

The background of the cover is a photograph of a cave interior. A large, textured rock formation with many stalactites hangs from the ceiling. A caver in a red jacket and helmet is standing in a pool of water at the bottom of the cave. The lighting is dramatic, with a bright light source illuminating the caver and the water.

**Volume 65  
Nos. 10-12  
Oct/Nov/Dec 2023**



**Eglwys Faen  
Derbyshire Meet  
Caving in Thailand  
Ogof Gwaliau Gwynion**

**CHELSEA SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY**



A person with a headlamp is exploring a dark, rocky cave. The person is on the left side of the image, and the cave walls are covered in stalactites and other rock formations. The lighting is dim, with the person's headlamp providing the main source of light.

# Contents

Rainy Day Cave Digging at Whitewalls	80-81
The Tinkle Chambers, Ogof Gwaliau Gwynion	81
Aquatic Adventures in Carlswark Cavern	82-83
Oxlow – Maskhill Exchange Trip	84-85
Water Icicle Close Cavern	86-87
CSS Meets 2024	87
Eglwys Faen – Part 1	88-89
Midnight Passage Dig Update	89
Tales from Thailand	90-94
New Library Acquisitions	95
Pen Park Hole	96
Grebe Swallet	97
Digging in Portland's Grove Cliff Caves	98
Joe's Corner	98
Index to Volume 65	99

A penguin is standing on a piece of white, textured material that looks like ice or snow. Next to the penguin is a small red gift box with a gold bow. The background is dark and indistinct.

*Front Cover: Rachel Smith in Tham Nam Hoo,  
Thailand by Martyn Farr*

*Above: Mandy Voysey in Mazeways, Dan yr Ogof,  
June 2023 by Matt Voysey*

*Left: Christmas at War of the Worlds, Ogof Draenen  
by Matt and Mandy Voysey*

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**Editorial** We're very fortunate in our club not only to have excellent writers and photographers but also plenty of enthusiastic cavers doing all kinds of caving activities to write about and take photos of. In this issue we proudly present more of your superb reports and pictures, and it's also particularly pleasing to see material arriving from new members and first time contributors. 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 or WeTransfer.

A PDF version of this newsletter is available to download from 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*

## EGLWYS FAEN CLEAN-UP

*by Mandy Voysey*

**3rd December, CSS Curry Weekend** - After the caving pursuits of the Saturday, which included an Ogof Draenen trip to Dollimore Series, a Daren Cilau to Cnwc through trip and an Agen Allwedd trip to de-rig the rope on the Lone Piton climb in Main Passage, a somewhat gentler exercise was on the cards for the Sunday. This was a trip to Eglwys Faen with a purpose to clean up all the remains of fires and burnt sticks that had appeared in the cave over the last few years and also to collect any litter in the cave while we were at it. A team of 11, consisting of Gary Jones, Carl Barnes, Jon Abbott, Tim and Alys Gibbs, Emyr Walters, Jamie Anderson, Matt and Mandy Voysey, Adrian Fawcett and Alex Randall, all headed into the cave with rubble sacks and tidied the Main Chamber.



*Cleaning one of the fire pits*

This didn't take too long so there was also time for a caving trip afterwards and we separated into different teams to thoroughly explore the cave. This was surprisingly arduous as we'd all forgotten just how much crawling and squeezing fun can be had beyond the Main Chamber and two of us abraded skin off our knees while doing it. Litter was also collected from below the popular picnic spots along the tramroad on the way back, so overall it was a very useful day. We aim to have another clean up to remove the recent charcoal graffiti from the walls of Main Chamber sometime in the summer when bats are not present.



*Eglwys Main Chamber*



*Adrian and Alex (in somewhat unusual caving attire)*



*Tim and Alys, Waterfall Entrance*

## 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)



# Rainy Day Cave Digging at Whitewalls

by John Stevens

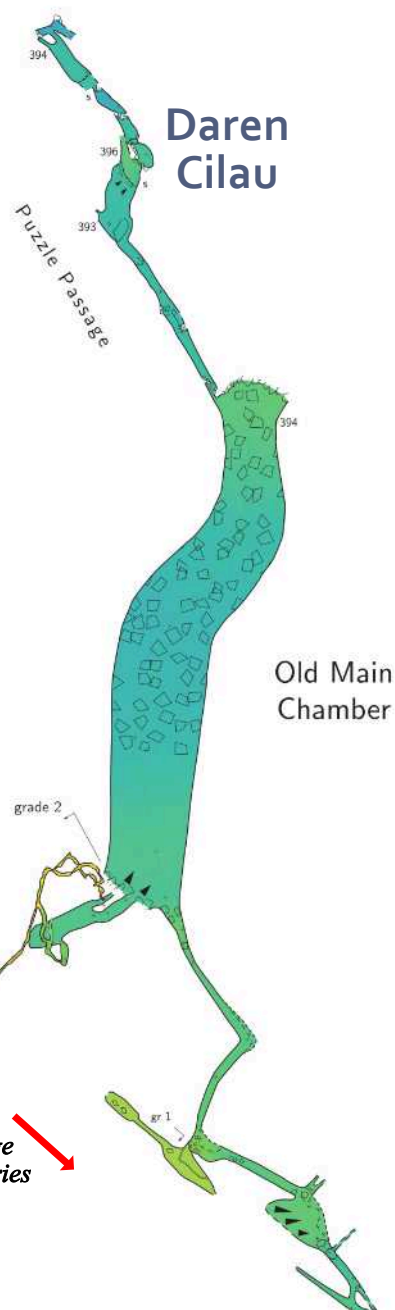
Mike Read, Andy Heath and I found ourselves at Whitewalls mid week with a forecast of heavy rain. We were after a medium length trip and considered various options. We could continue the survey in Craig a Ffynnon but were likely to get sealed in, and other similar surveying options were either too far or flood prone. We could dig in Spider Chamber again, but that was not a short trip. So Mike and Andy came up with the idea of looking at a couple of the smaller caves near Whitewalls. Both of these I had not visited in a considerable while, but there were still a couple things to check out in them.

First was Ogof Gwaliau Gwynion (OGG, Channer's Dig, Whitewalls Cave) which I had dug extensively back in the late 1980s to early 1990s changing it from a 30m cave to 180m one. When we stopped digging in the 90s, the draught was going through cracks in the roof and stacking room was becoming limited. The only option then was banging the roof we thought, but we had backfilled a very tight crawl to a choke that only Geoff Newton had reached. I thought that this could do with another look. As we now have plugs and feathers we could increase the crawl size after emptying it of backfill to re-reach the choke. I know that several other people had worked in there since I got distracted with other projects, so what the end was like now was going to be a bit of a surprise.

The three of us entered with crowbar, drill, hammer and feathers on 2nd August 2023. Tinkle Chambers have lost a lot of the formations they used to have, but the gours beyond them have stood up well to the passage of time and cavers. Once along Cauliflower Crawl, I went up the aven and saw it had been extended beyond a calcite blockage to an awkward squeeze and ascending rift. In the meantime Andy headed to the end with the drill. The old end was at the draughting roof cracks but it has since been dug on the left by others. This is a crawl about 6m long, which had regained the draught. While me and Mike reorganised the old spoil and tucked it away better, Andy was drilling away at the front. He had soon reduced the end calcite boulder to give a view ahead. Both Mike and I removed a couple more pebbles to see 2-3m ahead in a passage a metre or so wide but still too low. It does issue a good draught, so needs a proper session.

