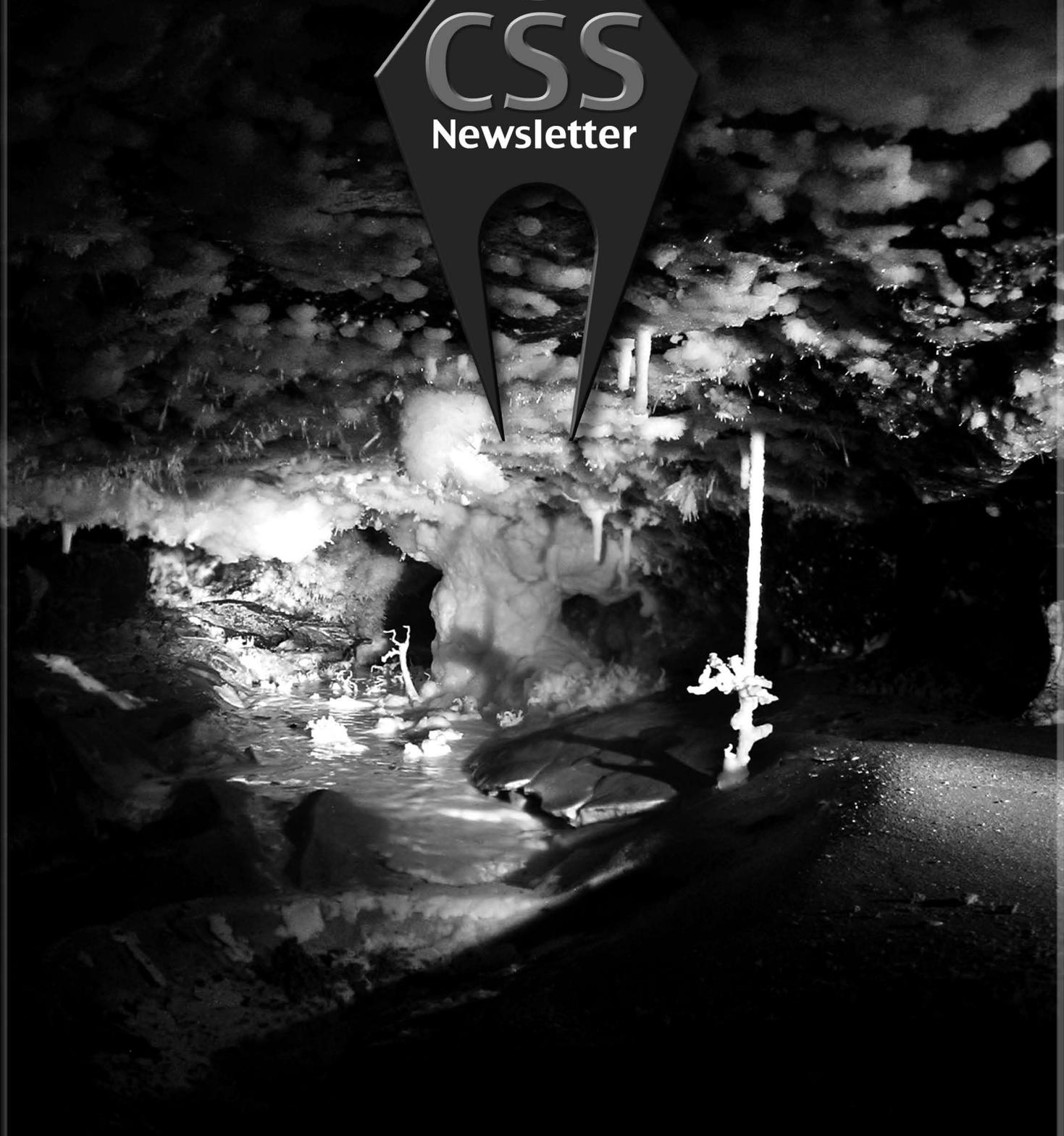


CHELSEA SPELAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Volume 52 No. 5 May 2010



The Geryon

Joe Duxbury, Telly Addict

Hopping Mad hops and maddens!

Chelsea Spelæological Society NEWSLETTER

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Andy Heath fettling the Tilley, Hard Rock Café., Daren Cilau

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Cover Photo:
Hopping Mad extension,
April 10 2010

Daren Cilau
Photo by Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley

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

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:

Full £30
Joint £43
Associate £20
Provisional £20 (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 Peter Ward know their **BCA
Insurance Number** and **Club**

Caving Insurance for 2010 £11

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.

If there is anything submitted that is in any way contentious it may well, if topical, get printed (as I'm an editor, not a censor), but I will gladly put in any alternative views that are presented by other club members (and occasionally from those outside the club) to give a sense of balance.

Gonzo

Mark Lumley

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

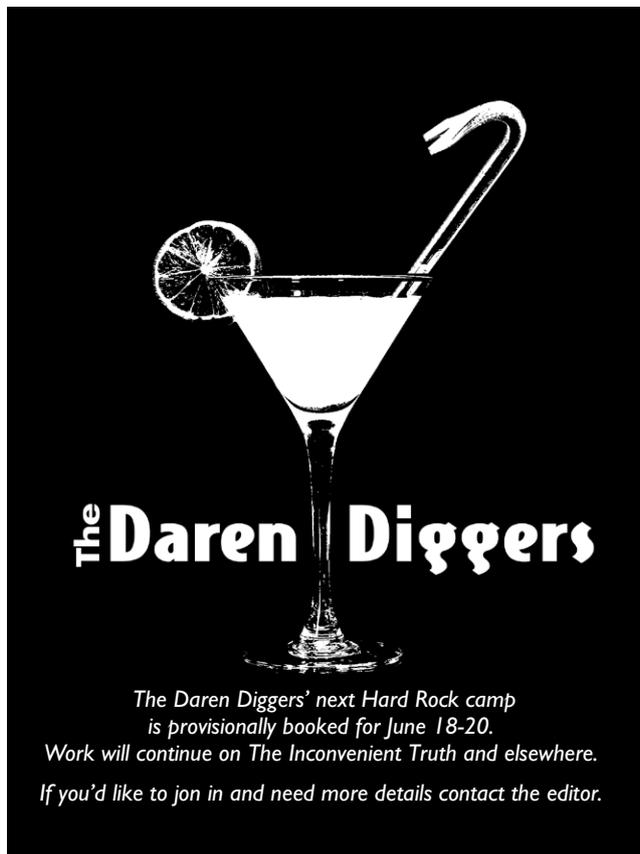
mark@creativeedge.me.uk

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

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

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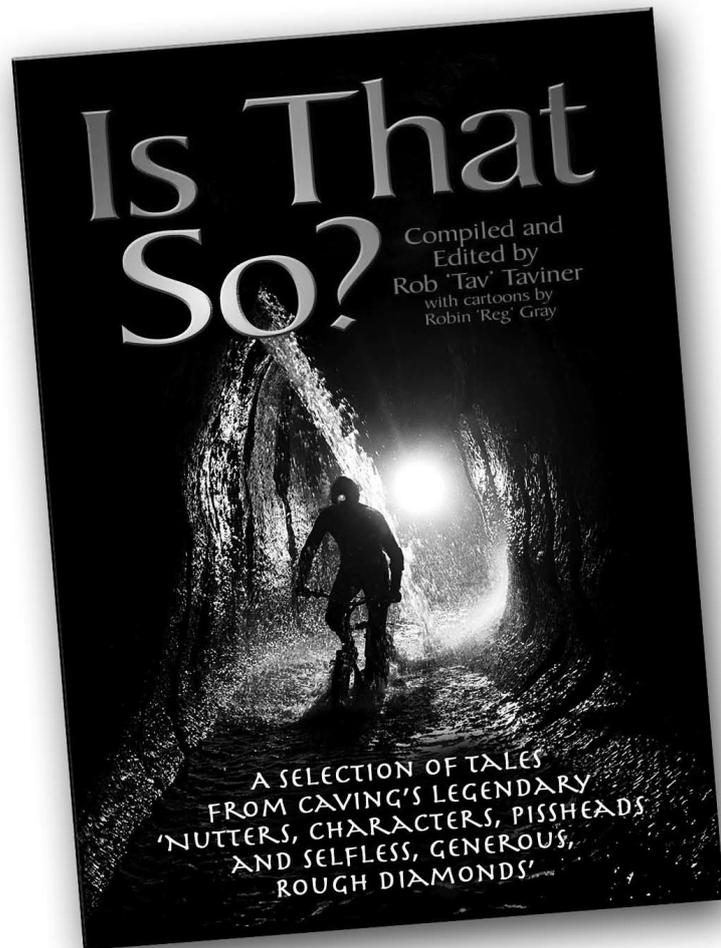
The Daren Diggers

