

# CHELSEA SPELAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

## CSS Newsletter

Volume 51 No. 11 November 2009

**Selected  
Caves of  
France**

**Urine for  
a Shock!**

**Titan**

# Chelsea Spelæological Society NEWSLETTER

Volume 51 No 11  
November 2009  
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Chris Seal Lifelines Andy Heath on the 65 ft Pitch. Daren Cliau

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Cover Photo  
Andy and Sue Watson  
**Loxton Cavern**  
Photo: Steve Sharp

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

## Membership

CSS Subs were due in October.

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

Current rates are:

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

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

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

**Caving Insurance for 2010** £11

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

## Membership Cards

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

# Editorial

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

*Gouzo*

Mark Lumley



*Clive and the motley Rock Steady Film Crew filming for BBC's Blue Peter at Aggy Passage, Daren Cilau, 1986*

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 Langley 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.

# Urine for a Shock!

by Pete Ward

An item found in Play magazine No. 181, pg 23. Tech innovator, NoPoPo from Japan has released batteries that are powered by piss.

Yes, piss.

That's right, you can piss to your heart's content and power-piss your way through every cave you come across. Now, instead of flushing your power away you can collect it in your piss containers and harness your piss to light your caving heaven.

Indeed there's no real need to collect your shots of pissing energy, just bring beer caving with you and instant energy is there. Copper coloured tops, no way! Golden from now on.

These come in AA and AAA sized batteries and this means you can shove where the sun don't shine C and D sized ones.

This is a revolution in sustainable technology, contains no mercury (don't want to rot your bits now do you?) and they are claimed to last up to 10 years.

The batteries are called Aqua batteries and now, you never need fear of being caught short whilst caving because your piss will save the day.

Friday nights at Whitewalls will never be the same again as cavers will drink knowing that their glorious golden flow will shine like the sun until the beer runs dry on Saturday night. Your one eyed friend will never feel so needed now thanks to NoPoPo.

For more information visit

[news.nationalgeographic.com/.../0818\\_050818\\_urinebattery.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/.../0818_050818_urinebattery.html)

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

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

# The Mighty Titan

by Gary Jones

Whilst up in Derbyshire for a cave diving training camp, Madphil Rowsell offered an evening trip into Titan and having never been there before I jumped at the chance. Hence at around 7.30pm on the Friday evening having driven up from the south, I found myself wandering across the hillside towards the Titan entrance shaft along with Phil. It's an easy place to find, it's right next to the big spoil heap!

The entrance is akin to Fort Knox and after a spell of light engineering removing scaffolding and wood, we could finally access the lock and open the lid. The cave was pre-rigged which made for a much easier and quicker trip. The first pitch is 45m deep straight down a dug cylindrical shaft. This drops into a short stoopy passage through a pool which leads directly to the top of the Titan shaft and what a spot it is. Edging myself out over the flowstone balcony reveals a vast round shaft dropping into inky blackness... From this point it's 130m to the bottom of the shaft. The top of the shaft is clearly visible above giving a total depth of 141.5m.

After checking my harness and rack for the nth time I gingerly swung out over the blackness and started to descend...or would have but even after taking two bars off the rack, I was still

resolutely just hanging there. The weight of the dry rope was just too much, I was forced to feed the rope laboriously through the rack bit by bit. It seemed to take an age to descend the 71m to the ledge below. Eventually, I did indeed reach the ledge and passed an easy rebelay. From here, it was a short drop down a slope to reach the lip of the ledge, the Event Horizon. Here was another rebelay, this time free hanging above a 55m drop. To add to the fun, a small trickle of water runs over the ledge and although not a lot, it's enough to give you a slow gradual soaking; it's not a place you'd want to get hung up.

The pitch drops down through an ever increasing amount of spray and mist before depositing you at the base of Titan. I then stood back and enjoyed the spectacle of Phil descending from above, it's quite some view!

We then went caving, taking in the Stemple Highway, AI passage (which I thought was particularly nice), the bottom of JH and finally a wander in the Bung streamway before making our way back to the bottom of Titan.