The next cave for the day was Pen Eryr. I think the last time I was in there was for a solo bat count many years ago. Many of the obstacles I failed to recall, and a couple of things I did recall I didn't recognise or we took a slight variation of route this time. We removed some old bang wire as it had been in there at least 30 years. On the way out I did recall one climb and interesting squeeze. I thought to myself, I'll do this one by squeezing over the top projection. Upon trying this I soon realised that I was not as thin or flexible as I once was, and had to opt for the sideward thrutching squeeze. A good refresh for the memory.

I had not converted the Ogof Gwaliau Gwynion survey into Therion. So this was done and the extra

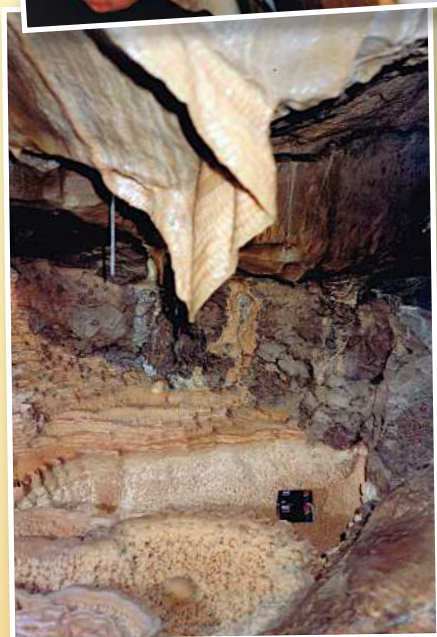


bits I had noted added to it. Adding it to the redraw of the Daren Cilau survey gave a good idea of the gap between the two caves, 35m. Both ends look like sand filled passages on a similar level and both ends draught. To prepare the survey for the newsletter, I thought I better get round to sorting out the information I had for Easter Maze in Daren from around 1985. The old scanned notes had only a couple of passage widths. It was a grade 2 survey, so had no height variation. The widths came from Dave Ramsay's masters for the Daren Cilau survey. So a fair bit of the Easter Maze passage shape is a best guess, but it still looks interesting. If OGG did connect then it could open up the digs in this area to regular digging.

# The Tinkle Chambers Ogof Gwaliau Gwynion

The Tinkle Chambers in Ogof Gwaliau Gwynion were discovered on 13th October 1990 by John Stevens, Geoff Newton and Trevor Pritchard.

Here are the photos taken by John on the day of the breakthrough.



## **Left: Top - Bottom**

*Tinkle Chamber stal with Geoff Newton.*

*Curtain at start of the gour crawl, film box for scale, but that's no help for the younger folk!*

## **Right: Top - Bottom**

*Stal in Tinkle Chamber part 2.*

*Tinkle Chamber part 2 looking back to part 1.*

*OGG spoil heap. It's weathered in nicely after 30 years.*



# Derbyshire Weekend

*Storm Babet may have arrived in Derbyshire at the same time as CSS, but that didn't stop us having three days of caving fun while staying at the Orpheus club hut in Monyash. Flooded roads meant that not everyone was able to make it; but those that did enjoyed a bonus day of caving Friday, a wetter than usual SRT exchange trip and pub dinner on Saturday, and an interesting mix of mine and cave on Sunday. Here are the trip reports from the weekend.*

## AQUATIC ADVENTURES IN CARLSWARK CAVERN

*by Mandy Voysey*

Keen for a bonus trip on Friday, Jon, Emyr, Matt and I all arrived at the Orpheus hut late Thursday night. Our plan for the following day was a Knotlow Cavern exchange, which I was quite looking forward to as I'd only been there once (back in 2006), but remembered it being a good trip. Obviously with Hillock's Mine just next door that was also tacked onto the plan. Meanwhile, Storm Babet had come along to join the party and the journey to the outside toilet was becoming an adventure in itself. Would heavy weather scupper our plans?... obviously the answer is yes as you can tell by the title of this trip report.

After a fiercely wet night, we were joined by Tim and Charles the next morning. Local opinion was that Waterfall Chamber in Knotlow Cavern would now be a lake and the parking spot for Knotlow and Hillock's a car sucking quagmire. Many other options followed the same pattern, we'd either drown or get stuck in a bog before we got there. In the end we settled for the nice dry novice trip of Carlsward Cavern as, with the exception of Charles, none of us had ever been there before.

Our mission decided we all piled into Emyr's van and set off on the 30 mins journey to Stony Middleton. About an hour and half of mass flooding and closed roads later, we finally arrived. The road running through the valley was now a river, but luckily the parking layby was on

higher ground, effectively an island between the river on the road and the Dale Brook which was also in full-flow. Oddly enough we were the only cavers there. I was surprised to hear my name called out, it was Jamie on his way back from work who had apparently wondered what kind of idiots would be caving on such a day when he recognised us.

Finally we arrived at the cave and headed into the Gin Entrance, to (initially) much drier conditions. Easy walking through puddles and shallow water soon brought us to Oyster Chamber, which was really nice. I had expected the cave to be rather featureless, but the ceiling here and elsewhere in the cave is amazing and full of large shells. Apparently these are the remains of *Gigantoproductus giganteus*, a brachiopod believed to be the largest that ever existed. A hole between smoothed boulders here is the route to the Lower Series, so we left our rope here and continued along the main passage. Large pools were soon encountered and reluctantly wallowed through and the now lower

*Right: Charles, Emyr, Mandy, Jon and Tim (behind Jon) celebrating their arrival at Stony Middleton without the van being swept away or flooded!*





## Gigantoproductus giganteus

According to Wikipedia (so it must be true) these large brachiopods existed between 345 and 328 million years ago and had a shell width of 30-35cm.



*Charles in Oyster Chamber*

ceiling had a number of interesting jets of water spurting at all angles. Crawling through varying amounts of wetness we explored the passages towards Cockle Passage. Where we actually went, who knows, the normally dry tubes and passages were now a flowing streamway and sumps were encountered in places they wouldn't normally be. Feeling that the water was rising, we headed back to find the pools were indeed deeper on the return.

Back at Oyster Chamber we rigged a handline for the descent to the Lower Series and Emyr popped on down. A wriggle through boulders then a short drop landed in a rift with no visible way on as it was underwater. So there was nothing left but to return to the surface. The rain had eased so we decided to nose into some of the other entrances along the impressive cliffs. The first was an obvious mined rift (Middleton Dale Mine Level 5/Fingal's Cave) which had some crystals on the walls before a climb up reached an unwelcomingly small and root infested excavated crawl. Next up was a short through trip in Middleton Dale Mine Level 4/Triple Hole; this also continued as mined passage in the other direction which had some nice mineral deposits part-way along.

Charles, Emyr and Jon then returned to the van while Tim, Matt and I continued further along the cliffs investigating more holes as we went. A couple of bonus through trips in the cliff face later, Tim remembered that he had the keys for the van. We headed back to find the others waiting cold, wet and shivering for our return.

Thankfully the journey back to the Orpheus was less eventful and the roads flowing with less vigour. We also managed to warm up quite well with beer and crisps by the fire at The Royal Oak before returning to the hut.