The Daren Diggers' next Hard Rock camp is provisionally booked for June 18-20. Work will continue on The Inconvenient Truth and elsewhere. If you'd like to join in and need more details contact the editor.

Neighbours

-end of an era.

It is rumoured that Mr & Mrs Thomas are moving from the hillside in May. Weekends at Whitewalls will not be quite the same without them . . .



Rob 'Tav' Taviner's new compilation of cavers' entertaining anecdotes, with cartoons by Robin 'Reg' Gray will be launched at the Hunters' Lodge, Priddy on Saturday 15th May at 8pm, priced at £10.

Profits will go to the **Mendip Cave Registry and Archive** to help finance future publications such as an up-to-date **Mendip Underground**.

A review will appear in the next newsletter.

More information on the book and MCRA is available at www.mcra.org.uk



Pottering About on Mendip

by
John Cooper

Charterhouse Cave

Saturday 27th March 2010.

The intention was to dig Sand bypass again. Michael Butcher (SMCC), Pete Hann, Alison & Pete Moody and I walked over to the entrance but the key refused to withdraw the bolt! Much fiddling and the use of a piece of fence wire to assist the key finally got the gate open. At this stage we discovered the lock was well and truly broken, the inside handle wouldn't operate the lock either so if we pulled it shut behind us we'd be locked in and have to rely on fiddling with the fence wire again! The two Pete's went back to collect some tools while AM took MB in. I guarded the gate. Once the tools arrived PH was able to detach the lock from the gate to discover that not only was the outer case broken but the main bolt was snapped inside the lock! The gate now has no lock on it (probably be repaired by the time you read this!). PH and I went in and put a padlock on the old gate before continuing in to join AM and MB for a few minutes digging. Trip only a couple of hours as PH had to be out early.

Saturday 10th April 2010.

I tagged along on a qualification trip where Alison Moody was showing Rosie Freeman (WCC) and Jeremy Gilson (MCG) the 2008 extension prior to them receiving their keys. On the way in through the old cave we took in Midsummer Chamber and peered into Forbidden Passage, Splatter Chamber and the old mining relics, The Citadel and Chiaroscuro Passage. We continued on with AM giving a running commentary so that the new leaders could appreciate the passages fully. Once we arrived at the bottom the others visited the streamway sump whilst I started on the Sand Dig. This had been dug the previous weekend by a Craven Pothole Club team who had done an excellent job removing a large boulder in the floor. We spend over an hour digging with one large boulder removed from the right hand side and a good number of trays of spoil taken out. Although no forward progress was made the dig was made ready for a good attack next time.

Thursday 15th April 2010.

The intention was to dig Sand bypass again. Michael Butcher (SMCC), Alison & Pete Moody and I straight in to the dig, about an hour. The end has pinched right in at roof level so we dug down in the floor hoping that we could go under the right hand wall. However we didn't find the way on there either. Pete spent a while digging further back, at the bend where we hoped it could cut straight across to The Timeline and unearthed a large boulder. If the weather stays nice we might have to leave the dig until next winter and put the tarpaulin back on the Frozen Cascade! 5½ hours total.

Charterhouse Warren Farm Swallet

Sunday 4th April 2010.

A cave visited infrequently as it is an archaeological site. I was fortunate to tag along on a photographic trip with John and Miranda Forder (Craven Pothole Club) led by Alison Moody. We put a handline down the surface shakehole and after removing a dead fox it took us nearly an hour to dig out the entrance. Fortunately we had come prepared with buckets and tools. The gate opened easily and we were soon inside laddering the 21m first pitch. Much of the pitch is free climbable and the ladder was left short (I think we had a 10m and a 5m ladder belayed to a 2m tape thread). The Corkscrew Squeeze was passed part way down and eventually we

dropped into Mitchell's Chamber where the formations started. We went along this chamber looking at deposits of bones, antlers and other unidentifiable bits, to me anyway. Although I didn't spot any bats there was both fresh and decomposing guano on the floor. They could not have come in the route we'd taken as the gate was completely buried. Returning to the entry point we continued on down to Rocky Horror Pitch. Bolts at the top were used to belay the ladder before a horizontal sideways rift was passed onto the top of the pitch proper. The ladder follows a too tight part of the rift but it is possible to get further out before dropping back under the tight bit and continuing down into the second chamber. We first went down to Dead Dog Chamber where the bones from a pretty well complete skeleton of small dog can be viewed. We came back up from that and visited Red Deer Passage (more bones and antlers) where we were able to look down into Grill Chamber. We climbed back up a short way and then dropped down into Grill Chamber, very pretty. We came back up out of that and into the Secret Garden, very, very pretty. We continued round the loop to pop back out at the bottom of the second ladder. Fun was had by all in ascending the pitches!

Goatchurch Cavern

Friday 2nd April 2010.

Assisted Alison Moody with a group of 5 children (ages 7 to 12) and 2 parents. Having first put a handline down the Tradesman's Entrance we went in the Main Entrance and along the first passage (several lesser horseshoe bats noted in passing) to the top of the Giant's Stairs. Down these then left along the middle passage to the Dining Chamber where daylight and the handline could be seen (1 adult exited at this point). Then took a narrow passage down to the Terrace and on into Boulder Chamber. Took a low level route back through Boulder Maze and finally back up and out via the handline.

Hillier's Cave

Monday 5th April 2010.

Joined Duncan Price on a survey trip. Might take another trip to reach the end and at least one more picking up the final chamber, Red Room, and other side bits.

Sunday 18th April 2010.

Joined Antoinette Bennett and Duncan Price on another survey trip. There was no lock on the cave today! Picked up the Red Room and the end bits. Duncan thought he'd finished but found another bypass passage on his way out! One roosting bat noted.

Swildon's Hole

Saturday 3rd April 2010.

John Cooper, Jack Harrison (Frome Caving Group) and Neville Lucas (Craven Pothole Club). Jack was carrying a tackle sack with the ladder and hangers, Neville was carrying a Peli case containing his camera and I carried a tackle sack with a rope. In the Dry Way. We caught up the second CPC party at the 20 where they were kind enough to let us through. Met the first CPC party at Sump 1, their limit for the day. As I waited the other side of Sump 1 first Jack came through then Neville and then, unexpectedly, a third head popped up. Arthur Champion (CPC) had decided he'd like to join us! Through Duck 2 then left the streamway and made our way up to the Black Hole. This was soon rigged and we all progressed to

the Second Choke, the current end. I think this is the first time I've seen a stream coming out of this choke. All back safely across the Black Hole and down to the streamway. For some reason Neville left his Peli case with camera and his helmet behind when he went through the sump! Arthur took the case through whilst I took the helmet. Took in Barnes Loop as we progressed up the streamway. At the 20 we removed the CPC ladder and rope but unfortunately the pulley and maillon were put on the floor whilst the rope was plaited and not picked up again – oops! Out the Wet Way. Pulley and maillon recovered a couple of days later.

