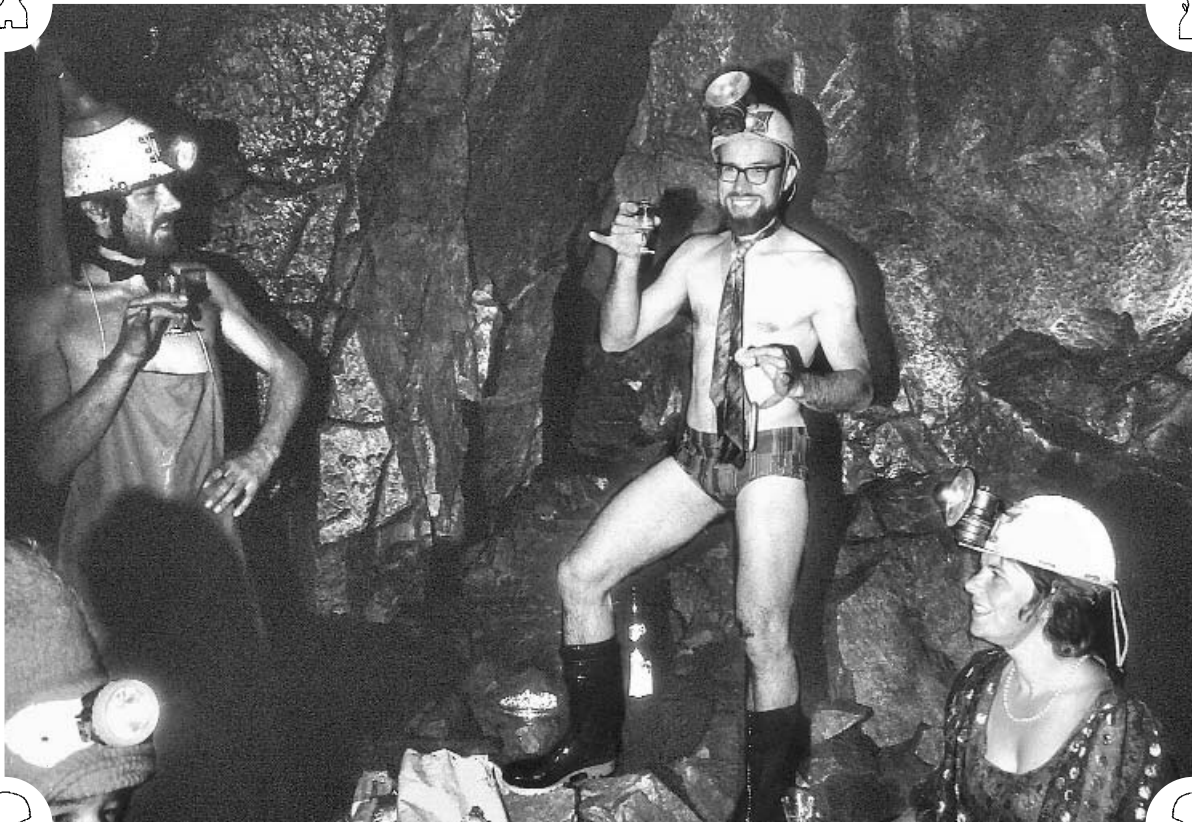


*comhairle uamh-eolasach na
monadh líath*

*the grampian
speleological group*
BULLETIN



Fourth Series vol.2 no.3



March 2005

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Cover: Wine and Cheese at the bottom of Sunset Hole, August 1983. (L.to R. [Charles Frankland]
Nigel Robertson, Ivan Young, Jackie Yuill. Photo. Ivan Young.

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The Grampian Speleological Group

EDITORIAL:

Recently, I was lunching with a few like-minded friends when I offered for sale a book which, when published, had been a seminal work on ancient Egyptian religion. A fellow diner, a distinguished Egyptologist, dismissed this with the comment: "But it's fifty years old", the clear inference being that it no longer served any useful purpose. I suppose this verdict would be applicable to a huge volume of scientific or investigatory texts. How un-equal to modern research for example is Darwin's *Origin of Species*? Recognising their current inadequacies should certainly not be the same thing as categorising them as intellectually irrelevant, but many people do because, like the man said, they are old.

Well, I think my friend was wrong. The progression of British speleology since, let's say arbitrarily for the sake of argument 1885, has been a fascinating, even exciting saga of daring-do, innovation and physical prowess which should fill us with pride and respect for pioneers no longer, alas, thrutching with us.

To know your subject, to really get yourself into the bricks and mortar of it, is a delight for the mind. On my latest foray to the Yorkshire Dales I pondered this very thing. As someone else once said, to really know a place intimately, you must see it at all times of the day and night, in every season, experiencing the complete vagaries of wind and weather. On Leck Fell water hung on jewelled, tawny grasses, the sky was uniformly grey and it was cold. Yet it took only the familiar reveal of a single limestone outcrop for me to feel I had been hugged by an old friend, a comrade of mists, whiteouts, gales, curlew-singing sunshine and lusty tramps down off night-sooted fells, cap lamp beams frolicking from point to point in the hard, frosty darkness. I felt completely at home.

There is the same comfortable assurance to be had from a conversancy with history, with one important caveat: human memory is a fallible phenomenon, which is why I place so much emphasis on thorough contemporary recording and on indexing. Indexing is the key to entering this garden of delight and I am so pleased at how common-place and sought after bibliographies and abstracts are nowadays, contrasting starkly with their introduction in 1962 being greeted by public utterances that their only usefulness was of a latri-nal nature!

However, to return to my original theme - a knowledge of history is not merely for building on explorations or avoiding time-wasting searches (although of course they both have their place) but for paying homage to the labours of our predecessors, appreciating their immense legacy of achievements. Like national heroes - Drake, Newton, Nelson - these trail blazers should never be forgotten. Only a firm grasp of Britain's rich caving past will permit us to assign to them their full and proper measure of respect.

Just because we can now do it more easily and with better technology, that in no way diminishes the accomplishments of our forbears; indeed you could say they are considerably enhanced thereby.

For myself, I can think of anthropoid machines like Eric Hensler and the ground-breaking Balcombe and Sheppard, the tenacity of Les Salmon or the Brindle brothers, the almost freaky imperviousness of Bob Leakey, the sheer stature of men like E.E. Roberts, Gerald Platten and Mike Boon, and if you do not recognise all these names then it just goes to show what you have been missing.

As it is now fifty years since the speleological Big Bang witnessed the creation of so many caving clubs following World War II, there has been a plethora of anniversary publications celebrating one kind of jubilee or another. They are a good starting point for your voyages back in time. Later in this issue you will find a review of Jim Eyre's autobiography. If it is not already on your shelf I urge you to purchase a copy. It will open your eyes to what now is another world, a universe of home made rope ladders, cut down raincoats and

bicycle lamps, a chronicle of caving long ago, eclipsed but cardinal to a proper comprehension of where we are at today.

Locked away in musty mimeographed or roneoed journals is a whole era of which this generation knows nothing. But it should. May I end therefore by expressing the tenor of my thesis in summary with this rather prosaic paraphrase of Lawrence Binyon's great paeon:

At the going down into a cave,
And on the surface,
We will remember them.

Alan L. Jeffreys, Editor.

AREA MEET REPORTS (To 21.2.05) [Edinburgh logbook only]

Once again, the intervening six months have witnessed encouraging gains in various parts of the country, although wet weather has restricted exploitation of some finds. It begins to look as though 2005 might develop into a bumper year and who knows, perhaps even Rana Hole will yield to the tenacity of its dedicated diggers.

ARGYLL

Not a lot of activity in Appin this season. In November George Kennedy soloed an interesting site on the island of Luing in the Firth of Lorn. (See this issue)

In January, Dick Grindley spent New Year at Morven and examined several sites in the area. The Lochaline Mines were found gated and locked, one being a working silica sand mine. Nearby at Drimmin he found a small rock shelter which is marked on the OS map, but it is only a shallow 3x2m overhang 1.5m deep. The district around Lurga lead mine was checked out to firm up grid references for a couple of workings.

In February there was a renewed assault on the caves of upper Glen Duror. In Albion Pot work was spent on improving the tight bits while Roger Galloway scraped away at the furthest point in the cave. Near the deer fence, the rest of the party made good progress excavating a couple of holes located from the survey as being just about at the end of Draught Caledonian. A depth of some two metres was gained, and a dye test proved the link with the main cave. Instability will require shoring before a connection can be contemplated.

AYRSHIRE

A follow-up visit to limestone workings at Coalbog, Bridge of Weir in December proved entertaining, with some nice scrambles amidst flaky boulder ruckles. However, lashing rain and muddy bogs certainly did not meet with approval from Goon's dog!

CANADA

There was a further GSG caving meet on Vancouver Island in August. A seven strong team carried out some trips on Weymer Ridge and were successful in passing a dig in Arch Type Cave that actually developed into 250 metres of new passage!

DERBYSHIRE

Joining SUSS trips at the end of December, Roger Galloway achieved descents of Titan Shaft into Peak Cavern and John Hall Mine.

EAST LoTHIAN

Three members returned to the site of an old coal mine beside a popular golf course at Gullane in November. This sea shore adit had been deliberately blocked many years ago and despite some enthusiastic digging and assaults on huge sandstone slabs, entry remained elusive.

EDINBURGH

On 11th September Subterranea Britannica held a field trip in Edinburgh. Several GSG members acted as tour guides and in the morning a large party enjoyed a thorough examination of the burnt-out and sadly trashed nuclear bunker at Barnton

INVERNESS-SHIRE

There was a mega club meet on Skye in September, staying at Torrin Outdoor Centre. It proved to be a damp weekend overall but much of the limestone terrain was visited, and some tiny gains made.

The trip commenced on Friday 17th September with four members checking out some potential in the Coille Gaireallach. On Saturday, at various times, 18 people wandered about the woods. An eight metre extension was made to Upper Through Cave and about five metres of miscellaneous passage found elsewhere (GPS'd!) Simultaneously, Goon checked over the limestones at Torrin, finding Boulder Pot blocked, but because of the wet conditions, noted a series of promising sinks on the east flanks of the hill. Later, at CG32, he noticed an aven accessed right down at water level which might repay digging. Late in the afternoon, High Pasture Cave was sumped for some at the duck, but all were impressed by Steve Birch's excavation works. The day was rounded off with a fruitless attempt to visit Spar Cave - beaten by the tide.

A very wet Sunday saw members trekking up the Allt nan Leac valley, touring most of the well known caves. Others walked over to Allt na Pairte and explored this isolated system. The best results came from a hillside on Beinn na Caillich near Broadford where Steve Birch had collected a series of targets for exploration. An active sink called Scapula Cave was dug for a while (until it began to flood) comprising four metres of crawl to a boulder constriction requiring heavy weaponry. Several other sites nearby can be classed as independent caves but some were swallowing ferocious amounts of water and were left alone. The best find, up at the gabbro/limestone junction, was Boundary Sink. A series of attractive crawls yielded some 14 metres of passage, although a fluorescein test revealed the rising to be immediately beyond. (See this issue)

PERTHSHIRE

In October, John Crae took three members to the site of a slate quarry at Craiglea, north of Perth, where a thorough exploration was carried out (see this issue).

In December, Jim Salvona found a tiny triangular-shaped 'cave' about 4.5 metres long at Hard Rock Quarry, Gilmerton.

RENFREWSHIRE

In November John Crae identified Fiddler's Cave at Greenock. It is visible from the road but only about one metre deep and three metres high.

SOMERSET

In December, Roger Galloway led an introductory foray down Swildons Hole, exiting to discover the Priddy

Hunt in full swing.

SPAIN

During a holiday on Gran Canaria at the end of November, Bob and Rosemary Jones and Ewen MacNiven visited several of the Guanche caves, which used to be inhabited by the indigenous people.

SUTHERLAND

In the late summer Nigel Robertson and family enjoyed a break at Elphin and aside from tourist trips into ANUSC and the Bone Caves, found a rock shelter at Lon na h-Uamh on the north side of Stac Pollaidh. On the 1st September there were introductory trips around Cnoc nan Uamh, ANUSC and Uamh an Claonaite.

At the beginning of October, an SCRO/AMRT practice rescue visited some new pastures with a casualty retrieval from Allt a Chalda Mor Stream Cave and some ropework over the surface river, and this was followed by a short descent of the Waterslide by two of the team. Seven members later descended Rana Hole and achieved some work.

The end of October saw the filming project in Claonaite being continued through the sump 1 bypass. While fidgeting during camera set-ups, a small series of phreatic bells was discovered above the bypass. There was more filming the following day and three days of digging in Rana resulted in 310 skips being hauled to the surface.

In November there was a tourist trip into Cnoc nan Uamh and the long gestating survey of ANUSC re-commenced. At Rana Hole five members removed 105 buckets of spoil. On Saturday 18th December, Dave Warren, Peter Dennis and son worked on improvements to the 'Sphincter' crawl in ANUSC and succeeded in identifying and opening an efficient water sink in the floor. This effectively dried the crawl but is very susceptible to re-blocking with the passage of cavers so care and maintenance is required.

The New Year meet, not over-blessed with fine weather, witnessed two visits to a very wet Rana Hole but the prize fell to Martin Hayes who, struggling through snow cover came across a new hole collapse some 100 metres downstream in Cuil Dubh's overflow streambed. A trip with failing light indicated a real cave but further solo pushing was considered unwise. He exited to a blizzard, thunder and lightning - were the gods angry at this latest access to the stubborn plateau? It would seem so because a return in force later on found the whole area under standing water!

A return on 29th January however allowed a team to explore more fully. A few metres of crawling and scrambling over large limestone chunks opens into a spectacular sloping chamber measuring some 15x20 metres with a sump pool at its base. This water level dropped overnight, permitting Julian Walford and Bob Jones to clear a way into an upstream crawl about 12 metres long, at the end of which a strong issue of water (presumably from Cuil Dubh) could be heard falling. This is the most significant hole yet explored on the plateau - probably the deepest - and although we can expect it to be isolated by shingled-up sumps at some point, could provide a valuable insight into the underground drainage of the area. Further exploration should develop in drier weather but be warned: this cave undoubtedly floods up from below and as is well known, the depression in which it lies frequently fills to a depth of 2-3 metres. Roughly 60-70 metres of passage have so far been explored and a full report will appear in the next issue of this Bulletin.

14th January saw seven people trawling around ANUSC and at the end of the month a small party stacked up a huge number of spoil bags at the foot of the main shaft in Rana Hole and revealed an encouraging new hole to follow down at the dig face.

WEST LOTHIAN

In September, as part of Subterranea Britannica's field trip to Edinburgh, Goon, Julie Hesketh and Ivan Young took parties to various sites of interest. The whole SB group travelled to Birkhill Fireclay Mine and the Prospect Hill Canal tunnel, lunching at the Falkirk Wheel. Thereafter, one group took a stroll through some of Leven Seat Limestone workings whilst the more adventurous went with Ivan to Philpstoun No.6 Shale Mine which seems to have had a higher water level than on previous visits.

YORKSHIRE

The Dales have seen a good level of activity from the club over the autumn and winter. At the start of September, during a local cave leader training session, Matthew Hudson descended Yordas, Thistle, Long Churn, Ibbeth Peril and Kingsdale Master caves and Bull Pot of the Witches.

In November, 13 members participated in a comprehensive descent of Lost John's Cavern. Cathedral and Centipede routes were both rigged (one on Friday night) and trips made into the Master Cave. The next day the team relaxed with a ladder climb down Calf Holes and out of Birkwith Cave.

In December, wet conditions repelled an attempt on Aquamole Pot so the seven strong party rigged both ways down Jingling Pot instead.

The first trip of the New Year was an exchange trip through Sell Gill Holes in rather wet conditions, followed the next day by a descent of Illusion Pot (after an extensive moor bash). Simultaneously, Julie Hesketh went off with two MCG friends to Easegill Caverns.

In February, there was a two day descent of Juniper Gulf in atrocious weather: two days because religiously following the rigging guide meant that the first trip ran out of rope half way in! On the Sunday two members opted to explore Thistle Cave and the Runscar series at Ribbleshead. The same month there were visits to Great Douk, Harddrawkin and Sunset Pots.

MEET NOTE:

FAIRY CAVE, LUING, ARGYLL

By George Kennedy

I found the cave easily, only a ten minute walk from the ferry point at the north of the island, not far from the slate quarries which once formed a principal industry here. It is not a sea cave as it lies up on the hillside well away from the sea. It appears to me to be made up of a mixture of slate and limestone, quite unlike any of the caves in Appin.

A low filthy crawl amongst the remains of dead sheep for two metres took me into a wee chamber big enough to stand in. Two metres ahead the chamber ended with the way on looking like a tight descent through a boulder ruckle. I was forced to leave this for another day due to my lamps noticeably dimming and a lack of spare batteries. Back at the start of the entrance chamber an opening to my right took me into a much bigger chamber with some of the most amazing formations I have seen yet, on the ceiling of the chamber and also the walls, which had a lot of flowstone seeping down them. There is a hole in the right hand wall of this chamber a metre off the floor which I also had to leave for another day and what looks like a choked off route at floor level. A bit of clearance may reveal more. The only artifacts I found were the remains of a dead tup curled up in a wee hollow and what I think might be very old bones of a deer. I am no archaeologist but these bones did look like those you might find in a Bronze Age dig and were quite fragile to touch. I left them as I found them in case they are of some interest.

(note: A preliminary search of Statistical Accounts etc has failed to reveal any reference to this site, which would repay further visits. Ed.)

