

**Volume 59
Nos. 7/8/9
Jul/Aug/Sep 2017**



Jura

Mendip

Yorkshire

Daren Cilau

Pembrokeshire

Old Daren Sunday School

CHELSEA SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY



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**UPCOMING HRC
DAREN CAMPS**

22nd-24th September
10th-12th November

New diggers always welcome
Contact: mandola76@gmail.com or
adrianfawcett@outlook.com

Front Cover: Jennie Lawrence, Ogof Gofan, July 2017
Top: John Stevens in Gelli Felen Tunnel, Jan 2015
Photos by Matt Voysey

Artwork by Gonzo

Editorial

Thank you to everyone who contributed articles and pictures for this issue, please keep it coming! Remember that as well as trip reports we welcome items of news or general interest, gear and literature reviews, technical/scientific articles, historical accounts and reminiscences, fun stuff, entertaining stories, and anything else you can come up with.

Please submit all material for publication to cssmattv@gmail.com

Send high resolution photos in JPG or TIF format. For very large files or collections of items upload them to Dropbox or Google Drive and send me a public shared link to the folder, or ZIP them up and send via MailBigFile.

A **FULL COLOUR** electronic version of this newsletter is available to download from the members area of the club website. Also, if you would prefer to go 'paperless' and receive electronic copies of the newsletter in future let me know.

Matt
(and Mandy)

CSS MEETS

September 29th-October 1st - Hidden Earth

This year the event will be taking place in Churchill, Mendip.

October 13th-15th - North Wales, staying at the Lancashire Caving / Climbing Club Hut

Our mission the Croesor/Rhosydd through trip, a classic underground adventure involving zip-wires, inflatable dinghies, and Indiana Jones style rickety bridges. There are other extensive mines to explore here and plenty of excellent mountain walks too.

November 3rd-5th - Bonfire Weekend at Whitewalls

Caving, bonfire, fireworks, food and fun with caving chums.

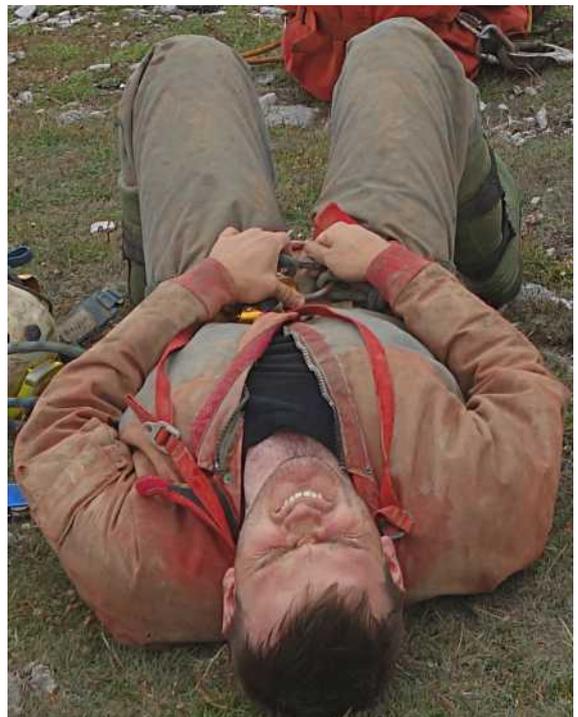
December 1st-3rd - Whitewalls Curry Weekend

More caving and fun with chums, but with homemade curry and sundries.

January 26th-28th - Annual Dinner Weekend

Venue TBC

Mandy - mandola76@gmail.com



Tim Gibbs demonstrates the best way to don an overly tight sit harness, Pembrokeshire July 2017

Membership

Current rates: Full: £30, Joint: £40

Plus BCA subscription per person of £6 for non-cavers and £17 for cavers. Members who have BCA membership via another club need not pay twice but should reference their BCA number and membership club with their payment.

Associate: £24 to receive publications, plus £6 for BCA non-caver insurance.

Provisional: £10 for any 6 months plus BCA active caver insurance to Dec 31st at £4.25 per quarter.

Full membership information and an application form can be downloaded from the CSS website

chelseaspelaeo.org

Please send all subscriptions to:

Gary Jones, 29 Canney Close, Chiseldon, Swindon, SN4 0PG.

Reminder: SUBS ARE DUE OCTOBER 1st!

The Old Daren Sunday School

by Adrian Fawcett



Chelsea Spelaeological Society has, at long last, taken ownership of the Old Daren Sunday School.

We don't have an exact date for its construction, but we believe it was built somewhere between 1850 and 1880, during which time many quarry workers would have lived on the hillside. By the 1940s, however, the local population had declined: the Sunday School was no longer in use, and was now derelict and in a semi-ruinous state.

Subsequently, the leasehold transferred from the Deacons of Bethesda to Brynmawr Scout Group, and was brought back into use as a very basic hostel. Cavers often stayed in it at this time, and in December 1956 it was purchased by Gwendoline Starr, Noel Starr, and Brian Price from the 10th Duke of Beaufort for the sum of £50. In today's money that's probably not far off the £2000 we have just paid.

Minor improvements were made over the next couple of decades, including the installation of fluorescent lighting, cupboards and extra bunks. From 1966 onwards, members of West Midlands Cave Exploration Group stayed there every month or two on their regular trips to South Wales. This came abruptly to an end in 1986 after the council received reports of a leaking cesspit, and subsequently declared the building unfit for human habitation. A closing order was made under the 1985 Housing Act.

In September 1986 WMCEG reached agreement to purchase the Sunday School for £1000, and planned to spend £3500 on its renovation. This, however, was a time of troubled relationships between cavers and the Commoners on Llangattock Hillside, and these proposals met stiff opposition. It was not until 1989 that the Commoners relented and accepted WMCEG's proposal to re-open the Sunday School as a hostel.

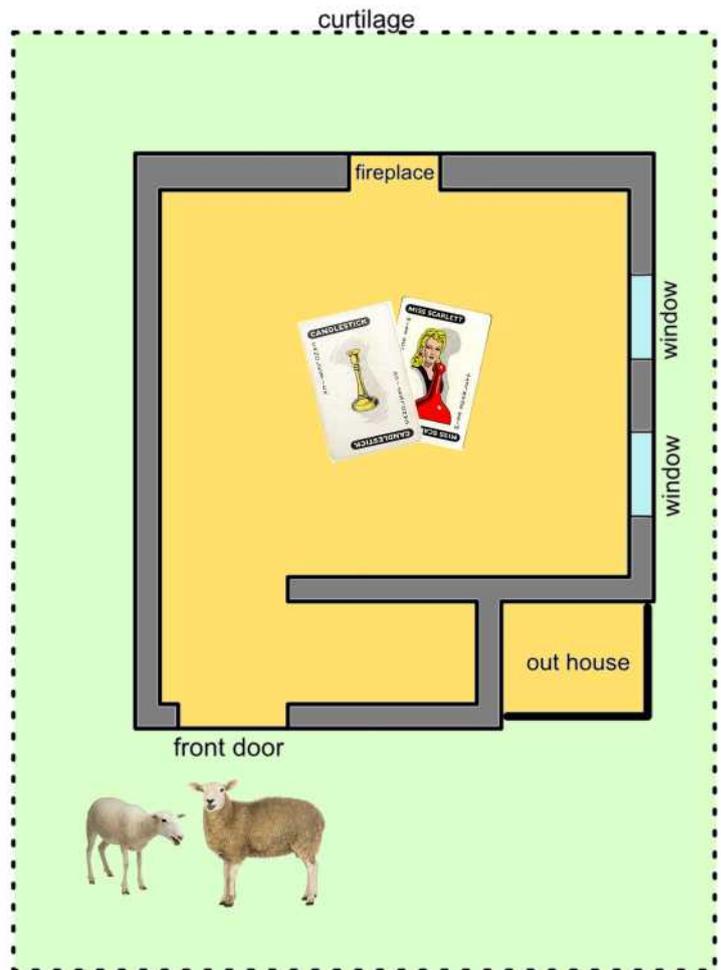
Eventually, in October 1992, a development order for an 8-bed hostel was submitted to the BBNP planning committee, and this was granted approval in March 1993. In 1995 the renovation project was finally launched, and was projected to cost £10000. One major problem was disposal of sewage – it was planned to apply for an easement to bury a 4000 gallon tank under adjacent common land, a scheme that would have cost £6000. In the end they opted for a composting toilet and a holding tank in the outhouse for waste water. An appeal for funds brought in donations totalling £650.

