

**Volume 60
Nos. 7/8/9
Jul/Aug/Sep 2018**



**Lava Tubes of Lanzarote
Mines of North Wales
Caves of Gower**

CHELSEA SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Above: The team outside OFD Top Entrance, CSS BBQ Weekend, June 2018. Photo by Jennie Lawrence.

Front Cover: Lisa Boore in Cueva Covon, Lanzarote. Photo by Dan Thorne.

ISSN 0045-6381

Contents

Lanzarote Lava Tubes	52-53
Paviland Cave and Culver Hole	54-56
Sunday School Update	57
Parys-Mona Through Trip	58-59
Cwmorthin and Oakeley Mine	60-61
Tween Twins Hole	62
August Daren Camp Round Up	63
Little Neath River Cave	64-65
Caving Log Books	66
Daren HRC Sound System	67
CSS Meets List	68
Joe's Corner	68
Milwr Tunnel	69-71

Congratulations!



Congratulations to Duncan Price and Naomi Sharp, who got married on 14th July!

Photo by Gary Jones

FOLLOW US ON:

WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/GOBELOW
 @GOBELOW
 @GOBELOW

CONTACT US:

CALL: 01690 710108
 VISIT: WWW.GO-BELOW.CO.UK

AUTHENTIC UNDERGROUND ADVENTURES

Editorial This issue includes some great colour photos, so please take a look at the full colour electronic download version of the newsletter available through the links posted on the CSS ProBoards web forum. Big thanks to everyone who sent material for this edition, keep it coming!

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

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. 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.

Newsletter Editor: Matt Voysey
Assistant Editor: Mandy Voysey



New CSS Promotional Flyer

With the previous information leaflet being out of print for some time, and with a clear need to bring the content up to date, a decision was made to revise and redesign it as more of a promotional flyer.

The new letter-fold leaflet has been designed by Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley, and includes stunning photos of our local caves from himself and Steve Sharp.

An initial print run was produced in time for the August bank holiday weekend and saw distribution to cavers partaking in Cave Fest trips, and to interested passers by from a new leaflet box attached to the information board outside the cottage.

So next time you're staying at Whitewalls please feel free to hand a copy to any interested parties you meet.

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 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 IN OCTOBER

Lanzarote Lava Tubes

by Dan Thorne

A week of caving in the warmth and sunshine

In February, where better could you go for a week of caving than a Canary island, for sun, sea and underground exploration? We had got hold of some information that Chris Binding and Carmen Smith had published, and despite some reservations about access to sites being protected and some dire warnings of fines that can be imposed we committed to the trip.

The island of Lanzarote has some interesting lava tubes of varying ages, the youngest eruptions occurring only 300 years ago in the Timanfaya area, and the older end of the island boasting nearly eight and a half kilometres of lava tube in the Mailpais de la Corona lava field, circa 20,000 years old.

Our trip started with a visit to the Timanfaya visitor centre to discover a bit about the formation of the island and learn about volcanoes. Whilst in the park and scanning the information, I noticed we were fairly close to the lava tube Cueva Pico Partido, our GPS giving a distance of only 700 metres or so. With full naivety we parked the car and set off across the lava field by the most direct route. It turns out that the Spanish name for lava field (Mailpais) is very descriptive, and the terrain is almost impassable. However after some interesting route finding we gained the Pico (small) lava flow and were rewarded with what turned out to be the prettiest and one of the shortest lava tubes of the trip. The lava flow was one of the youngest on the island and had some beautiful formations and lavicles, and being shallow it also featured some fine plant roots spreading into the tubes.

The next couple of days were spent in the much older Corona lava tube system. This features a number of through trips and an impressive couple of show caves, the best of which advertises about a kilometre of multi-level passage. We started out by exploring from the Gentes Jameos (Jameos is the word for shakehole or collapse) and explored up flow to a pitch which could have been rigged for a through trip, before heading down flow to the Puerta Falsa Jameos and into continuing huge passage to a fenced section separating it from the Verdes show cave. This trip took all day, mostly in large passage with boulder floors, and in the up flow area near the Prendes connection we found some beautiful cotton wool like formations and crystals.

To link the Corona lava tube system up to the sea involved taking the tour of the Verdes show cave. A worthwhile couple of hours with well lit passages and the usual show cave patter given in multiple



Cueva Gentes

languages. We then took the opportunity whilst parked in the show cave car park to sneak a look into the Cueva Los Lagos, which is also part of the



Blind Crab

same system, though separated by a collapsed section. Los Lagos is gated to prevent access, but unfortunately for the authorities who gated it, by doing so they have made access much easier. We took advantage of the wonderful steel climbing frame, which had some bars removed just above the ladder, to access the entrance, where once an abseil descent would have been necessary.

Los Lagos unfortunately has suffered from its proximity to the show cave, and although it boasts impressive passages it also has litter and graffiti. It is still a worthwhile trip to visit the two tidal lakes in the lower reaches. Both had crystal clear water and are home to the small blind crabs that Lanzarote is famed for. Whilst taking photos in the lakes it became apparent that the tide must have been coming in. Some wet shorts and a camera flash were the only casualties. But the clear blue water could catch you out if you were to swim the lakes to explore beyond.

A visit to the Jameos del Agua show cave, the final bit of lava tube accessible to non-divers before it continues under the ocean, features a lake that has an abundance of blind crabs for anyone to see.

The next day was taken up with a visit to Cueva Los Naturalista in a lava field in the central eastern side of the island. This was a through trip with some side passages to explore and a very different style of lava tube. Much younger, and still showing

the passage shape of a tunnel with a relatively flat lava floor. The best features of Naturalista are the many lava drips and lavatites, delicate helictite-like lava formations left from the high temperatures and molten flows of rock that formed the tubes.

The next lava tubes we planned to explore were in the national park of Timanfaya. This area is protected by EU legislation. We had been warned of potential fines for caving in the national park, and the signage on the few walking trails that are allowed include “No Caving” in the rules. Luckily the two tubes we planned to visit are beside the path or only just inside the park. Both Cueva Covon and Cueva Esqueleto can be done as through trips, but Covon has a flat out crawl link, and Esqueleto has an abseil exit to the bottom of some sea cliffs using some of the rustiest bolts I’ve ever seen. So both short trips were undertaken in



Cueva Los Lagos

both directions. Covon and Esqueleto were formed in the most recent eruptions on the island, and both had beautiful gypsum deposits and crystals.

We also explored a few smaller tubes and sites, as well as climbing a few volcanoes during the trip, which turned out to be an exploration into volcanology and a great insight into a different way of life on an Atlantic island. Thanks to Lanzarote for its hospitality.



Roots in Los Naturalista



While on a kayaking jaunt in the Gower Peninsula, Matt and I thought it would be nice to paddle along the section of coast containing Paviland Cave and Culver Hole. We had been to both of these caves before, but that was 12 years ago, and we thought it would be fun to try to approach and conquer from the sea like a pair of pirates or nautical idiots. We had no idea if this would actually be possible, but thought it would be a jolly adventure either way.

We set sail from Port Eynon on a marvellously sunny and windless day, to find that the sea was surprisingly choppy for such seemingly calm conditions. The headland around Port Eynon Point was the main area of roughness, with plenty of large foaming waves rolling in towards the rocks. But this is an area known for this kind of sea conditions, so we weren't overly worried about the white horses riding in and just headed further out to sea where conditions looked calmer. We gave the headland and the surrounding rocks what we thought would be a sufficiently wide berth, but when we found ourselves bobbing about in white foam being sprayed by crashing waves, I started to suspect that maybe we should have headed out a bit further. No matter, the Voysey vessels coped admirably, and the situation wasn't too desperate. That was until I spotted a monster looming towards me... Back in Port Eynon Bay I had been quite pleased to spot the ghostly shapes of Barrel Jellyfish moving through the water around me, but seeing one surfing on the crest of a wave about to crash over the front of my kayak suddenly filled me with panic. Anyone who doesn't know what a Barrel Jellyfish looks like should just imagine a normal jellyfish but of a monstrous size. Time then went a bit slow-mo for me as I observed this giant jelly beast loom towards me, destined to land in my lap. All I knew was that I really, really didn't want to end up wearing it! Desperate, frantic paddling ensued, and though I still got a soaking, I was very relieved to see the Jelly cruise on past.

