



**Volume 65
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Jul/Aug/Sep 2023**

**Spaderunner
Wogan Cavern
North Wales Meet
Mineshafts Project**

CHELSEA SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY



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UPCOMING MEETS

OCTOBER – DERBYSHIRE
NOVEMBER – BONFIRE WEEKEND
DECEMBER – CURRY WEEKEND
NEW YEAR PARTY AT WHITEWALLS

*Front Cover: Bridge in Croesor Slate Mine,
North Wales Meet - by Matt Voysey*

*Above: Charles Bailey and Joe Duxbury,
Ogof Fawr, June 2023 - by Matt Voysey*

**Next Daren Camp
17th - 19th Nov**

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Editorial Lots to read and enjoy in this issue, including eight pages of reports from the summer North Wales club meet, dig updates, an important Welsh archaeological find and rip-roaring tales of derring-do.

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

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

WKTJ Poznan visit to Whitewalls

by Peter Smith



Piotr, Jaś (Adam), Grzegorz, Krzysztof and Sławomir at Ogof Craig a Ffynnon entrance

Caves in Poland generally have a lot of vertical sections but not much in the way of calcite formations. Therefore, the cavers visiting Whitewalls from Poland Friday 19th to Sunday 21st May were particularly keen to see some of our best decorated caves. On Saturday 20th May I took five Polish cavers to Hall of



Sławomir emerging from top of second boulder choke

the Mountain King in Ogof Craig a Ffynnon. The weather was so good that it was almost a shame to be going underground. However, all enjoyed the trip.

After the trip into Ogof Craig a Ffynnon I took Piotr and Jaś into Ogof Capel the same day. We went as far as the duck. John Stevens and Adrian Fawcett each took a group of three of our Polish visitors into Ogof Capel as far as the duck the same day that I did at different times.

On Sunday I took a group to Penwyllt to meet Helen Nightingale for a trip into OFD Top Entrance, very ably led by Helen.

Other caves visited by WKTJ during their stay were Nant Rhin, Agen Allwedd, Otter Hole, OCAF and OFD.



*Krzysztof in Travertine Passage
Photos by Peter Smith*

Membership

SUBS ARE NOW DUE!

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Full: £30, Joint: £40, plus BCA subscription per person of £20 for cavers or £6 for non-cavers.

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

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


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

Email csstreasurer@chelseaspelaeo.org

NEW ROPE IN PWLL Y GWYNT

by Mandy Voysey

It had been on my mind for a while that the fixed rope at Fifth Aven in Pwll Y Gwynt could do with replacing; especially as there's a good chance it might be a remnant from the original explorations back in the early 80s! Aside from its vintage another problem was the thickness of the thing, being more akin to the type of rope we used to shin up in school sports halls than modern SRT rope – which is far from ideal on a 12m pitch. So on Saturday 28th July, Andy Heath, John Stevens, Matt Voysey and I ventured up to Pwll y Gwynt with a mission to replace this fat monstrosity with something more fitting.

For those of you unfamiliar with Pwll y Gwynt it's here  high above the tramroad between Eglwys Faen and Agen Allwedd. Formed in completely different rock beds than the caves below, it has a very different character and much of its 260m length is a medley of avens, rifts, climbs and squeezes. Mud is also a notable feature and all cavers and equipment will be liberally plastered in the stuff on a trip here, but overall it's a very fun and interesting cave.



After a very sweaty climb up to the entrance, we donned our SRT kits and rigged the entrance pitch. The main belay bar could really do with cementing in properly, so that'll be a worthy job for another day. From here we took the standard route through Second, Third and Fourth Aven before gaining a significant coating of mud in the section between there and the fat ancient rope at the bottom of Fifth Aven. On our last visit Emyr had free-climbed this using the rope as a safety line before rigging a proper rope for the rest of us. However none of us fancied doing this ourselves as it's really exposed and looks trickier at the top. Instead we tugged at the rope to check that it could take the weight then sent the lightest member of our team to prussik up. Obviously this was Matt. Though too big to fit through any descender, the rope just about fitted in his jammers.

The new rope (generously donated by Andy) was then rigged and a backup added for extra safety. At the top of the pitch is the continuation of the cave through a small tube which leads directly to a small window part-way up Sixth Aven. There's an 8m metre pitch to get to the bottom here, but the main problem is a constricted knobbly bend in the tube which is nigh on impossible to get through with SRT kit. Andy and John took a look at this and both agreed that plug and feather techniques would probably do the job. A good project for anyone wanting to look at digging prospects at the end perhaps?



Fifth Aven Pitch

Mission accomplished, we bagged up the old fat rope and a bunch of other detritus and made our way back out of the cave, Matt and I taking the 'Quick Way' route to Third Aven, while Andy and John went back the way they'd come to avoid the crawls. As it happened 'Quick Way' was indeed quicker, though by no means easier or less muddy. Returning to the surface, we were all well and truly filthy and the rope washer, hose and pressure washer were all put to good use back at Whitewalls.



The Pwll Y Gwynt description on the CSS website has now been updated with new tackle information, extra photos and additional route options. So check it out if you're planning a visit.

*Left: Andy and John muddy after the trip. Below: Andy exiting the cave.
Photos by Matt Voysey*



CROCHAN SION HOPKIN UPDATE

by Paul Hartwright

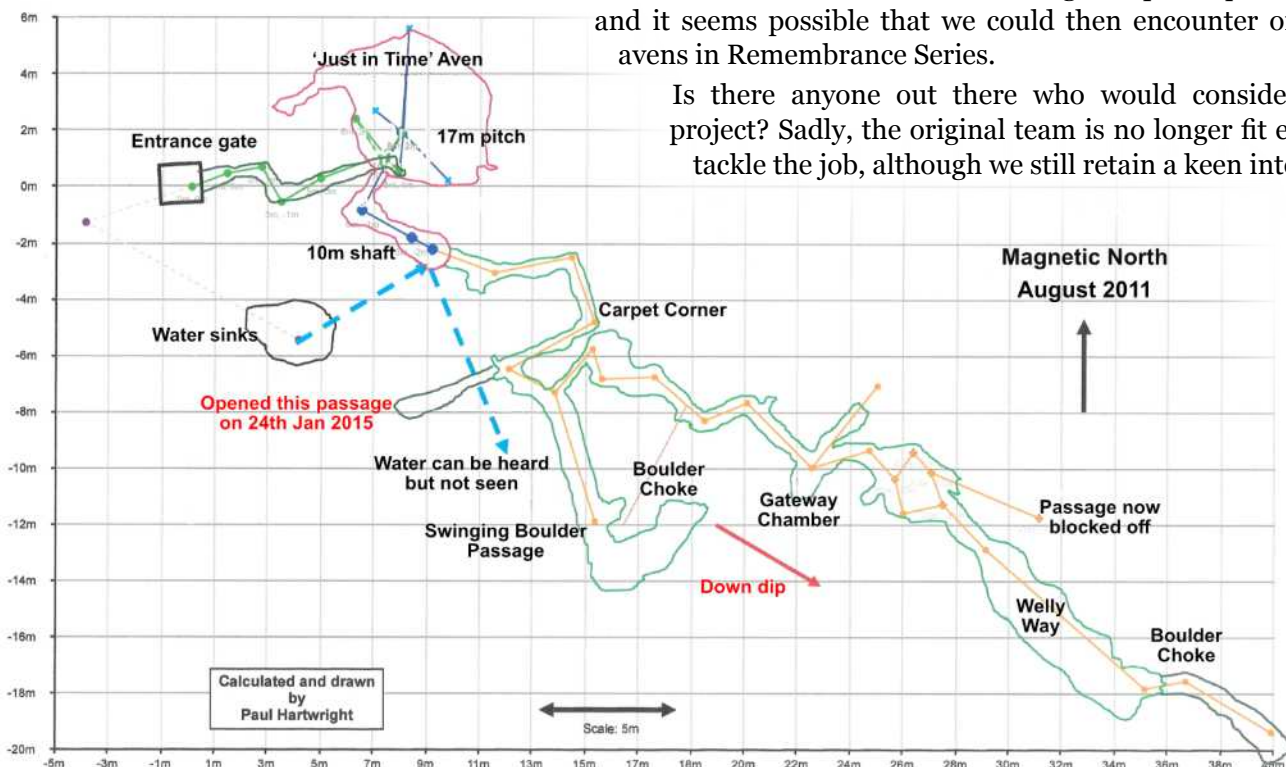
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The entrance gate at the top of the first shaft is now in working order. Paul Hartwright removed the gate and Phil Checketts was able to repair the latch and the frame at home. It had become distorted due to stones lodging behind the gate and it being forced in an attempt to close it again. We both returned to refit it on 14th September 2023. Just operate the lever as indicated.

A brief inspection as far as the top of the 17m pitch showed that the way is still open as usual. This is due to the scaffolding that appears to be holding well at present. All the pitches have fixed ladders or are easily climbable. However, rust will inevitably set in and eventually the damp conditions and the inrush of water after heavy rain will cause a collapse that will close the cave. So take care!

We know that this cave is only 150m horizontally from part of Remembrance Series in Agen Allwedd. At the lowest part of the cave water disappears through an impervious layer in several places to the passages below. This layer is likely to be in the region of 5m thick. We have reached about 70m below the surface of the moor. To go deeper requires blasting and it seems possible that we could then encounter one of the avens in Remembrance Series.

CSH Plan May 2014



Is there anyone out there who would consider such a project? Sadly, the original team is no longer fit enough to tackle the job, although we still retain a keen interest!

The Initials in Scaffold Passage Agen Allwedd

by Joe Duxbury

If you've read about the recent bolting trips investigating the high-level features of Aggy Main Passage then you will know about the initials discovered on these climbing endeavours. Who were the previous explorers that had left them there?

