

CHELSEA SPELAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

CSS

Newsletter

Volume 51 No. 6 June 2009

**Who are
ATLAS
anyway?**

**Daren Cilau,
that's a
terrible place!**

**A Purbeck
Stone Mine**

Star Shaft



Chelsea Spelæological Society NEWSLETTER

Volume 51 No 6 June 2009

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Andy Heath catering for indulgent diggers,
Hard Rock Cafe, Daren Cilau

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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:
Mandy Voysey on the breakthrough
into Curtain Passage

Fernhill
May 11 2009

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.

Dan Yr Ogof - The club has two cave leaders: **Stuart France** and **Paul Tarrant**. Contact them if you want to arrange trips into this superb cave.

Ogof Craig A Ffynnon - Access to this system is now managed by the **Llangattwg Cave Management Committee**.

Editorial

Are there any budding writers out there with an interesting article for the newsletter?

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

There is a consistent but small nucleus of CSS members contributing to this newsletter but I'm sure that there are many more of you who have something to offer that will make it a better, more rounded publication. Perhaps a write up of the last Club meet, water analysis in Swildon's Hole, diving activities in Daren Cilau and elsewhere. Perhaps you took part in a classic breakthrough trip for the 'Trip worth Remembering' section. Rescue training, Showcaves of the USA, designs for a new piece of caving kit, ideas for a Club stand at Hidden Earth, underground filming, a resumé of Committee business, CSS insurance by SAGA, activities of other clubs with which you are associated - the opportunities are endless, so go on, give it a go and make my life as Editor a little easier . . .



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

Clapton

Radstock

Somerset BA3 4DX

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

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

The Old Soaks in the Yorkshire Dales

Easter 09

Bruntscar and Great Douk

Caves 11th April 2009

**John Addison, Rick Box, Paul Tarrant
and Barry Weaver**

Bruntscar Cave has a most unusual entrance. The Northern Caves guide book says "go through old barn and into the cave". The barn is somewhat ruined now and has no roof, but it's not hard to imagine that once it was part of or was possibly the original farmhouse, built before the current 17C one. A set of steps leads down into the cave suggesting that the cave was once the main water supply to the farm.

An easy walking passage leads upstream to three waterfalls; from here the cave reduces in size with crawls under flowstone, sideways going and stooping. Nobody fancied the small high level passage or the final wet crawl into the end chamber. A fine cave.

We then decided to visit **Great Douk**, and enjoyed a pleasant half hour in this classic cave before a quick look into the dig in the bottom of the entrance shakehole.

Total time underground approx. two hours. At this point the Hill Inn beckoned and Cath Addison was heard saying "you spend too much time in the pub".

As always, many thanks to John Addison for organising a great weekend.

Social Section Easter statistics:

Pub visits: 7: to 6 different pubs

Home Guard Platoons encountered : 1

Peaks climbed: 1

Church visit: 1

Average m.p.g: 7.2; an excellent result achieved by John Addison and Rick Box and the Awards

Committee are delighted to present merit prizes for this outstanding performance to both John & Rick.

A real '**Clash of the Titans**'

On a more serious note the committee were saddened to receive reports of two attempts to influence the impartial observer. The miscreant has been fined two pints and will be warned as to their future behaviour. Again wine drinking was observed, but the committee have been assured that this was for medicinal reasons.



Daren Cilau, that's a terrible place!*

by Paul Tarrant

Daren Cilau always had a reputation as been a difficult cave in the 1970s when I first took up caving. As a young, eager to learn aspirant caver, I recalled the pub talk in the Britannia of the older lags, describing this place as the yardstick to measure yourself against. There were not many folk who had done a repeat trip to the then end of Daren and there seemed no point then as there was not much prospect of the cave being extended! [sic] The cave in those days measured somewhere in the region of 2,500 feet long.

My first trip in Daren Cilau followed a tattered trail of remains of boiler suits and bits of equipment which littered the entrance crawls. I did the trip in a wetsuit which cushioned the blows and the trip left me thinking that I would number one of those who would not make a return visit. I was wrong in this belief and I stupidly repeated the trip sometime in 1980, for want of something better to do. My clothing consisted of sweater and old jeans and zero knee protection and it came as no surprise to me when I could not walk for a week after, due to "water on the knee" brought on by the entrance crawls.

1984 had been a good year for me. The Black Mountain provided small discoveries at Ogof Siomedig, Arthur's Pot, and Carreg Yr Ogof, whilst exploratory trips on Gower had revealed an interesting long cave now lost, plus the reopening of other lost Gower gems. I was doing a lot of caving back in those days and whilst caving with Clive Gardener in Aggie - we visited Cascade Inlet, I received

an invitation to go down Daren Cilau the following weekend. On returning to Whitewalls, John Cooper and Jock Williams were just setting off to Daren, to remove cobbles in the entrance. This I found jolly interesting and indicative of some form of significant breakthrough and so I asked Clive to count me in on Saturday's trip.

Saturday the 8th September came and I was tasked with bringing Martyn Farr as a lucky talisman. We met at Whitewalls and joined with Clive, John Cooper and Jock, with the latter making his third consecutive trip to Whitewalls, a fact that reinforced the belief that something significant was going on. My diary records that we glided through the entrance crawls in 50 minutes. In those days there was no need to do the entrance crawls in anything less than this since there was not that much cave to explore.

Clive's dig was not far from the junction with Rift Passage and about 50 metres up from the frozen cascade off to the left of the junction. Both Martyn and I rather thought the dig site to be an obscure place, as it seemed to be in a blank wall, but then Clive speculated that what lay underneath the wall would be a continuation of the entrance stream passage. It was just a case of dropping down into it. With that he squeezed through some boulders and was lost to our view. Martyn followed and was then tasked by Clive to sort out the loose boulder choke which blocked the void visible to Clive.

Martyn called for silence as he pulled rocks down into the darkness beyond the choke. He then pushed the crux that had been persuaded

the previous night and called back that he was in a Craig-A-Ffynnon sized passage. Things then happened very quickly with John calling out that Jock had badly gashed his hand moving rocks and that he would escort him out to seek medical attention. For a fleeting moment I considered swapping places with John but when Clive called, asking whether I was coming through or not, all honourable thoughts on my part my part evaporated. Hell, I was on the right side to follow Clive, John seemed content to see Jock out, and Martyn's calls of delight further on decided things for me there and then. I followed Clive after shouting back to John "See you in half an hour".

