



grampian speleological group NEWSLETTER



No. 171

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Jim Underground!

The legendary Mr James Salvona makes history as possibly the UK's and certainly Scotland's oldest active caver.



Photo: Mark Stanford

The intrepid duo of Jim and Mark Stanford were hoping to visit Cleaves Cove in Ayrshire. Unfortunately, the weather defeated their parking attempts and the alternative, Crofthead Mine was thus tackled.

Bob Sommerville

AGM

It's that time again! The AGM has been arranged for Saturday 23rd February 2019 to be held in the George Washington Browne Room at Edinburgh Central Library, George IV Bridge, from 2-4pm. We have used this room for the past couple of years, but for newcomers, go down stairs toward the Scottish library, go in the first door encountered on the right, and the room in question lies diagonally across the mezzanine to the left.

This is an important event in the life of the club and it would be encouraging if more than just the same old regulars turned up to have their say. In particular, please consider how we resolve the matter of a Treasurer. For example, it need not be a club member, but does need to be someone prepared to make regular contact at the Tuesday night pub meetings, and thoroughly understand our various commitments.

Another item for your consideration: the location of the 2019 Annual Dinner. So far two suggestions have been tabled – Yorkshire and Assynt. We would also need volunteers to help with arrangements. Any other matters you may wish discussed should be sent to Andy Peggie, Secretary, by the end of January 2019.

Goon

Cave Diving in Traligill and Glenamuckrach

Earlier this year Simon Brooks undertook a series of dives in Sutherland and Glenamuckrach in Appin with the aid of Oana Chachula.

Traligill

Approaching the sump along the descriptively named "Passage of the Worms" it was disappointing to note that unlike the previous year there was no evidence of flood overflow water having flowed down the passage. Kitting up and entering the sump the fears were confirmed with little to nil visibility from the start of the dive and the sump full of black peaty mud.

Digging through the silt proved easier than on previous dives and a point was eventually reached an estimated 14m (into the sump) where once again, the accumulated sediments met the roof. Some progress made but the sump still not passed. Day two saw a return. The bolt and hanger line belay installed in 2015 in the floor of the sloping Thrust Plane Passage was found to be in place but the line broken. New line was laid for the first 10m in to the sump and connected to the existing line.

Glenamuckrach

At the end of May it was stunning weather in Appin. We approached Glenamuckrach via the Glen Salachan track and thanks to a new Hydro development at the top of the valley were able to drive through the forest gate and up and over the watershed to park (and camp) only some 400m away from the ruins of Glenamuckrach House.

Uamh A'Bhruthaich Chais Fhada (NM 9629 4977)



Photo: Oana Chachula

This fine little cave is one of the largest in the Appin Area and is unusual for Scotland in that its main feature is a fine 12m pitch that would not be out of place in a Yorkshire Pothole. Descending the 5m entrance and 12m main pitch the kit was carried to the main downstream sump that was understood to be undived, or at least not dived to a conclusion.

A well-positioned peg in the floor of the passage leading to the sump provided an excellent line belay as well as suggesting the sump had at least been looked at on a previous occasion. From the dive base the dive descended a roomy, 1.2m wide and 4m deep pot to reach a sloping cobbled floor.

From here the passage continued downwards in a broadly southerly direction at an angle of -45 degree becoming gradually smaller as the floor rose to meet the roof. At a distance of 8m into the sump and at a depth of 5.5m the diver ground to a halt with interference fit between the cobbles on the floor, the roof and both walls. The sump continues but not in a way that could be followed further. Prospects for this site are likely to be limited.

Uamh Steall Na Burich, (NM 9591 4955)

A pleasant walk down Glenamuckrach in stunning weather soon reached this delightful little cave. Arriving at the sump a weight belt and some lead weights belonging to diver/divers unknown was found. Kitting up the diver entered the sump finding the water much colder than previously remembered.

Progress down the sloping passage was slow as each constriction caused by shingle on the floor corresponding with a dip in the roof required digging open. As a consequence of this the diver arrive at the end of the line with only enough air to take a general feel around. A return is planned

with a little more air. Many thanks to Oana for the carry and support on all of the above trips.

