

**Volume 63
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**Diving in Daren
Mid-Wales Mines
Caving in Vietnam
Caves of Asham Wood**

CHELSEA SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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Above and Left: Andy Heath and Mandy Voysey in North-West Inlet, Craig a Ffynnon by Matt Voysey

Front cover: Rachel Smith in San Doong Cave, Vietnam by Martyn Farr

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) 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 At last things are slowly getting closer to normal, people have been enjoying going caving together again, and this issue sees the return of the CSS Meets calendar with club activities planned for the second half of 2021. Thank you to everyone who sent in articles and pictures for this edition, which as a special treat has been printed in glorious full colour. Enjoy!

Please submit all items for publication in this newsletter to cssmattv@gmail.com

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

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

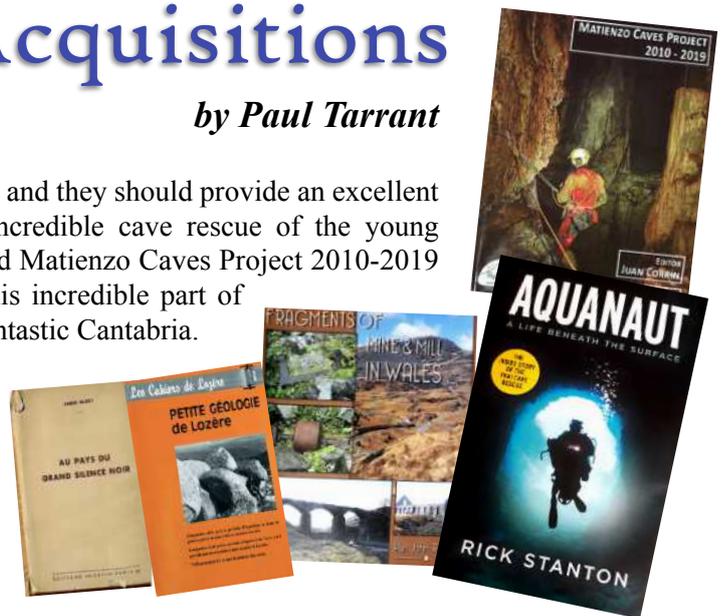
Editors: Matt and Mandy Voysey

New Library Acquisitions

by Paul Tarrant

Two new books have been bought for the Library and they should provide an excellent read. Aquanaut, Rick Stanton's account of the incredible cave rescue of the young football team in Tham Luang Cave in Thailand, and Matienzo Caves Project 2010-2019 which is guaranteed to fire up interest to go to this incredible part of northern Spain which is just north of the equally fantastic Cantabria.

Other books are geological books on areas of interest which I have cleared from my book shelf, plus a book on Welsh mines that I found I already had, albeit with a different cover! The last book, which is in French, is Au Pays du Grand Silence Noir by Andre Glory and is donated from Dick Laurence's collection.



Castlemartin Range West Access 2021

Castlemartin Range West is a military firing range in Pembrokeshire with a fantastic coastline and plenty of limestone scenery and cliffs. On days when the Army is not actively training, access is permitted for caving, climbing, surfing and fishing, provided a pass is obtained by the guard first. Usually you would need to attend a scheduled Army briefing before being allowed onto the range, but this year it can be done online and full details of how to apply can be found on the Pembrokeshire Coast website page below:

www.pembrokeshirecoast.wales/things-to-do/outdoor-activities/castlemartin-range-recreational-access-brief

Note: This does not include access to Ogof Gofan which is on Castlemartin Range East, permits for this can be arranged via Stuart France, see the Cambrian Caving Council website for further details: www.cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk

Membership

Current rates:

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

Associate: £18 to receive publications, plus £6 for BCA non-caver insurance.

Provisional: £10 for any 6 months plus BCA active caver insurance to Dec 31st at £4.25 per quarter.

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

Subscription renewals become due 1st October yearly. Please send all payments to:

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

Email csstreasurer@chelseaspelaeo.org

A Day Caving in the Clydach Gorge

30th May 2021 - Adrian, Emyr Walters and Helen Nightingale

by Adrian Fawcett



Emyr asked me if I was up for a trip to Shakespeare's Cave. Well, why not? My only previous trip to Shakespeare's was way back in 1992 so it was definitely time for another visit. Helen was at Whitewalls that weekend, continuing with her project to redecorate the changing room, and it took little to tempt her into joining us for the trip on a warm, sunny Sunday.

We parked by the 'rusty' footbridge in Clydach, only to find it was temporarily closed due to the footpath being lost to the roadworks. Emyr said he had recently seen a patrol car go past, so we took our chances it wouldn't be along again soon, climbing around the barricade and sneaking across the footbridge. While in the construction site on the other side we spotted a car with Battenberg markings coming up the road, so Helen and I ducked down into a pit – amusing Emyr who had correctly identified the vehicle as an ambulance.

Ignoring the temporary closure notice, since we happened to be going right past it on our way down to the river, we had a quick grovel in Ogof Capel, as far as the sump. There's not a lot to see, but it's a nice phreatic tube. Then on to Shakespeare's. It's a lovely little cave – far nicer than I remembered – and we were all glad to be wearing wetsuits since a soaking is guaranteed at each of the ducks. When I visited in 1992 Duck 4 was totally silted up, so that was the end of the trip on that occasion. This time the duck was clear. It's quite constricted, so you pass it on your back, feet first, on the way in. Unfortunately, Emyr didn't fit around the bend, so he decided to give the alternative sump route a try while we waited for him at the other side. We were in audio contact with him most of the way via fissures in rock – first along the crawl, and then after he had successfully passed the 2 metre sump. But he wasn't confident about the way on through Duck 5. I was waiting at the other end of the duck where the fixed line came through, but couldn't see his light the other side. Emyr headed back out, determined to come back with someone who knew the sump route. Helen and I meanwhile did the last bit of the cave as far as a too-tight rift, beyond which is Llanelly Quarry Pot.

Back out in the sunshine, a plan was starting to come together – we would proceed up the gorge to Ogof Clogwyn and Ogof Nant Rhin, then cross the A465 back to the cars via a bat tunnel. Helen revealed that she had never been into Clogwyn, so that was a 'must'. On the way we also had a quick look in Ogof Gelynnen which, like Ogof Capel, is officially off-limits due to the roadworks overhead. It is not far to the point where the contractors have temporarily blocked the connection to Ogof Capel. Hopefully it will not be too long now before we get access back.

The gorge was looking very pretty today, with the sunlight filtering through the new beech leaves. Rejoining the stream at Devil's Bridge, we picked our way carefully upstream over slippery rocks and negotiating quite a few fallen trees. The river water was a bit smelly so we were keen to avoid accidentally falling in.

Ogof Clogwyn is a pretty little cave, too, with its interesting passage shapes and phreatic shelving, and Helen was suitably impressed. The streamway is mostly a stroll, but we went in via the high-level crawl to make a round trip of it. Two walkers at the entrance when we arrived there were the only other people we saw the whole trip.



By the time we reached Ogof Nant Rhin we were running short on time – Emyr had already extended his callout once – so we just went upstream as far as the confluence, where there are a few nice flowstone formations. I was pleased to see the scaffolding in the entrance passage is still doing its job 9 years on, though the entrance could do with a bit of remedial work due to stream erosion.

From Nant Rhin, we traversed the steep side of the gorge (it would be worth going up there with a spade to cut a bit of a path) to reach the bat tunnel under the dual carriageway. The tunnel runs parallel with a culvert taking the Nant Gam under the dual carriageway and is equipped with a gate and small ladder at the far end – surely not provided for the bats to use? Then it was up again, climbing a steep slope through the trees, emerging on the Clydach road just above Blackrock Quarry, and 5 minutes back down to where we'd parked.

Ogof Clogwyn - photo of Emyr by Adrian and photos of Helen by Emyr



PYC ADVENTURES

Diving into Daren through Pwll y Cwm



by Gary Jones

Like most, my caving exploits over the last year or so have been somewhat minimal to say the least! Just prior to the world changing, there was an exceptional flood in Daren Cilau which amongst other things flooded Hard Rock. Once the flood waters had receded, I was keen to go and have a look myself, but the first lockdown started and any thoughts of a trip were quickly dropped.

Fast forward to July 2020 and both the weather and lockdown rules finally allowed a trip. My first dive was a very steady affair testing both myself and my gear and generally getting back up to speed. Connor Roe had been in a few days before and dug the choke open. Along with Andy Torbet, he had been through to Daren and visited Hard Rock. Between them, they had encountered and recovered various items from the sump such as a sack of rubbish, a BDH, a furry suit and a cam band. All these having been washed in during the big flood.

I spent a bit of time digging out the choke area further and also had a good look around to see if there were any significant changes evident. Nothing obvious was noted other than a very nice looking and shiny pair of line cutters. These turned out to belong to Connor however due to further lockdowns etc, they are still languishing in my diving box awaiting their return.

A week or so later, I visited again but this time with the intention of going through into Daren to recover my camping gear left up at the Restaurant. Approximately 200m into the sump I came across something wrapped around the line. Due to silt and poor visibility it was not immediately obvious what the item was, but it later transpired to be a black refuse sack. Shortly after, a sock was recovered, closely followed by what I initially assumed to be a second sock poking out of the silt. However when I attempted to pull it free, it kept on coming. It turned out to be the arm of a pullover almost completely

buried in the silt. A Bristol City FC hat completed the collection a few metres later!

