

**Volume 62  
Nos. 10-12  
Oct/Nov/Dec 2020**



**Ogof Ffynnon Wyntog  
Dry to Wookey 24  
Chilmark Stone Mines  
Sea Cave Adventures**

**CHELSEA SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY**



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ISSN 0045-6381

*Above: Mike Read in Lionel's Hole, Sept 2019.  
Photo by Matt Voysey*

*Front cover: Matt Voysey in 'The Technical  
Masterpiece', Eastwater Cavern, Nov 2020.  
Photo by Mandy Voysey*



## Whitewalls Access

During the coronavirus pandemic we are permitting strictly limited use of use of Whitewalls in compliance with Welsh and UK 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** A warm welcome to another fun and feature packed, Covid beating newsletter. Once again a big thank you to all our contributors who sent in material for this issue, please keep it coming.

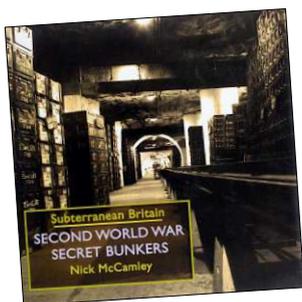
Please submit all items for publication in this newsletter to [cssmattv@gmail.com](mailto:cssmattv@gmail.com)

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 Acquisitions

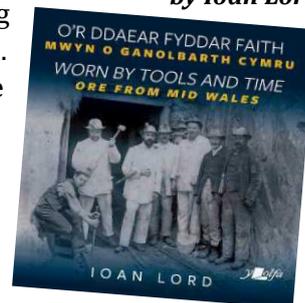


*Second World War Secret Bunkers by Nick McCamley*

A couple of new additions to the CSS Library: Second World War Secret Bunkers is a well-illustrated book describing the many mines and underground quarries that H.M. Government requisitioned and utilised during the nation's time of strife, while Ioan Lord's book describes the way in which metal mines in mid Wales were worked and is a companion to his earlier, excellent book, 'Rich Mountains of Lead' which came out in 2018.

*Paul Tarrant*

*Worn by Tools and Time by Ioan Lord*



## 2021 AGM

The 2021 Annual General Meeting will be held on Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> January at 11 a.m. as usual, though this year it will be in the form of a Zoom meeting. So no need to travel all the way over to Tretower, you can have your say and hear all the club news from the comfort of your own home.

Those of you who have participated in the virtual socials organised by Helen this year will already be familiar with Zoom, but anyone new to this virtual meeting platform can have a practice the week before by joining the Annual Dinner Virtual Social. AGM joining instructions will also be sent out prior to the meeting.

If you would like to be included in the meeting but lack the technology, a dial-in phone number can be arranged if that would be useful - please let Adrian know if you'd like this option. Don't forget your tea and biscuits!

The AGM notice and reports will be emailed out to the same distribution list as the monthly e-newsletter, so if you're not on the mailing list but would still like to receive the AGM info contact Adrian. Paper copies are also available on request.



## Zoom Socials

**Virtual Pub Night**  
8pm every Tuesday



**Annual Dinner Virtual Social and Quiz Night**  
Saturday 23rd January at 8pm

Contact Helen for further information and Zoom password  
[chelseameetssecretary@gmail.com](mailto:chelseameetssecretary@gmail.com)

## 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 WERE DUE IN OCTOBER!**

# CHILMARK STONE MINES

by *Andy Watson*

After first finding out about these stone mines somewhere and noting that the rock is similar to Portland and Purbeck; an Oolitic Limestone laid down in the Jurassic age that was/is popular for building stone and ornamental purposes, we recently went to relocate them from my memory but could not find them due to failing light. On the second attempt we



were more fortunate with the aid of a GPS and one rough NGR (ST 9744 3145) from an old MCRA reference which turned out to be close to Stone Mine No. 2 outside of the military fenced area. Historically, since the Middle Ages these quarries and stone mines were used for building stone, including some for Salisbury Cathedral, Wilton Abbey and Westminster Abbey. The quarries and mines were closed in 1935 and in 1936 the Air Ministry bought much of the area, including most of the mines and quarries. Mostly these are on the west side of the road and are all clearly marked and fenced off. Some quarrying or mining has been re-permitted on this site in recent years with some of the western stone mines in 2019 being in full production again (see Wessex Dimensional Stone Ltd). Many of these stone mines are bat roosts further in during winter and some are located in a Designated Special Area of Conservation, the bat types noted in the larger mines are Greater Horseshoe, Barbastelle, Bechstein's and Lesser Horseshoe.

## DIRECTIONS TO THE MINES

To find these stone mines they are best approached from the A303, drive south down Cow Drove which is signposted to both Farmer Giles Farmstead (a brown tourist sign - but long since closed) and Chilmark (a village a few miles south of the A303). Once in Chilmark you hit a staggered crossroads, turn right then left across this main road (B3089) down into the Chilmark village and follow the road out towards Tisbury, but a little distance out of the village is a left turning/fork towards Fovant. Follow this road for about half a mile and on your right is a slight layby and a 6ft military chain link fence with an access gate. Park here but do not block the gate. Now walk back along the road you came along for 150m and at a passing place on your right there's an obvious but slightly used path leading down-slope. After 75m you'll cross a little stream bridge, follow the path but keep close (ish) to the fence on your left and go all the way up (passing a small old grassed quarry on your left) until the rough path levels off and curves right (you should be just below the field fence line). Follow along the highest 'level' rough path about 2-3m below field level and you will find a low rock shelter on your left (entrance to **Chilmark Stone Mine No.1** NGR ST 97425 31494). This is not yet dug



open but is probably accessible without too much effort. Several metres beyond this is another low small entrance (**Chilmark Stone Mine No.2** NGR ST 97441 31483) which I think was the one we went to in 2011 and 2013 and is still accessible by clearing it out a bit and going feet first and face down into the bedding plane. After much wriggling and kicking of leaves and sticks out the way you get to a rising roof and a mine which is quite extensive and pretty interesting and even has bits where you can stand up in places.



Several metres further along is another possibly larger low entrance (**Chilmark Stone Mine No.3** NGR ST 97457 31471), I am not sure this will be accessible without some more effort. If you keep walking along at this level you will find a 2m high military chain link and barbed wire fence. There is another small natural cave and stone mine (**Chilmark Stone Mine No.4**) in an area used by the military (Note: I believe both sides of the Chilmark Combe had quarries and extensive stone mines. A large part of the area was acquired by the Air Ministry in 1936 for munitions storage prior to and during WW2 and it was then used as a military base (Teffont Quarry – RAF Chilmark North) until 1995. Both sides of the road are still fenced, owned by the military and partly occupied). This cave/mine is located inside the military owned area at about 20m south-east of NGR ST 97514 31398 at the fence line. No access is allowed. When you walk back the way you

*Top Right: Chilmark Stone Mine No.4  
Above: Entrances to Chilmark Stone Mine  
No.2 (top) and No.1 (bottom)*

came and go down-slope on the footpath, the quarry with a small level grass field is on your right has another possible entrance low against the cliff face (**Chilmark Stone Mine No.5 NGR ST 97308 31642**) which is yet to be excavated/ explored, if indeed it is another mine entrance? If you search online there are numerous large gated stone mines on the other side of the road that were used by the military and are still fenced and secured. These are leased by various businesses. No access allowed without checking for prior permission. My thanks to Sue for accompanying me with great patience.

**Note:** Andy Sparrow surveyed one of these in the 1970s when he was in the Salisbury Caving Club; I suspect it is No.1 in the sequence but I will confirm this at some point.

## DIGGING TRIPS SO FAR...

### Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2020 - Chilmark Stone Mines 1-3

Visiting these in the woods on a dark winter evening solo is a bit creepy, you have been warned. These mines are the older ones outside of the fenced MoD area. I took a small rake to clear out the leaves and a crowbar to shift any mud and rocks that had accumulated in the entrances over the years. I had a quick prod around in the filled old quarry on the left as you walk uphill in the woods as I think another entrance has been covered here, to no avail on this visit, then on to the mines 1, 2 and 3 at the top of the woods. I had a prod in the No.1 entrance under a low cliff but I could not find an easy way in. No.2 did not look initially enticing and so I went on to No.3 and had a go at getting in but needed more digging equipment. So back to No.2 where I had more success pulling out some rocks and clearing sticks and leaves etc, but I have put on weight during lockdown since my last visit and really need a small spade to progress re-entry. From memory I think this is the mine I've entered twice before. I left the No.2 more excavated entrance re-blocked with some 6" diameter short cut logs as these mines are in a 'rarely visited' area but are probably passed occasionally by dog walkers. I'll take a spade next visit.



*View in the tunnels*

### Friday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2020 - Chilmark Stone Mine No. 2

I took a spade and a small rake with me to see if I could get into the No. 2 entrance. I removed the log I'd left in the entrance 3 weeks ago to stop people's dogs going in and dug out the entrance so I could just squeeze through, pushing a few boulders some sticks and some dry grass out of the way. I succeeded in getting into the low bedding plane with a pillar that supports the roof opposite the 'WELCOME' graffiti. This confirmed that this was the mine entrance through which I had entered in 2013 and 2011. I then spent time roughly sketching a layout of this part of the stone mine and entered some areas that I had not been in before. It is possible that all three low entrances are connected to the same mine system. The entrance No.3 towards the south-west is some 10m from away from entrance No.2 at the same contour level and is most likely to join into the low earthy area shown on the right of my rough sketch. The No.1 in the low cliff to the north-west is also possibly part of the same system.



*Junction near the entrance*

After exiting through No.2 again I went further to the north-west and down the hill slightly to have another look at the possible other entrance in the quarry which has been in-filled and levelled off. I had a bit more of a dig there in the dark, I am pretty sure this area has another entrance up against the base of the steeply sloping overgrown quarry face and that if found it will be to a separate mine as it is on a different, 50ft lower contour. It will need a bit more digging out with a real spade, and probably with some permission as it's not too far from a farm or farm buildings and it really needs to be done in the daylight. In summary, a successful visit with more to look at and of course 'not without interest'.



