

# CHELSEA SPELAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

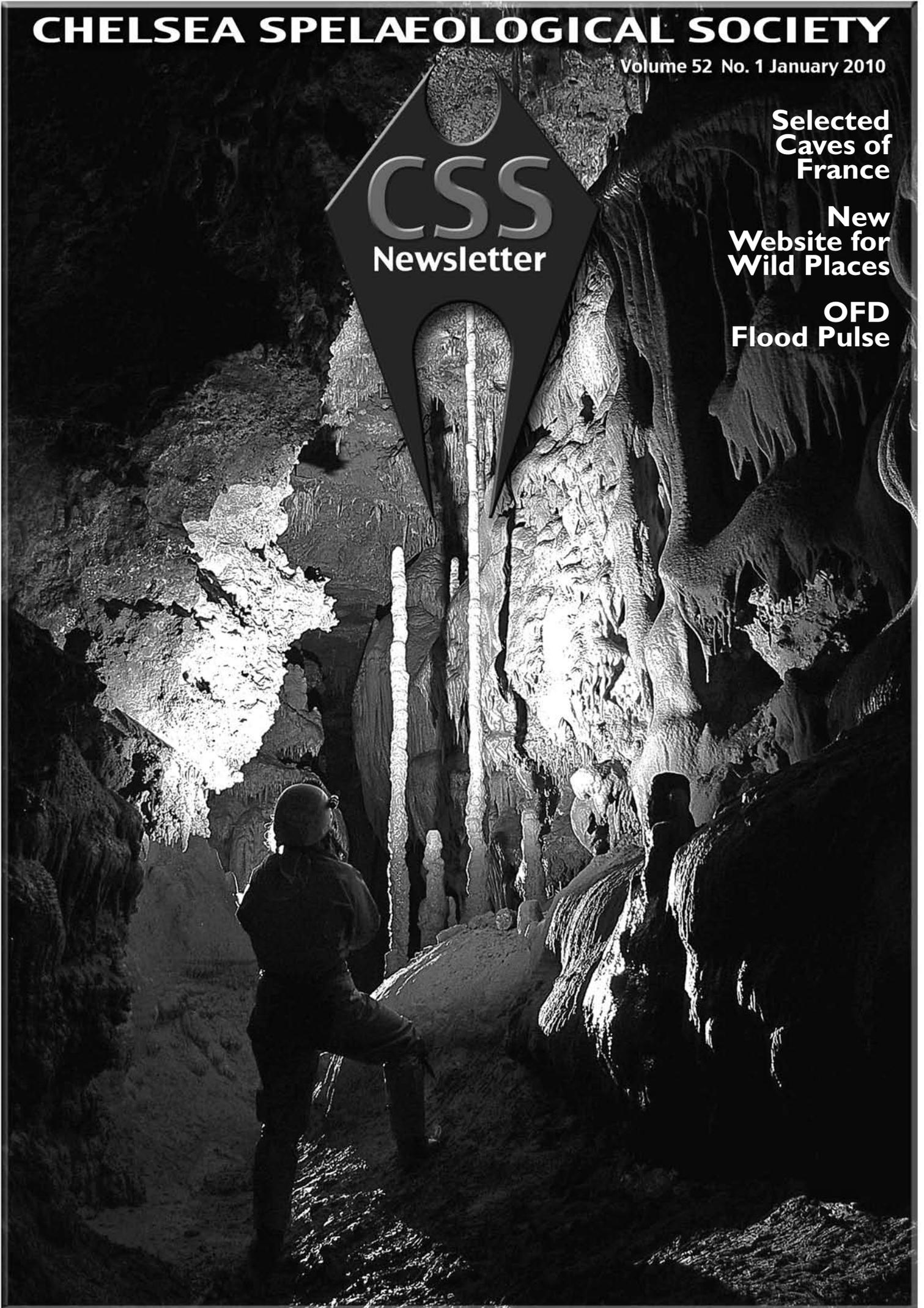
Volume 52 No. 1 January 2010



**Selected  
Caves of  
France**

**New  
Website for  
Wild Places**

**OFD  
Flood Pulse**



# Chelsea Spelæological Society NEWSLETTER

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Where the Sun Don't Shine, Hard Rock Extensions, Daren Clau.. Montage

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## Membership

CSS Subs were due in October.

Please send all subscriptions to:  
Peter Ward, 33 Gertrude Street, Abercynon,  
Mountain Ash CF45 4RL

Current rates are:

<b>Full</b>	<b>£30</b>
<b>Joint</b>	<b>£43</b>
<b>Associate</b>	<b>£20</b>
<b>Provisional</b>	<b>£20</b> (for six months).

Provisional members made into Full members  
this year have to pay the Full member rate.

These rates include non-caving insurance.

Any member that has **BCA Insurance** via  
another club can deduct **£5** from the above  
rates but please let Petre Ward know their **BCA**  
**Insurance Number** and **Club**

**Caving Insurance for 2010**      **£11**

Come the end of December 2009 any lapsing  
member will receive their last newsletter.

## Membership Cards

If you wish to have your photo on your Membership  
Card please send a JPEG to Peter Ward:  
**speleo@hotmail.co.uk**

# Editorial

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



**Mark Lumley**

## Withdrawal of an allegation by Graham Price

Adrian Fawcett has received a letter from Graham Price in which, after an approach from Martin Grass (Fairy Cave Quarry Management Committee) he unreservedly withdraws his allegation of outright lies told to the owners of Fairy Cave Quarry Caves.

*(Vol 51 no. 12, p161)*

**January 2010  
30<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup>  
Tretower  
Village Hall  
South Wales  
Dinner and AGM.**

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**

**Clapton**

**Radstock**

**Somerset BA3 4DX**

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.

# Membership

Welcome to new provisional member

**Matthew Emmett**, 47 Cardiff Road,

Reading, Berks RG1 8ET.

Work 01628 535019.

Email matt\_emmett@yahoo.co.uk

# Caver be Recognised

by Joe Duxbury

The American company "On Rope", that specialises in caving gear, sells t-shirts that give cavers the chance to declare themselves, to stand out from the crowd.

These t-shirts follow the same format as those of US government agencies, for example "FBI" or "NYPD", with the initials in large capitals across the back, on a dark blue background. Thus:



This may be all well and good for Americans, but would it be appropriate over here?

