

**CHELSEA SPELAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

**CSS**

**Newsletter**

Volume 51 No. 4 April 2009

**Noxton Park  
Iron Mine**

**Just one Easter  
Weekend - 1963**

**Frozen Cnwc**

**Ogof Garn y Bica**

# Chelsea Spelæological Society NEWSLETTER

Volume 51 No 4 April 2009

ISSN 0045-6381

Andy Heath in the Daren entrance

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## ADDRESS LIST

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

Current rates are:

**Full** £30  
**Joint** £43  
**Associate** £20  
**Provisional** £20 (for six months).

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

Cover Photo:  
Andy Snook in the  
**Frog Street**  
extension, Daren Cilau  
By Steve Sharp

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

## CAVING INSURANCE

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

# Editorial

Another plea for material - anything!

Trip reports, cave science, updates on digs, new cave, social activities, nostalgia.

It would also be good to have a selection of photographs to include in the Newsletter so hunt out those old classics, scan them and send them over.

*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:

**Mark Lumley**

**The Creative Edge**

**7 Langleys Lane**

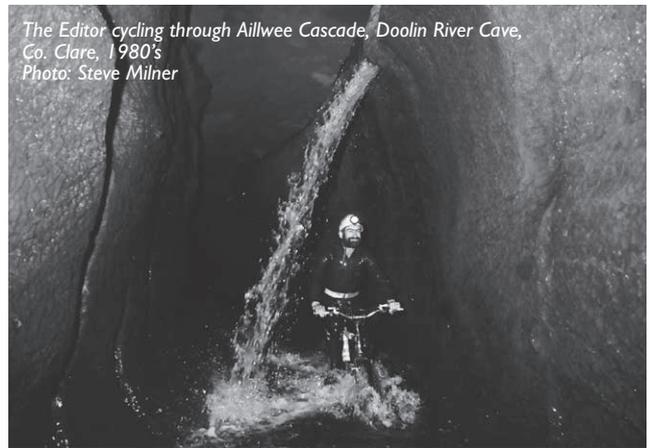
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Send text for your article as .doc or similar, or simply send it as an email.

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



The Editor cycling through Aillwee Cascade, Doolin River Cave, Co. Clare, 1980's  
Photo: Steve Milner

## A cave near Stonehenge?

The photo below is of Andy Watson's back garden 'cave' in Shrewton.

Andy reports:

*My Garden Cave / Mine was built during 2006/7. It has a gated cave entrance in the wall and a mine entrance on the right side and it has swallet holes in the shed floor and in the middle of the garden. It was built with 600mm drainage pipe and has a chamber.*



Photo: Andy Watson



# JUST ONE EASTER WEEKEND

Recollections of the breakthrough from Daren entrance crawl and the first 'bottom walking' dive of the terminal sump in Agen Allwedd, Easter 1963

by Fred Davies

In the '50's & '60's I was lucky to be a member of the Shepton Mallet Caving Club and associated with those such as Mike Boon, Mike Thompson and Steve Wynne-Roberts. We seemed to think that a caving trip without a bit of new ground discovered was a waste of time.

One of the great bits of news in 1963 was the extension down Southern Stream Passage in Aggy. To us the most exciting bit of this news was that it led to a sump, obviously undived, so when Steve suggested that he and I try it over the Easter weekend I readily agreed.

Once we had made arrangements for this I then had a letter from Mike Boon. As we were going to be in the Llangattock area would I like to join him in an investigation of a little cave he knew called Daren Cilau. Once I had agreed, the real motive for Mike's suggestion came out - "Would I bring a supply of **banger**?"



Fred Davies (left) and Mike Boon, 1961  
Photographer unknown  
Photo from Mike Boon, courtesy of Jim Hanwell

Hence Thursday 11 April saw my old Bedford CA loaded with gear, caving, diving, camping, 2 kids and a pregnant wife, away to Llangattock.

This was my first visit to Llangattock but we found our way onto the old tramway and set up our tents. Mike arrived, a hitch hike from London, a walk for the last ten miles or so.

So on Good Friday, 12 April, Mike and I entered Daren Cilau and made our way to the then end of the cave. It was just as Mike's enthusiastic description, a comfortable 2-3 feet high passage suddenly closed down at an almost vertical wall of rock **BUT** in the left hand wall was a hole and you could shine a light through the hole into vast black space, caverns measureless to man. First mud for tamping, lay the charge & tamp it well down, un-reel the bang wire to its full extent, open up a Nife cell, nothing wrong, a good loud bang.

During the wait for the fumes to clear we ate. Mike, much the youngest of our team, had acquired a bit of a name as a scrounger (all in the best motives, if he needed a jumper for a big digging trip he picked up the nearest one lying around\* - but he got lots of new cave so I was not upset). However, Mike had insisted that on this trip he would provide the underground provisions. He opened an ammo tin and gave me an amorphous lump of brown material. I took a bite and started chewing, and kept on chewing, and kept on chewing. The contents of my mouth, far from decreasing, seemed to

grow bigger and bigger. I got an explanation from Mike; working at the British Museum he found he had access to a hand-wound press for use in book binding. He had decided that food would travel better underground if compressed! The lump he handed over to me was a full loaf of bread. My bite took the equivalent of about 5 slices in one go!

