

the grampian speleological group bulletin



fourth series vol. 4 no.2

October 2009

Price £2

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Cover Design: P. MacNab

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The Grampian Speleological Group

EDITORIAL:

Readers will notice that the 'Additions to the Library' section in this issue is very much larger than usual. We have been privileged to benefit from an extraordinary act of generosity which has enabled the club to fill in a lot of gaps in journals runs, and add significantly to its stock of books.

Literate cavers seem to come in two distinct groups - those who amass information for useful speleological purposes, and those who collect material as much for its own sake as for its intrinsic value. Club librarians naturally come under the first heading, private collectors more under the second. Occasionally a person comes along who breaks out of the mould to encompass both intentions. Such a one was the late Tony Jarratt. Having stayed at his house (something of a caving shrine) I recall marvelling at the scope of his library, much of which was very rare and virtually unobtainable today. Collections reflected his travels around the world, yet also demonstrated some of his own personal foibles - you would have been hard put to find much about the Yorkshire Dales for example.

I am still in awe of Tony's almost light-hearted approach to his own demise and the care with which he planned the dissolution of his personal caving empire. Some years ago, when we were both sitting in his front room sharing maudlin reflections on life, the universe and everything, he expressed his feelings about the surrounding shelves, crammed with books and journals, his many etchings, watercolours, caving and mining ephemera saying that, of course, the Grampian would be in line for some it when he was with us no more. I was deeply touched by that 'of course', because it signified Tony's identification with a club, and a country, for which he had a great loyalty, even though his beloved B.E.C. would always be his natural home. I thought no more of the matter then, but here we now are, a year after his untimely death, beneficiaries of a massive pile of material for our library, carefully sorted by the long-suffering Jeff Price, who has laboured to ensure Tony's bequests and requests have been followed to the letter, and Martin 'Milche' Mills, who has assisted by checking through the GSG library list for journal gaps and so forth and acting as courier with the resulting boxes.

In addition, arising out of the legendary 'Rat-Fest' celebration of Tony's life held last October, funds have been raised and disbursed to assist with cave digs on Mendip and in Sutherland. Thus we now have a handsome donation toward the cost of building a proper gate at Rana Hole. To have such an impact on caving a year after he left us is a mark of his stature and after deliberation, the Group have resolved to preserve his memory in Rana Hole by naming the entire series that leads off from the foot of Black Rift as far as Two B's Chamber (virtually the last of Tony's discoveries) as 'Tony Jarratt Series'. It is little enough by way of thanks, not just for his bequests, but for years of companionship, good caving and incomparable 'craik', in Scotland, in India, on Mendip. The disparate nature of the donated journals and books does not really allow for a discrete 'J-Rat bequest' within the library and I have simply placed items in their own contexts. I'm sure he would have approved of this more practical approach.

It is with great pleasure therefore that I have this opportunity to publicly express our grateful thanks to Jeff Price for carrying out what, it must be appreciated, is a gargantuan task. Tony's house contained a veritable library which occupies several *hundred* boxes, not to mention all the other cave-related items, and Jeff labours to finalise the estate over and above all the multifarious demands made on every one of us. He deserves not just our support but encouragement. Thankyou, Jeff.

The donated material was brought north by Martin 'Milche' Mills who has also carried out a lot of checking against our library lists for missing journals. It is well past the time that his own support for our library is publicly acknowledged. For years, Milche has been sending photo-copies of rare articles, newspaper reports, journals and even books. His relentless collecting of cave 'ephemera' also results in some remarkable curiosities finding their way onto GSG shelves (*vide* the 'Potty Cavers Contest', item 1188 in this list of additions). Such selfless dedication is quite admirable and I should like to express our thanks to him for all his contribu

tions over the years, making it more widely known that they are greatly appreciated. Would that others nurtured our library to such an extent!

And there's more! The cessation of 'The British Caver' journal in 2007, a far-reaching *chef-d'oeuvre* of Gerald Platten from before the 2nd world war subsequently valiantly sustained by Tony Oldham since 1971, created another small problem: we exchanged the Bulletin for British Caver. Tony wishes to maintain contact with work in Scotland so he arranged to donate a large collection of notes, abstracts and miscellaneous correspondence relevant to Scottish caves in exchange for future issues. All this material was used while researching his publications on Scottish caves and mines and will be of great interest to members delving into the history of underground Scotland. Likewise therefore, I should like to express our thanks to Tony for this generous gesture - which will keep him in Bulletins for a very long while!

* * * * *

As recorded within these pages, more spectacular palaeontological discoveries have been made in Uamh an Claonaite, this time in an area off the Great Northern Time Machine. Clearly, this cave possesses rich deposits of faunal material which may increase further in value if unexpected animals are identified - the jaw of what appears to be a horse is one example. While some members may agonise over what could develop into a 'self inflicted wound', that is, that we be severely restricted in our movements around our own cave, it should be borne in mind that a trip into Claonaite 7 is not an easy one for non-cavers, therefore *we* would be responsible for any future removals and/or excavations, albeit under expert supervision. However, the main thrust of my comment here is to highlight the probability that, as discoveries continue, more sensitive sites will be encountered, particularly in high level passages off the GNTM and Legless Highway. Thorough exploration of the Palatial Abode of Edward Concretehead, which may lead to tunnels originally communicating with Bone Cave sites 6 and 7, is another region potentially housing animal remains, and all cavers are strongly advised to be constantly on the alert for bone fragments, taping off areas of interest before they are trampled into dust.

As it is an organisation dedicated equally to science and leisure, it is gratifying to see the GSG making significant contributions to our knowledge of ancient Scotland. Assynt caves have yielded most of the bear remains found in Scotland, and it is already known that archaeological deposits noted in Traligill indicate habitation - or at least use - of caves there. It takes a particular mind set to recognise brown bone fragments in brown soil or sand but perhaps the events of the last few years have triggered just such a sea change amongst members so that more evidence of our Quaternary past, particularly from the Pleistocene to the Holocene, will be brought to light. Claonaite 7 is truly a treasure house; treat it with respect.

Alan L. Jeffreys, Editor.

Cover Illustration:

Robert the Bruce, 1274-1329, was one of the most famous Scottish kings, reigning from 1306 to 1329 with his most famous battle in 1314 when he defeated the English at Bannockburn, effectively securing Scotland's independence from England. This was only after a series of hard fought battles and prior to his coronation it looked very much like the English would be the victors. In the winter of 1306, he took refuge in a cave carved into the sandstone cliff at Kirkpatrick Fleming near the Solway Firth, and is often depicted wearing a metal caving helmet.

Realising there was more to caving than a man-made hovel he moved, with 300 men, to the island of Rathlin off the Irish coast and in a cave there was heard to shout "Aghr! Ach! Na Figheadair!" (Gaelic for: Oh! The Spider!)] Despite his fear of spiders he took inspiration from its labours and returned to his campaign adding, first to Laland Scots and later to English, the word 'Aracnafeardie' and later 'aracnaphobia'. The truth is he was less afraid of the English than the spider!

Peter 'Snab' MacNab

AREA MEET REPORTS (to 5th September 2009)

The earlier half of the year saw widespread activity by the club, with, of course, a concentration in Claonaite and Rana Hole. These reports include for the first time entries from the Sutherland hut log, thus providing a more accurate picture of club work.

ANGUS

Nathan Jeffery attempted to explore caves at Arbroath in April but was generally prevented by high tides. He managed to scour skin off at one site however, which he shared with nesting birds.

ARGYLL

As a joint practice rescue had been arranged with Strathclyde Police MR Team, there was a recce of mica schist fissures on A' Crois near Arrochar in March. Five members plus one representative from the MR team descended several holes for some 20 metres or so on rope, and explored others which were free climbable.

On 4th April, two members investigated a group of caves in Appin, principally Uamh an Duilean Bhriste, and on 12th April, one of them explored a few underground features in the valley between Ben Vane and Ben Vorlich. The SCRO exercise took place at the end of April at the A' Crois fissures. Three members followed up a report of holes on Bein Ghlas in August but found nothing speleological.

AUSTRIA

The huge Lamprecht's Hole near Lofer in Austria was the subject of a tourist trip in June. Some 800 metres of the system have been developed as a show cave, although it extends further for 50 km and has a depth of 1632m.

BERWICKSHIRE

Alex Latta commenced an examination of various holes and caves at Cove coastline in March which included Pettico Wick and St Abbs Head. A return visit on 28th March revealed some old coal mining workings at the same location.

DERBYSHIRE

Arising out of a BCRA Cave Science Symposium, several members attended a tour of the Creswell Crag caves in early March, which seem to house the earliest recorded cave art in the UK. In May, three members carried out a short exploration of Bagshawe Cavern.

EAST LoTHIAN

A small party visited Pathhead Limestone Mine in March, which appeared to enter an area not noted before. Lots of metal litter scattered about as usual.

FIFE

There was a trip into Charlestown Limestone Mine in May. In August, having negotiated the splendid chain walk at Elie, Rebecca Carter checked out two small sea caves there.

INVERNESS-SHIRE

One Skye trip recorded in the log book was an extension achieved in Cyclone Cave at Strollamus by David Morrison and Ritchie Simpson in April. Some 10 metres of new passage were chalked up and there may be more to find in what is a complex little system.

KINROSS-SHIRE

Investigating a 'Shepherd's Cave' on an OS map in April, three members found little except for a very small rock shelter type void in volcanic rock.

LANARKSHIRE

A brief stop-off at Wanlockhead after visiting Lyon Equipment at Tebay, saw four members frustrated by a locked adit into West Glencrieff, so instead they splashed up a supposed drainage adit for Whytes Cleuch which ends in two blank walls after bifurcating.

PEEBLES-SHIRE

The almost obligatory rite of passage trip into Jeanie Barrie's Cave was the subject of an outing by Alex Latta and Mark Stanford in May when the top of the shute was reached.

PERTHSHIRE

Trinafour Rising was attacked at the end of March when the final choke was successfully passed to gain 20 metres of low passage which describes a long Z-bend and then chokes again. In April, four or five small caves were explored near Aberfoyle on the shore of Loch Ard. including Rob Roy's Cave. In May a return trip to Trinafour Rising revealed a mud filled crawl at the end which, although wide, was too low for even the thinnest caver.

POLAND

In March, while holidaying in Poland, Jackie Yuill and George Sutherland toured the Wieliczka Salt Mines, one of the largest such excavations in the world with over 300 kms of passages and chambers. In June, Dick Grindley also visited the salt mines and followed this with a tourist trip to Lokietka Cave north of Krakow.

ROSS AND CROMARTY

The SCRO staged a practice rescue at Applecross in May in conjunction with the Torridon MR team. Thus there were opportunities to investigate caves in the area. Cave of the Liar was used for the rescue, attracting twenty members, and other trips involved digging in Flake Pot, where a small chamber was revealed but not entered, Brindle's Rift and 3D Cave. On the following day there was a sporting trip through Cave of the Liar. A few caves were GPS'd as well.

SOMERSET

During a short visit in August, three members descended St Cuthbert's Swallet for a standard tourist trip which included September Series. The following day they participated in a dig at Home Close Hole to drain a standing pool there.

The occasion of the wedding of Annie Audsley and Roger Galloway in early September attracted a record 60 members of the club (including partners and children). Predictably, while a lot of merriment and beer was

generated, the only recorded caving trip was a descent of Swildon's Hole, taking in sump 2 and Black Hole Series.

SPAIN

Taking advantage of a holiday, Kirsty Moore and Nathan Jeffery visited Cova de la Vaca (a scuba dived sea cave) and an un-named mine working at Port de la Delva. At the end of June, Andy Peggie was also in Spain, and achieved a tour of Nerja Cave.

STIRLINGSHIRE

In March, there were visits to Airthy Silver Mine and Blairlogie Byrites Mine near Bridge of Allan. June saw Derek Pettiglio walking up Beinn Tulaichean looking for fissure caves near the summit, finding one very near the top some 70 metres to the east of the path. After some small climbs, about 27 metres of passage was explored.

SUTHERLAND

As usual, the season has been crowded with event, and some interesting discoveries made. In March, a return was made to find an open shaft in woods overlooking Loch Urigill - successfully. This site requires clearance of slurry and rubble to make further progress. The following weekend, filming resumed in 'old' Claonaite, when the party finally completed a tour to sump three. Afterwards a very large surface collapse was examined near Toll Radain. There was also an inspection of the pipe draining the Rana duck. The following day another trip to Urigill saw a further member examining the open shaft mentioned above. Simultaneous trips were held at ANUS Cave and the Bone Caves and in Rana there were two days of digging at the Skye-way. Another wander across to Loch Urigill failed to reveal any new sites. At the end of March, eight members conducted 13 RAF student associates around Cnoc nan Uamh, with a tour of ANUS Cave, Bone Caves and Rana Hole the next day.

In April the 'Mendip Invasion' occurred and kicked off with a tourist trip round Cnoc nan Uamh. On 26th April there was an inspection of possible dig sites in ANUSC and Damoclean Sink. Also located were Toll Radain and Titan Pot. During the next three days there was a great deal of work carried out digging and blasting in ANUSC near Drip Chamber, and clearing moraine out of Toll Radain. An attempt by Norman Flux to start stripping out metalwork from Rana Hole failed due to it being anchored by heavy silt so he went over to Campbell's Cave to continue building scaffolding there. On 30th April, clearance continued to create an overhead bypass to the Sphincter in ANUSC and the digs in Drip and Sink Chambers continued. Two photographic trips down Rana were followed by work at sump 6b when two divers passed into the Treen Scene to establish a vocal connection with Concretehead especially via the large boulder fall at the end of the Treen Scene with a depression off the main passage beyond sump 6b exit.

May witnessed more digging in the Skye-way, Rana Hole, whilst others examined the new discoveries around Nipple Chamber. Also, one digging trip to Toll Radain failed due to misleading GPS information but others cleared over 30 skips of muck and then protected the entrance with a wire grid. There was also a blasting trip to the Skye-way in Rana, in order to create a more comfortable route through. On 2nd May John Crae explored a short passage leading off the Great Northern Time Machine in Claonaite for some 20 metres. More digging took place in Toll Radain the next day, a site now showing real promise. The same day there were visits to ANUSC, Rana, Cnoc nan Uamh and Campbell's Cave. 3Gs Cave was re-examined and it was noted water flow is slowly clearing a passage through. On 6th May, some refilling took place in Rana when the pool at the bottom was found to be too deep! More trips down to Claonaite 7 established a definite lead towards Treen Scene from the Concretehead passages. On 10th May a Craven Pothole Club party discovered antler remains in an anti-chamber off GNTM which was duly left well alone.

On 16th May, Ivan Young, Tim Lawson, Steve Birch and John Crae went to the Great Northern Time Machine to examine evidence on the age of the cave system and the bear remains found nearby. Following reports from the CPC trip, the party entered the small anti-chamber on the west side and several other fragments of bone were revealed and a spectacularly well preserved bear skull and what is possibly a horse jaw bone. (A detailed article on these finds will appear in a future issue once carbon dates have been received). The next weekend Alex Latta found a cave in collapse on the headland at Clasnessie Bay near Lochinver. At the end of May there were tourist trips into ANUSC, Cnoc nan Uamh and Claonaite.

In June a further filming session was mounted in Claonaite 7, including sequences down to near sump 7 and in the Concretehead passages, and there was another tourist trip the next weekend. More bone hunting occurred on 20th June at the GNTM, and all found were carefully packed in pelicas and transported back to Edinburgh. The same weekend, Julian Walford walked to the Allt Bealach Choinnich outcrop south of the Allt nan Uamh valley. Three tiny sinks were noted but all required much digging and potential is not great.

At the end of June, in preparation for a practice rescue planned for the Autumn, five members carried out a series of 'plug and feathers' boulder splitting operations on the route through Rana, specifically at the exit from Two A's Chamber and the head of Black Rift. Eco-hangers were placed at various places for efficient rigging and some snapper firing also improved some choke points. In July, work continued on removing more of the dam from the foot of Rana, and placing sandbags into the pool there, followed by a couple of tourist trips to Claonaite 7.

At the beginning of August there were tourist trips into ANUSC and Claonaite and the next weekend some landscaping was carried out at Rana - turf laying over the spoil heap - while Ivan solo surveyed his way along Legless Highway in Claonaite, noting a promising aven some 50 metres in from the bone site. Nick Williams and Stuart Lindsay led a childrens' trip round Cnoc nan Uamh and he (StuL) then spent a week in the area, examining various holes above Knockan and in the Allt nan Uamh valley in very wet conditions, digging at several sinkpoints in the streambeds. Mark Sanford and Alex Latta explored ANUS Cave on 21st August and on 22nd, Martin Hayes and Ivan Young spent six hours lowering the Skye-way floor with a view to eventually connecting with the duck pool and creating a better drain for same. During the weekend there were also trips into ANUS Cave, Bone Caves and Claonaite.