*Photos by Matt Voysey*



*Mandy somewhere around Cockle Passage*



*Charles crawling in normally dry passage*



# OXLOW-MASKHILL

## Exchange Trip

by Charles Bailey

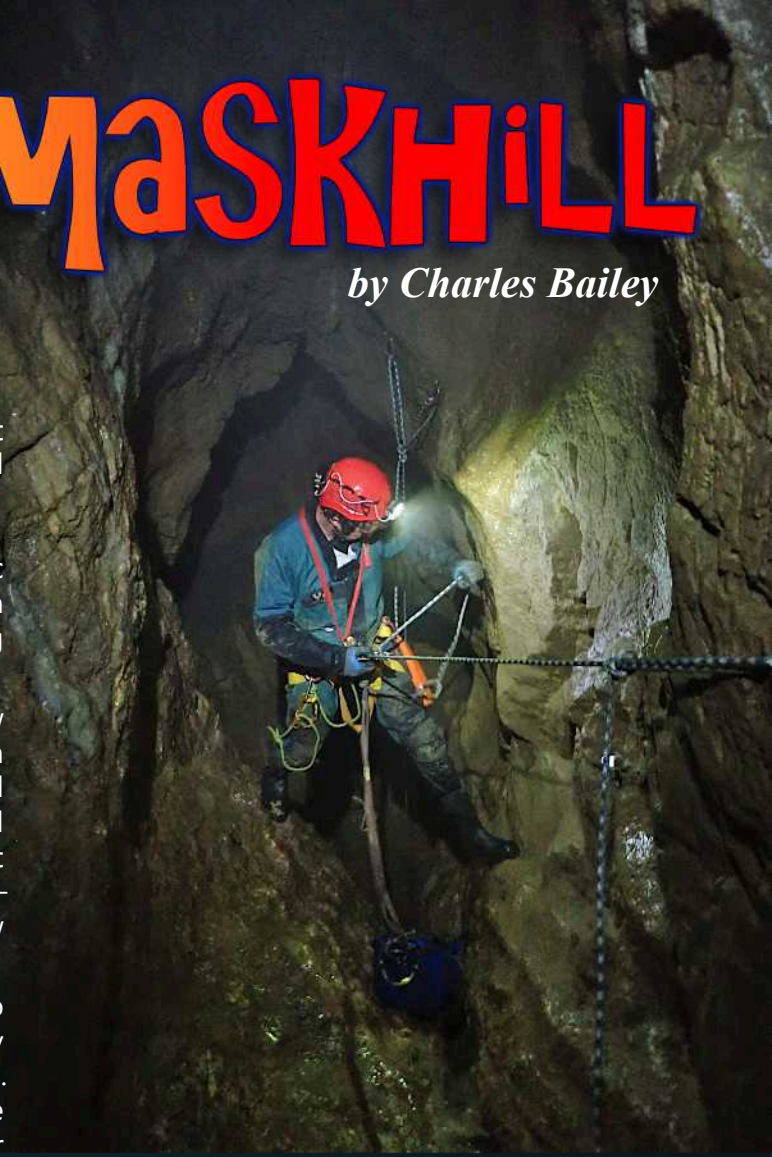
**21st October - The Team:** Tim Gibbs, Jon Abbott, Matt and Mandy Voysey, Emyr Walters, Alex Randall, and Charles Bailey.

After the biblical floods of Thursday/Friday, the epic drive over to Stoney Middleton Dale, and the bumble in the 'safe and dry' (not) Carlsark Caverns the preceding day, we were all looking forward to a dry weather day.

Well, the weather was dry, and thanks to the new concrete parking area at Oxlow House Farm, we had a nice benign changing experience. The conservatory full of cats, complete with feline food, litter and rank poo had been retained as a notable feature, but luckily you're not obliged to enter this emporium with your fee any more – the farmer is happy for you to leave this on the window sill if he isn't in. Tim kindly paid for the group.

Alex and Jon were keen on rigging, so we fell into two teams, three of us for Oxlow and four for Maskhill (at my suggestion due to the extra rigging/bags for the latter). Alex, Mandy and me wandered down to Oxlow. Surface conditions were fine and dry, with underground similar until just after the shuttered section at the bottom of the first pitch. At this point a significant stream entered from a calcite bank, making the rest of the descent rather aqueous. The third pitch was significantly wet, with a waterfall at the bottom, but once down a welcome drier continuation beckoned so Alex rigged this obvious continuation with no visible alternative. However, it didn't match the rigging guide, so I came down, and confirmed it wasn't right – we'd gone down East Chamber. Mandy was still above us at the bottom of the third pitch, and shouting above the noise of the water, couldn't see any other way on.

Up I went, stepped through the waterfall, and bingo – there was the ramp of East Swirl Passage. I'd made exactly the same mistake rigging this route a few years ago, so knew where to go. To gain lost time and warm up, Alex dispensed with rigging the ramp as the in-situ rope looked good, and simply rigged the fourth pitch. That left us with an embarrassing 1½ sacks of rope at the bottom of Oxlow. We met the Maskhill team just descending the last pitch, ironically with only just enough rope. After a brief exchange, we left the chaps to de-rig and hump our unused rope back out of Oxlow.



*Top Right: Emyr descending Maskhill Mine  
Bottom Right: Tim ascending Oxlow Cavern*





Alex and Mandy went ahead with me derigging Maskhill. This was consistently wet all the way to the second pitch, with little chance of getting out of the water. Cavers and ropes suitably sodden, I regretted suggesting just the three of us as a party – of course the smaller crew had to haul up more and wetter rope. Mandy really loved the bag I handed her for her exit leg, especially as this last section was dry but slippery with slick mud ingress!

Once on the surface, we realised the others had sensibly left. Walking off, we caught a glimpse of a car load of cavers heading off to Buxton Wetherspoons. Matt did claim to have checked his wife was okay at this point – quick thinking! Emyr walked over to meet us, and after the usual cold finger faff called getting changed, we were soon in a very rowdy 'spoons for a pint.

An exhilarating 5 hour trip topped off by a lovely meal and more beers in the Bull in Monyash. What more do you want for a Saturday?



*Top Left : Emyr in Maskhill Mine - Top Right: Tim in Oxlow Cavern  
Bottom Right: Jon and Alex consulting topos in Oxlow Cavern west Chamber*

*All photos by Matt Voysey*

## NEWS FROM THE DERBYSHIRE CAVING ASSOCIATION

**Warning!** A major collapse on the first pitch in Maskhill Mine was reported on Wednesday 16th November. Deads previously stacked behind angle iron have gone down the shaft and left a lot of hanging death. No-one was hurt as the ledge gave way under the 1st person down as he was rigging - so nobody was underneath the pile of rocks which went down. The rigger and those above him in the shaft were able to exit, safe but chastened. DCA are looking to stabilise the shaft eventually, but will be waiting a few weeks first to allow things to settle and see if anything else lets loose. We suggest the mine is best avoided for the time being. Check UKcaving.com and/or the DCA website for further news.

...looks like we were lucky.

*Emyr in Maskhill  
entrance shaft*





# Water Icicle Close Cavern

**Sunday 22nd October** - Jamie Anderson, Jon Abbott, Emyr Walters, Alex Randall, Tim Gibbs, Charles Bailey, Matt and Mandy Voysey and Pete Wagstaff (OCC)

The sun was shining as I arrived at the Orpheus hut to meet the other members of the club. After milling around chatting, warming up in the sun and waiting for everyone to get their kit together we all headed off to Monyash. On account of the rather wet preceding days and the complicated permit system to drive up the lane we opted to park in the village and walked up to the entrance.

Pete (our local guide who granted us access to the gated sections) rigged up a second rope down the entrance shaft to speed up getting the whole group of nine down quicker. Once we were all at the bottom we split into two groups. Group one of Alex, Tim and Matt were led by Pete to the gated extensions first, whilst the rest of us were led by Charles.

Our group went first to the Great Rift, the original route the miners would have taken. It was quite a remarkable feat of surveying and engineering that the shaft we had descended was driven directly into a three-way cave junction the miners discovered. We went on to the Olympic Stroll dig. The highlight of this section was the diggers slide; Emyr insisted on our return that we made it a slip 'n' slide so a bucket was dutifully passed back down the narrow passages, filled and then tipped down the plastic. It was fast but watch your head!