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY (To 26.2.05)

1. BOOKS

Jones, K. (no date) The Caves on the West Bank of the Afon Tawe
 Fanciaux, Dom F. (1950) Cavernes [Belgian caving]
 Trench, R. & E. Hillman (new edition 1993) London Under London
 Eyre, J. (2004) It's Only a Game
 White Rose Pothole Club. (2004) 50 Years of Caving & Potholing in the Yorkshire Dales, 1954-2004
 Beck, H. (ed) (2004) Craven Pothole Club Jubilee 1929-2004
 MacPhail, C. (2004) Underworld (childrens' novel)
 Mancinelli, F. (1981) The Catacombs of Rome
 Antonini, G. & G. Badino (1997) Grotte a Forre. Tecniche Speciali e di Autosoccorso
 Badino, G. (1992) Tecniche di Grotta
 Badino, G. (1998) Grotte & Speleologia
 Dal Cin, F. & A. De Vivo (2003) Meraviglie del Mondo Sotteraneo
 Scottish Natural Heritage (2005) Scottish Outdoor Access Code

2. SHEET SURVEYS

	Approx. Scale
Krem Um Thloo, India	2" = 100m
Spilja Drobovnik, Croatia	1" = 25m

3. CAVING JOURNALS

Bapco Journal	Vol.10 No.10 (2004)
BCRA CREG Journal	Nos. 57,58 (2004)
BEC Belfry Bulletin	Nos. 105-116, 119-129,133,135-141, 144-153,158, 182-189,195,197-199,213,221,222,224,229,231,233, 234,239,299,300,305-309,312,313,315,321-323,325- 328,376/7,379,382,386/7,388/9,400,485,486,487,500, 520 (1956-2004) + CD Rom: Belfry Bulletins Nos. 1-99 (1947-55) and BEC Logbooks (1943-97) (1999)
British Caver	Vol. 127 (2005)
British Caving Association, Newsletter	No.2 (2004)
Canadian Caver	Nos. 61,62 (2004)
Cave Diving Group, Newsletter	No.153 (2004)
Chelsea Speleological Society, Newsletter	Vol. 46 Nos. 8/9,10,11,12 Vol. 47 Nos. 1,2 (2004-5)
Club Alpino Italiano, Quaderni Didattici	No.2 (Tecnica Speleologia) (1999) No.4 (Speleologia in Cavita' Artificiali) No.5 (L'Impatto dell'Uomo Sull'Ambiente de Grotta (1999) No.7 (I Depositi Chimici delle Grotte) (2000) No.9 (L'Utilizzo del GPS in Speleologia) (2001) No.11 (Storia della Speleologia) (2001)
Craven Pothole Club, Record	No. 76 (2004)
Descent	Nos. 180,181,182 (2004-5)
Derbyshire Caver	Nos. 120,121 (2004)
Die Hohle	Vol.55 Nos. 1-4 (2004)
Italian Speleological Society, 'Speleologia'	Year 25 Vol. 50 (2004)
International Journal of Speleology	Vol. 32 No. 1/4 (2003)

Mondo Sotteraneo	New Series Year 26 No. 1-2
Mondo Sotteraneo	Year 27 No. 1-2 (2002-3)
NSS of the USA, News	Vol. 61 Nos. 9,10,11,12
	Vol. 62 Nos. 1,2,3,4,6,7 (2003-4)
Northern Pennine Club, Journal	Vol.2 No.1 (1957 - no surveys)
Orpheus Caving Club, Newsletter	Vol. 40 Nos. 1-3,4-6,7-9,10-12 (2004)
Red Rose Cave & Pothole Club, Newsletter	Vol. 41 No.3 (2004)
SMC 'Casbag'	Nos. 4,5 (2004)
Shepton Mallet Caving Club, Journal	Series 11 No.4 (2003)
Speleo-Club de Paris, Grottes et Gouffres	Nos. 23,24,25,26,27,28 (1960)
Subterranea Britannica, Newsletter	No.5 (2004)
Subterranea Britannica, 'Subterranea'	No.6 (2004)
Subterranea Croatica	Vol.3 No.2 (2004)
Sydney Speleological Society, Journal	Vol. 48 Nos. 1-12
	Vol. 49 No.1 (2004-5)
Univ. of Bristol Spelaeol. Soc. Proceedings	Vol. 23 No.2 (2005)
Wessex Cave Club, Journal	No. 292 (2004)
	Index to Vol. 27 (2004)
Westminster Spelaeological Group, Newsletter	2004/4
	2005/1

5. ABSTRACTS, CAVE GUIDES ETC

Abstract: The Mitchelstown Caves of Co. Tipperary. By C.A. Hill, H. Brodick & A. Rule. Proc. Royal Irish Academy, Vol. XXVII Section B No.11 (1909) pp 235-268. GSG No. 959.

Booklet: Air Ambulance Service Helicopters. Notes for General Practitioners on When and How to Ask for one. (1959) GSG No. 960.

Abstract: Noah's Ark Archaeology [High Pature Cave] Anon. Historic Scotland Magazine. Autumn (2004) pp.29-30. GSG No. 961.

Abstract: Full Circle for UK Canals: Restoring the South Pennine Chain. Anon. Civil Engineering Vol. 157 No.3, pp. 117-124. GSG 962.

Guide: Mary King's Close, Edinburgh

Information Leaflet: Mendip Rescue Organisation (2003)

Pamphlets: So You Want to Go Caving? NCA (1988)

Llanfair Slate Caverns

Llechwedd Slate Caverns

Rhondda Heritage Park

Wales Underground

Big Pit, Blaenafon

Great Orme Copper Mines

King Arthur's Labyrinth, Powys

Dan yr Ogof

Show Caves of Britain

The Caves of Nottingham

Wells and Mendip Museum

Corsham Underground Quarry

Monkton Farleigh Mines

Poldark Mine

Blue Hills Tin Mine

Geevor Tin Mine

Carnglaze Slate Caverns

Morwellham Quay and Copper Mine

Honister Slate Mine
 Threlkeld Quarry and Mining Museum
 Clapham, Doorway to the Dales
 Ingleton, Land of Caves and waterfalls
 White Scar Cave
 Cueva Benidoleig
 Orgnac Caverns
 Grottes de Thouzon
 Lascaux II
 La Cova del Rull
 Diamond Caverns, Kentucky
 Kentucky Caverns

The Wessex Cave Club, Jura Logbook 2004. N. Cleave (ed) GSG No. 963.

Abstract: Caves and Karsts of N.E. Africa. W.R. Halliday. Int. Journal of Speleology 32(1/4) (2003)pp19-32
 GSG No. 964.

CRO. Rescues of 2003 (2004) GSG No. 965.

Abstract: Northern Pennine Club, Historical material (Accounts of explorations of Penyghent Pot, Lancaster Hole, Stream Passage Pot and List of Publications and Explorations (from web site) GSG No. 966.

Gray, R. (ed) (2004) In the Streamway. [Poetry Anthology]. GSG No. 967.

Expedition Report: Himalaya Underground. G. Durrant, C. Smart, J. Turner, J. Wilson (1979). GSG No. 968.
 Speleological Abstracts No.41 (for 2002) (2004)

Protecting Children and Young People. Guide and Training Pack (2004) GSG No. 969

6. VIDEOS, SLIDES ETC.

CD: Dangerous Dick and the Duckbusters: In Too Deep (2004)

Vancouver Island Trip, Photographs

Archive photographs from 1963-4 and various 2004 meets

DVD

No.3 Meghalaya 2004 [with Meghalaya 2003 + stills]

No.4 Uamh an Claonaite [from entrance choke to first duck] (2004)

SLIDES

No. 1050. Uamh an Claonaite. Top of Entrance choke

1051. Uamh an Claonaite. Descending eyehole in entrance choke

1052. Uamh an Claonaite. Bottom of entrance choke

1053. Uamh an Claonaite. Cavers at foot of entrance choke

1054. Uamh an Claonaite. Cavers at foot of entrance choke

1055. Uamh an Claonaite. Approach to first cascade

1056. Uamh an Claonaite. Top of First Cascade.

PUBLICATIONS:

Now Available:

SUTHERLAND HUT LOGS Volume 5

(Taigh nam Famh Log No.3)

This latest publication covers the period from Jan 1st 2001 to December 31st 2004, and is more or less a complete record of caving work in Assynt during that period.

Available from A.Jeffreys (see front cover) price £8.50 (including postage)

-----oOo-----

GETTING DAMP IN DRAENEN

By Julie Hesketh

Some Mendip Caving Group friends and I have been digging in Ogof Draenen's Pontypool or Bust (POB) since 1996 - at the end of the Crystal Maze, at the upstream end of the Blorengge, just off the round trip. POB is a southern trending passage that runs parallel to the main streamway. Since our first visit in August 1996, a huge chunk of passage has been opened up to the south by other groups (Luck of the Draw), leaving a big hole in the survey. The digging is fairly straightforward and very pleasant - it's getting to the dig that is the 'fun' bit. All in all, we are usually underground for 10-12 hours, including the three hours of caving to the dig (and the same time back again), down the streamway and up the Blorengge and finally through the Crystal Maze. Never had it occurred to us in all the years that we have dug there that we would ever have any water-level problems. Draenen doesn't flood that badly, does it....?

We headed underground on Saturday 23rd October 2004 for the usual digging session - armed with our usual brew kit, dried food, lots of chocolate and even more light. We all remarked on the high water levels on our entry to the cave, but having been down Draenen tens of times, we had seen it higher so didn't think any more of it. The climbs in the Blorengge were knackered but I just put that down to being fat and unfit - not the high water levels.

We filled up our water containers at the head of the Blorengge - the usual drip of water from the roof was a healthy gush - and we headed off to dig. The dig is preceded by the nastiest squeeze I have come across, a keyhole shaped affair that follows a flat-out crawl that follows half an hour of flat out crawls and squeezes through the Crystal Maze, so it feels quite remote down there. The dig itself though, is easy digging in sand with about 2-10" airspace in lovely scalloped passage about three feet high. We have dug about 110m of new cave passage, meandering, low dry stream passage interspersed with roomier sandy chambers and spoil stacking space. We made good progress and came back to the 'camp' area tired but satisfied and had lashings of tea and dinner. Off we set, out of the Crystal Maze to exit the cave. All things being equal, we reckoned we'd be back in the Lamb and Fox pub in time for a quick half before closing time.

Except that the drip of water at the head of the Blorengge was now not just a healthy gush, but an angry, loud torrent. What really made our hearts sink though, was the thunderous roar of the main Blorengge streamway, echoing up to where we stood. The first waterfall we would have to climb down was just awesome - a foaming, roaring jet. The usually dry sandy bank at the base of that waterfall was under two feet of water - making it almost certain that the wallows of the Sewers would be sumped! Gloomy faces all round. Still, we could exit via the round trip. Tim had done it before about five years ago, so we might just be able to find it. Two hours later we gloomily returned to the Blorengge after having failed dismally to find the Squirrel Rifts - we had wrongly thought they were very close to Life on Mars in Far Agent Blorengge so we had looked in vain. In fact the rifts enter Haggis Basher (which we actually found without realising it) but we finally decided that as we were in the UK's longest cave the likelihood of taking the wrong route was high so, dejectedly, we decided we would be better off returning to the start of the Crystal Maze to await a drop in water levels. Luckily we had lots of fuel and water wasn't a problem (!) We sat on our kneepads to keep warm.

The first two hours whizzed by in a blur of laughter and chat. We brewed up every hour to keep ourselves going and crawled out to look at the water levels, which were, worryingly, going up and not down. The next two hours were spent thinking about the humiliation of rescue and the next two, sleeping and trying to stay warm. The 3am check came and amazingly in just an hour since we last looked, the water level had dropped visibly and the sandy bank was now only a mere foot below the water level. Hurrah! We were saved! We had no idea what the weather was doing outside but more rain was forecast for Sunday so we dared wait no longer than was necessary. We had to go; now or never.

The trip out was the trip of a lifetime - at least it felt like it took a lifetime. The Sewers had indeed sumped, the foam on the roof proved that. Indeed, even now, there were parts of the 15m wallow where the air

space was only about 6" - nice! And bloody cold. In a furry suit.

Needless to say our exit was hard work. The waterfalls in the Blorenge were intimidating - they are a bugger in the best conditions. It was the streamway that took us by surprise though. I swam a short way at least once against the flow as it was so deep in parts and we gripped the walls to pull ourselves against the flow of the very high water. The small cascades that one usually steps over from rock rim to rim were completely submerged making the going treacherous. The constant flow of heavy water was arduous. It seemed unending. Knackered and cold, we heaved ourselves up the entrance series, the promise of food and bed probably gave us our second wind. Finally, at 6.30am we emerged to a clear and starry sky. Relief!

Back to the Mendips and in bed by 9am. A trip of epic proportions, over 19 hours long (thank God for LEDs!) and a salutary tale in knowing your escape routes. My next Draenen trip will be to learn the round trip and to install a rescue dump at the dig!

-----oOo-----

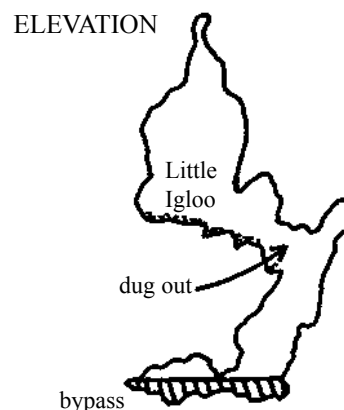
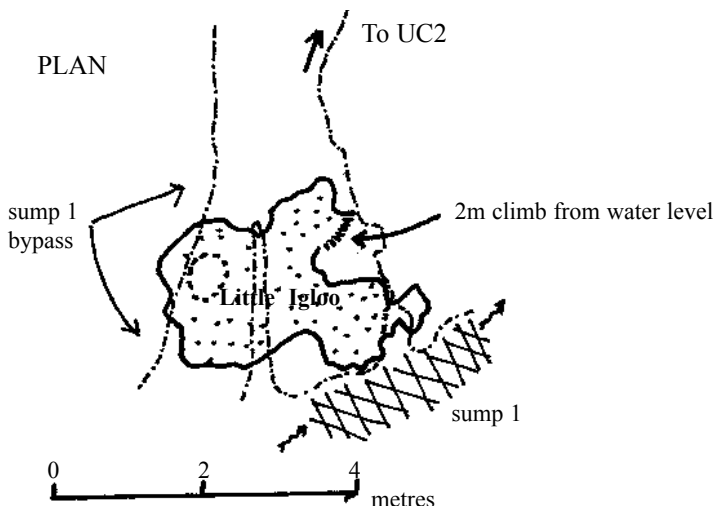
BIG HOPES FOR LITTLE IGLOOS

By Alan L. Jeffreys

To destroy the illusions of Hollywood romantics, may I emphasise that film making can run a close second to watching paint dry if you are not actively involved in the technical side. Patience spends a lot of time sitting on her monument! Thus, on Friday 29th October 2004, not being provided with a star's caravan during the Claonaite project, I was forced to keep active at the sump 1 bypass while Fraser sorted out his lights and camera angle, poking around in likely looking crevices and boulder piles.

Just at the point where one 'surfaces' from the duck (going inwards, by the route which turns sharp right), a dark grey wall ascends and if one stands with one's back to this and looks up, a small void can be seen to continue. I scrambled onto a handy ledge half way up the wall and looked into a small sloping opening floored with dry sand and shattered rock shards. This proved to be easy digging and I soon enlarged the hole enough to allow me to wriggle upwards into a respectable little phreatic chamber, roughly floor planned as a figure of eight. The roof was 2.5 metres high and the maximum width of the bell was four metres. Narrow continuations could be seen extending into the cave over the sump proper, but my interest was all to the right as I had entered the airbell, thinking that there might be a route bypassing the duck below. Sadly, the smooth dry floor lay flush against the walls, evincing no hint of continuation, but excavation *might* pay off. My reason for saying that of course is in remembering the small series of 'chambers' to the left just before the approach to sump 1. Could there be a connection that merely requires digging out?

There are several other tiny voids of a similar nature between the bypass duck and the smooth rock beach up out of the water, but none is presently enterable. I called my tiny find Little Igloo, and if nothing else, it will prove a magnificent place to sit out a flood such as I encountered in 1998; indeed I would definitely recommend placing an emergency stash here, as it is high and dry, at no risk from water or rockfall.



Sketch survey, Grade 1, Oct.2004, A. Jeffreys

SCOTTISH SPELEOPHILATELY

By Martin T. Mills

The first item that comes to mind is the GB Commemorative in the Soldier's Tale issue, date of issue 5th October 1999, the 19p black and pale yellow indicates Robert the Bruce (1274-1329) when as king he crept into hiding in a cave in the winter of 1306. There he hatched plans which would ultimately save the Scottish nation from extinction. After six defeats, in the Battle of Bannockburn on 23/24 June 1314, as king he led the Scottish nation to victory. Legend has it that a spider spinning its web in the cave provided the king with inspiration. However, the legendary spider never existed, but it was a brilliant metaphor for the war weary king's plight. The famed colourful account is from the imagination of Sir Walter Scott, "Tales of a Grandfather" in 1828. Unfortunately there is no hint of the legendary spider on the stamp.



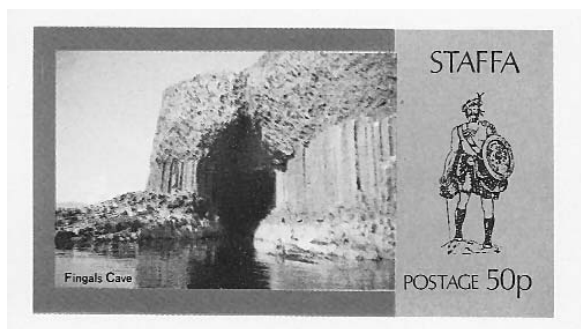
The Kings Caves on Arran are the supposed location for the legend. But the islands of Rhum, Rathlin (off Co. Antrim), Eigg, the Uists, Barra and Ghigha are all considered possible alternative location for the cave.

Now we come to Cinderella issues. These are locally/privately produced stamps which are not valid for prepayment of postal items in the national postal system. However they are increasingly being produced, principally to generate income on the pretext of pre-payment for postal items from remote islands to connect with the national Royal Mail system. These Cinderella issues are variously described as carriage labels, stamps and local carriage stamps. Not surprisingly Staffa, home to Fingal's Cave and other well-known caves (indicated on the map of the island below) has been a leader in issuing Cinderella issues. There are numerous items and those accompanying should be regarded as a selection and not definitive. There is also a degree of uncertainty in the chronological order of issue. Staffa stamps, introduced in 1968, were sold by the boatman who used to take visitors from Iona and Fionnphort out to Staffa in his motor boat. In 1969 it was stated that there was a posting box in Fingal's Cave and another one by the landing stage. All items posted in the boxes would receive a special hand stamp - see illustration. Then in 1974 the owner of the island, Alastair de Watteville, appointed a contractor to design, produce and supply new sets of stamps.

