

**Volume 64  
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Oct/Nov/Dec 2022**

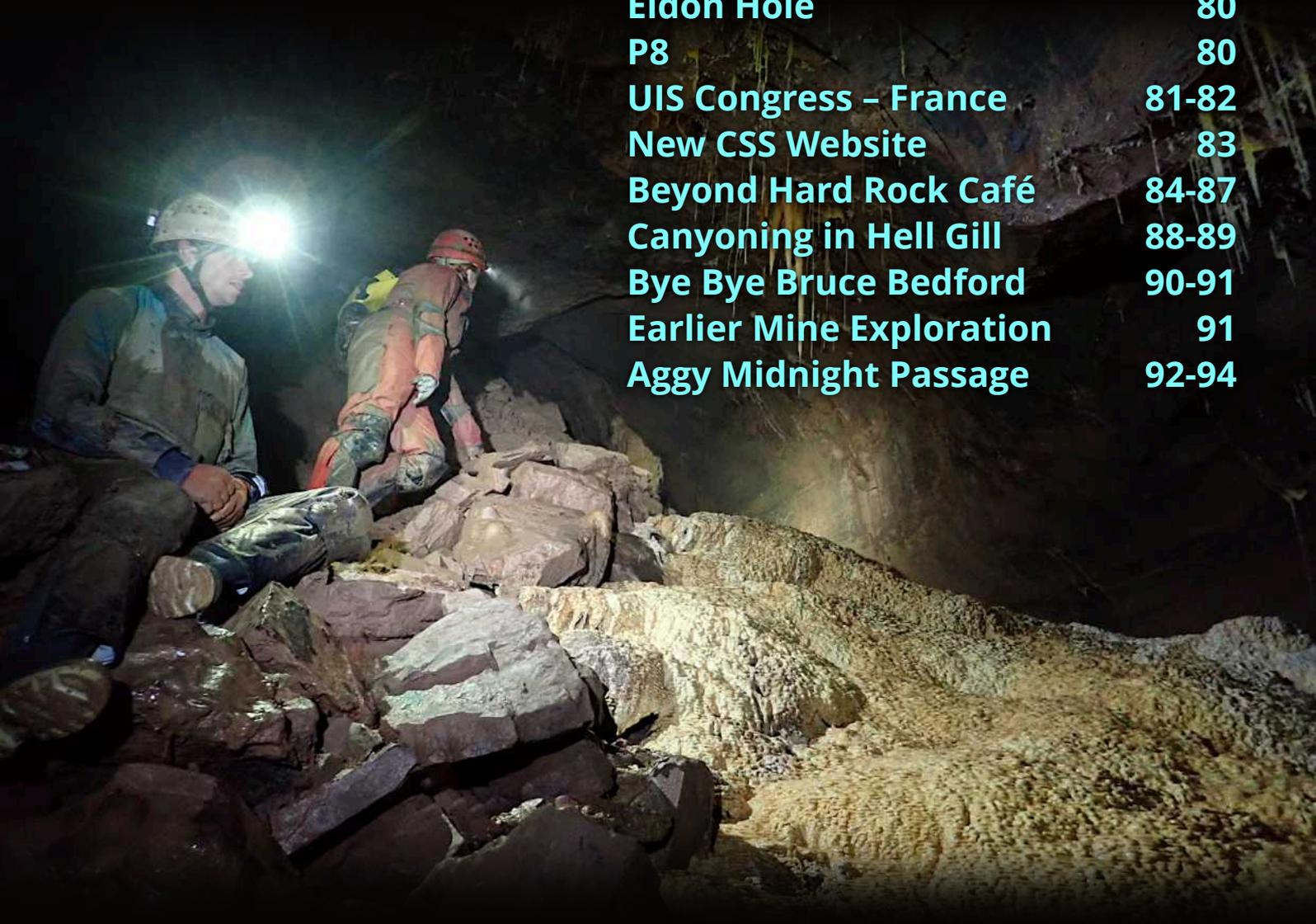


**Beyond HRC  
Bruce Bedford  
Derbyshire Meet  
Midnight Passage**

**CHELSEA SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

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## Upcoming Meets

### 27th-29th January – CSS Annual Dinner and AGM

The 2023 Annual Dinner will be held at The Bear in Crickhowell on Saturday evening, with a choice of caving trips before including the Annual Aggy Bat Count. The AGM is on Sunday at 11am in Crickhowell Parish Hall.

### 24th-26th February – Whitewalls Meet

With a range of caving trips and a booze themed evening.

### 10th-12th March – Mendip Meet

Staying at the SMCC hut in Priddy, caving trips to include Wookey 24, Fairy Cave Quarry and a Burrington adventure. Contact Mandy Voysey for info.

### 24th-26th March – Whitewalls Meet

Saturday evening to include a photo competition, please send your entries to Adrian Fawcett. Caving trips to be decided.

*More meets to be added throughout the year so check out the CSS website, members' Facebook and Proboards for updates.*

*Above: Alex Randall and Mandy Voysey in Heol Eira, OFD  
by Matt Voysey*

*Front cover: Kat Hawkins in Agen Allwedd Main Passage  
by Dewi Lloyd*

## Daren Camps

10-12 Feb

14-16 April

Contact Mandy or Adrian for further details

**Editorial** Welcome to the latest issue of the newsletter, packed with great features and photos, and once again may we extend a big thank you to everyone who sent us material.

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 a public shared link to the folder, or ZIP them up and send via MailBigFile.

An electronic version of this newsletter is available to download from the members area of the club website and the club forum. If you would prefer to go paperless and receive electronic copies of the newsletter by email in future then let us know.

*Editors: Matt and Mandy Voysey*

## New CSS Rope Washer *by Mandy Voysey*



**Got a dirty rope to clean and not looking forward to the misery of cleaning it? Have no fear, the new Acme "Scrubbarope" and "Ropeaway" are here to help!**

The "Scrubbarope" is mounted on the garden wall next to the cleaning sink outside Whitewalls. To operate connect the garden hose to the bottom, thread the rope through the pulleys and close the door. Then turn on the water and pull through as many times as necessary to remove dirt. Unlike most other rope cleaners the CSS Scrubbarope can

be easily used by one person due to the angle of the pulleys at the bottom, leaving the rest of team free to drink tea and spectate.



Once your rope is clean, it's then time to move on to the "Ropeaway". This is a wall mounted frame to assist in the chore of rope coiling, so no more aching arms or wet shoulders from your rope tidying endeavours. This is located opposite the Scrubbarope, folded away neatly. To use, simply lift and secure the top bar then unclip the two plastic pipes and place into the holes drilled in the wall below. Then wind the rope as demonstrated by Andy in the photo opposite, coil and tie the loose end below the top bar, remove from the frame and hey presto you now have a clean and tidy rope to be proud of!

Many thanks to Andy Heath for designing, building and fitting these fantastic new innovations.

## Membership

### Current rates:

**Full: £30, Joint: £40**, plus BCA subscription per person of £20 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:

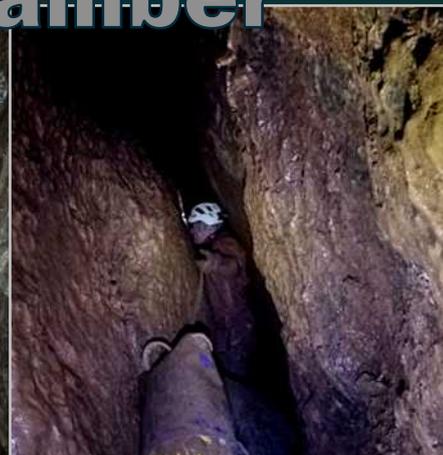
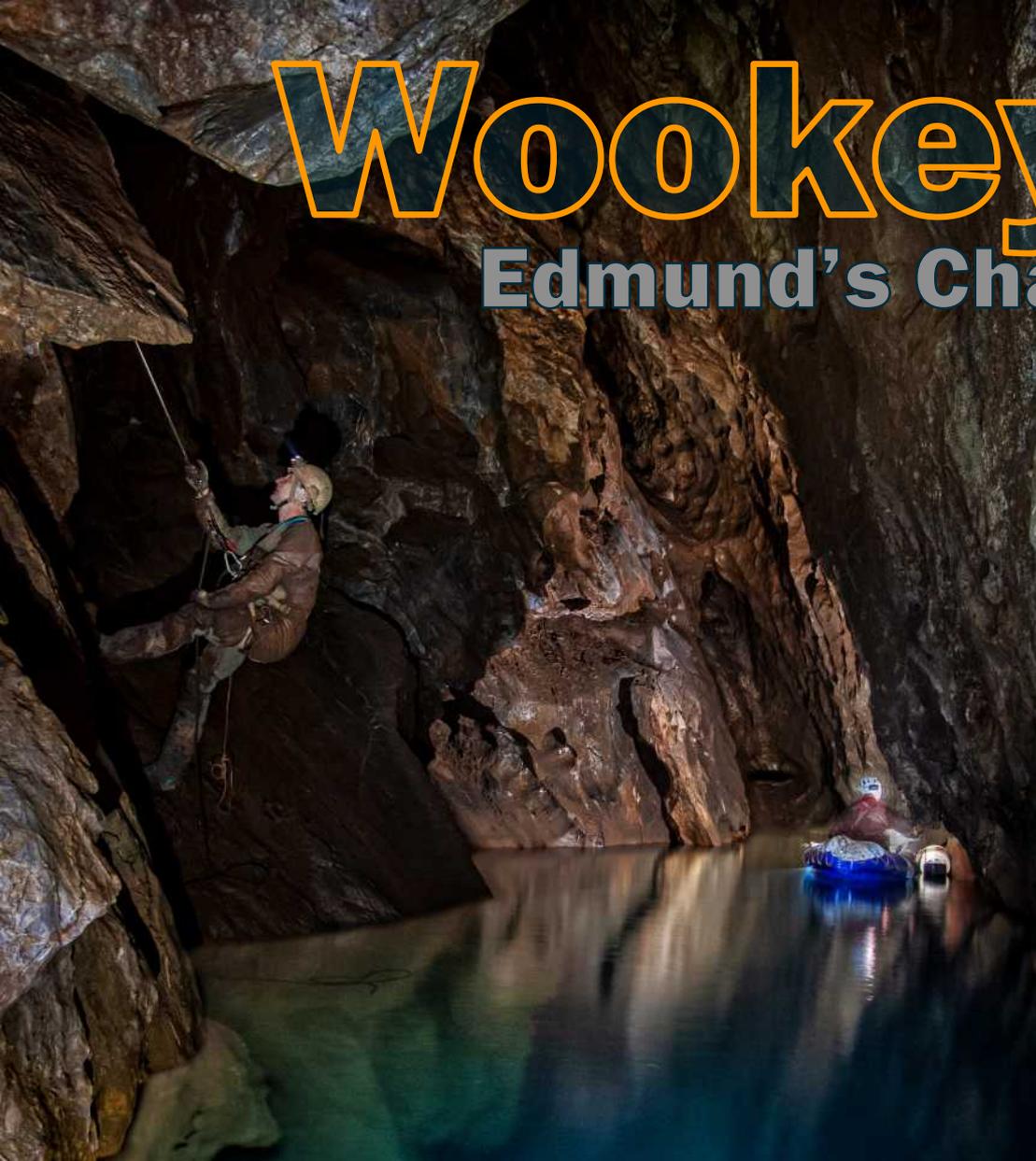
Andy Heath, 28 Brookfield Road, East Budleigh, Budleigh Salterton, EX9 7EL.