Traversing the breakthrough choke was simple enough too but I had to remove my Oldham cell to get through the tightest bit. I could see Martyn and Clive at the foot of a large passage, nicely decorated and being four metres wide and three metres high. When I dropped down to the other two, we took off following Martyn's footsteps in the virgin mud and on into a passage that seemed to be growing larger.

We reached the inevitable choke and whilst initially groaning at this, it provided no restriction to our progress. We carried on into the mountain with Martyn banging his ammo box with a crowbar in an attempt to exorcise any malevolent spirits that would try and place chokes in our way! Clive was wearing his characteristic grin that spread from ear to year. The noises we made created a happy din, which disturbed the silence of millennia.

The floor of the passage was then very beautiful, with smooth mud

covering rocks and boulders (it is now a squalid mud wallow). Everything was clean and fresh and untainted. The floor consisted of bubbly orange calcite with mud banks either side and a small trickle of water flowed along it. There were straws and also a curious little white formation that looked like a clog boot that would be worn by our caving friends in the North. This passage was to become known as Jigsaw passage and this led on to a major trunk route. Looking left it showed a tantalising large passage leading onwards into the darkness. Going right revealed a massive chamber with much break down. Boulders tipped and clattered noisily as we walked around in what was to become 'Big chamber (not near the entrance)'. The cave decided to play games on us at this point and we traversed Loop Route, laughing when we realised that we'd done a circuit.

Clive must have had an instinct for caves since he found a smallish passage off 'Big Chamber' which he wanted to dig the end of as he was convinced it pointed towards Eglwys Faen. Martyn and I saw this as being a longer term proposition [Clive was to break through into the second 1985 breakthrough phase just back from this place) and we pulled Clive away since there was a large unwalked passage demanding our immediate attention.

This passage turned out to be Epocalypse Way – named after Clive & Martyn's astrological stars that day that signified their lives were entering a new epoch. I think they were reading the Sun in those days... We were very much reminded of Ogof Craig-A-Ffynnon as we traversed Epocalypse with its mud floor and undercut walls. There was one point where an obvious extinct streamway revealed dry rusty ball bearing like cave pearls and 15cm long selenite crystal needles. There were also calcite lacework formations on some of the boulders. The mud floors had cracked into polygons. The whole area exuded an air of pristine freshness that possibly had not been disturbed from the time that the last glaciation had receded and melted away. We had exhausted our list of superlatives to describe things we were seeing such as the wonderful White Company formation. I recall we all thought the place was

very OCAF like. This feeling was emphasised when we came to a pagoda type stalagmite looking very much like the pagoda in OCAF's Promised Land passage. This feeling that we were close to OCAF sparked a bit of a giggle. We noted two ten-metre pots to the side of the passage. We could see a silver trickle of water flowing at the foot of both shafts. Martyn threw a stone down the shaft while shouting "Sorry John" (John Parker of the OCAF group who then maintained what was considered by many to be restricted access policies to OCAF, but in fairness to him CSS were always allowed access to explore the cave, but not to dig it!) so convinced were we that we'd crossed over to intersect OCAF -surveying proved we were some way off the mark, but hell, we felt we deserved the laugh!

A little further on from the shafts we were pulled up sharply by a huge area of chokes which looked like long-term dig propositions. Time to retreat! We stopped at a small inlet stream coming in on the left in what was christened 'The Kitchen' where we took on drink and ate some rations as we were pretty tired after some fairly intensive exploration of what we'd found. Martyn explored a passage near 'The Kitchen' whilst Clive & I ate. He came back claiming it went for 100 or so metres, but he kept quiet about what he'd really found (it was Antler Passage!).

We retraced steps back through to the breakthrough choke which presented no major difficulty climbing back up through it, and we then cracked open some celebratory fizzy pop in Rift Passage where we met Arthur Millett who was unsuccessfully trying to locate the breakthrough choke. It seems that JC's instructions were misinterpreted and Arthur was not happy! On learning of our discovery, he decided to exit the cave with us.

Clive and I gained the entrance after Martyn and Arthur and on reaching the coolness of the air in the quarry, with darkness not yet complete, I thanked Clive and shook his hand. The walk back to Whitewalls in the gathering dusk and the many cups of tea drunk there ended off a truly marvellous day. Martyn estimated that we'd found two miles of new passages. We had only spent five hours exploring the

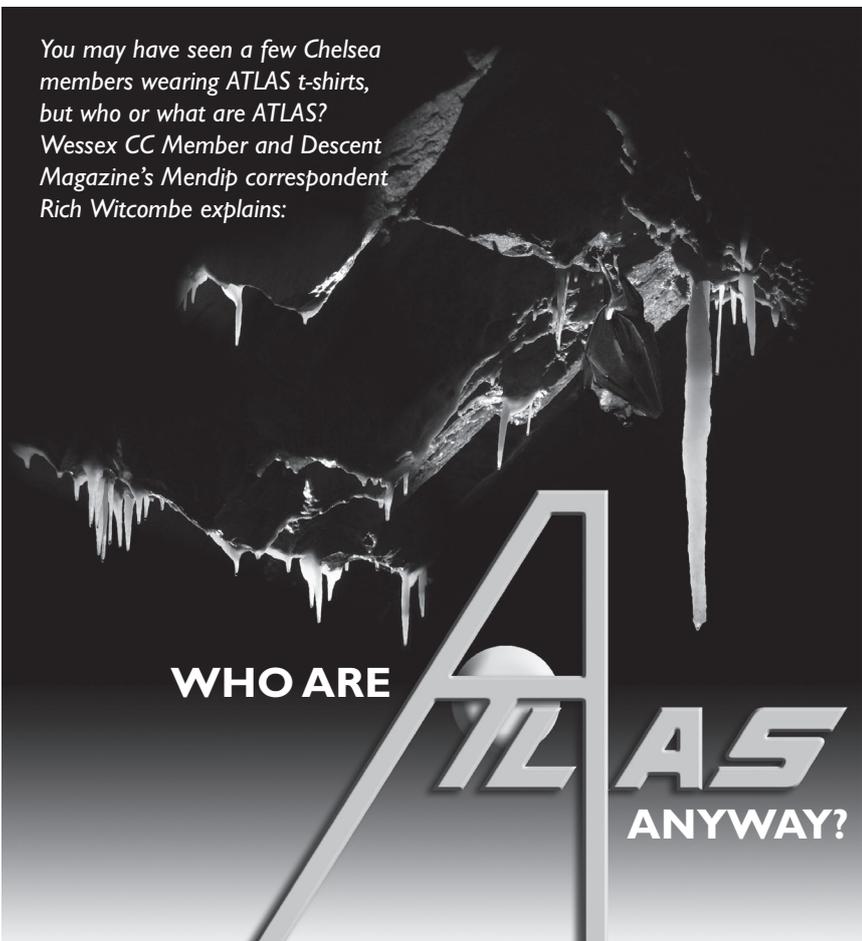
new extension.