*Looking down to Bat Corner*

### Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2020 - Chilmark Stone Mine No. 2

You may wonder why I keep going back in the dark, dark woods on my own, just to survey bats in the mine really. I went to look at a few extension possibilities and found a few bits. I also dug my way through leaves, sticks, small rocks and debris in a low section and broke into another bit which matches Andy Sparrow's survey, so it is the same mine! It has two entrances now, since his few visits in the 1970s, so I've updated his survey a bit. The old AS entrance needs



accessing it from the airy cliff face entrance and noted a strange chain type of 'gate' which we were able to pass without any hindrance. We

followed most of its passages and paid some attention to the end choke which had at that time been Hilti capped, presumably by

the Gower Caving Club. I recall the choke being tight and very muddy and not a place I would relish returning to. However, the rest of the cave was most definitely a place to see again and I think I did a further couple of trips with Nig and a few others.

I recall Nig mentioning that he had found a note at the entrance addressed 'To whom it may concern' asking us not to dig the cave, which was signed by GCC. Nig commented that they'd had more than a decade to conclude things in the choke area and that he would continue pushing it. There did not seem to be real evidence of recent digging activity in the choke.

A day was planned when Nig, Gareth Jones (SWCC and Grwp Garimpeiros) and I would visit the cave with the intention of further looking at the choke. It was a fine day and I had suffered an illness that prevented me going underground but I accompanied the other two to the cave and my intention had been to walk the sea cliffs in the area. Gareth and Nig changed and descended the cave and I stayed to admire the marvellous sea views. I was a bit surprised when Gareth returned, saying he could not get through The Vice, a rather tight sideways squeeze boulder obstruction (it does not exist now!)

We sat admiring the views and I then heard the rattle of small rocks falling down from above which prompted me to think that Nig had returned to the surface. Instead, a party of four equipped with caving tackle bags dropped down and joined us and started pulling out their caving gear. This was all incredible as the cave is so very remote from all other caves that people would normally go to explore on Gower. After exchanging pleasantries, I asked the question of one of them 'Are you Rob Davies by any chance?' and Rob confirmed he was indeed that person.

What followed was a Round Robin type of conversation where I was trying to keep the discussion going until Nig let a charge off. I kept the chat going for about fifteen minutes until Rob noticed the elephant in the room called Gareth, who was sat there in the background trying to look inconspicuous in his muddy caving gear and maintaining an obviously embarrassed silence!

'Is someone already in the cave?' Rob asked. I informed him Nig was down there and that Gareth should be but could not get through the squeeze. Rob obviously knew who Nig was and then he asked whether he was digging. I could not lie and explained that Nig was



persuading the end choke and this elicited a very angry response, mainly due to the fact that Rob and his pal could not now show their lady friends the cave. In a somewhat flimsy defence, I think I mentioned that they'd had a long time to explore and push the place which, on reflection wasn't perhaps the best retort! Eventually, Rob and his party realised their trip was off and so we continued to talk and eventually parted on amicable terms, with Rob telling me of the presence of fossilised bones in the cliffs of exotic animals that have long deserted this country.

After Rob and his party left, Gareth remarked that I had handled the confrontation well, and I commented on his maintained silence! Nig turned up eventually and then chastised me for not being more robust in my dealing with Rob! 'Great, I am Piggy in the Middle here and taking flak from both sides!' I thought.

I understand that Nig later met up with Rob at a pub to discuss the situation and presume an amicable compromise was reached, as Rob revealed to Nig further information about several other projects he was then working on in Gower. Nig continued to visit the cave but was unsuccessful in extending the choke to any great extent. I did a couple of trips with CSS members during one of our camping holidays to the area, and during one such trip, I gave some assistance to John Stevens who resurveyed the place, and produced the excellent survey that is published in this newsletter.



*Top: General view of the Knave looking west*

*Above: The cliffs that contain Ogof Ffynnon Wyntog. The upper entrance is visible at the top centre of the picture*

# Old Daren Sunday School Update

by Mike Read

Despite Covid, steady progress has been made on the Old Daren Sunday School and visitors will see a marked change over the year. We had envisaged a larger working session doing work on the ODSS and Whitewalls over a long weekend, but it was always recognised that, due to the size of the building and interaction of the tasks, jobs would have to be completed sequentially. Covid put a stop to that. However, we have managed a good number of small working parties utilising camping and barbecues to achieve social distancing.

Gary kicked off the year by undertaking the first fix electrics. He was assisted at times by Helen who apparently enjoyed developing her practical skills. The wires will be hidden behind the plasterboard so hopefully we haven't forgotten any important requirements and the wire end labels will still make sense in 12 months' time.



Due to the uneven nature of the walls and to make fixing the insulation and plasterboard easier, the walls have been battened. The walls were far from straight/vertical. The hardness of the local stone is very variable and can quickly destroy drill bits when drilling holes for the batten fixings. Despite having spares the destruction of drill bits did result in premature finishes some days to restock.

You would think that fixing insulation to battens would be quick and easy, but it takes a while with differing heights and working around joists etc. Also placing insulation between roof rafters takes ages due to the slightly varying widths and angles at the ridge and wall plate. However apart from the areas around the windows all was completed to give a shiny look to the building. A few sheets of plasterboard have also now been fixed.

To accommodate the wall insulation, the fire surround was brought forward and the old internal front door lintel used for a beam. For the hearth some of the old path steps were used. This of course made it more challenging cutting the insulation. One decision for 2021 is whether to go for a small wood burner stove. Ideally this would be best installed before works are signed off by the building inspector.

Outside Andy connected the gutter pipes to the old soakaway and undertook various landscaping works. The path up to the tram road has seen some regrading to reduce the steepness of the top section. Adrian also managed to reclaim some of his garage space by installing the shutters on the windows. They now glide back and forth, maybe one day we will have motorised versions with remote control! The worst of the



pointing has now all been raked out and re-pointed, there's more that needs doing, but no urgency and it's definitely a summer job.

We now have all the vents in place with ducting to the correct locations - some jobs take far longer than you would imagine. A mammoth effort saw the floor insulated laid and screeded. We found that the floor in one corner was over 75mm low and so now has more insulation to avoid excessively thick screed. The sand supplied had small pieces of stone in it rather than just course sand and was not easy to lay. It was well dark by the time we retired for food and beer. The picture below shows the damp-proof membrane before the screed was laid. Having considered various flooring options the best solution is

some form of tiles. I propose to submit a range of options for tiles from natural stone, ceramic to quarry for general consultation later in the spring. The finish must look right, be hard wearing and easy to clean.

The mezzanine level now has a floor and we need to decide how best to stop items falling over the edge. The ladders will be one of the last items to be fixed - these will be built in-situ so we can have bare feet friendly depth to the treads.

The water supply has now been connected and appears to be leak free, but as yet we don't have any internal plumbing. Installing the floor screed and insulation obviously raised the floor level so we had to install a new front door. This dramatically changes the appearance but still requires





work including new locks, drip bar and a panel on the left-hand side. A new base for the replacement lean-to shed has been cast and some temporary steps installed. Provision has been made for a socket and light. We have still to decide what form the patio and finish for the path up should take.

The decision was taken to purchase two new UPVC double glazed sash windows – these have been ordered but not yet received. The old windows have been removed and

we found the carpenter's signature on the back of one of the pieces of wood "John Price 1867", so they've lasted very well.

Total expenditure to date including windows and materials in my garage ready to install is just under £17k. The building inspector hasn't been able to make it to the Sunday School when we've been there for a while, but has been kept well informed and we have had very positive feedback from the photos I've sent him.

## Future Work

The next step is to install the new windows and insulation on the returns. There is a lot of plasterboard to fix. In reality this is best undertaken by a few people otherwise you trip over each other. Restrictions allowing, hopefully we can get going in January/February. There is then a lot of plastering to be undertaken, and some areas, particularly the sloping ceilings, will be tricky. I imagine this will take us quite a few months to complete unless we have some secret plasterers in the club or we go for some longer working weekends.

Following this we can lay the underfloor heating and tiles. Then it's down to our electrician for the second fix. We have the kitchen, cupboards and doors to install which also requires the plumbing to be completed. The shower also needs installing and tiling along with toilet and basin. Outside the shed needs constructing along with the patio.

The obvious question is how long and how much to finish? This is the stage in the project that is hardest to estimate as you can spend the minimum or too much on finishes. Finishing always takes longer than you expect. I would suggest that a reasonable standard could be achieved for around £6k excluding wood burner and electronic key system. On top of that there will be a few extras like mattresses, cushions and miscellaneous fixtures and fittings. I have a few bills yet to submit and deducting these from what Andy tells me is in the Sunday School account leaves around £5.5k. Potentially we could complete by the AGM in 2022; but that's very dependent on Covid, dedication of work force, decision making and funding – AND how much CAVING we do...

A huge thank you to everyone who has contributed, from grafting to tea making. I haven't advertised working weekends this year as Covid restrictions have limited numbers and even with a few working we struggled to achieve social distancing. John, Adrian, Andy, Gary and Helen have been key workers this year but several others have also contributed. I apologise for the extended working hours on some days/nights and the impact on beer drinking time.



## Bob Fish

I am sorry to have to inform members that Honorary Member Bob Fish died in Hillingdon Hospital from hospital-contracted Covid-19 on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2020. Having more or less lapsed into unconsciousness his end was peaceful.

Because of newsletter timings, a proper appreciation of the standard that Bob merits will appear in the next issue of the newsletter, with contributions from many of his old friends, including photographs.

*Roy Musgrove*

# Surveying in Ogof Ffynnon Wyntog

by John Stevens

Grid Ref SS 43299 86316 - Length 529m - Vertical Range 33m

Ogof Ffynnon Wyntog is situated on the south coast of the Gower peninsular in South Wales. Several years ago I was rung up by Nig Rogers who told me that he had a cave which he was digging and needed a good survey of the place to check they were attacking the right place. It could also give indications of other blocked entrances to the further reaches of the cave which were behind two seasonal sumps.