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

**SUBS ARE NOW OVERDUE!**

# Wookey 22

## Edmund's Chamber



*by Steve Sharp*

A short while ago I bumped into Duncan Price sitting on the outside bench at Whitewalls and over a cup of tea followed by consecutive beers, Duncan told me about his latest exploits in Wookey Hole and asked me if I would like to join the Diggers on a Thursday evening. Naturally, I jumped at the chance and enjoyed a trip to Land of Hope and Glory and a more rigorous trip to chamber 24 on a following Sunday trip. I have helped on consecutive digging trips which led to Duncan asking me if I would like to photograph chamber 22, Edmund's Chamber, which still holds Duncan's boat.

After various conversations involving a plan, I met Duncan at his house on Thursday 22nd September. Duncan has an impressive collection of Cave Diving books on display in his lounge. We put a few LED lights together and made our way to Wookey to meet up with Nick.

Chamber 22 is reached from chamber 20 the end of the show cave via a high level dry, but exceptionally muddy, route similar in character to the initial rifts just beyond the entrance boulder choke in Eastwater Cavern. Duncan chose to pull his bag behind him with

a tie whilst I opted to carry my heavy bag containing camera equipment and SRT kit. The route was exhausting and made worse by having to put SRT kit on in a confined space!

Once we were kitted up, we abseiled the 40m drop via a series of rebelayes and a few rusty deviations down to the bottom of the chamber which holds one solitary metal grill at the far end of the chamber. This was my only option to set up a tripod which naturally wanted to fall through the slots in the grill.

Due to time constraints, we quickly positioned Duncan in the boat at the rear of the passage and Nick posed on a slippery slope leading to the water's edge, I forgot my glasses which made taking the photo a challenge but after a few attempts we managed to get something half decent.

Once we had finished, we made a hasty retreat to the surface to be greeted by the pouring rain and a cold beer left dangling in the canal.

Wookey has now become far more accessible with all the dry routes and hopefully a dry route will someday be discovered which bypasses Sump 25 leading to the continuation of the cave.

# DERBYSHIRE WEEKEND

The CSS weekend in Derbyshire featured five different caving trips, three of which were in the superb Peak Cavern cave system followed by Sunday trips to Eldon Hole and P8. Some of the team also travelled over a day early for a bonus day's caving on Friday. Here are the trip reports from a highly active club weekend...



## A TALE OF TWO ROUND TRIPS a foray into the Peak-Speedwell system

by Andy Heath

Whether it's because we don't often go to Derbyshire or simply because we're now making the most of our post-pandemic freedom, it was great to see a turnout of no fewer than twelve members on a recent trip; that's over 10% of the membership!

Our base for the weekend was The Chapel in Castleton, headquarters for the TSG. Although it has its downsides (no camping and awkward car parking) it has some very fine up-sides, notably very close proximity to excellent caves and no fewer than seven pubs in one village.

### FRIDAY 7TH OCTOBER:

## JH & RIDE OF THE VALKYRIES

Our chosen trip for today was to James Hall's Over Engine Mine, more commonly known as JH, located just beyond Rowter Farm at the top of the Winnatt's Pass.

Being a predominately vertical place and with a party size of seven, it made sense to split into two teams; a rigging and a de-rigging team. Team one, the rigging team, comprised Jon Abbott, Charles Bailey and Andy Heath. Team two were Mandy Voysey, Matt Voysey, Alex Randall and Tim Gibbs.

Having parked at Rowter Farm and paid our £2 each to the farmer, Team one was soon at the top of the 55m engine shaft. Following a straightforward free-hanging abseil we made our way along the stooping/crawling cartgate level to the 48m Bitch Pitch. I have known this to be quite damp on previous trips but on this occasion it was bone dry. Although narrow in places and with several rebelay and deviations, I didn't find it as awkward as on previous occasions, presumably due to the lack of water.

Shortly beyond Bitch Pitch, The Workshop is reached where various mining artefacts can be

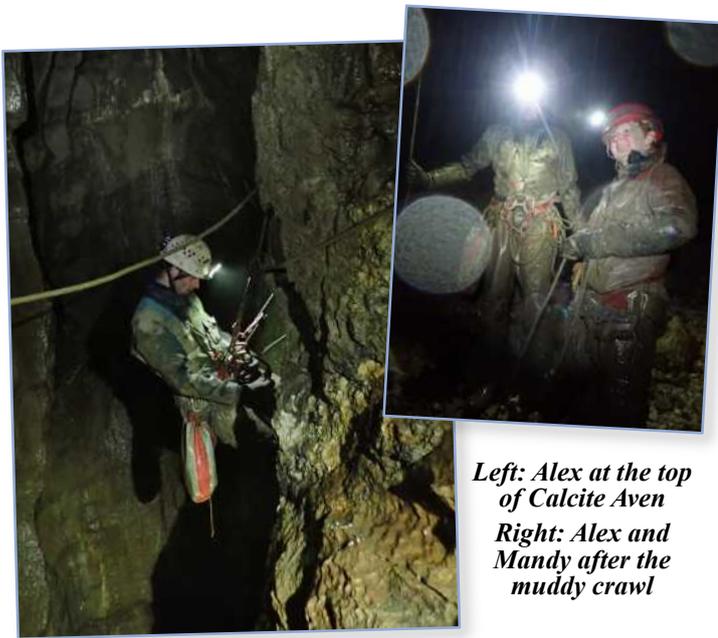
inspected. Beneath The Workshop, the splendid Leviathan pitch is to be found. There are two routes down the first section; we took the original route. This can be quite a damp descent; if so, the alternative route is a better bet. However, it was virtually dry on this occasion. On Charles's previous visit, his team abandoned the trip here; he likened the experience to being inside a depth charged submarine with water gushing in with force from every direction.

Leviathan is split into two sections, upper and lower, each requiring around 50m of rope. Although a natural shaft, T'owd Man has left his mark, evident by several massive stemples still in situ.

From the foot of Leviathan, there are two ways on. Upslope leads to an old gate giving access to the Boulder Piles in Speedwell Cavern. Downslope, the remains of the diggers' railway leads to a fairly squalid grovel into Stemple Highway and the Peak Cavern Far Sump Extensions, discovered by Martyn Farr in 1981 by diving Far Sump. It wasn't until 1996 that the current dry way in was opened. A third way in was discovered in 2003, when Titan was eventually linked to the surface.



Left: Tim at the Workshop  
Right: Alex descending Leviathan



*Left: Alex at the top of Calcite Aven  
Right: Alex and Mandy after the muddy crawl*

able to continue their trip up the big pitch without having had to wait for us.

At this point, Team one split. Charles had seen all of the Far Sump Extensions before, so began his journey out. Jon hadn't been here before, so I took him upstream to visit the bottom of the impressive Titan shaft and then downstream towards Major Sump. On the way back from the sump it suddenly occurred to me that Team two might have made better than expected progress and got back to Leviathan before us, derigging as they went. Now that would be embarrassing! Thankfully my fears were unfounded.

An uneventful exit was made, though both Jon and I agreed the entrance shaft seemed an awful lot longer on the way out and the pinprick of daylight at the top never seemed to get any nearer. With some relief, the surface was gained then back to Castleton for tea and medals.

For some however, the day was not over. Come 10pm I was getting a little concerned for the deriggers; shouldn't we have seen them by now? A TSG member kindly drove me back to Rowter Farm to check. Fortunately, on arrival at the farm we met the team getting changed. I definitely think they drew the short straw and would take the opportunity now to commend them for their sterling efforts.

## **SATURDAY 8TH OCTOBER:** **WHITE RIVER SERIES**

We had Peak Cavern booked for today with the White River Series being our chosen destination.

Again, being many in number, we opted for three teams. Team one, Adrian Fawcett, Lisa Boore, Matt Voysey and Mandy Voysey. Team two, Andy Heath, Jon Abbott, Alex Randall and new member Andy Ley (welcome, Andy). Team three, John Newton and Tim Gibbs.

Team one were to rig White River, Team two to derig and Team three to visit the main streamway and associated side bits.

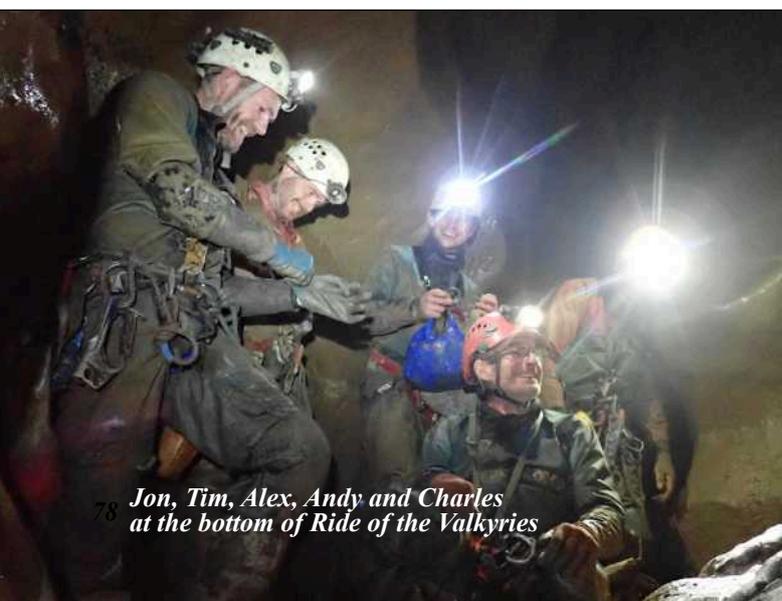
Whilst Team one went off to do their bit, Team two followed Team three to visit the impressive main streamway since two of our number had not seen it

Our destination today was the Far Sump Extensions. A few of us had been wanting for some time to visit Calcite Aven and The Ride of the Valkyries, a round trip within the extensions. Although often done as a pull-through, given none of us had been there before we decided an exchange trip was a better option.