Thursday 8th April 2010.

Michael Butcher, John Cooper and Alison Moody on a sampling trip. There have been reports of pollution in the cave since before Christmas but nothing had been done. Reports of mould growing on the walls and smell of "Diesel" were rife on the UK Caving Forum and have been reported here (see CSS N/L March 2010). Today we intended to collect samples. Met another group at the entrance who were also going to do the Short Round Trip so we hoped the Troubles would be lowered by the time we needed to pass them. We went in first. The smell was first noticed after passing through the Mud Sump and became stronger as we progressed. We diverted to check Fault Chamber and just before reaching it the smell was particularly strong and here we took our first mould samples. We continued on round and started the syphon on the First Trouble before returning and descending Blue Pencil into the Swildon's Four streamway. We went downstream, noting mould at the climb up to Watergate. We continued on downstream until we met the Watergate Stream Inlet where a couple of litres of water were collected. I thought this water smelt of Diesel. We climbed up here and collected another mould sample and also a mud/water sample from the deep pool in the Watergate streamway. Continued on down to Sump 4. On the way back up collected another couple of litres of water from Cowsh Avens but didn't notice this water smelling, it was just a bit browner. Up to visit downstream Sump 3. The bones on the ledge, stream right, were well and truly covered in mould. Back out of Blue Pencil, the bag was a bit heavier now! The water was flowing strongly which meant the other group were actively baling the First of the Troubles. When we reached the Troubles the other group were just going through so we stopped for our chocolate break. Caught them up again as they climbed up into Glistening Gallery so we went and checked Caliper Pot but this was clean. On down through the Glistening Gallery squeeze then through the wet Birthday Squeeze (a misnomer now as it's no longer a squeeze). Into Vicarage Passage, more mould growing, it had been pretty well continuous since we first met it around the Greasy Chimney area. Down into the streamway and out. Alison took photos of the mould in several places during the trip. About 4½ hours.

Sunday 11th April 2010.

John Cooper and Barry Weaver resume their Sunday stroll in Swildon's. Trip to South East Inlets to see if the pollution had hit that part of the cave. After leaving Tratman's Temple a strong outward draught was noted and before we reached the First Mud Sump the smell of "Diesel" became apparent. We continued onwards, baling the Mud Sump before passing through. By this time I thought the smell had changed to one resembling the garden pesticide "Tumble Bug". Once we diverted from the Round Trip route up into South East Inlets the smell vanished. On returning the smell was noticed as we dropped out of the boulders back onto the Round Trip route. Out the way we'd come. We didn't see any signs of mould on our trip today, we obviously hadn't gone far enough.

Upper Flood Swallet

Saturday 17th April 2010.

Richard Carey (MCG leader) and I on my first trip into this excellently decorated cave. Although Mendip Underground says wetsuits to be worn beyond the first duck I found a fleece and oversuit to be adequate. Walked from MCG cottage to entrance. Down entrance pipe, 4m total, into mined entrance series, a Willie Stanton special. Very noticeable where he stopped as the crawling

begins! Crawling and the occasional enlargement leads to Midnight Chamber where a Streamway is met flowing from right to left. More crawling in the streamway, carefully avoiding the formations, before a climb up into Bypass Passage. More crawling and a climb down to a duck, Lavatory Trap. Plenty of airspace today. More crawling to Sludge Junction and a left turn into the Canal, then more flat out crawling into the Red Room (red stal flows). Then the choke and a few squeezes to get to Golden Chamber (nice dry crystal pool on left at entry). Then lots more squeezes through the choke until we popped out into another streamway at the Departure Lounge. A large flowstone cascade on the left as we travel downstream is but the first of many formations. Strolled down the streamway, apart from the occasional gravel in the water to avoid formations, to 550m Passage. Passed through Walk The Plank Chamber en route to where the stream finally disappears into a too tight rift. Climbed up into fossil passage and continued on to Royal Icing Chamber, where the passage splits into three. We first did the straight on passage, Royal Icing Passage, but omitted the muddy end bits. Came back to the junction and went down West Passage. Passed entrance to Neverland on the left, continued over Chuckle Choke where the streamway can be heard (but not seen) below. Passage enlarged after this but finally arrived at a nasty choke. Back to junction again then down East Passage, larger and with phreatic bits, tall rifts and avens. Turned round before reaching the final end where it pinches down. Back to streamway for a drink and chocolate fix before a steady trip back out. 4½ hours.



Duncan Price and Rob 'Tav' Taviner surveying in Hillier's Cave
Photo: Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley

Wookey Hole

– 75 years of cave diving & exploration

An editor's tale by Duncan Price

As its title suggests, *Wookey Hole – 75 years of cave diving & exploration*, chronicles the efforts of cave divers to penetrate the underground course of the River Axe from its rising in the village of Wookey Hole, Somerset to the furthest point yet reached – over a mile from the resurgence and more than 300 feet deeper inside the Mendip Hills.

The idea of a book recounting the stories of the Wookey Hole Divers was conceived during the 50th Anniversary celebrations at the caves in 1985. Jim Hanwell oversaw the collection and collation of 21 chapters written largely by the chief protagonists. Sadly, progress faltered, but not before the initial part of the book (including its valuable illustrations) had been passed over to a publishing house for lay-up.

It was not until a couple of years ago that the project was given new life when John Buxton (one of the pioneers from the 1950's and still an active cave diver) was chatting with Jim following Tony Jarratt's funeral in September 2008. John encouraged Jim to dust off the manuscript and present it to the Cave Diving Group for consideration. A meeting was set up between Jim, Rich Witcombe and I with the aid of Martin Grass at the

Hunters' Lodge Inn on 21 October 2008 where we agreed to try to get the book out. I had previously worked on several CDG publications and had self-published these by means of a print-on-demand service and envisioned that it might be possible to do the same with the existing text with very little additional work. However, it was apparent that there was an opportunity to expand and update the manuscript with additional material covering the intervening years in order to bring the book out in 2010 to mark the 75th Anniversary of cave diving at Wookey Hole. Already we were working to a deadline and it was apparent that it was going to be a bigger project than I had previously tackled!

Jim and Rich had previously collaborated on the Wessex Cave Club publication *Swildon's Hole – 100 years of exploration* whereas I was the "new boy" and the only cave diver on the editorial team. The first task was to obtain the existing text in electronic format so that it could be dusted down and any errors corrected. We were fortunate that Tim Reynolds still had the original computer files for each chapter (albeit in an old desk top publishing package format that had to be converted from plain text files) and by February 2009 we had a working draft. At this point in time the economic crisis meant that I was put on a temporary four day working week. This gave me Fridays off and instead of being able to put me feet

up, or enjoy a bit of extra caving time, I found myself embroiled in regular Wookey Book meetings at Upper Pitts where the editors were able to use the club's extensive library facilities and broadband connection for research as we discussed every detail in the existing text.

I mustn't grumble – the regular Friday get-togethers were most enjoyable. Between them, Jim and Rich are not only a source of arcane information about caving history but many other topics. Where else would one learn that the venerable Herbert Balch was scared of water or that the writer of the Irish anthem "Danny Boy" came from Portishead (near to Bristol)? Sometimes I felt that I was presiding over an episode of QI!