Fumes cleared, back to the hole, brush away some debris and **Oh Joy** - it's big enough. Wriggle through into a **BIG** passage (my memory says 8 -9 feet high and at least as wide, I'm probably wrong) walking gently uphill to where a cross-rift seemed to have some boulders straight ahead of us but an equally large (or bigger) passage off to the right. How long we spent wandering through these passages I do not know. I do remember a beautiful white stal flow on a left wall. We took off boots & muddy boiler suits to climb it but found no continuation at the top. Finally we decided that we had reached a point with no obvious continuation, though dig sites needed looking at, so we turned and started out, cheered by memories of an hour or so walking in large, roomy, **NEW** cave passages.

A good night's sleep in the tent with the family, breakfast, and then the preparation & checking of gear. Oxygen bottles full, canisters carefully packed with soda lime, we were both using closed circuit equipment, and some helpers sitting and drinking tea.

We needed guides down Southern Stream Passage. Though Steve and I carried the bulk of our gear ourselves it is nice at tight bits and drops to be able to hand it on to someone else. Steve was wearing a new, extra thick, wetsuit and became badly overheated, so it was with some relief that we met a stream and ultimately the

sump.

My memory is of a stream dropping at 45° for about 10 feet into an almost circular pool some 10 - 15 feet in diameter. Ledges in the side gave us space to prepare and for helpers to watch.

It was my turn for the first dive. It was with shock, when I expected to wade across the pool, to find that I submerged in it. I had not yet put my mask on!! This initial cock-up over I did my breathing drill, picked up the line reel and went slowly under water on the far side of the pool. I made about ten feet along a hands & knees crawl. The passage felt roomy and, leaving the line reel, I turned and followed the line back to base.

Steve took note of my experience, did his drill and set off to feel his way along the line. At base we were startled a little later to experience a sudden increase in tension on the line. A few minutes later Steve reappeared and reported that he had encountered a sudden vertical drop in the floor. Only the line had enabled him to avoid falling down the pitch of unknown depth.

We were a reconnaissance party and not equipped for such conditions so that was it for the day. All that remained was to get out. We left behind some gear that may be useful for other attempts, our lead weights and at least one oxygen cylinder.

Apart from a pint in the pub and getting the family home that was the weekend over.

Further reading can be found at:  
Shepton Mallet Caving Club Journal  
Series 3 No. 5: May 1963  
[www.shepton.org.uk/sales](http://www.shepton.org.uk/sales)

*\* While seeking permission to use this photo of Fred Davies and Mike Boon which appeared in 'Swildon's Hole, 100 Years of Exploration', Jim Hanwell wrote back stating: "the original print was given to me personally by Mike when he left for Canada in the 1960s . . . - a typical example of his "customary barter" since he left the country wearing most of my clothes, and a pair of shoes!*

**Do YOU have  
A Trip worth  
Remembering?  
If so then please  
send it in and  
we'll keep the  
idea running as  
a series.**

# Cave Art

## beneath Llangattock - posers wanted!



*Henry Bennett and Charles Bailey digging The Gusset, Where the Sun Don't Shine, Daren Cilau. Pastel on Paper by Gonzo*

ISSA, The International Society for Speleological Art, are planning a sketching visit to Daren Cilau on the weekend of 22nd-24th May. They are looking for volunteer guides and models to help with the trips.

If you would like to help please contact Rhian Hicks  
[rhian@carreg.org.uk](mailto:rhian@carreg.org.uk)  
or visit [www.issa.org.uk](http://www.issa.org.uk)

## Membership

**Have YOU paid YOUR subs for 2009?**  
If you are marked as **LAPSED** on the 2009 Address List then this could be your last Newsletter ...

If your name is on the list below and you wish to remain a member of CSS then contact Pete Ward now:

[speleo@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:speleo@hotmail.co.uk)

**Dave Bennett**  
**Nicolas Chipchase**  
**Tony Moult**  
**David Pinchin**  
**Martin Reeves**  
**Julia Reeves**

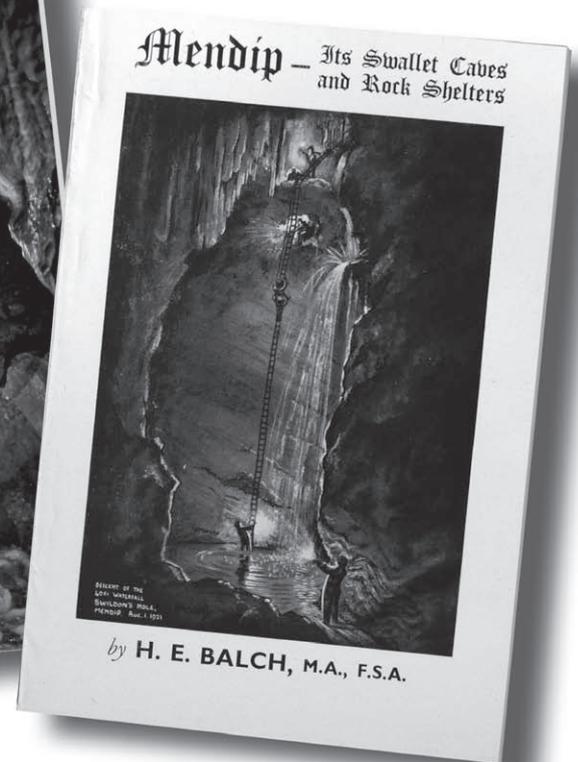
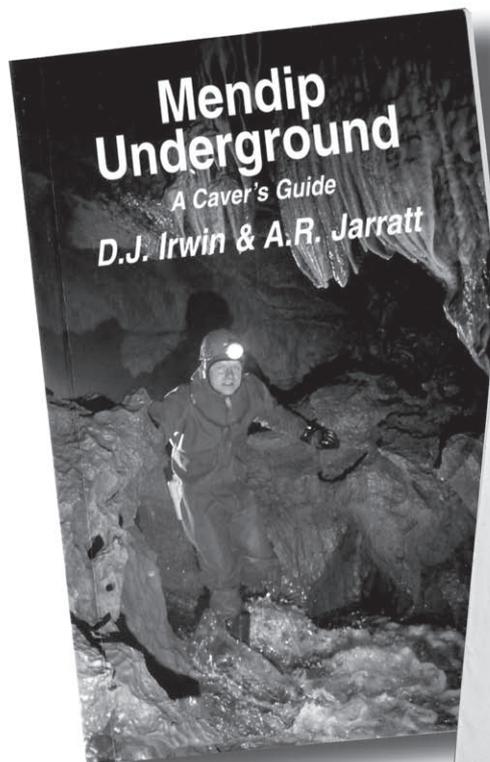
## CSS WEB Forum