Simon Brooks

Caves at Sand, Applecross

During the afternoon of Saturday 28th October, prior to the GSG Annual Dinner, Pete Dennis, Martin Hayes, Stu Lindsay and John Crae visited Sand, about 5 km north of Hartfield House. The sandstone fissures have been described as worth a visit and the coordinates and descriptions needed to be confirmed for the database. Located one large rock-shelter [NG 68368 49364], one small rock-shelter [NG 68443 49141] and several boulder caves [NG 68505-68513 49512-49672] but failed to find the massive fissures.

On Sunday 29th October, Bob and Eleanor Mehew managed to locate the fissures obtaining better GPS coordinates [NG 68605 49476 to NG 68556 49376 and NG 68564 49326 to NG 68609 49433]

John Crae/Bob Mehew

The Fraser Simpson Award

The loss of Fraser to the club last year was felt, not only by GSG members, but also in the wider speleological field because he was a staunch technical supporter of Hidden Earth, providing equipment and personal help at conferences for many years. This contribution has been recognised by the caving community with the establishment of a new prize:

The Fraser Simpson Award, for video entries into an annual competition specifically celebrating new work that brings innovation and originality of thought, technique, concept or philosophy to cave filming. Due to the late introduction of this idea, no award was made at the 2018 Hidden Earth, but notice was given to prospective film-makers for the 2019 conference.

A prize, consisting of a trophy (not chosen, and to be held for one year) and £100 – donated jointly by BCRA and Hidden Earth – will hopefully attract many entries and help to keep Fraser's passion alive and well.

A. Jeffreys

J Rat Award

The J Rat award had four in the running as follows:

Vurley Hole [Pot] Mendip, with 70 metres, UNCABAC with 74 metres, Halloween Rift, Mendip at 141 metres, and Uamh nan Clachan Dubhan at 151 metres [winner] There were short PowerPoint presentations on Vurley (with long boring video!), Halloween and Clachan Dubhan - this latter by Iain Greig, plus some other stuff on Portland caves and Estelle summarising the totals since 2008. Pete Glanville did Vurley, and Vern Simmonds [not sure of surname at the moment] did Halloween.

There was a good turnout with some 70 odd people crowded into the Hunter's function room. The GSG were represented by a lot of local members, and four from Scotland: myself, Toby Speight, Iain Greig and Neil Menzies. Next year there will have to be a new plaque as space for the cave names is all filled up, so if (when!) we win again, we get to keep the old one.

The event was MC'd by Martin Grass and Stu McManus. Much ale was consumed. I also prepared a small display on Clachan Dubh for their display boards, showing the survey and pics of the cave.

Goon

Hidden Earth 2018

Hidden Earth was held on the 22-23 September at Churchill School in the Mendips. Funnily enough, I went to sixth form there and it was quite odd to enjoy a beer or two in my old school (and not having to do this beyond the gates like the past!).

The weather was somewhat damp over the weekend, and as it was in Churchill for the second year running, turnout seemed to be lower than it had been in the past. Goon and I were the only folk that travelled down from Scotland. I think I had the more comfortable journey enjoying a G&T on the hour flight compared to Goon's battles with the traffic on the M5 and M6! However, the GSG was well represented by our southern members, and as ever it was good to catch up with everyone.

The talks were superb as usual. The headline talk and the highlight of the conference was Rick Stanton's account of the Thailand cave rescue. There were several revelations that hadn't been covered in the media, including having to dive out 4 rescue workers that had got flooded into the cave and nobody knew were missing, and that ketamine was used to

sedate the boys after anecdotal evidence that it would be ok as when given to seals (the animal, not the navy ones) their airways stayed open in the water.



Photo: Andy Morgan

The other rescuers joined Rick on stage at the end for standing ovation from the audience, and the talk was best summed up by Andy Eavis who said "I've been coming to Hidden Earth for 51 years and this is the best lecture I've ever come to". Les Williams was unusually lost for words and got a little choked up as he presented tankards with "unlimited refills at the bar" to the rescuers.

Goon presented the Scottish Round Up on the Sunday of some of the highlights in the Scottish caving scene in the past 4 years. This involved him chiding the audience for Scotland having the largest cave chamber in the UK (a sea cave in Shetland), and winning the J Rat Digging award in 2017

Andy Morgan

Fraser Simpson remembrance dinner



Photo: Ivan Young

November witnessed a dinner at the Hut in honour of the late Fraser Simpson, organised by Dan Harries

His memory was toasted in a style we know he would have approved of. Pete Dowsell provided an excellent curry for the gathering. Kate Stephens sent a well-received bottle of malt from New Zealand for the attendees. Tales of Fraser's exploits were recounted often centred around non-caving activities!

