

**Volume 60  
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Jan/Feb/Mar 2018**



**Daren Cilau  
Nenthead Mines  
Prokofiev & Nyth Brân  
Old Daren Sunday School**

**CHELSEA SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY**



*Above: The OFD Team, Feb 2018.  
Photo by Matt Voysey.*

*Front Cover: Jemima Chancellor in Creek Alley,  
OFD, Feb 2018. Photo by John Stevens.*

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*'Wishbat' by Gonzo*



*'The Laughing Caverlier'  
by Joe Duxbury*

**Editorial** Thank you to everyone who contributed stories and pictures for this issue. Without you there'd be nothing, so keep up the good work! 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. Also a special plea for the photographers out there to take note of the opportunity for a stunning colour cover or photo spread and send me your pictures.

Please submit all material for publication to [cssmattv@gmail.com](mailto: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.

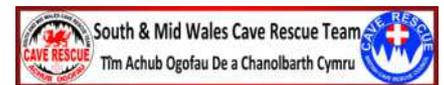
A **FULL COLOUR** electronic version of this newsletter is available to download from the members area of the club website and the club forum. Also, if you would prefer to go 'paperless' and receive electronic copies of the newsletter in future let me know.

*Matt  
(and Mandy)*

## Upcoming Rescue Practices

*by Paul Tarrant*

Here are the details of SMWCRT rescue practices that will take place during the coming year. The different rescue scenarios are designed to offer challenging issues to team members. Anyone from clubs affiliated to the team (CSS have long been affiliated to SMWCRT, and one of our members, Dan Thorne, is now its Chairman) are very welcome to join these exercises to gain experience of the technical equipment the team use, and to get access to interesting caves. I hope some of you can attend.



### Saturday 17th March - Ystradfellte and Nedd Valley

"Overdue cavers, uncertain Ystradfellte or Nedd Valley cave" rescue scenario.

### Saturday 28th April - National Trust Dolaucothi Mine, Pumsaint

Rehearse casualty evacuation through emergency escape shaft from public-accessed show mine.

### Saturday 2nd June - Dan yr Ogof Show Cave

Full scale training exercise to rehearse surface and underground search aspects of a cave rescue incident.

### Saturday 8th September - Whitewalls, Llangattock

Full scale training exercise in Agen Allwedd to rehearse all facets of a cave rescue incident.

### Saturday 1st December - SMWCRT HQ, Penwyllt

Annual Big OFD Training Exercise – proposed cave rescue scenario in Ogof Ffynnon Ddu I.

If you have any questions about Cave Rescue generally, Dan Thorne, Lisa Boore, Tom Foord and myself will only be too happy to give you answers.

## 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: £18** to receive publications, plus £6 for BCA non-caver insurance.

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

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

**[chelseaspelaeo.org](http://chelseaspelaeo.org)**

Please send all subscriptions to:

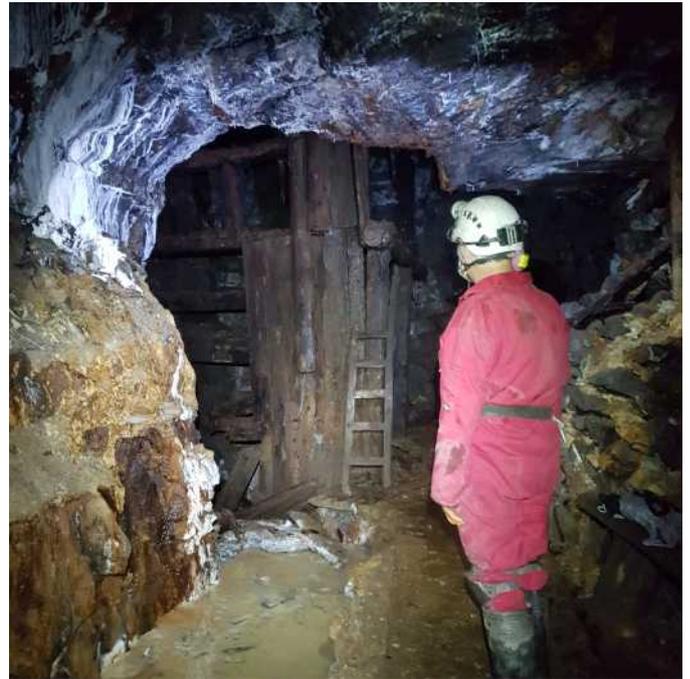
Gary Jones, 29 Canney Close, Chiseldon, Swindon, SN4 0PG.

# Nenthead Lead Mines

*by Helen Nightingale*

After the CSS North Wales weekend in October 2017, I headed north to Cumbria for a week in Nenthead to go down the lead mines. Nenthead is one of several villages claiming to be the highest in the UK. It's very bleak and normally cold and wet. The village was built for the lead miners, and there is very little there except a pub and mining heritage – imagine a Northern version of Tanygrisiau, only colder and wetter. There used to be a visitor centre, but sadly this closed down several years ago. The area, which is a scheduled ancient monument, is now looked after by a small charity, Nenthead Mines Conservation Society. One of the buildings they look after is now a bunk house available to BCA insured people. It used to be the Assay House, where batches of minerals and ores coming out of the mines were tested. It's very conveniently located right in the middle of the 4 major mine entrances on the site, and a 5-minute walk via gravel track to the pub.

In the car park by the old visitor centre are the entrances to Rampgill and Capelclough. Following the gravel track up a gentle slope takes you to the old Assay House, barracks, workshops, and remains of mining buildings. A large proportion of one of the buildings has now become Hartside Café, at the top of the highest hill in the area, and at the summit of a very windy steep road that the mad cyclists like torturing themselves on. Follow the track further up the hillside, and you find another old mine building, and the entrance into Carr's Mine. Part of the mine is a show mine, with tours lead by the same volunteers who look after the place. It's been kept as close to "wild" as possible but still keeping the mines inspectorate happy. There's some boarding over the water that flows along the path in places, and there is new timberwork in place rather than the rotting stuff you get used to seeing everywhere else, but that is essentially it. Further up the hill again is the entrance to Smallcleugh. At most it's a 10-minute walk from the bunkhouse to Smallcleugh – and it only takes that because the hill gets steeper and the wind gets stronger. There are various other mines in the area, all within a short drive. If you walk over the hillside, there is evidence of many shafts in various conditions that may or may not lead to anything. The companies who held leases to the mines had to pay to do exploratory work, and not everything was mapped or documented so there is much of the area that is completely unknown. One of the local myths is that there is an underground passage linking Nenthead to Alston, the nearby town. For once, the myth is sort of true. A drainage channel running under all the main mine system was dug and was passable by boat. In the middle was a large waterfall – the second part of the tunnel proved to be horrendously



*Wooden remains dividing a shaft for ore and men.  
Carr's Mine.*

expensive and was never finished properly. The tunnel was called the Nentforce Level, and is now largely inaccessible. More is known about the Nentforce Level than some of the workings that are still accessible.

All four of the main mine entrances lead to a massive rabbit warren of workings, and other mines called Middlecleugh and Longcleugh, that are only accessible via one of the other mines. Each of the entrances is on the "Horse Level" – so called because the ore was taken out of the mines using ponies and trugs. There's veins and cross veins, upper and lower levels, sublevels, flats, and all sorts to ensure you never run out of choices for trips. Rampgill and Capelcleugh at the bottom of the hill can be accessed from the mines higher up the hill via a host of contortuous routes, some of which you can see on the surveys, other areas are just blanks on the map. A few routes fall in so frequently that you need to take a shovel with you. Some areas look like they are about to fall to pieces but appear to have high levels of anti-gravity. In quite a few places it is wise not to touch anything except the floor you are crawling along. Some of the passageways are not as solid as you think, as false floors are not always immediately obvious. There are some places where gravity has won the battle, and the passageway just stops. It's a bit like walking the plank. There's places where the floor is so thin that my fingers could rest on the top and my thumb could tuck around underneath!