The web-based message board seems to be working well, with regular postings on a range of different topics, and the membership continues to increase, there are now 40 members. However there are a lot of people not yet using the message board who may be missing out on useful information and discussions, including trips that get organised at short notice.

Remember, the message board doesn't intrude on you by sending you emails - you just log on when you want to find out what's going on, or what everyone's talking about.

If you've not yet got around to signing up, why not visit <http://cssmembers.proboards85.com> today?

# J-RAT'S BEQUEST



In the weeks leading up to his death, Tony Jarratt very generously donated his remaining stock of the fourth edition of "Mendip Underground" and Herbert Balch's classic "Mendip - Its Swallet Caves and Rock Shelters" to the Mendip Cave Registry and Archive.

It was Tony's wish that the books be sold by the MCRA to raise funds for the publication of a fifth edition of "Mendip Underground". The MCRA will fulfil Tony's wish in the next 2 to 3 years and will dedicate the new book to both Tony and Dave Irwin, his co-author for the third and fourth editions.

The sale price for both books has been fixed at £5 each, with £4 going to the fifth edition fund, and £1 going to Tony's chosen cancer charity, the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation.

The two books can be bought together (while stocks last) for a discounted price of £9, but in this case £2 will still be given to the cancer charity. The books will be on sale at many future caving events or can be obtained through the post from Tony Boycott at 14 Walton Rise, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol, BS9 3EW  
Tel: 0117 950 7336  
[tonyboycott@btopenworld.com](mailto:tonyboycott@btopenworld.com)

# OGOF GARN Y BICA

27th December 2006 by Paul Tarrant

A caving trip is always a welcome diversion after the indulgences of the Christmas period, and I offered no resistance to a suggestion from Nig Rogers that we should visit a little known cave in the Trefil quarry area. I do not think we could have chosen a much colder day to make our trip, and if you'd seen the speed with which I got changed, you'd have been forgiven for thinking that I was really keen to go caving!

We left the car near the parking spot for Ogof Tardiadd Rhymney, above a quarry with destroyed, burned-out car wrecks and with the high cliffs and peaks of the Brecon Beacons glowering down at us from a distance. It looked like snow.

The walk to the cave was upwards, towards the higher ground and we followed a vague path in featureless terrain for about 10 minutes. The cave was situated in a flattish area with a boulder field. A doline with blocks suggested an entrance and squeezing between two gave access to a low passage which went for 10 metres. There was a shaft of eight metres depth in the floor of the passage which appeared to carry further on, although investigation showed a sizable chamber at the end of the passage. There were signs of digging, and evidence left to suggest the type of persuasion typically used back in the Seventies! The dig had not borne fruit in the chamber but the way on was down in the floor a little further back. Our objective was to drill bolt-holes so we could safely rig the pitches and also to do a basic grade five survey of the place. Mary (Nig's wife) and I were left the latter task, whilst Nig bolted and tackled the pitches. I couldn't help but notice when sighting the compass back towards the entrance the snow pouring into it.

The first pitch dropped from a trench in the floor and fell for 8 metres, although there was a rebelay at about three metres from the top. This pitch dropped into a rift chamber with loose borders in the floor, (these will definitely get you further down so care is needed). The way on was a round a corner where a window provided a continuation of the shaft amidst much black, shattered rock. The top of the pitch

here was a reasonably snug fit for me and elicited accusations that I had overindulged in Xmas fare. This pitch in turn led on to a high, boulder-strewn rift chamber which continued to drop steeply towards a further pitch. An alcove up on the right did not go but proved to be home to some rather large fine-looking bats which squeaked and flew around for us.

There was an interesting slab shaped boulder which had an extremely dodgy bolt placement which could be typically described as a 'Skull & Crossbones' type of job. Clearly it had been placed before the invention of electric drills! I was very glad we did not have to use it as the slab didn't look substantial enough to hold a person's weight and the bolt was only half in.

The rope continued down to the head of a pitch and this proved to be the final and a most beautiful shaft. A good take-off point from a freshly placed bolt gave access to a glorious shaft, some three metres in diameter. This dropped for 16 metres and was like a gun barrel without any rub points. This must be one of the best shafts anywhere in South Wales. It dropped into a large rift passage where Nig explored high level passages at one end. The passage pinched in just up from the shaft but it might be possible to dig a downwards trending passage in the floor, if you were so determined, but it does look like hard work and there was no draft evidencing the way on. The passage here is big and mature but filled with breakdown in the floor. We did not survey this bottom section but did ascertain the total depth of the cave as 36 metres, and we confirmed that we dropped the whole cave on a 45 metre rope. We also determined that the bottom of the cave is eight metres above the entrance to Ogof Tardiadd Rhymney, so they probably share the same limestone beds.

