

CHELSEA SPELAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

CSS

Newsletter

Volume 51 No. 10 October 2009

**Selected
Caves of
France**

**Montenegro
2009**

Steve Allen

Chelsea Spelæological Society NEWSLETTER

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Steve Sharp admires 'The Prince', Frog Street, Daren Clau

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Cover Photo:
Dave King (MNRC)
Elephant's Trunk Chamber

Withyhill
Fairy Cave Quarry

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

Membership

August members of Chelsea Spelæological Society, alas the season of autumn is rushing towards us and this delightfully reminds me that money needs to fall out of your bank accounts into mine, errmm Chelsea really. Indeed October is the end of harvest time and memberships are in the headlights of my combine harvester.

So, my address is
Peter Ward, 33 Gertrude Street, Abercynon,
Mountain Ash CF45 4RL
and the current rates are:

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

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

Anyone thinking of becoming a Joint member, No unless you fill in form GIT/1-2, available from Lehman Brothers offices in New York.

In relation to the BCA insurances, you can pay this in December 2009 or along with your membership renewal.

The rates include the non-caving insurance and if you want to be different an extra £11 gets you active caving insurance for 2010.

Any member that has BCA insurance via another club must let me know their BCA insurance number and club as this takes the £5 non-caving insurance off the above rates, or they will have to pay it via Chelsea.

Now, come the end of December 2009 any lapsing member will receive their last newsletter, and loose out on all the excitement going on in the club.

Also, with the membership cards for this year, I'm quite happy to have my beaming face on it or you can send in an appropriate Chelsea caving photo which would be less embarrassing for everyone. JPEG would be best and as many mega pixies for resolution etc.

Colour or monochrome is acceptable but no sepia.

Peter Ward, Treasurer

Editorial

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

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

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.

EQUIPMENT

H-Harnesses -an appraisal

by Joe Duxbury

While I was at the International Congress of Speleology in Texas in July, I bought a "Gonzo Guano Gear" frog chest harness. A similar harness is made by "PMI". They are commonly known as 'H-harnesses', due to their shape.

I stopped using a tape harness, threaded into a 'figure-of-eight', because it cut into my shoulders something chronic. I replaced it with a Caving Supplies 'bra'-type harness. This is good, except that the central tape, that supports the Croll ascender, is not quite long enough, so that when standing, there is only a little tape left threaded through the Croll. It also rides up at the back. So I thought that the two tapes of the H-harness that link to the sit harness, would overcome this. People who regularly use the GGG harness told me they found it good.

While this harness works in all respects as it should, it suffers from the same defect as the Petzl 'Torse', in that when not being used for prussiking, the straps tend to slide off the shoulders. This could possibly be overcome by extending both sides of the connecting strap at the back round to the front, and threading both sides of the Croll strap through it. I will give this a try.

But this change will make the thing more complex. The one type of chest harness I haven't tried is the modified figure-of-eight, such as that made by Aventure Verticale:

This looks as if it should stay in place, but will it, like the simple piece of tape, cut into my shoulders? If any of you use this type of harness, how does it perform?

If you know somebody who would like to join **CSS** then contact Pete Ward now:

speleo@hotmail.co.uk

When in Mendip do as Mendipians do

by Gary Kiely

There we were, the Chelsea representatives drinking tea in the Wessex caving club at 10.00am. It was all very civilised. Organising who was going on what caving trip was like herding cats down Swildons 1 in flood.

I must admit I didn't help either as I changed my mind 3 times in the space of 15 minutes.

One group went to St Cuthbert's swallett, led by Alison Moody.

Another group went to Banwell cave, led by Jacky Ankerman

All the youngsters went to Swildons, Shatter Pot.... So here is what happened at Shatter.

On the trip were Maxine Bateman (SWCC) James (SWCC) Matt Voysey (CSS) Mandy Voysey (CSS) and Gary Kiely (CSS).

Water levels were very low today, yet sufficient for a warm, welcoming Swildon's hug.

Went down the Dry Way, and was surprised as to how lively the pace was. James had the lead, being hunted down by Maxine, followed by me trying to keep my wellies dry, and the other 2 Well! we kept losing them at the back. Tut tut! We had a bit of a ladder natter as there was a group of about 5 going down the 20. They very kindly let us past them just after the ladder. Maxine took the lead and decided to go solo for a while as the rest of us climbed up towards mud sump. How far would she go before she realised she had lost us? Not far actually as her light was so rubbish, and she noticed it only when the rest of us weren't there, a minor issue of battery power. Mandy's light came out in sympathy and went into romantic mode too. What on earth do those girls do with their batteries?

