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**Obtainable from:**

The Grampian Speleological Group  
8 Scone Gardens  
EDINBURGH EH8 7DQ

(0131 661 1123)

**Web Site:** [http://www.sat.dundee.ac.uk/~arb/gsg/](http://www.sat.dundee.ac.uk/~arb/gsg/)

**E-mail (Editorial):** goon90@hotmail.com
The Grampian Speleological Group

Editorial:

*Death closes all: but something ere the end,*
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.

Tennyson

There are events in life’s journey that force us to self-examine, to reflect and, if we be earnest with ourselves, help us toward a brighter, more fulfilled future. Such a time is upon us now. A window - a shockingly brief opening of a window - affords a fleeting glimpse into that ‘undiscovered bourne’ which, in due time, we all must travel through. Like a summation of behaviour at New Year, we ponder the meaning and purpose of existence.

It will be encouraging if we can account for a life filled with achievement and a search for ever more intriguing possibilities. In my humble view, people should be judged not merely for what they have done, but for their zest to contribute, to set one or more building blocks into our culture’s edifice. As our anodyne, tech-driven century unfolds, it throws into ever sharper relief those who are ‘givers’ and those who are ‘takers’.

Few things are more pitiful than regiments of ‘takers’ who continually consume and litter, passing from day to day in a directionless electronic fog where even the simple joys of a country walk cannot be divorced from chattering endlessly into a mobile phone or being permanently plugged into an MP3 player (or whatever the latest gadget is called). What is life really about for these grey people for whom - apparently - a high point is downloading three million forgettable pop songs onto their phone? They give nothing; they take constantly; exercise no thought for anyone but themselves and in extreme cases, pass their lives sponging, complaining and, in an alarmingly high ratio, ruining themselves with drugs to nullify effects of a life without hope, without imagination.

Then there are the ‘givers’, those to whom imagination *is* the most precious life guide, for it stimulates them to create, to record and to make things better than they were. They are the drivers of human endeavour and without them our world would be a sad place indeed.

Ancient Egyptians believed that so long as their names were remembered and spoken, their eternal existence was assured. This is why they devoted so much time and effort decorating their tombs. What a profound maxim. Just so long as we recall friends and family who have left us, then accumulated memories mean, in effect, they are still among us.

We only have one innings on this earth to fill our fleeting four score years and ten with a worthwhile and productive life, which should be the definition of our human condition. Whatever our interests, all of us should feel duty bound to put something back, as a thank you *and* a helping hand to move things along. It is an important reason why we are here.

Contemplation of eternity is not everyone’s cup of tea. There may indeed be nothing beyond the grave - many of you probably subscribe to that opinion. Belief is a matter of faith, not fact, as would be any interpretation of what life ‘on the other side’ would be like. Never mind. Believe what you will. But what happens here, on earth, *is* our concern and I believe there is great comfort in contemplating that you

‘can fill the unforgiving minute
with 60 seconds’ worth of distance run.”
That is where we find ourselves at present, turning away from a lamentable spoiling of opportunity, alleviating our guilt at still being here with inward celebration of lives lived to the full. They are fitting tributes and no-one could ask for more of our lost comrades. Stand awhile amidst life’s chaos and demands; dream up a pool of silence and meditate on a future that they will never see. We will remember them. They are: Peter Ireson, George Alden, Tony Jarratt.

-----oOo-----

Alan Jeffreys, Editor.

AREA MEET REPORTS (to 20.9.08) (Edinburgh logs only)

Quite a variety of places visited during the Spring and early summer, despite wet conditions, with May being by far the busiest month. Naturally, Sutherland witnessed a lot of activity in Rana Hole and Claonaite, but this has not diminished investigations elsewhere.

ARGYLL

Jim Salvona paid a visit to the isle of Jura in May but only noted a few very small rock shelters, despite the reported presence of limestone on the geological map.

July saw a large NAMHO party exploring the lead mines at Tyndrum when McDougal’s Level was found to contain excellent artefacts.

In September two members had trips into Hibernian Hole and Draught Caledonian.

BERWICKSHIRE

There were solo visits to caves at St Abbs in July and in August another to the Elba Copper Mines.

CAITHNESS

In June a fine sea cave at Latheronwheel was explored.

CLACKMANNANSHIRE

There was a solo trip by Mark Lonnen to Jerah Copper Mine in May finding some 20 metres of passage, partially waterlogged. NAMHO members looked at the Alva Silver Mines in July.

CORNWALL

During a holiday in Cornwall, Alex Latta managed visits to Poldark Mine and the Carnglaze Caverns.

DERBYSHIRE

Alison Boutland had a family holiday in Derbyshire in July, managing to see some show caves at Castleton and went into Giant’s Hole and Gautries Hole as well.

DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY

A joint SCRO/Moffat MR rescue exercise embraced several scenarios in Barjarg Limestone Mine in May. Many participants and useful work done.
EAST LOTHIAN

The archaeological site of Archerfield Caves near Dirleton was the subject of a brief visit in August.

FIFE

A 16-strong party descended on Charlestown Limestone Mine in May and enjoyed a good trip, finding mine relics and needle crystals. In July, some NAMHO delegates visited Cults Limestone Mine and toured the surface features at Charlestown.

FRANCE

On a now regular holiday fixture to the Vercors in August and September, there were descents of Gour Fumant, Grotte du Bournillon, the Traverse des Anciennes, Grotte de Gournier, Pot du Loup, Grotte du Boudour and Grotte Dray Blanche.

Also in September, there was a holiday trip to the Perigord by four members. A wild cave, Grotte de la Rye was visited, along with a selection of the painted show caves of the region.

MIDLOTHIAN

Alex Latta walked down Roslin Glen in May and explored Wallace’s Cave. In June there were examinations of limestone workings at Middleton and later in the month, there were trips to Pathhead Limestone Mine and various adits nearby.

Tragically, a recce into an apparently shallow air shaft from a colliery near Newcraighall in July went disastrously wrong when Peter Ireson was overcome by heavy deposits of CO2 from which he never recovered.

PEEBLESHIRE

A tiny sandstone fissure on the Pentlands was discovered by Jim Salvona in May, and in July there was a foray into Jeanie Barrie’s Cave.

PERTHSHIRE

After being contacted by a member of the public and informed of possible caves near Trinafour, Goon examined the area in April, finding three modest caves and a promising resurgence. He returned with Ivan Young in July, extended one cave and, digging out the rising, was rewarded with 75 metres of entertaining waterlogged passage ending in a choke. A further visit in September saw yet more cave found and promising potential remaining. (See this issue).

SOMERSET

There was a pleasant jaunt down GB Cave by a group of seven in March followed by a classic round trip in Swildons Hole.

May saw a club party privileged to visit the recently found Upper Flood Swallet on the back of a geological investigation by Mark Tringham. During this long weekend there were also descents of Hunters Lodge Inn Sink and Eastwater Swallet.

In September, after attending Tony Jarratt’s funeral, six carried out a bottoming of St Cuthbert’s Swallet.
SOUTH WALES

The club enjoyed a round trip through Ogof Ffynnon Ddu in May and also explored the delights of Llygad Llwcwr.

SUTHERLAND

Understandably there has been a great amount of caving in Assynt, due entirely to the breakthrough into Claonaite 7. Most of these trips have been recorded in detail in the Sutherland hut log.

The season commenced with tourist sallies into Otter Hole and Cnoc nan Uamh in early March. April saw explorations of Allt nan Uamh Stream Cave, Otter Hole, Bone Caves and Rana Hole. Simultaneously, on a trip to Blue Chamber in Rana, Julian Walford and Martin Hayes discovered extensions leading off (which eventually resulted in the discovery of Two B’s Chamber, not recorded in the Edinburgh log). Another party took a large peli case down to the bone site in Claonaite. The next day a climb down Knockan Pot was frustrated by it being sumped 165 inches from the surface!

At the beginning of May Simon Brooks dived the pool in Blue Chamber, to find it choked after five and a half metres. The party then went to 2 B’s Chamber and, above sump 6 in Claonaite, revealed yet another extension - Duelling Pianos - after a short dig. This runs over the sump and may yet lead to a bypass, although huge boulders are a problem. Also that weekend a party went into Claonaite 8 where Simon dived sump 8 to find a small airspace and the others surveyed 8.

At the end of May there was a tourist trip down Rana and all over Claonaite 7. The next weekend another group investigated Duelling Pianos where Derek Pettiglio dug into another small extension which may connect into the Treen Scene. The same day, a complete descent of a now drained Knockan Pot was achieved.

In June, the removal of visible bear bones was carried out over two days. After assiduous examination of the site, most of the skeleton has been recovered but many small foot bones are still unaccounted for. Some 19 members were in the cave during this operation.

Later in the month more digging was achieved at the foot of Rana in an attempt to open an efficient drain for collecting water. Access to Skyeways is now much easier. While this was going on there was a tourist trip to ANUS Cave.

In August, trips into Claonaite via Rana were organised, first to take Daily Mail reporters to see the bone site and the next day to allow landowner George Vestey and family to visit this spectacular cave.

WEST LOTHIAN

Planning field trips for the July NAMHO conference, in March a group of three members inspected passages in Philpstoun No.6 shale mine, finding water levels quite high. In other Whitequarries entrances, heavy growth of brambles made access very difficult. There was another trip just before the conference to check things were stable. Two days later a group of five NAMHO delegates went sightseeing in the mine, where slightly heightened CO₂ effects were noted.

The same weekend there were two descents into Bowden Hill Mine, one a through trip from holes 3-4, and the other a furtle from 4-5. Three trips were undertaken into Leven Seat Limestone Mine and one into Oakbank Shale Mine.
In March there was an SRT training descent of Heron Pot by four members who also inspected some high level passages in the lower reaches.

The following month two members en route to the BCRC AGM in Derbyshire stopped off for an enjoyable slosh in Notts 2, going all the way to the upstream sump and checking out various inlets on the way back. Also in April, Mark Lonnen organised an extended family outing down Calf Holes to Browgill and then reversed the trip. Near the end of April there were trips into Aygill Cavern, Hardrawkin Pot and a Swinsto pull-through.

Yet another dual family gathering in early May saw a party of eight in Long Churn outnumbered by an influx of yellow plastic ducks. This was preceded by a round trip down County Pot and back via Wretched Rabbit.

At the end of May your editor joined a SWETC party for a jaunt up to Great Aven and Rowten sump in KMC - this being a pre-anniversary dinner appetiser.

A party of five carried out descents of County Pot and Lancaster Hole in early June and later the same month Goon celebrated 50 years active caving by bottoming Alum Pot 1958 style, complete with rope ladders, goon suits, pulp helmets and boiler suits. Sixteen members took part - all toeing the line as regards retro-gear. The affair proved so enjoyable that the next day five visited Calf Holes -Browgill with rope ladders while another five practised SRT in Sell Gill Holes.

In early July, seven members carried out a good thrutch around Notts 2 and the following weekend, over two days, club representatives joined the ‘open house’ digging project to create a dry route to Ireby 2. The sump was drained to allow diggers to attack both sides of the passage. Good progress was made and a welcome pint or two served back at the entrance afterwards!

At the invitation of Yorkshire Dave, ten members went caving in Swaledale in August, doing two trips into Crackpot Cave, one to Brandy Bottle Incline and one into Scrafton Pot. Also in August, a party of ten descended Jingling Pot and Cave.

ANOTHER MINE GONE: QUEENZIEBURN LIMESTONE MINE

In the summer of 1964, at the invitation of Glasgow Spelaeological Society, the GSG visited an interesting limestone mine on the Campsies, behind Burnhead Farm, Queenzieburn. A linear set of passages led us into some sporting workings, with soft red mud and shallow standing water in parts. Below the entrance tunnels, which resembled those of Bowden Hill, access was gained to a deeper level with larger passage cross sections.

In view of a forthcoming joint exercise with Strathclyde Police Mountain Rescue Team, I highlighted this site as a possible venue. However, given the intervening 44 years, I thought it might be as well to scout the area first, so on Friday 3rd October Carol and I set off for a recce.

The incised river valley where the mine was sited runs uphill beside the farm buildings and at NS 684786 there is a small exposure of limestone. The entrance used to be found at the south end of this exposure but nowadays there is nothing to be seen apart from bracken and mature trees which I don’t remember from before. The current farmer has no knowledge of an open mine and states that five years ago there was a mega flood down the river which caused extensive slumping and wreckage of the banks so this may have concealed any entrance. The last recorded visit was in June 1974 by GSS (although the entry did not state whether anyone went underground. From the tenor of the text, it would seem not!)