The return trip out was without incident until we hit the surface. It was well dark, absolutely freezing with a chill wind blowing spindrift snow.

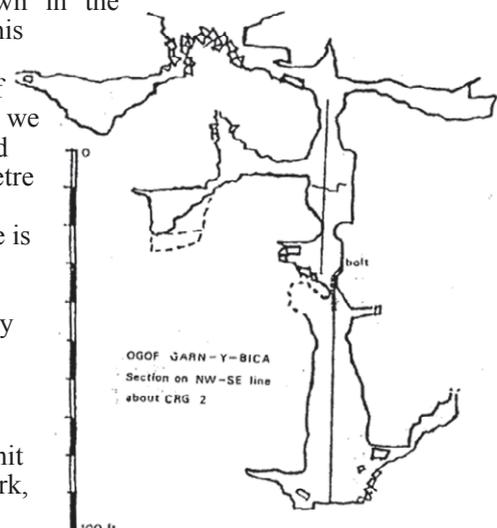
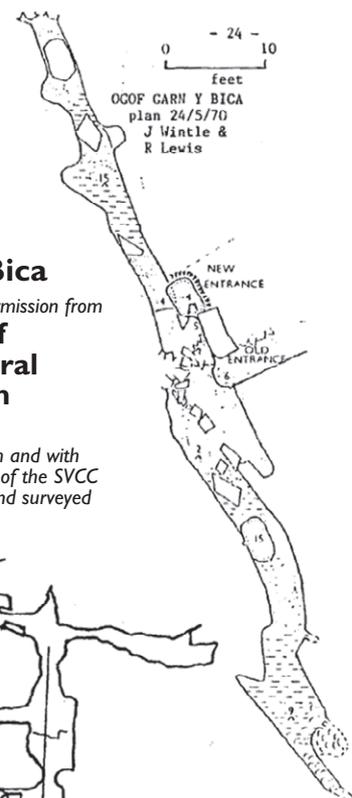
We found the car (thankfully) with the aid of the GPS and changed more than a little speedily. On the drive back we speculated who had found the cave and when, since clearly some efforts had been expended in digging the tops of some of the shafts. We could not find any reference to the cave in any of the usual publications and Martin Farr, who for some years apparently worked at an outdoor centre at Trefil, knew nothing of the cave. However Tony Oldham's book 'Caves of the Northern Outcrop' revealed the cave to be Ogof Garn y Bica which was dug by the Severn Valley Caving Club back in the Seventies. The national grid reference number is SO 0895 1381. If you wish to explore a really interesting cave then you can do no worse than explore this one.

## Ogof Garn y Bica

Printed with permission from

### 'Caves Of the Central Northern Outcrop'

by Tony Oldham and with due recognition of the SVCC who explored and surveyed the cave.



On exit after just 4 hours in the cave the icicles have grown back. You can see the earlier break lines.

# Frozen Cnwc

by John Stevens

**After the annual dinner I decided to stay around for a couple of extra days. After reports of many bats being seen on Saturday while various members were doing the Cnwc-Daren through trip, I thought I would have a look around and see how the dig in the Eastern branch of Busman's was going.**



The gate before I started, with just a small fist sized hole by the sign still open

Monday 2nd February was cold with light snow falling. I reached the gate at 11.30 and was greeted by a howling noise of wind rushing through a much reduced hole over the gate. The more major problem was the lock. Even though this was ice free and the key could be fully inserted, it would not turn. I tried warming the key in my hands several

times to no avail. The whole lock was then warmed or more accurately my hands were cooled down considerably but it did have the desired effect and the lock was opened.

Ice had built up over the handle and this was smashed off with one of the rocks lying around. Once this was free to move the gate was kick and hammered open. Only 10 minutes had been needed.

More ice on the inside with a nice column in the middle of the passage. To the left here in an alcove just a foot from some ice was a myotis bat covered in condensation from its breath. At the book, along with more ice were several more bats.

A few more metres and the cave was ice free. I went to visit the dig in eastern Busman's, that Tom and Martin had been digging. The end has narrowed to a rift only a few centimetres wide with no sign of it widening lower down yet. The north wall of the passage looks continuous but the south still has a few area of heavy clay still stuck to it, which may be hiding the way on.



Solo photo of Price's Prophecy, Busman's Holiday, Daren Cilau

I headed all the way to the climb down into Antler and was looking for a side passage I had missed on my last trip to this area. I decided to exit, just in case the snow was getting worse.

The bolt could be slid open after a tap but the door was not going to budge. The door opens inwards so kicking it was not that productive but was the only option as pulling on the frozen door was not working. If I couldn't get out, the Daren crawl was going to be really fun. Was the entrance puddle to Daren going to be frozen by the time I got there?

More kicking and at last it opened. The icicles I had broken on the way in just four hours earlier had already grown several inches. Snow had been falling, and was now a good couple of inches deep.