A respectful few moments spent at Tratmans Temple, and we carried on dancing our way along to Mud Sump. The last time I was here I spent an hour and a half bailing.

to get 2 inches of airspace. Today there was 2 inches of water. A clever collector system has been put in place at the other side which renders Mud Sump almost dry. Not yet tested by a Mendip winter. But the results are impressive so far. It did not take long to get to Shatter Pot. I have passed this place many times on the round trip and was really pleased at an opportunity to have a go. The ladder hang was lovely, far enough from the wall to not be a hindrance, yet close enough to be sociable. We gathered at the bottom of the ladder and had some meaningful conversations about chocolate. This was a first for all of us, Shatter Pot that is Not the chocolate conversations. We took the path most trodden upon. Quite a fun bit of flat out stuff with serious undulations. One little tube lead into a low chamber, which had 4 ways off. Aptly named junction chamber. We sent Maxine off to do all the work of investigating one of the side passages on the right, while I sat with my back against the gap that was the way on. After much huffing and puffing, Maxine returned saying it was too small. I was happy enough with that so I headed onwards. The 10-foot overhang was the next obstacle. A beautifully crafted fixed aid (rusty drill bit) was perched at the top of this climb. There are no hand or footholds here. And it took a bit of time to negotiate this. Maxine was on a roll and had a look down Bat Dig. This is another tube at a 35-degree negative slope. Maxine commented about the potential for struggle on the way up on the compressed mud. Indeed she did struggle, especially when I emptied the contents of my wellies down the slope. I just couldn't help myself. Horrible I know, but you will be glad to hear that bad karma being what it is, always comes back to bite you.

Not long after this climb we arrived at something of a chamber, with a dam with multiple hoses emerging from the dam back through

the water and out the other side to allow some funky Mendip engineer'd drainage system. I swear the Romans could have learned a thing or two from Mendip cavers! None of us had neoprene of any sort so we were not keen to have a go at the duck. James, the brave little soldier went half way and returned, but his sales patter was not up to much and we turned the trip here.

By this time another group had caught up with us. They didn't seem too keen on the idea either.

As we were on a jolly, we took our time and stopped again at Junction Chamber on the way out, where Mandy, now dubbed "The Haribo Queen" provided us with refreshments. Matt went to have a further look down the tube that Maxine had looked at on the way in, about 15 mins later with extreme huffing and puffing, he returned with a big cheesy grin, "that's really interesting, you should have a look" The grin should have told me. Head first on a 30 degree negative slope, tube was getting smaller and smaller.

"Are you sure about this?"

"Yep keep going, near the end roll onto your back"

this was easier said than done. I managed it by shuffling back up-tube again and rolling in a wider section. Really uncomfortable with this, downwards head first on my back, not a nice combination. Ok, now the rock is scraping my nose, so I twisted my head a touch to take advantage of the diagonal.

"Matt! are you really sure!!!!!!!"

"Yep you're nearly there"

12 inches later I had clearance. My head was out, a sigh of relief. My head was in a rift. I continued inching out of the hole. It was tighter on my chest than I would have liked. My chest was out now. All looking good. Next thing my helmet hit against the

far side of the rift.

“You have to be kidding me”

I managed to sort this by twisting my body and my neck and arching my back at the same time. Now I was sitting up. Thank God for that. A quick look around did reveal what seemed to be a walking size rift. I had arrived at the base of the rift perpendicular to the rift that was 2 foot wide. My legs were just not going to follow, where I wanted to go. I gave it some thought and still no way.

There is a time when you realise that you have seen all your going to see of a passage. Now I'm accepting that I cant turn around to come out, so it going to be feet first upwards 30 degrees on my back through a tube as slippery.....as a slippery thing with oil on it.

Oh did I mention on my back?

OK no problem.

OH MY GOD trying to get my neck to contort, to get my chest into the hole again. Pushing with both hands over my head, using all my neck muscles. I paused for a moment and I felt a panic creep over me. Thinking to myself. I can't do this! I don't know how to do this!, nobody can help me here! Dammit I'm stuffed!!!! ?@\$% it.

When that panic takes over, you can almost feel yourself get bigger. It's really not healthy. So caver composure was called upon, and in that situation it feels really good when you chill and work out logically what is required for each step. With one hand by my side to pull my crumpled oversuit down, the other one on the rift back wall, my head wedged and neck muscles working overtime I made inch by inch progress. The toughest thing I have ever done in my short caving life. Junction Chamber was a beautiful place to be at that time, my heart rate off the scale and lungs burning. I headed off to get to the ladder out of Shatter Pot. If I were the first up, I would have loads of recovery time.

I believe I managed at the time to mask the state I was in. See what I mean about bad karma! The plan worked and by the time everybody was back up the ladder I was fully recovered.

The way out was less eventful

other than Maxine and Mandy caving on lights equivent to baby glow worms. Swildons streamway is like a cavers' local high street. I met about five people from other clubs that I knew, who were not on out trip. All going to different places.

Even though we had not gone far in the general scheme of things, by the time I was out, I knew I had done a few hours caving. Back to WCC for tea and showers.

Later on in the evening we had a cracking BBQ with loads of goodies. However it was a dirty trick that was played on me. Somebody kept me nattering and I missed out on Jackie's Famous Banoffee Pie.

I think I speak for the masses when I say a HUGE thank you to Jackie and Lee and all their helpers, for laying on such an amazing spread of bbq compliments. It has also been noted that Chelsea members are improving their cooking skills, there was a very low sausage fatality rate this year.



CAVE ACCESS

Dan Yr Ogof

The club has three cave leaders:

Alan Brady, Stuart France and Paul Tarrant

Fairy Cave Quarry Caves

Trips into these caves can arranged through Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley and Mandy Voysey

Loxton Cavern

Mandy Voysey is a leader for this cave

OFD

CSS leaders for OFD I include Adrian Fawcett, Duncan Price and Paul Tarrant

Carnow Adit

CSS keyholders include Adrian Fawcett and Charles Bailey

Ogof Craig A Ffynnon

Access to this system is now managed by the Llangattwg Cave Management Committee

Otter Hole

CSS leaders include Adrian Fawcett

Selected Caves of France

by Andy Heath

In parts one and two of this whirlwind spelaeological tour of France, we were in the Franche-Comte. This month, we've gone 120km due south.