Alan Jeffreys
ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY (to 27.9.08)

1. BOOKS:

Kunath, C.E. (2007) 50 Years of Texas Caving
Stanier, P. (2002) Cornwall’s Mining
Park, R. (1964) Secret of the Maori Cave [Children’s book]

3. CAVING JOURNALS:

British Caving Association Newsletter No.9 (2008)
British Cave Research Association Newsletter No.9 (2008)
British Cave Research Association Cave & Karst Science Vol. 34 No.1 (2008)
British Cave Research Association, CREG Journal No.70 (+ erratum) (2008)
Cave Diving Group, Newsletter Nos. 167,168 (2008)
Cerberus Spelaeological Society, Journal Vol. 26 Nos. 5,6
Chelsea Speleological Society, Newsletter Vol. 50 Nos.4,5,6,7,8,9 (2008)
Craven Pothole Club, Record Nos.90,91 (2008)
Derbyshire Caving Association ‘The Derbyshire Caver’ Nos. 127,128 (2007-8)
Descent Nos. 201,202,203 (2008)
Irish Mountain Rescue Association ‘Call Out’ No.6 (2008)
Italian Speleological Society ‘Speleologia’ Year 29 No. 58 (2008)
Mondo Sotteraneo Vol. 28 Nos. 1/2
Vol. 29 Nos. 1/2
Mountain Rescue Committee, Scotland, ‘Casbag’ Nos.1,2,18,19 (2003-2008)
Orpheus Caving Club, Newsletter Vol. 43 No. 7-9, 9-12
Vol. 44 No. 1-3 (2007-8)
Red Rose Cave & Pothole Club, Newsletter Vol.45 Nos.1,2,3 (2008)
Shropshire Caving & Mining Club, Journal 1978
4. MAPS:

OS 1:50,000, Sheet 78 Nithsdale and Annandale (2006)
Sheet 94 Glasgow (2005)

5. CAVE GUIDES, ABSTRACTS ETC.:

Photo Wallet: St Michael’s Cave, Gibraltar
Handbook: Northern Rocks. The North Pennines Festival of Geology and Landscape 2008. No. 1147
Leaflets: Cave of the Mounds, Wisconsin
Friends of Williamson’s Tunnel, Liverpool
Nenthead Mines
Killhope Lead Mining Museum
Gunung Mulu World Heritage Area
Le Souterroscope des Ardoisieres
King Edward Mine Museum, Cornwall
Explore and Indulge. Discover the Yorkshire Dales
Swaledale Museum

CDs, DVDs.

VHS Video:
  No. 45: Crawley Tunnel, Edinburgh (1999)

CD Mossdale 1967. ‘In Living Memory’ BBC Radio 4 19.3.08

  29 The Giant of the South (Sima GESM) (2006)
  30 Chronicle: Images of Another World; Sporting Chance - Anneka Rice in Calf Holes
  31 Journey Into Darkness. Explorations of E.A. Martel (1994)
  33 Removing Bear Bones from Uamh an Claonaite (2008)
  34 Tony Jarratt’s Logbooks (1964-2008)

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VALE: GEORGE ALDEN 1940-2008

It’s not been a good year at all. They say misfortunes never come singly and this summer has proved that in spades.

To remember George Alden, we have to journey right back to the very birth of the club - indeed even before it, for George was active underground for a year prior to becoming a founder member. In 1959, he and I were both engaged as scientific assistants in the Royal Scottish Museum Arts Department and we immediately struck up a close friendship. Our ‘caving’ activities embraced many hours spent investigating the labyrinthine recesses of the museum’s foundations, from which practice we branched out into the real world, founded the GSG and attacked every old mine working we could find near Edinburgh (we were too impecunious to travel to real caves).

As the club began to expand and prosper, George was ever at the forefront. He took part in our first purely GSG descent in the Dales (Sell Gill Holes, 1964) and was with me when Jeanie Barrie’s Cave was extended beyond the chute - our first Scottish discovery.

Following his divorce in 1966, several members moved into George’s home at 121 Gilmore Place, Edinburgh. The premises gradually transmogrified into a caving hub, housing at various times speleological luminaries such as Steve Grimes, Snab, Roger Biddle, Black Angus Maitland, Mike Ferraro and Dermot Statham and some even more famous personages such as Gerry Rafferty and Willie Russell. We also formed a folk group - the Ghillies - whose songs illustrated our potholing from 1965 to 1968. They still release
floods of memories when I sing or listen to them now. By 1968 George had begun to scale down his caving, but was still, with Roger Biddle, the first to reach the sump in Firehose Cave.

When he eventually left the museum, he moved down to Hastings and general contact was lost for two decades. Later years were not altogether good to George as he endured several major operations and personal tragedies and generally not very good health but his enthusiasm for life, his love of antiques and his fourth (!) wife kept him going. He died of a massive heart attack on Wednesday 27th August in Bexhill on Sea.

George was an extraordinary people magnet, a kind-hearted, considerate friend and - in his day - a stalwart caver. He was also the last of a very small band of founder members I had contact with. Ave George. They tell me you’re faster than me! (in joke). Well, your race is over now, old buddy.

Alan Jeffreys

VALE: PETER IRESON 1971-2008

On Thursday 17th July, Pete Ireson abseiled a short distance into an abandoned mine shaft and, despite taking sensible precautions, was overcome by bad air. This tragic accident has taken away one of the nicest, friendliest and most enthusiastic cavers you could ever hope to meet: one of those rare people who lived life to the full, packing something into every minute of every day.

For the last ten years, Pete has been a major part of the GSG. He was tackle master, rope supplier, photographer, web master, chauffeur, wood collector, p-hanger installer, story teller, pitch rigger, computer fixer, SRT trainer, LED lighting maniac, odd job man, international travel arranger, novice herder, friend and general all round great guy.

Pete joined in trips to all caving areas of Scotland, including some extensive old mine workings, but was chiefly known as a leading light in the club’s current ‘Dales Team’, bagging pots and accumulating a good working knowledge of popular systems and their rigging requirements. He was at the front of most caving trips, normally rigging the hardest pitches, but when necessary, unleashing floods of rubber ducks on unsuspecting novices. He was so important to us, that one attractive female club member was prepared to go to extreme lengths:

“Please tell Pete I can’t believe that the offer of me coming over to sit on him naked didn’t cheer him up. Can you tell him therefore that I’m sending Goon over to sit on him naked. That should get a reaction!”

Sadly, neither promise nor threat was enough and on Sunday 20th July 2008, three days after his accident, Pete died peacefully with his family at his bedside.

On Monday 28th July, Pete was cremated at a beautiful humanist ceremony at Mortonhall Crematorium in
Edinburgh. Around 150 of Pete’s family, friends, work colleagues and GSG members travelled from all over Britain to celebrate his life. We remember a man who brightened the lives of everyone he met (even without taking his custom LED lighting systems into account), and laughed as we let Pete tell us his own tale of his approach to caving: his Simpson’s Pot trip report was funnier than anything we could have written about him. We shall all feel the loss of his relentless online supply of jokes.

We miss Pete dearly, but we’re happy that he lived, and that we were able to be a part of his life.

David Robinson and Mark Lonnen.

Note: A special issue of the GSG Newsletter dedicated to Pete is being compiled where there will be more space for members to express their memories and appreciation.

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VALE: TONY ‘J-RAT’ JARRATT 1949-2008

As if the foregoing were not enough, in early September came news of Tony Jarratt’s untimely demise from lung cancer. Aged 58, J-Rat was a caver of such stature that his departure has drawn tributes from all over the world. His contributions to cave exploration are so vast it would require a complete journal to do them justice; his intake of alcohol so vast it would take a whole brewery to keep him in beer!

Probably the ‘digger par excellence’, his list of discoveries on Mendip by this method includes Tyning’s Barrow Swallet (attributed to the GSG as he and Snab were the prime movers), Wigmore Swallet, Hunter’s Lodge Inn Sink, Stockhouse Shaft, Priddy Green Sink to Swildons Four and Rose Cottage Cave, to name only a few. It was no accident that Tony was co-author of Mendip Underground, the definitive cave guide to the area. Abroad, Tony played a significant role on expeditions to Austria, Mexico, Vietnam, Peru and, of course, Meghalaya which he referred to as his step-fatherland. Indeed, the combination of plentiful beer and world class caves in India cemented his relationship in an ideal fashion!

In the early 1970s, J-Rat, then working for the Ordnance Survey, took up residence in the old Knockan hut and joined the GSG. From that moment he became a firm and loyal member, developing a love of Scotland - particularly Assynt - that saw him making regular visits there over 30 years. He participated in both expeditions to Staffa, where several new caves and reliable surveys of known systems were achieved. His fixation (there can be no other word) with Rana Hole resulted in a persistent siege whereby he probably removed more spoil, blasted more boulders and encouraged more diggers, than any other one person. It is entirely right that Tony should be the first through to Claonaite 7 and that his very last discovery of note was Two B’s Chamber.

Typically, he made all the arrangements for his funeral and wake, providing ten barrels of free beer at the Hunters Lodge for his friends and colleagues. His last message, recorded just before he died was:

“Bid a farewell to my numerous caving mates throughout the British Isles and the rest of the world. Over the last 40 odd years I couldn’t have met so many nutters, characters, pissheads and selfless, generous rough diamonds in any other walk of life. Keep on diggin’” J-Rat.

Alan Jeffreys
Memories of Tony. (Peter Dowswell):

The world is an emptier place without Tony and it is hard to believe that he’s no longer with us. A legend in his own lifetime, few people in the caving fraternity both at home and abroad had not heard of him or met him, and the GSG was proud to have him as a member. His cheerful disposition in the face of any adversity and fine wit made him a fine companion on any trip or expedition. It was typical of his positive approach to life that he could enjoy planning his wake and finally signing out.

I first met him in the early 70s, when he still worked for the Ordnance Survey and had contrived to work in Sutherland for a good few months re-surveying the line of the A835 amongst other things. He became a permanent resident at the old hut at Knockan and during this time made many friends there including Willie Morrison, Murdo Macleod, John Ross and others. One of his many fine qualities was his ability to pick up on people’s characters and his impression of Willie Morrison was particularly fine, ranging from the ‘ach, is that so?’ to speculation as to how his parsimonious nature might be next applied. In those days the old Alltnacealgach was still standing, run by the redoubtable Mrs A., who kept a very tight ship, and whose waitresses Tony would do his best to bring a little pleasure to.

Like many of us J-Rat developed a great love for Scotland in general and Assynt in particular and through his huge enthusiasm attracted a vast number of people from Mendip to join the fun in what was to become the annual ‘Mendip Invasion’. This was characterised by great craic, the consumption of prodigious amounts of ale and whisky, but also an equal amount of digging and exploration. It never ceased to amaze me that however much had been consumed the night before he was always up with the lark in the morning and with his usual enthusiasm for all things underground.

He was a great advocate for Scotland and the GSG and undaunted by the relatively small nature of our finds would always maintain that a metre found in Assynt was worth a hundred metres anywhere else. His knowledge of Scottish caves was superb and he would always be digging up new bits of information generated by his love of books and the search from previously unexplored sources. He had a superb collection of paintings and engravings of Scottish caves accumulated over many years and these often led to further debate as to how accurately the caves were depicted and where they might be. Scottish caving owes him a debt of gratitude not only for all the hard work he put in physically and mentally but also for the large number of people he inspired to develop an interest there. His meticulous keeping of his log book was also a fine example to the less well disciplined.

He initiated or participated in a significant number of Assynt digs with many different people and it was particularly fitting that he was there at the final linking of Rana through to Claonaite - few were more deserving or had contributed more over the dig’s lifetime.

Thanks for all the memories and lighting up so many lives.

(Martin Mills):

Mine go back to the mid 1960s and the Axbridge Caving Group timber hut at the Stirrup Cup Garage at Nordrach on Mendip (where the MCG now are) and the discovery of Nettle Pot. I particularly remember a very early trip into Singing River Mine (and if I were not writing this on the other side of the world my log would reveal the exact date). I was with Ray Mansfield and when we met Tony, these two proceeded to tear the clothes off each other - to the amazement of those present. Such was our outrageous behaviour in those days!

One day I phoned Phil and Lil Romford at Bat Products who announced that they were off to do great things in Portugal and finding only Tony doing his training before taking the shop over. It served us and him well (just). One was always sure of a warm welcome and a long natter on trips to far flung places and we traded
show cave leaflets and spare guidebooks. He even turned up to our wedding reception in Fife in 1979.

In the old GSG Knockan hut he once asked me whether I wanted my bread ‘greased’, his way of saying buttered. I also remember a bottle of Glenfarclas 105 proof intended for his father. When working for the Ordnance Survey he had lived at the old hut and had to pay the survey men in cash. One occasion he had to phone Ordnance Survey HQ in Southampton whom he found were sending float money not to Ullapool but to Liverpool! One day he heard a knock at the hut door and opened it to find an Indian gentleman going door to door selling silk saris. He had obviously acquired the worst franchise area in the UK. Whilst working for the OS, Tony had had a year out in Lesotho where he naturally investigated rock shelter art.

Then there is the tale of the Balch books. It went something like this: Roy Uphill heard that an old bookshop in Wells was closing. He called in and asked the proprietor’s wife if they had any of Mr Balch’s cave books. She produced half a dozen copies of “Swallet Caves and Rock Shelters” which Roy bought. He kept one for himself and gave the other five to Ray Mansfield who sent some to friends abroad and passed the remaining ones to Tony. Tony went to the shop and asked the same question as Roy Uphill and the proprietor went upstairs and came down with a large package containing more than 400 copies! Tony had to go to the bank to borrow the money to buy them. I guess he still had a few left?