Time to get back and off the hill or I might not get away for several days. The snow had nearly stopped by the time I was ready to leave and a car had just come up the steep way, so I opted for that, as the first few bends had been hand gritted. The next straight section started OK but then the ice took over and even with div lock and low ratio, the car began a slow four wheel skid down the road and the only thing stopping me leaving the road was the grass bank on the downhill side. This unfortunately vanishes where a track goes to the water spring. So off the road I went, but the extra grip and slow speed allowed me to stop. Backed up to the road and went for it again, low revs and don't touch the brakes, but should I increase revs if I start sliding? Some distance ahead the road was gritted again outside some houses.

Walking up the hill was a group of some twenty walkers. These soon rushed for cover as the landrover approached them at 45 degrees to normal and then bucked as the wheels found something that was not ice.

The rest of the descent and steep part were all well gritted. The following week saw quite a bit of snow fall with temperatures not above zero for over a week.

We can only speculate how much ice must have formed in that time. It may well have iced the whole cave up!

All photos by John Stevens

# Fernhill

by Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley

Over on East Mendip the re-opening of Fernhill is giving plenty of entertainment to the ATLAS diggers.

From the base of the concrete pipes the team have dug down vertically through loose, bouldery fill in a wide rift (well a steep bedding actually) - a delicate job requiring regular shoring with timbers, steel bars and concrete.

On December 17 the 'south passage' shown on the 1960's survey was rediscovered. The main way into the well-decorated section of the cave is shown as being in the north wall, directly opposite this and a little lower.



Pete Flanagan at the start of the south passage looks up at Tony Boycott in the excavated rift beneath the pipes (just visible top right), Fernhill.

By early February we had dropped the floor by another 3 metres with no sign of the north passage. Some huge blocks were held in place with timbers and welcome protection was offered at the bottom by Richard Witcombe's careful positioning of a timber and plywood barrier to hold back falling rocks from the 15 metres of rubble and void above our heads.

Then on February 15, at the end of a day's work with crowbars, drill and plug & feathers (Tony Boycott advised us not to google 'plug and feathers' if we had children present!), we saw the faintest suggestion of the possible lip of the northern passage . . . then we had a major collapse! As we moved quickly to a safer level we were relieved to see that most of the shoring was holding firm. Unfortunately several tons of tumbling rubble were crashing down from more than 15 metres up, further along the rift beyond the shoring and running into the void we had created.

Work is now underway with stemples and shuttering to screen this entire area off so that we can resume our downward progress in safety. It had better be worth it!

If you're at a loose end on a Wednesday night then come and join us. Chelsea SS 'regulars' include Antoinette Bennett, Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley, Duncan Price, Steve Sharp, Mandy and Matt Voysey, Andy 'Vogon' Watson.

A log and photos of the dig can be seen at [www.atlasdiggerslog.org.uk](http://www.atlasdiggerslog.org.uk)

## Some thoughts on a screenplay for a spoof on *The Descent* by Joe Duxbury

After seeing the film "The Descent", and groaning at all the elementary caving mistakes that were portrayed, the idea of a parody of it came to mind. I present these few ideas, which do not constitute a complete story, and invite others to add to them, through the pages of this journal. Perhaps, through combined efforts, we can end up with a short script which will amuse the caving fraternity. (Oh, are you allowed to say "fraternity" any more? Is there a non-exclusive, PC term?). Maybe someone would even feel moved to turn the final script into a short video.

## The Descant

(Perhaps a scene can be developed in which a large recorder plays a prominent part) (Any ideas for another title?)

Narrative: An intrepid team of women spelunkers venture into the bowels of the earth, braving the perils of the impenetrable darkness...

(Note: All narrative and dialogue has to be read with a heavy American accent)

**A** is a woman (she has to be a complete air-head, very sexy) still coming to terms with a traumatic accident that she suffered a year ago. She broke a fingernail.

**B:** "I can understand how A feels. It must have been terrible for her. I nearly broke a nail once. It was awful, you know. Just, like, dreadful."

As the camera follows a rugged 4x4 driving along a country road, subtitles appear: "One year later. The Appalachian Mountains, USA" as the car drives past the Hunter's/the Hill Inn.

Five minutes after entering the cave, the group of women cavers (all with grotesque blonde wigs and totally inappropriate "sexy" clothing; one or more can be men in drag) stop: "Let's eat." They bring out a vast amount of food - boxes of chicken salad, bowls of chilli, cakes... And they do this several more times, at very short intervals, and the amount of food never gets any less.

They perform an SRT descent of a short (10, 15 m?) pitch. View from above that clearly shows the floor not far below. Splice a section of someone on the descent back into the sequence as many times as possible until it's not funny any more.

As they stumble along the forbidding passage, a strange sound from ahead stops them. They huddle together in fear. Around the corner a hideous, deformed creature appears. Cut to close-up of a suitable Big Name Caver\*, leering horribly. (Mimes to soundtrack of Kenneth Williams: "Oh, stop messin' about!")

*\*Now that Mr A. Jarrett, Esq. is no longer able to play this rôle, unless someone can computer dub him in, an alternative will have to be found.*

They enter a chamber with strange markings on the wall. As they approach and illuminate it with their lights, it is revealed as... a map of the London Underground? A survey of Swildon's?

*All further contributions will be most welcome.*

# CAVING TERMINOLOGY EXPLAINED

## **BACK-UP LIGHT**

A small torch for reversing.  
Usually held clenched between the buttocks.

## **BAT ROOST**

Sunday lunch in impoverished Geordie households  
(See also **BAT GRILL**).

## **BELOW!!**

Imminent grief.  
(See also **RESCUE CALL-OUT**).

