



**CSS**  
Newsletter

**Llangattock Traverse**  
**Darn Near Killed I**  
**ODSS Roofing**  
**Ogof Fawr**

**Volume 61**  
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**CHELSEA SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

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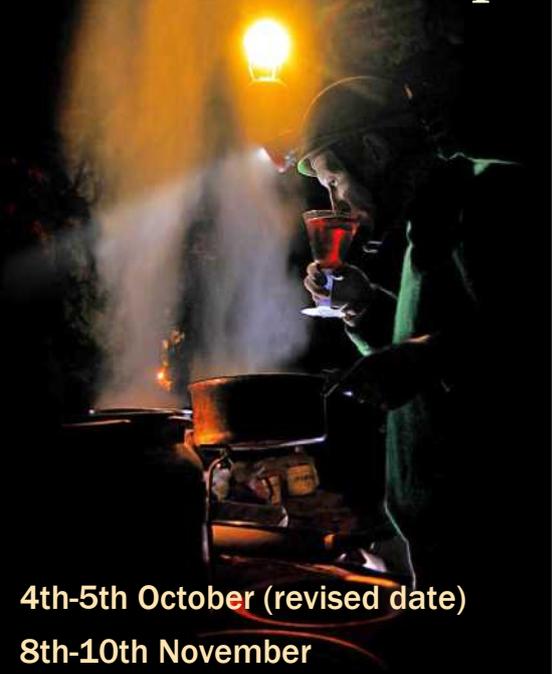


Above: CSS team in *Tratman's Temple, Swildon's Hole*, June 2019  
Below: Mandy Voysey in *The Lobster Pot, Sidcot Swallet*, September 2019  
Photos by Matt Voysey



Front Cover: Rachel Smith in *Ogof Fawr*, July 2019  
Photo by Martyn Farr

## HRC Daren Camps



4th-5th October (revised date)  
8th-10th November

The main focus of the upcoming camps will be our dig sites at Half Mile Passage and Beyond Time. New diggers always welcome. Contact Mandy [mandola76@gmail.com](mailto:mandola76@gmail.com) or Adrian [adrianfawcett@outlook.com](mailto:adrianfawcett@outlook.com) for more details.

# Editorial

Thank you to everybody who contributed stories, news and pictures for this issue. Keep the wonderful records of adventure, exploration and inspiration coming!

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

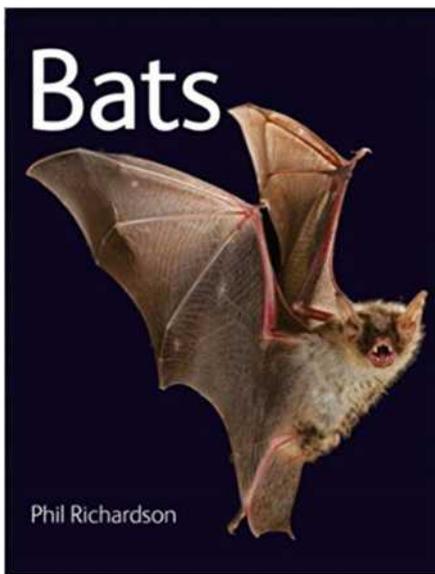
A **FULL COLOUR** electronic version of this newsletter is available to download from the members area of the club website and the club forum. Also, if you would prefer to go paperless and receive electronic copies of the newsletter in future let me know.

*Editor: Matt Voysey*

*Assistant Editor: Mandy Voysey*

## Book Review

Bats, Phil Richardson, Natural History Museum Life Series (2002)



This is a lovely introductory book to the world's bat species. Almost every page has a colour photo, and the text is easy to understand. Almost 1 in 5 of the world's mammal species are bats, and there are almost 1,000 bat species. They cover a huge range of habitats, and have many peculiar adaptations which have enabled them to live in niches many other animals can't. This is a small book covering a very wide ranging and varied animal, so it does not give great detail on any individual bat. Other books will give you measurements of finger bones and close up photos of penises for identification purposes. This book will give you an interesting overview of a fascinating creature - you will find out about how different types of bats echo locate in different ways; how some bats can fly at 30mph and others will travel 200 miles to reach their roost sites, or will migrate; some are all white and make tents out of leaves, and others hang on tree bark and look like moss; wingspans can vary from 17cm to 1.7m from the smallest to the largest species.

This book was worth every penny of the £2.49 I paid for it from a charity shop, but if you like bats I think it would be worth the £13 or so to buy a new copy.

*by Helen Pemberton*

## 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:

Andy Heath, 28 Brookfield Road, East Budleigh, Budleigh Salterton, EX9 7EL

**REMINDER: SUBS ARE NOW DUE!**

# The *Longer* Llangattock Traverse

by *Duncan Price*

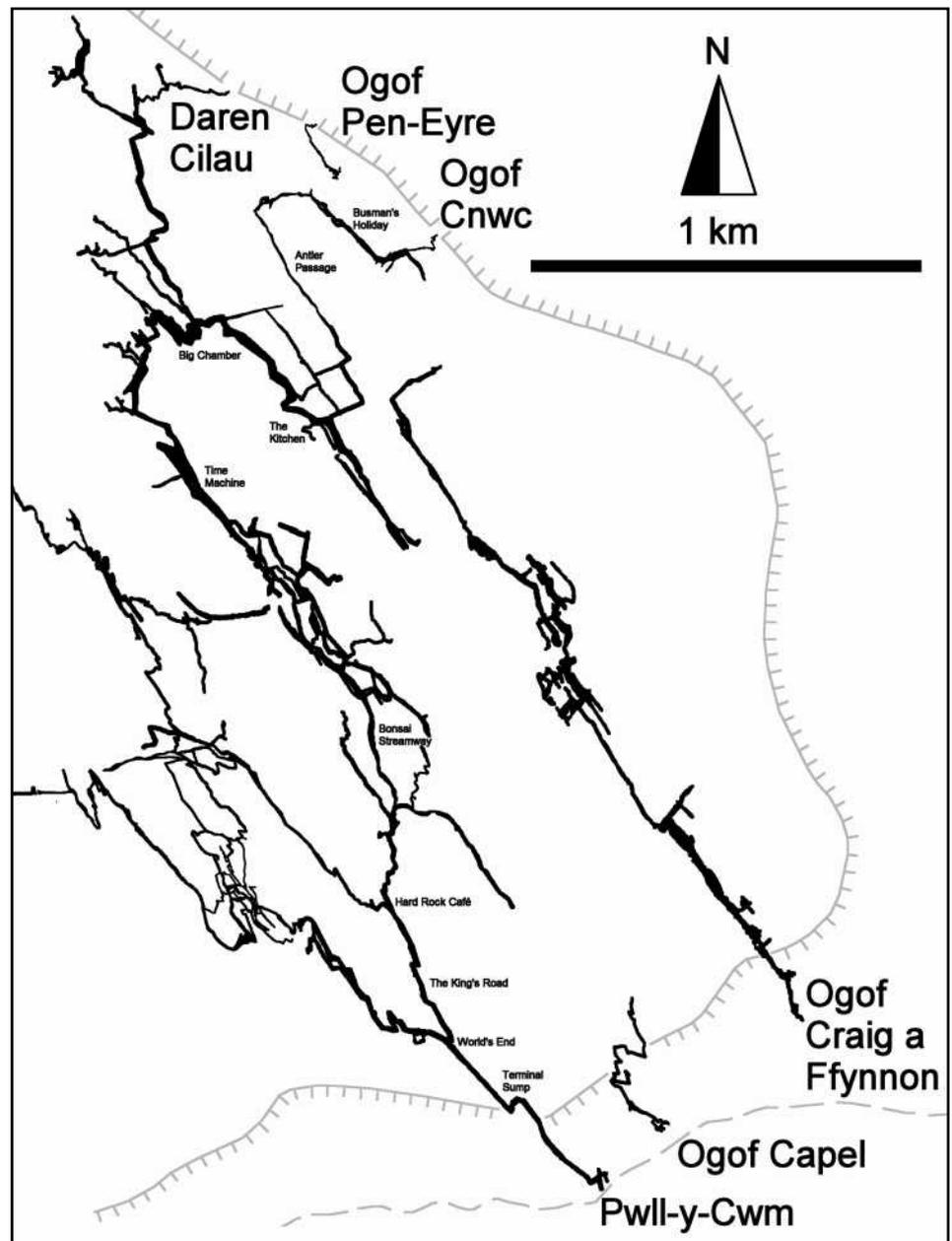
“Whose stupid idea was this?” I said to myself as I stumbled down the Bonsai Streamway in Daren Cilau for the second time in just over two weeks. Then I remembered that it was my idea and I hoped that this would be a one-way trip. The water levels looked to be in our favour, and it was a glorious August Bank Holiday Monday outside with no rain forecast. Connor Roe was ahead of me, his stated intent to be out before me and Gary Jones was bringing up the rear – obviously flagging from having finished work at 10:45 pm the day before and having had less than 5 hours sleep.

The first through-trip from the northern flanks of Llangattock to the Clydach Gorge had been done by Martyn Farr in 1986 when he dived from the terminal sump of Daren Cilau to surface out of Elm Hole. Easier diving access to the bottom of Daren was achieved in 1993 when the boulder choke at the base of the Pwll-y-Cwm resurgence was first passed, enabling cave divers to get from daylight in the Clydach to the terminal sump in Daren in under half an hour. Gary Jones and I did the first cave diving exchange through trip between Pwll-y-Cwm and Daren Cilau in 1997 when I dived in from the gorge wearing Gary’s drysuit to meet him and Andy Savage who had caved in from Daren Cilau. I swapped diving gear for caving gear and reached the Daren entrance in 2 hours with Andy who was nursing a burn from a leaking lead-acid caving battery that he still bears the scars from over twenty years later. Several cave divers have repeated the trip since (including an unplanned exit from Daren Cilau by Gary after he had equipment problems which left him with no option but to cave out and walk back overland to the Clydach to recover his car, clothes and Whitewalls key).

Having done a south-north trip, I had always wanted to go the other way: with the opening of Ogof Cnwc as another dry entrance to Daren Cilau (in 2002) it made the through-trip from there and out of Pwll-y-Cwm seem perversely

attractive. It would be a longer trip, but at least one had the chance of staying dry until the final dive out to the Clydach. The traverse would require some preparation as there would need to be diving gear cached at the bottom of The King’s Road to enable the team to exit and I put the idea to one side until some suitable date for the trip came up.

Roll on August 2019 - Connor and Rachel were getting married on Saturday 31st and Connor was having a stag weekend at Whitewalls on 10-11th. His best man, Tom Chatterton had arranged for participants to go mountain boarding and try some combat archery on the Saturday followed by a dinner at the Bear Hotel in Crickhowell. I was invited, and it was sort of my stag do as well since Connor (who had been my best man when Naomi and I got married on 14th July 2018) had



let me down owing to being involved in the Tham Luang cave rescue. In fact, Connor returned from Thailand on the 13th July and came directly from the airport to the church for the wedding rehearsal. A day later and I'd have had no Best Man!