Here are the results of Joe's investigation to find out.

I asked, through a post on the UK Caving Forum, if anyone could shed light on the initials RR and RS in Scaffold Passage. A first suggestion was that RS could be Russell Sullivan of the British Nylon Spinners SS, who was active with Mel Davies of SWCC. This was a likely answer, as BNS were active in Aggy in the 1960s. But then I was told of SWCC cavers Rhidian Roberts and Roger Smith, who were also active with Mel Davies around then. The combination of the two names looked to be even more plausible. I am more or less convinced this is the right answer.

Photos by John Stevens



North Wales Meet

A fun-packed weekend was had on the North Wales Meet on 9th-11th June, staying at the Bowline Climbing Club hut in Brynrefail near Llanberis. The adventures started on Friday evening with a circuit of Snakes and Ladders in Dinorwic Quarry, followed by Saturday trips to the Milwr Tunnel and Llanberis Copper Mine West. Then an extended Croesor/Rhosydd through trip on Sunday. An excellent and varied weekend of mines exploration, artefacts, formations, sporting SRT, sunshine, pub visits and great pizzas; here are the trip reports from activities undertaken.

Rhosydd Mine

Artefacts,
Llanberis Copper Mine

SNAKES AND LADDERS

by Mandy Voysey

Matt Chinner, Matt Voysey, Mandy Voysey, Jann Padley and Andy Ley

For those not familiar with Snakes and Ladders, it's an exciting romp around the magnificently large and atmospheric Dinorwic Quarry, with towering cliffs of slate on multiple levels, all liberally festooned with industrial relics of yesteryear with a wonderful backdrop of top-notch mountains all around. Quite frankly it's ace! The route is a sporting challenge utilising some seriously vintage miners' ladders, a massive chain, blasted tunnels and some shiny new abseil stations to complete a circuit around four different quarry workings – California, Australia, Lost World and Mordor. All good fun for anyone with a head for heights and a sense of adventure, though it should be stressed that this route is unmaintained, some of the ladders are in far from ideal condition and although such activities are 'tolerated' in Dinorwic quarry there is no official access arrangement.

Matt and I had attempted this once before, with Matt Chinner, Sascia Marques, Andy Heath and Chris Tomlin on a particularly rainy day in March 2019. On that occasion we only managed to get halfway before being defeated by foul weather, so I was well up for a return visit on the Friday evening of the CSS North Wales Meet to complete the circuit.

After a leisurely journey through sunny Wales following a night at Whitewalls, Matt and I arrived at the Bowline Climbing Club hut in Brynrefail, shortly after Matt C who was busy sheltering from sunbeams in the only piece of shade available. We waited for Jann and Andy to join us, then knowing that the rest of the party wouldn't be arriving until much later, the five of us set off for an intrepid evening of fun in Dinorwic, just a short car journey away.



Sunshine and fantastic views on our circuit of Dinorwic
Photo by Andy Ley



Above: Dali's Hole, between tunnels.
Top Right: Andy about to break a rib.
Bottom Right: Artwork in tunnel.

CALIFORNIA

Officially Snakes and Ladders starts with California, and today the weather was even fitting for the name. However we decided to skip this section for two reasons, firstly that it contains the most time-consuming and difficult obstacle of the circuit which we didn't really have time for, and secondly that it loops back almost to the start again so it's more of an 'optional extra' anyway.

We had completed this section before, on our previous trip where we discovered just how slippery slate can be in the wet while attempting the HVS climb in full waterproofs and walking boots. This part of the route is accessed via a tunnel at Dali's Hole, which is a good place to visit even if not attempting the climb. This leads through to an open chasm with a waterfall and the tunnel continues on the other side. This section has a really cool Banksy style piece of



artwork at the end before reaching the vast open quarry of California. Here, hanging from a hole high up in the cliff to the left, is a really chunky old chain which can be utilised to somehow swarm your way up the sheer wall of slate. Luckily Matt C is really good at that stuff, so he shinned up to rig a lifeline for the rest of us, and we were mostly shambolic. Aside from the hefty chain another random feature to aid this ascent is three metal prongs sticking out like a trident about two thirds of the way up, which Andy Heath managed to break his ribs on. Atop this sporting climb is another tunnel, at the end of which you rig a pull-through rope to abseil back down and 'hey presto' you're back to where you were earlier.



The first pair of ladders

AUSTRALIA

So, back to the trip in hand this sunny Friday evening. Completely shunning California, we instead headed for the tunnel before Dali's Hole. This is less obvious to spot as it's partly obscured by fallen blocks, but a caving-style squeeze down through smoothed rock leads into the darkness of quite a long tunnel before emerging in Australia. With not a kangaroo in sight, we had to do all the boulder hopping ourselves through this immense land of jumbled rocks, following Matt C on a journey up a number of scree piles heading to the left to reach some small buildings and a pair of fixed ladders hanging disjointedly beyond – our first ladder climb of the day. As the first ladder only went part-way up, a mid-air straddle was required to get onto a shorter ladder that reached the terrace above, with the next set of ladders on a path to the right. This pair are even more disjointed than the first as the ladders are at completely different angles, requiring an interesting mid-air manoeuvre. What's actually holding the top one in place? I've no idea... but it seems stable despite the bounciness and we all enjoyed the uniqueness of the situation.



Straddling the second ladders

Atop the ladders was a pleasant plateau which was very much enhanced by the summertime ambience and far reaching views. This was as far as we'd got on our previous visit and from here there is an easy return walk back via some slate steps, but today we were on a mission so after a quick look at the old quarry buildings and the various large metal artefacts we headed on to our next port of call...

THE LOST WORLD

Here we meandered along the scenic high-level path with views towards Snowdon to reach a gully. We skirted this by clambering across to a narrow path on the right which ended at a ledge overlooking the Lost World quarry workings; this is the 'snakes' part of the journey with two abseils. A short shuffle downslope on the cliff edge reaches a ledge with a nice shiny abseil station, which we rigged as a pull-through with a 60m rope to a the terrace below. Descending the slate slope below, we then located the next abseil station attached to a rather hefty boulder. This pitch was shorter and we again rigged it as a pull-through to descend to the rather cool and shady quarry below with bird calls echoing all around. Next up was another pair of ladders to climb down, and these were pretty sound with a nice ledge from one to the other. Below, a short chain assists the climb down to the very bottom of this rugged quarry.

There was now only one more realm to conquer and this was to be found through another tunnel, which still had railway lines in situ.



*Above: At the first abseil station
Right: Descending the first pitch*



MORDOR

At the other side of the tunnel we reached our final quarry of the day, the ominously named Mordor – which looked much nicer than it does in Lord of Rings. There is only one way out of this rugged pit of boulders, ferns and towering cliffs... you guessed it, another pair of ladders. Here the laughs of disbelief as we each started the climb prepared those below for what lay in store. The odd missing rung replaced by old rope on the first ladder were easily dealt with, and we all in turn wondered what all the faffing was about while waiting to climb the second. This was until we reached the section where **all** of the rungs were missing and most of the rope replacements were worn to the core. This exciting obstacle over,

we found ourselves on a grassy plateau with one final ladder climb to go. This was yet another pair, but in significantly better condition than the previous.

The adventure over, we were all really happy after a fun evening of epic scenery and unusual challenges. All that remained was the easy cruise back down to the cars, passing the now collapsed 'Bridge of Death' on the way. This was once an optional extra for anyone brave/foolish enough to trust an unsupported railway line over a chasm. It's perhaps lucky that this option is no longer available otherwise Andy would certainly have been on it. We got back just as the sun was setting and returned to the hut in time for a late dinner with some of the others who had only just arrived.

For more information on Snakes and Ladders there are a number of descriptions online. The route also features in the 'North Wales Slate' 2018 climbing guidebook by Mark Reeves, along with many other trad and sport climbs in the quarry.



*The dodgy ladders out of Mordor
Photo by Andy Ley*



Photos by Matt and Mandy Voysey unless stated otherwise

Llanberis Copper Mine

by Matt Chinner

10th July 2023 – Matt Chinner, Matt Voysey, Mandy Voysey and Adrian Fawcett.

The copper mines on the outskirts of Llanberis are a collective of workings that were known as the 'Yew Tree Works' operating between 1760 - 1885, and records show the mine was described as 'more productive than profitable'. The workforce mainly worked the copper mine 'Clogwyn Coch' which is situated at a much higher altitude in summer, and the much lower Llanberis workings in winter.

Recent exploration has been sporadic, known descents and exploration being The Eldon Pothole club (1980s), CATMHS in the 2000s and more recently some local teams including myself.

Saturday's alternative trip (for those who had visited the Milwr Tunnel before) was a descent of the Western workings (there are two separate large workings known as Eastern and Western workings), giving a fairly deep and interesting SRT trip, with some interesting features and rope antics along the way.

After a slight concern given there was a Triathlon in Llanberis on the same day, parking was easily secured at the start of the short but fairly steep approach path,

taking us up on to the lower flanks of Yr Wyddfa and above Llyn Peris. Arriving at the large open stope we peered down into the depths and cooled off a little after the approach.

Having enquired with a friend who had been recently exploring the workings I was informed 200m of rope was required to get us down to the fixed traverse lines and ropes on the final pitches that they had currently left in – this of course was duly carried up the steep hillside, and taken down with us...

Adrian commenced the rigging and after an awkward chimney climb to the pitch head, we descended two pitches of approx 50m down an impressively large stope, and were surprised to find fixed ropes already (a later conversation with said friend implied they had 'forgotten' this much rope had been left in – and I was assured it had not been a joke to get us to carry up twice as much kit as we needed..!)