It is well-known that the Americans have their own odd way of spelling words ending in "-re", such as theatre and manoeuvre, and so perhaps a British, or perhaps even European, equivalent would be



*Images supplied by  
Joe Duxbury*

So, step forward a British caving garment manufacturer and let us proudly proclaim our subterranean inclinations to the world!

# Selected Caves of France

by Andy Heath

This series of articles presents a personal selection of some of the caves that I've been to over the years across France (generally good, occasionally not so good!) and hopefully might provide the reader with inspiration for ideas of where might be worth a visit.

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



## Part Six: Correze/ Lot (via Ardeche)

In the last couple of articles I introduced just a few of the fine caves of the Vercors. A brief journey 100km south west takes us to the Ardeche for a tantalising glimpse of just a couple of caves and a precautionary tale of how not to go caving, followed by a 250km journey further west to the Correze /Lot for a couple of splendid trips to finish my tour.

## Ardeche

I've only visited this area once; and that was over nine years ago so my memories of it are fairly vague. Sadly it wasn't my best trip to France.

My own son, Josh, was only about a year old; and since he and my missus (at the time) were on the trip also, I knew from the outset that I was only going to get a couple of trips done. However, I did have a couple of 'day-passes'. What I wasn't banking on was the general apathy amongst the rest of the 'team'. Having set the scene, onto the caves:

### Event de Midroi

This cave is the bottom entrance of the (apparently) very good Aven Rochas – Event de Midroi through-trip.

The total length of the system is around 7.7km, with a vertical range of 220m.

Base-camp lassitude knocked the idea on the head of a possible through-trip, so I had to make do with just a trip into the Midroi.

The large 6 x 4m entrance is located down in the bottom of the famous and very fine Ardeche Gorge; a fine spot for kayaking; (there are numerous places where you can hire boats). The large entrance passage soon leads to a 30m long lake, which fills the width of the passage. There are three ways to progress: boat, swim or traverse. Since we had neither boat nor wetsuits, we opted for the latter. Rigging the traverse can take an hour or so. I seem to recall that there were good stainless steel anchors and found the rigging to be thoroughly absorbing and enjoyable, though quite physical in places. I'm not sure the rest of the group found it quite so good; once they

realised that I wasn't going to fall in, they lost interest and got quite cold (why they didn't go back outside and bask in the sunshine by the river, I don't know!)

50m of rope and a couple of dozen belays later and I was across. The rest followed without too much difficulty. A couple of hundred metres of large, muddy passage follows to a T-junction. The way on, to the left, leads to a large, well-decorated chamber and on to a large pool. This part of the cave is, apparently, usually sumped off from October to June; caution therefore required if you're planning on a Rochas-Midroi through trip. Beyond the pool, more large passage / chambers can be visited, also very well decorated in places.

Eventually a small hole is reached emitting an extremely strong draft; the wind literally roars around your ears. This, I presumed, must be where the Rochas comes in. Squeezing through this small hole, I eventually reached the foot of a pitch; indeed, I was at the bottom of the Rochas.

With nowhere else to go, all we could do was about-turn for the 2km trip out. A fine cave, well worth visiting, but I reckon it would be worth trying to do the full through trip for the full experience.

## Event de Peyrejal

This cave is well worth visiting if only for its remarkable phreatic tunnel; the 'Branche de Sauvas'.

The entrance comprises a manhole and excavated, uninspiring narrow shaft. The natural entrance is about 300m away and of less interest to the non-diver, since a sump soon bars access to the rest of the cave.

Below the short, scruffy dry entrance series, the main passage is soon reached. This is an impressive, large phreatic tunnel and a taste of what's to come. Although at the time of our visit we didn't visit all the corners of the cave, what we did see, I can thoroughly recommend. The passages display splendid phreatic features with much scalloping and bizarrely eroded rock shapes. Much of the floor is covered in large, rounded cobbles; testament to the often severe flooding that the cave can suffer.

The best bit, without doubt, is the Branche de Sauvas, the part of the system that brings in the water from the Goule Sauvas and the Cocaliere. (Incidentally, the latter is a show cave, and a couple that visited the cave tell me that it boasts some remarkable formations). Initially, the Sauvas branch starts small and cobbly. However, 100m or so later the passage changes to a textbook example of a phreatic tube; around 2m high, dead straight for around 30m or so with a clean-washed floor. Quite remarkable.

Beyond this tube, more fine phreatic passage follows, eventually to lead to a sump. The car tyres jammed amongst the cobbles serve as a reminder that at times, this is not the place to be. The air quality was pretty poor too, so we didn't stay there for long.

All too soon we were back on the surface, apathy for some unknown reason once again hitting the group, there being no enthusiasm to explore the rest of the cave.

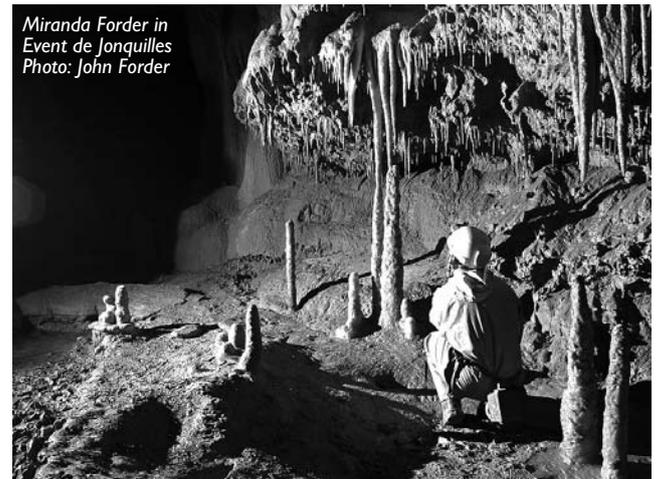
So that's my short account of the Ardeche; I'd be interested to hear from somebody who's spent more time in the area, without kids or apathetic colleagues.

Heading another 250km or so west, takes us to our final area on this tour:

# Correze / Lot

As with many areas of France, you need to be a bit of a detective to find out what trips are worth doing. Guidebooks are either out of print or non-existent. I could find no guidebooks, so a bit of internet searching and grilling of individuals on the ground was required. The latter came in the shape of ex-Hard Rock Crew member, Andy Cave who lives in the area.