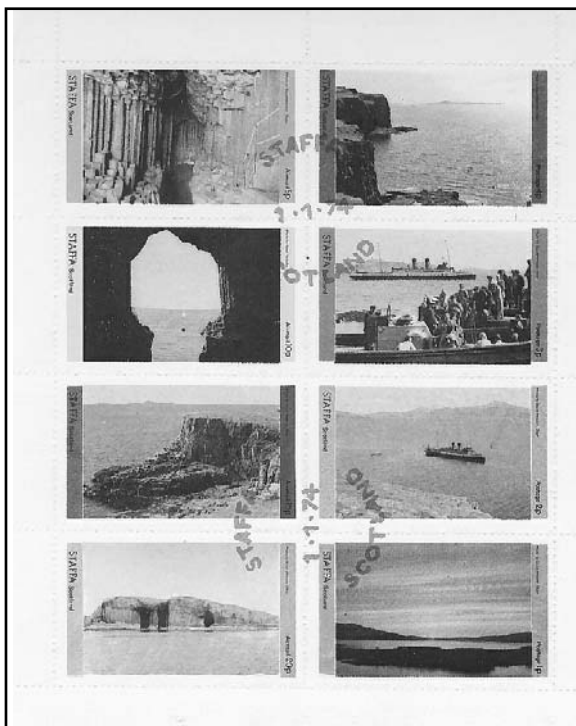


In 1976, when the launch "Laird of Staffa" came into service, a robust weather-proof letter box was installed at Clamshell Cave. Visitors could then buy postcards and Staffa stamps on board on the trip out to Staffa, post their mail in the letter box, and have it collected, franked on the return voyage, and handed in at a post office on Mull.

This arrangement worked well at first. It ended after two years when the contractor, in an excess of zeal, decided to issue Staffa stamps in each of the twelve New England States to commemorate the bicentenary of America's Independence. The earliest and by far the most attractive and professionally produced to my view



is the 1/6 in the series of 4 values showing Mendelssohn's head, Fingal's Cave in the background and Queen Victoria. This is multi-coloured with a predominance of brown, black and blue. As the set is pre-decimal currency it will be pre 1972; all the suggestions are that it was issued in 1969 or earlier. Queen Victoria's visit to the island was on 19th August 1847.

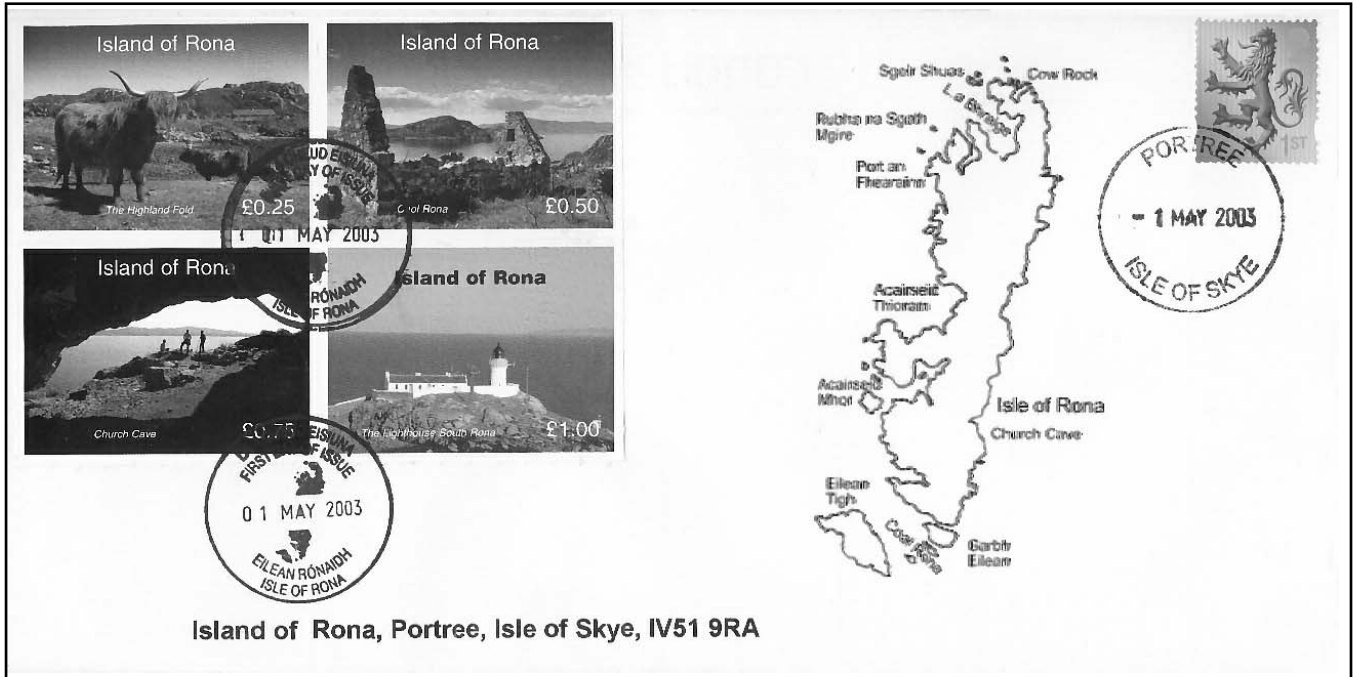


Next came the 50p label as I have a copy 'franked' 1.12.1973. Perhaps the £2 label dates from the same date or era. There must be considerable doubt as to what these are meant to be used for other than to generate income from ephemera collectors. Certainly from my visit to the island on 30th May 1993, there was no opportunity to purchase or better still post such items.

The miniature sheet primitively perforated of eight views is 'franked' with the date 1.1.74. The values are 1p, 2p, 3p,4p,5p,10p,15p and 20p. The block of eight comprising 4 x 14p and 4 x 18p values multicoloured was to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Mendelssohn's visit. As his visit was 8th August 1829, this dates these as issued in 1979.

More recently the Island of Rona, sometimes known as South Rona, which lies at the north end of Raasay and to the east of Skye, has started to produce stamps. They are produced by Ardochy and Rona Estates on behalf of the Danish owner, Mrs Dorte Mette Jensen. The first issue, a

set of four values, was on 1st May 2003, the 75p multicoloured value of which illustrates a view out through the entrance of Church Cave. The cave, also known as Giant's Cave, is situated on the east coast almost directly across the island from Acairseid Mhor (Big Harbour). Before the island church was built in 1912, the islanders worshipped in this cave and even after they had a church it was still the custom to have babies baptised in the cave. The last family left the island in 1943. The entrance is like a large gothic arch and there is a low stone pillar which was used as a pulpit. Beside it is a depression in the stone, fed by drips of water from the cave roof and this served as a font. Rows of stones were used as pews by the congregation. A service was held on Good Friday, 18th April 2003, when the Reverend Iain Greenshields from Kenseleyre Church of Scotland on Skye led the congregation of 64 in worship. This was the first service since 1970.



Rona and the northern tip of Raasay are composed of gneisses of the Lewisian complex. These rocks are not soluble so there are no solutional or karst caves. Church Cave is a sea cave formed by the action of waves. Erosion here was probably higher because of fractures in the rock produced by tectonic forces. The size of the stamp is 46mm by 34mm with roulette rather than traditional perforations. There was also a first day cover (illustrated)

A second edition was issued on 1st August 2004 to coincide with the delivery of a new GR post box presented by Royal Mail and mounted on the newly completed pier and pontoon at Acairseid Mhor (Big Harbour). The size of these stamps is smaller (35mm by 26mm) depicting the same views, colours and values.



A second issue was produced on 1st May 2004 depicting four artwork designs, the 25p multicoloured value of which illustrates an external view of Church Cave, including congregation. The artist was Rebecca Ellis from Knutsford, Cheshire.

UAMH AN RIGH (CAVE OF THE KINGS)

By Steven Birch

NGR NG 8544 4375

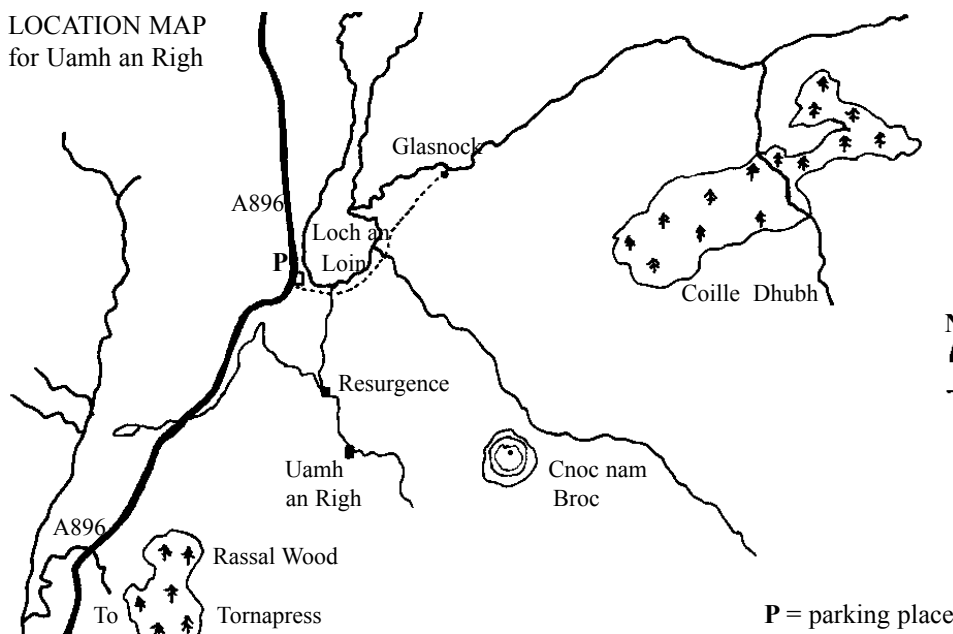
Altitude: c. 148 metres OD

Length: 54 metres

Depth: c. 12.4 metres

Uamh an Righ (Cave of the Kings) is situated on the slopes of Cnoc nam Broc, 1.2 km east south east of Couldoran House, Kishorn, Ross-shire. The cave is best found by parking in the wide passing place on the A896, where a small track turns off to Glasnock Cottage (east of the road when driving north from Tornapress). From the parking place, walk along the track for 150 metres and strike off south following a small burn. This starts to cut uphill to a shallow limestone gully, passing a prominent resurgence on the left bank. After a few metres following the small streambed above this (which can be dry), another shallow dry streambed branches off to the right, heading south east. This runs across the slope, past a level field with ruined buildings and cuts under a post and wire fence. Carefully climb over the fence and follow the dry bed to below a small waterfall. The entrance to the cave is in the left-hand bank (looking upstream), around 15 metres below the waterfall. The one metre high arched entrance has a small wall of boulders built across the front to stop livestock wandering into the cave (please replace after exiting the cave).

LOCATION MAP
for Uamh an Righ



History of Exploration:

The cave was discovered by David Morrison and Richard Simpson of Kyle of Lochalsh, during a reconnaissance trip onto the Kishorn limestone outcrop to prospect for new cave. When first found on the 31st October 2004, the entrance was blocked with small to medium-sized limestone boulders. However a few minutes digging with bare hands revealed a small chamber, The Causeway. A

few blocks removed from the chamber floor and roof gave access to a steeply descending boulder ramp (The Grand Gallery) and open passage. Due to the 'dodgy' nature of a looselimestone block in the entrance passage, David remained on the surface while Richard set off down the ramp. David could hear Richard's shouts describing the growing passage size with a resounding, "It's ****ing huge down here!" However, it was getting late in the day and both having made a descent of the cave to where a small stream was found ending in a sump, they decided to call it a day and return the next weekend.

David and Richard gave me a call on the eve of the 31st October and told me about their impressive discovery. I checked the description of Glasnock Cave (the only other recorded cavern in the area) and confirmed that this was indeed a new system. We returned to the cave on 7th November, with the aim of exploring the system and to make a basic survey. Previously in a dry streambed, heavy overnight rain resulted in a small stream entering the cave through the entrance passage. David and I entered the cave while Richard waited patiently on the surface. It truly was an impressive place with some of the largest passage I have seen in this part of Scotland. We descended the Grand Gallery to where the small stream disappears into a possible sump. Returning slightly up the ramp I noticed a possible way on to the left and I followed David through a smaller section of passage, after which we climbed down into another chamber. This also had a stream

flowing from under the right wall that swept around the end of the chamber to sink into another possible sump.

Having followed all of the obvious leads, we then set about creating a basic Grade 2 compass and tape measure survey of the cave system, which was none too easy with the relatively 'vertical' development of the passages. This survey is shown below and at least allows one to get a feel for the size of the cave's passages.

Description of the cave:

The entrance to the cave is situated in the left-hand bank of the usually dry streambed, some 15 metres below a 1.8 metre high waterfall over a small limestone outcrop. A sink below the waterfall normally feeds water into the cave. A short crawl through The Causeway, which includes a straightforward squeeze past a large limestone block, descends to where one can stand on the continuing ramp. Here, one gets one's first view down the Grand Gallery - an impressive steeply descending tunnel strewn with limestone blocks and boulders. Small, impenetrable inlets enter the passage here to left and right. The inlet on the left flows along the west wall into Khufu Chamber, a large void some 10 metres at its widest and approximately 2 to 3 metres high. Towards the base of the chamber the angle of the passage becomes less and the small stream



flows between large mud banks, and eventually flows into a low sump filled with sediment and silt. Another small stream flows from east to west across the end of the chamber here and also enters the sump, while a few metres back up the chamber a third inlet appears from the base of the east wall.

David Morrison looks on as Richard Simpson disappears into Cave of the Kings, Kishorn. Photo. Steve Birch

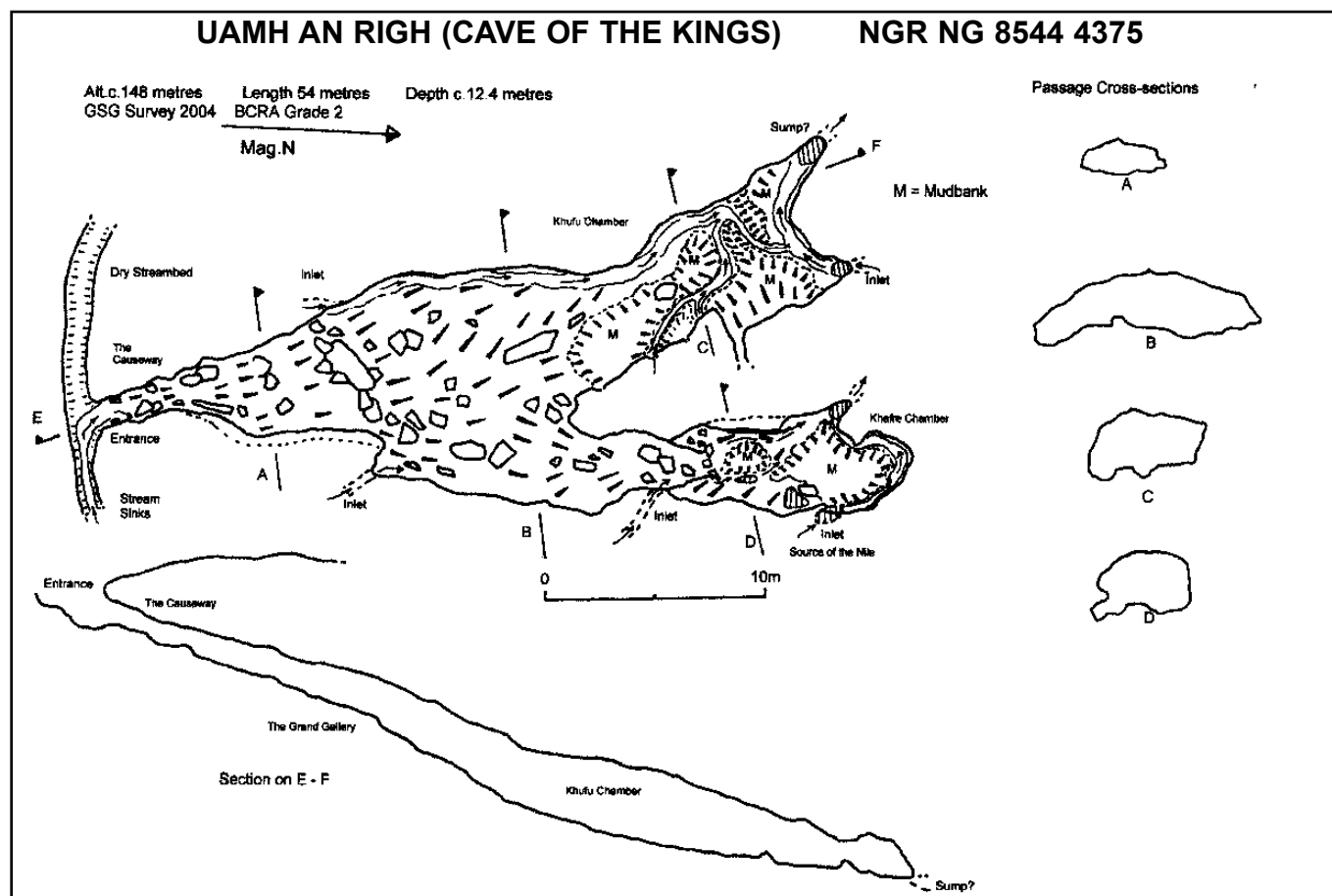
Returning south up the slope of Khufu Chamber, a branch passage leads off to the left (heading south). This is high at first and passes a depression in the floor filled with large breakdown, with voids showing below. Carrying on along the passage another inlet stream enters from high in the east wall. This is also impenetrable, but the passage on continues into a low section between boulders and down a 2 metre climb, with the stream from the inlet descending the east wall to the side. Small voids could be seen back under the climb, but these were not entered on this visit. Khafre Chamber continues on for some 8 metres past large mud banks to a small stream, which flows from a possible sump under the east wall, across the end of the passage, and sumps under the N.W. wall. This may be the stream that is seen at the end of Khufu Chamber.

Although it was disappointing to see these large cave passages close down in such dramatic style, it is possible that the sumps are merely caused by sediment banks in the passage. Certainly, during my visit to the cave, the water entering the 'sump' seemed to be flowing away freely. The steep dip of the passage to the north, if this dip-plane continues, would also suggest that open passage is not too far away beyond the sump. A dig at this site should repay the effort, with soft sediments barring access to what could be some impressive passage on the other side. A possible resurgence for the cave is situated approximately 320 metres to the northwest at NGR NG 8532 4407, the resurgence that is passed on the walk up to the cave, which is impenetrable.