YORKSHIRE

The Dales season commenced in March with two permit trips on Leck Fell. On Saturday 7th two members carried out an exploration of Mistral Hole, visiting many of the better parts of the system and the following day, augmented by four others, a partial descent of Lost John's Cavern was carried out in rather damp conditions so went no further than Wet Pitch. Also in March there was an SRT training session in Rowten Pot and a descent of Bull Pot, Kingsdale. The month was rounded off by Derek Pettiglio achieving a solo trip to the bottom of Aquamole Pot.

April 11th saw three members down Tatham Wife Hole and the next day the trio carried out a descent of Heron Pot. On 15th, two people went through Lancaster Hole and out via Wretched Rabbit and on 25th the EUG organised a self-rescue lesson in various parts of Yordas Pot, which was much appreciated by those attending.

White Scar Cave was the subject of a visit by three members in mid-May. Despite heavy rain, which meant keeping a close eye on water levels, the trip went successfully as far as the upstream sump, Sleepwalker Series and Moonmilk Inlet. Water levels dropped on the way out. The same day there was a descent of Jingling Pot via lateral route (a GSG discovery by the way).

On Sunday 17th May five members went into County Pot to exit from Wretched Rabbit. This trip was com

plicated by an Oxford Univ. group who were practicing rescue techniques (apparently without a permit). They failed to rig pitches with their own rope, misappropriated some rigging kit and were almost left stranded when the GSG rope was eventually de-rigged. Questions were asked!

On July 11th, the Club held its first 'Founder's Day' meet, scheduled as a rope ladder and old fashioned descent of Ireby Fell Cavern. Nine members attended on a very hot day, finding the cave nice and dry. Most went to the sump - except the founder, whose knackered knees and too-tight goon suit dictated a turn-around after Well Pitch. The next day three members went down Pillar Holes, finding many dead rabbits and bad smells at the bottom. At the end of July, Derek Jamieson led a young persons' tour of KMC which went up Philosopher's Crawl to the bottom of Swinsto. Simultaneously, Ross Davidson and Peter Dennis carried out a very creditable descent of Penyghent Pot to the bottom of the 10th pitch, where weight of tackle and time dictated an exit.

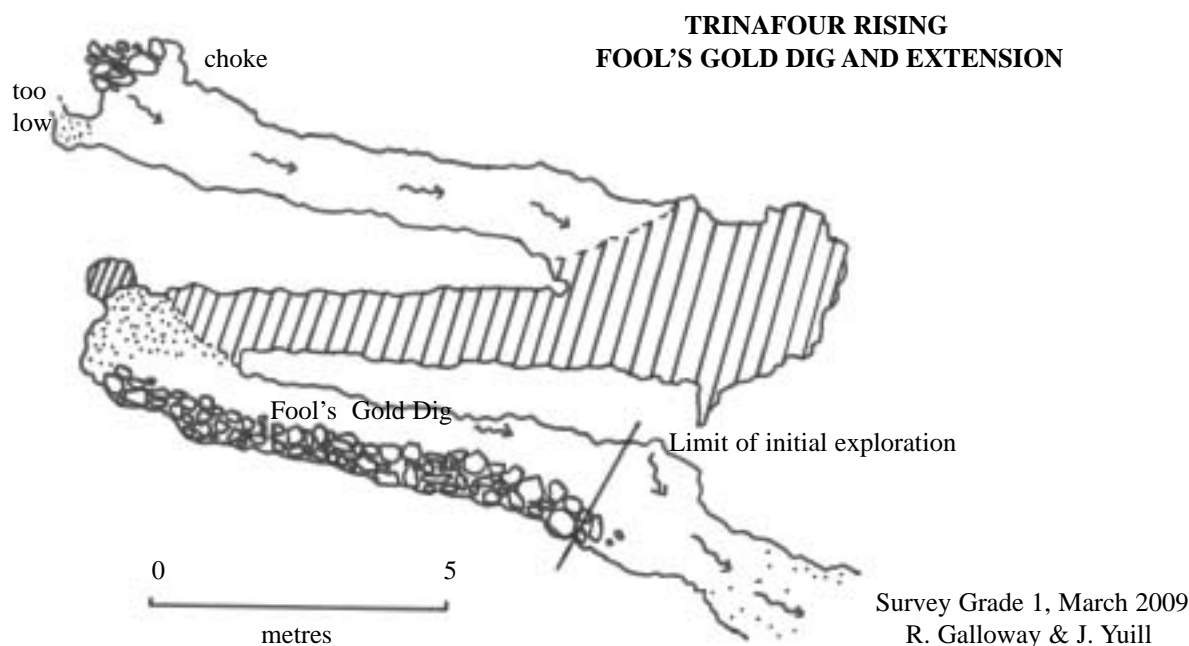
In August, in memory of Peter Ireson, there was a celebratory trip down Simpson's Pot (his favourite pot) attended by 18 people! Divided into three teams, various pull-throughs to KMC were achieved and one party entertained by Kirsty Moore's unintended partial descent of The Pit. The following day three of the party did Heron Pot, which was quite wet after overnight rain. At the end of the month there was yet another trip into KMC - this time to Milky Way Series.

PROGRESS IN TRINAFOUR RISING

The terminal choke in Trinafour Rising has been dug on several occasions by Roger Galloway and Jamie Yuill. It consists of a long rubble heap filling a sloping triangular passage but a route across was finally achieved on Saturday 28th March 2009. This led over a mud bank to where the passage doglegged sharply back on itself. After a section of standing water, a further corner was discovered where the cave resumed its generally westerly direction. Overall, some 20 metres extension was made ending at a small chamber blocked by boulders.

In May this was also dug for a couple of hours when a wide, muddy but too low passage was revealed, obviously impassable.

A preliminary sketch survey of the extension, and Fool's Gold Dig, the name given to the original terminal choke, appears below.



ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY:

1. BOOKS:

- Salvona, J. (2009) A Guide to the Awe-Inspiring Raasay Fissures.
Hutton, G. (1998) Mining the Lothians
'Ellis' (I. Chandler) (1998) In Sight of Light
d'Amboise, V. (1986) Eternal Caves
Baron, P.J. (1969) Speleologie du Canton de Vaud
Weite, P. (1946) La Speleologie Alpinisme al'Envers
Symons, S. (2003) The Wonders of Dan yr Ogof
Porter, A.R.D. (1990) Jamaica. A Geological Portrait
McClurg, J.E. (1962) Caves and Their Mysteries [Childrens' book]
Serko, A. & M. Ivan (1953) The Cave of Postojna
Oddou, A. & J-P. Sounier (1986) Speleo Sportive au Marguareis
Auchant, Y. & J-C. Frachon (1983) Speleo Sportive Dans le Jura Franc-Comtois
Douat, M., J-F. Pernette & S. Puisais (1985) Speleo Sportive a la Pierre Saint-Martin
Glory, A. (no date) Au Pays du Grand Silence Noir
Cook, S. (1889) The Jenolan Caves. An Excursion in Australian Wonderland
Burrows, R. & F. Rydholm (1992) The Mystery Cave of Many Faces
Allen, E.E. & J.G. Rutter (1948) Gower Caves
Ong, J. (1994) Mysterious Caves of Langkawi, Malaysia
Callot, F-M & E. (1984) Photographier sous Terre
Balsan, L. (1950) Grottes et Abimes des Grands Causses
Chvatal, M. (1996) Brezno
Siffre, M. (1979) Les Animaux des Gouffres et des Cavernes
Lismonde, B. & P. Drouin (1985) Chartreuse Souterraine
Szelerewicz, M. & A. Gorny (1986) Jaskinie Wyzyny Krakowsko-Wielunskiej
Halliday, W.R. (1976) Depths of the Earth [revised edition]
Lawrence, J. & R.W. Brucker (1975) The Caves Beyond [2nd edition]
Vidal, P. (1987) Cavernes en Perigord
Jakal, J. & A. Kolektiv (1982) Prakticka Speleologia
Meghalaya Adventurers' Association (2002) Handbook
Mazonowicz, D. (1975) Voices from the Stone Age
Minvielle, P. (1977) Grottes et Canyons
Pittman, B. (1999) Texas Caves
Roda, S., Rajman, L., M. Erdos & T. Szabova (1982) Vznik a Vyvoj Sintrovych Foriem V Piatich Jaskyniach Slovenskeho Krasu
Kolstad, R. [Ed] (1996) The Caves and Karst of Colorado
Stone, A.J. (1995) Images from the Underworld
Laming, A. (1949?) The Lascaux Cave Paintings
Balcombe, G. (1987) A Glimmering in Darkness. Transcriptions of the archives and notebook records of Graham Balcombe. [Loose leaf ring binder]
Publications of the Berliner Höhlenkundliche Berichte:
Band 1: Tanzania 1994-2000. M. Laumanns (2001)
Band 2: Mozambique 1998. M. Laumanns (2001)
Band 3: Mozambique 1999. M. Laumanns (2001)
Band 6: German Speleological Campaign Cambodia 95/96. M. Denneborg *et al* (2002)
Band 13: Madagascar 1991/2 and 2003. van der Schuit, S. & M. Laumanns (2004)
Band 16: The Unknown North of Laos. Dreybrodt, J. & M. Laumanns (2005)
Band 18: Resources on the Speleology of Jammu & Kashmir State, India. H.D. Gebauer (2005)
Band 19: Resources on the Speleology of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab and Haryana, India. H.D. Gebauer (2005)

Band 21: Resources on the Speleology of Himachal Pradesh, India. H.D. Gebauer (2006)

Band 22: Northern Vietnam 1993-2006. Masschelein, J. *et al* (2007)

Band 23: The Caves of Rwanda. 2nd Edition. M. Laumanns, S. Schmassmann & H. Schmassmann-Adrian (2007)

Band 27: Resources on the Speleology of Madhya Pradesh State, India. H.D. Gebauer (2008)

Morris, E. (1952) *The Plume of Smoke* [Adult caving novel]

Smith, S. (2009) *Underground England*

Judson, D. (2009) *Eli Simpson and the BSA*. BCRA Cave Studies No. 18

Oldham, A.D.O. (2008) *The Caves of Scotland*. A Bibliography. (2008)

Scott, M. (2008) *The Crystal Skull* [adult novel]

Griffith, C.J. (2009) *Opening Goliath*

2. SHEET SURVEYS

	Approx. Scale
Surtshellir-Stefánshellir, Iceland	1" = 50m
Surtshellir, Iceland	2" = 50m
Ogof Hesp Alyn, North Wales	1½" = 50m

3. CAVING JOURNALS:

Association of Mexican Cave Studies, Newsletter	No.18 (1991)
Association pour la Recherche Spéléologique Internationale a la Pierre-St-Martin	No.16 (2004)
Axbridge Caving Group & Archaeological Society, Newsl.	Jan,May,July,Aug,Sept,Oct,Nov,Dec.(1968) Jan,Feb,Mar,April,May,June,July,Aug,Oct, Nov,Dec. (1969) Jan,Feb,Mar,May,June,July,Aug,Sept,Oct,Nov, Dec. (1970) Jan,April,May,June,July,Aug/Sept,Oct,Nov, Dec, (1971) Jan,Feb,June,July,Aug,Sept,Oct,Nov,Dec (1972) Jan/Feb,Mar,May (1973) Feb,Mar (1974) July (1996)
Axbridge Caving Group & Archaeological Society, Journal	Vol.1 Nos. 2,3,4 Vol. 2 Nos. 1,2,3,4 (1952-55) Nos.71,73 (1997) June (2006)
Birmingham Polytechnic Carabiner Club, Journal	No.1 (1971)
Bristol Exploration Club, Belfry Bulletin	No. 324 (1974)
British Caver	Vol. 46 (1967)
British Speleological Association, Conference Brochures	1968, 1969, 1970, 1972, 1973, 1974
BCRA Members Newsletter	No.1, Aug, 1985; No. 2, May 1986, No.2, May 1987
BCRA Cave and Karst Science	Vol. 34 No.3 Vol. 35 Nos.1/2 (2007-8)
BCRA 'Speleology'	No.13 (2009)
BCRA Handbook 2009-2010	(2009)
British Caving Association, Newsletter	No.11 (2009)
Bulgarian Speleological Federation, Newsletter	No.5 (1993)
Cave Diving Group, Newsletter	Nos. 171,172 (2009)
Chelsea Speleological Society, Newsletter	Vol. 51 Nos.3,4,5,6,7,8 (2009)
Comite de Secteur Speleologique de la Cote Basque,	

'Ikartzalek'	No.8 (1983)
Cotham Caving Group, Newsletter	Vol.4 No.5/6 (1971)
Cotham Spelaeological Society, Memoirs	Vol. V, VII/VIII (1970--73)
Craven Pothole Club, Record	Nos. 94,95 (2009)
Death Coral Caver	No.1 (1991)
Derbyshire Caving Association News-sheet	Aug, 1968
Derbyshire Caving Association, Newsletter	Nos. 11,12,14,16,17,18,19 (1971-74)
Descent	Nos. 207,208,209 (2009)
Eldon Pothole Club, Journal	Vol.9 No.5 (1986)
Florida Speleological Society, The Florida Speleologist	Vol. 27 No.2 (1990)
Gloucester Speleological Society, Journal	50th Anniversary Issue (2008)
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AN ELUSIVE CAVE

Uamh Mhei Sain Reoich [also known as Ardkerilass Cave], Lochgoilhead

By Jim Salvona

This cave is said to be situated among the boulders, rocks and debris of a **massive** rock fall on the south side of Hell's Glen road, which is a side road on the right of the road into Lochgoilhead. It is alleged to have a circumference of 21.5 metres (70ft), and be 3m (10ft) high with numerous small 'vaults' resembling cellars all round.

"At one part a narrow passage leads to a small apartment not unlike a sleeping chamber; it is dry." This was allegedly used by a local bigwig as a hideout for a year!

The entrance is 1.2m high and one metre wide, but well concealed. I came across this reference in the New Statistical Account of Scotland and remember spending at least two days in the area. Although there was plenty of exploring and caving to be had, I never came across this one.

WHAT HAPPENED IN BOWDEN HILL?

By Alan L. Jeffreys

Literally generations of GSG members have crawled, squeezed and dug their way through various tortuous passages in Bowden Hill Mine, West Lothian which, although it's a limestone mine, appears in many places to resemble more of a natural cave, providing sport and challenges for all comers. Most of this wreckage is composed of limestone shards averaging some 8-10 cms in thickness. But here's a thought: just why and when did the workings suffer such catastrophic collapses that most accessible passages today occupy voids where the roof used to be (hence the tops of pit props protruding from the floor). In particular, the natural limestone chokes which lend such colour and interest to the through trips would have been massive subsidences, yet the passages adjoining them are relatively stable.

First, let's look at the time frame. As an active mine, Bowden Hill appears to have ceased operation at about 1900-1901. Given that stone would have been won from the inner reaches by that time, it follows that much of the access must have been in good condition - there being at that time many more entrances than are presently available; evidence of several blocked roadways is obvious. The first recorded examination by the GSG was in September 1962. By then, the topography of the mine was similar to its condition today. Indeed, by 1965 all major extensions had been explored, chokes cleared and excavated, new entrances opened (some from the inside) and over all that time, only two 'major' collapses have been noted: first, the blocking off of Hole 5 (the drainage pipe level) at or near the surface and secondly, a short section of the 'Chicken Run' some time in the last twenty years, which has dictated an alternative route for the classic through trip. Everything else has remained the same - so much so that 'trade routes' have been worn smooth by countless knees and elbows.

So, it is known the mine has remained largely unaltered for some 44 years. If work ceased in 1900, then all the collapse must have occurred in the first 60 years, possibly in an even shorter time frame than that. Some graffiti in Hole 5 passage dates to 1942 which suggests no collapse from that time, reducing the catastrophe window still further.

Various ad hoc theories have been mooted, such as vibration from mature tree roots during storms or removal of valuable timber props once work ceased. Certainly all railway lines and sleepers were recovered - only impressions remain in the muddy floors to show they ever existed. Similarly, no hutches or other relics were abandoned. But a lot of props and roof timbers remain. Indeed in the rear of the mine, off 'Central Hall' and 'Fossil Cross-over', there are routes through pillar and stall still well timbered with all props and shuttering *in situ*. Since these are likely to have been the most recent excavations, hence the best preserved timbers, why were they not removed, particularly as established walls of 'deads' abound, which would have held up most roofs following pit prop dismantling?

