



**Volume 65**  
**Nos. 4-6**  
**Apr/May/June 2023**

**Yorkshire**  
**Mendip Meet**  
**Mallorca Caves**  
**Bottoming the Berger**

**CHELSEA SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

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*Front Cover: Rachel Smith in Cove de Na Mitjana,  
Mallorca by Martyn Farr*

*Left: Pwll Dwfn, Fifth Pitch, May 2023  
by Mandy Voysey*

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## Upcoming Meets

**July – Yorkshire**  
**August – Whitewalls**  
**September – Hidden Earth**  
**October – Derbyshire**

Additional trips are also being organised via the CSS **WhatsApp** group, see Meets List on page 48 for details of how to join and further information on club meets.

**Editorial** Exciting tales of caving trips far and wide plus much appreciated national TV publicity for the club! Thanks to everyone for sending us such fantastic stuff to print, and do keep it coming.

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

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

**HAVE I GOT NEWS FOR YOU**

## Features CSS Newsletter as Guest Publication!

The Charterhouse Cave big exploration was delayed because Alex [REDACTED], Clive [REDACTED] and Dave [REDACTED]

Series 65:  
Episode 6

See next page for answer from the caption competition

## New Internal Locks at Whitewalls

The internal electronic locks at Whitewalls have been replaced with a new model which should be more reliable. These have no keypad and require your members' key fob to operate. Hold the fob onto the round sensor on the barrel to activate the lock; the indicator will flash green and blue to indicate the 'key' is engaged, giving you the next 10 seconds to turn the barrel to unlock the door. After 10 seconds the mechanism automatically disengages and the barrel will rotate freely. Locking follows the same procedure – use the fob to activate the 'key' then turn the barrel the opposite way to lock the door.



## 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)

# More High Level Antics in Agen Allwedd *by Joe Duxbury*



*Joe after completing the final bolt climb*

*Photo by John Mazzey*

On 24 February Emyr Walters, John Mazzey and Andy Heath continued to bolt up into Scaffold Passage. Emyr got high enough to be able to get into it, and found that it was blocked with mud, just like Lone Piton Passage. On the wall was smoked 'RS CSS'. The first guess at who 'RS' might be was Roger Solari. Because of the absence of marks on the wall of Main Passage, they must have used a maypole to get up there.

The bolting crew returned along Main Passage to The Spitway ('to Heaven') and started to bolt up that wall, rather than rely on the possibly 40 to 60 year old spits. Emyr got to within 2 bolts of the top before running out of bolts.

The next day John Mazzey and I continued this project. Although nowhere near as skilful as Emyr, I managed to put in the last couple of bolts and was able to climb into the passage at the top. This is a low tube, barely 1m high, no more than 3m long, also filled with mud.

So now all the high level passages in this area that needed bolting up into have been reached. Unfortunately all of them are full of sediment. But they do need to be surveyed now, along with The Hidden Chimney, and added to the Agen Allwedd master survey. Unless anyone wants to try and dig any of these passages out (and there would be no problem in disposing of spoil!) the ropes can be removed after this has been done.

N.B. Up in the roof of Main Passage, just before the descent into Main Stream Passage, there is a BIG hole. It looks as if it could easily be investigated using a camera-equipped drone... And before that is another tempting high level passage, up above a ledge on the left-hand side.

See CSS Newsletter Jan-Mar 2023 for articles on the previous two routes climbed in Aggy Main Passage

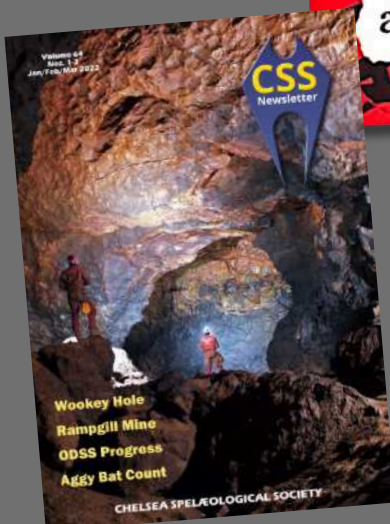
**HAVE I GOT NEWS FOR YOU**

**The answer from the caption competition taken from Vol 64, Nos. 1-3 (Jan-Mar 2022)**

**The Charterhouse Cave big exploration was delayed because Alex forgot his wellies, Clive forgot the ladder and Dave had changed the entrance locks**

Interestingly, the above words didn't actually appear in the magazine at all, but then the actual answer might have been less funny. Alex really did forget his wellies, but Clive didn't forget the ladder - it was still in a tackle bag that Mandy had forgotten to give to Adrian. However Clive did neglect to have the correct key for the cave as Dave had indeed changed the lock. Nevertheless the trip still took place and you can read all about it in the newsletter, which can also be downloaded from the CSS website.

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



# Latest Agen Allwedd High Level News

by Joe Duxbury and John Stevens

On 6 May John Newton, Steve Sharp and John Stevens started to survey the high level passages that had been reached recently. John S used the ropes that had been left in situ to climb firstly into Lone Piton Passage. This ends in the clay fill coming up to reach the roof. CSS is marked in carbide soot just before the end.



*The end of Lone Piton Passage*

as the ladder had been lowered. A knot and crab were used to stop the rope pulling through the top crab as John carefully ascended the other half of the loop. Once the rope had been secured, he continued the climb to the crawl at roof level. Surveying as he descended back to the top bolt a passage was noted on the right. This was reached to survey it, but to enter it a dig would be required as it was only 15cm high but over 1m wide. The passage then could be seen to increase in height but to enter would have required an extra bolt as the return was very exposed: John's feet were already well above the bolt he was attached to. As he surveyed this passage the laser could be seen from below in a small aven up in the roof, further along Main Passage. What could not be worked out was if the high level continued beyond the hole.

The next day they continued to Scaffold Passage, accompanied by Joe Duxbury and Ian Crossland (GSS). En route the lost prime point from Peter Cousin's survey from the 60's was found. It was directly opposite the climb. A survey back along main passage to tie in the Spitway and an even older survey mark

Next up was The Spitway. (What are we going to call the little tube at the top? 'Nefoedd'? ('Heaven' in Welsh)). The rope here was left as a double rope

was done. (As other side passages, Igloo and Rawhide were linked to this mark, the old guessed links can now be removed and passages moved a handful of metres to the more accurate link).

John S again surveyed and photographed the blocked Scaffold Passage. 'RS CSS' on the wall wasn't smoked, but scratched, as was also 'RR 1961'. Joe's first guess that RS was Roger Solari was disproved when Martyn Farr said that evening that Roger would have been 10 in 1961! (He was actually 12). So we still don't know who RR and RS were. There is no-one with either of those initials in the membership lists in the CSS newsletters from that period.



*End of Scaffold Passage*

This passage is more than just a tube, and there was enough space above the mud fill for John to stick a camera round a corner and see that it continued, tantalisingly, although still too small. As this was Ian's first visit to Aggy, Joe had taken him to the Music Room. While they waited for Joe and Ian to return, John N fetched a crowbar to allow John S to start removing the fill to allow a better look. The passage does a dog leg left then right, being large enough to crawl along after about half a metre of digging. More work is required.

The Hidden Chimney remains to be surveyed. It is easier to get into (as it starts at floor level), but the first vertical bit is complex, so that should be fun to do!



*Scratched initials in Scaffold Passage  
Top: R.R. 1961 - Bottom: R.S.*

*Photos by John Stevens*

# Bottoming the Berger

by Tom Foord

The Gouffre Berger has been on my 'must do if I get the chance' list ever since I first started caving back in the late 90s. Located on the Vercors plateau in south-east France, the Berger is a cave of legendary status, having been the first cave in the world to break the 1000m depth barrier (achieved by a series of epic expeditions back in the 1950s). The trip to Sump 1 at -1122m is a spectacular journey involving no fewer than 30 pitches, thundering waterfalls, deep lakes and canals, and vast chambers decorated with magnificent formations. It is rightly regarded as one of the world's classics.

The traditional approach to descending the Berger is to spend a week or two rigging and derigging the cave in the hope that a weather window will allow one or more teams to reach the bottom, possibly utilising one, or both, of the underground camps within the cave. But for those with less time (and rope) on their hands there is another way. Each summer, local French cavers organise the international 'Camp Berger' event, designed as a clean-up operation to help remove the mountains of rubbish that have accumulated within the cave over 70 years of exploration. The cave is left fully rigged for a period of 3-4 weeks, during which time 300 individual permits are granted to descend the cave and bring out whatever rubbish you can. When I heard there was a space available, I knew it was an opportunity not to be missed. And so it was that I jumped in a van with fellow CSS member Ian Holmes and our friends Dave Powlesland, Chris Jones and Dickon Morris for a long weekend in the south-east of France.