Part Three: Haute Savoie

I've only been to this part of France on one occasion to go caving and only managed to visit one cave, but on the strength of that one trip I can thoroughly recommend it as a fine spot for a caving holiday. The above-ground scenery's not bad either!

Grotte de la Diau

The Diau system comprises a total of around 33km of passage beneath the Parmelan plateau to the east of Annecy. With no less than 12 entrances, a feast of through trips is possible; the best of which I had been told is the Tanne des Trois Betas to the Grotte de la Diau; the goal of our visit in June 2009.

Any description of the Diau ought to include a warning about flooding. It is apparently most definitely not the place to be if rain is likely to fall, or especially if there is likely to be snow melt. It is not unknown for cavers to be trapped inside the system for several days.

In preparation for our through trip, one group of us went up onto the plateau to find the Tanne des Trois Betas entrance and to descend a pitch or two to get a feel for the place. Another group went to the Diau to check out the streamway and to try to find the route through to the bottom of the last pitch. This proved to be a most worthwhile exercise. I was in the Trois Betas party. Although relatively easy to find, knowing where the entrance is certainly saved us time when it came to the through trip. Also, having an idea of the nature of the rigging meant we were able to take with us a fair selection of kit. I also learnt a very valuable lesson; the quoted pitch lengths were a bit on the short side! A warning about the nature of the rigging might be appreciated by would-be visitors; the Trois Betas to the Diau is done as a pull-through trip, with no less than 24

pitches, the longest being around 55m. On arriving at the entrance, things looked hopeful; the belay comprised a double bolt linked with a chain and ring; ideal. Not so good though on investigating the head of the second pitch. Still two reasonable hangers, but this time only linked with a couple of tatty old slings. Hmm, perhaps we'd better take some disposable tat of our own! On getting halfway down the second pitch my rope ran out. A quick bit of rope joining and knot passing and I found myself at the top of the third pitch with better belays again. As suspected, my rope never reached the bottom of the third pitch, so about turn, 8m short of the floor. A valuable lesson was learned.

The Diau recce also proved to be worthwhile. On arriving at the entrance, the party were advised by a French instructor who was taking kids into the cave that they were underdressed in furry suits / oversuits; wetsuits being de rigueur for the main streamway. Back to the chalet they went to obtain more suitable attire. Once in the cave, they were grateful for the advice. The team managed to locate the bottom of the last pitch coming in from the Trois Betas; so mission accomplished, they left the cave, having familiarised themselves with a few junctions.

Two days later, a 5.15a.m.start proved to be a false alarm. Just as we were about to leave the chalet, it started to rain; it wasn't supposed to do this! We took the decision not to risk it; we didn't really know the hydrology of the place and we'd heard enough bad stories to decide discretion was the better part of valour. As it was, the rain never came to much and probably wouldn't have had a serious effect.

Next day, more frustration. Although slowly improving, more showers were forecast. However, again the rainfall turned out to be insignificant

Thursday arrived. The forecast was favourable and the sky looked good. Go for it!

After another early rise, we were up at the Chalet d'Angletaz, the starting point for the hour and a quarter trek in.

The team comprised Andy Ruming, Andy Heath, Matt Voysey, Mandy Voysey, Simon Mullins, Becky Mullins and Dave King.

The early start meant that thankfully the walk up wasn't too unpleasant for those of us who'd opted to walk in our wetsuits. Arriving at the entrance (a small slot in an inconspicuous depression), I had the honour of taking the lead. With seven in our party (a few too many for an especially speedy trip), we'd decided that the most practical and safe method of progression was for me to do a standard

rig and leave it to Andy R and Simon to follow on at the end and convert to a pull-through. We took with us enough rope of assorted lengths to allow me to keep four or five pitches ahead with the tail-end ropes continually being passed forward. Generally speaking, the system worked extremely well.

I'm not sure how far I'd got ahead before the entrance rope was pulled down, but obviously once done so, we were well and truly committed; it was the Diau or bust!

The 88m entrance shaft is rigged as 3 pitches of 22, 32 and 34m. Loose rock for the first stage demands extra caution; indeed we'd already realised that on the recce trip a few days earlier when a rock whizzed down the shaft, seemingly undisturbed by any of us! The fine shaft leads to a short bit of meandering canyon to the 4th pitch (6m), soon followed by further pitches of 20, 11 and 16m. A further short meander leads to a superb 63m fluted shaft, rigged in sections of 10 and 53m. A couple of rub points are thankfully protected with bits of tough plastic sheet fixed to the rock. At this point, the first water of the trip is encountered; indeed the fine spray watering the lower part of the pitch was most welcome!

Below this pitch, the nature of the cave changes. A large tunnel is followed to the head of a cascade. This is protected with an in-situ traverse line, which appears to be reasonably sound. The stream disappears down a hole; the route continues on to a large, muddy fossil gallery. We trusted ourselves on a short in-situ abseil, crossed the gallery to the 'Clay Wall', equipped with an electron ladder that looks like it's seen better days. A manky rope hung alongside, Figuring that two bits of tat might just about be ok, I very gingerly climbed the ladder whilst self-lining on the rope. At the top, I put a better bit of rope on for the rest of the team.

