

**Volume 62  
Nos. 7-9  
July/Aug/Sep 2020**



**Pwll Estrys  
Bat Detecting  
Richard Laurence  
Sea Cave Adventures  
Wookey Breakthrough**

**CHELSEA SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY**



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*Above: Mandy Voysey x2 in Dan yr Ogof near Pot Sump by Matt Voysey*

ISSN 0045-6381

*Front cover: Looking down the big chamber in the newly discovered 'Land of Hope and Glory', Wookey Hole by Mark Burkey*



## Whitewalls Access

While lockdown restrictions remain in place we are permitting strictly limited use of use of Whitewalls in compliance with Welsh social distancing requirements. If you are planning a visit it is essential that you contact John Stevens ([hut.warden@chelseaspelaeo.org](mailto:hut.warden@chelseaspelaeo.org)) in advance to ensure that space will be available — and that goes for camping in the garden as well as staying in the cottage. Whitewalls is available for use by members only while these restrictions are in place. Details of the current access arrangements are available on the CSS website and will be updated as the situation changes.

**Editorial** Thank you to all our contributors for this issue. Though club meetings may have been slightly curtailed, caving and digging continue and this issue we have some exciting new discoveries, post-lockdown rejuvenatory trips, bats and how to find them, sea spume ahoy, a rescue situation and even a ghost (possibly).

Please submit all items for publication in this newsletter to [cssmattv@gmail.com](mailto:cssmattv@gmail.com)

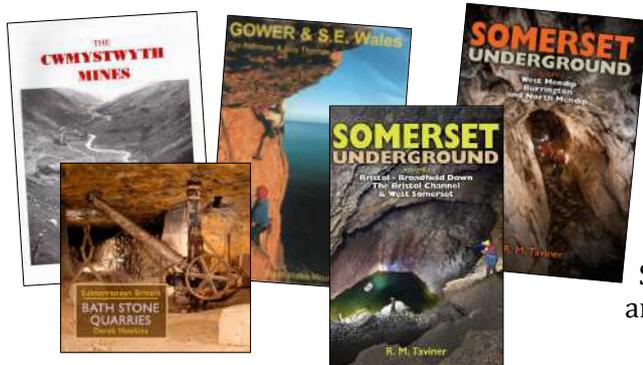
Remember that as well as trip reports we welcome items of news or general interest, gear and literature reviews, technical/scientific articles, historical accounts and reminiscences, fun stuff, entertaining stories, and anything else you can come up with. Send high resolution photos in JPG or TIF format. For very large files or collections of items upload them to Dropbox or Google Drive and send me a public shared link to the folder, or ZIP them up and send via MailBigFile.

A **FULL COLOUR** electronic version of this newsletter is available to download from the members area of the club website, 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.

*Editors: Matt and Mandy Voysey*

## New Library Books

CSS librarian Paul Tarrant has recently acquired the following books for the Whitewalls library...



Cwmystwyth Mines by Simon S. J. Hughes

Bath Stone Quarries by Derek Hawkins

Gower and S.E. Wales Climbing Guide by Gai Ashmore and Roy Thomas

Somerset Underground Vol. 1 - Bristol, Broadfield Down, The Bristol Channel and West Somerset by R. M. Taviner

Somerset Underground Vol. 2 - West Mendip, Burrington and North Mendip by R. M. Taviner

## Farewell Billy Watkins

*by John Stevens*

Billy Watkins, the local shepherd who ran most of the sheep on the hillside around Whitewalls, died early this summer. He has been an enduring fixture of the hillside, having been born in the same bed he died in. Once you took the time to chat with him, he was always friendly and had time to update you on activities on the hillside. He had a wealth of old knowledge and events.

He gave an initial impression of a make do and mend chap with an old crate and bit of drainpipe for his crutch, attached to his quad bike. He rode this side saddle in later years as he had broken his hip when it had overturned on him. His house, Tir Philip Farm, on the left just before the cattle grid on the steep way, was immaculate inside I am told. This is a Grade 2 listed building due to the unique oak work inside.

Unfortunately his family are not likely to take over running the sheep on the hillside and some of the stock has already been sold. The farm seems likely to go the same way. He owned quite a few fields around, some just below Whitewalls. In future years we may well have less grazing, so the mountain may change unless new owners or other farmers take on and run the livestock. The bracken has got a lot worse in recent years but what the reduction in grazing could produce may be interesting to see.

## 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 31<sup>st</sup> 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](http://www.chelseaspelaeo.org)

Subscription renewals become due 1<sup>st</sup> October yearly. Please send all payments to:

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

Email [csstreasurer@chelseaspelaeo.org](mailto:csstreasurer@chelseaspelaeo.org)

**REMINDER: SUBS ARE NOW DUE!**

# SHATTERED PASSAGE

by Mandy Voysey

Our triumphant return to Welsh caving

Agen Allwedd - 11/08/2020

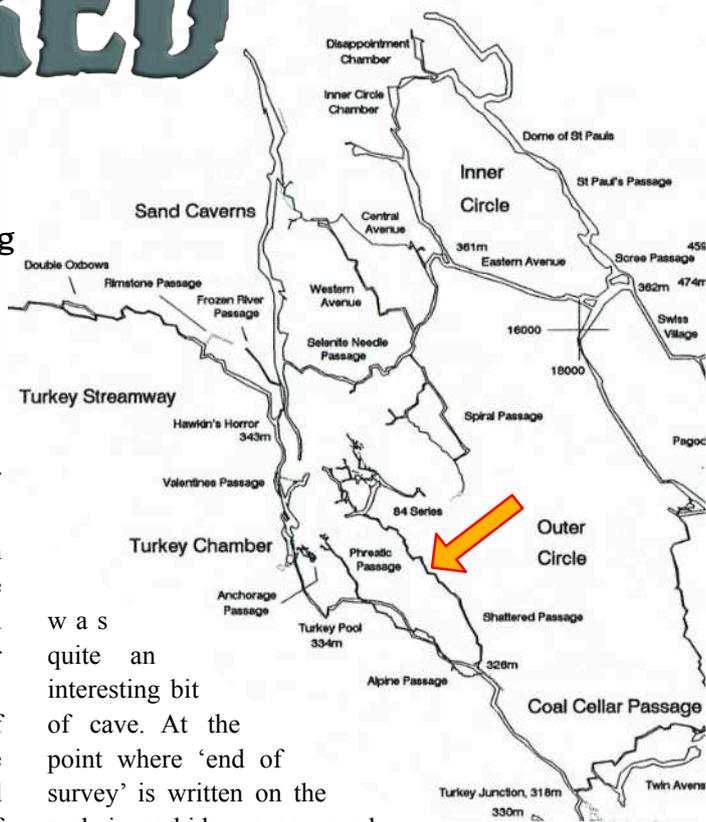
Matt and Mandy Voysey

My last caving trip before lockdown was a Daren camp on 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> March, and little did I know it would be over 4 months until I next ventured underground. After a couple of evening trips to St Cuthbert's and a stint assisting Vogon in his dig of certain doom at the end of July/early August, we started to think about the possibility of returning to the big caves of South Wales that we love and enjoy and once more soaking up the fantastic view from Whitewalls. So with restrictions eased and Whitewalls now open for members to stay (albeit in smaller numbers) we decided to bag a mid-week booking.

Our first trip was to Aggy and after contemplating burly stuff like the Grand Circle, we decided instead to go for one of the many niche side routes that we've never before explored and set our sights on Shattered Passage. This rarely visited bit of Aggy isn't anywhere that I'd really even thought of before and hadn't ever caught my attention on any previous jaunts in that direction, but I remembered John telling me of his recent survey trips there and as we enjoy doing the odd collector's piece we thought we'd give it an eyeball.

I was looking forward to bounding through the Aggy entrance series once more, but I must admit to being less fluid of motion than usual. Bigger... my time off caving had taken its toll. I also fuffed about a bit more at the ropes, the trouble was that after (seemingly) an age of not doing any wedging in smooth sided clefts it had become something I paused to think about rather than just doing. Still there was no difference to my performance in the slippery streamway as I'm never particularly graceful there, then it was simply a case of yomping up Turkey Streamway. If you're not familiar with the whereabouts of Shattered Passage, it's along Turkey Streamway and the first right-hand passage after the turn off into Coal Cellar. If you reach Turkey Pool you've gone too far.

The start of Shattered Passage certainly fits its name, as that's exactly what it looks like. Pretty soon a scruffy 3m descent is reached. Though short, it's a bit awkward due to the angle, but there's a fixed rope that's just about long enough which helps a lot. After this the passage seems to fluctuate throughout its length changing between shattered rocks that require a bit of care to lovely tall sculpted passage encrusted with gypsum crystals more akin to what you might see in the further reaches of Daren than in Aggy. There's a small streamway flowing along the bottom of the passage and we discovered that a general rule of thumb was that whenever there was a choice between a low streamway grovel or a higher traverse, heading high was always the safest option. This continued further than we expected and overall we thought it



was quite an interesting bit of cave. At the point where 'end of survey' is written on the rock in carbide we squeezed through boulders and followed the stream to a choice of routes, left had a lofty climb with two knotted ropes hanging down and right continued low, following the stream. The ropes had loops, but not big enough to put feet in, and the rift up looked to us possibly too wide for the climb to be comfortable and possibly also a little lacking in footholds, so it was perhaps lucky that due to a rather relaxed start we didn't really have the time to give it a go anyway. Instead we thought we'd just ask John what was up there when we got back and had a quick nose down the other way which soon became a low grovel ending in a diggable but unpleasant choke. On the way out I decided not to fuff about like an imbecile this time and we made it out in a much better pace than on the way in.

Back on the surface we chatted to John who told us that he hadn't actually surveyed as far as the rope climb yet, and though he'd been up the ropes to the '84 Series' many moons ago he couldn't remember much about it. Looking it up in the Llangattwg Journal it seems like there's a relatively extensive network of passages up there. It was first climbed by Martyn Farr in 1984 and I wonder if the ropes still hanging are the same vintage. Regardless we'd quite like to go back and have a look sometime – maybe with some cowstails just in case it's a pig. Interestingly it seems that the 84 Series could be roughly the same height as nearby Spiral Passage, so maybe there's a possibility of creating a sporty little round trip...

In conclusion I would say that if you haven't been to this part of Aggy before and you also like visiting the interesting oddments of the system that most people don't bother with, I recommend taking a look at Shattered Passage. It could also be combined with a foray into Spiral Passage and/or Central and Western Avenue too if you're feeling keen.

# Single Way Mine

## BATHAMPTON

by Joe Duxbury

9 August 2020. Joe Duxbury, Helen Pemberton, Dawn and Mike Read

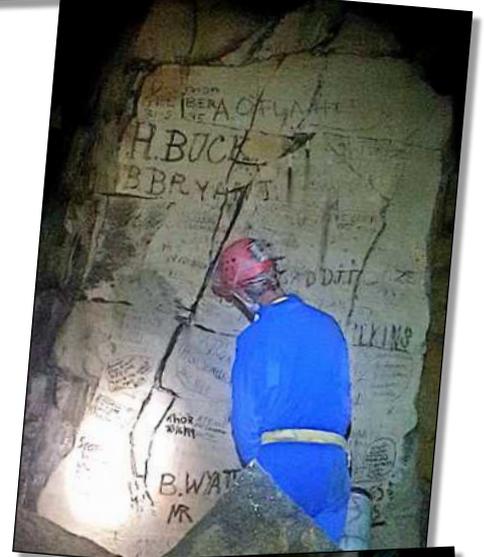
We all met up in the housing estate in Bathampton just off the A36, at the bottom of the hill up to the golf course. Out of consideration for the residents, we carried most of our gear up with us, rather than changing in front of their windows. We took a short footpath between the houses that connected to the old incline which used to serve the mines at the top. We followed the incline and took what seemed to be the appropriate left fork, and reached the 'flat-topped rock pillar' called The Devil's Table. The large entrance of Devil's Cave was comprehensively blocked with a cage of iron bars. The padlock on the gate had not been opened for a long time, judging by the rust. Helen poked herself into some low crawls, but there was no other way in. So we set off back down the hill and headed for Single Way Mine.

Armed with a map, a Google Earth picture, and the GPS co-ordinates, we set off across the golf course and got to a cutting, totally full of brambles and nettles and tree trunks. We did a circuit round the perimeter of the cutting, and eventually realised there was no alternative but to barge through the undergrowth, and Mike and Helen did this in fine style. Dawn and I joined them at the entrance, and in we went!

The Mendip Cave Registry says the mine is only 400m long, but the Shepton Mallet CC survey gives it as 792m long. It has only one branch, and ends in a small complex. There are cart tracks in the floor, but no crane or other artefacts. There are some deep rope gouges in one wall, showing where a crane was used to pull blocks round a corner. There is a small amount of historic graffiti, and plenty from the 1970s and 80s.

We got 'spoken to' on our way back across the golf course, but no great fuss was made. And I had collected a handful of golf balls from 'the rough'; these will be raffled later in the year.

We went back down the hill, and Helen found a pub with places in Monkton Combe, so we drove there and managed to get some drinks. But they were very casual with their food timings, and announced they had stopped serving at 3:30, despite the board saying food was available until 4. So they got given a poor review by Dawn. There was no enthusiasm to visit Swan Mine, so we made our separate ways home.