More recently in 2001 when I started working in Bristol and took up residence in the Hunter’s, Tony was banging in Hunter’s Lodge Inn Sink. Initially every time he banged it, he rattled the radiator in my room. It was he and I who were subject to a ‘lock-in’ late one night at the Hunter’s when Roger Dors thought the pub had been in the family for 100 years. We started on a project to catalogue all the engravings of Fingal’s Cave and all the others of Staffa, and even talked about a possible “Cave Illustrations of Scotland”. He and I would exchange greetings and latest gossip or just reminisce every time he was in, especially Wednesday nights after digging, me at Templeton and he back with his team from his latest investigation. He would then religiously proceed to write his trip up in the latest volume of his digging Logs. He had even been helping my other club, the Shepton, by banging in Gibbetts Brow.

Tony, despite his wanderings abroad, thought the view out of the bar window of the Hunter’s the most marvellous view in all the world. Curiously, Tony would never ‘do’ Yorkshire. He was a committed cave digger extraordinaire. With his passing so soon after the Wig (together they co-edited two editions of “Mendip Underground”) there is now such a big void in the BEC and Mendip caving in general. It will be very interesting to see how long and in what form this void is filled, assuming it is, but it certainly won’t be by such a marvellous character.

Farewell mate.

NAMHO IN SCOTLAND

On 12th-13th July the National Association of Mining History Organisations held their bi-annual conference at the Scottish Mining Museum, Newtongrange, near Edinburgh. As the host club, the GSG played a vital role in this event, mounting a display at the conference site and guiding members round mine workings near the city.

Saturday saw field trips into Leven Seat Limestone Mine, Bowden Hill Limestone Mine, Alva Silver Mines, Cults Limestone Mine, Linhouse Shale Mine and Charlestown limekilns. On Sunday there were further trips into Bowden Hill and a limited number of delegates visited Whitequarries Shale Mine.

Perhaps the high point of the field trips was an apres-conference exploration of the lead mines high above Tyndrum. Eighteen delegates joined two GSG members for a thorough look at the various adits and, as a bonus, we got into McDougal’s Level which proved to house a wealth of mining relics, much to the visitors’ delight.

A. Jeffreys
BENEATH THE PENNINES ON WOOD

By Alan L. Jeffreys

My first proper Yorkshire potholes were explored with the Settle based British Speleological Association and included a fistful of classics such as Little Hull Hole, Disappointment Pot, Penyghent Pot, Stream Passage to Flood Entrance and Grange Rigg Pot. This was in the late 1950s, when constraints of a wartime economy were just beginning to evaporate so equipment still had very much a ‘home-made’ quality.

Most of the above mentioned descents were made entirely, or very nearly, with rope ladders which may even have seen service with Arthur Gemmell during the war for all I knew - they certainly looked old enough! Orange rubber ‘goonsuits’ were the latest thing. Released from RAF service after the Korean War, these inflatable survival suits proved to be extremely useful for wet caving - even if a tad fragile - and you could not be considered a hard caver if you didn’t have one. Hawser-lay nylon ropes were also fresh on the market and eagerly adopted to replace doubtful hemp or manila lifelines but otherwise, caving gear consisted of a cobbled together heap of muddy rubbish, ex-army boots and steel krabs and, overall, the ubiquitous navy blue boiler suit. Helmets were almost universally the compressed fibre Coal Board variety (which softened when thoroughly wet!) or, occasionally, a fibreglass ‘Texolex’ model. The only meaningful contribution to modernity was the cap lamp, principally the Nife or Edison alkali or Oldham lead acid type.

This was the general technical state of play when I took my first steps underground in 1958. Having experienced all this equipment during BSA meets, I quickly sourced and purchased the necessary hardware, including a brand new Nife cell direct from the factory at Redditch. In passing, may I express my admiration for this piece of solid British engineering. It is almost impossible to destroy a Nife cell. My own lamp, having been standing almost dry on a workbench for over 30 years, was recently cleaned out, re-filled with fresh electrolyte and charged up. Result: 8 hours after one charge! Brilliant! No wonder the National Coal Board ditched them for the all too mortal lead acids - they lasted too long!

This ‘arts and crafts’ approach to caving declined as the 1960s progressed. A huge private manufacture of wire ladders by caving clubs was followed first by individual experimentation in clothing and then by enterprising cavers who produced customized gear, opened retail stores and generally flooded the market with shiny toys. The rest, as they say, is history.

So we fast forward to 2008 which is of course 50 years after I started this game. Such a long time spent crawling or dangling in an often squalid underworld seemed a thing worth commemorating so, after considering suitable modes of celebration, I hit upon the idea of carrying out a descent 1958 style, using as close as possible the same kind of equipment. This prompted me to make up a new set of rope ladders (there are still original ones in the club museum but I doubted whether members would be inclined to trust them), acquire nylon lifelines and obtain steel pulleys, all sufficient to bottom Alum Pot via Dollytubs. And so my troubles began. So far have we ‘advanced’ since 1958 that even finding the right materials without incurring a national debt proved horrendous. The original ladders had manila ropes and English oak rungs. Ash dowel pins secured the two. The method of construction is outlined in GSG Bulletin 1st Series Vol.1 No.5, page 14.

Consequently I set about making new stock. Problem No.1. Hemp is now so scarce it is prohibitively expensive. Fortunately, in a sailing shop I found a 12mm polypropylene hawser lay look alike which came in at £1.50 a metre. During the winter months I purchased over 100 metres of this (not cheap!). My search for suitable wood led to problem No.2. Keeping my budget within reason, I settled for dressed American white oak planks - a softer genus of oak than I would have preferred - which measured 18x145mm x 8 feet long. I got the supplier to rip them into 1½” wide lengths, which yielded 12 rungs per length (36 per plank). Because the circular saw was less than subtle I then had to sandpaper these cut lengths incurring several injuries as jagged splinters lanced into my hands. The 18mm thickness was a tiny bit thinner than the original rung specification but not significantly so. In all I purchased five planks which at some £35 each came to £205 inc. VAT.
Problem No. 3 arose when suitable dowel had to be found to fix ropes inside the rungs. 6mm rods of pine were commonly available but ash was not, not to mention the probable cost of specially ordering it. I settled for the pine but it is a much softer wood and subsequently a couple of pins failed when used in wet conditions.

Construction commenced with few complications. I made up a new spacing jig but otherwise work proceeded just as it had in 1959, that is, having threaded the ropes through enough rungs to produce a 25ft ladder, the first rung is set on the jig, a 6” nail hammered through the rope and a dowel pin, pointed by a pencil sharpener, driven through the resulting hole and sawed off flush. At each subsequent rung the ladder is turned over to prevent bias and the end traces, 30” long, are whipped. Incidentally, the internal rung spacing is 11½” and the overall rung width 8”. The ½” rope holes are drilled ¼” from each end and cross drilled with a 6mm hole for the dowel pin. (I realise there is a random use of imperial and metric measurements here, but I tried to adhere to the original specifications, adapting modern materials where necessary).

By these means I constructed seven ladders - five 25ft, one 15ft and one 10ft. Even allowing for a declining pound, I think today’s ladders were more expensive to make than the originals. Mind you, some of the latter were made with 1½” circ. Sisal (Scout Shop, £1 for 100ft) but survivors still take my weight!

For the great occasion - Saturday 14th June 2008 - I scoured the shops for authentic gear such as a pair of vibram soled leather boots and a navy blue cotton boiler suit (not easy to find). From ‘stock’ I resuscitated my old pulp helmet, Nife cell, original steel krab, wool socks, a nylon waist length and, pièce de résistance, a goonsuit which had partially perished down one leg and was therefore sacrifiable. A creditable 16 members turned up for the event and we had the system virtually to ourselves, barring a small CPC party doing the pot on wire ladders. A trouble free descent to the sump was achieved in good time and many photographs taken. All participants made a good effort to dress according to the age (although I suspect a few wet socks and other items were secreted past the history police) without a wellie, modern oversuit or LED light in sight. Quite a number of members expressed their approval of rope ladders and the comfort/security they provided. They also compared very favourably to the weight of wire ladders - I suspect the polyprop rope had something to do with that, and some were so impressed that we used one of the ladders the following day to carry out a through trip in Calf Holes- Browgill Cave.

Operationally, I experienced a slight hiccup when wet police trousers underneath the goon suit refused to
allow my legs to bend while climbing up ladders, and searching for belay points proved interesting in places where old-fashioned aids had been removed in favour of P-hangers which of course could not be used in the interests of accuracy, but otherwise everything went according to plan. Eschewing neoprene, fleece and cordura for wool and old clothes demonstrated (to me at least) that in many respects, modern cavers are over-dressed for what they face on average Yorkshire trips which is a lesson worth learning in these days of rising inflation.

The success of the day has prompted me to propose a club ‘Founder’s Day’ to be held in June each year, when the old style tackle will be used again. Next year’s plan is to descend Ireby Fell Cavern. Be there, or be square.

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**AN UPDATE TO THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ARTICLES OF SPELEOLOGICAL INTEREST IN THE SCOTS MAGAZINE**

By M.T. Mills


**2005**  
**September**, p. 262. Maclean, Alastair. Listen to This. CD Review. “Songs of Mining Life from 7 Pit Wynd, Coaltown of Fife”. Mactoots Recordings MTS052.


**November**, pp. 496-499. “Stories in Wood” by Steve McGrail. About Fife based wood sculptor Kenny Grieve who also does totem poles, one of which included the big cave on Bennachie.


**2006**  
**January**, pp. 70-74. “The Boiling Sea” by Rennie McOwan, about visits to the Gulf of Corrievreckan, but includes mentions of sea caves at north end of Jura and on Scarba, some of which have small dry-stone walls built at the entrances and used as shelters by deer hunters, fishermen and shepherds. Some of the caves were used as corpachs, or resting places, for bodies being taken to the sacred islands of Iona and Oronsay. A kind of altar, ancient shoe, stone coffins and jars containing bones have been found in the caves. Recounts the legend of Prince Breacin from Scandinavia, buried in the cave at the north end of Jura which is associated with him to this day [Uamh Breacain]. Colour photographs of sea caves on Jura, used for shelter by humans and animals.

**February**, p.214. Letters to the Editor. From Alistair G.H. Moore, Chairman, British Association of Colliery Management, adding further information to David McLaughlan’s article in September is about the Scottish Mining Museum.
March, p.253. Place that Place. Competition to identify colour photographs: “The entrance to St Fillan’s Cave somewhere in Fife”.


Ibid, pp. 290-297. “Meanderings in Moidart”, by Andrew McIntyre, starting with Richard Neilson’s visit in 1755 on behalf of the Commissioners of Fisheries and Manufacturers, passing mention of the lead mines at Strontian that had been established in 1723.

May, pp. [450]-454. “Lending a Hand on Handa”, by Genevieve Leaper of a week assisting the Scottish Wildlife Trust on the island. Passing mention of the collapsed sea cave at Poll Ghlup, now a shaft more than 200 ft deep.


Ibid, p.501. Place that Place. Answer to March’s quiz (see above). St Fillan’s Cave is at Pittenweem.

July, pp.[22]-27. “Paddy’s Milestone” by Hamish Brown about Ailsa Craig. Passing mention of sea caves in the cliffs, including one named Water Cave.

Ibid, pp. 38-42. “Rob Roy’s Cave” by Rennie McOwan, investigating and discussing the various sites including Kirkton Pass, Bealach Garbh, Creag an Taxman, Uamh an Righ, north of Inversnaid on the shores of Loch Ard (photo of entrance) and Echo Rock, beside the Aberfoyle to Inversnaid road (photo).

October, pp. [386]-392. “Jim Crumley’s Scotland: The Landscape’s Song” includes Fingal’s Cave on Staffa and Mendelssohn’s visit in 1829. Photo of entrance.


December, pp.602-605. “Small But Spirited” by Marieke McBean about the Loch Ewe Distillery at Aultbea, the only authorised small still to produce whisky. Passing mention of caves being popular for housing illicit stills, and sea caves ensured that customs officials couldn’t always get to you.

2007 February, pp.142-144. “In Search of Belnamoon” by David Elder. The search for the Balnamoon cave in Glen Mark. Two photos of the entrance.

April, pp.354-357. “Jim Crumley’s Scotland. The Cairngorms: Landscape of the Wolf”. Suggestion that the last wolf probably died old and alone in a cave...


September, pp. 240-244. “High Pasture Cave” by Terry Williams. Detailed account of the excavations and findings since 2002 at this Iron Age site on Skye and similarities with Minehowe on Orkney. Includes two underground photos.

November, pp. 527-531. “North-West Passage” by Paul Turner. Account describing the landscape wonders of Sutherland. Mentions Inchnadamph and Reindeer Cave.

2008 June, pp. 582-588. “A Different Viewpoint” by Rennie McOwan. About bagging the peaks of the Scottish islands. Detailed account of the legends of MacKinnon’s Cave on Mull. Also on Mull the small sea caves along the shoreline of Loch Buie used as secret hen houses when the owners of the estate in the 1800s had forbidden the keeping of hens. Passing mention of caves of Skye, Scarba and the Crowlin islands.

GSG PUBLICATIONS

The GSG is committed to producing printed information on Scottish caves with an ultimate view to documenting everything underground for the future. One aspect of this is the publishing of guides to the various caving regions. This on-going project has seen the publication of the following guides:

Caves of Skye
Caves of Schiehallion
Caves of Applecross and Kishorn
Caves of Appin [with addenda]
Caves of the Southern Highlands

Current work is produced in this bi-annual Bulletin. Some 90 issues have now been produced, and a good many are still in print.