What followed over the next three years has been well-documented in CSS newsletters and exploration journals. However, it is fantastic to reflect that the 1984 break through sparked so many trips of such significant exploration, by both divers and digging groups, ever pushing back the boundaries within our marvellous mountain. The period of exploration in the 80s & 90s was a true 'Golden Age' of caving in Wales and much of this had its origins in the open attitudes to Daren's exploration which were mainly instigated by Clive. He insisted that Daren was far bigger than Chelsea and that greater discoveries would come on the back of total openness which would bring in other cavers to push Daren's boundaries. The deal was 'Come and explore and dig where you like. Just tell us where so we can co-ordinate efforts and tell us what you have found so we can keep the survey up to date.' We saw many great cavers and personalities come and join us in a mutually beneficial alliance of exploration that paid real dividends. The incredible thing is that the explorations of newer generations of cavers and the discoveries made within Mynydd Llangatwg still continue unabated and long may they continue.

** Quote from Clive Gardener in the HTV film on Daren Cilau. Clive was trying to portray to the TV people the awesome nature of the place and the dual characteristics of heaven & hell that Daren caving could portray – the entrance crawls were a necessary evil but the big stuff further in revealed the heavenly side of caving. The quote was cut by HTV but in full read 'God! Daren Cilau, that's a terrible place! The worst cave I ever had the misfortune to go into in the first place...but once inside through the difficulties and challenges of the Entrance Series it's given me some of the most exhilarating and spectacular experiences of my life, nothing short of heaven on Earth! I don't think there's any other cave that has been transformed in such a way to become such a special and a favourite place.'*

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

You may have seen a few Chelsea members wearing ATLAS t-shirts, but who or what are ATLAS? Wessex CC Member and Descent Magazine's Mendip correspondent Rich Witcombe explains:



**WHO ARE
ATLAS
ANYWAY?**

A POTTED HISTORY by Rich Witcombe

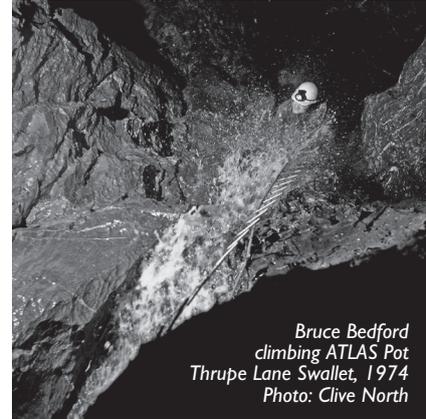
ATLAS is a Mendip cave digging team – an ad hoc, inter-club, mixed age and sometimes multi-racial digging team. Its origins go back to the early 1970s when a group of cavers drawn from several different clubs began a dig at Thrupe Lane Swallet above Croscombe on Eastern Mendip. Some years earlier the late Mike Thompson had coined the acronym – NHASA – for the allcomers team who came together to excavate North Hill Swallet near Priddy, making a link between the NASA astronauts in the news at that time and the “terranaunts” seeking new frontiers beneath Mendip. The North Hill Association for Speleological Advancement had a grandiose ring to it, and the writer, who was part of the group working at Thrupe, thought that a more modest team offering a degree of friendly rivalry to NHASA would be a good idea.

At that time your scribe had fairly left wing views, and his first attempt at a suitable acronym had a certain Labour Party ring to it – ATLEE or the Association of Thrupe Lane Experienced Explorers! His more “centrist” colleagues were none too keen, and so in 1973 he came up with

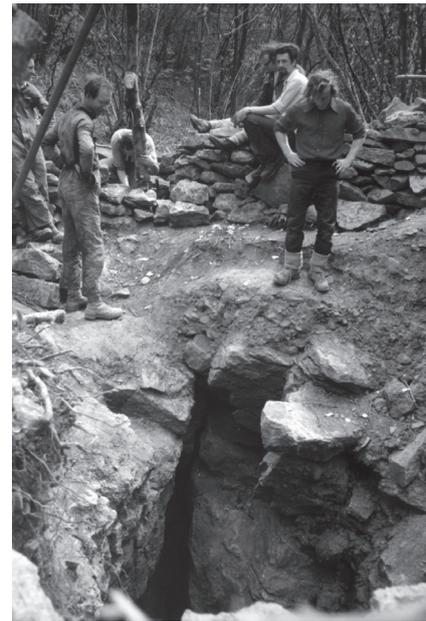
ATLAS – the Association of Thrupe Lane Advanced Speleologists. The name stuck. Around this time, some of the ATLAS team were also working with a group of Wessex and East Somerset Caving Club cavers, including John Cornwell and Tony Audsley, who were digging Charterhouse Warren Farm Swallet under the title of the Beaker team – a reference to the Bronze Age artefacts and bones being uncovered. For a short while the combined diggers became ABC or the ATLAS/Beaker Consortium, and Tony has remained an occasional ATLAS digger since those days.

The original Thrupe Lane diggers came from the Wessex Cave Club, the Axbridge Caving Group and the Westminster Speleological Group, and included Tony Dingle, Simon Meade-King, Clive North, Dave and Anne Everett, Barry and Andrew Webb from South Wales, Ray Cavill and the writer. At Easter 1974 after several years digging in several different shafts a breakthrough was made and the bulk of Thrupe Lane Swallet was quickly explored. With its deep pitches and roomy chambers, a length of over 4000’ and a depth

of over 390’, this cave remains the most impressive ATLAS find to date. The very hospitable Thrupe farmers, Nelson and Gilda Butt, who provided changing accommodation in a shed occupied by their son’s ferret, were commemorated by Butts’ Chamber, and the team itself by the 80’ deep Atlas Pot.



The diggers had entered the first major swallet cave feeding the St. Andrew’s Well resurgence at Wells, and were convinced that nearby sinks would prove just as productive.