Adrian on a bridge over a stope

Mandy with blue formations

Matt V with green formations

Arriving on a narrow ledge in the stope, a short climb up and through a window took us in to one of the main haulage floors (adit leading outby to hillside, dug out by myself and a local guy a few years ago, now blocked again), this was also the start of our round trip to the lowest accessible point of the mine (the workings continue some distance further, but are now flooded). Passing some artefacts (a hat and clog) and some pretty spectacular mineralisation on the walls we passed along a free-hanging traverse taking us back over the stope into another tunnel, which ended at another 50m pitch. Landing on another large ledge in the stope we made our way across an impressively long rope traverse across the stope wall and in to more tunnel, again showing fascinating mineralisation on the walls and floor. Arriving at a T junction, outby was explored to a now filled-in portal, while inby lead through more mineralisation, passing the remains of a wooden 'launder' (a wooden water channel) and after a while ended on a ledge in the stope some way up from the floor. We could see a tunnel opposite that is unexplored (a good winter bolting project) and a couple of other passages, but all requiring bolt climbs to access. We returned over the long traverse and descended a large and mobile slope of waste rock, eventually arriving on a platform above the large flooded engine shaft, with the remains of the rising main in-situ. A stop was had here for snacks and drinks. Progress was resumed with a short awkward pitch down to the water level, and an even more awkward swing in to a tunnel to get off the rope – hopefully without falling in the water. Arriving at a junction with a main haulage way we explored all the tunnels on this level, long passages and various climbs up were explored, again noting some that would require some aid to ascend. Making our way back to the engine shaft, we started our ascent with a careful climb of another very large, very

mobile slope of waste rock, arriving at some fixed rope that took us via traverses, climbs and pitches back to our ledge and rigging, completing the round trip. I followed Adrian out and Mandy and Matt de-rigged. Regrouping on the surface some excellent views of the Llanberis Pass were taken in while again we cooled off from the rather warm ascent, with Adrian noting that for such a large working there did not seem to be a huge amount of waste spoil / heaps on the surface – I have since discovered this is due to the bulk of the ore being taken away for smelting off site (the mine did have a stamp mill so crushing was done on site, although I am unsure if this was a later addition to the mine).



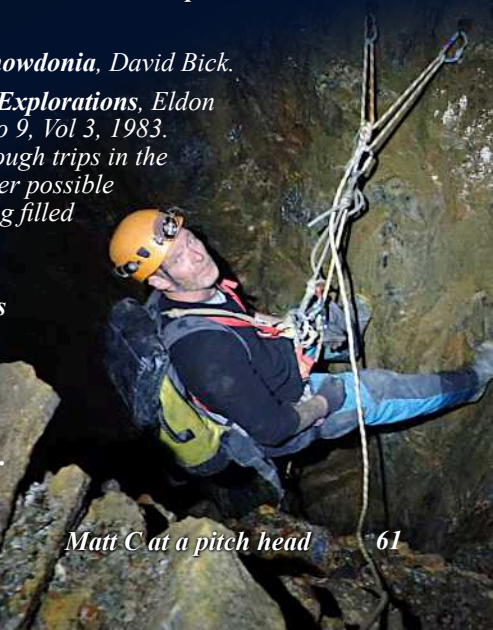
After returning to the vehicles and changing, a trip up the Pass to the pub in Nant Peris was enjoyed, before returning to the club hut to enjoy some excellent local pizza.

Left: Mandy and Matt on a stope traverse

References:

- The Copper Mines of Snowdonia, David Bick.*
- Llanberis Copper Mine Explorations, Eldon Pothole Club, Journal No 9, Vol 3, 1983.*
- The references to the through trips in the Eldon report are no longer possible due to the adits now being filled in / gated.*
- Survey and rigging topo for the Eastern workings available from Matthew Chinner.*

Access is sensitive, small parties advised.



Matt C at a pitch head

MILWR TUNNEL

by Gary Kiely

Saturday 10th June 2023

Andy Ley, Helen Nightingale, Jann Padley, Paul Stacey, Gary Kiely and three UCET members

Over the last few years, my ageing curiosity, ageing knees and general ageing body have appreciated the few mines that I have visited. I do find my nerdy self pondering the mechanics of the mines and the whole mining world when it was in full swing. So a visit to something a little different caught my attention.

The trip to the Bowline Climbing Club took several years, North Wales is not just South Wales and a little bit more, oh no... the road map lures you into a sense of orienteering denial. On arrival I was tired and wanted my bed, then Matt Chinner, who kindly organised the whole weekend, let me know that I would need to be leaving at 07.30 in the morning to get to the church car park to meet with three members of UCET who would be our guides.

It took a while to remember how to put on my SRT harness, which was recommended. We descended and headed off, straight away we were in a bit of knee deep water to keep us fresh. I felt we had a decent pace and it didn't take long to get to the top of the first ladder, but before we did, there were loads of bits of primitive mining equipment as we went past. However, our guides didn't make a big deal of this which made me think that there may be more later. The ladder layout was nice and logical, and obviously was pretty simple on the way down. One of the ladders was an original ladder made of wood and reinforced with metal, it looked in pretty good condition, and there was another ladder and another and another. There is a point while zipping down so many ladders that sensible head says "Hmmm that's a lot of ladder to go up later... you do realise you need to go back up?" There was a section of new ladders that were so well spaced that you could side-step from one to the other,

these were all roped for those who felt more secure being attached. Finally after almost 500ft of ladder descent we were on the level. We had just entered the Milwr Tunnel. Now, this was very different from anything I had seen before, it was like it had only shut down a few years ago. Huge pipes were stacked up on the sides with more large pipes running on the wall over the waterway, cables and insulators on the roof, and the odd train cart for minerals... and I thought that Raiders of the Lost Ark was fictional! It could have been filmed right here.

So just a brief description of how I understand the tunnel for those who have never been lucky enough to be there. The tunnel was built as a drainage system to drain the lower flooded sections of several mines in the area. It is about 10 miles long and empties the waters directly into the sea through doors that operate like a non-return valve. At one side is the drain/waterway and a narrow gauge train track runs parallel to the water. The track was designed to aid construction, but when the tunnel was complete it was used to easily move minerals to various shafts for extraction.

So we were off, like Thomas and friends racing down the tracks. Parts of the track were underwater, which was interesting, and sometimes the tracks were underwater with no gravel or terra firma underneath. Needless to say this slowed pace and focused the mind somewhat. One section had rail supporting concrete beams at odd intervals that spanned the waterway and the track. I have got good reach with my legs and was thankful of that. After getting a good bounce and rhythm going, I got to the end of that section and was very pleased with my efficiency, "oh yeah, I've still got it". This was quickly replaced by the guilt of having left a small child at home by mistake! Where was Helen and her tiny legs?... About 30 seconds behind me! No idea how... but my sense of



Left-Right: The ladders to Milwr Tunnel - Gary on suspended rails - Helen and some of the machinery still in situ.

Photos by Andy Ley except centre photo by Helen Nightingale

achievement diminished as the Rude Nora bounded gazelle-like towards me.

Despite what I had thought was a good pace, the leaders were in the shadows ahead. Jann and Andy stopped for a bit to wait for me, and I was pleased at this, however mutiny was in my head and I wanted to look at pretty things and electrical cables and steel beams absolutely covered from top to bottom in calcite and random hanging devices and all sorts of mining leftovers. So I asked my faithful messengers (Jann and Andy) to go forth and tell the others that I was bailing out of the rat race and studying the varying minerals in the rock around me, and that I was super happy to do that and knew my way out in case they were concerned.

So Helen started taking photos and I was pondering life in this tunnel 100 years ago. I was struck by how much the surrounding rock and minerals changed even in the space of 10 metres or so. It was like walking through a Battenburg cake. Eventually we arrived at a junction and the whole group was there, all appearing out of different tunnels. I felt a bit guilty about having slowed down the main party, but everybody was happy to hang around at this junction. We were shown into a siding/workshop which was complete with a main electrical intake and distribution system, massive battery chargers and batteries, and an almost complete lighting system with proper complete light fittings... As an electrician I was in nerdy heaven. At this point there was a massive shaft that went to the surface, no daylight so I will assume that the shaft has been capped. In the workshop was a very extensive and well stocked rescue store. I did comment that this did seem premature having a rescue store this early into the trip, on the scale of things it felt like having a rescue store at Baron's Chamber in Aggy... Very odd.

So, we all headed off again and I resumed my rebellious chilled pace. Nobody prepared me for what was just around the next bend... Yep, here were the

trains! Complete with batteries and carriages with seats etc, I mean it was more milk float than Tesla, but at least they probably worked without any Bluetooth or internet. There were more sections of aqueous track to navigate, but I was a pro now (in my head anyhow) so I bounded along nicely. After about 30 mins later, a bouncing light was heading towards us and it was one of the leaders letting us know to turn right at the next junction and meet them at Powell's Lode.

We followed commands and turned right. It was pretty pleasant going with the babbling of the stream by the path/railway. There were several huge rooms off to the left-hand side that were completely empty. All these rooms had iron and mesh door frames with grooves from old tracks that have since been removed. Odd lines of bricks on the floor had me rather confused, one of the rooms stank like somebody had burnt a load of rotten wood there recently, I later found out that these were the explosive storage rooms.

The tunnel became lower and all the ground had disappeared from under the tracks and the roof line lowered, so it was time to focus again as we hopped between track supports. Leaning against a wall for a breather and looking up is not for the faint hearted, you quickly realise that the roof is stabilised with jam sandwiches and chocolate hobnobs. It was not the best place to ponder life. The novelty of floating rail tracks wore off and I was happy to be on stone again. My sense of distance underground has never been great, so terms like "a long way" will have to do for now. So after a long way, we came to the compressor room at the bottom of a huge shaft with a bell at the bottom. We knew it was the compressor room as it had a sign displayed, and there were signs for other places here too, including our destination – Powell's Lode.