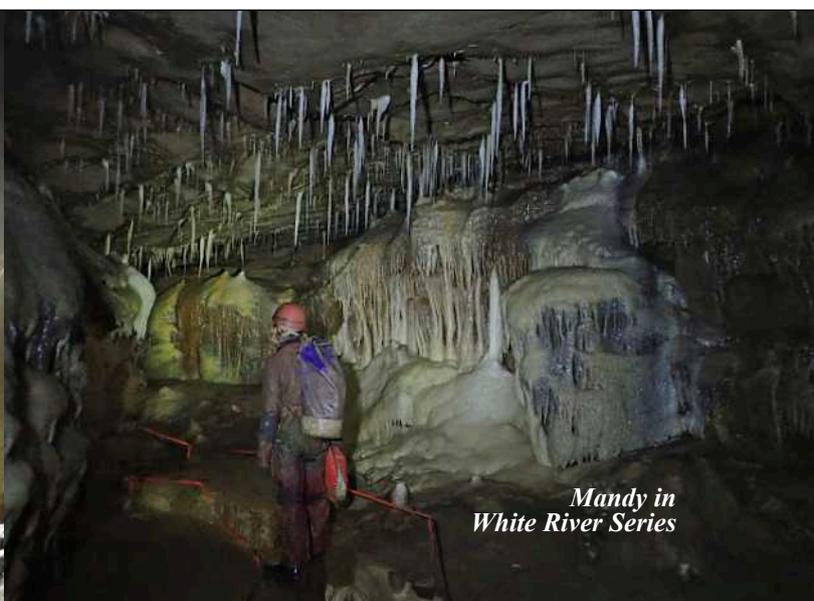
A hundred metres or so beyond the muddy grovel, a junction on the left leads to Calcite Aven, the way on for the round trip. Permanently rigged, several upward pitches in attractive clean rock climb around 45-50m to a higher level. We were under the impression that all the downward pitches needed rigging, so accordingly had brought all the necessary ropes with us. However, that proved not to be the case so we left our ropes in the bags and used in situ ropes for the two short drops which followed.

The next pitch, Ride of the Valkyries, starts as a straightforward traverse to a small Y hang and the vast main drop into Salmon's Cavern. Again there were ropes in situ so our traverse line stayed in the bag. The big drop however didn't look so good. Although the rope was probably ok, the krabs looked distinctly corroded so we chose to use our own kit.

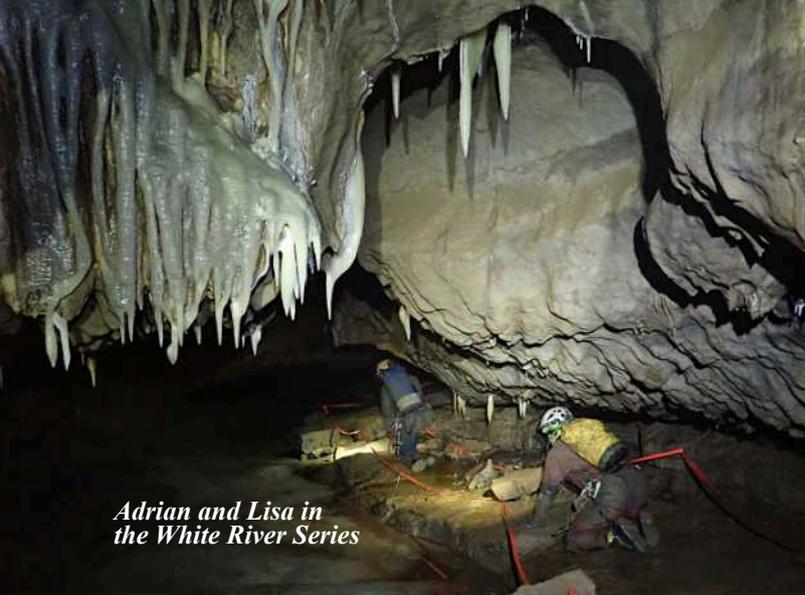
A magnificent free-hang of around 60m followed by two shorter sections took us back to Stemple Highway. Good timing; Team two had only just arrived so were



*Jon, Tim, Alex, Andy and Charles at the bottom of Ride of the Valkyries*



*Mandy in White River Series*



*Adrian and Lisa in the White River Series*



*Rigging the Terminator Pitch*

before and it gave Team one time to get ahead.

Having visited the streamway, Team two went back to The Treasury, being the way on to the White River Series round trip. From The Treasury, a very muddy section The Trenches leads to the equally muddy Colostomy Crawl. With some relief, Egnaro Aven was reached where fixed ladders lead down into the Speedwell streamway. Heading upstream, we were a little perturbed to reach a point where the roof dipped down to a few inches above the water. Surely that can't be the way on? Thankfully, by retracing our steps we located a low passage bypassing the wet bit.

On reaching Block Hall, we caught up with the last of the rigging party so carried on up the streamway for a quick look at the gated adit leading to the Speedwell Cavern showcave.

Back at Block Hall, three upward pitches (fixed ropes) lead to the White River Series. I was first up and would like to take the opportunity now to apologise to the rest of the team for forgetting to give the all clear until I was well up the second pitch; sorry chaps for making you get cold needlessly.

Several rebelay and 100m of prusikking later, the top of Block Hall is reached where the low Watt Passage leads to The Kingdom and the first of the pretties; a bit of a rarity in the Peak/Speedwell system.

Continuing on, the marvellous White River is reached, a flowstone river where cautious progress is needed to avoid kicking mud onto pure white stal. Passing two traverses over Nameless Pitch and The Moosetrap, the top of The Ventilator series is reached; four pitches totalling around 50m which drop back down to The Trenches and the way out.

We were under the assumption these were to be rigged as pull-throughs, so Team one's job was to rig them traditionally then the last man in Team two would quickly re-rig as a pull-through. However, the pitches were in fact already rigged which would have

made a pull-through potentially messy, so instead the last man trusted himself to the fixed ropes.

Back in The Trenches, the mud had become a delightful runny slurry, so it was with some relief when we eventually got back to The Treasury to then make our way out.

A good wash off in the pool just before the showcave where we were met by Team one coming back from a trip to the streamway, and all left the cave together for well-earned tea, medals and a visit to a couple of Castleton's seven pubs.



*Above: Descending the Terminator (the second pitch)*



*Right: Buxton Sump Main Streamway*



*Photos by Matt Voysey (featuring Team two on Friday and Team one on Saturday)*

# Eldon Hole

by Adrian Fawcett

09/10/22 – Adrian Fawcett and Jon Abbott

Eldon Hole has been 'on my list' for at least 25 years, so I was keen for an opportunity to visit. Finding the cave was easy – an unmistakably big hole in the ground. Choosing a descent route took us a little longer. We circumnavigated the perimeter of the entrance shaft, checking out the four options and trying to spot the bolts. The east and west routes looked as if they really needed a rope protector, and the north gully seemed to involve some vegetation. So we settled on the South Gully route, which is probably the most popular choice and involves a number of rebelay and deviations.

From the base of the entrance pitch, a scaffolded shaft provides a stable route down the otherwise loose slope into the main chamber. At the bottom we located the pull-up cord for the pitch up to Damocles Rift. The cord is rigged as a triangle to minimise the chance of everything getting twisted. On the second attempt we managed to get our rope through the big eyebolt at the top. We only found the roll of PVC tape that might have made things easier after we'd come back down.

From the top of our rope, a fixed rope with several rebelay carries on upwards into Damocles Rift. It's all rather pretty, with flowstone everywhere and a variety of other formations. The top of the rift ends abruptly, and the only way is back down. Damocles Rift is well worth the effort, and makes a very short trip a little less so.



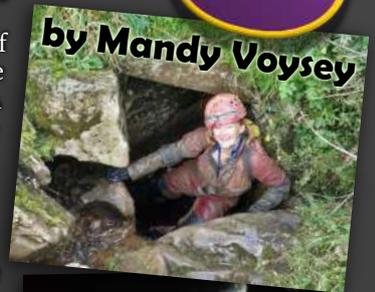
Jon ascending the South Gully route

09/10/22 – Matt Voysey, Lisa Boore, Tim Gibbs, Andy Ley, Alex Randall and Mandy Voysey

As I'd not been to P8 since 2007 and remembered it being a good cave, I was keen for a return visit to remind myself what it was like. Also after 2 days of big SRT trips, a gentle Sunday trip to somewhere pleasant and easy sounded quite appealing. We'd been told by TSG members that the high-level traverse route avoiding the second pitch was currently rigged so we need only bring one short rope for the 1st pitch, bonus! Only minor problem was that none of us could remember the route to the cave, but it turned out to be well-marked with reflective triangles, so that was another bonus!

My recollection of P8 (or Jackpot if you prefer) is that it's like a Swildon's Hole of the north full of swirling water – but there would be no fighting against an aquatic force of nature today as the stream flowing into the cave was a mere trickle and water levels were generally low everywhere. A number of sections that I remember being quite spray-lashed and sporting on the approach to the 1st pitch were much less so on this occasion, and the waterfall on the pitch itself wouldn't have given us much of a wetting even if we'd opted to rig straight through it rather than taking the side wall route to the ledge. Beyond this was into dryer territory high above the streamway where we continued over the top of the normal route down the 2nd pitch to reach the rigged traverse line – which we were very glad of at the exposed sections on the way to Mud Hall. We then rejoined the streamway and headed left for more traversing fun to reach the sump and the formations at the end. After that we headed back to follow the stream in the other direction and nosed in various interesting tubes, crawls and squeezes, all of which ended at either a dig or a sump. We'd reached the end of the cave and it seemed a much shorter trip than I remembered, though maybe the lack of water and omitting the 2nd pitch had something to do with that. We visited Stalagmite Passage on the way back, which was well worth the committing lunge across an abyss to see the large passage beyond. Then exited to sunshine with plenty of time for our long journey home. Overall a very pleasant and entertaining Sunday trip.

# P8



Above: P8 Entrance; Looking at the sump

L-R: The Sump; Lisa, Tim, Andy, Matt and Alex; 1st Pitch





## Le-Bourget-du Lac, France

24-31 July 2022



by Joe  
Duxbury



The 18th UIS Congress was originally supposed to be held in Lyon, France, in 2021. But Covid-19 interfered with that and it got postponed, and then the venue changed, so that it was eventually held this year. I signed up for it in early 2022.

In order to arrive at the Congress early enough to be able to pick a good spot for my tent and pitch it, and be at the Opening Ceremony on Sunday, I was to catch an early plane from Heathrow to Lyon. This meant driving from Cheltenham through the early hours of Saturday (23rd) morning.

At Lyon airport, the police were dealing with some unattended luggage, so the bus to Chambéry was delayed. Nevertheless, I was able to catch it and my first task in Chambéry was to find the right bus stop for the science park (Savoie Technolac) that is the site of the University and many scientific research companies. All in the blistering heat. After a half-hour bus ride to the campus, I found the registration and signed in. Fortunately Antoine Aigueperse, who had been on the first Namibian expedition with me, was on duty there, and he gave me a lift to the camp site which was a good 10 minutes' walk away.

Because the Congress didn't officially start until the Sunday, there was nowhere to eat or drink. Fortunately the local football club, next to whose football pitch we were camped, had a social evening and were quite happy to let us happy campers buy beer and barbecue food from them.

The Technolac campus was like a miniature Milton Keynes: a rectangular layout of roads with roundabouts sprinkled liberally across it. But it was very widely spaced. Apart from the camp site being a long way from registration, the cinema where all the films were shown was another 10 minutes' walk further on. The lecture theatres were dotted around, quite distant from each other. Despite the university

buildings having large identifying numbers on them, the Congress organisers had decided to relabel them with their own different numbers, which led to some confusion. The big events, the evening entertainment, and the main bar, were in a large red circus tent.

The bar and the Congress restaurant were run using tokens for payment. This seemed to be a totally unnecessary intermediate step for buying food and drink, but there was probably a good reason for it. Fortunately, some enterprising caterers brought food stalls on site and we could get meals using real money or cards.