Work on the Sunday School progressed over the next 6 years, until Foot and Mouth closed all access to the hillside from February 2001 until late summer, and WMCEG's project stalled.

Some years on, and WMCEG was effectively defunct. An agreement was reached in principle for CSS to purchase the property in 2010, and a working party was set up. Progress to this end was slowly made. At the 2013 AGM it was agreed to make an offer of £2000 for the Sunday School, plus all legal expenses. This was subsequently accepted by WMCEG. Due in part to difficulties communicating with the club, nothing much more happened until early 2016 when we finally obtained various paperwork, including a copy of the Deeds. Confirming with the WMCEG trustees and former chairman that our offer was still acceptable, we were finally able to action our solicitors, Behr & Co to prepare transfer deeds and perform the necessary checks. Finally in June 2017 the trustees of both clubs signed off on the transfer Deed, and payment was made in August. First registration of the Sunday School will not occur for a few months yet, but in the meantime we are the legal owners and can make plans for renovation and improvement works.

So, what exactly have we bought? The Sunday School is situated on common land, with a curtilage of between 1 and 4 yards beyond the outer walls. In addition to this, we own the steps from the building up to the tram road. There is already an electricity connection (even if it isn't in the electricity board's records) and provision for a connection to the mains water supply. As mentioned earlier, there is no septic tank so our plans need to include a means of sewage disposal. The roof is believed to be basically sound – for now, at least, it is watertight – but at some later date the roof will require work. More urgent is the renewal of the shutters (the sash windows are not lockable) and a new front door is probably required. John Stevens has taken detailed measurements, and Mike Read will use these to draw up plans and a list of materials for renovation works. The intention is to insulate the building as well as possible to minimise heating requirements. Other aspects remain open for discussion, such as whether to install a shower and cooking facilities to make it a self-contained facility.

It is envisaged that the Sunday School will be useful as members accommodation so that Whitewalls can be booked out to larger visiting groups than the current normal limit of ten. Also it could be booked for exclusive use by members with families. Furthermore, it might be used as a meeting and function room. All in all, the Old Daren Sunday School should prove a useful acquisition for the club.



*Grade 1 survey of the Old Daren Sunday School
by Adrian Fawcett **

Postscript



The first work on our new property was undertaken on the August Bank Holiday, with the unearthing of the old steps leading from the Tram Road down to The Sunday School. Though slightly wonky and in need of levelling, the steps are in pretty good condition and were a great surprise to those of us who had no idea of their existence.

Mandy

** includes some minor amendments by the Editors*

CSS visit to Yorkshire - Whitsun 2017

by Chris Tomlin

We stayed at the Craven CC hut which has the most well-built, longest and comfortable bunkbeds I've ever slept in. The hut is also clean and remarkably free of old pots, abandoned food etc. that are common in other huts and the pub is right next door. Nice.

Saturday: Gaping Gill (Stream Passage Pot)

Adrian, Matt and Mandy, Lucy, me.

Adrian decided to walk to GG right from the Craven hut and we all joined him. Well, it was a long way but at least we didn't have to carry any rope as most of the GG entrances were going to be rigged as part of the winch meet. After a long, very long, walk over the fell in sunny conditions we arrived at GG via a direct route over The Allotment. Route finding over the fell was interesting. It was a hot day, lots of people about and they were an interesting mix of people: fell-runners, cavers, ramblers, day trippers, Three Peaks sponsored walkers etc. It was great to see so many people out on the fell. The arrangement of the winch and dams was also quite neat.

After a bite and a successful search for the entrance we headed down Stream Passage Pot. There's an interesting squeeze on Pitch 1 where you have to find the right way to fit through the squeeze without immediately falling down the pitch beyond. These seem to be quite common in Yorkshire: Swinsto Pot, Trapdoor Pot, Bar Pot, Cow Pot, It's A Cracker and no doubt many others have one. After the pitch it was an easy stroll to the big pitches. I'd expected some big solution shafts but the main pitches are in a big blocky rift. Some acrobatics were necessary to get on the ropes but it was a great descent including a huge pendulum at the bottom to end up in the right place. We assembled at the foot of the pitches and confidently set off in the wrong direction up North-West Passage - well it's a big open passage, whaddaya want? After going uphill into increasingly squalid passage we realised our mistake and turned around to eventually arrive at Main Chamber (after occasionally getting directions from other parties and exploring many ways that don't go to Main Chamber). In fact we met a party coming in from Bar Pot not far from the foot of Bar Pot Main Pitch so we had to turn around again.

There were lots of people in GG Main Chamber which was as spectacular as ever and illuminated by huge lights. Then it was time for a painful crawl/stoop along SE Passage to Flood Entrance Pot, our exit route. Adrian started off first and had got a few metres up the bottom pitch when the drip-drip-drip of the Flood Entrance Stream went in a few seconds to ROAR-ROAR-ROAR as he got a flood pulse on his head. The rest of us took shelter from the sudden rush of water (we were in no danger and barely got wet) as Adrian did an unplanned changeover and came back down. We then decided to go back up Bar Pot. Expecting a queue we were pleased to see only two strangers ahead of us at the foot of Bar Pot main pitch. However it took them a while to get up the pitch: the first person was tied on to the end of the rope and her companion at the top used a static prussik technique to haul her bodily up the pitch like a sack of spuds, or a casualty - the technique is illustrated in lots of caving books but I'd never seen it used before. It isn't very fast. After she moved on the rope came back down and it was the other stranger's turn. He could prusik but didn't know



Mandy & Lucy, Stream Passage Pot

how to properly use the foot jammer and it kept coming off. Eventually the way was clear for us to follow. What we should have done then is go out via Small Mammal Pot from near the top of Bar Pot Main Pitch, but no-one knew the way so it was the trade route out. I remembered the tricky slab in Bar and was glad there was a rope there, but I'd forgotten how awkward the top of the first pitch is to those of us of er, more generous proportions. Going high is too tight but going too low means you can't get onto the ledge and then out. Adrian explaining afterwards that he can just go straight over the top where the rope goes didn't help at all!

Sunday: Top Sink

Adrian, Matt and Mandy, John Newton, me.

Hmm, no wonder it was the Yorkshire Ramblers Club that explored all these potholes as Yorkshire caving seems to involve more fell walking than caving sometimes! It is a long walk to Top Sink and the entrance lies above the Ease Gill canyon, in open land in a wide valley. It really feels like you've missed the entrance but the book description is accurate.

Old rusty scaffolding leads to a small entrance passage that is a little twisty canyon. It stays that way for a long time except for the magnificent Walrus Pot. It isn't so much tight as awkward - I would have had a much easier time if I had taken off my SRT gear as Adrian advised. Only Adrian and I went on from Walrus Pot after John Newton turned around there and Matt and Mandy kept him company [re-entering the cave via Wretched Rabbit - Ed.] Adrian and I carried on as a pull-through trip and the excruciating passage finally ended at the narrow Penknife Pitch. From there was a lot of clambering over muddy boulders reminiscent of Ogof Draenen. We had a look into Easter Grotto - lovely - and then it was an awkward climb down to fairly open streamway to Stop Pot. Well that's enough wide passage, time to go up Wretched Rabbit Passage. WR was easy after Top Sink yet the passage seemed very polished compared to what it was like in the early 90s - I remember it as almost sticky then - maybe it is the popularity of the WR to Lancaster Hole through-trip? I got so overheated trying to keep up with Adrian that my glasses steamed up so much I had to take them off for the rope climbs. He had a bag with the rope in it as well. We emerged into weak sunshine and a

After all that no-one wanted to do any more entrances so we walked back. I saw rope down a hole a few metres from Bar but did not have the energy to explore it, it was likely Small Mammal Pot. The walk back was better as we followed the wall along The Allotment rather than cutting straight across and the going was good underfoot.

Personally I was very glad to have done Stream Passage Pot after wanting to do it for years, although it was a bit different to how I had imagined it: more open and rifted. The stream was quite small although water levels were quite low until it started raining hard later in the day.



John, Mandy, Chris, Adrian & Matt, Wretched Rabbit

somewhat chilly day without seeing the others, so we obviously missed each other underground. From comparing notes afterwards we must all have been in the vicinity of Stop Pot at the same time and it was unfortunate we missed each other. Adrian had a poke about while I more or less sat there. After an hour or so he headed back down WR only to meet the others just inside. I didn't even have the energy to look at the entrance passages to County Pot and Pool Sink which was a shame as they both have the most beautifully-shaped curvy, clean and scalloped rock.

