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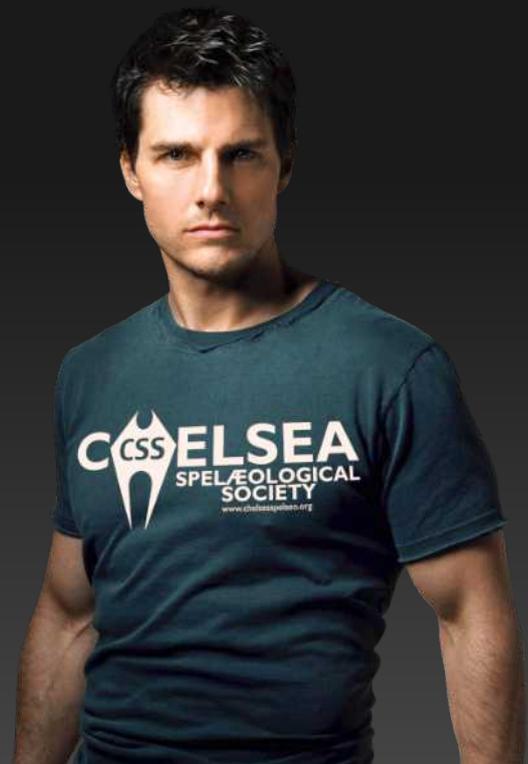
Flooding at Hard Rock
Dennis vs Draenen
Digging Special
Tich Morris

CHELSEA SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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*Front Cover: Louise Hull and Mandy's wellies.
Above: Mandy and Jennie Lawrence, White Dog Passage.
Tynings Barrows Swallet – photos by Matt Voysey*

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Editorial Please submit all material for publication in this newsletter 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, the Facebook group and the club forum. Also, if you would prefer to go paperless and receive electronic copies of the newsletter by email in future let me know.

*Editor: Matt Voysey
Co-Editor: Mandy Voysey*

As we were nearing completion of this issue the UK became very much under crisis in response to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, resulting in a country wide lockdown preventing organised social gatherings and group activities.

In the short term this has meant the cancellation of all planned club trips, events and meets until further notice. Caving and outdoor clubs, along with CSS, have now closed their cottages and accommodation completely. The longer term impacts of this on the caving community are uncertain at present.

Let us wish for a speedy end to this situation.

We may well be short of club trip reports for the next issue, but if you've got time on your hands please consider writing up any of your recent or old caving tales, digging updates, reminiscences, or even stories of self-isolation holed up in a cave for 3 months...

CSS Annual Dinner 2020

by Joe Duxbury

The Annual Dinner for 2020 was held at the Manor Hotel, a change from recent years. Here are photos of the happy diners just before the food arrived.

At Whitewalls, before the taxis arrived, there were comments made about what various people looked like. Lee was categorised as 'the pimp', Andrea (naturally enough) was 'the scarlet woman', and Mandy decided she was ok with 'wench'.

And the next photo shows her living up to this by brazenly showing more leg than she should! Does Paul look as if he's showing off his harem? Apart from only having one variety of beer on tap, the dinner was very successful. There was plenty of food, it was well-cooked, and the veg came quickly.



CHELSEA T-Shirts

If you would like to look as cool as Tom Cruise (opposite) contact Mel (melrei@hotmail.co.uk) to order your own fantastic new CSS t-shirt, available in a choice of colours at a bargain price of £8.

Membership

Current rates:

Full: £30, Joint: £40, plus BCA subscription per person of £17 for cavers or £6 for non-cavers.

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.

Members who have BCA membership via another club need not pay twice but should reference their BCA number and membership club with their payment. Full membership information and an application form can be downloaded from the CSS website www.chelseaspelaeo.org

Please send all subscriptions to:

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Email csstreasurer@chelseaspelaeo.org



Storm Dennis Destroys HRC!

by Kieran Ryan

February 2020 Hard Rock Camp, Daren Cilau

The February camp started like any other, I made my way down to camp on Friday afternoon closely followed by three TSG members Kris De Ste Croix, Steve Rhodes, Ricky McWilliams and Adrian Fawcett. Camp was soon set up and we settled down for the night and planned for the next day. On Saturday morning we made our way down Rock Steady Cruise to look at a couple of dig sites in the 12 O'clock High area, as well as to look at the fantastic formations at Where The Sun Don't Shine. After 2 hours of poking and prodding we made our way back to camp. At this point we expected to meet up with 5 members of Kent Uni who said they were coming down. However, they had not arrived.

Having looked at the water in Bonsai we decided we didn't particularly want to get wet so decided to have a look at the sump at the end of King's Road. Although the water was high it was not excessive, so after a few minutes we made our way slowly back up Kings Road. While walking back we also looked down various holes to see if we could find a connection to the continuation of the Bonsai Streamway. Soon we were back at camp and decided to have a dig in the passage in the storage area. At this point the water was high, Adrian noted this was the highest he had seen it since 1998. We soon stopped for tea and cocktails. It was noted at this point the water was dropping and by the time the uni students arrived (all 9 of them – 4 Kent and 5 Cambridge) the water was back to normal levels. When I went to bed around 2am there was nothing out of the ordinary.

At around 4am Sunday morning I was awoken to a commotion. I didn't think much of it until I heard someone shout "Adrian, Adrian help it's flooding what do we do?" At this point I thought I'd better get up and see what was going on. Making my way down the oxbow towards the camp I soon realised we had a problem. Along the way to the toilet and Adrian's sleeping alcove there was about 4 feet of water. Heading towards the kitchen I soon meet up with Steve and Kris and realised

the gravity of the situation. Adrian was trapped in the alcove and there was a river running through the middle of camp. Worst of all was that our kit stores had flooded and turned the changing area into a lake. Realising at this point that my helmet was on the far side of this lake and being that I had it on charge was thus not waterproof, I decided to hand traverse over the water (following the passage roof) to retrieve my helmet. Once over there I realised that although my helmet was okay I had lost my wellies, my spare gear was underwater and my drums were floating in the middle of the newly created lake.

It was not long before one of the uni guys had come over, and between the two of us we rescued and moved the gear to higher locations before traversing back to camp. Once back at camp we found that the camp kit was being relocated to higher ground and shouting communication had been established with Adrian. At this point the water was still rising, a stream had begun to flow down the oxbows and the passage to the toilet was a full blown stream. In camp itself the main seating was completely underwater and only inches from overflowing the cooking area, thus cutting the camp in two. It was at this point the difficult decision had to be made to sacrifice the cocktail bar to allow a dry walkway to continue to retrieve kit. It was also during this time that an escape plan had to be made. Upstream was simply not an option, this left only two choices: sit tight and hope the water doesn't rise to the roof, or evacuate down Rock Steady Cruise to 12 O'clock High. However taking this route would trap us until the numerous digs could be bailed, or worse if we left the decision too late trap people in The Ovaltinees.

Ultimately we were in an extremely unprecedented situation, this had never happened before. Although it was most likely that the toilet/Bonsai sump had simply been overwhelmed or blocked, there was still the slim chance that the water levels across the cave may have risen. It was at this point I decided to go for a walk down King's Road and have a look at the sump at the bottom

and see why the water was backing up at camp as opposed to flowing through the boulders. A quick strip out of my gear and a swim across the lake to the far side. The answer to the question was easy, the water simply could not flow through the mud and boulders. The far side was dry. A bit further on you could hear the river down a side passage. I continued down the passage and had what I have to say was one of the most surreal experiences of my life. I had gone from the constant roar of water to total silence; from here you would never have known of the pandemonium going on only a few minutes away. This did not continue for long though. I turned a corner and was immediately hit by the intense roar of water. Water was flying from the left-hand wall into the passage before flowing across and sinking again. A few metres further along out of the wall it came again, flowing across before sinking again. This continued all the way down King's Road. At one point I heard what must have been the clatter of a boulder rolling down an unseen river. Soon I reached the bottom of King's Road. The water was maybe 2 - 3 metres higher than the previous day and not far off the roof. The divers' gear store had been obliterated. However, the good news was it had not risen above the flood level – it was the Bonsai sump that had backed up so moving deeper into the cave was not necessary. On the way back I savoured the silence.

Back at camp there was still an air of panic but things had subdued. Almost all the kit had been moved and people were settling down for a long night. The water had steadied off and didn't seem to be rising much more. Not long after it was noted that the water had started to drop, not by much, and slowly, but at least not rising. Brew stations were set up and everyone huddled up. I managed to push/dig a high level sandy ledge that allowed me to get above where Adrian was, allowing us to talk. The next few hours we sat and waited, not knowing how long it would take for the water to drop.

Almost as fast as it started it ended. Just before 8am I heard a sound, I couldn't tell what, but something had changed. Making my way over to the changing area we found that it had suddenly drained. This gave us access to all our kit, and finally the water began to recede. We retrieved what we could, moving everything to higher ground. I also took the time to walk again to the end of King's Road. The passage was still wet but only a handful of sections had a stream. The divers' store was still underwater and had been turned into a giant whirlpool.

Back at camp water levels continued to drop, and the main areas were accessible once again. Not long after, a dry connection to Adrian was made. Most of the

kit was saved but damage has been sustained with much of the camp being underwater, and there is a considerable layer of mud coating everything. Myself and Adrian decided to make good use of the low water levels and make our way out. Bonsai was high and wet but not overly abnormal. The rest of the cave showed little signs of anything unusual. White Passage had had high water levels, and the entrance crawl was extremely wet – almost all of it was a flowing stream.

Yes, camp may need to move its kit store and mud needs to be cleaned away, but by no means is Hard Rock Café lost. Much of the equipment was saved, and the expensive and difficult to get in items were retrieved to safety. Thanks must be made to the students for their help in getting the kit to high ground, and general high spirits.



Campers and kit all relocated to higher ground

All photos by Harry Kettle (CUCC)



Left to right - Ricky, Josh Henry, Thomas Mc Neill, Harry Kettle and Tom Crossley relaxing with a brew

Daren Cilau wasn't the only cave affected by heavy rainfall during Storm Dennis; cavers in Ogof Draenen were also presented with some surprisingly aquatic challenges and unusual conditions. Tarquin Wilton-Jones (SWCC, MCC) has kindly written us this account of his trip and observations on 15th February.

Storm Dennis vs Draenen

by Tarquin Wilton-Jones

We had gone into Draenen on the Saturday of Storm Dennis knowing the cave and its normal flooding patterns very well. The cave normally floods just one stream at a time, so one part may be surprisingly challenging, but the rest is usually alright. Before we started, the rain had already been very heavy, and gale force winds were trying to rip the doors off the cars. The Entrance Series was running high, but still nothing out of the ordinary, so our trip continued without any worry. We reached Dollimore Series without issue, and the MSAD stream was at a fairly normal level. We assumed that Out of the Blue was probably flooding, since it is one of the streams that has been seen to rise rapidly and remain very deep during rain.