*by Jamie Anderson*



*L-R: Charles, Mandy, Jon, Pete, Tim, Alex and Jamie*



*Alex on the optional detour to Elevator Pitch*



*Pete, Charles, Emyr, Mandy, Jon, Tim and Alex in Urchin Passage*



We then returned to the bottom of the entrance shaft and headed up Northwest Passage to the (not so) new extensions. I had been into Water Icicle once before about seven years ago and not been overly impressed but I'm glad I came on this trip as we went through the gate at the top of the ladders to see all that the diggers had discovered. The dimensions of the passages are rather impressive by Peak District standards and while there aren't many amazing pretties there are some points of interest including a fine collection of cryogenic cave calcites. At this point we bumped into group one who had been down Cherty Two Passage without finding the Cherty Two. We headed up there and Mandy triumphantly found it! We headed up Urchin Passage with some fine sedimentation before turning around and heading back to the shaft.

It was a slightly squalid trip so I'm glad I had removed my SRT kit after descending. Even so by the time I had got to the surface it too had managed to be covered in mud. The rest of the team came up the two ropes and in dribs and drabs and made our ways back to the vehicles in the village, wandering down the lane in the sun. A quick yet interesting trip to finish what had been a rather wet weekend.



*Mandy and the Cherty Two*



*Alex, Pete and Tim at the Olympic Stroll dig*

*Photos by Matt Voysey except Mandy and the Cherty Two and Cherty Two detail by Jamie Anderson*

## CSS MEETS 2024

### **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 - 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.

### **February 23rd-25th - Whitewalls Weekend**

A selection of caving trips will be taking place over the two days, with a Fortified Wine evening planned for the Saturday. Bring along a beverage to share (port, madeira, sherry, marsala, vermouth are just a few options!) or just bring whatever you might normally have if you prefer.

### **March 22nd-24th - Mendip Meet**

A weekend staying at the Shepton Mallet Caving Club hut in Priddy, which is conveniently close to many of Mendip's fine cave systems and The Hunters' Lodge Inn too. As usual there will be a selection of trips to choose from on the Saturday and Sunday, and possibly a Friday evening trip too.

Additional trips and will be added throughout the year, so check out the 'events' page on the CSS website, and members-only ProBoards and Facebook page for updates to the meets calendar.

Extra caving trips can also be arranged via the CSS WhatsApp group. If you'd like to join the group, you can either use the link and QR code posted on ProBoards and Facebook or contact administrators Adrian Fawcett and Chris Seal for details.



# Eglwys Faen Part 1

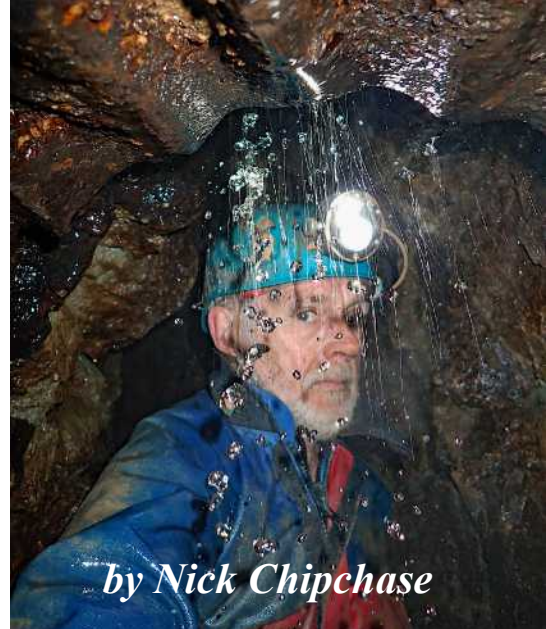
There is no doubt that a big cave system lies somewhere behind Eglwys Faen. The largest entrance passages on the Llangattock dramway and the strongest temperature controlled draught in the main passage. Yes there have been many attempts to find that system but none have made the major breakthrough. I had not been to the cave in decades and had no photos of it. So Mike Wise (new CSS member) and I went up to Whitewalls late in October for a prospecting trip.

Whitewalls was a hive of activity. Young people were scrubbing and cleaning everywhere. We thought it better if we changed outside. John Stevens was bustling about in the melee. I swear his beard is now a foot long. So off we went to E.F. On arrival we found a dead sheep in one of the minor entrances which Mike dragged out. Now I must admit that we were

not entirely sure of the routes but eventually found our way around the Western Series. Some good wet photo opportunities there and clearly an inlet so maybe not the key to the route through the mountain.

Back to the main passage for lunch and a try at getting artistic water shots near the entrance. We heard calls from above and found a big party of children with a few adults. I went out and invited them down as we had spare LED torches for the photography. The adults agreed to let me take photos. Earlier we had come across a large party of youngsters in caving kit. Again they allowed me to take photos (do ask if children are included). The non-caving children had a wonderful time and were quite impressed with the cave.

Eventually we had the place to ourselves. So did a bit of the Eastern



*by Nick Chipchase*



*Mike in the Western Series*



*Mike in the Eastern Series*



*Beyond the dam in the Western Series*



Series. Neither of us liked the four metre free climb so gave it a miss (forgetting that we could go down and exit through the waterfall entrance). We also poked around the Inner Chamber but chickened out at the stream sink dig as it meant getting a soaking. Funny round knobs all over the silt floor there and sadly lots of graffiti. I think that Mandy has a plan in hand for the latter.

After a leisurely four hours we ambled back to a quiet and sparklingly clean Whitewalls courtesy of our visitors that week, Forest School Camps. They kindly allowed me to share the photo I took (remember it's children). The Friday night drive home was awful. Diverted to the old bridge by Sat Nav. The M5 horrible all the way down to the Avon Bridge. The Welsh 20mph restrictions not too bad as fairly limited in length. We shall return for another amble into St Patrick's passage and perhaps the Upper Series. Happy days from decades ago when I used to come up with Trevor Knief and meet Arthur Millet. Long trips into Agen Allwedd and Daren which I would not dare to attempt now.

Refer to CSS Newsletter Vol. 63 (2021) Nos. 7-9, page 58-59 (re. digs and draughts). Oh I feel sure it's a dramway not a tramroad. Everyone seems to get it wrong.



*Children in Main Chamber*



*Mike foot-hauling in Main Chamber Crawl*

# Midnight Passage Dig Update

## AGEN ALLWEDD

*by Andy Heath*

Work has continued in the Midnight Passage Spider Chamber dig. When I last reported progress we had reached an impassable 90 degree bend but reckoned one more trip would get us round the corner...

**Saturday 3rd June 2023 - John Stevens, Mike Read, Andy Heath**

Progress was slow due to the crystalline rock splintering into small shards rather than coming away in satisfying chunks. However, we persisted and eventually got round the corner into open passage. When I say open I mean slightly larger than body sized. After another 90 degree bend and approximately 4-5 metres of grovelling, the mud floor rose to within 10cm or so of the roof. All a bit disappointing but at least there is still a visible direction to follow and the air is still fresh. One feature of interest was a rift overhead blocked by small rocks. Too narrow for any of the assembled three but possibly a job for Matt Voysey.

**Sunday 30th July - Mandy Voysey, Matt Voysey, Andy**

Matt was duly poked up the rift (ooh Matron!). He could almost get to the top (around 2m) but couldn't quite see the way on. Meanwhile, Mandy had a bit of a dig of the mud floor at the very end and declared it to still be worthy of further work.



*Andy breaking rock with plug and feathers*

**Sunday 3rd December - John, Mike, Andy**

No forward progress but a reasonable amount of wall and floor removed. We also surveyed the dig to the end which is still going in the direction we'd like it to. Mike was marginally more enthusiastic at the end of the session than at the beginning.