With three or four recommended trips in mind, a select group of determined cavers ended up in the area in the late summer of 2008. And so to the caves:



Miranda Forder in  
Event de Jonquilles  
Photo: John Forder

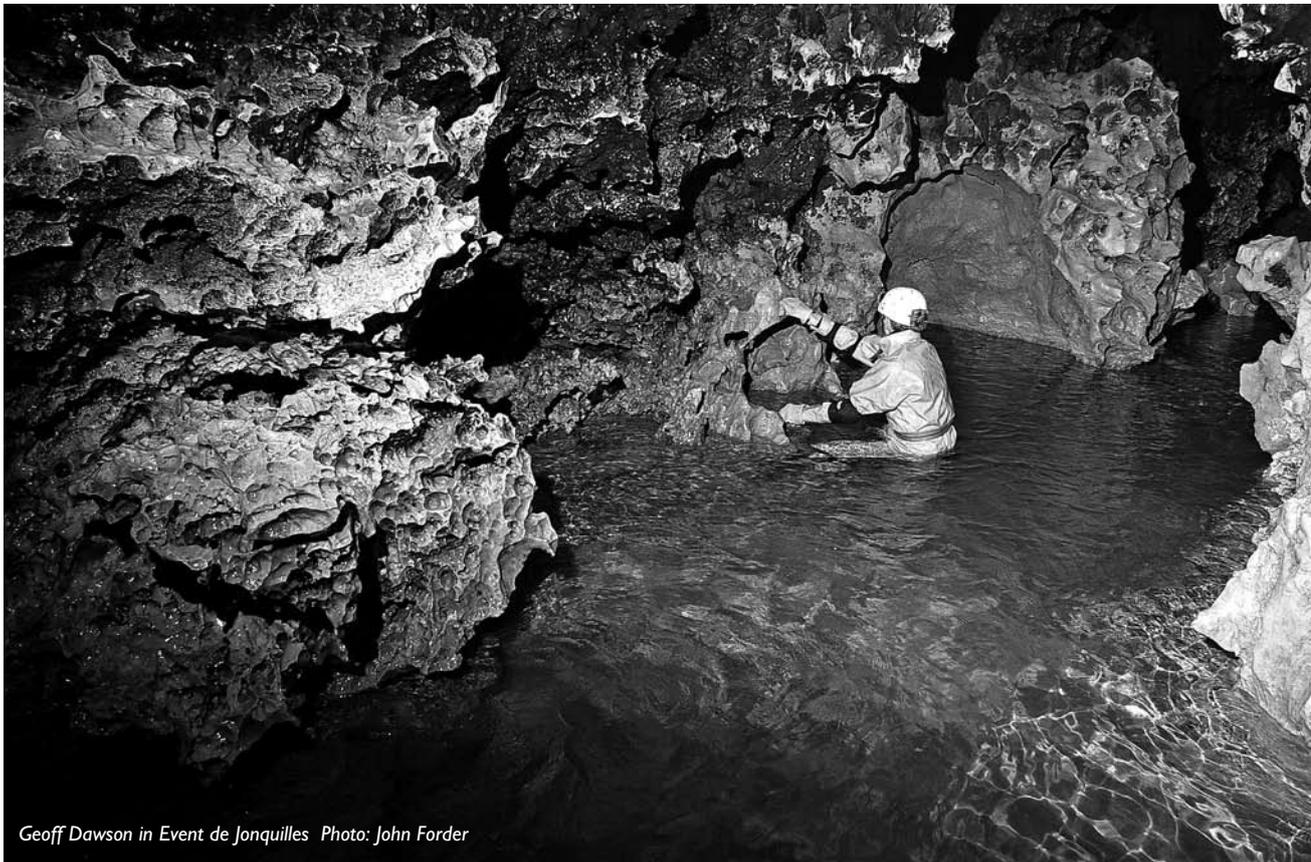
## Event de Jonquilles

The Event de Jonquilles is just one part of the Reseau de la Couze, one of the largest systems in the area; if not the largest.

It's a tricky entrance to find, being just a small manhole in the middle of the woods. There are no surface features to even suggest there might be a cave there; my guess is that this entrance was discovered from the inside via another entrance.

Belaying our 49m rope to a tree, a short section of steel lined shaft drops into natural passage. An in-situ anchor is followed shortly by two more, dropping briefly to a rebelay and then a 28m free-hang to the bottom. It's worth commenting at this point on the nature of the rigging in the area. Perhaps the French had heard my cries of frustration and alarm at stripped or popping spits in the Vercors the previous year. It was a pleasure to discover that most of the pitches we encountered were equipped with permanent anchors of some description. It was a shame however that the type of anchor wasn't universal on all pitches. Although the majority of the pitches we encountered later in the week had stainless steel ring anchors, the pitch in Jonquilles was equipped with some funny galvanised 'pig tail' things, which although gave a feeling of security, were too fat to take a standard 7mm maillon. Thankfully I'd been pre-warned about this, so we had sufficient screw-gate krabs with us to allow us to rig on those.

The pitch drops into a long-abandoned stream passage



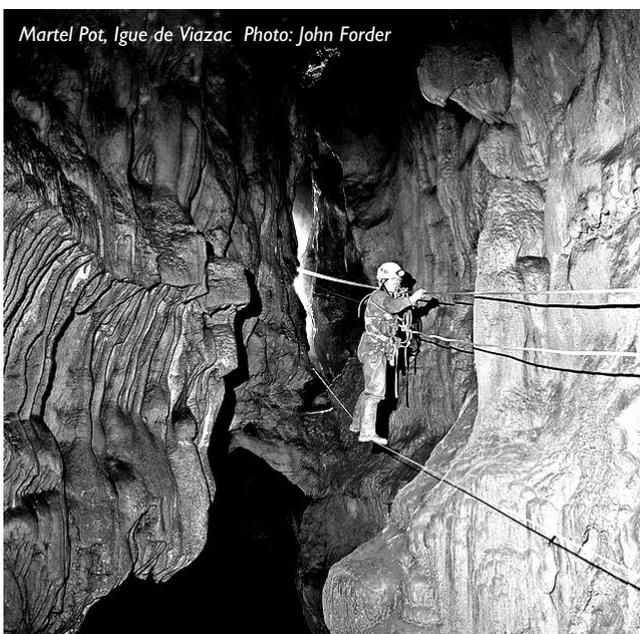
Geoff Dawson in Event de Jonquilles Photo: John Forder

with a choice of two ways on. 'Upstream', the passage leads for some considerable distance past some old but rather splendid formations, the most notable being some long (5-6m?) slender columns stretching floor to ceiling. Eventually the passage reduces to a crawl, where a healthy draft and many mosquitoes suggest a connection to the surface. On the occasion of our visit, Matt followed the flat out crawl for ten minutes or so, but eventually gave up.

