

CHELSEA SPELAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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*Cover photo and above:
 Helibeds. Daren Cilau.
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Editorial

Thanks for all your contributions over the past few years.

I'll be stepping down as editor at the AGM as I won't have any spare time for a couple of years while I try and convert a Cornish barn into somewhere to live.

I'd like to thank John Cooper in particular for his tireless attention to detail with the unenviable task of proof reading articles and compiling the Indexes.

Best of luck to my successor!

Mark Lumley

The views expressed in the Newsletter are those of the author of the article and do not necessarily represent the views of the Society.

Membership

Welcome to new provisional member:
Richard Frost

Please send all subscriptions to:
 Gary Jones, 6 West Down, Bookham,
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Current rates are:

Full £25
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Associate £21 (BCA Non Caver already included)
Provisional £20

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

New members wishing to join should send a cheque payable to **Chelsea Spelæological Society** along with their membership application form to the Secretary. Members who are renewing a subscription should sent the payment to the Treasurer. The committee will normally consider voting provisional members up to full membership after 6 months by which time they should have become known.

Provisional membership can be extended for another 6 months, but only once, if a Provisional Member has been unable to become known socially and as an active caver within the club. Please contact the Treasurer with any queries.

Bill Maxwell and the cave fauna

by Graham Proudlove

In the May-June edition of your newsletter George Fletcher painted a most interesting pen picture of Bill Maxwell who died in March this year. Bill was clearly a very remarkable chap. I never met him but did speak to him briefly on the phone in about 2006. Although not a member of the Chelsea Speleological Society I have visited Whitewalls a number of times for trips on Llangattock. I am the Biological Recorder for the British Cave Research Association and I thought that some of you might be interested in an aspect of Bill's caving career that is perhaps not so well known – certainly not to those under the age of 50 who are not cave biologists, which is most of you!

A bit of background. In 1938 two people, Aubrey Glennie and Mary Hazelton, realised that we were miles behind the rest of Europe in our knowledge of the cave fauna. They started a project to study our caves and find out what animals were present in them. This began in earnest after the war in 1946 and as the years passed the number of people collecting animals from caves grew. Mary Hazelton took on the post of Biological Recorder (the post I now hold) for the then Cave Research group in order to manage the collections and get the animals identified. She was very diligent and successful at this and as she published the results (from 1955 onwards) even more people were encouraged to collect - the heyday was the decade 1960-1970.

Enter Bill Maxwell. On the 11th March 1961 Bill collected his first cave animal, a small beetle called *Choleva agilis* from Agen Allwedd. He carried on collecting until his last recorded collection on 15th December 1974 in Dog Hole, Pridamsleigh. This last specimen was a very tiny animal called

a springtail, and of springtails the one he collected was one of the tiniest *Arrhopalites pygmaeus* (about 0.5 mm). Over the years Bill had made a special effort to collect and record these minute, but notable cave animals. No-one before him, or since, has been anywhere near as good at seeing and collecting these tiny springtails and pretty much all we know of their distribution in British caves is down to Bill and those who identified them. And he also collected many mites which are equally tiny.

But he did not allow this special interest to get in the way of the general collecting of all cave fauna. In the Biological Records (the general name for the published results compiled by Mary Hazelton) under Bill's name are listed 416 specimens. In conjunction with Pat Cornelius (who was Pat Browne in those days) he collected another 787 records to make a total between 1961 and 1974 of 1203. To really see the significance of this you need to know only that in the whole collection period – 1938 to 1976 – the total for all collectors was 5573 (most people only contributed a handful of specimens to this total). So Bill and Pat's total is about one fifth of the total collection.

So, to add to all of the other aspects of his caving career which George told us about and hinted at in his note, you can add master-cave-fauna-collector. It is no exaggeration to say that without Bill's (and in this we must not forget Pat's) collecting the data set we now have for the caves of Britain and Ireland would be a shadow of what it is. The full-data set is one of the best in the world and is currently being analysed in detail by myself, Lee Knight, Andrew Lewington and a number of co-authors. We hope for publication in 2014 but it may take a little longer thanks to Bill Maxwell's diligence.