The siege of Viaduct Sink in the neighbouring Ham Woods valley from the mid to the late 1970s saw the inclusion of West London Caving Club members, notably Bob Cottle, in the team, and the complex 350’ cave that resulted must surely one day be significantly extended. After nearly four years at Viaduct, and brief forays to Midway and Larkshall Slockers, a return was made to Thrupe Lane Swallet where high-level passages were dug out in pursuit of a route to



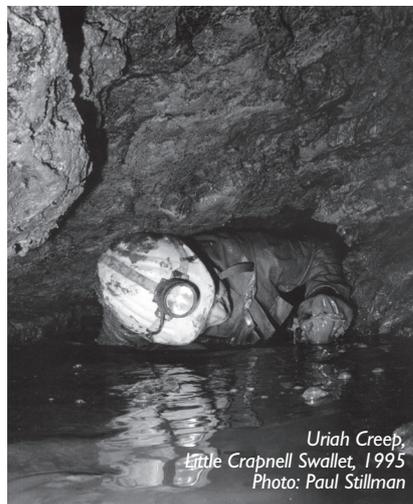
The ATLAS team on the breakthrough at Thrupe Lane Swallet, 1974.
From left to right: Anne Everett, Dave Everett, Simon Meade-King, Ray Cavill,
Rich Witcombe. Photo: Clive North

the top of Atlas Pot. The mid-1980s brought a change of scene and the team joined forces with the Wessex to dig Longwood Valley Sink. ATLAS diggers persisted here until the early 1990s but hundreds of sessions and a lot of explosives produced only a few tens of feet of passage.

In 1991, BEC members, Andy Sparrow and Steve Ellis, started a series of climbs in the upper reaches of Atlas Pot, hoping to reach the roof which was estimated to be about 100' above the Marble Streamway entry point. They eventually reached an area of rift chambers which they christened Wuthering Heights. As ATLAS diggers had passed over this point when exploring Bleak Hall and the Old Wells Road in 1983, Simon Meade-King decided to look around for a possible link. He settled on Chimney Pot, a narrow, often wet, slot upstream of Bleak Hall, and began a largely solo banging campaign. At a depth of 20' a voice connection was established with Wuthering Heights and the link passage was blasted open in July 1992, providing access to the top of the impressive 190' deep shaft and allowing a round trip for the SRT enthusiasts.

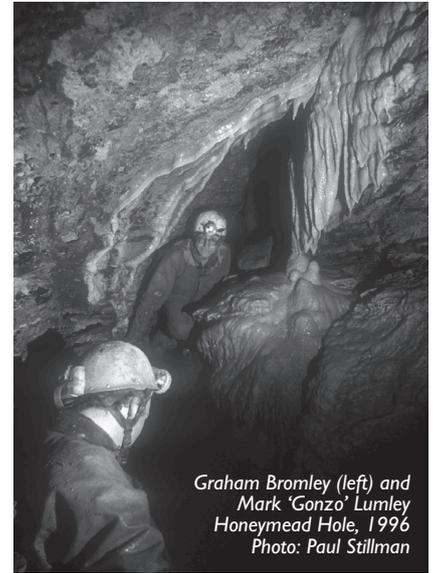
Short term projects with Wessex members, Dave "Tuska" Morrison and Graham Bromley, in Rushy Ground Swallet, Clay Holes and Eighteen Acre Swallet followed, producing only tiny extensions, and then a brief return was made to a dig below Downside Aven in Viaduct Sink. Disappointingly, this led only to a too-tight streamway. The team was in need of a significant breakthrough

and decided to try the new HyMac excavation technique being pioneered by "Tuska". A shallow depression on Little Crapnell Farm just west of Thrupe was chosen and the farmer's son, Dave Speed, proved a willing convert to cave digging. One weekend's HyMac excavation in 1995 and a few months hauling spoil up the concrete pipe entrance shaft produced a fine little stream cave nearly 1000' long and 300' deep. MNRC members including Paul Stillman joined the team at this time.



Uriah Creep,
Little Crapnell Swallet, 1995
Photo: Paul Stillman

Encouraged by this success, the team brought the HyMac back the following year to tackle a depression a hundred yards south of Little Crapnell Swallet. The well-decorated and complex Honeymeade Hole was the result, 1,300' long and 170' deep. New ATLAS diggers included Mark "Gonzo" Lumley of the BEC, Tony Boycott of the UBSS and Rob "Tav" Taviner of the Wessex. The short Parfitt's Cave next to Witherbrook Slocker was opened up following a



Graham Bromley (left) and
Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley
Honeymeade Hole, 1996
Photo: Paul Stillman

field collapse in the winter of 1996 but digging here was abandoned as part of a deal with Fairy Cave Quarry owner, Jeremy Hobbs, to regain access to the quarry caves.

In 1997 the team moved west to a huge HyMac excavation on Charterhouse Warren Farm. Dave Mitchell's Dig had been dug intermittently from the 1960s, but the new 40' deep digger excavated hole was one of the most impressive seen on Mendip. An airspace found at the bottom draughted well but it proved to be no more than a series of voids in stal-cemented buried scree. The three year dig consumed vast quantities of steel and concrete, and the lack of solid rock and the occasional "unprovoked" collapse proved unnerving to the diggers. It is still open but ATLAS has no plans to return. During this period in 1998 three short HyMac excavations in the same field as Honeymeade Hole all drew a blank.

During nerve calming breaks from digging at Charterhouse, the team took over a NHASA dig in 1997 at Frog Pot on Chancellor's Farm near Priddy. The farmhouse was the base for the Somerset Wildlife Trust's Mendip Hills Officer, Kate Lawrence, who had helped with Dave Mitchell's Dig, and she and Tony Littler of the MNRC joined the Frog Pot team. A shaft found by Imperial College cavers in 1966 was pushed to a second shaft and short passage, before serious slumping stopped work in 1998. The summer of 1999 saw digging at a collapse near Sand Pit, christened Beetle Drop after the swarms of black beetles which insisted on falling into it. At a depth of 15' a large diameter,

mud choked phreatic passage was entered, but only twenty feet of progress through glutinous clag was achieved before a more traditional East Mendip swallet dig enticed the team away.