Right: The golf course; team lounging on the surface; miners' graffiti; rope marks

Left: Joe's balls; miner's shoes; the end of the mine

Photos by Helen Pemberton

# NEARLY STUNG TWICE



by *Andy Watson*

## 6X Cave and Tisbury Swallets 20th June 2020

On Saturday 20th June 2020 I thought I would revisit **6X Cave (NGR: ST 9399 2819)** near Tisbury, one of the more easterly caves mentioned on the MCRA website. I visited originally in August 2011. It is a small, short rift cave 12m long in a light limestone quarry quite high on a hillside overlooking the river and railway line south of Tisbury and discovered by quarrying along with some other voids. It is at the base of the shallow quarry rock face and has a low slight squeeze at the

entrance that can be enlarged by light digging with a stick and opens up into a narrow rift. Not much to it really, but interesting as it was surrounded by 5 foot high very stinging nettles that stung through the trousers I had on.

To get to it on the private land you can park on the road where it widens between Tisbury and Hazeldon hamlet, it's not a layby but just okay, look south, cross over and straddle the barbed wire fence carefully and walk south up to the treeline up the field (200m). This is very visible to any passing tractors and you may get told to 'go away' etc. This time I started by turning right at Hazeldon hamlet crossroads and drove about a mile to a public bridleway (with signs) that crosses the single track road with a passing space that you can park in at one end. Walk east on the obvious footpath, through the next horse/pedestrian gate on to the next field gate in front of you, which is where the footpath goes, but just before step carefully over the gapped barbed wire on your left and almost due north you will see the trees, which are surrounding the small quarry. I followed the hedge line up (ducked under an electric fence) crossed the field to get to the fence and trees by the back of the quarry, then walked down-dip west along the field edge until there is an obvious spot out of the trees where you can carefully step over the lower barbed wire to enter the quarry on your left by the old quarry entrance track. Follow this into the second area of the quarry and the cave entrance is slightly right of the elderberry bush at about 45 degrees to the right of head on, low in the cliff face. I had to dig some of the soft soil away from the entrance. Upon entering the cave there is a squeeze 4m in which causes one to faff in a cloth overall. Onward the rift enlarges, deepens slightly and leads to a second squeeze, after which it closes down at choked rifts. What was weird was that two bees followed me in buzzing about a bit angrily, then flew out. I turned around and wriggled out the entrance squeeze and they, the same two bees, were seriously buzzing round my head trying to get me, I picked up my bag and partially ran through the nettles out into the middle of the quarry and they followed me buzzing around. As I took off my cloth overall another bee flew out from behind my neck, I think it was probably their buddy, anyhow they left me alone then! I escaped without a second stinging session but my legs were stinging still when I went to bed. I realised I had left my glasses case by the cave entrance in my rush, but the angry bees had gone.

Going back the same way, I hit the electric fence with my back – that gave me a good shock that put me on the floor! You have been warned. Nice area for walking though, if only people would stick to the bridleway/footpath. You could almost do this cave with overalls and a good head torch but be careful of some of the loose rocks. Back to the car and drive off, right at Hazeldon crossroads towards Tisbury to find a couple of swallets the other side of Totterdale Farm (not particularly caver friendly in 2011) then turn right and right again up a dead-end road and you will find another footpath with a passing place layby looking down towards a very nice thatched cottage and I suspect a very nice house out of sight. Park tidily, not blocking the gate, cross the road and walk up the obvious footpath to the gate and bridleway at the top of the field. Turn right on the track and down on the left as you enter the woods (100m ish) through the trees you can almost see **Tisbury Swallet (NGR: ST 950 275)** with a pond to one side, you can clamber down to them (a dry and a wet swallet). If you continue down the track a few hundred metres to a cross junction and turn left, walk round the gate and along the track, as it drops away on your right you will see two more swallets (one dry, one wet) these are **Pillow Mounds Swallet (NGR: ST 9504 2775)**. That's it folks. I could not get to the Totterdale Farm swallets as they are very close to the farm with tractors operating, although I understand these are better as they are in the dry valley bottom and might have potential.

When I got home I had lost my Fujitsu camera and case. The next day Sue and I went back to find it, luckily I had dropped it in the layby and it was wet but unharmed under some vegetation. We had a lovely picnic at Wardour Castle, very pleasant by the lake.



6X Cave photos by *Andy Watson*

by Andy Watson

# Kirkdale Cave

## 3 Vogon Generations go caving



Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Whilst on a fixed caravan holiday near Filey, Yorkshire with my wife, my son and his wife and their two children I thought it would be fun to arrange an adventure for my son Steve (32, but 14 years since his last caving trip), his son Ethan (6) and myself Andy (60) to go to a cave. I had briefly looked at the location before, it was about 30 miles from the caravan, called Kirkdale Cave (NGR: SE 678857), in a quarry to the south of the North Yorkshire moors. This was mentioned briefly in Descent 275 and has a YouTube video: [www.tinyurl.com/Buckland-bones](http://www.tinyurl.com/Buckland-bones).

Two cars left Filey early with 6 occupants that included Sue (my wife), Rebekah (Steve's wife) and Anna-Faith (Steve's daughter, 4) - this was my call out crew! They went for a short walk whilst we had the short adventure. Kirkdale Cave is a cave occasionally used by adventure groups for part of the cave, and by over enthusiastic diggers further in! After getting changed and posing for the obligatory 'before trip' photo I put a rope on the entrance which is up a short quarry face - for 'adventure purposes' and for my safety as a key leader! We went left, up a diggers dead end complete with plastic digging skip and reversed out, then down through some muddy wet puddles to The Sphincter, which did not look very inviting for me or my novices. We turned around again and back through the muddy puddles towards the entrance then turned down the left hand passage through muddier sloppy puddles that you need to lie in. I soaked up a lot, especially as I had only brought cloth overalls. Then we did a loop through a couple of funny slippery slight squeezes and back out via the other passage that brought us out of the entrance, down the rope (remembering *most accidents happen outside the cave*, especially here) and out to the nearby call-out party and back to the almost dry limestone river bed to wash our hands. Looking at the state of us, it was a good job we had brought a change of clothes, although in true caver style I forgot any dry underwear and suffered rather muddy damp underwear for the rest of the day under my summer holiday shorts. A fun trip by all, but I am unlikely to visit this one again. Sue and I posed with our new CSS T shirts outside the cave after the trip. If you are desperate for a caving trip whilst in the North Yorkshire area, search for the cave on Google and the survey is online. We also visited Flamborough Head with its chalk sea caves and lighthouse.



### CSS T-Shirts

If you too would like to pose around cave entrances in a smart new CSS T-shirt but have yet to order one, you'll be pleased to know that there are still some available in the following colours and sizes - Black (Small, Medium, Large), Charcoal Grey (Large only), Navy Blue (Large only), Olive Green (Medium only) and Rose Pink (Small Only). The price for these fine items of clothing is £8.50 including delivery, to be paid by BACS to the CSS Treasurer. To order one contact Mel Reid either by email at [melrei@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:melrei@hotmail.co.uk) or via the CSS Message Board.

# Richard Travers Laurence

by Paul Tarrant

Richard Travers Laurence, better known as Dick, passed away peacefully aged 86 on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2020. Dick joined CSS back in 1971 and was a stalwart member of the Society for thirty years, serving on the committee and participating in many of the social events that the CSS Old Guard [mainly the CSS of the 70s and 80s] undertook. He always kept in touch with what was going on in the club, and last attended the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of Whitewalls held in 2016 and more latterly attended the CSS Western Section Dinner held at The Hunters' Lodge in Priddy in March.



*Dick to the LHS of the cake (CSS Newsletter vol. 58, nos. 7-9)*

Dick was instantly recognisable with his full beard and kindly, gentlemanly accent that would have not been out of place on a BBC reporter from the 1960s. Dick worked for many years for BP and was able to retire at the young age of 51, when he relocated to Draycott in Somerset to the charmingly named 'Grockle Cottage' which was just big enough to house his extensive library of caving and mountaineering books as well as the interesting collection of exotic souvenirs that Dick amassed during his extensive travels throughout Europe, the Americas [his sister lives in Vancouver Island], the East and Australia. It was also a great place to go for the annual celebration of Dick's birthday!

Dick was a keen mountaineer and long-time member of the BP Mountaineering Club which had a hut at Craig Cwm Silyn in Snowdonia. He continued to visit Snowdonia until recent times, being a long term friend of Paul Krebs who had a cottage in Capel Garmon. His love of mountains took him to many spectacular ranges in Canada and the European Alps, and further afield to the Himalayas where he participated in several long treks to Annapurna and Nepal along with Ian Penney, Mick Starr, Rick Box and the late Ian Carpenter.

Dick's caving was done in the era of wetsuits, Oldham cells and wire ladders, and he was a keen supporter of most of the CSS trips to Wales, the Dales, Mendip and Derbyshire. He also attended the CSS weekly meetings that were held in the Community Centre in King's Road,

Chelsea, and was exceptionally good at getting members of the public to part with their hard earned cash for all sorts of junk when jumble sales were held to make funds available for the purchase of essential ladders, ropes etc.

Dick made the essential transition from using electron ladders to SRT when he learned the club intended visiting the classic Gouffre Berger in 1979. His objective, the Hall of the Thirteen, was made in company with Beryl Starr [an ex CSS hut warden], with both greatly enjoying the experience, although Beryl remembered an interesting moment when she was weighting the rope for Dick to ascend it on one of the entrance pitches. When he got to the pitch head he somehow put load on the rope so that Beryl was lifted about 10 feet off the ground and there then followed an interesting animated dialogue between the two!

Dick was always keen to visit new cave and did trips to the then newly discovered caves of Otter Hole, Ogof Craig a'r Ffynnon and Northern Stream in Agen Allwedd. He almost came unstuck in Daren Cilau however, when he took part in the follow up trip after the first big breakthrough in September 1984. He explored to the end of Epocalypse Passage but then had a major problem getting back through the breakthrough choke at the top of Jigsaw Passage. Liam Kealy of Hereford CC gave him much needed assistance as well as modifying the boulders in the choke with a lump hammer. Dick managed to get his reminiscences of this 11 hour epic trip into the CSS Newsletter [Vol 26, No. 12] before the discoverers [Gardener, Farr and Tarrant] were able to do so!



*Dick in Hall of the Mountain King - Ogof Craig a'r Ffynnon*

Two years later, a strong party of 30 CSS members accompanied Dick into OFD2 to celebrate his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. This trip almost resulted in CSS losing their annual permit to OFD as we apparently went in on just one ticket. Thereafter CSS members wanting a key for a trip would be greeted by SWCC's Brian Jopling who would, with a smile, implore the SWCC Duty Officer to 'search the buggers for cake!'



*Above: Dick's 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration*

*Left: Dick's 70<sup>th</sup> Celebration*



presented with one of the new hats which cheered him up!

Doubtless Dick would have said something in the way only he could. He had a way with words, sometimes bad ones which could be delivered with considerable aplomb in his gentlemanly accent when they would carry considerably more gravitas! There was a trip to the Ardeche in 1982 when Dick joined in the obligatory canoeing trip down the river. His navigation skills were called into question when he approached a very large rock in the centre of the river, which some say was by a distracting nudist colony. There were only two choices available, to go left or right of the rock, but Dick decided upon a third course of steering straight for the middle of the rock which he hit at a bone juddering 6-7 knots, causing much amusement to the assembled throng of people there. A Frenchman was heard to say 'Quel panache!' and Dick's response was a whole lot fruitier!

Dick effectively stopped caving shortly after but he was still keen to know what was going on in the world of caving and within CSS. He contented himself in visiting show caves or walking in the karst regions of the places he visited, and he continued to support the CSS annual holidays to France until the last one in the Tarn Gorge in 2006. He continued to attend 'Old Guard' trips in the UK, with his last one being to the Manifold Valley last autumn.

A further episode of Dick's command of the English vernacular was ably demonstrated during a CSS trip to the Chartreuse in 2005. Dick went for a walk in the beautiful, mountainous 'Zone du Silence' which is where the monks gather plants for making Chartreuse Liqueur, sales of which keep the magnificent monastery there afloat. Dick must have taken a bit of a tumble as his

Dick used to have a much loved navy blue woollen hat with a red tassel on it. It seemed to be a permanent feature of his head until it mysteriously disappeared during a pub visit somewhere. Dick expressed considerable chagrin at the loss of this treasured item. Unbeknown to him, Ken McLeay had the hat in his safe keeping and got his mum to knit several identical copies for the people attending the next caving weekend, whereupon Dick returned from the WC during a pub visit to find several CSS members wearing his hat. His old hat was given to him but it had sadly shrunk in the wash! He was



*Looking out of the Trou du Glaz*



*Left: Dick in the Cevennes 2007*

*Above: Dick takes a tumble at Cadair Idris*

utterance of ‘Oh f\*\*\*ing Hell!’ pierced the beauty of the surroundings, and could be heard echoing from the mountain sides for several seconds, delivered in his deep powerful voice!

Dick’s health started to deteriorate and limit the things he could do during the last ten years of his life and he was disappointed that a heart operation did not allow him to do the level of walking that he had previously enjoyed, but he still had a go, limiting himself to more realistic goals. He took up photography and was keen to explore coast and countryside. He would always meet up with John Cooper and Barry Weaver for a beer in the Hunters after the latter’s Sunday morning trips, so he continued to keep in touch with CSS.