All the items were retrieved and secured in a tackle sack for safe removal. All this extra faffing in the sump was not ideal from an air consumption point of view and due to a combination of slightly under filled cylinders to begin with, a bit more of a faff with the line at the choke and the extra time spent in billowing clouds of silt retrieving the detritus, it became clear at around 400m, I was not going to make it through within thirds so I turned round and went home instead!

Coupled with what Connor found, it's clear that a lot of items had been washed into the sump as previously expected. Much of the day's haul had been mostly buried in silt so it's highly likely there is more still to come. I suspect that this lot had probably all been in the black rubbish bag which was washed into the sump and carried some 400m or so through before splitting and dumping its contents along the floor.

Once again, more lockdowns intervened and the gear was once more put to the back of the garage, but finally in April this year a few days after Wales allowed entry again, I returned to try and have another go. This time a new problem had arisen. The national park authority had closed both the footpath from the north side of the gorge (the usual access route) and also the southern one connecting with Devil's Bridge due to the ongoing roadworks. After a bit of investigation, I found it was still possible to access the site via the Clogwyn path and a deviation along the gorge top. The route was longer and had a section of path where it ran adjacent to a significant drop. This route required more time, effort and care, but was possible.

On the plus side, due to the dry spell of weather, the visibility was unusually good and could almost be described as inviting! The rather large log jam



immediately upstream of the retaining wall was less so. I was fully expecting the odd tree trunk or two to be present in the pot underwater but was pleasantly surprised to find it clear of any such obstructions. The bottom of the pot and the choke area can vary in nature between visits. Sometimes, a fine layer of silt covers it, other times it's washed clean. The exact nature of the slope at the bottom is always hard to predict so it was nice to find the choke area consisting of large rounded clean washed pebbles. These are easy to dig and move out of the way, causing minimal silt disturbance. The usual route through lies to the left at the bottom, but occasionally there is a gap to the right which will allow at least some access. On my last trips several months earlier, I'd spent some time enlarging the right side, but on this occasion the right hand side was completely closed with no gap visible at all. The left however was partially open and only needed a five minute dig to gain me access. The technique generally being to push enough gravel/pebbles ahead out of the way to allow you to squeeze through and then turn around and enlarge the route from the inside out.

Due to the harder carry needed and it only being a recce/digging trip, I'd slimmed down the cylinders needed to a 7 litre coupled with a 3 litre as bailout rather than the usual twin 7 litre arrangement I would normally use for such a dive. Having squeezed through the choke quicker than expected, I had a quick tour upstream checking out the lines before I remembered I only had a small bail out tank and common sense prevailed and I returned back to the relative safety of the downstream side of the choke and an exit.

Chris Jewell, Andy Torbet and George Linnane were planning on a trip to the far end of the cave (beyond the San Agustin Way) and I reported back that the visibility was good, access awkward but possible and that the choke was open but still snug and would require a "proper" digging session to enable more fully laden divers to pass in comfort.

Chris and co. were at the site a few days later and after a lengthy digging session by Chris, made their way into Daren to drop off camping gear etc for their extended trip later that weekend. In the meantime, after helping with their dive gear, I set to work on the log jam above the pot with my trusty bow

saw and cleared this area.

Fortunately, Chris had made contact with cavers who lived nearby and creative arrangements were made to minimise the disruption from the footpath closures which made the carries a little easier but still difficult as opposed to the normal route from the north side. Very generously they also offered parking spaces on their land which Chris and his team were especially grateful for as they were reluctant to leave their vehicles unattended during their planned 3 day camp. The last time they had done so, it was noticed that the vehicles had remained overnight and with the best intentions, they had been reported as potentially overdue to cave rescue.

I'd originally planned on joining Chris at the end but was undecided as the trip approached. I've been there a few times before and wasn't convinced anything more could be easily achieved, but Chris had applied some persuasion to the end on his last trip so there was always that chance...

In the end, I elected to use the opportunity to get up to the Restaurant and retrieve my old camping gear that I haven't used since the Restaurant camps led by Madphil Rowsell tailed off some years ago.

Chris's team had all dived in on a Sunday with the intention of camping and visiting the end on the Monday. My plan was to dispense with the camping option and just do a day trip on the Monday. I'd stashed most of my gear in the gorge on the Saturday so there was minimal faffing for my dive in on Monday morning. This time, all went as planned and I made it through to Daren. The only unusual thing was finding what appeared to be a large red flag draped across the

dive line partway through the sump. On closer inspection, it turned out to be a large plastic fertiliser bag, no doubt another relic of the big flood. Upon surfacing in the Daren sump pool, I also found and recovered an old ammo box from the floor and a wetsuit that was bobbing around on the surface! These were returned to the bottom of Kings Road.

By the time I arrived at Hard Rock having changed into normal dry caving gear, Chris and co. had made good on their plan of an early start and had already departed for the end. I made swift progress via the dry way up to the Restaurant. Some years ago, there was a collapse in one of the low areas of



Pwll y Cwm Entrance

Acupuncture and a new route through was engineered by Madphil and his team (including me on one occasion). The end result is this section is now significantly easier than it used to be, a hands and knees passage now bypassing what used to be an energy sapping flat out crawl.

Arriving at the Restaurant, I was pleased to still be able to locate my camping gear and as far as I could tell, it all still looked good, though there was a bit of a musty smell emanating from the sleeping bag... I decided not to investigate this further at that point as it was coming back to Hard Rock regardless. After a brief rest and a bit of food, fondly remembering the previous camps I'd spent up there, I began the journey out wondering whether I would ever return to this part of the cave...

In addition to the tackle sack containing my old sleeping bag, I also had my thermarest plus a 3 litre cylinder that I'd taken in for a Seventh Hour sump trip some years ago. The journey out was unsurprisingly more difficult given I now had two bags and a cylinder to manage! Nevertheless I made good progress, the enlarged section in Acupuncture being particularly welcome. Another positive factor was that during the latest lockdown, Lucy and I had managed to buck the trend and both got a bit trimmer and fitter so the missing 20kg of blubber I was no longer carrying probably helped as well.

Once back at Hard Rock, I took the chance to examine my sleeping bag and alas the smell of mustiness did indeed tell the tale... I stashed it and the thermarest at Hard Rock to be brought out on a different day. In the meantime, Chris and co.

returned. They had managed to make progress past a tight squeeze leading to an air bell, however it sounded very much like the same air bell Duncan and I had got into when Dunc had dived under the squeeze as opposed to going over the top. So nothing definite for them on this trip, but they haven't given up hope and all the talk of the end got me thinking about some future trips.

After chatting for a bit longer than I probably should have and managing to turn down Chris's offer of a spare sleeping bag to stay over, I made my way out (retrieving the big red flag/bag en route) surfacing just before midnight. Getting my gear back to the car was the most difficult part of the whole trip and it wasn't until gone 2am that I was finally sitting in the car with all my gear retrieved. At this point, Chris's offer to stay at Hard Rock was beginning to look like one I should have accepted!

All in all, I enjoyed this latest trip and it was good to get my gear back to Hard Rock where it can at least be retrieved on a day trip. I've not been back since so am not sure of the current state of play regarding the footpaths, but for me, until they reopen big trips here are just too difficult, especially for a day. Chris's plan of camping helps, but I'm always reluctant to spend too long camping when I've dived in as there's always the nagging doubt about the exit through the choke to consider. The forecast has to be solid and lots of factors have to come together making the opportunities for those trips few and far between. Having said all that, I've been considering other options. Maybe those can be the subject of my next newsletter contribution...

Photos by Gary Jones



Caption Competition



This is the cartoon Joe Duxbury found on the website of an Italian caving club, the GSS (Gruppo Speleologico Savonese). The translation is "I have not yet been able to think of a way to prevent the change from falling out of my pockets" but Joe hoped someone in the CSS could come up with something better. Here are the dubious results, you decide...

What have Cliff Richard and ice caves got in common?

They are both bachelors (bat chillers).

I've got a bat friend that always wears stilettos, he's a hoes-shoe bat!

I had a bat friend that thought he was a chicken, he was a really good rooster!

One bat to the other:

'I was going to join in with that long-distance shitting contest the other day.

But when I got there there was a big sign saying "Guano Further!"

What's a bat's favourite dinner of the week?

Sunday Roost.

Dude! My penis is orange! What's yours like???

One moth to the other:

'Wow, did you see that bat go flying past?'

'Er, no, I was just concentrating on catching the bloody ball.'

What's my favourite herb? Oregano of course!

What do you call a bat with a light sabre?

A wombat.

You going down the hunters tonight Burt?

Hey Dude, howz it hangin'?

No Bob, all my cash fell out my pockets over night.

I wonder how long it'll be before they realise its not Italian, but code for the location of the new Draenen entrance.

Do you like Mothster Munch crisps?

Shut up Pig face

My friend the Vampire bat failed his art exam....

He was only able to draw blood.