Another visit is planned soon, armed with copious battery power to enable us to remove more wall. We should then be in a position to comfortably attack the mud fill at the end.

*Photo by John Stevens*



# Tales from Thailand

by Rachel Smith  
photos by Martyn Farr

A picture paints a thousand words... or, in our case, a stunning view of Tham Lod near Pang Mapha in Thailand. It was a Facebook post of John Spies' captivating image that alerted us to the magnificent caves of Thailand and whetted our appetite for a visit. We had no contacts there but Martyn soon applied himself to the task of finding some and before long we were messaging with John Spies himself and with Vern Unsworth who is based little further north near Mae Sai. Both of these people were extremely helpful in our planning stage and gave us invaluable local information and accompanied us on trips during our three weeks in Thailand.

Flights were booked and it was finally time to pack our bags... how does so little 'stuff' manage to weigh so much? Then there is always the worry of getting Martyn's camera and many lights and batteries through airport security. But on this occasion, all went smoothly and we were soon winging our way to Bangkok. An internal flight to

Chiang Mai and then a winding drive, uphill and down, saw us arrive early evening at Cave Lodge, near the Burmese border in north western Thailand. The base with its homely bungalow style accommodation is run by John, a place we can certainly recommend.

Tired from the travelling, we decided our first day would be well served with a visit to see the entrance and exit of the river cave Tham Lod. This cavernous but short cave is open to the public who can take a bamboo raft ride from one end to the other, stopping off en route to explore three high level dry chambers with some large formations. However, the most impressive feature of Tham Lod is that it hosts over 300,000 cave dwelling swifts which enter the cave each evening at dusk and exit at dawn every day. This was definitely a sight to see and, after our daytime entrance visit we decided to return and enjoy the evening spectacle for ourselves. Little did we know what 'fun' would ensue...

As always, Martyn was keen to get a photographic record and on arrival he identified the spot for me to stand (human model for scale) then he headed off to a higher vantage point to take the photos. With little to do except watch the swifts fly in and a stream of bats fly out, I thoroughly enjoyed myself. Meanwhile Martyn settled himself on a rocky ledge, put

*Title photo: Tham Pang Khan*

*Left: The boat ride through Tham Lod streamway*





down his rucksack and leaned against the cave wall for stability. Snapping away, he failed to notice that he had company... but, by the time we returned to Cave Lodge Martyn was decidedly itchy. On closer inspection we discovered he was crawling with lice (or some similar creature)!!! The rest of our evening was occupied with picking them out of his clothes, off the rucksack and off Martyn himself. Lesson learned, don't lean on the rock and don't put anything down on the ground.

Later in the week an early morning visit to Tham Lod showed us that there is a very healthy population of these parasites in all areas that the birds and bats occupy. They crawl on the ground, up the tourist stairways and across the rock. Furthermore, if you are at the cave early enough to need a headtorch the swifts themselves become a hazard. Bats flew past us unerringly, but the totally disorientated birds came crashing into us, clinging to clothes and shedding their tiny passengers. Despite this, standing at a

location recommended by John, the sight of swifts flying from walls and ceiling, just above head height, was stunning and is a 'don't miss' experience for anyone staying in the area.

Cave Lodge is a meeting point for visitors to the area and offers a range of guided tours to local caves. Despite being aimed at the non-caver, these are no easy potter around. We joined a small group on a visit to Tham Nam Hoo, a large river cave with an energetic walk in. The river was fairly low but still sported a good current and plenty of underwater projections and potholes making crossing from side to side somewhat challenging, especially with a hefty bag of camera equipment and lights. The guides were good and pointed out the best places to cross as well as the various underwater hazards. We travelled over a kilometre into the cave before stopping at the first photographic location. John had recommended a number of sites to Martyn and one guide stayed with us as we set up camera and lights whilst the second guide and other group members headed further into the cave. From here we gradually made our way back towards the entrance, stopping to photograph at several places and absorbing the sight of many beautiful, big flowstone cascades. For me there was an added bonus that when in the water, I could enjoy temperatures rather higher than the usual 8°C of British caves! Timing was excellent and, as we packed the kit from our last image, voices could be heard and the rest of the group soon joined us for the uphill trek back to our transport home.

On other days we visited some of the smaller local caves without needing a guide. We found one small but decorated cave on a day when we had left our caving kit in the car. Using just a phone and single small torch it proved possible to capture



*Top: Swifts in Tham Lod entrance*

*Right: Smaller cave visited without caving kit*





some of the beauty of this place. Another day we explored a chamber with one unusual central decoration and, further into the cave, encountered a strange and eerie noise like rushing wind. Assuming a second entrance, we moved towards the sound and found ourselves encircled by a cloud of extremely active bats that whirled and turned around us, their wings creating the noise we had heard on our approach.

We were joined on one occasion by Cal Callister and Amp Ample for a visit to Christmas Cave. This proved something of a challenge to locate but, once there, it was a pleasure to explore. Entered via a local style wooden ladder, this is a dry cave with plentiful formations. We spent some hours circumnavigating the chambers and setting up a number of photo shots. With so many possible locations, it was hard to choose which to include and which to leave out.

A highlight of our stay in this area was Tham Nam Lang, another cavernous river cave. John

accompanied on this trip and brought along his photographic kit and lights, somewhat different from Martyn's. There were opportunities for photographs at the entrance to the cave and we then embarked on another aqueous trip in fast flowing water. Underfoot the riverbed was reasonably level, which was fortunate as we were often over knee deep and in places wading up to our armpits and a little beyond! The effort was well worth it for the beautiful formations, perhaps the most impressive being a vast bank of flowstone, delicately coloured by a variety of minerals. Here there was a lengthy stop for photos. Acting as model, I discovered that holding still for a four second exposure, as I am used to doing, has nothing on the thirty seconds John asked for as he used his light painting technique. I quickly realised this called for a different approach by me and I sat down, holding my legs in an effort not to wobble or waver for the whole of the time! Finally, retracing our steps, we were treated to an array of





*Previous page photos: Tham Nam Hoo  
Right: Christmas Cave*

late afternoon sunbeams streaming into the cave entrance and illuminating the misty atmosphere in quite an ethereal way.

All too soon, our time at Cave Lodge came to an end. Despite almost two weeks there we were far from exhausting the caving possibilities and we had only visited one of the well-preserved coffin cave sites. But bags were packed and we set out on the drive to our next stop near Mae Sai in Chiang Rai province.

Day one was a chance to meet up with Vern and Sid Perou who came to join us, with his wife, Meow, and grandson Archie, for a gentle stroll to see some of the local cave entrances. We took the opportunity to visit Tham Luang, famous for the rescue of 13 members of the Wild Boar football team back in 2018. Here we were fortunate to bump into Adul, one of the boys who had endured and survived the flooding incident. He was home in Thailand for a visit but, as a young man in his early twenties, he now lives and studies in America for most of the time.

We had high hopes of a trip into the further reaches of Tham Luang later in the week but sadly a change of local government administration had put a stop on such activities just days before our arrival. We therefore contented ourselves with a



look at the short section which is open to the general public, effectively a 'show cave'. There are various artefacts from the rescue on display and a number of information boards and a small museum all of which relate the tale of this dramatic event. A large statue honours Saman Gunan, the Thai navy seal who sadly died whilst participating in the efforts to rescue the boys.

In the following days Vern accompanied us on visits to a number of caves. Many here are short; others have their entrances well hidden within the lush jungle undergrowth. It would be very easy to pass them by without the knowledge of a local caver to point them out, especially for those, like me, distracted by the variety of strange and lovely plants to be seen at every turn.