This discovery indicates the potential for cave passage in the Kishorn limestone, Cave of the Kings being

dominated by large breakdown. A detailed survey of this area is now planned to look for new cave entrances, while it is also proposed to explore the old mines that are known here (copper and iron?). This limestone outcrop is quite extensive and during our short visit to the area we noted several small resurgences, which must be fed by sinks higher up the hill.

[Note: TWO mentions of ancient Egypt in one issue! Things are looking up - Ed]



BOOK REVIEW: "It's Only A Game" By Jim Eyre.

Wild Places Publishing (2004) ISBN 0-9526701-6-X £18.95

Ranking as THE great caving character of the Yorkshire Dales, Jim Eyre here relates his life from pre-war schooldays, through naval service, to a long and successful caving career in which he has explored many of the world's great cave systems besides contributing massively to home-grown discoveries ranging from Lancaster Hole to Dale Head Pot.

Anyone who has read the hilarious series of articles published in *Descent* some 20-30 years ago, or his previous volume 'The Cave Explorers', will already be familiar with Jim's droll literary style. If you have not, I can safely state that this new book is a delicious treat not to be missed. How he survived war service in the Mediterranean, or myriad caving trips on tatty rope ladders and even worse clothing, is a mystery to us all. Jim Eyre writes with fluency and a self-deprecating manner which he uses to highlight the comic side of each episode - and there always is a comic side, whether it be gracefully bending scaling ladders, trousers in flames on motorbike rides, or incomprehensible encounters with foreigners. Well, to quote: "*Caving must be the only sport ever created for fearless halfwits....raving lunatics...harmless eccentrics, masochists and cross-dressers who are able to see in the dark.*"

Throughout, the book is liberally illustrated with his own inimitable cartoons and also photographs. The *only* downside is that the narrative stops at the early 1960s. The original text was so big that it has to be published in two volumes, BUT, the second instalment is subject to the first selling well enough to fund it. So go out and buy one NOW. I at least, am not just hungry, but starving, for the Word. You'll laugh yourself hoarse.

Alan L. Jeffreys

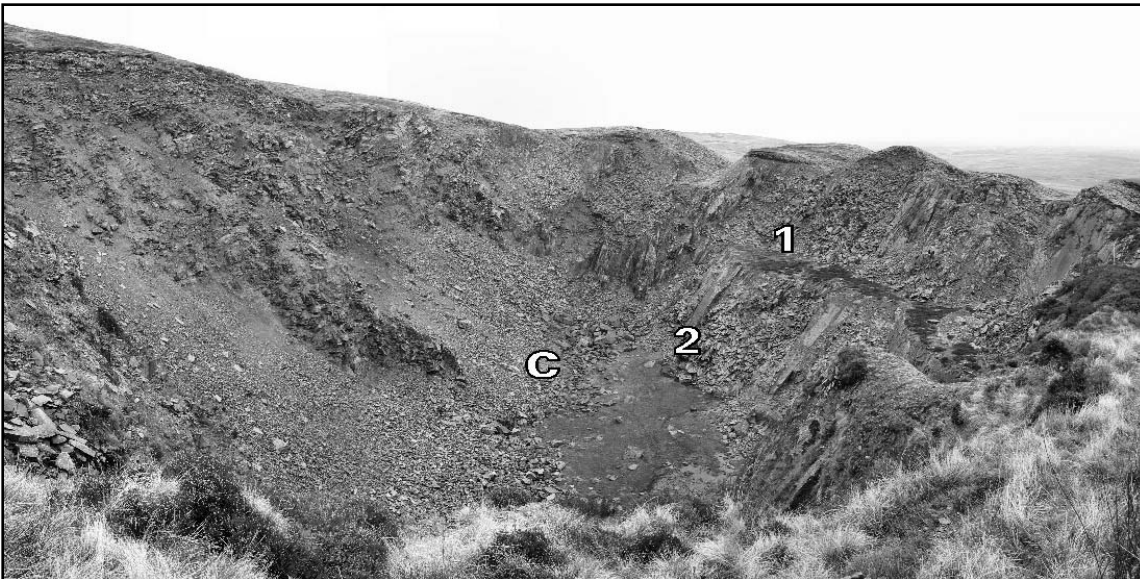
CRAIGLEA SLATE QUARRY, LOGIEALMOND, PERTHSHIRE

By John Crae

LOCATION:

Take the A9 to beyond Perth and then west along the B8063 to Harrietfield, where beyond the village a sharp bend takes the road around a deep gully. Off the north side of this bend a rough track, marked 'Logiealmond Lodge', quickly becomes a well paved single track road. The spoil heaps of the quarry are clearly visible on the hillside. Passing the 'No Entry' and 'No Unauthorised Vehicles' signs, the road runs up the west side of a wood (Logiealmond Wood) and near the top of the wood a rough track splits off uphill to the quarry. The paved road veers east into the trees, eventually reaching the lodge. At the top of the wood the rough track is blocked by a locked gate. Permission to visit the quarry should be obtained from the Logiealmond Estate (part of the Scone Palace Estates ?)

The spoil heaps of the quarry are about 500 metres up the track from the gate. Most of this track surface seems to be of a normal modern build-up but within 100 metres of the spoil heaps this changes to a cobbled surface formed from large chunks of local stone set on edge on top of an embankment raising its southern edge. On reaching the spoil heaps the track splits. To the left leads out onto the top of the eastern section of the lower spoil heap. This is separated from the western section by a series of gullies within the slate debris. The right hand track leads up over the north end of these gullies to a slightly higher plateau. Just north of the junction are the remains of some ruined buildings. There is a rising in the gully nearest the track. On the upper plateau the track splits again. The left hand route drops down the western flank of the spoil heap to the remains of the smithy. To the northeast of this is a spring which runs round the base of the spoil heap then away to the south. The right hand track leads up over the top of the west section of the lower spoil heap towards the top of Craiglea Hill.



panorama of North Quarry from western rim. Entrances to tunnels and cave are marked 1, 2 and C.

Photo. I. Young

THE QUARRIES AND TUNNELS:

The entrance to the South Quarry is off the right hand track just before reaching the top of the spoil heap. Loose slate fragments line the floor and east side of a narrow gully entering the quarry and all the faces of the quarry itself. This level is fairly small and was probably abandoned early in the life of the quarry. Slate fragments have been used to build drystone walls forming a path leading to another narrow gully and the North Quarry while another path leads to a sloping pile of slate fragments. Near the base of this pile a narrow opening (approximately 1.5 m wide and 300mm high) drops down a 1.5m high slope to a 2.5m wide and 2.1m high tunnel. This tunnel is approximately 14m long and cut through the bed rock. The last three metres of the east wall of the northern end have been lined with drystone walling suggesting it is either a wide narrow crevice or that this side wall is holding back a pile of crumbling slate from the spoil heap. At the north end of the tunnel a slope of loose slate fragments leads up to a narrow opening in the North Quarry. While

the tunnel is solid both ends have been blocked by falling rubble from the spoil heap. It was probably originally a drainage adit from the North Quarry, before it reached its present depth. Removal of the loose rubble at either end of the tunnel could open it to through traffic but as there is another route to North Quarry this is not really necessary. Some stabilisation of the rubble slopes would make the entrances safer but there is actually little risk in using this tunnel as it currently exists.



Peter Ireson entering short tunnel through to main excavation, North Quarry. Jim Salvona on the right.

Photo. Ivan Young

tunnel. Some drystone walling and timber propping appears beneath the slate slope. The base, walls and ceiling of the tunnel are solid rock running straight for about 230m with a fall of 1:150. Although the end of this adit was not reached, 150m were explored with a further 50m visible in the available light. There were no side passages.

Another small section of passage was found on the north side of the quarry, beneath a large boulder. This extended for about 4m and may only be a chamber formed beneath larger fallen rocks. However it is directly in line with the larger drainage adit and at the same approximate level. The rock above is very loose and may be dangerous.



View of North Quarry, with Jim Salvona standing on the bench to the right. The short tunnel ends beyond and behind him.

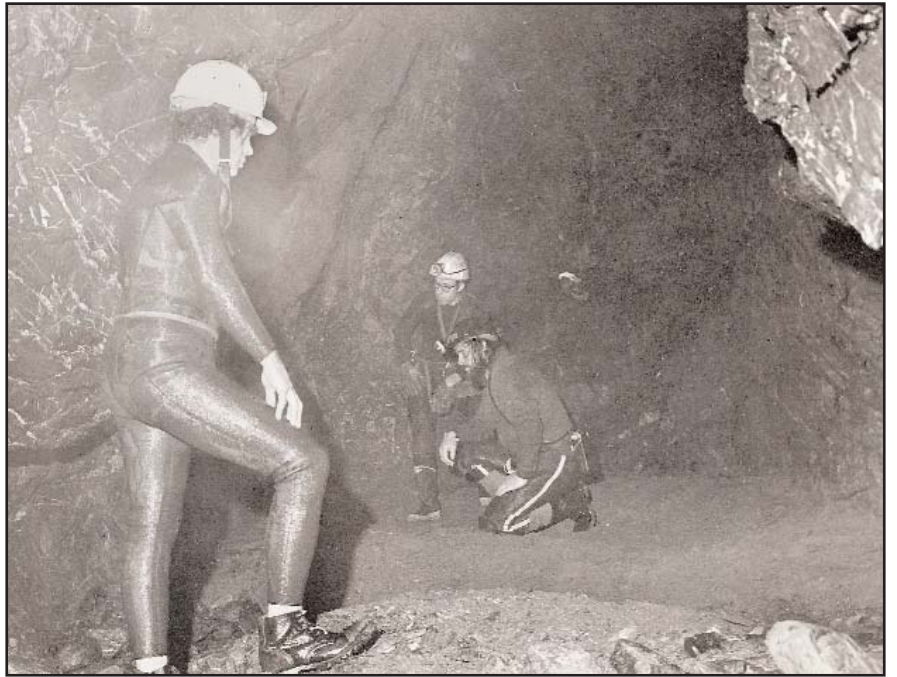
Photo. Ivan Young

Returning to the surface, the reputed end of the drainage adit - the spring adjacent to the 'smithy' - was investigated although this was not on the correct line for the straight tunnel seen below (almost 90° out). This appeared to be a natural spring not associated with the quarry workings although it may have been an impor

The North Quarry is much larger than the South and between 15 and 20 metres deeper. Roughly oval, the south, west and north faces seem reasonably solid while the east wall and the east ends of north and south faces are formed from fragments of slate. A small stream drops into the quarry at the northwest and the base of the quarry is a flat boggy area, with about 300mm of grass over a loose slate base. Larger chunks of rock appear nearer the base of the slopes within the smaller slate fragments while larger sections of solid rock protrude through the rubble slopes. The best access to the North Quarry is down the solid slope at the southeast of the quarry.

At the east end of the south face of the North Quarry, a small section of drystone wall below one of the larger rock protrusions marks the entrance to the lower drainage adit. To the right of the opening the quarry face is covered in loose slate. Approximately 1.8m up a rubble slope a 750mm x 250mm opening lies below the solid rock. An equal slope of smaller slate fragments drops down to the base of a roughly 2m x 2m

From the archives:
**Below Chest Pot in Uamh nan
 Claig-ionn, Argyll, May 1977.**
**L-R: Robin (Desperate)
 Duncan, Ivan Young, Iain
 Ogston.**
Photo: Alan Thomson



Assynt Practice Rescues, 2004.

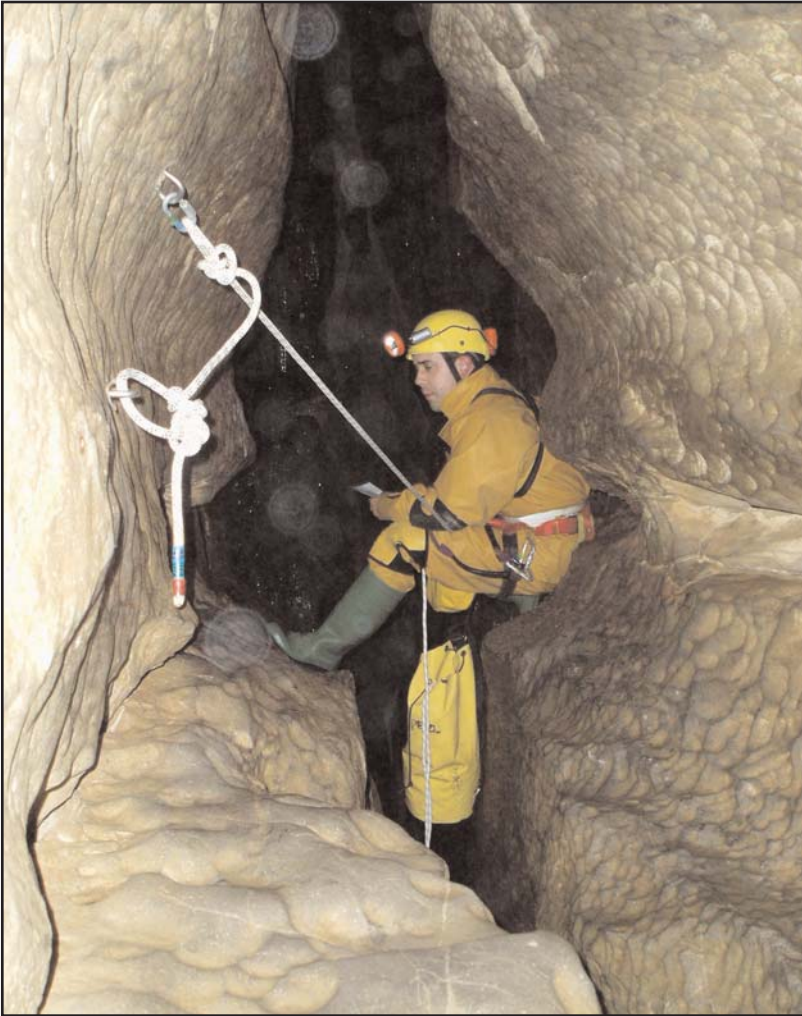
***Above: Outside Allt a'Chalda Mor Stream
 Cave, Achmore, October 2004.***

Photo: Hiba Aboulhosn

***Right: Rana Hole, Allt nan Uamh. Stretcher
 reaching the surface.***

Photo: Alan Jeffreys





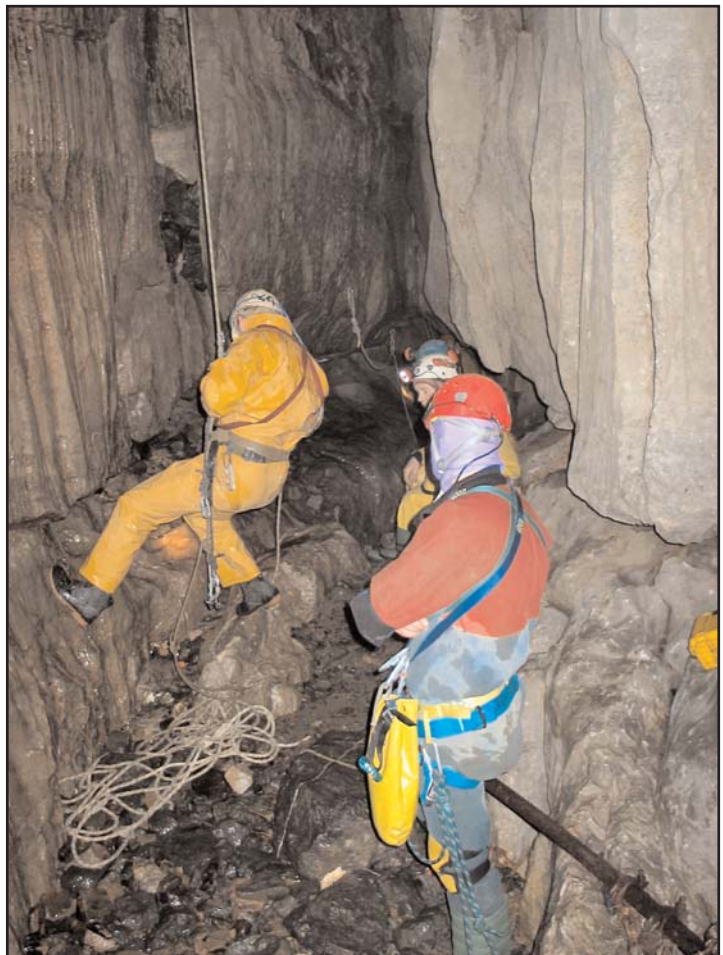
**Matthew Hutson on traverse
between 2nd and third pitches,
Juniper Gulf. February, 2005.**

Photo. Peter Ireson

**Base of bit pitch, Jingling Pot,
December 2004.**

**Martin Hayes on rope; front to back
in queue: Fraser Simpson, Roger
Galloway and Kate Janossy.**

Photo: Ivan Young





Members of Subterranea Britannica in an inclined rift, Philpstoun No. 6 Shale Mine, West Lothian, September 2004.

Photo: Ivan Young



Jim Salvona emerging from choked rift, Coalbog Limestone Mine, Bridge of Weir, December 2004.