The next section is all a bit vague in my memory; I do recall a traverse over a deep pit, equipped with a line abraded through to the core, plus a couple of short pitches that don't seem to be in the book. With hindsight, I'm wondering if I somehow lost the main route. Anyway, we did eventually end up back on route, finding ourselves in the large Salle des Rhomboedres. This big bouldery chamber marks the confluence of two other entrances, the Tanne du Tordu and the Tanne du Belle Espoir.

At this point, the party re-grouped for a bit of rope sorting for the next section. The way on is up a muddy slope marked by a big arrow pointing down a hole. A small meander is followed by a short, scruffy pitch of 6m and a further one of 20m. Below leads to the fine 39m Puits des Echo.

Once below this pitch, the caving just gets better and better. The Affluent des Grenoblois is initially followed at high level until a 26m pitch drops the explorer down into the streamway. Not a vast amount of water at the time of our visit, but enough to make it fun. A superb meander in pale limestone is followed for some considerable distance. Pitches of 5, 5, 2, 7, 5, 12, 6, 30, 12 and 11m add to the enjoyment. A fantastic bit of cave. The last pitch drops into the very draughty and slippery Moonmilk Gallery and the main Diau 'Collecteur'.

Once we'd all regrouped and sorted ropes, off we headed. This was familiar territory for the recce party from earlier in the week, so we were able to make good progress. Stopping briefly at the Salle du Chaos for a bit of nourishment, we then continued on down the Grand Gallery. A splendid series of pools, cascades, climbs and traverses in a big river passage are to me what continental caving is all about. This section is certainly on a par with the Verneau main drain in the Doubs. Many of the obstacles are equipped with steel wires for assistance. It's a sobering sight looking up into the roof, where other steel wires are in place; presumably these are for assistance for when the water is 20' deeper!

Continuing on down the river, a large sump pool is reached. A climb up to the right gains a fossil meander. The huge draught hints at this being the way on! The river is eventually regained; more fixed aids in place. Some of these fixed aids seemed to us to be totally over the top, although apparently the cave is often visited by novices who might appreciate their assistance. A rift liberally equipped with stemples was certainly unnecessary, and a one-legged ladder seemed more of a hindrance than a help. That aside, it's a fantastic bit of cave; it's certainly got to be up there amongst my favourites. Having by now left the river behind, a couple of fixed ladders are negotiated, and before long we were able to enjoy the last few minutes of daylight, having just enjoyed around 14 hours of top-class caving

References:

A Travers le Karst. F Darne & P Tordjman. Abymes editeur. 2002

Next stage, that old favourite of British cavers
the
Vercors

Steve Allen

by Mark Lumley

You may be aware of the death of Steve Allen, a former Chelsea SS, Cardiff University (UC4) and Rock Steady Crew member.

Steve died in a paragliding accident in Mid Wales in early August.

If anyone reading this knew Steve well perhaps you could send me an obituary?

I only really knew Steve from the mid 80's, as a fellow Rock Steady Crew member and a digger with a common interest in pushing West from the known parts of Daren.

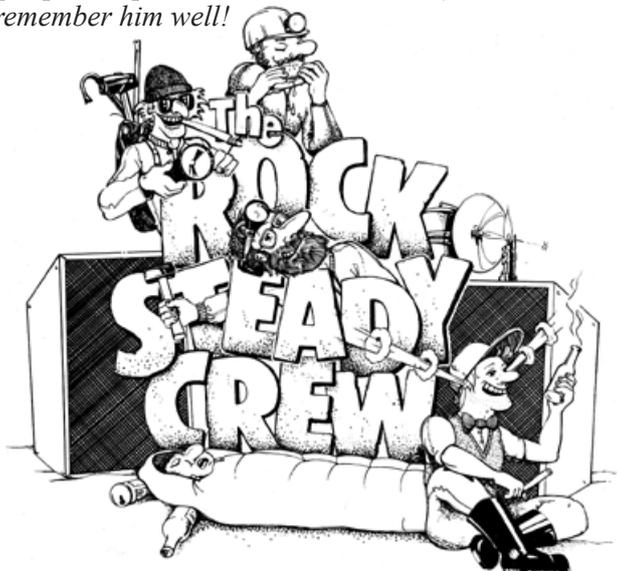
Steve was a colourful and enthusiastic character and I particularly remember (*like the 60's, if you can remember the early Rock Steady Crew days you weren't really there!*) the long day trip the two of us made to Western Union, where we dug along the base of the North wall, convinced that there should be something going on. After several hours we broke into the first 80 metres of Acupuncture (yes, we're to blame for all that misery!) before heading out to a glorious, sunny, Chelsea barbecue where we naively became hapless victims to a drenching in Paul Tarrant's vindictive game of 'Lancaster Bombers'.

On another occasion Andy Cave and I had been digging Spaderunner while based at the Restaurant at the End of the Universe alone for a week when Steve arrived, triumphant after a long solo trip, to present us with a luminous frisbee and a leaking BDH brimming with soggy bog roll and wet, muddy rice!