The potential for the cave, Nig thought, was huge as it was the flood resurgence for quite an area. He postulated that feeders to it were on the north side of the Gower, following the dip to the south to eventually reach Ogof Ffynnon Wyntog after about 4 miles.

The cave can only really be accessed during a dry summer. It has been known for the sumps not to break at all. Thus my first trip was to survey the main length of the cave to the end choke. While David and I surveyed, Nig's party was removing boulders in the choke.

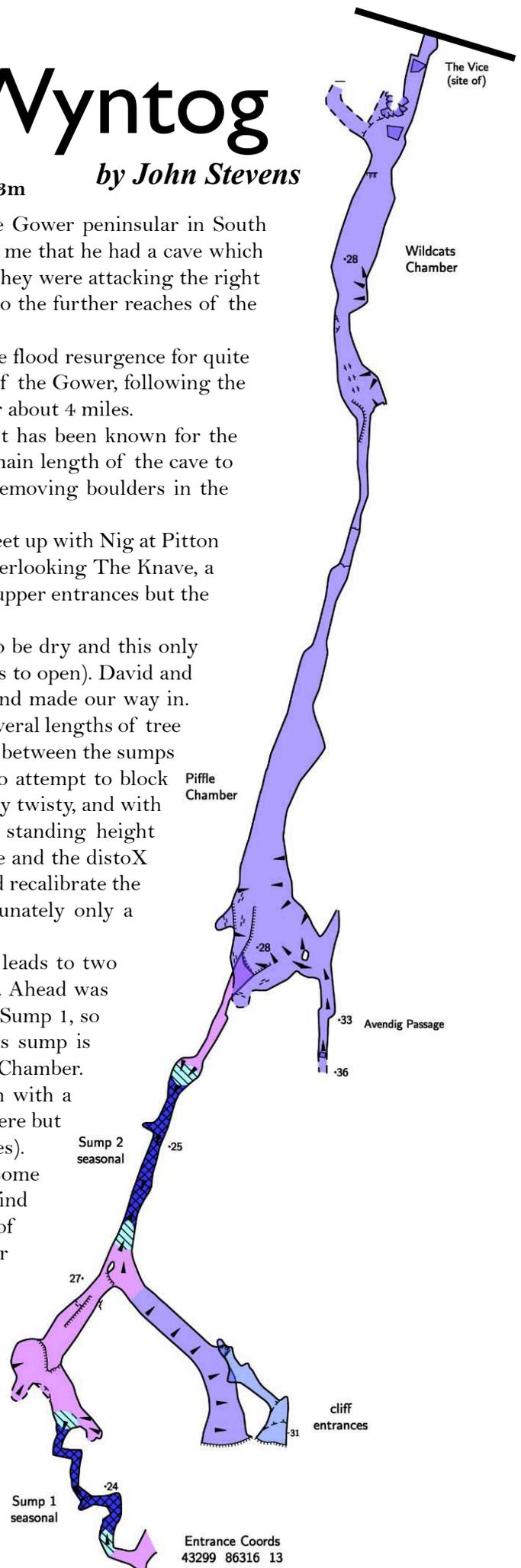
It was an early start from Whitewalls on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2011 to meet up with Nig at Pitton near Rhossili. It is then about a mile's walk to descend a path overlooking The Knave, a grassy knoll, to sea level. An overhanging rock face is above the upper entrances but the route in that way requires some protection.

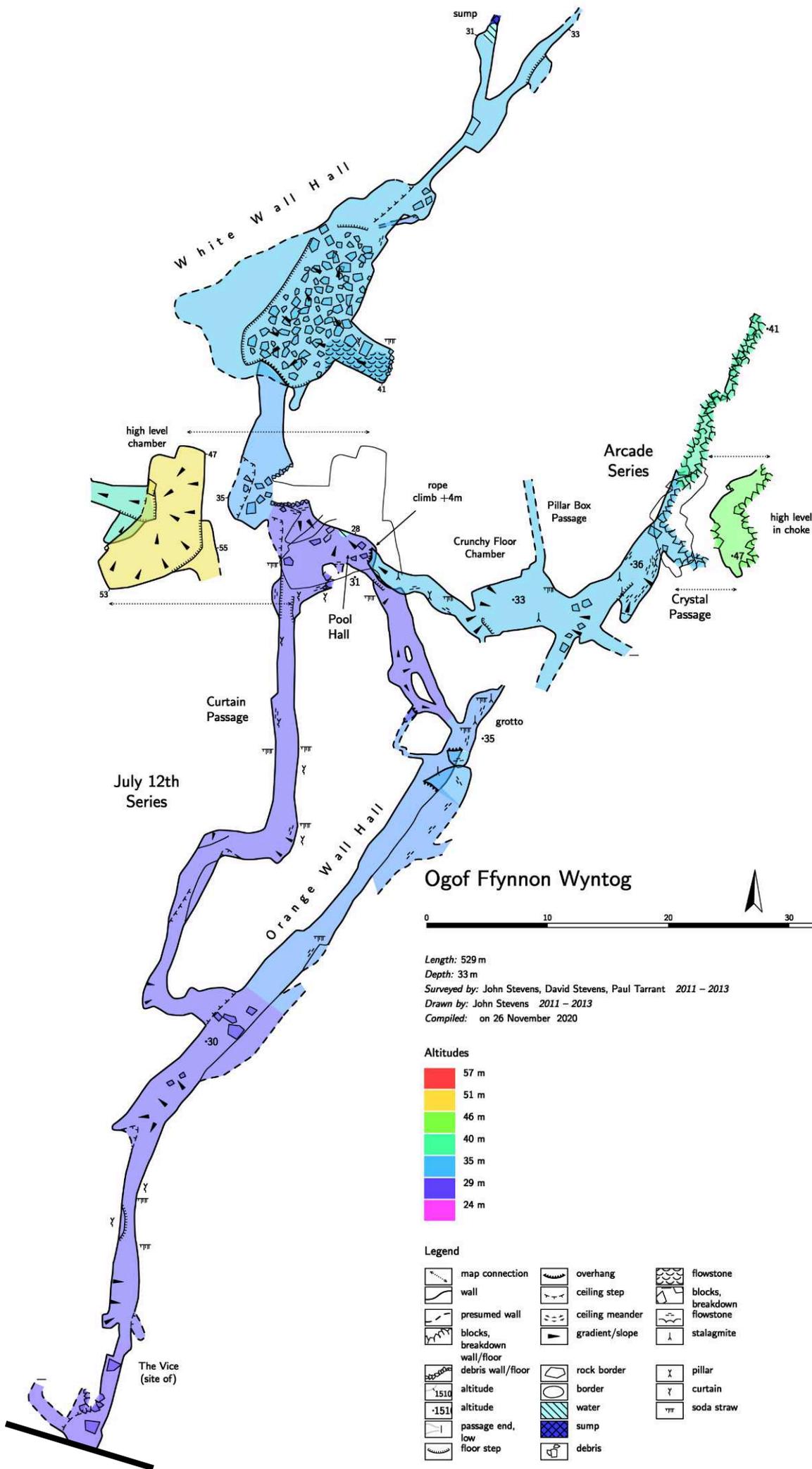
The main route in is via the resurgence. This obviously has to be dry and this only happens for about 4-6 months of the year (some wet years it fails to open). David and I started surveying from a GPS location just outside the cave and made our way in. The first sump was totally dry but had various obstacles in it – several lengths of tree trunk and a lot of hose pipe. The pipe had been washed out from between the sumps and got tangled with the timber. The timber had been placed to attempt to block access as it could not be washed in from outside. The sump is very twisty, and with the pipe and timber not really diveable. This emerges into a standing height passage with the way on over a rock shelf. Another leg was done and the distoX batteries ran out. Back to the chamber to replace the batteries and recalibrate the distoX, and this is when the rock shelf collapsed on me, fortunately only a bruise or two. This surveying trip was going really well!

Continuing the survey reached a passage on the right which leads to two exits on the cliff; these would be surveyed on the following trip. Ahead was the second dry sump. The water level for this one is 1.3m above Sump 1, so could be siphoned back to remove some of it but not all. This sump is roomier, sand floored and straight, and quickly emerges in Piffle Chamber. A passage to the right ascends steeply to a boulder obstruction with a tight right visible beyond. A radio location had been done from here but the terrain on the surface is not ideal to dig (cliffs and scree slopes).

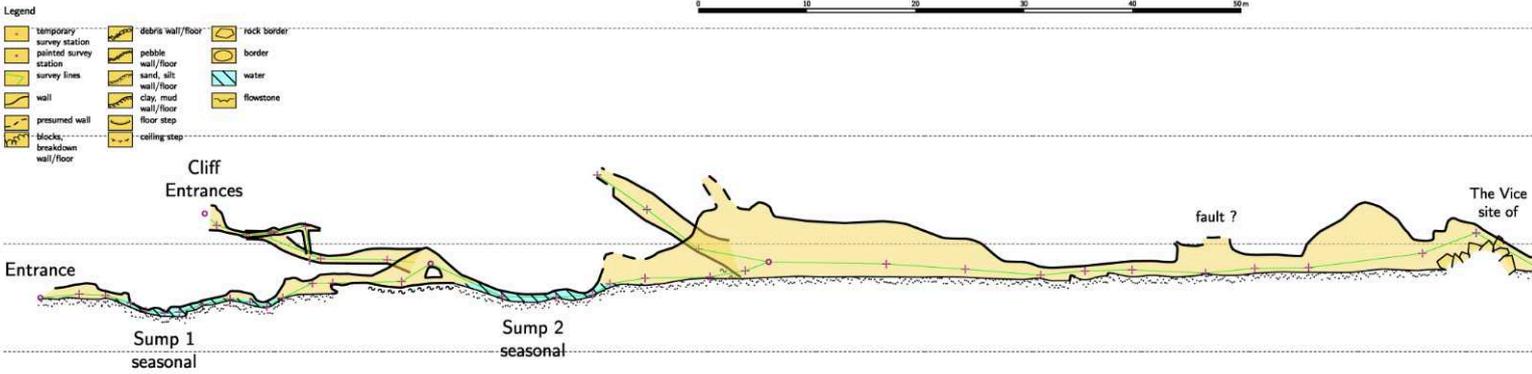
A crawl leads into Wildcat Chamber (I think this is where some wildcat faeces were found by the original explorers, but couldn't find the references when I was writing this article). This was the end of the original cave until the choke (The Vice) was passed then later removed. The cave soon gains considerable height and with it, some formations. This is Orange Wall Hall, with the right wall covered in flowstone of various hues of orange reaching up over 10m.