Photo: Alan Jeffreys



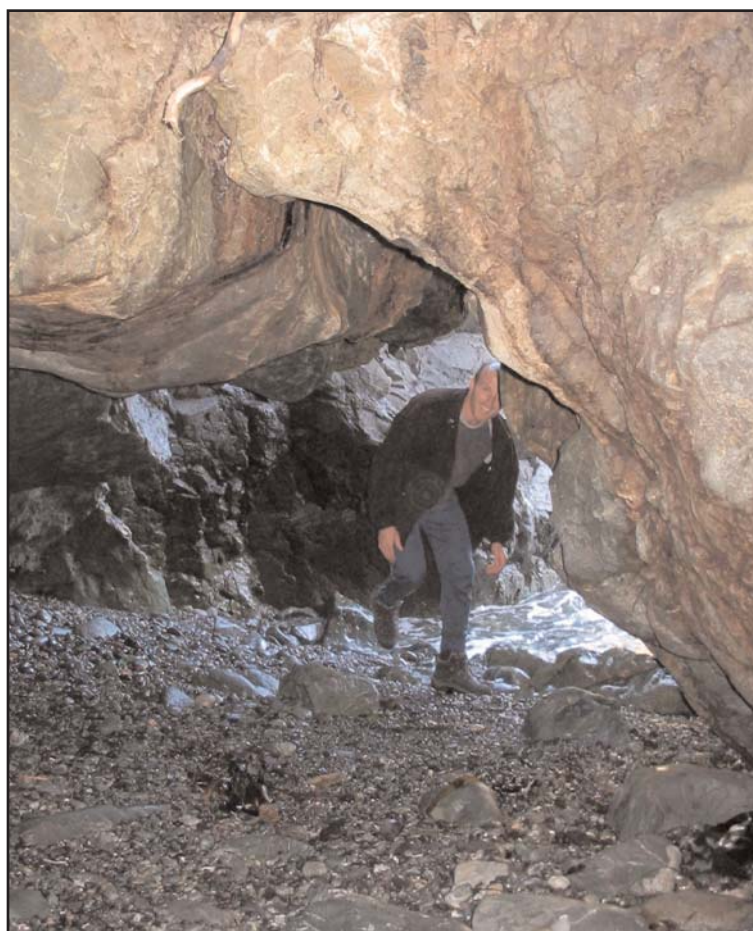
Looking out of blocked first entrance, Coalbog Limestone Mine, Bridge of Weir, December 2004. Derek Pettiglio (and Boffin-the-dog)

Photo: Alan Jeffreys



**GSG team on Vancouver Island,
L-R: Peter Ireson, Alice Dowswell, Mary Harrison, Martin Hayes, Dan Harries, Fiona Ware,
Peter Dowswell.**

Photo: Peter Dowswell

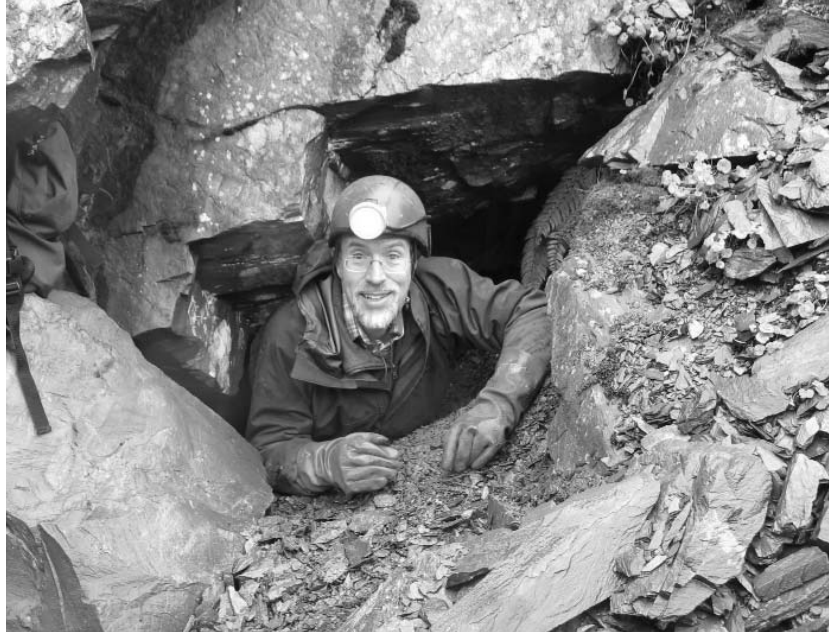


**Dan Harries in the entrance of a
sea cave, Uckluelet, Vancouver
Island.**

Photo: Peter Ireson

tant source of fresh water. It emerged in natural hillside and was too high relative to the level of the drainage adit. The 'smithy' building also seemed too small for this function and contained none of the furnaces or coal stores required for smithing. More likely this small building with no windows may have been an explosives store. From the alignment of the drainage adit and the relative levels, the outfall of the adit is on the top of the lower spoil heaps. The most likely point is the rising between the east and west sections of the lower spoil heap. This emerges from a slope of loose slate fragments under the quarry access road. (It is likely that I have confused the location of the smithy with the explosives store in the verbal descriptions received prior to this visit. If the ruined buildings to the east where the access road enters the spoil heaps are in fact the smithy then the 'spring' described as the lower tunnel entrance would be at exactly this point).

If the drainage adit from the North Quarry continues as seen in the explored section of the tunnel, the water level which was one metre deep 150m in, would be almost to the ceiling of the tunnel where it emerges at the south end. The amount of water entering and emerging from the quarry seems about equal. It might be possible to open the lower end of the tunnel as there is no evidence of collapse on the roadway above and the tunnel seems only to have been blocked by falls from the spoil heaps. Investigation by someone with a wet suit should confirm the length of the open passage.

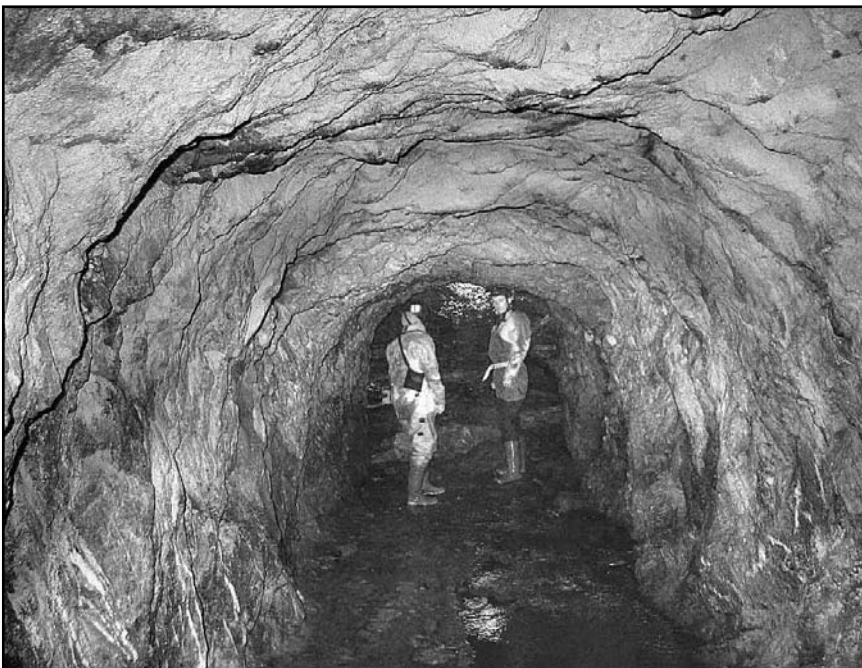


Ivan Young looking out of the lower tunnel.

Photo. Peter Ireson

The size and shape of the two confirmed tunnels seems excessive if the tunnels were simply used to drain the quarries and as access to the north quarry would be very difficult down the existing slopes, it is possible that they were also used to remove slate. The width of the tunnels matches the gullies cut at the entrances to both North and South Quarries. The use of tunnels, which would seem to be peculiar to this slate quarry with its narrow entrances, particularly the lower adit, running from a bedding plane on the south wall of each of the

quarries, suggests that they were worked from the top down along a particular slate seam down to the full working depth. This excavation was drained, slate removed through the tunnels and then the working face was gradually moved north. The upper tunnel suggests that the North Quarry was excavated to the same level as the South Quarry using this technique and later cut to its present depth. Most other Scottish slate quarries seem to have an open downhill side allowing drainage and slate removal without need of tunnels (although some of the smaller slate quarries and quarries for other types of stone will need to be checked).



Looking towards entrance of Second Tunnel. L-R: John Crae, Peter Ireson
Photo. Ivan Young

The buildings on the top of the lower

spoil heaps (possibly on natural hillside between the upper and lower spoil heaps) consist of an older building with a large rectangular room to the west and a smaller, almost square room to the east. The walls, which remain to a height of about 500mm are formed from large roughly squared blocks of local stone. Collapsed rubble against the walls made it impossible to locate the door without excavation and the walls have collapsed or been dismantled below the level of any strewn across the floor. Against the east wall, a later building has been constructed from smaller stones (still the local slate). The walls of this structure rise to the same level as the older building but the ground level is lower. Lower levels in the south wall suggest an entrance on this side. If this was the smithy this side of the building may even have been open.

The slopes of the spoil heaps seem relatively undisturbed although there has been some excavation of quarry slappings from areas outside the entrance to the South Quarry, most likely for use as a stable base for roads or for building up and levelling construction sites. This has left a couple of sheer faces which are likely to collapse at some time in the future. Overall the shapes of the spoil heaps suggest excavation started at high level probably in the South Quarry, forming the spoil heap between the entrance and the ruined buildings. The South Quarry was quickly exhausted and work moved to the North Quarry, forming the upper spoil heaps to the east and possibly the western section of the lower spoil heap as far as the road to the 'explosives store'. An earlier section of roadway may exist below this area of spoil. The construction of the upper tunnel probably had little effect on spoil distribution, the heaps continuing to rise at the entrance to the South Quarry, but when excavation reached the level of the lower tunnel the sections of the spoil heaps below the road to the 'explosives store' (by far the largest in volume) would have been developed - it being easier to tip spoil over the side of the roadway than to carry it to the top of the existing heaps.

It should also be pointed out that the present B 8063 follows the line of an earlier route and in places parallel to the road sections of a narrower track can be seen, particularly at Milton near Harrietfield and Chapelhill east of Logiealmond where a stream has cut a gully and the narrow trackway is carried on a stone bridge to Lochend further east. It is possible that these are sections of General Wade's military road which can be seen further west ⁽¹⁾, or possibly the base of a mineral railway (although there are no railways shown on early maps).

(1) Willdey, Thomas (1746) A Map of the King's Roads, Made by His Excellency General Wade in the Highlands of Scotland.

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SCOTTISH CAVE EPHEMERA

Many members will have been advised during their lives to 'watch what you drink'. This is even more important when it comes to uisge-beatha. As I have previously observed, Fingal's Cave is to my view probably the most famous, least visited cave in the world. It is also the only Scottish cave, so far as I am aware, to make it on to a whisky label, *circa* 1900.



This label was also reproduced on a modern postcard, published by Survival Kitsch of Inverkeithing in 1986 from the Scotch Myths archive. To date I have been unlucky in that I have found not a bottle, label or the postcard.

anyone know of any other examples?

Martin Mills.

A TRIP TO ANGUILLA

By Kirsty Mills

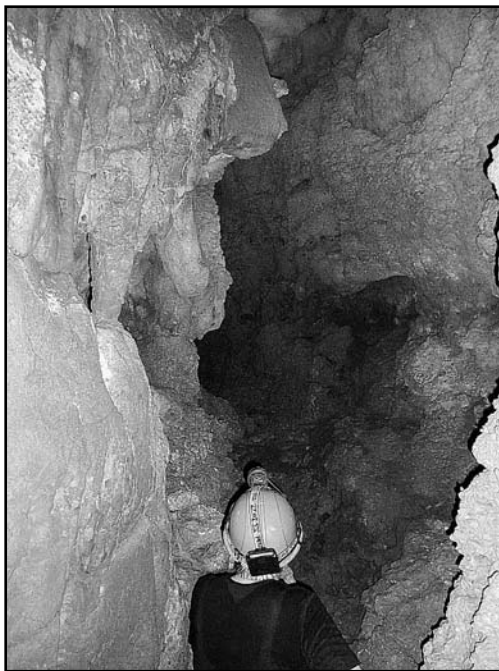
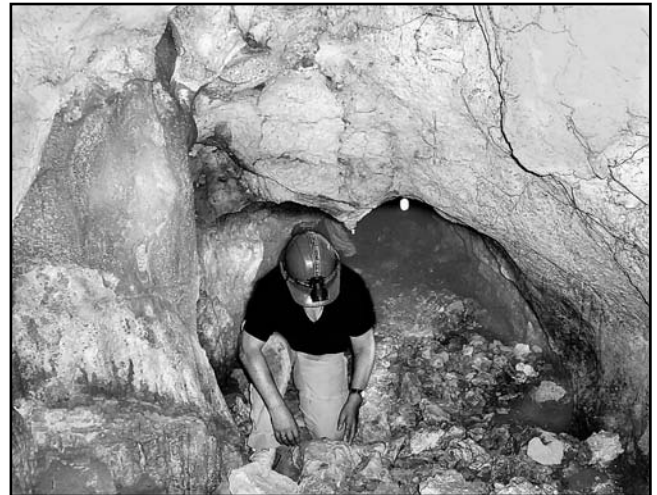
Our visit was prompted by an announcement in the Court pages of the Daily Telegraph that our friend Alan Huckle had been appointed Governor of Anguilla. This being our Silver Wedding year and his wife Helen having been my bridesmaid, it seemed very opportune to invite ourselves to Government House, Anguilla this summer. We therefore spent an enjoyable fortnight there from 3rd to 17th August 2004.

Having been given some advance warning of our impending visit, Alan pulled some strings and arranged some cave visits for us.

Saturday 7th August: Katouche Cave

Alan had arranged for us to meet up with Oliver Hodge, a local caver, at the post office in The Valley - the main conurbation on the island. He then took us to the cave on the north side of the island. It was not easy to find. Most of the 30 or so caves on the island are on private land, although this one was on Government land. We thrashed through some undergrowth to the entrance where Oliver spent some time getting rid of wasps' nests in the entrance before we started down. We climbed down into a chamber where we left extra kit but carried camera and bottles of water. We followed a dry passage with boulder strewn floor, sporting dry stal. and various water worn features, to a climb of about 5 metres down to the top of a 21m pitch. As we had no SRT gear or ladders with us we had to retreat from this point. Apparently the pitch leads to a large 'Hall of the Bats' and then another length of passage leads to the 'Blue Pool',

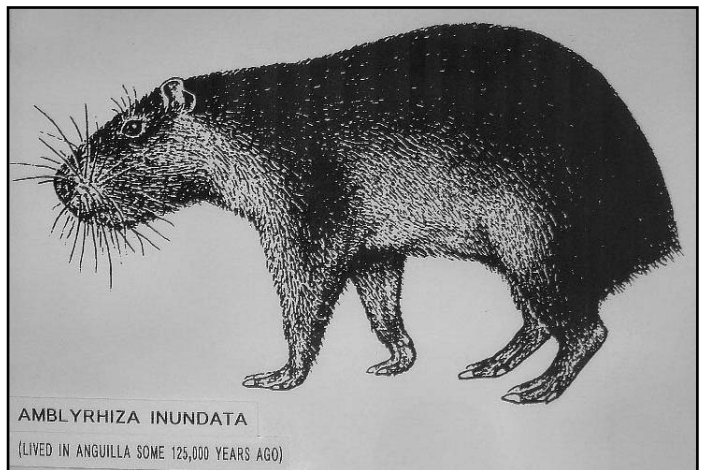
which although affected by tides, is fresh water. On the way back Oliver pointed out a calcified skeleton of a large rodent which is only found on Anguilla and St Maarten, the *Amblyrhiza Inundata*. This animal is related to the Guinea Pig and Chinchilla. It could weigh up to 300 pounds.



it came out on the surface but was not giving the information away. We returned to the main passage and exited the cave.

On the return trip we took a side passage up to an aven with daylight coming in. Oliver said this could be used as an emergency entrance if needed - he knew where

On the return trip we took a side passage up to an aven with daylight coming in. Oliver said this could be used as an emergency entrance if needed - he knew where



Wednesday 11th August: Caverns de Rio Camuy, Puerto Rico

Because it was only an hour's flight away, we decided to visit Puerto Rico for a couple of days. We arranged

the flights from Anguilla with American Eagle Airlines and checked into the airport at 6.00am on Wednesday morning for a 7.00am flight to San Juan. We had managed to find an hotel in Arrecibo via the internet but had left car hire until we got there, thinking it would be no problem because it was low season (well it was in Anguilla!). When we finally made our way through American Immigration and down through the airport to the car hire desks we found this was not so easy. All the usual hire firms like Avis, Hertz, Dollar, even Thrifty, could not help us but we finally found Charlie's Car Rental who could only offer us an SUV which we were grateful to take no matter what the cost. It turned out to be a Ford Escape - a Jeep type vehicle which was lovely to drive. It was also big enough to cope with the traffic which greeted us when we turned out of the car rental office straight into a 10 lane highway with traffic overtaking on both sides!

We drove to Arrecibo along the north coast of Puerto Rico and then turned inland. The cave - a show cave- (*see: Gurnee, R. Discovery at the Rio Camuy (1974 in the club library)*) was well signposted and we found our way with few problems.

When we arrived we were advised at the entrance gate to the National Park that there was a two hour wait. However having come so far we went ahead and parked up. The main building was fairly chaotic and could be improved but we managed to buy tickets for a trip 200+ numbers ahead of the trip then going in. We had lunch and then waited for our number to be called. There was a long gap then things speeded up - about 60 to a party.

We went into the theatre and watched a film about the cave and the surrounding area. Then we went out of the other exit and queued to get on a train- we were ushered out first to be on an English tour. The train was electric and seated about 30 people. It took us through the park and down to the bottom of a deep doline. We left the train and walked on a concrete path down into an enormous chamber.

The trip was well guided by a park ranger who gave us a good description of the cave and warned us well about the slippery floors etc. However Alison managed to slip and fall which caused a bit of a flurry as the ranger would have had to lead us all out of the cave while they sent for first aid if Ali had not been a hero and managed to limp her way round the rest of the tour. What is it with Ali and American show caves? In Carlsbad she got bitten by a scorpion or very large centipede



which meant a trip to the first aid station and bits of the cave and National Park that others don't get to see.

After following the path through this chamber we came out part way up in another huge shakehole with further cave leading off - not accessible to the general public. We then took another route back through the large chamber with a detour to look at a river passage (the Rio Camuy) some 50 metres below and a passage where there were lots of bats. Then we made our way back to the entrance where we rejoined the train to take us to another huge shakehole (the Tres Pueblos - Three Towns, which relates to the fact that it is on the boundary of three towns on the surface) with the river running through the bottom. Then the train returned us to the main building for visits to the shop and so on.