Shortly after, we emerged on the other side of the headland and into calmer waters. The sea remained a little choppy, but not enough to be a problem, so we were able to relax a bit more and admire the scenery. One thing I really enjoy about sea kayaking is that you get to see aspects of the coastline that are simply not visible from the land. The coast path along this stretch of coastline is really pleasant and scenic, but seeing the cliff faces beneath this path at such close quarters really is quite special too. From this vantage we were able to

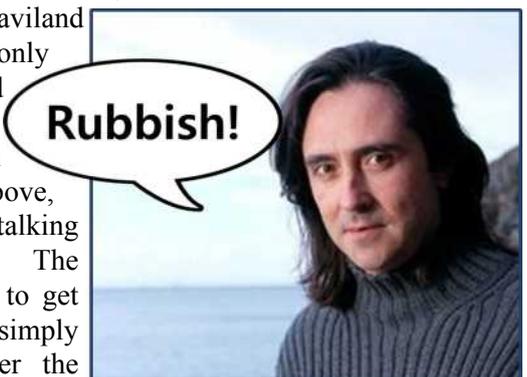
spy many a sea cave obscured from the path above, but with the downside that the cliffs and sharp rocks made landing to investigate further quite impossible.

Culver Hole is just past Port Eynon Point, and we spotted the impressive stone built façade while we were still quite far out to sea. But even from that distance the narrow inlet approaching the cave looked quite treacherous. Maybe the tide was too high? There was a stony beach nearby that we could conceivably have landed on and walked across to the cave, but we thought we'd save it for the way back anyway. Maybe the sea would be more in our favour by then...

So we paddled onward and saw a seal, various sea birds and lots of rocky cliffs, before spotting the obvious teardrop shaped entrance of Paviland Cave. There was most definitely no way of mooring a kayak here! So we took some photos and carried on past. However, soon after this we spotted an inlet to the small boulder strewn beach at Deborah's Hole. This was perfectly navigable with a bit of precision paddling, and also within easy walking distance of Paviland Hole. Excellent! So after a top-notch landing where neither of us collided with anything, got scuffed on barnacles, or got wet, we pulled the boats ashore and contemplated the climb up out of the cove. There was no easy path, but the big slabs of rock were very grippy to climb, and a sheep track above led us to cliff tops without too much trouble. Then it was a fairly straight forward walk to next inlet and the route to Paviland Cave.

Paviland Cave

This is the most famous of Gower's bone caves, and well known for being the final resting place of the "Red Lady of Paviland" (well, before "she" was dug up and re-located to Oxford Museum anyway). Very important archaeologically, and also a very aesthetically pleasing cave, it's well worth venturing to. On the BBC programme "A History of Ancient Britain", Neil Oliver said that Paviland Cave could only be accessed by abseiling down from the cliffs above, but he was talking rubbish! The easiest way to get there is to simply clamber over the



rocks at low tide, but the tide has not been in a favourable state to try this out either time that we've been, so we've taken the alternative "Traverse Route". This involves following the narrow dirt-track on the right-hand flank of the valley leading to a rocky spur running alongside the cliffs. You then walk along this knobbly spur, and just before the drop off to the sea there's a direct climb up on the cliff to your right which



On the traverse ledge

leads to a ledge coated with yellow lichen. This looks more intimidating than it is, hand and foot holds are all quite big and grippy, and the ledge leads you round to a flatter area of rock and the entrance of the cave. A hand-line may be useful for any nervous climbers, but we managed to do it okay even though the only footwear we had were silly neoprene beach shoes. The cave itself is not very long, but the large entrance is very impressive to see. Inside is basically one massive chamber, with two depressions in the floor where the archaeological excavations took place. There's a climb on the right-hand wall, which leads to a further climb then a chimney to a window in the rock above. This first climb looks really smooth and awkward, but it has lots of really good hand and foot holds, so again it's not as bad as it looks. Well, for most of it anyway. Our beach shoes turned out to be surprisingly good for climbing and I got up to the top with no trouble, but looking at the greenish slimy looking coating of the rock I would have to pivot on to get over the edge, I decided to take solace in the fact that I done this before rather than get my swimwear all grubby. Matt managed to get over cleanly using a handhold that I'd obviously missed (the blighter), but reported that the next climb was more slippery, so came back down. Back outside the cave we climbed up in the direction of where the window should be, and sure enough with a bit of scrambling we soon found it. Though not incredibly deep, this had smooth sides and looked like it belled out widely underneath. We both remembered that last time we had climbed the chimney, but then returned the way we had come. So with this in mind we assumed the last climb wasn't possible. However, upon reading my caving log when I got home it seemed that we had climbed out onto the rocky balcony, but hadn't spotted a way down the cliff. The upshot is that we failed to do a possible through-trip (twice!), but at least we know that it's possible now. It

would actually be very easy to rig a rope from top to bottom, which would make the slimy bit safer too, and make for a nice mini adventure that could be combined with some coast walking or kayaking. According to my log the chimney up is very pleasant, coated with cauliflower stal, and the sunshine coming through the window above makes it feel quite special... Oh well, I didn't really mind missing the top stuff this time. I was after all inappropriately dressed, and there was yet more messing about in kayaks and caves on the agenda...

Back at the boats, we had a spot of lunch with cider, before embarking on the mighty effort of portaging our vessels over the vast distance of slippery boulders that the ebbing tide had put between us and the sea. We had planned to continue onwards towards Worms Head, but decided to head back to Port Eynon instead to give us time to faff about in Culver Hole on the way. Though the sea was now much calmer than it had been earlier, our aspirations of rocking up to the cave from the sea were soon scuppered at the sight of the plateau of sharp barnacle clad rocks that had appeared around the cliff edges. Both the cave and the beach were now a huge distance from the sea. On the plus side getting around Port Eynon Point was a breeze, and we even got to sneak up on a seal that was having a bit of a nap out on the ocean wave. The jellyfish in the lovely clear waters were now an item of interest rather than



Paviland chimney entrance

fear, and a pleasant journey was had to the now much wider expanse of sand at Port Eynon Bay. Our ocean adventure over, we then loaded the vessels back onto the car, got changed, and as the sun was still out, had dinner of fish, chips and beer on the beach. We must have spent ages doing this, as when we headed off to walk to Culver Hole we were presented with yet more tidal challenges...

Culver Hole

Avast me hearties it's a piratey hole! Though in actual fact this unusual cave was used as a dovecot and has about 30 tiers of nesting holes inside for the very practical purpose of providing a reliable food source in the form of pigeon meat and eggs, despite this it is steeped in legend of smuggling, contraband and secret passages. Ace!