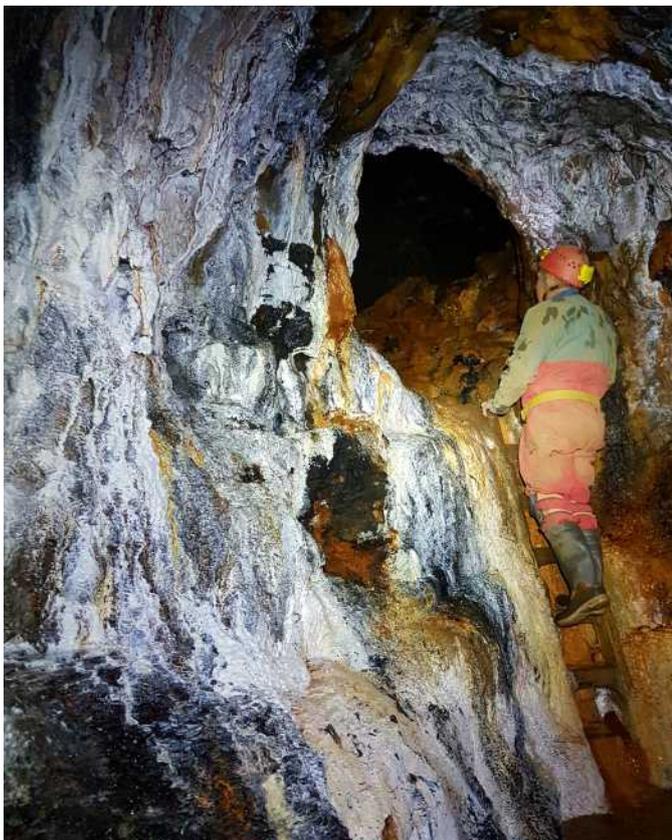
# Carr's Mine

Some of Carr's Mine is open to the public on certain dates, but outside of these access is limited. Apparently, it is possible to reach beyond the show mine section from Smallcleugh via a difficult and complicated route, so this is rarely done. There is now no access through the show mine, to keep the mines inspectorate happy. Thankfully, one of the people in the group I go to Nenthead with is a volunteer mine manager. One of his responsibilities is to check the mine for safety and that nothing is moving. Despite the fact that Carr's has been worked since before 1773, the section of the mine that hasn't fallen in is in pretty good condition. Because the mine is so old, and access is limited, there is still much to see and it is very pretty in places.

The miners blasted passageways using huge chisel-like tools and sledgehammers. One man held the chisel in place, the other hit it into the rock. Each shot-hole cut was triangular, the chisel cut one side and then was turned to cut the next side. You can still see evidence of some of the tools they used, and there is the occasional stick of dynamite lying around. Unlike the slate quarries of North Wales, most of the waste material was left inside the mines. The areas known as flats were large areas of poor quality rock in ancient times, which allowed plenty of mineralisation to occur as the landscape changed over millennia. As these areas were mined out, they formed flat floored room-like areas that are often high enough for the average sized man to stand up in comfortably. These flats are now filled with lumps of waste rock known as deads. Initially the mines were used for producing lead and later on zinc was

produced. The mine management knew that technology would improve over time, so in some areas the deads were re-worked as ore extraction methods changed. There are many other minerals found in the area, and you can see quartz crystals amongst others on the deads. The deads are stacked very neatly and passageways weave around through the flats between walls of deads. In order to use space efficiently, arched tunnels were built using locally produced stone. In many places, the tunnels were built so as to create more space to store the deads. In places, you can see evidence of the tools and equipment used to form the arches. The mines were lit using candles that the miners had to buy themselves. They worked in the dark wherever they could. Candles were held to the walls using lumps of clay. You can find the clay candle holders and some small remains of candles.

There are many well decorated areas in Carr's, although very little is calcite formations like you see in caves. The mine is situated underneath the Handsome Mea reservoir, so water seeps through the rock and minerals leach through with it. There is a lot of very bright white material on the walls, which is hydrozincite or smithsonite (depending on oxygen levels where it forms. They are fairly similar, especially to the ignorant such as myself). There can be yellows, greys and blues streaked down the walls a little like drizzled ice cream sauces. In some areas, there are black crustations down the walls, and in other areas there are ochreous decorations similar to flowstone. In one of the higher levels, tree roots have grown into the ceiling and have been calcited over. I'm using calcite as a generic term here, as its very unlikely whatever is coating the roots is just calcite. Post-mine supergene mineralisation seems to be the technical terminology. Although the mine is relatively small, there is quite a lot to see.



*Left: Typical calcited ladder and lots of Hydrozincite.  
Above: Colourful floor splat. Carr's Mine.*



# Rampgill Mine

Rampgill is easily found, tucked in the corner of the car park next to the buildings. You are well advised not to confuse it with Capelcleugh, which is again easy to find but the other side of the car park and over the stream. When I was having a lazy day, I decided to go for a bit of a potter. There are 3 main branches and one I had never been

down. Most of the horse levels are easy walking with water that isn't particularly deep. You have to go a fair way before risking it breaching your wellies. There are many well preserved artefacts, miners graffiti and interesting things to see in the areas of the mine that I have been into previously. The section I went for a last potter in was Hangingshaw level, and was described to me as turning wet and squalid after a while. Perfect :) Unfortunately I enjoyed a lie in a bit too much, and didn't have as much time as the trip deserved. I shall have to go back. I didn't have a survey, but thankfully if you get yourself confused you just follow the flow of the water to lead the way out. There are a few side branches, but I picked the right route and stuck to the main drag, passing several climbable shafts into the higher levels. Most of these would have been for getting the ore from the high levels down onto the horse levels and into waggons to be pulled out by the ponies. You can see many hoppers in varying condition. Some of the shafts were divided into two sections to separate the ore chute from the man way. In some places, you can find the remains of ladders, some of which are climbable, and in others there are routes to the higher levels involving bits of tat that you don't want to think about what they are held up by. I quite happily strolled along looking at all the prettily decorated walls, and after some time the water started getting deeper. After a while of the water levels rising, the mud levels started rising too. Thick, gloopy ochreous mud started gripping at my wellies, and was starting to get to knee depth. I knew there was a lot more to explore, I was having a lazy day, and I didn't have much time for all of it as we were going to the pub for dinner. I decided I really couldn't be bothered to fall flat on my face in cold water and orange mud, losing my wellies at the same time. As this seemed to be the most likely outcome, I turned around and headed back to where I had spotted a nice fixed

ladder leading up to a higher level.

The nice fixed ladder turned out to be two builders' ladders attached together and fairly firmly tied in place. Bombproof by mine standards. I went up, and found an extensive area of flats. There were quite a few artefacts to look at; trugs, tools etc. In clearings were the dressing floors where the raw rock would have been further prepared before sending it on down to the horse levels and out. There were some sections where you can see the working faces, where large streaks or chunks of galena were glinting in my light. It gives you a really good sense of what it might have looked like when it was still being worked. There are quite a few places where you can scramble around over the deads, and you can find crystals of various minerals if you are lucky. There is quartz, sphalerite, calcite, pyrites, fluorspar of various colours, and others. The area of flats is quite extensive, and I didn't have time to explore all of it. There are more pitches, bolted and pre-rigged to explore another time too. I headed back down the ladder. I had enough time to stop and admire the decorations on the way out. There were yellow mine pearls, and in places the rusting plateways had been covered in sheets of beautifully coloured swirls of mineralisation.

*Top left: Typical arched blockwork horse level with Hydrozincite along one wall.*

*Right: How not to get lost, follow the water. Below: Banging instructions. Rampgill Mine.*





*Snottite, Epsonite and Dynamite. Carr's Mine.*

## Capelcleugh Mine

The entrance to Capelcleugh must be less than 50m from Rampgill, but takes a different bearing under the hillside. It has a very different character to its neighbour. Capelcleugh is WET. It's a wetsuit type of place, and unlike Rampgill where you see pretty colours and niceness fairly early on, in Capelcleugh it's pretty grey and pretty wet right from the start. Strangely this trip was popular, possibly because we were going to the high levels where not many people go. For some reason, mine exploring is mainly done by older men. This trip was no exception. Nick, who lead the trip, and the only one who knew the way, isn't quite retired. Andy is retired but probably hasn't reached 70 yet. Mike is a very slightly built pensioner who has to be in his mid 70's. He's a bit stiff and rusty when it comes to SRT. Steve has fairly recently retired but long past retirement age, and although he is less slightly built than Mike, he can't swim and is afraid of heights. Rob is sort of retired, and is gradually becoming more nervous of new places. And me, at the sprightly young age of recycled 21, but I haven't done any SRT for several years. I didn't know it was an SRT trip until I saw everyone else getting their stuff out of their cars just before we were due to leave. In hindsight, this was probably too large a group to make this a quick trip. But never mind, what we lacked in youth we made up for in schoolboy enthusiasm for misery.

I have been in Capelcleugh before. "It's only shoulder deep at the worst," I was told. That was by an eccentric old man who is well over 6 foot tall. I swam part of the way. I knew better this time and was looking forward to the swim this time around. The first hour of the trip is down one straight passage, which fairly quickly deepens to above everyone's waist, and I quite happily swam along. At intervals, parts of the ceiling have flaked away

meaning you suddenly have submerged trip hazards. There are places where you remain shoulder deep in cold water but the floor has accumulated many bits of ceiling so you progress by suddenly stepping up onto the raised floor and moving while crouched. There are a few dry bits where quite a bit of ceiling now makes up the floor, so you have to crawl along being very careful not to touch anything. After about an hour you reach toilet box junction, named because this is where the miners had a wooden box to use as a toilet. Here it is shallow enough for a couple of people to easily get their SRT kit on. We waddled off down the left-hand turn, back into much of the same cold wet passage. We passed a few sumps and ore hoppers on the way, and then we reached a hopper with a bit of tat hanging down; this was where we started ascending up to the higher level.