The most devastated region seems to run from Hole 4a, through the Chicken Run (as far as it can be penetrated) into the hillside until flooded areas are reached. This is roughly the middle part of the mine workings. In other areas, although the roadways are piled almost to the roof with shards of limestone, the bays where good rock was removed are generally clear, and walls of deads stand in good repair. Hole 3 has about 90 metres of undamaged roadway, then gradually becomes more and more choked along the final 20 metres before closing down. Yet 'Tiger Balmy Passage', a parallel route to a now sealed entrance a short distance downhill has massive piles of debris, with but a handful of places where the original floor may be seen. What different factors affected the latter?

All the above should be reassuring for potential visitors. Only one underground collapse in 44 years indicates that caving trips through the workings are perhaps not as threatened as the terrain might suggest. For ardent diggers indeed, there are several places where a concerted campaign might open entry into considerable areas of mine presently unknown but evidently in existence between Holes 2 and 3. Several landscaped entrance tracks demonstrate that mining certainly occurred there. It is all a bit of a conundrum. Speculation may never resolve the issue completely but is interesting. What do you think?

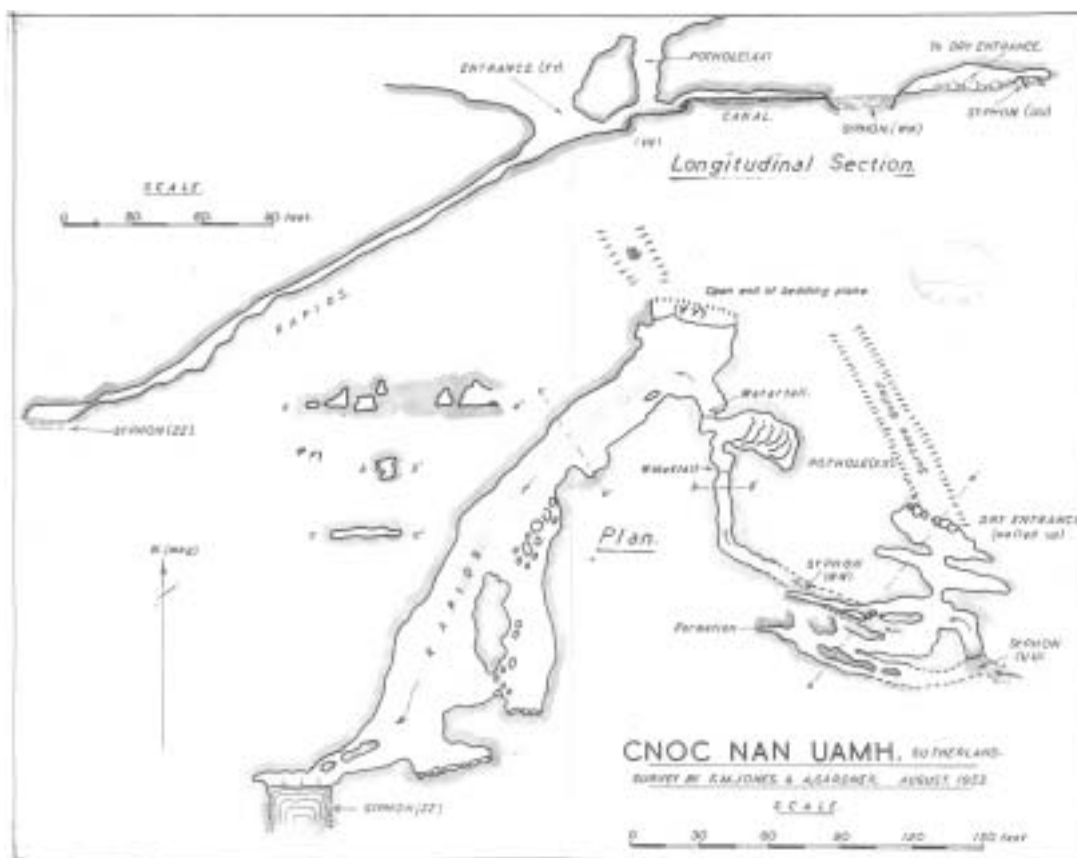
AN EARLY SURVEY OF CNOC NAN UAMH

By Martin Mills

In this Bulletin, Third Series Vol.4 No.2 p.6 (March 1997) there was an item 'Early Scottish Cave Records' in an attempt to locate two cave surveyors.

Subsequent items entitled 'A Sutherland Mystery' appeared in Descent (136) p.11 (June/July 1997) and 'Anyone Know of F.M. Jones and A. Gardner from the 1950s' in Speleo-History Group Newsletter New Series No.8 p.1-2 (May 2000). Despite these appeals and other investigations no further information, other than a report a couple of years ago that one of the surveyors met a GSG party on the hill and introduced himself, has come to light. In view of the advances in desk-top publishing I thought it appropriate to publish the survey (reduced to 40% of its original size) for the record.

The background note to this survey was that in early 1997 I acquired a collection of (mostly) newspaper



reports and abstracts on Scottish caves spanning a period from 1822-1960. These were presumed to have originated from Gerald Platten who would have used them for "The British Caver".

Amongst them were separate provisional sheets annotated in pencil of the longitudinal section and plan on cartridge paper and the finished survey. It will be noticed that this bears the surveyors' names and is dated August 1953, also that it only shows the Waterslide and the wet connection to the First Stream Chamber and very little else. This is curious, considering that Sheffield University Mountaineering Club parties had explored to at least Landslip Chamber in 1947. It is possible that the finalised survey has been fine-tuned by Eli Simpson, British Speleological Association, for it bears all the hallmarks of his style, not to mention the BSA 'Records' rubber stamp.

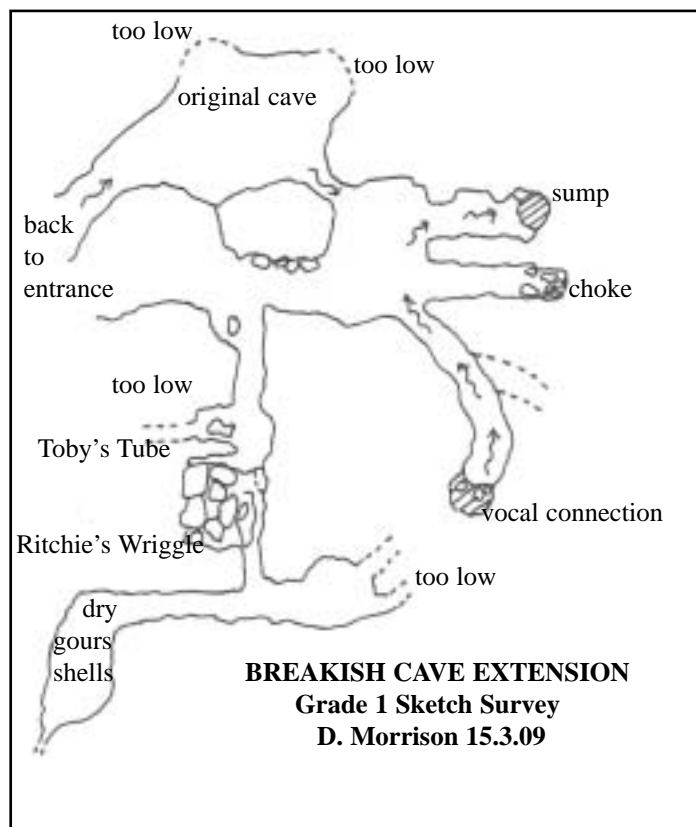
Goon has kindly pointed out that between 1947 and 1959 members of the Cheltenham Underground Exploration Team, Ferranti (Edinburgh) Mountaineering Club, Northern Pennine Club, Orpheus Caving Club, Oxford University Caving Club, Durham Cave Club, Queen Mary College Caving Club, Sheffield University Mountaineering Club, The Yorkshire Ramblers' Club and miscellaneous cavers from the north-east of England and Edinburgh were active in Assynt, mostly without leaving any published records.

PUSHING THE LIMITS

By David Morrison

Breakish

Whilst touring Breakish Cave back in December last year I noticed a tight passage that looked like it might go with a bit of persuasion. I eventually returned to the cave in March accompanied by Toby Speight and some tools. Toby went straight to the tight passage and promptly wedged himself in as far as he could. The news was not good, the way on was even tighter. After some contortions, he joined me in the small passage that heads east from the main cave and noticed a slot in the ceiling. This was tried but was also too tight. After much hammer and chisel work I forced my way up and into a small breakdown chamber, had a look about and came back out. Toby then squeezed in and announced he had found a way on but some digging was needed. This we decided to leave for another day.



A second spur of passage heading east was found near the end of the cave. This low wet inlet crawl is about 5-6 metres long ending at a choke. It is not on the original survey which is strange as it is easy to spot; maybe something has shifted?

I returned a week later with Ritchie and we went straight to Toby's dig. I smashed a large stone out of the way and the route on looked big enough to slide through.... just. Ritchie volunteered and after removing his helmet he slid through on his back and emerged into a parallel section of hands and knees passage. This went left becoming flat out and too low and right was an easy crawl to a steep sediment choke, full of shells. The total new passage including the chamber found by Toby and I is about 12-15 metres.

A dig at a choke beyond the formations near the entrance shows continuing too low passage and produced a pig's jaw bone of some vintage.

Strollamus

Ritchie and I decided to go digging at Carnivore Cave to see how far we could push the small passage at its end. Much constricted digging and packing of sediment into every available dookit resulted in about two metres of new flat out crawl. The passage is seen to continue but is just too tight.

We then went uphill to Cyclone Cave and managed to find 10 metres of new passage running above the original cave. A climb up the ramp above Mud Cairn Junction leads via a squeeze to a tiny chamber. This then leads to a low crawl ending at a pot which is about two metres in circumference and about 2.5 metres high. There is also a connection back to the original cave at floor level, which is too tight. This cave needs a proper survey to understand its complexities and there are a couple of leads that need pushing as well.

Ord

Toby and myself went for a wander around the North Ord limestone outcrop. At grid ref. 63025 13593 Toby found Two Skulls Cave, which is about five metres in length heading downhill (north-ish). It is choked with glacial debris, all too common hereabouts but may be worth digging as the passage size is good for the area.

A visit to Cave 1 was then made and Toby had a full tour. Some chisel work might give more passage. Cave

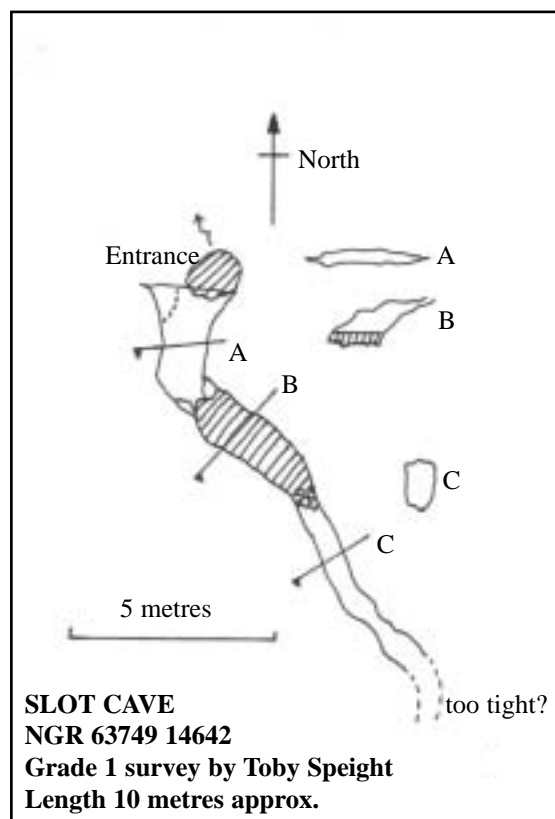
2 was GPS'd, then we headed down to Slot Cave. After re-routing some water Toby squeezed in and managed to force the cave for 10 metres to a constriction. If this was chipped then the passage looks passable. Next we looked in Mossy?/Extra Ord Cave. A small wall was built at the end to stop flood debris blocking the possible continuing cave, although some awkward digging is necessary.

Coille Gaireallach

I walked in to Ivy Hole one Saturday and hammered one of the boulders that was blocking the entrance (8 lb hammer). The entrance looked accessible but needed stabilising (see this issue's article on Ivy Hole). Two digs were also spotted on this visit. I returned the next day to the more



Toby Speight in Slot Cave
Photo: D. Morrison



promising dig and after some chipping I managed to squeeze into a typical Skye rift. This was later extended by Toby and is now about five metres in length and called T.S.R. (typical Skye rift). A mud bank needs removing to continue. This little cave is below CG 5 a little to the west and about 30 metres inside the tree line.

Upper Kilchrist

Toby and I walked in to the Allt na Pairte Cave via Uamh an-t-Sionnach (GSG Bulletin Oct 2000, p.47) which was found by GPS. The original description is a bit confusing as the low limestone face mentioned is actually in the trench formed by the stream falling into the collapse features. Just to the left of the stream which falls into the Allt na Pairte shakehole a small slot with a resurgence just below it was noticed. I managed to crawl in flat out for about five metres to a point where much digging would be necessary to continue. Toby pushed the downstream crawl in the main cave for what he felt was about 15 metres and found a sump. This was in dry weather so it would seem to be the end of the cave for non-divers.

182 showed any potential cave - a low bedding needing dug. There are many karst features hereabouts and a lot of strange conglomerate limestone all along the hillside, whose summit is at grid ref. 608 182.

Woods Again

Finally back to the Coille Gaireallach. After a failed attempt by myself, Toby and Ritchie to do a higher grade survey of Ivy Hole (too wet and dangerous), a hole beside the east entrance to Uamh an t-Sill was spotted. This is now an ongoing dig and is currently 5-6 metres long with more silted up but good sized passage visible. There is also a very good echo, so here's hoping.

Vale: Mike Holland

**“See Mike Holland, how absurd
galloping along like a clockwork turd.
Singing: boulder have a crunch, have a crunch on me.
Boulder have a crunch on me.”**

Mike was a very active Mendip caver, a member of the Westminster Speleological Group and the Wessex Cave Club, principally in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He participated in many of the epic explorations of Swildons Hole, especially Shatter Series and the push down the streamway from sump 4 where he assisted in ferrying gear and providing hot drinks for cold divers, as well as pursuing upward leads in Cowsh Aven.

He also played an active part in the assault, launched in 1959, on Priddy Green Sink, an effort with high hopes of linking down to Cowsh Avens in Swildons 4. Alas, this venture took until 1996 - almost 40 years - before success was achieved. Such was the noisome effluent within this dig, caused by outwash from Maine's Farm cow byre, that digging became increasingly unpleasant and this, coupled with unstable boulders, led to an abandonment until 1995. The challenging nature of this first dig led Mike to pen the Priddy Green Song which cleverly encompasses all the woes and aspirations of the original diggers.

In 1966 Mike moved up to Edinburgh because of work associated with the university. He soon sought out and joined the GSG, but wasn't overly active in the field. He was best known for sitting at the back of meetings, his diminutive figure puffing on a pipe and uttering words of wisdom from time to time. I suspect he felt his mainstream caving days were behind him by then, his track record speaking for itself.

News has been received that Mike died in the early summer from liver cancer. Yet another former member who will not be around for our jubilee. Spare a thought for Mike if you stand on Priddy Green during the dinner weekend. The words of his song could have been an anthem for Rana in the early days:

**“We've used a ton of gelignite
and we've lost a man or two.
I 'spect we'll lose another boys
before this dig is through.
But we've added a hundred feet or more
to the subterranean scene:**

Oh you'll rue the day that you came this way to dig on Priddy Green.”

Alan Jeffreys

MINING AT COUSLAND

A recent press release announced plans by Scottish Coal to create a massive 154 hectare open cast mine at Airfield Farm, Cousland, Dalkeith. Needless to say, this has met with vociferous opposition from the village residents (despite the fact that their electricity comes from the power stations of Cockenzie and Longannet, which the mine is set to feed).

The Cousland region is home - or was home - to several large limestone mines, some now inaccessible, some even quarried away, ironically for landfill at the site of Cockenzie power station! There are still underground workings which are of great interest to local history societies, although most of them are situated on the north side of the small road beside Airfield Farm and thus not in the designated area. Between this road and the A68 at Fordel lies the now sealed Fordel Coal Mine, one of the very first club playgrounds in the early 1960s and amongst the wildlife seen in the woods there were roe deer whose protection is one principle in the objections being offered. It is said that after five years the site will be landscaped back to arable farm land, but it would be regrettable to lose these sub-surface sites which hold a deal of nostalgia for older members.