When Dick passed, he had made arrangement for a very private funeral which, coupled with the COVID-19 restrictions, allowed no one from CSS to attend. It is hoped that next year some of us will be able to get together at Whitewalls to celebrate the life of the really lovely man that Dick was. His passing is the end of an era.



*The photograph above was the last picture of Dick taken by Dave Ramsey when he got him out to the Queen Vic at Priddy earlier this spring.*

# Old Daren Sunday School

## Progress Report

With the relaxation of lockdown and the easing of travel restrictions meaning that Whitewalls and the ODSS could once again be accessed by members, work has resumed on the renovation of the Old Daren Sunday School. Despite the necessity for the taskforce to be kept to a small number and the added difficulty of social distancing a good deal has been achieved and work is progressing at an impressive rate. Here’s a pictorial summary of some of the tasks completed so far...



**New Window Shutters**



**New Front Door**



**Fireplace rebuilt to be flush with insulated walls**



**Walls and floor insulated, floor screed laid and internal wiring fitted**

# SEA CAVE ADVENTURES

## PART 1

by Mandy Voysey

*I always enjoy messing about by the sea and also furling about in any sea caves that I encounter while I'm there. Most of these tend to be of a pretty generic nature, usually a single smoothed and water-worn passage ending sooner than you'd hope and often with a jumble of buoys, fishing rope, polystyrene and plastic bottles, and though fun can still be had prodding sea creatures, looking for pirate booty and dealing with the hazards of sea water and weed, it can get a bit samey. However, some of these nautical niches are full of surprising interest and wonder, so I thought I'd write about some of the short-but-super seaside caves I've enjoyed over the years.*

## PIPER'S HOLE

**Scilly Isles, Cornwall - Grid ref SV 8864 1655, Length 82m**

Situated on the northern coast of Tresco on the sunny Isles of Scilly, this must be the most southerly cave of note in Britain. There are many interesting aspects to this cave, firstly it's made of granite which isn't exactly your standard cave bearing material, and it also has a very varied history from smuggler's haunt to Victorian tourist destination. Legend has it that the cave once ran under the seabed to connect with a sea cave in St Mary's, the men who entered were never seen again and any dogs that undertook the journey emerged at the other side minus their fur! However, at the time of our visit the cave showed no signs of continuing for such distance and we neither evaporated into thin air nor lost our body hair.



Though it probably isn't worth doing a special helicopter/sea voyage to the island just

to see this cave, if you happen to be holidaying in the Scillies it's well worth an excursion. We went to Tresco on a day trip while camping in St Mary's, it was my birthday and we enjoyed a couple of hours of sunshine and apple beverages at a local cider festival before journeying to the cave. The only fact I knew about this cave beforehand was that it has a lake to cross, but being an optimist (and too lazy to bother packing and carrying useful stuff like towels and swimwear) I thought we'd probably be okay to just paddle across in shorts. Unfortunately this was not the case...

The entrance is in a rocky cleft by the sea, we found it easily enough despite the fact that it's not really visible from coast path. Once inside, a short section of boulder hopping soon brought us to the lake, which was deeper than I'd hoped. Back in the day tourists used to cross this lake by punt, nowadays a sensible person might take an inflatable dinghy or the like, I decided to remove all clothing below the waist and attempt to wade across holding a bag with my clothes above water so I could re-don them at the other side. However this turned to shambles as the water got deeper, so I returned to shore for plan B... au naturel caving. So aptly 'birthday suited' and perhaps emboldened by cider, I once more braved the murky water in pursuit of speleological wonders and possible pirate booty. This was by no means pleasant - the water was very cold, there were dubious lumps floating about and the underwater planks I was treading on were very squidgy underfoot. Tip-toeing cautiously across trying not to fall into any deep bits, the water still got to about armpit height on me and it was definitely a bit nippy. However, it could have been worse. One unusual thing about this lake is that it's actually made of freshwater percolated from the surface rather than sea water, so at least it's not full of weed, brine, slime or slippery/sharp/bitey sea creatures. With the maiden voyage successfully

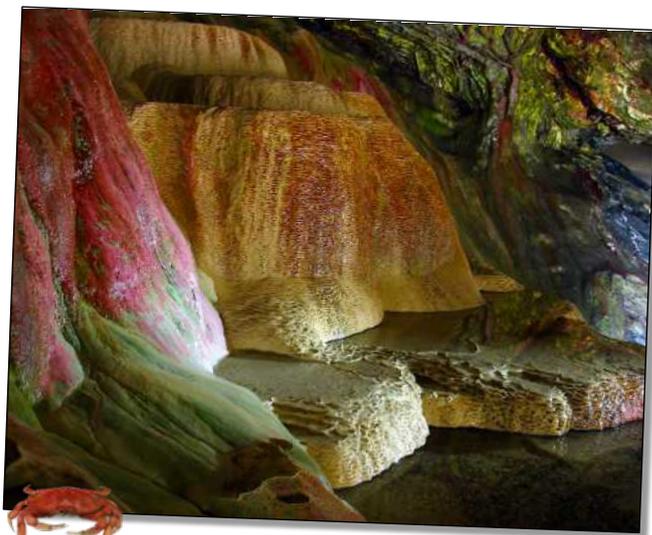


accomplished, it was now Matt's turn to take the plunge. He braved the depths admirably and emerged the other side a somewhat smaller man than he had been previously. Stumbling about barefooted on the gravel beach the other side we soon found ourselves in surprisingly tall and impressive passage. Nice easy caving for the nudey caver. This part of the cave has a seam of tin that was partially mined in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but there are no obvious signs of mining visible now, and sadly not a whiff of any pirate booty/smuggler's contraband either. Perhaps there are treasures untold beneath the water, but I didn't fancy diving it. So we returned to the sunny surface and lolled about on the hot boulders at the entrance like a pair of seals to dry ourselves, safe in the knowledge that we were hidden from view of anyone passing by. It's not really a busy tourist hub on that part of the island anyway. Fortunately we were mostly decent and just looking like shifty folk that had been up to shenanigans when the inevitable happened and we were sprung by a couple of walkers popping over to see the cave. A few minutes earlier would have been very embarrassing.

## HOLYWELL CAVE

**Cornish West Coast - Grid Ref: SW 7659 5942**

There are plenty of sea caves and multitudes of mines along the Cornish coastline, but Holywell Cave I think is particularly pleasant as it has gour pools of a size that I've never seen in a sea cave before. It's situated in Holywell Bay near Newquay and you'll need to time your visit with the tide as it floods completely when the tide is in. There are a few sea caves and nooks to explore here and from the beach this cave looks the same as any other, but it contains a natural wonder than has been the objective of many a pilgrimage of the past - a holy well once thought to heal the sick and infirm. There are many references to the healing powers of the water and cripples walking out without their crutches, but I didn't know anything about that when we went there so I didn't think to taste it. The well itself is at the back of the cave where a natural spring enters through a calcited hole and flows down a succession of impressive gour pools coloured with red, green and white. Though this is only a short cave and not really worth a special journey (unless you've got a broken leg and fancy giving the healing powers of the water a go), it's definitely a nice spot to visit if you happen to be in the area.



## ARIEL CAVE (BLACKNOR HOLE) - SANDY HOLE

**Portland, Dorset - Ariel Cave: Grid Ref - SY 67908 71665, Length 875m.**

**Sandy Hole: Grid Ref - SY 67979 71244, Length 1614m**

This fantastic cave on the Isle of Portland in Dorset may not be classed as a true sea-cave as it comprises fossil passages rather than being formed by sea erosion, but as it is situated by the sea and contains the fossils of ammonites which were sea dwelling creatures I'm going to call it a sea cave just so I can add it to my list. By far the best thing about Ariel Cave is the abseil into the entrance from the cliff path, which is fun in itself. Luckily there is an abseil station here (installed by Mike Read) otherwise it would be tricky to know where to launch from as the cave entrance is hidden from view at about 10m down the 30m sea cliff. It's likely that Ariel Cave and Sandy Hole were formed as one cave, but it was a breakthrough between the two in 1994 that made the through trip possible.

Matt and I did this trip on the CSS Dorset Meet in 2015 along with Mike Read, John Stevens and Lee Hawkswell, which is unfortunately too long ago for me to remember the route in any detail, but this is what I wrote about it in my caving log...



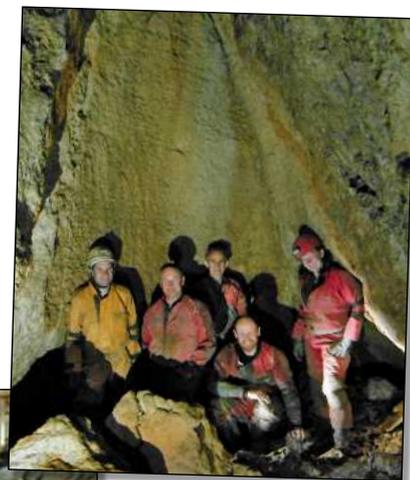
'THIS WAS A FAR SPORTIER TRIP THAN I HAD EXPECTED, SO WE WERE PLEASANTLY SURPRISED BY THE AMOUNT OF GYMNASTIC MANOEUVRES, BOLD STEPS AND CLIMBS, BUT BEST OF ALL WAS THE ABSEIL DOWN FROM THE CLIFF TOP, MADE ALL THE MORE ATMOSPHERIC BY IT BEING A PARTICULARLY WINDY CORNER THAT WE HAD TO DROP DOWN FROM. THE CAVE ENTRANCE IS A DISTANCE DOWN FROM THE TOP OF THE CLIFF AND IS A NICE BIG HOLE TO SWING INTO WITH THE WAVES CRASHING FAR BELOW. THE CAVE ITSELF IS PRETTY MUCH LINEAR AND MOSTLY IN THE FORM OF A TALL RIFT, BUT UNLIKE MOST SLIP RIFTS IT HAS SOME REALLY NICE CAVE FORMATIONS THROUGHOUT AND ALSO THE ADDED BONUS OF FOSSILS. I ENJOYED FINDING BITS OF AMMONITE JUTTING OUT OF THE ROCK. THERE WERE ALSO SOME SQUEEZY SECTIONS AND TRAVERSES THAT MADE THE TRIP QUITE VARIED. IT WAS ALSO FUN POPPING OUT OF THE CLIFF WALLS LOOKING LIKE MUD MONSTERS AND SURPRISING ALL THE CLIMBERS.'



Fortunately for anyone wanting to know the proper facts about the trip, you can find a good description of the caves in 'The Caves of Portland' available as a free download on the MCRA website, which also has a good survey of the cave drawn by Mike (see 'Articles and Books' and 'Cave Surveys' on [www.mcra.org.uk](http://www.mcra.org.uk)) and also on Tim Rose's 'Caves of Portland' website <https://sites.google.com/view/the-caves-of-portland>.

What I do remember however, is that this was a very enjoyable trip and the cave has a character very different to most others. There are also a number of optional side routes that can be taken, the most notorious of which is Ammonite Passage. This sounds fantastic as there are (apparently) some really good ammonites to view at the end; however the sting in the tail is the very, very long crawl to get there. When I asked how long it would take the answer involved hours not mere minutes. John and Mike had done it before but were in no hurry to repeat the experience.

The exit out of Sandy Hole is also via a hole in the cliff, and though not at such a lofty height as the Ariel entrance, it still requires either a ladder or rope to descend. We were fortunate on our trip to have Derek (Mike's neighbour and all round nice guy) who pulled up our abseil rope before walking over to Sandy and lobbing a ladder into the entrance ready for our exit.



*Ariel Cave/Sandy Hole photos by John Stevens*

*Previous page: Lee at the Ariel entrance*

*Above: The team assembled*

*Left: Matt in a decorated crawl*



## MORE COASTAL CAVING TO COME IN SEA CAVE ADVENTURES PART 2



# PWLL ESTRYS

### A DISTRACTION FROM WORKING ON THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

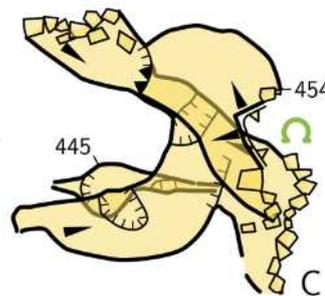
I arrived at Whitewalls on Tuesday to be met by Helen who was busy cleaning (whoops, sorry wasn't meant to mention that in case Trevor found out). I am not sure if it was the cleaning or my arrival but Helen had had enough and eventually headed back home (I think really that food rations were getting very low). After a quick lunch and coffee I wandered down to the Sunday School to try and remember what we were doing and see how Gary had got on with the wiring. He sure had been there, with wires spouting in all sorts of places all leading back to the consumer unit. Adrian had also been busy building a low wall to where one day the outside shed will be rebuilt. Robert Price had made a delivery to John the day before but unfortunately had failed to load the battens so it seemed a good opportunity to tidy the place up and make space for battening the walls. Having made some space I decided that it would be good to try and install the kitchen extractor fan ducting. A start on the hole had been previously made but it soon became clear that it needed to be lower. I estimated where I thought it should be and started to drill a series of holes with a 6mm drill to try and form a circular hole without breaking the remainder off a large stone. Having carefully honed the rock I found that

Plan and Section looking North  
BCRA grade 5d

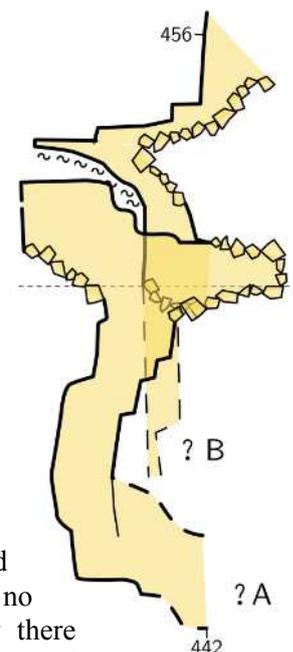
Length: 19 m

Depth: 14 m

Surveyed by: John Stevens 2013



by Mike Read



I was still too high and had to drill more holes. This was all too much for my poor drill bit and on investigating why it was not playing any more I found that it had a square end and no carbide tip. Anyway, by now there was little left of the rock I was trying to shape so I simply removed the remainder with a chisel. John meanwhile was installing the ducting for the shower. This involved cutting out one of the ceiling joists and putting a noggin in. Sounds easy but like everything is always far more involved than you imagine and required several coffee breaks.