The way we continued the survey was to take a lower sand gravel floored passage on the left (Curtain Passage). It starts as a low crawl but eventually becomes standing height and passes several sets of straws and curtains, then emerges in Pool Hall with several routes off. We climbed a 4m overhang using a rope, then crawled forward into Crunchy Floor Chamber. This has a low muddy crawl off to the left which





Ogof Ffynnon Wyntog  
Extended Section



closes down. Across this were some stals and the route into Crystal Passage. Again a lot of flowstone as it is on the same feature as Orange Wall Chamber. The choke at the end continues to rise up as the dig progresses through the boulders. We reached the end dig where Nig had been busy, but could not see any massive spaces to aim for. Near the start of the choke a route up could be followed. We surveyed this as it headed back over Crystal Passage but 10m higher. Again no obvious way on.

So back to Pool Hall to complete the loop to Orange Wall Hall. This would give us a good idea as to the accuracy of the survey. On route we picked up a couple of oxbows and a pretty grotto at the end of Orange Wall Hall. A Loop of 22 legs, 111m, 60cm closure, larger than I would like but acceptable.

A final side passage to the radio location point and then we called it a day as Nig had long gone. We had logged some 373m of passage in 88 survey legs and the pub was calling after 8 hours. We met up with Nig in the pub, but by then they had stopped serving food. So after a quick one, we left to find something to eat. David refused point blank to go into a McDonald's, so it was not until we hit Brynmawr that we found a chip shop that was open. Even this was just shutting up so we took the leftovers, some deep fried chicken and some other bits that were nondescript but very edible.

It was two years before I went back to finish the other main section of the cave. From Pool Hall, a route up through boulders on the left enters the White Wall Hall area. This trip was with Paul Tarrant on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2013 along with Nig Rogers and Ed Waters, who were reducing boulders at the end. I took in a Screwfix endoscope to look through and around the gaps in the end choke. Unfortunately it failed to reveal anything useful. However in the sump in Pool Hall it showed the boulders continued straight down with no sand/silt between. No undercut was found in that first metre but it would be worth trying to remove or break up some of these rocks. It seems that water resurges strongly from this sump and pushes quite coarse gravel up the slopes until it overflows and leaves via Curtain Passage.

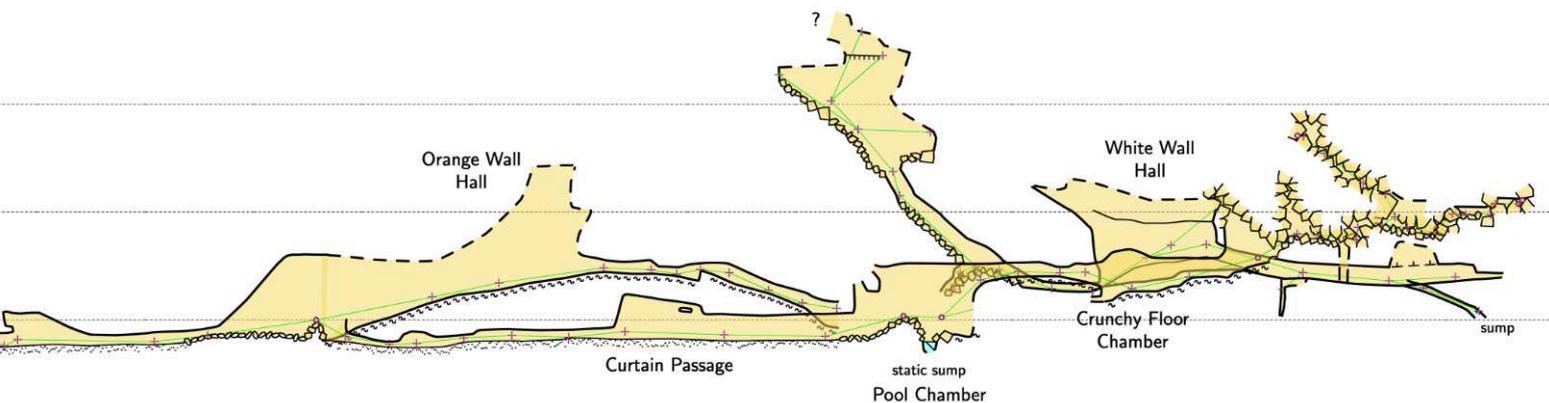
The survey passed through the choke out of Pool Hall to an incline going back over the choke. We would come

back to this, as the main way was through into White Wall Hall. A large calcited run in from the right could be ascended but ended in a flowstone blockage. The left wall is actually a large shelf with an inclined bedding behind it. The chamber lowers and splits. A tube to the left is a muddy slide into a static sump. I believe it has been dived but no progress was made. The slide is very tricky to ascend once it's wet. A slip and you end up in the water, making the next attempt even more fun (fortunately I had been pre-warned). The other branch lowers to a squeeze and is too low beyond. It is worth noting that the sump here is nearly 3m higher than that in Pool Hall.

Going back to the incline near the choke, the first part is an easy ascent up a boulder slope until a vertical wall is reached; a large boulder to one side creates an overhang to hide under. A 3m strenuous climb reaches the base of the next loose boulder slope. Paul stayed out of the way at the base of the climb as I surveyed upwards. One boulder slide was unnerving but I gained a flat area at the top. On the left wall a passage could be seen continuing up but it would involve a climb out over the slope to reach it. The further out you went the greater the exposure. The climb itself looked quite possible, but reversing it without a rope or a spotter for the feet was not a sensible option. So all I could do was to ping the highest and furthest points of it. This reached an altitude of over 4.5m.

The final section to map was the route between the two sumps to the exits on the cliff. The lower exit is not really accessible, so I ascended a chimney with the remains of an unusual chain type gate at its base. From there a short crawl reaches a ledge. By this time Nig had rigged a line for our safe traverse across the cliff face and down.

So once the survey had been plotted and compared to the surface, were there any easy digs to consider to bypass the sumps? The passage near the sump was on a cliff or scree slope, so that one was out. The high level above Pool Hall was near a shallow quarry on the surface, but an examination of this gave no clues. This shallow quarry was also near the inclined beddings of the top of White Wall Hall. Could something in this area be the original route in for the wildcats?



## CAVING ON PORTLAND ISLAND

by *Mike Read*

Some may be surprised to hear that there are quite a few caves on the Isle of Portland, Dorset. Whilst they aren't big, they are certainly worth a visit and hopefully we can organise a club trip to the island in 2021 when Covid permits. There are fundamentally two types of caves on Portland – water formed phreatic tubes and mass rock movement rifts. And of course, the water formed caves are bisected by the rifts which makes for interesting trips.

The longest cave is the Blacknor/Ariel system which is located on the west side of the island and is entered by abseiling off the cliff and swinging in. Currently the cave has a further two entrances, but there are two ongoing digs that could increase that number. The through trip takes 2-3 hours and whilst there is a fair amount of crawling is fairly straight forward and we can even boast some reasonable formations and decorated rifts. Close to this is Steve's Endeavour, a major rift which you can also do a through trip in. The rift does involve several climbs up and down and again is a worthwhile short trip. For those looking for an easier but slightly smaller cave there is the Grove system on the east side of the island. This is primarily a series of interconnecting rifts and now has six entrances. I regularly take scouts for trips in this cave.

And of course, not far away is the Purbecks where there are numerous stone mines. These are very different from the Bath mines and also make interesting trips. Also to promote a club trip we can offer wonderful beaches with kayaking and coastal walks with a good selection of watering holes (both alcoholic and non-alcoholic).

I plan to report in more detail on the prospects and digs in subsequent articles. So that's it for now.

### Geoff's Figs



At a recent Chelsea Zoom meeting, Geoff Newton started eating a fig. He has a fig tree in his garden, which this year has been very bountiful. I immediately made the connection to a famous brand of biscuits. But Geoff had never heard of them. Never mind. Perhaps an image of Geoff's fruit will be more relevant.



- *Joe Duxbury*



### John's Plums

John fed me his juicy plums. I thought you'd like a photo for the journal.

- *Helen Pemberton*



*“A towel is about the most massively useful thing an interstellar hitchhiker can have. Partly it has great practical value. You can wrap it around you for warmth as you bound across the cold moons of Jaglan Beta; you can lie on it on the brilliant marble-sanded beaches of Santraginus V, inhaling the heady sea vapours; you can sleep under it beneath the stars which shine so redly on the desert world of Kakrafoon; use it to sail a miniraft down the slow heavy River Moth; wet it for use in hand-to-hand-combat; wrap it round your head to ward off noxious fumes or avoid the gaze of the Ravenous Bugblatter Beast of Traal (such a mind-boggingly stupid animal, it assumes that if you can’t see it, it can’t see you); you can wave your towel in emergencies as a distress signal, and of course dry yourself off with it if it still seems to be clean enough.”*

***Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy - Douglas Adams***

## **BLUE POOL WEST CAVE**

**Gower, South Wales - Grid Ref SS 4070 9297, Length 40m**

Despite many years of not feeling the need to own a travel towel, I found that as soon as I did have one I used it all the time for a medley of purposes. One such occasion was our trip to Blue Pool West Cave, the site of yet another wardrobe malfunction.