*Above: Adul and mural of the Wild Boar football team and Thai rescue memorabilia*

*Right: Tham Luang entrance chamber*







Our final caving trip in the area was to Tham Sai Thong. This is a more extensive system already of several kilometres and with the potential to extend even further. We spent a good day here with Vern and Amp photographing and admiring the cave. The formations are large and impressive, bearing distinct 'tide marks' that show the water levels that are reached during the rainy season. There are extensive chambers with piles of rock and sediment to be scaled and at the far end, where things close down, Vern and other enthusiastic locals are pressing forward into the unknown. This is certainly the cave to visit in this area unless the situation changes and you happen to be fortunate enough to get into Tham Luang (this is still closed to cavers at time of writing).

Our final day dawned and we took our one trip

to a tourist destination – The White Temple. This is a place which has to be seen to be believed! Despite expecting to rapidly lose interest, we spent the day here looking around the various buildings and gardens and marvelling at the intricate decorations we encountered at every turn, all paid for, we understand, by a wealthy benefactor and the inevitable entrances fees collected at the gate.

So at last we say farewell to Thailand; a country with many caves and great potential for any club to visit. Local knowledge and connections are invaluable here and we know that without this, we would have seen and understood far less of this lovely country. A big thank you to John Spies and Vern Unsworth for their help in making our trip such a success!



*Top of page: Tham Sai Thong  
Above: Phi Maen Coffin Caves - Right: Hair Cave*



# New Library Acquisitions

by Paul Tarrant

The following books have been bought or donated to the library and there should be plenty there to read and help while away long winter evenings! Additionally, a continuous stream of newsletters and journals from caving clubs we exchange our newsletter with are received periodically and are well worth a read.

## Hidden Realms by Martyn Farr

The book's title further adds that this is 'a celebration of 100 of the finest caves and mines in Great Britain and Ireland', and indeed it is that, with Martyn's excellent photographs and brief descriptions of caves and mines throughout these Isles. Several CSS members feature in the photos, either as models or as flash gun carrying bods. Another superb book from Martyn, proving that he is the UK's most prolific writer of great, quality books on our sport!

## The Welsh Potosi – Metal Mining, Railways & Industrial Society in the Plynlimon Mountains by Ioan Lord

This is Ioan Lord's third book on the metal mines of Mid Wales. This newly published book covers the mines near to Ponterwyd and the Plynlimon area and is very well illustrated with surveys and historical and modern day photographs of workings that are still accessible.

## A Walker's Guide to the Geology and Landscapes of Western and Eastern Mendip

These two volumes are written and printed by the British Geological Society and present, in clear terms, what you can see of the geology and geomorphology whilst walking in different parts of Mendip. Each volume contains maps with suggested walks. Peter Smith has very kindly donated these books.

## The Old Metal Mines of Mid Wales Vol. 4 & 5 by David Bick

These are vintage publications and I know the club library once had them but they disappeared. A friend from Welsh Mines Society sourced the two missing volumes for me, so we now have a full set of this excellent publication.

**Descent 294 & 295** These have now been delivered and will provide interesting reading.

## Iran '77 by Peter Glanvill

This is an illustrated memoir of the expedition to the Kuh e Shahu region of Kurdistan in Iran. The book is well illustrated with photos and describes how the expedition came about and what was found during the trip in a part of the world that has seen both radical and terrible change wrought by revolution and wars since the time of the expedition. This is a well written and illustrated book that briefly describes the brewing turmoil in the area and also shows off two CSS members (Barry Weaver and Martyn Farr) who were both in their youthful prime back then! Big thanks to Barry Weaver for donating this wonderful book to the library.

## Aberllefenni Slate Quarry – A history of the last underground slate working in Wales by Jon Knowles

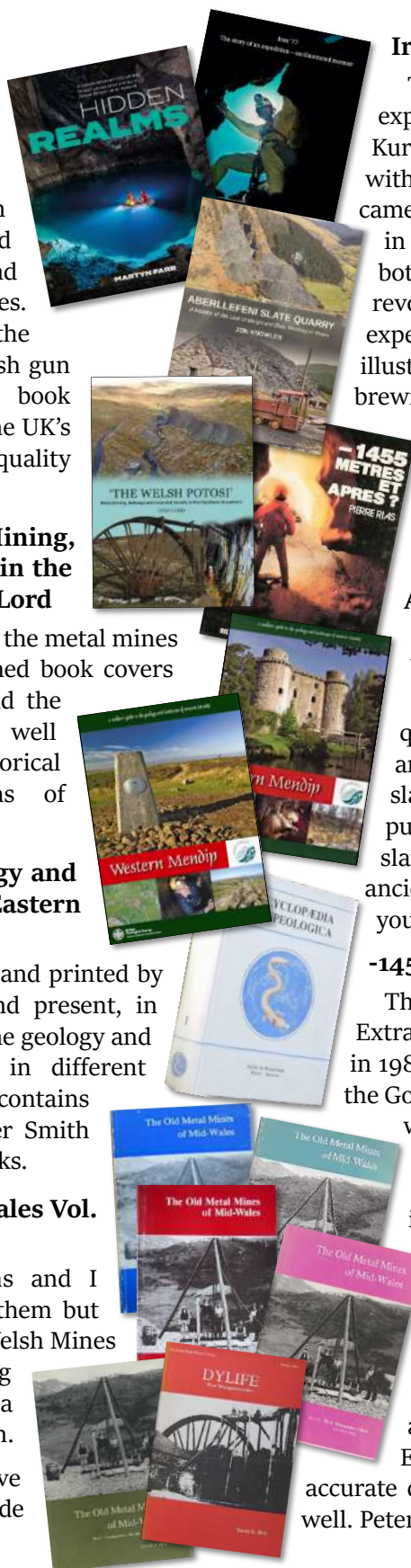
This book is about the underground quarry near to Machynlleth in mid Wales, and describes the methods of working the slate in this mine, the uses to which it was put, and the social aspects of mining the slate. Well illustrated with photographs ancient and modern and well worth a read if you intend visiting this remarkable place.

## -1455 Metres et Apres? By Pierre Rias

This book is part of the series Aventures Extraordinaires which was published in France in 1981, and covers the history of exploration in the Gouffre Jean Bernard, then the deepest in the world. The book covers the push to extend and deepen the cave by finding higher entrances. Well worth a look as it's well illustrated and the text, in French, is easy to understand. This was surplus to my own collection.

## Encyclopaedia Biospeologica

This massive tome, written in French, covers nearly all of the insects and creatures that are to be found in Europe's caves. It is illustrated with accurate drawings and covers this topic extremely well. Peter Smith has kindly donated this book.





# Pen Park Hole

**Southmead, Bristol - 16th November 2023**

*by Mike Wise*

**Present:** A mixed bag of cavers from different clubs including CSS, BEC, WCC and SWCC: Henry Dawson (leader), Ian Healey, Clare Vivian, John Roe, Jann Padley and Mike Wise.

The trip was arranged by Jann Padley. The gated and secured hole is hidden in a grove of trees in the park. The entrance area included a number of discarded alcoholic refreshment containers, some of which had not been opened.

It's a bit of a unique place for several reasons, the first of which was a warning given to be careful about an area at the base of the entrance tube ladder where discarded needles were apparently buried! It was also pretty warm inside.

A muddy entrance crawl leads to an 8m muddy sloping shaft equipped with several fixed ladders. This drops you into a series of three small chambers connected by short crawls under stacked deads. The walls and a lot of the deads are unusual, being covered in large dog tooth spar calcite crystals. I imagine it's a bit like being inside a geode. A final low passage leads out onto a balcony overlooking the lake chamber which was some 20m below. From here our trip entailed the four of us being life-lined down to a small lakeside beach and back up again.