CAVING IN THE LAND OF THE CEDARS

By Fraser Simpson

It was on the sad occasion of Tony Jarratt's funeral that a chance conversation took place with Emma Porter. She mentioned that she and a small group of cavers were heading to Lebanon the next Easter following up on previous trips. Immediately I was captivated as I had no plans to go to Meghalaya that year; also a number of years ago a few of the Grampian discussed the idea of a caving trip into Lebanon but investigations had soon been thwarted by more war in the area. A few telephone calls and a couple of months later plans were being firmed up and a small team finalised.

Emma Porter and Mike Clayton of Dudley Caving Club and the Craven P.C. established contact with Speleo Club du Liban several years ago and have been making yearly visits since joining in with SCL club meets and expeditions. Having persuaded Derek Pettiglio that what he needed was a nice caving holiday in Lebanon the Scottish contingent was formed and the other team members were to be Dave Cooke (Cookie) from Wessex Cave Club and Dave Appeling from Gloucester Speleological Society, both having been caving in Lebanon before. The six of us required the hiring of two small cars for getting around.

Five of us left Heathrow on Friday 3rd April, arriving late into Beirut and meeting up with Derek who, flying via Paris, had been waiting for several hours. Finally, after an age sorting out hire cars we were on our way downtown with Derek behind the wheel of our car. (Incidentally only three out of the six of us were willing to sign up as drivers.) Mike of course had driven there on numerous occasions and had little fear driving along the mean streets of Beirut. It would be a few days before I had the courage to get behind the wheel!

Finally in the wee small hours we were rattling on the door of Hostel Valerie, a small very basic joint in the heart of downtown Beirut. We were let in only to find that our room had been let to others. Eventually the owner turned up and we were put into another room whose occupier just happened to be out for the evening. At last some much needed sleep as the six of us crashed out in this small, cramped room. After what seemed like a few minutes sleep we were rudely awakened by the room's occupier returning to find his space full of dossing cavers. Dave Appeling, clad only in his underpants, remonstrated with this irate man who eventually disappeared looking for the management but: hey ho, not our problem. At last peace ensued.



Upper Gallery, Mgharet Roueiss

Photo: Fraser Simpson

After what seemed like only a very short while since Dave had fended off the room's rightful occupier the alarm clock went off. Tumbling out of the hostel and racing across Beirut, lucky that traffic was so light on an early Saturday morning, we made our 8am rendezvous where we were introduced to Rena, Issam and Samer from Speleo Club du Liban. As we Brits were all suffering from sleep deprivation, Samer volunteered to rig Jihad Cave located on the outskirts of Beirut where a short ladder pitch gained entry into a small chamber leading down to a larger, decorated chamber. Samer disappeared through a small slot to commence rigging. Rena and Issam were going to investigate a possible new route assisted by Mike and Emma. The rest

of us were to follow Samer down a series of shafts. Derek kitted up ready to follow and the next thing I knew I was waking up promptly to be told I had been snoring for over twenty minutes. There was no sign of Derek so I proceeded to descend the first pitch. Lebanese cavers favour 9mm rope so a braking krab was essential. Several pitches later we watched Derek descend and ascend the final pitch. By that time we were extremely knackered, so returned to meet the others near the entrance and learn they had extended the system slightly. We were ravenous by then so it was clearly time for food.

Sunday 5th found us heading south along the coast, then up into the hills - from the coast everything is uphill, indeed in Beirut one rarely gets out of second gear - stopping for breakfast: *manooshie*, which consists of unleavened bread covered in cheese or *zatar*, a herby thyme mix. We would be joining the two main Lebanese caving clubs, SCL and ALES (Association Libanaise d'Etudes Speleologiques) for whom relations have been a bit strained lately. This would be a 'Let's bury the hatchet' country walk culminating with a lunch of banquet proportions washed down by copious amounts of Arak and wine, and dancing. A fine time was had by all, but there were major traffic jams all the way back to Beirut that evening.

The following morning we met Issam at his house to collect maps, then our motley crew drove north, I finally gaining enough courage to start driving and give Derek a break. Stopping several times to ask directions we finally reached our destination just slightly north of Marjaba village in central Mount Lebanon. SCL had recently found a new shaft in this area so we split up and prospected for the afternoon - all to no avail.

Interestingly, close to the village is the entrance to an abandoned iron mine whose opening was currently being converted into a shrine by a nutty priest. He was not very keen on us venturing far into the mine because he was worried that we might hurt ourselves but this did not stop him from asking if we could ask churches in Britain to contribute funds for his quest.



Rock Bridge at Faraya
Photo: Fraser Simpson

The next day, determined to get a decent caving trip we had a fairly long drive north up into the Adonis valley where we planned a foray into Lebanon's second longest cave, Mgharet Roueiss (5411m). This gave us a splendid day's caving. The system is primarily horizontal on three levels but high water denied us access to certain areas. Some time was also spent on photography. The day was finished off with a visit to the stunning resurgence of Afqa Cave close by and another long drive back to

Beirut where after an evening meal we had a few beers.

On Wednesday 8th after the customary *manooshie* stop in the morning we drove north yet again, eventually arriving at a remote farm. Over the last few years Emma and Mike had become firm friends with the family there who also happen to have a nice pothole on their land.

After a courtesy call on the family we split into two groups. Cookie, Derek and myself would descend Hawqa Cave while the others would go prospecting in the area. Derek proceeded to rig his way down the fine shaft which soon belled out into a superb free hang. Seventy odd metres later the three of us reached the bottom

and spent a pleasant hour viewing magnificent curatins and other wonderful formations. On arrival back at the top we found the weather had changed for the worst, so we dried out over strong coffee and snacks and shared some laughs with the farm family whose hospitality and kindness were second to none. It was a fairly unpleasant drive back to Beirut that evening in heavy rain with locals only slowing down marginally on the freeway despite the weather. Certain aspects of driving here are extremely crazy. Ex GSG member Hiba Aboulhosn arrived back from Oman so we met up in town for a few drinks in a trendy bar.

The following day no caving because most of the team went skiing. I spent the morning walking around central Beirut getting told what not to take photographs of by various police and security guards. In the afternoon I took a taxi drive to a small town called Bamdoun to visit the brother and family of a colleague of mine from college. Thursday evening was club night at SCL headquarters where Mike and Emma showed a presentation on a recent caving trip to China and we learnt of underground plans for the forthcoming weekend.

Friday 10th, and whilst eating manooshie at the side of the freeway we witnessed a pedestrian being killed by a hit and run driver. I told you it was nuts on the roads there. We parked up at a quarry on the outskirts of Beirut where we were to be privileged with a trip down Mgharet El Kassarat, otherwise known as Antelias. The cave was discovered by quarrying and several entrances were uncovered. Its underground streamway supplies most of Beirut with its water. No abseiling down this shaft for us: Beirut Water Authority had kindly erected a long concrete staircase leading down from a blockhouse which I think is the only current entrance. At the bottom of the stairs a



**Derek Pettiglio on Tyrolean Traverse, Mgharet El Kassarat
Photo: Fraser Simpson**

short Tyrolean traverse gains access to one of the more decorated sections of Antelias, with various dams, weirs and other waterworks equipment installed deep underground, making for an interesting place although over the years it has had its share of un-necessary damage. A couple of hours were spent on photography, then the plan was to head up into the mountains where we would spend the night camping with members of SCL. It was dark by the time we had erected a collection of borrowed tents and being at the snow line we spent the evening imbibing generous amounts of alcohol to ward off the cold.

We awoke to a beautiful morning to find ourselves camped in a large limestone depression with, in front of us, a large stunning natural bridge. More SCL members arrived and the plan was to conduct a vertical rescue practice exchanging information and ideas. Several hours were whiled away in the sunshine hauling a stretcher up and down by various methods and en route back to Beirut an excellent lunch was eaten.

Sunday 12th was our last day in Lebanon and we were fortunate enough to be invited to part of the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the discovery of the upper gallery in the world famous Jeita Grotto. Yet again an early start as we cavers had to enter the show cave before the public were admitted. We had been granted access to the further reaches of the cave that during the civil war were never developed for public admittance. As arranged with the SCL we did not have to pay the usual twenty dollars entrance fee. Also, cameras were banned (of course we did not have any cameras hidden in our tackle bags!)



**Upper Gallery, Mgharet El Kassarat, Lebanon, April 2009
Photo: Fraser Simpson**



**David Morrison Hauling Spoil out of Uamh an t-Sill, Coille Gaireallach, Skye.
Photo: David Morrison**



**Club Wedding of the Year as Annie Audsley and Roger Galloway Tie the Knot. Mendip, Sept. 2008
Photo: Ivan Young**



**Rescue Practice from Mica Schist Fissure,
A'Chrois, Argyll. April 2009
Photo: Ivan Young**



**Tony Boycott in Skye-way, Rana Hole
following improvements to the floor
Photo: Ivan Young**

Alan Jeffreys climbs a Rope Ladder on Well Pitch, Ireby Fell Cavern during the 2009 'Founder's Day' Trip.

Photo: Ivan Young



**Alex Latta in Canal, Jeanie Barrie's Cave, Peebles-shire
Photo: Mark Stanford**



**Dave Warren in Simpson's Pot,
Kingsdale during the Peter Ireson
Memorial Trip, August 2009.
Photo. Mark Lonnen**



**Scorpion from Sotano Tres Quimeras, Mexico. April, 2009
Photo: Eric Sanson**

Walking through an artificially enlarged tunnel we emerged into what must rank as the most beautiful cave I



had ever seen to date. Leaving the concrete walkway we climbed up to two dazzling galleries where we spent time on photography, eventually joining SCL members who had rigged the original route taken by Sami Karkabi fifty years ago. This allowed some of us to descend to the streamway, to be whisked out by boat into the sunshine. What a memorable day! Later on we met up with members of SCL for a drink which ended up being a dry fruit cocktail bar. We certainly got more than our five-a-day that evening. Still, never mind - a night off the sauce did us good, especially as we were leaving several hours later.

Camp Site at Faraya
Photo: Fraser Simpson

What a fantastic country with people showing such kindness and hospitality. Many thanks to SCL for the loan of ropes and tackle and its members, especially Rena Karanouh and Issam Bou Jaoude.

FISHING FOR CAVES IN WEST ASSYNT

By Alex Latta

On a recent sea-fishing weekend to Clashnessie Bay in Assynt I became bored as the fish weren't biting and



A View of Clashnessie Sea Cave and rock arch.
Photo: Alex Latta

so went off exploring the local geology. Heading north along the rocky bay the first thing I found was a small sea cave (tube/blowhole type) about two metres wide by one metre high. The tide was already coming in so it couldn't be explored further, but was fairly short. Adjacent to this was a much larger and impressive sea cave which has multiple entrances. I climbed into the lower entrance first but was again



Looking Out of Clashnessie Sea Cave from Right Hand Entrance.
Photo: Alex Latta

stopped by the rising tide giving sea water about a metre deep just inside the entrance. At this point though I could see that the cave also had several holes in the roof and another, smaller entrance into its main chamber higher up on the rock face. The internal chamber area is about eight metres in height by five metres square, and the small passage about three metres in length. I think it is worth seeing when the tide is out - no formations of any sort but interesting all the same.

A much more interesting find though was a small ‘real’ cave a short distance further north in an enclosed area



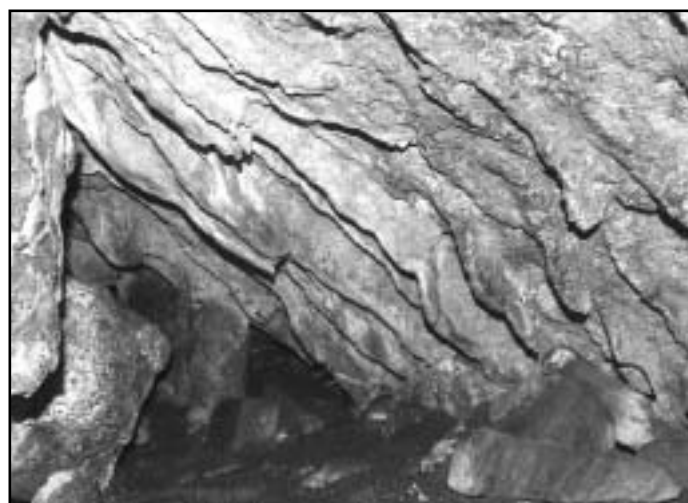
**The Author Outside Uamh Crom Mullach (Entrance top left)
Photo: Alex Latta**

of obvious ancient cliff collapse. At the very rear of a small shingle beach among a large heap of boulders a hole 0.5 metres by 0.7 metres could be clearly seen in the remaining headland. I didn’t have a torch or caving gear with me so gingerly entered using the ‘autofocus’ LED on my camera to see the best I could. The cave is roughly 2.5 metres by 2.5 metres and 1.2 metres high with an approximate 45 degree roof sloping down from left to right when viewed from the entrance. It has a mixed mud/boulder floor but was not overly wet. On the right hand side the sloping wall is decorated with curtain formations and to the rear of the cave a few sections of thick stal. joining the roof to the floor. My thoughts at the time were that there were

some small spaces at floor level continuing onwards behind the area where the formations were and also possibly on the left (I couldn’t pay enough attention with my autofocus light). In the absence of any evidence of it being known I have called it Uamh Crom Mullach (Sloping Roof Cave ?) The only reference I can give to its location is a grid reference from my old 1959 one inch to the mile map of the area, Sheet 13 NC 055318. The sea cave is situated at approximately Sheet 13 NC 057316 and is situated on the prominent headland just north of Clashnessie Bay. This Live Earth internet link shows where Uamh Crom Mullach is located: <http://www.flashearth.com/?1at=58.231468&1on=-5.31458&z=13.7&r=0&src=msl>



**Uamh Crom Mullach. Looking Back Toward the Entrance.
Photo: Alex Latta**



**Uamh Crom Mullach. Rear of Cave Showing Calcite Formations.
Photo: Alex Latta**

I wish I had paid more attention to the area towards the back of the cave as I’m now wondering if it goes any further or has possibilities of extension. The geology of West Assynt is stated to be ‘grey gneiss’ so I’m left wondering what formed those curtains on the right wall?

Getting a little infatuated with this little dirty hole, as I knew there were more secrets to be revealed, on 15th September 2009 I went back to it while my brother fished on the beach. Time was of the essence since we had arranged to meet up later so I first set about removing the boulders from the front area of the ‘triangle’ at the back of the cave which revealed that what still looks like ‘stal’ at the triangle is in fact part of a larger calcited boulder that blocks the way on. I then dug boulders out of the rear floor in the same area which let me

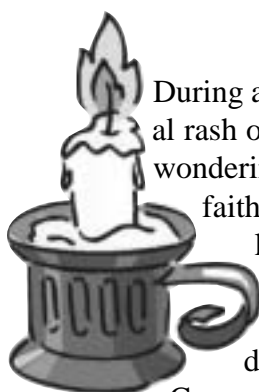
get closer to see beyond the blockage. I reckon I could see 8-10 metres beyond the blockage and still can't see an end or back wall. Having managed to get closer to the rear I took some photographs and an accidental video by poking my camera beyond the blockage. Some stal and needle formations can be seen here.

I had to finish up while trying to deepen the access area into the triangle, the floor here being made up of boulders 'cemented' together with calcite. I am not sure whether this would provide crawling access in towards the stal and needle crystals, hopefully with room to move left of it to find a way on. There may be some greater headroom further in but without access it is difficult to say at this time. It is without doubt one for people who like tight digs resembling ones I've seen in ANUSC. Question: is it really stal and needle crystals or a decaying woolly mammoth?

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CAVING BY CANDLELIGHT

By Richard Simpson



During a period of stormy weather here on the Scottish west coast we experienced a not unusual rash of power cuts in the village where I live. It was during one of these blackouts I began wondering about a few things. Does having a lightning rod on top of a church show a lack of faith! Why do I keep stubbing my toe on the same piece of furniture? What would it be like to cave by candlelight and where did I put those damn matches I had a minute ago?

I'm sure I've read accounts of people using candles while caving (back in the good ol' days), indeed I have come across evidence of this in Breakish Cave and McCoiter's Cave at Portree but I'm sure that wasn't their only source of lighting. As Skye is the nearest caving area to me I decided to test out my curiosity there and quickly chose to use High Pasture Cave which would give easy going passage.

A few days later and the storm had abated. With a promise of a bright day ahead and the swelling in my big toe reduced enough allowing me to put on my wellies but still with some discomfort, thoughts of journeying underground were put into action.