Our two-day Berger permit was for Sunday 31st July and Monday 1st August, but we decided to arrive early to give ourselves time to settle into the official Camp Berger campsite (located near the village of Autrans), fettle our kit, and sample one or two of the other local speleological attractions. Arriving on the Friday afternoon we met up with some friends from Sheffield University Caving Club and together paid a visit to the Caves de Sassenage showcave, which is the resurgence for the Gouffre Berger water. This is an entertaining little showcave, far more physical than anything you'd find in the UK, involving stooping through low tunnels, clambering up and down steep steps, through narrow rifts, and even boulder chokes (some supported by huge steel girders that would put many a UK dig to shame). This was all topped off with a rather bizarre sound and light show about a snake-tailed fairy who apparently inhabits the cave. It was a fun excursion, and definitely worthwhile to see where the Berger water re-emerges from its subterranean journey.

The following day, as a warm-up for the main event, we took advantage of the pre-rigged ropes in the nearby Saints-de-Glace entrance to the Trou Qui Souffle system, only a short walk from the campsite. This system is

apparently in excess of 50km in length and 670m deep, but our trip would be a whistle-stop tour of some of the more easily accessible parts of the system. Entering the Saints de Glace entrance, we followed a steeply descending canyon passage with several short pitches to eventually emerge from a small window high in the wall of the vast Salle Hydrokarst chamber. From here we explored spectacular phreatic tunnels in multiple directions, including a visit to a large sump pool at around -240m depth. It was impressive stuff and I would be keen to return in future to complete the through trip from the original Trou Qui Souffle entrance (apparently this is something of a classic exchange trip). We emerged after an enjoyable 4 hours underground, then finished our day with a hair-raising descent of the 'Speed-Luge' at Autrans, which is basically a steep downhill rollercoaster ride where it is up to the passenger to apply (or not apply!) their own brakes. Forget the caving... this was easily the most terrifying experience of the whole weekend!



*All aboard the Speed Luge*

*Photos: left by Chris Jones and right Tom Foord*

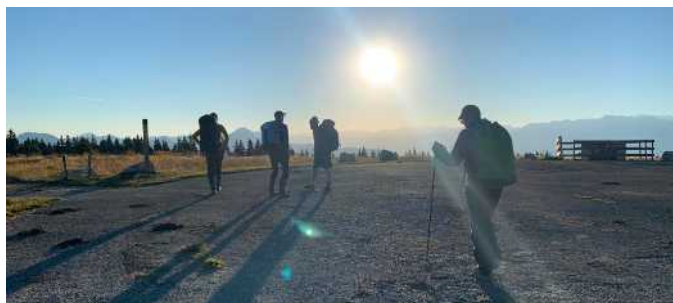
Back at camp we packed our kit and got an early night in preparation for the big day. Unfortunately, some of us managed less than 2 hours kip thanks to local hoodlums playing loud techno music until 3:30am on a nearby farm. As tempting as it was to go and join the party, this



*The team (minus the author) at Camp Berger (TF)*

perhaps wouldn't have been ideal preparation for the day ahead!

Rudely awoken by the 5:30am alarm, we cobbled together what breakfast we could in the dark and then set off on the half hour drive up to the Moliere car park on the Sornin plateau. From here it is a 45 minute downhill walk through the forest to the Gouffre Berger entrance which we thankfully managed without any navigational hiccups. Another party was just entering the cave as we arrived, so we took our time getting changed in order to give them a bit of a head start on the pitches. But eventually we couldn't put it off any longer, and soon after 8:30am we attached ourselves one-by-one to the ropes and began the long descent.



***Setting off across the plateau in search of the Berger (DP)***

The entrance series consists of a series of about 10 pitches ranging between 5m and 42m, interspersed by two long sections of meander traverse. Each pitch had been double-rigged, one being a direct hang and the other having rebelay, meaning there was no waiting around for others to descend. It quickly became apparent that the French are not keen on lugging around heavy metalwork for their rigging, as it was done almost entirely on loops of thin Dyneema cord that were threaded through drilled holes in the rock... there was barely a bolt in sight! It took a little getting used to, but actually it's a very effective, lightweight rigging method that avoids the risk of bolts failing or needing replacement every few years.

Before we knew it, we were descending the final pitch of the entrance series, the spectacular 42m Puits Aldo. A short wriggle then brought us out from underneath a jammed boulder into the vast Grand Gallery. We had now entered the main river passage that we would follow from here to the bottom of the cave. The large tunnel led in both directions, but our route was downstream. An easy walk took us along the stunning Riviere Sans Etoiles (Starless River) with its pale moonmilk floor, to soon arrive at Lac Cadoux. In periods of wet weather this lake rises and can only be passed by boat or a rope traverse along the wall, but for us the recent dry spell had rendered it little more than a slippery walk across a mud floor.

We continued our steady downhill trek through the vast Salle Bourgin with its impressive stalagmite formations, then descended the short Petit General and Cascade de la Tyrolienne pitches to arrive at the start of the Grand Eboulois (Great Rubble Heap). This was a truly enormous passage and I was glad to switch my Scurion

onto full power to take it all in. Some of the individual boulders were just ridiculous, surely at least 15m high.

Our rapid descent continued and before long we were passing through Camp 1 at -494m, and then the famous Salle des Treize (Hall of the Thirteen). The formations here were every bit as spectacular as they appear in photos, and again I was grateful for modern day high-powered lighting to be able to take it all in. But there was no time for loitering and so we forged ahead down huge calcite slopes and gour pools, leading to the Balcony Pitch and then the Vestiaire at -640m.

It is at this point that the cave suddenly changes character, becoming an altogether more serious undertaking. The passage reduces in size, the active stream re-enters, and the way on is through a series of long, deep canals. Rather than getting wet, the French had rigged a series of traverse lines above the water. We followed these, sometimes strenuously, for what must have been at least 100m. It was quite a relief to reach the next short pitch, Cascade Abelle, which signalled the start of the next section of the cave, 'The Cascades'. Here a series of small waterfalls and deep plunge pools were negotiated by the means of tyrolean traverses and guided abseils. By attaching a pulley to the end of our short cowstail we were able to glide gracefully across each of these obstacles without getting wet (although at one point I did make the mistake of using my long cowstail, resulting in an undignified dunking of my rear end in an icy pool. Lesson learnt!)

The next pitch, Cascade Claudine, had one of the most 'entertaining' pitch heads I've ever come across. Here, to create a relatively dry hang away from the waterfall, the original 1950s explorers had wedged a long metal bar between the lip of the waterfall and the left wall of the shaft, hanging their ladder from the far end of this bar. The same metal bar is still in place 65 years later, but the problem is the far end of the bar has corroded and completely separated from the wall it was originally jammed against. Instead, it is now suspended by a long sling hanging from a bolt high on the wall above. To reach the pitch head the caver must teeter their way along this swinging bar, suspended 20m above the floor of the airy waterfall shaft. It's like a cross between the OFD3 Maypole Bridge and a circus trapeze. All great fun, but maybe not for those of a nervous disposition!

After this, a couple more short pitches brought us to the head of the Grand Canyon. Here the water sank away and the cave once again became silent as we followed a slippery handline down a 100m high ramp of steep mud and boulders along the side of an enormous chamber. The view of a string of distant cavers' lights picking their way down this vast subterranean mountain was spectacular, and is one of the lasting memories that I'll take from the trip.

We were now below -800m and the cave was starting to feel distinctly serious. The next few pitches, Puits Gache, Mat, Singe and Grand Cascade came in rapid succession, dropping us over 70m on a single set of ropes. Freezing

waterfalls roared down all too close for comfort, and steeply descending traverse lines to each pitch head made for some fairly strenuous SRT. A section of streamway and then a short crawl through an oxbow (bypassing a short sump) brought us to the head of the final two pitches, La Vire Tu Oses (for some reason known to the British as 'Little Monkey') and L'Ouragan (Hurricane). The latter was a truly dramatic place, with the descent being made from a small, airy, undercut ledge 44m above the floor of a huge chamber, alongside a powerful waterfall. We had now passed -1000m, but the cave continued.

A steeply descending boulder slope led past the '1000m Inlet' (actually at -1075m) where the water from the Fromagere system cascades in from a passage up in the right-hand wall. The stream was now significantly increased in volume, however the passage itself narrowed to become a tall canyon. At the bottom of a small cascade a waist-deep pool barred progress. Having managed to stay completely dry until this point, and not keen on an immersion in the 5°C water, my four companions decided this was where they would turn back. But I had other ideas; there was no way I was getting this far down the Berger and not making it to Sump 1!

Having done my research, I knew that the final section to Sump 1 would involve a short swim through the 'Pseudo Siphon', a section of deep canal where the roof dips down to almost meet the water. I had come prepared

with a neo-fleece packed in my bag, and I commenced stripping off to change into it. This is when the others demonstrated what great friends they are, as they announced 'we've got something better for you to wear'. Placed on a boulder in front of me was what appeared to be a tangle of green string. It took me a moment to recognise what I was looking at... it was only the Borat-style mankini we had forced Dave wear on his stag do a year previously (I say forced... actually I think he quite enjoyed it!) Anyway, it was time for him to get his revenge. I posed for a few photos (which I'll probably regret for the rest of my life) before common sense prevailed and I donned my neo-fleece ready for the swim, now distinctly chilled (as a token gesture I did put the mankini back on over the top). I waded across the first pool and marched off down the continuing passage alone, attempting to get as much warmth back into my body as possible. But this wasn't as easy as I'd have liked, since the passage contained several more deep pools and also a slightly exposed rope climb bypassing a waterfall which necessitated slow and careful progress.