Son Doong

The Largest Cave in the World

by Rachel Smith



Waking, I lie for a moment in the dim light of my tent, listening to the quiet murmur of voices outside. Then I stir myself and step out onto the vast sandy expanse which forms the beach inside the entrance to Hang En cave. Camp porters and cooks are busy about their work and, with a steaming mug of coffee in my hand, I take in the scene. It is stunning; the vast entrance is framed by morning light, a great tumble of rocks lead down to a limpid green pool, stretching across to the golden beach where I am standing. What better to place to start your day?

But we are told there is a greater treat yet to come, if the morning is clear a sunbeam will make its way

into the entrance and track across the floor illuminating the pool, the beach and the camp. So, we start the climb up another vast pile of rocks at the back of the cave to reach a vantage point to wait and watch. The photographers in our group eagerly jostle for the best place to site a camera and people are dispatched to act as models, giving some perspective to the scale of the cave. And then the sun arrives... The beauty of that moment left us all in awe of nature and the stunning images she creates. It is a vision that will be etched in my memory forever as well as in the many photographs that were now being taken. Reality intruded; models were



directed back and forth and cameras clicked, striving to capture the scene as the sunbeam slowly made its way across the cave.

So, just over a year ago, began my fourth day in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, Vietnam where I was privileged to join Oxalis Adventure the company which is licensed to manage tours to Hang Son Doong, the world's largest cave. An initial, tentative conversation led to an invitation for two of us to join the 'set up' trip where Son Doong would be prepared for the 2020 tour season. The cave is closed due to the immense floods that rage through the area in the rainy season, indeed in late 2019 waters had risen by 90m in the cave at their peak! Oxalis remove all of their safety, camping and other equipment each September only to return it again in January ready for the next year.

This would be a completely new experience for me; my previous caving had all been done in Europe and staying overnight in a cave was another novelty. I was excited but, to be honest, I was also more than a little tentative. Would I be fit enough and technically able? The website describes rope climbs, river crossings and rocky scrambles, all things I had done underground many times but never on a four-day, three-night expedition. Alongside this I had reservations about being part of a commercial operation; would I feel herded along? Was the cave being exploited? How could its environment be protected with groups of people travelling through on a regular basis? And what about the local people and area being invaded by 'outsiders' coming to see the caves?

From the outset it quickly became clear that our contacts, Howard and Deb Limbert, feel passionately about the people, the region and Son Doong cave itself. Already familiar with some of the caves in this region, they were part of the initial exploration team that accompanied local resident, Mr Ho Khanh, on the three-day trek from the small village of Phong Nha to the great cloud-filled cave entrance he had found. Entering and exploring the cave the team was aware of its immense size but with ordinary caving lights they were not able to see and





and Oxalis staff were dispatched with lights to illuminate the lake, beach and more boulders behind. It was an ethereal and atmospheric scene.

Radios were used to direct people and lighting and finally there seemed to be satisfaction with the images that had been created. As the photographers returned, camp began to quieten, apart from the chug of a generator busy charging batteries for the powerful lights that would be needed again the next day. Gradually people retreated into their tents; finally with the charging complete, silence and darkness enveloped us.

And so we reach the point where this account begins; “I wake and lie for a moment in

Top: Portering to Son Doong

Right: Our tour group

marvel at the shapely passages, lively river and many magnificent formations. Over subsequent trips the beauty and size



of Son Doong were gradually revealed and, in association with a local businessman, the idea of opening the cave to fit and able adventurers was born.

And so, Martyn and I journeyed to Vietnam to experience for ourselves the unique cave of Son Doong. After an initial two days visiting other caves, we returned to base at Ho Khanh’s homestay. Here we hastily unpacked damp clothes, downloaded images and repacked our bags for the ‘highlight trip’, the four day expedition to Son Doong which we embarked upon the following morning. The first day was the walk in to Hang En Cave. Oxalis make it clear that anyone unable to complete this with reasonable competence will be turned around as they will not be fit enough to undertake the rest of the tour. So it was with some relief that I found the walking, scrambling and wading was well within my comfort zone. Arriving at Hang En was an eye opening moment as it gave the first indication of the size of the cave passages we would later be travelling through. A long walk down a slope of huge boulders leads to a raft crossing and thus to the sandy beach where this account begins. Camp was already a bustling hub and soon afterwards an incredible evening meal was provided. Following this, the photographers rafted back across to the entrance overhang

the dim light of my tent...” It is the second day of the trip and after witnessing the beauty of the sunbeam we return to camp and prepare to depart. It may be the ‘set up’ trip for the year but this is a well-oiled tour operation. Each tent is labelled with the occupant’s name and individual dry bags are provided to stow away items which are not needed until that evening. These will make their way with the team of sure footed porters to our next camp where everything will be prepared for us when we arrive.

So, we duck under the low arch at the back of Hang En and negotiate the short distance to the end of this cave. Reaching another magnificent arch, daylight floods in and we are able to see the river



Looking down at camp, Son Doong

meandering its way down-stream and a long line of porters carrying their loads onwards along the valley floor. We swiftly follow and, like yesterday, spend time crossing the river back and forth as we progress on our way. The morning is warm and still, so we are grateful to cool off as we cross another stretch of sand and enter the river, scattering an array of beautiful butterflies as we go. There ahead is the next challenge, a steady uphill climb on a jungle path, bringing us to our lunch stop, close to the entrance of Son Doong itself.

After eating, harnesses are distributed and a short safety briefing given as not everyone on the trip was familiar with caving; H'Hen Nie (a former Miss Universe Vietnam) and accompanying photojournalist Ngo Tran Hai An are with us undertaking a publicity shoot! Then downhill towards the open mouth of Son Doong itself.

Another awe inspiring sight meets us. The entrance is large with a series of short, roped scrambles down. As I am clipped to a lifeline I stare downwards and become aware of the line of tiny lights moving below me. The porters are still ahead and they begin to give some scale to this immense cavern. I begin to descend, stopping to 'pose' for photographs that will show the safety rope and harness to clients during the introductory briefings later in the season. And for these images the huge, powerful lights are once again deployed illuminating the depths of the shaft, the lake at its base and great formations marking the way into our onward passage.

Then we trek on, crossing the underground river and passing amazing formations, until light begins to filter into the passage and gradually another massive patch of daylight comes into view. Despite being there, it is difficult to grasp the scale of this cave. Formations which are illuminated by the entrance prove to be a kilometre away and it takes another 30 – 40 minutes of walking and scrambling for us to reach them. In the entrance, camp is already pitched and the inevitable mugs of coffee are handed out as we arrive. There is time to take stock and unpack belongings before we eat. Then off to view fossils in a side passage and enjoy a relaxing swim in one of the pools, then back to camp and bed, interrupted only by the mournful hooting of an owl who was waking somewhere close to us in the cave.

Day 3 dawns and after breakfast, which included freshly boiled eggs, we head out into the first doline. You couldn't get in or out at this point as the walls are overhanging

and rise an estimated 200 metres to the jungle above. This is an oasis of lush green foliage which we cross to reach the famous 'Wedding Cake'. Opportunities here for some pictures but we don't linger as it is the focus for a long photo shoot with H'Hen who makes several changes of costume as she poses for the camera and drone! As we make our way into the cool shade of the next entrance we are confronted by another massive passage, this time filled with gour dams and green pools reflecting the daylight and view from outside. It is here that we sit for lunch before the chance to stand back, further into the cave, and admire the true beauty of this place. For me, it is the iconic and most memorable scene in Son Doong; the colours created by light playing on watery pools, reflections of the doline and huge calcite formations, all given scale by the porters strategically positioned across the scene.

Then onward past more vast formations, to the steep climb up into doline 2 and another jungle traverse, keeping eyes open for the local flora and fauna that might be seen as we pass. At the far side we stand once again, looking into the depths of Son Doong and our final camp. The rugged path is negotiated with care and soon we are on the floor of the cave. After a brief rest we head into the passage to see and photograph yet more magnificent sights.



Above: Miss Vietnam on the Wedding Cake

Below: Rachel on the Wedding Cake



It is easy to see how the early explorers failed to recognise the full scale of Son Doong. Without the four powerful lights provided by Oxalis very little of the passage or formations can be seen. But once these are set out with their porters and Howard calls 'Bat dien' the lights turn on and a majestic world is revealed. Cameras click and models are positioned for brief moments as each light has only limited running time. As darkness falls we retreat to the familiarity of camp and our final sumptuous meal. Evening passes with the staff playing a local card game with lively enthusiasm and much cheering!! Tonight too, we are each allowed a celebratory beer before our final sleep in the cave.

Morning arrives and we head towards the Great Wall of Vietnam. Approaching this, the ground becomes slippery underfoot for the first time as we begin to encounter an altogether wetter part of the cave. Following a short, roped climb down we finally see the dark lake water stretching away before us. Boats and rafts are moored ready to ferry the whole team down a long canal to the Great Wall... but what is this? The first real hiccup of the tour; there seem to be no paddles! Some hasty discussions and hunting around and enough 'implements' are found to propel us on. It appears the new supply of paddles is still making its way into the cave from the exit end and hasn't yet arrived. Once again utilising the Oxalis lights, the deep dark water is illuminated into green pools and H'Hen poses for photos before we set off with people and loads balanced precariously on the small craft.