With no battens in sight I decided to start on the stonework for the fireplace. This involved much cutting of Portland Stone blocks. The forecast was meant to be overcast but this translates to light drizzle when you are at Whitewalls. This meant that the dust turned to a nice

sticky mess on me. Even the sheep weren't impressed with the weather and upon returning from one of the numerous hikes up to Whitewalls or John's for materials etc I found that one was inspecting the potential shelter. Just to add insult it left its calling card when being chased out.

The workforce was boosted by Adrian on the Wednesday who got stuck into the battens that had been delivered last thing Tuesday. Another 6mm drill bit passed away during active service. A full days' work was undertaken leaving little time for beer drinking. Adrian offered to return after work the next day.

During beer drinking we had a severe case of 'cave withdrawal' and so John and I hatched a plan to get underground for a few hours and be back hard at work by the time Adrian appeared.

With limited time John suggested having another look at Pwll Estrys. I have recently been experimenting with plug and feathers so this seemed a good place to play.

The cave was found on 1/6/86 by Dave Ramsay when investigating a choked hole on the opposite side of the gully to the current entrance. Dave recalled the discovery of Ogor Llungwyn was by digging on the opposite side of a swallow hole to a known cave, so he decided to try the same here. Despite the reluctance of the other party members he started pulling out clumps of heather, scrub and rocks and then heard a cobble drop into a large void. Obviously more frantic digging was undertaken and the entrance chamber was found. Further digs followed and the journal reports some options as being too tight and suggested the floor could be removed at the bottom of the loose shaft but this came with a health warning. The Llangattock Journal concludes with...

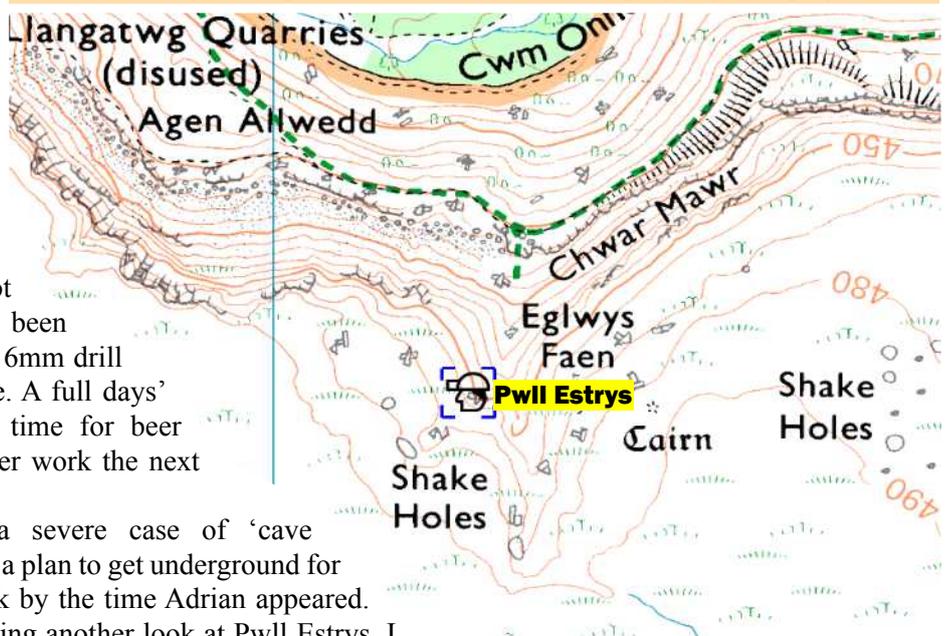
**'Pwll Estrys shows precisely where the grit / limestone boundary is and will allow other sites nearby to be dug knowing how far below the limestone is. It is another example of the shaft type pots which develop in the upper limestones and is the first to be found in the Eglwys Gully. There is almost certainly a Pwll Y Gwynt type complex beneath the gully and if this was discovered along with the Llangattwg Swallet water the significance could be phenomenal.'**

Interest in the cave was rekindled when back in the 2012 annual bat count two Daubenton's bats were identified by Peter Smith at the start of Trident Passage. They are normally only observed in cracks in the entrance series and only rarely beyond Stream Passage Junction. This led to various surface excursions and eventually John saw 15 bats emerging from the cave (full report in CSS Newsletter Vol. 55 Nos. 7-8 page 56).

In 2013 Matt and Mandy, supported by Mark Lumley and his drill, managed to remove a large boulder and flake to reveal a parallel shaft. Their report commented 'Exiting through the breakthrough was an alarming affair!' With the unstable nature of the cave, both at the entrance and in the exposed rift, the team decided that the best way forward was to remove all the loose material from the entrance down in order to gain safe access to the dig itself. A quick recce proved the cave was ongoing but required stabilising. Subsequently two boulders fell and blocked the way down.

Quickly moving on to July 2020 lockdown and desires for a quick trip underground, John and I wandered up the gully and found the cave with little difficulty (large spoil plateau outside and a crate gate). Entering the cave there was an old rope in place which greatly assists the clamber down the parallel shaft. Keen to develop plug and feather skills I set about enlarging the shaft and removing parts of a large flake. For those not familiar with the technique it involves drilling 14mm diameter holes around 70mm deep. It is a very old technique but cheap plugs online and improvements in battery drills have opened this technique to cavers.

The cave is located high above the tramroad in the gully beyond Eglwys Faen





*Plugs with the feather pushed fully in*

The plug and feathers comprise three pieces of metal held together with an O-ring. Initially the two plugs are placed in the hole up to the collar with the 'feather' just in. Then you simply tap the feather in. To be effective you drill a series of holes along the line you wish to split the rock at around 100mm centre and place plugs and feathers in all the holes. You then simply tap each one in turn. You don't have to hit them particularly hard – we forgot a hammer and used a small rock.

There are more detailed accounts on the ukcaving forum. Taking your time allows the crack to creep which makes an interesting sound. It's all very dull compared to capping but it does the job without rock flying everywhere. You have to be careful not to lose the plug and feathers down holes but they can normally be removed once the rock has cracked. I even managed to split the rocks blocking the hole down, recover the plugs and prevent most of the rocks falling down the hole. Getting the rocks up the shaft required quite a lot of effort and grunting. Whilst the cave was pretty dry there was just one drip located immediately above the rocks I was trying to split. With the rocks removed the way on was open but there was too much loose material for me to contemplate descending until some shoring has been installed. John and I measured up for scaffolding and quickly returned to Whitewalls before Adrian was due.

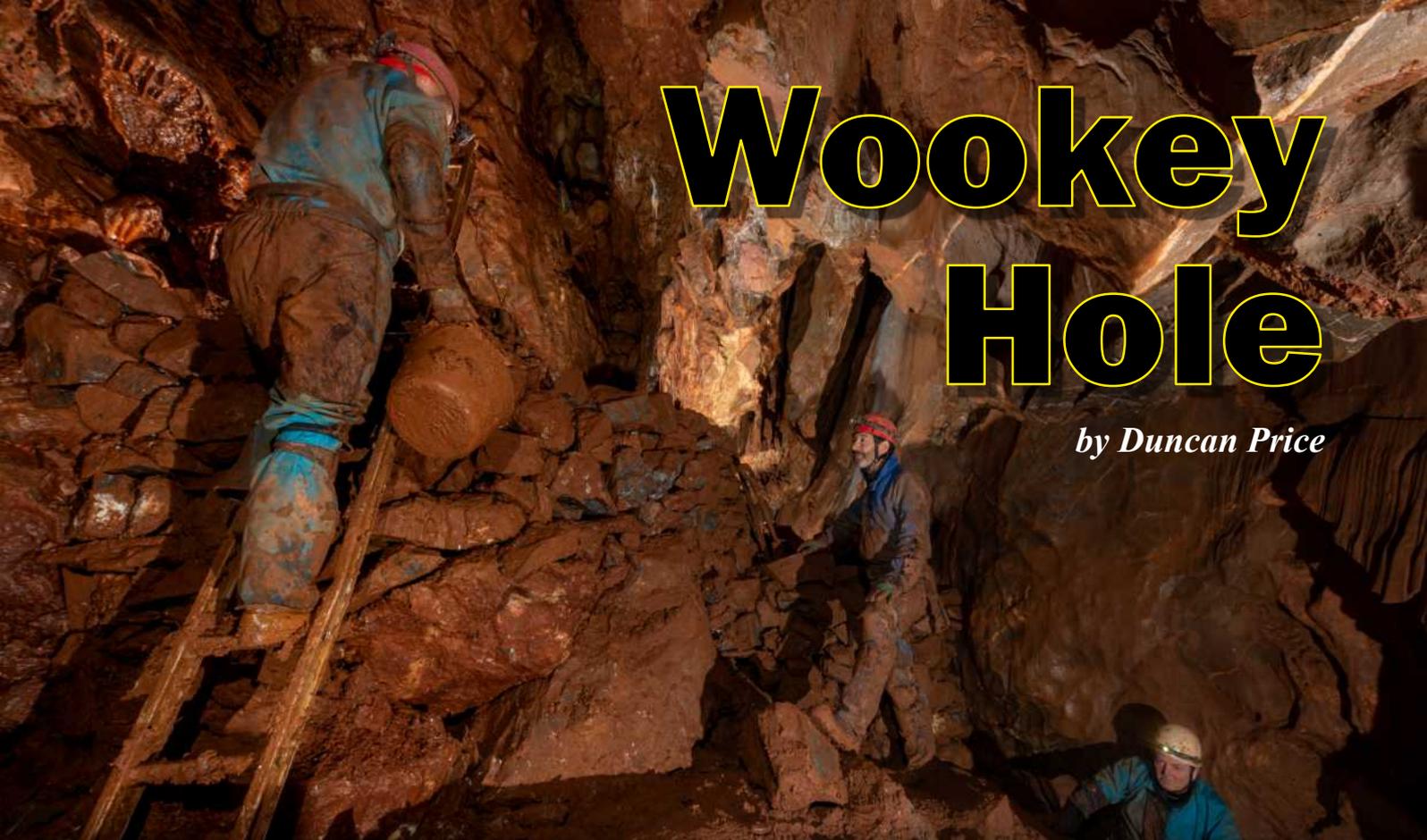
As a quick distraction from working on the Sunday school John, Andy and myself revisited the cave during the August working stint. During the previous session we concluded that it would be easier if there was a fixed ladder on the shaft and it so happened that I found one in a skip whilst out running. Having checked with the owner I returned and collected the ladder and brought it to Whitewalls. Helen requisitioned one section for painting the ceilings at Whitewalls but this still left one section available. Andy and I did get some odd looks carrying a ladder along the tramroad and had to explain that it was being used to ensure we kept our regulatory 2m apart. Navigating up the slopes through bracken carrying a ladder is not easy and resulted in a few encounters with trees and boulder heaps. However, the ladder was useful when we encountered a small outcrop. Having reached the cave it was decided that we might as well start removing debris from the start and we enlarged the entrance to facilitate what could be a significant amount of debris, still unsure how much to remove and how much to shore around the shaft. Andy soon got into the swing of plugging and the entrance slope was re-profiled to facilitate easy removal of material. During this John noticed that the maillon at the start of the rope pitch had

rusty right though and now was only a 'c' link. Fortunately the maillons inside the cave aren't as bad. Anyway our playtime soon came to an end and we returned to the Sunday School tasks. It was far easier to walk down without the ladder and we managed to avoid the small outcrop.

Next time we need to carry some scaffold poles up and look at fixing the ladder which is currently wedged in, it's likely to be interesting getting the ladder in place as it seems to get longer when you encounter the underground environment. The cave is easily reached and would be ideal for a short Sunday trip, the climb up doesn't take that long really and there's great views for surface team. I recommend you sign up when you hear of a trip going, it certainly makes a change.