Connor, Max Fisher and Gary Jones were keen to join me for the attempt and we arranged to do it on Friday 9th August so as not to interfere with Saturday's activities. The set-up would be done the day before, so we arranged to meet up at Whitewalls for 10 am on Thursday 8th August. The email chain records various debates about what equipment everyone would use, and the plan was still fluid when I turned up at the cottage. Over several cups of coffee, we finalised the arrangements: Gary and Connor would dive in Pwll-y-Cwm wearing drysuits, change into caving gear and exit via the original Daren Cilau entrance. Their cars would be left in the layby next to the footbridge over the Heads of the Valley Road for us to get back to Whitewalls after the trip. Max and I would dive in wearing drysuits and leave extra gear in to dive out (including wetsuits and spare fins – I had to lend Max a pair to leave). Gary kindly offered to let me use his full 12 litre cylinders to leave in the cave for the dive out and even carry one of them in for me. In turn the two of us would carry a small 3 or 4 litre tank each with a regulator so that we'd have spares in case of issues. Connor and Max were diving in using their homemade rebreathers – Connor's would be left in the cave overnight whereas Max had brought two rebreathers – one for the set-up dive and one to leave behind. Spare sets of dry clothes were to be left in the parked cars for us to change into on exit. Connor was going to leave his car keys in a locked box hanging from his suspension – Gary took a more traditional approach and was going to hide his keys on the north bank of the Clydach near to Pwll-y-Cwm.

Four cars set off along the tramroad to park up in Blackrock and a mountain of equipment was ferried

down to Pwll-y-Cwm. The river level was low, and the resurgence looked reasonably clear and inviting. While Gary and I portered the rest of our gear, the others went ahead to put a guide line down the shaft and connect it to the start of the permanent line. Max was carrying a four pack of beer to leave attached to the line reel to act as "out" markers. The idea was that each diver would collect one on exit the next day and when the last diver reached the choke, he would know that the others were out, and it was safe to remove the line. We thought it best that the boys on rebreathers went first as they could clear the choke if necessary, leaving Gary and I with more limited life-support to follow. Gary kindly offered to carry one of the 12 litre tanks for me as well as the 4 litre "oh shit" tank as well as the two sidemounted 15 litre cylinders that he was to dive in on and then use for the exit. I was laden with a pair of 12 litre sidemounted tanks to go in and out and the other 12 litre cylinder for the exit. My Decathlon 7.5 mm one-piece wetsuit for the through trip was in a tackle sack and very buoyant despite being weighted with a 3 litre cylinder. In addition, I had some small cut down fins, a harness and buoyancy compensator. I'd deliberately selected equipment that I was prepared to leave underground for an indeterminate time as there were concerns over the weather forecast of overnight heavy rain.

Eventually we all arrived at the bottom of the King's Road – I'd had a particularly uncomfortable dive in as I was lopsided from wearing the heavy 3rd 12 litre on one side of my chest and the very floaty bag on the other. Both Gary and I had used up more air than we would have liked: Gary had started breathing from the 4 litre tank to conserve gas in his big tanks – this didn't matter too much, and in any case the tank valve was leaking slightly when it was turned on so it made sense to use the air in rather than have it bubble into the sump (I really should have warned Gary to turn it on fully whereby the fault was rectified). We scattered the gear willy-nilly at the junction, Gary and Connor changed



*Gary, Connor and Duncan entering Ogof Cnwc on 26th August*

into caving gear and we split up. I decided to leave the good pair of fins in the cave and dive out on my cut-down pair that I'd carried in – I was a little concerned that I'd compromised my air margins due to my troublesome dive in but these worries proved groundless when I surfaced after a relaxing swim out having used half the air I'd used on the way in.

Max and I carried out gear up to our cars and drove back to Whitewalls via Brynmawr. Max stopped off at the chip shop for supper while I went to Asda to buy some pizzas and beer – Connor had requested one and I knew that Gary was short of food so I bought two of the biggest pizzas I could find to supplement another one that I'd picked up when I did my main food shop for the weekend en route to Whitewalls earlier. At the checkout I observed that I seemed to be the only customer paying by (debit) card whilst the locals preferred to pay in cash. That's the Valleys for you!

Max and I walked up to Daren Cilau to await Connor and Gary armed with a four pack of "Old Speckled Hen" and some custard doughnuts. Connor was first out at 19:25 and offered beer and starch. He'd left Gary behind at the start of the entrance series and covered the last stretch in a spritely 30 minutes. Gary was typically slower and arrived 45 minutes later. Proffering him a beer, Gary couldn't open the ring pull whilst wearing his gloves, I did the honours. Three pizzas went in the oven while Connor and Gary warmed up in the showers and we had an early night. It was pissing down when we turned in...

At 07:00 on the Friday (9th August) Gary and I got up. Max and Connor were sleeping outside in their tents. Max was already up when we were cooking breakfast, but there was no sign of Connor. By the time that we were ready to go, Connor was up and eating his breakfast. Mindful of the weather we set off to Ogof Cnwc, knowing that Connor would catch us up. As well as food for the trip ahead and various small items of dive gear (gloves, compass, depth gauge) I had brought along a waterproof camera to record events. I filmed us going in at 08:40 and at every stop during the way in. In order to timestamp the video footage, I would roll up my sleeve and film my watch on each occasion. Since the camera was in an underwater housing there would be no decent audio.

Connor joined us at some point down Antler Passage before we made our first drinks stop at The Kitchen. We signed in the log book at Big Chamber and headed towards the pitch, making another drinks stop from the collection of water bottles catching roof drips nearby. We were optimistic that we'd beat the flood pulse from the rains: after all the water tracing showed flow-through times from the sinks to be 24-48 hours. Even so, it was apparent even in Busman's Holiday that the cave was already quite wet and there were foam marks in Bonsai Streamway that showed that one flood stage had already passed through the cave. I was lagging by this point and was last to reach the bottom of The



*Max, Gary and Duncan traverse a section of deep water in Bonsai Streamway on the way in (9th August). There is foam on the surface of the water from a recent flood event.*

King's Road to find everyone gazing forlornly at a raging torrent of brown water flowing down the normally dry approach to the Terminal Sump. At least it was conclusive: we couldn't dive out – the water levels were such that it was positively suicidal. I filmed the scene and we moved our gear back to a safer position before starting the long trip out the drier way.

Renewed with reserves of energy I led out. At the start of Bonsai Streamway I went over on one ankle – I was unhurt but contemplated what I might have done if I'd been more seriously injured: I had the idea that I might stay at Hard Rock Café until such time that I could dive out (perhaps in Gary's drysuit) to Pwll-y-Cwm. There would be enough food to stay there for several days and I could sell the film rights to compensate for loss of earnings. Such fantasies kept me occupied and ahead of the others as far as the pitches. Connor held back until Gary had been life-lined down the climb and everyone split up in Big Chamber – Gary was going to exit via Ogof Cnwc, whereas the rest of us intended to go out Daren Cilau, which we thought was quicker. Even so, I took a long time in the entrance series and got out at 19:30, only 15 minutes ahead of Gary. The rest of the stag party were already arriving at Whitewalls and we partied through the night – some people were still up at 05:00 on Saturday and very much worse for wear later.

Max and Connor had collected Connor's car from the Clydach on Friday evening before everyone got shitfaced. They had walked down to the Clydach and brought back video footage of the state of the river. Unfortunately, Gary's car keys were the other side and he needed to get them back that day as he had to leave early on Sunday morning to go to work. Rather than go mountain boarding, Tim, Gary and I decided to get the keys back. Since I had my drysuit in the changing room, I volunteered to put it on, wade across the river and pick up the keys. We took a lifeline with us in case the river looked treacherous...

...as it was indeed! Way too wet to cross!! So, we



***Connor (right) helps Duncan from the water at Pwll-y-Cwm***

went back to Whitewalls to borrow some more rope, a couple of sets of SRT kit from John Stevens and some spectators (in the shape of John, Chris Seal and Damian Grindley). Tim and Gary traversed along the side of the cliff from the north end of Devil's Bridge and Gary abseiled down to the narrow river bank near Elm Hole to get his car keys. The actual recovery was missed by the onlookers who were hiding from the rain beneath a rock shelter opposite Pwll-y-Cwm. There was a visible boil of brown water coming out of the cave which was matched by the equally brown torrent coming down the gorge and overflowing the retaining wall on the upstream side of the risings. The mountain boarding was cancelled owing to the weather, but the combat archery (which we also missed) resulted in many of the participants nursing bruised arms from contact with the bowstring.

The evening meal in The Bear Hotel was a more sober affair than the previous evening's revelries at Whitewalls. The skies had cleared, and the stag party walked down to Crickhowell via the scenic route across the fields. Connor was still hungover and only managed to take a few sips from a pint of cider. We were saved the climb back up the hill by Tim and Damian who somehow managed to squeeze everyone into their cars. Plans were made for a return match – to complete the through trip and, more importantly to recover our frogman's apparatus.

Conditions were still unfavourable on the following weekend, but the August Bank Holiday weather was uncharacteristically kind and three of us – Connor, Gary and I – were available to do a trip on Monday August 26th. I drove over on the Sunday to meet Connor and his wife-to-be Rachel at Whitewalls. My own wife, Naomi, also came across on her motorbike just for the day. We were joined by George Linnane, a trainee cave diver from the Welsh Section Cave Diving Group, who wanted to take the opportunity to join me for a reconnaissance dive in Pwll-y-Cwm that afternoon to check conditions. Watched by the others, I dived the resurgence finding the choke still open and the line we'd left in place still in situ but tangled in debris washed in by the flood. I replaced the line and removed

the old one. Amazingly the four cans of beer were still OK, so I left them for their original purpose. George did his tourist dive after which Connor, Rachel, Naomi and I went back to the cottage in my car, leaving Connor's parked up at Blackrock so that we had transport for the return leg the next day. Gary was at work on Sunday but had assured us that he'd be there that night.

I got up at 02:00 for a pee as Gary was going to bed. He had finished work the previous evening and driven over after a quick pit stop at home to collect his caving gear. Five hours later my alarm woke me, and I staggered downstairs to put the kettle on. I gave Gary another 15 minutes lie-in before waking him bearing a cup of coffee. By 09:10 we crawled into Ogof Cnwc watched by Rachel who had walked to the entrance with us. This time I had forsaken the camera in favour of more food in case we had to come out of one of the dry entrances rather than dive out. Connor had offered to lifeline someone down the pitch if they had to solo out that way. Our pace was slower than on the previous trip: Gary's eyes were bloodshot from lack of sleep, and I was feeling tired as well. In Antler Passage I messed up a rope climb and had to stand on Gary's shoulder to get up.