We walked over to the cave from the beach, following the coast path then the narrow track below

the cliffs. The cave can only be accessed by a rope climb from the narrow bouldery inlet below, necessitating an easy clamber down to sea level. The rope climb up into the cave was a bit tricky, but the bit of hanging tat assisting the climb does at least appear to be well attached. It's very good that it's there, as it'd be a right pig getting up without it, but it is rather shorter than you'd hope, and also varies between baler twine and nautical rope as thick as your arm, which also isn't ideal. We both felt that this was more awkward than we remembered from our previous visit, and comparing the photos we took with those of 12 years ago it does seem that the rope is arranged less usefully than it once was. However we still made it up okay, and were soon in the entrance window pondering the next challenge - a flight of very narrow, ruinous steps, that slope disconcertingly towards a very big drop to the bottom of the cave. The steps were also piled high with bird poo, nesting material and general loose dirt, but I remembered last time I was able to use the nooks and crannies in the stone wall for grip as I went. We were just contemplating if there was in fact more birdy business here than there had been previously, when we happened to glance back down to the shore and spot that the sea was much closer than it had been when we arrived. Further watching confirmed that it was advancing by the second, so a swift retreat was now our



Ascent to Culver Hole

primary objective. Sort of relieved that we didn't have to pad through all the birdy excretions after all, we scampered down the rope, pleased to find that it was much easier than climbing up. We made it across the boulders to the climb up to safety just as the waves started to lap at the bottom. Further loitering would certainly have resulted in some kind of soaking. As it happened it all worked out quite well, as we were also only just in time to get out of the car park before it was locked too.

Inside Culver Hole it's possible to continue up to the round window using the crumbly steps and from there traverse across to a plank crossing the void below. However, I could only really see as far as the next square window on our foray, so I've no idea if the route beyond is still negotiable. On our previous trip this route was worrying, but perfectly possible and stable, and with the odd pigeon still in residence to catch you by surprise. It may be possible to safety the climbs with ropes, but I've no idea how this would best be rigged.

Although both Culver Hole and Paviland are only small caves and don't offer much in the way of a proper caving trip, I think they're certainly very interesting places to visit. Not just for the history and scenery, but also for the fun of getting there and messing about on rocks by the sea.



The Red Lady of Paviland

Back in 1823, prompted by a previous discovery of elephant bones at the site, an archaeological dig took place in Paviland Cave. This proved to be a really historic event as not only were more "elephant" bones uncovered, but also that of a human skeleton of unknown age with bones coated with red ochre. Initially it was thought that the body could be fairly contemporary, possibly the remains of a Customs Officer murdered by smugglers, but after further thought a completely different conclusion was drawn... Namely that the body was most likely that of a Roman prostitute. A seashell necklace, the red colouring of the bones, and the proximity of what was then thought to be a Roman hillfort, was enough to make this story plausible at the time and the legend of "The Red Lady of Paviland" began.

This proved to be a rather unfortunate title, as further examination of the bones in 1912 brought to light that they were in fact that of a man, and one far more likely to have been partaking in the burly pursuits of the Hunter/Gatherer than in prostitution. He was also much older in origin than previously thought, with the most recent carbon dating suggesting that he could be as much as 33,000 years old. Of course we can only hypothesise about what the landscape and climate would actually have been like at this time, but one thing's for sure... neither the "Red Lady" nor the elephants (that were actually Woolly Mammoths) would have had to totter over tiny ledges or dodge the waves to access the cave as we have to today. As sea levels were much lower, it's more likely that open plains would have been the view from Paviland Cave, making it a far more accessible shelter for both humans and animals.

Sunday School Update

While some of us were leading trips for Cave Fest and generally messing about underground on the August Bank Holiday Weekend, Mike Read, John Stevens and an ever-changing crew of whoever was available did some sterling work rebuilding the porch of the Old Daren Sunday School. Here's Mike's account of the work achieved over the three days...

Saturday - In good weather impeded by midges we removed the porch roof. The slates had reached the end of their useful life and we only managed to save one. Whilst some of the rafters were sound, the ones nearest the cottage were very rotten. As the rear lintel was the full width of the porch this meant we had to take down the whole porch gable end.

The front door to the Sunday School was already low, and the increase in floor height needed to provide insulation meant we had to either raise the door lintel, or limit the entrance to dwarfs. Knowing the forecast for Sunday, we pressed on and reinstalled the old stone door lintel at a slightly higher level, and John managed to find a pre-cast concrete lintel in his house for the back on the wall. We also built up the inside face of the side walls to wall plate level.

Meanwhile, Roy, supported by Adrian, Lee, and any other cavers not helping with Cave Fest, tunneled under the internal wall for the shower outlet and prepared for the installation of the new lintel over the WC. Mel also had a good sort out of all the mess inside. [Lee also did some plumbing in Whitewalls, installing new taps in the upstairs toilet to replace the old dripping ones – Ed.]

Sunday - Saw the arrival of heavy and persistent rain, and more keen Cave Fest cavers. Even the midges took cover! Our first job was to install a tarpaulin over the porch area. This enabled us to fix the wall plates, then cut and temporarily fix the rafters for the porch roof. Some of these will need to come down again to enable the internal lintel over the WC to be installed.

Mel continued sorting out the inside and decanted several items to John's garage to create some working space. Some further enlargement of the through trip between the main room and the WC continued, but like cave digs it always takes longer than expected and the squeeze remained too tight to make a physical connection.

However, Mel did manage a 'through the old door and into the trench for the sewer pipe' trip. It was clearly the weight of the muck she was carting out. After this we placed some strong planks over the trench to enable easier access in and out.

Monday - Better weather and the masons busy on the gable end. With the arrival of Andy work also progressed on the wall removal for the internal lintels, and the through trip can now be easily accomplished. Every time the breaker started the lights dimmed due to the long length of the extension leads from the cottage across to the Sunday School. The stone mined from the wall was grabbed by the masons and used to build the gable end.



Thanks to everyone for their help, both before and after taking Cave Fest participants underground, and particular thanks to Trevor and John N for their tea and coffee making.

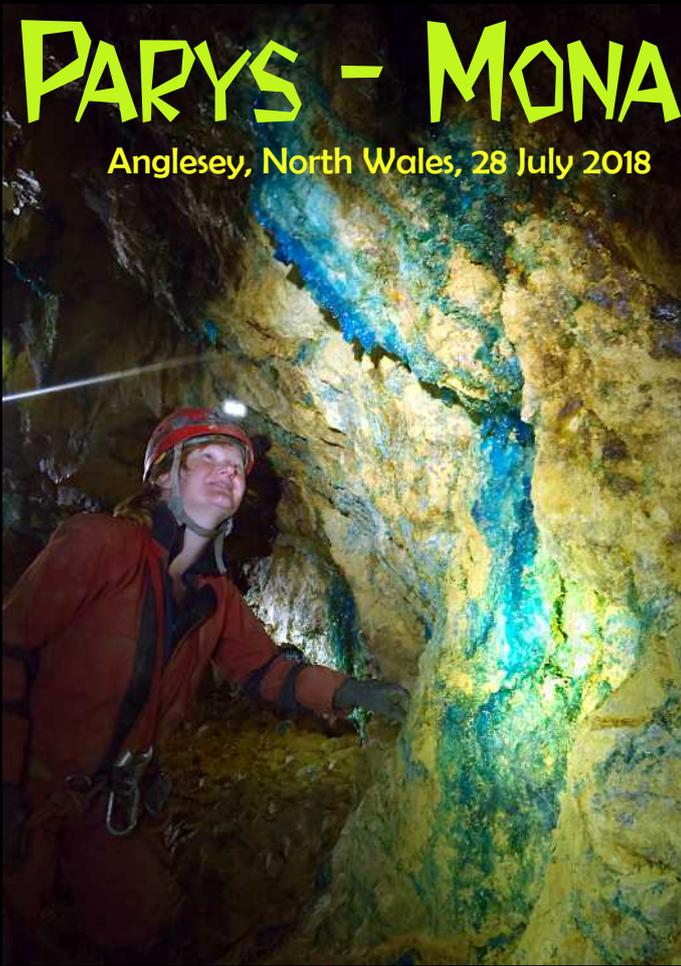
Workers: Mike Read, John Stevens, Adrian Fawcett, Mel Reid, Matt Voysey, Lee Hawkswell, Roy Musgrove, Andy Tyler, John Newton and Trevor Pemberton.

by Mike Read

PARYS - MONA THROUGH TRIP

Anglesey, North Wales, 28 July 2018

by Charles Bailey



It had all the ingredients of a Hollywood horror film. You know the sort – it starts with an inaccessible remote spooky hut on a windswept hillside. The team of 11 set off on an intrepid adventure, but unexpectedly groups go missing. A haunted mine, flesh eating acid water, the evil snotalite. Eventually the survivors find another exit and emerge disorientated.