Eventually I rounded a corner to arrive on a cobble

beach where ahead lay a long canal of deep, black water. This was it, the Pseudo Siphon! A few metres ahead of me I could see a length of blue poly-prop cord tied off to the right-hand wall, trailing through the water into the distance. Not wanting to hesitate, I immediately took the plunge and swam towards it, the icy water rushing into my slightly over-sized neo-fleece. Reaching the cord, my first instinct was to try and get this over with as quickly as possible, and so I pulled myself forwards with both arms. Unfortunately, rather than speed my progress, all this actually achieved was to drag me beneath the surface! After a brief panic I pulled myself together and settled on a new strategy that involved swimming with one arm while pulling gently on the cord with the other. This seemed to work, and I now made steady forward progress. After what seemed like an eternity I reached the far end of the rope where it was tied off to some stal on the left-hand wall. I instinctively hauled my upper body out of the water for a rest. But this wasn't the end of the swim yet, the deep water continued beneath a lowering roof. I knew the longer I stayed here the colder I would get, so I forced myself back into the water and swam forwards again. Soon I was passing beneath the low arch that gives the Pseudo Siphon its name, banging my head clumsily on a roof projection as I did so, which plunged my face beneath the water. After several metres the floor eventually rose beneath me and I clambered onto submerged boulders and then dry land, greatly relieved to

have completed the swim. It had been a lot longer and colder than I had anticipated.

Right... time to find the sump! I marched on down a short section of flowing streamway to arrive at a small cascade which I descended with care. Then, around a couple more corners, I found myself in a circular chamber with no exit, just a cobble slope descending into a clear, spacious sump pool. This was it, Sump 1 at -1122m... I had made it! The adrenaline was flooding through me and I couldn't help but let out a loud 'whoop!' (not that anyone could hear me of course!) I was conscious that I was now very cold, very alone, and this was no place for hanging about. I quickly waded into the sump pool, touched the back wall, dipped my head in the

water (apparently it's customary to do so in order to truly 'bottom' the cave!), and then without further ado I turned for home.

The return swim through the Pseudo Siphon was perhaps even more 'character building' than the inward journey. The flow was now against me, I was tiring, and my neo-fleece wasn't providing the warmth or buoyancy I would have liked. I was greatly relieved to reach the blue



**Tom dressed and ready to bottom the Berger! (CJ)**



poly-prop cord and gain a little extra propulsion for this section. Reaching the end of the swim I scrambled out of the water and immediately started shivering violently. Time to get moving! I safely negotiated the climb past the waterfall, then launched myself as quickly as I could up the streamway towards where I had left my friends. The cold had clearly affected my coordination and I tripped and stumbled on several occasions. At last, I saw the friendly glow of their lights in the distance, and I clambered up the boulders to where they were huddled preparing a warm meal. I stripped out of my wet clothing, dried myself off, layered up in all my warm gear, and tucked into a delicious vegetable curry and a mug of hot water.

The hot food and drink soon worked their magic and we gradually set off one by one to start ascending the ropes. The first couple of pitches (Hurricane and Little Monkey) were quite an ordeal and it was a good half hour before I really felt myself again. After that it was just a case of plodding onwards, alternating between prussiking and uphill trudging. The tensioned lines on the Cascades caused some entertainment on the ascent (I'm sure there must be a way of tackling these elegantly and efficiently, however none of us came close to achieving it), but at least this provided some welcome relief from the incessant climbing. By the time we arrived at the Hall of the Thirteen, psychologically we were almost out.

The next section up the Great Rubble Heap and Starless River became truly enjoyable caving... at least for me anyway. Ian, on the other hand, was suffering; he had broken his leg in a skiing accident only 4 months previously, and it turns out bottoming a 1100m deep pothole isn't the best form of physiotherapy! We dosed Ian up with painkillers, filled our tackle bags from a pile of old rubbish (the only one we had seen all trip), then set off up the 240m of pitches in the entrance series, finally reaching the surface at around 22:50. We had been

underground for just over 14 hours - not too shabby!

The trip has one final sting in the tail, since the walk back to the car park involves another 150m of elevation gain. This really did finish me off both physically and mentally. For the final few hundred metres we were surrounded by a surreal orchestra of jangling cow bells, as hundreds of cattle loomed out of the darkness, slowly plodding along the path in the opposite direction to us. It felt like some kind of weird dream (maybe it was!) Back in the van, we made our way carefully down the winding forest roads to our campsite and crawled into our respective tents. We all slept well that night.

The following morning was a lazy one, spent chatting with fellow cavers on the campsite, comparing stories and sharing info with those yet to descend the Berger. But we weren't going to leave the Vercors without ticking off one final cave, and so that afternoon we headed to the Grotte de Choranche, which is a fantastic showcave in the Gorges de la Bourne sporting beautiful river chambers and formations, and an even more bonkers, psychedelic sound and light show than the one we had previously seen in the Cuves de Sassenage. We even managed a fifth cave by taking a rather chilly swim in the entrance chamber of the neighbouring Grotte de Gournier



*Taking a refreshing dip in the Grotte de Gournier (CJ)*



*The happy team back on the surface after successfully bottoming the Berger (TF)*

(another Vercors classic that we'll have to return to explore another time).

We then headed for warmer waters in the village of Pont en Royans where we again met up with our friends from Sheffield Uni for a spot of gorge swimming and a demonstration (by Dickon) of 'deep-water-soloing' on the cliffs above the pools. A few beers were consumed by the river that night before embarking on the long drive back to the UK the following morning.

Overall, this was a fantastic long weekend spent in a stunning part of the world, with a world-class caving trip thrown in to boot. The descent of the Berger more than lived up to the hype and will last long in my memory. A top trip!

This was an evening trip where Helen Nightingale and Tim Gibbs were able to join Paul Collier (SWCC) and me for an easy but spectacular round trip in OFD 2.

Helen and Tim warmed to the suggestion of a visit to the Bedding Chambers, which although being no more than fifteen minutes from the entrance, gives excellent caving, presents good formations and a constantly changing landscape to maintain interest in a sector of the cave often neglected by people going to further inner destinations.

The walk up to the entrance elevated heart rates and we quickly reached the showery Brickyard just by the White Arch Series on the RHS. We headed on a bit further and then trended right and down through some boulders which eventually broke through into a large black shaley chamber boasting a superb straw filled passage leading off on the right. Photos were taken there whilst Tim explored the passage further until it became crawly.

We continued following a trade route and eventually took a left-hand turn which intersected a large passage running parallel to the one we had just been in, and going right brought us to a large ascending calcite flowstone slope, known as 'Speedy Caver' on account of people slipping and sliding to the bottom of said slope when they don't show the right degree of care. We put a handline on it to ensure a safe ascent for all and ended up under a pretty fringe of formations at the top of the climb, this being the main portal to The Bedding Chambers.

We explored the chambers for some time, noting a spot where a deep pitch dropped into Gnome Passage below, and also managing to find some unusual speleothems and other crawly passages which were explored by those enjoying the challenge of that sort of thing.

After exhausting most opportunities, we returned to the top of Speedy Caver and fell in with Helen's suggestion to take the small passage on the left when looking towards the Speedy Caver climb down. Both Paul and Helen had done this passage in recent time and so we followed it, without coming across any real technical difficulty. You just have to squirm your way through a few snug crawls and around boulders whilst admiring the formations that you pass en route to where the passage breaks out not far from the approach passage to the Mini Columns.

We turned right following the large passage to eventually end up in a large black, shaley chamber where a hole down on the furthest side took us into the White Arch Passage, taking us back to The Brickyard. Not wanting to exit just yet, we showed Paul C Big Chamber and followed the large passage that eventually led back towards the entrance, where we exited to a fine drizzly sort of evening.

# OFD 2 BEDDING CHAMBERS



*Photos by Paul Tarrant*



# Mendip Meet

The CSS Mendip Meet, staying at the SMCC hut in Priddy on 10th-12th March, was a great success. A variety of different caving trips were enjoyed and a good number of members came along for the fun. The underground explorations started on Friday with an Eastwater Cavern round trip, and Saturday saw a diving trip to Swildon's Hole and a 'Burrington Adventure'.

Two very different trips in Wookey Hole took place on Sunday, one to 'Land of Hope and Glory' while another team ventured to Wookey 24. A third team also did a trip to Shatter Cave and W/L in Fairy Cave Quarry. The evenings were also very sociable, with more people joining us for drinks at The Hunters'.

Here are the write-ups from some of the trips that took place...

*Drunkard's Hole*

*photos by Matt Voysey*

## A Diving Trip in Swildon's Hole

*by Alex Randall*

12th March 2023 - Alex Randall, Gary Jones, Jon Abbott and Carl Barnes

Having completed my Open Water diver cert earlier in the year it was time to put some of those skills to use in a cave, with the date set as the Saturday of the Mendip weekend for a trip down Swildon's streamway.