We paused briefly at The Kitchen for a drink and again at the pots collecting drips near to the 65ft pitch. Connor went up first and then life-lined me. The permanent ladders are a bitch to climb if your arms are weak, and I'd been suffering from tennis elbow in my left arm for several months so felt every foot of the ascent. While Gary was joining us, I ate one of my four chocolate bars intending to save the rest of my food for later. As we got closer to Hard Rock Café, Gary slipped further and further behind us. He'd left his drysuit at the camp, so we knew that he'd take a while to catch up. Connor and I discussed our options in case of equipment problems. His rebreather had spent a couple of weeks in the cave and he was concerned that the electronics might have become damp, but he reckoned that he had enough open-circuit bailout to dive on this alone... just! Both Gary and I had left conventional kit. The pair of 12 litre cylinders that I was to use were notionally full and even if one regulator was to fail I, ought to be able to continue out. Gary's 15 litre tanks had become depleted by the dive in and his margins were slimmer – I'd already agreed to exchange the regulator on my 3 litre tank with the one on the 4 litre tank that Gary had brought in (and partially used up) so that he could use this. The purpose of these small tanks was not only for the modicum of air they held, but to carry a spare regulator, so Gary and I had three: in extremis it is possible to depressurise them and swap from cylinder to cylinder underwater – but obviously one needs three regulators to start with so that there is one to breathe from...

Reaching our kit, it was still there and in good working order. Connor's rebreather had mould growing on it, but the electronics fired up OK. We had Max's

gear to plunder if necessary. Connor and I moved our equipment down to the start of the sump and got changed. Gary arrived after a while with his drysuit and did likewise. I stripped off my oversuit and furry suit to don my wetsuit – it had dried out a little and was not too uncomfortable to put on; although wearing a rash vest on the way in had been a good idea as I didn't have to put cold neoprene next to my chest. As a defence against the cold, I wore my oversuit on top of my wetsuit – it would combat water flushing through my wetsuit and the knee and elbow pads I wore would also help. Spare kit went in bags to be carried ventrally – these were weighted with the third cylinder.

We'd arrived at the bottom of The King's Road at 14:00 and it had taken over an hour for Connor and me to sort our gear out. Rob Franklin had texted me earlier to say that he would turn up at Pwll-y-Cwm to help us with our kit and I told him that we'd be out between 14:00 and 15:00. Likewise, Rachel was going to walk over from Whitewalls and wait for us to surface. We were running late...

Connor headed down to the sump and I waited until Gary was putting his drysuit on before I abandoned him to dive out. Connor had set off before I started kitting up, and I slipped into the murky waters at 15:30. My dive out was mostly uneventful – I've done it countless times, but never in a wetsuit. The inflator hose to my buoyancy compensator became detached a couple of times and I had to stop to reattach it. This didn't matter too much for the first half of the sump (which is shallow) but would be critical for the deep section from 300 m out to daylight. I swapped between tanks as usual at every line join (at 100 m increments) to balance my air usage between the big tanks, and kept my buoyancy compensator full once I was at depth. I wasn't cold (except for my feet which were clad in thin caving wetsuit socks rather than thicker diving ones) and I theoretically had enough air margins to return to Daren at any point. The big engraved roundels attached to the guideline counted down the distance to the end of the line inside the choke at Pwll-y-Cwm every 50 m. I rounded the deepest point near to The Corner and sped past the first line junction that leads to Elm Hole. At the choke there were now three cans of beer: Connor was out. I followed the temporary line to the restriction, removed my chest mounted tackle sack and squeezed through, pushing the bag ahead of me. After reattaching the bag, I slowly ascended through the gloom to daylight. The visibility through the sump had only been an arm's length – maybe a metre at best.

On the surface, Connor was still in his drysuit and waded across the river to help me from the water. Rachel and Rob were also there to help with kit. Rob had been delayed by traffic and this had worked in our favour with regards to our late arrival. I reckoned that Gary would be an hour behind me. It was 16:00 and I remember feeling no sense of achievement, just relief, at the end of a routine caving trip. We still had to carry

the gear up to Connor's car and get back to Whitewalls.

Sure enough, Gary surfaced at 5 pm. Rob had helped porter diving equipment up to the temporary bus stop on the "up" side of the Heads of the Valley road. We intended to drive around to collect it there rather than carry it another 300 m to the layby where Connor's car was parked. Connor and I were changed into out civvies and I had already drunk the can of lager that I'd removed from the cave. Although Rob had brought more beers, I refrained from consuming these as I intended to drive home later.

Gary dumped his excess kit and dived back to recover the temporary line and the crowbar that I had taken in the day before to dig the choke. This had served as a belay for the line and was jammed in the boulders. Gary left one can of beer for Max to recover when he went back for his gear. Gary (still clad in his diving undersuit) and I waited while Connor and Rachel circumnavigated the roadworks to pick us up. Somehow, we got three cave divers and their gear plus a petite passenger back to Whitewalls – although Connor's Skoda struggled.

Back at the hut, we had an equipment amnesty while we sorted the gear out. Connor and Rachel were first to leave as Connor needed to get home to get his car MOT'd the next day, although both were on holiday for the week before their nuptials. I called home – I'd already asked Rob to text Naomi to tell her that I was out. She'd picked this up and called Rob whilst he was driving to confirm that we were all safe. I told Naomi that everyone was accounted for and what time I expected to be back. In return I was informed that our boiler was not working and drove home contemplating the repair bill. It turned out that the pilot flame had gone out and only needed re-lighting. Gary was not so lucky: the clutch of his car packed up on his way home and he faced a £700 repair bill!

NOTE TO THOSE CONTEMPLATING THE TRIP (whatever your exit): It is better to do it the other way: dive in, dump gear, cave out and dive back in to recover your diving gear later. Alternatively, do an exchange trip with teams going each way. It was a stupid idea – I mentioned this at the start...

A video of the events of 8-9 August can be found here:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwpalJEJrF8>



Photos by Rachel and Connor Roe

# FROSTBITE IN A HEATWAVE

by Helen Pemberton

*Ogof Craig a Ffynnon, 29 June 2019*

In some ways, cavers are very much like small children – aside from the fact that some cavers are partial to making willies out of mud when bored at pitch heads. When I was a small child, my favourite item of clothing was my wellies. Holidays were spent climbing the waterfalls on Bryn Mountain, getting as wet as possible. It wasn't a day out until my gum-boots had filled with cold mountain water, which then warmed up. In those days I had those horrible knee high socks with flower pattern holes in, and ready-made neoprene socks were the works of a science-fiction writer's imagination. Other days were spent clambering over and under fallen trees, splashing in streams, and generally getting wet and muddy. Apparently I was utterly determined to remove stones from places they didn't want to be removed from, and getting a stone would make me happy. I had a waterproof all-in-one suit and various manky 1970s second-hand garments to go underneath. Not a lot has changed really – except these days I can give myself permission to go and play in the dark, and I allow myself to have samples of sphalerite and galena and similar such minerals lurking around my house.

Another thing about small children is they tend to believe things adults tell them in a convincing manner. I do remember trying to dig to Australia...

The 2019 BBQ weekend was one of a European heatwave, which extended as far as Wales. It was proper warm! The Sunday School building crew, having already spent several days re-roofing, had decided it would be a good time to go to Craig a Ffynnon to do the wet bit – as the water would be warm (honest!). Mandy told me the plan was to go see the crocodile and the railway. Being a caver who has spent some time inhabiting Hard Rock, I didn't think anything of this, and believed every word. Of course we'd see a crocodile and a railway. In a cave. In Wales. Before you laugh at me too hard, go into work tomorrow and describe the Hard Rock garden, the cocktail bar and the sound system and dance floor to your boss. He/she may not believe you. Especially not if you go on to describe the quality of the fishing as you go further into the cave. River trout may have a somewhat different meaning if you ask a caver or a fisherman.

Somebody mentioned a short stretch of chest deep water on the OCAF trip, and of course I believed that. I believed it would be short, and I believed it would be chest deep – despite the only person who had been there being a good foot and a bit taller than me, it would still be chest deep on me too. You are allowed to laugh at me for that bit. I then asked Mandy if I'd need my wetsuit. She said we'd do stuff in the main cave and do the wet bit on the way out, and right after the little wet bit was plenty of walking so we'd stay warm. It'll be fine! So I packed my manky (summer fishing) salopettes with holes in and no crotch, and my jumper rather than my very thin base layer. You might laugh at me for that bit too.

We went to see a new bit of the cave, down a passage that used to be sumped, and down a pitch. Mike and Andy



*All photos by Dan Thorne*

went ahead to bolt it for ladders. Due to my feebleness, Mandy, Dan and myself were a little way behind, and arrived at the pitch head to find freshly drilled bolts and a surprisingly vile y-hang. We didn't think the crawl there had been *that* bad. Mandy had 1 of the 2 ladders, and nobody knew how deep the pitch was. Dan abseiled down, thinking that it looked fairly climbable, while Mandy sorted the ladder. I'm not gullible enough to believe an unknown pitch is climbable for somebody with zero climbing skills and a cantankerous groin. Not after last time. Or the time before that... We did discover the ladder wouldn't reach the bottom – it's only a metre too short, it'll be fine! (Honest!) I don't believe a word! Dan was slightly confused as to why Mike and Andy had abb'd down the pitch, possibly without ascending gear, had buggered off with the other ladder, and more importantly where they had gone to. This is when we heard a booming in the distance, and realised they were behind us. They had overshot the turning and gone to Hall of the Mountain King, so still had the ladder and hadn't crawled off into the uncharted nether regions of the cave. Both ladders were promptly lobbed down the pitch, leading us into a lovely chamber.

This part of the story is all perfectly believable.

We finished ooohhh-ing and ahhhhh-ing and headed back towards the entrance for the next bit. When you get to the puddle on your right, walk into the nice clean rectangular “arch” above the “puddle”. Go through that, and it shallows out nicely. It didn't take long before there was a lot of squealing. First the wet bollocks squeal, then the wet nipples squeal, then the blast of freezing wind in your face squeal, followed by the freezing water in your armpits squeal. Repeat this 5 times over (Mandy and I both have bollocks, only ours are higher up than Dan's, Mike's and Andy's). Dan tried to tell me, in a high pitched voice, it was getting shallower, but at this point my chin was wet and I nearly lost a welly as my feet didn't touch the ground. I didn't believe him. At this point I didn't believe in sodding crocodiles or railways either, and was convinced I'd been fooled in the same way as I used to be convinced Wee Willy Winky was watching to make sure I was a good girl. The water just kept on going, and it felt like we were walking upstream – that is until I lost all feeling in my legs (and elsewhere, but we are still in the sensible part of the story). Just as you thought it was getting shallower, you discovered you'd been fooled and it was just a sloping rock diving board, and you'd fall into a deep hole when you stepped off it. Finally, after much squeaky swearing, we emerged from this icy lake, into a tall, easy walking passageway. You certainly won't find an enormous crocodile here. It's not worth getting inverted genitals for.