Arriving at the Great Wall there is a climb of some 10 – 12 metres, stepping up onto the ladder directly from the bobbing, wobbling boat. It is hard to believe that when we set out 3 days ago the water level had been higher and this climb was a mere 2 metres high! Later in the season the lake will dry completely leaving glutinous mud for clients and staff to negotiate as they head towards the end of the cave. So up the ladder and more photos of the safety ropes deployed here before our final gathering together for lunch. Then with many thanks to the catering team, we begin the final walk to the end of this magnificent cave. Once again the scale does not disappoint and tiny dots, our porter team, can be seen in the daylight entrance making their way up the vast boulder

pile that marks the end of our adventure in Son Doong.

As I sit writing this account I still feel the range of emotions I experienced over those four days; excitement and the flutter of nerves as we set out, awe and wonder traversing the cave, elation and a little sadness as we reached journey's end. And so I reflect on the questions I had before we began.

This is not 'wild' caving but undoubtedly a trip through Son Doong is an amazing experience, one I would recommend to anyone. The organisation by Oxalis is faultless and safety is paramount. Yet I never felt herded or hassled along, I could travel at my own speed safe in the knowledge that at any tricky point a staff member would be positioned to see safe passage or to lend a helping hand if it was needed. Howard provided informative and witty conversation as we traversed the cave but he also imparted a great sense of respect for the Oxalis staff, from the guides, porters and cooks accompanying us, through to the ladies in the village who would wash and re-pack tents and other equipment at the end of each tour. He, and all the staff, clearly enjoy their work and care greatly about the cave itself. This was evident through conversations and also in the way the tour was managed. A good example was the composting toilets, complete with rice husks, loo paper and hand sanitiser (well before Covid made this a popular commodity!). These areas were always clean and everything that went in with us was also brought out. The local staff appreciate secure employment with the chance to progress through the training they receive. They also recognise the wider benefits for their community including schools and improved road links which have resulted from the income Oxalis generates in the area.

So, look at the website, save some money and consider planning the 'trip of a lifetime' once travel becomes possible once again!



Photos by Martyn Farr

SUPer Day Out



by Helen Nightingale

After a chance conversation with Lisa and Dan about floating on water rather than lying in wet and muddy puddles in the dark, I was lucky enough to end up spending a day out on the Brecon canal paddleboarding with Lisa. SUP always looks such fun, but having never done any sort of kayak/canoe/paddle type activity before, I am completely clueless and didn't really fancy going out on my own and drowning. I must confess I swapped a day off paid work, intended for scraping paint off the Whitewalls changing room ceiling for a day out in the sunshine, paddling along the local canal. Sorry Mike! It was too good to feel hugely guilty over.

We headed over to Gilwern where there's sensible parking and a safe place to launch, and Lisa showed me the basics, like how to get on the board safely and how to hold the paddle. I learnt a couple of paddling techniques while still on my knees on the board, and gradually progressed to standing. That was so useful as a complete beginner. I also learnt about how to lose my balance and fall over safely. It was quite easy to get distracted by watching the ducks and forget to balance. SUP'ing looks really tranquil on canals, but seems to use lots of muscles in your feet that you don't use in other sports. Lisa did warn me I might get sore feet, but it wasn't too bad at all compared to beginning caving.

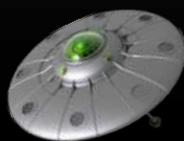
Once I'd managed to stand up AND look at the scenery AND steer, it was so lovely to see the mountain views we are so familiar with from the views from Whitewalls, but from the bottom of the valley. It was great to see different remnants from the limestone quarrying days and the early days of the canal's history, linking in with the history we can still see up on the tramroad, all created at a similar time. We paddled along to Llangattock and stopped for lunch in the glorious spring sunshine. Every other time I have walked that stretch of canal it has been properly grim Welsh weather, but on a fine day it was stunning views all round. The return journey passed far too quickly, after the fear of falling in all the time had subsided. We saw all sorts of wildlife as well as the well-loved mountain views.



It was a great day out, and you should all go book a session with Lisa here: www.outdoorcoachingandguiding.co.uk

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS ALIEN?

THIS INTERSTELLAR TRAVELLER HAS BEEN SPOTTED LURKING SOMEWHERE ALONG THE AGEN ALLWEDD ENTRANCE SERIES. SO SEE IF YOU CAN FIND HIM ON YOUR NEXT JOURNEY THERE.



CLUE: IT'S EASIER TO SPOT ON THE WAY OUT THAN IN.

Photo by Matt Voysey



PURGATORY by Mandy Voysey

IN SIDCOT SWALLET

On a sunny Saturday lunchtime sometime between lockdowns in 2020, Matt and I popped over to Windsor Hill, just outside Shepton Mallet in Mendip, to visit our chums in the ATLAS digging team. We had no intention of being useful in any way, we just happen to know what time they meet up for cake.

Between eating the various cakes and fruits of the typical ATLAS banquet, Rich Witcombe assigned us the task of visiting the Purgatory Series in Sidcot Swallet to update the description for the next edition of Mendip Underground. We agreed, and a couple of months later actually got around to doing it.

For anyone not familiar with Sidcot Swallet, it is probably the second most visited cave in Burrington Combe after Goatchurch Cavern. It's also home to the notorious 'Lobster Pot' a smooth-sided vertical tube that brings fun to both the caver tackling it and any spectators that happen to be watching. I myself have been in Sidcot loads of times over the years, but only once in all those times had I bothered to visit Purgatory. Looking in my caving log it transpired that this trip was back in 2005 and the whole endeavour had been summed up with the following words:

"Purgatory, as the name would suggest, was not the most pleasant of cave passages. Bit sharp and nasty really, consisting mostly of a fossil-bound gritty type of rock."

Looking for further insight I browsed through 'Mendip - Its Swallet Caves and Rock Shelters' by H.E. Balch to see what that had to say about it. A rather nice description of the cave written by The Stride Brothers from the Sidcot School Speleological Society back in 1945 had only this to say about Purgatory:

"This part of the cave is very different to Paradise. It has an air of instability and is very much damper. Little needs to be said concerning it. The only good formation is a beehive, like that of Lamb Leer, though not so well coloured."

The route to Purgatory became blocked in the mid-60s by stones thrown into the cave entrance, and so little was it missed that it wasn't until 1993 that a new connection was made by a team from WCC.

So just how rubbish is this part of the cave? There was only one way to find out!

Our expectations were pretty low, but we had a mission and we thought it might be fun. Shortly after the spider-fest that is the entrance wriggle through boulders, a well-worn route heads off to the right. This isn't the way. Instead you need to carry on and go through the squeeze that accesses the main part of the cave, but instead of heading down on the left, look for a hole a short distance to the right. This is the route to Purgatory. After a bit of an awkward corkscrew down through boulders a fairly nice rift passage is gained. From here we continued onwards, filming as we went so we could write the description from it later. Generally it's pretty uncomplicated, it's only a short section of cave after all, but what really struck me was that it wasn't actually that bad, in fact I'd go as far as to say it was really quite interesting. Towards the end of the main rift passage a climb up followed by a bold step over the passage reaches a small boulder chamber festooned with really good shell fossils and crinoids which I thought was well worth seeing. There are plenty of fossils throughout Purgatory, including a particularly sharp shell-lined tube which looks interesting even if it does just ends with a boulder choke. There are also a number decorated sections that are quite pleasant too.

After doing this trip, it struck me as a little unfair that this small, collector's item section of cave should be so little-regarded. So I guess the gist of this write-up is simply this... if you happen to be going to Sidcot Swallet, have a nose down Purgatory while you're there and discover for yourself that it's (possibly) not as unpleasant as you might think.



*The climb up to the fossil-filled boulder chamber
Photo by Matt Voysey*

GOODBYE ASHAM WOOD

by Andy Watson

WE HAD SOME FUN ANYWAY!

You may be aware that on the eastern side of Mendip, to the east of the large Merehead Quarry are some older quarries called Westdown Quarry, Asham Wood Quarry, and slightly further south Cloford Quarry. Hanson Heidelberg have been trying to get planning permission to extend or re-open these quarries in recent years.

In Asham Wood Quarry I initially dug at Yogi Pot from about 2010 until 2014 and extended this tiny seasonal pothole some 60 feet or so in a very claustrophobic tube that has a strong draught. This pot acts as a resurgence in the wintertime. After this initial excursion, myself and Paul Stillman discovered a new cave (based on some early geology work by Mr Bradshaw referring to some cavities and a reference by Phil Henty), which we subsequently called Bradshaw's Cave (155m), on the other side of the quarry towards Whatley Brook.

Adjacent to Bradshaw's Cave was a rift which was exposed after a quarry face rock fall, which clearly was a bat roost as I first discovered it when a bat flew out of the cave as I was exiting Bradshaw's. When we had achieved access and passed the funnel shaped squeeze into a fairly large rift I named it Hovvy's Rift Cave (circa 40m), after the Hoveringham's who used to quarry here many years ago.