Early on, we decided that the original text would be only lightly edited for content and that we would employ footnotes to inform the reader that sadly many of the original characters who were alive at the time that the manuscript was written were no longer with us. I was given the job of commissioning further chapters to describe more recent developments in the exploration of Wookey Hole and I am grateful for John Cordingley, Alex Gee and Gavin Newman for providing complete chapters for the "New Testament" as it became known. Having been involved in the 2004-2005 explorations by Rick Stanton and John Volanthen, I was well placed to be able to

write the final chapter for the book. Rich provided a narrative on the exploration of Eastwater Cavern which fits well with the coverage of the discoveries in Wookey's other two principal feeders: Swildon's Hole and St Cuthbert's Swallet which feature in the earlier part of the book (the "Old Testament"). With much cajoling, I was even able to cobble together material from Mike Barnes, Pete Bolt, Tim Chapman & Clive Stell which described their work in the deep terminal sump of Wookey Hole prior to Rick's breakthrough.

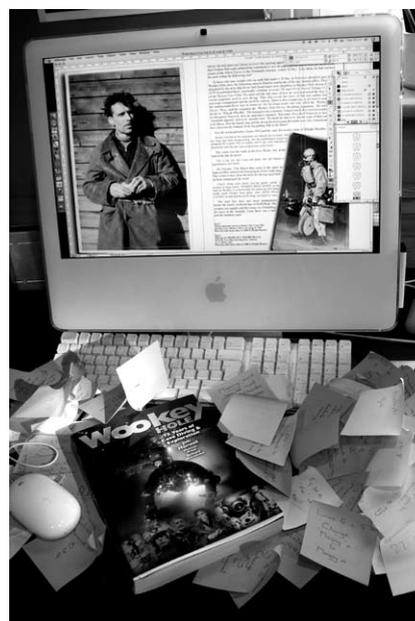
By the end of the summer of 2009 the complete text was ready for lay up. We had held a meeting with Dave Judson and Nick Williams from the British Cave Research Association and convinced them that the book would be an ideal project to receive funding from the significant bequest that the founder of the CDG and instigator of the original 1935 hard hat diving expedition, Graham Balcombe, had left to BCRA. Effectively, BCRA would put up the money for the book in return for receiving the income and using the profits to set up a pot of money to support cave diving related activities. Martin Grass was key to these negotiations and was appointed to the rôle of the project's "commercial manager".

At this point we wanted to commission a young, keen, talented and handsome graphic designer to combine the flawless text that we had written with the wealth of historic and unique illustrative material that we had assembled. Unfortunately we had to settle with Mark "Gonzo" Lumley to do the final stages as he was cheap and willing to put up with us. Gonzo had done a great job of arranging the Swildon's book and, from the outset, it was intended that our book would be an ideal companion volume and have the same "look and feel". There was a major disaster when we discovered that the original photographs for the initial chapters of the book were missing in action having been sent to a printer and lost! Jim and Rich scoured the archives of the Wells & Mendip Museum to find suitable substitutes whilst various cavers and cave divers supplied more photos for Gonzo to tart up.

Towards the end of 2009 the full text was sent out to Ric & Pat

Halliwell for proofreading. Clive Westlake kindly commented on the technical content. One problem remained – that of a suitable cover illustration. Everyone agreed that a good quality photo of Rick Stanton underwater in Wookey would be most appropriate, but of course we'd have to get one done especially as the only shots that we had of him diving in the cave were stills from Gavin Newman's Wookey Exposed DVD. Gavin, Rick, John Volanthen and I met up at Wookey Hole on 23 December for a shoot but the star's drysuit zip failed to do up in the car park and although we got some great photos of John instead, there was nothing that was suitable for the all-important front cover.

Undaunted, we continued to polish and re-polish the text, adding all-important captions and tracking down who exactly was who in the photographs, where, when and by whom etc. I was tasked with compiling the index which was no mean feat as although I had indexed the original text using Microsoft Word, the pagination of my un-illustrated version required adjusting to match the working copy. Indexing of the captions was done manually one Saturday afternoon with reference to a proof of the finished book. Finally, the text was sent to the printers for a full colour mock-up and this did the rounds of the editors for one last check resulting in a mountain of Post-It notes of yet more corrections! Poor Gonzo spent a full day just sorting these out. In retrospect, we should have waited until the text was complete and corrected but the

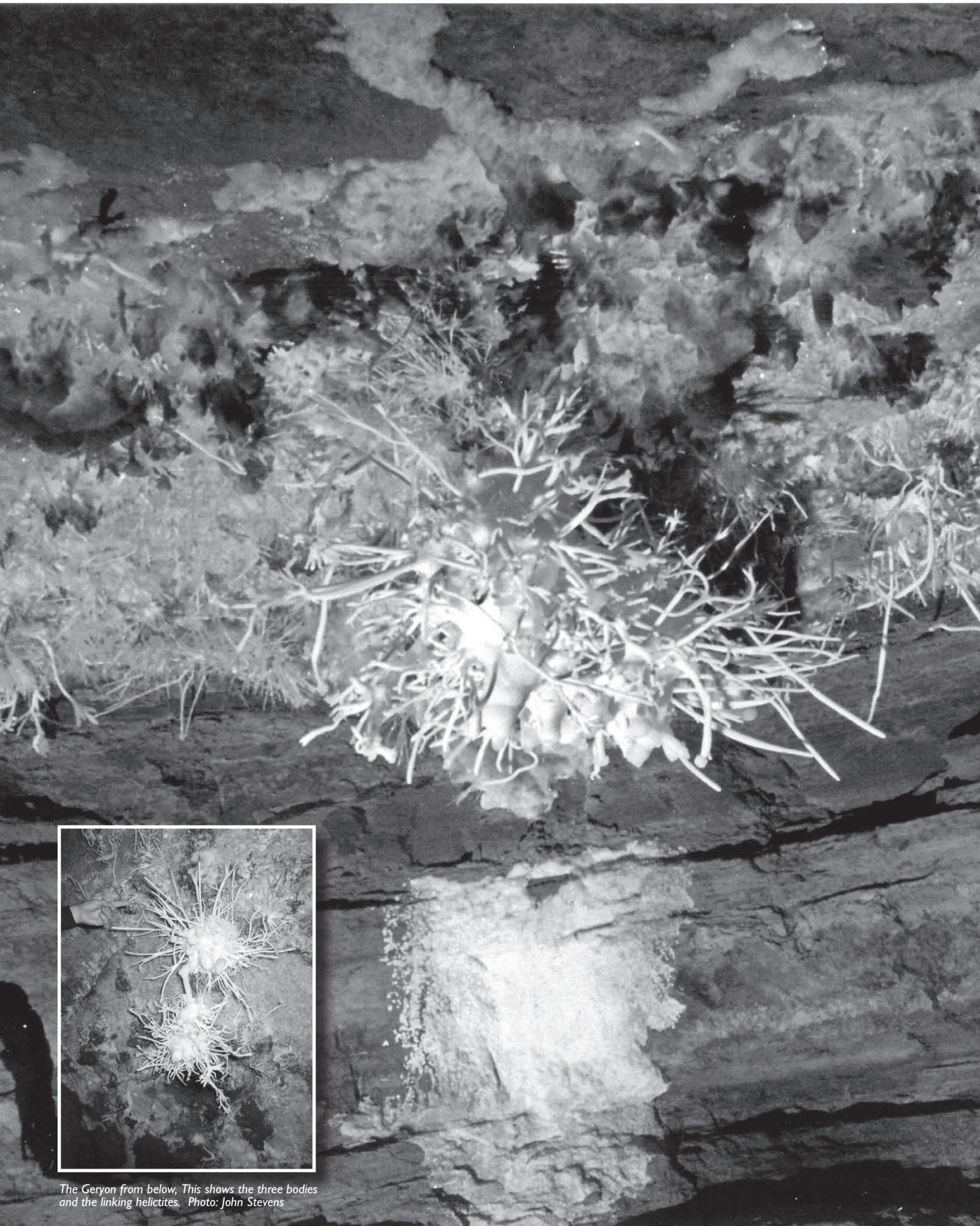


time constraints didn't permit this luxury. At one point Gonzo told me that he had a folder on his computer containing over 600 emails about the book, the true number probably runs to four figures.