During our exit, however, things had most definitely changed and the cave was in the most severe flood I have witnessed. At Indiana Highway, a large stream was seen in the bottom of the initial trench, flowing from under Megadrive and making a lot of noise as it fell down Lost Crusade. At Lamb and Fox Chamber the waterfall was very high, with the drinking canister hidden behind a deluge of water. I rushed ahead to check on the situation in White Arch so we could assess our options. Water was ponding in White Arch and flowing into Flood Passage, though it then re-joined White Arch later at the sump inlet. We decided to continue anyway. Several pools in White Arch were chest deep, requiring a careful check of where the boulders were beneath the surface, to try to avoid swimming. The pool just before Carpet Crawl was the deepest, requiring swimming to cross it.

This is something I have seen only once before, on a day that no other passages were in flood. None of us were wearing wetsuits, so I stood on the boulders at the edge of the deepest part to help guide a couple of the team back onto a solid floor as soon as possible. You can normally walk this entire passage with your feet dry.

The rest of the team went through Carpet Crawl, so I went via Tea Junction alone to get a better idea of the streamways. The two streams met with an intimidatingly powerful roar at Tea Junction, and

downstream the water was a raging torrent. Crossing it to get to Gilwern Passage did not look wise, though it would probably have been possible. It definitely would not have been possible to follow downstream safely. I was able to walk up Beyond a Choke to Wonderbra Bypass, but seeing this river in high spate at the same time as White Arch was a new experience for me and certainly did not bode well for the Entrance Series. As expected, water was roaring out of the Entrance Series at Cairn Junction. The roped climb was a powerful waterfall. I have seen it higher once, appearing more like a plughole with a rope hidden somewhere in the water, but on that day none of the rest of the cave (not even the entrance crawl) was in flood. This time the rope was still usable, and three of us climbed up. Two others were given a belay made from chained cowstails and I part-hauled them up out of the water as fast as possible, just to make it easier. We would all have been able to make the climb without hauling if needed.

The chert cascade at the junction of Spare Rib and Pitch Bypass was flowing extremely high, with the water overflowing down the passage towards the roped climb. At the top, about half of the water was coming from an inlet tucked under the wall, and half was coming from the



Above: White Passage in normal conditions

Right: White Passage on 15/02/20



corkscrew at the start of Spare Rib – the last time I saw a waterfall at the roped climb almost all of the water came from under the wall. The corkscrew was very wet and quite unpleasant, and the scaffolded shaft was a substantial shower. The part we had worried about the most was the wet slot at the top, but despite carrying a lot of water it remained passable. It was definitely nicer to face away from the water, but at least it wasn't a swirling plughole. The crawl above it was a bit disconcerting, as two of the team have had to exit it by treating it like a duck in the past (on a day when the rest of the Entrance Series was not in enough of a flood for the roped climb to be a waterfall). However, it turned out to just be a wet crawl. Exiting it was certainly enough to get you soaked – we were all soaked already – but not enough to call it a duck. We had poked the drain holes at the entrance on the way in, so the entrance was not a deep pool. The rain was starting to die off as we got changed at 18:00, though it was still pretty intense, so it's possible that this hillside did not get the amount of rain that Llangatwg experienced a few hours later that night.

A week later we visited Dollimore Series again, in much better conditions. The early part of the cave showed no evidence of the flood getting any higher than we had seen it. Out of the Blue and Into the Black both had flood scum marks, but only 2 feet above their normal levels in the worst places. The end of Into the Black has mud on the conservation tapes as high as 7 or 8 feet above the stream, so this area definitely can flood, but for some reason it had apparently not flooded during Storm Dennis while the rest of the cave (and the country) was in severe flood.

All in all, it was not a bad experience. It was definitely exciting and more than a little intimidating, burning a lot of adrenaline, but it shows how much of the cave can be passed even in a severe flood like this one.

All photos by Tarquin Wiltovn-Jones

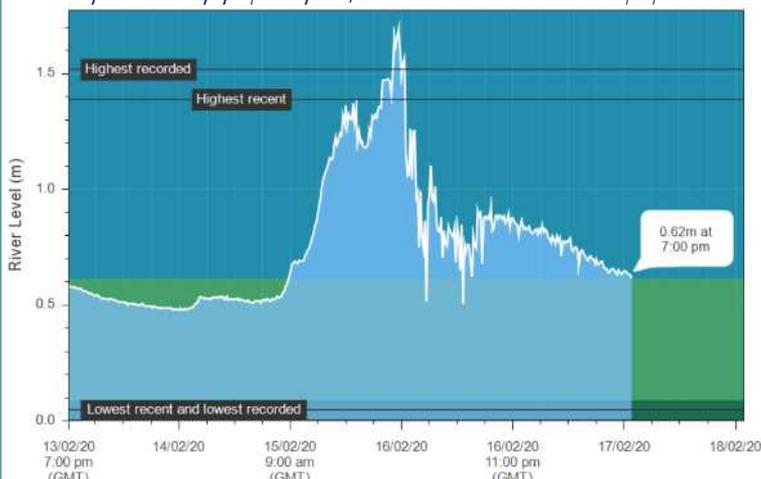


*Top: Rope climb during Storm Dennis
Below: Rope climb in normal conditions*



Water Levels During the Weekend of Storm Dennis

Lywd at Pontnewnydd/Abersychan, Last retrieved value: 0.71m on 17/02/20 at 7:00



Saturday night was the highest level recorded at Crickhowell since they started monitoring there. And the previous record had only just been set – on 26th October last year. The Usk, of course, has quite a wide catchment. I think Abersychan is probably a little more representative of the flooding pattern in Daren. Notably, we observed the double peak at Hard Rock at approximately these times. This monitoring station only recorded 1.2m back in October – and there was no evidence of any flooding at HRC on that occasion. Highest recorded there was in September 2008.

Question is – was this weekend's flood a once in a century event, or should we expect to see more like this?

– **Adrian Fawcett**

I've seen evidence (in the late 1990s) where water just about reached the basement store at HRC (wet drums, foam on rocks, few items damaged/soaked) but never higher or anything running through King's Road. – **Chris Seal**

At the same time as that hardy bunch of cavers were battling with unprecedented amounts of water in Daren and trying to salvage equipment from the murky depths of a muddy swollen streamway, four other Chelsea members were enjoying a trip of a very different nature...

Helen and Trevor Pemberton, Matt and Mandy Voysey

After a scary drive from Thatcham to Corsham (idiots driving on the M4, all you could see was a cloud of spray until we overtook them and found a car in the middle of the spray with no lights on), we arrived to meet Matt and Mandy Voysey looking a bit damp as they walked to The Swan pub to see if they could park in the car park and were told no.

We parked in a small layby just off the main road and changed at the back of the cars in the rain. The first mine entrance we ventured into was just across the road from where we were parked, just uphill from the bus stop. This was just a small crawl to get inside then it was standing room.

We ventured off, keeping to the 'keep left' system every time we came to a junction of any kind until we came to the dead ends, then carried on along the main passage until the next left turn, etc. Mandy had a laminated map of the mine system and we were trying to find out where we were as there are various different entrances and we hadn't quite worked out at this stage which one we had gone into.

It only took about an hour to complete this first section and end up back at the entrance having done a complete circle and seen three different kinds of bats: Greater and

Swan Mine

by Trevor Pemberton

Lesser Horseshoes and what Helen described as Splatter Bats. We looked at the survey map again and came to the conclusion that we had just done the section that was described as 'un-surveyed' and blocked. We exited the mine and walked about 30 yards down the road and found the next entrance the other side of the bus stop opposite The Swan pub.

This entrance had what was a shelter that had mostly collapsed but was not blocking the way in, again through a small crawl until inside then mostly standing room with the exception of some small crawls and climbs in some of the side passages. Again we used the keep left system until we had completed the circle again which this time took about 3hrs.

What we saw: more bats, plenty of drawings on the stone like the mouse in the house and one which looked like Hitler, with some having dates back to the 1870s. Also various artefacts like the old boots rotting away which would have been worn by the miners, hoof prints and footprints in the sand/mud, and the old crane (don't touch the crane it might fall!). All in all it was a very pleasant day, topped off with a visit to the pub after changing back into dry clothes, for a couple of beers and some nibbles.



Fun Fact

Interestingly, a bit of browsing through the history of this mine revealed the following fascinating fact. Not only has The Swan Inn served as invaluable watering hole both for the miners of the past and the mine explorers of today, it's also quite literally 'bound' to the mine workings opposite. Perched atop a steep drop, the pub is securely held in place by an iron band attached to girders within the mine via chains running beneath the road.



Graffiti photos by Trevor Pemberton. Tools and crane by Matt Voysey

Brief Encounter

by Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley



In the last newsletter Helen Pemberton wrote an enlightening article on the pros and cons of a variety of caving underwear. Putting aside, for now, Helen's lace panties, it is time for a closer look.

Firstly, by way of warning, I'll recount a disturbing anecdote to those of you thinking that 'going Commando' is a wise option.

In 1982 the BEC were engaged in a massive digging project at sump 2 in St. Cuthbert's Swallet. This required the installation of a fire hose reaching from a fire engine on the surface all the way to a submersible pump over a kilometre away in the terminal sump, pumping water back over a series of dams to expose the dig face to 'dry' diggers. While transporting the unwieldy reels of fire hose we formed a crocodile down the Ledge Pitches. I was in the middle, with a lady from Derbyshire behind me and, behind her, a Derbyshire-based bastion of the CDG, renowned for his free-diving. Unchallenged by underwear of any description, he had no idea that the gusset of his wetsuit had completely rent asunder and, as he reached behind for hose reels and passed them down, he was blissfully unaware that his own 'fire hose' alternated hypnotically from flopping over the peak of the Derbyshire lady's helmet to resting on her shoulder. She shrugged, grinned at me amusedly and we laboured on.

A well known Mendip cave diver and dear friend used to wax lyrical upon the merits of wearing a leotard beneath one's furry suit. This policy unravelled, disastrously, one drought-plagued day in the mid '80s as we were digging beyond Pinks and Posies in Wigmore Swallet. A fundamental disadvantage of the leotard is the inability of the wearer to remove it rapidly in an emergency and, as a result of a surfeit of faggot and peas and a shortage of time before digging commenced, all hell broke loose within the confines of said garment, necessitating a swift exit and a long, distressing walk in search of a soothing horse trough.

One chilly winter's morning I was changing beside the road in Kingsdale for a Rowten Pot trip with a companion from the Northern Caving Club who swore by the thermal properties of fishnet beneath a furry suit. Although his theory carries some weight it was of little consequence to the traumatized passengers in the passing car that came around the corner to behold 6' 6" of heavily bearded, tangle-haired, wild-eyed, dour northern caver standing in the snow wearing nothing

but his fishnet tights and a flat cap.

I'd like to take issue with Helen's derisive view of incontinence pants. One Sunday afternoon in 1987 I was wallowing in the aquatic and claustrophobic confines of the dig face in Bowery Corner Swallet. Behind me was the legendary digger Tony JRat Jarratt, customarily refreshed after a long lunchtime session in the Hunters' Lodge. At regular intervals I'd hear a contented sigh and the water would warm up, pungently unwelcome as I had my face in the stream. If incontinence pants had been available I would have offered them to my esteemed digging companion there and then.

While we're talking pants JRat once made the perceptive observation that a well known clothing retailer of the time, C&A, should print their logo along the gusset of their knickers to make it easier to differentiate between front and back.