You may think this isn’t the most obvious Gower sea cave to write about, and you’d be right, but as I’ve already written about Paviland Cave and Culver Hole (CSS Newsletter Vol. 60, Nos. 7-9) I’ve gone for this one as it’s probably my third favourite Gower sea cave. Matt and I went here on my birthday a couple of years ago, and as I’d read that there’s a real chance of finding treasure in the form of gold doubloons from an 18<sup>th</sup> century shipwreck I was quite excited. The cave is located in Blue Pool Bay, named after the beautiful natural wonder that is The Blue Pool – a large rock pool that remains 4-8 metres deep even when the tide is out, perfect for bathing and diving. Access is via a rocky scramble down from the coast path at Broughton Burrows and there are a number of caves in the area. We decided to work our way through from right to left and scrambled along the rocky cliff edges to get to Broughton Bay, the large sandy beach to the right. We poked about in a multitude of holes, cavelets, nooks and crannies that line the cliffs here, but alas not a whiff of any form of ancient coinage to be found. So we moved on to the bigger caves of Blue Pool Bay, Matt taking the more sensible route while I opted for the seafaring route (after all, we did have a travel towel in our rucksack). If trying this yourself, take note – the tide can come in quicker than you think. I set off in pants and vest top tucked into my bra but emerged somewhat less clothed after an emergency bid to keep my bra dry in progressively deepening water necessitated the removal of said item. This was swiftly followed by a desperate sprint into a rocky alcove where Matt flung the towel down to restore my dignity. Matt then rejoined me on the beach and we checked out the next caves on the agenda, of which we found Blue Pool West Cave to be much more interesting than we expected. Though not incredibly long, it does have



some attractive stal, a nice climb at the end, and looks very much like a natural cave rather than being formed by sea erosion alone. Overall we had a really fun day with a good mix of scenery, sea and small-scale spelaeology.

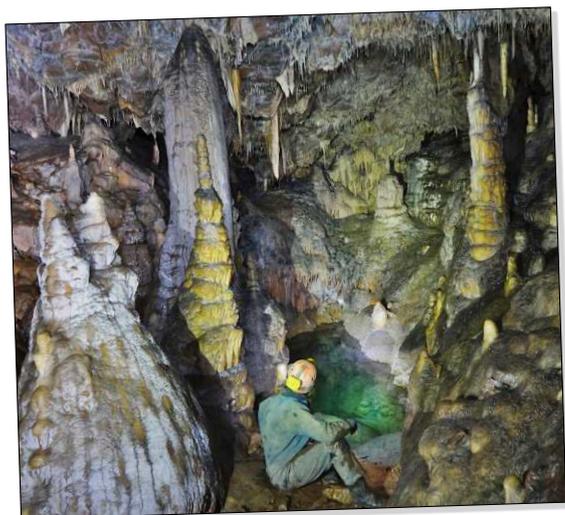
Be aware that the caves can only be explored at low-tide. Other caves in the area are Spaniards Rocks Sea Caves 1-4, Culver Hole (Llangenith), Three Chimneys Arch, Blue Pool Bay East, Blue Pool Bay Sea Cave, Foxhole, Little Foxhole, Broughton Bay Cave, and Twlc Point Cave. See [ogof.org.uk](http://ogof.org.uk) for full details.

**Note:** Ogof Ffynnon Wyntog (see articles in this issue) is not very far away from Blue Pool Bay, so an outing here could also be combined with a proper caving trip there.

## OGOF GOFAN

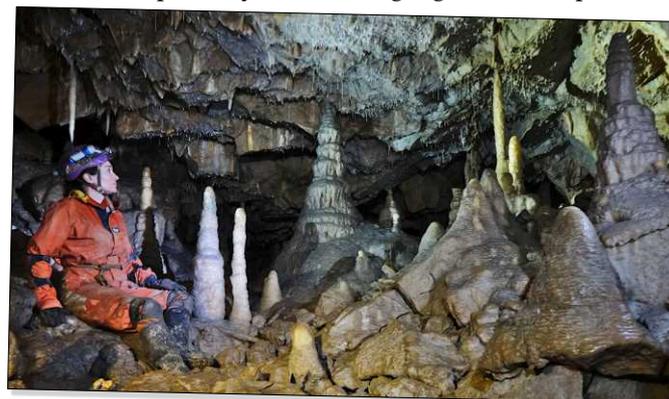
### Saddle Head, Pembrokeshire - Length 129m

Like Ariel Cave in Portland, this is also not a sea cave as such, but a completely natural cave that just happens to be by the sea, and yet again an abseil from the cliff top is necessary to reach the entrance. If you like coastal scenery and beautiful cave formations, then this is the cave for you! It takes a bit of forward planning as a permit is essential to visit the cave – partly due to the fact that it's on military owned land (Castlemartin Range East) and partly due to the vulnerable nature of some the formations. However this can easily be arranged via the CCC website and is well worth the effort. I did this trip on the 2017 CSS Pembrokeshire Meet and we rocked up to the cliffs armed with a medley of rope, slings, hangers, spanners and rope protectors and most vitally some good detailed info about the location and rigging that had been given to us with our permit. There were 8 of us in total, and though the group size is limited to 4 it was easy to split into smaller groups with one team heading in while the rest of us were still faffing about with our kit on the cliff top. The cave entrance can't be seen at all from above so for a while we were a bit stumped as to where to start but once the



initial rigging was put in place the route below became clearer. One thing's for sure, rope protectors really are a must, as the rock is mega sharp and abrasive on rope (and skin!). Despite the perils of scratchy rock and having to pose for photos while baking like a pig in the sunshine, I very much enjoyed abseiling from the cliffs with the sea foaming below. The entrance to the cave itself is a fantastic and much photographed teardrop shape, and shortly after this The Window is reached with another big drop to the sea below. The route through the cave is pretty straightforward and doesn't really take very long at all, but it's well worth taking time to admire the formations and take some photos. The Great Stalagmite Chamber is the largest part of the cave and probably the main highlight of the trip with a medley of sizeable stals and a lovely pool of clear green water.

Beyond this is Wedding Cake Chamber which is also surprisingly pleasant and liberally festooned with interesting formations. Even with the inclusion of cave photography and messing about with ropes this is only really a half day trip, but with plenty of coastal scenery and natural wonders to look at in the local area that's not really such a bad thing.



## BALNAKEIL GLOUP

### Durness, Scottish Highlands - Grid Ref NC 381 687

Okay, so it's a bit of a leap from Pembrokeshire to the far north of Scotland, but if you happen to be in the area for a visit to Smoo Cave and have the right kit for messing about in the sea then Balnakeil Gloop is a good fun excursion. We did this trip way back in 2010 on the annual Mendip Migration to the Grampian hut with Rob 'Tav' Taviner, Stu Gardiner and Hells Warren and had great fun bobbing about in the sea. According to the online Scottish Cave and Mine Database the cave is merely a short swim away, but nonetheless I remember it being quite an adventure so a wetsuit, buoyancy vest and helmet is a must. Another good piece of advice is don't even think about taking a decent/expensive caving light, as the sea is a great destroyer of all things electrical (something we found out much to the peril of our then quite new Stenlights). The cave is accessed from the cliff edge alongside the Durness Golf Club at Balnakeil Bay and an easy walk from the car park there. My memory of the best place to

start the nautical plunge is a bit vague, but I've been reliably informed that you walk across the golf course for 750m until a fenced shaft is reached. This is the blowhole for the Gloop. An obvious easy scramble down leads down to the water's edge. The best approach is made at low tide, when a short swim from a small rocky island gains a small hole, this is the entry to a short but atmospheric through cave. We really enjoyed going through this short cave tunnel and it's also a good marker to know you're on track. Beyond this, a longer swim leads to the inlet of the main cave. This starts off as a roomy chamber with lots of really nice formations and a pebbly beach. At the back of the beach there's a flat out crawl which sometimes gets blocked and needs digging open, but was fine when we were there. This leads to the base of the blowhole and plenty more formations to see. Our first attempt at visiting this cave was a big success and the sea was calm enough for all kinds of rock hopping



Photo by Stuart Gardiner

and jumping in the water. Our second outing was rather less successful, as undeterred by the teeth-chatteringly low temperatures of the Scottish Highlands at the end of October and a somewhat foaming sea, Matt and I once more attempted this fantastic voyage, this time with Tav and Emma 'Emsy' Heron. I think we made it as far as the tunnel before deciding that it was lunacy to continue further. However it was still fun, and the misery of freezing to our very cores had yet to sink in. Even shivering our way back in the biting wind wasn't too bad, but the interested tourists in the car park wanting to chat about our adventure when we desperately needed to change out of our wet gear really did take the biscuit!

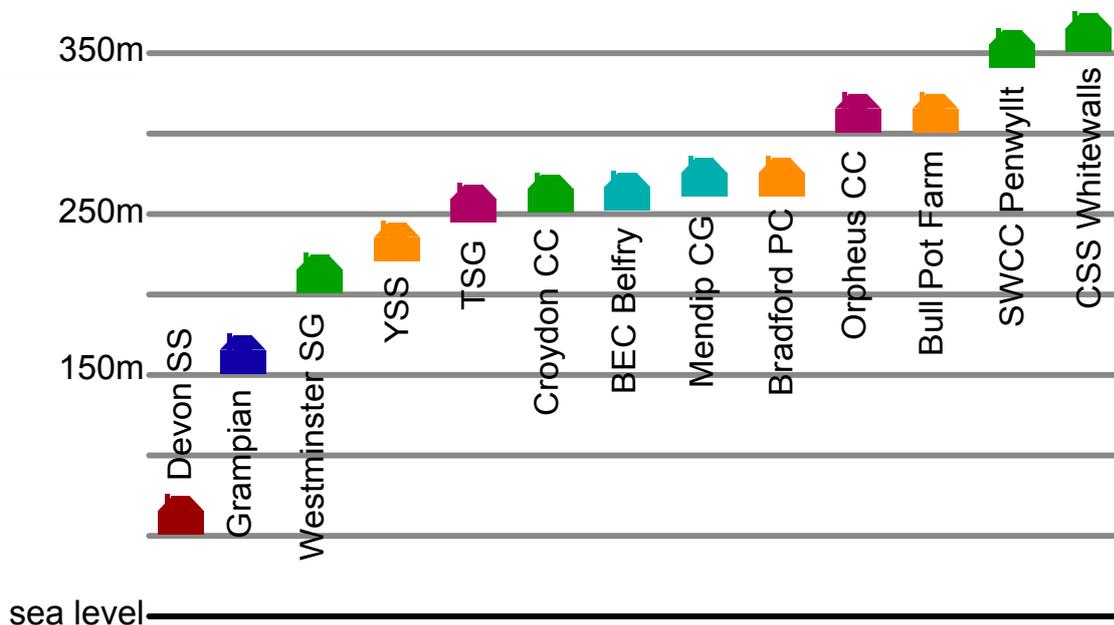
Apparently it's also possible to abseil into the blowhole from the surface and hence completely avoid the need for a swim, but I haven't done that myself so have no idea what the rigging would entail. However I'm sure info could be obtained easily enough by either contacting the GSG or asking advice from Fraser at Smoo Cave (no visit to Durness would be complete without a visit to Smoo Cave and doing the cave tour with a boat after all).