After our little reunification we went for a ramble back to Bull Pot Farm. I had wanted to do Top Sink for years and am very glad to have done it but won't hurry back there - too much like hard work.

It rained quite a bit on the Monday - sort of a combination of hill fog and drizzle - so we went to Inglesport for breakfast and then home. In retrospect we should have gone for a quick easy trip but next time let's hope.

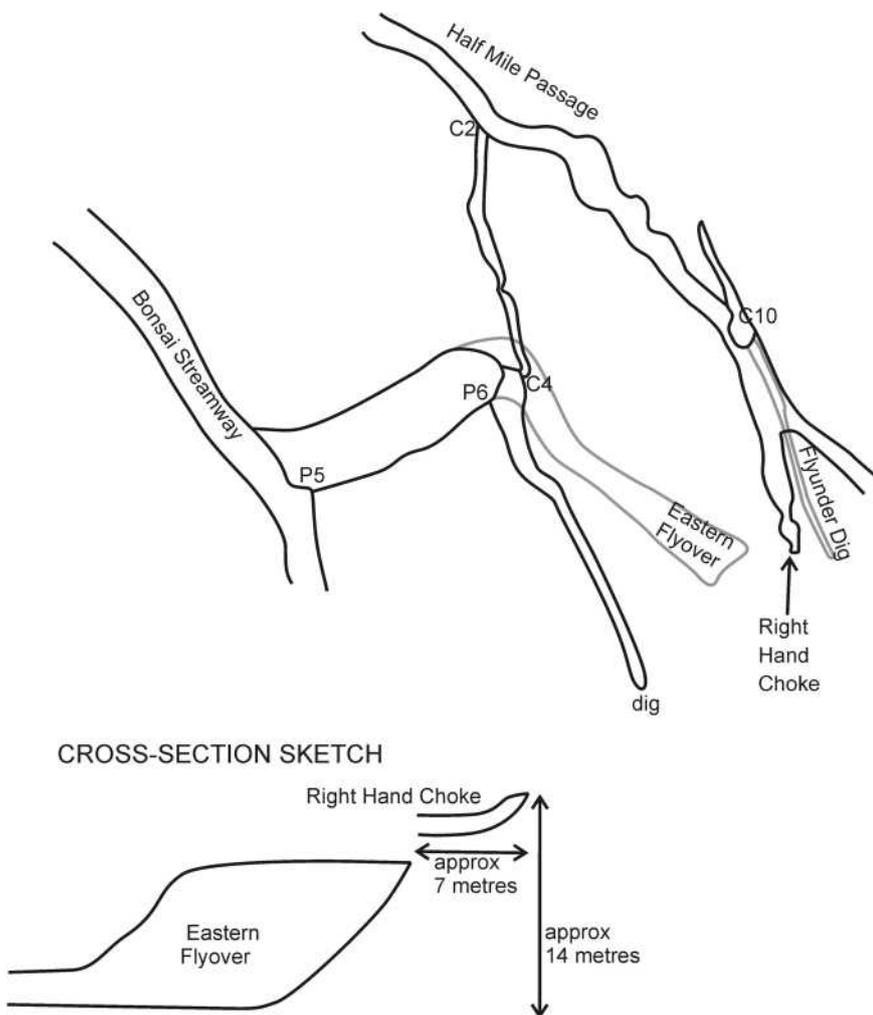
Bypassing Eastern Flyover Choke

by Adrian Fawcett

My previous article about extending Daren Cilau described attempts to break into large fossil passages believed to lie between the known cave and the Clydach Gorge, one of those being the continuation of Eastern Flyover passage.

The passage ends at a ramp rising nearly 10 metres into a very large choke. Digging this would be a very serious undertaking. A potentially easier dig is Half Mile Passage Right Hand Choke, and according to the published survey the horizontal distance between the two chokes is quite small.

There was also the question about where the end of the Flyunder Dig was compared with Eastern Flyover Passage. This had not been previously been surveyed to any grade.



On 20th May I undertook a disto survey from Eastern Flyover Choke to the Right Hand Choke and to the end of the Flyunder to get a better idea whether either of these two dig sites might lead to a connection.

First, the Flyunder. The end of this dig, although heading in a promising direction, is about 6 metres below the level of the Eastern Flyover floor before the ramp up to the choke. The Eastern Flyover Passage is expected to descend beyond the choke, but nevertheless the Flyunder is probably unlikely to break into open passage any time soon.

The Right-hand choke, on the other hand, is about 5 metres higher than Eastern Flyover Choke, and about 7 metres beyond it. If the Eastern Flyover ramp continues up into the choke – as seems likely – the two passages are on the right level to connect.

A preliminary digging session at the Right Hand Choke had already taken place in March and, encouraged by the

new survey data, a drain rod was taken into the cave on 18th August and used to dislodge boulders remotely. This technique worked quite well, and about a metre of forwards progress was made. Rocks come out in ones and twos with no major avalanche down the slope. While I was jousting boulders, Helen was enlarging the approach passage to make a rapid retreat more straightforward!

Another drain rod and some sort of grappling tool is now required for the next session. There is no evidence of collapse of the shale band, and the air is fresh rather than draughty, so I am hopeful the choke will not go too much higher before a stable ceiling is reached. The hope is that we will reach the top of a ramp going down the other side – hopefully time will tell.

Daren Camp, August 18th-20th

Last camp at HRC we had an impressive team of 9 which enabled us to have a full on dig at Kilburn Highroad, as well as make a good progress at the Flyby dig (see above report). Both digs are going well and are conveniently close together to be dug simultaneously while sharing the same luncheon area and stove for hot squash. It was good to have 4 new faces at camp, who not only helped with our digging efforts but also added to the fun of life at HRC. As well as hard graft with sand and boulders a tourist trip to the Helibeds was undertaken, and the way out was via the scenic route along Crystal Oxbow and Half Mile to the Meeting Room to show those that hadn't been before the splendours of that part of the cave. The next scheduled camps are 22nd-24th September and 10th-12th November, all takers welcome.

- Mandy



L-R Adrian, Rufus, Rich, Mike, Helen, Richard, Charles, Mandy and Matt



Rich Smith at the Helibeds

Photos by Mike Waterworth

Western Flyover Clean Up - All clutter from the kitchen area of the old Western Flyover camp was bagged up by Adrian on the last HRC weekend, and is now stationed at the foot of the Flyover rope and the White Passage rope climb ready to exit the cave. Any help transporting this out of the cave would be appreciated.

An excellent evening trip was had in

Llanelly Quarry Pot

Tuesday 16th May 2017. Dave Coulson, Adrian Fawcett, Paul Tarrant and Claire Vivian took part. We met near the quarry at 6.30pm and headed to the cave with minimal faffing. Paul was put off by some of the entrance section, but the rest of us continued down with Adrian forging ahead to rig the pitch. The entrance series was quite snug, but it opened up to a very nice pitch and then came some more crawling before we popped out in to the Midsummer Night's Dream streamway. This was larger and much prettier than I was expecting and we stopped to take some photos of the formations along the way.



Dave led out of the entrance series on the way out and found some of it slightly challenging with a lack of footholds within range to push off. This seemed to be a height issue to me as, for a change, I found being short helped as I could bend my legs enough to reach some footholds that had been out of Dave's reach. Fun was had! It was a perfect length evening trip. Thanks Adrian!

by Claire Vivian

CSS Mendip BBQ Weekend August 2017



Charterhouse Cave 5 August 2017

Joe Duxbury, Jennie Lawrence, Jann Padley, Dave King (MNRC)

Even before the new extensions to Charterhouse Cave had been dug, I had never been to what is currently the deepest cave on Mendip. So when the opportunity for a trip came up at the CSS Mendip weekend, I jumped at the chance. However, I hadn't realised what the trip would involve – I was in for a surprise!

After collecting Dave King, our leader, from the MNRC hut, the team met up at Charterhouse Farm. A short walk across the fields and we were at the entrance. After a short distance inside, there's an old gate, the approach to which is tight, snagging my oversuit because I was facing the wrong way.