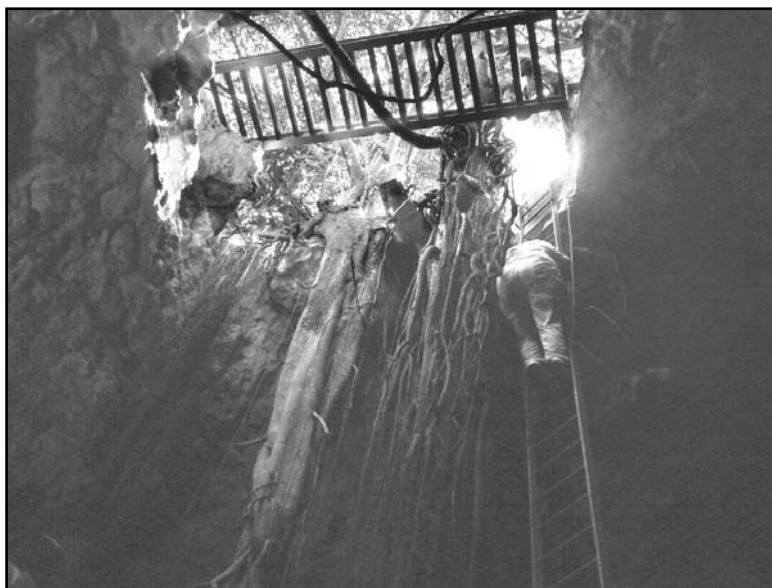
The next day, on our way back to San Juan and the airport, we visited the Arrecibo Observatory (305 m reflector dish, where scenes from Goldeneye were shot) and the Bacardi Rum Distillery. There's culture for you! The tour and the drinks were free! I think they thought you should spend a lot of money in the shop buying all the branded goods.

After checking in at the airport for our trip back on the last flight to Anguilla and much body searching etc, our flight was cancelled and we had an overnight stay in the Airport Hotel (at American Airline's expense) which turned out to be much better than the hotel we had found on the internet for the previous night. We caught the 7.00am flight back on the Friday but being in the Airport Hotel we could check in at 5.00am and then go back upstairs to the hotel for breakfast before going through security yet again and catching our flight. We were still back at Government House before 9.00am.

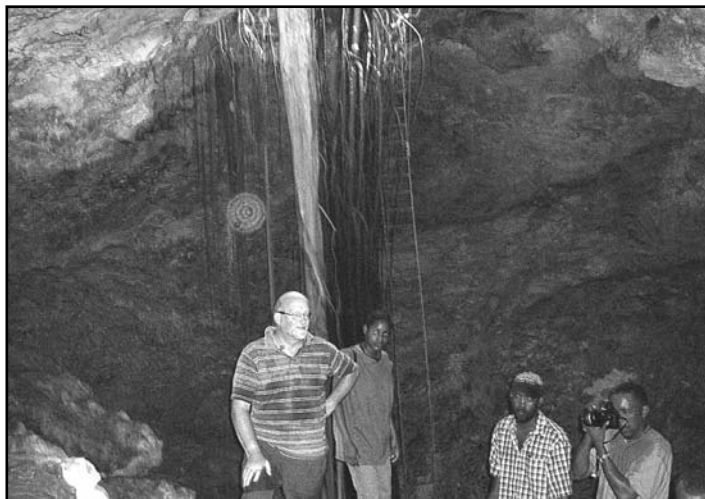
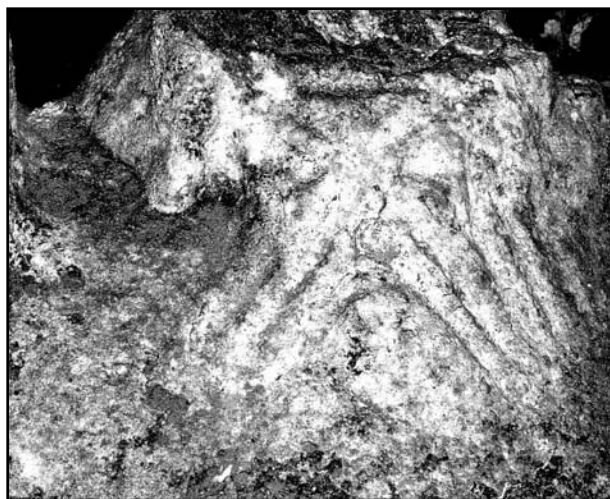
Saturday 14th August: Fountain Cavern, Anguilla

This was a very special trip, organised for us by Alan, the Governor. Fountain Cavern is in the charge of the Anguillan National Trust and is this year's UK site being promoted for World Heritage Status. Each country can only put forward one site per year. The visit by the Governor (and us) prompted not a little excitement. We had the press, photographers and a radio journalist following us about on our visit.

The cave consists of a fixed ladder approximately 10m long from a concrete landing in a hole about 2m across in the roof of a large chamber which had roots through it. Because of the press photographers, a generator and hand held lighting had been taken down into the cave.



We were taken down through the cave to look at some petroglyphs/Arawak carvings on the stal. The

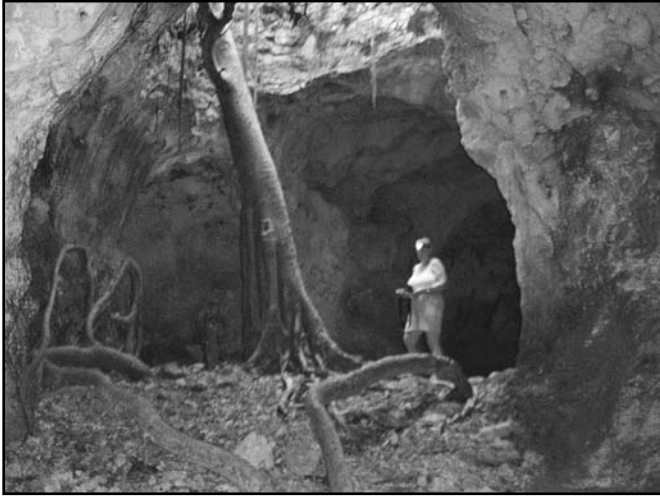


Arawaks inhabited the islands in the Caribbean about 2000 years ago but had died out in the 15th Century. There were several famous Arawak carvings to look at. The cave had not been inhabited but it was thought it had been used as a religious site. We walked round the chamber and looked at the two fresh water springs, which could account for the importance of the cave. All the descriptions of the cave were recorded for broadcast on the radio and Martin, Chris and I were interviewed at the end of the visit - as was the Governor.

We then adjourned to a local beach bar where there was a lively discussion on local politics (nothing changes!). This discussion was watched by the Governor with interest. He has the power to ask for a re-election if he doesn't like the outcome! The next election will be next Spring.

Monday 16th August: Gavanagh Cave

This is an open entrance on the path from Government House down to Katouche Bay. Martin and I went to



survey this cave. Martin had visited it with Chris on the first day of the holiday and decided he wanted to go back to survey and photograph it. Our survey looks very similar to the one we subsequently found at the office of the National Trust.

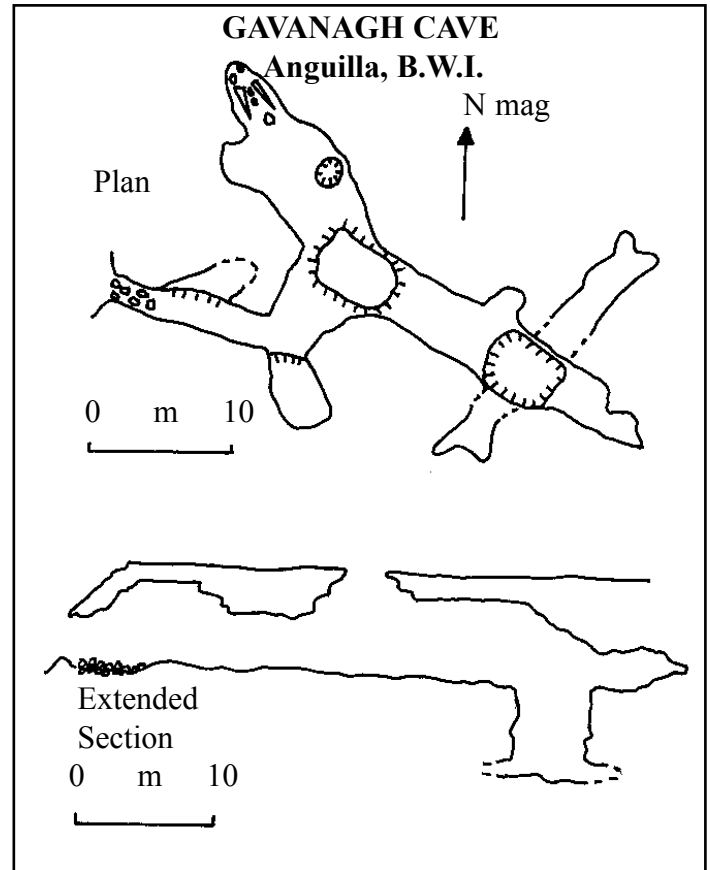
Our thanks are due to Damian Hughes who kindly produced a great deal of literature for us.

Grateful thanks are also due to His Excellency Alan Huckle, Governor of Anguilla and Helen Huckle for their kind hospitality and for arranging the trips for us, Oliver Hodge who took us to Katouche Cave, Damian Hughes and Karim Hodge for the visit to Fountain Cavern, Colville Petty for the visit to his museum and all the information he gave us about the island and lending us the video about the giant rodent - and everyone else for their kindness and hospitality.

We travelled KLM from Manchester to St Maarten via Amsterdam and return via Curacao and Amsterdam. Travel to and from St Maarten was by ferry and our trip to San Juan was by American Eagle Airlines. We hired cars on Anguilla for two weeks, St Maarten for a day and Puerto Rico for two days. Total cost for four (Martin, Kirsty, Alison and Chris Mills) - a lot!!!



The author, Kirsty Mills, in the entrance of Katouche Cave, Anguilla.



But hey, it had its compensations. This is one of the 35 beaches on the island.

MEET NOTE:**St George's Cave, Gorm Loch Mor**

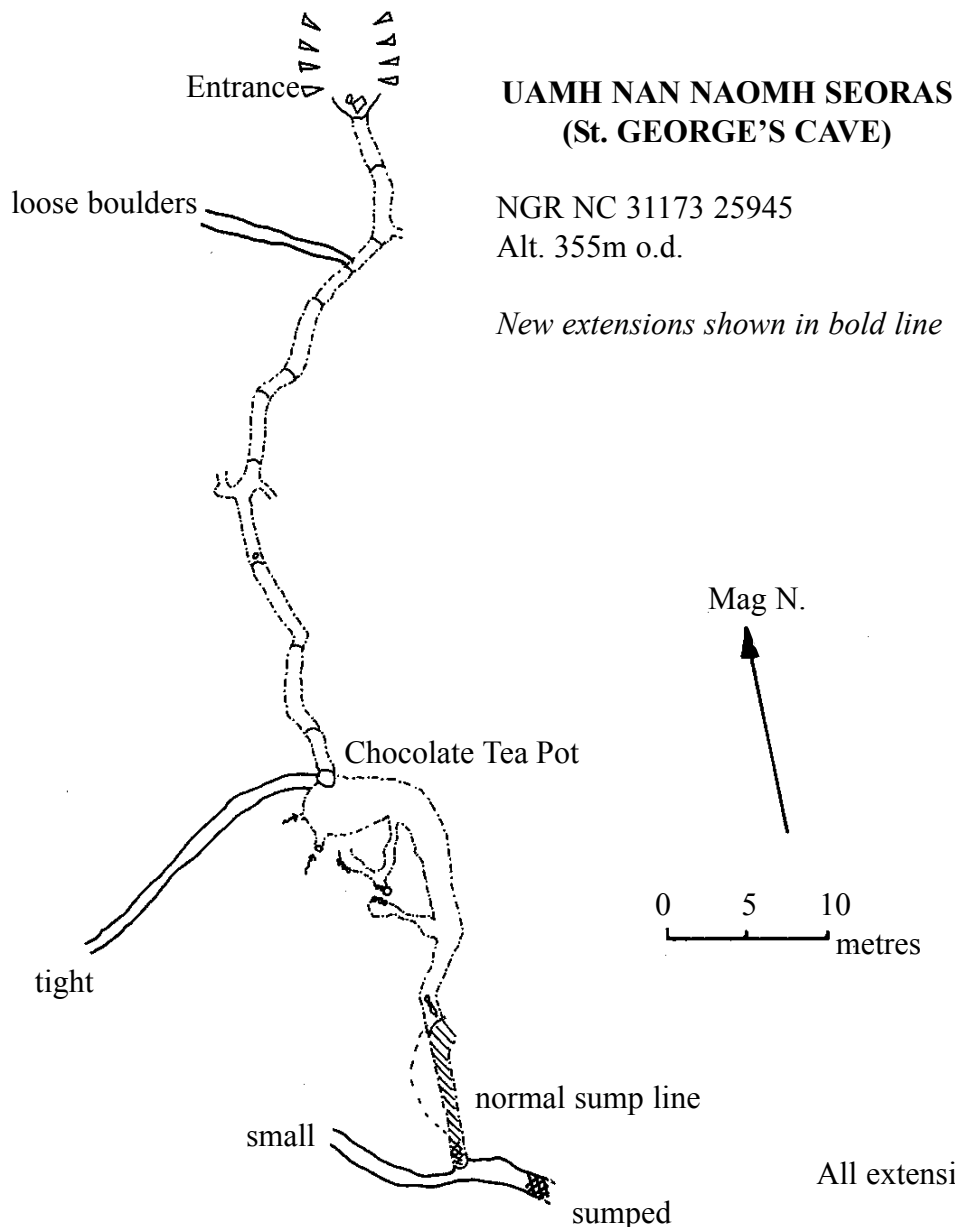
On 24th August 2004, Mark Campbell (Assynt MRT) and myself set out for the remote Gorm Loch Mor karst. We approached the area from Glen Cassley but found that the track didn't go on as far as we'd thought towards Gorm Loch Mor and we ended up with a seven km bog trot to the caves - 1.5 hours but the slog was well worth it. Not for the first time, we found the grid reference on the map was about 120m out and it took us some time to locate the entrance.

Very low water meant we could get beyond the known sump line to a small chamber where one could stand up and I followed a peaty crawl at 40° upwards for six metres. Back at 'sump' level it did in fact sump four metres further on in a wide and very low fissure between two slab walls and looks very tight.

On the way out we found a crawl beginning two thirds of the way up the three metre pitch which we followed for ten metres or so until it became too tight. Then ten metres from the entrance, on the left as you go out, we found another crawl beginning at head height which went on for six metres to a choke of boulders, which we presume to be below the sink and near the surface.

With GPS I established a more accurate grid reference as NC 31173 25945.

Chris Warwick

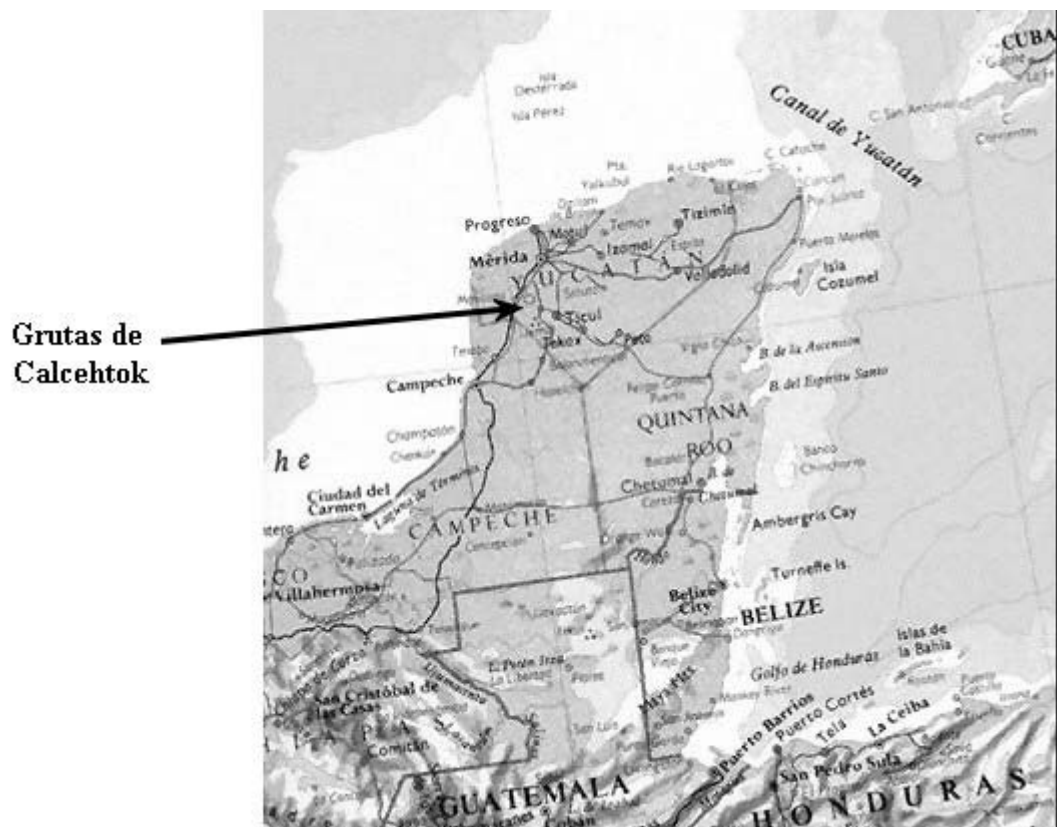


GRUTAS DE CALCEHTOK (ACTUN SPUKIL)
Yucatan State, Mexico

By Dan Harries

We visited Yucatan State in April 2004 and spent the bulk of our time engaged on pursuits of marine biological interest (such as diving & snorkelling on coral reefs and drinking beer on the beach) rather than caving but we did visit a few sites of speleological interest.

By far the most interesting of these sites was the Calcehtok cave system. We learned of the existence of Calcehtok cave from the Lonely Planet guide book and a locally published tourist guide. The cave is in the hills of the Puuc region about 60km south west of Merida. It is one of the largest dry cave systems in Yucatan with over 4km of passage with the added attraction of Mayan archaeological remains and abundant cave life including a dense population of bats.



According to the tourist guide it is obligatory to employ a local guide when entering the cave. However the cave is not gated and has not been developed as a show cave so it would have been possible to enter unaccompanied. We arrived in our hire car on an overwhelmingly hot day to find the area deserted apart from a young local man sitting below a tree. He was a member of the Cuy family who act as guides for the Calcehtok cave system. We had some language difficulties as we spoke virtually no Spanish and he spoke no English. We were told that a trip covering the entire cave took about 8 hours and cost 600 pesos (~£30). After some negotiation we agreed to go on a 5 hour trip that would cover all the most interesting parts of the cave at a cost of 300 pesos (~£15).

The entrance is an impressive doline formed by a huge chamber with two large (30-40m diameter) openings to the surface and a few smaller openings. We entered one of the larger openings descending a 4m fixed ladder to the top of an enormous debris cone of soil and boulders. A path winds down the debris cone through banana trees and lush vegetation before passing below the undercut walls of the doline to reach the threshold of the true cave some 40-50m below the fixed ladder.