In concert with these publications, a web site register containing over 1400 cave names is available to researchers, with links to the considerable library held by the Group.

Further information on the above can be obtained from Group members at goon90@hotmail.com or ivany@gsgroup.demon.co.uk

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ESOTERIC EXCAVATIONS  
By David Morrison

After completing ‘Caves of Applecross and Kishorn’ with Ritchie Simpson I thought it would be a good idea to compile a Caves of Skye supplement. Many new caves and sites of interest have been found and explored since ‘Caves of Skye’ was published in 1995. In fact, I have a list as long as the original contents of the guide. I have checked most of the new caves on my own or with Ritchie and we are slowly putting it all into print.

Now, the only trouble with checking caves or entrances is that there is a chance of finding something new. This puts any previous list out of date and delays its chance to be published. On one such occasion I went out on my motorbike and headed for Strollamus. I parked up and walked up the hill towards the two caves Steve Birch had found a few years earlier, both of which Ritchie and myself had explored previously. Downstream about 30 metres from the entrances I stopped to look at a dig we had started on our last visit. A stubborn flake barred the way into what looked like a low silty passage. This dig looked like it would go if the flake could be removed. I took note and carried on up the hill. I was now looking for Poll Goird, another of Steve’s finds. Apparently it was below a tilted basalt dyke. I had a look about but couldn’t find the little cave. However, a small hole in boulders near the dyke was noticed and there seemed to be a void below. Having no tools I headed off toward the motorbike, ripping the heel off my left boot at a steep bit...cheap rubbish! Another hole was noted near a dirt track so another visit was planned.

Ritchie and I returned a week later and immediately started digging out the nearest hole. After some widening and removal of some small boulders access was gained to 4 metres of tight descending passage ending too tight. It was called Worm Hole, then capped to keep out livestock. Next we headed over to the dig with the flake barring entry. Much hammering and prising with bars was done, but the flake would not come out. It was now quite loose but jammed. I decided to undermine it which was so successful that the passage beyond was within reach; it just meant crawling under a large loose flake. After wedging a pile of stones below the flake Ritchie was persuaded to take a look. This he did very carefully, he nearly disappeared but couldn’t quite push over a mud and gravel bank. I went in for a look and after some scraping, forced my way into a low wide chamber where I turned and came out. Ritchie went in for a look and seemed to be taking his time. I asked how he was getting on. He replied he was ‘going for a wander’. This involved squeezing forward to find more passage which needed dug out. Happy for now we headed uphill to the basalt dyke and the little hole I had found the week before.

A good look around found Steve’s little cave, then I started work on the hole in the boulder pile. After some hammering and chiselling the hole was big enough to enter. Ritchie dropped in and shouted that we had a small cave but it was full of silt. We swapped places and I dug out enough silt to get around a left bend. Changing places again Ritchie disappeared down the hole and soon shouted back that he was standing, then...
nothing for what seemed a long time. Eventually he popped out of the hole looking very pleased. He told me to go and take a look, so I did. We had found about 25 metres of very twisty passage and it was still going. By now we were knackered so we called it a day and headed home already planning another trip. We returned two days later and pushed on but the cave became choked with silt so it was left until the weekend.

Four weeks later and after some awkward digging at the cave with the loose flake, now called Carnivore Cave, more passage was gained ending at a low chamber with yet more digging necessary to continue. We then went to the other cave, Cyclone Cave, and dug out a few more metres of cave which gave two ways on and a good echo from the closest opening....off home again. We returned a couple of days later along with Rob Burrell and after he had toured Carnivore Cave we set about pushing Cyclone Cave. I went first and armed with hammer and chisel I set to work on the first of the two leads at the end of the cave. Soon I could squeeze into a larger bit of passage and a look about it seemed to show the way on blocked by a boulder and getting too tight beyond. I wriggled out and let Rob take over. He managed to shift the boulder and shouted that the passage got higher ahead if the floor was lowered. Ritchie then crawled forward to assist and after a while they gained entry to a high level passage leading to a small nicely scalloped pot which could be viewed but not entered. The way on to the right of the pot would need some hammer work, but not today. Happy with progress we went home.

Ritchie and I returned a few days later and had a second look at the high level passage. It looked like too much work so we started digging the lower, easier option. Eventually Ritchie had had enough. At one point he was wedged as far forward as he could get with no helmet and using my back-up light as a trowel he could just see round a bend but more digging would be needed, so we called it a day for now. Back at home I drew up a grade 1 survey which is shown in this report.

On our various visits to Strollamus we had passed a tiny limestone crag at the north east end of the Beinn na Caillich outcrop. One hot day I went to investigate. The little crag seemed to be quite isolated and no speleo activity was found so I wandered towards Scapula Cave to have a look at the resurgence. I managed to enter this for about 4 metres until a small pedestal of rock barred entry to a little chamber with a pool in the floor. The passage is seen to continue. I backed out awkwardly and found myself surprisingly wet and bruised. On the opposite bank of the stream that the resurgence flows into I started digging at a little hole but, being soaked I wasn’t very enthusiastic so I went home. A week later I was back and went to the little hole first. This was quickly dug out and a tiny, flat-out chamber was entered, with more flat out passage soon becoming too tight. The total was about 3.5 metres; a tiny stream flows through this tiny cave which I called Silty
Next I crawled into Scapula Resurgence Cave, intending to hammer the pedestal out of the way. On reaching it I managed to get my hand behind it and to my surprise it moved. It was part of a boulder which was pulled out of the way then I splashed into the chamber beyond. Alas, the passage got too tight but the floor looked diggable. Soaked again and knackered but able to turn around now I crawled out and headed home. I was back the next evening with Ritchie for support. He soon arrived at, then lay in the pool and successfully lowered the floor. Then, with a bit of effort he squeezed into the next section. Unfortunately, the passage split into smaller sections not far ahead and no more progress was possible so he turned around and came out. Then I went for a look and confirmed his findings. Our hopes of a through trip to Scapula Cave were dashed! We estimated the total length to be 10 metres and a grade 1 survey was drawn up that night.

Earlier in the year I had met up with Rob Burrell and his friend Craig Huggle in the Coille Gaireallach area. After comparing notes on some of the caves and entrances, I showed them a sink that Steve Birch had told me about. Ritchie and I had been for a look but a tight S-bend had repelled us. Rob, having misheard, thought it had been passed and disappeared down the passage. Craig and I waited patiently on the surface until he came back. He described what he found and after my puzzled response he realised he had just explored a new cave. I have included his description for anyone feeling a bit mad.

Visits to the Kilchrist area have found a number of sites needing a dig or a push or both. Namely Sink Cave: it would probably go on a bit if the floor was lowered. There are also several short sections of passage all about 2 to 4 metres, not worth describing here but they have been recorded for the supplement. There are two ongoing digs and any progress will be reported as necessary.

Cave Descriptions:
*Carnivore Cave*

Crawl under a supported flake into a very low, wide chamber. ‘Wander’ across this to a tight passage that leads to a second chamber where it is nearly possible to sit. The way on needs digging.

*Scapula Resurgence Cave*

A tight sideways crawl leads round a bend into a tiny chamber with a pool. A squeeze at the far side leads to a higher section then flat-out until the passage splits and is too tight.

*Cyclone Cave*

Climb down a hole in boulders to enter a low muddy passage. Follow this round a left bend, now in water, to reach a section where it is possible to stand. The way on goes through a low arch, round a bend, to a straight section with two easy squeezes. A junction is then reached. Right is too tight after a couple of metres. The way on is to the left but, just before this a ramp can be climbed showing a small chamber which is just too tight to enter. Some hammering here would allow access. Back down at the junction, the main way on goes round an S-bend and continues to a tiny chamber. A low crawl then leads to a choice of passage. Left is a tight upward squeeze leading to a higher flat-out passage with a lovely scalloped pot out to the left. Some awkward upward hammer work here may give more cave. Back at the other passage the way on is a straightforward tight crawl which is still being dug out.
Angel’s Cave

Description by Rob Burrell.

We call it Angel’s Cave, as in ‘Fools rush in where angels fear to tread’. NG 60270 19690
A short crawl in an obvious stream sink where the limestone borders a basalt dyke south east of Ivybush Cave. This leads to a very tight and low S-bend requiring contortionist’s manouevres. Beyond this the passage becomes a walking height rift, narrow in places with lots of loose dirt and hanging rocks. After several body lengths the passage widens enough for you to turn round. Shortly after this point the stream drops down about a foot and vanishes into a small triangular hole with little chance of a way on. I tried squeezing my legs into it but my arse wouldn’t fit.

Following the boundary on the surface towards Ivybush Resurgence leads to a tight vertical dig where the stream from Angel’s Cave can be seen. Further digging here may reveal more tight and tortuous passage suitable for skinny masochists. (A couple of skinny masochists dug out the hole but still couldn’t get in. David).

CAVES AT TRINAFOUR

By Alan L. Jeffreys

In March 2008 the club received some information from a hill walker who had sought us out via the internet, regarding some cave entrances he had chanced upon just to the north of Trinafour, a small hamlet on the B847 road from Calvine to Kinloch Rannoch. Some tiny outcrops of blue-grey limestone, obviously more of the Blair Atholl group found on Schiehallion (only seven miles south) seemed to contain underground drainage and enterable passage. This man, John Beck, was not a caver, but was interested to learn what, if anything, lay below.

On Tuesday 8th April, I set off for a reconnaissance in full caving gear, accompanied by wife and faithful dog. What I found was a very interesting little drainage pattern interspersed with small caves and potential for more exploration than I could manage in circumstances of wet weather and extremely cold water.

Location:

From Calvine on the A9, follow the B847 to Trinafour. Turn right here and drive north up an un-designated tarmac road (General Wade’s Military Road) past Loch Errochty and its substantial dam to the west. After some steep Z-bends the road levels off and a small lake will be seen adjacent to the left side of the road. This is Maud Loch, created by an earth dam, where cars may be parked off the road. Alternatively (and for a slightly faster approach), proceed north on the A9 until the Drumochter dual carriageway is reached. The turn for Trinafour is signposted almost at once and the loch lies some four miles down the road, by walking across the dam and skirting either side of a small hillock beyond, outcrops of limestone will soon be seen. Access from this point is made easier by a rough vehicular track. I first of all walked north-west until, about half a kilometre onwards, a single wooden post stands as a marker. Just beyond is a shallow valley running west and about 80 metres up this a stream sink is encountered. This was as high as I went, and it is possible more limestone may be found beyond the immediate hillsides.

Exploration:

The stream sank into a tiny rock face and was not penetrable, but behind it a series of shakeholes ran in a straight line toward the track. One or two housed small holes and water could clearly be heard running somewhere below. The third shake from the sink contained an open entrance, floored with several heavy duty polythene bags. Upon entry, I soon discovered that not only did the bags contain sheep carcasses, but the entire entrance ‘chamber’ was filled with substantial heaps of bones and damp, humus-like material which I
took to be the remains of soft decomposition. To the left two voids quickly choked off with earth. The way on was to the right, down the noxious slope into a triangular passage some three metres in length. At the end it was pinched out by boulders, but water could be heard below and to the left in this area. Frankly, digging was not attractive. I emerged stinking of death and had to roll about in the snow to clean off the worst effects. Thus I called this small cave Ossicular Hole and don’t recommend it as a promising dig!

Walking along the flank of the wooden post hillside back toward the track some 80 metres away I saw a collection of depressions in clear grass (most cover was heather) where one or two openings could be seen in the rock. All of these contained still, clear water and looked larger about a metre down but none was enterable at surface level. They are presumed to have some relationship with the Ossicular drainage.

Returning back eastwards along the track, an obvious outcrop of clints and limestone slabs was observed on the north side. Investigation revealed a very pleasing rock arch structure with a stream flowing below it to turn left and sink into a triangular entrance. This was Trinafour Upper Cave. Progress is flat out over shards of rock in a wide passage about 70 cms in height. It seemed to peter out to the right but by squirming left I entered a slightly higher void where it was more comfortable to turn round. At this point the cave veered right and developed into a wide but low (~ 60 cms) passage with water occupying the whole width. It ran in a dead straight line to a point where daylight seeped in and not being of a mind to thrash along this very cold stream when exit was not guaranteed (I did finally pass along it in July), I returned to the surface and paced out 11 metres to the other end. Here an enormous boulder prevented access but I could see about one metre over gravel to the stream which flowed out of a low bedding on the right. This area was, in effect, an elongated collapse forming a substantial depression and when I followed the water around it, I was delighted to find yet another triangular entrance swallowing the stream.

I crawled in, finding comfortable hands and knees going for six metres to a sharp corner. The limestone was
fretted and scalloped, displaying the same banding and crystalline texture familiar to aficionados of Foss caves. There was a deposit of thick, mustard-coloured calcite on the wall at the corner, which gave onto more small passage enlarging as it entered a Z-bend where it was possible to stand up. Beyond, the cave doubled back on itself and a vertical shuffle penetrated some eight metres to a junction. On the right, a step up onto a ledge turned left amidst soft peaty deposits and seemed to choke after two metres, while at floor level the stream went under a low rock lip into a body-sized tube which turned right about two metres in. This was a bit intimidating for a solo exploration so was left for the future. I was greatly cheered by this discovery, estimated at 27 metres, which I called Trinafour Lower Cave.