Rob 'Tav' Taviner digging along Inside Out (named after the BBC documentary that filmed our activities), Thrupe Swallet, 2006 Illustration by Gonzo



Rich Witcombe ladders Persistence Pot, Thrupe Swallet, 2003 Photo: Tony Audsley

Dave Speed had suggested sinking a steel shored shaft at Thrupe Swallet, some 300 yards north east of Thrupe Lane Swallet. This active sink, which is on a faultline, had been dug inconclusively on three previous occasions, the earliest in 1936, but ATLAS intended to pursue the small stream until open passage was reached. A technically demanding dig over the next five years eventually produced a sporting little cave some 750' long and over 200' deep. Fit and agile cavers with a bang licence might yet push it further. As interludes from Thrupe Swallet activity, Radford Farm Swallet was briefly probed in 2001 – it was unfortunately too close to the farmhouse living room for chemical persuasion – and the lost unconformity cave, Cloford Quarry Big Cave, was re-located and reopened in 2003. This geologically important 400' cave is formed at the junction between the Carboniferous Limestone and the Jurassic Limestone. Simon "Nik Nak" Richards of the Wessex and Dave King of the MNRC became regular ATLAS diggers at this time.

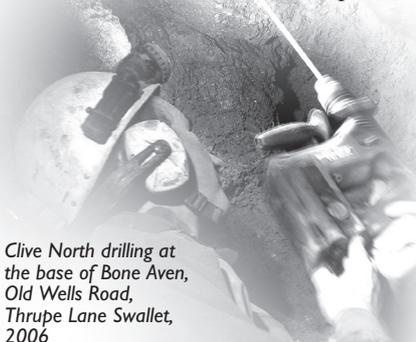


The ATLAS team prior to the first descent of Persistence Pot, Thrupe Swallet, 2003 From left to right: Clive North, Dave Speed, Dave King, Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley, Dave 'Tuska' Morrison, Bob Cottle, Simon 'NikNak' Richards, Rich 'Captain Mainwaring' Witcombe, Rob 'Tav' Taviner, Tony Audsley Photo: Tony Audsley



Tony Littler in Quality Street, Thrupe Swallet, 2003 Photo: Rob 'Tav' Taviner

With the far reaches of Thrupe Swallet becoming a crawl too far for some of the older diggers, a return was made to the higher levels of Thrupe Lane Swallet. Amongst other trial digs, the far end of the Old Wells Road was pushed for another 50', including a rather loose aven, but the hoped for

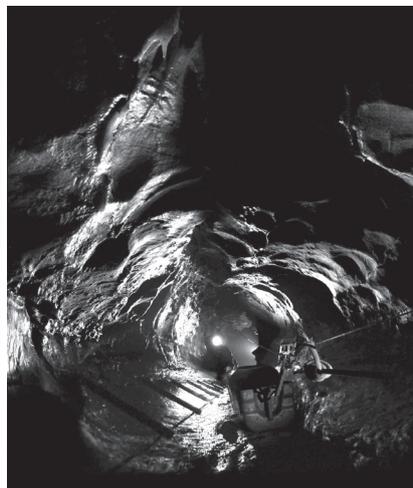


Clive North drilling at the base of Bone Aven, Old Wells Road, Thrupe Lane Swallet, 2006

high-level route to St. Andrew's Well failed to materialise. It was decided to seek pastures new and a project took shape to re-open Fernhill Cave, buried since the 1960s by quarry tip in Fairy Cave Quarry. The first attempt in 2006 was a series of short digs in the boulder ruckle which separates Fairy

Cave from Fernhill, but despite the best efforts of the stone wallers in the team it proved impossible to venture far into the vast jumble of small rocks filling the intervening cavity.

The team, augmented by Mandy and Matt Voysey of the Cerberus SS, then moved across the quarry to tackle the far end of Balch Cave's Pool Passage which seemed to offer a route under the quarry floor. A side passage attracted attention and although a breakthrough was quickly made, it was only a new route into a series found by John Walsh of the BEC in 1999. At least ATLAS had engineered a pleasant new round trip, and when the continuation proved to be too smashed up by quarry blasting to follow, a new dig was begun in 2006 at the bottom of a fine 40' pitch in John Walsh's series. Carpal Tunnel, a



40' Pitch JW Series, Balch Cave, 2007

mud and sand filled phreatic passage, is still being excavated today, and now snakes under the quarry floor for some 60'. Although there have been periodic set-backs caused by flooding and slumping, a possible aven development seen at the furthest point reached in 2008 entices the diggers onwards. Cavers joining the team during the Balch phase included Alan Gray of the Axbridge CG and Geoff Dawson from Northern Ireland via Lancashire.



Digging for Fernhill, 2008

To provide a little variety from this now very routine spoil removal process in Balch Cave, a second front was opened in the quarry in the spring of 2008. The search for Fernhill Cave was resumed, this time from the surface downwards. With financial contributions from Natural England and various caving organisations, the team raised sufficient funds to hire two mechanical excavators for a week. Under the technical control of Dave Speed, 2,500 tons of spoil was shifted and the blocked entrance shaft was uncovered at a depth of 35' feet. Dave Morrison and Jim Young assisted with the installation of a concrete pipe shaft, and digging proper began in mid-April 2008. Much steel, stone and concrete shoring has had to be inserted to safeguard the diggers from the run-ins which have bedevilled the dig, but a year later at a depth of 20' below the pipes, the southern passages of Fernhill Cave have been re-entered and the team, which now includes cave diver Duncan Price, is close to uncovering the route to the main chamber with its fine formations hopefully still intact*.

Over the thirty six years of its existence, the ATLAS team has welcomed well over a hundred cavers to its digs, from under 10s to over 70s. The latest recruit has resumed caving after a break of forty one years! At different times, the team has included

Pakistani, West Indian, Chinese, German and Australian cavers, not to mention contributions from the Welsh, Scots and Irish, including the redoubtable Bristol Irishman or Irish Bristolian, Pat Cronin. As is traditional on Mendip, digging takes place every Wednesday night in all weathers – torrential rain, sleet and snow included – with occasional forays at weekends. The group has been fortunate over the years in attracting a useful cross section of skills – bang men, drystone wallers, timber and steel shoring specialists, surveyors, photographers, artists and now even a tame diver, and prides itself on a high standard of conservation. All workmanship underground is to the highest standard achievable in the circumstances, and although the ubiquitous “plastic” sacks are used for spoil haulage, they are never left permanently underground.