*Above: One of the university buildings*

*Left: The opening ceremony at the circus tent*

*Bottom: The campsite, by a football pitch*

The grand Opening Ceremony was held on Sunday afternoon. It included the flag and playing the UIS anthem (I bet you didn't know there was one!) The trade stands in the sports hall opened on Monday morning, and there was lots on offer: equipment, books, and club paraphernalia. Another feature of the Congress was the Speleo Olympics. I only saw two events, crate stacking and the obstacle course.





*Left: The trade stands*

*Below: The 'Speleotruck' - "The Cave that Comes to You!"*

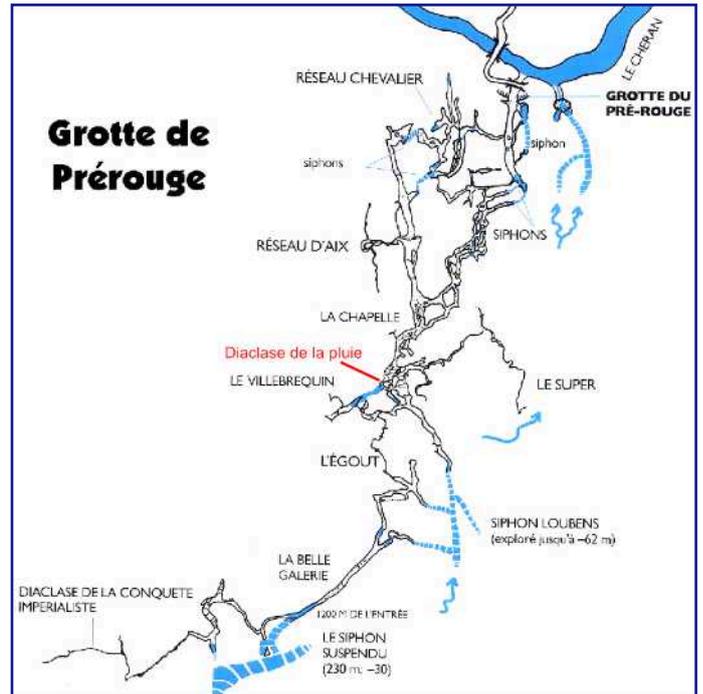


The first involved making a stack of milk (?) crates as high as you can, climbing up the stack as you do so with a lifeline. The record was 22! The object of the obstacle course was to complete it as fast as possible. It involved crawling through pipes, prussiking up ropes, and finally sliding down a zip line. Because it involved so many separate parts, I didn't find this very entertaining. A simple 50m prussik would have been better. Also on site was a transportable artificial cave 'The Speleotruck', primarily for children although it was advertised as for all ages.

Wednesday had been set aside for excursions, and I had signed up for a trip to the Prérrouge cave. As there were too many people signed up for this trip, we were divided into two groups. Our first group went into the cave, and I got taken as far as the 'Diaclase de la Pluie'.

Then we swapped over and we were taken to see the Lac du Mariet and the caves in the swallet holes beside it.

As well as lectures to listen to, there were many caving films to watch. Quite by chance, I came across Mel Reid and Dave, and we chewed the fat for a while. On Saturday 30th there was a final Gala Dinner: the food was good, but very slow between courses. The Closing Ceremony on Sunday was delayed while the UIS Committee debated vital matters. I left early on Monday morning and caught a bus to Italy, where I met cavers from the Gruppo Speleologico Savonese and stayed with them for a week.



*Left: The entrance of the Grotte de Prérrouge*

*Right: Grotte de Prérrouge in flood (quite a difference from the photo taken on 27th July)*



*Photos by Joe Duxbury (except flood)*

# CSS Annual Dinner and AGM

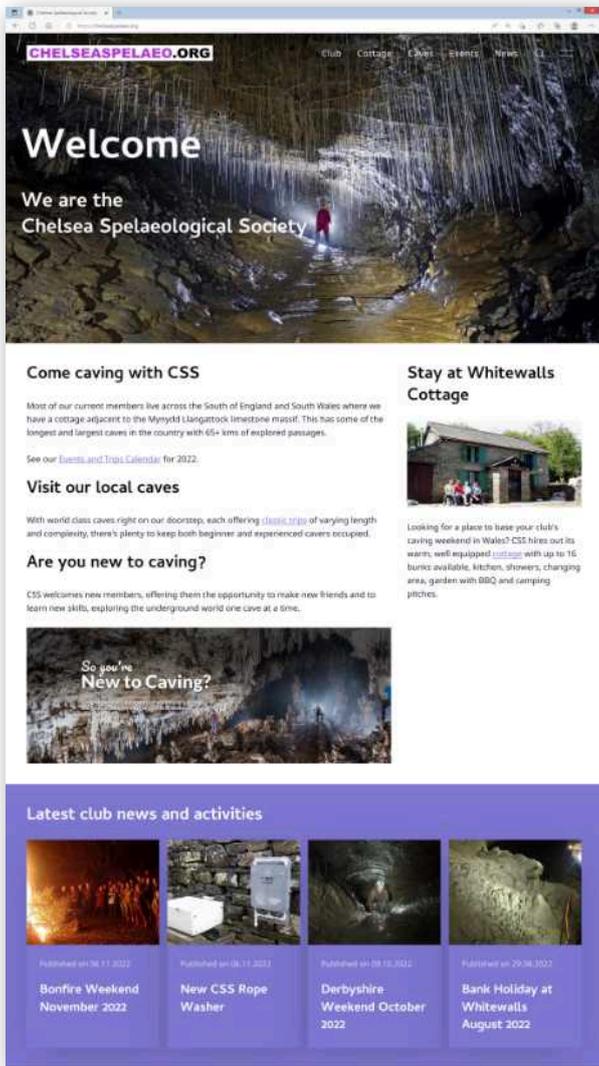
The 2023 CSS Annual Dinner will be at The Bear Hotel in Crickhowell on Saturday 27th January at 7pm. The dinner menu has been emailed to club members, if you've not received this please contact Adrian. Transport has also been organised, leaving Whitewalls at 6:30 and returning at midnight. As usual there'll be a selection of caving trips to local caves during the day to work up an appetite. **Please send your dinner choices to Adrian before Sunday 8th January and indicate whether you would like transport.**

The AGM will be at the same venue as last year, the Parish Hall in Crickhowell, with a starting time of 11am on Sunday 28th January. Do come along and give some input into future plans for the club. All members are welcome to attend and share ideas. Tea and biscuits are provided.

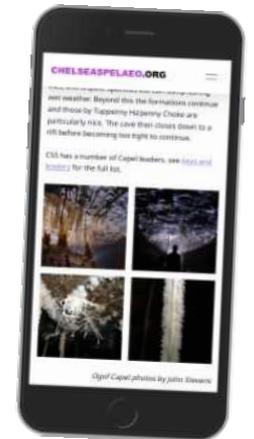
As in previous years, AGM paperwork will be circulated in advance by email, and paper copies will be available at the meeting.

# CLUB WEBSITE UPDATES

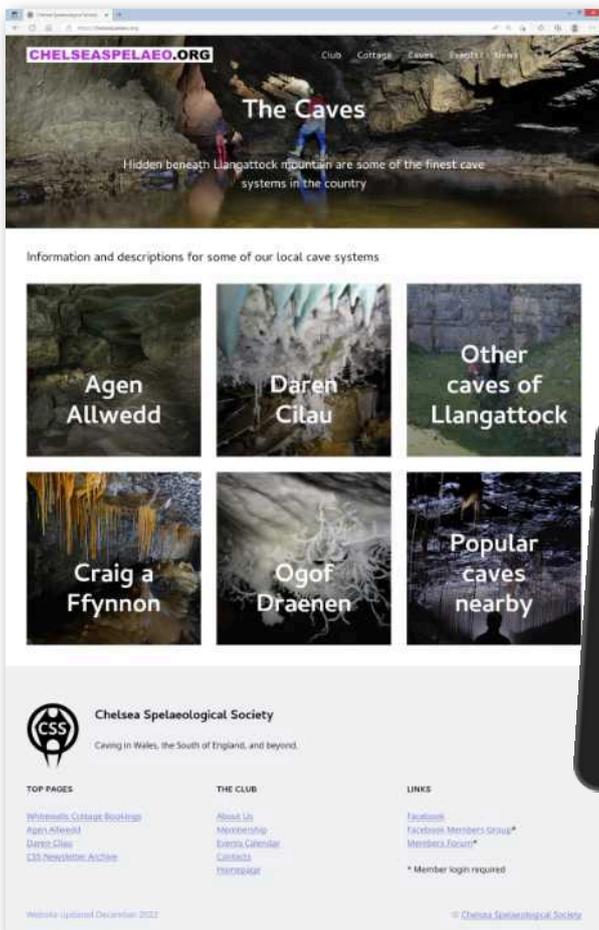
by Matt Voysey



The club now has a brand new revamped website, which went live at the end of October. The new design is modern and stylish, and includes major usability improvements for people viewing the site using a mobile phone or tablet, who make up more than half of our visitor numbers according to statistics. The website is designed to be useful to members, to act as an advertisement to non-members about who we are, what we do, and encourage them to join, and to be a useful resource to all cavers by providing information and route descriptions for our local Llangattock cave systems and the caves of the surrounding area.



Additional material now online includes information on cave keys and club wardens, reports and photo galleries from each club meet during year, cottage and club news, a list of caving tackle held by the club, revised and rewritten information about Whitewalls and how to get there, and more photos and information about our local caves. Plus the club events calendar, cottage bookings calendar, and CSS newsletter archive pages have been retained and improved.



A number of people helped greatly with this effort by supplying new photos, reviewing and reworking club information, and writing and checking cave descriptions, for which I'm extremely grateful. More additions are planned, and contributions and ideas are welcome.



If you haven't seen the new website yet please take a look:  
[www.chelseaspelaeo.org](http://www.chelseaspelaeo.org)

# ROUTE DESCRIPTION DAREN CILAU BEYOND HARD ROCK CAFE

Description and Photos by Gonzo

**TRIP TIMES**

Journey times shown are for a return trip from Hard Rock and are a rough guideline for a competent tourist party, with an absence of muppets, travelling at a suitable pace for enjoying the sites. Regular visitors will do the trips much faster but experienced parties have also taken much, much longer so leave plenty of time for your callout. Times shown do not allow for photography, etc. and do not include time taken while exploring side passages.

**NOTE: Take water bottles as the ONLY place you'll find fresh water is at Seventh Hour Sump just below REU.**

Hard Rock - 12 o'Clock High (inc. WTSDS) - Hard Rock: 3-4 hrs

Hard Rock - REU - Hard Rock: 5 hours (add 1 hr 30 min if visiting Pain Killer Passage)

Hard Rock - Spaderunner & Last Spit Choke - Hard Rock: 10 hrs (add 1 hr 30 min if visiting Dweebland)

## I. Hard Rock to Western Union

The further reaches of the cave are reached by heading west along the obvious walking/stooping passage by the camp at **Hard Rock**, ignoring unpromising digs on the right, to reach **The Ovaltinees**, the start of **The Hard Rock Extensions** and the first of many 'sand swims' or low, choked, dry u-tubes dug out between 1986 and 1987. This is quickly followed by a series of low wriggles between rifts at **H Block** and then by the 15m **Turtle Crawl** to emerge into **The Rock Steady Cruise**, a fine, crystal-walled walking passage reminiscent of **Midnight Passage** and parts of the **Gothic Extensions** in **Agen Allwedd**.