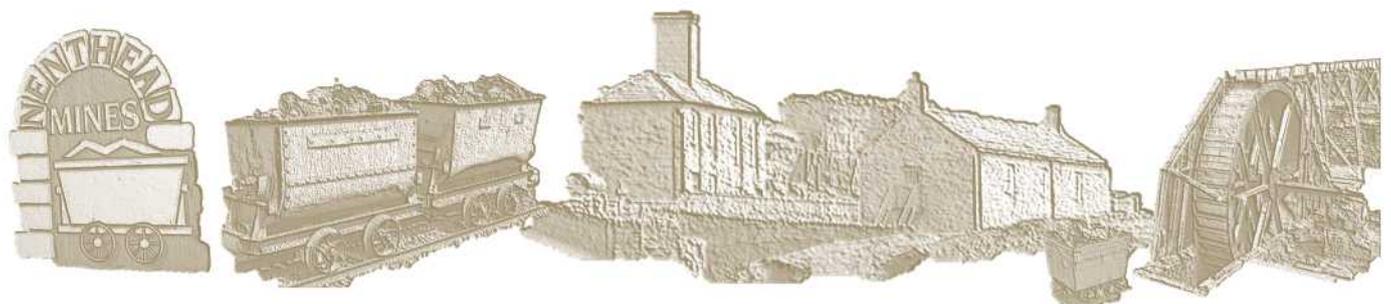
At first it was a bit of an assisted scramble up and over deads that were partially blocking the hopper, and a wiggle around so as to avoid some of the woodwork dividing the ore route from the man way – or what was left of the woodwork. Part way up, you realise where you have scabbled around next to is water filled ore chute. After a bit more scabbling around, you are able to start prossicking up the chute, again being careful not to knock into anything. The exit at the top was rather less than conventional and quite affy, but not *too* horrible. But by this time people were starting to get cold, and upwards progress wasn't fast. We had to wait for each other as only Nick knew the way properly. This plan sort of failed, as Mike was getting too cold. Nick forged ahead with him, leaving Rob directions to pass back. By the time Steve got to the top of the pitch, he was pondering whether he wanted to go any further or whether he should go back the way he came. Rob

seemed to suggest that the way on couldn't be as bad as turning around, and tried to hurry a decision as he was worrying about Mike freezing. He then decided we should press on in pairs, leaving Steve and Andy to faff about deciding what to do. So off we stomped, as best you can stomp when chest deep in water, wearing a wetsuit and full SRT kit. Rob's idea that the way on would be better than turning around turned out to be wishful thinking. The water was getting progressively deeper, easily chin deep, and the ceilings were getting lower. Not really the best place for a short pensioner who can't swim. The wind at the higher level was also remarkably colder, and I have read that it's the coldest place in the mine complex. We waded/swam onwards, through more and more grey passage and cold deep water, passing very little of interest. There were a couple of very old arrows the miners had marked on the walls in the 1700's, and a few bits of very elegantly written graffiti, but I wasn't particularly inclined to take too long to stop and look. We knew we had to go past several shafts and once we had gone past a couple with concreted dams in front of them, there was one rigged with tat that was the way down. The more shafts we went past, the colder and breezier the wind got. Rob was getting more worried about Mike freezing and needing a rescue, and whether Steve had decided to turn around and go back. Your own sploshy echoes can start to sound like other people's voices and you can convince yourself somebody else is close by but not see them in fairly straight passage, but nobody was in sight either in front or behind. We found the shaft going down, and Nick and Mike were just about still there. Close enough to pass Rob directions of getting out, and close enough we had to wait. The shaft seemed to be sucking the wind up it, and it was absolutely freezing. I went back down the passage to see if I could find Steve and Andy, as wading in almost chin deep water was more pleasant than waiting. I found them after a while – and then I realised that there was no more swimming for me. When Steve saw me swim, he then thought he might need to swim too, and wasn't too chuffed. I tiptoed my way back to the pitch. Rob was almost ready to head down. The pitch is on the far side of the shaft, so there is a traverse line and you need a very careful step to not knock any loose rocks down. While Rob continued faffing, I thought it would be a good time to put my descender on, while I had found the shallowest

of ledges to stand on. My hands were so cold that it dropped straight through my fingers and into the murky water. I was relieved I had chosen the shallowest bit to get ready. I put my hand in, and came up with a thin rectangular rock. And another one, and another. The concrete dam looked shallow, but the ground sharply sloped downhill towards it, and the layer of mud underfoot got deeper. Reaching the bottom meant getting my chin and half my face wet. And dodging Rob's size 12 wellies at face height as he knelt at the side of the traverse. He very gentlemanly left me to it and carried on down the pitch. Finally, I found it!

The traverse to the pitch head wasn't too bad, but Rob said the rope was very thin and didn't seem hugely pleased. Eventually I heard a bellow and headed down myself. The dam was doing nothing to stop water flowing down the pitch, and water was falling from above too. It was as if you were abseiling down the inside of a tube of flowing water. You couldn't see much through the torrent of water surrounding you from all sides. Rob called to me, and it took a while to spot him. He was off to my side, a few metres away. I suddenly wondered if I had to swing over into a side passage that I couldn't see, mid-pitch. Thankfully not. You go to the bottom and then scramble up a big heap of deads. The rope continued and lead into a too-tight traverse line, walking over steeply stacked and very loose deads. Finally, after struggling to get the stop off because of lack of rope, was the last pitch, which was short and fairly easy. But with a big fray in the rope a few inches below where your stop had to go to get onto the pitch. Everyone was beyond worrying.

We carried on down yet more grey passageway. Steve soon caught up, so I was chin deep and on tiptoes for quite a lot of the way. We waded on until we reached toilet box junction, with great relief. De-kitting was good, and it felt like we were nearly out. Only an hour of mainly wading to go. It was a similar feeling to arriving at the start of the Daren crawl on the way out. We knew exactly what was ahead of us, and we knew there were no nasty surprises. Mike survived fine, but we weren't sure if his wife would ground him. We were pleased to see him arrive at the pub, and Steve soon seemed to forget his displeasure once he had warmed up and had a pint. I have to say it was one of the grimmest trips I have done for a long time – the challenge might be to persuade anyone else to go back and do more of it!



# Jill's Slither Dig Reservoir Hole

by Nick Chipchase

During Autumn last year it became increasingly apparent that CO2 levels were rising in the dig at Vurley. A level of 6% was reached in sections of the cave so work was stopped until the Winter set in. Deprived of our usual Tuesday fun a small team of ex Reservoir diggers including me, Peter Glanvill and Chris Milne decided to investigate again the mud choked tube running off of Jill's Slither. We had help from Mike Kushy who seemed to have an unusual affinity with mud and it was he who was thrust up to the dig face. Several of our team had made small progress here in previous years but the lure of a Summer "surface" dig at a pleasant meadow with a hut at Vurley put paid to further work.

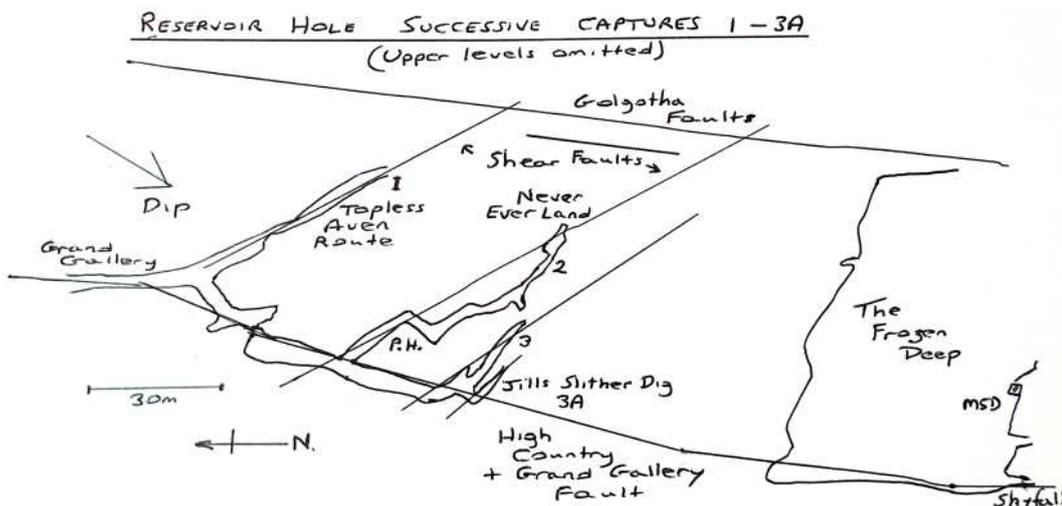


Chris Milne capping at Jill's Slither

We initially capped all of the boulders at the start of the dig to enable us to have a clear run with the mud tray. Mike burrowed manfully through the mud, achieving 34 tubs of mud removed on the last occasion in November 2017. However the tube was getting longer and the hauling became more difficult as the tub dug itself into the floor of the tube. We decided then to put the dig on hold until we could lay in some conveyor belting. We resurrected the washing tub in Chain Chamber and left a cache of decorator's oversuits to wear over muddy oversuits on the way out. Some were kindly donated by Mark Burkey and they worked very well. The dig is now on hold pending the arrival of the conveyor belt which Oscar Meyer and Co. of Chard say they will have at some time as they replace food transport belts at regular intervals. Quarry type belts would be too heavy to transport down the cave. The dig is currently 13 metres long.