Matt Voysey digging in Carpal Tunnel, Balch Cave, 2008

ATLAS is mercifully free of all bureaucracy, subscriptions and caving politics, but does publish an Annual Report and keeps the caving world abreast of its activities by means of the Thrupe Lite website run by Tony Audsley, and the diggers log – www.atlasdiggerslog.org.uk – maintained by Paul Stillman. At Thrupe Lane Swallet itself, the environs of which the team continues to look after, ATLAS maintains a small hut – the “new” Ferret Shed – for tool storage, changing and rescue purposes. Post-digging social drinking is naturally a requirement for team members, and as the Hunters’ is rather a long way from the present scene of operations, the current hostelry of choice is the Wagon and Horses, near Beacon Hill. If you enjoy good company, good humour and tall tales from around the caving world, look us up one Wednesday. We can’t guarantee a breakthrough but there are worse ways to while away the hours from 7pm to midnight.

* An ATLAS team including Chelsea SS members Antoinette Bennett, Mark ‘Gonzo’ Lumley, Duncan Price, Mandy & Matt Voysey finally broke through into Fernhill’s main chamber on Monday May 11.

A fuller report will be in the next Chelsea SS Newsletter.



Dave King and Clive North on the breakthrough into Curtain Passage, Fernhill, May 11 2009

Major Extension to Charterhouse Cave

The Wessex CC dig at the far reaches of Central Mendip’s Charterhouse Cave has broken through a committing squeeze through a bailed, perched sump. Plans are underway to enlarge the squeeze.

Alison Moody describes the 500m plus of new passage as large, on-going, with un-pushed side passages and avens. The party turned around in open passage with concerns about the sump filling up behind them.

This almost certainly makes Charterhouse the deepest cave on Mendip.

Chelsea SS member Andy Heath may well be kept busy when access arrangements are loosened as he has recently become a leader for the cave and will, once access is allowed, be permitted to take down both Cerberus and CSS members!

COTTAGE BOOKINGS

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

CAVING TERMINOLOGY EXPLAINED

PITCH RIGGING

A practice carried out by certain Asian betting syndicates.

PRISTINE

About to be trashed in the name of progress.

SHERPA

A gullible caver.

SEDIMENTARY

Sherlock Holmes with a bad cold.

SURVEY LEG

Cunningly calibrated trousers.

(See also **FOOT LOOP**).

THRUTCH

Attributed to sharing warm, damp caving gear.

(See also **VADOSE**).

VIRGIN

Uncommon in South Wales but accessible through several entrances with luck and perseverance. (See also **SPOIL**).

WEIGHT BELT

A device used to nullify an over-inflated ego.

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



A Purb

by John Stevens

At the beginning of February I had a long weekend away to celebrate my birthday. The previous week had seen a lot of snow fall and even on Friday, the day we were due to leave we were rung up by our accommodation in Langton Matravers to see if we were still coming and what time we might arrive.

On Sunday I decided to go for a walk of a couple of hours as the rain had eased. I had previously visited this area and had come across a still open mine. On route (about a mile) heading towards Swanage, I looked for other open mines but the only ones I came across had been back filled, leaving only the winch stones in place to give any indication of their existence.

After I had ignored the **No Entry** signs and climbed an 8 foot high wall, I found myself in an enclosed area with a pair of winch stones in the middle. The wall was part of the old open workshops for finishing the stone which surrounded it. One workshop still had stone seats but the tin roof was worse for wear. However the incline with sled groves cut into the ramp stones was still open.

The mine starts as an incline down about 10-15m about 10m back from the winch stones. On the right side of the incline were stone steps. This mine had some debris at the base and split left and right. Last time I went left so this time right would be my first choice. This then split and one route looked like a drive to link it to a second mine, as there were no workings off it for some distance. This then broke into a

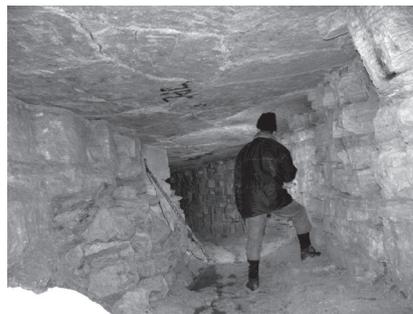
Purbeck Stone Mine



Above: The winch stones in a nearby garden
brambles beyond. To the right is an open workshop.
Left: The incline with sled groove
Below left: The linking passage with a flagged floor
Below right: With deads on the right and solid wall to the left. Grooves cur by sleds or carts are visible in the floor

All photos by John Stevens

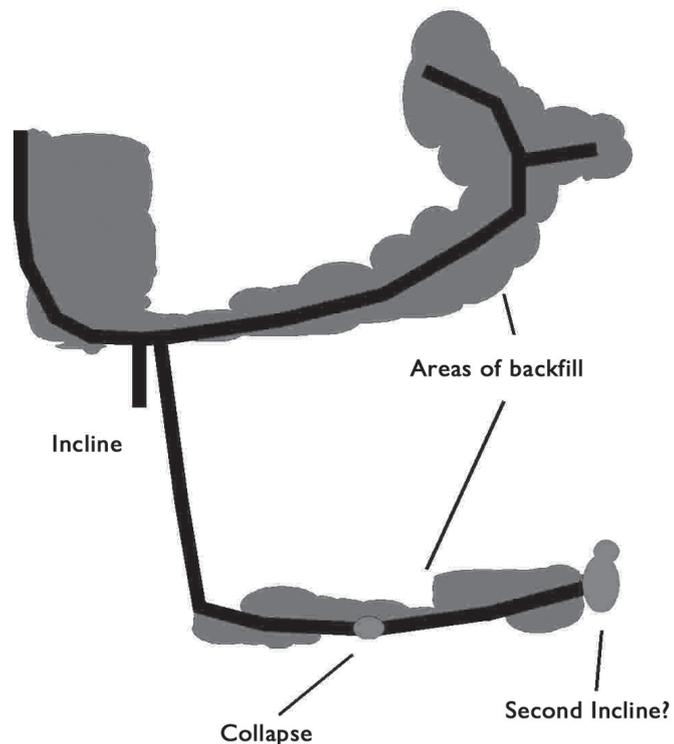
well managed pillar system with most areas back filled but leaving clear routes to the end workings. Only a couple of small areas had collapsed and one of these maybe the base of the second incline. I was not about to crawl over the very muddy mound to check the far side to confirm this, but there may well be quite a bit more passage beyond. This area also had a greater horseshoe bat, the only sign I saw of any bat activity.



A grade 1 plan of the mine

A Purbeck Stone Mine

Not to scale, from memory



I now returned to the other section of mine and had a look there, but stopped at anything that needed crawling. The backfilled areas seem to cover quite an area. The main open route was across dip with the backfilled area up dip from this. The left branch had a route up dip with levels across dip from this, backfilled mostly.