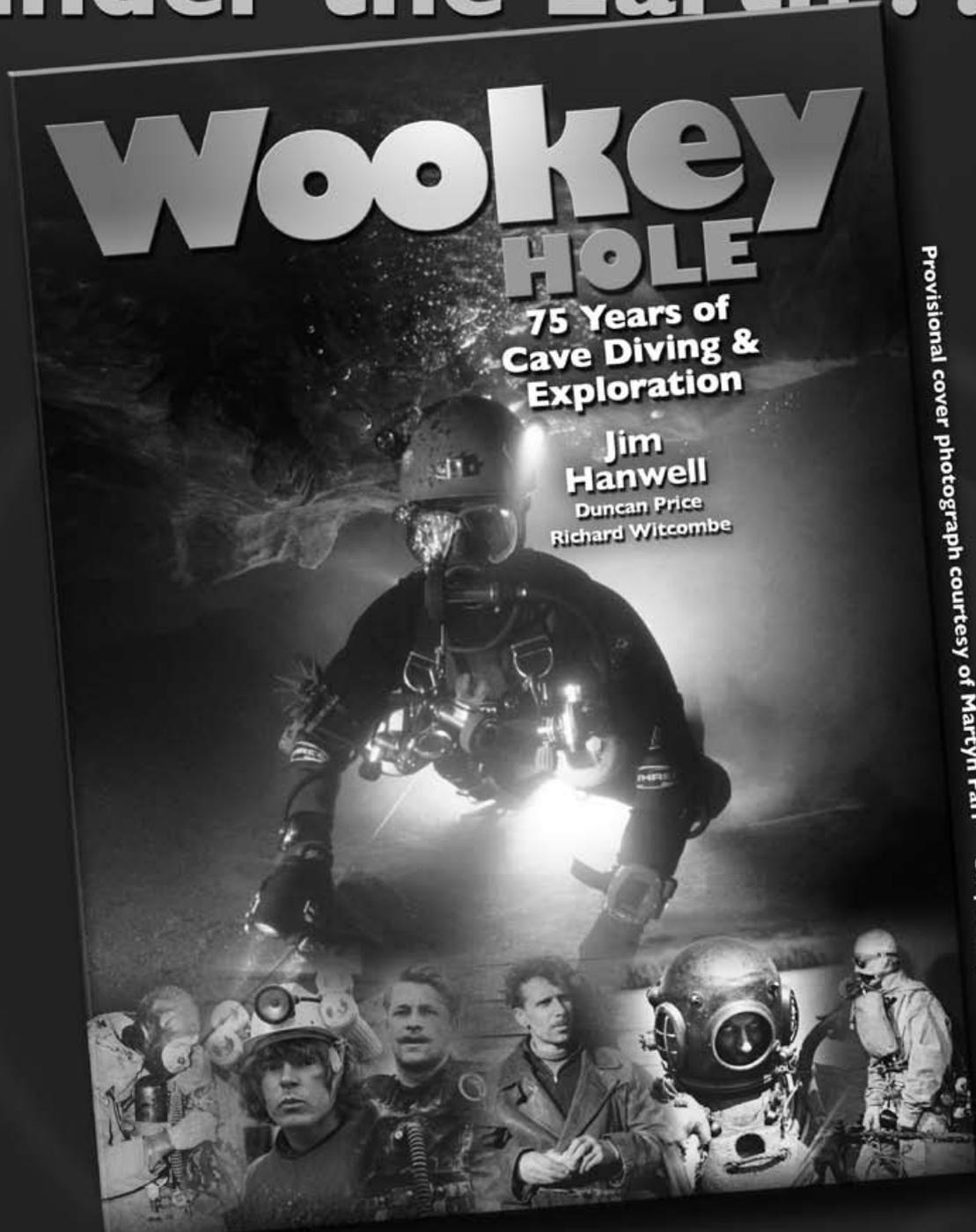
Thanks Steve - we'll miss you!

John Cooper comments:

Steve Allen joined CSS mid 1992 (reported as a new member in the July newsletter) whilst living in Cardiff. He was proposed for Full membership mid 1993 (see July 1993 newsletter) and accepted. He was mainly interested in the bigger cave systems under Llangattock and Pwll Ddu and was one of the early campers in Ogofy Darren Cilau. His membership lapsed September 2000. Rock Steady Crew will remember him well!



The Waters under the Earth . . .



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Montene

by Gary Kiely

Trying to keep a two-week expedition description to within two pages will probably be harder than the trip itself. This was a multi club expedition organised by Joe Duxbury. So it's all his fault! I was just the cook. Honest! Our mission on this Expo was to push the known limits of PT4 last explored in 2005.

On this trip was Paul Taylor, Andy Clark, (FODCC), Gareth Jones, Chris Backhouse (GSS) Chris Binding, Carmen Smith (WCC) Joe Duxbury, Gary Kiely (CSS) One poor overloaded minibus, and 1.6km of rope!

On the way out there, PT, AC, GJ, JD, and GK took turns in driving the mini bus. Carmen and Chris x 2 knew of my reputation for driving white vans, so they flew out. The drive took 3.5 days, which included 7 frontiers, shut motorways, a burst water pipe on the van that required re filling at EVERY petrol station, and the worst rain seen in Montenegro in 50 years!