*Top: Battling through the jungle of bracken  
Above: Putting the ladder to good use along the way  
photos by John Stevens*



# Wookey Hole

*by Duncan Price*

## LAND OF HOPE & GLORY

The extension of the show cave in 2015 to reach Chamber 20 afforded an ideal opportunity for “dry” cave diggers to ply their trade in the far reaches of a part of Wookey Hole Caves formerly only accessible to cave divers. I reported the driving of a tunnel from Chamber 9 to Chamber 20 in CSS N/L Vol. 57 No. 7 and it wasn't long before a team largely comprising a close-knit group of cavers who had spent many years excavating Hallowe'en Rift took an interest. Their first point of attack was a side passage near the end of the newly opened section that appeared to be a promising lead heading for the magnificent river cave of Chamber 24. This site had previously been looked at by Keith Savory, Tom Chapman and others who had to cave dive to get there but the logistics of pursuing a protracted campaign were beyond them. Not so the likes of Vince Simmonds, Graham “Jake” Johnson, Nick Hawkes and Robin “Tav” Taviner who had beavered away at Hallowe'en Rift and already had close contacts with the show cave management since their dig is on land above (and owned by) Wookey Hole. Having been involved closely with the tunnelling project, I didn't want to get left out and soon joined the group on Tuesday or Thursday digging sessions which traditionally concluded with a visit to the Hunters' Lodge Inn for refreshment. The Wookey diggers also included several cavers associated with the Home Close Hole/Wigmore Swallet connection (Paul Brock and Sam Batstone) and becoming involved with the team meant that I ended up helping out there as well as at Hallowe'en Rift.

Having a cave diver on your digging team is probably a bad omen for any project as we quickly discovered 70m of tortuous rifts and tight bedding passages that ended at a pool of water. This turned out to be a window into a flooded passage which forms the main underwater river passage from Chamber 24 to Chamber 22. Max Fisher and I have dived this intermittently since its discovery. The sump downstream of the point of entry is too tight to get very far but heading upstream a low inclined bedding surfaces in a small chamber with little dry land. Ahead and underwater, the bedding closes down, but back in the chamber, a strong current of water emerges from a shaft behind a rib of rock. We have followed this for 15-20m down a series of underwater drops in a very tight rift battling against the current. Having turned back on itself the passage is heading straight for Sting Corner Sump in Wookey 24. I've dived this down a similarly unpleasant passage to a depth of around 13m before it became too snug. I doubt that we'll be able to get through but Max is keen to have another go from the downstream end where at least the force of the water means that you have a chance of being spat back out again. On my first dive in “Wookey 23¼” (as the section has become known) I found a short length of dive line from the final sump that had been cut up by Mike Barnes during his dives there in 2003 so we know that it is the water route from the end. Meanwhile we have spent some time digging above both ends of this sump from both the 20 and 24 sides in order to achieve a bypass...

As an alternative to the torture of “23¼”, attention

turned to the sand and mud choked end of the main Wookey 20 passage. Again, this showed signs of cursory probes by cave divers and UBSS also scratched at the site in the early days of wider access to non-divers. We initially attacked the end of the main route but encountered large buried rocks so backfilled the site once we had switched attention to a side rift on the left. Soon we had a massive excavation over 2m deep and 2m square!

Flooding became a problem during the winter months and after periods of heavy rain as a trickle of water fed by drips from the roof of the passage further back entered the dig. We started doing midweek trips to Hallowe'en Rift (in addition to digging there on Saturday mornings) and in 2018 we were rewarded by the discovery of "An Unexpected Development" - a well decorated section of cave passage containing frost-shattered calcite walls and an 8 m deep shaft which is blocked with rubble. Over the years, we have been joined by many people on tourist trips to Wookey 20 and they have often helped (or hindered) our efforts. Given the ethos of keeping the dig roomy, we used full-size spades and pickaxes to fill buckets which were chained up and placed in a drag tray for emptying on the impressive spoil heap. Ideally, a team of five was required for the whole effort - one digging, two to load the skip, one to haul it back and another to remove the bucket and dispose of the spoil. More than this made work easier as spare hands could be employed to scrape out the buckets and assist in other tasks. At one point a short length of rigid ladder was taken in as the hole had become so deep that we needed it to climb up the other side. Only once did we have to resort to using high explosives to break up

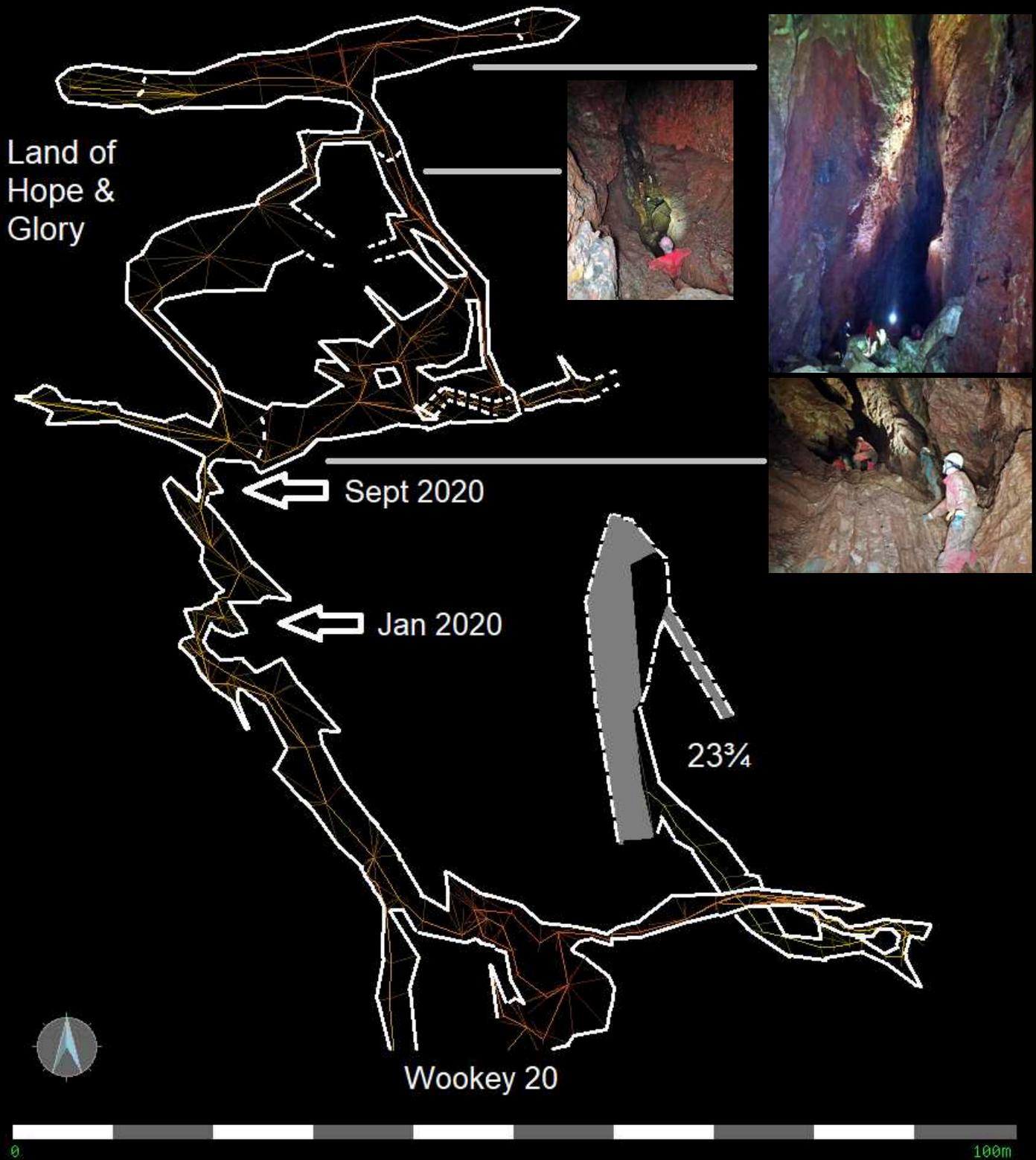
a large teetering rock. Finally, after digging forward for 15m, in January 2020 there was a view up into something interesting...

I missed out on the breakthrough as I was at a company "love-in" in Sussex, but on 30<sup>th</sup> January the regulars were rewarded with a chamber 15m long and 5m square. This was entered part-way along one wall with the back end of the chamber being very close to the point at we had abandoned digging at the start. At the other end of the chamber the walls closed in on a rift and the obvious place to dig was down in the floor. After 3m we hit solid rock. Not only was there an impressive spoil heap in the final chamber but we had walled-up and backfilled some of the previously excavated route to get there. We were forced to stop digging a while by some public health crisis, but once restrictions were lifted were soon back to the fray. Since the Hunters' was shut, we took to bringing our own drinks up to the show cave exit and cooling the bottles in the canal there ready for consumption when we surfaced.

A few probes were made elsewhere in the chamber resulting in the construction of a "sump" in one dig which subsequently filled with water. Next to the deep pit at the end there was a gap under the wall with a promising flow of cold air. This led to a small cross rift to a pile of boulders which were slowly reduced using a set of plugs and feathers. Since not everyone was needed to work this, attention returned to blowing up parts of "23 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". This only required two or three to drill and set the charges and then a bigger party to clear the results. By rotation, on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> September we were supposed to be clearing the dig in "23 $\frac{3}{4}$ " but there seemed to be more enthusiasm to go to the other dig instead.



# Survey of new discoveries so far



*Photo credits*

*Previous pages: Duncan, Vince & Tav in the chamber found in January 2020 by Mark Burkey*

*Duncan with rock crystals in the big chamber by Mark Burkey*

*Opposite: Conical mud formations by Vince Simmonds*

*Above: Tav & Duncan at the end of the lofty rift. The big chamber at the end. Duncan, Jake, Nick & Jon on the climb out of the first chamber, by Vince Simmonds*

Unusually for a Tuesday evening, Jon Riley had turned up - he normally dug at Cutler's Green Sinkholes - so something must be afoot. Vince went up to prise out some big rocks leaving the rest of us to place them on the spoil heap. Progress was slow, and we spent a lot of time just chatting. We normally started heading out at 9pm and by quarter-to there were the beginnings of mutiny while a particularly troublesome boulder was eased out from the sharp end. Vince squeezed through the space created and turned around to garden the route for Tav to follow. He hadn't bothered to look at where he was. Tav, on the other hand, was pleased to enter a chamber bigger than the one reached in January. At the lower end of the chamber there was a loose descending scree slope, but at the other end a passage could be seen heading off at the top of an easy climb.

The rest of us assembled in the chamber - not without some difficulty as the connection squeeze was rather awkward. Jake and I looked at the descending passage but a shout from the top of the 5m climb told us that there were more promising leads there. A walking-height, elliptical passage headed off to end at a narrow cross-rift. To the left were a series of hands-and-knees crawls forming oxbows to the main route which joined up further along the rift which brought us to an enlargement and climb down to the start of a pile of boulders. Vince paused to take a photo of the rocks - the passage is developed in dolomitic conglomerate with attractive gradings of limestone clasts within the finer matrix. Excited voices ahead informed us that something significant had been found as we clambered up the boulders into an enormous chamber over 20m high and 5m wide with both ends out of sight. The walls were coated with flowstone tinged red with iron oxides and there were blocks of haematite and limonite on the floor with large rock crystals on the walls. Totally amazing!

We had a scout around the chamber. Upslope it could be seen to end at a wall with a pile of tea-green mud that had fallen from the roof. Here there were more crystals forming a geode and a fine display of dogtooth spar. Descending from our point of entry, the slope became more unstable before bottoming out at an area of unusual conical mud formations and mud draperies which are perhaps best avoided in order to protect them. Right in the middle of the chamber a hole in the roof could be made out - the way on perhaps? Or maybe there was something buried in the floor? There was air movement, but it was difficult to discern where it was coming from.

Heading back out from the chamber we took a different route - a duck under a side passage from the bottom of the boulder pile gained a short section of parallel rift into an attractive wide bedding crawl. Nick sped off ahead sliding down a narrow rift into a large passage which turned out to be same chamber that we had squeezed into earlier. A brief foray was made down the loose and muddy slope to the bottom of this to where there was a drop that might need a rope to assist (it

turned out to be blind) before we started out - a bit later than usual and a lot more excited.

The next day Vince emailed the show cave management to share the news and some of the photos taken on the previous night's breakthrough trip. Tav and I were keen to start on the survey, so met up early on the evening of Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> September to get in ahead of the others which included Mike Moxon and Roz Simmonds - two other regular diggers. By the time we had company, Tav and I were already in the big chamber at the end and we managed to survey 210m comprising the two chambers and both connecting routes between them. Another early start on the following Tuesday picked up the oxbows between them and also a promising, but unpleasant, lead down a rift in the floor of the elliptical passage which seems to be heading towards Chamber 24. This brought the length of the new discoveries to over 277m.

Finding a name for the extension proved a problem - "Hall of the Six" was initially suggested for the big chamber at the end. As we'd found it on September 15<sup>th</sup>, a theme based upon British World War II fighter aircraft seemed appropriate, but we eventually settled on "Land of Hope and Glory" for the whole section - not only because of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the "Battle of Britain" but also because it took place just after "The Last Night of the Proms." Other, more politically incorrect, names have been redacted in order to protect the sensitivities of readers.