At this point there was a network of concrete walls used to manipulate the water flow and the stream swapped



The lake at Powell's Lode by Pete Knight (taken on a previous trip with the editors)

places with the railway so it was now on our left-hand side, why? I had nobody to ask, and forgot to ask later. We plodded on and the passage narrowed and there were less rooms and areas at the sides. I was concerned that our meeting up information was lacking in details, how was I to know when I was to get to Powell's Lode?

It was very obvious when I got there, it was a huge cavern, and the train tracks just disappeared into a wall. Lots of train tracks and some carriages (I know there is a proper name but today they are carriages). One corner of this enormous cavern had the most crystal clear still pool of water with a beautiful blue tinge. There was a log floating vertically, half above water and half below, it was perfectly motionless. This was both an eerie yet beautiful place... and a great place to rest, have some food and water and a little snooze.

Timing was perfect as about 15 mins later the rest of the party arrived from another tunnel having done a loop route to the same location. Everybody had a wander round and a little rest. My methods are catching! We headed back, it was "a long way". We all stopped at the start of the main tunnel, which is about 20 metres away from the last ladder that we came in on. I was apprehensive about the climb out as (if I was paying attention) there was something close to 150m of ladders to the entrance level. I was pleased that it was only the last ladder that really nailed my energy levels. I was at the back of the pack and chaperoned by one of the leaders, as all good cave leaders do. This was great as I was able to ask loads of questions. On the way in the first horizontal

level didn't take long to get to the first ladder. It took an age on the way out. As I stuck my head out of the gated entrance, I was greeted by a muggy atmosphere laden with the smell of ozone and a roll of thunder in the not so distant. The thought of changing in a thunderstorm focused my mind and knackered legs to get me up the hill to the car, and we all managed to get changed just in time



*Interesting fungus formation
by Helen Nightingale*

before the heavens opened. Off to the pub for beer and medals after. Apparently we did walk "a long way", a figure of 14km or something daft like that was thrown around... but it was at the pub so that may need some verification.

Thanks To Matt Chinner for organising the weekend and to the three super-human speedy cavers from UCET who looked after us and were a mine of information... sorry, I've waited all evening to get that one out.

Croesor – Rhosydd *by Adrian Fawcett*

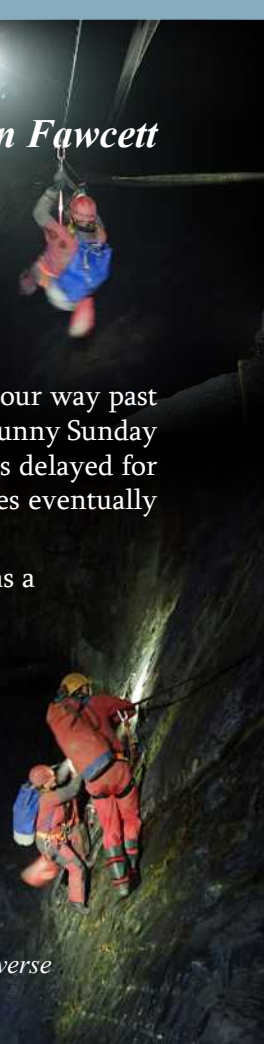
EXTENDED THROUGH TRIP

Party – Adrian Fawcett, Mandy Voysey, Matt Voysey and Matt Chinner

After negotiating our way along the scenic but tortuous roads of Snowdonia, and our way past dozens of cyclists participating in a road race, we arrived at Croesor. Despite it being a sunny Sunday in June, there was still space in the village car park. Our departure from said car park was delayed for some time while we emptied out Matt C's van looking for his glasses – which Matt V's eagle eyes eventually spotted in the undergrowth the other side of a low wall where they had accidentally been knocked.

It was a steady grind uphill for 2 miles in the heat of the day to reach Croesor Slate Mine, but it was a good path with fine views across the valley to Cnicht, so a pleasant walk nonetheless. On arrival at the Croesor entrance we were treated to a welcome blast of cool air. A short trudge up the adit led us to a steep slope, and the original through trip route on the left. We ignored that and carried on up the slope, because our objective was to follow the new route – which had been engineered since our last trip there. And very impressive it is, too.

After some traversing, the next obstacle is a sooty and greasy old ventilation shaft, with a traverse line across it. After that, things took a turn for the better, as we arrived at the first of three zip wires. Each crosses a chasm 15 to 20 metres wide, to the continuation of the passage the other side. The substantial array of bolts at each end, plus a pair of safety lines, inspires



confidence – but it still feels a leap of faith to push off into the void. The third zip line ended with a transfer to a somewhat flimsy ladder, a bit like an electron ladder, except the sides were made of 1 inch webbing. 5 metres up, and we were back into solid passage. Some abseiling, more traversing, and another zip wire followed – but the cargo net, it would seem, was probably a myth. The remains of a 130-year-old timber bridge ran parallel to one of the traverse lines, equipped with notices warning us not to touch it so that others could enjoy it until, one day, it inevitably plunges to the bottom.

Arriving at the zip wire over the lake, we were now back on the original route. This is now paralleled by a postman's bridge – a pair of wires, one to stand on, and one to hold on to – as an alternative way to cross. The obstacle course continues, with a suspension bridge, consisting of an extension ladder dangling off 6mm cords, crossing a void spanned by ancient timbers, and finally a lake crossed in a canoe, two at a time. Abseiling down an overly thick rope into a boat which is drifting away from you is not easy to get right, and is not covered in most SRT training courses. Soon after that, we crossed into Rhosydd Mine. At various places, daylight streams in from large entrances at the top of boulder slopes, but none of these were our exit. We also climbed an incline, where the headgear, trolley and counterweight were all still there to see – once we'd figured out how it worked. Down another incline, and we arrived at the adit back to the surface – further than it looked, as the semicircle of daylight at the end only gradually got bigger as we walked towards it.

Back out in the warm afternoon sunshine it was another uphill walk before dropping down the other side to re-join our outward route at Croesor Mine, and a long cruise back down the path to the village.



*Adrian on suspension bridge - Mandy with Rhosydd incline headgear - Matt C and Adrian on Bridge of Death
Photos by Matt Voysey*

CSS MEETS 2023

October 20th-22nd – Derbyshire Weekend

A weekend staying at the Orpheus hut in Monyash. There will be a big SRT trip on Saturday; suggestions include Maskhill/Oxlow exchange, Nettle Pot or Rowter Hole. There will also be a trip to Bagshawe Cavern visiting the formations in the gated sections of the cave. On Sunday we have a leader for the 2010 extensions in Water Icicle Close Cavern and an additional trip may also take place. 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 to celebrate his 50th anniversary of caving with CSS. Paul plans to replicate his first ever caving trip to Agen Allwedd's Second Choke and intends going a bit further than that this time, he would be delighted if others are able to join him. There may be cake!

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 decided.

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

See in the New Year at Whitewalls, activities to include caving, booze and fun.

January 26th-28th 2024 – Annual Dinner and AGM Weekend

The Annual Dinner is now confirmed for Saturday 27th at The Bear in Crickhowell at 7:30pm and there'll be a variety of caving trips going on beforehand, including the traditional Annual Aggy Bat Count. The AGM will take place on Sunday morning at 11am. Dinner menus and AGM information to be circulated closer to the event.

If you would like to know more about this years' club meets or have a caving trip you'd like to suggest, contact John Newton at meets@chelseaspelaeo.org

The Ups and Downs of Retirement Life

by Charles Bailey

The year didn't start well. Firstly, I was hindered by a big toe abscess spoiling the fun following a Daren Cilau camp in February. The skiing holiday a couple of weeks later inevitably knackered it again. This was followed by a knee injury early April. On the back of this I was determined to make the best of the next two months before playing nurse / housemaid / chef / dog walker at the end of June, as Judith was due to have a shoulder operation. Smelling freedom and good health I headed for the hills – with a hankering for bagging the highest altitude caving through trips in Scotland and Wales.

The Toe Returns: Daren Cilau – 14th to 16th April

Keen for a return, I got to Daren early for a sublime trip in, and managed to set up camp ahead of Matt, Mandy and Adrian who arrived 2 hours later. Despite various efforts, the tilly lamps proved resistant to fettling, so we had a feeble glow at best for the 'evening'. The previous camp in February had been part exploratory, sniffing out digging prospects, such that we had 4 good targets to play with. Saturday morning we were up and at it in moderately good time due to less plan related faffing and even an edge of enthusiasm.

One prime spot was a dig situated on the Unnamed Canyon shelf consisting of a very narrow entrance between jaws. All Mandy and me needed to do was dig out the sand / mud ledges on either side and we were in. Unfortunately, they turned out to be rock. Despondent, and needing mental reinforcements we moved onto the dig's smaller brother further along the ledge – with the inevitably similar result. Matt and Adrian had a fresh go with smaller bodies later – Matt declared it tight (that has to be a first!) although Adrian claims it's getting bigger beyond. How big remains to be seen.

Enough horizontal flapping, we decided to make use of my size and go vertical. The first dig, a poke in a steeply inclined rift, started to get hairy as most of the rocks were fist to Daren Drum size. Sanity prevailed before good progress could be made. The second, a sand dig at the end of half mile, had entertained us for a while due to some interesting characteristics. This ascended at 30 degrees in a sand swim, with easy digging but even easier entrance blocking. If that wasn't enough, the entrance to the dig was squarely on a lined traverse, so care on exiting was mandatory due to the 10m+ drop beneath. On the plus side, it made spoil disposal a doddle. The big issue with this fun packed dig, was that it had finished ascending at 30 degrees and was now descending at a similar angle, with digging life now resembling working in an egg timer. Luckily, at the apex of the dig was a draughting aven. All it needed was someone tall to invoke the poke / dodge routine. Progress was made for 1.5m before I ran out of bravery points.