Back on the surface, I paced out a walk downhill (generally south-east), encountering a coherent line of shakeholes en route. One or two of these showed tiny voids and might repay digging. A rising lay a little further in the same direction and is very obvious, some 150 metres from Trinafour Lower Cave extremity. There was probable open cave here but it was blocked with a large pile of small rocks - looking like some farmer in the distant past had purposely blocked it up. It seemed an easy dig. Evidently there was potential for a smart little cave system here which could be well over 100 metres long and worth the energy spent on it.

A return trip to survey finds took place in July. Ossicular Hole was given a wide berth, but a grade 3 survey of both Trinafour caves was achieved before exploration fever took over. At the lowest downstream point the writer, egged on by Ivan Young, ploughed his way along the low wet crawl, which soon eased as crouching sized streamway was regained. Here it was clear there was a visual connection back to the high level oxbow but this was not seriously attacked. Downstream, fairly easy going continued in a passage sometimes three or four metres wide for an estimated 38 metres, at which point a precarious square block, poised across the walls, looked a little threatening to crawl under solo, so a return was made. Passage could be seen continuing beyond in the same vein.

We next walked down to the rising, checking the line of shakeholes on the way. Clearance of the resurgence was extremely easy, the blockage consisting of rubble never more than football size, but liberally mixed with large numbers of jaw bones - deer, sheep, possibly even cows. There were so many indeed, that we concluded there must have been organised carcass decapitation at some time in the past, with all the heads chucked into the entrance. After less than half an hour, I was able to slide down into a wide, stooping height chamber, waterlogged to a depth of half a metre. Elated with our easy success we set off upstream, the cave yielding with ease as we progressed up a comfortable stooping crawl, where thick deposits of peat mud coated the sloping walls and water sloshed underfoot. Indeed, we began to wonder if the cave was ever going to end. Eventually, after an estimated 78 metres, we arrived at a boulder fall, which sloped steeply upwards and probably communicates with one of the shakeholes above. Beyond, a pile of black rubble seemed to require clearance, so we chose that point to turn around.

At the time, I was convinced this choke must be very close to the perched block found while exploring downstream but when Ivan checked the GPS readings, we were astonished to discover another 75 metres unaccounted for! This means that a connection would create a superb through trip over 200 metres in length, quite the longest cave in the greater Schiehallion group and a respectable find for Scotland in its own right.
TRINAFOUR UPPER CAVE

Entrance                  flat crawl                                                                    A'
B' entrance
C' C' D' E'
D' chockstone             E'

TRINAFOUR RISING CAVE

TRINAFOUR CAVES

Rising  NN 7225765965
Alt. 410m (overall)

Survey: Trinafour Upper and Lower Cave (to low crawl) (grade 3) July 2008 A. Jeffreys, I. Young.
Rest: grade 1, July/September 2008, A. Jeffreys

NCRS: Upper Cave NN 7213166139

TRINAFOUR CAVES

Perthshire

75 metres omitted 0 10

Survey: Trinafour Upper and Lower Cave (to low crawl) (grade 3) July 2008 A. Jeffreys, I. Young.
Rest: grade 1, July/September 2008, A. Jeffreys

NCRS: Upper Cave NN 7213166139
Yet another trip, at the beginning of September, saw a team of four attacking the blockage in Lower Trinafour Cave. Crawling below the perched block would have been very awkward and wet but Jim Salvona managed to remove enough rubble above and to the left to permit a squeeze over and back into the streamway. Here, similar sized passage led, after only 25 metres, to a sharp right turn and - a constricted sump! Thwarted, we returned to the rising and examined the choke at the end more closely. A low wide alcove to the left allowed the stacking of some preliminary rocks so that a better view of what lay in front could be discerned. The main body of the choke consists of a long heap of cobbles and earth, extending visually for some three to four metres with some 12 cms of airspace. It was not possible to see a definite end. Water ran under the right hand wall along the length of this collapse. At the near end, some large limestone slabs lean down from the roof and it is highly probable that they relate to one of the almost open shakeholes on the moor where a second entrance could be engineered, although a better idea would be to try for access beyond the choke.

That is where things currently stand. There have been several slightly wider searches of the moor which have not thrown up any further karstic features, including a look at a stream showing a sudden appearance above Loch Errochty at NN723659. If there are more limestone exposures, they are not going to be easy to find. The best options for new work lie around Ossicular Hole but digging will be required. A quick look on the other side of the road revealed no significant outcrops of limestone, and the ground from here toward the A9 does not look promising.

Future work will obviously be directed at clearing a route across the boulder choke in Trinafour Rising. Apart from guaranteeing further passage, an opportunity may arise to free up water flow, thus draining the sump in Trinafour Lower Cave and re-igniting hopes of a 200 metre through trip.

According to Robertson et al\(^1\) there is a substantial exposure of Blair Atholl ‘Dark Group’ limestones running NE-SW through Blair Atholl down towards Aberfeldy, with a branch extending due north from the southern end which probably embraces Trinafour. Further searches along this limestone may be fruitful. The Trinafour system is clearly the result of stream capture along the strike of beds folded almost vertical, much the same as Schiehallion, so one should continue to expect simple drainage conduits hereabouts without complex passage systems, each cave probably an isolated phenomenon.

To conclude, we owe a debt of gratitude to John Beck for drawing our attention to Trinafour in the first instance and hope this modest exploration will lead to further discoveries in the district.

Reference:

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MORE ABOUT “SCOTLAND’S FIRST CAVE BOOK”

By M.T. Mills

In this Bulletin, fourth series, Vol.2 No.5 pp 10-12 (March 2006) I provided an account of “Illustrations of the Island of Staffa in a Series of Views accompanied by Topographical and Geological Descriptions” by William Daniell (1818). This included eleven pages of text, which I have now had the opportunity to read in detail.

I concluded the above article with the suggestion of why Daniell chose to produce this separate book and suggested it was presumably demand, or anticipated demand, from the increasing number of tourists to Staffa. This was correct. On p. [1] Daniell states:

“The present series of views were executed during the author’s VOYAGE ROUND GREAT BRITAIN, and are introduced in the work now publishing under that title. As the object to which they relate has become peculiarly interesting in geology, and continues to attract numerous visitants, it occurred to him that the views, presented in a separate publication, accompanied by a concise description, would be acceptable to many whose researches being devoted chiefly to that department of science, or whose curiosity having been directed to this celebrated phenomenon, would feel interested in this particular portion of the work, and yet might not, for the sake of it alone, be disposed to possess the whole.”

It is interesting that Daniell is quite scathing about other peoples’ illustrations. p.[1]:

“There has been a general complaint that the various accounts of Staffa, and the disquisitions relative to it, have hitherto been inadequately aided by graphic delineations; and that those views which have obtained most circulation are in many respects utterly erroneous. The engravings for instance in Mr. Pennant’s Tour, from drawings by his servant, Moses Griffiths, have been so carelessly copied in several publications on the continent, that many objects have been reversed in their position, and their relative proportions have been still more incorrectly given than in the originals.”

And on p.5:

“Two very large engravings, the one representing the entrance, the other the interior of Fingal’s Cave, from drawings of M. de St. Fond, have been published at Paris. They are in every respect inaccurate, and convey a very fallacious idea of the scenes to which they relate. The former repeats the error observable in that published by Mr. Pennant, of representing the extremity of the cave as distinctly visible from its entrance. The errors in the latter are equally glaring; the distant islets that are within view of a spectator, looking from the cave, are represented as much nearer than they are in reality, being about three leagues distant.”

The text on p.7 confirms that in the illustration entitled “Staffa near Fingal’s Cave -22”, “The recess observable near the foreground is the Boat Cave.”

p.6 contains the following interesting historical anecdote relative to Fingal’s Cave:
A. Jeffreys on Rope Ladder, 3rd Pitch, Alum Pot, June 2008
Photo: Simon Brooks

View of Opencast Workings, Parys Mountain.
Photo: Alison Boutland
A. Jeffreys in Entrance Passage, Trinafour Lower Cave, July 2008
Photo: Ivan Young

Jamie Yuill in Streamway Beyond the Crawl, Trinafour Lower Cave, September 2008
Photo: Ivan Young

Ritchie Simpson at Scapula Resurgence Cave, June 2008
Photo: David Morrison
Strange Mud Formations in Two B’s Chamber, Rana Hole
October, 2008
Photo: Anna Ermakova

Party in Two B’s Chamber, Rana Hole
October, 2008
Photo: Anna Ermakova

Strange Mud Formations in Two B’s Chamber, Rana Hole
October, 2008
Photo: Anna Ermakova
“The roof of the cave, to a spectator far advanced within, excites both wonder and apprehension. It was mentioned by one of the boatmen, while the present view was taken, that the shooting parties, whom curiosity sometimes induced to extend their excursions to this spot, occasionally venture to discharge their pieces within it. The effect is described as awfully grand, but it must be attended with considerable peril, because the concussion occasioned by such an explosion cannot but tend to affect, perhaps to loosen, some of the ponderous fragments in this pendant ceiling, and these, if detached, might in their fall send the boat and its crew to the bottom. It was not stated that any accident of this kind ever took place.”

From a second copy now seen it should be mentioned that in both copies the aquatints are in a different order and neither follows the sequence in the text as was apparently intended.

MEET REPORT: STOB HOLE, GLEN SALACHAN

By Derek Pettiglio

On 24th September Jim Salvona and Derek Pettiglio made a return trip to Glen Salachan, Argyll to continue a dig that was started in 2007. We had no trouble locating the site and quickly set to the task in hand. Unfortunately both of us had underestimated the difficulty of gaining entry to the hole and had not brought the correct tools for the job so we had to improvise and a discarded fence post was used to pummel the rock into submission.

We now felt sure we could get in so I tried and failed first, and to add insult to injury found that I couldn’t get back out. After several failed attempts to pull me out Jim put the fence post across the hole directly above me and with four strands of hawser lay rope to grip I managed to pull myself free. Jim then had a go and found himself in the same predicament as me, unable to get in and unable to get out, but after a lot of struggling, pulling and swearing he managed to free himself with a bit of help from me and with the pummelling end of the post in tatters it looked like we might fail on this trip. I had a last hammer at an obstructing rock with Jim’s slide hammer and knocked a few chips off before dropping the hammer into the hole (bugger) “Sorry Jim”. So feeling guilty I made a last effort to get in and was successful; those small chips had made all the difference.

Once inside I was glad to see that everything around me was stable. The passage sloped down at about 45-55 degrees and was quite slippery so I got Jim to lower me a hand line. The passage was about 80cm by 60cms and at about 8 metres opened out and split into two. I continued down the left side for another 8m or so until it closed up and was too tight to continue. I then checked the right side which was about 2.5m wide and 90cms high, the floor clean stone with water running over it. At about 20m in from the surface the ceiling met the floor and the cave closed down, with the water sinking into a gravel floor. After I got myself back out Jim covered the entrance to stop any stupid sheep from falling in.

PS: I got Jim’s hammer back.

PPS: Jim’s name for the hole: Body Cork Cave!

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JIM EYRES AND JACK MYERS: AN APPRECIATION

By Alan L. Jeffreys

My earliest caving days in Yorkshire were, without a shadow of a doubt, coloured and inspired by close (and repeated) reading of a wonderful little book entitled “Underground Adventure” by Arthur Gemmell and Jack Myers. For almost the first time, first hand narratives of ‘modern’ potholing explorations in Britain were available in a readable, possibly even enticing, manner. I couldn’t wait to get stuck in!

One of the authors, Jack Myers, a Northern Pennine Club member, was an active force in Dales caving throughout the 1940s and 50s, taking the lead in many important discoveries such as Disappointment Pot, Notts Pot, Magnetometer Pot, Lancaster Hole and Easegill Caverns. In 1959 things went disastrously wrong when, after drinking polluted water underground, Jack was struck down by polio which rapidly brought an end to his active caving. He was an engineer for many years, maintaining an active interest in physics and electronics long after he had exhausted his stock of speleological material. In 1953, Dalesman published ‘Britain Underground’, an ambitious follow-on from the first edition of Norman Thornber’s ‘Pennine Underground’ (1947) and Jack Myers supplied the (very) modest Scottish section which was almost entirely restricted to Assynt. By 1957 he himself had explored some new caves of Skye (although exactly which ones has not been recorded). When the Bob Leakey tapes were serialised in ‘Descent’ I contacted Jack with a view to doing the same with himself. He steadfastly refused on the worthy ground that memory long after the event was not reliable enough to base historical material on, remarking that Bob Leakey’s reports owed a fair bit to fiction! Jack passed away in early September after a long period of illness, leaving a legacy of fabulous discoveries and very readable texts. He was one of the old school, a man of ‘demob suit’ dress and rope ladders who nevertheless employed the latest technical aids available at the time - hence the use of a magnetometer to relocate a shaft capped with iron girders.