Camp was set up in the only flat patch of grass between deserted villages 600m above Risan. The communal tent was first up, and I set up kitchen while personal tents were pitched and moved again due to the rising water in the flooded field. Direct water supply to the kitchen was by means of placing a 2-litre saucepan outside for 7.5 seconds. Things were looking grim. Dark clouds would wander across the field and swallow up people. But we are British and laugh in the face of rain! 2nd day we drove the speleobus to the highest possible road, off loaded exploration team 1 armed with 3 x GPS units and some coordinates. One hour later through almost jungle terrain with sacks and sacks of rope and personal kit, we got to a point where we had to leave the path. The path was created for mountain goats, by mountain goats, and from the dense vegetation, they weren't very hungry goats either. Another 2 hours were spent wandering on cliff top ledges, getting stuck in trees, wondering what on earth possessed me to do this and how the hell do GPS units get it so wrong? Chris Binding finally found the entrance to PT4. It was a bit of an anti climax...

“ Is that it? ” kind of moment.

The entrance looked nothing more than the entrance to Pen Eyre. Inside was a different matter.

A friendly looking sliding slope led me to the top of a 50M pitch! Welcome to Montenegro!

Considering my SRT experience was equal one 10th of very little, this was daunting. Ok I will admit it now. I thought 'I am so out of my depth here'. My light was on high power and I couldn't see the opposite wall of this shaft. Low power on my Bisun felt much more

comfortable. Thankfully this pitch, P1 Bitch Pitch 50m was the longest, split by a welcomed rebelay at 20m from the deck. About 30m to the farthest wall of the pitch was the 5M link to the head of P2 Fridgit, the place with the coldest wind chill factor that I have ever experienced. This wind had pieces of cardboard standing upright. This was a 2-part pitch, 12m to a slope in a rift and then another 10m to the deck.

A high level squeeze to an L shaped chamber lead to P3 nutcracker. 20m. This was quite tight, It had the effect of grabbing your oversuit as you forced yourself down creating the old weggie effect. So much so that on the 1st few days, we lost some of the team here, nearly a whole day was spent at enlarging this by about 3mm.

A stop on the end of cowstail was the way forward here. I found a bypass to this, but it was decided that *ye ha!* Free climbing did not qualify as a bypass! The bottom of this pitch led us into an Aven. Followed by a short rift covered in moo milk.

A 20m diameter chamber, whose roof was beyond the spot of anybody's light, led into the continuation of the moon milk rift. This was now caving in a Mendip style. A narrow meandering rift, with plenty of ledges and multiple levels. A wide dogleg at the top of this rifty meander led to a simple P4 8m. This pitch had very little to characterise it. This led into a wider, lower (obviously) part of the rift with a wannabe stream. Again going with the flow lead into another meandering rift to the head of P5. This was deceptive, it looked nice at the start, lovely creamy clean-washed walls for 6m and then you're standing on ledges but the rope continues through the "too tight slot". The only way was to walk backwards until the rift entered the vastness, lay back and walk down the outside of nothingness. Then let go and feed oneself into the rift again, all the time watching the rope for rub points, steering it through the twists and turns.

The next 2 pitches, P7 + P8 just did not qualify - they were wannabe pitches but in some ways they were more awkward than real pitches. Next was SOB story P9 25m, the furthest extent of previous exploration, not quite as deep as had been estimated by the 2005 team. The base of this pitch was about 20m in diameter. A short, silly, awkward, pitch of about 6m lead to my 2nd least favourite pitch. The top was covered in loose shattered shale at a 45 degree. A small alcove with zero footholds was the best we had as a take off point. Knees wedged in, back braced against the shaft, while I battled to get my stop on the rope that was so heavy that it took considerable effort to load. This was the point where people remarked on my colourful choice vocabulary.

Downwards into the unknown yet again. The drop

gro 2009

zone of this pitch was on a large bolder so care was essential when evacuating the potential shower of shale. There were two ways on from here and to date only one of which has been explored. A scramble beneath boulders led to a short pitch P10 8m, The A team who were in the day before, rigging all the pitches decided to have a giggle with this one. The rope was just long enough if you landed on the exact 12" square flat rock, which for some reason I kept missing. (Possibly because I'm rubbish!) I would have to go for a swing to get back to the spot.

Onwards and around the corner about 20m or so and looking back I could see the lights of people hanging around on the last 3 pitches. It was quite a spectacular sight. P11 9m was just a pain, an awkward take off to a drop that seemed to curl in beneath the take off point and landed on a muddy slope. The cave was getting smaller now. P12 6m, another rifty descent which opened out to a mud bank and the sound of a thundering stream! It was a very slippery climb down to the stream. It was all very exciting!

There seemed to be many dry routes off the stream way but as always we followed the draught 90m or so, which led to a nice climb down into a chamber with a mud covered bolder choke. There were the odd holes between boulders, where somebody could put a rope down, but this far into the cave (3.5 hours in a hurry) we were trying to be conservative with rope. I went on a bypass mission and found that an exposed climb had some gravity defying grippy rock, which made it all possible.