All those who knew Fraser would I'm sure join in raising a glass of their favourite tipple in memory.

In his own words 'A Top man at his craft'.

Bob Sommerville

Taigh nam Famh Wood Store

During the Fraser Simpson Memorial Weekend, Rodger and Ivan finished roofing the new wood store. It lies between the shed and the old wood store which will now be used to store gardening equipment. All we need now is some wood to store in it.

Ivan Young

Reciprocal Rights

A formal request was made to the club by Wessex Cave Club on Mendip for reciprocal rights at our respective huts. This was approved at our recent committee meeting and, pending a formal reply to the affirmative from WCC, will be taken as in operation. For those who don't know, the Wessex hut at Upper Pitts may be found by driving past the BEC lane (when coming from the Hunter's Lodge) and taking the next turning right toward Upper Pitts Farm. The hut lies to the left just before the farm is reached. Its attractions can be viewed on the Wessex website. Members staying there would therefore pay £4 per night each. The Wessex now joins BEC, BPC, Craven and RRPC with reciprocal rights.

Goon

Greenock Tunnels

Modern drainage tunnels are usually constructed either by cut and cover trenching or by hi-tech drilling or boring machines. In Greenock, in September, when rocky ground conditions were unsuitable for machine digging the best that could be done for Scottish Water's flood protection measures was to return to traditional methods of picks and shovels with the finished tunnel hand dug by engineers from Northern Tunnelling & Civil Engineering Ltd.

Although the finished tunnel was lined with concrete, during the works the 26 m of tunnel was reminiscent of the scenes from the Great Escape or one of the more technical cave digs in the Mendips.



Photo: Courtesy of Paul Bonthron

John Crae

Scottish Mountain Rescue Training Conference

This year's event was held at the usual venue of Glenmore Lodge. It's a get together of most of the main mountain rescue teams in Scotland. Scottish Cave Rescue was, as in previous years, included. Andy Morgan and myself accepted the offer. The conference was notable for caving as the opening lecture was given by one of the cave divers, Jason Mallinson involved in the recent rescue in Thailand. The lecture was brilliant and was well received by the non-cavers at the conference.

Bob Sommerville

A Rock Song

LED light, LED light, burning bright
in the caverns of the night.
What surveyor's hand or eye
can frame their fearful symmetry?

To document these Scottish caves
on hills remote, or washed by waves,
we need a person fit and keen
to chronicle these worlds unseen.

No matter where his feet may tread
our winner brings to bear his head.
For study of geology
improves our speleology.

There are new passages to force
through our Dalradian outcrops
coarse;
while prizes won for surveys done
will into Scotland's lap be swung.

So:

LED light, LED light, burning bright
In the caverns of the night,
Illuminate Iain Greig we pray
who gets to keep the Gnome today?

Goon

Golden Gnome

This year the worthy winner of the Golden Gnome was Ian Greig. Goon presented the award to Neil Menzies as Ian was unable to attend during the club annual dinner at Hartfield House in Applecross. True to tradition Goon composed the following Ode for the occasion, with no copyright infringement intended to William Blake!

GSG Database

I would like to remind GSG members that the GSG Database is now available on the BCA Server at the following address:

<http://registry.gsg.org.uk/sr/>

No password is required. This link takes users to the main search page where it is possible to search for a cave either by Name or Location.

The names in the database are classed as either the 'Primary name which appears in the various cave guides (usually but not always Gaelic) or as 'Alternate' names (unofficial names usually acronyms, English translations or variations in spelling). The name search will search both the primary and alternate names. Best results are obtained by choosing a relatively unusual part of the cave name and placing wildcard symbols (* or?) before and after the selected text (? replaces single letters while * will replace any length of text. For example, *Clog* will find Clogaid a' Bha Air Chall (Uamh nan) as a primary name for UNCABAC).

While a lot of alternative names have been included do not assume because your search does not find the cave you want that it is not in the

database. Try a different spelling or different punctuation. If all else fails look for a nearby cave and the entry for that may list the cave you want as being within 500 m.