The cave appeared to be a complex of linked chambers with little in the way of well defined passage. The

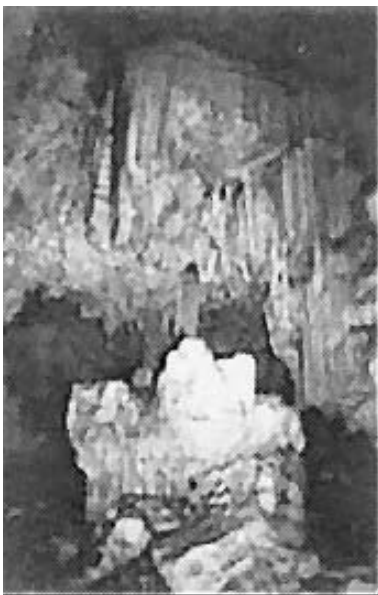
value of having a guide soon became apparent as many of the chambers had multiple potential routes leading off and left to our own devices we would have spent most of our time investigating alcoves and dead ends and consequently would have seen far less of the cave.

The guide took us along a convoluted route including a few short crawls and several climbs with fixed ropes. He wore sandals, shorts and T-shirt and carried a Coleman lantern. Despite this apparently inappropriate kit he coped rather better than us negotiating the climbs using only one hand and walking sure footedly down the many slopes of greasy compacted mud.

The larger chambers are of a significant size, up to 20m high and 40m in diameter. The 'Sala principal' (main chamber) has a flat clay floor, roughly circular plan and an impressively domed ceiling with a circular reddish cupola at its apex. The chamber contained some well developed formations some of which were named such as a calcite cascade called 'La Medusa' (The jellyfish). Other formations within the cave included large calcite domes, curtains, cascades and columns. At a point further into the cave we found ourselves weaving our way through a forest of 2m high columns that filled the passage.



Calcehtok entrance



Formations in Calcehtok

Most of the cave was dry apart from one or two trickles of percolation water and some damp patches in the bat guano. Our guide told us the cave was completely water filled in the ancient past. Many of the chambers did have a similar character to the water filled cenotes we had dived in near the coast at Tulum earlier in our trip. There was also evidence of high water levels from the cave formations with calcite shelves high on the chamber walls and other features including dry gourds and crystal pools.

The cave is hot throughout but it is particularly bad in the deeper areas of the cave; in fact the upper series seem pleasantly cool and fresh once you have experienced the inner reaches. The boundary seemed to be at a constriction where a 4m long body sized tube had to be negotiated. This constriction carried intermittent pulses of strong outward drafts of cooling air. Beyond the constriction the air becomes very hot and oppressive with a powerful stench of guano. Our guide indicated that there were problems with bad air in parts of the cave and we all found ourselves breathing heavily and struggling to get our breath when walking up slopes. As a result of

all this we became very dehydrated and had to cut our trip short by an hour to go out for water. We had each drank almost a litre of water each before entering the cave but failed to carry any with us. Anyone planning a long trip in the cave would be well advised to carry a couple of litres of water as well as making sure they are fully hydrated before going underground. They should also be aware of the potential problems posed by the bad air.

We were told that the system has multiple entrances and we exited by one of these alternative routes which involved a short flat out crawl leading to a large chamber with a slope of calcited boulders and a large scenic



Calcehtok, view from alternative entrance

entrance with trees, creepers and lush vegetation silhouetted against the sky.

There was evidence of human activity in all areas of the cave seen by us. Near the entrance some walls were soot blackened and we were told that Mayan torches and fires had caused this. We were also told that some large rock slabs in the centre of the Sala principal were a Mayan sacrificial altar but this is probably just be a story for the tourists because the slabs had no obvious signs of human construction and looked like an ancient ceiling collapse to my eyes.

Near the entrance and deep within the cave there were large stone blocks with one surface hollowed out. These appeared to be Mayan grinding bowls known as "metate". Shards of pottery were scattered throughout the cave and several intact pots were also seen. These pots were large (30 to 40cm diameter), of a roughly spherical shape and often coated by calcite. It seems likely that the pots were used by the Maya for gathering water. One example was positioned below a drip point with the inner surface coated in 1cm long calcite crystals and it was still full to the brim with water.



A grinding stone similar to those seen in Calcehtok

At several points within the cave stone walls had been built by the Maya to partially close the passage. Our guide told us that part of the cave had been used by the Maya as a cemetery and the walls were intended to seal off this area.

However, the walls were quite common and did not seem to be restricted to the cemetery area so it is likely that some at least were built for a different purpose. He told us that archaeologists had excavated at least three skeletons from the cemetery for removal to the museum in Merida and showed us an area with bone fragments including human molars.



Mayan pots similar to those seen in Calcehtok

result of any recent vandalism because secondary stalactites up to 10cm in length had formed on many of the broken surfaces.

We were curious as to why the Maya would have made such extensive use of the cave and why they penetrated so far into the system. Our guide offered the explanation that the cave was used as a refuge from the Conquistadores. This seems a plausible explanation and might explain the need for the stone walls at strategic points within the cave. There might also be additional reasons for the Maya to frequent the cave such as the need to gather water in the arid region of the Puuc hills. We were also shown areas of the cave where clay had been excavated for pottery and an area of vivid red clay that our guide said was used by the Maya for face paint.

In one area many of the large stalactites had been broken. It appeared as if 50cm or so of the stalactite tip had been snapped off leaving a broken end some 15cm in diameter. The resulting fragments were not lying on the floor below which suggested that they had been deliberately removed. Our guide told us that they were harvested by the Maya for use as weaponry. Given the softness of calcite this seems unlikely but the Maya did use obsidian for spear points and cutting edges so it is possible they may have made use of the stalactite tips. It was also clear that the damage was not as a

Such mineral and water resources offered by the cave may have provided an incentive for the Maya to use the site well before the arrival of the conquistadores. In one passage deep in the cave we found a ceramic pot that had been overgrown by a calcite boss which was around 40cm high and 10 to 15cm thick at the base. The pot was of a different shape from the others and was half embedded in the base of the calcite boss. It seems likely that this quantity of calcite deposition must have taken longer than the 400 to 500 years since the invasion of the conquistadores and might be evidence for considerably more ancient human use of the cave.

The cave also contained much of biological interest. The entrance doline seemed to be used as a refuge from the sun and heat of the arid scrubby forest on the surface. It contained many insects and birds including the spectacular and exotic looking Blue crowned Mot-Mot. There were large masses of swarmed bees high on the walls of the doline and numerous Swiftlets nesting on the cave walls within the doline and also in the entrance passages of the cave proper.

Bats were a major feature of the cave; the stench of guano was everywhere and particularly strong in the deeper parts of the cave. They were present in rock crevices within the doline and in low numbers in the entrance passages but became extremely abundant in the airless inner reaches of the cave. In one passage some 3m high and 10m wide the air was thick with bats disturbed by our presence. Their wings created a draught and a sound like the white noise of loud radio static. They were so dense that we began to doubt the efficiency of their echolocation and felt a strong urge to hold our hands in front of our faces in case of collisions.

Deposits of bat guano formed the cave floor in many areas and supported a variety of arthropods. Woodlice and millipedes were common on the guano with at least two different species of millipede present. The most frequent was a species of large brown millipede (6 or 7 cm long and 5 or 6 mm wide) these appeared to be mobile roving scavengers and were seen feeding on a dead bat. The other millipede was



Blue crowned Mot-Mot

smaller (3 or 4 cm long and ~4 mm wide) and pale coloured. Both millipedes reacted to light and the smaller species went into violent contortions when light was shone on them.



Brown millipede from cave in Belize - similar to those seen in Calcehtok

Webs were seen on the cave walls in places, some were made by small long-legged spiders and others consisted of delicate draperies of sticky threads built by small insect larvae which were probably the larvae of a species of Fungus Gnat (Mycetophilidae).

Large fast moving spider-like animals were frequently seen and these appeared to be very similar to whip spiders (Amblypygi) but we were unable to examine them closely enough to be certain of this.

As an epilogue to the trip, some two or three weeks after returning from Mexico Fiona began to suffer from a mystery illness that caused fever, joint pain, lethargy and intense sweating. This would last a few days then apparently clear up before re-occurring a few



Whip spider (Amblypygi)

days later. We originally suspected Malaria and she duly visited the doctor. They took several blood samples for various tests and sent her for a chest x-ray to rule out TB. The chest x-ray showed numerous nodules and shadows on her lungs which we found rather alarming and the doctors obviously thought so too because she was immediately admitted to the infectious diseases unit of the Western General hospital. She was kept in for a week and a biopsy was taken from the nodules on her lungs.

The consultant and doctors were all very excited at a new and interesting illness and began speculating about the research papers that they might write at a very early stage in proceedings. They eventually released her from hospital even though they had made no positive diagnosis because she seemed reasonably well and showed no sign of deterioration. It took a few more weeks before they made a diagnosis. A fungal infection had been a prime suspect from the outset and this proved to be correct. It was not Histoplasmosis but a somewhat more unusual bug called Coccidioidomycosis.

The doctors are still rather intrigued and one of the Professors at the Infectious Diseases Unit is planning to use her lung x-ray to catch his students out by asking them to suggest a diagnosis in their exams! It is likely to be a fairly long term and re-occurring illness. Fiona is back at work but is still not clear of it, she is still getting occasional fevers and a recent visit to the consultant showed an increase in the nodules on her lungs. As a result they have decided to treat her and have prescribed a 6 month course of fungicide. [Note: this comment dates to early summer 2004; Fiona seems to have made good progress in the interim. Ed.] It could have been contracted by inhaling spores at any point during our visit to Mexico but it seems highly probable that the bat guano in Calcehtok cave was the culprit.



Fiona's lungs

So, although it is a very interesting cave, Calcehtok does have a few problems that should be considered including high temperatures, bad air and unpleasant and persistent lung diseases.

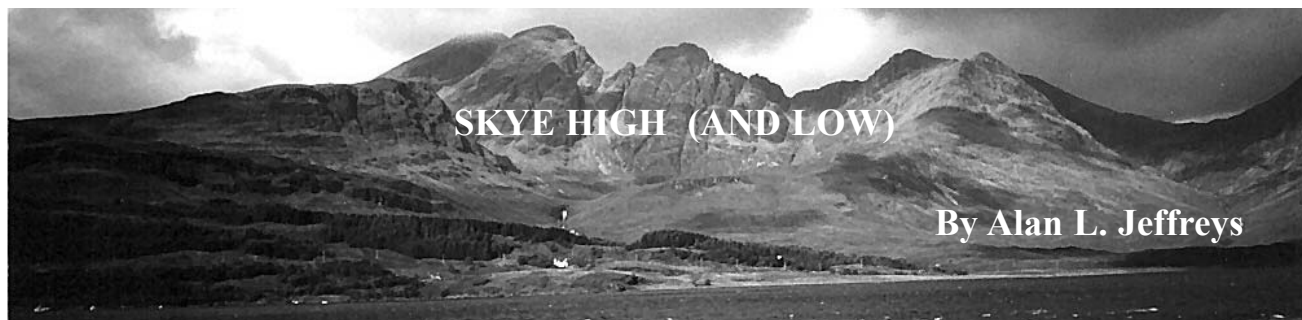
MEET REPORT:

Limestone Mine at Bridge of Weir NS 404656

A couple of visits have been paid to this small system which lies overlooking the river Gryfe near Coalbog, Bridge of Weir, west of Paisley, one in November 2003 and the other in December 2004.

A series of diminutive entrances lead off into a small overgrown face, the first to be approached from the parking place possessing a 2.5 metre arch. Five metres in a massive collapse of heavy limestone shards effectively seals off access to the workings beyond, and digging would be dangerous. Some metres further along the track, two other holes lead into a series of pillar and stall excavations running roughly parallel to the surface rock face. Roads leading deeper into the hillside very soon end in a flooded area, but a number of sporting thrutches through characteristic flaky chokes make a visit to this mine an enjoyable experience.

According to Glasgow Spelaeological Society, cataloguing the site in 1968, a local farmer informed them of a lower system of workings which were connected by a tight crawl near the entrance (not specified). There was no sign of this although the shattered chokes in entrance 1 do seem to indicate a fissure-like descent to some depth. GSS also mention a star-shaped kiln, whose foundations are now obscured by farm wastes. The remains of mine buildings can also be seen nearby, and the tarmaced track would provide good parking, except that on the latter visit, rubbish had been dumped across it.



Thank God they have at last removed the iniquitous tolls from the Skye Bridge; now we can enjoy visits there without arranging a second mortgage! However, in the best tradition, the GSG could not wait for the Scottish Executive and dashed up north in some strength for a meet there over the weekend of 17-19th September



Dave Warren and Fraser Simpson relax in the Torrinn Centre, Skye.

Photo. A. Jeffreys

2004. Twenty-five members and friends assembled in the Torrinn Outdoor Centre (an excellent base for caving if it is available, by the way) and despite the weather - it rained: surprise, surprise! - managed to visit an impressive spread of caves in the district. Perhaps the only down side was that a majority of those present had little or no experience of Skye caving, resulting in a quantity of 'tourist' descents but not a lot of original exploration. However, thanks to the guidance of locally based member, Steve Birch, who has dedicated a huge amount of time to cataloguing sinks and risings in the Coille Gaireallach, some potential sites were pointed out and a few metres of new passage wrested from the mossy landscape.

An advance party arrived on Friday 17th and spent a couple of hours examining possible dig sites in the Gaireallach woods, a task which paid off the following day when a collection of small holes (thankfully GPS'd, otherwise they would certainly remain anonymous in the humpy, overgrown landscape) were pushed for short distances, never exceeding five metres. The best gain was at Upper Through Cave where a sink in the west gully was found to be open. Mark Tringham wriggled into it and after some eight metres, shook hands with Martin Hayes travelling in the opposite direction from Upper Through Cave proper. A new through trip variant was thus created.

A veritable invasion commenced on Saturday, amidst sunshine and heavy showers, with cavers poking about in a wide selection of holes in the woods, and a succession of parties descending High Pasture Cave to view Steve Birch's excavation site near the entrance. Due to increasing rainfall, some teams found the duck in the main

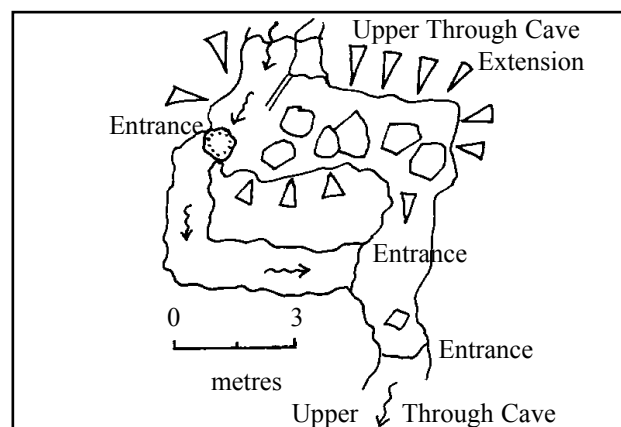


Remnants of the flood water at the entrance to High Pasture Cave, Skye.

Photo. A. Jeffreys

stream way sumped, which curtailed the trip somewhat. This was an aftermath of serious flood-

ing in the entrance depression that had occurred a week or so before, and traces of this devastation could still be seen. Diverting entertainment was provide by Nigel Marsh's sons, who appeared to delight in flinging themselves over small cliffs and through dense shrubbery, all (it seems) without any injury.



Sketch survey of New Through Trip at Upper Through Cave (West Gully) Grade 1, I. Young

In the early morning, while a lot of this was going on, I set off to examine the obvious limestone outcrops overlooking the Torrinn Centre and extending east towards Strath Suardal. The first hillocks demonstrated a

lot of almost vertical bedding with virtually no promise of underground access at all. After crossing a small river ravine (ripping half my hand off on barbed wire when my boot slipped on a greasy fence stabiliser), I reached a better area which houses Boulder Pot and Vampire Cave. The first has been blocked off with a huge limestone flake (by a farmer?), too wedged for me to lift out, and the second was partially choked with soft debris. In drier weather I might have attempted entry, but it was swallowing a respectable amount of water so I moved on.

Passing the hamlet of Kilbride, I descended a sloping valley tracing an un-named river (sometimes flowing on the surface but more often sub-surface) at roughly NG 597205. At intervals, holes in depressions gave an inkling of small passage and certainly there were quantities of water involved - although of course it was under very wet conditions - which all resurged in a wooded area down near the road. I suspect a lot of digging work would be involved but when we get desperate, it is worth keeping in mind.

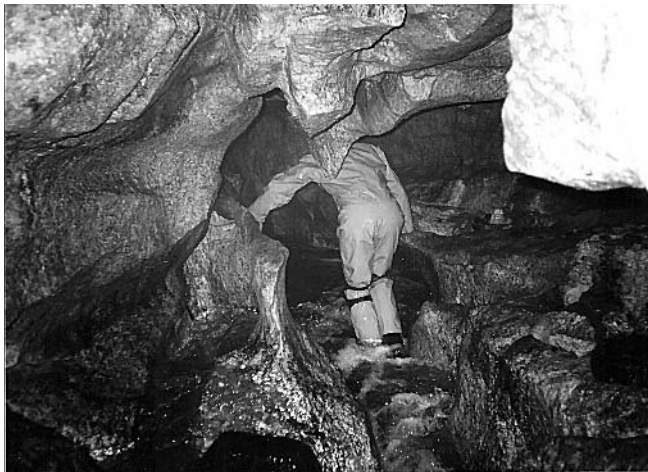
In driving rain, I met up with Fraser Simpson and Graham Marshall in the Coille Gaireallach, and trying to locate others by voice alone, stumbled around the limestone bands until we reached Poll Ceann a'Choile at the top granite boundary. This is an impressive sinkpoint offering a sporting little six metre climb down to a deep sump pool. Thrutching right down to water level (as one has to do), I took a good look round and noticed on the left an undercut opened into a parallel aven, floored with earth and boulders. I did not attempt to get into this, since it would have meant a complete ducking in the pool, a prospect which did not thrill me, but there is a chance here that this aven might bypass the sump, so it should be re-visited in warmer weather.

We also met up with others at Upper Through Cave and dutifully caved through the new extension, before traversing along to Uamh an Ard Achadh, finding it sumped at the first duck.