Now then, who hasn't found themselves in Whitewalls, late on a Friday night, busily cramming provisions into Daren Drums only to discover that you've insufficient room for those last two pitta breads and that hefty wedge of Stilton? A simple solution that I've discovered is Harvest Festivals (all is safely gathered in). This robust and enduring style of underpants is perfect for transporting those last few luxury items. Not only that but, on arrival at camp, they are perfect for drying plates and cutlery, without even having to take them off. Other uses include straining rice and party headgear, with a long balloon through the leg holes.

And what about the other options?

The G-String is seldom worn by cavers in the UK but is popular in warmer climes; indeed, you'll find G-Strings on show at many a sporting Brazilian entrance.

The elephant in the room is, of course, crotchless panties. These are of little use speleologically although they do open up possibilities for alternative ways of carrying a spare torch.

The thong isn't all its cracked up to be either, although it does offer an attachment point for that unwieldy crowbar. You'll occasionally find them being used by cave divers, generally adopting that familiar policy of 'one third in, one third out, one third in reserve'.

Very little virgin passage is found in a thong.

So there you have it, and we've not even begun to delve into the murky world of boxers. In brief, the sticky matter of caving underwear is nothing to be sniffed at.

Reminiscences of Trevor Leslie Frederick Morris (Tich)

DIED NOVEMBER 2019

by *Geo Fletcher*

I had known Tich since the early 1960s when I joined the Chelsea Spelaeological Society. The Society was formed from two other caving groups in London in 1957 and Tich was one of the early members. I got to know Tich very well as a friend and he was a great character, very much an individual, and a fearless rogue at times, a rough diamond you might say but he had a hidden heart of gold. In those days (1950s) all males over the age of 18 had to do two years National Service in the armed forces, as I did around the same time, and when Tich got his 'call-up papers' he quickly packed his rucksack and went 'walkabouts', getting lost in Wales and the north of England for three months. When he thought it was all forgotten and in the clear he returned, to be immediately arrested by military police and carted off to an army basic training camp. He was posted to Aden and went on night patrol against the local terrorists. When I met up with Tich after his discharge, we immediately got on as he was a fearless caver and climber and liked to push the boundaries as I did, and we were both apprentice trained carpenters and joiners.

In 1963 the Society purchased the derelict remains of an old stone cottage in Llangattock, South Wales where we could stay to go off caving instead of having to camp in the winter. I became the carpenter on the renovation project and Tich became the builder and plasterer, after a few tips from his plasterer dad.

In 1964 Bruce Bedford organised The British Expedition to Triglav Ice Pothole in Yugoslavia so a programme of training was planned. On one weekend trip to North Wales we drove from London and arrived at our camp site after midnight in a snowy blizzard. Tich in his usual independent way got his borrowed tent out of a cardy box (cardboard box) and proceeded to try to figure out how to erect it. When we all had our tents up and ready to bed down we wondered what Tich was up to, to find he had no pegs or guy lines to the small tent. It was in fact an ex-army desert tent and had pockets around the edges to fill with sand to keep it up. Boy did we all laugh and tease him. I had lots of spare pegs and cord so we managed to get it up. His friend in London must have been so amused to hear the story.

On another occasion we went to North Wales and proposed to walk the Snowdon Horseshoe Ridge with loaded rucksacks and while Tich was off to the toilet we unpacked his rucksack and put a heavy rock in the bottom. We all strapped another rock to the top of our rucksacks so if the going got hard we could dump them. Tich raced around the horseshoe not noticing the heavier rucksack or dumping the extra rock on top until he unpacked when we got back to the camp site and found the extra rock. More fun and laughter. Tich cursed us profusely but he could always take a joke. When he was best annoyed we addressed him as Trevor Leslie

Frederick Morris, which he hated so much.

On another occasion we all did a long caving through trip of Lancaster - Ease Gill potholes in Yorkshire. On emerging from the pothole it was dark, so Tony Payne, another good friend of Tich, got his compass out and set a course for the vehicle parked down the fell by the track. Tich who was his own man said, "Nah, that's not the ***** way" and off he went on his own. We all arrived at the vehicle to see a tiny light bobbing around on the fell side so we drove the vehicle along the track to meet him and he said, "I told you my way was the ***** right way!"

Tich was always very resourceful. He organised and built a pedal winch for use on the big pitches of Triglav from a bicycle frame which was most successful. When we actually went off to Yugoslavia the main expedition travelled in a 'Dormobile' vehicle bought to transport us all by road and another member had a Land Rover but Tich chose to go overland by train, bus, hitching and hike up the mountain on his own. We eventually got down 1,000 feet into the Triglav Ice Pothole system which was a world record for a short time as recorded by the Guinness Book of Records.

Tich helped complete the renovations of the Society's cottage as well as exploring many caves and pothole systems with us. He eventually joined an expedition to cave in Jamaica, from there he went to Canada, got married and ski-ed and climbed many high peaks in the Canadian Rockies. We corresponded and he always wanted me to join him and sent me lots of photos of the mountain scenery. I went as far as having an interview at Canada House in London but didn't take it any further. We used to send each other the same Christmas card we sent each other the previous year.

I last saw him at the Society's 50th Anniversary get together in Crickhowell in South Wales in 2006. Those of us who caved with Tich in the 1960s onwards meet up every year in South Wales and his name is always in our endless reminiscences with great affection. What a character. Loads more stories, but no space.



Tich outside Whitewalls 1964



Clockwise from above: Cave of the Prints, France 1964; Tich and plasterer's mate; Ladder Making 1964; Julia and Tich outside ODSS; Plastering Whitewalls; Pete Thompson and Tich, France 1963.

Photos by Geo Fletcher



More Tich Tales

by John Keefe

I don't think there is a week that goes by when the old firm in 'cavers' do not enter into my thoughts and I have three incidents concerning dear old Tich which I think I should pass on.

In the very early days of my association with Tich we went down to Llangattock, I think it was Whitsun 1963, travelling by public transport. The weather was terrible, snow and sleet, the time must have been past midnight and we just did not have the energy to get up to the camping site or squeeze into the Old Sunday School hut. The new Heads of the Valley road was underway at the time and we decided to break into a workman's hut or whatever, but these were too well secured. So in the end we decided to settle into as yet unused sewer rings which were about 3 feet high and under the circumstances it was not a bad night. However when I finally got up in the morning I found that dear Trevor had stuffed one end of the rings with all my clothes as a wind break and I was not pleased.

I do not remember the year but probably late 60s, Tony and Clive and myself went with Tich down to the far end of Henslow Passage in Giants Cave, Derbyshire to see if we could push the end. We knew rain was expected and at the sump ends the waters were rising so we decided to get out. I remember a long v-shaped slot, the crawl with all its sharp protuberances, and the water was already well up and I was the last man out. Clever old Tich decided to part-dam my exit towards the way out and the water rose up to my nose so I was having to take gasps of air in whichever of the larger cracks I could find. I was not pleased at his smiling face.

When the four of us spent a week underground to try to push the Main Passage sump in Aggy, Tich helped me up into an as yet un-entered roof chamber by standing on my shoulders and heaving down several giant boulders, narrowly missing me supporting him. I then climbed up on him, launched upwards and climbed into a beautifully gypsum decorated chamber about 20 feet by 10. It was a great moment.

Bos Swallet

'The Jewel in Burrington's Crown'

by Mandy Voysey

Ok, so I may have lied in the title as this cave certainly isn't most peoples' idea of a gem, but as it is a little-visited Mendip cave and one that we found to be a varied and interesting caper I thought it was worth a short write up. Though only a mere 78 metres long, a good couple of hours of caving fun can be had in Bos Swallet. It can also be combined with the neighbouring caves of Bath Swallet, Rod's Pot or Drunkard's Hole for a full day's entertainment.

Warning! If you are rotund, long-legged or dislike mud and confined spaces, this is **not** the cave for you!

Jan 4th 2020: One fine but muddy Saturday on Mendip, Andy Heath, Matt Voysey and I headed to Burrington Combe with a mission to do a collection of Burrington caves starting with Bos Swallet. This had been mostly my idea, as I'd only visited this cave once before and remembered it being a good fun trip. Mendip Underground suggests that 2x M8 rawlbolts and hangers are needed to rig the pitches, but knowing that we didn't have such items last time we were there I looked at my caving log database for further insight and discovered the following entry...

Bos Swallet - 10/07/2004

General Description - A small, tight, muddy and steeply sloping cave, very easy to descend by riding the slimy mud but really hard going on the return trip. There are a couple of interesting ladder pitches to contend with too.

Things Done - Everything! We reached the very end of the cave, which terminated at a very small chamber (only just room for two) with a tiny rift that would need to be blasted to continue.

Things To Do - Trick someone else into doing this trip by saying that it's great.

Notable Events - The first ladder pitch was a tad tricky as there are no bolts at the top of the pitch, only a single hole for a spit. The troublesome aspect was that most of the surrounding rocks were very loose, but we did manage to find a sturdy feeling rock after a bit of a search and backed it up with a boulder further back. Also at this point Matt was having some kind of issue with a large noisy fly that kept pestering him, much swearing and slapping going on. At the bottom of the first ladder pitch we found the only pretties of the cave, and at the foot of the second we found the skeletons of two rabbits.

Hmmm... the bit about tricking someone into doing this trip by *pretending* that it's great started to make me think that maybe this cave wasn't great after all, but nevertheless we persisted with our plan, it might still be an adventure after all. In fact just getting to the cave entrance was quite an adventure, with the three of us comedically lurching down the pit of slimy mud leading to the entrance. Inside the cave the sliding continued down a steep bedding plane containing much mud, leaves, sticks and general surface detritus. Andy forged ahead, followed by me raining down lumps and clumps as I went, and Matt who then showered me with debris. This was succeeded by some crawling in mud to a chamber, then more awkward downhill wriggles and a bit of a squeeze to reach the First Pitch. This we rigged using an M8 rawlbolt in the pre-drilled hole and we found to our delight that our ladder was actually long enough (Mendip Underground had 10m ladder in the tackle list for this pitch, but we only had 7m). In keeping with the rest of the cave, the head of this pitch was awkward and had limited space for free movement of knees and elbows, but it was well worth the effort.