A bit of clambering around brought us to a waterfall P13 7m. I had a good go at the free climb but the force of the water was too much. From here on was a rift that got a bit awkward, near the end a bit of deep water provided the first "critical level" wetting that was in the cave. Another waterfall was stumbled upon. It was not a bad climb; still it got rigged for safety. P14 10m

From the bottom of this waterfall there was a 10m square platform. to a large drop. I changed my battery here because I could see very little now. With a fresh battery I could still see very little but it was much brighter. The spray was quite impressive. Having time to kill while the previous pitch was rigged, I tied our last 30m rope to my helmet which I put on spot and lowered gently into the abyss. Twirling the rope slightly, to scan around to find a reference wall it was there but very distant. This was the extent of my exploration of this cave. The hanging around while this last great pitch was rigged was too much for me, the cold had been eating away at me. This last great pitch P15 30m apparently led to the top of a steep slope of boulders. I know that while watching Chris's fading light snaking through boulders it seemed like a very lonely

place. I was merely existing, to be the support for Chris.

When Chris Binding arrived, I was so pleased, I explained my situation and bolted out of the cave, just to get my core temp up enough to stop the uncontrollable shivering.

A few pitches later with no hold ups and I was back on form again, it's a very solo business this kind of SRT, a necessity to keep everyone moving fluidly. At a good pace I was able to get to the surface in 5 hours from the furthest point of my personal exploration.

It took 2.5 hard days, of stupid wind chill factors; snagged tackle sacks, to de rig the cave. On the last day of de rigging the hike back to civilian life via the goat paths with 3 full tackle sacks each, more or less broke us. The trip back home each day had been ok, but as the working days got longer, it was becoming more of a chore.

The caving itself was quite serious and methodical. In the evenings, the mood was light and cheerful. It's amazing what a few litres of local beer can do. I had taken on the roll of head chef at camp. This was a first for me, catering for 8 people each day, in a camping style. Dealing with no refrigeration and ants, was a new challenge for me. Thank God for the power of marinades. Every four days or so, somebody (generally caved out) would take the mini bus to Risan for supplies. The fruit and Veg stall owner and I got on really well. I couldn't understand a word she said and she couldn't understand a word I said. That probably explains it.

This was my first expedition. It was so much more than mere caving. I still find myself musing over the simple, day-to-day experiences that added so much colour to my time there. After two weeks, living with such different, amazing characters in a big brother style proximity, I was amazed that there were no clashes or fall outs. I have already signed up for Montenegro 2010. Sunshine holidays are just never going to cut it now.

I would like to thank Joe Duxbury so much for his hard work in organising the whole expedition. He thought of everything, guided us all through multiple visa and passport controls, jumped out of the bus and argued with a Croatian official for not stamping one passport, while surrounded by armed border control police. But even Joe could not predict that I would get seriously reprimanded for driving into Croatia with my top off. Bet there would be no problems if it was a woman driving!

All the descriptions, depths, distances of pitches are of my own estimation/ ramblings. The work on the survey data carried on long after the expedition finished. If you are at Hidden earth this year keep an eye out for Montenegro 2009, the official story!

Pottering About on Mendip

by
John Cooper

CSS ON MENDIP

Friday 24th July 2009.

Gary Kiely and Steve Sharp had a short evening trip into Eastwater.

Saturday 25th July 2009.

Jacky Ankerman lead Antoinette Bennett, John Cooper, Andy Farrant, Jason McCorriston and Duncan Price on trips into Banwell Bone Cavern and Banwell Stalactite Cavern. Ali Moody (WCC) lead Lee Hawkswell, John Newton, Stephen Newton, Mike Read and Steve Sharpe into St Cuthbert's Swallet. Gary Kiely et al (?) did a Shatter Pot trip into Swildons Hole. An excellent BBQ organised by Jacky Ankerman was enjoyed by all on Saturday evening.

Sunday 26th July 2009.

Swildons Hole. John Cooper, Gary Kiely, Mike Read, Mandy and Matt Voysey did the Short Round trip. The Newtons (John and Stephen) joined the Williams (Jock, Marguerite, Helen and David) on a trip to Sump 1. Gary Jones, Lucy Northover and her brother Isaac, and a friend of the Northover family from Denmark, Mette Bossen-Linnet (Mette's first time underground and she stormed it), visited Sump 2. A stray Wessex member (Stuart ?) also tagged along as well. Jason McCorriston and Steve Sharp did a photographic trip to Sump 2 and the Black Hole (joined by GK at The Landing). Lee Hawkswell did a trip to Tratman's Temple. Jacky Ankermann lead a trip over to Fairy Quarry (not sure who or what!).

Charterhouse Cave

Saturday 27th June 2009.

Another photographic trip with Simon Flower, Pete Hann and Alison Moody. Repeated a couple of photographs taken previously where Pete wasn't happy with the result before continuing to Gravel Crawl. Photographs taken from here to the current end. Investigated how to get into a possible high level continuation but rope and protection required. Got to consolidate current finds before looking for more! In parallel Andrew Atkinson and Pete Moody continued the Grade 5 survey as far as Diesel Duck. 6 hours.

Saturday 4th July 2009.

Another photographic trip with Simon Flower, Pete Hann and Alison Moody. Photography in Rip Passage, the only side passage investigated to date. In parallel

Andrew Atkinson and Pete Moody continued the Grade 5 survey from Diesel Duck, wet again today, to Gravel Crawl before a DistoX malfunction stopped them reaching the end. At least they achieved the -200m depth on the survey. 5½ hours.

Saturday 11th July 2009.