If all else fails searching by Location allows a local place-name to be inserted (again try alternate spelling) but do not be surprized if the location found by Google Maps is not exactly where you expect. A search for Glenbain found a site in Antarctica and Croy finds the town outside Cumbernauld. This will show all the caves within a selected range from 500 m to 10 km. Unfortunately, at present this only returns the Primary names but if you know roughly where the cave is, check any unfamiliar names the one you are looking for may be there under another name.

Once the Google map is available however it is possible to zoom in and out, and by selecting (clicking on) a point on the map then selecting the 'Search Here' button at the top of the map this will find all the caves in the database within 10 km.

Most of the individual entries for the caves are quite simple at the moment and I and the other editors are slowly expanding the descriptions, checking for obvious errors and will eventually add surveys and photos but if you spot anything wrong or there is information you wish to add contact me and I will update the entry as soon as I can.

John Crae

Stop Press (sometimes literally!)

We all get excited about new discoveries – and spreading news about them is good for Scottish speleology. With the advent of widely circulated online media sites like Facebook, it is very hard to keep a lid on things, *vide* the recent furore over Ach a'Chorrain which was picked up by the press from the JRat Award, and resulted, amongst other things, in Claonaite being promoted to a system over 1,700 miles in length!

Nobody objects to members talking to the press, but it is sanguine to consider your words carefully, especially if the name and reputation of the club is involved. Hopefully, the following bullet points will prove helpful, but the general rule should be, consult someone on the committee first if the GSG is involved or named, in order to fend off innocent faux pas or misconceptions.

- Think about what effect publicity issues could have and ensure landowners/stakeholders have been notified first before speaking to the press.
- It is best not to indulge in subtle humour – this is frequently taken at face value by journalists (who after all, don't have your insider knowledge of the subject) and there has been enough 'nut cases who go down rabbit holes' publicity without reinforcing it!
- Ensure your statements are accurate, and avoid loose speculation which the press could pick up as fact. It is better to play down the excitement a little rather than exaggerate.
- If your statement is clearly being made on behalf of the GSG, then the committee WILL need to be informed beforehand. Do not name individual club members without their permission.
- Avoid any mention of explosives, possible dangers to life and limb – except to make it clear new discoveries are not an invitation to unqualified visitors – and explain clearly what is meant by 'digging' so the public do not think in terms of mechanical excavators and/or grand alterations to the natural topography.
- Be prepared to channel enquiries for possible membership to the committee.

Goon

Meets and Events

26-27 Jan - Poets Supper - Assynt

9-10 Feb - SRT training weekend - YSS, Yorkshire.

** A more complete list to be provided in the next Newsletter*

Publications

Now Available: Sutherland Hut Logs, Taigh nam Famh Log no 12 (for 2017) Now obtainable, £2 per copy plus post

Goon

Elphin Caving Centre

Confirmed Taigh nam Famh Bookings (contact Hut Warden Pete Dowswell or Deputy Hut Warden Imogen Furlong for latest information)

If you intend booking accommodation please check with Imo Furlong.

Hut fees are £8 per night for non-members and £4 for GSG and members of clubs with reciprocal rights (see page 5), students, unemployed, children and OAPs. Camping is permitted at any time but the reduced rate of £4 applies only when the hut is full. Day fees are £2 for members and £4 for non-members.

If you want to stay in the hut, please contact Imogen Furlong who is responsible for hut bookings (Tel. Home: - 07532 388474. E-mail: - imo.furlong@gmail.com) – to check if there will be space. For any other hut related issues contact the Hut Warden – Pete Dowswell. (Tel. Home: - 01463 229250, e-mail: - hutbookings@gsg.org.uk).

REMINDERS

- 1. Inform the membership secretary (Ivan Young) of any changes of address or contact details, check what appears on the GSG web server and send any corrections to Ivan.**
 - 2. Send news items to Bob Sommerville for the Newsletter, longer items to Alan Jeffreys for the Bulletin. If in doubt send to both.**
 - 3. Borrowed kit should be returned clean and dry. If possible, record the length of time lamps are in use (do not recharge lamps before returning them). Do not allow lamps to remain in wet bags.**
 - 4. Consider standing for election to the GSG Committee at the AGM, attending committee meetings as an ordinary member or shadowing a committee post (acting as deputy committee member and becoming familiar with the duties of one or more of the committee posts).**
 - 5. Digital versions of all Bulletins, Newsletters and other official communications can be downloaded from the GSG website as alternative to paper (saving the GSG money on both postage and publication costs).**
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