Recently, after we'd heard that the Westdown Quarry extensions had been approved and the plan was to use Asham Wood Quarry as a working and lorry turning area I realised that we were probably going to lose access to these three caves, especially as the fences went up and the large boulders started moving around the area. Potentially they may be destroyed or lost like two previous Asham Wood quarry caves many years ago. I wrote to Hanson and Somerset Bat Group to no avail. With this in mind I thought it was appropriate to try and survey Bradshaw's Cave in better detail than I had previously, this I did a few weeks back with a rough hand drawn survey and also updated the description.

On 10 June 2021 I decided to go back and look at Hovvy's Rift Cave, to confirm the description that I'd done some years earlier and remove any digging paraphernalia in the cave to leave it back in a clean natural state again, for the bats, if it is not quarried away. Having no friends I carried out this trip solo (using Sue as my reliable callout), as even Paul who had been in the cave previously did not like 'The Funnel' squeeze. However, I had miscalculated how much weight I had put on during some 18 months of Covid-19 lockdown and I had also forgotten that it was harder to get back through the squeeze than it is to get in going forwards. Anyhow, I went through the squeeze to check some measurements for the description and pull out any rubbish and digging tools. I took some final photographs and then tried to get back through the squeeze. This proved rather challenging, if not impossible, and after throwing all the waste/paraphernalia through the squeeze keeping only essentials with me, I decided the only way I was going to get back through the squeeze after trying it both ways forwards and backwards was to remove my woolly bear and put my thin oversuit back on to my naked skin with no belt or knee pads. After some 15 minutes of breathing out, grunting quietly and pushing and pulling, I finally escaped from the clutches of 'The Funnel' squeeze with not too many grazes. So luckily I didn't have to wait for my wife to call out other cavers to firstly find a cave very few have been inside, and then to muster some enthusiasm to pull me out head or feet first covered in grease, perhaps just in my underpants!

So goodbye Asham Wood, we had some fun anyway! Ah well, plenty more digs to find



Selfie of Andy outside Hovvy's Rift



Digging paraphernalia removed from the cave



The area outlined in the aerial photo shows the extent of the proposed expansion including the currently disused Asham Wood Quarry and adjacent fields.

For further information on the plans for this development see

<https://www.hanson-communities.co.uk/en/westdown-quarry>

HOVVY'S RIFT CAVE

by Andy Watson

NGR ST 70695 45305, Length approx 39m

History: The cave is named after Hoveringham Stone Ltd, the quarry company who operated here from 1965. I suspect the chambered entrance of this pretty rift cave was probably collapsed in or was destroyed during the time this company operated here. Prior to 'Hovvy's' ownership the quarry was opened up and operated by the Evermy family as Asham Wood Quarry Company from about 1946.

Location: In Asham Wood Quarry lower section, not far from the Main Spring into Whatley Brook. Locate the Main Spring resurgence (often dry) at ST 7102 4528 and back-track, walking down-slope on the obvious old vehicle track for about 100m. Turn left into the quarry entrance area with large rocks and fencing across, then stay to the left of the open area for about 35m and enter the unkempt hedge area through an obvious gap, then over some rocks to a flat area. Turn left and walk towards the cliff face and follow it west for about 50m, passing the two small cave entrances of Bradshaw's Cave. The small cave entrance of Hovvy's Rift is about 5m above the quarry floor, between large stable boulders reached by an easy scramble heading towards a partially collapsed wide rift with a hanging tree.

Description: The small entrance drops 1.5m at 45° down to a 1m wide stable rift with jammed, mostly calcited boulders overhead. The parallel walls have a good red calcite flowstone covering and there are some small curtains. There is another lower hole dropping 1.5m here going slightly north, this is most likely a too tight voice connection to the end of Bradshaw's Cave adjacent to the east. Another 1.5m climb down reaches the gritty floor of a rift about 60cm wide heading south. A cool strong draught is often blowing outwards here and a few bats are occasionally seen flying in and around the cave as several bats roost under shelves further into the cave. Going south the solid rift continues



The cave entrance



Curtain in Main Rift



Inside the entrance rift

for about 4m to a squeeze 'The Funnel', which is wider near the top. Past the squeeze is a large rift passage about 4-5m high, 1-1.2m wide and 10m long with large boulders on a muddy floor and a shelf with good curtains on the right. The end of the main rift narrows and appears to close down in tightly-packed mud sediment to the roof, this was an old dig. This rift may be heading towards Seven Springs, (perhaps blocked during quarry track changes during 1948 or later) alongside Whatley Brook. Some 3.5m in from the Funnel squeeze there is a passage on the right about 1m wide and 3.5m high with some black knobbly limestone layers, 'Black Pudding Passage', with some short straws and flowstone. Great care is required entering this passage to avoid the straws on the roof and also the very large 'slightly jammed' boulders at the start that appear to be

unsupported along one edge! 2m past these there has been a collapse of some large roof slabs, under these there is an accessible bedding area with no apparent continuation, but it is possible to slide over the top with care for another 6m back to the old water flow passage at floor level. The end wall is a boulder ruckle, but low down it is possible to slip through to see the end of the cave at a tight vertical passage with a draught – perhaps another connection to the old Seven Springs Cave.

YOGI POT

NGR ST 70822 45386

This small cave was dug open by Clive North in the 1980s I think, but known about earlier probably as a resurgence in the Asham Wood Quarry floor (north-side lowest level). I first went to look at it in August 2010 and I thought it would be a good small dig site. It's covered by a bit of metal sheeting and some boulders to hold it in place at the base of a small tree. As it's a resurgence, it tends to fill up with grit and sandy mud at the bottom of the 4 metre pot. When I started digging I firstly removed this grit by filling a skip, climbing up the pot, hauling it out, then going down to repeat again. After dropping the floor about 18" down to the bedrock limestone and widening the base of the pot slightly it was possible to see under a large secure boulder to the north into a fairly immature rift, a body-sized passage a bit like Goatchurch's 'Drainpipe' in size but a smaller in places. This was full of more grit, some rocks and some bigger



boulders, but was draughting. I spent some 12 months digging Yogi on and off and firstly cleared the first 20 foot over a squeeze floor ledge turning NE into a further tight-ish rift (shoulder width) with boulders and a 5" vadose canyon in the floor. After another 20 feet it became bigger but still no room to turn around, so it was down the pot, wriggle around head-first along the tube with a skip (or net for the bigger boulders) then squirm backwards pulling the full skip to the base of the pot, haul up the spoil, then repeat. By May 2011 it was 30 foot long horizontally and by July it was getting fairly tedious as it was longer, but still no space to turn around. In August I managed to increase the height slightly at the end by digging a trench in part of the floor, but then it started to narrow again. By Nov 2011 it narrowed more and I got to near a sharp left turn, but it became rather more dismal and a long way to reverse with a skip or rocks and I knew it would flood again over winter. A determined caver with some chemical persuasion could open up the corner I got to. I have visited a couple of times since in, 2012, 2013 and 2015 to keep it clear and remove some skips and rocks and it still draughts. It is about 4m in depth then around 15m of horizontal flat-out passage if you fancy a visit! I am going to remove the skips etc post lockdown as Westdown adjacent quarry is being redeveloped to use again and Asham Wood with Yogi Pot is likely to be a lorry parking and turning area so it will be lost I suspect.



Yogi Pot Entrance



Dug out passage inside the cave

For a description of Bradshaw's Cave, which is also located in Asham Wood Quarry and likely to be affected by the quarry extension, see CSS Newsletter Vol. 60, Nos 4-6.

A Short Appreciation of George Fletcher

by Mac Ayton

George (Geo) Fletcher, who died recently aged 82, was a CSS member in the early 60s when we met at the wrong end of Kings Rd. He will be known to current CSS members from his contributions to the newsletter.

I can't write an obituary but would like to share some memories of this well-loved old mate. Geo was around when CSS bought the hole in the ground and pile of old stones that is now Whitewalls. Geo was enthusiastic in everything he did and being a chippie in the building trade he played a big part in its rebuilding. Skips were raided for building materials; there was no B&Q then. We camped in the Old Daren Sunday School. It was, according to Geo, colder inside that it was outside.

Everyone took to Geo; he was a mate to us all. We all have fond memories of caving and hut building weekends with him. A group of us took to climbing. We rented a dilapidated ex plate-layer's hut, christened "HUT 35", on a disused railway line in Snowdonia (Doctor Beeching had seen off the line). In no time, Geo had restored it into a bunkhouse. If there is a heaven I'd bet that he is now maintaining the pearly gates.

He started up the "Golden Oldies" for old CSS members in 2002, shortly after the Chelsea 50th anniversary. Geo organised a reunion in Crickhowell every year until illness took him over. Roy Musgrove was then press ganged into this role.

Geo was the most open and helpful mate anyone could have wished for. We all feel privileged to have known him.

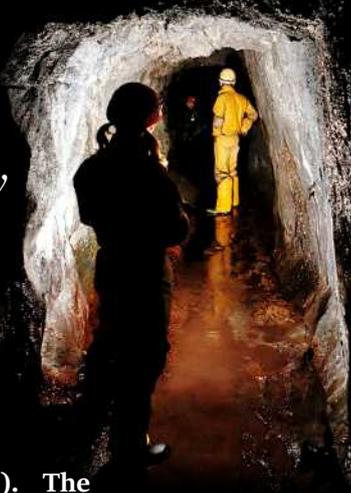


Mid-Wales Mines Spectacular

Part 2
by Mandy Voysey

Continuing the journey through the varied and interesting underworld of the Mid-Wales mines that I've visited, here are more tales of exploration into some (mostly) very enjoyable and fascinating mine workings.