The next major landmark is The Citadel, a large chamber with some nice formations. After that comes the Chill Out Choke, a marvel of subterranean effort, considering the choke was dug downwards (i.e. all the rocks had to be hauled upwards) for about 100 ft. As chokes go it was sporting, worming our way through the voids, none of which were too challenging.

Then we reached The Narrows, a stretch of downward-sloping tight rift. I confess I struggled through this. Eventually we reached The Frozen Cascade, which is a fine slope of flowstone. Dave told us that the Portal Pool was a bit further on, but I didn't feel the effort involved in a few more crawls to get there was necessary, so I waited here while the others went off for a look.

On the way back, I worried about the tight bits, so I got someone to go in front with a sling in case I needed a bit of a pull. But all the squeezes were in fact easier going uphill, possibly because less effort is needed to stop yourself falling forwards into the narrowest bits, at the floor. And going up through the boulder choke was a fine scramble.

Looking at the survey of the whole cave, we visited approximately only one-third of the total length. All credit to the diggers.

by Joe Duxbury



As Joe mentions in his Charterhouse write up, this was a particularly active weekend with a goodly number of trips going on. This started on Friday with Duncan kindly leading a trip to Chamber 20 in Wookey Hole, taking advantage of the new dry tunnel route so the non-aquatic caver can see the sights previously reserved for divers only. Tourists can only venture as far as the walkway traversing the chamber, but though the massive fluted rock that this showcases is impressive, there's plenty more passage heading off from here for the caver to explore and lots more formations hidden from the public eye. Everyone enjoyed their trip and we all met up at The Hunters' afterwards.

Wookey Team - Duncan, Mel, Mike, Dan, Joe and John.

Saturday involved a medley of underground excursions, with three trips going on in unison...

Charterhouse Cave - Dave King (Leader), Jann, Jennie and Joe - See write up on facing page.

Home Close Hole - Duncan, Adrian, Mike and Steve - A burly trip down to the end of the Wigmore Streamway, a varied trip with an impressive SRT pitch, ladders, splashy rifts and lots of Mendip mud (see Duncan's write up in volume 58 no 4/5/6 for further information).

Sidcot Swallet - Mandy and John - Our intention had been to do a trip to Tynning's Barrow Swallet, but as there was no one at the farm to collect a key from, we formed a plan B, Lionel's Hole. As we then were unable to find said cave (I'd foolishly left MU behind and couldn't remember how far up the road the entrance was), we changed to plan C of Sidcot Swallet. I always enjoy this cave, and John had never been before, so we had a very jolly outing. We even had a bonus sprint through Goatchurch and a visit to the ice cream van.

Back at the hut we met up with some of the others and embarked upon another caving venture...

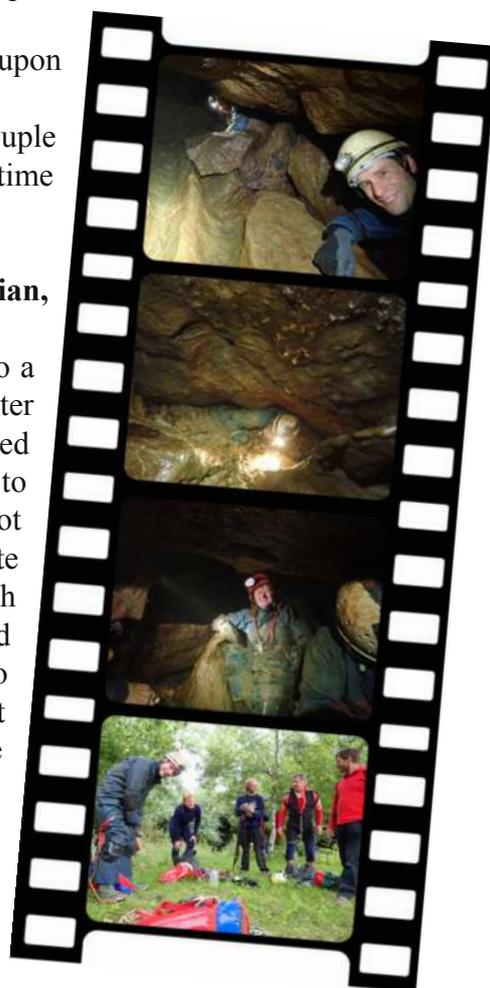
Swildon's Hole - Lee, Tim, Adrian, Mike and Mandy - We had a couple of hours to spare before we needed to stoke up the BBQ, so plenty of time for a saunter down to Sump 1 and back.

Hobnail Hole/Thrupe Lane Swallet - Jann, Jennie, Jemima, Adrian, Mike, Matt, Mandy plus Dave and Ray (MNRC)

This was our choice of cave on Sunday. My initial plan had been to do a simple though/exchange trip from one cave to the other. But high water levels prevented this option as the surface stream needed to be diverted down Thrupe in order for us to access Hobnail. So a plan was hatched to include a descent down to the bottom of Atlas Pot using the Slither Pot route from Marble Streamway. None of us had done this particular route before, so it seemed like a good thing to check out. It's actually a much muddier way than going directly down the shaft, and we were surprised at how much silt there was on the rocky ledge high up between the two pitches. As everything at that level was all rock, we concluded that Atlas Pot must occasionally flood all the way up to this point to leave the mud deposited there. This was an interesting outing, and the new entrance to the system was a first for most of the team, but I think we were all pleased to get back to the sunshine after exposure to the gusty breezes and splashy water at the bottom of the cave.

by Mandy Voysey

Photos by Steve Sharp and Jennie Lawrence





CSS Pembrokeshire Weekend

July 2017



An excellent range of activities took place on this CSS Meet, particularly as some of us extended our stay to include some kayaking among barrel jellyfish and seals on Thursday, and a good burly coast walk in glorious sunshine from St Martin's Haven to Dale and back via the pub at Marloes on Friday. Inclement weather somewhat scuppered our plans for kayaking and sea caves at St Bride's Bay on Saturday. Instead we split into 2 teams of 4 - one going to the Isle of Skomer to see the puffins, and the





other attempting then aborting a seafaring mission before heading to the pub at Druidstone, looking at the caves, and enjoying another good coast walk. Luckily the weather improved during the day, so both teams had a good time. We even managed to dine outside, and spend a cheery evening drinking, snacking and chatting round the campfire. The weekend was rounded off nicely by a trip to Ogof Gofan on Sunday, which was a first for most of us. I think we all enjoyed the abseil off the cliffs as much as we did the cave - though the formations are indeed top class. Thank you Mike, Dawn, Jann, Jennie, Paul, Adrian, Tim and Matt for coming along and contributing to the fun.



CHOKED

Beginnings

I am a Founder member of the C.S.S. and the editor has kindly suggested that fellow members might be interested if I wrote something about caving in the early days of the Society. So here goes!

A geographic conundrum

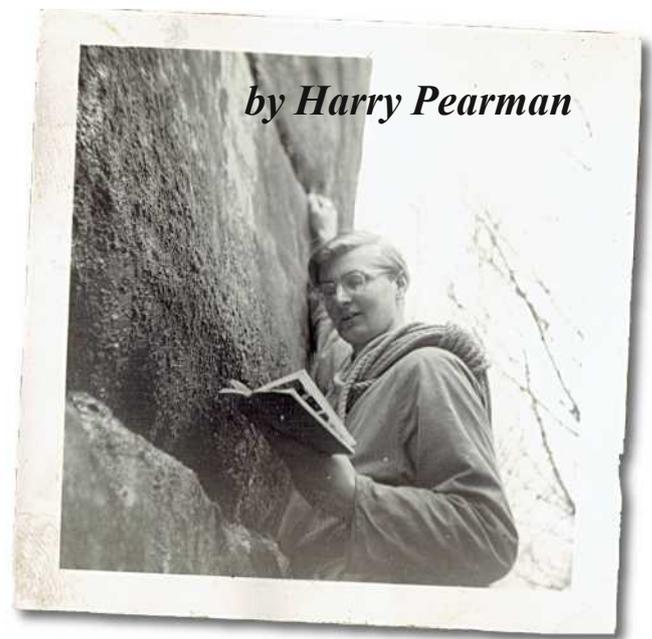
Chelsea is not the sort of place that you would choose instinctively to start a caving club. You could walk the length of the Kings Road, and believe me I have tried, and not find so much as an ornamental grotto. Yet the former Metropolitan Borough does have a deserved reputation as a trend-setter which is derived from its uncanny ability to produce, protect and nurture any worthwhile idea.