The Enormous Crocodile does exist, as described by Dahl R. (1978). Maybe not in Craig a Ffynnon, perhaps under a different hill, in a different corner of Wales:

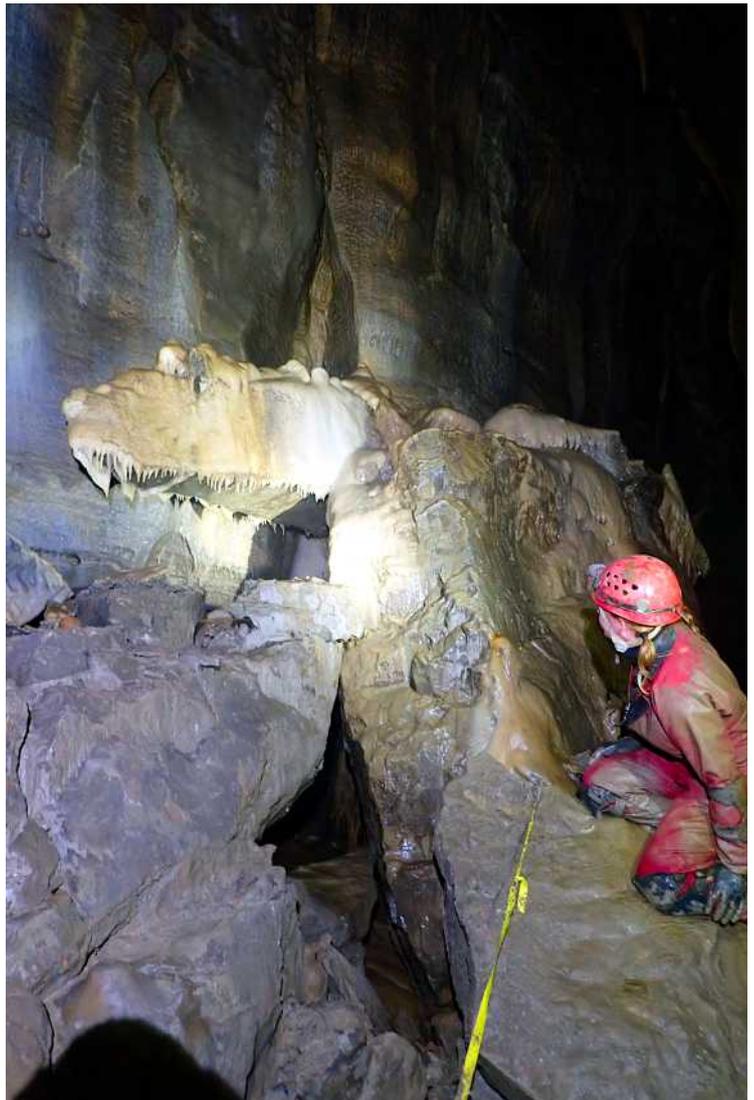
“The Enormous Crocodile likes eating children [wise crocodile], and tells Not-So-Big crocodile he wants to eat children for his lunch, but the smaller crocodile thinks they taste nasty and bitter.”

Children are an acquired taste you see, much like beer, geuze and decent gin. Dahl also describes typical large crocodylian behaviour:

“In his quest to eat children, the Enormous Crocodile disguises himself as a tree, complete with coconuts, but he is exposed by Humpy Rumpy [a hippo, obviously. We are all adults here]. Then he disguises himself by pretending he is made of wood, and sandwiches himself between a dragon and a lion on a merry-go-round. A young lady named Jill wants to ride him, but Roly-Poly [a bird of course] exposes him. He tries disguising himself as a flower in a bush, but Trunky [what else but an elephant] exposes him, he tries being a big wooden bench.....”

Move along now, there are no crocodiles to see here. They are clearly under a different bit of hill.

Further into this passage there is not a railway. People seem to be confused with another hill, in the top left-hand corner of Wales, where the Merioneth and Llantysilly Railway Traction Company Ltd runs. Here, Mr Dinwiddy, a remarkably odd, perhaps insane miner goes digging. He is said to enjoy explosions. Mr Dinwiddy keeps a dragon named



Idris in a thermally heated cave, and both Mr Dinwiddy and Idris make use of the services of an engine named Ivor. Nowhere in the literature is mention made of the Craig a Ffynnon Railway, however Postgate, O., (1962), clearly states of Ivor of the Merioneth and Llantysilly Railway Traction Company Ltd:

“PEEP....CHUFF....CHUFF....CHUFF....”



“off they went to do their day’s work, out of Cyffordd i’r Gogledd-Orllewin station and along the top of the hill, towards Darn-Crocodeil-Enfawr.

“He loved to look down at the valley and see the trees, and the cold, cold lakes and the stone walls and the horses, to see the big wheel of the pit spinning.....”

“CLOMPETY-CLOMPETY...over the viaduct, through Darn-Crocodeil-Enfawr....and PEEEP...into the tunnel, the dark, damp-smelling tunnel on the way to the Grumbly”

After not seeing a crocodile feeding on small children, nor playing on the railway carriages in the Darn-Crocodeil-Enfawr valley, we reluctantly returned to the Great Grey Green Greasy Banks of the Limpopo River, all set about with calcite trees. We did pass a Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake, and wanted to ask him if he had seen a crocodile. The Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake has a bit of a reputation for spanking people who ask too many questions, and the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake spans harder than anyone else.

There are no Grade V surveys of this area, but according to Grade I sketches published by Kipling, R., (1902), the area the crocodile inhabits is called the Promiscuous Parts, situated close to the banks of the Great Grey Green Greasy Banks of the Limpopo. We unanimously decided it was FAR, FAR too cold for a proper hard spanking anywhere near to any promiscuous parts, and thought we’d leave quickly. We agreed that the Enormous Crocodile clearly must inhabit these waters and neighbouring habitats (nod and agree here). The tide had turned in the time we’d been on the Merioneth and Llantysilly Railway, and the water had got deep enough to justify swimming. The water was still very cold, and head deep, and progress against the tide was slow. The fastest means of egress was to swim.

It was wonderful to emerge from the cave into glorious sunshine and warmth. It still took a long time to warm up, and I discovered my finger hurt because it had turned purple. Clearly frostbite, and about to fall off. Seeing as there is healthy profit in Frostbite Toe cocktails, anyone for Frostbite Finger cocktails? All proceeds go towards much needed Sunday School funds.

#### References:

- Kipling, R. (1902); *The Elephant’s Child, North-West Inlet: Chelsea University Press*
- Dahl, R. (1978); *The Enormous Crocodile, North-West Inlet: Chelsea University Press*
- Postgate, O. & Firmin, P; (1958-1975); *Ivor the Engine (Vol 1-26) North-West Inlet: Chelsea University Press*
- Sharma, R. (2019); <https://inews.co.uk/news/world/sourtoe-cocktail-canada-bar-yukon-frostbite-big-toe-toe-uk-man>, London: *The Independent*

# Darn Near

After 30 years of camping and digging in Daren and around 150 trips into the cave I've hung up my caving boots after developing Multiple Myeloma, the first signs of which being two ribs fracturing while exiting the cave from Hard Rock on my 60th birthday.

The Daren digging project has been great fun from the start and it has been a privilege to dig with a team ranging from hedonistic novice students, caving club tigers, wise old heads, the occasional self-absorbed prima donna and more than a few caving legends who have cut their teeth in Daren before moving on to excel elsewhere.

In an unguarded whisky-fuelled moment I accepted Matt Voysey's invitation to put together an article outlining places that might be of interest to future Daren Diggers with fresh eyes and cutting-edge technology, so load up the carbs, pad up those knees and elbows and enjoy a whistle-stop tour of obscure dig sites with potential from the entrance crawl to Last Spit Choke.



Entrance

On exiting the crawl empty your wellies and turn sharp right to take a look at the draughting, calcited choke at the end. Cappable? Probably, but there's no need for an easier entrance as the crawl also acts as an efficient Muppet-excluder, so move on and ignore it.

Before venturing into Jigsaw Passage turn right and head towards Old Main Chamber. About 50 metres before you get there, where the on-going passage drops to the right, a short, loose climb on the left (care) takes you to a higher series where

a draughting, easy, sandy dig looks set to bypass Easter Maze. This was unfinished business when I became ill, so tools are still in situ. This needs a team of 6 to get the spoil back to stacking space. Worthy of an occasional 'day off' scrabble as it isn't far in and has potential to access the rich rewards of the blank section between old Daren, Star Bar, Source of Time, Cliffs of Dover and Elgwy's Faen.

Move on, noting some potential around Aqueous Choke, then take a breather in St. Valentine's Chamber where a couple of bouldery alcoves were looked at briefly (CSS) in the 80s; they might reward the modern-day Hilti capper.

Down in Approach Passage all the inlets on the right were dug by myself and other Daren Diggers (DD) as a diversion from day trips sherpaing to camp, and all come to an abrupt ending on a draughty, bouldery fault. Carry on past the bottom of the pitch to Higher Things and you'll find another inlet on the right. This strongly draughting passage gains height before



Top of 65' Pitch



Time Machine

ending in sphincter-tighteningly loose boulders with open spaces between that might yield to modern techniques.



Rope Climb to White Passage

Take a drink at the drip with the bottles, nip up the ladder, down the rope climbs and into White Passage. Stop for a Snickers and listen to the stream below Red River. We'd always assumed that the roar from below was just amplification in the void but, after heavy downpours, we've heard it roaring in a manner seemingly disproportionate to the gentle flow in White Passage itself. A faster-reacting stream taking water from Llangattock Swallet to Ogof Capel perhaps?

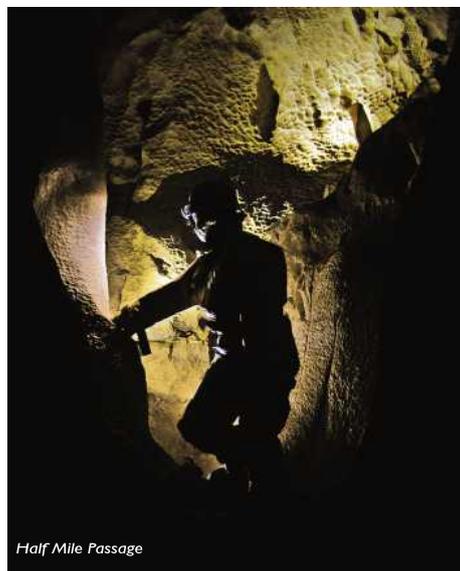
Move around to the Source of Time and check out the massive clay and boulder

# Killed I!

by Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley

choke at the end. This is an occasional dig for campers with time to spare on their way out. Is this downstream Aggy Main Passage maybe? Long term, with huge potential.

Through the Time Machine, climb up to the Meeting Room and check out a few possible leads, then onward to check out the penultimate boulder choke on the corner of the magnificent, sandy-floored Aggy Passage. In the mid 80s this was dug vertically through boulders by Northern Caving Club members supported by Rock Steady Crew (now referred to as the Daren Diggers) and the huge rubble slope is the displaced spoil heap. On several occasions diggers covering part way down braced themselves to the sound of falling boulders which never arrived at the base but could be heard trundling down an unseen slope into passage beyond. An Aggy Passage continuation perhaps? Digging this would require large amounts of scaffolding and the only practical way of getting decent lengths into the cave would be to dive them in. A long term project.