Well that concludes my sea cave adventures, though I'm sure there are plenty more yet to be had. If anyone else has any tales of similar outings and interesting spelaeology by the sea, it would be great to hear about them.

# TOP HUT!

by Adrian Fawcett

It's official: Whitewalls is the UK's top caving hut – when measured in terms of altitude above sea level, anyway. After the question arose about which was higher, Whitewalls or Penwyllt, I thought I would extend my research to the other caving huts in Britain. Here are some of them presented graphically, and coloured according to region. Altitudes were taken from Ordnance Survey 1:25000 maps and are believed to be accurate to within 10m.



# Wookey Hole

## Dry to 24

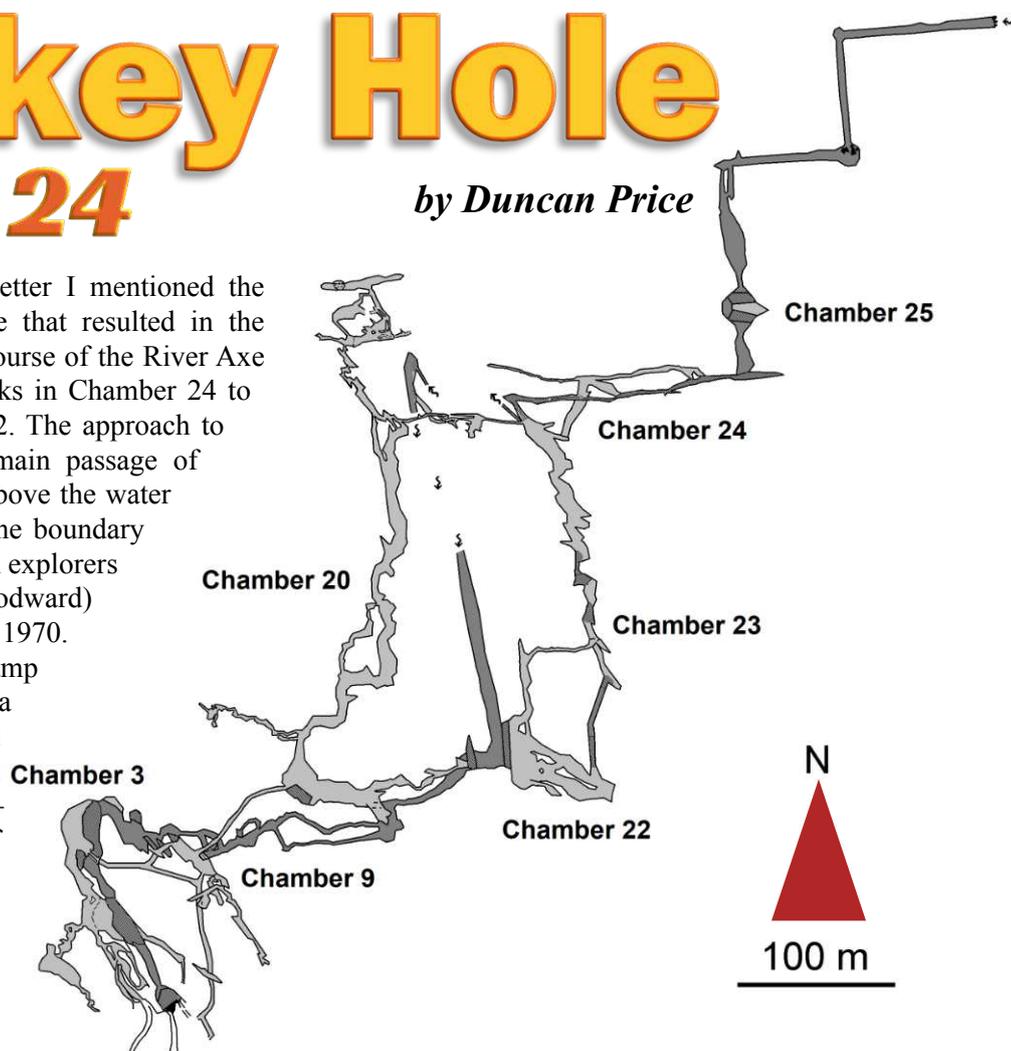
by Duncan Price

In the last issue of this newsletter I mentioned the digging activity in Wookey Hole that resulted in the interception of the underground course of the River Axe between the point at which it sinks in Chamber 24 to where it reappears in Chamber 22. The approach to the sump involves leaving the main passage of Chamber 20 at its highest point above the water table at the conglomerate/limestone boundary near to the point where the original explorers (John Parker and Brian Woodward) inscribed their initials in January 1970.

A small hole leads to a steep ramp covered in flowstone down into a short section of keyhole-shaped passage. A handline has been placed to aid the awkward ascent – going in can be simply a case of sliding down the slope using the rope as a brake. This side passage heads east towards Chamber 24 but becomes blocked by calcite at high level with a narrow slot in the floor as the only alternative lead.

Although the site was looked at in 1970, attention moved upstream when Chamber 22 was found the next year. Progress slowed as the course of the underground river was lost (we now know it comes out of a low inclined bedding plane on the northern side of the sump just before it surfaces in Chamber 22) and it was not until 1976 that the static sump at the end of Chamber 22 was passed to reach Chambers 23 and 24. The discovery of Chamber 24 by Oliver Statham and Geoff Yeadon was somewhat controversial as Colin Edmunds (supported by Martyn Farr) was close to surfacing in Chamber 23 after finding the way on. Aware that they had cheekily stolen the lead from others, the point at which the underground River Axe was regained in Chamber 24 was dubbed “Sting Corner” after the 1973 film starring Paul Newman and Robert Redford.

These new finds were quickly surveyed, but since mapping of the underwater sections of the cave was an imprecise art, a series of radiolocation exercises were carried out by Dany Bradshaw and Bob Cork in 1979 to correct the locations of Chambers 20, 22 and 24. In order to get an accurate fix, it was important to lay out the transmitter loop level. In Chamber 24, a sandy area in the normally dry passage downstream of Sting Corner was chosen. Adjustments were made to the map and, in the case of Chamber 24, there was a considerable error. While doing this work, Dany and Bob explored and surveyed a narrow rift off the high-level oxbow upstream



of Sting Corner heading back towards the far reaches of Chamber 20. They reached the head of a pitch and traversed across this to a short section of passage with a loose false floor to a calcited choke similar in nature to the side passage heading in the opposite direction from Chamber 20.

Spurred on by the apparent proximity of a dry link between Chambers 20 and 24, Dany and Bob tried to dig the calcited choke in the passage heading east from Chamber 20. Modern lightweight battery hammer drills were not available to them, so plaster charges had to be applied with little effect. In January 1981, Tony Boycott and Peter Glanvill tried digging down in the floor. Further trips with Jim Durston and Ray Stead made some progress, but it was not until the '90s that Tom Chapman and Keith Savory took up the challenge. Using a drill that they borrowed from the Wessex Cave Club, they enlarged a narrow series of descending rifts to reach a low mud-filled arch in a steeply dipping bedding plane. Originally, they attempted to keep the drill dry, but found that it still worked even after being flooded so dispensed with any form of protection. Misfires were frequent, and the pair used to take it in turns to squeeze back down the passage and repair breaks in the bang wire – a kind of Russian roulette. Coming back up one day, after preparing the charge, a large wall flake fell off and pinned Tom down. He was unable to move, but luckily Keith was behind him and was able to retrieve the lump hammer from the dig to

break up the offending rock into smaller pieces which he could then lift off Tom. Robin Brown, Phil Churches, Gavin Newman, Howard Price and Mike Thomas were also involved.

In the spring of 2015, a tunnel was dug between Chamber 9 and Chamber 20 which enabled a team of non-diving diggers to continue Tom and Keith's dig. Several modifications were made to the narrow approaches to facilitate the removal of spoil which had to be transported up three awkward climbs where it was used to backfill a blind rift. This enabled the team to clear the mud choke from the bedding plane which was followed down to a sump. As I've already mentioned, this was found to be part of the "missing" streamway between Chamber 24 and Chamber 22. Therefore, this area of the cave became known as "Wookey 23<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>." At the end of July 2016, having exhausted possibilities near the water table, a handful of digging and banging trips were done above the initial vertical climbs in search of a high-level continuation. Progress was hampered by the poor state of the rock, so the team turned their attention to the sand-choked western branch at the end of Chamber 20.

I had been involved in the initial cave survey work with Andrew Atkinson to get an accurate plan of Chamber 20 before the tunnel was started. On one of these trips, Malcom Stewart, Andrew and I visited the approach to Tom and Keith's dig. Only Andrew was slim enough to pass the initial squeeze to the head of the first tight vertical drop so he carried on surveying on his own just using a DistoX without a PDA, storing the data on the device for downloading later – a technique that I have used with much success on subsequent surveying trips. For surveying underwater, we put the DistoX in a pressure-proof housing and shot legs between ping pong ball floats attached to a series of tape measures cable-tied to the guideline.