As a provenance for this hypothesis we can point to the enduring 1950s legacies of Habitat, The Body Shop, Mary Quant, The Flower Show, Miniskirts, Ann Summers, Sloane Rangers, coffee bars, and boutiques. All of which coalesced to form the foundation for what became known as the Swinging Sixties.

The 1st Chelsea Rover Crew comprised four young men with a taste for outdoor activities and



*The first CSS annual dinner 1958
On the left from front to back: Vic Davall, Heather Morrison, Patsy O'Leary, Bill Maxwell, ?, ?
On the right from front to back: John Welch, Ian Morgan, ?, Charlie Cheesman, ?*



by Harry Pearman

seemed destined to be untouched by the Chelsea effect, but then they had their Big Idea, it clicked in, and events took their course. The group grew by accretion and by word-of-mouth recommendation.

When it was reconstituted as the C.S.S. [1] it consisted of about 15 men and women in their twenties with a mixture of trades, professions and educational qualifications.

And what was this idea? It was that beneath the Mynydd Llangattwg and adjoining mountains in the Usk Valley of South Wales, there lay a vast complex of caves, awaiting our exploration and survey [2].

But first we had a geographic conundrum to solve. Llangattock is 150 miles from Chelsea and none of us owned a car.

Getting there

The solution to the transport problem was to hire a 10-seater Dormobile with a roof rack for a weekend. On a Friday evening I would pick one up from a garage in Kingston Vale and park it outside



South Kensington Tube Station. People would turn up, tie their bags on the roof and snuggle down in the back inside their sleeping bags: Dormobiles were a bit draughty.

We would leave at 6.30 p.m. and take the A40 for the six and a half hour journey to South Wales (the motorways came later). There was one stop at



the legendary Windrush Café and during the journey the passengers kept the driver awake with an endless repertoire of caving songs.

At Llangattock we slept on the floor of the Old Daren Sunday School^[3] and cooked with Primus paraffin stoves. People took it in turns to go uphill to the spring to fetch water and downhill to empty the chemical closet.

Exploration

One weekend from this period stands out in my memory and it featured a determined attempt to push the exploration of Ogof Agen Allwedd (“Aggy”)^[4]. At this point, following the passing of the First Boulder Choke by the Hereford Caving Club and entry into Aggy 2, the Second Boulder Choke had been dealt with rapidly and Aggy 3 entered. A major inlet, the Turkey Passage Series, was still being explored by Hereford and the further exploration downstream of the Main Stream Passage was up for grabs. Entrance into the cave via Ogof Gam had yet to be established and everything had to be forced through the obstacle course of the Entrance Series, with its highlight, the notorious squeeze called Sally’s Alley^[5].

The Main Stream Passage had been followed downstream for several hundred feet, but exploration had been stopped by Deep Water. This exposed the limitations of the equipment then available, which were in turn conditioned by the

release of batches of war surplus materiel to the private sector.

Thus standard army hobnailed boots gave a good grip on rock at first but became slippery when the surface of the nails became smooth and polished with usage. It was a relief when rubber-soled (Vibram) boots became available. Cotton boiler suits were readily obtainable and were worn over several layers of woollen garments. This arrangement was comfortable enough, but it soaked up water like a sponge. Then exposure suits, popularly known as Goon Suits were released. These were developed to help airmen who faced exposure after ditching in the sea. They covered the whole body and included a hood. The suit could be inflated by pulling out a rubber tube near the chin and blowing into it. When fully inflated it made the owner look like an advert for Michelin tyres!

We also needed flotation gear and this was fulfilled when RAF K-type one man rubber dinghies came onto the war surplus market, and I managed to obtain two of these through the “Exchange & Mart” magazine, by swapping them for my extensive schoolboy collection of postage stamps. We tried the boats out at various locations such as a tunnel on the Regents Canal and a conduited section of one of the tributaries of the Thames. We also devised a number of ways in which two people could share a dinghy without capsizing.

Our plan for Saturday was to divide into three teams which would have the following roles:-

Team 1 (3 people) Carry the two dinghies to Deep Water and inflate them.

Team 2 (4 people) Leave two hours after Team 1. Meet them at Deep Water, take over the dinghies and explore downstream for two hours.

Team 3 (3 people) Leave two hours after Team 2. Meet them at Deep Water on their return and render any assistance required. Pack the dinghies and bring them out.

The plan got off to a good start. At Deep Water Team 2 arrived just as Team 1 had finished dinghy inflation and they took possession of the two craft and got ready to set sail on an unexplored underground river flowing to an unknown destination.

Setback

Then an unexpected setback occurred. As Team 3 got ready to go below ground, a thunderstorm broke out over Llangattock, which was one of the

worst in living memory, and it drenched the unprotected hillside with torrents of rain.

Team 3 were acutely aware that they had no means of communicating this turn of events and its implications with the two teams that were ahead of them.

I was in Team 2 and I had been as far as Deep Water before on a reconnaissance trip and I could not help but notice how much noisier it seemed than before. You could hear rocks being rolled along the river bed by the current.

We had all visualised a trip where we paddled slowly through lofty well-decorated corridors, but here we were faced with a fast-flowing sluice and a lowering roof. This raised the possibility of two fresh hazards. One was that we might disappear altogether after being sucked into an underwater system. The other was that we might become jammed between the ceiling and the water surface and be unable to progress or retreat.

Game On

There was a moment when the four of us stood staring at one another and I think that it would only have taken one of us to say “Blow this for a game of soldiers”, or words to that effect, and we would have quietly abandoned the trip, and returned to Chelsea to think again. In the event nobody said a thing so it was “Game On” and we set about embarking.



We had practised Embarking, Disembarking, Steering and Paddling in a variety of locations but nothing could have prepared us for the reality, for

as soon as we were afloat, the river grabbed us and flung us about in all directions. It took all of our efforts to stay in touch with the dinghies. After what seemed an age but was probably only about five minutes, suddenly we shot out into a substantial chamber floored with a lake.

The Mynydd Llangattock River flows across this chamber and loses itself in the base of huge shingle beach and at the back of this is another boulder choke (Choke 3), which stretches up out of sight above the ceiling level.

We paddled up to the beach, disembarked and stretched our cramped limbs, then for the next 30 minutes we indulged in a bout of explorers' fever. We drew an imaginary line down the middle of the choke and each boat took a half and chucked loads of rocks around looking for an easy way through. There wasn't one.

At one stage my companion was about to shift a large rock when he froze and pointed. It was coated in soft mud and in the middle was an arrow drawn by a human finger. The inference was that an unknown solo caver had been here before us^[6].

Half an hour after we started there came a shout from the beach. One caver from the other boat had gone back to get them each a Mars Bar^[7]. When we had disembarked we had pulled the boats up the beach clear of the water. To his horror he found that both boats were afloat. The true nature of our predicament suddenly became apparent. Water was

entering the chamber faster than it could escape and was backing up in the passage we had used.

We had a quick conference. The backing up meant that the current had reversed and would aid our escape. Also we had worked out that on bends the river was depositing shingle on the outside of the curves and cutting a trench on the inside. It should be possible to find a wading route out. This was just as well, as looking along the passage showed that the sides of the dinghy would scrape the roof in places. There was no question of anyone sitting in a dinghy. This left one problem – the complete lack of handholds.

Someone suggested letting half of the air out of the dinghies and two of us could push down on a boat till it submerged and we would then manoeuvre it

into position and let go. It should then pop up and cling to the roof of the passage, held in place by water pressure. We gave it a quick trial and it worked, although it took a lot of upper body strength to keep the boat under control. We began a slow retreat.

Back at the Deep Water start point Team 3 were far from happy. They had witnessed the severity of the thunderstorm, but felt obliged to venture underground to back up the others. Water was pouring into the cave through every fissure. They met up with the exiting Team 1 and were alarmed to learn that Team 2 had literally taken the plunge. Team 1 then continued out to put the Cave Rescue on standby. Team 3 then continued to the Deep Water start point and there they waited and waited, getting wetter and colder. Team 2 were half an hour overdue. Team 3 began to fear for their own safety.

One of the team then claimed to see a flash of light above the flood and they all waded in to give assistance, but it was a false alarm. Then, before their eyes, the nose of a partly deflated dinghy began to emerge, and, when they dragged it out two bedraggled and exhausted cavers were clinging to it. This was followed by the other boat and the united teams embraced one another. In a draught-free alcove Team 3 lit a butane stove and brewed up a restorative drink and handed round some more Mar bars. They had to shout to make themselves heard above the noise from the river.