Packing the necessary gear and remaining candles from the power cuts into the box of my motorcycle, I made my way to the site but not before stopping off at Broadford to buy a few tins of beer (it's quite a large box), reasons for which will soon be made clear.

Parking at the lay-by opposite a rough track which leads to the archaeological excavations and cave entrance of High Pasture Cave I quickly changed into my caving gear and put on my helmet while being watched by a small group of wary looking sheep. Word had got around the local sheep community that a strange human had for no apparent reason rubbed two of them together, leaving them stuck to one another (see: *Caving With a Beard*, GSG Bulletin 4th Series 4(1) pp39-40). It was said that it took Mabel and Jessie until the sun was almost down before they managed to free themselves from each other. This was no doubt aided by a release of static charge when young Timothy tried to suckle his mother and a blue spark arced from her teat, shooting the young lamb through the air where he landed dazed but unhurt a few metres away. Other sheep say that it is just an urban myth and that humans are far too stupid to want to do anything like that.

Carrying the candles, waterproof matches, lighter, cable ties, penknife and the tins of Export in my tackle bag along the short walk to the cave entrance, I quickly scooped down one of the tins of beer. Letting out a loud burp, I cut the top off the empty tin, split it down to the bottom and partially cut around the base before opening it up, making a crude lantern. Why use a beer can? Well, apart from not needing to use sticky back plastic, the idea was adopted from many a bothy trip, where by the end of the trip there would be enough make-

shift lanterns to light up the bothy like a glitter ball, and as there were no suitable cans in the shop I felt the sacrifice of a few more brain cells would be worth it. Besides, it also helped ease the now throbbing pain in my toe.

Stepping down the short ladder and joining the main stream passage I took out a candle and matches from the tackle bag and wondering why the matchbox was not also made waterproof I lit the wick. Dripping wax onto



**The author in full flow, High Pasture Cave.
Photo: Richard Simpson**

the base of the lantern I lightly twisted the candle into place and then stooped along the scalloped passage. Having been through the cave umpteen times before it was not a problem to find my way along the passage with the dim light flickering just ahead of me to the duck which would open onto higher passage. This was one point where I thought it might be a little awkward with the lighting set-up. The water level had been higher than usual due to the stormy weather and the air space through the short duck was only about six inches. It was time to break out the spare light but I made a bit of a hash of it so had to start again with another tin. The burp which echoed through the cave as I readied this other lantern sounded like a stag's roar, warning rivals off his territory. Thankfully there wasn't a reply.

I left the new lantern on a small ledge a few metres from the duck with the lighter as a backup in case the wick became too wet on my return. Negotiating this two metre duck was a bit tricky. Attaching the tackle bag to my waist belt and kneeling in the water I then had to turn my head to the side before ducking under the lip of rock, trying hard to keep the candle flame out of the water while doing my best not to blow it out. My breathing became faster and sharper as the cold water reached the more sensitive areas, made all the easier as both my under and oversuit are showing the full effects of many a day's caving within the tight, sharp Jurassic limestone Skye has to offer. I somehow managed to keep the candle alight as I emerged from the duck and as the passage from this point becomes higher and easier, it was time to break out extra candle power. I was secretly proud of the never ending belch which resonated down the passage and by now my toe had ceased to give any jip whatsoever. This lantern, mounted to the helmet by a cable tie through the lamp bracket would give a hands free option. It was certainly easier than attaching a wine bottle with a candle stuck in its neck. Feeling rather pleased with myself I began to whistle a merry tune as I ambled my way along the high passage, careful not to go too fast as the naked flames are susceptible to the draughts. I walked along the high passage only to be interrupted by an occasional convulsive hiccup which would send the candle flames into a flickering panic, forcing a stop to give them a chance to settle.

Reaching a short but wet climb I was soon upon a narrower section of rift passage having a heavy shower of water falling from high above which again, due to the recent precipitation not only threatened to extinguish the headlamp but drown out my whistling, sending it badly out of tune. Just like at the duck I decided to leave a spare lamp behind in case the set up became dowsed by the shower.

After passing this shower the going felt easier, no doubt aided by the now toe numbing consumption of alcohol, and I soon reached the far end of the cave. Finding the smaller passage to the left of the main chamber sumped I realised I still had one tin of beer left as a back-up. Downing the last tin in order to lighten the load of my tackle bag, I quickly felt my bladder feeling rather full and heavy, not helped of course by the sound of running water resonating throughout the cave. A speedy but controlled exit of the cave was now called for. Setting a steady pace I returned to the shower and short climb where I realised I had stopped hiccuping. I quickly put this down to my mind focussing on controlling my bladder muscles and dashed under the water

obstacle while trying to shield the helmet-mounted candle with my free hand. Somehow it remained alight but the hand held candle was put out. The next stretch of cave leading to the duck offered some respite to the stomach muscles. The candlelight was easily snuffed out as I entered the duck, the darkness smothered me but I knew the duck well enough not to panic. While passing this last obstacle and blowing hard again as the water threatened to submerge me (it's amazing the sobering effect cold water has when it reaches the more sensitive areas), the side of my helmet soon ceased to scrape off the roof, telling me I was through the duck and on to the last stretch of the cave. I stashed the now crushed hand lantern in my tackle bag and after some groping around I found the spare lamp and lighter.

Drying my hand as best I could on the inside shoulder part of my undersuit I managed to light the candle. Rounding a bend a short time later I could see daylight coming down from the hatch but by this point I had added a few more rips to my suit and could feel my face turning redder by the moment as the strain of the bladder muscle became unbearable. Climbing back up the short ladder to exit through the hatch I was blinded by the sunlight and so, shielding my eyes, I staggered about like someone who has been spun round blindfold. I tripped up a short series of steps, stubbing my toes. Mindful of the important site I was in, I vented a few expletives as I hopped and hobbled (not necessarily in a straight line) to an area where I was able to release the pressure and strain with an overwhelming sense of euphoria.

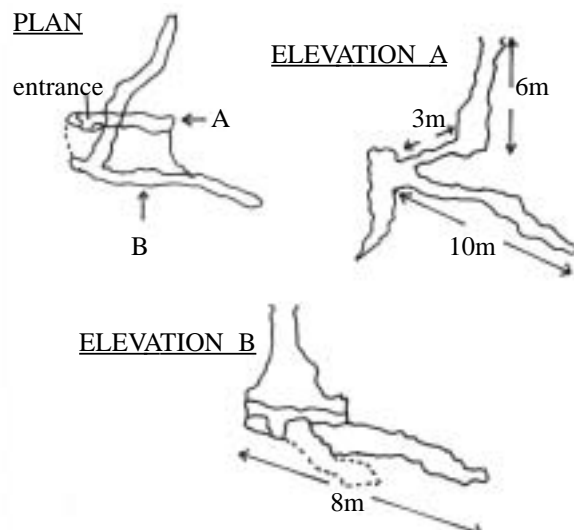
Unable to legally drive home yet, I kicked off my wellies, lay down on the grass, elevated my now aching toes on the tackle bag and promptly slept off the lingering effects.

One of a group of sheep having watched this spectacle turned to its neighbour and comments, "See, I told you humans were far too stupid!"

MEET NOTE: FISSURE CAVE ON BEINN TULAICHEAN, Stirlingshire.

By Derek Pettiglio

On Sunday 7th June, I went for a walk up Beinn Tulaichean to look at fissure caves on the summit. The weather was a vast improvement on my last trip to the area when Jim Salvona, Walter Fairnie and myself looked at caves Jim had previously spotted as potential sites. Unfortunately, I could not find the large cave that we had explored on the previous trip but I believe the entrance has been blocked as I'm sure I looked in the right place. I only found one good cave that we had not checked previously. Perhaps it had been seen on the last visit but missed out in the terrible weather conditions. The cave was very near the summit, about 70 metres to the east of the path. The entrance is about 1.5m by 0.8m and is a vertical pitch of 6m. At the base the cave extends 4m one way and 1m the other. The wall on the south side is undercut and a 3m crawl leads to a ledge and a drop of 1.5m. The passage continues east for 8m, sloping down to a choke. Another passage heads north under the entrance and is approximately 10m long, also sloping down to a choke. A small hole in the floor at the base of the pitch also leads into this passage. The cave was GPS'd and is situated at NN 41746 19440 at an altitude of 918 metres.



**FISSURE CAVE
on Beinn Tulaichean**

**NGR: NN 41746 19440
Alt. 918m**

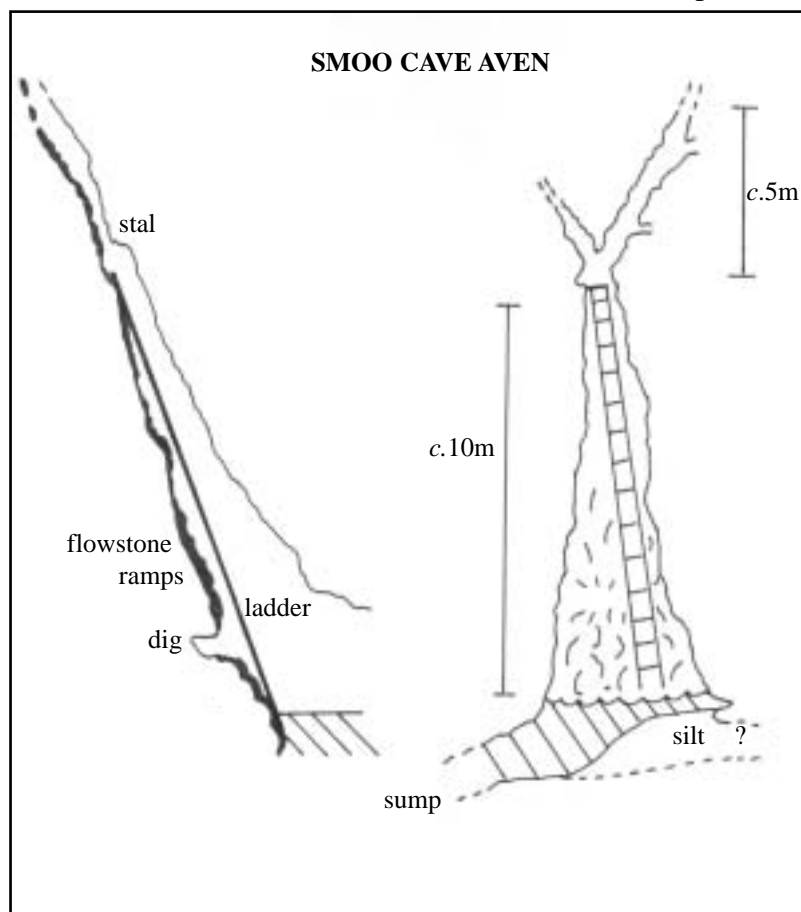
SMOO CAVE - 'SHAKES AND LADDERS SHAFT'

By Iain Greig and Colin Coventry

Whilst taking in the festivities of the Durness Games week, we finally decided to investigate the main shaft/aven above the terminal sump of Smoo Cave instead of continually pointing up to a dark void in the ceiling while conducting tours, unsure of where it actually went. (Previously described in GSG Bulletin 4th Series 3(3) p.24). Knowing that there was a relatively large shakehole in the back garden of the B&B lying almost directly above the aven, we decided to push this after Alan Jeffreys had previously free-climbed the flowstone many years beforehand and thought that it 'may go off to the left' above the flowstone with possible passageway.

Remembering conversation after Goon's free climb of the shaft, he had also suggested the use of a pole to investigate the area further. Not awfully keen on the idea of climbing a pole ⁽¹⁾, a robust, safety certified ladder, courtesy of local painter and decorator M.D. Mackay (provider of fine coating systems) was used instead. This 10m ladder was carried into the rear of the cave, partly by river raft, to the delight of bemused American tourists, informed that we were painters and decorators thinking that the rather drab green colour often put potential cave tour visitors off.

After a suitable crevice was pointed out by the assisting 'Kevin' Coventry (designer of aircraft to royalty), the ladder was secured onto the base of the flowstone ramp above the sump by a Wild Country No.9 rock along



with a stal thread. Once it was in place, we made upward progress along the ladder first ascended by Colin 'I hate ladders' Coventry. Once Colin had a quick look and descended the lower half of the shaft with his total non-confidence in ladders intact, Iain was able to follow him up with a slightly brighter lamp and a little more confidence, relying solely on the security of a figure of eight backed up by a granny knot.

Upon reaching the upper limit of the ladder, the shaft was seen to split into two sections overhead. One verged off to the left and appeared too tight after a couple of metres but the other to the right looked to be a relatively easy five metre scramble upwards over some interesting flowstone and curtain formations. However, with previous experiences of flowstone climbing within Smoo Cave it has been shown that additional protection would be recommended with something like a 15 metre vertical drop immediately below, especially due to a small waterfall resulting in some muddy flowstone.

fall resulting in some muddy flowstone.

Therefore due to the lack of suitable climbing gear (and bottle), any free climb onwards was seen to be unjustifiable. With a great sigh of relief, Iain descended after being tempted by the climb from the top rung of a wobbly and rather slippery ladder, not helped by the layers of wet residual paint which did not inspire confidence.

Further to this short investigation, a return trip is planned with additional protection for the lead climber although observations from this trip imply that it is more likely to pinch out towards the surface than lead into any accessible passage, although some small silt-choked shaftettes branching off were also observed.

(1) Editor's Note: I meant a *scaling* pole, with a ladder attached, not a rigid Indian Rope Trick!



The Smoo Crew relaxing after (or is it before, judging from the clean over-suits) their intrepid adventure in Smoo Aven. [Ladder used in the background]

CHOICE EXTRACT: [from *The Washington (DC) Times*, 25th January 1925]

“LIVE IN SEA CAVES AND DEFY THE LAW

Nightly Orgies of Disreputable Colony on the Coast of Scotland - Live Amid Filth and Vermin

EDINBURGH, Jan. 25. - The cave dweller recently sent to prison in Ayrshire for neglecting his children was a member of a large colony who infest the sea caves of the Ayrshire coast.

Nearly every cave - and the cliffs are honeycombed with them - has its recognized occupants. Large caves accommodate families; some are so small that they can harbour only a single dweller.

The laws of civilisation are not observed by the cave dwellers. They have a sort of rude socialism, which bids fair to degenerate into anarchy. The conditions of life are pestilential, and the habits are degrading.

If the cave dwellers see something that they want, they take it - and they are blessed with sharp eyesight. They laugh at the police.

The Police Powerless

“We try to turn them out,” said a police officer of the district, “but the attempt is hopeless.

“I enter their caves periodically and turn them out neck and crop, but as soon as my back is turned they return to the caves. I burn their straw, sacks and bedding, and all their other paraphernalia, but such things are easily replaced.

“I do not relish the job. The caves are filthy and verminous.

“The people go to Ayr or Maybole, and carry back immense quantities of drink.

“The results are dreadful. Men, women and children herd together in a drunken stupor, and no tribe of savages could behave worse.

“The potato pits in the district are robbed to the despair of the farmers who own them, and the many beautiful species of ferns for which Ayrshire is so famous will, I fear, shortly become extinct owing to these people using most of them for bedding and selling the finer specimens for drink.”

Lawlessness and License

Large numbers of navvies - there are several gangs employed on the Ayr to Girvan light railway construction - herd with the cave dwellers, and they supply the bulk of the drink.

There are many visitors to the cave colony, for the lawlessness and license of the place appeal strongly to the dissolute of the neighbourhood. The cobblers of Maybole regard the colony as a paradise on earth. One of them speaks with glowing enthusiasm of an orgy at the caves.

“It was worked on the co-operative system. A lot of us went down to the caves. Some brought whisky, and one brought a barrel of beer with him in a cart. We had a blazing fire, and as there was no chimney, the cave was so full of smoke that you could not see your neighbour's face. I shall not forget it in a hurry.”

These cave dwellers terrorize the countryside. Expert in poaching, vigorous in chicken stealing and sheep-lifting, they flourish exceedingly, and are not likely to be soon banished from the scenes of their depredations.

Nothing can be legally done to oust them. They plead that the air, the sky and the caves are their natural birthright.”

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(Many thanks to Tony Oldham for forwarding this newspaper report)

Tony Jarratt was an extraordinary caver by any standard. It is no exaggeration to say that he dedicated his life to speleology, and was known all over the world for his determined efforts to explore the realm beneath our feet. No task was too forbidding, no dig impossible, and his successes populate guide books in many disparate regions of the UK and beyond.

In 2008, he commenced a biographical narrative derived from his meticulous caving diaries, fleshing out the bald facts with humorous anecdotes, but this was cruelly truncated by his death in August of last year.