The Hut

The team turned up in dribs and drabs at the Cave and Crag club hut, Pant Ifan, 'near' Prenteg (Tremadog) on the 27th July. CSS members were Helen Nightingale/Pemberton, Trevor Pemberton, Adrian Fawcett, Matt Voysey, Mandy Voysey, Matt Chinner, Jann Padley and myself. In total there were 4 others from cave and crag staying – Eddie, Steve, Veronica and Clive.

Helen organised and provided directions to the hut which were almost perfect, albeit with a miscount on cattle grids. The track to the hut is definitely more green lane than road, and one you wouldn't drive down by mistake – it falls into the 'trust in the Lord'

category! Short wheel base or 4x4 vehicles are a necessity to avoid grounding. Apparently it's just as quick to take the 20 minute walk to the pub in Tremadog as it is to drive there, and a lot safer.

The place is well kitted out, with comfy beds and a refurbished kitchen. However, due to the summer drought showers were somewhat limited. [The hut relies on collection of rainwater, of which there is typically a ready supply in this part of Wales - Ed.]

Mine History

Modern mining apparently commenced in 1768. There were two mines – Parys and Mona with separate sets of buildings and a boundary that runs north-south between the summit windmill and the Parys mine entrance. Initial work was by shallow shafts and bell pits which were later deliberately opened to form the Great and Hillside Opencasts. On the surface these are still very evident.

Deep mining began before 1790 and eventually reached a depth of 270m. For those that know Anglesey, yes – that's well below sea level! Both mines were gravity drained by the Joint Drainage Adit (-90m), and everything below had to be pumped (hence the windmill) and is now flooded.

By the end of underground working there were over 100 shafts scattered across the mountain.

The Trip(s)

The intrepid 11 (8 CSS and 3 C&C) set off from the hut, but the C&C group fell foul of a tyre problem, and had to abort. Jann and Adrian suffered from the 'what's that knocking noise from the gearbox' problem, and arrived late, but nevertheless capable. Maybe not capable of making it back – but hey ho!



Try some of these tasty chemical crystals little...



Inevitably, things started off somewhat chaotically. The original idea was for a small SRT trip group and larger through trip group. However, this concept fell to pieces once we had the offer of an SRT trip combined with a through trip! Most of the surviving cast leaned in this direction, inadvertently leaving Helen and Trevor with individual 1:1 led trips. Personal service at its best. Our mine guides from the Parys Underground group were excellent – being very knowledgeable and flexible. The remaining 6 entered Parys, having changed in a fine stone hut that sits over the entrance. We had a great introduction to the mines, initially starting with a few straightforward SRT descents. On the way, we viewed some Bronze Age artefacts. These are in several places on the Parys Mine 16 fathom level (around -30m). 18/19th century miners broke into the bottom of Bronze Age workings coming down from surface. Although all trace of these workings at surface is now buried under massive tips, numerous radiocarbon dates from underground indicate that copper deposits were being mined here around 1900 BC. That's before Christ, not before carbide.

The mine features some impressive bright blue copper

based formations and minerals. Jann tried licking one (honest) and was so impressed with the 'battery tongue' hit that Matt V gave it a go. Boys will be boys!

Some sections feature very acidic water – around pH 2.4 – about the same acidity as lemon juice. You're advised to wash kit in fresh water as soon as possible after the trip, and this was taken up enthusiastically – particularly with thoughts of SRT harness, tapes and ropes. Mid-trip I managed to kick water into my eye, and waited for the sting which never came. There's clearly some variability dependent on how fresh the water is.

We took up the option to visit an excellently preserved mid-nineteenth century wheelbarrow in an obscure part of the mine. This involved a 20m two stage mud slope climb, culminating with a near vertical 4m chimney. Handlines were in-situ, making this straightforward. I was particularly impressed by the barrow having a T'Owd Man's headlight – a candle stuck forward facing to light the way.

The key to linking the two mines (and our exit), was the joint drainage level. This was followed for about 20m to take us from Parys to Mona. The water wasn't that deep – and looked to be lower than usual due to the dry conditions. Usually you get wet to around neck level.

Mona showed a little more breakdown, and both had significant and extensive snotalites! We staggered out after 5½ hours, only around 200 metres from the Parys hut.

Matt C resolved the necessary gear washing conundrum (bearing in mind limited water at the hut) by suggesting the river under 'Bat Bridge', Llyn Padarn. An excellent venue.

The End?

Eventually, with washing, barbeque shopping and managing Jann's car, we arrived back at the hut. Trevor and Helen had initiated a fine barbeque in the impressive old stone barn at the hut, resplendent with open fire and BBQ grills. Sorry about the marshmallows by the way – personally, I blame the alcohol.

Epilogue: Jann got a lift down the hill from Eddie and Veronica, called the RAC, and was advised to drive home – carefully. An errant thrust bearing, apparently. Sounds like a poorly directed caving manoeuvre to me.



Photos by Matt Voysey

A mystifying swirl of biological matter in an acidic pool

Cwmorthin Old Vein & Oakeley Back Vein

by Matt Chinner

With Charles Bailey, Helen Pemberton, Adrian Fawcett, Matt Voysey, Mandy Voysey, Jann Padley and Matt Chinner (leading this trip on his "day off" as a Cwmorthin guide).

After two months of glorious sunshine here in Snowdonia, we awoke to find normal summer service had resumed and a grey wet morning greeted us from the windows of Pant Ifan cottage, putting any ideas of climbing on sun kissed warm dry rock firmly back to bed. Over coffee and breakfast it was decided a trip to Cwmorthin would be a good accessible Sunday trip. So after packing up and confirming logistical arrangements we convoyed over to Tanygrisiau. Changing and gearing up in the top car park, we were soon up at the Cwm and passing the old quarry buildings, including Cwmorthin Terrace, the Manager's office and house, and the Blacksmith's Forge.

We entered the mine via Lake Level, passing through Robin Jones' old working area (Robin was the last person to work Cwmorthin, running a small unofficial 'bandit operation' making tiles until Welsh Slate finally evicted him in the late 1980's), and into the Narrow Vein to make a descent down to A floor via an old manway. This had been blocked with spoil until it was dug out and cleared last year for the opening of the Go Below 'Hero Extreme' route. After viewing the Old Vein Incline we made our way down a lovely stone staircase to B floor, past a hob nailed boot (left as a good luck token by the ever superstitious old men), and we were off over the 'Bridge of Peril', a Go Below installation in the style of an 'Indiana Jones' Burma bridge. This took us over one of the biggest chambers on Blaenau, over 900ft from top to bottom and a testament to the toil of the Victorian slate men who worked this area pre power with only 'Jymper' and candle. Then on to a zip line over the next chamber for part of the team, with others taking the original traverse we installed, to access the pillar overlooking a huge canyon shaped chamber. Then it was back up to A floor via a via ferrata style climb. Working our way westwards, down-climbs, traverses and another zip line bought us to the western extremity of the old vein, then further down-climbs and an abseil bought us down to D floor, the lowest floor of the old workings. Here, while working on the Hero Extreme last year, I found two unused tallow candles. This is very unusual as the men had to buy their candles from the slate company, usually at an inflated price, so they're not usually left lying about! After a spot of lunch we were off eastwards passing under the foot of the Old Vein Incline and the massive chambers we had earlier been passing over.