Waking up with a bit of sore head on Saturday I was quite pleased we'd have to wait for Gary to turn up and fuff around for ages, giving me time to procure a hood and knee pads from the Wessex hut beforehand. Hangover properly dissipated Gary talked me through the kit he was kindly lending me – a well-used 3 litre cylinder with an ancient bungee cord to wear over the shoulder and a jubilee clip to attach it to my belt, plus a set of valves carefully wrapped up in a daren drum for protection.

We made quick progress to sump I, and using the bank just upstream for our dive base we kitted up. Sump I is half a metre long, so no need for diving kit but shortly after sumps II and III are reached. Six and Eleven metres respectively and separated only by a couple of huge airbells these are free diveable by the brave but make a great venue for a first cave dive. Gary headed through first to check the lines before giving three tugs on the rope to signal it was good for me to come through. After checking everything worked fine underwater I headed into the murk. As promised the visibility was absolutely zero but I surfaced without incident. A short wade and a duck into the next airspace brings you to Sump III. Longer and deeper than II, this would be a challenging free dive. Again the visibility was near zero, probably a good thing as I've been told there's normally leeches to see here...

The streamway of Swildon's Four is always a joy, and available to dry cavers through Blue Pencil Passage or Priddy Green Sink. Sump IV is 5m long and commonly free-dived by any intending to do the Long Round trip. This is much narrower than the previous two and involved a bit more shoulder bashing but was also passed without incident.

This being Carl's longest trip since a shoulder injury he decided this was far enough for him, so we left him and the diving kit behind to see how much further we could get quickly. Following the excavation of a gravel bank on the far side, Sump V is usually passable by zigzagging between air bells. With fairly high water levels this was the most sporting bit of the trip. With minimal airspace I had to reach ahead to feel for the larger spaces, and then duck under the water to get the next bell. After watching me, Gary and Jon thought this too perilous, so I went ahead for a quick walk and swim in Sump VI before heading back to the others mindful of how quickly they'd get cold waiting.

All in all a great trip with great company, with the diving parts uneventful as it should be. I can't wait for next time!

# A BURRINGTON ADVENTURE

The main trip for Saturday was rather grandly badged as 'A Burrington Adventure' with the even more grandiose objective of doing ALL the caves of Burrington. Realistically I knew there was no chance we'd achieve this ridiculously optimistic task, but that didn't stop me telling everyone at The Hunters' that's what we'd be doing anyway.

The primary reasons for suggesting this trip were... A) Burrington has a good mix of trips available from beginner friendly caves to more arduous and difficult ones, so something for everyone. B) There are no access restrictions, so none of the logistical problems of warden-led trips with limited group size and C) I thought it would be fun.

Eight different caves were visited by a hardy team consisting of Emyr Walters, Tim Gibbs, Adrian Fawcett, Jann Padley and Matt and Mandy Voysey, these were...

BY MANDY VOYSEY

## 1. Read's Cavern

We opted to do this cave first due to its geographical location, it making sense to work our way through the caves in a west to east direction. I hadn't been to Rod's for many years and couldn't recall much of note about it, but actually it was very nice. Everyone went in via the wet entrance as this is the more obvious and easy way, except for Emyr who went in the dry way mistakenly thinking everyone else was following. We were soon reunited in the Main Chamber and were all impressed by the interesting rocks and geology there, especially the 'dog kennel' formation. We then did a bit of a round trip to a grotto which everyone seemed to reach by slightly different means, then a circuit of the Main Chamber. None of the lower sections were accessible due to bats, but that was quite handy for preventing us wasting time getting confused in the boulder mazes when we had ALL the other caves of Burrington still to come. We exited via the dry entrance, which was more awkward, but made it a round trip. Not wanting to miss out on the round trip experience, Emyr yet again went the opposite way to the rest of us.



Rift in Main Chamber



Bos Swallet Entrance



Tim enjoying the muddy tube

## 2. Bos Swallet

This is the next cave in a row of five, which naturally made it our next objective. This was to be a more sporting venture than the last, with two ladder pitches and some awkward sections, but I remembered it to be a good trip worth the effort. What I'd forgotten was the muddy, detritus filled tube that needs to be descended before the first pitch is reached. We had to leave a gap between each person, to avoid pelting those below with debris. This slippery slide, with a couple of awkward pinch-points thrown in for amusement, leads to Disappointment Chamber. Where we were rather disappointed to find bats preventing any further progress, as a number of them were in the squeeze leading to the ladder pitch. So Adrian, Tim and I returned to surface caked in mud, sticks and sweat, while some of the team hadn't even entered the cave yet. So on to the next cave, which was...

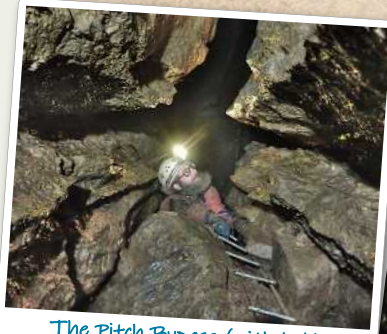
## 6. Goatchurch Cavern

The next closest cave on our route through Burrington was Goatchurch Cavern, so that was where we duly went. We discussed the various routes we could take through the cave; then decided that the simple through trip would suffice on this occasion as faffing about in the Drainpipe and the Dexion dig would take up valuable time that could more usefully be deployed bagging another cave. At the entrance we happened to meet a couple of non-cavers having a tentative investigation of the hole, so we offered that they could join us for a short caving trip if they liked. One having only a hand torch was decked out with a spare head-torch and we all went in the Main Entrance to the Giant's Staircase. Here our new companions were given the option of turning back should they wish, but they were game for adventure and slid on down with us to the walking passage below. Both managed the climb up the calcite ramp to the Trademan's Entrance at the end with ease and were soon on the surface again, slightly muddier than before, but very happy to have done their first caving trip. We said goodbye and ventured on to a slightly sportier venue...

### 3. Drunkard's Hole

We all piled in the cave and negotiated the somewhat awkward and steeply inclined entrance passages to reach a drop down. This caused a certain amount of confusion as we were unsure if this was the pitch or not. From above it looked quite deep and seemed to bell out below the squeeze. Tim and I fuffed about rigging a handline lashed around boulders for Adrian's descent, but then it turned out this wasn't necessary after all so we packed it away again, but left a sling to aid the pull up through the tight bit on the return. Below this the pitch is soon reached, an easy straight ladder hang to reach the rift passage below. However this all-to-obvious descent was shunned in favour of the more sporting and exposed traverse around the bend to the Pitch Bypass, where the in-situ traverse line was certainly useful. The descent to the bottom can be rigged with just a handline to aid the climb, but as we had a ladder we used that (or maybe we just hadn't paid enough attention to description to know it wasn't necessary).

The next section was a rift requiring some amusing wedging/traversing before thrusting yourself into the higher level passage on the right at the end. We all enjoyed this bit and many different tactics were deployed. You would assume there would be something of note to see beyond this... but not really. Perhaps if you have a maypole to gain access to the grotto, but aside from that there's just a chamber and some short muddy rifts to see. So it was back the way we'd come for more traverses, climbs, squeezes and wriggles through rifts to the entrance, rescuing a frog on the way.



The Pitch Bypass (with ladder)



The confined entrance passage



Traversing the Rift



The rescued frog

### 4. & 5. Rod's Pot and Bath Swallet

Next up was Rod's Pot, but in order to do the through-trip we'd first have to rig the ladder pitch in Bath Swallet. It was also time for a spot of lunch, then as Adrian and Tim were the first to finish eating they were volunteered to nip in and do the rigging leaving the rest of us to luxuriate on the surface... until it started raining.

Ladders successfully deployed in Bath Swallet, we journeyed over to Rod's Pot. Again, we all piled in and negotiated the very Mendip-esque steeply descending route through dark, smoothed rock and boulders and met up with a trio from the BEC just beyond the bold step, who were doing the through trip in the opposite direction. After a jolly chat we pressed on, crawling past and over the blind pots to reach Main Chamber. Here we initially went straight ahead to Hanging Rock Chamber, but realising this wasn't right we then descended a smoothed hole amongst stalagmites in the floor of the chamber as I recognised this was the way. When I say this was the way, it transpired that it was actually the way to the Bear Pit rather than the through trip. So third time lucky we took the last remaining option from Main Chamber. After a few zig-zags we reached the slot descent leading down to the top of Purple Pot. At last we knew we'd definitely gone the right way!