Maybe it was because I'd driven up that day and it was now 10 in the evening or maybe it was because I was just being a wimp but I found the prussic up

particularly hard especially the first pitch to the Event Horizon. My harness was cutting in, my thigh muscles were burning and generally complaining with every upward thrust and all the time I was getting steadily wetter and wetter. Distance up was measured by the bounce of the rope because looking up just produced an eyeful of water. Eventually though, the ledge was reached and under the small yet surprisingly damp trickle of water, the rebelay was passed and the ledge gained where I could enjoy a brief respite. By this time, it seemed my legs had got their act together and the next 71m section seemed much easier and before long the balcony came into view and the Titan shaft was completed. All that remained was the 45m entrance pitch.

The trip has already established itself as one of Britain's classic trips and rightly so, it's an awe inspiring place, even more so when you realise it was explored from the bottom up...

However, a word of warning, it's not for the faint hearted, you must be fit and your SRT must be up to scratch, to get tired or hung up would quickly leave you very exposed and vulnerable. Having said that, it's a great trip, I think a through trip from Titan to Peak will be next on my list, anyone fancy it?

# Digging in Daren

by Mark Lumley

The weekend from Friday the 16th to Sunday the 18th October saw another push on various digs off Frog Street in Daren Cilau.

A team comprised of Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley, Mandy and Matt Voysey, Chris Seal, Nick McIntyre, Andy Watson and Matt Davies (one of the 'secret diggers' involved in a dig for anorexic whippets in Fairy Cave on East Mendip, and grandson of Fred Davies - see Vol 51 No.4) made their way in at various stages through Friday afternoon and evening.

Several sites were worked, with The Inconvenient Truth (Helibeds) enlarged to more 'human' proportions by Gonzo. The rift beyond, previously observed by Adrian Fawcett,

is extremely narrow but has a tantalising, booming echo promising larger delights beyond. Enlargement began here using the team's 24 year old Bosch drill and a hand-me-down powerpack



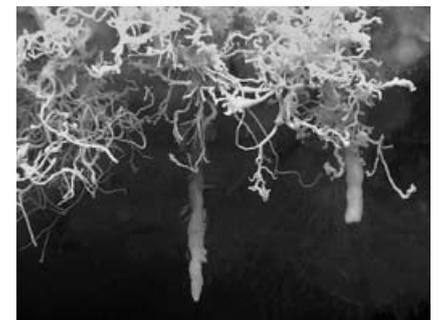
donated by Dr Tony Boycott which gave us 14 holes.

Meanwhile Chris took photos in Helibeds and the rest of the team investigated high level possibilities in the vicinity of

Southend on Siege, at the end of the extensions that line up beyond Half Mile Passage.

The team regrouped in the early evening to extend the draughting northerly passage at Hopping Mad by a couple of metres before returning to Hard Rock where they selflessly risked their livers to make inroads into the accumulating cocktail-lake.

A follow-up trip is planned for late November.



Photos by Chris Seal: Nick McIntyre and Matt Davies checking out the cocktails at Hard Rock, Formations at Helibeds, Gonzo in Helibeds.

# Selected Caves of France

by Andy Heath



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

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

## Part Four: Vercors

**To British cavers, the Vercors is possibly the most well known caving area in France.**

**Although vertical caves predominate, there are also a fair few horizontal caves worth visiting.**

## Grotte de Bournillon

Probably almost every British caver who's been to the Vercors has been to the Bournillon. The entrance is certainly impressive; reputedly the largest entrance in France at around 80m high. A lake often exists in this entrance porch. There is a concrete footway going into the cave; much of the water from the cave is diverted down a pipe to the hydroelectric power station in the valley below.

The cave comprises a fine gallery with big stal bosses and much boulder-hopping. The end of the cave can become dangerous in high water. On each occasion when I've visited the cave, the water levels have been too high to reach the end.

Not a long trip, but definitely worth a visit.

## Grotte de Gournier

Another favourite. A rubber dinghy is necessary to cross the 30m long entrance lake, unless you fancy a very cold swim. A short climb and a 30m traverse gains access to a kilometre or more of very large and very fine fossil streamway, well decorated in places.

Several holes lead down to active streamway, and a very fine streamway it is too. Much climbing, straddling, traversing and generally getting wet is involved; protection being offered by the many in-situ traverse wires. Eventually a large chamber is

reached; to progress further it's necessary to ascend a 40m pitch.

At the time of my visit, the in-situ rope looked decidedly dodgy, so once again I never got to the end. Apparently, most visitors stop at this point too. Again, well worth a visit.

