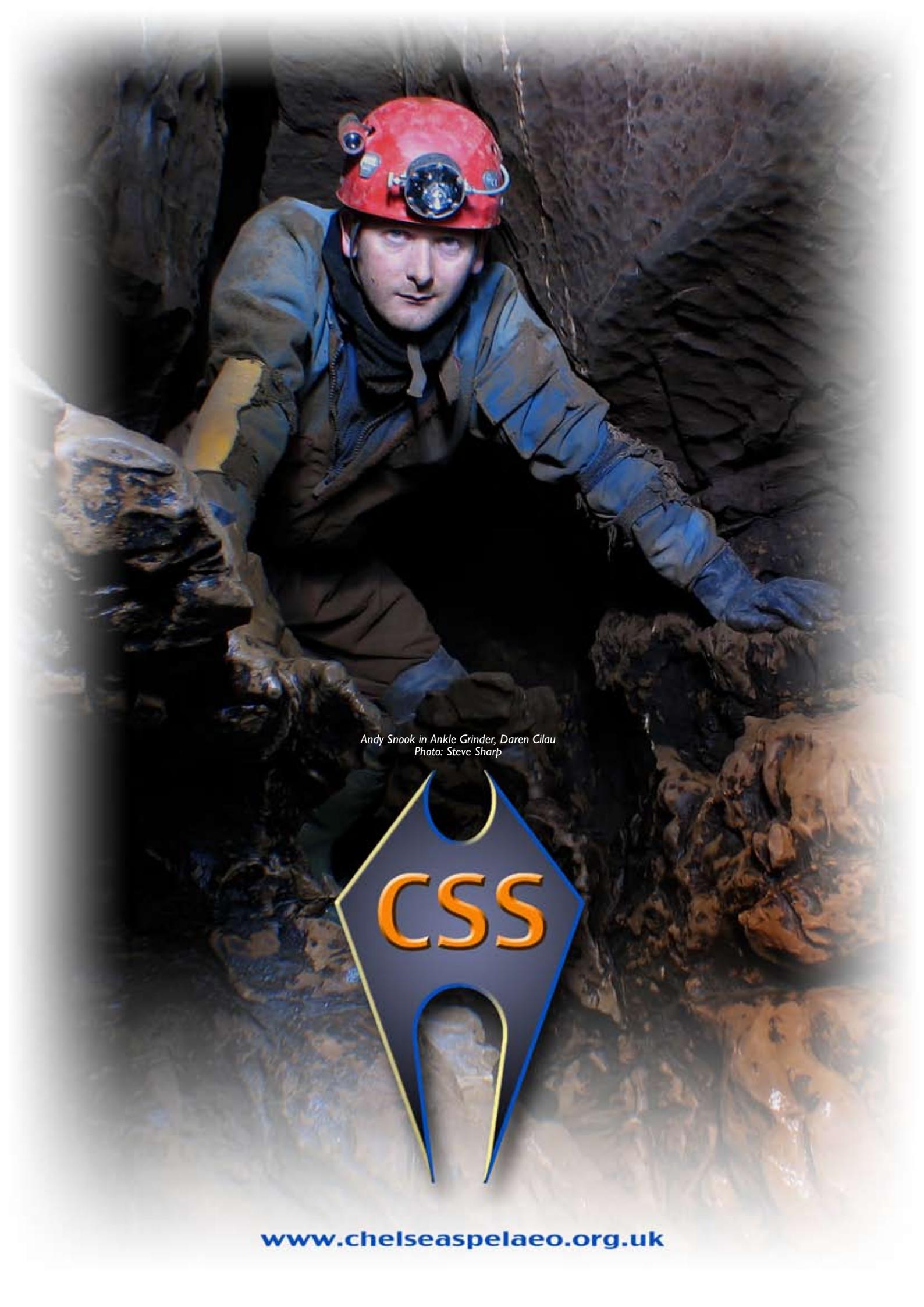
Top: Mandy Voysey in Cova de Can Sion, Mallorca Photo: Matt Voysey



Right: Approach to Sump One, Swildon's Hole Photo: Steve Sharp

Below: John Newton in Little Neath River Cave Photo: Steve Sharp





A color photograph of a caver wearing a red helmet with a headlamp, a blue zip-up jacket, and blue gloves. He is in a crouched position, looking towards the camera. The background is the textured rock walls of a dark cave.

Andy Snook in Ankle Grinder, Daren Cilau
Photo: Steve Sharp



A graphic logo consisting of a dark blue diamond shape with a yellow border. Inside the diamond, the letters "CSS" are written in a large, bold, orange font. There are two yellow semi-circular cutouts, one at the top and one at the bottom, framing a small white rock formation.

css