Rock Steady Cruise

A short walk and a move to the left bring you to a parallel rift, another sand swim at **Agoraphobia Air bell** (which needs

regular clearing out as sand is carried into the u-tube by each passing caver) and then the **Peace Pipe**, shortly beyond which an awkward thutch to the left brings you into **High Flyer** and an approach, through the **Coal Cellar**, to the boulder-choked bedding of **Brazil**. A low, dug-out crawl heading left at the top of a sandbank takes you through a bouldery bedding to a 'snug', moderate squeeze, **Miami Vice**, before spitting you out into a short, sandy crawl from which you quickly emerge into the more spacious chamber of **Western Union**.

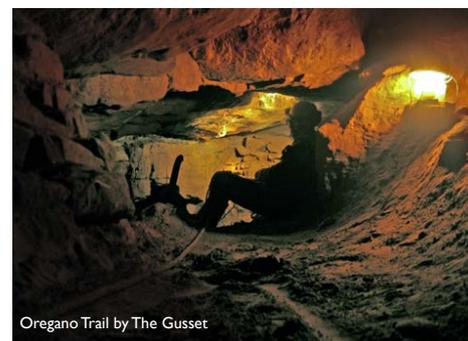


Miami Vice

## 2. Western Union to 12 o' Clock High

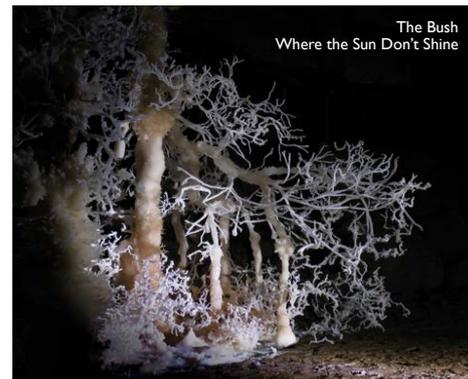
A scramble up through boulders to the left (west) side of Western Union brings you to a low arch beyond which an agreeable romp along the sand-floored rift of **Oregano Trail** is reached. Part way along is **Sand Chamber**, with an abandoned dig in the floor. A tape nearby on the RH wall marks a short climb up into **Terrapin North**, a high-level sand swim that heads back eastwards to an aural connection above **Western Union**. Part way along **TN**, on the left, a dug squeeze enters **Flight of the Bumble Bee** a small passage heading north and ending in a compacted choke. **Terrapin South**, a crawl to the right (south) of **TN**, can be followed for a few metres.

Back in **Oregano Trail** the obvious westerly route continues as easy caving to a section where the rift narrows and drops down steeply. At the bottom of this a low arch on the right **The Gusset** marks the dug-out approach to **Where the Sun Don't Shine**, a flat-out crawl where great care is needed to avoid damaging the stunning formations.



Oregano Trail by The Gusset

A way on can be seen at the end beyond a superb cluster of helictites, **The Bush**, but please don't be tempted to dig this as it is only a few metres away from known passage at **New Boots and Panties** and the loss of these fine formations and the vilification of one's peers is too big a price to pay for a few meager metres of dull, flat-out crawling passage and would only result in the most boring and unwanted round trip in history.

The Bush  
Where the Sun Don't Shine



Acupuncture Passage

mountain to **Psychatronic Strangeways** and is described elsewhere) and head north (right), away from the noise, along the tortuous, welly-grabbing-pooled, tacklebag-snagging rift of **Ankle Grinder Bypass**. CAUTION.

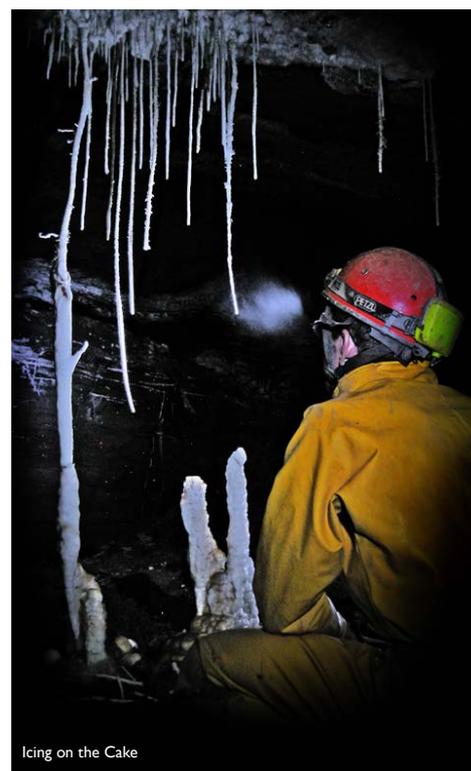
This is a flood overflow to the main stream which disappears further up. It has been known to flood extensively in wet weather.



Ankle Grinder Bypass

There are a couple of uninspiring, partially choked, high level tubes along the way but nothing of great interest to the tourist caver. Eventually, after several hundred metres, you will arrive at a 5 metre long duck beyond which the passage enlarges. CAUTION. This duck becomes a sump in wet weather and can remain so for several days. Above the duck, a 4 metre climb enters the high level, dry, **Prawn Cracker Passage** which heads south for 100m before finishing in a choke. Continuing from the duck the passage continues up a bouldery slope with a

fossil side passage on the right, **Icing on the Cake**, sporting some photogenic columns and stalactites on a pristine mud floor beyond which it continues southwards, beyond conservation tape, with the airspace slowly diminishing.



Icing on the Cake

Continue up the main route, negotiating large boulders in big passage until you reach a short, airy traverse and climb down on the right hand side, where you can decide for yourself whether to avail yourself of the antiquated handline and fossilized bolts, then drop down to the streamway to approach the 6 metre fixed **Jacob's Ladder** (lifeline in situ) and a short climb up to **The Restaurant at the End of the Universe**.

Returning to the main passage continue on for a few metres and up a bouldery slope to enter the impressive chamber of **12 o' Clock High**. At the far end a bouldery slope upwards leads to a compacted boulder-and-clay choke. At the base of the slope a wriggle down through boulders brings you into the smaller, westerly-headed passage of **Chokes Away**, which heads past an unpromising cross rift to a loose boulder choke which has been passed on the right hand side for a few metres to a point where the strong draught is sucked down through loose boulders which appear to be above, and close to the end of, the divers' extension **San Agustin Streamway**.

### 3. Western Union to The Micron

Up the sandbank on the NE side of **Western Union** yet another low, dug-out archway leads to the abrasive delights of **Acupuncture Passage**, 150m of flat-out crawling through sharp, crystal-covered breakdown. The early stages of the crawl are along a sand-floored bedding interspersed with a few dug-out links through roof collapse. A wide, rocky bedding follows for 80m with a final 20m dug-out-breakdown thrutch to bring you to a large, sandy-floored passage which drops down to **The Micron** and the enticing roar of the stream below. Before dropping down this, carry straight on up the other side to view a fine helictite cluster, **The Blockhead**, in the wide, fossil bedding passage of **New Boots and Panties**, with its sandy, boulder-strewn floor which continues around several bends, dwindling gradually, to a choke that is not far from **Where the Sun Don't Shine**.



The Blockhead  
New Boots and Panties

### 4. The Micron to The Restaurant at the End of the Universe

At **The Micron** a fixed rope of uncertain age drops 7 metres through perched boulders (care) into a clean-washed rift. Ignore the siren call of running water from **Borrowed Boots Streamway** (which heads down the



Restaurant at the End of the Universe

Before climbing up note that this stream, originating from **Llangattock Swallet** and emerging from **Seventh Hour Sump**, is your **ONLY** source of fresh drinking water before the current end of the cave, a hot, dry, sweaty, energetic 2 miles away. The spot downstream where the stream disappears is also the camp toilet, a suitable spot to avoid polluting the cave ahead.

**The Restaurant at the End of the Universe** is in a large, dry, boulder-floored chamber perched above **Seventh Hour Sump** and was originally set up to facilitate digging in the more remote reaches of the cave. Please note that the sleeping bags, supplies and equipment stored there belong to the current diggers and, like those at Hard Rock, are not for general use. At the time of writing there is a First Aid supply and a dragsheet at the camp, for emergency use only. Please ensure that this is kept clean and airtight.

## 5. The Restaurant at the End of the Universe to Painkiller Passage

An obvious climb up on the east wall of the main camp area (just above the drop towards **Jacob's Ladder**) traverses to the right and turns into a spacious rift over **Jacob's Ladder**. Above the rift is the roomy, and uncharacteristically damp, diggers' old sleeping area, unnoteworthy except for one pathetically small but richly deep blue stal hiding itself in a nondescript crack in the ceiling. Continuing along the rift below this chamber, easy clambering, with one uncomfortable crawl through boulders, brings you into passage of more spacious dimensions. Double back to the left in this passage, passing through fine formations and you arrive at the startlingly peppermint-hued **Blue Greenies**, a mesmerizing, and thankfully still pristine, array of flows, stalactites, helictites and crystals in **Leonie-Jayne's Playpen**.



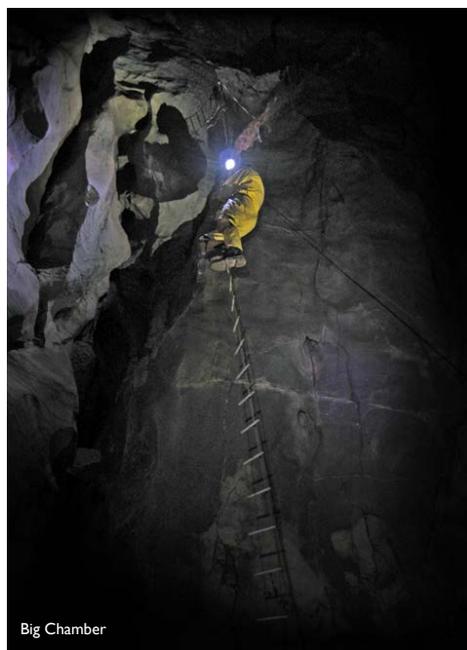
The Blue Greenies

Back in the main passage a rubble-strewn crawl becomes walking passage with oxbows continuing to a T Junction after 300m. **Little Gem**, 200m of southerly meandering passage, finishes in a choke which lines up enticingly with

**Flight of the Bumble Bee**. A second, decorated passage chokes after 40m while the way ahead, beyond a 2m climb down, enters a small chamber beyond which is the large, sandy **Painkiller Passage**. This impressive passage continues to the left for 100m before ascending to an enthusiastically-dug, but stubborn, calcited choke that bears all the signs of being a vestigial main thoroughfare and which trends towards an alluringly blank square kilometre between the **Time Machine** and the **REU** extensions. Just to the left of the **Painkiller Passage** junction are a number of sandy interconnecting crawls which end in unpromising digs. To the right it continues, passing through a couple of constrictions before ending in a boulder choke where the tapping of a hammer can be heard from **Beyond Time**. It is also close to the northern end of **Western Flyover**, another connection best left unexplored to help preserve the **Blue Greenies** by eliminating the shorter route.