CSS Golden Oldies celebrate 50 years of White Walls

by Geo Fletcher

This year is the 50th since the Society first embarked on researching, purchasing and renovating the old ruin known as White Walls on Llangattock Hillside from just four crumbling walls into a wonderful centre for caving on and around Llangattock. So it was appropriate that many who were involved with that process during the 1960's wanted to come together to celebrate and reminisce about the good times we had together.

Trying to organise CSS Golden Oldies is like trying to steer a sailing ship against the wind. My well published plan was for us all to meet up in The Bear Inn in Crickhowell on Friday 13th September to greet each other and to plan activities for the Saturday, however, most arrived and ate at The Dragon Inn and drifted across to the Britannia Inn whilst but a few managed to meet in The Bear.

Plan one gone wrong straight away; are you following me so far!

Saturday was to be a free DIY day for walks in the area or visits to places of interest or perhaps even caving and then to meet up in The Dragon Inn at 6.30 p.m. for drinks and socialising before dining.

I planned Sunday for us all to meet up at White Walls for tea and biscuits and a wander around the Tramroad to Eglwys Faen and

Aggy before saying our farewells to those who were not staying over until the Monday, however, as it was such a nice sunny day on Saturday most Golden Oldies couldn't resist a visit to White Walls after doing various trips and walks around the area. Mark Lumley and family were in residence at the time and kindly made a huge pot of tea for us all to share.

So that was plan two that went wrong!

Most of us met up as arranged in the bar of the Dragon Inn on Saturday evening for drinks and reminiscences while choosing our meal from the a la cart menu; well all except two who met up in The Bear Inn, I won't say who it was as Bruce might get annoyed.

Plan three nearly went wrong!

Anyway, eventually twenty eight of us, some from Australia, some from Germany, some from England, some from Wales, a Yorkshireman and me from Cheshire had a good meal in The Dragon meeting room served by an attentive staff. We toasted old and absent friends, we remembered Bill Maxwell who organised the purchase of White Walls and even took time out to phone our old mate Bob Fish to wish him well and hope he would be with us all next year after his illness.

We all sang "Happy Birthday

White Walls." (Daft lot.) Many photo records were taken, at one time there were more people taking photos than there were people to photograph of. Lots of old photos were passed around and viewed showing many of us in our skinny youth during the 1960's.

The party broke up late but it could have gone on all night reminiscing but we had to end it so the Dragon staff could lock up and go home.