Mandy on the first traverse



Looking down an interesting aid climb



Arriving at 'the link' chamber, connecting Oakeley to Cwmorthin, we passed the water crossing successfully (no one fell in...) and on into the Back Vein Oakeley workings. Cwmorthin was connected to Oakeley in 1930 and reworked by the Oakeley Slate Company, the Cwmorthin Slate Company having gone out of business in 1900 and the mine sitting dormant until then. Here some fantastic artefacts can be seen, including a stitch drill from c1900 and a large electric winch purchased from a colliery in South Wales and used during the working under Cwmorthin in the 1930's. Then on to the iconic Compressor Room to see the boilers and huge tea urn used by the quarrymen, and a good explore of the floor finding many interesting artefacts including cigarette packs, boots, tools, det boxes and cord, powder horns and a felt hat (worn by the rockmen). Then down further to G floor and the 'deepest publicly accessible point in the UK', with some 1200ft of mountain above us at this point, from which the only way is up...



Passing the 'Queen Mary Café', an iconic caban with many more interesting artefacts, and some of the huge chambering done with 'modern' air powered drills, we made our way to the Waterfall Climb. This is an old man way cut in the 1930's to allow ventilation and access between floors leading back up to Cwmorthin Old Vein. Making our way along E floor balancing on submerged scaffolding poles to keep our feet dry, we arrived at the Back Vein Incline and made our way up to C floor, passing the old pump gear and train of four rubble carts and remains of tripod cranes used for lifting the won blocks. Crossing the remains of an old timber bridge we then climbed up to B floor and a traverse originally used by the old men with only a chain for handline for the final ascent back up to Lake Level, completing a very enjoyable round trip of some 6km underground - only a small part of the Cwmorthin/Oakeley complex which combined has 102km of passage. A post trip pint was had in the Oakeley Arms, a fitting tribute as the building was part of the Oakeley family estate Plas Tan y Bylch.



Top to bottom: An airy traverse, the stitch drill, and Miners' artefacts.

Right: The team after the trip (minus photographer).



Photos by Matt Voysey



by Helen Pemberton

Tween Twins has been known as Fester Hole, and was dug into in 2016 by a team from the Wessex. It was taped the day after breakthrough, and trips are limited to help preserve the cave, which has been designated a SSSI.

Chris Seal and Steve Sharp joined me for a very fatty but very pretty trip. It started off with the leader forgetting the key, and between us, no ladder. Thankfully, the ladder is only needed for a short stretch of maybe 45° sloping tube, which is very muddy and slippery. We rigged up a rope handline to stop us sliding too much. The entrance is clearly heavily dug, and is muddy and small, but not tight at all. After a short



Photo by Steve Sharp; title photo by Helen Pemberton.

distance the leader asked us to take our oversuits and wellies off, as we couldn't take any mud into the pristine cave. This section was far more upright, and walking through a cave in wetsuit socks feels a bit odd.

It was wonderful to see a cave that felt new and unworn, and with formations in such clean condition. The cave isn't very big, and is easy caving, but we spent ages just looking. Some sections are only big enough for 1 person, so we took it in turns to admire the formations and to take photos. It was well worth the visit. There's currently only one more trip available this year, for 3 people. The cave is closed over winter because of the bats and to help stop mud getting taken in, and there's only 1 trip available per month.

Upcoming SMWCRT Rescue Practices

Saturday 1st December - SMWCRT HQ, Penwyllt

Annual Big OFD Training Exercise, with a proposed cave rescue scenario in Ogof Ffynnon Ddu I. Taking place 9:30-17:00.

All CSS members are welcome to take part in this exercise and gain experience of rescue procedures and the technical equipment that the team use.

Contact Paul Tarrant for further details:
ptpeaty@yahoo.co.uk



HELEN'S DAREN HEN WEEKEND

The August HRC Daren Camp was an unusual mix of digging, tourist caving and Hen Party. Charles Bailey, Jemima Chancellor, Matt Chinner, Beth Knight, Adrian Fawcett, Mandy and Matt Voysey all partook in celebrating Helen Pemberton's weekend as a Hen, despite the fact that she had already married in June!

As usual everyone arrived at camp at varying times on the Friday, though I think Charles, Matt and Beth were the only ones to get there before midnight. By the time we'd had dinner, quaffed a number of cocktails and set up our beds for the night, there were worryingly few hours to go before Adrian's estimated time of arrival at 10:30am. Who needs sleep anyway? Adrian was actually earlier than expected, prompting those of us still cocooned in our sacks feigning sleep to shamefacedly rouse for breakfast and get ready for a day of activity. Helen, Charles, Matt C, Beth and Jemima all had a jolly day sightseeing at the REU, Blue Greenies and 12 O'clock High, while Matt V, Mandy and Adrian did some burly digging at Beyond Time. The day was rounded off with lashings of curry, cocktails and a disco lit Hen adventure down to the sump.

For the next camp in November we've got a few projects on the go, so the dig site will be decided depending on numbers. New are diggers always welcome - contact Mandy (mandola76@gmail.com) or Adrian (adrianfawcett@outlook.com).

by Mandy Voysey

Charles Bailey's August Daren Camp Round Up In Numbers

- 15 hours caving total
- 14 hilarious minutes watching Matt V almost learning 'the floss'
- 13 hen night balloons smuggled into camp under clothing
- 12 loads of washing up done by Matt C, or so it appeared
- 11 sub-standard cocktails - we must try harder!
- 10 a.m. (or thereabouts) arrival Saturday for Adrian, wondering why we weren't ready
- 9 hours sleep total
- 8 hours driving (round trip from Wareham)
- 7th hour sump visited (nearly)
- 6 meal variants cooked in 2 days, not counting breakfast
- 5 visitors to the fabulous blue greenies
- 4 a.m. bed time each 'night'
- 3 diggers
- 2 troublesome courgettes
- 1 surviving welly

Next Daren Camp: 9th-11th November 2018

Little Neath River Cave

by Jennie Lawrence



The Team: Paul, Nicky, Mike, Jennie, Martin, Jann, Jessica, Jamie and Phil.

8th July 2018. It was yet another lovely day after a prolonged spell of dry weather. We called in at Blaen Nedd Isaf Farm to pay our nominal goodwill fee, meeting the affable farmer and his friendly dogs. The cave is liable to severe and rapid flooding so this was just the right time for our trip, and with what happened in Thailand, we weren't going to take any risks! All arrived at the parking space without any problems and changed into wetsuits – despite the anticipation of warm water we were taking no chances!

The cave takes water from the Afon Nedd Fechan and has active as well as fossilised passages. Paul led through the small unwelcoming Flood Entrance and the flat out hands and knees crawl in flowing water. There was more water than we thought there should be after the drought, where was it all coming from?

After negotiating the entrance series we followed the main stream passage to mud and sand chambers.

Martin showed us the low downward slope to Sump 1, which is usually not accessible with normal or high water levels. He had never seen it this low before. Jann and Mike dived in eagerly to see if there was any chance it might have turned into a duck and be passable into Bridge Cave! Jann though there might be a voice connection to Bridge Cave – he could see a black line about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch high where the light was reflecting off neither the water nor the roof. Possibly a tiny, but unusable air space?

Retreating from the sump we went back

to Sand Chamber. Further back Martin had pointed out the start of the Canal Bypass which avoids The Canal... But hey, we were in wetsuits! The Canal is a 150m bedding plane in flowing water with a duck at the end. I didn't really notice a duck so assumed the water level was much lower than usual.