As soon as the tunnelling was complete, the tape measures and floats were relocated upstream in the sump towards Chamber 22. After a series of dives surveying the line and then repositioning markers, air surface was reached in April 2016. A few months later, Max Fisher and I resurveyed the main parts of Chamber 22 after a trip to support Chris Jewell on a dive beyond Chamber 25 had been postponed due to poor visibility. This was followed by an 18 month hiatus until January 2018 when we got around to mapping the overland route, "Cam Valley Crawl" (discovered in 1983 by Rob Harper and Trevor Hughes) to Chamber 23. Joined by Mike Waterworth, we stopped at a wetsuit-shredding narrow vertical rift (which Max descended) to a letter-box slot into a second vertical drop. I left a bottle of Tippex® (used to mark survey stations) on the endpoint of the survey for future reference.

On 4 February 2018, Max and I went to Chamber 24 with a drill and bolting kit to continue work on several climbing projects. Above the entry point for the Sting Corner Sump we noticed a promising rift in the roof which appeared to be on the same line as the flooded

passage below it. The first part of the route involved scaling the fixed ladder that had been placed to help carry diving gear upstream. By crawling along a horizontal gap in the rock buttress to the right of the rift we were able to bypass the bottom of the climb. After chimneying up the abrasive walls of the passage we reached a short horizontal continuation and a small dried-up gour pool. A strong outwards draught blew out of a too-tight section beyond this which looked passable by a thinner person. We weren't sure if this had been previously pushed and resolved to return suitably armed to investigate further.

A couple of weeks later Max and I were joined in Chamber 24 by Connor Roe to complete some climbs that Max had begun in December 2017. While Max and Connor were busy elsewhere, I took a bag containing tools to enlarge the squeeze in the rift above Sting Corner Sump. Hitting the flowstone with a lump hammer only resulted in me receiving a face-full of dust blown down the passage by the healthy draught. The walls were quite solid and wouldn't easily succumb to a chisel. Then I managed to drop the hammer into the sump pool below me. In disgust, I surveyed back down the passage and covered part of Chamber 24 downstream of Sting Corner. The water levels in the cave were quite high, and there was a section of canal leading to the static sumps separating Chamber 24 from Chamber 23, so I stopped at a convenient point and struggled upstream to meet the others. Once Connor and Max had concluded their activities, we persuaded Connor to have a look at the rift. He was able to pass the squeeze by breathing out but reported that the way on was blocked by calcite a few metres beyond this. The orientation of the high-level passage looked promising to intercept the side passage heading east from Chamber 20, but although the 1979 radiolocation point was nearby, there was still some room for error.

At the beginning of September 2018, Connor, Gary Jones and I surveyed Chamber 23. The water levels were low meaning that two of the static sumps had airspace through them. Connor dived the final sump trailing a tape measure so that we could get a reasonable fix on the downstream end of Chamber 24. The sump is short, shallow and can probably be free dived under these conditions. The following weekend, I was back in Chamber 24 to support Chris Jewell doing a deep dive beyond Chamber 25. Mike Waterworth and I filled in the missing part of the survey in the bottom end of Chamber 24 as well as covering part of the streamway and high-level oxbow opposite the divers' camp. The rest of the streamway and the narrow rift first visited by Bob Cork and Dany Bradshaw was done on two trips with Tim Morgan and Josh Bratchley respectively. The only part of the survey missing was the climb down from the end of Cam Valley Crawl into Chamber 23.

On 22 June 2019, Max free climbed up to the connection with Cam Valley Crawl from Chamber 23 trailing a 20m SRT rope. Two temporary hangers were installed below the bedding plane that connects with the

jagged rift down from Cam Valley Crawl. The first part of the climb is an ascent of a muddy slope which proved treacherous – some surplus dive line from Chamber 23 was used to put a knotted line on this. This was followed by a chimney up to a traverse onto a roomy ledge involving a bold step which I found challenging. From here, a narrow rift (10m high) reached a horizontal bedding plane to the tight 3m thrutch up to Cam Valley Crawl. After a series of contortions, I was able to shoot a survey leg to the bottle of Tippex® at the top and I continued making measurements back to a known point in Chamber 23. The SRT rope proved too short to reach the bottom, so some more dive line was employed to rig the Y-hang and then form a re-belay around a big boulder to abseil back down without doing the airy traverse. One of the original explorers of the link, Rob Harper, had come along for moral support and insisted on serenading me with various folk/caving songs while I surveyed.



The results were encouraging: my data agreed with the position of the radiolocation point in Chamber 24, but the orientation of the passages needed rotating slightly. This placed the high-level passage heading off above Sting Corner Sump less than 30m away from (and at the same level as) the top of the bedding leading to the sump in Wookey 23¾.

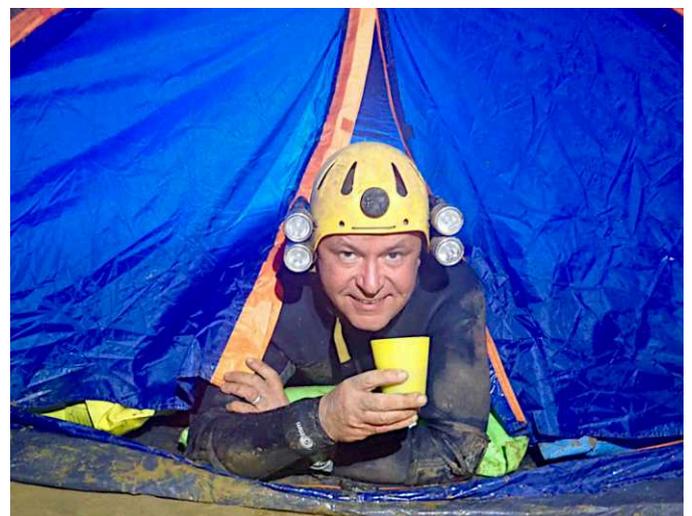
On 21 September 2019, my drill and appropriate accompaniments were taken to Chamber 24. The drill itself stayed dry in a watertight bag, but the rocket tube containing the drill battery flooded on route rendering the battery unserviceable. A second attempt was made on 31 October, with an early start in order to avoid costumed tourists on Hallowe'en. This time, Max's drill and some Hilti 4-point drill bits were taken in. Gareth Davies and I climbed into the passage and Gareth drilled four holes in the hope of cleaving off enough rock to allow easy movement through the restriction. Once the charges had been fired, we went upstream to join Tim Robjohns and Max at the divers' camp for a brew but found the lighter was out of gas, so a pan of calcium carbide and water was sparked to achieve the necessary ignition source. The high-level passage was revisited on the way out to assess the damage. Despite some air movement in the dig, it was still full of fumes, so an exit was made for ice cream.

Max and I went back a month later and found the route passable. This gained a 5m long enlargement suitable for us to work in. We could see that the passage continued beyond a football-sized gap. Five shot holes were placed around the periphery and fired from a safe distance. A follow-up trip on 16 December gained access to a continuation of the rift – about 0.7m wide and up to 5m high. This pinched in after 7m where a petrifying trickle of water was depositing calcite on the walls. It was

possible to squeeze up the rift and see a boulder blocking the passage with a view up into an enlargement. Three holes were drilled in the walls of the rift in order to improve access and fired from the main passage. A return was made on 8 February 2020 when Max was able to get a better view of the route ahead – a corkscrew squeeze up

through boulders gave a view into a "chamber" where it would be possible for two people to stand up. Unfortunately, large, poised boulders still prevented access. The squeeze up the rift before this remained problematic, so more chemicals were applied to widen it. There was a very strong inwards breeze at the time and despite visits to Wookey 23¾ a day or two after banging above Sting Corner when traces of fumes were detected, it was not at all obvious where the air movement was coming from.

In between digging trips to Chamber 24, sporadic attention had been paid to the Chamber 20 side. In 2017, Chris Binding had enlarged a couple of squeezes in the approach to Wookey 23¾. The first one was at the very top of the calcite ramp which had the unwelcome result of leaving the slope below covered in sharp gravel until the passage of cavers swept it clear. The second squeeze was at the bottom of the rift in the approach to the first vertical drop. Neither modifications were really necessary, but at least the latter one allowed us to relocate the spoil heap from a back-filled blind rift that we thought might be a possible route to Chamber 24 – sadly this closed in with no air movement. In January 2020, a couple of trips were made to the bottom of the second vertical drop to clear spoil from an infilled shaft. A trickle of water disappeared here, and I thought that this might be the same one that was coming down the wall in the dig from Chamber 24. Before we got too far with this, COVID-19 intervened and all caving and diving in Wookey Hole was suspended.



Top: Chamber 24 upstream of Sting Corner  
Above: Duncan enjoying a cuppa at the camp Sept 2019

Activities resumed in July 2020 when on Sunday 29th Chris Jewell, Max, Connor and I made an early start diving from Chamber 9 before the cave was opened to tourists. Chris headed off to Chamber 25 to place some anchors for an underwater habitat but was thwarted by a flat drill battery. Meanwhile, the last charge had widened the approach to the blockage in the dig allowing me to get a good look at the offending boulders. Having indicated where these might profitably be broken with small charges, Connor went in to prepare four short shot holes under my supervision. These were fired from a safe distance and everyone dived back out to the Resurgence in order to avoid meeting the general public in the Show Cave. Having posted a photo of us enjoying the traditional post-dive ice cream on social media after our rock bothering in Chamber 24, I was contacted by Chris Binding who asked how we were getting on, and if there was anything he could do by (more) widening of the approach from the Chamber 20 side. I summarised our progress and said that as the air movement had been into the dig, it might be worth going to smell for fumes in Wookey 23¾. Chris replied that he wouldn't be able to visit until the end of the week, so I went there on the Tuesday evening when we normally dug in Chamber 20. I couldn't detect anything. I lowered a small rock down a promising rift at high-level attached to a bit of bang wire on the off chance that we might be able to see it from the other side at some point.