Bwlch Glas Mine



Bont Goch, Ceredigion, Grid Ref SN 7097 8765 (parking SN 7099 8780). The quarry is located down the dead-end road midway between Talybont and Bont Goch running alongside Afon Cyneiniog. From the quarry/car parking spot, the route to the mine is up a vague track past the ruins of old mine buildings. The entrance is located behind a mound of scree, so can't be seen from below.

In the summer of 2017 we were back in Mid-Wales with another bevy of SMCC, BEC and GSG cavers, and this time we even managed to bag a stay at a campsite without hooting trains.



This is a really good mine, not especially extensive, but really dramatic. As I've already written a description of this trip in CSS Newsletter Vol. 60 Nos. 4-6, I'll not reiterate everything as you can refer to my previous article for a full description. However, a brief summary is as follows... The entrance tunnel soon reaches a wooden platform with ladders descending. Though appearing to be reasonably solid, these are vintage ladders so rigging for SRT is the wisest option. Beneath this the final pitch is soon reached. This is initially enclosed and needs a deviation near the top to avoid rubbing, then all of a sudden you're free-hanging in a fantastically large open chamber and a vista full of stemples and rock piles, but mostly inky blackness. The remains of the wooden ladders that the miners would have used to descend are scattered down below next to a clear, blue, and very deep pool. Once down on solid ground the main attraction of the chamber is soon reached and that's the headframe and cages of the lifts used by the miners to access the levels below. Peeping beneath these it's possible to see the way down is now completely filled with water. There's a bit more to see in the passage beyond and some smaller mining artefacts scattered about, and back up the pitches there are some dry high level passages that can be explored too. An interesting diversion (which I wasn't aware of at the time) is the very wet passage to the right of the wooden platform. We didn't venture there on our trip as the water was deep and nobody fancied the soaking, especially as we didn't think there was anything to see beyond. However Matt Chinner visited this mine last year and braved the waters to find a really good kibble still hanging from its chain over a winze, which looked well worth the effort of getting wet (see CSS members-only facebook page for more pics). On our trip we happened to meet a group of fellow explorers wearing thigh-high waders, I wonder how they fared in the chest deep water...

Rigging for SRT: This mine is fitted with 12mm studs, so you'll need to bring your own hangers!

Laddered Pitch - This can be split using a 28m and 20m or rigged with a single 48m rope. You'll also need 2x 12mm hangers and nuts to back up the dubious in-situ hangers, plus 1x 12mm hanger and nut for a re-belay at the lower platform.

Main Pitch - 35m Rope, 3x 12mm hangers and nuts to back up the in-situ hangers with an additional Y hang and safety line, plus a karabiner for the deviation.

An appropriate spanner is also essential, and if contemplating the watery passage a rubber ring or similar could be advantageous.

Trip Highlights: Definitely the atmospheric abseil down into the big chamber, the cage lifts are also amazing.



Top: Ystrad Einion Mine by Toby Speight. Middle: Miners' lift cages by Matt Voysey. Bottom: Matt Chinner beyond the wet passage by John 'Pred' Hughes

Wemyss Mine



Cwmnewyddion Valley, Ceredigion. Parking Grid Ref: SN 7158 7418. The ruins of Wemyss Mine are at a bend in the road part-way along the minor road between the villages of Pont-rhyd-y-groes and Abermagwr. The adit is only a short distance away and easy to find.

This trip was a mistake in every way. Not only was it very wet and muddy, it also wasn't the mine we thought it was.

The day after our visit to Bwlch Glas, a crack team of Neil Reaich (SMCC), Estelle Sandford, James Begley, Barry Lawton, Jo Meldner (BEC), Matt and I, went on mission to find and explore Frongoch Mine armed only with some very vague instructions regarding its location. Parking somewhere that fitted the bill next to a collection of old mine buildings we went in search of our mine. We soon found an entrance, but didn't really like the look of it. A nice stone lined adit it was, but it was also mostly full of water. This wasn't particularly welcoming, so hoping that this wasn't our intended destination we scoured the area hoping to find something more appealing. We found a few holes that were full of rubbish (maybe these would reveal something interesting if cleared out), but after a pretty thorough search of the area revealed no other entrance we finally had to face the fact that the small wet entrance we'd found must surely be our mine. So one by one we eased ourselves into the chest deep water and followed it until a tunnel on the left was met. This was a bit grubby, but at least it was dry. However after a short distance this ended in blockage, so back into the water it was. Continuing along the main passage we were surprised to find that this too ended quite soon, so as there was no other way we headed back out. We could only assume we'd gone to the wrong place, surely no one in their right mind would recommend this mine as worthy of a visit! There was nothing for it but to head to the pub. Browsing through Aditnow over a beer and a hearty lunch confirmed our suspicions, but as time was now getting on, Frongoch would have to wait for another day.

Trip Highlights: The trip to the pub afterwards, much nicer than the mine.

Nantymwyn Mine, Level Cadno

Rhandirmwyn, Dyfed. Parking Grid Ref: SN 7839 4385. Park at the start of the forestry track on the right of the road heading north from Rhandirmwyn. Follow the path up to a gate, then follow a wire fence on the right. When you see spoil above, go up in a straight line. The entrance is at the end of a cutting above a pile of stones.

On the 2017 August Bank Holiday weekend, Paul Tarrant organised another CSS day trip to Mid-Wales. This time to Nantymwyn, an SRT trip with four pitches to reach some well decorated horizontal passage below. The group consisted of Paul, Adrian Fawcett, Stuart France, Richard Dewsnap, Joe Duxbury, Gary Kiely, Jason McCorriston, John Stevens, Matt Voysey and me, so there were quite a number of us. Armed with a description and plenty of kit we wandered purposefully towards our conquest, somewhat later, still shambling all over the hillside we came to discover that the route we'd taken was perhaps not the most effective, but at least it was sunny and there was music in the air from a local beer festival. Eventually after much sweaty walking in our caving kit the entrance was located and the mine exploration commenced.

Adrian was our designated rigger, while I somewhere towards the rear of the party had the description, not a problem as each pitch seemed to be pretty straight forward with hangers fitted in all the necessary places. The first pitch had a log across it with a homemade ladder attached, rather cunningly crafted from baler twine and twigs. Ingenious as this was, we opted for the more technically sound option of SRT. A short distance below this a ledge was reached and the next pitch rigged. Below this yet another pitch was soon met and rigged, and yet again a homemade ladder also descended the full distance. The fourth (and therefore our final) pitch had quite an attractive look to it, there's a kind of dog-leg partway down the shaft, but I don't remember any difficulties negotiating this. When everyone bar Stuart, Matt and I had descended, the three of us at top became aware of a general kerfuffle from below. It seemed that though the rope bag was now empty, another pitch lay between us and the



bottom of the mine. Stuart headed down while I dug out the description for insight as to what might have gone awry. This is when our mistake became apparent - we had accidentally rigged two ropes on the first pitch! Seems there had been two options here, either a straight descent or heading over to the ledge and splitting it as we had done. No doubt the Heath Robinson style ladders had confused things as it had seemed natural enough to follow the same route as they had taken.

One option we had was that Matt and I could scoot back to re-rig the top to use only one rope and return with the other, but that would obviously add quite a bit of time to the trip so I headed down to discuss what we should do. As it happened, a Plan B had already been hatched by the team. It transpired that the rope we'd used on that pitch was much longer than we needed with enough left over to get us down the next pitch too if we cut it. Only trouble was that it was my rope! Fortunately it was quite an old one and the lengths would still be useful when chopped so I graciously agreed with the plan, after all I did want to get to the bottom sometime that day. Problem sorted, the final pitch was soon rigged. This pitch has a ledge part-way down and then opens out into a free-hang landing in wet horizontal passage. To the right the passage continues and becomes well decorated, however it was also very wet. Most of the party had already headed off when I landed, with the exception of Stuart who didn't fancy getting a soaking and was taking photographs instead. I waited for Matt and couldn't believe it when he also chose dry clothes in favour of formations. So I waded through the thigh-high water on my own and met up with the others taking photos at the formations, they'd been to the end and were on their way back. The passage here is not particularly long, but it's pleasant and the formations are well worth the wetting. I love blue stals, and these were different to what I'd seen in places like the Coniston Copper Mines and Bellan Mine, being more akin to delicate cave formations with straws and ribbon-like curtains in a nice mix of blues and white. Returning to the rope after visiting the end of this side, some of us then braved the even deeper water in the other direction while the rest of the team started on up. This didn't go very far, but was interesting enough. As the others had all been in the water longer than me, I volunteered to be last up and de-rig, which I quite like anyway, and we all made it out without any problem. At the top an extra rope was put down the straight descent which provided a choice of routes and sped things up a little. The direct route was easy enough, but a bit scruffier



than the way we'd come down. Back on the surface we succeeded this time in finding the most efficient route back to the cars then toasted our success at the Beer Festival in the local pub.