## Scialet de Trisou

It was a long time ago that I visited this cave, so my memories of it are fading. Also, I never got to the end (do you see a pattern developing here?). However, my memories of it are that it is not unlike a sporting Yorkshire pothole. A fairly rapid succession of short pitches interspersed with well-sculpted meandering passages. I seem to recall the further you get into the system, the damper the pitches become; indeed, the cave can apparently be a very dodgy place to be in wet weather.

The one thing I do remember about this cave is that it's in an area where car break-ins are common (sadly, we didn't know that at the time). I recall standing in the local police station after the trip in my furry suit in an ever-increasing pool of water trying to explain in my best French that we'd had all our stuff nicked. However, the loss of my clothes was minor compared to loss experienced by my mate who'd left his £2,500 Rolex watch in the car! There's a lesson to be learnt here; not least of all, don't spend two and a half grand on a watch!

## Les Saints de Glace

In itself, not an especially exciting cave for much of its length, though a cave worth learning if you have aspirations for greater things, (see Paul Tarrant's article in CSS Newsletter, May 2009). This cave is one of the entrances for the Trou Qui Souffle system, the one that Paul couldn't find the way out of. To give Paul credit, the way through the cave is not totally obvious, despite the apparently simple survey. Like the Trisou, Saints de Glace is not dissimilar to a Yorkshire cave; short pitches interspersed with meanders and small chambers. By far the best bit of the trip is dropping through the roof of the 'Salle Hydrokarst', where the small passages suddenly expand into this vast chamber.

At the time of our visit, this was the main aim of the trip, to learn the route in preparation for a through trip at a later date, so after a short furl around in the very muddy passages below, we left the cave by the same route.

As it happens, I've never been back since, so probably wouldn't remember the route!

## Gouffre Berger

The Berger hardly needs an introduction, so this will be one of the shortest reports of any trip into this fine, deep cave. If you want to read all about the place, I suggest you find a report written by someone who has been to the bottom!

I think I can probably say that the trip I went on in 2002 was one of the least well-organised foreign trips I've had the misfortune to go on, so this report should be read as a cautionary tale on how to not get to the bottom of the cave.

I think I can say from the outset that this was never going to be a good trip. There were too many people from too many different groups who didn't know each other. I don't mind admitting that I was as guilty of this as many others; I'd not made much effort to meet up with folks beforehand. The group to my mind never gelled as a team; too many people had their own agendas and didn't pull their weight.

The weather was most certainly not on our side and with hindsight we should probably have not been in the cave at all. On two occasions we had groups stuck down there. On the first occasion a group got trapped just beyond Lac Cadoux without a boat (the lake wasn't there when they went into the cave but was when they came to exit) and on the second a small group got trapped beyond the canals, well into the cave, when the water rose to such a degree that all they could do was sit it out for 24 hours until the water dropped. At the same time, another group was stuck at Camp One when Aldo's Pitch (the last of the entrance pitches) was impassable.

When the time came for my attempt for the bottom, I found myself with one caver who shall remain nameless who quite frankly was a complete liability (I told him so after the trip; he's never spoken to me since!). My heart was no longer in the trip and he of all people was not the one I'd want to be stuck with for 24 hours!

When it came to de-rigging the cave a large proportion of the expedition were notable for their

absence; especially annoying since a lot of the stuff to be taken out was their own personal kit. If it wasn't for cave conservation, we were tempted to leave all their kit down there.

But, all this aside, it's a fantastic cave and if you get the chance to go there, do so. Just make sure you go with the right people and stay out if the weather's bad! I'd certainly like another crack at the place.

So on that note we'll leave the Vercors for the time being, to return again in the next newsletter.

### **References:**

*Vercors Caves. Des Marshall. Cordee. 1993*

*Speleo dans le Vercors. Tome 1. Caillault, Haffner & Krattinger. Edisud. 1997*

*Speleo dans le Vercors. Tome 2. Caillault, Haffner, Krattinger & Delannoy. Edisud. 1999*

*Speleo Sportive dans le Vercors. Delannoy & Haffner. Edisud. 1987*

**Will I get to the bottom of  
a Vercors cave?  
Watch this space!**

## **JRat's Digging Award**

**Saturday 21st. November  
Hunters Lodge**

from 2030hrs. presentation at 2130hrs.