One sad last minute amendment was the insertion of another footnote reporting the demise of Willie Stanton – we sincerely hoped that no one else would pass away before the book launch which was set to coincide with CDG AGM and Dinner weekend at the end of April 2010. The CDG Dinner normally moves in rotation around Somerset, Derbyshire, Wales and Yorkshire and is hosted in turn by its four regional sections. The 2009 dinner was hosted by the Welsh Section and it was therefore due to take place in Yorkshire this year but the 2009 AGM had agreed to move it to Somerset. The pressure was really on, and there was still some doubt that the slow moving wheels of BCRA finance would deliver the advance required by the printers to go ahead.

At the 11th hour the money came through, and at 13:23 on 21 February the cover photo of Rick Stanton was taken in Wookey Hole by Gavin. I registered a couple of domain names (wookeybook.com and wookeybook.co.uk to mirror Gavin's film) and set up a website to promote the book. The curious may care to visit either URL – both point to the same material – where it is possible to download the contents pages, a couple of sample chapters and the all important index (Jim and Rich were keen to include as many names as possible so that readers would see their name in print and buy a copy!).

Published by the Cave Diving Group and supported by funding from the British Cave Research Association, the book runs to 28 chapters (368 pages) in full colour. The book is not only about Wookey Hole, it also represents an in-depth (no pun intended!) social history of cave diving and caving since the 1930s. Priced at £25 (+ p&p), the book is available from the CDG online shop, Wookey Hole Caves and other outlets. An order form is available from the website. BCRA members get free postage as part of the funding arrangement (contact BCRA for this), but I'm afraid that I can't offer you a cheap copy: so don't ask!



The Geryon from below. This shows the three bodies and the linking helictites. Photo: John Stevens



The Geryon

by John Stevens

On 19th April 1997 I was surveying Luck of the Draw with Mike Read. We had reached what appeared to be a short side branch which had a small high level feature and a boulder blocked undercut. I climbed up to sketch the high level and Mike decided to see how long term the undercut was. In just a few seconds I was sketching by myself as Mike had vanished.

I quickly finished the drawing and crawled into a low sandy crawl which soon raised to hands and knees and then walking. Junctions now began to appear so I called out, to find where Mike had vanished to. Reunited to begin to explore a complex area of passages which were of a very different character to that of Luck of the Draw. As we had so many side branches we checked out, we kept splitting from each other. Then Mike called to say he had a formation. I was expecting a short stal or an odd straw. Mike had positioned himself so that I could not see past him until I was up into the small chamber, I was sure he was winding me up. But what he revealed was amazing. A huge wheel of helictites and crystals (later measured at 90x60x40cm) with three main cores. Around the walls were many more loops and crystals. It was only on the following trip did we see a cluster of needles behind us on the wall. The view in front had been so breathtaking.

Back in the main drag of the

needles were found, giving the name to this passage, Needle Passage. Arthur and Paul were surveying further down Luck of the Draw and we were meant to survey down to their start station. So back we went and linked the surveys and then to tell them the bad news. More passage to survey! We all returned and started to think of a name for the formation. Medusa Children is the helictite mass further up Luck of the Draw, so it would be nice to keep the Greek theme. Out came some old books of mine and I found Geryon, grandson of Medusa. Geryon had one head and three bodies, so it fitted quite well.

During the next few trips we added tape to various parts of the extensions and double taped the needles as they were just too easy to miss and are vulnerable to the careless. In May 1999 (I think) we decided to donate a surveying book as a logbook for those that reached the Geryon. Even though we know there have been trips that have not been logged, it gives an idea of how many have been there.

Dudley Caving Club were staying at Whitewalls and were off to photograph the Geryon and the Needles. It had been my intention to visit and record the book, replace pencils etc for a while. Brendan Marris was kind enough to do this for me and the results follow.

14 trips, about 44 different cavers in over 10 years. It's a pity it is not visited more often.

Anne Wakeham with the Geryon. Photo: John Stevens

find some very delicate long

Underneath the Cotswolds. On the Telly Again!

by Joe Duxbury

Because of the great interest I have received from my faithful fans, I have been asked to explain how I came to appear on the BBC television programme *Countryfile* that was shown on Sunday 28 March 2010.

Completely out of the blue, I received a telephone call from Stephen Lockwood, one of the directors. He told me that a hole had appeared in one of the fields on the Cotswolds Farm Park, that features in the series, and invited Gloucester Speleological Society to go and have a look. I jumped at the chance, and we arranged to meet at the farm on Thursday, 4 March.

I was joined by Phil Howells, another GSS member, and, with a couple of bags full of tackle, we arrived at the farm in good time. We were met by Stephen, and he introduced us to Paul, the sound man, Adam Henson, who presents the farming part of *Countryfile*, and Andrew Armstrong, an archaeologist from Gloucestershire County Council. He was there in case it turned out to be a site of archaeological interest.

I had looked at some old OS maps of the area, and the presence of an old quarry right by the farm led me to think that the hole could be a collapse into an underlying mine passage. But we loaded all our gear into a couple of 4x4s and drove off to a field quite distant from the farm.

From the bottom of the field, there was no sign of any hole. Despite the fact that the field had already been sown with winter wheat, Adam assured us that it would recover after being merely trodden on, and we set off up the hill.

He took us to a very unassuming little hole, maybe 2ft 6 across, and about 5ft down to the earth that had collapsed into it. The sides were very stony, but not solidly compacted. It was not a well, and there was no evidence at all that it was anything

but natural. At the bottom, voids led off. Stephen had a camera and a light attached to a pole, and he poked this down the hole and into the corners. There certainly appeared to be more to it, but without scale it was difficult to see just what size the holes were.

So there was nothing for it but to get in there and have a look!

Because we were being filmed it was important that we did this right, meaning safely. Stephen was very concerned about risk, and so we explained how we proposed to go about the descent. Phil had managed to get a couple of iron stakes, and we fixed an electron ladder to one, and a belay for the lifeline and the lifeliner to the other.

Because I had more experience with electron ladders than Phil, I reasoned I should be the one to descend first. Perhaps we should have spun a coin. Anyway, with the ladder running over a scaffolding plank, to keep it off the edges of the hole, down I went, belayed by Phil. It was impossible to descend without knocking any stones out of the sides, but only small bits came down. I could stand up on the bottom (the top of a debris cone), with my head barely below ground level. Crouching down, I first looked to my right (roughly northwards) where the camera had shown there was a hole going down. There was, and it had a slight draught coming out of it, but it was only about fist-sized! No way on there, then!

I squirmed around and ducked my head under the lip of the roof and looked in the other direction (roughly southwest). In front of me was a huge rift, going off into the distance (under the hill). Well, this was obviously going to go on and drop into the top of a mine passage! There was room enough to slide between the roof and the fallen soil under me. I turned round once more

and told everyone on the surface what I had found and that that I was going into it. So I stuck my feet in the hole and wriggled backwards. I heard someone above me say: 'He's gone!' Oh, we don't hang about in the GSS.

The soil was held up by a few rocks at the edge of a drop of about 5ft. I got to the bottom of this and stood up and turned round. Ahead of me was a rift, a little over 1ft wide (just a bit smaller than the length of my helmet), and as much as maybe 20ft high. The lifeline was dragging over all the loose rock behind me, and as I didn't want this pulling stuff down, I told them above that I was going to detach myself. They were a bit concerned at this, I think, but it was safer not to have the rope pulling on anything. Once free of the line, I crab-walked sideways down the rift for about 20 to 30ft. The end was blocked with rock, and it turned to the right, but the widest part, at floor level, was far too narrow to get into.