As I was on a time limit, I headed out after $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour. After climbing out of the enclosure, a local house had a set of winch stones in its garden. These were aligned to a heavily overgrown area which may well hide the second incline into the mine.

Pottering About on Mendip

by
John Cooper

CSS Western Section Dinner

The very first dinner was held on Saturday 18th January 1975 at the Old Oak restaurant, Axbridge, Somerset. Those present were Mick & Jan Butterley, Trevor & Wendy Knief, Bob & Mary Drake, Bruce & Jen Bedford, Chris Doe and Collette Lord. After an extremely good three course Turkey dinner, coffee and drinks, silly songs and even sillier discussions ensued. (Original report by Collette Lord in CSS Newsletter Vol 17 No 6 April + March 1975)

The latest dinner was held on Saturday March 21st at the Hunters' Lodge Inn where 21 people (6 from the originals listed above!) enjoyed an excellent meal provided by Jackie Dors. The rendition of The Aylesbury Duck song showed signs of the singers ageing!

Swildon's Hole, Sunday 26th April 2009

A routine trip with BW to Mud Sump. The water level in the sump was exactly as left last Sunday, about an inch of hose pipe sticking out above water. Bailed a couple of dams full out until it was pretty well dry, would have needed a sponge to get much more out. Will check again to see if the pipe the other side is taking the drips away, which will mean it stays open much longer.

Swildon's Hole, Monday 4th May 2009

Alison Moody (WCC) invited me to join her, Andrew Atkinson (UBSS) and Simon Flower (UBSS) on a trip to Watergate. As this trip is one Lee Hawkswell was thinking about for the CSS July Mendip meet it seemed an excellent opportunity to learn the route (and obstacles!).

We were underground by 11.15 am and took the Dry Way, even though we were all wearing full wetsuits in anticipation of what lay ahead. The Twenty had been left laddered by a WCC party on Sunday but even so some other group had put their ladder down as well! The Mud Sump was just as dry as BW and I left it last week.

We arrived at the squeeze down to Lower Fault Chamber and AM and SF took the 2 ladders (10m & 5m) through. Laddering from the scaffold pole across the top of the rift was achieved using a short tape sling. At the bottom an inspection revealed that some bailing was required so SF and I followed on down. The water has to be bailed from Link Pool and passed up the slope into a high level dam where a hose then takes it through the pool and into the stream passage beyond. Half an hour was enough to open Link Pool and we then retraced our way up the ladder and then onwards to Blue Pencil.

Crawled down this, doing the last bit feet first on right hand side to get round bend, then down the chain. A visit to Sump 4 to admire the leeches on the gravel banks and climbing the walls before returning to the climb up into Watergate, about 10m downstream of the chain and on the same side of the passage.

A climb up the wall to head height then head up into a tight rift. AM said "Go in on your left side" and then promptly went in on her right? Everyone else followed on their right as it was much easier to step across and up into the rift that way. However at the end a sharp right turn appeared! Fortunately there was just enough height to squeeze up and round the corner. The passage then opened up to walking size for a few metres before the roof dropped and the first of the ducks, Christening Pool, appeared. Out came the hoods and once fitted it was onto the back and through with mouth, nose and eyes just clear of the muddy water. This duck goes off to the left as you look into it, but obviously once on your back it goes right. Once through the passage kinks back again and a slope leads into a canyon passage negotiable along the top. At one point an awkward climb is needed to attain this top part! Once passed the floor is regained and a muddy crawl follows. The Watergate stream is finally reached where it disappears on the right, and the stream is followed up a nice phreatic tube, Sac Gang. Very soon the water can be seen emerging from a tiny rift at floor level

in the right wall. Once the stream is left behind the passage continues to climb but much more as a canyon than a tube. Finally it levels out at the next wet bit, Double Duck. Through this, again on the back, and it's not long before the next one appears, Spectacle Duck. Here AM spent 10 minutes or so scooping water back with her right arm and swishing it down a drain hole on her left. By now it's not water any more in these ducks, it's slurry! Once AM got bored we went through, again on our backs, and then grovelled through the mud to the next one, Long Duck. Same again, although each time it's a slightly thicker consistency slurry. Finally through into a bit of walking passage and Watergate Sump 1. Here we formed a chain to bail the sump and chucked the water well down the passage to ensure it ran away OK. About 30 minutes I guess before AM deemed sufficient airspace. When I finally entered it I thought she'd gone well over the top in bailing, but as I progressed through the roof dipped lower and lower, so she knew what she was doing! Finally through and I was able to take my hood off only to discover the clip on my Petzl helmet wouldn't snap shut as it was clogged up with grit. No amount of swishing in water would clear it so for the rest of the trip I was careful to keep my head up. (Back at home I found a very small piece of sand/grit wedged in that was stopping it fitting together properly.) Very soon after leaving the sump the drain hose from Link Pool was met. A climb up a very muddy slope on the right just before Watergate Sump 2 was followed and the pipe met and followed to Link Pool and Lower Fault Chamber. Up the ladder we'd left earlier, although the lower 5m was coiled up first as it wasn't used. Once at the top the bottom of the 10m ladder was dragged up the squeeze crawl into Paradise Regained where it could be coiled up. At last we were back to where we'd left our chocolate bars and they tasted real good.

In order to complete our figure of 8 trip we repeated the bit we'd done earlier to reach Blue Pencil and then up to the Troubles. When we'd first arrived at

Blue Pencil the syphon was running well, set going by an earlier party, but now it had stopped completely. It was possible to crawl through all the Troubles face down for a change, it's obviously been drier recently. Continued on to Glistening Gallery where we all slid through the squeeze and finally down through the choke to the Landing and the streamway. A leisurely stroll to Sump 1 and then out the Wet Way. Just over 4 hours.

Swildon's Hole, Sunday 10th May 2009

A routine trip with BW through Mud Sump. The water level in the sump was still as low as ever. Continued as far as Lower Fault Chamber Junction before returning. Met Duncan and Antoinette below the Twenty on our way in, they were just exiting. Met Alison Moody on Priddy Green afterwards who regaled us with descriptions of the latest Charterhouse extensions, only found yesterday.