*Keep on digging!*

Hunters Bar 

The first annual award to be presented to the club or team that has found and surveyed the most new passage in one cave in Somerset or Scotland in the year from November to October.

The award will be presented each year on the nearest Saturday to Tony's birthday the 21st. November.

A free barrel and a few "nibbles" will be provided.  
All welcome!

For further information or to register your claim to the award please contact Stuart McManus on 01749 870793 or Martin Grass on 01934 742710.

# Sun, sea, caving in Greece?

Dear Mr Fawcett,

I am a retired VP of a multinational with European HQs in Brussels. I retired in Greece, in a magnificent spot named Monemvasia; an area blessed with Byzantine history, sun, sea and limestone; which brings me to the subject of caves. The area abounds with interesting caves with only a few open to the public. The rest are accessible with the assistance of our local speleological society.

Since my retirement, I have used my spare time to develop activities which will, in time, increase the tourist season in our area. To this end, I formed back in 2002, a sailing club which is now up and running. I have a vested interest (my wife and I have a few rooms to rent) in opening up the area to specialised activities.

Being a graduate of the Royal School of Mines, Imperial College, I obviously thought of opening up the rich caves "heritage" of Lakonia.

Perhaps CSS would be interested, in close collaboration with our local society, in organizing some expeditions in our area and at the same time experience the richness of our historical heritage and taste our excellent wines, known in Medieval England as "Malmsey wine"..

Should this be of interest to CSS, please contact me and I will, together with our local society, formulate and propose a programme.

Looking forward to hearing from you

Byron Veras

Castro Monemvasias

23070 Lakonia

Greece

Tel/Fax: +30 27320 61189

Email: verasb@otenet.gr

Web: [www.monemvasiaescapade.g](http://www.monemvasiaescapade.g)

*If this is of interest to any CSS members then please contact Stuart France*

# Withyhill Drainage

by Mark Lumley

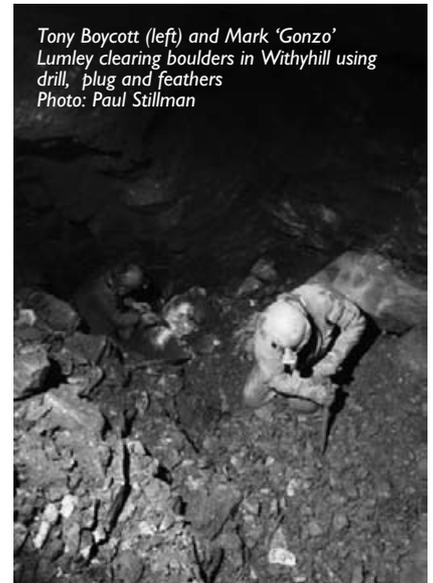
The ATLAS diggers and the Fairy Cave Quarry Management Committee have joined forces in an effort to improve the drainage of floodwater from Withyhill cave. In recent years flooding has become a problem that has been intensified by heavy rainfall together with improved drainage of surface water into the system at Withybrook Slocker.

With the current Withyhill entrance two metres higher than the route that the floodwater takes and with drainage constricted and limited by quarry spoil, the water has tended to back up dramatically, coating the walls with a fine silt after the floods have receded.

The team have dug a two metre deep trench right through a boulder choke to extend the streamway from below the old gate, along to a point two metres beneath the concrete entrance pipes. Options to extend this out into the quarry and over to a point at a lower level are being investigated by the team in conjunction with the owners, Hobbs Properties Ltd. and Natural England who manage the site.

It has felt a little odd putting so much effort into a digging project that is not going to find new cave but, hopefully, the quality of this wonderful cave will benefit from all our effort.

Tony Boycott (left) and Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley clearing boulders in Withyhill using drill, plug and feathers  
Photo: Paul Stillman



## COTTAGE BOOKINGS

09/10/2009 **Shepton Mallet Caving Club (10 bunks)**

09/10/2009 Also a cave rescue practice is running in Eglwys Faen, so park carefully and come and join in with the fun.

16/10/2009 **Reading Uni CC (FULL exclusive booking)**

The FULL booking is a uni club coming with lots of people (maybe 20 or so), an exclusive one, so it would be best to stay clear if you want to remain sane.

You should be doing Box Mine anyway

30/10/2009 **Imperial College CC (12 bunks)**

01/11 - 05/11 **Independent (2 bunks)**

07/11/2009 **An auction of old and duplicate cave rescue kit** will probably take place at Whitewalls over this weekend (5pm on Saturday). A list of likely items will hopefully be produced in the next couple of weeks.