The next evening, I was surprised to receive another message from Chris Binding congratulating me on my good thinking regarding the stone on a wire. He'd obviously been in and seen it. He went on to press me on our plans to return as he was keen to start blasting operations at high level (where I had left my tell-tale). Over several exchanges, I stressed that this would be premature, and it would be in the wrong place since there was a considerable height difference. Finally, he asked if it would be OK for Mike and/or Robert Thomas to go into our dig "to have a peek from the 24 side?"

"I'd prefer not!" was my terse reply.

I shared the gist of this conversation with the others. Although I'd been assured that my wishes would be respected, there was no guarantee that someone might visit the site – especially as Chris Jewell was planning a long dive in the final sump at the end of the following week. He'd assembled an army of helpers to support him and there would be a lot of traffic in Chamber 24 from cave divers with time on their hands. Connor was doing an evening trip to Chamber 24 with John Volanthen on 27 July. He asked if he could check out the results of his (first) bang. I didn't have any objections and asked him to reel in the firing cable in case others visited later in the week – at least it wouldn't get damaged. At about 10pm I got a message from Connor, "Efforts last week were very successful, boulders much smaller. Move to a 3m climb up, then moved boulders for around 30 seconds through a duck under to a large chamber. Chamber approximately 10m wide in places, rift above. Passage carried on

straight ahead on flowstone, had a little look up but did not go right to the end..."

"Beginner's Luck!" was my first thought, although my reply to Connor was more colourful. That's how the discovery got its name.

We hastily organised a trip to check out the find and survey it. The only time that Max, Connor and I could all make it was the evening of Thursday 30 July – not ideal, but it would have to do. Max and I went in ahead of Connor and resurveyed inwards from the main passage. The last bang had been effective but the climb that followed proved a little tricky with few holds. A tight squeeze at the top entered a sizeable passage formed in dolomitic conglomerate. The obvious way on to the west ended at a steep flowstone slope which became near vertical and pinched in. This looked very much like the rope slide down into the start of Wookey 23¾. Max disappeared through some boulders to the south which brought him to a roomy inclined bedding plane developed in limestone. It was a dead ringer for the Strike Passage leading off Chamber 22 towards Cam Valley Crawl and resembled the slope down to the sump in Wookey 23¾. I was just surveying this, and shooting some video, when Connor joined us. There were several cross-rifts in the bedding plane, one of these must surely be the link with Chamber 20?

We exited the cave just as the digging team were changing outside by the canal. After the Spring lockdown, we had taken to congregating there rather than in the car park to avoid drawing attention to ourselves. The canal was a good place to cache a bottle of beer to cool during the summer evenings for consumption later. I quickly processed the survey data and shared the information with the rest of the team. If the results were to be believed, then one of the cross-rifts in Beginner's Luck was less than 5m away from Wookey 23¾. The only problem was that the closest point from the "dry" side was behind the spoil heap...

In 2016, we had dug down to get to the sump in Wookey 23¾. A lot of rock had been stacked in the final chamber reached by Tom and Keith in the '90s. We'd employed some cement mixed with mud to form a mortar to build a retaining wall across a rift which appeared to close in amongst fallen slabs. On 4 August, Vince Simmonds, Robin 'Tav' Taviner, Nick Hawkes, Nick's nephew and I revisited the site. There was slight air movement, and Vince was quite enthusiastic. We resolved to enlarge the rift using explosives until we broke through. Our plan was to alternate work between here and the dig at the other branch of the end of Chamber 20 where we'd had a minor breakthrough in January 2020.

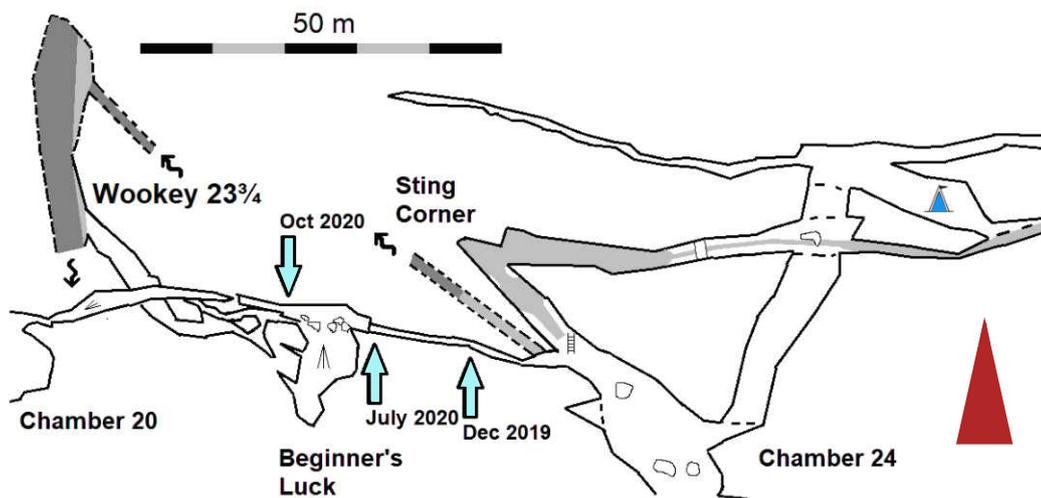
We were justifiably coy about the proximity of the connection to avoid unwelcome interest. Our subterfuge was helped by the fact that the other dig in Chamber 20 "went" in September with the resulting discovery of 300+ m passage (CSS Newsletter vol. 62, nos. 6-9, pp. 68-71) diverting attention elsewhere. Furthermore, visits

to the Hunters' Lodge Inn were restricted by COVID-19 which limited the traditional vector for gossip. Vince was instrumental in drilling and banging the rift, often assisted by his wife Roz. Ideally, three people were needed to ease portorage of equipment – especially on the return. Clearing the debris required a larger team to find increasingly innovative places to stack the spoil. Initially we lifted rocks and gravel up the previous climb and backfilled my abortive dig from January. Then we filled in a neighbouring muddy rift at the top of the slope down to the sump (joking that this was probably the way on). Finally, buttress walls were built in the final chamber to hold debris. The draught picked up and then disappeared. We progressed up a bedding plane to a point where there were holes between pendants in the roof – the best option appeared to be over to the right.

Despite the excitement of our discoveries elsewhere, disillusionment was creeping in. A second wave of COVID-19 was approaching, and we were digging on borrowed time. On the evening of 15 October, Chris Jewell and Max visited Chamber 24 to collect some cylinders left in the cave from Chris' dive in July. This was an ideal opportunity to try for a vocal connection. Tom Chapman and I went in early to listen for them near the bottom of the flowstone ramp with the handline on it. Roz and Vince joined us and headed down to the dig face to drill some more holes. After a while, we realised that the noise of the drilling had stopped so Tom and I went to investigate. As we approached the dig, Roz excitedly informed us that Vince was talking to Max and it sounded close. Tom and I took turns to crawl in for a chat before work resumed and the divers exited.

By the following week, we had done two more bangs and could see through into Beginner's Luck. I recognised a few features and circulated a still from my video footage shot in July of the area where I thought we might be heading. We were entering upslope from one of the cross rifts, but there was a rise in the ceiling which might be to our advantage. Another bang went in on 26 October to be followed up by a clearing session the following day. Frustratingly, despite our best efforts, it was still too awkward to get through – perhaps had we been 30 years younger we'd have done it. There was talk of returning with plug and feathers, but we decided it would be simpler to come back the next evening with more explosives. This would be the 12th bang.

Thursday 29 October was the big night. Vince and I had already made three trips that week, Nick two. Roz (who'd also done two trips) couldn't make it due to work



commitments and Tav was self-isolating. Also missing were Paul Brock and Jonathan Riley who had helped over the past 3 months. Regulars Graham 'Jake' Johnson and Mike Moxon were there. Just to be sure, Vince had brought his drill and plug and feathers anyway. These weren't necessary and we finally crawled through into the basement of Beginner's Luck. After a slippery ascent into the main rift, I followed Vince into Chamber 24 along the section we'd dug through from the other side.

Reassembled at the foot of the builders' ladder at Sting Corner, the team toured the passage downstream towards the static sumps from Chamber 23. Nick braved the swim upstream to the divers' camp and the next sump. I started out early to survey the connection and had finished work by the time the others caught me up. When the numbers were processed, there was less than 1% error in the closure between both ends of the circuit from Chamber 20 through the sump to Chamber 22, overland to Chamber 23, through another sump to Chamber 24 and back into Chamber 20 via our discoveries.

Vince emailed Wookey Hole Caves the next morning to tell them the news. The breakthrough came just in time to be added as an endnote to an article that he was preparing for Descent. Chris Binding wasted no time in visiting Chamber 24 and the YouTube video of his trip was quickly picked up on social media. Regrettably, half of the digging team hadn't been able to visit Chamber 24 before the country went into a second lockdown. The link is physically demanding, especially on the return, and has some difficult, awkward climbs. Hopefully, they will stay that way!



Above: Mike Moxon crawls into Beginner's Luck  
Left: The first banged squeeze  
Photos by Duncan Price

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# OGOF CLOGWYN

*by Andy Watson*

My first Ogof Clogwyn trip was during a week of adventure caving from Longtown Adventure Centre in about 1973. Among others we did Eglwys Faen, Agen Allwedd, Chartist Cave, Little Neath River Cave and Bridge Cave in a week arranged by Northamptonshire Education Authority during the summer holidays. My sister was a fan of caving in those days and she was 18 months older than me, so she had been first. The leader was Bill Gascoigne who some will remember from those early years.

Since 1973 I had only visited the cave once, with some of the HSCC (Hampshire Scouts Caving Club) team in 2014. I said I had done it years ago when a mere young boy! Sue and I revisited the cave in January 2020 on the CSS Annual Dinner weekend. It is a lovely little cave with great shelving.



## Send Us Your Pictures!

A call for readers to take a look through your archive of caving photographs, both old and more recent, and send us some of your favourites to be showcased in future issues.

If you only have originals and no way to scan them get in touch and we'll see what we can do.





*Chris Tomlin, Coniston Copper Mines,  
March 2018. Photo by John Stevens*



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