The Canal leads to Junction Chamber. This is where the other end of the Canal Bypass comes in and would be our way out on our return.

We continued along the main stream passage until we entered the start of the 3D Maze where we hunted for and found a tight and awkward squeeze down into a small passage. Some of the team gave this a miss after hearing various groans from those of us who descended down it! Soon we were met by some nice formations which made it all worthwhile.

Continuing along the passage it narrowed then came to an end, the way on being down a steep and tricky climb that would be more difficult to get back up. Martin warned us that "bad air" had been reported in the passage below. As none of us fancied the climb down to possible bad air and the difficulty in getting back up again, we turned round!

Jann made going back up the squeeze look easy, but Nicky's long legs made it a lot trickier!

On our way back, we missed the way on and entered an opening on the right. We crawled along this small fossilised passage above a dry streamway for what seemed like a very long time... Mike keenly disappeared out of sight to the tight end rift where it became impassable. He could just about turn round, which was just as well as none of us



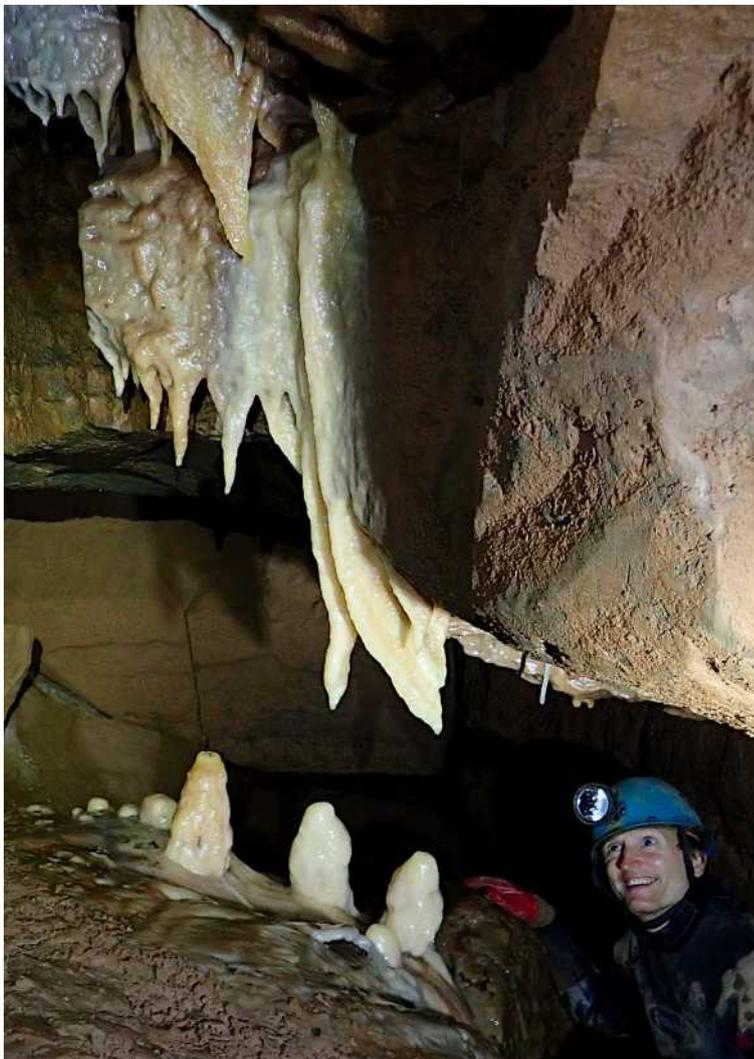
Jann and Mike at the sump

followed him to the end! We made our way back to the main passage. Three cavers from Gwent Caving Club that we'd met as we were leaving the 3D Maze had caught up with us and were taking a break before exiting. Some of us went ahead but Nicky had plans for Mike!

Nicky had actually persuaded the three young cavers to join in and be "real men". So they all exited the crawls in their underpants!

Back at the cars Paul spoke to two divers that had just come out of Bridge Cave. They said that there was air space all the way through the sump, but not really usable. Jann estimated that the sump is normally about 18m (60 feet) long, but followed the diver's line for about 10m, which implies that it was very short. Calculating that, due to the dry weather, if the sump was 10m shorter on the inside, and 3m shorter on the outside, then it would only be 5m long! And he could almost see that far...

This was Jess's first caving trip, and she did exceptionally well through both water and squeezes, and squeezes in water! So hopefully we'll see her on many more trips. We were underground for approximately 5½ hours, and a great time and a lot of fun was had by all. We finished the day with a swift pint in a local pub.

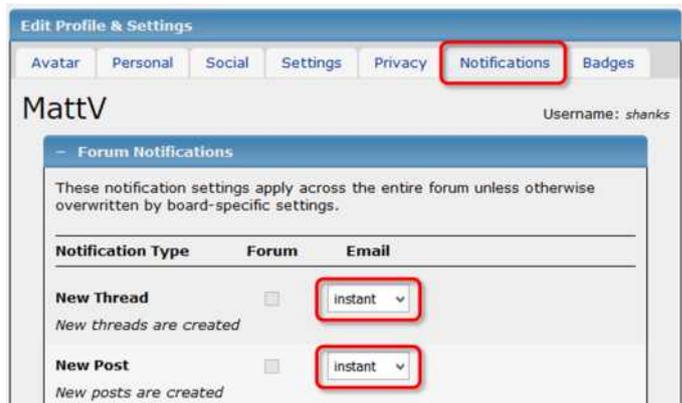


Did you know..?

You can choose to receive notifications of any new posts on the CSS forum/message board direct to your email inbox.

To set this up log in and click on the Profile button in the top menu bar to view your user information, then click on the Edit Profile button.

On the next page click on the Notifications tab. You can then change the Notification Type for New Thread and New Post to 'instant'. There are additional options to send round-up emails at most once a day or once a week if you prefer.



Caving Log Books

Extract from Steve Milner's Log Book

This log book entry from 1986 is an account of a follow up trip after the breakthrough at "Brazil" in the Hard Rock Extensions of Daren Cilau.

Sat/Sun (7/8) June. Daren Cilau.

After the usual BEC committee meeting, the first Friday of the month was the usual session at the Hunters. Tim & Wobbly got well pissed, the latter passed out at 10.30 in the Pub. I remained sober to drive the others back to Bristol for a good night's kip at home. Snablet crashed out at my flat.

Same rise saw us on the way & Tim had a driving lesson to Crickhowell. We were underground by 11.30 am laden with camera gear etc. Just 10 mins into the entrance Tim pulled a muscle in his back and had to go out. Pete & I headed on, we didn't take Tim's flash gear in as Pete Bolt said he was taking his in, however he didn't get to the bottom owing to light failure! So camera work was limited to snapshots. An uneventful 5 hr trip to the bottom saw us at the

camp. Pete & I cooked a ~~meal~~ ^{Snacks} & headed up the dig into the new stuff. We met with Steve Allen & Arthur Millett just the other side of the complex beyond Brazil, they gave ^{Pete} the grade 5c survey owing to lack of people & to explore the extension & see the formations. Arthur was exhilarated the cave passed the divers extension (over the top) & went due west!, towards Aggy (Yiharr). The cave is magnificent fine tiny crystals, flow, aragonite formations & most impressive a rifty sump tube which comes out in a massive (ish) chamber approx 50' wide, 150' long ascending at 45° - beautiful phreatic tube. At the top is a boulder chole, with calcite and it draughts strongly. A very exciting place but it needs banging or someone to play with a crowbar to gain height in the ruckle. Possibly a very dangerous place. ~~take up~~

We returned to Brazil, I went taking snapshots, ^{Arthur} Pete, Steve & Dave continued with the survey, Pete taped the formations. Mark & Geoff Newton returned from a 300m extension (hard-won) which linked Catnap Junct. to the other side of Brazil. My knee was giving me a bit of a lip.