Tony Audsley writes: "Tony started writing this when he was told about the terminal nature of his cancer. He tried very hard to complete it, but in the end he got beaten. The account is incomplete but no-one but Tony could complete it, so here it is, as it is.

The account has a refreshing immediacy about it, perhaps an indication of his rush to try to finish it. I have edited the text only slightly, largely limited to scattering a handful of commas over it and putting in a few paragraph breaks."

Covering a period from the mid-1960s to 1988, here is the story of J-Rat's caving life, warts and all. I have divided it into two parts, the second to follow in the next issue of the Bulletin.

Alan Jeffreys

FORTY YEARS WELL SPENT

By Tony Jarratt

"I shall be gone and live, or stay and die."

Shakespeare.

It seemed a good idea to knock up an article on my caving and digging experiences over the last forty-four years. This would hopefully illustrate the changing nature of our way of life to complement the current series of Descent articles on a similar theme. Any of the characters mentioned herein could have written an almost identical tale involving a whole host of different personalities and events in the karst lands of Britain, but I just happened to be anorak enough to write it down! The classic books on this subject are those written by my old mate and top raconteur Jim Eyre, which should be read and enjoyed by all up and coming cavers, and Alan 'Goon' Jeffreys has also penned some classic articles in Descent. Dave 'Pooh' Yeandle's autobiography covers much the same period and people but with a greater emphasis on diving and the Dales.

I started off as a 14-year old, naive Brummie school kid who cycled with his mates to the dangerously unstable but very impressive limestone mines in the Black Country town of Dudley. Most of these are now fallen in, destroyed or otherwise inaccessible - doubtless a good thing for the health of the local kids. I remember that our lighting was primitive - torches and hurricane lamps - but at least I had a pressed-fibre miners' helmet given to me by my collier 'uncle' Glyn Thomas from Tredegar. My inspiration came from '*How Underground Britain is Explored*' (Showell Styles), which I unearthed in Saltley grammar School library, and also from watching dramatic cave rescues on black and white TV. My mother regularly stated that I would not have a motorbike or go potholing! She was wrong on both counts.

Very soon after this we moved to Congresbury, Somerset and I attended Nailsea Grammar School where, after a couple of years, I found a like-minded soul in the person of the adventurous Steve Shepstone. Thus I commenced my real caving career with endless visits to Burrington Combe and even the Ystradfellte area - reached then by car ferry and very remote compared to today. We both joined the Exploration Group of North Somerset (EGONS) and added Eastwater, Stoke Lane and Swildon's to our trophies. I had laddered the Forty Foot Pot by 3rd July 1966 and was now committed to a cold, wet, muddy and totally absorbing future in the world's entrails in company with some of the craziest characters on the planet. On the 4th February 1967 things got even worse when I commenced my first dig in the Water Chamber of Goatchurch Cavern and was able to see into a small stream passage with a decorated 2m diameter chamber above. This was eventually reached on the 2nd July and though only tiny, its exploration proved to be the final nail in the coffin of normality and the beginning of a life now dedicated to digging grotty holes in unpromising and obscure places

throughout the land.

Devon and Yorkshire also were visited at this time and Steve and I then graduated to membership of the Axbridge Caving Group and Archaeological Society along with Stu McManus, Dave Yeandle, etc. Here we met older and more experienced Mendip cavers such as the still active John Chapman (Tom's dad), Dr Bob and Ann Everton, Mike 'Fish' Jeanmaire and James Cobbett (these latter two my lifelong heroes), Dr. Stan Cannicott and many others. Social contacts from other clubs included Zot, Jok Orr, Bob Lewis, Malcolm Cotter, Tony Knibbs, Simon Knight and eventually just about everyone in our newly discovered 'Centre of the Universe', the Hunter's Lodge Inn. Here we learnt to sing both caving and foul songs and to destroy our few brain cells with cheap cider and ale. The five-mile walk from the Axbridge hut often doubled on the way back! I was overawed by the hard men in the pub and was particularly wary of the rude and crude B.E.C. - a club that I swore to avoid joining at all costs!

Our caving gear at this time was essentially 'wool next to the skin', long johns, string vests, boiler suits together with army gaiters and a hemp waist line and hobnailed boots. Wellies were frowned upon and wet-suits were just about to appear to revolutionise caving, although the French sharkskin neoprene was very expensive and only for the truly dedicated. To get mine I sold my golf clubs! Nylon ropes were coming into use but the occasional rope and wood ladder was sometimes seen - I did Centipede Pitch in Lost John's Cavern on one. Cycles, motorbikes, scooters and sometimes illicitly borrowed vehicles got us about if it was too far to walk. Cardboard miners' and plastic construction helmets held 'stinky' carbide lamps, crappy battery cycle lamps or bloody great heavy NiFe cells for the real 'tigers'. Old batteries and carbide lamps littered the depths of Eastwater and Swildon's along with boot soles and bits of flesh burnt off by alkali! All trips were acetylene scented.

Our next dig started in the abandoned Nettle Hole, Nordrach on the 10th September 1967 and was soon to move to the adjacent 'Foot and Crutch' depression where we were allowed to continue work during that year's foot and mouth outbreak. I also got dragged through my first sump in Stoke Lane so that I could sherpa bottles for my heroes - another prelude to future misery as a not very dedicated cave diver. This was to be a tool to get me to the parts that other diggers couldn't reach. Chris Richards, Clive North, John Cornwell and team had now discovered Sludge Pit Hole and we were recruited to dig here at the sump bypass. 1968 saw the discovery of Ubley Warren Pot via the 'Foot and Crutch' entrance, the discovery of the initial section of Tynings Barrow Swallet and the washing away of the floor of the Forty Foot Pot - and an illegal re-entry of Pen Park Hole in Bristol.

Digging at Netherwood Swallet, Nordrach, started early the following year but was not to last. Seeing what lies below it now maybe we should have persevered! Working trips to St. Cuthbert's Swallet in the company of Dave 'Wig' Irwin, Bob Cross, Butch, Crange, John Riley, Martin Bishop, Brian Woodward and Dick Wickens may have indicated the shape of things to come and work, in the form of a surveying course at the Ordnance Survey HQ in Southampton, definitely did. The next 19 years were to see my horizons much expanded and whole droves of new characters discovered. A drunken weekend dig at the flood-blocked Eastwater Cavern saw a bunch of young reprobates from the Axbridge, Severn Valley, B.E.C. and E.G.O.N.S. re-entering the system, much to the surprise and annoyance of the older and wiser Hunters' bar-proppers such as Mike Dewdney-York!

On a trip to Derbyshire, Eldon Hole chamber was entered after a very long time by laddering down the side of an underground snow crevasse, thus proving that winters were indeed harsher then. I was very taken with the Peak District and vowed to spend more time there with its tough Eldon and Pegasus cavers. Back on the Hill I undertook my first cave dive on Boxing Day under the tutorship of Alan 'Satanic' Mills. This presented a minor problem due to the cold water and the fact that I had just had most of my teeth removed and couldn't grip the gag properly! I also couldn't swim. My kit consisted of a brand new and expensive Deepstar valve, a pressure gauge and a side-mounted ex-WD 'Tadpole' bottle with pillar valve. These were off Mosquito bombers and cost 2/6d. After hours spent unwinding the bullet-proof wire wrapping and empty-

ing out the rust they were ready for (hopeful) filling by some unsuspecting compressor owner (Midland Diving were reputed to fill a brown paper bag for a price) and they saw sterling service throughout Britain. Mike Boon's had a unique bayonet fitting and now hangs in the Wessex hut, having been retrieved from Swildon's Nine by Pete Moody and I. Usually over pressurised they were best kept out of the sun and not dropped. I once fell off my motorbike with mine strapped on the back - exciting!

1970 and I was now resident in Shrewsbury, Shropshire and commuting regularly at weekends to Derbyshire, where I joined the Pegasus Club along with Mac and James Cobbett and gained many new friends such as Paul and Jud Thomson, Cheg Chester, one-armed Dave Lucas, Pete Watkinson, Barrie Parker and Vic 'The Wop' Holland. Eldon mates included Clive Westlake, George Cooper, Paul Deakin, Bobs Togood and Dearman, Dave 'Grotty' Gill, Bill Whitehouse etc. Here, and in Shropshire and mid and north Wales, my continued interest in old mines was rekindled and a major digging project commenced in the fabulous and deep Hollandtwine Mine above Castleton in a search for the lost 'Great Swallow'. Shropshire also generated an interest in other subterranea in the form of the artificial Hawkstone Caves, Nesscliff Cave and others.

This same year, the next caving apprenticeship took place when I joined the Nottingham University Caving Club expedition to the Picos D'Europa in Northern Spain where a good amount of exploration and diving took place in a very mellow spot between the mountains and coast. Spanish cider, lakes of cheap booze, hot sun and warm caves had rapidly converted us to the idea of foreign expeditions - which was later brusquely altered in the depths of Austria! The only British discovery this year was the entering of Rum Aven, Swildon's with Satanic and Al Thompson.

The new year saw me briefly diving in the Pont Newydd Rising, Cilcain, Flintshire, several training dives in White Lady/Cwm Pwll-y-Rhyd and Porth-yr-Ogof, P8, Redhurst Swallet, Bagshawe Cavern and Swildon's - where the sump 6 bypass was opened up. My most novel 'dive' was for some 500m in the dry but gas-filled Leigh Level, Minsterley, Shropshire to reach the foot of the blocked Blue Barn Shaft. Supposedly with an atmosphere of methane, sulphur dioxide and sulphuretted hydrogen, this may not have been a good idea at the time - especially as I had left a work colleague at 600m in to await my return! An interesting free-diving trip in Bridge Cave, Ystradfellte yielded some good new passage which was written up in a Westminster S.G. rag but the arsehole who wrote it forgot to mention that I was in front of him (or even that I was there at all!) and a dive in Ogof Fechan frightened me shitless when I blundered into big, open passage which was way beyond my capabilities. A tourist dive to Little Neath River Cave 5 with Dick Pike was another epic when we came out on a single light.

Digging at last paid off in Hollandtwine Mine with the discovery of several hundred feet of attractive natural passages leading off from the 360ft level but not, alas, the Great Swallow. Keith 'Mad Ben' Bentham, famous digging eccentric and character, and Jerry Wooldridge failed to find it some years later but the current diving team of Jim Lister and friends are trying to get there from beyond Ink Sump in Peak Cavern and I wish them the best of luck. According to the Old Man's sketch section this apparently undescended natural shaft is on a par with Titan Shaft! One of our digging team was the newly recruited Sulo Sulonen - a travelling, erudite Finn with a German registered sports car, an Irish girlfriend and heaps of charisma. We soon got completely used to his broken accent as he worked his way up to club secretary, got regularly paralytic, became a cave diver and was submerged in the caving ethos. More on Sulo later. He was instrumental in organising our Christmas visit to the truly magic land of County Clare where I discovered fantastic, clean-washed river caves, traditional Irish music and endless supplies of Guinness at the famous O'Connor's Bar, the world's most hospitable people and even romance. Since then, Clare and I believe Ireland in general, has been ruined by European handouts and lost much of its character - though I am sure that the locals prefer their new lifestyle. My memories remain happily frozen in time.

Back home 1972 was spent caving and mine exploring throughout England and Wales with notable dives in Pridhamsleigh Cavern and Swildon's Hole. The latter involved free-climbing of the, to me, awesome Victoria Aven in company with the redoubtable Pete Moody (I was now a Wessex member). This was par-

ticularly satisfying as it had been my ambition since I had heard of the place and a major reason for learning to dive before some other bugger scaled it! A fascination with Bob Dylan picked up from John Norris of the Axbridge inspired the name Desolation Row for the appropriately grim extensions at the top. U.B.S.S. divers Tony Boycott, Bob Churcher, Aldwyn Cooper and Julian Walford later assisted here and joined my growing band of cronies. At this time we were all under the fairly rigid control of the superbly eccentric Dr. Oliver Cromwell Lloyd - of whom there will never be the like again - and whose birthday parties in Swildon's Old Grotto were truly memorable with sherry, cake, and bods in evening dress, playing banjos or, in Roger Dor's case, carrying a tray of booze and with a dog on a lead!

In the Peak District, Ray Mansfield, Bob Mehew and other Shepton men and I joined Paul Deakin, Dave Draper, P.B. Smith (another 'over the top' character), Mick Durdey (yet another, but more volatile!) and a host of E.P.C., B.S.A. and T.S.G. enthusiasts at a pumping session at Knotlow Mine, where an ancient and complete rag and chain pump was discovered. This was a major find in the world of mining artefacts so even more satisfying as it was the Mendippers who identified it! It now resides at Matlock Mining Museum.

In North Wales, Pont Newydd Rising came back into favour and I passed my first virgin sump. Only 23m long and with a mere 12m extension beyond but all mine. In the extensive, aquatic and bloody dangerous Hillcarr Sough, Derbyshire, our Pegasus team joined Nottingham Mines Research Group members Lawrence Hurt and Dave Epton on the rediscovery of some 4-500m of neck deep canal over 3km into the level, the atmosphere of which was essentially composed of methane, carbon dioxide and sulphuretted hydrogen (familiar?) and which necessitated the use of a canoe full of air bottles to keep us alive. Oh, the folly of youth - but what an adrenalin buzz! (On missing Vic the Wop before leaving, we providentially found him lying on the floor, underwater and without air. He still owes us a pint).

Apart from all this normal (?) caving activity there was usually a good sprinkling of rescues throughout the year. One in Giant's Hole stands out as a classic. Two of our lads were reported overdue, so three of us went for a look and found the cave rapidly flooding. Halfway down the Crabwalk we met Al Steans who shouted "Leave me and get to Chuck". Our man was wedged horizontally in The Vice with only his head above water and as we reached him this backed up then flowed right over him. I pushed him and he was swept away downstream, luckily to stop on the edge of a pitch from where Andy 'Honker' Sutton and I dragged him to an alcove. He and I were to spend some hours here while Andy left for help and a knife to cut Chuck's waterlogged heavy duty goon suit open. Chuck was too exhausted to move. Disembodied voices beyond The Vice proved to be Daves Draper and Allsop. The former provided coffee and aid and the latter an utterly useless NiFe cell - far too blunt! To cut a long story short, I retreated amongst a crowd of incompetents with my (actually Pete 'Ratarse' Webb's) wet suit trousers being partly washed away and the glorious sight of a hard Eldon team traversing in above. These lads took 16 hours to get Chuck out on this minor epic. The finest sight I saw on my retreat was the sudden, rapid and unplanned descent of Dr. Hugh Kidd from the ceiling amongst a cloud of whisky fumes. Where are such heroes in today's land of health and safety?

The year was concluded with a relaxing (read drunken) County Clare session, but a Doolin Cave through trip earlier in the year is worth recording to illustrate the charms of the place. Jim Shannon, my girlfriend Peggy Faughnan and I laddered Fisherstreet Pot with a borrowed 20m Coastguard ladder taken to the entrance by motorbike. In dry grotts and with bike lamps and quarrymen's helmets we waded upstream to emerge in glorious sunshine and hitch a lift back to O'Connor's Bar on a donkey cart. The E.U. provided none of this.

Pont Newydd Rising featured again early in 1973, when another 21m of dry stuff was found and the second sump of 12m passed to a black space. This became blacker when 'light pox' set in. At Thistle Pot dig in Derbyshire, some 20m of pretty but loose rift was found with a 4m deep, blocked pitch below. In World's End Cave No.4, Llangollen, I was forced to drag my drowning staffholder, the infamous Gordon 'Poison Dwarf' Parkin (Eldon P.C.) from a low duck as we were supposed to be at work at the time. Some of his other claims to fame were being left down Giant's Hole for three days with a Mars Bar until he was surprisingly missed and of pebble-dashing his own arse in a dig when his tiny bit of scrounged slow burning fuse detonated as he

tripped running back down the passage and dropping his stinky. His kind offer to assist some Welsh farmers rescue a terrier from a slate fissure near Trawsfynydd resulted in another day skiving off mapmaking, many soggy and distressed press operatives, the top half of a mountain blown off and, unsurprisingly, a decidedly dead dog. Surveying at night by torchlight rounded off this novel day. He did join me at a new dig at Ogof Rhewl near Ruthin, where I was now stationed, but this promising site still awaits a good push.