So a fun camp, without any major dig positives, and a few leads to return to. On the bright side, at least my toe didn't explode this time.



Top: Charles on Crystal Oxbow rope climb on the way to Nameless Canyon

Bottom: Mandy and Charles in Nameless Canyon



Charles and Judith on Brauch na Frithe

Up, up and away: Scotland in May

We traditionally we head north of the border for most of May, and although objectives always vary, this year was no exception.

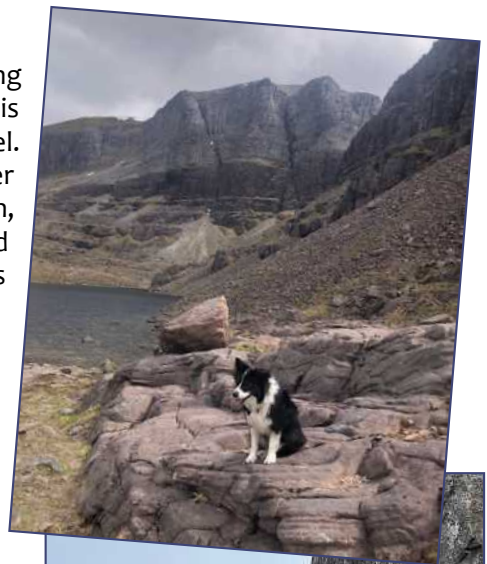
First up was a week on Skye in the relative luxury of a nice cottage with my sister and brother-in-law Helen and Ken. Although not really adventure types, they'd been keen to visit the island as I'd obsessed about it for years. Skye has become fashionable, and some of the tourist hotspots can be rammed, so we elected to take them to niche out of the way places, yet to be discovered by the hordes. They were happy then to be pointed in the direction of the hot-spots, and volunteered to manage our Border Collie Soay (named after an Island to the south of Skye – I did say I was

obsessed!). That freed us up to escape up the Cuillin hills.

We decided to repeat and extend a trip we'd done 15 years ago, involving a high grade scrambling traverse of part of this wondrous ridge. This including an abseil of 20m at an altitude of around 900m above sea level. Back in 2008, Judith had had a 'training course' on a valley level 3m boulder as a prelude. On the ridge, this had been done with sling, crab, Italian hitch, no helmet and a simple instruction not to let go of the rope. She achieved the abseil with little fuss – quite impressive for a first ever proper abseil! This time we pimped things up with a proper harness, helmet and grigri.

The route took us up Sgurr nan Gillean via the 'Tourist Route', and after a super picnic, a descent from this peak where we also completed a through trip of arguably the highest 'cave' in the British Isles at 950m! Then followed the abseil descent off the knife edge ridge, along under Am Basteir and over to Bruach na Frithe. Having ticked off the second Munro, we descended initially on scruffy scree, to a lovely stream walk off for 3 miles. All in perfect walking conditions and 75% of the day with the mountains pretty much to ourselves.

We rounded off our Scottish tour with time in the Torridon mountain, staying at the excellent Youth Hostel there, then the Grampian SG hut at Elphin. Gloucester SS were there too to add to the fun. A cracking few days were had, including ascent of Suilven and Stac Pollaidh.



Top: Soay at Coire Mhic Fhearchair, Torridan

Above: Charles on the through trip, Sgurr nan Gillean



Above: Stac Pollaidh - Right: Soay map reading



OCC Tourist Trip: Daren Cilau: 3rd to 4th June

I heard from some Orpheus Caving Club friends about their attempted trip to Hard Rock Café that had been partly successful, but fraught with navigational delays and resulted in them just getting to the Time Machine. Offering to organise a guided tour, with a HRC one night camp, free three course dinner and cooked breakfast, they were hooked! Phil Wall, Pete Wag, Paul Thorne and me selected a date to suit, booked Whitewalls, and commenced the planning. Bearing in mind this was their first overnight camp, I had to think this through from the ground up (or is it down?). My 33 years of Daren camping assumed knowledge had to be parked, sifted through and questioned to advise them accordingly. I put together a list of the basics for them to take in, and suggested what to pack it in. None of the three had taken a full tackle sack through the entrance before, and discovered the fabulous asset called a Daren Drum. I took in an extra sleeping bag and food stocks on trips in advance. They brought welcome food donations, determined not to simply be passengers.

We all met up on Friday the 2nd, and in providing loan Daren drums, I made a bit of an idiot of myself by giving Paul one without an O-ring! Luckily, he checked beforehand, and a replacement was gained avoiding damp kit. Saturday morning, with limited faffing, we were all in the entrance by 10:30. My heavily food laden tackle sack was a bit of a drag due to the incredibly low water levels, but we made decent progress. I managed to pick up an additional 'bag of bags' from big chamber and take to the rubbish pile at the top of White Passage, to help the post-flood tidy up rubbish removal. Pressing on, they gracefully declined a bonus diversion to Helibeds, as they agreed they'd done with crawling for the day. The inbound trip had taken 7.5 hours, with plenty of poking around and tour guide commentary.

The chaps assisted ably at camp whenever possible, including lighting both a primus and tilly. Good effort! Later, having been fed on superb mature cheddar and olives, falafel with mango chutney, lentil curry and sponge cake (4



The OCC get the customary warm welcome to Hard Rock

courses technically!) we had a wander down King's Road to St David's 'Streamway' - notable for the lack of flowing water. Maybe one day we'll be able to walk out to the Clydach this way? On the way we admired the dark cricket pitch and thought provoking roof collapse from the earth tremor a decade or so ago.

Sunday morning, my guests were greeted by tea in bed, followed by a cheese omelette, sausage and wrap breakfast. To their immense credit as camp newbies, they got stuck into assisting with camp chores whenever feasible, meaning we were packed up and underway in good time. A grand tour then followed initially Western Flyover, then via Eastern Flyover to Half Mile. The traverse at the end of Half Mile proved a bit of a challenge for the three amigos, particularly as Paul isn't the tallest. Joint tactics served to get him across. We then continued via Aggy Passage, Unnamed Canyon and the Meeting Room, all the while pointing out the many and various digs. All in all a super trip was had, which I'm pleased to say worked out as hoped and planned. Monday morning they creaked and groaned a bit out of the comparative luxury of Whitewalls bunks, but regaled tales of their fabulous excursion, later writing up trip notes for the Orpheus newsletter concluding :

Paul: "Overall, I found this 34 hour trip (about 15 hours of non-rushed actual caving) quite challenging, but also very rewarding, the Hard Rock Café camp experience being the highlight with such a close knit team of us together."

Phil: "A great trip. It will remain long in the memory."

Job done, although I did admit afterwards that the mature cheddar had a use by date of May. Thank goodness no one asked me which year.

It's caving, but not as we know it: Snowdonia 12th to 14th June

Dara O'Briain (Irish comedian) once said the melting point of an Irishman is 30°C. It applies to this Yorkshireman too. However, with blue sky weather forecast for a few days, I couldn't resist the temptation of some quality scrambling. I'd just have to work around the heat wave.

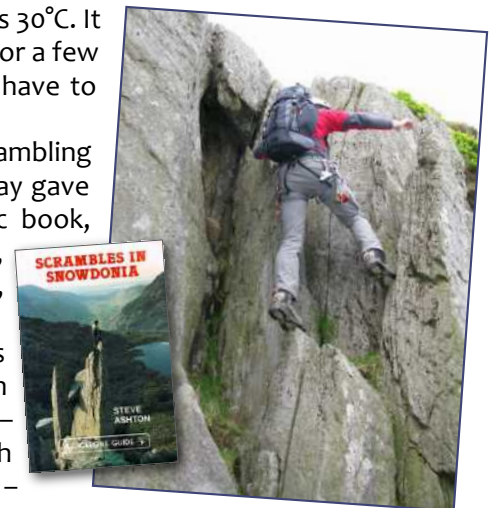
A couple of decades ago I was taken with the fabulous top end scrambling opportunities in Snowdonia, and working some of the time near Colwyn Bay gave me the chance to pop out on summer evenings. Steve Ashton's classic book, *Scrambles in Snowdonia*, inspired me to try some off the beaten track routes, and eventually I'd managed 68 out of the 69 routes solo in Steve's book, including some graded as moderate or difficult climbs, many several times.

The plan was to revisit some of the daring do's from when I was 20 years younger, fitter and a lot more flexible. In the hottest June on record, with wisdom and guile, what could possibly go wrong? To start with the weather – the evening of the 12th tested my old Eurohike tent with torrential rain, which it repelled admirably. The problem was I was still in the shower block – blocked indeed! After 15 minutes of lightening watching, I just got wet dashing to the tent.

The general strategy was to camp at Dolgam, near Capel Curig ensuring a short commute. I'd be up at 5am, off by 6am, and tackle north facing crags. I'd make sure I have emergency kit, rope and abseil kit just in case, and several litres of fluid packed. The rucksack might be a bit big, but hey! With a bit of luck I'd be smugly in the pub by mid-afternoon.



Atop Maybe Tower Rib



Charles on Milestone Buttress in 2010

The 13th went pretty much to plan initially, tackling some old favourites – Tryfan's Millstone Buttress and Continuation routes, both grade 3's. In 2010 Judith and I had done this roped, and when she was struggling for reach on the exposed and thought provoking Continuation, I'd offered to lower her "like a sack of spuds". It's probably not the best thing to say to your Irish future wife, but it won the day for motivational speaking – she got up.