Mark, Geoff, Pete & I returned to camp to eat. Geoff cooked & I placed a banger just to wake him up, he was most upset. We had a curry with rice followed by plenty of tea & whiskey. We were quite pissed by the time Arthur returned, he headed out about 1 am. Henry & Tim Smart were at the dig. Andy Cave & LCY also were in the dig. I didn't see the others as I crashed out in the hammock pretty early.

Snablet & I got our acts together (eventually) & left camp about midday. Henry came out with us & we (I) got out at 5 pm. Snablet was half an hour later coming thru the entrance series. A beautiful day. The draught out thru the entrance series was phenomenal. 30 hrs.

Log book entries are often very interesting reading and give a unique perspective on caving trips, digging endeavours or breakthroughs into the unknown. If anyone else has any personal records relating to significant trips or discoveries, we would be very grateful to receive them.

Image by Mark (Gonzo) Lumley

Gear Review

Daren HRC Sound System

by Matt Voysey



For a while the sound system at Hard Rock Camp had been a little lacklustre. Distorted, temperamental and often cutting out completely, it needed expert fettling to get going. Admittedly this is true of most of the camp facilities (and quite often many of the camp occupants too!)

The old speakers were of a bygone design, once popular with owners of Sony Walkmans etc., and were originally acquired in a simpler age before the dawn of iPods, MP3 players and smartphones. Even so they had served a long and distinguished life, bearing witness to many a camp reveller “dancing themselves right down the slot.”¹

We had a look at the options available and quickly identified a few difficulties in obtaining a suitable new amplifier and speaker system for camp these days:

- They're all Bluetooth or Wi-Fi connected. We want to plug in basic MP3 players with a phono cable.
- They all have built-in Lithium Ion batteries and require charging through mains-powered USB adaptors. We need something that can be powered from standard batteries.
- We require something that can withstand the damp, dirty conditions at camp.
- We need something that can be field-repaired.

Thus a new audio amplifier was sourced, constructed and brought into camp by Adrian. This was based on a self-contained electronic hobbyists' 3W stereo amplifier unit, which works within a wide supply voltage range (3 - 10V), and he'd neatly housed it inside a custom plastic case with everything exposed for easy repair. Yes we could arguably benefit from a little more output power, but this unit runs nicely on 4 x AA batteries for many hours (4 camps counted before the first battery change).

The old speakers were connected, their built-in amplifier bypassed and discarded, and we had music to dance to again. But with the new amp we soon realised the old speaker units were actually somewhat under par. Presumably a combination of time, moisture and mould had rotted the speaker cones and degraded the coils, making them anything but Hi-Fi. We put “new speakers” on the camp shopping list.

On a subsequent camp Adrian turned up with a pair of replacement speakers that seemed to fit the bill. On face value these seemed just the ticket: “80W peak power, Moisture Resistant, Can work in Kitchens and Bathrooms”. We excitedly tossed the old speakers aside and connected up the new pair to the amplifier. To our dismay the resulting audio quality of these speakers was dreadful. Tinny and quiet, like an old telephone; almost as bad as listening to someone's over-cranked headphones on the train.

For some reason we suffered this weedy performance for Friday and most of Saturday's camp time, until a distant memory popped into my head – yes, all speakers are intended to operate within some kind of enclosure or cabinet. I grabbed an empty Daren Drum and balanced a speaker in its opening. Wow! What a difference! Suddenly we had volume, and BASS!

For fact fans - the pair of 'bass bin' Daren Drums have been unknowingly 'donated' by Matt Davies – grandson of Fred Davies who, along with Mike Boon, was the first to break through the end of the Daren entrance series into the Old Main Rift in 1963.



The amplifier and MP3 player



Speaker and drum. Note the segments cut from the circular surrounds of the speakers, necessary to enable insertion through the 130mm diameter opening of a standard Daren Drum for transport and storage.

CurTec 3.6L Wide Neck Drum, a.k.a. Mini “Daren Drum” - <https://tinyurl.com/ycsr5tas>

e-Audio White 5 inch 8 Ohm 80W Moisture Resistant Ceiling Speakers - <https://tinyurl.com/y86qsopm>

Kemo Electronic Stereo amplifier 3W - <https://tinyurl.com/ydc7vqsm>

¹ Mostly Henry Bennett

CSS MEETS

October 14th-21st - CSS trip to Mallorca

This will be a week-long caving holiday to explore some of the many excellent and well decorated caves on the island. There will be a mix of trips available, both SRT and non SRT, plus canyoning, walking, running and snorkelling. We'll be staying in a villa with mountain views, swimming pool, BBQ area and jacuzzi, situated within easy reach of caves, beaches, mountains and a brewery.

November 2nd-4th - Whitewalls Bonfire Weekend

Saturday's trip will be to "Spectacles or Bra" in the Inner Circle area of Aggy, followed by an evening of bonfire and fireworks at Whitewalls. Hot food, puddings and barrels of beer will be provided for a small fee. Please bring a firework to contribute to the display, and aim for one large one rather than multiple little ones.

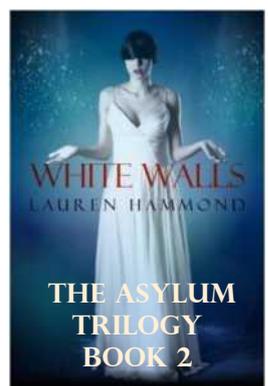
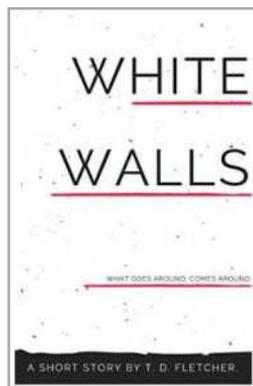
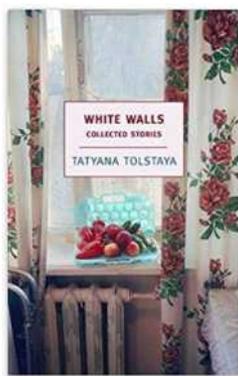
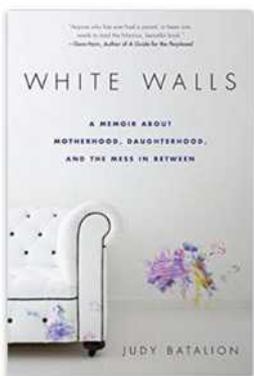
November 30th-2nd December - Curry Weekend

Saturday night is Curry Night, so bring along a homemade curry to share. Caving to include a cave rescue practice in OFD on Saturday, plus other trips TBA. Sunday's caving will be fart powered and suitable for fat bellies, Ogof Rhyd Sych perhaps ;)

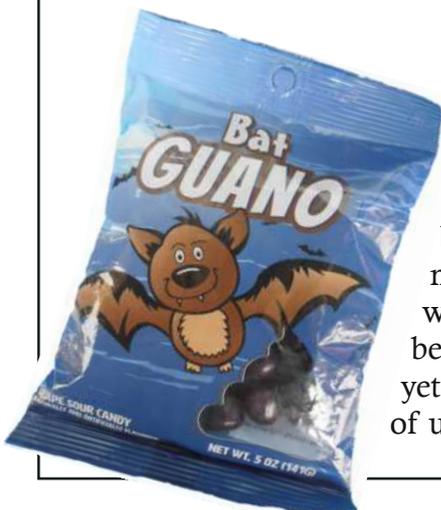
January 25th-27th - Whitewalls Annual Dinner and AGM Weekend.

Short caving trips on Saturday, to give plenty of time to get dressed up for dinner at The Bear in Crickhowell. So dust off those DJs. A set menu for the dinner will be made available nearer the time. The AGM will be on the Sunday.