Suddenly there was silence.

It was as though someone had thrown a switch. Deep Water had sumped.

It was time to leave.

They stowed the dinghies high up in the roof and made a slow exit.

Postscript

One month later four other C.S.S. members capitalised on the experience and made a campsite for themselves in Keyhole Chamber back near the Second Choke. They had organised a back-up team of Sherpas, who paid a daily visit to bring in consumables and a weather forecast and took out rubbish. They planned to stay underground for up to a week. The camp was only 20 minutes from Deep Water and they ran a handline through this and adopted the wading route.

The dinghies were repacked and taken out. They later saw service in Dan yr Ogor and Speedwell Cavern. At a high point in the Third Choke they installed a survival box with emergency rations and first aid kit for anyone unlucky enough to get trapped by flood water.

They spent many hours working on the 3rd Choke using a crowbar, club hammer and wedges. On the third day the Choke yielded and they entered Aggy 4, which comprised another length of the main stream passage leading to Choke No. 4.

The Sherpas were given a tour of the new extension as a reward for their efforts.

Footnotes

[1] The Society was formed in 1956.

[2] As arranged through the good offices of Brian Price, the discoverer of Ogor Agen Allwedd.

[3] A more detailed account of the early days of the Society can be found in its 50th anniversary publication.

[4] Ogor Agen Allwedd = Cleft Key Cave after the keyhole shape of the entrance.

[5] "Sally" Seagrave was member of a Sea Scout troop run by Brian Price. He was the first person to pass this obstacle

[6] This individual has never been identified.

[7] Mars bars were the principal source of subterranean sustenance at this time following the discovery that you could coat them in mud and mangle them into any shape and still eat them.

My guess is that we have so far fulfilled 50% of the 'Big Idea' which to remind you is the exploration and survey of the cave systems associated with Mynydd Llangattock. We have some useful assets put by, viz. a significant body of members living in Crickhowell, a well-established hut on the mountain serving as a venue, HQ, and rescue centre, plus cash in the bank. All that we need now is a plan, dividing the overall task into discrete projects, setting out objectives, manpower estimates and timescales for each, and determining priorities. What do you think?

Mandy Voysey's JOURNAL FROM JURA

Last year seven intrepid CSS members journeyed to the Jura for a caving holiday. After which we all seemed to be suffering from the same delusion - that someone else would write up the trips. However now that my husband is an editor in need of material I felt duty bound to cobble together this piece, which may well be lacking in useful facts, but none the less tells the tale of our exploits in the fine caves of France.

1st July - Gouffre des Ordon

Today started rather surprisingly with an abduction. It was during breakfast that I noticed that Adrian was missing; the others then informed me that he was last seen being bundled into a foreign vehicle and taken off by some unknown men. Certain that he would *probably* return, we all spent a pleasant while basking in sunshine and kit fettling. An hour or so later Mr Fawcett was eventually returned to us. I assumed they'd thought him unlikely to gain a profitable ransom, but it seems that they'd all gone in search of Gouffre des Ordon, our cave of choice today.

Mike Read, John Stevens, Adrian, Matt and I then set off for some caving action, where further minor complications ensued. Firstly Adrian had obviously eaten too many pies and seemed unable to squeeze into his harness, Mike and I tried to assist, but this was considered annoying rather than helpful. All fully kitted up we finally arrived at the cave, where Adrian commenced the rigging. The first 10m pitch is in daylight and rigged using spits, the next pitch of 20m immediately follows and has been P bolted. It was while rigging the second pitch that Adrian discovered that his light was not working. Undeterred he carried on rigging and descended the open void to the marvellous chamber below - though he couldn't see the marvels for himself until someone more illuminated joined him there. This isn't a particularly long cave (in fact it's quite short), but it is beautifully decorated and a fine choice for our first outing. Lots of photography was undertaken before heading back to the surface. Caving trip sorted, we then collected Dawn and Helga and went for a pleasant wander in a wooded gorge, visited Ornans for posh ice cream, then headed back to the gite for feasting, boozing, and badminton.



2nd July - Gouffre de la Belle Louise

This was the cave that Matt, Adrian and I opted for today as it was local to where we were staying and the description sounded nice. Apparently this isn't a cave to visit in high water conditions, and it was clear that flooding had obviously occurred here fairly recently as the surrounding grass had been flattened by running water flowing down the open shaft. Luckily for us there was nothing but dryness and sunshine on our visit, so we were fine to descend. We were pleasantly surprised yet again to encounter P bolts, and this time for the full descent too. The actual route down into the cave is through a quite diminutive hole just to the side of the vast open chasm. Though initially narrow, this soon opens up to become a spacious wide rift. There are three pitches to descend in this cave, the first 48m with two rebelayes, the second 20m and third 10m, all of which are in attractive white fluted rock, the second and third being particularly shapely and pleasant. We very much enjoyed the cave thus far; however the character did take a bit of a turn for the worse at the bottom. There had been some mighty wedged logs on the way down as a testament to how much water this cave can take, and the lower region had a sort of stagnant pond mud vibe to it. After an initial deep pool that Matt refused to cross, the passages, though spacious, were now muddy, stinky and ornamented with bones.



It was on the way back while posing for a photo in the pool that I spotted the first leech of the holiday. I may have over-reacted to this slightly, as a lot of splashing, thrashing and demanding of help to extricate myself from the leech ridden pool ensued. We then

returned back to the nice stuff to exit the cave. I did spot another couple of leechy blighters on the way out, but the others thought they were just figments of my crazed imagination. Back at the surface we wandered over to look at Grotte des Cavottes then headed back to compare tales with the others, eat, drink and play badminton.

3rd July (my 40th Birthday) - Grotte du Moulin des Iles

When I awoke and headed into the kitchen today I found that Mike had been putting his morning time to good use by making me a brilliant 40th Birthday banner out of cardboard scavenged from around the gite. I was very happy. Birthday greetings dealt with, Mike, Adrian, Matt and I headed off to do Grotte du Moulin des Iles. This was described as "a wet and entertaining trip", which indeed is what it was. This is a single, canyon style stream passage cave with some 120 gour dams, and also helictites to look at. Its location is on the bank of a rather scenic section of the river Loue, which was also very nice. There's nothing too taxing about this particular cave, in fact it is a bit samey, but for a simple fun jaunt it was just the ticket. Taking full advantage of my birthday girl status, I even managed to get both Matt and Mike to ferry me across some of the deep bits on their backs. We got as far as an evil looking duck before returning to sunshine, paddling and stone skimming in the river outside. Back at the gite we met up with the others and headed off for a walk up a local hill topped with a monument, before returning back for a BBQ feast, cider aplenty and more badminton.



4th July - Via Ferrata des Baumes du Verneau



I had attempted this via Ferrata before, many years ago on a previous caving club outing. However back in the day I was petrified of heights and swiftly retreated sweaty browed and clammy handed to go for a walk on good old terra firma instead. Nowadays I'm not quite so easily fazed, so I wanted to have another go to see how enjoyable clambering across the cliffs high above the Verneau actually is. Adrian joined Matt and me, and we spent an excellent couple of hours climbing a medley of metal fixed aids in various lofty positions with birds circling far below.

Our plan after this was to have a trip down the Gouffre de la Baume St Anne. I'd seen pictures of the impressive free hang down the daylight shaft (as seen in an old Petzl poster) and was keen to experience it for myself. However when we arrived at the site with all necessary kit in tow we found that the field containing the shaft was well and truly fenced off with no discernible path to the cave. Undeterred we forged through the long grass to find that the shaft was circled with barbed wire and lots of "Keep Out" signs, obviously cavers were no longer welcome here. As we were in plain sight of a farmer ploughing the neighbouring field we decided it was best not to risk it and headed back disappointed, opting for a walk around the Source du Lison instead. I thought it would be very time efficient to change my clothes in the car on the way over, and I was most surprised while in my undercrackers to see faces I recognised through the back window. It was Mike and Dawn cycling to the same destination. We met up for drinks at the bar, investigated the Source du Lison, checked out the ancient tree and the statistics of its circumference, and nosed inside the entrance of Grotte Sarrazine before returning back for more food and booze, sadly too late for badminton.



5th July - Gouffre de Jerusalem (home of the Monster Leech!)