## **BUNK ROOM**

Sufficient space to run away.

## **CAVE DIVER**

Negatively-bouyant and a third full of hot air.

## **CAVE LEADER**

A suitable recipient for your back-up light.

## **HAND JAMMER**

A person who doesn't notice that the bread is missing when making their sandwiches.  
(See also **CONSERVATION**).

## **KNEE PAD**

A limp, rubberised blob usually worn around the ankles.  
Frequently used for removing sand and sharp rocks from caves.

## **LAMP BRACKET**

A caving bra.  
(See also **CHEST HARNESS, BOULDER HOPPING**).

## **NOVICE**

Daren entrance series with one of the obstacles removed.

## **OVERDUE PARTY**

A celebration by newly-weds planning a family.

## **SOME POTENTIAL**

A hopeless, abandoned dig.

## **SPELÆOLOGIST**

A posh caver with a thong.

## **SPORTING**

Abject misery.

Send in *YOUR* (printable!) Caving Terminology for future Newsletters.

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## COTTAGE BOOKINGS

4-5 April	<b>CSS Cottage building</b>
18-19 April	<b>Lost World CC</b>
2-3 May	<b>Exeter Uni SS</b>
22-25 May	<b>CSS Whit BH</b>
27-28 June	<b>CSS BBQ</b>
4-5 Sept	<b>Lost World CC</b>
14-15 Nov	<b>Devon SS</b>
22-23 Jan 2010	<b>Cambridge University CC</b>

# Noxon Park Iron Mine

21<sup>st</sup> Feb 2009



Photo: Steve Sharp

## by Duncan Price

Cave diving can be a pain in the balls at times. Though not usually while you are driving to the cave! In this instance Antoinette and I were travelling to Bristol to meet up with John Volanthen before going over to the Forest of Dean to dive in an old iron mine. We were typically late, a situation that was exacerbated by a road closure and subsequent diversion. Antoinette had just used my mobile phone to alert John to the situation. On finishing the call, I suggested that she replace my Nokia handset on the cradle on the dashboard. "That's what it's for," I said. Ooach! Antoinette threw the phone down in my lap. Rather firmly and right in the groin. I struggled to drive and shouted at her in pain. Fortunately there was a layby ahead and we pulled over and stopped for a few minutes while I regained circulation in my nether regions.

We got lost again in Bristol. I know where John lives but usually go and see him from work rather than home. Anyway, we had a

nice tour of the docks. John was pleased that we were late as he wasn't ready and was still getting directions to the place from Gavin Newman. I had earlier told John the grid reference but got it wrong, hence the confusion. We piled out gear into John's truck and headed across the old Severn Bridge and up the A48 towards Lidney where we turned left into Bream. Apparently, everyone who visits Noxon Park Mine leaves their cars at a garden centre near to Clements End. I had visions of some large horticultural outlet but there is in fact a modest nursery there and we parked next to a BMW which looked like the one that Chris Jewell drives as we were supposed to meet him there at 11:30. Antoinette went into the shop to see if they sold sandwiches - an ice cream sign outside suggested that they might - to no avail. They we decided to drive a bit further down the track to a caravan park where we found Chris's real car. But no Chris.

The three of us set off to find the mine entrance. We'd come across a promising collapse with enticing looking emerald green pools but still not found Chris despite us shouting into a few dark holes. Back at the cars we found Chris who had already done one trip to drop off gear in the mine. He'd visited the place before and had also come across a distressed sheep en route to the mine. Collecting half our tat, we set off for the entrance only to discover that the one we thought was the right one was not the right one and it was best to follow Chris. Unfortunately the real mine was a lot further away from the cars than the wrong one. We climbed a gate and down into a collapse with a little rabbit hole leading off. This was the way into the mine which soon turned out to be quite impressive. The old nature of the workings means that it is very cave-like with sculpted walls. Eventually we arrived at a big lake with the way on being underwater. I found a nice little island to drop

my gear on and claimed it as my own as it was the best kitting-up spot.

Another trip was made back to the cars for the rest of the gear. We elected to carry our drysuits into the mine to put them on down by the water. Just as well, as it was a lovely day and we would have surely roasted to death otherwise. En route for the second time we diverted to another collapse to rescue the sheep. Well, it didn't actually need rescuing as it stood up of its own accord when we tried to put a rope around it. Farmer Price reckoned that it must be lambing season soon and that the ewe was clearly pregnant so we left it alone.

Down in the mine, John, Chris and I got ready to dive. I was first to set off and swam over to the wall to look for a dive line. The water level in the mine can fluctuate by as much as 15 m and was in its high position. Despite the red mud everywhere, the water was stunningly clear - with up to 20 m visibility. A line going off in the right direction was spotted and followed to a milk bottle float in the roof from where the way on lay beneath the rock.

Gavin Newman had kindly provided us with a sketch survey and I simply went straight ahead, noting side passages but sticking to the main line. I had to stop several times to clear my ears as a combination of winter colds and not having been diving for three months meant that my sinuses were a little sticky. To add to the irritation, one of my regulator second stages became detached from my neck strap so I had to tuck it into my harness in order to keep it within reach and stop it dragging on the floor. My trim in the water also seemed to be awry, but this was simply because my waist belt had slipped around my body while kitting-up.

Soon I arrived at the head of a

drop with a plastic jug tied to the line at its summit. Gavin had told us about this and I knew that I was on the right route. Sailing over the edge the line descended deeper, 30, then 40 metres depth and feeling the effects of nitrogen narcosis, impending decompression penalties and on limited air supplies I decided that this was a good point to turn around.