Purple Pot is essentially a wide muddy chimney that would be very difficult without the pre-rigged handline. This is also the dug-out connection to Bath Swallet, so we all descended in turn to emerge in our fifth cave of the day. Now in Bath Swallet, the way on was mostly crawling with a couple of squeezes thrown in for Emyr to enjoy before reaching the Diggers Shaft. This is a 10m chimney climb up a wall of cemented rocks. Just a short distance beyond, the bottom of our pre-rigged ladders were reached at the base of Shower Pot. As we had many other caves yet to come, we opted not to go for a full exploration of the Eastern Extensions and it's many excitingly named passages such as Cake Hole, Vagina Rift, The Cervix and Anal Passage (apparently very muddy) and headed on out with plenty of time for further adventures. However, there was time for a mini-explore for some while waiting for the ladders to become free to climb. The upper of the two ladders is the trickiest of the two, and seemed to snag on every possible lump on our way out, but we coped with this inconvenience and were soon on the surface once more ready for the next cave.



Main Chamber - Rod's Pot



Descending Purple Pot



Top of the ladder climb out

## 7. Sidcot Swallet

Being just a short distance down from Goatchurch, this was our next port of call. We blasted past the spiders in the entrance boulders to the rather unfairly named 'Hell Series' down to the Tie Press and Boulder Chamber and on to Water Chamber and the Lobster Pot, which is always fun. We all dropped down this short, smooth-sided tube climb and continued on to 'Paradise'. I'm not sure that most people's idea of Paradise would involve mud, boulders, a flotilla of plastic ducks and average-at-best cave scenery, but obviously someone thought so. As the very end of the cave is only accessible by super-waifs we headed back for even more fun ascending the Lobster Pot to continue steeply up-slope to the entrance once more. By now it was dark and getting quite late, but we figured we had time for one short bonus cave before heading back to the cars.



Mandy in the Lobster Pot



Jann in the Lobster Pot

## 8. Aveline's Hole

This impressive but short cave is easy to find being right next to the road, and a fact that I find very interesting is that it's hypothesised to have once been a resurgence. A very solid gate was installed a number of years ago, preventing access to the further reaches of the cave. This was successful in preventing Emyr, but the rest of us managed to squeeze through and went on a little further.



Aveline's Hole

We were a long way from completing the proposed circuit of EVERY cave in Burrington, but we had a very satisfying and surprisingly varied day venturing into caves that we otherwise wouldn't have done, which I think we all enjoyed. Maybe we'll have another Burrington adventure sometime to do all the caves we missed...

Photos by Matt Voysey (except Rod's Pot Main Chamber by Adrian Fawcett)

# Fairy Cave Quarry

by Tim Gibbs

I had recently watched Andy Sparrow's 'Between a rock and a hard place' on YouTube and found the history of Fairy Cave Quarry fascinating. I was also keen to see if the formations were deserving of the quarry owners' gesture several years ago to stop the expansion of the quarry to preserve the cave. So when Mandy let us know a trip was an option, I was quick to sign up.

Mandy Voysey was our glorious leader, with Jon Abbott, Siân Barnes, Andy Ley and myself making up the rabble. First up was Shatter Cave. Probably the most difficult obstacle was getting the caves open, but once solved we followed the drainage pipe into the shattered rock. The cave was immediately decorated in the first chamber with flowstone formations but also some bright red rocks that caught my eye. There were lots to see from the large to the small and standing still and looking around I noticed all sorts of interesting things in such a small area. There were dogtooth calcite, helictites, iron minerals, fossils and interesting structures in the limestone itself.

We headed through the cave into Diesel Chamber and then on at a steady pace to Erratic Rift marvelling at the formations along the way. Entering Tor Hall we saw the formation that chamber is named after as it apparently resembles Glastonbury Tor. Consensus among the group was that it looked more like a breast, and a gnarly breast at that, but I suppose the discoverers wanted to keep the names more highbrow.

We moved on to Pisa Chamber with its angled stalactite resembling the famous tower. No debate on the name this time. Presumably it had been broken by some event and then continued to grow around its base hiding the fracture that occurred when it was knocked from the vertical. We found our way through the Z Squeeze to Pillar Chamber and then onto Plughole Chamber where a large boulder in the roof hangs above a depression in the floor. There were several



Left: The Leaning Tower - Right: The Tor  
Photos by Andy Ley

beautiful formations to be seen on our journey including the exquisite Angel Wing, the Cascades and the Pillar itself. Within this part of the cave there are also bands of very well-preserved crinoid fossils in the limestone, certainly the most impressive I've seen based on average size and abundance. Some of the curtains present were very impressive and had the likeness of streaky bacon owing to the iron stained bands within them. We returned via a mini round trip using the Ring Road passage to end up back in Pisa Passage before making our way back out of the cave for a spot of lunch.

Our second cave for the day was W/L Cave which was much shorter. After fumbling around to get the gate open we entered the cave noting the penetrating tree roots that suggested the cave being closer to the surface than Shatter Cave. The Lily Pads, which are surfaced crystallised calcite sheets on a pool of water, were a noteworthy formation on the way in. However, it didn't take us long to get to the end and do a little extra exploring. The great rift chamber was an impressive place with its high wall at one end of the tall and sloping chamber.

While W/L cave is also well decorated, we had by this point been spoiled by the splendours of earlier, and I'm sure I could have appreciated it a bit more if I hadn't become blind to formations by that stage. All in all it was a perfect trip for a Sunday, plenty of reward for little effort expended.



*Tim in W/L Cave*

# WOOKEY 24

*by Adrian Fawcett*

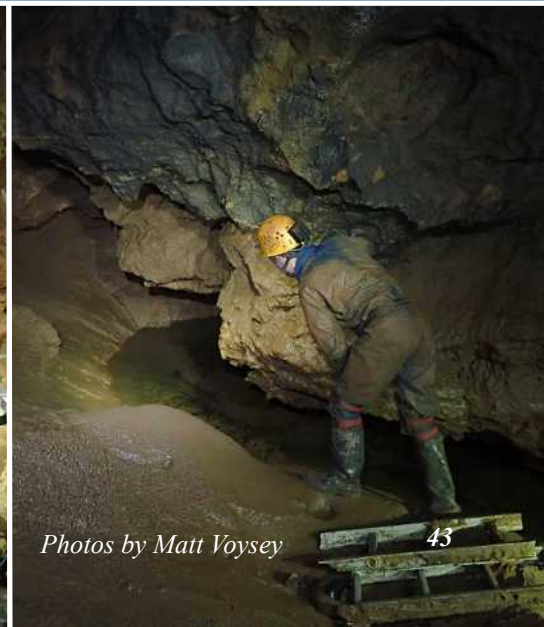
Alex Randall, Matt Voysey and I met up with two other cavers, Andy and Monica, in the car park at Wookey Hole. As per the rules, we arrived wearing our undersuits, prior to going into the hotel reception to sign some pre-trip paperwork. Unfortunately, the zip on Andy's fleece had failed, and care was necessary to avoid an embarrassing situation while in said respectable establishment.

The formalities completed, we finished getting changed and walked to the back door to the cave, only to find it had accidentally been closed by the previous group. Three of us walked around to the entrance, but found it unmanned. Fortunately, a member of staff soon arrived and let us in without question, and we were able to let Andy and Monica in via the back door.

A few minutes' walk along a blasted tunnel brought us to Chamber 20, the end of the showcave, and the start of caving. The first part of the route is the same as for Land

of Hope and Glory, after which there is a further climb up through boulders before a steep descent of narrow rift passages with fixed handlines. A short re-ascent reached the breakthrough point, then it was down again to a large lofty passage and the roar of the streamway. We had reached Chamber 24, and the divers' camp. It's an impressive section of cave - attractive rock and sand banks, and it's great that the non-diver can now enjoy it. There was no serviceable boat available, but Andy went for a swim while the rest of us chose to watch. After that we put our trust in Duncan's "via ferrata" - bent pieces of rebar poked into drilled holes, fortunately none of which fell out. This provides a high-level bypass to a deep section of the streamway. Andy and Monica opted for the wet way on the way back.

The return trip from Wookey 24, up the rifts, is a little more strenuous, but overall less so than our expedition to Burrington Combe the day before!