The chamber below was actually quite pleasant, not particularly dramatic or well decorated, but mud-free and interesting to look at. The cave from here on was quite different to what we'd seen thus far; everything was clean-washed and the rocks had coloured bands and fossils, there were even a few formations. Continuing onwards it wasn't long before we



Mandy on the first ladder pitch
Photo Matt Voysey

reached the Second Pitch. Here yet again there was a hole for a rawlplug right next to the pitch head, but there was also a very large and solid looking boulder wedged across the top, so we opted to loop slings around and attach the ladder to that instead. Then we hopped over the top of the boulder and down to a ledge to descend the ladder. This pitch was shorter than the last, but a bit knobbly and catchy. Again it dropped into a small but pleasant chamber, and shortly afterwards we happened across the rabbit bones mentioned in my log book entry. These were still in two piles and clean from mud despite their close proximity to any cavers crawling past, so possibly an indication that not many cavers venture along here. It wasn't very far to the end of the cave from here, shortly before which was a climb up-slope which had clearly been dug at some point. This didn't go very far, but had some interesting coloured shale bands in the rock and clusters of nice fossils to look at. Below this was the low crawl to the bitter end, which also has some good fossils on view including some very prominent brachiopod shells in the boulder right at the start. We did this last bit one at a time as it was quite a tight turning circle at the end. I think either Matt and I were both midgets back in 2004 or I was being very optimistic in my claim that the end was big enough for two in my previous write up. The view from the end was quite interesting, the narrow rift heading off into the unknown would certainly need of some serious enlargement before any person could fit through, but the darkness beyond looked like it might possibly widen out further ahead. Andy was quite enthused about this and thought it could be a good site to tackle with capping skills and a good drill. However as none of us possessed either of those things, the only thing left to do was head back out the way we had come. This was not quite as easy as we thought it might be... Matt was first up the pitch and made such a cacophony of noise about it that Andy and I began to worry. Assuming that we weren't first flattened by a falling Matt, it was looking quite likely that we too would soon be suffering the same fate of having a bit of a difficult time. Indeed we were right, as the top of the climb was quite constricted, smooth-sided and awkward. This could have been successfully avoided had we rigged using the pre-drilled hole and arranged the ladder to go over the boulder, but then we all enjoy doing a pointless sporting challenge from time to time. Andy even said he was 'having fun!!!' The next pitch was actually easier going up than down, but then we were back in the muddy zone with gravity no longer on our side. The three of us thrutched up the squeezes and rifts, gathering mud and clag over our kit and ourselves as we went, to emerge into the daylight and do battle once more with the muddy escalator on the surface.

We all agreed that despite the myriad of minor difficulties and the abundance of mud this had been quite a jolly adventure well worth doing... or am I just saying that it's great to trick yet more people into going?...

St Dunstan's Well

- I didn't know he was ill

by Andy Heath



St Dunstan's Well is a significant rising on East Mendip being the resurgence for such beauties as Stoke Lane Slocker and the caves of Fairy Cave Quarry. Just above the capped rising is the small entrance to the infrequently visited collector's piece that is St Dunstan's Well Cave. Mendip Underground gives the warning "only the thinnest cavers should contemplate this trip". The guy who was rescued from there in the early '80s would endorse that:

MENDIP RESCUE ORGANISATION Report for the year ending 31st Dec 1983

Saturday 12th November 1983

Yeovil Police alerted Brian Prewer at 8:06 p.m. because a caver had been reported as stuck in the squeeze before the sump. He had been jammed for 2 hours by that time. Four well equipped and wet-suited cavers associated with Aberystwyth University went down the cave at about 5:45 p.m. In following the rest to the sump, 25 year-old Howard Davies inadvertently strayed off the main route and became firmly stuck by his hips in a bypass. He had attempted to descend a steeply inclined side rift head first. Fortunately, he could be approached from either end but there was little room to help. Myr Roberts left the cave to raise the alarm.

Tim Large and Fiona Lewis were alerted and reached the Cerberus Cottage within 10 minutes of the call out. Fred Davies arrived shortly afterwards. Other rescuers stood by at Priddy whilst Brian Prewer and Chris Batstone set out to establish a telephone line down the cave and a radio relay via Beacon Hill. Julie Wootton took messages near the entrance and Mike York was stationed on the road with a handset. Tim Large, Pete and Alison Moody, Tony Jarratt, Pete Hann, Dean Fenton, Catherine Howard and Bill Hayes carried comforts and hauling gear. They were unable to free Davies after assisting for over an hour. At 9:45 p.m. they requested hammers and chisels to open up the passage. As the patient was now delirious and complaining of going numb, it was decided to call Dr Peter Glanvill who knew

the cave well. Dr Don Thomson was also informed and stood by on the surface. Additional kit was taken underground by Glyn Bolt with Bob Lewis, Al Keen and Sarah Bishop. Fred Davies and others already underground set about clearing the gravel to enlarge the Domestos Bend squeeze.

At 11:00 p.m. after the patient had been firmly stuck for five hours and was distressed, a message came out that was interpreted as a warning that a carbon dioxide build-up could be a danger; also that a rock drill would probably be necessary to open up the rift. Jim Hanwell and Rich West took along heavy hauling gear and further medical supplies and it was decided to request a compressor from the Fire Service to clear the air and provide drilling power. An appliance set out from Yeovil whilst Brian Workman and Dave Turner collected high pressure hose from NHASA. The rescuers underground continued chiselling and reached a point where the patient's belt could be cut away.

Dr Peter Glanvill entered the cave at 11:30 p.m. followed by Kevin Clarke and Edric Hobbs with more medical supplies. The persistence of those underground eventually paid off and Howard Davies was freed by 11:45 p.m. He was able to help himself even though being stuck fast for nearly six hours and despite getting into quite a state. All were out of the cave by 12:40 a.m. Apart from rather ugly "instant bedsores" around his hips, Howard Davies was in surprisingly good spirits and appreciated the help he had received.

I remember the rescue because the unfortunate Howard and his chums were staying at the Cerberus Cottage, a club of which I was a member at the time. Most weekends I would have been there, but on that occasion I and other Cerberus members were over at Penwyllt and so were absent from the drama. I understand Howard was unrecognisable after the rescue, even by his closest buddies on account of a grossly swollen face as a result of being upside down for so long and never really went caving again. Happily the swelling did go down.

I did several trips to the cave both before and after the rescue, primarily being involved in various re-surveying/radiolocating trips. I've never actually seen the completed survey, despite having been involved. Not quite sure why, though I do have suspicions...

For old times' sake, Matt, Mandy and I visited the cave recently to remind ourselves of its charms.

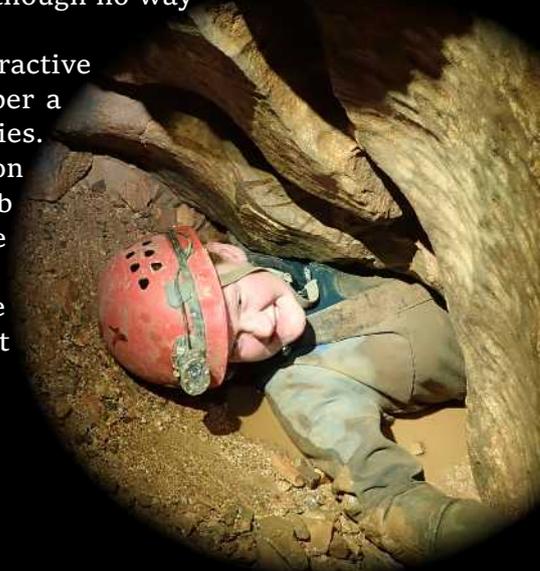
After a short hands-and-knees crawl and a low puddle, a steep bedding plane up and short climb down leads to the first real obstacle, 'Domestos Bend', so-named I understand because of its likeness to a toilet U-bend. This can be sumped and should not be free-dived. Various receptacles are lying around to enable a chain of cavers (probably a minimum of three) to bail the water and dispose of it out of harm's way. We took a Daren drum which serves the purpose admirably. In my view, it's worth bailing completely dry since it's the only place you could really get wet (unless you fall in the 'lake', more of that later). It doesn't actually take too long, so that's what we did. Although Domestos Bend is a snug fit, I think it was tighter before the rescue.

More snug obstacles follow. As well as Mendip Underground's warning of only being suitable for skinny cavers, I would imagine anybody of greater than average height might also find it pretty tough going. Shortly after a tight bedding plane, a slightly roomier bit is followed by a tight steeply descending squeeze. Just to the left of this is another steeply descending squeeze, though even tighter. This is the one where Howard Davies got stuck... be careful! Mindful of the cave's history, I managed a gymnastic turn in the slightly roomier bit to enable me to descend the correct squeeze feet first. Great caution is required though as shortly after the squeeze a 'large' (by Dunstan's standards) chamber is reached with a steep muddy drop into a deep green-blue static pool. If you fell into this, not only would you suffer complete immersion, you'd struggle to get out (though there is a muddy rope in-situ, just in case). The pool has been dived on several occasions to a depth of 6m, though no way on has been found.

Above the pool, a steep passage up leads past pleasingly attractive formations terminating at a point where roots can be seen. I remember a particularly chilly radiolocation trip to this point in the early eighties. After an hour or so of sitting around freezing our bits off, we emerged on a frosty night to discover the surface team had long since gone to the pub once they realised the loop wasn't transmitting. They might have come down to tell us! Bastards!

Although the total cave length is just a modest 120 metres, the place provides a couple of hours 'fun', or more if you get stuck! Worth a visit if you like tight collector's pieces.

*Domestos Bend
Photos by Matt Voysey*



OLD DAREN SUNDAY SCHOOL ELECTRICKERY

Saturday 29th to Sunday 1st February

by Gary Kiely

I secretly planned the necessary electrical works on the ODSS while our buildings foreman was on holiday, this gave me the opportunity to have a lie in beyond 08.00 each day. It **WAS** a well-planned operation. This is how it went:

Friday

21.00 Arrived and unlocked WW and ODSS

21.10 Unloaded tools and materials into ODSS

21.40 Locked up ODSS and studied the detailed drawings at WW with a cup of tea

21.45 Sequenced tasks ready for an efficient hard hit the next morning

22.00 Helen and Trevor arrive

22.10 Beer and wine come out...

Saturday

03.45 Bedtime... and some doubt about the efficient plans for tomorrow

10.00 Previous doubts confirmed

11.00 Standing in ODSS without a clue where to start or what I was doing there

12.00 Started wiring etc.

Helen joined me shortly after and started fitting socket back boxes and clipping wiring. That was until my SDS drill came out and Helen claimed custody of her new toy. Thankfully the long, tedious, dusty job of drilling out through the cottage walls was delegated to... the person with the drill and the biggest grin on her face.

It has been known for me in the past to utter the odd expletive or two when hitting my hand with a hammer, or having non-compliant cables that just want to wrap themselves around ladders etc. Well I'm afraid to say Helen was a great apprentice and joined in wholeheartedly with this, and it's probably best that there were not many people around to hear us this weekend. We packed it in about 7.45pm when I was getting hungry and lost the will to carry on, by this point the lighting wiring was 98% complete.

John and Helga Stevens and Andy Tyler joined us on Saturday evening at Whitewalls and the evening's shenanigans of food and beer finished at a much more civilised 2.00am. That is not to say that the conversations were civilised. Thankfully no impressionable new members were present.

Sunday had a less foggy start and I put Andy and Helen to good use, pulling cables, clipping cables, fitting capping etc. Even Andy dabbled in building site language. All the sockets, lighting, extractor fans and cooker circuits were complete. It's now all ready for the next stage of building works.

Thanks to Helen and Andy, my two cable monkeys, and to Mike the designer.



Photo by Gary Kiely

My Path to Spelaeology

by Geo Fletcher

I was always an outdoor person and went through the scouting system and eventually ran my own scout troop and would take the patrol leaders off on long weekend training camps. It was at one of these camps on the Mendip Hills in Somerset that we were doing a map exercise and saw that there was a 'Rod's Pot' marked in Burrington Combe, so we had to go and find out what it was. It turned out to be a small cave entrance going into the limestone cliff with a wonderful damp cavy draught coming out. This excited me and that was it. I wanted to explore, but being scouts we only had short trousers and no suitable clothing for cave exploration let alone helmets or adequate lights, so that was that for the moment.