Having topped Tryfan via the North Ridge, I headed for the shade of the imposing Alphabet Slabs of Glyder Fach. My target was the Chasm Face route, another grade 3, steep, exposed and intricate, picking a route up between proper climbs on either side. Whereas I'd done Millstone Buttress at least a dozen times, my only ascent of Chasm Face was in 2004. Steve's book states that it's best avoided in wet weather, and at the crux there's a cleft to crawl through, followed by a chimney climb up. Furthermore, he advises "claustrophobic, overweight or overclad scramblers" of an abseil bail out route. I'd made notes too from 2004 –

“Excellent, but expect some caving! Don’t try with a big rucksack”.

I didn’t take much note of either Steve’s or my own recommendations, and regretted it. Firstly, the start up Main Gully, a 40m grade 2 introduction, was still damp from the overnight rain. Luckily the steeper grade 3 above was tinder dry. Secondly, a bit of caving in shorts and T-shirt isn’t that smart. Thirdly, leave your overly large rucksack at home, or failing that, tie on a haul line beforehand rather than flapping around in the cave. Scuffed, mucky and sweaty, I emerged from what must be the hardest caving through trip in Wales 850m above sea level! Then payback time – a wonderful scramble to virtually the top of Glyder Fach, followed by a long and easy walk off and couple of fine pints in the Tyn-y-coed hotel.

After a decent nights sleep, the early start / north face routine was applied to a longer day with multiple classics. I started in the wonderful valley past Llyn Ogwen, giving a wave to a couple of climbers who’d made an earlier start. The scrambling took in the Idwal Staircase and its own continuation, then a dip into the little visited isolated upper cwm to ‘Maybe Tower Rib’. The latter, another grade 3, I’d done in mist almost exactly 20 years earlier, and last visited 18 years ago to much better views. Today’s matched them – all the way beyond Bethesda to Anglesey, then once at the top of Glyder Fawr, Snowdon (or Yr Wyddfa as we’re now expected to call it) and South Snowdonia (Eryri).

With the sun on my back, I skirted around and descended Senior’s ridge (very apt) to the start of Cneifion Arete. I’d passed this already on the way to Maybe Tower, and knew the sun would be almost high enough to be in my eyes on the ascent. However, this is technically the hardest ‘scramble’ of my day, with the initial wall being a moderate climb, and the rest a sustained grade 3. There was to be no faffing, but definitely plenty of care and attention – my climbing daughter Jess had informed me that an experienced climber half my age, Thomas Furey, fell to his death here last October.

The arete isn’t technically that hard, but a vertical start, off balance chimney mid-section, and then very exposed moves on the right near the top do demand sustained concentration. The high sun was a bit of an obstruction at the end, but the satisfaction at my 6th ascent was palpable! I celebrated



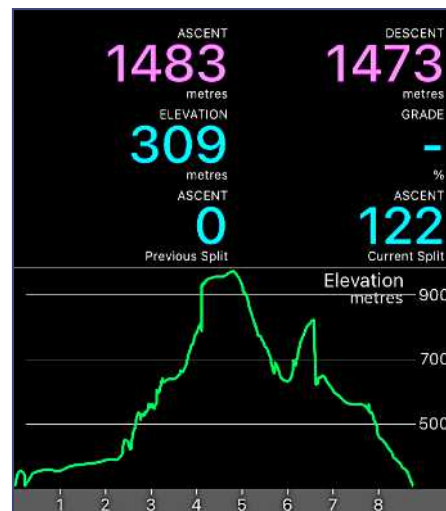
Calorie Replacement Therapy

with a litre of water, a sandwich and snacks behind a shady rock. Finally, a descent was made via the False Gribin ridge scramble to Llyn Bochlwyd, to pass my first humans since the two climbers.

Planning to drive home later in the day in a hot car, a beer would have to wait. Instead, I headed for the Moel Siabod Café in Capel Curig and the biggest scones you’ll find for calorie replacement therapy. This was washed down with tea, pondering the 69th scramble which is on the cards for 2024 with Jess. Unlike my scone, some things are worth sharing.



Snowdonia Day 2
Above: Route Taken
Below: Altitude of Route



Photos: Daren Cilau by Matt Voysey - Scotland and Snowdonia by Charles, Judith Bailey and Jess Bailey

Got a Dig in Need of Some Rope?

If the answer is yes, then you’re in luck! The club has recently retired a number of lengths of Edelrid static rope, which though no longer suitable for SRT, could still be put to good use for horizontal skip pulling or any other non-safety critical aspect of digging. This has been labelled as digging rope and is now stored in the tackle cupboard under the stairs. Please help yourself.

Artwork: Digging ‘Where the Sun Don’t Shine’ - Daren Cilau
by Mark ‘Gonzo’ Lumley

35,000 year old discoveries in WOGAN CAVERN PEMBROKE CASTLE

by Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley



Above:
Pembroke Castle, showing the entrance of Wogan Cavern.

Below:
Looking past the Finds table towards the entrance above the moat

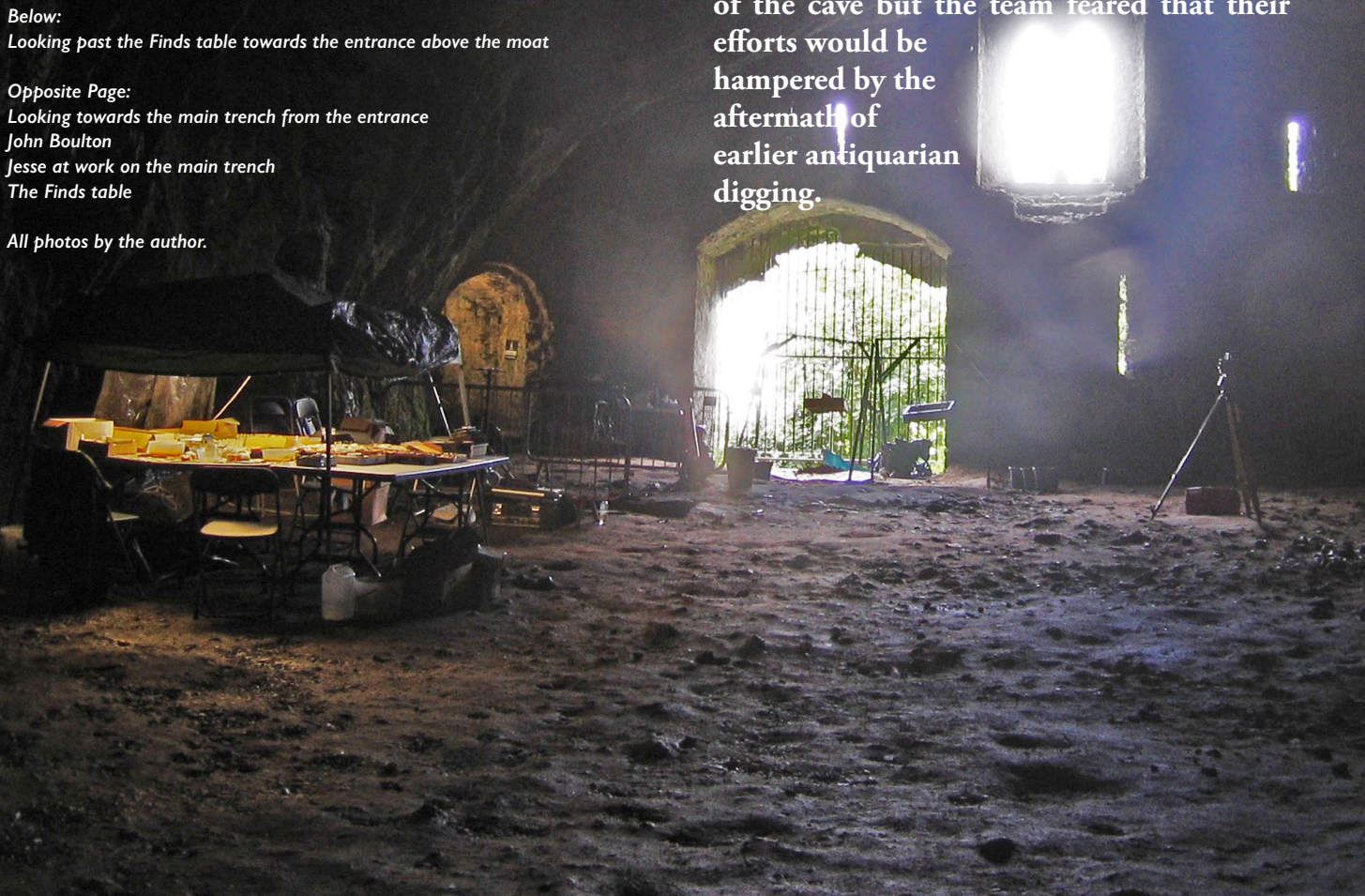
Opposite Page:
Looking towards the main trench from the entrance
John Boulton
Jesse at work on the main trench
The Finds table

All photos by the author.

In 2021 John Boulton, a Devon Speleological Society caver, archaeologist (and occasional Daren digger!), together with fellow archaeologist Rob Dinnis and a small team of cave excavators sunk their first trench in the floor of the impressively large, dry chamber, known as Wogan Cavern, beneath Pembroke Castle.

Located at the head of a tidal reach, in the cliff beneath the castle, the cave has probably been used for the offloading and storage of goods since the inner bailey was first built in 1093.

A spiral staircase leads up into the keep. Little is known about the earlier history of the cave but the team feared that their efforts would be hampered by the aftermath of earlier antiquarian digging.



CAVERN

A pristine, 20cm thick, stal floor was almost immediately encountered and hopes were raised that any finds beneath this barrier would be well preserved. On breaking through the stal layer the team were delighted to discover a thin layer rich in Mesolithic finds, including bone and flint shards, dating to around 9,000 BCE.

Beneath this find-rich Mesolithic layer was a deep unit of glacial Pleistocene deposits, the top part of which was almost entirely free of bones and artefacts. However, further work in 2022 and this summer (2023), with a larger team made up of local volunteers and archaeologists from universities across Britain, revealed further concentrations of worked stone and bone fragments, including the bones of woolly mammoth, woolly rhinoceros, horse and reindeer.