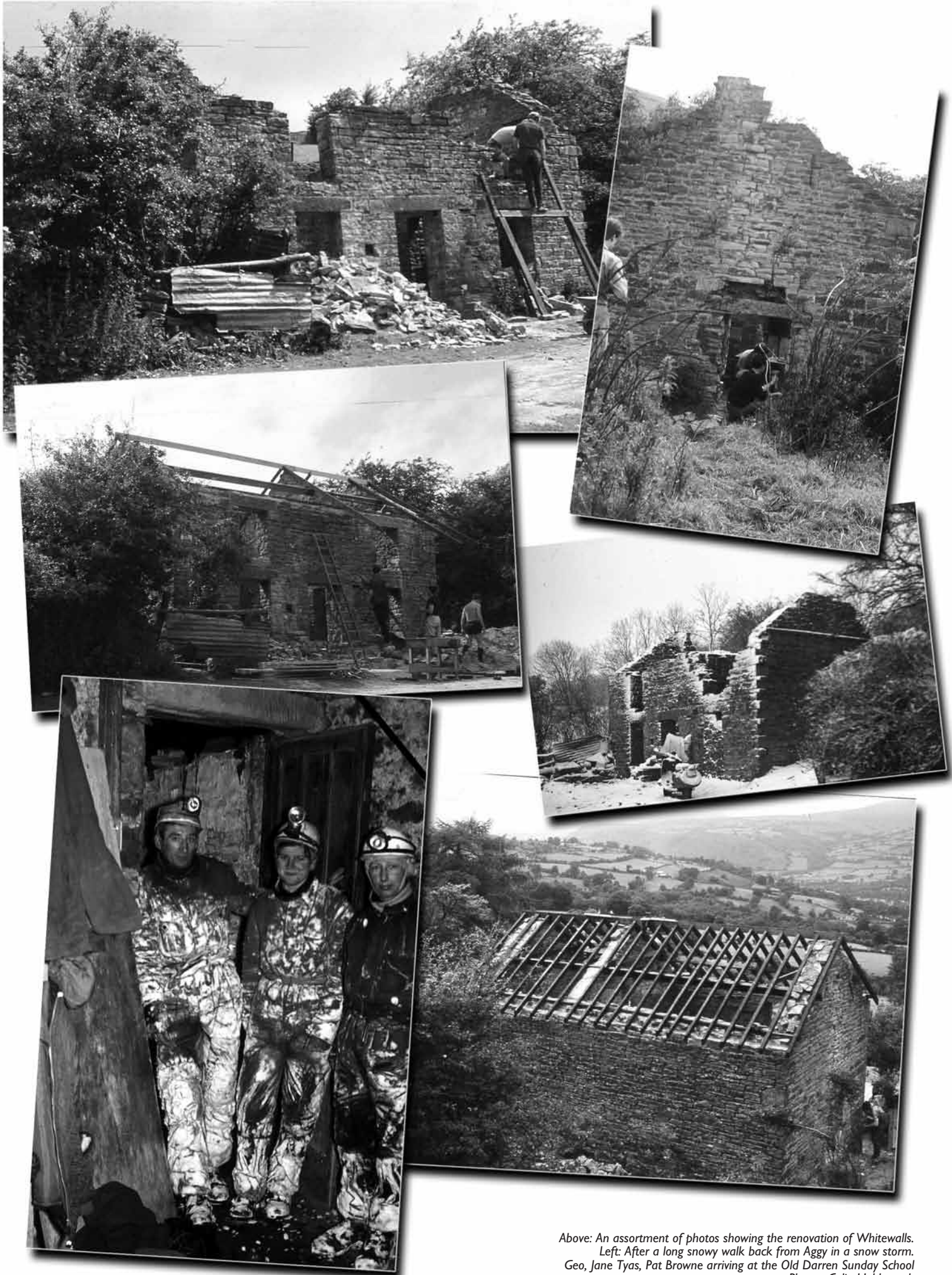
A few of us did go up to White Walls on Sunday in the wind and rain before some headed home, others did lower level tours around to get out of the typical South Wales rainy weather we all know so well.

Thirteen of us stayed over for the night on Sunday and did eat in The Bear Inn and enjoyed a most pleasant evening of good food and conversation. We all breakfasted in The Dragon on Monday morning before sadly saying our farewells but having enjoyed a most happy weekend of wonderful memories with old friends.

Shall we do it again next year? (Answers on a post card please.)

Can you email me some of your photos and I will make up a collage and send it around.

Thank you all for your company and the trip down memory lane and a really great weekend.



Above: An assortment of photos showing the renovation of Whitewalls.
 Left: After a long snowy walk back from Aggy in a snow storm.
 Geo, Jane Tyas, Pat Browne arriving at the Old Darren Sunday School
 Photos: Colin Holdsworth

Ogof Pont Gam – Ogof Nant Rhin

7 December 2013 Joe Duxbury, Steve Sharp.

by Joe Duxbury

Who was it suggested a visit to this cave? Although neither Steve nor I had brought SRT gear for the weekend, with generous assistance from Mike Read and John Stevens, who lent us their kit, we were able to give it a go.