Mindful of the need to document the discovery while it was still unspoilt, a photographic trip was hastily arranged for Mark Burkey assisted by his wife, Jess, on September 27<sup>th</sup>. Chris Binding from the "Wild Wookey" adventure caving experience (and also show cave manager) was also invited along. During the trip we took the opportunity to build some paths through the big chamber to preserve its unique mineralogical features for future visitors. Given the current situation we are having to manage visits carefully to achieve a balance of accessibility whilst allowing exploration to continue. Who knows what lies beyond?



# Online Newsletter Archive

Have you ever had to spend ages poring through old CSS newsletters trying to find a particular article? Perhaps something about a caving trip that you're thinking of doing yourself, a survey that might be useful or maybe research into a new dig site. Well, help is at hand...

I'm sure many of you know that the CSS Newsletters are also available to view on the club website ([www.chelseaspelaeo.org/newsletters.htm](http://www.chelseaspelaeo.org/newsletters.htm)) as full colour PDF files. However it was not previously possible to discover what was in each issue without downloading and browsing through. Not so anymore! The web pages are being expanded to include the cover page picture for each newsletter issue plus a list of contents together with a brief summary of each article. Not only does this make it easier for site for visitors to look up articles, importantly it also makes them far more accessible for search engines like Google to index so that they appear in web search results. So far we've covered all issues back to 2009, with the eventual goal of making every volume easily searchable with the content easy to see.

These new website pages capitalise on a more complete and thorough piece of work being undertaken by Mandy Voysey to compile a full bibliography database of articles written for the CSS Newsletter, with the intention of making this fully searchable by cave name, author, content, category or region. It may take a while to complete the full task, but there's a huge amount of really useful information contained within the 62 volumes of CSS Newsletters, so it's well worth making all that knowledge more easily accessible for all.

*Matt Voysey, CSS Webmaster*



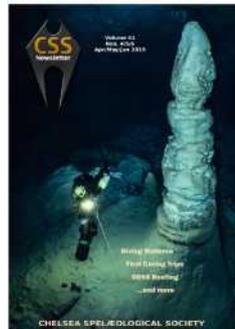
## CSS Newsletters 2019 - Volume 61

### Nos. 1-3, January-March 2019



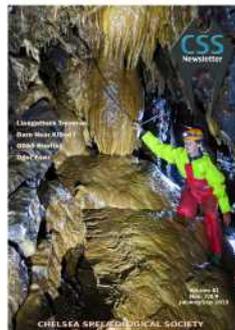
**Adventures in Frongoch Mine** - A trip to Frongoch Mine, and old lead and zinc mine in Ceredigion with mining artefacts, formations and flooded slopes.  
**A Schoolboy's Introduction to Squalor, Darkness and Adrenaline** - Mark 'Gorzo' Lumley's tells of his introduction to caving back in 1969, with trips to Goatchurch Cavern, Sidcot Swallet and Sunset Hole.  
**Mendip Meanderings** - Digging updates for Reservoir Hole and Varley Swallet and the filming with the From's in Fairy Cave Quarry.  
**Epocalypse Chokes - Daren Cilau** - A trip to the Epocalypse Chokes in Daren Cilau.  
**Parc Mine** - An SRT trip to Parc Mine Pot visiting the Organ Loft and a massive load.  
**Parc Mine** - An SRT through trip in Parc Lead Mine, North Wales.  
**More Work on the ODSS** - Work done on the Old Daren Sunday School on 8th-10th Feb and a caving/surveying trip to Crwch.  
**Pom Pom Passage - OFD II** - A trip to Pom Pom Passage and Fault Aven Series in OFD done as part of a through trip from Cwm Dwr to Top Entrance.  
**Goodbye, Harry** - Tribute to Harry Pearman, a founder member of CSS who died February 2019.  
**Silverline 361253 Heavy Duty Cable Puller** - A Gear review for Silverline 361253 Heavy Duty Cable Puller and how it's been put to good use at a dig in Half Mile Passage, Daren Cilau.

### Nos. 4-6, April-June 2019



**Pwll Y Gwynt** - An SRT trip to one of the lesser-visited caves of the Llangatlock escarpment.  
**Dan yr Ogof** - A trip to the '37 Series and Corbel's Chamber, both interesting parts of the cave system not necessitating doing the Long Crawl.  
**ODSS Scaffolding Weekend** - Photographic account of the preparations made to the Old Daren Sunday School in April 2019 in readiness for the new roof work.  
**My First Caving Trip or How I began my illustrious Caving Career** - Six CSS members tell how they came to be cavers and what their first trips were.  
**Aggy Bat Count** - Report from the 2019 Annual Bat Count in Agen Allwedd.  
**Tynny's Barrows Swallet** - Write up of a trip to Tynny's Barrows Swallet with advice about tackle requirements.  
**Loose Rocks in Agen Allwedd** - A trip to Cascade Inlet and back and a surprising rock movement encountered along the way.  
**Cova de Sa Gleda** - Diving exploration, surveying and photography in a spectacular Mallorcan cave.  
**Mendip Photography Weekend** - A weekend of photography with trips to Hunters' Lodge Inn Sink, Eastwater - Dark Cars and Sunglasses, Beechen Series, Twin Verts, 13 Pots and Swildon's Hole to Mud Sump and Sump 1.  
**Epocalypse Chokes** - A trip to the Epocalypse Chokes in Daren Cilau to take some photos of this under-visited part of the system.  
**Aggy and Daren Trip Statistics** - Charts and statistics showing which destinations are the most popular in Agen Allwedd and Daren Cilau.  
**The ODSS Big Roofing Week** - During the week of 23rd May-2nd June 2019 much work was done on the Old Daren Sunday school, including the removal of the old roof and a start on the re-building of a new one.  
**My Review of Eglwys Faen** - Trip report from a father and daughter trip to Eglwys Faen.

### Nos. 7-9, July-September 2019



**Book Review- Bats by Phil Richardson** - Review of Bats by Phil Richardson, Natural History Museum Life Series.  
**The Longer Llangatlock Traverse** - The tale of the epic Daren through trip entering Crwch and diving out Pwll y Cwm initially undertaken on Connor's stag weekend.  
**Frostbite in a Heatwave** - A trip to North-West Inlet - Craig a Phynnon, involving a railway and an enormous crocodile.  
**Darn Near Killed II** - An inspirational journey through the cave system and the sites that might yield more discoveries.  
**Carrion Slocker** - Description of the cave, location and history and an update on the dig.  
**ODSS Roofing Part 2** - Progress report on the re-roofing of the Old Daren Sunday School and work done on the CSS BBC weekend on 27th-30th June.  
**Mid Wales Mines** - Write up the CSS Mid-Wales Mines Weekend with trips to Henfwich, Camdorbach and Cwmystwyth Mines.  
**Sunday School Take 3** - Old Daren Sunday School working weekend on 10th-21st July 2019 which saw the completion of the main roof.  
**Ogof Fawr** - Write up of a caving and photography trip to Ogof Fawr.

### Nos. 10-12, October-December 2019



**Ogof Rhyd Sych** - A trip report from a notoriously tight and food prone cave with fine formations.  
**Surveying Parc Lead Mine** - Details of techniques used while solo surveying in Parc Lead Mine, Gwydyr Forest.  
**Rescon'd from Wookey** - Duncan's experience of being dived in a stretcher from Wookey chamber 22 to 20 in rescue practice for Rescon 2019 conference, with a report from the Dave Pike incident of 1987.  
**The Famous Five go Loopy in Derbyshire** - A trip to the former showcave of Wapping Mine and Cumberland Cavern with a variety of loop routes and some facts about its history.  
**Peak Cavern!** - Description of a streamway trip undertaken in Peak Cavern.  
**Five Have a Wonderful Time - A Maskhill Mine Oxlow cavern Exchange** - Trip report from an SRT exchange trip from Maskhill Mine to Oxlow Cavern in Derbyshire.  
**Giant's Hole** - The Giant's Hole round trip, a Derbyshire classic!  
**Titan!** - Write up of a trip to the Peak Cavern System via the mighty Titan Shaft.  
**Helen and Trevor Have Fun Not Caving In The Peak District** - A tale of drinking, caving games, walking the Tassington Trail and visiting Creswell Crags on the CSS Derbyshire weekend.  
**South Wales Cave Fest Weekend** - Mandy takes a jolly motley crew of Cavefest participants on the Daren round trip.  
**Daren Cilau: HRC and Western Flyover Clean-Up Project** - Plans to clean up HRC and the old Western Flyover camp in Daren Cilau, and report from the last camp.  
**New Life at Whitewalls** - Discovery of a Springtail colony living at Whitewalls.  
**Easy Drain Grundies** - Why cheap lacy pantries are well suited to caving.

# Lockdown Boredom Busting Bat Detecting

by Helen Pemberton



locate their food, and have excellent low-light vision.

The cheapest bat detectors are heterodyne detectors, which is one method of converting the bats calls into audible sound. You can buy one for less than the cost of an oversuit. Older models have a dial where you tune into the sound of the

Not being able to leave home, except for essential shopping or 1 form of exercise is **REALLY BORING**. I know many of you have lovely gardens where you can probably watch or listen to bats flying around. Or, if like me, you don't have a garden, there's probably some bats living close by. Watching the bats at sunset is a wonderful way to spend an evening, without having to go very far. I know several members do have bat detectors, and if you don't but like bats, you should get one. Using a bat detector can while away many happy hours, but it can get a bit complicated. This article only covers the very basics. To properly understand bat sounds takes many years of experience and can get quite technical.

In the UK we have 18 species of bats, 17 of which breed here. The 18<sup>th</sup> species is the Greater Mouse Eared bat (*Myotis myotis*), which was declared extinct in 1990, but a solitary male has been found to have been hibernating in Southern England between 2002-2018. We also get a few vagrant species visit but which do not breed or hibernate here. The bats we have in the UK fall into 2 families. One includes the Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats, and the other includes all the other bats – both resident and vagrant. This family is called the Vespers, the horseshoes are leaf nose bats.

Bats echo-locate emitting a sound wave from themselves which bounces back from an object in its path and is then picked up by the bat. They use echo-location to navigate and find food. The sound waves the bats emit are too high pitched for most people to be able to hear. Children can often hear the lower ranges of a bat's call, but this ability tails off with age, especially in men. Bat detectors work by converting the high frequency sounds into frequencies which the average adult can hear, using a variety of methods at a wide variety of price points. Our hearing starts to fade out at around 20 kHz, and bat echo-location calls can range from 20 kHz to over 100 kHz. Bats emit rapid pulses of sound, easily 10-15 pulses per second, and are able to judge distance and whether the echo is from a plant or insect, from picking up the returning pulses of sound. Each call lasts for only a few thousandths of a second, and is very loud, around 110 decibels – about the same as a low flying plane overhead, and loud enough that if we could hear the noise, the HSE would like us to be wearing ear defenders when listening to bats. It's quite an incredible amount of noise for such a tiny creature. To enable them to make this amount of sound they emit an echo-location call on every wingbeat. The Vesper bats do this by exhaling and calling through their mouths, and the horseshoes and other leaf-nosed bats do this through their ornately structured noses. In order to gain the most amount of information from reflected sound waves, bat calls often start out at very high frequencies which fall much to much lower frequencies, in a way that is often but not always distinctive between species. Fruit bats normally do not echo-locate as they tend to locate their food by smell. Contrary to widely held belief, bats do not rely fully on sonar to precisely

bat, like you would an old radio. The newer models have a display so you can easily see the frequency of the sound you are hearing.

The cheapest bat detector that uses different technology to convert the sound into audible sound and sonograms starts at around £200. The bat detectors used by ecologists for surveys can cost thousands of pounds.

The most likely bat British people

will encounter are the Pipistrelles. There are three species, the Common Pip (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*), the Soprano Pip (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*), and the Nathusius (*Pipistrellus nathusii*). The Common Pip is our most common bat, followed by the Soprano, although the Soprano is more common in some parts of the UK. Both species are happy in a wide range of habitats, even including roosting in newer housing, and will live in crevices in buildings, in roofs and cavity walls as well as trees and bat boxes. They are the bats you are most likely to encounter in your gardens, and they may live in your house. This is no bad thing, as they can eat 3,000 insects each night. The Nathusius, while found across the UK, is much rarer and is more specific in its habitat requirements. Unless you happen to have a lake and waterside woodland in your garden, you probably won't be able to watch them at home. Thankfully, the Pipistrelle bats are relatively easy to tell apart using the most basic bat detectors.

The Pipistrelle bats are said to sound like a series of wet slaps, with some clicks at the higher frequencies. Open your mouth and slap your cheeks, and you will be doing a Pipistrelle impression. They make quite fast slaps, and the tone of the sound varies. To me, they sound like lots of fast clicking, with the occasional sound of a pool ball bouncing off the table and across a hard floor. Playing pool after several beers was never very successful for me, so this was a familiar sound in my younger years. To pick up the sounds of Pipistrelles, point your bat detector upwards. People have been known to point their detector at the floor and wonder why they don't hear much. Here's a link to hear a Pipistrelle: <https://soundcloud.com/invisible-dust/pipistrelleog>

Knowing the frequency of the sound is really important for starting to identify the bats. If you see the sound of the bat on a spectrogram, the Pipistrelle's echo-location call looks a bit like a hockey stick. All the 3 species will sound pretty much the same (unless you are very experienced), but the bottom



*Heterodyne bat detector  
photo Gary Kiely*

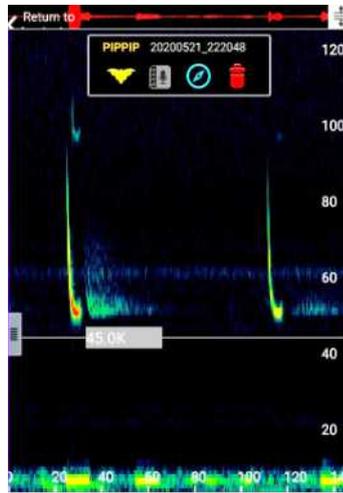
of the hockey stick falls at a different frequency depending on the species you are listening to. Just to make things complicated, a heterodyne bat detector can't normally be used to create spectrograms, they are principally used for hearing the sounds. The lowest frequency of the bat's calls is what is important to find - the bottom of the hockey stick on the sonogram.