Graham Marshall and Fraser Simpson at the 6m climb, CG32 (Poll Ceann a'Choile).

Photo. A. Jeffreys



Dave Warren in the upper streamway, Uamh an Ard Achadh.

Photo. A. Jeffreys

On Sunday 19th September, while the bulk of the membership went off to the

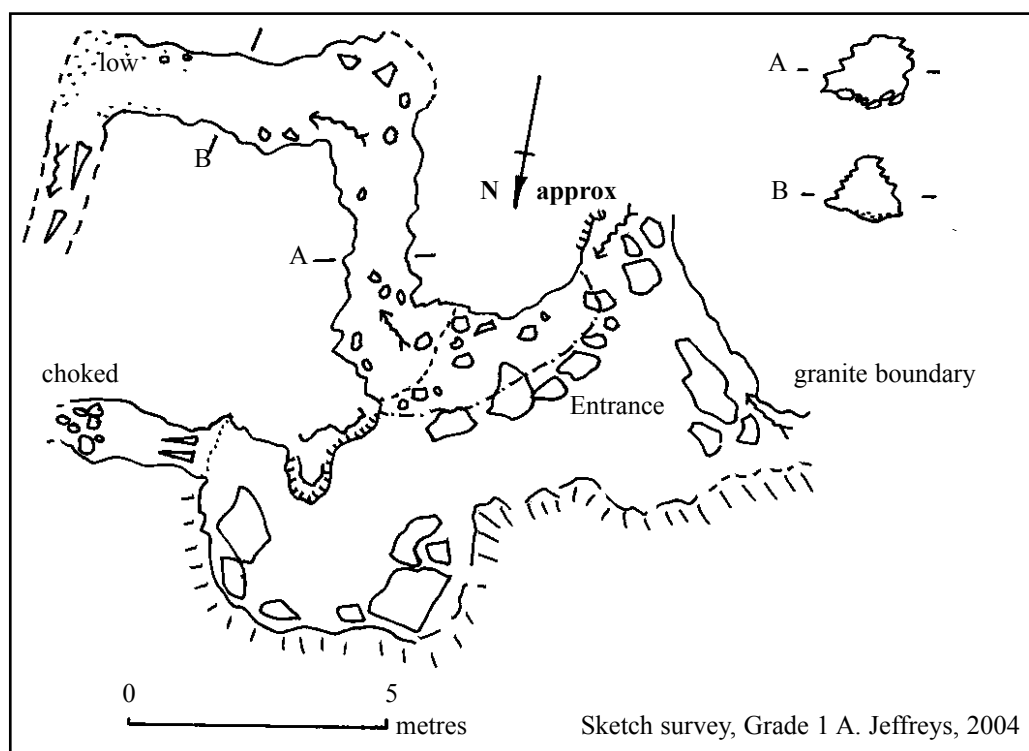
Allt nan Leac and Allt na Pairte valleys, Steve Birch led three of us to a little known outcrop on the north slopes of Beinn na Caillich west of Broadford. Only one cave had been recorded here, Shelter Cave (1) which is really only a single tiny chamber with an abhorrent flat out squeeze leading off to parts unknown. However Steve has been busy tramping the heather and a collection of open holes awaited our inspection. First was an active sink/rising bordering a small stream bed at, I would guess NG 62044 24521.

Water flows into a slot in the rock on the right, but a half metre corner to the left drops into a body sized crawl, with the stream issuing on the right to swirl away in a blocked passage. We cleared a lot of rubble away until a recalcitrant rock in the floor refused to yield. This lay at arm's length in a tightening tube and resisted all efforts to release it. The cave clearly continues beyond the four metres gained. Because of an eroded limestone flake at the entrance which resembled a shoulder bone, we named this site Scapula Cave. Following the streambed downhill for about 60 metres, the presumed rising for this cave was seen, but it consists of a tiny crack, far too tight for exploration.

A branch valley leading off uphill north-west at this point ended in a spectacular swallow, filled unfortunately

with a pile of heavy gabbro boulders. We were astonished at the mass of water crashing into this sink which would not be out of place at any respectable Yorkshire pot, but since persistent rain had raised the stakes more than a little, we were unable to achieve anything useful. We shall return. Traversing roughly north along this contour we were shown a selection of open shakeholes, one of which was a pretty, eroded limestone fissure where a depth of some four metres may be attained before chokes in narrow going forced a retreat. Pale cream rock laced with black contributes to a very photogenic little pot. It lies at approximately NG 619244.

Sadly the weather was getting truly depressing, but Steve had one more ace up his sleeve so we doggedly trudged uphill to the gabbro boundary, where a small cliff signalled a sink into limestone at approximately NG 61736 24402, altitude of 200 metres. Amazingly, this turned out to be a wide-open, un-explored cave - a real cave! Unable to contain myself, I crawled over a jumble of limestone chunks and found myself in an extremely attractive hands and knees passage, walled with jagged flakes of the same pleasing cream and black colouration mentioned above. Seven metres further in a sharp left hand corner signalled a lowering of the roof but the passage continued until silt and gravel appeared to form an end point. I returned to the surface to find John Crae had emptied rubble out of a flood overflow tube in the depression, also running down-valley. This was not entered, but looks caveable. Martin Hayes pushed a little further in the main cave, confirming the tight ending, but describing another left turn where the water ran downslope into impetrable passage. Ivan Young, who had come armed with fluorescein, turned the system green, and much to our expectations, within a steady count to 77, it spouted forth from a bouldery rising a very short distance downhill. Clearly, the explored end of the cave lies very close to this issue. It was named Boundary Sink and for all its shortness is worth a visit for its picturesque qualities.



BOUNDARY SINK,
Beinn na Caillich, Skye
NGR: NG 618245 approx. Alt. 200m approx.

By now, rain was lashing the hill slopes to a demoralising degree so with mutual consent the party quit cave hunting and retreated to waiting transport, which became well steamed up with damp bodies attempting to struggle into dry clothes in the downpour.

All in all, despite climatic conditions, this latest trip to Skye achieved both aims: (1) to familiarise members with a selection of some of Scotland's most sporting systems, and (2) to search for new passage. Most of all, it should encourage

Steve Birch that he can call on a manpower reservoir when original work is called for.

Apart from the 'classic' areas such as the Coille Gaireallach and Allt nan Leac valley, Skye possesses quite a scatter of other limestone outcrops east and west of the principal exposures. None of these have been thoroughly exploited and further effort dedicated at Beinn na Caillich, Cnoc nam Fitheach overlooking Torrinn, Breakish and Skulamus, and the moors trending toward Heast will certainly pay dividends to the determined caver.

VANCOUVER ISLAND ADVENTURES 2004

By Peter Dowswell

GSG Participants: Peter Dowswell, Alice Dowswell, Dan Harries, Mary Harrison, Martin Hayes, Peter Ireson, Fiona Ware.

Canadian Cavers (Vancouver Island Cave Exploration Group -VICEG): Martin Davis, Dale Chase, Ray Smith, Andrew Boden.

Following the success of our 2002 trip seven members decided on a return in 2004 and had a very pleasant fortnight in Canada at the end of August enjoying once again the fine hospitality of Canadian cavers. This time direct flights from Glasgow to Vancouver ensured that our baggage arrived with us. With seven of us an upgrade on our transport was required and Pete Ireson much enjoyed the four wheel drive function on the 5.3 litre V8 which proved invaluable in getting up and down the Weymer forest tracks.

This time the weather wasn't initially as kind as previously with rain for five and a half days out of the first seven. However it stopped raining long enough for us to get up onto Weymer Ridge for the last few days of the Weymerfest and pitch our tents in the relative dry before it started pissing down again. The Canadian use of tarpaulins makes camping marginally more civilised and allows sitting round the fire in the rain. A few days caving followed during which a good few trips were undertaken, some surveying done and some new cave found.

Weymer Ridge is home to the Ursa Major System, now pushing towards 10 km and still with much potential and unexplored leads remaining. The system is a bit like a huge version of the Coille Gaireallach area on Skye with lots of interconnecting pots and passages formed along the top and sides of a large limestone ridge. The ridge is covered by old growth forest which to the untrained eye all looks very similar. The use of trail tape (brightly coloured PVC tape about an inch wide) helps a bit but is used sparingly for obvious reasons. Some of the entrance shafts are really spectacular and the passages equally so.

Various parts of the system were visited (more detail in the diary below), mostly on pushing or surveying trips and Martin Hayes at last had the pleasure of a dig that actually went in Arch Type Cave. After three of us digging out a pile of boulders from a rift for about an hour he had the pleasure of knocking up 250 metres of new passage with the rest of us rapidly following on behind. A final day's caving was a tourist trip into the Ursa Major system starting at Slot Canyon and heading up to Nun's Nightmare, a good sporting trip. The climb up the dinosaur's back at the beginning, the use of 'Dale' ladders (rope and plastic tubing) on various traverses and a fairly long squalid slither in the middle all added to the enjoyment. The newcomers also had a quick visit to Fallen Giant Cave nearby where a huge tree trunk spans the entrance.

There then followed a few days on Hornby Island to the east of Vancouver Island, courtesy of Dale Chase, who we had first met at Weymer. Hornby is an interesting place, with a lot packed into its small size, with some old growth trees, interesting coastline, pleasant walking and a fine bakehouse. It is also home to a population of ageing hippies and an environmentally friendly culture that recycles a large proportion of its garbage including free exchange of unwanted items at the local dump. Various forms of entertainment were had including hiring mountain bikes for some and a boat for others. The boat trip round half the island was a lot of fun and allowed us to see the lighthouse, some petroglyphs and Spanish graffiti on Chrome Island.

Pacific Rim National Park followed, on the west coast of Vancouver Island, with huge windswept beaches and surfers and the two small towns of Uckuelet and Tofino. Much beer and fine food was consumed with some pleasant walking along the length of Long Beach.

Then it was back to Vancouver for a little culture and a visit to the IMAX before heading home. A very pleasant city with many diversions.

Diary

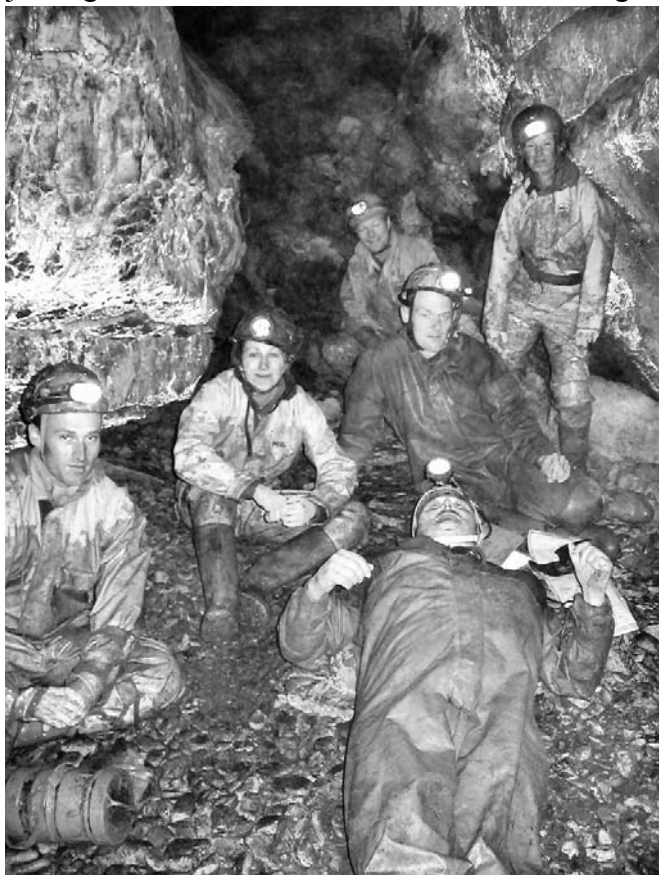
Monday 23rd August. Met up in Glasgow Airport and boarded flight to Vancouver, stopping briefly at Manchester Airport, arriving at Vancouver at around ten in the evening. Much time spent selecting an upgrade to the booked vehicle ending up with a 5.3 litre V8 GMV Yukon. So many bells and whistles that it took days to work them all out.

Tuesday 24th August. In spite of an early start we miss the early ferry at Horseshoe Bay due to the length of time to cross Vancouver. Plus side is a huge and varied breakfast at Trolls in Horseshoe Bay. Continue to Campbell River and purchase huge quantities of food and drink to add to the eight litres of spirits purchased duty free. Arrive at Tahsis early evening and meet up at Martin's house.

Wednesday 25th August. Load up waggons and head up to camp at Weymer Creek and meet other Canadian cavers: Dale Chase, Ray Smith and Andrew Boden. 4-wheel drive proves its worth and Peter Ireson declares himself satisfied with its off-road capabilities. Set up camp.

Thursday 26th August. Several different trips undertaken:

Arch Type Cave. (PD,AD,MH,Dale Chase) Walk up through forest almost to top of ridge to north of Ursa Major Cave, passing a number of interconnected entrances on the way. Dig at base of 6m entrance pitch attacked by Peter, Martin and Dale. Removal of a few boulders and loose stones in a draughting inclined rift allowed access to the upper part of a large chamber roughly 5m wide x 12m long and 3m high with a drop to a streamway. Beyond drop, walking size high rift passage led past small inlets into a developing streamway to junction. Streamway continued low to the left with first of two walking passages to right rejoining the stream after a few metres. Twisting vadose passage tight and awkward but then dropped into high walking passage.



The GSG team in Slot Canyon Cave, Weymer Ridge.
L-R: Dan Harries, Alice Dowswell, Martin Hayes,
Peter Ireson, Peter Dowswell, Fiona Ware.

Photo. Peter Dowswell

After several high avens, a short hands and knees crawl led through an oxbow to the head of a pitch. Stones thrown down the pitch had a three second drop suggesting about 20m into a large chamber with massive breakdown boulders. Elated we return to the surface.

Deer Drop Cave. (Dan, Fiona, Peter I., Ray Smith). Entrance chamber led to a 5m pitch and a hole in the opposite wall unexplored to date. Climb to hole led to mud choke after 4m. Returned to entrance pitch and followed steeply descending passage in loose rock for 40m. Pit in the floor (7m) led to vadose canyon followed at upper level, but tight. This area surveyed and entered for the first time. Fiona and Dan passed tight squeeze but stopped surveying and continued for 10-15m reaching tight S-bend. Returned to base.

Sphincter Cave. (As Deer Drop). Explored to first waterfall from entrance.

Friday 27th August. Arch Type Cave (Dale, Fiona, Andrew Boden, Martin H.) Surveyed 61 stations from top of entrance pitch to top of waterfall following passages explored the day before - 256 metres. (Dan, Martin D., Ray) descended pitch at the end of previous day's exploration. Depth estimated at 30m. Pitch is circular with a ramp on one side. Clean base with one foot deep pool. Stream continues down vadose passage soon arriving at survey marker denoting streamway

being part of Ursa Major System.

Saturday 28th August. Broke camp and trudged downhill in the rain to find we'd left one window on the truck open for three days. Sodden seat but no lasting damage. Fine cheap meal at a local eatery. Rained all day.

Sunday 29th August. Day of drying kit. Still raining. Visited pub and partook of salmon barbie in support of the local Salmon Enhancement Society. Visiting bear appears in Martin's back garden - could this be the same one that ate the fertiliser whilst we were up at Weymer?

Monday 30th August. Rain still showing no signs of stopping so went caving to get away from the precipitation. A fine trip into Slot Canyon (another part of the Ursa Major System) providing a bit of everything - climbs, squeezes, ladders, moisture and mud. A well decorated final chamber - Nun's Nightmare. A quick look into Fallen Giant Cave by Pete I and Martin H before communal mud removal in the stream. Pete I. enjoyed the off-road driving and the 'concealed trail', so called as it supports a fair number of small trees.

Tuesday 31st August. Packed up truck and headed for Hornby Island to visit Dale Chase. Eventually after retail therapy in Campbell River got the ferry across to Denman and then Hornby and found Dale and Meia. Pitched tents and enjoyed a quick trip down to Ford's Cove for a quick walk along the sandstone cliffs. Lots of interesting erosional features.

Wednesday 1st September. Pleasant day on Hornby. Weather eventually cleared up around lunchtime and a pleasant wander around Helliwell Park was had in the afternoon poking around rock pools and looking at old growth forest. Visit to bakery in evening to eat copious quantities of pizza, Peter I winning \$10 by eating a whole large pizza and PD not. Touching to see the local ladies concerned for Peter I's health.

Thursday 2nd September. Another excellent day on Hornby. In the morning Pete D. and Martin H. walked up to Mount Garret along the forest trail, returning at 11am for a fine breakfast of blueberry pancakes prepared by Meia. In the afternoon Peter D, Dan, Fiona and Martin had a pleasant time in a hired 20hp aluminium boat visiting petroglyphs on Chrome Island and then Flora Island. The rest spent the afternoon on hired mountain bikes touring the island. Meal cooked for everyone in the evening included use of 'emergency oven' recycled from the dump operated on the back of Phillip's pick-up.

Friday 3rd September. Packed up camp and headed for Pacific Rim Park. Found a campsite at Ucluelet and spent rest of the afternoon on Wild Pacific Trail, 4.5km in pleasant coastal old growth.

Saturday 4th September. Breakfast in Tofino and then visits to Radar Hill, Scooner Trail, walk along full length of Long Beach to Green Spruce Trail, Peter I. driving the truck to the other end. Then Rainforest Trail and thence to Wickaninnish Centre. Back to camp and another blow-out at the Eagles Nest marine pub.

Sunday 5th September. Breakfast in Ucluelet and then drive to Cathedral Grove, some of the largest trees on the island. Thence to ferry and brief visit to Horseshoe Bay and Campilano Suspension Bridge (too expensive for time available), two films at the IMAX and return to Travelodge. Evening spent re-acquainting ourselves with the local pub.

Monday 6th September. Dan Harries and Fiona Ware to Stanley Park by public transport (not recommended). Rest to Museum of Anthropology and then to Mountain Equipment Co-operative for more outdoor gear. Visit to Stanley Park to meet up with Dan and Fiona and visit Aquarium. Very impressive but felt sorry for the performing Beluga whales. More booze at pub to finish off the day.

Tuesday 7th September - to morning of 8th. Travel to airport after packing dried tents, surrender truck and board plane. Touch-down in Calgary to pick up more passengers and through the night backwards to Glasgow to arrive at 8am.