Jill's Slither is the last in the sequential draining points from Grand Gallery running down dip. Initially phreatic water went up Topless Aven but as the base level receded water drained first to Potter's Heaven via Chain Chamber then to Jill's Slither and the current dig. Both seemed to have been open passages for some time as stal has been deposited on the sediments here. It seems likely that development at Cheddar at Cox's Mill (now an abandoned hotel) had raised base level at the risings by two or three metres, resulting in reverse flooding and silt deposition at the lowest parts of Reservoir Hole. Potter's Heaven was pushed by us to an unsurveyed chamber in the bedding but reverse flooding over Winter made access impossible. We never returned. It was easier work at Jill's Slither and we still seem to be a few metres above sump level at Dingley Dell. The Topless Aven route eventually reached the Golgotha Fault with phreatic water reaching The Frozen Deep. Both Potters and Jill's follow strike and minor shear faults and are also heading for the Golgotha fault. This will be at a much lower level than known cave so whatever happens then is anybody's guess.

Eventually the CO2 reached acceptable levels at Vurley and our efforts are concentrated there now. We have



encountered an unstable choke some 70 metres down and are currently working to cage it in with scaffolding. Wet weather streams gather here and sink below the choke along a solid bedding wall. For the time being we still seem to be within the South West Overthrust with bedding now near vertical.

# Sandstone Passage Dig Agen Allwedd

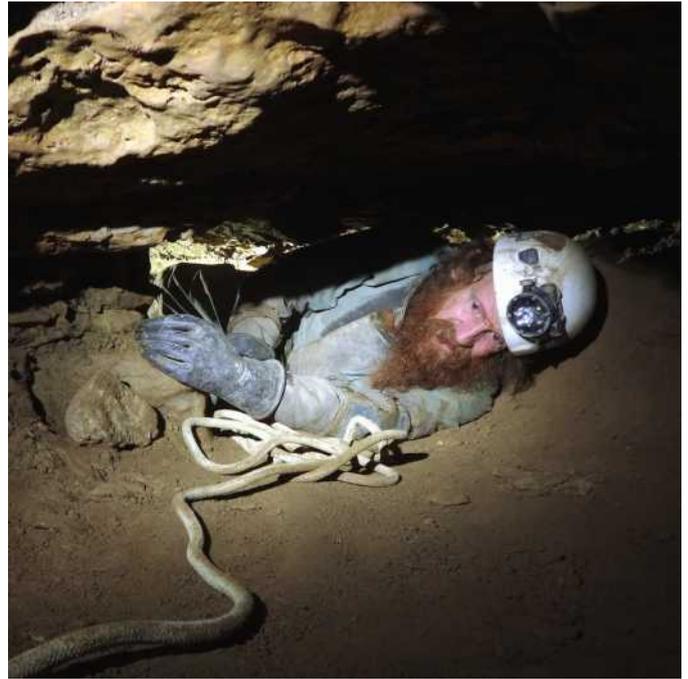
by Mandy Voysey

We had for while intended to take a look at Sandstone Passage. Inspired by the fact that this is an awkward and little visited part of the cave heading into the blank area in the middle of the Grand Circle, we thought it had potential for yielding a good dig site for the smaller statured caver. Encouraged by reports of possible dig sites spotted by John Stevens on one of his surveying trips, Matt, Adrian and I went to check it out for ourselves at the end of September 2014, and returned soon after with enthusiasm to take on the sandy infilled dig at the very end.

The journey into Sandstone Passage starts with a small body-sized tube heading off from the Upper Southern Stream route, and from the onset it's obvious how this part of the cave got its name as the rock here is a lovely orangey colour and looks very much like Sandstone. It's also quite holey and pocketed a bit like cheese, which I quite like. The awkward tubular entrance is just the start of a series of interesting obstacles, but basically if you can fit through the entrance tube everything else *should* be do-able. The next section is mostly crawling with the odd low belly wriggle over sandy floor, and a couple of notable more gymnastic wriggles around solid rock. This part of the passage actually has quite a few side offshoots and holes you can poke yourself into that are quite interesting, but nothing that continues any distance or looks too promising. After a bit too long of annoying crawling, the passage changes character as a small stream is met at a sort of junction chamber. The water here seeps in through an unstable boulder run-in on the right. Some digging effort has been put into this site in the past, but any further progress through the boulders here would definitely require some proper shoring to safely hold the boulders in place.

The next section of passage is quite pleasant really, well at least you're upright, which feels quite good after all the crawling effort. Most of this is walking on side ledges above a narrow trench containing a small stream. This ends abruptly at a rock wall where the water disappears through narrow rifts fissures to reappear at 2nd inlet in Southern Stream, but a low passage continues to the right heading

away from Southern Stream and into the unknown. Many parts of this crawling section have been dug open or enlarged along the way, the end terminating at a sandy dig. We found that a skip and rope had been left in the area, but no tools remained, which confirmed the general impression that this dig had long been abandoned.



*John Stevens readying for hauling duty*

Unfortunately the roof was lowering, so further digging effort would necessitate digging downwards through the solid fill, which wasn't immediately promising... however on the plus side it was only sand, and we had space within easy hauling distance to relocate anything extracted, so we thought it worth having a go to see what happened. We didn't have time to start anything on this first visit as we'd spent a lot of time investigating everything on route, but left our tools in readiness to give it some burly yor next time.

Since then we've been making steady progress at the site, though I've no idea how many metres we've gained. The passage very quickly started to trend upwards, which we were very pleased about. Each section has had to be dug to reasonably roomy dimensions initially, just to give us enough room to wield digging tools in what has turned out to be quite a narrow meandering passage.

Afterwards any sizable sections seem to strangely shrink somewhat, as spoil from the front gets relocated to whatever space seems readily available when we're pushing at the front without having a hauling party to take it the full distance.

The digging team has mostly consisted of just Matt and myself, but we have had additional support from Adrian Fawcett, John Stevens and Mike Read on occasion, which has enabled us to clear much more than we would ever be able to do alone. The digging is very easy, as we're basically just emptying the sand out of a natural passage that has at some point become infilled. We've got solid walls and ceiling and have yet to encounter a floor. Each digging session seems to yield one more bend or air gap to aim for that just keeps us heading back. Each time we hope that it will make up its mind and either pop into something bigger or conclusively crap out, but it seems to be stubbornly refusing to do either at the moment. A couple of digs ago Matt and I were sure we were headed for a breakthrough as a dark void suddenly appeared, but a frenzy of crowbar action raining sand down into our eyes, noses and ears found a mere side pocket with more solid fill ahead.

The good news is that we are still continuing upwards and the way on is not completely solid fill at present. At the end of our last session we couldn't quite see far enough to be sure which way it's trending up ahead, but it does feel like it ought to go *somewhere*. The bad news is that the lack of draught clearly indicates further solid fill ahead and the air can get decidedly stuffy at the dig face, especially

if two people are exerting themselves in the confined space at the end. It can be worse if you have the addition of a flatulent caver who's been on the beans or bottle conditioned beer.

However I like to think of the multitudes of low dug out passages that connect to quite major stuff in many of the big cave systems of the area, so I'm hopeful that there's a chance that Sandstone may yet pop into something more significant... or maybe I just delude myself into positivity... we'll see.

At present the dig needs a team of 4 (or 3 with extra effort) to get the spoil from the front to the chamber further back that still has stacking space, and can no longer be effectively done in a team of two. Any assistance from people of small to medium size who enjoy obstacles, wielding crowbars and shovels in confined conditions, and getting sand everywhere would be very welcome. I can bribe with sweeties if necessary.