I sidled back up to the base of the hole, and stuck my head through the gap to let them know what I had found. I suggested that, if they wanted, I could take the small camera off the pole, and film what I had got into. They agreed and lowered the camera, with light attached, to me. I then went back down into the rift, slowly panning the camera sideways and up and down as I went. The cable was not long enough for me to get right to the bottom of the rift, and when I climbed back up, they suggested I try and film myself in the slot, to give an idea of scale. So I propped the camera on a convenient ledge and sidled past it to the bottom once more, then back up again. That was all I was able to achieve, so I handed the camera back and wriggled my way back to the surface.

What I had entered seemed to be just a fault that had come close to the surface. Such rifts are called 'gulls' on the Cotswolds. Adam was concerned about the possibility of further collapses, but because the gull ran back into the hill, such that the ground cover was increasing, my opinion was that there was little risk of this happening. Downhill, the void was already filled with debris. So, no huge cave system full of fossils and cave paintings to be turned into another tourist attraction for the Farm Park!



He could put some slabs over the hole, below ploughing depth, and cover it over so that it was no longer a hazard for vehicles or livestock crossing the field.

As the object of the exercise was to take preliminary look, and give an opinion on whether the hole constituted a hazard, we had not come equipped to make a proper survey, so all I was able to do was make a BCA Grade 1 sketch of the hole.

Unfortunately, the film crew needed to get back to the farm for a demonstration of a new super-duper plough, so there was no time for Phil to take a look down the hole as well. But when the crop has been harvested, Adam said, there would be the possibility of taking another look. So we plan to go back in September and make a full survey, to give Adam some more definite details about the depth of soil between his tractors and the top of the rift.

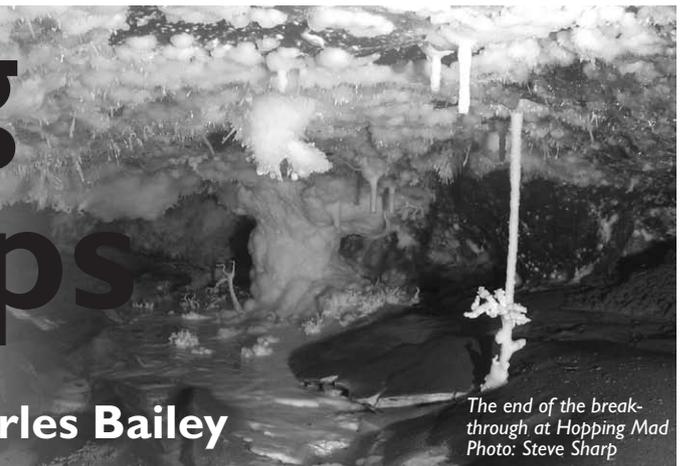
Stephen and Adam put a pallet over the hole, we put all the gear back in the wagon, and returned to the farm, where Phil and I were treated to lunch.

Television stardom again!

*The hole with Phil's legs for scale.
Photo: Joe Duxbury*

Hopping Mad Hops Again

by Charles Bailey



*The end of the breakthrough at Hopping Mad
Photo: Steve Sharp*

An interesting camp was had at Hard Rock, on the weekend of 9th to 11th April, with a large team at hand.

Hopes were high that the dig at Hopping Mad would prove fruitful, whilst the war of attrition that was the project at The Inconvenient Truth was set to continue. On the Friday afternoon Mark Lumley, Andy Heath and Mandy Voysey made their way up to Hopping Mad to make a start on the dig. Charles Bailey, after causing a blockage in the entrance with a light failure in the tight wet z-bend, went on to warm up Hard

Rock and get some food on.

These were joined by Steve Sharp, Dave King and Frank Longwill for dinner, and much later (at Ridiculous O'Clock) by Lucy and Gary.

Saturday saw the 9 occupied on a number of fronts. The Daren Diggers have been blessed with small but spectacularly beautiful breakthroughs over the past few years in Where The Sun Don't Shine and Frog Street. We were hoping for a change to huge undecorated passage. Unfortunately, Hopping Mad was in no mood to barter, and

gave 5 flat-out metres to some annoyingly pretty formations. The limited view beyond shows even more formations, so that's the end of that dig!

Progress at The Inconvenient Truth is best described as steady, with a lovely booming echo beyond the slowly yielding rift. It's perfectly obvious to all concerned that this is where the huge undecorated passage lurks – we just need the right karma for the cave to believe it too.

Otherwise, it's back to the end of Frog Street, atop a high aven, where the air feels particularly fresh.

Ogof Draenen Correction and Clarification

by Fleur Loveridge

The March 2010 issue of the Chelsea newsletter contained an article by Stuart France entitled "Gathering and Interpretation Cave Visitor Data". I would like to provide some corrections and clarifications regarding statements within that article.

Caver Numbers in Ogof Draenen

The article refers on a number of occasions to caver data from Ogof Draenen. Stuart variously describes caver numbers as "pitifully low", "falling year on year", "annual number are in decline", "declining interest in the cave", "very low" and that "cavers have lost in interest in Ogof Draenen". Unfortunately Stuart only ever presents partial data and selectively uses 2006 to 2008 to support his claims. However, if the full range of caver visitor data is viewed (see below) then it is clear that since the early heady days of exploration in the late 1990's caver

numbers in Draenen have been fairly stable at around 300 to 350 visitors per year. This is consistent for other caves in the area, for instance the 244 and 272 visitors to Daren Cilau in 2007 and 2008 respectively.

Use of Caver Counters in Ogof Draenen

I would like to make it clear that no permission has been given by either the landowner or the Pwll Du Cave Management Group (PDCMG) for the installation of caver counters in Ogof Draenen. This is in contravention to the Code of Conduct for access to the cave, which requests that proposed projects, such as scientific study, which may have a significant impact on other cavers, should be undertaken after consultation with the management group. While it is true that caver counters, if used responsibly can provide anonymous counts of "people behaviour, not actual people" it is unfortunate that the caver counters in Draenen have

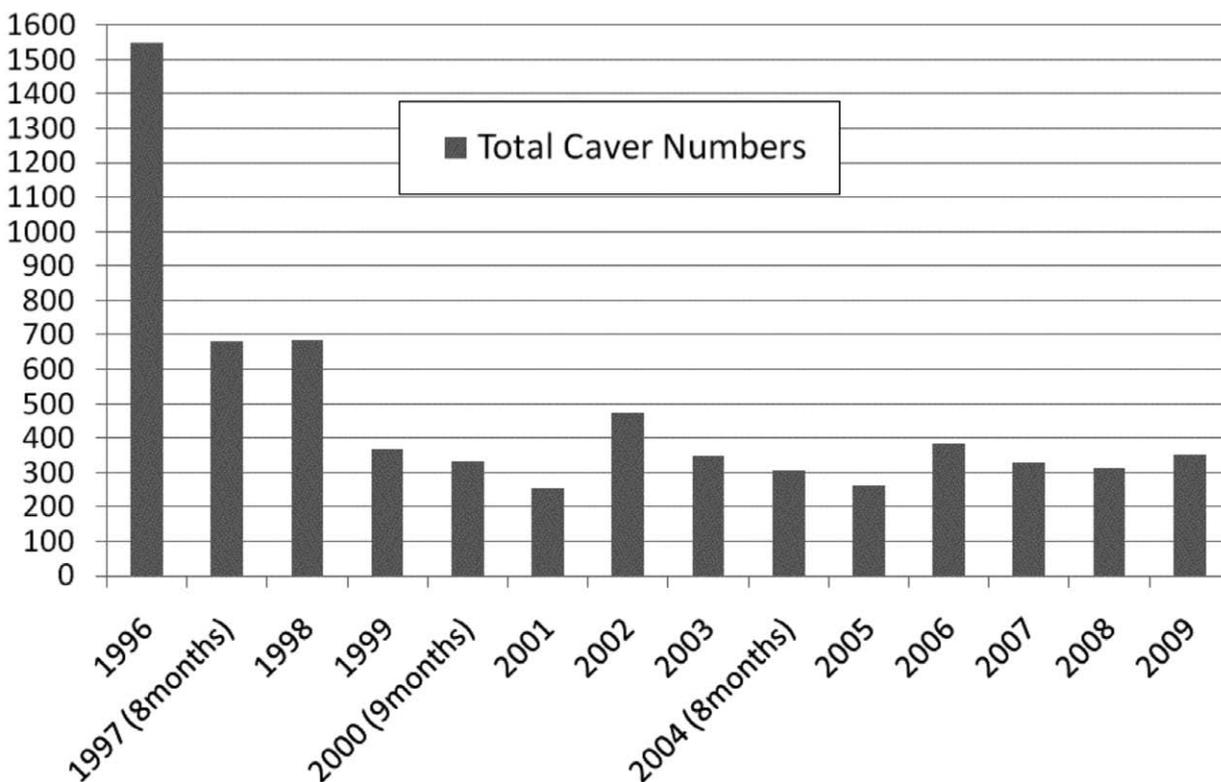
been recently been used precisely to identify and track individual cavers without their consent.