After a brief spell in the Shropshire Mining Club I was now involved in the formation of the North Wales Caving Club - a conglomeration of independent groups who still exist but were once again fragmented to a degree by the dreaded club politics. Crispin Ebbs, Graham Woolley, Jerry Dobby, Phil Huner, Mel Davies, Pete Appleton, Alan Hawkins, Phil the Miner, Derek Brandon and a host of witty Scousers provided much amusement and some good digging trips with not a little passage found in this remarkably unexplored and promising area. On the evening of the 8th June I just happened to be at the club dig in the dry river bed at Cilcain where I had done only one previous shift. Pete arrived and after an hour or so of boulder shifting, I was able to squeeze down into a surprisingly large passage. Pete joined me and, passing a duck in our clean clothes, we proceeded to explore one of the largest caves in North Wales - Ogof Hesp Alyn. Within two days we had over 2km of superb phreatic tunnels, chambers and pitches and lots of leads including a static sump. North Wales was suddenly in the news and is now in its rightful place as one of Britain's top caving areas with a magnificent variety of caves and mines opened up by the N.W.C.C. and Grosvenor Caving Group amongst others.

A choice mining treat this year was a visit along with twenty two other Mendip cavers, mainly B.E.C., to Somerset's last working colliery, Writhlington. The 1,461 feet deep downcast shaft was descended and a mile or so of 'gates' and workings inspected before we got a ride back on the conveyor belt. Oh, these heady pre health and safety days were in another world. A surface geological visit to the Avoca Mines in Wicklow with my Welsh 'cousin' Jeff Thomas and an introduction to the Blaenau Ffestiniog Slate Quarries also took place.

This year's expedition was the surreal 'Amazin' Raisin Show' to the Reseau de la Pierre St. Martin in the French and Spanish Pyrenees in the company of Eldon, B.S.A., B.E.C., D.C.C., L.U.S.S., A.C.G., W.S.G., French and Polish cavers.. Ladders, abseiling and self lining were our preferred techniques as S.R.T. had yet to make a real impact (though James Cobbett and I had experimented with dreaded Heibler jammers in Spain in 1970) and this was to make rigging hard work but classically satisfying for our mainly North Midlands heroes. Here we met Max Cosyns, maker of the infamous winch from which Marcel Loubens fell, got filmed by a Bulgarian T.V. crew in the Salle Verna, attempted to rescue five Poles doing an illegal through trip, burnt off Rubin 'Gonads' Gomez (self professed top Frog caver), got sunburnt and stuck without passports in no man's land, de-rigged a 1300 ft pitch with ledges and came out by the light of a Camping Gaz stove (Ken James and I), set off across the lapiaz to call out a rescue at 2.00am (Nigel Taylor and I), arrived to find the Speleo Club de Paris lying in pools of vomit outside their wine-soaked tents, pissed off Max, drank far too much and had a thoroughly excellent time. To round it off, I got beaten up by an irate Polish road-hog in North Wales on the way home. I think we may also have found some new passage.

Back in Wales, the Tan-yr-Ogof Caves near Abergele became my new dig as they may have provided a tourist attraction for the adjacent Gwrych Castle, a medieval banqueting site, resulting in endless free beer.

On the 29th September, the fun (but certainly not the surrealism) ceased when our Pegasus team went to look for a lost calf at Eldon Hole. Sulo volunteered to abseil down but stupidly neither he nor I used lifelines to reach the ledge at some 40m from the floor. As I climbed out he passed me, then fell to the ledge. Before we could react, he had rolled over to his death. Endless repercussions then started as it was soon realised that Sulo Sulonen was only one of the many names used by professional London con-man Paul Wynne or Frost (the latter following his theft of a very fine Rover car from the Russian Embassy). A great friend to us all, if he walked into the Hunters' tomorrow no-one who knew him would be surprised! We upset the local coppers again in November when a mighty, drunken firework display down Oxlow Caverns caused at least one rescue and the heady sight of linked chains of revellers emerging in puffs of smoke, running off and then return

ing soberly from a different direction as responsible D.C.R.O. members. Sulo would have loved it.

Discoveries in 1974 were some 150m of workings in Pant y Buarth (Mold) Mine with local expert Chris Williams, a 15m, decorated extension at Tan-yr-Ogof, 20m of high level stuff in Ogof Hesp Alyn and 200m at Allt Wen Mine, Llanrwst with Shom Scheltinga, Neil 'Bardic Nonsense' Weston (B.E.C.) and Arwel Roberts (the only man ever brave enough to give a speech in Welsh at the Pegasus dinner!)

Two grim rescues marked out this year. The first, at Lamb Leer, involved 'Black Wal' Willcocks and young Rich Bainbridge. A fantastic turn-out saw them both to the surface within two hours. A month later in Merlin's Cave, Derbyshire, John 'Shag' Smith of the B.S.A. - another great character - died on an exploratory dive. I assisted the legendary Tom Brown to remove his body, which actually involved a lot of sitting on it and telling bad taste jokes. Tom had been worried when the police arrived to collect him as he had spent most of the night in a drunken poaching spree and rescuing a mate had not been in his uppermost thoughts!

Back in North Wales, my mining enthusiast mate Shon had a plan to remove a 1905 Thomas Evans steam sinking pump from the depths of Cyffty Mine's 45m entrance shaft. With the help of mine explorers from Derbyshire, Mendip, Mid and North Wales and power from Cheg's Land Rover, this hefty monster was eventually stripped down and winched out for future display at the Llywernog Silver Lead Mine Museum near Aberystwyth. Not before time either as just as we had finished the estate agent turned up to throw us off the land! The bugger had nearly killed me at one point when the hauling rope snapped - luckily just after I had untwisted a guide rope from around my wrist. The descending cast iron section ripped out 10m of stampling and the hauling rope stood 45m vertically in the air, Indian style. Another interesting and particularly hairy bit of mine exploration was my ascent of 20 odd metres of compressed air pipes in a shaft at the end of Coed Mawr/Pool Mine's kilometre long and truly monotonous Level Fawr, Betws-y-Coed to an unreachable level and waterfall shaft beyond, wherein were said to be abandoned rock drills. I don't know if anyone ever followed this up.

On rapidly to 1975 and a minor epic in March at Raddle Pits on Moss Rake, Bradwell Moor, Derbyshire. This involved the rediscovery of lots of both cave and mine passage and an entertaining rescue starring the Peak's latest raving looney, Derek 'T-Pot' Staples, almost certainly the only man ever to eat my snot - and live. As I pottered along one of the lower levels of this artefact filled ancient lead mine a mighty rumble from a ginged climbing shaft above announced the arrival of several hundredweight of deads and a severely bruised T-Pot. The little sod was packaged and hauled 90m up the engine shaft and off we went to celebrate at the Three Stags' Heads, our favourite traditional Derbyshire hostelry. Unfortunately, our plans to push on next day were thwarted by an enormous and irascible sparman who denied all knowledge of giving our mate Paul 'Torchy' Foster permission to explore and threw us off the land. Back in those days access at least was not as easily obtained as today and much 'pirating' was necessary. Soon after, during a Pegasus trip down Disappointment Pot, we were accosted by Vic, shouting 'Bill McGuinness has falled down Bar Pot'. With thoughts of a paper bag job, we arrived to find that he had considerately only peeled off on the 10m first pitch, so we left the C.R.O. to fish him out and went on an alcoholic tour of Craven with Bob Cross and Jim Abbott instead.

As an interlude, a tale of the Stags springs to mind. Al Steans, a furniture remover, parked his van outside the pub en route to a delivery job in Manchester and had the foresight to lay out the customer's mattress at the back as a mighty P.U. was in the offing that night. In the early hours he staggered from the boozier suitably refreshed and eventually forced his way into his pre-arranged pit. Later that morning he awoke in discomfort to find his sleeping bag unoccupied and himself firmly ensconced among the springs of the mattress into which he had ripped his way in his emotional state.

The Gouffre Berger was this year's great Irish/Welsh/English/Australian expedition with guest appearances by such household names as Rich Stevenson, Martins Bishop and Farr, John Parker, Paddy O'Reilly, Mike Orr, Hywel Ball, Phil Collet, Dave Drew, Pete Lord, Sue Jordan, Dave Tringham, Jeff Phillips, Julia James and Neil Montgomery amongst many others. A fantastic cave bottomed in magnificent company. Paddy's

superb reflexes were demonstrated as a rucksack fell down Aldo's Shaft while we gazed upwards and he leapt 5m sideways at the shout of 'below' to receive the bag full on his head. We were now into both ladders and rope-walking and I had been lent a home made, supposedly self-stopping descender made in Frome by Glyn Bolt of the Wessex. The design for this was not quite perfected and I returned up Aldo's with peculiarly sore and short legs, but on showing the device to a certain local entrepreneur, by name Fernand Petzl, I received a big smile and my only ever sight of a Frenchman's eyes revolving with Franc symbols. The 'Buggery Box', invented in the famed Mendip Hills, is actually the proud father of untold numbers of the far more catchy sounding 'Stop!'. The finale of this fine trip involved lots of drinking, 'football' and welly-throwing sessions with N.C.C. stalwarts John 'Lugger' Thorpe, Bob Cockeram, Derek Crossland and mates who were to feature prominently in the future.

Back to Britain, and a Land Rover drive north for not far off the same distance, took me to my next field post - the stunning county of Sutherland in the northern highlands of Scotland. The gods were really on my side and this is still my (almost) favourite caving area and to my mind scenically unrivalled in the U.K. Here I met Pete Dowswell, Chick Calder, Jim Campbell (who had caved with Neil Armstrong [the astronaut] in Ecuador), Bill Ritchie and sundry old mates exiled in the north, the G.S.G. having a long-standing contingent of Mendip members. I soon joined the Grampian Speleological Group and got stuck into the digging. Within a few weeks Chic and I had a short, loose and dangerous extension in the squalid Otter Hole but I was hooked on the previous unrealised potential of these remote limestone glens and have never looked back.

In 1976 I even started a dig at Smoo Cave, on the north coast at Durness, but it never went far. Bob Mehew, Julian Walford, Andy Parkes and Bill Ritchie (crofters' hero) joined me at a major dig at Uamh Cailliche Peireag, another unfinished project and on the 4th April, Bob, Jim Smart and I dug into what later became known as Rana Hole. At least I don't have to write that epic up now! Lots of other caves and caving areas throughout Scotland were visited at this time and all were found to be fascinating and virtually unknown in the over-crowded south of Britain.

France was graced by our presence again this year and the Reseau Felix Trombe received the doubtful benefits of scores of assorted Derbyshire types drinking to excess and finding virtually nothing, even with sub-aquatic messrs Cobbett and Fish. We did get caught breaking into the important archaeological site of the Grotte de Montespan where Norbert Casteret did his famous free-dive to reach the 'oldest statues in the world'. Torchy and I were blissfully unaware of the two car loads of irate Frogs berating James at the entrance as we were already inside, Torchy having previously intensively studied the insecure lock. A small, elderly gentleman shouted up at our 2m high leader who replied in his own inimitable style, "My good man, we are the British Expedition to the Reseau Felix Trombe". With a confused Gallic shrug the old chap replied, "But I am Felix Trombe." At the end of the day all went well. We drank wine and cooled bitter with our new chums, I spent a fine trip following Monsieur Trombe's niece's derriere throughout the cave and Torchy's bag was found to be remarkably free of 20,000 year old clay bison statues! A visit to the spectacular Grotte Casteret ice cave was also made and a thoroughly good time had overall in the Bar Centrale (St. Girons) and the cavers' bar at Arbas. Perhaps our greatest triumph was in being evicted from the campsite at Prat by armed gendarmerie.

Around this time my long-suffering girlfriend Peggy got very understandably fed up with my selfish and totally obsessive lifestyle and went her own way. She had been dragged down caves and mines throughout the British Isles and to not a few club dinners and P.U.s. We once even took loads of people in wheelchairs down Gough's Cave and found it to be bloody hard work. She still keeps an eye on me via our Irish emigres Cheg Chester and Pat Cronin and if she ever reads this, I thank her for some cracking years.

While our Mendip contingent slaved away in Assynt, Pete 'Snab' MacNab was bribing Farmer Mac Payton of Tynning's Farm with Scottish sheepdogs and pipe music to regain access to Tynning's Barrows Cave. It worked - read on.

On the 13th February 1977, I passed a squeeze in this dig, hotly pursued by Ross White, John Dukes, Andy Sparrow and Graham Wilton-Jones. Taking turns to lead we pushed a kilometre of roomy passage in under six hours and running out of light, decided to stop and 'call it a day'. The end has been called 'A Day' ever since! This was almost a unique occurrence at a Mendip dig and the only one who moaned was Snab, who was absent at the time (but gracious enough to write a song about it).

In May, I fell out of the top bunk in the Belfry at 7am and broke my femur, so prepared myself for some enforced leisure. This was not to be and the results roll on to this very day. The 24th June saw Bob Cross, Bill Combs (European Grotto, N.S.S.) and your cripple touring some of the old mines and digs of Mendip. One of these was recorded as 'a very interesting site in dolomitic conglomerate' and bore the name Wigmore Swallet. We must have found it particularly interesting as next day we had permission from another Scot, farm manager Frank Booth, to dig it and Nigel Taylor, Bob, Stuart Lindsey (Cotham S.G.), Ross White, 'Father' Sid Hobbs and your crutch-balancing scribe were hard at work with a bucket and pulley system which soon materialised in the improbably gorgeous summer weather of those days. Fresh enthusiasts and the S.V.C.C. winch from Hillgrove Swallet arrived next day to bash on with our latest project as it was obvious that we would soon be in! It had been dug and abandoned by the M.N.R.C. in 1934-7 and by the W.C.C. in 1938 but now the B.E.C. had arrived. To cut a very long story short, there now followed some fourteen years of sometimes hectic and intense and sometimes sporadic digging by hundreds of cavers from across the planet resulting in (a) egg on the faces of the experts who said it would never go and (b) one of Mendip's finest stream caves. The potential for many more kilometres of the Cheddar Rising System is obvious, especially since the brilliant discoveries of Chris Jewell, Stu Gardiner, John Maneely, Duncan Price and team, following in the bold fin-steps of Mike 'Trebor' McDonald and Ross White. Read all about it in old and new Belfry Bulletins, the Wigmore Swallet Report and Descent and watch this space as a mighty Dave 'Tuska' Morrison digging epic takes place to get normal diggers dry and direct to the end.

Tony's adventures will be continued next issue.

IVY HOLE, SKYE

By Toby Speight (Red Rose C.P.C.)

Since moving to the Highlands, I've spent far fewer weekends in the Dales than previously, but that doesn't mean I've not been caving. Although the caves of Wester Ross and Skye are nowhere near as impressive as those of Yorkshire, the much lower caving population means that new discoveries are generally less obscure and more accessible.



Toby Speight in the Entrance of Ivy Hole
Photo: David Morrison

David and Ritchie are my local troglodytes, and recently David asked me to give him a hand excavating the collapsed entrance to Ivy Hole in the speleologically productive Coille Gaireallach woods, with a view to improving the existing Grade 1 survey and checking out the 'too tight' continuation. When we arrived, it was obvious that the collapse wasn't quite as serious as I was expecting (thanks to David's earlier efforts), and within an hour we had a retaining wall with all of this rubble held behind it. Caving could commence!

At the sink, the entrance is a drop of a metre or so, to reunite with the stream which has percolated through boulders. From here, it's a ten metre crawl over cobbles to a pool, then a short duck to a point where the

stream disappears down a narrow slot and around a corner out of sight. There's a whole confusion of pas-

sages branching off at this point - it seems that the stream has hit one of the many volcanic dykes that cross the woods and has tried many routes around it, leaving numerous gaps, all too small for a caver. Slightly above and to the side of the stream was one such small way that appeared to connect with the continuation. A thrown pebble confirmed this, with a satisfying echoey splash on the far side. But we'd need to return with enlargement tools.

The return journey began with the duck, which I didn't particularly fancy, so ten minutes' digging at its natural dam of stones and gravel lowered it to a much more pleasant wet crawl, and we were able to exit in relative comfort.



David Chiselling at the Volcanic Dyke, Ivy Hole
Photo: Toby Speight

My second visit was also with David. This time we came armed with hammer and

chisel to knock through the thin dyke and make further progress. At least, that was the plan. After two hours, all we had to show for our efforts was a blunt chisel and a hole I could get my shoulders through. Unwilling to accept defeat, we persisted in the bashing a bit more, then I succumbed to Digging Red Mist and forced my reluctant body through the hole, dropping into a tangled heap in the streamway below. Success!