*The current view at the sharp end, Jan 2018*

## HRC Daren Camp Weekends 2018

23<sup>rd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> March

11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> May

22<sup>nd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> June

10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> August

21<sup>st</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> September

9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> November

**New diggers always welcome**

Contact Mandy: [mandola76@gmail.com](mailto:mandola76@gmail.com)

Or Adrian: [adrianfawcett@outlook.com](mailto:adrianfawcett@outlook.com)



# *A Trip to the End of Daren* *(more or less)* by Christopher Tomlin

**February 16th-18th 2018**

**Participants: Matt and Mandy Voysey, Matt Chinner, Adrian Fawcett, Roz Simmonds, Peter Bolt, Tarquin Wilton-Jones, and Christopher Tomlin.**

This was a weekend camp at Hard Rock and a rare chance to go to bits of Daren that I had only read about. Having been ragged by Judith for years about being all talk and being scared of Daren (true on both counts), it was time to shut up and go caving. Before the trip I had lots of good advice from Mandy as well as the loan of a tackle bag and a bit of old karrimat to keep the bag from folding over in the entrance series (it works very well). After a quick visit to Whitewalls we set off to doom. Mandy accompanied me through the Entrance Series. I had really been worried about passing the calcite squeezes but all it takes is proper technique, one arm first through the curtain is the way to go. There was enough water to float the tackle bag so that wasn't a problem.

Most of us set off in little groups from Whitewalls but we regrouped at the ladder. Then off and over Higher Things to camp. I made a mistake in taking a sling and krab for the traverses - nothing like tiptoeing over a 22m pitch knowing that your sling might not hold if you fell off, so it will be proper cows-tails next time.

We got to Hard Rock and settled in with food and cocktails. I mixed a cocktail or two that wasn't too vile, the key is mango schnapps and curacao. No-one went to the sump though. [Actually Matt, Mandy, Adrian and Tarquin did complete the traditional totter to the sump and back later that Friday night/Saturday morning; Chris, Roz and Peter were sensibly tucked up in their sleeping bags at this point! – Ed.] Dinner was a lovely curry with prawns then we turned in... I had brought my own liner to go inside one of the camp sleeping bags (another bit of good advice from Mandy) and was as snug as you like though it was difficult to keep sand from getting everywhere. At Hard Rock and REU there are Daren drums with the names of their owners, some of whom seem no longer to be on the scene. I borrowed some clothes out of Gary Kiely's stash after realising that just a single thin top wasn't enough, cheers Gary, I owe you a favour. I need gloves and more warm clothing for underground camping.

After getting up not too early on Saturday it was a good breakfast and Adrian made a lot of wraps. Then off up Rock Steady Cruise for a long day's caving. The low bits and Miami Vice weren't too bad (cheers to Peter Bolt and others for digging them out). I had my helmet off a lot to look ahead and got an awful lot of sand in my hair. I really did not like Acupuncture, it was sharp, low and unpleasant. We saw the old bit of the crawl there that collapsed a few years ago, and according to Peter Bolt the new bit is much nicer. In the twisty squeezes I remembered a quote from the great caver/climber Pete Livesey saying: don't worry about your feet, they'll follow along in their own time. After much effort, especially for those carrying kit, and several pauses to take photographs we arrived at The Micron. This was an interesting descent, it is certainly wide enough and slippery enough to plummet all the way down into the streamway, glad there was a rope there.



*Restaurant at the End of the Universe*

Downstream of The Micron the stream looks lovely but it was up Ankle Grinder for us. I don't really remember a lot of this passage, but it was low and stooey and went on and on. We learned later that there had been an earthquake roughly the time we were in Ankle Grinder, but no-one noticed a thing.

After much stooping and passing through a duck we got to the foot of the ladder up to REU. This ladder is the right way up, unlike the big ladder up to Higher Things, and much easier to climb. Then two more climbs up to REU proper. The camp was different to how I imagined it, basically it is perched on rocks high in a big chamber with tricky



*The Blue Greenies*

climbs. The big drystone table and seats at the cooking area there are quite impressive. Peter says that in the early days there were lot of holes in the camp itself that people could disappear into if they weren't careful. Even now you have to watch your step, it's a tricky climb down merely to get water. After a little look round (the camp evidently isn't used much these days) and a bite to eat it was off to the end, up and down some awkward climbs and the 10m ladder into Big Chamber (a nice ladder) followed immediately by a flat-out crawl followed by more crawling and mixed ground, very dry and sandy, no water anywhere. I got to the end of Friday 13th, to the beginning of Sh\*t Rift, much to my amazement. The party split here with Mandy and I heading back and the others carrying onto the end. However Peter Bolt, Roz Simmonds and Matt Chinner caught up with us near Big Chamber. I gather that the tight squeeze into Still Warthogs was a bit of a showstopper and that only Matt Voysey and Tarquin had carried on through it for a good look round Spaderunner and Dweebland. On the way back up the Big Chamber ladder I came off near the top but merely dangled in space a moment before regaining the ladder. Thanks to the belayer!

Back to REU for another bite then via a nasty sharp passage to the Blue-Greenies. What amazing formations they are: not only great colour but a profusion of helicities and other formations. The ceilings are completely covered by white stal, it's worth learning to cave just to see them. Then back down Ankle Grinder via Icing on the Cake (just off the streamway), up the Micron, which is not hard if you take your time, then more crawling back through Acupuncture... urgh, I went up the wrong passage and missed the very large way on, I did think things might be wrong when the increasingly low ceiling began pressing me into the sandy floor. Back at camp I washed my hair in the stream and got the sand out, although it was still very dirty. By this point I had a slight stinging in my elbows. It turned out that the sand had got up the sleeves of my oversuit and taken a lot of skin off my elbows. The elbow pads didn't help and likely made things worse. However it was okay on the way out. Luckily there is a first aid kit at Hard Rock, it seems to be used often.

Back at Hard Rock for a second night, it was great to hear Peter Bolt's stories of the old days of Daren in the 1980s/90s. Roz, Peter and Tarquin got up early on the Sunday morning and went out first. After another lovely breakfast, we packed up the camp and headed out. I went the wrong way up Crystal Gallery, doh. It was disappointing to see a big pile of used carbide near the first of the rope climbs up to Higher Things - it's just to the right from the bottom of the climb, might have a go at cleaning it up next time. I was making my slow way out through the entrance crawl when I got into difficulties in the low knobbly green passage: the bag got stuck for a few minutes and I got very cold lying in the water. Matt and Mandy then caught me up. Mandy took my bag (ta) and was offering much encouragement - I could not keep up with her even though she had two tackle bags and I had none. A few minutes more and then we were out to a cold windy day with yellow light, then a long discussion with the neighbour about bins then finally into Whitewalls for tea and a shower. The beer in the Three Horseshoes sure tasted good!

I now need a new oversuit, mine got shredded. Ta to all for the help and the opportunity. I'd like to go left from The Micron next time, perhaps even do some digging. I will be back.



# ADVENTURES IN PROKOFIEV - NYTH BRÂN

**OFD - 24<sup>th</sup> Feb 2018.** On a very cold, but pleasantly sunny day, Matt, Adrian, Joe, John N, John S, Helen, Jemima and I all headed over to Penwyllt with a mission. That was to go to OFD, conquer the Prokofiev Series, and have a jolly good time. None of us had been there before, and most of us didn't really know what the trip entailed except that there were some "interesting" tight traverses and that it might be a bit gnarly. Personally I quite like that kind of thing, so I was pleased that Helen had picked it as the trip of choice to do on the now traditional booze themed weekend. This year the chosen beverage was Gin, and we had lashings of it in all different flavours, but first we had to work up a thirst with a bit of daring do underground.

We headed into Top Entrance and had the usual problem of not being able to see anything for ages until our eyes had adjusted. As I mentioned at the beginning it was very sunny outside, almost summery, but luckily the freezing temperature made us glad to be nicely tucked underground. Just inside the entrance were a couple of really interesting bats, none of us knew what type they were, but they looked cute and fluffy and gave the impression of being quite good friends with each other.

I'm completely useless at route finding around OFD, particularly the area around Top Entrance. Luckily Mr Fawcett is quite proficient in this department, so we just followed his lead and did (what was for me anyway) a mystery tour to Timo's Table. We passed recognisable landmarks on the way such as Gnome Passage, Arête Chamber and the Wedding Cake, mostly it was stomping down large boulder strewn passages, with occasional short climbs. At Timo's Table we posed for photos and then set off in the direction of the Prokofiev Series and into pastures new. Here the dimensions became less grand and a couple of climbs brought us reasonably swiftly into the first real section of obstacles. We formed an orderly queue at a narrow tube that headed towards a traverse that was also narrow, via a squeeze. Progress here slowed considerably and the grunting and rustling ahead increased significantly.