With indefinite information regarding the nature of the place (was it 3 pitches, or 4?) we packed a tackle sack with ropes, maillons, and krabs, and set off. The entrance to Pont Gam is an obvious hole up on the right bank of the Nant Hafod stream, just below a large culvert. Steve did the right thing, and went and asked for permission to enter the cave at the house opposite (The Unicorn), and in we went. The entrance is low and dirty, and continues like this for some way. Not only is it also narrow, but it's been designed with lots of pointy bits, all facing the wrong way, so that everything catches. Especially in SRT gear. It's like crawling through super-size Velcro.

After about 30 m we reached the first pitch, which we were delighted to see was already rigged. A good Y-hang down a pitch of about 10 m. A short pitch of about 4 m followed, and then more narrow passage. Deeper now, but still thrutchy and awkward with the tackle sack.

The rope for the third pitch (5 m) was rigged directly into a hanger (no maillon), backed up to a natural in the roof. The pitch head was tight, making it difficult to get a hand to the descender handle, and the rope ran over the edge. When I got to the bottom, and watched Steve come down, I could see two more hangers, out over the pitch – how much better it would have been to use them. A bit more narrow, winding passage led to the top of Aven D'Oznog (a Breton name, perhaps?), a fine shaft of 12 m, dropping into a shallow pool.

This had previously been the upstream limit of Ogof Nant Rhin, a spacious aven with a large stal column opposite the drop. Off on the left side, a stal flow came down from a body-sized tube. With light shone from below at the right angle, the drops of condensation on the ceiling gave a convincing impression of daylight. If only!

This was approximately halfway – see the survey, in the Croydon CC newsletter¹. The rest of the cave is a relatively straight passage, traversed at high level along ledges of phreatic shelving. This is reached by climbing up behind the large stal column, rather than following the stream below. There are several constrictions to pass, and some stal concretions to be careful of. The shelves gradually slope down to meet the floor, and progress became a lot easier.

When we reached a frame of scaffolding tubes, the entrance was not far beyond. To return to Steve's car involved a climb straight up the bank above, cross the A465, and straight up the bank of the stream the other side. An entertaining trip of about 3½ hours, which would have been a lot longer if we'd had to rig all the pitches. A pull-through is quite possible.

Back at Whitewalls we found there was a whole, decorated series we'd missed, about half as much again. There was a junction we'd missed somewhere in the passage with shelving. Does that mean we should go there again?

1. Pelobates, Croydon Caving Club Newsletter, no. 86, Feb 2007, p. 10.

From the latest Cambrian Caving Council Newsletter:-

Dan yr Ogof's Chairman, Ashford Price said :-
"I have been at Dan yr Ogof for over forty years, and have always tried to ensure that cavers from all over the world enjoy their visit to one of the finest caves in Europe. The fact that the caves are so well preserved is due to the South Wales Caving club, and also the Dan yr Ogof Cave Advisory Committee that has administered access for cavers for the past 20 years
However, I now want to move on from a committee style approach to caving. I have selected six cavers with various speleological skills to form the Dan yr Ogof Conservation Advisory Panel. (DYOCAP).
This body will also have direct access to the main DYOC Board when necessary. The Panel will also have representatives from the Brecon Beacons National Park, and Natural Resources Wales.
The Board of Dan yr Ogof wants this Panel to have full control of both access, and all conservation issues. The DYOC Boards aspirations for this panel will lead to long term benefits for the future of this great Welsh cave system.
The Panel's main role will be to consider the best conservation measures for Dan yr Ogof. Conservation will be at the heart of all the decisions the Panel makes.

There are within the caves so many amazing formations, and geological features. However, their long term future depends on the Panel getting right the delicate balance between exploration, digging etc., and the need to conserve what we already have.

Achieving the above aims will be no easy task, and will need all the innovative skills that the Panel can come up with. However, cave conservation only works when you have the full cooperation of the cavers that cave at Dan yr Ogof.