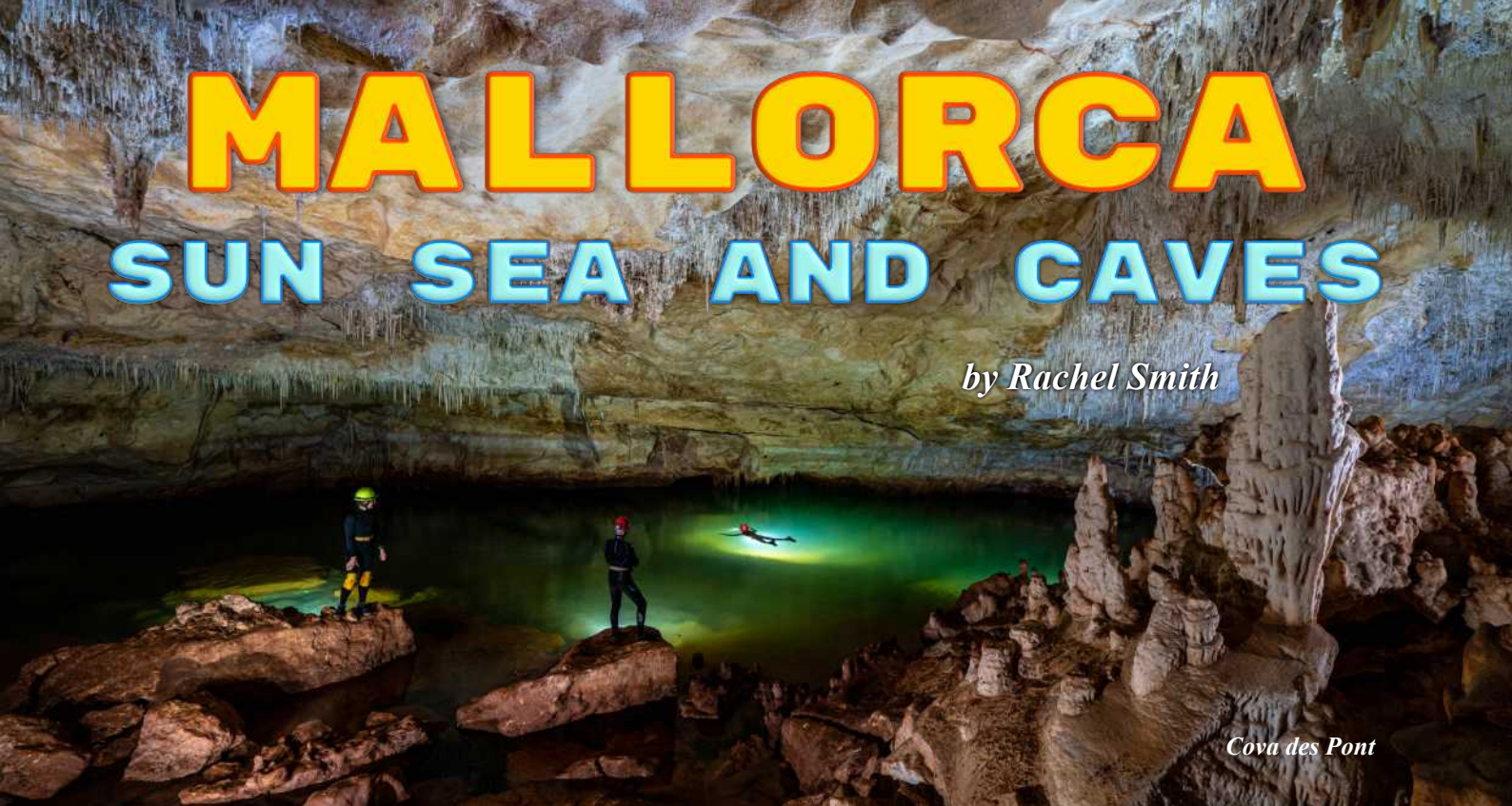


*Photos by Matt Voysey*

# MALLORCA

## SUN SEA AND CAVES

*by Rachel Smith*



*Cova des Pont*

Early November and it's a shorts and T-shirt day as we walk to the cave. The blue sky is reflected in an equally vivid sea... Mallorca certainly has a lot to commend it! Accommodation of all sorts is easy to find; we opted for a spacious villa with a covered terrace which was ideal for drying damp kit and sorting bags as well as enjoying a warm evening 'sundowner'.

Mallorca has many caves, the best of which are covered in a guidebook that is now some years old (pub. 2006); 'Mallorca, bellezas en la oscuridad'. This is a useful starting point but, as you will discover, things have changed at several of the venues and cavers would do well to research up to date information or approach a local Mallorcan caving club for their advice as access can be delicate to say the least! So, what of the caves we visited? Well, below are

some that we enjoyed the most...

Our first target is one that Martyn knows of old – Cova des Pirata. We diligently follow the instructions in the guidebook to locate the parking spot but 'Lo' a locked barrier now stretches across the narrow access lane and this will enforce a much longer walk-in. We drive on, finding a lay-by not too far away. Once out of the car we notice many local people equipped for a day on the beach and cautious enquiries suggest we should follow their path initially before branching off for the cave. After a mile of walking down the lane the way seems barred by a high metal gate (the point where previously cars could be parked). We step through a gap in a wall and follow a family as they climb over the next wall and a fence and then head onwards. Clearly the barriers are no deterrent to those wishing to go to the beach!



*Cova des Pirata*



Soon after, we take leave of the sun-seekers and make our way back onto a private farm track, following this away from the coast and towards the cave. Arriving at the entrance we are surprised to find two sightseers at the opening, but we change and carry all our belongings into the darkness of the cave. Inside the way is obvious as this has, in the past, been a show cave of sorts. We stash our few belongings well off the normal route, assured by Martyn that they will be completely safe, and make our way deeper in. As with many Mallorcan caves there is a profusion of immense formations, some of which bear evidence of earth movement with gaps and displacement clearly visible. We stop for the inevitable photographs, gradually descending to the lowest point where a deep pool prompts the call for 'models' to be in the water. What a pleasure to be floating in warm, clear waters rather than the usually chilly depths of Welsh caves! Then we journey out collecting our bags as we approach the entrance again. It is only later that we realise that during our time underground the bags had been rifled, though fortunately only one small item had been taken. Lesson learned – possessions will stay with us from now on!!

And so to Coma Freda and another parking challenge! The hotel, where you used to gain permission to visit, has now closed and the attendant told us to just park on the side of the road and go to the cave. This might be fine if we'd hired a 4-wheel drive or tractor, but no way was the little Fiat Panda going to drop off those enormous curbs – they were car-eaters! A couple of passes up and down the road finally yielded an accessible bit of hard standing and we prepared ourselves for another, longer than expected, walk in. Yet again we found the area fenced off with an abundance of signs declaring it was 'Private'. But as we'd had the OK to visit, we carried on. The track deteriorated and we enjoyed a bit of close-up time with some rather vicious thorny plants before arriving at the entrance.

A simple pitch (35m rope and SRT kit) leads us into a well decorated chamber with central formations and some small side grottoes. Out comes the camera and lights and Lin and I run around setting up and 'modelling' for Martyn as he takes images in several places before we look to explore further. The way on was elusive and initially uninspiring but a scramble up leads us into another larger and deeper chamber with more good formations. It took some time to decide on the best angle to photograph this and deploying lights involved a fair bit of clambering up, down and across but finally Martyn was happy and the image was taken. Kit packed, we made our way back to the entrance and up the rope before wending our way downhill and back to the car... well after dark!

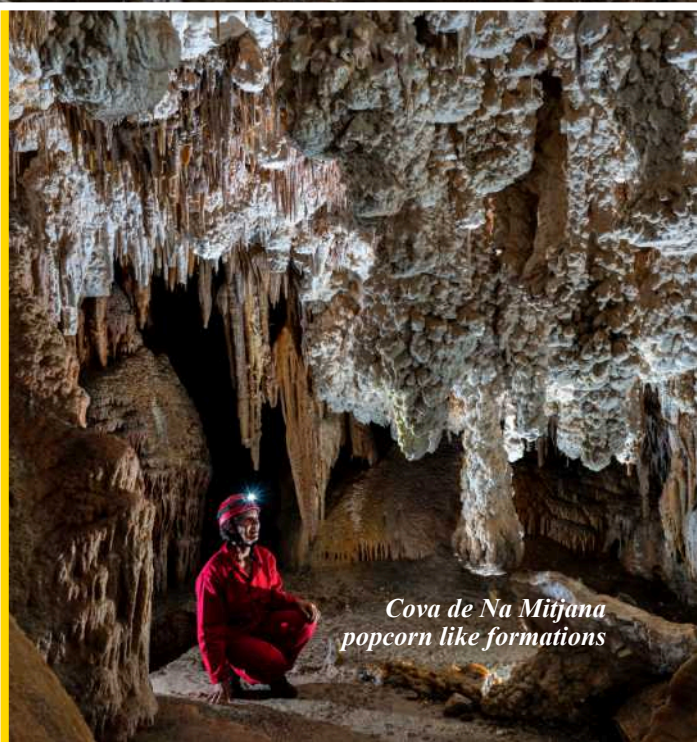
Our next adventure is the coastal cave Cova de Na Mitjana.



*Coma Freda main grotto*



*Coma Freda side grotto*



*Cova de Na Mitjana  
popcorn like formations*

It's an energetic walk and a bit of a scramble down a steep cliff to reach the entrance. A short, free-hanging pitch gains the interior of the cave and also demonstrates the importance of ensuring you have up to date access information. Last time I was in Mallorca (2012) there was a fixed household ladder allowing anyone to visit this site and sadly also to light and leave many candles, tea lights and litter as they partied inside. Today the ladder has gone (7m rope and SRT kit needed), and the cave has been subject to a substantial clean-up effort meaning only those competent in vertical techniques now enjoy a much more pleasant environment.

Like many Mallorcan caves, Na Mitjana is beautifully decorated and sports a clear blue/green lake. Within the main chamber a large stalagmite forms an island in the pool and the water swells and recedes around it in time with the sea outside, lapping eventually onto the white sandy shore. Beyond this main attraction are smaller side grottoes, some decorated with unusual bulbous pendules – eye-catching to say the least. Martyn and I spend several hours in this peaceful spot working hard to do justice to the sights we were enjoying.