Contact Helen at heleninightingale@gmail.com for further information on any of the above events.



While I was mooching around a bookshop in America, I came across a book entitled 'White Walls', by one Judy Batalion. Well, I thought, perhaps we ought to have a copy of that! So when I got home I looked it up on Amazon, and up popped three other books with the same title. The ones by Tatyana Tolstoya and T D Fletcher look fairly mundane, but the one by Lauren Hammond looks more appropriate! Perhaps the rumour that there's a stock of straightjackets in the rescue store is true!



Here are some 'sweets' I came across in America. They were so irresistible I bought a pack. I will bring them along to Whitewalls the next time I visit, and will share them with those members lucky enough to be there. I haven't tasted them myself, yet, so it will be a new sensation for all of us!





by Mandy Voysey

Matt and I had decided to extend our stay in North Wales after the club meet in July, and this turned out to be an excellent idea as it gave us the chance to bag a bonus trip to Milwr Tunnel on the Monday. Matt Chinner happened to be leading a trip there for some of his fellow Go Below crew and kindly offered that we could join the team. Brilliant!

Our entrance was through Rhyd Alyn Lead Mine. A complex of passages with cream coloured mud and some wading through shin height water. This was actually quite cave-like and interesting in itself. There were a few sections of collapsed or dubious false floors, but these had traverse lines for safety and really weren't a problem. To get down to the level of the tunnel there's a series of fixed ladders, and lots of them! These were all of varying length and rung spacing, some metal, some wooden with metal rungs, and all were quite old. Despite their vintage, the ladders seemed remarkably sound, and all had safety lines at the top to clip into while crossing the voids. We'd been expecting to end up on a shiny set of newly installed orange ladders on our way down, but had somehow missed the connection. However we found ourselves at the foot of these at the bottom, just beyond a short muddy squeeze, and decided we'd go back up that way on our way out for variety. From here it was just a short easy walk to reach the Milwr Tunnel.

This impressive feat of engineering extends for 10 miles and intercepts many more miles of interesting workings. In order to travel this distance in style, both the Grosvenor Caving Club and UCET (United Cavers Exploration Team) have their own mini locomotives within the tunnel. The "Underworld Princess" (a train constructed by UCET and lowered down the Cae Mawr Shaft), was stationed at the point where we joined the tunnel, but this luxurious mode of transport wasn't for us; long distance extreme rail track walking was our fate. So the walking commenced. This was mostly just

following the rail tracks across a raised floor alongside a channel of water called "The Grip". Luckily water levels were very low on the day of our visit, but there were muddy tide lines on the wall indicating how wet it can be. There was also quite a lot of mud on the rails, so it was unlikely the train could run without derailment anyway. Our first port of call was the Rhosesmor Branch Tunnel and the large natural chamber at Powell's Lode, but there was 4 miles of tunnel walking to do first. Luckily there was quite a bit to see, and there were loads of trucks left perched on the rails all the way along, explosives storage areas, and various other bits and bobs. At about the halfway point we came to a workshop, with lots of machinery, charging bays, and all kinds of tools. There was a junction here, but we continued down the tunnel and found quite a few sections where the tunnel had been reinforced with metal caging. Onward progress in these sections necessitated either girder hopping, balancing on rails, or some kind of combination of the two. Matt adopted a technique that involved falling into the water, and says he fell in "once on the way there, twice on the way back, and at least one other time."

Eventually we made it to Powell's Lode Cavern, which was huge. We tried to look at the sides and the ceiling, but those of us not wearing Scurions failed and had to be content with either slight illumination hitting the wall, or just moving closer instead. There was also a sizeable lake which was very blue and very deep. Apparently this lake had spoil dumped into it from the nearby tipper for 6 years without any discernible difference being made to its depth! We had a spot of lunch, and then retraced our steps back to the junction. This time we took the other tunnel heading off from the Workshop, and passed lots more store rooms, trucks, and a really good man rider on our way to our next destination, which was the Limestone Workings. This doesn't sound like a very exciting title, and though Matt



The Team: Pete, Beth, Miles, Mandy, Matt, Matt, Clive and Pred

told us it was really cool, he seems to be the kind of chap who's enthusiastic about most things, so I was expecting it to be merely "interesting". However when we arrived it was "amazing", I don't think I've ever seen an underground space so massive. The limestone here was very pale, looking very much akin to chalk. The passages were wide, lofty, and very uniformly cut with a completely flat roof. The chambers and passages off the side were also very impressive, and two of them had really cool rock bridges that we could walk over. There was also another workshop here, yet more trucks and a couple of Eimco Shovels (rail mounted mini-diggers) that had been left behind despite the removal of the rails. We had a good explore here, and another spot of lunch before heading back.

From here we could just plod back the way we had come, but Miles had a better plan. He knew an alternative route back to the Milwr Tunnel, and liking the idea of variety, we were all game to give it a go. So



this time it seemed to go on for an eternity. I basically just went into auto-pilot. It was like a kind of purgatory with rail tracks stretching seemingly endlessly before my eyes, until, finally, we reached the Underworld Princess once more. Hoorah! Then back into the Rhyd Alyn vein for the final part of our epic journey. This time we set off up the new ladders, but really they weren't any easier, and in fact it felt like there were more of them. We'd climbed quite a number when a shout from above announced that the ladders had run out. Our leader Matt was confused and clambered past all the waiting bods to have an eyeball himself. Indeed it was true. There was no ladder continuation, only a dodgy-looking rope over an unfriendly chasm. There was however a passage heading to the right further down which looked quite well worn, so we took this route. This led back to the old ladders via a couple of shuffles over bars spanning collapses in the floor. So we continued up the way we had come in, and found the top section of the new ladders along the way.



we hopped up a short ladder to a hole in the passage wall, and did a rope traverse along the top of a slope in the huge chamber beyond. Next came a short rope climb and a couple of metal ladders, to reach a mined passage of more normal dimensions. This section was really nice and after a bit of easy walking we found ourselves at the bottom of the laddered route in controlled by Grosvenor CC. From here it's apparently possible to climb out to the surface in mere minutes; that is if you have the key, which we of course didn't. Nearby is the massive Olwyn Goch Shaft, with the laddered route down that we were planning to take. However, we arrived to find the area around the shaft festooned with warning signs and tape, evidently some kind of collapse had taken place here. Initially we intended to ignore these warnings and stick with the plan if possible, but with so much clutter and broken stuff it was hard to even see where the ladders actually were. When we eventually spotted them we all agreed that they were a bit dicey to get to, and as we couldn't make out what condition they were in further down it would be much wiser to return the way we had come. No matter, we'd made good time and had seen an interesting part of the mine, so it wasn't so bad. So we headed back for yet more endurance tunnel walking, but

From here we were now basically out, with just a short section of mine passage between us and the surface. Well that's what I thought anyway, but I'd forgotten how long the next section was. In reality it probably wasn't very far, just longer than you'd hope when you're starting to hanker after dinner and beer. Then, lo! I was surprised to see sunshine streaming through the entrance hatch. After 9½ hours underground I was expecting it to be dark.

Though our limbs were tired, I think both Powell's Lode Cavern and the Limestone Workings were definitely well worth the time and effort it took to get there, and I had a really enjoyable trip. Many thanks to Beth, Pete, Miles, Pred and Clive for being such friendly chaps and letting us gate-crash their team outing, and particular thanks to Matt for leading, arranging, and inviting us along.





*Photo credits: Trucks, ladder and limestone workings by John 'Pred' Hughes.
Powell's Lode pool and girder tunnels by Pete Knight.*



*Cueva Esqueleto and Los Naturalista, Lanzarote
Photography by Dan Thorne*