## 6. The Restaurant at the End of the Universe to Trouser Filler and Starbar

From the top of the **REU** chamber duck left into a walking-sized phreatic passage with fine acoustics which heads, via two very short, rope-assisted climbs, to **Cordillera Blanca Chamber**. Climbs in the roof reach a small chamber, oxbows and unpromising digs. Continue northwards to a constriction with a choice of a tight squeeze at low level or a short climb up. This brings you to a short traverse (care) and the head of a 13 metre ladder pitch (ladder and lifeline in situ) down into **Big Chamber**.



Big Chamber

Several digs have been undertaken here with a view to regaining the streamway somewhere below, but to no avail. Continue through a low arch on the opposite side of the chamber to begin the long crawl which becomes a Neanderthalesque stooping trudge along the **Inca Trail**. The next few hundred metres continue along a wide, sand and rubble-floored passage with occasional crawls and thrutches through passage-blocking breakdown, past an

abandoned dig in the floor at **Unicorn Shit Rift** until a low arch is reached in the left hand wall of a sand-floored walking-sized section just before the rocky slope up to the **Matchu Pitchu** boulder choke. Crawl left through this arch, the **Matchu Pitchu Bypass**, to emerge in more sandy-floored passage and a short walk left to the junction at **Parting of the Ways** and the choked termination of the passage at **Trouser-Filler**.

To the right **Starbar** continues in a northerly direction as a spacious but block-strewn passage for some way to (you guessed it!) another extension along low, crawling passage to a choke. The bottom end of **Trident Passage** in **Agen Allwedd** perhaps?



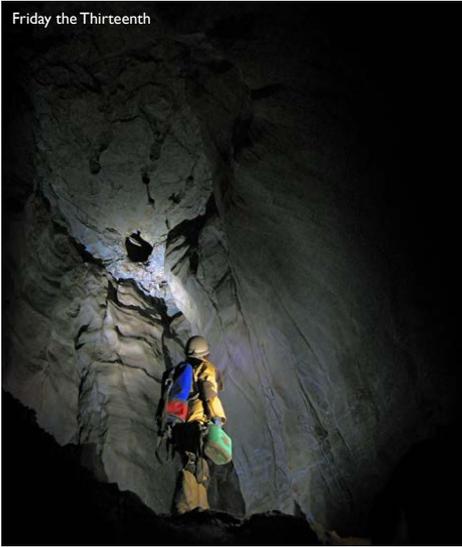
Starbar

## 7. Trouser Filler to Last Spit Choke

It is worth noting that, from **REU** to this point, the passage has trended updip through the mountain in a northerly direction, but things are about to change.

Take the northerly passage from **Trouser Filler** and follow it as it trends immediately westwards through a series of small chambers and walking and all-fours crawls. Just before it degenerates to a long, flat out crawl, the **Sand Swims**, a passage on the right, the **Warren**, heads north, mainly as a thrutchy crawl, to a 6m pitch up, possibly still rigged with an antiquated ladder (care), through a series of sand-filled chambers whose connecting digs require regular clearing, ending in a lead with spectacular aragonite formations that would be more viable if there was a bit more stacking space without the likelihood of blocking yourself in. Another contender for the southerly continuation or **Trident Passage** or, further away but well-aligned and similar in nature, **Midnight Passage** in **Agen Allwedd**?

You now resume the long see-saw back down the mountain with a tedious, flat out crawl, with one all too brief respite, through the **Sand Swims** heading due south and, after 100 metres, reach the large passage of **Friday the Thirteenth**. Ignore a dig up on the left wall, **Gwyn's Surprise**, which doubles back to the north before fizzling out, and head



down the impressive main passage. Bypass a boulder choke by climbing up and along on the RHS to drop down to the continuation, note an impressive hole up in the roof before eventually coming to a passage on the left, **Shit Rift**, which continues for over 100 metres, becoming increasingly narrow until impassible to even the slimmest of anorexic cave tigers.

Just beyond the start of **Shit Rift**, in a moderate-sized passage, you arrive at a dug out, sandy u-tube (which needs regular clearing out as sand is carried in by each passing caver) and a banged dig, **Another Bloody Valentine**, above which a short climb heads up into a bouldery rift with an enticing draught continuing upwards, with spaces between boulders, that may reward a committed siege with a good drill. 5m up the rift a gnarly, constricted, horizontal squeeze past blocks brings you out into **Payoff Passage**, a parched, crumbly, breakdown passage which is followed, gently downhill, mostly on all fours with several unrelenting constrictions, for about a hundred metres until, just before a short wriggle, a small inlet on the right, **Bad Bat**, is reached. When it was discovered **Bad Bat** had a promising draught that was lost, possibly due to spoil being stacked to the sides while digging. Parties on subsequent trips have experienced bad air problems. **Bad Bat** trends westwards for some way as a low crawl with squeezes, heading close to, but at a higher level than, the extensions beyond **Iles Inlet** in **Agen Allwedd**.

Continue south, through the wriggle, along the main passage and pass over a narrow slot, through which stones can be dropped into a tantalizingly out of sight, lower level void, to eventually arrive at the massive boulder choke of **DADES** (Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?) **Choke**. This is one of the closest points for a connection to **Agen Allwedd**, and gets to within 35m of **Priory Road**. A connection has been attempted, and abandoned, from the **Agen Allwedd** side and would require long-term, committed digging through a large, unstable boulder choke. Regular diggers on the **Daren** side have hitherto opted to leave the two caves unconnected to preserve the unique nature of this extremely remote section of cave (not to mention the long term siege tactics required for the project!).



DADES Choke

In the floor nearby is a choked dig, **Stingray**. Carry on below **DADES Choke**, avoiding the right hand passage to **Sick Choke**, and follow the left wall along the south-trending sandy crawl, **Still Warthogs After All These Years**, with progress predictably being mostly on all fours with occasional walking. A side passage on the left, **Mark's Headroom**, has been dug to enter a short network of small passages.

Carrying along the more obvious southerly main drag brings you to a low crawl on the right which quickly becomes a tight squeeze through unstable boulders (caution) to emerge into a small chamber, **InBetweeb**, and another short crawl into **Dweebland**, a parallel series of mostly stooping and all fours in sandy passage with a southerly-headed dig, **Downdweeb**. Upstream are two further leads, **Updweeb**, just 22m from **Agen Allwedd**, the closest known point between the two caves, and **Archies**, both degenerating into committing boulder chokes.

Declining the allure of the **Dweebland** connection continue the route along a small, sandy, block-strewn passage, ignoring a small passage to the right, **The Yohzone**, which heads back and nearly connects to **Sick Choke**. before climbing up through a bouldery constriction, **The Lemon Squeeze**, into a low, boulder chamber at the back of which you can drop comfortably through **Dig of a Thousand Pricks** into **Spaderunner**, a comfortably sandy all fours crawl of about fifty metres which concludes at a narrow, banged out, horizontal rift which drops after 10m through a constricted hole 1m to a sandy floor. The only way on leads after a few metres to a dome-roofed breakdown chamber below the far wall of which is a slot down to a 2m flat out crawl, **Ground Hog Day**, which gives way to walking size passage. 10m further on, via a clamber over a short wall, is **Last Spit Choke**.



Last Spit Choke

This unassuming, excavated 2m square 'chamber' in small loose rock and infill, marks the current end of the cave and the start of the entertaining six mile journey back to the surface for you and your smarting knees and elbows.

Route Descriptions for this and many other popular trips in Daren Cilau and elsewhere will be available soon on [chelseaspelaeo.org](http://chelseaspelaeo.org)



Thanks to Charles Bailey, Peter Bolt, Adrian Fawcett and John Stevens for clarification of a few details that escaped my memory. To find out more about the colourful history of exploration of this part of the cave look out the Daren Diggers' log books in the CSS library and An Exploration Journal of Llangattwg Mountain - CSS Records Volume 19

OK, so this isn't a cave, but cavers like canyoning too don't they?

by Mandy Voysey

Hell Gill is a slot canyon with steep walls up to 20m high towering on both sides, and the river running through it is Hell Gill Beck. The beck actually marks the border of Cumbria and Yorkshire at this point, so one fun fact is that you can have a foot in each county when traversing the canyon. Another point of interest is that there are also some small caves to explore along the way, none of which are very long but they add some spelaeological interest if you're up for a bit of grovelling. There are also a number of really good fossils to look out for, and the sculpted rocks and general scenery make this a natural wonder well worth exploring. Generally it's very much like caving, but with the added bonus of sunshine (unless it's raining).

I'd never heard of this canyon before, but spotted a photo of it while browsing through a guide book and thought it looked really interesting. We then did a bare-footed reconnaissance of the top section while out on a walk around Mallerstang followed by a bit of online research to find out what a full descent of the canyon would entail. Here we learnt that the crux point is a waterfall about halfway along – beyond this point it would be difficult to return. There are also no exit routes up the cliffs, but overall it looked perfectly do-able without the need for tackle – which was great as we didn't have any.

Ordinarily this trip would be best done in a wetsuit and some kind of neoprene shoes or canyoning boots, but we hadn't packed any of that sort of stuff. We did however have some caving kit, so furry suits and welly boots would just have to do.

**The Canyoning Trip:** We found the closest parking spot next to the railway line, and trekked up to the top of the gorge without problem. Water levels at this time were generally low and we were met by a pleasant burbling stream. A little further on the stream narrows and begins its descent through the canyon, initially in a series of gentle cascades, but as the cliffs rise higher the clear water continues its journey with a great variety of pools and mini-waterfalls through beautiful sculpted rock. We bounded through this section finding progress with welly boots a breeze compared with our previous foray with bare feet. We'd also brought a headtorch with us so we could nose in the caves along the way, but this was a bit of a half-hearted pretence at caving enthusiasm really as the caves quickly became grovelly and the entrances were buzzing with midges.

Beyond the caves the next landmark was the short rope climb which had been the end of our previous excursion. In bare feet this had been a bit awkward and uncomfortable underfoot, but now suitably clad we were mighty. For a short while anyway... It was not long until we were at the supposed 'point of no return' – the waterfall. Here we wondered if this obstacle could be combatted without a thorough soaking. We were banking on using the rope that we knew would be fixed here – only trouble was that when we were actually there it looked a lot different to what we'd glimpsed on the YouTube video. Rather than one waterfall, it seemed there were two and the fixed traverse line spanned a looong distance in open space before reaching the rope climb back down. This was not a particularly high waterfall, more of a smooth-sided water chute with a deep plunge pool at the bottom. Any normal canyoneer wearing a wetsuit would simply jump in and probably enjoy it, but Matt decided the 'gibbon' approach was the way to go. It looked tricky, but worst case scenario was he'd just fall in the water. So he monkeyed across on his arms and dropped down on the rock beyond the plunge pool about halfway along. From here he could see that the second waterfall was actually just an easy climb, so there was no need to do the full length of the traverse line or get a full wetting after all. Hoorah!