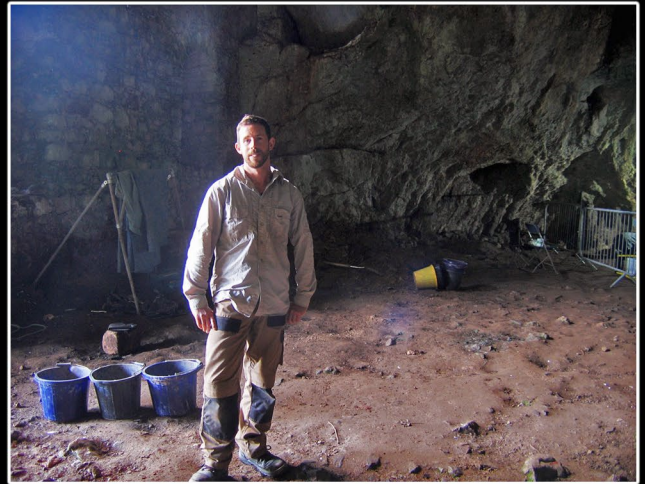
The team thinks that the oldest stone tools found so far date to around 35,000 BCE. Significantly, now at 1.6m, their original trench is still revealing numerous finds and continues downward.

This summer John, Rob and the team also opened a trench on the opposite, western, side of Wogan Cavern, to see if the artefacts were dispersed equally around the chamber and were pleased to find that, beneath the same pristine stal floor, more Mesolithic flints and bone were apparent.

In contrast, a trial dig in the middle of the chamber revealed signs of earlier excavation but will be continued to see if the ground lower down is undisturbed.

Cave sites such as this, in such a seemingly pristine state of preservation, are extremely rare in the UK and, with finds of such antiquity, make Wogan Cavern a site of international importance.

Work in the cave will continue. Further work later this year is planned, as is another excavation in summer 2024.



THE MINESHAFTS PROJECT

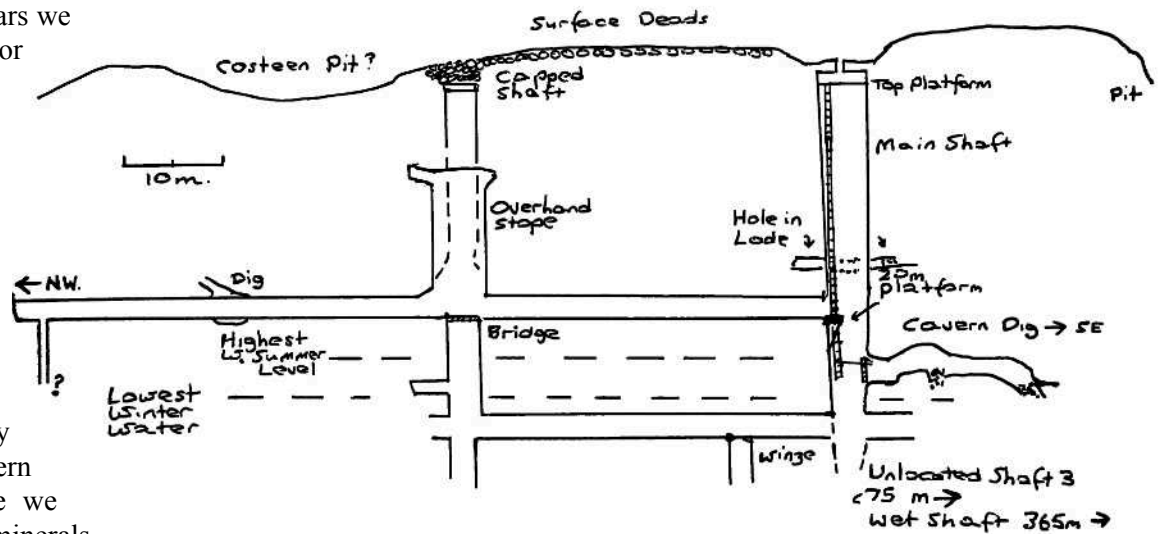
by Nick Chipchase

Well I have to call it that for the moment as we are still operating under the terms of our licence. Our three year term is up in April 24. What happens then I do not know; maybe a short extension or closure of the project. Closure would mean that we are free to publish all material no longer anonymised. Downside being that we can't see the landowner wanting to take on the access. From my point of view it is the responsibility of a huge amount of engineering I have designed and had fitted (purely for my own use, I state categorically).

In two and a half years we have opened three major shafts plus a smaller ventilation shaft. Initially from a caving standpoint we were looking for caverns discovered in the mine c. 1795. It's become more than that. It's an exercise in mining history, local geology and hypogenic cavern development, for here we have voids and minerals formed by upwelling water highly charged with chemicals that create the voids and mud filled cavities. Think Pen Park Hole and even Lechuguilla, certainly Holwell Cavern and perhaps many Devon caves. It's a branch of cave science that is rapidly expanding. Andy Farrant speaks about this at Hidden Earth 2023.

Currently we are excavating infilled hypogenic voids trending SE and following a byrite lode. The miners mention this lode as being seen in the caverns. This lode they called "The Heavy Spar". We have exhausted all possibilities going NW, but in doing so we discovered a nice dry level running off the shaft at 20m depth. That came to a second shaft that we had to bridge. Above the

bridge is a high level stope. All involved engineering, sometimes with my seven metre telescopic ladder (very handy for cave exploration). A fine coffin level follows the bridge, but ends in a deep winze down to water (the lower levels were originally pumped). Some extreme acrobatics by Brian Johnson got him part-way up the second shaft where he could see a large cap but no caverns. The main shaft is similarly capped. We got to that after digging some three metres down.



The main shaft is all laddered. We have an upper platform and another at 20m to access the dry level. Across the wide shaft and above the water is an alcove which is natural. We built a traverse pole to reach that. Onward from here is the main dig heading SE. All but one chamber has been dug out to a large size. The chamber was in fact a nice roomy void where we now have lunch. The caverns are thought to be between here and the next as yet un-located shaft 75m away. All spoil goes down the flooded main shaft, initially helped by a long pipe and then a child's slide – both now removed as we have a skip shuttle system running on conveyor belt.



Left to Right: The Lunch Room, our first natural void - The main dig, with lode left - The slide and pipe (now removed)

We are hampered by the variable water level, and last year saw a rise and fall of 7m. We got within a half metre of the main flooded adit which Connor Roe pushed to an unsafe area. At high level the cavern dig is flooded out. I have been monitoring levels with a graph over the last two years. Essentially the main mine adit has remained flooded in all of that time. Efforts to clear it from the portal end got us some 60m to a ventilation shaft which we opened. We used a digger to clear the collapsed cut and cover lower section and installed pipes and a new 7m deep manhole. Many arduous hours were spent digging the adit terminal choke which gave ominous rumblings without us getting forward at all. With up to 6m of water head beyond, it was rather worrying. We dug out some five cubic metres in bags which one day translated to a five cubic metre sized hole on the surface. All very embarrassing and timely to get stuff to fill it back in. Now whether all of this adit tinkering has helped the water flow we really don't know. It's still running much as before maybe but certainly continues to drain the whole

mine before the input exceeds the output.

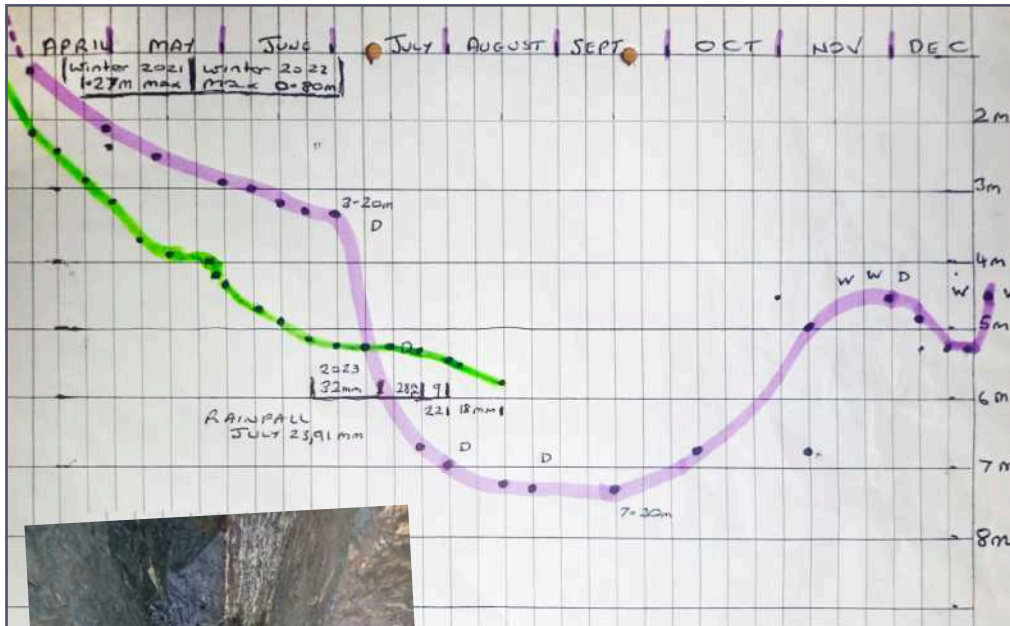
Another shaft was opened much further up the adit.

That's 365m away in a straight line. Again this was laddered with a top traverse platform and a halfway switch over stage. Total depth 20m. Initially it was flooded but to our amazement, dried out to a solid floor composed of mud and timbers stripped from the shaft during wet times over 200 years. When dry we could see where the water was going down a hole in the floor. Now at low water we are digging downwards hoping to find the adit. We have reached water again hoping that it will drop as it did last year. A complex frame of scaffolding and timber has been built at the bottom. In winter the shaft takes a high volume of sub surface drainage from the fields above. At the bottom it's like being in a rainstorm and best avoided.