Likely items :- ladders, ropes, figure of 8's, steel crabs, bosch drill, battery belts, ammo tins.

Auctioneer wanted !!

13/11/2009 **Devon SS (10 bunks)**

04/12/2009 **Curry Weekend**

22-23 Jan 2010 **Cambridge University CC**

## Officers of the Society:

### Chairman

Adrian Fawcett  
5 Ambryn Road, New Inn, Pontypool  
Torfaen, NP4 0NJ  
(01495) 763130 (Home)  
07973 815050 (Mobile)  
adrianfawcett@talktalk.net

### Secretary

Stuart France  
The Smithy, Crickhowell, Powys, NP8 1RD  
(01874) 730016 (Home)  
css@linetop.com

### Treasurer

Peter Ward  
33 Gertrude Street, Abercynon  
Mountain Ash, CF45 4RL  
07749 235985  
speleo@hotmail.co.uk

### Cottage Warden

John Stevens  
14 Kiln Close, Hermitage, Thatcham  
Newbury, Berks, RG18 9TQ  
(01635) 200879 (Home)  
john@k-stevens.fsnet.co.uk

### Tacklemaster

Gary Kiely  
22b St Johns Road, Isleworth,  
Middlesex, TW7 6NW  
07958 039721 (Mobile)  
gkiely72@mac.com

### Newsletter Editor

Mark Lumley  
7 Langleys Lane, Clapton, Radstock  
Somerset, BA3 4DX  
(01761) 419246 (Home and Work)  
mark@creativeedge.me.uk

### Librarian

Anna Northover  
42 BrynGwyn Road, Newport, NP20 4JT  
(01633) 678833 (Home)  
anna@pnorthover.freeserve.co.uk

### Meets Secretary

John Newton, 39 North Park Grove  
Roundhay, Leeds, LS8 1EL  
(0113) 293 3807 (Home)  
jnewton5@csc.com

### Records Officer

John Cooper  
31 Elm Close, Wells, Somerset, BA5 1LZ  
(01749) 670568 (Home)  
csspub@googlemail.com

### Web Master

Stephen Newton  
68 Myrtle Avenue, Long Eaton, Notts, NG10 2LY  
(0115) 972 9029 (Home)  
snewton@ukonline.co.uk

### Committee Member

Mel Reid  
3 Bryntirion Terrace, Llangollen, LG20 8LP  
07711 943492 (Mobile)  
melrei@hotmail.com

### Committee Member

Jason McCorrison  
72 Christchurch Road, Penmaen Estate  
Oakdale, Blackwood, Gwent, NP12 0UX  
(01495) 221479 (Home)  
jason\_mccorrison@talktalk.net

### Whitewalls

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

## Meets List 09/10

This is an outline of the meets for this year.

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

**South Wales.**

Draenen Round Trip.

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

**South Wales.**

Swansea Valley

(DYO subject to weather).

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

**South Wales.**

Cottage building weekend.

A lot of small jobs to be completed.

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

**Derbyshire** (Orpheus).

Nettle Pot/Oxlow/Bagshaw.

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

**South Wales.**

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

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

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

BBQ and Barrel on Saturday night.

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

**Mendip** (Wessex).

Banwell Bone/Stalactite Caves as an option on

Saturday. Eastwater as another option on Saturday.

Swildons on Sunday.

BBQ will be arranged for Saturday night.

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

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

Lost Johns/Birks Fell

(Days will be confirmed when permits booked).

Please contact me for any other requests.

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

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

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

**Mendip** (Wessex).

Box Stone Mines on Saturday.

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

**South Wales.**

Agen Allwedd obscure passages.

Fireworks on Saturday night.

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

**South Wales.**

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

Decide on your own trips.

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

**South Wales.** Dinner and AGM.

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

**John Newton, Meets Secretary**

# Photos of the Month

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



*Andy Snook in Hunters Hole Photo: Steve Sharp*



*Andy Watson in Loxton Cavern Photo: Steve Sharp*



*Duncan Price (left) and Jon Vonlanthan in Chamber Nine, Wookey Hole Photo: Mark Lumley*

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

*Helibeds, Frog St., Daren Cilau  
Photo: Chris Seal*