Today we were once again in a team of 5 with John, Mike, Adrian, Matt and I all caving in Gouffre de Jerusalem. Knowing that this is quite a popular cave being part of the Verneau system, and encouraged by the amount of P bolts we'd encountered in caves so far, we turned up with a mere 10 hangers and found that in this particular cave dodgy spits are still the only option. Somehow we still managed to descend the 4 pitches to the bottom using some inventive rigging; I think Adrian and Mike quite enjoyed the challenge of it. Matt and I had actually done this cave before, and my memory of it was that it was a bit like a Yorkshire pothole with plenty of rope work but not much cave, however there was much more to see than I expected. I assume that we may have somehow missed the side routes last time, or maybe I'd just forgotten, either way I was quite impressed and we all enjoyed our trip. It was on the way out that I spotted the Monster Leech, lurching about on a ledge part way up the lower section of the daylight pitch. I'd certainly never seen one so long before and it was evidently very eager to attach itself to any passing food that it encountered. Wanting to share my repulsion I pointed the horrible fellow out to the others and insisted that Adrian should abseil back down for a look. John and Mike then headed back to find Dawn and Helga while Matt, Adrian and I checked out the neighbouring Gouffre de la Baume des Cretes. This had a very impressive daylight shaft and some very shiny new P bolts. It looked very tempting, and not wanting to re-don our wet caving kit, we did consider dropping the first bit in normal garb. Maybe we ought to have, but as time was getting on we decided to head back instead and looked at a ruined chateau along the way. Back at the hut more booze and badminton ensued.



6th July - Grotte de Chauveroché

This is the day that will forever be remembered as the day Mike decided that he truly hated his wetsuit. I'd never seen Mike look fierce before, but it seems that spending hours in a chaffing wetsuit that doesn't bend can make even the merriest of men look savage! This cave is a true French classic, and one I'd been wanting to do for many years. The start of the cave is not dissimilar to the muddy parts of Otter Hole, but thankfully doesn't go on for quite so long. Walking like a robot with neoprene seams deeply embedded, Mike was particularly pleased to get this section of the cave out of the way and immerse himself in the watery wonderland that the remainder of the cave is made of. The stream passage really is spectacular with beautiful clear blue water, punctuated only by the walls of large gour pools and flowstone. There are 204 pools to cross before reaching the end of this cave, mostly waist deep, but there's certainly plenty of swimming involved too. Though I would quite like to do the entirety of this fine streamway one day, today we had no intention of pushing on that far, especially as those with less natural insulation than I were getting a bit cold. The cascade climbs seemed like a logical place to turn around, particularly as the water was really pelting down the already very awkward climb. Returning to the surface we were forced yet again into the water, this time into the river outside as clean suits had yet again got covered in clag in the muddy section.

Later that day after dinner, badminton, and possibly too much booze, John proposed an excursion to the Karst walk supposedly only a short distance away. This turned out to be a bit further afield than expected, and it was getting dark by the time we arrived. This is quite a nice landscaped walk with lots of karst features of interest. I believe it might even look better in daylight! John, spotting a cave in a locked compound, decided to climb the barrier to investigate and took Matt with him as his photographer. The rest of us continued walking the circuit, then waited a while, but no sign of John and Matt. Turns out they'd had quite an adventure, first getting lost in the woods, then getting found by members of the local caving club who were having a Speleofest with a woodland party tent. They generously offered Matt and John beds for the night, but luckily didn't offer any booze no matter how keenly Matt and John eyed up their hoard, otherwise we probably wouldn't have seen them again until next morning!



7th July - Relocation day

Today was the day we all departed from the gite at Montrond le Chateau. Matt, Adrian and I had a plan to tack on a trip to Gouffre de Pourpeville, as none of us had done this cave before and we'd heard that it's very well decorated. As it was quite a distance away we decided to re-locate to a campsite nearer to the cave. It took quite a while to travel across, find a campsite and pitch our tents, so we didn't really have time for caving. Instead we went for a walk around the local countryside and discovered that the French also have brambles and nettles.

8th July - Gouffre de Pourpeville

Our objective today was to visit the Avenue Sud, in the Pourpelui 2 section of this cave. Described as "vast, beautiful and carpeted with gour pools", it seemed like a sight not be missed. So, armed with a survey and what seemed like a very useful and detailed trip report, we set off full of confidence and prepared to witness wonders. The entrance to the cave is a 10m daylight shaft, and shortly afterwards the Grand Puits is reached. This is a 33m deep shaft, initially against a wall, but then opening out to become a particularly airy free-hang. We all agreed that this was an impressive pitch. The route after this was initially easy, we knew that there was a particularly tortuous route or a more sensible option to choose from, and we succeeded in finding the latter. So far so good... everything was very pleasant going. The passage here was mostly aqueous and often deep, but very attractive. We could tell when we were approaching the Lac du Guano as we could smell the guano and hear the bats well before we could see them! After this straight forward bit of streamway everything got a bit confusing, we were following the directions correctly, but the description no longer fitted. We did a lot of re-tracing our steps and reinterpreting the information before finally it seemed that everything made sense. That was until we got a very low, long, wet crawl, with a danger sign warning of flooding. This wasn't mentioned at all in the report we had. Matt continued regardless, while Adrian re-examined the write up and survey to conclude that we must be heading towards the mini-collecteur and hence completely the wrong part of the cave. The spirit of *bonhomie* was temporarily absent at this point in our trip, Matt had gone solo while Adrian sat resolute, and I was just generally miffed. However when Matt returned with tales of wonder, hostility was soon out of the window and we were united in the knowledge that it was most definitely the description at fault. We then sped through the horrible crawl, up an awkward climb and marvelled at the medley of long knobby stalagmites and large gour pools, before making a swift exit to be out in time for our call out.





We returned to the campsite very happy to have concluded our caving holiday with such nice trip and enjoyed pizza, beer and live music at the on-site alfresco bar. The couple providing the musical entertainment even did requests, but sadly didn't indulge Adrian's suggestion of The Alan Parson's Project even though it was apparently on their repertoire.

All in all a very enjoyable time was had. The caving was fun and varied, the climate lovely, and the cider a revelation. This was an excellent location, not just for the subterranean delights on offer, but also for the local scenery. Plenty of walking and cycling was also undertaken during the week, and we all enjoyed the BBQ's and badminton matches we had at the gite. Thank you Adrian for organising this CSS Meet.

The Great Holwell Cavern Mystery

The last newsletter stirred a few memories as Holwell Cavern was host to my very first cave visit, my first cave digs and my first cave photos. Also it reminded me of a mystery we never got around to solving. OK so back to the beginning as it were. As school kids we used to cycle up to the cave in the early 1960's. I must have got hooked on caving then but having no transport other than a pushbike my horizons were limited. None of the East Series was known back then and I remember looking at an undug mud choke at Shepton Squeeze thinking "that looks interesting". Anyway as you might have guessed Shepton Mallet Club members beat me to it. Well no worry I just dug the end of the new extension to find "The East Series Extension" which had some fine formations, sadly now long gone I guess. This provided yet another entrance to the cave but even back then

it was too tight for me. We used the old Victorian gate to support boulders at the start of The East Series. We started the Cerberus Chamber dig in a failed effort to intercept the stream running that way from Andrew Crosse's Chamber. Peter Glanvill helped here and Luke Devenish came up with the bang. It is still the deepest point in the cave. I borrowed a camera and asked somebody in a local shop how to use it in a cave. I still have the photos. One shows my village friend Terry Robinson in a motorbike helmet. That was way back in 1963. Well, what of the mystery?



My first cave photo, showing Terry Robinson in a crash helmet 1963

Later in the 60's it appeared to us that somebody else was visiting the cave. It was a lovely spot back then and a huge stag frequented the wood. We got sort of friendly with him though he did bite me on one occasion. We left a note at the cave to be picked up by a young fellow from Chard. This was Peter Glanvill who became a lifelong friend and now 50 years later I am still digging caves with him. Another to join us was Pete Rose, also a life long caving friend. Miraculously we three just avoided drowning in Swildon's in 1968 when the cave flooded to the roof. We got windy at the 40ft Pot and went out. Anyway we were the last to see The Forty before it got washed away. So, back to Holwell.