Mention rope ladder caving and one is transported back to an era of rationing and privation in the war years and following decade. Caving then required much more determination and toughness, and it bred a generation of amazing quality. No star in this galaxy shone more brightly (or lasted so long) as the mighty Jim Eyre. We are fortunate that Jim was not only an incredibly hard caver but a literary genius with a penchant for the humorous. A stream of hilarious articles recounted his often strange antics and mishaps such as being locked in a men’s loo one cold night. A clutch of books followed, autobiographical (‘The Cave Explorers’); on general cave history (‘Lancaster Hole and the Easegill Caverns’, ‘The Easegill System: Forty Years of Exploration’) and expedition reports. Jim was very involved with the CRO and co-wrote with John Frankland an engaging history of that organisation (‘Race Against Time’). His swan song, the two-volume ‘It’s Only a Game’ which was very recently published, sums up everything that Jim was about: his racy life style, his passion for cave exploration all over the world, his humour, the characteristic cartoons which decorate pubs in the Dales as well as publications and, of course, the tremendous contribution he made to our knowledge of Yorkshire’s hidden world.

I valued his friendship highly (I even feature in a dedicated cartoon from him!) Trite though it is to say it, Jim was a one off, another of the old school whose exploits during what I deem the most romantic period of British speleology were almost beyond belief. I mean, would you contemplate climbing down an electron ladder for 550 feet in a shaft over 1,500 feet deep, most of it free-hanging, and then climb all the way back up because the lifeline was too short? And in someone else’s boots! The man was a legend and he has past into legend because he died at Lancaster Infirmary in September. The Yorkshire Dales are going to seem empty without him.

Both of these men were justly famed within caving circles. As speleology advances into a fresh technological metamorphosis, let us never forget the important contributions they made during an era when ‘suffering for one’s art’ was a regular feature. When places like Mossdale Caverns and Penyghent Pot were explored without the benefit of any form of specialised exposure clothing, and a sparsity of transport meant very long walks with heavy tackle, winter and summer. Myers and Eyre may seem relics from a forgotten age but they were giants.
It had been sometime since myself and David Morrison last visited Brindle’s Rift at Applecross and remembering it had potential for more passage, we drove over the Bealach na Ba and dropped down out of the thick mist to park up on a piece of flat ground near a passing place.

Following the line of telegraph poles which run along the edge of the forest and reaching the third one from the fence, we headed into the trees. A small stream runs down through here and as we followed it we checked holes along the way until, not far from where this water sinks, we reached the entrance to Brindle’s Rift which lies in a shakehole with a moss covered deciduous tree growing from it.

Knowing that there had been a collapse and later, some rock fall at the point where you drop down a narrow rift, I wasn’t sure what to expect but after a short crawl from the entrance it was soon reached and looked to be clear of debris. Dropping down this rift we crawled along the passage passing avens to the right which have large blocks in them, some of which are still hanging and dissuaded too much poking about. At the end of this passage David began to carefully clear rocks which were a little too close to some of the collapse. Making progress he soon started to remove stones from the floor and taking a turn to dig out a large block barring the way on I could hear water not too far ahead which gave added encouragement. Eventually the block was shifted and this 6 metre flat out crawl stepped down into an approximately 4 metre long by 3 metre high by just over a metre wide chamber. At the end of this another low but easier crawl of about 6 metres through L-shaped passage which rises at one point to easily allow a person to stand up, leads to another chamber of about 5 metres long by 4 metres high and again at its widest point, just over a metre wide. A small waterfall flows from a too tight inlet high on the left wall and quartz rock crystal was also found on this side along with some flowstone and small stal which can be seen higher up in this chamber. Some bones, teeth and limpet shells have also been found in this cave.

There could be scope for more passage at the end of the terminal chamber but what looks to be more rift passage is blocked by breakdown. However, with this extension it is thought that the cave has now doubled in length to about 40 metres.
Meghalaya, abode of the clouds, land of exotic peoples, rolling karst landscapes and countless kilometres of vast caverns. Ironic then, that we should have travelled all this way only to find ourselves climbing over a mountain of guano in order to reach the tightest, most awkward dig I have ever seen. Imagine, if you will, a body length tube inclined at some forty degrees to the horizontal, narrowing from about a metre across to a triangular aperture of maybe twenty centimetres at its widest point. Here chiselling was to be applied in order to widen the gap - rather like trying to swing a mallet with your outstretched arms wedged up some unfortunate hippy’s flared trouser leg.

The location of these endeavours, Swiftlet Pot, was first located by Yorkshire Dave and Mark Brown in 2004. The cave consists of a sequence of four roomy pitches, all horizontally quite close together, making it highly reminiscent of a Yorkshire pothole. On one of these pitches a bolt failure had provided some excitement for Dan Harries, leaving him plummeting a couple of metres before landing, thankfully intact, on the ground. Nonetheless they soldiered on, and pushed the cave as far as the constriction and guano pile, which was assumed to be of bat origin. Between some of the pitches the cave funnelled down to relatively narrow passage, not a place to be at around five each evening, when a several hundred strong flock of swifts returns to roost. As in the Hitchcock classic, the onslaught begins slowly at first, with a few individuals swooping past, their sharp chattering calls echoing off the walls, but within minutes their number builds up to a chaotic maelstrom of feathers, beaks and noise. Negotiating a pitch head with an army of confused birds trying to get through the narrow gaps on either side of your shoulders is a difficult business, particularly when some of them seem to be under the impression that the way on is down the back of your oversuit. The original team quickly realised that this was the origin of the guano, and the cave was subsequently renamed from its original ‘Banana Custard Tree Hole’ to Swiftlet Pot.

The potential to do some digging was like a red rag to a bull for Tony Jarratt, who was drawn to such situations like a moth to a lantern and, as (ahem) the thinnest member of the expedition I was recruited to help. At the foot of the final pitch a passage leads off from the aven, following the stream the short distance to where it drains into a bedding plane which was too low to enter. The only hope of progress lay with the terminal constriction that we found ourselves hammering away at, just above the level of the stream. Needless to say this was not digging for digging’s sake - the echo beyond this small hole was booming and the draught was also noticeable. As airport security generally frowns on the transportation of explosives on aircraft, and battery power was in short supply, J-Rat’s usual arsenal was largely limited to hand tools. Consequently the going was painstakingly slow, confounded by having to swing the mallet with outstretched arms, which made it difficult to keep up the work for more than about twenty minutes at a time. Despite, as we now know, being only a few months away from death, J-Rat’s stamina was admirable, chipping away for much longer at a time than I could manage. As many have pointed out, his tenacity was epic, and this quality enabled many of his discoveries on the Shnongrim Ridge and elsewhere to be made.

In three days we managed to enlarge the hole by a good inch and a half, extracting at least three teacups of spoil. In between bouts of digging the occasional attempt was made to squeeze through, pushing harder each
time as the frustration grew with the lack of progress chiselling. Eventually, after much team pushing on my feet, I was shoved through. This troublesome delivery completed I emerged, not quite as naked as the day I was born, into a well decorated aven. The elation of getting through the squeeze was soon dampened when it was realised that the echo was generated purely by the aven heading back to the surface and that there was, alas, no way on.

After some clothing and light had been passed through the next job was to run a final couple of survey legs into the aven before digging myself back out. This was miraculously easy compared to getting in - with plenty of room to swing the hammer it was possible to smash away great chunks of rock, making more progress in half an hour than had been made over the previous three days.

On that final day we just about got back on the surface in time to avoid the swifts and J-Rat, ever resourceful, managed to produce a couple of beers. We sat watching the black cloud of birds wheel into the cave entrance, drank up and went back to camp. Although our efforts unfortunately did not result in a significant extension of the cave, this was a definite victory for determination!

MEET NOTE: CORNWALL, July 2008

While on holiday in Cornwall I managed to get in a couple of tourist underground visits with my daughter in tow under duress. These were Carnglaze Caverns and Poldark Tin Mine.

Carnglaze Caverns are a series of three large caves, the largest known as the ‘Rum Store’ which was previously used by the Navy to store its rum. The chambers are very large, the biggest being 33 metres high in total (the spoil level being 30 metres high though). The tour goes 150 metres into the hillside and 60 metres below the surface. The three caverns were created as miners pursued the better roof slate workings further and further under the hill. The lowest cavern has a small lake at its lowest point. This trip was quite interesting but for the more experienced caver I wouldn’t recommend it.

Poldark Mine was a much more interesting visit as the mine is in more or less the same condition as it would have been when it was being worked. The passages have been opened up to allow easier tourist visits and it has electric lighting of sorts. It is still very wet, has fairly small, low passages, uneven walkways, sloping adits, metal staircases and has a small section of working left as it would have been which requires careful ‘stooping’ while being navigated close to the bottom of this registered mine. A depth of 55 metres below ground was reached during the tour, which I felt gave a good understanding of how difficult life was for miners (including young boys) in the 1780s. In the oldest section, known as ‘Old Man’s Workings’ it took a team of two miners a whole day to dig with a chisel and hammer two inches worth of passage - this was in the days before explosives. There is also a working beam engine and small museum on site that makes the visit bearable for non-cavers. The beam engine does actually pump water constantly from the mine although it is hydraulically powered nowadays instead of steam. I’d recommend this visit to anyone in the area as it is part of a world heritage site.

Alex Latta

For more information, visit: http://www.carnglaze.com/guided_tours_1.0.htm
http://www.poldark-mine.co.uk/mine.htm and http://www.poldark-mine.co.uk/history.htm
FORTRESS OF THE PIGEONS

By Jim Salvona

Fortress of pigeons perched on high rough silhouette, against the sky to learn thy secrets mortals try with might and main. But though they poke around and pry 'tis all in vain.

Above these jagged caverns deep how, aimless browsing wand’ring sheep ever manage life to keep sore puzzles me. More massive crag in jumbled heap I ne’er did see.

Born of titanic turmoil long ago that awesome chasm there below past midsummer, ‘holds’ deep snow and sometimes ice. All who would its secrets know with Death must dice.

First, outwitting guardian adder a group attacked, but lacking ladder, obstacles, them just made the madder and tempers show. From thy stronghold feeling sadder were obliged to go.

Safe in town, they like will prate and bold adventure oft relate and ‘self’ made ‘hero’ implicate with much ado. Some would say their proper state was in a zoo.

Dispensing wisdom, there, you stand! Sentinel; Teacher; Refuge of this land. All nature’s minions near at hand ‘share thy tent’. But, loving, vicious, childlike man knows not content.
Last summer I was extremely lucky to be treated to a guided tour of the underground workings of Parys Mountain Copper Mine, courtesy of the Parys Mountain Underground Group. The trip was extremely interesting and I reported on it in GSG Bulletin Vol.3 No.3, p.11. Unfortunately due to lack of time I was unable to take advantage of the heritage trail which has been set up to guide visitors around the surface workings, so during this year’s family holiday to Anglesey, time was put aside for a revisit to the mountain.

Parys Mountain near Amlwch, Anglesey was mined during the mid-eighteenth century and the copper ore produced from the area dominated the world’s markets during the 1780s. The mountain was worked between two mining companies: the Parys Mine and the Mona Mine. Initially the ore was removed from shallow surface workings, then from open cast pits, then later from shafts and adits up to 300 metres deep. The ore was broken up and taken to the port at Amlwch and from there it was shipped to Lancashire and South Wales for smelting. Copper was also extracted from the mine drainage water in precipitation beds using scrap iron to produce a metallic copper residue. But the area has an earlier history of mining back to Roman times and even the early Bronze Age making this one of the earliest copper mines known in Britain.

The best time to visit the mountain is just after rain when the sun is shining brightly. The area was rich in many minerals including chalcopyrite (copper and iron), galena (lead), sphalerite (zinc) and more abundantly pyrite (iron). Although there is now very little trace of copper on the surface, the remaining iron has weathered and gives the mountain a striking red and brown patina which glows in the sunshine, especially when wet. The weathering of the sulphurous minerals has also produced a very acidic soil which supports only lichens and heather. This red and barren landscape is very surreal, and has been used as a film set for several programmes including Dr Who.

The heritage trail around the mountain starts from the car park which is directly off the B5111, about 4 km south of Amlwch. A leaflet giving information about the trail is available from a box in the car park for a small donation. The trail takes about 1 to 2 hours to complete and the path requires sturdy footwear. The trail goes round the mountain anti-clockwise, starting with a viewing platform overlooking the great opencast. This impressive chasm was opened up and worked following the earlier shallow shafts collapsing, and prior to the later deeper shafts. Following round the side of the huge pit, the trail takes you past the remains of the Mona Mine yards and the precipitation ponds. The path then climbs up around the eastern side of the mountain to take in the remains of the Pearl Engine House which used to house a Cornish Beam Engine used to pump water out of the deeper shafts. The building is currently being conserved by the Welsh Mines Preservation Trust with funds from Cadw. From the engine house, the path takes you up to the most dominant feature on the skyline: the remains of the windmill. This was built in 1878 to pump water out of the lower mine workings, and was unique in the area by having five sails. Almost at the end of the trail, the path then leads you back down towards the car park and at the same time gives you a view of the modern mine across the road. This is owned by Anglesey Mining plc where mining continues today.

Parys Mountain has a unique beauty and history, and the Heritage Trail is definitely worth a visit if you happen to be in the area.