The Soprano's lowest frequency section of their echo-location call is around 55 kHz, the Common 45 kHz and the Nathusius 39 kHz, so to identify which species you are listening to, you'd tune the bat detector to the lowest frequency you can hear well. So, if the lowest sensibly tuned sound you get is 55 kHz, you might have a Soprano, if it carries on tuning down to 45 kHz you might have a Common Pip, if you carry on tuning down to 39 kHz, and can still hear the bat properly, you probably still have a Common Pip and not a Nathusius, especially if there are lots of bats flying. The pipistrelles can make calls well below the 45 or 55 kHz of their standard echo-location calls, when they make social or other non-location calls.

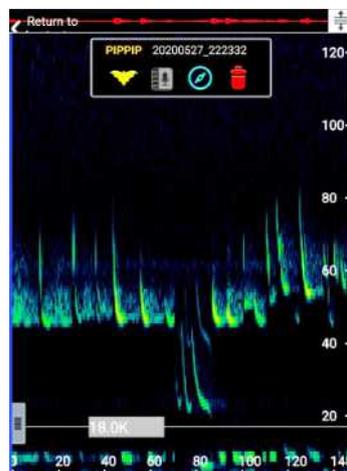
Once you have a good idea of what the bat sounds like, you may need to use other clues such as habitat, flight pattern, colour of fur and what seems like a million and one variables. If there are lots of bats flying in the same area, they might lower the frequency of their calls, just as you might shout louder in a nightclub compared to in a library. They also change their calls depending on if they are in open space, near a tree line or hedge, near vegetation, over water... and then they make different sounds for social calls and feeding. There are so many factors that we can't just go by what the bat detector tells us is the right frequency.

Pipistrelle bats are a rich brown colour, and are way cuter and fluffier than hamsters. In the dark, they look black. They are amongst our smaller species, and have a fairly small wingspan. Small wings tend to mean faster wingbeats, faster calls, and a much greater manoeuvrability. Pips will often emerge from their roosts 20-30 minutes after sunset, and will initially fly fairly high, with their flightpath lowering as night draws in and the temperature (and insects' flight paths) drop. You will often see them flying around head height as darkness falls. They fly with impressive agility around trees, and it's lovely to watch them weave around catching flying insects. Pipistrelles make social calls which can sound a bit like the Noctule and Serotine bats echo-location calls, but these bats are bigger and have a different style of flight - which is really only of help if you are lucky enough to see them.

If you go to a lake or calm waterway like a canal or slow



**Spectrogram showing echo-location call of a Common Pipistrelle, using Real Time Expansion to convert the sound. Note the second smaller hockey stick that goes above 100 kHz**



**A non-echolocation call of a Common Pip**

flowing river, you may be able to watch Daubenton's bats. Using your bat detector, they will also tune in to around 48 kHz. Confusingly similar to the common Pip! However, the sound is different once your ears become attuned, and their flight pattern is quite unique. Although the frequency of the sound is similar to common Pipistrelle bats, the clicks are slightly faster and have less variation in tone. They are often described as sounding like machine gun fire, burning stubble, a fast typist, or a Geiger counter. I reckon they make lots of fast clicks with the odd wet fart thrown in. At first I found it easiest to distinguish Daubenton's from Pipistrelles by the wet fart vs bouncing pool ball sounds, and gradually became more used to the different fast clicking sounds. Here's a link to hear one:

<https://soundcloud.com/bcn-wildlife-trust/daubentons-bat>

What makes Daubenton's really easy to identify is their habitat and flight pattern. Take a torch with you to your local water body, and shine it over the surface of the water. Daubenton's tend to

feed on insects on the water surface, and in good conditions they will be seen just inches above the surface, gliding around like hovering ice skaters. They pick insects from the water using their feet, and pass their prey to their mouths in flight. They have wonderful long and hairy toes. If you have the privilege to hold a Daubenton's bat, you can identify it from similar species by these impressive feet. Daubenton's bats are part of the Myotis family of bats, many of which are very similar and almost impossible for novices to tell apart. They have grey bellies, which you may be able to see in your torchlight. If you are looking for Daubenton's bats and trying to count them, the Bat Conservation Trust recommend that you listen for the sound, and only then shine your torch across the water, because the bats can see the beam as a barrier to their flight. Daubenton's bats normally hunt over still water, hence lakes and canals are good places to find them. If they are hungry and the water is too choppy, they may



**Daubenton's Bat**

hunt around trees or hedge lines, but when you see them away from the water surface, they are much harder to identify. Point your bat detector towards the water surface to pick up the sounds of Daubenton's bats, rather than towards the sky.

We have several species of Myotis bats in the UK. Daubenton's (*Myotis daubentonii*), Natterer's (*Myotis nattereri*), Whiskered (*Myotis mystacinus*), Brandt's (*Myotis brandtii*) and Bechstein's (*Myotis bechsteinii*). With the exception of the Daubenton's flying so close to the water surface, they look and sound pretty similar. Their spectrograms look like slightly slanting or curved lines, so if your bat detector is capable of producing spectrograms, the

**Right: Suitably still water, a good place to find Daubenton's**

**Below: Too much water movement**



slightly faster and a bit more smacky than cloppy. As clear as mud, especially as these bats can fly at rooftop height and are much harder to see in flight. Leisler's are rare and are not found in Wales, and Serotines are more common but are only found in Southern England and Southern Wales. If you hear a "cloppy" bat rather than a

"clicky" bat, the easiest question is which of the 3 big bats lives where you happen to be, and if that doesn't narrow it down, then "big bat" will sometimes have to do.

I can't show you what the big bats calls look like on a spectrogram, as all my recordings look rubbish, but here's what they sound like:

**Noctule:** <https://soundcloud.com/norman-macleod-337402945/noctule>

**Serotine:** <https://soundcloud.com/djapotter/serotine-bat-sound>

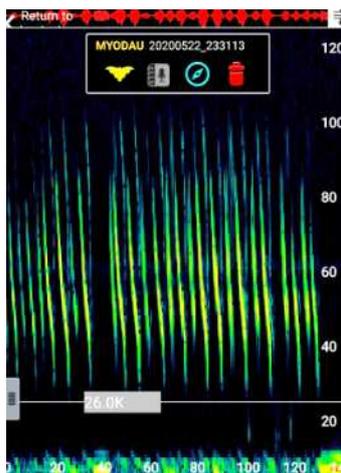
**Leisler's:** <https://soundcloud.com/invisible-dust/rog-0019-nyctalus-leisleri-01>

Myotis bats are easy to tell apart from the Pipistrelles, just harder to differentiate on a species level.

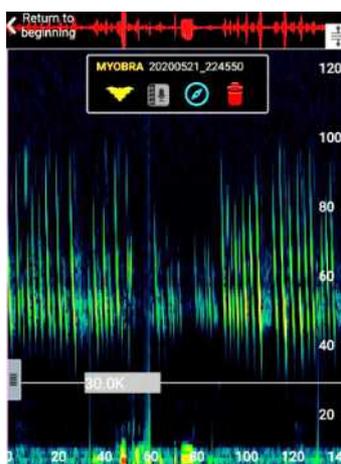
If you go to watch some Daubenton's over a watercourse, you may see grey bellied bats flying a metre or more above the water, along with grey bellied bats flying very close to the water. You are probably watching at least 2 species. I often go to a railway bridge crossing the canal as there are so many bats there. The Daubenton's fly close to the water, the unidentified Myotis fly at head to bridge height, and common and soprano Pips fly around the nearby trees.

The Natterer's is most common Myotis bat after the Daubenton's, and is found across the UK, the Whiskered and Brandt's are rarer and are only found in England and Wales, with the Bechstein's being rarest and only found in Central Southern England. Despite living in Central Southern England, my local bat group would be very excited if we found any Bechstein's bats. If less experienced people find grey bellied bats that sound like a machine gun operated by a farting soldier, that isn't obviously low over water, the best thing is to say you have found a Myotis bat. If you live right up North, you can often eliminate a few of the Myotis species just on location.

So far, the bats mentioned have been small, agile bats. We have 3 species of bats that are counted as large bats - the Noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*), Serotine (*Eptesicus serotinus*) and Leisler's (*Nyctalus leisleri*). These species have larger wingspans, and tend to fly with a slower wingbeat (and echo-location call). They are less agile, and will fly faster and straighter than the small bats. These species sound quite different to the small bats, but can be easy to confuse with each other until you get used to the sounds and likelihood of finding them where you live. Their sonograms are again quite different, looking like curved horizontal lines at a lower frequency than the small bats. The Noctule is the most common large bat, and is found across most of Britain and into Scotland. I always think it sounds like Monty-Python style coconut shell hoof beats at a very slow pace. The sound is described as metallic and irregular chip-chop sounds. The Leisler's is described as sounding pretty much the same, although it actually sounds a bit different, and the Serotine is described as



**Above: Daubenton's  
Below: Brandt's -  
Brandt's are rarer in Southern  
England, and I am not sure if  
my ID software is right**



Pipistrelles and Myotis species, plus our 3 "big bats" are quite easy to hear using a bat detector. The Brown Long Eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*) and the much less common Grey Long Eared bat (*Plecotus austriacus*) have a slow, fluttery flight pattern amongst vegetation and they hover occasionally. Although a slow flight including hovering makes it seem like they should be easy to detect, they are very quiet and are often seen rather than heard on bat detectors. I know exactly where some Brown Long Eared bats roost near where I live, but I haven't managed to hear any yet. I may have to spend a long time lurking in my local woodland at night before I get to hear these wonderful creatures. The barbastelle (*Barbastella barbastellus*) can be found in England and South Wales, and again is very quiet. Its echo-location sounds like castanets. If you hear a quiet castanets sound at around 38 kHz, then that might be an exciting find.

Finally, the horseshoe bats. Technically, the Greater Horseshoe is large by UK standards, and the Lesser is small. But, because they are so different from all of our other species, size classification doesn't count. What matters is their amazing nose leafs and how they produce sonar from their nose rather than their mouth. Imagine you are listening to an alien playing one of those amusement arcade machines. This is exactly what a horseshoe bat sounds like to me. No clicks or clops, but a happy almost electronic burble. Again, we know exactly where both Greater and Lesser Horseshoes hibernate and roost in S Wales, Mendip and Wiltshire, but it is very hard to pick their calls up with a bat detector. You need to point it in exactly the right place. If you do manage to hear them, they won't fail to put a smile on your face.

Greater Horseshoe: <https://soundcloud.com/wildlife-sound-recording/greater-horseshoe-bat>

Lesser Horseshoe: <https://soundcloud.com/charlie-bird-12/lesser-horseshoe-bat-at-reeds>



*Greater Horseshoe about to be measured and ringed*

All of our bats are protected species, and they are a good indicator species to tell how well nature in general is doing. Due to Covid-19, most of this year's bat monitoring projects have been cancelled. This is due to risk of transmission of the virus person-to-person and person-to-bat, rather than bat-to-person. It's really hard to check bat boxes high up in trees and maintain social distancing. It's also thought to be really hard to catch Covid-19 or any other SARs virus from a bat without some other vector such as pangolins which don't live here. Some bat workers have been scared they may actually pass the virus to endangered species of bats rather than the other

way around.

If you have bats in your garden or know where bats roost, there are a few bat conservation projects that have not been cancelled AND you don't need much experience to take part. You can take part in citizen science and help protect these amazing creatures, even if you are really bored and can't go very far. Even if you have no garden and live in a town, it's very useful to know if bats are attracted to insects flying in the street light near your home. Changing technology in street lighting is having a big effect on bats, and town planning can be influenced by better understanding of how lighting affects protected species. More info on how to help can be found in the link:

<https://www.bats.org.uk/our-work/national-bat-monitoring-programme/surveys/sunset-sunrise-survey>

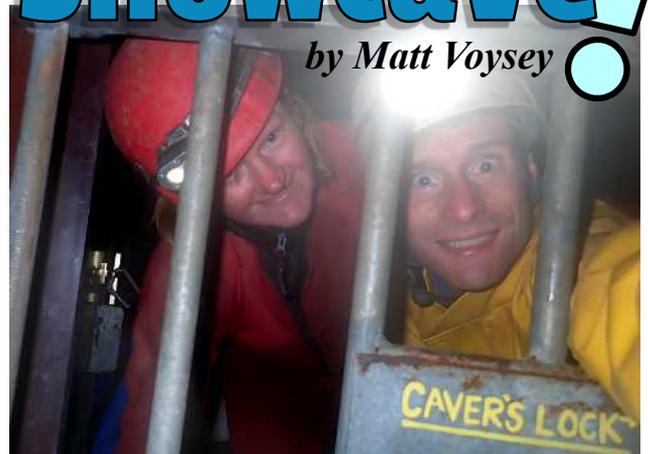
All photos of bats in this article were taken under supervision of a licensed bat worker. It is illegal to take photos of or disturb bats in any way, unless you are suitably licensed or under training by a licensed person. My photos are remarkably bad but are legal and taken under appropriate and permitted supervision. Unless you are working with a local bat group, please don't take any photos of bats, shine torches into bat boxes or otherwise disturb them, and if you see any underground (assuming you are reading this in better times) then make sure to shine your torches away from them and move away as quickly as possible. Even your body heat or torch light in close proximity to a hibernating bat could kill them by warming their bodies up too much when they need to stay cold, hence arousing them and so consuming fat reserves that are needed to get them through the winter.