Nonetheless I decided not to take any chances and used the only tackle that we had – a sling and a single snap-krab to attach myself to the traverse rope and pull myself across. This was quite a sensible move as I was also carrying the car keys in a container that was only 'probably' waterproof, so I really didn't want to fall in (I also knew Matt would take the mickey if I failed). Beyond this the canyon closes in more and becomes much darker. I'd read that the darkness makes this bit just like being in a cave, but being a caver I'd say it's definitely not dark enough for that. However the unavoidable wet section encountered next that found us in chest deep water desperately gripping the texture of the wall to avoid sliding in further felt very familiar. The next notable landmark encountered was the bridge spanning the canyon way up overhead, which looked very atmospheric. Beyond this the cliff sides started to open out and the sunshine yet again shone down into the streamway. All too soon we were in more normal terrain. Hell Gill Beck was now wide and shallow, the rock more slippery with weed, and the mighty cliffs no longer towering either side. Here a short waterfall straight ahead was quite slippery and looked as though it would be awkward to get down, but the exit path is just before this on the right. A hop over the wall would soon bring you to the main path once more.

However, as our journey down had taken us a mere 40 mins, we decided we'd have a go at going back up for a bit of extra fun. We thought that getting back up the waterfall would be an 'interesting' challenge, but deploying the sling, krab and belt technique we were able to pull ourselves up and across in a way that was hilariously lacking in grace, but worked absolutely fine. The rest was an easy return romp, surprising a few birds that were also messing about in the water along the way.

Though this was not an epic trip by any means, it was a really fun excursion and something a bit different to do. I'd recommend it to anyone who happens to find themselves in the environs of the Eden Valley/Yorkshire border.

You can pay an outdoor pursuits company for a guided adventure through the canyon, but I think it's much more fun to just do it yourself.



**The Caves:** The caves of Hell Gill are detailed in the 2017 Northern Caves guide book, though the length of all 10 combined is only 91m so don't expect any epic explorations. There are also a huge amount of pots and shakeholes within walking distance in the Mallerstang area. According to Northern Caves none of these go very far, but this area surely has huge potential with so much limestone and karst landscape. All the potholes we saw looked as though barely anyone had ever descended them.

# Bye Bye Bruce Bedford

by Roy Musgrove

You would never know on meeting Bruce that he was born and spent his early childhood in Leeds, where his grandparents ran a bakery which he loved. Even at that age he displayed an interest in investigating the wider world. One snowy winter day he pulled his young sister on a sledge on an expedition to the North Pole in a local park.

As he grew to his teens the family moved to London and he got his first reporting job on the local Tooting and Balham Gazette. Later he moved to the Kensington News, where, as a junior reporter, he interviewed a local teenage girl named Beryl, who was later to marry Clive Calder. In 1960 he joined Chelsea Spelæological Society. He kept a diary for much of his life, and his detailed account of his first trip down Aggy with "Nigel" ran to 17 pages! In 1962 he took a year out and hitch hiked to Australia, stayed for a few months then hitch hiked back. A couple of years later he organised the 1964 club expedition to Triglavski Jama, high on the side of Triglav, the highest peak of the Julian Alps in what is now Slovenia. Prior to departure Bruce practically was the expedition, soliciting masses of food and other essentials from sponsors with which he filled his parents' house, organising transport and liaising with local cavers. The rest of the club manufactured enormous quantities of ladder from steel wire rope and aluminium rungs, secured by Talurits. A winch was built to cope with the considerable lifeline lengths involved. This was based on a bicycle, and drove a windlass where the rear wheel had been. The local cavers named it "Kurač", a Serbo-Croat obscenity. If it wasn't dreamed up by Bruce it should have been. Of course, it worked adequately as intended. This vast array of gear was carried a considerable way up the mountain on people's backs to a dom or mountain hut which served as the base. The idea behind the trip was to descend to the level of the risings, some 5000', when the ice melted in summer. Unfortunately global warming wasn't able to keep up with Bruce, and the expedition

reached a premature end at the ice seal still in place some 300' or 400' down.

After his return from Triglav he started up The Speleologist magazine, which represented a level of quality not seen among club publications. On one subsequent trip in Aggy a quite large group took a breather in Main Chamber on the way

out. In a typical Bruce way he decided to clean a contact lens. Naturally he dropped it and a team of cavers were left crawling around the uniform mud floor looking for it.

Fortunately one of them had sharp enough eyes to find it and an exit was made without further ado.

He then entered a partnership with John Dryden to found "Devon Life" and "Descent" magazines. He moved to Exeter and met up with the cavers there on Llangattock tramroad, where he approached their tent carrying a broom with which he appeared to be sweeping the said tramroad. Bruce was very good at making contact with newcomers and leaving them feeling very welcome. One was his lifelong friend John Steere, who was his best man when he married Jen, whom he also met in Exeter.

The publishing partnership ended rather acrimoniously but Bruce was able to retain Descent. This enabled him to move to St Pauls Cray, Kent when Jen got a job locally and then following her next job to Wells. There he also opened an equipment shop, Rocksport, in the town and he remained a Somerset resident for the rest of his life. Bruce had five children but none have shared his passion for caves.

Bruce later moved to Somerton and continued his career as a freelance journalist, writing among others for the Sunday Times and The Observer.

In 1975 Allen & Unwin published his first book "Challenge Underground", intended for both caver and non-caver readers. A copy of this is held in the National Library of Australia! A decade later Collins published his "Underground Britain". He also taught creative writing at Yeovil College and gave various workshops and talks on writing. He

switched activity at the beginning of the 1980s and submitted a radio play in a competition run by Radio



Bruce in the Old Daren Sunday School after caving



Photos from an Aggy trip to Southern Stream (1960s)

Left: Geo Fletcher, Clive Calder, Bob Fish and Bruce

Right: Bruce at the waterfall climb

Bristol, which came top of 350 scripts. This work led to eight commissions for plays from BBC Radio 4. His work attracted some highly complimentary comments from playwrights Sir Alan Ayckbourn and Arnold Wesker, and the novelist Fay Weldon wrote "Bruce Bedford has many fans, myself amongst them. He is an energetic, intelligent, witty, idiosyncratic and original writer... An accomplished playwright with a lively style, an excellent sense of character, action, a real gift for language, an understanding of form and a sense of the absurd. He is a serious writer, who can also be very, very funny". Perhaps the biggest compliment came from his radio version of the Ealing Comedy film "The Ladykillers". This was essentially visual, with limited dialogue. Bruce understood it so well that Stratford Johns, who played the same part on both film and radio commented that he remembered speaking some specific lines from the film. They had not been in the film and were written by Bruce.

He was among those Somerset residents who noticed that when CSS members had emigrated from London many of them had ended up in the south west. This led to the formation of the unofficial CSS Western Section, whose principal activity was the holding of an annual dinner in a Wells or Mendip pub. This still continues. Bruce appointed himself Secretary and read a "Report" to the meeting which was his usual mixture of reality and invention, all with the type of humour that he modelled on Spike Milligan, his favourite comedian. He was skilled at inserting words that fitted the context perfectly but that no-one else would have thought of. Also his spelling and grammar were honed to perfection and his radio producer commented that a sub-editor was never needed for Bruce's work. This even extended to his

emails. Maybe that is why many of them were sent at times such as one in the morning.

His later years were marred by health problems. His kidneys failed and he had to undergo dialysis until he received a transplant. In 2004 he met Lesley through an online facility and they hit it off quickly and she remembers that at their first meeting in person she arrived to find him already there. "It is the only time I have ever known Bruce early for anything!" She was a rock on whom he could rely throughout the bad times. These got worse when he tipped boiling fat over onto one foot and he ended up having to have the toes amputated. He was cheerful, at least outwardly, in the face of adversity and, thanks to Lesley, was able to attend the last Western Section Dinner in March 2022 although obviously poorly.

At his Parting Party his eldest daughter read an email which he had sent to the children in March 2020 at the start of the pandemic. Not only was it reassuring to them, it was extraordinarily perceptive as to how things would unfold. Seen from now it sounds as if Coronavirus was reading from a Bruce Bedford script. Unusually for an Arts person he took a keen interest in Science and read



the New Scientist thoroughly every issue. Following a fall which resulted in a broken leg he was hospitalised in Taunton and contracted septicaemia. He died 5 days after his eightieth birthday.

He was a wordsmith extraordinary. He was always himself and he was a very good friend. Thanks for sharing yourself with us Bruce.

## EARLIER MINE EXPLORATION

*by Roy Musgrove*

The report on Cwmorthin Slate Mine in the last Newsletter reminded me of earlier exploration of the, mostly lead, mines of the Marches. The late David Leitch, who wrote the first comprehensive account of Agen Allwedd, and his friend Roy Machin ("The Baron") spent quite an amount of effort in visiting these and I hope that they were written up in Hereford Caving Club Newsletters.

My favourite among David's accounts of their trips was of a rare and hazardous risk to which mine explorers are subject. Down one mine, whose name I cannot recall, they noticed an alcove in the wall containing a package wrapped in newspaper. Taking this down, they found that the newspaper was dated 1913. Carefully unwrapping this outer cover they were amazed and somewhat alarmed to find the inner packaging announced that the contents were "Mr Nobel's Prize Blasting Powder". Holding their nerve for a little while, they re-wrapped it in the newspaper and put it back where they had found it before exiting the mine sharpish!

It is not often (sometimes fortunately) that you come into such close contact with a significant piece of history.

# AGEN ALLWEDD - MIDNIGHT PASSAGE

PAST AND PRESENT

by Andy Heath

I first visited Midnight Passage with Matt and Mandy Voysey in January 2010 following a tip-off from Gonzo that it offered a promising dig. "Hmmm" I thought, "Seeing as it's not that far to get to (just before the 2nd Choke), there must be a catch". And indeed there was. Just beyond a small U-tube, a short mucky crawl leads to a very dodgy looking loose aven. If anything even remotely substantial was dislodged, our exit could be seriously blocked, not a happy scenario, so we decided to park the idea and move on elsewhere.

However, the memory fades with the passage of time so when John Stevens recently suggested there were some interesting leads in Midnight Passage, off I went again with John and Mike Read.