In a nutshell there are no access changes. Cavers in future may be asked to help with conservation measures, and will also be encouraged to come up with conservation ideas.

The long term future for Dan yr Ogof depends on the co-operation of all cavers. If everyone works together future generations of cavers will also be able to marvel at the splendours Dan yr Ogof offers".

Key points:-

- Access arrangements for cavers to remain unchanged.
- Management activity to be focussed on conservation of the cave. Conservation will take precedence over all other considerations.
- The new panel will be hand-picked for their specialist skills and knowledge of the system.
- Panel members will have direct access to the DYOC Showcave Board.

SLUDGE PIT HOLE 29th Sept

by Andy Tyler

Colin Rogers (Axbridge Caving Club), John Palmer, Mike Walker, George Clement, Pete Flanagan (non aligned!) and Andy Tyler

Since starting caving in the late 80's I had always known about this cave but it had always been closed. My old friend Colin Rogers had always talked about it as he was involved in digging it open with Clive North and others.

With the recent reopening of the cave I took the opportunity of a trip down. This was Colin's second trip down since its reopening. We met at the Wessex. I brought my boys along in the camper van, as my wife was away. The cave is only a 5 minute walk but it took half an hour to rig the ladder and lifeline at the entrance, the "pitch" is 5 feet to a shelf and a further 15 feet mostly freehang.

At the bottom in the Boulder Chamber are several ways on. We followed the larger passage which is walking for a short distance where we had to climb down about 10 feet to a lower passage which goes through a pit (where a way down leads to a mostly walking passage down the Main Rift to the sump).

We continued a short way to the beginning of The Maze. Here the passages are low but easy crawling with dry mud. I went alone up Skeleton Passage, there are some rifts, this is a dry inlet. Back at The Maze I went down to the sump. Probably the most interesting part is the Four Pots Rift, which involves some thrutching in the rift which has pots at the bottom and appears to be the continuation of Skeleton Passage inlet. The rift itself, with a squeeze, loops back to The Maze.

Back at the ladder I announced to the others that I wanted to go first as I needed to check up on my lads(!), but I did bribe them with the offer of cups of tea. I exited after 1 ½ hours. By the time I had changed and had a cup of tea the others had turned up and I was able to thrust a hot cup of tea into their hands as they arrived.

The cave although not very long is quite sporting and interesting with many loops and plenty to poke around in which we didn't do.

The Curry Weekend was well attended with about 16 people turning up for the evening. There were several different curry types on offer from spicy Chicken Tikka Marsala, to Vegetable Curry, Lamb Rhogan Gosht, Mince Beef and Peas, Dhals, and too many other types to remember. Duncan, true to his word provided some scrummy Pakistani sweets and deserts as well as some excellent mulled cider which went down a treat. Joe gave an illustrated resume of the Czecho International Congress he attended in the summer.

Caving wise there was a surveying trip to Flood Passage in Aggie, plus a through trip done in Ogof Pont Gam to Nant Rhin in the Clydach Gorge. There was no snow this year, for a change! So, the next big event is the Annual dinner weekend in January at the Bear Hotel.

Paul Tarrant

Trip to North Wales

14 - 15th September 2013

by Paul Tarrant

A small group comprising Stuart France, Richard Dewsnap, & Paul Tarrant stayed at Stuart's mountaineering hut in the Ogwen Valley to do a walk and a mining trip. The weather forecast for the Sunday was dreadful so that set the agenda for the weekend and we chose to walk out on the Saturday from the hut to do the Tryfan North Ridge – Bristly Ridge scramble and a traverse of Glyder Fawr.

North Ridge set a few of us a bit of a challenge on the same trip last year when we attempted it in the early evening and almost ran out of light to complete it. This time we had Stuart's expert experience to benefit us and we traversed up the east side of the ridge via an easy path and joined the ridge at a higher point. There were a lot of people queuing on the ridge and we had to climb around them to get ahead of the game.