Half Mile Passage

On again to Half Mile Passage to wriggle to the left through the stuffy, CO<sub>2</sub>-blighted confines of the long term dig at Kilburn High Road. This remorseless, sandy dig has the potential to intercept the passage beyond Aggy Passage and is a regular 'favourite' when nobody at Hard Rock can think of anything better to do. Be aware that, on a prolonged dig, bad air is a serious issue in the low sections.

While in Half Mile take a look at the terminal choke, just beyond which an unnecessary, long term, bouldery dig would bring you out at the top of Cheese Aven in the Hopping Mad extensions beyond the stunningly beautiful but tortuous Helibeds (reached from Frag Street, off Bonsai Streamway). This is another area with potential to pick up the continuations of the large fossil passages and progress might pick up the water sinking down the nearby Pwll Coedog. There's potential here for another big section parallel to Ogof Craig A Ffynnon. Where it emerges in the Clydach Gorge is anyone's guess, but projecting the prevailing passage in the associated beds would bring it out in the concrete embankment below the parking area for OCAF.

Back up from the choke to contort through tubes and climb down to the upper levels of Eastern Flyover. A long term dig here has potential but the end is claustrophobic and intimidating. Daren Diggers are currently working on a possible interception of the Eastern Flyover continuation from a site back in Half Mile and would welcome your contribution.

If you're feeling masochistic you might climb up into Frag Street and crawl along to Frig Street and up the rift into Perseverance Passage, thrutching endlessly to the unimaginatively named Remote Chamber, more colloquially known as 'Bugger Hall' because there's nothing there except for a large, draughting choke with potential but no obvious way on. If you still have the energy



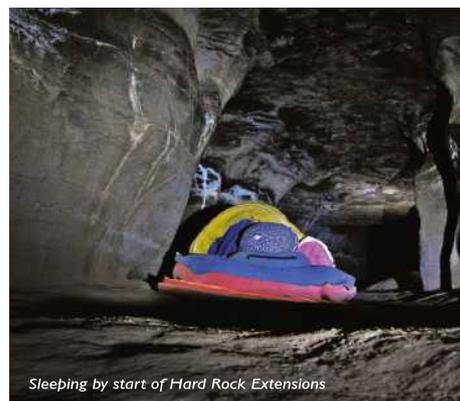
Water carry along Bonsai Streamway

you could check out The Inconvenient Truth, just beyond Helibeds - a hard-earned, stuffy, drill-and-bang marathon which is dropping down steeply to uncharted depths and a rare, enticing puddle just out of sight below.

Pick up a couple of gallons of water from Crystal Inlet and move on, noting several maypolding options in the roof as you head down to Hard Rock where tea, food and a well-earned cocktail or two can be enjoyed in convivial company.



Master chef sampling a cocktail at Hard Rock

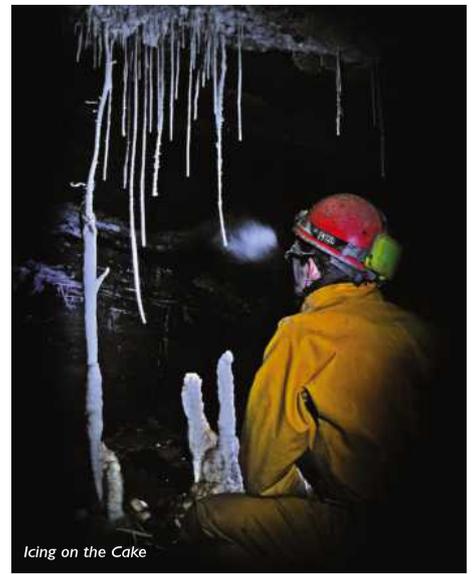


Sleeping by start of Hard Rock Extensions

A fresh day, after checking out a minor, half-choked tube in the camp storage area, sees you heading up the Hard Rock Extensions (DD). Turn left after Brazil at Western Union and, halfway along the Oregon Trail, climb up into a sandy swim; after several metres, squeeze into a small passage on the left 'Flight of the Bumble Bee'. This may well be the downstream end of Icing on the Cake so, although too well decorated at the top end to be viable as a trade route, there may be fine formations



Where the Sun Don't Shine



Icing on the Cake



Miami Vice



Acupuncture

Check out the Blue Greenies (CDG) and the long-term seige-potential of Pain Killer Passage before chilling with a well earned pit-stop.



REU

ahead if the hard-packed choke at the end were to succumb to capping.

Move along Oregano Trail, taking in the stunning formations of Where the Sun Don't Shine before visiting Chokes Away, a low crawl below 12 O' Clock High which leads to a choke with an engineered route around the right hand edge to another loose-bouldered, strongly draughting bum-squeaker of a dig. This is directly above the San Agustin Streamway (CDG) and will pay dividends to a committed team with scaffolding.

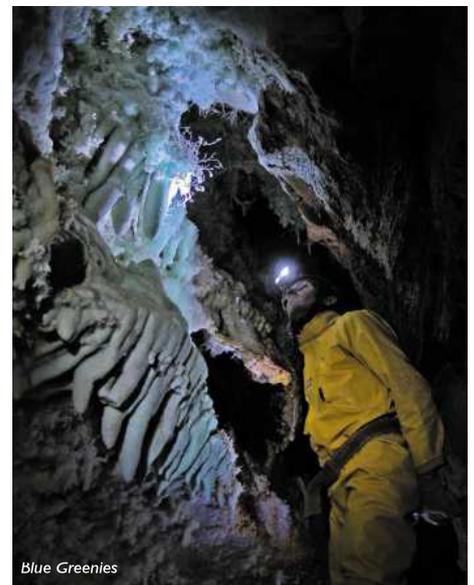
Retrace your steps to Western Union, endure the abrasive hug of Acupuncture then, after a brief look at New Boots and Panties (which would connect to Where the Sun Don't Shine if there weren't fine formations to conserve), drop down the Micron into Borrowed Boots Streamway and take the time to go downstream to climb up into Rowley's Oxbow where a draughting rift on a sharp corner offers hours of fun to someone armed with a drill and caps.



Digging 'The Gusset' approach to WTSDS



Borrowed Boots



Blue Greenies

Upstream, enjoy the welly-trapping delights of Anklegrinder, a soaking in the duck, then 'ooh' and 'aah' at Icing on the Cake before climbing up to the Restaurant at the End of the Universe.

From here on you won't find a drop of water and the commute to the end, even without digging or prospecting, takes two hot, sweaty hours each way, so take a couple of litres of water for each person in your party. MadPhil and the Fat Belly Boyes [sic] have spent a lot of time working beyond here so apologies for anything I suggest that has already been worked.

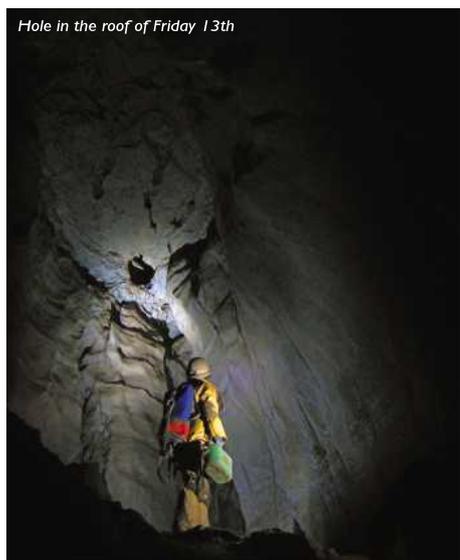
A full English (keep the carbs up - you'll need them!), then on through phreatic passages with fine acoustics and, with care,

climb down (or replace) the antiquated stainless steel ladder into Big Chamber. At the bottom there is a bouldery dig that may reveal its prize to modern techniques and which has the potential to reconnect upstream of the water issuing, below REU, from 7th Hour Sump.



Slither into the Inca Trail (CDG), past Unicorn Shit Rift and stroll up to a connecting all fours crawl, Matchu Pitchu Bypass. Has something been missed here? My gut feeling is that something is going on at a lower level but there's nothing to suggest it except tantalizing topographical hints when the survey is overlaid on a Google Earth view of the mountain.

On again, past the F B Boyes' dig at Star Bar, the kamikaze joys of the Warren (lower Trident?), through the tedious Sand Swims, a quick look at Gwyn's Surprise (a fractured skull!) and into the grandeur of Friday the Thirteenth where an intriguing black void can be seen in the roof.



At the end, avoid Shit Rift (the furthest point found by the divers) and take the (DD) dug u-tube towards Still Warthogs After All These Years. Before moving on look

up through a strongly draughting boulder choke. Is there a way on up by capping?

An intimidating squeeze at Another Bloody Valentine brings you into Still Warthogs and a steady crawling and all fours slog down to Bad Bat. A connection to Agen Allwedd was never one of our priorities, and would spoil the unique sense of remoteness in this area but, if that's your intention, then this is a good place to start. Although the end is now airless there was a good draught when we started digging. A thorough check to the sides of the passage, where soft spoil has been packed, would be a great idea. The passage continues considerably further than shown on the survey.

A tin mug of water over a couple of nightlights for a hot brew, a high calorie, slow-release, tortilla wrap pig-out, a boost of chocolate, then move on.

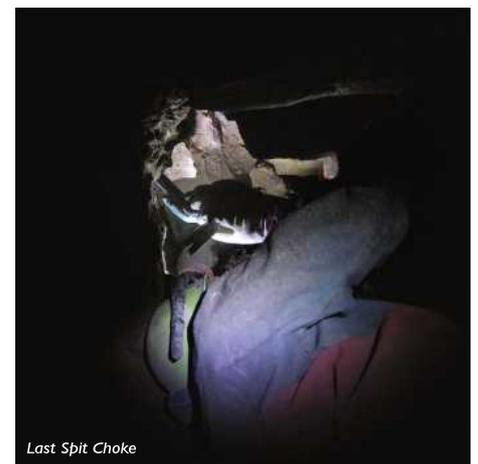


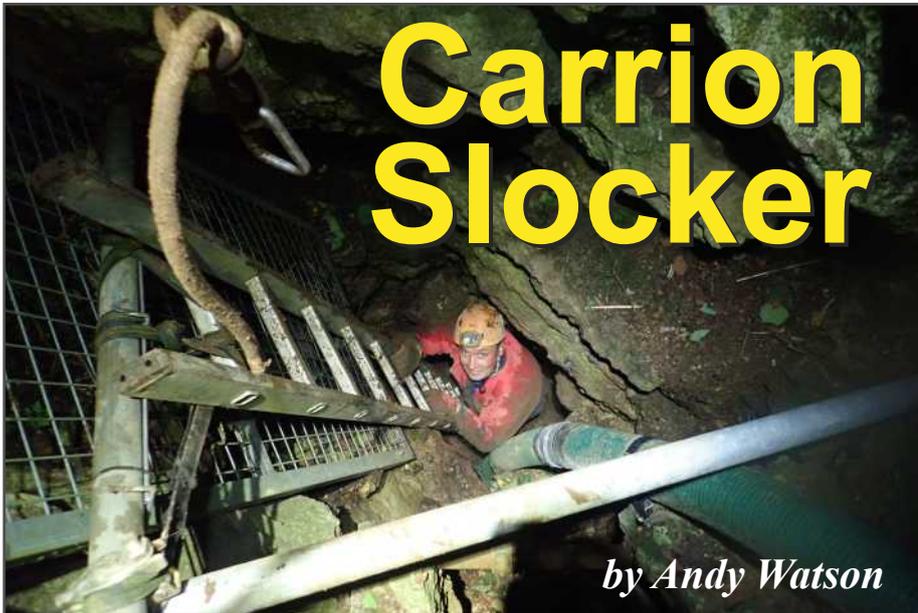
Part way down Still Warthogs you'll find a narrow slot in the floor (unfortunately, back around 2000, so did an inconsiderate and incontinent unknown tourist caver who clearly wasn't into digging!). Throw a stone down here and it will drop for a guesstimated 15 -20ft before dropping into what sounds like a sandy passage. When discovered, we had no toys more powerful than a 24v Bosch drill - a quantum leap from plaster slabs optimistically tamped on walls, but not up to a task of this magnitude (and we had better sites to go for at the time), so it was never pushed. The place takes on more significance now as, since it was discovered, Agen Allwedd has been extended in this direction and the drop would align it more closely with nearby passages beyond Iles Inlet. A capper with support and a good supply of power would sail down here.