'Downstream' from the entrance pitch, some considerable distance of easy walking along the large, 2m x 15m(?) passage and scrambling over some old gour dams, it's possible to eventually hear the stream. Passing over several holes, the passage continues to a point where it is no longer possible to progress forward,

the way on being to climb down, somewhat precariously, into the stream. Downstream soon leads to a sump, but upstream continues for several hundred metres in fine style. A fairly powerful stream flows in an attractively sculpted passage with deep pools and sporty climbs; all good stuff. After a while, the passage changes to a large, gravel floored phreatic tunnel, much easier going. Fast progress for several hundred metres up the crystal clear streamway eventually leads to a sump. If all sumps looked as attractive as this one, I could almost be tempted to take up cave diving...and the water is comparatively warm, too! It's easy to see why the area is a bit of a mecca for divers.

The whole trip took us about five hours.



Martel Pot, Igue de Viazac Photo: John Forder

## Igue de Viazac

An impressive gaping entrance shaft, rigged as four successive pitches of around 30m, 35m, 25m and 30m with little horizontal passage in between. Beyond the pitches, the next obstacle is a bit more 'spicy', a wire traverse crossing the 20-30m deep blind pitch of 'Martel Pot'.

The 20m crossing of the pot is aided by three wire tigtropes; one for the feet and two to clip into. It's recommended also to take a dynamic rope to act as lifeline for the first man across and extra safety rope for the rest. The actual manoeuvre isn't actually that hard, but nonetheless it is a bit intimidating.

Once across the pit, the next obstacle is the big pitch, 'Echo Pot'. Not especially difficult, but the inclined angle of this 81m pot means a fair few rebelayes are required, interim bolts generally being about where you want them to be.

The next pitch, 'Puits de la Boue' follows immediately in two sections of eight and 15m and was indeed horribly muddy. At the foot of the pot, a final scramble for maybe 30m over muddy and therefore very slippery rocks leads down to a beautifully clear 65m long lake (though sadly with all the mud, it doesn't stay a beautiful green for long).

Crossing the lake in a boat takes the explorer to a muddy beach in a large, tall chamber. Two fixed ropes of questionable age hang down from unseen belays up in the roof.

I'd been told that these ropes were ok to use, though I must admit it was with some hesitation and very steady prusiking that I ascended my chosen rope. Once at the top, I was relieved to see that the anchors/bolts were mainly sound, though I did re-rig with our own stuff for the benefit of the rest of the team. It is generally known that the caves in this part of France often suffer from bad air; this became very evident this far down into the cave, especially with the exertions of prusiking.

Unfortunately I had chosen the wrong rope to ascend; the one we went up led only to some very greasy rifts and climbs, ending in a sump with copious amounts of pipework leading from the sump; obviously the site of some exploratory project.

Once back down the rope, we decided not to try the other rope (and apparently main way on for some considerable distance), as we were both running out of time and feeling the effects of the poor air. It wasn't until we were back across the lake and at the top of Echo Pot that we felt happy that we could breathe properly again!

A fine cave, well worth a visit; be prepared for a good 12 hour trip.

## Saut de la Pucelle

Easy to find, the entrance being right beside a main road and marked on the 1:25,000 map.

The Pucelle, I understand, is definitely a no-go if water is flowing into the entrance. On the day of our visit, the sun was shining and no heavy rain was forecast.

Wandering into the large horizontal entrance tunnel, much debris including some very large tree trunks bears testament to what the cave could be like. It certainly looks like it could get nasty down there. On our visit, 'Sump One' at 150m in and 'Sump Two' soon after were thankfully nothing more than slightly smelly, knee-deep pools. The whole place is certainly quite gloomy; several of our party found it quite oppressive.

Passing through the 'Grande Salle', the only real chamber in the cave, we arrived at the active streamway, about 500m or so from the entrance.

The 2km or so of following streamway was a sort of a 'Super-Swildons', with no less than 12 short pitches, none requiring more than a 20m rope, many much less. It all becomes a bit of a blur of which pitch was which. Some required nothing much more than a knotted handline, others included several rebelays in order to traverse out beyond the force of the water. On the day of our visit, it would have probably sufficed to drop straight through the water. However, given a stronger flow, I should imagine one or two pitches would be formidable obstacles. To add to the interest, two or three of the pitches end in deep pools, meaning the visitor has to get off the rope and start swimming. The odd deep canal here and there adds to the interest. I think it's probably fair to say that those wearing a wetsuit were more comfortable than those in a neo-fleece, if only for the security of the buoyancy offered! It proved to be a wise decision to have had an empty Daren drum in the bottom of each tackle sack; trying to swim with a bag of wet rope would not have been a pleasant experience.

After the eleventh pitch (I think), the nature of the cave changes. The stream disappears under rocks, a dry oxbow offering the way on. Despite all the flowing water, even this cave seemed to have high a concentration of CO<sub>2</sub>, if my laboured breathing was anything to go by. I guess it was probably due to decomposing vegetation. Beyond the oxbow, the stream is regained. Easy going passage, one more short pitch, a bit more easy passage and the inevitable sump, approximately four hours from the entrance.

We emerged, eight hours after entering the cave, just as the rain started!

A cracking trip, well worth checking out.

So, that concludes my visits to the Ardeche, Correze and Lot and indeed my 'Tour de France (for now)'. There are several more areas I want to visit; up high on my list are the Pyrenees and the Chartreuse, to name but two. Return visits to the Vercors and the Franche-Comte wouldn't go amiss either.

I hope my short descriptions have been of some use, if only to give an idea or two for places worth checking out.

# Salut!

## References:

### Ardeche:

*A Travers le Karst. F Darne & P Tordjman. Abymes editeur. 2002*  
*Speleo Sportive en Ardeche. P Drouin & T Marchand. Edisud. 1989*

### Correze/Lot:

*I failed to locate any books, but the websites of the 'Speleo Club de Figeac' and the 'Comite Departmental de Speleologie du Lot' are very useful, with a few topas of some popular caves.*



## The Daren Diggers

The Daren Diggers' next Hard Rock camp will be on the weekend of 16-17 January. If you'd like to get involved contact the editor



Cocktails at Hard Rock. Photo: Steve Sharp.