MU5 rates the ladder pitch as 'awkward', it's certainly interesting. After the first awkward move over a sharp edge, it's free but not vertical for some 7 or 8m and in this section, at a certain point, the ladder suddenly flips and you find yourself beneath the ladder. The only solution is to keep going, whereupon it flips back and leads you to a muddy sloping shelf. The final 10m or so is against a muddy sloping wall before a short drop dumps you on the beach. Our ladder was a couple of metres short. It looks possible to use a handline to reach the muddy sloping shelf from the bottom to avoid the awkward sloping wall, but apparently the vintage of the rope and its belay are a bit hazy.

All the above was accomplished in 90 minutes in an elevated CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere where even sitting down and chatting caused us to puff and pant.

We exited covered in horrible sticky mud that turned out to be difficult to remove and repaired to the Henbury Arms for refreshments and a chat, but my plan to return to the Quantocks via Cribbs Causeway to avoid the clean air zone charges came to nothing as the causeway had been closed overnight.

*Photos courtesy of Martyn Farr*

*The Lake pitch image also features in Martyn's new book **Hidden Realms**, alongside many other top quality photos of the wonders of the underworld.*

*Top: Dog tooth crystals - Right: Lake pitch*





# Grebe Swallet

*by Mike Wise*

**Present:** Sir Nick Chipchase, Mr Nick Thorne (MCG), Chris Binding and Mike Wise

This trip was arranged by Sir Nick and Chris after Sir Nick had let off steam about something on UK Caving. I went along as Sir Nick's driver, carer and occasional bag carrier!

The cave is owned by Chris and is in a fenced area not far from Upper Flood. There is a description in MU5 but it is a bit out of date. A short entrance ladder drops into a passage where there are some interesting mineral, crystal and mining exhibits before the cave uncovered by the 1968 floods and the mined section intersect. We looked at Sidcot Chamber and turned right into Young and Clark passage and turned right again to Bootprint Chamber where the boot print of a visiting preservation official placed on top of a preserved feature has itself been preserved.

The old digs below here were abandoned some years ago and now the way on is straight on from Sidcot. A huge amount of work has been done here including drainage, but the current dig face is prone to flooding so work on this continues. We hauled 6 or 7 bags of spoil out to Sidcot to show our appreciation for the visit. I carried Sir Nick's as well as mine, since he was busy taking photos and the bags were quite heavy and he is 76 you know!

On the way out we visited Lode Chamber which is at the bottom of the original mine entrance shaft. This section is heavily cemented and is equipped with some 'interesting' looking hanging death of considerable size which we tried hard to ignore.

It was very interesting to see all the walling and other protective measures put in place by Willie Stanton all those years ago and the graffiti left by the two young lads accompanying the mine inspector on the last visit before the mine was closed in 1755.



*Corkscrew straw formation*



*Mr Nick in the mud*



*Above Left: Willie's wall  
Above: Bridge Crossing  
Left: Drilling in the secret dig*



*Ignoring the hanging death*



On our way home we stopped at a local emporium where I purchased some tubes of Dr Nobel's persuasion powder and we repaired to our secret mine dig to persuade an awkward section of rock that it wanted to be absent. This activity ended with some evidence that it might have been of some use, but we will have to wait until our next visit to find out.

*Photos by Nick Chipchase*



# A day digging in Portland's Grove Cliff Caves

by Andy Heath

I'd refer you to club member Tim Rose's excellent website "The Caves of Portland, Dorset" for a detailed description of this and other caves to be found on the Isle of Portland.

Grove Cliff mainly comprises a series of interconnecting rifts formed primarily by earth movement. Prior to our recent visit the system had no fewer than six entrances. Mike Read and I visited the cave recently to see the sights but took along a crowbar 'just in case'.

Whilst exploring the Grove Cliff Fissure section Mike noticed a low crawl which he didn't remember having been into before. A bit of furling with the bar revealed an upward slope amongst loose rocks to open space. After a brief game of Kerplunk we were through into a narrow rift. Initially too narrow to pass, forward progress was quickly made by simply prising flakes off the shattered walls and letting the removed rock fall into the rift below. If only all digs were this easy.

After an hour or so the suspected futility of this dig became apparent; we could hear the sea. A bit more digging and I could see daylight. Mike exited the cave to enable us to work out exactly where this new entrance was. A bit of an awkward squeeze led me to a very narrow entrance from where I could see Mike around 10m below. We weren't able to complete the through trip since we didn't have a rope and there probably wasn't anything solid to tie it to anyway. I doubt we'll bother. After all, how many entrances does a cave need?

## GROVE CLIFF CAVES

The Grove, Portland, Dorset

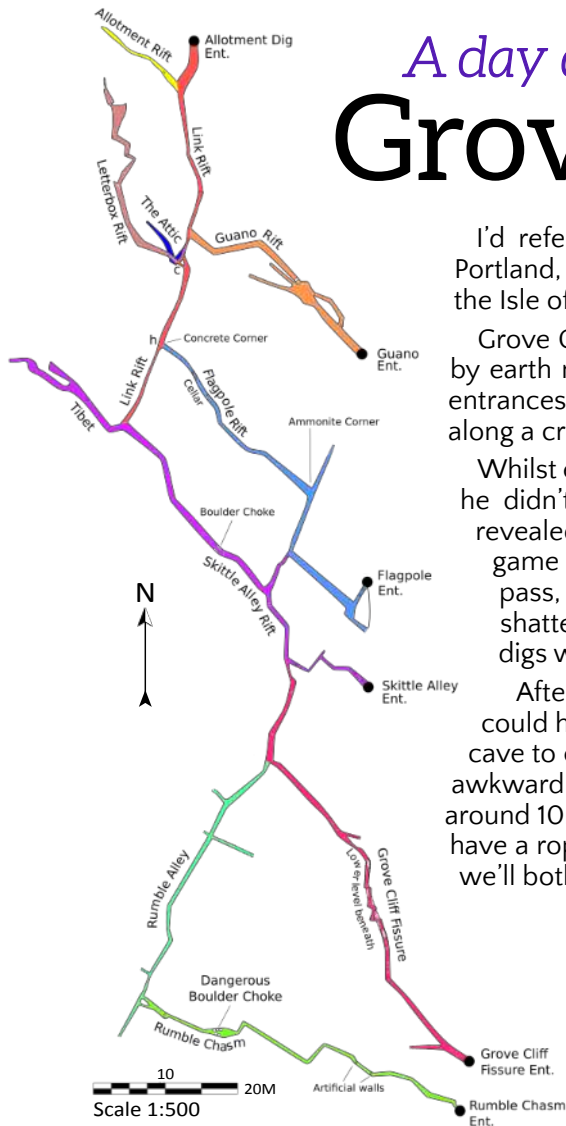
Length: 590m, Depth: 22m

Survey: Tim Rose, Sas Watson, Richard Saunders 2019

Updated 2021

Grade 5c

Survey taken from *The Caves of Portland* website  
[www.sites.google.com/view/the-caves-of-portland](http://www.sites.google.com/view/the-caves-of-portland)



## Joe's CORNER



### Curry Meal Wipes

Those of us who were at the CSS traditional curry meal during Hidden Earth may remember the 'Luxury Soft Wet Towels' that came at the end of the meal. And the strange symbols that were on the back of the packets they came in. See the accompanying image.