After the scout camp I couldn't get the thought of caving out of my mind. I felt I must try to join a caving club, but how to start? First stop was Plaistow local library. It was an old Edwardian building with dark oak floors and furniture and upon entering the librarian would put her finger to her lips and go shhhhhh. If anyone even closed a book noisily she would look up and go shhhhhh. It had a reading and reference room with frosted glass where only men were allowed, can you imagine that today! I quietly asked if there were any books on caving. The answer was no; why would anyone want to know about caves in West Ham. I asked if she could find out if there were any caving clubs in the London area and she said she would try, made a note and told me to come back next week. If I put Caving Clubs into Google now I get over 29,000 hits.

When I returned enthusiastically the next week she kindly gave me two addresses, one for the secretary of the North London Caving Club and the other for the Westminster Speleological Group. Excitedly I immediately wrote off to the two addresses and put in a stamped addressed envelope. Do you remember stamp addressed envelopes? I then waited and waited... and NOTHING.

After a month I went back to the library and shyly asked again. The librarian frowned and said "I'll see what I can do", made a note and I was told to come back next week. She had found two more addresses so off I went and wrote more letters and more stamped addressed envelopes. I waited another month and was wondering what to do next when I got a reply from one of my first letters that had been passed around the houses. I was invited to go along to a meeting of the Chelsea Spelaeological Society in the Community Centre in Kings Road. I learnt that the N L C Group had

joined forces with the Chelsea Rover Scout Caving Group to become the CSS.

The very next Tuesday I cycled over to Chelsea and joined the meeting.

I first went along to a weekly Society meeting in March 1961. In those days it was held in the Chelsea Community Centre and then in the pub opposite after. I nervously came through the meeting room door and was welcomed by Stan Spencer who was a founder member with Harry Pearman, and was then left to make my own way. I chatted to a few people hoping to be invited on a caving trip but when I was asked, "have you done any caving", I said "no" and so that was that!

At that time few people owned vehicles and not many even had driving licences, the exception was Bill Maxwell who had both. When club trips were arranged a driver was needed to hire a Dormobile, usually Bob Fish or Harry Pearman, then at least ten cavers were needed to fill it to cover the cost of hire and petrol. When the leader filled the Dormobile the list was closed. That was it, hard luck.

Geo. Fletcher's First Caving Trip November 1961

After months of attending indoor club meetings I was invited on the club's Derbyshire trip. Harry Pearman, our trip leader, drove us up in a hired Dormobile. We camped on a very frosty night at Perryfoot Farm, near Winnats Pass and next morning went down Speedwell Mine. The boat trip in the entrance adit was very exciting and then



1962 - Geo in Ogof Cnwc (formerly known as Price's Folly)

at the Bottomless Pit we were on our own to explore the cave system proper. When we got to the Whirlpool Stream Passage the water seemed to start to rise around our legs. We looked at each other hoping we were all experiencing the same rising water level until it came up to our waist when we could see the concern in the whites of our eyes. Harry Pearman started blowing up a one man rubber dinghy and a dozen bold cavers immediately panicked and grabbed hold of the sides until it too went under the water. Still the water rose until we were swimming and then to our relief it slowly started to go down. We soon came to the inlet passage to see that the water had stopped flowing. You must remember that this was before wetsuits and all we had to keep us warm was woolly long underpants, woolly jumpers and if lucky, a woolly hat under the miner's compressed cardboard helmet holding a carbide lamp. Yes naked flames and rubber dinghies!

We later found out that there is a giant siphon passage in the cave system that builds up huge amounts of water and eventually discharges the lot in one big rush and floods the passageway and it happened to do it when we were in there. After a wonderful wet trip we had to go back to the campsite in the dark and cook up our evening meal on a paraffin Primus stove outside the tent.

From that time onwards I began going caving most weekends with trips to Mendip, Devon, South Wales, North Wales, Derbyshire, and started potholing trips to Yorkshire with Pete Thompson. I went on many foreign expeditions to places like Austria, France, Spain, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria.



Geo outside ODSS after a St Patrick's dig in Eglwys Faen. Goon suited up.

Why I am a Caver

by Joe Duxbury

People have often asked me why I started caving. In my last years at school I began to read books of exploration, of mountaineering. And when I had exhausted most of the books on climbing, right next to them were a few books on caving. So I read these too, and I was hooked. When I went up to university, the one club that I knew I would join was the caving club.

But even before then, the stories of the Second World War that most appealed to me were the stories of escape from prisoner-of-war camps. And of those, the most exciting were the ones in which the prisoners tunnelled their way out. In the waste ground behind our house in Putney, my friend and I started to dig a hole. We went straight down about six feet, and then started to dig horizontally. We must have gone in at least two body lengths. Despite being fully aware of the fact that the POWs had shored their tunnels with wood, we took no such precautions. We were outraged when some well-intentioned parents (I never did find out who it was) filled our hole in. In hindsight, it was probably a good job they did – there was very little to stop the primitive tunnel collapsing.

So was I inherently inclined towards grovelling around in the dark? I don't know. There was no living history in my family of subterranean activity. One of my great-grandfathers was a miner, but there were no memories of his life passed down to me. But the sight of a photograph of light glinting off a scalloped cave wall, or of a caver outlined against a bank of flowstone, makes me respond: "This is it for me. This is why I go caving."

Digging Beyond the Crystals

Agen Allwedd

by Helen Pemberton

I had a day's holiday to use up by the end of December, so I decided to go to Whitewalls on Thursday night for the December meet. I was planning to just go for a nice walk somewhere, not expecting anyone else to be around. It was a pleasant surprise to arrive and find people already there, and the luxuriant radiators had already warmed the place up.

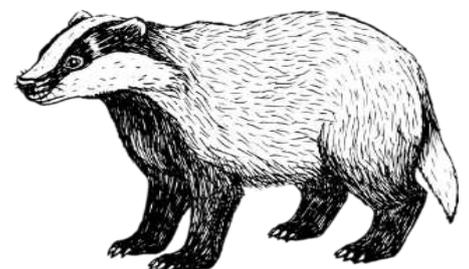
Recently, my caving ability has got really, really bad, and I'd sort of talk myself out of doing anything harder than really easy. Somehow Mike and John hypnotised me into joining them on their dig in Aggy, and I failed to manage to make an excuse that I wasn't able to. Before I knew it, I was in the Aggy entrance series, wondering why a boulder was much bigger and harder to climb over than I remembered. I foolishly threw my bag over it in front of me so it didn't pull me over backwards midway over it. Mike and John were behind, as they'd stopped to inspect a rock. I had to accept defeat and go back and say I needed a hand. Embarrassingly, I had actually got lost and missed a turning, and the problematic rock was actually not the one I thought it was. Most of the side passages are used for bat counts and cave rescue practices, so I didn't think anything was amiss until my incompetence stopped me. Once my bag had been rescued, John did say that I could have gone quite a long way in the wrong direction, so that was some small comfort.

Poor John and Mike had to push and pull me up easy climbs, and catch me and let me use them as mobile rocks on the way down. It was quite embarrassing but they were very kind. I am very thankful to them for helping me so much without ever moaning. We finally got to the dig, up a climb, past some fine crystals, through a square but still flat out crawl and into standing room chamber. At this point, John showed me the entrance to the dig – a small tunnel. He said it isn't very tight, gets a bit tighter where it goes uphill, and then opens right out again, and proceeded to scuttle off down the rather small looking tunnel. A bit like a baby rabbit. I was surprised to hear scuffling going on for longer than I expected, and looking into the tunnel, I could still see feet. It was a bit smaller than I expected. Still more scuffling. I was starting to get cold waiting, so I went back to a previous chamber where Mike was prodding rocks. By the time he'd done, John was out of the crawl to the dig. The tunnel turned out to be maybe 10m of one arm in front flat-out, sloping slightly downhill, followed by a sharp, almost right angle bend heading straight up. John was right, it did get tight. My caving might be pretty bad at the moment, but I have very rarely visited places where I had to breathe then move. I'm not used the cave completely squeezing me. John and Mike are

both thin and fit, whereas I am unfit and getting fatter – more a fat knackered badger than baby rabbit. I will admit to making a bit of a faff out of it, but at least I didn't get completely stuck. Reversing uphill in a superman pose wasn't appealing, and I'd already done that a couple of times to see if John was progressing. Over lunch, John did have to admit to having to dig himself through, hence the large amount of scuffling and static feet.

The dig was up a climb at the far side of the chamber, and involved throwing a steady stream of rocks from the top. I wasn't actually sure if I'd fit back out the rabbit hole, being neither a baby rabbit nor a contortionist. Rather than have rocks fall on my head, I started digging the rabbit hole open in the hope to make it at least badger sett dimensions. This involved sticking my head downhill to see, then wielding a girly size crow bar in front of me, one handed and sometimes not really being able to see much because of the lack of space. Mud generally got flung behind me, in any direction possible; sometimes balled up, sometimes like dry sand. It was very slow progress to even get as far as the tightest bit at the right angle bend. I finally dug enough space to use my lunch box as a drag tray. By the time it came to leave, I had deepened the rabbit hole by maybe an inch, and shallowed out the angle of the approach so it was less like diving headfirst into a swimming pool made of solid mud. I was mildly more confident of being able to fit around the U-bend to get out, but only mildly.

Once I got through (Yayyyy! No callout needed), I realised I had been digging for ages and was a bit knackered. Poor Mike and John had to manhandle me back down the climb to the main passage, and more pushing and shoving to get me up the easy climbs. The lower bypass (avoiding the climb I fear most, having had a fall off it back when I was fitter and more capable) was too wet to be sensible, so more pushing, pulling and cajoling was needed to get me back to Main Chamber. From that point on I know I'm OK, just painfully slow. I was bugged, and John and Mike were like they had strolled around the garden. It really is time to get back out of this rut and do more caving! I need to say a massive thank you to them both for, quite literally, giving me a kick up the bum. I'm now determined to stop being a clapped out old badger so I can at least fit into fox dens again.



CSS MEETS 2020

March 27th-29th - Devon Weekend

Staying at the DSS hut in Buckfastleigh. Trips to include Afton Red Rift, Pridhamsleigh Cavern, Dog Hole plus any extra bonus caves that people fancy from the bevvy of short but interesting ventures available in the area.

April 24th-26th - Whitewalls/Forest of Dean Weekend

Jennie Lawrence will be leading a trip to Old Ham Iron Mine 7:30 Friday night, please contact either Jennie or Helen for details if you'd like to come along. Saturday will be a trip to Westbury Brook Mine with Jann Padley, this should be a fun trip and will involve a few short SRT pitches so don't forget to bring your SRT kits.

May 29th-31st - Yorkshire Dales Weekend

Organiser Adrian Fawcett. Provisional plans are for a trip on Ingleborough like Tatham Wife Hole on Friday, an Easegill adventure on Saturday and a short but fun trip like Swinsto on Sunday. Contact Adrian for further details about accommodation and trips.