## COTTAGE BOOKINGS

22-23/1/2010 Cambridge University CC

# CAVE ACCESS

## Dan Yr Ogof

The club has three cave leaders: Alan Brady, 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

## Carno Adit

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

# Daren Drums

by Henry Bennett

Anyone looking for Daren Drums may be interested to know that you can get them for half the normal rate from **Key Industrial** plus free shipping.

**Normal £7**

**Small £5**

[http://www.keyonline.co.uk/wide-neck-kegs\\_338462002010264760.html](http://www.keyonline.co.uk/wide-neck-kegs_338462002010264760.html)

They became known as 'Daren Drums' in the late 80's. Prior to using these drums, the Rock Steady Crew (mostly BEC and Cardiff University Daren Diggers) used BDH containers which you could get free from university chemical departments, as they were used to ship big bottles of acid and the like. The first drum was brought in by Tim Allen (NCC) and its potential was quickly recognised. Nick Wall, a Daren digger who now lives in New Zealand, had a chemicals company and received raw material in these drums. It didn't take long to put two and two together and consign BDH's to the rubbish heap.

# Pottering About on Mendip

by  
John Cooper

## Charterhouse Cave

**Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2009.**

John Cooper, Simon Flower, Pete Hann and Alison Moody on a wet trip to the 2008 extensions. Spent 2½ hours digging at the Sand Dig, about 1m of forward progress. Met an MNRC party on their way in near the end as we were just starting out. 5 hours. Saw Gary Kiely on his way to Swildon's on Saturday morning.

**Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2009.**

John Cooper, Simon Flower, Pete Hann and Alison Moody on a digging trip to the 2008 extensions. On way in AM very cross to find a mud streak on a stal bank that had been cleaned and taped off so we cleaned it again. She was even crosser on the way out to find two more streaks across it that had been done that day so we cleaned it yet again. It is quite easy to avoid by keeping to the left wall going in, right wall coming out. One of the access conditions is that oversuits should be clean on entering the cave. Similar progress in dig as last week. Were visited by an MCG party and a BEC party. 5 hours.

## Redcliffe Caves

**Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2009.**

Joined an afternoon tour by Alan Gray of this interesting sandstone mine in Bristol.

## Swildon's Hole

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2009.**

John Cooper and Barry Weaver on a quick trip to Mud Sump and back. BW very surprised at the recent collapses.

**Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2009.**

John Cooper and Barry Weaver on a quick but very wet trip to Sump 1 and back.

## Swildon's Hole Closure

As the cave is currently closed I'm afraid you will not be able to read reports for a while.

For those interested I will try to describe the current state of the entrance. The initial drop through the gate appears unchanged. Going forward a couple of metres to enter the first chamber it has changed a lot. Previously it was possible to go left and down, then look back up left to the route from the tree hole. From this point it was possible to slide down a slab to drop into the middle chamber. At present this route is blocked by boulders. Alternatively it was, and still is, possible to go straight across the first chamber to where a climb down on the left arrived at the same place. Now this climb drops onto a funnel of boulders which have collapsed into Showerbath Chamber, the start of the Wet Way. Continuing across the middle chamber and taking the normal route down into Showerbath Chamber finds the floor much higher and on looking back towards the entrance you see a loose wall of boulders with a large block perched on the top of them. I think a good flood will wash the boulders down, probably bring the large block down and the floor of the middle chamber could vanish. I wouldn't like to say what effect this would have on the first chamber as it's not possible to see whether the walls of this are more large blocks or wall. As I haven't done the Zigzags, which go off on the right in the first chamber and finally drop down above Jacob's Ladder, for a long time I'm unsure of the state of that passage, although I hear someone's been trying to open it up a bit. So to summarise: the roof of Showerbath Chamber is being washed out which is causing the floor of the middle chamber to collapse in and there's been a lot of movement in the boulders in the first chamber (although I'm not convinced that bit is natural movement).

If you know somebody who would like to join CSS then contact Pete Ward now: [speleo@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:speleo@hotmail.co.uk)

# Soggy Digging in Daren

by Gary Kiely

Living in London means that on a Friday night before A Hard Rock Camp, I end up making the trip up the path of doom on my own. I really dislike caving on my own at the best of times, but such are the crosses we have to bear, all in the name of having a good time. This particular Friday night was the wettest I had ever seen. The rain was bouncing back up from the ground, it was that heavy. For once it was quite nice to get myself into the beginning of the crawl, to shelter from the elements. Yea it really was nicer in there.

By the time I was through the Vice I knew that either

- A. My bag was too heavy or
- B. I had become quite unfit.

There was a definite flowing stream keeping me company through the crawl and 1<sup>st</sup> inlet was gushing. It was not really a worry, but just a different way to see the cave. The entrance has been written about many times in the past so all that is needed to add is that it was very wet.

There is not much to remember when doing this trip on your own, I suppose you motor on a bit more, subconsciously. I was very aware that I was not as fit as I was when I last did this trip about a year ago, so I was not bouncing about quite like normal. I was glad of a drink in Approach Passage and took the time to chill out here before the ladder. With my trusty chest jammer attached, I started self lining. To my horror the rope would not flow through, so every few rungs of the 70 foot beast, I would have to hold on with my left arm (which I pulled muscles in about 2 days before) and pull the slack rope through with my right. It was hard work. For a moment I contemplated taking the jammer off, it would have made life so much easier. A glance into the gloomy blackness below me, sorted that one out. At the ladder ledge or twist, the weight of the rope helped the jammer to work free hand. I got to the top and flopped on the ground looking up at the mud city thinking to myself, "That's Darren reminding me not to get too cocky". My arms had not recovered by the time I reached the rope climbs. And my usual finesse was lacking in my descent. Some of you can stop laughing now!

Dropping into White Passage is normally a silent affair but the stream-way was blazing through. Stepping into Time Machine was surreal, the stream-way underneath was roaring under the boulders. This is normally a dead place with little echo, as the size of the passage, means that voice does not hit the walls to come back. (My theory anyway) so this was great. The noise and seeing water flowing around the bases of the huge boulders was fascinating. Bonsai Streamway was a guessing game, you had no idea what rock you were stepping on, or indeed what holes you were falling into, but wonder wellies do seem to grip in the harshest situations.

Crystal Inlet was not very "crystal" today; this worried

me more than anything. I suppose we could boil all our water if necessary.