Carry on past DADES choke (Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, the Philip K. Dick book that the film Bladerunner was based upon) - a long-term possibility for a team with an army of diggers and sherpas, a sponsor and a large budget. Ignore Mark's Headroom (one of my 9 lives), carry on past the squeeze to Dweebland (with potential for modern digging techniques heading south, and the Archies looks like a likely contender for a connection but is heavily choked), and move through Spaderunner (OK, I confess I was smitten with the film at the time!) and you'll finally reach the bitter end of the cave at Last Spit Choke (from a desperately thirsty Charles Bailey and a prematurely-quenched Andy Tyler!). A daunting, long term project, there may be options at the very top to progress along a solid-roofed passage through loose, rocky fill, or potentially following the level sandy floor past the choke further back. In all probability this passage will connect with the watery far reaches of Agen Allwedd, but if not there is no reason why it shouldn't pass under the Clydach Gorge, which it pre-dates.

The logistics for pushing leads in these far reaches is considerable. In the past, digging teams were based around REU with regular week-long camps, energy-sapping daily commutes and eight hour digging shifts. A better way might be for a lightweight team of 3 diggers to bivouac close to the end (Spaderunner perhaps?), being serviced with water and provisions by sherpas based at REU and a team bringing in charged drill batteries from Whitewalls.

So there's your guided tour. I hope you enjoyed it and are enthused to take up the challenge. If you have half as much fun and meet as many great characters down there as I have you'll have a blast. Now all you have to do is turn around and enjoy the six mile slog back to daylight!





# Carrion Slocker

by Andy Watson

**Heale Farm, Downhead, Shepton Mallet**  
**NGR ST 68738 44908**

**Introduction:** Where the name came from is unclear, however, it is thought likely that carrion crows regularly fed at the slocker hole after dead animal carcasses were dumped there by the Heale Farm owners up to the 1960s. It also took some farmyard drainage. The sink hole is not referred to in any caving or other literature until around 1970 [see references]. It was clearly known about during the 1960s when Heale Slocker and Heale Farm Cave were being dug out by cavers, but it is thought the landowners at the time prevented access and clearly it was not an enticing place to dig. The sink hole is some 10 metres west of the shallow valley where the main stream flows to feed Heale Slocker, some 150 metres lower down in the valley.

Historically, the site is thought to have taken water from the springs that drain the Red Sandstone cap of the hill, acting as an intermittent sink, but it is likely that some of this flow was diverted when a stone track was built across the field for vehicle access and only the shallow valley to Heale Slocker was properly piped under this track. In drier weather this allowed Carrion Slocker to dry out and it was used as a farm waste dumping area for carcasses, rubble, wiring, a big tree stump etc. It rarely takes much water except after very heavy local rainfall, whereupon it still acts as a field drain, and during the winter months.

Around November 2016 the field (among others) was sold by Aggregate Industries to the Britten's of Green Farm lower down the valley. We cleared much of the farm rubbish away and partly funded the fencing of the sink hole. We then agreed access to dig it out to see if there was any accessible cave in the base of the sinkhole. It is possible that being slightly closer to the known Downhead fault line some underground cavities may be accessible.

**Location:** The cave is located some 35 metres north-east from the road gate directly opposite Heale Farm yard gate (by the large beige horse jumping building), in an obvious wooded sink hole at the base of a low cliff, within a 3 metre deep depression. The sink hole is fenced. Always close the fence gate as cows, bullocks or sheep are usually in the field.

**Road Access:** Please do not park in the road gateway mentioned above as it impedes horse box and farm vehicle access opposite, but park further north by 30 metres on the same side in an angled gateway off the road. If more parking is required go 150 metres further and park tidily in the next gateway layby on the right - please do not block this gateway itself; parking here is by kind permission of Green Farm in Downhead. Avoid creating any noise near the Heale Farm House.

**Description:** Initially the site was a shallow 3 metre deep depression with some sloping water-worn cliffs of Inferior Oolite, and a dug shaft some 5-6m deep leading to a small chamber.

**Digging Progress:** 2016-17: Rubbish cleared, trees and bushes cut back. Many metal parts were cleared, including two old farm Villiers engines. Lots of glass bottles, wiring, batteries and plastics removed. A large tree stump in the main sinkhole was cut up and removed. Four inch drainage pipes installed and dig ongoing: from the bottom of the shaft a sloping rift adds another 3-4m.

2018: After 42 trips (about 100 hours we estimate) using only brute force, drill, and plug and feathers we are 5 metres straight down through the Inferior Oolite Group (circa -170m years), and now digging down in mixed Dolomitic Conglomerate hardened by metamorphic action (circa -250m years, a coarse grained poorly sorted breccia comprising angular limestone and sandstone cemented by calcite and local silica, part of the Mercia Mudstone Group) with a small chamber (approx. 1m x 1m x 1.5m) near the top of a

potentially descending rift into Burrington or Vallis type Carboniferous limestone (circa -350m years?).

2019: The dug and engineered shaft is holding up well and we entered our first small void/chamber with interesting geology on the north-east face. Our 4" drainage pipe system is keeping the digging section mostly dry but can get overwhelmed in wet weather. The water now avoids the shaft and diverts into Bethlehem, a dug open small and 'stable' rift which we initially could see into (July 2018) and was about 2m deep. After much drilling and plug/feathers we have now entered (July 2019) and are now digging. There is also a sloping and unstable rift to the south, now called Nazareth (an 'un-stable' town?) which is also 1-2m deep. During November 2018 a bat flew in, around my head and out again whilst I was digging and no doubt our new cave will be a bat roost now, like the nearby Heale Farm Cave. I estimate we have cleared over 10 tonnes of split rocks. My Bosch drill finally died after having its gearbox and chuck replaced last year. Perhaps I will get a new drill for Christmas. The cave is drippy over winter when the field is wet but it does not take as much water as the Heale Farm sink to the north-east. We've dug in the snow, the snow melt (brrrrr) and on very hot and humid days. I've had bruises, cuts, bloodied numb fingers and joints, crushed and split fingers, and grit and mud in my eyes. I finally entered the Nazareth rift in March 2019 and after a few weeks of drilling I broke through into a small standing height chamber, Payday Chamber, in July 2019 with no obvious way on, perhaps downwards in one corner. We are still digging in Bethlehem downwards with much mud and spoil to be cleared.

Digging continues in 2019 with kind permission from Green Farm. If you would like a visit/viewing please ring Andy Watson - 07881 420048.

My thanks to the other diggers Paul Stillman (regular) and Matt & Mandy Voysey (occasional), and support from Sue & Ali (rare surface gardeners).

#### References & Historic notes:

No references in Mendip Cave Bibliography (hard copy).

The Caves of Mendip (Barrington, 1962): no references.

The Complete Caves of Mendip (Barrington/Stanton, 1970):

'A depression taking farmyard drainage and used as a carcase dump.'

The Complete Caves of Mendip (Barrington/Stanton, 1976/7):

'A depression taking farmyard drainage and used as a carcase dump.'

Who was Aveline Anyway? (Revised version Witcombe, 2008):

'A swallet full of dumped rubbish and carcasses.'

Mendip Underground series 1977 - 1999: no references.

MCRA Online Cave Registry ([www.mcra.org.uk/registry](http://www.mcra.org.uk/registry)):

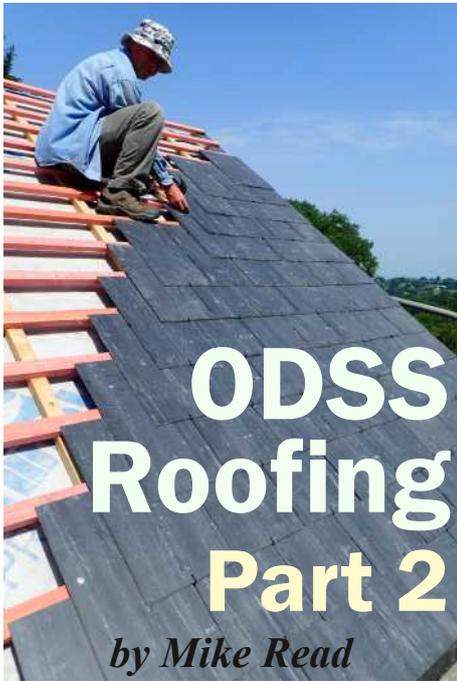
'Intermittent stream sink filled with farm rubbish.'

#### Survey:

Rough scaled sketch available from Andy Watson.



Photos by Matt Voysey



During the previous working week there had been one corner of the ODSS roof that had to be left undisturbed due to a redstart nest full of eggs. John kept watch on their progress and saw that the eggs had hatched and the chicks were being fed, so all being well they should have been fully fledged and out of the roof in time for us to start work on this section by the BBQ Weekend (27-30 June).

Unfortunately the nesting birds seemed to have become victim to the bad weather and cold nights and consequently the chicks died. John removed the nest as it was attracting flies. This did however give us the green light to undertake more work on the BBQ weekend.

The building inspector was booked for the Friday afternoon, and looking at what needed to be done it was decided that we needed to make a start on Wednesday. Packing the car with all that was required took longer than planned so I was late picking Mandy up. We arrived early afternoon and set about building up the wall under the wall plate adjacent to the nesting birds and taking down the very loose stones on the gable end to establish a stepped profile rather than the old roof slope. Mandy also painted the planed fascia boards. As usual we ended up working late, by which time Andy had arrived and cooked us all tea. On Thursday we fitted the missing rafter then spent much time faffing with the fascia boards. Getting the correct height, taking account of the membrane tray and trickle vents with the battens in the correct place, is always far trickier than you would imagine, complicated by warped boards, minor imperfections in roof line and level, and trying to hold everything in place to work out dimensions. The chimney stone work was also completed, along with liner and new pot.