The PDCMG and Drws Cefn

Stuart France suggests that "the PDCMG put forward the argument in December that the new Drws Cefn entrance would result in the cave being overrun by visitors". At the PDCMG EGM on the 12th December the relative risks and benefits of the new entrance were discussed by the Group. The PDCMG is a broad church which contains people and clubs of various opinions. While some advocated that Drws Cefn would lead to an increase in caver traffic and hence damage to the cave, others felt that this potential increase in damage could be satisfactorily managed. In the end the Group voted by 7-5 for "no access to Ogof Draenen via Drws Cefn". Subsequently the landowners have also formally instructed that access to Draenen to be via the original entrance only. Given the recent uncertainty over future access to the cave it is now imperative the all cavers respect this position.

Fleur Loveridge,
PDCMG, Hon. Secretary

1st April 2010



Note: some years include incomplete data and are therefore underestimates of caver numbers

DRAENEN LOGBOOK AND COUNTERS COMPARED

by Stuart France

This article continues my piece from the March issue (Vol.52 No.3) by presenting more results from recent work in Ogof Draenen. The previous article ended with myself on the site discussing with the landowner how well the logbook reflected the real usage of the cave, and the landowner speculating that there were more cave visitors than entries in the logbook suggested. This was based on the number of parked cars he had seen.

Our conversation then moved to the subject of automatic caver counters and he saw no problem with using these, indeed he immediately grasped their potential to identify any further new entrances being put into use as rumours of one on Gilwern Hill were concerning him. On that subject, the recent counter results do not suggest that any secret entrances exist, at least not in so far as they are being used as a means of accessing the main parts of the cave system.

I had said in PDCMG's December meeting that there were counters in Drws Cefn in order to monitor what activity there was in that contentious part of the cave, and nobody objected to them at that time. I also presented charts which showed declining activity in the years 2006-08, based on PDCMG's logbook data. I was not being selective, as these charts merely utilised all of the logbook data to which I had access.

The logbook suggested that fewer cavers were tending to visit the more distant parts of the cave while visits to the middle area of the cave had risen, relatively, although overall caver numbers had dropped across years 2006-08 from about 400 per year to about 300. I do not have a copy of the 2009 logbook, but I understand that visitor numbers in 2009 are up a little, about 350 cavers, whilst in 2005 where again I have no logbook the annual total was around 250 cavers. These are very low numbers for an 80km cave system near to major centres of population. Given that the greatest potential for new discoveries is in the eastern part of the cave and under Gilwern Hill that are now little visited, it was then and still is true to say that most people's interest in cave exploration has withered.

The charts in my presentation were, of course, based on people's intentions as written into the logbook, not what these people actually did later the same day. In most cases people will either do their intended route or a shortened version of it. Some people will not complete the logbook on principle, or because it is full, or the pencils have broken, they forgot, or some other reason. Some might want to cloak their activities and so are less than candid. Sometimes a logbook is rather illegible due to the handwriting style, the type of pencils available, how wet and muddy the book or the cavers have become, etc. The question is therefore: how reliable is a logbook for providing usage data?

My experiment ran for 3 months from the end of a long snowy period, 20 January to 19 April 2010. The winter

quarter is historically the busiest one of the year with a third of the annual total of cavers visiting in that calendar quarter. According to the 2010 logbook there were 93 cavers in 31 groups during the experiment. Several of these trips concerned the counters project itself. But the counter data indicated a total of 36 groups, so 14% of the total groups did not complete the logbook by choice.

| Period | Cavers |
|-----------------------|--------|
| 20 Jan to 19 Apr 2006 | 136 |
| 20 Jan to 19 Apr 2007 | 115 |
| 20 Jan to 19 Apr 2008 | 115 |
| 20 Jan to 19 Apr 2009 | n/a |
| 20 Jan to 19 Apr 2010 | 93 |

The table above of logbook results shows that total caver activity is in decline. Now consider where all these Quarter-One cavers went. I have divided the cave into three Sectors: West – Gilwern Hill; Middle – the entrance series and the main stream and everywhere as far as Lucky 13; and East – everything beyond Lucky 13.

| | EASTERN | MIDDLE | WESTERN |
|----------|---------|--------|---------|
| Y2006-Q1 | 32% | 32% | 36% |
| Y2007-Q1 | 24% | 41% | 35% |
| Y2008-Q1 | 22% | 48% | 29% |
| Y2009-Q1 | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Y2010-Q1 | 17% | 64% | 19% |

The table above of Sector Activity for Quarter-Ones, demonstrates that visits to, and therefore exploration of, the remoter western and particularly the eastern area of the cave with the greatest potential are in steep decline. Visits to the middle sector, which includes the entrance series, as a proportion of the whole, therefore must be rising.

One has to use common sense and some judgement to decide, when there is more than one group in the cave on a given day, whether a particular group carried out its logbook plan or not. So there may be some uncertainty in the conclusions reached. But the indications are that 19% of groups did not fully carry out their plan written down in the logbook. This means that the charts shown at the December PDCMG meeting (now also on their website) may have over-estimated the numbers of groups reaching the more distant parts of the cave. In other words, there are even fewer visits to the furthest reaches of the cave than the already low numbers revealed in December.

There has been adverse comment about the use of electronics to 'track people'. But it must be remembered that the electronics in question do not record identities – there are no cameras. Moreover, the counters are configured to record the passages of entire groups not individuals or group size. What 'people tracking' there is has been done by the logbook, the use of which is required by PDCMG. Cavers are asked to write down their names, clubs, route plan, time in and estimated

time out. Although not a formal safety measure, they are also expected to cancel their entry on leaving the cave to avert any potential rescue call-out. I suppose there is the expectation that logbook entries will be accurate, as these records containing personal data are being stored by the management group as part of the historic record of the exploration and use of the cave.

When there were two recording systems running simultaneously, one paper-based and the other electronic, then odd discrepancies might later come to light. No questions would arise if the plans people had themselves entered into the logbook were largely in accord with the later activity. Only one striking oddity was followed up because some individuals linked to the cave management group itself entered into their own logbook their intention to do conservation work in one unassuming location when instead they went on a lengthy surveying trip in that most recently disputed of places, Drws Cefn, which should have needed special equipment and therefore some planning. I feel that the discussion arising from this particular case was thus fair comment.