Mid-week and an easy day walking near the villa ensures that we are finished early and ready to drive to Palma in good time for Martyn to give a talk to the



*Cova de Na Mitjana*

SEB (Societat Espeleologica Balear). Here we meet people he already knows and are introduced to a new generation of younger cavers. The talk/slideshow goes well with one of the club members, Toni Merino, translating into Catalan as Martyn speaks. Afterwards there is time for informal chat and the offer from two club members to take us on a visit to a venue not covered in the regular guide.



*Cova de s'Onix*

We meet two days later and travel to a hotel car park. This is something of a clandestine operation and we have to find a discreet place to leave the cars, well out of sight of the staff. Led by those with local knowledge, we head along an obscure path until we reach a large, gated portal, the original entrance to the mine Cova de s'Onix. The underground is not accessible from here, as it's securely gated and locked. However, we follow our guides through yet more undergrowth until we reach a small, cave like opening and wriggle inside. The roof rises and we walk down man-made paths tracing the vein of onyx that was once mined here, an interesting sight. But then, as we enter the lower levels, calcite formations begin to appear. A magnificently decorated chamber opens before us posing the question 'Where to photograph first?' All of



us enjoy the beauty as lights are deployed and some fine scenes captured. Then we head towards the mine's finale – a spectacular lake with its split onyx column and rafts of delicate calcite floating on the water surface. Lighting this without causing damage was a challenge but, with patience and care, a lovely record was made. By late afternoon we were making our way out to the surface, well pleased with what had been achieved.

Our final day sees another challenge of navigation as we head towards Avenc d'en Corbera. Parking place found, we head the short distance towards the cave, looking for a faint track leading off the lane. It took some time to locate a possible place and that proved to simply be a dead end. Back to the car and consult the information held on Martyn's phone. He and friend 'Bomber' decide they know where to go so Sam and I meekly follow as they head for "a wall". This was duly found along with a gate that was firmly padlocked – that wasn't mentioned in the book! Well, not people to be easily deterred, we set about finding the best way to scale this 2m high barrier, climb over the barbed wire on top and drop down on the other side, ferrying bags as we went. From here the large entrance proved to be close by. Rigging the pitch (35m rope) stressed my nerves rather as there were several rub points and we had no real rope protectors but finally I was satisfied and headed down into the daylight entrance chamber.

The others followed and when all were assembled, we set off to explore. Once again, we were in a cave with huge, mainly inactive but very impressive, formations. The floor proved slippery and progress was slow especially as there were a number of height changes; a high level passage reached by a greasy climb, a lower level chamber accessed by a narrow, steeply descending track and various boulders to be scrambled over or around. Martyn chose a number of locations to photograph before we headed back towards daylight and a final stop for pictures as people ascended and exited the cave. The day's challenges overcome, just a brisk walk back to the car remained. The three guys scrambled back up the wall and over the wire, as I brought up the rear. Then, just as I was atop the wall, one leg over the wire, a local appeared, stopped his bike, looked up and asked what I was doing. Try looking innocent as you explain that one ...!

We visited a number of other caves during our two weeks on the island; Cova de Cal Pesseo with its large tunnels and entertaining slippery handline descent, Cova Tancada des



*Avenc d'en Corbera Columns Chamber*



*Avenc d'en Corbera Entrance Pitch*

Cap de Menorca with massive columns and a window onto the sea, Cova des Ases where Martyn had dived many years ago and Cova des Pont (located close to Pirata) with tranquil lakes and grand formations. All of them hold interest and beauty. There are also longer and more challenging vertical trips, for example Cova de Sa Campana, Avenc de Fra Rafel or Avenc de S'Embut, that require considerably more rope than we had available.

Mallorca packs a lot into its caves and, due to the island's small size, if you base yourself fairly centrally, then nowhere is too far away, although a car is essential. Do plenty of research before you go to avoid the hassles we encountered with parking and access and, if you can, make contact with local cavers who will undoubtedly be a great source of information and may well offer to show you some of the less well publicised underground sights that the island has to offer. It's an excellent choice for some good caving and late autumn sun!



*Cova des Pont*



*Cova de Cal Pessó*



*Cova Tancada des Cap de Menorca*

See CSS Newsletter Vol. 60, Nos. 10-12 for more information on caving in Mallorca, with location maps and rigging details for trips undertaken on the CSS 2018 Mallorca Meet.

*Photos by Martyn Farr*

## CSS MEETS 2023

### July 28th-31st – Yorkshire Weekend

Three days of caving in the Yorkshire Dales staying at the YSS hut, conveniently close to the Helwith Bridge Inn. Caving trips are yet to be decided, contact trip organiser Adrian Fawcett for further information about this weekend.

### August 26th-28th – Bank Holiday at Whitewalls

A long weekend of caving at Whitewalls, and hopefully we should enjoy some sunshine too. There is the possibility of making this a 'family weekend', with child-friendly caving trips and other activities if enough members would like to take part. Please contact Meets Secretary John Newton to register your interest.

### September – Hidden Earth

Date and venue yet to be announced.

### October 20th-22nd – Derbyshire Weekend (TBC)

A weekend staying at the Orpheus hut in Monyash, which has a number of different caves, mines, walks and cycle trails nearby. Caving trips are yet to be decided, but the intention is to have trips to cater for all abilities with easier SRT or non-SRT trips, as well as more 'technical' options. Contact trip organiser Mandy Voysey for more details.

### November 3rd-5th – Bonfire Weekend at Whitewalls

Paul Tarrant will be providing a barrel of free beer for us all to celebrate his 50th anniversary of caving. As usual there'll be a huge bonfire to enjoy and everyone should bring one big firework to add to the display. A feast of dinners and puddings will be provided for a small fee.

### December 1st-3rd – 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. Caving trips to be decided.

### December 31st - January 1st – New Years Party at Whitewalls

If you would like to know more about this year's club meets or have a caving trip you'd like to suggest, contact John Newton at [meets@chelseaspelaeo.org](mailto:meets@chelseaspelaeo.org)

Additional trips may be added during the year, so check out the CSS website, and members only WhatsApp group, ProBoards and Facebook page for updates.

Caving trips are also organised via the CSS WhatsApp group. If you'd like to join the group, see the link and QR code on the ProBoards and Facebook pages or contact administrators Adrian Fawcett and Chris Seal.

# 4 days caving in Classic Yorkshire Potholes

by *Tim Gibbs*

## Day 1: Lost John's Cavern

Jon Abbott, Alex Randall and I had all arrived the night before at YSS where Alex and I learned to tie a Yosemite Bowline and Fusion Knot under Jon's guidance. We left the YSS about 10am and after a morning visit to Inglesport that lightened the wallets, we headed to Leck Fell in Jon's van. We got slightly delayed by a farmer herding his sheep up the road. He seemed to be having a bad day with his sheep and lambs not being very compliant, going in hedges rather than up the road. He had a trainee dog that used its bite more than its bark, before it got it disciplined and fitted with a muzzle. We managed to pass the farmer after some time, and he was doing some first aid to one of his sheep. We parked in the spot not far from the entrance to Lost John's.

We entered the cave following some fine stream passage before reaching the first pitch, noting that water levels were low. Our chosen descent route was via Vestry, Cathedral and Dome pitches to Dome Junction pitch and then down Candle and Shistol pitch. We then joined the impressive Battle-axe Traverse before dropping down to meet the final pitch down to the Leck Fell master cave.

On reaching Groundsheet Junction we first went right, downstream through some fantastic walking sized stream passage to finish at deeper water that was close to the sump. I chose not to get any wetter than thigh height for obvious reasons, with Alex going a little further to look at the sump.

We then headed back upstream. Along the streamway there were some interesting formations which appeared to have organic debris from flooding calcified into them. Passing Groundsheet Junction again, we explored the upstream side and made our way to Lyle Cavern up a small fixed rope. Lyle Cavern was impressive and well decorated, and we discussed some of the possible through trips to Notts II. Returning the way we came, we then headed out of the cave de-rigging as we went.

It was my first time in Lost John's and I have to say what a great cave it was with a good deal of classic horizontal passage, fine pitches and the impressive Battle-axe Traverse. The trip was around 6 hours in total and we headed back to the YSS hut and to the Helwith Bridge pub for food where we were joined by Adrian Fawcett who had just driven up, for a few well-earned pints!

## Day 2: Ireby Fell Cavern

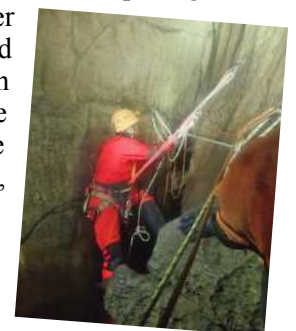
Our destination for Day 2 was Ireby Fell Cavern. We had originally planned to rig both the Shadow and the Ding, Dong, Bell routes but were beaten to the cave by a local party who were planning on doing the shadow route and round trip. We adapted our plan to rig just the one route, when several other cars turned up, some quick investigations established the other larger party were heading for Marble Steps and everyone was content and relieved to know who was doing what. While kitting up, Adrian put on his new oversuit he'd had delivered to YSS and was duly teased about looking like a novice in it.