I took in a few side passages on the way back, one of which made an obvious loop back around to the main line. Another looked like it was heading to surface elsewhere so I didn't follow too far as clearing my ears could have been problematic on the return. Chris and then John were met coming in. They had taken so long to get ready that Antoinette had only been waiting for about 5 minutes by the time I got back.

My early return, allowed me to change back out of my gear and get my stuff to the surface while John and Chris were still diving. They had gone further into the mine beyond my limit to reach a T-junction where the route splits. John followed the left branch to an unstable area - the guideline being covered by collapses. The right route apparently forms a circular route back to link in with one of the side passages I had explored. Antoinette and I made another two trips into the mine to help recover the rest of the gear and it was a further couple of walks through the woods before everything was back at the cars. Chris was heading over to SWCC for the rest of the weekend while we returned to Bristol.

All in all, it was a fun day out - made better by the good weather and good company. Permission to visit Noxon Park must be obtained from the Forest of Dean Conservation and Access Group and we are grateful to Chris for sorting this out. A return trip is planned, though I'll remember to put on a cricketers' box next time!

# Pottering About on Mendip

by  
John Cooper

## Ogof Cnwc to Ogof- y-Daren-Cilau, Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2009

Owing to the Annual Dinner and AGM this weekend I was not able to do the usual Swildon's Hole trip. Instead I joined a party organised by Gary Kiely and lead by Mike Read on this very enjoyable through trip. There were a few diversions as Mike tried to remember the route but we knew Adrian Fawcett was following in later to mop up any stragglers. I think the times for the 7(?) of us ranged from a bit over 3 hours to just under 5 hours with me nicely in the middle at 4 hours. There were a lot more climbs in Antler Passage than I remember from the days when I was surveying it! Many thanks to Gary Kiely for an excellently organised weekend and dinner.

## Swildon's Hole, Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2009

John Cooper and Barry Weaver on the usual trip. In the Long Dry Way, visited the Mud Sump and out the Short Dry Way. The Mud Sump had nearly a foot of water over the end of the hose pipe, no airspace at all and the upper dam bucket disconnected.

## Swildon's Hole, Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2009

John Cooper and Barry Weaver on the usual trip. Decided to go and repair the Mud Sump dams. In the Dry Way, left our tackle at the top of The Twenty as it was already rigged. En route to the Mud Sump noticed the pools were muddy so someone was obviously ahead of us. At the Mud Sump there was about 4 inches of air space and it was well stirred up by the party ahead. Whilst BW emptied out the top dam I emptied the lower one and then sorted out the plastic sheeting. Left it all nice and tidy with no water in the dams but still about 8 inches of water over the tip of the hose. Met another party of 2 intending to do the Round Trip on our way back to Tratman's Temple. On arriving at The Twenty

we discovered the earlier party doing the Round Trip had removed their tackle but failed to put ours down! Oh! Whilst deciding how we were going to extricate ourselves another of the regular Sunday morning parties arrived at the top with their tackle. A nasty situation avoided. They said they had met a party of 2 exiting. Who were the morons that don't know the basic rule to rig with tackle left at the top if you remove yours?

## Swildon's Hole, Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2009

John Cooper and Barry Weaver on the usual trip. After last week's episode at the Twenty decided to go and practice free-climbing it. In the Dry Way to The Twenty. Let a party of 4 come up and then it was clear. It was a bit too wet to attempt the direct route up the water, although BW did try, but I managed the left wall (looking upstream). The first time I used the P-hangers at the top as pinch grips but the second time I did it without them. I find it too wide to bridge so just use the one wall. Used a life line for safety. Will go back when it's drier and try the direct route.

## Swildon's Hole, Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2009

Antoinette Bennett, John Cooper and Duncan Price. As Barry Weaver was away in Cornwall for the weekend JC was expecting a nice relaxed Sunday. However a phonecall from DP soon changed that. Underground about 11.45am and in the Dry Way leaving our ladder at the top of The Twenty. Up into Tratman's Temple and on our way to the Mud Sump. Here we found it much reduced from two weekends ago with the hose at surface level. (The top dam's bucket was disconnected and the Denzo tape seems to have gone missing so couldn't connect it back up.) Through on our backs without any baling required. Noticed a hose running at high level is being installed to keep the Mud Sump clear. Looks like "Work

in progress". Carried on the Round Trip calling in at Fault Chamber on the way. Whilst AB waited at the start of Blue Pencil JC and DP went to the First Trouble and started the syphon. Down Blue Pencil, ABs first time and DPs first for about 20 years. Visited downstream Sump 3 and Upstream Sump 4 before returning up Blue Pencil. Back at the Troubles the water level was still high, a gap about 3 inches square above water, so resorted to baling to speed it up. Once the gap was about a foot wide we decided that was OK and floated through on our backs, being careful not to make waves that would wash up our noses. The Second Trouble was also high but we thought it OK so went straight through, again on our backs. By the time we got to the final Trouble AB was starting to think enough's enough but again sailed through carefully on her back. On to the climb up into Glistening Gallery and down through the squeeze to yet another wet section though Birthday Squeeze, again done on our backs, except for DP who decided to treat it as a sump. Along Vicarage Passage and down The Landing into the streaway. A stroll up to The Twenty where we found our ladder to be the only one left. Exit via the Wet Way to complete a 4 hour trip.