June 26th-28th - CSS Summer BBQ Whitewalls

A weekend of fun, flames and feasting on the Llangattock escarpment with plenty of caving options to suit all abilities. Trips to include a Daren through trip with Mandy Voysey, plus an easier trip on Sunday suitable for novices, beginners or anyone slightly hungover and in favour of gentle but fun outing.

July 24th-26th - Mendip Weekend

Staying at the SMCC cottage. Trips to be arranged closer to the time, but there are plenty of options for both burly and less strenuous trips so there should be something for everyone.

July 25th-30th - Eurospeleo 2020 in Cantabria

August 15th - Kayaking on the Wye

A fun day on the river paddling from Glasbury to Whitney with a lunch stop at Hay on Wye. Whether you're a seasoned kayaker with your own vessel or never been on a river before, it should be a good day out. Camping accommodation is available nearby. Canoe hire and transportation will be arranged by Helen, so please get in contact for more details. A £10 deposit will be required by 10th April to secure your place, bookings after this date will depend on availability.

August 21st-24th - Whitewalls Bank Holiday Weekend/Mendip Cave Fest

Paul Tarrant will be leading a Nantymwyn Mine trip in Saturday, this is a very photogenic Welsh lead mine, involving some sort SRT pitches.

September - Hidden Earth

November 6th-8th - CSS Bonfire Weekend

Fire, frolics and caving fun. Bring a stonking firework and do your best anti-rain dancing. Caving trips TBC but will include a range of options for all abilities.

December 4th-6th - Whitewalls Curry Weekend

The annual evening of home-made culinary curry delights with a selection of caving trips on offer to work up an appetite. Bring along a curried concoction to share, be it a vat of curry, a spicy side-dish or some tasty sundries.

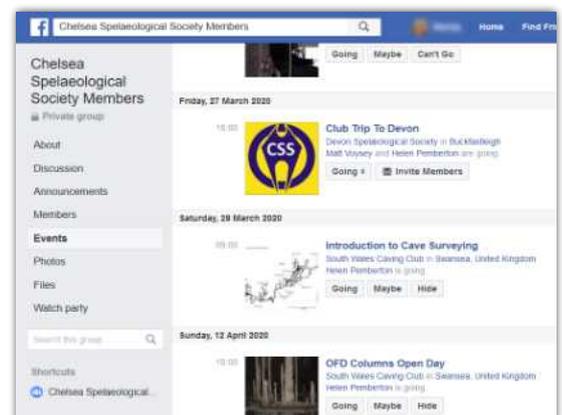
December 31st - New Year's Caving at Whitewalls

Why not see in the New Year with a caving trip and get together with chums at Whitewalls. The ODSS might even be in a fit state for a party by then.

STOP PRESS: As a result of the coronavirus outbreak some or all of these events may be cancelled or rescheduled. Please check on the Facebook group or contact Helen for updates.

Reminder: The CSS members group on Facebook includes a full calendar containing the club meets and other choice caving events. One very handy feature is you can say whether you intend to go or not, which helps the meets organiser plan for numbers, make hut bookings etc.

Please contact Helen Pemberton for further details on any of the above trips, via Facebook or email at heleninightingale@gmail.com



Castlemartin Range West

by Mandy Voysey

Last August Gonzo invited Andy Heath, Matt Voysey and me to stay at his house near Castlemartin in Pembrokeshire. Our mission was to make a new fantastic caving discovery on Castlemartin Range West. This spectacular stretch of coastline is owned by the MOD and actively used for military training, with tanks and other ordnance volleying a variety of missiles about the landscape. Quite sensibly access is denied while live firing is taking place, but on other occasions (weekends, bank holidays, and non-firing weekdays and evenings) access to the coastline is granted to the climbers, surfers, fishermen and cavers who have attended a military briefing that year. We'd timed our visit to coincide with an evening briefing, so the next day we were granted permission to access the range.

Our glorious plans were somewhat scuppered by high winds and on the two days we spent in the pursuit of spelaeological wonders we were buffeted around on clifftops, sprayed by either sea or rain (we didn't know which) and quite severely sand-blasted. The sea was a seething mass of foam and fury which prevented us venturing too close, but the landscape was truly astounding. There are no known caves of any size along this particular headland, but the amount of limestone and the proximity of caves like the beautifully decorated Ogof Gofan hidden in the cliffs at Castlemartin Range East inspires hope that new discoveries could be just waiting to be found.

If you'd like to access the range to see for yourself, the 2020 briefings are scheduled for the following dates:

Thursday 5th March - 18:00

Saturday 7th March - 10:00

Thursday 9th April - 18:00

Friday 10th April - 10:00

Thursday 21st May - 18:00

Saturday 23rd May - 10:00

Saturday 1st August - 10:00



The Digging Section

Knowing that there's an abundance of digging activity within the club that most of us only hear about over a beer on club social weekends, we thought it would be interesting to compile a selection of digging reports from the various active diggers of CSS. Here is part one of what we hope will become a regular feature.



Upper Southern Stream - Agen Allwedd

by Andy Heath

Matt, Mandy and Andy recently spent a few happy hours digging a side passage off Upper Southern Stream Passage. The site has obviously been dug before (the rope and skip were a giveaway), but seemingly not for a few years. The passage can be easily identified by 'BNS 1962' marked on the wall. Fill is mainly sand, with a few inches of open space. Two or three hours of digging rewarded us with around two metres of progress.

On checking the survey once back at Whitewalls, it's an almost dead cert the passage will link through to Sandstone Passage, not so very far away. Whether any further visits are worthwhile is debatable.

Sandstone Passage Dig - Agen Allwedd

by Mandy Voysey

This sporty little passage heading into the blank area within the Grand Circle route has been dug intermittently by Matt and me for a couple of years now. The digging here is fairly easy, and the end is nice sandy fill that can be dug with relative ease with a short-handled shovel, however the approach down Sandstone Passage varies between tight, awkward or just merely uncomfortable for much of its length and is definitely not compatible with people of larger than average girth. Despite the difficulties it's still an interesting outing in itself and the dig face, though distinctly lacking in draught, shows promise enough to keep us intent on return. Currently a team of 4 is ideal to make good progress, but 3 would do at a push, so any help would be greatly appreciated. The old British Nylon Spinners dig at Upper Southern Stream is almost certainly a sand/rock filled connection to Sandstone (see previous page), so we plan to take a survey in with us next time to try and ascertain where exactly this might join. As mentioned by Andy in his digging report there's unlikely to be any glorious new discoveries to be made from further digging at this site, but a connecting route if it can be easily forged may still be worthwhile to produce a sporting round trip of a very different nature to the trips usually undertaken in Agen Allwedd.

Paul Hartwright's

Digging Update

Several digs have been tackled during recent years with some success but no BIG breakthrough recently. I have a licence to use chemical persuasion to break up larger rocks and it makes sense if we try to dig where there is the highest probability of making a decent extension. That usually means that the dig could continue when we give up, but that there is a better possibility somewhere else. This is an update of recent digs with some assessment of their potential. The dates given refer to when we finished digging at each location and are approximate.

Crochan Sion Hopkins [SO 16508 16282] - 2008-2014

Phil Checketts, Nick Negus and I dug at this very active sink for about 6 years and managed to gain a depth of 70 metres from the surface. This involved a lot of scaffolding which is still in place. Fixed metal ladders are also in place for the verticals and there is a nearly horizontal continuation of about 50 metres at the bottom of these pitches. Some of the diggers would like to go back but we have to find a way of getting through an impervious layer estimated to be about 5 metres thick. This would give access to Remembrance Series above the sumps in Agen Allwedd.

(Right of) Ogof Ffw [SO 18558 16211] - 2015

Once again we visited Ogof Ffw or the Badger holes at the base of the cliff above Waun Ddu. The badgers were still in residence so there was little we could do. However, whilst examining the cliff in more detail we found a small hole only 8 metres from one of the larger entrances. No badgers were present so we removed a small amount of mud and rock and were able to get in. It is a flat out crawl where it is possible to progress for perhaps 8 metres. We were stopped by the passage turning right and getting too small over a tiny pool. Previous digging by cavers (CSS?) in one of the other entrances had gone beyond the point we were at so any attempt to widen the passage through the solid rock was abandoned. We do not know why the previous diggers gave up – unless the badgers were still there!

The entrances are rather like those that give access to Agen Allwedd. If it were possible to dig through here it could eventually connect with Summertime.

Draught Passage, Agen Allwedd - 2016

This passage heads in a north-westerly direction just before First Boulder Choke in Agen Allwedd. Due to the strong draught we decided it would be worth digging and started under a protective rock roof. We removed rocks for about 5 metres with the draught still strong in front of us. We could have continued by removing more rocks. But after a bit of investigation on the inside of the First Boulder Choke, it seemed sensible to do a smoke test to see if there was any connection to the dig at the top of the mud slope on the inner side. It worked! We found that the draught goes through this route parallel to the usual route through the choke. To confirm, we were able to do another test when the air flow was in the reverse direction. Both proved positive.

It is still possible that there is another connecting passage somewhere in the middle of the two digs but we decided to move on. It could probably be opened up if the route through the main choke became blocked but it is unlikely to be any easier.

Ogof Caci [SO 17074 16713] - 2018

After looking into this cave, that had previously been dug, we decided that it was feasible to remove mud from the 1 metre diameter passage heading into the cliff face. Access was easy (only about 10 metres in) and no scaffolding would be needed. The potential for new cave is great because it heads into a blank space on the Agen Allwedd survey. It is possible that it could eventually connect with Summertime Series.

We removed the mud, thus increasing the length of the cave by about 6 metres. A small hole appeared at the top of the passage that took a definite draught. We enlarged this and saw black space beyond. We crawled through but unfortunately were only able to progress by about 10 metres. It ends in a rift about 6 metres long, 3 metres high and 1 metre wide. The draught appears to go into the roof.

It would be possible to dig mud again at a point less far in but if the mud is to be deposited outside it is necessary to contact NRW for instructions on where to put it so that rare plants are not destroyed.

[See CSS Newsletter vol.59 nos.1/2/3 for full report of this dig.]

Llethryd Swallet [SS 5310 9120] - 2019

This substantial cave on the Gower peninsular has become blocked due to water moving blocks around in the normal entrance. Many years ago I became trapped in this cave due to rising water so it has always interested me. Whilst talking to Andy Freem, he told me that he was working on another entrance that could give more direct access to the large decorated chamber in the cave. The new entrance needed a bit of widening, so using chemicals I took some rock off a constriction a short distance inside. This gave better access to a continuing passage that can take a huge amount of water in times of flood. Digging continues; contact Andy for latest information.

Eglwys Faen [SO 19285 15684] - 2018-2019

Many years ago I did a careful test of airflow in Eglwys Faen and decided that about two thirds of the airflow went into the main choke beyond the flat out crawl. But we could not find a place to dig that seemed safe and worthwhile. More recently a further investigation showed that it would be possible to dig along a left hand wall if we used some scaffolding for protection. So we carried many lengths of scaffolding along the tram road and into the cave. This was assembled to give extra support to the roof close up under the main choke.