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TAIGH NAM FAMH

The club owns a spacious field centre in Elphin village, N.W. Sutherland, close to Scotland’s finest caving region. Well appointed with drying room, showers, heated bunkrooms and fully fitted kitchen, it is available for booking by non-members at £5 per head per night. Contact the hut warden, Peter Dowswell at peter.dowswell@btinternet.com for details.
HEALTH AND SAFETY AT THE HUT

The number of accidents and mishaps at Taigh nam Famh (zero) has concerned the committee for some time. In an attempt to create a properly safe and friendly environment for no-brainers to enjoy a stress free stay the following code of use will be introduced shortly and strictly enforced with a mallet. These regulations have not been formally approved by the Health and Safety Executive but reflect the duty of care owed by the Group to every member and guest.

RULES

1. Light switches and sockets are connected to LIVE wires. Before operating them, users must satisfy the committee that they are qualified to do so and have attended an accredited Switching Course.

2. All cutting implements in the cutlery drawers should be blunted to EU standard.

3. The stove becomes very hot when lit. No person is permitted to approach closer than three metres, except properly trained professionals re-charging it with fuel.

4. On no account should anyone approach a loaded mousetrap without wearing protective clothing.

5. Any vehicle parked on the slope behind the hut should be chocked and the rear axle chained to an immovable anchor point to prevent said vehicle free-wheeling down the car park.

6. Some bunks are situated at high levels. Before choosing to sleep in these, users should test access ladders and satisfy the Hut Warden that they are conversant with procedures for evacuation from altitude. Always wear and use cows tails when negotiating the step ladder.

7. Gas appliances use naked flames. On no account should these be lit when persons are on the premises.

8. Anyone wishing to use a shower with hot water must be accompanied by a committee member qualified in advanced first aid. (It is permissible to have a cold shower alone).

9. Please note that smoking anywhere in the universe is a capital offence.

10. No one should breathe out inside the hut. To avoid accidental infection, exhalation must be done outside. (Note: leaning out of the window is not acceptable).

11. The practice of consuming food and drink in the barbeque area can be sanctioned only after said food has been washed in disinfectant and all alcohol boiled to remove contaminants. To prevent insect infestation, the area should first be hermetically sealed with heavy gauge polythene sheeting or a brick building that satisfies current building regulations.

12. Snorers must submit a risk assessment plan before selecting a bunk and provide ear defenders on request.

13. If the temperature inside the conservatory exceeds 18°C the building should be evacuated until cooler conditions obtain. Assembly areas are:

   (1) Putting green for all those on the west side of the hut.
   (2) Summit of Cnoc Breac for all those on the east side.
   (Persons in the pub need not return for an assembly head count).

Application of these simple, common-sense rules will ensure a safe and pleasant stay and protect the committee’s collective ass.

Alan Jeffreys
Much has happened following the breakthrough into Claonaite 7 over New Year 2007-8. It has been strange in a way to hear of members - indeed non-members and complete newcomers to caving - touring the Great Northern Time Machine and wandering along passages until so recently the preserve of a handful of cave divers. Since the way was opened up, there have been discoveries in both systems, some of them dramatic, leading to the Claonaite system firmly occupying its place of honour as Scotland’s best, longest and deepest cave. There are indications that this latter factor may be extended in an ‘uphill’ direction as work to link in the high level sinks at the limestone boundary on Beinn an Fhuarain develops, and inlet caves are being explored along the lower flanks of Creag Liath which should communicate with fossil passages in East Bloc or Capital Series.

By general agreement, Rana Hole is said to finish at the point where one emerges into Belh Aven, which means the new system is now one of Scotland’s longest and deepest caves in its own right! The recent trend, of discovering large chambers relatively close to the surface and/or early in a cave’s topography (such as in Storm Cave and Rana Hole), greatly encourages diggers to clear out choked shakeholes high on Assynt’s mountain slopes and certainly gainsays any who say Assynt is largely worked out now. It is also to be hoped that members will not neglect the ‘old’ Claonaite entrance and streamway. It remains the best stream passage trip in Scotland and there are still avenues for exploration to capture the imagination there.

The following articles recount progress from April to September and more or less bring the story up to date.

A. Jeffreys, Editor

Mendip Invasion 2008 - Discoveries in the Rana Hole/Uamh an Claonaite System

By Tony Jarratt

This year’s Mendip Invasion of Assynt was a poorly attended affair from the south with Paul Brock (B.E.C./G.S.G.), Anne Vanderplank (B.E.C./W.C.C.), Robin ‘Tav’ Taviner (G.S.G/W.C.C.) and the writer making up the team. Tony Boycott and Tangent were unfortunately unable to join us but club support came from Yorkshire (Dave Hodgson and Jamie Anderson), Derbyshire (Nick Williams, Eddy Mason, Norman Flux, Mark Brown, Anwen Burrows and Simon Brooks) and Edinburgh (Fraser Simpson, Roger Galloway, Annie Audsley and Ivan Young). Just before the Mendip team left more G.S.G. members turned up and surprise visitors Yvo Weidmann and his girlfriend Martina arrived from Switzerland. Yvo is a top European cave diver, surveyor, Meghalaya veteran and cave photographer whose work can readily be seen and appreciated in most, if not all, Speleo Projects calendars.

Paul and your scribe drove up on the 26th April (well, Paul did) in eleven hours but this did include stops at the Black Isle Brewery for supplies and fish and chips in Ullapool. A session in the Alt Bar that night saw them not at their best next day and almost abandoning digging due to the glorious weather. Tav and Anne succumbed to this to ascend Arkle while the hungover ones eventually staggered up the Allt nan Uamh valley in the wake of Fraser, Yorkshire Dave and Jamie who were intent on completing the first diving through-trip from Claonaite to Rana. In the latter the Black Rift was rigged with ladders and the awkward traverses and knobbly crawls leading to Blue Chamber negotiated - Slipping Into Something More Comfortable (S.I.S.M.C.) After admiring the blue and crystal-clear static sump the duo crawled on into the 30m up-dip extension discovered by Julian Walford and Martin Hayes on 12th April. Here they admired pure white stalactites and helictites, mud formations and strange red crystals on the floor before looking for possible dig sites. Paul spotted the best option which was an almost vertical ‘bedding plane’ filled with dodgy boulders to a height of about four metres to where a small black space hinted at open passage beyond. Each wielding a small crowbar they set about the choke at two places and easily disposed of tons of rock with the aid of
The writer was then able to push boulders into Paul’s dig from above and after about an hour and a half was able to traverse across the steep slope below even larger piles of ‘hanging death’ to reach the black space. A squeeze upwards and he was in more roomy passage and soon joined by Paul. Amazed at their easy victory the explorers realised that they were standing at the bottom of a huge and steeply sloping passage or chamber with a dry mud-covered breakdown floor. Now feeling much improved and almost bursting with excitement they scrambled up the 60 metres or so to the top of the chamber to find it over 30 metres wide at one point and with a central roof height of 5-6 metres. There were no formations but some impressive geological features which are well worthy of study by an expert.

Near the top of the chamber, where huge breakdown slabs blocked any way on, a 20m long passage was explored to a mud choke and a lower passage (later called Not Two B) and pushed by Paul for about 25 m, also led to a long term dig. Further down the chamber a descending side passage, later pushed by Annie Audsley, also ended at a diggable mud choke. A couple of other unpromising sites were also later noted. Totally gobsmacked the jubilant duo named the find ‘Two B’s Chamber’ as it was Bigger and Better than Two A’s Chamber - and was found by two lucky B.E.C Bastards- and set off into the depths of Claonaite to meet the divers. They had just emerged from sump 6b when the pair arrived and were also much pleased by their successful dive, though not looking forward to dragging all their kit up through the generally vertical passages of Rana Hole. Fraser had to drive home but the other four later celebrated at the Inch. Paul was so embarrassed by the day’s discovery that he at last joined the G.S.G.

Two B’s Chamber is probably the second largest in a Scottish limestone cave - with the possible exception of the partly sea-eroded main chamber of Smoo Cave, and has undoubtedly formed by roof collapse into the original bore tube heading through Blue Chamber and onwards to the Great Northern Time Machine - Scotland’s largest chamber - where it was joined by another phreatic bore tube coming in from Two A’s Chamber, Belh Aven and Portobello Promenade/Memories of Tangalle. Investigations above the Twin Falls of Jabaroo may reveal more breakdown passage running back up towards Blue Chamber. Without the fortuitous short phreatic tube dropping into Blue Chamber from the awkward S.I.S.M.C. this fine addition to the system would be inaccessible. Could this be a flood overflow conduit formed along a convenient joint after the main bore became blocked with glacial (?) deposits? Much more recently this passage was utilised by the Black Rift streams.

The discoverers were back down Rana next day along with Ivan, Annie and Roger and a survey was completed from Black Cuillin Chamber to the end, a total of 261 metres (new passage making up 166 metres of this) and showing that the end of the chamber is located in the limestone band to the east of Beinn an Fhurain. The passage seems to be running roughly parallel with the Claonaite streamway some 150 metres further east. To inspire further celebration it was now realised that the system had been pushed to just over 3 kilometres - another Scottish record. Eddy, Nick, Tav and Anne had meanwhile been touring and looking at digging sites.
Plan of Uamh an Claonaite system including preliminary survey of Rana Hole
For a change Campbell’s Cave was the focus of attention next day with Roger, Annie, Anne, Norman, Paul and the writer preparing the surface depression for a major onslaught. Stone steps were constructed, the spoil heap extended, the cave entrance area stabilised and a massive wall commenced in the stream channel. No forward progress was made but good weather made this tidying operation a pleasure.

Roger, Annie and the writer were back down Rana next day but on a purely tourist trip to show Richard McKendrick (the owner of the Inch) and his Dutch friends Jan and Joris Van den Berg the cave as far as the head of Black Rift. All thoroughly enjoyed it - especially 11 year old Joris - and were most impressed with the engineering. Roger started a dig in the higher reaches of Two A’s Chamber (to which he and Annie returned on the following day and declared a long term job).

The 2nd May saw Norman continuing work on the Rana breakthrough point dam while Tav, Paul and your scribe assisted Simon with his diving gear. Blue Chamber sump was the target but unfortunately after some five metres it was completely silted up. Simon then visited Two B’s Chamber where he took lots of photos with the writer for scale. Tav and Paul went to dig at a site above Sump 6b where a breakthrough was made after half an hour into some 50 metres of bedding passage with a dug (and horribly loose) connection to ‘The Palatial Abode of Edward Concretehead’ and thus a round trip of academic interest. It was named ‘Duelling Pianos’. The possibility still exits here of a by-pass to sumps 4, 5 and 6b.

Your scribe, being fed up with the A.N.U.S. valley, walked from the G.S.G. cottage to the Abhainn a’Chnocain area on 3rd May. The partially blocked entrance of the 8 metre long Easter Bunny Cave was easily found and made accessible - if a trifle squalid - within 20 minutes. Half an hour of crowbar and entrenching tool work on the terminal collapse revealed a 2 metre extension and no possible chance of any more. At now 10 metres in length it can be thankfully ignored in the future. It was found by the writer and Helen Macpherson on 4th April 1980 and had been awaiting another visit since then! The entrance was partially refilled with peat, rocks, slime and an old bucket. Directions to its exact location can be found in the G.S.G. Hut Log should any masochistic grothole connoisseurs be reading this. Back at Taig nam Famh a visit was had from a couple of Jehovah’s Witnesses but they were repulsed by Anwen who gave them a piece of her mind regarding their missionary zeal amongst perfectly happy tribal societies. Roger, Annie, Mark and Norman continued clearing the Skye-Way in Rana.

Other activities included hill-walking, dig investigation by Nick and Eddy in Traligill and levelling of the site for the store extension by capping and banging. The latter was particularly impressive as large chunks of shattered pallet landed on the cottage roof and debris rained from the skies following a 9 shothole charge of 12 gm cord! Refreshment at the Inch, the Alt and back at Taig nam Famh was a suitable reward for the hard work regularly expended.

A serious geological and geomorphological study now needs to be done on the Rana Hole/Uamh an Claonaite system. Huge lumps of broken stalagmite bosses at the top of Black Rift should surely be perfect for dating purposes and would give an indication as to when breakdown created Two A’s Chamber. They also indicate a much warmer climate with plenty of vegetation when they were formed. The high-grade survey of the system needs upgrading and perhaps re-surveying in Claonaite Seven, especially in the complicated area around
Duelling Pianos. Tav has found a possible link dig to Otter Hole and there are many more sites of interest as shown by the above results. The southern contingent hope to return for the G.S.G. Annual Dinner in October when some of these sites will hopefully be investigated - if they have not already yielded by then!

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DIVE REPORTS - MAY 2008

By Simon Brooks

Friday 2nd May 2008
Blue Chamber sump, Rana Hole

Diver: Simon Brooks (CDG, GSG, OCC)
Support: Paul Brock (BEC, GSG) Tony Jarratt (BEC, GSG) Rob Taviner (WCC, GSG)

Blue Chamber as GSG members will know is one of the newer bits of Scottish cave passage, being discovered by Mark Brown during the post GSG 2007 Annual Dinner digging effort. The eastern side of Blue Chamber is occupied by an inviting semi-circular blue pool that is some 7 metres long and 3 metres wide and appeared to be divable. Rather idiosyncratically, though not inappropriately, the chamber is named after a GSG member, Paul Brock’s, deceased Border Terrier (called Blue), rather than the obvious blue pool.