Before I continue with tales of the present, it is worth going back in time to tales of the past when the current limit was reached. Over to Clive Gardener who has sent me this extract from his Llangattock book(s), yet to be published:

*"The 1981 Chelsea Spelaeological Society explorations in Pwll y Gwynt were drawing to a close and an inlet in the Agen Allwedd 2nd Choke, below Keyhole Chamber, had been associated by dye tracing with the newly discovered upper Dowlais Limestone cave. On Sunday 17th January 1982 Clive Gardener and Sean Heaver probed around the area of this inlet and ended up visiting Midnight Passage. As the latter appeared to offer potential for a continuation, the two returned with Bas Slade on 27th February and tackled a sand-filled U-tube at the final end. The sand dig was indeed passed and 25ft (7.6m) of new passage discovered, terminating in a loose boulder and gravel-slurry collapse, within what appeared to be a large chamber or aven.*

*Although the new Midnight Passage choke was dug during March and April without further extension, the discovery, with its roosting bats and guano-littered floor, was to prove a good encouragement for Sean Heaver, who was just beginning his detailed studies of the bat life of the region. It was also the first section of passage to be discovered by Clive Gardener in his own right, where it wasn't necessary to excavate every inch or enlist the help of others for employing the use of the likes of explosives. The confirmation that digging still offered a realistic means of finding new passage beneath the mountain gave a tremendous boost to the new incoming generation of 1980s cave explorers.*

*The last major C.S.S. pushing trip to the end of Midnight Passage [prior to the B.E.C. visits from November 1986] was when Clive Gardener took Phil Thomas and Italian visitor Gian Maria Schiaffino to*

*the slurry choke on 6th March 1983. Philip had dug enthusiastically up through the boulder choke into a large void above, but the upwards squeeze was somewhat suicidal since loose bits were still falling down. It was decided to give the sludge time to settle, but on the same trip some 2m progress was also made in a small narrow side passage by the base of the choke, where a left-hand corner could be seen ahead.*

*Henry Bennett was the next to commence operations in the dig at the end of the passage on Saturday 29th November 1986. However, after he lit a cigarette to find out which way the draught was blowing the air became quite polluted! A drag tray and crowbar were left in situ for the next visitors. On 3rd December, during a 10-hour working trip, Tim Large, Mark Lumley and Mike 'Trebor' MacDonald made 6m progress low on the right-hand side, past the boulder slope to reach a boulder choke. A way on up to the left appeared possible. At the same time as the C.S.S./B.U.S.S. cavers were examining potential new digs in Gothic Passage, on Saturday 6th December 1986 Mark Lumley, Steve Milner, Arthur Millett and four others spent several hours shifting debris in the Midnight Passage choke. This enabled them, during a 10-hour trip, to ascend a 4.6m aven where they found loose boulders hanging above. The next plan was to dig out a section of the boulder cone and aim straight ahead. A return was made on Sunday 21st December by Tim Gould, the late Tony Jarratt (1949-2008), Karen Jones, Mark Lumley and Chris Smart when around 30 bucket-loads of rock were moved. Two more trips followed on 29th and 30th December. On the former occasion Mark Lumley undertook a 5-hour trip accompanied by a bad headache! Meanwhile Henry Bennett paid a visit the same day with Barbara 'Bee' Hamilton, Hugh Penney and a couple of other friends. On the second occasion, a day later, Mark Lumley was one of a 7-man team when 20 loads of rock debris were shifted. However, this seems to have been the last trip for the period since, on Saturday 17th January, Mark and Jim Smart headed down Gothic Passage during an 8-hour trip - to find out what all the commotion was about! A week later they and other Rock Steady Crew were firmly back in residence for a weekend's camp at the Hard Rock Café in Daren Cilau, digging Acupuncture Passage - which was conjectured to be heading towards the same unexplored region as the new Gothic Passage extensions, except from the eastern side of the mountain!*

*Following up on the B.E.C. probes of the late 1980s - early 1990s, Mark Lumley revisited the Midnight Passage dig with Charles Bailey and Tony Boycott on*

7th January 2001. Mark again returned with Charles Bailey and Rob Murgatroyd on 10th February when 8 hours were spent removing spoil from the base of the aven."

I also asked Gonzo for his memory of the dig and its potential:

"Midnight Passage was one of our 'weekend off from Daren' projects. It was drawn to our attention by Clive, who had recently passed the u-tube at the end and, after a couple of trips with him, we carried on digging at the end with a view to pass the choke at the end.

We thought the upwards draught through wet collapse-fill was a red herring (and also noted that there is a lake directly above it!) and took scaffolding in to shore up the choke and go around the right hand side but couldn't get it through the u-tube in useful lengths.

We also looked at the higher level but had our 'top end of Rock Steady Cruise' blinkers on and so were looking at that main route which was on the right level and typical in nature to the Hard Rock extensions.

So we can only claim a few meagre metres at the end, plus the removal of rusted sardine tins and perished miscellanea from previous visitors.

I vaguely recall a possible dig part way along but it didn't appear to be heading anywhere we wanted to go and there were plenty of other projects on the go at the time."

### So back to the present...

**Thursday 20th October 2022 -**

Equipped with assorted digging equipment, a ladder, a rope, some bolts and a drill, John, Mike and I headed off for Midnight Passage. The aim, based on John's memory, was to bolt a way up the terminal aven to facilitate a safe means of approach. On arrival, it appeared John's memory of the place was as bad as mine. On closer inspection John and Mike soon came to the conclusion that the end choke posed more of a danger than previously thought so once again it was left for another day.

Not to be disheartened

though, we took a look up a small low crawl some distance back from the end which leads to a 7-8m chimney. At the top of the climb, several ways lead off.

First point of interest, investigated by Mike, was a squeeze to a short drop leading to a short crawl and an upward slot, too tight to pass. It did however look like the passage might continue, if only we could get through the slot to take a closer look. Mike exited to pass the reins to the author, equipped with plugs and feathers. I was initially sceptical of Mike's view that the slot could be enlarged sufficiently to allow passage as there was no easy angle to enable the drill to 'bite'. However after a few contortions and very awkward upward drilling I was proved wrong. Goggles and a dust mask might have been useful though; drilling whilst shutting the eyes and holding the breath is not very efficient!

Having removed a 2" projection, I was now able to squeeze up the slot but the view ahead was now barred by another rock. However, three carefully placed holes enabled me to remove the top of this slab and ascend a little higher to gaze into the wonders beyond. Unfortunately those wonders proved to be a very narrow rift around 2-3 metres long, seemingly pinching off to nothing.

We turned our attention to other potential leads. Access to these though is a bit dodgy, being back over the top of the 7-8m climb, so a traverse line was rigged to enable safe progress. At the time of writing the rope is still there, as is a line going back down the climb.

Second point of interest, probed by John, is a narrow aven. The air here is very fresh. Despite his best efforts, John couldn't fit so I had a go, also without success. It looks however as though the passage might widen a little further up so we decided the next option would be to return with Matt Voysey, the human eel.

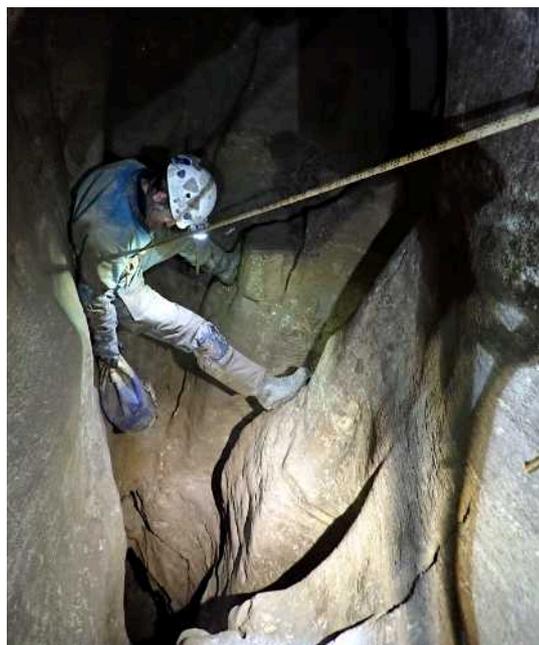
Third and final point of interest for the day was another vertical squeeze nearby. I had a go first but found it too tight.



Andy sporting a rock dust face mask



Andy attempting the narrow aven climb



John on the rope climb up to the dig

Mike then had a go with a similar outcome. It did however look as though it widens not too far up, so Mike removed a small corner of what I believe to be a large detached block. It was still too tight, so I took over from Mike and with only four holes and a bit of good luck, managed to remove a satisfyingly large chunk. Still too tight, but worth another tickle in the future.

**Saturday 5th November 2022** - A return visit was made by John, Mike, Matt and Andy to continue where we left off.

Whilst Andy continued to drill and enlarge the vertical squeeze, Matt was sent up the narrow aven which we'd been unable to pass. Without too much effort, Matt found himself in a series of narrow rifts heading in several directions. Sadly he was not the first to have passed that way; there was evidence of a few rocks having been shifted around by a previous visitor. No easy or obvious way on, though.

After an hour or so of drilling and rock splitting, Andy reported back that the squeeze was probably passable, though a little more work would be required to enable the whole team to get through. After a brief pause for lunch, Mike took over and another half hour or so he was able to enter a narrow ascending rift for a couple of metres to where he could see along a low passage for five metres or so to where the passage appeared to enlarge. Once the whole team had assembled beyond the squeeze, Mike led the way to a small flat-roofed chamber, roughly a metre high and around 6-8 metres across. This was obviously new stuff, evident by the pristine sand/mud floor.

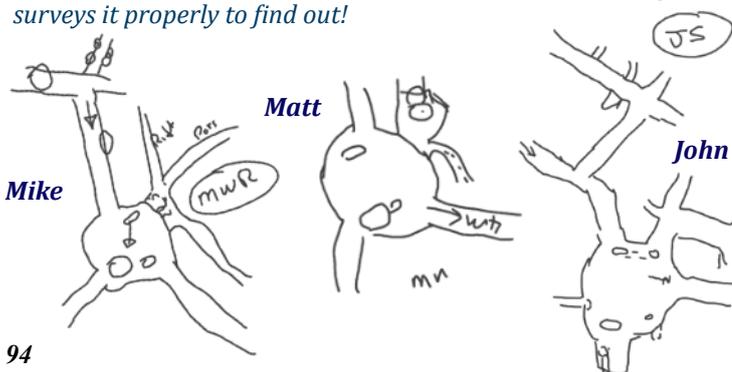
It was quite exciting having found a chamber, I for one had expected at best more tight rifts. John dubbed the name 'Spider Chamber' on account of several possible 'legs' leading off the chamber, though at the moment they're all pretty much choked with sand. I think John needs to go back to school though, from memory I only remember six 'legs'. The next task will be to survey the new find to determine which would be the best leg to attack.

Before leaving the area, Mike spent ten minutes levering several large rocks out of a side crawl which enabled us to get back into the narrow rifts entered by Matt earlier.

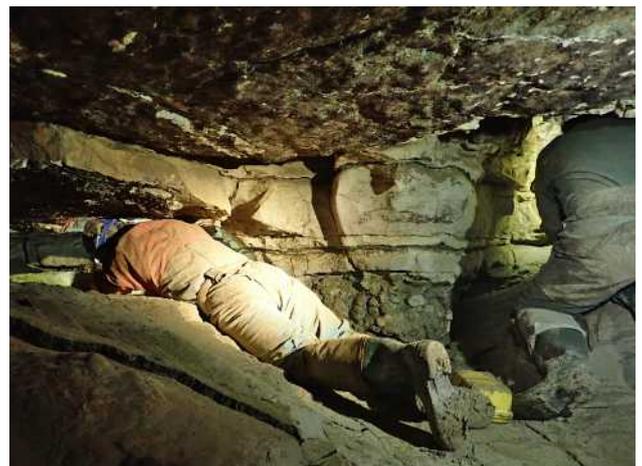
As for the potential? It's quite encouraging having gained the height above the known passage. If we can find a dig leading off the chamber heading in the right direction, perhaps we can get beyond the current terminus and drop back down to the continuation of Midnight Passage? We can but hope.

*While discussing their breakthrough into Spider Chamber, three different surveys were drawn from memory by the team (except Andy who felt that all the options had already been covered).*

*Which one is the most accurate? We'll have to wait until John surveys it properly to find out!*



*John, Mike and Andy in Spider Chamber*



*Mike and John digging the Spider legs*



*John in Midnight Passage*



*The team in Spider Chamber*

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*Below: CSS Bonfire Weekend  
by Matt Voysey*