Having walked the 20 or so minutes up the hill we descended into the steep shakehole and kitted up for SRT, pausing a little to let the party doing the round trip get a head start. We then headed into the concrete tube and down Ding pitch. The pitch already had the other party's rope in addition to what was described as a divers' rope, that looked tired and worse for wear, meaning by the time we descended it was triple rigged. Dong pitch caused no issues but some inconsistencies in the topo meant we had to join two ropes to get to the base of Bell pitch. To finish the nursery rhyme we free-climbed down Pussy pitch, before completing the descent with Well and Rope pitches.



take the dry but muddy route to Duke Street II we retraced our steps to the rope and ascended a short pitch to Starlight Express crawl. The crawl was mostly hands and knees but at times smaller and muddy. My estimate was around 300m as it seemed to go on for a very long time especially in full SRT kit, but the guide book has it at 170m.

Dropping down a thick and sandy rope, I made the safest descent of my life inching down the rope. To the right was a sump and deep water and the way on was to the left in flooded passage until we reached the even larger Duke Street II. We explored the passages that were there, with Alex going up some fixed rope where the carabiners on the deviations were dodgy at best, before deciding to come back down. Adrian, Jon and I explored a narrow streamway before deciding to turn back. Duke



Street II was an impressive place with some nice and near-pristine formations.

We then headed back the way we came, stopping in Duke Street to wash some of the mud off our SRT kits and having some chocolate or Soreen. We retrieved our ropes on the way out and while Jon, Alex and Adrian were waiting for me to de-rig the last pitches, some sheep with

I quote “evil intentions” gathered at the top of the shakehole and had a menacing presence about them. I think the others must have told the sheep that a Welshman was soon to emerge because by the time I surfaced they had disappeared! We were underground for around 5-6 hours. We headed back to the YSS for some food and few beers after sorting and washing kit.

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### Day 3: Rowten Pot Exchange

The weather forecast for the Sunday was the least favourable of the weekend, so we decided a trip to Kingsdale and Rowten Pot was in order. We made an earlier start leaving YSS at around 9am to beat the crowds. We split into two teams Adrian and I doing the Big Gully route and Jon and Alex doing the Eyehole route. We had well over 400m of rope between us to rig both routes.

The Big Gully route began mostly in daylight and a bit of a traverse before the serious descent began. I personally enjoyed the daylight part of the pot as it made a change having good visibility, the downside of course was that it was pretty slippery. Adrian and I headed down to pick up the flyover route. One of the pitches had several re-belays in quick succession and I'd describe it more like a descending traverse, but it was fun technically. While we were descending, we could hear and see the lights of Alex and Jon on the Eyehole then Direct route but never really crossed paths directly.

At the bottom we had a look at the sump and Jon and



Alex were discussing a future trip to dive out to Valley Entrance. The bottom part of the cave had lovely scalloped pale limestone and there were some top-notch coral fossils there too. I know it might sound strange, and I recognise my enthusiasm for rocks may be higher than most, but I thought the end section was well worth going to see and certainly worth the rope work to get there!

On the way out we exchanged routes, Jon and Alex out through the Flyover and Big Gully, while Adrian and I returned via the Direct and Eyehole routes up the main shaft that was as impressive as it was airy.

We found ourselves out of the cave fairly early just after 2pm and popped into Inglesport on the way home for a hot drink and inevitably to purchase some new equipment. After that we headed back to the YSS and Helwith Bridge pub for food and beers.

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### Day 4: Alum Pot/Diccan Pot

We again set off a shade before 9am and paid our fee at Selside farm before parking and kitting up. Adrian and Alex formed the party that descended Diccan Pot, while Jon and I went down through Long Churn, the Dolly Tubs and Bridge way.

Today was the day that Adrian was to christen his new harness bought in Inglesport the day before and similarly I had purchased a neofleece a few days earlier and decided that today would be a good day to wear it. Not necessarily because I thought I needed to, more because I had some new kit and wanted to try it out.

Adrian noted that the water was high in Diccan but still at a safe level, before continuing down to begin the rigging while Jon and I headed for Lower Long Churn. Dolly Tubs was rigged without incident, despite failing to find the deviation, that wasn't really necessary. The next pitch the Greasy Slab caused us a little more trouble especially with the topo being a little out of date. We started to rig the pitch from a boulder as suggested, and went down to a bolt until we realised that there were bolts higher up and that the first bolt was the rebelay. The hangers almost seem more difficult to spot in daylight! So I came back up and we rigged it properly. Jon then rigged the Bridge pitch and rest of the way down but we were running short on clips based on Greasy Slab pitch being different from the topo. We utilised a spare carabiner or two from harnesses and reached the bottom of Alum Pot where Adrian and Alex were waiting. We exchanged pleasantries quickly before both parties made their way

out on the exchange. I think everyone was quite cold at this point so were keen to get warmer on the ascent.

Diccan Pot was as impressive as its billing with a substantial waterfall emerging before disappearing to the sump. We set off up Diccan, Jon first then me. When I started the first pitch for the first metre or two I got a face full of water that was quite refreshing and disorienting, before the deviation took the rope away from the water. Communication in Diccan was difficult given the constant roar of the waterfall and the spray that disrupted any clear view of what was going on. Ascending the shaft with its numerous deviations, I met Jon at the very wet and draughty shelf halfway out and handed him the first bag of rope. It was a very cold place that day with a howling draught and thick spray and Jon looked cold when I saw him. We then exited without incident.

I found dragging the bag full of wet rope against the stream to the entrance a bit slow but was soon in the daylight to see the rest of the party sorting out ropes and gear in preparation for heading home. I attempted to help out but was still a little cold at that point and it took me a while to warm up and become useful again. The consensus among the team was that a neofleece was a wise option, but I couldn't be smug as I had only chosen to wear it for the sake of it, and even then, I was never really warm on the way out of Diccan.

The trip completed, we headed back to YSS for some lunch and all headed home back down South. All in all, it was a fantastic few days sampling several of the classic Yorkshire potholes and caves.

# New CSS Tackle Store

by Mandy Voysey



The New Tackle Store!

The 'Tackle Wardrobe' is no more! We now have a fantastic bespoke new tackle store fitted in the Whitewalls changing room. Not only does our new store hold much more kit, it is also well-ventilated and has a drainage gap to allow ropes and other equipment to be hung up inside even when wet. This is a huge improvement on the old wardrobe, as ropes no longer have to be left out until dry before being returned to storage.

The new store comprises sturdy steel cage doors fitted onto a recess in the changing room and is large enough to house all club ropes, ladders and novice caving kit and tackle bags. It is also robust enough to be of use on the unlikely occasion that we have a werewolf to secure, or even to lock up the club's Chairman and Cottage Warden (see photo). The smaller under stairs tackle area will continue to be



used for metal items (such as krabs, maillons, tethers etc), excess tackle bags and digging ropes and equipment.

This superb addition to the club hut started with a design drawn up by Mike Read and Andy Heath, which was then expertly implemented by Emyr Walters who constructed and fitted the new store. This project was also sponsored by the William Hare Group who very generously donated all materials used. A massive 'thank you' to everyone involved.



Photos by Mandy Voysey

## CSS WEBSITE UPDATES

There have been a number of new additions to the website in the last few months, most notably in the 'Caves' section which now includes remastered surveys of our local caves and more route descriptions for popular trips. The route descriptions all contain photos of the sights encountered along the way and are additionally available in an A4 text-only format that can be downloaded for printing and taken underground. This is an ongoing project which is being progressively added to and updated; content so far includes:

### Agen Allwedd

Full system surveys spread over 3 print-friendly pages.

Photographic route descriptions and printable downloads for trips to **The Music Room, The Grand Circle, Inner/Outer Circle** plus new routes coming soon for **Iles Inlet** and **Maytime**.

### Craig a Ffynnon

Full system survey.

Photographic route descriptions and printable downloads for trips to **Hall of the Mountain King, North West Inlet** and coming soon **Promised Land** and **Helictite Passage**

### Daren Cilau

Detailed system surveys spread over 2 print-friendly pages and combined full system survey.

Photographic route descriptions and printable downloads for **The Through Trip** (in both directions), **The Time Machine, Hard Rock Café** and **St David's Sump** (including high-level routes), **Hard Rock Café to Restaurant at the End of the Universe** (including Blue Greenies) and **Restaurant at the End of the Universe to the end of the cave**.

To take a look for yourself visit [www.chelseaspelaeo.org/caves](http://www.chelseaspelaeo.org/caves)

### Other Caves of Llangattock

Surveys and photographic cave descriptions plus printable versions with survey included for the following caves: **Eglwys Faen, Pen Eryr, Ogof Gwaliau Gwynion** and **Pwll y Gwynt**.

All caves and route descriptions include directions to the entrance with location grid refs and what3words.

Also don't forget to check out the news page for online trip reports and photo galleries for every club meet.