## Swildon's Hole, Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2009

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



# Joe Duxbury's Book Review

## The Descent

By Jeff Long

First published by Crown Publishers  
(a division of Random House, Inc.)  
1999.

Many of you have seen the film *The Descent*, but have you read the original book? You might ask why you should, seeing as that the only thing they have in common is the basic concept of people going underground and encountering strange, mutated humans. The book is a much darker (ho, ho) and more complex affair. Perhaps the filmmakers decided they liked the basic idea but couldn't cope with the scale that would be involved in keeping to the original.

The author confesses he "is not a spelunker"; he is a climber, and his childhood caving experiences do not seem to have endeared him to the underground. Despite claiming that he is amazed with the "beauty of subterranean places", he writes "caves took away freedom [that could be ... horrifying and liberating]. Their darkness and sheer gravity were tyrants. They compressed the imagination and deformed the spirit." That does not sound like someone who is captivated by the beauty of calcite or the sinuous forms of limestone passages. Is your spirit deformed, dear speleologist?

Although his many acknowledgements include caving references his research has produced a lot of nonsense. For example, on one page we get "the iron mines of West Cumberland in S Wales", and "the Picos Mountains in Basque country". Then, despite the fact that his father was a geologist, he gives us "limestone, which fused at lower levels into ... beerstone and eventually, much deeper, into basalt." He seems to have appropriated the term "beerstone" for a mineral of his own invention, and basalt has an

entirely different composition from limestone\*. On the next page he calls Mulu foot "a tropical cave disease" when it's just a tropical jungle disease. He obviously couldn't resist mangling of fact.

My feeling was that he has overdone the plot. He just throws in all sorts of topics; the Turin Shroud, the origins of Mankind, Dante's *Inferno*. Then there was all that jumping about from one location to another.

Many other reviewers thought it was frightening and thrilling; by the time the story ended, I didn't care who Satan was masquerading as.

\*My thanks to Art Palmer for his assistance with geological facts.

## FROG STREET

A 72 hour trip took place from Thursday 26th February to Sunday March 1st. Andy Snook, Steve Sharp and Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley were there for the duration with Gary Kiely and Adrian Fawcett digging on the Saturday. The boulder choke at the northern end was pushed vertically for 3-4 metres and subsequently dubbed 'Chicken Run'! It now requires chemical persuasion.



Andy Snook digging close to Chicken Run.  
Frog Street extension, Daren Cilau.  
Photo: Steve Sharp

All the obvious leads in the vicinity were dug with little progress made. The southern end was extended by Adrian for a few metres and now requires enlargement to the approach and 'siege tactics'.

Work continues . . .

## Style and Distribution of the CSS Newsletter

Make it larger  
and slightly more  
expensive?

Print in colour and  
put the subs up?

Smaller and  
Cheaper?

Monthly or only  
when there are  
sufficient articles  
of interest?

Downloadable from  
the Website?

Regulars to collect  
from Whitewalls  
to cut down on  
postage?

What are YOUR  
thoughts?

[http://  
cssmembers.  
proboard85.com](http://cssmembers.proboard85.com)



The Pagoda, Promised Land, Ogof Craig-A-Ffynnon.  
Photo: Andy 'Vogon' Watson

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## Meets List 09/10

This is an outline of the meets for this year.

**February 21<sup>st</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup>**

**South Wales.**

Draenen Round Trip.

**March 28<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup>**

**South Wales.**

Swansea Valley

(DYO subject to weather).

**April 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup>**

**South Wales.**

Cottage building weekend.

A lot of small jobs to be completed.

**April 25<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup>**

**Derbyshire** (Orpheus).

Nettle Pot/Oxlow/Bagshaw.

**May 23<sup>rd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>**

**South Wales.**

Otter Hole on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**June 27<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup>**

**South Wales.** Decide your own trips.

BBQ and Barrel on Saturday night.

**July 25<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup>**

**Mendip** (Wessex).

Banwell Bone/Stalactite Caves as an option on

Saturday. Eastwater as another option on Saturday.

Swildons on Sunday.

BBQ will be arranged for Saturday night.

**August 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>**

**Yorkshire** (YSS The Old School House).

Lost Johns/Birks Fell

(Days will be confirmed when permits booked).

Please contact me for any other requests.

**September 26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>**

**Hidden Earth** (Location to be confirmed).

**October 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup>**

**Mendip** (Wessex).

Box Stone Mines on Saturday.

**November 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>**

**South Wales.**

Agen Allwedd obscure passages.

Fireworks on Saturday night.

**December 5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup>**

**South Wales.**

Curry Extravaganza #5 on the 5<sup>th</sup>

Decide on your own trips.

**January 2010 30<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup>**

**South Wales.** Dinner and AGM.

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

**John Newton, Meets Secretary**

# Photos of the Month

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



Above: Gonzo starting to drop 'Chicken Run', the boulder choke (presumed to be the south end of the terminal choke in Half Mile Passage) with a lightweight scaffold bar, Frog Street extension, Daren Cilau.  
Right: Half an hour later, 2 metres up. Photos: Steve Sharp.

Below: Duncan Price in Chamber Nine, Wookey Hole  
Photo: Antoinette Bennett



Above: Tea and the boulder choke, Frog Street extension, Daren Cilau.  
Left to right: Gary Kiely, Andy Snook, Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley.  
Photo: Steve Sharp



Below: Chocolate Fingers, Frog Street, Daren Cilau. Photo: Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley





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