Joe seemed to be finding the squeeze a bit of a pig. He made it through OK, but wasn't inspired by the sight of the narrow rift beyond. John Newton was also lacking in enthusiasm at the prospect of getting wedged in a tight rift, and decided to save himself the bother of thrusting through the constriction knowing that he would only have to turn round and do it again. Meanwhile John Stevens, Helen and I had gone along the passage below and could see Joe's dancing feet through a hole up above, which provided Joe with a route back without having to deal with the squeeze once more. I was next through the squeeze, to be followed by Helen. Unfortunately Helen's legs weren't feeling in good fettle and bracing in the rift didn't help, so she also

*by Mandy Voysey*

descended Joe's slide and the trio of John, Joe and Helen went off on their own adventures while Mr Stevens and I ventured boldly across the traverse to try and catch up with the others. The traverse wasn't really a problem at all. Parts of it didn't really have ledges, and some sections I was most definitely slipping down somewhat, but it was quite narrow, so I found that generally I wedged quite well.

The traverse ended with a nice stal fluted pot to the floor

with a continuation at the same height straight ahead. John and I met up with Matt here. He was perched at a comfortable bit with what was apparently quite a nasty traverse ahead of him. Adrian was currently tackling this with Jemima, and there were lots of sounds of discomfort and difficulty coming from their direction. We hopped down so as to assume a more comfortable stance and noticed that there was a passage heading off on the left. I trotted off to check it out, and found it to be ongoing. Not wanting to be left behind I returned to find that still there seemed to be lots of faffing upfront, but Adrian and Jemima were obviously quite determined as they didn't seem to want to return. After perusing the survey that we had fortunately been left with, we started to think maybe the way on did actually lay in the route below. From this point the trip briefly slipped somewhat into disarray. John and I beetled off to explore the



*Mandy in traversing action. Photo by Matt.*

alternative route and started to gain confidence in it being correct as sure enough after a few twists and turns it popped out into some large and pleasant passage, with a short scruffy climb up leading to ongoing big passage and some nice helictites. Matt then arrived and we looked at the survey some more. It was sort of inconclusive, but we thought that we were *probably* going the right way. John took some photos of me gurning at formations while Matt went back to find the others, but found only Jemima and the kit bag. Figuring that Adrian would probably turn up at some point, we continued as a foursome. Looking at the survey it seemed very likely that our route would meet up with Adrian's so we had high hopes of bumping into him further on. However our progress was soon checked by an unexpectedly tricky free climb. This was basically a hole 7m up in what may as well have been a completely flat wall. Luckily next to this smooth un-scalable surface was a knobbly narrow cleft, which I managed to utilise to climb up most of the way. Here there was a hanger attached to a spit in reachable distance, which we considered attaching the ladder to, but we would still not be high enough to then post ourselves into the hole. We were a bit flummoxed really. We knew we could have a go at rigging something to see if it was do-able, but on the other hand we weren't confident either in it being the way or the safety of using the vintage hanger. As the only people who had taken note of what this trip actually entailed were no longer with us, we concluded that possibly the way on might be in Adrian's direction after all and headed back.

We then met Adrian on our route back. Apparently the traverse he'd done was a real pig and definitely wasn't the way. He and Matt then went back to inspect the climb, while John, Jemima and I had a snack break. Though I definitely wanted to get to Five Mile Chamber and experience the fantastic remoteness of it that I'd heard about, I was sort of worried that Adrian would just scamper up the climb and make me look like a right wuss for just faffing about and musing about rigging methods instead of just boldly going for it. Luckily for my pride (though maybe not beneficial to the trip), Adrian didn't like it all and wondered how I made it up as far as I did without peeling off the wall as he did. After all the general loitering around we were keen to just go somewhere and do some caving, so we decided to leave this obstacle and go and do something different instead. So we headed back over the traverse and through the squeeze and took a different route to that we'd come in by with a new destination in mind "The Crevasse", followed by a journey around the Nyth Bran Series. I liked this plan as the Nyth Bran Series is somewhere that I'd often thought I'd like to go but hadn't ever got around to. Along the way we all enjoyed the delights of the Poached Eggs, especially John who seemed to enjoy clutching the globular pair more than most. It seemed as though there may once have been a rope here, but there wasn't anymore. At the Crevasse,

we looked down, admired, then headed back to take a turn off on the right leading to "Creek Alley". This was rather good, with an area of really quite grand formations that we thought were great. [See front cover - Ed.]

Just after the formations the traverses started in earnest. These were the exact opposite of those we had done earlier in getting progressively wider until my thighs started to feel the burn as I pretty much did the splits while looking down at some seriously deep drops. Innuendos aside I honestly had no idea I could spread my legs that wide, I was astounded when I saw the photos afterwards. It was certainly dramatic stuff. Traverses sorted, we now had a choice of routes available to make this journey a round trip. Either a straight forward passage heading back parallel to that we'd come up, or another further along called Nant Bach. On the old survey this was shown as two points that almost connect, but the new survey showed that a connection could possibly have been made. Intrigued, we thought we would check out this route. It all started out well, and rather like you'd expect from OFD, just stomping down a passage of pleasant dimensions. Then after a while the size started to diminish and the floor became a mix of mud and moonmilk with a narrow trench in the middle. Here we had to do that annoying walking like a Stork thing along the trench or scoot along with knees either side. Soon enough this changed to squeezing through gaps in boulders with bits of shattered bang debris around. We were losing confidence in this being a viable route, but as it was continuing we through we may as well carry on going to



*Matt in Creek Alley. Photo by John Stevens.*

see what happened. A series of short climbs and squeezes popped down into sections of rock and moonmilk floor. This was actually very slippery, and the first drop down onto this floor caught us all by surprise as we all dropped down and slid over in turn.

The last obstacle of this route was a boulder squeeze to a narrow rift that belled out at the bottom. This looked nastier than it was, but we all found it quite awkward, and then lo! we popped out just opposite the Poached Egg climb. John felt the Poached Eggs thoroughly once again and we all headed out by yet another route. We decided not to detour to anywhere else as we knew that the others may well have been out for a while already and we had an evening of Gin and Tapas at Whitewalls to get back for. It was still sunny when we returned to surface, which brought out the russet of John's beard nicely, so we took some jolly team photos before heading back to the hut. We met Mr Newton sauntering towards the entrance to see if we



were out yet; he, Joe and Helen had all had a good trip but had been back for a while and were wondering where we were.

All in all this was a good fun trip. Though we didn't achieve our primary objective, and things didn't always go to plan, we did manage to go to places and see sights that were new to us all. I enjoyed the variety we experienced along the way, we certainly had a bit of everything! Using the power of YouTube, I now believe I know how to tackle the climb that foxed us in Prokofiev too (thanks to the Dudley CC and their enthusiasm for filming). So I'm confident that we will succeed if we decide to give it another go sometime.

Back at Whitewalls we were all amazed by the fantastic array of food that Trevor and Claire had prepared in our absence, which was then washed down with copious amounts of exotic Gins and Tonics and a good time was had by all.



## CSS MEETS *by Helen Nightingale*

### April 21st-22nd Whitewalls Weekend - Slaughter Stream

A trip to Slaughter Stream Cave in the Forest of Dean on the Saturday and local caving Sunday.

### May 4th-7th Bank Holiday Weekend - Mendip Cave Fest

Accommodation is booked at the Shepton Mallet Caving Club hut, but please let me know if you want a bunk. I will need to give them numbers as it's a busy weekend. There will be caving on Saturday, followed by talks, demos, SRT training etc in Priddy, plus a Stomp and beer at the Village Hall in the evening. It's possible this may lead to table games back at the hut. More caving on Sunday and there will also be digging opportunities and fundraising for Cave Rescue. Trips for all levels are available on the Saturday and Sunday. If anyone is able to lead trips on the Friday or Monday, please volunteer, as I might be stuck at work. Further details for this event can be found at [www.cavefestuk.co.uk](http://www.cavefestuk.co.uk). This is a free weekend but you must book online to participate in any of the pre-arranged trips. I'm sure we can also arrange other things



if nothing already organised floats your boat - or muddies your wellies.

### May 25th-28th Bank Holiday Weekend - Yorkshire

Staying at the Craven Pothole Club bunkhouse in Horton-in-Ribblesdale. Again, please let me know you are coming because I will need to let CPC know numbers for bunks. There'll be a trip to Gaping Gill Saturday - weather permitting. The Bradford Pothole Club are hosting the winch meet this weekend, with beginner friendly winched trips into the main chamber, plus many other pre-rigged routes into the cave system. Sunday and Monday are also weather dependent. Please let me know if there is anywhere you really want to go that will need permits. There are very well decorated caves involving no SRT, such as Illusion, so all abilities welcome, SRT or non SRT.