After heavy rain a flood stream from the fields ran off to enter the quarry and sink at the cliff face 50ft West of the known cave. It is possible this stream entered the cave at Pretty Grotto to join the main stream in Andrew Crosse's Chamber. I joined Peter Glanvill and friends at a dig there in 1968/69. We trenched down to find natural cave passage but it became too tight for us to follow. Both Petes went off to university around then and having my own transport I became interested in digging caves at Fairy Cave Quarry. We never went back and I suppose the trench fell in and the dig was forgotten. Well at some point Peter Glanvill got a letter from a local school saying that a small boy had passed the tight bit to enter a new chamber. We never checked it out and I have no reason to doubt the authenticity so therefore virgin cave should exist at Holwell. Maybe it could be accessed from the known cave. The original trench got buried when the Tradesman's Entrance was blocked by tipped material. Neither are very deep down and could be excavated from the surface. Access to the cave seemed impossible for a long while as the previous owner was rather anti-caver. Maybe if things have changed I will pop back for a look.



Pete Glanvill's photo of the dig with me on the left

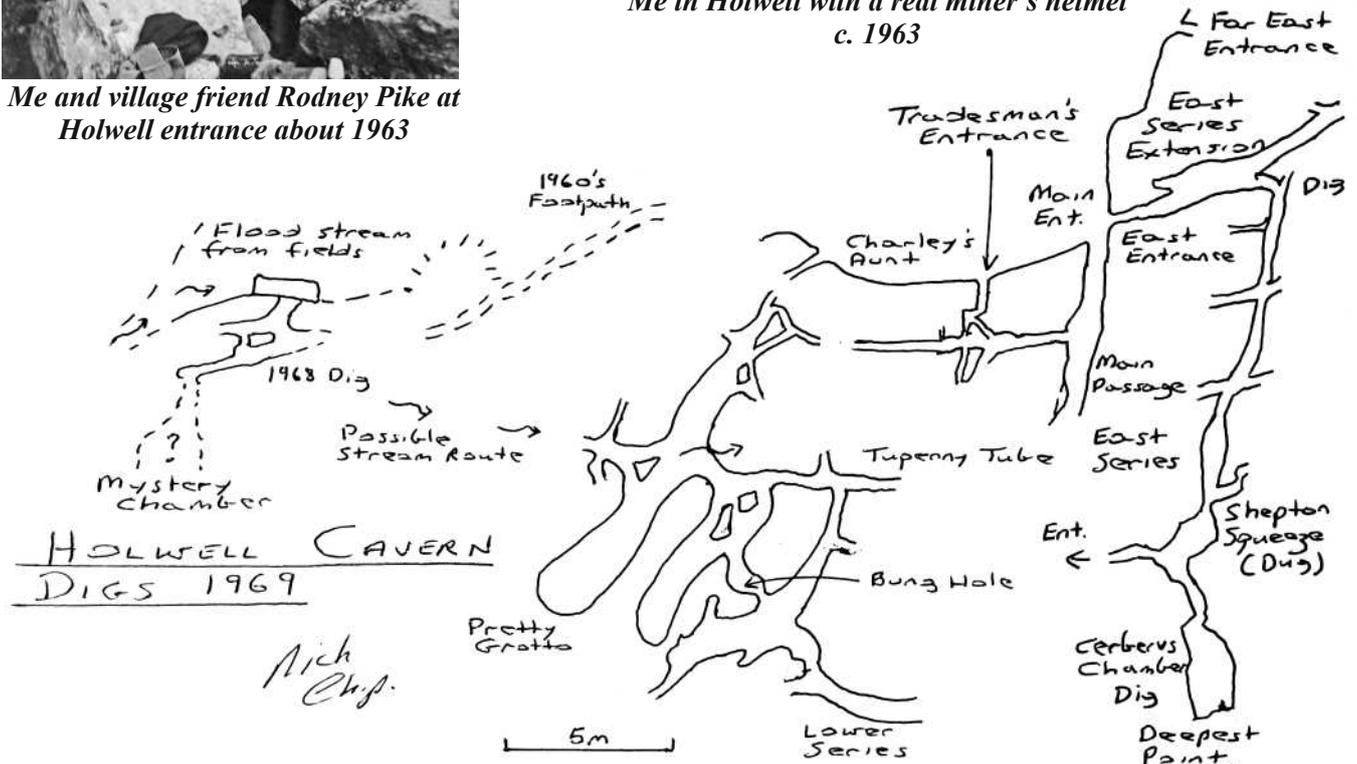
Nick Chipchase, August 2017.

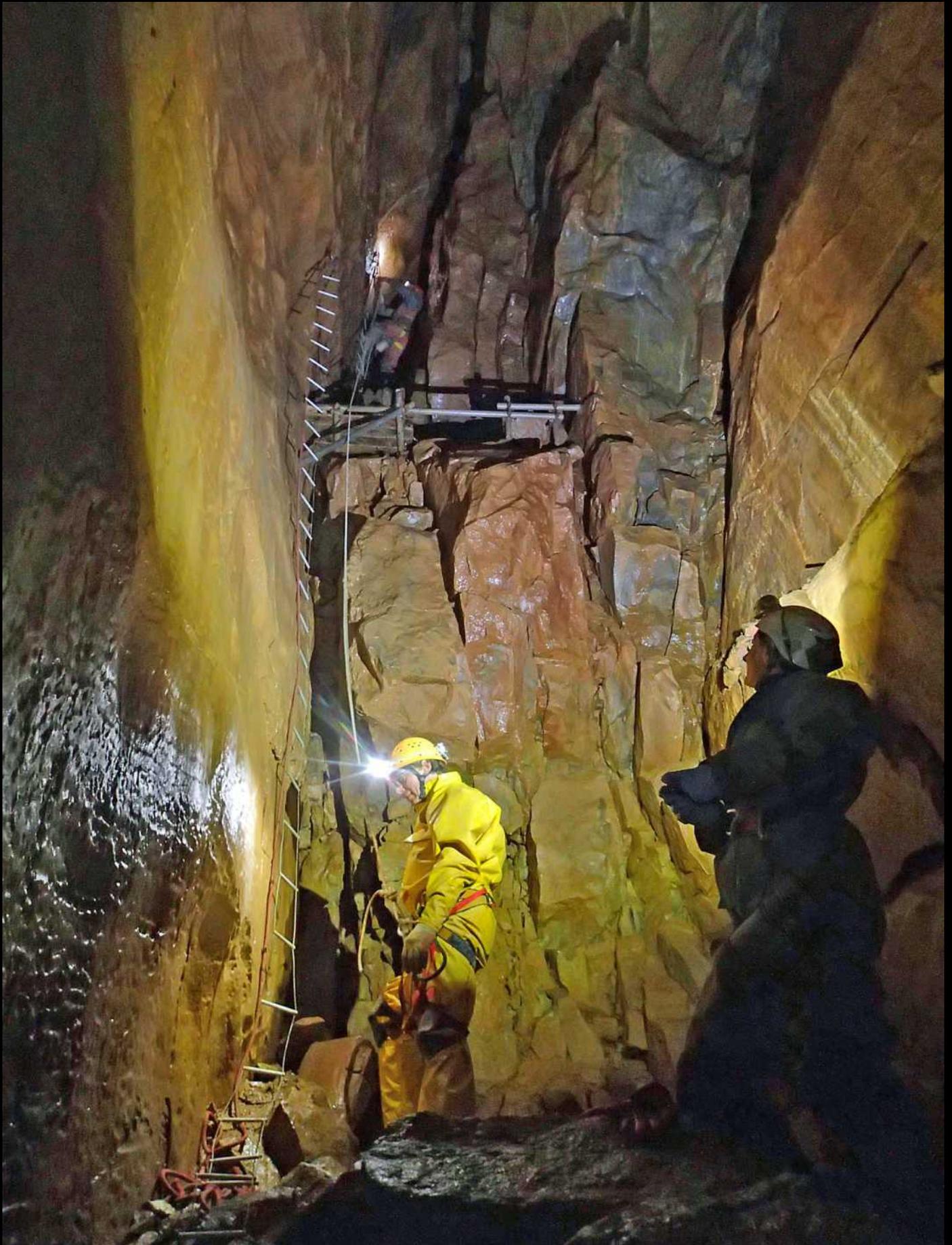


Me and village friend Rodney Pike at Holwell entrance about 1963



Me in Holwell with a real miner's helmet c. 1963





*Pitch and Platform
The Frozen Deep, Reservoir Hole.
by Nick Chipchase*