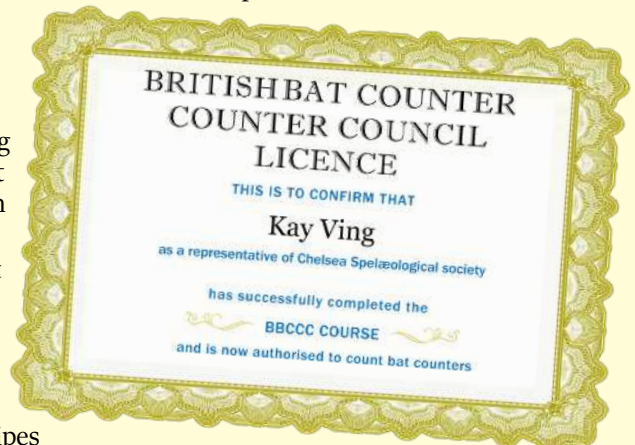
I have done some research, and have managed to interpret what they mean.

- Use them to clean your tableware.
  - Use them to clean your aircraft. (Maybe just the windscreen, as in the film 'Airplane').
  - Use them to clean cavers and their kit. (Maybe the jumbo size wipes would be better for this purpose).
  - Use them to clean your hairdressing implements.
  - Wrap them round your feet when you lose your shoes.
- So now you know what to do with them.



## Aggy Bat Count

During the winter months, members of bat groups visit cave and tunnel systems across the country to identify and count hibernating bats. An additional level of certification is required to carry out these counts. To ensure such bat counts are performed to a high standard, licensed personnel from the British Bat Counter Counter Council are authorised to keep a tally of the bat counters. BBCCC personnel will establish their authentication by showing their licences, such as the one presented below:





# Index to Volume 65

Index to the following Chelsea Spelaeological Society Newsletters (ISSN 0045-6381), published in 2023:

1/2/3 - Jan/Feb/Mar	4/5/6 - Apr/May/Jun	7/8/9 - Jul/Aug/Sep	10/11/12 - Oct/Nov/Dec
---------------------	---------------------	---------------------	------------------------

The index uses Newsletter number:Page number (with newsletter number being the first of each issue, 1, 4, 7 or 10). (P) indicates a photo, (S) indicates a survey.

## Section 1 - UK

### A

#### Agen Allwedd,

Bolt climbing in Main Passage, 1:4-5 (PS), 4:32-33 (P), 7:57 (P)  
The Courtesan, 1:21-22 (P)  
Midnight Passage (Spider Chamber), 1:24-25 (PS), 10:89 (P)

#### Alum Pot, 4:50

#### Aveline's Hole, 4:42 (P)

### B

#### Bath Swallet, 4:41 (P)

#### Bos Swallet, 4:40 (P)

#### Bridge Cave, 1:15 (P)

### C

#### Carlsark Cavern, 10:82-83 (P)

#### The Caverns (secret location in Somerset), 1: 9-10 (PS), 7:72-73 (PS), 10:97 (P)

#### Crochan Sion Hopkin, 7:57 (S)

#### Croesor Slate Mine, 7:53 (P), 7:64-65 (P)

#### CSS,

Annual Dinner, 1:19 (P)  
Cave Rescue Awards, 1:19 (P)  
Committee, 1:2  
Have I Got News For You, 4:31-32 (P)  
Library, 1:27 (P), 10:95 (P)  
Meets, 1:25, 4:48, 7:65, 10:87  
Website, 4:51 (P)

### D

#### Dan yr Ogof, 10:78 (P)

#### Diccan Pot, 4:50

#### Dinas Silica Mine, 7:76 (P)

#### Drunkard's Hole, 4:41 (P)

### E

#### East Rhydtalog Mine, 1:6 (P)

#### Eglwys Faen, 10:79 (P), 10:88-89 (P)

### G

#### Garth Iron Mines, 1:12-14 (P)

#### Gigantopoductus giganteus, 10:83 (P)

#### Goatchurch Cavern, 4:40

#### Grebe Swallet, 10:97 (P)

#### Grove Cliff Caves, 10:98 (S)

### H

#### Heron Pot, 1:11 (P)

#### Hidden Realms book, 1:3 (P), 10:95 (P), 10:96

### I

#### Ireby Fell Cavern, 4:49-50 (P)

### J

#### Joe's Corner, 10:98 (P)

### L

#### Llanberis Copper Mine West, 7:58 (P), 7:60-61 (P)

#### Lost John's Cavern, 4:49

### M

#### Maskhill Mine, 10:84-85 (P)

#### Milwr Tunnel, 7:62-64 (P)

#### Mountain Climbing – Scotland, 7:66-67 (P)

#### Mountain Climbing – North Wales, 7:68-69 (P)

### O

#### Obituary,

Arthur Millett, 1:20-23 (P)  
Dave Dadley, 1:26

#### Ogof ar Olygfa Braf, 1:20

#### Ogof Cnw, 1:20-21

#### Ogof Craig a Ffynnon, 7:55 (P)

#### Ogof Daren Cilau, 1:1 (P), 1:27 (P), 1:28 (P)

HRC Camps, 7:66-68 (P)

The Hydra, 1:21 (P)

Sarah MacDonald Rescue, 1:22

Trip to Spaderunner, 7:74-75 (S)

Digging potential from Ogof Gwaliau  
Gwnion to Puzzle Passage,  
10:80-81(S)

#### Ogof Draenen, 1:21

#### Ogof Fawr, 7:54 (P)

#### Ogof Ffynnon Ddu, 4:38 (P)

#### Ogof Gwaliau Gwynion, 1:20, 10:80-81 (PS)

#### Old Daren Sunday School, 1:16-17 (P)

#### Oxlow Cavern, 10:84-85 (P)

### P

#### Pen Park Hole, 10:96 (P)

#### Pwll Dwfn, 4:30 (P)

#### Pwll y Gwynt, 7:56 (P)

#### Pwll y Pasg, 1:20

### R

#### Read's Cavern, 4:40 (P)

#### Rhosydd Slate Mine, 7:58 (P), 7:65 (P)

#### Rod's Pot, 4:41 (P)

#### Rowten Pot, 4:50 (P)

### S

#### Shatter Cave, 4:42-43 (P)

#### Sidcot Swallet, 4:42 (P)

#### Snakes and Ladders, 7:58-60 (P)

#### Swildon's Hole, 4:39

### V

#### Virtual Reality Caving, 1:7 (P)

#### Urley Swallet, 1:8-9 (PS)

### W

#### Water Icicle Close Cavern, 10:86-87 (P)

#### Whitewalls,

New Internal Locks, 4:31

New Tackle Store, 4:51 (P)

#### W/L Cave, 4:43 (P)

#### Wogan Cavern, 7:70-71 (P)

#### Wookey Hole, 1:18 (P), 4:43 (P)

## Section 2 - Outside UK

### Vercors, France

Gouffre Berger, 4:34-37 (P)

Saints de Glace, 4:34

### Mallorca, Spain

Avenc d'en Corbera, 4:47 (P)

Coma Freda, 4:45 (P)

Cova de Cal Pessó, 4:48 (P)

Cova de's Onix, 4:46-47 (P)

Cova des Pirata, 4:44 (P), 3:52 (P)

Cova des Pont, 4:44 (P), 3:48 (P)

Cova Tancada des Cap de Menorca,  
4:48 (P)

Cove de Na Mitjana, 4:29 (P), 4:45-46 (P)

### Thailand

Christmas Cave, 10:92-93 (P)

Hair Cave, 10:94 (P)

Phi Maen Coffin Caves, 10:94 (P)

Tham Lod, 10:90-91 (P)

Tham Luang, 10:93-94 (P)

Tham Nam Hoo, 10:77 (P), 10:91-92 (P)

Tham Nam Lang, 10:92, 10:100 (P)

Tham Pang Khan, 10:90 (P)

Tham Sai Thong, 10:94 (P)