With Blue Pool being an undived sump (and there are not too many of these about nowadays) and the fact that its alignment offered potential to get into a hitherto unknown section of the Great Northern Time Machine I was keen to dive it. Assisted by Paul, J-Rat and Tav the diving equipment was carried via Rana to Blue Chamber whereupon I kitted up and entered the sump. Whilst Paul took lots of pictures I followed an obvious joint in the roof of the sump and entered what looked like a roomy underwater passage. This was followed for a modest 5 metres in an easterly direction before a blank wall was met. Undeterred I then checked the remainder of the sump but found no way on. There would seem to be minimal prospects of further extension of this sump.

Returning to base the kit was packed up and J-Rat and I went to have a look at the very recently discovered Two B’s Chamber where I took some photographs. Entry into the chamber proved a little tight for me, both because I was wearing a diving suit and also because I had neglected to remove my weight belt. Thankfully this was removable in the squeeze otherwise a call for assistance may have been required. Returning to Blue Chamber the kit was collected and on the way back along the rift passage that leads to Blue Chamber a number of the pools in the floor were investigated. The pool nearest Blue Chamber was the deepest at a modest 1.4 metres whilst the others were little more than puddles. A pleasant but disappointing dive but still nice to dive a previously un-dived sump. Many thanks to Paul, J-Rat and Tav for the carry.

Sunday 4th May 2008
Uamh an Claonaite, Sump 8

Diver: Simon Brooks (CDG, GSG, OCC)
Support: Mark Brown (SUSS, GSG), Mark Tringham (GSG)

Taking advantage of the newly discovered dry way into Claonaite 7, I was assisted by Mark B and Mark T in carrying diving equipment and a large lump hammer into Claonaite 7 and to the start of sump 7. The plan was to have a really good look at the end of sump 8 now that it is not quite such a remote spot thanks to the
Rana connection. Depositing the diving equipment at the start of sump 7, Mark B and Mark T then went through the tight and muddy sump 7 bypass and spent the next hour surveying the dry passage and chamber in Claonaite 8. Meanwhile I kitted up and entered sump 7 as this is an easier route (for a diver) to Claonaite 8 than the tight bypass. Some 2 metres from base the line was found to be broken which was a little surprising considering that the dive line placed in this sump was an old, but substantial, 11mm climbing rope. Clearly a lot of water goes through this sump in times of flood. Not having any spare line with which to effect a repair and knowing that sump 7 was fairly straight forward I continued without a line and quickly emerged in Claonaite 8. Sump 8 was then dived to reach the line reel that lies at the furthest point of exploration some 20 metres into the sump. The original plan was quickly abandoned due to poor visibility and the fact that the constricted nature of the end of the sump meant there was little room to swing the hammer effectively. Leaving the lump hammer next to the line reel as a marker on the floor of the sump, which was the next best thing I could think of as I did not want to disturb the line reel which was looking a bit old and manky, the short cross rift that runs in a SE to NW direction across the current end of the sump was re-examined. Previous dives had found this to ascend to a flat roof at 0 metres depth. However, on this occasion a small bedding plane rift airspace was located at the NW end of the rift where it was possible for me to get my head and shoulders out of the water. The sloping rift could be seen to ascend for a further 3 to 4 metres between mud and jammed boulders and could possibly lead to more passage/way on as it would appear to be beyond the dry passages of Claonaite 8. Although it would be possible to climb further out of the water this was not attempted on this occasion, as it would have required pulling the jammed boulders down into the sump and most certainly on top of myself.

Descending to the line reel and the lump hammer I then decided to have a real go at the small tube at the end of the sump. Fins were removed and weighted to the bottom of the sump using the lump hammer as ballast (I always knew there was a good reason for bringing a lump hammer on this dive) and the tube entered feet first. A body length of progress was made before I became jammed. Wriggling free I had another couple of goes before giving up, collected my fins and the lump hammer and swam back to base. Clearly the end of sump 8 is going to require some serious hammer treatment, possibly exploiting a fissure in the floor of the final tube.

At the start of sump 7, I collected all the various bits of old line and climbing rope I could fit together and used this to reline the sump on my way out. An uneventful exit was then made from the cave. Many thanks to Mark Brown and Mark Tringham for their assistance.

-----oOo-----

THE CLAONAITE BEAR BONES

By Ivan Young

In July 1995 during the second diving trip into Claonaite 7 I took a different route to the other four divers. Leaving the streamway I entered a higher level fossil passage that paralleled the stream. Varying from crawling to walking height Portobello Promenade is mostly floored in sand and leads to the Great Northern Time Machine. Part-way along near a junction I found some bones lying on top of slabs of sand-covered breakdown. They were obviously leg bones, one being a femur, and prompted the name of Legless Highway for the adjoining passage. Other bones, pelvis, ribs, vertebrae, lay nearby and during later dives even more bones, including the skull and jaw, were found. It appeared that we had discovered most of the skeleton of a bear. One bone was removed - half of the lower jaw - and given to Dr Andrew Kitchener, Principal Curator of Mammals and Birds in the National Museums, Scotland. He confirmed that it was a bear, but it wasn’t well enough preserved to unambiguously name the species. Because of the fragility of the bones and the difficulty in trying to dive them out, we decided to leave them...
in place until we had a ‘dry’ entrance.

Step forward 12 years to New Year 2008 and we had our alternative entrance. The GSG’s Rana Hole dig broke through into Claonaite 7 on December 30th 2007 and gave a dry non-divers’ route to the bones. That was good because they were now easy to reach, but also potentially bad because the bones would inevitably suffer from the greatly increased caver traffic past the site. In fact shortly after they were discovered a short-sighted diver managed to walk over and snap one femur. That led to other divers erecting a ‘wall’ of rocks around the site to guide visitors away from the bones. Despite this the bones inevitably attracted attention. A comparison of the earliest photographs with the latest images shows damage to the more delicate parts of the skull no doubt due to repeated handling by passing cavers. If more damage was to be avoided they needed to be removed and the sooner the better.

To move the bones required permission from several places. The landowner, George Vestey was first to be asked and quickly agreed to our plan. Scottish Natural Heritage needed to be involved for two reasons: the area is in the Ben More SSSI and the caves are in the Allt nan Uamh GCR (Geological Conservation Review) area. Lastly Historic Scotland had overriding authority because the bones lie within the area of the Bone Caves Scheduled Ancient Monument. Both these organisations needed to give their permission and approve our plan. We had to demonstrate that what we were planning was necessary, would be done to a high standard, produce worthwhile results, and not damage whatever remained.

To obtain the required permission we assembled a team comprising Steve Birch (GSG), archaeologist, to lead the project; Dr Tim Lawson (GSG), to examine the cave sediments and morphology of the site; Dr Andrew Kitchener, to examine and analyse the bones; and Alan Jeffreys, John Crae and myself to assist and produce surveys and a photographic record. Steve pulled together data from us all to produce an excellent 24 page project report to support his application for Scheduled Monument Consent. This was submitted to Historic Scotland in early April and permission was given in mid-May.

Initial work started on Saturday 21st June. Tim and I got underground somewhat later than planned after we had gently strolled up the valley discoursing on geology, caves and bear bones with Cameron McNeish while being filmed for a programme on Sutherland planned for transmission during Christmas 2008. More delay followed as Cameron was filmed descending part-way into Rana Hole.

When we eventually reached the bones Martin Hayes, John Crae and Andy Peggie helped me stretch a 1m grid of yellow builders’ line over the site. The intersections were labelled A1 to E6 and I took about 50 overlapping photographs to piece together into a photomontage: much faster than getting an artist to sketch the area. Tim meanwhile looked around the area inferring water flow directions from the sediments and deciding what needed to be recorded. Helped by Julian Walford and Bob Jones more red and white tape was used to ‘protect’ interesting areas of sediments showing that water flowed from Belh Aven up to the bones and then
down to the Great Northern Time Machine and along Legless Highway. Tim also marked the position of several bones along Legless Highway plus another fragment uncovered when he took a random scoop of sediment to examine the sedimentary profile. Either that was completely fortuitous, or there are many more bones hidden in the sand deposited along these passages.

The main bone removal was over the following weekend. On Saturday 28th June there were initially many willing helpers to transport piles of equipment into the cave, but many got diverted to continue digging in Rana. That left the small efficient team of Steve and Alan collecting all visible bones while I surveyed the immediate area and took detailed cross-sections of the passage. I had borrowed a Stanley TLM130 Laser Distance Measurer, and this proved ideal for single-handed surveying. I also used the GSG’s camcorder to shoot short video clips suitable for handing out to the media.

On Sunday, Annie Audsley replaced Goon and the searchers concentrated on looking under the slabs of breakdown flooring the passage. This found several more bones some of them quite a few metres away from the main area. The other half of the lower jaw and some other skull fragments were among the pieces found. Andy Peggie joined Ivan to continue the surveying.

The whole area was illuminated using two of the Cave Suns built by Peter Ireson. These are self-contained LED floodlights each with a dozen high power 4W LEDs. They were used at perhaps half power and provided enough light to make photography possible without using flash. On this occasion we used external battery packs to give greatly increased run time though with the penalty of greatly increased weight!

The bones were carefully packed with plenty of bubble-wrap into large Pelicases loaned by Dan Harries. These only just fitted through the tight spots down Rana and had required a little hammer and chisel work to get them through the top of the Black Rift. We used two on Saturday and one on Sunday to remove all the bones we’d found. Back at the hut after laying them out on the table for inspection they were carefully rewrapped and sealed into cardboard boxes for their journey south. Later that week I handed the boxes over to Andrew Kitchener and Drew Bain who was to clean and conserve the bones.

The next visit on Saturday 19th July saw Steve and me joined by Julian Walford, Bob Jones and Ross Davidson. We first removed the ‘wall’ of rocks around the site and stacked them further down the passage.
After re-photographing the area an intensive search was started to look for smaller bones that might lie between or beneath the blocks of breakdown flooring the passage.

Over half the bones in your skeleton are in your hands and feet (106 out of about 206). Bears have a similar total. We had found very few of these small bones. We moved and looked under the smaller slabs, but many were just too heavy to shift. This search did find about another 20 bones, but most from the bear’s paws are still missing. They have most likely been swept further downstream or now lie under or between slabs of breakdown that require more than muscle power to move. The best find of the day was the recovery of a tibia from the depths of a fissure between two very large slabs. Julian had brought a 70cm long Grabbing Claw or Helping Hand and this proved ideal for performing the extraction. We’d never have been able to reach the bone without it.

While most of the bones were small and fitted into the containers we had taken in, we hadn’t expected another long bone. A quick trip to Sump 6, however, brought back the tube carried in by Goon on his ill-fated 1996 diving trip which ended in Raigmore Hospital. Finally, after a wait of 11 years, the tube was used for the purpose intended! When I took this latest batch of bones to Drew he showed me the first set, cleaned of their coating of mud, drying slowly in their freeze-dryer.

As well as the bones at the main site, several more that had washed along Legless Highway were collected during the first weekend. Last of all, Steve removed an extra leg bone sticking out of well-compacted sediments 32m along Legless Highway. This required additional permission from Historic Scotland. This bone is important because it must have been emplaced well before the other bones during what I deduce would have been a much more turbulent flow regime in the passage.

By early September Andrew had tentatively identified the first set of bones and drawn some preliminary conclusions. The bear is a large adult brown bear, probably male, and not a polar bear as most of the newspapers reported the find. The canines are very worn, rather like those of zoo animals after they’ve chewed on the bars of their cages. That could be from prolonged immersion in water rather than diet: the other teeth were also worn. Another interesting snippet is that some bones appeared to have been chewed by rodents. He is selecting bones, including the extra ulna, for radiocarbon dating while the rest are being treated to harden and preserve them. This is a slow process and involves dipping the bones into a solution of plastic which is allowed to dry thus coating them internally and externally.

We hope that more detailed examination once the bones are fully conserved and can be handled safely will start providing answers. When did it die? Did the rodents chew it before or after it arrived in the cave? Did it die in the cave or arrive as a corpse? How much older is the other leg bone from Legless Highway?

There are other questions about how such a large animal managed to get to Portobello Promenade. Was it
washed downstream or could it have walked in from an entrance perhaps under Creag nan Uamh? Which ever route it took is now sealed and has probably been so for many thousands if not tens of thousands of years. Many hypotheses are possible and we eagerly await radiocarbon dates.

The site may have been searched twice, but more bones could still turn up. Please keep your eyes open, and if you do find one please do not move it. Mark its position using the red and white tape we’ve left at the main bone site and tell us. We’ll then record its position and remove it at the first opportunity.

------oOo------

Looking down Portobello Promenade toward Belh Aven from Edge of Bone Site

Photo: Ivan Young

Some of the Recovered Bones Laid Out in Taigh nam Famh

Photo: Ivan Young

Another General View of the Bone Site. Members Searching for Bones

Photo: Ivan Young
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GRAMPIAN SPELEOLOGICAL GROUP
BULLETIN

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