As noted earlier, plans entered into a logbook, if they change at all, are usually curtailed. The reasons for this include allowing insufficient time, getting lost or tired, bored, happening upon something else of more interest, an accident, and so forth. I am not implying when I say that 19% of trips failed (in terms of written aims) that cavers are in any way incompetent as there are many good reasons why plans would need to change. Visitors might delay leaving the cave too, after finding new passages, or exploring areas that particularly interested them, and so their aims change. This is fine, so long as any timed call-out arrangements are flexible enough to avoid a rescue being started up.

What is less easy to understand is why a few people write down the wrong starting time for their trip. This could be simply mean that they do not carry a watch. Certainly some people do not know the date, as the counters showed in a few cases that they did their trip a day or two before or after the date they imagined it to be. I can see that some people might write down, say, 11am for their start time when it was more like 10am or noon, but when they write, say, 9am for a start during the afternoon it does look most odd. I would speculate that some people want to make their trip appear far shorter or longer than it actually was for reasons that readers can imagine for themselves.

So I have established what I wanted to know, which is the general reliability of written information in a cave logbook. The general conclusions I have reached are that:

1) A logbook is good enough to follow trends in the number of groups/cavers annually for statistical purposes, but it will under-estimate the real usage because not everyone is willing to use a logbook, or because it has filled up and needs changing – as is the case with the Draenen one as I write this.

2) The destinations and trip times written into a logbook are less reliable and cannot be used with the same degree of confidence to assess the relative usage of the cave by sector, and if that sort of information is wanted for management purposes then it would best be obtained with automatic counters.

Finally, may I respond to the pieces written recently by others for this newsletter. The Drws Cefn entrance has revealed widely differing views. I believed that it could have transformed the access situation at Ogof Draenen and been a catalyst for exploration and discovery, and the completion of the Grade 5 survey. But the cave management group has now got the closure outcome that it so clearly sought. It is misleading when they say that the December vote was 7-5 against the Drws Cefn entrance. There were indeed 5 clubs supporting Drws Cefn access but there were not 7 clubs voting against it, since the 7 votes in question included the votes of privileged individuals whose private votes annulled the corporate votes of entire clubs.

Attempts since December to broker compromises have not worked. A decision to seal off Drws Cefn now will not somehow magic away the widespread dissatisfaction with the way this matter has been handled and the outcome. The cave management group should not pretend that things are otherwise. It is true that the landowner has recently confirmed that he now wants only one entrance, but he had no choice but to work with PDCMG and their restrictive policies since no alternative had emerged. Back in the autumn of 2009, I believe that the landowner had a somewhat more open mind, evidenced by him allowing a generous amount of time for concensus and a stable way forward to come together for his consideration. PDCMG's reluctance to even try to negotiate a more flexible access system when they have had such an opportunity handed to them has been nothing other than a disaster for British caving.

There have been a number of opinions and views being posted in the Newsletter lately, specifically concerning PDCMG, Ogof Draenen and Ogof Drws Cefn. There are many differing views which can be highly polarised and that have caused responses from inside and outside the Club. I would normally call this politics.

The club is a set of individuals who (mostly) enjoy each others company and (mostly) go caving! As a set of individuals the Newsletter is one of many forums where individual members can express their views, share stories and get involved. The Newsletter is not censored by Gonzo, for anything other than articles that would bring the club into disrepute and I believe it should should not be. That does however mean that the Newsletter is a collective bunch of views from its members and not necessarily a club consensus or club view.

That said, politics in a Newsletter always has the potential for aggravation. Lets draw a line under this debate within the Newsletter and go and enjoy some caving, especially as I am writing this two days before my wedding and once I'm married, I'm reliably told that I'll be able to get more caving in !

**Tim Morgan
CSS Chairman**

Open Letter to CSS, PDCMG and Charles Bailey: CSS & PDCMG

Dear Charles,

In response to your open letter to the CSS committee concerning CSS and PDCMG received on the 4th March. I did not attend the meeting, however I'd like to clarify the position of the CSS Committee regarding Pwll Du Cave Management Group (PDCMG).

Firstly CSS continues to recognise several national, regional and local cave management bodies and as such, we have actively contributed to many groups including PDCMG. Our representative on the PDMCG committee is currently Chris Seal and John Stevens is also the current Survey Recorder for the group. As far as I am aware, our representative on the PDCMG, Chris Seal, has been consistent in representing the club's view, according to the direction of the CSS committee.

Secondly we have and continue to recognise PDCMG as the local cave management group for Ogof Draenen setup with the aims and objectives, as per its constitution, to:

- Promote the conservation, management, scientific study and exploration of the caves of the area and access to them. Conservation is the prime objective.
- To advise cavers in the responsible use of and access to the area.
- To encourage a free exchange of information between interested parties.
- To control access to Ogof Draenen

Thirdly CSS will continue to contribute to PDCMG and the agreements it has with the landowner to achieve the objectives of PDCMG as set out within its constitution.

Finally we recognise that PDCMG is a group made of many clubs and individuals who represent many different interests. As such I believe that member clubs and individuals, including Chelsea, should be entitled to voice their opinions within the PDCMG forum. Likewise during decisions of policy within the PDCMG, I believe that member clubs and individuals should be able to agree and disagree with the policies of the PDCMG, within the forum provided by PDCMG.

It's been fairly well documented, both within the PDCMG and in CSS's committee meeting minutes various views towards access to Ogof Draenen, in particular the issue of multiple entrances. It's a contentious issue for the constituent members of the PDMCG and it is clear that it brings with it many strong and vocal viewpoints. I do not wish to open this debate in this letter but, from my personal standpoint, I believe that the PDCMG is the right forum to have this debate and reach a consensus. However, in order to avoid some of the bitter arguments that have arisen in the past, we all should do this in a constructive manner, respecting the views of others and according to the aims of the group, while ensuring that PDCMG is truly representative of the cavers who use Ogof Draenen; for continued conservation and access of the system lies in their hands.

Yours Sincerely

Tim Morgan CSS Chairman

Officers of the Society:

Chairman

Tim Morgan
53 Coldershaw Road
London
W13 9EA
(07989) 595430
Tim@TerminalSump.com

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.freerve.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

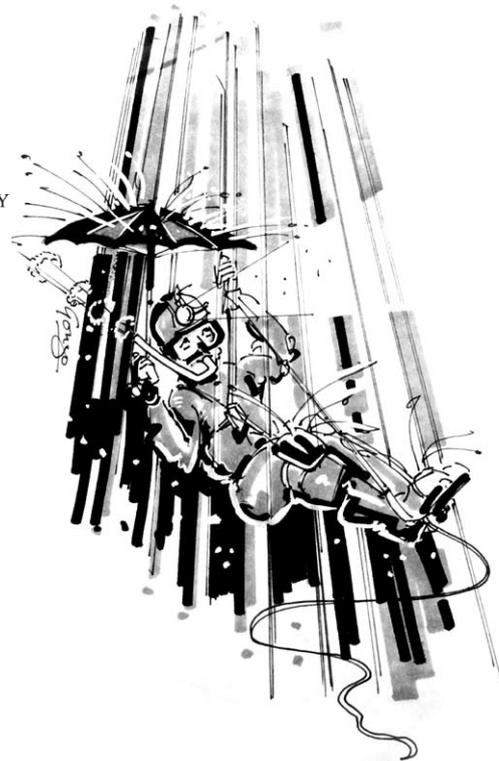
Jason McCorriston
72 Christchurch Road, Penmaen Estate
Oakdale, Blackwood, Gwent, NP12 0UX
(01495) 221479 (Home)
jason_mccorriston@talktalk.net

Cave Rescue Liaison

Tom Foord
138 Habershon Street
Cardiff
CF24 2LD
(02920) 355130 (Work)
07766 605827 (Mobile)
tomfoord@gmail.com

Whitewalls

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





Goatchurch Cavern
Photo: Steve Sharp

www.chelseaspelaeo.org.uk