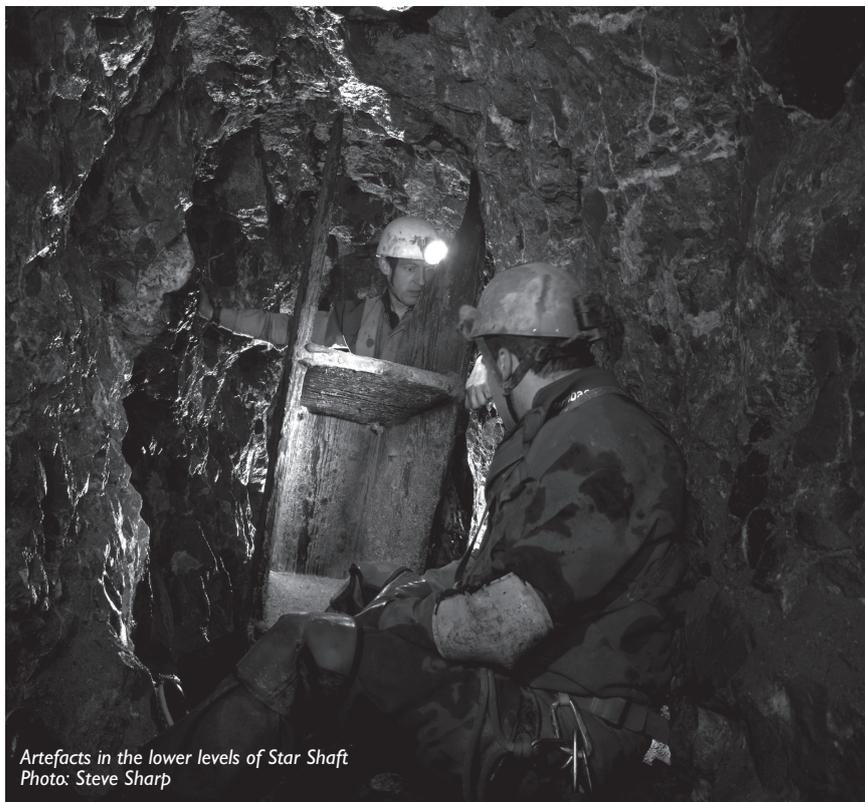
Swildon's Hole, Sunday 17th May 2009

A routine trip with BW through Mud Sump. At the squeezes after leaving Tratman's Temple there was a good outward draught. At the Mud Sump someone has pulled the end off the hosepipe that sticks up out of the mud reducing it to about 2cm protruding. The water level in the sump was still as low as ever, about 2cm. Continued as far as Lower Fault Chamber Junction where BW was persuaded to have a go at the low crawl down to the head of the pitch into Lower Fault Chamber. He managed this, so next time will take a 10m ladder and see if he fits down the pitch as well! At the top of the Greasy Chimney on the way out noticed that there was a strong draught coming up it! That was odd as it was the opposite of what was noted earlier. Back at the squeezes approaching Tratman's Temple confirmed that the draught had in fact reversed. Looked at the Mendip weather station data after the trip and couldn't work out why the draught should have reversed about noon, the pressure had been dropping steadily from 1003mb for about 15 hours but from 9am had been steady at 997mb. Very odd. Met Pete Hiscock and Phil Dunk in the Hunters, they were down for the SMCC 60th Anniversary Dinner.

Star Shaft

1st May 2009
by Steve Sharp

Simon Moth, David Holmes,
Steve Sharp



*Artefacts in the lower levels of Star Shaft
Photo: Steve Sharp*

Star Shaft has always been a nice little SRT trip, especially in the summer months when the water levels drop 20m in the lower levels of this mine.

A recent discovery in Mendip terms and not widely known about, it is rumored that the miners used to terrorize the Shipham locals.

The mine was capped on 4th August 2006

The descent of the initial 25m large main shaft takes you down to a tunnel leading to another peculiar shaped 10m shaft which leads to the start of the remainder of the old mine workings. During the winter months this is the limit of exploration. Wooden platforms surround the final 20m third and final shaft. The old timber spends most of its life submerged in water so is a little unstable in places. The descent at this point is a little tricky as you have to slot yourself between the timbers while being careful not to stand on anything. The ascent is even more complicated. The colorful walls of

the mine are covered in drill and blast marks.

As we approached the floor of the final tunnel we were greeted by waist-deep water.

The final shaft leads to two tunnels containing collections of the miners' tools, not dissimilar to the Mary Celeste, rusting metal tools, spades and an old wheelbarrow all left in place.

At this point the water levels were lower as the floor gained height. We gently manoeuvred around the wheelbarrow. Although intact the timber is as soft as butter. Beyond the wheelbarrow the tunnel ends after about 10m. In the opposite direction an old broken stone wall leads you deeper into the mine, to a point where there were two more wheelbarrows, but unfortunately time has taken its toll and broken timber lies beneath the water.

We are unsure why the miners stopped work. Star shaft is an interesting geology trip with lots of history, look but don't touch and make sure you take a camera.

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Meets List 09/10

This is an outline of the meets for this year.

February 21st – 22nd

South Wales.

Draenen Round Trip.

March 28th – 29th

South Wales.

Swansea Valley

(DYO subject to weather).

April 4th – 5th

South Wales.

Cottage building weekend.

A lot of small jobs to be completed.

April 25th – 26th

Derbyshire (Orpheus).

Nettle Pot/Oxlow/Bagshaw.

May 23rd – 25th

South Wales.

Otter Hole on Saturday 23rd.

June 27th – 28th

South Wales. Decide your own trips.

BBQ and Barrel on Saturday night.

July 25th – 26th

Mendip (Wessex).

Banwell Bone/Stalactite Caves as an option on

Saturday. Eastwater as another option on Saturday.

Swildons on Sunday.

BBQ will be arranged for Saturday night.

August 15th – 17th

Yorkshire (YSS The Old School House).

Lost Johns/Birks Fell

(Days will be confirmed when permits booked).

Please contact me for any other requests.

September 26th – 27th

Hidden Earth (Location to be confirmed).

October 17th – 18th

Mendip (Wessex).

Box Stone Mines on Saturday.

November 7th – 8th

South Wales.

Agen Allwedd obscure passages.

Fireworks on Saturday night.

December 5th – 6th

South Wales.

Curry Extravaganza #5 on the 5th

Decide on your own trips.

January 2010 30th – 31st

South Wales. Dinner and AGM.

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

John Newton, Meets Secretary

Photos of the Month

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



Curtain Passage, Fernhill



Antoinette Bennett at Llygad Lluchwr Photo: Duncan Price



Simon Moth (ACG) in Star Shaft Photo: Steve Sharp



www.chelseaspelaeo.org.uk

A fine view after a Daren Trip