The final climb up out of the streamway to camp was the most dramatic part. This bit of passage is the width of Whitewalls living room and 3 times the height. Normally water covers your heels, this evening I contemplated swimming. It was up to my arm pits! Yep critical level three. Climbing out of this pool I was covered in foam. Having climbed to the storeroom to change, you open your drums to see if you have succeeded in getting everything into the cave dry and intact. Then going through your stored personal kit is like opening presents at Christmas. Did I forget anything? Are my dry clothes wearable? And most of all, how mouldy has my sleeping bag got? Thankfully a good shake and a beating and my sleeping bag was like new.... Well.... with added aroma.

Charles Bailey and Mandy Voysey came down to say hi and offered me the most valued thing in the world (at that time). No cup of tea on the surface tastes quite as good as the first camp tea. Its just tea, but it signifies you're dry, warm and in company, having finished the ordeal, and it is sooo good. Charles heated up some dinner for me just to add to the "your home now son" feeling. A few hours of socialising and off to bed.

I have never been the first one up in the morning at camp. I think that decision to get up is directly controlled by ones bladder. Gonzo's must be knackered! I used to feel guilty about being last up in the morning. Turning your camp light on and seeing your breath condense in the air outside your sleeping bag, makes you pull the drawstrings tighter. Some times when you really push it, somebody will bring you a cuppa in bed; it is a mean trick because you really want that tea, but you will loose the bladder battle and then you're up. Breakfast never looks pretty but tastes real good. We have found that eating more than is really necessary does help in having a productive days digging.

Hmm digging, that why were here. I remember now. On our way back out to Bonsai Streamway the water levels had dropped to waist high, I never knew that this part of the stream was quite so reactive.

The Inconvenient Truth dig had changed a lot since I last launched my chest in there, almost a year ago. Due to the angles, depth, twists and turns of this dig any less than 4 people would be very hard work. I got into the position of least movement. In a curled up ball position, taking the bag from the hands of Gonzo. I never really saw anything else just this bag with 2 human shovels attached. Then balancing the bag on my feet and lifting it to the next stage and over a narrow trench for Mandy to take and drag around the next corner for Charles to dispose of.

I have been really spoilt in the past by my digging trips. My first digging trip in Darren went quite dramatically with the discovery of the Frog Street formations etc. Alas today was an ordinary days digging. Progress was made, but we worked for it. Later on back at camp I took charge of the kitchen and made dinner, I had become rusty with the challenges that HRC throws at you on the culinary front. Like accurate temperature controls, and somebody stealing your stove because tea is deemed more vital. As in the civilised world, the one with blue sky and clouds and things, dinner is finished off with desert and coffee. Then

we sat around for the rest of the night talking nonsense. The only specification of the cocktail contents was the request for blue, green, or red ones. Invariably the ability to distinguish colours, and hold coherent conversation dissipated as the night carried on.

The next morning, all food has to be consumed, to avoid carrying it back out. We always end up bringing in a little too much food. Dismantling of camp is quite a sad thing for me. It is the end of a fun weekend. I packed my sleeping bag and a few clothes to bring out of the cave, to freshen them up. The trip out was a jolly jaunt, much easier than on the way in now that the water level

had almost returned to normal. Even though my bag was much lighter this time it still nearly pinned me in the entrance crawl a few times. For some unknown reason I dramatically messed up the Calcite Squeezes, it was embarrassing, and I the ending up with water in the brain. God knows I could do without diluting anything there. Back to WW for the best shower of the week. Oh how we appreciate these little luxuries.

Looking forward to the next camp. None of this year's gap before my next one malarkey. What on earth was I thinking! Thanks to the small crew of great people who made this return so comfortable for me.



Looking into the low passage below the Piccadilly shortly after the flood began. The water is already up to thigh depth behind me. Photo: Tom Lia.

# OFD Flood Pulse – 21<sup>st</sup> November 2009

by Tom Foord

The weekend of 21<sup>st</sup> November I was talked into leading student trips at the annual CHECC conference which was being held at Penwyllt. Come Saturday, most of the students were either too hungover from the previous night's festivities, or too put off by the grim weather, to even

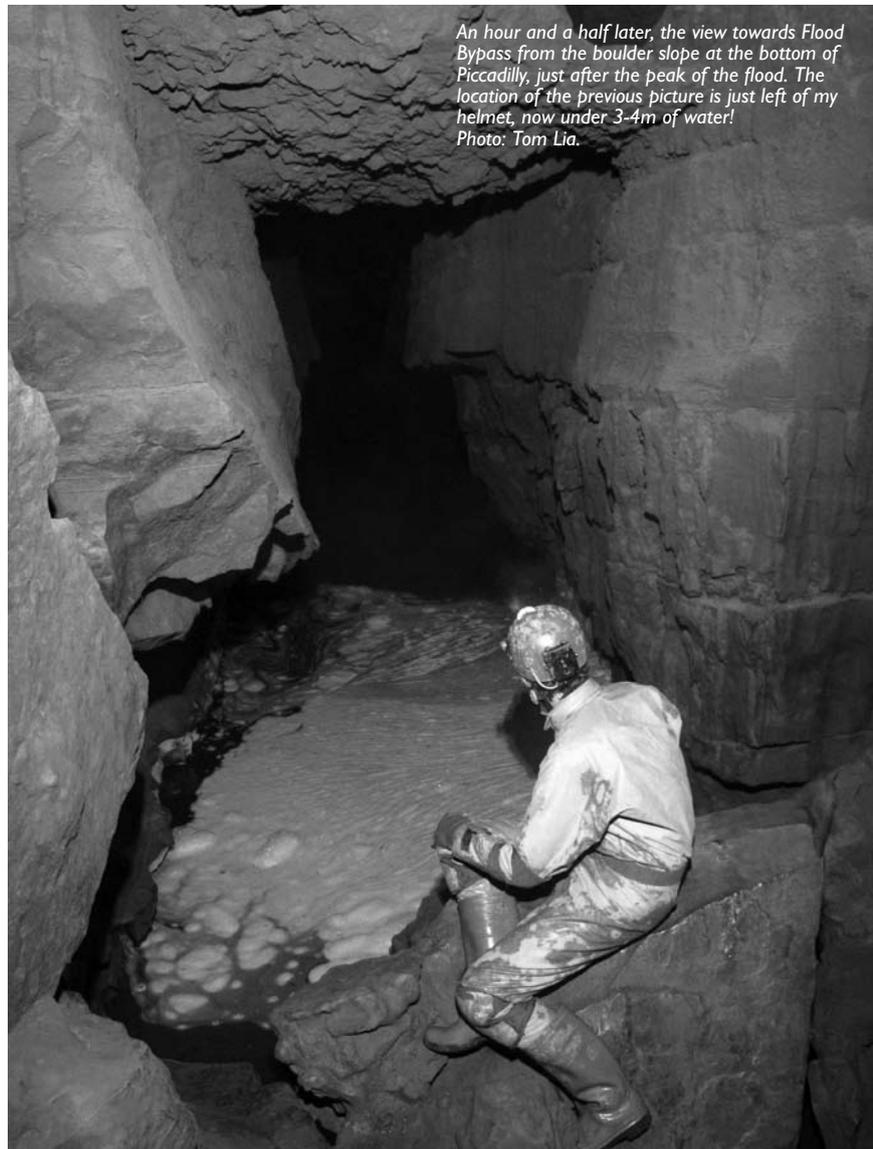
contemplate dragging themselves out of the comfort of Penwyllt and into caving gear. This left me and Tom Lia (a mate from Cardiff Uni), at a bit of a loose end, so we decided to pop down Cwm Dwr to take a few photos and have a look at the main streamway which we thought should be in