Apparently there are more adits to explore in this area and plenty more mine here that's yet to be rediscovered. Paul had an investigative trip here back in 2016 to explore the various entrances and surface features and wrote an article about his findings in CSS Newsletter Vol 58, Nos 10-12. He states that though the mine complex extended for over 20 miles only half a mile is currently accessible.



Rigging for SRT: Despite the fact that it was me that organised the tackle for this trip, I haven't been able to find any info about the actual rope lengths needed. I believe I probably just worked it out based on the approximate pitch lengths mentioned in the description which is as follows... **Remember to add extra rope length for knots and rigging!**

- P1 - 80ft/25m** (Descent to Lewis Level) - Y-hang at the pitch head and back-up to rear wall. This can be rigged as either a straight descent or split in two at ledge a short distance down leading to the old ladder route.
- P2 - 120ft/64m** (Descent to Maescarhyg Level) - Again with hangers for Y-hang at the pitch head and a back-up line.
- P3 - 30ft/9m, then a further 40ft/12m** (Descent to Angred Level) - This requires a longer traverse/safety line to the Y-hang. The pitch is split in two with a dog-leg part way down.
- P4 - 70ft/22m** (Descent to Pannau Level) - Hangers for a Y-hang and a scaffold bar for back-up.

Trip Highlights: Definitely the blue formations, always a joy to behold.

All Nantymwyn photos by Paul Tarrant. Wemyss, Frongoch and Temple photos by Matt Voysey

Frongoch Mine



Cwmnewyddion Valley, Ceredigion. Grid Ref: SN 7138 7427. Parking the same as for Wemyss Mine (SN 7158 7418), from here the easiest approach to Frongoch is walk up the road a short distance to the Adit Entrance (very wet), then follow the cutting uphill to find the fenced compound of the Adit Shaft Entrance. The entrance is covered but not locked.

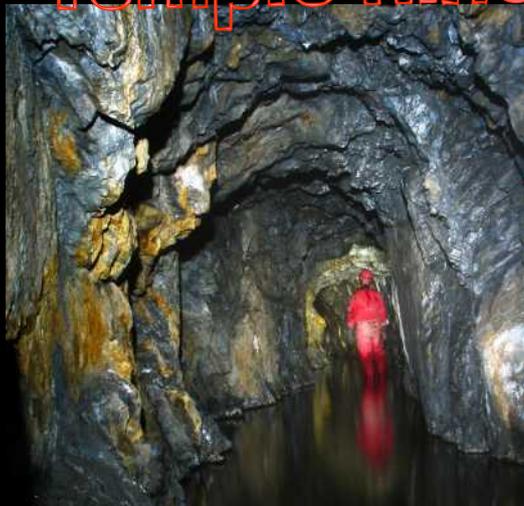
After our abysmal failure to find this mine on our last BEC/GSG/SMCC venture to the area, we returned for another go the following year, but this time I spent a bit of time beforehand looking up the location in order to guarantee success. So armed with a description and a rough map of the entrance location, Matt and I finally managed to find and explore this fascinating mine with fellow BEC members Barry Lawton and Jo Meldner. This (like Allt y Crib and Nantymwyn) is another Roy Fellows special, with much of it only being only accessible due to his digging and shoring efforts. Though I've written about this mine before (see CSS Newsletter Vol 61, Nos. 1-3 for full description), I thought it worth mentioning again briefly as it's a really interesting outing.



The thing I liked about this mine was the variety of different things to see, there are flooded sections you can explore with wetsuits/inflatables, a long multi-level ladder climb up to the well decorated "14 Fathom Level" and loads of visible history throughout the whole trip from miner's artefacts like tools and a wooden wheelbarrow to clog prints in the mud so small they must have been left by children. The Engine Shaft with pump rods is pretty good too and there's even a smattering of blue formations in one of the chambers if you look hard enough.

Trip Highlights: The flooded bits were the most fun, the formations were a brilliant surprise and I really liked the miners' footprints too.

Temple Mine



Rheidol Valley, Ceredigion. Grid Ref: SN 7490 7918. Following the path upstream from the west side of Parson's Bridge near Ysbyty Cynfyn. After the second stile turn right into the mine ruins, the adit entrance is located next to an old wheel pit.

We did this as a very short Sunday trip as it was just a 20min walk away from the campsite we were staying at. To be honest there's not a huge amount of mine here to explore and a trip to the end and back doesn't take long, but what there is of it is quite nice. The main feature of the trip is a massive angle bob located about halfway along the level, this would have been powered by a waterwheel in the pit outside. The adit is basically one single passage and ends at a dead end sooner than you'd like, but just before this there's a very tempting looking fixed rope hanging down at a point that's reasonably narrow but very high. Though many of our caving crew had done this trip before us, no one had mentioned this, so we were unfortunately lacking the equipment to scale the rope. Having spotted an aluminium builders ladder back at the entrance, Matt and I fetched it to see if it would afford us a better look but it was woefully short so we used it as a camera tripod instead. Chatting about the rope afterwards, it transpired that the reason it hadn't been mentioned as a possibility was simply that prusiking up a rope of unknown vintage and attachment point seemed like a dodgy idea so no one had considered actually doing it. I've tried looking it up on the internet since then, but haven't found much more than just a couple of photos and get the impression that probably there isn't a great deal to explore up there... but who knows, it might still be worth a look if it can be safely done. Another interesting thing here was some unusual rainbow hued goo on the walls at the end, we couldn't figure out what on earth this could possibly be.

Trip Highlights: Large angle-bob and intriguing rainbow goo.

That concludes my journey through the mines of Mid-Wales that I've visited. If anyone else has any trip reports, recommendations or information about mines in the area, I'd very much like to read about it.

For further reading on Mid-Wales mines, check out 'Worn by Tools and Time' and 'Rich Mountains of Lead' by Ioan Lord, and 'The Cwmystwyth Mines' by Simon Hughes available to members in the Whitewalls library. The newsletter articles mentioned can be accessed via either the members ProBoards and Facebook pages or the CSS website.



If you'd like to join any of the club meets **please let Helen know** that you're coming so she can make sure we comply with any restrictions in place at the time. All meets are dependent on government guidelines permitting and may be cancelled if the situation changes.

Additional trips are also being planned on the members' ProBoards and Facebook pages, so check that out if you'd like to do extra caving trips or to arrange your own and invite others.

July 23rd-25th - Whitewalls Working Weekend

The plan is to get Whitewalls ready for a return to group caving and social events in time for the CSS Summer BBQ scheduled for the following weekend. There'll be plenty of jobs for all skill levels, and plenty of cleaning and tidying too. We'll also have beer and a post-work BBQ, and possibly even caving if enough work gets done.

July 30th-August 1st - Summer BBQ Weekend

A weekend of caving, flames and feasting at Whitewalls. There'll be at least one OFD trip on the Saturday, including the option of a descent down The Knave, so bring your SRT kit along if you'd like to do that. There's also the option of any of our local caves and as usual there'll be a barrel of beer (or maybe 2), and BBQ accompaniments provided for a small fee. Just bring your own meat/veggie choice to put on the BBQ.

August 20th-22nd - Kids Caving and Family Weekend

Bring your kids, grandkids, nieces and nephews for child-friendly caving and other fun stuff. The priority for the weekend is happy kids (and parents) instead of lots of hard caving. If it happens that you're child-free, come along anyway to join the fun.

August 27th-30th - Cave Fest and Chelsea Film Night

There'll be a Draenen trip on Saturday, followed by a Film Night in the evening so bring plenty of popcorn. Other trips will be decided closer to the time, or you can just bring your own ideas and see who else wants to join you.

September 3rd-5th - Portland, Dorset

Portland has some really interesting caves, the longest and most notable being the Ariel/Sandy though-trip which involves an abseil down from the cliffs, so don't forget your SRT kit if you'd like to do that. There'll also be some easier options available, and possibly a day of kayaking/SUP. There are also plenty of good walks in the area. Please let Helen know in advance if you're coming so she can arrange accommodation.

September 17th-19th - CSS "Un-annual Banquet"

We'll be having a 65th Anniversary Un-Annual Banquet on Saturday night, so get your evening dress or DJ on for a candle-lit dinner in Eglwys Faen. There will of course be food and beer (for a small fee), and to work up an

appetite a caving trip to DY0 during the day. Other trips to be decided closer to the time, but there should be something for everyone.

October 15th-17th - Whitewalls Weekend

Trips for this weekend to be decided, but if there's anything in particular you'd like to do, let Helen know. Alternatively just come along and bring your ideas.

November 5th-7th - CSS Bonfire Weekend

Fire, frolics and caving fun. Bring a stonking firework and do your best anti-rain dancing. Caving trips to be decided, but it will include a range of options for all abilities. As usual there'll be a communal feast for after the fireworks, barrels of beer and a huge bonfire to enjoy.