After about an hour and a quarter we reached the easier ground towards the summit and swapped pleasantries with some lads celebrating their triumph with bottles of beer! We dropped down the ridge to Bristly Ridge which is a grade 1 scramble and made swift progress up the gully which was boulder filled and steeper than I remembered it from previous occasions I had done the ridge. The exposure in parts was sufficient to make me question if we were on the correct route.

The crux was a boulder slab that barred the way which was easy on this occasion but was a

greasy slimey climb on a previous trip that had defeated my pal and I. Above this a boulder blocked the gulley and it was necessary to climb under it to get around it. The ground became easier after this until the final section where there was a spectacular pinnacle which required turning on the left hand /eastern side where there was a bit of a drop off below.

We topped out on the top of the ridge and made our way to the Cantilever where Stuart did the usual trick of jumping up and down to try and topple it but to no avail. Then the rain swept in forcing us to seek refuge under boulders whilst we ate lunch.

The rain was short lived and enabled us to go over to Castell Y Gwynt [Castle of the Winds] which is, according to one guy I overheard talking, a doorway to a dragons lair! We decided not to waste time and argue with this person as being English, he could hardly be an authority on Welsh mythical fauna!

The day improved and we headed over to the col separating Llanberris valley with the Ogwen Valley and dropped down the path to the east of Devil's Kitchen and skirted Llyn Idwal. Return to Ogwen Cottage provided much needed coffee and signalled an end to the main walk. However, Stuart suggested we continue back to the hut via a low level path at the far side of Llyn Ogwen which added another hour of easy walking. The road bridge at the start of the walk went over an

ancient stone packbridge which made interesting viewing.

Our evening was spent relaxing and eating an excellent meal of Moroccan Lamb Tagine provided by Stuart which we ate in company of Mel Reid who came over for the evening.

Sunday started wild and windy and it was clear it was going to deteriorate into a bad day. We paid our dues and drove to Betws Y Coed where we met Ian Adams of UCET. He was keen to join us on a trip to an un-named mine some distance from B Y C. The mine was truly spectacular and we benefitted from Ian & Stuart's experience of the place. There were excellent examples of extensive timber working supporting false floors visible in the worked out stopes plus several wooden ore shoots used to drop ore from one level to another. We rescued a frog which had somehow managed to find it's way in and we terminated our trip after about 3 hours of fun exploring. Again, it was not possible to leave the place without feeling the utmost respect for the old miners who had created these fantastic places with nothing more than pick, shovel, blasting powder and sheer brawn, and all done with the illumination provided by a guttering candle stuck on a lump of clay attached to a felt hat!

So, a brilliant weekend and one that will be repeated as there is so much of interest in this area. Thanks to Stuart for arranging this trip.

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Sopot, 7&8:52-4

Triple Doline Cave, 1&2:5(P)

Twin Arch Cave, 7&8:53

Twin Arch Pot, 7&8:53-4(P)

Vjetrena Presjeka, 7&8:54

Comments noted during Indexing:-

The HSCC trip to Devon was printed twice, first in the 5&6 Newsletter and again in the 7&8 Newsletter. Only the first has been indexed.

Ditto for the Miss Grace's Lane Cave report by Joe Duxbury.

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Notice is given of the **AGM**
Sunday 26th January at 10.30am at Tretower
village hall.

This will be preceded by a short committee
meeting at the same venue. Officers reports will
be available on paper at the meeting or from mid-
January by downloading them from
www.linetop.co.uk/cssdata/agm2014.htm

2014 ANNUAL DINNER

This takes place at the **Bear Hotel** in Crickhowell
on **Saturday 25th January**. If you have
not already ordered any transport from and to
Whitewalls, or made your menu choices you can
find further details on the club forum or
www.linetop.co.uk/cssdata/agm2014.htm
or from Paul Tarrant.



www.chelseaspelaeo.org.uk

Rhino Rift. Photo: Steve Sharp