John and Caroline Mazzey plus Adrian arrived in the evening to swell the workforce. John Stevens also completed the priority task of getting the barrel and of course the obligatory trip to Screwfix. Friday started with a good clear up and tidying up a few bits and pieces for the building inspector. It was easy to see who had helped fit the gable end fascia boards as they had black lines on their hands as the paint on the edges was still tacky. The team then went on to fixing the battens on the west elevations. This went pretty smoothly with only minor tweaks of the batten spacing required to arrive at the correct position at the top. The building inspector had a good look around and was quite happy with everything. His next visit will be to check the insulation, I did warn him that once the roof was finished we would be prioritising caving for quite a while. We decided that we needed more long screws to secure the counter battens so as John was helping Peter on the A465 improvements cave monitoring near Merthyr Tydfil, we asked him to further boost Screwfix's profits.

Andy and I were set on caving, having not managed any during last month's working week, but as there was still loads to do we commenced early (before 7:00) and started building up the stonework on the gable wall and fixing the bottom line of slates. Having got to the end we ended up with too wide a verge. Roy had carefully laid out the slates the day before but it seems that when nailing we ended up with a very slightly wider gap, however when you multiply by 34 (the number of slates per row) the small discrepancy becomes a problem. Unfortunately we decided that we would have to start again and widen the verge on both sides of the roof. Another step backwards. John returned and took over the masonry work and Adrian and Matt took on the tiling whilst Andy, Mandy, Helen, Dan and me skived off down Craig a Ffynnon. Sunday was another early start, interrupted by committee meetings but the show went on. We managed to install the last of the insulation and most of the battening on the east side and complete the slating on the west side except where flashing will be required.

Another successful session with much hard work and long hours. A big thankyou to everyone who helped, even if just for an hour. I expect that it will take another weekend to complete the main roof and probably another two days to complete the porch roof. Then we can concentrate on caving for a while.

Working team- Mike Read, Andy Heath, John Stevens, Adrian Fawcett, Matt and Mandy Voysey, John and Caroline Mazzey, Roy Musgrove, Andy Tyler, Barry Weaver, Paul Tarrant, Mel Reid, Dan Thorne and Helen Pemberton. Thanks also go to Andrea and Trevor for supplying us with much-appreciated beverages.



*Photos by Matt and Mandy Voysey*

# Mid Wales Mines

by *Adrian Fawcett*

July 2019, with Helen and Trevor Pemberton, Adrian Fawcett, Jann Padley, Martin Lloyd.

Helen told us that, amongst other things, we needed to bring insect repellent and a wetsuit. Both were valuable pieces of advice. Arriving at the campsite in the middle of nowhere in Mid Wales on Friday evening I wasted no time in putting up my tent as quickly as possible and diving inside for safety from the marauding midges. The rest of the team arrived about an hour later. Helen and Trevor found some respite from the midges by going into the river; I chose to remain in my nylon enclosure.

Next morning the little creatures weren't so active as there was a bit of a breeze, and we were able to discuss plans over breakfast. Unexpectedly, Martin Lloyd arrived – a spur of the moment decision to join us for the day. Since Cwmystwyth Mines were close by, we decided they would be better for Sunday's trip, so for Saturday we chose to visit Henfwlch and Camdwrbach Mines, both near Nant y Moch Reservoir, about 30 minutes drive to the north of Cwmystwyth. The road past this reservoir seems to be on a touring route through this part of Mid Wales, apparently popular with people who have all day to spend getting nowhere.

We weren't exactly sure where the entrance to Henfwlch Mine was, but Helen had previously seen cavers coming back from it. Also, we had been led to believe it was an SRT trip, but decided to locate the entrance before loading ourselves up with ropes and vertical gear. After hunting around for 5 minutes, Jann figured the entrance was probably to be found by following the small stream. This led us to a timber gate secured with a piece of rope, beyond which was an adit leading into the mine. The system turned out to be mainly horizontal, and a series of tunnels led to some large chambers at the end. Some green mineral veins in the rock were accompanied by gold-like deposits, but sadly gold they were not.

But where was the vertical part of the mine which needed SRT? We didn't find it. Back out of the mine, we checked out a nearby spot marked as a mine shaft on the OS map, but all we

found was a pit filled with rubbish. Maybe a former entrance to the mine, but no longer accessible. [It transpires that there is no SRT in Henfwlch Mine, which is why the team couldn't find any - Ed.]

Camdwrbach Mine was a bit more of a walk from where we'd parked, and quite warm in a wetsuit. The entrance involved a scramble down a steep moss-covered slope, so we were glad we'd brought a handline. Once down, a short grovel led us into a tunnel filled with chest-deep water which went on for a couple of hundred metres, passing a vertical shaft to the surface along the way. Beyond the deep water there were some dodgy timbers to negotiate, then came an amazing sight. We had been told there were cave pearls in the mine, but these were nothing like any cave pearls I had ever seen. They were like metal ball bearings of different sizes, some arranged in geometric rings, under a couple of inches of water. All very pretty. The shapes were so geometric it was as if somebody had arranged them by hand. And what was the origin of the metallic appearance? Somebody must have done a scientific study of them, but we were intrigued. And it didn't stop there – further along the passage there were some amazing coloured deposits – greens, yellows and oranges on the walls. Just as well this place has a deep canal to protect it from the casual explorer.

We had arranged a rendezvous with Trevor for a drink at Devil's Bridge, but had time for a bit more mine prospecting on the way there. In Devil's Bridge we contemplated going to see the river gorge and waterfalls but didn't have enough pound coins between us for the turnstiles. However, Jann succeeded in entering by going underneath the turnstile!

Sunday's trip took us into Level Fawr at Cwmystwyth. Water levels were lower than usual, being not much more than knee deep beyond the plastic tube at the entrance. After a spin around the horizontal lower levels we went up into some of the very large upper workings. The first section just involved a bit of a scramble, and considerable care passing under rotten timber supporting massive stacked deads. It is surely only a matter of time before



it all comes crashing down. The descent route was via a long and elderly ladder – thankfully equipped with a safety line.

The second section was already rigged with ropes, secured to some more reassuring-looking timbers. The ropes carry on up above the big galleries – the top anchor is an old iron bar wedged into a monumental wall of deads – hardly confidence-inspiring. An alternative route up took us to a coffin level. A sign at

the bottom had warned to approach the final climb from behind due to ‘a recent incident’ – presumably the boulder slope leading up to it is on the move. This level in the mine contained some very big chambers and, most interesting, a shaft up to daylight, maybe 20 metres above us. So, it would seem there is an upper entrance somewhere up on the hill giving an interesting alternative route in, and a good excuse for a wander on the surface sometime.

# Sunday School Take 3

*by Mike Read*

As always these projects take longer than you think!!!!

So roll on Sunday School Roofing Part 3. With the list of jobs significantly reduced, and to avoid tripping over each other we decided to go for a low-key long weekend at short notice. Consulting with Andy we found that the weekend of the 19th July was free in both our diaries. We accepted that caving was unlikely but did pack caving gear just in case – waste of time. A quick check with our chief wall stuffer and her roof slating husband identified that Matt and Mandy could also make the weekend, and Adrian was free on the Sunday.

However, as the weekend approached the weather was graphically described by Mandy as ‘pants’ – I would say this turned out to be an understatement. I arrived late Thursday afternoon and set about erecting the tower scaffolding (again) and finding all the materials and tools to complete the small section of remaining stone work on the porch wall. I managed to resist the temptation to break into John’s house to nick his mixer, but mixing cement in a barrow is not quick. The evening was sunny and warm and I started to consider that the forecast could be wrong, especially as I realised I had failed to pick up my waterproof.



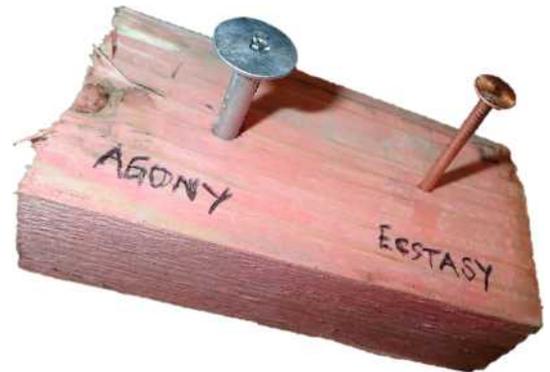
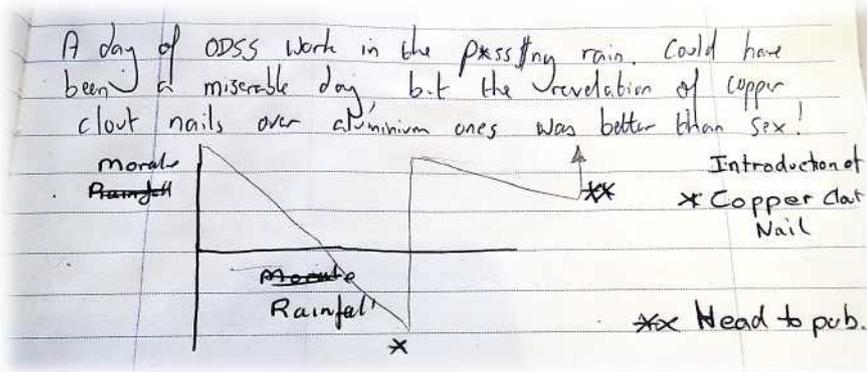
Friday turned out to be wet and cold but Andy was not put off, whilst I made excuses about needing to sort out things inside. Eventually I felt so guilty I donned my caving oversuit (there was a reason I brought my gear) and joined him on the roof working on the lead work. We did have extra coffee breaks during the heaviest of rain to warm up and restore morale. By the end of the day we had removed the chimney liner which I had installed upside down. Even with the liner out and inspecting in great detail it was hard to spot the arrows, but it was clear it was not a uni-directional flue. This job is one of the few that took less time than expected. By the end of the day Andy had prepared the roof ready for slating by master slater Matt who appeared on Friday evening. Clearly it was necessary to discuss the program in detail so we had to retire to The Bear for food and beer.

Good progress was made on the slating whilst Mandy and I tackled the porch roof; installing more insulation, battening, trimming stone and of course some stuffing to bring the walls up to level. The weather was kinder but not wonderful – despite this we worked to well gone 7pm before cleaning up and heading to get a takeaway.