Switch over pole in the wet shaft. Traverse platform and cap above.

Work continues now in late summer racing against the impending autumn rise in water level and the end of our three year licence next year. Maybe we will never find the mythical caverns. It ceases much to matter now. We have some 200m of two hundred year old mine, two impressive laddered shafts, a heck of a lot of "engineering" (feeding my obsession with ladders and scaffolding – you should see Vurley). Three of us are over 70. We made some good friends with the locals. What else is there to do?



Left: Graph showing 2022 (purple) and 2023 (green) main shaft water levels.

Previous page: Sketch section of the main mineshaft.



Left: The heavy spar lode. Right: Shoring in the wet shaft dig.

Photos, graph and sketch by Nick Chipchase



Trip to Spaderunner

The end of Daren Cilau *by Alex Randall*

With the Beast of Llangattock running race taking part on the hillside, two cavers made their way to Daren Cilau entrance for their own underground Beast of Llangattock.

At about 28km total length Daren Cilau is not the longest cave in South Wales, but with both arduous dry entrances at one end of the system and the wet entrance only being available to fully competent cave divers, the far reaches of the cave are some of the most remote places in UK caving. The current end of the cave, Spaderunner, is approximately 10km from the nearest dry entrance, little of which is considered easy caving. The obvious challenge being – can we get there and back in a day?

At the entrance Adrian Fawcett, the only other person keen enough to turn up for such an endeavour, headed in first. Much of my recent caving has not included much sustained crawling so the entrance crawl felt tough, but with only small bags we were through in under 50 minutes and onto the logbook at Big Chamber Nowhere Near the Entrance in just over an hour. Respectable but not rapid, this would be a marathon not a sprint.

Both being regular campers we got our heads down and made quick progress to the Hard Rock Café. So much so I didn't even notice the Bonsai Tree on the way past. The café appeared closed, so we had a quick snack from our bags then headed out through the sand swims to the Rock Steady Cruise, which is always a pleasure, apart from the Peace Pipe. This sharp Z bend is passed by those with short legs by simply crawling as if there is no obstacle. On the other hand, I have to curl into a ball at the apex of each bend to get my longer legs through here. This fun is followed by Miami Vice and Acupuncture Passage which is less pleasurable with very low but straightforward crawls. By the end of the snaggy Ankle Grinder Bypass we had finally dried out from the entrance series, just in time for the waist deep duck that leads to 7th Hour Sump and the last fresh water before the end of cave.


From here the short climb of Jacob's Ladder leads up to the Restaurant at the End of the Universe, and our second food stop. A time check showed our efficient progress had continued, getting here in under 4hrs. From here on the passage is back to mostly walking, with a few fixed handline climbs and constrictions, and takes you past Cordillera Blanca pretties before arriving at the pitch head to Big Chamber, which is the furthest into the cave I had been


until now. With the benefit of hindsight this should have been called Big Chamber Nowhere Near the Entrance!

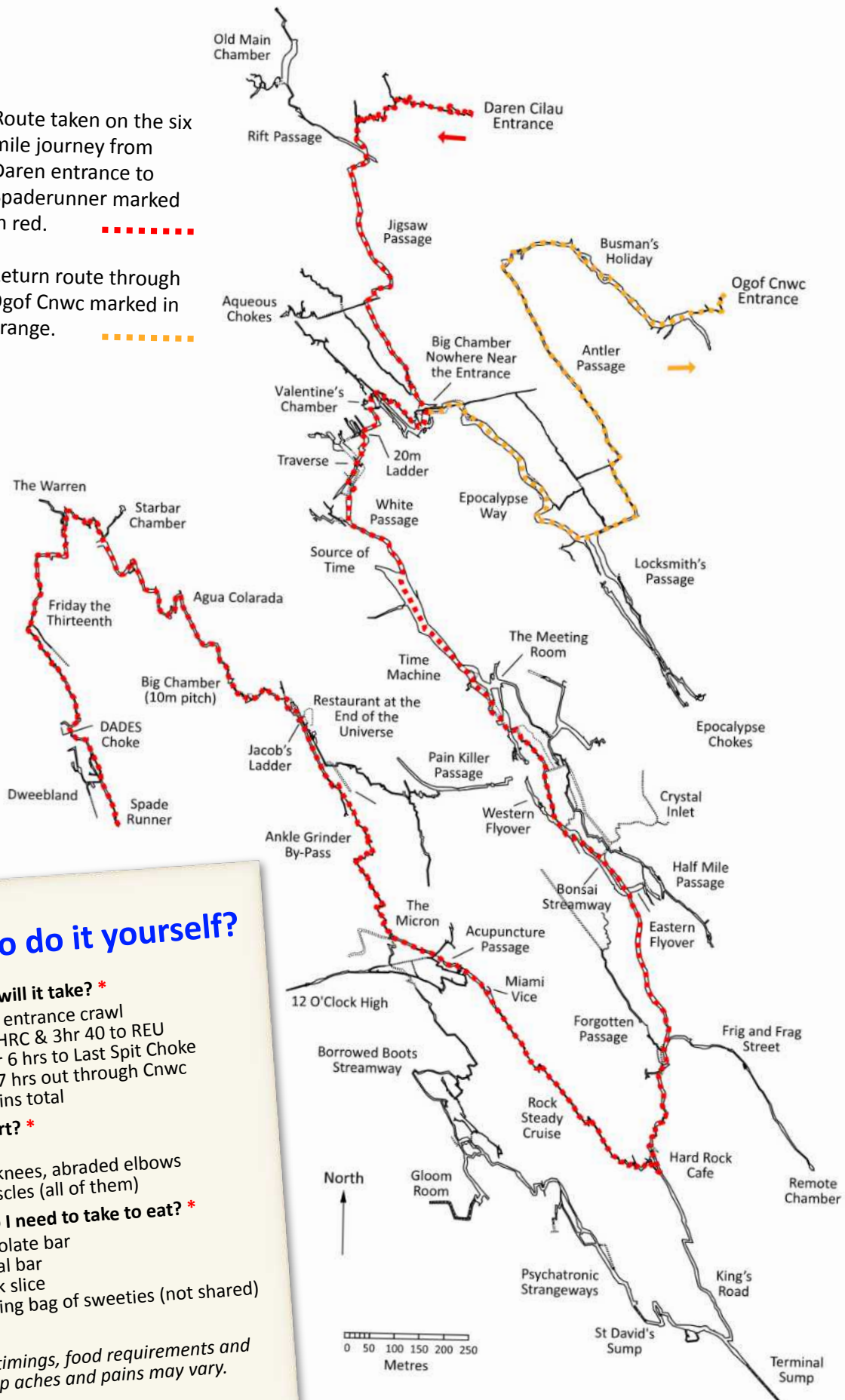
Here we had the only bit of faffing around on the whole trip. On a previous trip we had replaced the maillons on the ladder and stashed a rope nearby to rig a new traverse line to the pitch head. Not having a spanner with us to undo the maillons Adrian had to rig this by tying through the maillons which took a few goes with a lot of rope. The current ladder here is starting to look a bit worse for wear so we also measured this to procure a replacement. No one wants to be on the receiving end of a rescue call out if the ladder here failed!

From here to the end, we would be using the route description (available on the CSS website!) as Adrian has only been here a handful of times. From here through to Friday the Thirteenth all I remember is a lot of crouching interspaced with a bit of occasional walking and crawls that seem to go on forever. Adrian had pre-warned me that after the spacious passages of Friday the Thirteenth the difficulties became more sustained, almost all crawling with brief sections of respite and squeezes through boulders, with a few side passages – getting tantalisingly close to the far reaches of Agen Allwedd. From here the highlights are a mannequin's hand rising from the sand clutching a toy car and a Land's End tiger shell a stone's throw from the end of the cave. A shade under six hours since leaving the daylight we reached the beautifully decorated final chamber. Wait. That's not right. The final uninspiring excavated chamber Last Spit Choke at the end of Spaderunner feels like a fitting destination to a largely pointless trip. The way on from here does not look entirely hopeless but would be a time-consuming dig for a very keen team – so will probably remain as the end of the cave for a while.

Knowing that the return journey would feel tougher than on the way in, we didn't loiter long. By the time we got back to the logbook at Big Chamber Nowhere Near The Entrance my knees and elbows felt like I was crawling on Lego blocks, so we decided to go out the Cnwc entrance, with the penalty of miles of tedious slippery boulder hopping in return for a bit less crawling. As with every part of Daren it does get better, but first it gets worse. In this case the worse was the last wet muddy crawl to surface, and the better being the still warm leftovers from the CUCC group staying in the hut.

Route taken on the six mile journey from Daren entrance to Spaderunner marked in red. 

Return route through Ogof Cnwc marked in orange. 



Want to do it yourself?

How long will it take? *

47 minute entrance crawl
 2hr 20 to HRC & 3hr 40 to REU
 Just under 6 hrs to Last Spit Choke
 Just over 7 hrs out through Cnwc
 13 hr 5 mins total

Will it hurt? *

Yes
 Swollen knees, abraded elbows
 Sore muscles (all of them)

What do I need to take to eat? *

4 x chocolate bar
 3 x cereal bar
 2 x steak slice
 1 x sharing bag of sweeties (not shared)

* Your timings, food requirements and post trip aches and pains may vary.

Above: Simplified version of 'Daren Cilau - Full System Survey' available to download on CSS website, showing route taken.

Route descriptions and surveys for Daren Cilau and other Llangattock caves can be found at www.chelseaspelaeo.org