With DistoX still out of order, Simon absent and Pete M damaged just four set off to check out a couple of side passages. About 100m found with an oxbow and a link down into Rip Passage from the lower fossil passage. Checked that Diesel Duck was still open and took some buckets to the other side to be used to bail it in the event of getting trapped the far side. 5½ hours again.

Saturday 18th July 2009.

Joined Pete Hann and the Moodies investigating more side passages in the Rip Passages area. Boulders lifted out of Boulder Pot but it simply went back underneath. However a squeeze up above it led to more ongoing pretty passage. Left until clean boots and overalls could be taken in. Then went and checked the level of Diesel Duck. Had a small stream flowing into it with just over an inch of airspace left! Coming back checked another side passage which ended after a short distance looking down past boulders into a larger passage with a disturbed mud floor, believed to be the southern end of Rip Passage. Removing the final boulder, a bit large, would produce yet another round trip. Just over 5½ hours again.

Saturday 29th August 2009.

A gap of several weeks owing to Portal Pool being sumped. Joined Pete Hann and the Moodies to check it out and if it was still closed continue an attempt at a bypass. Portal Pool had dropped quite a bit although was still just sumped. Pumped it out until there was about 5 inches of airspace (couldn't pump any more as dam full) then went though, helmet off and head tipped to side to keep nose and mouth above water, just. On to check level of Diesel Duck, about 10 inches of airspace. Back to the walking sized inlet on left before DD. A few metres along this and it stopped and a climb on the left led up to a very tight little passage which AM spent some time digging out until she got into a continuation that was getting even smaller. Back until just before the streamway where a small inlet on the right (going in) was checked. AM and PM went a few metres before it appeared to split and became a dig. Survey needed before any more work done. Back to the streamway where PM, followed by AM went downstream until it got too small; stream lost before end reached. Back to Portal Pool, I thought it had filled a bit but the rest didn't. At least the dam had drained away completely. 5 hours.

Saturday 5th September 2009.

Same team as last weekend. Another pumping session on Portal Pool meant it was possible to leave helmet on this time (just). First task was to remove the boulder left from 18th July. PM and PH moved it sufficiently to get AM over and below it. She dug out underneath it and then it was dropped to the floor below. Round trip now available for surveying. Diesel Duck had only a couple of inches airspace so left it alone, probably the heavy rain midweek. More photography on way out in preparation for Hidden Earth lecture. One side inlet checked to avenge smelling of Diesel and also black walls. Too tight at top. 6 hours.

Saturday 12th September 2009.

Whilst Andrew Atkinson and Pete Moody continued the survey to the end I joined Andy Farrant, Simon Flower, Pete Hann and Alison Moody on a fact finding trip to the end. Repeated a couple of photographs in and beyond Diesel Duck where PH hadn't been happy with the result before continuing to the end. AM made lots of notes for her talk at Hidden Earth whilst AF made notes on the geology etc. 6¾ hours.

Swildon's Hole

Sunday 16th August 2009

John Cooper and Barry Weaver resumed their ambles in this cave. In the Dry Way and out the Wet visiting Vicarage Pot on the way.

Sunday 23rd August 2009

John Cooper and Barry Weaver continued their ambles in this cave. In the Dry Way and out the Wet visiting the Mud Sump, still dry, on the way. Very quiet, didn't meet anyone at all.

Sunday 30th August 2009

John Cooper and Barry Weaver continued their ambles in this cave. In the Long Dry Way taking a look at lots of side bits not normally seen, for example the New Grottoes. Finally reached Sump1 then out the Dry Way.

Sunday 6th September 2009

John Cooper and Barry Weaver had a wander round the Oxbows.

Sunday 13th September 2009

John Cooper and Barry Weaver collected a length of pipe from the Lower Oxbow and delivered it to Upper Pitts.

Ogof Cnwc

Monday 10th August 2009.

John Cooper, David and John Stevens spent 8 hours 20 minutes surveying in Busman's. Started about halfway along, just before the crawl, where the previous surveying party had stopped. Finished with link into the end chamber in Antler Passage. Two stations from the end of the original survey were located and tied into. About 350m of centreline, which included side passages. DistoX used with Pocket Topo for drawing up. Really need to complete the link from the entrance to Price's Prophecy to complete a massive loop! There's a section of big passage still to be found which the crawl bypass goes round and probably a link out to the cliff in that section as well.

Recent work in Fairy Cave Quarry

by Mark Lumley

In Fernhill, two digs are underway. The first 'Mainwaring's Meander' is a calcited tube heading East, away from the Main Chamber. The second is a dig down a draughting rift towards the long lost Ducks Pot.

In Balch Cave work continues through sand fill up 'Geoff's Rift'.

In Withyhill, CSS members Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley, Mandy and Matt Voysey, together with Tony Boycott (UBSS) and Rob 'Tav' Taviner (Grampian) are working on a draughting site beyond Jonathan's Chamber, originally dug by Graham Price (banned from the quarry by the landowner) and Nick Chipchase (both Cerberus SS), and have moved forward about 8 metres and recently broken into a draughting, well decorated but small section 'Priceless Grotto'. Work continues.



Priceless Grotto, Withyhill

Meanwhile, Duncan Price is working on an updated survey of all of the caves in the quarry.

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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.





*Gary and Carmen at The Courtesan,
Broadway, Agen Allwedd
Photo: Steve Sharp*