We progressed along the wall for about 6 metres and then came up against what appears to be solid rocks ahead. The draught became less the further we went so we had to review the situation. We could have turned right into more loose boulders but we would have lost our reassuring wall. This reduced our enthusiasm so we have removed the tools and looked elsewhere. That was disappointing because there is a lot of space on the survey where there is no known cave.

Agan Allwedd – Flood Passage - 2020

When John Stevens mentioned that there was open passage beyond a rock blockage, my interest was immediately aroused. John was busy around Christmas but my two sons and I found a day when we were all free. We made good time through the entrance series and down towards Second Choke. Water levels were fairly high but that is not a problem in this upper part of the stream passage.

We climbed into Flood Passage and after about 50m arrived at a possible climb up to a higher level. Was this the one John meant? It was not the 'First Aven' shown on his survey but it fitted his description. With some difficulty and Adam's help, we all squeezed up through a narrow rift into a sandy area about 7m above. We soon found the small hole where open passage could be seen beyond. The rocks were as described and would need to be removed – carefully!

So we came back on 21st December 2019 with the necessary drill, 'washing line and pegs'. We had decided to take out the left hand boulder because it would have less effect on the roof above. We used this opportunity for Grant to write up an account of the process so that he can apply for a 'bang' licence at a later date. From the stream passage below, from about 15m away we twisted the handle and judging by the noise, we should then have been able to walk in. But a cautious check showed that there was a lot of smoke and still more rocks to move. Time was running out so we decided to leave it to settle and come back at a later date.

Now February 2020, we have not yet been back. The truth is that great care is needed under a dodgy roof. Any further digging needs to take this into consideration. But the open space is still there!

A hole in the cliff face near Eglwys Faen [SO 19365 15674] - 2020

Tom Williams of CSS has pushed into this small cave for perhaps 15 metres but normal sized people cannot get this far in. So Grant, Jan and myself widened a U-bend and took a corner off further in. The passage continues but is very narrow and will almost certainly need further widening.

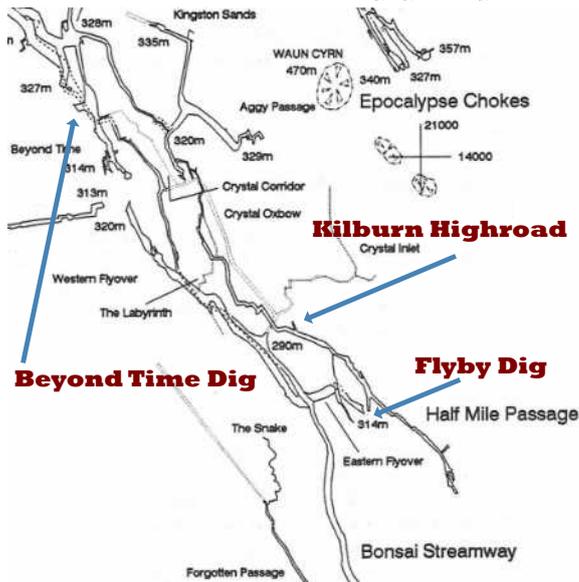
On the last visit I could not detect any draught when it could have been quite strong. So it may be blocked with mud but we know how to move that! The cave heads into the cliff face on the left hand side (east) of Eglwys Faen. It could connect with the known cave or it could bypass it and go somewhere new between Daren Cilau and Agan Allwedd, so it is worth continuing to dig if possible.

So as time goes on, it becomes progressively more difficult to find new cave. There is little chance of walking into one these days! However, the next dig is waiting, so watch this space

Daren Cilau

Digging from the comforts of Hard Rock Café

by Mandy Voysey



There have been a number of articles in the CSS Newsletter about the various dig sites being tackled by the Daren diggers based at the Hard Rock Café camp, but to summarise, most of our digging efforts in recent times have been focused on 3 sites in the vicinity of Half Mile Passage. These are the Beyond Time dig, Kilburn Highroad, and the Flyby dig, their close proximity means that more than one site can be dug at once if we have a large enough team while still being able to meet up for lunch and have a bit of a swap around. Beyond Time is still ongoing and easy digging through sandy fill, this is heading roughly towards the blank area above Painkiller Passage so could possibly intercept any cave passages hiding between the Time Machine and Agua Colarada. Kilburn Highroad continues to be an effort consuming almost solid-filled passage, though the air quality seems to have improved slightly. The positive aspect of this site is that it's heading in a very promising direction and has the potential to connect with any passages laying between Daren Cilau and Craig a

Ffynnon and the possible continuation of Locksmith's Passage beyond the Epocalypse Chokes, the down-side is that's currently looking very long-term. The Flyby dig is a boulder-filled off-shoot from Half Mile looking like a good contender to pick up the continuation of the Eastern Flyover beyond the boulder choke, though this now needs more than just some cable-puller winch action [see CSS NL Vol.61 Nos 1/2/3] to continue any further. The focus on the last camp shifted to 12 O'clock High and a potential dig site that was draughting well, and there are lots of other potential dig sites to be checked out too. The Daren camps happen roughly every 6-8 weeks (depending on the availability of the diggers) and new diggers are always welcome.

MENDIP

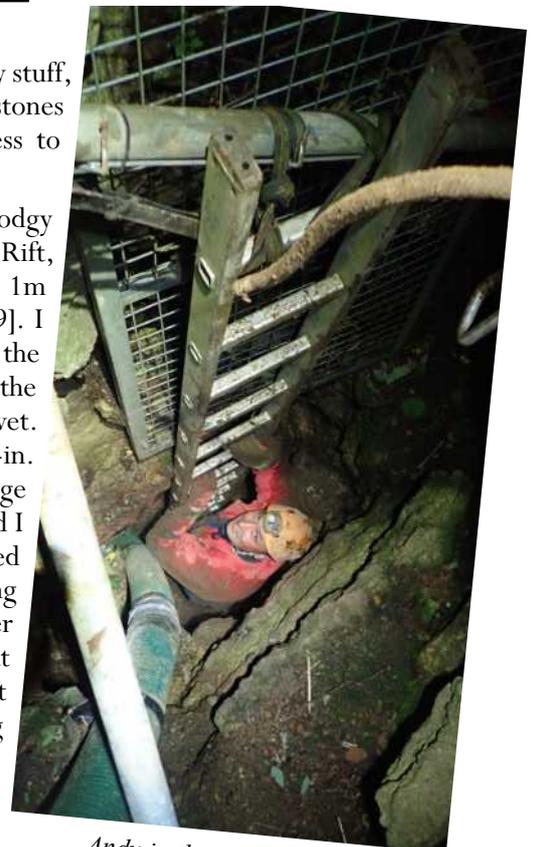
Carrion Update

by Andy Watson

I have been stuck, freaked out, tired, wet, bruised, squashed fingers, struck by stuff, etc. Bits have collapsed in between visits, dig sites have re-filled with sticks, stones and mud. Of course all digging exploits have ended in 'caverns measureless to man'!.. Now digging in Carrion Slocker in Tombstone Rift, that says it all.

2019: The Carrion Slocker dig saga continues. After a digging gap with dodgy knee until May 2019, I went back to the draughting dig at the end of Nazareth Rift, where in July we broke into Payday Chamber with standing room, 3m long, 1m wide and 2m high but no obvious way on? [See CSS NL vol. 61 nos. 7/8/9]. I continued digging in Bethlehem Pot and eventually opened up a visible hole in the eastward direction floor. I just remembered why I called it Bethlehem – due to the un-stable floor and walls! It needed scaffolding, and soon! October: Cool and wet. We scaffolded it a bit and needed mesh too to avoid a second big run-in. November: Very frosty, more stabilising, and Mandy pointed out that a large boulder 6 foot above my head was loose and moved easily, very considerate and I dealt with it. I built steps down the rift from the entrance, then Matt tipped sloppy spoil all over them – who would do that? The void opened up more during December trips, and after nervous drilling I squeezed into a small lower chamber about 2m high, 1.5m square with a descending rift... not knowing that there was a serious hole - Tombstone Rift / The Pit of Doom beneath what seemed to be a reasonably solid floor... The saga will continue in the CSS mag for 2020.

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



Andy in the entrance shaft
Photo by Matt Voysey

I have a regular involvement in three Mendip digs, typically Viaduct Sink on Fridays, Rock Farm Cave on Saturdays and Snake Pit Hole on Sundays.

Viaduct Sink

Viaduct Sink is situated just upstream of a viaduct on the old Somerset and Dorset Railway, where it crosses the Ham Woods valley. In dry weather the valley stream sinks in the stream bed close to the entrance shaft put in by ATLAS, and in wet weather the excess water flows on down valley for a considerable distance past the viaduct.

Viaduct Sink was first entered by ATLAS in the 1970s, when they were all young and fit and they pushed all the leads thoroughly. However, they gave up on the streamway at the bottom of the cave which became too tight and resisted attempts to enlarge it by use of plaster charges. Eventually they backfilled the streamway end whilst excavating The Somme, a nearby relict phreatic tube nearly filled with sediment and rubble. This in turn was abandoned when the logistics of digging became too much. Eventually the cave was closed about 15 years ago due to persistent vandalism of the gate.

Fast forward to the present day and the availability of cordless hammer drills, and Rich Witcombe realised that modern cave enlargement techniques made the streamway end a viable dig again. However, there was not a queue of ATLAS diggers keen to take up the challenge of this, so Rich head-hunted me and Mike (Kushy) Kousiounis, as we had acquired a reputation for digging in difficult conditions in Sludge Pit Hole. And in due course I joined ATLAS for this and other reasons I won't go into here.

In October 2018 ATLAS reopened the cave and installed a new gate engineered by Dave Speed. The stream end was soon un-backfilled by me, Dave King, Mike Kushy, Courtenay James, and Monica Bollani in a handful of sessions. However, once that point had been reached, only me and Dave King stayed committed to the project. Further progress depended on "chemical enlargement" and neither me nor Dave had the paperwork to do this. We received a few offers to assist with this, but when push came to shove nobody actually had the time to help. So, after a few frustrating months, me and Dave both set things in motion to acquire the said certificates and equipment, and in due course

Three Mendip Digs

by Geoff Newton

we were able to start chemical enlargement in November 2019.

However, whilst we were waiting for the paperwork, I did a little work with hammer and chisel and was able to penetrate 2 or 3 metres further in before things got silly. Lying flat out in the stream was not pleasant and I decided that it would be possible to dam the stream and pipe the water into The Somme, thus making digging the streamway easier and possibly also washing out the blockage in The Somme. At this point Dave King, the resident ATLAS engineer, designed an elegant concrete dam with tubes able to take semi flexible plastic pipes and in three visits we were able to construct the dam and pipe all the water in the streamway into The Somme.