Sunday saw another 7:15 start as Andy and I wanted to get away at a reasonable time. Andy and Matt worked on the slating whilst I completed the battening and fascias for the porch. Mandy did advanced stuffing of the slate verge (the gap between the top slates and the undercloak slates). Once the slating was completed I took it out on some innocent pieces of lead to try and shape them around the chimney and Andy volunteered(ish) for fixing the ridge tiles while Matt ran around supplying him with bits (technical term for slates, cement, stones fixings etc). Andy for some reason didn’t find sitting on the ridge comfortable and even managed to squeeze his bits (different type) in the gap

between the slates and the ridge batten. Luckily for Andy, John arrived and relieved him of his torture. I left as the new John/Matt team were fixing the last ridge tile. Adrian had a good day completing one side of the porch roof, and reckons that if he can avoid breaking any slates we will have three left, so no pressure, and I hope there aren't too many knobbly ones. Adrian hopes to complete the other side in the next few weeks just leaving a bit of lead work to be done.

Summary: We can go caving again!!! We all need a break now, but I will start preparing a list of jobs that can tick over in the background subject to sufficient funds being available.



*Addendum: Since this article was written Adrian has indeed completed the tiling on the porch roof, and John has finished off the porch ridge and remaining cement and lead work. The roof is now a wonder to behold!*

## CSS MEETS 2019

### October 18th-20th - Peak Distict

Staying at the Orpheus Caving Club. There will be lots of trip options for all abilities, plus the chance to experience the deepest shaft in Britain as we have a permit for the Titan entrance to Peak Cavern.

### November 1st-3rd - Whitewalls Bonfire Bash

A weekend of caving, fireworks, fire and feasting .

### December 6th-8th - Whitewalls Curry Night

A caving and home-cooked curry themed weekend.

### January 24th-26th Annual Dinner and AGM Weekend

Dinner venue TBC.

More activities will be added throughout the year, so watch this space. For more information on any of the above trips please contact Helen Pemberton at [heleninightingale@gmail.com](mailto:heleninightingale@gmail.com)

## SMWCRT Rescue Practices

Sat 5th October - Cancelled

Sat 30th November - Big OFD Practice, Penwyllt

Sun 19th January 2019 - Rescue Workshop & AGM, Penwyllt

For up to date information regarding the venue and focus of the above events see the team's website at [www.smwcr.org](http://www.smwcr.org) or speak to CSS members Paul Tarrant, Dan Thorne, Lisa Boore or Tom Foord. All practices run from 9:30-17:00 including briefings.

All members are welcome to partake in these events and learn about all aspects of cave rescue from the SMWCRT team. Whatever your skill set there will be something useful to do and plenty to learn.





# Ogof Fawr

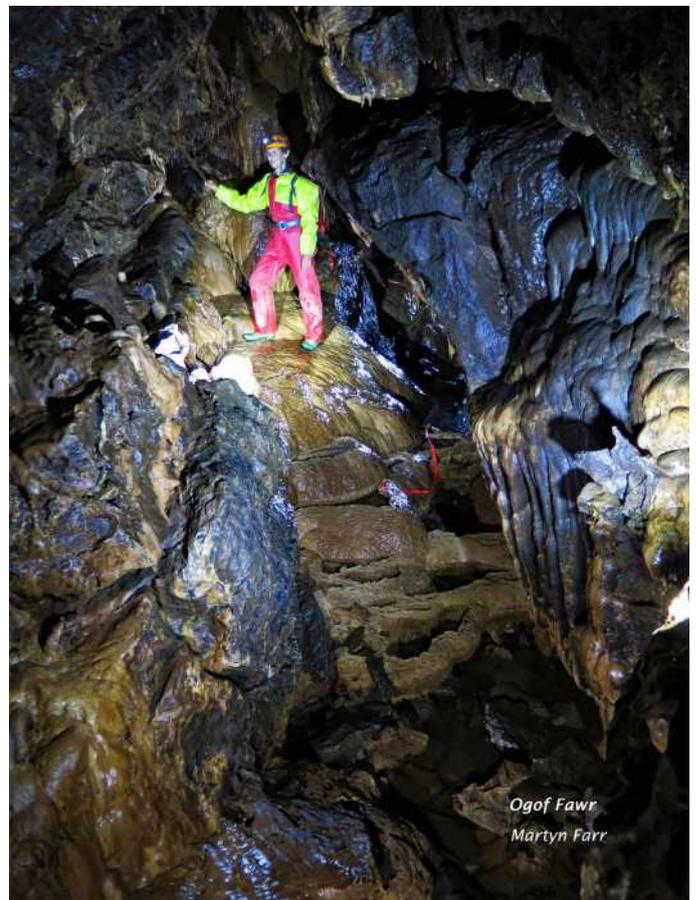
by Rachel Smith

A visit to Ogof Fawr had been on the cards for a while, just waiting for an opportune, dry day for the walk across the moor and to remain safe at this flood prone site. Parking for the cave is on the road which runs from Penderyn to Llwyn-on Reservoir. As this is not the most secure of places, we opted to take all valuables with us and leave the car looking as uninteresting as we could. Setting out, the walk was aided by following sheep tracks wherever possible and trying to note our route for the return. Once the forestry is in sight a key feature to head for is the prominent pointed corner of trees.

At the cave Martyn took some pictures of the entrance before we headed underground. It was immediately clear that Ogof Fawr sees very few visitors and is in a poor state of repair. The wooden boards on the floor of the entrance passage are rotting and were covered in soil and vegetation, dotted with a number of rocks which had deposited themselves from 'somewhere'. The passage dips steeply down and soon a small drop was reached where a block had clearly detached from the roof, bounced and then wedged itself in the floor. I opted to send Martyn in front at this point... After a few judicious

kicks he declared the rock was firmly stuck and quite safe. I pointed out that my worry was about any other bits of roof that were thinking of yielding to gravity and falling down to join it! Continuing downwards through a scaffolded section, there are clearly other potentially loose rocks which could indeed fall.

A short climb down dropped us into the first chamber where a roped climb, close to a large and precarious boulder, led down to a low arch which leads sideways into the second chamber. It should be noted that the whole area around the roped climb and first chamber is extremely loose and great care should be taken moving



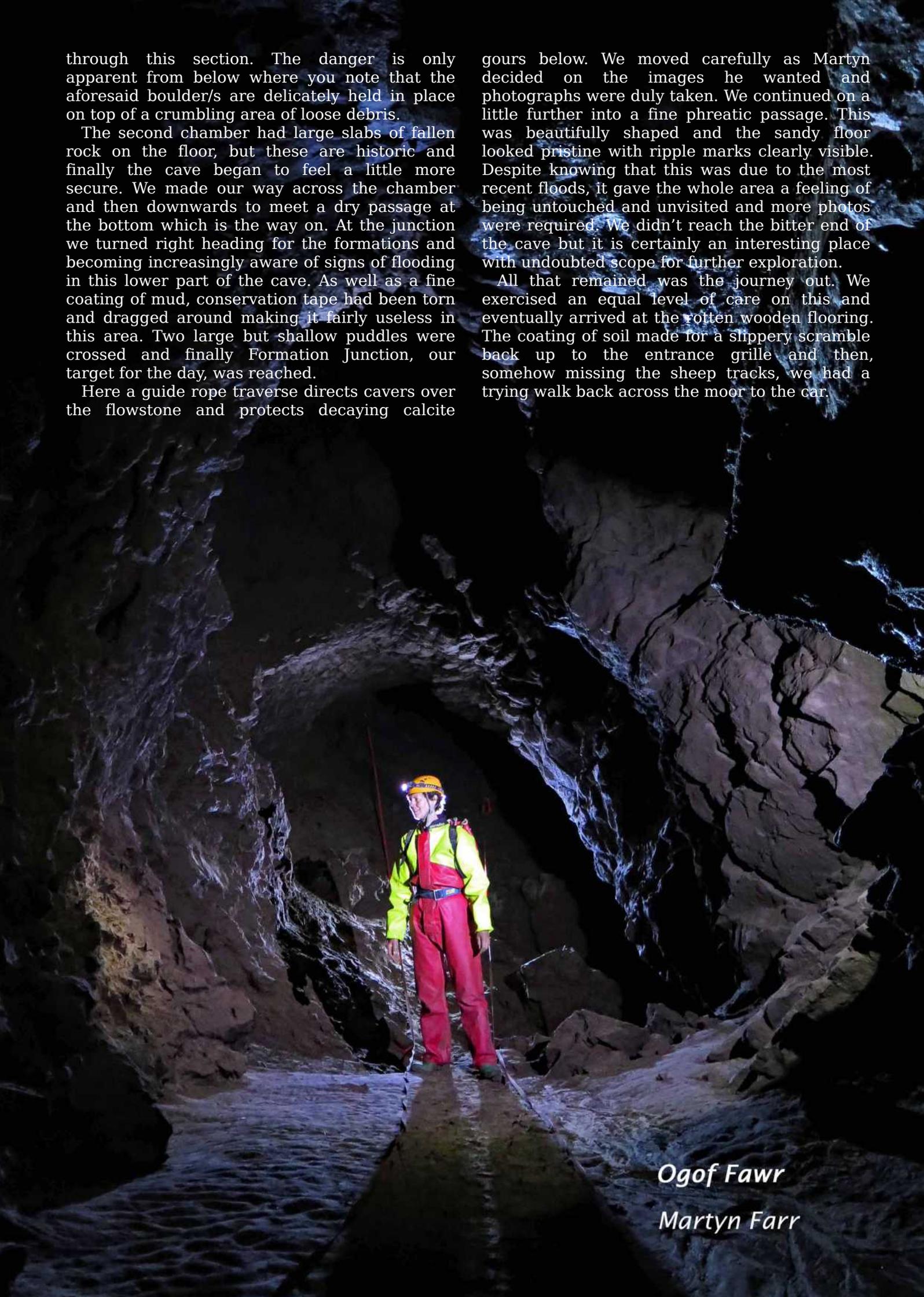
through this section. The danger is only apparent from below where you note that the aforesaid boulder/s are delicately held in place on top of a crumbling area of loose debris.

The second chamber had large slabs of fallen rock on the floor, but these are historic and finally the cave began to feel a little more secure. We made our way across the chamber and then downwards to meet a dry passage at the bottom which is the way on. At the junction we turned right heading for the formations and becoming increasingly aware of signs of flooding in this lower part of the cave. As well as a fine coating of mud, conservation tape had been torn and dragged around making it fairly useless in this area. Two large but shallow puddles were crossed and finally Formation Junction, our target for the day, was reached.

Here a guide rope traverse directs cavers over the flowstone and protects decaying calcite

gours below. We moved carefully as Martyn decided on the images he wanted and photographs were duly taken. We continued on a little further into a fine phreatic passage. This was beautifully shaped and the sandy floor looked pristine with ripple marks clearly visible. Despite knowing that this was due to the most recent floods, it gave the whole area a feeling of being untouched and unvisited and more photos were required. We didn't reach the bitter end of the cave but it is certainly an interesting place with undoubted scope for further exploration.

All that remained was the journey out. We exercised an equal level of care on this and eventually arrived at the rotten wooden flooring. The coating of soil made for a slippery scramble back up to the entrance grille and then, somehow missing the sheep tracks, we had a trying walk back across the moor to the car.



*Ogof Fawr*

*Martyn Farr*



*Emyr Walters and Mike Read in Swildon's Hole  
Photos by Matt Voysey*



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