### June 1st-4th - NAHMO Mines Conference - Forest of Dean



You don't need to be in a mining history association to go! And it's not just a conference, there are lots of good underground trips too, often to

places with difficult access arrangements. This year, there are trips to Gold, Stone, Iron and Coal mines, plus a winch trip, steam train ride (via an old coal mine), wild boar hog road inside Clearwell Caves, beginners SRT training, surface walks and inside talks. Quite a few of the trips this year have been planned so you can do 2 trips in a day, or a full day for more difficult trips. All abilities will be catered for. Trips start on Friday afternoon through until Monday, and all will be guided by people who know the place well.

You must register and pay for this weekend at [www.namho2018.info](http://www.namho2018.info). Also see website for further information on trips and accommodation for the weekend. Early booking is advised if you want to go on the harder trips or more restricted access mines.

Although you have to pay, you normally get a gift. I have a nice slate coaster, tote bags and pint pots from recent years. It's worth the booking fee for the trips you otherwise would struggle to organise for the club or as individuals.

#### **June 29th-July 1st - Whitewalls BBQ Weekend**

Paul will be leading a Classic Round Trip in DYO, plus all the normal BBQ stuff. Volunteers needed to help with this weekend.

#### **July 27th-29th - North Wales - Parys Mountain**

With a Mona-Parys through trip confirmed for Saturday-possibly with SRT to some lesser visited areas. This will depend on if they have finished rebolting the place. There's some amazing snottites in there. It's not a massive trip, but very interesting, and lots of weird surface stuff to see too.

#### **August 10th-12th - Daren Cocktail Party on the shores of St David's Sump**

A weekend of camping at Hard Rock Cafe, combined with my Hen Party. With cocktails and a disco at St David's beach, after caving to interesting and horrible places - Blue Greenies, Forgotten Passage, Helibeds - wherever anybody fancies. Dig prospecting or tourism. Anybody prepared to go welcome, skirts and wigs optional.

#### **August 24th-27th - Whitewalls Weekend and South Wales Cave Fest**

(Also possible Whitewalls Working Weekend). Details TBC, but it's very likely there will be many trips available. SWCC might have a fete, and general stuff happening.

#### **September - Hidden Earth - Date & Venue TBC**

#### **October 15th-21st - Proposed trip to Mallorca**

Possibly to stay in a villa owned by a caver, with caves on the owners' land.

#### **October 27th-29th - SUICRO Irish Caving Weekend**

#### **November 2nd-4th - Whitewalls Bonfire Weekend**

#### **December - Curry Weekend - TBC**

#### **January 25th-27th - Whitewalls Annual Dinner and AGM Weekend**

*Also suggested - Peak District, Otter Hole (October and somewhen else), West Wales, a few more Welsh trips, other stuff... Contact Helen at [helenlnightingale@gmail.com](mailto:helenlnightingale@gmail.com) for more details.*

### Sunday School Appeal

At the AGM it was agreed to proceed with a full renovation of the Old Daren Sunday School as a multipurpose building, involving renewal of the roof, building mezzanine sleeping areas, installing insulation and underfloor heating, a toilet, shower and kitchen area with pumping system to the Whitewalls septic tank. The estimated cost of these works is £15000.

Currently we still need to raise £13000 of this, although a loan of £5000 has been made from general funds to get the project started.

Donations from members are therefore being sought – any amount, large or small, will be gratefully received by the treasurer. Although a separate account is being used for the Sunday School Building Project, donations can be paid into the CSS general account and Gary will transfer the money from there.

Gary can be contacted as always at [chelseatreasurer@gmail.com](mailto:chelseatreasurer@gmail.com)



# More on the Origins of the Old Daren Sunday School and Hillside Community *by Roy Musgrove*

Reading Joe Duxbury's observations on The Old Daren Sunday School in conjunction with Adrian Fawcett's article in the previous newsletter, the latter answers Joe's query as to which denomination built the Sunday School. The Starrs and Brian Price acquired the leasehold from "the Deacons of Bethesda". The Chapel at the junction of Hillside Road and the Beaufort road is United Reform Church (formerly Congregational Church) Bethesda. This is identified in the last entry in the Kelly's Directory extract. "Independent" was a term frequently used for Congregational Churches which, despite a national association, had governed themselves individually since the days of Cromwell. The "mission churches" mentioned in Kelly's directory were Church of England chapels, both built after their Congregational precursors, which did not merit mention by that publication. The Hillside one was down the Laswern unmade road that descends from the tramroad.

The Bethesda Chapel was built in 1835 on a site donated by Sir Joseph Bailey of Glanusk. It cost £800 and the congregation carried the stone from the hillside themselves. It opened 1st January 1836. There is a history of the congregation edited by the minister Rev Margaret Williams <sup>(1)</sup>. This account confirms that under the prompting of the then Minister Rev Evan Watkin the congregation repainted the Chapel and built a Sunday School on the Hillside in 1858. We shall therefore commence renovation exactly 160 years after the original building. The congregation carried the stones down from the quarry themselves and the building cost "something over £80". Interestingly it was built as a Sunday School and for weekday evening services, so, OS names notwithstanding, it was always both a chapel and Sunday School at the same time.

The quarry workers who provided the population of Hillside, and also the congregation for the Sunday School, fell from a high point of about 90 in the late nineteenth century during the decade 1901 to 1911, the main quarries having closed ca. 1900. The Thomas family of Laswern Fach continued to work the limestone. Already by 1910 there was but one tram on the tramroad and the ironwork had gone from the upper levels. However the inclines continued to be operated, with a long-stacked traction engine nicknamed "the coffee pot" working the higher of the two. Its operator was one 'Tippo' Lewis. Eventually all the trams ended

up in a heap at the foot of the incline and were cleared for scrap by a contractor during the First World War. The quarry working was now for lime and the visible remains of kilns seen locally were ones worked by the Thomases. Originally coal was transported from the valleys by mule train over the mountain to fire them, and later these also distributed lime round the district. They employed a mule driver called Aneurin Hopkins of Llangynidr <sup>(2)</sup>. He was probably the explanation for a photograph I saw in the Coach and Horses, Llangynidr from the 1920s of a laden mule train outside the Pantyrhiwgoch Inn (now the Llanwenarth Arms) on the Abergavenny road. I asked Alan Thomas about this at the time, as he was a member of this Thomas family, and he said they belonged to his uncle and were kept at the holding above Travellers Rest. The Hillside Road was not tarmacked until 1938, so this was the only possible form of transport to use. I can remember Alan moving up to Travellers Rest from lower down the Hillside in the late 1960s or early 1970s and I recall that his late wife was a member of Bethesda Chapel and is, I think, buried there. Association of the chapel with the Hillside residents clearly persisted well after the abandonment of the Sunday School.

I first came to Brynmawr in the autumn of 1962, when the new three-lane road from Gilwern up the Clydach Gorge was just being completed. We used to go straight ahead at the bridge, now a roundabout (the Heads of the Valleys Road to Tredegar was still one lane each way and passed through the valley head towns like Beaufort). We would turn almost immediately right into King Edward Road and stop at No 6 to pick up the Sunday School key from Mr Ron Starr, then drive on up to Intermediate Road. I am not sure what Ron's relationship to Noel was.

My first edition 1:63,360 geological map, and the original 1840 OS map on which it is based, show only Pant y Rhiw. Travellers Rest and White Walls are both absent. Since work on the quarries began several decades before, that in itself is a matter of interest. Perhaps these buildings were a product of the increased economic activity of the mid nineteenth century. A landlord is certainly recorded at the Travellers Rest in 1851.

The complete timeline of the Sunday School thus reads:

- 1858 Lease of site from Duke of Beaufort's Estate and construction of Sunday School by Bethesda Congregation, Llangattock.
- By 1911 Sunday School ceased regular use, due to collapse in local population numbers.
- ca.1947 Leasehold acquired from Congregation by Brynmawr Scout Group (Brian Price) for caving use.
- 1956 Freehold bought from Duke of Beaufort's Estates by Noel & Gwendoline Starr and Brian Price for £50.
- 1986 Closing order issued by Breconshire District Council under the 1985 Housing Act on grounds of a leaking septic tank. Freehold bought from the Starrs and Brian Price by West Midlands Cave Exploration Group for £1000.
- 1992 (Oct) to 1993 (Mar) Planning approval obtained from Brecon Beacons National Park by West Midlands Cave Exploration Group for an 8 bed hostel.
- 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease closed access to the Hillside for six months, halting works.
- 2010 A declining West Midlands Cave Exploration Group agreed sale in principle.
- 2017 Chelsea Speleological Society purchased freehold from West Midlands Cave Exploration Group for £2000.