# Trapped in a Showcave!

by Matt Voysey

**Tuesday 11 August 2020**

Never ones for making early morning starts, we arrived at the Dan yr Ogof showcaves at the sociable hour of midday, and were then told we had to wait an hour to join the 1pm group into the cave. Under Covid measures they were controlling visitor numbers via allocated hourly time slots for entry, which at least gave us the welcome opportunity for an ice cream, as it was baking hot. We changed into our caving gear (which this time included the obligatory face covering to be worn outside and when passing through the show cave) and headed up to the entrance early, thinking that it would make sense for us to get in before the tourists so that we'd be out of their way – a good plan as we were told to skip the queue and were swiftly admitted into the cave by the guide at the gate. We strode through the tourist free cave and donned the remainder of our kit over the railing down by the first lake. Our idea for the trip was to improve my familiarity with the general round trip route in both directions, and to take a look at some of the off-route side passages that took our fancy on the way. We weren't actually planning to do the Green Canal so didn't bother with wetsuit/neofleece, figuring that furrys are more comfortable and



we'd be moving quickly enough as a duo to keep warm. However the lakes at the start of the trip are cold and deep, and there was certainly a degree of whimpering to be heard. Luckily the water levels were reasonably low, though there was a lot of tell-tale foam all over the walls indicating that it had been much higher at some point recently and the low section had clearly been sumped.

We refer to Dan yr Ogof trips as 'luxury caving' as you get to see some exceptionally fine formations, sculpted passages and impressive chambers without having to put in too much hard graft and effort. It's like a show cave just for cavers. And many of the passages don't even have

any annoying boulders or rocks littering the floor! Yes, people complain about the Long Crawl, but you can just consider that as the price of admission. After our extended enforced absence from Welsh caving we were looking forward to reacquainting ourselves with some of these wonders.

We thought we'd start with the pretty way and headed to Flabbergasm, Cloud Chamber and eventually the start of the Green Canal, looking at various bits and bobs on the way. Then we headed back to Grand Canyon to check out Elliptic Passage. This connects Grand Canyon to Bakerloo so we thought it might be fun/useful to try. The route starts as a crawl from the side of the main passage, near where Flabbergasm oxbow joins high above, and eventually leads to the top of a very smooth-sided 6m pot with seemingly no foot or hand holds. There's probably a knack to descending this climb, but our recent lack of caving had taken its toll on our bravado and we decided to err on the side of caution, well aware that a cave rescue in Covid times would be particularly unwelcome. We agreed that 'now wouldn't be a very good time to risk needing rescue'. Little did we know we'd be delighted to see them in about 7 hours time...

So we backtracked and thence into the Lower Series for more lake wading action and the normal tourist route as far as the junction just before the Green Canal, where we headed up Go Faster Passage and enjoyed the impressive passages beyond as far as The Risings and the ladder leading up to the Far North. To save time we decided to take the Green Canal route back, given that we were now on the side where all the flotation aids were. To be 'helpful' we took two each, knowing there were none on the other side, but it turns out that sitting atop two stacked inner tubes isn't a very stable way to travel. I ended up lolling desperately on top, fighting to keep hold and not slide off into the deep cold water, with no arms free and relying on leg propulsion only – a very slow journey.

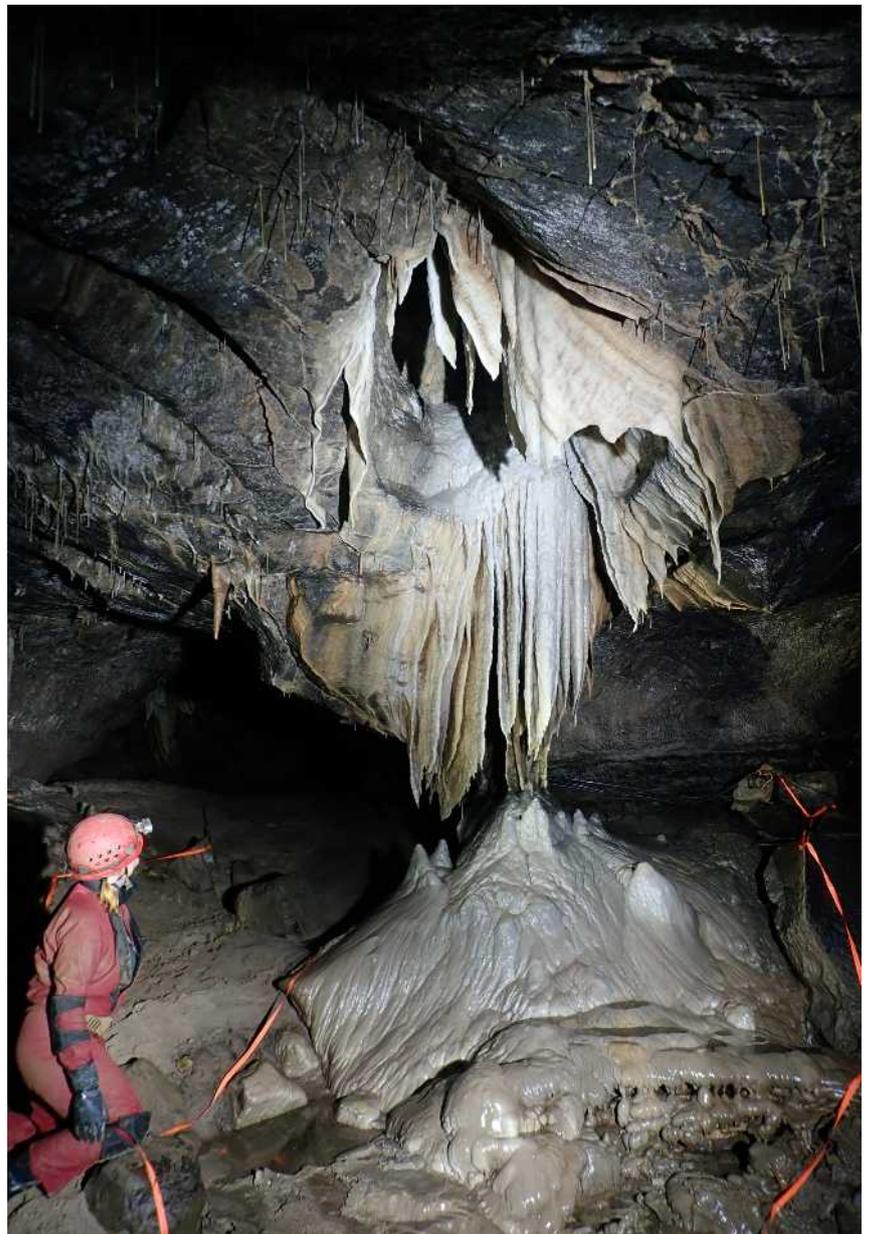
We looked quickly into Hangar Passage, then headed out. Approaching the start of the entrance lakes with the sound of water becoming audible we realised we still had plenty of time to spare, so stopped to take some photos. As always, struggling with lighting and multiple not quite perfect long exposure shots, this took rather longer than intended and by the time we got going again we were absolutely, teeth chatteringly freezing. With no time to warm up we tiptoed, clung and shivered our way back through the lakes (which oddly didn't feel so cold this time; our bodies must have been chilled to the same temperature they were) and then strode swiftly back to the showcave

entrance to warm up, enthused about our caving trip and happily looking forward to the hot summer evening outside, beer and a hearty meal.

At the locked door we opened the cavers' cat-flap no problem, but something was amiss with the cavers' gate: the handle didn't work. It just swung in a full circle without opening anything. Initially undeterred we tried several tactics, some delicate and some rather more vigorous, to stimulate a more positive response from it, but all to no avail.

The show cave was now closed. It was dark and there was nobody around. Eventually realisation struck that we were stuck in the cave and would have to face the awful shame of our first ever cave rescue, and from a showcave!

We'd arrived at the gate around 7pm and our call out was for 8, so we figured 9 was probably the soonest anyone would find us and knew that was probably very optimistic. There seemed nothing else to do except admit defeat and hope that John remembered that he was our call out. In the worst case scenario, at least we'd be found in the morning when they opened the cave for visitors. In the meantime we had two chocolate bars left, a pack of



sweets, water (refilled from roof drips) and a dry showcave to run around, so things weren't so bad.

We closed the two sets of double doors just inside the entrance to stop the powerful cold draught, which made it much more hospitable, but we were still wet and cold. We left the inner gate open with our tackle bag and stuff visible to show we'd been there, and then set off on some laps of the showcave circuit.

During the first while I performed an extensive search of the showcave, high and low and in every nook and cranny, looking for tools with which to repair the lock (I could see that with the aid of just one Allen key I could open the cover and probably draw the bolt manually), but found nothing of any pertinent use whatsoever. I can certainly state that they do keep a very tidy show cave!

We located the two older cavers' entrance hatches into the cave, but both have now been permanently sealed so no way out that way. At some point I discovered the control panel to turn on the lighting and sound system in Cauldron Chamber. This made it a bit more cheery, plus you could warm your hands in the heat of the bright halogen light bulbs. We also tried two conspicuous looking 'emergency telephones'. Both dead – presumably these only work while the show cave is open. We located a rusty hair clip dropped by a tourist and I considered whether it was worth trying to pick the lock of the outer padlock so that we could open the outer handle, but then thought that might just leave us with the bigger

problem of two broken locks.

From 9pm onwards we made sure one of us was always by the entrance and took turns walking round to keep warm. The worst thing was knowing that people would be starting to worry on the surface and the rescue team would be contemplating having to do a potentially major rescue when we were actually perfectly fine, just unable to tell anyone.

We amused ourselves by taking photos of our predicament and had just decided we'd move on to photographing the indigenous cave life (a few spiders, mayflies and a friendly woodlouse) when we saw lights approaching. We were saved! The first members of Cave Rescue arrived at about 10:30, accompanied by cave owner Ashton Price who had the key to the main gate. 'Hello there, could you let us out please?' I said. (OK, I have to admit that at this moment I was secretly a bit annoyed that I didn't get to take the picture of the spider I'd just set up!).

Everyone was very concerned that we must be freezing being trapped for so long, but the outside world felt very nice and toasty and we just stood about chatting to the rescue team for a bit. Everyone was very nice and some were even disappointed they didn't get a caving trip in the end. It turned out there had been some severe thunderstorms accompanied by extremely heavy rain affecting some of the valleys, and we could see spectacular lightning flashes to the North as we stood there. The storms had totally missed us but had caused some worry – including to the participants of the weekly CSS 'Virtual Pub Meet' who had learned of our plight while it was in progress and were consulting the weather radar while debating the drainage patterns in the Black Mountain...

Thank you very much to SMWCRT and to John Stevens for calling them out.

*Footnote: The exit hatch lock has since been repaired and works properly again, I know this because I made a point of testing it on the way in on the next trip we did about a month later!*



*We looked too happy in the first photos so we took some more of us looking fittingly anxious (below)*



# EDWARD FOLEY'S HOLE

by Andy Heath

I can give you an update on the new Devon cave now known as "Edward Foley's Hole".\*

Digging commenced, with the assistance of the churchwarden. Careful removal of the turf revealed a 2' diameter shaft. The intrepid explorer descended to a depth of around 3' to an earth floored brick lined chamber, around 6' long by 3' wide. The impression was there was more to be discovered beneath the earth. Each end of the chamber was roofed over by a redbrick archway. It was deemed inadvisable to crawl under the roof as it appeared as if it could collapse at any time, entombing the explorer for eternity.

Accordingly, around half a ton of rubble was carefully stacked under the archway to prevent further collapse. For reasons unclear to the explorer, the churchwarden would not permit infilling with old roofing felt or paint tins despite the explorer's request. The shaft was then backfilled with topsoil and the turf replaced.

It is thought there could be several hundred similar caves in the immediate vicinity, though none are likely to connect.

*\*see CSS Newsletter Vol.62, No's 4-6 for report of the discovery of this cave*



Above: Andy in his new Devon dig (scene recreated by photo trickery)

Left: The hole that opened up beneath Andy on 19/6/20

## Alfresco Dining at Whitewalls



*Photos sent in by Louise Hull. When caught in a rainstorm while walking, she and Ralph opted to use the 'outdoor cooking facilities' at Whitewalls. "The greedy chickens were after the chilli."*





*Duncan Price at the top end of the big chamber  
in Land of Hope and Glory, Wookey Hole  
Photo by Mark Burkey*

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