a fairly spectacular state (this was a day of prolonged, heavy rainfall, which incidentally also saw a group flooded in at Craig-a-Ffynnon).

We took the high level route through Cwm Dwr, along the impressive Nether Rawl, to arrive at Piccadilly with its waterfall issuing from the ceiling. It was already pretty evident that things were in a state of high flood, with the normally minor inlet streams followed through Cwm Dwr transformed into knee deep, fast flowing rivers.

From Piccadilly a steep slope is descended to a junction of several large passages. One of these on the right is the route to the Diver's Pitch and the connection into OFD1, but to the left a slope of boulders drops another 3-4m to the floor of a tall passage. At the bottom on the right is a lowish opening which takes the small stream originating from the Piccadilly waterfall. I don't know if this passage can actually be followed or not, and thankfully with hindsight we didn't investigate(!) Beyond this the main passage is very tall, about 3m wide, with a gradually ascending floor. I made a passing comment that the floor here looked like it maybe sometimes takes a stream in extreme flood, but clearly not today. The passage continues to a corner to the left where it then descends slightly along the normally dry Flood Bypass, which under normal conditions can be followed reach the main streamway sinking off to the side after some distance. Flood Bypass was where we had expected to meet the water (the name is something of a giveaway!), and sure enough just before the left hand corner we encountered a static pool which we waded across at about thigh depth by hopping across submerged boulders and sticking to the left hand wall. Beyond the pool, at the left hand corner, was a dry pebble bank, and beyond this a deep looking lake of water stretched off along Flood Bypass itself.

But this was no static lake, it was flowing towards us at a reasonable rate, and seemed to be disappearing away into a swirling sump pool on our right. We stopped here for a few moments to take in the scene and observe the water levels. It suddenly became apparent that the water's edge was ascending our pebble bank



An hour and a half later, the view towards Flood Bypass from the boulder slope at the bottom of Piccadilly, just after the peak of the flood. The location of the previous picture is just left of my helmet, now under 3-4m of water!  
Photo: Tom Lia.

at a rapid rate. The sump it was flowing into clearly couldn't take the volume of water and it was backing up. Our little spot of dry land was disappearing fast! We thought this a pretty good time to retreat so we set off wading through the 'static' pool we had crossed just a moment ago. No longer static, this had now increased from thigh deep to waist deep in the space of just a few minutes. By pure fluke we exited the pool at the exact moment when it overflowed, and we were then able to walk alongside a small wave of water as it travelled down the dry passage floor back toward Piccadilly. This was not dissimilar to those flash floods you see coming down dry desert riverbeds on TV nature programs. The flow increased very rapidly,

and within a couple of minutes the entire width of the passage was taken up by fast flowing, brown water. We retreated to the safety of the boulder slope at the bottom of Piccadilly to watch the show. Unfortunately in the excitement of the moment we didn't think to take any photos of the flood pulse coming down the dry passage. Had we been given a little more warning and some time to prepare, this would have made a fantastic sequence of shots. As it happens the flash gun was playing up anyway, so we only managed to get a couple of usable shots.

It's hard to say, but we estimated that the passage would have been totally impassable within about 15 minutes from the start of the pulse. The water

was initially rushing off down the low passage (the one I mentioned previously) at the bottom of the slope below Piccadilly, but as the flow increased it was clear that this couldn't take the volumes of water involved for much longer. Sure enough the water soon reached the roof, and then started to back up creating a lake in the main passage. After maybe 30-45 minutes there was approx 1.5-2m depth of fast flowing water getting sucked into the sump below us. You wouldn't stand much chance if caught up in that.

We were both getting pretty cold by now so we headed off for an hour or so to have a little explore around Birth Canal Series (it lived up to its name), after which we returned to Piccadilly to see if things had changed at all. The water had continued to rise and its surface, covered with a rippling layer of foam, now stretched around the corner into the first few metres of the passage toward the Diver's Pitch. We estimated that there must now be something in the region of 3-4m depth of water backed up in the main passage, and it was still flowing at a decent rate too. This must be getting forced at very high pressure through the low sumped passage below. Foam on the walls just above the water surface indicated that the level had just peaked and was now starting to recede. In fact in the time it took Tom to unpack his camera it had dropped by about 30cm, and it continued in that vein from then on.

We've all heard cautionary tales of flood pulses and their dangers, but to actually witness this first hand was something else. The thing that amazed me most was the speed with which it all happened. It was a real eye opener. Anyone unlucky/foolish enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong time (eg. poking

around down that low passage below Piccadilly) would have had no chance at all of escape. We were just fortunate to be able to witness the whole thing from a nice safe location.