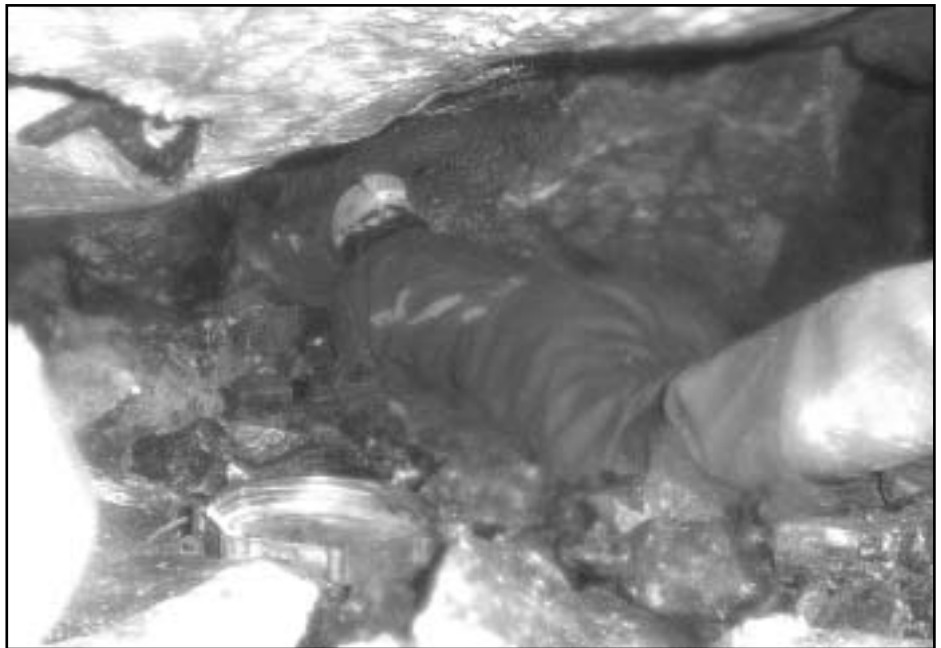
After five minutes recovering, I bounded down the generally spacious passage for ten or twelve metres of easy caving along the stream. The passage appeared to end by sloping down into a rubble-filled floor, but when I squeezed into it, I found that the left-hand wall was another dyke, about three inches wide, with a window into a parallel rift. With some delicate contortions, I was able to twist enough to get my head in and see 'going' passage beyond. But pushing was out of the question, given that I was effectively solo, out of earshot on the wrong side of the tight squeeze.

The true tightness of the squeeze became quickly apparent on my return. On the way in, careful positioning of my legs had allowed my pelvis to angle at its narrowest to get through; on the way back, however, the bend of the passage didn't leave enough room for the same manoeuvre. A feet-first exit by doing a handstand in the water and threading my feet up through the hole wasn't going to work either, so I made plans to receive a food drop every few days whilst trying to force an exit through the incredibly hard volcanic rock with a lump hammer and blunt chisel.

Half an hour of brutal thuggery and a total disregard for personal comfort did allow my eventual disincarceration, albeit with a good covering of bruises. We decided that a bit more widening would be required next time!

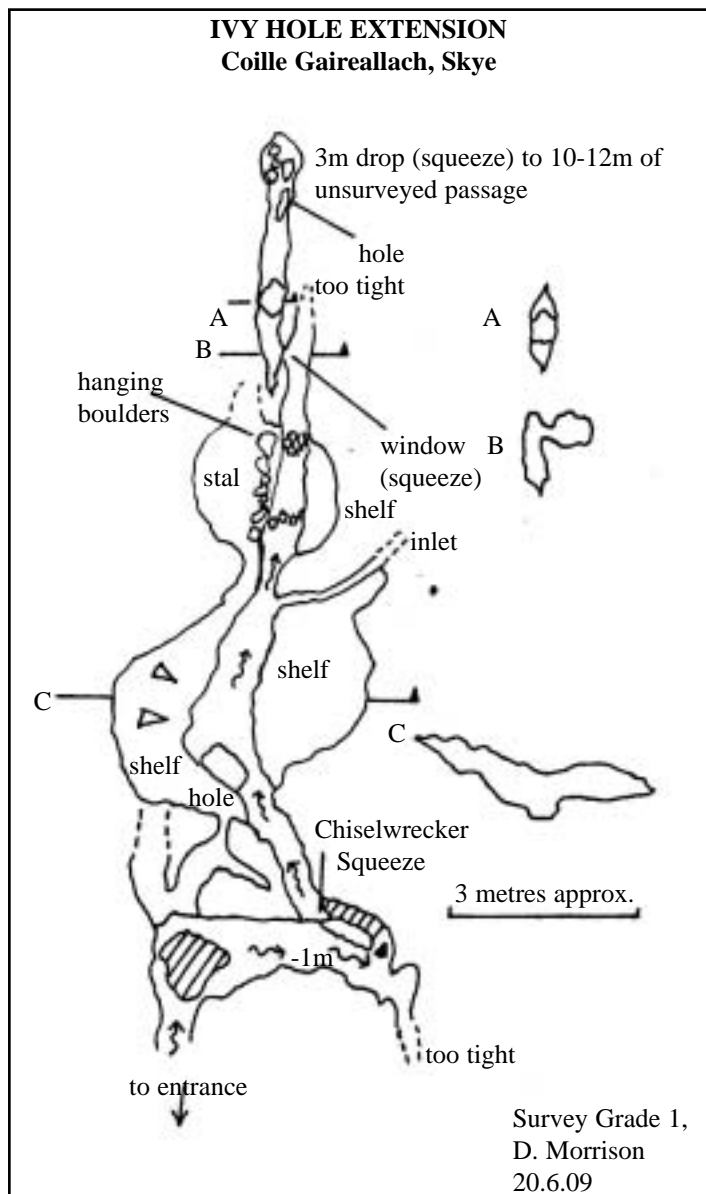
'Next time' turned out to be the following weekend. With Ritchie also available, we prepared by sharpening two chisels (on the theory that we could now attack it from both sides) and by fashioning a rudimentary capping set. Thus equipped, we set about removing a bulge that seemed to be the key to progress. I was able to pass through and start drilling from the other side; by the time I'd exhausted both batteries of the drill, I had a hole just deep enough to contain one cap. More in hope than expectation, we fired it anyway, but the results were pretty much what we expected - plenty of noise and very little else. So we went back to old-fashioned mechanical persuasion.

After a couple of hours of bashing, and both chisels now blunt, I decided that since the Chiselwrecker Squeeze - as we'd now named it in honour of our destroyed tools - was big enough for me. It wasn't really my job to be widening it for the others (except perhaps to assure myself of rescue if necessary). Instead I headed downstream to excavate cobbles from the window I'd seen last time. A small retaining wall in the streamway gave somewhere to dump the spoil and I made a start. Ten minutes later David joined me; it seemed that the thought of missing out had spurred him on.



Digging in Ivy Cave.
Photo. Toby Speight

I soon discovered that one corner of the window was blocked by a wedged cobble, and a little bit of levering soon released it, making the window just the perfect size to wriggle through and drop down. Three or four metres of easy passage under the



huge chockstone led to a boulder blocking the way. A small gap to the right accepted thrown stones which rattled well before landing in a pool, so the hammer as brought out again. Unlike the Chiselwrecker, the dyke here put up no resistance and I was soon able to push through, with encouragement shouted through the window from Ritchie, whose turn it was to visit.

'Chiseller's Revenge' seemed an apt name, and it led to a drop into a slightly fading rift where the stream rejoined and continued gently downwards for a further ten metres to a flat-out crawl in cobbled streamway, where I declined to push further (although persistence may well reward a determined masochist) and I returned to find the other two looking at their watches. My hopes of getting the survey done this visit were dashed by family commitments, so another trip awaits - probably just as well, as I've since learnt that the intrusions tend to be iron-rich and therefore magnetic. Exploration continues with optimism after two visits that have doubled or tripled the cave's length, with another 40-50m still to go to the resurgence.

BACK ISSUES:

A fair number of previous Bulletins are still available from the Editor (address inside front cover) at £2 each plus postage.

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MEXPE 2009

By Ross Davidson



In April I spent four weeks participating in the Mexpe 2009 expedition to explore the Sotano Tres Quimeras, organised by the Societe quebecoise de speleologie. This huge sink is located in the Sierra Negra region of Puebla State, around seven hours journey in a 4x4 south-east from Mexico City. Our almost utopian base camp (the 'almost' representing the large number of mosquitoes) was adjacent to the cave entrance, at 145m altitude, with the stream providing our water requirements before plunging down the 100m entrance shaft. The team was around 50% Quebecoise, plus cavers from the US, Mexico, France, UK and Australia. Mexpe 2007 had taken the cave to -500m. The objective this year was to complete a traverse of the system, with expectations that it would connect to a resurgence on the other side of the mountain.

After an initial section of 19 pitches, including a couple of traverses and tyroleans, over the space of around 1.5 km, the cave reaches a long 2km horizontal section, with the limit of the previous expedition about half way along this. A secondary objective was the sampling of the various fauna, with a particular interest in the cave scorpions that were to be found predominantly in high level dry sections of the horizontal development, over false floors above the stream. Before my arrival, just under a week into the expedition, the first few trips had entered and re-rigged the surveyed cave. Unfortunately the 40 hour journey from the UK had taken its toll on my immune system, and I arrived with a bad cold which subsequently spread to a couple of other members of the expedition, although they were not as badly affected as they had already had time to acclimatise. After a few days, impatience with my slow recovery took over, and a preparatory trip with Andy Chapman of SUSS was made half way to the limit of exploration. This initial trip was useful as I had not encountered much in the way of 'light rigging' before, and some adaption to my technique was required. The cold and damp didn't do my chest much good - another few days to recuperate would have been ideal - but I put up a reasonable effort. On our way out we collected an interesting and rather alien looking animal, about an inch long with huge tentacles and pincers, by putting it in an old water bottle. This was later identified as an 'amblipigid', and was unfortunately not new to science, with several samples already having been collected.

Meanwhile, pushing trips into the cave were ongoing - two weeks in and exploration trips were reaching 18-20 hours. I teamed up with Andy, Imogen Furlong also of SUSS (and who has since joined the GSG), and Bev Shade, a Texan lass with a bottomless reserve of energy, to push further. Andy was at the back and had been having trouble with his shoulder, which was aggravated by the descent until at the bottom of the seventh pitch or so he decided it was wise to pull out, leaving the three of us. I was still quite short of breath, but the two girls were happy to go at a steady pace and see what we could achieve. After the second set of pitches we proceeded part way along the horizontal section to a particular chamber where scorpions had been previously seen. A number of specimens were collected and bottled in vodka, a fate which they were remarkably relaxed about. These light brown alcoholic arachnids are very slow moving compared to their surface dwelling cousins, which we were later informed is perhaps a sign of an abundance of food. Exactly what it is they are managing to consume (apart from vodka) is something of a mystery, although small fish are present in the surface stream and a petrified crane fly was found dangling from a rock, evidence perhaps that the strong draught carries a supply of insect life. A few hours further on and we were at the limit of known cave, where it reaches another section of pitches, only to discover that we had no bolting hammer. A small amount of rigging was managed nonetheless, and ropes left for the next team before turning around and starting the long journey out. My pace was significantly slower than the other two, and in the end it took another 12 hours to emerge in base camp to find a rescue team starting to get kitted up. At 25 hours, this was my longest caving trip that didn't involve an underground camp, and also the hardest I've done.

Three subsequent trips were made into the cave before completion of the traverse, all of which made use of



**Ross Davidson climbing out of the entrance shaft,
Sotano Tres Quimeras.
Photo: Imogen Furlong**

an underground bivvy. By the penultimate trip the depth had reached down to around -700m. At the same time several other trips were being made into the cave to sherpa equipment and to film and take photos. On one of these I nearly choked when I realised I had almost swallowed an amblypygid from my water bottle.

Surface recce trips in the vicinity of Tres Quimeras yielded disappointingly little, the deepest cave being a rather tight tube descending for around 60m down a dip of around 45 degrees, before pinching down to something that nobody was confident of being able to get out of if it were investigated head first. In addition the tube was full of worrying looking black and yellow spiders which were enough to freak out most of those present.

Impressive climbing on the overhanging cliff from which the suspected resurgence issued, some three hours 4x4 ride away, had resulted in access being gained to what was suspected to be the bottom of the cave, a brief section of which was then surveyed to the bottom of another climb up a waterfall. Some time after another group had entered from the top to continue pushing the cave, I joined up with two Quebécoise, Eric Legare and Jean-Francois Levis (Jeff), to

try and explore upwards from the bottom. Jeff made a climb up the waterfall which was extremely bold, given that the rock was crumblier and flakier than a certain well known chocolate bar. Continuing upwards we heard Jeff whooping ahead, and upon joining him realised that he had found the final survey marker left by the team that had entered before we left. In the event, the last trip into the top had arrived at a mere fifteen minutes from the resurgence before turning round to make the 15 hour trip back out!

After the connection had been made there was another week remaining, with unfortunately few leads. There was, however, one source of potential development which remained. A trek of around an hour and a half over a ridge at about 1700m brought us to the next village, where there were a couple of huge shafts right in the centre. Significant negotiation and bargaining was needed to gain access, involving a village meeting with all of the menfolk from each family. When access to one of the shafts was eventually granted, a team arrived to a very warm welcome. Imogen and Bev descended, but upon reaching the bottom found themselves wading through a rubbish dump. After squelching across the bottom of the shaft (down which somebody's uncle had apparently fallen drunk one night many years before), Imogen began digging out a 'plastic bottle sump', which was roaring air. Unfortunately, although perhaps to their relief, it was too tight. It was reported that any dig there would be a fairly major operation, and would require a cast iron stomach and no sense of smell!

On our homeward journey a few days were spent in Mexico City (just as swine flu was breaking out, although we were unaware of it at the time). Here fifteen scorpion samples were delivered to a jubilant researcher at the university, who confirmed that they were almost certainly a new species.

Overall this was a worthwhile and challenging expedition on which I learnt a great deal from some very experienced cavers. On the down side, I was never really on great form, particularly in the earlier stages when there was still a significant amount of exploration to do. That we ran out of things to do is perhaps an integral hazard of single cave expeditions. Nonetheless, the second deepest through trip in the Americas, at 815m depth over 5.2 km horizontally, had been completed and a new species of scorpion discovered.

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From the Bulletin, 45 Years Ago. (April 1964):

GAPING GILL 1964

By Alan L. Jeffreys

The original schedule of this Yorkshire trip included a descent of Jinglyng Pot, Kingsdale, but time prevented us from carrying out this plan.

After an early start from Langcliffe on the 11th, we arrived at Bar Pot before 11am and recovered our breath after the tiring plod up the moor with piles of tackle by walking over to the Main Shaft, G.G. Only an average amount of water was flowing in and nothing spectacular seemed likely to happen.

The first pitch (45 ft.) of Bar was tighter than we expected, and as we were using rope ladders for the big pitch, these had to be rolled through the steep fissure, causing some inconvenience later on as an un-rolled rope ladder is rather an awkward thing to carry about below.

A rapid slither through several holes fetched us to the head of the big pitch. This is a very fine, straightforward 100 footer into the South-east Passage of Gaping Gill. While the ladders were being joined up and lowered, I rigged a double lifeline and pulley to enable all the members of the team to descend.

Joe [*Holliday*] climbed down first and found all the ladder had piled up on a ledge about 30 feet down. He kicked it away and continued to the bottom. The rest of the party joined him immediately, and some photographs were taken.

We wasted no time in setting off for the main chamber, and reached this after what must be nearly a record run through South Passage. Quite some time was spent in G.G. taking photographs and generally wandering about, trying to take in the fantastic grandeur of this gigantic cavern. All members agreed it was well worth the trip down.

A quick journey was made to Mud Hall, myself being abandoned by the others to 'do' the earth traverse alone. Consequently I did not bother trying to reach Far East Passage! It is a pity that so many of the fine formations in the area have been smashed by souvenir hunters. A few broken specimens were retrieved from the mud and are now in the G.S.G. mineral collection.

Time prevented us from (a) exploring to the foot of Stream Passage Pot via Sand Caverns, and (b) looking for, and going into, the new connection between Bar Pot and New Hensler's Passage, so we began our return journey. While resting at the T-junction we met some members of the North West Pothole Club coming through from Disappointment Pot. On reaching Bar Pot we were asked to take one of their company (a teenage girl) out with us as she was not up to returning via 'Dis'. Frankly she was not up to anything, but we managed to pull her back up all the pitches to the surface, although it took a fair time to do it.

We finally emerged at 7 pm, after eight hours underground, to find the C.R.O. encamped all around. They were waiting for us to vacate the hole before commencing a cave rescue film. They should have come down with us! After profuse apologies for taking up so much of their time we shouldered our tackle and headed down to Clapham.

Next year we intend to descend via Disappointment Pot and explore Hensler's Passage and adjacent series. Who knows, we might even try the crawl. (Joke).