#### SOURCES:

- (1) BETHESDA Founded 1768 by Lewis Richards, 1818- 1896 Translated from the Welsh by Caroline Jones and edited by Rev'd. Margaret Williams 2008.
- (2) A HISTORY OF LLANGATTOCK 1851 – 1951 Compiled by Residents of the Parish  
Reprinted by Crickhowell Archive Centre from Brycheiniog 7 (1961), 8 (1962), 9 (1963) and 32 (2000).



Photo by Richard Dearden

## More on the Sunday School

Following the article on the history of the Old Daren Sunday School in Volume 59, nos. 10/11/12, of the CSS Newsletter, I received a message from John Henderson (an Associate Member) which clarified the denomination of the Sunday school when it was originally a chapel.

He wrote:

*The "Independents" were a distinct denomination, resulting from the 1662 schism in the Church of England. Later they became known as the Congregational Church, and in 1972 they united with the Presbyterian Church in England to form the United Reformed Church.*

*In the 1947 Year Book of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, there is a directory of all their churches. On page 274, it lists those of the Brecon and Radnor United Association, which includes Daren, which is given as a 'Mission Station' of Llangattock. A Mission Station did not have its own minister, so their services would be led by a minister or lay person from the host church.*

Thank you, John, for this information. So the description of the chapel as 'Independent' in the 1891 census was specific – it did not simply mean 'independent'. Furthermore, the status as a Mission Station in 1947 confirms that of the 1895 Kelly's Directory, and suggests that in 1947 it was still being used for worship as well as a Sunday school. I wonder when the last service was held there?

**Joe Duxbury**

# Old Daren Sunday School Recollections

When I contacted some of the older generation of CSS members to let them know about the club's purchase of the Old Daren Sunday School, a few of them sent me some of their recollections of their experiences with it.

*Joe Duxbury*



*When I joined CSS in 1964, we always stayed in the Sunday School. Geo [Fletcher] had a photo of Pat standing in the doorway, him and me (Tyas then) after fighting our way back from Aggie in a blizzard along the tram road which was indistinguishable from the mountain slope, filled with drifts. I remember the SS as being very cosy.*  
*Jane Bonner*



*John Keefe getting changed for an Aggy trip*



*Bruce Bedford*

*Used it a couple of times '65ish? No real memories; pretty much an empty space I think and cold of course.*  
*Mick Butterley*



*Bill Maxwell washing up*



*Pat Browne, Bob Fish, John Lomas*

*Beryl and I used to sleep there when Alex and Bex were small, to save disturbing the regular covers in Whitewalls. Occasionally the Sunday School served as an overflow when Whitewalls was full, as happened on bonfire nights etc. Those were the days.*  
*Mick Starr*

*All photos on this page - Geo Fletcher*

*During the time I was staying at the Old Sunday School, that is from before the break-through at the first boulder-choke in Ager Allwedd (1957) until June 1961, eight to ten of us would travel down from London in a rented minibus ... The accommodation was very basic, no electricity, the water came from a stand-pipe in front of the building and folding stretchers were used for sleeping, with our own blankets/sleeping bags.*  
 Fred Topliffe



*Julia James and Tich Morris having a welcome beer after a long trip. GF*



*Left to right: Trevor (Jack) Dore, Harry Pearman, Vic Davall, Fred Topliffe. Oct 1956. HP*



*Harry Pearman, Peter Graham, Stan Spencer.  
 The figure in the doorway could be Mari l'Anson.  
 August bank holiday 1956. HP*

*It's very fitting that the CSS has at last gained ownership of the Sunday School as the Society did most of the work to improve the building in the 1950/1960's when it belonged to the Brynmaur scout group. It was used as a base when we were re-building White Walls. The original wooden floor was replaced with concrete, the roof was re-slatted and shutters put on the window, electricity was connected, water was collected from the roof and much, much more. We used to collect the key for the place from Ron Starr in King Street, Brynmaur and walk around the tram road to the Sunday School. Happy days.*

*Geo Fletcher*



*by Andy Watson*

A visit to 'Paradise Lost', a type of country park and picnic area in Kiambu, near Nairobi, Kenya, which boasts a cave system - the Mau Mau Stone Age Caves, a waterfall and the small River Gichi (very dry at the time after a 4 month

drought). Paradise Lost is only about 30 minutes out of Nairobi and although the cave has been known for 8 to 12,000 years with Stone Age dwellers with their obsidian artefacts, it only really came to be noticed in the 1970s when the Mau Mau were living and hiding in the caves when they were fighting for independence in Kenya. The cliffs at the front of the cave entrance were damaged by British Army explosives as bombs were set off trying to get the Mau Mau out of their secret encampment. The cave is located within a large coffee plantation and was only 'officially' discovered in 1996 by the farmer, a Joseph Mbai. For tourists it costs about \$10 to enter the country park and another couple of dollars to go and visit the cave. The cave has a fascinating history and some interesting geology.

After a small entrance passage the cave is around about the same size Goatchurch Cavern in the Mendips. It's lit up with a few dubious electric

lights. That said, they assured me that one of the smaller passages went at least 10 km, highly unlikely, but there were smallish fruit bats flying out further into the cave from one of the side passages. The cave is in a type of Carboniferous limestone which is overlain by deep red soil, 5.5-6.0pH and very high in iron; this soil is self-draining and probably drained in at the back of the cave, indicated by an old gour pool formation, at one point during its millions of years of history. The geology has also been affected by volcanic activity, which has given it some unusual geology formations, along with the more obvious human activity of opening up some of the passages. Of course the Mau Mau and perhaps Stone Age fires caused blackening around the entrance under the cliffs and in the entrance cavity, along with the streaks of carbonised goat's fat visible behind the figure in the photo.



## **Agen Allwedd Bat Counter Count Carried Out**

On the weekend of the CSS Annual Dinner, a successful bat counter count, believed to be the first of its kind, was performed in Agen Allwedd. Four bat counters were counted, in locations as widespread as the Entrance Series and Main Passage. The counter count was carried out by two bat counter counters, according to an account from an independent team of bat counter counter counters.

### **Overheard at Whitewalls**

"I said he could share my family room." – Mandy Voysey

"I'm always worried when I've got someone big on top." – John Newton

"Come on, get it out." – Mandy Voysey to John Stevens

"All I can say is that it was an interesting experience sticking it in." – John Newton

"Do you know Toni?" "Would I recognise him (sic) with his clothes on?" – Mandy Voysey



# Boulder Fall in Daren Entrance

Heading into Daren Cilau for a weekend at HRC on 16<sup>th</sup> Feb, Chris Tomlin, Peter Bolt, Roz Simmonds, Tarquin Wilton Jones, Adrian Fawcett and Matt and Mandy Voysey were all surprised to see a new obstacle added to the entrance series. A boulder had fallen down from the cliff above and was sat right in front of the cave entrance in an upright position.



The plus side of this additional

wriggle was that it would save anyone of larger dimensions the bother of having to travel as far as “The Vice” to find that that they didn’t fit, the down side was that it was sort of in the way. Matt knocked it down flat so it would be easier to negotiate on our exit, but it was way too big to manoeuvre aside.

The following weekend the boulder was duly broken up and removed by a crack team consisting of John Stevens - drill and capping duties, Joe Duxbury and John Newton - the rock lump removal team, Matt Voysey - action photographer, and Mandy Voysey - basically just getting in the way.

(Note: The fallen boulder definitely wasn’t a result of the 4.4 magnitude earthquake that occurred in South Wales on Sat 17<sup>th</sup>, of which no effects whatsoever were felt by any of us underground in Daren at the time).

*by Mandy Voysey*

## Whitewalls Refuse Arrangements

*We now have a CSS wheelie bin to be used for all non-recyclable waste. This is situated along the tramway from Whitewalls, and is attached to a purpose-built hitching rail to hopefully prevent it careening down the hill at the mercy of the local weather. The old green bin is no longer being emptied by the council and will likely be removed.*



## Officers of the Society

### Chairman

Chris Seal

### Secretary

Adrian Fawcett

### Treasurer

Gary Jones

### Cottage Warden

John Stevens

### Meets Secretary

Helen Nightingale

### Librarian and Rescue

#### Liaison

Paul Tarrant

### Newsletter Editor and Web

#### Master

Matt Voysey

### Tackle Master

Joe Duxbury

### Records Officer

John Cooper

### Additional Committee

#### Members

Mel Reid, Jennie Lawrence, Lee Hawkswell

*For contact details refer to the website or members handbook.*



*Matt Voysey in Prokofiev Series, OFD.  
Photo by John Stevens.*



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