# New Website for Wild Places

Chris Howes has turned his hand to website design and produced a new, simple to use site for Descent and other Wild Places products and publications online at [www.wildplaces.co.uk](http://www.wildplaces.co.uk)

The screenshot shows the homepage of Wild Places Publishing. At the top, a navigation bar contains links for DESCENT, PRODUCTS, ABOUT, CONTACT, and ORDERING. The main header features the text "Written by cavers, produced by cavers, read by cavers ... Everywhere" and "Publisher of Descent magazine WILD PLACES PUBLISHING". A central banner reads "Welcome to Wild Places Publishing and Descent magazine". Below this, a section titled "The current issue is:" highlights "Descent (211) for December 2009 / January 2010". A "Features" section lists several articles, including "Bad air: the latest research from Mendip shows that we don't know everything about how gases accumulate in caves", "Vietnam: The discovery and exploration of the largest known cave passage in the world", and "Electronic surveying comes of age: how caver adaptations produced a DistoX instrument, enabling a complete survey to be produced on the spot". A sidebar on the left contains sections for "LATE NEWS", "LINKS", "CLUBS & GROUPS", and "Underground Worlds". At the bottom, a footer contains the copyright notice: "This site is copyright © Wild Places Publishing | Contact | Terms of Use | Privacy policy | Sitemap".

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# OUR CAVING EXPEDITION THAT UNEXPECTEDLY WENT A BIT ADRIFT

by Andy Watson

Thank you to the West Brecon Cave Rescue Team on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2009 from some Hampshire Cavers. We were going to Ogof Craig-a-Ffynnon above the Clydach Gorge behind the now closed Rock & Fountain Pub. The weather was cloudy when we left our lodgings.

**09:30** Left our digs. We gave our call out time to our friends (latest Estimated Time Out – ETO) of 18:00 with expected time back to lodgings at 19:00.

**09:45** Weather check on Metcheck.com for South Wales was light rain clearing later.

**10:05** As we walked up to the entrance all the signs were good and dry, low water by the limekilns and a dry path up to the cave entrance, I commented on this.

**10:30** Entered cave, filled out ‘inside’ log book with party names and areas to be visited with an ETO of 17:00.

**11:00** Gasoline Alley 4-6” water flowing clear and bright. Pitch, a little water flowing as normal. Second Boulder Choke first bit was wet and drippy as usual. At the exit of Boulder Choke (2<sup>nd</sup>) I thought it was slightly wetter than usual but it just looked like the water had found a slightly different route.

**11:45** Into Hurricane Highway from Hall of the Mountain King – no noticeable water flow, except in big chambers a slight dribble from the roof on the flowstone boss in the lake area up past the gower pools.

**12:30** Through the Forth Boulder Choke with no noticeable water flow anywhere, looked at some formations in a side passage then rigged the short rift pitch down to the Promised Land and just visited the nearby Pagoda formations. My time check at Pagoda was 13:15.

Back through 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Boulder Chokes and rigged rift pitch down to Blaen Elin stream way from near the Severn Tunnel crossroads. Water in stream was clear and not frothy, so no clue here regarding rain on the surface or potential flooding.

**15:20** Out via Severn Tunnel and Hurricane Highway and out into Hall of the Mountain Kings where I noticed an unusually loud water noise from the back of the third boulder choke and I commented on this to the caving team. At the Second Boulder Choke there was more water as we crawled in, coming from the left and it was splashing on to us noticeably. On exiting this Boulder Choke at the short free climb down the water flow and

splashes were noticeably wetter and a small flow was running from here over the 12m pitch which was only slightly wetter, particularly on the landing area two thirds of the way down just above the fixed ladder.

**16:30** When we got back to the gravel bottom stream passage (Gascoline Alley) not far from the bottom of the pitch we discovered this stream way was sumped to the roof. The water was still rising when we got there and over the next 10 minutes or so it rose about another 2” to fully sump and it also completely covered the square tunnel entrance which goes towards Things to Come Passage, commonly referred to as the canal I think.

We knew we were in for a long wait so we checked out two places to sit it out and finally decided on the mud and rock bank just back round the corner between the square tunnel entrance and the wet flowstone wriggle up to the bottom of the 12m pitch. This was unlikely to get flooded out or washed out as it was well back from the main fast water flow and we could also just still see the square tunnel entrance and a rock ledge in the stream to monitor water levels.

We pulled out our emergency kits and had some 10 snack bars, 2 wooly hats, two balaclavas, drinks, two survival bags, candles, lighters and lots of spare light capacity and a first aid kit, etc. We got into our survival bags (2 in each) and cuddled up for a long wait. All of our experience, cave training and first aid training was now very valuable.

**17:30** Water still rising but the rise rate had probably slowed.

**18:30** Water now steady and perhaps dropping slightly.

**19:00** We were all a bit chilly but generally okay and rather worried about one member of our group, George’s safety who had actually exited some 60 minutes in front of us, we estimated.

**20:00** Water now going down slowly and slightly noticeable on the rock ledge we were watching in the stream and about 2” down in one corner of the square tunnel canal entrance.

**21:00** The other two with us went round the corner to look at the sumped Gascoline Alley and there was now an air gap of 2” with still fast flowing water below.

**21:25** We monitored the water and said we would look again at 22:00 to see if it was passable.

**21:30** Gary from Cave Rescue Organisation came around the corner, much to everyone’s relief as we were rather cold. He said more rain was expected, so if we were all mobile and unhurt, which we were, we could get through the 5-6” air gap now if we moved promptly. We needed no encouragement. Some 15 minutes later we were all back through the initial wet sumped parts of the stream passage and climbing down through the scaffold bars and fixed iron ladders with CRO cavers guidance, the water was still hammering down these and it had flooded to about 6-8 feet at the bottom a while earlier. The next part had also backed up to about 7 feet in depth and some of it had sumped earlier, but it was now back down to about 18 inches or so. It was this area that George had swum across earlier when he came back into see if we could actually get through this passage before exiting the cave again and calling Cave Rescue via 999 at about 17:15.

**22:00** We were out of the cave to be met by more Cave Rescue Cavers, the Fire Brigade, some Ambulances, etc.

A quick check over and tea and changed and we were whisked off to Abergavenny Hospital for a quick check over (temperature, blood pressure, blood sugar levels) before driving back to the digs for tea and off the bed at just past midnight.

A big thank you from us all. Our learning points were: Always be prepared, which we generally are and don’t trust metcheck.com, apparently the weather from BBC Wales is better. In retrospect this reinforced how important many things are when you are doing a reasonably long trip underground; Survival bags, food, wooly hats / balaclavas, good communications etc.





[www.chelseaspelaeo.org.uk](http://www.chelseaspelaeo.org.uk)

Waterfall  
GB Cave  
Photo: Steve Sharp