December 3rd-5th - Whitewalls Curry Weekend

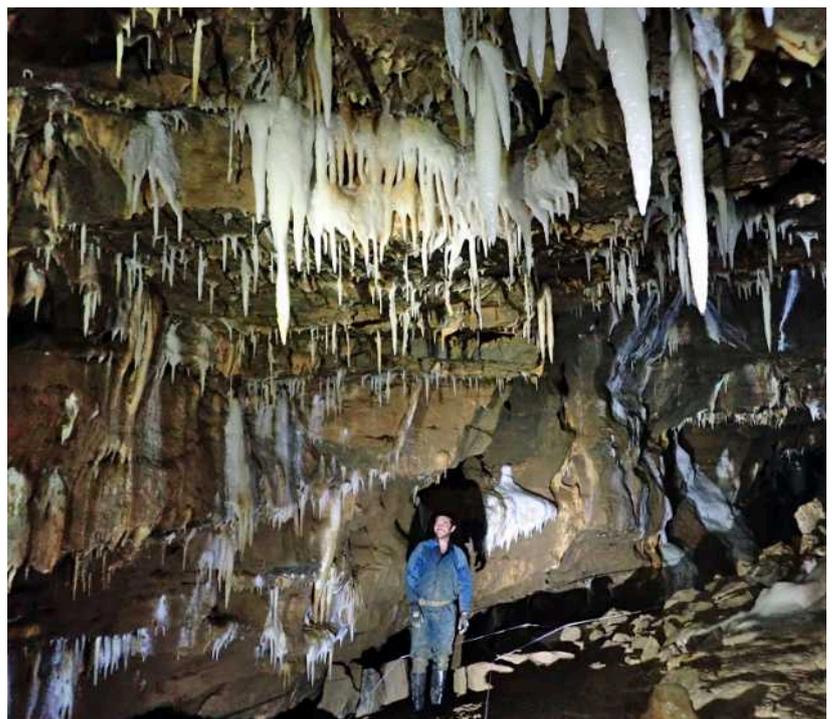
The annual evening of home-made culinary curry delights with a selection of caving trips on offer to work up an appetite. Bring along a curried concoction to share, be it a vat of curry, a spicy side-dish or some tasty sundries.

Zoom Socials

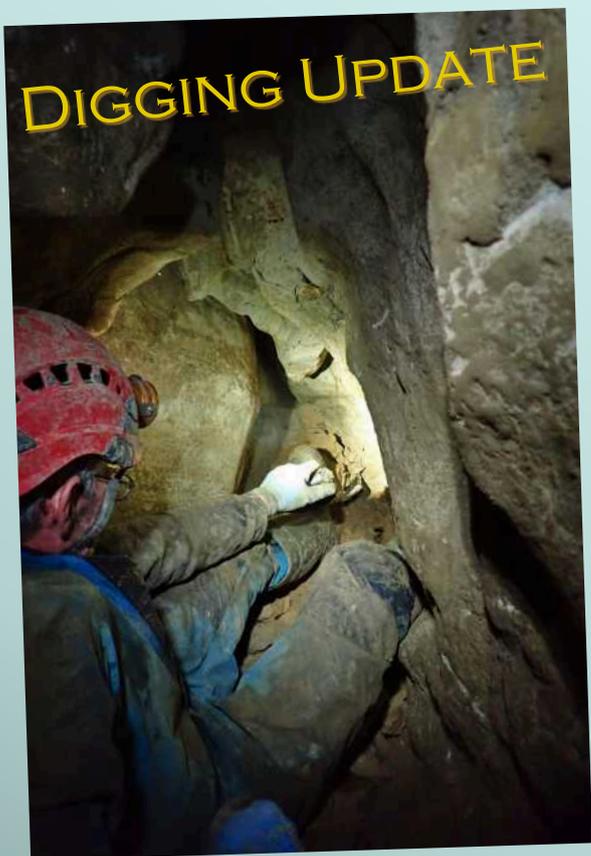
Virtual Pub Night
8pm every Tuesday



Contact Helen for password and further details.



Emyr Walters in Bat Passage, G.B. Cave, Mendip - Photo by Matt Voysey



Upper Southern Stream Agen Allwedd *by Andy Heath*

Although I'd previously questioned whether the old BNS 62 site is worth any further effort, Matt, Mandy and I recently returned to give it a further tickle.

Armed with better weaponry (a mini shovel) three hours of digging advanced the face a further two metres or so.

Much enthused, we returned again the next day. Removal of a large rock assisted by plug & feathers enabled even easier spoil removal and a further two metres were gained.

Gluttons for punishment, day three saw us back on site. Another two metres of progress.

As far as prospects are concerned, on the assumption it's going to link to Sandstone Passage, we've got around 10-12 metres to go. Say it quickly and it's two weekend's work.

Andy Demolishes a Boulder photos from the BNS 62 Dig



Photos by Matt Joysey

Any Hole's a Goal ★

Tales of caving withdrawal during lockdown



In these desperate times, we have to make the most of any opportunity to get into a hole in the ground. Yes I did have to pull him out. Yes I did wonder how the conversation with the police might go if he got stuck... "Please call cave rescue. My friend is stuck upside down with his head in a badger sett"

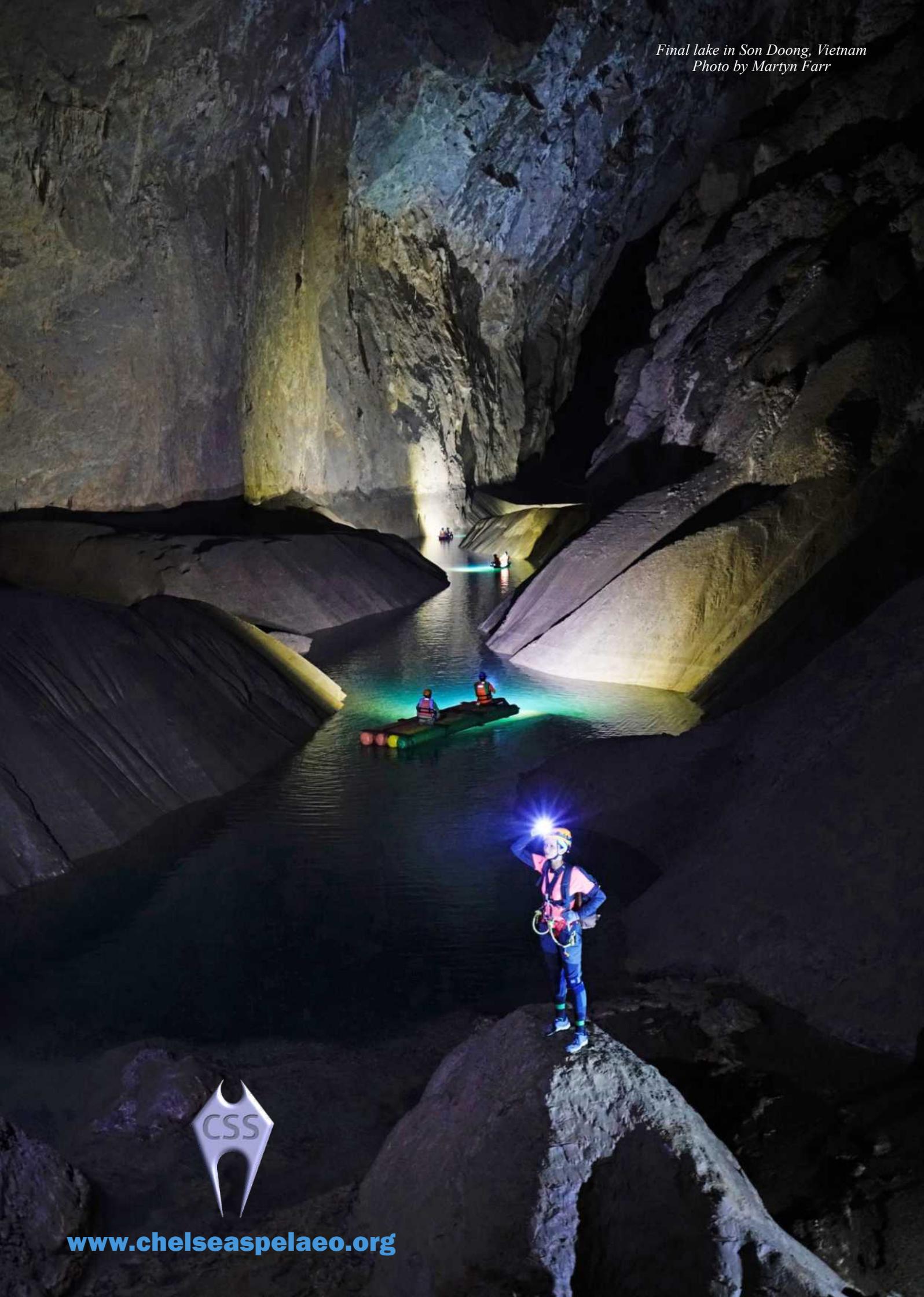
Helen Nightingale



Our house had a blocked sewer and it flows past the back of next door before joining the main sewer in the road. I rodded it to no avail then went next door and opened theirs with them looking on and it was a bush root blockage. Hanging upside down in the manhole was a bit like cave digging, but pulling out the roots full of sewage was not as interesting. A Victorian sewer 'not without interest'.

Andy Watson

*Final lake in Son Doong, Vietnam
Photo by Martyn Farr*



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