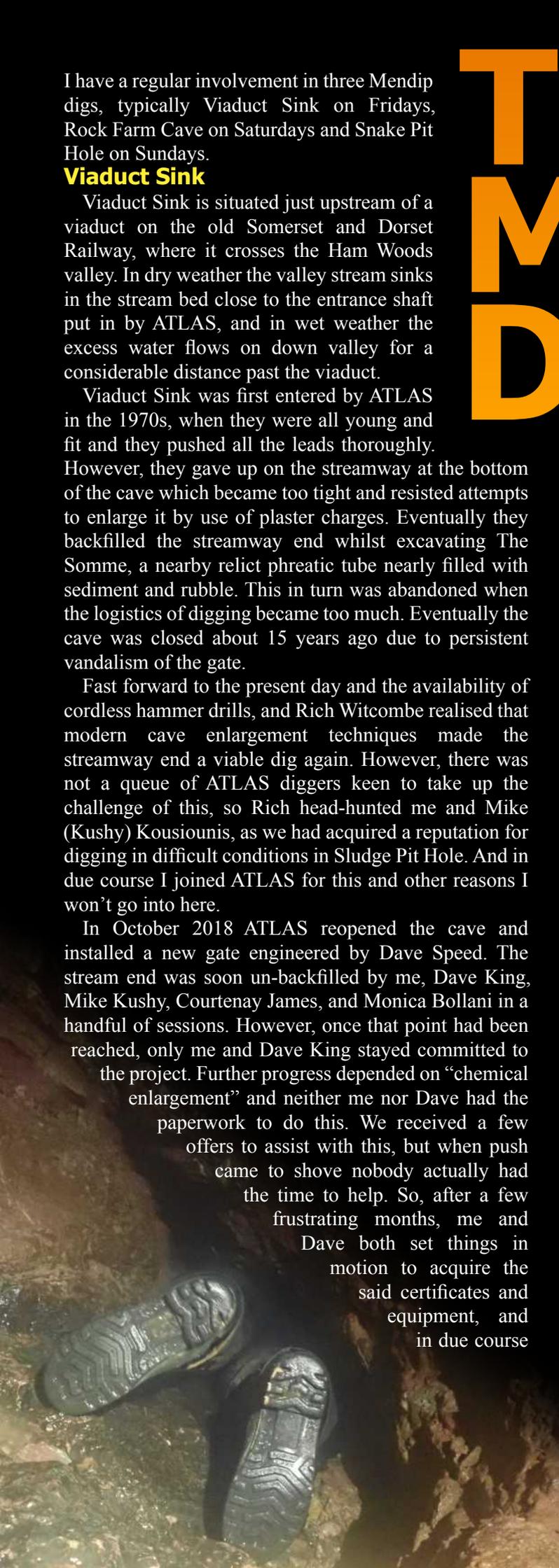
Chemical enlargement was mostly used on the roof. This has worked well, but the spoil has to be taken all the way out to Downside Aven, nearly half the way to the entrance, which is hard work and time consuming with only two of us, as one has to crawl nearly all the way and negotiate a few obstacles. The dig face is not entirely dry as in wet weather tiny inlets of water come in downstream of the dam. Rich Witcombe built a spoil retaining wall in Downside Aven and Simon Meade-King helped in a couple of clearing sessions. A group of five Wessex cavers also put in a mammoth clearing session on one occasion.

At the time of writing, we have extended the cave by about 8 metres of steeply descending passage which shows no signs of getting bigger. There is a slight draught.

Rock Farm Cave

This dig was already in progress when I joined ATLAS. The Windsor Hill stream is a large stream not far from Viaduct Sink which is big enough to have powered several watermills in bygone times. The stream used to sink close to Windsor Hill Farm, but hundreds of years ago it was diverted into a mill leat. The water was sent further down valley and the area of the old sink(s) was covered in farm buildings. These include old farm buildings, previously part of Windsor Hill Farm, being converted by Gavin Lyall into a house, 'Rock Farm'. There is a cliff face behind these buildings and in the

Photos by Dave King



process of improving access to the rear of the buildings he exposed a series of three or four open vertical fissures in the rock face. Rich Witcombe got to hear about this and reasoned that these might represent the original stream sinks and might give access to the original cave passages. To date all these fissures have been investigated by ATLAS and one of them, Rock Farm Cave, descends to a narrow streamway which is fed by other local drainage water, via a culvert under the lane. ATLAS have been enlarging this streamway over the past four years, hoping to intersect the original cave passage(s).

However, despite accumulating a number of small inlets, the streamway has become progressively smaller. Currently the water flows into an inclined bedding passage about six feet wide and two inches high, which is rather depressing. This can only be worked by removing some of the water from the stream by inserting submersible pumps into the above culvert. Currently it is necessary to use three pumps! Without the pumps, the dig can sump in wet weather. Clive North is the man in charge of chemical enlargement, and he has recently taken to wearing a wetsuit. After such a promising start the dig has now become more akin to mining. Other regular participants include Rich Witcombe, Dave King, Simon Meade-King, and in earlier times Rob Taviner and Emma and John Gisborne. However, most of ATLAS help out from time to time. Apologies to the countless people I have not mentioned. There is a Wednesday evening session as well as a Saturday session, but midweek evenings are not a viable option from Bournemouth. Spoil is taken to the surface.

The rock in the cliff face has many fractures, and the cave fissures found by Gavin seem to be part of a relict phreatic maze, invaded by streams at various points. The worry is that because the fractures are so numerous none of the streams stay in one fracture for long but instead they keep moving on from one crack to another, hence mature cave passages of a decent passable size may never form. Hence the single big open cave passage commensurate with the size of the Windsor Hill Stream that we are looking for may simply just not exist, or at least not until deep down close to the water table.

Snake Pit Hole

This cave is located in Snake Pit, a depression in rough open ground close to the road between the Hunters' Lodge and Miners' Arms crossroads. It's on Stock Hill Forestry Commission Land. On the opposite side of the road are Waldegrave Pond and three stream sinks, Waldegrave Swallet, Road Swallet (incorrectly also known as Wheel Pit?) and Five Buddles Sink. The middle one, Road Swallet is only a stone's throw from Snake Pit and is headed towards us. Snakes are common in the vicinity of the swallets. I have not seen them in Snake Pit but have seen slow worms there. Waldegrave



Swallet and Road Swallet are believed to drain to Rodney Stoke!

The rock is conglomerate, predominantly pale grey, or it would be were it not covered in brownish red mud. There is some mineralisation and metamorphism and geodes containing crystals can be seen. Recent discoveries in Stock Hill Mine Cave suggest there is plenty of cave to found under Stock Hill.

The cave was discovered by MNRC in the late 1960s when they dug a 6m shaft in the bottom of the depression. They found 20m of miserable muddy cave, modified by mining. They gave up and backfilled the shaft. In the mid-1990s the BEC dug an alternative entrance, connected it with the old cave and they then extended the cave by 10m or so before other projects called them away after 2 or 3 years. About 3 or 4m in from the entrance they saw a too tight, slightly calcited rift heading off towards the road, but they rejected digging here in favour of digging at the bottom of the 'old' cave.

In May 2018 I was looking for a dig to replace Sludge Pit Hole as the digs there had become silly, and I looked at Snake Pit. The BEC dig involved digging hard-packed clay out of a small tube whilst lying flat out in muddy water. There was little stacking space and it would need a very large team to get spoil out to the surface. I decided instead to give the rift near the entrance a go, reasoning that if I dug in the mud floor adjacent to the rift, the latter might bell out. Initially digging was easy and with the help of Wayne Starsmore and later Mike Kushy, we soon broke into a section of descending open 4m deep rift with nice phreatic scallops. This led away in the opposite direction to the road, to a tiny chamber with an inlet rift. That was the end of open passage.

The way on was directly under the rift heading back to towards the road. From now on all progress was made by removing mud and boulder fill from the passage out to the surface. Some boulders have needed capping or banging although the passage itself, though contorted and sporting, is not small enough to need enlargement.

Digging Update

by John Cooper

Dave Mitchell's Dig - ST 49284 54335

Ref: <http://www.mcra.org.uk/registry/sitedetails.php?id=128>

This is currently being dug by a Wessex Cave Club team involving regulars John Cooper, Nigel Graham, Pete Hann, Adrian Vanderplank, Jude Vanderplank and Barry Wilkinson on Saturdays. Other people occasionally come and lend a hand. Involves digging downwards through boulders, cementing chock stones in place as we go. Boulders are mainly broken up using a capping technique, occasionally resorting to something stronger. Spoil has to be hauled up to the surface in a staged manner. Unfortunately the only straight haul is the 12m entrance shaft, constructed from concrete cylinders. There are currently four staging posts for spoil en route to the surface. Although recorded on Mendip Cave Registry as 20m deep, the last time I measured it it was over 50m deep. I'm currently waiting for dry weather to run a proper survey down it!

Spider Hole - ST 4806 5424

Ref: <http://www.mcra.org.uk/registry/sitedetails.php?id=762>

Ref: <https://spiderholedig.blogspot.com/>

Currently being dug by a Wessex Cave Club team with too many to mention individually – see blog. The current end is about 100m deep and still going down. Spoil has to be hauled up the bottom two shafts and is being used to reduce the length of Nut Pitch; Hazel Pitch has already been replaced with a via ferrata. Four-Tonne Shaft was named after the amount of cement used to build it! The last digging down session produced enough spoil at the base of the bottom shaft to require 3 weeks of hauling up the bottom shaft and another 3 weeks hauling up Four-Tonne Shaft to clear it – a slow process! As in Dave Mitchell's Dig boulders are mainly broken up using a capping technique, occasionally resorting to something stronger. The main hauling sessions are on Monday evenings with consolidation work occasionally done on Thursday evenings.

To start with the mud was sticky and glue like, but the further in we went, the more liquid the mud became. It is now relatively easy to empty from the buckets and to wash off your kit, which is as well because after a session you are absolutely covered in red mud from head to foot. A variety of obstacles present themselves to the person clearing spoil, a leg trapping slot in the floor is followed by a flat-out squeeze. Round a bend leads to a chamber. Originally it was a rift, but large boulders kept falling out of the right-hand wall. Dismantling these and taking the pieces out has left us with a chamber large enough to be occupied by two people. The way on is a rift in the floor which refreshingly seems to have solid walls. We are still taking out mud and rocks. There is a certain fascination as the passage shapes are revealed as the fill is removed. The cave would be quite attractive if it were not coated in mud. Much of the time I have been digging on my own although many people have helped now and then, notably Courtenay James, Mitch Parry, Kim Lake, Chris Williams and particularly Mike Kushy.

The spoil heap is becoming more conspicuous, particularly in the winter when the screen of hawthorn bushes is less effective, but the site is surprisingly secluded given its location near a busy road in an area heavily used by walkers.

The dig is still ongoing, over 10m long, still heading towards the swallets on the opposite side of the road, still speculative (not draughting) and still muddy. It will soon become the deepest part of the cave. However, it is reaching the stage where it is becoming unproductive to dig on my own, as taking out spoil is excessively sporting and time consuming for one person. However, there are certain tasks like dismantling boulders that can still be done solo. You are all welcome to come and help out!



Above: Rich Witcombe at Rock Farm before excavation
Left: Geoff with some of the ATLAS team at the new entrance to Viaduct Sink
Previous page: Drilling in confined conditions at Viaduct Sink

Photo Competition Winners



*Joint winners in the CSS Photo Competition February 2020
Aberllefenni Slate Mine by Matt Voysey
Otter Hole by Jennie Lawrence*

